

BEATING THE ODDS

Analysis of Student Performance on State Assessments



Results from 2011-2012 School Year

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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.)

State Department of Education websites.

About the Council of the Great City Schools

The Council of the Great City Schools is a coalition of 66 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 ongoing 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.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council of the Great City Schools has prepared this twelfth edition of *Beating the Odds* to give the nation an in-depth look at how big-city schools are progressing toward the academic goals and standards set by the states. This analysis examines student achievement in mathematics and reading from spring 2009 through spring 2012. 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. Performance at the elementary level is generally better than in the middle grades. Nevertheless, the data indicate overall movement and progress. In general, *Beating the Odds XII* 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 XII* 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 trust 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 66 city school systems from 36 states and the District of Columbia. The statistics are presented by year and grade on each state test in mathematics and reading between 2008-2009 and 2011-2012. 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 federal law—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 2007-2008 and 2010-2011 (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 2008-2009 through 2011-2012.

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 innovation 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 look at "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 XII*.

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 twelfth 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 XII* (BTO) 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.

Organization of the Report

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 profiles, the individual profiles are available on our website at <http://www.cgcs.org>. There, readers have the option of downloading the district profiles 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 XII* is not only a report card on urban education, it is also a report card on the nation and its commitment to future generations.

Methodology

This report presents district-by-district reading and mathematics achievement for 66 of the nation's major city school systems. It provides performance data from spring 2009 through spring 2012. It also presents state test data by year, grade, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and 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 and 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 in "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 annual change 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 XII* 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 that is 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 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 2008-2009 through 2011-2012), 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. Most states do not yet publish the statistics necessary to make these calculations possible. 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: 2011-2012. Districts with 2011-2012 data were only included in the analysis if 2011-2012 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 the 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 2007-2008 and 2010-2011 (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.

Once the data were collected, the Council prepared preliminary profiles on each member city. Profiles were e-mailed to the superintendent and the research director of each member district. Districts were asked to review the data, submit corrections, and add clarifying comments and end notes.

Corrections to the profiles were then made. Few districts adjusted any of the statewide achievement reports, but some provided clarifying information about changes in state testing practices and reporting. Districts were asked to provide documentation in the form of published reports or internet links to support their requested changes. A number of corrections, however, were made to NCES demographic and staffing data. The Council made those corrections but included a note on the profile, so readers would know that data came from NCES but were adjusted by the individual school systems.

DISTRICT ACHIEVEMENT ON STATE ASSESSMENTS

I. IMPROVING MATHEMATICS ACHIEVEMENT: A NATIONAL PRIORITY

In April 2009, 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 XII* 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—

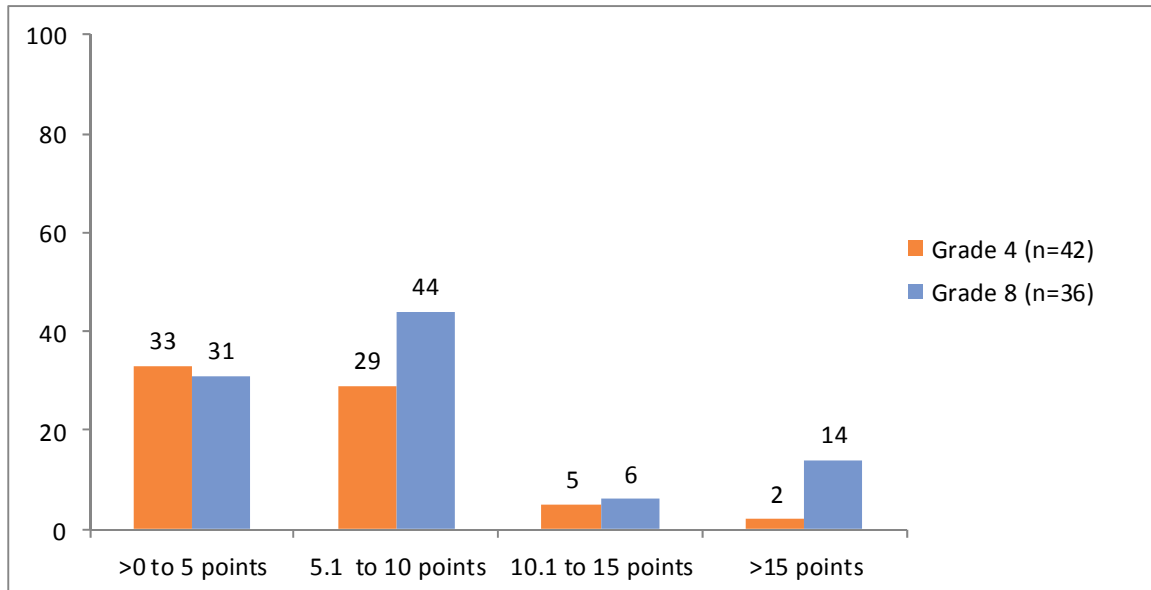
- Trends in mathematics achievement on state assessments,
- District achievement compared to the state, and
- Changes in achievement gaps in mathematics among various student groups.

