

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Foreword</b> .....	2
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	7
<b>Introduction</b> .....	10
<b>Findings</b> .....	18
The Nation's Best Cities for School Reform .....	18
The Middle of the Pack .....	20
The Nation's Worst Cities for School Reform .....	22
Taking A Closer Look .....	23
Cities Matter .....	23
The Impact of Collective Bargaining .....	25
Performance Across the Cateories .....	26
Performance by Category .....	27
<b>Implications</b> .....	33
<b>Appendices</b> .....	35
Appendix A: Methodology .....	35
Appendix B: Scoring Rubric .....	39
Appendix C .....	49

The Thomas B. Fordham Institute is a nonprofit organization that conducts research, issues publications, and directs action projects in elementary and secondary education reform at the national level and in Ohio, with special emphasis on our hometown of Dayton. It is affiliated with the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, and this publication is a joint project of the Foundation and the Institute. For further information, please visit our website at [www.edexcellence.net](http://www.edexcellence.net) or write to the Institute at 1016 16th St. NW, 8th Floor, Washington, DC 20036. The Institute is neither connected with nor sponsored by Fordham University.

This report and others on this topic are available in full on the Institute's website: [www.edexcellence.net](http://www.edexcellence.net).

# FOREWORD

By Chester E. Finn, Jr. and Amber M. Winkler

Not long ago, Education Sector policy director Kevin Carey perceptively captured the current zeitgeist in education reform—and how swiftly it has changed<sup>1</sup>:

When I began working on education policy full-time in the early 2000s, the center of gravity in education reform sat with the coalition of civil rights advocates, business leaders, and reform-minded governors of both parties who pushed NCLB through Congress in 2001. To find that same hum of ideas and influence today, you'd head straight for the annual New Schools Venture Fund Summit and its confluence of charter school operators, TFA alumni, urban reformers, philanthropies, and various related “edupreneurs.”

Indeed, education entrepreneurialism is all the rage—at least if you see the world through magazine articles and conference keynotes. Think of Teach For America and New Leaders for New Schools, of KIPP and Uncommon Schools, of Wireless Generation, K12, EdisonLearning, SchoolNet, and so many more players that scarcely existed a few years back.

But is this spirit of innovation and enterprise embraced by today's real world of public education, especially in America's big cities, where the greatest challenges can be found? Alas, not so much. Too few of our major metropolises have the talent, leadership, infrastructure, culture, and resources—both human and financial—to beckon enterprising reformers and then help them to succeed there. That's one core finding of this study. The other finding is more encouraging: A handful of communities have succeeded in creating healthy reform environments. The actual, as Kant observed, proves the possible. If a few places can begin to resemble Silicon Valley when it comes to education reform, others could, too. Be warned, however, that it isn't easy.

---

According to the *Dictionary of American History*, “Silicon Valley” came to “symbolize a type of high-risk business characterized by rapid success or failure.”<sup>2</sup> The individual most often credited with the start of Silicon Valley was William Shockley, an English physicist who worked to develop the transistor at Bell Laboratories before World War II. He was “a restless person whose inquisitive mind and entrepreneurial aspirations did not find satisfaction in the larger corporation [i.e., Bell Labs]” and who subsequently left to establish Shockley Semiconductor Laboratories just south of Palo Alto. Other electronics start-ups, including Intel, Atari, and Apple, were launched by talented individuals who once worked at Shockley.

But it wasn't just the influx of human talent into northern California that birthed an entire high-tech industry there. Look deeper and you find other key ingredients that made the area ripe for entrepreneurial activity.

---

1. “Whatever Happened to No Child Left Behind?,” *Quick and the Ed*, June 25, 2010, <http://www.quickanded.com/2010/06/whatever-happened-to-no-child-left-behind.html>.

2. Stanley I. Kutler (ed.), *A Dictionary of American History*, 3rd ed. (New York City, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2002).

These talented individuals thrived in a culture that eschewed traditional large-scale firms and the unions that came with them. They had access to world-class universities and deep-pocketed investors in search of promising ventures. They benefited from positive publicity and interest in their efforts. They developed rich social networks with all sorts of other organizations. They enjoyed an ample supply of financial, managerial, and legal expertise. And they worked during a time when political and economic power in America was shifting away from the industrial Midwest and toward the information technology emphasis of the Pacific West. In other words, the Valley boasted an “ecosystem” that attracted entrepreneurs and helped them succeed.

Could a healthy ecosystem be the key to education entrepreneurship, too? We think so, and that’s largely because we’ve been convinced by the groundbreaking work of Frederick M. Hess, director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute. Widely known as an intellectual entrepreneur and maverick, Rick wrote his first book about education entrepreneurship nearly a decade ago (*Revolution at the Margins*), when many were still trying to figure out what the term meant. And he recently published *Education Unbound*, which calls upon educators and policy makers to embrace freedom and innovation. We asked Rick to apply his theories about entrepreneurship to a practical study of major U.S. cities. He agreed—and Fordham analysts Stafford Palmieri and Janie Scull consented to join him.

In this report, the Hess team examines six areas that are vital to a reform-friendly ecosystem: 1) access to an ample supply of human talent; 2) a pipeline of readily accessible funding—venture capital and operating dollars alike—from private and public sources; 3) a thriving charter-school sector; 4) attention to quality-control metrics to guide and regulate entrepreneurial ventures; 5) receptivity to nontraditional providers<sup>3</sup> (including clearing hurdles that would otherwise impede them) and to reforms at the district level; and 6) similar receptivity at the municipal level.

Authors examined the school-reform environments in the nation’s twenty-five largest cities, plus five smaller communities. As reputed “hotbeds” of reform, they reasoned, these five additional locales (Albany, NY; Gary, IN; New Orleans, LA; Newark, NJ; Washington, D.C.) would permit comparisons of big cities with smaller but potentially more nimble places.

They tapped three types of data. The first was public information gleaned from large national databases and organizations (e.g., evaluations of state charter-school laws and data systems, participation levels in alternative teacher-certification programs, and per-pupil spending figures). Since many of the data they sought were not readily available (or even collected), two new surveys were also administered. One went to leaders in national organizations—mostly nontraditional providers themselves—that are actively involved in cities across the nation. They were asked to rate comparatively, insofar as they possessed the requisite knowledge and/or experience, the cities in our sample on the six areas above. The second survey obtained more granular data about school system behaviors and community-level reform infrastructure and climate from on-the-ground education reformers in each city.

---

3. These are entities that operate either inside or in concert with districts, colleges of education, or district schools. Their roles vary: Some provide schooling options other than traditional schools, others recruit or train teachers, and still others develop new tools, technologies, data systems, and learning aids that help solve operational challenges and/or boost achievement.

## What were the results?

Nine cities bubbled to the top of the reform-friendly heap: New Orleans; Washington, D.C.; New York City; Denver; Jacksonville; Charlotte; Austin; Houston; and Fort Worth. They all earned Bs. There were no As.

Six cities landed at the bottom with Ds and Fs: San Jose, San Diego, Albany, Philadelphia, Gary, and Detroit.

Among the six realms we examined, cities generally fared best at securing financial capital. They were less attentive to managing their human capital pipelines, i.e., recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers, and they fared badly when it came to district environment. Here a third of them received failing grades, generally due to skittish leaders and bureaucratic fiefdoms hostile to nontraditional problem-solvers.

Some variation emerged within states. In California, for example, San Francisco ranked a respectable 10th place nationally while San Diego lagged at 22nd.

---

What to make of these results? On the one hand, they aren't too shocking. Everybody knows about exciting reforms underway in New Orleans, Washington, New York, Houston, and Denver. And everybody bemoans the sorry plight of unyielding education systems in declining communities such as Detroit and Gary.

But not everybody would have predicted that Austin, Charlotte, Jacksonville, and Fort Worth would turn out to be hotbeds of edupreneurship. It appears that Austin benefits from the long and successful run of superintendent Pascal "Pat" Forgione as well as the general spirit of innovation that pervades the community—not to mention a fairly weak teachers' union. Charlotte has a well-run countywide school system with lots of middle-class support, and a labor environment conducive to reform. Jacksonville profits from the aggressive reforms of the Jeb Bush era in Florida as well as a burgeoning reform-friendly, local philanthropic community—and a strong state charter law. Fort Worth is home to a strong municipal environment and a school district that actively uses data to adjust its policies and programs.

A scan of the bottom-scoring cities reveals that reform apathy plays no geographic favorites. In their overall lack of receptivity to entrepreneurial education reform, we don't find much difference between such "rust belt" cities as Detroit and Gary and more prosperous (and populous) coastal and "sun belt" locales like San Jose, San Diego, and Philadelphia. None is attracting large numbers of eager innovators and none boasts reform-friendly labor policies. Many feature calcified bureaucracies and lethargic municipal leaders.

Is there hope for the laggards? Indeed, yes. This study outlines enormous opportunities for mayors, school systems, and business leaders to turn things around, though such transformations won't come easily or fast. But then, Silicon Valley did not become a hotbed of innovation over night. It took decades to infuse the region with the financial capital, talent, networks, and expertise that make it what it has become.

To move their community seriously toward entrepreneurial education reform, leaders of that community need to think very differently than in the past. Monopolies and top-down reforms by themselves only get you so far. Competition is healthy for the public sector and so is innovation. There's a nimbleness and creativity to nongovernmental providers. But the injection of a small amount of entrepreneurialism doesn't inoculate the entire body or transform the whole ecosystem. This needs to grow and it needs to grow energetically, smartly, and in a sustained way.

Nor should one expect instantaneous results. Just as new business activity in your city (e.g., the launch there of a bio-tech firm) takes a while to pay off in real economic growth, we find no immediate relationship between the reform-friendly grades for cities in this study and gains in pupil achievement. No education reform—entrepreneurial or top-down—boosts test scores overnight. It needs to get traction, to attain reasonable scale, to change actual behavior and alter traditional practices.

### Big Fat Caveat

The findings reported in these pages will upset some folks in every city that we profile. (Some of them are friends of ours, too.) So let us acknowledge up front that the methods we used to grade cities, while commonsensical, are nonetheless fragile. They rely on surveys that didn't always yield the hoped-for response rates and on analyses and interpretations by people who don't live in—and may never even have visited—the places they're depicting. Individuals on the front lines in those places may reasonably charge us with casting too negative a light on good work about which they know and in which they may even be participating. We also may be accused of reporting imprecise or misleading data. That said, the report's findings are indeed based on a variety of publicly available data, as well as national and local survey data. All judgments found herein are to be attributed to the report's authors, not their informants.

As for those who don't share our vision of "reform" or believe in the entrepreneurial approach to rekindling American education, we look forward to your, ahem, analysis of our analysis.

Fostering entrepreneurial reform is no silver bullet, either. Also essential are quality teachers, rigorous academic standards, rich curricula, vibrant school choice, capable school leaders, data-based decision-making, astute governance, rational finances, and scads of other ingredients called for in the recipe for effective K-12 education. Many of these elements begin with sound, learning-centered, kid-oriented public policies and effective district (and state) leadership. But most of them also happen faster and better if those policies and leaders are open to innovation and assistance from entrepreneurs.

That's really the lesson of this report. America's most promising education hotspots *blend* sound "top-down" policies with environments that welcome entrepreneurial activity and private initiative. The welcoming becomes part and parcel of their public policies as well as their community culture. And their superintendents, chancellors, mayors, and other community leaders encourage and facilitate this blending because they understand that it works better than government alone, even though opening the door and ushering nontraditional folks through it causes dismay in the usual places.

Other communities could open their doors, too. And their children would benefit.

## Acknowledgments

Many people and organizations helped make this study possible. Our thanks go to the Walton Family Foundation for its support of Fordham's work on charter schools and school choice, and to the Achelis Foundation, The Boston Foundation, Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation, Inc., and Houston Endowment Inc. for their support of this project in particular. This study was also supported in part by our sister organization, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.

Special thanks to Rick Hess, who is not only one of America's foremost education scholars but also a longtime friend. This report is the latest in a lengthening series of insightful studies that he has contributed to or conducted for Fordham, including an analysis of collective bargaining agreements in large school districts (*Leadership Limbo*, 2008) and thought pieces on the uses of education data (*A Byte at the Apple*, 2008) and on school superintendents and the law (*From Schoolhouse to Courthouse*, 2009). Fordham-based coauthors Stafford Palmieri and Janie Scull also spent countless hours on this report from start to finish. Their attention to detail and perseverance are greatly appreciated. Michael Petrilli, Vice President for National Programs and Policy, offered plenty of guidance, solutions, and encouragement, as well as skillful editing.

We're thankful, too, for the hard work of many others on the Fordham team, including interns Charlotte Underwood, Hannah Miller, Jack Byers, Kyle Kennedy, and Saul Spady, public affairs director Amy Fagan, new-media manager Laura Pohl, copyeditor Erin Montgomery, and designer Bill Buttaggi.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study evaluates how welcoming thirty American cities—the twenty-five largest and five smaller “hotspots”—are to “nontraditional” problem-solvers and solutions. It assumes that the balky bureaucracies meant to improve K-12 education and hold leaders accountable are so calcified by policies, programs, contracts, and culture that only in the most exceptional of circumstances can they be fixed simply by top-down applications of new curricula or pedagogy.

