



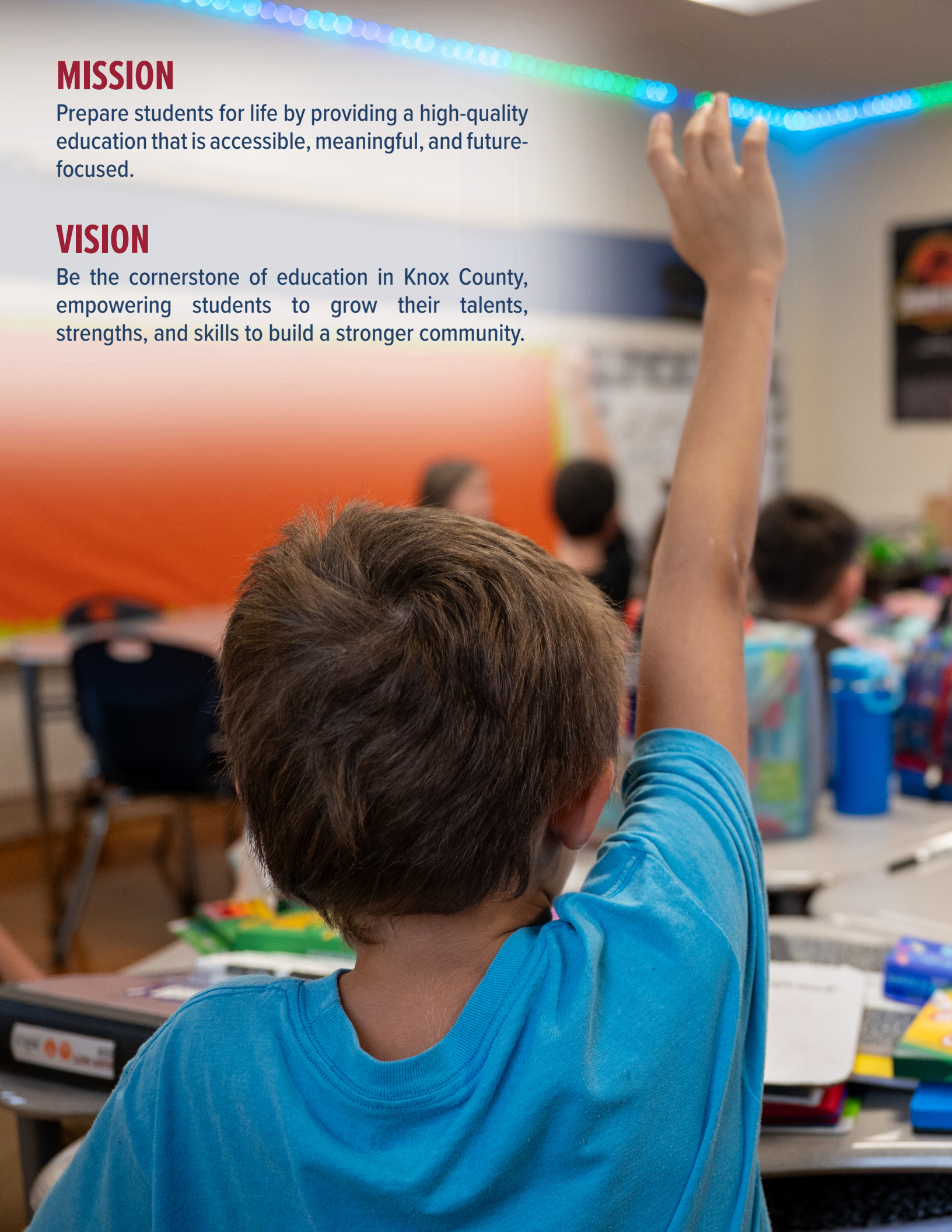




KCS MOMENTUM

FROM IMPROVING TO ACCELERATING

2024-2025 ANNUAL REPORT



MISSION

Prepare students for life by providing a high-quality education that is accessible, meaningful, and future-focused.

VISION

Be the cornerstone of education in Knox County, empowering students to grow their talents, strengths, and skills to build a stronger community.



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KCS **LEADERSHIP**

DR. JON RYSEWYK



Superintendent

KRISTI WOODS
Chief of Staff

ADRIAN RUCKER
Senior Advisor

DR. KEITH WILSON



Assistant Superintendent of Academics

Shannon Jackson *Executive Director of College & Career Readiness*
Theresa Nixon *Executive Director of Academic Supports*
Dr. Erin Phillips *Executive Director of Teaching & Learning*
Ryan Siebe *Chief of Schools*

JENNIFER HEMMELGARN



Assistant Superintendent of Business & Talent

Mitchell Cox *Executive Director of Benefits & Employee Relations*
Ashley Huffaker *Executive Director of Staffing & Compensation*
Ron McPherson *Chief Financial Officer*
Alex Moseman *Executive Director of Talent Acquisition*

DR. GARFIELD ADAMS



Assistant Superintendent of Operations

Freddie Cox *Chief Technology Officer*
Ryan Dillingham *Executive Director of Transportation*
Brett Foster *Executive Director of Child Nutrition*
Carlo Granillo *Chief of School Safety*
Dr. Olivia Ritter *District Property Manager*
Doug Shover *Executive Director of Facilities & New Construction*
Chris Towe *Director of Maintenance & Operations*

DR. ANDREW BROWN



Assistant Superintendent of Student Success

Dr. Brad Carr *Executive Director of Special Education*
Janice Cook *Executive Director of School Culture*
Brian Hartsell *Director of Student Discipline*
Alicia Jones *Executive Director of Student Supports*

KORI LAUTNER



Assistant Superintendent of Strategy

Tammi Campbell *Director of Student & Family Supports*
Carly Harrington *Executive Director of Communications*
Steve Rudder *Director of Impact & Analytics*

STRENGTHENING **ALIGNMENT** ACROSS **DISTRICT DIVISIONS**

Beginning in the 2025-26 school year, the Strategy Division will transition into the Superintendent's Office as **Impact & Policy**, strengthening cross-divisional alignment while driving, evaluating, and reporting on the impact of major initiatives. The Assistant Superintendent of Strategy role will be repurposed as the Assistant Superintendent of Impact & Policy, with **Kori Lautner** continuing to lead Communications and Impact & Analytics. The Student Success Division will also be renamed to **Student Services** under the leadership of **Dr. Andrew Brown** to better reflect its mission and maintain its focus on creating accessible and effective learning environments through individualized instruction, services, and supports. Together, these shifts create a more cohesive and student-centered organizational structure that supports consistent implementation and measurable impact across the district.

MESSAGE FROM THE **SUPERINTENDENT**

At Knox County Schools, our mission is clear: **preparing every student for life after graduation.** Delivering on that mission requires discipline, strategy, and an unwavering belief in what students can accomplish with high expectations and strong systems of support.

In 2022, KCS was identified by the Tennessee Department of Education as a district '*In Need of Improvement*,' ranking our academic performance among the bottom 5% of the state. We told the community then that we could—and would—do better.

This year's annual report is a reflection of that commitment.

For an unprecedented fourth year in a row, KCS students have **advanced in every tested subject**—reading, math, science, and social studies. These results are not limited to any one student subgroup or grade level. Reading and math proficiency is on the rise for students with IEPs, and graduation rates are significantly increasing among historically vulnerable student groups—including economically disadvantaged students and students experiencing homelessness.

These results earned us an '*Advancing*' designation from the state, and they are a testament to the tremendous discipline, dedication, and talent of students, educators, and staff. I've said before that results like these don't happen by accident, and that continues to be true today.

We know what it took to get here. We have identified the priorities and strategies that work. Our focus now must be on **scaling those strategies** and embedding those priorities in every classroom across every region so that every student in every school feels the benefit of their impact every day.

This report provides an in-depth look at the strategies that got us here and what it will take to drive us to the next level.

In education, there are no quick or easy wins. This is hard, deliberate work, and I've never been more confident that **the path we're on is the right one**. The progress we have made over the past three years would not have been possible without your continued support.

As Superintendent, I am deeply proud of what Knox County Schools has accomplished and confident in the direction ahead. The work reflected in these pages represents more than a successful year—it is evidence of our continued commitment to advancing with intention, relying on evidence, and creating clear pathways to success for every student.

I want to thank our educators, families, community partners, and Board of Education for your continued leadership, trust, and partnership. Together, we are building **a stronger future for Knox County**.



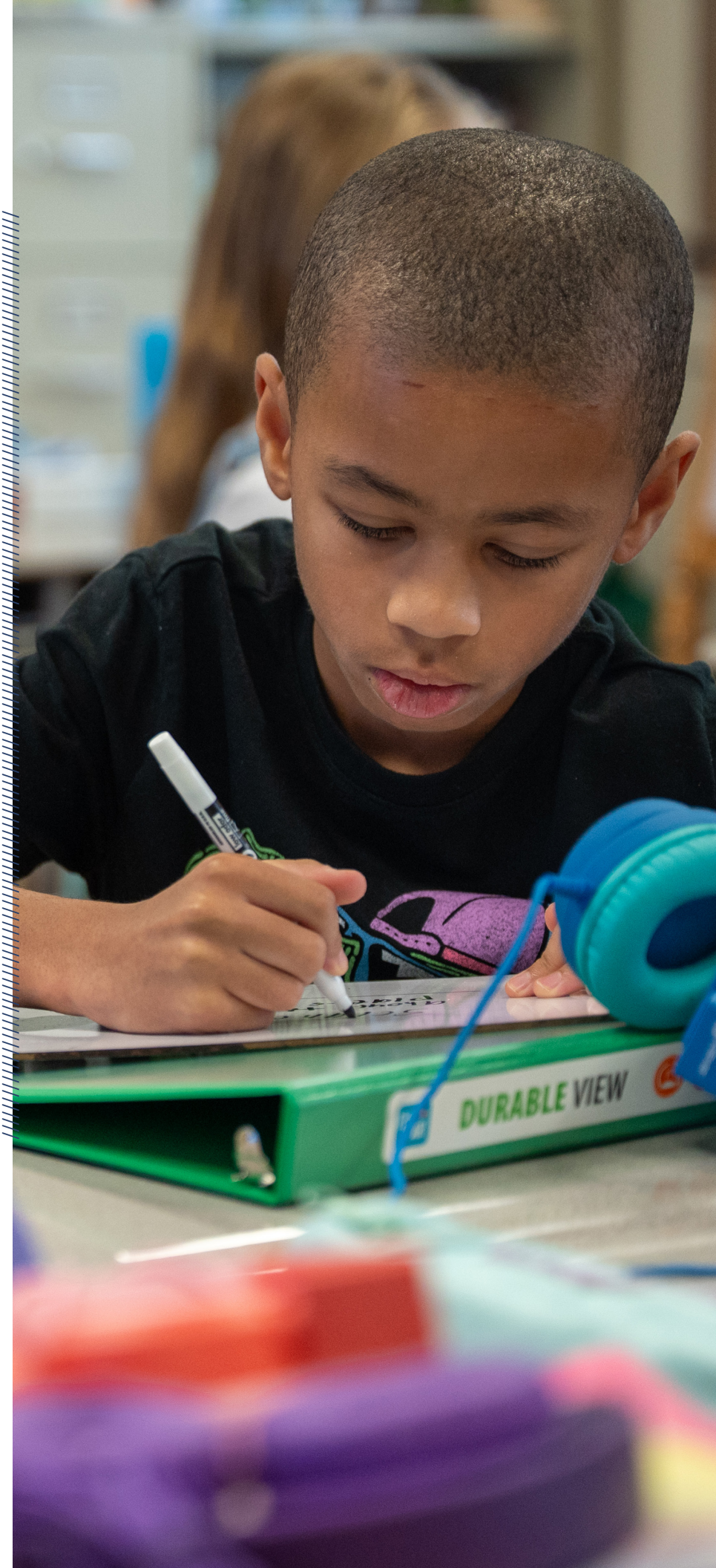
Sincerely,
Dr. Jon Rysewyk
Superintendent






HONORING
SERVICE
Thank You, Veterans!
KCS | KNOX COUNTY SCHOOLS




DURABLE VIEW

IMPACT **AT-A-GLANCE**

91
SCHOOLS

7.2%
INCREASE IN READY GRAD RATE
since 2022

$700.5M
GENERAL PURPOSE BUDGET

9,131
EMPLOYEES
5,059 certified
4,072 classified

120+
UNIFORMED OFFICERS
& one of the largest law enforcement agencies in the state

OVER
10%
INCREASE IN MATH & ELA PROFICIENCY
over last 4 years

120+
LANGUAGES & DIALECTS

10,000+
GUARANTEED EXPERIENCES
guest speakers, industry experiences, postsecondary visits, & job shadows

82%
OF STAFF SAID THEIR SCHOOL IS A GREAT PLACE TO WORK

68th
LARGEST DISTRICT IN THE NATION

80%
OF KCS SCHOOLS EARNED TVAAS LEVEL 3, 4, OR 5

93%
GRADUATION RATE

58,000+
STUDENTS

5TH CONSECUTIVE YEAR
NAMED FORBES "BEST PLACE TO WORK"
(2021 - 2022 - 2023 - 2024 - 2025)

FROM IMPROVING TO **ACCELERATING**

From steady gains to historic achievement: How Knox County Schools is turning progress into performance and scaling success for every student in every classroom, every day.

Three years ago, the Tennessee Department of Education identified Knox County Schools as a district '*In Need of Improvement*'—an identifier reserved for the lowest performing districts in the state. **Dr. Jon Rysewyk** had been Superintendent for just a few months at the time. Standing before a group of families and community members, he said of the results: "To put it simply, our growth scores were not what we want—or what we expect—them to be."

That expectation—to not just do better, but to provide the nearly 60,000 students at KCS with a high-quality, competitive education—has become the cornerstone of the district's mission.

The challenge KCS faced in 2022 was clear: growth had stalled, learning loss from the pandemic lingered, systems meant to support students and schools weren't aligned, and outcomes varied widely from classroom to classroom. Meaningful and lasting change would take more than a few quick wins. It would require deep, systems-level thinking grounded in evidence and best practice.

Building, implementing, and scaling systems in any environment is a significant undertaking. In a public school district of more than 90 schools and over 9,000 employees, that complexity is magnified, which is why KCS focused its efforts on **making complex simple**. This guiding principle generated a number of improvements, including:

- Establishing the district's four core priorities—**Excellence in Foundational Skills**, **Great Educators in Every School**, **Career Empowerment and Preparation**, and **Success for Every Student**—to serve as the lens through which every decision, investment, and expectation is made;
- Regionalizing school supervision and support according to feeder pattern and geography, streamlining services, and expediting support for schools;
- Creating the district's first team dedicated to talent acquisition and retention, and investing more than $119 million in people;
- Developing a targeted improvement plan for Region 5 schools; and
- Reimagining high schools through the 865 Academies.

The impact of these efforts is undeniable.

Last year marked the district's **fourth consecutive year of growth** across every tested subject—an unprecedented achievement for KCS. Reading and math proficiency have increased by more than 10% in that time, with gains made across every student subgroup. In the past two years, KCS has been able to close the number of teacher vacancies on the first day of school from a staggering 78 unfilled positions in 2022 and 2023 to fewer than 10 classroom vacancies in 2024 and 2025—meaning more than 1,500 additional students started the school year with a dedicated teacher at the helm.

Graduation rates for the district's most vulnerable student groups, including economically disadvantaged students, unhoused students, and English Language Learners, have increased between 5-10%. The average KCS graduate now walks across the stage with approximately three early postsecondary opportunities—such as AP classes, dual enrollment coursework, or industry certifications—under their belt. Compared to 2022, 7.2% more students graduated 'ready' for life after graduation based on the state's Ready Grad standards.

These are more than numbers. Every percentage point gained represents **another door opening** for a student.

"We can never lose sight of what's at stake," Dr. Rysewyk told principals when discussing last year's data. "We are the only organization that wakes up every day thinking about what it takes to prepare the next generation for life after graduation."

For thousands of students, that future is already brighter. KCS is no longer a district '*In Need of Improvement*.' In November 2025, the Tennessee Department of Education recognized KCS as an '**Advancing**' district—one of the state's highest designations. "We know our systems and strategies are working," Rysewyk added. "The focus now has to be on scaling what works to every classroom, every day."

Knox County Schools is no longer asking whether improvement is possible. The work now is about **acceleration**—taking what works and strengthening it to ensure every student in every region is reached. With clarity, consistency, and a continued investment in people, the district is building a system to perpetuate progress.



REGIONS

CHIEF OF SCHOOLS

The Chief of Schools provides leadership and direct supervision to regional directors, supervisors, and principals across all 91 schools, ensuring alignment with the district's vision, priorities, and policies.



Ryan Siebe
Chief of Schools

PRESCHOOL

Standalone preschools are located across Knox County and are served by School Board members Rev. Dr. John Butler, Patricia Fontenot-Ridley, and Betsy Henderson.



Dr. Beth Lackey
Director

Cedar Bluff Preschool
Fair Garden Family and Community Center
Fort Sanders Educational Development Center
Karns Preschool

REGION 1

Region One schools are located along or near Kingston Pike and Westland Drive or their connectors. School Board members Rev. Dr. John Butler, Patricia Fontenot-Ridley, Katherine Bike, and Lauren Morgan serve Region One communities.



Dr. Shelly Maddux
Director



Seth Smith
Supervisor

A.L. Lotts Elementary
Bearden Elementary
Bearden High
Bearden Middle
Blue Grass Elementary
Farragut High
Farragut Intermediate
Farragut Middle
Farragut Primary
Northshore Elementary
Pond Gap Elementary
Rocky Hill Elementary
Sequoyah Elementary
West High
West Hills Elementary
West Valley Middle
West View Elementary

REGION 2

Region Two schools are located north of Interstate 40 and in the area between the Clinch and Tennessee Rivers. School Board members Patricia Fontenot-Ridley, Betsy Henderson, and Steve Triplett serve Region Two communities.



