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The Six Largest Public School Districts in the U.S.

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THE SIX LARGEST PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN THE U.S.

K-12 Education Fact Sheet No. 2 | December 2020

Prepared by: Marie A. Falcone, Saha Salahi, Olivia K. Cheche, Peter Grema, Caitlin J. Saladino, William E. Brown, Jr., and Magdalena Martinez

PURPOSE:

This fact sheet examines the student enrollment of the six largest school districts in the United States. The following school districts are included based on enrollment data for the 2015-2016 school year:

National Rank (by size)	School District Name	School District MSA
1	New York City Public Schools (NYCDOE)	New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA
2	Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA
3	Chicago Public Schools (CPS)	Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI
4	Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS)	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL
5	Clark County School District (CCSD)	Las Vegas-Henderson-Paradise, NV
6	Broward County Public Schools (BCPS)	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL

Data are also presented on the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) populations of these districts and the student to school board trustee ratios. These figures allow policymakers to better understand the student enrollment and metropolitan dynamics of large school districts for comparative analysis.

ABOUT THE DATA:

U.S. Census Bureau population estimates for 2015 are provided for the 5 MSAs that are home to the six largest school districts in the U.S.¹ Data from The Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)² provides the number of students and schools in each district for the 2015-2016 school year. Using the school board website of each district, we report how school board trustees are placed in their positions (either through election and/or appointment) and the number of trustees per district to calculate the student to trustee ratio.

KEY FINDINGS:

1. In 2015, the Clark County School District (CCSD) was the fifth largest school district in the nation, located within the 29th largest metro (Las Vegas-Henderson-Paradise, NV MSA), making it an outlier. The remaining five school districts in this fact sheet are located within the seven largest MSAs in the country.
2. Among the 6 largest school districts in the U.S., Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is the only school district that appoints its school board members. All other boards are determined by direct election.
3. New York City Public Schools (NYCDOE) utilizes 352 school board trustee members to represent nearly one million students, or a ratio of 2,797 students per 1 trustee.

¹ Miami-Dade County Public Schools and Broward County Public Schools are two school districts in Florida that are both located in the Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL MSA. Both school districts, despite being geographically similar, encompass their own school boards and separate trustees that represent the district's enrollment.

² See the Civil Rights Data Collection, (<https://ocrdata.ed.gov/>).

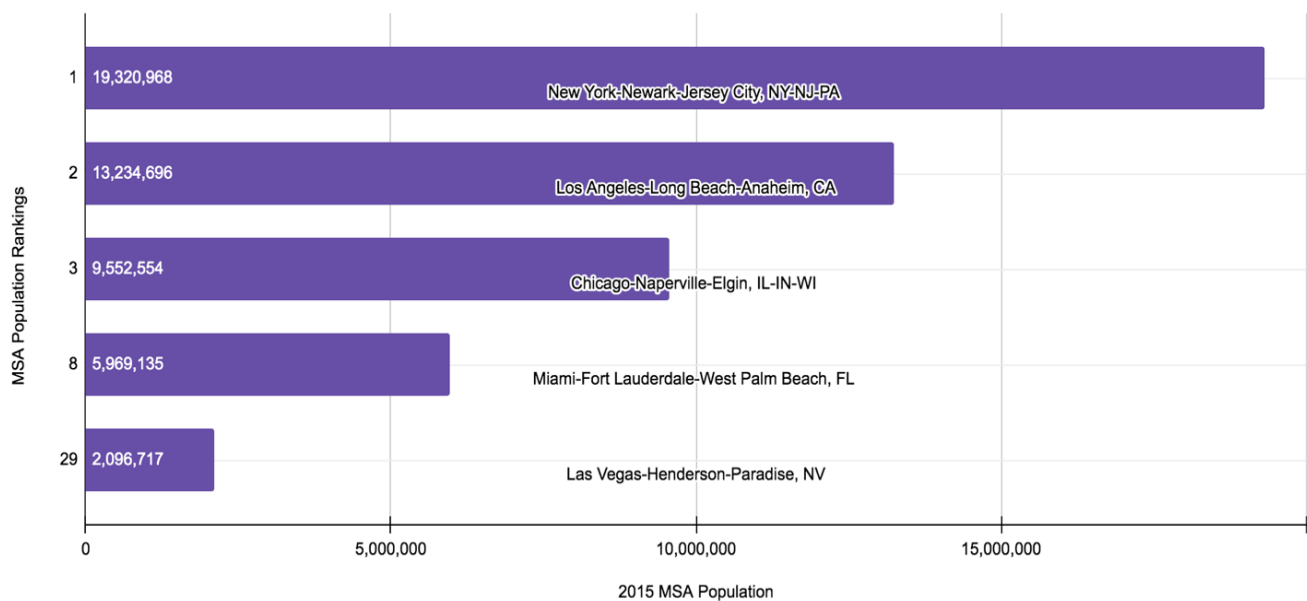
Figure 1 provides the overall MSA population of the six largest school districts in the nation, based on 2015 Census data. The NYCDOE is located in the New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA MSA, which expands into New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Los Angeles Unified (LAUSD) covers the Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA MSA. CPS encompasses the Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI MSA, which expands into the states of Indiana and Wisconsin.

Both Miami-Dade Public Schools (M-DCPS) and Broward County Public Schools (BCPS) are included in the Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, FL MSA. Because M-DCPS and BCPS are located in the same metropolitan statistical area, both are represented by one bar in the chart. CCSD is located in the Las Vegas-Henderson-Paradise, NV MSA.