Trends in Mathematics Achievement at the School District Level

Figures 1 and 2 display these results:

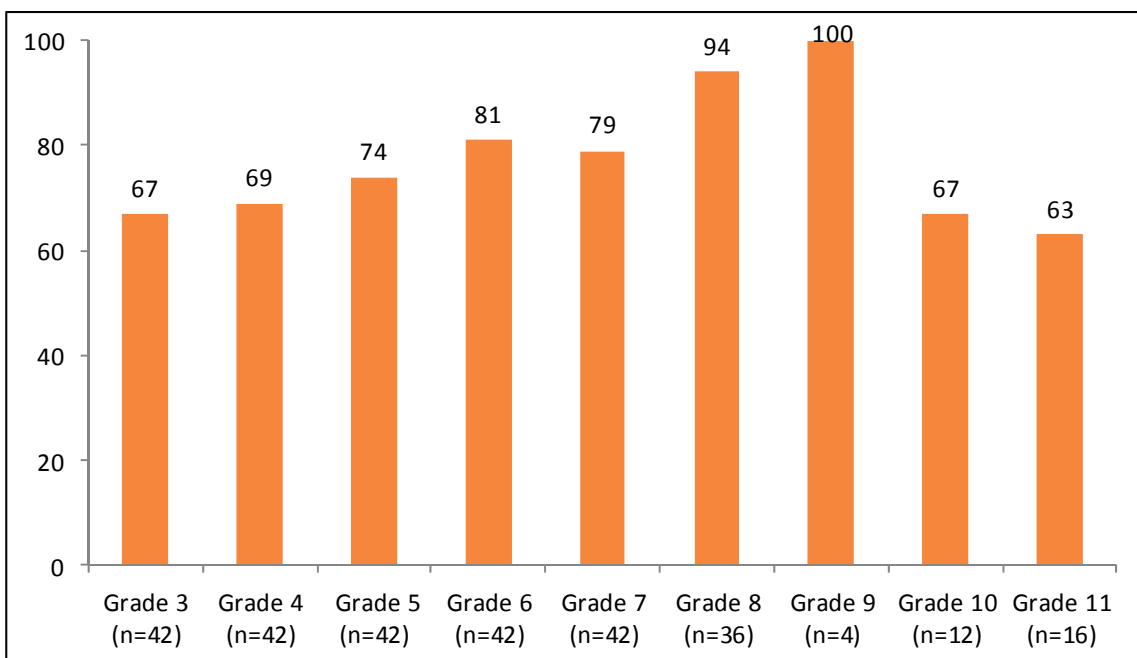
- Sixty-nine percent of districts increased the percentage of fourth-grade students who scored at or above proficient between 2009 and 2012. About seven percent of districts increased the percentage of fourth graders that scored at or above proficient by greater than 10 percentage points (Figure 1).
- Ninety-four percent of districts increased the percentage of eighth-grade students who scored at or above proficient between 2009 and 2012. Approximately two out of 10 (20%) of these districts increased the percentage of eighth graders that scored at or above proficient by greater than 10 percentage points (Figure 1).
- Over 60 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 2009 and 2012*



* 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 2009 and 2012



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 26 percent of districts had fourth-grade proficiency rates that were equal to or greater than their respective states in 2012 (Figure 3).
- Sixteen percent of districts had eighth-grade proficiency rates that were equal to or greater than their respective states in 2012 (Figure 3).
- Forty-three percent of districts showed changes in students scoring at or above proficient levels that were greater than their respective states in fourth-grade mathematics (Figure 4).
- Sixty percent of districts showed changes in students scoring at or above proficient levels that were greater than 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, 2011 and 2012

