



Key Takeaways: June 2018

Over the past year, Oakland has simplified enrollment and started developing a multiyear plan to reconfigure the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) through the [Blueprint for Quality Schools](#). However, the district's ongoing budget crisis and threat of state receivership present immediate concerns. OUSD must reduce central office spending and will need to consolidate, improve, or close underenrolled and underperforming schools while still focusing on improving outcomes. This is a severe challenge, but presents an opportunity to reset how OUSD and schools are managed. Another key step is to improve family involvement in reform efforts so policies don't falter from community pushback, as they have in the past.

Challenges Ahead

► Developing a clear plan to address Oakland's financial woes

OUSD faces a major financial crisis, flat district enrollment, and underenrolled and underperforming schools. Addressing all of this will require district action. OUSD should also reassess central office spending and increase schools' flexibility over their own budgets on a weighted, per-pupil basis so school leaders, with training, can more nimbly address student needs. Through a coalition of engaged leaders, each sector can take responsibility for the financial crisis and the difficult decisions ahead to work together as a portfolio district. The Oakland School Board's [July decision](#) to coordinate with the city's charter schools is a promising step forward.

► Combining strategy with data to close underenrolled schools and improve the school supply

Oakland needs a strong portfolio management strategy driven by school quality that oversees all city schools—district and charter—in a coordinated and strategic system. OUSD, with its many underenrolled schools, must be able to support strong schools while consolidating or closing low-performing schools. Over the past year, the district rolled out its [Blueprint for Quality Schools](#) process, using facility and school quality analyses intended to guide school portfolio decisionmaking. The district also passed a Community of Schools Policy to develop a citywide plan across district and charter schools to focus on quality, equity, and financial sustainability. The superintendent is charged with presenting a plan by November 15, 2018.

OUSD has long had good data in place, such as the annual [Strategic Regional Analysis](#) reports that identify school quality and enrollment trends across the city. But this data has not been used to improve access to quality schools. Interviewees in our study perceived that school closures are hampered by community pushback, and that new charter schools often open where space is available, rather than where they are most needed. There is tension in Oakland around school closures and authorizing new charter schools. OUSD should focus on right-sizing while hearing from communities about the types of school programs they need and want going forward. To address facility issues, OUSD might consider a real estate trust for school buildings or leasing empty buildings to growing community organizations on short-term contracts.

► Shifting the conversation to address the needs of Oakland's low-income families

Like a number of cities, Oakland struggles with a confluence of challenging education and societal issues: finances, school quality, growing income disparities, and inequity in schools. City education leaders want to give Oakland students—especially low-income students—access to great schools, but struggle with the practical and political challenges to get there: closing low-quality schools while incubating and opening high-quality ones, balancing the budget while maintaining needed student services, and addressing inequity within schools. Levelling the playing field while cutting the budget will be painful. City education leaders should be transparent about the need and tap a range of parent and community leaders to help shape and communicate the asks. Giving school leaders control over their budgets is one way to make sure cuts are made while protecting what is most valuable at each school.

Despite Oakland’s robust, cross-sector school choice resources, community leaders still report that many low-income families are unaware that they have a choice, need more support distinguishing school options, and/or simply don’t trust the system. To address choice equity, tailored supports to families can help: OUSD can use existing community groups, and funders can consider investing in parent groups that provide supports. District or community leaders should conduct surveys or focus groups to find other ways that resources can better meet family needs.

Spotlight

Parent-Led Group Pushes OUSD and Charters for Better Schools in Oakland

Oakland has an active and outspoken community when it comes to education, but not all voices have been well represented—especially families most impacted by low-performing schools. The Oakland REACH, a nonprofit parent-led group, has set out to change that.

Founded by an Oakland parent with children in both district and charter schools, The Oakland REACH’s mission is to give parents power with knowledge and tools to press for better schools in Oakland. Started in 2016 with a group of 50 parents identified by principals as those most likely to have frustrations about their schools, this grassroots effort trained these parents on the history of education in Oakland, civil rights, and current challenges.

Approximately 200 parents have been trained via this citywide, cross-sector advocacy fellowship. Many parents from that first group then talked with 1,700 parents at social services offices, malls, parks, rec centers, and on buses, educating them about school quality data and budget information. To date, parents have had over 3,000 1:1s with families in Oakland’s lowest-performing schools.

