



2022
2023

YEAR IN REVIEW

ROCKETSHIP
PUBLIC SCHOOLS
WISCONSIN

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NETWORK
LIFETIME
STUDENTS
SERVED

30,499

713 Rocketeers
85% Socioeconomically Disadvantaged
34% English Language Learners
94% Latino and Black
14% Special Education

2022-23
WISCONSIN
STUDENT
POPULATION

Sixteen years ago, Rocketship Mateo Sheedy opened its doors in downtown San Jose with a humble 160 students. Today, we have grown into a formidable force in public education, with 23 schools spread across California, Milwaukee, Tennessee, Washington DC, and Texas, serving nearly 11,000 children and families each day. Our progress from that single school to a widespread national network mirrors the rise of innovative public charter schools across the country.

A recent groundbreaking study from Stanford showcased that students in public charter schools consistently outperform their district school counterparts. The study's author, Margaret "Macke" Raymond, wrote that "What you're looking at is really the only story in U.S. education policy where we've been able to create a set of conditions such that schools actually do get better." The study recognized Rocketship Public Schools as a "gap-busting" network — proof that high-quality public education is possible in any community.

Charter schools were founded in 1988 by Albert Shanker, an education reformer and American Teachers Federation president. The founding premise of charter schools was to free educators from the bureaucratic constraints of traditional district schools and empower educators to experiment with innovative approaches to instruction, especially for students in disadvantaged communities of color who continued to be underserved by the traditional system. Charter schools were conceptualized as a means to revitalize the twin promises of American public education, fostering social mobility and unity in our diverse society. Our commitment to realize that promise is why over 30,000 families have chosen to send their children to Rocketship over these last 16 years.

While we celebrate the incredible progress our network has made, Rocketship remains a work in progress. Just as our Rocketeers continuously learn and grow, we, too, are committed to continuous learning. We are relentless in our pursuit of innovative methods to better serve our students, nurture our talent, and support our parents to champion equity and excellence in their communities. Together, our collective of parents, teachers, leaders, supporters, and students are igniting a movement to reshape the future for underserved communities throughout our nation. Together, we are unleashing potential.



Preston Smith
Co-Founder & CEO,
Rocketship Public Schools



This past year we had the distinct honor of celebrating 10 years of Rocketship in Milwaukee. I am so grateful for the courageous leadership that brought Rocketship to Milwaukee, and to be leading our region serving nearly 700 students and families every year. As we look ahead to the future, we have so much to be excited about, and there is still much work to do on behalf of our students.

Our talented and dedicated educators are focused on improving learning outcomes for each and every student we serve. Our personalized learning approach combined with our intentional and deep partnership with families ensures that every student gets the support that they need to thrive. Our fearless school leaders prioritize developing our teachers and staff to be the best educators they can be, providing weekly coaching and monthly professional development, improving outcomes for all students.

This year we opened a new gym for our North side community, realizing a longstanding dream for the school that operated without a gym since 2018. As we build our footprint, we also look forward to serving more families and growing our impact in the city.

Thank you for being a part of our movement!



Kadeem Gill
Executive Director,
Rocketship Wisconsin



Major New Stanford Study Highlights “Gap-Busting” Public Charter Schools

A major new [Stanford CREDO study](#) of more than 3 million public school students found that students at public charter schools outperform traditional public school students. More notably, the study highlighted Rocketship Public Schools as one of the charter sector’s “gap-busting” networks that are providing empirical proof that high-quality public education is possible anywhere.

The study also pushed back on a common, unfounded claim that charter schools “cherry pick” the best students as a way to improve their results. In multiple analyses, this major study found the opposite is true. Charter schools enroll students who are disproportionately lower achieving than the students in traditional schools. Charter schools are serving the students most in need and realizing stronger results.

Margaret “Macke” Raymond, founder and director of CREDO, put it best when she said that:

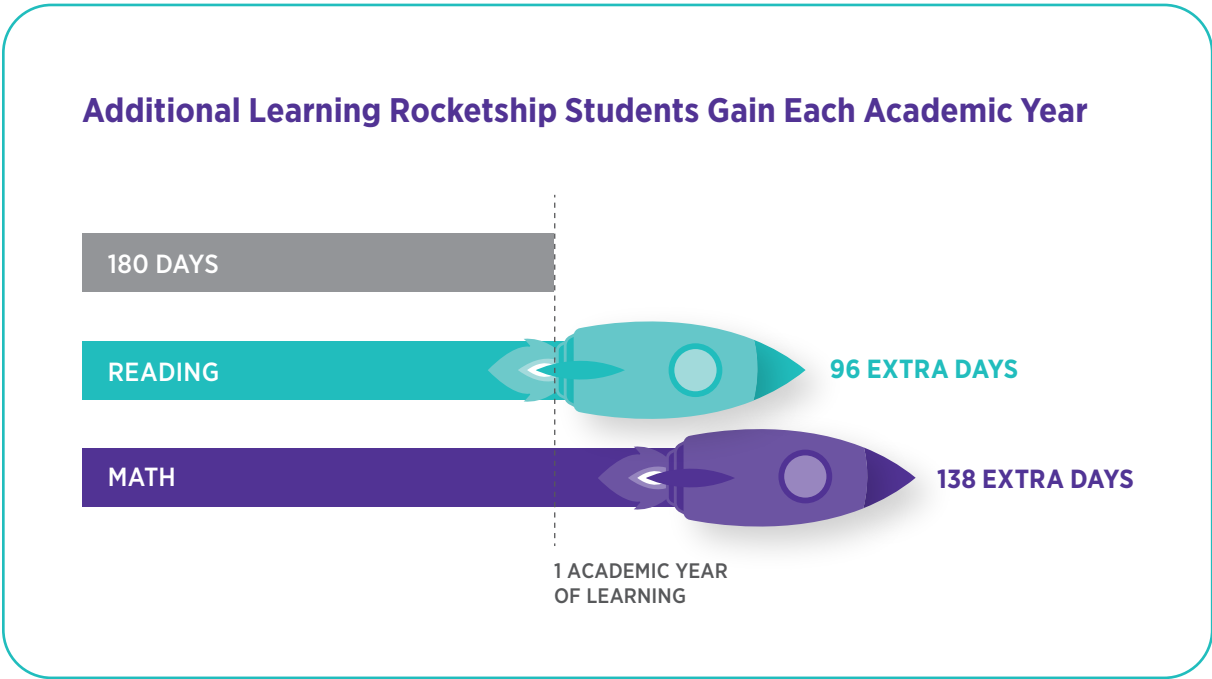
“What you’re looking at is really the only story in U.S. education policy where we’ve been able to create a set of conditions such that schools actually do get better.”

