



Johnston County Public Schools

P.O. Box 1336, Smithfield, NC 27577
919-934-6031

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

09/03/2026

CONTACT:

Richard L. Carr
Chief of Communications and Family Engagement
919-934-2016 x 1002
richardcarr@johnston.k12.nc.us

JCPS Reaches Historic High in Academic Performance, Celebrates Significant Gains Across District

SMITHFIELD, NC - Johnston County Public Schools (JCPS) has released its 2025-2026 school year performance data, as reported by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), noting that the district has reached a historic high in academic performance and is currently ranked 29th out of the 115 NC public school units. The district's overall performance composite increased to 61.0%, its highest level in the current performance model, continuing a consistent upward trajectory since 2022 and remaining above the overall state average in the percentage of students demonstrating grade-level proficiency.

Superintendent Dr. David Pearce credited the district's students, educators, staff, families, and community for the continued progress, noting that the results reflect the collective efforts of the entire JCPS family.

"The progress we are seeing across Johnston County Public Schools is the result of students and staff working together with a clear focus on achievement and academic growth," stated Dr. Pearce. "We are encouraged by these results, but we also recognize that our work is far from finished. Our goal is to ensure that every student is prepared to be college, career, and life-ready, and we will continue moving forward together to make that vision a reality."

Districtwide Academic Progress

The district's current ranking represents a significant accomplishment and reflects the continued improvement in academic achievement. JCPS has steadily advanced in statewide rankings, moving from 83rd in 2019 to 29th in 2026.

JCPS saw significant gains across multiple areas, particularly in reading, mathematics, science, and high school coursework. Grade-level proficiency, defined as students earning a Level 3, 4, or 5 on End-of-Grade and End-of-Course assessments, increased 3.8 percentage points from 57.2% in 2025 to 61.0% in 2026.

Performance was strong across JCPS as ninety-one percent of its schools earned a letter grade of A, B, or C, compared to 76.6% of schools statewide. The total combined number of schools that met and/or exceeded growth was 36, which remained the same total from the previous year. This measurement equates to 73.5% of JCPS schools that met or exceeded growth expectations as measured by EVAAS, aligning with the growth demonstrated at the state level. Four schools ranked among the top 20% of schools statewide for academic growth.

The percentage of students achieving College and Career Ready (CCR) proficiency also increased by 3.6 percentage points to 37.3%, narrowing the gap between JCPS and the state CCR rate of 37.5%. The increase in Level 4 and 5 performance demonstrates that a continued focus on rigorous, grade-level instruction is supporting growth not only in overall proficiency but also in students' readiness to meet more advanced academic expectations.

Elementary and middle school grade spans each demonstrated a 3 percentage point increase in overall proficiency. JCPS remained above state proficiency averages in Grades 3-8 Reading and Math, as well as Grade 5 and Grade 8 Science.

High school proficiency rates improved by 7 percentage points, with Math I exceeding the state proficiency rate and Math 3 performing at the state average. The largest improvement at the high school level was demonstrated in Biology, with an 11-point increase in proficiency.

"Seeing a seven-point increase in high school proficiency is a strong indicator of the progress our students and educators are making," said Kristy Stephenson, Assistant Superintendent of Accountability and School Performance. "We are especially encouraged to see Math I students outperforming the state proficiency rate and Math 3 performing at the state average, and the 11-point increase in Biology."

Graduation rates also continue to improve, with JCPS reaching 92.6%, compared to the state rate of 88.8%.

One of JCPS's strategic priorities is to equip every student to be college, career, and life-ready. Progress toward this priority is demonstrated not only through End-of-Grade and End-of-Course assessment results, but also through ACT WorkKeys and ACT performance. WorkKeys measures students' career readiness, while the ACT serves as an indicator of college readiness. In 2026, the combined percentage of students earning a Silver certificate or higher on WorkKeys or achieving an ACT composite score of at least 17 increased to 62.0%.

The achievements showcase the district's ability to respond to the challenges associated with the implementation of new standards and continue moving student achievement forward.

School Spotlights

As previously noted, many JCPS schools have shown tremendous growth. While each of these schools has achieved noteworthy success, seven schools are highlighted below:

West View Elementary School

West View Elementary School was recognized as the Most Improved Elementary School, improving its overall performance composite by 10 percentage points. The school saw significant gains in reading (+10.5), math (+7.8), and science (+15.1), meeting the district's "Strive for Five" goal across all areas.

