Key Takeaways: June 2018

In late 2017, the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) began the process to return school governance to local control after 17 years under state control, with a new, mayoral-appointed board taking the place of the School Reform Commission. New board members will have an opportunity to continue existing efforts to improve the school system for families. Over the past year, there has been progress toward simplifying the school choice system, improving school leadership, and supporting parent advocacy. Graduation rates have been on the rise. But the Mayor, the new board, and other city leaders must stay focused on supporting equity and success for underserved students. Looking forward, education leaders will need to work together to address uneven distribution of high-quality options, complex enrollment systems that limit students' access to the city's best schools, and low trust among families.

Challenges Ahead

▶ **Continuing the push for progress under new, local governance**

Philadelphia has just emerged from 17 years of state control, and the city is largely unified in its optimism and support of the shift back to local control. Ensuring continuation of the recent work to stabilize district finances will be first priority for Mayor Kenney and the new board. But the new leaders will also need to stay laser-focused on taking action to grow high-quality options for all students, especially those that are currently underserved. The board should proactively seek input and real partnership with parents and leaders from underrepresented communities and low-performing schools and avoid capture by strong political interests in order to remain open-minded to solutions and truly representative of all families.

▶ **Accelerating the growth of high-quality options in every neighborhood**

SDP collects data on performance, enrollment shifts, and other variables to determine neighborhood needs, and there are differentiated strategies for new schools, school improvement, and closures or consolidations laid out in the district's System of Great Schools plan. But despite the availability and analysis of data, there is a perception from interviewees that the district is not taking enough action based on this data, as too many poor schools linger. On the charter side, the city's only authorizer, the School Reform Commission (which will be replaced by the new board), has informed charter applicants about high-needs areas and priority school types, but under the state charter law cannot prioritize neighborhood need in authorizing decisions. The SDP Charter Schools Office has supported the SRC's authorizing by improving quality oversight and evaluation practices with the goal of creating a stronger pool of charter schools overall, but is unable to encourage more strategic siting due to the state charter law. Given the gaps in achievement and access for low-income students, it is critical for both the district and charter sector to deepen community engagement to understand what families want, and rapidly increase options in high-need areas. The new governance structure may open up opportunities for leadership on this issue.

▶ **Simplifying enrollment and supporting families through the school choice process**

Interviewees cited confusing application timelines and processes as a significant challenge for families in accessing quality schools. In efforts led by the Philadelphia Schools Partnership, the charter sector has made progress on aligning enrollment timelines and is taking steps to build a common online application with the goal of going live next fall. But the district still uses a separate application for choice schools that is due much earlier than most charter applications. Short of fully unifying enrollment, the district could take steps to streamline the process by pushing their application deadline back to align better with most charters, and could consider providing information or links on how to apply to charter schools on their school selection website. To accompany these efforts, education leaders can expand support to new and existing organizations that help parents navigate the enrollment and school choice process in order to make sure that choice is working for families.

Spotlight

Training School Leaders to Improve Student Outcomes, Teacher Recruitment, and Their Own Skills

A group of leaders from district, charter, and parochial schools is taking steps to improve instructional practice and learn from one another through the Philadelphia Academy of School Leaders. The initiative, now in its fourth year, has trained more than 60 principals to improve their craft over the course of a two-year program tailored to the specific context of Philadelphia schools.

Leaders share strategies for addressing common problems, including teacher retention and student absences, alongside a professional development curriculum focused on leadership essentials.

