

2019**2020**

YEAR IN **REVIEW**



ROCKETSHIP
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

THE 2019-2020 SCHOOL YEAR WAS UNDOUBTEDLY OUR MOST CHALLENGING YEAR TO-DATE. BUT IT WAS ALSO OUR MOST INSPIRING.

By the end of the first semester, our Rocketeers were on track to achieve their highest academic growth in four years. All signs were pointing to another year of gap-closing gains. Then COVID-19 struck. Our campuses across the country closed as we were confronted by a truly unprecedented challenge.

The COVID-19 crisis has reinforced the extreme inequities in our society. Disadvantaged communities of color have been disproportionately impacted by this global health and economic crisis. We knew that the learning losses that result from nationwide school closures could be catastrophic. This is not just because of the lack of high-quality classroom instruction. Schools provide a safe haven and source of stability for the millions of students and families who have dealt with trauma in their lives – from poverty, crime, domestic violence, racism, and more. With schools closed, those safety nets are significantly disrupted.

In the early days of the COVID-19 crisis, schools across the country were paralyzed by uncertainty. But **while others waited, we acted.**

We launched our distance learning program just 24 hours after our campuses closed. Teachers and team members across our network stepped up to the challenge. And while we can't replicate all of the robust supports that are in place when kids are on campus, we still found ways to create community and provide stability, support, and joy for our students and families in this time of incredible crisis.

In times of crisis, individual and organizational values are laid bare.

This extraordinary crisis reinforced Rocketship's unequivocal urgency to fight for equity and meet the needs of our kids and communities no matter where they are.

Our values were put to the test again when our nation was violently reminded of another pandemic that has crippled our country for centuries - systemic racism. Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd joined the tragically long list of victims of racial violence. As an organization grounded in social justice and equity, our mission is firmly entrenched in the Black Lives Matter movement. The majority of our staff are people of color. The majority of our students are Black and Latinx. Our entire Rocketship community was grieving. And just as we demonstrated in our response to COVID-19, our network responded to this crisis with a fierce sense of urgency and commitment to support our students and staff of color. As we fight for equity in our communities, we are also confronting inequities in our own organization. We know that if we truly want to change the future, we must also examine and dismantle the implicit bias in our own systems, policies, and practices.

There is nothing normal about the world we all live in right now. But while so many of us are eager to get back to normal – to get back

in school, go back to the office, eat a meal with friends – we must not forget that normal America is not good enough. Racial inequity is normal in America. Inequity in education, housing, healthcare, employment, criminal justice, and more are normal in America. We have yet to realize the idea that forged our nation's founding - that all people are created equal. But it is still an idea worth fighting for. Indeed, it is our mission and our responsibility at Rocketship to fight for justice and demand equity.

We still have so much more work ahead. But no matter what challenges we confront, this past year has made resoundingly clear that we will never waver from our commitment to our Rocketeers, our communities, and our movement to create a more just and equitable future.

AT ROCKETSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS, **WE ARE UNLEASHING POTENTIAL.**



Preston Smith,
Co-Founder and CEO



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 6 [Distance Learning](#)
- 8 [Family Relief Fund](#)
- 12 [Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion](#)
- 16 [Educational Impact](#)
- 22 [Rocketship Bay Area](#)
- 26 [Rocketship Milwaukee](#)
- 30 [Rocketship Nashville](#)
- 34 [Rocketship Washington DC](#)
- 38 [Financials & Supporters](#)

STUDENTS
SERVED
LIFETIME

22,500



9,706 Rocketeers

76% Socio-economically Disadvantaged

49% English Language Learners

84% Latinx or Black

SUPPORTING
RESILIENT
COMMUNITIES



RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

FINDING JOY & STABILITY DURING UNCERTAINTY

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, our schools nationwide closed on Monday, March 16. On Tuesday, March 17 we reopened virtually. It took us just 24 hours to transition to distance learning. We acted with urgency and agility. We knew our approach would not be perfect from the start, but we fiercely believed in the importance of staying connected to our kids and families and iterating on our approach as we navigated learning in a virtual world.

Three guiding principles informed our approach to distance learning: 1) maintaining stability for our students through familiar routines; 2) prioritizing community engagement and support; and 3) ensuring daily student engagement in distance learning. From day one of distance learning our platform provided our Rocketeers and families with daily rituals to establish strong routines. Our days started together with virtual Launch - a school-wide pep rally for learning. Then, we came back together at the end of the school day for virtual Landing - a time to celebrate goals achieved and honor our community.

We realized pretty quickly that our families were especially hard hit by this crisis. In response, every Rocketship

school designated a CareCorps - a team whose mission is to support families who are experiencing the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. Every morning, the team sent a brief wellness survey to all families to ensure everyone felt safe at home and identify any needs in their school community.

Throughout the remainder of the school year we focused on continuous improvement to our distance learning program. We drove student engagement through daily live teaching and small group instruction. We emphasized social emotional learning in partnership with our school-based mental health providers. Plus, we designed a custom software program, **JetPackED**, to track students' online learning progress across all programs and provide teachers with real-time data to further personalize virtual instruction.

Above all else, this crisis has made it clear that, now more than ever, disadvantaged communities need schools that are innovative, agile, compassionate, and responsive to the needs of their community.

LEADING INSTITUTIONS HIGHLIGHT ROCKETSHIP'S DISTANCE LEARNING

The Fordham Institute featured Rocketship in their special report: *Schooling Covid-19: Lessons from leading charter networks from their transition to remote learning*. The report provides concrete recommendations to help schools nationwide significantly improve remote learning by highlighting key actions taken by leading school networks, including Rocketship, "who achieved striking success in the face of the viral challenge."

Bellwether Education Partners and Teach For America also profiled Rocketship in their report: *Promise in the Time of Quarantine: Exploring*

Schools' Responses to COVID-19. The report notes that while "no one school has found the perfect approach to distance learning" the twelve school systems profiled in this report "adopted promising practices in response to common challenges, offering lessons for other schools seeking to improve their distance learning models."



SUPPORTING RESILIENT FAMILIES WITH ROCKETSHIP'S FAMILY RELIEF FUND

The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacts low-income communities of color across our country – the very communities our mission compels us to serve. The impact of this crisis on our families can be catastrophic: lost housing, food insecurity, or reduced access to healthcare. These are key factors that cause children to experience “toxic stress,” which research has shown can derail student learning and delay child development.

Daily outreach to families through our CareCorps revealed the wide range of financial challenges our families were facing as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. So, on April 2, we launched the Rocketship Family Relief Fund. In just six weeks, we raised \$400,000. By the end of May, we distributed all of these funds to 800 of our most resilient families – providing direct financial support for essential needs when they needed it most.



