

2023  
2024



ROCKETSHIP  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
TENNESSEE

# YEAR IN REVIEW



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**NETWORK  
LIFETIME  
ROCKETEERS  
SERVED**

32,244

Schools: **3**  
Rocketeers: **1,410**  
Black & Latino: **92%**  
English Language Learners: **38%**  
Special Education: **13%**

**2023-24  
TENNESSEE  
STUDENT  
POPULATION**



10 YEARS  
6,000  
ROCKETEERS

#### Dear Rocketship Tennessee Community,

It is an honor to introduce myself as the new Executive Director of Rocketship Tennessee. I am thrilled to share our Year in Review report and why I am inspired by the remarkable work of our educators, students, and families. The enclosed report highlights the very best of our Rocketship community and posits a compelling vision for the future of Rocketship here in Tennessee.

The past year was one of progress and impact. Our teachers created joyful and rigorous learning environments, our students rose to new challenges, and our families remained steadfast partners in education. The results of that dedication are evident in the stories and achievements highlighted in this report.

As I step into this role, I am eager to build on this strong foundation. My commitment is to support our schools, champion our educators, and ensure that every student has the opportunities they deserve. Together, we will continue to **empower communities, uplift families**, and provide an **exceptional education** that prepares our Rocketeers for bright futures.

Thank you for your continued trust and partnership. I look forward to working alongside each of you to propel Rocketship Tennessee to even greater heights.



**Eric Dailey**  
Executive Director  
Rocketship Tennessee



#### 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



# ROCKETSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS TENNESSEE



3

SCHOOLS

1,410

ROCKETEERS

92%

BLACK & LATINO

38%

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

13%

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Our first school in Tennessee, Rocketship Nashville Northeast Elementary, launched in 2014. Rocketship United Academy opened in south Nashville a year later. And in August 2022, Rocketship Dream Community Prep opened in southeast Nashville. Our three schools served more than 1,400 students in the 2023-24 school year. Rocketship Nashville Northeast Elementary and Rocketship United Academy have both been named a “Reward School,” the highest recognition for student achievement, by the Tennessee Department of Education.

Rocketship Tennessee is opening doors of opportunity and providing much-needed options for families to choose a school that best meets the needs of their students. All Rocketship Tennessee campuses use the same core academic model, but each offers a unique enrichment program to meet the needs and desires of the community it serves. Rocketship Nashville Northeast focuses on STEM education, Rocketship United Academy is a multicultural school with an exceptional student government program, and Rocketship Dream offers a music-enriched curriculum to help bring learning to life at Rocketship Dream Community Prep.



## Strong Academic Growth in Math and Reading

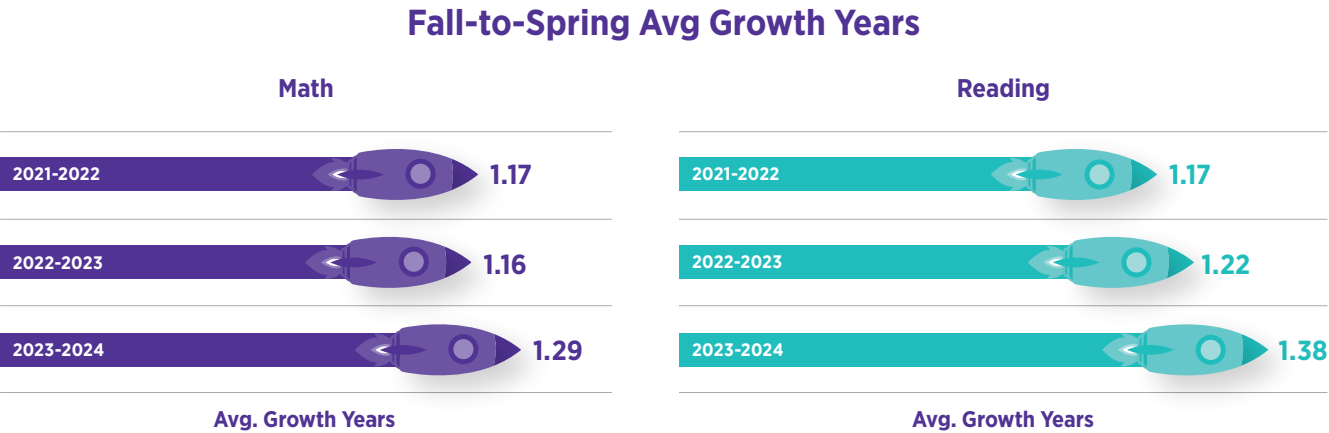
## Tennessee Rocketeers are Growing Fast



