

Key Takeaways: June 2018

In July 2018 the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) will finish receiving all of the schools formerly managed by the state-run Recovery School District, making OPSB the first school system in the country comprised solely of autonomous schools. New Orleans made strong [early progress](#) closing the city's achievement gap with the state between 2010 and 2015. But state data released in November 2017 revealed a decline in the city's test scores, highlighting the urgency to address persistently low-performing schools. This will mean doubling down on recruiting the talent the city needs to drive school-level improvement and using data to ensure new or restarted schools are in the highest-need neighborhoods and at the most-needed grade levels. Setting a clear vision for a high-quality system of schools, and involving families and schools in the process, will be key steps post-unification.

Challenges Ahead

► Establishing a common vision for a system on reset

Starting in July 2018 the publicly elected OPSB will manage a fully decentralized school system, all the while navigating a tight financial situation and adjusting to new state [grade](#) requirements. Reunification has presented a common goal that the city's disparate nonprofits, civic leaders, and schools can rally around. But once unification is complete, New Orleans must develop a common vision and plan that can continue to guide efforts forward as a high-quality system of schools, rather than a smaller, more traditional school district. The board, district, and community organizations must clarify how each group interacts with and advances that vision in unified and role-appropriate ways. Unification provided an opportunity for community groups and families to provide input and be part of the city's education coalition. It will also be important for system leaders to sustain opportunities for community input while also closing the feedback loop so families know what the system can and can't respond to.

► Developing talent and operators who can succeed in New Orleans

The state's last year of curved scores were published in November 2017, exposing a three-year decline. Forty percent of the [schools](#) were rated as D or F; the percent would have been higher had the scores not been curved. School improvement in a fully autonomous system can happen—as early progress in New Orleans demonstrated—but it will require system leaders to double down on attracting and developing high-quality leaders, teachers, and operators. 2018 interviewees expressed a concern that the novelty of New Orleans' school system has worn off, making it harder to recruit talent. Nonprofits and system leaders must seek new avenues to recruit nationally and further develop “grow your own” models. The city should also look into developing new partnerships with nonprofits and universities to focus teacher and leadership development on areas that matter most in New Orleans: being successful in autonomous school settings, guiding school turnaround, and working with youth who have experienced high levels of trauma. The quality and fit of operators is also critical. In 2018 OPSB received only one application each for three charter schools it planned to restart. System leaders must assess why so few operators in the city have capacity for the work and how to address this shortcoming. Continuing to attract and develop operators that can deliver a variety of learning environments, motivate students, and prepare them for life after high school must also remain a priority.

► Ensuring system leaders have the data to drive improvement

To push forward on school and system improvement, New Orleans needs data and a way to store and share it. OPSB just approved a new school performance framework to assess quality and is working to align new school development with the Facilities Master Plan. [New Schools for New Orleans](#) is starting to track teacher vacancies to drive talent strategy. These efforts are headed in the right direction, but it is still just the start. Identifying who will own data collection for school portfolio management and talent—OPSB or a nonprofit—is a critical question. System leaders

now have a common framework, but they must ensure that they have the capacity to conduct regular analyses using this, and to regularly update the facilities plan. In the future, system leaders may want to include survey information from families about what school models and services they want for their child's school. Then the system must make the data and analysis transparent so it is accessible to the many schools, service providers, funders, and nonprofits in the city. System actors can then use the information to locate, restart, and expand in the highest-need neighborhoods and at the most-needed grade levels.

Spotlight

Teacher Council Guides Talent Strategies

A group of 36 teachers from across New Orleans are being tapped to provide input on district strategy and teacher pipeline development. The [Teacher Advisory Council](#) is the last of three advisory bodies established by the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB)—the others are student and parent councils.

The council has already been asked to give input on the district's strategic plan. Their main work, however, is to partner with system leaders on improving teacher pipelines. Teachers on the council will administer surveys at their schools so system leaders will know the supports teachers want and the struggles they face. Especially important is identifying differentiated supports teachers need, depending on how long they have been teaching, and other factors. Then OPSB and the council's partner, [New Schools for New Orleans](#), can develop strategies to leverage existing supports or create new recruitment and development pipelines.

While this work is just beginning, there is also hope that the council can help break down silos, both between teachers and with system leaders. Teachers across different charter networks and neighborhoods will work together. OPSB also wants to use the council to help teachers understand their role in the larger system and know which levers they can pull when they want to see change.

