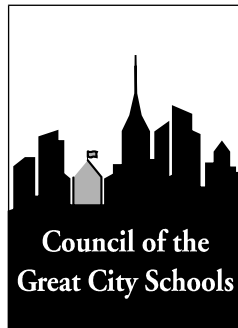


STRATEGIC PLAN



Council of the Great City Schools

THE NATION'S VOICE FOR URBAN EDUCATION

Strategic Plan, 2019-2024

Strategic Plan Of the Council of the Great City Schools 2019-2024

Organization

The Council of the Great City Schools is a coalition of 72 of the nation’s largest urban public-school districts, founded in 1956 and incorporated in 1961. The group was formed with 12 big-city school systems at a period in American history when the nation’s cities and their public schools were undergoing substantial transition and there was no formal national organization that could help address the challenges ahead.

The organization is governed by a board of directors that is composed of the superintendent and one school board member from each city. The Chair alternates each year between a superintendent and school board member. The board of directors elects a 24-member executive committee that is equally composed of superintendents and school board members and that oversees the operation, rules, and finances of the organization when the board is not in session.

The organization has been guided over the last 25 years by three broad goals: to educate all urban students to high standards; to lead, govern, and manage our urban schools efficiently and effectively; and to bolster public confidence in urban education.

Strategic Planning

In late 2017, the leadership of the Council of the Great City Schools initiated a strategic planning process to guide the organization over the next five years. The process involved an extensive survey of the membership, a retreat by the organization’s executive committee, and a detailed analysis of organizational assets and liabilities by the group’s senior staff members. From survey results, the membership articulated several critical needs and priorities, including—

- ❖ Increasing the level of academic achievement throughout and across districts to ensure that students are graduating college and career ready
- ❖ Turning around the lowest performing schools
- ❖ Closing achievement gaps
- ❖ Balancing budgets while delivering quality instruction
- ❖ Strengthening the pipeline of effective educators
- ❖ Increasing public confidence in public schools

These priorities are consistent with the Council’s long-standing vision, mission, values, and goals.

Vision of the Great City Schools

Urban public schools exist to teach students to the highest standards of educational excellence. As the primary American institution responsible for weaving the strands of our society into a cohesive fabric, we—the leaders of America’s Great City Schools—see a future where the nation cares for all children, expects their best, values their diversity, invests in their futures, and welcomes their participation in the American dream.

The Great City Schools are places where this vision becomes tangible and those ideals are put to the test. We pledge to commit ourselves to the work of advancing empathy, equity, justice, and tolerance, and we vow to do everything we can to vigorously resist the forces of ignorance, fear, and prejudice, as we teach and guide our students. We will keep our commitments, and with society’s support, cities will become the centers of a strong and equitable nation with urban public schools successfully teaching our children and building our communities.

Mission of the Great City Schools

It is the special mission of America’s urban public schools to educate the nation’s most diverse student body to the highest academic standards and prepare them to contribute to our democracy and the global community.

Values and Commitments of the Great City Schools

The ongoing work of the Council is built on the following values and commitments that we embrace both for and with our students:

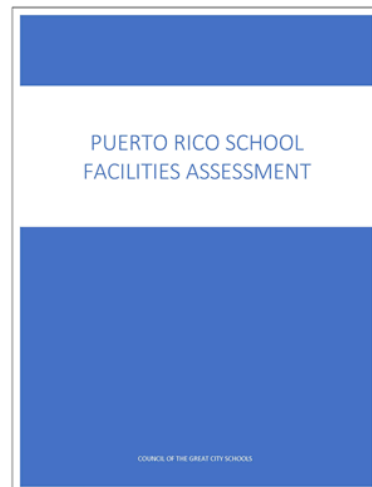
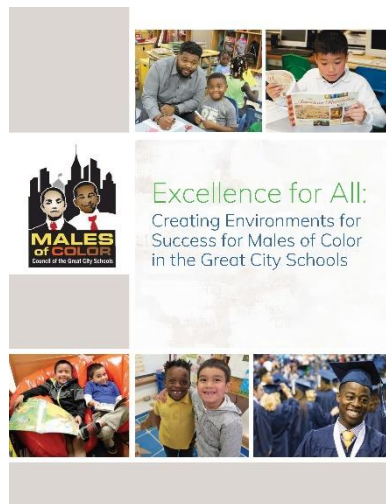
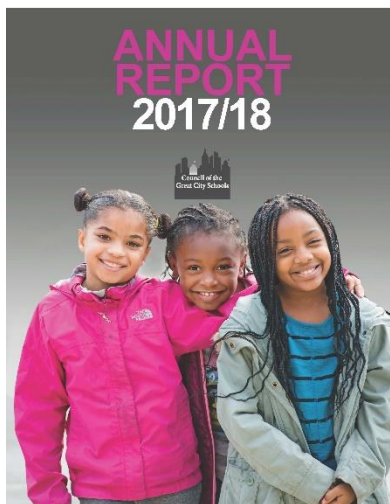
1. *Leadership.* The Council of the Great City Schools is the nation’s premier leader in urban public education. This is true not only because the organization is unrivaled in the field in terms of the quality and innovation of its work, but because it seeks to make its schools the best in the country. In addition, the organization’s leadership is defined by its unwillingness to wait for anyone else to improve the quality of public education for us, instead harnessing the expertise of urban education practitioners across cities—as well as the voices of our communities and students—to take charge of our own, shared future and to show what is possible in our big-city public schools.
2. *Improvement.* The Council and its members embrace continuous improvement in the instructional and non-instructional services provided by the membership and the organization. In many ways, this long-standing commitment sets the organization apart from other national education associations who simply represent and defend their memberships or constantly change priorities. Over the years, the Council has pursued those traditional roles, but also sought to improve public education in the nation’s urban areas using the expertise of member districts in unique and collaborative ways.

