DC SPECIAL EDUCATION cooperative

Inspire.
Implement.
Transform.

DEMONSTRATION CLASSROOMS

How Demonstration Classrooms are Driving Growth for Students with Disabilities and Transforming the Special Education Ecosystem

The challenge of effectively educating students with disabilities is one that – even 50 years after the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) – remains elusive for our nation's schools. Though experts believe that 85-90% of students with disabilities are capable of performing at grade level with the right instruction and supports[1], the actual achievement of students with disabilities is alarmingly low. Here in the Nation's Capital, barely 10% of students with disabilities are proficient in reading; fewer still in math. Lower academic achievement and graduation rates, paired with higher rates of exclusionary discipline[2] all point to a systemic failure to meet the needs of our most vulnerable population.

The DC Special Education Cooperative (Co-op) is turning the desire for change into the ability of schools to make change. One key driver of this change is our Demonstration Classroom Program, launched in 2018 with partner schools to create high quality classrooms showcasing evidence-based, high leverage practices. This program is driving growth for students with disabilities while transforming how schools approach special education. More than this, the Demonstration Classrooms create the possibility of transformative change throughout the DC educational ecosystem by serving as open laboratories that bring school leaders, instructional coaches, and teachers together to see systemic change in action, and bring that change to their schools.

The unique position of the Co-op in DC's special education landscape enables us to both support improvement at individual schools and drive systemic, city-wide change.

THE SPECIAL EDUCATION COOPERATIVE

In 1998, DC Charter School leaders founded the Co-op as a true cooperative, with the belief that working together would drive positive change for DC's most vulnerable students. Since its founding, the Co-op has filled a unique need in the city's educational ecosystem by working with teachers, school leaders, and across charter schools to improve educational services for students with disabilities. Today, 58 of the 68 public charter schools in DC are members of the Co-op.

With its driving mission to create equitable and excellent educational systems where students with disabilities thrive, the Co-op's programs and services have ignited a movement to:

- Find new and innovative ways to meet students where they are;
- Design programs based on unique student needs; and,
- Prepare students for life beyond high school graduation.

The Co-op is shaping education legislation, administration, and implementation and in turn improving the way in which thousands of students with disabilities are taught each day.

1 Students with Disabilities in Educational Policy, Practice, and Professional Judgment: What Should We Expect? (NCEO Report #413)
2 Landscape Analysis, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2019

EQUITY IMPERATIVE

Special education in Washington, DC, is a racial and social justice issue. With 78% of students receiving special education services identifying as African American, and Black males disproportionately identified with disabilities at twice the rate of their white peers,[3] the need for systemic change is urgent. These disparities are compounded by inequitable access to high-quality instruction, inconsistent implementation of evidence-based practices, and persistent barriers that limit students' opportunities to thrive.

The Co-op's **Demonstration Classroom program** is an essential step toward dismantling these inequities. By establishing a network of real-time, high-quality instructional models across the city, we are ensuring that all students with disabilities – especially historically marginalized Black and Brown students – have access to teachers equipped with the knowledge, skills, and resources to meet their needs and are educated in schools where systemic barriers that have historically prevented them from fully accessing their education are being dismantled.

This initiative advances equity by:

1 Expanding Access to Effective Instruction

Equipping educators with hands-on learning experiences in evidence-based strategies such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), so that students with disabilities remain meaningfully included in general education settings.

2 Closing the Opportunity Gap

Addressing the systemic barriers that prevent students with disabilities from receiving high-quality interventions, ensuring that special education is not the default solution for struggling students.

3 Empowering Schools to Lead Change

Building capacity in schools to sustain and scale effective models, ensuring that best practices reach every classroom, not just isolated settings.

It is critical that we move beyond isolated interventions and toward **systemic transformation**. The Co-op's Demonstration Classroom program is not just about professional development – it is about **redefining educational equity** by ensuring that students with disabilities, particularly those from marginalized communities, have access to the **rigorous, affirming, and inclusive education they deserve**. If we are not solving these equity issues, we are failing our students.

SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATION STARTS WITH MINDSET SHIFTS:

- Embracing a vision of inclusion that treats students with disabilities as vital members of a thriving community, rather than as burdens to be shouldered
- Believing that students with disabilities are worthy and capable of accessing rigorous, grade level standards and acting in accordance with those beliefs
- Regularly using a variety of data to drive instruction and decision-making, rather than relying on potentially biased beliefs about students to determine needs
- Centering the needs of students with disabilities when decisions about programming, scheduling, and budgets are made

3 Landscape Analysis, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2019

EXPANDING ACCESS TO EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION

Bridges Public Charter School

As a school with one of the highest populations of students with disabilities and English Learners in the city, Bridges needed an instructional model that ensured all students – especially those with the greatest challenges – could successfully access the general education curriculum. Teachers felt overwhelmed with the variety of student needs in their classrooms, and achievement scores for students were lagging behind the city averages. To address this need, Bridges partnered with the Co-op for training and coaching that would allow them to provide rigorous, accessible instruction to all learners.

BRIDGES DEMOGRAPHICS: SERVING DC'S MOST VULNERABLE LEARNERS

Created in 2005 as an intentionally inclusive school, Bridges serves a higher percentage of students with disabilities and English Learners than the city average. In SY 2024-25, 38% of Bridges' students had Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and 54% were English Learners. This compares to approximately 15% of students with IEPs and 13% English Learners across DC. With a population that is 98% students of color, Bridges serves students who are historically among the most marginalized and disenfranchised in DC.

The Solution: Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Reimagined Professional Development

UDL is a framework and approach to instruction based on the science of learning. Recognizing that learner variability is the norm and that no two students learn the same way, UDL provides a structured framework designed to remove barriers and build in flexibility for how students access information and demonstrate their knowledge. When applied in the general education classroom, UDL creates equitable access to high-quality instruction for all learners. The goal of UDL is "learner agency that is purposeful and reflective, resourceful and authentic, strategic and action-oriented."[4]

UDL is based around three broad principles that inform lesson design: Engagement, Representation, and Action/Expression. Teachers are taught the importance of creating strong learning targets and then designing options within each of these principles that help students reach the target.

4 CAST.org/impact/universal-design-for-learning-udl

WATCH NAKITA'S INTERVIEW

"Students in our classrooms are excited about challenges; they're excited about new learning. It's 100% engagement. Students know what they need to be expert learners. They know the tools and resources that they need, so they aren't afraid to take academic risks."

