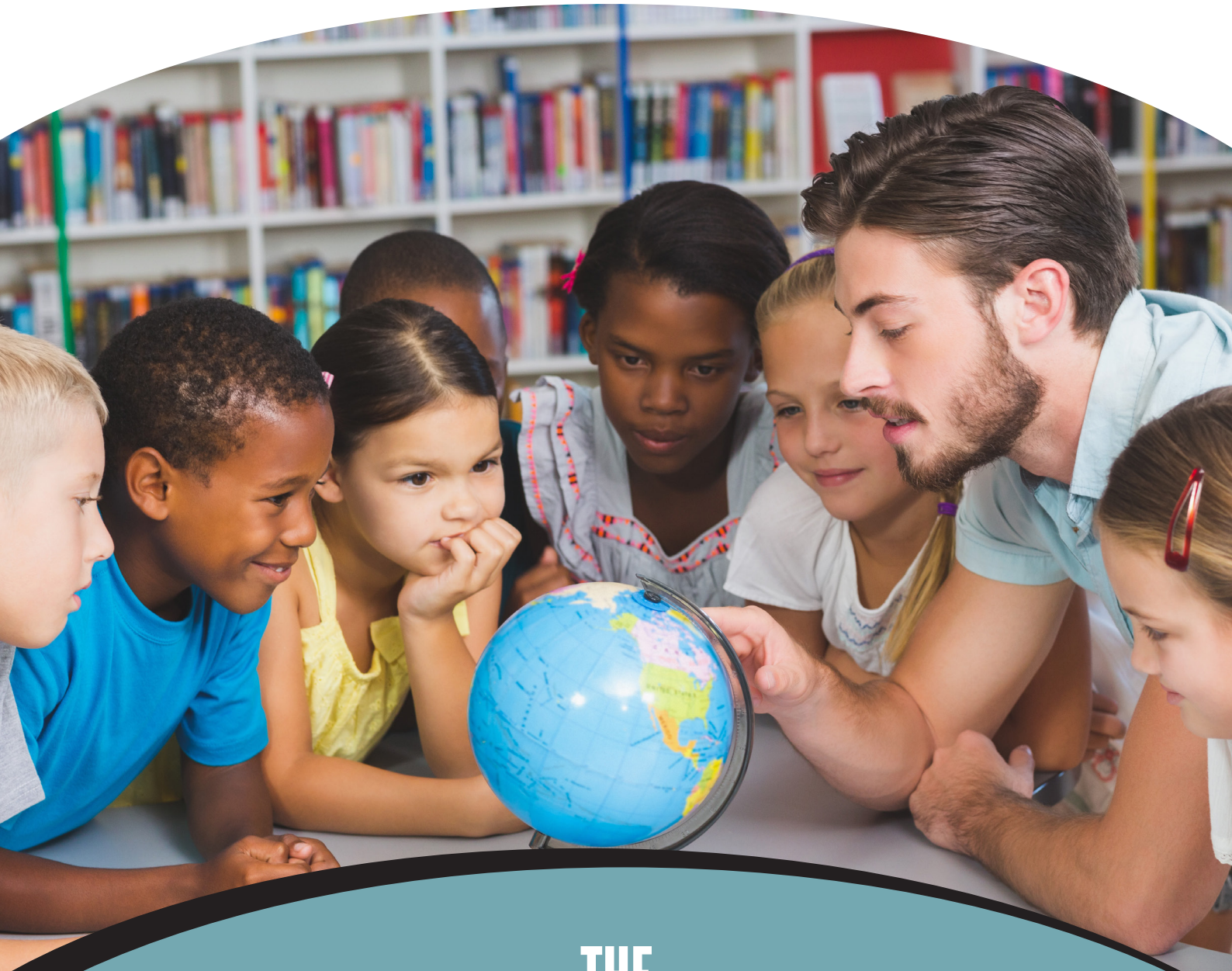
FAIR AND FRANK

GLOBAL INSIGHTS FOR MANAGING SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

MARTINE UDAHEMUKA

FOREWORD BY LORD O'SHAUGHNESSY



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2017

The New Zealand Initiative is an independent public policy think tank supported by chief executives of major New Zealand businesses. We believe in evidence-based policy and are committed to developing policies that work for all New Zealanders.

Our mission is to help build a better, stronger New Zealand. We are taking the initiative to promote a prosperous, free and fair society with a competitive, open and dynamic economy. We develop and contribute bold ideas that will have a profound, positive, long-term impact.

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FOREWORD

About 15 years ago I was starting out on my policy career. Based in the Conservative Research Department, I was the desk officer for education and tasked with two activities: attacking the then Labour Government for its education policies, and coming up with some alternatives for the Conservatives. As it turned out, some of the very policies of the administration I was meant to be opposing – increasing rigour in primary schools, creating Teach First to attract high quality graduates into teaching, and launching the first City Academies – would become the cornerstones of the education policy in the 2010 Conservative Party Manifesto, which I authored for David Cameron. This taught me an important lesson: the best ideas are often under your nose, if only you care to look for them.

Martine Udahemuka's excellent report, *Fair and Frank*, is the result of both her curiosity and rigorous analysis. By having the courage to question the assumptions underpinning New Zealand's school system, and then asking what other countries are doing to raise standards, she has discovered some important truths. The first is that no system can be better than the quality of its teachers, and so recruiting the best graduates, giving them professional autonomy, and facilitating their professional development is the first task of any thoroughgoing reform programme.

The second truth is that what is taught in schools must be rigorous. This is where many school systems go wrong – they are prepared to accept sub-standard curricula and sub-standard teaching because of what George W. Bush so memorably called "the soft bigotry of low expectations". This is the idea that some pupils will never do well because of their backgrounds, so why bother stretching them? Happily, as countries like Singapore and China, and some English academies and U.S. charter schools, have shown us, a disadvantaged background need be no impediment to excellence.

The injection of both rigour and ambition is especially effective for those whose home lives provide the least support, as the D.C. and New York initiatives outlined in this report show. This can be summed up in a phrase favoured by former British Education Secretary Michael Gove – "Raising the bar, closing the gap" – which brings to life the idea of a levelling up, not a levelling down.

Finally, there is the most controversial topic of school autonomy itself. As this report shows, and is evidenced by the OECD, there has been a trend towards school-level autonomy over many years but within an accountability framework of publishing outcome data, inspection regimes, and intervening in failing schools. This managerial approach is an effective way of fixing acute underperformance, with fewer badly failing schools in jurisdictions that have implemented it. However, the approach has its limitations. It may rein in poor performance but cannot foster greatness. That requires great teaching and rigorous curricula, as well as strong leadership, competition and collaboration.

I wrote on this topic for the UK think tank Policy Exchange in 2012, finding that collaboration gave a school the internal motivation to improve, while the sharp edge of inter-school competition ensured collaboration did not lead to cosiness or complacency. Known as co-opetition in business literature, its application in education is best delivered when schools group together in federations. In England, multi-academy trusts, or MATs, provide economies of scale a single school cannot, driving efficiency gains and offering varied career paths for teachers.

One of the problems with New Zealand's school reforms of the 1980s was that it created atomisation among schools. The answer is not to reverse the freedoms given to schools, but to bring schools together in 'hard' organisational forms to support and challenge one another in equal measure. It is not enough to hope it occurs organically: rather, the government needs to make change happen by enabling schools to be responsible for their own performance and equipping them with the resources to achieve the choice and quality of education New Zealand's young people deserve.

Lord O'Shaughnessy
Founder, Floreat Education Academies Trust
London

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

> I'm always on the hunt for what other systems are doing that we might be able to appropriate and incorporate so I come with a very open mind and active listening.[1]
>
> — Hekia Parata, Minister of Education

Every child deserves access to an adequate education. This belief was the starting point for The New Zealand Initiative's research on what facilitates or hinders access to a quality schooling experience.

This is the second report in a series of three on school underperformance. The first, *Signal Loss: What We Know About School Performance,* showed that though most students in New Zealand have access to quality schooling, most is not good enough. Thousands of students attend schools where failure has become the status quo (See the Appendix for a summary of the report). The education system requires innovative solutions to systematically deal with the pockets of chronic underperformance in New Zealand.

There also needs to be better measures of the quality of teaching and learning in each school. At the moment, judgments of school performance against national benchmarks do not consider the starting points of students. A school with school-ready students may seem successful for meeting national targets even if its students underperform relative to their capabilities. Conversely, a school with many lower starting-ability students may seem a failure for not meeting national benchmarks even though its students may have progressed substantially. The current system focuses on final attainment rather than progress, so it is harder to identify effective schools and effective teaching.

These challenges are not unique to New Zealand. In a travel journal format, this report documents the strategies implemented in five jurisdictions across England and the United States to *identify* effective schools and effective teaching, and *reform* failing schools,[2] and also explore the successes, failures and implications of those strategies.

FINDINGS

England's efforts to transform failing schools: Shaking up the status quo

- Under England's school inspector regime, the process of defining, assessing and managing performance is clear. Schools are held accountable for the outcomes of their students, and performance information for parents clearly indicates the quality of individual schools.
- In 2002, the Academies policy introduced independently run but government-funded academies to replace failing schools. Academies bridge the gap between private and state sectors in managing schools. To inject fresh ideas into the sector, private parties were invited to invest capital and expertise, and manage state schools that had historically underserved students.
- The policy, which politicians of all colours supported with rare accord, has transformed England's schooling landscape. Over a quarter of all state schools are now academies.
- Time, money, expertise and school-to-school collaboration have contributed to notable success for the earliest group of academies, particularly for secondary school students. The failings of more recent academies have been attributed to a lack of performance oversight, rapid expansion, and fewer high quality sponsors.

1 Hekia Parata, "Bennett to OECD education ministers: We can transform the world," *The Jerusalem Post* (27 September 2016).

2 The terms 'failing,' 'underperforming,' and 'poorly performing' – and their derivatives – are used interchangeably in this report to refer to schools that do not meet the benchmarks set in the jurisdiction.

New York City charter schools: One Big Apple solution for disadvantaged students

- New York City's charter schools provide a positive alternative for disadvantaged students who had disproportionately failed in traditional public schools. Parents are now demanding more seats in these schools than are available. In 2016, 98% of students applying to oversubscribed charter schools were selected through a lottery.
- Many students in Harlem, one of the city's poorest areas, attend charter schools and their choice has, in general, improved their knowledge– sometimes up to seven months worth of additional maths learning in a year. Charter schools that are part of a network provided, on average, 10 months worth of extra learning for their students.
- Some highly successful charter schools have delivered on their promise to act as hubs of new ideas so other schools can learn from their successes.

Massachusetts: Where complacency is not an option

- Although a national leader in education rankings, Massachusetts has persistent achievement gaps and failing schools. Leaders believe the quality of their education system cannot exceed the quality of their weakest schools, and are working tirelessly to support failing schools.
- The *Achievement Gap Act* was introduced in 2010 in an effort to close disparities in achievement by improving low-performing schools using innovative turnaround models.
- The school 'restart' model (successful education management organisations taking over failing schools) introduced under a new accountability regime created opportunities for the private sector and the state to work together to improve student outcomes.
- Although restart schools are a new approach to school turnaround and small in scale, they are vastly improving student performance. One such school visited has improved from fewer than 1 in 3 students reaching grade-level proficiency to at least 1 in 2 in just three years.

The District of Columbia: How much teachers matter

- The District of Columbia has gone from the worst performing jurisdiction in education to the fastest improving in America. The public school system has regained the community's trust with unprecedented student roll growth in recent years.
- Reforms focused on improving the quality of teachers, particularly by revising the step-raise performance system that rewards time in the job rather than success in the classroom.
- The IMPACT appraisal system implemented in 2009–10 isolates the impact of teachers from other factors contributing to student achievement outside the classroom.
- Schools are now able to better identify and reward their most effective teachers. Evaluation information also helps tailor professional development. Ineffective teachers, though a small minority of the workforce, have in general been replaced with better performing teachers.
- The District's teaching profession has become highly valued, with quality teachers among the highest paid in the country and more of them choosing D.C. as a place of work.

The Houston opportunity: Implementing lessons from successful schools

- Faced with dire educational outcomes, Houston's leaders turned to other successful schools for inspiration and guidance.
- The political courage in partnering with academics led to a nation first: applying evidence-based practices from successful charter schools in New York to traditional public schools.

- Convinced by the potential benefits for Houston's lowest performing schools, the federal government, philanthropists and local communities made significant investments to implement the practices – the three-year Apollo 20 programme was thus born.
- Improvements were observed in maths in each year of the programme, though it is not clear whether the gains have been sustained beyond the three years.

The places visited demonstrate the potential for improving outcomes for students. Politicians had the courage to denounce failing as status quo and pursue radical mechanisms to overcome failure. In New Zealand, we still call 'world-class' an education system that underserves thousands of students and lets poorly performing schools persist for decades. Insights from these five systems for managing school underperformance will inform policy recommendations for New Zealand in the third and final report of the series.

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INTRODUCTION
IN THE BUSINESS OF EDUCATION SUCCESS

Walking through the hallways, it was easy to feel the calm, see the discipline, and sense the focus. In the corridor stood a group of young men dressed neatly in suits and ties looking like managers or business visitors. They were in fact senior students required to dress professionally during their final two years in school.

This was Walworth Academy, a secondary school in Southeast London. The academy was my first stop in exploring how different education systems are managing poorly performing schools.

Eight years ago, Walworth had a different feel to it. In fact, a Google search in preparation for my trip left me anxious. Among search results were references to weapons and violence, and even a former principal calling the school a dire place.[3] Walworth ticks all the boxes for a high-needs school. More than half of its 800 students are eligible for free school meals (a measure of economic disadvantage), which is well above the national average. The school also educates a higher than average proportion of students with special learning needs, and with English as a second language.[4]

In 2007, fewer than 3 out of 10 students reached minimum academic targets by the time they left school.[5]

That year, Walworth School was closed as a state-managed school and re-opened as Walworth Academy. The academy has since been independently managed by ARK, an education management organisation that had already turned around underperforming schools in London.[6]

The academy's new lofty buildings, clearly commanding respect, stand in sharp contrast to the surrounding streets in the impoverished neighbourhood – just like the school's recent improvements over past performance. In 2009, two years after the takeover, 45% of students reached minimum academic levels. By 2015, the figure was 54%, just below the 55.8% national average, putting Walworth in the top 40% of similar schools, and the middle 20% of all schools nationwide.[7]

Three years after becoming an academy, independent school reviewers described Walworth as being 'in the business of transformation' – not only of students' educational performance but also of their lives by producing "great leaps in their personal development".[8]

A number of factors contributed to the school's newfound success.

The head teacher (principal) at Walworth said focusing on the impact of teaching on student outcomes was paramount. ARK holds teachers accountable for student outcomes and promotes sharing good practice within its network of schools. At the time of takeover in 2007, only 37% of the teaching observed by an independent school inspector was judged *good* or *outstanding*. The

3 The staff in pre-conversion Walworth School disagreed with media reports. Teachers said though Walworth was a tough school, weapons were rare relative to other local schools and were dealt with swiftly. Staff, Walworth Academy, Email (November 2016).

4 Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), "Walworth Academy inspection report" (London: UK Government, 2010).

5 ARK, "Annual Review 2010" (London: 2010), 8.

6 Walworth School was categorised by the Department for Education as being in "challenging circumstances," but not categorised as a failing school. Staff, Walworth Academy, Email (November 2016).

7 Department for Education (DfE), "Ark Walworth Academy: Compare school and college performance," Website.

8 Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted),"Walworth Academy inspection report" op. cit.

figure rose to about 65% within two years under ARK.

The teacher hosting me had been through the takeover and said the expectations from the school, parents and students were now more explicit. Each student and parent signs a contract that spells out expectations and consequences for behaviour – possibly a key driver of success.

Pride in their school was obvious among seniors preparing for an exam. One of the boys was from a migrant family and had joined the school in 2014. "The school gives me opportunities I never thought I would ever get", he said, referring to the business seminars and mentors the school organises for students to discuss their goals after graduation. In 2016, 99% of seniors achieved their A levels, and 1 in 6 had enough grades to attend England's top universities.

Walworth's success is but one story. But it is a story that shows what is possible when leaders like Andrew Adonis, Michelle Rhee, and Terry Grier decide to do whatever it takes – no matter how politically challenging – to give each child a chance at an adequate education. For Walworth's students, these efforts have opened up a world of opportunities they may not have had in the previous school.

There is no silver bullet to solve educational challenges. That is why innovative solutions beyond our own borders are worth exploring.

Of course, what has worked elsewhere may not work in our cultural, economic and political context. But successful elements can be adapted by school leaders in New Zealand who want to fix our underperforming schools.

This report tells the stories of strategies used to address ongoing school underperformance in five jurisdictions across England and the United States. Readers may wonder at comparing New Zealand to countries it outperforms on international tests such as PISA.[9] The New Zealand Initiative could have analysed policies in countries that top international charts, such as the European powerhouse, Estonia, or the fierce Asian tigers, Singapore and Hong Kong. While our international ranking has been nearer the top than the bottom, the five jurisdictions visited face stubborn achievement challenges similar to New Zealand. They have also in recent decades implemented radical reforms to manage school underperformance.

England, New York City, Massachusetts, the District of Columbia, and Houston have shattered the status quo. In my research trip to these places, I did not try to decipher the complexities of each system. Instead, I met with students, teachers and principals, bureaucrats and politicians, and academics to learn how particular policies have worked (or not) and, where relevant, to extrapolate lessons for our own challenges in New Zealand.

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9 The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests, every three years, basic English, maths and science knowledge of 15-year-olds in OECD and OECD partner countries. OECD, "About PISA," Website.

CHAPTER ONE
ENGLAND'S EFFORTS TO TRANSFORM FAILING SCHOOLS: SHAKING UP THE STATUS QUO

The Academies policy of 2002 decided failing schools could no longer be tolerated – and triggered a transformation of state schools in England.[10] Underperforming schools were removed from Local Educational Authorities (LEAs) and placed in the hands of independent philanthropic sponsors as academy schools, but continued to be government-funded. Essentially, an academy is a state school with alternative and independent management and governance structures. The policy now extends far wider than initially intended – more than a quarter of state schools are now academies and over a third of all state school students in England attend an academy.