Indeed, this study makes it clear that public charter schools are driving significant progress in public education. And at the core of that progress is our commitment to continuous learning, innovation, improvement, and meeting the unique needs of all students and families. All of us at Rocketship are tremendously proud to play a significant role in demonstrating what is possible in public education.



Rocketeers Gain Five to Seven Months of Additional Learning per Year

The Stanford CREDO study found that nationwide, public charter school students gain the equivalent of 16 additional days of learning in reading and six additional days of learning in math compared to their peers in the traditional public schools they would have otherwise attended. At Rocketship, our Rocketeers gained significantly more — the equivalent of 96 additional days of learning in reading and 138 additional days of learning in math. That is equivalent to five to seven months of additional learning in a single school year. We truly are unleashing potential.

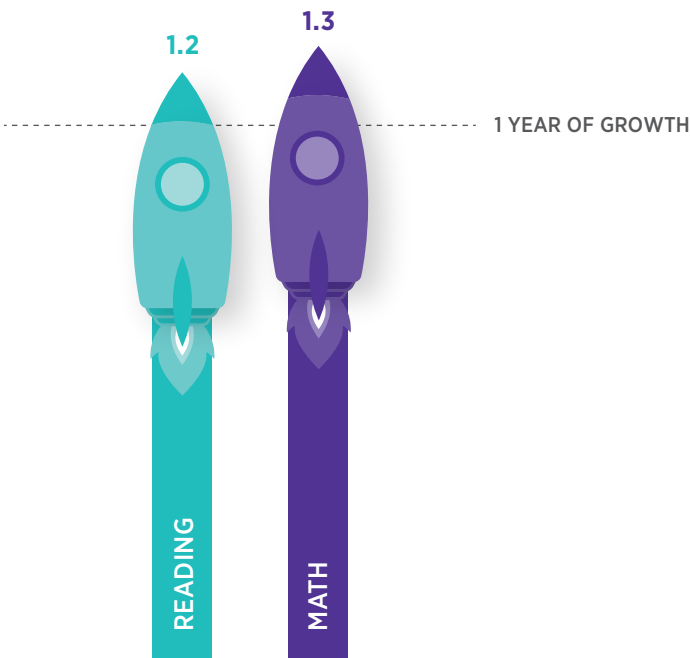


First-Year Rocketeers Narrow Achievement Gaps

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 offers multiple grade levels in year one and continues to backfill students every school year. Of course, we do not expect to close academic gaps that accumulated over several years of prior schooling in a single school year at Rocketship. But we do expect major gains in academic growth that narrow the gap that separates them from their college-bound peers. In the 2022-23 school year, our first-year Rocketeers achieved gap-closing results in every region. By growing over a grade level in a single school year, students are gaining ground on their college-bound peers and eliminating the achievement gap.

NWEA, the Northwest Evaluation Association, and its MAP Growth nationally normed assessment, is used by more than 9,000 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. Last year, our new Rocketeers grew an average of 1.3 grade levels in math and 1.2 in reading.

Average New Student Growth



Partnering with Parents from the Start

Our approach to personalized learning is focused on building deep relationships with our Rocketeers and their families. A strong relationship between the family and school is the backbone of child development. At Rocketship, this starts with our annual home visits. Last school year, our teachers visited the homes of 8,632 students by Thanksgiving break. This annual practice enables our educators to learn about their students' home environment, family structure, unique interests, and more.

In addition to annual visits, our teachers hold three family-teacher conferences every year. And throughout the course of the year, families receive weekly updates on how their child is progressing and how to help support their child's growth and development at home.

We know that when parents are more involved in their child's education, Rocketeers have greater chances at excelling in school. By creating multiple opportunities for families to engage, we're able to support Rocketeers holistically and connect with families genuinely.

