Seattle Public Schools Performance Analysis 2009–2010

In November 2010, Seattle Public Schools (SPS) released its school and district performance report cards. In doing so, Seattle joins dozens of other districts and states across the country that are sharing their progress and challenges as part of their efforts toward school improvement.[1] The district's transparency about its performance offers everyone in Seattle—district and school personnel, parents, community activists, and others—the opportunity to see how students in particular schools are doing and how the district is doing overall. And it has the potential to help the district better direct resources to increase learning for all of the city's children.

In this brief, the Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) analyzes the school performance levels, how performance varies across different parts of the city, and how access to high-performing schools varies across different demographic groups of students.

Segmentation Analysis: What is it?

Using the report cards, the district categorized each school in one of five performance levels, a process called "segmentation."[2] In the following graphs, schools are charted on two factors:

1. Absolute achievement: the percentage of students in a school who met district goals in reading and mathematics on state tests, earned credits and graduated on time.
2. Achievement growth: the percentage of students in a school whose achievement improved from one year to the next in regard to the school's annual growth target, which varies from school to school.[3]

These performance measures compare only two years of data and are weighted heavily by test scores, but they are a good place to start when comparing schools.[4]

The SPS table below explains the color-coding and definition of schools by segmentation levels.[5]

Segmentation Level	Overall Absolute Performance	Overall Growth Performance
Level 1	Low	Low-to-Medium
Level 2	Medium-Low	Low-to-Medium
Level 3	Low or Medium-Low	High
Level 3	Medium-High	
Level 4	High with Income Achievement Gap	
Level 5	High with no Income Achievement Gap	

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[1] Seattle Public School's use of growth and achievement to rank and display school performance is similar to accountability measures first developed for school districts in Colorado, which have since been adopted by Arizona, Indiana, and Massachusetts, with more states interested in adopting this accountability model in 2011.

[2] A detailed explanation of the performance rankings can be found here: http://www.seattleschools.org/area/strategicplan/segmentation.pdf.

[3] SPS uses a complex index to create the achievement and growth factors, including points for meeting district-wide strategic planning goals, school growth targets, and matched student scores in reading and math. For a more detailed explanation of the index, contact Seattle Public Schools Department of Education Technology, Research, Evaluation and Assessment, http://www.seattleschools.org/area/siso/index.dxml.

[4] Other measures of school quality might include: student retention, student engagement (tardiness, activities), student attraction to the school, teacher attraction and retention, and school climate surveys.

[5] SPS used two absolute performance measures to define schools in Level 3 (yellow); they also did not indicate growth performance measures for certain levels.

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What do the graphs tell us?

As the school district graphs illustrate, some schools made big improvements but still had lower overall achievement scores (schools in yellow).[6] These will be schools to watch to see if the growth can be sustained and whether it will translate into increased achievement scores over time.
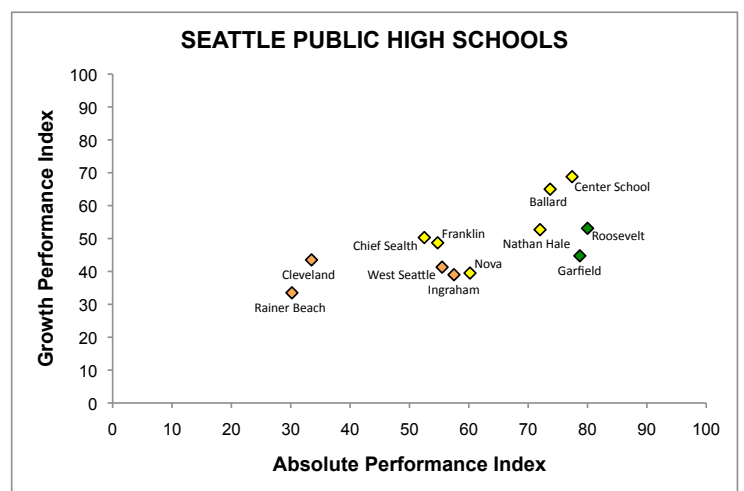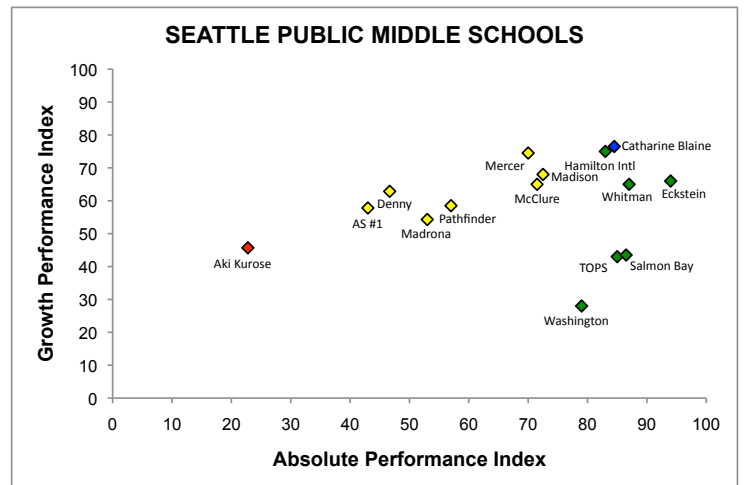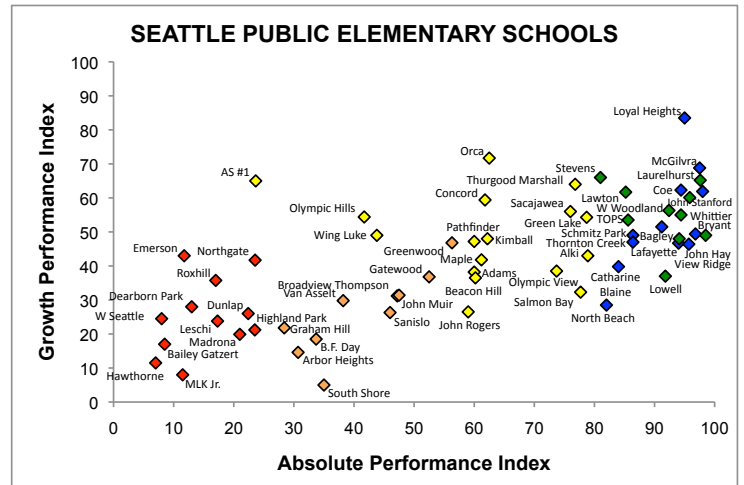
Other schools have high overall test scores but show little growth—for these schools (lower right quadrant, green and blue), students are coming to school well prepared, but the school could be doing more to add value.

