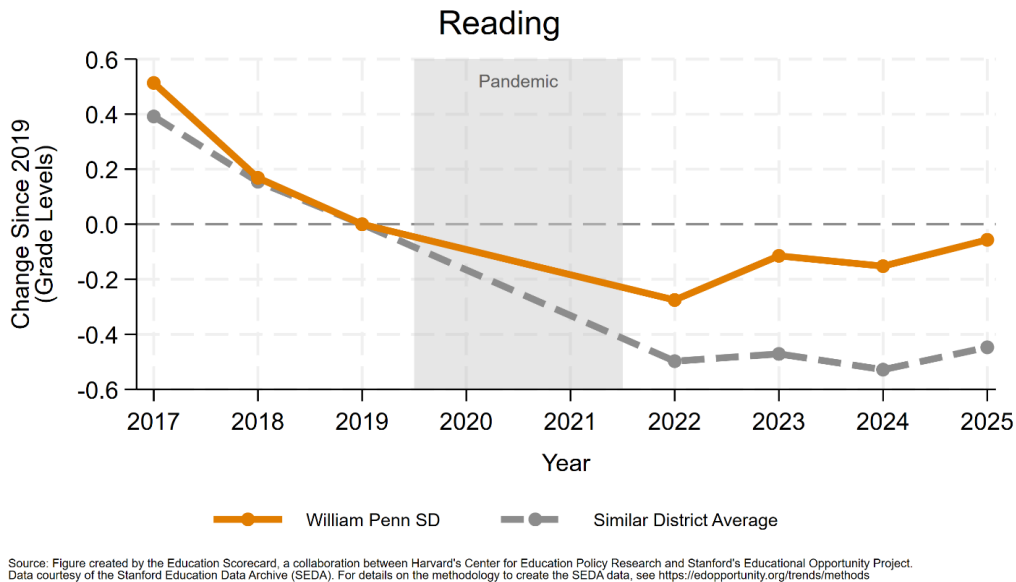
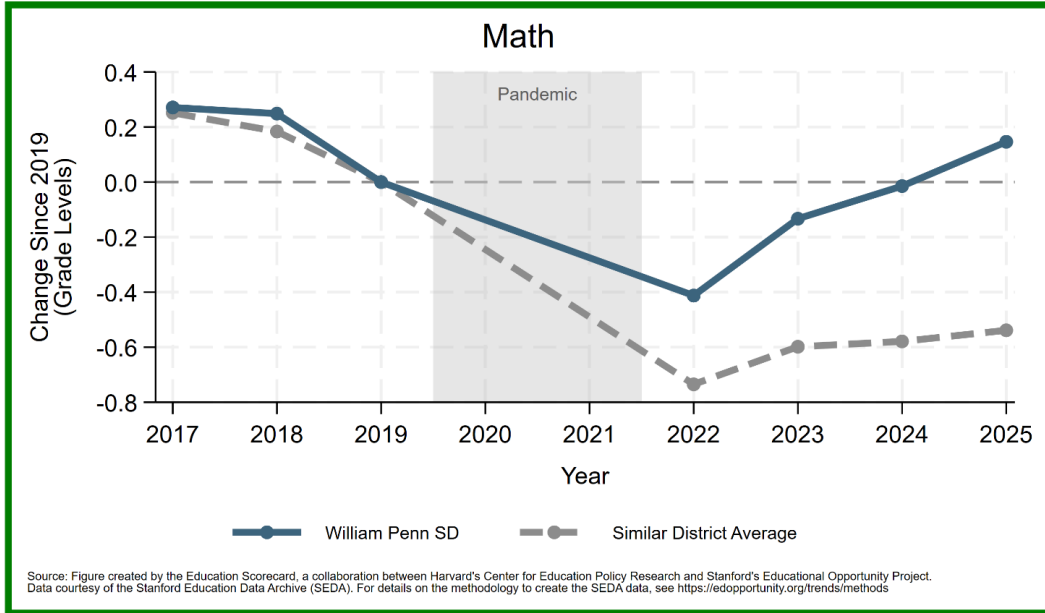


William Penn School District
Lansdowne, PA

William Penn SD, PA

Rising Faster than Similar Districts in Math



Similar Districts: Southeast Delco SD, Wilkinsburg Borough SD, Penn Hills SD, Steelton-Highspire SD, Woodland Hills SD



