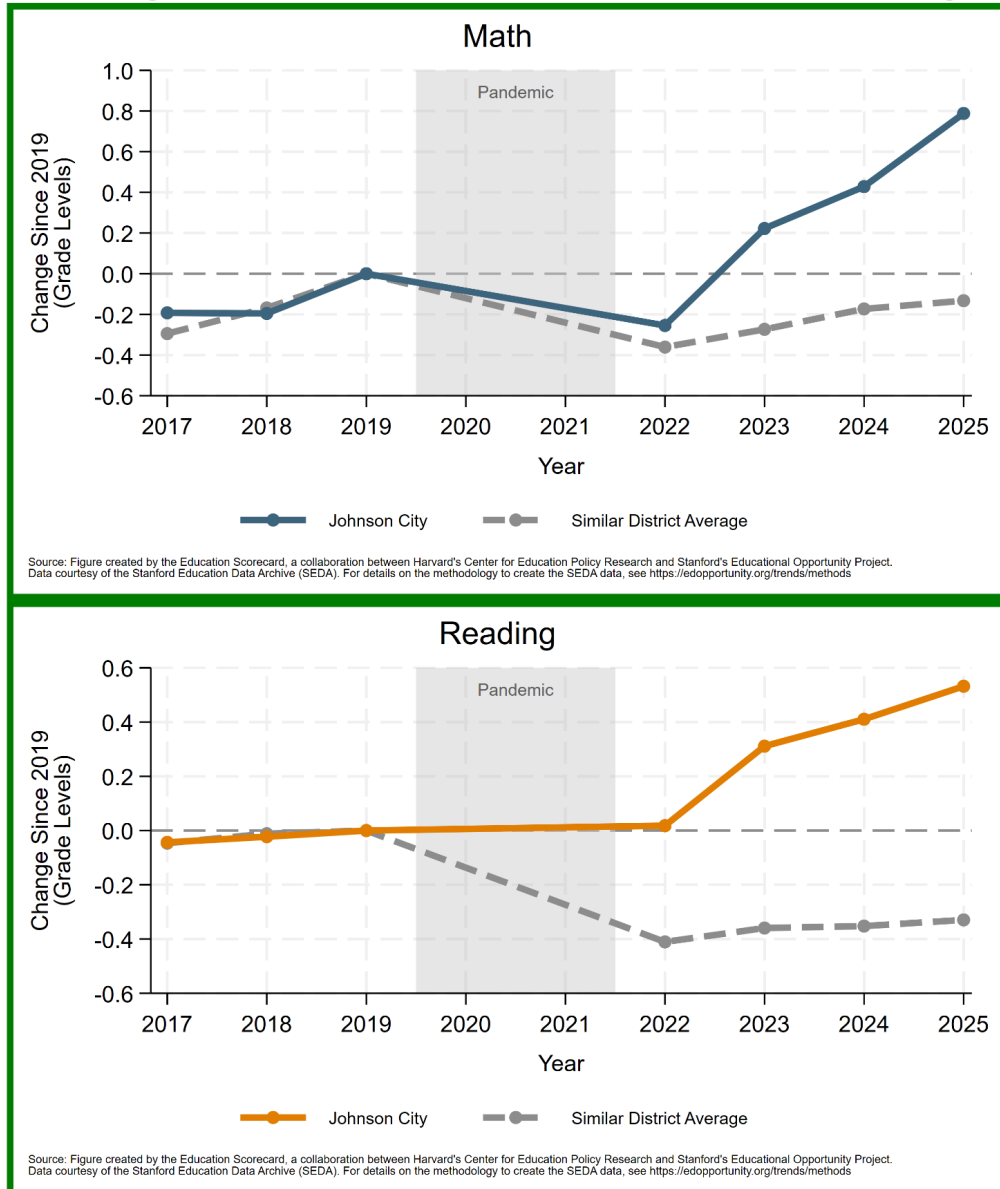


Johnson City Schools
Johnson City, Tennessee

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Rising Faster than Similar Districts in Math & Reading



Similar Districts: Kingsport, Bristol, Cleveland, Hamblen County, Murfreesboro

Student Demographics:

Total student population: 7,623

Economically Disadvantaged: 36%

Three largest racial demographics:

White 67%

Black/African American 15%

Hispanic/Latino 14%

Erin Slater, Superintendent

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- “Johnson City Schools has maintained a high level of achievement that can be attributed to several factors that have been synchronized over time. Our motto, “Expect the Best!” is lived every day. It has created a long-term culture of learning with high expectations, which fosters our continuous improvement cycle. This accountability is shared by the Board of Education, district leadership, building leadership, and our staff. Engaging classroom instruction delivered by our high-quality teachers and supported by building staff, combined with partnerships from a strong community, city commission, business, industry, and our families, has sustained our high level of achievement. “

Background

Johnson City Schools has been on a steady upward trajectory in student achievement for roughly two decades, even as Tennessee has revised academic standards and the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted learning statewide. District leaders describe the central theme as consistency: Johnson City selects a small set of core instructional strategies and sustains them over many years, rather than cycling through short-lived reforms. Johnson City has earned a Level 5 composite on the [Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System \(TVAAS\)](#), the state’s highest growth rating, for four consecutive years, and ten of eleven Johnson City schools earned an “A” in the [2024-25 state letter grades](#).

District staff attributes these gains to a long-term focus on recruiting and retaining experienced educators, leveraging instructional coaching and data, making disciplined use of ESSER funds, and building a culture of high expectations for both learning and attendance. That culture is reinforced by a community that holds the district accountable for student performance, pressure that local leaders treat as an asset rather than a burden. First-year Superintendent Dr. Erin Slater leads a senior team of supervisors with 10 to 25-plus years of tenure in Johnson City Schools. That continuity of leadership reflects the district’s emphasis on doing a small set of things well, year after year.

Strategies for Success

Two Decades of Coaching and Data

- Since 2005, Johnson City Schools has grown an instructional coaching program from one academic coach to 19 across ELA, math, science, RTI, CTE, SPED, ESL and

instructional technology, providing ongoing, job-embedded support to teachers at all experience levels.

- For roughly 20 years, the district has used [checkpoints](#), benchmarks, and other formative assessments to give teachers early, frequent data months before state tests, pairing those results with coaching and targeted support so instruction can be adjusted well before April.
- Tennessee’s teacher evaluation system ([TEAM](#)) is used as a structured feedback loop, combining observations and student data so evaluators and teachers identify specific growth areas and connect them directly to coaching, resources, and next steps.
- Across grade spans, the district builds in collaboration time: high school “learning labs,” middle school “school within a school” teams, and elementary master schedules all ensure content- or grade-level teams have common planning to align curriculum to standards, analyze checkpoint data, refine pacing, plan supports, and create or review common assessments and student work.
- Recruiting and retention reinforce this backbone. As a city system, Johnson City attracts veteran teaching talent from surrounding districts: of approximately 50 new teachers onboarded in summer 2025, 80 percent had 10 or more years of classroom experience. A pre-pandemic Educator Provider Program partnership with East Tennessee State University and Milligan University also feeds a steady pipeline of high-quality beginning teachers into the district.

Science of Reading within a Coherent Literacy System

- Johnson City has fully implemented Tennessee’s science of reading requirements and embeds that training within its long-standing coaching, evaluation, and formative assessment systems.
- The district treats curriculum and instructional expectations as system responsibilities, ensuring science of reading practices are applied coherently across schools and grade levels rather than as isolated initiatives.
- The district uses its 20-year instructional coaching and evaluation systems to embed science of reading training into daily classroom practice, relying on the same formative assessment and feedback loops that guide other subjects to refine literacy instruction.

Technology and ESSER built on 10-year Head Start

- The district entered COVID with one-to-one devices, Canvas for grades 3–12, Google Classroom for K–2, and a decade-old Teacher Tech Leadership program that had trained more than 100 teachers as building-level ed-tech leaders.
- ESSER funds were used to deepen this foundation: expanding and then selectively sustaining only the most effective digital tools, hiring additional teachers to reduce class sizes in key grades and core courses, and funding targeted tutoring (with transportation) before, during, and after school.

Attendance and Healthy School Environment

- Every school has an attendance secretary, and ESSER-funded attendance interventionists were added in higher-need schools to work intensively with students and families.
- The district provides families with calendars and a tiered attendance policy, runs Attendance Spirit Week, highlights attendance in newsletters, and allows schools to design their own incentives that reward both strong and improving attendance.
- For about 15 years, Johnson City has sustained a Safe and Healthy Schools–inspired mental health model, dedicating between 1%-2% of its budget to additional case managers and therapists so each school has a counselor, case manager, and therapist, supported by weekly meetings to remove barriers to support a healthy school environment and academic success.