Nathan Langlois
Director



Christy Dowell
Supervisor

Amherst Elementary
Ball Camp Elementary
Cedar Bluff Elementary
Cedar Bluff Middle
Hardin Valley Academy
Hardin Valley Elementary
Hardin Valley Middle
Karns Elementary
Karns High
Karns Middle
Knox County Virtual School
Mill Creek Elementary
Northwest Middle
Norwood Elementary
Pleasant Ridge Elementary
Powell Elementary
Powell High
Powell Middle
West Haven Elementary

REGION 3

Region Three schools are located in the area between the Holston and French Broad Rivers. School Board members Rev. Dr. John Butler, Travis Wright, and Kristi Kristy serve Region Three communities.



Dr. Megan O'Dell
Director



Tommy Watson
Supervisor

Bonny Kate Elementary
Career Magnet Academy
Carter Elementary
Carter High
Carter Middle
Chilhowee Intermediate
Dogwood Elementary
Dr. Paul L. Kelley Volunteer Academy
East Knox County Elementary
Gap Creek Elementary
L&N STEM Academy
Mooreland Heights Elementary
Mount Olive Elementary
New Hopewell Elementary
South-Doyle High
South-Doyle Middle
South Knoxville Elementary
Sunnyview Primary

REGION 4

Region Four schools are located in communities connected by Beaver Creek in the northeast section of the county. School Board members Anne Templeton, Steve Triplett, and Travis Wright serve Region Four communities.



Cindy White
Director



Adam Parker
Supervisor

Adrian Burnett Elementary
Brickey-McCloud Elementary
Central High
Copper Ridge Elementary
Corryton Elementary
Fountain City Elementary
Gibbs Elementary
Gibbs High
Gibbs Middle
Gresham Middle
Halls Elementary
Halls High
Halls Middle
Inskip Elementary
K.A.E.C.
Richard Yoakley
Ridgedale School
Ritta Elementary
Shannondale Elementary
Sterchi Elementary

REGION 5

Region Five schools are located inside the city limits, north of the Tennessee River, and are some of the most historic in the county. School board members Rev. Dr. John Butler and Anne Templeton serve Region Five communities.



Dr. Dexter Murphy
Director



Sallee Reynolds
Supervisor

Austin-East Magnet High
Beaumont Magnet Academy
Belle Morris Elementary
Christenberry Elementary
Fulton High
Green Magnet Academy
Holston Middle
Lonsdale Elementary
Maynard Elementary
Sarah Moore Greene Magnet Academy
Spring Hill Elementary
Vine Middle Magnet
Whittle Springs Middle

FOUR **PRIORITIES**

EXCELLENCE IN FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS

Early literacy and middle school math are **foundational to a student's academic and lifelong success**. By preparing students to read proficiently by 3rd grade and to reach or surpass proficiency in Algebra I by 9th grade, KCS is **equipping every student with the skills needed to succeed in and beyond the classroom**.

GREAT EDUCATORS IN EVERY SCHOOL

Great educators are core to the mission of KCS. By **investing in meaningful professional development and growth opportunities** and pursuing **innovative strategies to retain and recruit high-quality educators**, KCS is positioning great educators in every classroom.

CAREER EMPOWERMENT & PREPARATION

KCS is committed to preparing students for **life after graduation**. By providing students with **early and meaningful opportunities to explore colleges and careers**, KCS is empowering students to approach their future with confidence, prepared for the 3 Es: enrollment, enlistment, or employment.

SUCCESS FOR EVERY STUDENT

All students have unique abilities, needs, personalities, and ambitions, and KCS is committed to equipping every student with the **individualized services, interventions, resources, and supports** needed to **achieve success**—no matter their zip code, culture, or financial resources.



IN **ACTION** AT **VINE MIDDLE**

Vine Middle Magnet, led by veteran administrator **Robin Curry**, is advancing the district's four priorities through intentional systems, innovative practices, and a deep commitment to meeting every student's growth. Even in her first year at Vine, Curry has implemented significant structural changes, building a school culture that empowers students, strengthens teaching, and expands opportunities.

Excellence in Foundational Skills

Vine has redesigned its daily schedule to include a **30-minute Skills Block** to rapidly close literacy and math skill gaps. In math, instruction centers on prerequisite skills aligned to Tier 1 curriculum, with teachers adjusting lessons based on identified student needs. In literacy, students spend time reading, writing, and discussing texts to strengthen comprehension and critical thinking. Students who demonstrate proficiency receive enrichment through science or social studies, ensuring every learner is **appropriately supported**.

Great Educators in Every School

Vine's **robust mentoring program** ensures all educators have the support they need to grow. New teachers participate in an early onboarding experience, which includes school tours, mentor connections, and training on digital resources. Throughout the year, veteran teachers lead monthly mentoring sessions tailored to the staff's needs, while all educators receive **one-on-one coaching** from administrators or instructional coaches, with a schoolwide goal of delivering weekly feedback.

Career Empowerment & Preparation

Vine engages students in meaningful experiences that help them explore interests and talents. Students participate in an annual **College & Career Fair** and explore interests through grade-level field trips and clubs such as robotics, art, dance, band, and gardening. **Local partnerships** bring real-world expertise into classrooms, particularly in science and other enrichment areas. These experiences help students explore their interests and talents while strengthening their sense of possibility.

Success for Every Student

Vine's commitment to whole-child support is evident in its **data-driven systems** and restorative practices. School teams closely track academic and behavioral data to identify students in need of additional assistance and support. Needs are addressed by a strong restorative team and proactive counselors who provide consistent check-ins, de-escalation support, and structured action plans. By coordinating academic and behavioral supports, Vine is actively ensuring every student has the opportunity to succeed.



ANNUAL ACTION **PLAN**

With clear objectives and accountability, the Annual Action Plan keeps momentum moving forward.

The 2024-25 Annual Action Plan (AAP) is designed to keep Knox County Schools moving forward with purpose and urgency. Serving as a bridge between the Board of Education's five-year strategic plan and the district's four priorities, the AAP identifies the specific steps needed this year to accelerate student learning and strengthen academic outcomes.

"Momentum is only meaningful if it leads to impact," said Superintendent **Dr. Jon Rysewyk**. "The Annual Action Plan ensures our energy is directed where it matters most—student learning and success."

This year's plan reflects the district's ongoing focus on **Excellence in Foundational Skills**, **Great Educators in Every School**, **Career Empowerment and Preparation**, and **Success for Every Student**. By breaking long-term ambitions into targeted annual objectives, the AAP makes big goals actionable and measurable.

In 2024-25, KCS set **37 objectives** and **met or exceeded 23** of them, while making meaningful progress on an additional 10 objectives. That success established a strong base of momentum heading into 2025-26, where new objectives will continue to sharpen instruction, strengthen supports, and expand opportunities for students across all grade levels.

With the Annual Action Plan as its guide, KCS is driving momentum toward lasting achievement—ensuring every action taken today moves students closer to a brighter tomorrow.

2024-2025 ANNUAL ACTION PLAN RESULTS	MET	MADE PROGRESS	NOT MET
Excellence in Foundational Skills	2	2	1
Great Educators in Every School	8	1	1
Career Empowerment & Preparation	4	2	1
Success for Every Student	2	4	1
Leadership of the District	7	1	0
TOTAL	23	10	4

2024-2025 **RESULTS**

The Annual Action Plan consists of measurable and milestone objectives. **Measurable** objectives are quantifiable measures of success capable of year-over-year monitoring. The results of measurable objectives will be reflected in a comparison of 2024 data to 2025 outcomes. **Milestone** objectives represent significant, one-time achievements or critical progress improvements. As a result, these objectives are not accompanied by measurable data points for year-over-year comparison.

LEADERSHIP OF THE DISTRICT

Maintain effective communication with the Board, staff, families, and other key stakeholders

Objective	2023-2024	2024-2025	Change
Establish effective systems and structures to improve families' access to district information, resources, and supports	—	—	✓
Maintain strategic relationships with key officials (Board, mayors, community leaders, and organizations, etc.)	—	—	✓
Leverage multiple channels of communication to enhance awareness of district work priorities and mission among internal and external stakeholders	—	—	✓

Leverage channels of community input to support the district's four priorities

Objective	2023-2024	2024-2025	Change
Leverage law enforcement partnerships to enhance school safety and security	—	—	✓
Collaborate with Regional Family and Teacher Councils to enhance engagement and forward district priorities	—	—	✓
Collaborate with districtwide councils (CASL, CEO Champions, Student Leadership, etc.) to enhance engagement and forward district priorities	—	—	✓

Maximize the budget by aligning work and resources around the four district priorities

Objective	2023-2024	2024-2025	Change
Develop an annual Return on Investment and comprehensive financial status report to monitor effectiveness of pilot and major-dollar initiatives	—	—	—
Complete a comprehensive facility assessment to inform development of the annual budget	—	—	✓

EXCELLENCE IN FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS

Enhance instruction through the development of deep content knowledge in ELA educators

Objective	2023-2024	2024-2025	Change
Increase 3rd grade proficiency[1] rates on TCAP by 1.9%	44.4%	43.6%	-0.8%
Decrease percent of 3rd graders performing below the 40th percentile on Aimsweb[2] by 1.5%	40.3%	40.0%	-0.3%

Enhance instruction through the development of deep content knowledge in math educators

Objective	2023-2024	2024-2025	Change
Increase Algebra I proficiency[1] rates by 2.5%	24.2%	28.7%	4.5%
Increase math proficiency[1] for 6th-8th graders by 1.9%	35.7%	38.0%	2.3%

Concentrate resources to ensure highly effective reading and writing strategies are being implemented in every ELA classroom districtwide

Objective	2023-2024	2024-2025	Change
Increase ELA proficiency[1] for 4th-8th grade by 1.9%	40.6%	42.3%	1.7%
Decrease percent of students performing below the 40th percentile on Aimsweb[2] by 1.1%	32.1%	33.9%	1.8%

[1] **Proficiency**: performance demonstrates that the student has a comprehensive understanding and a thorough ability to apply the grade/course-level knowledge and skills defined by the Tennessee Academic Standards

[2] **Aimsweb:** RTI2 universal screener that assesses each student's foundational reading skills

2024-25 **RESULTS CONTINUED**

GREAT EDUCATORS IN EVERY SCHOOL

Establish innovative strategies to position highly qualified educators in every classroom

Objective	2023-2024	2024-2025	Change
Maintain enrollment in KCS EPP[3]	61	57	-4
Maintain enrollment in district-supported teacher pathways	180	192	12
Increase the number of external applicants for teaching positions by 5%	800	930	16.3%

Recruit and retain highly effective teachers in areas of greatest need

Objective	2023-2024	2024-2025	Change
Retain 95% of highly effective teachers[4]	—	95%	✓
Increase the minimum teacher salary to $48,500	$47,011	$48,531	✓
Increase retention of teachers of color by 5%	81.8%	87.7%	5.9%

Create opportunities for educators to grow professionally and to receive exposure to leadership development

Objective	2023-2024	2024-2025	Change
Implement the Teach Knox framework for professional development	—	—	✓
Invest in high-quality training and leadership development opportunities for school leaders and central office administrators	—	—	✓
Leverage educator input and feedback to assess and improve professional development throughout the district	—	—	✓

CAREER EMPOWERMENT & PREPARATION

Reimagine systems and structures to ensure all students have access to college and career opportunities and are prepared for success after graduation

Objective	2023-2024	2024-2025	Change
Increase the percent of students participating in grade-level aligned guaranteed experiences to 85%	—	72.8%	—
9th Grade Participation Rate	—	*95.4%*	—
10th Grade Participation Rate	—	*59.7%*	—
11th Grade Participation Rate	—	*63.3%*	—
Implement the curriculum and toolkits in the Secondary Counseling Handbook at all middle schools and develop a comparable implementation model for high school counselors.	—	—	✓
Increase the percent of students who have completed an aptitude assessment to 95% by the end of 8th grade and 90% in 9th grade			—
8th Grade Participate Rate	*90.0%*	*91.0%*	—
9th Grade Participation Rate	*79%*	*93%*	—

Advance local business, postsecondary, and non-profit partnerships for all schools

Objective	2023-2024	2024-2025	Change
Enhance and strengthen districtwide committees of business, postsecondary, and non-profit leaders to support schools	—	—	✓
Establish a strategic framework through which businesses and community organizations or institutions can effectively support schools and major district initiatives	—	—	✓

Create meaningful industry and postsecondary experiences to instill students with the 865Ready Portrait of a Graduate characteristics: lifelong learner, effective communicator, collaborative teammate, creative problem-solver, and community minded-citizen

Objective	2023-2024	2024-2025	Change
Increase the percent of students enrolled in EPSOs[5] by 1.1%	65.3%	64.7%	-0.6%
Create a catalog of high-quality college and career exposure opportunities for elementary and middle school students	—	—	—
Increase Ready Graduate rate by 1.8%	46.2%	49.7%	3.5%

Implement plans to address achievement gaps for underperforming student groups

Objective	2023-2024	2024-2025	Change
Increase math achievement among state-identified groups by 2.5%	15.7%	17.3%	1.6%
Black/Hispanic/Native American	*18.1%*	*20.0%*	*1.9%*
Economically Disadvantaged	*14.8%*	*16.2%*	*1.4%*
English Learners	*17.4%*	*19.0%*	*1.6%*
Students with Disabilities	*11.0%*	*12.1%*	*1.1%*
Increase ELA achievement among state identified groups by 2.5%	17.3%	20.0%	2.7%
Black/Hispanic/Native American	*21.6%*	*25.0%*	*3.4%*
Economically Disadvantaged	*17.7%*	*20.5%*	*2.8%*
English Learners	*14.3%*	*16.1%*	*1.9%*
Students with Disabilities	*10.0%*	*12.2%*	*2.2%*

Enhance processes to address mental health obstacles and challenges

Objective	2023-2024	2024-2025	Change
Develop effective processes to support student reentry from alternative school and for threat assessment case management	—	—	—
Decrease chronic absenteeism[6] by 2%	19.6%	19.4%	-0.2%

Execute Year One strategies established in the Region 5 Strategic Plan

Objective	2023-2024	2024-2025	Change
Strategically leverage community partnerships to support the needs of students and families in Region 5	—	—	✓
Increase 3rd grade ELA proficiency in Region 5 schools by 3.3%	21.9%	22.4%	0.5%
Increase 8th grade math proficiency in Region 5 schools by 3.5%	8.0%	11.0%	3.0%

Met or exceeded goal

Made progress

Did not reach goal

— **Milestone objective, no measurable outcomes**

[3] **Education Prep Provider (EPP):** postsecondary institution approved by the Tennessee State Board of Education to train students to become certified teachers

[4] **Highly effective teacher:** a teacher who receives a 4 or higher on their annual TIGER Evaluation (Teacher Instructional Growth for Effectiveness and Results)

[5] **EPSOs:** Early Postsecondary Opportunity, such as Advanced Placement (AP), Cambridge International Examinations, College-Level Examination Program (CLEP), Dual Enrollment, International Baccalaureate (IB), or Student Industry Certification

[6] **Chronic absenteeism:** students are considered chronically absent if they are absent 10% or more of the days they have been enrolled in the district

ACADEMICS



DR. KEITH WILSON
Assistant Superintendent of Academics

DEPARTMENTS
Academic Supports
College & Career Readiness
School Regions
Teaching & Learning

80%
OF KCS SCHOOLS EARNED TVAAS LEVEL 3, 4, OR 5

TVAAS LEVEL
5
in English Language Arts, math, science, and social studies

93%
GRADUATION RATE

10,000+
GUARANTEED EXPERIENCES
guest speakers, industry experiences, postsecondary visits, & job shadows

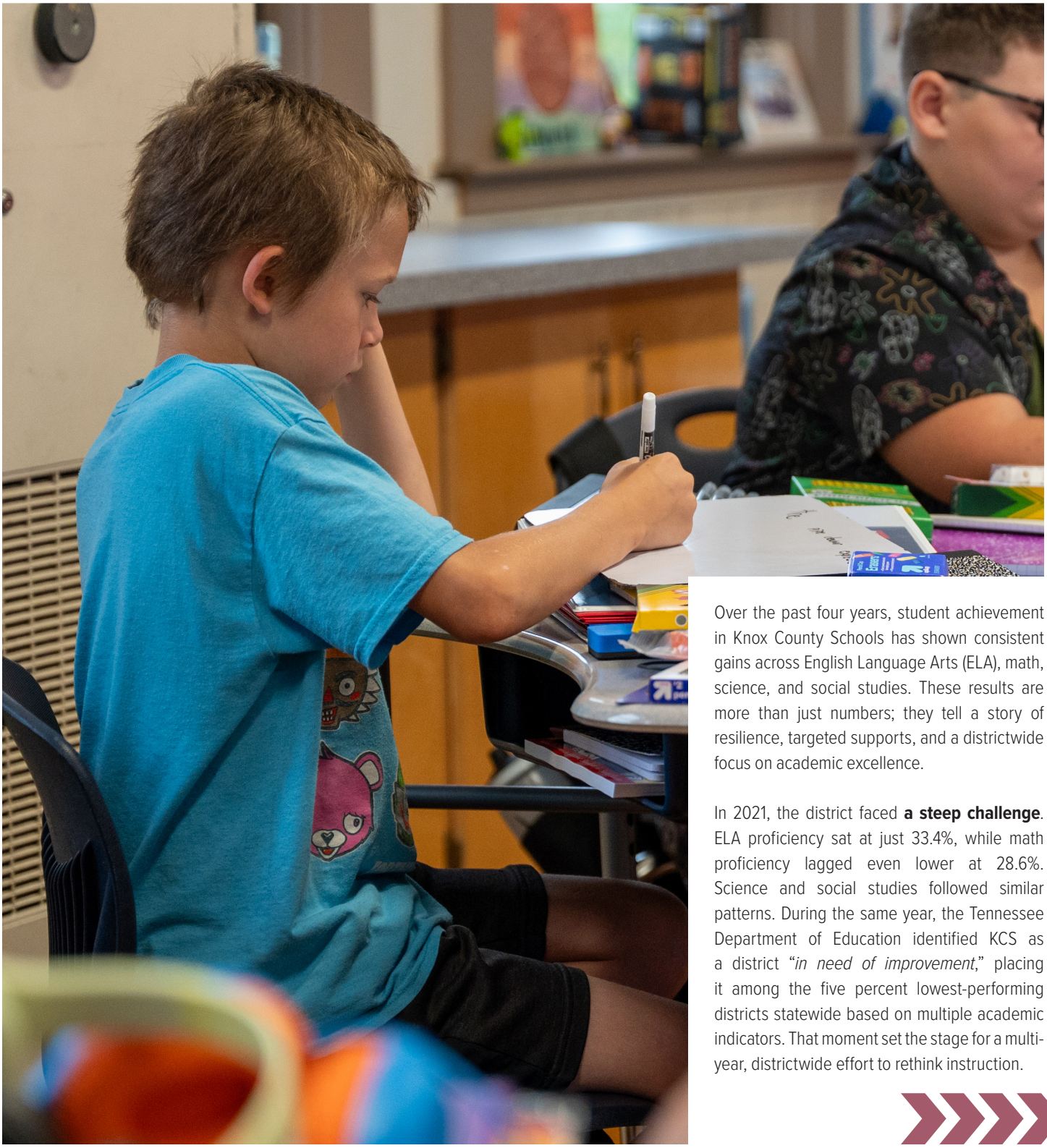
7.2%
INCREASE IN READY GRAD RATE
since 2022

OVER
10%
INCREASE IN MATH & ELA PROFICIENCY
over last 4 years

4
YEARS OF CONTINUOUS GROWTH
in English Language Arts (ELA), math, science, and social studies

FOUR YEARS OF **RISING ACHIEVEMENT**

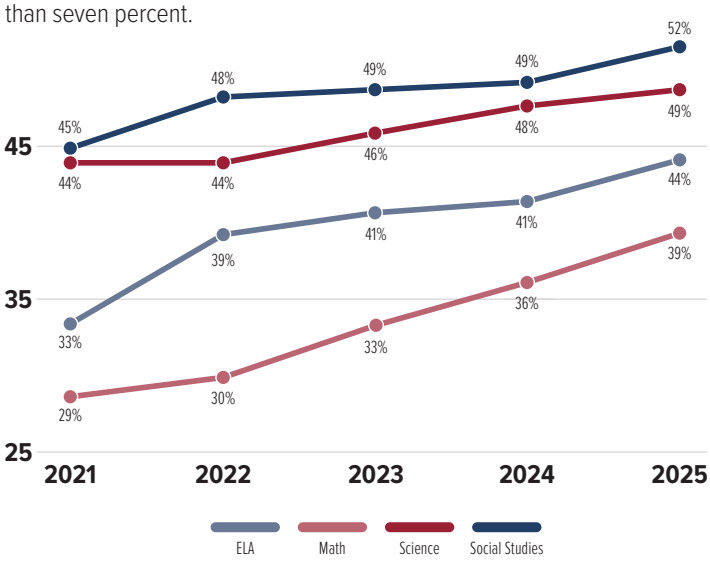
A sustained commitment to student learning has translated to measurable growth across every core subject area, proof that steady focus, strong strategies, and persistence pay off.



