

Key Takeaways: June 2018

Chicago can be proud of increased student performance: according to research lead by [Stanford professor Sean Reardon](#), Chicago students are learning at faster rate than 96% of school districts in the country. Janice Jackson, a previous Chicago Public Schools (CPS) student, teacher, principal, and administrator, was tapped to serve as CEO in 2018. The system is giving more decisionmaking authority to individual schools, developing strong school leader pipelines, and has introduced a unified information and enrollment system for all public high schools in Chicago. But the city must remain focused on elevating voices of underrepresented communities in the system, planning for quality schools in every neighborhood, and providing better transportation options.

Challenges Ahead

► Building a citywide plan for a dynamic school system

Education leaders are rightsizing Chicago Public Schools (CPS) by consolidating underenrolled schools at shared campuses and not opening new district schools. However, CPS must ensure that families have access to good options in their own neighborhoods. This is a critical need, given the lack of free transportation to all choice schools. Leaders should leverage collaborative structures, like the Chicago District-Charter Collaboration Compact, to develop a vision for the city's portfolio of schools. CPS and the charter sector should coordinate on citywide facilities planning, and use performance and enrollment data to identify where quality seats are lacking and where the market is already saturated. Education leaders should encourage applications from charter schools whose models reflect family needs and can open in the neighborhoods that most need them.

► Improving transit options

Chicago education and civic leaders should identify what improvements could be made to the current transportation policy, which only ensures free transportation to students attending choice schools in their neighborhood, or some magnets. A free transit pass could be a good start for older students, but district and charter leaders could also explore options to share the costs of expanding bus services or work toward a bus circulator system like Denver's "Success Express."

► Proactively seeking input from underrepresented communities

Good processes are currently in place for families to shape school-level policy. Additionally, CPS involves the community on school consolidations and openings, but decisions are usually made at the central office. However, there are groups whose voices are missing, especially when providing input on systemwide issues such as the district budget. For example, despite a growing Hispanic demographic presence in the city, there is reportedly little representation from this community, and few grassroots organizations are working to elevate parent concerns. Philanthropy can help build capacity among existing leaders and organizations from underrepresented communities. Education leaders should also make sure to report back to the community how their input was incorporated in systemwide initiatives or explain why it wasn't.

Spotlight

Chicago Students' Dramatic Gains Analyzed by Researchers

Research led by Stanford Professor Sean Reardon and released in late 2017 found that Chicago students have been making some of the [most dramatic gains](#) in the country. Based on state test data of district and charter students from 2009 to 2014:

- Chicago students' performance grew faster than 96% of ALL school districts in the United States.
- Chicago has the highest growth rate between 3rd and 8th grades among the 100 largest districts.
- Each new CPS class outperforms the prior class and improves at a rate much higher than the national average.

Compared to the national average, “that’s like an extra year of schooling squeezed in somehow between 3rd and 8th grade” said [Reardon](#) (Chicago Sun-Times, Nov. 2, 2017).

The system has a commitment to data and research: the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research tracks student performance in great detail and is seeing similar trends. Director Elaine Allensworth says the performance could result from a number of factors, including serious use of the Common Core, a commitment to school autonomy along with a willingness to close bad schools, strong charter management organizations, and district network leaders (principal supervisors) that have learned to work for schools rather than impose their own mandates.

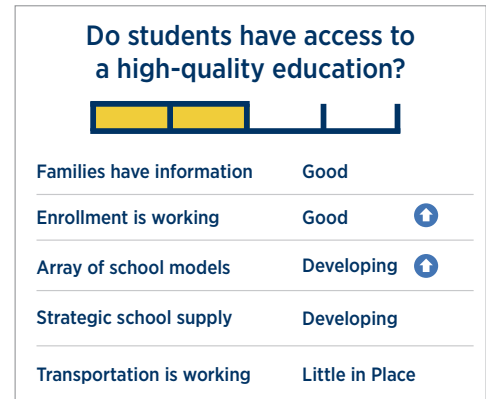
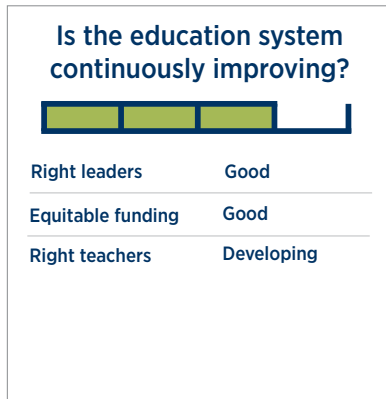
District and Charter Leaders Collaborate to Align Performance Standards, Unify Enrollment

