



K-12 EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FIRST 100 DAYS IN OFFICE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Biden-Harris administration will enter office facing an unprecedented and unique array of challenges to ensuring equity, fairness, and excellence in our education system. Some of these challenges are not new. Decades-old policies of inequity and systemic racism continue to limit opportunities for students from low-income families, students of color, and others from historically disadvantaged groups. What's more, the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated these troubling and chronic impediments to student success not just in the policy and practice of education but more broadly with regard to the dire economic and resource straits in which millions of families find themselves and the health risks posed to students, educators, and families by the pandemic which are increasing exponentially across the U.S.

We urge the President- and Vice President-elect to advance education policies that aspire to the historic role the federal government has played in narrowing opportunity gaps and channeling resources to the students and schools most in need of them, toward the goal of ensuring that a high-quality education is a universal right for *all*, regardless of race, family income, zip code, disability, or country of origin. We strongly believe that, in addition to President-elect Biden's commitment to unprecedented levels of funding, transformative change will require innovative and bold policies directed at improving outcomes for our nation's historically underserved students.

This brief contains equity-driven recommendations for elementary and secondary education for the Biden-Harris administration to consider as part of their first-day and 100-day plan to improve educational opportunity in this nation, as overviewed below.

RECOMMENDATIONS OVERVIEW

PROVIDE COVID-19 RELIEF

- Present a comprehensive plan for COVID-19 relief, starting negotiations with the \$3 trillion Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions “HEROES” Act, proposed by Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives earlier this year. Included within a ‘COVID-4” relief bill should be funding provisions to support the following:
 - Universal broadband for every household in America, as well as internet-connected devices for every K-12 student.
 - “Pandemic Pods” and high-dosage tutoring that would make small group instruction outside of the classroom available to all public school students, regardless of family income.

CONTINUE ANNUAL ASSESSMENTS & ACCOUNTABILITY

- Resume the administration of annual statewide summative assessments in Spring 2021.
- Ensure that the school accountability, support, and improvement systems in states’ Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plans capture key metrics designed to hold districts and states to account for addressing the educational needs of students, with some time-limited flexibility for modest adjustments that may be needed due to the pandemic.

CREATE A DIVERSE, HIGHLY EFFECTIVE, AND WELL-PAID TEACHER WORKFORCE

- Present a plan to compensate, prepare, and support a diverse, highly effective, and well-paid teaching force.
- Support provisions contained in the Supporting the Teaching Profession Through Revitalizing Investments in Valuable Educators “STRIVE Act” that would increase the value of federal TEACH Scholarships and make the teacher loan forgiveness program more generous, less backloaded, and better targeted to high-need schools, subjects, and specialty areas.
- Work with Congress to simplify eligibility requirements for teacher loan forgiveness programs under the Higher Education Act.
- Support changes to Title II of the Higher Education Act that would support states in making a wider range of relevant data available to educator preparation programs (EPPs) and other stakeholders; recognize best EPP practices; provide supports to EPPs in need of improvement; and take corrective action in cases of persistent underperformance of EPP.

INNOVATE TEACHER AND SCHOOL LEADER PREPARATION

- Support the Teachers and School LEADERS Act that would expand the range of high quality EPP programs eligible for Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants.
- Support changes to accreditation policies for EPP's under the Higher Education Act that emphasize outcomes over inputs.

MAINTAIN PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE AND PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

- Maintain federal funding through the Charter Schools Program for high-quality public charter schools.
- End federal funding for for-profit charter schools.
- Preserve and support autonomy for public charter schools in exchange for accountability for results.

ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

The following list of policies does *not* exhaust the list of everything we hope the Biden-Harris administration can and will do on education from Day One through Day 100 in elementary and secondary education. For a complementary and fairly comprehensive set of recommendations on K-12 policy, see the transition memo from a coalition of advocacy, civil rights, and disability groups sent on December 1, 2020 which we are including as an attachment [here](#).¹ Some of the content and views expressed here draw on our work with this and other coalitions, but nonetheless what follows is intended to reflect the views *only* of Education Reform Now.

