



# THE JOURNEY TO CREATING EXCELLENCE FOR EVERY STUDENT

**T**here has been a lot of change in Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools during the past six years. In 2009, the district's federal funds were frozen for poor accounting practices. Metro Schools lacked a permanent director and public confidence in the district was low.

By 2015, Metro Schools' graduation rate has increased dramatically—up more than 20 percentage points in 10 years—and the district regularly hosts visitors from across the country and foreign countries wanting to learn about our high school redesign built on business and community partnerships. Academic performance is improving for all grade levels and the district is a leader in social and emotional learning, leadership development, teacher recruitment and development, and implementation of Tennessee's State Academic Standards. The district is in good standing with the federal government and its business, purchasing and accounting areas have been completely overhauled. Enrollment has increased from 75,000 in 2009 to more than 85,000 students as more families choose Nashville's public schools.

The journey is not complete. Much work remains in Metro Schools' quest to become the top performing urban school system and the first choice for Davidson County families, but the progress is undeniable.



# MNPS Achieves

Following a strategic review of Metro Schools' operations and performance, MNPS Achieves launched in May 2009 with more than 200 district and community leaders working in Transformational Leadership Groups (TLGs) to transform Metro Nashville Public Schools in areas of high need.

Five of these groups worked to address students' academic performance:

- High Schools
- Middle Schools
- Elementary Schools

- English Learners
- Special Needs

The other five groups focused on improving processes and systems:

- Human Capital
- Communications
- Data Management & Technology
- Central Office Effectiveness
- Community Supports

The main goals of this work were to provide an excellent education to all students, attract and keep the highest quality teachers and employees, and operate efficiently to make the best use of all available resources. In April 2010, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University began a two-and-a-half-year documentation and evaluation of MNPS Achieves, designed to capture the reform as it evolved.

## THE TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP GROUPS DEVELOPED KEY REFORM STRATEGIES:



### PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Professional development for teachers on inclusive practices and differentiated instruction, allowing students with special needs to spend more time in the classroom with their peers



### PERFORMANCE OF DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

Recommended pilot of community school programs, which was later named Community Achieves



### PERFORMANCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS / LIMITED ENGLISH SPEAKERS

Decentralization of English Learner services, allowing students to be directly served at their schools rather than at an off-site location



### MIDDLE SCHOOL REFORM

Developed common vision for district-wide middle school reform, evolving into the Middle Preps of Nashville, which launched in 2014



### HIGH SCHOOL REFORM

Created a vision for small-learning communities within large high schools, which resulted in The Academies of Nashville launching in all MNPS zoned high schools



### HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

Redesigned the structure and operation of the district's Human Capital (formerly Human Resources) department to focus on recruitment, development and retention of high quality teachers and leaders, including earlier hiring to ensure a larger pool of qualified applicants



### INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY & DATA MANAGEMENT

Further development and effective use of the data warehouse to guide decisions around instruction and student supports

Created the Anytime Access for All initiative, which seeks to expand access to technology and the Internet to the 44% of Metro Schools families who lack it



### COMMUNICATIONS

Worked with English Learners group to identify ways to improve communications with non-English background families—resulting in additional resources to EL department for translations and use of translators for district calls and materials



### CENTRAL OFFICE EFFECTIVENESS

Pushed more resources to schools, resulting in reorganization of Central Office and redeployment of more than 200 positions into schools, including the creation of cluster support teams made up of attendance, social work, parent engagement and other staff

Worked with outside contractor to redesign and train central office staff for improved business practices, resulting in good standing for the district with the federal government

# Tennessee Wins Race to the Top



**W**ith a one-year foundation of needs assessment already complete through MNPS Achieves, Metro Schools was able to immediately begin work when Tennessee became one of the first two states in the country to be awarded Race to the Top funding in 2010.

Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools was awarded \$31.9 million from the Tennessee Department of Education to allocate to its own set of comprehensive reform plans aligned with the State's goals, and targeted to the five key areas of reform outlined by the U.S. Department of Education. For this alignment, MNPS Achieves became MNPS Achieves: First to the Top. The focus remained on the original nine areas, all of which were included in one of five categories outlined by the U.S. Department of Education in the Race to the Top grant: STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math), Standards and Assessments, Teachers and Leaders, School Turnaround and Data. MNPS was also successful in securing additional Race to the Top funds made available by the State of Tennessee in support of targeted "First to the Top" State initiatives including \$1.8 million for a teacher and principal residency program, \$2.7 million investment in a regional STEM innovation network and \$3.7 million to support the turnaround of low performing schools, for a total of \$40.1 million.