THANK YOU FOR MAKING THE FAMILY RELIEF FUND A REALITY

RELIEF FUND DONORS:

- Aaron Cardwell
Abigail Spaulding
Adair White
Adara Robbins
Alex Terman
Allison Heredia
Amy Filsinger
Amy Klement
Andrew Stern
Anna Santos
Anne Dhanda
Arthur and Toni Rembe Rock
Barbara Schaefer McDuffie
Bethann and Leo Horey
Cameron Keefe
Charles Robinson
Chimezie Chidi
Chris Murphy
Christina Gonzalez-Lopez
Claudia and Richard Deffenbaugh
Cristina Galaviz-Vasquez
Daiana Lambrecht
Daniel Velasco
David Li
Deborah McGriff
Derek Chen
Don and Karen Smith
Douglas Nichols
Elaine Heredia
Emily Alwood
Fred Ferrer
Gloria and Felix Flores
- Greg and Lisa Stanger
Hector Colon
Tyler Blue
Jacqueline Martinez Blanton
James Keefe
James Attard
Jennifer Solomon
Jim and Cynthia Butz
Joan and Barry Rosenthal
John and Catherine Debs
John and Rachel Rosenberg
John Danner
John Lunde
Jordan Blanton
Julia Stiglitz and Vijay Karunamurthy
Justin White
Kamilah Williams-Kemp and Jason Kemp
Kate Leist
Kathleen Matthews
Kristarae Flores
Laura Kozel
Lauren and Bobby Turner
Leigh Mason
Lester Terrence Smith
Lieselotte Groberg
Lisa Applegate
Marc Mumby
Margaret Robinson-Li
Marie Issa Gil
Marvin Bynam
Maureen Matthews
Michael Pritzl
- Nancy Rasmussen
Nathaniel Levine
Paul Hickerson
Perrone Charitable Fund
Preston and Liz Smith
Rachel Heredia
Ralph and Patricia Weber
Raymond Raven and Despina Spanidis
Rebecca Owens
Robert Huizar
Roshni Patel
Sam Rose
Samantha Hanlon
Sandra Levy
Sarah Sealock
Satish Sharma
Shawn and Jennifer Carolan
Stephanie Brown
Susan Paterson
Tammy Chen
Tanya Perez
William Jaume
Yolanda Samano

- Foundations**
Ludwig Family Foundation
McNulty Foundation
Sobrato Family Foundation
Stanley and Jolene Slotter Family Foundation
The Louis Calder Foundation
Tipping Point Community

“

The money helped in countless ways because without it, I would not have been able to maintain basic life anymore. The entire Rocketship organization is an outstanding place that changes, and sometimes saves, the lives of their students and families. I don't know of any other school that goes to the lengths that yours does. You are truly guardian angels.”

Nashville family



DISTANCE LEARNING LAUNCHPAD: A FREE RESOURCE FOR FAMILIES AND EDUCATORS EVERYWHERE

In this time of crisis, collaboration has never been more important. That is why we developed the Distance Learning Launchpad - a free resource to help families, students, and teachers outside of Rocketship adapt to distance learning by sharing what is working for us. By no means do we believe we have all the answers on distance learning. But we do have a growing bank of content, tools, and tips that are proving effective for our students.

Through the [Distance Learning Launchpad](#), families accessed academic lessons by grade level and video lessons on social-emotional learning, art, and movement breaks. As it became clear schools would not reopen before the end of the year, many parents worried that their children were falling behind and had no way to assess their progress. To help families track their students' learning at home we published end of year learning goals for each grade along with corresponding lessons to help students learn and practice their skills.

Our educators are innovating new approaches to distance learning every day and we are continuing to expand this resource for as long as students are out of school.



RESOURCES ACCESSED BY NEARLY

80,000

UNIQUE USERS OVER
FOUR MONTHS



DISTANCE LEARNING LAUNCHPAD

Academic Lessons



[Kindergarten-Readiness Kit](#)



[End-of-Year Learning Goals](#)



[Lessons by Grade Level](#)

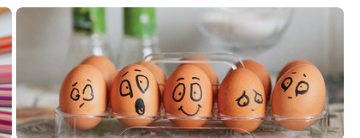
Whole Child Learning



[Cultivating Community](#)



[Movement & Creativity Breaks](#)



[Emotional Well-Being](#)

Access and Equity



[Racial Justice](#)



[Special Education](#)



[Multilingual Learners](#)



BE THE CHANGE

CONFRONTING SYSTEMIC RACISM

In 2020, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and more joined the tragically long list of victims of racial violence. Our entire community was angered by the killing of Black lives and the lives of so many others who came before them – named and unnamed.

Explicit and systemic racism continues to infect our nation.

Racial violence in this country has deep roots. There is no simple fix to dismantle systems that reinforce and perpetuate racist policies and ideologies. We all must play a role in condemning racial violence and ending the systematic oppression of people of color in our country. At Rocketship, we are harnessing the most powerful tool to transform our society and eradicate deeply ingrained cultural biases – education. Instilling in our Rocketeers the importance of social and racial justice is paramount to changing their future and our culture for the better.

In our current struggle to transform underserved communities across the country, we have seen entrenched powers resist change, and we have seen the power of a tenacious community persistently agitate for the opportunities all children deserve. We should be wary of those who avoid agitation. To quote Frederick Douglass, “If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation, want crops without plowing up the ground.”

Our ground needs more plowing.

As an organization grounded in social justice, we know we have to work harder to elevate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) across our network. In 2019, we formed a 15-person DEI National Leadership Team to guide our network strategy and partnered with Promise 54 to assess

our staff experience and workplace practices related to diversity, inclusion and equity. We hosted anti-racism training sessions across our network led by DEI experts Overcoming Racism and oneTILT. We recognize this is just the beginning of a long road ahead, but we are committed to driving this critical work forward as a key organizational priority over the next five years.

Across our network, our leaders and educators are leaning into developmentally appropriate discussions and examinations on race with our Rocketeers. Racism is a reality for our Rocketeers. We must help our students understand its roots and realize their power to work against and overcome racism in our society. In the year ahead, we will be refining our curricula with a focus on elevating socio-political consciousness alongside academic success, cultural competence, and social-emotional learning. We’ll continue to develop the critical consciousness of Rocketship staff members on themes such as racial identity, racism, social identities, the anti-oppression lens and how each of these themes interact with school leadership.

Teaching is a tool of activism.

As educators and catalysts for change, we must not stay silent. Our fight to create educational equity will never be won as long as racial violence and injustice persist. We must provide safe spaces to support our staff and our students through trauma, lean into uncomfortable conversations about systemic racism, and work together to see through the smog* of racism.

* From: Tatum, Beverly Daniel. “Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? and Other Conversations About Race.” New York: Basic Books, 1997.





ROCKETSHIP'S DEI VISION

Rocketship seeks to unleash the full potential of our incredible team and communities by purposefully pursuing representation in our communities and breaking down barriers to power. At Rocketship, we work to create a safe, collaborative environment that celebrates our differences and strengthens our community. Our pursuit of diversity, equity, and inclusion recognizes the systemic inequality of opportunity in our society, and we seek to address these disparities.