3. *Accountability.* The Council has sought ways to demonstrate accountability for results and foster a culture of shared responsibility for the education of urban children. One can see this in its annual reports, district-specific services and return on investment reports, its policy positions on legislation like No Child Left Behind, its initiation of the NAEP Trial Urban District Assessment, its hard-hitting Strategic Support Team reviews of districts, its research reports, and other activities and efforts.

4. *Equity.* The Council is a strong and outspoken voice for equity, equality, opportunity, and social justice. Over the years, the organization has repeatedly spoken out on the education-related issues of the day when others did not, and it has imbedded these values of equity into ongoing policy discussions, legislative positions, conference agendas and speakers, initiatives, reports and resources, and other activities.

5. *High Expectations.* The Council is unwavering in its demand for quality work from ourselves and our students. The organization strives in all its efforts to reflect the highest standards of expertise and performance in both students and adults. This commitment sets the organization apart from others and is evident in the group’s personnel, products, reports, research, conferences, recommendations, and communications.

6. *Integrity.* The organization is uncompromising in its veracity, consistency, and truthfulness in the pursuit of its mission—including the ability to self-critique. These qualities have helped build the organization’s reputation for forthrightness with the public, the media, and government. The group works from the assumption that if one builds a reputation for high quality and integrity then the organization attracts the right kind of attention and support.



The Challenges Ahead for the Great City Schools

The nation's urban public schools face an extraordinarily difficult landscape over the next five years. These challenges might best be characterized as falling into the following categories—

- *Pressure for Better Academic Performance.* Despite improvements, the nation's urban school systems and the Council will encounter ever greater pressure to advance further. This pressure will come from many sources and will have multiple agendas, but ultimately the health and welfare of the nation depends on our ability to raise student achievement and close achievement gaps. The challenge to urban school systems will be to improve our outcomes as student needs remain high.
- *High Student Needs and Scarce Funding.* The needs of urban school students are expected to remain high over the next several years. There is no reason to think that poverty, language needs, disability status, and other challenges that students bring to school will fade over the next several years. In fact, even with a pull-back in immigration, there are likely to be substantial numbers of English learners, students living in poverty, and students with disabilities in urban schools. This dynamic may be further exacerbated by the rising gentrification and increasing polarization of the population.
- *Dominance of State Policy and Governance.* State authority in educational policy making has waxed and waned over the decades, but it is now resurgent and is expected to remain a prevalent force for the foreseeable future. This prevalence was codified in the latest authorization of the *Every Student Succeeds Act*, which essentially pulled the federal government back from any leading role in educational decision making. The challenge to urban schools will be to maneuver around or create common ground with a governing entity that may sometimes be hostile to urban interests. Either way, the historic bonds between the federal government and the nation's major urban areas is steadily eroding.
- *Rising Polarization and Partisanship.* The political landscape both in Washington and in state capitols has become debilitatingly partisan and antagonistic to public entities of every type. This partisanship is fed, in part, by rising distrust of public institutions and government *writ large*. The challenge for urban schools will involve remaining as bipartisan as possible and maintaining good relations with supporters in both political parties.
- *Appeal of Choice and Charters.* Choice and charter schools have been backed by a bipartisan base of proponents for some 25 years. Despite evidence of mixed efficacy, there is little indication that support will end anytime soon. While the Council supports effective charter schools—with appropriate local oversight and accountability, choice advocates and critics of public education have sought to portray them as a replacement—rather than a partner—for traditional public schools, essentially weaponizing them in an effort to dismantle the public-school system. In reality, our district public schools will remain the primary institution for serving the full range of diverse learners in urban areas for years to come. The challenge for districts, then, will be communicating the vital and enduring role public schools play in advancing educational, social, and economic opportunities.

- *Changing Press Imperatives.* Economic pressure on the media has resulted in substantial cuts in funding and staff for newspapers and television stations across the country. One of the consequences is a rise in sensationalized coverage of the perceived failures of government institutions in general—and public schools in particular— in order to build audience share. Journalists and news organizations are also increasingly partisan in their coverage, allowing their reporting of news to reflect underlying political agendas or allegiances. Finally, another consequence of funding and staffing cuts to traditional media outlets is the rise of alternative forms of media (including blogs and various social media platforms). This has meant an explosion in the sheer numbers and varieties of people who are now considered part of the press—a palpable challenge for communications directors and staff charged with building and maintaining relationships with the media and ensuring fair and accurate coverage of public schools.
- *Increasing Racial Divisions and Hostilities toward Immigrants.* Underneath many of the challenges already articulated is an emerging division in the American population defined by race, income, native language, class, national origin, and sense of victimization. These divisions are being fanned and encouraged in ways that are more open now than ever, and they show little sign of ebbing. This climate can be felt acutely in urban areas and big-city schools, which serve the highest numbers of diverse and immigrant students. The support for public education, moreover, requires a sense of shared responsibility for the nation’s future. This sense of common purpose appears to be fracturing, and the lack of unity will challenge public education and the nation in ways that are hard to predict.
- *Other challenges.* The nation’s urban public schools are also faced with challenges around the scarcity of diverse educators who are ready and willing to work in urban education, the waning of community partnerships in some locales, and pushback on high standards, standardized tests, and accountability.



