BEATING THE ODDS

Analysis of Student Performance on State Assessments

Council of the Great City Schools™

Results from 2012-2013 School Year

Beating the Odds

Analysis of Student Performance on State Assessments

Results from 2012-2013 School Year

Renata Uzzell, Research Manager
Jeannette Fernandez, Research Intern
Moses Palacios, Research Specialist

Ray Hart, Research Director
Michael Casserly, Executive Director

Acknowledgements

The Council of the Great City Schools thanks our superintendents, school board members, curriculum directors, research directors, communication directors, ELL directors, special education directors, and staff for their courage in producing this report and for their commitment to our urban schoolchildren.

Sources

Data were gathered from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," and "Local Education Agency Universe Survey." (All data are labeled preliminary by NCES.)

Student achievement data were gathered from State Department of Education websites.

About the Council of the Great City Schools

The Council of the Great City Schools is a coalition of 67 of the nation's largest urban public school systems. Its board of directors is composed of the superintendent of schools and one school board member from each member city. An executive committee of 24 individuals, equally divided in number between superintendents and school board members, provides regular oversight of the 501(c)(3) organization. The mission of the Council is to advocate for urban public education and assist its members in their improvement. The Council provides services to its members in the areas of legislation, research, communications, curriculum and instruction, and management. The group convenes two major conferences each year; conducts studies on urban school conditions and trends; and operates networks of senior school district managers with responsibilities in such areas as federal programs, operations, finance, personnel, communications, research, and technology. The Council was founded in 1956 and incorporated in 1961, and has its headquarters in Washington, DC.

Contents

Executive Summary……………………………………………………………………………………1
Introduction……………………………………………………………………………………5
District Achievement of State Assessments……………………………………………………………………11
I. Improving Mathematics Achievement: A National Priority……………………………………11
II. Improving Reading Achievement: A Fundamental Change……………………………………16
Student Demographics and Staffing……………………………………………………………………23
Discussion ……………………………………………………………………………………29
Appendix ……………………………………………………………………………………33

Figures

Figure 1. Percentage of CGCS districts with proficiency gains on state mathematics assessments between 2010 and 2013……………………………………12
Figure 2. Percentage of CGCS districts with proficiency gains on state mathematics assessments by grade, between 2010 and 2013……………………………………12
Figure 3. Percentage of CGCS districts with mathematics proficiency rates greater than or equal to state proficiency rates, 2012 and 2013……………………………………13
Figure 4. Percentage of CGCS districts showing changes in proficiency levels in mathematics greater than or equal to their respective states between 2010 and 2013……………………14
Figure 5. Percentage of CGCS districts reducing achievement gaps on state mathematics assessments by student groups, 2013……………………………………15
Figure 6. Percentage of CGCS districts with proficiency gains on state reading assessments between 2010 and 2013……………………………………17
Figure 7. Percentage of districts with proficiency gains on state reading assessments by grade between 2010 and 2013……………………………………17
Figure 8. Percentage of CGCS districts with reading proficiency rates greater than or equal to state proficiency rates, 2012 and 2013……………………………………18
Figure 9. Percentage of CGCS districts showing changes in proficiency levels in reading greater than or equal to their respective states between 2010 and 2013……………………19
Figure 10. Percentage of CGCS districts reducing achievement gaps on state reading assessments by student groups, 2013……………………………………20
Figure 11. Council of the Great City Schools Demographic Profile……………………………………24

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council of the Great City Schools has prepared this thirteenth edition of Beating the Odds to give the nation an in-depth look at how big-city schools are performing on the academic goals and standards set by the states. This analysis examines student achievement in mathematics and reading from spring 2010 through spring 2013. It also measures achievement gaps between cities and states, Blacks and Whites, Hispanics and Whites, and between other student groups. Finally, the report examines district progress. It asks two critical questions: "Are urban schools improving academically?" and "Are urban schools closing achievement gaps?"

Data from this report indicate that urban school districts are making progress. Some outcomes look better than others. Trend lines differ from one city to another. Nevertheless, the data indicate overall movement and progress. In general, Beating the Odds XIII shows that the Great City Schools continue to make important gains in mathematics and reading scores on state assessments. The study also presents additional evidence that gaps are narrowing between urban districts and states.

As with other reports in this series, the findings in Beating the Odds XIII are to be interpreted with caution. The nation does not have an assessment system that allows us to measure progress relative to the same standard across all school districts in the country. The Council of the Great City Schools is addressing this weakness through the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and we hope this concern will be further mitigated by the implementation of the common core assessments.

For more than a decade, the Council has produced this report on how its major city school systems are performing on the state assessments devised to boost standards, measure progress, provide opportunity, and ensure accountability for results. Data are presented on 67 city school systems from 37 states and the District of Columbia. The statistics are presented year-by-year and grade-by-grade on each state test in mathematics and reading between 2009-2010 and 2012-2013. City-by-city statistics are available on the Council's website, www.cgcs.org. We also present data by race, language, disability, and income in cases where the states report these publicly. Every effort was made to report achievement data in a way that was consistent with the No Child Left Behind Act—that is, according to the percentages of students above "proficiency."

The report also presents important demographic data. Included are enrollment data by race, poverty, English language proficiency, and disability status. Statistics are also presented on student/teacher ratios and average school size. Finally, changes in these demographic variables between 2008-2009 and 2011-2012 (the most recent year on which federally collected data are available) are shown. Data are presented for each city and state.

Where We Are Today: Key Findings

To assess student achievement in the Great City Schools, the Council analyzed state assessment data in a variety of ways.

First, we examined the percentage of Great City School students who scored at or above proficiency on their respective state assessment. These data on fourth and eighth graders are reported from 2009-2010 through 2012-2013.

Second, the Council looked at gaps in student scores on state assessments based on race as well as economic, language, and disability status. We wanted to determine the extent to which the Great City Schools have reduced achievement gaps and to discern which grades were making the most progress in narrowing the gaps. Rather than defining the achievement gaps as the difference between the various student groups within each district, we define the gap as the difference between the proficiency rates of a given student group in the district and a comparison group statewide. For example, we compared the proficiency rate of Black students in a given district to White students in the same grade across the state. We also compared other student groups like English language learners in the district to non-English language learners across the state. This methodology eliminates the artificial "zero-sum" game that pits students in the same district against one another, and takes into account the fact that some cities have very few White or economically advantaged students to whom a comparison can be made.

Third, the Council looked at whether the performance of each Great City School district was above or below the average for its state. We did not examine the data school-by-school or "group performance within school" because of the sheer volume of such an analysis.

Six major findings about student achievement in urban schools emerged from this study, Beating the Odds XIII.

1. Mathematics achievement on state assessments is improving in urban schools.
2. Urban school achievement remains below state averages in mathematics on state assessments.
3. Gaps in mathematics achievement on state assessments in urban schools appear to be narrowing.
4. Reading achievement on state assessments is improving in urban schools.
5. Urban school achievement is below state averages in reading on state assessments.
6. Gaps in reading achievement on state assessments in urban schools appear to be narrowing.

INTRODUCTION

The movement to reform education in the U.S. is grounded in concerns for improving America's urban public schools. Conversations about standards, testing, vouchers, charter schools, funding, equity, desegregation, governance, privatization, mayoral control, social promotions, and accountability are discussions—at their core—about public education in the cities. It is a discussion worth having, for nowhere does the national resolve to strengthen our educational system face a tougher test than in our large urban centers. There, every problem is more pronounced, every solution harder to implement.

