

Hartford Public School District

The 2008-09 Strategic School Profile

Last month, the Connecticut State Department of Education released its annual set of School Profiles for the 2008-2009 school year. These Profiles are prepared using data and narratives provided by the school districts, testing services and census profiles. Hartford's profile was reviewed with the Board of Education at its December 16, 2009 board meeting.

While aspects of the data have been previously reported, the recent annual release of the Profile by the State provides further opportunity for district peer group and statewide comparisons. This summary provides highlights and observations based on the profile, as well as additional information gathered from other sources. While there is a great deal of data contained in the profile, we have not attempted to summarize it all. We have highlighted select information and included comparisons to help place certain demographics and the overall academic performance of the district in further context. Some information, including but not limited to budgetary and special education data, has not been included. The entire profile can be accessed at our website at www.achievehartford.org or the State Department of Education's website at www.sde.ct.gov.

An Overview

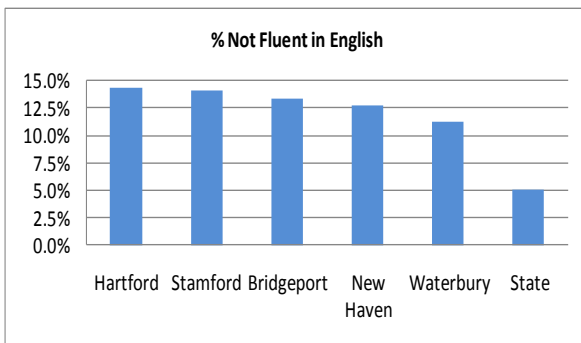
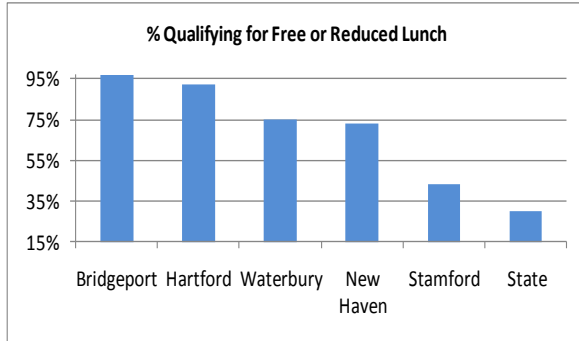
Hartford's Strategic School Profile documents the demographics and academic performance of students in the Hartford Public School District. The district is still performing significantly below most other school districts in the state, and the achievement gap between Hartford and the state remains large. However, a trend of improvement is emerging, and reform efforts underway appear to be having an impact. The Hartford Public School District continues to make strides relative to its peer districts¹ and has demonstrated a rate of academic improvement that surpasses most districts in the state. Here are key observations:

- The HPS official enrollment in 2008/2009 was 21,587 students, with over 92% qualifying for free or reduced lunch - education's proxy for poverty - representing the 2nd highest percentage among peer districts.
- Over 43% of HPS students live in households where English is not the primary language, and 14% of students are not fluent in English, the highest percentage among peer districts.
- In 2009, Hartford students showed a 20% increase on standardized test scores since 2007, with 27.9% of students performing at "goal" level. Still, this percentage is much lower than peer districts at 36.3% and the statewide average of 62.3%.
- While 10th grade standardized test scores remained relatively flat, Hartford's rate of academic improvement for grades 3 - 8 outpaced all peer districts, with an increase of 3.7 points over 2008. The state's average increase was 2.5%.
- Hartford's cohort-based graduation rate has increased steadily from 29% in 2007, to 36% in 2008, and 42% in 2009. SAT scores, while among the state's lowest, have improved at a slightly higher pace than peer districts.
- Hartford's average elementary and high school class sizes are generally equal to, or slightly lower than, peer districts and state averages.

1: "Peer districts" refers to those districts in CT with student enrollments over 14,000: Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, Stamford, and Waterbury (the "Comparison Set").

Hartford Demographics

Hartford's per capita income is still one of the lowest in the nation. This poverty level translates into 92% of students in the Hartford Public Schools qualifying for free or reduced lunch, with only Bridgeport being higher among peer districts. With a small tax base in the city, only 24% of the school district's budget comes from local revenue. The state provides 66% and federal and special dollars make up 10%. Additionally, only 61% of adults in Hartford have a high school diploma.