The New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami metro areas are among the seven most populous in the nation.

According to 2015 Census data, the Las Vegas metro area ranks the 29th largest MSA in the country, yet CCSD is the fifth largest school district, a departure when compared to the MSA populations of the other school districts.

Figure 1: MSA Population of the Six Largest School Districts in the U.S., 2015



* Adapted from the U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division³

Both Table 1 and Figure 2 display the ratio of students to one school board trustee member in each district. To calculate this figure for each school district, we divided the number of students enrolled by the number of school board trustee members. Figure 2 also indicates the method of obtaining school board members, either through appointment or direct election (light or dark purple bars). The only district that appoints school board members is Chicago Public Schools.

³ See United States Census Bureau, "Population Division", (<https://www.census.gov/topics/population.html>).

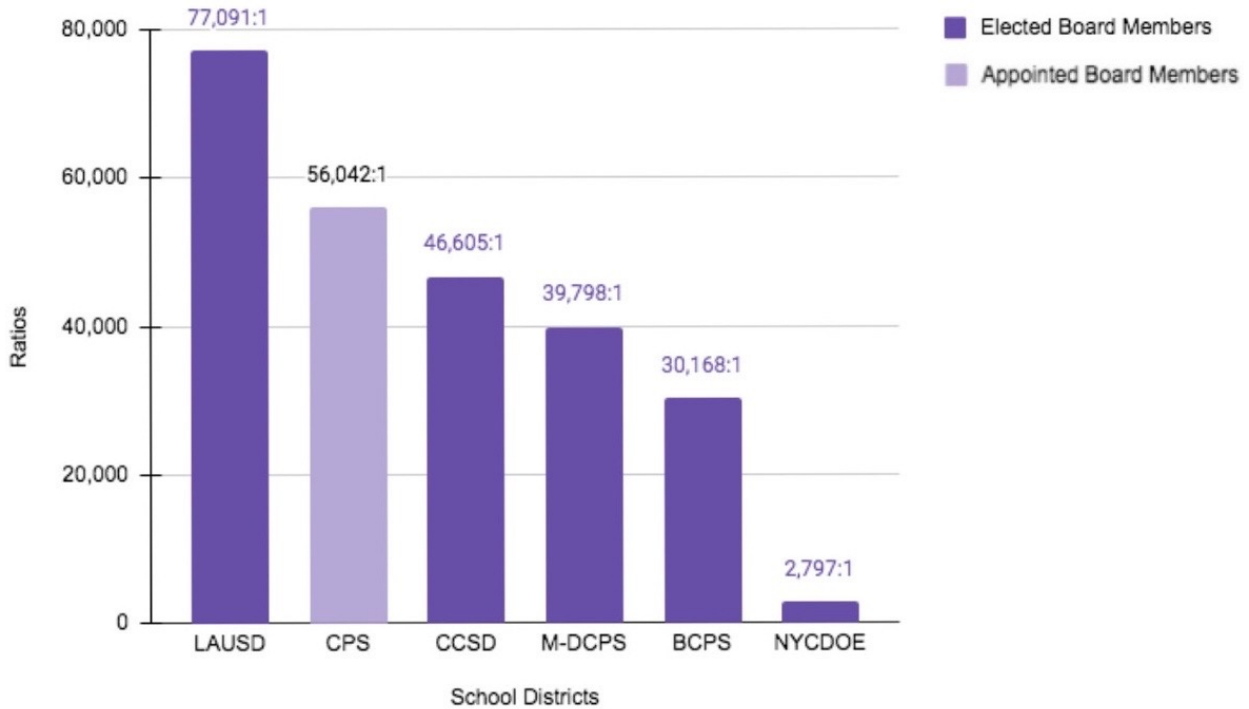
Although it is the largest school district in terms of student population, New York City Public Schools (NYCDOE) utilizes 352 school board trustee members to represent nearly one million students; this represents the smallest student to trustee ratio (2,797 students to 1 trustee) among the six largest school districts in the U.S.

Table 1: Student and Trustee Totals for the Six Largest U.S. School Districts, 2015

District Name	Trustee Selection	# of Trustees	# of Students
New York City Public Schools (NYCDOE)	Election	352	984,500
Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)	Election	7	539,634
Chicago Public Schools (CPS)	Appointed	7	392,303
Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS)	Election	9	358,129
Clark County School District (CCSD)	Election	7	326,238
Broward County Public Schools (BCPS)	Election	9	262,666

*Adapted from Civil Rights Data Collection, (<https://ocrdata.ed.gov/>).

Figure 2: Student to Trustee Ratio for the Six Largest U.S. School Districts, 2015



*Adapted from the school board websites of each District⁴

⁴ NYC Department of Education, “Panel for Education Policy,” 2020 (www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/leadership/panel-for-education-policy); Los Angeles Unified School District School Board, “Board of Education,” 2020 (www.laschoolboard.org/); Chicago Public Schools, “Chicago Board of Education,” 2020 (www.cps.edu/about/chicago-board-of-education); Dade Schools, “M-DCPS School Board: School Board Members,” 2020 (www.dadeschools.net/schoolboard/bdmembers.asp); Clark County School District, “Trustee General Information,” 2020 (www.ccsd.net/trustees/); Broward County Public Schools, “School Board of Broward County, Florida,” 2020 (www.browardschools.com/schoolboard).