Nakita Henderson Packer, *Bridges, UDL Coach*

Strategic, Transformative Professional Development

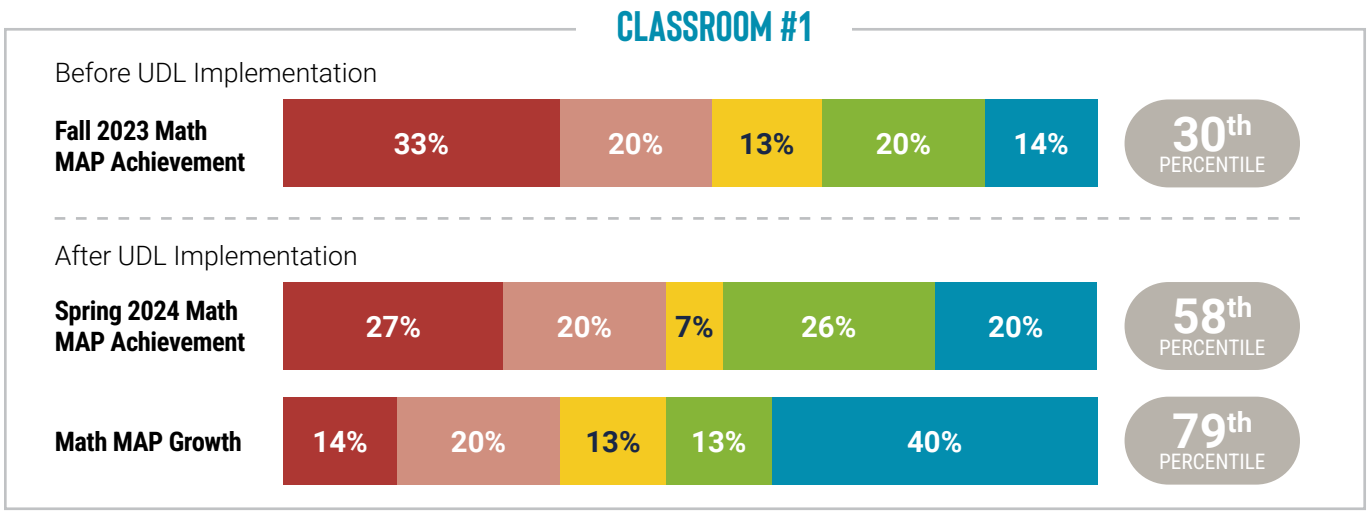
To implement UDL at Bridges, the Co-op provided professional development on the broad principles of UDL to the entire Bridges staff. Working with administrators, the Co-op then identified a strong co-teaching partnership to receive intensive training and coaching to effectively implement UDL in their classroom. Selecting a strong set of classroom teachers to serve as a model and "early adopter" of a new practice ensures that the practice is done well, so that other teachers see it in action and know it works. It prevents "initiative fatigue" in which schools try to launch a new practice school-wide, often without adequate support for implementation and, when it is not broadly successful, declare it a failure and move on to yet another new initiative.

This strong co-teaching team became our "Demo Classroom", opening its doors to educators from across DC and showcasing how the achievement of students in this classroom exceeded that of other classrooms both at Bridges and citywide.

Year after year students in the Demonstration Classroom achieved superior results compared to classrooms not implementing UDL. This led Bridges' leadership team to commit to strategic expansion of UDL across all grades and classrooms. In SY 23-24, 2nd grade math teachers received training and support from the Co-op and the original Demonstration class team, producing phenomenal growth for students (see Charts below).

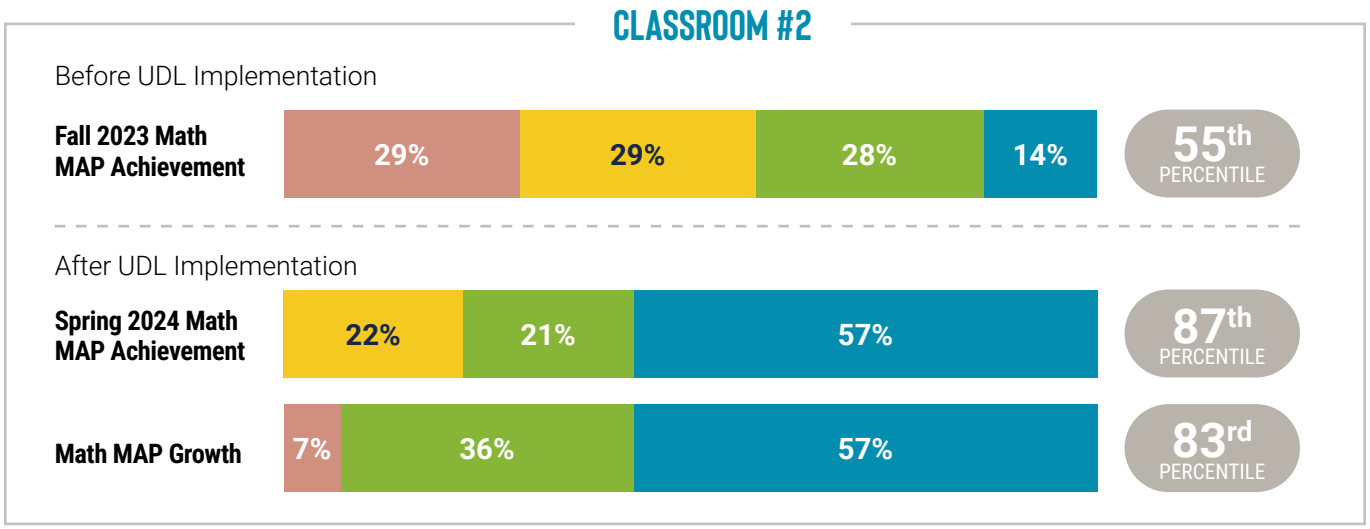
Impact of UDL Implementation on Student Achievement and Growth

In 2nd Grade Classroom #1, prior to UDL Implementation, 66% of students were slightly-below to well-below proficient (yellow, orange, and red); only 34% met or exceeded proficiency levels (green and blue) at the start of the school year.



Following full UDL implementation, 40% of the students ***exceeded*** the median MAP growth goal; another 13% met the median growth goal. Student growth led to increased proficiency. By the end of the school year, the number of students below or well-below proficiency had dropped from 53% to 47%, while 46% met or exceeded proficiency levels, compared to only 34% at the start of the year.

Students in 2nd grade Classroom #2 also achieved exceptional growth. At the start of the school year, prior to UDL implementation, only 42% of students met or exceeded proficiency (green and blue). While higher than the starting point for Classroom #1, this still left 58% of students slightly below or below proficiency.



Following full UDL implementation, 93% of students met or exceeded their MAP growth goal. These gains helped close the achievement gap. By the end of the year, no students were below proficient. Twenty-one percent of students met the standards for proficiency, and a majority of students – 57% – exceeded expectations.

While many factors can contribute to changes in students' achievement and growth, students' gains in MAP following UDL implementation in these two classrooms are striking.

With clear evidence that strong achievement could be realized beyond the Demonstration Classroom, Bridges committed to school-wide adoption of UDL in SY 24-25. The Co-op and Demonstration Classroom team have led school-wide professional development, established Professional Learning Communities, and conducted instructional rounds across all grade levels.

Teachers across Bridges are now consistently using principles of UDL in their lesson design – benefitting all students but particularly students with disabilities. Data from SY 24-25 shows our Demonstration Classroom continuing to drive growth for students. Out of 32 students, 24 ***exceeded*** their MAP growth goal – many by a significant margin; another 4 met their goal. Ten out of the 11 students with IEPs exceeded their growth goal; the other student with an IEP was one point shy of meeting his growth goal.

