



Key Takeaways: June 2018

Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS), the largest of 11 school districts in the city, is undergoing rapid, systemwide changes to increase school autonomy and parent choice. IPS has several prominent partners, including the mayor's office, that authorize charter schools, and nonprofits that provide enrollment and education support. Conditions are ripe for innovation and improvement, but IPS education leaders and the mayor's office must do more to help the community not only navigate these changes, but ensure the community—along with top leadership—understands and is committed to the changes. Across all charter schools and the 11 districts, school performance remains flat, and student access to advanced coursework in high schools is not equitable. Other district townships surrounding IPS may join in school improvement and reform efforts as they gain ground.

Challenges Ahead

► Sustaining commitment to the district's new vision

Under the leadership of the current board and superintendent, IPS has begun to pave the way toward transformation through its work on developing school-based autonomy and reorienting the central office to support more flexible school options. Interviewees indicate that the superintendent has worked hard to align and connect top district leaders to the new strategy, but are concerned that a real commitment and understanding of the new autonomy strategy does not exist yet beyond this top level of leadership. Despite agreements supporting existing Innovation Network Schools, many of the new shifts toward choice and school-level autonomy are still nascent and vulnerable to future leadership change, as we have seen in [other cities](#). To establish stability and coherence of the transformations that IPS has worked hard to achieve, top leaders and board members must commit to ensuring that community members, families, and district staff down to the school level understand the theory behind the changes and understand how they can be part of it. As noted below, district leaders must also develop clear plans for school-based autonomy and focus on shifting organizational culture among teachers and school leaders to support these changes from the bottom up.

► Improving communication and engagement so communities are not left behind

As part of IPS' transformation, families now have more opportunities to participate in strategy decisions, but interviews with community members indicate that many still feel left out of these changes. IPS and the mayor's office can address this in three ways: improve the feedback loop with families, increase its capacity to effectively engage with families, and hold meetings closer to where families live. Not all of this has to be done by IPS: they can build partnerships with existing neighborhood groups or local community leaders who can discuss education changes with families and then report family issues, like concerns about school lunches or safety, back to IPS. The charter sector and IPS must make sure they have the capacity and structures to sustain engagement by investing in dedicated staff and creating goals around how they want to engage and what success will look like. The strategies used to engage community in the development of new Innovation schools can be used as a blueprint for sustained engagement with other IPS schools.

► Moving to a system of autonomous schools

IPS must develop a coherent vision for school autonomy. This includes defining the skills needed for school and central office leaders to succeed in their new roles and identifying which academic and operational autonomies are available to school leaders. This year, discretion over a greater proportion of funds were moved to the school level, so IPS must work to support school leaders in understanding service options and using these flexibilities well. Similarly, establishing a standard menu of school autonomies from which a school can choose, as is [partially in place](#)

for Innovation schools, would provide a degree of standardization for systemwide school autonomy and relieve the district of negotiating individual school contracts. As the network of autonomous schools expands, talent will become a more pressing issue. The nonprofit [The Mind Trust](#) helps the city incubate new school leaders, and IPS has provided support for 18 principals to develop new school designs and effectively use autonomy. Next steps for IPS will be to reorient and retrain central office staff and services to support a system of autonomous schools.

Spotlight

Incentivizing Excellent Teachers to Mentor Peers and Teach More Students

In the 2017-18 school year, 15 IPS schools began to implement [Opportunity Culture](#), a program that provides higher pay to effective teachers in exchange for mentoring teachers or instructing more students.

Unlike in many schools, where good teachers may move into honors or advanced courses that teach fewer students, the [Opportunity Culture program](#) incentivizes effective teachers to reach as many as a third more students. In keeping with IPS's school autonomy strategy, school teams chose an Opportunity Culture model from a menu of options developed by the nonprofit Public Impact.