Some schools, however, are doing both—high achievement and high growth (upper right quadrant)—and these schools will be important to learn from.

- Green schools (Level 4) exhibit high growth and high achievement; however, they have an income achievement gap.[7]

- Blue schools exhibit high growth and high achievement with no income achievement gap, though eight of the twelve Level 5 schools have fewer than 10% of students who are low income.

And some schools are exhibiting neither growth nor achievement (schools in red).

The district has plans for schools at each level and it will be especially important to watch whether these plans will turn around low-growth/low-achieving schools in a short enough period of time to catch up currently enrolled students with their peers in the higher-growth/higher-achieving schools.[8]

SEATTLE PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

SEATTLE PUBLIC MIDDLE SCHOOLS

SEATTLE PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

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[6] Seattle Public Schools originally created 2 charts: elementary and secondary. For the purposes of this brief, we separated middle schools and high schools to make more visible comparisons. For the two original charts, go to http://www.seattleschools.org/area/strategicplan/segmentation.pdf.
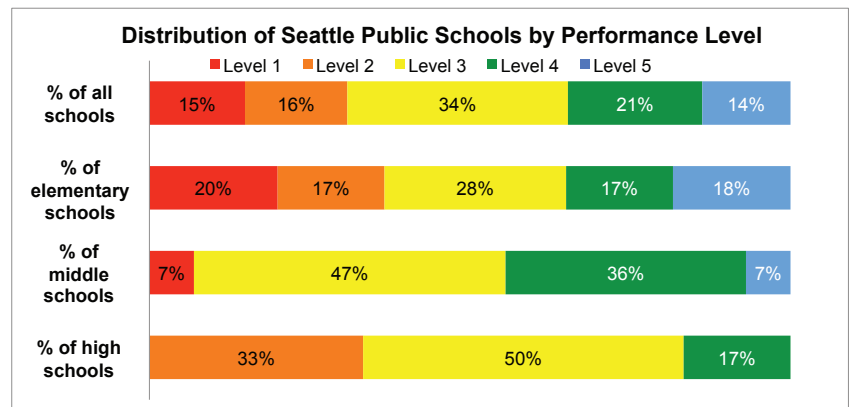
[7] Seattle Public Schools defines the income achievement gap as the difference in achievement between students eligible for the Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Program and students not eligible for the meal program.
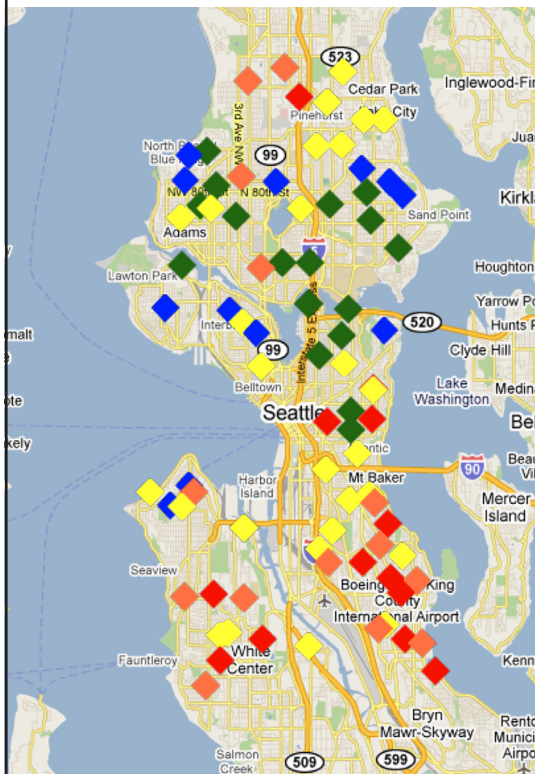
[8] See elements of the improvement plans at http://www.seattleschools.org/area/strategicplan/faqschoolreports.htm#27.