The divide between district and charter schools is a central issue in a number of cities, including Chicago. Yet leaders in Chicago often showed a commitment to rise above turf wars to find solutions for the pressing issues facing the school system. The city’s [District-Charter Collaboration Compact](#) made concrete policy changes, more than any other city with a formal collaborative effort.

Between 2011 and 2017, the Compact team successfully advocated for a more equitable distribution of funds to district and charter schools, worked together to support personalized learning, and developed the unified enrollment system.

One of the most significant wins was the development of aligned performance standards through the [School Quality Rating Policy](#), which uses academic and school climate indicators. This information is now available in [GoCPS](#)—a consolidated school guide—so families can easily compare school options.

System Reforms



Each indicator is scored with a rubric on a 4-point scale. We added the scores for the indicators to get an overall goal score. An arrow shows increase or decrease from the 2017 score.

Key Takeaways: System Reforms

Chicago has strong school leadership development programs and a number of civic, philanthropic, and nonprofit organizations engaged in the education strategy. While there are still gaps in helping families access options, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and the charter sectors just introduced a new unified information and enrollment system, which should help alleviate some barriers. CPS must develop a long-term vision for managing its portfolio of schools. Additionally, the district could provide more opportunities for communities impacted by low-performing schools to give input on system-level changes.

Is the education system continuously improving?



Do schools have the resources they need? School improvement happens at the school level, but making sure resources are available requires sound, citywide policy. Having the right talent in a city is critical for schools to be able to provide students with a quality education. Schools should also have control over their budgets so they have the resources to address the needs of their student population.



Do schools have the kinds of leaders they need?

Among district schools, [Local School Councils](#)—composed of parents and teachers—hire principals that have been vetted by Chicago Public Schools (CPS) staff, which helps address fit between leader and school. The district has a number of preparation programs, including the [Chicago Leadership Collaborative](#) and a new [Assistant Principals Institute](#). There are also opportunities for strong school leaders: CPS launched the Master Principal Mentorship program which pairs experienced principals with newer principals. A local group funds a [Chicago Principal Fellowship](#) for high-performing principals. In 2017, leaders at some of the larger charter management organizations were just starting to work together on recruitment

and preparation efforts. Launched in 2018, the [Chicago Principal Partnership](#) is a citywide effort to ensure that every public school in Chicago is led by a strong principal. Principals, nonprofit organizations, charter networks, philanthropic partners, universities, parents, and community members support the partnership. They have developed a comprehensive hiring portal that provides candidates and schools with a clear picture of available candidates and opportunities. The Partnership also plans to pool resources for programming and professional development.



Does funding equitably follow students?

According to CPS, 521 district-run and contracted schools are funded through its Student-Based Budgeting formula, which is equivalent to 34% of its entire budget. Specialty and alternative district-run schools are not funded through this formula. Charter schools previously used the formula, but are now outside of it due to a change in state law in August 2017. Charter school students must be allocated between 97% and 103% of what CPS spends per pupil.



Do schools have the kinds of teachers they need?

CPS reports that the most significant teacher vacancy challenges remain in hard-to-staff subjects like special education and bilingual education. To increase teacher diversity, the district recruits from historically black colleges and Hispanic-serving institutions, and is strengthening its dual-credit programs to grow its own pipeline of diverse teachers. CPS provides intensive recruitment and retention support to a cohort of high-needs schools to increase equitable access to great teachers. The district also launched a paraeducator-to-teacher program and recently expanded new teacher residency programs to increase the number of teachers in hard-to-staff subject areas. Interviewees previously reported that teacher quality and recruitment in the charter sector vary by network. The charter sector has not done sectorwide analysis on quality and fit.

Is the education strategy rooted in the community?