The work continues, with an emphasis on sustainability. The district has invested heavily in its employees through professional development, leadership training, reorganizing to directly support schools and improving the availability and use of data. With the end of Race to the Top Funds, Metro Schools moved to ensure the progress would continue by incorporating the work into a new district strategic plan, Education 2018: Excellence for Every Student, approved by the board in fall 2013. The Board of Education, school and district staff, parents and community, all provided input into the plan's development.

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THE WORK CONTINUES, WITH AN EMPHASIS ON SUSTAINABILITY. THE DISTRICT HAS INVESTED HEAVILY IN ITS EMPLOYEES THROUGH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, LEADERSHIP TRAINING, REORGANIZING TO DIRECTLY SUPPORT SCHOOLS AND IMPROVING THE AVAILABILITY AND USE OF DATA.

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The strategic plan continues to focus on changes that develop and increase the use of data systems to support instruction, recruit and retain great teachers and leaders, turn-around low achieving schools, build family and community participation and involvement in schools, and build strong academic programs aligned with Tennessee's state standards.

# Where the Money Went



# Supporting Student Success with Data



**M**etro Schools has one of the most sophisticated public school data warehouses in the nation. It's a national model for using data systems to make decisions about instruction, and it helps improve achievement outcomes for students.

Data alone are just sets of numbers and cannot do the work. It takes collaboration between educators, parents, and staff to propel students in making academic gains. Conversations between teachers, students and parents let students see that everyone is invested in their success.

Laura Tyburski, a math teacher at Glencliff High School, sees great value in talking to students about data and keeping them informed.

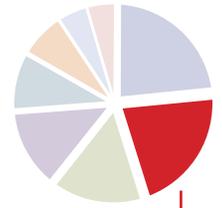
"It's nice for them to be able to understand what standards they are lacking in and what areas we need to correct instead of just 'I failed Unit One,'" Tyburski said. "So they actually know where their weaknesses are."

MNPS DATA WAREHOUSE USAGE HAS GROWN DRAMATICALLY OVER TIME, WITH THE INCREASED REPORT GENERATION AMONG TEACHERS THE MOST ENCOURAGING SIGN THAT DATA IS BEING USED TO GUIDE INSTRUCTION.

This data sharing with families and students creates a culture of collaboration within schools and across the district. It also allows educators to talk to students individually about what's going on in their lives – at home and at school.

"For students it's an 'Aha!' moment that we have this data at our disposal, and that we truly care about how they are performing, and that we are interested in what it takes to get them to the next level," said Dr. Adrienne Koger, Executive Principal at Antioch High School.

With thousands of data points to pull from, the district continues to develop and fine tune reports available to teachers and school administrators to have maximum impact in a number of areas. That could mean regular classroom instruction, predicting which students are in danger of dropping out and detecting possible issues outside of school that are having an impact on the child's academic life.



**DATA SYSTEMS  
TO SUPPORT  
INSTRUCTION**

## USING DATA EFFECTIVELY DEPENDS ON COLLABORATION WITH FOUR KEY GROUPS:



### TEACHER TEAMS

Armed with the latest data, teachers come together in grade level and subject area teams to talk about individual students. Together, they can make decisions about instruction based on each child's unique needs.



### STUDENTS

Students and teachers meet for one-on-one talks about where they stand academically, what specific skills they can work on and strategies they can use together to improve.



### PARENTS

Parents play a big part in instruction. Once they see the data and hear from their child's teacher about how things are going in the classroom, they learn ways to help at home based on their child's specific needs.



### EXTENDED LEARNING (AFTERSCHOOL) PROVIDERS

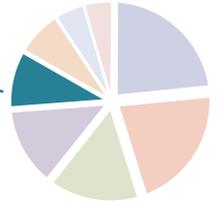
Students often spend hours every week in afterschool programs. Aftercare providers can see certain kinds of student data so they can tailor tutoring and other academic activities to the needs of their students.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Though Race to the Top has ended, the work continues. The staff who are vital to maintaining and effectively using these data systems will be carried over into the operating budget. The district is also starting to track student outcomes after graduation, meaning college and career. There are also new reports based on teacher data to help strategically plan recruiting and hiring.

