

— A SNAPSHOT OF —



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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Letter From Executive Director Todd Mann

Dear Friends,

On behalf of Magnet Schools of America and the board of directors, I am proud to share our snapshot of magnet schools. Today, there are more than 4,340 magnet schools providing high-quality public education to nearly 3.5 million students across 46 states and the District of Columbia – more than ever before.

Since magnet schools were founded in the 1970's with the explicit goal of desegregation, they have delivered life-changing results for students. We see ever-diversifying classrooms where students are excited to learn through theme-based classes and are prepared to graduate and succeed at college and in their careers. And magnet schools are more accessible than ever before, with three in four magnet schools using a lottery system for admission rather than academic criteria.

Take Arthur & Polly Mays Middle School in Miami, Florida, where principal Martin T. Reid focused on parent and community partnerships to turn around one of the state's lowest-performing schools. While others focused on the school's failings, Reid "saw a great opportunity to transform a struggling middle school into an award-winning magnet school for the arts." Reid's and the stories in the following pages are just a few of the thousands that demonstrate the transformative power of magnet schools.



While we witness so much of the great work that magnets are doing every day, unfortunately, there is inconsistent data regarding the number of magnet schools across the nation. As the voice of magnet schools, we owed it to America's educators and students to get a more accurate, comprehensive number of magnet schools to illuminate their growing presence – and to make sure they have the resources they need to continue to provide excellent educational opportunities for their public school students.

To do this, we partnered with Dr. Amy Hawn Nelson and her team of researchers at the University of North Carolina - Charlotte's Urban Institute. The team at the Urban Institute found that many school districts define and label their magnet schools differently. This varies from state to state, especially as it relates to whether or not a school had a stated diversity goal. To get an accurate count, we focused on characteristics that could be explicitly measured and consistently applied across the country to ensure the number was correct and to provide a definitive state-by-state count of magnets.

Diversity is at the heart of everything we stand for and always will be. Though not measured here, diversity is one of the five pillars of magnet schools and we at Magnet Schools of America know it is the cornerstone to offering students a global educational experience. Research shows that diverse classrooms with students from a wide array of backgrounds are better for our students for countless reasons.¹ They help students develop empathy and respect and teach them how to work collaboratively with people of all backgrounds – to name just a few.

We must do everything we can to foster an environment in which magnet schools have the support they need to promote educational options, equity, diversity, and academic excellence for all students.

Our organization is proud to work on behalf of the thousands of magnet schools across the country that answer the call for high-quality public education and prepare our students for future success.

Magnet schools have been a springboard for success for so many students. Let's work together to make sure every student's story can be a success story.

With gratitude,
Todd Mann

INTRODUCTION

There's no one-size-fits-all in education. Policymakers and school districts seek to provide more opportunities for low-income students, more choices for parents, more diverse classrooms, and more school accountability. Providing an excellent education to prepare our nation's students for college and careers has never been more important for keeping the nation competitive – and for helping our students reach their full potential.

And with sustained — and increased — funding, magnet schools can continue to answer the call for high-quality public education — and serve more students.

The good news is that magnet schools are helping solve the challenges that educators face in delivering high-quality public education to all students.

So what are magnet schools, and what makes them an integral part of our education system? Magnet schools are public schools that provide a specialized theme-based education to prepare students for college and careers. Free to attend and accessible to all students, magnet schools in the United States enroll a higher proportion of low-income students and are more racially and ethnically diverse than traditional public schools.² Furthermore, magnet schools are administered by local public school districts, ensuring they are accountable for delivering great results to the communities they serve.

Magnet Schools of America, the national association of magnet and theme-based schools, commissioned a study with the University of North Carolina – Charlotte's Urban Institute to compile a comprehensive and more current count of the number of magnet schools across the country, as many school districts have broadened what it means to be a magnet school. The Institute determined there are now **4,340 magnet schools**. These dynamic schools educate one out of every 15 public school students in the United States.³

As the largest and original provider of public school choice⁴, magnet schools have the power to turn around low-performing schools, and forever shape students' and educators' lives. The stories included in this report illustrate the transformative power of America's magnet schools. Read on to learn about the educational movement that's already benefiting nearly **3.5 million students** across the United States.



What is a magnet school?

Magnet schools:

- are administered by local public school districts.
- have a specialized curriculum or theme.
- attract students from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- provide parents with choices for their child's education within the public school system.

See more about the methodology for defining magnet schools for this report on page 11.

How are magnet schools funded?

Finding resources to operate specialized theme-based magnet programs can be a challenge for school districts. Magnet schools are generally funded with local dollars. A small number of states provide additional support. The federal government also plays a role by awarding grants through the Magnet Schools Assistance Program.

Magnet schools need continued support at the federal, state and local levels. With sustained — and increased — funding, they can continue to provide high-quality public education to more students.