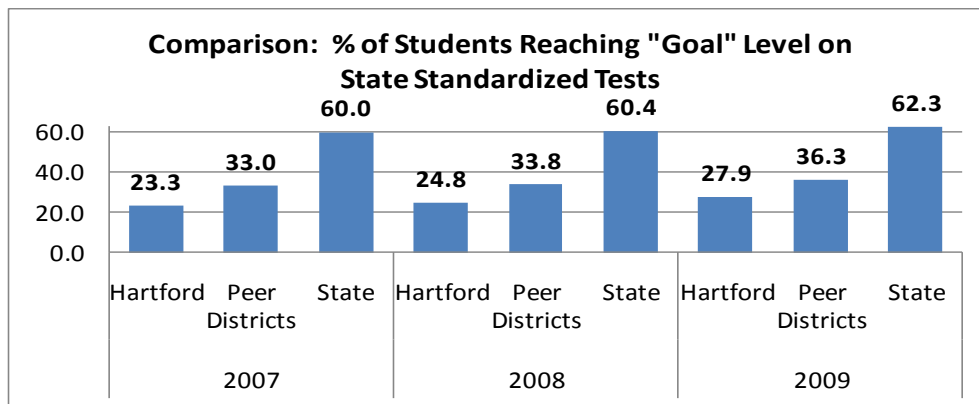
Official enrollment for HPS for 2008/2009 was 21,587 students. Over 43% of students in Hartford live in households where English is not the primary language. This contributes to over 14% of students coming to school not fluent in English - highest among peer districts. The Hartford resident population is 93% minority, with 39% being Black and 53% Hispanic. Also, the number of students who attend pre-school, nursery school or Headstart programs is only 35%, compared to peer districts at 64.3% and a

statewide average of 79.7%. This latter statistic is of particular importance as students are entering school at preparation levels well below their suburban peers.

To be sure, some of the underlying demographics of Hartford's population continue to provide a challenging environment and, like most low performing urban districts, Hartford needs to have targeted efforts to address the unique needs of this population without lowering standards.

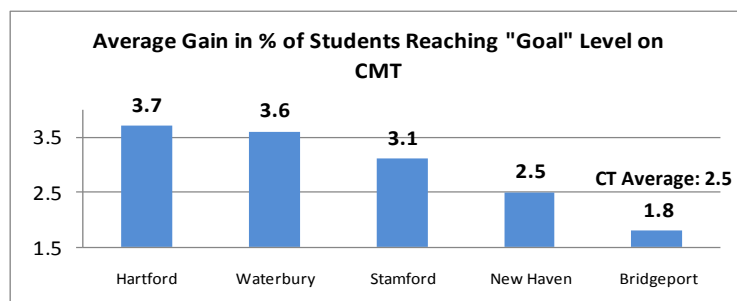
District Academic Performance

When compared to peer districts and to the state, Hartford still performs much lower on state standardized tests. However, despite only 27.9% of Hartford students performing at "goal" level on state standardized tests in 2009, the performance represents a 4.6 point increase since 2007, or 20% improvement, compared to 10% improvement for peer districts over that time.



Note: "Peer districts" in the graph above is calculated by taking an average of each district's average overall performance in the Comparison Set.

Hartford's rate of improvement is largely due to the performance of students in grades 3 - 8 on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT), where Hartford's improvement from 2008 to 2009 averaged 3.7 points across all subjects. This improvement was the highest among peer districts and compares to a state-wide average increase of 2.5 points. While overall performance is still well below state averages, this second year of improvement is encouraging (particularly in reading where improvement in 2009 was noted in all grades) and indicates that Hartford's K-8 students are improving at accelerating rates.



For high schools (10th grade), scores from the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) showed relative flat performance over the last two years, with 15.1% of Hartford students scoring at "goal" level compared to a state average of 48.4%. This performance results in approximately 93% of the state performing at levels ahead of Hartford. However, average SAT scores over the last two years show modest improvements. The table below compares Hartford's SAT scores from 2007 to 2009. In each subject area, improvement is steady, and gains in Hartford are outpacing both gains at the state level and among peer districts. Compared to the rest of state, however, much work remains as Hartford's scores are still lower than 95% of other districts.

