

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study evaluates how welcoming thirty American cities—the twenty-five largest and five smaller “hotspots”—are to “nontraditional” problem-solvers and solutions. It assumes that the balky bureaucracies meant to improve K-12 education and hold leaders accountable are so calcified by policies, programs, contracts, and culture that only in the most exceptional of circumstances can they be fixed simply by top-down applications of new curricula or pedagogy.

Enter the education entrepreneur, a problem-solver who has developed a different and—it is to be hoped—better approach to teaching and learning, either inside or outside the traditional school system. He or she may provide, among other things, a novel form of brick and mortar teaching, an alternative version of teacher recruitment or training, or time-saving software and tools that make for more efficient instruction and surer learning. Which cities would welcome and support such problem-solvers by helping to bring their ideas to scale, improve their odds of success, and nurture their growth? Put another way, which cities have the most reform-friendly ecosystems?

To answer this question, analysts examined six domains that shape a jurisdiction’s receptivity to education reform:

- 1 Human Capital:** Entrepreneurs need access to a ready flow of talented individuals, whether to staff their own operations or fill the district’s classrooms.
- 2 Financial Capital:** A pipeline of flexible funding from private and/or public sources is vital for nonprofit organizations trying to break into a new market or scale up their operations.
- 3 Charter Environment:** Charter schools are one of the primary entrees through which entrepreneurs can penetrate new markets, both as direct education providers and as consumers of other nontraditional goods and services.
- 4 Quality Control:** Lest we unduly credit innovation per se, the study takes into account the quality-control metrics that appraise and guide entrepreneurial ventures.
- 5 District Environment:** Because many nontraditional providers must contract with the district in order to work in the city, finding a district that is both open to nontraditional reforms and has the organizational capacity to deal with them in a speedy and professional manner can make or break an entrepreneur’s foray into a new market.
- 6 Municipal Environment:** Beyond the school district, is the broader community open to, even eager for, nontraditional providers? Consider, for example, the stance of business leaders, the mayor, and the media.

Drawing on publicly available data, national and local survey data, and interviews with on-the-ground insiders, analysts devised a grading metric that rated each city on its individual and collective accomplishments in each of these areas.

What did they discover? Few cities are rolling out the red carpet for education entrepreneurs. No cities were awarded As and just a handful of cities received Bs when measured for their hospitality towards reformers. The majority fell in the C range, half a dozen in the D to F range, and the remainder had too little data to judge (see Table 1, page 8). Low-scoring cities were characterized by lethargic district

**TABLE 1: Reform-Friendliness:
Final Grades in Rank Order**

RANK	CITY	FINAL REFORM-FRIENDLY GRADE
1	New Orleans	B
2	Washington, D.C.	B
3	New York	B
4	Denver	B
5	Jacksonville	B
6	Charlotte	B
7	Austin	B
8	Houston	B
9	Fort Worth	B
10	San Francisco	C
11	Chicago	C
12	Dallas	C
13	Indianapolis	C
14	Memphis	C
15	Boston	C
16	Los Angeles	C
17	Baltimore	C
18	Columbus	C
19	Milwaukee	C
20	Newark	C
21	San Jose	D
22	San Diego	D
23	Albany	D
24	Philadelphia	D
25	Gary	D
26	Detroit	F
N/A	El Paso	no grade
N/A	Phoenix	no grade
N/A	San Antonio	no grade
N/A	Seattle	no grade

**TABLE 2: Reform-Friendliness:
Final Grades in Alphabetical Order**

CITY	FINAL REFORM-FRIENDLY GRADE
Albany	D
Austin	B
Baltimore	C
Boston	C
Charlotte	B
Chicago	C
Columbus	C
Dallas	C
Denver	B
Detroit	F
El Paso	no grade
Fort Worth	B
Gary	D
Houston	B
Indianapolis	C
Jacksonville	B
Los Angeles	C
Memphis	C
Milwaukee	C
New Orleans	B
New York	B
Newark	C
Philadelphia	D
Phoenix	no grade
San Antonio	no grade
San Diego	D
San Francisco	C
San Jose	D
Seattle	no grade
Washington, D.C.	B

administration, inert political leadership, arcane staffing policies, and unsupportive (or silent) local business and philanthropic communities.

We also found that cities are making greater strides in some areas than others:

- They do best at drumming up sources of financial capital to advance reform: Nine cities earned As and ten earned Bs; support from outside the district is also strong, with municipal environment seeing nine As and eight Bs.
- They fare least well when it comes to district environment, where a third got Fs.
- Grades were generally mixed with respect to human capital, charter environment, and quality control.

Finally, substantial variation exists within states that had more than one city in the study. This suggests that entrepreneurial fate is not sealed by state lines: local officials, educators, and reformers can shape their own destiny.

- Of the four cities graded in California, San Francisco finished tenth overall while Los Angeles ranked sixteenth. San Jose and San Diego placed twenty-first and twenty-second, respectively.
- And in Texas, which had four cities in the final rankings, the spread in the national rankings was small, with Austin finishing seventh, Houston eighth, Fort Worth ninth, and Dallas twelfth.
- Less surprisingly, in Indiana, Indianapolis scored thirteenth nationally while Gary finished twenty-fifth; in New York, NYC finished third nationally, and Albany came in twenty-third.