Meanwhile, the Demonstration Classroom continues to serve as an open laboratory where educators from across the city can come to see quality instruction in practice and learn what it takes to bring it to their classrooms and schools. Since 2023, staff from 16 schools representing all sectors of the Charter School community have toured the Demonstration Classroom at Bridges.

"It was extremely refreshing to see all the intention in the environment, from the pacing, the rigor, the individuals delivering instruction, and the students' engagement and movement through their lesson."

***Katrina Porter**, Director of Special Education, Inspired Teaching Demonstration Public Charter School*

"This was one of the most meaningful tours I have been on. [I am] beyond impressed... love how the students are already demonstrating true learning and resourcefulness"

***Amanda Arellano**, Special Education Manager, Latin American Montessori Bilingual Public Charter School*

CLOSING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP

Washington Latin & Thurgood Marshall Academy

Washington Latin and Thurgood Marshall Academy – two schools with significantly different populations but both committed to maintaining rigorous standards of excellence leading to college readiness for their students – worked with the Co-op to address opportunity gaps that threatened each school's ability to fulfill its mission.

One of the most diverse and high-performing charter schools in DC, Washington Latin (Latin) nonetheless struggled to meet the needs of at-risk students and students with disabilities. Latin emphasized deeply knowing each student, which made for strong personal relationships between staff and students, but lacked systems for collecting or using academic or behavioral data. As a result, significant barriers had emerged in Latin's ability to effectively serve its highest needs students, and exclusionary discipline rates for these students were soaring. Latin needed to examine its existing academic and behavioral systems and dismantle barriers to positive outcomes for its highest needs students, while maintaining its commitment to a quality classical education, teacher autonomy, and strong personal connections.

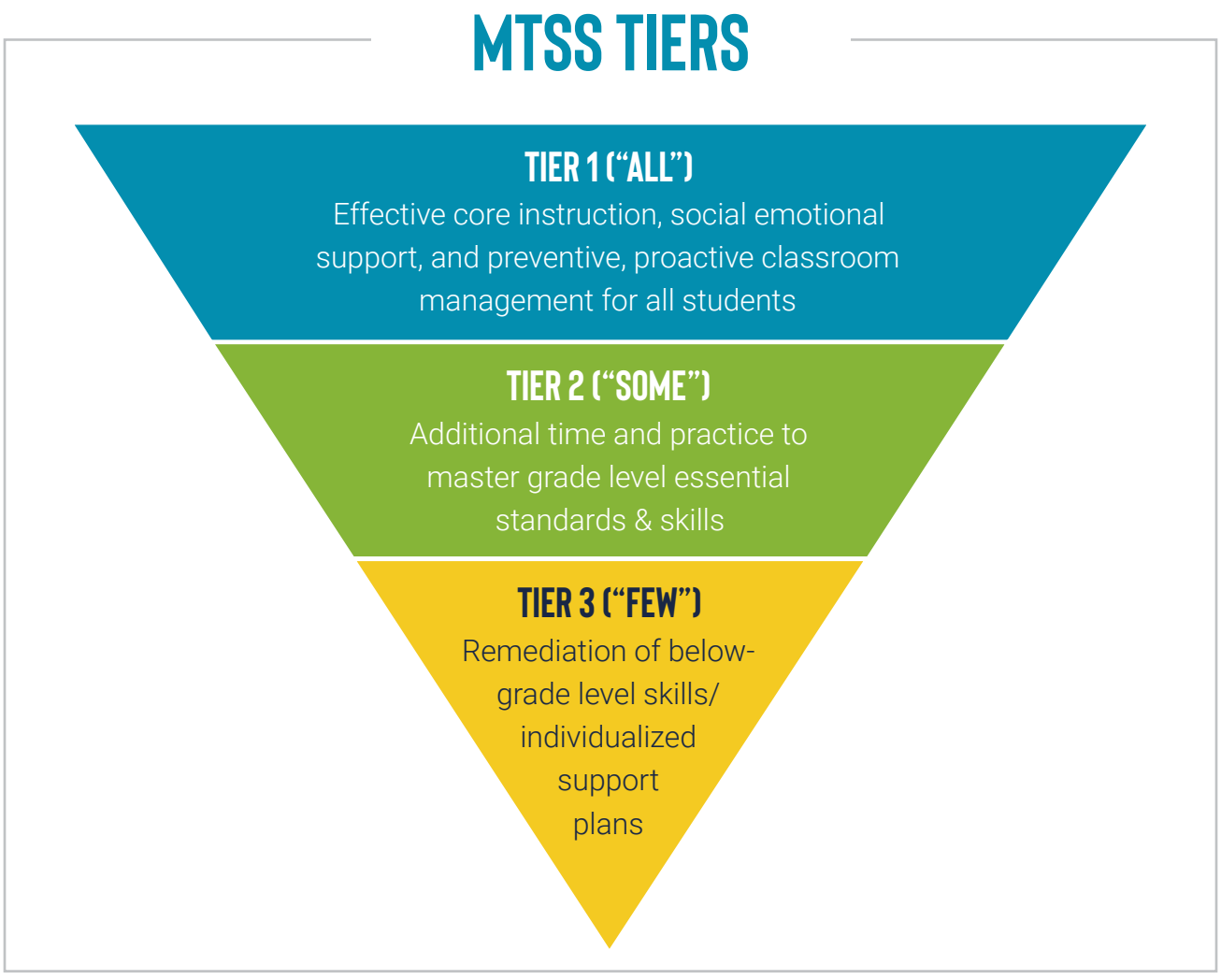
Thurgood Marshall Academy (TMA) is a law-themed high school offering a college preparatory curriculum. It prides itself on 100% college acceptance rates for its graduates. Yet many students matriculate to TMA severely behind in their math and reading skills, impacting their ability to access the rigorous curriculum. TMA turned to the Co-op to help create systems for incoming students to receive intensive intervention while continuing to access rigorous grade-level instruction.

The Solution: Implement Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)

MTSS is a framework and data-driven process designed to lead to early identification and support of students with learning and/or social-emotional-behavior needs. The goal of the MTSS process is to close existing gaps, provide support, and keep struggling students from falling further behind.

When done well, a strong MTSS also helps eradicate systemic bias in special education programming. By using objective data to quickly identify students in need of targeted support, an effective MTSS process both helps ensure that students who are in need of special education services receive it while also preventing over-identification, since difficulties can be remediated before a student requires an IEP. The use of objective data prevents decision-making based on potentially erroneous and biased assumptions about students' abilities, and students who have IEPs benefit from structures that ensure they get the right level of support at all tiers of instruction.

Given that the majority of students with disabilities spend most of their school day in general education settings,[5] it is imperative that schools create effective Multi-Tiered Systems of Support to ensure that all students have equitable access to the general education curriculum. The Co-op supported both Latin and TMA in developing these systems and closing the opportunity gaps that were adversely impacting their most vulnerable students. To date, 40 staff from 19 schools have visited the Demonstration Classrooms at Washington Latin and Thurgood Marshall Academy to see high-quality MTSS interventions in action.