Enter the education entrepreneur, a problem-solver who has developed a different and—it is to be hoped—better approach to teaching and learning, either inside or outside the traditional school system. He or she may provide, among other things, a novel form of brick and mortar teaching, an alternative version of teacher recruitment or training, or time-saving software and tools that make for more efficient instruction and surer learning. Which cities would welcome and support such problem-solvers by helping to bring their ideas to scale, improve their odds of success, and nurture their growth? Put another way, which cities have the most reform-friendly ecosystems?

To answer this question, analysts examined six domains that shape a jurisdiction’s receptivity to education reform:

- 1 Human Capital:** Entrepreneurs need access to a ready flow of talented individuals, whether to staff their own operations or fill the district’s classrooms.
- 2 Financial Capital:** A pipeline of flexible funding from private and/or public sources is vital for nonprofit organizations trying to break into a new market or scale up their operations.
- 3 Charter Environment:** Charter schools are one of the primary entrees through which entrepreneurs can penetrate new markets, both as direct education providers and as consumers of other nontraditional goods and services.
- 4 Quality Control:** Lest we unduly credit innovation per se, the study takes into account the quality-control metrics that appraise and guide entrepreneurial ventures.
- 5 District Environment:** Because many nontraditional providers must contract with the district in order to work in the city, finding a district that is both open to nontraditional reforms and has the organizational capacity to deal with them in a speedy and professional manner can make or break an entrepreneur’s foray into a new market.
- 6 Municipal Environment:** Beyond the school district, is the broader community open to, even eager for, nontraditional providers? Consider, for example, the stance of business leaders, the mayor, and the media.

Drawing on publicly available data, national and local survey data, and interviews with on-the-ground insiders, analysts devised a grading metric that rated each city on its individual and collective accomplishments in each of these areas.

What did they discover? Few cities are rolling out the red carpet for education entrepreneurs. No cities were awarded As and just a handful of cities received Bs when measured for their hospitality towards reformers. The majority fell in the C range, half a dozen in the D to F range, and the remainder had too little data to judge (see Table 1, page 8). Low-scoring cities were characterized by lethargic district

**TABLE 1: Reform-Friendliness:  
Final Grades in Rank Order**

RANK	CITY	FINAL REFORM-FRIENDLY GRADE
1	New Orleans	B
2	Washington, D.C.	B
3	New York	B
4	Denver	B
5	Jacksonville	B
6	Charlotte	B
7	Austin	B
8	Houston	B
9	Fort Worth	B
10	San Francisco	C
11	Chicago	C
12	Dallas	C
13	Indianapolis	C
14	Memphis	C
15	Boston	C
16	Los Angeles	C
17	Baltimore	C
18	Columbus	C
19	Milwaukee	C
20	Newark	C
21	San Jose	D
22	San Diego	D
23	Albany	D
24	Philadelphia	D
25	Gary	D
26	Detroit	F
N/A	El Paso	no grade
N/A	Phoenix	no grade
N/A	San Antonio	no grade
N/A	Seattle	no grade

**TABLE 2: Reform-Friendliness:  
Final Grades in Alphabetical Order**

CITY	FINAL REFORM-FRIENDLY GRADE
Albany	D
Austin	B
Baltimore	C
Boston	C
Charlotte	B
Chicago	C
Columbus	C
Dallas	C
Denver	B
Detroit	F
El Paso	no grade
Fort Worth	B
Gary	D
Houston	B
Indianapolis	C
Jacksonville	B
Los Angeles	C
Memphis	C
Milwaukee	C
New Orleans	B
New York	B
Newark	C
Philadelphia	D
Phoenix	no grade
San Antonio	no grade
San Diego	D
San Francisco	C
San Jose	D
Seattle	no grade
Washington, D.C.	B



administration, inert political leadership, arcane staffing policies, and unsupportive (or silent) local business and philanthropic communities.

We also found that cities are making greater strides in some areas than others:

- They do best at drumming up sources of financial capital to advance reform: Nine cities earned As and ten earned Bs; support from outside the district is also strong, with municipal environment seeing nine As and eight Bs.
- They fare least well when it comes to district environment, where a third got Fs.
- Grades were generally mixed with respect to human capital, charter environment, and quality control.

Finally, substantial variation exists within states that had more than one city in the study. This suggests that entrepreneurial fate is not sealed by state lines: local officials, educators, and reformers can shape their own destiny.

- Of the four cities graded in California, San Francisco finished tenth overall while Los Angeles ranked sixteenth. San Jose and San Diego placed twenty-first and twenty-second, respectively.
- And in Texas, which had four cities in the final rankings, the spread in the national rankings was small, with Austin finishing seventh, Houston eighth, Fort Worth ninth, and Dallas twelfth.
- Less surprisingly, in Indiana, Indianapolis scored thirteenth nationally while Gary finished twenty-fifth; in New York, NYC finished third nationally, and Albany came in twenty-third.

# INTRODUCTION

Americans have tended to discuss school reform in terms of efforts to impose solutions on systems. Those solutions may involve new reading programs or pedagogies, site-based management or block scheduling, sometimes even new school configurations and models. While there's much variety among these reforms, they all arise from the view that improving K-12 schooling is mostly a task of superintendents, with the approval of their boards or mayors or whomever, successfully imposing the right mix of changes on the bureaucracies they lead.

The present study arises from a very different philosophy of reform. It presumes that many of these balky old bureaucracies are so calcified by policies and programs, contracts and culture, that they cannot be fixed simply by top-down applications of new curricula or pedagogies. It proceeds instead from the assumption that what reform requires is the opportunity for problem-solvers to devise and bring to scale better approaches to teaching and learning, whether inside or outside of school systems. What such endeavors need to put down roots and flourish are the conditions—"ecosystems," we call them—that invite problem-solving, welcome and support problem-solvers from all directions, improve the odds of success, and nurture and encourage growth.

Though policy plays a critical role in cultivating such opportunities, local ecosystems are not just about statutes, regulations, procedures, and formulae. An ecosystem perspective reflects a far more Tocquevillian vision. It assumes there are things that federal and state government (and even local government) cannot effectively do, and that a vibrant educational environment in which children and schools flourish demands substantial dollops of private and community activity. Such things can be encouraged but they cannot be mandated. Note that we are not fixed here on "buy-in" to a top-down reform plan, but rather on a vision in which entities like media, foundations, and private nonprofits each have distinct but essential roles to play. This study, then, examines how well America's largest cities provide dynamic education problem-solvers the opportunities, scaffolds, and other supports they need to succeed.

## Hard-to-learn lessons

School systems have tried for decades to emulate, import, or impose one heralded pilot site or program after another. Such efforts have mostly been earnest but rarely successful. They've been plagued by the barnacles that encumber today's school systems, including inefficient human resource departments, constrictive collective bargaining agreements, outdated technology, ill-designed management information systems, and other structural impediments.

Continuing in this mode does not bode well for our children. It's time to view education reform through different lenses and to clear pathways for other sorts of initiatives with greater odds of succeeding. In sector after sector, solving new problems—or more effectively tackling old ones—has been the province of new entrants.

But these ventures run into many hindrances on the ground. Some are formal barriers, others subtle, informal impediments. The formal kind include regulations that hamper the opening of a charter school, state licensure systems that make it costly and onerous for candidates to obtain teaching certification, and textbook approval systems so arduous that only the largest publishers are able to compete successfully. The informal kind includes political sniping, operational routines, and cultural norms.

Knocking down such obstacles is part of equipping problem-solvers to succeed—and too often that important work has been tackled in piecemeal fashion, often dependent on the reign of an outsized personality in the superintendent’s office or the product of extraordinary circumstance (most famously, when Hurricane Katrina toppled most of the structures, arrangements, and norms that had long prevailed in New Orleans). But creating an environment in which problem-solvers can succeed entails more than knocking down barriers. It also entails fostering nimble, cooperative, and performance-oriented district and municipal governance; resources; talent; infrastructure; and sensible quality control.

### What does “nontraditional” mean anyway?

If the province of solving new problems is frequently the province of new providers, then such endeavors represent critical pieces of the school improvement puzzle. These new, specialized, and entrepreneurial providers are typically described by the umbrella term “nontraditional”—they operate outside the “traditional” system of school districts, colleges of education, and brick and mortar schools. However, these ventures are noteworthy not because they are “nontraditional” per se, but because they have been created free from the bureaucracy, aged arrangements, unwieldy contracts, multiplicity of cooks, and political interference that hamper traditional districts and programs. Readers will note that term is frequently used in this report.

Their roles vary: Some provide schooling options other than traditional district schools (e.g., charter schools, virtual education), others recruit or train teachers or leaders in alternative ways, and still others develop new tools, technologies, data systems, and learning aids that can help solve operational challenges or boost achievement. It can be useful to think of these endeavors as falling into three categories: school builders, talent providers, and tool builders.

Some of these ventures are marquee organizations like Teach For America, the KIPP Academies, Green Dot Public Schools, New Leaders for New Schools, and The New Teacher Project. But there are also several dozen less well-known enterprises such as Wireless Generation, National Heritage Academies, Smarthinking, Citizen Schools, Tutor.com, Schoolnet, CaseNEX, Citizen Schools, YES Prep, Aspire, and Teach Plus.

## Purpose

This study, then, asks not whether cities have embraced this or that promising organizational reform, new program, or widely hyped instructional model, but whether they are creating opportunities to solve problems and build smarter ventures. It identifies places where district and state policy makers and local reformers have gotten this right, partly right—or not at all right. It also provides a template for the kinds of changes that can help transform lethargic urban communities.

### We're talking to you...

This study is intended for three primary audiences.

- Funders and entrepreneurs looking to expand, and contemplating which cities to regard as alpha sites for reinvention.
- State and federal policy makers wanting to know which systems are leading the way, which need help, and what to do about it.
- Local reformers considering how their respective cities stack up and what they can do to make their communities more attractive to high-powered problem-solvers.

We examine and rank conditions in thirty cities.<sup>1</sup> While our primary focus is on each city as a complete community, we also examine conditions in the city's primary school district (typically the biggest). Oxygenating the environment for entrepreneurial reformers to breathe deeply is not the work exclusively of the school system, but of the entire community and all of its leading sectors. Rather than asking what's right or wrong with a city's schools, the question we investigate is whether the local ecosystem, including the primary school district, is configured to foster problem-solving and nurture excellence.

## Key elements of an entrepreneurial ecosystem

In this report, we focus on six metrics that help assess the vibrancy of a local ecosystem. They're based upon the framework sketched by coauthor Frederick Hess in his 2010 book *Education Unbound*.<sup>2</sup> They also borrow, in places, from the 2009 *Leaders and Laggards: A State-by-State Report Card on Educational Innovation*, coauthored by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Center for American Progress, and Hess.<sup>3</sup> The six components span the availability of talent and other resources, the vitality of the charter sector, the attention to quality control, and the caliber of local political and district leadership.

1. While it may strike some as peculiar to rank cities in the manner we have here—on ecosystems rather than test scores—it shouldn't. Outside of education, analysts seeking to judge the best places to open or expand new ventures routinely compare states and cities when it comes to business climate, transportation, universities, the labor market, and the legal and political environment. What's peculiar is not to do this in schooling.

2. Frederick M. Hess, *Education Unbound: The Promise and Practice of Greenfield Schooling* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development, 2010).

3. Center for American Progress, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and Frederick M. Hess of AEI, *Leaders and Laggards: A State-By-State Report Card on Educational Innovation* (Washington, D.C.: Authors, 2009), [http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/11/leaders\\_laggards/report.html](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/11/leaders_laggards/report.html).

**Human Capital.** Entrepreneurs must have access to a steady flow of talented individuals, whether to staff the organization's central office or to fill the district's classrooms. This component evaluates an entrepreneur's ability to find talent in the city and/or recruit talent to move there. We examined such factors as the alternative certification routes for aspiring teachers, district human resource policies for teachers and central office staff, and the restrictiveness of the local collective bargaining agreement as it pertains to tenure and differentiated pay, among other areas.

**Financial Capital.** A pipeline of readily accessible funding from private and public sources is particularly important for nonprofit organizations trying to break into a new market or scale up their operations. This component tests whether, and how much, national and local philanthropic organizations give to nontraditional providers in each city, as well as the local availability of dollars from public sources. Though education reformers often tout the importance of quality over quantity, from the perspective of an entrepreneur, free-flowing dollars are an asset.

**Charter Environment.** Charters are one of the main ways in which entrepreneurs can enter new education markets, both as providers of instruction and services and as consumers of other nontraditional goods and services. We evaluated both the current market share of charters in each city—under the assumption that, once a path has been blazed by others, it is easier for new providers to follow it—as well as the various legal and policy hurdles faced by current or potential charter operators. More formal barriers often occur on the state level (e.g., charter laws) so, where appropriate, we incorporated state-level metrics into city grades.

