2025

Sioux Falls Thrive: Kid Link Outcomes

AN INITIAL EXAMINATION OF KID LINK'S EFFECTS ON ATTENDANCE, ACADEMIC PROFICIENCY, AND BEHAVIOR

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Background

Kid Link, a pilot project of Sioux Falls Thrive, began in 2020 in the Riverside neighborhood. Centered around Laura B. Anderson Elementary School, Kid Link grew from a series of summer events to a reliable schedule of weekly educational activities for kids and families. Activities included games and crafts focused on math, literacy, science, and fun; snacks; parent education and engagement; visits from the bookmobile; a food giveaway; and a free hot meal to go.

Kid Link launched during the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through innovative approaches to community gathering and partnerships with community organizations—including, notably, the Sermon on the Mount Mennonite Church, with provided meeting space—Kid Link grew in spite of the pandemic.

In October 2022, a second Kid Link site opened at Terry Redlin Elementary School. Sioux Falls Thrive partnered with the Sioux Falls School District to adapt the Kid Link model to this new site and ran it alongside the district's new strategy for after-school programming through Kids Inc., Volunteers of America, and the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Sioux Empire. As Kid Link expanded and demonstrated success, Kid Link became the prototype for a Community Learning Center model that is now offered in every elementary school across the Sioux Falls School District.

Outcomes

The Kid Link pilot offers a sort of natural experiment to test the effects of building community around a school. The following charts show trends over time in attendance, academic proficiency, and student suspensions for Laura B. Anderson Elementary (LBA) as compared to other Sioux Falls School District Title I schools. All data were drawn from South Dakota annual report cards for schools, available online at https://sdschools.sd.gov/. Some data points are not available for 2019-20 and/or 2020-21 due to the pandemic.

Attendance Rates

Compared to other Title I schools, LBA has shown more positive growth in attendance. Before the pandemic, attendance rates at both LBA and other Title I schools were on a downward trend, and this continued for both through 2021-22. However, after that year, the two trend lines diverged: LBA attendance rates climbed markedly while attendance rates at other Title I schools remained essentially flat.

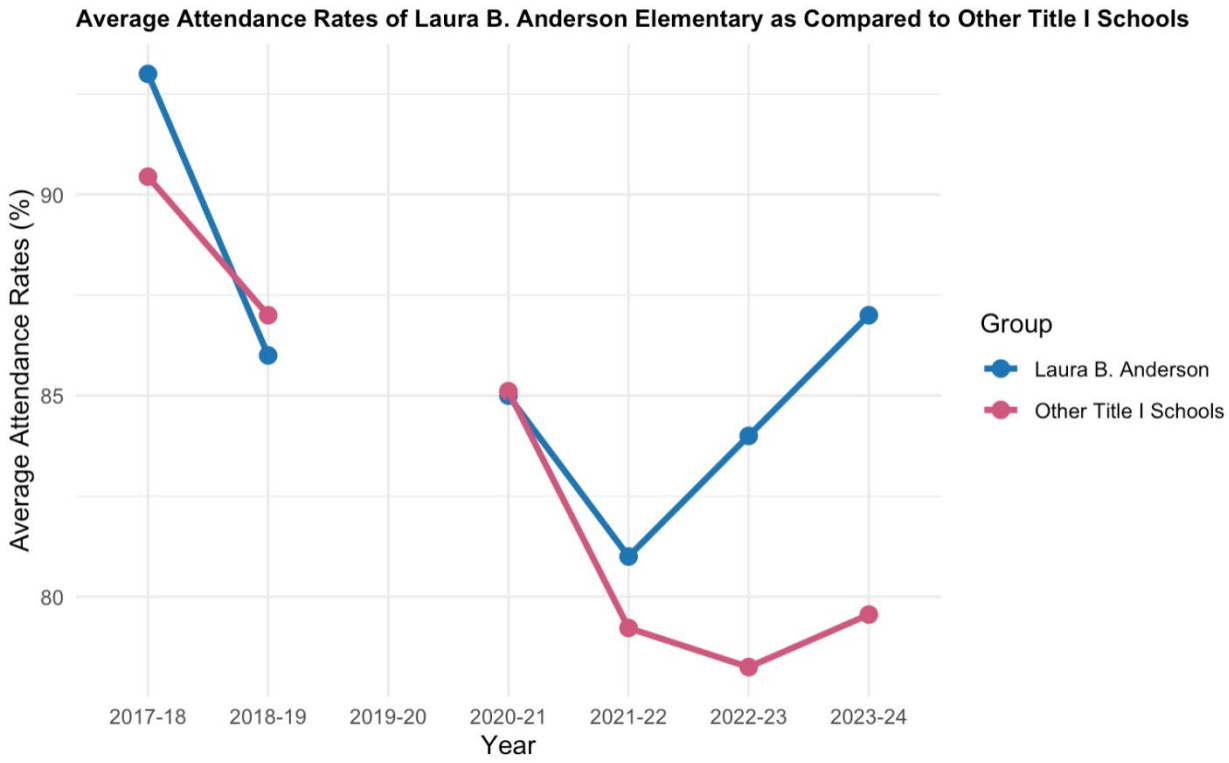

Figure 1. Average Attendance Rates of Laura B. Anderson Elementary as Compared to Other Title I Schools

