

Students are Proficient in Core Academic Subjects

Understanding Academic Proficiency

What is academic proficiency?

Academic proficiency means students have the math and English Language Arts (ELA) skills they need to succeed in their grade level and beyond. When students are proficient, they can solve problems, think critically, and analyze information effectively. These core skills prepare students for college and careers after they graduate from high school.

Why is measuring academic proficiency important?

Academic proficiency matters because it shows whether students are building the foundation they need for future success. Students who are proficient in math and ELA develop strong problem-solving, analysis, and critical thinking skills that help them in all areas of life.¹⁻³

Proficiency in core subjects early on is important for students' success later in school. Studies have shown that the risk of dropping out of high school can be identified as early as elementary school.⁴ In another study, course failures in middle school were one of the indicators used to identify students who would not graduate from high school.⁵

Schools and communities can use proficiency data to identify where students need more support and adjust programs to help them succeed and, ultimately, reach graduation.

Who gets measured?

Per U.S. Department of Education and Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) guidelines, Ascend tracks academic proficiency for students in grades 3 through 8 and grade 11 at the five Promise Neighborhood schools: S.A.N.D. and Wish elementary schools, Milner and M.L. King, Jr. middle schools, and Weaver High School.

How is academic proficiency calculated?

Academic proficiency is measured differently depending on the grade level:

For grades 3-8: Students take the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) test each spring. This test is aligned with Connecticut Core Standards and measures both math and ELA skills. Students receive scores at four achievement levels:

- Level 1: Does not meet the standard
- Level 2: Approaching the standard
- Level 3: Meets the standard
- Level 4: Exceeds the standard

For grade 11: Students take the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) during Connecticut SAT School Day, which measures both math and ELA skills for high schoolers.

The proficiency rate is calculated by:

1. Counting how many students scored at Level 3 or 4 (meeting or exceeding the standard).
2. Dividing by the total number of students who took the test.
3. Multiplying by 100 to get a percentage.

Higher percentages are better, showing that more students are meeting grade-level standards.

Where does the data come from?

A data sharing agreement between the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), the University of Hartford Center for Social Research, and Connecticut Data Collaborative allows Ascend to track academic proficiency by grade level, by school, and for all five Promise Neighborhood schools each year. For comparison, Ascend also calculates proficiency rates for other Hartford Public Schools. The state also makes trend data publicly available through public-edsight.ct.gov though some details are limited due to privacy rules.