Education leaders in IPS are hopeful that the strategy can bolster teacher recruitment and retention efforts. One school in the program hopes that it will help them retain effective teachers who, like in many district or charter schools, leave urban classrooms to pursue teaching opportunities in other schools or school administration positions.

Allowing Schools to Choose from a Menu of District Resources

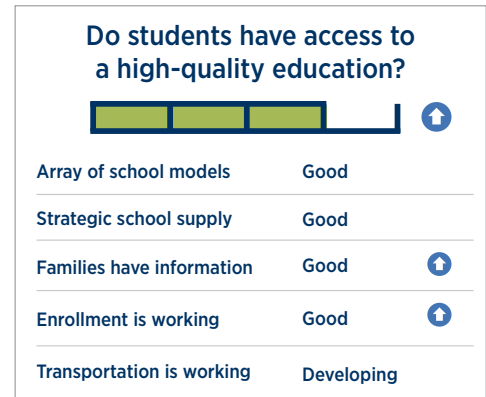
Indianapolis' improvement strategy is centered around creating more school-based autonomy and choice. A key piece of this work, and a creative new approach to district-charter partnership, is the expansion of ["Innovation Network"](#) schools.

Thanks to a [state law](#) passed in 2014, IPS can open new schools, or restart existing district or charter schools as schools governed by nonprofit boards with charter-like autonomies. [These schools](#) remain part of the district for enrollment, accountability, and planning purposes and have full control over curriculum, talent, operations, and use of funds allocated through IPS' [student-based allocation](#) system, but have access to district programs and services as they choose.

Many of these schools are the product of a partnership between IPS and The Mind Trust, which provides a [school incubator program](#) for promising leaders.

The role of these Innovation Network schools is growing within IPS and currently represents 16 schools—nearly one quarter of district enrollment.

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

Indianapolis Public Schools, the mayor’s office, and charter authorizers are being increasingly strategic about managing the city’s supply of schools. Efforts are underway to improve family engagement and teacher pipelines, but both areas require continued focus.

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.



Exemplar

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

The current education strategy has strong support and alignment among most civic and education leadership. The Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) district superintendent and current school board are generally aligned in their vision for the city. Both enjoy support from the mayor’s office, local funders, and The Mind Trust, a local nonprofit. Some resistance to the strategy exists, especially around issues like the recent closures, but so far it has not been consistent or particularly active. However, IPS recently postponed a referendum vote on funding, likely because they must better promote the referendum to the community ahead of a vote. But it may indicate that there is more resistance to the strategy than is currently apparent. IPS is working to engage groups that were previously underrepresented in strategic shifts in the education strategy.



Exemplar

Are a variety of groups engaged in education?

Several groups are engaged in education, including the NAACP, [The Mind Trust](#) (a “quarterback” organization), church groups, and Stand for Children, a multistate nonprofit with a team focused on the city. Parent advocacy efforts are active, as are groups representing the city’s historically disadvantaged populations. The Mind Trust plays a significant role in bringing groups together with community, district, and civic leaders.



Good

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

IPS and the mayor’s office hold community meetings about prospective school openings and closings, and manage operator-to-neighborhood matching processes. Innovation Network schools in particular have incorporated parent testimony to inform school design and guide restarts. IPS used a high-touch engagement strategy in the process to close three high schools, and while the choices were still controversial, remaining options were informed by community input. However, community members report that some families still believe they are not getting needed information about school changes or that their input is not shaping decisions.



Developing

Does the education system respond to community feedback?

Education nonprofits host community panels and co-host events to talk to the community about education issues. There appears to be a disconnect, however, between efforts made by education leaders and how those efforts are received. Over the past year, IPS has worked, with assistance from The Mind Trust, to help community members understand changes in strategy, but interviews with community members indicate that rapid system changes can be challenging to track. While education leaders are engaging families around big initiatives, community members still do not perceive that there are regular opportunities to provide feedback or understand how their input has shaped strategy.

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.



Good

Do schools have the kinds of leaders they need?

