Building A Shared Vision for 21st Century Public Education in St. Louis

Strategic Overview – January 2021

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Looking across the nation, cities that started in a similar position to St. Louis have seen 5–6X more progress in the last decade

Newark and Washington, DC are typical of two different theories of systemic change that have both catalyzed significant improvement. Each strives to increase equity and access in a choice context and requires meaningful accountability for persistent failure at both the school and district level.

Reading Growth of 8th grade students, 2009-2016
By number of years below grade-level expectations
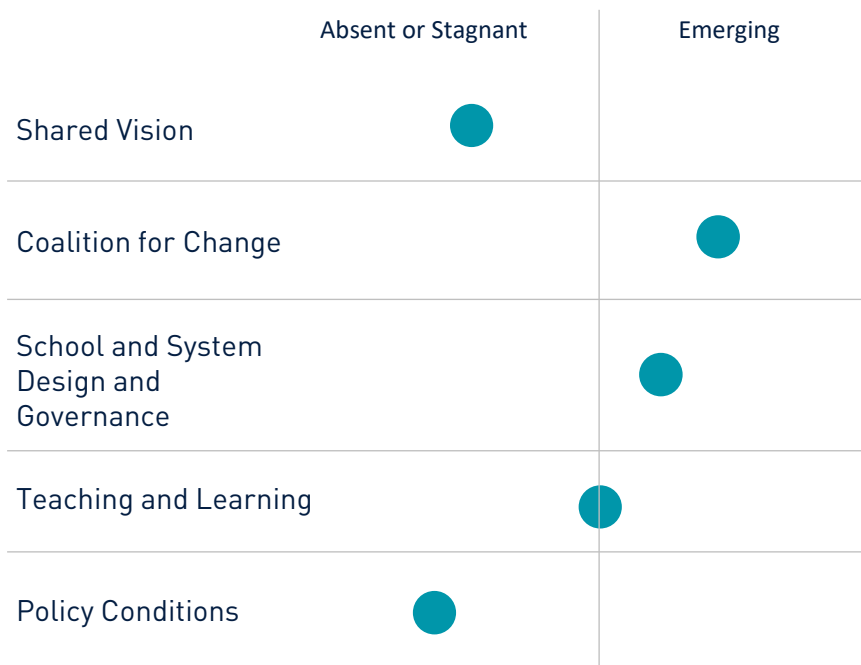
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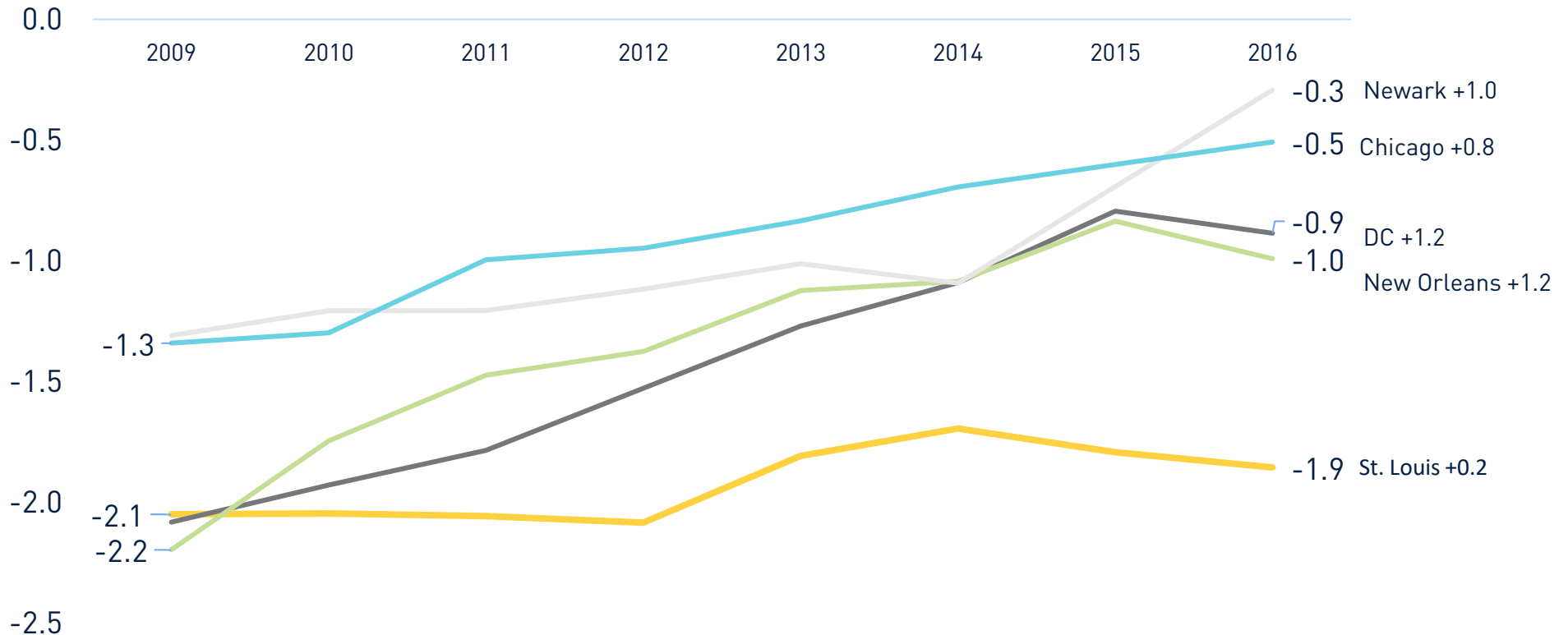
Both theories of systemic change among fast-improving systems embrace choice, educator autonomy, accountability, and transparency to families