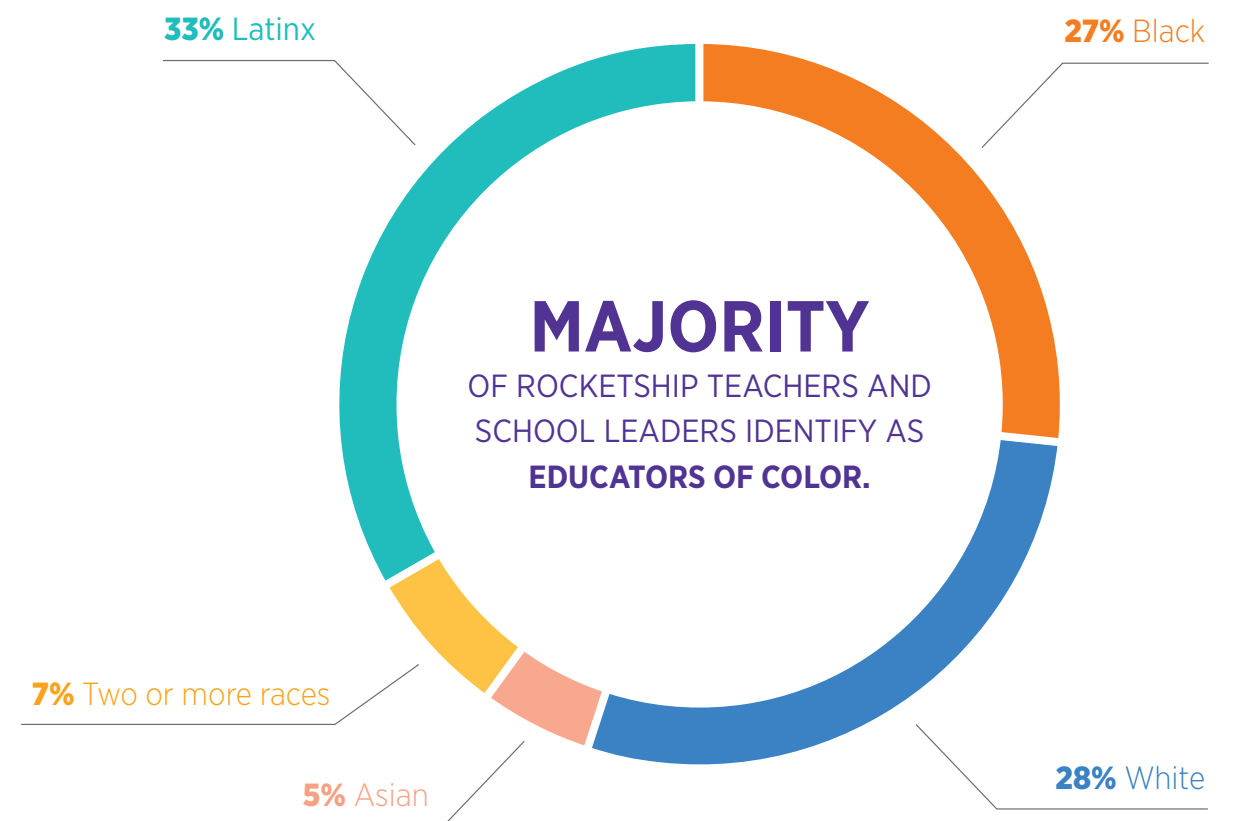
- **DIVERSITY:** We seek to create a diverse collective of change agents with voices, experiences, backgrounds, and identities, at all levels, that authentically represent the communities that we serve.
- **EQUITY:** We acknowledge that systemic advantages and barriers exist in our society at large. We work to break down those barriers to ensure all staff, families, and students have equitable access to opportunities regardless of identities.
- **INCLUSION:** We create a culture of belonging where people of diverse values, backgrounds, and identities are valued, and respected. We will include diverse perspectives in decisions that impact our collective work.

EDUCATOR DIVERSITY BENEFITS ALL STUDENTS

An increasing body of research has shown that student achievement and attendance go up, and suspension rates go down, when students have at least one same-race teacher. Yet, a recent federal [report](#) from the Institute of Education Sciences shows that America's teaching force hasn't increased in diversity. 79% of the nation's public school teachers in 2017-18 were white. While public schools saw a slight increase in Latinx teachers since 2015, there was no change in the share of Black teachers, which has actually declined since the 1990s.

We are flipping the diversity in education script at Rocketship. The majority of our educators - 72% - identify as people of color.

Equity in education is about providing each student with what they need to succeed. This includes learning from teachers who offer both windows and mirrors - people who bring new perspectives, as well as reflect their own background and experience. That is why we are striving to create a more diverse workforce with educators that bring a rich variety of experiences, ideas, and perspectives to our classrooms.





BEATING THE ODDS

ROCKETEERS ON PACE FOR HIGHEST GROWTH IN 4 YEARS

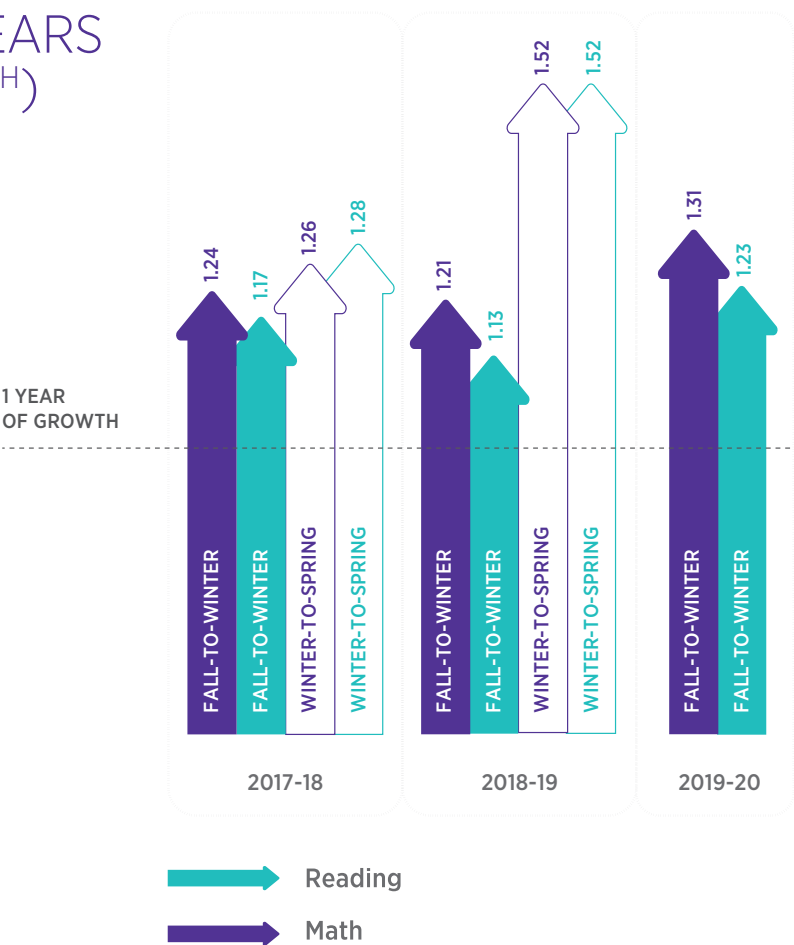
Every year a student spends in an underperforming school is another year they fall further behind their college-bound peers. Eventually those gaps become insurmountable. That is why Rocketship opens multiple grade levels in year one and continues to backfill students every school year. When students first join Rocketship, we anticipate major gains in academic growth to start

narrowing the gap that separates them from their college-bound peers. With end of year assessments canceled due to COVID-19, we cannot report on the performance and progress of our Rocketeers for the entire 2019-20 school year. However, our mid-year assessments administered in December indicated that Rocketeers were on pace to

grow 1.31 years in math and 1.23 years in reading over the 19-20 school year. At mid-year, our Rocketeers were on track to achieve their highest academic growth in four years. First year Rocketeers made impressive gains and were on track to grow 1.61 years in math and 1.34 years in reading.