Over the past four years, student achievement in Knox County Schools has shown consistent gains across English Language Arts (ELA), math, science, and social studies. These results are more than just numbers; they tell a story of resilience, targeted supports, and a districtwide focus on academic excellence.

In 2021, the district faced **a steep challenge**. ELA proficiency sat at just 33.4%, while math proficiency lagged even lower at 28.6%. Science and social studies followed similar patterns. During the same year, the Tennessee Department of Education identified KCS as a district "*in need of improvement*," placing it among the five percent lowest-performing districts statewide based on multiple academic indicators. That moment set the stage for a multi-year, districtwide effort to rethink instruction.

Thanks to a core set of strategies established by the Teaching & Learning Department, achievement is steadily increasing. Through **high-quality instructional materials** (HQIM), lesson internalization, ongoing professional learning, and a strong instructional framework, those numbers have steadily climbed. Since 2021, reading and ELA proficiency has grown by more than 11%, math has increased by nearly 10%, science has risen by almost five percent, and social studies has grown by more than seven percent.



"For a district of our size, consistent year-over-year gains like this are borderline **unprecedented**," said Dr. Jon Rysewyk, reflecting on the significant progress in all four tested subjects.

Since 2021, KCS has **outpaced the state** in ELA and math nearly every year, posting higher proficiency gains in both subjects.

Together, these results show what is possible when schools rally around proven strategies by setting clear goals, monitoring progress, and providing students with the *right supports at the right time*.

"Our work is far from finished. We are immensely proud of the progress students and educators have made but we are aware there's still a long way to go," said **Dr. Keith Wilson**, Assistant Superintendent of Academics. "The focus now is on **scaling the strategies that work** to ensure they reach every student in every classroom, every day."

BUILDING LITERACY SKILLS THAT LAST

Reading and ELA performance has seen one of the most encouraging upward trends, increasing by **more than 10 points** over four years. These gains are rooted in HQIM and **intentional literacy strategies** that begin in the earliest grades and build upward through middle and high school.

In kindergarten through second grade, students participate in **small group instruction** that targets foundational reading skills. Every day at 10 a.m., students in **Sarah Gore's** class at **East Knox County Elementary** move from whole-group instruction to small groups, allowing teachers to address each learner's specific needs. This work is reinforced through a long-term partnership with the KCS Elementary Literacy team and Instruction Partners, a contracted group, to provide coaching and model strategies aimed at supporting elementary school leaders.

> When we use HQIM and take time to internalize the lesson, it helps ensure every student has access to challenging material and is actually meeting the standards. It makes the learning clearer and more consistent for kids.
>
> *Sarah Gore, East Knox County Elementary*

In middle and high schools, professional learning communities (PLCs) and leadership teams emphasize **lesson internalization**, a process that ensures teachers deeply understand the intent and objectives of each lesson before stepping into the classroom each morning. Leaders and coaches walk alongside teachers to ensure those adult learning moments translate into student success.

Summer literacy bootcamps for elementary teachers and secondary literacy cohorts for middle and high school teachers extend this work beyond the school year. Teachers record lessons, receive targeted feedback, and engage in job-embedded coaching throughout the year.

"That ongoing professional learning has really created a ripple effect across grade levels," said **Dr. Erin Phillips**, Executive Director of Teaching & Learning. "We're seeing students build stronger reading comprehension, better writing skills, and confidence in themselves as learners."

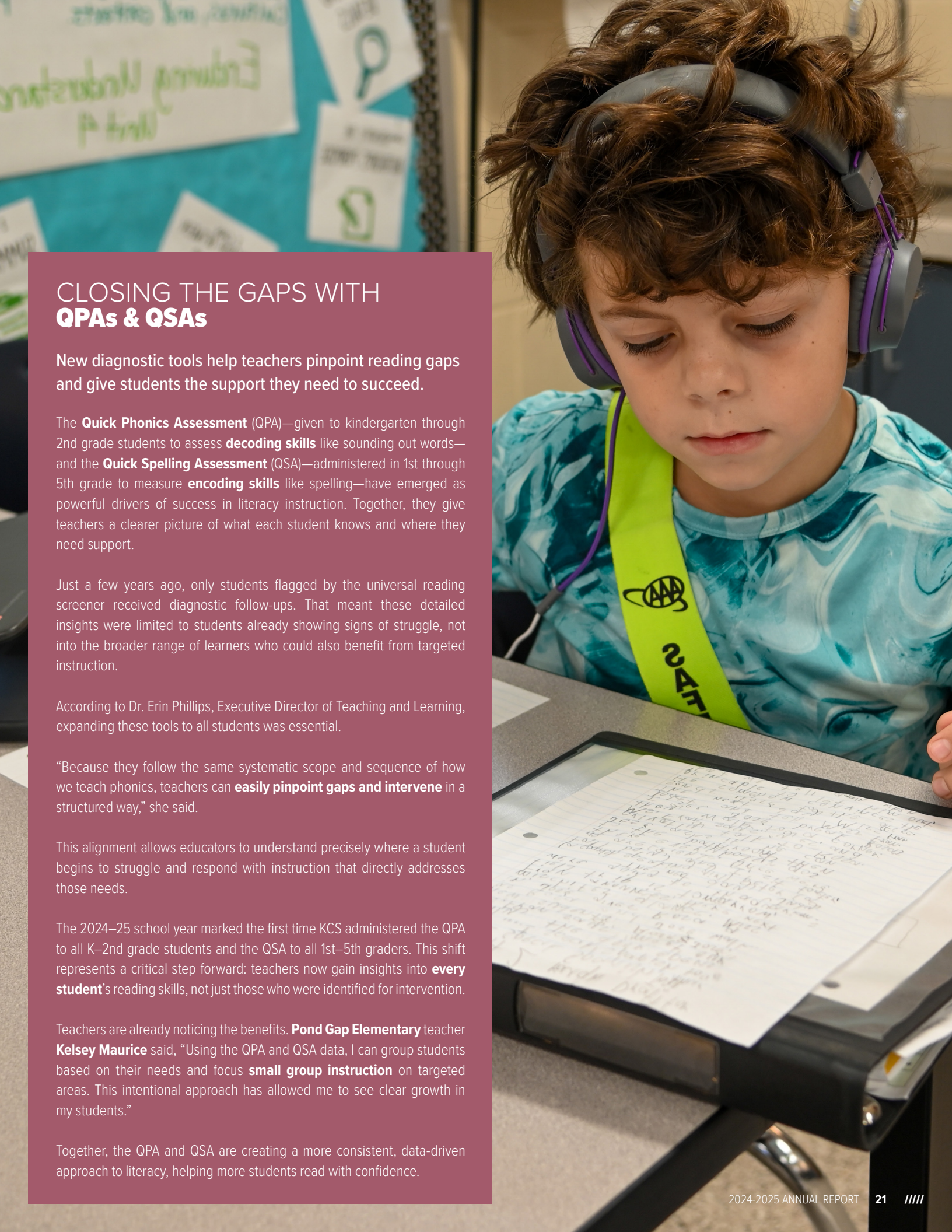
MATH MOMENTUM

Math teachers from across Knox County gathered at Distric Learning Day to unpack upcoming units, internalize lessons, and anticipate where students might need additional support. Working side-by-side with math leaders, teachers analyzed HQIM and identified the **intent of each lesson** to plan for stronger student engagement and purposeful practice. Teachers have embraced lesson internalization, anticipating student needs, scaffolding supports effectively, and building understanding.

> Our growth in math really came from working closely with colleagues across the district. We tightened up our practices, learned from each other, and created the kind of consistency and encouragement students need to succeed.
>
> *Betsy Adkins, Northwest Middle*

In 2021, fewer than three in 10 students were proficient. By 2025, nearly four in 10 were meeting grade-level expectations—a gain of **more than 10 percentage points**. Still, fewer than half of students are performing proficiently in math.

Middle schools have become a critical focal point in equipping students with foundational math skills. Math leaders and teachers received coaching and feedback to **strengthen core instruction**. At the high school level, the district launched an **Algebra I cohort**, supporting teachers in a course that supports students' long-term academic success. Across the district, the focus shifted from memorization to problem-solving, helping students think critically, reason flexibly, and apply their learning to real-world situations.



CLOSING THE GAPS WITH **QPAs & QSAs**

New diagnostic tools help teachers pinpoint reading gaps and give students the support they need to succeed.

The **Quick Phonics Assessment** (QPA)—given to kindergarten through 2nd grade students to assess **decoding skills** like sounding out words—and the **Quick Spelling Assessment** (QSA)—administered in 1st through 5th grade to measure **encoding skills** like spelling—have emerged as powerful drivers of success in literacy instruction. Together, they give teachers a clearer picture of what each student knows and where they need support.

Just a few years ago, only students flagged by the universal reading screener received diagnostic follow-ups. That meant these detailed insights were limited to students already showing signs of struggle, not into the broader range of learners who could also benefit from targeted instruction.

According to Dr. Erin Phillips, Executive Director of Teaching and Learning, expanding these tools to all students was essential.

“Because they follow the same systematic scope and sequence of how we teach phonics, teachers can **easily pinpoint gaps and intervene** in a structured way,” she said.

This alignment allows educators to understand precisely where a student begins to struggle and respond with instruction that directly addresses those needs.

The 2024–25 school year marked the first time KCS administered the QPA to all K–2nd grade students and the QSA to all 1st–5th graders. This shift represents a critical step forward: teachers now gain insights into **every student**’s reading skills, not just those who were identified for intervention.

Teachers are already noticing the benefits. **Pond Gap Elementary** teacher **Kelsey Maurice** said, “Using the QPA and QSA data, I can group students based on their needs and focus **small group instruction** on targeted areas. This intentional approach has allowed me to see clear growth in my students.”

Together, the QPA and QSA are creating a more consistent, data-driven approach to literacy, helping more students read with confidence.

REGION 5 **AT-A-GLANCE**

92%
of Region 5 schools
BEGAN THE SCHOOL YEAR FULLY STAFFED

85%
of Region 5 schools
EARNED TVAAS LEVEL 3, 4, OR 5

4.2%
READY GRAD RATE INCREASE
at Fulton High

61.5%
of Region 5 schools
IMPROVED CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATE

10.6%
INCREASE IN MATH PROFICIENCY
over the last four years

10
Region 5 schools
ARE UNITED WAY COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

RISING **TOGETHER**

For the first time in nearly a decade, Knox County Schools reached a remarkable milestone: a **TVAAS Level 5 score**—the highest possible—across all tested subjects. The Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) is a measure of year-to-year student growth, and for KCS, this achievement reflects the dedication of educators and students.

Included in these results were 85% of Region 5 schools which earned TVAAS Level 3, 4, or 5. Among one of the most inspiring stories is **Austin-East High**, which achieved extraordinary growth in just three years. In 2021–22, the school earned an overall TVAAS score of 1, the lowest possible rating. Then, in 2024–25, Austin-East achieved a **Level 5 score for the first time**. The school also experienced its **strongest TNReady achievement results** across all subjects since the tests began.

"This is no small accomplishment," said Austin-East Principal **Dr. Rob Speas**. "It reflects the hard work, resilience, and brilliance of our teachers, our staff, and most importantly, our students."

That hard work is clear in classrooms like those of English teacher **Skikila Smith**, who helped in the school's turnaround. Smith credits the **Region 5 Strategic Plan** with giving teachers the support and structure needed to elevate instruction.

"When resources, consistency, and the presentation of content within a context of high expectations are functioning like a well-oiled machine, **scholars rise**," she said. "Teamwork truly does make the dream work: students, families, the school, and community partners equals **Level 5 in Region 5**."

Over the past three years, the momentum built at Austin-East has energized Region 5 and beyond. This transformation shows how intentional support, collaborative leadership, and community investment can drive meaningful, lasting growth. It's proof that when a district comes together, **every student** can thrive.



GROWTH **BUILT TOGETHER**

How Lonsdale Elementary's steady, intentional work led to exiting Priority school designation.

For the **Lonsdale Elementary** community, exiting the state's Priority school list marks more than a status change—it signals the impact of sustained, intentional work to improve outcomes for students.

Each year, the Tennessee Department of Education identifies schools for varying levels of support based on performance across key indicators, including student achievement and growth, chronic absenteeism, and English language proficiency. Schools are designated for Priority status—also known as **Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI)**—when they fall in the bottom five percent of performance statewide and remain on the list until they demonstrate sustained improvement over time. Lonsdale's exit from Priority status reflects steady improvement supported by more aligned student support and instructional systems.

"This milestone would not have been possible without the dedication of our staff or the strong, trusting partnerships we share with our families," said Principal **William Smith**. "It reflects years of consistent effort, clear direction, and shared responsibility for student success."

Lonsdale's approach to learning was focused and urgent: ensuring all students had access to strong instruction, targeted support, and high expectations. Rather than relying on quick fixes, the school committed to building systems designed for long-term growth.

A key part of that effort was the intentional use of Title I funds to strengthen academic support. Two academic interventionists now lead Lonsdale's Response to Intervention process, guiding data meetings, managing intervention resources, coaching staff, and supporting professional learning. This structure allows instructional coaches to spend more time in classrooms providing meaningful feedback and support for teachers.

The school also made **targeted investments** to support language development and student well-being. An ESL instructional coach collaborates with teachers through planning, professional learning communities, and scheduling to strengthen instruction across classrooms. Lonsdale's master schedule ensures each grade level has a dedicated ESL teacher with aligned planning time, creating consistency and shared ownership of language supports. At the same time, a behavior interventionist works alongside teachers to support positive learning environments and respond to students' social-emotional needs as they arise.

Ongoing professional learning and strong family engagement further reinforced these efforts. Staff participate in regular, data-informed training and collaborative planning focused on instructional improvement, while families work closely with the school to maintain alignment between home and classroom expectations.

While exiting CSI status is a moment of pride, Principal Smith emphasizes that the journey is far from over:

"Exiting CSI status is not the end of our journey. It is a meaningful affirmation of who we are as a school and what is possible when a united community works together to ensure the success of every child."



GROWING GLOBAL LEADERS

Austin-East feeder schools prepare to launch a whole-school model for learning.

In 2023, KCS made a commitment to Region 5 to expand advanced academic opportunities across the Austin-East feeder pattern. As a result, three schools have pursued candidacy for the International Baccalaureate (IB) Programme, marking a historic step as KCS works to pursue the full IB continuum across three schools simultaneously. **Sarah Moore Greene Academy**, **Vine Middle**, and **Austin-East High** are preparing for the Primary Years Programme (PYP), Middle Years Programme (MYP), and Career-related Programme (CP), respectively.

Throughout 2024-25, district and school teams began IB training and will continue to build on that work in 2025-26. The district is prioritizing implementation of the MYP first, creating a strong foundation for the CP and, ultimately, the Diploma Programme (DP) to complete the continuum.

IB offers a **rigorous, globally recognized approach** that emphasizes inquiry, critical thinking, communication, and real-world application. Students at **Bearden Middle** and **West High** already have access to these opportunities, and soon, Region 5 students will have access to the same internationally accredited instructional model.

"IB is more than academics—it's about personal development, service, and international mindedness," said **Shari Valencic**, the IB Coordinator at West High. "The habits they develop—**reflection**, **inquiry**, **communication**—are things they carry with them beyond school."

A SMARTER PATH FORWARD

In the 2024-25 school year, Knox County Schools partnered with Tennessee SCORE, an external research group, to explore **a more aligned approach to literacy intervention** in four elementary schools. Through a randomized control trial, the district tested a critical question: *does aligning small-group intervention to Tier I instruction help students learn more?* The answer was a clear yes.