Goals and Strategies of the Great City Schools

The Council pledges to build on the legacy of continuous improvement and collective action it has constructed over the years to expand opportunities for all our children. The Council proposes to remain faithful to its three main goals between 2019 and 2024, adjusting its tactical efforts from time to time to ensure that it can address any new or foreseeable challenges. The strategies and tactics to be employed to achieve the organization’s goals include the following.

GOAL 1. TO EDUCATE ALL URBAN SCHOOL STUDENTS TO THE HIGHEST ACADEMIC STANDARDS.

Strategy:

Build the capacity of the membership to implement high standards and improve student achievement. This strategy will have three prongs: an emphasis on continuing *districtwide* academic improvements; a focus on turning around our chronically low-performing *schools*; and a concentration on supporting the academic growth of *student groups* that have been historically underserved, including males of color, English learners, students with disabilities, and students living in poverty.

Tactics:

1. Enhance and protect federal financial support and regulatory flexibility for urban school systems. Ensure continued targeting of federal aid for major urban school systems, protect major civil rights protections, and support local flexibility in program operations. Continue strong urban school advocacy in the nation’s capital.
2. Lead and support the continuing implementation of challenging college- and career-readiness standards. Maintain emphasis on successful implementation of common core standards or similar college- and career-readiness standards, high-quality assessments, and support for high standards of academic attainment for urban students.
3. Conduct continuing research on why and how some urban school *systems* improve faster than others, draw lessons, identify high-leverage approaches, and imbed emerging findings into the Council’s technical assistance, resources, conferences, and professional development. Synthesize lessons learned from the many Strategic Support Teams and technical assistance that the Council has provided over the years to help build member capacity to improve student achievement.
4. Support and improve *schools* in our cities that are identified as the lowest performing. Conduct additional research on strategies that districts are using to

- improve their lowest-performing schools, draw broad lessons, provide technical assistance to districts with these schools, and track trends.
5. Identify, develop, and emphasize effective initiatives for improving the academic attainment of males of color, English learners, students living in poverty, and *students* with disabilities. Track which member districts make the most progress for each student group, identify reasons for the improvements, and build member support around lessons learned.
 6. Pilot test methods of augmenting balanced literacy in urban schools and assess the effects of these strategies on reading performance. (The Council has piloted a new approach to balanced literacy in Nashville that showed promising results. The pilot is being expanded to San Antonio in the fall of 2018.)
 7. Track our performance on the Trial Urban District Assessment, state assessments, and the organization's Academic Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to gauge progress and identify where additional emphasis is needed. Automate the academic KPIs for improved district access and usage. Begin tracking core-course participation rates among urban students and build strategies for enhancing the numbers of students successfully completing these courses, particularly in math.
 8. Pressure commercial organizations to improve the quality of their instructional products, particularly for struggling students and English learners, and enhance member use of Council tools, such as the Professional Learning Platform and Curriculum Framework, to improve academic achievement.
 9. Encourage social services and wrap-around supports for urban students—but not as a substitute for higher standards of instruction. Conduct research on district use of social-emotional and social support strategies and help assess the effects on academic attainment. Retain academic achievement as the organization's primary goal.
 10. Conduct research on the numbers and percentages of educators of color in member districts and begin developing strategies for increasing those numbers and percentages. Document and disseminate promising practices and lessons learned from educator pipeline programs in districts around the country.
 11. Partner with colleges of education in the Great Cities in preparing the next generation of educators and diversifying the teacher force in urban schools.
 12. Create a new urban school executive management training program for district instructional leaders to help improve academic leadership and programming.

13. Continue to convene regular meetings of chief academic officers, bilingual education directors, directors of teaching and learning, research directors, and special education directors to foster and enhance collaboration, mutual support, and ability to act collectively. Increase the numbers of member staff participating in these meetings and coordinate the agendas of the meetings with priorities of the executive committee and board of directors.

Metrics:

The Council will monitor and gauge progress on this goal by using the following metrics.