8,632

Students Across the Network
Received Home Visits from Educators



SRI Spotlights Rocketship's Parent Power

A parent is a child's first teacher and lifelong advocate. Parents hold extraordinary power to change outcomes for their children and improve the quality of their community. But they often don't have a seat at decision-making tables. We're working to change that.

SRI International, an independent nonprofit research institute, spent months analyzing our parent leadership work and published a report detailing our model and results. [The study](#) authors noted that, "Rocketship parents are learning to use their voices to influence local and state policies that impact their families and communities."

We believe every parent can become a leader. Parents who get involved in this work typically do not have any experience in community organizing or advocacy. As they learn about new issues affecting their community and acquire new skills, our parents build power and create change in their communities. Rocketship families have pushed for better traffic safety measures, raised awareness about the importance of voting, participated in marches and rallies, and advocated for policies that are improving excellence and equity in public education. For many parents, these experiences have led to increased self-confidence, lasting friendships and, in some cases, jobs in advocacy and government.



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Rocketship parents are learning to use their voices to influence local and state policies that impact their families and communities.

– SRI International

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Voices for Change:
Parent Leadership &
Advocacy at Rocketship
Public Schools

SRI International®

Wisconsin Families Unite to Increase State Funding for Charter Schools

Prior to July 2023, charter and choice schools in Wisconsin received 20% less funding — a staggering \$5,000-\$7,000 less per pupil — than traditional public schools. This marks the lowest public funding rate for charter and choice schools in the country, even though more than half of Milwaukee families attend such schools.

Parents knew something had to be done, so they came together to fight for equal funding. Rocketship's parent leadership team equips families with skills to advocate for political issues like this in their community. And our team knew they could make a meaningful change if families across the state came together. So, Rocketship Wisconsin's senior education organizer, LaToya Woods, teamed up with other charter schools to lead an initiative that would go down in Wisconsin history.

First, Rocketship's education organizers worked with City Forward Collective to bring together over 200 families from nine different Milwaukee charter schools to learn about this issue and how to organize for legislative change. Parents then led 11 meetings with members of their State Legislator's Joint Finance Committee, State Assembly, Senate, and Education Committee. Here families shared how their charter schools have transformed their kids and communities. Most importantly, they asked them to support a bill to increase funding for charter and choice schools.

Then, hundreds of families reconvened to attend four additional Joint Finance Committee hearings, two state senate and assembly hearings, and two budget listening sessions with local representatives. Families from charters across Milwaukee showed up in green shirts with "parent power" scribed on their backs and stood tall in the room, visually demanding equal school funding for their communities.

Parent after parent shared how their children are thriving in their charter schools. But to be sure their voices were heard, families decided to close out the campaign strong. More than 600 parents contributed to an email campaign where 5,500 emails were sent to elected officials asking for their support in closing Wisconsin's substantial education funding gap.

It took five months and hundreds of parents but together all of these collective efforts paid off. The deciding committee voted 6-1 in favor of a funding increase. From there, Wisconsin Gov. Evers and state legislators put forth a bill to allocate an unprecedented \$2,500 per pupil increase to charter schools.

This is a historic win for charter schools in the state of Wisconsin!

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"We know quality education is a matter of justice for our children and we will keep holding our leaders and systems accountable to make sure high quality schools can thrive in ALL of our communities."