For many years progress in urban education appeared to be at a standstill. Critics noted that performance was stagnant and urban systems seemed paralyzed by structural problems in governance, labor relations, bureaucracy, resources, management, operations, and politics.

Urban school leadership appeared to have tried everything and come up short: thousands of education programs, hundreds of curricular changes, countless social interventions, and numerous parental involvement strategies—all at a cost of millions of dollars. Among many observers, there was the nagging fear that the struggle was lost and the effort wasted.

What changed the outlook, of course, was the standards movement in the early 1990s. The public reminded educators—particularly those in cities—why we were in business in the first place and what we were being held responsible for delivering. Not only did the priorities of big city schools change, but the prospects for meeting our challenges brightened as well. Urban leaders redoubled their efforts. They improved their support to schools, designed more purposeful professional development, better aligned their curricula to state standards, differentiated instruction, and created meaningful accountability systems; thus bringing forth the first fragile signs that a turn-around in urban education was indeed possible.

Urban schools know that it is not enough to assure people that we are working harder to meet high standards or to say that public education is worth the investment, although both are surely true. We must back up those assurances with results—concrete, verifiable documentation that our efforts to improve education in the cities are paying off and that the public's money is being well spent.

This report provides a thirteenth look at the performance of the Great City Schools on assessments used by the states to measure student achievement and to hold districts and schools accountable. Beating the Odds XIII seeks to answer the questions, "Are urban schools improving?" and "Are achievement gaps narrowing?" This report provides a straightforward picture of urban school progress to the public, the press, policymakers, educators, and everyone with a stake in education reform.

The report is divided into two sections:

- The first section explains the purpose of the report, the methods used to analyze the data, and the limitations of that data. It lays out the main findings emerging from the Council's analysis of state assessment data and other information. It also presents graphs and bullets showing critical trends in urban student achievement and changes in urban school demographic patterns.
- The second section presents a summary of demographics for all of the Council districts. Print editions of this report from previous years included individual district profiles. This year, because of the sheer volume of the data, the individual city profiles are available on our website at http://www.cgcs.org. There, readers have the option of downloading the districts of most interest to them.

The purpose of measuring student performance and reporting it to the public is, of course, to channel help to those students, schools, and communities that need it most— and to honestly confront shortcomings and pursue needed improvements. This report will show the shortcomings and the progress. It also lays out the challenges, for Beating the Odds XIII is not only a report card on urban education— it is also a report card on the nation and its commitment to leave no child behind.

Methodology

This report presents district-by-district reading and mathematics achievement for 67 of the nation's major city school systems. It provides performance data from spring 2010 through spring 2013. It also presents state test data by year, grade, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language and disability status.

These state assessment results were collected by Council staff from a number of sources. Each state's website was searched for information that described its assessments, the grades and subjects in which the tests were administered, the years in which the tests were given, the format or metric in which results were reported, and changes in test forms, procedures, or scales. The decision was ultimately made to include data only on reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, because all states reported results in these critical subject areas. Science results will be added in subsequent reports.

Assessment data were then examined to determine the number of years the state had administered the tests to ensure that the report included only results that were comparable from year to year. Data were eliminated if states changed tests or significantly modified their guidelines about which students to test.

Data were also collected by race where reported by the state. Not all states report their disaggregated data, even if they gather it. Results for Black, Alaskan Native/American Indian, Asian American/Pacific Islander, Hispanic and White students are included in this report.

When available, data were also collected on economically disadvantaged students (usually defined as free & reduced-price lunch or Title I eligibility), English language learners (usually defined as limited English proficiency or bilingual), and students with disabilities (usually defined as special education or students with Individualized Education Plans).

The reader should note that data are generally presented in the same way that the federal legislation requires. Every effort was made to report district-wide data on "performance levels" to show the percentage of students who score at or above "proficient" levels as specified in the law. We did not report "at or below basic" categories, as this represents only the inverse of proficiency scores rather than a meaningful category of the lowest level of achievement.

We then calculated the percentage point change between 2010 and 2013 for each district and juxtaposed it against the state's progress over the same period so the reader could compare each district's rate of progress with that of its state. We define the gap as the difference between the proficiency rates of a given student group in a district and their comparison group statewide.

In addition to the data presented for individual districts, aggregate test results are reported for districts. Aggregate district results are generated by counting the number of districts that achieved a particular outcome (e.g., the number of districts that increased or decreased achievement gaps since the earliest year of data reported for their district in this edition of BTO).

Data Limitations

The assessment data presented in Beating the Odds XIII have a number of important limitations that readers should keep in mind. We have not been able to correct many of these problems since our first report was published because states have not always changed how they report their results. The reader should be aware of the following limitations in the data.

1. As a result of the nation's 50-state assessment system, it is not possible to compare assessment data across states. Each state has developed its own test, test administration guidelines, timelines, grades tested, and other technical features. It is not technically sound to compare districts across state lines. Therefore, the report does not rank cities on their performance, nor are test results in one state or city directly compared with any other. Comparisons within a given state can be made but should be done with caution.

2. Student performance considered "proficient" in one state may be "basic" or below in another. In addition, the scale from the highest possible score to the lowest will differ from test to test across states and will affect how close city averages look compared to their states. Moreover, the distance between any two points on a scale may not be the same.

3. Trend lines vary in duration from state to state. Because of differences in testing patterns, data availability, and changes in tests from state to state, some districts have trend lines spanning more years than other districts do. Some may have data for as many as four years (from 2009-2010 through 2012-2013), while others may have data for just one year.
4. No tests of statistical significance were conducted on test score changes on state assessments, nor are standard errors of measurement included in this report. As such, the comparisons in this report are made using point estimates rather than confidence intervals.
5. Tests also vary in their degree of difficulty. This report did not attempt to analyze the difficulty or rigor of state assessments. A state with a challenging test may produce lower district scores, while a state with an easy test may have higher district scores. High scores do not necessarily mean an easier test, however.
6. The data in this report are limited by what each state publicly reports. There may be circumstances where the data in this report are incomplete because the state has not posted all of its findings on its website or has not broadly circulated reports containing the findings by our publication date.
7. One part of the analysis compares specific districts to their respective states in the most recent year of testing: 2012-2013. Districts with 2012-2013 data were only included in the analysis if 2012-2013 data was also available for their state. These calculations are represented in the summary statistics regarding district performance relative to their states.
8. State and aggregate results in the report include data from their respective cities. We have not attempted to remove city data from state or national averages before making comparisons.
9. Some states administer reading tests to their students; other states administer an English language arts test. This report presents both kinds of data under the general "reading" heading. In general, language arts tests include both reading and writing, but states may have such tests with differing mixes of the two areas. In addition, the types of writing included on the state tests may differ from state-to-state and from year-to-year. For instance, one year a state may have a writing component that calls for students to write a narrative, but the next year, the state may have students summarizing information or responding to a literature prompt. Scores can fluctuate accordingly. This report relies mainly on reading tests to summarize our findings, but if language arts tests are available instead of reading tests those results are used here.

Demographic and Staffing Data

To place the academic gains in context, the Council collected additional data on district demographics and staffing. This information came from various surveys of the National Center for Education Statistics that we collected through the Common Core of Data. Trends for each demographic variable are shown for school years 2008-2009 and 2011-2012 (the most recent year for which federal data were available). Thus, the time period for these contextual data is slightly different from the period for which test scores were reported.