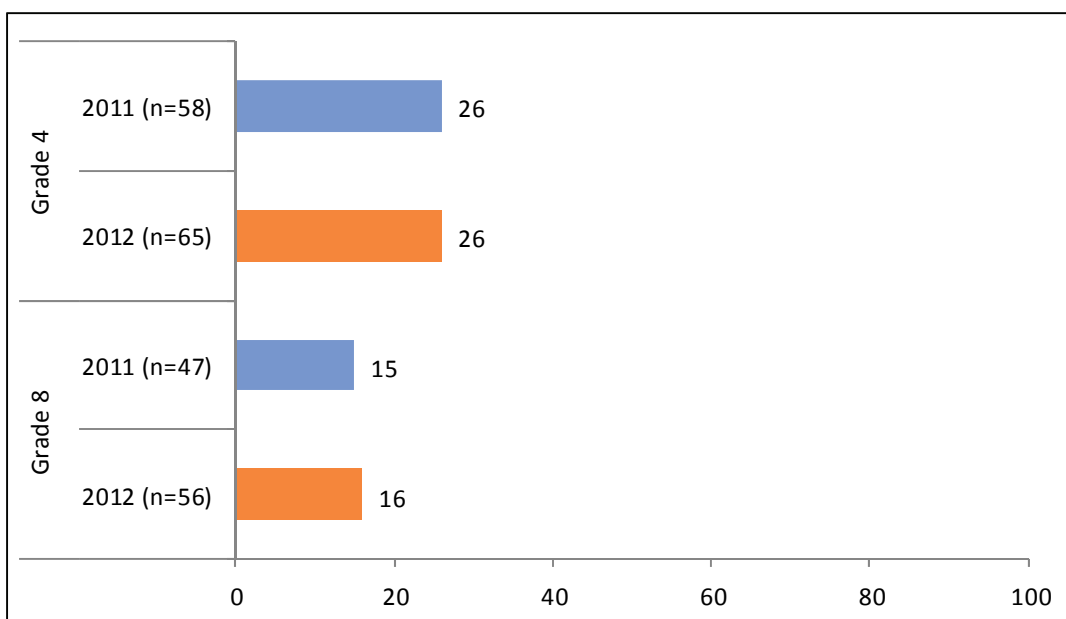
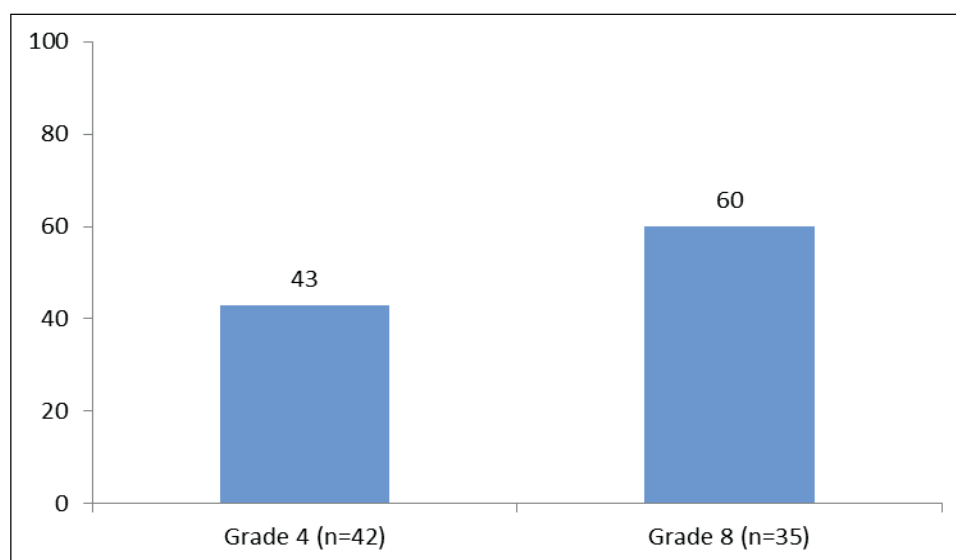


Figure 4. Percentage of CGCS districts showing changes in proficiency levels in mathematics greater than their respective states between 2009 and 2012



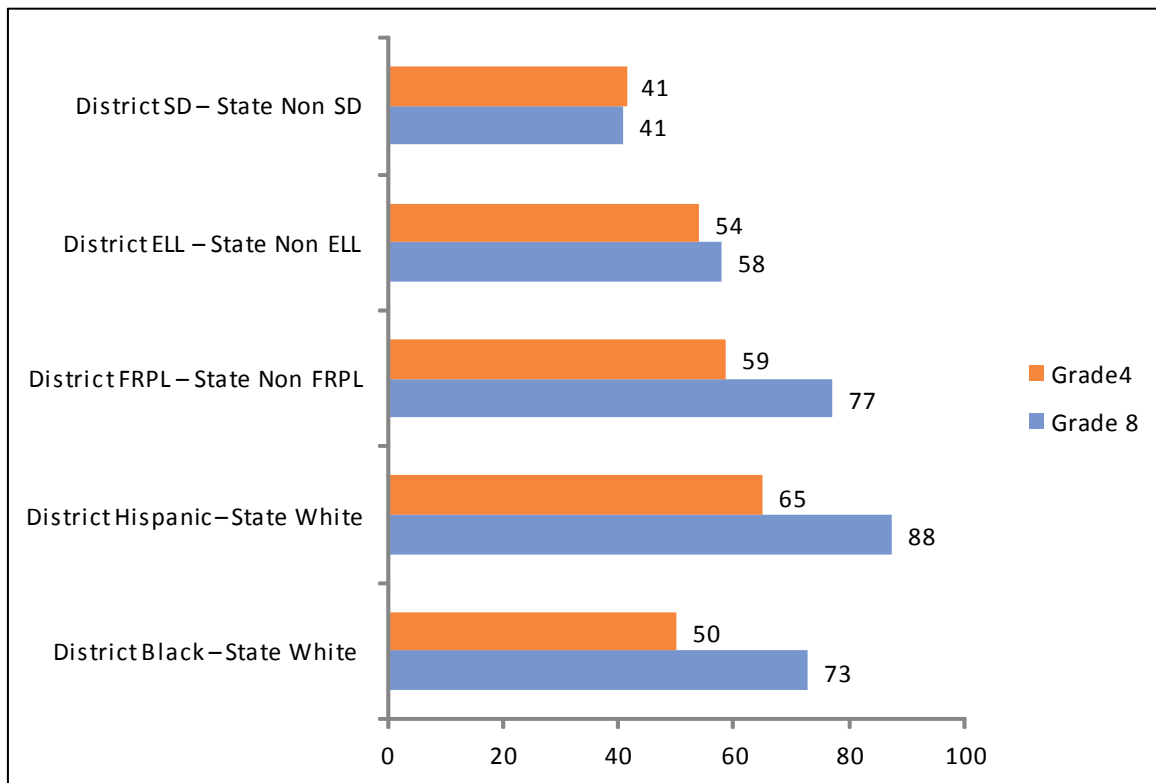
Changes in Mathematics Achievement within Student Groups

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

- Approximately half of districts narrowed the achievement gap between their Black fourth graders and White fourth graders statewide; and nearly three-quarters (73%) of Great City School districts narrowed the achievement gap in mathematics between their Black eighth graders and White eighth graders statewide.
- Sixty-five percent of districts narrowed the achievement gap between their Hispanic fourth graders and White fourth graders statewide; and close to 90 percent of Great City School districts narrowed the achievement gap in mathematics between their Hispanic eighth graders and White eighth graders statewide.
- Fifty-nine percent of districts narrowed the achievement gap between their economically disadvantaged fourth graders and non-economically disadvantaged fourth graders statewide; and over three-fourths (77%) of Great City School districts narrowed the achievement gap in mathematics between their economically disadvantaged eighth graders and non-economically disadvantaged eighth graders statewide.

