

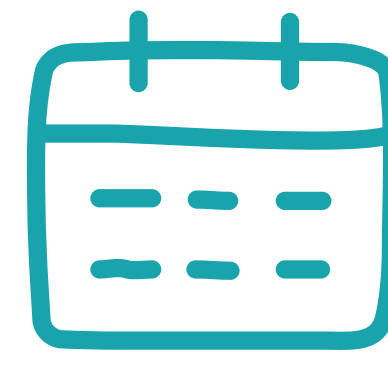





Chalkbeat

2019 Annual Report

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A message from our CEO



Elizabeth Green
*Chalkbeat Co-founder
and CEO*

Dear Friends,

In 2019, we covered major breaking news, from teacher strikes to school closures; published important investigations that led to major policy shifts; and lifted up the voices of students, parents, and educators across the country.

We also paved the way for the organization we plan to become and announced [Chalkbeat 2025](#), our five-year strategic plan to extrapolate our successful model from seven bureaus to 18 over the next five years. We will expand our breadth of coverage to include stories from parts of our nation well beyond our initial bureaus. We will serve more local communities and integrate their powerful stories into the larger, national story of how public education is transforming across the country.

It is both an exciting and humbling time here at Chalkbeat, and we could not have gotten to where we are at this moment without you and your

support. Over the past six years, 1,300 donors, 1 million readers, and 200+ sponsors have come together with our team to create the thoughtful journalism public education deserves.

Thank you for supporting us throughout our journey. Thank you for your feedback, story ideas, and petitions to come to your city. And thank you to our team, who works tirelessly and shares with me a common mission to provide local-first coverage on one of our society's most critical issues.

Together, we can create the new civic infrastructure our democracy deserves: independent, local-first coverage about public education that we can all rely on for generations to come.

Chalkbeat reporting impacted education in each of our communities



In 2019, Chalkbeat recorded 277 real-world impacts as a result of our reporting. We track our impact using our [“MORI” tool, for Measures of Our Reporting’s Influence](#). Some highlights include...

Chicago

2019 was a year of collaboration for Chalkbeat Chicago. In January, we joined forces with 10 local media and civic organizations to create the nonpartisan website [Chi.Vote](#), a collaborative voting guide aimed to make city elections transparent and accessible to all voters. We also launched our own [voter guide](#) for the mayoral election to help readers better understand the candidates’ education platforms. The team also moved into [Civic Exchange Chicago](#), a unique co-working office space of eight local startups, who have worked together to co-host events focused on civic service and independent journalism.

In November, the bureau began [a partnership with 6 other local newsrooms](#) on a nonpartisan collaboration called Lens on Lightfoot, which is devoted to following Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot’s progress throughout her first year in office. Partners in this project are the Better Government Association, Block Club Chicago, The Chicago Reporter, The Daily Line, La Raza and The TRiiBE.

In addition to stellar local collaboration, Chalkbeat Chicago was repeatedly singled out for our exceptional coverage of the October teacher’s strike. We began well before other local news outlets stepped in, with close documentation of the initial negotiations and early rumblings of a strike. The strike itself stretched for 11 days, with the team providing [live updates on day 10](#) as the teacher’s union evaluated, and ultimately accepted, the city’s offer.



Striking Chicago teachers and supporters march downtown in a rally midday Oct. 17, 2019, to press their demands. (Photo by: Ariel Cheung/Chalkbeat)



Union supporters convened at the Denver Public Library as negotiations resumed on the teacher strike's second day. (Photo by: Melanie Asmar/Chalkbeat)

Colorado

The Adams 14 school district was a major area of coverage for the Colorado bureau. From the surprise departure of the superintendent to questionable approaches to teaching English language learners, Chalkbeat Colorado reporter Yesenia Robles provided relentless coverage of the long-struggling district, the first in the state to face outside intervention. No other media outlet has given this kind of attention to one of the most critical education stories in Colorado.