West View also improved its school performance grade from 72 to 76, maintaining a "B" while achieving the highest numeric grade in the school's history. The achievement portion of the school performance grade increased by 8.9 points, highlighting significant progress in student achievement.

Benson Middle School

Benson Middle School was recognized as the Most Improved Middle School, improving its overall performance composite by 8.9 percentage points. The school demonstrated significant gains in reading (+8.7), math (+6.4), and science (+18.7), meeting "Strive for Five" expectations across all areas.

Benson Middle improved its school performance grade from 55 to 60, maintaining a "C" while achieving the highest numeric grade in the school's history. The achievement portion of the school performance grade also increased by 8.4 points.

West Johnston High School

West Johnston High School was recognized as the Most Improved High School, improving its overall performance composite by 9.3 percentage points. The school experienced significant gains in Math I (+8.6), Math 3 (+11.7), Biology (+16.3), and English II (+2).

While maintaining its "C" designation, West Johnston High improved its school performance grade from 66 to 69, demonstrating continued progress in student achievement.

North Johnston High School

North Johnston High School achieved a significant milestone by improving its school performance grade from a "C" (66) to a "B" (70), marking an important step forward in academic achievement.

The school's overall proficiency increased by 7.6 percentage points, with notable gains in Math 3 (+16.9), Biology (+14.5), and English II (+4.4).

Smithfield Middle School

Smithfield Middle School improved its school performance grade from an "F" (39) to a "D" (46), representing significant progress in the school's academic performance.

The school's performance composite increased by 5.1 percentage points, with notable gains in Math (+8.3) and Science (+12.8).

Smithfield-Selma High School

Smithfield-Selma High School demonstrated significant academic growth, increasing its overall proficiency by 8.8 percentage points, the second-highest improvement among JCPS high schools.

The school saw substantial gains in Math I (+22.8), Math 3 (+7.7), and Biology (+8.7). Smithfield-Selma High met expected growth for the first time in school history and improved its numeric school performance grade from 62 to 66 while maintaining a "C." The score of 66 is the highest grade the school has achieved under the current accountability model.

Four Oaks Middle School

Four Oaks Middle School continues to demonstrate exceptional academic growth, leading JCPS in growth for three consecutive years, and remains in the top 10% in the state for growth. The school recorded a growth index score of 10.73 in 2023-2024, 7.51 in 2024-2025, and 5.2 in 2025-2026.

Overall proficiency increased by 3.5 percentage points, with math proficiency increasing by 3.6 points. The school exceeded growth expectations in math, recording a growth index score of 5.39, and science proficiency increased by 12.8 points.

Four Oaks Middle earned a "C" with a numeric grade of 67, the highest grade the school has achieved under the current accountability model.

Pursuing Excellence in the Journey Ahead

Johnston County Public Schools remains focused on building upon the academic progress demonstrated throughout the district. The continued increases in proficiency, growth, school performance grades, graduation rates, and college and career readiness reflect the district's focus on student achievement and academic growth.

"We are proud of the historic progress our students and educators have made, and we are committed to building on that success," Dr. Pearce added. "Our North Star remains student achievement and academic growth. We will continue working collaboratively, identifying opportunities for improvement, and providing our schools with the resources and support they need to help every student reach his or her full potential."

As JCPS continues moving forward, the district remains committed to ensuring that every student is prepared for success beyond high school. Through a continued focus on rigorous, grade-level instruction, academic growth, career and college readiness, and strong partnerships among schools, families, and the community, JCPS will continue building on the progress achieved this year.

"Every gain represents a student who has made progress, a teacher who has made a difference, and a school community that has worked together toward a common goal," noted Dr. Pearce. "The results we are celebrating today give us even greater confidence in what is possible when we keep students at the forefront of everything we do."

JCPS is committed to its motto, "Forward Together, Stronger Together, Excellence Always."

Data Packet:

[JCPS 2025-2026 Performance Data Infographic](#)

###

[PHOTO1](#): JCPS shines bright in newly released performance data and moves the needle forward in many areas.