- Over half (54%) of districts narrowed the achievement gap between their English language learners in fourth grade and non-English language learners in fourth grade statewide; and 58 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.
- Forty-one 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; and the same percentage narrowed the gaps at the eighth-grade level.

Figure 5. Percentage of CGCS districts reducing achievement gaps on state mathematics assessments by student groups, 2012*



* 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 looked at data on state assessments in multiple ways. This report examines—

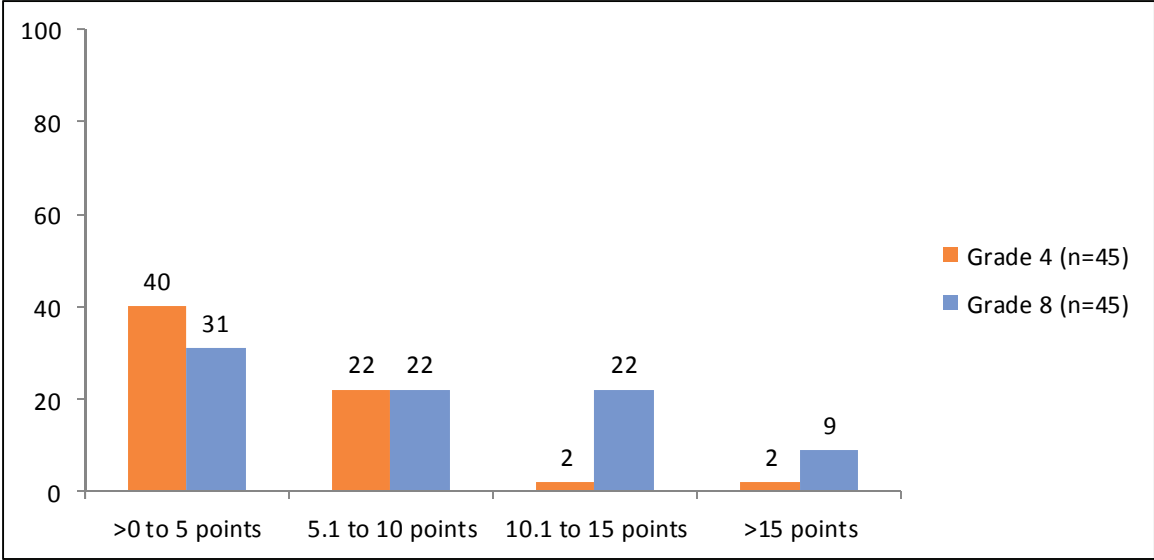
- Trends in reading achievement on state assessments,
- District achievement compared to the state, and
- Changes in achievement gaps in reading among various student groups.

Trends in Reading Achievement at the School District Level

Figures 6 and 7 display these results:

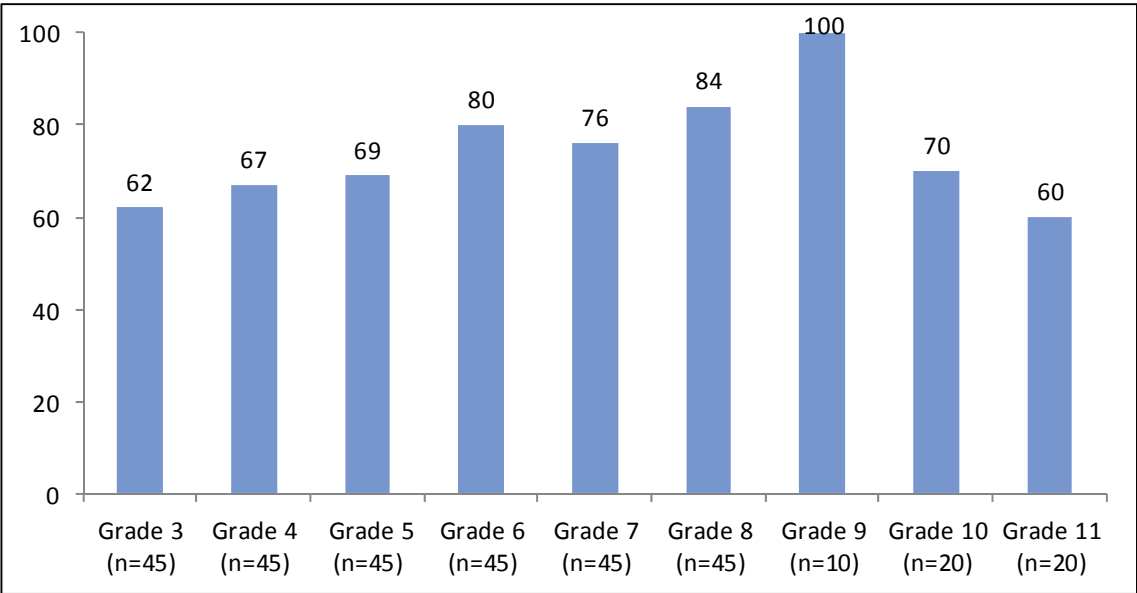
- About four percent of districts increased the percentage of fourth graders that scored at or above proficient by greater than 10 percentage points (Figure 6). Sixty-seven percent of districts increased the percentage of fourth-grade students who scored at or above proficient between 2009 and 2012 (Figure 7).
- Eighty-four percent of districts increased the percentage of eighth-grade students who scored at or above proficient between 2009 and 2012. Almost one-third (31%) of these districts increased the percentage of eighth graders that scored at or above proficient by greater than 10 percentage points (Figure 6).
- At least 60 percent of districts improved in reading across all grade levels (Figure 7).