COVID-19 RELIEF

→ **On Day One**, Biden and Harris must present a comprehensive plan for education that responds to the many needs of families and schools stemming from the COVID-19 crisis. The *starting point* in negotiations should be the House Democrats' \$3 trillion Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions or "HEROES" Act, which passed the House on a largely party-line vote back in May. HEROES would channel funds to education in a few different ways:

- Create a \$90 billion "state fiscal stabilization fund" for both K-12 and higher education, 65% (or about \$58 billion) of which would go to states and local school districts.
- Provide \$1 trillion to state and local governments to make up for revenue losses stemming from the pandemic, some of which could be channeled toward education.
- Provide \$5.5 billion to close the "digital divide," including \$1.5 billion for the federal E-Rate Program to provide broadband access to students and families to support distance learning.

The Biden administration should insist that federal COVID-19 funding advance equity in state and local school finance, including: distribution through, or based on, the "new money Title I targeted formulas;" closing of the comparability loophole;² and, maintenance of effort provisions for K-12 *and* higher education state funding. Moreover, when presenting this ambitious funding plan, President-elect Biden and Vice President-elect Harris

¹ Alliance for Excellent Education; Center for American Progress; EducationCounsel; Education Reform Now; The Education Trust; Migration Policy Institute, National Center for Immigrant Integration Policy; National Center for Learning Disabilities; National Urban League; SchoolHouse Connection; Teach Plus; and, UnidosUS

² For more on the comparability loophole, see "The Potential Impact of Revising the Title I Comparability Requirement to Focus on School-Level Expenditures, U.S. Department of Education, November 2011, accessible at: <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/title-i/comparability-requirement/comparability-policy-brief.pdf>

should lay out some clear, aspirational goals that are commensurate with the package's \$3 trillion price tag, including:

1. *Universal Broadband and Device Access*

First and foremost, given the likelihood of the continued need for remote learning to replace, or at the very least supplement, in-school instruction, the Biden-Harris administration should set a goal that every American household has access to broadband internet, which has become essential not just for education but for everything from health care to banking to supporting Black-owned businesses. The Brookings Institution has specified five steps necessary to get the Internet to all Americans.³ In addition, a corresponding goal should be that every K-12 student has his or her own internet-connected device.

2. *Publicly Funded Pandemic Pods and High-Dosage Tutoring*

The Biden administration should insist that a dedicated portion of COVID relief funds for education be used to establish a national effort for all parents to access high-dosage tutoring (HDT) and small group instructional approaches—run by school districts, colleges and universities, or community-based non-profit organizations—that tap currently underutilized human capital and create a streamlined career path to teaching, especially for aspirants of color.

With more than half of U.S. K-12 students enrolled in districts providing no in-person instruction, and many more districts considering moving to all-remote learning due to spiking COVID-19 infection rates, pressures are mounting on parents to find ways to guide, support, and supplement their children's education.

We know that many parents who can afford it are enrolling their children in private tutoring and small group learning programs also known as "Pandemic Pods." Learning pods are, overall, a promising idea. However, only higher income parents can afford them, which exacerbates already wide opportunity gaps in our current public education system.

[Recent polling](#) commissioned by Education Reform Now Advocacy and conducted by Latino Decisions found that a majority of voters in one swing state had similar concerns: 73% of likely voters indicated they were somewhat

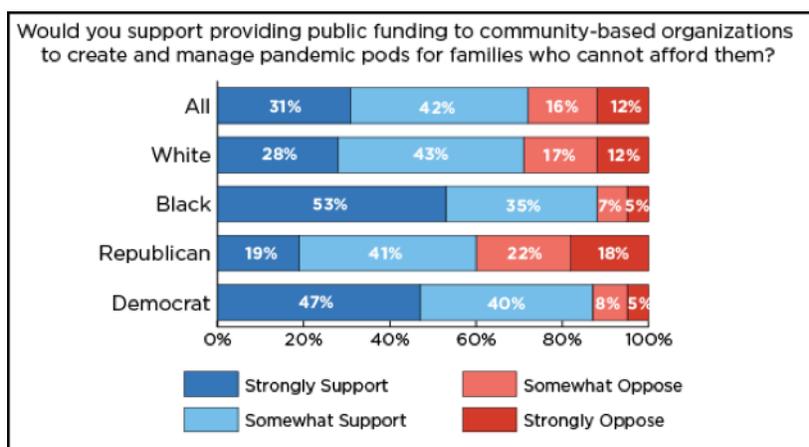
³ See "5 Steps to Get the Internet to All Americans, T. Wheeler, Brookings Institution, May, 2020, accessible at: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/5-steps-to-get-the-internet-to-all-americans/>

or very concerned that private pods would worsen opportunity gaps. These concerns were even higher among Black and Democratic voters, with 87% and 85% voicing concern, respectively.