DISTRICT ACHIEVEMENT ON STATE ASSESSMENTS

I. IMPROVING MATHEMATICS ACHIEVEMENT: A NATIONAL PRIORITY

In April 2010, President Obama reconfirmed the nation's commitment to strengthen student achievement in mathematics and science. Addressing the National Academy of Sciences, the president announced the beginning of a national campaign to move American students "from the middle to the top of the pack in science and mathematics over the next decade."

While science scores are not yet reported as widely, Beating the Odds XIII examines state assessment results in mathematics to determine whether urban public school systems are making progress toward this goal of increased student achievement. The Council examined mathematics achievement data on state assessments in multiple ways. This report tracks—

- Trends in mathematics achievement on state assessments,
- District achievement compared to the state, and
- Changes in achievement gaps in mathematics among various student groups.

Trends in Mathematics Achievement at the School District Level

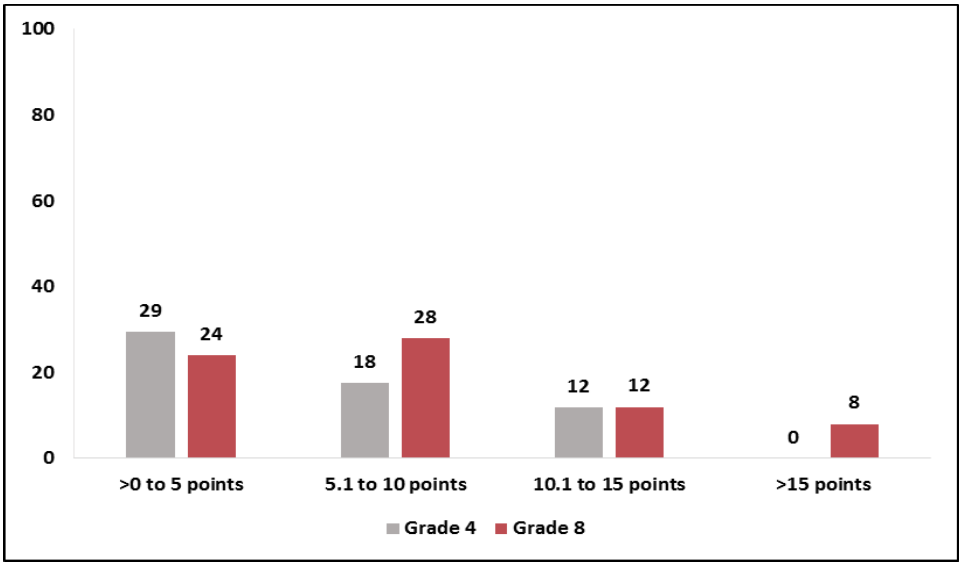
Figures 1 and 2 display these results:

- Fifty-nine percent of districts increased the percentage of fourth-grade students who scored at or above proficient between 2010 and 2013. About 12 percent of districts increased the percentage of fourth graders who scored at or above proficient by greater than ten percentage points (Figure 1).

- Seventy-two percent of districts increased the percentage of eighth-grade students who scored at or above proficient between 2010 and 2013. Approximately two out of 10 (20%) of these districts increased the percentage of eighth graders who scored at or above proficient by greater than ten percentage points (Figure 1).

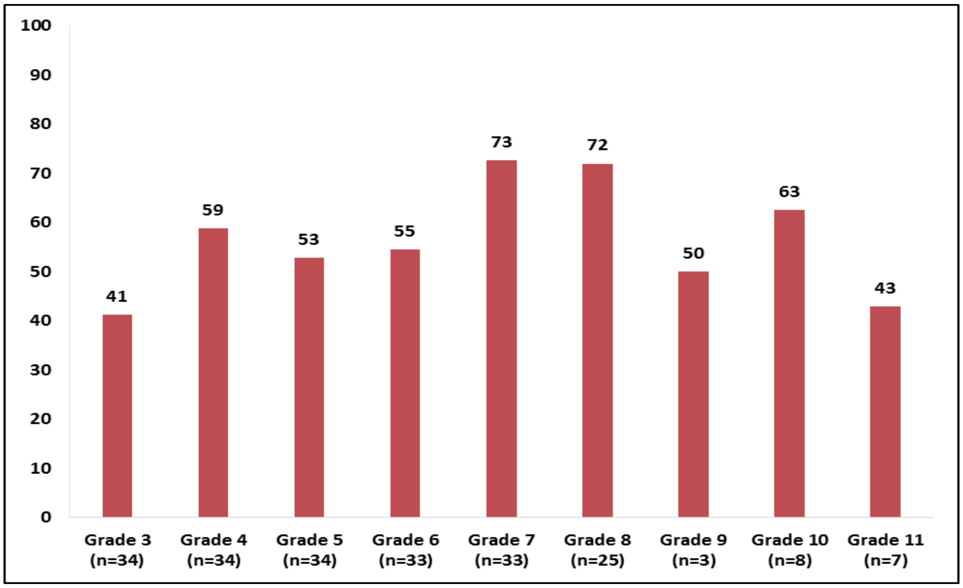
- Over 40 percent of districts improved in mathematics across all grade levels (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Percentage of CGCS districts with proficiency gains on state mathematics assessments between 2010 and 2013*



* Percentage point gains do not sum to 100 percent because not all districts made gains.

Figure 2. Percentage of CGCS districts with proficiency gains on state mathematics assessments by grade between 2010 and 2013



District Achievement in Mathematics Compared to the State

The Council examined how Great City School districts performed in relation to their states on mathematics assessments. These district and state level achievement data were analyzed to determine: 1) the percent of districts with mathematics scores equal to or greater than their respective states; and 2) the percent of districts that increased their mathematics scores at faster rates than their respective states.

Figures 3 and 4 display these results:

- Some 23 percent of districts had fourth-grade proficiency rates that were equal to or greater than their respective states in 2013 (Figure 3).
- Twenty percent of districts had eighth-grade proficiency rates that were equal to or greater than their respective states in 2013 (Figure 3).
- Twenty-nine percent of districts showed changes in students scoring at or above proficient levels that were greater than or equal to their respective states in fourth grade mathematics (Figure 4).
- Forty-four percent of districts showed changes in students scoring at or above proficient levels that were greater than or equal to their respective states in eighth-grade mathematics (Figure 4).