Figure 6. Percentage of CGCS districts with proficiency gains on state reading assessments between 2009 and 2012*



* 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 2009 and 2012



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 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 20 percent of districts had fourth-grade proficiency rates that were equal to or greater than their respective states in 2012 (Figure 8).
- Sixteen percent of districts had eighth-grade proficiency rates that were equal to or greater than their respective states in 2012 (Figure 8).
- Thirty-six percent of districts showed changes in students scoring at or above proficient levels that were greater than their respective states in fourth-grade reading (Figure 9).
- Sixty-four percent of districts showed changes in students scoring at or above proficient levels that were greater than 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, 2011 and 2012

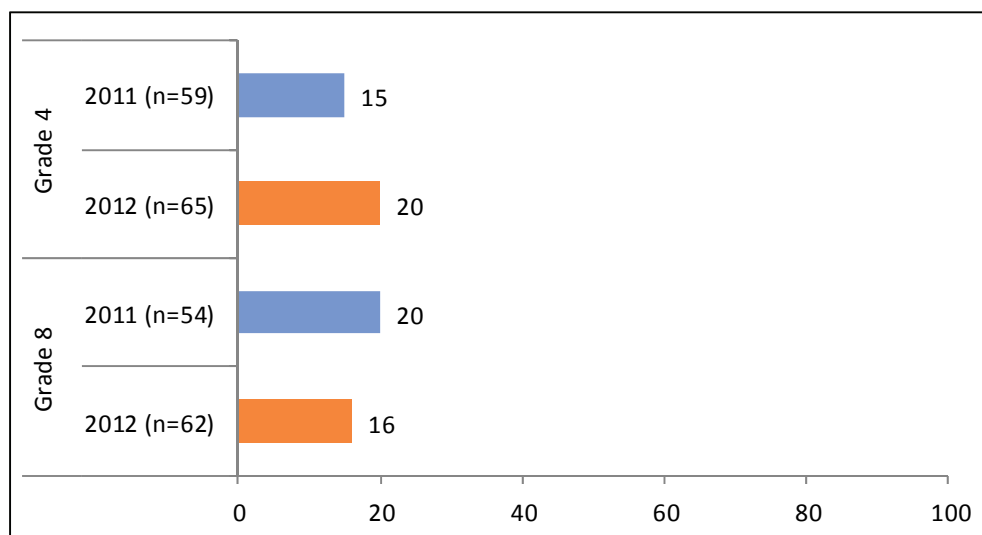
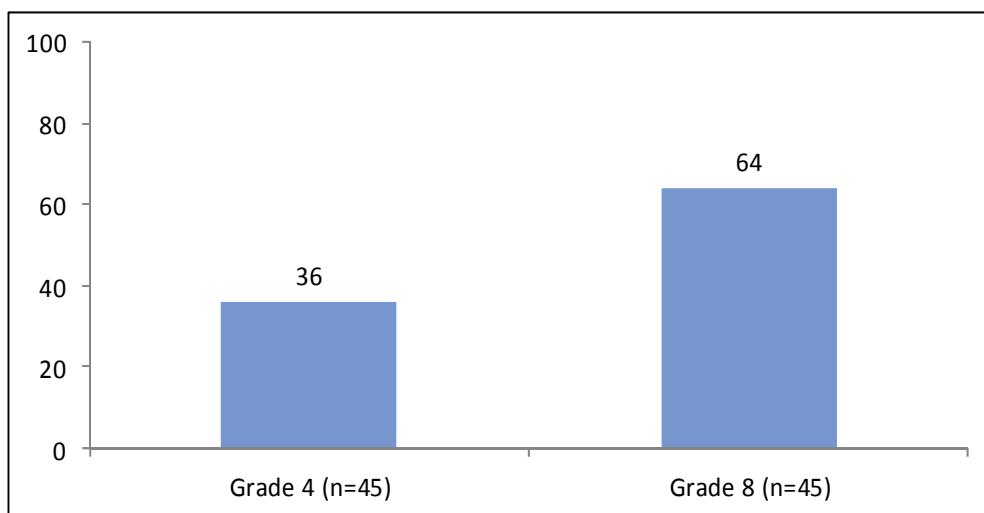


Figure 9. Percentage of CGCS districts showing changes in proficiency levels in reading greater than their respective states between 2009 and 2012



