



NEW HAVEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

When Adults Work Together, Children Succeed



Across the country, school districts and teachers unions are battling over teaching and learning reforms to boost student achievement and turn around low-performing schools. These conflicts often stymie reform efforts and end up hurting students. But something very different is happening in New Haven, Connecticut.

In 2009, New Haven Public Schools (NHPS) collaborated with the New Haven Federation of Teachers (NHFT) to ratify a new contract. They also co-created a new educator support and evaluation system that incorporated student growth measures and raised teacher salaries—all without much of the acrimony and rancor seen in other districts. Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, [proclaimed](#), “New Haven is a gold standard in terms of how you do things right,” and former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan [lauded](#) the contract for providing new teacher induction, mentoring programs and other supports.

“Engagement is a core part of NHPS’ theory of action,” says Superintendent Garth Harries, who was appointed to the position in 2013 after serving as a deputy superintendent in NHPS for four years. The district has invited unions, educators, external partners, higher education and even students to roll-up their sleeves and get involved in the nitty-gritty and often messy work of improving the city’s public schools. Collaboration isn’t always easy, and many of NHPS’ schools continue to struggle, but students are succeeding across a variety of metrics: Between 2008 and 2013, reading and math proficiency rates on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) rose steadily in most grades; the high school graduation rate increased from 58.1 percent in 2009 to 75.5 percent in 2014; and the college persistence rate exceeds the national average by 9 percentage points. New Haven is showing the rest of the country that when adults work together to address the challenges in our public schools, children can reap the benefits.

Engaging the teachers union

Engagement wasn’t always a strength of NHPS. David Cicarella, president of NHFT, recalls, “The relationship between the district and union used to be really contentious. There was a lot of finger-pointing.” The financial crisis that began in 2008 and Connecticut’s persistent achievement gaps—[some of the largest in the country](#)—created a sense of urgency for reform during contract negotiations. “We started negotiations with a shared belief that we should have the best teachers in front of kids,” explains Michael Crocco, the talent director at NHPS.

NHPS and NHFT agreed on a contract in 2009 that called for a new evaluation and support system that incorporated measures of student learning and increased teacher salaries. The contract ensured teachers would have [input on the design and](#)

New Haven Public Schools

Urban District
2014–15

48 SCHOOLS
32 elementary and middle **10** high
5 transitional **1** adult & continuing education center

1,880 TEACHERS **49 PRINCIPALS**

21,500 STUDENTS

12% special education
15% English language learners
59% free or reduced-price lunch

- ▲ District was awarded \$53.4 million Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant from U.S. Department of Education.
- ▲ 28 of NHPS’ 48 schools are magnet schools; 18 magnet schools are open to residents in surrounding suburbs.
- ▲ Eight public charter schools operate in the city.

Source: *New Haven Public Schools*

DISTRICT PROFILE

[implementation of the new evaluation](#). Over the following year, a committee of teachers, principals, union leaders and central office staff came together to develop what would become [TEVAL](#)—the new evaluation and support system for NHPS teachers.

Collaboration is evident in some of TEVAL’s key features. NHFT opposed using “value-added” measures—like those used in Washington, DC, and Tennessee—to evaluate teachers. Instead, NHPS teachers consult with their “instructional manager”—generally a principal or assistant principal but sometimes a teacher leader—to set learning goals for their students at the beginning of the school year. Teachers and instructional managers meet in the middle of the year to discuss students’ progress and adjust learning goals if needed. At the end of the year, teachers and instructional

managers meet one last time to review student data and discuss evaluation ratings. During these checkpoints, teachers also receive feedback on the other components of TEVAL: [instructional practice](#), assessed during classroom observations, and [professional values](#).

These regular checkpoints are part of what makes TEVAL work. “The most important part of TEVAL is the conversation that takes place between a teacher and principal,” says Crocco. “The central theme of these conversations is that we are all continuously learning, and we set the expectation that all classroom visits result in feedback.” Principals complete calibration training to ensure that they are evaluating their teachers accurately and providing high-quality feedback.

“At our school, TEVAL is collaborative in nature, which is shifting our school culture and helping us see success in more places.”

