

NEWARK KIDS COUNT



DATA SNAPSHOT 2025

Education in Newark Public Schools

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The Newark Public School District has been in a transitional period since regaining control from the state in 2020. After maintaining control of the District for 23 years, the state concluded that “the Newark Public Schools had made significant progress and had satisfied the regulatory requirements of Quality School Accountability Continuum (QSAC),” and so the State Board voted to begin the return of local district control in September of 2017. Roger León was appointed superintendent on July 1st, 2018, and he soon developed a comprehensive 10-year plan, known as “The Next Decade: 2020-2030,” which intends to build a new, enriched educational ecosystem that provides excellent education for every child in Newark.

The plan is five years in, and improvement is already evident. Here’s a snapshot of how the District is currently performing:

Graduation Rates are Improving

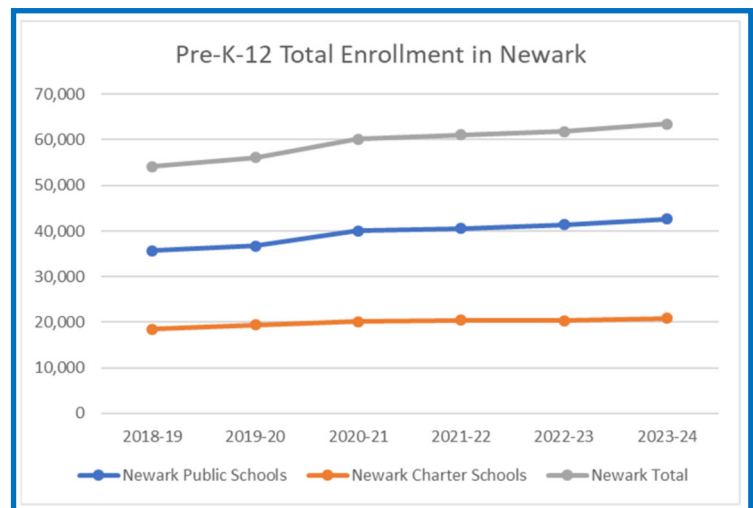
As reported by the NJ Department of Education’s 4-year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate data, the District’s graduation rate gradually increased from 81% in the 2020-2021 school year, to 86% in 2022-2023, and remained at that percentage point in the following year.

Student Attendance is Improving

As reported by the NJ Department of Education’s NJ School Performance Report data, the rate of chronic absenteeism in NPS District went down from 12.7% in the 2022-23 school year to 11.5% in the following year.

Increased Enrollments

The city of Newark has seen an increase in total enrollment (Pre-K-12) over the years, a trend seen in both the NPS District and Newark charter schools. As reported by the NJ Department of Education’s October Enrollment data, the brick city’s total enrollment has grown by 17% between 2018-19 and 2023-24, now reaching almost 63,500 students (including charter schools). Newark charter schools have increased by 13% and NPS by 19% in the same time period.



NOTE: With the exception of the graph above, all data in this report focuses on the Newark Public School District. Charter schools are public schools but operate independently of the local school district, each managed by its own Board of Trustees and treated as a separate district.

Changes in Multilingual Education

The Newark Public School District has in recent years seen a rapid increase in the percentage of enrolled multilingual learners, formerly known as English Language Learners. In 2019-20, 17% of the students in the NPS District were identified as multilingual learners, which increased to 24% in 2023-24. This 24% equates to 10,250 students throughout the District.

Schools are required to provide Multilingual Learners (MLs) access to equity and excellence in education. An ML is a student whose primary language is other than English, and is identified as a student who does not have English language proficiency in listening, speaking and writing. Once identified, he or she will be provided with English language services to be successful in the District’s academic program. MLs are to be assessed annually to measure progress toward English language proficiency and to determine readiness for exiting the program.

The Newark Public School District has been making efforts in increasing the number of teachers equipped to educate the growing multilingual learner student body. The District is offering a \$4,000 bonus to teachers who obtain an English as a Second Language certification or bilingual endorsement, provided with assistance from Montclair State University (Wall, 2021.)

As a result of the growing number of multilingual learners, the Office of Bilingual Education at NPS has created after-school professional development sessions aimed to support teachers of multilingual learners. While it is helpful that the District is arranging these sessions, it is also crucial that more bilingual teachers are brought into the NPS District.

In the 23-24 school year, there were 230 bilingual teachers in the entire NPS District. To break this down, for the 10,250 multilingual learners enrolled last year in the District, there would have been roughly 45 students for every multilingual teacher. While there isn’t a specific ratio of bilingual learners to staff required by law, the state of New Jersey’s Department of Education determines the class size maximums based on grade and ELP (English Language Program) levels in Table 2 below.