5 Landscape Analysis, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2019

Washington Latin Public Charter School

Washington Latin's reputation as one of the highest performing schools in the District has made it a destination of choice for a diverse group of learners who come from throughout DC to receive its classical education. However, prior to working with the Co-op, Latin was not equitably serving all students. Before the pandemic, at-risk students and students with disabilities were being suspended at a disproportionately high rate – 26% received an out of school suspension in SY 18-19. Studies show that removal from school becomes a vicious cycle in which students most in need of high quality instruction miss out on that instruction and fall further behind academically – and opportunity gaps continue to widen.

As the school returned from the pandemic and prepared to launch a new campus in Northeast DC, Latin was determined to live out its commitment to an equitable education for all students. They turned to the Co-op to ensure that they could close the opportunity gap and meet the needs of all learners.

Working with the Co-op's team of Program Quality Specialists, Washington Latin shifted from a reliance on relationship-based problem-solving to analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data, including administering benchmark assessments, to determine students' needs. To ensure that data analysis led to action, the school created a master schedule that prioritized providing interventions with fidelity and ensuring that students with high needs were not pulled from core Tier 1 instruction to receive intervention.

WASHINGTON LATIN DEMOGRAPHICS: ENSURING EQUAL ACCESS

Washington Latin has a student body that reflects DC's racial and socio-economic diversity, and serves students from all 8 DC wards. Its Cooper campus, which houses our Demonstration Classrooms, currently serves grades 5-8, and is slated to add a grade every year through 12th grade. Its student body is 45% White, 36% Black/African-American, 8% Hispanic/Latino, and 10% Other/ Multi-Racial.

In SY 22-23, Washington Latin began providing Equitable Access preference – which provides enrollment preference to students who are experiencing homelessness, are in DC's foster care system, or receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) program – in order to reach more students who are furthest from opportunity.

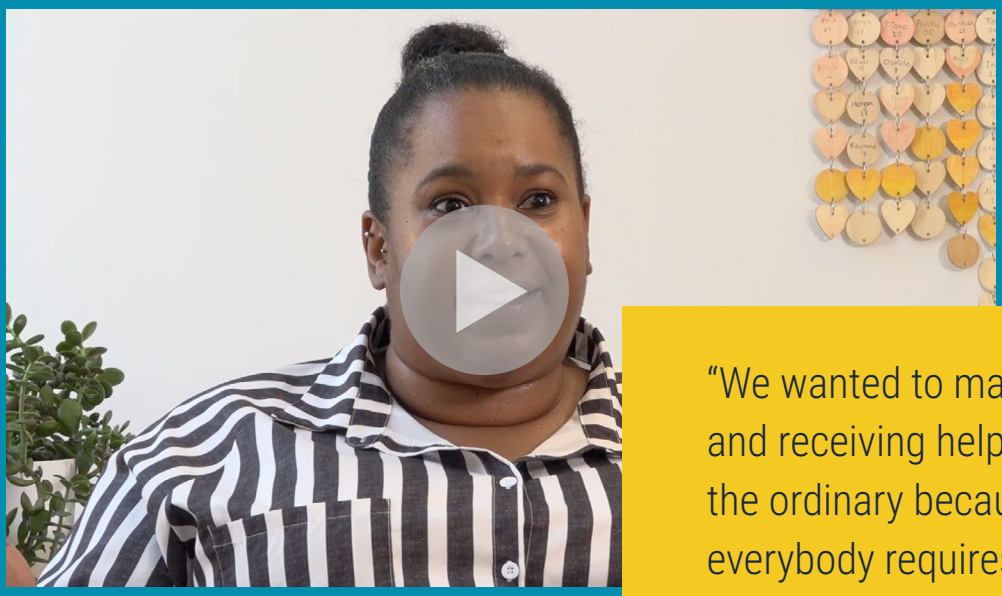
Washington Latin consistently meets the DC Public Charter School Board's standards of high performance, but like other schools in DC, experiences significant discrepancies in outcomes for students with disabilities, Black students, and "at risk" students. Its mission to ensure equitable access was a driving factor in its decision to work with the Co-op to create an effective MTSS.

At Latin, all middle school students participate in intervention or extension courses based on data about their levels and need: an evidence-based intervention targeting foundational academics (**Read 180** or **Math 180**), executive functioning support, or an advanced book club for students who are mastering grade level content. In addition, the schedule includes a weekly study hall period in which teachers are able to deliver Tier 2 instruction by meeting with groups of students who need additional support with the grade level content to keep from falling behind.

With academic needs being met, there are far fewer behavioral issues. At both the 2nd Street and Cooper Middle School campuses, in SY 23-24 fewer than 1% of students with disabilities received an out-of-school suspension, compared to 9% of students with disabilities citywide. For students who need additional support, grade level teams and the Intervention Team work to develop individualized plans.

Outcomes

Washington Latin's MTSS is propelling growth for students with disabilities. While students with disabilities experience lower achievement than their non-disabled peers, they are growing academically at rates commensurate with their peers.



WATCH KHASHIFFA'S INTERVIEW

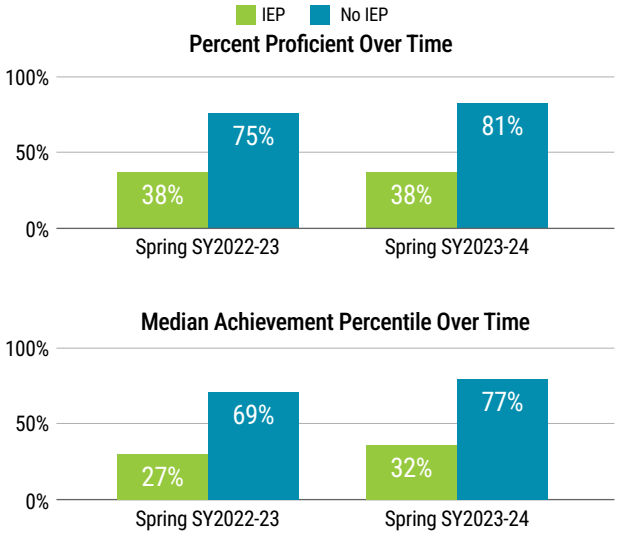
"We wanted to make sure that asking for help and receiving help was not something out of the ordinary because the way that we saw it, everybody requires help no matter where you are as a student. There's always some area of growth that we all have."

Khashiffa Roberts, *Principal, Washington Latin, Cooper Campus*

Academic Achievement and Growth

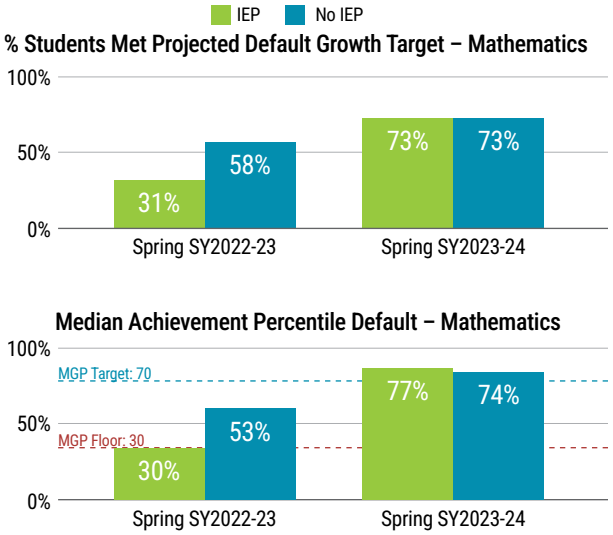
The gap in proficiency between students with IEPs and those without remains high in math (see Chart 1). However, students with IEPs showed significant growth (see Chart 2). In Spring 23-24, 73% of both students with and without disabilities met their growth targets; and the median growth for students with disabilities slightly exceeded that of students without IEPs. Compared to growth measures from the previous Spring, the growth for students with disabilities is even more striking.

