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2026 REPORT



# STEADY PROGRESS: MORE URGENCY REQUIRED TO SEE BIG GAINS

This year's 2026 Memphis State of Education Report shows steady progress in K-12 educational outcomes; however, much of this change is incremental, and more is required for our highest-need students to reach their potential.

The past year has seen the city of Memphis thrust into the spotlight at both the state and federal level. One specific challenge is the expansion of voucher programs, which funnel public dollars to private education. At Memphis Education Fund, we believe that now, more than ever, the city, the county, and all the school systems that operate within must own the responsibility for the outcomes of all of our children.

We continue to have a complicated public education landscape where responsibility is divided among four school authorizers: Memphis-Shelby County Schools (MSCS), the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission (TPCSC), the shrinking Achievement School District (ASD), and now, the newly authorized University Schools District.

With such complexity, Memphis Education Fund understands the importance of transparent and accessible public data that are comprehensive and unbiased. This report serves as a resource for all policymakers, school leaders, and community members to understand where progress is being made and where additional work is required.

In this time of change, it is critical for Memphis to lead the creation of bold locally led efforts, sweep out what is no longer serving us, and chart the way for innovative collaboration.

We remain optimistic about the future of public education in our city.

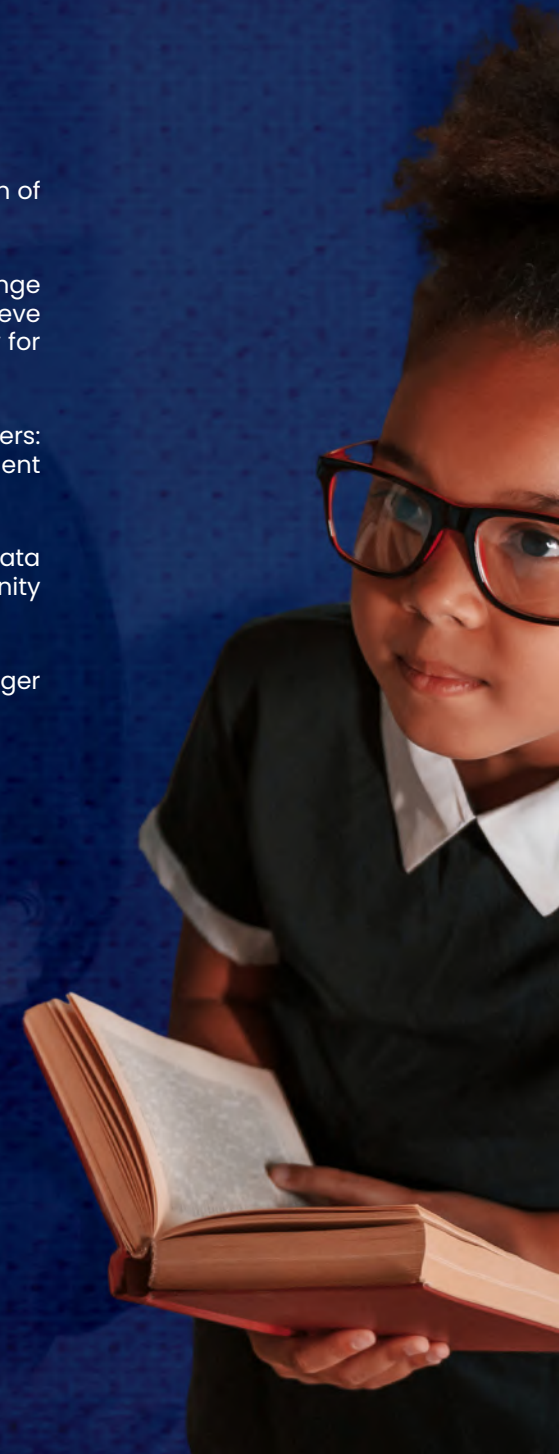
Stay engaged, utilize high-quality data sources, and stay hopeful!



J. Terence Patterson  
MEF President and CEO



Memphis Education Fund (MEF) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that has operated in the city for over a decade, working to improve the public-school landscape and champion a quality educational experience for all children.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

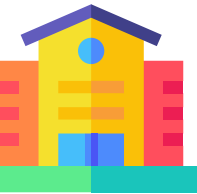
|  |       |
|--|-------|
| Trends and Opportunities                                 | 1     |
| Pre-K Investments Yield Longterm Gains                   | 2     |
| Our Schools  | 3     |
| More Schools Earn A's and B's                            | 4     |
| Academic Performance by Region and School Type           | 5-6   |
| Most School Types Show Academic Growth in 24-25          | 7-8   |
| Opportunity to Close Achievement Gaps                    | 9     |
| Celebrating Schools that are Breaking Barriers           | 10    |
| Action Needed to Responsibly Manage Aging MSCS Footprint | 11-12 |
| Elementary Highlights                                    | 13    |
| Middle School Highlights                                 | 14    |
| High School Highlights                                   | 15    |
| Gaps in Transition to Post-Secondary                     | 16    |



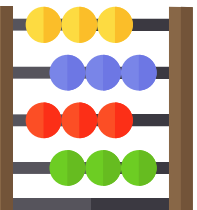
# TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES



**Academic performance continues to increase, but gradually and unequally.** More ambitious efforts must be made to ensure all children have access to a quality public education. While steady gains are being made in Math, not all school types have returned to pre-pandemic levels. In ELA, progress has slowed.



Within Memphis and Shelby County, there are too many deteriorating buildings with high deferred maintenance costs. In order to keep children safe, these buildings must be closed. **More money should go toward innovative academic programming, rather than the upkeep of aging, and often underenrolled, buildings.**



Pre-K investment is important. **Filling in the regional gaps in Pre-K service could lead to significant gains for children as they age into the K-12 grades.**



**Geographic and demographic disparities must be addressed thoughtfully.** Not all children in Memphis have access to a quality education. There are no regions in the city where more than 50% of schools score an A or B letter grade. The East region comes closest. In our Breaking Barriers Award, we highlight exemplary schools that are serving economically disadvantaged students well.



ACT scores and graduation rates remain largely the same from last year. Undergraduate enrollment is making a slow comeback but still is considerably behind where it was prior to the pandemic. **Authorizers can do more to ensure that students complete their FAFSA, as Shelby County completion rates rank in the bottom fourth of all counties statewide.**

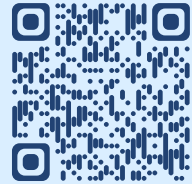


# PRE-K INVESTMENTS YIELD LONGTERM GAINS



This page was created in collaboration with First Eight Memphis, a nonprofit that works to ensure every child in Memphis and Shelby County can reach their full potential by building a strong start during the first eight years of life.

Click or Scan Here



Parents, learn more about how to enroll your child in free Pre-K.

Providers, join the Pre-K Work Group working to align processes and standards that will improve our system's outcomes.

## Students Who Attend Pre-K Outperform Their Peers

- Memphis and Shelby County research shows that children who attend a quality Pre-K program outperform their peers by 13-15% on NWEA-MAP and i-Ready.<sup>1</sup>
- Children who attend a quality Pre-K program are less likely to be placed in special education and are more likely to graduate high school.<sup>2</sup>

## More Public Funding is Needed for Additional Pre-K Seats

- There are 25,000 3 and 4-year-olds in Shelby County. Although not all parents will opt into publicly funded Pre-K options, there are currently only seats available for 25% of 3-year-olds and 50% of 4-year-olds.<sup>3,4</sup>

## Seat Expansion must Address Geographic Disparities

- Several ZIP Codes are critically lacking in publicly funded seats.

