

Scenario 2: Sweetgrass Basket

A slow and intensive process like that of making a basket. The sweetgrass must be processed before it is pliable enough to produce useful products

Charleston County School District engages in a series of incremental reforms based on consultation with community leaders and grassroots advocates. School-level decision making is expanded. Existing systems are redesigned to increase services CCSD provides to the schools and community. While important gains are made, frustration and resistance create tensions in many parts of the community. Grassroots leaders work with elected officials to pass a number of reforms including the amendment of Act 388, dismantling Constituent Boards and aligning the school board elections with the nine County Council District seats. The phase-out of Act 388 changes the funding formulas and allow the creation of a variety of school and community-based initiatives. Programs to close racial and economic achievement gaps are implemented. Teacher recruitment, education, and compensation are restructured and—coupled with affordable teacher housing—enables Charleston County to attract, hire, and retain high-quality educators. More minority teachers are recruited and supported. Culturally appropriate practices are created to understand and reduce racism. Although racial issues and community challenges remain, by 2035 these efforts result in stronger civic engagement and a smaller achievement gap.

Achievement Gaps

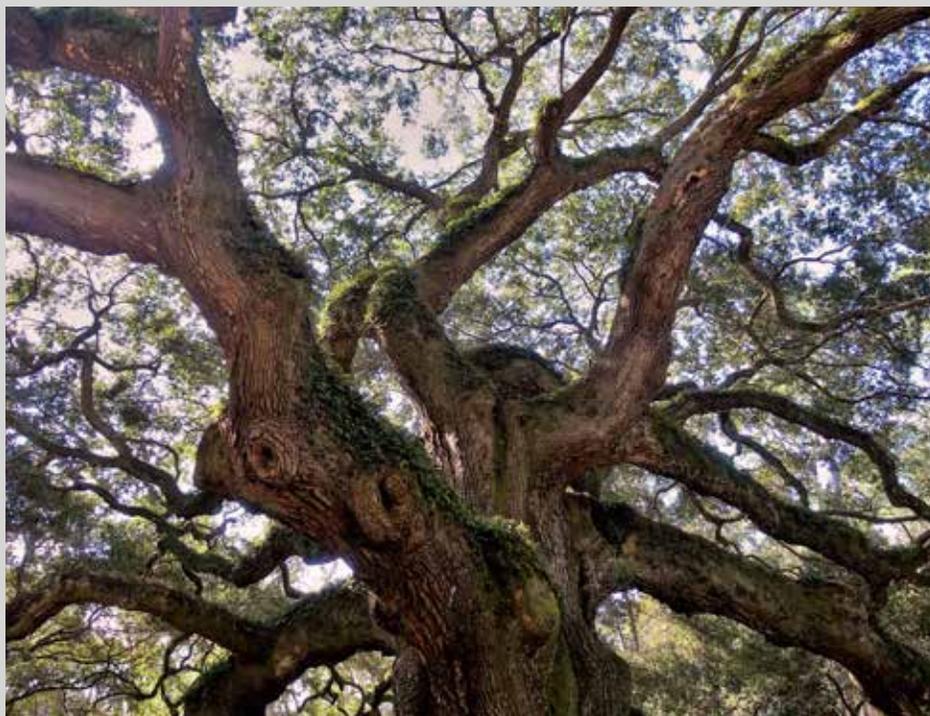
The sources of the achievement gap in US schools are well documented. In most cities and states across the country, educational and civic leaders are frustrated by how entrenched the patterns and policies are that sustain inequitable educational systems. There are promising experiments occurring at the city and state levels because there is a need for collaborative and comprehensive approaches that go beyond a single school district.

Over the last two years, six cities from across the country have participated in an experiment to find out what it really takes to close those gaps — an experiment based on the recognition that schools alone can't do it. Leaders from these six cities have reorganized and aligned their municipal structures to address the multifaceted challenges that cement the correlation between socioeconomic status and educational achievement.

The Education Redesign Lab at the Harvard Graduate

School of Education is sharing some of the key lessons for a successful citywide campaign to prioritize educational equity. As the report cautions, the work is not easy, not always orderly, and not of short duration. But there are broad takeaways that can help other cities launch a similar community effort.

