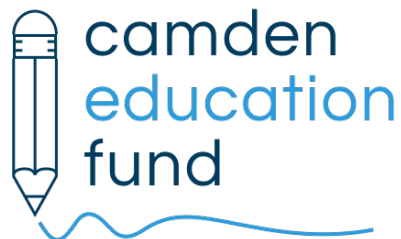


Can **CAMDEN STUDENTS CONTINUE *the* COMEBACK?**

After learning loss during the pandemic, early student learning results are showing progress



Camden on the Rise

Dear Friends, Colleagues, and Community Partners,

Despite the setbacks of recent years, Camden city and its schools are still rising.

Camden has created one of the most innovative school systems in our region over the last ten years, with the combination of traditional district, renaissance, and charter schools coming together to create an education system that is responsive to student and family needs. This innovative system has resulted in academic progress for students, improved school facilities, and a school system more prepared for the future.

Like all city school systems across the country, the pandemic set our students back. After several years of analysis and learning about where things stand as a city, this report shows that – despite the significant learning loss during the pandemic – Camden students are beginning to rebound, and are doing so on pace with their statewide peers. We share some areas of focus that we believe are promising strategies to get students back on track and continue to build on Camden's progress as a city.

While we work to get back on track, we can also better prepare students than we did before. Specifically, we've learned that we need to do more to support students socially and emotionally in and outside of schools, and provide them with more opportunities and postsecondary pathways after graduation. We can integrate these lessons and accelerate student learning outcomes because of Camden's responsive and innovative school system and school types.

In order to do this, we need to continue our investment in facilities and innovation across our community, and continue to collaborate across sectors. The opening of new school buildings in recent months and years at Camden High, KIPP Hatch, and Camden Prep High School – and investment in a new Eastside High School – are great examples of this.

Camden can be an example of what an equitable modern school system looks like, but it will take all of us. We need to work together across traditional district, renaissance, and charter school sectors to ensure that we have the best educators, that ALL of our students feel supported, and that their families feel welcomed to participate in their success.

Lastly, we will only get there if we have a laser focus on what works for students and best supports educators. The last several years have been deeply challenging, but as we look toward the future, we must see this moment as an opportunity to better understand what is working and what our students need to set, reach, and even exceed our collective goals. We hope to start us in that direction with this short research brief. We look forward to working together to use this information to make life better for Camden students and their families.



Sincerely,

Giana Campbell, Executive Director

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Can Camden Students Continue the Comeback?

Executive Summary:

After Learning Loss During the Pandemic, Camden Schools Are Starting to Rebound on Pace with the Statewide Average

As we look to the future at Camden Education Fund (CEF), we know that we first have to understand where we are and where we've been. Toward this goal, we are sharing a short data brief on the recent education trends in Camden. This will include both the progress made in Camden from 2015 – 2019, as well as the learning loss and recovery that occurred between 2020 and 2023 as a result of the pandemic. We will also share some survey data to better understand how families feel about education in Camden. Review of this data reveals a few core findings:

1

Camden students fell behind during the pandemic, but data shows they are catching up at a pace similar to the state average in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math.

2

Data shows Camden students have made learning gains over time. Current test scores not only show that students are rebounding, but are still outperforming where they were a decade ago.

3

Citywide enrollment has remained constant, but enrollment shifts between school types helped drive learning gains before the pandemic and is now helping with recovery.

4

Families believe teacher shortages, student social emotional well-being, and academic quality are the top challenges facing Camden schools.

Our hope is that by understanding where we are, we can come together around common goals and solutions. We must create goals and solutions with a focus on accelerating learning for our students by making them feel academically supported, comfortable, and safe in their environments, and in school buildings that provide conditions where they can thrive. Specifically, we think there are a few core things Camden leaders can come together on. They include:

- **Invest in Academic Support Strategies that Research Shows are Working**
- **Provide More Programming and Supports to Students Outside of Schools and Classrooms**
- **Create a Supportive and Attractive Environment for Educators**
- **Continue Investment in Healthy and Updated Buildings that Meet Community Needs**

We hope you will see — as we do — that while the pandemic set our schools and students back, Camden remains a city on the rise. Camden students, teachers, staff, and families created great momentum in the form of learning gains and better life outcomes over the last ten years, and if we redouble our efforts together we can get students back on track.

So where do things stand and what information do we have available that can inform us about the state of Camden schools? We invite you to read this brief to learn more.

