

2023  
2024



**ROCKETSHIP**  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
WISCONSIN

# YEAR IN REVIEW

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**NETWORK  
LIFETIME  
ROCKETEERS  
SERVED**

32,244

Schools: **2**  
Rocketeers: **628**  
Black & Latino: **95%**  
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged: **86%**  
Special Education: **18%**

**2023-24  
WISCONSIN  
STUDENT  
POPULATION**



17 YEARS  
32,244  
ROCKETEERS  
ACROSS THE NETWORK

**Dear Rocketship Community,**

Over the past 17 years, Rocketship has grown from a bold idea to rethink elementary education into a powerful collective of families, educators, and leaders united by our mission to unleash the potential of every child. What began with a single school in San Jose has expanded into a network serving thousands of students across the country. And we're just getting started.

As we chart the next phase of Rocketship's impact, we've turned to our community—families, educators, and leaders—to help shape our vision. Through these discussions, we arrived at a new vision for the next chapter of our movement: **Equal access to opportunity for all.**

This vision reflects our commitment to ensuring every child, regardless of background, has a fair chance to succeed. It's about leveling the playing field, removing barriers to opportunity, and providing the support and resources students need to achieve their dreams.

To bring this vision to life, we are launching a bold five-year strategic plan focused on **quality schools, community power, and scaled impact.** Our schools will remain rooted in delivering excellence, while expanding our work to honor and amplify the voices of families. Together, we will deepen and extend our impact, creating a culture where every child, family, and educator feels valued and supported.

Thank you for being an essential part of this journey.

**Preston Smith**  
Rocketship  
Co-Founder and CEO



**Dear Rocketship Wisconsin Community,**

This year has been a powerful reminder of the impact we can achieve when families, educators, and communities unite to transform public education. At Rocketship Wisconsin, we are leading the way, not just in our classrooms but in the broader movement to close opportunity gaps in Milwaukee.

In 2023-2024, our Rocketeers achieved extraordinary growth. Rocketship Wisconsin led the network with its highest-ever academic gains, with students growing 1.55 years in math and 1.32 years in reading at our flagship campus. These results are a testament to our innovative model—one that combines personalized learning, culturally responsive classrooms, and deep family partnerships to ensure every child gets the support they need to thrive.

Our commitment to equity extends beyond academics. This year, we secured a \$2.5 million federal grant to strengthen our community schools model, enabling us to expand wraparound services, increase afterschool and summer learning opportunities, and deepen our engagement with families. Together, we're not only improving student outcomes but also creating stronger, more vibrant communities.

As we look to the future, we remain steadfast in our mission to unleash the potential of every child. Whether through our fearless educators, empowered parents, or resilient students, Rocketship Wisconsin is proving that high-quality public education is possible in every neighborhood. Thank you for being part of this journey to build a brighter future for Milwaukee's children.

With gratitude,  
**Kadeem Gill**  
Rocketship Wisconsin  
Executive Director



# ROCKETSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS WISCONSIN

2 **SCHOOLS**      628 **ROCKETEERS**      95% **BLACK & LATINO**

18% **SPECIAL EDUCATION**      86% **SOCIOECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED**

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 and personalized learning, our educators engage students in a joyful learning community focused on positivity, growth, and opportunity. We're leveraging our national wraparound service approach and doubling down on being community schools in Milwaukee. The U.S. Department of Education recently awarded Rocketship Wisconsin with a \$2.5 million grant, further enabling us to do just that. 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 600 students on both the North and South sides of Milwaukee.



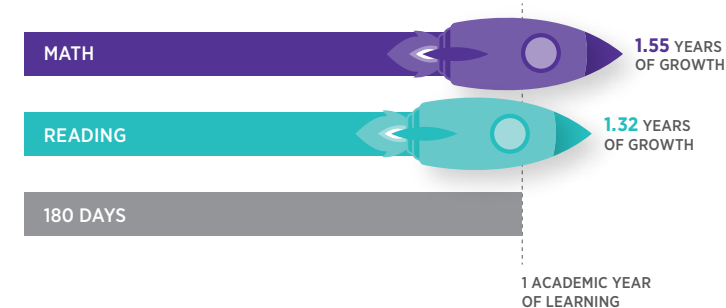
**Highest Growth in Both Subjects**  
Since Serving All Grade Levels

## Rocketship Wisconsin Leads the Network for Growth in Math

On the nationally normed NWEA Map assessment, Rocketship Wisconsin achieved the best growth since offering all grades at both campuses. Rocketship Southside Community Prep earned its highest-ever average growth in both subjects—1.55 years in math and 1.32 in reading.