CHART 1



Math Proficiency – MAP Spring 2023-Spring 2024

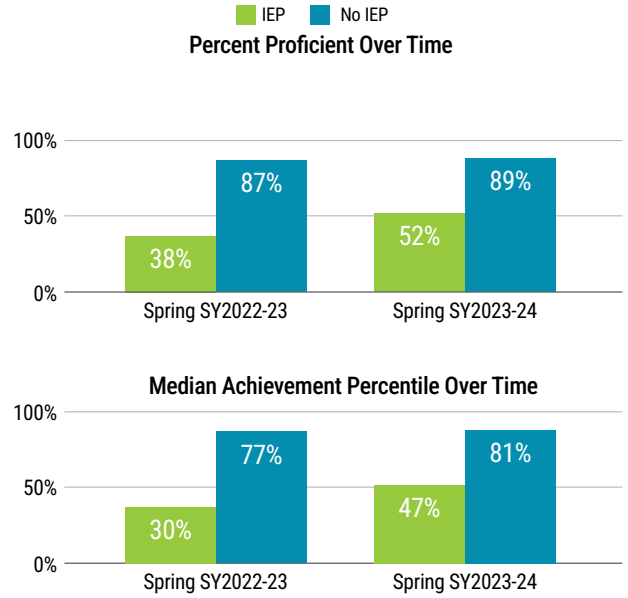
CHART 2



Math Growth – MAP Spring 2023-Spring 2024

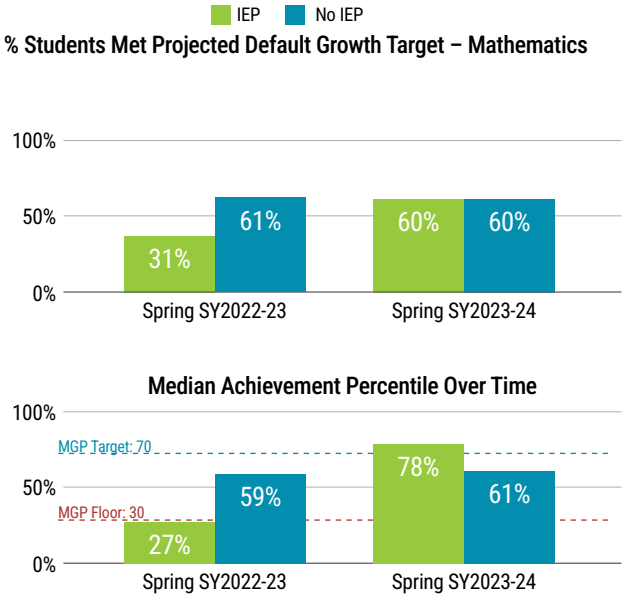
Similar to math, gaps in proficiency between students with and without disabilities in reading also remain. However, from Spring 22-23 to Spring 23-24, Latin succeeded in significantly reducing this gap, with 52% of students with disabilities scoring proficient at the end of SY 23-24, compared to only 38% the previous year. The median achievement percentile increased for students with disabilities from 30 to 47 (see Chart 3). Strong growth helped propel these gains in proficiency for students with disabilities (see Chart 4).

CHART 3



Reading Proficiency – MAP Spring 2023-Spring 2024

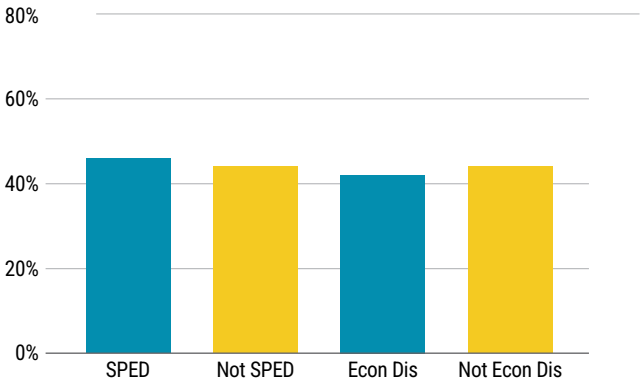
CHART 4



Reading Growth – MAP Spring 2023-Spring 2024

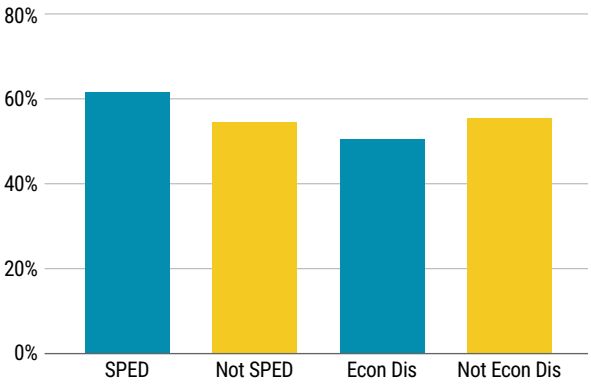
Students' scores on the DC Comprehensive Assessment of Student Progress (CAPE) tell a similar story. In math, nearly 50% of students with disabilities improved their score from the previous year, slightly higher than other subgroups (see Chart 5). In ELA, gains were even stronger, with over 60% of students with disabilities increasing their score, again, higher than gains in other subgroups (see Chart 6).