Academies can be broken down into three main types:

- **Sponsored academy:** Typically a previously poorly performing school closed and taken over by an independent sponsor to improve it.
- **Converter academy:** Typically a *good* or *outstanding* school that converts into an academy to enjoy academy status but does not require a sponsor.
- **Free school:** A new school with academy freedoms opened by other schools, charities or individuals (including parents and teachers).

This chapter documents the evolution, state and outcomes of sponsored academies to understand how they have improved educational achievement.[11] The chapter also notes high-level differences between England's and New Zealand's official reviews of school performance.

1.1 THE EVOLUTION OF THE ACADEMIES POLICY

The Academies policy began under the Labour government in 2002, followed by two more iterations in 2010 and 2016. The original Labour policy principles remain but the application has changed.

Academies 2002 version 1.0: Sponsored failing secondary schools

As the local arm of the Department for Education (DfE), LEAs in England oversee state schools in their geographic areas, including intervening in failing schools. These DfE-funded local authorities decide how to distribute funds to each school, and also procure operational and educational services on behalf of schools.[12] But in 1997, fewer than a third of the students in more than 1,500 schools

10 Tony McAleavy and Alex Elwick, "School Improvement in London: A Global Perspective" (Berkshire: Education Development Trust, 2016).

11 There are no academies in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland. See Nerys Roberts, "FAQs: Academies and Free Schools," Briefing Paper 07059 (London: House of Commons Library, 10 November 2016).

12 Until 1988, LEAs made operational decisions on the hiring, firing and paying of school staff. From 1988, under the *Great Education Act* these decisions were devolved to schools. LEAs became less directly involved, though they still managed school funding, remained legal employers of staff, led school improvement efforts, and appointed school governors. The Academies policy further expanded school autonomy and minimised LEA control. Lord O'Shaughnessy, Founder, Floreat Education Academies Trust, Email (November 2016).

were meeting national targets.[13] Tony Blair's New Labour government found local authorities were failing to address ongoing poor performance in urban secondary schools – and responded by introducing the 'sponsored academies' model under the *Education Act 2002*.[14]

In consultation with the local authorities, private and voluntary sponsors were invited to take over schools deemed poorly performing by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), a Crown entity that independently inspects schools in England.[15] Sponsors were usually businesses, charities, faith groups, or voluntary organisations. More recently, they include other schools and universities. The intention was to by-pass the local authority and give greater autonomy to schools (in partnership with independent sponsors) to manage funding, operational and academic services to suit their needs. Freedoms include the ability to hire staff and set their pay and conditions, decide how to deliver the National Curriculum, and alter the school day and term length. Schools still have to follow national rules on admissions, special educational needs, and exclusions.[16] Once a school becomes an academy, it ceases to be a separate legal entity and becomes part of a charitable academy trust. Academies can be single or multiple schools under an academy chain or multi-academy trusts (MATs). The trust operates under a contract with the secretary of state, and is directly accountable to the state.

Ironically, Labour's initiative facilitated the entry of the voluntary and private sector into state education. In his June 2001 speech introducing the sponsored academy policy, Lord Andrew Adonis said: "There is no point being in public life unless you seek, as honestly as you can, to address the big problems facing the country and make a stand for policies you genuinely believe will make society better, free from outdated dogma".[17] The policy enabled 'the injection of fresh expertise from an external sponsor'.[18] Sponsors invested the first £2 million towards the initial funding or provided services in kind from their businesses. Lord Adonis held that the opportunity to "breach the educational Berlin Wall between private and state education provision" through the academies model would raise standards across the education system.[19]

Other expected benefits were devolving decision-making to schools and better accountability mechanisms. Sponsors were free to develop ways to manage and govern schools; in return for the flexibility and financial freedom, academies that did not improve risked closure by the DfE.

Academies 2010 version 2.0: Sponsored failing primary schools, successful converter schools, and new free schools

Under the *Academies Act 2010*, Labour's original policy was expanded by the Coalition government. Education Secretary Michael Gove introduced five main changes. First, failing primary schools could be replaced by sponsored academies and without local authority consultation. Second, the Act introduced 'converter academies' to incentivise

13 Andrew Adonis, "Academic excellence," *The Guardian* (26 March 2008).

14 The sponsored academy policy had similarities with the 2000 city academies programme introduced by the Labour government, which focused on urban colleges in disadvantaged areas. See David Blunkett, "City academies: Schools to make a difference, a prospectus for sponsors and other partners," Speech to the Social Market Foundation (London: Department for Education, 15 March 2000).

15 Although there are inconsistencies between reviewer comments and published material about the criteria the DfE uses to require a school to become a sponsored academy. For example, Walworth Academy staff say the school never failed Ofsted inspections, but the DfE says the school was in "challenging circumstances." Another reviewer said the DfE incentivised LEAs to give up their "rundown schools" by giving them "shiny new buildings for new academies".

16 Nerys Roberts, "FAQs: Academies and Free Schools," op. cit.

17 Andrew Adonis, "A new settlement between state and private education in England," Speech to Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (28 June 2011).

18 Simon Day and Sue Hackman, "Strategies to challenge and support school performance in the United Kingdom (San Francisco: WestEd, 2012).

19 Andrew Adonis, "Bringing down England's Berlin Wall," www.andrewadonis.com.

effective schools to keep improving: schools rated *good* or *outstanding* could apply to convert to an academy and sit outside local authority control; they also did not require a sponsor.[20] Converting to an academy was to be contingent on taking on a failing school, but this did not happen.[21] Third, charities, schools or groups of individuals could open 'free schools' to meet identified community needs.[22] Fourth, successful schools or academies could take over a failing school as sponsors without committing the initial funding or services in kind. Finally, new academies no longer had to follow the National Curriculum.

In an interview almost 10 years after its introduction, Gove explained his rationale for extending the policy to all schools. He wanted to "give teachers more power, control and influence over what happens in their classrooms over the length of the school day, and over the discipline methods that they could use in order to keep order". Gove also sought to change the curriculum and exams so "those extra freedoms would be seen in a context of accountability …"[23]

Hugh Greenway, CEO of one of England's most successful academy sponsors, gives his analysis of what triggered Gove's actions:

> Gove felt that England had just come from three terms of central government spending more on education than had ever been spent in the country and things hadn't improved as much as they should have done – a lot of that money was wasted.[24]

Greenway further explains the impetus behind the expansion of the academy programme:

> The people in education have [continually] failed to … explain why it's more difficult to move this school than that school, which is [probably] why [Gove said] enough of this nonsense – far too long, too much, too big a state – let's make it go away, let's reform …[25]

Academies 2016 version 3.0: Every school an academy

Almost 15 years after the introduction of the academies policy, Conservative Education Secretary Nicky Morgan campaigned to take Adonis' and Gove's plans even further. Morgan's 2016 white paper, "Education Excellence Everywhere", outlined plans to convert every government-run school in England, regardless of its performance, into an academy by 2020. The aim was to spread excellence across the system in a collaborative manner, with successful schools committing to supporting underperforming schools.[26]

Morgan's proposal, however, met with resistance not only from unions and head teachers of high performing schools but also from a number of Conservative MPs. Schools Minister Nick Gibb was accused for imposing the academies model on schools that didn't need or want it.[27] The proposal was also criticised for removing a key element of the converter model – choice – and reducing incentives for *good* schools to do better.[28] The forced expansion was thus cancelled in May 2016 due to fierce sector and political resistance,[29] though reviewers disagreed on whether the proposal has been totally dropped or merely watered down.

20 Amy Finch, Ben Dobson, Elaine Fischer, and Alasdair Riggs, "Academy Chains Unlocked" (London: Reform, 2016).

21 The Academies Commission, "Unleashing Greatness: Getting the Best from an Academised System" (London: Pearson and RSA, 2013).

22 Free schools can be a new school opened by teachers, parents or the community, but are not generally used as a mechanism to tackle underperforming schools – this academy type is not the focus of this report.

23 The Andrew Marr Show, "Interview with Michael Gove, Education Secretary," *BBC* (12 May 2013).

24 Hugh Greenway, Chief Executive, The Elliot Foundation, Personal meeting (17 May 2016).

25 Ibid.

26 Department for Education (DfE), "Educational Excellence Everywhere" (London: UK Government, 2016).

27 BBC News, "Schools Minister Nick Gibbs heckled over academy plans" (4 April 2016).

28 Amy Finch, et al. "Academy Chains Unlocked," op. cit.

29 Steven Swinford, "David Cameron announces U-turn on academies following Tory rebellion," *The Telegraph* (7 May 2016).

Despite this, Prime Minister Theresa May supports the academies policy in principle: "The Academies and Free Schools movement overseen by pioneers such as Andrew Adonis and Michael Gove has been a huge success and begun to build an education system fit for the future".[30]

Despite academies becoming more contentious in recent years, there remains some support in the sector and schools continue to voluntarily opt for academy status. However, the momentum of uptake has slowed down.

Academies now

Academies have transformed England's school management landscape. The number of sponsored-academies soared from 203 in 2010 to 6,272 in 2016, making up over a quarter of all schools in England: two-thirds of secondary schools and one-fifth of primary schools are now academies.[31] Over half are in multi-academy trusts or chains. Almost one-third of all academies are sponsored academies, i.e. typically previously underperforming schools (see Table 1), and 243 sponsored and 781 converter schools are in the pipeline to become academies.

Table 1: Sponsored academies opened by academic year (2000–16)

Academic year of opening	Number opened	Total
Up to 2010	203	203
2010–11	69	272
2011–12	97	369
2012–13	379	748
2013–14	385	1,133
2014–15	305	1,438
2015–16	203	1,641
2016–17	64	1,705

Source: Department for Education (DfE), "Open Academies and academy projects in development," Website.

30 Theresa May, "Britain, the great meritocracy," Speech (London: Prime Minister's Office, 9 September 2016).

31 Department for Education (DfE), "Open Academies and academy projects in development," Website.

Because the focus of my visit was to look at sponsored-academies as a mechanism to manage underperforming schools, this chapter takes a somewhat backdoor approach to telling England's performance story. It has explained the evolution of academies but not how schools are evaluated. This is set out below.

1.2 A FAIRER WAY TO ASSESS STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Schools are judged on meeting a minimum floor standard, a national target that requires schools to meet two elements of achievement: attainment and progress. This section focuses on the recently introduced concept of measuring progress as a complementary benchmark of learning success.[32]

In 2014, the DfE announced that school accountability would be reformed in 2015–16 "to allow better recognition of schools doing well with a challenging intake, and to challenge those that are not doing enough with a high-attaining intake. We want to be able to recognise the progress that schools make with their pupils, including low, middle and high attainers".[33] This recognises the barriers some schools and teachers face while also identifying 'coasting' schools, whose students do not make expected progress over time.

Measuring progress in schools is complex, but a simplified description follows.

Progress in primary school is the difference between scores in baseline tests usually taken between ages 5 and 7 and scores (or attainment) in tests taken at the end of primary school, usually at age 11. A school is deemed above the 'floor' standard if primary school leavers make sufficient progress in reading, writing and maths compared

32 House of Commons Library, "Changes to school accountability and 'league tables' in England 2016," Briefing Paper (London: UK Parliament, 23 December 2016).

33 Department for Education (DfE), "Primary School Accountability in 2016: A Technical Guide for Primary Maintained Schools, Academies and Free Schools" (London: UK Government, 2016), 3.

to all students, nationally, with the same baseline test scores.[34]

Progress in secondary school is judged by the gains students make between the end of primary school and the end of secondary school when compared to peers with similar characteristics. A progress score is calculated for each student by comparing their achievement with the average achievement score of all pupils nationally with a similar starting point (or 'prior attainment'). The progress measure indicates whether, as a group, pupils in the school made 'above' or 'below' average progress compared to similar pupils nationally.[35]

As this is a relatively new performance indicator, this section discusses the principles of the measure rather than how it has worked out in England. It is easy to see the benefits of a progress-focused accountability approach, at least in principle. Greenway explained why looking at progress is important:

> It strikes me as fair … that if you are in a disadvantaged community you don't necessarily have to get all your children to the mark. Not all schools are created equal. We have children coming to school in nappies, unable to communicate. And there are lots of families that just don't face that, so to compare schools by where they get all their children at the end is just stupid. You need to do something with context. And that is measured in the 'progress measure'.[36]

However, Greenway pointed out a major flaw in the application of the progress measure – it undermines the efforts of schools teaching younger cohorts by ignoring what has happened until Year 3:

> A school which has broken its back getting non-verbal children in nappies up to the required Year 3 standard will be indistinguishable from a lazy class school coasting on the backs of engaged parents and will actually suffer in comparison despite being a better school.[37]

Nonetheless England's fairer progress measure recognises that how far students have come is as important as how far they got to. In New Zealand school success and underperformance is not always visible because schools and teachers are treated as if they educate similar students. Looking at progress *and* overall attainment would put less pressure on all schools to meet national standards at the same pace. It could incentivise schools to focus on the learning of all their students – not just those on the cusp of meeting attainment targets.

Considering the improvements students make seems a better approach to getting students meeting national benchmarks over time. England is making headway in this regard but as prior achievement is the only consideration, experts say the progress measure still disadvantages schools in poorer areas by pitting them against all other schools nationally.[38] While prior achievement matters it is clearly easier to get students to be successful if they start with greater advantage and are more school-ready than their more disadvantaged peers.[39]

34 Ibid.

35 Department for Education (DfE), "Progress 8 and Attainment 8 Measure in 2016, 2017, and 2018: Guide for Maintained Secondary Schools, Academies, and Free Schools" (London: UK Government, 2016).

36 Hugh Greenway, Chief Executive, The Elliot Foundation, Personal meeting (17 May 2016).

37 Ibid.

38 See Rebecca Allen, quoted in Richard Adams, "Progress 8 and GCSEs: Will the new way to judge schools be fairer?" *The Guardian* (23 August 2016).

39 Information held in Statistics New Zealand's Integrated Database Infrastructure (IDI), a comprehensive administrative database, can enable more nuanced links between individual family backgrounds and student performance and even better performance measures. See Statistics New Zealand, "Integrated Data Infrastructure," Website.

1.3 FRANK AND FOCUSED SCHOOL INSPECTIONS

Ofsted plays a critical role in reforming underperforming schools and informing DfE interventions.

Ofsted's approach is rather different from New Zealand's equivalent, the Education Review Office (ERO), in three areas: notice, focus and reporting, and outcomes of the review (or inspection).

1. Notice

England's schools are usually notified about an inspection by Ofsted the previous afternoon,[40] compared to ERO's four to six weeks' notice.[41] Ofsted Inspector Christopher Wood says the short notice means inspectors are more likely to see a school as it is on most days thus encouraging schools to do their best every day, not just during inspections.[42]

2. Focus and reporting

Both Ofsted and ERO focus their reviews on the effectiveness of leadership and management; quality of teaching, learning and assessment; student behaviour and welfare; and academic outcomes as key areas of school quality. The main difference is in the grading of schools. Ofsted grades each area and the overall quality of the school on a 4-point scale: outstanding, good, requires improvement, or inadequate (see Figure 1).

Accordingly, Ofsted reports provided to parents and schools clearly indicate where a school features in performance rankings (see Figure 2), and a school's previous judgment is on each report as an indication of progress (or lack thereof). Matters are rather different in New Zealand. For example, it may not be immediately obvious to those unfamiliar with ERO's reporting system or terminology that the 'review time' indicates the quality of the school. New Zealand schools judged highly performing are reviewed every four to five years; those not meeting

Figure 1: School performance review grades (Ofsted)

What inspection judgements mean

School Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school that has **serious weaknesses** is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors. A school that requires **special measures** is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.

Source: Ofsted, Website.

40 Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), "School inspection handbook," Website.

41 Education Review Office (ERO), "The review process for early learning services and schools," Website.

42 Christopher Wood, Ofsted Inspector, Personal meeting (20 May 2016).

all expectations but with the capacity to improve are reviewed after three years, and those that are underperforming or lack the capacity to improve on their own are supported by ERO and/or the Ministry of Education over one to two years.[43]

Ofsted's review times are also differentiated by performance: *outstanding* schools are usually exempt from reviews, and *inadequate* schools face closer and regular scrutiny. But unlike Ofsted, ERO's reports do not show, at first glance, the overall quality of a school, or clearly outline what a school does well, and which areas need improvement (see Figure 3).

Ofsted explicitly evaluates and reports on the quality of teaching in each school. However, from 2017 Ofsted will no longer review the quality of teaching as a separate performance element. This came about after the sector pushed back, arguing that Ofsted's reviews forced prescribed practices on teachers and stifled teacher agency and innovation.[44] One reviewer for this report said this is a good move as the quality of teaching should ultimately be evident in the outcomes of students. Some teachers have also raised concerns about Ofsted using a "politicised, punitive and irrational approach".[45]

3. Outcomes of a school inspection: How underperforming schools are managed

This section brings us back full circle on managing poorly performing schools in England. Ofsted places *inadequate* schools in one of two categories – *serious weaknesses* or *special measures* – based on how well they can make changes on their own.

Figure 2: First page of a school report in England (Ofsted)

School report

Ofsted
raising standards
improving lives

St Nicolas' CofE Primary School

Locks Hill, Portslade, Brighton, East Sussex BN41 2LA

Inspection dates	14–15 September 2016
Overall effectiveness	**Good**
Effectiveness of leadership and management	**Good**
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	**Good**
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	**Good**
Outcomes for pupils	**Good**
Early years provision	**Good**
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher provides strong leadership which has steered the ongoing improvements since the previous inspection.
- The school's very strong community and caring ethos underpins all that it does. Parents are highly positive about the headteacher, the staff and the school's work.
- Teaching is good. As a result, all groups of pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics as well as a range of other subjects.
- Teachers plan work which interests pupils. Teachers regularly check the progress that pupils are making. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and are keen to do well.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is good, largely because they practise the school's values in their daily lives.
- The school's exciting curriculum is broad and balanced and supports pupils' personal development well.
- Staff prioritise the welfare and emotional well-being of pupils. As a result, pupils feel safe and valued.
- Teaching is good in the early years. Children get off to a good start. Staff work well to establish positive relationships with parents, even before children start school.
- The governing body makes a strong contribution to school improvement.

Source: Ofsted, Website.