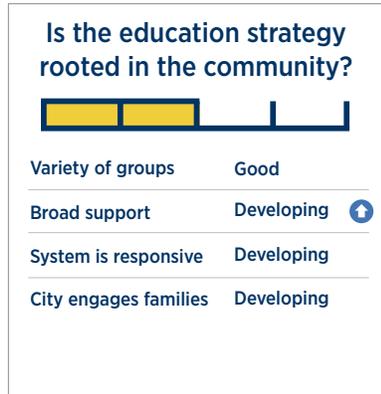
This “movement of parents” is making itself heard at OUSD board meetings, pushing for increased access to better school options for students in lower-performing schools. They are pushing OUSD on their Blueprint plan to make sure both district and charter schools will change their enrollment practices to provide better access and education for the families that are often left behind. The Oakland REACH cuts across the charter-district divide to put the focus on families and better schools.

Education Leaders Seek Cross-Sector Solutions to Talent Challenges

As part of a former citywide Equity Pledge begun under the previous superintendent, Oakland education leaders from the district and charter sectors set out to work together on strategies to attract and retain talented teachers, leaders, and staff. Results of this collaboration work include plans to host a citywide teacher recruiting event, a citywide website promoting teaching in Oakland, and a pilot outreach effort to recruit experienced teachers in high-need specializations (STEM, special education, ELL) for both sectors.

By anticipating vacancies and developing citywide recruitment strategies, Oakland is hoping to collaborate on common recruitment problems, such as the rising costs of housing.

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, Oakland has made progress in improving the choice process for families and in reaching out to the community for input on large initiatives. However, no progress has been made on improving transportation and while new strategies are in place to improve school portfolio decisions and teacher fit, both remain challenges.

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?

The Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) started the school year with no reported principal vacancies, an improvement over past years. To recruit leaders who are representative of their students, OUSD educates community members about credentialing opportunities, hosts job fairs, and invests in “Grow Your Own” pipelines that recruit local talent. The district also has MOUs with local universities. Larger charter networks have developed their own leadership programs, but smaller charters, without pipelines or money, struggle to attract and retain school leaders.



Do schools have the kinds of teachers they need?

District interviewees reported that over the past several years, OUSD has reduced the number of vacancies at the start of the year. The district has focused on attracting more Latino candidates so teachers are representative of the city’s students. Strategies include an applicant tracking system, local and international job fairs, drop-in coaching for interest-

ed candidates, and monthly credential sessions. Charter leaders report that charter schools do not collaborate around talent and that smaller schools struggle to recruit qualified applicants from a limited applicant pool. The high cost of living in the Bay Area, especially with housing, poses a challenge for both sectors around recruiting and keeping teachers. Local education partner, [Educate 78](#), has carried forward the work of the cross-sector [Equity Pledge](#) to create a database of talent data so schools can better anticipate vacancies and identify recruitment needs. The initiative started under previous district leadership but because of the placement fees, the district is not currently participating while they assess their budget.



Does funding equitably follow students?

District money does not flow to district schools through a student-based allocation formula (based on an analysis of fiscal year 2017-18). California education is financed by the Local Control Funding Formula, which provides additional funding to districts for each low-income student, English language learner, and foster youth and requires districts to use those funds to increase and improve services for high-need students. OUSD attempts to supplement some school budgets through an additional allocation based on “Z-score,” a measure of student population need. But with projected large budget shortfalls, OUSD will need to find ways to ensure these students are better served. OUSD has made its accounting data publicly available on its website.

The city’s most recent two parcel taxes (Measure N in 2014 and Measure G1 in 2016) have included charter school students. There is still an ongoing dispute about charter school student access to a prior parcel tax, Measure G.

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.



Are a variety of groups engaged in education?

Community leaders report that several community groups and nonprofits are actively engaged in the education strategy, including grassroots organizations that partner with families from low-performing schools. The city has both anti-charter and pro-charter organizations, but a growing number of organizations are governance-neutral and focused on school quality. A new parent-led organization, The Oakland REACH, trains district and charter school parents to advocate for better school quality. GO Public Schools launched [1Oakland](#), a campaign attempting to bridge the sectors through alumni, educators, and parents from both systems, and calling on education leaders to build a system of schools that serves all students.



Does the education system respond to community feedback?

Policymakers and education leaders prioritize community engagement, but the perception among community groups has been that a few vocal groups and individuals drive discussions, and OUSD only responds under pressure. In interviews, community groups expressed the hope that engagement used for the rollout of the [Blueprint for Quality Schools](#) could be used for other district initiatives. For the Blueprint, the district led full-day retreats and local school meetings about facilities, school quality, and feeder patterns. But some participants felt that even though this was a robust process, a loud minority still dominated. Charter school staff and families were not included in the first round of conversations, though they may be in the future.