Is the whole community engaged? Education is a citywide endeavor. When families, community organizations, and city leaders have the opportunity to provide feedback and share in the vision, the strategy is more likely to be sustainable and meet the needs of all students. In this goal, we look at how well the city is doing with engaging key stakeholders.



Does the city engage families in educational decisions that impact them?

Both sectors engage with families around school openings, closings, and consolidations, although processes could be improved by involving families earlier. An interviewee explained that decisions on closure are made at the central office and then “sold” to the community, rather than having the community help decide which schools to close. Community members reported that planning for the upcoming merger of Ogden and Jenner elementary schools seems to have worked well, even as they serve very different neighborhoods on the North Side. In contrast, the plan to close four high schools on the

South Side was met with fierce opposition. The district did, however, consent to [phasing out](#) the schools rather than closing them outright. State law mandates a regular process for informing families about closures and helping them transition to a new school. In the charter sector, most schools host information fairs for families facing school closure to help them understand their alternatives. Both sectors engage with families around school openings; CPS has started to use multiple methods to inform families and solicit input, including community meetings, public hearings, and newspaper advertisements.



Does the education system respond to community feedback?

CPS has implemented several strategies to collect and incorporate community input, and there are avenues for engagement across district and charter schools. The Local School Councils give input on school direction in district schools. The Illinois Network of Charter Schools works with member schools to conduct family engagement trainings, and listens to family concerns. CPS has partnered with the University of Chicago to [survey](#) charter and district families annually and report the results as school climate measures. There is some opportunity for parent groups to meet with the board of education on systems-level issues, but these efforts may not reach all parents; the district also runs a parent university, Community Action Councils, and Parent Advisory Councils. Despite these promising strategies, there is a perception among community members that district decisions are not always based on community input, and that that the city is not necessarily responsive to concerns about the “big ticket” items such as budget cuts or teacher strikes.



Is there a strong and deep coalition of support for the education strategy?

CPS is under mayoral control, which has encouraged alignment and involvement among civic leaders. There is significant coordination between education leaders in the district and charter sectors on shared priorities such as facilities funding, common accountability, talent, personalized learning, and others. However, the teachers union in Chicago is powerful and not generally supportive of the direction of reform efforts.



Are a variety of groups engaged in education?

Several community-based organizations support CPS in its work around parent advocacy and engagement. There is also local philanthropic support for school improvement, teacher development, and more. Local universities are actively involved in talent initiatives. However, community leaders say that not all voices are regularly included in discussions about the direction of education and that some groups, such as Hispanic families, are not well represented.

Do students have access to a high-quality education?



Do school choice and supply meet family needs? This goal addresses how well the city is doing with providing families access to quality schools. We look at what the city is doing to ensure quality schools are in every neighborhood, and how well the choice process is working for families who want to use it.



Do families have the information they need and know how to use it?

In fall 2017 CPS launched a new unified enrollment system called [GoCPS](#), with a search feature that includes in-depth profiles on all public schools, district and charter, across grade levels. The guide includes information from the district’s school quality ratings. The amount of detail about school programs and curriculum varies widely, and there is no information about specific special education services available at the school level. Interviewees suggested that many families don’t understand the choice landscape as a whole and need more support making sense of the information available to them. CPS partnered with some community groups to help with outreach and education, but interviewees reported that this effort is being rethought to improve its effectiveness and reach. Additionally, CPS and the University of Chicago launched [High School Bound](#), which allows Chicago students to learn about the many public high schools and programs offered at CPS.



Is the enrollment process working for families?

Through GoCPS, incoming 9th graders for the 2018-19 school year used a single application, single offer process to select and enroll at all public high schools, both district and charter. Following the application window in March 2018, the district [reported](#) that 92% percent of incoming freshman (nearly 25,000 students) were matched to a school through the system, and 81% of students were offered a seat at one of their top three choices. CPS acknowledged that some top-performing schools could accept only a fraction of those who applied, highlighting the need for continued school improvement efforts. In Kindergarten through 8th grade schools, CPS streamlined the process for district schools of choice, including open enrollment at neighborhood schools, into two applications within GoCPS. K–8 charters use separate systems.



Does the school supply represent an array of models?