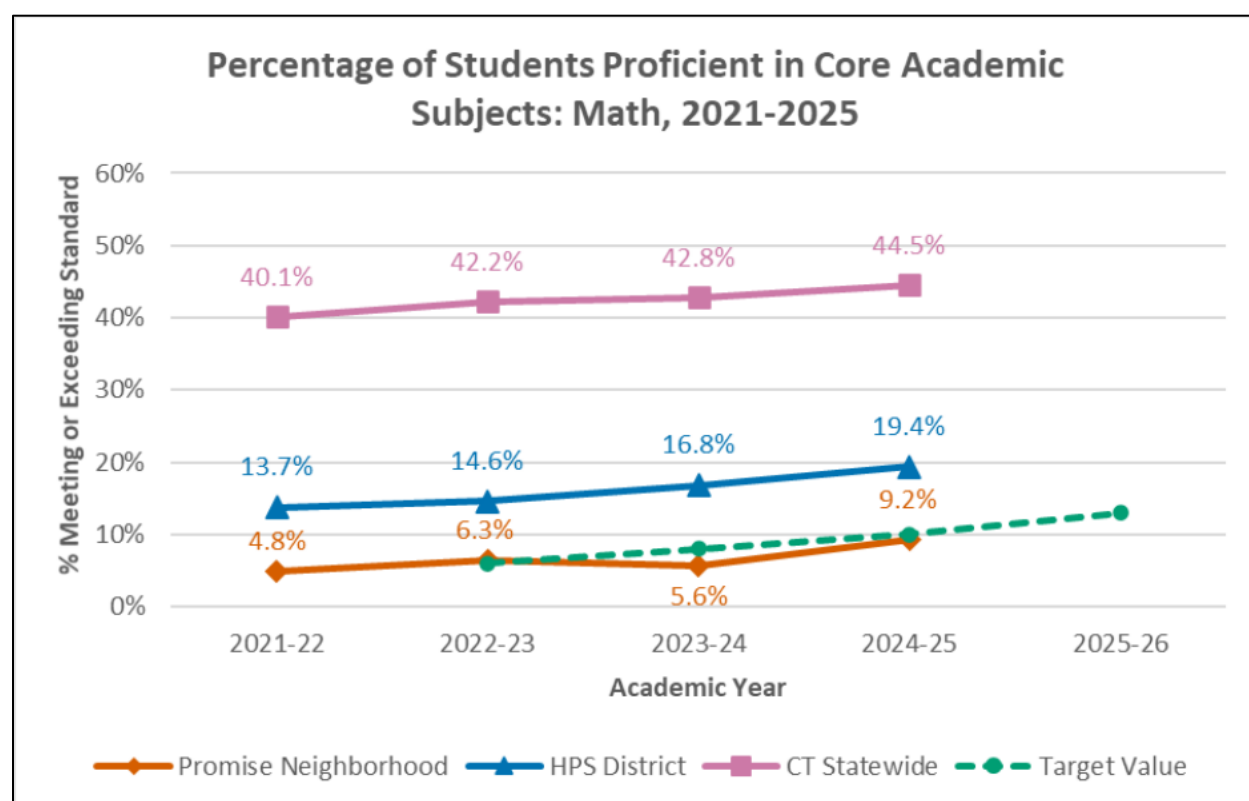
How to Read the Graphs

The graphs below show the percentage of 3rd through 8th graders and 11th graders (combined) who met or exceeded state standards in Math and ELA from 2021-22 to 2024-25.

The orange line in the graph shows the percentage of students attending the Ascend Promise Neighborhood middle and high schools who were proficient in a subject, the blue line shows the percentages for students attending other Hartford Public Schools, and the pink line shows the percentages for students attending other Connecticut public schools. The dashed green line represents the Ascend target value set for each indicator for the years covered by the Promise Neighborhood grant.

For academic proficiency, higher numbers are better!

Math Proficiency

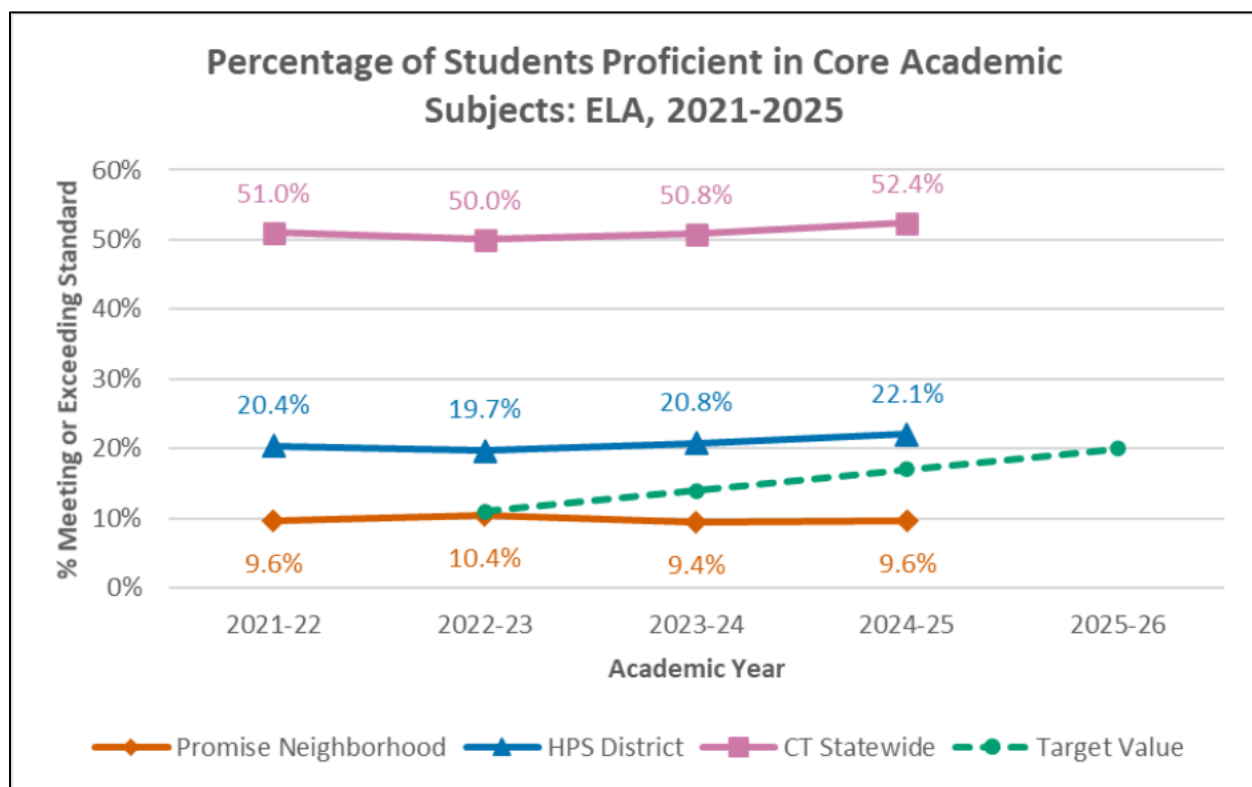


- In 2024-25, 9.2% of students attending Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools met or exceeded the standard for math proficiency, only 0.8 points below the target value for the year.
- Compared to 2023-24, math proficiency increased by 3.6 points in 2024-25.
 - Further inspection of results by grade levels indicates that performance improved across elementary, middle, and high school levels, with 11th