Rocketship Tennessee has demonstrated remarkable resilience in the past year, charting a strong course back toward pre-pandemic performance levels. Our students have shown exceptional academic growth, achieving 1.29 years of progress in mathematics and 1.38 years of progress in reading. This is our highest growth in three years (all post-COVID) and our second-highest growth rate in our 10-year history. In fact, this year outpaces growth from 2017-2018 when our 1.2 and 1.3 years of growth helped us reach record-high levels of absolute academic achievement. Additionally, both Rocketship United Academy and Rocketship Dream Community Prep achieved a TVAAS Level 4—demonstrating that our schools are helping Rocketeers grow each and every day.

These growth rates propelled us to pre-pandemic levels of achievement and charted a course for even higher levels of success in the years to come.

By focusing on individualized support and innovative learning strategies, Rocketship Tennessee is steadily rebuilding academic foundations and positioning our students to even further unleash their potential.







# 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 children's learning and learn how to harness the power of their voice to advocate for their children and their communities. Families participate in middle school fairs and get connected to schools with high success rates. They 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.

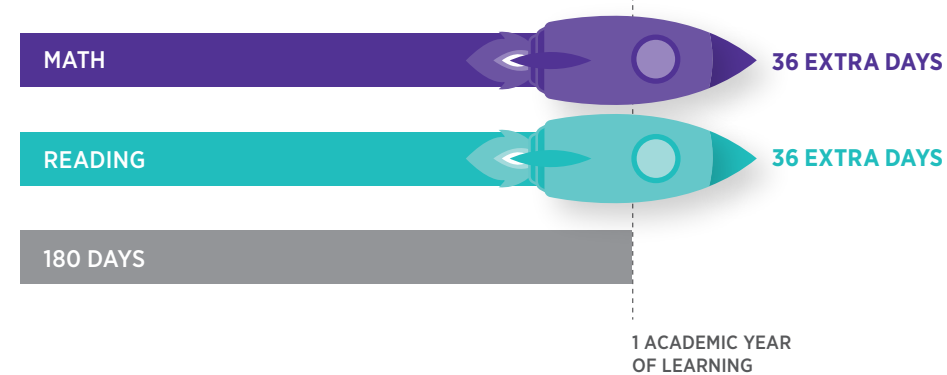
## Rocketeers Across the Network Gain 36 Extra Days of Learning

Every year a student spends in an underperforming school is a year they spend falling 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 to narrow the gap separating 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, then 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. This 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!