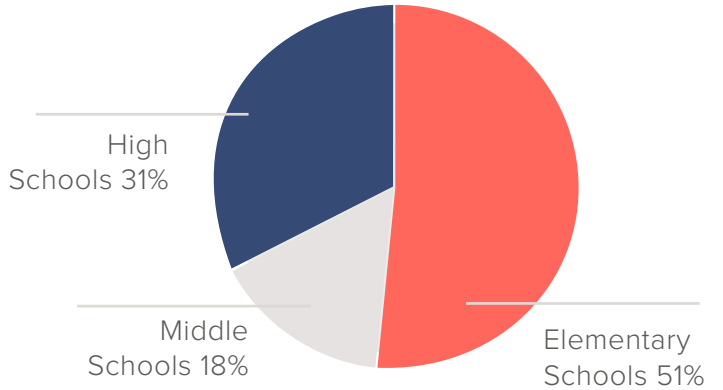
MAGNET SCHOOLS

Attracting More Students Than Ever Before

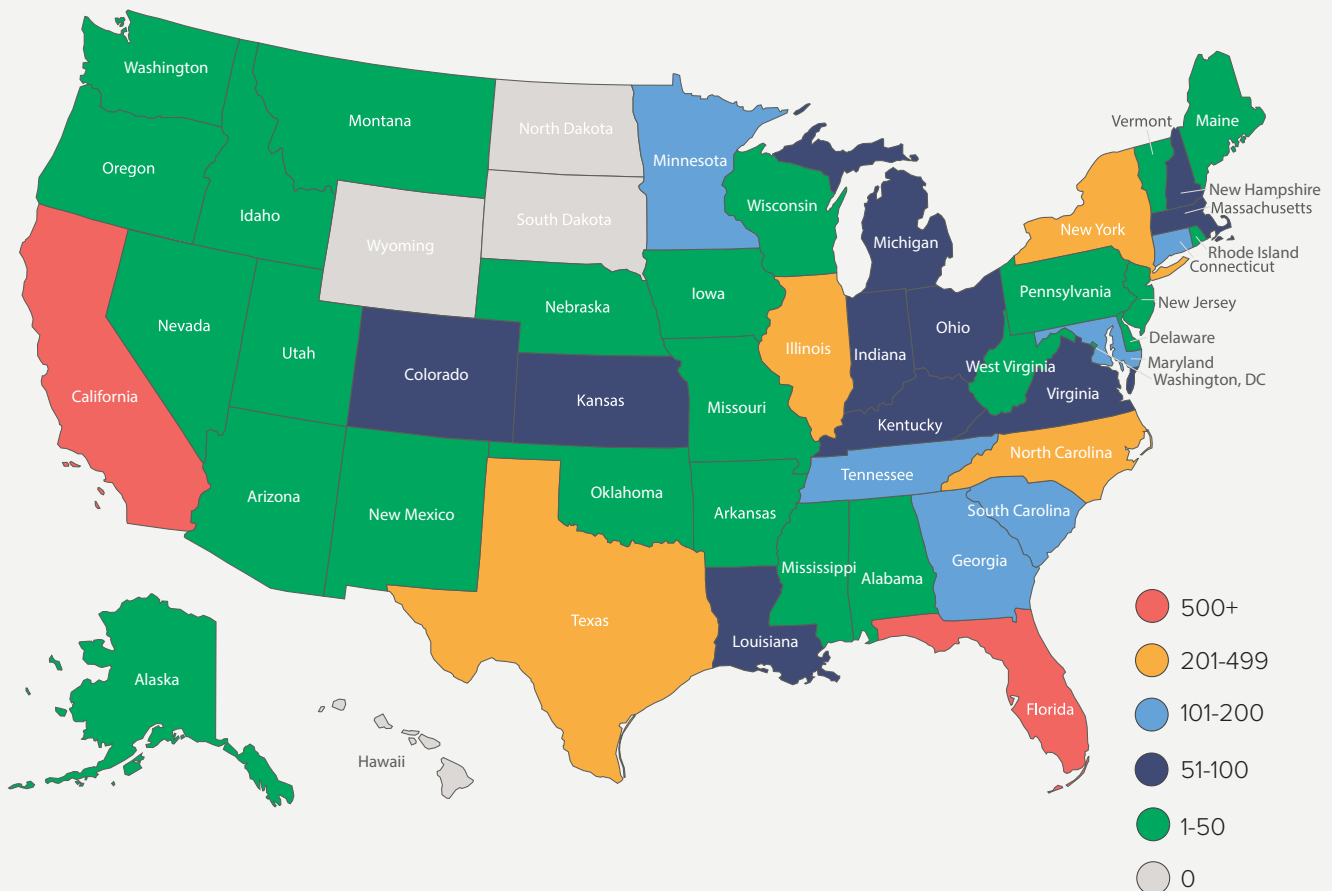
Magnet schools are a growing force in education from coast to coast. There are now more magnet schools than ever before: 4,340 and counting. These theme-based public schools deliver a high-quality education to nearly 3.5 million students across 46 states and the District of Columbia.

Since the 1970s, magnets have provided high-quality education to students, and with each success story, interest in these unique schools grows. In fact, most magnet schools have waitlists of students eager to enroll.