Education leaders perceive that the city has a fairly diverse set of school options, both district and charter. However, of the five new schools that opened between 2014-15 and 2016-17, all had traditional instructional models. No new schools opened in 2017-18. In 2018-19, two district schools with a [classical model](#) will open, as will [Art in Motion Charter School](#). In May 2018 the district [received](#) a \$14 million dollar grant from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative to support personalized learning at 35 schools.



Is the city strategically managing its school portfolio?

In February 2018 CPS [moved](#) to close four underenrolled schools and consolidate a few others. Between 2012 and 2017 the district placed a moratorium on district school closures, and only five schools opened between 2014-15 and 2016-17 (all charter schools). Enrollment and common performance data are available for making decisions. However, community and education leaders feel that CPS does not yet have a long-term plan for its school portfolio, and that education leaders are not being strategic about closing or siting individual schools. Interviewees said that charter school openings have been driven by available facilities and will open where they are most likely to attract students, not necessarily where a new school is most needed. CPS said it plans to announce new policies later in 2018.



Is transportation working for families?

Transportation is a barrier for families wanting to access the choice process. CPS provides transportation for K–8 students at CPS neighborhood or magnet schools within a certain geographic area. Students can receive partial discounts for public transit passes, but there is no free option for charter school students or district school families attending the few choice schools that do not provide transportation. Given the size of the city, this is a significant challenge for families trying to access schools that are farther away, as well as for families who cannot afford the discounted transit pass.

Data & Scoring

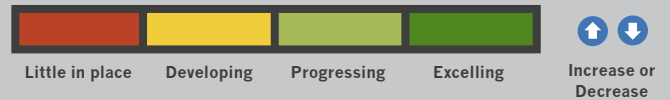
Where did we get this information?

- ▶ Interviews with district, charter, and community leaders
- ▶ Policy documents from district, charter, and state websites
- ▶ School data from each city
- ▶ A 400-parent survey administered in March, 2017 in Cleveland, Denver, Indianapolis, Memphis, New Orleans, Oakland, and Washington, D.C.

How did we score the system reforms and goals?

- ▶ Each indicator is scored with a rubric on a 4-point scale. We added the scores for the indicators to get an overall goal score. See the [Methodology & Resources](#) page for details.

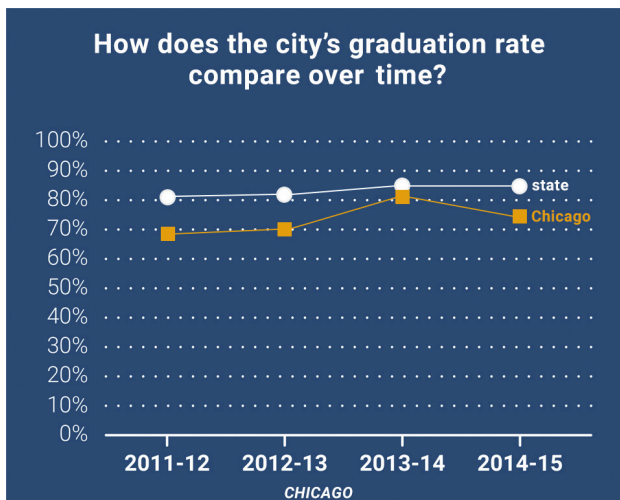
Score Levels



Key Takeaways: Student & School Outcomes

Chicago schools are showing improvement, but there is still work to be done. Over four years, math and reading proficiency rates have shown statistically significant improvement, and graduation rates gained on the state. However, both remained below state averages. Low-income students in the city are performing slightly better on state assessments than their peers nationally. However, black students had disproportionately low enrollment in high school advanced math coursework.

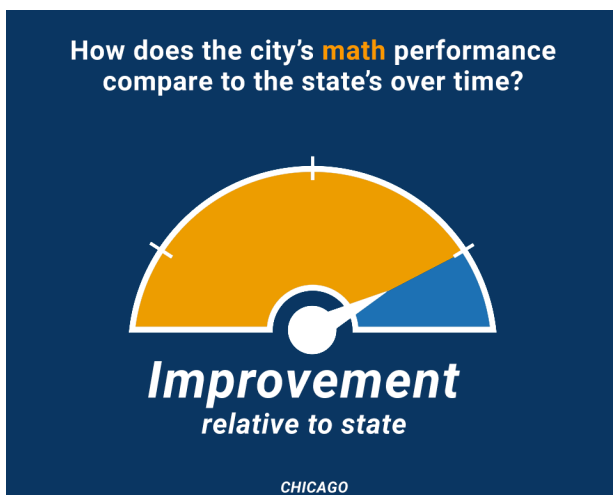
Is the education system continuously improving?



