

The District at a Glance: A Preliminary Analysis

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The statistics provided by the district offer us a snapshot of the status of our schools. Overall, the present picture is a little gloomy; our district is struggling. The good news is that a little more research will make our next steps clear. Gathering information on comparable school districts will help us to (1) reassess our spending strategy and (2) address the discrepancy in scores between the small or medium schools and the large schools of our district.

Our district summary stats are not flattering. Figure 1 offers a summary of our current performance and our passing rates are much lower than our goals. The data also reveal a large discrepancy between our highest performing and lowest performing schools. Figure 5 lays out the data school by school and highlights highly performing and poorly performing schools. Analysis of performance by grade year revealed surprisingly stable performance in each school from year to year. One would expect some random variance between classes, but our district currently shows no more than a two point difference between the average scores of any two years. Two major trends present causes for concern. First, schools with higher per-student budgets are performing more poorly (see Figure 2). Second, larger schools lag significantly behind small and medium schools in test scores (see Figure 3). Finally, charter schools are performing better than district schools. This is reflective of factors beyond the control of the district, most notably, socioeconomic status of enrollees.

The trend of lower-budget schools outperforming higher-budget schools may call for a reassessment of spending strategies. To determine whether such a reassessment is necessary, we will need to expand the analysis in two ways. First, expanding the data collection from a snapshot to a story will shed more light on the present situation. For example, we may ask, “How has funding changed in the recent past and how has it impacted school performance?” Second, seeking comparable school districts from our state and nation will allow us to draw on the experiences of other education leaders who have faced similar problems. If this is a wider pattern than our own district, we can employ already-completed research into the cause of this discrepancy. If other districts have succeeded or failed in adjusting spending to improve performance, we can learn from their experience. Depending on the results of that exploration, district leadership may consider “trimming the fat” by reducing unhelpful spending and identifying budget items that may be doing more harm than good to school performance.

An exploration of the cause of the lagging performance of the larger schools will also benefit the district. First, information about comparable districts will also be helpful in this case. Is it typical of schools in our state or nation that large schools perform more poorly? Here again, we may benefit from an understanding of statewide and national trends. Second, searching for confounding variables¹ may reveal that size is not the source of the trend. Do larger schools tend to be urban or rural? Do they tend to have more racially diverse student bodies? The answers to these questions will shed light on further actions. Would it be best to divide the big schools into smaller ones? Would we be wisest to adjust our spending or planning at larger schools to improve test scores? Answering these questions will enable us to inform our strategic decisions in the near future.

¹ A confounding variable is one that impacts the results of the analysis even though it is not the variable under consideration.

Figures

Figure 1. District Summary Statistics

Total Schools	15
Total Students	39,170
Total Budget	\$24,649,428
Average Math Score	78.99
Average Reading Score	81.88
Percent Passing Math	74.98
Pct. Passing Reading	85.81
Pct. Passing Overall	65.17

Figure 2. Statistics by Spending

<i>Spending Ranges (Per Student)</i>	<i>Average Math Score</i>	<i>Average Reading Score</i>	<i>% Passing Math</i>	<i>% Passing Reading</i>	<i>% Overall Passing</i>
<\$585	83.46	83.93	93.46	96.61	90.37
\$585-630	81.90	83.16	87.13	92.72	81.42
\$630-645	78.52	81.62	73.48	84.39	62.86
\$645-680	77.00	81.03	66.16	81.13	53.53

Figure 3. Statistics by Size

<i>School Size</i>	<i>Average Math Score</i>	<i>Average Reading Score</i>	<i>% Passing Math</i>	<i>% Passing Reading</i>	<i>% Overall Passing</i>
Small (<1000)	83.82	83.93	93.55	96.10	89.88
Medium (1000-2000)	83.37	83.86	93.60	96.79	90.62
Large (2000-5000)	77.75	81.34	69.96	82.77	58.29

Figure 4. Statistics by Type

<i>School Type</i>	<i>Average Math Score</i>	<i>Average Reading Score</i>	<i>% Passing Math</i>	<i>% Passing Reading</i>	<i>% Overall Passing</i>
Charter	83.47	83.90	93.62	96.59	90.43
District	76.96	80.97	66.55	80.80	53.67

Figure 5. Statistics by School

<i>School Name</i>	<i>School Type</i>	<i>Total Students</i>	<i>Total School Budget</i>	<i>Per Student Budget</i>	<i>Average Math Score</i>	<i>Average Reading Score</i>	<i>% Passing Math</i>	<i>% Passing Reading</i>	<i>% Overall Passing</i>
Bailey High School	District	4976	\$3,124,928.00	\$628.00	77.05	81.03	66.68	81.93	54.64
Cabrera High School	Charter	1858	\$1,081,356.00	\$582.00	83.06	83.98	94.13	97.04	91.33
Figueroa High School	District	2949	\$1,884,411.00	\$639.00	76.71	81.16	65.99	80.74	53.20
Ford High School	District	2739	\$1,763,916.00	\$644.00	77.10	80.75	68.31	79.30	54.29
Griffin High School	Charter	1468	\$917,500.00	\$625.00	83.35	83.82	93.39	97.14	90.60
Hernandez High School	District	4635	\$3,022,020.00	\$652.00	77.29	80.93	66.75	80.86	53.53
Holden High School	Charter	427	\$248,087.00	\$581.00	83.80	83.81	92.51	96.25	89.23
Huang High School	District	2917	\$1,910,635.00	\$655.00	76.63	81.18	65.68	81.32	53.51
Johnson High School	District	4761	\$3,094,650.00	\$650.00	77.07	80.97	66.06	81.22	53.54
Pena High School	Charter	962	\$585,858.00	\$609.00	83.84	84.04	94.59	95.95	90.54
Rodriguez High School	District	3999	\$2,547,363.00	\$637.00	76.84	80.74	66.37	80.22	52.99
Shelton High School	Charter	1761	\$1,056,600.00	\$600.00	83.36	83.73	93.87	95.85	89.89
Thomas High School	Charter	1635	\$1,043,130.00	\$638.00	83.42	83.85	93.27	97.31	90.95
Wilson High School	Charter	2283	\$1,319,574.00	\$578.00	83.27	83.99	93.87	96.54	90.58
Wright High School	Charter	1800	\$1,049,400.00	\$583.00	83.68	83.96	93.33	96.61	90.33