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Council of the Great City Schools®

1331 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Suite 1100N, Washington, DC 20004

[cgcs.org](http://cgcs.org)

**FOR RELEASE**

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CONTACT: Tonya Harris

[tharris@cgcs.org](mailto:tharris@cgcs.org)

## **New Study Shows Students in Large City Schools Are Mitigating The Effects of Poverty Faster than Others**

***Analysis Shows How Large City Public Schools Narrowed Gap with Nation in Reading  
and Math by Half to a Third***

### **Individual City School Districts Show Significant Progress**

WASHINGTON, June 29 – Students in the nation’s urban schools are about 50 percent more likely to be poor, twice as likely to be English learners, twice as likely to be Black or Hispanic, and about 50 percent more likely to have a parent who did not finish high school as students in all other schools. Yet despite these factors often correlated with low student achievement, urban school students are making significant progress academically, according to a new report by the Council of the Great City Schools.

The study, [\*Mirrors or Windows: How Well Do Large City Public Schools Overcome the Effects of Poverty and Other Barriers?\*](#) used the last ten years of data in reading and mathematics at the fourth- and eighth-grade levels from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to answer the question of whether schools are windows of opportunity – and help overcome poverty and other barriers – or they are mirrors of society’s inequities. Data was also used from the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) of NAEP, which the Council initiated in 2000 so that the nation’s largest school systems could track their progress against other cities, states, and the nation. Twenty-seven large urban school districts volunteered to participate for the 2019 urban NAEP.

Using both general NAEP student-level data and district-specific TUDA student-level data, the study looked at poverty, language status, parental education, disability, literacy materials in the home, and race ethnicity to assess student achievement. The study then predicted student results based on all of these variables and compared those predictions against actual results over six separate administrations of NAEP between 2009 and 2019.

Findings from the study suggest that poverty was not necessarily destiny in urban public education. The analysis showed that:

- Students in large city schools narrowed the gap with students in all other schools in both reading and math at fourth and eighth grade levels between 2003 and 2019 by a third to a half, depending on grade and subject;
- After considering differences in poverty, language status, race/ethnicity, disability, educational resources in the home, and parental education, large city schools had reading and mathematics scores on NAEP that were significantly above statistical expectations at both the fourth- and eighth-grade levels in 2019 (the latest year NAEP was administered) and in most years since 2009; and
- After factoring in these variables, students in large city schools consistently had significantly higher results on NAEP than students in all other schools in the aggregate.

Several big-city school districts demonstrated results that were significantly above expectations in 2019 in at least three of four subject/grade combinations on NAEP: Boston, Miami-Dade County, Hillsborough County, Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Cleveland, New York City, Duval County, Fort Worth, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, the District of Columbia, Austin, and Guilford County. In addition, six districts improved their ability to “beat the odds” in at least two grade/subject combinations over the ten years studied: District of Columbia, Detroit, Miami-Dade County, Chicago, Cleveland, and Atlanta. The study showed a number of notable examples of significant results—

Boston consistently demonstrated some of the highest fourth- and eighth-grade reading and mathematics effects that were well above statistical expectations in every grade, subject, and year between 2009 and 2019.

Chicago was one of only a handful of urban school districts that showed gains in district effects in at least two grade/subject combinations, and it was one of the few districts showing gains between 2009 and 2019 that went from below expectations to above in at least one area.

Dallas showed reading and mathematics results that were above statistical expectations in three of four grade/subject combinations, and it produced a district effect that was well-above its scale scores in all grades and subjects.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools not only scored higher on NAEP than Large City School averages in all areas, the district outperformed All Other Schools, public and private, nationally in 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading and mathematics. In addition, Miami-Dade County Public Schools’ district effects exceeded All Other Schools in 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math. Miami-Dade County emerged as the only district to be in the top rankings in both average scores and district effects in three of four NAEP assessments.

Finally, the District of Columbia Public Schools posted the largest increases of any of the TUDA districts in all four grade and subject combinations tested, outperforming expectations in reading and math, and improving faster than any other major city school system in the country. Detroit was the second fastest improving in three of four grade/subject combinations.