Key Findings:

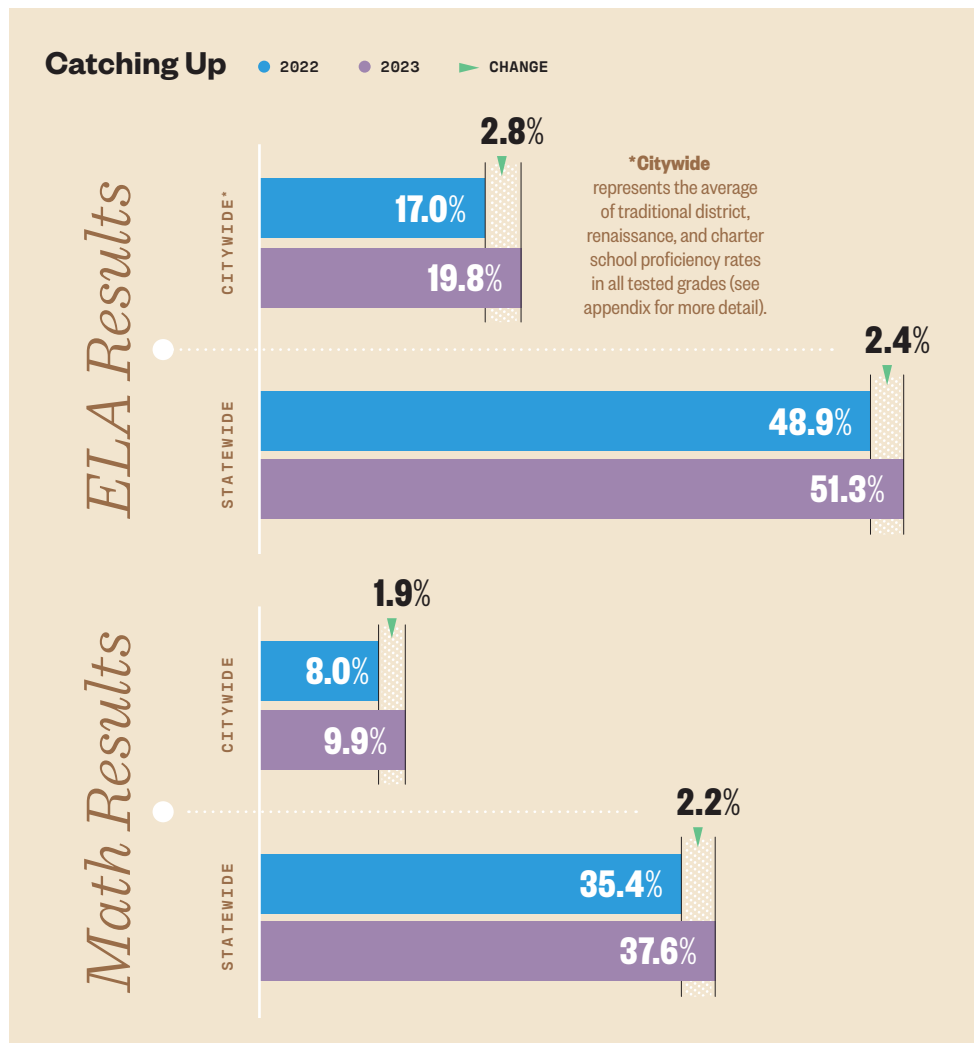
A Look at Citywide Education Trends

1. Camden students fell behind during the pandemic, but data shows they are catching up at a pace similar to the state average in ELA and Math.

Camden Education Fund used publicly available statewide data to understand how Camden students were impacted by the pandemic, and how they have fared since.

Our analysis shows that students in schools across all sectors lost a considerable amount of learning in both English language arts (ELA) and Math between 2019 and 2022. This loss is consistent with trends across the country, and particularly with communities that predominantly serve low-income minority students like Camden. (According to US Census Data, 40.9% of 5-17 year old children in Camden live in Poverty, compared with just 12.2% statewide.)

Looking at data from the 2022-2023 school year shows that students are already starting to rebound from pandemic lows, and when looking at results across school types citywide (traditional district, renaissance, and charter schools), that students are catching up on pace with statewide averages.