Traditionally, students needing additional support are taught using different materials during pull-out intervention, often disconnected from core instruction. Instructionally coherent intervention takes a different approach by aligning intervention lessons to the same high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) used in Tier I classrooms, creating a seamless and reinforced learning experience.

Students receiving instructionally coherent intervention gained an average of **1.3 additional months of literacy growth** compared to peers in traditional models, with even stronger gains for lower-performing and male students. Importantly, these results were achieved without adding instructional time, increasing staffing, or purchasing new materials.

This approach also maximizes district resources. Because HQIMs often include built-in intervention supports, the district can eliminate separate programs. For KCS, this strategy could translate to an estimated **$2 million in savings**, creating opportunities to reinvest in other high-impact priorities.

Educators see the value as well. **Four out of five teachers** who experienced both approaches preferred instructional coherence, noting stronger alignment, easier implementation, and greater instructional momentum. School leaders echoed these benefits, emphasizing improved strategic grouping and clarity across classrooms.

Grounded in the strongest causal evidence to date, KCS will begin **scaling instructional coherence districtwide**, so every student has cohesive literacy instruction.



A NEW ERA OF MILITARY ENLISTMENT

Building pathways and support for students entering the armed forces.

Through the 865 Academies, Knox County Schools is committed to preparing students for **life after graduation**—whether that means enrolling in college, enlisting in the military, or finding employment in a high-wage, in-demand career. In Knox County, college and career pathways have long been highlighted as options for students after graduation, but **military pathways** have not always received the same attention.

That is why the district strengthened its focus on enlistment as a valued postsecondary option. In May 2025, KCS proudly hosted its inaugural **Enlist865: Celebrating Service** event, honoring students who committed to enlisting in the military, enrolled in a service academy, or received an ROTC scholarship.

The event recognized future service members with a level of **ceremony and respect** rarely seen at the high school level. Families, district leaders, and military personnel filled the room, creating an atmosphere of pride and gratitude.

One highlight came from keynote speaker Hamblen County Schools Superintendent and four-star **Retired Air Force General Arnold Bunch**, who delivered a stirring message on honor, sacrifice, and service to the country.

As he addressed the honorees, Bunch reminded them that service requires perseverance, noting, "You are going to face obstacles. It's not going to be easy, and you're not going to succeed at everything you undertake. You must **be resilient and have grit**."

His message mirrored the district's work to honor the sacrifice of service and the opportunities it creates.

A key driver to this work is **Dr. JD Faulconer**, the district's first **Director of Military Enlistment**. Under Faulconer's leadership, KCS is helping students see that service can open doors to careers, education, and leadership. Through military career fairs, teacher externships, JROTC competitions, and student experiences, he is introducing students and staff to a side of the military many may not see.

"My goal is to make sure students have every resource to make the best decision for their future," Faulconer said. "If that choice is military service, then **we want to honor it at the highest level**."

FROM STUDENT TO SOLDIER

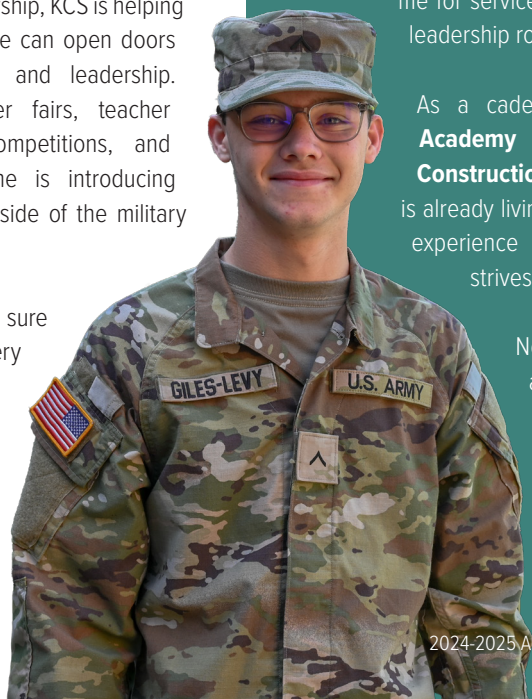
Farragut High School senior **Ethan Giles-Levy** returned to school this fall with a new uniform and a new title: soldier.

While many classmates spent their summer on vacation, Ethan was completing 10 weeks of Army Basic Combat Training. A member of the **Tennessee Army National Guard**, he officially enlisted as a junior and trained at just 17-years-old.

"Being in JROTC for the last three years has really been a benefit," Ethan said. "It definitely prepared me for service, especially through my leadership roles."

As a cadet and student in the **Academy of Agriculture, Construction, and Leadership**, he is already living the kind of real-world experience Knox County Schools strives to provide.

Now serving one weekend a month and two weeks each summer, Ethan is gaining military benefits, valuable connections, and a foundation for his career.



GUARANTEED

FRESHMAN

"Throughout my freshman year, the 865 Academies provided multiple opportunities to further my education. My pathway got to go on a tour of ORNL and their facilities, and we discussed the use of surgical robots with a biomedical engineering company. These experiences have provided a solid foundation for my future."

Tyler Brillante
Academy of Physics, Mechanics, & Engineering | L&N STEM Academy



SOPHOMORE

"During my sophomore year, I was excited to take Automotive Maintenance & Light Repair I. This class taught me how to rotate and balance tires and how to change oil and the oil filter. We went into the shop and practiced all these skills several times, and it was an amazing experience. I can't wait to see what my junior year brings!"

Camille Santiago Santos
Academy of Business, Health, & Professional Services | Gibbs High School



JUNIOR

"During a visit to the UT Haslam College of Business, my group participated in a video advertisement competition for a University of Tennessee-themed card game to see whose campaign was most successful. This experience through the 865 Academies provided me with insight into what occupation I could potentially pursue outside of high school."

Zoe Hasan
Academy of Global Commerce and Communication | West High School



SENIOR

"The Guaranteed Experiences at Hardin Valley Academy have collaboratively shaped me into the type of student I am today. As a senior, I have the ability to exercise my developed CTE skills through Capstone experiences, which have helped me transition into a mature student and hone in on my desired career through extensive opportunities and resources."

Matthew Greenwood
Academy of STEM | Hardin Valley Academy



CLASS OF 2025 **SNAPSHOT**

9%	2%	12%	35%	37%	4%	1%
WORKFORCE	MILITARY	TECHNICAL/ TRADE SCHOOL	COMMUNITY COLLEGE	4-YEAR COLLEGE	UNDECIDED	OTHER

EXPERIENCES



"As an Algebra 1 teacher, I have seen firsthand how the 865 Academies are impacting the way students make connections from class content to the real world. Students are able to see how math and problem-solving skills are applied beyond the classroom and are directly utilized in various fields. These opportunities have made lessons more meaningful and students are more engaged."

Whitney Rowlett
Freshman Academy | Powell High School

TEACHER



"As part of the 865 Academies, we pair classroom teaching with hands-on experiences and external partnerships. By learning from local barber and cosmetology schools and professionals, my students explore every aspect of the beauty business: cutting hair, styling, selecting inventory, consulting with clients, and more. This ensures students are ready to thrive in a competitive market."

Lisa Woods
Academy of Health and Human Services | Halls High School

TEACHER



"The Guaranteed Experiences offered through 865 Academies have provided Fulton High School students with opportunities they might not have otherwise encountered. Seeing their smiles and the light in their eyes in photos or as they speak about their experiences makes it all worthwhile. I hope these experiences continue for years to come!"

Kendedrick Jones
Executive Principal | Fulton High School

PRINCIPAL



"At Greenheck Group, we're honored to partner with KCS and Carter High in advancing the mission of the 865 Academies. We're proud to invest in the launch of Engineering Tomorrow and the expansion of Carter's Manufacturing Site-Based Enterprise, ensuring every student has hands-on opportunities to explore career paths, spark curiosity, and build essential skills."

Scott Graf
Chief Manufacturing Officer | Greenheck Group

PARTNER

POWERFUL **PARTNERSHIPS**

2,890	1,004,749	18,332	9,881
PARTNERSHIPS	STUDENT IMPACT HOURS	VOLUNTEER HOURS DONATED	EXPERIENCE HOURS

BUSINESS & TALENT



JENNIFER HEMMELGARN
Assistant Superintendent of Business & Talent

DEPARTMENTS
Finance
Benefits & Employee Relations
Staffing & Compensation
Talent Acquisition

5TH CONSECUTIVE YEAR
NAMED FORBES "BEST PLACE TO WORK"
(2021 - 2022 - 2023 - 2024 - 2025)

92%
TEACHER RETENTION RATE
90% staff retention rate

82%
OF STAFF SAID THEIR SCHOOL IS A GREAT PLACE TO WORK

$119.1M
NEW INVESTMENTS IN STAFF SINCE 2022

9,131
EMPLOYEES
5,059 certified
4,072 classified

91%
REDUCTION VACANCIES
in two years

$66,800
AVERAGE TEACHER SALARY

SMART STAFFING. **STRONGER SCHOOLS.**

Innovative staffing gives schools the freedom to think differently and lead with impact.

Knox County Schools is transforming how schools think about *people*, *positions*, and *potential*. Through a bold new approach to **flexible staffing**, the district is empowering principals to reimagine their resources—unlocking adaptability, boosting innovation, and ensuring that every dollar directly supports student success. While the staffing formula has not changed, principals now have the flexibility to configure staff resources in ways that best meet the unique needs of their schools.

"This gives principals the autonomy to think creatively about deploying talent and repurposing or redesigning roles to **maximize impact** for students," said Assistant Superintendent of Business & Talent **Jennifer Hemmelgarn**.

The shift represents more than a new budget process; it's a new mindset. By treating staffing as a **lever for innovation** rather than a limitation, schools are redesigning roles that reflect their specific priorities, from improving communication and instruction to strengthening student supports.

For example, **Christenberry Elementary** repurposed an existing educational assistant allocation to create a part-time clerical position, freeing the principal to spend more time as an instructional leader in classrooms. The remaining flexibility allowed the school to establish three teacher leadership roles, expanding the reach of high-capacity teachers. These leaders support colleagues with targeted instructional strategies—such as strengthening literacy instruction, analyzing student data, and refining classroom practices—amplifying impact across the entire building.

The result of this reimagined approach is a more responsive system, one that trusts school leaders to design solutions that fit their students.

At KCS, flexible staffing isn't just adapting to budget constraints; it's redefining what's possible.



Christenberry Elementary reimagined existing positions to strengthen instructional leadership.

> We're unlocking new potential by viewing our people and positions through a lens of impact and innovation. Leaders have the flexibility to create an environment that truly supports educators and empowers students to succeed.

Dr. Tonya Cash
Executive Principal
Christenberry Elementary



THE PEOPLE **PRIORITY**

Knox County Schools reaches near-zero vacancies through bold salary reform, strategic hiring, and a commitment to valuing every employee.

On August 7, 2025, Knox County Schools reached a historic milestone: **two years of near-zero teaching vacancies** on the first day of school. Vacancies were down **91%** from two years prior, marking a dramatic turnaround after years of staffing challenges. This success was no accident. It was the result of intentionality, historic investment, and a relentless focus on valuing the people who make student success possible.

Since 2022, KCS has invested **$119.1 million** in staff, laying the foundation for competitive pay. The 2024-25 school year marked the first time employees felt the impact of these investments in their paychecks. Through the implementation of new salary schedules, the district made the single largest staffing investment in its history—**$44 million** to bring every employee up to a **market-value wage**. Recommended by Evergreen Solutions after a comprehensive compensation review, the new schedules provide clear annual step raises, retention bonuses, and transparent pay structures that reward both experience and advanced degrees. Moving forward, KCS will maintain its salary schedules by advancing salaries on a structured step system and conducting market-value assessments every three to five years to align with market value pay.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE TEACH KNOX STRATEGIES

KNOXSCHOOLS.ORG/TEACHKNOX

But salary advancements are only part of the story. In 2024, KCS established a **Staffing Committee** — made up of 10 principals representing every region and grade band, five regional representatives, and nine district representatives — to develop school staffing formulas. These formulas align teachers to student enrollment, allowing schools to consistently plan and predict staffing needs for the upcoming year.

These results speak for themselves: more than 9,000 employees are now supported by a modern compensation system, with pathways for growth and recognition. By **prioritizing people**, KCS has built a foundation for long-term recruitment and retention success, ensuring every classroom is staffed and every student has the support they need.

TEACH KNOX

Initiatives like **Teach Knox** brought a proactive approach to teacher recruitment, development, and retention. Prescreened interviews **cut the hiring timeline by roughly two weeks**, allowing principals to review pre-recorded candidate responses at their convenience. Real-time applicant databases streamlined the process further, while “stay conversations” helped staff feel *seen*, *heard*, and *valued*, increasing the likelihood they will stay at their school.

Partnerships with institutions like the **University of Tennessee** expanded pipelines for special education and math teachers, strengthening recruitment in historically hard-to-staff areas. These strategies empowered principals to build stronger teams earlier and more effectively.

Meanwhile, the **New Teacher Experience** helped new educators navigate the system, provides targeted mentors, and delivers a clear road map for the first year—support that strengthens retention and effectiveness.





ADVICE FROM **FIRST-YEAR TEACHERS**

"Engage with different types of professional development to strengthen your skills as an educator and lean on your school's supportive culture."

Jeremy Petrie
Fulton High

"It's okay to have high expectations for your students. If you set it, they will bust through that wall for you. Show them you believe in them, and they'll believe you. It's just an amazing thing to see."

Lindsey Ducheney
Brickey-McCloud Elementary

"Focus on building relationships first, especially in kindergarten. You may not see a child's full story or know what they're carrying, so take the time to get to know them."

Cameron York
West Haven Elementary

"You have to rely on the people around you. I became best friends with the teacher across my hall on my first day of teaching. Relying on her made my experience night and day. The staff at my school is fantastic."

Maggie Wilson
South-Doyle Middle

"You are going to have a mentor your first year, and probably beyond your first year. Lean on them when you need help. Also, get to know your administrative team as best as you can. They are a huge asset for any teacher."

Ryan Haller
Bearden High

PRINCIPAL **PLAYBOOK**

Creating a framework for developing school leaders.

Strong teachers are the strongest indicator of student achievement, and great principals grow great teachers. At Knox County Schools, 91 principals lead and develop more than 4,500 teachers, making the scale and impact of school leadership unmistakably clear.

The **Principal Playbook** was created in response to a year-long analysis conducted with PIVOT: School Improvement Leaders. Stakeholder feedback from principals, assistant principals, teachers, and district staff identified a need for **clearer expectations**, **stronger development systems**, and a **shared vision of leadership**. The engagement also surfaced a critical pipeline challenge: *62% of assistant principals aspire to become principals within the next 1–5 years, yet only 34% feel they are being adequately developed for the role*. This gap describes the need for a defined leadership framework that prepares future principals while strengthening those currently serving.

The Playbook establishes a clear **Leadership Goal**: *KCS leaders are intentional, disciplined, and supportive. They drive people to action and make complex simple*. To achieve this vision, leadership is organized into six domains: **Strategic Leadership**, **Instructional Leadership**, **Growth-Focused Leadership**, **Operational Leadership**, **Relational Leadership**, and **Adaptive Leadership**. These domains create the **Game Plan**, providing a unified framework that aligns daily practice to student success. Supporting the Game Plan are the **Plays**—practical, evidence-based actions that translate each leadership domain into daily routines.

Looking ahead, KCS will move from design to implementation. A handful of Plays will launch in the 2025-26 school year, giving principals practical guides for coaching, planning, and decision-making. The **Academics Division Principal Council** will support the development and launch of these Plays and additional resources.

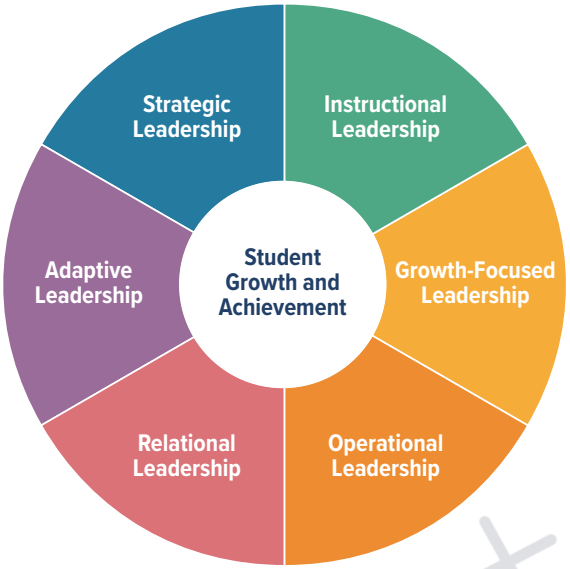
Over time, the Playbook will guide leader development across the district, supporting current principals, preparing aspiring leaders, and creating a sustainable, scalable model for excellence in every school.

The **Principal Playbook** is the district's guidebook for connecting *vision* and *action*–for making the aspirational operational. The Playbook is organized into two key components: The **Game Plan** and **Plays**. Together, these resources will provide leaders with the clarity, structure, and shared language needed to lead with focus, consistency, and impact.

Both the Game Plan and its supporting Plays are anchored in a core belief that, when our leaders succeed, *students win*.

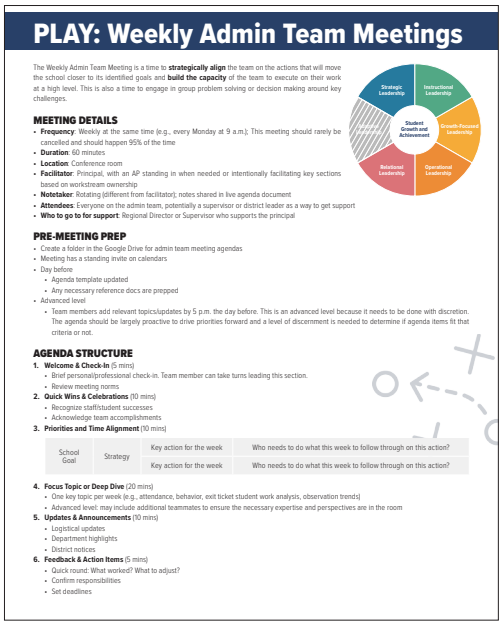
The Game Plan

Defines what great leadership looks like. It outlines the core competencies effective school leaders must demonstrate to drive school improvement and student success.