Participants in the program report a higher principal retention rate than leaders in comparable schools. These successes have led to increased collaboration between the nonprofit, SDP, and other cross-sector talent pipeline efforts like PhillyPLUS. Together, these programs are beginning to partner more formally to build mutual understanding and create pathways for effective teaching and leadership in all schools.
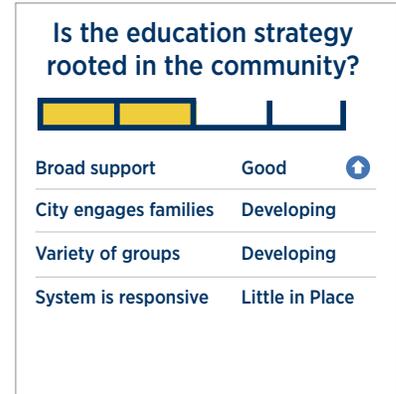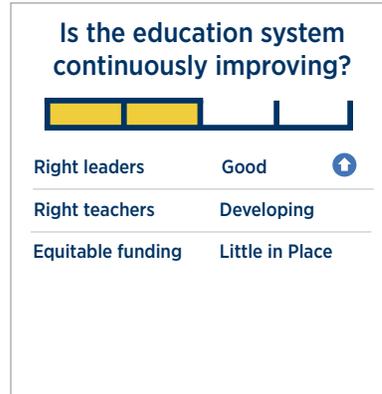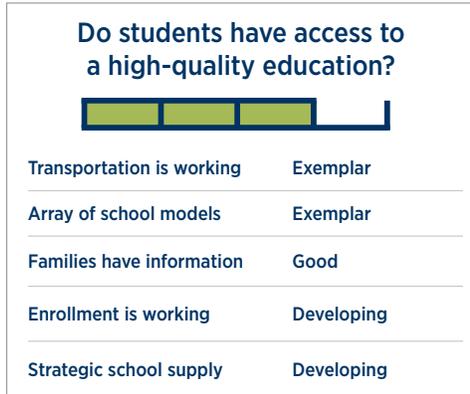
Using Parent Perspectives to Achieve Academic Transformation

Over the past two years, SDP has created more meaningful pathways for community participation on the school and system level through newly redesigned School Advisory Councils (SAC) and a new Family Academy Courses and Training (FACT) program. The SAC program has existed for several years, but in 2016, the district shifted policy to require each school to include an SAC and expand the roles and responsibilities of members. SACs now advise school leaders on budget, academic improvement, and other school community issues.

The district is taking steps to train school council members through the new FACT program so members can more deeply understand school-level data, budgeting, curriculum, and other topics. Principals are given training and support on how to effectively partner with their SACs.

School advisory councils are a strategy that other cities are exploring, but SDP's efforts to support these councils through training members and school leaders is a promising practice. While the new FACT program is still building capacity to meet parents' needs, leaders report that in the long run they will know the program is successful if parents trust the district as a partner, and leaders are able to stand with parents to advocate for students. As the program grows, leaders will need to ensure that SACs are representative of the school community, and that they open up avenues to broader system engagement.

System Reforms

Do students have access to a high-quality education?

Transportation is working	Exemplar
Array of school models	Exemplar
Families have information	Good
Enrollment is working	Developing
Strategic school supply	Developing

Is the education system continuously improving?

Right leaders	Good	⬆
Right teachers	Developing	
Equitable funding	Little in Place	

Is the education strategy rooted in the community?

Broad support	Good	⬆
City engages families	Developing	
Variety of groups	Developing	
System is responsive	Little in Place	

Little in Place | Developing | Good | Exemplar | Increase or Decrease ⬆⬇

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

Philadelphia families have access to information about school options, students have access to free transportation to all schools, and the city is building a diverse school supply. To inform the education strategy, the city needs to amend current policies to ensure that schools are able to locate where they are most needed, streamline enrollment time-lines, and provide more engagement opportunities for families most impacted by low-performing schools.

Do students have access to a high-quality education?

Good

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 neigh-borhood, and how well the choice process is working for families who want to use it.

Exemplar

Is transportation working for families?

The district provides all students outside of the 1.5 mile walk zone with free transportation (by transit pass or bus) to any school of choice: district, charter, or private. Despite the challenges associated with young students using a public transit system, community leaders do not cite this as a significant barrier for families. Community leaders say that families want high-quality school options within walking distance, but perceive that many neighborhoods still lack such options.

Exemplar

Does the school supply represent an array of models?

About one-third of the district and charter schools that opened, restarted, or expanded between 2014-15 and 2017-18 use a non-traditional instructional model, like project-based learning or personalized approaches. However, school model variety is more limited in low-income communities.

Good

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

Information about performance, enrollment, and school culture is available for all district, charter, and parochial schools through the Great Philly Schools website, which is operated by the Philadelphia Schools Partnership. The SDP Charter Schools Office's directory offers similar information for charter schools, as well as performance, curriculum, finance, and evaluation data, and SDP has also made data more transparent through their new School Profiles site. Despite the plethora of information available, community leaders report that families still need more information about student services like special education and ELL, and more support to choose schools that are a good fit.

Developing

Is the enrollment process working for families?

