

Half Cap Ceremony

A Presentation of Data & Effectiveness
For DeKalb County School District Board

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HALF CAP CEREMONY TESTIMONIALS

MAJOR CEREMONY



BACKGROUND & HISTORY



Half Cap Ceremony

Celebrating the Midpoint to Graduation

A districtwide milestone recognizing scholars who have successfully reached the halfway point toward graduation and **are on track** to complete their diploma requirements.



Recognize Progress



Strengthen Engagement



Support Graduation
Pathways

A strategy to affirm scholar success and promote commitment to graduation

Why Celebratory Recognition Matters for Scholar Progress

— Research-Backed Impacts of Recognition & Celebration on Scholar Outcomes —

- ◆ Recognition Drives Motivation & Persistence
- ◆ Recognition Improves Retention & Academic Engagement
- ◆ Participation & Recognition Linked to Well-Being
- ◆ Celebrations Validate Small Wins on the Path to Big Goals

HALF CAP CEREMONY

PURPOSE

Celebrates, recognizes, encourages, and motivates our 10th-grade scholars who are on track for graduation.



CRITERIA

On Track Criteria for the Half Cap Ceremony:

- 1 Successfully earned 10 total credits (5 core and 5 elective).
- 2 Currently passing at least two courses.

* **Core courses** – mandatory subjects needed to meet the required core units for a high school diploma.

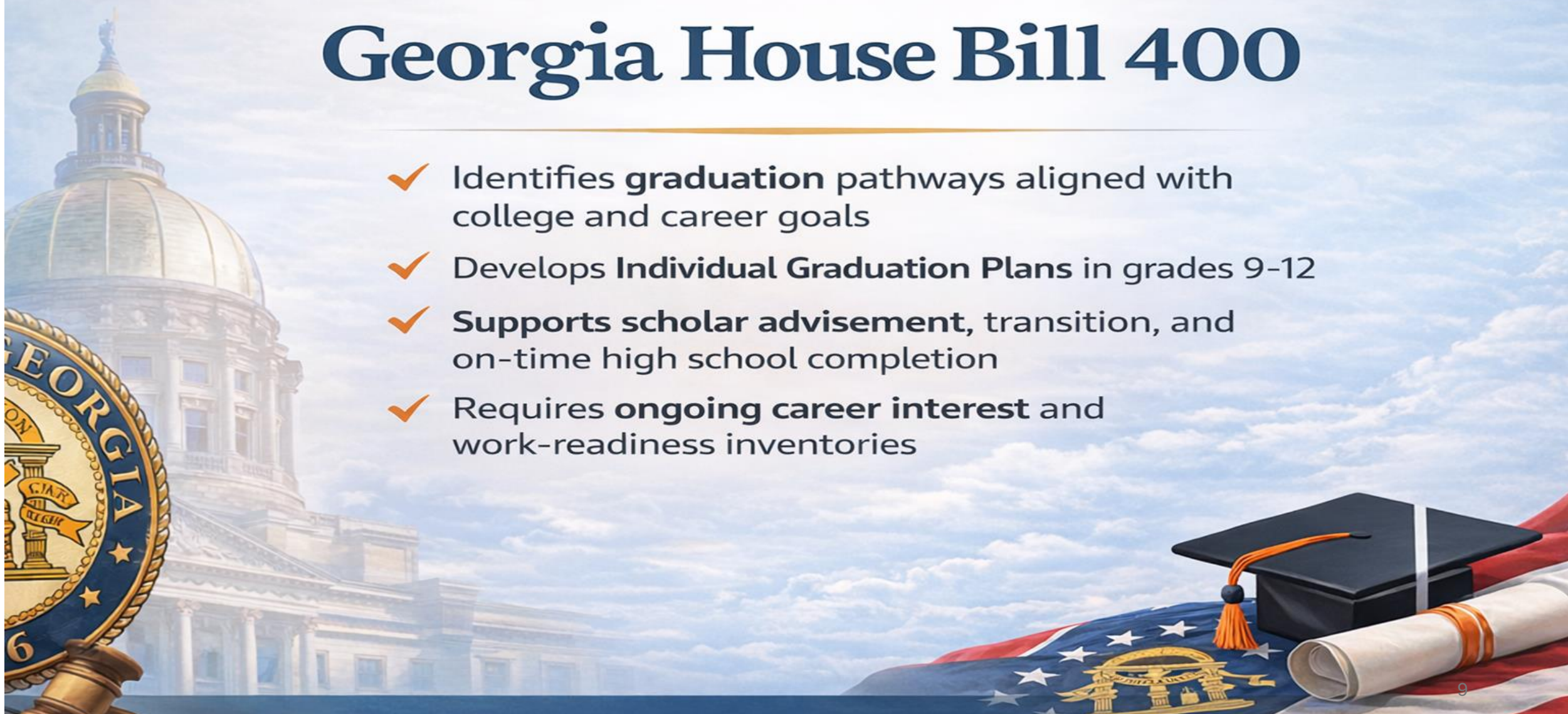
* **Elective courses** – scholar selects beyond the core requirements to fulfill the total units.