City Upgrades Special Education Application and Enrollment Process

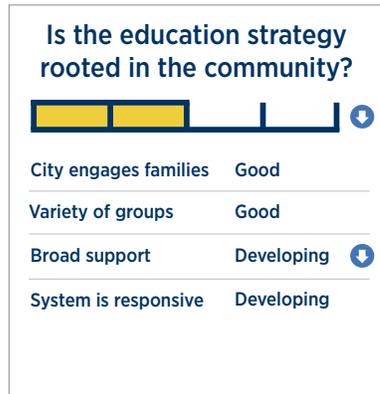
Families of children with IEPs want to know what specific services are available at a school before applying, but school information guides rarely provide descriptions about these services, leaving families. This means families must track down someone to talk to at the prospective school or enroll and find out midyear whether it is a good fit.

[EnrollNOLA](#), the city's application and enrollment system, publishes detailed information about which special education services are available at each school. A family will know whether the school is inclusion-only or has special programs for students with moderate to severe needs.

To improve the application and enrollment process, the city conducted a landscape analysis in 2017 to identify available special education seats. It is also working to set aside space for students requiring specific services. EnrollNOLA adjusted its algorithm for how students are assigned and when they can transfer, so special education students can more easily transfer when a school is not the right fit.

Meeting the needs of students requiring specialized services has been a weakness for New Orleans in the past. The measures above are not perfect: schools still don't report the percent of students receiving special education services. But these are critical improvements for any family living in a high-choice city.

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

Over the past year, Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) and local nonprofits have made steps to increase avenues for community input, address transportation, and improve the process for assessing school quality—all while planning for reunification. Each strategy will need to be a continued area of focus as OSPB and its partners begin to execute their work as the sole public education system in the city. In addition, system leaders will need to pay attention to other weaknesses: talent identification, development, and retention; the curricular variety of new school options; and OPSB’s school portfolio management.

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.



Is transportation working for families?

New Orleans families have free transportation to nearly all schools in the city, either through busing or transit passes. Despite these existing policies, in a 2017 survey of 400 New Orleans families, nearly a third (30%) said that transportation was a challenge. Families have [expressed concern](#) with safe passage, long commutes, and high costs. In response, OPSB [pushed](#) a noncompliant operator to provide busing and hired a consultant to develop recommendations for improving transportation.



Is the enrollment process working for families?

The city’s unified enrollment system, [EnrollNOLA](#) provides families with a streamlined application and enrollment process. However, a third of families surveyed in 2017 said that understanding which schools they were eligible to attend was difficult. Over the 2017-18 school year, OPSB worked with the nonprofit [Ed Navigator](#) to provide additional support to families in the choice process.



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

School information is accessible and easy to use, although 36% of families say finding enough information about schools makes the application process difficult. Community members report that the guide lacks detail about school curricular models and school climate. Many schools also don’t provide information about English language learner services.



Does the school supply represent an array of models?

[School information](#) is accessible and easy to use through EnrollNOLA. The guide makes it easy for families to compare schools, and it provides detailed information about special education services. However, some school entries lack detail about curricular models and English language learner services. Interviewees in 2017 noted that families are using the guide, but they want more information about school climate. In our survey, about a third of families said that finding enough information was a difficulty during the application process.



Is the city strategically managing its school portfolio?

Clear criteria and procedures have been in place for school closure and restart, but interviewees have noted that without a structured siting process, it has been challenging for the city to be strategic about where new schools locate or expand. According to interviewees, the city has also struggled to improve the supply of high-quality seats at the middle and high school levels. To guide improvements, OPSB developed a new school performance framework over 2017 and 2018 with significant community and school leader input. The framework establishes a common definition of quality for all schools in the city. OPSB is also trying to better align its [Facilities Master Plan](#) (last updated in 2011) with the district’s school pipeline development work. To date, OPSB has not yet implemented much of the portfolio management work resulting from unification. In 2017 fewer than half (43%) of all families reported having confidence in the system to provide quality options for every neighborhood, and a fifth of families believed that public schools in the city were getting worse.

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?

Nonprofit groups in New Orleans support families throughout the turnaround, closure, and operator selection process. This includes [Parent Advocators](#), which supports family engagement. However, with so many groups involved, the lines of responsibility are not always clear, and interviewees noted that families have gotten frustrated when they perceive that their input is not included in system-level decision making.