Chronic Absenteeism

Trends in chronic absenteeism are consistent with those in average attendance rates. While LBA, like other Title I schools, had climbing rates of chronic absenteeism before the pandemic and through 2021-22, trends diverged after that year: at LBA, chronic absenteeism dropped off while it remained steady at other Title I schools.

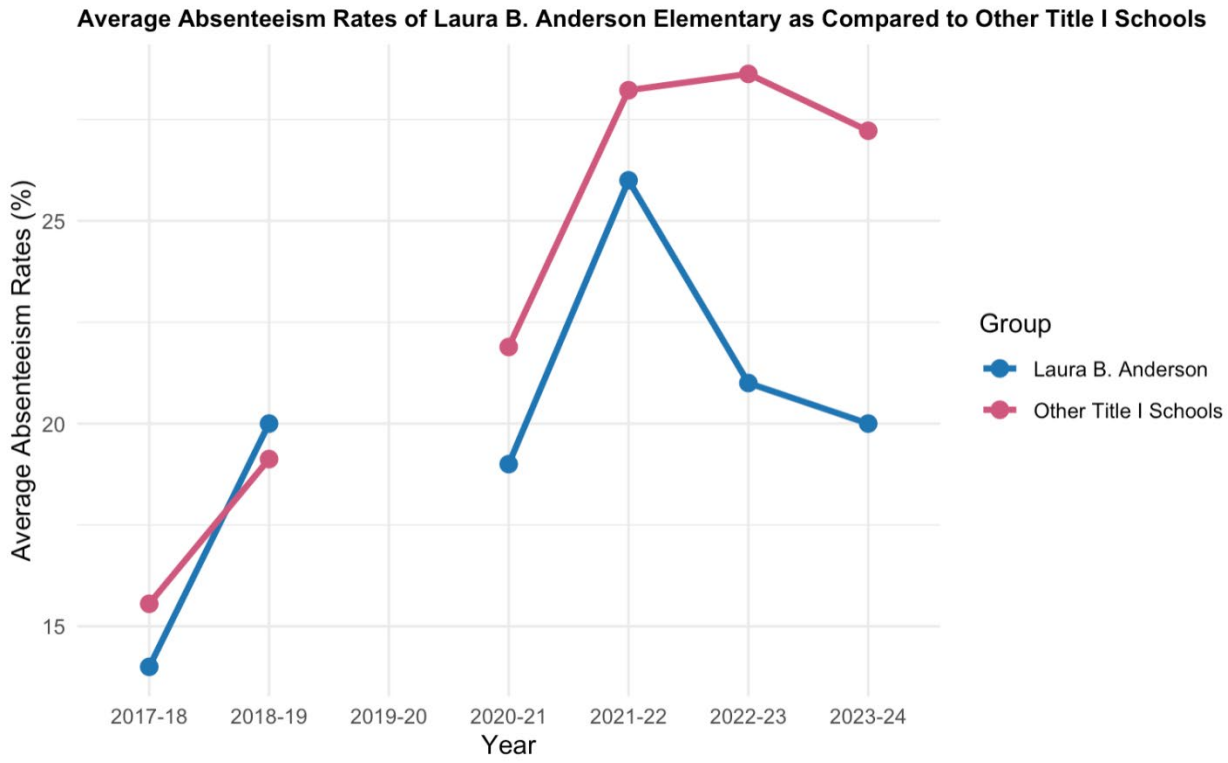

Figure 2. Chronic Absenteeism Rates of Laura B. Anderson Elementary as Compared to Other Title I Schools

Academic Proficiency

Outcomes in academic proficiency are less clear. While LBA proficiency rates in ELA climbed above rates for other Title I schools, LBA's proficiency rates in science remained lower than other Title I schools (though rising after 2022-23). In math, LBA's proficiency rates were initially higher than other Title I schools, but fell in line by 2023-24.

