



# The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

The DC Fiscal Policy Institute blog  
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## An Uphill Climb for DC Schools: A Look at DC CAS Trends

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Much of the discussion of school test scores in the District focuses on system-wide changes from year to year, such as the change in proficiency among all DCPS students. While this information is important, we at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute think it also is worthwhile to look at changes at the individual school level. How well is the typical school doing? What is the range of progress among various schools? We decided to look at the proficiency rate in every school — the share of students scoring at the proficient or advanced level — in both 2008 and 2012.

What did our analysis find? The proficiency level at the typical publicly funded DC school — that is, the mid-point among all DCPS and public charter schools combined — stood at 41.2 percent in 2012, down slightly from 41.8 percent in 2008. Behind this overall lack of progress, however, there is a lot of diversity. Of the schools operating in both 2008 and 2012, roughly one-third saw a notable decline in proficiency, one-third had modest changes, and another third saw notable increases. In every ward and at every age level, there were schools where proficiency improved during the four-year period and schools where proficiency declined.

That said, there also were some notable trends:

- Math proficiency at the typical school improved, while reading proficiency fell. The most dramatic growth for math was seen at the typical middle school. The most dramatic decline was in reading at the elementary school level.
- The typical public charter school showed improvement in proficiency, while the typical DCPS school declined over the four years.
- The typical DC schools in Wards 4, 5, 7, and 8 saw proficiency declines while the typical school in Wards 1, 2, 3, and 6 saw increases.
- The lowest scoring schools in 2008 experienced increases in test scores between 2008 and 2012, but they still struggle with very low proficiency rates. The schools in the broad middle in 2008 saw declining proficiency rates over the four years, while the top performers saw a small increase.

DC Public Schools 2012 “Capital Commitment” [plan](#) includes the ambitious goal of increasing proficiency rates at the 40 lowest performing schools by 40 percentage points by 2017. Given the test score trends over the past four years, DCPS will need to change the ways it supports individual schools to make this goal a reality, including steering more resources to lower-performing schools.

DCFPI soon will analyze DCPS' proposed school budget allocations for 2013-14 to see whether they reflect efforts to add supports to schools in need.

You can read the full report [here](#).