Outputs	Outcomes
1. Guidance and data to Congress on the need, value, and use of federal dollars in urban school systems.	Continued targeting of federal financial aid for urban school systems.
	Changes to regulatory language indicating increased flexibility for urban school districts.
2. a) A report analyzing factors contributing to urban school improvement.	Improved district performance on NAEP, state assessments, the Council’s academic key performance indicators, and other indicators of academic improvement.
b) A report synthesizing lessons learned across strategic support teams in academics and instruction.	Higher graduation rates and levels of college and career readiness.
3. Technical assistance and support for low-performing schools in the ten districts participating in the Wallace Foundation turnaround initiative.	Higher student performance in struggling schools across the ten Wallace Foundation turnaround initiative districts.
4. A report identifying and analyzing the characteristics and strategies of districts that have made strong progress improving outcomes for males of color, ELLs, students living in poverty, and students with disabilities.	Improved academic outcomes for historically underserved student groups, including males of color, ELLs, students with disabilities, and students living in poverty.
5. An evaluation of the effects of the Balanced Literacy initiative in pilot districts, and dissemination of lessons learned.	Higher reading performance in Balanced Literacy pilot districts.
6. a) Annual reporting on district performance on NAEP, state assessments, and academic key performance indicators.	Improved district performance on NAEP, state assessments, the Council’s academic key performance indicators, and other indicators of academic improvement.
b) An automated system of academic KPIs for member use.	Improved district performance on NAEP, state assessments, the Council’s academic key

	performance indicators, and other indicators of academic improvement.
7. a) Greater number of companies and organizations producing high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials for ELLs and struggling students.	Improved academic outcomes for ELLs and struggling students.
b) An online Professional Learning Platform providing professional development for effective instruction of struggling students.	Improved academic outcomes for ELLs and struggling students.
8. Survey of district practices around social-emotional and social support strategies.	Appropriate metrics and linkages to academic achievement and completion.
9. a) A survey of the numbers and percentages of teacher of color in member districts.	Increased number of educators of color in member districts.
b) Summaries of promising teacher and leader pipeline programs across the country.	Stronger human capital strategies for identifying and developing educators in urban school systems.
10. Revitalized network of Great City Colleges of Education and boost participation.	Improved local collaboration, pipelines, and joint initiatives.
11. A new urban school executive management training program for district instructional leaders.	Stronger, more effective instructional leadership.
12. Annual meetings of chief academic officers, bilingual education directors, research directors, and special education directors.	A strong and growing network of academic leaders and staff across urban school districts.



**GOAL 2. TO LEAD, GOVERN, AND MANAGE OUR URBAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
IN WAYS THAT ADVANCE THE EDUCATION OF OUR STUDENTS AND ENHANCE
THE EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY OF OUR INSTITUTIONS.**

Strategy

Build the capacity of urban school boards, superintendents, and managers to lead, govern, and manage our districts; improve the academic and operational performance of our school districts; and bolster the tenures of effective urban school leaders.

Tactics:

1. Expand the organization's work to strengthen the governing capacity of member school boards and bolster the working relations between boards and superintendents. This will involve new professional development and more technical assistance to sitting school boards and cross-district support of board teams, school board presidents, and new school board members on both effective governance and their roles in improving student achievement.
2. Provide technical assistance, ongoing mentoring, and support for member superintendents through a cadre of successful former superintendents. The Council will pursue additional financial support to provide mentors for new superintendents in the organization's membership, participate on new superintendent transition teams, and provide on-site orientation for new superintendents.
3. Revamp and expand the Council's urban school executive's management training program to include chief operating officers, chief financial officers, human resource directors, chief information officers, and key academic leaders. Coordinate this effort with the Casserly Institute.
4. Sustain and improve the Council's performance management system and its non-instructional key performance indicators. Analyze urban districts with exemplary governance and operations and use the results to track and improve school board governance, organizational and process effectiveness, cost-efficiency, and return-on-investment. Conduct additional analysis of progress on operational key performance indicators across districts and strategies that produce better results.
5. Continue to provide Strategic Support Teams (SSTs) and technical assistance to member school systems on management and operational issues. SSTs will focus on in the areas of organizational structure, staffing levels, human resources, facilities operations, maintenance and operations, budget and finance operations, information technology, safety and security, procurement, food services, and transportation.

6. Begin synthesizing the results of the Council’s many SSTs over the years to articulate lessons learned and best practices. The Council has conducted some **300** SSTs over the last 20 years. The results, in combination with the key performance indicators, have significantly improved operations across the Great City Schools. The Council will begin synthesizing lessons learned and best practices to allow the membership to sustain and improve the gains made over the years.
7. Convene regular meetings of operational and finance staff to foster and enhance collaboration, mutual support, and the ability to act collectively. Coordinate agendas of job-alike meetings of the human resource directors, chief operating officers, chief financial officers, and information technology directors with priorities of the executive committee and board of directors.
8. Continue responding to ongoing information requests, providing data and best practices, sharing data, and conducting customized research for member district staff.

Metrics:

The Council will monitor and gauge progress on this goal by using the following metrics.

Outputs	Outcomes
1. a) Cross-district professional development for board teams, school board presidents, and new school board members on effective governance.	Stronger, more effective urban school board leadership and increased board and superintendent tenure.
b) On-site technical assistance to sitting school boards on effective governance and their role in improving student achievement.	Stronger, more effective urban school board leadership and increased board and superintendent tenure.
2. Support for new urban district superintendents.	Stronger, more effective district leadership and increased superintendent tenure.
3. A re-envisioned urban school executive management training program for chief operating officers, chief financial officers, human resource directors, and chief information officers.	Stronger, more effective operational leadership.
4. a) An online performance management system and annual	Increased operational efficiency on key performance indicators across member districts.

report on operational data and trends across districts.	
b) Analysis of operational practices among effective urban school districts.	Increased operational efficiency on key performance indicators across member districts.
5. Technical assistance through Strategic Support Team reviews of district financial and operational functions.	Increased operational efficiency on key performance indicators across member districts.
6. A report synthesizing lessons learned across strategic support teams in the area of finance and operations.	Increased operational efficiency on key performance indicators across member districts.
7. Annual meetings of human resource directors, chief operating officers, chief financial officers, and information technology directors.	A strong and growing network of financial and operational leaders and staff across urban school districts.
8. On demand research and information on district management practices.	Increased operational efficiency on key performance indicators across member districts.