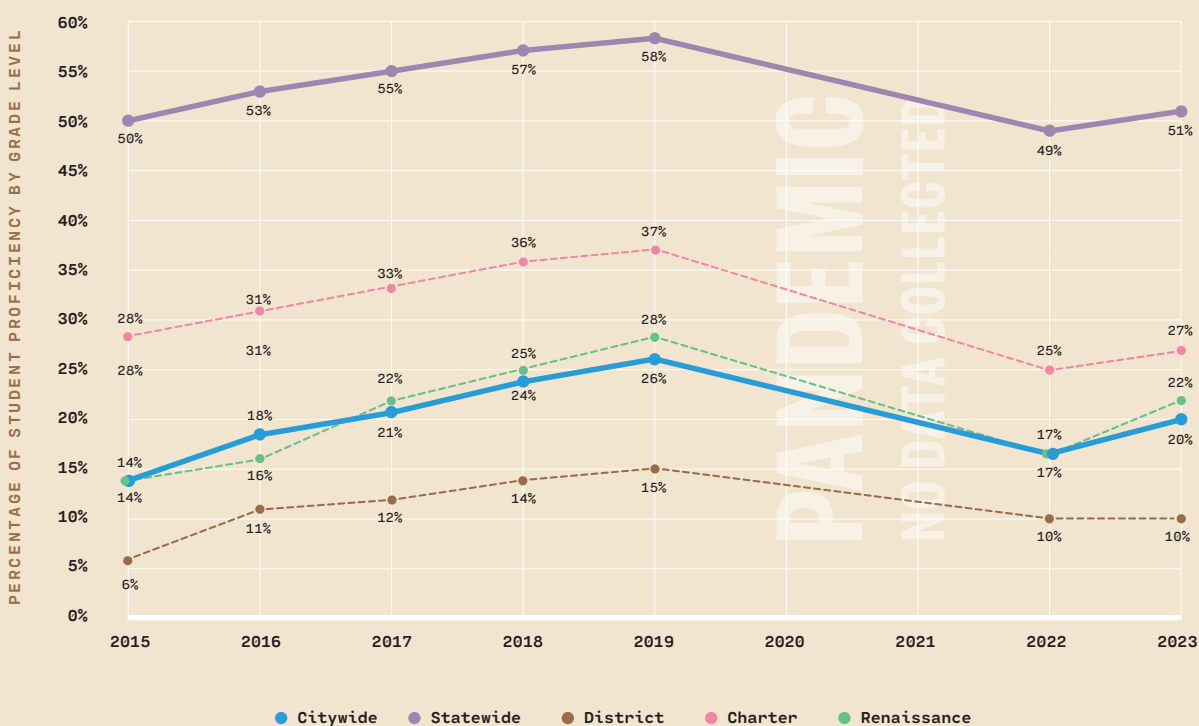
IN 2023, CAMDEN SCHOOLS IMPROVED BY 2.8 PERCENTAGE POINTS IN ELA AND 1.9 PERCENTAGE POINTS IN MATH CITYWIDE – ON A PACE SIMILAR TO THE STATEWIDE AVERAGE IN BOTH SUBJECTS.

2. Data shows Camden students have made learning gains over time. Current test scores not only show that students are rebounding, but are still outperforming where they were a decade ago.

When we zoom out further, the overall story of Camden learning over the past decade is clearer. After several years of improvement — and closing the gap with the state — Camden schools saw learning loss during the pandemic that reopened some of those gaps. Learning loss data across the country shows that students from lower income backgrounds were hit hardest by pandemic era issues, like school closures, family health issues, or lack of support for learning at home.

Despite these nationwide trends, Camden students fell behind at a rate similar to statewide averages, and are now catching back up at the same rate statewide. In addition, when we look at where student learning is now citywide, compared to where it was in 2015 (the first year of new standards aligned assessments), students continue to outperform where they were at that time in both ELA and Math.