Are a variety of groups engaged in education?

In New Orleans, a number of nonprofit organizations (like [YouthForce NOLA](#), a civic, education, and business collaborative) provide services to schools. New Orleans also involved community groups across the city in planning for unification. There are not yet concrete plans in place to continue this level of engagement post-unification, but interviewees identified it as an area of focus for OPSB. Interviewees noted that support from the local business community is lacking. It is unclear which organizations will push the system toward continued progress and how they will do it—through advocacy, increased transparency, or other avenues.



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

The school board, superintendent, and state are mostly aligned in their support of the education strategy, though the alignment is still at a policy level rather than at the level of implementation. For example, in 2018 OPSB voted [to support](#) the governor in his push to address the state’s shortage of certified teachers. The public has backed the return of Recovery School District schools to OPSB, as well as the general direction of the city’s reform efforts. Now that unification is nearly complete, the next step will be to clarify and operationalize OPSB’s new strategic plan and determine who will own and be accountable for which elements of the education system moving forward.



Does the education system respond to community feedback?

Newly formed [Superintendent Student Advisory Committees](#) provide avenues for students to give input on issues of importance to them and on citywide education strategy. A [similar committee](#) for teachers launched in April 2018 in partnership with New Schools for New Orleans. A parent committee is set to launch soon. The newly formed nonprofit [Our Voice Nuestra Voz](#) works with Latino families to help them advocate for their needs. These groups may address concerns interviewees in 2017 expressed—that community members had few opportunities to provide feedback or engage around issues related to the school system as a whole.

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.



Exemplar

Does funding equitably follow students?

In New Orleans, all recurring public funds follow students using a student-based allocation formula. OPSB has put effort into ensuring a student-based allocation formula is maintained following reunification in July 2018 (based on analysis of fiscal year 2017-18).



Developing

Do schools have the kinds of teachers they need?

Talent is emerging as a major issue for New Orleans, despite a number of internal external pipelines in place. To date, data has not been collected across all schools on teacher retention, quality, or fit, making it difficult to identify talent issues and develop strategies to address them. To start this work, OPSB has begun partnering with [New Schools for New Orleans](#) (NSNO) to track teacher vacancies. OPSB initiated new school pipeline work, which it is doing in collaboration with nonprofit partners like [Camelback](#) and NSNO. This work aims to create new opportunities for teachers and teacher leaders to develop school models based on community need.



Developing

Do schools have the kinds of leaders they need?

To date, New Orleans has had only anecdotal or partial data about vacancies and quality across all of its autonomous schools. There is an interest among system leaders to collect data. System leaders also recognize the need to develop new strategies to recruit and develop school leaders who can push for school improvement and excellence.

Data & Scoring

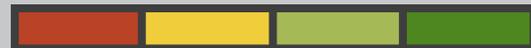
Where did we get this information?

- ▶ 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



Little in place Developing Progressing Excelling

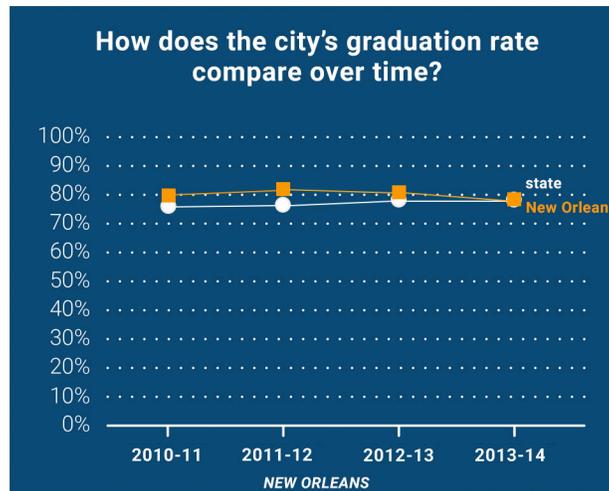


Increase or Decrease

Key Takeaways: Student & School Outcomes

Between 2012 and 2015, New Orleans' school proficiency rates improved in reading and math, relative to the state. The city is about at the national average when it comes to how well it educates low-income students, and all students are proportionately enrolled in advanced math coursework in high school. Graduation rates remained mostly flat.