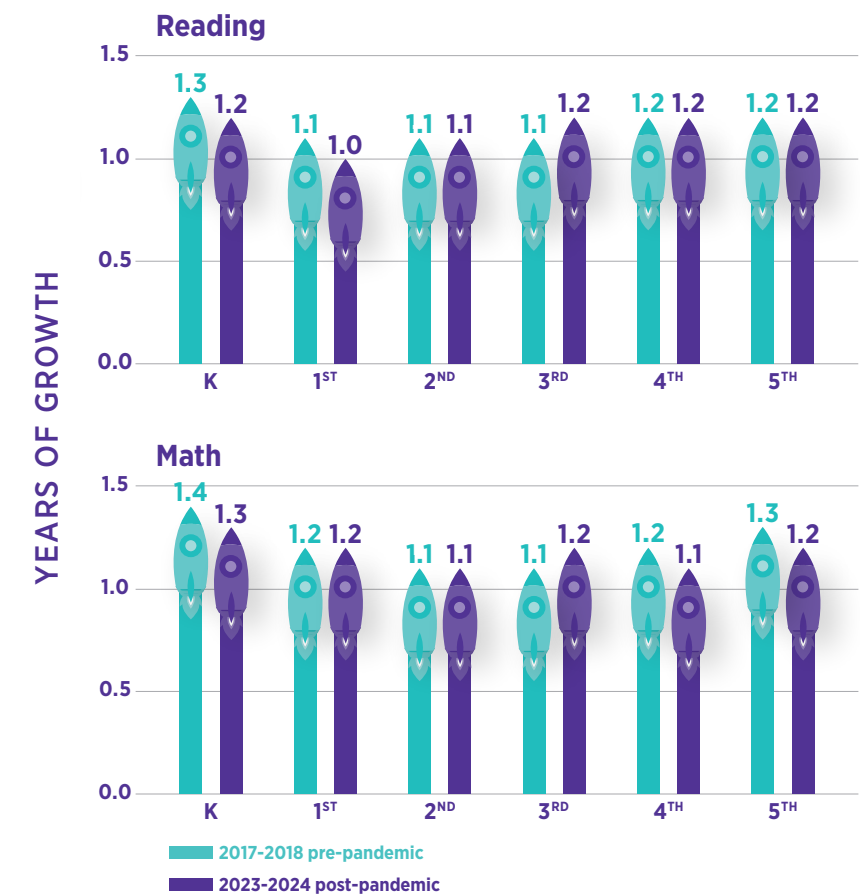
In the wake of COVID-19, many states are lowering academic standards, conceding a generation of students to lower growth and achievement. At Rocketship Public Schools, we refuse to accept that. We will never lower our standards—for ourselves, our Rocketeers, or the communities we serve.

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. We meet each child and family where they are 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. Our personalized learning model ensures that every Rocketeer gets the right support at the right time to foster academic growth.

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.

FALL TO SPRING STUDENT GROWTH BY GRADE LEVEL







## Rocketship Alumna Aims to Give Back to Her Community

BY JENNY SERRANO, ALUMNA ROCKETSHIP UNITED ACADEMY

When I think back to my time at Rocketship United Academy, I realize just how much it shaped who I am today. One thing I learned there was to be faithful and committed to my academic journey. That lesson stuck with me and gave me the discipline I needed to earn a full-ride scholarship to Lipscomb University, where I'm studying biology with a focus in pre-dental.

Rocketship taught me so much more than academics. The school's values and the caring teachers left a lasting impression. I'll never forget Ms. Alexis Morris, my fourth-grade learning lab teacher. She was just like me—outgoing, dedicated, and full of energy. Seeing her passion for teaching and her genuine care for us inspired me to carry those same values into my own life. Even the home visits were special. I still remember my mom and my teacher sitting together in our living room, talking about how much they believed in me. It felt like having two moms, both cheering me on.

Now, as a freshman in college, I'm dreaming big. I want to become an orthodontist during the day and an environmental advocate in my free time—working toward sustainability and helping provide healthy, affordable food for communities in need. But my dreams go beyond career goals. I've been working with nonprofits in Antioch, my hometown, helping families connect, network, and feel seen. Rocketship planted the seeds of those dreams, and I'm grateful every day for the community and opportunities it gave me.