The "competition" theory focuses driving improvement through two separate public systems – charter and district. The "portfolio" theory emphasizes an integrated choice system that learns and improves collectively. The "portfolio" theory is championed by the Center for Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington.

St. Louis/Missouri is stagnant or emerging in key areas of building a 21st century school system.

Faster-improving systems largely sit in the growing category.

No system is 'transforming' on all elements.

	Absent or Stagnant	Emerging	Growing	Inflecting	Transforming
Shared Vision	●				
Coalition for Change		●			
School and System Design and Governance		●			
Teaching and Learning	●				
Policy Conditions	●				

Competing Approach

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

NYC Department of Education

Chicago Public Schools

Portfolio Approach

Newark Public Schools

myIPS

DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS — Discover a World of Opportunity™

NOLA PUBLIC SCHOOLS — NOLA — EVERY CHILD. EVERY SCHOOL. EVERY DAY.
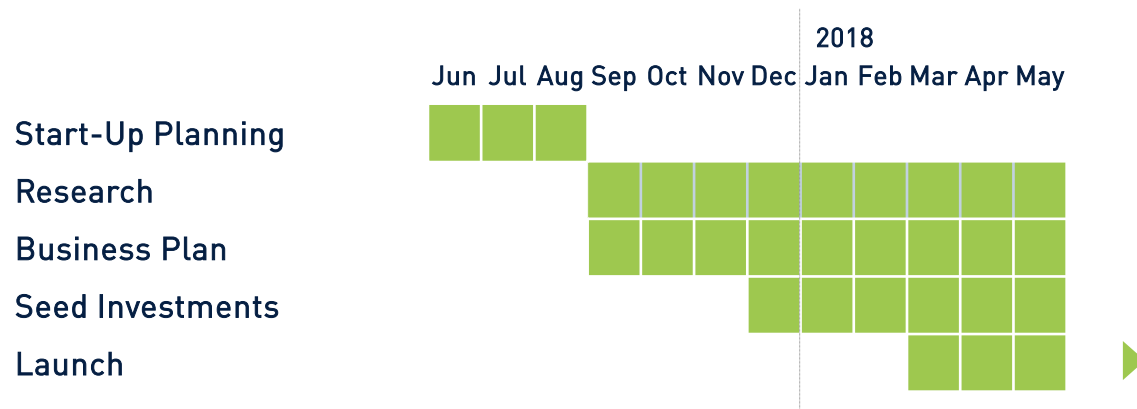
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THE OPPORTUNITY TRUST