LaToya Woods,

Sr. Educator Organizer, Rocketship Wisconsin

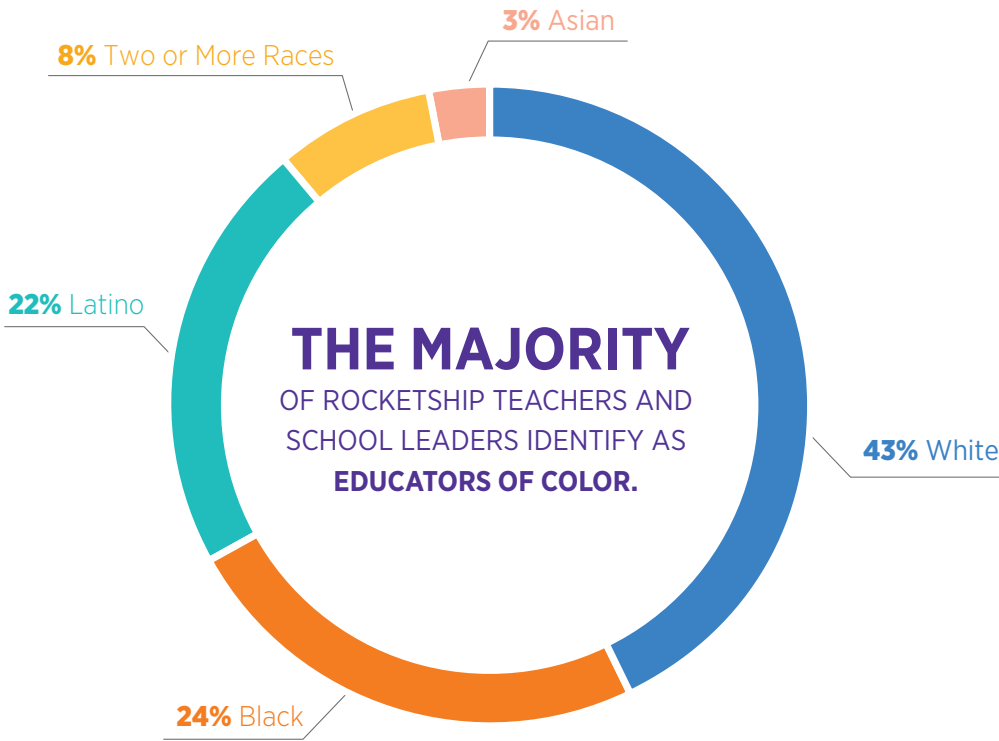


Rocketship Educators Reflect the Communities We Serve

An increasing body of research shows that student achievement and attendance go up and suspension rates go down when students have at least one same-race teacher. Yet national data from the Institute of Education Sciences shows that America’s teaching force hasn’t increased in diversity. In fact, 79% of the nation’s public school teachers are white. In contrast, 45% of the nation’s public school students are white, according to the National Center of Education Statistics. While there has been a slight increase in Hispanic public school teachers since 2015, the share of Black teachers has actually declined since the 1990s.

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 Rocketship is working relentlessly to ensure that our Rocketeers are taught by a representative team of educators that bring experiences, ideas, and perspectives to our classrooms that truly connect with our kids and communities.

We are flipping the “diversity in education” script at Rocketship. **Our educators reflect the communities we serve. The majority of our educators—57%—identify as people of color.**



*All Rocketship teachers and school leaders



“ Rocketship Wisconsin’s staff are significantly more diverse than those in the Milwaukee Public Schools, where 75% of staff are white and only 6.3% of staff are Black. We’re proud to have exceptional educators who reflect the communities we serve. ”

Kadeem Gill,
Executive Director, Rocketship Wisconsin





ELEMENTARY- ONLY BY DESIGN



Improving the Public Education Ecosystem

By focusing exclusively on elementary education, we work 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 our graduates move on to attend different middle schools, those students 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 middle school classmates in both math and reading. 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 of their child's learning and learn how to harness the power of their voice to advocate for their children and their communities. They learn to hold leaders accountable and ensure their kids continue to receive the same excellence in education that they experienced during their elementary years at Rocketship.

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 elevate the entire public education ecosystem in the communities we serve.

Rocketship Wisconsin is Going to College!

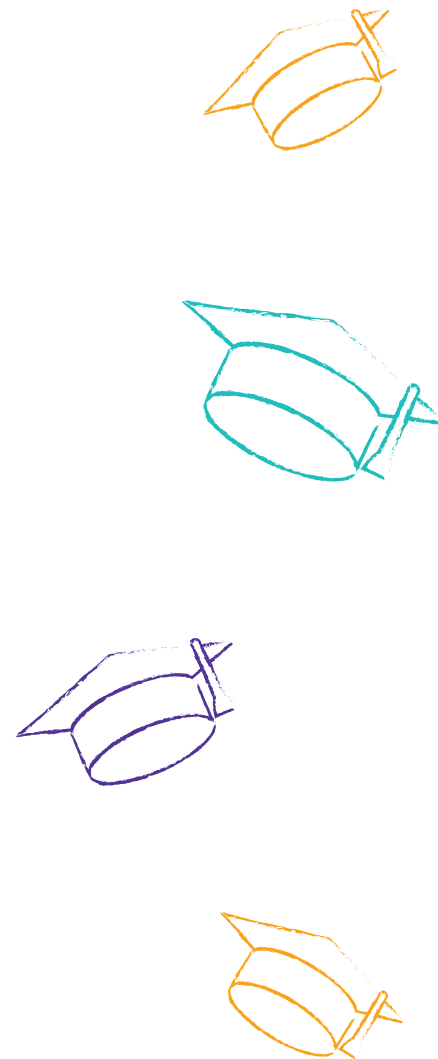
By Amir Santiago

Founding student, Rocketship Southside Community Prep

I'm a first-generation college-bound student, and as anyone will tell you, the cards are stacked against kids like me. I feel blessed to have been accepted at multiple colleges like the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Carroll University, and I plan to go to Marquette University next year. As I look ahead to college, I can't help but think about my elementary school experience. I will never forget my first day of third grade at Rocketship Southside Community Prep. I remember how intentional Rocketship teachers were about building inclusive classroom environments, where everyone felt equally loved and respected. Because I was taught how to navigate diverse perspectives in social relationships as a young elementary student, I was better prepared for middle and high school — and I'm sure, college.

The friendships I built with my classmates and the deep, meaningful relationships I built with my teachers are the biggest highlights of my time at Rocketship. My friend, Mariana, was also in my class and is a first-generation student like me. She's getting ready to go to Marquette University, as well. Mariana wants to become a nurse to help people like her mom who was diagnosed with cancer while we were at Rocketship. Her parents are monolingual, so she was often the family translator, trying to ensure her mom got the care she needed at the tender age of 10. Rocketship's project-based learning approach helped Mariana learn English well enough not only to help her mom as she was going through cancer treatments but also to become an advanced English-language reader by the end of our first year.

Both Mariana and I feel prepared for college because of our experiences at Rocketship. I know that I'm prepared to tackle this next challenge in my academic career because of the empathy and skills I learned as a little one. And I know I am not alone as I enter the next chapter of my life.



