Substantial and Persistent: Racial and Student-Group Gaps in Brookline Public Schools

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BRJE BROOKLINE FOR RACIAL JUSTICE & EQUITY

Summary

Brookline's public schools post some of the strongest results in Massachusetts. This report asks whether that success reaches every group of students. Drawing on the most recent data published by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), it compares Brookline with the state and with 16 peer districts named by DESE and by leaders of the Public Schools of Brookline (PSB) across test scores, graduation, college enrollment, attendance, discipline, special education, advanced coursework, and staff diversity, and against the targets in the district's own strategic plan and examines what the state's accountability rating captures.

What we found

- **Black students trail far behind, and the gap is not closing.** In 2026, 27% of Black students in grades 3–8 met the state's math standard, against 78% of white students. The 51-point gap is the second widest among the 17 districts and nearly double the state's 27 points. Black students' math results are no higher than they were in 2017.
- **The gap widens while students are in Brookline's schools.** Brookline's white students post higher growth scores than its Black students, and the 9-percentile-point difference is the widest among peers in English language arts (ELA) and the second widest in math.
- **It holds against the fairest available comparisons.** Brookline's gaps remain among the widest when it is compared only with other districts in METCO, the state's voluntary school integration program, or with Newton, Milton, and Lexington, the peers with similar numbers of Black students.
- **The same pattern appears outside test scores.** Black students graduate on time at 89%, 13th of 15 peers and about the same rate as nearly 20 years ago. They are chronically absent at more than twice the rate of white students and are 5.4 times as likely to be disciplined. The state has designated Brookline for identifying Black students as having learning disabilities at three times the rate of other students.
- **Brookline has real strengths.** High-needs students rank second among peer districts, and Black, Latino, and low-income students complete advanced courses at rates few peers match. At Lincoln School, Black students meet the math standard at nearly three times the rate they do at Driscoll.
- **The district is falling short of its own goals.** Its strategic plan calls for Black and Latino students' results to rise three points a year in ELA and math. Over the plan's first two years, that occurred in two of eight cases.

What we ask

We ask PSB to report publicly each year on its strategic plan targets by race; to set growth targets that close the gap; to publish special education referral and identification rates by race; to apply consistent attendance and discipline practices across its schools; and to rebuild the equity and data capacity lost in recent budget cuts.

Key findings in detail

- **The comparison holds against METCO districts and districts with similar Black enrollment.** Among the 11 districts that enroll Boston students through METCO, Brookline's math gap is the second widest. Against Newton, Milton, and Lexington, the only peers with similar numbers of Black students, Brookline's gaps are the widest in both ELA and math. Brookline's Black students score near the middle of these groups; the gap is wide because the district's strengths reach white students far more than Black students. Measured against all other racial groups combined, Brookline's gaps for Black students are still the fifth widest of 17 in both ELA and math. (Sections 2.1, 3, and 4)
- **Growth scores show the gap widening year by year.** In 2026, white students' average growth percentile in math was 63; Black students' was 54, close to the statewide norm of 50. The ELA figures are 59 and 50. That 9-percentile-point growth difference is the widest of the 17 districts in ELA and second widest in math. (Section 2)
- **Gaps are consistent with pre-pandemic levels.** Black students' math results were 29% in 2019 and 27% in 2026. White students went from 77% to 78%, widening the math gap from 48 points to 51. The ELA gap narrowed from 42 points to 39, but only because white students' results fell further. (Section 7; Figure 3)
- **Every school shares the gap, but some do far better.** In the 2024–2026 results, each K–8 school has a Black–white math gap of at least 43 points. Yet Black students meet the math standard at 38% at Lincoln and Lawrence and 14% at Driscoll. Lincoln, with the district's largest shares of Black and low-income students, posts the strongest results for its Black and Latino students. (Section 8; Figure 4)
- **Latino students sit mid-pack, with a warning sign.** Latino students rank fifth of 17 in ELA (51%) and seventh in math (47%), but their ELA results fell 10 points since 2019, against a 6-point drop for white students; Latino students statewide fell 11 points over the same period. They graduate on time at 94%, sixth among peers. (Sections 2, 7, and 9)

- **The pattern extends beyond test scores.** Across the classes of 2023–2025, Black students graduate on time at 89%, about the same as in the late 2000s and 13th of 15 peers. In 2025–26 their chronic absence rate (18.2%) is more than double white students' (7.6%), a gap that has more than doubled since before the pandemic. Over the three years to 2024–25 they are 5.4 times as likely as white students to be disciplined. And in 2025 DESE designated Brookline for identifying Black students with learning disabilities at more than three times the rate of other students. Black graduates' college enrollment has fallen from 84% for the classes of 2017–2019 to 69% for the classes of 2023–2025. Meanwhile, Black teachers' share of the faculty fell from 4.6% to 2.4% between 2019–20 and 2022–23 and has only partly recovered, to 3.0%, though Brookline's teaching staff remains the second most diverse among its peers. (Sections 9 through 13 and 15)
- **Advanced coursework is the bright spot.** Across 2023–24 to 2025–26, 81% of Brookline's Black juniors and seniors complete an advanced course, third among 17 districts and 25 points above the peer median. Latino, low-income, and English learner students also rank near the top. But Black students rarely take AP exams: over 2022–25, about 13 per 100 juniors and seniors, half the peer median and well below Black students statewide. (Sections 14 and 14.1; Figure 8)
- **Brookline does comparatively well for high-needs students as a group.** High-needs students rank second of 17 in both ELA and math, and the ranking holds after removing former English learners, who lift the group's results. Students with disabilities rank third. The exception is low-income students in math: their 44-point gap with other students is the third widest among peers. (Section 5)

The pattern is clear. Brookline has raised results for students the state labels high-needs, and it has opened advanced courses to Black and Latino students at rates few peers match. It has not done the same for Black students' achievement, attendance, or graduation. The sections that follow lay out the evidence.

How to read this report

Throughout the report, Brookline is compared with the state and with 16 peer districts identified by PSB leaders and DESE. The report uses the most recent years DESE has published, often combined across three years where groups are small; each section states its years. "Rank of 17" counts Brookline and the 16 peers, with 1 the highest result or the widest gap. Where a lower figure is better, as with absence, the table says so. Some rankings exclude districts with too few students to report. Sources and definitions are in the methods and data notes at the end.

Part I: Academic Achievement and Test Score Gaps

For Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) results, two measures carry the analysis. **Achievement** is the share of students meeting or exceeding expectations. **Growth** is the average student growth percentile (SGP), which compares each student's progress with students statewide who scored similarly the year before. An SGP of 50 is typical growth; DESE calls 40–60 moderate. Growth matters because it separates what schools add from what students bring with them.

We measure each gap three ways:

Within Brookline: Black and Latino students against white students (and, as a check, against Asian students and all other students), and each high-needs group against all other Brookline students.

Against the state: Brookline's students in each group against the same group statewide.

Against peers: Brookline's gaps and group results against 16 peer districts. PSB leaders name 11: Lexington, Newton, Milton, Amherst-Pelham, Andover, Arlington, Belmont, Wellesley, Needham, Concord, and Sharon. DESE names 10 comparable districts: Acton-Boxborough, Andover, Arlington, Belmont, Chelmsford, Lexington, Melrose, Natick, Newton, and Westborough. Five appear on both lists.

Unless noted, MCAS figures cover grades 3–8 combined, weighted by the number of students tested in each grade.

1. District-wide test scores

Across all students, Brookline outperforms the state by about 30 points and ranks in the top six of the 17 districts in every subject. Growth is strong too: an average SGP of 59 in ELA and 62 in math, against the state's 50. Brookline's white students post the second-highest results of any peer district in both ELA (74%) and math (78%).

Subject, grades 3–8	Brookline	State	Peer median	Brookline's rank of 17
ELA	68%	40%	65%	6th
Math	73%	41%	69%	3rd
Science (grades 5 and 8)	72%	41%	70%	6th

These headline numbers are real, and the district is right to point to them. They are also the reason the rest of this report matters. A district that can produce these results has the capacity to produce them for all of its students.

2. Test scores by race and ethnicity

Brookline's 51-point Black–white gap in math is the second widest among the 17 districts, behind only Belmont, and nearly double the state's 27 points.

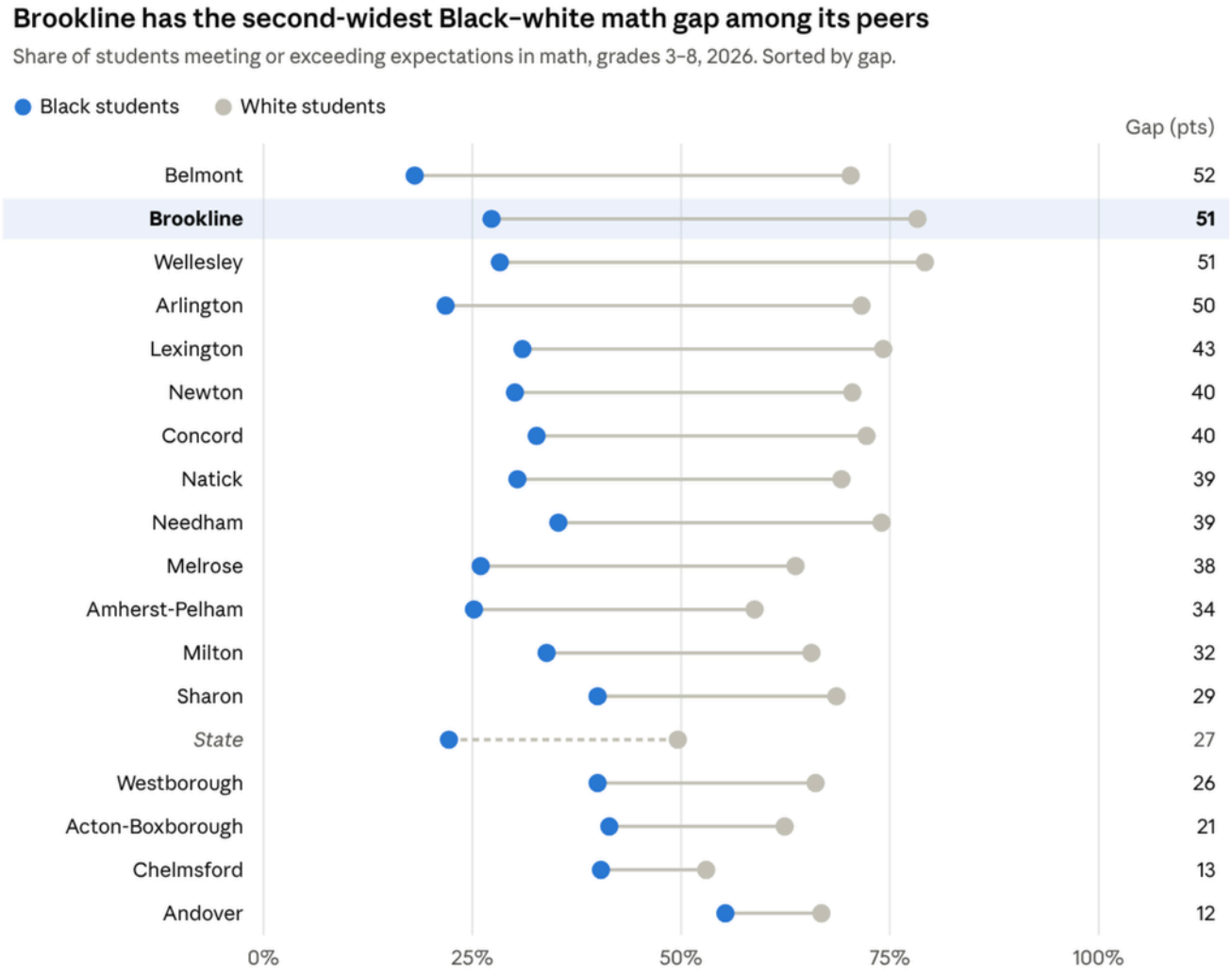


Figure 1. Source: DESE MCAS Achievement Results, 2026, grades 3–8 combined

ELA tells the same story with smaller numbers: a 39-point gap, fourth widest among peers, against 23 points statewide. Brookline's Black students do outperform Black students statewide (35% vs. 25% in ELA, 27% vs. 22% in math), but by far less than Brookline's other students outperform theirs.