# Adopting High-quality Standards and Assessments

STANDARDS & ASSESSMENTS



2010

## MARCH 2010

Tennessee won Race to the Top funds, with more than \$30 million going to Metro Schools. \$3.8 million of the district's award was dedicated to adopting high-quality standards and assessments, including training teachers on the Common Core State Standards.

## 2010-11 SCHOOL YEAR

Elementary teachers and instructional coaches developed district-led Common Core training.

## 2011-12 SCHOOL YEAR

Implemented English language arts and math standards in kindergarten, first and second grades. More than 2,000 teachers and coaches attended district Common Core Training.

## 2012-13 SCHOOL YEAR

Implemented English language arts and partial math standards in grades 3-8, as well as literacy standards in grades 6-12. Nearly 4,400 teachers and coaches attended district Common Core Training.

## SUMMER 2013

Partnered with the Tennessee Department of Education for professional development provided at Metro high schools, reaching key representatives from all middle and high schools. District-led professional development on the standards continues.

K-12 instructional coaches and teachers created curriculum and intensive training for all math and English language arts teachers.

## 2013-14 SCHOOL YEAR

Implemented full English language arts and math standards in grades 3-12. More than 800 teachers and coaches attended face-to-face training with thousands more taking part in job-embedded training in the schools.

## SUMMER 2014

State-led training, district-led training and All-star Training continue, reaching 100% of Metro teachers.

All-star Training begins (see page 7) and includes strategies and best practices for teaching to the new standards effectively.

## 2014-15 SCHOOL YEAR

Full implementation of the Common Core State Standards is complete. On-going training for teachers continues.

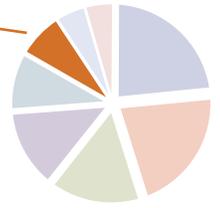
2015

### WHAT'S NEXT?

With full implementation of the new standards complete, the district is preparing for new assessments from the Tennessee Department of Education. These long overdue replacements for TCAP and End of Course exams will be properly aligned with what students actually learn in class.

# Personalized Learning Through Technology

INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY



How do you reach students of different abilities, different backgrounds—even different languages—all in the same classroom?



Differentiated instruction is a way to personalize learning for every student. It lets teachers give each child exactly the support he or she needs no matter their individual circumstances. This is the crux of the district's strategic plan, Education 2018: Excellence for Every Student, and it was made possible by programs paid for by Race to the Top.

It's not easy, but technology makes it a lot easier.



Laptops, tablets, smart boards, clickers - these are great tools for getting kids engaged in learning and tailoring lessons just for them. But without the knowledge to use these tools productively, they don't help students learn. It took a massive effort to make sure every teacher is using technology effectively in every classroom.

All-star Training was a first-of-it's-kind professional development for all teachers in Metro Schools.



Last summer and into the fall, more than 5,000 Metro teachers took a series of classes in person and online called All-star Training. They learned best practices for teaching new state standards, strategies for smart implementation of technology and methods of personalizing learning for every student without slowing down instruction.

Once they had the know-how, teachers also got the tools to make it happen.



After successfully completing All-star Training and meeting other requirements, every teacher got a brand new laptop to use in the classroom. Armed with both the knowledge and the tools, they were free to design the instructional practices that would reach their students and help them grow, achieve and be empowered.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

All-star Training is the new normal in Metro Schools. Every new teacher goes through the entire program and receives a laptop upon completion. This is sustained through the operating budget.

# Creating and Supporting Great Teacher Leaders

GREAT TEACHERS AND LEADERS



In 2011, Metro Schools opened the Teacher Leadership Institute (TLI), to help young teachers build leadership skills. It is designed to develop and retain talented teachers who can remain in the classroom while also taking on increased school leadership responsibilities.

TLI was paid for entirely by Race to the Top. This is the personal testimonial of a TLI grad who has become a key instructional leader in Metro Schools.