The pool of leadership talent is generally good, and strategies are in place to develop leaders citywide and help them open new charter and district Innovation Network schools. IPS also partnered with Education Resource Strategies to prepare district principals to lead autonomous schools by guiding them through the [strategic school design](#) process. Efforts are underway to further improve leadership pipelines by refining internal pathways and developing new partnerships with external organizations. Work is still needed to match leaders to schools.



Does funding equitably follow students?

As of 2017-2018, the district allocates between 5% and 50% of its budget via a [student-based allocation](#) formula. In the 2017-2018 school year, IPS expanded its student-based allocation formula to all schools. Charter and Innovation schools will receive the same state and federal tuition support.



Do schools have the kinds of teachers they need?

IPS does not lack teachers, but quality, fit, and high turnover rates across schools remain a challenge; the district is addressing this through several strategies. It works more closely with traditional teacher preparation programs and gives principals more control over hiring so teachers are better matched to schools. IPS also partnered with TNTP, TFA, TeachPlus, and others to recruit and train teachers. Local institutions are building quality talent pipelines: [Marian University](#) developed a new residency program in partnership with local charter schools and districts, and a local charter network created its own [teacher preparation program](#). IPS has data to drive strategies, but charter data is largely anecdotal. IPS, The Mind Trust, and the mayor’s office recently launched a new [“Teach Indy” campaign](#) to recruit teachers and help them find positions in both district and charter schools (though IPS is currently under a [hiring freeze](#)).

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.



Does the school supply represent an array of models?

About a third of recently opened, restarted, or expanded schools in IPS and the charter sector offer nontraditional instructional models, such as project-based, dual language, or alternative programs. Among families surveyed in 2017, nearly half said there was a great deal of programmatic variety between schools. However, about a quarter of families still struggle to find a school that is a good fit for their child.



Is the city strategically managing its school portfolio?

IPS uses enrollment data to gauge community interest in school openings and performance data to identify candidates for restart as [Innovation Network](#) schools. In 2017-18, IPS overhauled their high school program by closing three high schools due to underenrollment and reconstituted the remaining four into [all-choice college and career magnet schools](#). The city’s largest authorizers have begun meeting with IPS to evaluate school supply and demand data so charter schools can more consistently open where high-quality options are needed, but opportunities for space and buildings remain a barrier to strategically siting charter schools. The mayor’s office, IPS, and The Mind Trust also have a [partnership](#) to incubate new school options. Nearly half of families surveyed in 2017 say they have confidence that the city can ensure every neighborhood has a good school.



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

Information is available in a consolidated guide for IPS schools and the city’s charter schools through [Enroll Indy](#). The guide is only available online, and does not provide consistent information about school curriculum or special education and English language learner services. In 2017, community leaders reported that many families were unaware of the information, and of families surveyed in 2017, 18% say that finding enough information about schools is a challenge, with district school families reporting this as more of a problem than charter school families. Over the first year of implementation, education leaders focused on messaging and outreach to the community and believe that this has helped families connect with the resource.



Is the enrollment process working for families?

A unified enrollment system, [Enroll Indy](#), launched during the 2017-18 school year. This independent organization was created in partnership with IPS, the Indianapolis mayor’s office, and the Indianapolis Charter School Board. It includes IPS and 90% of Indianapolis’ charter schools. Schools from surrounding districts may be added later. Enroll Indy has a unified series of deadlines for all school types and provides one match for applications. The system aligns application processes, but many IPS schools still use neighborhood assignment: schools opt into open enrollment and some have application criteria, limiting access for students. CRPE surveyed families prior to Enroll Indy and found that nearly a fifth reported difficulty understanding which schools their child was eligible to attend. Even with an enrollment system in place, the city must educate families about school eligibility and choice.



Is transportation working for families?