School Performance Over Time — English Language Arts

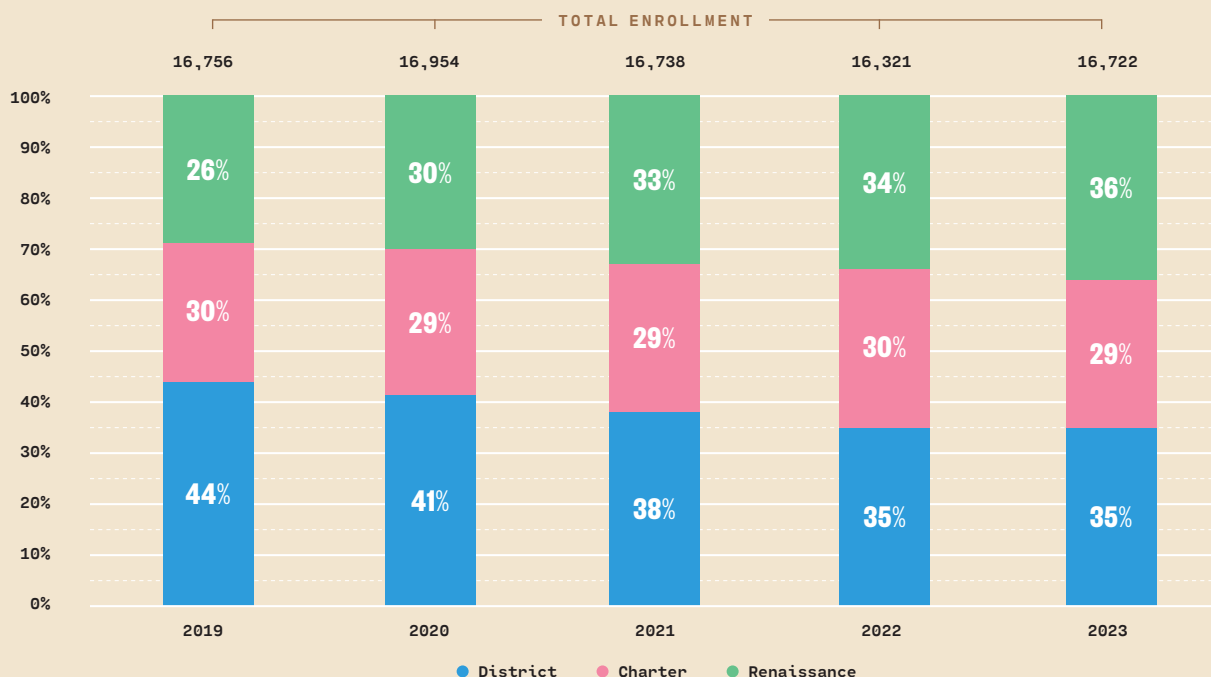


IN 2015, THE GAP BETWEEN CAMDEN CITYWIDE AND STATE PROFICIENCY WAS 36 PERCENTAGE POINTS. EVEN WITH PANDEMIC ERA CHALLENGES, THE GAP HAS CLOSED TO 31 PERCENTAGE POINTS.

3. Citywide enrollment has remained constant, but enrollment shifts between school types helped drive learning gains before the pandemic and is now helping with recovery.

More good news in Camden City relates to overall student enrollment. Where many city school systems experienced pandemic enrollment declines, Camden schools have seen enrollment remain steady overall, with shifts across different school types over time and specifically an increase in enrollment in renaissance schools.

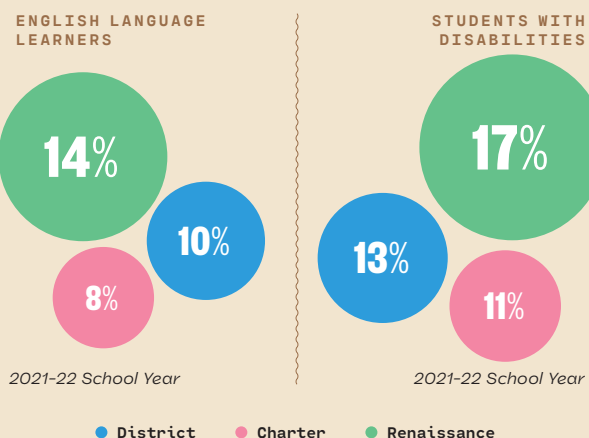
Market Share by School Type



While these different school types are spread across the city and serve different student populations, it is notable that as these shifts occur, renaissance schools are serving a higher percentage of English language learner (ELL) students and students with disabilities than district schools.

Lastly, while steady enrollment is a positive indicator, the most recent data available about chronic absenteeism in Camden is deeply concerning. 51% of students in Camden schools citywide were chronically absent in the 2021-2022 school year (2022 was the most recent data available during the drafting of this report). We look forward to seeing whether these trends have changed in the 2022-23 school year and whether any shifts relate to the gains we are seeing in schools.

