

## Key Takeaways: June 2018

Tulsa faces the challenge of having to rapidly increase the number of quality schools, even as state revenue shortfalls consume much attention. In April 2018, teachers across Oklahoma walked out to demand legislative action on increasing salaries and providing additional funding for schools. Schools in Tulsa cancelled class for weeks in support. On the plus side there is engagement on school improvement efforts: Tulsa Public Schools Superintendent Deborah Gist brings passion and urgency, Mayor G. T. Bynum supports education as a top priority, and [Impact Tulsa](#) pulls together local education, nonprofit, philanthropic, business, civic, faith-based, and community-based organizations. Greater visibility is needed for Hispanic, Black, and Native American communities most impacted by low-performing schools. The city provides a healthy number of school choice options, but better information and enrollment supports would help families navigate the system.

### Challenges Ahead

#### ► Improving school quality and ensuring access

School quality and student opportunity are unevenly distributed in Tulsa, as in many cities across the country. Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) leadership are addressing school quality by developing a strategic plan, partnering with community groups, developing high-quality instructional materials, and increasing teacher leadership. As school quality improves, the choice process must be made more accessible to all families or the historic gaps in student access and outcomes will continue. Many families still do not understand the full array of options available to them. Education leaders should consider creating a consolidated information guide that would allow families to compare performance, school culture, and curriculum to find high-quality, good-fit schools, district or charter. They could also consider developing a unified enrollment system for both district and charter school options.

#### ► Using collaboration to address talent recruitment and leadership development

Stagnant pay and education budget cuts over the last decade have led teachers to move to other states or change professions. Their frustrations came to a head in April 2018 when teachers across Oklahoma walked out of classrooms, demanding remedies from the state legislature. Both TPS and charter leaders closed schools in support of teachers, but they must look for additional recruitment and leadership strategies. The district has initiatives to develop teacher and principal talent, including partnerships with TNTP, but could collaborate with charter schools and other districts in Oklahoma to make these efforts more sustainable. Collaboration can also be improved with state university-authorized charter schools, which currently operate in isolation. The Tulsa [District-Charter Collaboration Compact](#) provides a structure to pursue collaborative work around talent. The Compact has previous achievements, such as successful facilities-sharing agreements. However, only half of the city's charter schools are in the Compact, so a true citywide initiative must involve other charter school leaders. Partnerships with the city and civic leaders could lead to innovative solutions, like housing incentives, that could further attract talent to Tulsa.

#### ► Strengthening school- and community-level engagement

TPS and local organizations understand the importance of community engagement. When TPS faced the need to make budget cuts in 2017, it deeply involved community members in identifying and refining budget priorities. Education leaders can build on these experiences to create ongoing opportunities for involvement. Engagement in school portfolio decisions—like turnarounds, school closures, and the development of innovative instructional models—may need to be restructured so that all families can participate. This is especially true for black and Hispanic families who have been historically underserved by the city's school system. Another key next step will be clarifying the district strategy around school partnerships and district school autonomy. A well-defined policy of school autonomy can attract community groups to help operate neighborhood partnership schools, much like MetCares that opened the

Greenwood Leadership Academy in 2017. Neither the district nor the charter sector has the capacity to drive public engagement efforts alone. This is an opportunity for sector leaders to collaborate with each other and with local funders and nonprofits. Community groups can support the school system by training families on how to support turnaround efforts and advocate for family and student needs.

## Spotlight

### Building a Pipeline to College in East Tulsa’s Growing Latino Community

“I always knew I wanted to come back to East Tulsa and start a college prep school,” says Elsie Urueta, who founded [Tulsa Honor Academy](#) (THA) in 2015. The first in her family to attend college, Teach for America drew her to become a teacher—first in St. Louis and then at Chicago’s highly successful Noble Street charter network. Urueta says East Tulsa’s Latino population has grown rapidly since she first arrived from El Paso with her Mexican immigrant parents in the 1990s. Yet, the community can still feel isolated and underserved by good school options. The THA Familia—as Urueta calls her team—aims to raise expectations for its middle schoolers, making good use of data to guide instruction. And indeed, these kids are outperforming comparable schools in the city.

Starting a new school anywhere can be daunting work. Urueta received a fellowship from [Building Excellent Schools](#), which helped her develop her charter application and provided valuable leadership coaching during her first two years. Although it has outgrown its existing facility, THA also benefited from colocating on district campuses. The Tulsa District-Charter Collaboration Compact provides an avenue for accessing district services on favorable terms, including facilities. Charter leaders say that the district’s Chief Innovation Officer Andrea Castañeda has brought new energy to the collaboration work. As its students mature, THA plans to expand into high school, creating a complete pathway to college in East Tulsa.

