

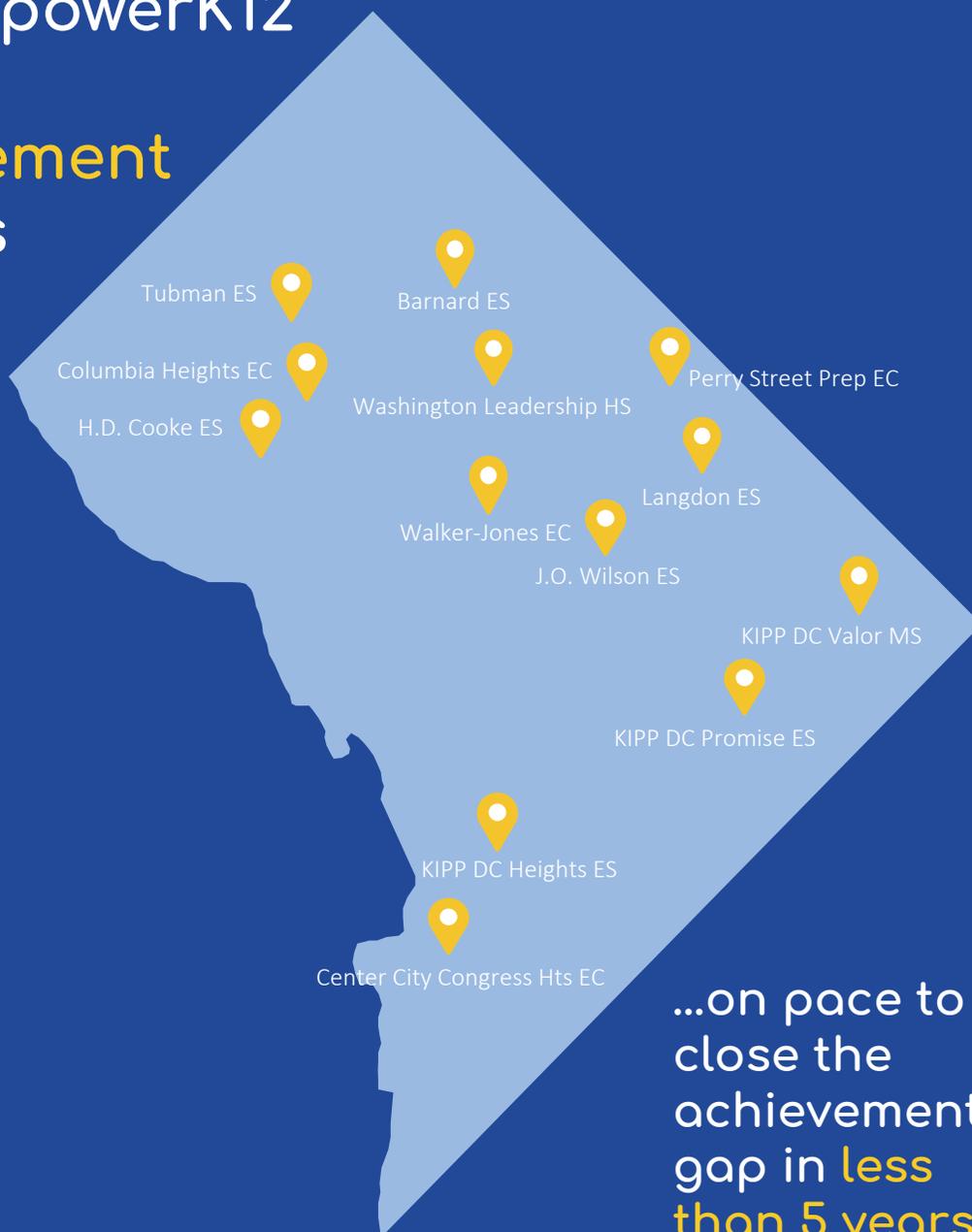
# 2019 BOLD IMPROVEMENT SCHOOLS



EmpowerK12

Walker-Jones EC

# The 2019 EmpowerK12 Bold Improvement Schools



...on pace to  
close the  
achievement  
gap in **less**  
**than 5 years.**

## INTRODUCTION

In 2014, the District of Columbia adjusted the formula that determines the funding for every DC public school to better support our students most at risk of academic failure. The at-risk student allocation is based on the number of students who are one or more of the following: homeless, in the District’s foster care system, receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or, in high school only, are at least one year older than the expected age for their grade. In the 2019-20 school year, traditional and charter public schools in DC will receive \$10,980 per student regardless of risk factors with an additional \$2,471 for each identified student at risk.