Growth explains part of why. Brookline's white students post average growth percentiles of 59 in ELA and 63 in math. Black students post 50 and 54. That 9-point difference is the widest of the 17 districts in ELA and the second widest in math. In most peer districts, the difference is 6 points or less.

Latino students fare better. Their results rank fifth of 17 in ELA (51%) and seventh in math (47%), and their growth nearly matches white students' (57 vs. 59 in ELA). But the Latino–white gap in math, 31 points, is the fourth widest among peers and above the state's 28.

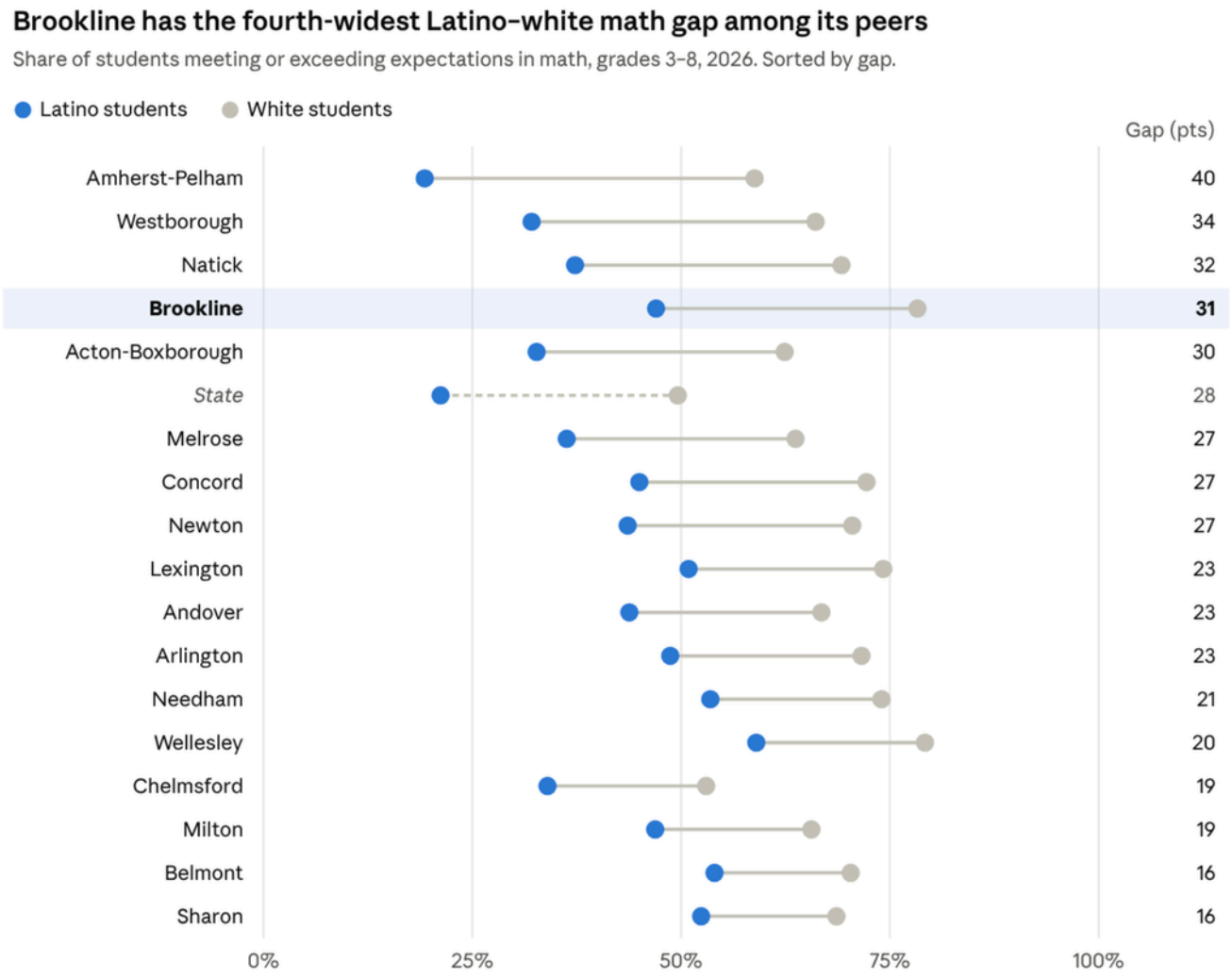


Figure 2. Source: DESE MCAS Achievement Results, 2026, grades 3–8 combined

As with Black students, the width of the gap owes a good deal to Brookline's white students, who score near the top of the peer group. Brookline's Latino students land in the middle, and districts such as Sharon, Belmont, and Wellesley pair high results for white students with Latino results above 50%.

2.1 Asian students, and other ways to measure the gap

Asian students make up about a fifth of Brookline's students tested in grades 3–8. In 2026, 86% met the math standard, above white students (78%), and 72% met the ELA standard, just below white students (74%). Their growth scores are the highest of any Brookline group: 64 in ELA and 65 in math.

This report uses white students as its main comparison because DESE and most research do, which keeps Brookline comparable with the state and its peers. The primary finding does not depend on that choice. Measured against Asian students or against all other students, Brookline's gap for Black students stays above the peer median in math.

Gap definition, grades 3–8 (pts)	Math: Brookline	Math: rank of 17	Math: peer median	ELA: Brookline	ELA: rank of 17	ELA: peer median
Black vs. white students	51	2nd	39	39	4th	32
Black vs. Asian students	59	4th	50	37	10th	39
Black vs. all other students	48	5th	37	36	5th	30

The Black–Asian gap is larger in points, but Brookline stands out less on it because Asian students score highly in nearly every peer district; in ELA it sits near the peer median. The comparison with all other students is the most neutral of the three, and on it Brookline's gaps are the fifth widest of 17 in both ELA and math, 6 to 11 points above the peer median.

3. Comparison with METCO districts

Brookline is one of 11 districts in this report that enroll Boston students through METCO. The other 10 are Arlington, Belmont, Concord, Lexington, Melrose, Natick, Needham, Newton, Sharon, and Wellesley. Many of their Black students commute long distances from Boston, and some join partway through school. METCO participation is the most common explanation offered for gaps of this size, and the data supports part of it: five

of the six narrowest Black–white gaps in the peer group belong to districts that do not take part in METCO, Sharon being the only exception. Across the 10 METCO peers, the median math gap is 40 points; across the six others, 24.

So the fairest test is METCO district against METCO district.

METCO district, grades 3–8	Black students tested	Black students meeting/exceeding: ELA	Black students meeting/exceeding: math	Black–white gap, ELA (pts)	Black–white gap, math (pts)	Growth gap, ELA	Growth gap, math
Belmont	83	21%	18%	49	52	6	10
Brookline	**187**	**35%**	**27%**	**39**	**51**	**9**	**9**
Wellesley	60	38%	28%	40	51	1	8
Arlington	87	27%	22%	47	50	4	4
Lexington	145	37%	31%	32	43	4	0
Concord	49	35%	33%	37	40	2	1
Newton	249	35%	30%	33	40	4	6
Natick	69	36%	30%	25	39	3	8
Needham	85	40%	35%	29	39	5	6
Melrose	96	33%	26%	34	38	2	3
Sharon	85	39%	40%	23	29	1	3

Growth gap: white students' average growth percentile minus Black students'. Positive means white students grew faster.

Against other METCO districts, Brookline's Black students land near the middle: at the median in ELA (35%) and somewhat below it in math (27%, against a median of 30%). What sets Brookline apart is the distance between Black and white students. Its math gap is the second widest of the 11 and its ELA gap the fourth widest. Its ELA growth gap of 9 points is the widest; no other METCO district's exceeds 6.

METCO helps explain why gaps in districts like Brookline run wider than the state's. It does not explain why Brookline's run wider than most other METCO districts'. Sharon shows what is possible: a METCO district whose white students score 69% in math, it brings 40% of its Black students to the standard and holds its gap to 29 points.

4. Districts with similar Black enrollment

Brookline tested 187 Black students in grades 3–8 in 2026, about 6% of its students. Only three peers come close: Newton (249), Milton (224), and Lexington (145). Most others tested between 45 and 110. Milton offers a useful contrast because it is not a METCO district.

District, grades 3–8	METCO	Black students tested (share of all tested)	Black students meeting/exceeding: ELA	Black students meeting/exceeding: math	Black–white gap, ELA (pts)	Black–white gap, math (pts)	Growth gap, ELA	Growth gap, math
Brookline	**Yes**	**187 (6%)**	**35%**	**27%**	**39**	**51**	**9**	**9**
Newton	Yes	249 (5%)	35%	30%	33	40	4	6
Milton	No	224 (11%)	36%	34%	31	32	6	2
Lexington	Yes	145 (5%)	37%	31%	32	43	4	0

Growth gap: white students' average growth percentile minus Black students'. Positive means white students grew faster.

In ELA, Black students in all four districts score within 2 points of each other. The difference is on the other side of the gap: Brookline's white students score 74%, against 67% to 69% in the other three, and grow faster. In math, Brookline's Black students trail all three districts by 3 to 7 points, and Brookline's gap is 8 to 19 points wider.

Put plainly: in ELA, Black students in Brookline perform about as well as those in the most comparable districts, while white students perform substantially better. In math, Black students in Brookline score lower than their counterparts in all three districts, while white students score higher.

5. High-needs students

Brookline's high-needs students outperform their counterparts in nearly every peer district. Each group's results run 10 to 41 points above the same group statewide.