ALIGNMENT

• Georgia House Bill 400 (BRIDGE Act) •

Georgia House Bill 400

- ✓ Identifies **graduation** pathways aligned with college and career goals
- ✓ Develops **Individual Graduation Plans** in grades 9-12
- ✓ **Supports scholar advisement**, transition, and on-time high school completion
- ✓ Requires **ongoing career interest** and work-readiness inventories



STRATEGIC PLAN INDICATOR ALIGNMENT

COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION	STRATEGIC PLAN	INDICATOR(S)
Half Cap Ceremony Milestone	Recognizes scholars who earn 10 or more credits, pass required courses, and complete BRIDGE Law requirements while progressing toward the 4E pathways of education, employment, enlistment, and entrepreneurship	Goal 1: Academic Success	1.3 CCRPI Growth 1.4 Graduation Rate 1.6 Pathway Completion
Scholar Tracking and Verification System	Counselor led transcript reviews identify scholars who are on track for graduation and advancing toward the district's 4E postsecondary readiness goals	Goal 1: Academic Success	1.3 CCRPI Growth 1.4 Graduation Rate
Family Invitations and Ceremonies	Formal invitations, performances, and celebrations engage families and community partners in supporting scholars on their path to the 4E pathways	Goal 2: Family and Community Engagement	2.1 Family Participation 2.2 Communication Quality 2.5 Inclusive Engagement
Scholar Reflection and Scholar Voice	Scholar speeches and testimonials from upperclassmen highlight real experiences connected to education, careers, military service, and entrepreneurship	Goal 4: Culture and Climate	4.1 School Belonging 4.4 Attendance
School Pride and Culture Building	Regalia, music, and celebration build school pride and reinforce scholars' commitment to graduation and the 4E pathways	Goal 4: Culture and Climate	4.1 Climate Ratings 4.3 PBIS Implementation
Counselor and School-Based Planning Teams	Senior advisors, assistant principals, counselors, and class sponsors coordinate ceremony logistics and monitor scholar progress toward graduation	Goal 3: Talent	3.2 Leadership Pipeline 3.5 Professional Learning 3.6 Induction & Mentoring
Connection to P.U.S.H. Plan & Graduation Tracker	Half Cap serves as a strategic checkpoint within the Secondary P.U.S.H. Plan to monitor scholar progress toward graduation and the 4E pathways	Goal 6: Organizational Excellence	6.3 Technology Systems 6.5 Operational Effectiveness

STRATEGIC PLAN: SMARTAO GOAL

Graduation Rate Improvement by 2029 Goal:

By 2029, increase the district's 4- and 5-year cohort graduation rates through consistent implementation of strategic supports and expanded graduation pathways.

Key Strategies:

- **Standardized Implementation:** Implement and monitor consistent Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) across all cohorts.
- **Targeted Academic Supports:** Expand access to tutoring, mentoring, academic intervention classes, credit recovery, and after-school programs.
- **Expanded Graduation Pathways:** Increase opportunities through alternative and flexible graduation options.
- **Early Promotion Success:** Implement targeted strategies to increase the number of students successfully promoted from 9th grade, strengthening the graduation pipeline.

TIMELINE OF IMPLEMENTATION

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Half Cap Ceremony

2023-2024

Implementation

Selected Pilot Schools:

- Clarkston
 - Columbia
 - Cross Keys
 - DeKalb Alternative
 - Dr. Ronald E. McNair
 - Elizabeth Andrews
 - Towers
- Districtwide effort through Strategic Accountability Framework P.U.S.H. Plan.
 - Aligned 10th grade monitoring with graduation targets.
 - Pilot schools selected due to grad rate < 75%

2024-2025

Initiation

- Expanded and formalized Half Cap Ceremony as a signature milestone to all high schools within DeKalb County School District.
- For all 10th graders identified as on track based on academic criteria.
- Evaluation of success of the initiative began.