IPS recently expanded its transportation system to provide better access to schools outside neighborhood zones, but still, not all students have access to any school, and not all charter schools are eligible. This is in part because charter schools do not have access to local funds used by the district for transportation, and no city agency subsidizes public transportation for students. Transportation was among the top challenges reported by families during the application process. In our 2017 survey, 30% of charter school families reported it as a problem, while 15% of district school families did. Indianapolis leaders are exploring a student shuttle modeled after Denver’s “Success Express.”

Data & Scoring

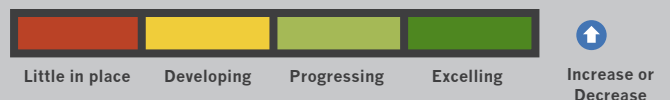
Where did we get this information?

- ▶ 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.

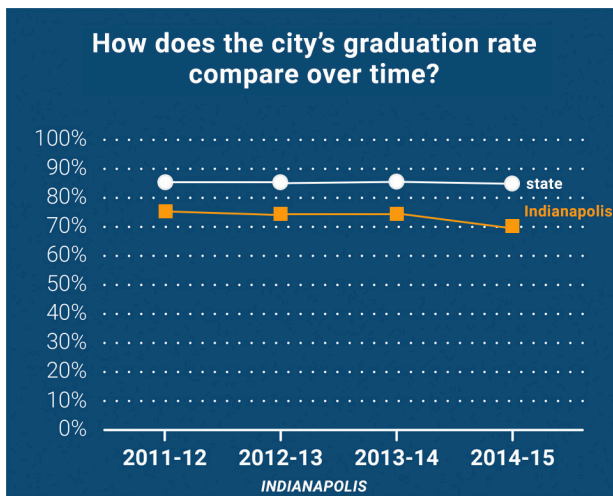
Score Levels



Key Takeaways: Student & School Outcomes

While the city is slightly above the national average when it comes to how well it educates low-income students, school proficiency rates in reading and math have remained flat over the past four years, relative to state averages. In addition, racial and ethnic sub-groups are not proportionately enrolled in advanced math coursework, and citywide graduation rates have declined.

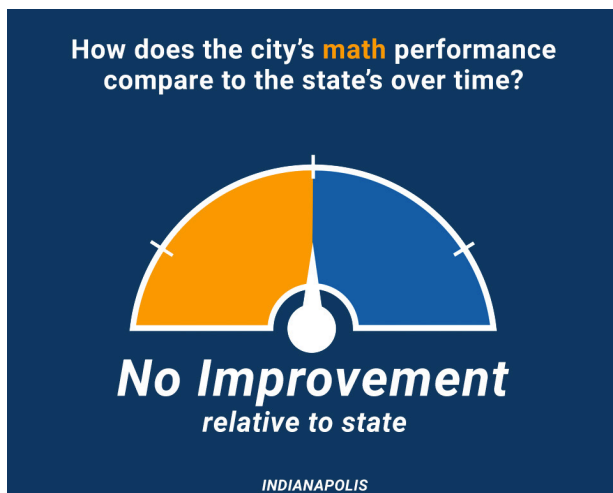
Is the education system continuously improving?



- ▶ Between 2011-12 and 2014-15, graduation rates declined relative to state averages. In 2014-15, the city's graduation rate was below the state's.

Data: Percent of first-time 9th grade students graduating in four years, citywide and statewide.

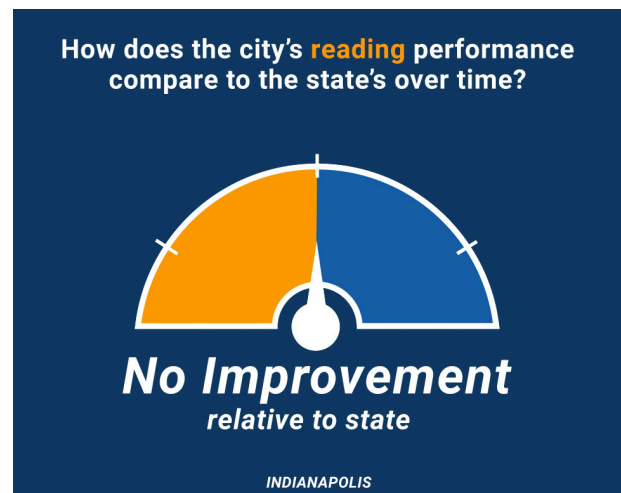
Source: EDFacts Initiative, U.S. Department of Education, Assessment and Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates Data, 2011-12 to 2014-15.