To promote greater educational equity, we think it makes sense to establish publicly funded, evidence-based, one-on-one tutoring programs and pandemic pods, especially for those students who are the most ill-served by remote and hybrid COVID learning models. These could be run by school districts, colleges and universities, or non-profit community-based organizations.

As outlined in our recent [brief](#), HDT is a proven method for improving academic achievement, while also providing students with social-emotional support from a consistent mentor. While the unprecedented nature of the pandemic makes replicating existing models difficult, integrating the qualities of HDT that we know work (daily, one-on-one or very small group instruction with a consistent instructor, integrated in the normal school schedule) as much as possible could help close opportunity gaps for students unable to access private pods.

And our polling shows strong support for those options: 72% of likely voters in one swing state favored public schools creating their own version of pods for low-income families and 73% of respondents supported publicly funded tutoring delivered by non-profit, community-based organizations. As with school-based pods, while a majority of voters across party and racial lines support CBO-based pods, support is highest among Black and Democratic voters, with nearly 90% of supporting this approach.



Some, mostly relatively small, efforts to provide tutoring or pods to students most in need of them have already been mounted:

- This past summer, former Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam [created the “Tennessee Tutoring Corps,” a privately funded small group tutoring program](#) in collaboration with Boys and Girls Clubs. Assessments and instruction were aligned with state academic standards.
- In Cleveland, a community-based organization called the [Best Community Resource Center operates](#) a mobile classroom that provides students with WIFI and tutoring.
- In Fresno, California, the district spent \$280,000 of their CARES Act funding to [provide students access to virtual tutoring](#).
- Anchorage elementary schools are [bringing small groups of students into school buildings](#) to receive tutoring and enrichment activities.
- Vox [reported that](#) a number of nonprofits are establishing ad-hoc tutoring programs.

Since state and local funding is scarce, we think the best bet to provide additional instructional support is through the federal government, which could supply funds so that students can increase the number of hours they receive in-person instruction. A recent Center for American Progress brief⁴ outlined how a federal program could be structured, as well as cost estimates for scaling up tutoring. In the shorter term, via a “COVID-4” relief bill, Congress could allow states and districts to utilize funds to offer high-dosage tutoring learning pods, tapping underutilized human capital and creating a career path to teaching with an emphasis on diversifying the teaching force.

ANNUAL ASSESSMENTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

→ **On Day One**, the Biden administration should announce that it supports and will resume the administration of annual statewide summative assessments for Spring 2021. Recently, Education Reform Now joined with the *National Urban League*, *UnidosUS*, the *National Action Network*, and other civil rights and advocacy groups⁵ to insist that annual statewide summative assessments resume in Spring 2021. This letter was sent to the current administration, as well as the Biden transition team on Nov. 20. The Biden administration should affirm its support of this policy.

⁴ See: The Opportunity and Counseling Corps: Helping K-12 Students and Young Adults Recover From the Coronavirus Crisis, August 2020, accessible at: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2020/08/10/489168/opportunity-counseling-corps-helping-k-12-students-young-adults-recover-coronavirus-crisis/>

⁵ The other organizations that signed this letter are: the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC); National Indian Education Association (NIEA); Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC); Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA); National Center for Learning Disabilities; National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools; the Education Trust; and the Alliance for Excellent Education

For parents, families, and communities, the data from annual statewide assessments are an important source of information. The use of standardized tests has helped to reveal long-standing achievement gaps and racial disparities in academic opportunity and guide the targeting of resources.

The Trump administration gave states the opportunity to opt-out of summative assessments last spring and all 50 states did so. If the U.S. Department of Education grants these waivers to states again, educators will lose two years of data on our students' performance at a time when barriers to opportunity are growing.