Florence R. Constantinople, Teacher, Brennan-Rogers Magnet School, New Haven Public Schools

NHPS and NHFT also collaborate when exiting ineffective teachers from the school system. Low-performing teachers rated Needs Improvement are flagged by instructional managers and observed by third-party “[validators](#),” superintendents or administrators from nearby school districts who have strong resumes in teacher evaluation. If validators agree with the instructional manager’s assessment of a teacher’s performance, then NHPS may terminate the teacher.

In the 2012–13 school year, TEVAL’s third year, [a new consequence kicked in](#): Teachers who were rated as Developing (a two on a five-point scale) also faced termination if they failed to improve to Effective (level three) within three years.

Since TEVAL was launched, [between 1 and 2 percent](#) of NHPS’ teachers—tenured and non-tenured alike—have been exited from the system for performance-related issues each year; many of these teachers chose to voluntarily resign rather than challenge their evaluation ratings.

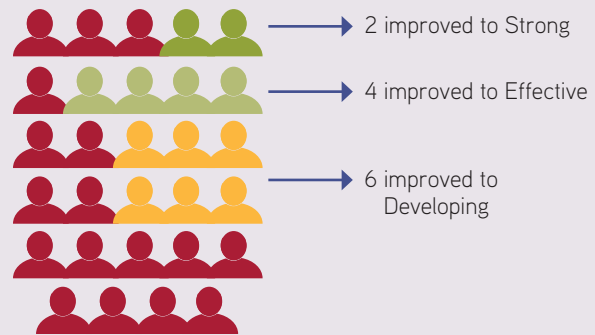
Focusing on professional growth

For most teachers, TEVAL is a tool for professional growth. NHPS found that [most low-performing teachers who remain at NHPS improve their performance within two years](#). For example, 86 percent of those teachers rated Needs Improvement in 2011–12 raised their performance to Developing or higher the following year, and 91 percent were rated as Effective or higher in 2013–14. “There’s no question in my mind that TEVAL is improving practice,” says Cicarella, which he attributes to the training evaluators receive and more meaningful professional learning for teachers.

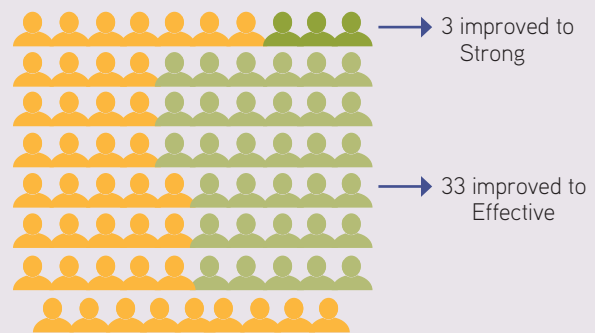
NHPS and NHFT renegotiated the teacher contract in 2013 and redoubled their efforts to improve educator effectiveness. The 2013 contract creates opportunities for teacher leaders to earn more compensation in exchange for taking on [additional responsibilities](#) or [expanding their influence over students](#), by mentoring new

TEVAL helps NHPS teachers improve

Of the 29 teachers rated Needs Improvement in 2011–12, after one year...



Of the 79 teachers rated Developing in 2011–12, after one year...



Source: *New Haven Public Schools*

teachers, writing new curricula aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), leading professional learning sessions or tutoring struggling students. NHPS received a [\\$53 million Teacher Incentive Fund \(TIF\) grant](#) from the U.S. Department of Education to support its teacher leadership work.

“There’s no question in my mind that TEVAL is improving practice.”

David Cicarella, President, New Haven Federation of Teachers

The contract also adds 30 minutes to each school day for teachers to collaborate, share best practices and learn from each other. School administrators and teachers can aggregate that time however they’d like, depending on their professional development needs. According to Justin Boucher, who works in NHPS’ talent office, the district has a three-prong plan to coordinate professional learning and make it more valuable: (1) Encourage small-scale pilots that show different approaches to professional learning; (2) categorize professional development based on the TEVAL skills and content it addresses; and (3) track the effectiveness of professional learning and direct resources toward opportunities that have the greatest impact on teaching and learning.