The Plays

Instruct leaders on how to bring the goal to life and provide actionable tools, routines, and coaching strategies that translate leadership competencies into daily practice.



PLAY: Weekly Admin Team Meetings

The Weekly Admin Team Meeting is a time to **strategically align** the team on the actions that will move the school closer to its identified goals and **build the capacity** of the team to execute on their work at a high level. This is also a time to engage in group problem solving or decision making around key challenges.

MEETING DETAILS

- **Frequency**: Weekly at the same time (e.g., every Monday at 9 a.m.); This meeting should rarely be cancelled and should happen 95% of the time
- **Duration**: 60 minutes
- **Location**: Conference room
- **Facilitator**: Principal, with an AP standing in when needed or intentionally facilitating key sections based on workstream ownership
- **Notetaker**: Rotating (different from facilitator); notes shared in live agenda document
- **Attendees**: Everyone on the admin team, potentially a supervisor or district leader as a way to get support
- **Who to go to for support**: Regional Director or Supervisor who supports the principal

PRE-MEETING PREP

- Create a folder in the Google Drive for admin team meeting agendas
- Meeting has a standing invite on calendars
- Day before
  - Agenda template updated
  - Any necessary reference docs are prepped
- Advanced level
  - Team members add relevant topics/updates by 5 p.m. the day before. This is an advanced level because it needs to be done with discretion. The agenda should be largely proactive to drive priorities forward and a level of discernment is needed to determine if agenda items fit that criteria or not.

AGENDA STRUCTURE

1. **Welcome & Check-in** (5 mins)
   - Brief personal/professional check-in. Team member can take turns leading this section.
   - Review meeting norms
2. **Quick Wins & Celebrations** (10 mins)
   - Recognize staff/student successes
   - Acknowledge team accomplishments
3. **Priorities and Time Alignment** (10 mins)

School Goal	Strategy	Key action for the week	Who needs to do what this week to follow through on this action?
		Key action for the week	Who needs to do what this week to follow through on this action?

4. **Focus Topic or Deep Dive** (20 mins)
   - One key topic per week (e.g., attendance, behavior, exit ticket student work analysis, observation trends)
   - Advanced level: may include additional teammates to ensure the necessary expertise and perspectives are in the room
5. **Updates & Announcements** (10 mins)
   - Logistical updates
   - Department highlights
   - District notices
6. **Feedback & Action Items** (5 mins)
   - Quick round: What worked? What to adjust?
   - Confirm responsibilities
   - Set deadlines

LEADERSHIP GOAL

KCS leaders are **intentional**, **disciplined**, and **supportive**. They **drive people to action** and **make complex simple**.

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

Strategic leaders inspire and align their schools to a shared, forward-thinking vision that supports districtwide goals. They drive long-term improvement and strategic planning.

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Effective school leaders establish a data-driven culture focused on student growth and achievement across all student groups by creating optimal conditions for both teacher and student growth in alignment with the KCS Instructional Framework.

GROWTH-FOCUSED LEADERSHIP

Leaders develop a strong school team by recruiting, supporting, and empowering educators while fostering leadership among their team.

OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP

School leaders effectively manage time, resources, and school operations to maximize impact on student achievement.

RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Leaders cultivate trust and collaboration through strong communication and relationship-building with students, staff, parents, and the broader community.

ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP

Effective leaders navigate challenges with adaptability, a growth mindset, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

OPERATIONS



DR. GARFIELD ADAMS
Assistant Superintendent of Operations

DEPARTMENTS
Asset Management
Facilities & New Construction
Information Technology
Maintenance & Operations
School Nutrition
School Safety
Transportation

9 million
SQUARE FEET
of educational space

324
DISTRICTWIDE ASSETS
such as a site or building

13,141
DISTRICTWIDE ELEMENTS
such as walls, windows, ductwork, roofs

as defined in the facilities assessment

NEARLY
$110 million
INVESTED IN BUILDING NEW SCHOOLS

355+
BUSES
transporting students to and from school

125
ARMED UNIFORMED OFFICERS

7.3 million
MEALS SERVED



BUILDING **SMARTER**

How a districtwide facilities assessment is transforming operations, modernizing maintenance, and setting a new standard for efficiency and accountability.

Knox County Schools took a big step toward transforming the way it manages more than 9 million square feet of educational space. Through a districtwide **facilities assessment**, leaders set out to answer a critical question: *How can we make our operations as effective and efficient as the classrooms we serve?*

"The assessment revealed a powerful reality," said Assistant Superintendent of Operations **Dr. Garfield Adams**. "While maintenance teams were delivering exceptional results, the systems supporting them had not evolved in decades."

Work orders were still being written on paper, scanned, and emailed in, which created barriers to efficiency and accountability. Guided by a commitment to **data-driven decision-making**, KCS recognized the need for modernization.

Now, through new tools and smarter processes, KCS is building a future-ready approach to operations—one grounded in data, transparency, and collaboration.

MODERN TOOLS, MODERN RESULTS

Using insights from the facilities assessment, the district introduced **Operations Hero**, replacing outdated paper processes with a real-time digital system. Staff submit work orders electronically, maintenance teams use tablets to track repairs, and leaders monitor live dashboards, streamlining communication and improving service.

DESIGNING FOR THE FUTURE

Insights from the facilities assessment are also shaping the district's approach to new construction and renovation. From energy-efficient materials to flooring that saves maintenance time, KCS is designing smarter, ensuring every project supports both operational sustainability and educational excellence.

DATA THAT DRIVES DECISIONS

A districtwide **asset management** effort cataloged every major piece of KCS equipment, turning millions of square feet of facilities data into actionable insights. By knowing each asset's age, condition, and life cycle, the district can better prioritize replacements, reduce unexpected costs, and plan smarter for long-term investments.

BUILDING FOR THE **FUTURE**

Expanding access, opportunity, and innovation through next-generation learning spaces.

NEW K-8 SCHOOL

In the heart of the Maynard, Lonsdale, Beaumont, and West View communities, a **new K-8 school** is taking shape to serve students for generations to come. In 2024, Knox County Schools committed **$66 million** to design a K-8 model that unites innovation and opportunity under one roof.



District teams facilitated an **extensive engagement process**, gathering thousands of voices through multilingual surveys, community meetings, and ranked-choice feedback to ensure the design reflects future-focused programming.

After evaluating multiple sites, the district selected the centrally located, 16-acre former **Rule High School** property through a strategic land swap with Knox County. The facility, designed for roughly 1,000 elementary and middle school students, will feature open collaboration spaces and advanced technology that mirror real-world settings. Construction is expected to begin in 2027, with doors opening by 2029.

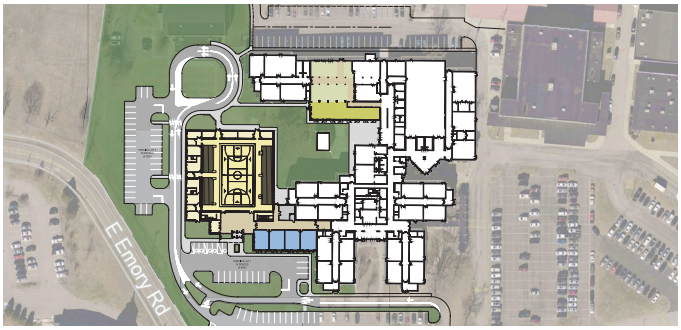
NEW FARRAGUT-AREA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

In one of Knox County's fastest-growing regions, a **new elementary school** is rising to meet the moment.



Breaking ground in May 2025, this **$47.7 million** project in Farragut reimagines what an elementary school can be—flexible, future-ready, and built for all students. The one-story campus, located on Village Commons Boulevard, will serve up to 1,400 students in a bright, collaborative environment designed to inspire curiosity and connection.

The facility will include **over 65 classrooms**, outdoor learning zones, and spaces dedicated to art, music, and hands-on discovery. With sustainability at the forefront, the school will feature energy-efficient systems and an ICC-500 storm shelter. Families, students, and staff helped shape design priorities, ensuring the building reflects the students and community it will serve. When it opens for the 2027-28 school year, Farragut's newest campus won't just ease overcrowding—it will **set a new standard** for how space, creativity, and technology come together to support young learners.



HALLS MIDDLE RENOVATION

The Halls Middle School renovation reflects a **smart, student-centered approach** to growth.

During site visits, the Operations team recognized that adding classrooms without expanding cafeteria capacity would strain schedules and push lunch blocks into hour-long stretches. By **broadening the scope of work** to include a larger cafeteria, the project now aligns with master-schedule realities and the school's growing enrollment.

The team also integrated **ICF construction**—an energy- and cost-efficient, storm-resilient material new to KCS—positioning Halls Middle as a pilot for future, more sustainable building practices.



STERCHI ELEMENTARY UPDATE

Sterchi Elementary's update showcases a shift toward **intentional, data-driven facility planning**.

With enrollment declining in the area, the KCS team reevaluated an approved classroom addition project that no longer matched the school's needs. Instead of expanding unused space, the **plan was redesigned** to provide what Sterchi truly required: updated office areas, improved gym space, and dedicated special education rooms.

This student-focused redesign reduced unnecessary costs, honored community priorities, and ensured the project delivered meaningful value, demonstrating **a more strategic approach** to capital planning.



HARDIN VALLEY ACADEMY ADDITION

In the rapidly growing Hardin Valley community, space equals opportunity, and Hardin Valley Academy's **new addition** is expanding both.

Completed in August 2025, the two-story, 43,000-square-foot expansion redefines what it means to plan for growth with intention. The first floor now houses a dedicated **Freshman Academy**—part of the 865 Academies—complete with its own administrative suite, modern science and health labs, and a secure storm shelter that doubles as an instructional space.

This **$11.4 million** project reflects the district's commitment to providing every student with access to high-quality learning environments, even as populations surge. Designed with flexibility and connection in mind, the new addition allows ninth graders to **build confidence and community** as they transition into high school. As Hardin Valley continues to grow, these new spaces will ensure that academic innovation, safety, and student belonging remain at the core of the district's vision for the future.

A DAY IN **OPERATIONS**

From before the first bell to after the students leave for the day, our teams make every school day possible.

Behind every thriving classroom and every inspired student is a team of dedicated professionals working tirelessly to make our schools safe, welcoming, and ready for learning. The Operations Division ensures everything from transportation and nutrition to facilities, technology, and maintenance runs seamlessly. Take a look behind the scenes at the departments that turn vision into reality every single day.



6:00 AM

TRANSPORTATION

As dawn breaks, **more than 355 buses** roll across Knox County, carrying students safely to their schools.

Together, our transportation partners log **over 3 million miles** each year, navigating city streets, rural roads, and everything in between. Every mile traveled is a commitment to getting students to school ready to learn and home safely.

8:30 AM

SCHOOL SAFETY

As the morning bell signals the start of the school day, School Safety Officer **Matt Reddick** at **Gibbs Middle** completes his rounds, locking doors and ensuring the campus is secure.

The KCS School Safety Department is **one of the largest dedicated school safety forces** in Tennessee. Through year-round training, rapid emergency response, and proactive strategies, the SSOs create an environment where students and staff can learn and teach safely.





10:30 AM

NUTRITION

At **Bearden High**, the aroma of fresh fruits, vegetables, and wholesome meals fills the cafeteria. The School Nutrition staff prepares meals with care, sustaining students' learning, focus, and success.

Federally funded nutrition programs provide **balanced, nutritious meals** that meet or exceed USDA standards to invest in and support students' health, learning, and lifelong healthy habits.

1:00 PM

FACILITIES & NEW CONSTRUCTION

On the site of the **new Farragut-area elementary school**, the Facilities & New Construction team meets with contractors to **review progress**. This will be KCS's largest elementary school to date, designed to accommodate a growing community and modern educational needs.

Facilities leads long-range planning, new construction, and renovation projects that turn blueprints into **vibrant learning spaces**.



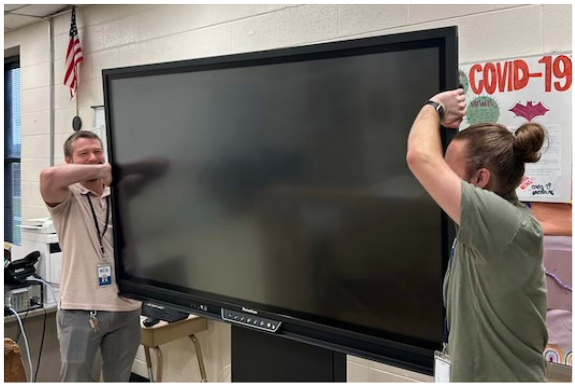
5:00 PM

MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

At **Northshore Elementary**, **robotic custodians**—the newest members of the Maintenance & Operations team—glide across the floors. These autonomous machines are mapped to clean floors in seven KCS schools, freeing up staff to focus on higher-level maintenance and repairs.

Maintenance & Operations oversees daily cleaning, preventative maintenance, and repairs for all 91 schools in the district. From HVAC upkeep to custodial services, their work keeps classrooms comfortable, functional, and ready for learning every day.





2:30 PM

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

At **Karns High**, the IT team installs a new panel, ensuring teachers and students have access to the **latest technology** for their classrooms.

The IT Department keeps the district's networks, systems, and digital tools running reliably, supporting teaching, learning, and communication across the district. Every update, installation, and troubleshooting session is part of creating a future-ready learning environment.

STUDENT SUCCESS



DR. ANDREW BROWN
Assistant Superintendent of Student Success

DEPARTMENTS
School Culture
Special Education
Student Discipline
Student Supports

4.4%
GROWTH IN MATH PROFICIENCY
for students with IEPs

4.3%
GROWTH IN ELA PROFICIENCY
for students with IEPs

12.3%
OF ELL STUDENTS MET STATE EXIT CRITERIA
up from 7.8%

120+
LANGUAGES & DIALECTS

9,000+
STUDENTS WITH IEPs
in Knox County Schools

5
YEAR SPED STRATEGIC PLAN
in development

14
RECOMMENDATIONS
created from a districtwide evaluation

44
ACTION ITEMS
created from a districtwide evaluation



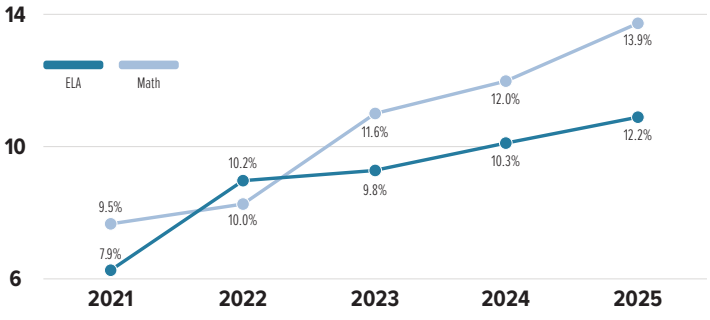
GROWING MOMENTUM FOR **EVERY LEARNER**

Inside the strategies helping KCS students with IEPs thrive in every classroom.

Knox County Schools serves **more than 9,000 students with IEPs**, which are individualized education plans tailored to meet each student's unique learning needs. An IEP outlines a student's present levels of performance, establishes goals, and identifies the services, supports, and accommodations to enhance access to grade-level instruction and make **meaningful progress**.

In classrooms across Knox County, students with IEPs are making **academic gains**. Over the past four years, steady gains in ELA and math have shown what's possible when staff, families, and leaders share a belief that every student can achieve at high levels.

The results are clear: proficiency for students with IEPs in grades 3-8 has grown from **6.3% to 10.9% in ELA** and from **7.7% to 13.7% in math**. Behind these numbers are countless stories of educators reimagining what inclusion should look like and students finding new confidence in classrooms.

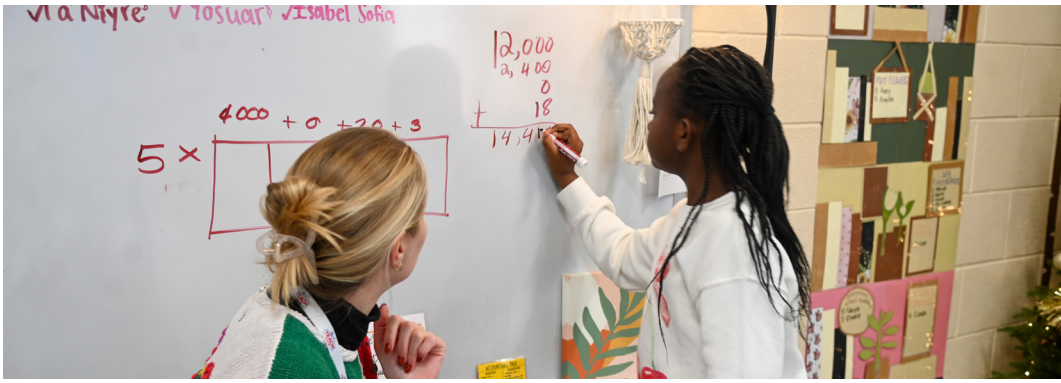


When asked how these gains became possible, Executive Director of Special Education **Dr. Brad Carr** points to one bold change.

"The single biggest factor was increasing the number of students served in general education classrooms," Carr said. "When students are consistently taught by content experts and supported by our special education staff, they're exposed to material that all other students are learning. That ***access*** makes all the difference."







CLASSROOMS LEADING THE WAY

At schools like Powell Middle and Fort Sanders, **co-teaching** has become a cornerstone of student success. General education and special education teachers plan lessons together, model strategies for one another, and ensure all students can access grade-level content.

In one 7th grade classroom at **Powell Middle**, students rotate between small group stations. A general education teacher leads guided reading, while special education teacher **Ashley Wright** provides scaffolded support, and both celebrate when a student masters a skill.

> **"We don't separate students by labels anymore. We plan for every learner, every day. That shift has changed our whole school culture."**

At **Fort Sanders**, special education teacher **Nathalie Murphy** explains the importance of co-taught classrooms.

"Our preschoolers show **incredible growth when they feel included**," she said. "Even at four or five years old, they notice when they're included, and that's where our community of learners is truly formed— where we **see each other as equal**, contributing members with something valuable to share."