**Quality Control.** Lest we unduly credit innovation for its own sake, the study takes into account the quality-control metrics that guide and regulate entrepreneurial ventures in our cities. These may take the form of official regulations and practices, such as the quality of the state achievement test (again, we extrapolate state grades for our cities), or more informal guides, such as support organizations for nontraditional providers that also keep an eye on quality, such as private groups that help entrepreneurs to navigate district rules and policies.

**District Environment.** Since many nontraditional providers must contract or otherwise work with the district to do business in the city, finding a district that is both open to nontraditional reforms and has the organizational capacity to handle dealings with such operators in a speedy and professional manner can make or break an entrepreneur's foray into a new market. We considered formal barriers, such as the power of the local teachers' union over district decisions, as well as informal ones, such as whether district leaders were audible voices for reform.

**Municipal Environment.** Beyond the school district is also the question of general municipal openness to nontraditional education providers. This amorphous sphere includes such entities as the local business community, newspaper editorial boards, and the city government. Having these folks on the side of reform, even if they are not the ultimate consumer of entrepreneurs' wares, can be a powerful asset.

## Methodology

This analysis examines the school-reform environments in the nation's twenty-five largest cities, plus five additional smaller communities. We reasoned that, as alleged "hotbeds" of reform, these five would permit comparisons of conditions in big cities with those of smaller but potentially more nimble locales. Ultimately, two of these cities did very well (Washington, D.C., and New Orleans, LA), while the other three (Newark, NJ, Albany, NY, and Gary, IN) did not.<sup>4</sup>

Our grades draw upon three types of data, beginning with extant information from reliable sources. These include, for example, earlier evaluations of state charter school laws, figures on Teach For America participation levels, and per-pupil spending figures. These data were typically obtained from large national databases and organizations (see Appendix A).

In many instances, however, the types of data we sought were not available at all, or for particular cities. So we also drew upon survey data gathered specifically for this study. Two online surveys were constructed and administered. The first was sent in late 2009 to senior leaders of sixteen national organizations that are actively involved in a number of locations across the nation, including at least a handful of our cities (see Appendix C for a partial list of organizations). These individuals oversee organizations that manage human capital pipelines, operate charter schools, develop educational technology and tools, or provide the private dollars that fund them. They were asked to comparatively rate, insofar as they are active in or knowledgeable about cities in our sample, such areas as the quality of district leadership, availability of local philanthropy, and support of the civic leadership.

The second survey obtained granular and city-specific data from reformers on the ground. It was designed for respondents with firsthand familiarity with local conditions. Whereas we asked national respondents to rate cities comparatively on various dimensions, local respondents provided more concrete and pointed information regarding reform infrastructure and school system behaviors in their own cities. In four areas—human capital, charter schooling, philanthropy, and local schools—we sought to identify at least one respondent in each sector in each city.

We used several methods to identify such respondents. For human capital and charter school respondents, we requested names from senior leaders at Teach For America and the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. For philanthropic respondents, we requested names from leaders at a national philanthropic support organization, and then supplemented that list with organizations identified by the Foundation Center Directory as contributing to the education reform priorities of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act 2009.<sup>5</sup> Repeated attempts to engage with appropriate senior-level school district

---

4. One obvious challenge in an exercise like this is the number of metrics on which sheer city size can confer an advantage. Larger cities are more likely to have attracted such nontraditional providers as The New Teacher Project or New Leaders for New Schools. They are also more likely to have large philanthropic communities and multiple charter authorizers. In that sense, smaller cities were playing against a stacked deck. But there are two provisos to keep in mind. First, smaller cities have off-setting advantages. It may, for instance, be easier in a small city to engage the business or philanthropic community in a focused effort or for the school district leadership to overhaul the bureaucracy. Second, the world is not a fair place. This is a report of the best and worst cities for school reform. If smaller cities or those in less geographically desirable locales have more trouble offering attractive environments or attracting talent, then, to quote a famous philosopher, "them's the breaks." Those are conditions that cities need to recognize and to do their best to overcome or offset.

5. See [http://foundationcenter.org/educationexcellence/top\\_lists.html](http://foundationcenter.org/educationexcellence/top_lists.html) (accessed September 15, 2009).

operations or procurement staffs were largely ignored, so local district staff were not included in the survey. A total of 150 individuals were invited to take the local survey over a six-week period in late 2009. The response rate for the local survey was 61 percent and for the national survey, 81 percent.

As with any study, it was necessary to choose a date at which data collection ended so that the authors could start to analyze, synthesize, and write up the findings. The findings reflect the state of the cities studied as of late 2009. As with any such exercise, therefore, the findings should be read with the appreciation that tracking and analyzing the school reform landscape is inevitably a moving target—and that, inevitably, there have been subsequent developments. There would likely be some variation in grades if data collection were to take place today. Our response to concerns on this score is twofold. First, this kind of lag is the price of doing business—whether the instrument is the National Assessment of Educational Progress or anything else. Second, this merely affirms the value of conducting this kind of analysis on a more regular and sustained basis.

### Note on Methods

There are many ways one can judge the reform-friendliness of cities (and districts), and we don't claim that the recipe we've baked here is necessarily the "right" one. It did allow us, however, to honor the localized nature of break-the-mold reform, which tends to unfold in particular cities rather than across states.

We're well aware that creating metrics with which to judge municipal environments, talent, or quality control is an inexact science. It's far cleaner and easier to rate cities on test scores and dropout rates than on whether they are creating conditions for entrepreneurialism. But we believe, for all its messiness, that this effort is well worth the bother. Test scores and graduation rates may tell us how well hard-pressed urban districts are carrying out essential tasks today, and whether they've improved over time, but they can't tell us how districts are positioned to succeed going forward—much less whether they are poised to energize local schooling or pursue transformational improvement.

That said, we make no claims that we have gotten the categories or the metrics just right, nor that we have precisely captured every detail about every individual city—most especially when these involve recent developments. As with any effort to rank cities on transportation, health care, livability, or economic prospects, this exercise turns on judgments about what matters and how best to measure those things. For those who find our premise and approach compelling, we trust they will find our effort to be fodder for reflection, debate, and reanalysis.

## Grading Metric

We evaluated our study cities along the six dimensions noted above and, within each of these, based our grades on a number of different criteria. (See Appendix A for the full methodology.)

### Human Capital

- To what extent have nontraditional teachers and administrators penetrated the city?
- How restrictive is the teachers' union contract when it comes to the recruitment, hiring, and firing processes of the local school district?
- How easy is it for entrepreneurs to find locally grown talent in this city?
- How easy is it for entrepreneurs to import talent to this city?
- How do district hiring processes support or interfere with the talent pipeline in this city?
- How do district termination processes support or interfere with the talent pipeline in this city?

### Financial Capital

- What is the per-pupil expenditure (adjusted for the cost of living) in the city's primary school district?
- Where is money most available? From philanthropic or public sources, or private investors?
- Does the local school district seek non-public dollars to further its reform ambitions?
- Are local dollars available in this city for nontraditional education reforms?
- Are national dollars available in this city for nontraditional education reforms?<sup>6</sup>
- What impact do philanthropic dollars have on nontraditional education reforms in this city?
- Does the district have a coherent vision for how to spend its dollars strategically?

### Charter Environment

- Are there any high-quality non-LEA charter school authorizers?
- Are charter schools funded fairly compared to traditional schools?
- To what extent have charters penetrated the market?
- What is the status of the state's charter school cap?
- What kind of non-district support exists for charter schools?
- Does the biggest authorizer in this city exercise effective authorizing practices?
- What type of funding is available for charter schools?
- Is there a charter support organization in this city? If so, is it quality-conscious?

### Quality Control

- How good is the state's longitudinal data system?
- How rigorous is the state test, compared to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)?
- Are quality-control mechanisms used well in the city?
- Is there outside support for nontraditional reformers that acts as an additional check on their operations?
- Are there quality-control mechanisms in place in this city's primary school district?
- Is there organizational support for nontraditional providers in this city, either inside or outside the primary school district?

---

6. Respondents were provided with a list of high-profile national foundations that contribute annually to education.



**District Environment**

- Do students in the district have access to online schooling (via a state-run virtual school)?
- How easy or hard is it for providers to set up shop in this district?
- Does the teachers' union wield considerable influence?
- Does the district support nontraditional providers trying to set up shop?
- Does the local teachers' union hold tangible sway over district decisions and operations?
- Are district leaders visible and effective voices for reform in this city?
- Does the district operate in an efficient and/or innovative manner?

**Municipal Environment**

- Is there a state-level education reform organization that supports nontraditional providers?
- How favorably, if at all, does the editorial board of the city's largest newspaper cover nontraditional reforms?
- Do municipal civic leaders, including the mayor, business community, and philanthropic community, have the political will to advance potentially controversial reforms?
- Do municipal civic leaders, including the mayor, business community, and philanthropic community, expend their respective political capital on nontraditional reforms?
- Does the local philanthropic community support nontraditional reforms?
- Does the local business community support nontraditional reforms?
- Are the editorial pages of the local papers supportive of reform?

**Grades**

A city's final grade is the average of its performance in each of the six equally weighted areas noted above. In order for a city to receive an overall grade for "reform-friendliness," it had to have enough data in at least four of the six areas. Four cities—El Paso, Phoenix, San Antonio, and Seattle—did not meet this criterion and, consequently, do not have final grades.

All data were translated onto a 0-4 grading scale (see Appendix A). Table 3 shows the grading scale.

**TABLE 3: Grading Scale**

>3.0	A
2.50-2.99	B
2.00-2.49	C
1.50-1.99	D
<1.49	F

# FINDINGS

## The Nation's Best Cities for School Reform

While no cities earned an overall A grade, nine of them earned solid Bs—identifying them as America's most welcoming communities for nontraditional school reformers (Table 4). They are: New Orleans, Washington, D.C., New York City, Denver, Jacksonville, Charlotte, Austin, Houston, and Fort Worth.

TABLE 4: Top Nine Cities for Education Reform

CITY	FINAL REFORM-FRIENDLY GRADE	FINAL REFORM-FRIENDLY RANK	HUMAN CAPITAL		FINANCIAL CAPITAL		CHARTER ENVIRONMENT		QUALITY CONTROL		DISTRICT ENVIRONMENT		MUNICIPAL ENVIRONMENT	
			GRADE	RANK	GRADE	RANK	GRADE	RANK	GRADE	RANK	GRADE	RANK	GRADE	RANK
New Orleans	B	1	B	2	A	1	A	1	B	8	B	2	C	18
Washington, D.C.	B	2	A	1	A	2	A	2	B	5	C	5	C	19
New York City	B	3	B	3	A	8	B	10	B	2	C	8	B	13
Denver	B	4	C	5	A	7	B	8	C	14	C	10	A	4
Jacksonville	B	5	D	14	C	21	B	11	A	1	B	3	A	8
Charlotte	B	6	C	8	B	18	No Grade		C	11	A	1	C	22
Austin	B	7	C	7	A	5	C	13	B	4	C	4	B	12
Houston	B	8	C	9	A	4	C	16	B	3	D	13	A	9
Fort Worth	B	9	D	15	B	15	C	14	B	7	C	9	A	2

In **New Orleans**, Superintendent Paul Vallas, in partnership with State Superintendent Paul Pastorek and the private entity New Schools for New Orleans, has worked hard to rethink the role of a school district and to turn post-Katrina New Orleans into an entrepreneurial hothouse. New Orleans finishes in the top five cities in every area except quality control (where it ranks eighth) and municipal environment (where it is eighteenth), with respondents describing a city rife with philanthropic support, energetic talent, and a school district receptive to nontraditional providers.

**Washington, D.C.**'s chancellor Michelle Rhee has gone out of her way to recruit new talent and pull forward a recalcitrant district bureaucracy. D.C. finishes in the top five cities in nearly every area (other

than municipal environment), with respondents describing a city rich with talent, a district willing to work with high-performing outsiders, and substantial extra-district support for charter schooling and nontraditional providers. It tops the list for its human capital pipelines, while coming in second for availability of financial capital and its charter environment. At the same time, respondents note a lack of municipal support from outside the mayor's office and that Rhee's hard-charging style can be polarizing within the community.

**New York City's** mayor Michael Bloomberg, a fierce champion of school reform, has recently launched his third term and Chancellor Joel Klein, the high-profile and tenacious leader of the million-student system, is closing in on a decade. Their multifaceted efforts have transformed a district culture once lampooned for its bureaucratic inertia. New York finishes in the top five when it comes to human capital and quality control, with respondents noting the city's support for nontraditional providers and for the deep, readily available pool of talent. New York is also an example of how big cities can use their natural assets—such as appeal to young, educated professionals and the presence of philanthropic funders and wealthy individuals—to fuel and support new ventures.

While less celebrated than New Orleans and New York City, **Denver** is home to a number of notable developments in recent years. Under two successive and admired superintendents, Michael Bennet and Tom Boasberg, and aided by the steady support of reform-minded state superintendent Dwight Jones, Denver helped lead the nation in rethinking teacher pay. After a slow start, it has created a vibrant charter school community and fared well in terms of financial capital and municipal environment—with respondents citing the impact of the generally supportive *Denver Post* and a focused philanthropic community.

