

Chalkbeat

2018



A Message From Our CEO

Dear Friends,

I'm so proud of what Chalkbeat accomplished in 2018.

We told more and better stories in our communities, and in more communities. (Hello, Newark and Chicago!)

We launched our first-ever listening tour, working with community groups that are often disenfranchised to ask the question, What's missing from your city's education story?

We created our first-ever membership program, giving our readers new ways to help build our community and to engage with our reporting.

We continued to add "boots on the ground" reporters as other local newsrooms suffered devastating cuts. Our 34-person newsroom produced 2,412 original stories in 2018.

And nearly 400 times, we saw real-world consequences follow from the stories we told, testifying that we are succeeding at our mission of arming the education debate with news and context that can change minds, inform understanding, and better anchor decisions in reality.

The following year in review offers some highlights of that work — powerful stories that made a real difference. There's Adeshina Emmanuel's story of a 16-year-old boy in Chicago who reads at a second-grade level and what his experience says about literacy programs in the city. There's Yesenia Robles' coverage of changes in a Colorado school district that would have marginalized the opinions of parents — particularly those who were non-native English speakers — but ended

up driving parents to exercise their voices. And there's Erin Einhorn's series, produced in partnership with Bridge Magazine, about a single middle-school classroom in Detroit that typifies the consequences of the city's incredibly high student mobility rate (in that single class of 31 students, the group had attended 128 schools among them by the time they reached eighth grade).

And I've only named only a few.

While we're proud of what we've accomplished, we also know our work is far from complete. There are still too many public meetings we can't attend, too many communities without any education press, and too many stories left untold. We have made our business model stronger every year, but we still have more work to do to guarantee our sustainability long into the future.

And yet 2018 tells us that we are moving in the right direction. For that, I am so grateful — for our outstanding team, and for the incredible readers, supporters, and communities that make Chalkbeat's work viable and meaningful.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Green,

Chalkbeat CEO,
& Editor-in-chief



Chalkbeat reporting impacted education in each of our communities

In 2018, Chalkbeat recorded nearly **400** real-world impacts that have resulted from our stories.

Some highlights:



A mural inside the Community Youth Development Institute in Chicago.
(Photo by Adeshina Emmanuel/Chalkbeat)

Chicago

Chalkbeat Chicago's profile of Javion Grayer, [a 16-year old student who struggles with reading](#), was one of our most powerful stories of the year and emerged from an encounter with Javion's aunt during our summer listening tour. The story itself has received more than 10,000 pageviews and reporter Adeshina Emmanuel orchestrated a highly personal [Twitter thread](#) around the story, which earned 140,000 impressions and close to 4,000 engagements, including 300 retweets. Chicago Public Schools in response to the story [emphasized its efforts to address the issue](#), including work on a central reading curriculum that should be completed in two to three years. The story also inspired a [first-person piece](#) by an educator who advocates for greater access to reading specialists as a solution for students like Javion Grayer. Javion's struggles also fuelled broader informed discussion of the issue of reading instruction and intervention through republications and mentions in Politico's Illinois Playbook, The Council of Great City Schools, and the Education Writers Association, among others. A member of the group Raise Your Hand told us that the group discussed Javion's story during their conversations about legislation targeting students in special education.



Chalkbeat reporting impacted education in each of our communities



Colorado Bureau Chief Erica Meltzer leads a listening session with parents of students with disabilities and state policymakers.

(Photo by Ann Schimke/Chalkbeat)

Colorado

Engaging parents, particularly low-income parents of color, has been a consistent goal across our organization, and in 2018, some of Chalkbeat Colorado's most substantial impacts were the fruit of this focus. Reporter Yesenia Robles revealed that a Colorado district was [doing away with parent-teacher conferences](#) in an effort to maximize instructional time. Following our report, there was an overwhelmingly negative reaction from parents, many of whom are non-native English speakers and learners and voiced concern that the online portal the district was offering as a replacement for face-to-face conferences would be insufficient and confusing. In response, [the district reversed course](#). Another story about a district's attempt to [increase learning time by cutting recess](#) led to an equally unfavorable reaction by parents and teachers who had been futilely pushing back against the district's plan. In response to our article, the school district [launched an advisory committee](#) to investigate concerns advanced by these parents. In a similar sequence, after Chalkbeat reported on a local community's concerns with changes being made to their biliteracy program, parents and bilingual education advocates began attending every school board meeting, frequently citing our coverage. The district ultimately decided to [formally convene a group](#) of community members to study the issue.