The NPS District had 188 bilingual teachers employed during the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years; 222 bilingual teachers in the following year, and 230 bilingual teachers employed during the 2023-24 school year. This shows that the bilingual faculty is in fact growing right along with the multilingual student population, but requires more assistance to fully catch up with the rapidly accelerating multilingual needs of the District. In 2023-24, the home language of 40% of NPS students was Spanish, an increase from 32% in the year prior, and Portuguese for 9% of NPS students. In addition to this, other languages spoken are Arabic, Haitian Creole, French, among others.

An additional \$4.2 million was included in this school year’s budget to expand bilingual programs across schools to properly meet the District’s latest surge in MLs, specifically aiming to grow the program throughout both elementary schools and high schools (Gómez, 2024). One such bilingual education program was launched at Malcolm X Shabazz High School, located in Newark’s South Ward, which previously lacked any high school programs for English language learners, despite the area’s heavy Spanish-speaking population. Establishing English language programs in the neighborhoods

Table 1

Multilingual Learner Enrollment as Percent of Total Enrollment					
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Newark Public Schools	17%	16%	17%	22%	24%
NJ State Average	7%	7%	7%	9%	10%

Table 2

Maximum Class Sizes for Bilingual and ESL Programs				
	Bilingual Class Size Maximums		ESL Class Size Maximums	
	Classes with MLs at ELP Level 1-2	Classes with MLs at ELP Level 3-6	Classes with MLs at ELP Level 1-2	Classes with MLs at ELP Level 3-6
Number of Students in Grades K-1	21	25	21	25
Number of Students in Grades 2-12	18	25	15	20

where high populations of multilingual students live makes them more accessible. Otherwise, some students might have to overcome transportation obstacles, as Superintendent León noted during the announcement of the program at a 2024 school board meeting, that Spanish-speaking students living in the South Ward took multiple buses in order to reach a bilingual language program (Gómez, 2024). Installing more of these programs across the District while also making them easier to attend could assist with ensuring that all students have equal access to the resources and support they need to succeed.

Improvement in State Assessment Performance

The 2021-22 school year was the first-year post COVID-19 when a statewide assessment was administered. After the results of the New Jersey Student Learning Assessment, it was clear that New Jersey’s students needed more assistance, as only 42% of the state’s 3rd graders met or exceeded expectations in English Language Arts and 45% in Mathematics. In Newark, unfortunately, the percentage of 3rd graders meeting or exceeding expectations were even lower, as English Language Arts was 19% and 15% in Mathematics. As for NPS 8th graders, the results for English Language Arts and Mathematics had a considerable gap between the two subjects. In 21-22, 32% of Newark Public School 8th graders scored at or above expectations in ELA and 11% in Math. It is important to note that while test scores are not the defining factor in a child’s success, they do help to assess where students may be struggling.

The results of the English Language Arts portion of the NJSLA sparked a push in the direction of improving literacy, especially for children living in the brick city. Third grade is an important point in a child’s education, as it is often said that children are learning to read up to this point and then after third grade,

children are reading to learn (Institute for Multi-Sensory Education, 2023). This means that up until 3rd grade, children need more support from teachers, parents, and guardians to learn how to read. Then in 4th grade and beyond, children are expected to be more independent using reading as a tool to learn.

Newark has boosted its efforts to help its students by reinforcing tutoring, summer and Saturday school, and introducing a new writing and reading curriculum (Gómez, 2025). The Newark Public School District has made several strides in offering more resources for students. The Newark Board of Education has an Office of Extended Learning Time (OELT) whose goal “is to coordinate, develop, implement and promote quality before/after school and summer programs” and partners with the wider community to fulfill this mission. There is a tutoring program offered by the OELT called Excel After School program, which serves preK to 8th grade students in 42 schools throughout Newark. The program not only provides academic tutoring from September through June, but enrichment activities like yoga, STEM, book club, and more. During the 2024-2025 school year, 7,900 students were enrolled in the Excel After School program.

These efforts produced positive results, showing test scores for NPS 3rd graders gradually improving in both English Language Arts and Mathematics. While still lower than that of the state, this improvement is commendable, but more work needs to be done. To be more specific, the results of the NJSLA show that improvement for 8th graders not only at the NPS District, but for the state as a whole is improving at a slow rate. Both New Jersey and NPS District’s 8th graders who have met or exceeded expectations in math have seen slow improvement, but still only make up less than 20% of 8th graders.