## Helping Principals Become Instructional Leaders



While great teachers like Danielle were just beginning their leadership training, another portion of Race to the Top was dedicated to strengthening the very ideas of school leadership through research-based professional learning. The purpose behind these programs was to bring new knowledge into the system that could be put to practical use. Principals had their own leadership institute (PLI), and district and city leaders were given front row seats to cutting edge national research on educational leadership:

- The National Advisory Panel was formed with America's top minds offering real-time review and guidance of the district's turnaround efforts.
- A series of events dubbed Emerging Knowledge Forums brought world-renowned researchers and educators to Nashville to speak to school leaders and stakeholders on the most important education topics of the day.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Next year TLI will expand to include a program for veteran teachers with six or more years of classroom experience. The 2015-16 Operating Budget also includes more money to compensate teacher leaders who put in extra work and time to serve their schools.

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*My name is Danielle Norton. I am a prekindergarten instructional coach at the Bordeaux Early Learning Center and a member of the inaugural cohort of Teacher Leadership Institute.*

*I didn't really know what to expect from TLI, but I knew that I was already becoming a leader in my school and wanted learn new tools and resources to become an even better teacher leader.*

*Teacher leaders don't wait for someone to tell them to make a positive change. They just do it. What I learned during my year in TLI is how to systematically and strategically go about making positive influences in a school, cluster and district.*

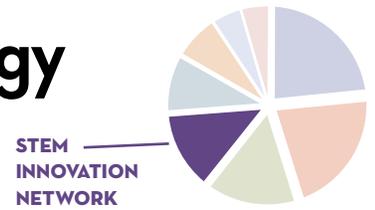
*Each TLI member sets and works to achieve a goal focused on improving his or her school, cluster or the district as a whole. There are initiatives born in TLI that have led to real change and improvement in Metro Schools.*

*The Teacher Leadership Institute literally changed the trajectory of my career. I don't know if I would be in the place I am professionally if I didn't have the experience of TLI. I think it is vital for MNPS to maintain this wonderful program so that we have a generation of teachers who become even stronger leaders than they already are and lead and make changes for the education of children in our district, state, country and world!*



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# Growing Focus on Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM)



In 2010, Metro Schools received a \$6 million grant from the Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP) to develop STEM and other thematic magnet schools at Stratford, Bailey, Hattie Cotton and others. When this funding was put together with Race to the Top, STEM

instruction in Metro Schools took a giant leap forward. Together, RTTT and MSAP made it possible to build a world-class STEM program in multiple schools. Those schools have now laid the foundation for a strong STEM focus district-wide.

## SCHOOLS IN THE PROGRAM

- Hattie Cotton Elementary
- Bailey Middle
- Litton Middle
- Stratford High
- Hillsboro High

These schools started the STEM revolution in Metro Schools. They were outfitted with state of the art equipment for scientific research, computer engineering and more. But equipment alone will not help students, so another big piece of the grant went to gathering the know-how needed to teach these advanced subjects.

## EQUIPMENT IN SCHOOLS

- Full research labs with Vanderbilt
- Computer graphics and gaming lab
- Forensics lab
- Laptop & tablet carts
- Professional-grade industry software

**\$2.66 MILLION**

## KNOW-HOW

- More teachers
- Professional development
- STEM consultants
- Conferences and learning events

**\$1.6 MILLION**

The effects of this transformation were immediate. Stratford STEM Magnet High School became the center of the STEM world in Nashville with Vanderbilt research scientists teaching classes alongside former FBI agents and students building and programming robots from scratch.

## BUILDING A STEM NETWORK

- Teachers & staff
- Research labs
- Teacher professional development

**\$1.6 MILLION**

Once the groundwork was laid, district leaders made sure these schools wouldn't be the only ones to benefit. The Middle Tennessee STEM Innovation Hub was established as a statewide effort—with Metro Schools as the leader—to further develop the curriculum, partnerships and resources needed to keep STEM expanding to other schools in Tennessee.