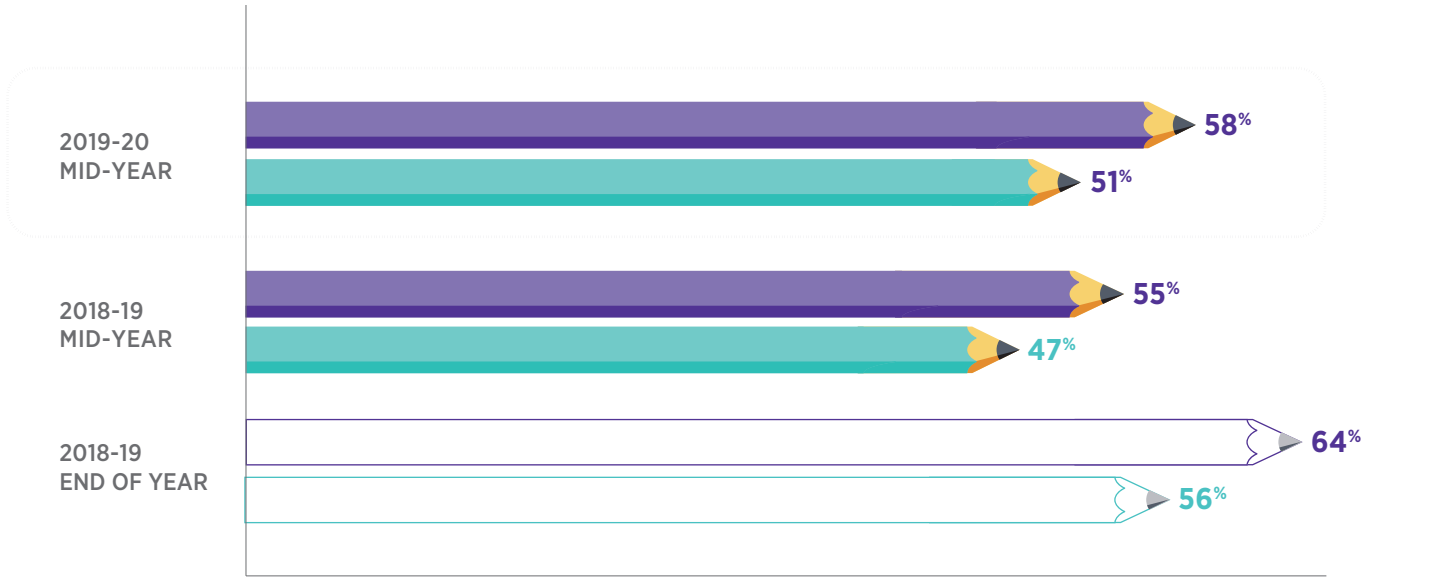
NWEA MAP GROWTH™ YEARS FOR ALL STUDENTS (K-5TH)

NWEA, the Northwest Evaluation Association, and its MAP Growth™ nationally-normed assessment, is used by more than 8,000 schools and districts throughout the world. Rocketship students take the MAP assessment in the fall, winter, and spring. Our Rocketeers grow more than a full grade level in a single school year, every year. On last year's winter assessment, our Rocketeers achieved the highest mid-year growth performance over the last four years. As the chart shows, Rocketeers historically accelerate their academic growth from winter to spring. We have no doubt that our Rocketeers would have set new end of year records had COVID-19 not forced us to cancel our end of year assessments.



STUDENTS ON TRACK TO SURPASS HIGHEST ACHIEVEMENT

We aim to get every Rocketeer on the college and career-ready path by the time they move on to middle school. One way that we measure this is by assessing how many Rocketeers score at or above grade level on the nationally-normed NWEA MAP exam. NWEA measures “on grade level” as scoring at or above the 50th percentile. In 2019-20, our end of year assessment was canceled due to COVID-19, but on the mid-year assessment, our network was outpacing our average for the prior school year in both math and reading.



This chart shows the percentage of Rocketeers in every region scoring at or above grade level (50th percentile) on the nationally-normed NWEA MAP assessment.

Math
Reading

ACHIEVING MY COLLEGE DREAMS

by Chelsea Torres, Rocketship Los Sueños Alumna



Rocketship Los Sueños is where my dreams started. I was nine years old when my elementary school went on a field trip to the University of California - Berkeley and my mom came along as a chaperone. No one in my family, not even my cousins, had ever been to college, so I didn't really understand what it was. I'd never considered what came after high school other than working long, hard hours like my parents and aunts and uncles did. I guess I assumed I'd clean houses like my mom or work in a bagel shop like my dad. Instead, this fall, I will be attending UC Berkeley.

Stepping onto the UC Berkeley campus at nine years old, my dreams were born. From that day on, my mom and I shared a dream of me one day walking that campus as a student – as the first in my family to go to college, as a proud member of my East San Jose community, as a carrier of my farmworker ancestors' dreams.

I achieved this dream because 10 years ago, my parents enrolled me at Rocketship Los Sueños Academy. There I learned about college and how working hard at school could give me opportunities my family had never had. I joined a community of dedicated teachers and students who lifted each other up through hard times and good ones, from elementary school all the way to today.

I transferred into Rocketship midway through third grade. My parents weren't happy with the education

my older brother received in our local elementary school, and I was struggling as well. The transition was pretty rough – I wasn't used to homework and struggled to get up to speed. But by the end of that third grade year, through the tireless efforts of my teachers, I was on track and getting the hang of things.

Now, becoming a Berkeley student will help me to fulfill a new dream: becoming a social worker. Going to school on the Eastside, I saw peers who were not as prepared as I was – academically or with life skills to succeed. Through social work, I want to give back to my community by helping academically gifted students overcome barriers such as societal stereotypes, family problems, coming from bad neighborhoods, and others, and help them find success.

I will enter UC Berkeley alongside two of my Rocketship Los Sueños classmates – Alex Garcia and Ciara Lopez. Together, we are living our dreams and those of a proud, hardworking Latino community from East San Jose. As Alex reminded me the other day, the parents who put their kids at Rocketship Los Sueños are painters, house cleaners, grocery baggers. They're workers. We come from a community of workers who dreamt of better opportunities for their children. It's up to us to continue this tradition and make them proud.