While **Jacksonville** rarely receives notice when talk turns to reform-friendly environs, the findings suggest it may deserve a careful look. Jacksonville is described by national and local respondents as a community where support from business leaders, philanthropists, and the media make for a hospitable reform environment. Jacksonville also benefits from a strong educational infrastructure at the state level, including rigorous standards for the state test, a robust data system, and America's most expansive state-operated virtual school.

Perhaps the biggest surprise on this list is **Charlotte**, long recognized as home to the accomplished Charlotte-Mecklenberg School District, but which has generally not been considered a mecca for outside entrepreneurs. Charlotte fared best in district support—illustrating how an effective and well-run district can help ensure that nontraditional problem-solvers get a fair hearing and are judged on results.

Another surprise in this list may be **Austin**. This central Texas city has been celebrated for the successful decade-long superintendency of Pascal "Pat" Forgione and for rising student achievement, but generally not for its entrepreneurial K-12 community. Yet Austin stands out with its eye to quality control and welcoming district environment. It also benefits from generous funds invested locally by the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation and the contributions of a passel of wealthy former Dell executives. National and local respondents describe a district where leadership is outspoken in its support of reform, union influence is limited, and nontraditional providers find it easy to set up shop.

## The Middle of the Pack

Eleven cities earned Cs (Table 5). One of the “high Cs”—Chicago—is a familiar name in school reform circles. Meanwhile, San Francisco and Dallas do not typically make the reform radar, but likely deserve additional consideration. Scanning some of the other C cities, such as Boston and Newark, remind us that hype must be tempered with reality when viewing cities through an ecosystems lens. Let’s take a closer look at the top three “high Cs” and the bottom three “low Cs.”

**TABLE 5: Middling Cities: Those with a “C”**

CITY	FINAL REFORM-FRIENDLY GRADE	FINAL REFORM-FRIENDLY RANK	HUMAN CAPITAL		FINANCIAL CAPITAL		CHARTER ENVIRONMENT		QUALITY CONTROL		DISTRICT ENVIRONMENT		MUNICIPAL ENVIRONMENT	
			GRADE	RANK	GRADE	RANK	GRADE	RANK	GRADE	RANK	GRADE	RANK	GRADE	RANK
San Francisco	C	10	B	4	C	22	A	3	B	6	F	17	B	16
Chicago	C	11	C	6	B	16	D	23	C	17	C	7	A	1
Dallas	C	12	D	12	B	14	No Grade		No Grade		C	6	B	15
Indianapolis	C	13	D	16	B	10	B	12	B	9	D	14	B	11
Memphis	C	14	D	13	B	13	C	18	D	22	D	16	A	3
Boston	C	15	C	10	B	12	C	15	B	10	F	26	A	6
Los Angeles	C	16	D	18	C	20	B	9	C	12	F	21	A	7
Baltimore	C	17	C	11	B	17	C	21	D	24	D	12	C	20
Columbus	C	18	F	23	A	9	D	22	C	16	D	15	A	5
Milwaukee	C	19	F	22	A	6	C	17	D	23	D	11	B	17
Newark	C	20	F	21	A	3	C	19	C	13	F	19	C	21

**San Francisco** ranked low in terms of its district and municipal environments, but posted solid marks in the areas of human capital, charter environment, and quality control. The “talent” score might not surprise—given the presence of top-flight universities, San Francisco’s innate appeal, and a strong Teach For America presence—but some of its other results are impressive. Especially when compared to several other California locales that fare much worse, the results suggest San Francisco is doing something right.

**Chicago** is known for Schools CEO Ron Huberman’s—and even more so his predecessor Arne Duncan’s—aggressive efforts to scrub away barriers that stifle new providers and focus on cost-effectiveness. Under Duncan’s leadership, Chicago Public Schools was ambitious in its efforts to turn around low-performing schools, close failing schools, and launch charter schools through its Renaissance 2010 plan. Huberman has taken over that initiative, while tackling other issues such as teacher tenure.

**Dallas** received its lowest ranks in its financial capital reserves and municipal environment. The city struggles to overcome a leadership void at various levels—civic, political, and district. This has prevented bold movement on the education reform front, but as of late, an education reform conversation has begun to take off. Dallas also benefits from a relatively weak teachers’ union.

**Columbus** did quite well in availability of financial capital—due both to its relatively high per-pupil expenditures and to its generous local philanthropic support—and in the reform-friendliness of its municipal environment. It fared poorly in securing talent. Its primary school district has some reform-friendly leanings, but they pale in comparison to many others in this report.

Similarly, **Milwaukee** has strong financial capital pipelines and a somewhat reform-friendly district environment. But talent is not easy to come by in Brew City, nor is it easy to recruit outsiders to move there. Quality-control measures to gauge the success of Milwaukee Public School’s programs and vendors are weak; survey respondents report that the metrics that are in place are more likely to hinder than help their operations, and the district itself rarely uses data to make real-time adjustments to policy or practice.

And **Newark**, home to the recently launched, multimillion-dollar New Charter School Fund and dynamic, reform-minded mayor Cory Booker, nonetheless posted a mediocre performance across the board, with especially low marks for human capital. The city’s schools remain under state control, and the city faces myriad problems such as high unemployment rates and a looming budget deficit. Further, state law permits only the state commissioner of education to authorize charter schools and fails to provide them with adequate and equitable funding.

## The Nation's Worst Cities for School Reform

Six cities fared dismally in the final tally, with five Ds and one F (Table 6). They all fell short in multiple areas, demonstrating conditions inhospitable to dynamic school reform.

Two places that we had expected to do much better were the smallish cities of Albany and Gary, since both are known in particular as charter-friendly locales. Yet the data suggest that charter schooling in these communities has unfolded with limited support from the larger environment. **Albany**, for example, registered Fs when it came to human capital, district environment, and municipal environment. **Gary** also scored Fs in human capital and district environment. While each registered an occasional bright spot, the overall data depicted these communities as littered with political and practical obstacles to new providers.

Dollars are hard to come by in **San Jose** partly because California faces a severe budget crisis. The district environment in San Jose Unified is tainted by strong union resistance and leaders there are generally apathetic towards school reform (though a new superintendent may change that).

**San Diego's** human capital policies are anything but friendly to entrepreneurs, and the San Diego Unified School District—under sway of the local teachers' union—hampers reform within its perimeter. San Diego's charter sector, however, has fared well.

TABLE 6: The Bottom Six: Cities Receiving Ds and Fs

CITY	FINAL REFORM-FRIENDLY GRADE	FINAL REFORM-FRIENDLY RANK	HUMAN CAPITAL		FINANCIAL CAPITAL		CHARTER ENVIRONMENT		QUALITY CONTROL		DISTRICT ENVIRONMENT		MUNICIPAL ENVIRONMENT	
			GRADE	RANK	GRADE	RANK	GRADE	RANK	GRADE	RANK	GRADE	RANK	GRADE	RANK
San Jose	D	21	D	17	F	25	B	5	C	15	F	20	B	14
San Diego	D	22	F	25	C	23	B	7	C	19	F	23	B	10
Albany	D	23	F	20	B	11	B	6	C	20	F	25	F	24
Philadelphia	D	24	D	19	D	24	No Grade		C	18	F	22	C	23
Gary	D	25	F	26	B	19	C	20	C	21	F	24	No Grade	
Detroit	F	26	F	24	No Grade		No Grade		F	25	F	18	F	25

**Philadelphia's** D might catch some by surprise. After all, the City of Brotherly Love is home to a district that has been led by a couple of highly respected maverick superintendents in the past decade (Paul Vallas and Arlene Ackerman) and gained notice for innovations like contracting school operations and launching (with Microsoft) the much-discussed School of the Future. The results, however, place Philadelphia in the bottom five in terms of financial capital, district environment, and municipal environment. Local and national respondents see a large school district marred by partisan politics, unduly impacted by the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and lacking a coherent vision for reform.

Behind even Gary came the deeply troubled city of **Detroit**, which received Fs across the board. Given Detroit's abysmal student achievement and negative press in recent years, its ranking as the least reform-friendly city in this analysis is unsurprising. Despite reasonably high per-pupil expenditures in DPS, funding for reform is largely unavailable from public sources. Fortunately, philanthropies have lately begun to plug the holes. Though they long remained aloof to Detroit's deteriorating climate for years, now—with conditions so dire—disparate groups have come together to form a united reform coalition. These results suggest just how far they have to go.

## Taking A Closer Look

### Cities Matter

Is it useful to examine multiple cities in a state, or does the influence of state policy and climate mean that the results would be fairly steady across cities? In fact, we found variation—some more significant than others—*within* states (Table 7, page 24). In the four states with multiple cities in this study (California, Indiana, New York, and Texas), overall grades varied widely, and grades within individual categories varied even more. State lines, it seems, are not destiny: Good state laws can help, but strong local leadership and strategic investment can help one locale thrive where another, similarly situated, can stagnate.

The greatest variation is in New York State, where New York City achieved top marks while Albany received a D. New York City couples strong reform leadership with a wealth of local philanthropy and its deep talent pool. Meanwhile, Albany features a scrappy charter school community under the inspired leadership of Tom Carroll, but lacks strong district or municipal leadership or the deep pockets that abound in its more glamorous neighbor.

When comparing Gary to Indianapolis, the dynamic is similar. Indianapolis is a relatively large city with a troubled school district, but it is also home to concerted political and reform leadership by the likes of former mayor Bart Peterson and The Mind Trust honcho David Harris. Indianapolis features big-city amenities, including a successful NFL franchise, which tend to make it a more desirable place to live—thus easier to replenish its human capital pipelines. Gary lacks the size and stature of Indianapolis, and has lacked the entrepreneurial political leadership of its larger neighbor.

States, then, can matter—a lot. State policies influence the data or charter school environment in very direct ways. For instance, the federal Race to the Top program has usefully pushed states to lift caps on charter schools, modify teacher tenure laws, and demolish data “firewalls” that prohibit states from

TABLE 7: Within-state Variation

CITY	FINAL REFORM-FRIENDLY GRADE	FINAL REFORM-FRIENDLY RANK	HUMAN CAPITAL		FINANCIAL CAPITAL		CHARTER ENVIRONMENT		QUALITY CONTROL		DISTRICT ENVIRONMENT		MUNICIPAL ENVIRONMENT	
			GRADE	RANK	GRADE	RANK	GRADE	RANK	GRADE	RANK	GRADE	RANK	GRADE	RANK
<b>CALIFORNIA</b>														
San Francisco	C	10	B	4	C	22	A	3	B	6	F	17	B	16
Los Angeles	C	16	D	18	C	20	B	9	C	12	F	21	A	7
San Jose	D	21	D	17	F	25	B	5	C	15	F	20	B	14
San Diego	D	22	F	25	C	23	B	7	C	19	F	23	B	10
<b>INDIANA</b>														
Indianapolis	C	13	D	16	B	10	B	12	B	9	D	14	B	11
Gary	D	25	F	26	B	19	C	20	C	21	F	24	No Grade	
<b>NEW YORK</b>														
New York	B	3	B	3	A	8	B	10	B	2	C	8	B	13
Albany	D	23	F	20	B	11	B	6	C	20	F	25	F	24
<b>TEXAS<sup>A</sup></b>														
Austin	B	7	C	7	A	5	C	13	B	4	C	4	B	12
Houston	B	8	C	9	A	4	C	16	B	3	D	13	A	9
Fort Worth	B	9	D	15	B	15	C	14	B	7	C	9	A	2
Dallas	C	12	D	12	B	14	No Grade		No Grade		C	6	B	15

<sup>A</sup>Although six Texas cities were included in the study, only four were graded due to lack of data. El Paso and San Antonio are omitted from the table.



linking teacher and student data. Such state-level changes have the ability to improve the health of local ecosystems in each affected city.

### The Impact of Collective Bargaining

Reformers often point to union influence and collective bargaining agreements as huge obstacles. So, how much does it matter whether a city is located in a right-to-work state? Here's one answer: Every city that receives a D or an F in this analysis is in a collective-bargaining state (Table 8). Meanwhile,

two-thirds of the top nine scorers (cities receiving a B) are located in right-to-work states (Table 9, page 26). All of the cities located in right-to-work states included in this study received a B or C, and none received a D or F.

Cities located in right-to-work states appear to have a somewhat easier time fostering hospitable entrepreneurial environments, though the presence of strong collective bargaining laws hasn't stopped some heavily unionized cities like New York City or Washington, D.C., from taking giant strides. The lesson? Reformers and district leaders should not use collective bargaining to explain or excuse an inhospitable environment.