Student Demographics:

Total student population: 4,504
Economically disadvantaged: 83%

Three largest racial demographics:

Black: 84%
Hispanic: 5%
Two or more races: 5%

Dr. Eric Becoats, Superintendent

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- “When our educational leaders truly understand the data we collect, they move beyond identifying gaps to mastering the strategies required to close them. It allows us to visualize exactly what is necessary to move a student from zero to 100 in terms of mastery.”
- “There is often a temptation to dictate programs from the top down, but we believe the most sustainable growth comes from investing in our people. When we build the capacity of our staff and allow them to lead, we see the kind of authentic professional ownership that transforms a district.”

Background:

Located in the southwest outskirts of Philadelphia, William Penn School District (WPSD) serves a student population where approximately 84% are economically disadvantaged. Historically, the district has been a primary advocate for equitable education funding, serving as a lead petitioner in the landmark lawsuit that resulted in a 2023 Pennsylvania Supreme Court decision declaring the state’s school funding system unconstitutional. Despite significant financial challenges, WPSD has demonstrated notable resilience and growth in student achievement by prioritizing the use of student data to drive all instructional and operational decisions.

Strategies for Success:

Supporting educators to deliver evidence-based instruction:

- WPSD administers [MAP Growth](#) and [Acadience](#) assessments three times per year in reading and math to continuously measure student learning and forecast performance on the annual spring assessment.
- After each assessment is administered, Superintendent Dr. Becoats recognizes the teachers whose students have made significant growth on the assessment at the next school board meeting to drive home the connection between daily classroom instruction and student outcomes.
- The district employs two types of specialized instructional support: instructional facilitators and school-based teacher leaders, who support and coach teachers using a [student-centered coaching model](#), and academic interventionists, who support students. During the 2024-2025 school year, each elementary school was assigned two interventionists and one facilitator.
- WPSD provides Instructional Pacing Guides (IPGs) to each school to ensure consistent instruction and pacing across the district. The IPGs are built by the teachers from a collaboration of suggested pacing guides from the vendor, state standards (ensuring the



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timeline prepares students for testing), and the district's academic calendar. This collaboration allows teachers to strategically plan lessons and pacing.

- Grade-level or subject-area teachers come together on a quarterly basis to review the IPGs and collaboratively plan for the upcoming quarter using the [Understanding by Design Framework](#). These planning sessions are led by a principal or an instructional facilitator.
- The Develop From Within initiative establishes a professional roadmap that allows educators to visualize and achieve career growth within the district, enabling staff to advance from roles such as instructional assistant to teacher, or from teacher to department chair. The district pays for educators to continue their education, a strategy that has successfully transitioned three instructional assistants into certified classroom teachers.

Strengthening data-driven decision-making:

- WPSD is driven by its strategic plan. When Superintendent Dr. Becoats arrived in 2020, he led the development of [Focus Forward 2025](#) which outlined three major priorities: Academic Excellence, Cohesiveness, and Efficiency, Effectiveness, and Equity. Building on the success of this plan, [Focus Forward and Beyond](#) was launched in April 2025. The district maintains a [living spreadsheet](#) that breaks down the district-level goals that make up these three priorities, the strategies it is using to achieve them, and their status.
- WPSD employs a Research Supervisor to ensure that data is not merely collected but translated into actionable instructional strategies for principals and teachers. In this capacity, the district is able to provide comprehensive research analyses to every school three times per year. The analyses include data from Acadience foundational math and literacy assessments, MAP Growth assessments, the Pennsylvania [Firefly](#) benchmark science assessment, and state assessments scores in math, English language arts (ELA), and science, as well as attendance data and student, staff, and family surveys.
- District leadership, which includes the academic services team and cabinet-level department leaders, meet with principals monthly to review specific student data points, ensuring central office staff have structured time to understand school-level priorities and provide targeted academic support.
- The district convenes quarterly Data Protocol Sessions for each school, aligned with [guidance](#) from the Pennsylvania Department of Education via Intermediate Unit 13. These sessions provide a structured forum for principals to share their goals directly with central office leadership and cabinet members—including representatives from special education, operations, and other student support services—to ensure a holistic approach to student needs. Superintendent Dr. Becoats emphasizes that these sessions are critical for aligning various student services toward common goals, noting that operational factors such as bus delays and cafeteria operations can significantly impact a student's ability to learn.
- Principals, instructional facilitators, and/or school-based teacher leaders are required to lead Common Planning Time meetings, typically held weekly or more frequently, which follow a [structured protocol](#) where teachers evaluate student work to identify learning gaps and conceptual misunderstandings. These sessions allow educators to make collaborative, data-driven decisions about immediate instruction and remediation efforts while rotating the focus of each meeting across different academic subjects and grade levels.