## Ten Years Later Tennessee Alumni Reflect on Rocketship's Impact

Since launching Rocketship Tennessee more than 10 years ago, our alumni are excelling in middle school, high school, and soon, in college. They will always appreciate the educational foundation they built during their time at Rocketship. Hear what two former Rocketeers had to say about their time at Rocketship:

*"Rocketship United Academy wasn't just a school, it was a place where I found not only academic growth but also personal development and lifelong friendships. It's where I learned the value of teamwork, perseverance, and the importance of cherishing every moment. Reflecting on those memories fills me with happiness for the experiences and the people who made my time at Rocketship United Academy truly unforgettable."*

-COURTNEY KOON

HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR, REPUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL  
ALUMNA, ROCKETSHIP UNITED ACADEMY

*"Thinking back on my time at Rocketship Nashville Northeast, there's one memory that stands out above the rest. It's the image of me and my buddies playing soccer in the big gym. The sound of our laughter bouncing off the walls, the thrill of chasing after the ball - those moments were pure joy. My friends weren't just classmates; they were like family, always there for each other through thick and thin. I may not remember all my teachers' names, but I'll never forget the impact they had on me. They believed in us, pushed us to be our best, and helped shape who we are today. So here's to the school that helped mold me into who I am today. Thank you for the good times and the life lessons. You'll always hold a special place in my heart."*

-PEDRO GONZALEZ

HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR, REPUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL  
FORMER STUDENT, ROCKETSHIP NASHVILLE NORTHEAST ELEMENTARY





## Rocketship's Next Chapter in Tennessee: Planning for Future Growth

Rocketship Tennessee is committed to expanding its impact and providing more students with access to a high-quality, personalized education. With a proven track record of academic excellence and student growth, Rocketship is working to bring its innovative model to more communities in Tennessee.

**As part of this vision, Rocketship is pursuing the launch of two new schools—a second school to serve families in the Antioch and Cane Ridge communities in Davidson County, and our first school in Rutherford County to serve families in Smyrna and LaVergne.** These communities are the fastest-growing areas in their respective counties and face similar challenges with overcrowding of local elementary schools. Rocketship is seeking to partner with the local school districts to provide much-needed additional capacity—with a school model proven to close achievement gaps for historically underserved students.

Rocketship's decision to expand followed an extensive 18-month "greenlighting" process, ensuring strategic, data-driven growth. Leaders from the network and regional teams pored over data, including the academic performance of existing Rocketship schools, population growth patterns, and local school capacity projections, to identify and confirm the local communities that Rocketship is best positioned to serve.

Key reasons Rocketship sees the need for a second school in the same community is the extensive waitlist at Rocketship Dream Community Prep in Antioch, along with all of the nearby district elementary schools being at or over capacity. Expansion into Northwest Rutherford County is a natural next step, as many families Rocketship serves have relocated there in search of affordable housing and job opportunities.

As Rocketship looks to the future, it remains focused on delivering strong academic outcomes through rigorous academics, targeted interventions, and deep family engagement. Rocketship is eager to work alongside families and stakeholders to ensure that more Tennessee students—regardless of background—have the opportunity to thrive, achieve, and reach their full potential.

## Increasing Our Impact Across Tennessee



Communities we aim to serve with our fourth and fifth campuses, pending charter authorization





“Once we had a plan in place for him, he has been doing amazing. I just want to say Rocketship, thank you so much. Everyone else just threw us to the side...but I know here, he’s getting his education. They’re paying attention, they’re making sure he gets everything he needs.”

BOBI,  
ROCKETSHIP PARENT

HEAR FROM BOBI:



# Rocketship Classrooms Serve All Students

Last year, 11% of Rocketeers nationwide 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 to moderate special needs grew more than a year in both reading and math.*



# No-Stigma Summer School Boosts Student Performance

Summer school has long been viewed in our society as a punishment, but that’s not the case at Rocketship Tennessee. **We have turned summer school into something students and families want to experience.** For the second year in a row, we had a waitlist of families looking to enroll in our summer program.

Many families lack access to quality child care during the summer, and when leveraged effectively, summertime can be used to both accelerate learning and give our children access to enrichment opportunities they otherwise wouldn’t get to experience. We view this as a win-win-win.

To bring this vision to reality, Rocketship was awarded a significant grant by Summer Boost, a private philanthropic initiative supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies in partnership with other co-funders.

The program is designed to support summer programming for public charter students in elementary and middle schools. Nashville is one of seven U.S. cities benefiting from this philanthropic partnership.