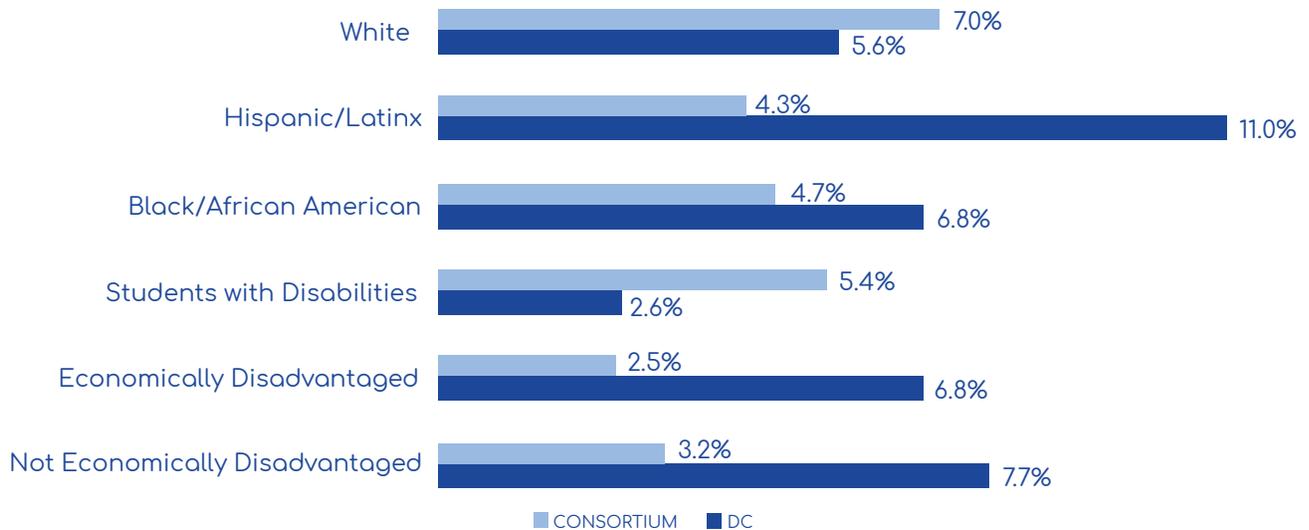
In 2018, EmpowerK12 honored our first-ever Bold Improvement schools serving high percentages of at-risk students with academic growth data putting them on pace to close the socioeconomic achievement gap in less than five years. This year, with new and additional student group data for at-risk and not at-risk students published by the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education, it was possible to gain a more robust sense of socioeconomic gaps within DC. We analyzed the new DC School Report Card and found 13 schools serving high proportions of at-risk students and at-risk students with disabilities where academic growth exceeds growth among not at-risk students without disabilities at DC’s lowest poverty schools. See the methodology section to learn more.

Ultimately, low-income student achievement at this year’s Bold Improvement schools is accelerating, and their at-risk students are on track to close the PARCC achievement gap with their higher-income peers in less than 5 years.