ELEMENTARY-ONLY BY DESIGN



CHANGING THE PUBLIC EDUCATION ECOSYSTEM

By focusing exclusively on elementary education, we are working to improve the entire ecosystem of public education in the communities we serve. We are not creating a parallel K-12 school system, we are focused on improving outcomes for kids and deepening engagement with parents at the elementary level.

Our expertise in elementary education prepares thousands of Rocketeers in their vital early years of education. When they move on to attend different middle schools across the communities we serve, those schools welcome our Rocketeers who are ready for the rigors of middle school. In fact, a three-year [study by SRI Education](#) found that our Rocketeers are a full year ahead of their classmates in both math and reading in middle school. This means middle schools are enrolling more students that are on grade level and ready to advance their education.

We are sending powerful parents off to join their middle school communities, as well. During their time at Rocketship, our parents are deeply engaged in their Rocketeers' education. They become champions for their child's learning and learn how to harness the power of their voice to advocate for their students and their communities. They learn to hold leaders accountable and ensure their student continues to receive the same excellence in education that they experienced during their elementary years.

Excellent elementary schools beget stronger middle schools beget stronger high schools. It's a virtuous cycle designed to scale impact far beyond the number of seats offered by Rocketship. This is how our elementary-only model is designed to improve the entire public education ecosystem in the communities we serve.

ROCKETSHIP BAY AREA

6,703
STUDENTS

74%
LATINX

79%
SOCIOECONOMICALLY
DISADVANTAGED

56%
ENGLISH
LEARNERS



Rocketship started in 2007 in a church in downtown San Jose with makeshift classrooms, seven fearless teachers, and 160 courageous Rocketeers. Building on an innovative model of teaching, learning, and parent power, Rocketship has grown to a network of 13 high-performing schools across the Bay Area serving nearly 7,000 students.

Rocketship is working to improve equity in communities across the Bay Area. While our organization has evolved since then, one thing remains for our founding region: the thriving Bay Area economy is not benefiting all communities. Our families, the vast majority of whom are low-income Latinx or Black, were already struggling to find good jobs, affordable housing, safe neighborhoods, and manageable commutes. Then this winter, the Bay Area became one of the first places in the U.S. to combat COVID-19. The largely Latinx East Side of San Jose accounted for more than one third of the county's first 100 deaths from COVID-19. People in Santa Clara County's poorest zip codes are four times more likely to die from COVID-19 than those in the wealthiest zip codes. Throughout this crisis, our 13 schools have been a lifeline for our communities - providing support, resources, and stability along with continuing to serve our Rocketeers with the excellent education they deserve.



RECOGNIZED AS TOP BAY AREA SCHOOLS FOR UNDERSERVED STUDENTS & DISTINGUISHED SCHOOLS OF CALIFORNIA

Each year, Innovate Public Schools recognizes the Bay Area public schools achieving excellent results for low-income Latino and African American students. Their annual [Top Bay Area Public Schools for Underserved Students Report](#) examines state test results to identify schools that are closing the achievement gap. Since Innovate's first report in 2014, few Bay Area schools have achieved this honor. Out of 1,280 schools in the Bay Area only 52 schools made the list in 2019-2020 - eleven of those were Rocketship schools. For the third year in a row, Rocketship had the most schools of any charter network or school district featured on the list.

Three Rocketship schools were also named 'Distinguished Schools' by the State of California for closing achievement gaps and achieving exceptional student performance. Congratulations to Rocketship Fuerza Community Prep, Rocketship Mosaic Elementary, and Rocketship Spark Academy! On the most recent state assessment, disadvantaged students at Rocketship's three Distinguished Schools scored above the 80th percentile in reading and math among disadvantaged students statewide. At Rocketship Mosaic and Rocketship Spark, disadvantaged students scored in the 99th percentile in math, which is especially notable given the underrepresentation of diverse backgrounds in technology and science fields in the region.





REDWOOD CITY ROCKETEERS CELEBRATE NEW CAMPUS

After months of parents and education organizers coming together, we're thrilled to announce that Rocketship Redwood City Prep has moved to a new campus! This new school environment allows us to serve even more students and will feature 12 classrooms, renovated restrooms, an indoor gymnasium, kitchen servery, fully-equipped administrative offices, and best of all, an amazing playground structure with abundant play space. This milestone came at perfect timing as Rocketship Redwood City Prep celebrated its strongest year of enrollment since opening. Congratulations to the committed staff and parents who partnered with the district to make this a reality!

SUPPORTING STUDENTS THROUGH TRAUMA

This year Rocketship mourned students whose lives were lost to tragedy and violence. Our hearts are forever with these families. After first-grade Rocketeer, Stephen Romero, was killed in a mass shooting in Gilroy, CA, Principal Danny Etcheverry wrote the following reflection to help other school communities cope during times of loss. This story was originally posted on [Chalkbeat.org](#).

My first day of school this year started in a distressing new way: with a moment of silence.

I am the principal of Rocketship Spark Academy in San Jose. Six-year-old Stephen Romero, a rising first-grade student, was gunned down in [Gilroy, California](#), on July 28, 2019. School started just two weeks later.

Nothing prepared me to lead a school through the aftermath of this tragedy. How do you make sense of such unspeakable violence, let alone help an entire elementary school heal?

I desperately hope that no one else will ever need to use the lessons I learned. But I know they will, so here are a few ideas that helped guide us — and that might ease the burden a little bit for educators who find themselves with such a task.

COMMUNICATE HONESTLY

We worked with our families to explain the tragedy to their kids before school started. This approach provided a more private space for students to learn about the tragedy before hearing about it at school. We then started the first day of school with a moment of silence. Instead of jumping right into first day activities, we took the time to hold community meetings. We encouraged teachers to show their emotions, offering a healthy example of responding to tragedy.

PROVIDE DIFFERENTIATED SUPPORT

With our youngest Rocketeers, we spent a lot of time talking about the concept of death and tragedy. For Stephen's class (and that of his sister and cousin), school leaders and mental health counselors joined the first-day community meeting, offering immediate, one-on-one support. We also gave students

the chance to process through action, encouraging them to write letters to Stephen or draw pictures of their favorite memory of him.

The conversations that unfolded in our classrooms helped us understand the kind of support needed for both students and staff.

TREAT COMPOUNDED TRAUMA

At Rocketship Public Schools, well over 80% of our students are classified as socioeconomically disadvantaged, and up to 30% of students at some of our schools are classified as homeless. It is well documented that our children are much more likely than their more affluent peers to experience trauma, which can impede their learning and development.

At Rocketship Spark Academy, some of our students responded by revisiting past family traumas, some reverted to old, disruptive behaviors, and some refused to engage at all. So we met students where they were. We infused social-emotional learning lessons into every class and deepened our parent engagement efforts. We focused on using our trauma-informed teaching techniques, which include learning how to put disruptive student behaviors into context.

When navigating unthinkable tragedies like this, we need to be mindful to balance our compassion with intolerance for the violence that affects our communities and society at large.

Healing is a long journey, and we're just getting started.