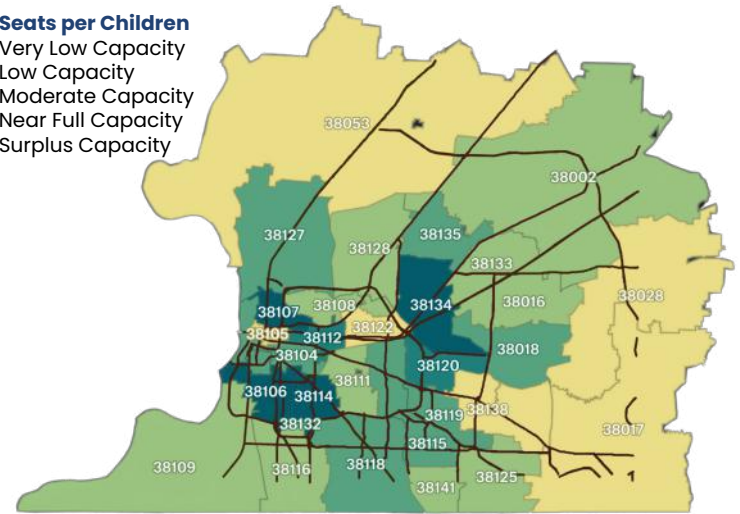
## Publicly Funded Options Provide High Quality

- Large quality differences exist between Pre-K types. Some public options give families access to wraparound services, while many private options do not.
- It is critical to collect consistent Kindergarten Readiness assessments across the country to help us understand differences in quality across Pre-K program types.

## 29 out of 38 ZIP Codes in Shelby County do NOT have enough seats for every child to attend Pre-K.

### Seats per Children

- Very Low Capacity
- Low Capacity
- Moderate Capacity
- Near Full Capacity
- Surplus Capacity



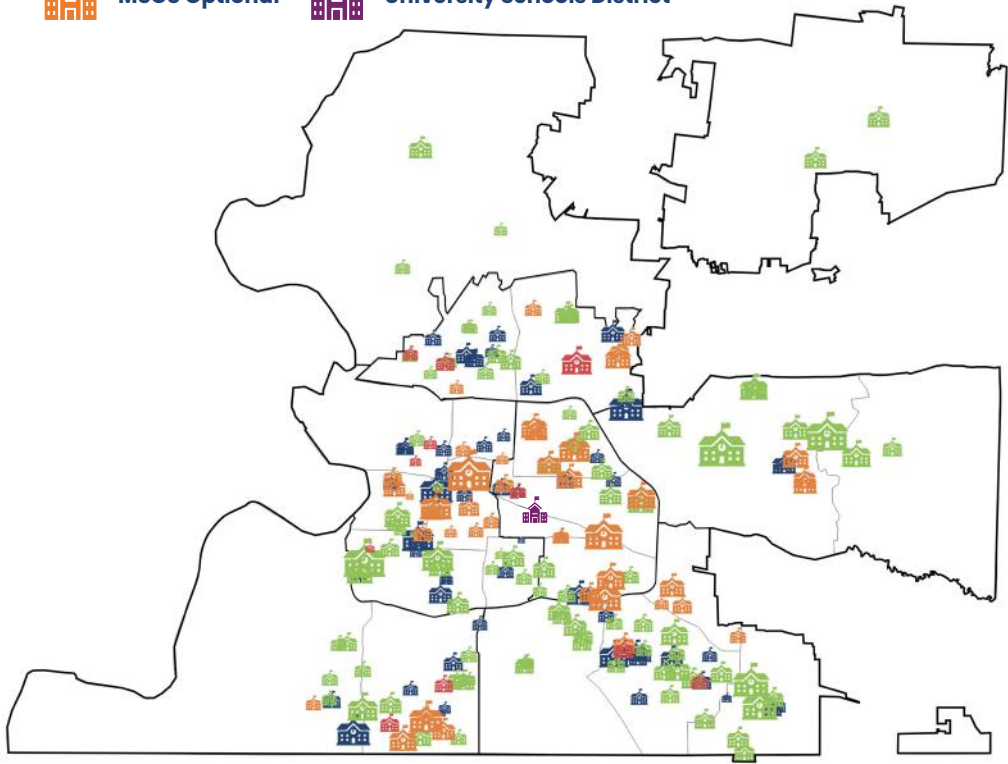
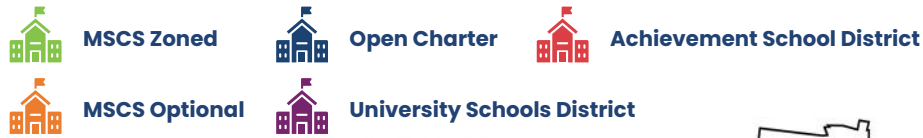
Shelby County has built meaningful Pre-K infrastructure. Now the priority is targeted expansion to ensure equitable access to high-quality early learning for all children. We must also utilize Kindergarten Readiness assessment data to understand community needs and ensure every child is prepared to excel as they transition to Kindergarten.

**Note**

1. *First Eight Memphis Shelby County Pre-K Analysis*: [www.first8memphis.org/latest-f8m-news/shelby-county-pre-k-data-show-positive-impacts-lasting-through-7th-grade](http://www.first8memphis.org/latest-f8m-news/shelby-county-pre-k-data-show-positive-impacts-lasting-through-7th-grade)
2. *Impacts of Early Childhood Education on Medium and Long-Term Educational Outcomes* (McCoy et al. 2016)
3. Publicly funded Pre-K seats are school-based or community-based early childhood education seats for 3- and 4-year-olds, financed by federal, state, local government, or philanthropic funds rather than tuition fees.
4. Seat-to-child ratios and the map were created by Innovate Memphis/ Data Midsouth using U.S. Census Bureau child population estimates and Pre-K seat data provided by First Eight (Fall 2025).

# OUR SCHOOLS

In the 24-25 school year, there were approximately 111,000 K-12 public school students in Memphis within each of the five school types listed here:



Two MSCS school types appear in this report: MSCS Zoned and MSCS Optional. To enroll in an MSCS Optional program, children must meet specific academic criteria, and their parents must submit an application. Some Optional schools also enroll children who are zoned to that school, but most of those children do not participate in the Optional programming. MSCS Zoned schools enroll students based on the zones in which they reside.

The Open Charter category includes schools across two different authorizers: MSCS and the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission (TPCSC).