SDP and the charter sector have separate enrollment systems, and deadlines are not aligned. Community members report that many families—especially low-income families—are not aware of SDP's deadline for applying to district choice schools, including selective admissions and non-assigned neighborhood schools, which comes much earlier than charter school deadlines. However, there is progress within the charter sector. The Philadelphia School Partnership, a local nonprofit, has launched a common application, which the majority of charter schools use, and is working toward a common online enrollment system for the 2019-2020 school year. Most charter schools also adhere to one of two enrollment deadlines. The Philadelphia Schools Partnership holds an annual school fair showcasing all schools in the city, charter and district. The district also hosts choice fairs every year.

Developing

Is the city strategically managing its school portfolio?

While many strategies are in place to improve the school supply, there remain barriers to implementation. SDP and the School Reform Commission (SRC), which has been the city's only charter authorizer, collect and use data in line with the citywide school portfolio plan, the System of Great Schools. SDP is adding schools to the Turnaround Network (schools that receive extra resources for internal turnaround), but there is a perception among some education leaders that the SRC has not used data aggressively enough to invest in school improvement or close persistently under-performing schools. Under the newly appointed school board, this may change. The district's signature turnaround strategy, the Renaissance Schools Initiative, has been on hold until an evaluation can be completed. The SDP issues RFPs that specify what kind of models are needed for new district schools, but interviewees reported that there are few quality applicants. Within the charter sector, there is an over-abundance of K-8 and K-12 schools, which limit opportunities for students to enroll in middle or high school charter schools, and there is a perception that schools are not consistently opening where needed. By state charter law, charter school applications cannot be denied based on lack of need alone, limiting the district's ability to strategically plan school openings. However, SDP's Charter School Office has continued to improve oversight and support to authorizing and renewal practices, most recently by revamping its performance framework to better align with federal and state policies as well as feedback from the charter sector.

Is the education system continuously improving?

Developing

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?

Our interviewees identified school leader quality as uneven in both sectors, with strong leadership lacking in district comprehensive high schools and charter school that are expanding or replicating. Several cross-sector fellowship and pipeline efforts are in place to build talent, like the Philadelphia Academy of School Leaders and PhillyPLUS. To attract strong candidates that are a good fit for their schools, SDP has developed a 'competency map' for school leaders and is working to align hiring processes with these competencies. SDP is also starting to manage and develop clear leadership pathways, match experienced leaders to schools, and create a more competitive hiring process by starting recruitment earlier in the year.

Developing

Do schools have the kinds of teachers they need?

Teacher fit and quality are issues in both district and charter schools. SDP has expanded its evaluation team to push for greater quality and identify specific teacher development needs. It is also starting to use differentiated retention strategies to reduce the attrition of effective teachers. Education leaders say that more special education and STEM-certified teachers are needed in both district and charter schools. Philadelphia has done a good job of forming cross-sector partnerships to address these gaps through pipeline, development, and residency programs, like the Relay Teaching Residency and expanded partnerships with local schools of education.

Little in Place

Does funding equitably follow students?

In 2016, Pennsylvania began using a weighted formula to distribute money to districts, but as of 2017, the district still allocated funds to schools using staffing formulas rather than basing allocation on costs within specific schools. Schools had little discretion over budgets based on an analysis of Fiscal Year 2017-18. Anecdotally, SDP has recently increased support to its neediest schools.

Is the education strategy rooted in the community?

Developing

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.

Good

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

In late 2017, the partially state-appointed School Reform Commission voted to dissolve itself and return SDP to local, mayoral control. Mayor Kenney has appointed a new school board, and there has been little public opposition to this move. There is optimism over the possibilities for the new leadership, and public support is strong. However, issues like charter expansion, teacher compensation, and school choice remain politically contentious, so the new board faces challenging work ahead.

Developing

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

In the past year, the district has taken steps toward more regular engagement with families about school openings and closures. The district partnered with Temple University and third-party facilitators to better involve families in exploring options for schools flagged for turnaround. The district has also implemented school advisory councils to improve parent engagement within schools. However, these councils do not inform system-level decisions. The Charter Schools Office holds public meetings, but these are sparsely attended. In 2017, interviewees noted that because of lengthy appeals processes, final decisions about charter school closures are sometimes made after enrollment deadlines, leaving families scrambling to find a new school.