► Chicago's graduation rate slightly improved. However, in 2014-15 it was still below the state's.

Data: This chart shows the percent of first-time 9th grade students graduating in four years, citywide and statewide.

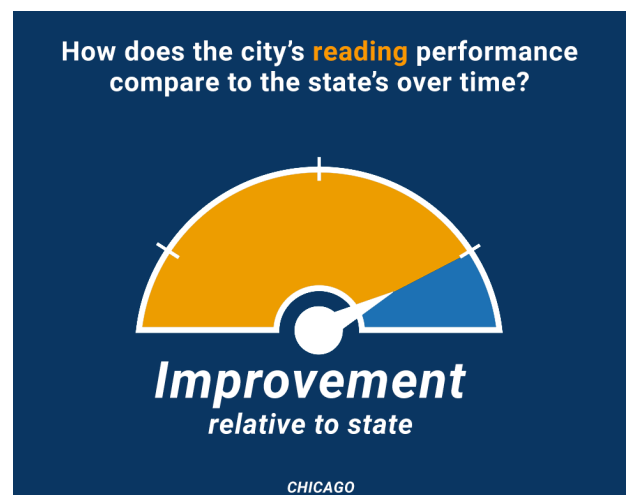
Source: EDFacts Initiative, U.S. Department of Education, Assessment and Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates Data, 2011-12 to 2014-15.



► Between 2011-12 and 2014-15, the math proficiency rate gap between the city and state was closing. In 2014-15, the city's proficiency rate was 8 percentage points below the state's.

Data: This figure reflects the city's estimated gains in proficiency rates across elementary and middle schools, standardized at the state level and controlling for student demographics.

Source: Illinois State Board of Education, 2011-12 to 2014-15.

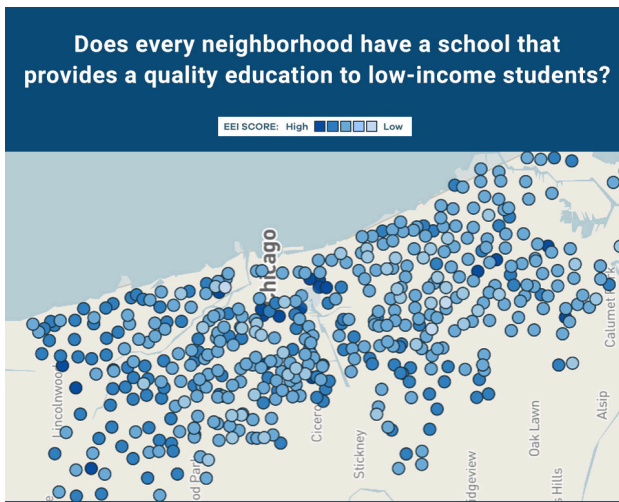


► Between 2011-12 and 2014-15, the reading proficiency rate gap between the city and state was closing. In 2014-15, the city's proficiency rate was 8 percentage points below the state's.

Data: This figure reflects the city's estimated gains in proficiency rates across elementary and middle schools, standardized at the state level and controlling for student demographics.

Source: Illinois State Board of Education, 2011-12 to 2014-15.

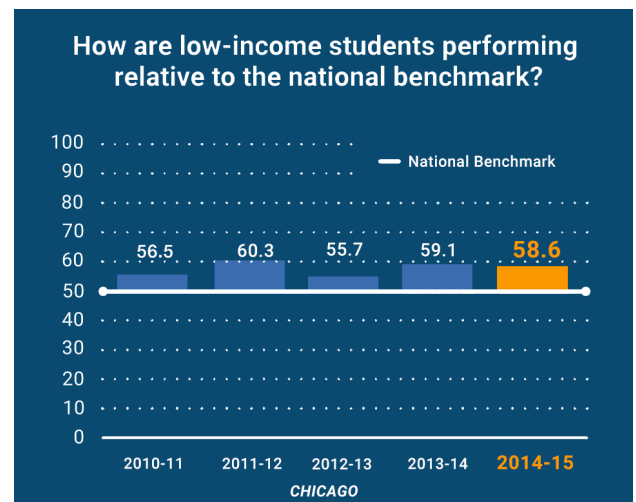
Do students have access to a high-quality education?