GOAL 3. TO BOLSTER THE PUBLIC'S CONFIDENCE IN URBAN PUBLIC EDUCATION AND BUILD A SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY FOR RAISING OUR CHILDREN AND ENHANCING THEIR FUTURE.

Strategy:

Improve the public's perceptions of, support for, and confidence in public education by making progress academically and operationally, letting people know about that progress, and celebrating success. Negative is always louder than positive, so in service of this goal it will be necessary to listen to our critics and address our challenges but avoid spending much time or energy trying to persuade opponents. In sum, our strategy is to make progress and build the capacity of districts to communicate it; it's hard to fight success.

Tactics:

1. Enhance the Council's outreach efforts to the public, placing more explicit emphasis on the successes and progress of urban public schools, and our members' role in strengthening our communities. Place additional priority on finding and sharing examples of district, school, and student success across a broader public audience at the national level.
2. Develop and provide member districts with additional communications tools, platforms, and strategies for improving the public's perception of urban schools at the local level. In addition, create a prototype for districts to use to better communicate with the public in crisis situations, manage negative news, and build the capacity of the membership to tell their own stories of progress and success.
3. Assist districts in developing strategies and models for more effectively engaging parents and community stakeholders. Design a prototype for how urban school leaders could reconceive and enhance their public engagement initiatives and strengthen public trust in the institution.
4. Provide additional Strategic Support Teams to member districts to help improve their capacity to communicate with the public. These teams would consist of expert communications staff from peer districts that have particularly strong programs and initiatives.
5. Conduct polling on the public's perceptions of urban public schools and where and how targeted messaging might prove effective. Seek external funds to support polling like what the Council has done in the past to gauge the public's evolving confidence in urban public education.
6. Expand the Council's social media presence to reach a wider audience when

communicating the progress of urban public education. Step up the organization’s daily postings on social media (Twitter and Facebook) and the numbers of ‘followers’ it has on social media outlets. Expand social media presence into Instagram. Increase use of memes, videos, and photos. Expand use of the Council’s #GreatCityGrads hashtag and connections to the #mybrotherskeeper hashtag.

7. Provide more comprehensive information to national and local community-based groups on the social services that our schools deliver to parents and the community. Distribute this information through national and local parent groups to help build support for their local public schools.
8. Continue conducting the biennial survey of member communications departments, their staffing levels, functions, responsibilities, funding, and the like. Moreover, expand the representation of districts at the annual meeting of the Council’s public relations executives.
9. Strengthen contacts with mainstream media, alternative media, and ethnic media and their reporters to ensure that the Council is called when they are writing stories relevant to urban education.
10. Carefully vet partnerships with external organizations around critical priorities identified by the membership.

Metrics:

The Council will monitor and gauge progress on this goal by using the following metrics.

Outputs	Outcomes
1. Identification and dissemination of stories on the successes and progress of urban public schools through <i>The Urban Educator</i> and other outlets.	Enhanced public support and confidence in urban public schools.
2. A guide for district communications leaders and staff on managing crisis communications.	More effective district messaging and management of crisis situations.
3. A guide for district communications leaders and staff on community, parent, and media engagement.	More effective district communication and engagement of stakeholders, and stronger customer satisfaction.
	Stronger parent and community buy-in and support for public schools.

4. Technical assistance through Strategic Support Team reviews of district communications and community engagement functions.	More effective district communication and engagement of stakeholders.
5. A survey of the public's perceptions of urban public schools.	More effective Council and district communications and messaging to improve public perception of urban public schools.
6. Increased social media presence for the Council.	Enhanced public support and confidence in urban public schools.
7. Tools for districts for increasing parent understanding and access to the social services provided by public schools.	More effective district communication and engagement of stakeholders.
	Stronger parent and community buy-in and support for public schools.
8. Biennial survey of member communications departments, including their staffing levels, functions, responsibilities, and funding.	More effective district communication and engagement of stakeholders.
9. Information and input into mainstream and alternative media coverage of education issues and urban school trends and progress.	Enhanced public support and confidence in urban public schools.
10. Approved partnerships that enhance the Council's support and services for member districts and students.	



Officers of the Council of the Great City Schools

Larry Feldman, Chair of the Board
Miami-Dade County School Board Member

Eric Gordon, Chair-elect of the Board
Cleveland Metropolitan Schools Chief Executive Officer

Michael O'Neill, Secretary/Treasurer
Boston School Committee Member

Felton Williams, Immediate Past Chair
Long Beach School Board Member

Michael Casserly, Executive Director

STATUS UPDATE

Status of Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Council of the Great City Schools

January 2021

GOAL 1. TO EDUCATE ALL URBAN SCHOOL STUDENTS TO THE HIGHEST ACADEMIC STANDARDS.