Engaging teachers on new standards

Connecticut adopted the new CCSS in 2009, and according to Imma Canelli, deputy superintendent, NHPS whole-heartedly embraced and implemented the standards. NHPS consulted national experts, including Student Achievement Partners, while crafting its CCSS implementation strategy.

NHPS brought together teams of teachers in each grade and subject area to review the standards and write new curriculum aligned to the Common Core along with rigorous new performance tasks and rubrics. Grade-level curricula were broken down into units that address multiple standards and include core texts and “power strategies” for instruction. The district also revised formative assessments in math and English language arts and mapped each question to the new standards.

To build the capacity of teachers to create standards-aligned lessons, NHPS provided systemwide professional development led by Canelli and central office staff. Teacher facilitators and instructional coaches also led grade- and content-specific professional development in each school building. NHPS currently is developing an online video library showing high-performing teachers delivering rigorous, standards-aligned instruction that incorporates the Common Core instructional shifts.

Canelli believes that NHPS teachers have internalized the standards and changed their instruction. “When we walk through classrooms, we see teachers engaging students in rigorous content and managing student-independent classes.” Instruction may be changing, but according to 2015 Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) data, [NHPS students are struggling](#) to meet the new standards. Only 29.1 percent of New Haven students are on track for college and careers in literacy and 13.5 percent are on track in math, [compared to 55.4 percent in literacy and 39.1 percent in math among students statewide](#). NHPS unveiled a plan to boost future SBAC scores by deploying math and literacy coaches to support teachers, adding new professional development, and integrating literacy and writing across other disciplines.

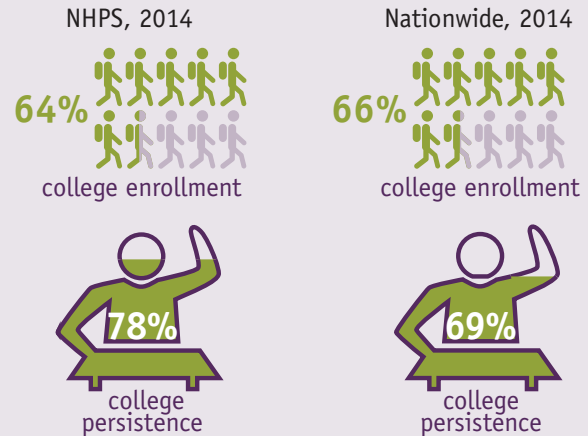
Engaging the community to raise standards

“We heard from local universities that many of our graduates were unprepared for college-level coursework and had to take remedial classes in the first year,” says Suzanne Lyons, who works in NHPS’ Office of College and Career Pathways. In 2013, a [RAND study](#) found that more NHPS students were attending college, but many of them felt unprepared for college-level coursework and struggled with study skills and time management.

With the support of key community partners, NHPS is addressing these challenges and building a college-going culture in its schools. NHPS brought together high school teachers and faculty from local universities to calibrate on student work samples using Common Core-aligned rubrics. NHPS also invited university faculty to district-led Common Core professional development. These strategies helped build a shared understanding among university and high school faculties about the skills students need to be successful in postsecondary education.

NHPS collaborated with Yale University to create [New Haven Promise](#), a program that provides scholarships and other supports to NHPS students planning to attend college. The [RAND study](#) found that the percentage of graduating students eligible for Promise scholarships has increased since 2010, along with college enrollment for all NHPS students—even those not eligible for Promise scholarships. In 2014, the number of NHPS graduates who enrolled in college rose to 64 percent, and the number of students who enrolled in college for a second year (the college persistence rate) increased to 78.5 percent—well above the [national average](#) of 68.7 percent.

College enrollment and persistence rates in NHPS are up



Sources: [New Haven Public Schools](#), [national enrollment data](#), [national persistence data](#)

“At first, many of our community partners resisted the idea of being accountable for improving student outcomes. Likewise, the district was hesitant to take on a larger role in student success outside the classroom. But now, the district and community partners understand that they share responsibility for students’ academic and life success—and we are working hand-in-hand to achieve both.”

