

New report paints sobering picture of urban education in the U.S.

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A groundbreaking new report provides a sobering picture of the state of urban education in America, especially when it comes to educational opportunities for poor students and students of color, who now make up the majority of America's public school students nationwide.

The report provides the first citywide assessment of the changing and complex public [school](#) landscape in the U.S., enabling city leaders to assess the overall health of all of their cities' schools, regardless of whether they are district- or charter-run, and to benchmark them against schools in other cities.

In "Measuring Up: Educational Improvement and Opportunity in 50 Cities," researchers at the University of Washington's Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) went beyond test scores, using publicly available data to develop nine indicators related to school improvement and academic opportunity.

These cities reflect rapidly changing student demographics and the complexity of today's urban public education landscape, where multiple agencies oversee public schools and enrollments are spread across a variety of school types.

Key national findings:

- Performance in most cities is flat, with limited proficiency gains and large shares of schools stuck in the bottom 5 percent of

schools in their state.

- Students from low-income households and [students](#) of color face staggering academic inequities, with limited access to high-performing schools and college preparatory experiences.
- Across the 50 cities, white students were four times more likely than [black students](#) to enroll in a top-scoring elementary or middle school.
- Black students were twice as likely to receive out-of-school suspensions as white students.
- Less than 15 percent of all [high school students](#) took the ACT/SAT in 30 of the 50 cities.
- Less than 10 percent of all high school students took advanced math classes each year in 32 of the 50 cities.

Though it paints a bleak picture, the report also highlights cities that have made significant progress.

"I hope this will serve as a catalyst for city leaders to take a look at where they might be falling short and identify other cities they might learn from," said CRPE Senior Research Analyst Michael DeArmond, the report's lead author.

For example:

- How have New Orleans and other cities managed to improve or replace so many of their lowest-performing schools?
- What is happening in cities like Memphis and Chicago—where black students participate in advanced courses and the SAT at high rates?
- Why do some cities, like Newark and Columbus, have high numbers of schools that "beat the odds" by performing better than schools with similar demographics?
- What accounts for the favorable discipline outcomes in cities like

Baton Rouge, the only city in the report where black students are not suspended at higher rates than white students? Or Los Angeles, where overall suspension rates are low and Hispanic students are less likely to be suspended than [white students](#)?

"This report suggests that inequity in public education, though widespread, isn't inevitable," said CRPE Director Robin Lake. "What should make us angry is that there is evidence that things can be better."

The analysis suggests that no single model for providing or governing schools—district operation, chartering or vouchers—has been a sure solution to address the needs of urban students. However, given the enormity of the challenges represented in this study, no city should close off any possible source of good schools or promising solutions.

Lake is calling for civic and school system leaders across the country to learn from one another and to aggressively hunt for evidence-based new solutions that enable them to do more of what works and respond quickly and meaningfully to shifting demographics and other challenges.

"America is at a profound moment of social struggle," she said. "School improvement can't wait for us to solve poverty or racial injustice. But we can create great school options now for young people that can help to mitigate these other social challenges.

"Education is a crucial lever for mayors and civic leaders to provide hope and opportunity for our most vulnerable youth. We can't improve our cities without improving our schools."

The report features interactive charts enabling users to sort each indicator by student sub-groups and outcomes. Measuring Up: Educational Improvement and Opportunity in 50 Cities and interactive data are available at

<http://www.crpe.org/publications/measuring-educational-improvement-and-opportunity-50-cities>.

Provided by University of Washington

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