graders achieving the largest gains (11 points, a 110% increase over baseline) in 2024-25.

- Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools have achieved a 4.4-point net improvement (a 92% increase) in math proficiency over baseline.
- Students attending Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools continue to be less likely to meet or exceed standards in math proficiency than their peers attending other schools in the district, and while the gap narrowed from 2023-24 to 2024-25, it has not narrowed from the start of Ascend.

ELA Proficiency



- In 2024-25, 9.6% of students met or exceeded the standard for ELA proficiency, and this is 7.4 points below the target value for the year.
- Compared to 2023-24, ELA proficiency increased by 0.2 points in 2024-25.
 - Further inspection of results by grade levels indicates that the increase was primarily due to improved performance of 11th graders on the SAT, while performance decreased slightly for both middle and elementary grades on the SBAC.

- The most recent ELA proficiency rates have not changed for Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools in comparison to the baseline, as the trend line has remained relatively flat over the past four years.
- Students attending Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools continue to be less likely to meet or exceed standards in ELA proficiency than their peers attending other schools in the district, and the gap has widened slightly over the past two years.

How are math and ELA proficiency trends different?

Looking at both subjects together reveals important patterns:

- Math proficiency at Ascend schools increased in 2024-25, 4.4 points above the 2021-22 baseline. It is an improvement from the decrease in 2023-24.
- ELA proficiency in 2023-24 matches the baseline rate in 2021-22, at 9.6%.
- This suggests math interventions may be working better than ELA interventions, or that different factors are affecting these subjects.

Why is this happening?

While the data shows what's happening with academic proficiency, understanding why requires looking at the support systems and challenges students face. Several factors likely influence academic performance, including housing stability, family resources, attendance, and the transition back to normal testing after COVID-19.

The timing of improvements and declines suggests that some interventions may be working, but that sustained progress requires ongoing support and potentially different approaches for different subjects.

How can Ascend help improve academic proficiency?

Several programs affiliated with Ascend are designed to support student academic success:

[**Hartford Promise**](#) offers college scholarships up to \$100,000 for students who maintain a 3.0 GPA and 93% attendance while staying in Hartford schools from 9th through 12th grade. This program incentivizes academic achievement and school stability.

[**Hartford Public Schools**](#) offers multiple programs, services, and supports to students and their families as part of the Full-Service Community School model implemented at

each of the Promise Neighborhood schools. These services may be provided by either school staff (e.g., FCSSPs, School Social Workers) or community-based organization partner(s), or both working in conjunction with each other. They provide the following types of support to students and to other members of their families:

- Integrated Student Supports (at all schools) promote students' academic success by developing and coordinating supports that target academic and non-academic barriers to achievement, including providing resources and supports to meet basic needs.
- Family Engagement services (at all schools) involve outreach and engagement with family members, including providing direct assistance to family members of the student. A few examples include Parent Engagement Groups, home visits, back-to-school events, and parent-teacher conferences.
- Referrals to outside organizations (at all schools) address needs that require a higher level of care or access to resources available outside of the school, such as housing, employment, food, and energy assistance.
- Family Resource Centers (at S.A.N.D. and Wish elementary schools) provide access to a continuum of services that foster the optimal development and education of children beginning at birth. They provide early childhood education, child care, and family support services to meet the specific needs that are presented when engaging with families.
- Career and Workforce Development (at MLK and Milner middle schools and Weaver High School) includes programs and services that support post-secondary education and career development, in-school or out-of-school, such as those that link students to higher education, vocational training, or work-based learning opportunities, or connect classroom learning to career pathways. This area also includes efforts to engage parents and provide financial resources for continued learning and/or student transition assistance.

United Way Readers specifically supports ELA by pairing students reading below grade level with volunteers for one-on-one literacy support for one hour per week throughout the school year.

The data reveals an opportunity to further engage these programs and develop additional targeted interventions, particularly for ELA proficiency, to provide more comprehensive math and ELA support to students.

References

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