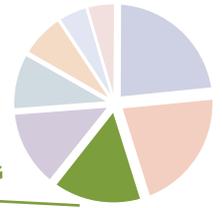


The real results will be long-term. Now that the foundation has been laid, STEM education will continue to grow in Metro Schools. New partnerships with companies like Aegis and Siemens will give students the latest technology and industry expertise. More schools will get on board and more students will benefit from learning 21st century skills for college and career.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

The STEM program can be sustained in the operating budget. The next steps for expansion are largely school driven. Principals are clamoring to get new STEM programs in their schools. District administrators and the STEM Innovation Hub help find the right programs for each school, the partnerships that can help build them and the faculty who can teach them.

# Supporting Students and Families



Community Achieves is a model for coordinating needed community service programs for students and families at school. The key is in the word “coordinate.” Community Achieves doesn’t require the school district to provide these programs. Instead, it

empowers schools with the framework that brings together non-profits, volunteer groups and other community partners who then use schools as hubs for offering a variety of programs geared toward improving the conditions of learning for our students and schools.

14  
Community Achieves schools in  
2014-15 serving  
11,865  
students

9 clusters  
3 elementary  
6 middle  
5 high

80  
community partners providing  
more than 100 programs

COMMUNITY ACHIEVES STAFF LOOK AT STUDENT AND FAMILY DATA TO DETERMINE WHICH PROGRAMS SHOULD BE OFFERED AT WHICH SCHOOLS. THAT WAY THEY ARE GETTING TO THE FAMILIES WHO NEED THEM MOST.

## ALL PROGRAMS SERVE FOUR AREAS OF NEED:



### FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

- Family Resource Center
- Parent University
- Family Suppers
- Event for dads and male role models



### COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS

- FAFSA Night
- Tutoring & Mentoring
- Reading Clinics
- ACT Programs



### HEALTH & WELLNESS

- Mental Health Counseling
- Nutrition Classes
- Health Check Ups



### SOCIAL SERVICES

- Food Pantries
- Workforce Development & GED Classes
- Financial Classes

“

*I was homeless and struggling to get to school every day. Ms. Hill has helped me find housing and showed me how to get government assistance for food. I also was able to receive clothes and school supplies from our Family Resource Center. I can truly say without this wonderful school, I don't know how this school year would've ended. I am excited to be graduating with my class this May. — Pearl-Cohn Student*

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## WHAT'S NEXT?

District leaders have proposed expanding Community Achieves into at least five more schools, for a total of 19, and hiring 14 full-time coordinators to manage the program in schools. The Community Achieves model is also being implemented in all priority schools to complement the academic reform strategies currently being used or planned for next year.

# Education 2018

**R**ace to the Top allowed the district to accelerate the implementation of its five-year strategic plan, MNPS Achieves. Having completed the plan's strategic goals in only three years, the district embarked on developing a new strategic vision in 2013 to scale the reforms started under MNPS Achieves.

The new strategic plan, called Education 2018: Excellence for Every Student, focuses on personalized learning to help students grow academically, socially and emotionally every year. Personalized learning involves meeting the needs of individual students while expecting high academic achievement from every student. This educational model values diversity as a strength and promotes an inclusive culture focused on excellence.

## KEY STRATEGIES:

### QUALITY TEACHING

*Recruiting, retaining and empowering excellent teachers:* We are working to hire, and keep, the best teachers in the profession by providing support, expanded opportunities in and out of the classroom, and higher compensation.

#### CHANGES HAPPENING NOW:

- The district is changing the way it provides stipends to teachers in order to value teacher leadership roles in the same way that other additional responsibilities, such as coaching and club sponsorship, are recognized and rewarded.
- New strategic recruiting practices give principals a diverse and skilled pool of candidates so they can hire teachers with the skills to serve their students.

### EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

*Directing resources and supports to the specific needs of students.*

#### CHANGES HAPPENING NOW:

- The district is shifting to Student-Based Budgeting, which allocates dollars to schools based on the needs of the students they serve rather than a fixed number of employee positions.
- The expansion of Community Achieves will provide full service, non-academic supports to students and families in need to help bridge the vast gulf between disadvantaged students and their peers.

### TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

*Increasing principal flexibility and accountability to lead and manage change in their schools:* We are working to hire and keep the top-performing principals through increased autonomy and better support. We will support leadership development for principals and teachers, and increased opportunities for collaborative leadership with parents, students and the community.