**TABLE 8: Cities in Collective-Bargaining States**

CITY	STATE	FINAL REFORM-FRIENDLY GRADE	FINAL REFORM-FRIENDLY RANK
Washington	DC	B	2
New York	NY	B	3
Denver	CO	B	4
San Francisco	CA	C	10
Chicago	IL	C	11
Indianapolis	IN	C	13
Boston	MA	C	15
Los Angeles	CA	C	16
Baltimore	MD	C	17
Columbus	OH	C	18
Milwaukee	WI	C	19
Newark	NJ	C	20
San Jose	CA	D	21
San Diego	CA	D	22
Albany	NY	D	23
Philadelphia	PA	D	24
Gary	IN	D	25
Detroit	MI	F	26

**TABLE 9: Cities in Right-to-Work States**

CITY	STATE	FINAL REFORM-FRIENDLY GRADE	FINAL REFORM-FRIENDLY RANK
New Orleans	LA	B	1
Jacksonville	FL	B	5
Charlotte	NC	B	6
Austin	TX	B	7
Houston	TX	B	8
Fort Worth	TX	B	9
Dallas	TX	C	12
Memphis	TN	C	14

### Performance Across the Categories

Some areas prove to be more challenging for cities than others (Table 10). More cities do well in the areas of financial capital and municipal environment, for example, than they do in human capital and district environment.

**TABLE 10: Grades by Category**

GRADE	OVERALL GRADE	HUMAN CAPITAL	FINANCIAL CAPITAL	CHARTER ENVIRONMENT	QUALITY CONTROL	DISTRICT ENVIRONMENT	MUNICIPAL ENVIRONMENT
A	0	1	9	3	1	1	9
B	9	3	10	9	9	2	8
C	11	7	4	9	11	7	6
D	5	8	1	2	3	6	0
F	1	7	1	1	1	10	2

## Performance by Category

As is already clear, performance varied a great deal across the dimensions we examined—and individual cities tended to do much better in some areas than in others. Drilling down more deeply can be useful in two ways. One, it can help entrepreneurs, reformers, educators, and funders gauge which cities are doing especially well (or poorly) in areas of particular concern. Second, it underscores the fact that few cities are uniformly “good” or “bad” when it comes to reform; most have areas of both strength and weaknesses.

### Human Capital

This category measures the penetration of high-quality nontraditional recruitment programs, the flexibility of the local teacher-union contract, availability and utilization of talent, and the quality-consciousness of district personnel decisions. Cities that have made recruiting nontraditional talent and promoting more nimble management a priority, such as Washington D.C., New Orleans, and New York City, populate the top five (see Table 11). Also notable is Denver, home of the path-breaking ProComp collective bargaining agreement and one of the first districts to welcome The New Teacher Project. The cities that lagged (see Table 12) tend to be heartland communities that often encounter difficulty attracting talent and that were reported to have school systems that do not do a good job of utilizing talented employees.

The top four cities all have significant penetration by “brand-name” alternatively prepared teachers and administrators (limited for our purposes to the largest national alternative certification programs: Teach For America, The New Teacher Project, and New Leaders for New Schools). San Francisco posted the highest marks on both counts, and is the only city in the sample where brand-name alternatively prepared administrators make up more than 10 percent of school leaders. New York City had the largest absolute number of alternatively certified instructors—not surprising considering its size, but surprising in light of its history.

**TABLE 11: Top Five in Human Capital**

CITY	GRADE
Washington, D.C.	A
New Orleans	B
New York City	B
San Francisco	B
Denver	C

**TABLE 12: Bottom Five in Human Capital**

CITY	GRADE
Milwaukee	F
Columbus	F
Detroit	F
San Diego	F
Gary	F

New Orleans is the only city in the analysis without a collective bargaining agreement (the city's teachers' union was unable to reorganize after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita).<sup>7</sup> This yielded obvious opportunities in regard to workforce flexibility. The other four cities got middling grades on this measure. In addition, survey respondents gave the New York City and San Francisco school districts low marks for their stringent obedience to "last hired, first fired" rules in making personnel decisions.

The five lowest performers all lost points due to the rigidity of their collective bargaining agreements. Milwaukee, San Diego, and Gary, in particular, were dinged for a dearth of local talent and failure to compensate via outside recruitment. All five cities have either zero or limited penetration of brand-name alternative certification programs. (Note, though, that Milwaukee opened its doors to these programs relatively recently—2009 for TFA, 2008 for TNTP, and 2006 for NLNS—and appears to be moving in a more fruitful direction; and Detroit reopened its doors to TFA in 2009, while Gary is a small part of Chicago's TFA placement area.)

### Financial Capital

Funding is essential fuel for launching and sustaining any venture—whether it is public dollars from government, investments by profit-seekers, and/or contributions by philanthropists. While reformers (including the coauthors) have been critical of undisciplined district spending, it is also true that high levels of state and district per-pupil expenditures make locales more attractive to problem-solvers seeking to launch new schools or to provide services to districts. Cities here are evaluated on their per-pupil funding, the presence of local philanthropic investment, and the district's commitment to pursuing philanthropy to promote reform efforts, among other areas.

Familiar names—D.C., New Orleans, Austin, and Houston—topped this category (see Table 13, page 29), along with one surprise. Newark, which performed poorly overall, got high marks due to its generous state support and per-pupil funding, and to the catalytic role of the deep-pocketed Newark Charter School Fund that launched in 2008. The bottom five cities (see Table 14, page 29) include three California locales, all of which suffer due to California's meager per-pupil funding.

Top-performing cities shared several factors. National respondents characterized their district leadership teams as proactive in seeking funding to advance reform. All five have both national and local philanthropies funneling funds into nontraditional providers; in point of fact, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is active in all five locales. All but Houston ranked relatively high when it came to per-pupil spending. Local survey respondents did tweak Newark for lacking a coherent vision for spending but also noted that nontraditional reforms receive their fair share of philanthropic dollars and that philanthropies have been a positive influence on the city's reform aspirations.

---

7. The school district used in the study for New Orleans was the Recovery School District since it oversees the vast majority of its schools. Orleans Parish Schools (OPS), the other district in NOLA, existed pre-Katrina but runs only a small number of schools today. Neither the Orleans Parish School Board, which oversees OPS, nor the Recovery School District has a collective bargaining contract with the United Teachers of New Orleans—despite UTNO's attempts to negotiate one with both entities.

TABLE 13: Top Five in Financial Capital

CITY	GRADE
New Orleans	A
Washington, D.C.	A
Newark	A
Houston	A
Austin	A

TABLE 14: Bottom Five in Financial Capital

CITY	GRADE
Jacksonville	C
San Francisco	C
San Diego	C
Philadelphia	D
San Jose	F

Of the cities that fared worst in this realm, none has very high per-pupil expenditures. National respondents also characterized them as generally lacking “venture” dollars from public or private sources. San Diego fared especially poorly for the district’s lack of coherent vision when it comes to spending decisions, and for district lethargy in securing additional funding for reform.

### Charter Environment

Reformers in some communities have made great strides in recruiting and cultivating high-performing charter schools, actively policing their quality, and helping them secure funding and facilities. Further, some states have nurtured authorizing and statutory environments conducive to supporting charter school excellence. These are the types of indicators measured in this category.

Two cities with exceptionally large percentages of students enrolled in charters, New Orleans and Washington, D.C., finished in the top five (see Table 15, page 30). Especially notable in New Orleans is New Schools for New Orleans, a nonprofit enterprise that has helped recruit promising charter operators and secure facilities, cultivate local relationships, and incubate new operators. Top-five finishers are also notable for their generally strong state charter environments, the presence of multiple authorizers, and the availability of resources and support.

Among the top five, only New Orleans was located in a state that the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools considers a healthy authorizing environment (with multiple authorizers, adequate state funding, and rigorous rules for authorizer quality).<sup>8</sup>

The worst-performing cities for charter school environment also display some common features (see Table 16, page 30). In none do charters serve a significant percentage of the pupils in the city’s primary school district. Three jurisdictions (Gary, Baltimore, and Chicago) were marked down due to lax state-level support and oversight of authorizers. Seattle’s abysmal grade here is unsurprising, considering that it’s located in a state with no charter law.

8. The others are New York, Ohio, Michigan, and Louisiana. For more information, see *How State Charter Laws Rank Against the New Model Public Charter School Law* (Washington, D.C.: National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2010).

**TABLE 15: Top Five in Charter Environment**

CITY	GRADE
New Orleans	A
Washington, D.C.	A
San Francisco	A
Phoenix	B
San Jose	B

**TABLE 16: Bottom Five in Charter Environment**

CITY	GRADE
Gary	C
Baltimore	C
Columbus	D
Chicago	D
Seattle	F

### Quality Control

The quality-control category includes measures of the rigor of state accountability systems, the comprehensiveness of data systems, district attentiveness to quality considerations, and the extent of local support geared to ensuring the quality of new providers.

Top cities boasted effective local- and state-level quality-control mechanisms (see Table 17). Jacksonville, Houston, and Austin are in states that earned accolades from the Data Quality Campaign<sup>9</sup> for their data systems.

Those cities with lackluster quality control tended to fare poorly across both state and local metrics (see Table 18). Memphis, Milwaukee, and Detroit fared poorly due to state performance systems that yield remarkably inflated estimates of student proficiency when compared to NAEP. All five cities are located in states that did poorly on the Data Quality Campaign rating system. The one area where bottom-five finishers did fairly well was assistance for nontraditional providers, as several of these cities boast an organization that helps tool builders or charter operators navigate tricky district regulations. Memphis, Milwaukee, and Detroit fared well on that score, though it was not enough to compensate for other weaknesses.

**TABLE 17: Top Five in Quality Control**

CITY	GRADE
Jacksonville	A
New York City	B
Houston	B
Austin	B
Washington, D.C.	B

**TABLE 18: Bottom Five in Quality Control**

CITY	GRADE
Gary	C
Memphis	D
Milwaukee	D
Baltimore	D
Detroit	F

9. See [www.dataqualitycampaign.org](http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org).

Memphis deserves a special note here, given that Tennessee took ambitious steps in late 2009 and early 2010 in pursuit of federal Race to the Top funds. Those efforts, as well as Tennessee’s admirable data and accountability framework, helped the state become one of only two first-round RTT winners. As noted in the Methods section, reports such as this always offer a snapshot at a given point in time, and subsequent developments mean that picture will inevitably be imperfect. Memphis’s results are a particularly good example of how these findings ought to be interpreted in light of changing circumstances—especially because the aim of the study is to spur precisely the kind of measures that would result in higher scores and rankings.

**District Environment**

This category gauges districts’ organizational capacity to do business with nontraditional reformers speedily and professionally.<sup>10</sup> We considered both formal barriers, such as the power of the local teachers’ union over district decisions, as well as informal ones, such as whether district leaders were audible voices for reform.

Entrepreneurial providers consistently point to district leadership as critical in determining whether a particular community is a promising place to set up shop. Leading cities include Austin, Jacksonville, and Charlotte, as well as, once again, D.C. and New Orleans (see Table 19). In D.C., Chancellor Michelle Rhee has aggressively courted nontraditional providers of teachers and principals, while recruiting charter school operators to help tackle “turnaround” schools.

In the high-scoring cities, teachers’ unions are generally described as having limited sway over district decisions. In New Orleans, the union is neutered (and has no contract with the Recovery School District). In Charlotte, local respondents note that the Charlotte-Mecklenberg Association of Educators is generally skeptical of reforms like charter schools, performance-based pay, or alternative certification, but that the import of this opposition is minimized by North Carolina’s right-to-work law. Top scorers are home to districts where nontraditional providers find it easy to set up shop. Even there, however, respondents are hesitant to report that district leaders are highly visible or effective leaders for reform—with Washington D.C., led by outspoken chancellor Michelle Rhee, the only locality to post high marks on this count.

**TABLE 19: Top Five in District Environment**

CITY	GRADE
Charlotte	A
New Orleans	B
Jacksonville	B
Austin	C
Washington, D.C.	C

**TABLE 20: Bottom Five in District Environment**

CITY	GRADE
Philadelphia	F
San Diego	F
Gary	F
Albany	F
Boston	F

10. Typically the biggest school district, which was identified for respondents in each city, was evaluated. Obviously had we evaluated a different district than the one we did, the city’s grade—in this area, and likely across the board—may have changed, for better or for worse.

In low-scoring districts, both local and national respondents tend to report heavy union influence and ill-managed central offices. National respondents also note that these are difficult places for new providers to launch operations (see Table 20, page 31). Philadelphia's district leaders, for example, are vocal about education reform, but have done little to turn rhetoric into reality. San Diego has churned through a series of superintendents since former chief Alan Bersin departed in 2005, which has stalled reform. Boston, too, has little to show for the heralded decade-long tenure of former superintendent Tom Payzant and the energetic efforts of Superintendent Carol Johnson. A strong union provides an obstacle at every turn, while the district struggles to turn good ideas into action.

**Municipal Environment**

While the school-system environment is vital, so too is the larger municipal climate. Producers of all stripes migrate toward places where they feel welcome. In K-12, the attractiveness of the local ecosystem hinges on myriad factors, three of which are measured here: the presence of a significant state-level school reform advocate; the reform-mindedness of the local newspaper; and the support of the mayor, business community, and local philanthropists.