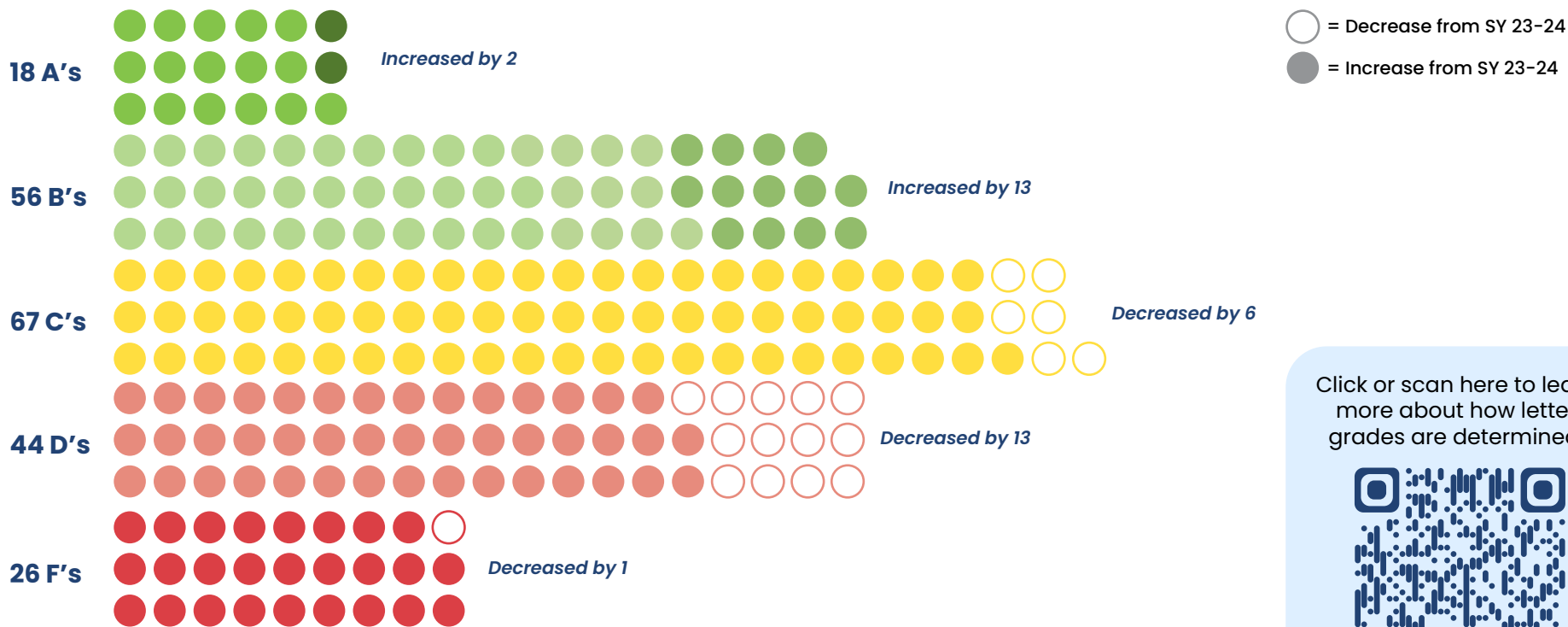
The Achievement School District (ASD), the state's turnaround program for low-performing schools, is phasing out and may no longer appear in future iterations of the report. For now, around 1,400 students still attend the two remaining ASD schools.

The University Schools District is a new addition to the Memphis landscape and contains three schools and nearly 1,000 students. Until recently, these schools operated under MSCS, but now are authorized by the University of Memphis, which may also authorize additional schools in the future.

# MORE SCHOOLS EARN A'S AND B'S

Every year, the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) releases letter grades for each public school. Elementary and middle school grades are based on student achievement, overall academic growth, and the growth of the school's highest-need students. An additional measure for high schools is college and career readiness.

Memphis schools have made progress in letter grades since the 23-24 school year by increasing the number of schools with an A or B letter grade by 15 schools. Additionally, the number of schools with a C, D, or F letter grade decreased by 20.

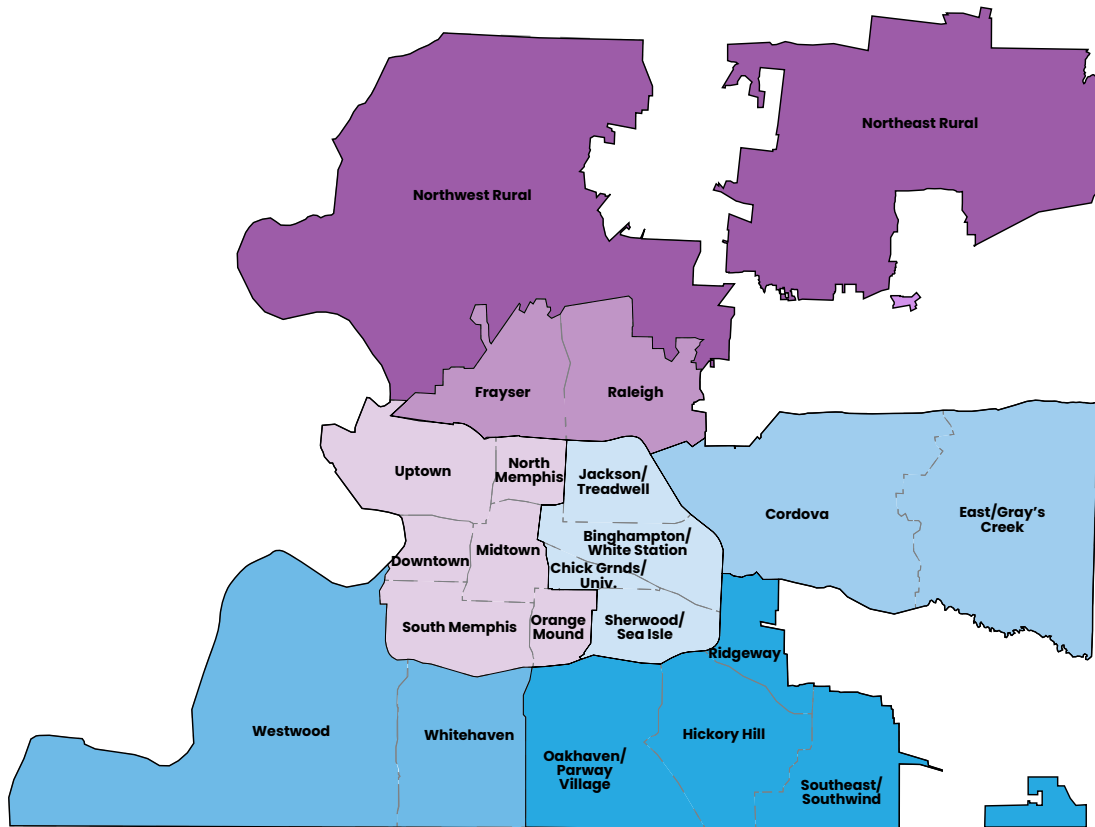


**Note**  
1. All Letter Grade data covers Grades 3-12 and comes from TDOE.

Click or scan here to learn more about how letter grades are determined.

# ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE BY REGION AND SCHOOL TYPE

There are 74 A or B schools located across the city, which is 15 more schools than the 23–24 school year. The North, Central City West, and Southwest regions have the highest percentage of economically disadvantaged students. These regions also have the lowest percentage of A and B schools, with the North region having a slightly higher percentage. The Central City East and East regions have the highest percentage of A or B schools and the lowest percentage of economically disadvantaged students.



Neighborhoods with a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students are often associated with lower school letter grades. This indicates the need for targeted investments in more impoverished regions. All students across Memphis should have access to A and B schools, regardless of their location and economic status.