Alumna & Mother See Rocketship's Impact Long After Graduation Day

“

“I felt the difference on the first day of first grade at Rocketship. I liked it better than my other school because getting to know my teachers and classmates was easier. I was able to build deep relationships with my teachers, many of whom I have kept in touch with today. Teachers like Ms. Alvarez always pushed me to do well and get a head start on preparing for college.”

Esperanza Heredia,

Founding Rocketeer at Rocketship Discovery Prep and freshman at University of California, Irvine

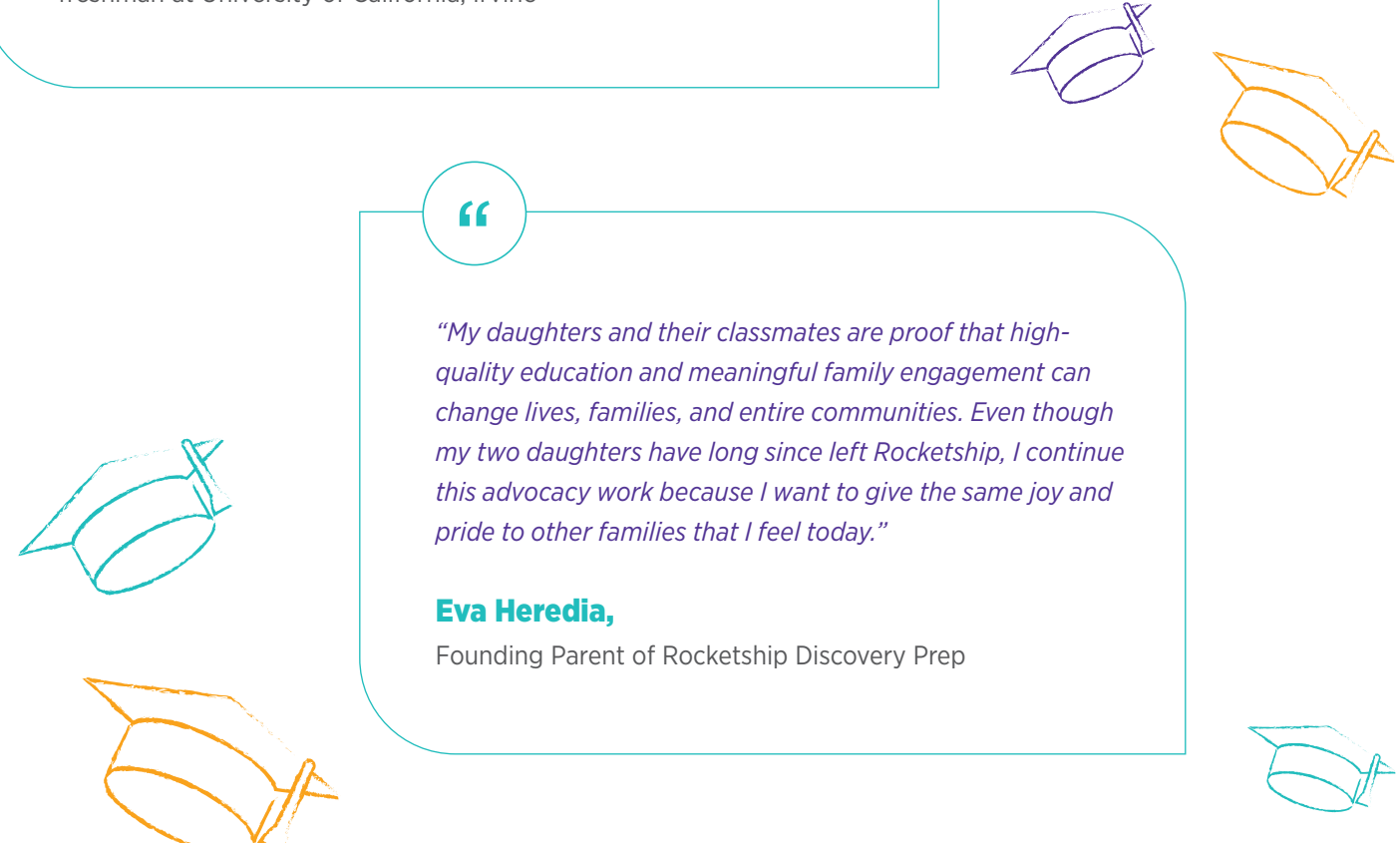


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“My daughters and their classmates are proof that high-quality education and meaningful family engagement can change lives, families, and entire communities. Even though my two daughters have long since left Rocketship, I continue this advocacy work because I want to give the same joy and pride to other families that I feel today.”