Regarding accountability, our coalition also stipulated that "The school accountability, support, and improvement systems in states'...plans must be used to capture key metrics designed to hold districts and states to account for addressing the educational needs of ...students...with some time-limited flexibility for modest adjustments that may be needed due to the pandemic."

We at Education Reform Now believe that it is possible to administer assessments even for students who are only enrolled in remote learning. For example, assessments can be adjusted to reduce testing time and increase flexibility without sacrificing reliability and validity; existing assessments are readily adaptable to online platforms and our understanding is that some already have been; and, administration can be adapted to retain some level of oversight to prevent cheating and protect proprietary test items. If states and vendors begin planning immediately after the Biden administration, on Day One, affirms that state summative testing will resume in Spring 2021, there is a very good chance that valid and reliable assessment information can help inform COVID education policy and drive resources to the schools where they are most needed.

A DIVERSE, HIGHLY EFFECTIVE, AND WELL-PAID TEACHER WORKFORCE

→ **By Day 100**, the Biden-Harris administration should advance a comprehensive plan for creating a diverse, highly effective, and well-paid teaching force. We believe strongly that our nation must commit to the grand bargain that could transform 21st century education: compensating, preparing, and supporting teachers on par with the immense responsibilities they have for ensuring student success in college, careers, and citizenship.

Every field with broad social importance undergoes, at some point, a

transformation to catch-up to societal expectations and advances in knowledge. Modernization leads to qualitatively different approaches to training and pay, which in turn enhance professional prestige. In this era of ever-increasing international competition and higher academic standards, substandard educator compensation and preparation is just as unfair to teachers as it is to students.

Teacher Compensation

We support provisions contained in the STRIVE Act⁶ (Introduced by Senators Booker, Harris, and Schatz) that would increase the value of federal TEACH Scholarships and make the teacher loan forgiveness program more generous, less backloaded, and better targeted to high-need schools, subjects, and specialty areas. These changes could help entice more high-achieving and ethnically diverse candidates to enter and stay in the profession.

We also urge the Biden administration and Congress to pay close attention to reports from the GAO and the U.S. Department of Education on how these programs can be better managed and administered.⁷

In addition, the federal government must simplify eligibility requirements for teacher loan forgiveness programs under the Higher Education Act. Stafford loan forgiveness, Income-Based Repayment (IBR), and Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) all have distinct purposes. They are not duplicative, but they are too interdependent. For instance, IBR affects potential Stafford Loan forgiveness amounts and teachers who get Stafford loan forgiveness are not eligible for PSLF. These rules are complicated and confusing, and they break the three inherent promises of each separate program resulting in abysmally low participation rates and greatly limiting the potential impact of these policies.

If we are serious about recruiting great teachers, we should not make them choose between cheaper monthly loan payments, capped forgiveness at five years, and erasure of debt at ten. It's going to take that and a lot more. The easy solution is not to let participation in any one loan forgiveness program affect eligibility in the others.

⁶ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/1866>

⁷ See: Better Management of Federal Grant and Loan Forgiveness Programs for Teachers Needed to Improve Participant Outcomes, General Accountability Office, February 2015, accessible at: <https://www.gao.gov/assets/670/668634.pdf>

[Building Data Systems to Drive Higher Quality Educator Preparation Programs](#)

→ **By Day 100**, we urge the administration to send legislation to Congress that would update the required metrics for both State Education Agencies (SEAs) and Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) under Title II of the Higher Education Act (HEA). Our goal is to ensure that these data are more useful and actionable first and foremost for prospective educators, as well as states, EPPs, school districts, policymakers, and the general public.

Based on a solid base of research evidence and input from practitioners, we believe the policy recommendations presented below would vastly improve the entire teacher pipeline and help ensure that a cadre of high-quality educators is available to serve in our nation’s high-need schools and shortage areas. The changes outlined below will shine a light on best-practices across EPPs, provide EPPs with actionable data toward the goal of continuous improvement, and enhance EPPs’ ability to recruit, train, and place educator candidates so that all students have an excellent teacher and principal.