CHART 5



CAPE – Math Improved Score from Previous Year – School Year 2023-2024

CHART 6

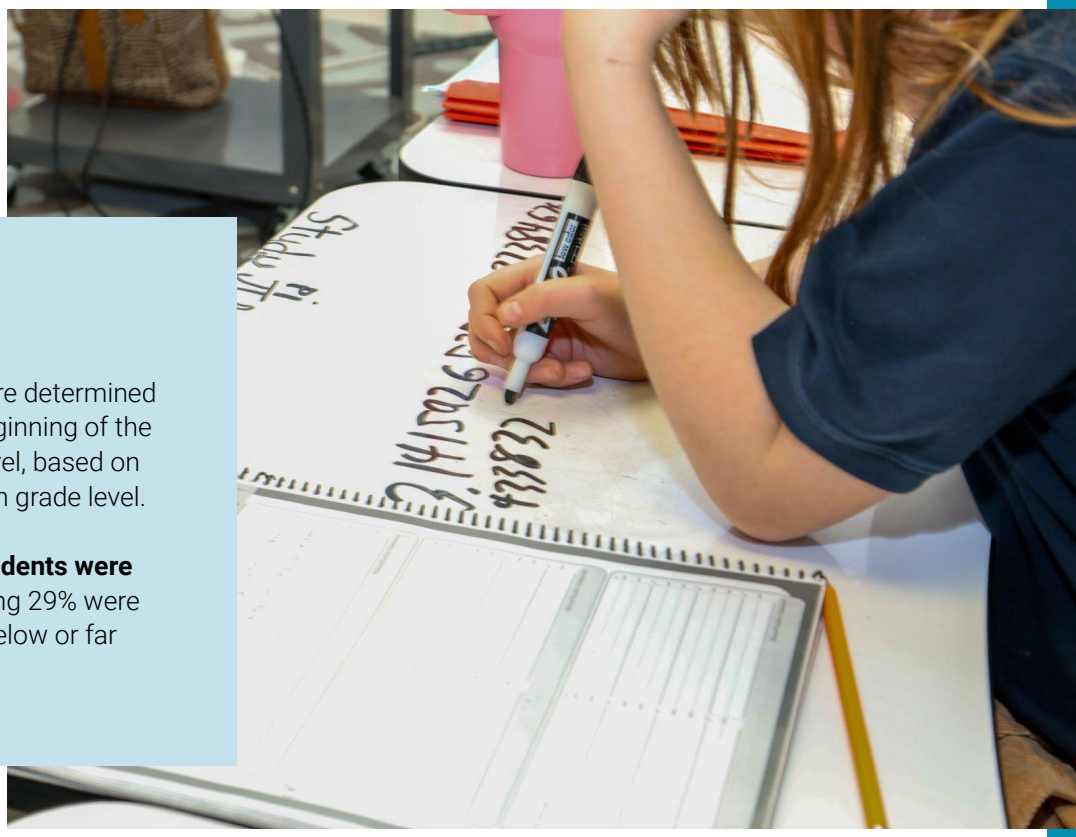


CAPE – ELA Improved Score from Previous Year – School Year 2023-2024

INTERVENTION HIGHLIGHT

In SY 23-24, half of 7th graders who were determined to need a reading intervention at the beginning of the year tested below or far below grade level, based on assessment data. None were reading on grade level.

By the end of the year, **71% of these students were reading on grade level** and the remaining 29% were approaching grade level. **None** tested below or far below grade level.



Thurgood Marshall Academy Public Charter School

Founded by law students and professors at Georgetown University Law Center, Thurgood Marshall Academy (TMA) is built around Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall's legacy of equal opportunity. TMA seeks to uphold that legacy through its commitment to providing an excellent education for all students, yet faces significant challenges with the average 9th grade student entering TMA three to four grade levels behind.

THURGOOD MARSHALL ACADEMY DEMOGRAPHICS: SERVING HISTORICALLY MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

TMA is located in DC's Ward 8, where 88% of residents are Black, and where nearly 20% of families with children live below poverty. It serves a population that has historically been marginalized and underserved.

- Approximately 338 students
- Student body is predominantly Black/African American (98%)
- 100% qualify for free or reduced lunch
- 28% students with disabilities, well above DC's overall rate of 14%

To address the needs of students who are entering many years below grade level, TMA turned to the Co-op for support in creating the conditions necessary to effectively implement Tier 3 reading and math intervention for incoming 9th graders needing intensive remedial academic support.

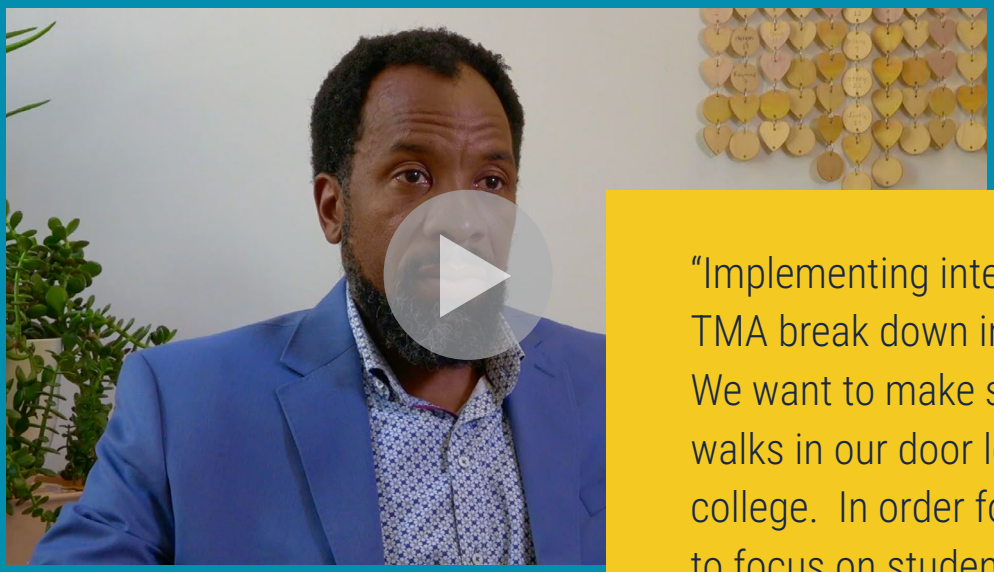
The Co-op supported TMA in designing a master schedule in which intervention is directly embedded, allowing for consistency in application and implementation. This schedule ensures that interventions are delivered with fidelity, while students in intervention also attend grade level Math and English courses so that they do not fall behind in earning required credits for graduation.

The Co-op also looked for interventions in both reading and math that had strong evidence of success for struggling students, ultimately identifying **Read 180** and **Math 180** as interventions that could meet TMA's needs. Teachers received ongoing training and coaching from expert coaches, and direct support from the Co-op in data collection and analysis.

Students in the classes participate in either small or whole group rotations that include direct whole group instruction, small group instruction, independent reading, and personalized pacing on digital platforms. They are aware of their personal goals and receive individualized instruction, coaching, and support in striving to meet those goals. Progress monitoring is built into the system, allowing for support to be highly targeted to each student's evolving needs. Intervention teams also regularly discuss students' social emotional and attendance needs, working to build students' confidence, which is often severely lacking after years of academic struggles.

Outcomes

Thurgood Marshall Academy's Intervention Classrooms – structured learning environments that combine evidence-based programs with expert instruction – are demonstrating measurable success in closing achievement gaps for struggling learners. Many students enter 9th grade performing three or more grade levels below expectations, making individual growth metrics such as NWEA RIT scores essential indicators of program impact.



WATCH RAYMOND'S INTERVIEW

"Implementing interventions with fidelity helps TMA break down inequities in our building. We want to make sure that every student that walks in our door leaves with a plan to get into college. In order for that to happen, we needed to focus on students on the margins."

***Raymond Weeden**, Thurgood Marshall Academy, Executive Director*

Student Growth Results for SY 24-25

Mathematics (Math 180)
From Fall to Spring of SY 24-25, 64% of students enrolled in **Math 180** met or exceeded their individual projected RIT growth targets. This represents a 14 percentage point increase over average expected growth based on NWEA norms. Even more notably, when examining the **Percentage of Projected Growth Met** – which calculates the proportion of the group's cumulative RIT growth goal achieved – students in **Math 180** achieved approximately 200% of their projected growth. This indicates that, on average, students in this intervention setting doubled or tripled their expected RIT growth over the course of the year, far surpassing national benchmarks.

