Pittsburgh Public Schools Goal Monitoring Report: 3rd grade Mathematics

Introduction and Goal

This report provides the first formal update for the 2025–2026 school year on Pittsburgh Public Schools' (PPS) progress toward improving third-grade mathematics proficiency. In alignment with the Board's Student Outcomes Focused Governance model, this report communicates current student performance, examines emerging trends, and outlines the District's strategic response through a continuous improvement framework.

Third grade represents a critical juncture in students' mathematical development. During this year, students transition from foundational number sense to more complex applications, including solving real-world and mathematical problems involving multiplication, division, fractions, and multi-step reasoning. Mastery of these concepts is essential, as students who exit third grade without a solid foundation in mathematical reasoning are more likely to experience difficulty as content becomes increasingly abstract in the upper grades.

At the conclusion of the 2020–2021 school year, 21.2% of PPS third-grade students scored proficient or above in mathematics. This outcome established the District's five-year goal of reaching 39.4% proficiency by 2027. For the 2024–2025 school year, an interim target of 33.4% proficiency was established, with a subsequent benchmark of 36.4% proficiency by the end of the 2025–2026 school year. SEE ATTACHMENT A

The Data

The mid-year assessment data for third grade Mathematics provides a comprehensive and urgent picture of student performance across the District. Two primary assessments—the PSSA, and the Classroom Diagnostic Tools (CDT), offer insight into grade-level proficiency and mathematical development. Collectively, these data sources highlight both areas of improvement and significant gaps that must be addressed through coherent, equity-driven instructional strategies.

District-Level PSSA Performance

District-level PSSA data indicate steady improvement in third-grade mathematics proficiency since the baseline year. Results from the 2024–2025 school year show that 40.7% of third-grade students scored proficient or advanced on the PSSA and PASA, reflecting an increase from the prior year and surpassing the District's interim target of 33.4% proficiency. These outcomes suggest that recent instructional and professional learning investments are contributing to measurable gains in student performance. Despite this progress, achievement remains uneven across schools: only 24% of PPS schools

exceeded the state average, and 38% did not meet the District's interim proficiency benchmark, highlighting the need for greater consistency in implementation and instructional impact. SEE ATTACHMENT B

Subgroup analysis reveals persistent disparities. While African American students and English Learners demonstrated notable proficiency gains (22% to 24%, and 26.3% to 36.1% respectively), significant gaps remain between African American and White students (24% vs 66.1%), as well as for students with disabilities (20.8%) and economically disadvantaged students (28.7%) SEE ATTACHMENT C. These patterns underscore the need to strengthen equitable access to high-quality Tier 1 instruction while ensuring targeted support for students requiring additional assistance.

Classroom Diagnostic Tool (CDT) Data

The Classroom Diagnostic Tool (CDT) is a state-provided, computer-adaptive assessment developed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The CDT assessment is a formative, diagnostic instrument administered three times per year to support instructional decision-making. It is intentionally designed to identify student strengths, skill gaps, and readiness for upcoming grade-level content rather than to predict performance on summative assessments such as the PSSA. As a result, CDT proficiency rates should not be interpreted as forecasts of PSSA outcomes. Instead, CDT data provide valuable insight into student learning trajectories and growth over time, helping educators understand where students are entering the year, monitor progress throughout instruction, and adjust teaching and supports to improve end-of-year outcomes.

Interpreting Beginning-of-Year CDT Results

At the beginning of the school year, many students scored in the Red ranges for several expected and instructional reasons:

- **Instructional Timing:** The CDT is administered early in the year, before students have received instruction on current grade-level standards. Scores often reflect learning at the end of the previous grade rather than readiness for new content.
- **Skill Retention:** Some students experience learning loss over the summer months, which can temporarily depress early diagnostic scores.
- **Developmental Progress:** Beginning-of-year assessments capture a snapshot in time; students may not yet demonstrate mastery of skills that typically develop with focused instruction and sustained practice.

- **Diagnostic Purpose:** The CDT intentionally adapts to each student's performance level to pinpoint learning needs. Lower scores do not indicate failure; rather, they identify where targeted instructional support is most needed to promote growth.