Changes in Reading Achievement within Student Groups

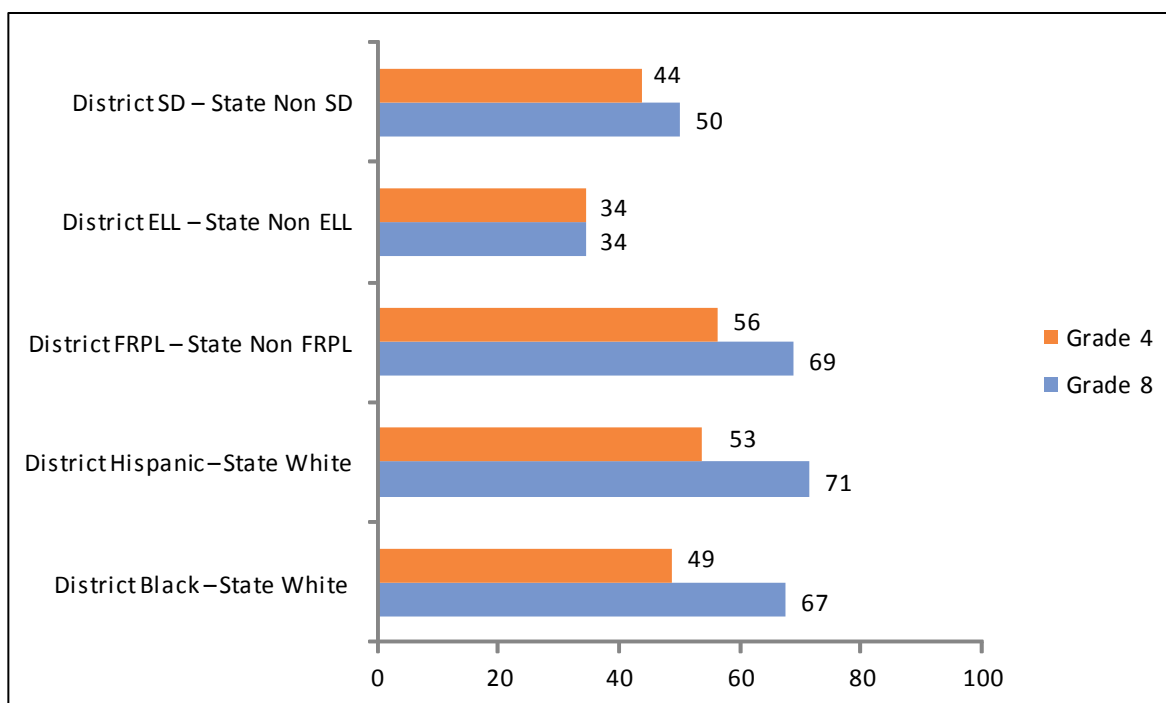
Finally, state assessment data were examined to determine whether achievement gaps in reading were narrowing between student groups in the Great City Schools. Figure 10 displays these results—

- Nearly half (49%) of districts narrowed the achievement gap between their Black fourth graders and White fourth graders statewide; and two-thirds (67%) of Great City School districts narrowed the achievement gap in reading between their Black eighth graders and White eighth graders statewide.
- Over half (53%) of districts narrowed the achievement gap between their Hispanic fourth graders and White fourth graders statewide; and over 70 percent of Great City School districts narrowed the achievement gap in reading between their Hispanic eighth graders and White eighth graders statewide.
- Fifty-six percent of districts narrowed the achievement gap between their economically disadvantaged fourth graders and non-economically disadvantaged fourth graders statewide; and nearly 70 percent of Great City School districts narrowed the achievement gap in reading

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

- One-third (34%) of districts narrowed the achievement gap between their English language learners in fourth grade and non-English language learners in fourth grade statewide; and the same percentage of districts narrowed the achievement gap in reading between their English language learners in eighth grade and non-English language learners in eighth grade statewide.
- Forty-four 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; and half of districts 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, 2012*



* 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 2010-2011 data, the information was supplemented with data from district or state websites and district research staff.

Student Enrollment in the Great City Schools

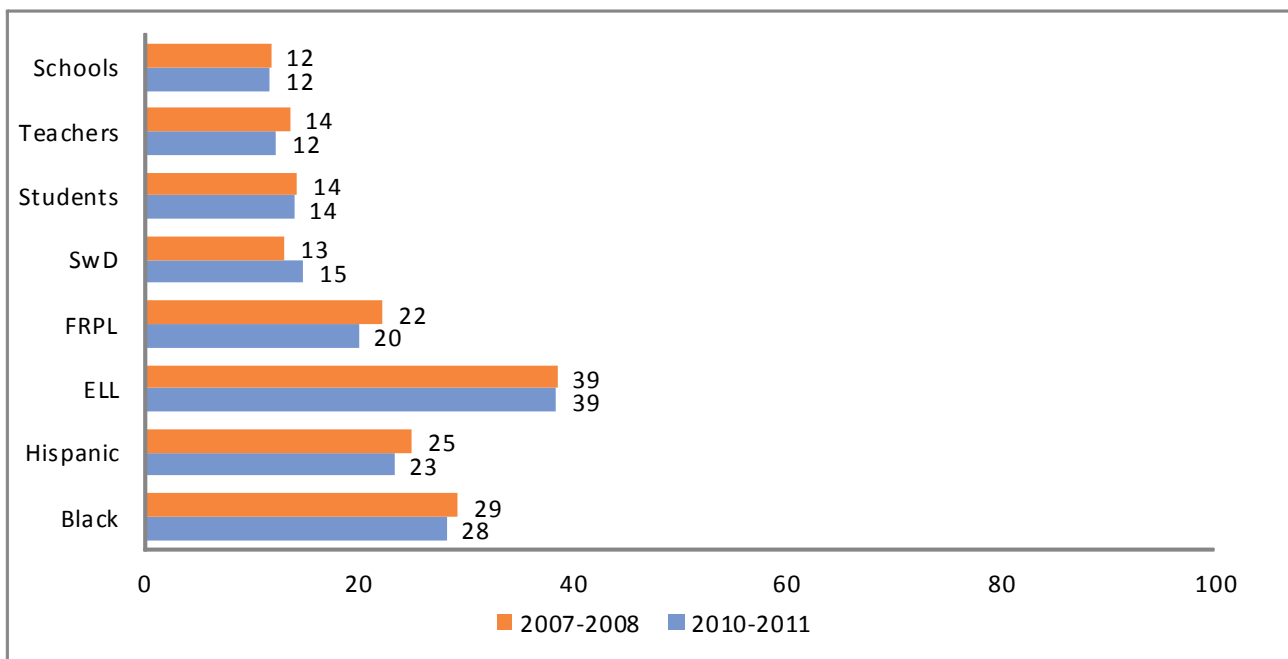
The Great City Schools continue to enroll a significant share of the nation's students (Figure 11). Data from the NCES Common Core of Data and school district data show that—