Group, grades 3–8	ELA: Brookline	ELA: State	ELA rank of 17	Math: Brookline	Math: State	Math rank of 17
High needs (low income, disability, or current or former English learner)	44%	22%	2nd	53%	23%	2nd
High needs, excluding former English learners	34%	20%	3rd	41%	20%	2nd

Group, grades 3–8	ELA: Brookline	ELA: State	ELA rank of 17	Math: Brookline	Math: State	Math rank of 17
Low income	36%	22%	5th	36%	21%	6th
Students with disabilities	31%	11%	3rd	34%	13%	3rd
Current English learners	14%	4%	5th	42%	8%	3rd
Former English learners	66%	35%	2nd	80%	39%	3rd

Former English learners are students who have reached English proficiency and left English learner services. DESE counts them in the high-needs group, and in Brookline they make up nearly a third of it: 397 of 1,297 students in grades 3–8. Because they score close to or above the district average, they lift the high-needs figure above every other group in the table. The second row removes them. High-needs students who are not former English learners score 34% in ELA and 41% in math, 10 to 12 points lower, but Brookline's rank barely moves, because peer districts' high-needs groups include former English learners too, in some districts an even larger share. Brookline's high-needs students rank near the top of peer districts whether or not former English learners are included. But the overall high-needs figures mask substantially lower scores among students who still need additional support. The separate rows for low-income students and students with disabilities give the clearest picture of how Brookline serves those students.

The gaps between these students and the rest of Brookline's students are mostly no wider than the peer median. One stands out: low-income students trail other Brookline students by 44 points in math, the third-widest such gap among peers.

Gap in points vs. other Brookline students	ELA: Brookline	ELA: Peer median	Math: Brookline	Math: Peer median
High needs	42	45	34	42
High needs, excluding former English learners	48	49	45	48
Low income	39	38	44	40
Students with disabilities	48	54	49	52
Current English learners	58	57	33	46
Former English learners	2	11	−8	0

A negative gap means the group scores above other students.

Two cautions. English learners' ELA results fell from 36% in 2019 to 14% in 2026, but the state's fell from 15% to 4% over the same years, likely reflecting more newly arrived students tested in English. And the low-income measure changed in 2022 (see Methods), so its trend before and after that year is not directly comparable.

6. By grade and subject

The Black–white gap appears in every grade and every subject, from third grade through tenth. It does not shrink as students move up.

Math, 2026	White	Asian	Black	Latino	High needs	Black–white gap (points)
Grade 3	76%	79%	27%	46%	53%	49
Grade 4	74%	87%	22%	45%	54%	52
Grade 5	73%	87%	35%	33%	49%	38
Grade 6	80%	87%	12%	38%	53%	68
Grade 7	79%	87%	22%	61%	52%	57
Grade 8	86%	91%	40%	63%	58%	46
Grade 10	87%	94%	38%	57%	53%	49

ELA, 2026	White	Asian	Black	Latino	High needs	Black–white gap (points)
Grade 3	72%	64%	35%	53%	45%	37
Grade 4	69%	65%	26%	45%	43%	43
Grade 5	70%	74%	50%	45%	42%	20
Grade 6	73%	77%	29%	43%	43%	44
Grade 7	76%	71%	28%	65%	43%	48
Grade 8	83%	84%	40%	58%	49%	43
Grade 10	82%	84%	39%	56%	44%	43

Science shows the same pattern: white students at 74% (grade 5), 80% (grade 8), and 81% (high school), Asian students at 79%, 83%, and 89%, and Black students at 45%, 35%, and 38%.

Read single grades with care. Each grade has only 24 to 40 Black students tested, so one year's figure for one grade can swing by 10 points or more. The consistency across all seven grades and three subjects is the finding, not any one cell. Grade 10 results also carry a statewide caveat: MCAS is no longer a graduation requirement, and high school scores fell across Massachusetts this year.

7. Test score trends since 2017

Nine years of results show no progress in closing the Black–white gap. Black students' math results stood at 32% in 2017 and 27% in 2026; white students' rose from 76% to 78%.

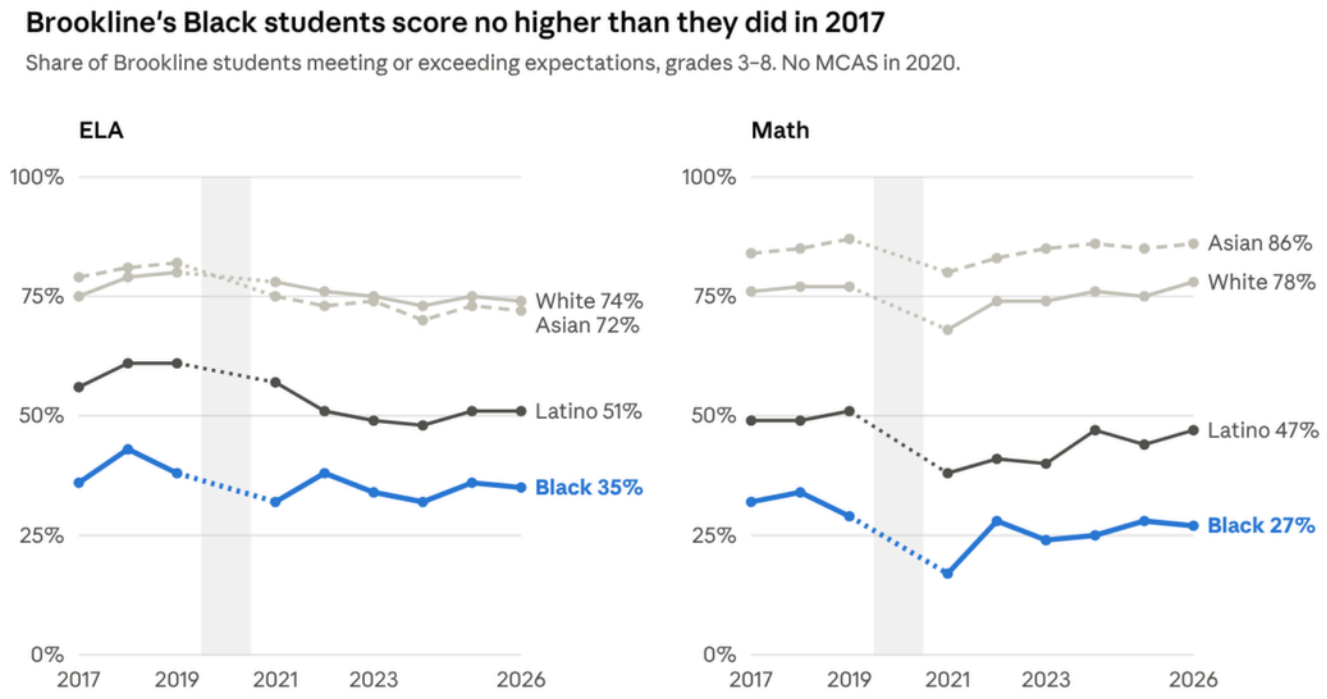


Figure 3. Source: DESE MCAS Achievement Results, Brookline, 2017–2026, grades 3–8 combined

The math gap measured 48 points in 2019 and 51 in 2026. The ELA gap narrowed slightly, from 42 to 39 points, but only because white students' results fell further than Black students' did. That is not the kind of progress anyone should count.

For context, the state's own Black–white math gap was 28 points in 2019 and 27 in 2026. The state has held its gap roughly flat at about half the size of Brookline's.

Latino students lost ground in ELA, falling from 61% in 2019 to 51% in 2026, a 10-point drop. Statewide, Latino students fell 11 points over the same years, so Brookline is tracking the state rather than protecting its students from the decline. In math, Latino students have recovered to within 4 points of their 2019 level.

Asian students' ELA results fell by the same amount, from 82% in 2019 to 72% in 2026, while their math results held steady (87% to 86%). Asian students statewide also fell 10 points in ELA, so here too Brookline is tracking the state. Brookline's Asian students now trail their counterparts in most peer districts in ELA, where 73% to 82% typically meet the standard, and the shortfall is concentrated in the early grades: 64% in grade 3 and 65% in grade 4, against 84% by grade 8. One plausible factor is Brookline's large population of current and former English learners, but DESE does not report the two groups together, so the data cannot confirm it. "Asian" also combines very different communities, from Chinese, Korean, and Indian families to Nepali, Bhutanese, and Vietnamese families, and a strong average can hide students who are struggling.

8. School by school

The gap is not confined to one or two schools. Every one of Brookline's eight K–8 schools has a Black–white gap of at least 43 points in math. Because each school tests only a few dozen Black students a year, the figures below combine 2024, 2025, and 2026.

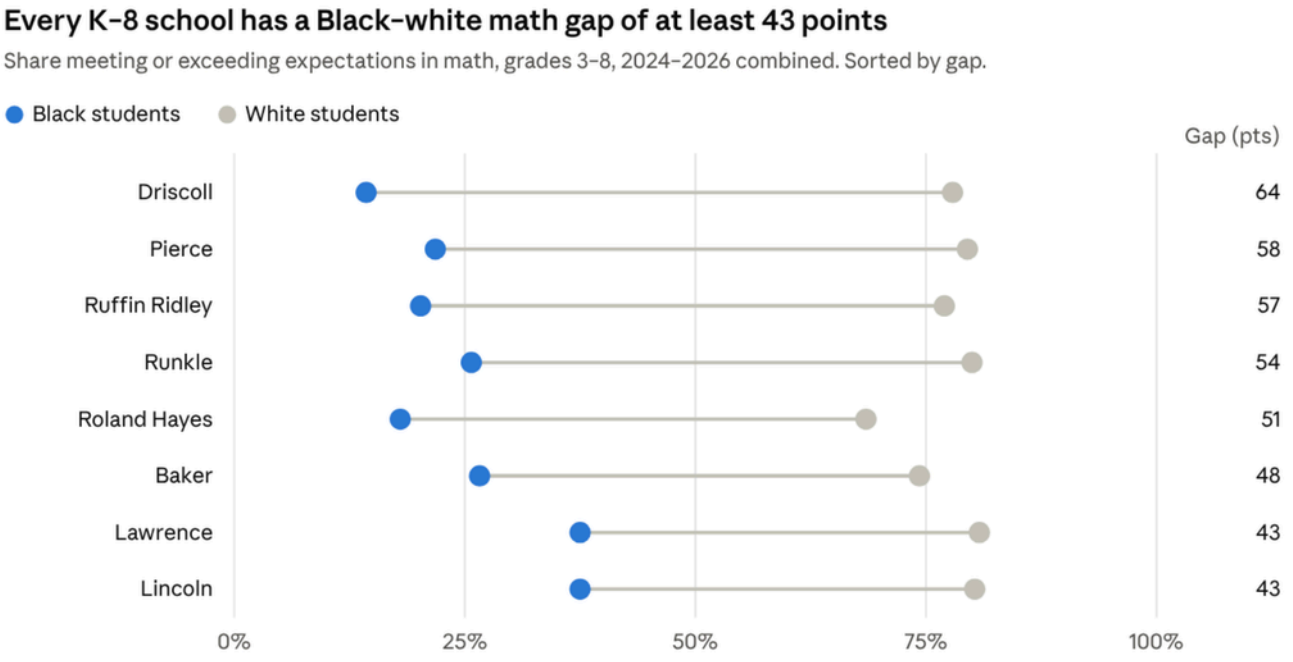


Figure 4. Source: DESE MCAS Achievement Results, school level, 2024–2026 combined

School, grades 3–8, 2024–26	Black student tests	Black share of tests	Black: ELA	Black: math	White: math	Black–white math gap (pts)	Black students chronically absent, 2025–26
Lincoln	104	12%	44%	38%	80%	43	17.0%
Lawrence	64	6%	42%	38%	81%	43	11.4%
Baker	94	8%	36%	27%	74%	48	21.3%
Roland Hayes	50	6%	34%	18%	69%	51	36.0%
Runkle	35	4%	12%	26%	80%	54	5.3%
Ruffin Ridley	84	6%	26%	20%	77%	57	23.1%
Pierce	78	7%	41%	22%	80%	58	16.7%
Driscoll	56	6%	20%	14%	78%	64	29.6%

Black student tests count each student once for each year tested. Runkle's figures rest on especially small numbers.