Figure 3: First page of a school report in New Zealand (ERO)

Aotea College - 11/10/2016

On this page:

Findings
1 Context
2 Learning
3 Curriculum
4 Sustainable Performance
About the School

AOTEA COLLEGE REPORTS
Aotea College - 04/11/2013
Aotea College - 11/10/2016

Findings

NCEA results show ongoing improvements in achievement. Ensuring equity for Māori and Pacific students is a strategic priority. Improving teachers' use of assessment information is an area of focus. The school is well placed to strengthen evaluation practice and continue to build student success.

ERO is likely to carry out the next review in three years.

1 Context

What are the important features of this school that have an impact on student learning?

Aotea College, located in the Porirua City, caters for students in Years 9 to 13. The current roll of 929 includes 30% who identify as Māori, 12% as Samoan and 13% from other Pacific groups.

There have been a number of schoolwide professional development programmes over the past three years. These include Ministry of Education initiatives, Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) and Kia Eke Panuku: Building on Success.

The schools values of and expectations for Manaakitanga, Perseverance, Sauni and Excellence are integral to learning.

Planning is well advanced for the construction of new buildings and facilities over the next 18 to 24 months.

Source: ERO, Website.

43 Education Review Office (ERO), "Return times for school reviews," Website.

44 Lord O'Shaughnessy, Founder, Floreat Education Academies Trust, Email (November 2016).

45 Hilary Douglas, "Militant teachers vote to boycott inspections," *Sunday Express* (31 March 2013).

Schools with *serious weaknesses* are judged to have the internal capacity to address shortcomings, while those in *special measures* do not have the capacity. Under the original 2002 academies model, schools in *special measures* were tagged to become a sponsored academy but required an appropriate sponsor. Schools with *serious weaknesses* were given a notice to improve and were monitored more regularly by Ofsted and typically re-inspected within a year of the notice. If they did not improve substantially by their next review, the schools were placed in *special measures* and became subject to the sponsored academy takeover procedures.[46] However, the *Education and Adoption Act 2016* lowered the threshold for requiring schools to become sponsored academies: all *inadequate* schools (having *serious weaknesses* or in *special measures*) are required to find a sponsor, by-passing the *notice to improve* period.[47] The Act also empowered the secretary of state to intervene in 'coasting' schools if their students had not progressed over a given period.[48]

If *inadequate* schools cannot find their own sponsor, DfE-appointed regional commissioners do so. *Good* or *outstanding* schools can also apply for academy status. Academies are also reviewed by Ofsted, and those found wanting undergo the same intervention process as locally maintained schools. This can mean a failing academy is taken from its sponsor and given to another. Despite Ofsted's advice to government, academy chains (with multiple schools in their care) do not undergo routine inspections.[49] Greenway says many academy chains, including his own, want inspections.[50]

In New Zealand, schools placed on the one to two years' review cycle receive ongoing support; however, as our first report found, this process has been ineffective in some schools despite close monitoring and interventions.[51] In England, the recognition that despite receiving government support, some schools continued to perform poorly led to the radical Academies policy.

1.4 THE ACADEMIES POLICY: POTENTIAL AND PITFALLS

The changes in remits and the rapid expansion have unsurprisingly made for a complex evaluation framework – thus, the long-term effects of academisation on student achievement remain unclear.[52]

The National Foundation for Educational Research's (NFER) review of 13 studies published between 2010 and 2015 on the performance of academy schools found it difficult to provide a comprehensive assessment owing to differences between:

- the funding and purpose of early academies (2002–09) and later academies (2010–15)
- pupil intakes and profiles of converter and sponsored academies
- primary and secondary academies, and
- academies in different chains.[53]

Consequently, NFER says: "It would be simplistic and misleading to draw firm conclusions and make a singular assessment of academies as a whole".[54] Moreover, most analyses suffer from selection bias –

46 A school has legal authority to appeal the academisation decision; however, this rarely happens. See Browne Jacobson, "FAQs – becoming a sponsored academy," Website.

47 House of Commons Library, "School Inspections in England: Ofsted," Briefing Paper (London: UK Parliament, 26 September 2016).

48 Robert Long and Paul Bolton, "Every School an Academy: The White Paper Proposals," Briefing paper (London: House of Commons Library, UK Parliament, 29 April 2016).

49 House of Commons Library, "School Inspections in England: Ofsted," op. cit.

50 Hugh Greenway, Chief Executive, The Elliot Foundation, Email (10 November 2016).

51 Martine Udahemuka, "Signal Loss: What We Know About School Performance" (Wellington: The New Zealand Initiative, 2016). The report found twenty schools to have been poorly performing according to ERO reviews altogether for an average of eight years; some for longer than a decade.

52 Jack Worth, "Academies: It's Time to Learn the Lessons" (Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research, 2015).

53 David Sims, Hilary Grayson, and Karen Wespieser, "A Guide to the Evidence on Academies (Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research, 2015), 2.

54 Ibid.2.

academies are compared to non-academies without considering inherent differences in performance status. In this regard, it does not make sense to compare the performance of sponsored academies with that of all non-academy schools. Just as it makes no sense to compare the performance of *good* or *outstanding* schools that converted into academies with all non-academy schools.

Despite these evaluation shortcomings, there is evidence of success for the earlier 2002–09 group of sponsored academies. There is less clear-cut evidence for the post-2010 group, though the speed of expansion may explain this. Success is also more evident for schools that are part of an academy chain or a multi-academy trust. But being an academy is not a guarantee for success, and not all academies have improved student outcomes. There are clear lessons to learn from this.

a. Sponsored academies pre-2010: Time and autonomy, if used, point to sustained gains

Stephen Machin and James Vernoit from the London School of Economics compared academies operating between 2002 and 2009 with a control group of schools approved, before 2010, to become academies after the 2008 academic year.[55] They found academisation improved student performance in secondary schools. The results were greater the longer a school had been open, particularly for those that took advantage of new flexibilities. Machin and Vernoit also found that sponsored academies generally attracted higher ability students than their predecessor – creating competition between the new academy school and the traditional local school. Jack Worth from NFER concluded that perhaps: "Giving the school a new name, new leadership and new buildings meant academies were no longer the 'sink' school in an area, but a desirable school for parents to actively choose for their child".[56] Machin, et al then explored whether the higher ability students' opting into academies had any effect on neighbouring schools. Although these neighbouring schools experienced, on average, a decrease in the ability of student intake, their performance improved too. The positive effect of an academy on neighbouring school performance is noteworthy.

b. Sponsored academies post-2010: Small gains

Jack Worth compared the 2015 assessment outcomes of academies with those of similar local authority schools at the end of primary school (aged 11, Key Stage 2) and secondary school (aged 16, GCSE). He compared academies operating for two to five years with traditional schools with similar characteristics at the time of becoming academies.[57] In other words, these schools had a similar probability of being turned into a sponsored academy based on Ofsted ratings, pupil achievement, measures of deprivation, and a similar number of students. Worth looked at the effects of the length of time a school had been operating as an academy on performance outcomes, and how students from disadvantaged backgrounds (those eligible for free school meals) were faring on average. He did not find any conclusive evidence of the impact of academy status for primary school attainment pre- or post-2010 conversion, and no compelling evidence that academy status had any significant bearing on the performance of students eligible for free school meals. Secondary school outcomes were more positive (student performance and overall school quality). The findings there are clearer when broken down.

55 Stephen Machin and James Vernoit, "Changing School Autonomy: Academy Schools and Their Introduction to England's Education" (London: London School of Economics, 2011).

56 Jack Worth, "Academies: It's Time to Learn the Lessons," op. cit.

57 Jack Worth, "Analysis of Academy School Performance in 2015," (Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research, 2016).

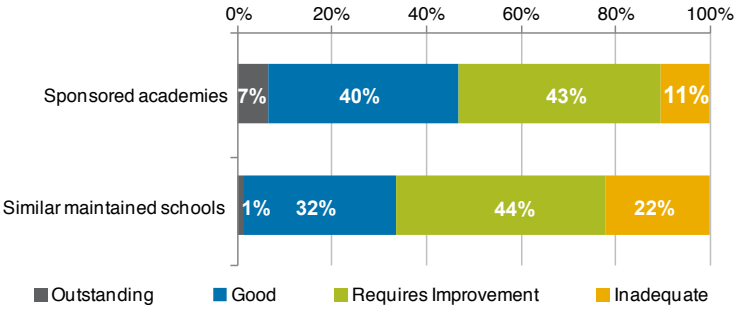
Student performance: Secondary academies compared to similar maintained schools (post-2010)

The proportion of students meeting minimum academic standards in sponsored academies was 2.7 percentage points higher than in maintained schools. Worth equates this difference to about five additional students in a typical 180-student secondary school meeting the threshold. There was no difference in GCSE results between the types of schools.

School quality judged by Ofsted: Secondary academies compared to similarly maintained schools (post-2010)

Worth's findings about Ofsted's judgments of overall school quality (see Figure 4) were also positive. Sponsored academies were more likely to be judged as more effective *and* less likely as inadequate than local authority schools with similar characteristics at the time of conversion. Ofsted evaluates elements beyond academic performance such as leadership, teacher quality, and student behaviour and welfare. Worth's findings could thus mean elements of school quality other than student performance are easier to improve in a short time. This supports Machin and Vernoit's findings that given enough time, new leaders can embed structural and cultural changes and improve academic outcomes in academy schools.[58]

Figure 4: Post-2010 secondary academies Ofsted outcomes (2012–2015)

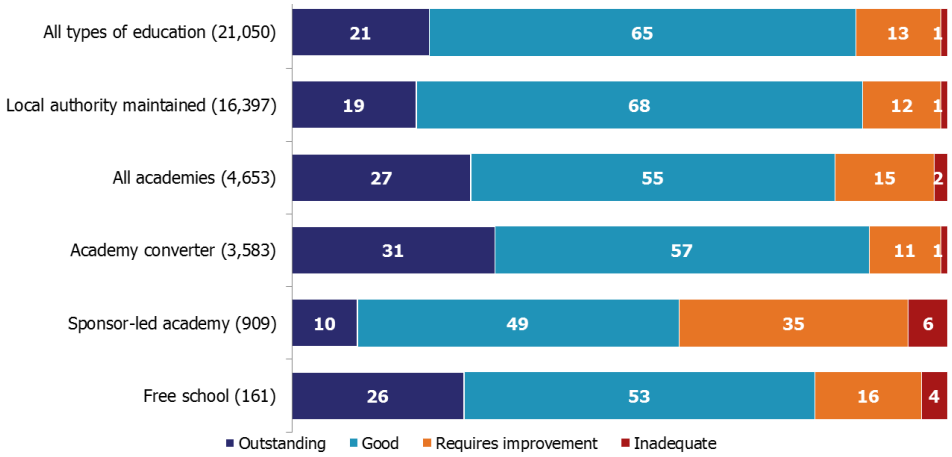


Note: Figures may not exactly sum to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Jack Worth, "Analysis of Academy School Performance in 2015" (NFER, 2016), Figure 3.4.

Worth's 2015 findings are similar to Ofsted's review of a select few sponsored academies in overall school quality in 2016 (see Figure 5). The review found 59% of sponsored academies inspected were *outstanding* or *good*, and this proportion increased by over 2 percentage points from August 2015 to March 2016.[59] Given the sponsored schools would have been *inadequate* at takeover, these are positive results. The proportion of *good* or *outstanding* non-academies, i.e. under local authority, also improved by nearly 3 percentage points. However, these results need to be read cautiously. Given these schools would have been among the worst performers before converting, it would be useful to

Figure 5: Ofsted school review outcomes (31 March 2016)



Source: Ofsted, "Maintained schools and academies inspections and outcomes: Official statistics, as at 31 March 2016," Website, Chart 4.

58 Stephen Machin and James Vernoit, "Changing School Autonomy," op. cit.

59 Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), "Maintained schools and academies inspections and outcomes: Official statistics," Website (London: UK Government, 29 June 2016).

determine what fraction of *similar* non-academies made similar progress – which the Ofsted review did not report. In this case, Worth's 2015 findings are more meaningful.

Conclusions about the better performance of the earlier set of academies (2002–09) require a caveat. Data received from Ofsted indicate that the original 203 sponsored academies were neither all low performing schools nor compelled to convert into academies.[60] It also shows that group to have had more better performing schools than the post-2010 group. Cohort effects could explain the reported improvements in the earlier set of schools if at the time more low performing schools self-selected into academy sponsorship, particularly since 2010 changes include a lower threshold and coerced academisation.

c. The threat of conversion incentivised improved results – but only temporarily

For some schools, it was enough to know they might be forced into academisation to change course. The incentives to improve were clear, though initial improvements were not always sustained. The London School of Economics and the Education Policy Institute, a UK think tank, found that post-2010 sponsored academies posted gains in school leaver results in the year before conversion. However, the improvement was not sustained in the years after becoming an academy and, in fact, flatlined after three years. The report suggests: "It could be the imminent threat of conversion that causes schools to focus on Key Stage 4 pupils [end of secondary school] and temporarily boost results". [61] However, it was difficult to determine how much of the decline in achievement was due to the schools getting worse or comparative traditional schools getting better.

d. Academies that work together fare better than lone academies

Better results are more prevalent in academy chains or multi-academy trusts than single academies. The Sutton Trust evaluated the same group of sponsored academies over four academic years (2010–14) and found a worrying trend that academies showing improvements tended to have more students taking easier courses compared to local schools. Taking this into account erased the reported improvements for most academies in their study. However, they found that though success was not widespread, a smaller group of academy chains consistently demonstrated dramatic improvements for its students.[62]

e. Academy status is not a magic wand

Clearly, not all academies are created equal. Ofsted inspections of academies in seven large multi-academy trusts or chains in 2015–16 reveal poor student progress and behaviour, poor teacher quality, lack of strategic oversight, and inability to deal with weak senior and middle leadership. In his advice note to the secretary of state, Ofsted Chief Inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw said:

> Despite having operated for a number of years, many of the trusts manifested the same weaknesses as the worst performing local authorities and offered the same excuses. … It is of great concern that we are not seeing this [rapid improvement] in these seven MATs and that, in some cases, we have seen decline.[63]

Sir Michael also questioned the value of rapid expansion and warned that many of the trusts were no better than the local authorities they had replaced. He found that highly effective sponsors were unlike poorly performing sponsors, less

60 Ofsted, Email (December 2016)

61 Jon Andrews and Natalie Perera, "Analysis of Effect of the Post-2010 Sponsored Academies" (London: Education Policy Institute, 2016).

62 Merryn Hutchings, Becky Francis, and Philip Kirby, "Chain Effects 2016" (London: The Sutton Trust, 2016).

63 Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), "HMCI Advice Note on Multi-Academy Inspections" (London: UK Government, 10 March 2016).

interested in 'building an empire' and more considered in their capacity to take on schools.[64]

Becky Francis, whose team researched academy chains, echoed Sir Michael's concerns that with a lack of oversight and accountability, "the impact of an underperforming academy is highly disruptive and has disastrous outcomes for students".[65] The scrutiny of sponsors is also questionable as more often than not almost all sponsor applications were approved by the DfE.[66] Although things have slightly improved with the appointment of regional commissioners in 2014 to approve, monitor and evaluate all academies in England, it remains unclear how this works in practice; in 2016, there were only eight commissioners for 5,000 or so academies.[67]

Francis says the threat of academisation forced some local authorities to take a firm accountability approach. Ultimately, "it is less about the school structure than it is about the calibre and expertise of people making decisions and driving the school culture".[68] In fact, a 2016 report by the Education Policy Institute found greater variance within local authority schools and academies than between the two groups. More importantly, it cautioned against moving schools from high performing local authorities to low performing academies as being an academy did not guarantee success.[69]

64 Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), "Ofsted's Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, comments on high performing multi-academy trusts and what they have in common," (Gov.uk, 11 October 2016)

65 Becky Francis, Director, UCL Institute of Education, Skype meeting (13 June 2016).

66 Only 25 out of 704 applications had been rejected in 2014. Department for Education (DfE), "Academies and Free Schools: Fourth Report of Session 2014–15," House of Commons Education Committee (London: UK Parliament, 2015).

67 Schools Commissioners Group, "About us", Website

68 Becky Francis, Director, UCL Institute of Education, Skype meeting (13 June 2016).

69 Jon Andrews, "School Performance in Multi-Academy Trusts and Local Authorities – 2015" (London: Education Policy Institute, 2016).

Nonetheless, research on the long-term trends of academy chains by the Sutton Trust showed there were clear leaders in the chains with sustained improvements across qualifications and years that other academies could emulate. This aligns with Lord O'Shaughnessy's observations:

> … sort of unintended in a way there has been a discovery … that certain types of groups of schools are incredibly effective and the group dynamics of these academy chains can unlock this capacity to improve schools, maintain good schools, open new schools and train teachers … which stand-alone schools can't do as they simply don't have the capacity …[70]

What are successful academies doing right?

Hill, et al. from Harvard Business School studied pre-2010 sponsored academies and concluded that successful turnaround required strategic leaders who thought about sustainable changes rather than quick fixes.[71] These leaders had found out first-hand that:

- Improving teaching first was often a mistake. It was unrealistic to ask teachers to work with an ineffective school leader, badly behaved students, and across a number of school sites.[72] Rather, leadership, governance and student behaviour needed attention first so resources were not wasted in areas such as reducing class sizes.
- Schools that accepted students from age 5 to the end of secondary or senior school did better as the school culture was developed right from when students began at school.
- At takeover, sponsors usually replaced the principal with a 'change principal' brought in from a successful school on short-term contracts to save a school and then leave. This

70 Lord O'Shaughnessy, Founder, Floreat Education Academies Trust, Personal meeting (18 May 2016).

71 Alex Hill, Lix Mellon, Jules Goddard, and Ben Laker, "How to Turn Around a Failing School," *Harvard Business Review* (5 August 2016).

72 As it were for some schools in transition.

has a short-term impact and may not be what the school needs. Because of the high stakes, school leaders focused on measured areas without creating foundations for sustained improvements such as investing time and resources across all year groups.

- Surprisingly, it was easier to improve inner city schools as they had better access to human capital. Smaller schools in remote areas needed a different approach.
- Money mattered a lot but only if it was spent well. Schools with tight budgets may suffer financially in the initial stages of change. This points to the benefits of working in a network of schools to create economies of scale and sharing resources.
- The order of changes was just as important as the changes themselves.