Strategy:

Build the capacity of the membership to implement high standards and improve student achievement. This strategy will have three prongs: an emphasis on continuing *districtwide* academic improvements; a focus on turning around our chronically low-performing *schools*; and a concentration on supporting the academic growth of *student groups* that have been historically underserved, including males of color, English learners, students with disabilities, and students living in poverty.

Tactics:

Proposed Tactics to Meet Goals	Summary Status of Tactics to Meet Goals
<p>1. Enhance and protect federal financial support and regulatory flexibility for urban school systems. Ensure continued targeting of federal aid for major urban school systems, protect major civil rights protections, and support local flexibility in program operations. Continue strong urban school advocacy in the nation’s capital.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Filed successful amicus brief with the U.S. Supreme Court to block addition of citizenship question. • Held two legal webinars for members on the 2020 Census. • Disseminated Census material to members to encourage counts. • Convened annual town hall meeting on ideas for spurring 2020 Census participation. • Set up website with resources for members. • Collaborated with other educational organizations to prevent cuts to Medicaid, Title II, 21st Century Grants, and other programs. • Filed detailed regulatory comments on E-Rate, supplement/supplant, school meals, equitable services, Title IX, and school discipline. • Remained vigilant to efforts to amend the Title I formula to dilute targeted funding. • Successfully organized national education organizations in support of higher annual education appropriations. • Initiated letter signed by member superintendents supporting new federal spending to cover COVID-19-related costs.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggressively supported and lobbied House and Senate for additional supplemental appropriations to cover COVID-related costs. • Gave multiple press interviews making the case for greater federal education spending. • Filed successful suit against the U.S. Department of Education on their rules to redistribute CARES Act funds to private schools • Recommended to the Biden transition team that ED enforce state MOE requirements.
<p>2. Lead and support the continuing implementation of challenging college- and career-readiness standards. Maintain emphasis on successful implementation of common core standards or similar college- and career-readiness standards, high-quality assessments, and support for high standards of academic attainment for urban students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed new report outlining the features of a high-quality curriculum. • Developed a self-assessment tool for the membership to assess their curriculum. • Drafted new professional development framework. • Testified before the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) on the alignment between NAEP and college- and career-readiness standards. Submitted detailed written comments. Effort was successful. • Testified again before NAGB on postponing the 2021 NAEP testing. • Maintained overall support for college- and career-readiness standards. • Met quarterly with Student Achievement Partnership on status of standards. • Prepared and disseminated guides for the members on “unfinished learning” and data-driven school opening in the wake of COVID-19. • Recommended to the Biden transition team that accountability requirements on spring 2021 testing results be waived.
<p>3. Conduct continuing research on why and how some urban school <i>systems</i> improve faster than others, draw lessons, identify high-leverage approaches, and imbed emerging findings into the Council’s technical assistance, resources, conferences, and professional development. Synthesize lessons learned from the many Strategic Support Teams and technical assistance that the Council has provided over the years to help build member capacity to improve student achievement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finished a series of site visits to Council districts to determine what they were doing to make progress on NAEP. Write up of findings are in draft form. • In the process of conducting a detailed statistical analysis to determine which districts are out-performing expectations. • Conducted Strategic Support Teams on special education in Albuquerque, Stockton, Clark County, and Omaha. SSTs pending in Norfolk.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted Strategic Support Teams on bilingual education in Puerto Rico and Providence. • Conducted Strategic Support Team on instructional programming in Philadelphia and staffing in Atlanta. • Published major survey results on status of English learners in member districts. • Finished data collection on efforts in member cities to improve math and science results.
4. Support and improve <i>schools</i> in our cities that are identified as the lowest performing. Conduct additional research on strategies that districts are using to improve their lowest-performing schools, draw broad lessons, provide technical assistance to districts with these schools, and track trends.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have collected data on the numbers of CSI schools in member districts. • Are participating in a new Wallace Foundation effort focused on turnaround schools in over 40 member districts. • Are collecting preliminary data on district turnaround school efforts. • Have collected preliminary data on the effect of the increased state set-aside for turnarounds on urban school funding.
5. Identify, develop, and emphasize effective initiatives for improving the academic attainment of males of color, English learners, students living in poverty, and <i>students</i> with disabilities. Track which member districts make the most progress for each student group, identify reasons for the improvements, and build member support around lessons learned.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up internal system with NAEP and KPI data to track districts making substantial progress with males of color. • Continue to analyze data on the value-add of urban school districts. • Established a females of color task force and convened initial meeting at fall conference. • Have collected new data on the status of males and females of color. • Have drafted goals for females of color task force.
6. Pilot test methods of augmenting balanced literacy in urban schools and assess the effects of these strategies on reading performance. (The Council has piloted a new approach to balanced literacy in Nashville that showed promising results. The pilot is being expanded to San Antonio in the fall of 2018.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launched initiative in San Antonio to test theory about how to produce better literacy results in the early grades with balanced literacy approaches. Have conducted an initial analysis of project effects on reading outcomes.
7. Track our performance on the Trial Urban District Assessment, state assessments, and the organization's Academic Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to gauge progress and identify where additional emphasis is needed. Automate the academic KPIs for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have augmented KPIs to collect additional data on special education and staff demographics. • Have automated the Academic KPIs. • Have not yet expanded into course-participation rates.

