

How reform-friendly is Gary?

CATEGORY	HUMAN CAPITAL	FINANCIAL CAPITAL	CHARTER ENVIRONMENT	QUALITY CONTROL	DISTRICT ENVIRONMENT	MUNICIPAL ENVIRONMENT
Rank	26 of 26	19 of 25	20 of 24	21 of 25	24 of 26	N/A

Overview

Which American cities are most hospitable to education reform, especially the “entrepreneurial” kind? To answer this question for Gary and other cities examined in this study, we used publicly available data, national and local surveys, and interviews conducted with on-the-ground insiders.¹ Respondents provided information about the city environment as a whole as well as the Gary Community School Corporation.² Judgments based upon these data, however, are the responsibility of the authors. Note, too, that due to the study’s timing, any major policy changes that cities (or states) may have made in connection with the *Race to the Top* competition are not captured in these rankings (but see sidebar for partial update).

Background

Our analysis of Gary was limited by a low response rate on the national stakeholder survey. This resulted in too few indicators to calculate a ranking for Municipal Environment (see Appendix A for Methodology).

Still, we include here information from the national responses that we did receive as well as publicly available data, local survey responses, and interviews.

Race to the Top Update: Indiana—Gary

Indiana applied for round 1 of Race to the Top funding but was not chosen as a finalist. The state decided not to reapply for round 2.

Gary is a challenging locale for an entrepreneur looking to set up shop. The city’s most serious barrier to reform is its district environment, paralyzed by an “old-timer” mentality entrenched in the status quo.

Turnover within the Gary Community School Corporation (GCSC) has left the district with no centralized leadership in favor of reform, and stalled the few reform efforts that had managed to take root. Further, GCSC is the subject of a recent local school board investigation for mismanagement of funds.

Snapshot

Gary suffers from weak **human capital** pipelines. The local talent pool is practically nonexistent, and recruiting fresh talent to the city is nearly impossible. While Gary hosts a small Teach For America contingent as an offshoot of the larger Chicago program, it is devoid of other national alternative

1. This analysis examines the reform environments in the nation’s twenty-five largest cities, plus five additional smaller communities. We reasoned that, as alleged “hotbeds” of reform, these five would permit comparisons of conditions in big cities with those of smaller but potentially more nimble locales. In addition to Gary, IN, these smaller cities include Albany, NY; New Orleans, LA; Newark, NJ; and Washington, D.C.

2. This profile provides a snapshot of the data collected for Gary, Indiana, in fall 2009. For the full data, see http://edexcellence.net/index.cfm/news_americas-best-and-worst-cities-for-school-reform.

certification programs such as The New Teacher Project and New Leaders for New Schools. A restrictive bargaining agreement between the teachers' union and GCSC includes "last hired, first fired" policies that are unlikely to alter these trends.

Financial capital is somewhat available in Gary but is not employed in favor of reform. GCSC per-pupil expenditures are relatively high, but GCSC does not have a coherent vision for change and does not spend its own money on reform initiatives. Public funds may be available, but the district is already so low-performing that it focuses resources on meeting bare minimum requirements rather than looking forward to reform. Local philanthropy begins to fill some holes, but national philanthropic investment is rare in Gary.

Gary's **charter environment** is struggling. While Indiana law effectively places no cap on the establishment of charter schools, it also does not require adequate oversight of authorizers to ensure school quality.³ Though it affords charters nearly equitable operational funding, the schools face difficulties obtaining this funding. Local institutional support is feeble in Gary, too. The only authorizer that charters schools in Gary—Ball State University—is only somewhat selective in who receives charters and does not take a hard stance on improving the quality of low-performing schools.