Eva Heredia,

Founding Parent of Rocketship Discovery Prep



ROCKETSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS WISCONSIN



713
ROCKETEERS

94%
LATINO
& BLACK

85%
SOCIOECONOMICALLY
DISADVANTAGED

14%
SPECIAL
EDUCATION

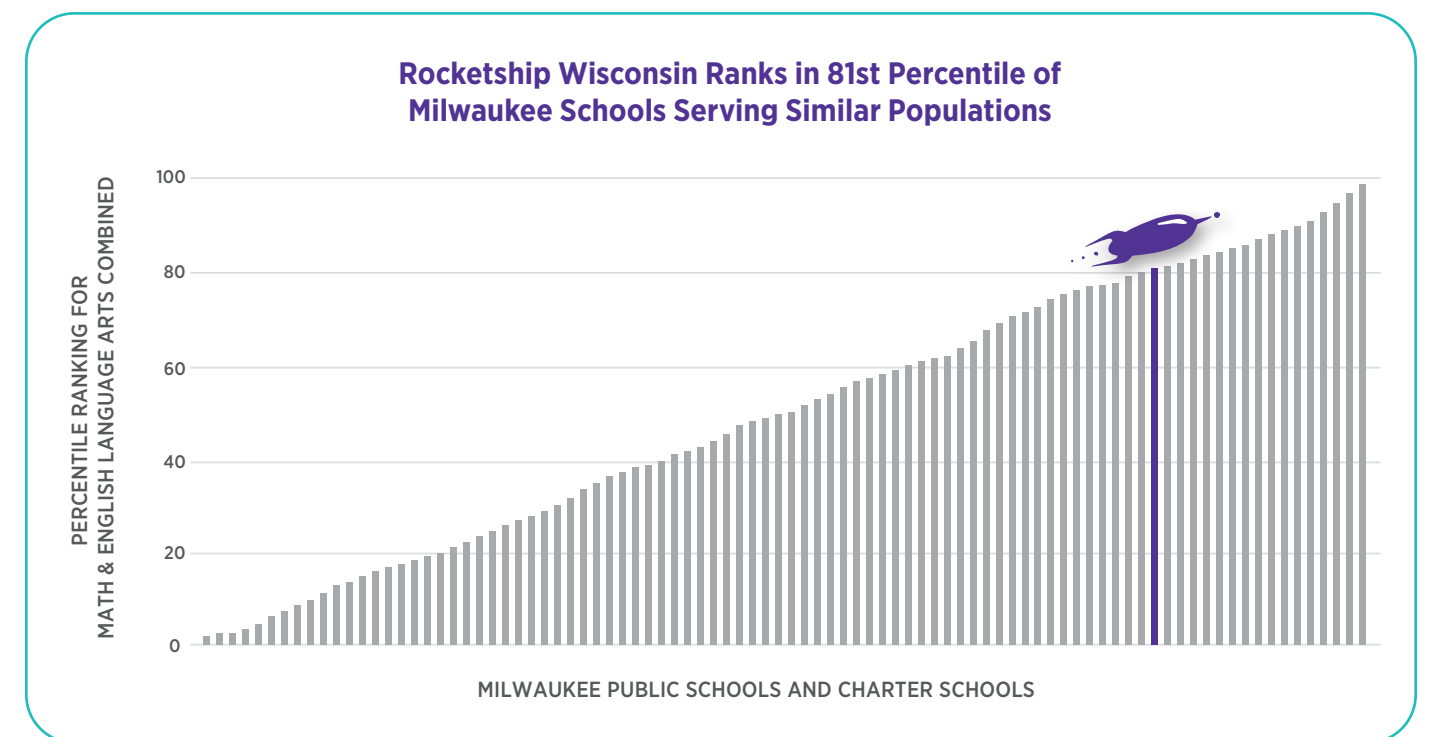
Despite decades of effort, the racial achievement gap in Milwaukee is still among the worst in the nation. Another generation of students in Milwaukee is at risk of being denied the opportunity to realize their full potential. Standing apart from this seemingly intractable problem is Rocketship Wisconsin. Focusing on small group instruction, culturally responsive classrooms, and social-emotional learning, our educators are engaging students in a joyful learning community focused on positivity, growth, and opportunity. And our families are deeply engaged in both our school community and the greater movement for equity in Milwaukee.

In 2013, Rocketship Wisconsin launched the largest charter school opening in the history of Milwaukee: Rocketship Southside Community Prep. In 2018, we launched our second school, Rocketship Transformation Prep. We are proud to now serve over 700 students on both the North and South sides of Milwaukee.

 2013 Rocketship Southside Community Prep launches as the largest charter school opening in the history of Milwaukee	 2014 Southside Community Prep earns 'Exceeding Expectations' on the state accountability system's annual record card	 2018 Rocketship Transformation Prep opens on the North Side and triples enrollment after moving into its permanent space a year later	 2018 Rocketship Southside Community Prep wins "Beating the Odds" award from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
 2020 Parent leaders meet with the Governor to share their testimonies and demand for equitable funding for Wisconsin's charter schools	 2021-2022 Parent leaders encourage a turnout of over 1,000 community members for a virtual forum with Milwaukee mayoral candidates in advance of the election	 2023 Rocketship parents lead the Equal Funding Campaign with nine other partner choice schools in Milwaukee to achieve historic school funding increases from the Wisconsin legislature and Governor	 2023 Rocketship Transformation Prep breaks ground on expanded campus to include a new gym, cafeteria, food server, and laundry room — the culmination of five years of work to serve more families

Rocketship Wisconsin Ranks in 81st Percentile of Milwaukee Schools Serving Similar Populations

Among Milwaukee district and charter schools that serve a similar population, Rocketship Wisconsin ranked in the 81st percentile in English Language Arts and math combined on the Wisconsin Forward Exam in 2023. State-wide, our schools also ranked in the top 80th percentile in English Language Arts among all Wisconsin serving a similar population. While our scores did dip from the heights we achieved before the pandemic, our resilient Rocketeers are still outperforming their peers at local schools.