Barriers for widespread success

The debate on forced conversion is not yet settled in England. The Conservatives may have backtracked on turning every school into an academy by 2020, but there is still talk of schools needing to convert or to have plans in place to convert in the coming years. Those against forced expansion argue the intended systemic improvements have not occurred, nor have policy principles been upheld. The key rationale for improving system-wide standards was that successful schools would commit to supporting less successful schools. This did not happen.

Recall the key policy tenets: devolving decision-making from the local authority, giving greater autonomy to schools, and improving accountability mechanisms. With regards to the first tenet, the appointment of regional commissioners in 2014 to oversee academies may have added another layer of bureaucracy to oversee all academies in England, and is perhaps not too different from traditional local authority oversight. A 2014 DfE survey also found that single academies do not take advantage of the new freedoms to the intended extent.[73] The lack of clear mechanisms to hold academy chains to account[74] and the availability of capable sponsors are also considered barriers.[75] In fact, a key concern revealed during my visit was the lack of human capital needed to turn around a school. It is possible the first wave of sponsored schools were lucky to be taken over by the most altruist groups or individuals. The academy model prohibits trusts from making a profit, cutting off many successful business leaders who may have the expertise but also need a financial incentive.

All in all, the Conservative push to expand the academies model was bad politics that undermined significant policy benefits. The rapid expansion led to a fragmented school system and removed the incentive for schools to improve. In fact, interviewees for this report cited politicians, and the lack of careful policy implementation and evaluation, as the main obstacle to system-wide success.

Advisors from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) union said:

> [A] key challenge … is reducing political interference in education … [Politicians] need to slow the pace of change, they need to do proper piloting of any changes they bring forth and allow a much longer bedding in time … they need to be less politically and ideologically driven and bring in more evidence … but because we have politicians who want to be seen to do the stuff in two or three years – that often doesn't happen …[76]

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73 Kathy Baker, "Briefing: Do Academies Make Use of Their Autonomy? – DfE Research" (London: Local Government Information Unit, 2014).

74 Warwick Mansell, "'Trojan horse' report suggests Lord Nash is governor of too many schools," *The Guardian* (29 July 2014).

75 John Dickens, "Struggling schools ordered to become academies still waiting for sponsors," *Schools Week* (15 August 2016).

76 Alison Ryan and Simon Stokes, senior policy advisors, Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), Personal meeting (19 May 2016).

This frustration resonated with Greenway, who said:

> My thesis is simple. Seek to reduce the political involvement in education because politicians of all hues are the problem. Every time they implement policy changes, they fail to check whether the last changes actually worked. And at the same time, the gap between policy making and professional practice is larger than it has been for some time.[77]

1.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE GOOD AND THE BAD OF ENGLAND'S FAILING SCHOOLS REFORMS

The landscape of England's education system looks vastly different to 15 years ago. Although robust evaluations of England's academies are in the early stages, clear themes are emerging. For one, failing schools can be turned around with time, fresh ideas, used freedoms, and strategic leadership. Generally, academies with greater school-to-school collaboration show greater sustained results.

The bad news is that success is not widespread. Academy status is not a panacea for fixing failing schools. The system-wide improvements envisioned by academy advocates have been trumped by a focus on quantity rather than quality. The policy has been implemented beyond its original remit and expanded rapidly without careful evaluation. Nonetheless some academies continue to improve student outcomes and provide lessons for scaling success to other schools.

The Economist probably offers the best conclusion about the radical and innovative academies policy: "For all their flaws and failings, the new schools have injected something exciting into a once-moribund education landscape: the belief that regardless of wealth or background, schools can transform lives".[78] Successive governments have agreed that allowing low performing schools to continue is no longer an option in England. With careful implementation, oversight and evaluation, the academy model can alter the fortunes of students stuck in a dysfunctional school. New Zealand could seek solutions in England's academies approach to fix its own least effective schools.[79]

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77 Hugh Greenway, Chief Executive, The Elliot Foundation, Email (10 November 2016).

78 *The Economist*, "The new school rules" (11 October 2014).

79 About 8% of New Zealand schools are poor performers and a small number are chronic poor performers. Martine Udahemuka, "Signal Loss: What We Know About School Performance," op. cit.

CHAPTER TWO
NEW YORK CITY CHARTER SCHOOLS: ONE BIG APPLE SOLUTION FOR DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

After visiting England to learn about its efforts to fix failing schools, I moved on to my next stop – the United States. It would be fair to ask what New Zealand could learn from a country dubbed a "nation at risk" three decades ago for its abysmal educational outcomes.[80] In fact, the president of a leading U.S. think tank responded to my request for a meeting with: "I'd love to get together, though I fear that the U.S. doesn't have much to teach".[81]

While the United States spends more on compulsory education per student than most developed nations, this spending is not translating into better performance. In the 2015 PISA results, American 15-year-olds ranked close to the bottom 20 out of 70 countries and cities in maths. The average American student is almost two years of formal schooling behind their Singapore peers in PISA maths and about one year behind in science. A gap of 1 to 1.5 years exists between New Zealand and Singapore, but we beat American students by about half a year of learning in all the subjects.[82]

Why the United States then? Among its documented failings are stories of states, districts and schools that have defied the stereotype. America as a nation was not the focus of my 10-day research trip. Instead, I chose four jurisdictions that implemented radical strategies in recent years to manage failing schools: New York City, Massachusetts, the District of Columbia, and Houston.

The U.S. public education system, briefly

Compared to New Zealand, the U.S. public education system is a complex web of structural layers.

The federal government traditionally makes minimal input in schools. By law, it cannot promulgate, much less require, a national curriculum or learning standards. School education constitutes less than 15% of federal spending. With states being almost entirely responsible for education, 51 autonomous school systems set their own priorities.[83] In most states, public schools are organised geographically in school districts governed by elected boards that generally oversee most school matters. Despite the decentralisation, the link between setting priorities and the accountability for meeting them has not always been clear.[84]

Concerned that U.S. education was no longer internationally competitive, the federal government in recent years has pushed states to raise standards. The Bush administration's *No Child Left Behind Act 2001* (NCLB) and the Obama administration's *Every Student Succeeds Act 2015* (ESSA) aim to hold states accountable for educational outcomes and "offer the lowest-achieving pupils from low-income families a way out of failing schools".[85]

80 U.S. Department of Education, "A nation at risk," Website.

81 Michael Petrilli, President, The Thomas B. Fordham Institute, Email (29 April 2016).

82 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), "Results for PISA 2015, United States," Country Note (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2015). PISA assesses every three years the ability of 15-year-olds from mainly OECD countries to solve basic maths, reading and science problems.

83 Including the District of Columbia.

84 U.S. Department of Education, "About ED," Website.

85 Tony Hockley and Daniel Nieto, "Hands Up for School Choice: Lessons from School Choice Schemes at Home and Abroad" (London: Policy Exchange, 2005), 18.

Using various funding mechanisms, NCLB expanded federal power in holding states and districts responsible for educational outcomes, and also gave them more operational freedom. However, the additional funding and freedom came with increased accountability. States decide proficiency levels for their school districts, but if the goals are not met they risk losing funding and being subjected to a cascading range of consequences for all or a sub-group of students. A state can intervene in a school district for chronic low performance using a number of turnaround strategies. These include transferring students to better district schools, closing schools, turning them into charter schools, or using statutory takeover powers.[86] Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) reports submitted by participating states serve as a monitoring mechanism for the federal government.[87]

This chapter covers NYC's charter school expansion since 2002 to tackle stubborn achievement gaps between rich and poor students – a reality New Zealand knows all too well.

2.1 THE BIG APPLE: A TALE OF TWO REALITIES

I had already been to New York a few times as a tourist. But this time, I was not there to gaze at the big city lights and mega billboards of Times Square like the other million visitors to the city every year. This time I was observing the city through a different lens, soaking up the in-your-face social, class and economic disparities between people living in the same city.

A few blocks from the thriving city centre on Broadway and Seventh Avenue but still within walking distance exists another reality. The vibe of Harlem, a large district in Manhattan, is in stark contrast to midtown Manhattan. The two places are in the same borough but with realities light years apart.

Compared to the hustle and bustle of Times Square, time seem to stand still in Harlem. The homeless, the drunk and the beggars occupy much of the district's pavements. I wondered about the future of the boys hanging around street corners during school hours. The poverty rate in Harlem is six times higher than in midtown NYC and almost one in three of Harlem's children live in poverty. [88]

But this chapter is not about poverty, at least not for its own sake. It's about NYC's efforts to address inequitable educational opportunities – and how unwavering leadership expanded charter schools to help more students from poor families attain basic numeracy and literacy skills than in previous decades.

2.2 POVERTY OF EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

New York City has the largest (and possibly most complex) public school system in the country, with 1.1 million students attending more than 1,800 schools.[89] By contrast, New Zealand has 770,000 students but in more schools (2,500).[90]

The city's educational landscape has long been plagued by challenges. Like England's urban high schools, inner city schools in NYC face disparate achievement outcomes. Schools that disproportionately serve more students from poor families have worse academic outcomes, on average, compared to schools serving more peers from wealthier homes. In 2009, 41% of adults in Harlem had no high school qualification compared

86 Alyson Klein, "No Child Left Behind: An overview," *Education Week (10 April 2015)*.

87 NCLB was criticised for its too prescriptive testing and too difficult to achieve requirements for teachers and students, and will be replaced by ESSA from late 2017. See U.S. Department of Education, "Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)," Website.

88 About 38% of its inhabitants live below the poverty line. NYC Government, "East Harlem," Website.

89 NYC Department of Education, "About us," Website.

90 Education Counts, "School rolls: Time series data for student numbers," Website.

to 28% in the rest of the city.[91] These challenges are not unique to New York or Harlem or even Southeast London. Schools in lower socioeconomic areas in New Zealand too struggle with getting a majority of their students over national targets.[92]

Individual student backgrounds count for much of the differences in achievement. A 2007 review of U.S. education literature found a number of factors that put students at a greater risk of not graduating high school: low education levels of parents, low socioeconomic status, family disruption, etc.[93] In 2009, more than half the students in Harlem came from single-parent families.[94] Similarly, out of a sample of 7,000 low-achieving students in New Zealand, 87% had a primary caregiver with less than NCEA Level 1, 84% had parents/caregivers on an unemployment benefit, and 53% lived in highly deprived areas.[95] However as evidence in this report show these impediments can be overcome when it comes to school outcomes.

The leader who fought for greater school accountability and parental choice

Upon taking office in 2001, Michael Bloomberg said the mayor needed to be accountable for the performance of the city's schools. He fought for and won 'mayoral control' in 2002 – the authority to appoint or fire the schools chancellor, appoint members of the NYC Board of Education, and close schools to fix the mismanagement of school operations.[96] Before 2002, community school boards and a board of education were responsible for schools in 32 districts. Dean Ball, deputy director of the Manhattan Institute, said: "Fifteen years ago, New York City identified challenges with local community school boards in managing school affairs. Many boards were corrupt and funds disappeared and there was no accountability for performance".[97] One of Bloomberg's first actions under the new set up and with the support of his first Schools Chancellor, Joel Klein, was to expand the choices available to parents by promoting charter schools. [98]

"Without the critical leadership of Bloomberg and Chancellor Joel Klein, the charter school sector would not have thrived as they have", said James Merriman, CEO of the NYC Charter School Center.[99] Both leaders created an urgency in increasing educational efficiency and forged an environment where charter schools could share building space with district schools. Otherwise near impossible for charter schools without capital to invest in property in the city's tough real estate market.[100]

2.3 THE CHARTER SCHOOL IDEA: AN ESCAPE HATCH FOR STUDENTS

The charter school movement took off in America in the late 1990s and early 2000s against an abysmal national academic backdrop. Albert Shanker of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Union

91 Caroline M. Hoxby, Sonali Murarka, and Jenny Kang, "How New York City's Charter Schools Affect Achievement" (Cambridge, MA: New York City Charter Schools Evaluation Project, 2009).

92 In 2015, 20% of students from lower decile schools (deciles 1–3) left school without a high school qualification compared to only 5% in higher decile schools (7–10). In 2015, for every two students from decile 1 to 3 schools with enough credits for direct entry to university, there were five from decile 7 to 10 schools. Education Counts, "Highest Attainment Numbers (2009-2015)," Website.

93 Cathy Hammond, Dan Linton, Jay Smink, and Sam Drew, "Dropout Risk Factors and Exemplary Programs: A Technical Report" (Clemson, South Carolina: National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, 2007).

94 Caroline M. Hoxby, et al. "How New York City's Charter Schools Affect Achievement," op. cit.

95 Ministry of Education, Response to Information Request under the *Official Information Act 1982* (25 February 2016).

96 Ashley Hupfl, "Five things to know about mayoral control," *City & State New York (13 June 2016)*.

97 Dean Ball, Deputy Director, State and Local Policy, Manhattan Institute, Personal meeting (23 May 2016).

98 Abby Goodnough, "Justice Dept. allows a shift in school powers," *The New York Times* (4 September 2002).

99 James Merriman, CEO, New York City Charter School Center, Personal meeting (23 May 2016).

100 Although traditional district schools saw co-existence with charter schools as a threat, and charter schools were less than diplomatic in their views on district schools. Ibid.

introduced the idea of charter schools in 1988 to give teachers the freedom to manage their students as they saw fit. Teachers could try innovative ideas under a contract, which would be forfeited if those freedoms were not used to improve outcomes.[101]

In many ways, charter schools are similar to England's academies. They are based on the premise that professionals in schools know best, private entry into the education market brings new ideas, and accountability goes hand-in-hand with autonomy. Charters are publicly funded but operate largely independently of the DOE. They were to meet two key objectives:

- provide an alternative form of schooling for students underserved by traditional state schools, and
- bring innovation in the sector by acting as experimental labs for what works in schooling.

Charters are approved for new schools, existing schools converting to enjoy charter freedoms, or operators taking over a failing school. Oftentimes, charters are new schools in areas where local schools are underperforming. These schools operate under a 'charter' contract between the operator and the state, hence the name. Students do not have to live within the school zone to apply to a charter school. Oversubscribed schools are required to hold entry-by-lottery admissions. The majority of charters are stand-alone; however, an increasing number are part of a network and run by outfits known as charter management organisations (CMOs) if they are not-for-profit. In New York City, charters are usually five-year contracts and can be revoked either by authorisers or other agencies delegated by the mayor to oversee charter quality.[102]

The expansion of NYC charter schools

New York passed its charter law in 1998. Under Bloomberg, the number of charter schools in NYC grew from 19 in 2002-03 to 159 in 2012-13.[103] In 2016-17 academic year, 216 charters were teaching 106,600 students.[104] Enrolments in charter schools have been growing at the expense of district schools. In 2002–03, 80% of NYC students attended district schools, fewer than 1% attended charter schools, and almost 20% attended independent schools. Ten years later, the respective figures were 77%, 5%, and 19%.[105] By 2016, charter schools were educating about 10% of the city's students – a sign the public had welcomed the alternative school option. Indeed, charter schools are not opening nearly fast enough to meet demand. The NYC Charter School Center, which provides technical assistance to charter schools, reports 44,400 students were waiting for a place in 2016 – almost double the 23,600 seats available that year.[106] That year, 98% of NYC charter students were admitted through a lottery and 2% on a first-come, first-served basis.[107]

2.4 ARE NYC CHARTER SCHOOLS DELIVERING ON THEIR PROMISE?

The demand for places shows charter schools are a coveted alternative school choice. I visited one such alternative school, Harlem Prep Charter School, which is proving a beacon of hope for its 270 students. Almost 90% of its students identify as either black/African-American or Hispanic.

101 Richard D. Kahlenberg and Halley Potteraug, "The original charter school vision," *The New York Times* (30 August 2010).

102 Department of Education, "About charters," Website (New York: 2016).

103 New York City Independent Budget Office, "School Indicators for New York City Charter Schools 2013-2014 School Year", (New York: 2015).

104 New York City Charter School Center, "NYC Charter School Facts (2016–2017)" (New York: 2016).

105 New York City Independent Budget Office, "New York City by the numbers," Website.

106 New York City Charter School Center, "New York City charter schools are growing (2016-2017)" (New York: 2016).

107 James Merriman, CEO, New York City Charter School Center, Email (December 2016).

Five years ago, the school – then Harlem Day Charter School – was the worst performing school in Harlem. In 2011, Democracy Prep, a successful NYC charter school network, took it over in the first charter-to-charter takeover in the state. Rather than closing the school and finding other schools for the students, a charter 'restart' process, similar to England's sponsored academies, was used. The school operator and board were replaced and all staff reapplied for their positions, but all students were guaranteed a seat in the new school.[108]

The words "Work Hard. Go to College. Change the World!" loom large as you enter the rebranded two-storey school. The motto reinforces the school leaders' expectations that no matter where their students come from, they can achieve their dreams. Within 12 months of the restart, the proportion of students reaching grade-level proficiency grew from 25% to 59% in English, and from 44% to 72% in maths.[109] And more students are choosing to re-enrol in the new school – from 57.4% in 2011 to 82.5% in 2014.[110]

Harlem Prep is one of many NYC charter schools transforming educational outcomes for their student and is also an example of the consequences faced by a poorly performing charter school. While the overall quality of charters as a school type is hotly debated, asking about the quality of an entire type of school is like asking about the quality of all CEOs of large organisations. Inevitably, evaluations will show the quality varies. Research is further complicated by every U.S. state defining its own charter school laws, complicating comparisons of quality on a national basis. However, as places in an oversubscribed charter school are allocated by lottery, researchers have been able to estimate the effect of charter schools compared to district schools for students who win or lose the lottery.

a. NYC charters are closing the achievement gap between rich and poor

Caroline Hoxby, Sonali Murarka, and Jenny Kang found that NYC charter schools provide more learning to their students incrementally every year, particularly in maths, and give traditionally lagging students a chance to catch up to their peers.[111] Before charters, Harlem students scored, on average, 35 percentage points below students from Scarsdale, a more affluent neighbourhood. Charter students have been closing this gap, which was only a seventh of its previous size in maths and a third in English by 2011.