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- Every school, regardless of proficiency levels or federal identification, is required to submit an annual [School Improvement Plan](#) to the district. The requirements for the Improvement Plan are similar to what the state requires for districts in need of support and are built by analyzing data including student attendance, suspensions, and performance on common assessments. The district follows the [state-provided guidelines](#) which lists four attributes for an effective improvement plan. WPSD begins the planning process with principals in January to prepare for the following academic year.
- In recent years, Penn Wood Middle School exited its 2022 state Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI) designation as a result of its effective planning and implementation, and Penn Wood High School was one of the few schools in the commonwealth of Pennsylvania to exit not one but two ATSI designations from 2018 and 2022.
- The budget process is intrinsically tied to data. Schools must justify requests for additional school personnel based on their specific improvement plans and student proficiency data. For example, the district's Ninth Grade Academy requested an exclusive site-based teacher leader to coach math teachers in the 2023-2024 budget year, and an additional math teacher to support changing the schedule to increase instructional time for Algebra I in the 2024-2025 budget year. According to WPSD, these changes corresponded to significant growth as measured by the Pennsylvania Value-Added assessment system in the 2024-2025 school year.
- Between the 2023-2024 and 2025-2026 school years, during the period in which the district significantly improved its implementation of these strategies, students in grades 3-8 grew from the 29th to 57th median growth percentile in math from fall to winter and from the 45th to 60th median growth percentile in reading from fall to winter.

Strengthening positive behavior systems and school climate:

- WPSD's 47% decrease in student behavior incidents between the 2023–2024 and 2024–2025 school years reflects the impact of a coordinated, districtwide focus on consistent expectations, proactive supports, and strengthened school climate systems. This improvement is driven by aligned efforts across schools that emphasize prevention, early intervention, and clear behavioral expectations supported through multiple layers of support. These outcomes are the result of intentional implementation of systems and practices that strengthen both student accountability and supportive school environments.
- School Safety Officers (SSOs) engage in ongoing training in threat assessment, emergency management, CPR/AED, de-escalation, and crisis response through Navigate360 and related coursework, ensuring they are prepared to respond effectively across a wide range of school-based situations while supporting safe and orderly environments. SSOs are strategically deployed based on school needs and pre-event site evaluations to ensure appropriate coverage and maximum effectiveness, helping to reduce incidents before they occur.
- SSOs build strong, trusting relationships with students, staff, and families, supporting early identification of concerns and helping to prevent incidents from escalating. The district maintains close coordination with local borough police departments and community partners to ensure timely communication and shared awareness of potential safety issues impacting schools and surrounding communities.
- Survey feedback from students, staff, and families is systematically incorporated into school-level planning and decision-making to strengthen school climate. Principals and district leaders review survey results to identify trends, address areas of concern, and



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implement targeted improvements that enhance the overall school experience. This ongoing feedback loop ensures that school climate strategies are responsive, data-informed, and continuously refined based on stakeholder input.

- Positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) are embedded within school systems to establish clear expectations, reinforce positive behavior, and recognize students through consistent, schoolwide reward structures. This work is aligned within a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS), with Tier 1 strategies focused on universal expectations and prevention for all students, and Tier 2 supports providing targeted interventions for students who need additional behavioral or social-emotional support.
- Student voice is also intentionally integrated into school climate efforts through structures such as student councils and schoolwide town halls, which provide regular opportunities for students to help shape expectations, reinforce shared behavior norms, and contribute to a positive school culture. These forums allow school leaders to communicate expectations clearly while also receiving direct student input on school climate, engagement, and improvement initiatives. At the elementary level, student safety is further reinforced through school safety programs such as School Safety Patrols, which promote leadership, responsibility, and shared ownership of maintaining a safe and respectful school environment. These efforts are supported by additional school-based strategies that strengthen consistency, reinforce expectations, and build a positive sense of community across all grade levels.