The Opportunity Trust was conceived to help steward research-based systemic change in the St. Louis region

A combination of leading national and local philanthropic and civic organizations supported the year-long process to develop the plan for the organization.

In our planning year, we:

- Learned from fast-improving regions, notably Indianapolis, Denver, Newark, DC, and Chicago;
- Engaged parents; community organizers; advocates; and business, civic, district and school leaders to understand barriers, opportunities, and to enlist support;
- Developed a business plan; and
- Piloted mini-grants to test and develop ideas in the St. Louis region.

Initial funders included:

Civic Progress

RBC REGIONAL BUSINESS COUNCIL

William T. Kemper Foundation

ST. LOUIS COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

newschools venture fund

The WALTON FAMILY FOUNDATION

SILICON VALLEY community foundation®

ljaf laura and john arnold foundation™

The Trust **launched in July 2018** with an initial commitment of $30M from local and national funders

2018

Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec Jan Feb Mar Apr May

Start-Up Planning

Research

Business Plan

Seed Investments

Launch

For St. Louis.
From St. Louis

The Opportunity Trust is the result of nearly a year studying what is working in our nation's most dynamic regions and by engaging with parents and teachers, as well as leaders in schools, communities, and businesses on how we can help to accelerate the pace of change in St. Louis.

We envision a St. Louis where every single person is able to find success in a rapidly changing world and a region that draws people from all backgrounds because of its renewed sense of possibility, growing economic opportunity, and safe, just, and joyful communities.

The Opportunity Trust is led by St. Louis natives Eric Scroggins and Marcus Robinson.

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Connect with us connect@theopportunitytrust.org

Pictured: www.theopportunitytrust.org

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The Opportunity Trust invests in four research-based levers to grow the number of children who have access to a world-class public school and to help our public education systems continuously improve and innovate

Together, these levers will enable us to increase the percentage of children attending world-class schools in St. Louis City from 10% to over 40% over ten years and ensure another 3,000 students are enrolled in world-class schools in targeted districts of St. Louis County.

Our Strategy

Launch, scale and transform **schools** across the region

Advocate for **policy** that encourages continuous improvement

World Class Schools

Strategically develop and support the **talent** necessary for change

Empower parents and **families** to navigate the system and learn from what's working

Our Strategic Priorities

SP 1 Invest in growing the capacity of our most successful schools, launching new and innovative schools, strengthening existing schools with strong leadership, and helping districts transform approaches.

SP 2 Increase the size and diversity of teacher and school leadership pipelines and ensure educators are connected to best-in-class professional development.

SP 3 Elevate the voices of those most underserved by our systems, empower families and students to design and drive change, and help the system as a whole learn from what's working.

SP 4 Support research-based policymaking at the local and state level that encourages innovation, maintains high standards for all students, and fair accountability.

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We have distilled these insights into a set of initiatives with 5-year goals and intermediate benchmarks requiring $38M in philanthropic capital