At the time of Hoxby, et al.'s research, 94% of students in NYC charters were admitted through a lottery. It can be assumed that students who apply for a place are, overall and on average, similar at the time of the lottery on observable and unobservable characteristics such as motivation and family interest in education. The researchers compared the performance of students who won the lottery and those who did not. They considered their study 'gold standard' as any differences in outcomes observed then depended on winning the lottery, i.e. gaining a place in a charter school.

b. NYC charter students gaining, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds

The Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University examined the effects of NYC charter schools on academic performance from 2005 to 2011.[112] Comparable pairs of students from charter and district schools were matched by the same characteristics: race/ethnicity, gender, special education needs, English language learning, poverty, and prior achievement.[113] Comparing like with like, CREDO found charter students made on average larger

108 Kevin Shrum, Principal, Harlem Day Charter School, Personal meeting (24 May 2016).

109 Democracy Prep Public Schools, "Living the Dream: DPPS newsletter" *(1 August 2012)*.

110 State University of New York, "Renewal Recommendation Report: Harlem Prep Charter School" (Albany, New York: 2016).

111 Caroline M. Hoxby, et al. "How New York City's Charter Schools Affect Achievement," op. cit. viii.

112 Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO), "Charter School Performance in New York City" (Stanford, California: Stanford University, 2013).

113 Student-level administrative data from the New York Department of Education for 19,534 students aged 8–14 in 79 charter schools was used.

learning gains in reading and maths than district students – up to seven months of extra maths learning in a year. CREDO found that Harlem students, one of the largest groups served by NYC charter schools, gained more in maths by attending charter schools (see Table 2).[114]

CREDO also found that charter networks, like academy chains in England, had better results than single charter schools. An average student attending a charter school under a CMO gained almost a year worth of extra learning over and above what they would have in a district school (see Table 3).

Both the CREDO and Hoxby, et al. studies noted that improvements in reading were not as large or across the board as in maths, but they did not explain the disparity.

c. NYC charters are not pushing out harder-to-teach students

Critics say the reported gains are due to NYC charters pushing out the harder-to-teach students. However, Marcus Winters' analysis found low performing NYC charter students are more transient and likely to leave school earlier than their better performing peers, but this is also true for district schools. However, when comparing school types, fewer special education needs students left charters than district schools. Winters found that the fewer numbers of special education needs students and English Language Learners in charters has more to do with applying to charters than with being pushed out of schools.[115] Merriman explained immigrant parents tend to choose district schools as the default and the NYC Charter School Center is thus promoting charter schools to these communities.[116]

Common practices in successful charter schools

Overall, and unsurprisingly, research shows not every charter school is effective – but so is not every traditional public school. It is more important to know the reasons for the variable quality to understand what works and what doesn't, and of

Table 2: Learning gains in NYC charter schools compared to district schools

	Subject	Additional months of learning in a year
All charter schools in NYC	Maths	5 months
	Reading	1 month
Charter schools in Harlem	Maths	7 months
	Reading	Less than 1 month
Charter schools not in Harlem	Maths	4.5 months
	Reading	1 month

Source: Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO), "Charter School Performance in New York City" (Stanford, California: Stanford University, 20 February 2013).

Note: The researchers translated the magnitude of the effects to provide a 'more meaningful' measure to readers. The months are estimates based on CREDO's judgments.

Table 3: Learning gains in single and multi-school charters compared to district schools

	Subject	Additional months of learning in a year
CMO	Maths	10 months
	Reading	4 months
Single Charters	Maths	3 months
	Reading	Lagged behind traditional public school by 1 month

Source: Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO), "Charter School Performance in New York City" (Stanford, California: Stanford University, 20 February 2013).

114 CREDO's raw test scores show that at the school level, overall, 63% of the charter schools outperformed their public school equivalents, 25% performed worse in reading, and 14% performed worse in maths.

115 Marcus Winters, "Charter myths and realities," *City Journal* (Manhattan Institute, 25 February 2015).

116 James Merriman, CEO, New York City Charter School Center, Personal meeting (23 May 2016).

course how to implement what works to improve other schools. After all, charters were developed on the premise they would be hubs of innovative ideas to be replicated.

Economists Will Dobbie and Roland Fryer sought to do exactly this. Their team explored the 'inner workings' of some of NYC's charter schools to understand what drove success. I met Fryer's team at the Education Innovation Laboratory (EdLabs) at Harvard University where they explained their analogy of treating school failure like cancer and their research as a quest to find a vaccine.[117]

The team reviewed more than four decades of qualitative research and found about 500 variables that contribute to student achievement. They studied how these input and output factors played out in 39 NYC charter schools. Input factors included class size, per student expenditure, and the number of teachers with certifications and postgraduate degrees. Output factors included the frequency of feedback to teachers, the extent of one-on-one tutoring, and time spent on learning. Volumes of data were collected from a variety of sources, including interviews with staff and students, and video-taped classroom sessions. Like Hoxby, et al., Dobbie and Edlabs also looked at the outcomes of lotteried-in and lotteried-out students to compare charter outcomes with district school equivalents. They found that the 'vaccine' used in highly effective schools were five practices which together explained nearly half the difference between high- and low-performing charters.[118] How these practices were implemented in Houston's failing schools is discussed in Chapter 5.

BOX 1: THE FIVE PRACTICES USED BY HIGHLY EFFECTIVE NYC CHARTER SCHOOLS

- more time in school
- high-dosage tutoring
- deliberate focus on human capital
- data-driven instruction; and
- a culture of high expectations.

Source: Fryer, Roland and Will Dobbie. "Getting Beneath the Veil of Effective Schools: Evidence from New York City," *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 5:4 (2013), 28–60.

2.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS: NYC CHARTER SCHOOLS SERVING DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

The Big Apple journey showed that for too long, students from disadvantaged backgrounds have been underserved by the city's schools, and how charter schools have helped improve outcomes.

Parents continue to demand more seats in NYC charter schools than are available. Comparing outcomes of students who applied and successfully gained a place with those who did not, shows substantial gains for charter students, particularly for Harlem students who make up a large portion of the charter student population.

Like England's academy chains, the gains in NYC were in general greater for schools managed in a network of schools with economies of scale and sharing of practice (although not necessarily causally linked). The incentives are clear: leaders in these schools have the freedom to suit policies to needs. Innovations can be instructional (e.g. varying the school day and year) and structural (e.g. employing teachers on terms outside of collective bargaining). However, charter schools in New York that do not deliver are closed and can

117 Education Innovation Laboratory (EdLabs) team, Harvard University, Personal meeting (25 May 2016).

118 Roland Fryer and Will Dobbie. "Getting Beneath the Veil of Effective Schools: Evidence from New York City," *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 5:4 (2013), 28–60.

be taken over by successful school management organisations.

To make headway, understanding under which conditions different schools are effective is likely to be more fruitful than discussions about the horse race between alternative schools and traditional public schools. For example, partnership schools in New Zealand use a ballot system when demand exceeds capacity[119] and information on the outcomes of students who do not get a place could shed light on the school choice debate in New Zealand. Like in NYC, once schools effective in adding value to their students are identified, we can find out what makes them effective and devise strategies for schools with similar challenges to learn. The initial charter school policy aim was for effective practices from charters to flow on to other schools facing similar challenges – and clearly some charters are meeting this goal.

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119 Ministry of Education, "Enrolment Schemes – Secretary's Instructions," Website.

CHAPTER THREE
MASSACHUSETTS: WHERE COMPLACENCY IS NOT AN OPTION

New York City showcased how charter schools can help students in failing public schools. Students there are burdened by a poverty of money, a poverty of social capital, and a poverty of school choice – contributing to a poverty of equitable school outcomes. But unlike my next stop, Massachusetts, NYC historically had not enjoyed stellar academic performance.

I visited Massachusetts for two reasons. First, the state is the world's most prestigious hub of academic research.[120] Researchers at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) have produced some of the nation's leading research on school effectiveness.[121]

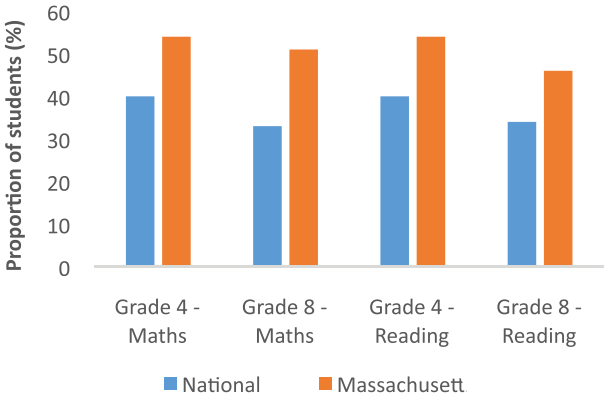
Second, Massachusetts is said to have the best public school system in the United States. But it also faces stubborn achievement gaps and chronically low performing schools. I was interested in exploring the 'restart' model used to restructure these schools via a partnership between the local district and an independent school management organisation.

3.1 EDUCATIONAL TRIUMPHS AND CHALLENGES

The Massachusetts public school system serves almost 1 million students enrolled in about 1,850 schools, of which around 80 are public charter schools educating 3.9% of the student population. As with New York, the public schools operate within geographic districts governed by locally elected school boards and superintendents overseeing the school districts.[122] Boston, the capital and the largest city in the state, has about 125 public district schools and about 56,650 students.[123]

Massachusetts has performed significantly better than average nationally for decades on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a federally administered exam in maths and reading. Its results are published in the *Nation's Report Card* and show the state above the national average since at least 2000 in maths and 1998 in reading for 4th (9- to 10-year-olds) and 8th graders (13- to 14-year-olds). The NAEP cores show the state having the highest proportion of proficient students in maths and reading in 2015, well ahead of the national average (Figure 6).[124]

Figure 6: Massachusetts reading and maths proficiency (2015)



Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), "State profiles," Website (U.S. Department of Education).

120 QS Top Universities, "World University Rankings: Who Rules?" Website.

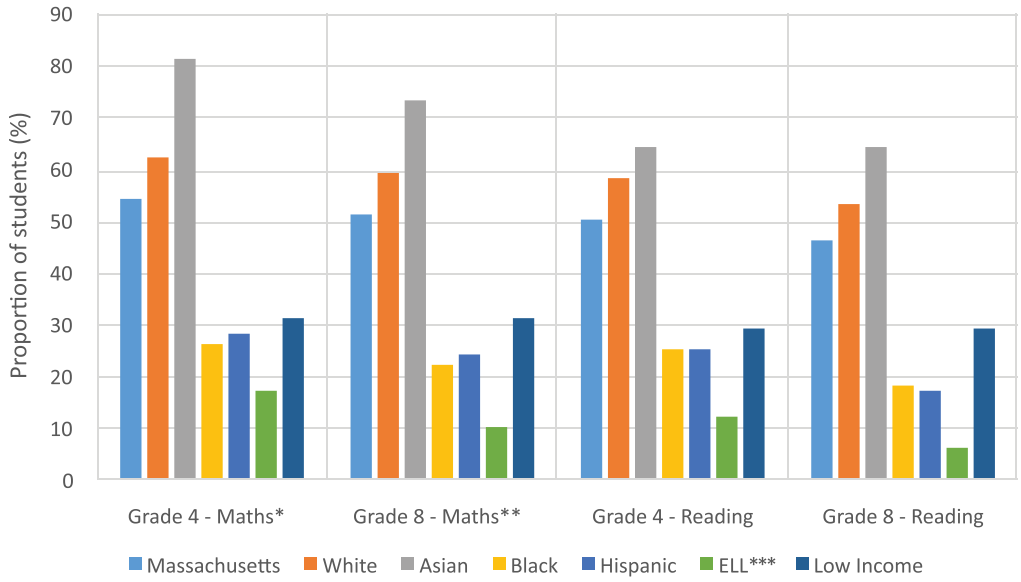
121 Roland Fryer's Edlabs team at Harvard University; Joshua Angrist, David Autor, and Parag Pathak's School Effectiveness and Inequality Initiative team at MIT.

122 Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, "School and district profiles" (Massachusetts: 2015–16).

123 Boston Public Schools, "Boston Public Schools at a Glance, 2015–2016" (Boston: 2015).

124 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), "The nation's report card: State profiles," Website (U.S. Department of Education).

Figure 7: Reading and maths proficiency among sub-groups in Massachusetts (2014)



Source: ED Date Express, "States tables," Website (ED.Gov).

*Note: *ages 9–10,** ages 13–14, *** English language learners.*

What is not obvious is that Massachusetts' aggregate performance masks concerning disparities among sub-groups. Asian and white students there generally perform better in maths and reading than ethnic minority students (Figure 7). [125]

There are likely overlaps between students from ethnic minorities, non-English backgrounds, and low-income families. These students start their educational journeys on the back foot and disproportionately attend poorly performing public schools.[126] Like in New Zealand, disaggregated achievement results in Massachusetts reveal weaknesses of otherwise strong education systems. Narrowing achievement gaps between student sub-groups and turning around low performing schools are priorities for Massachusetts. [127]

3.2 A MECHANISM TO IMPROVE LOW PERFORMING SCHOOLS

Rising to the federal challenge for states to improve their weakest schools, Massachusetts passed the *Achievement Gap Act 2010*. Secretary of Education James Peyser calls the Act "the most significant piece of state legislation to lift the performance of our schools and students since the *Education Reform Act 1993*".[128] Indeed, the Act created "a sense of urgency around the need for dramatic improvement" of underperforming schools.[129] It gives the schools commissioner powers to classify all schools in the state with sufficient data into one of the five accountability and assistance levels (1 being the highest performing and 5 the lowest). School and district performance data are gathered from multiple sources to inform the performance designations. Level 4 *turnaround* schools are among the lowest achieving and least improving schools in the state. Districts with nine or more

125 ED Data Express, "Data about elementary & secondary schools in the U.S.: States Tables," Website (ED.Gov).

126 The Boston Foundation, "Taking Stock: Five Years of Structural Change in Boston's Public Schools" (Boston: 2014).

127 James Peyser, Education Secretary, Personal meeting (26 May 2016).

128 Ibid.

129 Elizabeth Pauley, "Toward Closing the Achievement Gap: A One-Year Progress Report on Education Reform in Massachusetts" (Boston: The Race to the Top Coalition, 2011), 14.

Level 4 schools undergo a 'restart' management restructure, including takeover by an education management organisation. *Turnaround* schools that do not improve within three years of their designation can be declared as Level 5 *chronically underperforming* and put into state receivership. [130]

The school restart model

Massachusetts' school restart model is one in which:

> … [a local education agency] converts a school or closes and reopens a school under a charter school operator, a charter management organization (CMO), or an education management organization (EMO) that has been selected through a rigorous review process … A restart model must enroll, within the grades it serves, any former student who wishes to attend the school …[131]

The restart model was first used in Massachusetts in 2011. Restart schools are also known as Horace Mann Type 3 charter schools and operate to an extent under district rules, sitting somewhere between traditional district schools and conventional charter schools. For example, teachers in restart schools are guaranteed the district's bargained pay as members of the Boston teachers' union but can waive most other collective bargaining terms. While former students are guaranteed places, leaders and teachers have to re-apply for their roles. In the UP Academy Boston school I visited (see Box 2), only the students are the same; several professional staff reapplied but none were hired.[132] Restart school managers have instructional and structural autonomy to manage change. Most of the district funding is given to new school leaders in bulk to allocate as needed; however, new schools largely rely on existing funding.[133]

130 Executive Office of Education, "Massachusetts' system for differentiated recognition, accountability, & support," Website (Commonwealth of Massachusetts).

131 U.S. Department of Education, "Guidance on school improvement grants" (Washington, DC: Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015), 9.

132 Scott Given, Founder and CEO, UP Education Network, Personal meeting (24 May 2016).

133 U.S. Department of Education, "Guidance on school improvement grants," op. cit.

BOX 2: UP ACADEMY BOSTON: FAILING YESTERDAY, THRIVING TODAY

UP Education Network was founded by Scott Given in 2010 to replicate the success of high performing schools in persistently poorly performing district schools.

The problem: In 2011, the Boston DOE closed Patrick F. Gavin Middle School, where fewer than 1 in 3 students in grades 6 to 8 could read, write or do maths at grade-level proficiency.

The solution: UP Education Network won the contract to restart the school. The restarted UP Academy Boston was required to re-hire unionised teachers who could grandparent some of the working conditions. However, the school was given flexibility in hiring, managing and firing professional staff; extending the school day and year; and making curriculum changes. The school year was extended by five days and teachers prepared for a full month before the school year began.

After one year: UP Academy Boston students showed tremendous growth, ranking first among middle school students in median school growth on the 2012 state test in maths. Additional instructional time and feedback to teachers may explain the improved results.

After two years: Out of 496 middle schools across the state, UP Network's two schools were first and second for median student growth. UP Academy Boston was first for two years in a row.

After three years: At least 1 in 2 students in grades 6–8 met grade-level standards:

- **Maths:** Proportion of students proficient or advanced in maths increased by 36 percentage points within three years of takeover (from 25% to 61%).
- **Science:** Proportion of students proficient or advanced increased by 50 percentage points within three years (from 1% to 51%).
- **English:** Proficiency rates increased by 31 percentage points within three years (from 33% to 64%).

Source: Visit to school and school documentation provided by Scott Given, Founder and CEO (24 May 2016).

3.3 A SECOND CHANCE FOR MASSACHUSETTS STUDENTS

By the end of 2015, UP Academy Boston was the highest performing (Level 1) public middle school in the city.[134] Researchers attribute the gains to the 'restart' process rather than chance. With students choosing to remain in the restart school, researchers were able to determine the effects of attending the school by comparing changes in performance for already enrolled students with changes in similar schools not restarted. Taking into account student characteristics and pre-restart achievement, Atila Abdulkadiroğlu, et al. found middle school students who remained in UP Academy Boston made significant gains in maths and English. Students got almost half a year's worth of additional learning in a year in maths across grades. Existing students performed comparably with new students who had gained a place in the school by lottery. [135] The UP Education Network has demonstrated learning gains for their students in six restart schools, but results have not been empirically evaluated. [136]

However not all interventions have been successful. In 2010, 35 schools were classified chronically failing, or Level 4 *turnaround* schools. The Boston Foundation found that after three years, 14 of the original 35 *turnaround* schools had improved enough to be reclassified. Five moved from Level 4 (second lowest) to Level 1, among the best schools in the city but this means interventions were unsuccessful for 60% of chronically failing schools. [137]

134 UP Academy Charter School of Boston, "Application for renewal of a public charter school," Submitted to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Boston: 31 July 2015).

135 Atila Abdulkadiroğlu, Joshua D. Angrist, Peter D. Hull, and Parag A. Pathak, "Charters Without Lotteries: Testing Takeovers in New Orleans and Boston," *American Economic Review* 106:7 (2016), 1878–1920.