2025-2026

Districtwide Engagement

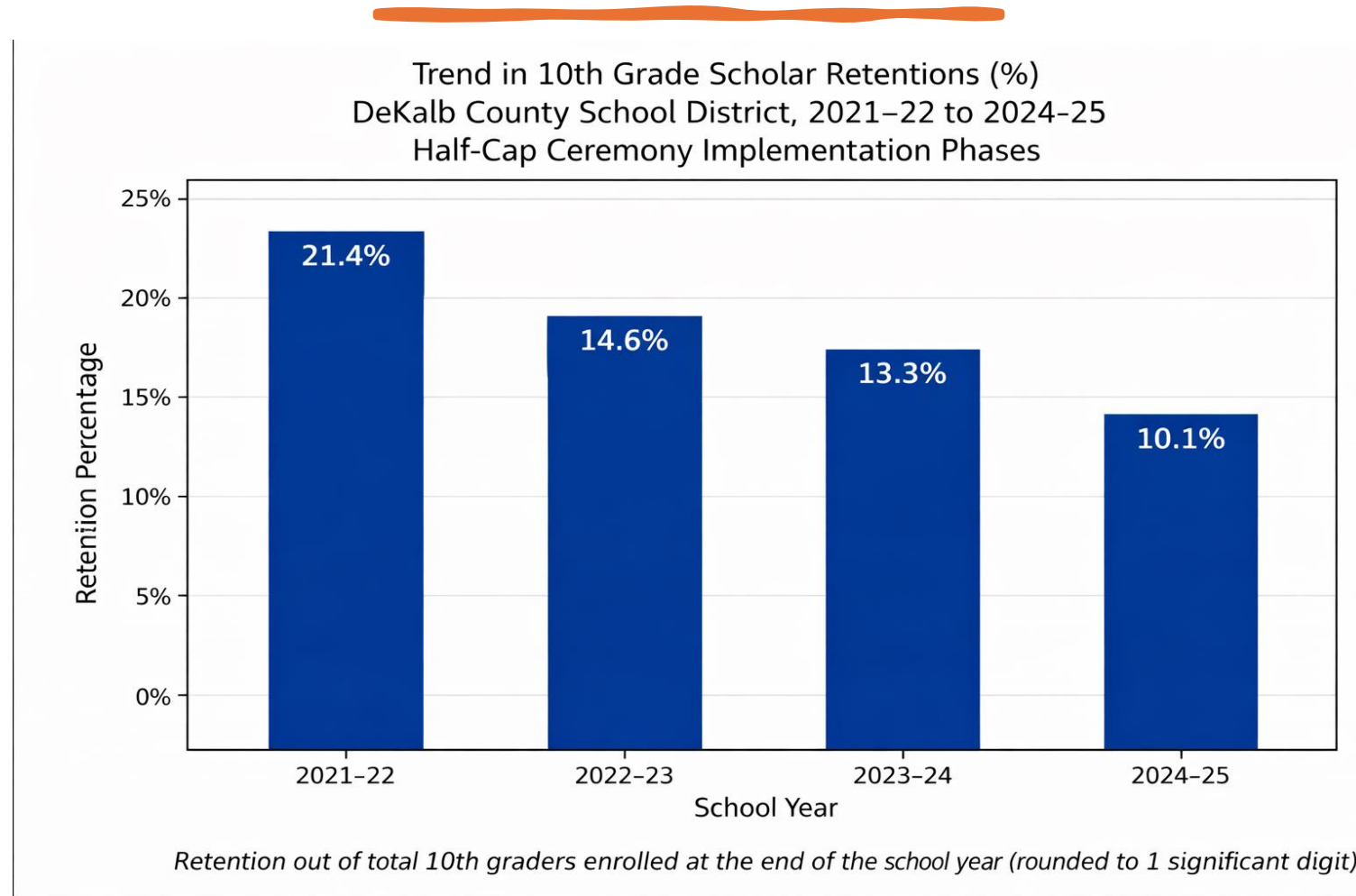
- All high schools engaged
- Stakeholder collaboration to refine and share best practices.
- Collected feedback to improve and sustain Half Cap Ceremonies.
- Ongoing measuring impact