<p>improved district access and usage. Begin tracking core-course participation rates among urban students and build strategies for enhancing the numbers of students successfully completing these courses, particularly in math.</p>	
<p>8. Pressure commercial organizations to improve the quality of their instructional products, particularly for struggling students and English learners, and enhance member use of Council tools, such as the Professional Learning Platform and Curriculum Framework, to improve academic achievement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launched the ELL math materials joint procurement initiative. • Expanded number of videos in the Professional Learning Platform and increased participation rates. • Have begun preliminary tracking of district results using the PLP. Results in Guilford County are particularly encouraging. • Are collecting commercial instructional product information from members for grades k-5.
<p>9. Encourage social services and wrap-around supports for urban students—but not as a substitute for higher standards of instruction. Conduct research on district use of social-emotional and social support strategies and help assess the effects on academic attainment. Retain academic achievement as the organization’s primary goal.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Published a guide for the membership on best practices in mental health and social-emotional learning in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.
<p>10. Conduct research on the numbers and percentages of educators of color in member districts and begin developing strategies for increasing those numbers and percentages. Document and disseminate promising practices and lessons learned from educator pipeline programs in districts around the country.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have collected preliminary data from the membership on demographics of superintendents, principal supervisors, principals, assistant principals, and teachers.
<p>11. Partner with colleges of education in the Great Cities in preparing the next generation of educators and diversifying the teacher force in urban schools.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No action yet on this tactic.
<p>12. Create a new urban school executive management training program for district instructional leaders to help improve academic leadership and programming.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have sketched out the preliminary components of the Casserly Institute for district instructional leaders.
<p>13. Continue to convene regular meetings of chief academic officers, bilingual education directors, directors of teaching</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have continued regular meetings of chief academic officers, bilingual education

<p>and learning, research directors, and special education directors to foster and enhance collaboration, mutual support, and ability to act collectively. Increase the numbers of member staff participating in these meetings and coordinate the agendas of the meetings with priorities of the executive committee and board of directors.</p>	<p>directors, directors of teaching and learning, and research directors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have not yet explicitly tied agendas for meetings to executive committee priorities. • Held calls every week with job-alike groups since mid-March 2020 to coordinate COVID-19 responses and strategy. Held some 467 ZOOM calls between mid-March and the end of December 2020.
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GOAL 2. TO LEAD, GOVERN, AND MANAGE OUR URBAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN WAYS THAT ADVANCE THE EDUCATION OF OUR STUDENTS AND ENHANCE THE EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY OF OUR INSTITUTIONS.

Strategy

Build the capacity of urban school boards, superintendents, and managers to lead, govern, and manage our districts; improve the academic and operational performance of our school districts; and bolster the tenures of effective urban school leaders.

Tactics:

Proposed Tactics to Meet Goals	Summary Status of Tactics to Meet Goals
<p>1. Expand the organization’s work to strengthen the governing capacity of member school boards and bolster the working relations between boards and superintendents. This will involve new professional development and more technical assistance to sitting school boards and cross-district support of board teams, school board presidents, and new school board members on both effective governance and their roles in improving student achievement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launched the Harvard-Great City Schools Accelerating Board Capacity Institute. First sold-out cohort met on July 28-31, 2019. Second cohort for 2020 was postponed because of the pandemic but rescheduled for 2021. Are rescheduling 2021 session. • Sketched out new school board audit service for the membership. • Provided on-site technical assistance to school boards in some 30 cities since January 1, 2019. • Hired a new Director of Governance.
<p>2. Provide technical assistance, ongoing mentoring, and support for member superintendents through a cadre of successful former superintendents. The Council will pursue additional financial support to provide mentors for new superintendents in the organization’s membership, participate on new superintendent transition teams, and provide on-site orientation for new superintendents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No specific action yet on this tactic.

<p>3. Revamp and expand the Council’s urban school executive’s management training program to include chief operating officers, chief financial officers, human resource directors, chief information officers, and key academic leaders. Coordinate this effort with the Casserly Institute.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launched a revamped urban school executive management program under the Casserly Institute banner in Spring 2019 with IT directors and CFOs. Have not yet included COOs and HR directors.
<p>4. Sustain and improve the Council’s performance management system and its non-instructional key performance indicators. Analyze urban districts with exemplary governance and operations and use the results to track and improve school board governance, organizational and process effectiveness, cost-efficiency, and return-on-investment. Conduct additional analysis of progress on operational key performance indicators across districts and strategies that produce better results.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted the 2019 and data collection on the Council’s non-instructional KPIs and released the results at the annual fall conference in Louisville and the virtual fall conference in 2020. Have not conducted any additional analysis on results.
<p>5. Continue to provide Strategic Support Teams (SSTs) and technical assistance to member school systems on management and operational issues. SSTs will focus on in the areas of organizational structure, staffing levels, human resources, facilities operations, maintenance and operations, budget and finance operations, information technology, safety and security, procurement, food services, and transportation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have conducted numerous SSTs since January 1, 2019, including facilities (Buffalo and Broward County), IT (El Paso, Guilford County, and Aurora), business operations (Clark County), transportation (Seattle), human resources (Milwaukee, Birmingham, Columbus), organization and finance (Hawaii, San Antonio, and Hillsborough County), and others.
<p>6. Begin synthesizing the results of the Council’s many SSTs over the years to articulate lessons learned and best practices. The Council has conducted some 320 SSTs over the last 20 years. The results, in combination with the key performance indicators, have significantly improved operations across the Great City Schools. The Council will begin synthesizing lessons learned and best practices to allow the membership to sustain and improve the gains made over the years.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have begun preliminary drafting of this synthesis. • Published guides for the membership on school reopening in the wake of COVID-19 in the areas of transportation, facilities, security, and budget.