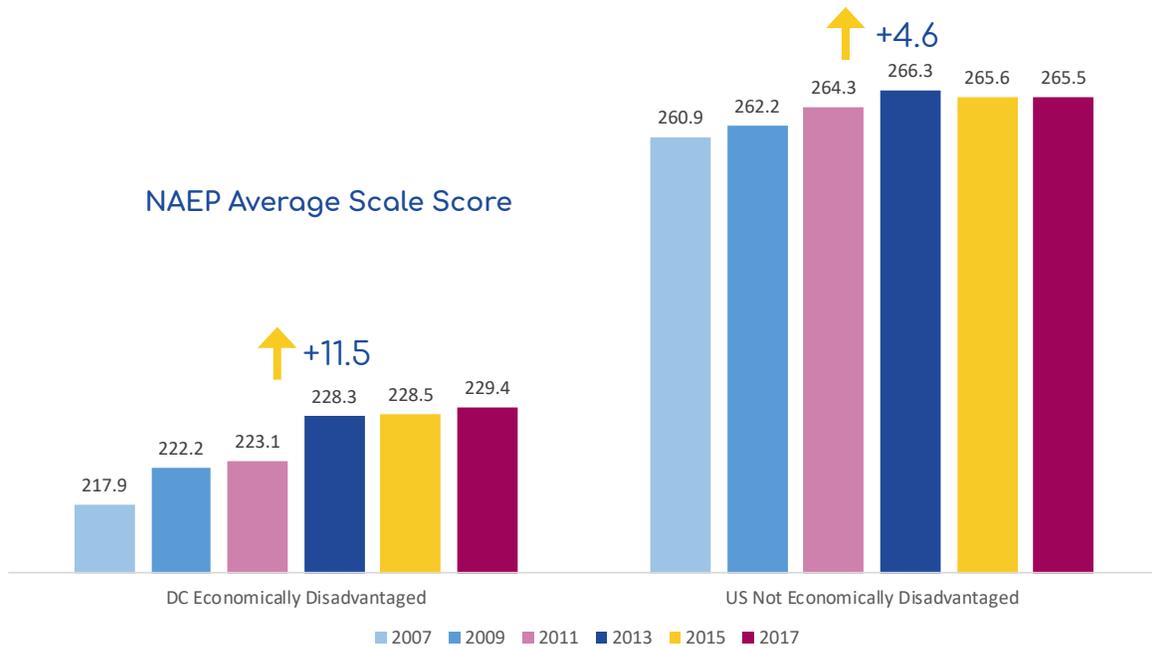
## DC’S PROGRESS AND LINGERING CONCERN

Schools in both DC Public Schools and the charter sector have improved academic outcomes for all student groups over time. The percentage of District students meeting or exceeding expectations on the annual Partnership for Assessment of College and Career Readiness (PARCC) exam has improved from 24.8% (2015) to 33.3% (2018) in English language arts and 22.1% to 29.4% over the same timeframe in math. Those improvements have outpaced other states in the PARCC consortium. The table below shows the percentage-point improvement in achievement rates for different student groups over the last four years.

### PARCC Proficiency Improvement 2015-2018 (ELA/Math Combined)



On the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), where results are commonly reported by average scale score for 4th and 8th graders, the District's low income student gains have outpaced most jurisdictions, yet remain behind the national average for not economically disadvantaged. Nationally on NAEP, students who are not economically disadvantaged have gained 4.6 scale score points over the last 10 years (2007-2017), while DC's economically disadvantaged students have gained 11.5 points, the largest improvement for that student group of any urban district participating in NAEP/TUDA.

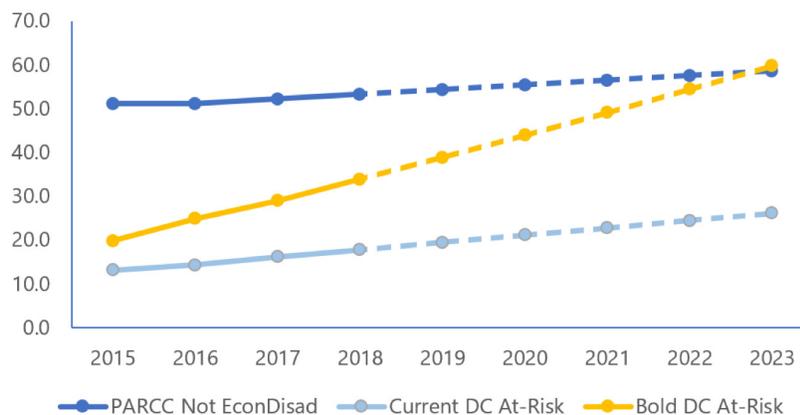


EmpowerK12 applauds District school leaders and teachers for their efforts to improve student outcomes for all students, something few jurisdictions have been able to accomplish. However, we remain primarily concerned about two facts:

- 1 | At current improvement rates, DC's at-risk students will close the gap with their wealthier PARCC consortium peers in 34 years and their wealthier NAEP national peers in 52 years. To us, and to anyone who believes in equitable education, that is far too long.
- 2 | Gains for students with disabilities lag their nondisabled peers. Across the PARCC consortium, students with disabilities improved proficiency by 5.4% since 2015, while DC improved 2.6%.