A NETWORK OF SUPPORT

For more than 8,000 students with IEPs in Knox County, success starts with data. Through recently implemented **Data Days**, the district reviews academic and behavioral progress on a structured, quarterly basis.

The initiative shifts the focus from end-of-year results to real-time monitoring.

"You can't wait until May to see if a strategy worked," said Carr.

At the heart of this work is a comprehensive database that organizes information by region, school, teacher, and intervention to highlight trends and identify students needing extra support.

But the greatest impact comes from collaboration. When a student isn't progressing, classroom teams, facilitators, and administrators come together to problem-solve, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to grow.

Whittle Springs Middle teacher **Catherine Martinez** recently reviewed a student's progress during Data Days and realized the instructional approach wasn't producing the needed growth. Using data as a guide, she adjusted instruction by meeting the student at an appropriate grade level, aligning assessments and daily lessons more closely to current skill levels, resulting in greater success and confidence.

SCALING THE MOMENTUM

The work continues, but the foundation is strong. With clear structures, meaningful training, and a culture of shared responsibility, KCS is proving that students with IEPs can—and do—achieve at higher levels.

"Every year, we get better at this work," said Assistant Superintendent of Student Success **Dr. Andrew Brown**. "Now it's about **consistency and fidelity**. When we do this well across every school, the results will take care of themselves."

The progress in reading and math is only the beginning. Across Knox County, inclusion is no longer a strategy—it's a mindset. And for thousands of students, it's opening new doors of opportunity every single day.





OPENING DOORS THROUGH **PROJECT SEARCH**

Every Tuesday at 9 a.m., **Christian Ewing-Rowe** arrives at **Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center** to help keep the neurology intensive care unit running smoothly. With guidance from hospital staff, the Austin-East student restocks supply stations, organizes linens, and ensures the unit's equipment and patient care areas are ready for the day. For Christian, this work offers a real-world opportunity to learn professional routines, build confidence, and contribute to meaningful patient care.

The transition from school to the workforce can be filled with challenges for students with IEPs. **Project SEARCH** is helping to change that story by providing hands-on experiences, professional training, and a pathway to meaningful employment.

"The goal is for our interns to learn skills to gain competitive, integrated employment in the workforce at the end of their **yearlong, hands-on internship**," said **Miller Foutch**, Project SEARCH instructor.

While Knox County Schools has partnered with several local businesses to provide job training opportunities, the 2024–25 school year marked the first time the program partnered with KCS departments—a milestone that **expanded the reach and impact** of Project SEARCH within the district itself.

Three students worked directly with the Operations team and are now thriving in their new roles post-graduation.

"It's really been a blessing," said Warehouse Foreman **Ryan Tankersley**. "The students were energized, willing to help, and always had a great attitude. **They made a real impact**. Our warehouse is cleaner, better organized, and our staff can focus on pulling orders."

By connecting students to meaningful opportunities and surrounding them with strong support, Project SEARCH is helping KCS deliver on its commitment to **preparing every student for life after graduation**.

RAISING THE BAR FOR **ELL STUDENTS**

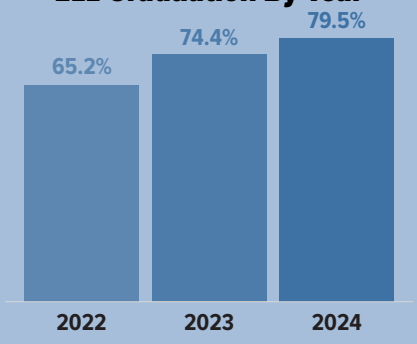
Across Knox County Schools, more than 5,000 English Language Learners (ELL)—speaking more than 120 languages and dialects—are developing the language proficiency needed to successfully exit direct English Language Development services and thrive in general education settings. The district's new English Language Proficiency Assessment, **ELPA 21**, is helping accelerate that progress.

KCS saw promising results from its first year using ELPA 21, nearly **doubling the exit rate** from 7.8% under the former World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment, WIDA, to 12.3%. Because the test pinpoints individual achievement gaps earlier, teachers can provide targeted interventions achieve proficiency in English.

ELPA 21 gives teachers a clearer picture of each student's strengths and needs, and that data drives individualized learning plans, sets language goals, and equips educators with strategies to help students succeed. These supports help students receive the right instruction at the right time. Stronger professional development and closer collaboration between ELL and general education teachers further reinforce that work.

At **Farragut Middle**, veteran teacher **Elizabeth Choi** saw firsthand how these changes benefit students. "Our English Learners see a **tangible result** to their daily effort, and as a result, they are highly motivated to continue the hard work needed to become proficient in English," Choi said.

ELL Graduation By Year



CREATING A STRONGER SYSTEM FOR **EVERY STUDENT**

How a districtwide evaluation is shaping the future of special education in Knox County Schools.

When Dr. Jon Rysewyk became Superintendent, one of his first acts was to charge the KCS Special Education Department with **rethinking special education** and strengthening services for students with IEPs. That work began in the 2022-23 school year with a districtwide review of student supports, including RTI and tutoring, English Language Learning, and special education.

To better understand that need, the district partnered with **Public Consulting Group (PCG)** in 2024-25 to conduct a comprehensive, data-informed evaluation of the special education program. The study included classroom observations, focus groups, interviews, and surveys, engaging teachers, administrators, and families. PCG evaluated the district against six domains: *human capital*, *systems and structures*, *leadership*, *family and community engagement*, *high expectations*, and *the learning environment*.

PCG noted **several foundational strengths** in KCS, including a shared belief of inclusion, a commitment to student achievement, and promising structures such as the multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS), positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) frameworks, early-grade focus, and collaborative transition programs. These elements demonstrate that the district has important pieces in place. At the same time, educators and families made clear these strengths are not yet experienced consistently across schools, and many families reported feeling insufficiently supported in navigating special education.

PCG's review highlighted that KCS has **significant work ahead**. The report identified substantial opportunities to strengthen data-informed decision-making, expand effective co-teaching in elementary grades, and improve the monitoring and alignment of professional development. In total, the review outlined **14 recommendations** and **44 specific action steps** focused on four priorities—instructional practices, collaboration, personnel and staffing, and data monitoring—making clear that meaningful improvement will require sustained, systemwide effort.

KCS is now launching a **one-year planning sprint** and will engage in a second-year implementation sprint to move each recommendation forward with clarity and intention. This work will follow a phased approach, developing plans, addressing immediate needs, and field-testing pilots across priority areas throughout the year. This deliberate rollout recognizes that meaningful change takes time, allowing the district to learn from early implementation and **scale what works**. The result is a clear, sustainable path toward stronger, more consistent supports for every student with an IEP.



ACTION PLANNING **PROCESS & IMPLEMENTATION**

YEAR 1
2025-2026
- Plan development
- Filling immediate needs
- Field testing

YEAR 2
2026-2027
- Implementing proofs of concept
- Monitoring and revising

YEAR 3
2027-2028
- Full-scale implementation and evaluation
- Action planning for years 4-5

YEARS 4-5
2028-2030
- Maintenance
- Continuous improvement

1ST QUARTER
INSTRUCTION
- Identification & Placement
- Grade-Level Curriculum
- Curriculum Modification Training
- Aligned Reading Interventions
- Expanded PD Opportunities

2ND QUARTER
PERSONNEL
- Workloads vs. Caseloads
- Staffing Allocations

3RD QUARTER
COLLABORATION
- Collaborative Structures for Decision-Making
- Communication Consistency
- Rebuilding Trust

4TH QUARTER
MONITORING
- APR Reporting & Data-Driven Results



REFRAMING THE **MINDSET**

A new vision for special education: collaboration and outcomes.

Across Knox County Schools, a culture shift is reshaping how educators think about special education. The focus is moving beyond programs and placements toward a broader, **more inclusive vision**—one that values collaboration, instructional leadership, and outcomes for every student.

This new approach begins with a simple truth: *special education is not a separate system*; it's an essential part of how the district supports all learners.

> **Our goal is to move from a mindset of isolation to one of integration. When teachers, families, and leaders work together around shared goals, we see better outcomes for every student.**
>
> *Dr. Brad Carr,*
> *Executive Director*
> *of Special Education*

That belief is fueling new structures and conversations across the district. **Cross-departmental collaboration** has become the norm, with special education teachers sitting alongside academics, human resources, and school-based teams to make decisions that align instruction, staffing, and student support. The Special Education Council serves as an ongoing partner in shaping policies and identifying needs.

The reframing also extends to how the district defines success. While compliance remains essential—it ensures access and establishes the baseline every student deserves—KCS is committed to moving far beyond the minimum. The new focus is on **growth**, **access**, and **achievement**, keeping students' academic and behavioral development at the center of every decision. This approach uses data to guide meaningful action and supports continuous improvement that goes well above the baseline.

As this work continues, one thing is clear: success for students with IEPs depends on the strength of the system that surrounds them. Through collaboration, data-informed decisions, and a relentless focus on outcomes, KCS is redefining what it means to serve every learner and ensuring that every student in every classroom has the opportunity to thrive.

SPECIAL EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN **TIMELINE**

2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Student Success Deep Dive: • RTI/Tutoring • ELL • Special Education	Establishment and implementation of the KCS Way for IEPs	Continued implementation of KCS Way for Special Education	Establishment and implementation of five-year special education strategic plan
	RFP for Strategic Planning Consultant		
Special Education Task Force	PCG: Comprehensive analysis of special education services and supports		
	Action planning based on PCG recommendations		

STRATEGY



KORI LAUTNER
Assistant Superintendent of Strategy

DEPARTMENTS
Communications
Impact & Analytics
Student & Family Supports

$23 million
IN ISM GRANTS

5,240
FAMILY COMMUNITY LIAISON SUPPORT REQUESTS

75%
TRANSFER ACCEPTANCE RATE

2,370,720
PARENTSQUARE MESSAGES SENT

170+
HOURS OF DATA CONSULTATION
with school leaders

1,155
NEW STUDENTS ENROLLED

NEARLY
10,000
STAKEHOLDER RESPONSES
to shape the 2030 Strategic Plan

REIMAGINING **CONNECTION**

How Knox County Schools transformed the one-stop shop website into an audience-centered experience.

Knox County Schools undertook a major digital transformation this year, launching a **redesigned district website**, shifting all staff-facing content to the **new internal site**—the KCS Intercom—and preparing **91 school websites** for a full rebuild by the end of 2025. Together, these improvements mark a significant step toward a more intentional, audience-centered digital ecosystem that meets the needs of families, staff, and the broader community.

For years, the district website was built to serve everyone at once—students, families, teachers, principals, community members, and prospective employees. The result was predictable: cluttered pages, sprawling navigation, and outdated content that made it difficult for users to find what they needed.

"We heard loud and clear that our sites weren't intuitive," said Executive Director of Communications **Carly Harrington**. "This redesign was about stepping back and asking, 'What is the purpose of each platform?' then rebuilding them from the ground up to serve that purpose exceptionally well."

To understand those needs, the district engaged teachers, families, and prospective employees through regional councils and feedback sessions. Their input revealed two distinct digital audiences: **external users** seeking clear, accessible information, and **internal users** needing streamlined tools, resources, and communication.

This led to the first redesign: separating internal and external content. All staff-facing resources are now housed on the **KCS Intercom**, an employee intranet launched in May 2025. On Intercom, staff members can request time off, access instructional resources, and stay up to date on important district announcements. At the request of school leaders, a dedicated Principal Portal was also built within Intercom, giving principals and assistant principals easy, reliable access to the information they need.

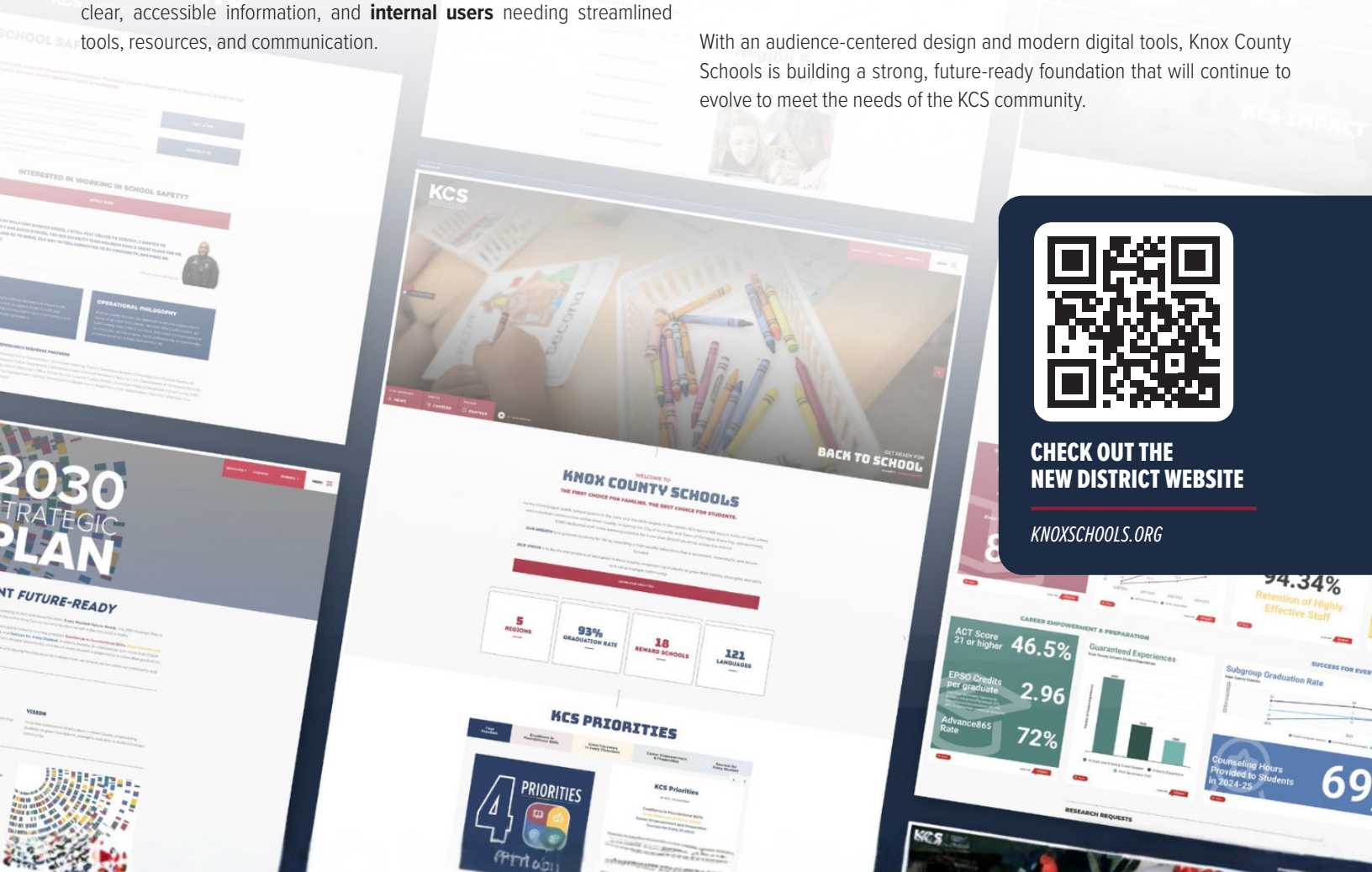
By moving this content off the public site, the district website was transformed into a family- and community-focused experience built around clarity, navigation, and storytelling.

Launched in July 2025, the redesigned district website introduces a streamlined structure, improved quick links, focused resources for families and job seekers, and the removal of more than 50,000 outdated pages.

The next phase—launching **new school websites** by December 2025—will bring these same user-friendly improvements to every site, giving families with students in multiple schools a consistent experience in navigation, layout, and access to essential information.

"Our goal was clarity," Harrington said. "Each audience deserves a place built for them, and these new platforms finally make that possible."

With an audience-centered design and modern digital tools, Knox County Schools is building a strong, future-ready foundation that will continue to evolve to meet the needs of the KCS community.



CHECK OUT THE NEW DISTRICT WEBSITE

KNOXSCHOOLS.ORG

SEASON ONE
GUESTS



Todd Howell
WBIR Chief Meteorologist



Mike Odom
Knoxville Chamber President & CEO



Hallerin Hilton Hill
Radio & TV Host



Dr. Sharon Roberts
Tennessee SCORE Senior Advisor



Krissy DeAlejandro
President & CEO of tnAchieves



Glenn Jacobs
Knox County Mayor



Gen. Arnie Bunch
Hamblen Co. Schools Superintendent

THE EDUCATION BLUEPRINT

Where big ideas, bold conversations, and the future of learning take center stage.

In January 2024, Knox County Schools launched **The Education Blueprint**, a podcast designed to pull back the curtain on the systems, decisions, and innovations shaping today's public schools. What began as an additional communication tool quickly became a resource that helps families understand district work and highlights the leaders shaping education in Tennessee. Season 1 sparked curiosity, elevated diverse voices, and built a living library of conversations for families, educators, and community partners.

The first season delivered **eight episodes** featuring leaders from meteorology, higher education, economic development, media, and military service, and include an end-of-season "mailbag" episode answering listener questions. Each conversation offered a unique lens on how these fields intersect with student learning and the future of work. Episodes explored topics from the 865 Academies to early literacy and capital planning. Available across four platforms, the podcast has already reached more than 2,500 listeners in nearly a dozen countries.

Co-host **Prentice Elliott** reflected on the purpose of the project, explaining:

"A lot of the terms and acronyms in this space can feel overwhelming. When we talk about simplifying things, I get a big sigh of relief as a parent. This podcast is about making sure everyone feels included in the conversation."

Season 2 builds on that momentum. Upcoming guests include KCS Chief of School Safety **Carlo Granillo**, YouScience Co-founder **Betsy Wills**, University of Tennessee AI Tennessee Initiative Director **Vasileios Maroulas**, and SCORE CEO **David Mansouri**. Each conversation is designed to deepen understanding of the challenges and opportunities shaping the future of education.

With every episode, The Education Blueprint strengthens the district's connection to its community and offers clear, accessible insight into the work behind student success.



Prentice Elliott
Co-Host



Dr. Jon Rysewyk
Host, KCS Superintendent

LISTEN TO THE ENTIRE SEASON 1 LIBRARY NOW!