136 UP Education Network, "Home," Website.

137 The Boston Foundation, "Taking Stock: Five Years of Structural Change in Boston's Public Schools," op. cit.

3.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS: KEYS TO MASSACHUSETTS' RESTART SUCCESS

The relatively new approach to school turnaround in Massachusetts is small in scale, with fewer than 10 restart schools in the state. MIT researchers suggest the positive gains by UP Academy reflect the district's desire to address low school performance and the presence of a willing operator.[138] Peyser says giving greater autonomy to schools by shrinking district resources and re-allocating them to schools could explain much of the success made possible under the *2010 Achievement Gap Act*.[139] Tom Birmingham, distinguished senior fellow at the Pioneer Institute, says Massachusetts' success reflects:

- greater political will to make changes
- additional funding going directly to schools
- greater commitment to saying no to special interest groups
- greater scrutiny when approving charter school operators, and
- less shyness in revoking charters that were not delivering.[140]

Clearly, the leaders and people of Massachusetts refuse to remain complacent just because of their leading position in the country. They hold that the quality of their school system cannot exceed the quality of its weakest school. However, a narrow focus on the weakest schools has meant leaders missed the opportunity to keep some schools from decline.[141] Thus the 2010 Act has sometimes been labelled one of intervention rather than prevention.

138 Atila Abdulkadiroğlu, et al. "Charters Without Lotteries," op. cit.

139 James Peyser, Education Secretary, Personal meeting (26 May 2016).

140 Tom Birmingham, Distinguished Senior Fellow, Pioneer Institute, Personal meeting (25 May 2016).

141 Elizabeth Pauley, "Toward Closing the Achievement Gap," op. cit. 19.

Like England and New York City, Massachusetts leaders deliberately set out to assess school performance and hold schools accountable for results. Key factors in all three jurisdictions are the greater autonomy and regulatory flexibility for school managers, as well as the opportunity for the private sector to add value where traditional public schools have failed. In New Zealand, there is a contradiction between the autonomy schools are said to have and the constraints placed on school leaders in their management of finances and staff.[142]

THE NEW ZEALAND INITIATIVE

142 New Zealand is regarded to have one of the most decentralised school system in the developed world yet the state (through union negotiations) prescribes conditions on teacher hiring decisions, controls contracts and pay, and limits performance management. Martine Udahemuka, "Signal Loss: What We Know About School Performance," op. cit. 35.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA: HOW MUCH TEACHERS MATTER

From Boston, I made my way to the District of Columbia. The District had until recently occupied one of the lowest spots on the nation's league tables for about 50 years despite spending relatively more per student than most states.[143]

Against this backdrop, reform in the D.C. has in the last decade focused on teachers as the vehicle for raising standards. A most controversial reform was IMPACT, a merit-based teacher evaluation system introduced in 2010.

The Initiative's previous reports highlighted the limitations of the tick-box approach of New Zealand's teacher appraisal system.[144] Seasoned principals spoke of knowing who their good and not-so-good teachers were; however, most did not have an objective way of knowing which teachers added the most value to their students' achievement.[145] Similar challenges had been evident in D.C. and the IMPACT system addresses these gaps. I was in D.C. to learn about its inception and impact on students and teachers.

4.1 NUMBERS DON'T LIE: STUDENTS FLED D.C.'S TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

D.C. has 231 schools, including 118 charter schools, and more than 4,000 teachers teaching about 87,350 students.[146] The public school system had been for decades finishing last on the *Nation's Report Card* in the nationally administered NAEP tests. For years D.C. struggled to get even half their students grasping basic maths and reading skills. In 1996, only 20% of D.C.'s 4th graders (9- and 10-year-olds) had at least a basic grasp of maths compared to 62% nationally. A similar trend was observed for 8th graders (13- and 14-year-olds) for the same year. The equivalence in reading was 27% D.C. and 58% fourth graders nationally in 1998 and 44% compared to 71% eighth graders nationally. By 2007, the District had 49% fourth and 34% eighth graders performing at or above the basic maths level and 39% fourth graders and 48% eighth graders for reading. The respective national proportions were: 81%, 70%, 66% and 73%.[147]

The public had lost faith in the traditional public (district) schools, and charter schools provided an alternative for students. The first charter school in D.C. opened in 1996 and for a long time, district schools were losing students while charter schools were gaining them. Enrolments in district schools declined from 71,889 students in 1998–99 to 44,718 in 2009–10. Meanwhile, more students were

143 Washington, DC: US$17,953; US average: US$10,700. U.S. Census Bureau, "Public Education Finances: 2013" (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, 2015), Table 8: Per pupil amounts of current spending of public elementary-secondary school systems by state: Fiscal year 2013, 8.

144 See John Morris and Rose Patterson, "World Class Education? Why New Zealand Must Strengthen Its Teaching Profession" (Wellington: The New Zealand Initiative, 2013).

145 Martine Udahemuka, "Signal Loss: What We Know About School Performance," op. cit.

146 DC Public Schools (DCPS), "We The People: 2016 Report on DCPS Educators" (Washington, DC: 2016), ED Data Express, "Data about elementary & secondary schools in the U.S.: States Tables," op.cit.

147 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), "The nation's report card: State profiles," op. cit.

choosing charter schools as an alternative: from 3,594 students in 1998–99 to 27,661 in 2009–10. Charter schools teach a higher share (44.5%) of public school students than any other city in the nation – with the exception of New Orleans.[148] As schools chancellor Kaya Henderson explained, "People were fleeing the school system and fleeing the city, frankly, because they didn't feel like we could provide a decent education, and we weren't".[149]

This dismal state of low basic literacy and numeracy, declining district school enrolments, and rising high school dropout rates motivated the reforms of the 2000s. Changes began at the chalkface with the adults in front of the students every day. From 2007, D.C. developed a new system for appraising and managing teacher performance. Henderson and her chief of human capital, Jason Kamras, say:

> Great schools start with great people. No matter where you go, when you see students inspired to reach for their dreams, you invariably encounter a visionary leader, expert teachers, and dedicated support staff. So that's what we set out to achieve – in all of our schools – almost a decade ago.
>
> We were fortunate to be able to begin this work in 2007 by standing on the shoulders of the thousands of talented educators who have been working tirelessly on behalf of D.C. students for decades ...[150]

4.2 TEACHERS MATTER, THAT'S CLEAR

Research has proven that investing in teacher quality benefits students while at school and beyond.[151] In fact, you would be hard pressed to find a policymaker who does not advocate improving teacher quality.

What is less clear is the *what*, the *how*, and the *so what*. Specifically, what is good teaching (defining quality), how are effective teachers identified (measuring quality), and what is achieved by knowing effective from ineffective teaching (managing quality).

The late 1990s saw a great interest across the United States in using better judgments of teaching quality. This was particularly aided by the *No Child Left Behind Act 2001* (NCLB) and President Barack Obama's Race to the Top competition in 2009. Both endeavours incentivised accountability where good teachers are recognised for their value and ineffective teachers are supported, but have to leave the profession if they do not improve.[152]

But even definitions of teacher quality under this new accountability framework were flawed. NCLB pointed to a teacher's credentials and years of teaching experience as indicators of quality. But Winters, a widely published researcher on teacher quality policies, argues these variables may contribute to teacher quality but do not define it. They are important signals but they alone say little about a teacher's impact on student achievement. However using test scores as a variable remains contentious. Opponents say raw test scores do not take into account students' starting points or discern a teacher's role in student outcomes.

148 DC Public Charter School Board, "Home", Website.

149 NPR, "Kaya Henderson on education and her tenure as D.C. schools chancellor," Interview with Michel Martin (27 September 2016).

150 District of Colombia Public Schools (DCPS), "We The People: 2016 Report on DCPS Educators," op. cit. Introduction, 1.

151 See Eric Hanushek, "The Trade-off between Child Quantity and Quality," *The Journal of Political Economy* 100:1. (1992), 84–117; Raj Chetty, John N. Friedman, and Jonah E. Rockoff, "Measuring the Impacts of Teachers II: Teacher Value-Added and Student Outcomes in Adulthood," *American Economic Review* 104:9 (2014), 2633–2679.

152 Marcus Winters, *Teachers Matter*: *Rethinking How Public Schools Identify, Reward, and Retain Great Educators* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

Proponents say value-added (VA) measures fill this gap by isolating a teacher's contribution to student outcomes from other factors.

VA is "the tool developed by economists and statisticians to measure and compare teacher quality … and estimate how a particular student would perform at the end of the year, on average, had she been assigned to one teacher instead of another".[153] It separates the effects of being in a particular school or classroom from other factors (e.g. prior academic achievement, family background, and demographics such as race, gender and family income).

Indeed, high quality teachers, i.e. with high VA scores, produce better school and post-school outcomes compared to low quality teachers. As early as 1992, economist Eric Hanushek found that all else being equal, a top teacher (at the 75th percentile) boosts a student's reading skills by about one and a half grades in a school year. Conversely, the reading skills of a student with a teacher at the lower end (25th percentile) increase only by about half a grade in a year.[154]

More recently, economists Raj Chetty, et al. looked at the value of a good teacher on outcomes beyond test scores. They tracked 1 million American students from age 9 to adulthood to observe how changes to teaching staff influenced student outcomes. The entry of a high VA teacher raised test scores while the exit of a high VA teacher led to a decline. Students who had a highly effective teacher – VA measured – for one year were better off in the long run: they were more likely to attend college, more likely to earn more, and less likely to fall pregnant in their teenage years compared to students who had an ineffective teacher (or low VA).[155]

So teachers matter – a lot. Students with similar backgrounds can perform vastly differently just by having a different teacher and not every teacher is good at what they do. Yet for decades before 2009, there was a paradox between teacher evaluations and student outcomes in D.C. public schools. Over 95% of DCPS teachers were rated effective (or satisfactory) on annual appraisals, while only 12% of grade 8 students could read at grade level. It was difficult to determine not only who was effective but also how to support teachers who were ineffective. There were other gaps in DCPS' teacher performance system. School leaders were restricted in what they could do to attract and retain effective teachers. Under the last-in, first-out human resources model, if there was a restructure those hired last had to leave first regardless of performance.[156] Teacher pay was also based on years in the job and qualifications, not student achievement. The same salaries applied to everyone, so teachers were not motivated to teach in struggling schools. For these reasons, the DCPS teacher performance evaluation system was overhauled. [157]

4.3 THE ROAD TO BETTER EVALUATION AND MANAGEMENT OF TEACHER IMPACT

An unwavering political commitment and a focus on what works for students has been critical to improving teacher quality in D.C. In 2007, the *Public Education Reform Amendment Act* was passed, giving the mayor and schools chancellor total control over the city's public schools. D.C. Mayor Adrian Fenty and schools chancellor Michelle Rhee created IMPACT, a system that clarified expectations for teachers, differentiated and measured effective teaching, gave tailored development training to teachers, and linked payment and bonuses to student performance.[158] Crucially, teacher practice was linked to student achievement while considering student backgrounds.

153 Marcus Winters, *Teachers Matter*, op. cit.

154 Eric Hanushek, "The Trade-off Between Child Quantity and Quality," op. cit.

155 Raj Chetty, et al. "Measuring the Impacts of Teachers II," op. cit.

156 Susan Headden, "Inside IMPACT: D.C.'s Model Teacher Evaluation System" (Washington, DC: Education Sector, 2011).

157 DC Public Schools (DCPS), "We The People: 2016 Report on DCPS Educators," op. cit. 8.

158 Education Consortium for Research and Evaluation (EdCORE), "DC Public Education Reform Amendment Act (PERAA) Report No. 3 Supplemental," Submitted to the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor (Washington, DC: George Washington University, 3 December 2014).

BOX 3: IMPACT OBJECTIVES

- **Clarify expectations:** IMPACT outlines performance expectations for all school-based employees. Performance metrics and supporting rubrics are clear and aligned to responsibilities.
- **Provide feedback:** During each assessment cycle, staff discuss strengths and growth areas. Staff can also view written comments about their performance in their online IMPACT account.
- **Facilitate collaboration:** By providing a common language to discuss performance, IMPACT supports collaboration, communication and teamwork.
- **Drive professional development:** IMPACT data helps D.C. public schools make strategic decisions about differentiating support programs by cluster, school, grade, job type, etc.
- **Retain great people:** By mentoring and serving as informal role models, highly effective teachers and staff provide an exemplar of excellence that motivates and inspires others. IMPACT helps retain these individuals by recognising outstanding performance.

Source: District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), "IMPACT: An overview," Website.

IMPACT sector buy-in: Threats, money, non-conformism and loopholes

The development of IMPACT took time and money, and expectedly faced pushback from teachers and their unions. From 2007 to 2009, IMPACT leaders held a series of workshops with educators and their unions, researchers and academics, as well as the wider community.[159] Substantial private investments were poured into the design process from powerhouses such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Wilton Family Foundation, and the Robertson Foundation, in addition to a multi-million federal grant for further iterations.[160]

The exodus of students from district to charter schools ultimately helped Rhee get the controversial contract with the teachers' union.[161] Facing competition from charter schools, the union stood to lose members to charters in droves if district schools continued to lose students.[162] The threat was real enough to get the union to the table, but that was only the beginning. Money mattered, as did an 'untraditional' union leader.

Media reports point to the lucrative contracts as what won over the union, but it cost Washington Teachers' Union (WTU) president George Parker his job when he couldn't halt the implementation of IMPACT, and due to his support for other changes under Rhee. But his view was that getting "in front of reform" was a risk, but it was not something he regretted: "...I think ultimately to improve education in this country, union presidents are going to have to get in front of reform".[163]

The journey was not smooth-sailing, but Rhee was relentless and unapologetic. Where the union resisted, Rhee found legislative loopholes to make staffing decisions in schools – overriding the wishes and demands of the union.[164] For better or worse, Rhee gained universal attention for her approach in dealing with a long failed public school system and implementing IMPACT.[165]

159 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), "District of Columbia Public Schools: Important steps taken to continue reform efforts, but enhanced planning could improve implementation and sustainability" (2009).

160 Drew H. Gitomer, Kevin Crouse, and Jeanette Joyce, "A Review of the DC IMPACT Teacher Evaluation System" (Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, n.d.).

161 Joel Klein, in Marcus Winters, *Teachers Matter: Rethinking How Public Schools Identify, Reward, and Retain Great Educators*, op. cit.

162 Michelle Hudacsko, Deputy Chief, IMPACT, Personal meeting (27 May 2016).

163 Bill Turque, "Washington Teachers' Union President George Parker loses run-off election," *The Washington Post (30 November 2010)*.

164 Steve Moschak, "Compensation reform for public school teachers," op. cit.

165 See Emily Richards, "IMPACT teacher bonuses haven't had much impact on test scores in DC public schools," *CNS News* (9 June 2015); Sarah Childress, "After Michelle Rhee: What happened next to D.C.'s schools," *PBS* (8 January 2013).

A DCPS employee who had participated in negotiations with the union said: "It took three years, good faith on both parts, and patience. And, of course, we put a lot of money on the table". The proposal went through a number of iterations, with teachers generally agreeing the proposed system to be "fair, transparent, and an improvement over the current evaluation". The parties agreed in 2009 on five-year contracts to retroactively cover teachers from 2007 to 2012. [166] By early 2010, IMPACT was implemented throughout D.C.[167]

IMPACT: How is teacher quality appraised?

Teachers are appraised against a number of components throughout the year. Appraisers gather information by combining five annual observations of teacher performance into an overall score for the end of the year. Usually, three observations were done by the principal and two by independent subject experts. One of the principal's observations could be informal, but four had to be formal, unannounced and moderated.[168]

Using a defined weighted rubric, teachers are graded against five components: [169]

- **Individual Value-Added (IVA)** measures student progress across yearly standardised tests and accounts for 35% of the final score.
- **Teacher-Assessed Student achievement (TAS)** measures student progress where a teacher agrees with the principal on growth goals to suit the subject and students' needs. This accounts for 15% of the score.
- **Quality of classroom practice** is measured through classroom observation using the Teaching and Learning Framework and accounts for 40% of the score.
- **Commitment to school community** considers a teacher's performance outside the classroom, including supporting school goals and initiatives and collaborating with peers and parents. This component accounts for 10% of the score.
- **Core professionalism** contributes to the final score only if a teacher is identified to have acted unprofessionally – in which case it would reduce the overall score. [170]

The idea behind the IVA component is sound and was, in fact, the answer to the concerns raised by some teachers that using test scores might penalise teachers with challenging cohorts.

Let's see an example of two groups of students taking the same maths test at the same time. Ms Peters teaches many students from poor migrant families and with parents having no formal qualifications. Across the hallway, Mr Baker teaches many students from wealthy homes and with highly qualified parents. Average test scores show Mr Baker's class has done much better than Ms Peters', but it would hardly be fair if Ms Peters was penalised for poor class results while Mr Baker received a raise.

Imagine there are many other classrooms in the same school and across the school system like Ms Peters'. If Ms Peters' students have indeed progressed at least as much as comparable

166 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), "District of Columbia Public Schools," op. cit. 25.

167 Chancellor Henderson's initial good relationship with the union was short lived. The contracts have since ended, but the parties have been unable to reconcile their differences, three years on. The current state of affairs and the union's reservations are not clear. See Sarah Childress, "After Michelle Rhee: What happened next to D.C.'s schools," op. cit.; Fox5 News, "DC teachers protest after contract talks fall apart" (5 May 2016).

168 District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), "IMPACT: An overview," op. cit.

169 District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), "IMPACT: The District of Columbia Public Schools Effectiveness Assessment System for School-Based Personnel 2015–2016" (Washington, DC: 2015).

170 From the 2016–17 school year, all observations have to be done by the school principal, with a student survey added to the rubric. The Teaching and Learning Framework will also be replaced by the Essential Practices component measuring instructional practice. Weighting for the components may also be altered from year to year. District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), "IMPACT: The District of Columbia Public Schools Effectiveness Assessment System for School-Based Personnel 2016–2017," (Washington, DC : 2016)

students in other classrooms, she would have been effective. This is how IVA helps compare apples with apples.