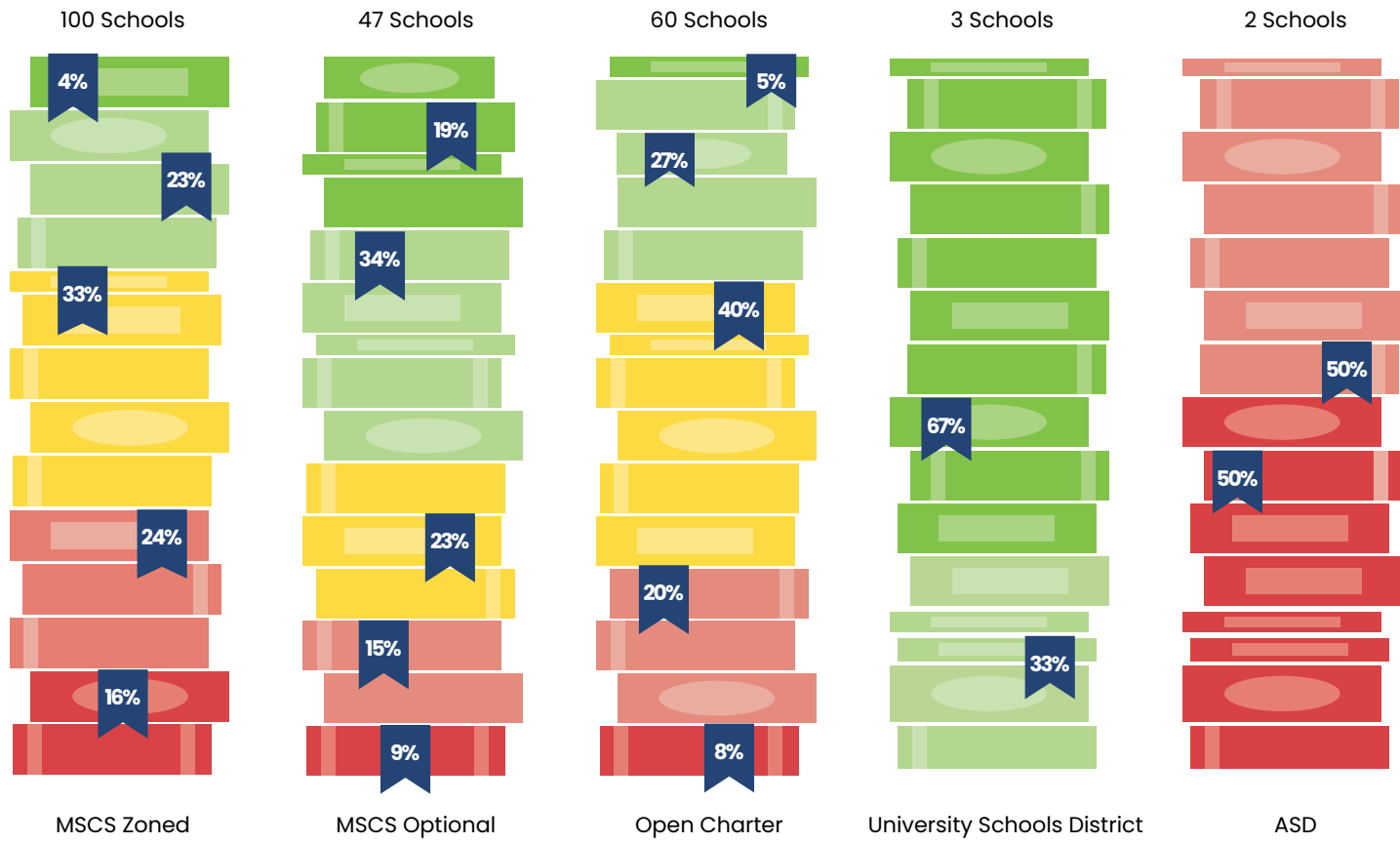
| Region            | % Economically Disadvantaged Students | % A or B Schools |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| Rural             | 58%                                   | 33%              |
| North             | 70%                                   | 29%              |
| Central City West | 70%                                   | 22%              |
| Central City East | 47%                                   | 45%              |
| East              | 51%                                   | 47%              |
| Southwest         | 70%                                   | 21%              |
| Southeast         | 56%                                   | 38%              |

**Note**

1. This is based on the Tennessee Department of Education's letter grade ratings for School Year 24–25.



## Letter Grades Across School Types



MSCS Zoned, Open Charter, and MSCS Optional schools increased the percentage of A or B letter grades from the 23-24 school year. Notably, MSCS Zoned schools increased by 10 percentage points.

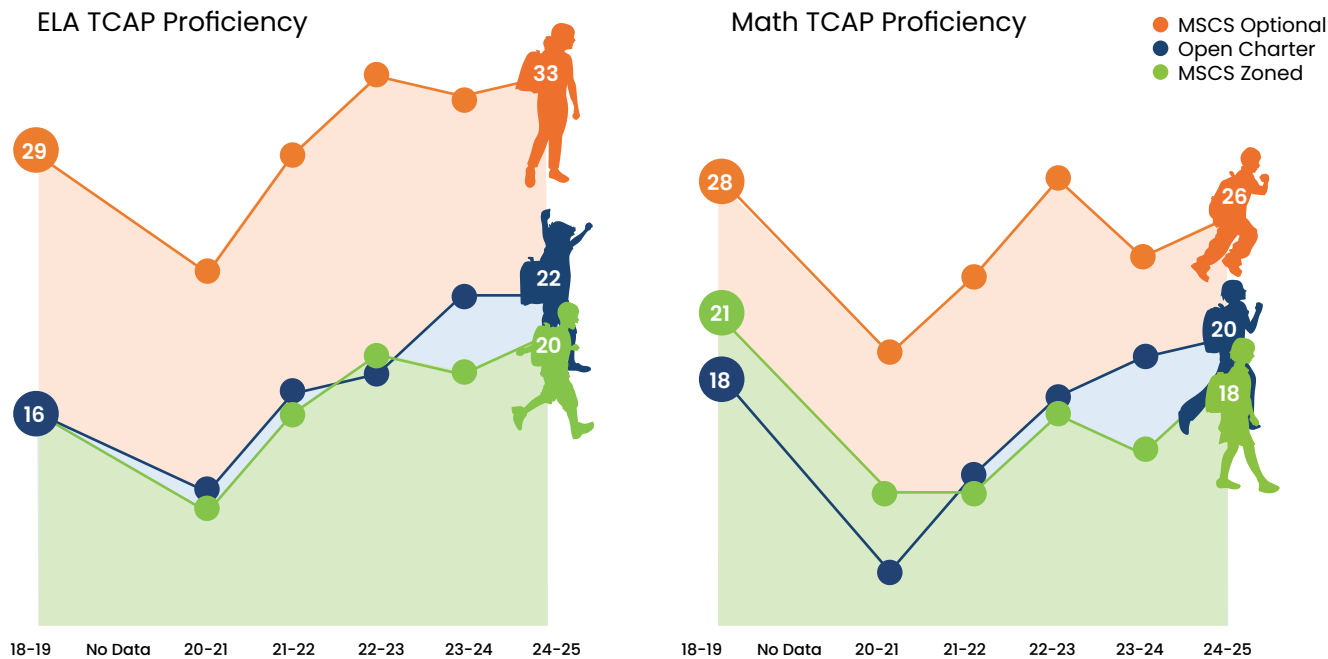
While there was a reduction in schools earning a C or below, 40% of MSCS Zoned schools still scored a D or F.

Meanwhile, in our smallest districts, the three schools in the University Schools District have the highest percentage of schools earning an A or B letter grade, and both ASD schools have a D or F letter grade.

# MOST SCHOOL TYPES SHOW ACADEMIC GROWTH IN 24-25

In Tennessee, academic proficiency is assessed using the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) in grades 3–8, and End-of-Course (EOC) examinations in high school. TCAP evaluates student performance in English Language Arts (ELA), Math, Science, and Social Studies. Throughout this report, proficiency is defined as the percentage of students who meet or exceed Tennessee academic standards in Math and ELA in TCAP and EOC assessments.<sup>1</sup> Note that this page omits the smallest districts, the ASD (2 schools), and the University Schools District (3 schools).

For MSCS Zoned schools, proficiency has increased in ELA and Math since last year. Notably, Math increased by 4 percentage points. In Open Charter schools, ELA results stayed the same as last year and Math increased marginally.



MCSC Optional Schools continue to outperform other school types. However, they have not yet reached their pre-pandemic scores in Math.