► The Education Equality Index (EEI) identifies how students from low-income families are performing in cities and schools across the country. See this interactive tool to explore individual school performance.

Data: The Education Equality Index (EEI) was supplied by Education Cities and GreatSchools. See their site for more detail.

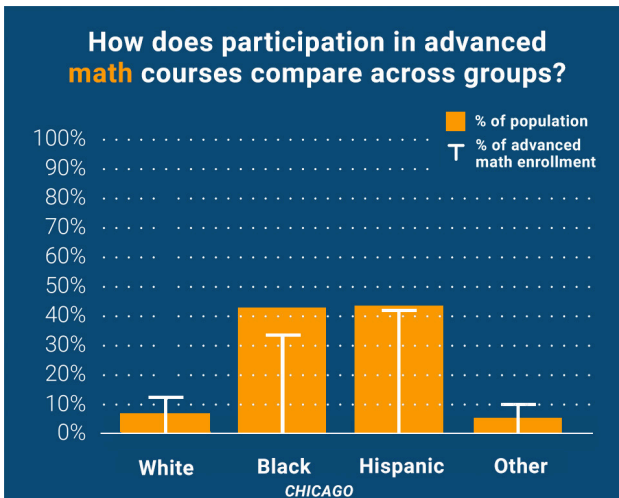
Source: Illinois State Board of Education, 2010-11 to 2014-15; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2010-11 to 2014-15.



► Students from low-income families in Chicago are performing somewhat better in math and reading than low-income students in the average city. EEI scores in Chicago have improved by 1% over time.

Data: The Education Equality Index (EEI) was supplied by Education Cities and GreatSchools. See their site for more detail.

Source: Illinois State Board of Education, 2010-11 to 2014-15; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2010-11 to 2014-15.



► In 2013-14, white students were enrolling in high school advanced math coursework at rates above their enrollment, while black students had disproportionately low enrollment.

Data: Enrollment of students in math courses above Algebra II. Rates calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled in advanced math by the number of students in the school. Sub-group rates determined at the school level.

Source: U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection 2013-2014.

Data & Scoring

Where did we get this data?

- Publicly available state and federal data, making our results comparable and reproducible.
- The most up-to-date data available for all 18 cities at the time of our data collection. See [Methodology & Resources](#) for more information.

What makes the data citywide?

- We include all charter and district schools within the municipal boundary of a city.
- In Houston, Indianapolis, Memphis, New Orleans, and San Antonio we use school data from multiple districts within the municipal boundary.

About Chicago

Over the past several years, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) has devolved authority to schools while raising standards and student achievement. Funds are distributed to district schools on a per-pupil basis, autonomous leaders are supported through an [Independent School Principals](#) program, and [Local School Councils](#) drive school-level decisions. Janice Jackson, who attended CPS and then served as teacher, network chief, and chief education officer, became chief executive officer in 2018.

School Choice in the City

Families attending district schools choose among schools in their neighborhood. The majority (but not all) of traditional public schools allow students living outside the neighborhood to apply and are admitted based on a lottery system. The district also has magnet and selective admission schools. Charter schools offer open enrollment across the city using lottery systems.

Governance Model

Chicago Public Schools has been under mayoral control since 1995. The seven-member Board of Education is appointed by the mayor. Most Chicago charter schools are authorized by CPS. Six are authorized by the Illinois State Charter School Commission.