**Yet rapid progress is possible:** despite this gap in outcomes, our analysis shows that some of the highest-poverty schools in the city are also among the fastest-improving academically. The 13 2019 Bold Improvement schools honored this year are on pace to close the socioeconomic gap by 2023.

PARCC Proficiency Rates





2019 BOLD IMPROVEMENT SCHOOLS

The table below identifies the 2019 Bold Improvement Schools, their Bold index score, and which at-risk student groups at the school are on pace to close the achievement gap within 5 years:

SCHOOL	WARD	% AT-RISK	INDEX SCORE	STUDENT GROUP NOTES
Barnard ES	4	50%	81.2	At-risk students above threshold
Center City Congress Hts	8	66%	80.6	At-risk students above threshold
Columbia Heights EC	1	51%	78.6	At-risk students with disabilities above threshold
H.D. Cooke ES	1	53%	82.5	At-risk students above threshold
J.O. Wilson ES	6	53%	88.7	At-risk students with disabilities above threshold
KIPP Heights ES	8	62%	77.7	At-risk black students above threshold
KIPP Promise ES	7	59%	80.8	At-risk black students above threshold
KIPP Valor MS	7	57%	79.3	At-risk black students and at-risk students with disabilities above threshold
Langdon EC	5	59%	83.7	At-risk students and at-risk students with disabilities above threshold
Perry Street Prep EC	5	57%	94.7	At-risk students with disabilities above threshold
Tubman ES	1	56%	78.0	At-risk students above threshold
Walker-Jones EC	6	80%	90.0	At-risk black students and at-risk students with disabilities above threshold
Washington Leadership HS	5	58%	95.8	At-risk students above threshold

This issue brief discusses how we identified DC’s fast-improving schools that serve at-risk students and outlines the strategies they use to close the achievement gap and meet the needs of a high-poverty student body.

<sup>1</sup>The calculation methodology follows our “EmpowerK12 Preferred” STAR model we introduced after the new reportcard was released. See “methodology” section for more detail.



## THE BOLD IMPROVEMENT SCHOOL SOLUTIONS

The cohort of 2019 Bold Improvement Schools represents a diversity of school types, geographic locations, and student populations. Yet, as we met with each school's leaders and teachers, our team identified three commitments all of the schools make in order to move the growth needle forward for all students.

Bold Schools:

- 1| Use data and information in frequent and intentional ways, focused on continuous improvement
- 2| Increase collaboration within the classroom and school as well as across schools
- 3| Ensure students are ready to learn by setting high expectations and creating a warm social-emotional environment

The methods taken to meet these commitments are similar but not the same at every Bold school. School leaders employ different implementation strategies based on their student population and human capital talent to maximize student outcomes. The process of utilizing information to drive those decisions, however, is virtually the same at each of the schools, and it is not the typical practice we see at schools that are not improving rapidly.

## FREQUENT AND INTENTIONAL INFORMATION ANALYSIS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Every year, school staff are increasingly collecting, and are able to access, more data about their students. To guard against information overload, a common practice at Bold schools is to look at data more frequently and in smaller, more digestible chunks based on priority. Every Bold Improvement school identified for huge gains reported to us that all teachers review student information to make instructional decisions at least once a week, if not daily.