**All school types exceed their own pre-pandemic ELA proficiency. In Math, Open Charters are the only school type to have bounced back to pre-pandemic levels. More needs to be done for all schools to reach and exceed their pre-pandemic proficiency.**

**Note**

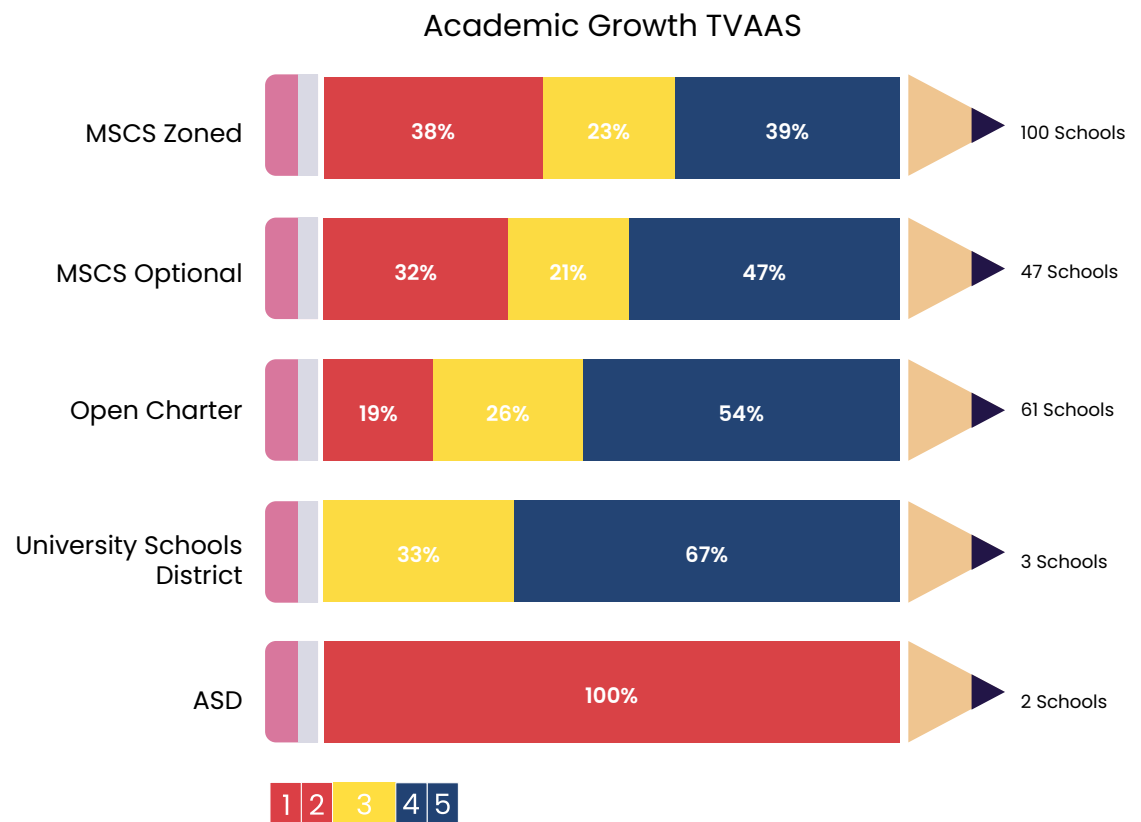
1. This analysis categorizes EOCs Algebra I, Algebra II, and Geometry under "Math" and English I and English II under "ELA".



To measure academic growth, Tennessee uses the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS). While TCAP measures student proficiency at a single point in time, TVAAS captures student academic growth from one year to the next. TVAAS scores of 1 or 2 indicate less-than-expected growth, whereas scores of 4 or 5 reflect greater-than-expected student growth.

Open Charter schools continue to outpace MSCS Zoned and MSCS Optional schools with 54% of schools earning a 4 or 5 TVAAS. Students are growing more than expected in more than half of our Open Charter schools.

**All school types had a reduction in the percentage of 4 or 5 TVAAS scores compared to 23-24 (except for University Schools District schools as they were not a district in 23-24). There needs to be more consideration into how we can support all schools in achieving and sustaining greater than expected growth to close gaps for all students.**



# OPPORTUNITY TO CLOSE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

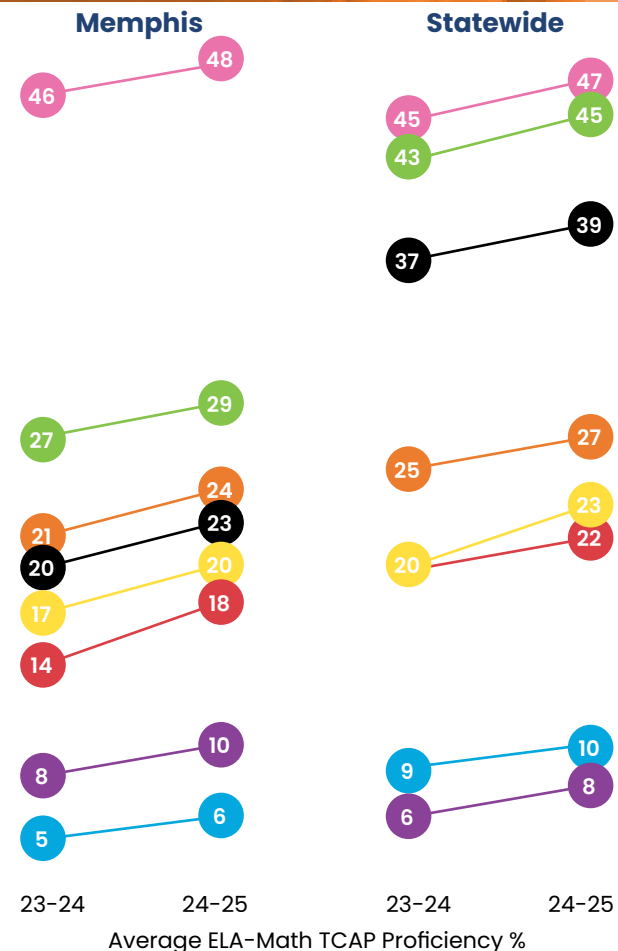
Each of the following subgroups in Memphis have improved their ELA–Math TCAP proficiency from the 23–24 school year:

- All Students
- Economically Disadvantaged
- Black or African American
- Non–Economically Disadvantaged
- Hispanic
- English Learners
- White
- Students with Disabilities

The proficiency growth of 3 percentage points for All Students in Memphis marginally exceeds that of the state. Scores in Memphis for Economically Disadvantaged, Hispanic, and African American students slightly underperform the state averages for the respective peer groups.

White students in Memphis score slightly higher than they do statewide. English Learners in Memphis score 2 percentage points better than the state, while Students with Disabilities in Memphis lag the state average for that group by 4 points. More must be done for these populations at the state and local levels.

**Interestingly, the most significant difference in scores between Memphis and the state average is that Non–Economically Disadvantaged students (43% of all students) achieve significantly better scores across the state than in Memphis. School authorizers in Memphis should take note and use their access to more granular data to explore this disparity.**

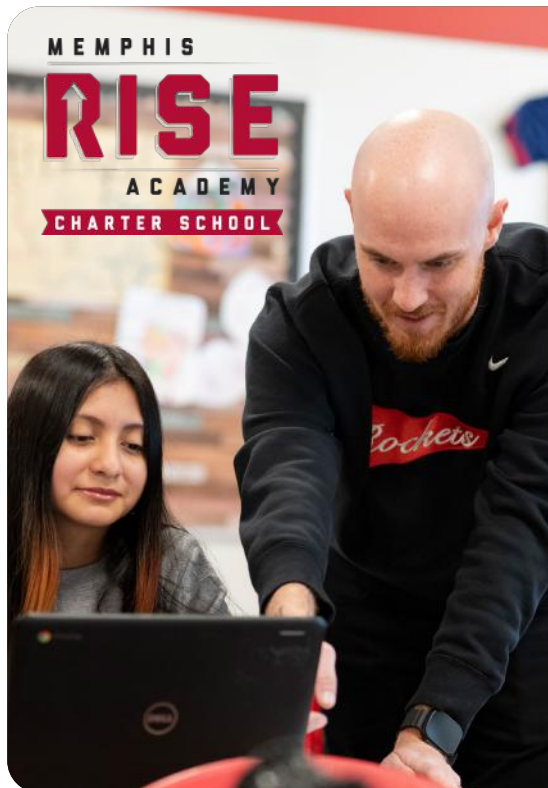


**Note**

1. This data cut includes Grades 3–12. To calculate a proficiency rate for Grades 9–12, a weighted average is taken of relevant EOC subjects, where Math is composed of Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, Integrated Math I–III and ELA is composed of English I, English II.
2. Economically Disadvantaged (ED) is a definition used by the Tennessee Department of Education and is based on whether the child’s family receives government assistance in the form of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) or the Supplemental Nutrition Program (SNAP). To learn how this definition undercounts the number of children in poverty, see EdTrust Tennessee’s report, *The Undercount: Tennessee’s Narrow Poverty Definition Shortchanges Schools and Students*.
3. Students with disabilities are those aged 3 to 21 with a state-recognized disability requiring special education services. (34 C.F.R. § 300.8).