- Require that data be reported at the individual EPP program level (e.g., undergraduate elementary; graduate special education; secondary math, English/Language Arts, or science) rather than the entity or Institution of Higher Education (IHE) level since some IHEs house multiple EPPs.
- Require that data be reported for both alternative and traditional preparation programs.
- Identify whether programs are public, private non-profit, or private for-profit.
- Identify the type of program as to whether it is: “exclusively online,” “some but not all online,” or “not at all online.”
- Metrics to be reported by each EPP should include employment outcomes of recent graduates (both teachers and principals) and key quality indicators, all of which should be disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, family income level, and linguistic status whenever possible. At the very least, EPPs should report:

1. *Employment Outcomes*

- (i) Number and percent of recent graduates⁸ serving in full-time positions
- (ii) Number and percent of recent graduates serving in high-need schools

⁸ “Graduates” refer to both educators and principals, depending on the type of program.

- (iii) Number and percent of recent graduates serving in high-need schools for at least three years
- (iv) Number and percent of recent graduates who teach in state-identified high-need subject
- (v) Number and percent of recent graduates working in a full-time position but who are considered “out-of-field” in one or more subjects, specialization areas, or grade-levels

2. *Key Transparency Indicators*

- (i) First-time passage rates on state licensure exams for all teacher candidates taking the test
 - (ii) Overall passage rates on state licensure exams for all teacher candidates taking the test
 - (iii) Cohort graduation rates
 - (iv) Number of hours of supervised, pre-service clinical experience
- Require states to report teacher supply and demand metrics within three years. Specifically, states should report the number of vacancies in specific teaching positions (by subject, grade, and the concentration of low-income and non-white students in each school) such that they can be easily compared to relevant data collected and reported by EPPs (e.g., the number of teachers prepared in specific certification areas for the preceding three years, disaggregated by local school district or region).
 - All data reported by State Education Agencies should be reported in the aggregate, and reported separately, for all programs and entities in the state - traditional and alternative, baccalaureate, post-baccalaureate, and master’s programs. (Note: The Department of Education’s reporting template will automatically preload program data in the state report cards, reducing burden at the state level.)
 - Federal policy should also continue to reinforce privacy requirements so data being collected and used is properly safeguarded.

INNOVATIVE EDUCATOR AND SCHOOL LEADER PREPARATION

→ **By Day 100**, the Biden-Harris administration should take a federal role in promoting innovation in teacher and school leader preparation.⁹ We recommend supporting the Teachers and School LEADERS Act (Introduced by Senators Bennet, Cornyn, Warner, and Scott)¹⁰ that would expand the range of high quality EPP programs eligible for Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants. We also support changes to accreditation policies under HEA that emphasize outcomes over inputs, as described in the 2017 ERN issue brief “New Colleges of Education: A Path for Going from Concept to Reality.”¹¹

In addition, we urge the Administration to recognize that Minority-Serving Institutions of higher education (MSIs) play an important and outsized role in preparing teachers of color. MSI’s prepare nearly 40% of *all* Black teachers with bachelor’s degrees in the United States. Yet MSIs are often under-resourced while at the same time are serving high percentages of students with financial need and who are first-generation college students. We appreciate the advances made last Congress through the FUTURE Act (P.L. 116-91) and the 15% increase to discretionary programs in Title III and Title V of the Higher Education Act in FY2020 that support MSIs generally. Given the important and outsized roles that MSIs play in building a diverse teacher workforce we recommend a 20% increase over the FY2020 allocation for Title III and Title IV MSI Programs authorized for appropriations in Section 399 and 528 (Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities, Section 316; Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions, Section 317; Predominantly Black Institutions, Section 318; Native American-Serving, Nontribal Institutions, Section 319; Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions, Section 320; Strengthening Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Title III Part B Section 323; and Hispanic-Serving Institutions Title V-Part A).