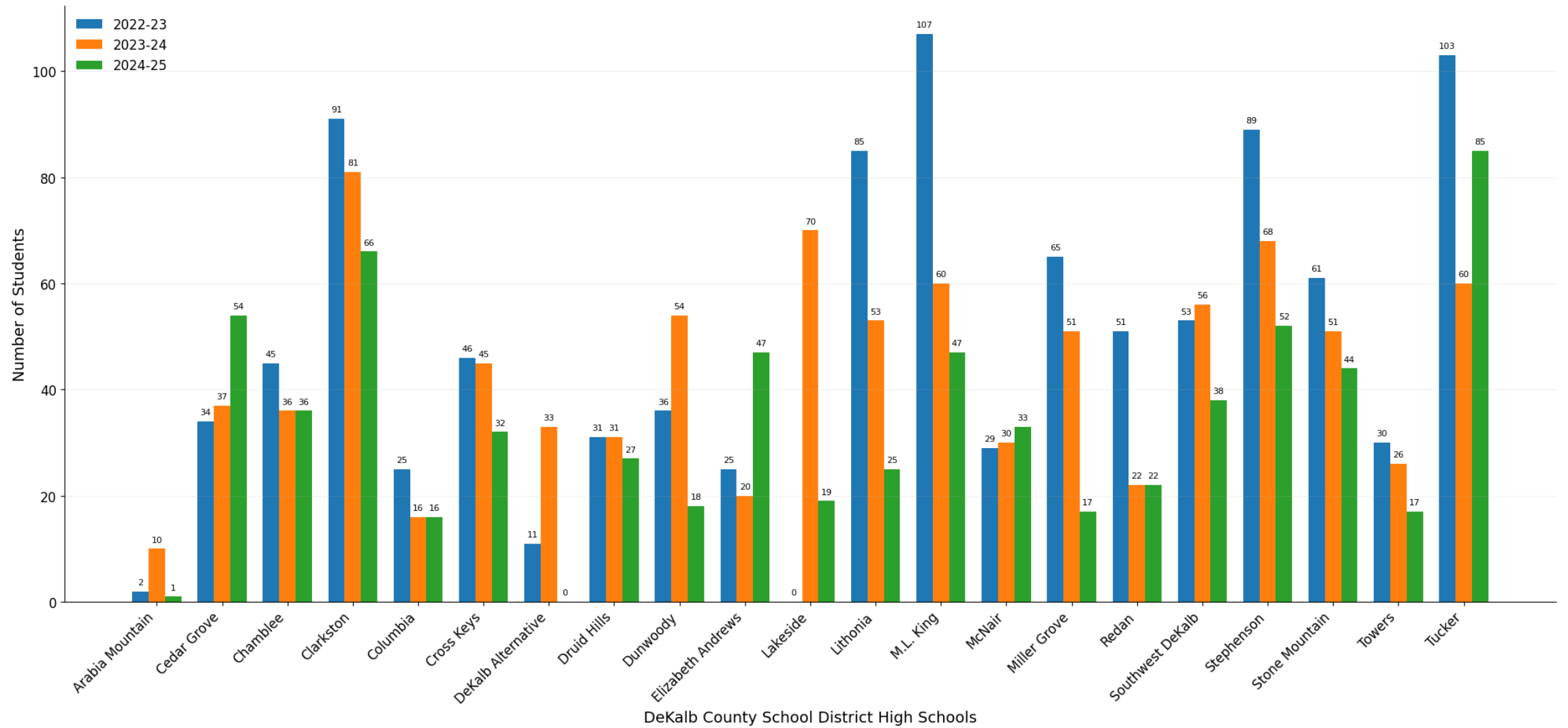
10th GRADE RETENTION DATA ANALYSIS *QUANTITATIVE*

Nearly **50% reduction** in retained 10th graders over four years

Largest decreases coincide with **expansion of Half-Cap implementation**



10th Grade Retained Students by School (3-Year Trend)



Half Cap Impact on Scholar Behavior

Attendance & Discipline Trends (2024–2026 Cohorts)



ATTENDANCE

+3.87%

Increase in Average Daily Attendance



More scholars attending consistently to remain eligible for Half Cap.



Half Cap = Motivation Driver



DISCIPLINE

ISS **-2.12%**

OSS **-0.16%**



Fewer discipline referrals, better student choices.