The reform-friendliest cities include two with education-focused mayors (Richard Daley in Chicago, who has control of the city schools, and Mike Moncrief in Fort Worth), one with an education advocate in the statehouse (State Senator Michael Johnson in Colorado), one with a philanthropic community particularly focused on reform (Memphis) and one with multiple state-level advocacy organizations (Columbus) (see Table 21). Cities with strong municipal environments also tend to have supportive media—local editorial boards that write favorably about nontraditional reforms and the city's efforts in this regard. These communities also tend to be backstopped by state-level advocacy organizations that fight for education reform in the capital and by supportive philanthropic and business communities.

Cities such as Philadelphia and Detroit, which have been hampered by chaotic local politics, populate the bottom five (see Table 22). Low scorers generally lack strong state advocates for reform and the local media tend to give their efforts the cold shoulder. Municipal, business, and philanthropic leaders are also less likely to expend political capital for entrepreneurs, which makes these communities less amenable to nontraditional reform.

**TABLE 21: Top Five in Municipal Environment**

CITY	GRADE
Chicago	A
Fort Worth	A
Memphis	A
Denver	A
Columbus	A

**TABLE 22: Bottom Five in Municipal Environment<sup>A</sup>**

CITY	GRADE
Newark	C
Charlotte	C
Philadelphia	C
Albany	F
Detroit	F

<sup>A</sup>There were no Ds in this category.



# IMPLICATIONS

These results highlight a persistent frustration among educational entrepreneurs: City and district environments make a difference. In the end, it doesn't much matter why or how changes in them occur—just that they do. So what is it that state and local leaders, including but not limited to those in school systems, need to do to make their communities more receptive to reform entrepreneurs? Here are five ideas.

**1. Knock down barriers.** These include formal legal and regulatory obstacles, such as licensure provisions that make it difficult or costly to operate nontraditional teacher training programs, contract provisions that prize tenure over talent, and procurement arrangements that effectively prevent entrepreneurs from doing business with the district. Or they can be informal impediments such as longstanding routines and district cultures. Simply removing contract provisions or state policies that stifle new providers will not ensure their emergence, but it is a necessary first step. Remember the first rule of entrepreneurship: It won't happen if it's prohibited.

**2. Build supports.** If traditional schools need support with technology, hiring, transportation, assessment, data analysis, and so forth, then entrepreneurs, who face those same challenges, in addition to breaking into new markets and building to scale, need all that help and more. New charter schools, for example, face the additional challenges of arranging for facilities and financing, marketing themselves, and negotiating local politics and the authorizing process. By designating offices or individuals charged with facilitating the work of nontraditional problem-solvers and identifying points of contact to help them negotiate challenges and access resources, district and municipal leaders can provide invaluable aid.

Meanwhile, locally grown independent entities like New Schools for New Orleans and Indianapolis's The Mind Trust provide essential material support, relationships, local expertise, and smart quality control. These outfits help identify and recruit promising school leaders and/or providers, assist them in securing funding, help clear away political and local obstacles, connect them to savvy advisors, and otherwise make immense challenges more manageable. Other communities would benefit by creating organizations that resemble them.

**3. Gather, use, and leverage data.** Without robust metrics by which policy makers, parents, and practitioners can compare their performance and cost-effectiveness to the status quo, nontraditional providers will struggle to prove their mettle. An entrepreneur may have a terrific solution for engaging parents, recruiting teachers, or tutoring English language learners, but be unable to get traction without tangible evidence of that solution's impact. Measures of performance and cost-effectiveness also provide a powerful safeguard against snake-oil peddlers. As coauthor Hess and Harvard University's Jon Fullerton have noted in *The Numbers We Need*, metrics that accurately reflect the good or service in question are crucial, whether it's improved principal selection, more useful data tools, or enhanced foreign language instruction.<sup>11</sup> Test scores and graduation rates alone won't cut it.

---

11. Frederick M. Hess and Jon Fullerton, "The Numbers We Need: Bringing Balanced Scorecards to Education Data," *Phi Delta Kappan* 90, no. 9 (May 2009): 665-69, <http://www.kappanmagazine.org/content/90/9/665.abstract>.

**4. Think outside one's own backyard.** School improvement suffers from the expectation that school and district personnel will hand-craft solutions to all of their instructional, staffing, and operational challenges, as if everything is *sui generis*. Part of what's valuable about nontraditional providers is their ability to think beyond the individual school or district. In fact, many specialize in pyramiding expertise across multiple locations. That's what New Leaders for New Schools and The New Teacher Project, for example, have done in staffing, and what Wireless Generation and Schoolnet have done in the area of data and technological tools. Districts could do vastly more to identify experienced specialists at work in other places to help solve thorny problems, leverage such assistance, and integrate such relationships into district and school routines.

**5. Flex your political muscles.** Doing any of this hinges on political support. Public education is a public enterprise. The lion's share of the funding is public. The rules—and accountability systems—are made by public officials. Yet the nature of public bureaucracies is that inertia tends to prevail. State and local policies that may have made sense at one point may now do more harm than good. Yet these laws, regulations, and contract provisions have no expiration date and will not fade of their own accord. Remaking them, however, along with the norms and expectations that have grown up around them, is hard, messy, political work. It requires advocacy, the cultivation of community support, philanthropic backing, and efforts to win over media and opinion makers. More than anything else, it needs a voice for reform that can counter the agenda of the teachers' union.

## Final Thoughts

In recent years, reformers seeking to remake urban schooling have gained some traction—and can show some results. But the modest reading and math gains visible so far, laudable as they are, don't come close to being sufficient. Cities that are serious about renewing their K-12 education systems must be prepared to act boldly. This means making room for new problem-solvers, and their tools, talent, and technologies.

America's leading reform cities have begun that transformation. Schooling in locales like New Orleans, Washington, D.C., and New York City already bears a visibly more dynamic and entrepreneurial cast than it did a decade ago. And while even these cities still have a long way to go, many other locales have not even gotten started. Which leaves them hoping against experience that another in a series of superintendents will turn out to be the miracle worker.

The challenge is to do profoundly better. Whatever the merits of steady efforts to improve professional development and tweak curricula, they are unlikely to deliver dramatic gains in performance or major new efficiencies. In education, as in so many other walks of life, that work will fall upon the shoulders of problem-solvers with the flexibility to tap new tools and talent, to approach stubborn challenges in fresh ways, and who are free to paint on a blank canvas. America's most educationally successful cities, in 2020 and beyond, are going to be those that embrace and foster these efforts.

# APPENDIX A

## Methodology

This analysis examines the reform environments in the nation's twenty-five largest cities, plus five additional smaller communities. We reasoned that, as alleged "hotbeds" of reform, these five would permit comparisons of conditions in big cities with those of smaller but potentially more nimble locales. The five additional cities are Albany, NY; Gary, IN; New Orleans, LA; Newark, NJ; and Washington, D.C.

## Data Sources

Data for the study were collected from three sources: publicly available records, a survey of national providers, and a survey of local authorities in each city (and subsequent interviews with some of those individuals). Interview data were not included in the grades or rankings—but did provide context and texture for the city profiles. More on each of these data sources follows.

### Publicly Available Data

Where possible, extant data were gathered from public sources, including the federal Common Core of Data (for per-pupil expenditures), the Data Quality Campaign (for state longitudinal data systems), the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (for state charter school laws and local charter-school market shares), the National Council on Teacher Quality (for local collective bargaining agreements), and Teach for America, New Leaders for New Schools, and The New Teacher Project (for enrollment in alternative certification programs). (See "Scoring Metric" in this appendix for additional details.)

### Survey Data

In many instances, suitable data were not available from extant sources. Hence, we also drew upon data from two surveys—one focused at the national level and the other locally—that were developed specifically for this study and administered in late 2009. These online surveys added valuable information and nuance to the extant data.

**National Survey.** This survey was administered to senior leaders of sixteen national organizations that are actively involved in multiple cities across the nation (see Appendix C for a partial list of organizations). These national stakeholders oversee organizations that manage human capital pipelines, operate charter schools, develop educational technology and tools, or provide the private dollars that fund them. And they do so in numerous locations. Thus, they were asked to comparatively rate, insofar as they are active in or knowledgeable about, the cities in our sample in such realms as the quality of district leadership, availability of local philanthropy, and support of civic leaders. The national survey was administered in November-December 2009; the response rate was 81 percent.

**Local Survey.** This survey obtained more granular data from on-the-ground education reformers in each city. It was designed for respondents with firsthand familiarity with local conditions. Whereas national respondents rated a number of cities comparatively, local respondents provided more concrete information for their own cities regarding infrastructure for reform and school system behaviors. In four areas—human capital, charter schooling, philanthropy, and local schools—one respondent was identified in each for each city.

Several methods were used to identify such respondents. For human capital and charter school respondents, contacts were requested from senior leaders at Teach For America and the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. For philanthropic respondents, contacts were requested from leaders at a national philanthropic support organization; that list was then supplemented with organizations identified by the Foundation Center Directory as contributing to the education reform priorities of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act 2009.<sup>1</sup> Repeated attempts to engage appropriate senior-level school district operations or procurement staffs were largely ignored—though we tried diligently—so local district staff were not included in the survey. A total of 150 individuals were invited to take the local survey in November-December 2009; the response rate was 61 percent. In all, between the two surveys, 106 individuals participated.

The local and national surveys can be found online at [http://edexcellence.net/index.cfm/news\\_americas-best-and-worst-cities-for-school-reform](http://edexcellence.net/index.cfm/news_americas-best-and-worst-cities-for-school-reform).

### Local Interviews

In order to add context to the thirty city profiles, interviews were conducted with two to three knowledgeable residents of each city. (Interview data were not included in the grades or rankings.) Most had previously completed the local survey; others were recommended by local or national survey respondents. Phone interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes; interviewees could also submit responses via email.

Interviewees were asked to expand upon two overarching questions:

- 1 What, if anything, makes your city a welcome place for educational entrepreneurs to do business?
- 2 What, if anything, makes your city an unwelcome place for educational entrepreneurs to do business?

A series of more specific follow-up questions were asked based on responses to the above, but generally included:

- 1 How receptive is district leadership when it comes to school choice (including charter schooling)? Performance-based pay? Alternative teacher certification? Using new technologies in the classroom?
- 2 How about the local school board, local teachers' union, and local community (as relevant) on these same issues?
- 3 In general, how influential are the business and philanthropic communities in this city when it comes to education reform?

Interview data were summarized by question and used as appropriate in the city profiles, typically to contextualize quantitative and survey data.

---

1. See [http://foundationcenter.org/educationexcellence/top\\_lists.html](http://foundationcenter.org/educationexcellence/top_lists.html) (accessed September 15, 2009).

## Data Requirements

Data were gathered in six areas: human capital, financial capital, charter environment, quality control, district environment, and municipal environment. Each area was divided into “indicators,” which were typically phrased as questions (for example, indicator 5.3: “Does the teachers’ union wield considerable influence?”). Each indicator was further divided into more specific “sub-indicators.” For example, sub-indicator 5.3.1 from the national survey asks respondents the extent to which “the local teachers’ union wields substantial political influence over district decisions.”

Data were not available for every indicator for every city. To ensure that data were sufficient to warrant a grade for that city, we used the following decision rules:

- 1 Each area (human capital, charter environment, etc.) had to have data from at least two of three sources (publicly available data, national survey data, or local survey data).
- 2 Within each of the data sources, there were several indicators. No more than one indicator in each data source could have missing data.
- 3 Each indicator was further subdivided into multiple sub-indicators. No more than one sub-indicator (per indicator) could have missing data.

Further, for the indicators that were informed by survey data, each had to pass three additional thresholds or they were not included:

- 1 Each city had to have at least three respondents per survey (i.e., three national respondents and three local respondents).
- 2 Each survey question had to have an overall response rate of at least 60 percent across all of the cities.
- 3 Each survey question had to have a response rate of at least 60 percent to be included for any particular city.

“Charter environment” presented a unique situation. The data in this category drew only from publicly available data and local (not national) survey data. Since this area had only two, not three, data sources to begin with, the data thresholds were relaxed slightly: Each city had to have at least two survey respondents for the local survey; and each data source was allowed two missing indicators.

In the end, cities received a final grade if we were able to obtain enough data in at least four of the six areas. Four cities failed to do so: El Paso, Phoenix, San Antonio, and Seattle.

## Grading

Each of the six areas was comprised of five to seven indicators; each area contributed approximately 17 percent to a city’s final grade, while each indicator individually contributed 2 to 3 percent. Indicators with sufficient data were averaged, as were individual grades, for each of the six areas.

A 0 to 4 scale was used across the board. For publicly available information, data were typically ranked and curved onto a scale (see Table A-1). For example, one sub-indicator in the “financial capital” area examines per-pupil expenditures in each city’s primary school district normed for the cost of living in the district’s location city. To convert per-pupil dollar amounts to a 0 to 4 scale, cities were ranked from highest to lowest normed expenditures; the top 20 percent were assigned a “4,” the next twenty percent a “3,” and so on.

