



EXTRA ordinary DISTRICTS

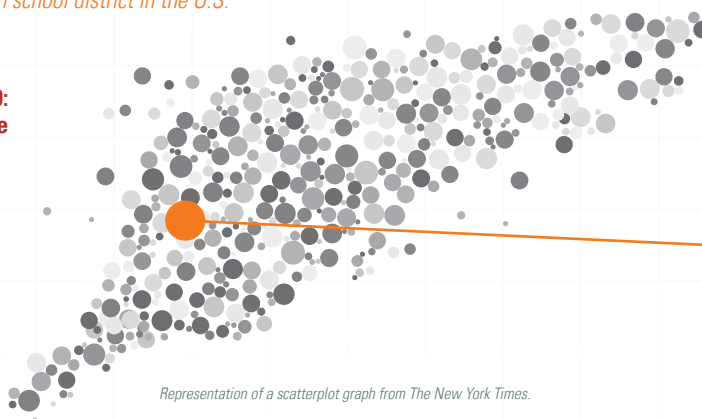
Ordinary school districts that get extraordinary results

ExtraOrdinary Districts is a podcast from The Education Trust that demonstrates the power that schools and school districts have to educate all children, regardless of background. To identify leading districts, we used an analysis of almost 12,000 districts done by a team led by Stanford University's Sean Reardon.

Episode 4: Chicago Public Schools: The Work of a Generation

Educational attainment in each school district in the U.S.

City of Chicago 299:
1.0 grade levels below average



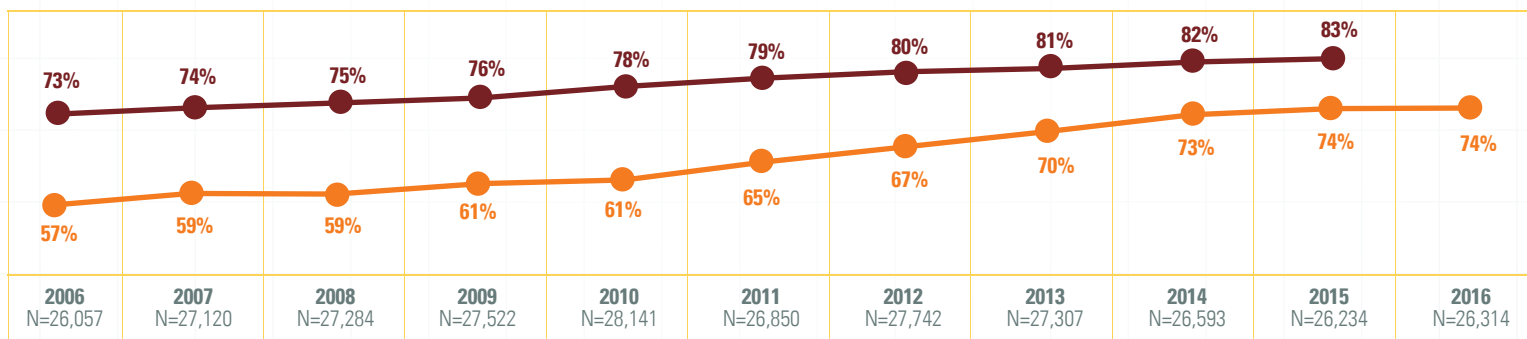
Representation of a scatterplot graph from The New York Times.

- 3 grades ahead of average
- 2 grades ahead of average
- 1 grade ahead of average
- About average
- 1 grade behind average
- 2 grades behind average
- 3 grades behind average

POORER ← Parents' socioeconomic status → RICHER

Why focus on Chicago? Chicago emerged in Reardon's analysis as the district that, in his words, "grows" its students the most of any large or medium-sized district. That is to say, its third graders read and do math significantly below the national average. But by eighth grade, they are performing pretty much at the national average, as measured by annual state tests. Although this means that overall, Chicago's third through eighth graders still perform below the national average, Chicago Public Schools have been remarkably successful at helping students improve their performance through the years. Reardon's analysis tallies quite closely with a completely different assessment, the Trial Urban District of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. In addition, Chicago has shown considerable progress on graduation and college going rates. No matter how you look at the data, Chicago has come a long way since 1987, when then-U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett called it the "worst" school system in the country. No one thinks Chicago's work is done, but Chicago demonstrates that large public districts can make enormous progress.

Basic Facts 381,349 Students | 38% Black | 47% Hispanic | 4% Asian | 10% White | 80% Economic disadvantage
Number of schools: 514 District-run, 122 Charter | English Language Learners (ELL) 17 %



YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

● CPS ● Nation



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Episode 4: Chicago Public Schools: The Work of a Generation

What contributed to Chicago's improvement?

Chicago Public Schools is a big, complicated school system. Any quick summary is bound to be incomplete. But Chicago has a unique resource in the University of Chicago's Consortium on School Research, which has been closely studying Chicago's schools since shortly after the Chicago School Reform Act of 1988. That law was the culmination of a city-wide commitment to school improvement on the part of parents, civic organizations, businesses, foundations, and universities. It radically decentralized Chicago's schools by creating elected local school councils for every single school. In addition to disrupting the power of the central office, it created a unique research opportunity. Funded by Chicago foundations, Consortium researchers studied which schools improved and which didn't and — importantly — identified the factors that seemed significant. One of the keys: school leaders who built trust within the school community.

In part because of that research, the district has made development and support of school principals a key strategy of improvement and has developed its own requirements in addition to the state certification requirements. This means that when a local school council hires a principal, that principal has demonstrated an ability to develop leadership among teachers, parents, and students. Many new principals are graduates of the University of Illinois-Chicago's Urban Education Leadership program, which has pioneered a new model of principal preparation that is focused on preparing principals for Chicago schools.

The University of Chicago Consortium for School Research has continued to do deep research on Chicago Public schools and has developed a number of important tools for principals to ensure that their students are on track to not only graduate, but enroll in and graduate from college.

What can other districts learn from Chicago?

- A key driver of school improvement is the knowledge and skill of school leaders who are able to develop the leadership capacity of teachers, staff members, and students. Such school leaders need to be carefully and deliberately cultivated.
- School leaders greatly benefit from timely data and analysis of their students' performance and research that helps guide next steps. For example, high school principals have greatly benefited from the Chicago Consortium's identification of "ninth grade on-track" data as well as research findings on how schools can help keep ninth graders from falling behind.
- When nonprofit organizations, parent and advocacy groups, foundations, businesses, and universities work together to understand the research and help schools to get better, tremendous progress can be made.

UPDATE: Since the podcast was recorded, the state of Illinois has adopted a new funding formula that should increase the amount of money that Chicago and other high-need districts receive from the state, a change that was applauded by advocacy organizations. In recognition of the new formula, Chicago dropped its lawsuit against Illinois, though it retained the right to refile if the new funds do not materialize.