## Finding Out How Districts Improved

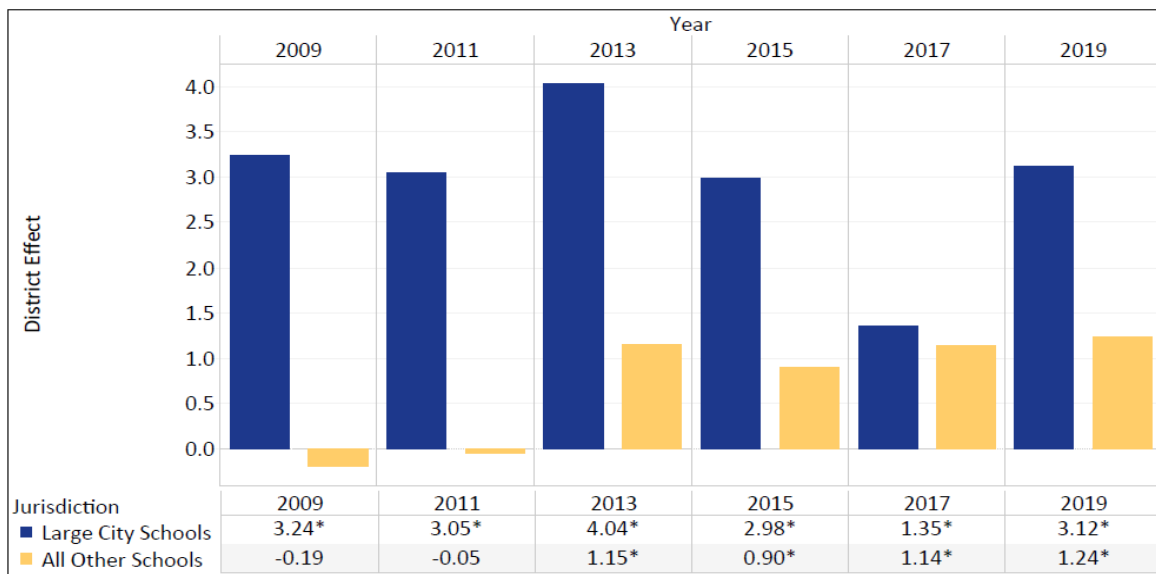
In an effort to find out the reasons some urban public-school districts seem to be mitigating barriers and increasing student achievement faster than others, the Council conducted site visits to six districts that demonstrated substantial improvements: Boston Public Schools, Chicago Public Schools, the Dallas Independent School District, the District of Columbia Public Schools, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, and the San Diego Unified School District. The Council also visited two other districts that were not making as much progress to compare practices.

The Council conducted these visits to find out if there were approaches or strategies these districts were using that could inform the work of other major urban school systems. The visits revealed several common practices the districts were taking connected to the progress seen in student performance. They included: strong and stable leadership focused on student instruction; high academic standards and well-defined instructional support; strong professional development and school-based support structures; systemwide change; accountability and a culture of collaboration; resilience and resourcefulness in the face of adversity; support for struggling schools and students; and community investments and engagement efforts.

“While urban school districts have not overcome or mitigated the barriers before them entirely, it is clear from the data in this study that large city schools may be doing a better job of mitigating the effects of poverty, discrimination, language and other barriers than other schools in the country,” said Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. “We know there is more work to do, but by examining the extent to which urban schools are “beating the odds” we know that with the right strategies and practices the nation’s large city schools can and do improve, but they can significantly raise student achievement and produce results that defy expectations.”

The exhibits below compare the differences between statistically expected results and actual NAEP results in large city schools and all others, showing that large city schools produced a larger than expected result in most years, subjects, and grades.

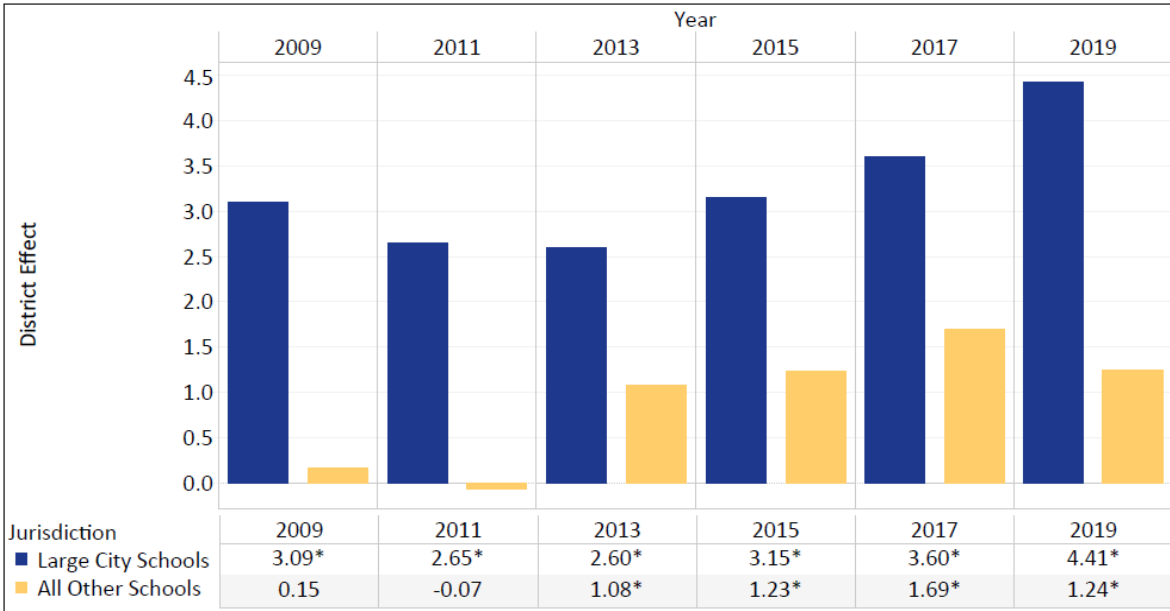
Trends in District Effects† on NAEP Fourth-grade Mathematics by School Type, 2009 to 2019.