When the Denver teachers union went on strike in February for the first time in 25 years, the Colorado team proved to be authorities on the matter with coverage that was both deep and broad, starting with the historical context for why the strike was happening and the events leading up to it. Reporter Melanie Asmar's comprehensive [look at what led to the strike](#) was mentioned repeatedly by readers as vital to their understanding. We revealed that Denver has a large number of administrative positions, compared to other districts, and we examined whether bonuses given to teachers who return to schools deemed "highest priority" were actually improving teacher retention. Our reporting on these key issues was cited at the negotiating table and helped shape the deal that ended the strike. Our coverage was republished widely, appearing in local publications such as *Denverite*, *The Colorado Independent*, *Colorado Public Radio*, and *The Denver Post*. It also prompted an outpouring of spontaneous praise and support from our readers, who understood the valuable service that the team provided. One reader, after sending in a \$500 donation, tweeted, "Chalkbeat Colorado's coverage of the dispute between the DPS and the teacher's union has been exemplary. Balanced, timely, informative, fair and comprehensive. I can't think of anything else that would define good journalism."

Detroit

School closures result in upheaval for all involved, especially students, [whose learning environments are disrupted](#) and who are forced to acclimate to entirely new surroundings, sometimes in the middle of a school year. When Detroit reporter Koby Levin reported on [the closure of a charter school](#) in the city, he closely examined the expensive lease agreement that proved to be beyond its means and interviewed all sources who were willing to speak on the topic in order to present a transparent portrayal of the situation for readers. While the result of our reporting is still to be seen, we expect the state to consider changing the way it vets charter schools applying for financial help through the loan program, to ensure that schools aren't getting into leases they can't afford, as a potential solution to the problem Chalkbeat brought to light.



Parents and teachers crowded into a board meeting at Southwest Detroit Community School in October to voice concerns about their struggling school. (Photo by: Koby Levin/Chalkbeat)



Emmerich Manual High School in Indianapolis. (Photo by: Jennifer Dummett/Chalkbeat)

Indiana

After Chalkbeat Indiana reporter Dylan McCoy noticed an unusual trend in home-school numbers at Manual High School, she spent six months analyzing data and interviewing students, former educators, experts, policymakers and school leaders for her story on [how some Indiana schools have written off struggling students as home-schoolers](#). Most importantly, she took time to get to know residents in the neighborhood around Manual and talked to one family in particular that provided a human face for the numbers. In her reporting, McCoy knew she needed to understand the root of this issue, hear from the important players, give the school a chance to offer their explanation, and speak to a family that had been directly impacted.

After McCoy's story, the Indiana Charter School Board denied requests from a for-profit management company to continue running Manual High School and two other takeover schools, [citing concerns](#) over the large number of students leaving to "home-school." The Indiana State Board of Education subsequently voted [to return the three schools to local district control](#). In addition, a state committee is [calling on lawmakers](#) to change how graduation rates are calculated and how schools are graded after our investigation highlighted how those metrics can be manipulated by schools marking students as leaving to home-school instead of dropping out..



(Photo by: Christina Veiga/Chalkbeat)

New York

When New York rolled out a universal preschool policy — called Pre-K for All — in 2014, preschools across the city expanded rapidly. Chalkbeat New York’s [sustained reporting](#) on the topic found that as the programs have grown over the years, a stark pay disparity emerged between preschool teachers in NYC public schools and those in community-run programs. Pre-K teachers in public schools are public school teachers represented by the United Federation of Teachers, and received up to 60% higher salaries and a benefits package than their counterparts at community-run programs. Our coverage sparked a widespread conversation about this disparity and in August, the city and union [announced a deal to boost pay](#). Our reporting was so influential that the Citizens Committee for Children gave reporter Christina Veiga its Samuel Peabody Award, saying her reporting built the “groundswell of support needed” to make politicians prioritize pre-K salary parity in budget negotiations.

Newark

In December, Chalkbeat Reporter Devna Bose wrote about [the challenges Newark schools face with the prevalence of students with asthma](#) in the district. About one in every four children in Newark has asthma, which is a rate three times higher than the national average, and studies have shown that Newark children are hospitalized for asthma 30 times higher than the national rate. These numbers may be due to environmental concerns, such as students living in high-traffic areas that cause poor air quality, as well as the [state of some Newark schools](#), which need an estimated \$311 million in repairs.

Despite state law requiring annual “asthma education opportunities” for all educators, the number of schools with an “asthma-friendly” designation — meaning their teachers and nurses were trained to deal with asthma and there was a nebulizer at each school — has dropped in the last decade from all district schools to just 11 of 64. As a result of the Newark team’s strong coverage on the topic, the [Newark Teachers Union vowed that every teacher](#) will receive asthma training and within a month of our initial reporting, nearly 600 Newark teachers and school staff members had received training.