Figure 3. Percentage of CGCS districts with mathematics proficiency rates greater than or equal to state proficiency rates, 2012 and 2013

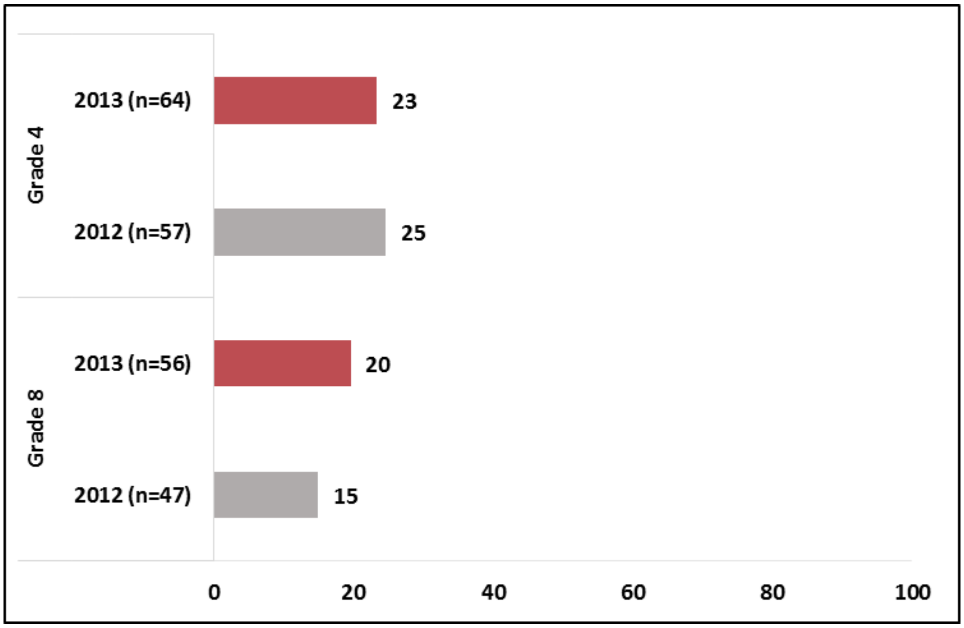
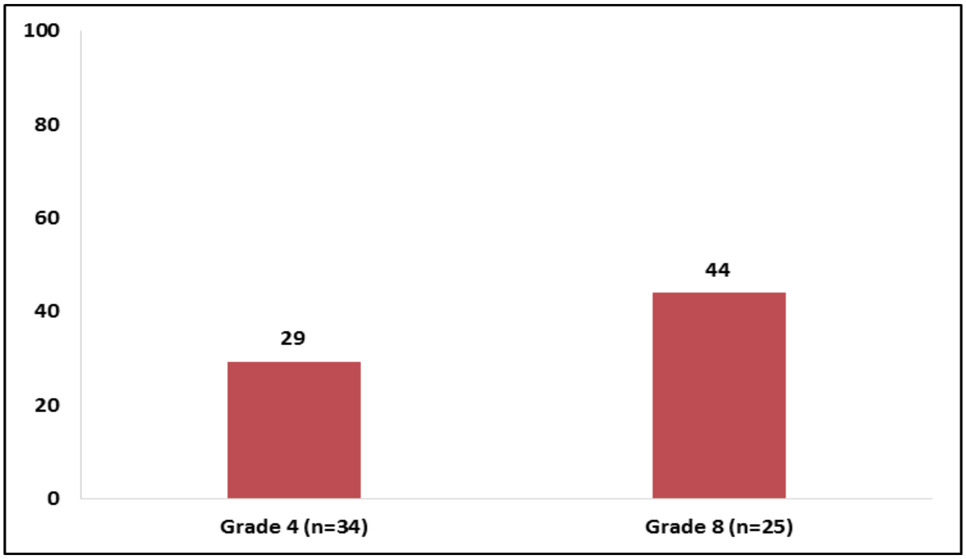


Figure 4. Percentage of CGCS districts showing changes in proficiency levels in mathematics greater than or equal to their respective states between 2010 and 2013



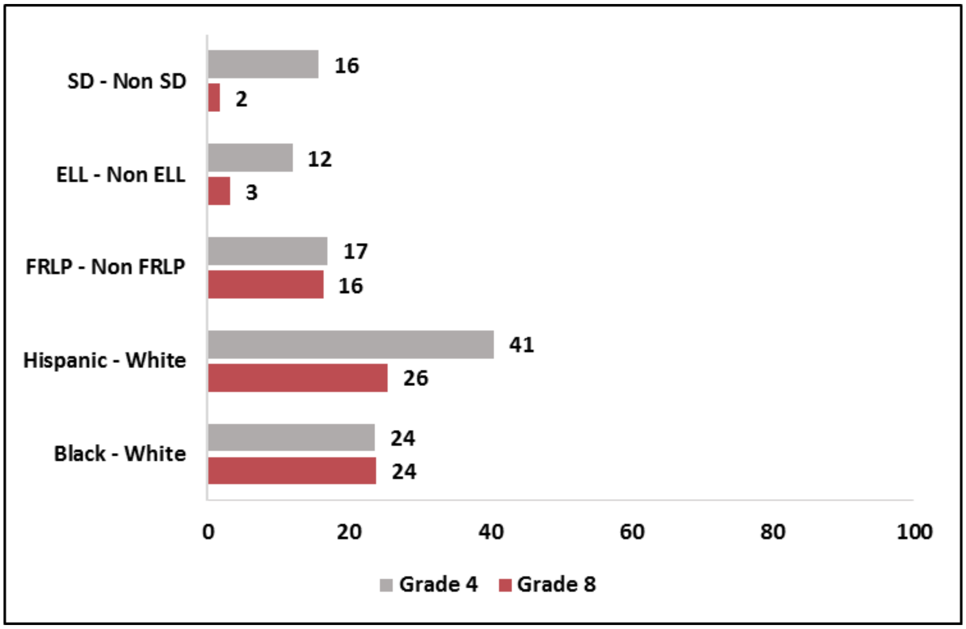
Changes in Mathematics Achievement within Student Groups

Finally, state assessment data were examined to determine whether achievement gaps in mathematics were narrowing in the Great City Schools. Figure 5 displays these results—

- Nearly a quarter of districts narrowed the achievement gap between their Black fourth graders and White fourth graders statewide; nearly 25 percent of Great City School districts narrowed the achievement gap in mathematics between their Black eighth graders and White eighth graders statewide.
- Over forty percent of Great City School districts narrowed the achievement gap between their Hispanic fourth graders and White fourth graders statewide; twenty-six percent of districts narrowed the achievement gap in mathematics between their Hispanic eighth graders and White eighth graders statewide.
- Seventeen percent of districts narrowed the achievement gap between their economically disadvantaged fourth graders and non-economically disadvantaged fourth graders statewide; sixteen percent of Great City School districts narrowed the achievement gap in mathematics between their economically disadvantaged eighth graders and non-economically disadvantaged eighth graders statewide.

- Twelve percent of districts narrowed the achievement gap between their English language learners in fourth grade and non-English language learners in fourth grade statewide; three percent of Great City School districts narrowed the achievement gap in mathematics between their English language learners in eighth grade and non-English language learners in eighth-grade statewide.
- Sixteen percent of districts narrowed the achievement gap in mathematics between their students with disabilities in fourth grade and students without disabilities in the fourth grade statewide; two percent of districts narrowed the achievement gap in mathematics between students with disabilities in eighth-grade and students without disabilities in the eighth-grade statewide.

Figure 5. Percentage of CGCS districts reducing achievement gaps on state mathematics assessments by student groups, 2013*



*See appendix for group size

II. IMPROVING READING ACHIEVEMENT: A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE

In the nation's urban school systems, the polarizing debate over whole language versus phonics has largely given way to a growing understanding of the need to both build foundational literacy skills in early childhood and explicitly support academic literacy development throughout adolescence. However, advancing literacy—particularly at the secondary level—remains a fundamental challenge for local and national education leaders, and the need to raise student achievement in reading has never been more pressing.

"*Encouraging students to improve their reading is a key to their success in school and in life*,"
Secretary of Education Arne Duncan

To examine reading achievement in the nation's Great City School districts, the Council examined reading achievement data on state assessments in multiple ways. Looking at district results on state assessments for all of the Great City School districts along with statewide results, this report examines—

- Trends in reading achievement on state assessments,
- District achievement compared to the state, and
- Changes in achievement gaps in reading among various student groups.