Within that common pattern, the differences between schools are large. In math, 38% of Black students meet the standard at Lincoln and Lawrence, against 14% at Driscoll and 18% at Roland Hayes. White students, by contrast, score between 74% and 81% at every school except Roland Hayes.

Lincoln deserves particular attention. It enrolls the largest share of Black students of any K–8 school and the largest share of low-income students, yet its Black students post the strongest results in both ELA and math and its gaps are the narrowest. Its Latino students also lead the district, with 60% meeting the math standard. Whatever Lincoln is doing is worth understanding before the district looks outside Brookline for models.

The schools with the weakest results for Black students also tend to be the ones where Black students miss the most school. Driscoll and Roland Hayes have the lowest Black math results and the highest Black chronic absence, 30% and 36%, against about 10% and 9% for white students at the same schools. At Brookline High, by contrast, 12.9% of Black students were chronically absent. Lawrence, where Black students' chronic absence is among the lowest, is among the strongest. The numbers are too small to separate cause from effect, but they suggest attendance and achievement should be addressed together, school by school.

Part II: Educational Outcomes and Opportunities

9. Graduation rates

Test scores are not the only place the gap shows up. Brookline graduates 96% of its students in four years, in line with its peers and well above the state's 89%. But Black students graduate on time at a lower rate in Brookline than in almost any peer district. Brookline graduates only 26 to 50 Black students a year, so the figures below combine the classes of 2023, 2024, and 2025, weighted by the number of students in each.

Four-year graduation rate, classes of 2023–2025	Brookline	State	Peer median	Brookline's rank
All students	96%	89%	96%	11th of 17
White	97%	93%	97%	7th of 17
Asian	98%	96%	98%	10th of 17
Black	89%	85%	95%	13th of 15
Latino	94%	80%	89%	6th of 17
High needs	89%	83%	89%	9th of 17
Low income	87%	82%	89%	14th of 17
Students with disabilities	85%	77%	84%	9th of 17
English learners	89%	69%	83%	4th of 12

Ranks leave out districts with fewer than 20 students in a group across the three years; for Black students, that excludes Needham and Westborough.

The Black–white gap in on-time graduation is 8 points in Brookline, the second widest among peers and the same as the state's. In most METCO peer districts, Black and white students graduate at about the same rate. Against the districts with similar Black enrollment, Brookline trails clearly: 89% of its Black students graduate on time, against 95% in Newton, 95% in Milton, and 98% in Lexington. The three-year figure also smooths over a recent decline: Brookline graduated 95.8% of its Black students on time in the class of 2023, 86.7% in the class of 2024, and 82.5% in the class of 2025.

Latino students tell a different story. Brookline graduates 94% of them on time, sixth among peers and 14 points above the state, and the Latino–white gap of 3 points is narrower than in most peer districts. Low-income students are the other group where Brookline trails, ranking 14th of 17. The trend is the starkest part of the picture.

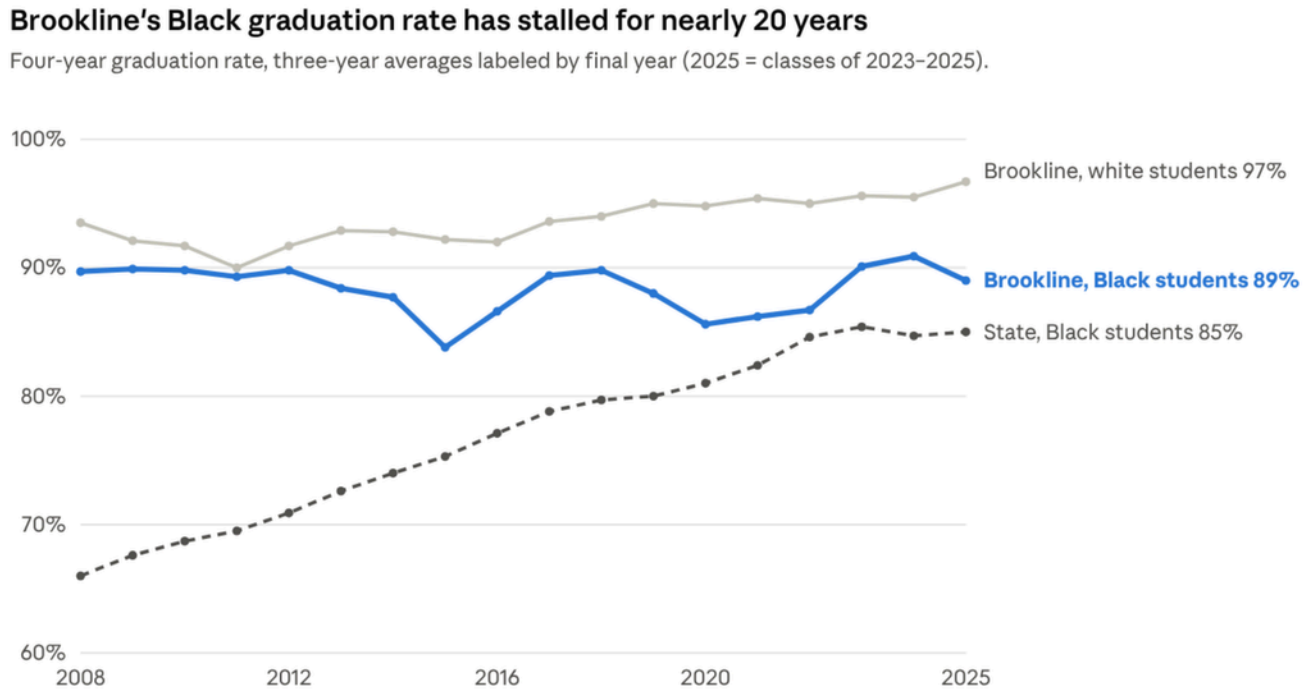


Figure 5. Source: DESE High School Graduation Rates, Massachusetts four-year rate, district level; three-year averages weighted by cohort size

Brookline's Black students graduated on time at about 90% in the late 2000s, and they graduate at about 89% today. Over the same period, white students' rate rose from about 92% to 97%, so a gap of 2 to 4 points has grown to 8. Statewide, Black students' graduation rate climbed from 66% to 85% and the gap with white students shrank from 20 points to 8. A decade ago, Brookline's gap was a fraction of the state's. Now the two are the same.

Some of Brookline's Black students finish in a fifth year. On DESE's five-year rate, which runs a year behind, 93% of Brookline's Black students in the classes of 2022–2024 graduated, against 96% of white students. That narrows the gap but does not close it, and Newton and Lexington still graduate 96% of their Black students within five years.

10. College enrollment

DESE tracks the share of each district's high school graduates who are enrolled in college by the March after graduation, using National Student Clearinghouse records. The figures below combine the classes of 2023, 2024, and 2025.

Graduates enrolled in college by March, classes of 2023–2025	Brookline	State	Peer median	Brookline's rank
All students	75%	61%	80%	16th of 17
White	74%	69%	82%	16th of 17
Asian	83%	79%	86%	10th of 15
Black	69%	57%	not available	see below
Latino	73%	40%	63%	4th of 13
Low income	72%	46%	68%	5th of 17
Students with disabilities	60%	44%	69%	14th of 17

Two things stand out. First, Brookline's graduates as a whole enroll in college at a lower rate than graduates in almost every peer district, and the same is true of its white graduates. The data may understate Brookline: the Clearinghouse does not track students who enroll at universities abroad, and Brookline's international families may send more students overseas than its peers do. The data cannot confirm that.

Second, the gaps between groups are small. Black graduates enroll at 69% and Latino graduates at 73%, against 74% of white graduates, and both groups enroll well above their counterparts statewide. Latino graduates rank fourth among peers. For Black graduates, DESE suppresses results for groups with fewer than 15 college enrollees, so only the districts with similar Black enrollment can be compared: Brookline's 69% falls between Newton's 76% and Milton's 68%.

The trend is the concern. For the classes of 2017 through 2019, 84% of Brookline's Black graduates enrolled in college, more than its white graduates (79%). For the classes of 2023 through 2025, the figure is 69%, a 15-point drop, against a 5-point drop for white graduates. With only 26 to 50 Black graduates a year, single classes vary, but the decline has held across several of them. Combined with the stalled graduation rate, it means a smaller share of each class of Black students in Brookline is reaching college than did before the pandemic.

11. Chronic absenteeism

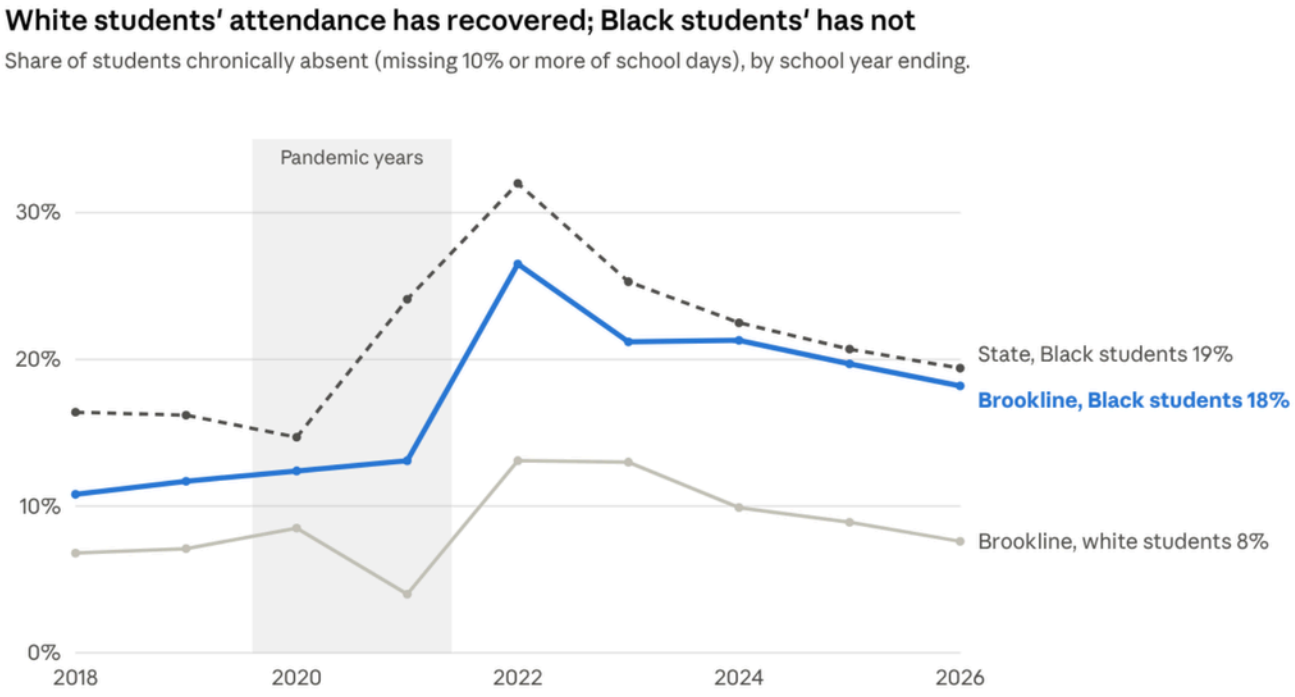
DESE counts a student as chronically absent if they miss at least 10% of the days they are enrolled, about 18 days in a full year. In 2025–26, 9.7% of Brookline students were chronically absent, far below the state's 17.1% and close to the peer median of 8.8%.