Examples of how Bold schools are meeting the commitment of frequent and intentional data analysis:

- At Langdon ES, teachers collaborate and utilize student data to create dynamic student groups that change weekly throughout the year. Depending on the skills and standards being taught during the upcoming week, students as young as kindergarten may spend small group work time in another classroom or even another grade. They are matched with the teacher who best teaches the skill a student is behind in mastering. This strategy requires a time investment at the beginning of the year coaching kids about handling movement and being flexible, but the benefits appear to be significant. Langdon's at-risk student Median Growth Percentile of 75 is more than five points higher than any other DC school serving at least 10% at-risk.
- At Walker-Jones EC, school leaders and teachers noticed several areas of concern in their Panorama student survey data they felt were preventing students from maximizing their growth opportunities. Instead of being overwhelmed by trying to correct all of them in one school year, the team decided to focus on student self-management skills. They created their own rubric to help students and teachers understand how they can demonstrate self-management during a week in school. Then, using a homemade tracker in Google Docs, teachers enter student self-management progress data and discuss results at weekly team meetings.
- At KIPP Promise ES, student intervention blocks are scheduled in the afternoon. Students complete exit tickets online (using a tool called Edulastic) in the morning. Teachers review the results at lunch to set up groups for the afternoon, ensuring students receive immediate additional support to stay on track.



WE IDENTIFIED FOUR  
KEY APPROACHES THE  
BOLD SCHOOLS TAKE  
THAT HELP MAKE  
THEIR DATA-DRIVEN  
STRATEGIES  
SUCCESSFUL:



Barnard ES

**1 | STUDENTS OWN THEIR DATA, TOO:** Educators frequently share data with students regardless of how dispiriting the information may seem. They are honest with students about where they are, help them set ambitious growth goals by week and semester, and celebrate with students as they meet their goals along the way. At Columbia Heights EC, students generate their own “Path of Progress” (PoP) sheets on which they graph their current progress and mark where they want to go in the next period. The PoP sheets are most often completed in 9-week intervals, but some teachers use them with students on a weekly basis.

**2 | YOUR DATA IS EVERYONE’S DATA:** Most of the Bold schools have built a familial staff culture founded on a theme of mutual support. This was particularly noticeable at Center City Congress Heights, where teachers know each other’s class information and use it to collectively brainstorm solutions to challenges that may arise over the course of the school year. Data analysis is a pivotal part of the trust circles among staff and leaders. When teachers successfully analyze student work and data to make instructional decisions on a weekly basis, school leaders give teachers more freedom, which, in turn, builds trust across the entire staff.

**3 | DATA FOR IMPROVEMENT FIRST:** At all our on-site interviews, we only heard stories about data being utilized for positive, improvement-oriented purposes. A couple of Bold schools told us that they “celebrate failure” so that students and teachers “know it is okay to fail, because that is how we learn.” Staff and leaders frequently analyze data and either make plans to improve a practice not demonstrating results or stop using it altogether. We praise the open, positive approach Bold Improvement schools take with data as well as the bravery to change course when the information supports doing so.

**4 | DATA DELEGATION:** Another strategy employed to conquer the overwhelming amount of data analysis required is through the delegation of ownership of key indicators and outcomes. For example, one staff member might own the monitoring of chronic absenteeism data while another member tracks the co-academic skill progress of students.

Overall, Bold school leaders and staff have exceptional data-oriented improvement mindsets for themselves as well as all staff and students.

## INCREASE COLLABORATION WITHIN AND ACROSS SCHOOLS

Bold schools creatively find ways in the school schedule to increase the amount of collaboration between adults inside and out of the classroom.

Here are few of the best examples we learned from this year’s Bold Improvement school cohort:

- For students with disabilities and English learners, Bold schools attempt to maximize the time spent in the general education setting by having the regular lead teacher and specialist co-teach. We learned about a variety of co-planning and co-teaching models in use by schools that earned Bold status based on the academic growth of their at-risk students with disabilities. Each model depended on the needs of the student population and instructors' strengths.
- Columbia Heights EC and Tubman ES, both Bold schools this year, created a “bridge” program where 6th grade teachers at CHEC went to Tubman to learn about and meet their 5th grade students, building the middle school student-teacher relationships a year early.
- Several teachers mentioned the benefits of creative scheduling that allows instructional teams to meet more frequently to look at student work and make plans together.
- School leaders at KIPP Promise ES and KIPP Heights ES, both Bold schools this year, recognized the time they spent working together, sharing data, and visiting each other’s schools as key levers to drive collective improvement.