Source: <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/18/06/how-cities-can-act-close-achievement-gap>



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key lesson for a successful citywide campaign to prioritize educational equity

How Cities Can Act to Close the Achievement Gap
The Education Redesign Lab at the Harvard Graduate School of Education

A gradual system of reforms takes place

Based on several news reports in 2018, the following year the CCSD Board amends its strategic plan to be more inclusive of community concerns. Community members are invited to participate in the proposal and the development of the initial 2020 Facilities Funding Referendum, designed to provide more capital improvements for schools. After a period of struggle and disagreement, the community groups decide to support the proposed reforms. The Referendum passes with some innovative initiatives, including shared spaces for wrap-around services and non-profits. Emboldened by this outcome, community leaders press state-level politicians to amend Act 388 and create a more equitable distribution of funds. Although the initial bills filed to amend Act 388 fail, a bill phasing out Act 388 over 10 years, among other major tax reforms, is eventually passed. After a divisive series of confrontations concerning local control, reforms to Act 340 are passed as well, ending Constituent Boards. Attention shifts to how attendance zones would be redrawn and progress is slow. Further reforms result in CCSD Board elections aligned with the nine County Council District seats and are more representative of regional constituencies. Encouraged by results and supported by the community, the Board implements extended school days and a longer school year schedule based on

developmentally-appropriate practices. These changes are opposed by businesses that rely on student workers for summer jobs, especially in the tourism industry.

CCSD community engagement programs gradually create stronger communication and trust between the District and the community. However, levels of distrust remain, especially within the African American community. As funding formulas change with the phasing out of Act 388 and other changes, the functioning of the District begins to be perceived as more transparent. The District works with local colleges and universities to transform teacher recruitment, development, and retention policies and practices. The District's initial aggressive increases in salaries for teachers slow down as the tax structures cannot continue to match that pace. To help attract and retain teachers, some existing, vacant schools are turned into affordable teacher housing through private partnerships and housing subsidies. The changes are not universally supported; with those served by the old system becoming vocal opponents. The reforms lead to frustration within several schools, particularly among administrative staff, yet the metrics indicate progress is being achieved. By the early 2030s, staff evaluation mechanisms indicate a more positive or neutral attitude toward the reforms.

School-level decision making and expansion of services

CCSD adopts a more inclusive approach to curriculum development, providing comprehensive implementation support. School leadership teams are empowered with school-level decision-making and include advisory roles for parents, students, and community leaders. CCSD partners with local colleges and universities to support this work. Schools work with District staff to adopt academic and operational goals and benchmarks. As the teams reach their benchmarks, the schools are given more flexibility with the use of resources and decision-making to meet the needs of their students. This allows schools to bring in programs and services better aligned with the needs of their students and teachers.

Schools work with mental health experts and other professionals to adopt a more holistic approach to support students learning and achieving. School leaders identify student populations that are not getting the educational services they require. Teachers are trained and empowered to better use data along with their knowledge of their students to implement evidence-based literacy and math interventions. These actions begin to show a decrease in achievement gaps. The Board approves requests from several schools to pilot extended

school day and year-round calendars in schools where the teachers and parents agree to approve it. Additionally, the District invests strategically and equitably in career and technology training in partnership with local industry, linking education to real life opportunities. There are also increased opportunities in the arts and local and international exchange programs. By 2032, over 75% of the schools in the district are making school-based decisions with moderate growth in closing achievement gaps.

Some rural schools as well as some small urban schools in North Charleston and on the Peninsula are considered for closure due to low enrollment, generating backlash from the communities affected. Supports through community partnerships are put in place for schools that are struggling, but access to resources remains limited. Schools enjoy expanded telehealth services, allowing them to use digital information and communication technologies to help students access health care. The District is able to gain approval for a broader use of Medicaid funds for telehealth. Changes to Act 388 empower local governments and school districts to work together to use transportation funds more flexibly, further enhancing access to education, employment, and support services. As school buildings are modernized, they include spaces for family resource centers with health clinics and human services. Despite improvements, the teacher shortages and affordable housing crisis continue. Some educators resign or are fired because they are unwilling or incapable of adapting to the ongo-

ing changes. There is still some friction and political fallout on the School Board.

A new way to engage with community

2019 community outreach gives all sectors an opportunity to express concerns and share ideas. The initial suspicion from the community is slowly overcome through appropriate design and honest communication. CCSD moves from presenting information to the community to actively involving them in the creation process. There is an increase in civic engagement and more interest from younger and more diverse populations, including many of them being appointed to committees and running for elected positions. The faith community encourages civic engagement and opens their doors for meeting spaces. Grassroots advocates share small gains and productive struggles on social media. Schools hold open houses to share best practices with other schools and communities, igniting a new sense of belief in education.

Stronger school-family relationships are built as home visits become the norm. There are regular phone calls and visits with families. Teachers, parents, and students alike begin to feel they have a voice. CCSD establishes programs to broaden students' understanding of their role as citizens in this community and the world. High school students are able to spend an exchange semester in a different school within the district or in a fully immersed apprenticeship program with a local

employer. Neighborhoods mobilize to advocate for the supports needed in their schools based on data and an understanding of the decision-making process. By the early 2030s the communication channels within the community remain strong. However, pockets of the community disengage by 2035, as they no longer see the strong need for participation due to the educational improvements achieved.