Rocketship Transformation Prep Expands to Serve More Students and the Community

In the Spring of 2023, we broke ground on a brand new, 5,000-square-foot addition at Rocketship Transformation Prep. The added physical space will become a multi-purpose gymnasium that allows Rocketeers to enjoy art, dance, physical education, and gather the entire school community under one roof. This beautiful new wing also comes with a cafeteria, food server, and a laundry room available for families to use.

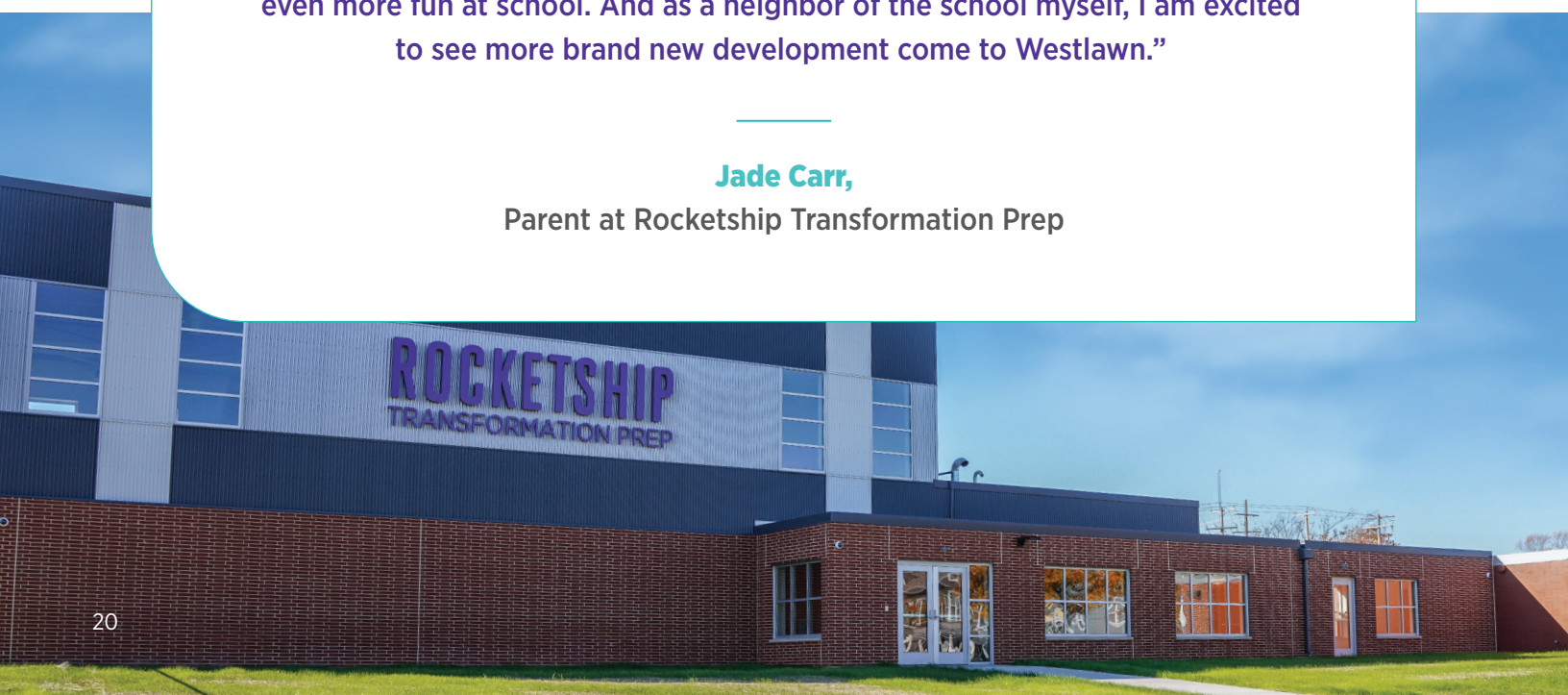
The dream of having a state-of-the-art gymnasium has always been at the forefront of our minds, especially for our dedicated parents. We believe that our students deserve the very best. A gym is not merely a building with walls and a roof; it's a space where dreams are nurtured, where physical well-being is promoted, and where teamwork and discipline are instilled. Our students are the future, and they deserve the best tools and facilities to excel holistically.

“

“My son has special needs and he has thrived at Rocketship Transformation Prep since the first day it opened. The new additions to campus will give my baby, and all our kids, extra space to be able to learn, dance, play, and have even more fun at school. And as a neighbor of the school myself, I am excited to see more brand new development come to Westlawn.”

Jade Carr,

Parent at Rocketship Transformation Prep



More Special Education Funding Is Needed

By **Kadeem Gill**, Executive Director of Rocketship Wisconsin

Governor Tony Evers fought to increase all public school spending this legislative cycle and made massive gains for teachers and schools everywhere. But special education funding was once again left behind — increasing only three percentage points, from covering 30% to covering just 33% of costs. We must do more. Our students with special needs deserve to attend public schools that are equipped to serve all students with excellence.