(Photo by: Patrick Wall/Chalkbeat)

Tennessee

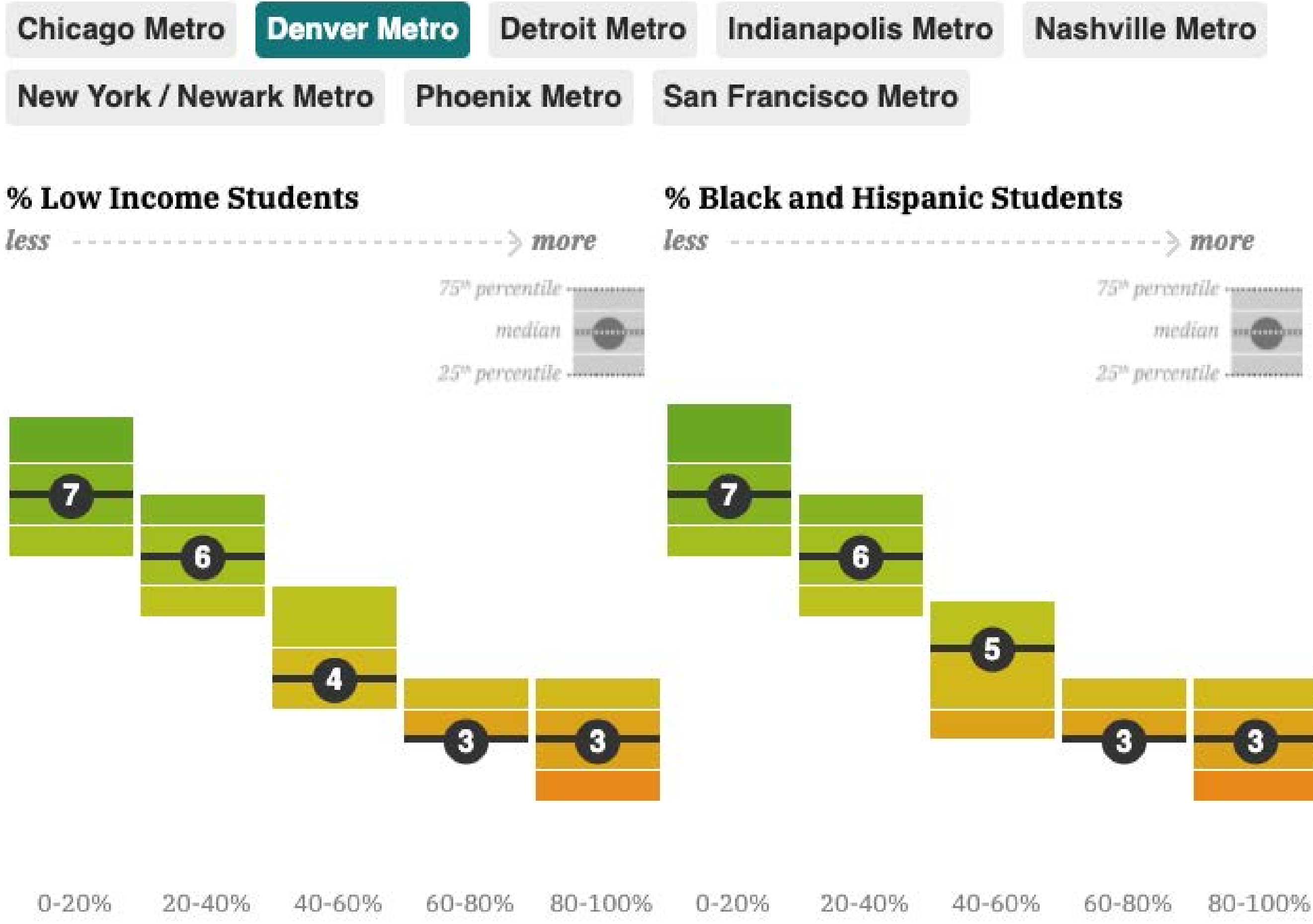
Based on the district’s initial report to the department under a new state law around lead testing, Chalkbeat Tennessee initiated a public records request with the Tennessee Department of Health. What they found led to [this story](#), which revealed that the first batch of 10 Memphis schools in the report tested high for lead in at least one water source. In subsequent days, our story prompted Shelby County Schools to release the names of [more schools](#) — 39 in all — flagged for unsafe lead levels. This coverage had a great impact on the community, in that parents learned sooner about which schools were affected. It also led the local health department to begin offering free blood screenings to those students.



