

TO: Newton School Committee

FROM: Dr. Anna Nolin, Superintendent

DATE: July 12, 2026

RE: Executive Summary: 2025-2026 Year-End Data & State of Our Schools

Dear School Committee Members,

As we close the 2025-2026 academic year, I am proud to present this executive summary of our district's performance and operational data. This year, we have made significant strides in systematizing our multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), centralizing family engagement, and preparing for upcoming possible/proposed shifts in state graduation requirements. While we celebrate substantial achievements in early literacy, math growth, and leadership development, this data also provides a clear map for where we must target our resources in FY27—particularly in addressing the divergence in performance between our elementary and secondary students.

Here is a comprehensive summary of our year-end data across six critical domains.

1. The Story of Our Schools: Elementary vs. Secondary Progress & Performance

Our universal screening data (Star assessments) and MTSS frameworks show that our schools are places of rigor and positive trajectory, but a closer look at the data reveals a distinct divergence in performance, growth, and standards mastery between our elementary and secondary schools.

- **Exceptional Elementary Early Growth:** Our youngest learners established an impressive foundation this year. By March 2026, 78% of Kindergarteners met or exceeded expectations in math (with an average high-growth SGP of 64), and nearly 84% met or exceeded expectations in early literacy (SGP of 66). By reorganizing our staffing to place certified unit A literacy and math specialists in every elementary school, we drastically reduced the number of elementary students needing intervention. For example, elementary students elevated in the literacy risk threshold dropped from 241 in the fall to just 87 by June.
- **Disparities in Reading Mastery & Text Complexity:** Elementary students are demonstrating higher rates of standards mastery compared to their secondary peers.
 - elementary mastery ranges from 75%-88% across domains,
 - highlighted by an exceptional 88% mastery in Informational Texts: Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity. **(Powerful Movement)**

- In contrast, middle school mastery ranges from 56% to 78% across literacy domains
- grade 9 ranges from 54% to 74%.
 - This gap is most visible in the "Informational Texts: Range of Reading and Text Complexity" domain, where elementary students achieved 88% mastery, compared to just 56% at the middle school level and 54% in grade 9.
- **Math Gaps in Abstract & Structural Domains:** A similar trend is evident in mathematics.
- Elementary students showed solid conceptual mastery in foundational skills (e.g., 65% proficient in Operations and Algebraic Thinking).
- However, secondary students struggled significantly as concepts became more structural and abstract—only 18% of middle school students mastered Geometry, and 85% of grade 9 students did not show mastery in "Algebra: Seeing Structure in Expressions".
- **Closing the Proficiency Spread Across Schools:**
- Our elementary schools made exceptional progress in reducing performance disparities *between* different buildings, tightening their reading proficiency spread from 21 percentage points in January to just 12 points by June.

2. English Language Learner (ELL) ACCESS Performance

This year marked our first ACCESS administration aligned to the new 2020 WIDA English Language Development Standards, shifting our instructional focus toward explicit academic language and writing production. The elementary vs. secondary disparity is mirrored heavily in this data:

- **Elementary Excellence:** We saw exceptional outcomes at the elementary level, with an average of **~77% of elementary ELLs making progress** toward English proficiency. Schools like Zervas, Ward, and Countryside saw over 90% of students meeting proficiency benchmarks. **(Powerful Movement)**
- **Secondary Disparities:** Growth at the secondary level requires urgent attention. Middle schools averaged only ~53% progress, and a significant disparity exists between our high schools (Newton South at 79% progress vs. Newton North at 33%).
- **Next Steps:** For FY27, we will prioritize targeted instructional supports for Long-Term English Learners (LTELs) and students co-served by Special Education, launching individualized English Learner Success Plans (ELSPs) immediately in the fall. These plans have never existed for these learners before since their progress was never sufficiently measured.

3. Family Engagement (FEA) Impact

In its inaugural year, our centralized Welcome Center revolutionized how we partner with our community, managing massive demand with a dedicated team of just three staff members.