I should know — I was a child with special needs. Though my Individualized Education Plan (IEP) was for a ‘mild’ speech disability, if I had not received special education services, I would have been held back from realizing my full potential. Instead, I was holistically supported and ended up leaving my IEP behind by third grade. Becoming the first in my family to attend college and leave my low-income housing, I graduated from Princeton University and today am finishing up a doctorate in educational leadership from New York University. As a low-income, Black and Latino kid from a rough neighborhood, my speech disability could have been one barrier too many for me to overcome. But I was supported and invested in, so I could make a better future for myself and my family. Speech therapy unlocked my ability to discover and to strengthen my voice.

I’m not even close to the only story like this. I’ve been in education for 15 years and currently serve as the Executive Director of Rocketship Public Schools Wisconsin, a nonprofit public charter school network in Milwaukee. I’ve seen so many students either succeed or fail based upon the special education supports they receive.

At Rocketship, we utilize a “meaningful inclusion” model where students with special needs remain in class with the general population for at least 80% of their day. The goal is for all students to get the same rigorous instruction in the same setting, creating community and avoiding stigma for students who need additional services. Those with special needs also have individualized or small group support from our robust team of trained specialists — including occupational therapists, paraeducators, and counselors.

At Rocketship Wisconsin, 85% of our students are classified as economically disadvantaged, and 22% have special needs. Every year, we are spending nearly half a million dollars out-of-pocket to properly support our students with special needs.

We are extremely proud to serve all students and run a robust, high-quality special education program. It is core to who we are as an organization focused on educational equity. But the lack of funding for these services means that there are trade-offs in what we can offer our students and how much we have to fundraise to cover the gap.

Our children deserve better. We must invest in fully funding special education so that all students with special needs get the education they deserve, and have a chance at a future where they are independent learners who can contribute to our world. How many of our children with special needs are left on the sidelines, relegated to the margins of our society instead of welcomed into the center? I hope that next legislative session our lawmakers will continue working to prioritize equitable education funding for all our children in Wisconsin.

This story original appeared in

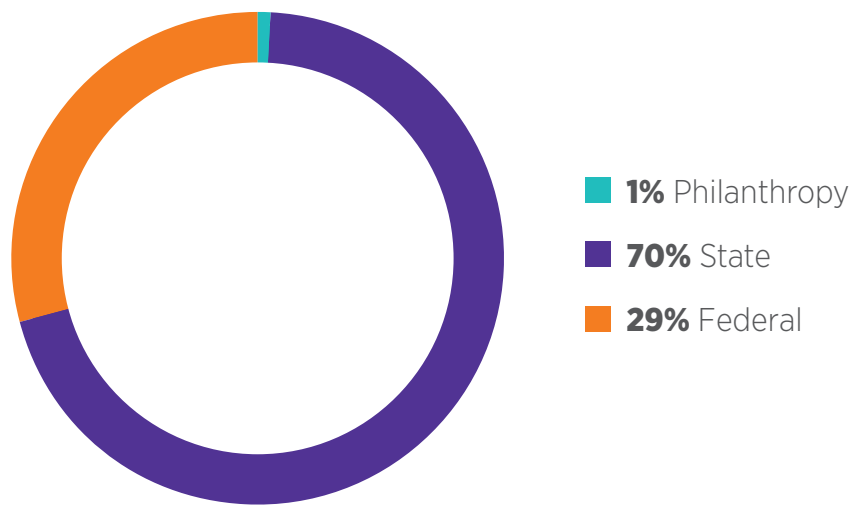
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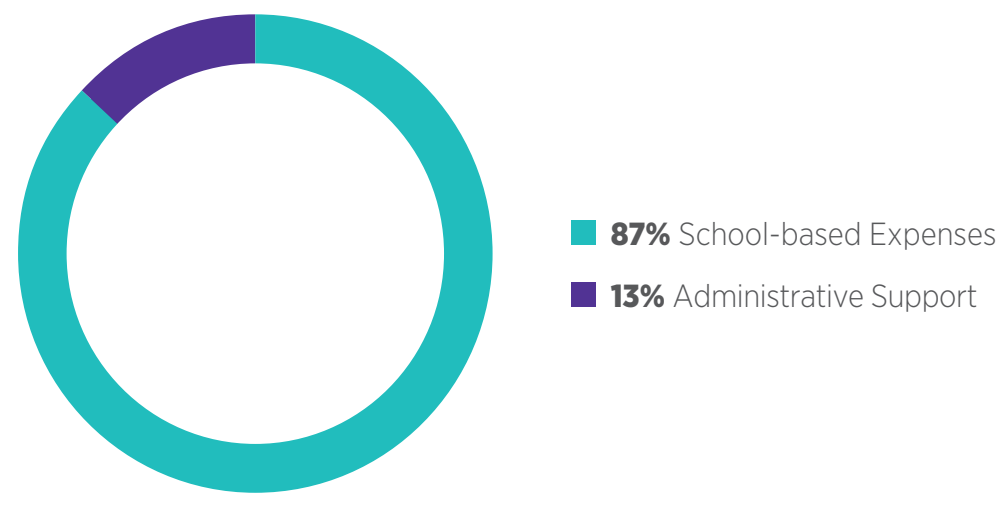
FINANCIALS

Rocketship is building a scalable and financially sustainable non-profit school model that propels student achievement in underserved communities across the country. In 2022–23, 99% of our funding came from public sources. School-based expenses accounted for 87% of our spending.

REVENUE



EXPENSES



SUPPORTERS

Become a Rocketship Supporter



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