Laoise King, Vice President of Education Initiatives,
United Way of Greater New Haven

NHPS also partners with the United Way of Greater New Haven and the city of New Haven to provide wraparound services to families and students. This program, [Boost!](#), serves 7,234 students in 16 schools by connecting nonprofit organizations in the city with schools and students that need the services they provide. Schools share student data with these organizations to assess the effectiveness of their interventions, a practice that has created a “share[d] responsibility for students’ academic success,” according to Laoise King, the vice president of education initiatives at the United Way of Greater New Haven, the organization that developed Boost! before handing it off to the district.

Engaging Students

Superintendent Harries has made stakeholder engagement a core part of his reform agenda, and that includes engaging NHPS' most important customers: students. Harries began reaching out to students to collect their input on School Change, NHPS' strategic plan. He established a High School and Middle School Cabinet to ensure that students' voices were heard throughout the implementation of School Change. In 2013, New Haven voters supported a measure that created two student positions on the Board of Education. NHPS continues to seek new ways to engage students in district reforms and is considering incorporating student voice into TEVAL.

Results

NHPS is pursuing a reform agenda that meets the many needs of its student population. The district is seeing gains in student achievement and several key metrics:

- High school graduation rates increased from 58.1 percent in 2009 to 75.5 percent in 2014.
- College enrollment jumped 8 points from 2014 to 2015.
- College persistence, defined as the percentage of students who return to college for a second year, is 78.5 percent, compared to 68.7 percent nationwide.
- The percentage of 8th graders scoring proficient or above on the CMT increased in math from 62.1 percent in 2008 to 72 percent in 2013 and in reading from 51.2 percent in 2008 to 72.8 percent in 2013. Proficiency rates in grades 5–7 also increased.
- NHPS enrollment has increased by 9 percent over the past five years, while statewide public school enrollment decreased over the same time period.

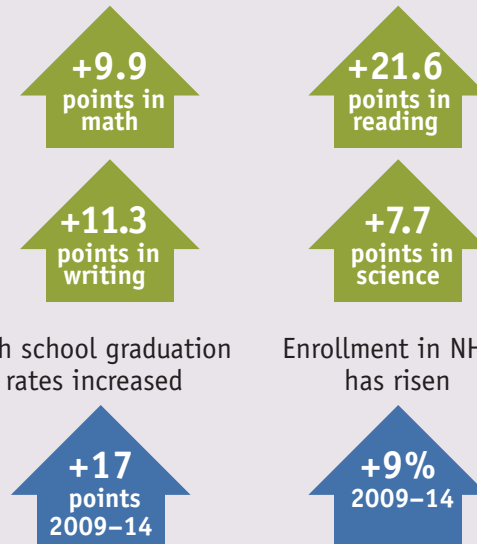
Conclusion

NHPS has experienced success in implementing a reform agenda and raising student scores on statewide assessments, but its performance still trails statewide averages. NHPS has had **only modest success** in narrowing achievement gaps between white students and their African American and Latino peers. Between 2008 and 2013, 8th grade achievement gaps on the CMT decreased slightly in reading and writing but actually increased in math and science.

NHPS also is addressing equity concerns, stemming in large part from a lack of transparency in the way schools are funded. Education Resource Strategies **found** that NHPS' magnet schools receive more funding per pupil than neighborhood schools, and high schools are funded at higher levels than K–8 schools. The district has created a **school funding committee** to add transparency to the school funding process and address resource equity gaps.

Key student achievement indicators are up

8th grade proficiency rates on the Connecticut Mastery Test increased from 2008 to 2013 by:



Sources: Connecticut State Department of Education, New Haven Public Schools

Lately, the stresses of reforms have strained the relationship between NHPS and NHFT—last year, the union strongly opposed a proposal to allow Achievement First to open a new charter school in New Haven. In just about any other district, this might be a bad omen for the future. But in New Haven there's still reason for optimism. "This is challenging work. [NHPS] is committed to coming to the table," says Crocco. Union president Cicarella agrees: "We shared a commitment to doing this the right way. We aren't going to walk away just because the work gets hard."