System-Level Implications

At the start of the 2025–2026 school year, more than 90% of PPS third-grade students fell within the red range on the CDT. This result should not be interpreted as a deficit in student ability. Instead, it signals a system-wide instructional priority: the need to strengthen and elevate Tier 1 core instruction across all classrooms. The data reinforce the importance of ensuring that all students have consistent access to rigorous, high-quality, grade-level mathematics instruction aligned to the core curriculum.

Viewed appropriately, CDT data function as a pre-instruction diagnostic that allows the District to move beyond generalizations and deploy resources with precision. These results informed the design of core instruction, the implementation of the MTSS framework, and the targeting of professional learning and coaching supports to the areas of greatest need.

CDT Comparisons and Subgroup Trends (Beginning of Year Analysis)

Comparison of beginning-of-year CDT data from 2024–2025 to 2025–2026 revealed modest but meaningful improvements in early readiness indicators:

- Overall, the percentage of third-grade students identified as likely Proficient or Advanced during the Fall window increased from 2.0% to 2.8%, representing a 0.8% point increase in students entering the year already demonstrating grade-level readiness.
- Black third-grade students decreased from 0.7% to 0.5% likely Proficient or Advanced.
- White third-grade students increased from 4.8% to 7.1% likely Proficient or Advanced.
- Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) increased from 0.9% to 1.0% likely Proficient or Advanced.
- English Learners increased from 0% to 0.5% likely Proficient or Advanced.
- Economically disadvantaged students increased from 0.1% to 0.6% likely Proficient or Advanced.

When comparing baseline CDT Data from the prior year to this year, the upward trends across nearly all subgroups suggest that more students are entering third grade with

stronger foundational skills than in the prior year. These early gains provide an important opportunity to accelerate learning through sustained, high-quality instruction and equitable access to supports. SEE ATTACHMENT D

CDT Comparisons and Subgroup Trends (Second Administration)

The second administration 3rd-grade CDT data shows overall improvement in student performance from the Fall to the Winter assessment window. The percentage of students performing at or above grade level increased from 6.5% in the Fall (1st administration of the CDT) to 13.1% in the Winter (3rd administration of the CDT), reflecting a 6.6-percentage point gain. Black students, English Language Learners, and Economically Disadvantaged students showed improvement, with increases of 3.2, 2.1, and 2.9 percentage points, respectively, in students performing at or above grade level. White students demonstrated the highest growth, with a 13.6 percentage point increase in students performing at or above grade level. Students with IEPs also seen a 3-percentage point gain in the number of students performing at or above grade level. Despite these improvements, a significant number of students remain in the "Red Range," particularly among Black (95.1%), IEP (94.4%), and ELL (96.8%) students SEE ATTACHMENT E.

This suggests that while progress is being made, continued focus on providing quality, engaging Tier 1 instruction is necessary to create conditions for all students to thrive.

Within the District's continuous improvement framework, CDT data are used alongside classroom evidence, coaching data, and summative outcomes to monitor implementation effectiveness and equity. By grounding instructional decisions in diagnostic evidence while maintaining high expectations for student growth, PPS ensures that CDT data serve as a tool for improvement rather than a predictor of limitation.

Interpretation

Taken together, the PSSA and CDT data present a coherent picture of both progress and urgency. Summative PSSA outcomes demonstrate that PPS has made meaningful gains and exceeded interim targets, while diagnostic CDT data highlight the instructional work still required to ensure that all students consistently access and master grade-level mathematics content. These data reinforce that improved outcomes are not achieved through isolated interventions, but through sustained, high-quality Tier 1 core instruction that reaches every classroom and every learner, every day.

Importantly, the data call for unwavering commitment to high expectations for all students, with particular attention to African American students, English Learners, and students receiving special education services. Persistent gaps in proficiency and readiness are not indicators of student potential, but signals that instructional practices, supports, and

access to grade-level content must be strengthened and made more equitable. Supporting these students requires intentional acceleration strategies, culturally responsive instruction, consistent use of language supports, and inclusive practices that prioritize access over modification.

By grounding instructional decisions in both diagnostic and summative data, PPS affirms its responsibility to ensure that every student—regardless of race, language status, or disability—receives rigorous, grade-level mathematics instruction paired with the necessary supports to succeed. This interpretation underscores the District's focus on equity, coherence, and collective accountability as essential drivers of continued improvement.