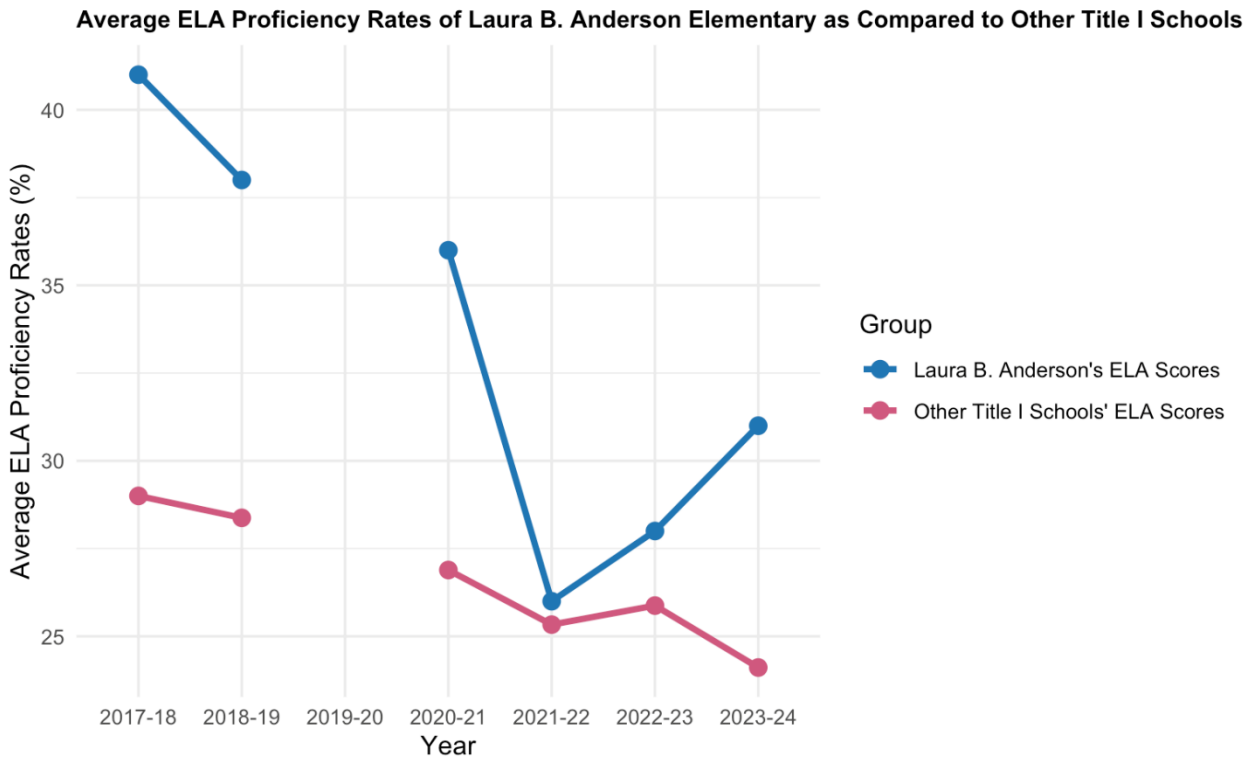

Figure 3. ELA Proficiency Rates of Laura B. Anderson Elementary as Compared to Other Title I Schools