We removed the decades-old stigma tied to summer school by opening the program to any Rocketeer who wants to participate while prioritizing spots for those who need it most. We’ve also made it fun! And while having fun in our summer school program, 50% of our third-grade cohort advanced to the next proficiency level on their summer TNReady re-take.

“Not only is our summer school program popular, but it’s also proven to be effective. Half of the third graders in our summer school program this year moved up an entire proficiency level on their post-summer TCAP assessment.”

SARAH STRODE,  
ROCKETSHIP TENNESSEE  
2024 SUMMER SCHOOL  
PRINCIPAL







## Volunteer Grannies Become Second Family to Rocketeers

The relationship between a grandparent and a grandchild is unlike any other—one filled with wisdom, love, and a deep sense of connection. While not all children get to experience that bond, Rocketeers in Nashville have the incredible opportunity to create it through the Volunteer Granny Program.

Since 1965, Fifty Forward’s volunteer granny program has been a pillar of support for at-risk students in local schools. Through this initiative, adults that are fifty-five-years-old and older can sign-up to do things like check homework assignments, read with Rocketeers, and assist as a teacher’s aide. Most importantly, the grannies’ role is to build relationships with the students and provide them with a caring adult who can provide emotional support at school.

These grannies offer far more than academic assistance—they are a source of emotional support and steady presence in the students’ lives. At Rocketship Nashville Northeast Elementary, for example, Mrs. Wyvonia Brooks has been volunteer since the school opened more than 10 years ago and has touched the lives of countless Rocketeers. Reflecting on her time with the students, she says, “This is what makes [me] want to get up in the morning.”

The Foster Grandparent Program, a branch of AmeriCorps Seniors, allows these volunteers to share their life experiences in meaningful ways. By mentoring, tutoring, and caring for children, they not only impact our Rocketeers but leave an indelible mark on the entire community.

## Families Gather to Support the Future of Rocketship Nashville Northeast Elementary

Tennessee Public Charter School Commission voted unanimously in support of Rocketship’s charter renewal appeal for Rocketship Nashville Northeast. This approval means our school is approved to operate for another 10 years!

We are grateful that the Commission staff conducted a fair and thorough appeal process and proud that Rocketship Nashville Northeast received high marks (meets or exceeds standards) in all four evaluation categories: academics, finances, operations, and future planning. The executive director also noted that we had “one of the strongest showings of public support” she has seen related to an appeal with over 300 written and spoken comments.

Thank you to the parent leaders, staff, and wider Rocketship Tennessee team for coming together for this monumental effort!





## 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 1,324 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.



94%  
of Rocketeers in  
Tennessee 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 and guide them through a unique journey.

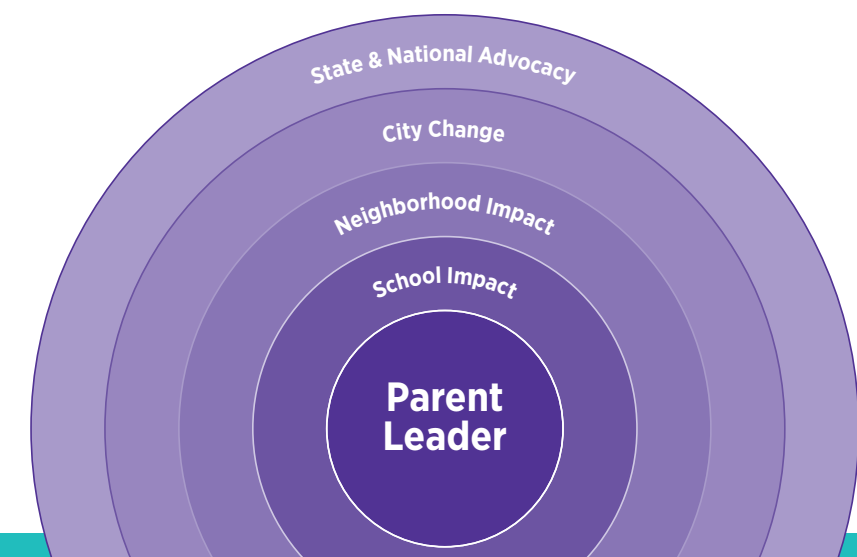
As parents become more involved at their school, our regional education organizers invite those with leadership potential to join their school's volunteer organizing committee. In this role, parents deepen their understanding of educational issues, receive training in advocacy and community organizing, 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.