Continuous Improvement Approach (PDCA)

The District utilizes continuous improvement cycles grounded in the Plan–Do–Check–Act (PDCA) methodology to refine strategies and remain responsive to evolving data. This iterative approach ensures that implementation is evidence-based, allowing for real-time adjustments based on the successes and challenges identified during mid-year analyses.

Strategic Response and Implementation Progress for 2024–2025

In January 2025, the District prioritized three foundational strategies to drive third-grade mathematics proficiency: developing positive math identities, delivering curriculum-based professional learning, and integrating Math Language Routines (MLRs). By maintaining this PDCA lens throughout the year, the District has sustained rigorous progress monitoring and refined instructional supports, which directly informs the 2025–2026 goal-monitoring plan. This forward-looking approach scales previous efforts by providing deeper teacher coaching and launching comprehensive assessment strategies that empower educators to leverage formative data to bridge learning gaps.

1. Developing Positive Math Identity

The core of this work began with the development of positive math identities, where the District established universal math norms and integrated identity-building mini-lessons to help students see themselves as capable mathematicians. Professional learning sessions modeled strategies to foster inclusive classroom communities where students feel safe to take risks, a practice that remains a pillar of the current strategy. In the transition to the 2025–2026 school year, these strategies have moved from a phase of "introduction" to one of "consistent daily practice." They are now more deeply woven into the fabric of coaching cycles and curriculum-based professional learning, ensuring that a culture of mathematical belonging is sustained across all classrooms.

2. Curriculum-Based Professional Learning

Simultaneously, curriculum-based professional learning has evolved from the initial "Year 1" focus on unpacking units and understanding the new problem-based structure. Last year, the District also established a vital measurement process through "math walks" to track implementation progress in real-time. As the District enters Year 2, the focus has shifted from initial experimentation to the refinement and strengthening of practice. Current efforts are specifically tailored to supporting teachers new to the grade level while helping veteran educators adapt the curriculum to meet diverse student needs. Furthermore, the District is intensifying supports for building leaders, equipping them with the expertise necessary to provide high-level instructional oversight and mastery within their respective buildings.

3. Math Language Routines

Finally, the introduction of eight specific Math Language Routines has provided a framework for students to navigate contextual math problems and articulate their reasoning effectively. Initially supported by visual aids and facilitation guides, these routines remain a central focus of ongoing professional development and coaching. This year, the work centers on helping teachers refine their facilitation and experiment with sophisticated ways to adapt these routines to their specific classroom dynamics. By integrating these routines with identity-building and curriculum mastery, the District is ensuring a holistic and adaptive approach to mathematics instruction that evolves alongside the needs of its students.

Identified Challenges

Despite our gains, implementation challenges emerged, including instructional overload from multiple concurrent initiatives, high coaching caseloads, and inconsistent accountability structures across schools. Leaders also identified a need for additional professional learning to support sustained math improvement efforts.

Evidence and Plan for 2025–2026

As the District continues to analyze PSSA and mid-year performance data, the Superintendent and Academic Cabinet are simultaneously planning for a more comprehensive instructional strategy for the 2025–2026 school year. This forward-looking approach is designed to strengthen instructional practice, improve school-family communication, and ensure sustainable implementation of district mathematics priorities.

1. Curriculum-Based Professional Learning

This strategy is designed to strengthen teacher practice through sustained, curriculum-based professional learning focused on effective implementation of the District’s core

math curriculum. By continuing a multi-year professional learning model and embedding key instructional priorities—such as positive student math identity and the consistent use of Math Language Routines—the District aims to support meaningful instructional improvement rather than short-term or superficial change. A targeted emphasis on kindergarten through grade three reflects the critical importance of early math foundations for third-grade achievement.

Key Components

- Targeted, job-embedded coaching will continue to support K–3 educators in refining instructional practices aligned to the problem-based math curriculum.
- District-wide professional learning will include required full-day sessions to ensure consistent messaging and optional half-day sessions that allow for differentiation and focused study of specific topics.
- Enhanced Leadership Support: School leaders will receive additional support through Leadership Learning Institutes, Network sessions, and math-specific professional learning for new administrators, ensuring principals and assistant principals are prepared to effectively supervise instruction and lead high-quality math programs.