KNOXSCHOOLS.ORG/PODCAST

STRATEGIC PLAN

2030: EVERY STUDENT *FUTURE READY*

With the last strategic plan ending in 2024, Knox County Schools was faced with an opportunity to step back, reflect on its priorities, and engage the community in shaping a bold vision for the future. That work—and a shared commitment to accelerating student achievement—became the foundation for the **2030 Strategic Plan: Every Student *Future Ready*** .

Development of the plan began in August 2024 with the formation of a **Strategic Planning Committee** appointed by the Knox County Board of Education. The committee was charged with guiding the creation of a five-year roadmap that elevates student learning, strengthens schools, and positions the district as a leader in public education. From the outset, the Knox County Board of Education challenged the district to move beyond a traditional strategic plan and design a framework that would actively drive improvement over time.

The result was the *2030 Strategic Plan*. Over a period of nine months, **nearly 10,000 stakeholders**—including students, families, educators, and community members—shared their perspective and insight through surveys, focus groups, and listening sessions. The district contracted with two external partners—**Millan Chicago** and **Accenture LLC**—to lead stakeholder engagement and strategic planning over the course of the project. The sheer number of voices engaged in the process, combined with the depth of research and analysis conducted by the two consulting firms, produced a plan rooted in community interest and grounded in evidence.

The *2030 Strategic Plan* centers on the district's four core priorities—**Excellence in Foundational Skills**, **Great Educators in Every School**, **Career Empowerment and Preparation**, and **Success for Every Student**—while adding a fifth area of focus: **Communication and Engagement**. Each domain identifies an ambitious five-year goal supported by three long-range objectives.

Together, these goals and objectives paint a sharp, ambitious vision for the future of KCS.

"The work now is to deliver on that vision," said **Kori Lautner**, Assistant Superintendent of Strategy.

Unlike most strategic plans, there are no annual targets outlined in the *2030 Strategic Plan*. Instead, the plan calls for an **Annual Action Plan** to be established in partnership with the Board of Education each Fall.

"This process keeps the strategic plan top of mind year over year," Lautner explained. "The biggest risk to any strategic plan is being left on the shelf—the Annual Action Plan prevents that from happening."

Setting annual targets will require that the district evaluate progress on an annual basis, and that all future targets are set with the prior year's results in mind.

According to Lautner, a continuous improvement mindset is at the heart of the *2030 Strategic Plan*.

She says, "We'll incorporate anywhere we fall short into next year's target and be able to set more ambitious targets anywhere we excelled." Ambition of this caliber is what it takes to graduate every student future-ready.

CHECK OUT THE 2030 STRATEGIC PLAN!

KNOXSCHOOLS.ORG/STRATEGICPLAN

2030 COMMITMENT

EXCELLENCE IN FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS
Students will be regionally and nationally competitive in reading and math proficiency.

GREAT EDUCATORS IN EVERY SCHOOL
Every educator will be equipped with consistent resources, training, and support to enhance instruction.

CAREER EMPOWERMENT & PREPARATION
Students will be confident in their plans for life after graduation by 11th grade and will graduate ready for enrollment, enlistment, or employment.

SUCCESS FOR EVERY STUDENT
Every classroom will be equipped with state-of-the-art, evidence-based strategies to accelerate student learning.

COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT
KCS will meaningfully and intentionally engage and communicate with stakeholders to enhance the student experience.

THE **DOT CONNECTORS**

Meet the team ensuring every big idea, grant, and initiative lands smoothly where it matters most.

The KCS Project Management team was established in the 2024-25 school year within the Strategy Division to meet a growing need across the district. Complex, high-impact ideas require **coordination, planning, and follow-through** that often exceed the day-to-day capacity of school and district leaders. Project Management serves as a support arm, one dedicated to guiding major work from concept to sustained implementation by filling gaps, triaging needs, and removing roadblocks so departments can focus on their core work.

Acting as the district's **central hub for complex initiatives**, their work includes meeting facilitation, timeline development, vendor and purchasing coordination, grant and budget alignment, data tracking, and building systems from the ground up. In every case, their role is to elevate the expertise of the people closest to the project, ensuring the right voices stay connected and the right details stay in motion.

"Project Management connects the dots that others can't always see," said Director of Impact & Analytics **Steve Rudder**. "They help translate big ideas into actionable plans, and that makes a difference for schools and students."

Project Management also plays a key role in bridging efforts across competitive grants and strategic priorities. It helps schools put available resources to work quickly, navigate grant requirements with principles, and coordinate progress on projects so improvements reach classrooms faster. With the ability to coordinate across divisions, it identifies connections others may not see, anticipate challenges before they arise, and create the alignment needed for smooth implementation.

Throughout its first year, the Project Management team has become an **essential district resource** that keeps important work from becoming fragmented or stalled. By providing coordination, consistency, and hands-on support, it helps KCS move major initiatives from big ideas into reality, strengthening outcomes for students and the community.



BREWING **IDEAS** INTO **REALITY**

The Daily Drip café at **Gibbs Middle** shows what happens when a great idea meets strategic project management. Funded through an **Innovative School Model (ISM)** grant, what began as a concept on paper became a fully operational student-run café thanks to the hands-on support of the KCS Project Management team.

"Through their work in the café, students gain lifelong skills, strengthen teamwork, and develop problem-solving abilities," said Gibbs Middle College & Career Teacher **Caitlin Long**.

From the start, the Project Management team helped bring the Daily Drip from idea to reality. They supported the grant application, collaborated with administrators to shape the café's purpose and operations, and mapped out everything needed to bring the space to life. Once planning was underway, the team led procurement and construction, coordinating equipment, timelines, and logistics to ensure the café aligned with both student learning goals and real-world workplace standards.

Project Management's guidance ensured the smooth launch of a high-quality, functioning café and allowed school staff to focus on leading rather than juggling logistics.

Now open on Tuesdays and Thursdays, the Daily Drip offers student-made beverages and a menu of learning opportunities. Students collaborate, problem-solve, and practice responsibility in a space that feels both energizing and entirely their own.

"Working in the café has helped set me up for achieving goals in the real world while still having fun!" said Gibbs Middle student **Eden Shockley.**

FROM **IDEA** TO **IMPLEMENTATION**

In 2022, Knox County Schools received **$23 million** in **Innovative School Model (ISM) grants** from the Tennessee Department of Education. Funding was distributed across 15 high schools and 16 middle schools to support a wide range of initiatives tailored to each school's needs. Because this was a significant investment, the Project Management team collaborated closely with the Facilities and College & Career Readiness departments to intentionally guide planning, budgeting, and implementation. Together, they helped schools design projects that reimagine learning, give students access to real-world experiences, and connect classroom instruction to future career opportunities.



FARRAGUT MIDDLE: **PRINT SHOP**

At Farragut Middle, ISM funding supported the development of a student-run enterprise that designs and produces branded merchandise. The school completed renovations that included updated flooring, flexible furniture, and improved storage. New screen-printing and embroidery equipment was purchased to expand production capabilities and additional computers were added to enhance students' digital design and creative work.



HALLS HIGH: **CTE EQUIPMENT**

At Halls High, ISM funding supported upgrades across multiple career pathways. The school renovated its agriculture greenhouse to expand hands-on learning opportunities, added a new brake lathe to strengthen real-world training in the automotive program, and acquired a plasma cutter to enhance welding instruction.



HOLSTON MIDDLE: **MUSIC LAB**

At Holston Middle, ISM funding strengthened the performing arts experience through targeted upgrades to both the music lab and auditorium. The school added new keyboards, stands, and student stools to create a more functional, modern music learning environment. Enhanced sound and lighting systems—along with a new projector—improved the quality of performances and schoolwide events.











LOOKING AHEAD

KCS is committed to preserving the district's most meaningful traditions while identifying and pursuing opportunities to continuously improve our work on the four key priorities—**Excellence in Foundational Skills**, **Great Educators in Every School**, **Career Empowerment and Preparation**, and **Success for Every Student**. Approaching district leadership in progressively innovative ways, the district has developed and/or introduced a number of strategic initiatives since 2022. Each initiative has been cultivated to better support the acceleration of learning and improvement of outcomes for all students, is aligned to one or more priorities, and managed by a division of the district office.

Several of these initiatives are highlighted in the pages of this progress report and others will be detailed in the 2025-26 Annual Report; here, the panoramic overview provides a strong visual representation of their collective integration.

ACADEMICS DIVISION

Middle School Landscape Analysis	Teach Knox: Defining & Developing Leadership	Innovative Schools Model: Increasing Choice	Region 5 Strategic Plan	865 Academies

BUSINESS AND TALENT DIVISION

Teach Knox: Recruitment & Retention	Analysis of Internal School Funds & Oversight of School Support Organizations	Enhancing Transparency & Efficiency in Finance & HR

OPERATIONS DIVISION

Safe Schools, Safe Students	Strategic Planning for Customer Service & Continuous Improvement in IT	Enhancing Transparency & Efficiency in Operations	Cohering Systems for Operations Workflow

STUDENT SERVICES DIVISION

Alternative School Analysis	Strategic Plan for Special Education	Systematizing the Work of School Culture for Student Impact	Enhancing Student & Family Supports: Enrollment & Transfers

IMPACT & POLICY

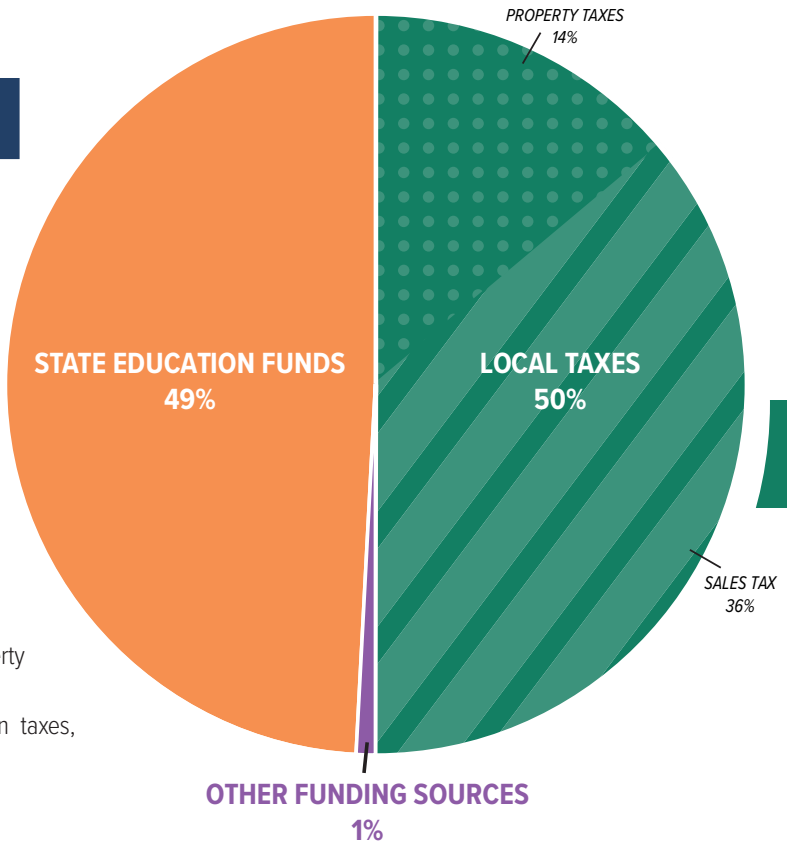
Broadening Communication Districtwide	Increasing Interdivisional Alignment	Developing & Deploying Communication Tools for Principals

GENERAL PURPOSE **BUDGET**

FY2026 REVENUE

$700.5 MILLION

The General Purpose School Fund is used to account for general operations of the district. Roughly 99% of the funding is provided through local tax levies and state education funds.



LOCAL TAXES
$351 MILLION

Sales Tax Revenue: Approximately 72% of Knox County and the City of Knoxville's local option sales tax and 50% of Farragut's portion go to the KCS General Fund.
Property Tax Revenue: Approximately 31% of the Knox County Property Tax rate is allocated to the KCS General Fund.
Other Local Revenue: Includes portions of the wheel tax, litigation taxes, licenses, and permits.

STATE EDUCATION FUNDS
$341.4 MILLION

TISA: Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement funds (the State's public education funding formula) represent the single largest source of revenue for the KCS General Fund. Allocations to K-12 districts include a base funding amount for each student, with additional layers of funding determined largely by economically disadvantaged students and students with unique learning needs.
Other: Miscellaneous other State revenues include mixed-drink taxes, Medicaid reimbursements, and driver education fees.

OTHER FUNDING SOURCES
$8.1 MILLION

Includes revenue for indirect costs received from federal grants, leases and rentals, federal ROTC reimbursements, and other miscellaneous revenue.

FEDERAL FUNDING

The majority of the $40.6 million of federal formula grants awarded to the district for FY26 comes from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA). ESEA grants — also called Title funds — provide additional resources for schools with higher concentrations of economically disadvantaged students, as well as English Language Learners, immigrant students, and those considered neglected. IDEA grants supplement services and support for students with special education needs.

SCHOOL NUTRITION

The district's school nutrition program operates independently from the General Fund and Capital Fund budgets. For FY26, 80% of the approved budget is federally funded through USDA reimbursements that cover free breakfasts and lunches for eligible students and meals served at no cost, regardless of family income, in schools participating in the Community Eligibility Provision. Additional revenue comes from the purchase of breakfast and lunch meals by students and staff across the district.

BUDGET **SUMMARY**

For FY26, the district maintained a future-focused strategy, asking which expenses are necessary, justified, and aligned to priorities. The General Purpose Budget was strategically developed to **maximize impact** for students across 91 schools and more than 508 square miles.

"This is about investing with intention," said Superintendent **Dr. Jon Rysewyk**. "It's not about simply increasing last year's numbers but aligning every dollar to student outcomes and the workforce of tomorrow."

Leaders reviewed FY25 expenditures to guide **strategic reallocations**, ensuring resources remain closest to students. Lower-than-anticipated revenues required reductions totaling 23.5 positions in the district office, preserving school staffing and prioritizing classroom impact. Other reductions, including the elimination of the Night Alternative Program, inspired innovation: students serving suspensions now access daily virtual instruction through the KCS Virtual School, saving approximately $400,000 while enhancing services.

The resulting FY26 General Purpose Budget totals $700.5 million, a 3.1% increase over FY25. Of the $21.2 million growth, $19.7 million is dedicated to staff salaries and benefits, bringing total investment in employees since 2022 to $119.1 million. The budget is **intentional**, **student-focused**, and **results-driven**, designed to prepare every KCS student for success in college, careers, and life beyond graduation.

FY26 BUDGET PRIORITIES

The FY26 budget includes $30.1 million in strategic, priority-aligned investments in addition to the $19.7 million dedicated to employee salaries and benefits.

Great Educators in Every School: The district continues to invest in its most impactful contributors. The FY26 budget allocates **$21.3 million** to support employees through General Scale Step Advancements, which total $5.9 million, and Certified Scale Adjustments, which total $7.4 million, ensuring compensation remains **competitive and market-aligned**.

Success for Every Student: Recognizing that each student has unique needs, the district committed $2.2 million to expand student support. This includes funding 10.5 new student support positions at a cost of $594,000 and providing additional middle school English Language Learner (ELL) materials costing $241,000, supporting **individualized interventions** for students who need them most.

Excellence in Foundational Skills: To **strengthen learning outcomes**, $1 million was invested in high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) totaling $540,000 and preschool supports totaling $194,000, providing the tools necessary to accelerate foundational skills and literacy development.

Career Empowerment and Preparation: Students continue to benefit from investments that enhance future opportunities. The FY26 budget dedicated $460,000 to expand partnerships, including $178,600 for partnership development, and $160,000 to support enlistment pathways, ensuring that all students have guidance and experiences to **prepare for college, careers, and beyond**.

Knox County Schools spends **an average of $12,471 per student** to nurture vibrant learning environments where every child can reach their full potential.

KEY FY26 BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

Every budget is shaped by economic conditions, policy changes, and funding shifts, and the FY26 budget is no exception.

Student enrollment, which dropped from approximately 59,500 in 2022 to 58,000 in 2024, is projected to **decrease by about another 500 students** in FY26, influencing state funding and staffing allocations.

At the same time, **revenue growth is normalizing** after several years of atypical patterns. Total revenue is projected to increase by $21.2 million, with stable growth in Local Option Sales Tax and TISA funding offsetting a 3.9% decrease in property tax allocations, supporting predictable, student-focused resource planning.

Together, these factors ensure the FY26 budget remains strategically aligned, student-focused, and responsive to both current needs and future opportunities.



COMMUNITY **ENGAGEMENT**

ENGAGING OUR COMMUNITY & SHAPING OUR SCHOOLS

At Knox County Schools, meaningful progress is fueled by the voices of our community. Gathering those insights, however, requires more than good intentions. It needs a deliberate system for engagement.

"We've intentionally created multiple pathways for community input, ensuring communication is consistent, two-way, and actionable," said Dr. Jon Rysewyk.

These pathways are thoughtfully designed to capture feedback in a variety of ways. Some are organized around geography, bringing together neighborhoods and local perspectives. Others focus on roles, expertise, or specific areas of interest. Some blend both approaches. This structured framework allows the district to cast a wide net, welcoming diverse viewpoints, while also generating the targeted insights needed to address specific challenges.

By creating intentional spaces for dialogue, KCS turns community engagement into a tool for informed decision-making, helping shape policies, programs, and initiatives that reflect the needs and aspirations of students, families, and local leaders.









LEARN HOW TO GET INVOLVED!

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SCHOOL-LEVEL ENGAGEMENT

School-based organizations and volunteers are essential partners in supporting students and teachers across Knox County. These groups identify specific opportunities for support, mobilize local resources, and foster collaboration that enhances the educational experience for all learners. Their deep commitment and ongoing efforts strengthen schools from the inside out, creating responsive, community-centered environments where students can thrive.

REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Regional Family and Teacher Councils bring together educators, parents, and guardians from each region to offer classroom-level feedback, share community-based insights, and highlight issues affecting local schools and students. By uniting these perspectives, the councils help shape solutions that honor the unique needs and strengths of rural, urban, and suburban communities across the district.