Student Enrollment Percentage

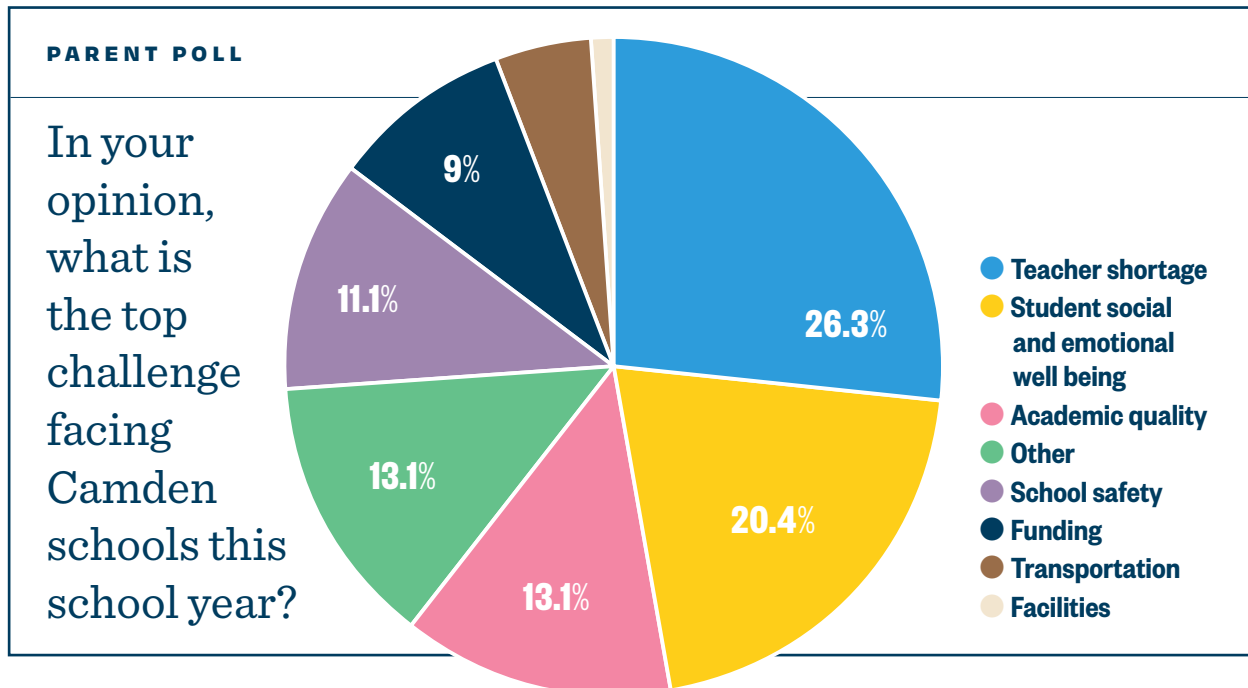


4. Families believe teacher shortages, student social emotional well-being, and academic quality are the top challenges facing Camden schools.

In the fall of 2023, a local organization, Parents Invincible, asked families if they believe their child is performing at grade level. 82% of parents said yes, and just 17% said no. While this optimism may have reflected the improvement they were seeing in their students, it is important to note that the vast majority of students in Camden are not performing on grade level, and in fact, are still working to catch back up to where they were before the pandemic. While it is important that families feel positive about their students' experiences and that we celebrate progress when it happens, we can not lose our sense of urgency. We must remain laser focused on regaining the momentum Camden schools had before the pandemic, and ensure Camden student outcomes are once again closing gaps with their statewide peers.

JUST 17% OF CAMDEN PARENTS SAID 'NO' WHEN ASKED IF THEIR STUDENTS WERE PERFORMING ON GRADE LEVEL.

When asked about the top challenge facing Camden schools, families shared that they are most worried about staffing shortages and the social/emotional well-being of students, which points to the need for support both inside and outside of school. They also pointed out academic quality and school safety as areas of challenge. These views can help inform how we support students and families moving forward, and have informed our next section about what we can do to help Camden students continue the comeback.



Survey data was shared by the non-profit organization, Parents Invincible. 289 Camden parents responded to the survey between August and September 2023.

Solutions:

What Can We Do to Help Students Continue to Comeback?

The data shared in this brief makes us optimistic that Camden students can continue the comeback, and recreate the gap-closing momentum we saw before the pandemic. In order to do that they need the support of our leaders, schools, and community members to help overcome barriers they continue to face coming out of the pandemic years. There are a few core things Camden Education Fund (CEF) and our school and district partners are doing to help students continue the comeback:

Invest in Strategies to Provide High Quality Academic Supports

At CEF, we have identified sustainable solutions with a proven track record of success, as well as new opportunities for investment and collaboration that can help students get back on track. We see two primary ways to do this:

1. **Don't ignore what has worked:** Past data shows that our collective focus on schools with high quality academic programs and a focus on teacher quality helped lead to improved learning for students. This was done with a core commitment to equity, where serving all students with rigorous instruction truly meant for ALL students. We see this commitment across our city where all schools serve similar levels of students with disabilities and those learning English as a second language. We must keep this focus, and sustain it as we try new strategies to catch students up.
2. **Identify new opportunities and accelerate learning:** Below are a few examples of new ways CEF is working with local schools and partner organizations to further accelerate learning to guarantee Camden students continue the comeback.
 - a. **Support schools to adopt the highest quality instructional materials** to ensure that all schools are adopting and implementing research-based practices and curriculum proven to help students accelerate their learning.
 - b. **Provide targeted, high dosage tutoring**, through statewide collaborations like NJ Tutoring Corps, to students who are furthest behind as a result of pandemic-related learning loss
 - c. **Improve college access for Camden youth** by allowing high school students to take free, credit-bearing dual enrollment college courses in their junior and senior years, while receiving aligned college readiness support during the school day.



Provide More Programming and Supports to Students Outside of Schools and Classrooms

CEF's Youth-Serving Organization (YSO) grants provide outstanding, Camden-led nonprofit organizations with additional resources to support students outside of the classroom, including mentoring, social emotional and mental health supports, academic tutoring, and opportunities in athletics and the arts.

NEWS CLIP • AUGUST 31, 2023 • FROM

TapInto Camden



Women of the Dream Using Camden Education Fund Grant to Focus on Trauma in Middle School Girls

When the nonprofit Women of the Dream organization began working on life skills and college preparation with girls from Camden public schools, an alarming trend began to emerge.

The nonprofit — with a mission to “empower, cultivate and inspire” young Camden women to help them succeed — found that underlying be-

havior issues often grew from some type of trauma that never had been addressed.