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

The Blueprint for Quality Schools, which is expected to be passed at the end of the 2017-18 school year, has created a process for families to engage on how OUSD will manage its portfolio of schools, from openings to closings. Over this past year, interviewees reported that the district navigated a school consolidation in West Oakland by focusing the conversation on improving student outcomes. As the system weighs school consolidations and potential closures, there is an opportunity to move beyond engagement toward actual empowerment of impacted families—for example, weighted preference in nearby high-performing schools. A local nonprofit has also been working with the community to incorporate input into new schools and redesigns, but these processes have not yet been formalized. For charter school openings and closings, securing approval of a charter petition in Oakland requires well-documented and highly vocal support from families who wish to enroll. Family engagement with charter school closures have been mixed, based on the approach of the operator.



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

Superintendent Johnson-Trammell has broad support in the community and in the local media. There is general sympathy from the community over the \$9 to \$15 million shortfall she inherited. The mayor is active in education. She backs the [Oakland Promise](#), a cradle to career investment in Oakland youth, and is supporting a parcel tax for November 2018 that supports this initiative and increased access to high-quality preschool education.

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?

Oakland has a variety of public school models, including Waldorf, personalized learning, STEM, dual language, arts, and military focus. However, interviewees reported that some models, like dual language, offer no full pathways from elementary to high school, which causes problems for families. Since 2014-15, new charter schools have been either

single-site charters or part of small, local networks; some charter leaders worry that a preference for homegrown charter schools prevents high-quality national operators from opening in Oakland. In a survey from spring 2017, 50% of families reported that academic programs varied a great deal among schools, but 49% still reported that finding a school with a good fit was a challenge.



Is the enrollment process working for families?

In 2016-17, Oakland charter schools, advocacy organizations, and funders collectively launched [Enroll Oakland](#), an enrollment platform that streamlines the application process to one for district schools and one for most charters. In 2017-18, the charter enrollment system was further updated to eliminate holding seats by introducing a single-accept system. Some charters are starting to adapt their enrollment policies to hold seats for midyear arrivals like unaccompanied minors and refugees. CRPE conducted a survey in spring 2017 before the updates were in place, and found that charter families struggled much more than district families with understanding school eligibility (42% of charter school families reported it as a challenge versus 30% of district families) and navigating multiple applications (28% of charter families versus 16% of district families).



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

Enroll Oakland provides school information for nearly all district and charter schools in an interactive, online school finder that includes information about curriculum and school programs. In 2017-18, the system added school performance information. However, the online tool lacks information about the specific special education services offered at each school. Interviewed community members said that underserved communities, non-English-speaking parents, and parents of children with special needs require more support to know how to use the information tools. A recent survey in Oakland showed that over 70% of families still rely on word of mouth when considering school choices.



Is transportation working for families?

Oakland has no school busing system for students attending nonassigned neighborhood district or charter schools. Free transportation is guaranteed to students with special needs, but all other families must pay for public transportation or drive their children to school. Interviewed community members said that this resulted in many low-income families being limited to the options in their neighborhood. Despite the lack of a strategy, families in our survey reported information as a bigger challenge than transportation. 35% of surveyed charter school families reported transportation as being a challenge, versus 30% of district families.



Is the city strategically managing its school portfolio?

OUSD publishes detailed regional supply and demand data via annual [Strategic Regional Analysis](#) reports, but interviewees reported that this data is not used to inform school siting decisions or school consolidations and closures. Some schools are overenrolled and could be replicated, while many other schools have unsustainable low enrollment. Even though OUSD is the city’s principal charter authorizer, it cannot always strategically site new charters because of facility constraints and state authorizing law, which does not allow authorizers to deny charter applications based on location alone. Our interviews revealed a perception that charter schools open where space is available, not necessarily where they are needed most. Many education leaders also perceive that the current fiscal crisis is due in part to OUSD’s inability to close underenrolled and underperforming schools because of community pushback. The district’s Blueprint for Quality Schools is a step in the right direction toward building a coherent plan for facility, feeder pattern, and school supply decisions; the key will be to use the plan and criteria to guide decisions.

Data & Scoring

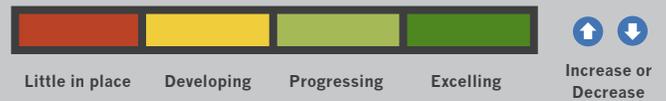
Where did we get this information?

- ▶ 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.