Chalkbeat



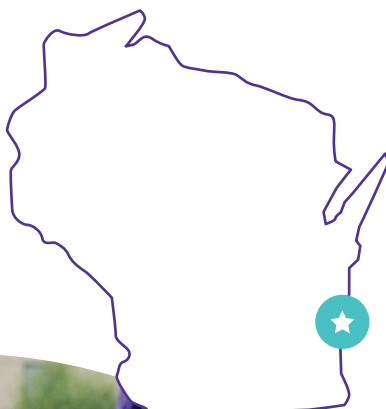
ROCKETSHIP MILWAUKEE

669
STUDENTS

74%
LATINX

72%
SOCIOECONOMICALLY
DISADVANTAGED

16%
SPECIAL
EDUCATION



In 2013, Rocketship Milwaukee launched the largest charter school opening in the history of Milwaukee: Rocketship Southside Community Prep including 230 founding Rocketeers. Since then we have grown this school to over 500 students and launched our second school, Rocketship Transformation Prep, in 2018. We are proud to now serve nearly 700 students on both the North and South Side of Milwaukee.

Milwaukee continues to hold the distinction of being one of the most segregated cities in our country. It has also been ranked the worst place in America for Black families, and Latinx people suffer from high levels of poverty and lagging household incomes. COVID-19 follows this pattern - disproportionately affecting Black and Latinx communities. In the spring, Black people represented 26% of the Milwaukee County population, but 70% of total deaths from COVID-19.

Our families are courageously navigating the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, and our schools stepped up to fight alongside them. Rocketship launched high-quality distance learning and Care Corps. Our educators went above and beyond to get our students the tools they needed to learn. And when George Floyd's death ignited a national reckoning with systemic racism, our Rocketeers led their communities in protest. This year, more than ever before, affirmed that together, we are all Rocketship Rocketeers.



ROCKETSHIP TRANSFORMATION PREP CELEBRATES NEW CAMPUS ON THE NORTH SIDE OF MILWAUKEE

Founding families at Rocketship Transformation Prep recently celebrated the opening of their new, six-acre campus on the north side of Milwaukee last year. Formerly in the Silver Spring Neighborhood Center, the school's new bright and beautiful facility provides a welcoming school environment for students, staff, and families.

Transformation Prep's larger, new campus allows us to expand our impact on the North Side to serve up to 400 Rocketeers. The second phase of renovations will transform the former church sanctuary into a gymnasium and a cafeteria, where students can enjoy meals and playtime together. We also plan to utilize this space as a hub for the larger community.

“

We are so proud of our new home. Our school families and their children deserve this safe, clean, beautiful space that facilitates joyful culture and strong learning.”

Kourtney Vang
Founding Principal



STANDING IN SOLIDARITY WITH BLACK LIVES MATTER

At the end of the school year, Rocketeer students and staff joined the millions of Americans demanding an end to police brutality and racial injustice. Schools across our network held moving digital protests where they vocalized their pain and outrage and lifted spirits with chants of Black Lives Matter. In Milwaukee, Rocketship Transformation Prep organized a silent protest, where teachers, students and parents knelt for nine minutes on the sidewalk outside of school. Assistant Principal Mia Harvey was featured on [NPR's Morning Edition](#) highlighting why it's critical for the school community to come together during this time.



“

It was very important to invite our families here, and see that we're not being silent about this. Many mothers are really scared for their sons, and that's very unfortunate. So we're just letting them know, we're going to do everything we can. We're going to protest, we're going to fight, we're going to write letters. We're going to do all we can to stand up, and let them know, we're not going to let this die down. We're going to fight for their rights every day until this changes.”

Mia Harvey

Assistant Principal, Rocketship Transformation Prep

MILWAUKEE TEACHER FINDS NEW WAYS TO SPARK STUDENTS' LOVE FOR LEARNING

The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel featured a story on the challenges young children faced during distance learning and how Emily Suarez Del Real, a Rocketship Southside Community Prep Kindergarten teacher, is overcoming barriers to keep her students engaged and motivated. Here are a few excerpts from that story.

“My main job as a K4 teacher is making kids fall in love with learning.”

And Emily Suarez Del Real is doing her best to do her job. These days, it's not easy, and the circumstances are not ideal. Suarez Del Real's work took a big turn when conventional schooling stopped in mid-March due to the coronavirus pandemic. She has been working with her students since then by video, online conversations, phone and so on.

But Suarez Del Real and many others like her are convinced kids can make progress in education in this time of distance learning, even young kids.

Brittany Kinser, who leads the two Rocketship schools in Milwaukee, said that at least 80 percent of its 700 students are expected to meet this year's learning goals that were set before the great disruption. Suarez Del Real thinks the percentage for her K4 kids will be higher.

milwaukee journal sentinel

Kinser said, “If we can make sure they are learning, that is the most powerful thing we can do. . . . We cannot give another obstacle to our students.”

Martha Ruiz said her daughter, Maya, one of Suarez Del Real's students, has taken surprisingly well to at-home learning.

“I stay in constant communication with Ms. Suarez and make sure she (Maya) has met her Rocketship goals for the week.” However, success at any time, especially now, takes more than giving kids good computers and lessons. Kinser said, “We have to show them love and support.”

Almost no one thinks what is going on now, even in the best examples, is better than being in school. But when regular school isn't an option, there are still ways to connect, to teach, and, as Suarez Del Real puts it, to offer kids ways to fall in love with learning.



ROCKETSHIP NASHVILLE

1,028
STUDENTS

36%
LATINX

61%
SOCIOECONOMICALLY
DISADVANTAGED

57%
BLACK

Rocketship opened Rocketship Nashville Northeast Elementary in 2014 and Rocketship United Academy in 2015. Our two schools serve over 1,000 students in Nashville. Yet, those children face obstacles that were built far before their time at Rocketship.

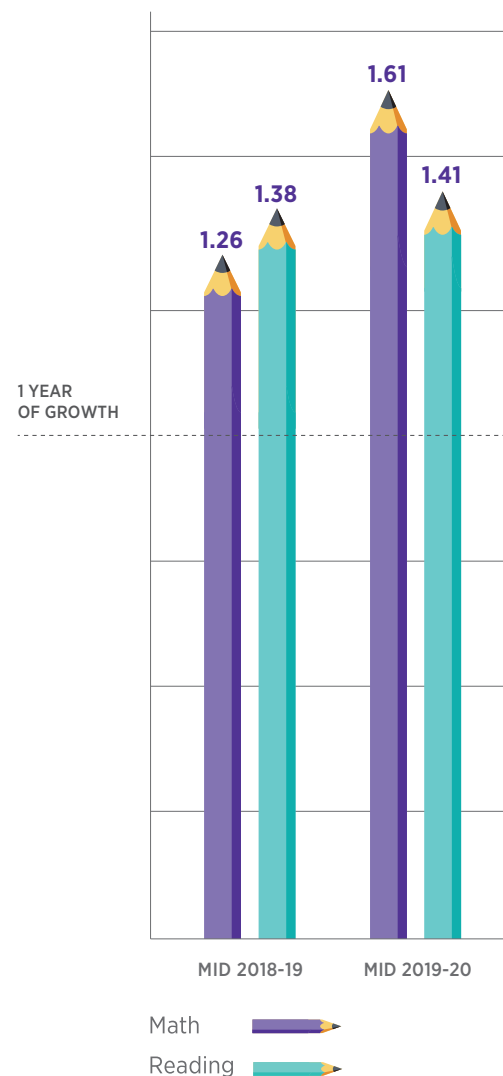
It took a court order issued more than a decade after the landmark decision of Brown v. Board of Education for Nashville's public schools to fully integrate. Still a half century later, the stain of systemic racism on the city's public education system remains: Students of color and students from low-income families are those most likely to be zoned for low-performing schools.