The student achievement gap decreases

In 2020, CCSD partners with local colleges and universities to adopt culturally relevant and rigorous curriculum from 3K to 12th grade. These partnerships address existing learning gaps. The District moves to provide trained paraprofessionals in nearly all classrooms where more than half of the students are reading below grade level. The additional staffing, extended school day, and year-round calendar begin to show improvement in students who were most behind. Academic achievement improves every year.

These developments reduce the achievement gap, yet problems remain. In response, new community-based literacy programs are funded in partnership with faith-based organizations and public housing. These provide training for families in homes and community centers. Parents are taught strategies to help their children develop a love of reading and positive study habits. By 2035, there is an important reduction in the achievement gap, yet much more work is still needed. SAT and ACT scores are just a few percentage points apart for the various subgroup averages and students with special needs have made important gains as well. Students in high-poverty communities have better access to opportunities to develop their talents and skills, resulting in higher graduation rates.

Racism is structurally addressed, yet remains present

Many in the community make it clear to the Board that reducing racism and discrimination is a key priority. Professional development offered to principals and teachers in 2020 is designed to be culturally relevant, historically grounded, and based in research and data. A few teachers and administrators who don't embrace the new approach decide to leave the system. Family nights at the schools are centered around civic engagement and related to race, diversity, and inclusion. Students engage in discourse regarding race and the history of racism and oppression. A gradual change takes place as the institutional barriers embedded in



Achievement Gaps (continued)

All Children, By All Means

The six cities who've joined the experiment — Louisville, Kentucky; Oakland, California; Providence, Rhode Island; and Salem, Somerville, and Newton in Massachusetts — comprise the first cohort of a consortium called By All Means, which provided the framing philosophy and guidance, city-specific consulting help, and a broad professional community for reflection and collaboration beyond city lines.

Each of the six cities explored equity gaps in distinct and context-specific ways, making changes — some more successful than others, some just beginning to bear fruit, some that will need a generation to assess — and building connections among city agencies, the school districts, nonprofits, and residents. Among the

issues they tackled: access to preschool and to college, improving behavioral health services, expanding access to personalized learning, and creating universal summer and afterschool programming. Some of the lessons that have emerged thus far include:

1. Visible, Effective Mayoral Leadership
2. Establishing Children's Cabinets That Have Authority and Accountability
3. Build Internal Capacity
4. Being Prepared for Turnover; Plan for Ongoing Momentum
5. Building Strong City-School Relationships
6. Recognizing That Funding Challenges Are Ongoing
7. Defining, Communicating, and Building Community



laws, policies, and practices are slowly uncovered and undone.

More minority teachers are recruited from within the community. CCSD works with local colleges and universities to create affordable pathways to teaching. CCSD provides greater outreach in all schools and shares positive stories about their teachers. By 2025, school choice options have more diverse student bodies through more outreach, access to transportation, and reduced barriers to entrance into magnet schools. County demographics continue changing, and some neighborhood schools are reported to be more integrated. While there are still some schools with more than 90% of one race, all schools are showing academic gains. Many families continue to live segregated lives outside of school, through their religious affiliations, social networks, and employment. Race awareness built slowly over the 2020s, especially among young adults, allows a majority of the Charleston society of the 2030s to gain a deeper understanding of the city's history and systems of racism, and these structures are considerably less prevalent. However, some residents continue to perpetuate traditions contributing to

racism, and prevent a wholesale, community-wide movement away from segregation.

Locals are better prepared to join the workforce

Some sectors of the Charleston economy continue to thrive. As businesses increase their partnership with CCSD, a coalition of business partners expands existing apprenticeship programs. Outcome measures are applied together with academic assessments to track school and student progress. The appropriate use of technology in the schools gives confidence to industry that CCSD graduates have the skillsets they require, leading to a boom in local hiring. The city now talks about a school-to-work pipeline, rather than the previous school-to-prison pipeline. Charleston enjoys a manufacturing boom in the late 2020s. Despite these gains, not all have benefitted and many minority families still experience a wide socio-economic gap compared to their white counterparts.

Gradual reforms lead to gradual improvements

After the 10-year phase out of Act 388, the divisive end of Act 340, and a number of other reforms, the Charleston education system is yielding results.

By 2035, teacher recruitment, retention and professional development programs have been transformed. School-level decision making is allowing schools to provide services that better meet the needs of their students and teachers. Special-needs students and students in high-poverty communities have better access to opportunities, resulting in higher graduation rates. A majority of schools show reductions in behavior issues and provide more affordable mental health services. Industry has confidence CCSD graduates have the skillsets necessary for available jobs. There is an important reduction in the achievement gap, yet much work remains to be done. Teacher shortages and the affordable housing crisis remain. Although initiatives to address racism have made some progress, racism persists. Pockets of frustration within the system remain. And, by year 2035, enthusiasm for progress has waned. The community has taken a more passive stance, given the perceived educational outcomes achieved.