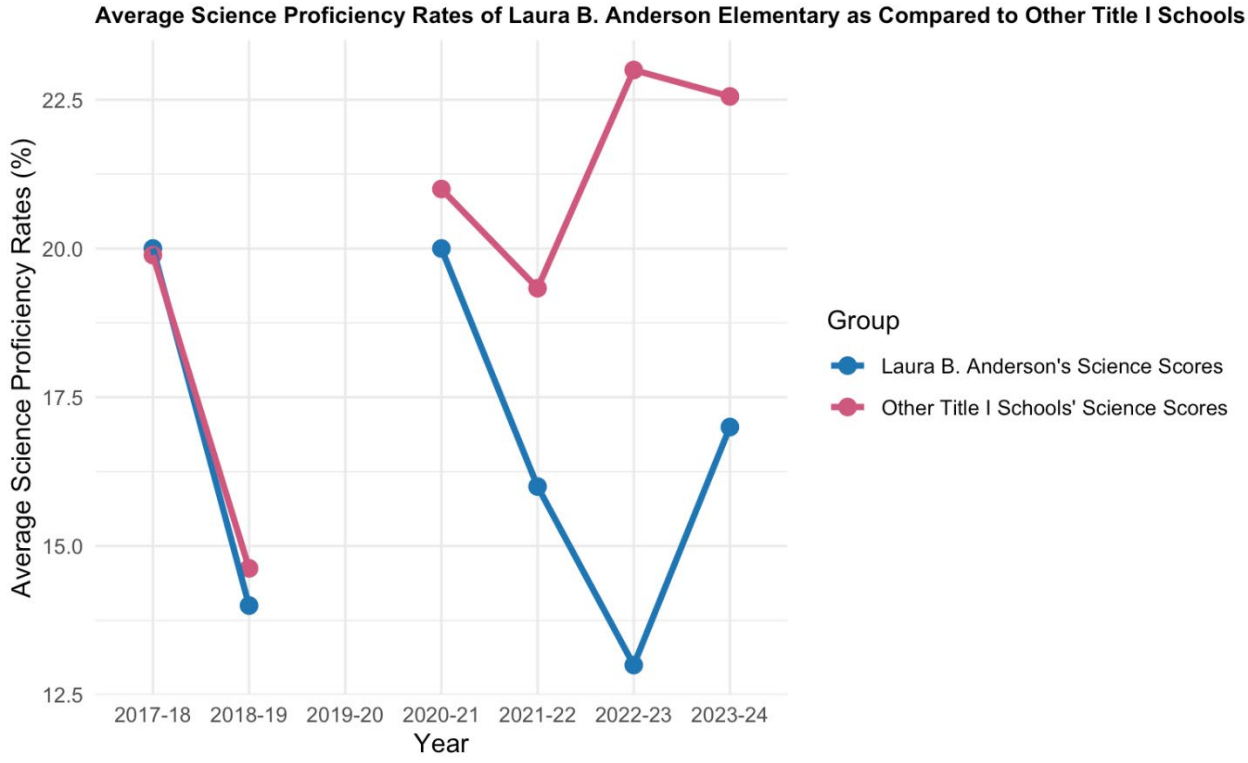

Figure 4. Science Proficiency Rates of Laura B. Anderson Elementary as Compared to Other Title I Schools

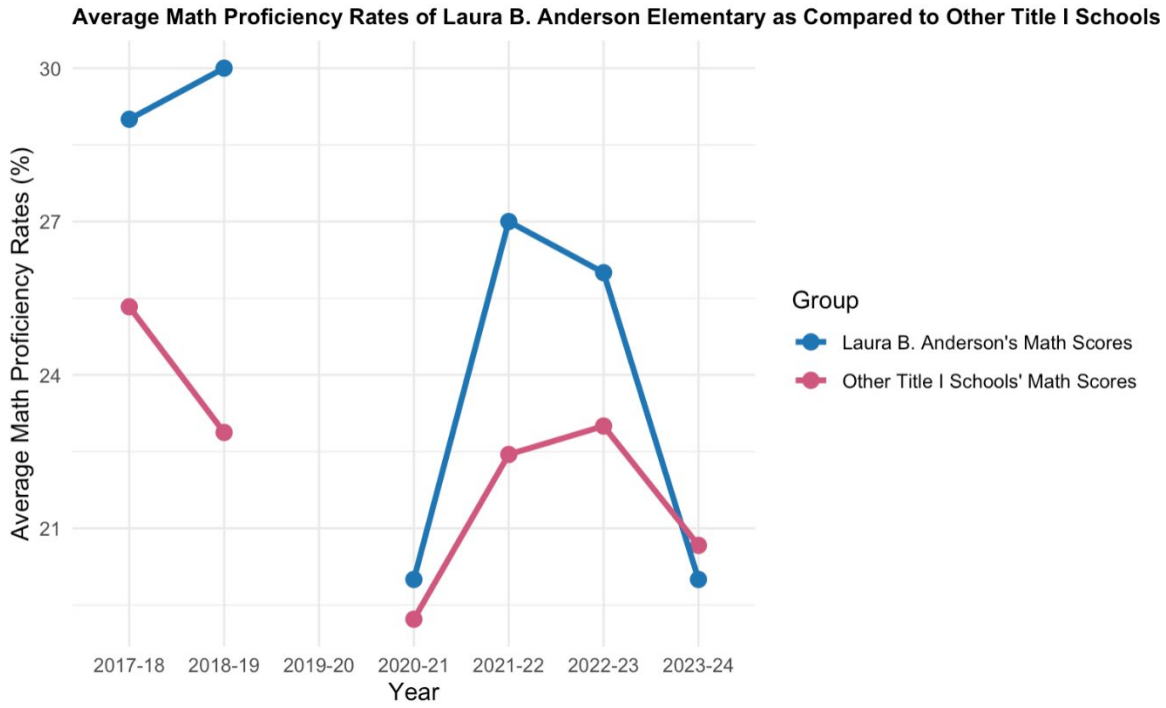

Figure 5. Math Proficiency Rates of Laura B. Anderson Elementary as Compared to Other Title I Schools

Student Suspensions

LBA maintained lower suspensions rates than other Title I schools both before and after Kid Link. Suspension rates were calculated by dividing the number of in-school and out-of-school suspensions by the total number of enrolled students at each school.