- **Enrollment & Efficiency:** The Welcome Center streamlined the transition of our registration system to Aspen. The team also executed six residency investigations, voluntarily withdrawing four non-residents and **saving the district \$172,468** (monies to support non-residents and their students' needs/services which are often extensive).
- **Ecosystem of Care:** We successfully deployed Pocketalk translation devices to all schools, providing instant translation in 92 languages. Furthermore, our partnership with Cradles to Crayons will formally launch a stigma-free "District Care Closet," addressing basic needs that act as barriers to attendance.

4. Elementary Principal Leadership & Growth

We have been analyzing our elementary principals' growth as providers of instructional feedback since their leadership in Dr. Farag has been consistent for several years and they are implementing the most and foundational changes for the district.. The "ILA effect" (instructional leadership academy work for 2 years) has fostered a genuine reorientation toward classroom presence and instructional accountability/progress tracking:

- **Volume of Feedback:** The group increased documented classroom observations by **over 53% year-over-year**, maintaining a post-ILA average of 32.7 to 34.4 observations per principal.
- **Quality of Feedback:** Principals demonstrated strong growth in moving from merely scripting lessons to providing analytical feedback that names *why* a teacher's move matters. They also achieved near-universal inclusion of actionable next steps for teachers.
- **Growth Edge for the Future:** The most persistent area for continued growth across our leadership team is capturing concrete evidence of *student content learning* (what students actually understood or produced), rather than just noting behavioral engagement.

5. Staff Absenteeism Trends

A review of our "Top 3" staff absence dates reveals distinct seasonal strains on our building operations.

- The data shows heavy clustering of staff absences in **December** (specifically the weeks of Dec 1, Dec 8, and Dec 15) and **early Spring** (mid-March through April).
- For instance, Brown experienced 61 absences the week of December 1 (evenly spread across the days of that week), and F.A. Day managed 59 absences the week of December 15, with the bulk of the absences clustered on Monday and Friday of that week. We will need to proactively plan our substitute coverage and operational supports

around these seasonal spikes moving forward and implement unit C working group recommendations. The committee continues to focus on this area as an area for attention in upcoming negotiations. Student and staff attendance have bearing on student progress; attendance is a complex issue and should be approached in a nuanced and multipronged manner.

6. MassCore Alignment & New State Graduation Recommendations

The new Statewide Graduation Council has released recommendations to replace the MCAS graduation requirement with a comprehensive framework consisting of MassCore coursework, End-of-Course (EOC) assessments, MyCAP postsecondary planning, and Culminating Experiences. Newton is well-positioned for this shift, though administrative clean-up is required:

- **Current Alignment:** 61.8% of our 2025 graduates matched the state's MassCore completion metric.
- **Data Discrepancies:** An additional 37.3% of our students met MassCore by Newton's standards, but were flagged by DESE as "not met" in an internal review. This 37% discrepancy is primarily driven by local differences—namely, Newton counts Engineering and Business courses toward the Arts requirement (which DESE does not), and we currently do not transmit transfer student course data to the state.