Reading (Read 180)
Similarly, 62% of students in **Read 180** met or exceeded their projected RIT growth targets, outperforming national norms by 12 percentage points. The group achieved 112% of their projected growth, reflecting that several students made exceptional gains that raised the group's overall performance above expectations.

Program	% Meeting Growth	Pts above avg	% of Projected Growth Met
MATH 180	64%	▲ +14	200%
READ 180	62% (Avg 50%)	▲ +12	112%

While many factors influence academic achievement, the data strongly suggests that students participating in TMA's intervention-focused demonstration classrooms are experiencing accelerated growth. This success is attributable to a strategic combination of research-based instructional programs, skilled educators, and structured learning environments designed to meet students' individual needs.

EMPOWERING SCHOOLS TO LEAD CHANGE

DC Bilingual Public Charter School

Recognized as a 2024 National Blue Ribbon School by the US Department of Education, and the recipient of many awards throughout its history ("Leveler" School, "All Star School", and "Bold Improvement School") DC Bilingual (DCB) has a strong and enduring commitment to excellence. After adopting DC's equitable access preference – designed to ensure that students who will most benefit from their programming have a fair chance to enroll – more than 40% of newly enrolled students qualified for the preference.

As DCB's population of students with disabilities also increased, the school recognized that its continuum of special education services was not effectively serving students, but struggled to determine how to effectively change existing systems. The Co-op encouraged DCB to think differently about their special education continuum and to change how decisions about special education services were made.

DC BILINGUAL DEMOGRAPHICS: DUAL LANGUAGE IMMERSION FOR A DIVERSE POPULATION

DCB is a dual-language (English and Spanish) charter school, serving a diverse population of students: 45% Hispanic/Latino, 30% White, 20% Black/African-American, and 5% other races.

DCB is currently expanding, and by 2028 expects to serve 700 students. Students with disabilities make up 18% of its population, and 45% are English Learners.

The Solution: Learning Labs Across the Least Restrictive Environment Continuum

DCB needed to reimagine the systems it had in place to serve students with IEPs. Like many other schools, it developed its general education schedule first, and then scheduled services for students with IEPs around that existing schedule. Predictably, this led to students with disabilities being frequently pulled from core classes, with special education teachers struggling to meet students' assigned IEP hours. This in turn left little time for collaboration between general education and special education teachers.

The Co-op encouraged DCB's leadership team to think differently about its continuum. Bringing together the Executive Director, Principals, and Special Education Director to reimagine their continuum was critical to building lasting change, in which decisions were made based on the needs of each student, rather than trying to fit students into existing structures. Using tools developed by the Co-op, DCB was able to effectively analyze

individual student needs, identify specific evidence-based interventions needed to fill gaps, and determine precisely how many hours of specialized instruction both in and out of general education each student needed. The Co-op's tools also enabled DCB to identify staffing levels required to address those needs.

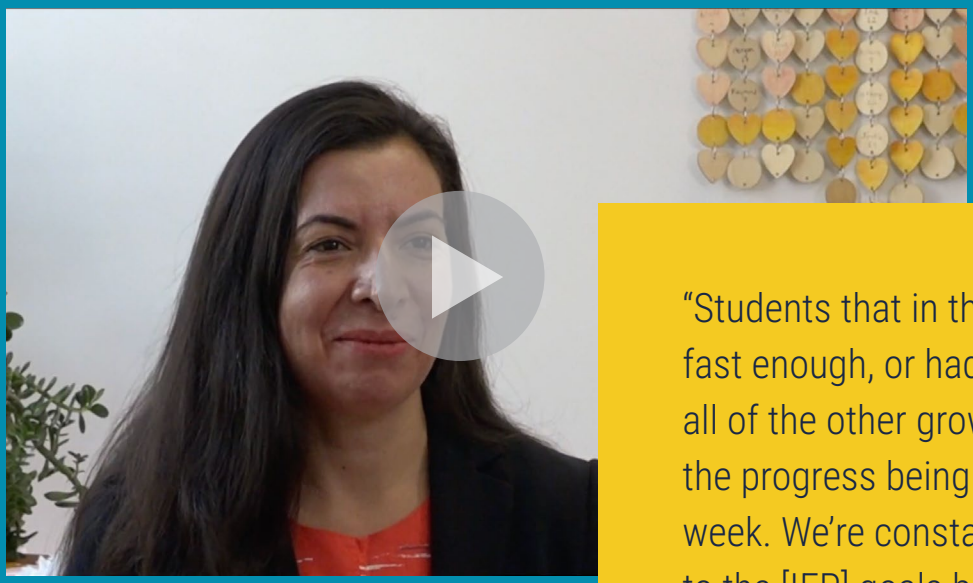
With this information in hand, the Co-op then worked with DCB to create a master schedule that prioritized the needs of students with disabilities first in order to ensure the provision of a full continuum of instructional support and meet the Least Restrictive Environment requirements of IDEA and DC regulations.

Working together, DCB and the Co-op created two Learning Labs where students could move in and out flexibly based on their identified needs. Some students attend the Learning Lab for a single period each day to receive an evidence-based intervention in reading or math, while students with higher needs may spend part or all of the day in a Learning Lab, some of which are equipped with sensory tools or other specialized equipment.

Each year, DCB reassesses student needs and redesigns the structure of the Learning Labs, including adding additional Learning Lab spaces as needed. School schedules are built around students with the highest intensity needs, ensuring that those students are always able to access the instruction they need. With schedules structured around student needs, special education teachers have more time available to collaborate with their general education counterparts, ensuring that all students with IEPs – regardless of whether they receive instruction inside or outside of general education – receive the targeted instruction they need.

Outcomes

Learning Labs are driving growth for students with disabilities. While there are clear gaps in the level of proficiency (which drive the placement in a Learning Lab), students who received support in a Learning Lab are meeting growth targets at the same rate as their non-disabled peers.



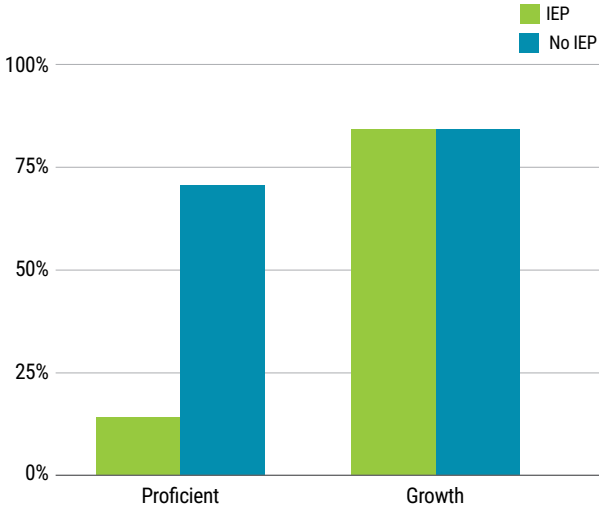
WATCH DANIELA'S INTERVIEW

"Students that in the past may not have [grown] fast enough, or had growth that was on par with all of the other growth of students – we're seeing the progress being made day by day, week by week. We're constantly having to make updates to the [IEP] goals because they're reaching their goals much more quickly."