Chalkbeat reporting impacted education in each of our communities

Detroit

Chalkbeat Detroit's five-part [Moving Costs](#) series, produced in collaboration with Bridge Magazine, examined the implications of students switching schools often. It was one of our most impactful projects ever, resulting in four media appearances by Chalkbeat reporters, two informed actions, and multiple informed debates, republications, and pickups. Most notably, gubernatorial candidates [proposed school bus funding](#) in response to the series. Plus, multiple stories from the series were cited in a pair of amicus briefs on Detroit civil rights cases about student access to literacy made to Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals.



Detroit Superintendent Nikolai Vitti, second from left, says a tweak to school funding policy in Michigan would alleviate some of the effects of high student mobility. (Photo by Koby Levin/Chalkbeat)

"One of Indiana's largest high schools ended this past school year with almost 5,000 students, but no desks and no classrooms. The school also had very few graduates — 61 out of more than 900 seniors graduated last year."

(Photo by Shaina Cavazos/Chalkbeat)



Indiana

Shaina Cavazos' reporting on questionable practices at one of Indiana's largest [virtual charter schools](#) set off a string of impacts that has carried through 2018. Two [new bills](#) were introduced in the Indiana state senate in January 2018. In March, Rep. Greg Porter cited our reporting in a U.S. House Ways and Means committee meeting as he [proposed an amendment](#) — which was later withdrawn — to impose consequences on online charter schools that [fail to meet a graduation threshold](#). Rep. Tim Brown, chairman of the committee, also cited Chalkbeat's coverage as spurring interest from lawmakers in virtual education.

More recently, an Indiana state committee tasked with addressing the dismal results at Indiana's virtual charter schools came out with a [set of recommendations](#) for switching course and providing greater oversight. One of our [follow-up stories](#) about the committee was [cited by Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici](#) in a U.S. House Committee on Charter Schools. Also, the Indiana State Teachers Association included a [moratorium on virtual schools](#) in their legislative agenda.



Chalkbeat reporting impacted education in each of our communities



Weequahic High school in Newark, one of the schools our reporter Patrick Wall looked at as part of his story on local suspensions in collaboration with ProPublica.

(Photo by Patrick Wall/Chalkbeat)

Newark

Chalkbeat Newark launched at just the right moment, as Newark schools returned to local control and as a locally elected school board — for the first time in more than two decades — selected the city’s new superintendent, Roger León. Reporter Patrick Wall followed the selection process and published a [deep-dive profile on León](#). As a result, WNYC republished Wall’s story and invited him on air to discuss Newark’s new superintendent.

Other key impacts from our first year in Newark include a citation of our coverage of a [Newark charter school’s cracking down on uniform violations](#) in a complaint lodged by The Education Law Center to the state. Also, a story about [local suspensions, which](#) emerged from a collaboration with ProPublica, was widely circulated and featured on NJ.com, Politico’s newsletter, WNYC, and The Star-Ledger.

New York

In June of 2018, NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio chose Chalkbeat to [announce his](#) proposal to eliminate the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT). The mayor’s proposed overhaul of admissions is part of an effort to improve diversity in the city’s prestigious specialized high schools. Chalkbeat has followed up with significant [coverage](#) of the plan, as well as of the reactions of schools, parents, and students. Also related to our SHSAT coverage is [our reporting on the Discovery program](#), which aims to promote diversity at Specialized High Schools but has a questionable track record of doing so. A [civil rights lawsuit](#) challenging de Blasio’s expansion of the Discovery program cites our reporting on how the program has benefitted few black and Hispanic students.

Parents gathered in District 20 in south Brooklyn for a town hall where many of the questions centered on the city’s plans to integrate specialized high schools. (Photo by Christina Veiga/Chalkbeat)





Chalkbeat reporting impacted education in each of our communities

Tennessee

On the 50th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s death, Chalkbeat participated in the [MLK50](#) series of coverage and events memorializing his legacy in Memphis, including Chalkbeat's co-sponsorship of the event [Show Mem the Money: The Education Edition](#) about how the business of education can be an economic driver for black- and women-owned businesses. Leading up to the event, reporter Laura Kebede had a conversation with Shelby County Schools Chief of Staff Brian Stockton about how school districts today can live out King's campaign on behalf of the poor and disenfranchised. After Shelby County Schools announced that more than 1,000 school employees will get pay raises, Stockton told Kebede that the district's decision to provide hourly workers with a living wage was inspired by their conversation.