- ▶ Between 2011-12 and 2014-15, the city's math proficiency rate trends mirrored the state's. In 2014-15, the city's proficiency rate was 12 percentage points below the state's.

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

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

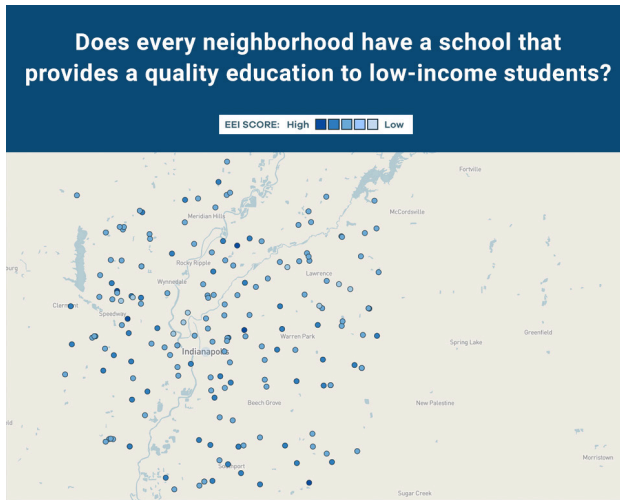


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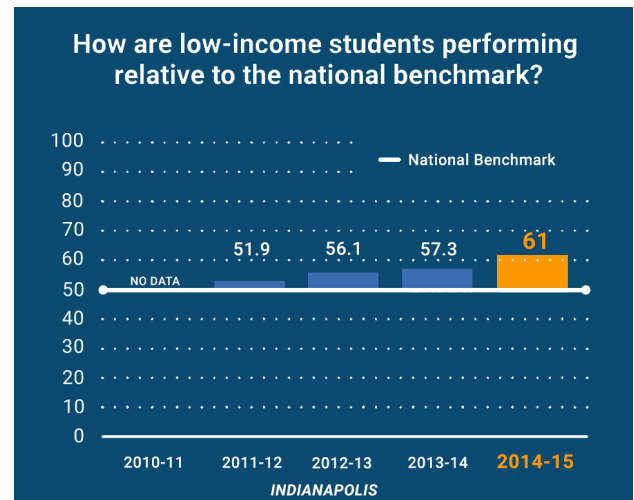
Do students have access to a high-quality education?



- ▶ The Education Equality Index (EEI) identifies how low-income students 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.

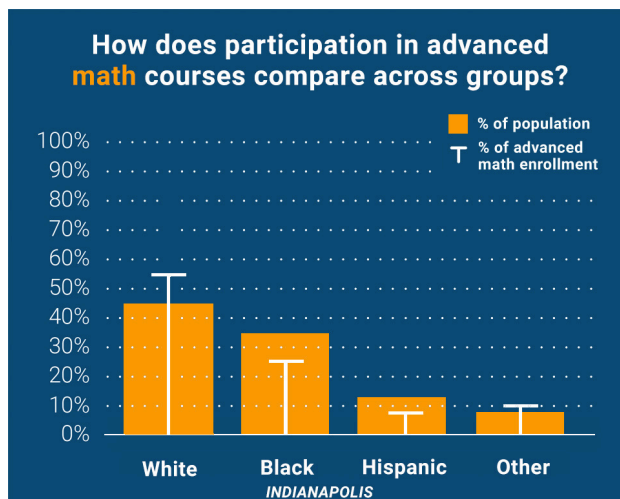
Source: Indiana State Board of Education, 2010-11 to 2014-15; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2010-11 to 2014-15.