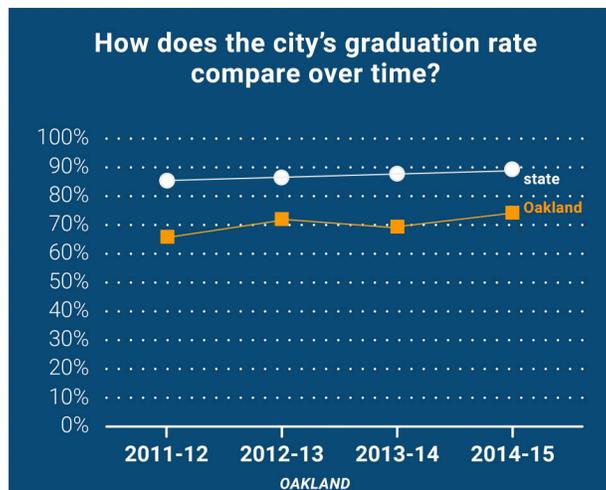
Score Levels



Key Takeaways: Student & School Outcomes

Oakland has seen some improvement in student and school outcomes over time. However, the city still lags behind state and national averages and disparities persist. Graduation rates have improved, but fall behind the state by 10 percentage points. Low-income students in the city are performing worse on assessments than their peers nationally, although this metric has improved somewhat over the past five years. Students are not proportionately enrolled in advanced math coursework in high school, indicating disparities in access to high-quality educational opportunities.

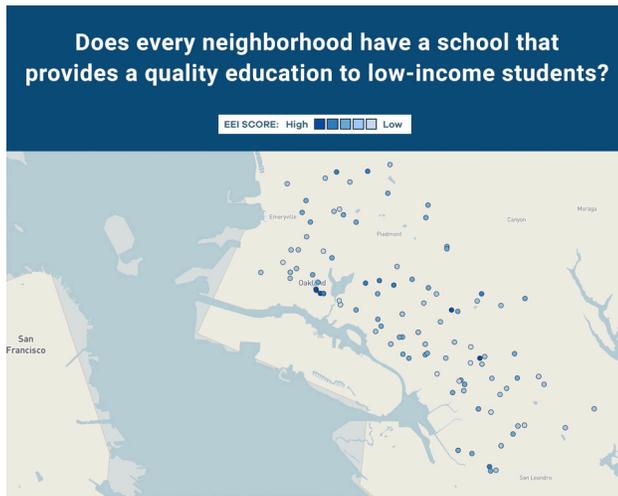
Is the education system continuously improving?



- ▶ In 2014-15, the city's graduation rate improved relative to the state, but still lagged behind the state average.

Data: Percent of first-time 9th grade students graduating in four years, citywide and statewide.
Source: ED Facts Initiative, U.S. Department of Education, Assessment and Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates Data, 2011-12 to 2014-15.

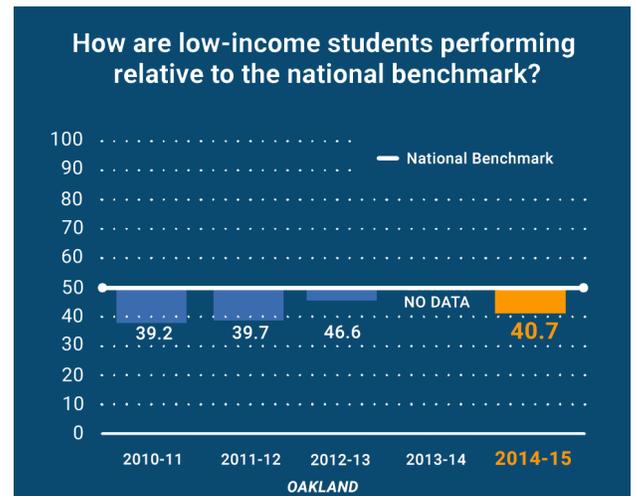
Do students have access to a high-quality education?



► 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.

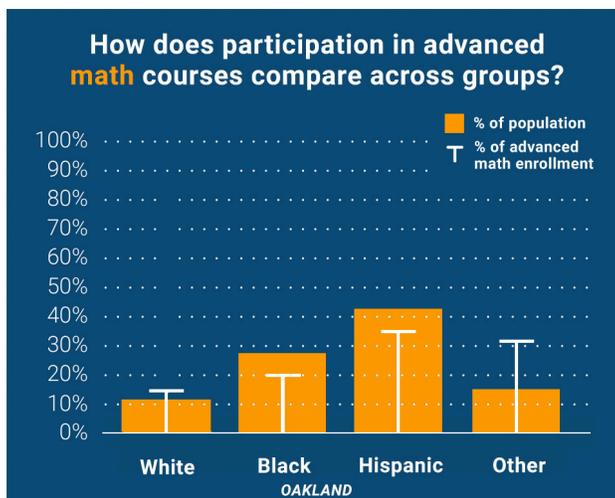
Sources: California Department of Education, 2010-11 to 2014-15; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2010-11 to 2014-15.