Addressing trauma for high school girls was added to the organization’s existing programs, which teach life skills and college preparation to young women. The nonprofit also each year sends young women to a STEM conference for girls at Drexel University.

“Many of our girls answered ‘yes’ to having experienced childhood trauma, and ‘no’ to not having received counseling for this trauma,” says Leslie Morris, founder and CEO of Women of the Dream. “We realized that trauma is driving a lot of the behaviors that we see in our kids.”

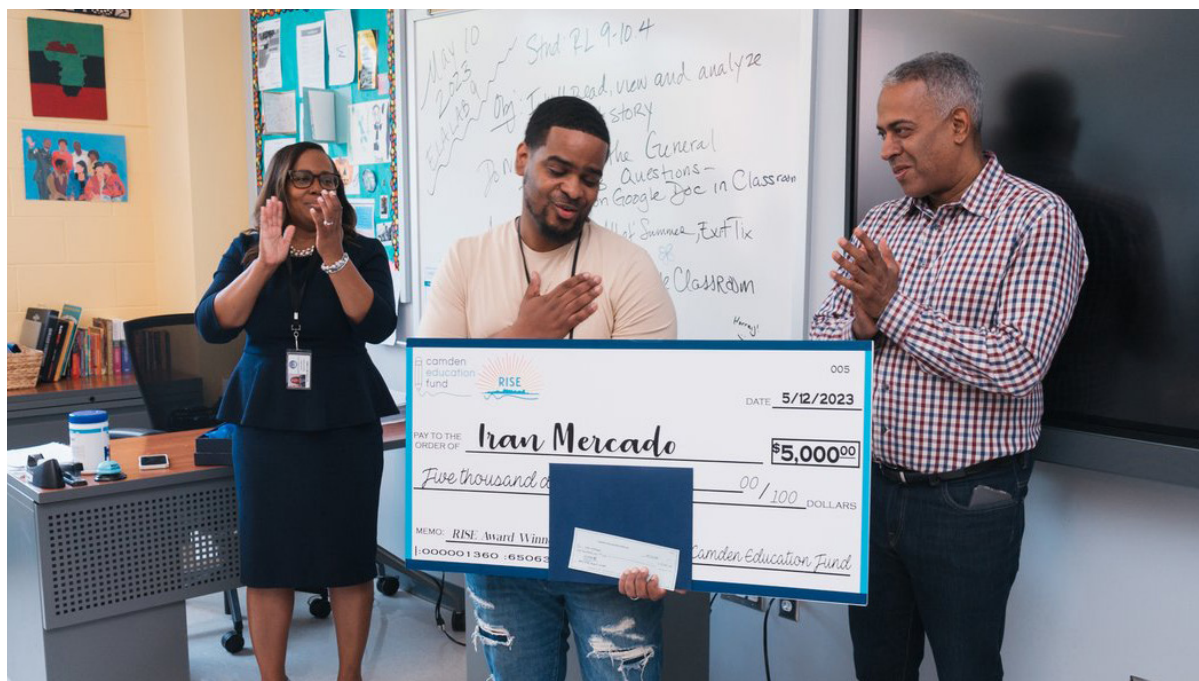
[READ STORY →](#)

Create a Supportive and Attractive Environment for Educators Who Support Students

Families are affirming what we already know from experience as education leaders — teachers and caring school staff matter — probably now more than ever before. And with more educators leaving the profession and fewer entering, it is as difficult as it has ever been to get the best educators and staff in buildings to support our students. With this in mind, we see some core programs, collaborations, and investment opportunities to continue to ensure Camden students have great educators and staff supporting them to accelerate learning outcomes.

In fact, CEF is already working with local and state leaders to recruit, develop, and retain great educators for Camden students, and we believe if we continue to invest in some of these budding programs, that we can help Camden students accelerate their comeback with the support of more diverse and talented educators. A few examples of this include:

- 1. Camden Teacher Pipeline:** Camden Teacher Pipeline (CTP) recruits aspiring teachers, matches them with Camden schools for student teaching, and provides ongoing support and mentorship as they transition into the classroom. CTP is a partnership between the Camden Education Fund and New Jersey colleges and universities. To date, over 75% of CTP participants have secured full-time roles in the classroom. All teachers are certified.
- 2. Center for Black Educator Development:** The Center for Black Educator Development (CBED) aims to recruit and train the next generation of Black educators. In Camden, CEF has partnered with CBED to recruit high school and college students interested in entering the Black Teacher Pipeline as well as to support existing black male educators, including \$10,000 to sponsor 25 Camden school-based staff educators to attend the annual Black Men in Education Convening (BMEC) held in Philadelphia.
- 3. Annual RISE Award:** The annual Resilient, Inspirational, Solutions-Oriented Educator (RISE) Awards recognize and reward up to six PK-12 outstanding public school teachers across the city of Camden. RISE Award winners receive citywide recognition and a \$5,000 prize. Winning teachers represent the diversity of great educators in the city and teachers from various grade spans, public school types, as well as general education, special education, and bilingual/ESL teachers.