# CELEBRATING SCHOOLS THAT ARE BREAKING BARRIERS

For the second year, Memphis Education Fund is giving its Breaking Barriers Award to 10 schools across the city. This award highlights schools with the highest combined Math and ELA proficiency scores on the 24-25 TCAP. Each school serves a student population with more than half of its students identified as economically disadvantaged. Here is a profile of one of our winners.



Founded in 2014, Memphis Rise Academy Charter School serves students in grades 6-12 in the Raleigh neighborhood. Its student population is nearly 80% Hispanic and 20% African American, with more than a third of their students having limited English proficiency. Memphis Rise's success lies in its focus on strong instruction and aligned, high-quality instructional materials. Memphis Rise utilizes a self-developed streamlined curriculum paired with a subject-based model of instruction that has been refined over its 12 years of operations to allow teachers to center their full attention on what they are teaching and not how.

**Most Memphis Rise students enroll as 6th graders, where they begin their middle school journey with a school-designed curriculum that starts with remedial content in each subject area. This approach ensures students have a solid foundation from which they can grow and quickly move into grade-level content.**

Additionally, Memphis Rise provides two class periods of core Math and ELA instruction to all middle school students, along with smaller-group instruction in a data-driven focus period. This has been a cornerstone of the model that allows Memphis Rise to excel in serving all students well.

To view more school profiles and a list of all Breaking Barriers Award schools, please click or scan the QR code.



# ACTION NEEDED TO RESPONSIBLY MANAGE AGING MSCS FOOTPRINT





In 2023, MSCS commissioned Bureau Veritas to conduct a facilities study for its buildings.<sup>1</sup> The last iteration of this study was conducted in 2016. Our analysis of that data is presented here. The district’s Facilities Roadmap can be found in the link below.<sup>2</sup>

The Facilities Condition Index (FCI) ranges have changed since the 2016 report, see table. FCI is defined as, “the ratio of the cost of current needs divided by current replacement value (CRV) of the facility.”

FCI values were estimated for the year when the site visit took place (either in 2023 or 2024) and were forecasted over a period of 10 years. The higher the FCI value, the more investments are needed to keep that building in operable condition.

This analysis focuses on FCI scores of 10% and above, which describes a building “Nearing the end of its useful or serviceable life.”

The analysis table shows the condition of facilities across each of the five MSCS administrative regions. See notes for information on how iZone schools are distributed across each of the four geographic regions.

|   | FCI Range     | Updated Definition  |
|---|---------------|---|
|    | 0-5%          | In new or well-maintained condition, with little or no visual evidence of wear or deficiencies. |
|    | 5-10%         | Subjected to wear but is still in a serviceable and functioning condition.                      |
|   | 10-30%        | Subjected to hard or long-term wear. <b>Nearing the end of its useful or serviceable life.</b>  |
|  | 30% and above | Has reached the end of its useful or serviceable life. Renewal is now necessary.                |

**Note**

- Each school report can be found at [blueprintforgreatness.org/schools-by-region/](https://blueprintforgreatness.org/schools-by-region/). All items in the orange analysis table, with the exception of the third column, “Buildings at < 60% Utilization”, are calculated using the information found in the school-level reports. Our analysis varies from what is presented in the MSCS Facilities Roadmap 2025, since not all of the available facilities’ reports were published on the Blueprint website.
- MSCS’ Facilities Roadmap from December 2025 can be accessed through the Daily Memphian at: <https://daily.memphian.com/subscriber/article/58223/memphis-shelby-county-schools-interim-superintendent-roderick-richmond-interview#&gid=1&pid=1>



**Within five years, more than half of MSCS’s buildings will be near or at the end of their serviceable life.** Nearly 60% of buildings in the Northwest and Southeast will be nearing or at the end of their life by 2030. Note that 18 of the 34 underenrolled buildings (with a utilization rate of 60% or less) are in the Northwest and Southeast.

MSCS plans to reduce deferred maintenance costs by closing or transferring five schools by the end of school year 2026. This is estimated to save \$21 million in the long term. Plans also exist to close another 10 schools over the next two years, mostly in the Northwest and Southwest, resulting in a 10% reduction of the overall footprint.

| Analysis Table <sup>1</sup> | Number of Buildings         | Buildings at <60% Utilization | Average Age     | Near-Term Maintenance (Total Cost) | Long-Term Maintenance (Total Cost) | Buildings Nearing End of Life in 5 Years <sup>2</sup> |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Northeast                   | 36 main (64 total)          | 9                             | 49 years        | \$120 M                            | \$271 M                            | 16 (44%)  |
| Northwest                   | 28 main (34 total)          | 12                            | 68 years        | \$83 M                             | \$193 M                            | 16 (57%)  |
| Southeast                   | 30 main (50 total)          | 6                             | 39 years        | \$112 M                            | \$220 M                            | 17 (57%)  |
| Southwest                   | 21 main (39 total)          | 7                             | 60 years        | \$64 M                             | \$145 M                            | 11 (52%)  |
| iZone                       | 34 main (57 total)          | *                             | 56 years        | \$105 M                            | \$245 M                            | 17 (50%)  |
| <b>Total</b>                | <b>149 main (244 total)</b> | <b>34</b>                     | <b>54 years</b> | <b>\$483 M</b>                     | <b>\$1 B</b>                       | <b>77 (52%)</b>                                       |

**This work must continue so that MSCS can devote its limited resources to ensuring ALL students receive a quality education in a safe and functional building, rather than spending those resources to care for aging, underutilized buildings.**

**Note**

- To see a map with the boundaries of each of the four MSCS regions, see the MSCS Facilities Roadmap 2025. This table does not include Career and Technology Centers (CTCs), of which there are 4, or stadiums, of which there are 10. The 34 iZone schools fall across the four geographic region as follows: 2 in Northeast, 11 in Northwest, 2 in Southeast, and 19 in Southwest. Utilization figures for iZone are not currently available from the district’s reporting.
- Many schools, stadiums, and CTCs have supplemental buildings. The building assessor assigned individual FCI scores to each supplemental building. To analyze this data, we performed a weighted average on the FCI figures to produce one overall FCI score for that cluster of buildings.



# ELEMENTARY HIGHLIGHTS

**Delano Optional School** is located in Frayser and serves a student body that is 95% African American and 70% Economically Disadvantaged. At Delano, students engage in goal-setting and data talks with their teachers throughout the school year. Teachers are expected to know their students deeply, both academically and socially.

