

# The Washington Post

## Reading and math scores fall sharply at two KIPP schools in District

By Bill Turque  
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Reading and math scores fell sharply at two of the three high-performing D.C. charter middle schools operated by the Knowledge Is Power Program, the national network regarded as a model for serving children from low-income backgrounds, according to data released Friday.

The scores are part of a mixed picture that emerged in the release of school-by-school results from the 2010 D.C. Comprehensive Assessment System, given annually to all D.C. students in grades 3 through 8 and to high school sophomores to meet the proficiency requirements of the No Child Left Behind law.

Just 15 of the District's 198 eligible public and public charter schools -- five public charter and 10 traditional public -- achieved "adequate yearly progress" in test scores and other academic categories as required by the federal law. That's a steep drop from last year, when 47 schools -- 13 public charter and 34 traditional public -- met performance benchmarks. Part of the decline is attributable to a sharp increase in the numerical targets written into the law. As currently written, the law calls for all schools to be at 100 percent proficiency by 2014. Many of the schools that fell short will face federally mandated interventions to improve teaching and learning.

Jennifer Calloway, spokeswoman for Chancellor Michelle A. Rhee, said in a statement that the school system accepted the higher bar and will work to clear it. "We embrace those high expectations for ourselves and our students," she said.

Citywide results released last month showed that elementary students in traditional public schools lost between four and five points in reading and math proficiency after two years of sizable gains. Public secondary students continue to improve, but they still lag significantly behind their peers in public charter schools.

The most surprising aspect of the new school-level data is the drop at the KIPP schools, which educate about a thousand children from mostly low-income families in grades 5 through 8 on three campuses, two in Southeast Washington (AIM and KEY a

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cademies) and one in the Ward 2 section of Northwest (WILL Academy). The basics of the KIPP program -- longer school days, weekend and summer sessions, teachers available after hours, and a rigorous incentive system that penalizes poor behavior -- have been widely praised.

Until this year, they have also produced steadily rising test scores. But pass rates on the reading test at the AIM Academy dropped to 54 percent from 65 percent in 2009; pass rates in math fell to 76 percent from 84 percent last year. At KEY Academy, reading slid to 68.5 percent from 77 percent and math to 81.5 percent from 94 percent in 2009. Only WILL Academy showed small gains, rising to 65 percent in reading from 60 percent and 77 percent in math from 74 percent in 2009.

Susan Schaeffler, executive director of the District's KIPP schools, said the decline was chiefly among fifth-graders, those newest to the KIPP system. At KEY, for example, fifth-graders registered 48 percent proficiency in reading and math. But in eighth grade, reading and math pass rates are 80 and 96 percent, respectively.

"Our sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders are the highest-performing in the city," she said.

Schaeffler said her staff was working to determine what the problem in fifth grade might be. "We're looking at everything from teacher turnover to a change in the incoming

students."

KIPP and other public charter middle schools still outperform most of the traditional public middle schools in the District. There are a few bright spots, among them Deal and Hardy. Several struggling middle schools have pushed reading and math scores up: Hart, Eliot-Hine, Ron Brown and MacFarland.

At Sousa Middle School in Ward 7, Principal Dwan Jordon drew wide attention for significant increases in test scores last year: Reading scores grew 16 percentage points and math scores by 25 percentage points. This year, the gains were more modest. Reading proficiency grew slightly more than two points and math slightly less than five.

But most of the city's regular public middle schools still struggle with chronically low test scores. At Johnson Middle School in Ward 8, just 14 percent of the students read and perform math at proficient levels,

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according to the new data. And 19 percent of the students at Kelly Miller Middle School in Ward 7 clear the proficiency threshold in reading; 18.5 percent have passing rates in math.

Calloway said several middle schools will see expanded world language offerings and expanded use of the READ 180 program for students at basic or below basic reading levels. The District will also expand the so-called "full service model" to additional middle schools, bringing extra counseling and social services.

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