

How reform-friendly is Jacksonville?

| CATEGORY | HUMAN CAPITAL | FINANCIAL CAPITAL | CHARTER ENVIRONMENT | QUALITY CONTROL | DISTRICT ENVIRONMENT | MUNICIPAL ENVIRONMENT |
|----------|---------------|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Rank | 14 of 26 | 21 of 25 | 11 of 24 | 1 of 25 | 3 of 26 | 8 of 25 |

Overview

Which American cities are most hospitable to education reform, especially the “entrepreneurial” kind? To answer this question for Jacksonville 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 Duval County Public Schools.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

Jacksonville, according to a local entrepreneur, is “a small town with big buildings”: Despite its sizable population, the city maintains a small-town atmosphere and largely avoids national attention. This

both helps and hinders its burgeoning school-reform movement. Though human and financial capital pipelines are less than robust, the city’s intimate atmosphere helps build relationships among reformers. Though it may not have all the resources of other cities at its fingertips, Jacksonville has made great strides over the past few years.

Race to the Top Update: Florida—Jacksonville

Florida applied for round 1 of Race to the Top funding and was chosen as a finalist, but ultimately did not win. The state reapplied for round 2 and was again chosen as a finalist. In advance of the competition, Florida passed several initiatives that strengthen school accountability and graduation requirements, allow state takeovers of failing schools, regulate teacher assignment, and expand the state’s tax credit voucher program.

Snapshot

Jacksonville’s **human capital** pipelines are middling. The city lacks a deep local talent pool and recruiting talent from outside can be difficult. Teach For America began operations here in 2008, but its numbers are small. The local collective bargaining agreement is somewhat flexible in HR matters.³

1. Our analysis of Jacksonville was limited by a low response rate on the national stakeholder survey; therefore, those responses were not calculated into the rankings or final grade (see Appendix A for Methodology). Still, we include here information from the national survey responses that we did receive as well as publicly available data, local survey responses, and interviews.

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

3. For more information, see: National Council on Teacher Quality, *Teacher Rules, Roles and Rights (TR3)* database, <http://www.nctq.org/tr3/home.jsp>.

For example, seniority remains a factor in determining lay-offs but teacher performance counts, too. Efficient turnover policies and extra pay for staffing hard-to-fill areas facilitate the integration of available talent into the school system.

Jacksonville's sparse public **financial capital** is somewhat offset by local philanthropic investment. Per-pupil expenditures in Duval County Public Schools (DCPS) are relatively low. But a burgeoning reform-friendly philanthropic community—from the Jaguars Foundation to the Jacksonville Public Education Fund to high-profile local businessmen who support KIPP—aims to establish long-term funding for change. Unfortunately, the city doesn't attract much national philanthropic interest.

Jacksonville's **charter environment** is well supported on the state level. Florida charter law provides for ample growth, authorizer oversight, and relatively equitable funding.⁴ Still, local charter support is lagging. The city's sole authorizer—the local school board—is only somewhat selective in granting charters and does not ardently emphasize quality. But the charter sector may soon improve: The opening of the first KIPP school in 2010 is a sign that national and local organizations are entering this territory.

Florida boasts impressive state-level **quality-control** measures that propel Jacksonville to the top spot in this category. The Sunshine State collects a wealth of linked student and teacher data and can track a variety of outcomes across years. The state also makes these data available in user-friendly formats.⁵ In addition, Florida's state test is more comparable in rigor to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) than most other state tests in this report.⁶

Jacksonville's **district environment** is fairly reform-friendly. District leaders communicate a sense of urgency, though they do not always receive the political support they need to make things happen; as a result, leaders do not typically push to innovate and excel. DCPS does, however, use technology to its teachers' benefit, helping them deploy electronic and online tools to strengthen instruction—and DCPS students, like all students in the state, have the option of attending Florida Virtual School. The teachers' union is also less antagonistic than many other local unions in this study—even supporting charter schools.

Jacksonville's **municipal environment** is generally friendly to reform. The mayor, civic leaders, and philanthropic and business communities are all willing to expend political capital to advance nontraditional programs—though the mayor is less inclined to do so than other entities. The *Florida Times-Union*, however, is less supportive of education reform than newspapers in other cities in this analysis. That said, the paper recently launched a series on education change in Jacksonville—too new to be included in our analysis—that may help spur reform.

4. 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).

5. 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.

6. 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

Jacksonville's reform sector has room to grow. Unlike most other cities, which face a negative district environment and powerful anti-reform teachers union, Jacksonville is relatively open to reform; but it needs stronger human and financial capital pipelines.

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 pertains 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.