Developing

Are a variety of groups engaged in education?

Local businesses, faith-based communities, local funders, and the teachers union are engaged in education in the city. However, community leaders say that many of these perspectives are not representative of all families and that black and Hispanic community members and parents representing low-performing schools are often left out of the conversation. Organizations like Parent Power and Educational Opportunities for Families do help fill this gap.

Little in Place

Does the education system respond to community feedback?

SDP, the Charter Schools Office, and many charter schools are trying to improve responsiveness by creating more formal avenues for families to provide feedback. SDP recently launched the Family Academy, which provides classes to help parents advocate for their students and schools. But community members say there is still a widespread perception among families that the education system does not listen to the needs of the entire community. Some feel that the engagement process favors those with the loudest voices, who are often the most resourced, and that education leaders mainly seek input on issues they see as priorities, rather then soliciting issues of concern to community members. At the school level, interviewees in 2017 said that some school leaders can be unwelcoming and unresponsive to the needs of low-income families.

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.
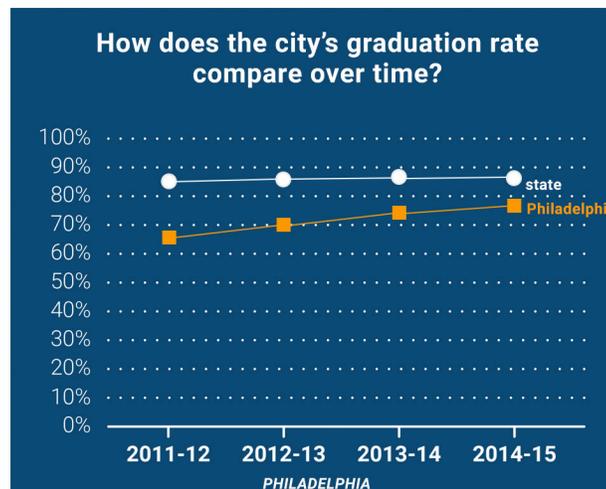
Score Levels

| Little in place | Developing | Progressing | Excelling | Increase or Decrease |
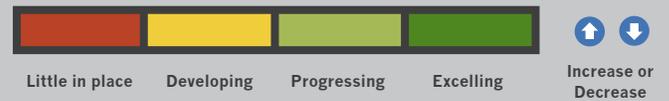
Key Takeaways: Student & School Outcomes

Graduation rates in Philadelphia have improved over time relative to the state, but remain below the state average. School proficiency rates did not show statistically significant improvement relative to the state, and remained about 20 percentage points below state averages. Disparities also persist. Low-income students in the city are performing slightly lower in math and reading assessments than their peers nationally. In advanced coursework in high school, black students were underenrolled, while Asian American, Pacific Islander, and students of more than one race were overenrolled.
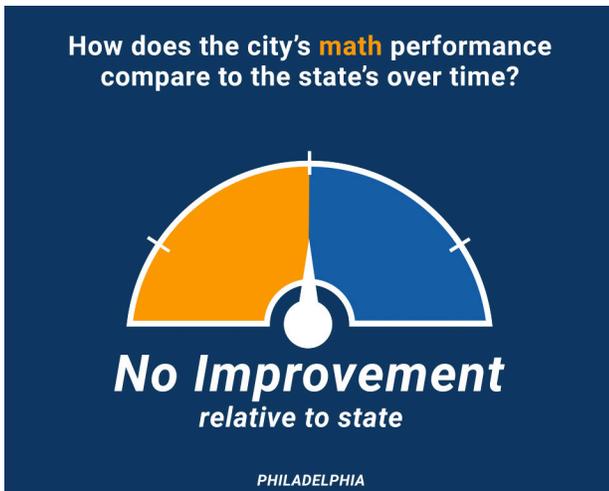
Is the education system continuously improving?

How does the city's graduation rate compare over time?

state
Philadelphia

2011-12   2012-13   2013-14   2014-15

PHILADELPHIA

▶ **The city's graduation rate has increased over time, but in 2014-15 it was still 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, 2011-12 to 2014-15.

How does the city's math performance compare to the state's over time?

No Improvement
relative to state

PHILADELPHIA

▶ Between 2012-13 and 2014-15, the city's math performance trends mirrored the state's. In 2014-15, the city's proficiency rate was 21 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: Pennsylvania performance data, 2012-13 to 2014-15.