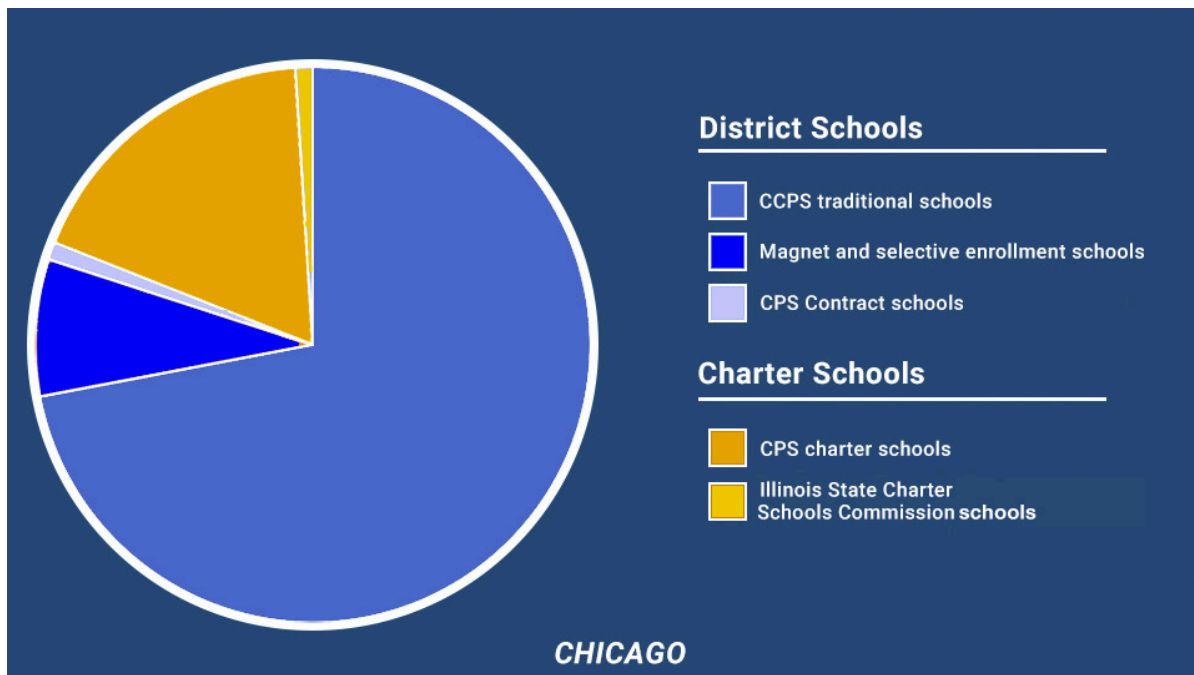
2017 District and Charter Student Body

Enrollment: 381,349 students

Race and ethnicity: 47% Hispanic, 38% black, 10% white, 5% other

Low-Income: 78% free and reduced-price lunch

2017 School Composition



*Note: Enrollment and demographics data for CPS and CPS-authorized charter schools only.
Source: Chicago Public Schools, 2016.
School data from researcher analysis of public records, 2016-17.*

About This Project

The Citywide Education Progress Report looks at how a city is doing across three goals:

- The education system is continuously improving
- All students have access to a high-quality education
- The education strategy is rooted in the community

Across each goal we present indicators of what the cities are doing (what we call “system reforms”) and how they are doing (what we call “outcomes”).

Our city reports focus on education strategies for the 2017-18 school year. Our analyses reflect developments through June 2018. These are updates to our original reports from the 2016-17 school year.

To understand how well cities are doing, we used state and federal data to track school improvement, graduation rates, and student access to high-quality schools. Our student and school data cover the 2011-2012 to 2014-2015 school years. To understand city strategies and identify early progress, we relied on interviews, surveys, public documents, and news articles from 2014-2015 to the present. This analysis uses data for district and charter schools to look at all schools within municipal boundaries, rather than just one sector or district.

We cannot say that employing a certain strategy will lead to a particular result, or even whether a particular strategy is effective in these cities. But the reports can help us to see how a strategy is working, what problem areas remain, and which cities are seeing promising results.

The 18 cities in this study include Atlanta, Boston, Camden, Cleveland, Chicago, Denver, Houston, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Memphis, New Orleans, New York City, Oakland, Philadelphia, San Antonio, Tulsa, and Washington, D.C.

To learn more about the project, compare other cities, and read the cross-city analysis, visit:
research.crpe.org/projects/stepping-up



The Center on Reinventing Public Education is a research and policy analysis center at the University of Washington Bothell developing systemwide solutions for K–12 public education. Learn more about our work at crpe.org.