## HIGH EXPECTATIONS IN SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

At Bold Improvement Schools, there is a pervasive culture of and commitment to high academic expectations for every single student. All school elements — from curriculum to staff, to facility design and presentation — are designed to advance the belief that every student can and will achieve high levels of academic success.

Existing research suggests that high expectations for all students, regardless of race or income level, help them academically achieve at proficient levels.<sup>2</sup> In Bold Improvement Schools, we observe many policies and practices that demonstrate a culture of high expectations at all levels, including:

- Teachers ensure maximum time spent in the regular education setting for students with disabilities and English language learners by “pushing-in” special educators and interventionists to help co-teach lessons.
- Every student, regardless of the skill deficits they have upon arrival, is exposed to daily grade-level content. Students needing additional support to meet the rigor receive specialized interventions.
- Bold Improvement educators prioritize social-emotional skills and beliefs, integrating them with academic development so that students have the right tools for engagement and a language for learning.



## BOLD IMPROVEMENT SCHOOL LESSONS FOR POLICY LEADERS

As we met with school teams, principals and teachers, we took careful note of comments and ideas from them that will ensure more schools can meet the Bold Improvement standard in the years ahead. Even Bold schools on pace to close the achievement gap in less than 5 years do not feel they have the financial resources they need to close the gap. Bold School leaders and teachers believe they can close the achievement gap within three years, if they receive adequate funding.

From our site visits, we believe there are three “bold” demands of our city leadership to help move the growth needle forward at their schools and all schools across the District. If the demands below are met, based on rigorous data modeling, we think the District’s at-risk students can close the gap with their wealthier peers nationally in less than 10 years.

**1 | FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND HUMAN CAPITAL PLANNING:** We asked Bold school leaders what they would do if they received the adequate per-pupil funding rate, and they nearly unanimously answered: more staff. The additional staff would provide more push-in intervention support, free up time on the schedule for more teacher/instructional coach collaboration, and offer needed counseling and mental health services.

- A |** To meet these Bold leaders’ request, we recommend city leaders commit to a three-year plan to raise the per-pupil base rate to the recommended adequate funding rate.
- B |** Given that schools will primarily spend the additional funds on human capital, we suggest the Deputy Mayor for Education create a human capital task force to develop a comprehensive cross-sector plan to recruit, train, and support staff with the right mindsets to address the challenges ahead.

**2 | SCHOOL COLLABORATION OPPORTUNITIES:** Since we began our Bold schools work three years ago, we are commonly asked how schools that want to be Bold can learn more about the detailed practices of those that already are. School leaders demand more authentic opportunities to share data, conduct site visits, and rigorously evaluate their different strategies to solve the same problem. We suggest OSSE, perhaps through the Research-Practice Partnership or other grant-funded opportunities, create avenues for educators to collaborate across campuses and sectors. These smaller networks of schools working together should be intentionally designed, using data to group schools to work on challenges we know have a lot of impact (i.e. 9th grade GPAs, middle school transition, special education growth, etc.).

**3 | SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING BEST PRACTICES:** The Bold schools focus a significant portion of their work on building student and family relationships to ensure students are mentally ready to learn every day and overcome adversity they experience in and out of school. Leading brain science research confirms that students who experience trauma and stress significantly outside of the normal bounds can still thrive and develop neural networks while engaged in classroom instruction when teachers create a social-emotional environment setup for success.<sup>3</sup> To better support all schools in building safe, stable learning environments, we suggest additional investment in training for school staff on trauma-informed brain science and family engagement best practices. Local organizations like the Flamboyant Foundation and Turnaround for Children come to mind as possible sources for additional support in this area.