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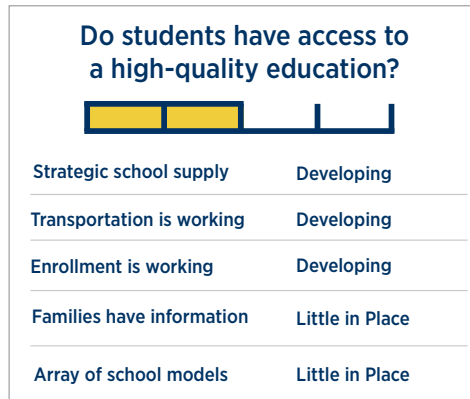
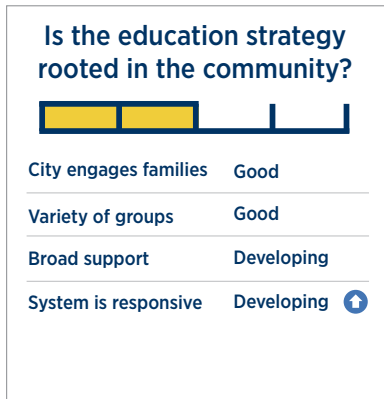
### Building Upon the Legacy of Tulsa’s Black Community

How do school systems partner with communities? The historic roots for Tulsa’s black community lie in Greenwood in the northern area of the city. It was once home to “Black Wall Street” before the Tulsa Race Riots of 1921 destroyed the thriving black businesses there.

Partnering with the MetCares Foundation, a local community group, Tulsa Public Schools opened Greenwood Leadership Academy in fall 2017. The student body is nearly 100 percent black and mostly low income. Under founding principal Kojo Asamoah-Caesar, campus leaders hope to develop a culture and school design that reflects a commitment to black excellence and draws on Tulsa’s history of a stable, successful black community.

Greenwood Leadership Academy operates under a new governance model authorized by the state through House Bill 1691, which allows MetCares and the district to partner on facilities, transportation, and other district services. Teaching staff are employees of MetCares and the campus shares space with Academy Central Elementary. Much hard work remains, but the school could prove to be an important pathway for increasing student achievement, improving community engagement in the school system, and drawing families back to the district who have left for other schools.

## 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

Many community groups in Tulsa are engaged in education, but more can be done to ensure all voices are heard. Families lack comprehensive, consistent, and user-friendly information about their school options. The district is taking steps to address talent, but retaining teachers—both novice and experienced—and developing a pool of leaders to lead autonomous schools remain challenges.

### 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?

Over the past few years, TPS has engaged in a robust process, including surveys, listening sessions, focus groups, and social media to develop academic and budget priorities for the district. For the 2016-17 school year, TPS worked with the community to identify school consolidations as the best of several options for reducing the district’s budget. The district did not close or plan to close any schools in 2017-18 or 2018-19 school years. The community organization MetCares opened a partnership school (a charter/district hybrid) in North Tulsa in the 2017-18 school year, using community engagement to build and demonstrate support. Charter school engagement practices around school openings and closures vary from school to school. In response to parent demand, two charter middle schools are expanding to serve high school students, and a third charter middle school is expanding to serve elementary students.



**Are a variety of groups engaged in education?**

[Impact Tulsa](#), a collective impact network, works to improve kindergarten readiness, middle school math performance, and graduation rates. The initiative pulls together local education, nonprofit, philanthropic, business, civic, faith-based, and community-based organizations. The black community in North Tulsa is engaged through the [MetCares Foundation](#), North Tulsa Economic Development Initiative, [100 Black Men](#), and other groups. However, more work could be done to engage the growing Native American and Hispanic communities on education issues.



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

The superintendent and school board are aligned on strategies for TPS, but funding shortfalls generate headlines and can divert the public’s attention from other efforts. Tulsa Mayor G. T. Bynum supports education as a top priority and advocates for municipal funds to augment the school system. The district and district-authorized charter schools are part of Tulsa’s District-Charter Collaboration Compact; a steering committee meets monthly and periodically refines the parameters of this agreement. The Compact does not include state university-authorized charter schools, which account for six of the city’s twelve charter schools. There are divergent views on continued charter growth, especially regarding virtual or blended models.