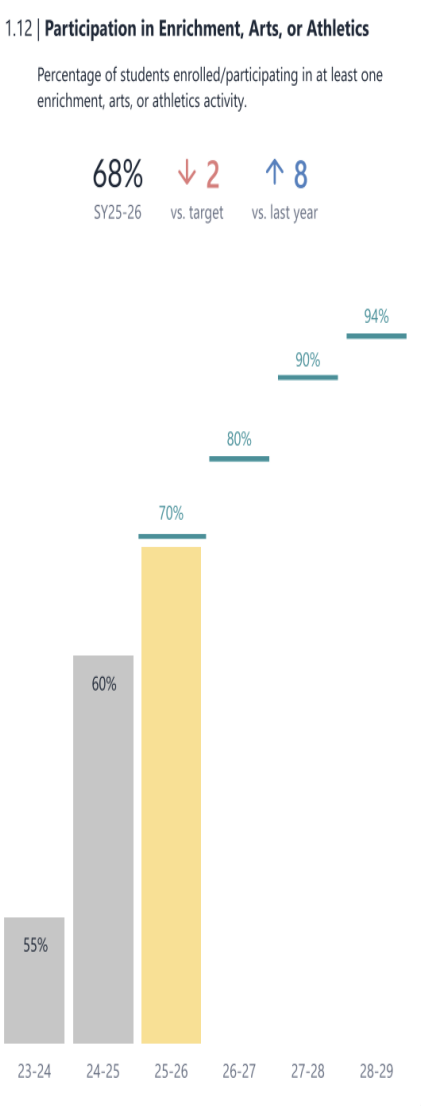
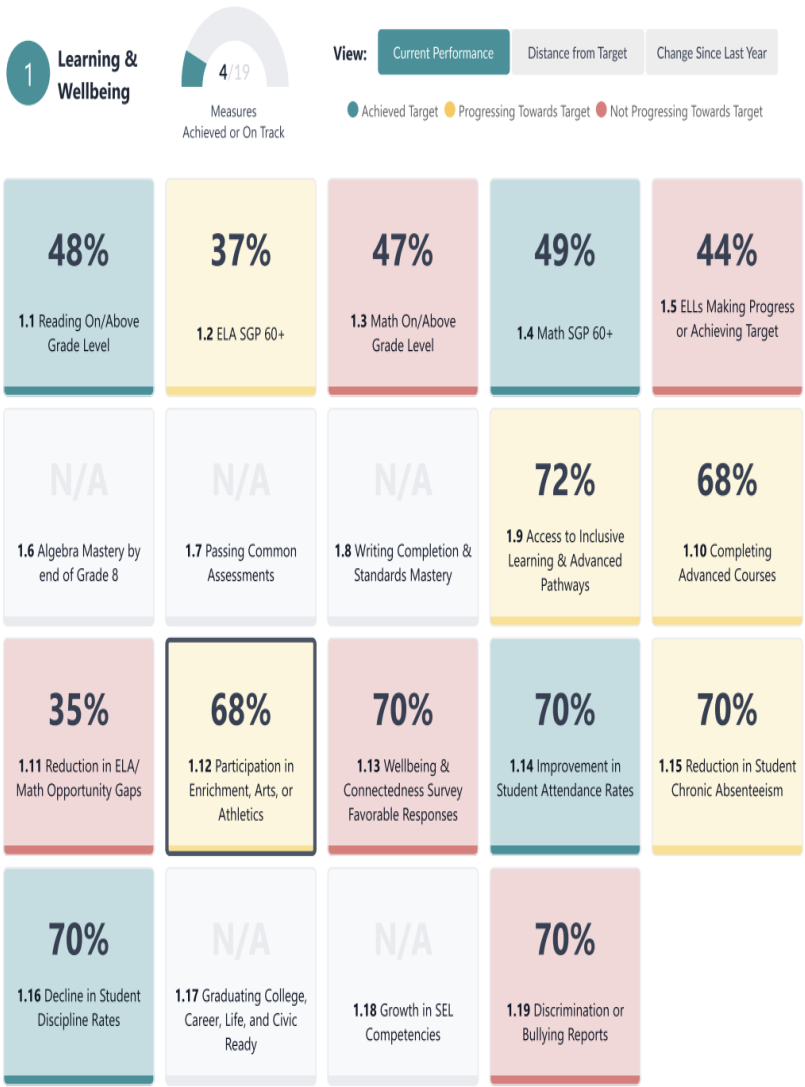
In conclusion, we end the 25-26 school year with robust systems in place. From standardizing our MTSS interventions to centralizing family support, we are moving away from "random acts of engagement" to predictable, equitable frameworks. There is clear and documented progress occurring—undeniable evidence of the combination of high quality coordinated curriculum coupled with existing instructional expertise in our staff—now aligned to a district vision for progress—and the required intervention supports so students can receive personalized instruction in order to thrive. I look forward to partnering with the Committee to tackle our secondary (MS and HS) performance gaps and consistency needs in reading complexity, abstract math, and English language acquisition, while continuing to build on our tremendous elementary momentum in the year ahead.