Table 3

Percentage of 3rd Graders who Met or Exceeded Expectations on the NJSLA English Language Arts and Math by Race/Ethnicity						
	21-22		22-23		23-24	
	ELA	MATH	ELA	MATH	ELA	MATH
Newark Public School District	19%	15%	19%	20%	23%	24%
New Jersey	42%	45%	42%	46%	44%	48%

Table 4

Percentage of 8th Graders who Met or Exceeded Expectations on the NJSLA English Language Arts and Math by Race/Ethnicity						
	21-22		22-23		23-24	
	ELA	MATH	ELA	MATH	ELA	MATH
Newark Public School District	32%	11%	37%	11%	38%	14%
New Jersey	51%	15%	55%	18%	53%	19%

State Policies Aim to Boost Literacy

The results of the English Language Arts portion of the New Jersey Student Learning Assessment rang alarm bells throughout the state calling for work to be done to improve literacy for New Jersey's children. A major piece of work was the passage of Senate bills S2644 and S2647, which were signed into law in August 2024 (Office of the Governor, 2024).

S2644 establishes a Working Group on Student Literacy, which will be composed of members appointed by the Commissioner of Education from all regions of New Jersey. The group will have the responsibility of making recommendations on implementation of evidence-based literacy strategies, screening methods, and student instruction as well as finding opportunities for professional learning. DOE will create and publish guidance for school districts beginning in the 2025-2026 school year. Beginning in the same year, school districts will (at least twice annually) conduct a literacy screening of each kindergarten to 3rd grade student. Parents and guardians will be notified by the district of their child's screening results within 30 days of the close of the initial screening period. DOE will also create professional development programs for early education teaching staff, librarians, and those serving multilingual learners and/or students with disabilities at no cost to the districts.

S2647 established the Office of Learning Equity and Academic Recovery (LEAR) to promote student literacy and advance learning equity which was created in February 2025. For more information on the office, visit <https://www.nj.gov/education/lear/>.

Universal screening for literacy began in Fall 2025 and the data collected will help to improve student learning along with the guidance on best practices from the Department of Education.

The initiatives from these bills will provide extra support to the school professionals and students, as well as better inform parents on how their children's literacy is progressing. In October 2025, NJDOE awarded NPS district \$460,000 in grants to support student literacy for the 2025-26 school year, with \$400,000 from IMPACT grants aiding in high-quality training and instruction materials, and \$60,000 in LIFT grants to aid in family outreach. These grants are part of the federally funded Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) grants and will build on the New Jersey Literacy Framework.

Revamped 2025 New Jersey Student Learning Assessment

A new adaptive version of the NJSLA is in the beginning stages of field testing in schools in the fall semester of the 2024-2025 school year. This revised annual exam, which is now referred to as the New Jersey Student Learning Assessments-Adaptive, is gauging the learning of English Language Arts, mathematics and science for grades 3 through high school. The NJSLA-A is a computerized test that is designed to reduce testing anxiety, track growth and identify strengths and weaknesses by varying questions based on which problems students get right, as they're taking it in real time. Other states, such as Delaware, have adopted this style of assessment either partially or fully, but more time and study is needed to determine if this testing model is ultimately helpful for struggling students. For more information about this test, please visit <https://www.nj.gov/education/assessment/resources/>.

Conclusion

Halfway through its ten-year strategic revitalization plan, the District data is showing improvements. As the city of Newark itself grows and demographics continue to change, the District will have to grow. For instance, if the NPS District's multilingual population continues to grow at recent rates since the pandemic, then more professional multilingual faculty and staff will be necessary to meet the rising need of these students. The results from the NJSLA in recent years led to a greater focus on improving literacy for all New Jersey's students. The Newark Public School District has been offering avenues to support children's learning such as afterschool and summer programs.

In addition to the efforts by the NPS District, it is important that families of students become more involved. The New Jersey Literacy Framework details the importance of meaningful family engagement, such as informing parents of their children's results in the universal literacy screening, making families aware of their child's progress, and giving feedback on how the parents can assist their child's growth.

ACNJ will continue to track the progress of students as well as outcomes in other areas including health, family economics and teens in our Newark Kids Count data reports. Visit www.acnj.org for recent reports and sign up for updates.

NOTE: All data in this report are from the New Jersey Department of Education, specifically October Enrollment data, Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate data, and Newark's School Performance Report data.

*For more information about the New Jersey Student Learning Assessments-Adaptive test, please visit <https://www.nj.gov/education/assessment/resources/>.

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