Only 11% of registered voters in the U.S. being Black and Latino. Our Rocketship Votes! program increases voter registration, and 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







*"All the teachers give you that sense of security. The front office staff, they make you just feel at home. It's just a friendly environment. The biggest thing that I do love about the school though, is the curriculum. Because as challenging as it is, my kids do get the hang of it and understand it. So that means the teachers are actually taking their time to teach the kids what they need to know to be able to do the work they need to do. I love that."*

**JERRICA,**  
PARENT, ROCKETSHIP TENNESSEE

## Igniting a Love for Learning in Tennessee

*"What I really like about being here at Rocketship is the fact that they take time with each individual student, and that's for if he's behind or if he's ahead. My son really has worked hard, but a lot of that is attributed to the teachers, to the school, the curriculum, how they have it set up to where they make sure each student has a path for success."*

*"I feel like the way that Rocketship has set the curriculum, it gives students goals, those different goals where they can see their progress and not just see the pitfalls that they have. It's really been a big boost, and my middle child thrives off of positive reinforcement. So his growth is really attributed to the way that the curriculum is set up. And I love it. I mean, in contrast to how we've normally seen, the curriculum is perfect for our family."*

**JEREMY,**  
PARENT, ROCKETSHIP NASHVILLE NORTHEAST ELEMENTARY



WHY ROCKETSHIP PARENTS  
Love Our Schools



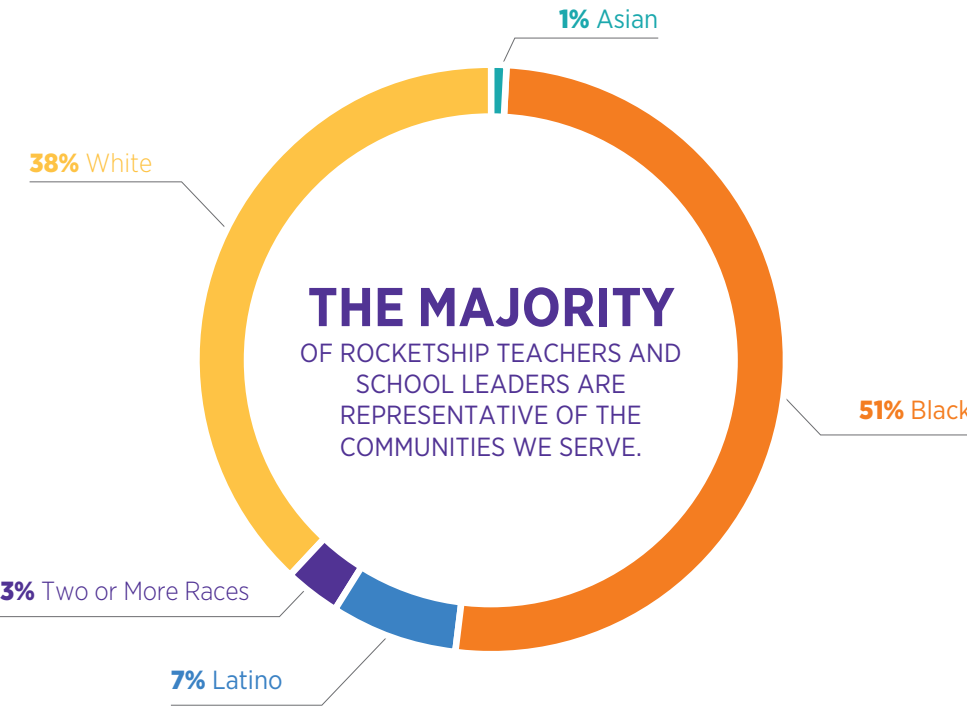


# Rocketship Tennessee Educators Reflect the Communities We Serve

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—only 20% of public school teachers in the U.S. 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 but 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 our educators—62 percent—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. Coaches also partner with their teachers to regularly review data and progress to adjust upcoming lessons, find new ways to improve, and maximize student success.