Rocketship Transformation Prep improved from last year and earned its highest growth in both subjects since reaching full enrollment in the 2021-22 school year.

Rocketship Wisconsin is making major progress toward closing long-standing achievement gaps in Milwaukee. In classrooms like Lauren Geary's third grade at Rocketship Southside Community Prep, our Rocketeers are achieving remarkable results—1.84 years of growth in math! Growing nearly two full school years worth of academic achievements in just one year, and repeating that year-after-year, is how we will close the achievement gap in our lifetime and get our Rocketeers on the path to college and career success.



### Ten Years later Alumnus Reflects on Rocketship's Impact

*"One Rocketship teacher who stood out to me was Mrs. Wilhelm. She was a big support for me, even on my bad days, she would be there to lift me up. And she's been there for me my whole journey— my middle school graduation and my high school graduation.*

*I'm also proud of myself because I got a full-ride scholarship to my private high school, which was \$25,000 a year to attend. So, you know, me being just some regular kid from the south side of Milwaukee, it was kind of a dream come true. I'm going to the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, and I'm studying computer engineering and I plan to be an engineer after I graduate."*

**-MAXIMUS MOLINA**  
STUDYING ENGINEERING AT  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN  
ALUMNUS, ROCKETSHIP  
SOUTHSIDE COMMUNITY PREP

## Rocketship Wisconsin Wins \$2.5 Million Federal Grant to Strengthen its Community Schools Model

### The U.S. Department of Education chose Rocketship Wisconsin as one of only 30 recipients nationwide of the new Full-Service Community Schools grants!

Rocketship Wisconsin will receive \$2.5 million over five years to accelerate academic achievement, support family well-being, develop and retain high-performing educators, and elevate parents' power in advocating for educational equity and systems-change across Milwaukee.

**Rocketship Wisconsin is the only grant recipient in all of Wisconsin and the only charter school organization in the entire country to be awarded this funding.**

We could not have won this award, nor can we do this work going forward, without our strong partnerships with other community organizations.

Over the next five years, this grant will help us to give every single Rocketeer and their family:

- **High-quality and individualized education resources** with a key focus on social-emotional learning and a multi-tiered system of support for students.
- **Expanded and enriched learning time opportunities**, including additional afterschool resources, summer school, Kinder Camp, enrichment classes, and tutoring.
- **Active family and community engagement opportunities**, including home visits, community resource and educational workshops, community K-12 pipeline events, leadership development for parents and residents, strong partnerships with the police department to support public safety, and nonpartisan voter registration.
- **Leadership training and mobilization** that provide the foundation for implementing all key activities with collective buy-in from all stakeholders, leading to strong academic results, retention of high-quality and diverse staff, and engaged families and residents.

## From Founding Parent to Grand Slam Teacher

BY KARLA GUITERREZ, LEAD INSTRUCTIONAL LEARNING SPECIALIST, ROCKETSHIP WISCONSIN

While most at Rocketship Southside Community Prep know me as a Lead Instructional Learning Specialist supporting Rocketeers in Learning Lab, my journey with Rocketship began as a founding parent when Rocketship first came to Milwaukee in 2013. Since then, all of my four children have attended Rocketship Southside Community Prep.

Initially, I got involved with Rocketship as a parent and recruiter because of my passion for the Southside community and my love for teaching. The South side community here in Milwaukee is predominantly Hispanic, so I saw myself in many of the students.

Now, as an Instructional Learning Specialist (ILS), I work with students in small groups to support their individual needs. I love being able to provide different curriculums that are personalized for each student.

*Each of my own kids has had their own needs, from speech therapy to IEPs, and they have benefited from the services Rocketship provides. For my oldest, when she was in 2nd grade, she was sent to 5th-grade reading and math to be able to learn at her intellectual level.*

My younger daughter received special education services, which enabled her to grow exponentially. This impact made me want to make sure ALL students get an individualized learning program.