Continue To Invest in Healthy and Updated Buildings that Meet Community Needs

Maintaining Camden students' comeback requires improved student attendance and steady sustained enrollment, which we believe requires keeping students feeling healthy and safe is through continued investment in the buildings and classroom environments where students feel welcome and are learning. The sentiment was shared by Camden City School Superintendent Katrina T. McCombs at the recent announcement of a new Eastside High School Campus: "I am grateful that our collective efforts have demonstrated and revealed that all of Camden's children, all of them, are valued. Because we're not just building a school, we're building a stronger, more sustainable and equitable future."

With the latest announcement for a new Eastside High School, nearly \$600 million has been invested or committed to new school buildings in Camden over the last 10 years. This investment has resulted in six brand-new school buildings and nine fully renovated buildings, which together will serve over 7,500 students when they are all completed and full (this is out of nearly 17,000 students total who attend public schools in Camden).

This means that nearly half of all Camden students will have the opportunity to walk into and experience vastly improved and more modern learning environments than students in the same schools and neighborhoods experienced just 10 years ago.

NEWS CLIP • OCTOBER 23, 2023 • FROM

Courier Post

New Facilities Provide Equitable Future

CAMDEN, NJ (OP-ED) — If you paid attention to the back-to-school news this fall, you may have noticed a theme in Camden: the opening of more new and fully renovated school buildings.

On Sept. 18, Camden City School District and state officials came together to announce plans for a brand new Eastside High School building. In late August, Uncommon Schools Camden Prep opened their brand new high school and KIPP Hatch Middle School welcomed students to a fully renovated building — both serv-



ing neighborhood students under the city's renaissance school model. These openings all come after a brand new Camden High School opened in 2021.

We join with the sentiment shared by Camden City School Superintendent Katrina McCombs at the Eastside announcement: "I am grateful that our collective ef-

orts have demonstrated and revealed that all of Camden's children, all of them, are valued. Because we're not just building a school, we're building a stronger, more sustainable, and equitable future."

[READ STORY →](#)

Conclusion:

Can Camden Students Continue the Comeback?

Absolutely! The promising data trends we have just reviewed tell us what is possible. Camden students are making great strides despite the challenges our city has faced. But, we need to work together to sustain and accelerate the progress.

Camden is Rising: Camden has created one of the most innovative school systems in our region over the last ten years, with the combination of district, renaissance, and charter schools coming together to create an education system that is responsive to student and family needs. This innovative system has resulted in academic progress for students, improved school facilities, and a school system more prepared for the future.

But We Need to Make Sure Camden Students Continue the Comeback: Like all city school systems across the country, the pandemic set our students back, but Camden students are now catching up on a pace with statewide averages. We can work together to get students fully back on track and continue to build on Camden's progress as a city.

We Can Also Learn From the Last Few Years: While we work to help Camden students continue the comeback, we can also better prepare students than we did before. Specifically, we've learned that we need to do more to support students socially and emotionally in schools, and provide them with more opportunities and pathways to the workforce. We can integrate these lessons and accelerate core student learning outcomes because of Camden's responsive and innovative school system and school types.

This Will Require Continued Investment and Innovation: In order to do this, we need to continue our investment in facilities and innovation across our community, and continue to collaborate across sectors. The opening of new school buildings in months and years at Camden High, KIPP Hatch, and Camden Prep High School — and continued investment in Eastside High School — are great examples of this.

Cross Sector Collaboration: Camden can be an example of what an equitable modern school system can look like, but it will take all of us. We need to work together across traditional district, renaissance and charter school sectors to ensure that we have the best educators, that ALL of our students feel supported, and their families feel welcomed to participate in their success.

And a Focus on What Works for Students and Educators: Lastly, we will only get there if we have a laser focus on what works for students and how to support educators. The last several years have made it difficult to know what works with unique circumstances and little information, but as we look toward the future, we must better understand what is working and what our students need to set and reach our collective goals.

Thank you for reading this research brief, and for your consideration and partnership in working to support Camden students. You can learn more about CEF, and what we are doing to help Camden students continue the comeback here: **camdenedfund.org**



Data Appendix

The ELA and Math data included in this analysis reflects a longitudinal tracking of all grade levels that have data reported for NJSLA assessments. For ELA, this universe includes students who participated in NJSLA ELA assessments in grades 3-9; for Math, this includes students who participated in NJSLA Math assessment for grades 3-8, as well as Algebra I, Algebra II, and Geometry. This universe is intended to be inclusive of all grade levels that participated in NJSLA assessments for both reading and math.