Chronically absent, 2025–26	Brookline	State	Peer median	Brookline's rank (1 = least absence)
All students	9.7%	17.1%	8.8%	11th of 15
White	7.6%	12.4%	7.6%	8th of 15
Asian	7.7%	9.6%	6.4%	11th of 15
Black	18.2%	19.4%	15.4%	11th of 15
Latino	16.6%	27.3%	17.5%	7th of 15
High needs	15.3%	24.1%	15.2%	8th of 15
Low income	22.2%	27.3%	22.0%	9th of 15
Students with disabilities	17.9%	24.8%	15.8%	11th of 15
English learners	14.0%	25.4%	16.4%	6th of 15

Peer comparisons cover the 14 peers that report attendance as single K–12 districts. Concord and Amherst-Pelham report their elementary and regional districts separately, so they are left out.

The pattern is familiar. Brookline's white students are absent far less often than white students statewide (7.6% against 12.4%), but Brookline's Black students are chronically

absent nearly as often as Black students across Massachusetts (18.2% against 19.4%). The Black–white gap of 10.6 points is the fifth widest among the 15 districts and wider than the state's 7.0.



The gap is mostly new. Before the pandemic, 11.7% of Brookline's Black students and 7.1% of white students were chronically absent, a gap of under 5 points. Absences spiked for everyone in 2021–22. Since then, white students have returned almost exactly to their pre-pandemic rate. Black students have not: at 18.2%, their rate is still more than 6 points above 2019, and the gap has more than doubled. Statewide, the Black–white gap is about where it was before the pandemic.

This is also where the METCO question matters most. The same widening shows up across METCO districts: their median Black–white gap grew from about 4 points in 2019 to about 10 in 2026, while in peers without METCO it stands at about 2. Long daily commutes from Boston may weigh on attendance in ways they did not before the pandemic, though DESE's data cannot separate METCO students from Black students who live in town. Among districts with similar Black enrollment, Brookline's gap (10.6 points) sits above Newton's (7.1) and Milton's (9.0), and below Lexington's (11.8). Whatever the cause, chronic absence is something a district can act on directly, and it is one plausible contributor to the achievement and graduation gaps described above. Black students' chronic absence is concentrated in the K–8 schools (Section 8).

11.1 Unexcused absences and court filings

Brookline also records far more absences as unexcused than most of its peers. In 2025–26, 14.3% of Brookline students had 10 or more unexcused absences. In most peer districts the figure was under 7%, and in Sharon, Needham, Natick, Milton, and Acton-Boxborough it was close to zero. Much of that variation likely reflects how districts code absences rather than how often students miss school. But the coding has consequences: unexcused absences shape how schools respond to attendance, up to and including, in some cases, truancy petitions in juvenile court.

Within Brookline, unexcused absences fall unevenly: 24.0% of low-income students, 23.6% of English learners, 22.0% of students with disabilities, 21.9% of Latino students, and 18.9% of Black students had 10 or more, against 12.7% of white students. Brookline.News has reported that PSB filed five Child Requiring Assistance petitions in juvenile court in 2024–25, more than Cambridge, Milton, Newton, or Needham, and 17 over the past four years. The district declined to share the race or disability status of the students involved, and said it does not formally track the filings. Statewide, the Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board has found that Black and Latino students and students with learning disabilities are more likely to face these petitions.

Coding also varies widely among Brookline's own schools.

2025–26	10 or more unexcused absences: all students	Black	Latino	White	Chronically absent (about 18 or more days): all students
Ruffin Ridley	29.4%	28.8%	37.9%	28.5%	12.7%
Driscoll	25.6%	44.4%	33.8%	26.6%	10.8%
Lincoln	22.1%	27.7%	26.3%	20.7%	10.7%
Roland Hayes	20.0%	24.0%	22.4%	13.6%	12.3%
Baker	14.3%	21.3%	37.0%	11.1%	7.0%
Runkle	12.3%	10.5%	21.1%	9.6%	10.5%
Lawrence	11.6%	14.3%	26.8%	10.2%	7.0%
Pierce	9.8%	16.7%	10.9%	8.2%	8.0%
Brookline High	2.2%	5.0%	5.7%	1.4%	8.0%

Ruffin Ridley marks three times as many students with 10 or more unexcused absences as Pierce does, though the two schools' chronic absence rates are much closer.

Brookline High has about as many chronically absent students as the K–8 schools but records almost none with 10 or more unexcused absences. The pattern has held in each of the last three years. Differences this large are hard to explain by attendance alone; they could point to schools applying different standards for what counts as excused.

Within schools, the burden falls unevenly. At Driscoll, 44% of Black students have 10 or more unexcused absences, against 27% of white students. At Baker, 37% of Latino students do, against 11% of white students, and at Lawrence, 27% against 10%.

This also qualifies the link to court filings. Brookline.News reported that most of the district's petitions are filed in early high school, where unexcused absences are rarely recorded, so the connection between coding and court filings is less direct than the district-wide figure suggests. The inconsistency is the finding in itself: students in the same district can end up with very different attendance records, and potentially different consequences, depending on which school they attend and, within schools, on their race or ethnicity. (Preschool is excluded; attendance there is not compulsory.)

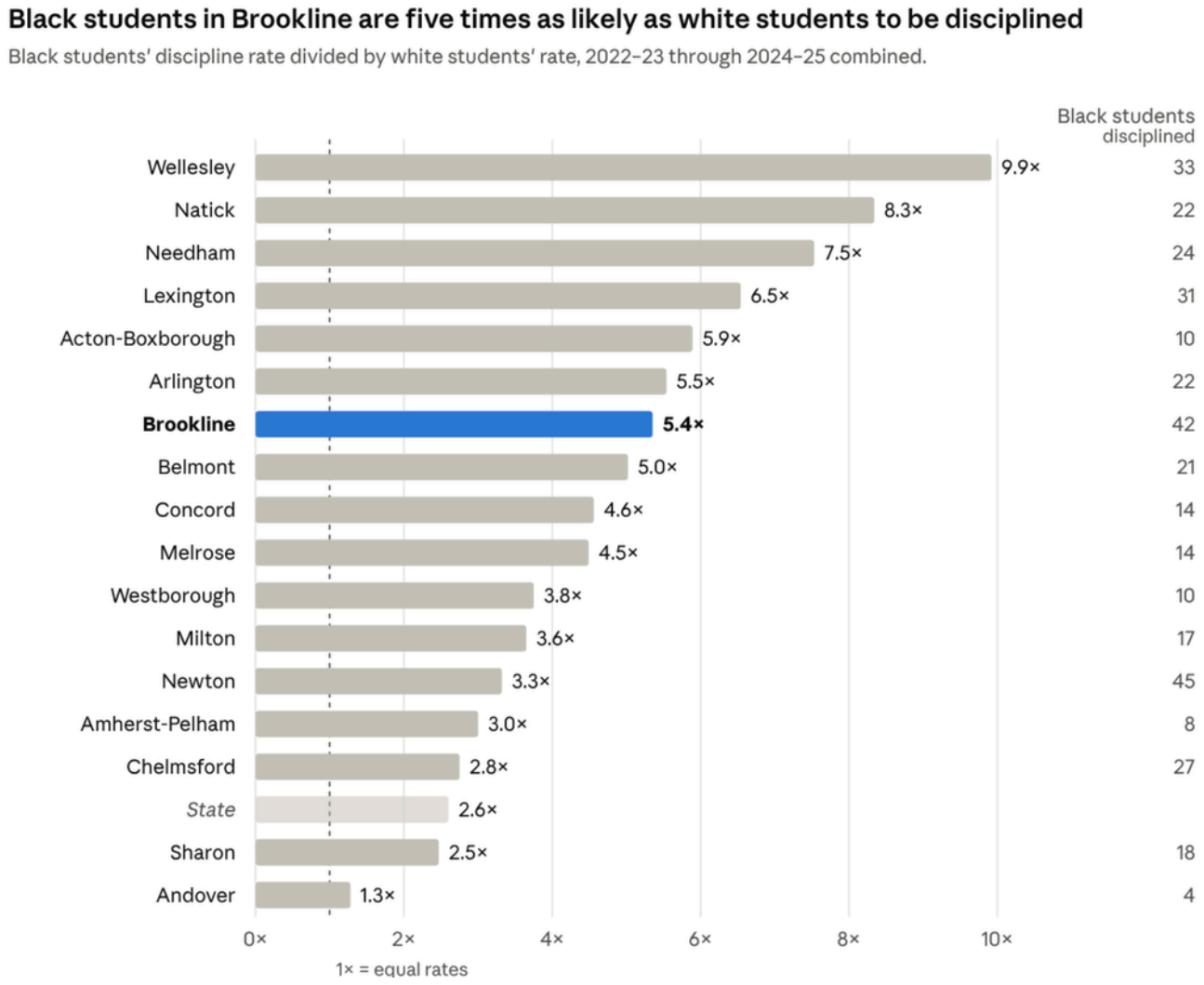
DESE's 2026 review called the district's attendance system a strength, citing regular review of attendance data, principal outreach to families, and a chronic absence rate well below the state's. That credit is deserved. But the review did not examine the racial gaps described here.

12. Discipline

Brookline disciplines few students. Each year, fewer than 1 in 100 receive an in-school or out-of-school suspension, expulsion, or removal, against more than 3 in 100 statewide. But the students it does discipline are disproportionately Black. Because the numbers are small, the figures below combine the 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25 school years.

Share of students disciplined each year, 2022–25	Brookline	State	Peer median
All students	0.8%	3.4%	0.8%
White	0.6%	2.4%	0.6%
Black	3.1%	6.2%	2.9%
Latino	1.4%	5.1%	1.8%
Low income	2.2%	5.6%	2.6%
Students with disabilities	2.2%	6.2%	2.3%

Black students are about 6% of Brookline's students but about 24% of the students it disciplines. A Black student in Brookline is 5.4 times as likely as a white student to be disciplined. Statewide, the ratio is 2.6.