(Photo by: Ruma Kumar/Chalkbeat)

GreatSchools ratings map closely to students’ race and poverty

The black lines below show the median GreatSchools rating for each grouping of schools. The colored bars represent the middle 50% of schools in each grouping. Categories do not necessarily have the same number of schools.



(Graphic by: Gabrielle LaMarr LaMee/Chalkbeat)

National

National reporter Matt Barnum, along with Chalkbeat’s Gabrielle LaMarr LeMee, dove deep into the GreatSchools rating system, which has become a standard component of home listings on major real estate websites like Zillow. Their [analysis](#) found that the rating system effectively steers consumers towards whiter, more affluent schools. The team also partnered with Vox on a [video](#), and together the pieces prompted a raft of articles and discussions about what the findings meant and how the ratings could be improved.

National reporter Kalyn Belsha also [revealed](#) how the Trump administration stymied school integration efforts across the country. In documents that had not been previously made public, 17 big-city and mid-sized school districts had explained how they would boost socioeconomic integration with money from a federal program killed shortly after President Trump took office. Years later, some said that funding gap meant they had to abandon those efforts. The story prompted local follow-up reporting, including from cities without a Chalkbeat presence.

A Year in Review

January

Chalkbeat Newark, which debuted in Spring 2018, was approved by our Board of Directors to officially move out of pilot mode and become a full bureau, allowing Chalkbeat to solidify our long-term commitment to the city. Our application to host a Report for America corps member was also approved, which immediately expanded our editorial capacity. In 2019, Chalkbeat Newark recorded 12 [real-world impacts](#) as a result of stories published.



February

We kicked off hiring in 2019 with a new digital marketing manager, Kary Perez. She dedicated the year to building Chalkbeat's membership offerings and growing our audience. Chalkbeat hired 20 new staff members in 2019. You can meet all of our team members [here](#).

March

Our product team rolled out a new internal data library, which is a system to organize and look up all of the data we have used in our reporting. This powerful tool has enabled us to more effectively share and compare data across our bureaus, allowing for reliable fact-checking and more cross-team collaboration on hard-hitting stories.

Traditional high schools, including Malcolm X Shabazz, will offer new career-focused “academies.” (Photo by: Patrick Wall/Chalkbeat)



Rising third-graders attending Denver Public Schools' “summer academy” stop to inspect a mushroom during a nature walk. (Photo by: Melanie Asmar/Chalkbeat)

April

A big month for Chalkbeat awards! The Colorado team cleaned up at the Colorado Press Association, winning first place in Public Service, first place in Education, second place in Education and Feature Writing and second place in Sustained Coverage. Chalkbeat Indiana won four Indiana Professional Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists awards — first place for Children's Issues, second place for Minority Issues, as well as second and third place in Education Reporting. New York reporter Christina Veiga and Digital Producer Sam Park won a top medallion award from the Society of Silurians in the reporting on minority issues category.

May

Chalkbeat Colorado Reporter Yesenia Robles won an Investigative Reporters & Editors fellowship to crunch data on long-term English language learners — students who are stuck spending most of their time learning English and denied other educational opportunities.

June

Our team began to utilize Metrics for News, a tool for journalists designed by The American Press Association to transform traditional web analytics into real insights about how to effectively engage audiences. It has allowed us to develop deeper insights into the types of stories and key topics that our readers crave.



All-staff retreat in Detroit.

July

Chalkbeat's entire staff met in Detroit for our annual all-staff retreat.

Because our team is dispersed across the nation, this was an opportunity for us to meet in person to talk about the future of Chalkbeat and our new diversity, equity, and inclusion work. We also had the opportunity to check out the city, eat some great meals together, and host an event to express our gratitude to our local funders.

August

We launched our second Listening Tour, which comprised parent-focused reader engagement events in all of our bureaus. Nearly half of all attendees were parents and we came away with 40 new story ideas. Read more about how we conduct our Listening Tours and what we learned in [this story](#), from Chalkbeat's [first-ever Engagement Editor](#), Caty Green.

September

The [Ready or Not](#) series launched in Detroit and Newark, which focuses on 5 students on their journey through their first year of college. Lori and Pat were awarded grants from the Education Writers Association for this cross-bureau collaboration.