► Students from low-income families in Oakland are performing somewhat worse in math and reading than low-income students in the average city. EEI scores in Oakland have improved by 2% over time.

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

Sources: California Department of Education, 2010-11 to 2014-15; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2010-11 to 2014-15.



► In 2013-14, no student sub-groups in the city were enrolled in advanced math coursework at similar rates as the high school population. White, Asian American, Native American, and Pacific Islander students (shown here as “Other”) were enrolled at rates above their enrollment. Hispanic and 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 Oakland

In 2009, California returned control of Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) to the locally elected school board. Since then, the district has pursued a variety of reform strategies. OUSD produced a citywide school finder, and in the past two years has streamlined the enrollment processes for district and charter schools. In May 2017, Kyla Johnson-Trammell became OUSD’s sixth superintendent in nine years.

School Choice in the City

All of Oakland’s district and charter schools participate in open enrollment. Students who apply to district schools are assigned by default to a neighborhood district school, but they may apply to any school in the city. Students who apply to charter schools participate in those schools’ lotteries.

Governance Model

The OUSD school board oversees district schools and OUSD authorizes the majority of the charter schools in the city. The Alameda County Board of Education serves as the other primary charter authorizer.

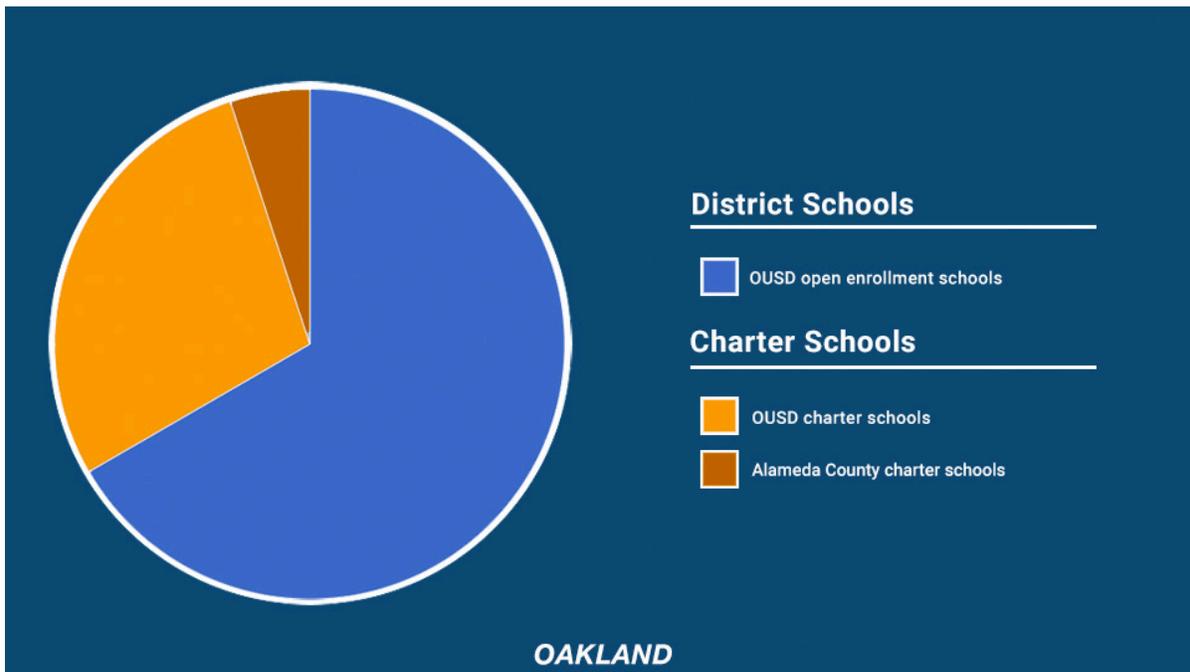
2017 District and Charter Student Body

Enrollment: 49,600 students

Race and ethnicity: 41% Hispanic, 26% black, 22% Other, 11% white

Low-income: 73% free and reduced-price lunch

2017 School Composition



Note: Enrollment and demographics data for OUSD district schools and OUSD-authorized charter schools only.
 Source: Oakland Unified School District and ED-Data, 2016-17.
 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.