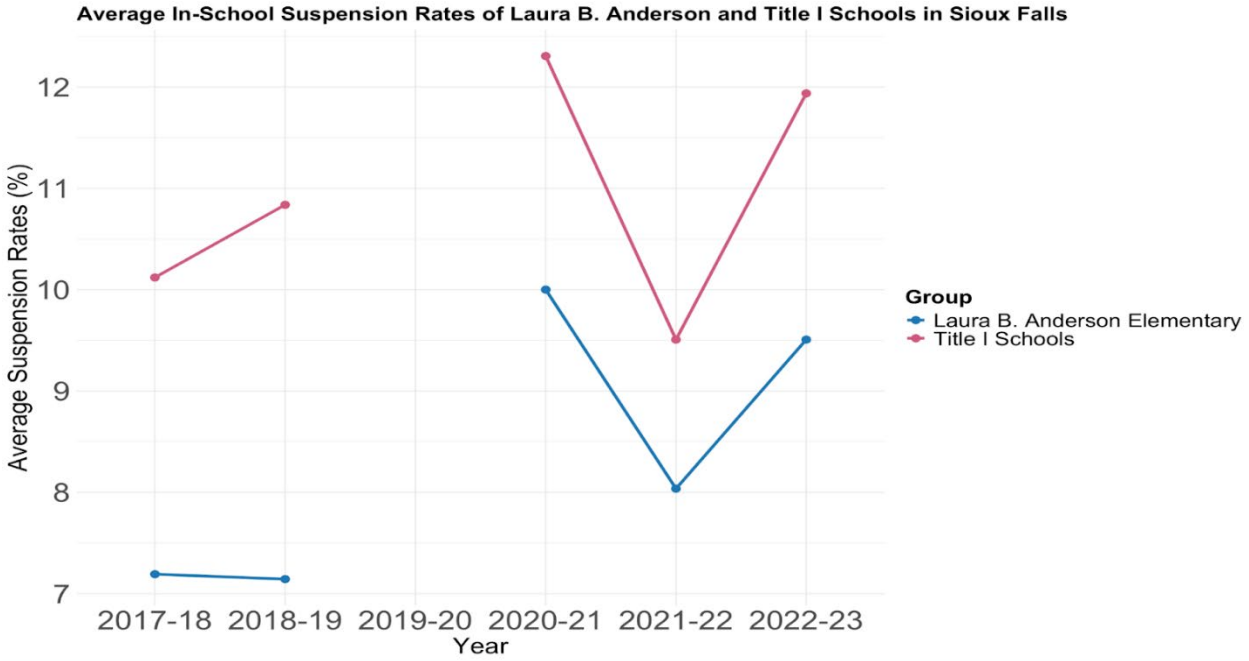

Figure 6. In-School Suspension Rates of Laura B. Anderson and Title I Schools

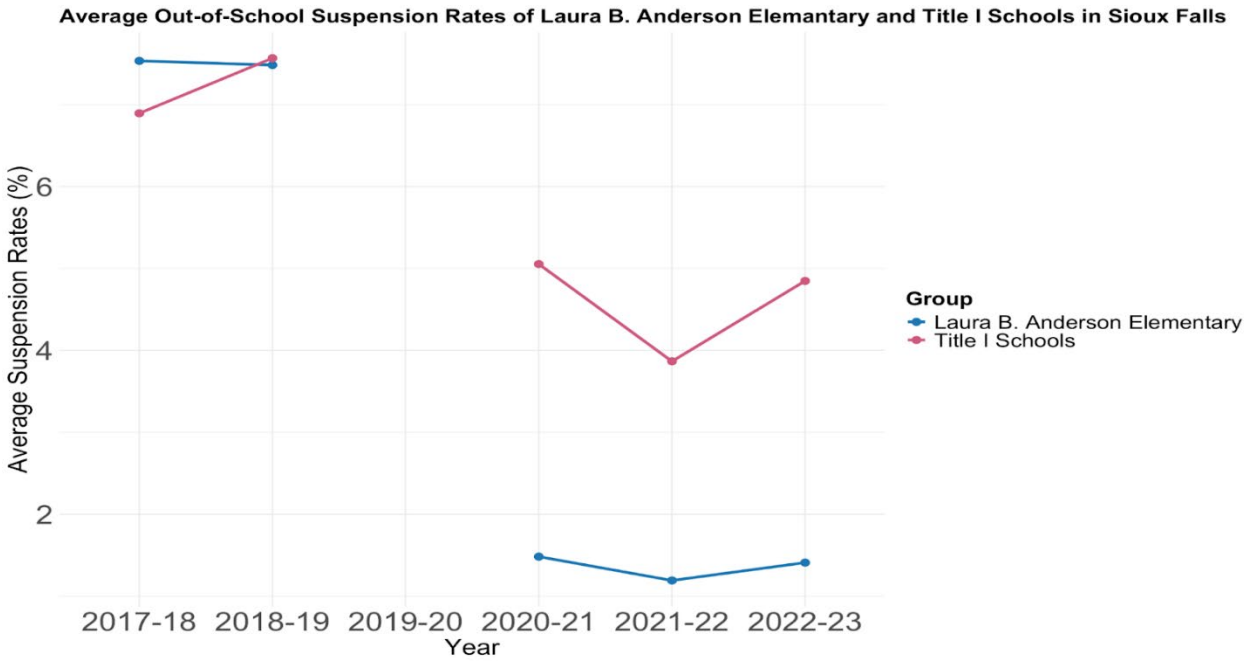

Figure 7. Out-of-School Suspension Rates of Laura B. Anderson and Title I Schools

Appendix: Additional Charts

The following charts provide additional points of comparison. They include data points for LBA, Title I schools as a whole, non-Title I schools, elementary schools as a whole, and the entire school district as a whole.