Changing this fact is what drives Rocketship's work in Nashville. Both of our schools are Title 1, serving a majority of low-income families, and both have been named a "Reward School," the highest recognition for student achievement by the Tennessee Department of Education.

Nashville families are taking notice and advocating for more access to Rocketship's high-achieving elementary school model. With the support of parents, Rocketship received approval in late 2019 to open a third school in Southeast Nashville, the most diverse and fastest-growing part of the city, where nearly all district-managed schools are both over capacity and under-performing. We are eliminating racial inequity from public education in Nashville, one community at a time.



Tennessee NWEA Scores



NASHVILLE SCHOOLS BREAK CEILINGS IN ACADEMIC GROWTH

Last year, Rocketeers at Rocketship United Academy and Rocketship Nashville Northeast Elementary reached new heights in their year-over-year academic growth! Every fall, winter, and spring students take the nationally normed NWEA MAP assessment to measure growth and grade-level achievement. This year, COVID-19 cancelled the spring assessment. But our Tennessee Rocketeers were on track for incredible growth - averaging 1.61 years of growth in math.

Our Rocketeers tend to grow even more from winter to spring, so we have no doubt our Nashville Rocketeers were on track for record-setting spring results.

THIS YEAR, TENNESSEE
ROCKETEERS SCORED

1.61

YEARS OF GROWTH IN MATH
ON THE MID-YEAR ASSESSMENT.

ROCKETSHIP WINS CHARTER FOR THIRD SCHOOL IN NASHVILLE

This year Rocketship Public Schools earned a charter to open its third school in Nashville’s rapidly-growing Antioch community. With two “Reward Schools” in Nashville—the state’s highest recognition for academic achievement—we’re excited to serve more families starting in the 2022-2023 school year.

Mr. Lopez, a parent at Rocketship United Academy, lives in Antioch and advocated for this new campus. Prior to coming to the United States, the Lopez family lived in Mexico and enjoyed a high-quality private school. But after relocating for Mr. Lopez’s work, the family’s experience with our local public education system was anything but exceptional.

Mr. Lopez’s oldest child, who is now in fourth grade, was in the first grade at the time. After only one week at their zoned neighborhood school, he said it was clear no one was focused on helping his child improve his English or acclimate to learning in a new country. He searched for a

better public school option and found Rocketship United Academy. The family immediately noticed a difference.

Mr. Lopez shared his story during a Metro Nashville School Board public meeting. “The staff at Rocketship show respect for different races. They don’t discriminate because you don’t speak the language,” Mr. Lopez said to the board. He said his son’s English and academic knowledge quickly surpassed that of his cousins who had come to the U.S. around the same time.

The Lopezes are just one of the families living in Antioch. The bus ride for students like Mr. Lopez’s son is a full hour. He told the board he hoped his one-year-old daughter will have the opportunity to attend a Rocketship school much closer to home. Now, his family and many others will have the opportunity to do so.



THE POWER OF COMMUNITY



Just before the COVID-19 pandemic hit Tennessee, a deadly tornado tore through Nashville, displacing both Rocketship students and staff. Though devastating for many, the tornado also highlighted the community, love, and trademark volunteer nature of our very own Tennessee Rocketeers. Right away, Rocketship Public Schools and other charter networks went to work to support their families, staff, and the Nashville community at large by organizing and acting courageously - another testament to what’s possible when people come together amidst crisis.”

James Robinson
Director of Schools, Nashville

ROCKETSHIP WASHINGTON DC

1,306
STUDENTS

98%
BLACK

74%
AT-RISK

29%
HOMELESS

In 2016, Rocketship Rise Academy opened in Southeast DC's Ward 8 as the largest charter opening in DC history. Rocketship Legacy Prep opened in Ward 7 a year later. In their very first year, both schools achieved Tier 1 status - the highest ranking for DC Public Charter Schools. Partnering with AppleTree Institute to provide high-quality pre-K education, we serve over 1,300 Rocketeers every day - students who have the potential to be DC's next leaders and creative thinkers.

DC has always been a city of uneven power, opportunity, and access to resources. Crossing the Anacostia River can feel like entering a different world. While the federal government and those in its orbit concentrate wealth, many in DC live in economically distressed neighborhoods with little hope for change.

Tragically, COVID-19 is no different. In DC, Black residents make up 47% of COVID-19 cases in the city yet account for 80% of the deaths. Once again, the unequal toll of this pandemic largely mirrors historic patterns of neglect and systemic racism.

Our schools are fighting to change those patterns. Our two schools stand proudly as proof that income and zip codes do not limit the potential of our Rocketeers. Rise Academy and Legacy Prep are community spaces, mental health centers, food distribution hubs, and so much more. The learning, growing, joy, and love that our Rocketeers experience every day - in-person or during distance learning - is putting every single student on the path to a better future.



FOUNDING FAMILIES NAME ROCKETSHIP'S NEW SCHOOL IN DC

Over the past two years, our team has done incredible work to prepare for the opening of our third campus in Washington DC. We pride ourselves on building deep relationships with our parents and communities during the founding of a new school. And our DC team, led by Founding Principal Angel McNeil, wasn't going to let the COVID-19 crisis undermine our ability to partner with parents to define and develop the unique identity of our third DC school.

School naming is a rite of passage for all founding families in the first year of a new Rocketship school. We come together as a united community, share our aspirations for our school, and set a foundation for parent power. On April 25th, our school leaders, teachers, and parents came together virtually to share ideas and propose names for our new campus in Ward 5. A few weeks later, the school community reconvened online and voted to name our campus Rocketship Infinity Community Prep! Our community also selected Integrity as our school's fifth core value (alongside Respect, Responsibility, Empathy, and Persistence). Our STEAM-focused (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) school opened its doors in August 2020 and offers Rocketeers enrichment offerings in dance and visual arts!



SEEING A BRIGHTER FUTURE

To a striking degree, children's school performance—and how they feel and behave in class—is affected by vision. The American Academy of Ophthalmology estimates that 80% of all learning during a child's first 12 years comes through the eyes.

In our mission to eliminate the achievement gap in our lifetime, Rocketship DC knew we had to do something to help our students see clearly so they could learn. We found that 86 of the 97 Rocketeers screened needed glasses. So, last spring, thanks to the Rales Foundation and Eye Central, we offered a free eye exam and gave DC Rocketeers two free pairs of glasses - one for home and one for school.

"We know the difference vision makes in a child's confidence and their learning. I was born and raised here in Ward 7 of DC, so it's important to me to be able to do this work in the community I come from."