This is a METCO-district pattern as much as a Brookline one. Across METCO peers the median ratio is about 5.3, against about 3.3 in districts without METCO, and Wellesley, Natick, Needham, Lexington, and Arlington all exceed Brookline. Among the districts with similar Black enrollment, Brookline's ratio is higher than Newton's (3.3) and Milton's (3.7) and lower than Lexington's (6.5).

The disparity has grown. In 2016–17 through 2018–19, Brookline's Black students were 3.9 times as likely as white students to be disciplined. The rate has fallen for both groups since then, but it has fallen much faster for white students (from 0.9% to 0.6%) than for Black students (from 3.6% to 3.1%).

These ratios rest on 42 Black students disciplined over three years, about 14 a year. Even so, a disparity this consistent across years and across METCO districts deserves a close look at who is disciplined, for what, and by whom. Latino students in Brookline are disciplined at 2.5 times the rate of white students, below the peer median of 3.1.

Students with disabilities face a similar disparity. They are 19% of Brookline's students but 53% of the students it disciplines, and they are 4.8 times as likely as other students to be disciplined. That is close to the peer median of 5.0 but double the state's ratio of 2.3. Because Black students are overrepresented in special education in Brookline (see Section 13), the two disparities likely compound, though DESE does not publish discipline figures for students who are both Black and have a disability.

Brookline reported no arrests or referrals to law enforcement over the three years. Emergency removals are rare, but in 2024–25 they involved 0.7% of Black students and almost no white students.

DESE's 2026 review points in the same direction. It found a need for greater consistency in behavioral expectations and consequences across Brookline's schools, and middle school students told reviewers that consequences are not always enforced equally.

13. Special education identification

In 2025, DESE gave Brookline a Significant Disproportionality designation in special education. Black students in Brookline are more than three times as likely as other students to be identified as having a learning disability, a pattern the state first flagged more than five years ago and found the district had not made reasonable progress on. The designation requires Brookline to identify root causes and adopt an action plan. According to district data reported by Brookline.News, Black students were 6.3% of enrollment but 13% of students in special education.

The district's own early analysis points to its practices. Black students are most often identified with a specific learning disability in reading, and Brookline's deputy superintendent for student services told the School Committee that nearly half of those students had not received a general education intervention before they were referred. District leaders also reported that the disproportionality does not track family income. Asian students, by contrast, are identified far less often than their peers; DESE does not monitor under-identification.

This finding connects much of the report. In Brookline, students with disabilities are nearly five times as likely to be disciplined, more likely to have 10 or more unexcused

absences, and graduate on time at 85%. When Black students are identified for special education at three times the rate of others, many of them, by the district's own account, without first receiving help in the general classroom, those disparities fall on them twice. Publishing identification rates by race and disability category each year, along with the findings of the district's root-cause analysis, would let the community measure whether the action plan is working.

DESE's 2026 comprehensive review of the district reports that Brookline has now been cited twice for significant disproportionality. In response, the district formed a disproportionality working group, reviewed its assessment and eligibility practices, trained its psychologists, team facilitators, and speech and language pathologists, and began strengthening its system of tiered supports so that struggling students get help in the general classroom first. But the review also found those supports uneven: academic interventions have historically been left to individual schools, and implementation still varies. It recommends that the district keep monitoring special education and course referral practices for equitable representation, and adjust them when disparities appear.

14. Advanced coursework

DESE tracks the share of 11th and 12th graders who complete at least one advanced course: Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, dual enrollment, or other courses a district designates as advanced. The figures below combine the 2023–24, 2024–25, and 2025–26 school years.

Completed an advanced course, grades 11–12, 2023–26	Brookline	State	Peer median	Brookline's rank
All students	93%	69%	80%	4th of 17
White	95%	74%	83%	3rd of 17
Asian	96%	87%	92%	6th of 17
Black	81%	60%	56%	3rd of 17
Latino	89%	56%	63%	2nd of 17
Low income	85%	55%	57%	2nd of 17
Students with disabilities	74%	40%	44%	3rd of 17
English learners	88%	35%	24%	1st of 15

Here Brookline stands out for the right reasons. Its Black students complete advanced courses at a rate 25 points above the peer median, third among the 17 districts, and its Latino, low-income, and English learner students rank near the top as well. The Black–white gap of 13 points is narrower than in all but three peers, and the Latino–white gap of 6 points is among the narrowest in the group. In advanced math alone, 79% of Brookline's Black juniors and seniors complete a course, second among peers, against a peer median of 50%.

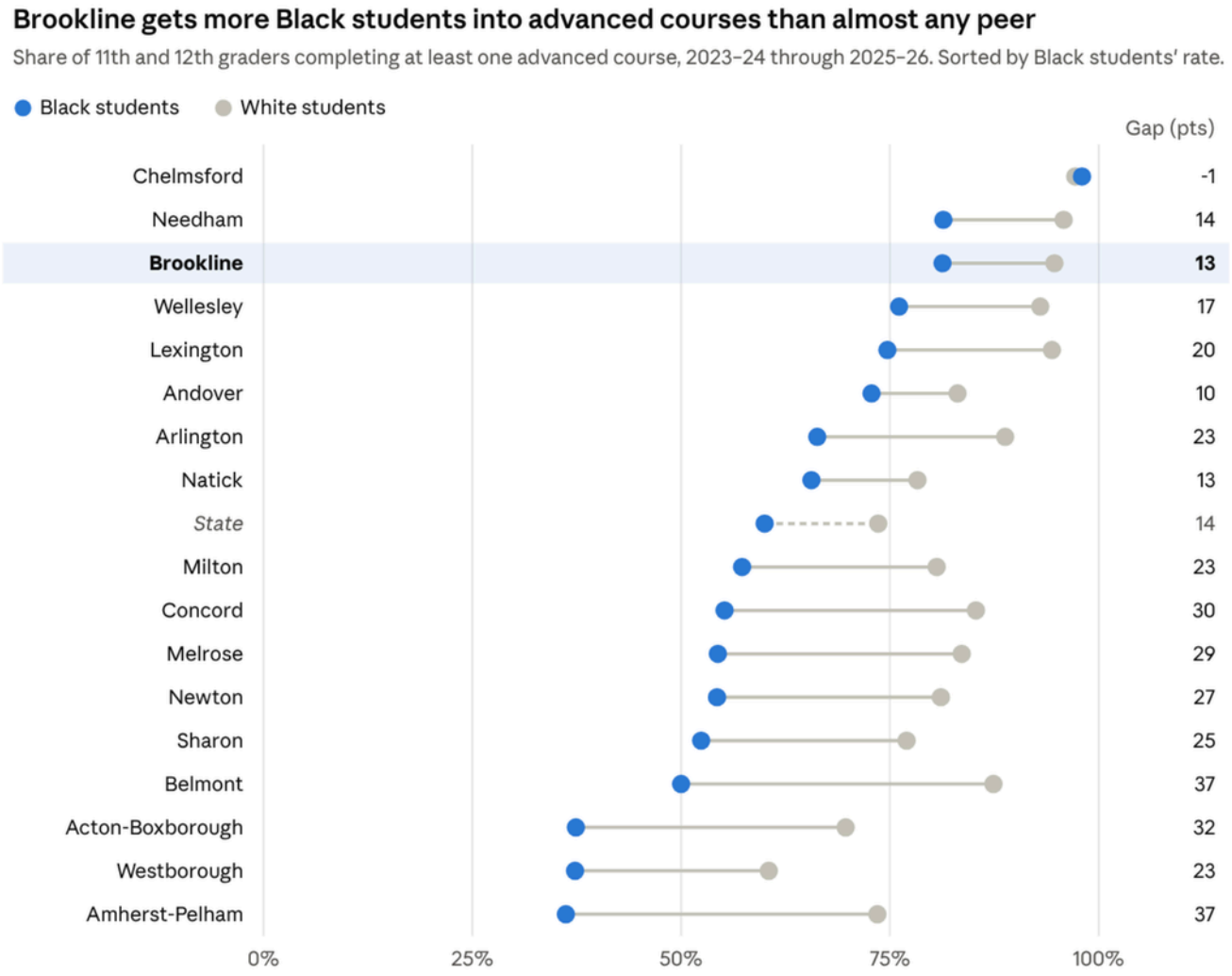


Figure 8. Source: DESE Advanced Course Completion, district level; three school years combined, weighted by enrollment

Two cautions apply. First, the gap has widened. In 2017–18 through 2019–20, about 87% of Black students and 92% of white students completed an advanced course, a gap of about 5 points; it is now 13. Black students' rate fell as low as 73% in 2023–24 before recovering; Brookline has only 65 to 85 Black juniors and seniors a year.

Second, the measure counts a single course and depends on how each district designates its courses. Chelmsford reports that 97% of all its students complete one, which suggests a broad definition. It measures access, not depth: it does not show how many advanced courses students take or at what level.

Still, this is the clearest evidence in the report that Brookline can open doors for Black and Latino students when it sets out to. The question is why that access has not yet shown up in their MCAS results and graduation rates, and what the district would learn from tracking how many advanced courses each group takes and how they do in them.

14.1 AP exams: a different picture

Advanced Placement exams offer one test of depth, and there the picture changes. DESE reports how many students in each group take at least one AP exam. Dividing that by the number of juniors and seniors in each group gives a rough measure of participation. It is not a true rate, since some test takers are younger students, but it is consistent across districts.

AP exam takers per 100 juniors and seniors, 2022–25	Brookline	State	Peer median	Brookline's rank
All students	60	44	68	12th of 17
White	64	49	62	8th of 17
Black	13	31	26	15th of 17
Latino	42	26	39	7th of 17
Low income	28	25	32	11th of 17
Students with disabilities	8	7	11	11th of 17

Brookline's white students take AP exams at about the peer median, and its Latino students somewhat above it. Its Black students take them at about half the peer median and well below the rate for Black students statewide. Over three years, 28 Black students in Brookline took at least one AP exam, about 9 a year, against roughly 350 white students a year. White students are about five times as likely as Black students to sit for an AP exam in Brookline, compared with about two to three times in most peer districts.

This does not cancel out the advanced coursework finding, but it qualifies it. Black students in Brookline complete courses the district designates as advanced at high rates. They rarely take the national exams that signal college-level work and can earn college credit. Brookline may lean less on AP than some peers, which would lower its overall numbers, but that would not explain why the gap is so much wider for Black students than for white or Latino students. DESE's AP data shows participation only; it does not show which courses students take or how they score, which is why this report asks the district to track advanced course-taking in more detail.

DESE's 2026 review offers one clue. A district leader told reviewers that at the high school, students who do not start in higher-level math or world language courses find it hard to move up, which can contribute to tracking. The same review described broad participation in rigorous courses across student groups as a district strength. The AP figures here suggest that conclusion does not hold for Black students.

Part III: Educator Diversity and District Accountability

15. Educator and staff diversity

Brookline's staff is more diverse than most of its peers', and more diverse than it used to be. In 2025–26, people of color held 21% of all staff positions in the district, up from 13% in 2008, and Black staff held 7.7%. Statewide, the figures are 16% and 5.5%.