Coming from a country with no room for opportunities to grow, Rocketship has opened the professional development door for me. This has built my confidence and grown my leadership skills to coach and teach other educators. All the professional development from the past 10 years has truly made me grow in a positive way. Looking back at my time as a recruiter, educator, and parent, I feel eternally grateful for where I am now.

Last year, I was selected as the Milwaukee Brewers' Grand Slam Teacher of the Month. It was such an honor, and I was overwhelmed with emotions. Receiving love from all coworkers, students, parents, and the people that I have encountered has made me feel appreciated. This means everything to me. I feel seen and more motivated to continue doing great work.





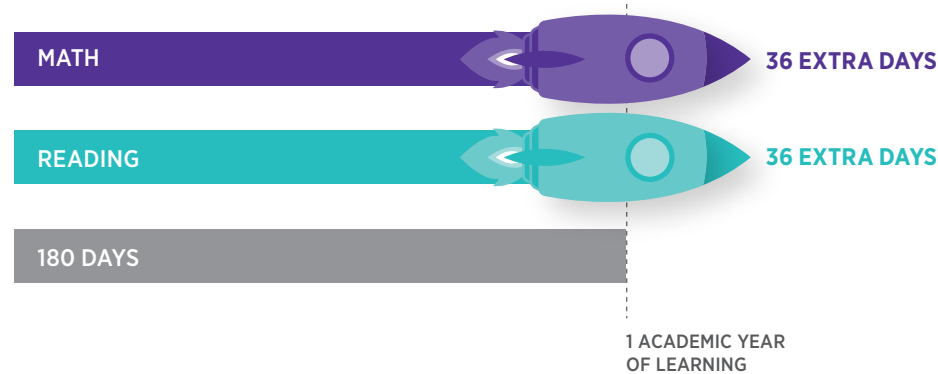
## Rocketeers Across the Network Gain 36 Extra Days of Learning

Rocketship Wisconsin is part of a national network of high-performing, public, nonprofit charter schools. Across the network we know that every year they fall further behind their college-bound peers. Eventually, those gaps become insurmountable. 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 2023-24 school year, our Rocketeers grew an average of 1.2 years in both math and reading. This means that our students gained the equivalent of 36 additional days of learning this school year.

Gaining more than a year's worth of learning in a single school year, and repeating that year after year after year for the past 17 years, is how we are eliminating the achievement gap and ensuring our Rocketeers are on the path to college and career success.

**The Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA)**, and its nationally normed MAP assessment, evaluates more than 13 million students annually across more than 35,000 schools and 146 countries. The MAP assessment measures how well students are learning and growing in core subjects. Rocketship students take the MAP assessment in the fall, winter, and spring to evaluate student progress and inform instruction. Last year, our Rocketeers grew more than a full school year in Reading and Math and gained the equivalent of 36 additional days of learning.



## Nationally, Rocketeers Close in on Pre-Pandemic Levels

Rocketeers grew in math and reading at rates that reflect what we experienced prior to the pandemic and led to gap-busting schools!