Rationale: This approach reflects research indicating that sustained, content-specific professional development embedded within curriculum implementation is the most effective way to improve teaching and learning. As the District enters its second year of implementing a new problem-based math curriculum, ongoing support remains essential for educators to master grade-level standards, instructional routines, and complex tasks. Feedback from math walks and teachers continues to highlight the need for focused implementation support. Attention to math identity and language routines also addresses barriers that can limit student access to rigorous content, supporting more equitable learning opportunities. Investment in leadership capacity further ensures fidelity and long-term sustainability.

2. Strengthening Family Partnerships for Math Support

This strategy focuses on strengthening the connection between classroom instruction and home support by providing families with clear, accessible information about how mathematics is taught and how they can support learning at home. The goal is to position families as partners in their children's math education and to foster positive attitudes toward mathematics beyond the classroom.

Key Components

- Dedicated Family-Facing Curriculum Resource: The District will develop a dedicated, family-facing online resource that outlines the third-grade math curriculum, including unit overviews, key standards, instructional strategies, and practical suggestions for home support.
- School-Based Family Math Nights: Schools will host Family Math Nights that offer interactive, hands-on opportunities for students and families to engage in math activities together and experience instructional strategies in action.
- Systematic Family Communication: The District will ensure consistent, timely communication with families through the distribution of unit-specific family letters that preview upcoming content and suggest aligned activities.

Rationale: Research consistently shows that strong home–school partnerships contribute to improved student outcomes. When families understand instructional approaches—particularly the use of visual models and multiple strategies—they are better equipped to provide consistent support at home. This alignment reduces confusion and math anxiety for students and caregivers alike, while Family Math Nights help shift perceptions of mathematics toward a more positive, collaborative experience.

3. Implementing High-Leverage, Equitable Assessment Practices

This strategy centers on using assessment as a tool to inform instruction and support student learning, rather than as a measure of failure. The District will prioritize equitable, high-leverage assessment practices that promote consistency, inclusivity, and meaningful use of data.

Key Components

- Standardized, Technology-Enhanced Unit Assessments: All students will participate in standardized, online end-of-unit assessments to ensure regular exposure to technology-enhanced items and written responses that mirror state assessment formats.
- Formalized Assessment Guidance and Communication: The District will provide clear, written guidance outlining the purpose and appropriate use of all required assessments, including diagnostic, formative, unit, and interim measures. This guidance will emphasize maintaining high expectations for all students by prioritizing accommodations over modifications.
- Data-Driven Acceleration over Remediation: Professional learning will focus on strengthening teachers' ability to analyze formative data and implement timely

instructional supports that emphasize acceleration, ensuring students remain engaged with grade-level content.

Rationale: These practices are designed to reduce test-day anxiety, promote consistency across schools, and ensure assessment data are used to guide instruction rather than for compliance alone. Emphasizing acceleration over remediation supports long-term student success by addressing learning needs within the context of grade-level standards and preventing cumulative gaps.

Measuring Impact and Ensuring Accountability

The District will monitor the implementation and impact of these strategies using multiple measures to ensure transparency and continuous improvement. Evidence will include participation in coaching and professional learning, observations of instructional practice, leadership engagement data, family participation and communication metrics, and assessment implementation trends. Collectively, these measures will allow the District to track progress, ensure fidelity of implementation, and make informed adjustments in support of improved instructional quality and student outcomes.

Conclusion

This mid-year Goal Monitoring Report presents a clear and comprehensive assessment of third-grade mathematics performance across Pittsburgh Public Schools, using PSSA and CDT data to identify progress, trends, and areas requiring focused attention. The District has demonstrated meaningful advancement toward improving third-grade mathematics outcomes, surpassing interim targets and strengthening instructional practices across classrooms. However, persistent equity gaps and variability in implementation underscore the need for continued attention, accountability, and strategic refinement.

Through sustained investment in high-quality, curriculum-aligned professional learning, equitable assessment practices, and strong family partnerships, Pittsburgh Public Schools is well positioned to build on recent gains and accelerate progress toward exceeding its long-term goal of 39.4% proficiency by 2027. The District remains committed to transparent data use, timely responses to identified gaps, and supporting educators in delivering rigorous, high-quality instruction that ensures equitable outcomes for all students.