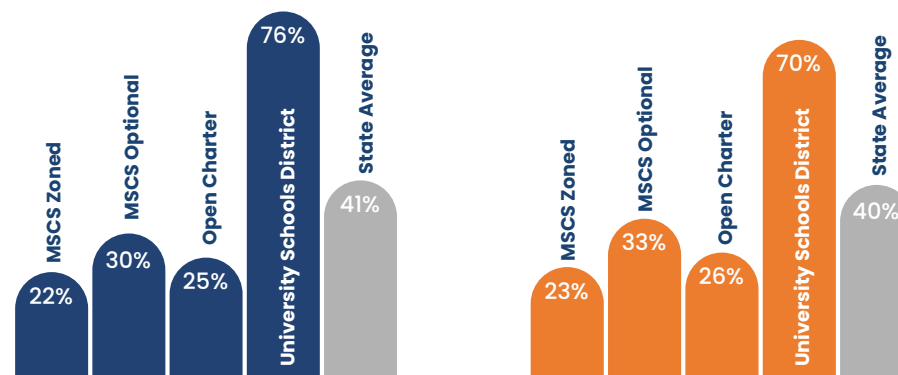
Delano maintains a culture of high expectations and strong support with its staff. Teachers are given autonomy within a clear instructional framework. Alignment is done around standards and outcomes, but trust is placed with educators to use their expertise, creativity, and relationships to drive engagement and achievement. Data informs the instructional practices for student growth.

A key factor in the school's success is collective ownership. Content teams collaborate regularly to analyze student work, anticipate misconceptions, and refine instruction. Instead of compliance-driven walkthroughs, Delano focuses on coaching conversations that center on student thinking and instructional impact.

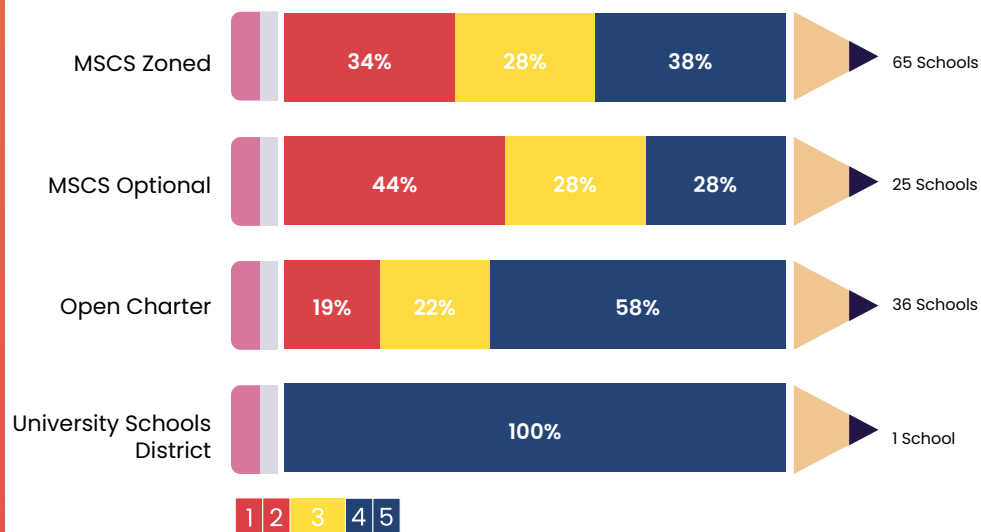
**All elementary school types improved in Math proficiency since last year. Notably, Open Charters reduced the percentage of TVAAS Level 1 and 2 schools by 10 percentage points since the 23-24 school year.**

ELA TCAP Proficiency

Math TCAP Proficiency



Academic Growth TVAAS



**Note**

1. All TCAP and TVAAS data covers Grades 3-12 and comes from TDOE.
2. Schools that serve multiple grade bands appear in both grade bands for TVAAS analysis. K8 schools are shown in Elementary and Middle school TVAAS charts. 6-12 schools are shown in Middle and High school TVAAS charts.



# MIDDLE SCHOOL HIGHLIGHTS

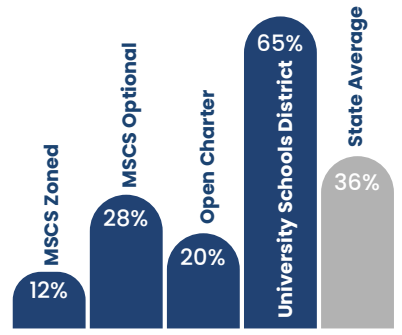
Located near Getwell and I-240, **Leadership Preparatory Charter School** opened its doors in 2015 and serves scholars in grades K-8. Its student body is 70% African American, 30% Hispanic/Latino, and 60% Economically Disadvantaged. The school is committed to delivering a rigorous, supportive educational experience built on high academic expectations for scholars and educators.

Leadership Prep implements a streamlined lesson delivery model across all content areas to ensure instructional time is used intentionally and effectively. Skills-based intervention blocks are embedded into the school day, so all scholars receive targeted support aligned to their individual learning needs.

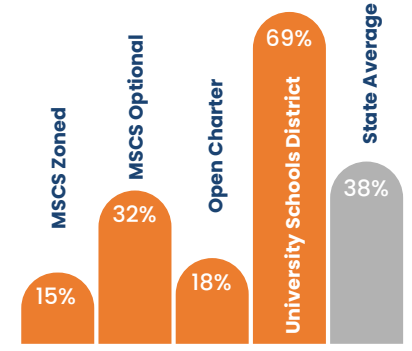
Leadership Prep makes strong investments in its educators, providing two weeks of professional development each summer along with continuous coaching and growth opportunities throughout the school year. Educators benefit from support provided by internal and external subject-matter experts, as well as structured collaboration with peers. This deep commitment to adult learning directly drives stronger scholar outcomes.

**All middle school types also experienced gains in Math. MSCS Optional schools made a significant 9-point increase in Math TCAP proficiency and are approaching the state average.**

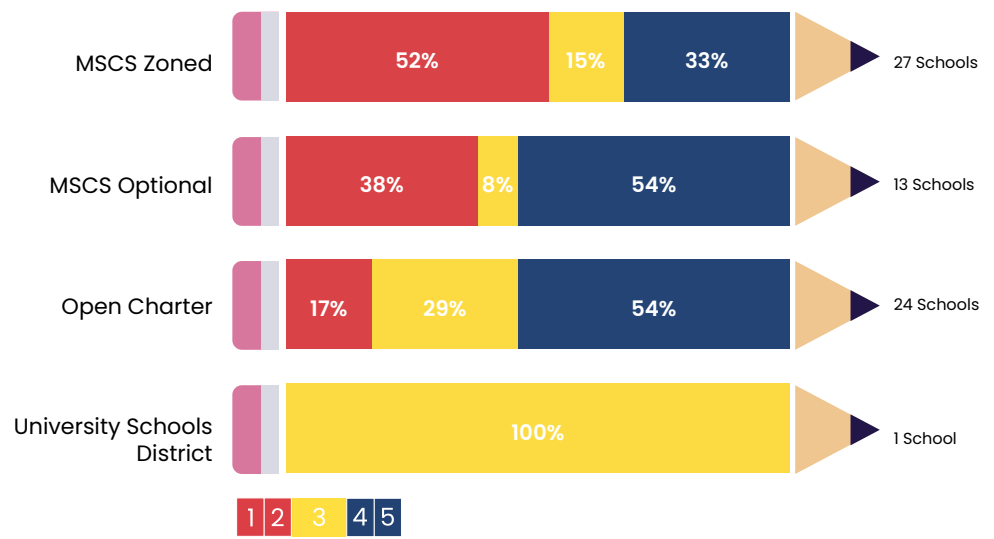
ELA TCAP Proficiency



Math TCAP Proficiency



Academic Growth TVAAS



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# HIGH SCHOOL HIGHLIGHTS

**Middle College High School**, a part of the National Middle College Consortium Network, is a general choice school located in the heart of Memphis. With a total enrollment of just over 300 students, the campus serves 95% African American and 35% Economically Disadvantaged students.