- The Great City Schools enrolled 6,869,723 students in 2010-2011 (the most recent year on which federal data are available), a decrease of about two percent from the 7,009,328 students enrolled in 2007-2008.
- During the same period, total public school enrollment nationally increased from 49,290,559 students to 49,484,181 students, an increase of less than one percent.
- The share of the nation's public school students enrolled in the Great City Schools remained the same from 2008-2009 to 2010-2011 at 14%.

Figure 11. Council of the Great City Schools Demographic Profile (n=66)

	CGCS		NATION	
	2007-2008	2010-2011	2007-2008	2010-2011
CGCS School Data				
Number of Students	7,009,328	6,869,723	49,290,559	49,484,181
Number of FTE Teachers	434,392	380,247	3,199,995	3,099,094
Student-Teacher Ratio	16	18	15	16
Number of Schools	11,694	11,655	99,535	99,749
Student Groups				
Free and Reduced-Price Lunch	62%	69%	39%	48%
Students with Disabilities	11%	14%	12%	13%
English Language Learners	22%	23%	8%	8%
Student Racial/Ethnic Enrollment				
Amer. Indian/Al. Native	1%	1%	1%	1%
Asian	6%	7%	5%	5%
Black	35%	32%	17%	16%
Hispanic	36%	39%	21%	23%
White	20%	20%	55%	52%

CGCS as a Percentage 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 2010-2011 school year include the following—

- About 69 percent of students in the Great City Schools were eligible for a free and reduced-price lunch subsidy, compared with 48 percent nationally.
- About 20 percent of the nation's free and reduced-price lunch eligible students 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. Still, the Great City Schools often enroll a greater share of students with high-cost disabilities. Key indicators in the 2010-2011 school year include the following—

- About 23 percent of students enrolled in the Great City Schools are English language learners, compared with eight 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 school students are also significantly different from those in 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 45 percent nationally.

Key statistics include the following—

- About 32 percent of Great City School students in 2010-2011 were Black, compared with 16 percent nationally.
- About 39 percent of Great City School students in 2010-2011 were Hispanic, compared with 23 percent nationally.

- About 20 percent of Great City School students in 2010-2011 were White, compared with 52 percent nationally.
- About eight percent of Great City School students in 2010-2011 were Asian American or Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaskan Native, compared with six percent nationwide.
- The percentage of students in the Great City Schools who were Black declined from 35 percent in 2007-2008 to 32 percent in 2010-2011. (The percentage of students nationally who were Black decreased from 17 percent to 16 percent over the same period.)
- The percentage of students in the Great City Schools who were Hispanic increased from 36 percent in 2007-2008 to 39 percent in 2010-2011. (The percentage of students nationally who were Hispanic rose from 21 percent to 23 percent over the same period.)
- Approximately 23 percent of all students of color in the nation were enrolled in the Great City Schools in 2010-2011.

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 urban districts—

- The average student-teacher ratio in the Great City Schools was 18 to 1 in 2010-2011, compared with the national average of 16 students per teacher.
- The average number of students per school in the Great City Schools decreased from 599 students in 2007-2008 to 589 in 2010-2011.
- The average number of students per school nationally remained about the same from 2007-2008 to 2010-2011 at 496.
- The average school in the Great Cities enrolled about 93 more children (589 students) than the average school nationally (496 students) in 2010-2011.

This report represents the twelfth time that 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 XII* present the best available picture of how America’s Great City Schools are performing on state tests and strongly suggest that they are making substantial 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 federal law. 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). In particular, 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 grades.

Mathematics Results

The trends in mathematics performance are unambiguous for the nation and the Great City Schools. Achievement is improving. The only debate at this point is over whether the gains should be faster. *Beating the Odds XII* indicates that 69 percent of Great City School districts increased the percentage of fourth graders scoring at or above proficiency between 2009 and 2012. Additionally, seven 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, 94 percent of districts increased the percentage of eighth-grade students who scored at or above proficient between 2009 and 2012. Approximately two out of 10 (20%) of these districts increased the percentage of eighth graders that scored at or above proficient by greater than 10 percentage points.