**Does the education system respond to community feedback?**

The district has been proactive about communicating with families, but there is still limited opportunity for families to provide input on issues that go beyond the individual school level. In the 2017-18 school year, the Superintendent took a lead role in advocating for increased district funding, and district leaders proactively communicated with families about the April teacher walk-out. TPS is trying to engage more deeply with groups that represent families most impacted by poor-performing schools. [Choice Matters](#) seeks to engage a broader cross-section of the community. However, this work is just beginning and there is still far to go. For charter school families, avenues for community engagement are mostly at the individual school level. Families in university-authorized charter schools are often unclear where to go to elevate their concerns.

**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.



Developing

**Is the city strategically managing its school portfolio?**

The district did not close or plan to close any schools in 2017-18 and 2018-19. In Fall 2017, the district launched a partnership school, Greenwood Leadership Academy, co-located with a low-performing neighborhood school. When making past decisions about closing or consolidating schools, TPS analyzed building utilization rates as well as past and projected enrollment. The district launched a performance framework for district-run schools in July 2017 that can help guide future school supply decisions and school-based interventions. Based on projected enrollment, two charter middle schools are expanding to serve high school students, and a third charter middle school is expanding to serve elementary students. Universities authorize charters in Tulsa without coordination with the district; however, one interviewee reported that Langston University aims to improve their authorizing practices and may be more open to collaboration in the future.



Developing

**Is transportation working for families?**

Interviewees reported that transportation is a barrier for families who want to enroll students in schools outside their own neighborhood. High school students can ride public transit for free, and five of the twelve charter schools in Tulsa provide transportation through TPS. However, there is no bus transportation for students attending district magnets or out-of-boundary schools.



Developing

**Is the enrollment process working for families?**

The enrollment process is not streamlined, and interviewees reported that it can be complex for families. Families are assigned to a neighborhood school and must request a transfer using an [online application](#) for magnet schools and/or other district schools with space. District-authorized charter schools use a [common application system](#), but it is not yet aligned with the district system and it does not include university-authorized charter schools. All charter schools operate their own lotteries.



Little in Place

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

Community leaders reported that in general it is difficult for families to know what school options are available. There is no resource for families to compare performance for all district schools, district-authorized charter schools, and university-authorized charter schools. Families must go to individual school websites to find information about curriculum, programs, and services.



Little in Place

**Does the school supply represent an array of models?**

Almost all district and charter schools in Tulsa follow traditional instructional models. However, there are some new models being explored. In 2017-18, a local nonprofit opened a partnership school model. Separately, Rose State College approved EPIC Charter Schools to open a blended learning center. EPIC also operates a state-approved online schooling option that is popular with Oklahomans, though there are reservations about the quality of this program. The district established an innovation office and hopes to develop more instructionally diverse schools, but some interviewees perceived the district could be more transparent about new models it aims to launch. District leaders report that teachers are excited about providing input into personalized learning models, and also hope to open a Montessori model in 2018.

## 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 teachers they need?

While schools rarely start the year with vacancies, retaining teachers throughout the school year—both novice and experienced—is a considerable challenge. Low pay for teachers contributes to recruitment and retention issues. To pressure the state for more funding, in April 2017, [teachers walked out of classrooms](#) and class was canceled for two weeks. To mitigate the impact of filling hard-to-staff subjects like math, science, and Special Education, the district gives high-need schools priority access to teacher pipelines. The district is also starting to work with TNTP to develop a long-term strategy. Within the charter sector, interviewees reported that charter school challenges vary. Some schools experience high turnover, while others use their prestige and work environment to attract and retain teachers.



### Do schools have the kinds of leaders they need?

District leadership has identified leadership as a challenge. District and charter schools rely primarily on homegrown leadership pipelines. As one strategy, 23 instructional leaders from TPS attended Relay Graduate Schools' [National Principals Academy](#). Additionally, TPS better defined the leader selection process, developed a set of competencies for leaders, and established a leadership pipeline, but reports that more work remains to define and develop leaders' autonomy. The district sees opportunity for partnership with charter schools on school leader development.



### Does funding equitably follow students?

The district has held off implementing a student-based allocation formula for district-run schools until state revenues increase. The Oklahoma Public Charter School Association [sued](#) the state board of education over equitable tax revenues for charter school students; Tulsa Public Schools filed to intervene in the lawsuit. As of May 2018, the matter was still proceeding through the [court process](#).

## Data & Scoring

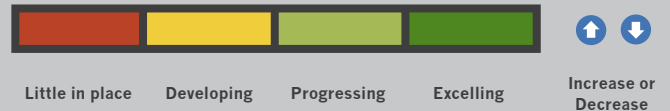
### Where did we get this information?

- ▶ 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.