Among teachers, 14.4% are people of color, second among the 17 districts, about double the peer median of 7.3%, and above the state's 10.4%. Black teachers are 3.0% of the faculty, third among peers but about the same as the state's 3.1%, and Latino teachers 4.6%, second among peers and on par with the state. But Brookline's students are more diverse still.

Brookline	Share of students, 2024–25	Share of teachers, 2025–26
Black	6.3%	3.0%
Latino	12.4%	4.6%
Asian	23.5%	5.2%
White	46.9%	85.6%
All people of color	53.1%	14.4%

Students of color are a majority of Brookline's enrollment; teachers of color are about one in seven.

15.1 Where staff of color work

The district's diversity is concentrated in some roles and thin in others.

2025–26	Brookline staff (full-time equivalents)	Brookline: staff of color	Brookline: Black staff	State: staff of color	State: Black staff	Peer median: staff of color
Administrators	90	24%	11%	20%	10%	11%
Teachers	476	14%	3.0%	10%	3.1%	7%
Paraprofessionals	314	34%	15%	26%	9%	22%
Special education related staff	52	10%	3.5%	10%	3.1%	5%
Office and clerical staff	65	35%	13%	23%	7%	—

Brookline's leadership is notably diverse: about one in four administrators is a person of color, second among peers. Paraprofessionals and office staff are also far more diverse than in most districts. Teachers are less so, and special education related staff, the psychologists, speech and language pathologists, and therapists who evaluate and serve students with disabilities, are the least diverse group of all, at about one in ten, the same as the state. That matters given the state's finding that Brookline over-identifies Black students for special education. In practice, Black students in Brookline are far more likely to be supported by a Black paraprofessional than taught or evaluated by a Black professional.

15.2 Leadership

A closer look at the administrator ranks shows that Brookline's leadership diversity is real but uneven. DESE reports administrators by role; the table groups those roles into four kinds of leadership.

Leadership group, 2025–26	Brookline positions (FTE)	Brookline: people of color	Brookline: Black	State: people of color	State: Black	Brookline's rank of 17 (people of color)
Central office leaders (superintendent, assistant superintendents, district-wide administrators)	18	34%	17%	27%	14%	2nd
Principals and assistant principals	27	36%	15%	15%	8%	1st

Leadership group, 2025–26	Brookline positions (FTE)	Brookline: people of color	Brookline: Black	State: people of color	State: Black	Brookline's rank of 17 (people of color)
Special education administrators	24	4%	0%	8%	5%	3rd
Curriculum and subject-area leaders	13	6%	0%	10%	2%	8th

Brookline's school leadership is the most diverse in its peer group and more than twice as diverse as the state's. Thirty percent of principals and 40% of assistant principals are people of color, and the assistant principal share has risen from 28% in 2015–16. Central office leadership is also well above the state.

Two groups stand apart. Special education administrators in Brookline, the people who oversee evaluations, eligibility decisions, and placements in each school, include one person of color and no Black administrator. That is below the state (8% people of color, 5% Black), though most peer districts have no administrators of color in these roles at all. Given the state's finding that Brookline over-identifies Black students for special education, the makeup of the team that runs that process deserves attention. Curriculum and subject-area leaders, who shape what is taught and how courses are structured, are similarly almost all white. These are small groups, so one hire or departure can move a percentage by 4 to 10 points. But the pattern is consistent: Brookline has diversified the leaders students and families see most, its principals and assistant principals, more than the leaders behind the scenes.

15.3 The trend

The share of teachers of color rose steadily from about 10% in 2008 to 15.8% in 2018–19, then fell to 12.0% in 2022–23 before partly recovering to 14.4% in 2025–26. Black teachers followed the same arc: their share peaked at 4.6% in 2019–20, fell to 2.4% in 2022–23, and stands at 3.0% now. Statewide, the share of teachers of color has risen steadily, from 6.7% in 2008 to 8.1% in 2018–19 and 10.4% in 2025–26, without the setback Brookline experienced.

Retention drove much of the decline. DESE's retention data shows that in 2022–23, 71% of Black teachers and 78% of Latino teachers stayed from the year before, against 87% of white teachers. Hiring did not make up the difference: of 136 teachers Brookline hired from 2020–21 through 2022–23, 4 were Black and 8 were Latino. Retention data is not yet available. DESE's 2026 review confirms that recruiting and retaining diverse staff has been a challenge, and that hiring processes vary from school to school.

15.4 Why it matters

Studies have found that Black students who have even one Black teacher are more likely to graduate and less likely to be disciplined, and the district's own analysis of special education referrals points to teacher expectations as part of the problem. Brookline has diversified its school leadership and support staff. The next step is a teaching and specialist workforce that looks more like its students, and keeping the teachers of color it hires.

16. Measured against the district's own goals

Outside benchmarks are not the only way to judge Brookline's progress. Its 2024–2027 strategic plan commits the district to eliminating barriers to achievement for every student, regardless of race, and it sets specific targets for Black and Latino students. The share meeting or exceeding expectations in ELA and math is to rise by 3 percentage points each year. Their average growth percentile is to reach at least 50, rising to 53 in 2027. And chronic absence is to fall by 4 percentage points for every student group from its 2022–23 level.

Strategic plan target	2025 result (change from 2024)	2026 result (change from 2025)
Black students, ELA: +3 points a year	+4.5: met	−1.4: missed
Black students, math: +3 points a year	+2.2: missed	−0.3: missed
Latino students, ELA: +3 points a year	+3.0: met	−0.5: missed
Latino students, math: +3 points a year	−2.8: missed	+2.8: missed narrowly
Black and Latino growth percentile of at least 50	Met	Met (Black students' ELA growth exactly 50)
All students, ELA and math (73% for 2025, 74% for 2026)	69% and 71%: missed	68% and 73%: missed
Black students' chronic absence: down 4 points from 21.2%	19.7%: missed	18.2%: missed

Over the plan's first two years, Black students gained about 3 points in ELA and 2 in math, against a target of 6 in each. Latino students gained about 2.5 points in ELA and none in math.

The one target the district met in both years shows the problem with the targets themselves. A growth percentile of 50 means a student is growing at about the state's typical rate. Brookline's white students grow faster than that, at 59 in ELA and 63 in math. A district can meet a growth target of 50 for Black students while the gap between Black and white students keeps widening, which is what this report finds. The 2027 target of 53 would still leave Black students growing more slowly than their white classmates.

The plan also made commitments the community should ask about:

- **An equity audit and root-cause analysis,** scheduled for 2024–25 and 2025–26, along with a redesign of recruitment and hiring for staff of color and a mentoring program for them. Much of this work was assigned to the Office of Educational Equity, which DESE's review reports was eliminated in budget cuts.
- **A working group to reduce the impact of bias in the transition from 8th to 9th grade,** where high school course placement is decided. That connects directly to the AP gap and the tracking concern raised in DESE's review.
- **Annual reporting, by each school's referral team, of the share of Black and Latino students referred for special education evaluation,** which is the data this report asks the district to publish.

These are the district's own commitments, made publicly. Reporting on them each year, and raising the growth target so that closing the gap is the goal, would give the community a shared yardstick for holding the district accountable.

17. What the state's accountability rating shows

DESE gives every district an accountability score each year. Brookline's 2026 score is 76%, which DESE classifies as "meeting or exceeding targets." It is worth understanding what that number measures, because it is easy to misread.

The score is not a ranking of districts. It measures progress toward each district's own improvement targets in achievement, growth, chronic absenteeism, graduation, and a few other indicators. At the district level, only two groups count: all students, and the

lowest-performing students, roughly the bottom quarter based on prior test scores. Results for Black, Latino, and other student groups are reported, but they do not feed into the district's score directly.

That design means the score does not reward narrow racial gaps. Among Brookline and its peers, districts with wider Black–white gaps actually score somewhat higher on average, and Black students' results show no relationship to the score.

District	2026 accountability score	Black–white math gap (pts)	Black students meeting/exceeding, math
Needham	90	39	35%
Lexington	88	43	31%
Acton-Boxborough	86	21	41%
Belmont	85	52	18%
Arlington	82	50	22%
Wellesley	81	51	28%
Concord	79	40	33%
Brookline	**76**	**51**	**27%**
Sharon	75	29	40%
Westborough	73	26	40%
Newton	69	40	30%
Milton	67	32	34%
Andover	64	12	55%
Natick	62	39	30%
Melrose	59	38	26%
Amherst-Pelham	49	34	25%
Chelmsford	49	13	40%

Figure 9. Source: DESE 2026 district accountability reports

Where the rating does speak to equity is in the lowest-performing group. Brookline earned more of the available points for its students as a whole than any of the four comparison districts in Figure 9: 97% in grades 3–8 and 93% in high school. For its lowest-performing students, it earned 55% and 45%. Needham and Lexington, the two top-scoring peers, earned between 79% and 87% for the same group. That difference accounts for most of the 12- to 14-point gap between their scores and Brookline's.

Newton and Milton, the two peers that test the most Black students, show the same pattern in sharper form: strong results for students overall and very weak results for their lowest performers in high school, 18% and 21% of available points. On this measure, Brookline sits with Newton and Milton rather than with Needham and Lexington. Five districts are too few to prove a connection, and DESE does not publish the racial makeup of the lowest-performing group. But with 27% of Brookline's Black students meeting the math standard against 73% of all students, Black students are very likely overrepresented in it.

The practical point for district leaders is direct. Brookline has little room left to gain points from students who are already succeeding. The points it is missing sit with the students it serves least well. Raising results for those students, including Black and Latino students, is the clearest path to a higher state rating, and the right thing to do regardless of the rating.

Two supporting analyses appear in Appendix A: a worked example of how gains for Black students would move the rating, and details on Brookline High and Roland Hayes, which DESE has flagged for low test participation in certain student groups, not for achievement.

17.1 A blind spot in the state's rating

DESE's system does not ignore race, but its headline rating lets racial gaps go uncounted. Only all students and the lowest-performing students count toward a district's score. Black, Latino, and other groups each have targets, and DESE publishes their results, but those results do not move the number. Every group is also measured against its own past performance rather than against other students, so a widening gap registers nowhere in the score.

Brookline's 2026 report shows what that means in practice. In the same year the district was rated "meeting or exceeding targets," white students in grades 3–8 exceeded their ELA target while Black students' scores declined and earned no points. Black students'

four-year graduation rate fell from 86.7% for the class of 2024 to 82.5% for the class of 2025, against a target of 91.6%, and their completion of advanced coursework fell from 89.7% to 81.3%. And the flags DESE does attach to student groups compare each group with the same group statewide. Because Brookline's Black students outperform Black students across Massachusetts, a 51-point gap with their white classmates triggers nothing.

There are real reasons for DESE's design. Many districts test too few Black or Latino students for stable scores. A gap measure can narrow simply because top students decline. And the lowest-performing group, which likely includes a disproportionate share of Brookline's Black students, does carry weight in the score. But the result is a public label that tells Brookline families their district is meeting expectations while one group of its students loses ground.

We urge DESE to:

- Show each district's student-group results alongside its headline score, so gaps sit next to the rating rather than in detail tables.
- Flag districts whose gaps between their own students far exceed the statewide gap, not only those whose groups trail the same group statewide.