Priority	Initiatives	Intermediate Outcomes	5-Year Investment
1 SP1. World-class Schools	• SP1a: School Innovation • SP1b: High-Performing School Expansion • SP1c: Existing School Improvements • SP1d: District Transformation	• Identify and incubate 10 entrepreneurs who launch 8 new, innovative schools • Fund planning and expansion of top 3 performing schools Recruit best-in-class capacity building supports to improve 10 high potential schools • Support district level transformation in districts with strong, innovative leadership	$17.7M
2 SP2. Diverse and Effective Educators	• SP2a: Establish New Teacher Pipelines • SP2b: Scale Up Existing Pipelines • SP2c: Professional Development	• 200 St. Louis Teacher Residency teachers • 100 new Teach For America teachers • Partnership with SLU and Harris Stowe to reimagine teacher preparation and education leadership programs • Best-in-class national teacher development supports and local anti-racist education capacity building	$4.0M
3 SP3. Empower Family and Community Voice	• SP3a: Community Engagement • SP3b: Parent Leadership • SP3c: School Finder Tool	• Data warehouse and research reports • Community capacity building to elevate parent and student voice • Update school finder online • Support schools in collecting, analyzing, and sharing more wholistic measures of student success	$13.0M
4 SP4. Policy	• SP4a: Policy Conditions • SP4b: Research Initiatives	• Stronger charter accountability and research-based interventions for persistently failing district schools	$1.1M
Building an Effective Organization	• Fundraising • Team • Board • Operating Systems	• Raise $38M to capitalize the fund • Build a staff of 6-8 FTEs • Recruit 7 governing board members • Launch diverse community advisory board	$3.0M

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*Note: "Seeded" school seats have active investments within the five year fund but will not be realized until FY26.

In addition to financial resources, we are directly building the capacity of our grantees, connecting them to best-in-class resources, and playing a coordinator and accountability role in the ecosystem

Capacity Building	• Design, launch, and lead fellowships to directly build the capacity of diverse local educators to lead classroom, school, and system transformation • Incubate new efforts and initiatives where gaps might exist in the overall education ecosystem
Coaching	• Problem-solving with senior leadership of schools, districts, elected boards, and related nonprofits throughout strategic plan creation and implementation • Targeted observation and feedback through quarterly reviews with partners to help identify strengths and weaknesses and additional resource needs
Connecting	• Ensuring district and school leaders are connected with program officers at national foundations, resulting in significant additional funding • Recruiting and facilitating cross-sector (district/charter) collaborations with nationally-renowned capacity building organizations
Coordinating	• Sharing insights across districts and schools and investing in spaces for community convening and learning • Working with local philanthropists and civic organizations to ensure aligned strategies and mitigate duplication
Accountability	• Building data fluency of philanthropists, district and charter school board members • Aligning investments to student outcomes • Highlight successes, best practice, and persistent failure

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Our school start-up and district transformation strategy is anchored in empirical research

A growing body of school effectiveness research over the past decade has made clear that **there are significant differences in school quality**, both within and across districts, and that **school quality can be improved and replicated**. The key is to institutionalize this research in policy and practice across both districts and charters.

Starting and Replicating High Performing Schools

High quality **models can be replicated to improve quality across the system** and doing so **can have positive effects on traditional schools**, as well.

"Replication charter schools generate large achievement gains on par with those produced by their parent campuses" – MIT School Effectiveness & Inequality Initiative

Source:
"Can Successful Schools Replicate? Scaling Up Boston's Charter School Sector" by Sarah Cohodes, Elizabeth Setren, and Christopher Walters, SEII Discussion Paper #2016.06, March 2018.

"Greater charter attendance increases per-pupil expenditures in traditional public schools and induces them to shift expenditure from support services to instruction and salaries. At the same time, charter expansion has a small positive effect on non-charter students' achievement." – MIT School Effectiveness & Inequality Initiative

Source: "Fiscal and Education Spillovers from Charter School Expansion" by Matt Ridley and Camille Terrier, SEII Discussion Paper #2018.02, July 2018.

Improving Schools with Promise

While school improvement is hard, **whole-scale school improvement is possible, particularly when talent is in-focus**.