Gary's **quality-control** metrics are a mystery, further hampered by mediocre state-level metrics. Survey respondents largely left data-related questions unanswered, likely indicating lack of familiarity. On the state level, Indiana collects an abundance of information on student achievement but it neither links student data to teachers, nor presents data in a user-friendly format.⁴ The state's student proficiency measures also fall short when compared to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).⁵

GCSC's **district environment** is allergic to change: Leaders do not communicate a sense of urgency, do not make bold decisions or push to innovate and excel, and do not reward smart problem-solvers. The district engenders further dysfunction through constant turnover: The school board is mired in a lawsuit over mismanagement of funds, and the district has cycled through four superintendents in recent years. Making matters worse is a local teachers' union that is united in its opposition to reform.

Though inadequate data prevented calculation of a grade in this category, Gary's **municipal environment** appears relatively accepting of reform. The local philanthropic, business, and media communities all generally support reform—though not enough to garner the attention of national respondents, who generally viewed Gary as a non-player.

3. For more information, see: *How State Charter Laws Rank Against the New Model Public Charter School Law* (Washington, D.C.: National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2010).

4. For more information, see: *2009-10 Survey Results Compendium—10 Elements and 10 Actions* (Washington, D.C.: Data Quality Campaign, 2010), http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/files/Elements_Compendium.pdf and http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/files/Actions_Compendium.pdf.

5. For more information, see: Victor Bandeira de Mello, Charles Blankenship, Don McLaughlin, and Taslima Rahman, *Mapping State Proficiency Standards onto NAEP Scales: 2005-2007 (NCES 2010-456)* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, October 2009), <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pubs/studies/2010456.asp>.

Bottom Line

The city of Gary sees little support for reform initiatives outside of its municipal leadership. Entrepreneurs must also contend with a dysfunctional school district when attempting to set up shop here.

Our Categories

Human Capital. Entrepreneurs must have access to a steady flow of talented individuals, whether to staff the organization's central office or to fill the district's classrooms. This component evaluates an entrepreneur's ability to find talent in the city and/or recruit talent to move there. We examined such factors as the alternative certification routes for aspiring teachers, district human resource policies for teachers and central office staff, and the restrictiveness of the local collective bargaining agreement as it pertained to tenure and differentiated pay, among other areas.

Financial Capital. A pipeline of readily accessible funding from private and public sources is particularly important for nonprofit organizations trying to break into a new market or scale up their operations. This component tests whether, and how much, national and local philanthropic organizations give to nontraditional providers in each city, as well as the local availability of dollars from public sources. Though education reformers often tout the importance of quality over quantity, from the perspective of an entrepreneur, free-flowing dollars are an asset.

Charter Environment. Charters are one of the main ways in which entrepreneurs can enter new education markets, both as providers of instruction and services and as consumers of other nontraditional goods and services. We evaluated both the current market share of charters in each city—under the assumption that, once a path has been blazed by others, it is easier for new providers to follow it—as well as the various legal and policy hurdles faced by current or potential charter operators. More formal barriers often occur on the state level (e.g., charter laws) so, where appropriate, we incorporated state-level metrics into city grades.

Quality Control. Lest we unduly credit innovation for its own sake, the study takes into account the quality-control metrics that guide and regulate entrepreneurial ventures in our cities. These may take the form of official regulations and practices, such as the quality of the state achievement test (again, we extrapolate state grades for our cities), or more informal guides, such as support organizations for nontraditional providers that also keep an eye on quality, such as private groups that help entrepreneurs to navigate district rules and policies.

District Environment. Since many nontraditional providers must contract or otherwise work with the district to do business in the city, finding a district that is both open to nontraditional reforms and has the organizational capacity to handle dealings with such operators in a speedy and professional manner can make or break an entrepreneur's forays into a new market. We considered formal barriers, such as the power of the local teachers' union over district decisions, as well as informal ones, such as whether district leaders were audible voices for reform.

Municipal Environment. Beyond the school district is also the question of general municipal openness to nontraditional education providers. This amorphous sphere includes such entities as the local business community, newspaper editorial boards, and the city government. Having these folks on the side of reform, even if they are not the ultimate consumer of entrepreneurs' wares, can be a powerful asset.