Summary of results: How well are Seattle schools performing?

One in seven Seattle schools is both high growth and high achieving, and none of these is a high school.

Most of the low-growth/low-achievement schools are elementary schools, which is surprising as the higher-grade levels are often acknowledged as more challenging—20% of elementary schools are Level 1, while only one middle school is and no high schools are Level 1. In fact, of the thirteen schools in the lowest level (Level 1), twelve are elementary and one is a middle school. Middle schools in general boast a greater percentage of high growth schools (Level 3, 4, 5) than other grade spans. There are twelve high schools, but none are in the highest level (Level 5), and only two are Level 4.

Distribution of Seattle Public Schools by Performance Level

Legend: ■ Level 1 ■ Level 2 ■ Level 3 ■ Level 4 ■ Level 5

Category	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
% of all schools	15%	16%	34%	21%	14%
% of elementary schools	20%	17%	28%	17%	18%
% of middle schools	7%		47%	36%	7%
% of high schools		33%	50%	17%	

Seattle School Performance by Neighborhood, 2009–2010

An interactive version of this CRPE-generated map can be found at http://bit.ly/h2MYT8.

There are only two Level 5 schools south of I-90 and none in southeast Seattle.

Geographically, school growth and performance are split. Neighborhoods to the north are home to mostly Level 4 and Level 5 schools, while neighborhoods south of 1-90 have 75% of the lowest-performing schools (Level 1 and Level 2) in the city. There are no Level 4 or Level 5 schools south of I-90 except for two in West Seattle.
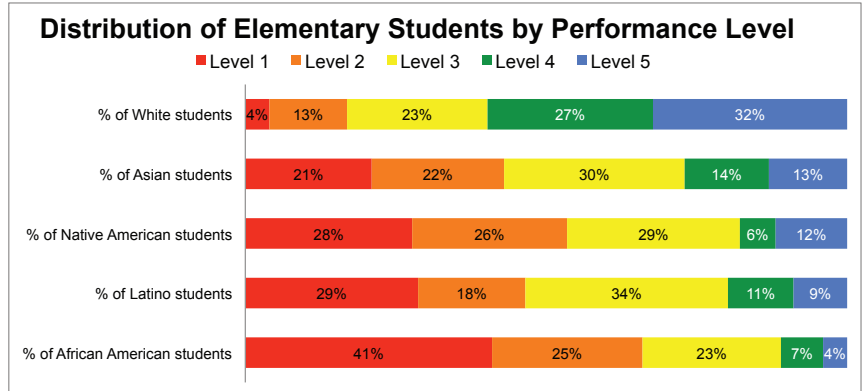
Some high-poverty schools are achieving much more than others.

Of the thirteen Level 1 (red) schools in Seattle, 70%-92% of their students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Absolute achievement correlates very highly with income level, but some schools are overcoming those trends. South Park's Concord International Elementary School and Beacon Hill's Mercer Middle School have roughly the same demographics and poverty levels as the other Level 1 schools but they dramatically outscore them in both growth and absolute achievement.

Access to high-performing schools varies by student groups.

Only 10% of African American children are currently attending a high-performing (Level 4 or Level 5) elementary school. In contrast, 40% of African American elementary students are enrolled in Level 1 schools, while only 4% of White students are. The district's Asian, Latino, and Native American populations attend Level 4 and Level 5 schools at slightly higher rates—roughly 20-25%.

Student groups in middle schools and high schools are more evenly distributed, but because there is only one Level 5 middle school and no Level 5 high schools, student access to high-performing/high-growth schools at the secondary level is much more limited.

Distribution of Elementary Students by Performance Level

Level 1 ■ Level 2 ■ Level 3 ■ Level 4 ■ Level 5

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
% of White students	4%	13%	23%	27%	32%
% of Asian students	21%	22%	30%	14%	13%
% of Native American students	28%	26%	29%	6%	12%
% of Latino students	29%	18%	34%	11%	9%
% of African American students	41%	25%	23%	7%	4%

More information

The school and district data released this year provides a baseline from which to view school achievement; next year will offer more useful information in the way of trends. This brief provides analysis on just one element—the segmentation data. Parents and community members can review this and other data through the links below.

To view the district score card, go to http://www.seattleschools.org/area/strategicplan/districtscorecard.pdf.

To view individual school reports, go to http://www.seattleschools.org/area/strategicplan/schoolreportslist.html.

To view the segmentation analysis, go to http://www.seattleschools.org/area/strategicplan/segmentation.pdf.

For an interactive map of Seattle Public Schools by performance level, go to http://bit.ly/h2MYT8.