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, 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

# Rocketship’s Journey to Career Advancement



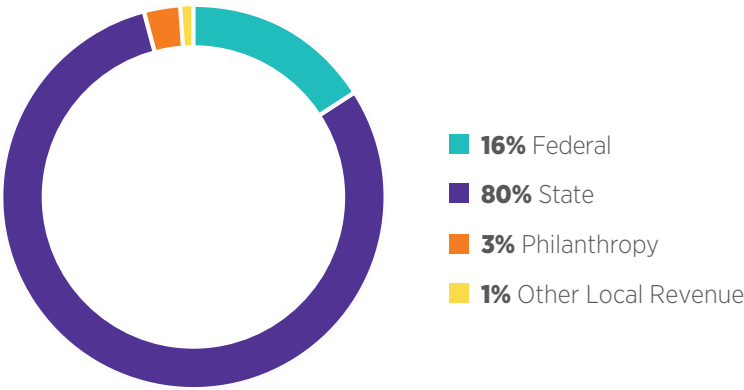
# Financials

Rocketship is building a scalable and financially sustainable non-profit school model that propels student achievement in underserved communities across the country. In 2023-24, 96% of our funding came from public sources. School-based expenses accounted for 89% of our spending.

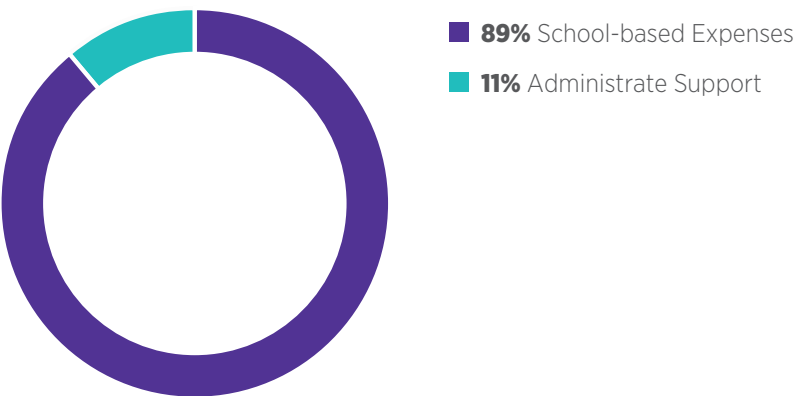
## FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Fully enrolled schools reach financial sustainability by their fifth year after launching. Each region is financially sustainable once it operates between three to eight schools. Our California region was our first fully sustainable region, meaning that our 13 schools and their regional support team operate solely on public funds. Tennessee, home to three campuses, is now our second sustainable region. While we're proud to continue to drive toward financial sustainability, philanthropic support remains critical to our ability to innovate and expand our impact.

## REVENUE



## EXPENSES



# Tennessee Supporters

Become a Rocketship Supporter



## TENNESSEE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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- Phil Ebert
- Robert Elliot

## MAJOR DONORS

- Below are supporters who gave \$1,000 and above.*
- Thank you for your generous support of our educators, communities, and Rocketeers.*
- Bloomberg Philanthropies
  - Charter School Growth Fund
  - Hickory Hollow Partners LLC
  - Margaret Riley King
  - Robert and Ann Marrie Elliott
  - Scarlett Family Foundation
  - Sunnyside Foundation

## AUTHORIZERS

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

- Metro Nashville Public Schools
- Tennessee Public Charter School Commission