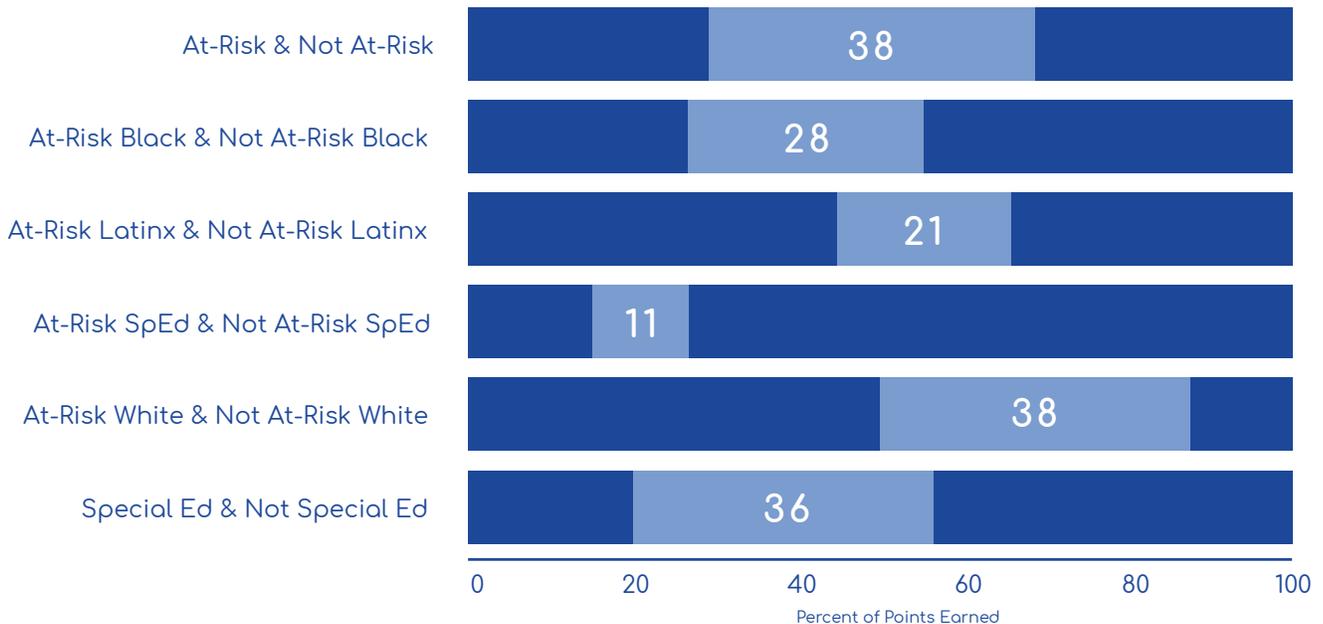


**BOLD IMPROVEMENT METHODOLOGY**

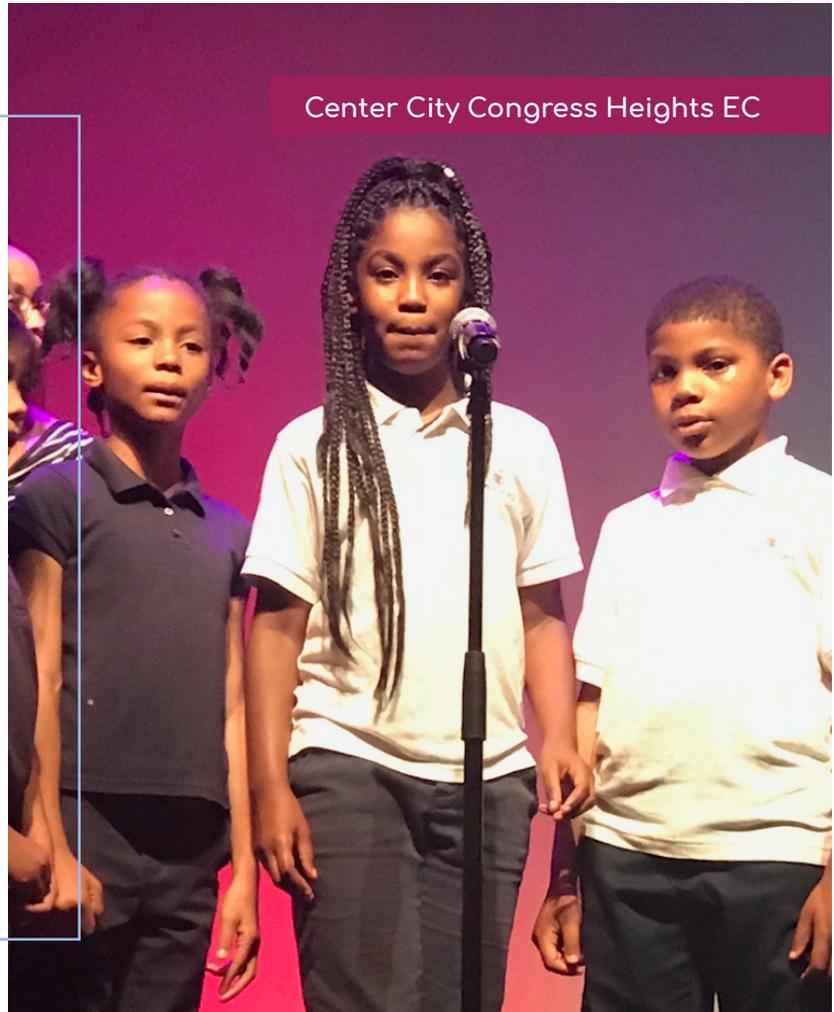
The DC state School Report Card, first published in December 2018, utilizes new growth measures, including growth-to-proficiency, attendance growth, and English learner growth. The overall score for each school comprises performance for all students, at-risk, students with disabilities, students by race, and English language learners. In March, OSSE published data for additional student groups (e.g. “Not At-Risk”, “At-Risk Students with Disabilities”) on report card metrics.

