10 DC Schools Are "Bold Improvement" Winners for Strong Student Growth That Is Closing Gaps

EmpowerK12 and Education Reform Now's analysis of the District of Columbia's academic growth data reveals which DCPS and charter schools are closing the achievement gap between at-risk students and their peers in Washington's wealthiest neighborhoods

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WASHINGTON (July 12, 2018) — A new analysis of DC students' academic performance has singled out 10 DC public schools that serve a high percentage of at-risk students for achieving some of the most significant academic growth in the city. Students' improvement on the annual PARCC exam put these high-poverty schools—five DC Public Schools campuses and five charter schools—on track to meet or exceed the test scores of schools in DC's most affluent neighborhoods in a little more than three years.

For showing what success is possible in urban education, EmpowerK12 and the DC chapter of Education Reform Now have named these first-ever "Bold Improvement Schools" in a new report being discussed today at the 9th Annual DC Data Summit. The report draws on data analysis, school visits and interviews to identify what practices and mindsets contribute to extraordinary school-wide improvement.

The 2018 Bold Improvement Schools are:

Aiton Elementary (DCPS / Ward 7)

Center City Shaw ES/MS (Charter / Ward 6)

DC Bilingual ES (Charter / Ward 1)

Friendship Blow-Pierce MS (Charter/ Ward 7)

Ketcham Elementary (DCPS / Ward 8)

Kimball Elementary (DCPS / Ward 7)

KIPP Northeast MS (Charter / Ward 5)

KIPP Promise ES (Charter / Ward 7)

Nalle Elementary (DCPS / Ward 7)

Thomson Elementary (DCPS / Ward 2)

Together, these 10 Bold Improvement Schools educate 3,400 students, of whom 14 percent receive special education services and 62 percent are considered at-risk. An at-risk student is a child whose family qualifies for SNAP or TANF benefits, is placed in foster care, or is homeless. Almost 50 percent of DC students tested in 2017 were considered at-risk. Typically, the more at-risk students a school serves, the lower a school's median student growth percentile, according to EmpowerK12's analysis. This is the crux of the socioeconomic achievement gap.

By contrast, Bold Improvement Schools serve a high at-risk student population and have combined math and English language arts growth rates dramatically higher than similar schools—an average of 16 points more. To identify the honorees, EmpowerK12 analyzed the most recently available PARCC data, from the 2017 testing season, along with school-by-school equity reports from the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education.

EmpowerK12 Executive Director Josh Boots praised the combined efforts of students, educators, and families at these schools: "Due to the extraordinary efforts of these Bold Improvement schools, their students are on pace to close the achievement gap with their more affluent peers in Ward 3 in a little over three years."

Leaders at Fast-Improving Schools Focus on Data & Continual Improvement

All 10 Bold Improvement Schools benefited from the presence of a strong, inspirational school leader; have a pervasive culture of high academic expectations for every single student; are deeply invested in teacher quality; focus on supporting the whole child, including their families; and push for access to additional resources and greater autonomy.

Although there are effective practices unique to each of the award-winning schools – ranging from family engagement activities to selective classroom practices to technology implementation – these ideas were all data-driven and subject to continuous improvement cycles.

The findings are published in the report, "Lessons for All from DC's Bold Improvement Schools" – a collaboration between EmpowerK12, ERN, and the winning schools that provides a roadmap for school and district leaders aiming to be "bold." Additionally, this report provides the type of quantitative analytics and qualitative research, built under a collaborative framework, that Washington, DC, needs in order to maintain and build upon its historic improvement rates.

"As DC searches for a new schools chancellor and as the entire public education community, traditional and charter, seeks to build upon the progress in DC's schools, we believe that the lessons learned from Bold Improvement Schools are vital," said Boots, who co-authored the report with ERN's Mira Taichman.

The Bold Improvement honors for student growth build on EmpowerK12's recognition last fall of Bold Performance Schools – DCPS and charter schools serving large numbers of at-risk students where scores on the 2017 PARCC exam beat the trend line. Of the Bold Improvement winners for growth, Ketcham, KIPP Promise and Thomson were also Bold Performers, while Center City Shaw and Friendship Blow-Pierce received honorable mentions.

EmpowerK12 and ERN congratulate this year's Bold Improvement School winners and thank them for helping close the socioeconomic achievement gap in the District of Columbia. The two organizations will look to spotlight more school success later this summer after Mayor Bowser releases the 2018 PARCC data, and later this year when the Office of the State Superintendent of Education releases the new STAR school report cards.

The "Bold Improvement Schools" report will be discussed today, July 12th, during an 11:30 AM-1:00 PM session of the DC Data Summit, organized by FOCUS. The summit will take place at Carlos Rosario Public Charter School, 1100 Harvard St NW. The topic: "Boldly Using Data to Improve Student Success" with

panelists Josh Boots, Empower K12; Eric Dabney, Kimball Elementary School; Maisha Riddlesprigger, Ketcham Elementary School; and Brandy Tyson, Center City PCS.

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EmpowerK12 is a DC-based nonprofit organization that supports the city's traditional public and public charter schools to implement data-driven instructional practices.

Education Reform Now is an action tank that aims to: (1) reorient education policy as a content-based, as opposed to time- or place-based, right for students and teachers; (2) ensure consistent and mutually reinforcing policies at elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels; and (3) promote new methods of content delivery and tools of influence on teaching and learning. Americans of all ages – from cradle to grave – deserve full and fair access to quality education opportunities.