

HOUSTON Grade: B (8th of 26 cities)

Final GPA: 2.57

This analysis examines the education reform environments in thirty U.S. cities. Data for the study were collected from three sources: publicly available records, a survey of national providers, and a survey of local authorities in each city. Data were gathered in six areas: human capital, financial capital, charter environment, quality control, district environment, and municipal environment. Each area was divided into five to seven "indicators" (for example, see 1.1 below), which were then divided into more specific "sub-indicators" (see 1.1.1 below). A zero-to-four "GPA" scale was used across the board. GPAs were calculated by averaging indicators in each area and final grades by averaging area GPAs. Note that some indicators and areas are not scored due to missing data; to calculate a final city grade, four of six areas had to be scored. Data are current as of fall 2009.

Key:	
Publicly Available Records	
National Survey Data	
Local Survey Data	
Insufficient Data	

Indicators		GPA
Human Capital	1.1 To what extent have nontraditional teachers and administrators penetrated the city?	1.08
	1.1.1 Absolute current and alumni numbers of three nationwide, "brand name" alternative certification programs	
	1.1.2 Brand-name alternatively certified personnel as percentage of existing overall workforce	
	1.2 How restrictive is the teachers' union contract when it comes to the recruiting, hiring, and firing processes of the local school district?	2.94
	1.2.1 Collective bargaining agreements evaluated for compensation, personnel decisions, and work rules	
	1.3 How easy is it for entrepreneurs to find locally grown talent in this city?	3.00
	1.3.1 There is a deep talent pool of potential employees for entrepreneurs eyeing this metro area	
	1.4 How easy is it for entrepreneurs to import talent to this city?	2.75
	1.4.1 It is relatively easy to recruit talent and individuals to move to this city	
	1.5 How do district hiring processes support or interfere with the talent pipeline in this city?	2.00
1.5.1 Slack district hiring routines or slow districting hiring cycles serve to keep alternatively trained teachers out of district classrooms		
1.6 How do district termination processes support or interfere with the talent pipeline in this city?	1.67	
1.6.1 The district abides by a "last hired, first fired" policy when contemplating teacher hiring and firing decisions		
Human Capital		2.24
Financial Capital	2.1 What is the per-pupil expenditure (adjusted for the cost of living) in the city's primary school district?	2.00
	2.1.1 Average per-pupil expenditures over three years (2004-07) for the city's primary school district, normed using the ACCRA cost of living index	
	2.2 Where is money most available? From philanthropic or public sources, or private investors?	2.64
	2.2.1 Funding in each respective city is readily available for nontraditional providers from philanthropy	
	2.2.2 Funding in each respective city is readily available for nontraditional providers from public dollars	
	2.2.3 Funding in each respective city is readily available for nontraditional providers from private investors	
	2.3 Does the local school district seek non-public dollars to further its reform ambitions?	n/a
	2.3.1 Leaders in this city actively seek non-public funding (e.g., from philanthropists, venture capitalists, corporations, etc.) to support innovative programs	
	2.4 Are local dollars available in this city for nontraditional education reforms?	4.00
	2.4.1 At least one local philanthropy invests in, or contributes to, one or more of these reforms: charter schools, performance-based pay, alternative teaching routes	
	2.5 Are national dollars available in this city for nontraditional education reforms?	4.00
	2.5.1 At least one major national foundation is helping to support at least one of the following in this city: charter schools; performance-based pay; alternative teaching routes	
	2.6 What impact do philanthropic dollars have on nontraditional education reforms in this city?	3.50
2.6.1 Nontraditional reforms (e.g., charter schools, alternative teaching routes, or smart applications of technology) get their fair share of philanthropic dollars available in this city		
2.6.2 Philanthropists and/or philanthropic organizations have been a negative influence in this district because they have promoted initiatives that conflict with district priorities		
2.7 Does the district have a coherent vision for how to spend its dollars strategically?	3.08	
2.7.1 The district spends its own money on nontraditional educational tools and programs		
2.7.2 District leadership has a coherent vision for change and is disciplined about pursuing philanthropic/private funding to support that vision		
Financial Capital		3.20