October

We publicly announced [Chalkbeat 2025](#), our 5-year strategic plan, which involves strengthening our local-first model and growing to 18 bureaus in the next 5 years. Here's a look into [how we built it](#), from Chalkbeat's CEO and co-founder Elizabeth Green.

November

As we embarked on our new strategic plan, we recognized the need for a [new brand identity](#) that better reflects how much we have grown and who we are now — local, innovative, inclusive, and trustworthy. We launched our new website, which has the flexibility to grow as we do.

December

We raised just over \$56k in our End-of-Year membership campaign from a total of nearly 700 supporters. All [members](#) who donated \$100 and above received our favorite swag yet — [a Chalkbeat umbrella!](#)

By the Numbers

We're continuing to grow...

\$8,997,501: Our operating budget for 2019-2020, which accounts for expanded local and national coverage, as well as greater specialization at the network support level.

 **62** 

The size of Chalkbeat's staff. This includes our award-winning reporters, story editors, bureau chiefs, as well as our product, revenue and operations teams. You can learn more about our different teams and find all of our staff bios [here](#).

We're reaching and engaging our core audience...

997,200: The average number of monthly Chalkbeat pageviews in the last quarter of 2019.

58%: Percent of survey respondents who have been reading Chalkbeat for 2+ years.

 **51,818**

Total number of readers who subscribed to our newsletters in 2019. This is up from 33,490 subscriptions in 2018. [Sign up here!](#)

46%: Percent of survey respondents who said Chalkbeat is the only education newsletter they read.

8.2 (out of 10): Average survey response when asked if they would recommend Chalkbeat to a friend or colleague.

16: Number of Chalkbeat readers participating on our [Reader Advisory Board](#). If you're interested in joining us, you can [apply here](#).

We're making a difference...

2,463: Original Chalkbeat stories published in 2019.

1,605: Number of times Chalkbeat stories were republished in 2019.

 **25+**

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

277: The number of real-world impacts — instances of informed conversations and actions — that we've tracked back to our reporting this year. Including:

66: Number of times our reporters appeared on television and/or radio to share their expertise.

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

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

Our 2018-2019 fiscal year audit attests to our financial health...

\$7,189,705: Revenue

\$6,355,722: Expenses

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

77% Program services

13% Management and general

10% Fundraising

176: Organizations and companies who posted jobs on Chalkbeat's [jobs board](#) in 2019.

\$6,079,396: Net Assets

52: Organizations and companies who sponsored Chalkbeat this year.

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

“Chalkbeat devotes **time, attention and care** to covering education in a way that other outlets in the city can’t.”

“If you’re interested in what’s happening in schools both **locally and nationally**, Chalkbeat should be your news source!”

“Local reporting is hard to come by and Education reporting is a black hole, but Chalkbeat provides **quality, local reporting** on education.”

“Great, **unbiased** education overview that’s as in the weeds as you like, but broken down by multiple levels of specificity. Bomb newsletter.”

“I love having the most up-to-date information about what’s happening in schools and districts across the state **all in one spot** - my inbox!”

“Most news sources regurgitate the same lines and quotes provided in a press release or statement. Chalkbeat goes beyond that to help you understand the matter at hand and its **impact**.”

“Chalkbeat provides the most **expert**, close-to-the-ground reporting on K-12 education practice and policy in the cities and states it covers.”

“I have found this publication to be **the best** I have read in years. I especially enjoy the fact that REAL educators are a part of discussions and responding to questions.”

“No other site covers education the way Chalkbeat does, making it both **accessible** to everyday readers but also covering the issues the most plugged-in audiences would care about.”

“I find Chalkbeat **honest, fresh, and insightful**. It shares the good and bad in education, and its direction both locally and nationally.”

“Their reporting is top-notch. Reporters clearly understand the context of the issues they write about and don’t shy away from the **deeper stories**.”

Support Us

If you are interested in supporting Chalkbeat or connecting with our team, we’d love to hear from you.

Contact our network team

General contact: contact@chalkbeat.org

Sponsorships: sponsor@chalkbeat.org

Philanthropy and major donors: grants@chalkbeat.org

Membership and online donations: membership@chalkbeat.org

Jobs Board: jobs@chalkbeat.org

Pitch a First Person submission: firstperson@chalkbeat.org

Pitch a national story: national@chalkbeat.org

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