Survey responses were also converted to a 0 to 4 scale. The format of most questions was either a five-point scale (ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*) or a two-point scale (*yes* or *no*). For the former, a numerical value of “0” to “4” was assigned to each option (for example, *strongly disagree* a “4,” *disagree* a “3,” *neutral* a “2,” and so on). For yes/no questions, a yes was assigned a “4” and no a “0.”

Table A-1 shows the grading scale.

**TABLE A-1: Grading Scale**

>3.0	A
2.50-2.99	B
2.00-2.49	C
1.50-1.99	D
<1.49	F

# APPENDIX B

## Scoring Rubric

Six areas were examined in the scoring metric: human capital, financial capital, charter environment, quality control, district environment, and municipal environment. Sometimes the data pertained to the city as a whole, other times to the city's primary school district. (In some cases, state measures, like the strength of the state's charter law were also considered.) The primary school district is typically the city's largest district by enrollment. Detailed questions and data sources pertaining to each area are presented below.

### Area 1: Human Capital. (6 indicators)

#### Indicator 1.1: To what extent have nontraditional teachers and administrators penetrated the city?

- **Sub-indicator 1.1.1.** *Absolute current and alumni numbers of three nationwide, "brand-name" alternative certification programs: Teach For America (TFA), The New Teacher Project (TNTP), and New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS).*<sup>2</sup> "Alumni" include program participants who had completed all program requirements as of 2007-08. Since measuring how many alumni remained in a particular city after their teaching/administrative service had ended was not possible, a conservative estimate of 50 percent was used. Thus, current placement numbers in each city for the 2008-09 school year (the most recent year for which there were data) were added to 50 percent of each program's alumni total. Programs that began in 2009-10 were not counted. All data were provided by the respective organizations listed above. All cities with zero current participants or alumni received a score of "0." All other cities were ranked highest to lowest; the top 25 percent of cities received a "4," the next 25 percent a "3," and so on. Each program was ranked separately, and scores of all three programs were averaged for a final score.
- **Sub-indicator 1.1.2.** *Brand-name alternatively certified personnel as percentage of existing overall workforce.* The total current numbers for TFA and TNTP (2008-09) were computed as a percentage of absolute full-time employment (FTE) teachers (2007-08) as reported by Common Core of Data (CCD) (2007-08 was the most recent year for which CCD had data). Since the number of teachers employed by districts stays fairly static from year to year, the mismatch between reporting years is not troubling. Raw NLNS numbers (2008-09) were computed as a percentage of FTE school administrators (2007-08) as reported by CCD. Teacher and administrator percentages were separately ranked, scored, and then averaged together according to the method described in Sub-indicator 1.1.1.

#### Indicator 1.2: How restrictive is the teachers' union contract when it comes to the recruitment, hiring, and firing processes of the local school district?

- **Sub-indicator 1.2.1.** *Restrictiveness of teachers' union contract.* Collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) were assessed on a 0 to 4 point rubric, across three categories: compensation, personnel decisions, and work rules. The same rubric used in Fordham's 2007 report, *The Leadership*

---

2. Since alternatively certified teachers and administrators are typically assigned to regions and not districts, we used a city's metropolitan division—as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau—as our unit of analysis. While this measure provides for consistency across locales, using it as our denominator likely underestimated the total.

*Limbo*, was applied here.<sup>3</sup> Data were gathered from the National Council on Teacher Quality's TR3 database for twenty-five of the study's thirty cities. Among the missing five, four were not included in TR3 (Albany, Gary, San Jose, and Phoenix), but their CBAs were obtained and graded using the same rubric. New Orleans does not have a collective bargaining agreement. CBAs were current as of December 31, 2009.

**Indicator 1.3: How easy is it for entrepreneurs to find locally grown talent in this city?**

- **Sub-indicator 1.3.1.** National survey question. "There is a deep talent pool of potential employees for entrepreneurs eyeing this metro area."

**Indicator 1.4: How easy is it for entrepreneurs to import talent to this city?**

- **Sub-indicator 1.4.1.** National survey question. "It is relatively easy to recruit talent and individuals to move to this city."

**Indicator 1.5: How do district hiring processes support or interfere with the talent pipeline in this city?**

- **Sub-indicator 1.5.1.** Local survey question. "Slack district hiring routines or slow district hiring cycles serve to keep alternatively trained teachers out of district classrooms."

**Indicator 1.6: How do district termination processes support or interfere with the talent pipeline in this city?**

- **Sub-indicator 1.6.1.** Local survey question. "The district abides by a 'last hired, first fired' policy when contemplating teacher hiring and firing decisions."

## Area 2: Financial Capital. (7 indicators)

**Indicator 2.1: What is the per-pupil expenditure (adjusted for the cost of living) in the city's primary school district?**

- **Sub-indicator 2.1.1.** *Per-pupil expenditures normed for local cost of living.* Average per-pupil expenditures over three years (2004-07) for the city's primary school district, as recorded by CCD,<sup>4</sup> were normed using the ACCRA cost of living index rating for the third quarter of 2009.<sup>5</sup> To convert per-pupil dollar amounts to a 0 to 4 scale, cities were ranked from highest to lowest expenditures; the top 20 percent were assigned a "4," the next 20 percent a "3," and so on.

**Indicator 2.2: Where is money most available? From philanthropic or public sources, or private investors?**

- **Sub-indicator 2.2.1.** National survey question. "Funding in each respective city is readily available for nontraditional providers from philanthropy."

3. Frederick M. Hess and Coby Loup, *The Leadership Limbo: Teacher Labor Agreements in America's Fifty Largest School Districts* (Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2008), [http://www.edexcellence.net/doc/the\\_leadership\\_limbo.pdf](http://www.edexcellence.net/doc/the_leadership_limbo.pdf).

4. See CCD LEA Finance Survey (F33), available at <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/f33agency.asp>.

5. Due to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, data for the Recovery School District (RSD), the primary district of New Orleans, LA, were only available for 2006-07. (The RSD was actually created pre-Katrina in the year 2003.) The figure for New Orleans is based on per-pupil expenditures for 2008-09 alone.



- **Sub-indicator 2.2.2.** National survey question. “Funding in each respective city is readily available for nontraditional providers from public dollars.”
- **Sub-indicator 2.2.3.** National survey question. “Funding in each respective city is readily available for nontraditional providers from private investors.”

**Indicator 2.3: Does the local school district seek non-public dollars to further its reform ambitions?**

- **Sub-indicator 2.3.1.** National survey question. “Leaders in this city actively seek non-public funding (e.g., from philanthropists, venture capitalists, corporations, etc.) to support innovative programs.”

**Indicator 2.4: Are local dollars available in this city for nontraditional education reforms?**

- **Sub-indicator 2.4.1.** Local survey question. “There is at least one local philanthropy that invests in, or contributes to, one or more of these reforms: charter schools, performance-based pay, alternative teaching routes.”

**Indicator 2.5: Are national dollars available in this city for nontraditional education reforms?**

- **Sub-indicator 2.5.1.** Local survey question. “At least one major national foundation is helping to support at least one of the following in this city: charter schools; performance-based pay; alternative teaching routes.” [Included pull-down list of national foundations]

**Indicator 2.6: What impact do philanthropic dollars have on nontraditional education reforms in this city?**

- **Sub-indicator 2.6.1.** Local survey question. “Nontraditional reforms (e.g., charter schools, alternative teaching routes, or smart applications of technology) get their fair share of philanthropic dollars available in this city.”
- **Sub-indicator 2.6.2.** Local survey question. “Philanthropists and/or philanthropic organizations have been a negative influence in this district because they have promoted initiatives that conflict with district priorities.”

**Indicator 2.7: Does the district have a coherent vision for how to spend its dollars strategically?**

- **Sub-indicator 2.7.1.** Local survey question. “The district spends its own money on nontraditional educational tools and programs.”
- **Sub-indicator 2.7.2.** Local survey question. “District leadership has a coherent vision for change and is disciplined about pursuing philanthropic/private funding to support that vision.”

### Area 3: Charter Environment. (8 indicators)

#### Indicator 3.1: Are there any high-quality non-LEA charter school authorizers?

- Sub-indicator 3.1.1.** *Availability of and support for authorizers.* Two indicators from the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS)'s *How State Charter Laws Rank Against the New Model Public Charter School Law* report were used: "Multiple Authorizers Available," and "Adequate Authorizer Funding."<sup>6</sup> NAPCS scores the former on a 0 to 12 scale and the latter on a 0 to 8 scale. Scores were combined for both indicators to create a 0 to 20 scale. Combined scores were divided by 5 to obtain a 0 to 4 scale.
- Sub-indicator 3.1.2.** *State-level quality control mechanisms for authorizers.* Five indicators from NAPCS's *How State Charter Laws Rank* were used: "Authorizer and Overall Program Accountability System Required," "Transparent Charter Application Review, Decision-Making Processes," "Performance Based Charter Contracts Required," "Comprehensive Charter School Monitoring and Data Collection," and "Clear Process for Renewal, Nonrenewal, and Revocation Decisions." NAPCS scores these indicators on 0 to 12, 0 to 16, 0 to 16, 0 to 16, and 0 to 16 scales, respectively. All five scores were combined to create a 0 to 76 scale. Combined scores were then divided by 19 to obtain a 0 to 4 scale.

#### Indicator 3.2: Are charter schools funded fairly compared to traditional schools?

- Sub-indicator 3.2.1.** *State of charter funding.* Data from NAPCS were combined with data regarding the federal Charter Schools Program. Two indicators from NAPCS's *How State Charter Laws Rank* were used: "Equitable Operational Funding and Equal Access to All State and Federal Categorical Funding" and "Equitable Access to Capital Funding and Facilities." NAPCS scores both indicators on a 0 to 12 scale. Scores were combined for both indicators to create a 0 to 24 scale. Combined scores were then divided by 6 to obtain a 0 to 4 scale. One indicator regarding the federal Charter Schools Program was used: A city received a "4" if its state had received a Charter Schools Program grant as of October 2009, and a "0" if it had not. The combined NAPCS indicator score was then averaged with the Charter Schools Program score to achieve a final score. The final score was curved as follows: a score of 0 received a "0"; above 0 to 2.0 received a "1"; 2.1 to 2.5 received a "2"; 2.6 to 3.0 received a "3"; and 3.1 and above received a "4."

#### Indicator 3.3: To what extent have charters penetrated the market?

- Sub-indicator 3.3.1.** *Market share of charter school enrollment.* The percentage of students enrolled in charter schools within the boundaries of each city's primary school district, as presented in NAPCS's *Top 10 Charter Communities by Market Share*, was used.<sup>7</sup> (Title notwithstanding, the report actually includes data for the top fifty school districts by market share.) Percentages were scored as follows: 0 to 9 percent received a "1," 10 to 19 percent a "2," 20 to 29 percent a "3," and 30 percent and above a "4."

6. *How State Charter Laws Rank Against the New Model Public Charter School Law* (Washington, D.C.: National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2010).

7. *Top 10 Charter Communities by Market Share* (Washington, D.C.: National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2009).

**Indicator 3.4: What is the status of the state's charter school cap?**

- **Sub-indicator 3.4.1.** *Restrictiveness of the state's charter school cap.* One indicator from NAPCS's *How State Charter Laws Rank* was used: "No Caps." NAPCS weighting (0 to 4 scale) was maintained. It is as follows:

4=The state does not have a cap.

3=The state has a cap with room for ample growth. OR The state does not have a cap, but allows districts to restrict growth.

2=The state has a cap with room for some growth.

1=The state has a cap with room for limited growth.

0=The state has a cap with no room for growth.

**Indicator 3.5: What kind of non-district support exists for charter schools?**

- **Sub-indicator 3.5.1.** Local survey question. "The city has one or more non-district charter school authorizers."
- **Sub-indicator 3.5.2.** Local survey question. "There is at least one charter-school support organization in this city (i.e., an entity that provides technical assistance for and/or lobbies on behalf of charter schools)."

**Indicator 3.6: Does the biggest authorizer in this city exercise effective authorizing practices? [Respondents were first asked to name the biggest authorizer in the city.]**

- **Sub-indicator 3.6.1.** Local survey question. "To my knowledge, this authorizing entity is selective about which charters it approves."
- **Sub-indicator 3.6.2.** Local survey question. "To my knowledge, this authorizing entity seeks to improve low-performing charter schools."

**Indicator 3.7: What type of funding is available for charter schools?**

- **Sub-indicator 3.7.1.** Local survey question. "Public funding (from local, state, or federal sources) is available for charter school facilities."
- **Sub-indicator 3.7.2.** Local survey question. "It is relatively easy for current or future charter school operators to obtain facilities funding."
- **Sub-indicator 3.7.3.** Local survey question. "The level of charter school per-pupil funding is 75 percent or more of district school per-pupil funding."

**Indicator 3.8: Is there a charter support organization in this city? If so, is it quality-conscious?**

- **Sub-indicator 3.8.1.** Local survey question. [if yes to above] "To my knowledge, this charter support organization emphasizes quality when assisting new or prospective charters."
- **Sub-indicator 3.8.2.** Local survey question. [if yes to above] "To my knowledge, this charter support organization seeks to improve low-performing charter schools."