Definitions

- ▶ **Charter School:** Refers to a free, public school that is privately operated by a nonprofit charter management organization and is independent of the local school district’s board of education. The school is governed by a board of trustees in accordance with the charter granted by the New Jersey Commissioner of Education and state laws and regulations that govern charter schools.
- ▶ **Traditional District School:** Refers to a free, neighborhood public school that is operated by the local school district’s board of education or, in the case of a state-controlled district like Camden, operated by the New Jersey Commissioner of Education.
- ▶ **Renaissance School:** Refers to a free, neighborhood public school that is privately operated by a nonprofit charter management organization and is independent of the local school district’s board of education. The school is governed by a board of trustees in accordance with the Urban Hope Act under a charter granted by the New Jersey Commissioner of Education.
- ▶ **Citywide:** Refers to a weighted average of traditional district, renaissance, and charter school proficiency rates across all tested grades in NJSLA assessments for both English language arts and math.

Camden Proficiency Rates 2019 – 2023

Math

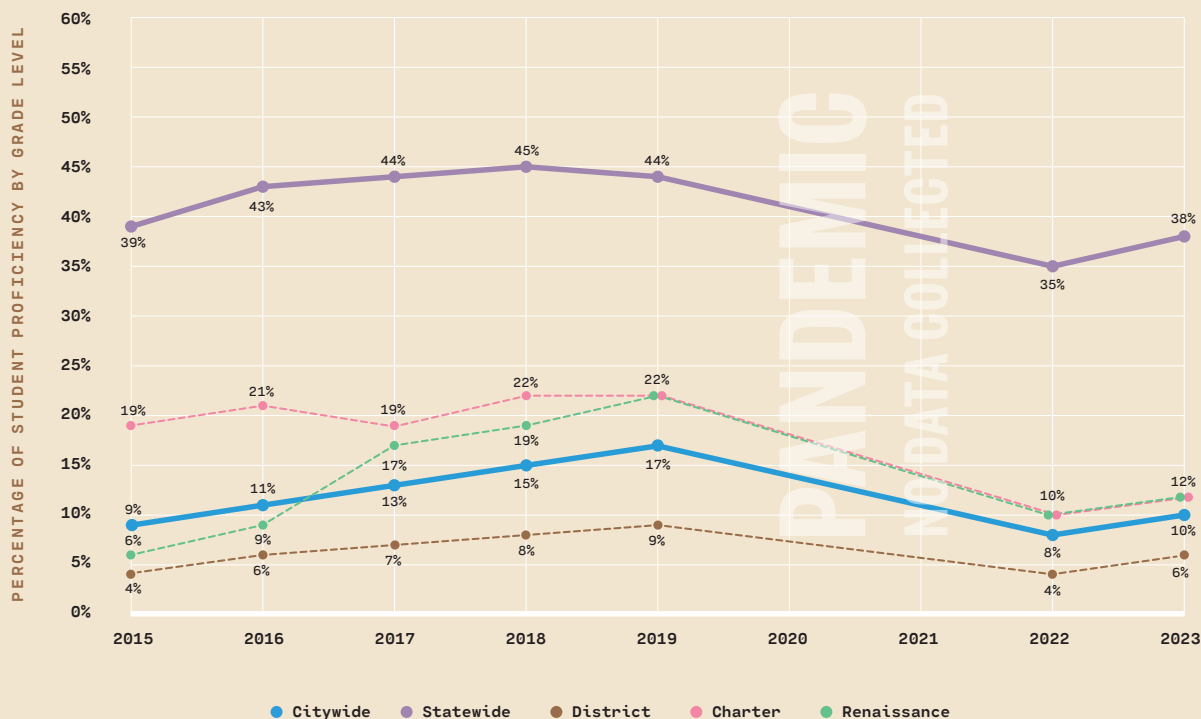
TYPE	2019	2022	2023	% OF LL RECOVERED
Charter ●	21.8%	9.8%	11.5%	14.5%
District ●	8.6%	4.1%	5.5%	31.8%
Renaissance ●	22.4%	9.8%	12.0%	17.9%
Citywide ●	16.6%	8.0%	9.9%	22.2%
Statewide ●	44.0%	35.4%	37.6%	25.5%

Camden Proficiency Rates 2019 – 2023

ELA

TYPE	2019	2022	2023	% OF LL RECOVERED
Charter ●	36.6%	25.1%	26.8%	14.8%
District ●	15.4%	9.8%	10.1%	5.2%
Renaissance ●	28.4%	16.6%	21.7%	43.0%
Citywide ●	26.1%	17.0%	19.8%	30.8%
Statewide ●	57.8%	48.9%	51.3%	26.9%

School Performance Over Time — Math



IN 2015, THE GAP BETWEEN CAMDENCITYWIDE MATH SCORES AND THE STATE WERE 30 PERCENTAGE POINTS. THE GAP IS NOW 28 PERCENTAGE POINTS.