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Charter Environment	3.1 Are there any high-quality non-LEA charter school authorizers?	2.00
	3.1.1 Availability of and support for authorizers (e.g., multiple authorizers available; adequate authorizer funding)	
	3.1.2 State-level quality-control mechanisms for authorizers (e.g., performance-based charter contracts required; clear processes for renewal, nonrenewal, and revocation)	
	3.2 Are charter schools funded fairly compared to traditional schools?	2.00
	3.2.1 State of charter funding (e.g., equitable operational funding and equal access to all state and federal categorical funding)	
	3.3 To what extent have charters penetrated the market?	2.00
	3.3.1 Market share of charter school enrollment (i.e., percentage of students enrolled in charter schools in each city's primary school district)	
	3.4 What is the status of the state's charter school cap?	2.00
	3.4.1 Restrictiveness of the state's charter school cap (e.g., state does not have a cap; state has cap with room for growth; etc.)	
	3.5 What kind of non-district support exists for charter schools?	4.00
	3.5.1 The city has one or more non-district charter school authorizers	
	3.5.2 There is at least one charter school support organization in this city	
	3.6 Does the biggest authorizer in this city exercise effective authorizing practices?	2.45
3.6.1 The authorizing entity is selective about which charters it approves		
3.6.2 The authorizing entity seeks to improve low-performing charter schools		
3.7 What type of funding is available for charter schools?	1.50	
3.7.1 Public funding (from local, state, or federal sources) is available for charter school facilities		
3.7.2 It is relatively easy for current or future charter school operators to obtain facilities funding		
3.7.3 The level of charter school per-pupil funding is 75 percent or more of district school per-pupil funding		
3.8 Is there a charter support organization in this city? If so, is it quality-conscious?	2.67	
3.8.1 This charter support organization emphasizes quality when assisting new or prospective charters		
3.8.2 The charter support organization seeks to improve low-performing charter schools		
Charter Environment		2.33
Quality Control	4.1 How good is the state longitudinal data system?	4.00
	4.1.1 Essential elements and actions of a state longitudinal data system (e.g., student-level test data; ability to match student-level P-12 and higher education data; etc.)	
	4.2 How rigorous is the state test, compared to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)?	1.00
	4.2.1 Rigor of state test (compares proficiency cut scores on both)	
	4.3 Are quality-control mechanisms used well in the city?	n/a
	4.3.1 How this city uses outcomes and metrics to police quality has helped rather than hindered my organization's operations	
	4.4 Is there outside support for nontraditional reformers that acts as an additional check on their operations?	n/a
	4.4.1 The mayor and/or other municipal leaders help nontraditional providers overcome local obstacles or district resistance (e.g., by providing resources, making phone calls on their behalf, or clarifying rules)	
	4.5 Are there quality-control mechanisms in place in this city's primary school district?	2.50
4.5.1 The district uses the information that it collects in order to make real-time adjustments in practice or policy along the way		
4.6 Is there organizational support for nontraditional providers in this city, either inside or outside the primary school district?	4.00	
4.6.1 There is an entity or individual <i>outside</i> the district that helps nontraditional providers with finances, facilities, and/or regulatory guidelines		
4.6.2 There is an entity or individual <i>inside</i> the district that helps nontraditional providers with finances, facilities, and/or regulatory guidelines		
Quality Control		2.88

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District Environment	5.1 Do students in the district have access to online schooling (via a state-run virtual school)?	0.00
	5.1.1 The presence of a statewide virtual school	
	5.2 How easy or hard is it for providers to set up shop in this district?	n/a
	5.2.1 It is easy for nontraditional providers to establish operations in this city	
	5.3 Does the teachers' union wield considerable influence?	n/a
	5.3.1 The local teachers' union wields substantial political influence over district decisions	
	5.4 Does the district support nontraditional providers trying to set up shop?	n/a
	5.4.1 District leaders are accessible and respond in a timely manner when dealing with nontraditional providers	
	5.5 Does the local teachers' union hold significant sway over district decisions and operations?	1.75
	5.5.1 In this district, the teachers' union is usually able to block or weaken reforms, innovations, and entrepreneurial ventures that it opposes	
	5.5.2-5.5.4 The teachers' union is supportive of (5.5.2) alternative certification; (5.5.3) charter schools; and (5.5.4) performance-based pay	
	5.6 Are district leaders visible and effective voices for reform in this city?	2.38
	5.6.1 The district has a culture that rewards smart problem-solvers, not only employees who have put in their time or have paper credentials	
5.6.2 District leaders communicate a sense of urgency about raising achievement and improving schools		
5.6.3 In general, district leaders have the political support they need to make things happen		
5.6.4 In general, the superintendent and senior leadership in this district make bold decisions and push to innovate and excel		
5.7 Does the district operate in an efficient and/or innovative manner?	2.75	
5.7.1 The district is attentive to making tools (e.g., hand-held devices, online instructional software programs, etc.) easy to use for its teachers and administrators		
5.7.2 The procurement office is well managed and responsive		
District Environment		1.72

Municipal Environment	6.1 Is there a state-level education reform organization that supports nontraditional providers?	4.00
	6.1.1 Presence of a state-level reform organization	
	6.2 How favorably, if at all, does the editorial board of the city's largest paper cover nontraditional reforms?	2.00
	6.2.1 Local editorials and opinion pieces (i.e., Is coverage of alternative certification, performance-based pay, charter schools, etc. negative, neutral, or positive in a given time frame?)	
	6.3 Do municipal civic leaders, including the mayor, business community, and philanthropic community, have the political will to advance potentially controversial reforms?	3.33
	6.3.1 The mayor is willing to spend reasonable amounts of political capital to support nontraditional providers and advance potentially controversial reform ideas	
	6.3.2 Other civic leaders are willing to spend reasonable amounts of political capital	
	6.3.3 The business community is willing to spend reasonable amounts of political capital	
	6.3.4 The philanthropic community is willing to spend reasonable amounts of political capital	
	6.4 Do municipal civic leaders, including the mayor, business community, and philanthropic community, expend their respective political capital on nontraditional reforms?	2.75
	6.4.1 For the most part, the mayor is willing to spend political capital to advance bold education reform ideas	
	6.4.2 For the most part, the business and philanthropic community in this city are willing to exert political influence to advance bold reforms	
	6.5 Does the local philanthropic community support nontraditional reforms?	3.22
6.5.1-6.5.3 The local philanthropic community is supportive of (6.5.1) alternative teaching routes; (6.5.2) charter schools; and (6.5.3) performance-based pay		
6.6 Does the local business community support nontraditional reforms?	3.00	
6.6.1-6.6.3 The local business community is supportive of (6.6.1) alternative teaching routes; (6.6.2) charter schools; and (6.6.3) performance-based pay		
6.7 Are the editorial pages of the local papers supportive of reform?	3.00	
6.7.1-6.7.3 The local editorial voice is supportive of (6.7.1) alternative teaching routes; (6.7.2) charter schools; and (6.7.3) performance-based pay		
Municipal Environment		3.04