DISTRICTWIDE ENGAGEMENT

Council on Accelerated Student Learning (CASL)

CASL brings together business, community, nonprofit, and postsecondary leaders, along with parents, teachers, and administrators, to help advance the district's four priorities. The council recommends improvements, champions key initiatives, and informs projects designed to accelerate learning across grades. By engaging resident experts and diverse perspectives, CASL ensures that KCS maintains a comprehensive, 360-degree approach to supporting students' academic growth.

Division Councils

Principals play a critical role in shaping school culture while leading curriculum and instruction. Principal Division Councils bring together school leaders to act as thought partners and provide targeted feedback across the district's five flagship divisions: Academics; Business and Talent; Operations; Strategy; and Student Success. This framework ensures district decisions are guided by leaders with firsthand insight into how policies and initiatives impact schools and classrooms.

CEO Champions

The CEO Champions group includes respected business and community leaders who offer candid perspectives on workforce needs and emerging industry expectations. Their input helps ensure that high-school instruction and work-based learning are aligned with the skills students need whether they plan to enroll in college, enlist in service, or enter high-wage employment. By connecting real-world readiness with classroom learning, this group advances the district's commitment to preparing students for success after graduation.

Lunch Break with the Super

Lunch Break with the Super creates a relaxed, conversational opportunity for families, staff, and community members to speak directly with Dr. Jon Rysewyk and senior district leaders. These gatherings encourage open dialogue, strengthen relationships, and build transparency while rotating through restaurants across Knox County—providing an additional way to support and highlight local businesses.

THANK **YOU**

Community engagement is essential to the success of public schools, as it fosters collaboration, strengthens relationships, and enriches the learning environment. When families, businesses, and community members are actively involved, students thrive, and schools become vibrant centers of support and opportunity.

DISTRICT ENGAGEMENT COUNCILS

COUNCIL ON ACCELERATING STUDENT LEARNING

Dr. John Bartlett, Farragut High
Tomma Battle, Region 5 Family Member
Jamea Beach, United Way
Megan Blevins, Brickey-McCloud Elementary
Tyler Boldin, Big Brother Big Sisters of East Tennessee
Claudia Caballero, Centro-Hispano
Dr. David Cihak, University of Tennessee, Knoxville - College of Education, Health, & Human Sciences
Jay Cobble, Providence Commercial Real Estate
Sharon Davis, 4-H
Jennifer Davis, Big Brother Big Sisters of East Tennessee Brother& Big Brother Big Sisters of East Tennessee Sisters
Krissy Delejandro, tnAchieves
Steve Diggs, Emerald Youth
Paula Hancock, KCEA
Lori Humphreys, YMCA
Matt Johnson, Johnson University
Desiree Jones, Cedar Bluff Middle
Vincent Jones, Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church
Haley Kidd, Carter Middle
Matt Kittrell, CGI
Richard Lawson, Region 4 Family Member
Leidzina Leana Leiteo-Duff, Vine Middle Magnet
Jonathan Mayfield, Home Federal
Jeff McMurray, Halls High
John McNeely, The McNeely Group
John Meade, Midwest Railcar
Janet Morgan, Region 1 Family Member
Nancy Nevander, Trane Energy
Chris Parrott, FirstBank
Dr. Sharon Roberts, SCORE
Grant Rosenberg, City of Knoxville
Matt Ryerson, YMCA
Ashlee Smethers, Region 2 Family Member
Wesley Stone, Stone Law Firm
Chase Valentine, Pond Gap Elementary
Dr. Marianne Wanamaker, University of Tennessee, Knoxville - Baker Center
Caleb Whitworth, Karns High
Tonya Williams, Region 3 Family Member

SPECIAL EDUCATION PARENT EMPOWERMENT COUNCIL

Tim Buss
Will Edwards
Tania Garcia
Betsy Gill
Darlene Lampman
Codou Samba
Quannaha Washington

SPECIAL EDUCATION COUNCIL

Kevin Dubose
Cherylynn Delisle
Will Edwards
Courtney Harrell
Cortney Piper

CEO CHAMPIONS

Gabe Bolas, Knoxville Utilities Board
Kelli Chaney, Tennessee College of Applied Technology
Keith Gray, UT Medical Center – UT Medical Center
Betsy Henderson, Knox County Board of Education
Lt Colonel Travers Hurst, 134th Air Refueling Wing
Glenn Jacobs, Knox County
Parinda Khatri, Cherokee Health Systems
Indya Kincannon, City of Knoxville
Matthew Kittrell, CGI
Charles Lomax, Knoxville Area Urban League
Bart McFadden, Boys & Girls Clubs of the Tennessee Valley
Bridgett McMahan, BESCO
Lisa New, Zoo Knoxville
Mike Odom, Knoxville Chamber of Commerce
Donde Plowman, University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Matt Ryerson, United Way of Greater Knoxville
Rob Stivers, Regions Bank
Wes Stowers, Stowers Machinery Corporation
Mike Taylor, Knox Education Foundation
Jim VanderSteeg, Covenant Health
Erin Wakefield, The Wakefield Corporation
Anthony Wise, Pellissippi State Community College

865 ACADEMIES STEERING COMMITTEE

Mohamad Abbas, Denark Construction
Tanisha Baker, Knoxville Utilities Board
Gregg Bostick, Tennessee Small Business Development Center
Rev. Dr. John Butler, Knox County Board of Education
Lauren Butler, DeRoyal
Windy Clayton, Knox Education Foundation
Autumn Derrick, University of Tennessee Center for Industrial Services
Courtney Durrett, Knox County Commission
John Ewart, AGC
Nick Gill, Tennessee College of Applied Technology
Carly Hammonds, Knox Area Urban League
Kacy Helton, Carter High
Dr. Polly Johnson, Boys & Girls Clubs of the Tennessee Valley
Dr. Larry Kessler, Boyd Center for Business & Economic Research
Ellie Kittrell, United Way of Greater Knoxville
Spencer Long, Halls High
Lauren Longmire, Knoxville Chamber
Jackie McDonald, tnAchieves
Lori Ortega, CGI
Ed Rottman, Chroma Energy Group
Josh Sanderson, Smithbilt Homes
Jennifer Searle, City of Knoxville
Rhonda Smithson, Knox County
Dr. Patty Weaver, Pellissippi State Community College
Abbey Weaver, Zoo Knoxville
Mark Wittschen, Regions Bank

DIVISION COUNCILS

ACADEMICS

Jessica Doran, Sterchi Elementary
Brent Glenn, Karns Middle
Tara Howell-Spikes, Fair Garden Family Center
Charlene Lewis, Career Magnet Academy
Tanna Nicely, South Knoxville Elementary
Rocky Riley, Bonny Kate Elementary
Debbie Sayers, Bearden High

BUSINESS & TALENT

Dr. John Bartlett, Farragut High
Ashley Booher, Cedar Bluff Elementary
Dr. Brad Carr, South-Doyle High
Robin Curry, Vine Middle Magnet
Brent Glenn, Karns Middle
David Guyer, Belle Morris Elementary
Spencer Long, Halls High
Stephanie Prince, Adrian Burnett Elementary
Lana Shelton-Lowe, Dogwood Elementary
Shay Siler, Sequoyah Elementary

OPERATIONS

Daniel Champion, Karns Elementary
Stephanie Prince, Adrian Burnett Elementary
Rocky Riley, Bonny Kate Elementary
Chad Smith, Powell High
Cory Smith, K.A.E.C.
Jason Webster, Gibbs High
Lynn White, Farragut Primary

STRATEGY

Jimm Allen, L&N STEM Academy
Laicee Hatfield, Karns High
Desiree Jones, Cedar Bluff Middle
Katie Lutton, Holson Middle
Nathan Lynn, Halls Elementary
Anthony Norris, South-Doyle Middle
Suzanne Parham, Farragut Intermediate
Trina Spista, Amherst Elementary

STUDENT SUCCESS

Casey Cutter, Blue Grass Elementary
David Guyer, Belle Morris Elementary
Susan Hutton, Brickey-McCloud Elementary
Kristen Jackson, West Hills Elementary
Jamey Romig, Halls Elementary
Danielle Rutig, Central High
Jessica Schaefer Ruiz, Ford Sanders

CHECK OUT THE COUNCILS & COMMITTEES

KNOXSCHOOLS.ORG/ENGAGEMENT

REGIONAL FAMILY & TEACHER COUNCILS

REGION 1

Lacy Adorante, Blue Grass Elementary
Suzanne Bond, Sequoyah Elementary
Melissa Brown, West Hills Elementary
Emily Carroll, Sequoyah Elementary
Keely Chamberlain, Farragut High
Karen Claussen-Bishop, Bearden Middle
Ashley Coleman, Pond Gap Elementary
Allison Gill, Bearden Middle
Meredith Ginn, Farragut Primary
Heath Grubb, Blue Grass Elementary
Candace Gunter, West Valley Middle
Kasheila Hayles, Pond Gap Elementary
Megan Hedge, Farragut High
Kristin Hobbs, Farragut Intermediate
Audrey Houser, Bearden Elementary
Danielle Humphrey, A. L. Lotts Elementary
Paula Jones, Bearden Elementary
David Krebs, West High
Lindsay Lowrey, Farragut Primary
Courtney Maynard, Northshore Elementary
Shelley Morris, Rocky Hill Elementary
Evelyn Napier, West View Elementary
Amy Olson, Farragut Middle
Joe Peeden, Rocky Hill Elementary
Doneisha Ramsey, Bearden High
Emma Rester, Farragut Middle
Joselyne Rivera-Colon, West View Elementary
Roshawnna Roberts, West High
Jennifer Roche, Northshore Elementary
Samantha Smith, Farragut Intermediate
Autumn Suranofsky, Bearden High
Coral Turner, West Hills Elementary
Kaitlyn Wade, A. L. Lotts Elementary
Antoinette Williams, West Valley Middle

REGION 2

Michelle Amazeem, Karns High
Kristie Blevins, Northwest Middle
Aly Carpenter, Northwest Middle
Laura Crettol, Cedar Bluff Preschool
April Mariah Danzey, Mill Creek Elementary
Jenna Darnbush, Karns Preschool
Lynn Davis, Cedar Bluff Middle
Micah Deaver, Karns Preschool
Kimberly England, Powell Elementary
Hunter Fendley, Karns High
Kailynn Health, Norwood Elementary
Vicky Hughes, Amherst Elementary
Laurel Humphreys, Cedar Bluff Elementary
Brandy Jerrell, Hardin Valley Elementary
Brandy Jerrell, Hardin Valley Middle
Maya Johnson, Cedar Bluff Elementary
Chris Keim, Hardin Valley Acadamy
Kendall Kobler, Hardin Valley Middle
Kristin Lane-Burrows, West Haven Elementary
Brian Lanius, Powell High
Shelby Lanpheare, Karns Elementary
Julie Leathers, Powell Elementary
Rebecca Loveday, Hardin Valley Elementary
Dana Martin, Cedar Bluff Middle
William Mitchell, West Haven Elementary
Leila Myers, Norwood Elementary
Katoura Patterson, Mill Creek Elementary
Sarah Patton, Hardin Valley Acadamy
Joe Peeden, Cedar Bluff Preschool
Alex Roushdi, Amherst Elementary
Phillip Sherman, Karns Middle
Samantha Singh, Pleasant Ridge Elementary
Ashlee Smethers, Ball Camp Elementary
Brandon Stubbs, Karns Elementary
Gail Todd, Ball Camp Elementary
Daria Turner, Pleasant Ridge Elementary
Mary Beth Unthank, Karns Middle
Becky Vanderlan, Powell Middle
Katelyn White, Powell High

REGION 3

Margie Abbot-Weaver, Bonny Kate Elementary
Moneek Anderson, At Large
Thea Baker, New Hopewell Elementary
Bailey Beam, Gap Creek Elementary
Jennifer Bowes, South Knoxville Elementary
Casey Brooks, Carter High
Ashley Caraco, Dogwood Elementary
Erika Chandler, At Large
Amy Chester, New Hopewell Elementary
Michael Childers, Career Magnet Academy
Emily Clabough, Career Magnet Academy
Kelly Deal, Kelley Volunteer Academy
Heather Deyton, Carter Middle
Shannon Edwards, Mount Olive Elementary
Kimberly Egan, Kelley Volunteer Academy
Carrie Grey, Mooreland Heights Elementary
Leslie Griffith, South Knoxville Elementary
Sisse Hadjiharalambous, L&N STEM Academy
Annie Henry, Carter Elementary
Denise Hood, South-Doyle High
Julie Humphress, South-Doyle Middle
Jason McLemore, South-Doyle Middle
Kiely Morreo, Mooreland Heights Elementary
Megan Newpher, Bonny Kate Elementary
Stacy Palado, Carter Middle
Jennikae Reid, Gap Creek Elementary
Susan Reynolds, South-Doyle High
Lisa Ridenour, At Large
Hannah Robinson, Sunnyview Primary
Anna Roeder, Carter High
Lori Shanks, Mount Olive Elementary
Jesselyn Smith, Chilhowee Intermediate
Kelly Villano, East Knox County Elementary
Jaime Watkins, East Knox County Elementary
Anne Williamson, Sunnyview Primary
Terry Woodby, Carter Elementary
Heather Wooliver, Dogwood Elementary

REGION 4

Cindy Akins, Gibbs Elementary
Shanda Anderson, Gibbs Middle
Kathryn Branam, Fountain City Elementary
Jim Burge, At Large
Mary Beth Burns, Ridgedale
Brittany Carstens, Copper Ridge Elementary
Zachary Clause, Ritta Elementary
Melissa Cox, Fountain City Elementary
Jennifer Crawford, Central High
Rachel Crigger, Gresham Middle
Kayla Daugherty, Gibbs Elementary
Danielle Davis, Central High
Lisa Deal, Brickey-McCloud Elementary
Kelly Deal, Ridgedale
Madi Drumright, Inskip Elementary
Sherrie Dudley, Corryton Elementary
Melissa Gibson, Adrian Burnett Elementary
Amy Giles, Halls Middle
Melissa Graves, Gibbs High
Julianna Hasche-Dooley, Halls Middle
Kim Hawkins, At Large
Dacia Humphrey, Gibbs Middle
Ashley Ivnes, Gresham Middle
Sarah Kee, Fort Sanders
Laura Kelley, Corryton Elementary
Bailey Letner, Halls Elementary
Lindsey Lindwall, Ritta Elementary
Heather McFall, Shannondale Elementary
Stephanie Meyer, Richard Yoakley
Niki Miller, Gibbs High
Shirley Moux, Adrian Burnett Elementary
Deborah Neal, Copper Ridge Elementary
Allison Oaks, At Large
Jessica Osborne, Shannondale Elementary
Brooke Partin, Halls High
Mac Pickle, K.A.E.C.
Heather Presley, Sterchi Elementary
Kenny Pryor, Inskip Elementary
Roshawna Roberts, Sterchi Elementary
Kailey Ryan, Halls High
Kelley Schmied, Fort Sanders
Laurie Smith, Brickey-McCloud Elementary
Jennifer Williams, At Large
Megan Witt, Halls Elementary

REGION 5

Adilene Arevalo, Whittle Springs Middle
Valerie Bachmann, Holston Middle
Julianne Brandt, Vine Middle Magnet
Liliana Burbano, At Large
Erica Burse, Austin-East Magnet High
Olivia Cates, Belle Morris Elementary
Megan Haselschewerdt, Green Magnet Academy
Paris Hoover, Fulton High
Danielle Humphrey, Whittle Springs Middle
Mackenzie Kinney, Lonsdale Elementary
Sara MacFarlane, Christenberry Elementary
Sarah McKinnon, Spring Hill Elementary
Davie McLaughlin, Maynard
Tiffany Milton, Holston Middle
Jennifer Reddell, At Large
Jourdan Richardson-Elder, At Large
Shawn Richmond-Scarbrough, At Large
Anna Schnuck, Christenberry Elementary
Anitra Selmon, Maynard Elementary
Bret Van Hoy, Belle Morris Elementary
Tiara Lady Wilson, Austin-East Magnet High
Brittney Womack, At Large

COMMUNITY **PARTNERS**

Knox County Schools is honored to collaborate with these exceptional organizations, whose steadfast dedication to students plays a vital role in building brighter futures and a stronger community.

Partners in Education Foundation
KCS | KNOX COUNTY SCHOOLS

The Partners in Education Foundation (PIE) connects community leaders and businesses with individual schools and the district. Through these partnerships, PIE expands opportunities for students and invites the community to play an active role in supporting learning, strengthening schools, and shaping the future of Knox County.



KNOX education FOUNDATION

The Knox Education Foundation (KEF) advances public education by investing in programs, partnerships, and initiatives that improve outcomes for all students. As the funding and convening partner of the 865 Academies, KEF helped launch the initiative and continues connecting community partners with schools to strengthen real-world learning opportunities.





UNITED WAY
Greater Knoxville

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Community Schools are a partnership between Knox County Schools, United Way, and local organizations that positions schools as hubs for coordinated resources and support. By focusing on neighborhood health, safety, and student achievement, the initiative strengthens learning and helps build thriving communities with strong schools at the center.



KNOXVILLE
CHAMBER

As the economic development organization for Knox County and the City of Knoxville, the Knoxville Chamber promotes regional growth. By connecting the business community with the goals of the 865 Academies, the Chamber helps ensure students develop high-demand career skills and are prepared to contribute to the region's future workforce.

2024-2025
BOARD OF EDUCATION

Rev. Dr. John Butler	DISTRICT 1
Anne Templeton	DISTRICT 2
Patricia Fontenot-Ridley	DISTRICT 3
Katherine Bike	DISTRICT 4
Lauren Morgan	DISTRICT 5
Betsy Henderson	DISTRICT 6, CHAIR
Steve Triplett	DISTRICT 7, VICE CHAIR
Travis Wright	DISTRICT 8
Kristi Kristy	DISTRICT 9
Sophia Elkins	STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE

MISSION

Prepare students for life by providing a high-quality education that is accessible, meaningful, and future-focused.

VISION

Be the cornerstone of education in Knox County, empowering students to grow their talents, strengths, and skills to build a stronger community.



knoxschools.org/board


Roadrunners
2
FLAGS


Student
865
ACADEMIES
Ambassador


CLASS







CONNECT with KCS

knoxschools.org

400 W. Summit Hill Drive
Knoxville, TN 37902

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