Reducing racial disparities in academic achievement is also a fundamental goal. This report, *Beating the Odds XII*, indicates that the Great City Schools are reducing racial and ethnic gaps in student performance in mathematics. Over half of Council districts are narrowing racial and ethnic gaps in mathematics achievement among fourth and eighth graders. Furthermore, over half 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 XII* found gains in the percentage of students who were scoring at or above proficiency levels on their respective state tests. Sixty-seven percent of Great City School districts increased the percentage of fourth-grade students who scored at or above proficient between 2009 and 2012. Similarly, 84 percent of districts increased the percentage of eighth-grade students who scored at or above proficient during that same time; and about three out of ten (31%) districts had gains of over 10 percentage points.

Racial achievement gaps in elementary reading achievement also showed signs of narrowing. Approximately half of urban school districts narrowed the gaps between their Black students and White students statewide. Similarly, over half of districts narrowed the fourth- and eighth-grade Hispanic-White achievement gaps. Over half 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 XII* 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 and reduced-price lunch eligible students, 23 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 the need for additional support for these students and their teachers so that all students reach their highest potential.

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.

Number of Districts Included in Specific Data Analyses

Figure 1. Percentage of CGCS districts with proficiency gains on state mathematics assessments between 2009 and 2012	Number of Districts Improving	Number of Districts Reporting
Grade 4		
>0 to 5 points	14	42
5.1 to 10 points	12	42
10.1 to 15 points	2	42
>15 points	1	42
Grade 8		
>0 to 5 points	11	36
5.1 to 10 points	16	36
10.1 to 15 points	2	36
>15 points	5	36
Figure 2. Percentage of CGCS districts with proficiency gains on state mathematics assessments by grade, 2009 and 2012	Number of Districts Improving	Number of Districts Reporting
Grade 3	28	42
Grade 4	29	42
Grade 5	31	42
Grade 6	34	42
Grade 7	33	42
Grade 8	34	36
Grade 9	4	4
Grade 10	8	12
Grade 11	10	16
Figure 3. Percentage of CGCS districts with mathematics proficiency rates greater than or equal to state proficiency rates, 2011 and 2012	Number of Districts with Scores Greater than or Equal to State	Number of Districts Reporting
SY 2011-12		
Grade 4	17	65
Grade 8	9	56
SY 2010-11		
Grade 4	15	58
Grade 8	7	47
Figure 4. Percentage of CGCS districts showing changes in proficiency rates in mathematics greater than their respective states between 2009 and 2012	Number of Districts with Faster Growth than State	Number of Districts Reporting
Grade 4	18	42
Grade 8	21	35

Figure 5. Percentage of CGCS districts reducing achievement gaps on state mathematics assessments by student groups, 2012	Number of Districts with Faster Growth than State	Number of Districts Reporting
Grade 4		
District SD – State Non SD	12	29
District ELL – State Non ELL	14	26
District FRPL – State Non FRPL	17	29
District Hispanic – State White	26	40
District Black – State White	20	40
Grade 8		
District SD – State Non SD	9	22
District ELL – State Non ELL	11	19
District FRPL – State Non FRPL	17	22
District Hispanic – State White	28	32
District Black – State White	24	33
Figure 6. Percentage of CGCS districts with proficiency gains on state reading assessments between 2009 and 2012	Number of Districts Improving	Number of Districts Reporting
Grade 4		
>0 to 5 points	18	45
5 .1 to 10 points	10	45
10.1 to 15 points	1	45
>15 points	1	45
Grade 8		
>0 to 5 points	14	45
5 .1 to 10 points	10	45
10.1 to 15 points	10	45
>15 points	4	45
Figure 7. Percentage of CGCS districts with proficiency gains on state reading assessments by grade, 2009 and 2012	Number of Districts Improving	Number of Districts Reporting
Grade 3	28	45
Grade 4	30	45
Grade 5	31	45
Grade 6	36	45
Grade 7	34	45
Grade 8	38	45
Grade 9	10	10
Grade 10	14	20
Grade 11	12	20

Figure 8. Percentage of CGCS districts with reading proficiency rates greater than or equal to state proficiency rates, 2011 and 2012	Number of Districts with Scores Greater than or Equal to State	Number of Districts Reporting
SY 2011-12		
Grade 4	13	65
Grade 8	10	62
SY 2010-11		
Grade 4	9	59
Grade 8	11	54
Figure 9. Percentage of CGCS districts showing changes in proficiency rates in reading greater than their respective states between 2009 and 2012	Number of Districts with Faster Growth than State	Number of Districts Reporting
Grade 4	16	45
Grade 8	29	45
Figure 10. Percentage of CGCS districts reducing achievement gaps on state reading assessments by student groups, 2012	Number of Districts Reducing Gaps	Number of Districts Reporting
Grade 4		
District SD – State Non SD	14	32
District ELL – State Non ELL	10	29
District FRPL – State Non FRPL	18	32
District Hispanic – State White	23	43
District Black – State White	21	43
Grade 8		
District SD – State Non SD	12	32
District ELL – State Non ELL	14	29
District FRPL – State Non FRPL	17	32
District Hispanic – State White	26	42
District Black – State White	20	43



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