Trends in Reading Achievement at the School District Level

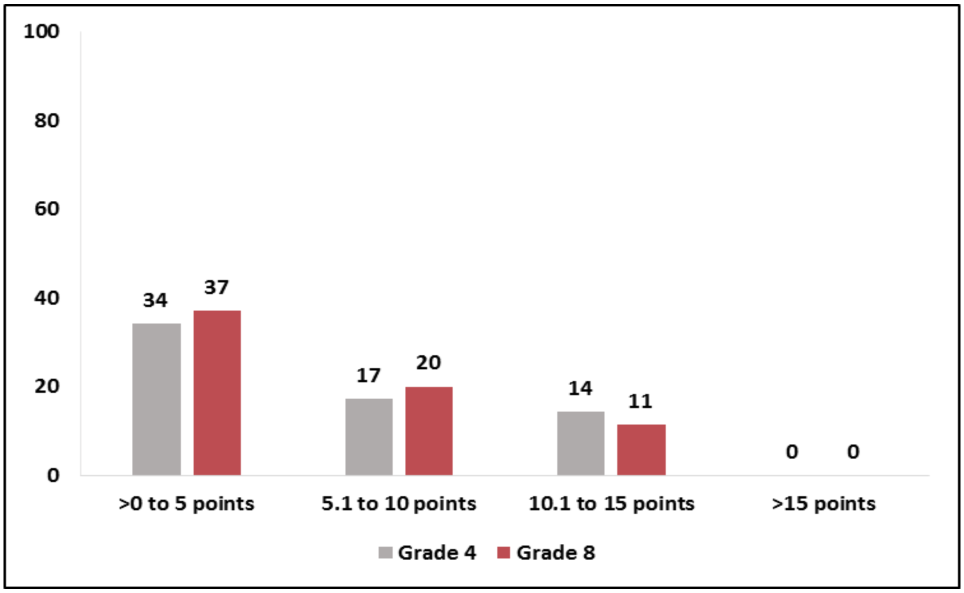
Figures 6 and 7 display these results:

- Sixty-five percent of districts increased the percentage of fourth-grade students who scored at or above proficient between 2010 and 2013 (Figure 6). About 14 percent of districts increased the percentage of fourth graders who scored at or above proficient by greater than ten percentage points (Figure 6).

- Approximately 68 percent of districts increased the percentage of eighth-grade students who scored at or above proficient between 2010 and 2013. Slightly more than one out of ten of these districts increased the percentage of eighth graders who scored at or above proficient by greater than 10 percentage points (Figure 6).

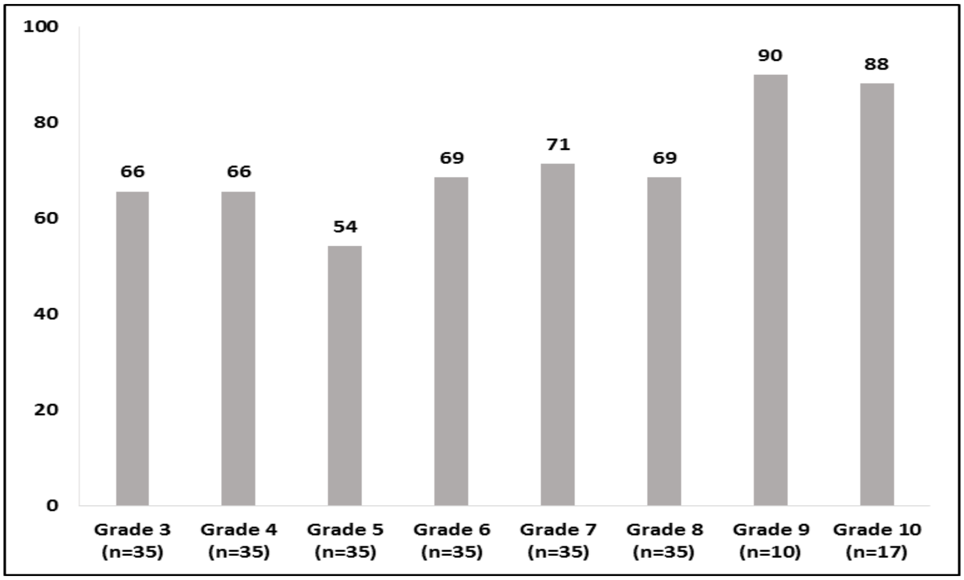
- Districts continue to make progress in reading as more than half made gains on state reading assessments across all grade levels (Figure 7).

Figure 6. Percentage of CGCS districts with proficiency gains on state reading assessments between 2010 and 2013*



* Percentage point gains do not sum to 100 percent because not all districts made gains.

Figure 7. Percentage of CGCS districts with proficiency gains on state reading assessments by grade between 2010 and 2013



District Achievement in Reading Compared to the State

The Council examined how Great City School districts performed in relation to their states on reading assessments. These district and state level achievement data were further analyzed to determine: 1) the percent of districts with reading scores equal to or greater than their respective states; and 2) the percent of districts that increased their reading scores at faster rates than their respective states.

Figures 8 and 9 display these results:

- Some 22 percent of districts had fourth-grade proficiency rates that were equal to or greater than their respective states in 2013 (Figure 8).
- Twenty percent of districts had eighth-grade proficiency rates that were equal to or greater than their respective states (Figure 8).
- Over thirty percent of districts showed changes in students scoring at or above proficient levels that were greater than or equal to their respective states in fourth-grade reading (Figure 9).
- Over forty percent of districts showed changes in students scoring at or above proficient levels that were greater than or equal to their respective states in eighth-grade reading (Figure 9).

Figure 8. Percentage of CGCS districts with reading proficiency rates greater than or equal to state proficiency rates, 2012 and 2013