"Two studies from California show that schools improved both by differentially retaining their most effective teachers and by providing teachers with increased supports for instructional improvement such as opportunities to visit each other's classrooms and to receive meaningful feedback on their teaching practice from school leaders." – Brookings Institution

Source: Loeb, S. (2017). Continued Support for Improving the Lowest-Performing Schools (Evidence Speaks, 2, 8). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

Closing Low Performing Schools

System-wide improvement can also be achieved by **moving students from low-performing to higher-performing schools**.

"Aided by the closure of low value-added schools, much of the improvement was due to shifting enrollment from lower- to higher-growth district and charter schools. Shifting enrollment accounted for 62 percent of the improvement in English. In math, such shifts offset what would have been a decline in achievement growth." – Harvard Center for Education Policy Research

Source: Chin, M., Kane, T., Kozakowski, W., Schueler, B., & Staiger, D. (Working Paper). School District Reform in Newark: Within- and Between- School Changes in Achievement Growth. NBER Working Paper 23922

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And we are building a more robust data, learning, and advocacy infrastructure required to support continuous improvement in St. Louis

This ecosystem exists in all regions with sustained improvement and innovation.

Mechanism to find and compare schools
Enable families to search for and filter schools based on criteria and preferences that matter to them, such as location, performance, accessibility, climate and culture and more

Better, holistic measures of school effectiveness
Clarify and enrich state accountability data with a common school performance framework that includes a range of indicators, enabling "apples to apples" comparisons of schools

Families
Choosing the best school for their child's needs

Organized, informed constituency of parents
Capacity building effort that identifies and trains parent leaders who can be a resource in their community

Research and learning
Sponsor more and better research on comparative school effectiveness and families' educational needs and preferences and opportunities for schools to collaborate

Policymakers
Creating evidence-based education policy

Schools
Learning and sharing what's working

Common application timeline and process
Aligns the processes and timelines for families to more easily navigate schools' specialized programs, admissions requirements, admissions preferences and application deadlines

Unified enrollment
Leverages a single application and student assignment process to match as many students as possible to their preferred schools

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Overview of Investments

SP1: Grow our most successful and promising schools, launch new and innovative schools, and help our districts to continuously improve and innovate

Investing in St. Louis Schools and Districts

- Since 2019, we have invested $8,304,485 directly into schools and districts in St. Louis City and County. 71% of the leaders we've invested in to launch new and innovative schools identify as Black. 33% of the leaders we've invested in to grow and improve existing charter schools identify as Black. 100% of the leaders we've invested in to reimagine learning in traditional school districts identify as Black.

- Building off of more than 20 years of school and system improvement, major investments require a set of conditions for autonomy and flexibility at the school level that currently do not exist in most traditional systems in St. Louis.

- Due to growing awareness and openness, and strong leadership, we have significantly increased our investment in district partnerships, which make up 25% of our total LEA investments for the 2020-2021 school year.

- We hope to support additional traditional public school districts in creating strong conditions for improvement in future years.

Distribution of Investments in LEAs ($M)