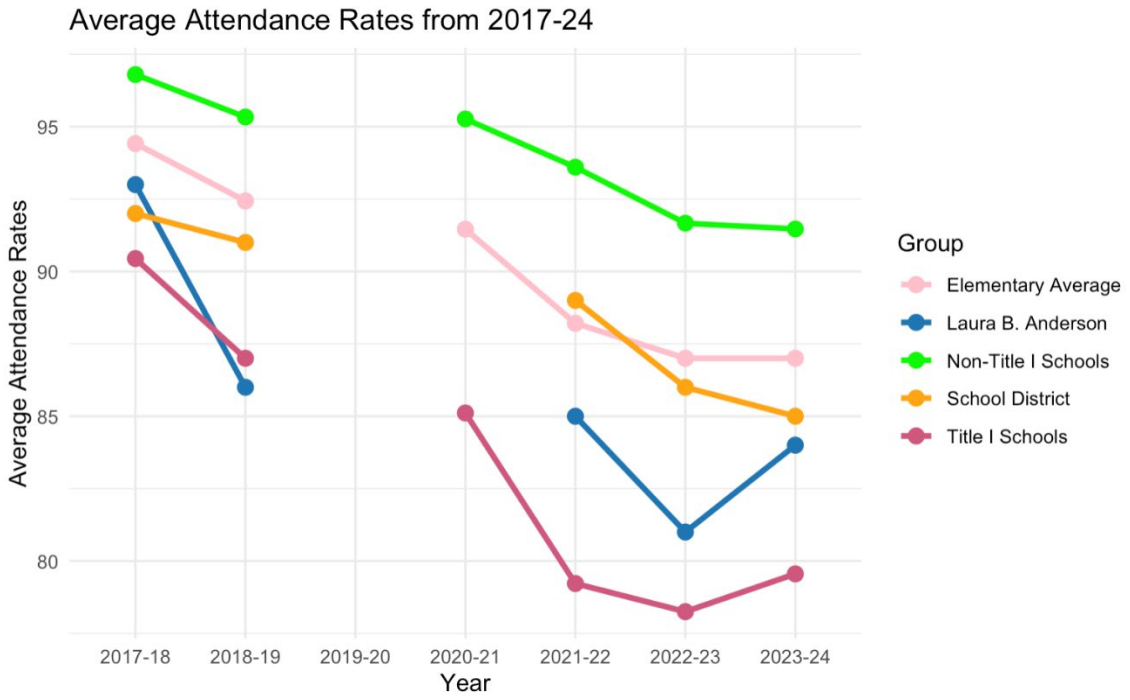

Figure 8. Average Attendance Rates, 2017-18 to 2023-24

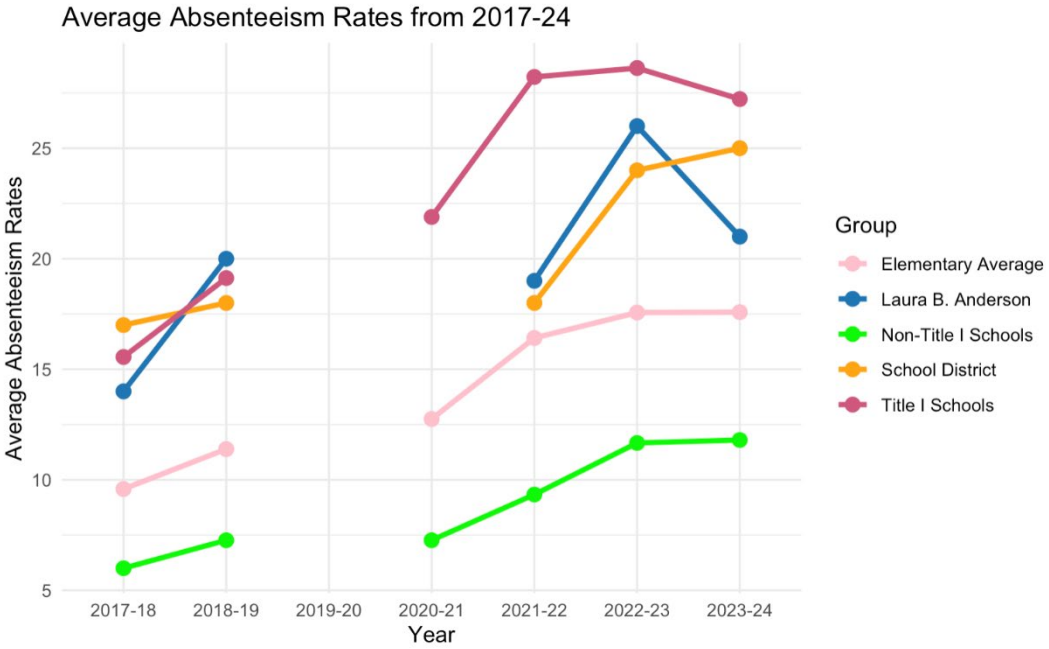