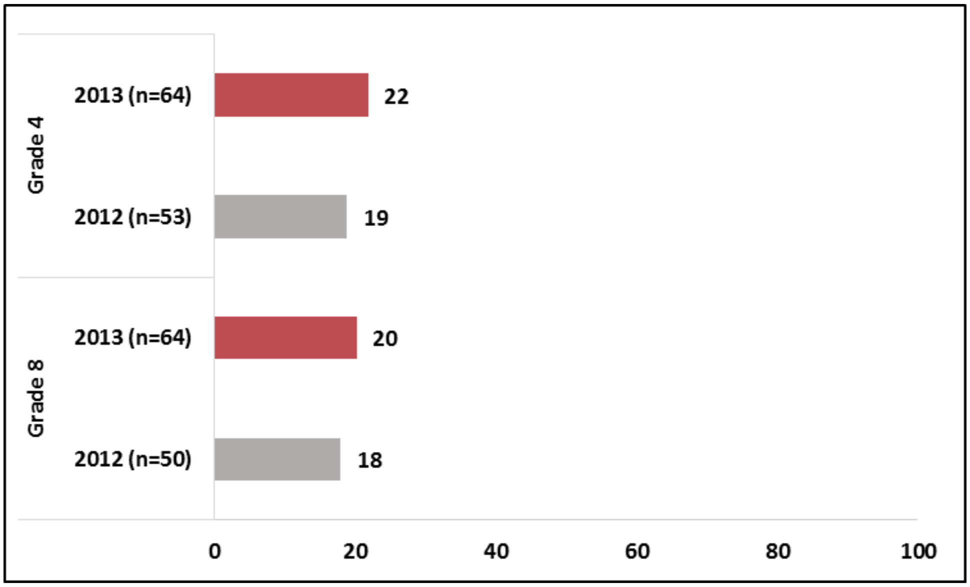
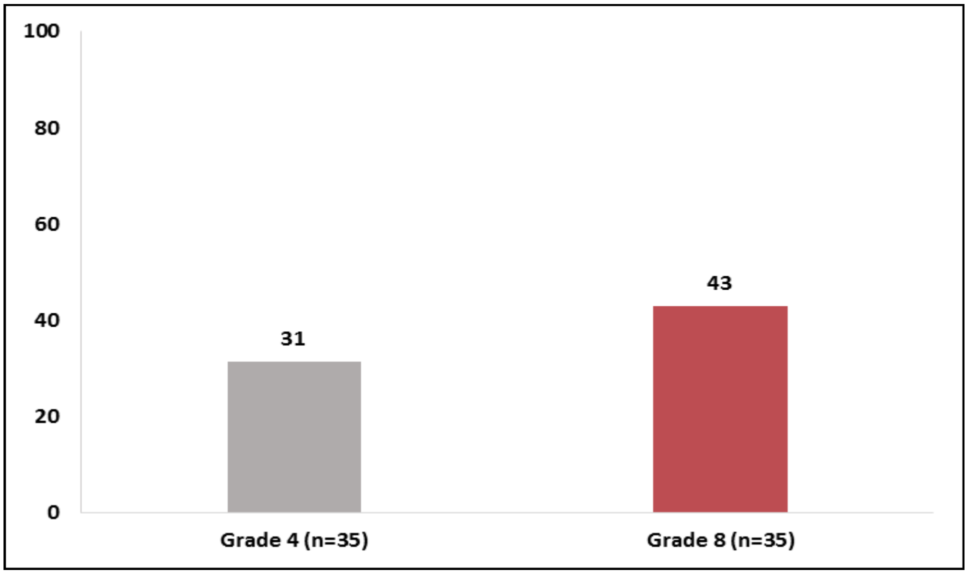


Figure 9. Percentage of CGCS districts showing changes in proficiency levels in reading greater than or equal to their respective states between 2010 and 2013*



Changes in Reading Achievement within Student Groups

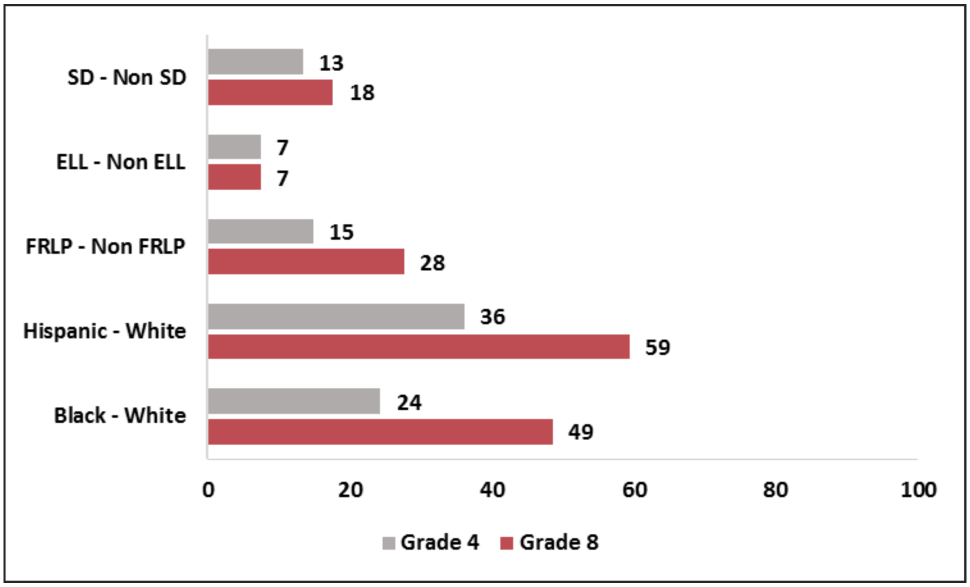
Finally, state assessment data were examined to determine whether achievement gaps in reading were narrowing in the Great City Schools. Figure 10 displays these results —

- Nearly a quarter (24%) of districts narrowed the achievement gap between their Black fourth graders and White fourth graders statewide; nearly half (49%) of Great City School districts narrowed the achievement gap in reading between their Black eighth graders and White eighth graders statewide.
- Over a third (36%) of districts narrowed the achievement gap between their Hispanic fourth graders and White fourth graders statewide; over half (59%) of Great City School districts narrowed the achievement gap in reading between their Hispanic eighth graders and White eighth graders statewide.
- Fifteen percent of districts narrowed the achievement gap between their economically disadvantaged fourth graders and non-economically disadvantaged fourth graders statewide; over a quarter of Great City School districts narrowed the achievement gap in reading between

their economically disadvantaged eighth graders and non-economically disadvantaged eighth graders statewide.

- Seven percent of districts narrowed the achievement gap between their English language learners in fourth grade and non-English language learners in fourth grade statewide; the percentage was the same in eighth grade.
- Thirteen percent of districts narrowed the achievement gap in reading between their students with disabilities in fourth grade and students without disabilities in the fourth grade statewide; eighteen percent narrowed the achievement gap in reading between their students with disabilities in eighth-grade and students without disabilities in the eighth-grade statewide.

Figure 10. Percentage of CGCS districts reducing achievement gaps on state reading assessments by student groups, 2013*



*See appendix for group size

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS AND STAFFING

The challenge of the Great City Schools is to increase student achievement in a context far different from that of the average public school system. Urban education is unique, in part, because it serves students who are typically from lower-income families, who are learning English as a second language, and who often face discrimination. The role of urban schools is to overcome these barriers and teach all children to the same high standards.

This chapter examines the context of urban education—a context that should be considered in discussing the achievement data presented in previous chapters. The chapter reviews basic demographic characteristics of the Great City Schools, including student poverty and limited English proficiency, and how they have changed during the period in which state assessments were being implemented.

The reader can find individual city data online. The demographic and staffing data for this portion of the study were gathered from the Common Core of Data at the National Center for Education Statistics. Due to the preliminary and sometimes erroneous nature of some of these 2011-2012 data, the information was supplemented with data from district or state websites.

Student Demographics

The demography of urban education continues to be a subject of enormous public interest. Our student composition is important because research shows that income, disability, and English-language proficiency are strongly correlated with academic achievement.