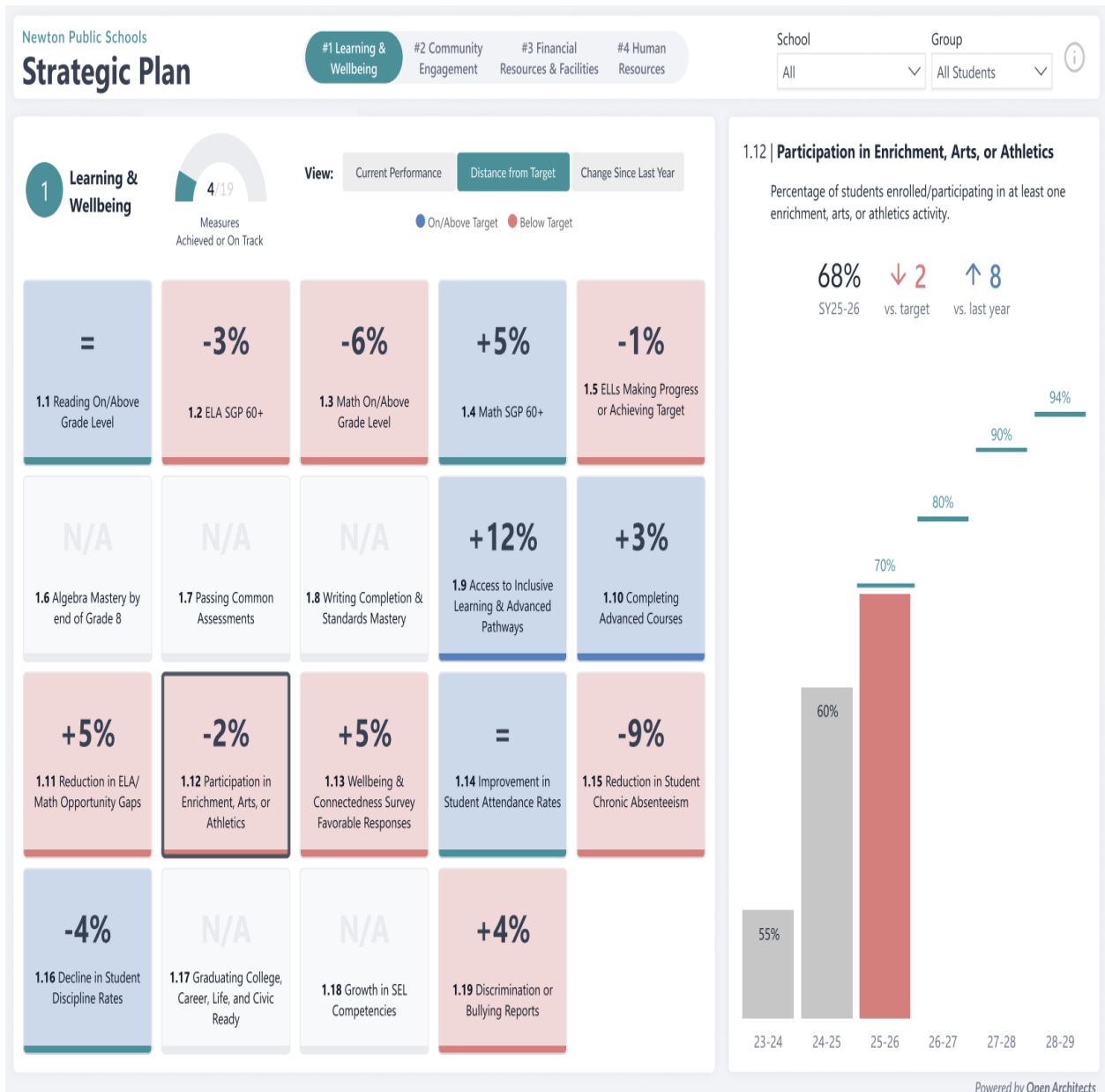
For areas with existing data sets and three years of data tracked across the district now analyzed, the district will set targets for goal setting and systematic steps to address continuing gaps. As noted at the mid-year update, some areas do not yet have data sets or mechanisms to collect the data and those will be developed before the conclusion of the THRIVE 2030 plan. The DRAFT dashboard for tracking these goal areas is located below as a preliminary sample. With this type of dashboard, the district, community, and families can watch the real time progress of the district.