Figure 9. Chronic Absenteeism, 2017-18 to 2023-24

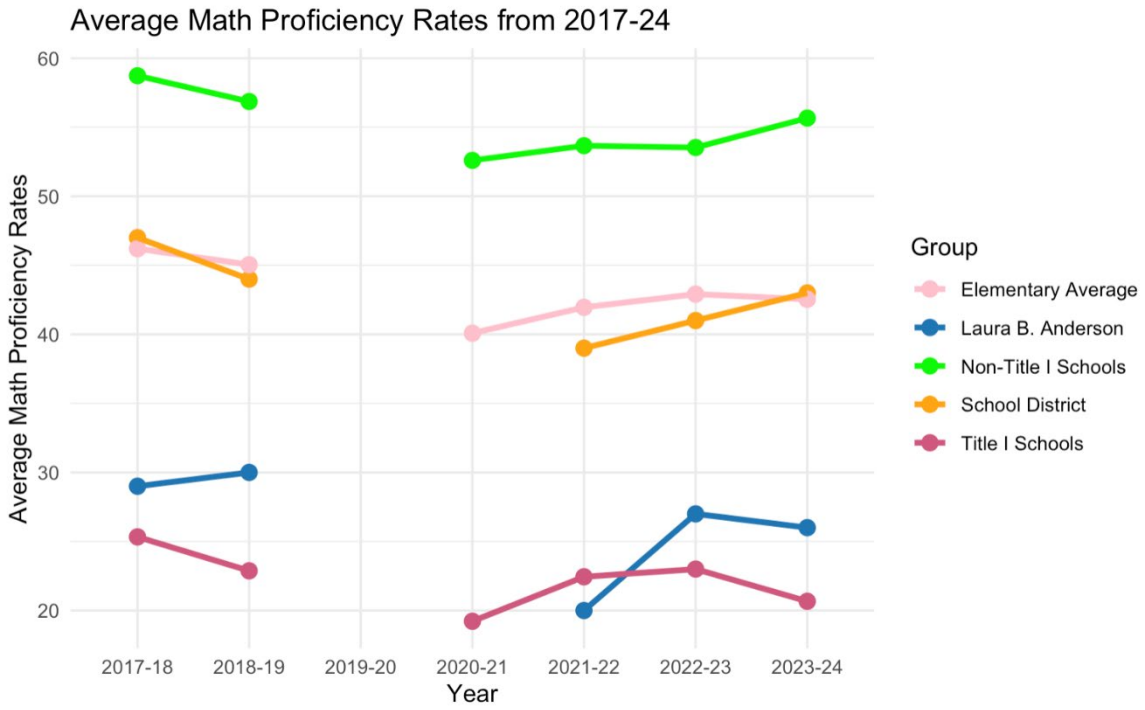

Figure 10. Math Proficiency, 2017-18 to 2023-24

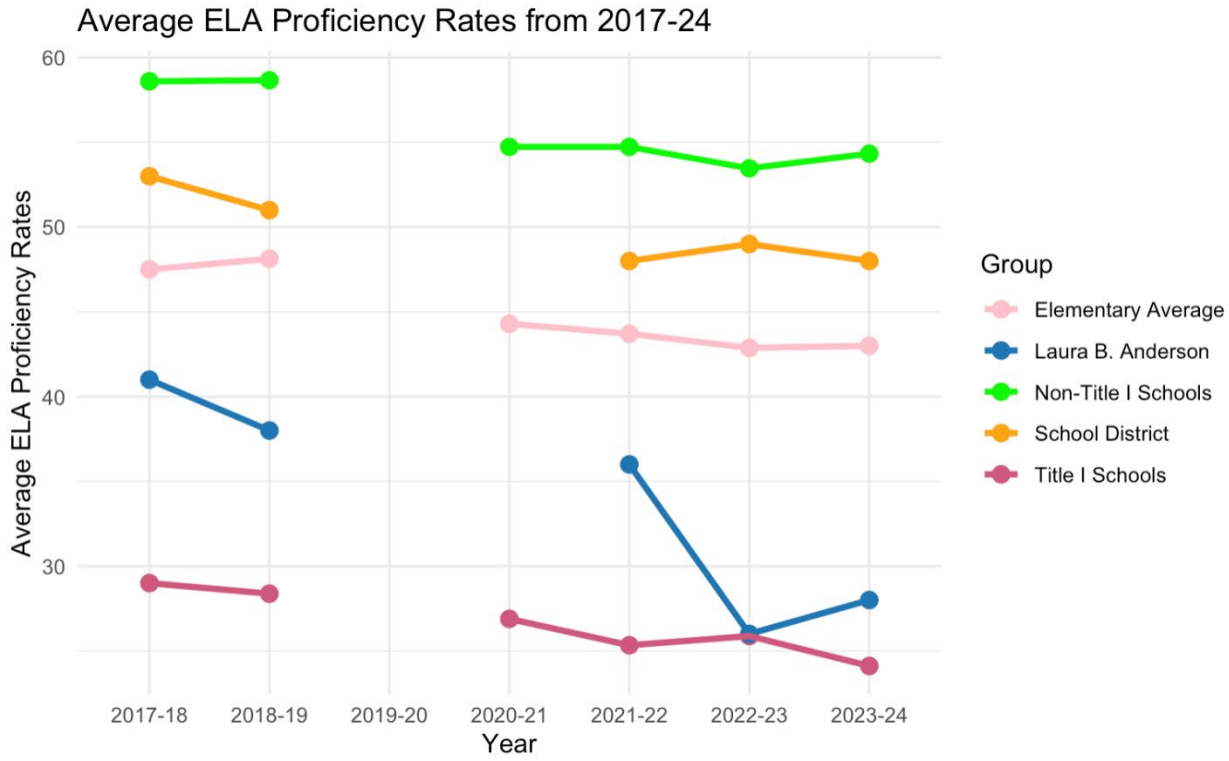