Student Enrollment in the Great City Schools

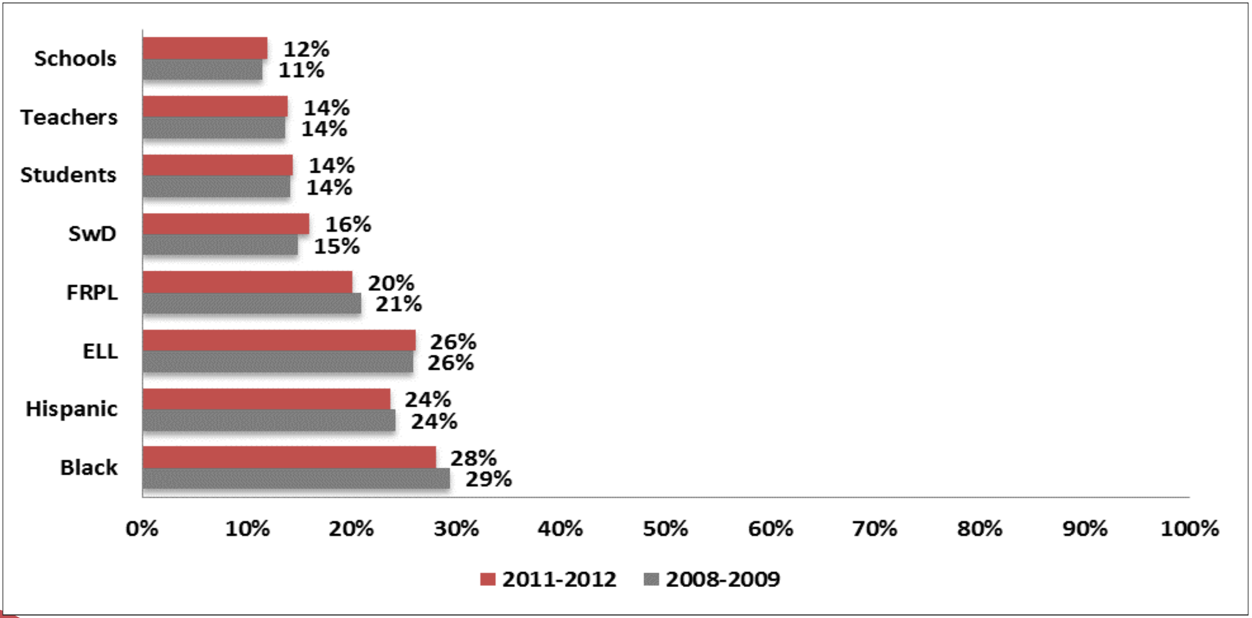
The Great City Schools continue to enroll a significant share of the nation's students (Figure 11). Data from the NCES Common Core of Data show that—

- The Great City Schools enrolled 7,133,116 students in 2011-2012 (the most recent year on which federal data are available), an increase of about two percent over the 6,965,810 students enrolled in 2008-2009.
- During the same period, total public school enrollment nationally increased from 49,265,572 students in 2008-2009 to 49,429,653 students in 2011-2012.

Figure 11. Council of The Great City Schools Demographic Profile

	CGCS		NATION	
	2008-2009	**2011-2012**	**2008-2009**	**2011-2012**
Number of Students	6,965,810	7,133,116	49,265,572	49,429,653
Number of FTE Teachers	443,779	414,976	3,246,705	2,987,042
Student-Teacher Ratio	16	17	15	17
Number of Schools	11,711	12,095	101,979	100,920
Student Groups				
Free and Reduced Price Lunch	65%	68%	44%	49%
Students with Disabilities	13%	14%	13%	13%
English Language Learners	16%	16%	9%	9%
Student Racial/Ethnic Groups				
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1%	1%	1%	1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	7%	8%	5%	5%
Black	35%	31%	17%	16%
Hispanic	36%	39%	21%	24%
White	20%	19%	54%	52%

CGCS as a Percent of the Nation's Public Schools



Income and Poverty in the Great City Schools

Students in the Great City Schools are far more likely to come from low-income homes than the average student nationally. A summary of key indicators for the 2011-2012 school year include the following—

- About 68 percent of students in the Great City Schools were eligible for a free/reduced price lunch subsidy, compared with 49 percent nationally.
- About 20 percent of the nation's students eligible for the school lunch program are enrolled in the Great City Schools.

English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities

The Great City Schools also serve a higher proportion of English language learners than the average school system. However, these urban school systems enroll about the same percentage of students with disabilities as the average school district nationally, although the Great City Schools often enroll a greater share of students with high-cost disabilities. Key indicators in the 2011-2012 school year include the following—

- About 16 percent of students enrolled in the Great City Schools are English language learners, compared with 9 percent of students nationally.
- About 14 percent of students in the Great City Schools are classified as students with disabilities, compared with 13 percent of students nationally.

Enrollments by Race and Ethnicity in the Great City Schools

The racial characteristics of urban schools are also significantly different from the average school system nationwide. Approximately 79 percent of Great City School students are of color—primarily Black, Hispanic, Asian American or American Indian—compared with 46 percent nationally.

Key statistics include the following—

- About 31 percent of Great City School students were Black in 2011-2012, compared with 16 percent nationally.

- About 19 percent of Great City School students were White in 2011-2012, compared with 52 percent nationally.
- About nine percent of Great City School students were Asian American or Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaskan Native in 2011-2012, compared with six percent nationwide.
- The percentage of students in the Great City Schools who were Black declined from 35 percent in 2008-2009 to 31 percent in 2011-2012. (The percentage of students nationally who were Black decreased from 17 to 16 percent over the same period.)
- The percentage of students in the Great City Schools who were Hispanic increased from 36 percent in 2008-2009 to 39 percent in 2011-2012. (The percentage of students nationally who were Hispanic rose from 21 percent to 24 percent over the same period.)
- Approximately 25 percent of all students of color in the nation were enrolled in the Great City Schools in 2011-2012.

Student-Teacher Ratios and Average Enrollments per School

Research suggests that the number of students in a class affects student achievement. In particular, access to smaller classes has been shown to improve achievement for some students, while larger classes have a negative effect on student performance. Moreover, the benefits of smaller classes appear to be greater for disadvantaged and minority students. In order to explore this issue, the Council analyzed two contextual variables: student-teacher ratios and average enrollments per school. Student-teacher ratios are not synonymous with class size, because they include special education teachers and other instructional staff that are often assigned to small and dedicated classes, but the ratios might serve as a convenient proxy.

The Council's analysis showed the following trends in school size in urban districts—

- The average student-teacher ratio in the Great City Schools was 17 to 1 in 2011-2012, compared with the national average of 17 students per teacher.
- The average number of students per school in the Great City Schools decreased from 595 students in 2008-2009 to 590 in 2011-2012.
- The average number of students per school nationally increased from 483 2008-2009 to 490 in 2011-2012.
- The average school in the Great Cities enrolled about 100 more children (590 students) than the average school nationally (490 students) in 2011-2012.

DISCUSSION

This report represents the thirteenth time the Council of the Great City Schools has examined the status and progress of America's urban schools on state reading and mathematics tests. The report is imperfect for all the reasons indicated in the methodology section. Data are not comparable from one state to another. Test results are reported in different metrics. Not all states publish their disaggregated results. Test participation rates are not always available. Testing procedures are sometimes not the same from year to year.

Nevertheless, the data in Beating the Odds XIII present the best available picture of how America's Great City Schools are performing on state tests and suggest they are making some progress in both reading and mathematics.

These results continue to be preliminary but encouraging. The Council is committed to improving its annual reporting of city results on state tests. And the Council will make every effort to continue reporting data in a way that is consistent with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) as long as the law is in place. We want to encourage the public to expect more transparency in urban school data.

City schools, moreover, want to improve their reporting to the nation on other indicators, including course-taking patterns and graduation rates. No single indicator gives the public the entire picture of urban education any more than one Stock Market index adequately describes the economy.

However limited and flawed the state data continue to be, the overall direction of the state numbers is corroborated by the most recent estimates from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The state assessment data indicate that mathematics achievement in the cities has improved by significant margins at both the fourth and eighth grades, and that reading is improving in the cities at the fourth and eighth-grade level.