Memphis educators and students share their stories at an event hosted by Chalkbeat and Spillit.

(Photo by Jacob Steimer/Chalkbeat)



Colorado teachers rally for more education funding on April 27, 2018.

(Photo by Melanie Asmar/Chalkbeat)

National

Our national team fueled conversations related to key equity-related themes this year, particularly the impacts of school funding and discipline policies on students. [One story](#) featured research that found a direct correlation between school spending and student performance. Another pair of stories ([here](#) and [here](#)) layered the issue by revealing that it's not just school finances that matter. When it comes to student well-being and performance, family finances matter, too, which is why some education programs are switching the focus outside of schools to broader on anti-poverty measures.

In the discipline debate, our [national team reported](#) on the growing consensus that harsh disciplinary actions, such as suspensions, negatively impact students' academics. When [Chicago Public Schools, for example, decreased suspensions](#), they saw increases in student attendance and test scores. In a potent sign of the changing ideas around discipline, [KIPP has also begun to rethink its approach](#), shifting towards restorative justice.

Chalkbeat's coverage of teacher pay and family finances were picked up by far-reaching publications such as [Slate](#) and [The New Republic](#). Plus, the [Education Writers Association](#) interviewed national reporter Matt Barnum about the effects of student poverty, and a [Maryland school board](#) featured his coverage in a conversation about reimagining discipline policies.



A Year in Review

January

Our new Colorado and Indiana Bureau Chiefs kicked off our hiring spree in January. Over the course of 2018, a total of 22 new people joined the ranks of Chalkbeat. Meet them all [here](#).

February

Chalkbeat Newark launched reporting with Chalkbeat veteran [Patrick Wall](#) diving right in to cover the return of [Newark's schools to local control](#). Chalkbeat Chicago also launched in 2018, bringing Chalkbeat's coverage to a total of seven local communities, in addition to our national coverage.

March

Chalkbeat hosted our first-ever [Great American Teach-Off](#) at SXSW EDU, which elevated the craft of teaching through a challenge where two teams of teachers designed and executed a 20-minute math lesson in front of a live audience and judges.

April

Two new newsletters debuted in April: “En Espanol,” which aggregates Chalkbeat stories for Spanish-speaking parents in our Colorado market, and “How I Teach,” which is a curation of stories for educators. In November, we launched a third new newsletter, “The Starting Line,” which is a monthly roundup of national early childhood stories. You can sign up for our newsletters [here](#).

May

Chalkbeat journalists attended the Education Writers Association conference, where Chalkbeat won in the categories of “[Beat Reporting](#)” and “[Single-Topic News or Feature Reporting](#)” and was a finalist for our “[Investigative Reporting](#).” Our journalism received lots more local and national recognition throughout the year.

June

More than 1,000 readers participated in our [annual reader survey](#) confirming the value of the work we are doing with responses like: “Chalkbeat is the go-to source for education news and analysis. These folks know education and provide the news you can't find at daily newspapers, national news media, or in journals.”



A Year in Review

July

Chalkbeat staff from across the country convened in Indianapolis for our biggest organization retreat yet (nearly double the size of 2018!). For two days, we silenced our phones, shut our laptops, and paused the daily grind to step back and reflect on the work we've done over the past year and set the goals we wanted to work towards in the year ahead. Plus, we had the chance to explore Indy and mingle with local stakeholders and funders during a welcome event.

August

Over the summer, we amped up reader engagement with our first-ever "[Listening Tour](#)," which was comprised of 14 open events across six of our communities that connected us to 70 story ideas and 150 new sources.

September

Chalkbeat CEO Elizabeth Green co-founded the [American Journalism Project](#) to leverage philanthropy to power local news projects "that believe access to civic information is a public service in and of itself." Read [Elizabeth's Medium post](#) about her dogged belief in this effort and its connectivity to Chalkbeat.