Figure 11. ELA Proficiency, 2017-18 to 2023-24

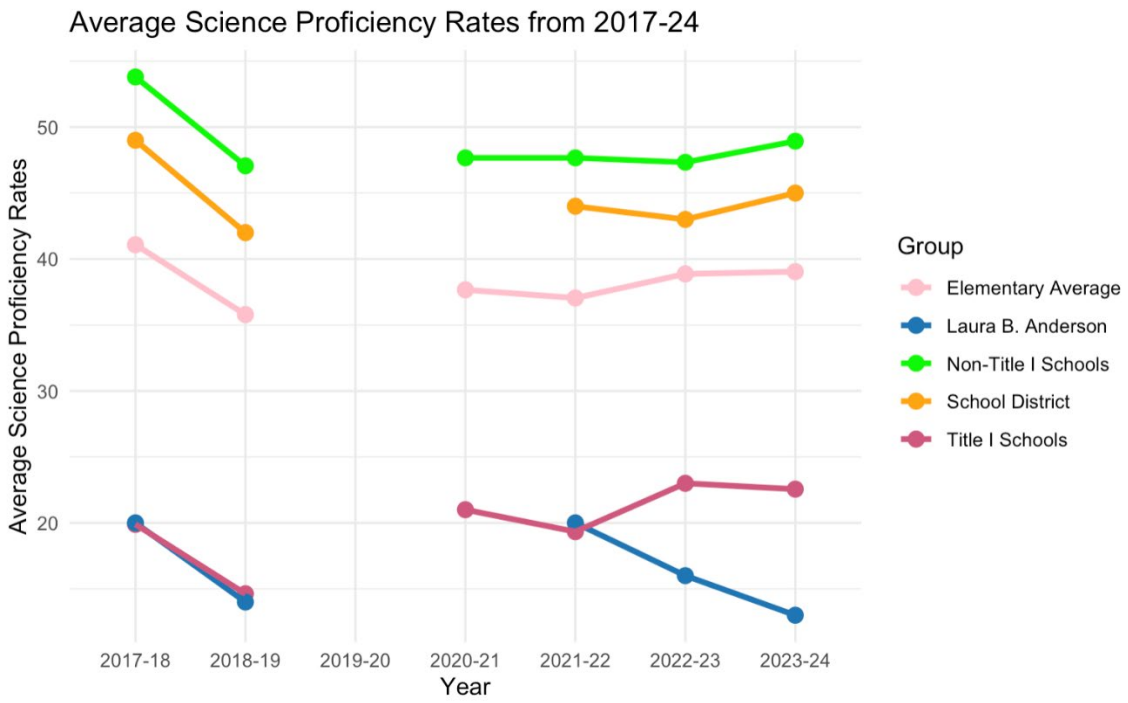

Figure 12. Science Proficiency, 2017-18 to 2023-24