Mathematics Results

The trends in mathematics performance are unambiguous for the nation and the Great City Schools. Achievement is improving. However, the Council does acknowledge the gains should be faster. Beating the Odds XIII indicates that 59 percent of Great City School districts increased the percentage of fourth graders scoring at or above proficiency between 2010 and 2013. Additionally, 12 percent of the districts increased the percentage of fourth graders that scored at or above proficient by greater than 10 points over that same period. At the same time, 72 percent of districts increased the percentage of eighth graders that scored at or above proficient; and twenty percent had percentage point increases of greater than 10 points.

Reducing racial disparities in academic achievement is also a fundamental goal of NCLB. This report, Beating the Odds XIII, indicates that the Great City Schools have made some incremental reductions in the disparities of racial and ethnic gaps in student performance in mathematics between 2010 and 2013. On average a quarter of Council districts are narrowing racial and ethnic gaps in mathematics achievement among fourth and eighth graders. In addition, about 15 percent of the districts are also reducing differences by economic group in achievement at both the elementary and middle school levels.

Reading Results

The data in this report also suggest that reading achievement in the Great City Schools is improving. Beating the Odds XIII found gains in the percentage of students who were scoring at or above proficiency levels on their respective state tests. Sixty-five percent of Great City School districts increased the percentage of fourth-grade students who scored at or above proficient between 2010 and 2013. Similarly 69 percent of districts increased the percentage of eighth-grade students who scored at or above proficient during that same time; nearly a third of districts had gains of over 10 percentage points.

Racial achievement gaps in elementary reading achievement also showed signs of narrowing. Over a quarter of urban school districts narrowed the gaps between Black students and White students statewide. Similarly, over a third of districts narrowed the fourth and eighth-grade Hispanic-White achievement gaps. Over fifteen percent of districts narrowed the gaps between economically disadvantaged fourth and eighth graders and their more well-off counterparts statewide.

The Urban Context

Progress in mathematics and reading achievement is occurring in an urban context that is significantly different from other schools. Beating the Odds XIII looked at those differences and how they have changed over the last several years. Urban schools enroll about 20 percent of the nation's free-lunch eligible students, 25 percent of all students of color in the country, and disproportionately large numbers of English language learners and economically disadvantaged students. While we embrace and encourage diversity, we understand that large concentrations of these student groups often dictate additional support for these students and their teachers so that all students reach their highest potential. These percentages have remained relatively unchanged in recent years.

Nonetheless, it is clear that student achievement in the Great City Schools is improving. Some of these gains are coming from working harder and smarter and squeezing inefficiencies out of every scarce dollar.

Some of the gains, however, come from cities doing what the nation has agreed is likely to work- higher standards, strong and stable leadership, better teaching, more instructional time, regular assessments, stronger accountability, and efficient management.

The data suggest that gains are possible on a large scale— not just school-by-school. It is now time to determine how the pace of improvement can be accelerated. The Council of the Great City Schools and its member districts are asking these questions and pursuing the answers aggressively.

The nation, for its part, needs to think long and hard about why urban schools have to beat any odds.

APPENDIX

Number of Districts Included In Specific Analyses

Figure 1. Percentage of CGCS districts with proficiency gains on state mathematics assessments between 2010 and 2013	Number of Districts Improving	Number of Districts Reporting
Grade 4		
0 to 5 percentage points	10	34
5.1 to 10 percentage points	6	34
10.1 to 15 percentage points	4	34
≥ 15.1 percentage points	0	34
Grade 8		
0 to 5 percentage points	6	25
5.1 to 10 percentage points	7	25
10.1 to 15 percentage points	3	25
≥ 15.1 percentage points	2	25
Figure 2. Percentage of CGCS districts with proficiency gains on state mathematics assessments by grade between 2010 and 2013	Number of Districts Improving	Number of Districts Reporting
Grade 3	14	34
Grade 4	20	34
Grade 5	18	34
Grade 6	18	33
Grade 7	24	33
Grade 8	18	25
Grade 9	1	2
Grade 10	5	8
Grade 11	3	7
Figure 3. Percentage of CGCS districts with mathematics proficiency rates greater than or equal to state proficiency rates, 2012 and 2013	Number of Districts with Scores Greater than or Equal to State	Number of Districts Reporting
SY 2012-13		
Grade 4	15	64
Grade 8	11	56
SY 2011-12		
Grade 4	14	57
Grade 8	7	47
Figure 4. Percentage of CGCS districts showing changes in proficiency levels in mathematics greater than or equal to their respective states between 2010 and 2013	Number of Districts with Faster Growth than State	Number of Districts Reporting
Grade 4	10	34
Grade 8	11	25

Figure 5. Percentage of CGCS districts reducing achievement gaps on state mathematics assessments by student groups, 2013	Number of Districts Reducing Gaps	Number of Districts Reporting
Grade 4		
District SD - State Non SD	8	51
District ELL - State Non ELL	6	50
District FRPL - State Non FRLP	8	47
District Hispanic - State White	15	37
District Black - State White	9	38
Grade 8		
District SD - State Non SD	1	59
District ELL - State Non ELL	2	62
District FRPL - State Non FRLP	9	55
District Hispanic - State White	12	47
District Black - State White	11	46

Figure 6. Percentage of CGCS districts with proficiency gains on state reading assessments between 2010 and 2013	Number of Districts Improving	Number of Districts Reporting
Grade 4		
0 to 5 percentage points	12	35
5.1 to 10 percentage points	6	35
10.1 to 15 percentage points	5	35
≥ 15.1 percentage points	0	35
Grade 8		
0 to 5 percentage points	13	35
5.1 to 10 percentage points	7	35
10.1 to 15 percentage points	4	35
≥ 15.1 percentage points	0	35

Figure 7. Percentage of districts with proficiency gains on state reading assessments by grade between 2010 and 2013	Number of Districts Improving	Number of Districts Reporting
Grade 3	23	35
Grade 4	23	35
Grade 5	19	35
Grade 6	24	35
Grade 7	25	35
Grade 8	24	35
Grade 9	9	10
Grade 10	15	17
Grade 11	12	17

Figure 8. Percentage of CGCS districts with reading proficiency rates great than or equal to state proficiency rates, 2012 and 2013	Number of Districts with Scores Greater than or Equal to State	Number of Districts Reporting
SY 2012-13		
Grade 4	14	64
Grade 8	13	64
SY 2011-12		
Grade 4	10	53
Grade 8	9	50

Figure 9. Percentage of CGCS districts showing changes in proficiency levels in reading greater or equal to than their respective states between 2010 and 2013	Number of Districts with Faster Growth than State	Number of Districts Reporting
Grade 4	11	35
Grade 8	15	35

Figure 10. Percentage of CGCS districts reducing achievement gaps on state reading assessments by student groups, 2013	Number of Districts Reducing Gaps	Number of Districts Reporting
Grade 4		
District SD - State Non SD	7	52
District ELL - State Non ELL	4	54
District FRPL - State Non FRLP	7	47
District Hispanic - State White	13	36
District Black - State White	9	37
Grade 8		
District SD - State Non SD	9	51
District ELL - State Non ELL	4	54
District FRPL - State Non FRLP	13	47
District Hispanic - State White	22	37
District Black - State White	18	37