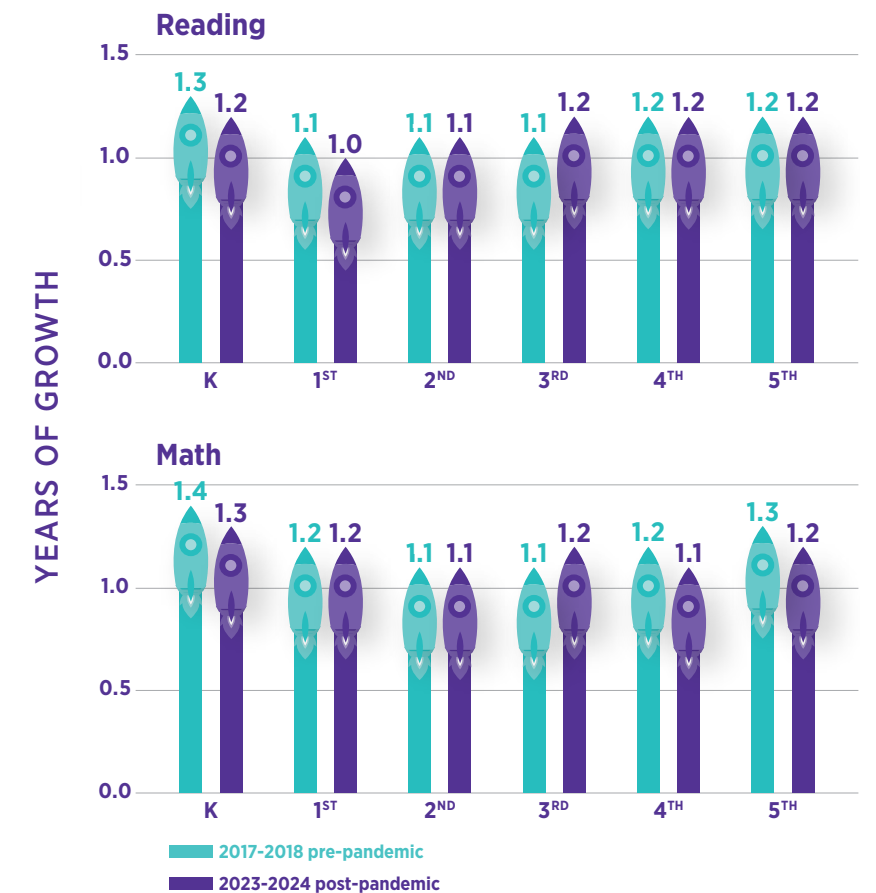
In the wake of COVID-19, many states are lowering academic standards, conceding a generation of students to lower growth and achievement. At Rocketship Public Schools, we refuse to accept that. We will never lower our standards—for ourselves, our Rocketeers, or the communities we serve.

And it's working. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, our academic growth is back on track to pre-COVID-19 levels—and we're not stopping there. Our students are showing us, day by day, that with the right supports, they can and will exceed expectations.

Driven by a vision of equal opportunity for all children, we believe in a future where every Rocketeer can soar, supported by personalized learning, strong relationships, and communities committed to their success.

Our approach is not to use a singular "silver bullet," but a comprehensive, community-driven model. Through offering a variety of programs—like data-informed instruction, tutoring and small groups, wraparound services, intentional parent partnership, mental health supports, and meaningful inclusion in special education—we meet each child and family where they are. Our personalized learning model ensures that every Rocketeer gets the right support at the right time to foster academic growth.

FALL TO SPRING STUDENT GROWTH BY GRADE LEVEL



“Special education for me is deeply personal. Parents are always coming up to me and saying that they really appreciate that it’s not just a slogan that we serve all students. We show them through our programming and processes that we really mean we serve all students.”

**KADEEM GILL**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

HEAR FROM KADEEM:



## Rocketship Classrooms Serve All Students

Last year, 18% of Wisconsin Rocketeers were students with special needs. In most public elementary schools, students with special needs are separated from their peers for most of the learning day.

Rather than isolate and further stigmatize students, we operate a meaningful inclusion model that ensures all of our students with special needs have daily access to our general education environment. This means all students with learning disabilities spend at least half of their day in general education classrooms, with the vast majority spending over 80% of the day in the general education environment.

With this inclusive approach, our students with special needs are exposed to the same instructional program as their typically developing peers. By coupling our meaningful inclusion model with individual supports including small group co-teaching and individual instruction, we help all Rocketeers achieve ambitious academic and social outcomes.