<p>7. Convene regular meetings of operational and finance staff to foster and enhance collaboration, mutual support, and the ability to act collectively. Coordinate agendas of job-alike meetings of the human resource directors, chief operating officers, chief financial officers, and information technology directors with priorities of the executive committee and board of directors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have continued regular meetings of HR directors, COOs, CFOs, and CIOs directors. • Have not yet explicitly tied agendas for meetings to executive committee priorities. • Held regular ZOOM calls with CFOs, COOs, and others to strategize on school opening in the wake of COVID-19.
<p>8. Continue responding to ongoing information requests, providing data and best practices, sharing data, and conducting customized research for member district staff.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have continued responding to ongoing information requests. • Have conducted a survey of membership on interoperability challenges. • Have conducted a survey of the membership on bonding policies and issues in the membership.

GOAL 3. TO BOLSTER THE PUBLIC’S CONFIDENCE IN URBAN PUBLIC EDUCATION AND BUILD A SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY FOR RAISING OUR CHILDREN AND ENHANCING THEIR FUTURE.

Strategy:

Improve the public’s perceptions of, support for, and confidence in public education by making progress academically and operationally, letting people know about that progress, and celebrating success. Negative is always louder than positive, so in service of this goal it will be necessary to listen to our critics and address our challenges but avoid spending much time or energy trying to persuade opponents. In sum, our strategy is to make progress and build the capacity of districts to communicate it; it’s hard to fight success.

Tactics:

Proposed Tactics to Meet Goals	Summary Status of Tactics to Meet Goals
<p>1. Enhance the Council’s outreach efforts to the public, placing more explicit emphasis on the successes and progress of urban public schools, and our members’ role in strengthening our communities. Place additional priority on finding and sharing examples of district, school, and student success across a broader public audience at the national level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have prioritized success stories in both communications and research functions. • Had members share methods at the PRE conference on how they spread good news and progress with their communities. • Beginning efforts to better disseminate Council products. • Commissioned an external audit of Council social media practices.

<p>2. Develop and provide member districts with additional communications tools, platforms, and strategies for improving the public’s perception of urban schools at the local level. In addition, create a prototype for districts to use to better communicate with the public in crisis situations, manage negative news, and build the capacity of the membership to tell their own stories of progress and success.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have digitized the <i>Urban Educator</i> and described dozens of success stories in the beginning-of-the-year newsletter.
<p>3. Assist districts in developing strategies and models for more effectively engaging parents and community stakeholders. Design a prototype for how urban school leaders could reconceive and enhance their public engagement initiatives and strengthen public trust in the institution.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrote a report on communicating with parents, the public, and stakeholders on COVID-19 and district strategies.
<p>4. Provide additional Strategic Support Teams to member districts to help improve their capacity to communicate with the public. These teams would consist of expert communications staff from peer districts that have particularly strong programs and initiatives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No action yet on this tactic.
<p>5. Conduct polling on the public’s perceptions of urban public schools and where and how targeted messaging might prove effective. Seek external funds to support polling like what the Council has done in the past to gauge the public’s evolving confidence in urban public education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No action yet on this tactic.
<p>6. Expand the Council’s social media presence to reach a wider audience when communicating the progress of urban public education. Step up the organization’s daily postings on social media (Twitter and Facebook) and the numbers of ‘followers’ it has on social media outlets. Expand social media presence into Instagram. Increase use of memes, videos, and photos. Expand use of the Council’s #GreatCityGrads hashtag and connections to the #mybrotherskeeper hashtag.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have dedicated one staff person in the office to post social media messages every day. Have seen uptick in followers, although the list is still modest in size. • Have conducted a third-party audit of Council social media practices with recommendations for next steps.

<p>7. Provide more comprehensive information to national and local community-based groups on the social services that our schools deliver to parents and the community. Distribute this information through national and local parent groups to help build support for their local public schools.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No action yet on this tactic.
<p>8. Continue conducting the biennial survey of member communications departments, their staffing levels, functions, responsibilities, funding, and the like. Moreover, expand the representation of districts at the annual meeting of the Council’s public relations executives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalized the 12th Biennial Survey of member communications offices and released the results at the 2019 Public Relations Executive’s meeting. • Saw record attendance at the Council’s most recent in-person PRE conference.
<p>9. Strengthen contacts with mainstream media, alternative media, and ethnic media and their reporters to ensure that the Council is called when they are writing stories relevant to urban education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are reviewing and updating mailing lists of mainstream and alternative media. No other action yet.
<p>10. Carefully vet partnerships with external organizations around critical priorities identified by the membership.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This continues to be done on an ongoing basis, particularly with input from the executive committee.