October

We published two major collaborations with partner organizations: [Moving Costs](#), a project between Chalkbeat Detroit and Bridge Magazine about the effects of students changing schools, and [Miseducation](#), a project which involved all Chalkbeat markets working with ProPublica to explore educational inequities at the local level.

November

[Election Day](#) brought our biggest traffic day of the year with more than 75,000 pageviews. This year, we gathered best practices in reporting, product design, and engagement for the lead-up to Election Day, the election itself, and its aftermath. Our goal is to create several "playbooks" like this to optimize our coverage of other recurring events, such as back-to-school.

December

December saw the final push for our first-ever [membership drive](#) with special benefits for readers who support us with a donation of \$35 or more. We have more than 450 inaugural members and are eager to see those numbers grow.



Chalkbeat: By the Numbers



Chalkbeat hosted a school board candidate forum, which was split into two panels. The first panel, moderated by reporter Laura Faith Kebede and Central High School graduate Hali Smith, was among candidates from Districts 1 and 8.

(Photo by Xzavier Bonds/Chalkbeat)

We're still growing

\$7,085,791: Our operating budget for 2018-2019, which accounts for expanded local and national coverage and greater specialization at the network support level.

51: The size of Chalkbeat's staff, which not only includes our award-winning reporters, story editors, and bureau chiefs but growing product, revenue, and operations teams. Learn more [here](#) about Chalkbeat's team.

We are reaching and engaging our core audience

830,673: The average number of monthly Chalkbeat pageviews in the last quarter of 2018.

1.5 million: The number of people our stories reach through our top local distribution partners in each market.

33,590: Readers who subscribe to our email newsletters. That is up nearly 10,000 subscriptions from 2017.

16: The number of Chalkbeat readers participating on our [Reader Advisory Board](#).

56: Percentage of readers who reported in a survey that they'd discussed something they read in Chalkbeat with colleagues in the month prior to the survey.

47: Percentage who said they directly applied knowledge gained from Chalkbeat in their professional life.

45: Percentage who shared an article or information from Chalkbeat on social media.

20: Percentage who changed their minds about an education related topic because of something they read in Chalkbeat. This is higher than ever before!

65: Percentage of respondents who said that if Chalkbeat ceased to exist they'd feel they'd lost a source of news they can't find anywhere else.



Chalkbeat: By the Numbers

We're making a difference

2,412: Original Chalkbeat stories published in 2018

391: The number of real-world impacts – instances of informed conversations and actions – that we've tracked back to our reporting this year, including:

56: The number of times our reporters appeared on television and/or radio to share their expertise.

27: The number of actions–legislative changes, protests, petitions, investigations, institutional changes– that have been informed by our reporting.

19: The number of times a public official explicitly referred to Chalkbeat coverage.

25+: Number of local and national distribution partners republishing Chalkbeat's reporting. These partners include The Atlantic, Slate, Flipboard, The Commercial Appeal, The Detroit Free Press, The Indianapolis Star, WNYC, and The Denver Post, the Tri-State Defender, the Indianapolis Business Journal, and Crain's Detroit Business.

Our 2017-2018 fiscal year audit attests to the financial health of Chalkbeat

\$6,812,469: Revenue

This is just shy of double the amount of revenue accounted for in our 2016-2017 fiscal year audit.

450+: Inaugural members of Chalkbeat's new membership program.

100+: The number of all individual, foundation, and in-kind donations of [\\$1,000 or more](#) that Chalkbeat had received in the last two fiscal years.

203: Organizations and companies who posted jobs on our jobs board in 2018.

49: Companies and organizations who sponsored Chalkbeat this year.

\$4,138,650: Expenses

76%: Program services

14%: Management and general

10%: Fundraising

\$5,245,413: Net Assets

Our full audited financials and 990 documents can be [found here](#).

Thank You! We are more grateful every day for the expanding community of leaders, readers, and friends who make up Team Chalkbeat.



Support Us!

If you are interested in supporting and/or connecting with Chalkbeat, we'd love to hear from you:

Contact our network team

General Contact:

contact@chalkbeat.org

Membership:

membership@chalkbeat.org

Sponsorships:

sponsor@chalkbeat.org

Pitch a First Person submission:

firstperson@chalkbeat.org

Jobs Board:

jobs@chalkbeat.org

Pitch a National Story:

national@chalkbeat.org

Grants:

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Contact our local teams

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