#### CHANGES HAPPENING NOW:

- The shift to Student-Based Budgeting also involves giving principals the autonomy to build their budgets and staff based on a school design that they develop to meet the needs of their unique student population.
- A new system for hiring principals called New Leaders gives the district a much more rigorous selection process for school leaders. They now must demonstrate educational philosophy and skills through case study activities and role playing in addition to providing personal performance data and participating in multiple interviews.



Education 2018 defines a new role for Central Office, where it becomes an educational support system providing:

- The knowledge base for best practices in education.
- The systems and operations schools need to run effectively and efficiently, like Human Capital and IT services.
- The accountability structure to ensure our schools remain diverse and are held to high standards of academic performance.

## ACHIEVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

**↑ 20%**  
Jump in graduation rate in 10 years

**TCAP SCORES ROSE**

 MATH <b>18</b> POINTS	 READING <b>6</b> POINTS	 SCIENCE <b>11</b> POINTS
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**SINCE 2010**

**END OF COURSE EXAM SCORES ROSE**

 ENGLISH I <b>14</b> POINTS	 ENGLISH II <b>8</b> POINTS	 ALGEBRA I <b>19</b> POINTS	 BIOLOGY <b>9</b> POINTS
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**SINCE 2010**



4 Metro Schools have earned the ultra-prestigious National Blue Ribbon designation: Martin Luther King, Jr. Magnet School, Rose Park Middle, Meigs Magnet Middle and Hume-Fogg Magnet High.

**MORE THAN \$465,000,000**

in capital spending since 2009 to build new schools, improve and expand existing schools, and make major purchases like school buses and IT infrastructure

**1,800 STUDENTS**

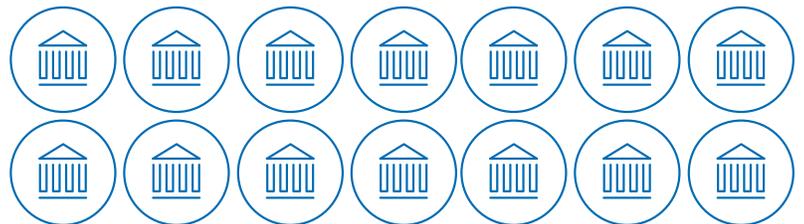
who had either dropped out or were in danger of dropping out earned diplomas from the fast-track Academy schools at Old Cockrill, Hickory Hollow and Opry Mills

Scholarship offers to Metro graduates have increased by \$40 million...

**\$102 MILLION**

**\$62 MILLION**

rising every year from \$62 in 2010-11 to more than \$102 million in 2013-14.



14 high school Academies (one-third of the total) have earned "Model Status" from the National Career Academy Coalition. Three high schools have wall-to-wall Model Academies: Antioch, Hillwood and McGavock.

Since 2009, Metro Schools has made major operational changes to improve instruction and offer more opportunities to students:

Developed a new performance measurement tool tougher than the one used by the state to track individual school progress.

Retooled operating procedures and business practices to put Metro Schools **back into good standing with federal funding (in an unprecedented one-year turnaround) and improve flow of goods and services to schools.** Reorganized business, human resources and federal programs operations to achieve higher efficiency and better operating practices.

Established a **diversity plan** to ensure the needs of all students are met while celebrating and learning from students whose families come from more than 100 countries.

Adopted a national model charter school application and approval process that takes into account **the needs of the community and the best interests of students.**

Joined **PASSAGE**, a four-city program of action to **tackle the issue of racial and other disparities in school discipline.** Other participating cities are New York, Chicago and Los Angeles.

Committed to providing **prekindergarten to every child who wants and needs it by 2018.** Started by opening three new model pre-K centers in partnership with Vanderbilt University with plans to expand programs even more in 2015 with funding from a federal pre-k grant.

Established **partnerships with more than 300 businesses and non-profits** through the Academies of Nashville to provide real-world learning and hands-on opportunities for students.

Developed **new pathways to graduation** for students of all needs, including:

- MNPS Virtual School for full-time online learning and the Academies at Old Cockrill, Hickory Hollow and Opry Mills for fast track, no-frills credit completion for students who have dropped out, are thinking of dropping out or have life circumstances that interfere with the traditional school setting.
- Placed the district's top principals in leadership positions over networks of schools, empowering them to expand their reach and help guide other schools to similar success.



This report supported by Race to the Top funding

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