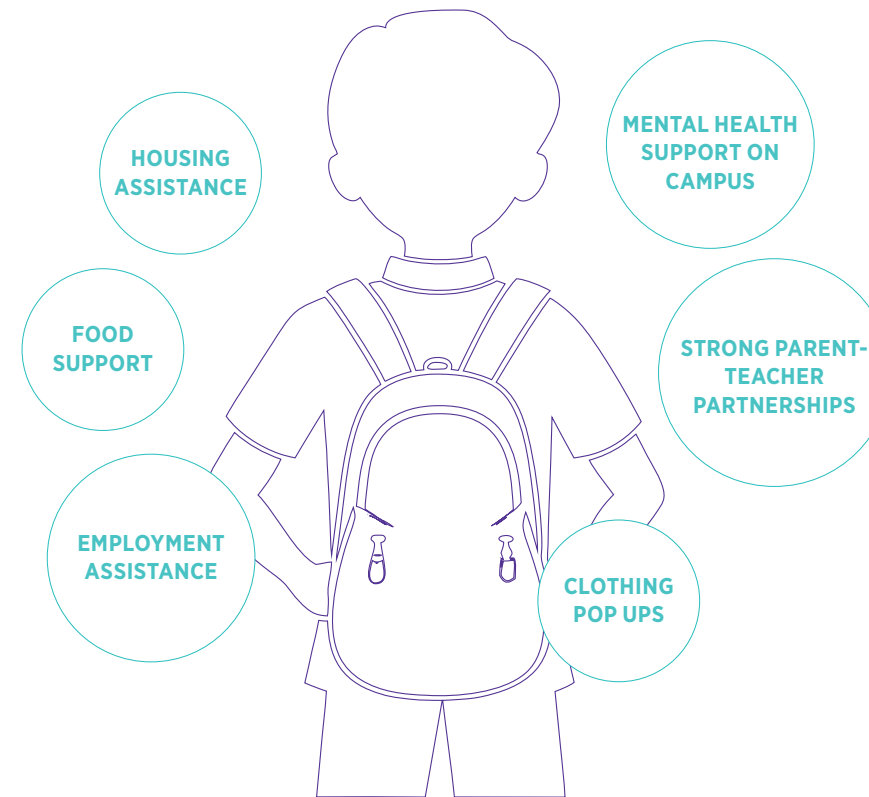
*Students with mild-moderate special needs grew more than a year in both reading and math.*



## Supporting the Whole Child through a Community Schools Approach

In order for students to thrive both inside and outside of the classroom, Rocketship creates partnerships with community-based organizations to provide wraparound services to give our families a wide net of support beyond academics. This includes partnering with community organizations to provide resources such as food, housing, clothing, and employment support. This comprehensive network of support helps create an environment where Rocketeers can unleash their full potential in all areas of their lives.

### Partnering with Community Organizations to Provide:



## Connecting with Families Beyond the Classroom

Our approach to personalized learning begins with 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 7,921 students** by Thanksgiving break. This annual practice enables our educators to learn about their Rocketeers' home environment, family structure, unique interests, and more.

By changing the power dynamic from parent in a teacher's classroom to teacher in a parent's home, we are able to develop much deeper relationships with parents that carry into the school year and beyond.

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



# 7,921

## Rocketeers Across the Network Received Home Visits from Educators

## A Parent's Journey Cultivating Community Power

At Rocketship, we believe that families are powerful agents of change. To ensure that their voices are heard, we empower parents with the tools they need to shape educational policies.

Our program guides parents through a unique journey. As parents become more involved at their school, our regional education organizers invite those with leadership potential to join their school's volunteer organizing committee. In this role, parents deepen their understanding of educational issues, receive training in advocacy and community organizing, engage directly with elected officials, and more. This path empowers parents to become influential stakeholders in their communities who lead the way in creating equitable education opportunities for all.

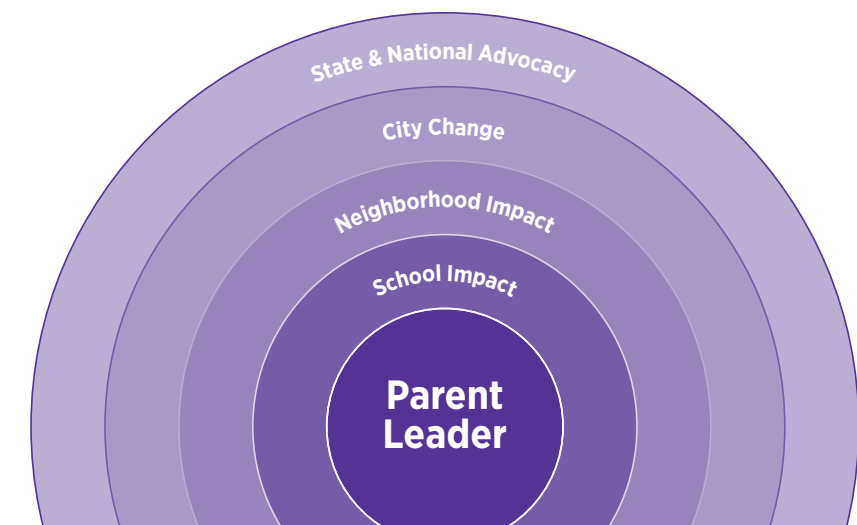
One example of how parents exercise their power is through "Days on the Hill." In the spring of 2023, Rocketship families from Wisconsin, Texas, California, and D.C. participated in State and National Days on the Hill to elevate critical issues in their communities. They met with 35 state senators and representatives to advocate for **public safety initiatives, increased charter school and Title 1 funding, and increased mental health resources** for students.