To take advantage of the new data, EmpowerK12 modified our Bold Improvement school calculation methodology with the goal of identifying schools on pace to close the achievement gap in the shortest amount of time. We examined how two student groups, all at-risk students and at-risk students with disabilities, performed on the leading report card metrics compared to their not-at-risk peers without disabilities at low-poverty schools. To accomplish this, we used student group raw data and applied the floors and targets for the “all students” group to the outcomes for every school and student group by report card framework (e.g. elementary, middle, high school). This method clearly defines outcome gaps within the District as well as identifies the leading indicators of those gaps.

The graphic below shows gaps in points earned for student groups across the entire District using the All Students floors and targets. For example, at-risk students would earn only 30% of the possible points based on the All Students floors and targets. Meanwhile, students not at risk would receive 68% of the possible points, leaving a 38 point overall gap between them on the STAR report card metrics.



ANALYSIS OF THE DC DATA CONFIRMS WHAT MUCH OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL LITERATURE ALREADY SUGGESTS: THE PRIMARY DRIVERS OF THE GAP ARE DIFFERENTIAL ATTENDANCE AND ACADEMIC GROWTH RATES AMONG SOCIOECONOMIC STUDENT GROUPS.



To identify schools that are bending the at-risk student learning curve to new heights, we utilized all the STAR metric data, including achievement, and focused more heavily on the academic and attendance growth data to generate a Bold Improvement Index score for every student group at every school.<sup>4</sup>

In STAR's methodology, ELA and math growth is worth 40 points and achievement is worth 30 points. Our Bold Improvement Index weights growth as much as 60 points and achievement 22 points, and we used the new attendance growth metric instead of the 90% attendance metric in the calculation. For high schools, since ELA and math growth data are not available, we focused on attendance growth as a leading indicator as well as at-risk student achievement changes from PARCC to SAT/AP. A comprehensive set of Bold Improvement Index scores for every school can be found on our website, [empowerk12.org](http://empowerk12.org).

The average Bold Improvement index score for not-at-risk students without disabilities at low-poverty schools serving less than 25% at-risk was 77.3. We set this score as the baseline and found 13 Bold Improvement schools' at-risk or at-risk students with disabilities (or both, at five schools) index scores above that threshold.

<sup>4</sup> The calculation methodology follows our "EmpowerK12 Preferred" STAR model we introduced after the new report card was released. Find additional information here: <https://empowerk12.org/blog/f/what-if-growth-mattered-even-more-on-star-and-demographics-less>



DATA INTENTIONALLY

COLLABORATE STRATEGICALLY

BOLDLY ACCELERATE LEARNING



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