IMPACT IVA considers the student and classroom factors outside of the teacher's control that contribute to differences in test scores. Student factors include prior achievement, attendance, eligibility to a free or reduced lunch, English language needs, and special education needs.[171] Classroom factors include the number of students in the classroom, average test scores from the previous year, extent of variation in students' scores from previous years, and backgrounds of other students in the classroom. Since the IVA score is based on standardised test scores, only those teachers in tested subjects (maths and English) are evaluated against it. As a result, only 15% of teachers in DCPS are assessed using IVA.[172]

Unfortunately, but unsurprisingly, the IVA score is still the least understood component by some teachers, likening it to a "confusing black box", said a DCPS official. Teachers prefer and better understand TAS, which is based on the goals they set for their students.

IMPACT: How are teacher evaluation components scored?

A teacher receives a 4 (highest) to 1 (lowest) rating for each component. The scores are averaged to form an overall score for each observation, and again at the end of the year to produce an overall IMPACT score for each component. Each score (out of 4) is multiplied by its weighted percentage to create a final weighted score between 100 and 400 (see Figure 8).[173]

Figure 8: IMPACT sample score card

SAMPLE SCORE

COMPONENT	COMPONENT SCORE	PIE CHART PERCENTAGE	WEIGHTED SCORE
Teaching and Learning Framework (TLF)	3.72	x 75	= 279.0
Teacher-Assessed Student Achievement Data (TAS)	3.50	x 15	= 52.5
Commitment to the School Community (CSC)	3.30	x 10	= 33.0
TOTAL			365

Source: District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), "IMPACT: An overview," Website.

Each teacher is then given a rating on the 100–400 point scale that corresponds to categories of teacher quality as outlined in Figure 9.

IMPACT: How is teacher quality managed?

Teachers scoring above 350 in a given year receive a bonus, and a permanent pay increase if they exceed the bar for two consecutive years. Effective teachers receive scheduled pay increases, while ineffective teachers are dismissed. Minimally effective teachers receive tailored support and development throughout the year but face dismissal if they have not improved by the end of the year. Teachers receiving a 'developing' score for three years in a row are dismissed.[174]

Within the first year of IMPACT, 476 teachers out of 3,600 received sizeable bonuses, but 65 were found ineffective and dismissed. More than 80% of teachers rated effective or higher in 2013–14 returned to the profession the following school year.[175] (See Figure 10 for a description of each category.)

171 Interestingly, gender and race/ethnicity are not included in the model but the reasons are not explained.

172 District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), "Individual Value-Added (IVA)," Website.

173 District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), "IMPACT: An overview," op. cit.

174 Ibid.

175 District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), "IMPACT: The District of Columbia Public Schools Effectiveness Assessment System for School-Based Personnel 2015–16," op. cit.

Figure 9: Teacher rating under IMPACT

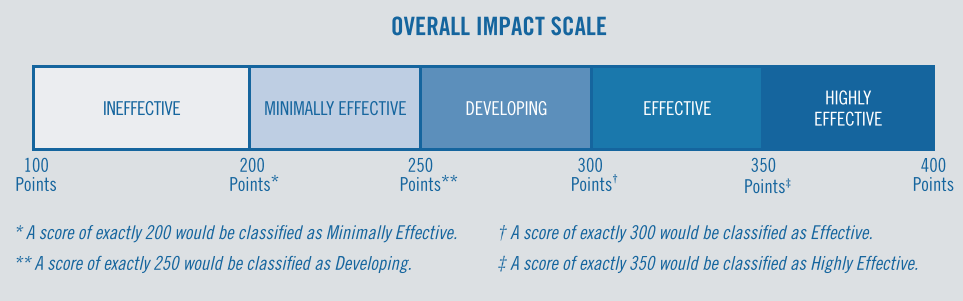


Figure 10: IMPACT teacher evaluation categories

What do these ratings mean?

Highly Effective: This rating signifies outstanding performance. As teachers earn Highly Effective ratings, they are eligible to advance to the next Leadership Initiative For Teachers (LIFT) career stage, giving them access to a variety of leadership opportunities, as well as increased recognition. Members of the Washington Teachers' Union (WTU) and Council of School Officers (CSO) are eligible for additional compensation as outlined in the IMPACT*plus* section of this guidebook.

Effective: This rating signifies solid performance. These teachers will progress normally on their pay scales. As teachers earn Effective ratings, they are eligible to advance to the next LIFT career stage (up to the Advanced Teacher stage), albeit at a slower pace than teachers who earn Highly Effective ratings. Members of the Washington Teachers' Union (WTU) may be eligible for additional compensation as outlined in the IMPACT*plus* section of this guidebook.

Developing: This rating signifies performance that is below expectations. A WTU or CSO member who earns a Developing rating will be held at his or her current salary step and will not advance on the LIFT ladder until he or she earns a rating of Effective or Highly Effective. If, after three years, a teacher does not move beyond the Developing rating, he or she will be subject to separation.

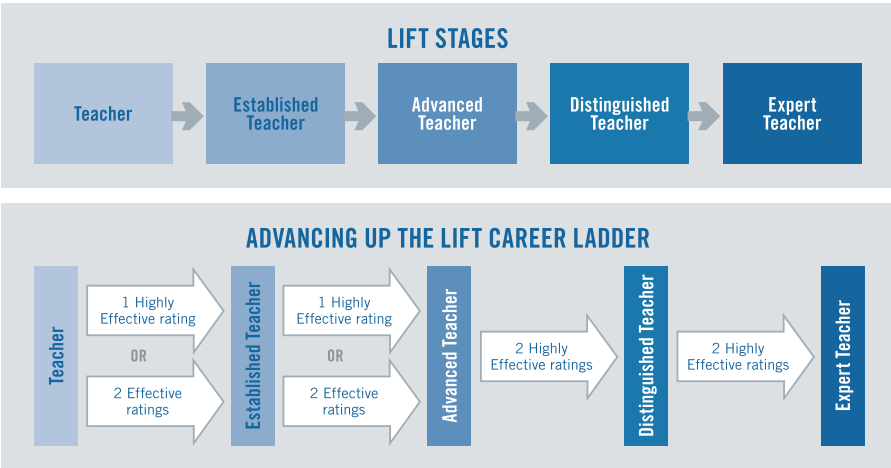
Minimally Effective: This rating signifies performance that is significantly below expectations. A WTU or CSO member who earns a Minimally Effective rating will be held at his or her current salary step and will not advance on the LIFT ladder until he or she earns a rating of Effective or Highly Effective. If, after two years, a teacher does not move beyond the Minimally Effective rating, he or she will be subject to separation.

Ineffective: This rating signifies unacceptable performance. Teachers who receive this rating for one year will be subject to separation.

Note: In very rare cases, a principal may recommend that a teacher be separated more expeditiously than outlined above if the teacher's performance has declined significantly from the previous year or if there is little evidence that she or he is improving. For example, a principal, in consultation with her or his instructional superintendent, may recommend that a teacher who has earned two consecutive Developing ratings, but who has shown no signs of growth, not be provided with a third year for improvement. In these very rare cases, a principal will need the approval of her or his instructional superintendent to submit a recommendation for early separation. A three-member panel comprised of senior leaders in DCPS will review the recommendation and issue a decision. Teachers will have the right to appeal the panel's decision through the Chancellor's Appeals Process.

Source: District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), "IMPACT: An overview," Website.

Figure 11: District of Columbia Public Schools Teachers Career Ladder



Source: District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), "IMPACT: The District of Columbia Public Schools Effectiveness Assessment System for School-Based Personnel 2015–2016" (Washington, DC: 2015).

Under IMPACT, teachers are also recognised for their expertise and can be promoted accordingly. As illustrated in Figure 11, the pathway and expectations from 'Teacher' to 'Expert Teacher' are now clearly laid out for teachers.

4.4 A FOCUS ON TEACHER QUALITY: THE IMPACT ON D.C. PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS

DCPS points to a number of success indicators worth highlighting. The first is where we began: Had student achievement on the *Nation's Report Card* improved? Indeed, students aged 9–10 years and 13–14 years vastly improved their maths and reading outcomes from 2011 to 2015. Fourth graders gained 9 average test points in maths and 11 in reading. Eight graders gained 3 points in maths and 6 in reading. And more students were meeting basic skill levels: 69% fourth graders and 51% eighth graders were at or above the basic maths level and 56% in both grades were at that level in reading.[176] DCPS report the public school system has indeed had the fastest academic growth in the nation.[177]

The second indicator relates to a renewed confidence in the public school system. The number of students in D.C. schools had steadily declined for 39 years until 2009.[178] But from 2011–12 to 2015–16, enrolments increased by 7% from 45,191 to 48,353 students.[179] Henderson says this shows "more parents are trusting their [children] to DCPS because we are offering great opportunities and helping students realize success".[180] However, charter school enrolments during the same period grew from 39% from 2010–11 to 44.5% in 2015–16, although the rate of growth has decreased in recent years.[181] It is also possible that dissatisfied students were choosing to study in neighbouring states (Maryland and Virginia) until recently (Virginia is just across the Potomac river from D.C.). What is clear is more students in recent years are choosing D.C. as a place of study (charter and district schools): from 70,919 students 2009–10 to 87,344 in 2015–16.[182]

176 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), "The nation's report card: State profiles," op. cit.

177 District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), "We The People: 2016 Report on DCPS Educators," op. cit.

178 DC Public Charter School Board, "Facts and figures: Market share," Website.

179 District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), "DCPS enrollment continues to increase in fourth year of growth," Website (20 October 2015).

180 Ibid.

181 DC Public Charter School Board, "Facts and figures: Market share," op. cit.

182 Ibid.

It could be argued that since D.C. was at the bottom, any initiative would have made improvements, however small. This reservation lends itself to the next obvious question: Did IMPACT ratings show improved teacher quality? Indeed, year-on-year comparisons show more teachers rated *effective* while fewer rated *ineffective*. The 2016 DCPS annual report indicates 35% of its teachers were rated *highly effective* – more than double the percentage in 2009–10, the first year of IMPACT.[183]

IMPACT outcomes also more clearly brought to light that highly effective teachers were distributed unequally across DCPS schools, and students in the lowest income areas had the least access to the most effective teachers.[184] As a result, in 2012–13, DCPS incorporated financial incentives in its compensation structure for highly effective teachers to teach in high-poverty schools;[185] however, it is not clear whether this move has succeeded.

Identifying effective and ineffective teachers helps teachers and students

The above indicators are positive but cannot be directly attributed to IMPACT. Two research studies point to changes evident *under* IMPACT.

Thomas Dee (Stanford University) and James Wyckoff (University of Virginia) showed that since IMPACT, teacher quality and student outcomes have improved. They looked at whether after three years of IMPACT, the unusually large incentives and threat of dismissal had any effect on the quality of teachers. They found that teachers whose rating implied a strong dismissal threat were more likely to voluntarily leave; crucially, the threat improved the performance of the remaining teachers. On the other hand, teachers who stood to gain a permanent salary raise were more likely to improve the following year. This turns on its head the rhetoric that monetary incentives are not necessary for teachers to improve. Dee and Wyckoff conclude that teachers are more responsive to incentives when they have the knowledge and support to go from where they are to where they need to be.[186] Indeed IMPACT provides the opportunity for teachers to get tailored professional development and support.

In a follow-up study, Melinda Adnot, et al. say teacher turnover is not necessarily bad for students. It may be initially disruptive but when ineffective teachers left DCPS between 2009–10 and 2011–12, they were generally replaced by higher performing teachers – as rated by IMPACT. The new teachers on average produced about three months more of learning a year for students. By contrast, teachers who voluntarily left for reasons other than performance negatively affected students compared to teachers who left because they were ineffective (though there was no statistical significance).[187]

Drivers of change in D.C. success

The D.C. system now leads the nation in using the potential of credible evaluation systems to improve teaching and student outcomes. New York City failed dismally in implementing a merit-based teacher evaluation system in the 1990s; leaders there are now looking to D.C.[188]

183 District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), "We The People: 2016 Report on DCPS Educators," op. cit.

184 Education Consortium for Research and Evaluation (EdCORE), "DC Public Education Reform Amendment Act (PERAA) Report No.3: Trends in Teacher Effectiveness in the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) School Years 2012–2013," Submitted to the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor (Washington, DC: George Washington University, 2014).

185 Teachers rated highly effective and teaching in a high-poverty school can earn up to US$25,000 in bonuses.

186 Thomas Dee and James Wyckoff, "Incentives, Selection, and Teacher Performance: Evidence from IMPACT," Working Paper 19529 (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2013).

187 Melinda Adnot, Thomas Dee, Veronica Katz, and James Wyckoff, "Teacher Turnover, Teacher Quality, and Student Achievement in DCPS, 2016," Working Paper 21922 (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2016).

188 Steve Moschak, "Compensation reform for public school teachers," op. cit.

DCPS administrators continue to tweak the IMPACT tool, but the major components and principles remain. Hudacsko says the following factors have made IMPACT a success:

- **Commitment:** 100% and on-time completion of evaluations means the process is not delayed. Comprehensive internal policy documents are made available to support staff.
- **Transparency:** Teachers know what is expected from them. The classroom practice framework helps teachers know what and how to teach. The multiple observations mean the final evaluation score does not come as a surprise to teachers.
- **Opportunity to improve:** DCPS leaders give teachers ongoing feedback and support, and are committed not to "fire their way to a better teaching workforce". DCPS has recruited school-based coaches to support teachers in teaching maths and reading skills.
- **IMPACT tool pillars:** Reformers were adamant there would be no pilot as "students had no time to wait" to get good teachers in front of them. The tool also needed a distribution that could separate effective from ineffective practice – rather than revert to the binary system. Evaluations are multi-dimensional and provide enough stakes for teachers willing to improve.

4.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS: EVALUATING TEACHER IMPACT IN D.C. PAID OFF

The teaching profession in New Zealand and abroad is notorious for high turnover. Some attribute this to traditional pay structures that reward years of service and academic degrees, rather than success in the classroom. IMPACT sought to fix this gap.

D.C.'s aggressive overhaul lured talented people to the profession and persuaded the most effective teachers to stay. The tool has also brought to the forefront another concern: that there are fewer highly effective teachers in the most disadvantaged schools. As a result, D.C. has set out to do something about it. The Initiative's *Signal Loss* report found that unfortunately the New Zealand Ministry of Education does not analyse trends (reasons and destinations) of teacher turnover in schools. The Ministry also does not know the quality of teachers who are leaving the profession compared to those who are staying.

Better modelling is possible today more than ever, as more education systems are collecting long-term data on student achievement, characteristics and demographics.[189] But England, Massachusetts and D.C. are well ahead of New Zealand in judging relative progress by comparing like students and schools. New Zealand can do better than the District of Columbia. We have the resources to find out how a student is doing in Ms Peters' class compared to Mr Baker's. We have information on parents' qualifications and employment status, and on students' engagement with other public services such as Child, Youth and Family.

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189 Marcus Winters, *Teachers Matter*, op. cit.

CHAPTER FIVE
THE HOUSTON OPPORTUNITY: IMPLEMENTING LESSONS FROM SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS

Houston, a city of innovation, boasts many firsts. There is landing the first man on the moon, completing the first successful open-heart surgery, and more recently implementing bold school turnaround policies.

Harvard researchers Fryer and Dobbie identified five common practices (see Box 1) that successful charter schools used in New York City, explaining almost half the difference in student achievement between schools. These practices relied on quality teachers and principals, intensive tutoring, data-driven instruction, more learning time, and a culture of high expectations.[190] But Fryer and Dobbie knew it would take a long time for charter schools to replace the least successful schools, not to mention tough politics. Opting instead to replicate the five practices into the lowest performing public schools, they sought school districts in America to participate in the initiative but found most leaders unwilling to take on the politically charged challenge.[191] Until Terry Grier. The superintendent of the Houston Independent School District (HISD) had inherited many chronically failing schools at risk of closure or state takeover, but he was committed to keep them within district control rather than hand them over to the state. With HISD eligible for federal grants for school reform, Grier thought Fryer's idea worth considering.[192]

I spoke to Grier and Fryer's team about the turnaround story of Houston's public schools. They were enthusiastic about the untapped potential of replicating evidence-based policies, and the impact on students historically left behind – not only in the U.S. but also in other nations.[193]

5.1 HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM: POVERTY OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

The largest public school district in Texas and the seventh-largest in the nation, HISD, has more than 280 schools educating about 215,000 students – a fraction of New Zealand's system. HISD has a diverse student population, many of whom tick the disadvantage box of factors that contribute to underachievement. In 2014–15, 62% of students identified as Hispanic, almost 25% as African-American, just over 8% as white, and almost 4% as Asian. About 75% were eligible for free or reduced price lunches (an indicator for deprivation), and 33% had limited English language proficiency.[194]

190 Roland Fryer and Will Dobbie, "Getting Beneath the Veil of Effective Schools: Evidence from New York City," op. cit.

191 Roland Fryer, Interview on 29 June 2015, in Chelsea Straus and Tiffany Miller, "Strategies to Improve Low-Performing Schools Under the Every Student Succeeds Act: How 3 Districts Found Success Using Evidence-Based Practices" (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, 2016).

192 Terry Grier, Superintendent, Houston Independent School District, Personal interview (3 June 2016).

193 Education Innovation Laboratory (EdLabs) team, Harvard University, Personal meeting (27 May 2016); Terry Grier, Ibid.

194 Houston Independent School District (HISD), "Student Profile 2014–15," Website.

Despite a myriad policies aimed at improving outcomes, student and school achievement left much to be desired.[195] In 2008, more than 15% of students of colour dropped out of high school. Only 11% of African-American students and 7% of Hispanic students went on to earn college degrees, and these students were disproportionately served by the lowest performing schools. When Grier became superintendent in 2009, one-third of students were performing below grade level in maths, reading, or both.[196] Fortunately, aided by the federal push and deteriorating educational standards, there was a sense of urgency and agency in the late 2000s in Texas to fix struggling schools.[197]

Grier knew many Houston parents thought their kids were being cheated out of opportunities and languishing in low performing public schools. He felt school policies generally protected the adults in the schools rather than students, and adults did not always have the individual courage to improve, which made change politically very difficult. Nonetheless, he believed schools could improve with radical reforms and an overhaul of conventional school structures.