Cohort Influence in Action

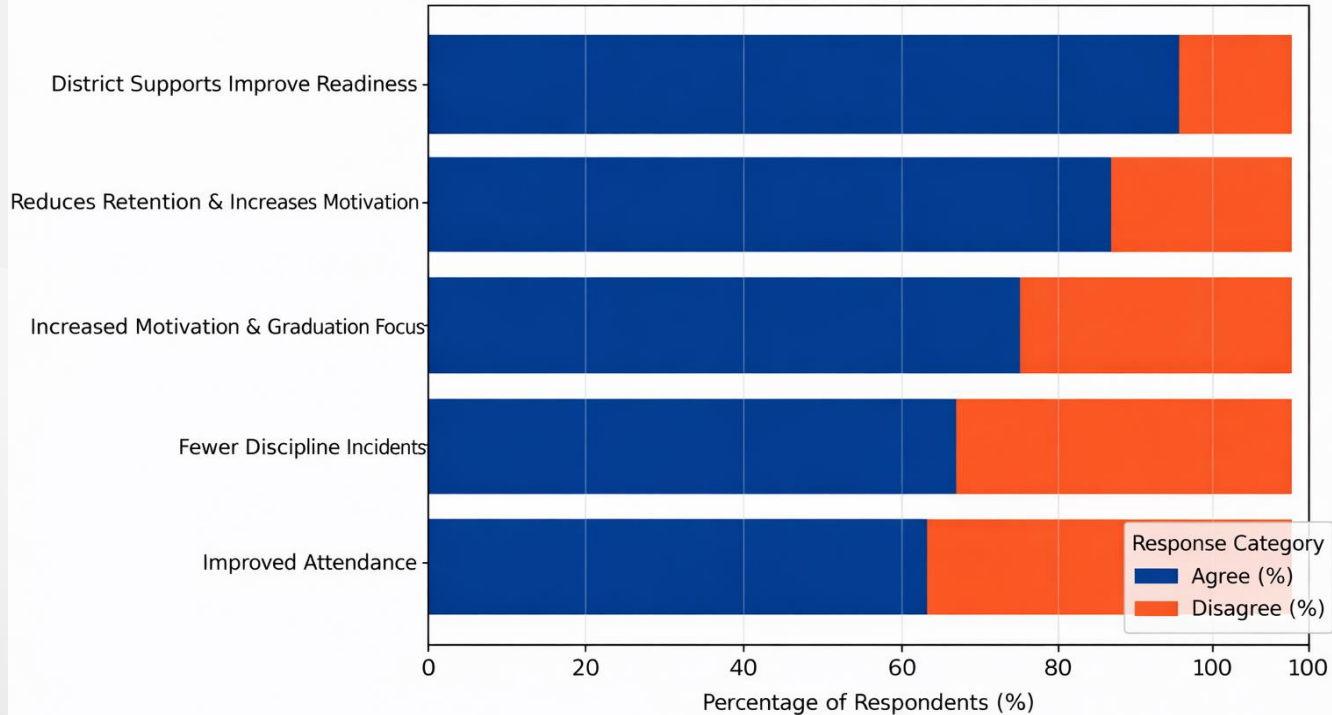
*Scholars who observe Half Cap participation in earlier cohorts demonstrate **improved attendance and behavior** as they progress into 10th grade.*

Data reflects percentage point changes across 2024–2026 10th grade cohorts

10th GRADE RETENTION DATA ANALYSIS *QUALITATIVE*

PARTICIPANT PERCEPTION DATA

Leadership Perceptions of Half-Cap Impact
Survey of Principals, Assistant Principals, and Head Counselors (n = 70 of 75), 2024



Improved attendance among participants:

59% agree

Fewer discipline incidents:

59% agree

Increased motivation and graduation focus:

69% agree

Half-Cap reduces retention and increases motivation:

80% agree

District supports tied to Half-Cap improve readiness:

87% agree

INCENTIVES AND OUTCOMES

HOW INCENTIVES DRIVE OUTCOMES

Incentive-Based Action	Intended Impact	Strategic Connection
Awarding caps, medals, and certificates	Encourages scholars to view themselves as “on the path” to graduation	1.4 Graduation Rate 4.1 Belonging & School Climate
Publicly naming and celebrating scholars	Builds scholar confidence and pride	4.1 School Belonging 2.1 Family Engagement
Inviting families and showcasing success	Increases accountability and family-school partnership	2.1 Family Participation 2.5 Trust & Engagement
Ceremonial recognition before senior year	Creates momentum for finishing strong	1.3 CCRPI Growth 1.6 Pathway Completion
“Soft reset” for scholars slightly off track	Promotes re-engagement through proximity to celebrated peers	4.4 Attendance 5.1 Mental Health Supports

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

HISTORIC GRADUATION RATE!

DCSD achieved the highest 4-year cohort graduation rate in **school year 24-25** **(81.4%)**



If current trends continue, **10th-grade** retentions are projected to **decline by 71% in 2026-27** and **potentially decline to 86% in 2029-30**.

Over the past four years, **10th-grade retention has steadily declined**, reflecting the positive impact of intentional monitoring, early identification, and recognition of on-track scholars through the **Half-Cap** initiative.

HALF-CAP

SCHOLAR RETENTION IMPROVEMENT & HALF-CAP PARTICIPATION GROWTH

As 10th-grade retention rates have decreased, the number of **Half-Cap Scholar Participants** has steadily increased.



ON-TRACK SCHOLARS



Employment



Education



Enlistment



Entrepreneurship

* Based on current data; numbers are projected and may change depending on the size of the cohort.

THANK YOU!

Comments & Questions