With only 11% of registered voters in the U.S. being Black and Latino, our Rocketship Votes! program increases voter registration. By the end of the 2023-24 school year,

**47%** of Rocketship families were registered to vote!

### JOURNEY OF A PARENT LEADER

## HOW A PARENT LEADER DRIVES CHANGE





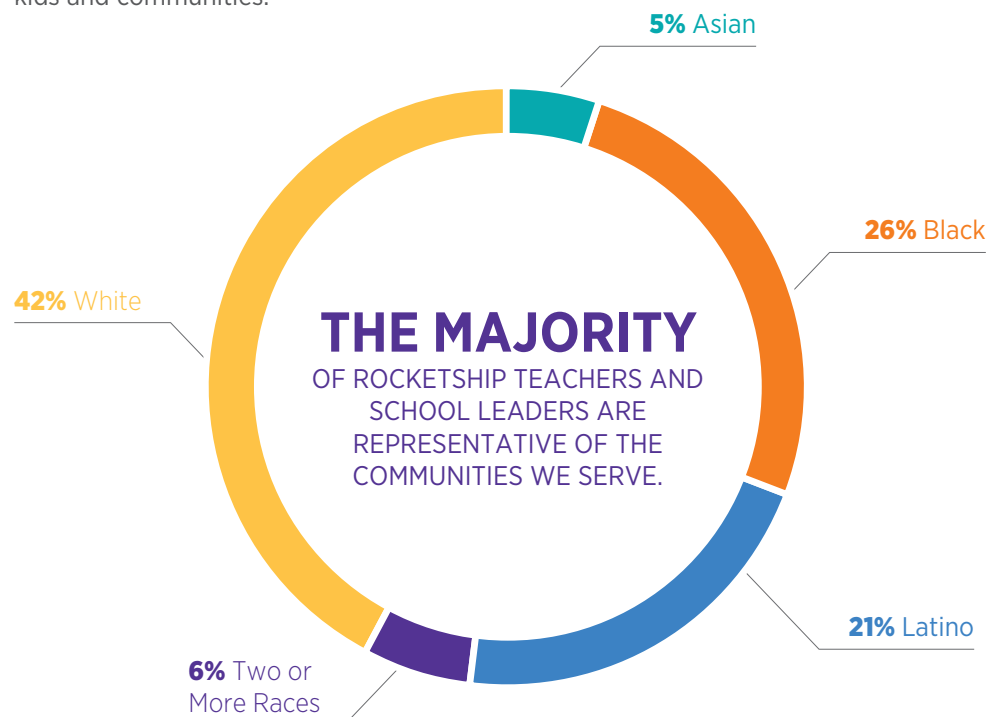


## Rocketship Wisconsin Educators Reflect the Communities We Serve

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 America’s teaching force has not increased in community representation over the years with only 20% of public school teachers in the U.S. who are people of color. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there has been a slight increase in Latino public school teachers since 2015 and the share of Black teachers has declined since the 1990s.

We are flipping the script at Rocketship. Our educators reflect the communities we serve. **The majority of Rocketship Wisconsin’s educators—58%—identify as people of color.**

Equity and excellence in education are 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 who bring experiences, ideas, and perspectives to our classrooms that even more deeply connect with our kids and communities.



## Rocketship is Creating Pathways to Economic Mobility

Our model prioritizes personalized learning to unleash the potential inside every Rocketeer, and that includes our educators. Unlike most public elementary schools, Rocketship teachers engage in weekly professional development sessions and each has a coach where they receive in-the-moment feedback as they’re teaching. Informed by data, coaches also partner with their teachers to adjust upcoming lessons to maximize student success and regularly review progress to find new ways to improve.

We recognize that one of the greatest ways for us to bolster our educators and catalyze student success is to grow from within. We are making strategic investments to create a recruitment funnel that attracts local candidates who reflect the communities we serve and then provide them each with an individualized growth plan to support their development.

Rocketship has built strong relationships with external partners like Rivet School and Reach, and programs that specialize in offering an affordable pathway for receiving the required degrees and credentials to support teaching careers.