† District effect is the difference between the actual district mean and the expected district mean.

\* District effect is significantly different from zero at  $p < .05$ .

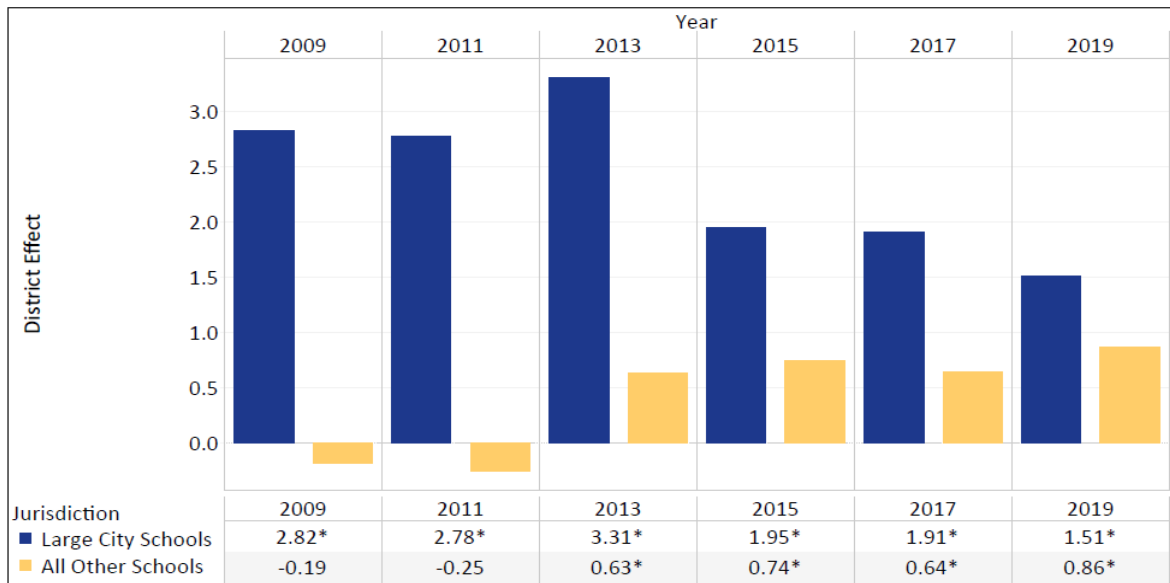
Trends in District Effects† on NAEP Eighth-grade Mathematics by School Type, 2009 to 2019.



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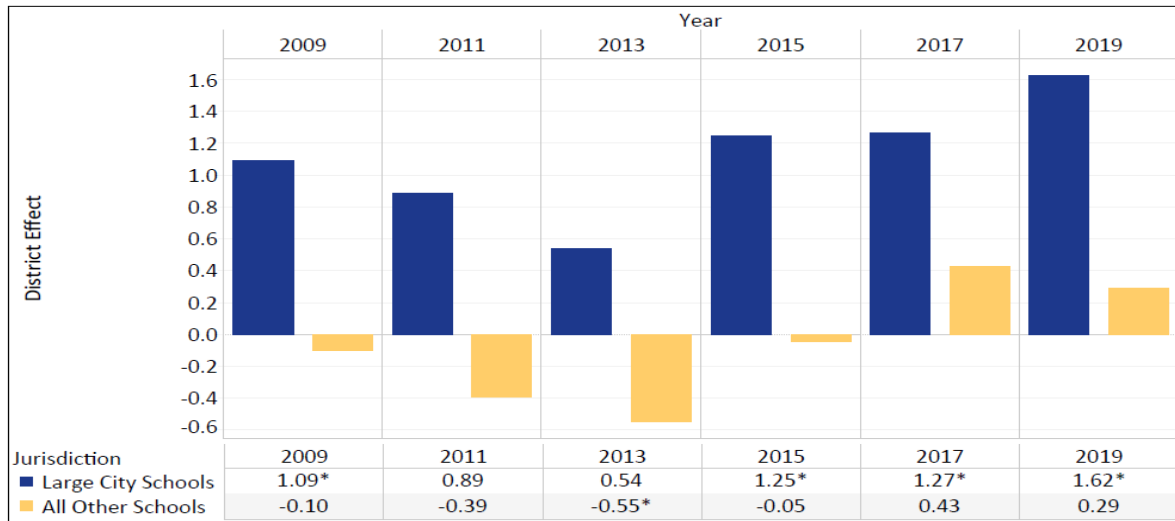
Trends in District Effects† on NAEP Fourth-grade Reading by School Type, 2009 to 2019.



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