

## The School District of Philadelphia (SDP) Year 2 Report On Three New High Schools

This brief summarizes selected findings from a study conducted by the Office of Research & Evaluation (ORE), which examined student outcomes for students enrolled in the three New Schools after two years of operation. All three schools opened in September 2014. The full report is available upon request.

### Why this Study

The mission and vision of all three New Schools are informed by evidence-based design principles for high performing high schools that support rigor and mastery of standards, youth development, personalization, and community-connected school environments. The goal of opening these schools in Philadelphia was to design new high schools that would engage and support the city’s most underserved students. This study is designed to identify if and to what degree the New Schools are making progress towards meeting this goal.

### What We Studied

This study examined New School student outcomes after their second year of operation. Three primary research questions were the focus of this evaluation:

- Across and within the first two years, what enrollment and/or retention patterns emerge (including student characteristics)?
- How do the New School student outcomes (attendance, suspensions, course marks, and standardized test scores) compare to the student outcomes of similar students in other District high schools?
- Based on student feedback from the District-wide survey, how do students and teachers at the New Schools feel about instruction and school climate? Are there trends in Year 1 versus Year 2?

### Findings

#### Student Enrollment and Retention

- New Schools **enrolled** higher proportions of Black (65%) and Latino (30%) students compared to the District overall (55% Black and 17% Hispanic/Latino).
- Based on a zip-code analysis, 44.1% of New School students are living in areas of Philadelphia where the poverty rates are above 40% (compared to 31.5% in Philadelphia and 14.5% across the United States).
- Across the three New Schools, Building 21 had the highest **retention rate** (75%), followed by the LINC (73%) and the U School (72%).
- During the 2015-2016 SY, the most common **Exit Reason** was “Student Transfer within SDP” (N=40). Of the 32 students with the Exit Reason “Withdrawn to Charter,” 50% (N=16) exited in September or October.

### Three New High Schools

In September 2014, three new high schools of choice opened in SDP. All three schools served only 9<sup>th</sup> grade students the first year and are designed so that each year, an additional grade is added. None of the schools has admissions criteria; while they are open to students citywide, each reserves a certain percentage of seats for students living in the surrounding neighborhoods.

The Carnegie Corporation of New York’s Opportunity by Design Challenge Initiative (OBD) funded two schools (The LINC and U School) and one (Building 21) was funded by Building 21, a non-profit organization.

### New School Student Demographics

*In the 2015-16 SY, New School students were (n=658\*):*

Asian	1%
Black	65%
Hispanic/Latino	30%
Other	2%
White	3%
Female	50%
Male	50%
Special Education	20%
ELL	9%

\*Only students enrolled for at least 30 days.

## Students' Outcomes Compared to a Matched Group

Students who attended New Schools did not perform uniformly better or worse than the comparison group. In Table 1, a green-shaded cell indicates that New School Students performed better, while the red cells indicate worse performance. "Better" or "worse" depends on the nature of the metric. For example, having a higher average daily attendance is positive (green), while having a greater number of suspensions is negative (red).

**Table 1: Statistically Significant Differences between New School Students and Comparison Group Students**

		Building 21	U School	LINC
<b>Attendance</b>	Average Daily Attendance	No	Yes ↓	No
	% with 95% Attendance*	Yes ↓	Yes ↓	Yes ↑
<b>Suspensions</b>	Average OSS Absence Days	No	Yes ↓	No
	Number of Suspensions	Yes ↓	Yes ↓	No
<b>Core Course Marks</b>	Pass Rate	Yes ↓	Yes ↓	No
<b>Average Keystone Scaled Score<sup>^</sup></b>	Literature	No	NA	No
	Biology	No	NA	Yes ↓
	Algebra 1	Yes ↓	NA	Yes ↓

\*Differences are relative to the grand mean

<sup>^</sup>Students at the U School did not take the Keystone exams.

## Student and Teacher Survey Responses about Climate and Instruction

- With one exception (U School Student surveys), District-wide survey response rates for New Schools decreased in 2015-16 as compared to 2014-15.
- Students at the U School responded more positively to questions about school climate in 2015-16 compared to 2014-15. Students at Building 21 responded less positively about school climate during the same time. LINC did not have a large enough student response rate for analysis.
- At all three New Schools, parent/guardian response rates were too low for analysis.
- There were decreases in the percentage of Building 21 and U School students selecting the most positive response to questions aligned with the Instruction construct. The LINC did not have a large enough student response rate for analysis.
- Teacher survey data are consistent with the trends seen in the student data in that there were decreases in both the U School and Building 21 for both of the Instruction sub-constructs.

## Conclusion

After two years, the findings from the three New Schools are mixed when compared to similar students in the District. That said, it's important to keep in mind some key contextual features that make comparisons to other students in the District challenging to interpret. First, the environments of the New Schools were designed to be distinct from other schools across the District. The data presented in this report do not consider school-level factors at comparison schools that may influence students, such as changes in leadership, staff, or policy changes. Second, new schools have only existed for two years and serve a relatively small student body. Finally, moving forward it is critical that the New Schools work to increase their survey response rates, so the data from all schools is representative of a range of perspectives.