How does the city's reading performance compare to the state's over time?
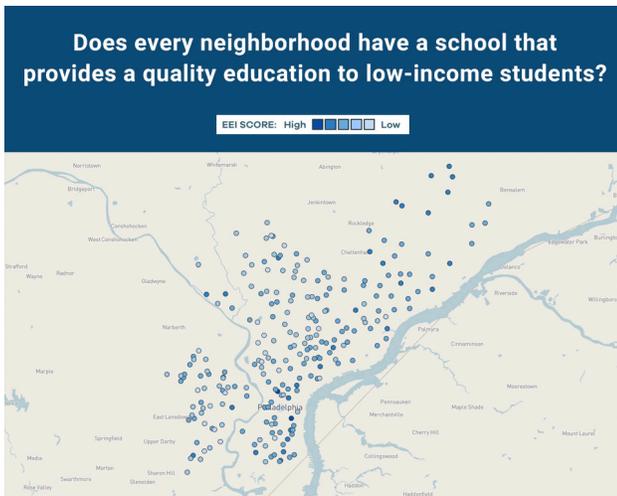
No Improvement
relative to state

PHILADELPHIA

▶ Between 2012-13 and 2014-15, the city's reading performance trends mirrored the state's. In 2014-15, the city's proficiency rate was 22 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.

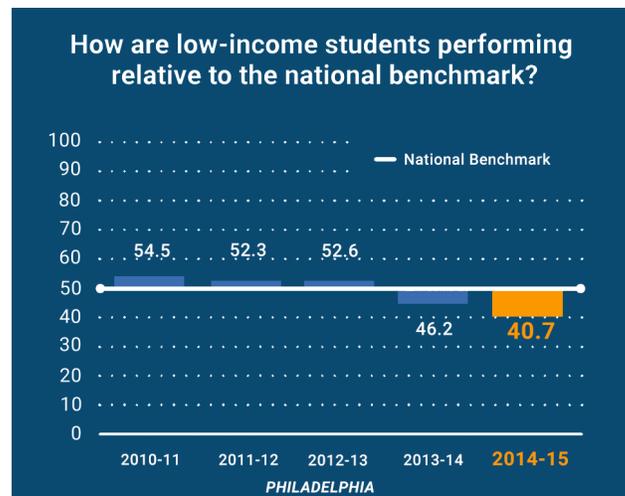*Source: Pennsylvania performance data, 2012-13 to 2014-15.*

Do students have access to a high-quality education?

Does every neighborhood have a school that provides a quality education to low-income students?

EEI SCORE: High ▪▫▫▫▫ Low

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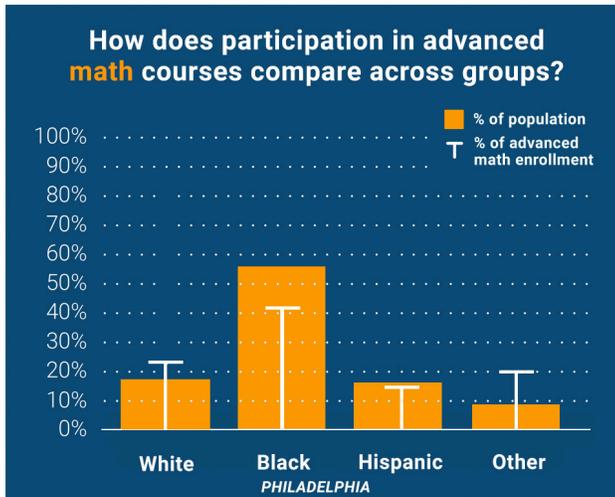
Sources: Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2010-11 to 2014-15; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2010-11 to 2014-15.

How are low-income students performing relative to the national benchmark?

— National Benchmark

54.5   52.3   52.6

46.2   **40.7**

2010-11   2011-12   2012-13   2013-14   **2014-15**

PHILADELPHIA

▶ Students from low-income families in Philadelphia are performing somewhat lower in math and reading than low-income students in the average city. EEI scores in Philadelphia have decreased by 7% over time.

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

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

How does participation in advanced math courses compare across groups?

% of population

% of advanced math enrollment

100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%

White   Black   Hispanic   Other

PHILADELPHIA

▶ In 2013-14, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and students of more than one race (shown here as "Other") were enrolling in high school advanced math coursework at rates above their enrollment in the high school population, while black students had disproportionately low enrollment.