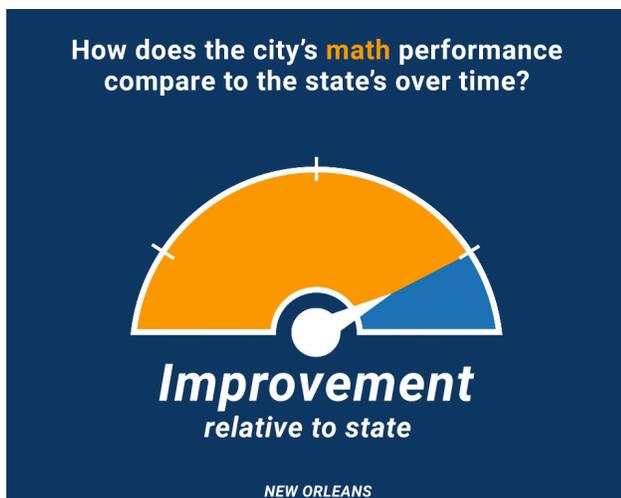
Is the education system continuously improving?



► In 2013-14, the city's graduation rate was about on par with 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, 2010-11 to 2013-14.



► Between 2011-12 and 2014-15, the math proficiency gap between the city and state was closing. In 2014-15 the city's proficiency rate was 2 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: Louisiana State performance data, 2011-12 to 2014-15

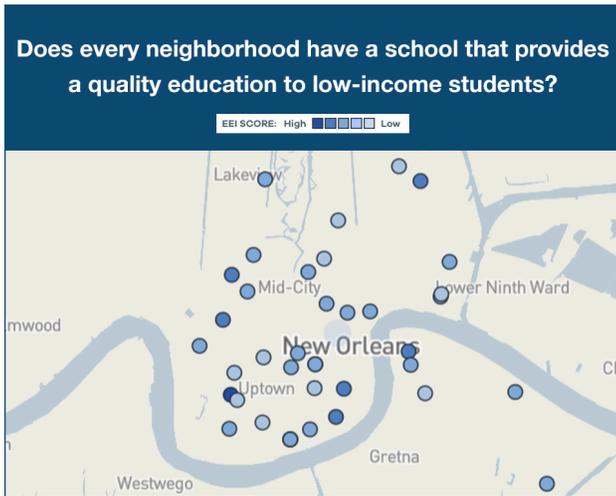


► Under reading gains chart, use this caption: Between 2011-12 and 2014-15, the reading proficiency gap between the city and state was closing. In 2014-15 the city's proficiency rate was 4 percentage points below the state's.

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: Louisiana State performance data, 2011-12 to 2014-15.

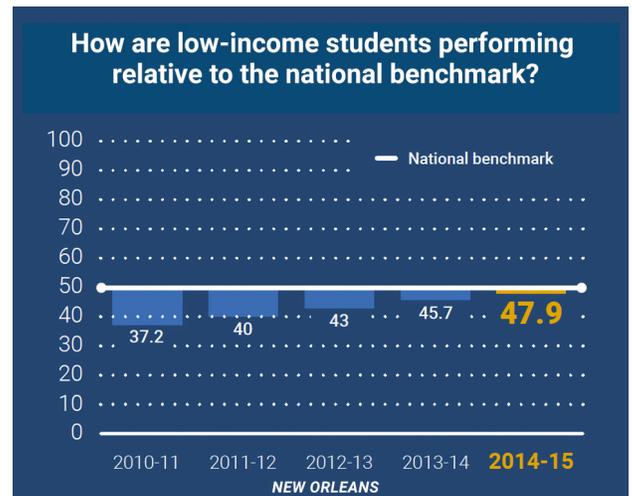
Do students have access to a high-quality education?



► 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.

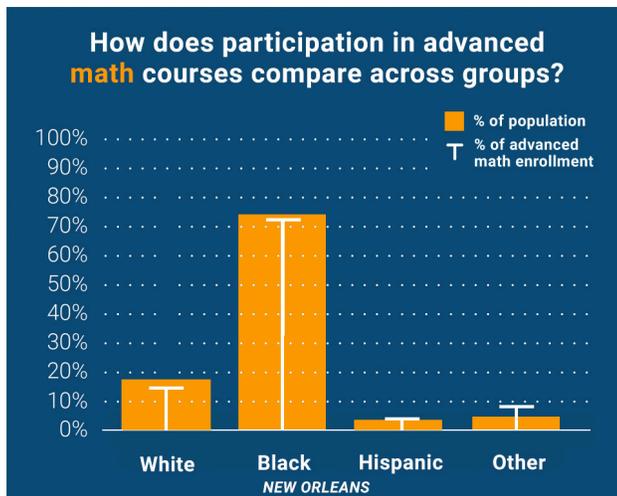
Sources: Louisiana State performance data, 2010-11 to 2014-15; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2010-11 to 2014-15.