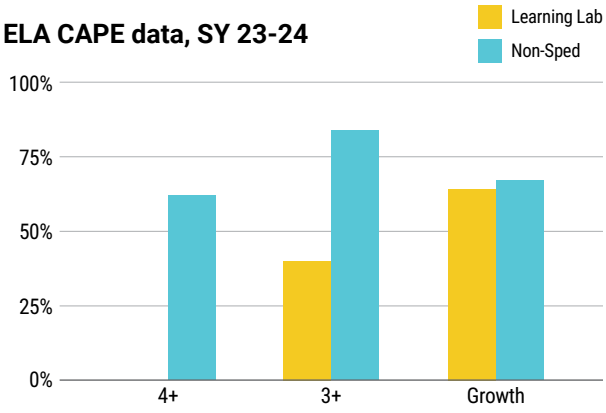
***Daniela Anello**, Head of School, DC Bilingual*

In SY 23-24, 85% of students with disabilities in the Learning Labs met their reading growth targets for the year. Similarly, CAPE data from SY 23-24 shows large gaps in proficiency, but high numbers of Learning Lab students meeting their growth targets.

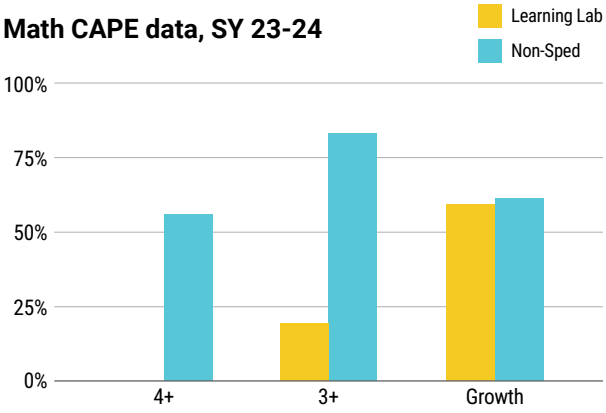
Reading Achievement and Growth Scores, SY 23-24 (Fountas & Pinnell)



ELA CAPE data, SY 23-24



Math CAPE data, SY 23-24



Students in the Learning Lab outperformed other students with disabilities across DC, with 40% earning a score of 3+ compared to the citywide rate of just over 20% in ELA. While math continues to be an area of weakness for students with disabilities across DC, students at DCB nonetheless outperformed their peers citywide by 4 percentage points

ELA CAPE Data SY 23-24: 3+ Citywide students with disabilities vs. Learning Lab

Math CAPE Data SY 23-24: 3+ Citywide students with disabilities vs. Learning Lab

The 53 visitors from 21 schools who have observed DCB's Learning Labs in action to date see that systemic change is possible when mindsets shift. They walk away knowing that it is possible to give every student with disabilities the just right level of support, and that when they do, every student – regardless of the intensity of their needs – can grow.

KEY LEARNINGS

The Demonstration Classrooms are a key mechanism by which the Co-op's mission ***to create equitable and excellent education systems in which students with disabilities thrive*** is coming to life.

In a city where achievement gaps for students with disabilities are among the highest in the nation, the Co-op's Demonstration Classrooms are proving that positive change and growth are possible. The following are key learnings from our work with schools:

Mindset shifts drive change
The Co-op's Demonstration Classroom work began with helping schools see students with disabilities in a different light: believing that students with disabilities can succeed when given the right support; regarding educating students with disabilities as the work of the entire school, not just the special education team; understanding that providing support to students at the margins benefits all students; and considering students with disabilities as worthy of investment in time and resources.

Leader buy-in and participation are essential
These mindset shifts only happen when the entire school leadership team commits. Responsibility cannot rest solely with special education teams; doing so only promotes continued siloing and marginalization of students with disabilities. At each of our Demonstration Classrooms, the Head of School provided the key direction and leadership driving this work forward. Their support enabled change to happen.

Programming for students with disabilities must be prioritized
At each school, the needs of students with disabilities moved to the forefront of planning. This meant that schedules were designed around the needs of students with disabilities and the teaching staff needed to meet those needs, rather than trying to slot interventions into existing schedules.

Data needs to drive all aspects of decision-making
Instead of making assumptions about students with disabilities, decisions at our Demonstration Classrooms are grounded in real-time data that clearly identifies which students need support, in what areas, and at what level.

Change is an ongoing, iterative process
Schools need to continually analyze and make decisions around programming, training, and scheduling based on what the data says about students' evolving needs.

Professional development must be reimagined
The power of the Demonstration Classrooms lies not only in the students served directly within the walls of those classrooms, but in their impact in spreading these practices to other schools. Our Demonstration Classrooms are one way in which the Co-op is reimagining professional development. By seeing high-quality, evidence-based instructional practices in real time, with an opportunity to debrief what they saw, teachers and school leaders can envision how they can incorporate these practices in their own classrooms and schools and leave inspired to take the first step. Multiple schools are now working with the Co-op to implement Universal Design for Learning, improve their MTSS programming, or develop a high quality continuum.

"[The Co-op's] expert-led demo observations provided us with clear, actionable insights that have directly supported our annual and priority planning work as an organization. The depth of knowledge and guidance they offer has helped us think through how we can refine our approach to supporting diverse learners. Through their expertise and high-quality learning opportunities, we have been able to evaluate and begin thinking through our own programming with confidence."

-Mary Pendleton, Senior Director of Program, DC Prep PCS

TRANSFORM POSSIBILITY INTO PRACTICE

Join the Movement for Educational Equity

Across DC, students with disabilities – particularly Black and Brown learners – are being left behind, not because they lack potential, but because systems have failed to deliver the instruction and support they need. The data is clear: when schools embrace inclusive mindsets, prioritize evidence-based practices like Universal Design for Learning and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support , and lead with purpose, students with disabilities grow – and they thrive.

The DC Special Education Cooperative's Demonstration Classrooms prove what's possible. From Bridges to Washington Latin, Thurgood Marshall Academy, and DC Bilingual, these innovative models are dismantling inequity and rewriting what's achievable for our most marginalized students. But this work cannot remain isolated. It must become the standard.

Now is the time to act.

If you are a school leader, instructional coach, or policymaker:

- **Visit a Demonstration Classroom** and witness transformation in action.
- **Partner with the Co-op** to reimagine professional development and sustainably scale these practices in your school.
- **Prioritize students with disabilities** in your strategic planning, staffing, and scheduling.
- **Commit to data-driven, equity-centered change** that places students' real needs – not assumptions – at the center.

We cannot afford to wait.

Every day we delay, more students fall further behind. The Co-op has created the roadmap. Join us in scaling what works, so that every student with a disability – regardless of race, income, or zip code – can access a rigorous, inclusive, and affirming education.

Let's transform possibility into practice – together.

Visit specialedcoop.org/programs/demo-classrooms to get started.