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

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

Data & Scoring

Where did we get this data?

▶ Publicly available state and federal data, making our results comparable and reproducible.

▶ The most up-to-date data available for all 18 cities at the time of our data collection. See Methodology & Resources for more information.

What makes the data citywide?

▶ We include all charter and district schools within the municipal boundary of a city.

▶ In Houston, Indianapolis, Memphis, New Orleans, and San Antonio we use school data from multiple districts within the municipal boundary.

About Philadelphia

In 2018, the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) returned to local control for the first time in 17 years, with a new school board replacing the School Reform Commission. Severe funding challenges have dogged Philadelphia for years which, combined with falling enrollment, forced SDP to close 10% of its schools in 2013. Charter schools have been operating in the city since 1997, and now account for nearly a third of total public school enrollment. The SDP's Renaissance Schools Initiative is a cooperative effort between the district and high-performing charter management organizations to turn around the city's lowest-performing schools. Since its inception in 2010, 22 Renaissance schools have opened throughout the city.

School Choice in the City

Families can choose district magnet schools, citywide charter schools, or any district school outside of their neighborhood as long as enrollment at that school is under 85% capacity.
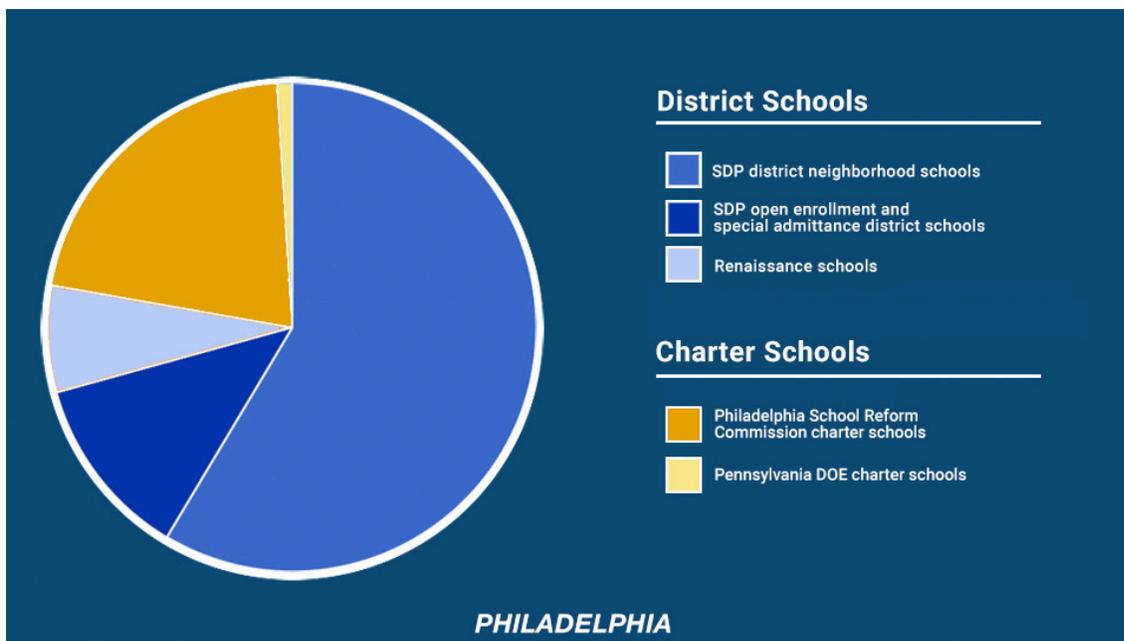
Governance Model

The mayor appoints board members who oversee SDP schools and authorize charter schools. The new board is replacing the School Reform Commission for the 2018-19 school year.

2015 District and Charter Student Body

Enrollment: 194,557 students
Race and ethnicity: 55% black, 19% Hispanic, 14% white, 12% other
Low-income: 85% free and reduced-price lunch

2017 School Composition

District Schools

- SDP district neighborhood schools
- SDP open enrollment and special admittance district schools
- Renaissance schools

Charter Schools

- Philadelphia School Reform Commission charter schools
- Pennsylvania DOE charter schools

PHILADELPHIA

Source: Enrollment data from EDFacts, 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.