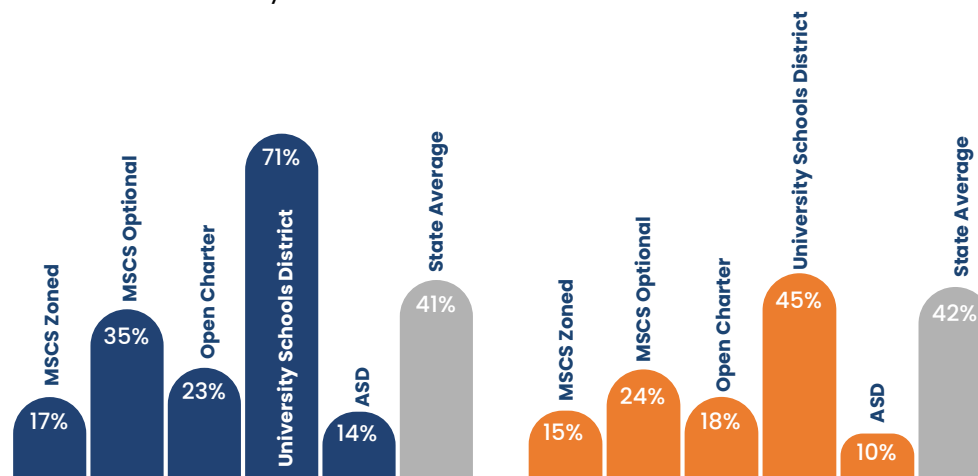
Students at Middle College have access to dual credit classes that can lead to completion of the first two years of college prior to graduation. College courses are offered at Middle College, Christian Brothers University, and the University of Memphis campuses. This key motivator drives the student commitment to high achievement.

At Middle College, the counseling team regularly engages with students each year to monitor progress in core classes. In recent years, there has been an intentional focus on making improvement across content areas and in ACT testing, which is key to an early college program's success.

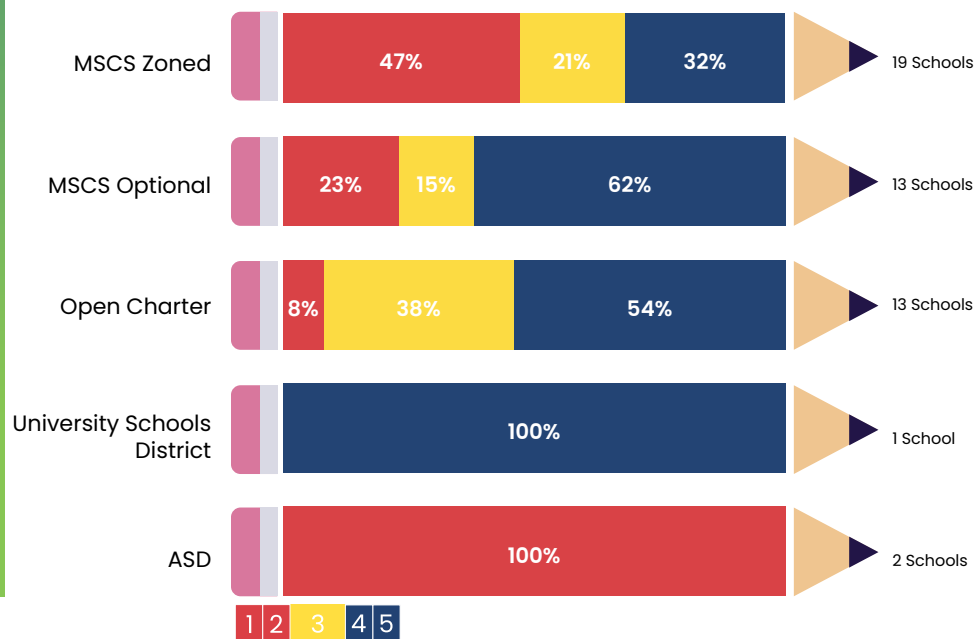
**In high schools, all school types saw gains in Math.<sup>1</sup> In ELA, MSCS Optional and ASD increased marginally while Open Charters and MSCS Zoned decreased. Work remains to improve performance across all school types, as proficiency at most schools continues to trail state averages.**

ELA TCAP Proficiency

Math TCAP Proficiency



Academic Growth TVAAS



**Note**

- All TCAP and TVAAS data covers Grades 3-12 and comes from TDOE.
- Schools that serve multiple grade bands appear in both grade bands for TVAAS analysis. K8 schools are shown in Elementary and Middle school TVAAS charts. 6-12 schools are shown in Middle and High school TVAAS charts.
- This analysis categorizes EOCs Algebra I, Algebra II, and Geometry under "Math" and English I and English II under "ELA".

# GAPS IN TRANSITION TO POST-SECONDARY



Graduation rates across the city are 84% on average. Open Charters have the highest rate at 90%, MSCS Optional schools are at 85%, and MSCS Zoned are at 82%.

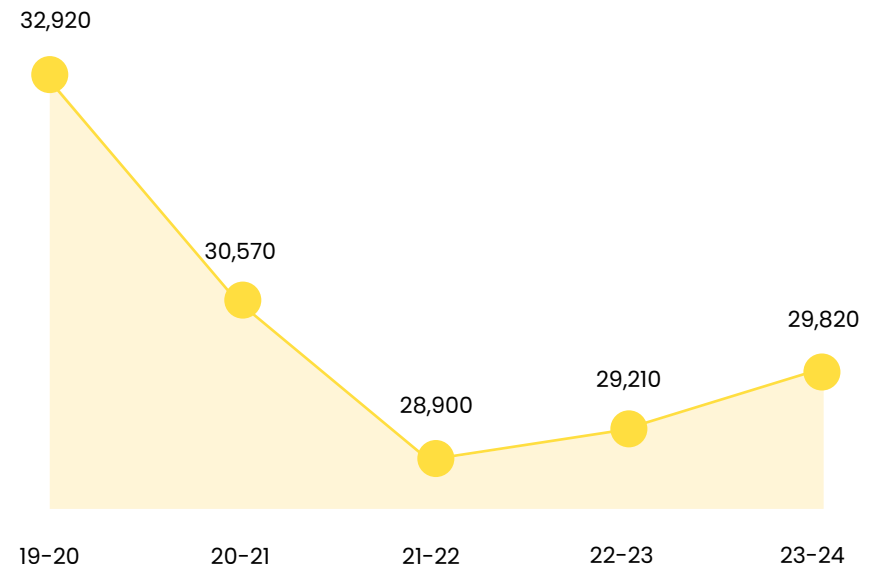


ACT scores have remained steady from last year, with MSCS Optional and Open Charters tied with average scores of 17. MSCS Zoned on average scored a 15.



In FAFSA completion, Shelby County ranks **#72** out of 95 TN counties, with **67%** of students completing the FAFSA.<sup>1</sup>

## Shelby County Undergraduate Enrollment Slowly Rebounds<sup>2</sup>



## Large Disparities Between Demographic Groups Statewide

Across the state, Hispanic/Latino students are college-going at the lowest rate of 39%, compared to 48% of African American students and 62% of white students. Female students across all demographics are college-going at a rate more than 10 percentage points higher than their male peers.<sup>3</sup>

### Note

1. This data can be found in the 2025 Higher Education County Profiles: <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/thec/countyprofiles>
2. This graph reflects enrollment in TCATs, public community colleges, and public universities, and includes dual enrollment students.
3. Tennessee College Going & The Class of 2024.

# STAY IN TOUCH

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Memphis Education Fund (MEF) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that has operated in the city for over a decade, working to improve the public-school landscape and champion a quality educational experience for all children.

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