SAT Performance						
Subject	2007	2008	2009	Hartford Gains 07-09	State Gains 07-09	Peer Districts Gains 07-09
Mathematics	389	391	400	+11	+4	0
Reading	391	394	395	+4	+1	-1
Writing	394	399	399	+5	+3	0
Total Score	1174	1184	1194	+20	+8	-1

Individual Schools

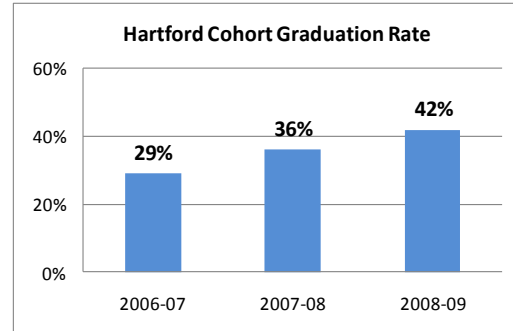
To rank the performance of an entire school, and to take into account all students' performance levels on state standardized tests - not only those students performing at "goal" level - the district developed a metric in 2006 called the Overall School Index (OSI). While not a metric used within the Strategic School Profiles, the OSI provides a consistent measurement to evaluate all schools within Hartford. The highest and lowest OSI performers for 2009 are listed below, as well as the five schools with highest OSI gains.

5 Highest Performing (OSI)	2009	5 Lowest Performing (OSI)	2009	5 Largest Gains (OSI)	08-09
University High (magnet)	77.0	Latino Studies Academy at Burns	32.2	Henry C. Dwight School	+10.7
Hartford Magnet Middle	76.4	CommPACT at MD Fox	31.3	Kinsella Magnet	+10.5
Henry C. Dwight School	72.6	HPHS Engineering & Green Tech	30.9	Montessori Magnet	+9.2
Classical Magnet School	72.5	Core Knowledge at Milner	28.3	Parkville Community School	+7.7
Capital Prep (magnet)	72.0	Culinary Arts at Weaver	27.5	Clark Elementary/Middle	+7.0

While magnets are well-represented among the highest performing schools in Hartford, an increasing number of neighborhood schools are showing meaningful gains, as demonstrated in the right column above. In most schools, however, much work remains to close the achievement gap.

Graduation Rates

In September, Hartford independently reported a cohort-based 2009 four-year graduation rate of 42%, compared to 36% in 2008 and 29% in 2007. The graduation rate in the state profile is calculated on a different basis, but does indicate that 95% of other districts have a better graduation performance than Hartford. That said, for those students that do graduate in Hartford, 86% pursue higher education opportunities, compared to a state average of 82%. This is a key statistic that makes improvements in graduation rates particularly meaningful.



Additional Information

In the areas of teacher experience, Hartford statistics indicate years of experience consistent with the rest of the state and somewhat greater than peer districts. As to average class size, Hartford is close to or slightly lower than the state average and peer districts. Given ever present funding issues in Hartford, we find this statistic encouraging. Interestingly, class size statistics for the neighboring suburban districts of West Hartford and Avon are at 21.1 and 19.8 for the early grades and 20.1 and 17.2 for high schools, respectively - not meaningfully different from Hartford.

	Hartford	Peer Districts	State
Teacher Experience (yrs)	13.5	12.6	13.6
Class Size (Grades K,2,5,7)	19.7	21.2	19.8
Class Size (High School)	17.8	18.7	19.3

Conclusion and thoughts:

Hartford's Strategic School Profile provides a snapshot of the demographics and academic performance of students in the Hartford Public School District. Looking at this data in context, our overall takeaway from the Profile is that while the district is still performing significantly below most other school districts in the state, and the achievement gap between Hartford and the state remains large, reform efforts underway appear to be having an impact.

While there are many data points and facets of student performance that impact how we can evaluate the success of the Hartford Public School District, data within the Profile indicates that improvement is real and the achievement gap is beginning to close. Even with a high poverty level, there are high performing schools in Hartford, both neighborhood and magnet. A handful were recently recognized by the US News and World Report. The challenge is to replicate the success of those schools and ensure that every school in Hartford can become a high performing school.

Looking forward, the district must maintain its current rate of annual improvement over eight years in order to close the gap with the state - a feat that is even more challenging given the state's and city's fiscal outlook. However, we must not let up. Reform is complex, and meaningful, sustained improvement takes time. We encourage all stakeholders - teachers, students, parents, administrators, the business and civic communities - to stay actively involved and develop further ownership of the reform so it can be lasting. We believe that ongoing, candid and constructive dialogue about the challenges Hartford faces as well as a continued commitment to innovation will help maintain the momentum that is emerging.