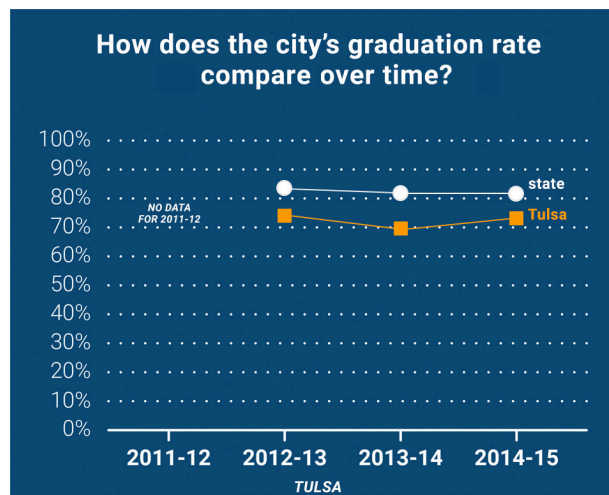
#### Score Levels



## Key Takeaways: Student & School Outcomes

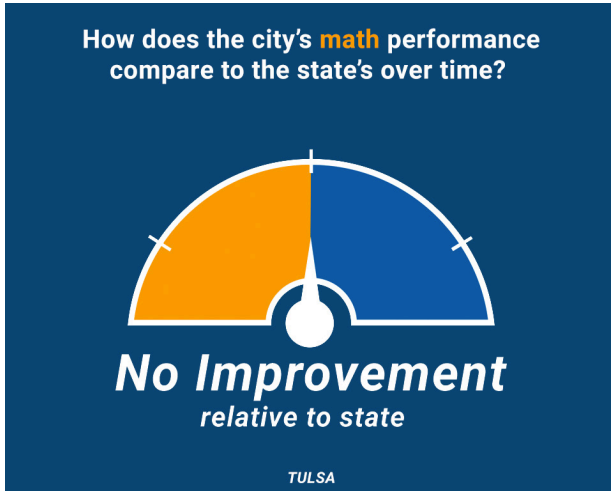
Graduation rates in Tulsa showed little change relative to the state, remaining 9 percentage points below state averages in 2014-15. Math and reading proficiency rates also did not improve relative to the state. Most student sub-groups are not proportionately enrolled in advanced coursework in high school: Black and Hispanic students are underenrolled while white students are overenrolled.

### Is the education system continuously improving?



▶ In 2014-15, the city's graduation rate was behind the state's.

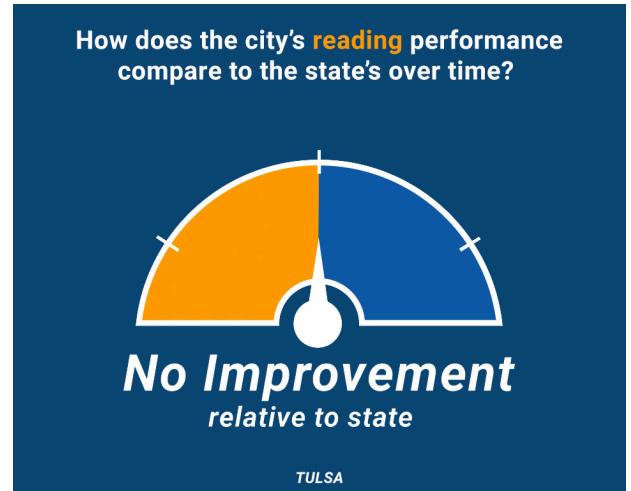
*Data: Percent of first-time 9th grade students graduating in four years, citywide and statewide.  
Source: EDfacts Initiative, U.S. Department of Education, Assessment and Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates Data, 2012-13 to 2014-15.*



► Between 2014-15 and 2016-17, the city's math performance trends mirrored the state's. In 2016-17, the city's proficiency rate was 16 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: Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2014-15 to 2016-17.*

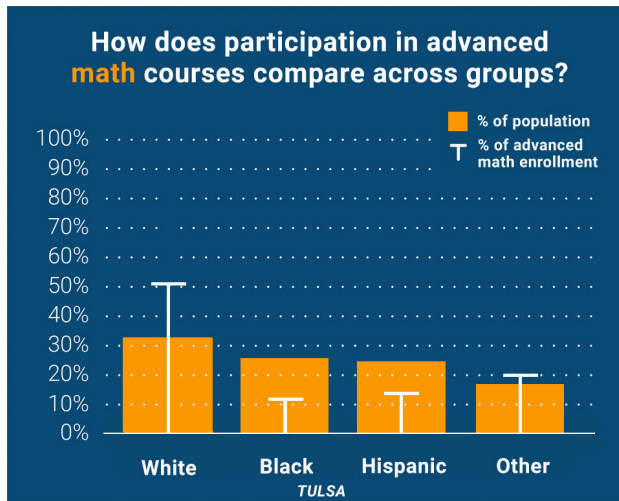


► Between 2014-15 and 2016-17, the city's reading performance trends mirrored the state's. In 2016-17, the city's proficiency rate was 15 percentage points below the state's.