Note: ignore the color coding at this time, since targets are not hard wired into the dashboard as they have not yet been set. When the dashboard is live, you can click on the colored tile and it will expand in the larger tile on the right to show yearly progress on the tile content. Viewers will be able to click on each area of the strategic plan at the top, and can also pick schools,

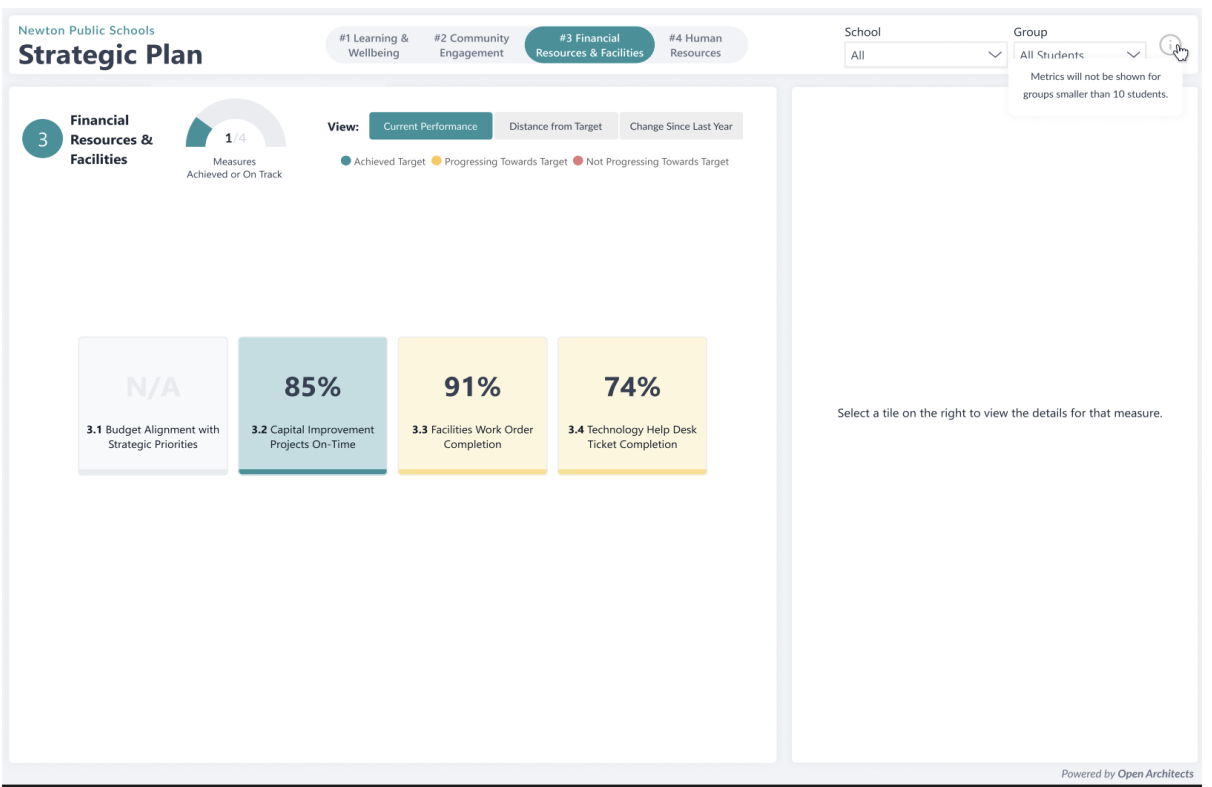
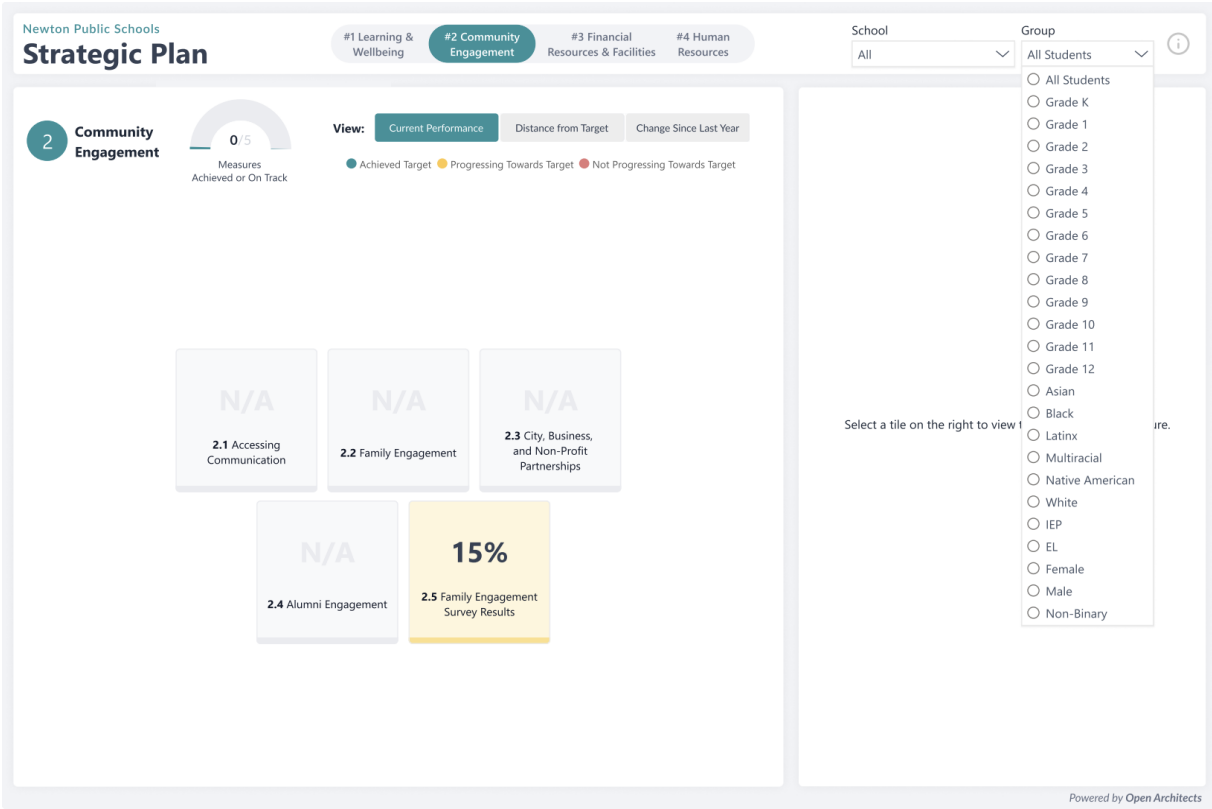
grades, and student groups in the dropdown filters. If a cohort has less than 10 students, the data in the dashboard will be suppressed to protect student privacy.