Our recruitment and retention efforts exemplify our capacity as a workforce development engine. We have demonstrated our ability to hire someone at an entry-level, hourly rate, provide them with real-world experience in the classroom or our learning lab, and scaffold their development with degrees and credentials to pave the way for a salaried teaching position and beyond. From there, our in-house talent development strategies coupled with our performance-based pay system enable top achievers to thrive as educators.

*“I truly see my coaching as a piece of feedback that only helps me get better. I can testify that I am where I am today due to my super critical, but not in a bad way, feedback from my coaches. I think coaching should be mandatory at every school, and in the way that Rocketship does it.”*

**EMILY SUAREZ DEAL REAL,**  
Former Rocketship para-professional  
Current first-grade educator,  
Rocketship Wisconsin

HEAR FROM EMILY:



## Rocketship’s Journey to Career Advancement





# 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** on day one of middle school. This means middle schools are enrolling more students that are on grade level and ready to advance their education.

**We are also sending powerful parents off to join their middle school communities.** 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. Families also participate in middle school fairs and get connected to schools with high success rates. They also learn to hold leaders accountable in the local school district or charters, and ensure their kids continue to receive the same excellence in education that they experienced during their elementary years at Rocketship.

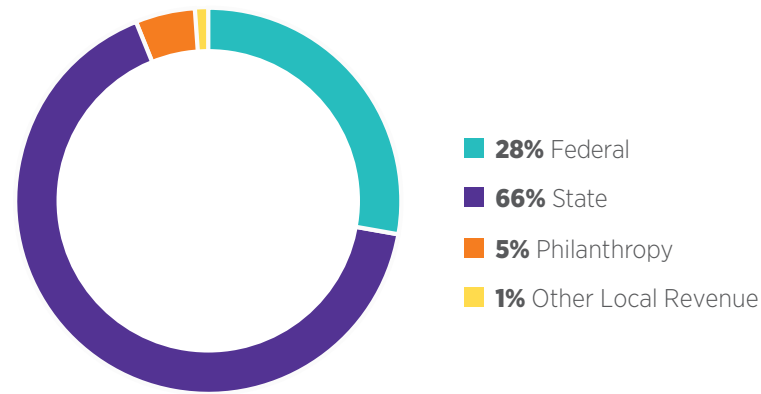
**Excellent elementary schools beget stronger middle schools beget stronger high schools.** It's a virtuous cycle designed to scale impact far beyond the number of seats offered by Rocketship. This is how our elementary-only model is designed to elevate the entire public education ecosystem in the communities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



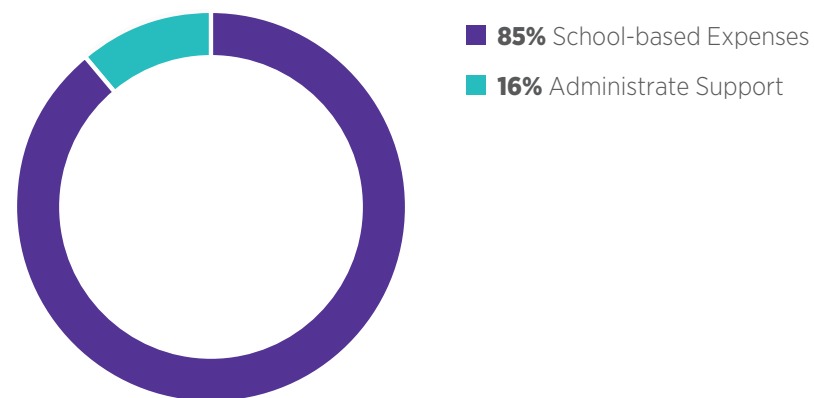
# Rocketship Wisconsin Financials

Rocketship Wisconsin is building a scalable and financially sustainable non-profit school model that propels student achievement in underserved communities across the country. In 2023-24, 94% of our funding came from public sources. School-based expenses accounted for 85% of our spending.

## REVENUE



## EXPENSES



# Rocketship Wisconsin Supporters

Become a Rocketship Supporter



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### AUTHORIZER

*Rocketship couldn't do this work without the partnership, support, and expertise of our authorizer.*

- University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
- Office of Charter Schools

### MAJOR DONORS

*Thank you for your generous support of our educators, communities, and Rocketeers. Below are supporters who gave \$1,000 and above.*

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