*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: Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2014-15 to 2016-17.*

## Do students have access to a high-quality education?



► In 2013-14, white students were enrolling in high school advanced math coursework at rates above their enrollment, while black and Hispanic 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 Tulsa

The primary district in Tulsa, Tulsa Public Schools (TPS), has been pursuing a number of systemic changes to improve school and student performance. The district adopted a strategic plan in 2016 and is currently focusing on teacher leadership, school innovation, and personalized instruction. TPS also aims to increase school-site autonomy and partner with nonprofit groups to operate some school campuses.

## School Choice in the City

Tulsa is home to 12 charter schools. TPS operates magnet schools that have neighborhood preference and selective admission policies. Families can also opt in to any district neighborhood school on a space-availability basis using an administrative transfer process.

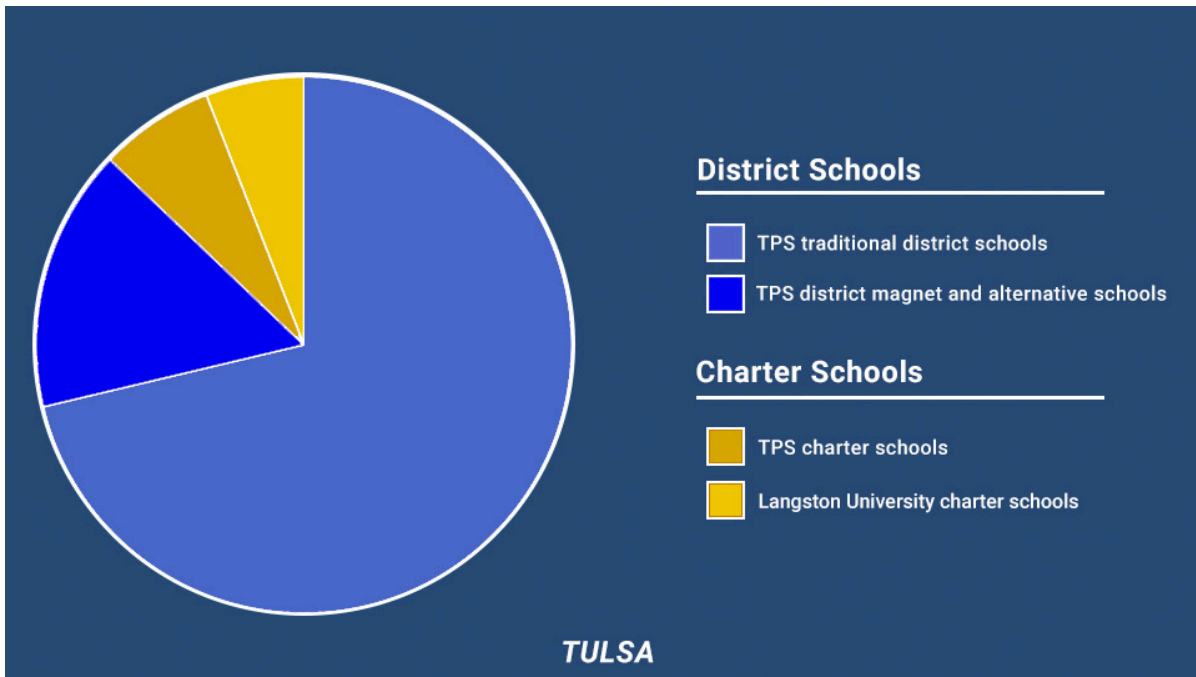
## Governance Model

The Tulsa Public Schools Board oversees district schools, and TPS authorizes half of the city’s charter schools. The other charter schools are authorized by Langston University or Rose State College. TPS also contracts for partnership schools.

## 2016 District and Charter Student Body

Enrollment: 38,628 students  
 Race and ethnicity: 33% Hispanic, 25% white, 25% black, 17% other  
 Low-income: 73% free and reduced-price lunch

## 2017 School Composition



Note: Enrollment and demographics data for Tulsa district schools only.  
 Source: Tulsa 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](https://research.crpe.org/projects/stepping-up)



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