Tamika Joyner

Associate Director,
Growth & Community Engagement



ROCKETSHIP DC COMMUNITY RALLIES FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

In June, school leaders, teachers, parents and Rocketeers came together virtually to hold a rally in support of Black Lives Matter. Many members of our community shared moving speeches and heartfelt reflections.

Rocketship Rise teacher Elizabeth Pinede aptly shared how important it is for our brilliant Black students to feel seen, safe, and heard.

"After hearing the tragic news of the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, and Breonna Taylor, one of my first thoughts was, 'What am I going to tell my students?' I was afraid I would say the wrong thing. I was afraid they wouldn't understand. I was afraid that this might be too big of a conversation for them.

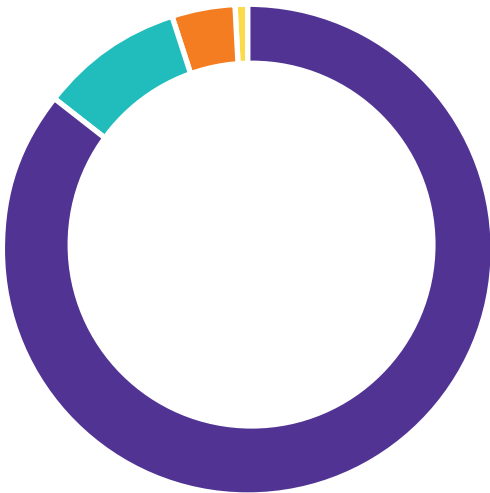
However, after having several conversations with all of my students, I was in awe and inspired by the many moving and beautiful things that they had to say. Our kids are the future. Our kids are watching us, and they're looking to see what we do. Let's continue to make them proud. It's up to us to make sure that we're creating a world where they don't have to continue to see this anymore. It's up to us to speak up, to speak out. And to all of the children watching, remember your voice matters. Your words have so much power. Keep speaking up. Keep fighting for justice. We will change this."

FINANCIALS

Rocketship is building a scalable and financially sustainable non-profit school model that propels student achievement in underserved communities across the country. In 2019–20, 95% of our funding came from public sources. School-based expenses accounted for 84% of our spending.

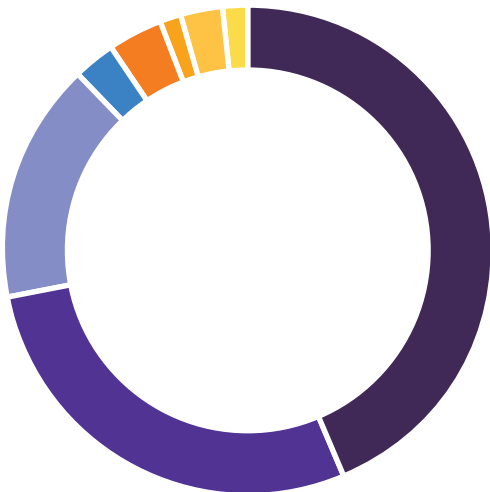
FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY
Fully enrolled schools reach financial sustainability within three to five years of launching. Each region is financially sustainable at five to eight schools. Our Bay Area region is our first fully sustainable region, meaning that our 13 schools and the regional team supporting them operate solely on public funds.

REVENUE



- 86% State
- 8% Federal
- 5% Philanthropy
- 1% Other Local Revenue

EXPENSES



- 45% School Staff
- 25% School Operating Costs
- 14% School Facilities
- 4% Achievement & Personalized Learning
- 3% Community Engagement, Comms & Parent Leadership
- 3% Facilities & Operations
- 3% Talent, HR & Strategy
- 3% Finance & Legal

SUPPORTERS

ROCKETSHIP BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Louis Jordan, Chair
- Alex Terman
- Charmaine Detweiler
- Daniel Velasco
- Deborah McGriff
- Greg Stanger
- Jean-Claude Brizard
- Jolene Slotter
- Julia Stiglitz
- June Nwabara
- Mai Huong Ho-Tran
- Mike Fox
- Ralph Weber
- Raymond Raven
- Yolanda Bernal Samano

WISCONSIN BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Ralph Weber, Chair
- Emily Alwood
- Kamilah Williams-Kemp
- Marvin Bynum
- Paul Hickerson
- Tim Sheehy

DC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Jolene Slotter, Chair
- Barry Rosenthal
- Keshia Battle
- Jacque Patterson
- Justin Bakewell
- Matthew Aaron
- Melissa Martin
- MenSa Maa
- Rena Johnson
- Rose Waller
- Simone Brown
- Tom Nida
- Zakiya Reid

TENNESSEE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Abby Spaulding, Chair
- April Taylor
- Anderson Green
- Daniel Lopez
- Dr. James Hildreth

- June Nwabara
- Maragret Riley King
- Phil Elbert

TEXAS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Peter Philpott, Chair
- Alex Jimenez
- Cynthia Prince
- Derek Carson
- Loretta Burns
- MiShon Landry
- Ralph Emerson
- Vincent Davila
- Victoria Puente
- Walter Dansby

AUTHORIZERS

Rocketship couldn't do this work without the partnership, support, and expertise of our authorizers.
Antioch Unified School District
California State Board of Education
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Office of Charter Schools
District of Columbia Public Charter School Board
Franklin-McKinley School District
Metro Nashville Public Schools
Redwood City School District
Santa Clara County Office of Education

MAJOR DONORS

Thank you for your generous support of our educators, communities, and Rocketeers. Below are supporters who gave \$5,000 and above.

National

- Alex Terman
- Apple
- Arthur and Toni Rembe Rock
- Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation*
- Charter School Growth Fund
- Crites Family Charitable Fund
- Dauber Foundation
- Deborah McGriff
- Greg and Lisa Stanger
- Iriz Ruiz
- John and Catherine Debs

- John and Rachel Rosenberg
- Julia Stiglitz and Vijay Karunamurthy
- Louis and Lynda Jordan
- Maria and Dave Kaval
- Michael & Susan Dell Foundation
- Orrick, Herrington, & Sutcliffe LLP

Bay Area

- California Charter Schools Association
- Marin County Day Schools
- San Jose Public Library Foundation
- Silicon Schools Fund*
- Tipping Point Community

Milwaukee

- Bader Philanthropies Inc
- City Forward Collective*
- Gass Weber Mullins
- Greater Milwaukee Foundation
- Honkamp Family Foundation
- Northwestern Mutual Foundation
- Perkins Malo Hunter Foundation

Nashville

- Sunnyside Foundation
- Vanderbilt University Medical Center

Texas

- Kleinheinz Family Foundation*
- Sid W. Richardson Foundation*
- The City Fund*
- Walton Family Foundation*

Washington DC

- CityBridge Foundation*
- DC Education Equity Fund
- Douglas and Deborah Nichols
- Leo and Bethann Horey
- Stanley and Jolene Slotter
- Family Foundation
- The J. Willard and Alice S. Marriott Foundation*
- The Norman and Ruth Rales Foundation

* Indicates single year of multi-year commitment