PSB does not need to wait for the state. It already has targets for Black and Latino students in its strategic plan; it can report on them publicly and strengthen them now, as the final question in this report asks.

Part IV: Conclusions and Recommendations

18. What this means for Brookline

The strongest defenses of the status quo are that Brookline's white students simply score very high, that its Black students still outperform Black students statewide, and that many of them come from Boston through METCO. Each is true, and none explains the results. As the sections above show, Brookline's gaps remain among the widest when it is compared only with other METCO districts or with the districts that have similar numbers of Black students, and the state average is a bar no one in Brookline would accept for any other group of children. The growth data settles the question. If Black students simply arrived behind, the gap would hold steady; instead, it widens inside our schools.

The same pattern runs through graduation, attendance, discipline, and special education, and several of those gaps are matters of district practice: how absences are coded, when students are referred for special education, how discipline is applied. They require new decisions more than new resources.

Making those decisions takes capacity, and the district's own capacity has shrunk. DESE's 2026 comprehensive review of Brookline found that the district eliminated its office of equity in budget cuts, setting aside two strategic plan goals tied to that office's work, including efforts to recruit educators of color. The review also found that cuts to central office staff, including key data positions, have limited the district's ability to analyze data and monitor progress; one district leader told reviewers the district lacks the capacity to understand "the gaps that exist." And it found the same school-to-school inconsistency this report documents. After years of leadership turnover, Brookline now has a permanent superintendent and a strategic plan that its own leaders

say needs updating. That makes this the moment to rebuild the equity and data capacity the district has lost.

The district can do this work; it already does in places, from high-needs students who rank second among peers to Lincoln School, where Black students meet the math standard at nearly three times the rate they do at Driscoll. The task is to make those results the rule rather than the exception.

Bold and urgent action and measured, measurable progress are not opposites. These numbers give us both a baseline and a yardstick.

We ask Public Schools of Brookline to answer seven questions in public:

1. Why do Black students grow 9 points slower than white students in Brookline, when peer districts hold that difference to half as much or less?

2. What are Sharon and Needham, METCO districts like Brookline, doing that keeps their Black–white math gaps at 29 and 39 points, compared with Brookline's 51?

3. What explains the stronger results for Black students at Lincoln and Lawrence, and how do results differ between Black and Latino students who live in Brookline and those who attend through METCO?

4. Why did Latino students' ELA results fall 10 points since 2019, and what is the plan to recover them?

5. What has the district's root-cause analysis for its special education disproportionality designation found, and will it publish identification rates by race and disability category each year?

6. How does the district decide when an absence is unexcused, and how many juvenile court petitions has it filed each year, by race and disability status?

7. Will the district report publicly each year on its strategic plan targets for Black and Latino students, and will it raise its growth target so that Black and Latino students grow at least as fast as their white classmates?

DESE will publish new results next fall: test scores in September, and graduation, attendance, and discipline figures in the months that follow. The only question is whether they will tell the same story.

Methods and data notes

MCAS. DESE's MCAS Achievement Results dataset, published through the Massachusetts Education-to-Career Research and Data Hub and current as of September 22, 2026. District and state rows, plus school rows for the school-by-school section. 2020 has no results and 2021 testing was disrupted.

Accountability. DESE's 2026 district and school accountability reports, released the same day.

Graduation. DESE's High School Graduation Rates dataset, using the Massachusetts four-year and five-year rates (the rates DESE uses in accountability). District rates include students placed outside the district's high school. Multi-year figures combine classes weighted by cohort size.

College enrollment. DESE's Graduates Attending Institutions of Higher Education report: enrollment by the March after graduation, as a share of all graduates, based on National Student Clearinghouse data. DESE suppresses results with fewer than 15 college enrollees.

Chronic absenteeism. DESE's Student Attendance Report (end-of-year data). A student is chronically absent after missing at least 10% of enrolled days.

Discipline. DESE's Student Discipline Data Report (all offenses). A student counts as disciplined if they received an in-school or out-of-school suspension, expulsion, or removal during the year; students disciplined in more than one year are counted in each.

Special education and court petitions. Figures come from Brookline.News reporting (November 2025) on DESE's designation and Massachusetts Trial Court data, not from the DESE datasets used elsewhere in this report.

Other sources: targets in the "Measured against the district's own goals" section come from the Public Schools of Brookline Strategic Plan 2024–2027, with results drawn from the DESE data in this report; findings on district systems, staffing, and practices come from DESE's Comprehensive District Review of the Public Schools of Brookline, conducted by the American Institutes for Research (site visits March–April 2026, published September 2026).

Advanced coursework and AP. DESE's Advanced Course Completion data for grades 11 and 12. AP participation comes from DESE's Advanced Placement Participation report (students taking at least one exam), divided by grade 11–12 enrollment; because some test takers are in earlier grades, it is a ratio rather than a true rate.

Staff diversity. DESE's Staffing by Race/Ethnicity and Gender data (full-time equivalents, district and state level, through 2025–26); teacher figures use the "Teacher" job class. Leadership groups combine DESE administrator job classes: central office (superintendent, assistant superintendents, human resources, and other district-wide directors), school leaders (principals and assistant principals), special education administrators (school and district), and curriculum leaders (curriculum and subject-area supervisors and coordinators). Retention and hiring come from DESE's Total Educators, Retention, and New Hires by Race/Ethnicity data (headcounts, through 2022–23), so counts differ slightly between the two sources. Student shares by race come from DESE's discipline data for 2024–25.

Combining grades. "Grades 3–8" uses DESE's own combined figure, which weights each grade by students tested. Growth for combined districts is weighted by the number of students with a growth score.

Combined districts. For MCAS, Concord combines Concord (grades 3–8) with Concord-Carlisle Regional (grade 10), and Amherst-Pelham combines Amherst (grades 3–6) with Amherst-Pelham Regional (grades 7–10); Pelham's elementary district is too small to report and is left out, and Amherst-Pelham's Black students have no combined growth figure. High school measures use Concord-Carlisle and Amherst-Pelham Regional. Attendance comparisons leave both out, because their districts report separately without counts to combine them. Staffing combines Concord and Concord-Carlisle; Amherst-Pelham staffing covers the regional district only.

METCO districts. Brookline, Arlington, Belmont, Concord (with Concord-Carlisle), Lexington, Melrose, Natick, Needham, Newton, Sharon, and Wellesley appear on DESE's METCO grant list (FY2018 notice); Acton-Boxborough, Amherst-Pelham, Andover, Chelmsford, Milton, and Westborough do not. METCO now partners with 33 Boston-area districts; the list should be confirmed with METCO, Inc. DESE's data does not identify METCO students, so METCO and resident Black students cannot be separated.

Gaps for high-needs groups compare each group with all other students in the same district, calculated from DESE's counts (all students minus the group).

Income measure. DESE reported "Economically Disadvantaged" through 2021 and "Low Income" from 2022, a broader definition. Low-income trends are not compared across that break.

Small groups. DESE suppresses results for very small groups. No district-wide MCAS figure in this report is suppressed, but many peer districts tested fewer than 100 Black students in grades 3–8, single-grade figures for Brookline's Black students rest on 24 to 40 students, and Brookline graduates only 26 to 50 Black students a year. Results for groups this size can shift several points from year to year, which is why many sections combine three years.

Not covered here. Results for students who are both Black or Latino and low-income, or both Black and have a disability, which DESE does not publish as combined groups. School-level results cover MCAS in grades 3–8 and chronic absenteeism only. DESE also reports Asian students as a single group, so results for specific Asian communities are not available. Low-income trends are not compared across that break.

Appendix A: Accountability details

These two analyses support the discussion of the state's accountability rating in the main report.

A.1 A worked example

How much would gains for Black students move the rating? In 2026, Brookline's lowest-performing students in grades 3–8 fell just short of their targets. They averaged 484.5 in ELA against a target of 485.3, and 486.1 in math against a target of 487.9. Each miss cost a point.

Suppose Black students make up about a sixth of that group, which would mean roughly half of Brookline's Black students in grades 3–8 fall in it. If their average scores had been 5 scaled-score points higher in ELA and 12 points higher in math, the group's averages would have risen by about 0.9 and 2.0 points, enough to reach both targets. Using the weights in Brookline's own report, we estimate that would have raised the district's 2026 annual figure from 74% to about 80%. Its reported score, which blends 2025 and 2026, would have risen from 76% to roughly 79% or 80%, and would settle near 80% if the gains held a second year. For scale, Brookline's Black students trail white students by about 24 scaled-score points in ELA and 27 in math.

Three cautions apply. DESE does not publish the racial makeup of the lowest-performing group, so the one-sixth share is an assumption; PSB should have the actual figure. DESE resets targets each year, so this replays 2026 rather than forecasting 2027. And the point cutoffs are inferred from the labels in DESE's reports, which follow fuller rules than this example captures, so the result is an estimate, not a projection.

A.2 Brookline High and Roland Hayes

Two Brookline schools, Brookline High and Roland Hayes, are classified by DESE as requiring assistance, specifically "in need of focused/targeted support." In both cases the reason is test participation, not achievement. DESE expects at least 95% of students in every student group to take MCAS, and it flags a school when a group falls short.

Brookline High fell short for most of the student groups this report examines. White and Latino students met the target; Black students, Asian students, and every high-needs group did not, and neither did all students in science.

Brookline High, 2026 accountability report	Share of required MCAS tests taken	Met 95% target?
English learners and former English learners	88%	No
Low income	90%	No
High needs	92%	No
Students with disabilities	92%	No
Asian	94%	No
Black	94%	No
Latino	95%	Yes
White	95%	Yes
All students, science	94%	No

Rates combine ELA, math, and science. For most groups, DESE's rate combines 2025 and 2026.

Roland Hayes missed the target for one group: students with disabilities, who took 93% of required tests over two years. Every other group met it; Hayes tested too few Black students for DESE to report a rate.

This matters for reading the high school results in this report. The students most likely to miss tests at Brookline High belong to the same groups whose results we examine, so those groups' reported scores rest on fewer students and may not represent everyone in them. The data cannot show whether the students who skipped would have scored higher or lower. Voters removed MCAS as a graduation requirement in 2024, which may make it harder to get every high school student to sit for the test; DESE's data cannot tell us whether that explains Brookline High's pattern.

Otherwise, both schools rate well against similar schools, with DESE accountability percentiles of 88 for Brookline High and 87 for Roland Hayes. And at both, as in the district overall, the lowest-performing students account for most of the points lost. They earned 33% of available points at each school in 2026, against 92% at Brookline High and 83% at Hayes for all students.

About BRJE

Brookline for Racial Justice & Equity (BRJE) is a nonprofit community organization committed to eliminating racism in Brookline, Massachusetts. We are a grassroots organization dedicated to dismantling systemic racism and advancing policies that promote racial and social justice in our community. We believe that justice is not inevitable; it is something we create together through organizing, persistence, and an unshakable belief in a more equitable future. Through advocacy, education, and direct action, we work to challenge inequities in education, housing, policing, and governance, while building spaces for communities of color to thrive.

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