Legend:
- Charter Schools
- Districts

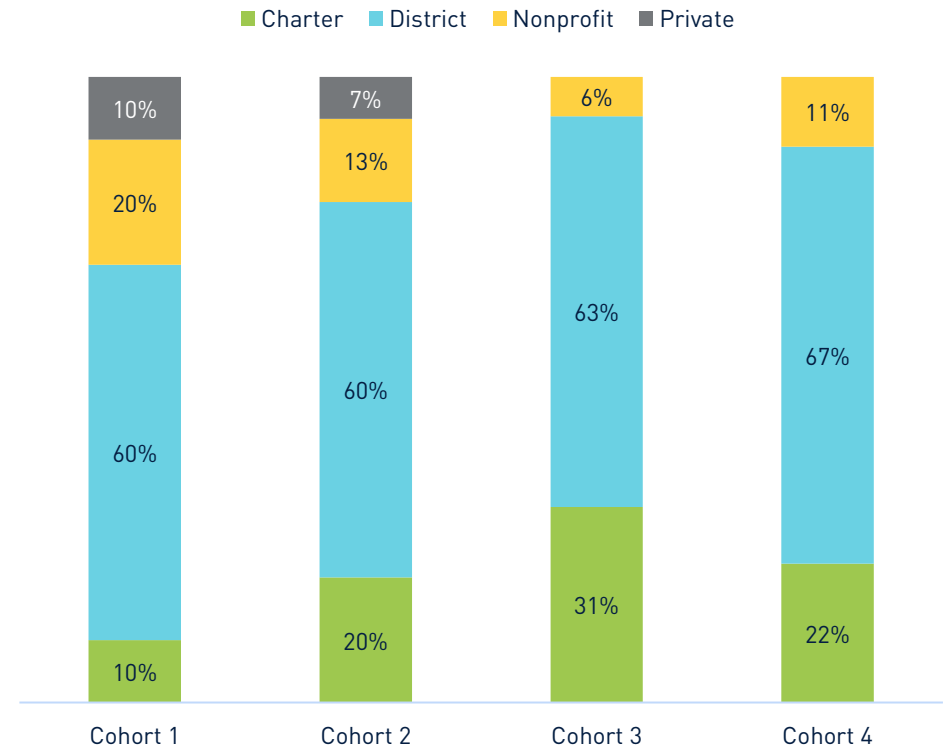|	FY19	FY20	FY21
Districts	$0.3	$0.4	$0.7
Charter Schools	$1.9	$2.7	$2.7

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SP2 : Increase the number, diversity, and effectiveness of educators serving our most vulnerable children

Investing in Teachers and School Leaders

- Since 2019, we have supported the recruitment, training, and support of more than 200 teachers and school leaders, connecting St. Louis educators to leading national professional development.

- More than 50% of these teacher leaders identify as people of color, increasing the overall diversity and capacity of the educator force in St. Louis.

- The teachers recruited and trained through our grantees work in both traditional district and charter schools:
    - Districts - St. Louis Public Schools, Riverview Gardens, and Normandy
    - Charters - KIPP, SLLIS, EAGLE, Hawthorn, Lafayette Prep Academy, North Side Community School, and City Garden Montessori

- Some other investments include funding for Black Male Educators of St. Louis, Education Equity Center of St. Louis, St. Louis Black Authors of Children's Literature.

Catalyst Program Demographics

Legend: ■ Charter ■ District ■ Nonprofit ■ Private

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4
Private	10%	7%		
Nonprofit	20%	13%	6%	11%
District	60%	60%	63%	67%
Charter	10%	20%	31%	22%

- District teachers and leaders consistently seek out our fellowships and have made up more than 60% of fellows each year.

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SP3: Elevate the voices of those most underserved by our systems, empower families and students to design and drive change, and help the system as a whole learn from what's working

Investing in Parent and Community Resources

- Since our launch, we have invested $4,850,401 in efforts to empower parents and community to drive change.

- Our support of community resources is our second largest investments after schools and districts.

- 100% of our SP3 grantees are led by women of color, including Navigate STL Schools, The Ed Equity Center, WePower, and Bridge 2 Hope.

- Each of these investments, like our school transformation work, is rooted in community-centered design that prioritizes the needs and experiences of those most impacted by educational inequity. For example, Navigate STL Schools was designed through a year-long iterative process with feedback from over 200 families living in our highest poverty neighborhoods, stewarded by a diverse stakeholder group.