## Area 4: Quality Control. (6 indicators)

### Indicator 4.1: How good is the state's longitudinal data system?

- **Sub-indicator 4.1.1.** *Essential elements and actions of a state longitudinal data system.* The primary indicators from the Data Quality Campaign's *2009-10 Survey Results Compendium*—both *10 Elements* and *10 Actions*—were used.<sup>8</sup>

The 10 Elements consist of: 1. Statewide student identifier; 2. Student-level enrollment data; 3. Student-level test data; 4. Information on untested students; 5. Statewide teacher identifier with a teacher-student match; 6. Student-level course completion (transcript) data; 7. Student-level SAT, ACT, and Advanced Placement exam data; 8. Student-level graduation and dropout data; 9. Ability to match student-level P-12 and higher education data; 10. A state data audit system.

The 10 Actions include: 1. Link data systems; 2. Create stable, sustained support; 3. Develop governance structures; 4. Build state data repositories; 5. Implement systems to provide timely access to information; 6. Create progress reports using individual student data to improve student performance; 7. Create reports using longitudinal statistics to guide system-wide improvement efforts; 8. Develop a P-20/workforce research agenda; 9. Promote educator professional development and credentialing; 10. Promote strategies to raise awareness of available data.

One point was assigned for the presence of each element or action for a maximum possible total of 10 points in each category; the two categories were averaged for a total score. Total scores were converted to a 0 to 4 scale according to the following: total scores of 0 to 3.9 points were assigned a “0”; 4 to 4.9 were assigned a “1”; 5 to 5.9 were assigned a “2”; 6 to 6.9 were assigned a “3”; and 7 to 10 were assigned a “4.”

### Indicator 4.2: How rigorous is the state test, compared to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)?

- **Sub-indicator 4.2.1.** *Rigor of state test.* State test proficiency cut scores on the NAEP scale, as computed by the National Center for Education Statistics in *Mapping State Proficiency Standards onto NAEP Scales: 2005-2007*, were analyzed.<sup>9</sup> Respective NAEP scale equivalents for fourth- and eighth-grade reading and math proficiency standards in each state were subtracted from the NAEP proficiency score in each subject and averaged. State average differences were then ranked with the smaller gaps receiving higher scores. Cities from the four states with the smallest gap received a “4”; cities from the next four states received a “3”; and so on. Five states received a “1” due to a tie between Texas and Illinois.

8. *2009-10 Survey Results Compendium—10 Elements and 10 Actions* (Washington, D.C.: Data Quality Campaign, 2010), [http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/files/Elements\\_Compendium.pdf](http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/files/Elements_Compendium.pdf) and [http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/files/Actions\\_Compendium.pdf](http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/files/Actions_Compendium.pdf).

9. Victor Bandeira de Mello, Charles Blankenship, Don McLaughlin, and Taslima Rahman, *Mapping State Proficiency Standards onto NAEP Scales: 2005-2007 (NCES 2010-456)* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, October 2009), <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pubs/studies/2010456.asp>.

**Indicator 4.3: Are quality-control mechanisms used well in the city?**

- **Sub-indicator 4.3.1.** National survey question. “How this city uses outcomes and metrics to police quality has helped rather than hindered my organization’s operations.”

**Indicator 4.4: Is there outside support for nontraditional reformers that acts as an additional check on their operations?**

- **Sub-indicator 4.4.1.** National survey question. “The mayor and/or other municipal leaders help nontraditional providers overcome local obstacles or district resistance (e.g., by providing resources, making phone calls on their behalf, or clarifying rules).”

**Indicator 4.5: Are there quality-control mechanisms in place in this city’s primary school district?**

- **Sub-indicator 4.5.1.** Local survey question. “The district uses the information that it collects in order to make real-time adjustments in practice or policy along the way.”

**Indicator 4.6: Is there organizational support for nontraditional providers in this city, either inside or outside the primary school district?**

- **Sub-indicator 4.6.1.** Local survey question. “There is an entity or individual outside the district that helps nontraditional providers\* with one or more of the following: finances, facilities, or regulatory guidelines. \*Note: By “nontraditional providers” we mean those who provide alternative sources of human capital, goods and services, and education options such as charter schools.”
- **Sub-indicator 4.6.2.** Local survey question. “There is an entity or individual inside the district that helps nontraditional providers\* with one or more of the following: finances, facilities, or regulatory guidelines.” \*Note: By “nontraditional providers” we mean those who provide alternative sources of human capital, goods and services, and education options such as charter schools.”

**Area 5: District Environment.<sup>10</sup> (7 indicators)****Indicator 5.1: Do students in the district have access to online schooling (via a state-run virtual school)?**

- **Sub-indicator 5.1.1.** *The presence of a state-run virtual school.* Data were collected from the Editorial Project in Education’s *Technology Counts 2009* report. Cities were awarded a score of “4” for the presence of a statewide virtual school or “0” for the absence of a virtual school.

---

10. Many questions in this area dealt with the city’s primary school district—each of which was identified for survey respondents. The districts were as follows: Albany: City School District of Albany; Austin: Austin Independent School District; Baltimore: Baltimore City Public Schools; Boston: Boston School District; Charlotte: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools; Chicago: Chicago Public Schools; Columbus: Columbus City Schools; Dallas: Dallas Independent School District; Denver: Denver Public Schools; Detroit: Detroit Public Schools; El Paso: El Paso Independent School District; Fort Worth: Fort Worth Independent School District; Gary: Gary Community School Corporation; Houston: Houston Independent School District; Indianapolis: Indianapolis Public Schools; Jacksonville: Duval County Public Schools; Los Angeles: Los Angeles Unified School District; Memphis: Memphis City Schools; Milwaukee: Milwaukee Public Schools; New Orleans: Recovery School District; New York: New York City Public Schools; Newark: Newark Public Schools; Philadelphia: The School District of Philadelphia; Phoenix: Mesa Public Schools; San Antonio: San Antonio Independent School District; San Diego: San Diego Unified School District; San Francisco: San Francisco Unified School District; San Jose: San Jose Unified School District; Seattle: Seattle Public Schools; Washington: District of Columbia Public Schools.

**Indicator 5.2: How easy or hard is it for providers to set up shop in this district?**

- **Sub-indicator 5.2.1.** National survey question. “It is easy for nontraditional providers to establish operations in this city.”

**Indicator 5.3: Does the teachers’ union wield considerable influence?**

- **Sub-indicator 5.3.1.** National survey question. “The local teachers’ union wields substantial political influence over district decisions.”

**Indicator 5.4: Does the district support nontraditional providers trying to set up shop?**

- **Sub-indicator 5.4.1.** National survey question. “District leaders are accessible and respond in a timely manner when dealing with nontraditional providers.”

**Indicator 5.5: Does the local teachers’ union hold tangible sway over district decisions and operations?**

- **Sub-indicator 5.5.1.** Local survey question. “In this district, the teachers’ union is usually able to block or weaken reforms, innovations, and entrepreneurial ventures that it opposes.”
- **Sub-indicator 5.5.2.** Local survey question. “[The teachers’ union] is supportive of alternative certification.”
- **Sub-indicator 5.5.3.** Local survey question. “[The teachers’ union] is supportive of charter schools.”
- **Sub-indicator 5.5.4.** Local survey question. “[The teachers’ union] is supportive of performance-based pay.”

**Indicator 5.6: Are district leaders visible and effective voices for reform in this city?**

- **Sub-indicator 5.6.1.** Local survey question. “The district has a culture that rewards smart problem-solvers, not only employees who have put in their time or have paper credentials.”
- **Sub-indicator 5.6.2.** Local survey question. “District leaders communicate a sense of urgency about raising achievement and improving schools.”
- **Sub-indicator 5.6.3.** Local survey question. “In general, district leaders have the political support they need to make things happen.”
- **Sub-indicator 5.6.4.** Local survey question. “In general, the superintendent and senior leadership in this district make bold decisions and push to innovate and excel.”

**Indicator 5.7: Does the district operate in an efficient and/or innovative manner?**

- **Sub-indicator 5.7.1.** Local survey question. “The district is attentive to making tools (e.g., hand-held devices, online instructional software programs, etc.) easy to use for its teachers and administrators.”
- **Sub-indicator 5.7.2.** Local survey question. “The procurement office is well managed and responsive.”

## Area 6: Municipal Environment. (7 indicators)

### Indicator 6.1: Is there a state-level education reform organization that supports nontraditional providers?

- **Sub-indicator 6.1.1.** *Presence of a state-level reform organization.* “State-level reform organization” was defined as those members of the Policy Innovators in Education Network (PIE Network).<sup>11</sup> Cities were awarded a “4” if there is an education advocacy organization in their state that is a member of PIE Network and a “0” if there is not.

### Indicator 6.2: How favorably, if at all, does the editorial board of the city’s largest newspaper cover nontraditional reforms?

- **Sub-indicator 6.2.1.** *Local editorials and opinion pieces.* A Boolean search of editorials appearing in the city’s largest paper (by circulation) was conducted in LexisNexis using a list of reform keywords: charter schools, alternative preparation, alternative certification, teacher pay, merit pay, professional development AND teachers, exit exam, dropouts, teacher layoffs, charters, nontraditional school. The search included dates between Labor Day 2008 (9/1/2008) and Memorial Day 2009 (5/25/2009) as proxies for the typical “school year.” Editorials were appraised as “negative” (0 points), “neutral” (2 points), or “positive” (4 points). Points were averaged, ranked by city from the highest to the lowest, and curved according to the following guidelines: 0 to 1.99 points received a “0”; 2 to 2.24 a “1”; 2.25 to 2.49 a “2”; 2.50 to 2.74 a “3”; and 2.75 and above a “4.”

### Indicator 6.3: Do municipal civic leaders, including the mayor, business community, and philanthropic community, have the political will to advance potentially controversial reforms?

- **Sub-indicator 6.3.1.** National survey question. “[The mayor] is willing to spend reasonable amounts of political capital to support nontraditional providers and advance potentially controversial reform ideas (e.g., performance-based pay, charter schools, distance learning, and alternative licensure).”
- **Sub-indicator 6.3.2.** National survey question. “[Other civic leaders] [are] willing to spend reasonable amounts of political capital to support nontraditional providers and advance potentially controversial reform ideas (e.g., performance-based pay, charter schools, distance learning, and alternative licensure).”
- **Sub-indicator 6.3.3.** National survey question. “[The business community] is willing to spend reasonable amounts of political capital to support nontraditional providers and advance potentially controversial reform ideas (e.g., performance-based pay, charter schools, distance learning, and alternative licensure).”

11. See <http://www.pie-network.org/>.

- **Sub-indicator 6.3.4.** National survey question. “[The philanthropic community] is willing to spend reasonable amounts of political capital to support nontraditional providers and advance potentially controversial reform ideas (e.g., performance-based pay, charter schools, distance learning, and alternative licensure).”

**Indicator 6.4: Do municipal civic leaders, including the mayor, business community, and philanthropic community, expend their respective political capital on nontraditional reforms?**

- **Sub-indicator 6.4.1.** Local survey question. “For the most part, the mayor is willing to spend political capital to advance bold education-reform ideas.”
- **Sub-indicator 6.4.2.** Local survey question. “For the most part, the business and philanthropic communities in this city are willing to exert political influence to advance bold reforms.”

**Indicator 6.5: Does the local philanthropic community support nontraditional reforms?**

- **Sub-indicator 6.5.1.** Local survey question. “[The local philanthropic community] is supportive of alternative teaching routes.”
- **Sub-indicator 6.5.2.** Local survey question. “[The local philanthropic community] is supportive of charter schools.”
- **Sub-indicator 6.5.3.** Local survey question. “[The local philanthropic community] is supportive of performance-based pay.”

**Indicator 6.6: Does the local business community support nontraditional reforms?**

- **Sub-indicator 6.6.1.** Local survey question. “[The local business community] is supportive of alternative teaching routes.”
- **Sub-indicator 6.6.2.** Local survey question. “[The local business community] is supportive of charter schools.”
- **Sub-indicator 6.6.3.** Local survey question. “[The local business community] is supportive of performance-based pay.”

**Indicator 6.7: Are the editorial pages of the local papers supportive of reform?**

- **Sub-indicator 6.7.1.** Local survey question. “[The local editorial voice] is supportive of alternative teaching routes.”
- **Sub-indicator 6.7.2.** Local survey question. “[The local editorial voice] is supportive of charter schools.”
- **Sub-indicator 6.7.3.** Local survey question. “[The local editorial voice] is supportive of performance-based pay.”



# APPENDIX C

Individuals from a number of national organizations helped to shape the study design and survey instruments, as well as participate in the national survey. Below represents a partial list.

Achievement First  
Eli & Edythe Broad Foundation  
Charter School Growth Fund  
EdisonLearning  
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation  
Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP)  
Mondo Publishing  
The New Teacher Project  
Teach For America  
The Walton Family Foundation  
Wireless Generation