In his quest, Grier learnt of Fryer's proposition and was sold by the evidence-based strategies and reliance on the two most vital factors of school success: quality leaders and teachers. [198] Fryer says:

> It was the perfect storm between me, who really wanted to do this work and appreciated how hard it was because others [district leaders] were not willing to take the lead, and Terry, who had just inherited several schools that the state was going to take over if he didn't do something.[199]

195 Terry Grier, Superintendent, Houston Independent School District, Personal interview (3 June 2016).

196 Houston Independent School District (HISD), "Apollo 20," Website.

197 Terry Grier, Superintendent, Houston Independent School District, Personal interview (3 June 2016).

198 Ibid.

199 Roland Fryer, Interview on 29 June 2015, in Chelsea Straus and Tiffany Miller, "Strategies to Improve Low-Performing Schools Under the Every Student Succeeds Act," op. cit.

Grier and Fryer's EdLabs team at Harvard University embarked on the "nation's first large-scale effort to implement high-performing charter school practices in a traditional public school environment".[200] The result: Houston's Apollo 20 programme.

5.2 HOUSTON, WE HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY: THE APOLLO 20 TURNAROUND INITIATIVE

The three-year Apollo 20 programme was launched in 2010 and implemented in 20 schools (4 high schools and 5 middle schools joined in 2010–11, and 11 elementary schools joined the following academic year).[201] Most of these schools were 'chronically low-performing' or close to it by Texas benchmarks. The schools had the lowest average scores in the 2009–10 standardised exams in reading and maths, and were given the highest priority in the programme. The Apollo 20 schools taught about 7% of HISD students.[202] The total three-year cost above school funding for secondary schools was US$59.1 million (estimated at US$1,837 marginal cost per student).[203] (In New Zealand, that would convert to NZ$2,500 per student/year for the 3,000 students in the 20 poorly performing schools identified in the Initiative's previous report).[204] Elementary schools could implement the

200 Chelsea Straus and Tiffany Miller, "Strategies to Improve Low-Performing Schools Under the Every Student Succeeds Act," op. cit.

201 Elementary school students (Kindergarten – 5th grade or Year 1–6 in New Zealand) are 5–10 years old; middle school students (6th–8th grade or Year 7–9 in New Zealand) are 11–14 years old; high school students (9th–12th grade or Year 10–13 in New Zealand) are 14–18 years old.

202 Roland Fryer, "Injecting Charter School Best Practices into Traditional Public Schools: Evidence from Field Experiments," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (2014), 1355–1407.

203 The district raised almost US$17 million from the community in the first year. Houston Independent School District (HISD), "Donors step up to fund Apollo 20 school turnaround effort,"*Enews (10 January 2013);* Roland Fryer, "Injecting Charter School Best Practices into Traditional Public Schools", op. cit.

204 Martine Udahemuka, "Signal Loss: What We Know About School Performance," op. cit.

programme without additional federal or private funding by re-allocating their existing funding.[205]

Successful strategies borrowed and adapted for Houston schools

Grier and Fryer designed the programme to implement the five practices from successful NYC charters. Principals in the 20 schools were given autonomy over staffing decisions and additional funding to implement these practices to fit students' needs:[206]

- **Increasing learning time (or more time on task):**
  - The school day in the nine Apollo 20 secondary schools (middle and high school) was lengthened by about one hour, four days a week; the school year was lengthened by 10 days. Students had 21% more time in school than in previous years.
  - Elementary schools offered Saturday school and after-school tutorials, and the time spent on non-learning activities was reduced.
- **Building human capital by hiring effective teachers and school leaders:**
  - 19 of the 20 principals and about half the teachers were replaced.
  - Schools were then staffed, wherever possible, with new principals and teachers who had a track record of improving student achievement.
- **Providing intensive (or high-dosage) tutoring:**
  - All 4th, 6th, and 9th graders received maths tutoring.
  - Students struggling in maths or reading (i.e. performing below grade level on state tests) received an extra hour of instruction daily in that subject.
- **Using data to inform teaching (or data-driven instruction):**
  - Schools assessed students' performance regularly (every three to four weeks), and used that data to tailor lessons to individual needs in a timely manner.
  - Schools were provided with benchmark assessments, along with assistance in analysing and presenting student performance on those assessments.
- **Building a culture of high expectations (or 'no excuses' policy):**
  - Clear expectations were set for school leaders, and families were asked to sign contracts committing to the programme.
  - Schools were given a rubric for the expected school and classroom environment.
  - Student achievement performance goals were set for each school. Principals were given financial incentives, and held accountable for meeting the goals.

To reduce low attendance in schools, parents were given incentives; for example, the names of parents of children who did not miss class even once in a month were put on ballots to win prizes such as grocery vouchers.[207]

By 2010, more than half the original Apollo 20 teachers had left – either voluntarily or by dismissal. Fryer says rehired teachers were more effective and had a history of increasing student achievement in language, maths, reading, science and social studies compared to those who left.[208]

205 Additional costs differed between school levels; for example, for the most part, elementary schools re-allocated existing federal funding to the Apollo 20 programme. Education Innovation Laboratory (EdLabs), Harvard University, Email (November 2016).

206 Roland Fryer, "Injecting Charter School Best Practices into Traditional Public Schools," op. cit.

207 Terry Grier, Superintendent, Houston Independent School District, Personal interview (3 June 2017).

208 Roland Fryer, "Injecting Charter School Best Practices into Traditional Public Schools," op. cit.

5.3 DID THE HOUSTON EXPERIMENT WORK?

The original Apollo 20 programme ended in 2012–13. Fryer and his team did their own empirical analyses and reported measurable gains in each of the three years of the programme. The most impressive results were in additional maths learning for students who received extra tutoring. These gains were on par with peers in successful charter schools:

- 6th grade students (11-year-olds) gained about 6 months of additional learning, and
- 9th grade students (14-year-olds) gained about 5–9 months of additional learning per year.

Although students from all racial and ethnic groups benefited from attending Apollo 20 schools by the third year, Hispanic students and those eligible for free or reduced lunch (a measure of economic disadvantage) made the greatest leaps. Despite the success, particularly in maths, Apollo 20 schools faced the same problems effective charter schools in New York did: minimal and unsustained gains in reading.

Success did not stop at maths scores: school dropout rates declined, and college enrolment and completion rose. Almost all (90%–97%) students in the four Apollo high schools applied to two-year college programmes and were accepted; 60%–84% also applied to four-year courses, and 42%–70% were accepted.[209]

But not everyone was sold on the Apollo story. District leaders faced tough pushback from the African-American community. Teachers and principals were part of the tightknit community, and firing them was like firing church friends even though parents knew schools were failing. But the alternative was for the state to close schools that had been underperforming for 15 to 20 years.[210]

The Houston Press summarised community perceptions about the programme:

> People either embraced Apollo as an about-time recognition of the neglect allowed for too many years for some of the district's children or thought it was a high-priced dog and pony show.[211]

The teachers' union complained of inadequate consultation, but possibly did not push back too much as laid-off teachers who opted to stay were re-assigned to other, better performing schools in the district.[212] HISD also offered to pay the salary of those teachers if other schools took them on. Teachers who were unable to find a position at another school were paid a full year's salary.[213]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, recruitment was one of the biggest challenges when all principals but one were dismissed: It took more than 300 interviews to recruit 19 new principals.[214] Retention too was a problem: despite enticing financial incentives, none of the new principals remained beyond three years. District leaders tried to tackle the high attrition rate by training principals in conflict resolution, marketing, and financial management: areas that were 'sticky points' for principals. Yet Grier said if he had a second shot at Apollo, he would "remove all adults [staff in schools]".[215]According to him failing schools were often imbued with a culture of complacency – even good teachers fell victim to it and resented radical changes.

In 2013, Grier proposed to the Texas Education Board to expand Apollo 20 to more schools. The Houston Education Research Consortium (HERC), along with Rice University and HISD, reviewed

209 Ibid.

210 Terry Grier, Superintendent, Houston Independent School District, Personal interview (3 June 2016).

211 Margaret Downing, "Rewriting history: Apollo 20's Legacy as it is now, was once and what it was supposed to be," *HoustonPress (2 December 2014)*.

212 Ibid.

213 Education Innovation Laboratory (EdLabs), Harvard University, Email (16 November 2016).

214 Roland Fryer, "Injecting Charter School Best Practices into Traditional Public Schools," op. cit.

215 Terry Grier, Superintendent, Houston Independent School District, Personal interview (3 June 2016).

Fryer's analysis of the programme. HERC held that the gains reported by Fryer were likely, but cautioned against expanding the programme. It recommended that since not all the five practices were equally effective, schools should focus on the most effective component of Apollo – the small group, high-dosage maths tutoring – and extend it to reading and more grades.[216] Edlabs disagrees, saying tutoring was a part of other interventions, and separating each part's effects may be misleading. [217] Ultimately, it is an empirical question that can be tested by seeing whether tutoring alone is effective. Critics also questioned the sustainability of a three-year programme costing close to US$60 million. But Fryer found Apollo 20 was more effective than reducing class sizes, paying teachers more to work in hard-to-staff schools, and implementing early childhood programmes.[218] Indeed, Grier said it would have been foolish to ignore the evidence and the programme was expanded to elementary schools in its second year and other schools in the district adopted the strategies by 2012.[219]

5.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS: USING WHAT WORKS TO HELP STUDENTS IN HOUSTON'S FAILING SCHOOLS

For Houston's most disadvantaged students stuck in failing schools, the benefits are clear. The lessons are less about the specific practices deployed in these schools and more about the political courage to find successful practices elsewhere and adapt them for schools with similar challenges.

But as Grier said, "Good policy backed by evidence can take a backseat to politics". Despite Apollo's success, many critics and independent reviewers remain sceptical. Like the academies in England and reforms in other U.S. states, Apollo 20 is controversial. Apollo was a rather ambitious programme given the talent supply challenges the district had with recruiting and retaining new principals. Like in England, leaders considering performance-managing out ineffective leaders and teachers need to first solve human capital challenges.

However, the programme has worthwhile legacies, particularly for New Zealand's culture of allowing underperforming schools to persist.[220]

New Zealand has many good schools. Some of them outperform expectations given their student intakes. It makes sense to examine what practices make them successful and implement them in other schools. The successful examples are there, and so is the data. But if schools can continue to show minimal improvement and face little consequence, why should they strive harder?

A year after Apollo 20 began, Grier gave his 2011 State of the Schools address – and nailed what every parent, principal, teacher and critic querying the urgency of fixing failing schools ought to ask:

> Would you want us to wait if your child were sitting in a failing school? Would you want us to wait if your child were among the 30 percent of high school students who don't graduate on time? Would you want us to wait if your child's teacher hadn't met expectations for three years in a row?[221]

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216 Houston Education Research Consortium (HERC), "Review of Dr. Roland Fryer's Apollo 20 Report, 'Injecting Charter School Best Practices into Traditional Public Schools': Evidence from Houston" (5 February 2014), 1.

217 Education Innovation Laboratory (EdLabs), Harvard University, Email (November 2016).

218 Roland Fryer, "Injecting Charter School Best Practices into Traditional Public Schools," op. cit.

219 Houston Independent School District (HISD), "2012 Annual Report" (Houston: 2013).

220 Martine Udahemuka, "Signal Loss: What We Know About School Performance," op. cit.

221 Houston Independent School District (HISD), "HISD Superintendent Terry Grier: Budget cuts won't stall reforms," Press release (17 February 2011).

CONCLUSION

Politicians and school leaders the world-over are confronted by what strategies to implement to support schools that have struggled year after year. The first report in this series of three on school underperformance in New Zealand found that while most students attend high quality schools, too many remain in persistently failing schools. England and the United States have embraced non-conventional paths to deal with stubborn underperformance, with three key common themes that will inform policy recommendations for the third and final report.

The first theme, and one that underpins all others, is the political will to be frank about failing schools, and design and implement radical interventions to reform the schools. Effective reform can be crippled by short-term political thinking. Politicians want rapid changes during their time in power and also changes that look different from those of their predecessors. However, the case studies in this report show improvements are possible when politicians and school leaders pursue reform agendas that put students first.

The second is the benefit of infusing fresh ideas, time, expertise and money from private and voluntary sectors in state education where state interventions have been ineffective. America's charter schools and England's academies were the most successful when schools used their operational autonomy and economies of scale by sharing resources and practice across networks of schools.

The third is the benefit of implementing fairer and improved ways of evaluating the quality of learning, of teachers, and of schools. England's progress-focused measures hold schools accountable for the students they teach. The District of Columbia's IMPACT is the most innovative and successful teacher evaluation tool I came across. Along with other sources, teachers are evaluated on their students' progress given their backgrounds. This makes it easier to identify teachers earlier who need support, give them tailored support, and recognise the most effective teachers.

Reformers in England and the United States have tried to encourage system-wide improvements through school-led changes. They incentivised successful schools to support or take over struggling schools; injected successful practices in low performing schools; and invited successful groups or individuals with proven records to manage low performing schools. Underlying the reforms was the pivotal role of using student and school data to identify, monitor and manage underperforming schools. Incentives for good performance were clear. The threat for a failing school to be taken over or an ineffective teacher to be dismissed was sometimes real enough to spur improvement. D.C. teachers who stood to gain permanent financial rewards were incentivised to become teaching superstars: many moved from *effective* to *highly effective* by the time of their follow-up evaluation.

Although ideas cannot be directly transferred between systems, the experiences of England and the United States provide lessons worth considering for New Zealand. Our overall story is not as shocking as those of our international peers, but we should not ignore our failing schools or deny them the support they need. Without brave school leaders and politicians to shatter the status quo and propose provocative new ideas – no matter how politically challenging – children will continue to miss out on reaching their potential. In the final report in this series on school performance, The New Zealand Initiative will offer policy recommendations for New Zealand to scale up exemplary practice so all students can get access to effective teachers and effective schools.

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APPENDIX
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF *SIGNAL LOSS*

> School decline compromises the educational opportunities for students, hinders the careers of teachers and school leaders, disturbs communities, and costs governments millions of dollars … it is critical that interventions [are timely and] are founded on comprehensive data analysis and wise interpretation …
>
> — Kay Hawk[222]

New Zealand's compulsory education sector benefits many students. Most young adults leave school having gained valuable skills that serve them well into adulthood. This is credit to hard-working students; engaged parents; committed sector leadership; and the quality of our school leaders and teachers. Our country and society leverage off the human and social capital drawn from a quality schooling experience.

But 21st century New Zealand is facing particular challenges: an ageing workforce; a growing need for young people with adaptable skills; and an upward demand for better skilled and higher educated workers. The days when low-skilled school leavers could easily slide into jobs requiring only basic literacy and numeracy skills will increasingly become few and far between. It is thus vital to give students the tools they need to access further training and meaningful employment. The better qualified they are, the easier it is to adapt to changing work conditions. The cost of a poor education, on the other hand, presents ripple effects that go beyond the individual and hurt the growth, productivity and prosperity of the nation.

Thus, a true measure of the quality of an education system should be how it supports all students to reach their potential and gain skills to help them participate meaningfully in the labour market and contribute to citizenry. In New Zealand, a number of key indicators are used to judge how students and schools are doing. These include well-established international tests, national assessments, and independent school reviews. This is the first report in a series of three examining the state of New Zealand's student and school performance.

At first glance, average primary and secondary student performance in New Zealand is promising:

- The country's top students are on par with the brightest students internationally.
- The proportion of students reaching national benchmarks is increasing year after year.

However, amid the good lies a layer of poor performance:

- Performance in basic literacy and numeracy in international tests is declining.
- In 2014, 1 in 10 students left secondary school without a formal qualification; 1 in 5 left without a National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Level 2 qualification.
- Though they are improving at a faster pace than the national average, Maori and Pasifika students continue to be over-represented in underachievement statistics.

The Education Review Office (ERO) evaluations also show most schools doing well and many others improving. But at 30 June 2015, 185 schools (8% of all state and state-integrated schools) were in ERO's lowest performance tier. These schools lack the internal capability to manage significant concerns and need intervention.

222 Kay Hawk, "School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention," Ph.D. thesis (Auckland: Massey University, 2008), 26, 29.

Persistent poor performance is an issue for many schools:

- 65 of the 185 schools (one-third) already in ERO's lowest performance tier had not significantly improved their performance by their next review, despite intervention;
- 20 of the schools had performed poorly for eight to nine years on average, and some had persistently failed for more than a decade;
- 67 school boards were under Ministry of Education intervention and more than half (51%) of the students under these boards were in deciles 1–3.

Although the key performance indicators allow observers to know who is and who isn't meeting national targets, and the Ministry knows which are the weakest schools in the country, this report argues that this is not sufficient because of the following systemic issues:

- Existing data on students is neither used to adequately determine whether they perform as expected, given their starting points, nor determine the academic quality of schools based on their student intake.
- Current teacher appraisal systems do not accurately differentiate between effective and less effective teachers.
- Teacher turnover is increasing, and it is higher in lower decile schools compared to higher decile schools.
- Ineffective governance, leadership and teaching are prevalent in most poorly performing schools.
- ERO and the Ministry do not formally evaluate interventions in poorly performing schools, teacher turnover trends, or leadership issues to understand what works, what does not and why. Systematic evaluations could help replicate successful interventions in schools facing similar challenges, and adjust or abandon those that do not work.

The introduction of NCEA in 2002 and of National Standards in 2010 has resulted in an abundance of data on students. Furthermore, the push by the Government for evidence-based policy has seen the introduction of a one-stop shop of administrative data, namely, the Integrated Database Infrastructure (IDI) that safely houses longitudinal individual level data. These developments are yet to be optimally used in order to improve the quality signals of the teaching and learning that happens in schools – and ultimately support systematic school improvement efforts.

The demand for information on school performance comes from many people, which is why media agencies continue to produce annual school league tables. But these tables are poor indicators of how effective a school is in educating its students when compared to schools with a similar intake of students.

Thus, there needs to be much better use of the available data on schools and students.

Good information is key to raising standards in any sector. If a business fails to meet customer expectations and does not swiftly find solutions, it will organically lose to competition as customers choose to go elsewhere. But school choice for parents in New Zealand is limited by both restrictions on school enrolments and the substandard quality of publicly available information about schools' relative strengths and weaknesses. This report finds that some schools, whose core business is to educate the country's youth, continue to poorly perform – sometimes for as long as a student's entire schooling career.

This report is the first in a series of three dealing with the definitions, measurement and management of school success and failure. The report presents an overview of performance in primary and secondary schools, including initial observations about the problems associated with the analysis and distribution of information to improve student achievement.

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