- ▶ Low-income students in Indianapolis are performing somewhat better in math and reading than low-income students nationally. EEI scores have improved 4% over time.

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

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



- ▶ In 2013-14, black students were enrolled in advanced math coursework at lower rates than the high school population while white students were enrolled at higher rates.

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 of 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 Indianapolis

Indianapolis has 11 public districts; the most prominent, Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS), includes about a third of all schools citywide. Reform efforts are beginning in IPS with the potential to extend to outer township districts. IPS is rapidly building out a system of autonomous schools that gives leaders more decisionmaking authority to adjust curriculum, make staffing decisions, and control the budget. The mayor’s office is a significant player as a charter authorizer. A local nonprofit, The Mind Trust, supports collaboration efforts and has incubated third-party organizations that offer education services.

School Choice in the City

Indianapolis families have a diverse set of options within the city, including charter schools and IPS magnets, Innovation, and alternative schools. Six of the ten surrounding townships provide choice based on capacity to families living outside of the district. IPS assigns a default neighborhood school for K–8, which families must opt out of if they wish to attend a different school.

Governance Model

Indianapolis Public Schools is one among 11 school districts within the city’s municipal boundary. The mayor’s office is the main charter authorizer.

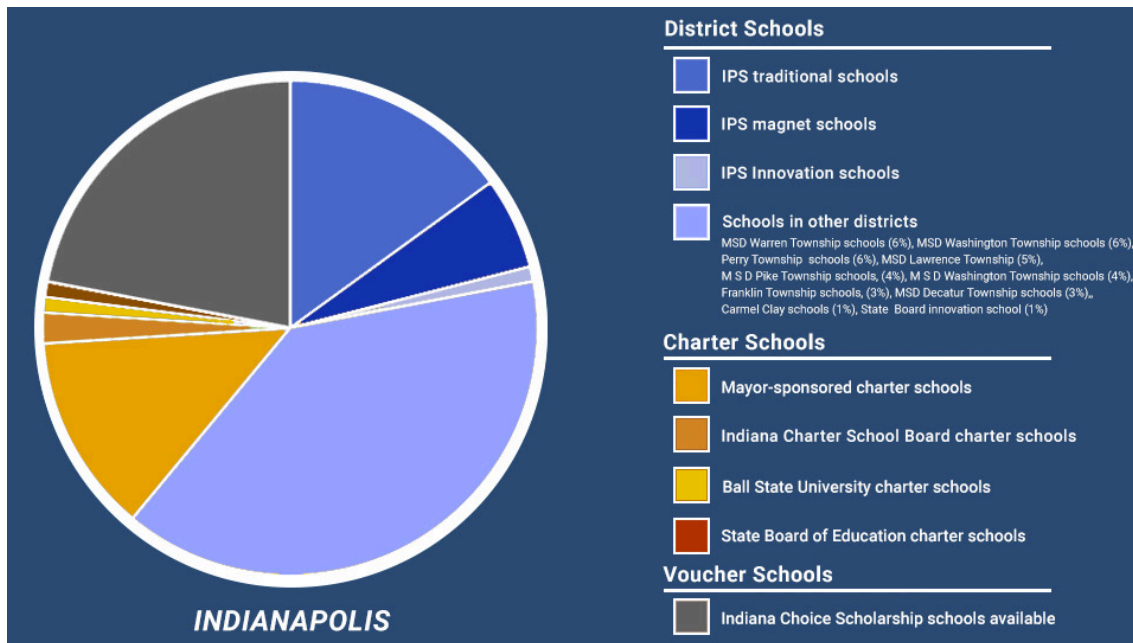
2015 District and Charter Student Body

Enrollment: 150,145 students

Race and ethnicity: 37% white, 37% black, 18% Hispanic, 8% other

Low-income: 67% free and reduced-price lunch

2017 School Composition



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.