Different areas of the strategic plan will be updated at different times throughout the year as data becomes available. Some must be 1 time per year (such as MCAS), while others, such as Star will update more frequently (three times per year). We still have questions about attendance, activities, etc and how we will conceive and develop our engagement metrics and the “life ready metric.” As a reminder, our plan is a 5-year one and we have time to fully develop these indicators. This dashboard has been built as part of our data analytics product (Open Architects), which means that most of the data updates are automated, with some manual uploads for particular goal areas.





The last screen (not created yet until we have year 1 target selected and a year of data collected) will be to share changes since the prior year.





4 **Human Resources**



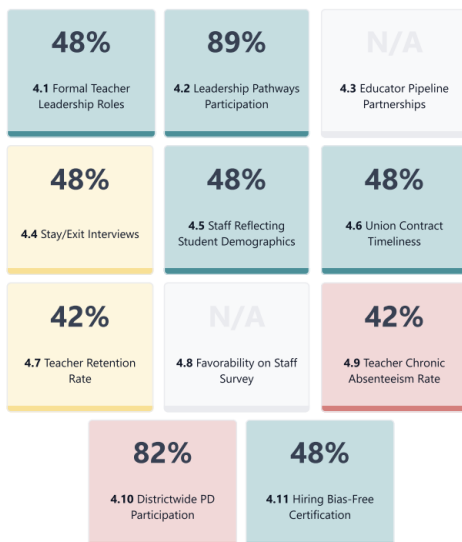
View:

Current Performance

Distance from Target

Change Since Last Year

● Achieved Target ● Progressing Towards Target ● Not Progressing Towards Target



Select a tile on the right to view the details for that measure.