⁹ For more on innovation in teacher prep, see:

Breaking the Cycle of Mediocrity, C. Barone & N. Munyan-Penney, Education Reform Now, March 2020, accessible at: <http://edreformnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Breaking-the-Cycle-of-Mediocrity.pdf> and,

A Deep Dive into Alternative Teacher Prep, C. Barone and H. Cope, Education Reform Now, September 2019, accessible at: <https://edreformnow.org/policy-briefs/deep-dive-alternative-teacher-prep/>

¹⁰ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/468/cosponsors>

¹¹ See “New Colleges of Education: A Path for Going from Concept to Reality.” D. Bergeron and M. Dannenberg, Education Reform Now, September 2017, accessible at: <https://edreformnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/ERN-New-Teacher-Prep-Final.pdf>

PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE AND PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

→ **On Day One**, the Biden-Harris administration must make clear that the Trump/DeVos agenda on school choice and charter schools is very different than what we, as Democrats, support. Betsy DeVos is a proponent of private school vouchers and for-profit charter schools that have been complicit in profiteering, with no accountability or oversight. As a first step, the Biden-Harris administration must end federal funding for for-profit charter schools.

We, as Democrats, support public school choice, with accountability, including: non-profit, public charter schools; magnet schools; and, career academies. Democratic leaders no matter what their opinion on these matters, should not denigrate or threaten these public school choice options for the millions of parents — especially parents of color and those with lower incomes — who choose them for their children. We urge the Biden-Harris administration to maintain support for public school choice through the federal Charter Schools Program, which provides funding for the replication and expansion of high quality public charter schools.

In July, we joined a [broad coalition](#) of civil rights and advocacy organizations in stating that:

“Access to high-quality choices among different pre-K-12 public education providers is needed now more than ever as evidenced by the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the way schools deliver learning to students. Congress and the next Administration should promote high-quality public education options so that all students can attend a school that meets their academic and social-emotional needs. These public options include magnet schools, charter schools, career academies, language immersion schools, traditional district-run schools, and dual enrollment programs.”

The public charter school model — autonomy and accountability — provides the conditions for success but does not guarantee it. Both facets — autonomy and accountability — need to be preserved in order to maximize its potential. The administration should preserve and protect public charter school autonomy, as well as enforce, and where necessary strengthen, accountability for results. Pushing public charter schools into traditional governance structures will hinder and likely cripple their ability to provide high-quality instruction, especially in the states and districts where public

charter schools are outperforming their traditional public-school counterparts.

Some observers have pointed out that nationally, on average, the results for charters are quite modest. That is because the real story is that some states do better than others and some demographic groups — including **Black students, students in poverty, and English language learners** — are particularly well-served by charters.

Stanford's Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) studies are the gold standard for judging the performance of students enrolled in public charter schools vs. their peers in traditional public schools. CREDO compares demographically matched sets of students enrolled in public charter schools with their peers who are enrolled in traditional schools and CREDO matches students in public charter schools to students in traditional schools according to: gender, race/ethnicity, level of English proficiency, family income, and baseline test scores.

CREDO has found that:¹²

- Even averaged nationally, disadvantaged students, Black students, students in poverty, and English language learners enrolled in public charter schools progress further in reading and math than their peers in traditional public schools.
- In nine states — Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island and Tennessee — plus the District of Columbia — public charter students did significantly *better* than their matched peers in traditional public schools in *both* reading and math.
- In urban charter schools, students gained, on average, 40 additional days of learning in math and 28 additional days in reading compared to their district school peers.
- Across all urban regions, Black students in poverty receive the equivalent of 59 days of additional learning in math and 44 days of additional learning in reading compared to their peers in traditional public schools.
- Across all urban regions, Hispanic students in poverty experience the equivalent of 48 days of additional learning in math and 25 days of additional learning in reading in charter schools relative to their peers in traditional public schools.
- Public charter school students in the San Francisco Bay Area, Boston, Washington D.C., Memphis, New Orleans, New York City, and Newark had

¹² See "Urban Charter Schools Study." Center for Research on Education Outcomes, March 2015, accessible at: <http://urbancharters.stanford.edu/download/Urban%20Study%2041%20Region%20Workbook.pdf>

the equivalent of more than 80 additional days of learning in math compared to students in traditional public schools.

- In terms of reading, charter students in San Francisco Bay Area, Boston, Memphis, Nashville, and Newark received the equivalent of more than 80 additional days of learning.
- Boston and Newark charter students had especially large learning gains compared with their traditional public school peers, with the equivalent of over 150 additional days of learning in reading and math.

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CONTACT INFORMATION

For additional information or to discuss any of the above policy recommendations, please contact Charles Barone at charlesbarone@dfer.org.