► New Orleans' EEI score is in the Average category. Students from low-income families in New Orleans are performing somewhat worse in math and reading than low-income students nationally.

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

Sources: Louisiana State performance data, 2010-11 to 2014-15; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2010-11 to 2014-15.



► In 2013-14, all student sub-groups were enrolled in advanced math coursework at similar rates as the total high school population.

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 New Orleans

After more than 10 years of overseeing a majority of the city’s charter schools, Louisiana’s Recovery School District (RSD) is transferring its 49 schools back to the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) by July 2018 under a unification plan (Act 91). This transition will mark the next chapter of the city’s work to transform how public schools are governed and operated.

School Choice in the City

All New Orleans schools are open enrollment, with some that have selective enrollment. There are neighborhood zones for a share of spaces at most schools, but families are still able to apply to any school across the city using the OneApp process.

Governance Model

This past year (2017-18), New Orleans schools were either overseen by the Orleans Parish School Board or the Recovery School District.

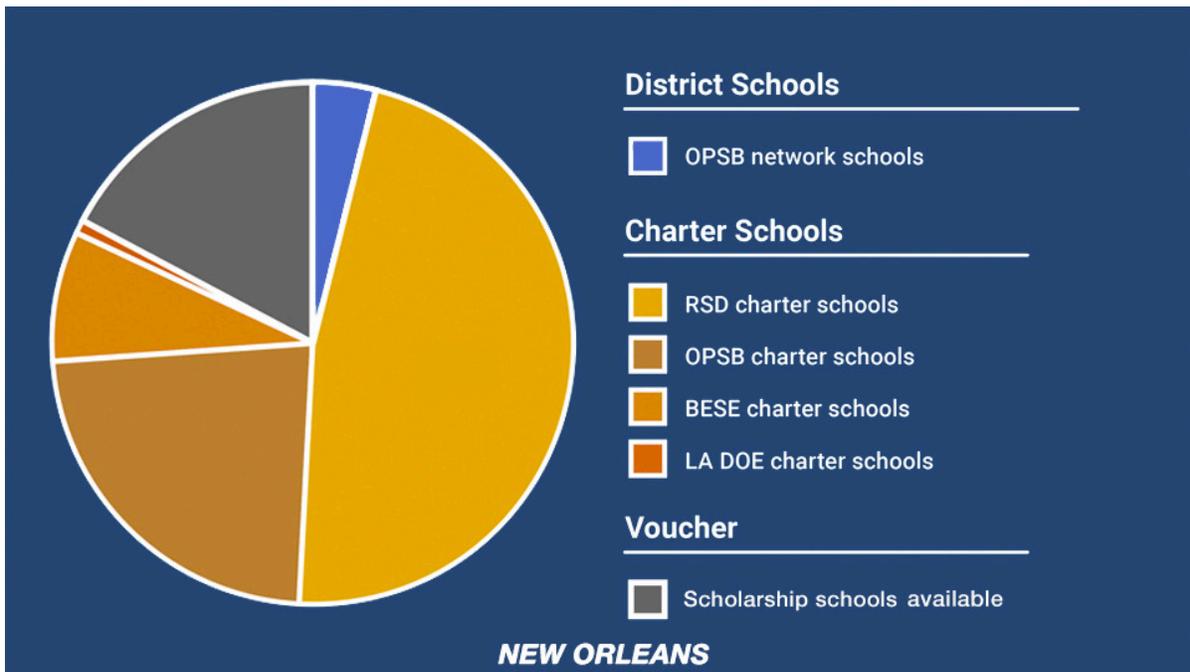
2015 District and Charter Student Body

Enrollment: 43,948 students

Race and ethnicity: 87% black, 7% other (including Hispanic), 6% white

Low-income: 84% free and reduced-price lunch

2017 School Composition



Source: Enrollment data from ED Facts, 2014-15.
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.