Distribution of Investments ($M)

Legend:
- World Class Schools
- Family and Community Voice
- Diverse and Effective Educators
- Policy

FY19
- Policy: $0.1
- Family and Community Voice: $2.3
- Diverse and Effective Educators: $0.5
- World Class Schools: $2.2

FY20
- Policy: $0.4
- Family and Community Voice: $1.5
- Diverse and Effective Educators: $0.6
- World Class Schools: $3.1

FY21
- Policy: $0.4
- Family and Community Voice: $1.1
- Diverse and Effective Educators: $0.9
- World Class Schools: $3.4

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We organize our budget by our research-based priorities for improvement, but these initiatives cut across schools and systems and are helping to build community infrastructure for learning and equity

Distribution of Investments by Priority since 2019 ($M)

- World Class Schools — $8.7
- Diverse and Effective Educators — $2.1
- Family and Community Voice — $4.9
- Policy — $0.9
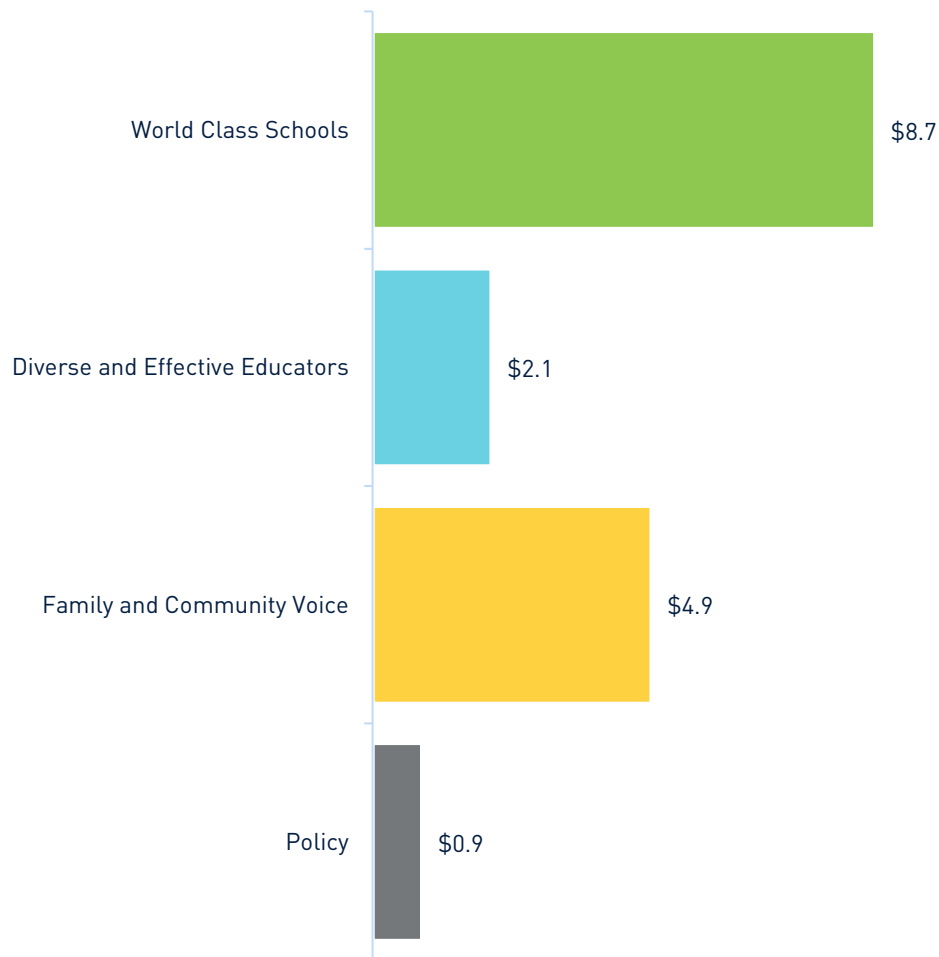
Cross-cutting Initiative Examples

- The majority of the $860,000 we have invested in our fourth priority area, Research, Learning, and Policy, is focused on our Better Measures initiative. This initiative to support schools and districts in measuring and improving Social-Emotional Development and school climate has reached over 20,000 children across 14 systems and influenced numerous other systems that we do not invest in directly (e.g. Clayton School District).

- Our investments in data, such as our support for the State of Education work done by Forward Through Ferguson, have been utilized by parents, educators, and community members across the region.

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