MAGNET SCHOOLS BY GRADE LEVEL

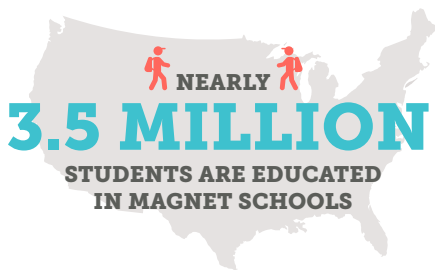


Number of Magnet Schools by State

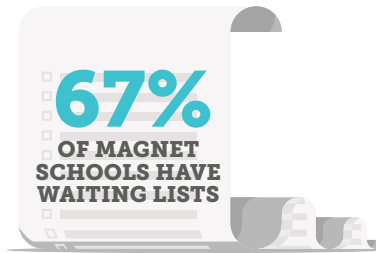


FAST FACTS

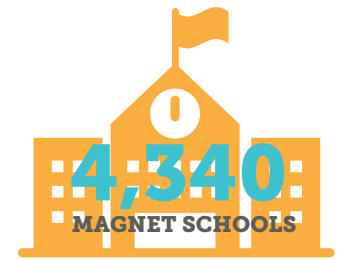
About Magnet Schools



A recent study revealed that
1 OUT OF EVERY 15
PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS
in the U.S. attends a magnet school – that's
nearly **3.5 million students** across the country
receiving a high-quality, theme-based education.








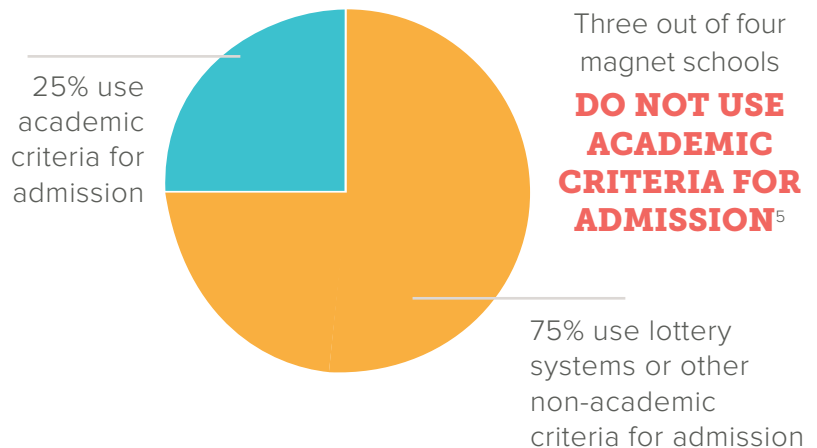
Magnet schools are a popular
school choice option.
MANY MAGNET SCHOOLS
HAVE WAITING LISTS
full of parents eager to get their students
into these high-performing schools.⁵



THERE ARE NOW 4,340
MAGNET SCHOOLS.
With continued funding, more parents will
have the opportunity to choose the public
magnet school that best suits their
child's learning needs.

COMMON MAGNET THEMES³

-  STEM Related 30%
-  Visual, Performing Arts 16%
-  International Baccalaureate (IB) 12%
-  Gifted and Talented 8%
-  Foreign/World Languages 7%



- **A large percentage of magnets report graduation rates of 90 percent or higher**, with at least 72 percent of students enrolling in post-secondary education.⁵
- **Low-performing schools can be revitalized** by magnet programs through specialized curriculum, high-quality instruction, and family and community partnerships that include mentoring, internships, financial support, and real-world learning experiences.⁶
- Fifty-eight percent of magnets surveyed report lower teacher turnover rates than at the district level.⁵
- **Sixty percent of magnet schools report state math test scores that were higher than those at the district level.**⁴
- **Magnets enroll a larger share of black and Hispanic students than traditional public schools and a higher proportion of low-income students**, ensuring that all students have access to rigorous high-quality academic options.⁷

THE HISTORY OF MAGNETS

Magnet schools were originally created with the explicit goal of promoting school desegregation. Magnet schools are considered the original form of public school choice and were modeled after specialized programs such as the Bronx High School of Science, Boston Latin School, San Francisco's Lowell High School, and Lane Tech College Prep High School in Chicago. By utilizing theme-based

backgrounds, and from neighborhoods all over the city. About the same time, a visual and performing arts school opened its doors in Houston, TX and was described as working like a "magnet" in attracting students.

By 1980 many urban areas had systems of magnets, but it was the federal courts that caused the greatest surge in magnet education. Following a court ruling approving special enrichment programs to help to overcome the effects of "past discrimination," almost every court order mandating schools to desegregate had a voluntary magnet school component. With the creation of the federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program, the nation continued to witness a dramatic increase in the development of magnet schools through the 1990s and into the 2000s.

Today magnet schools continue to flourish and reflect the creativity and determination of desegregation efforts of the past while delivering a high-quality public education to all.



Photo of Skyline High School courtesy of Dallas ISD

curriculum and instruction in subject areas such as math, science, or the arts, magnet schools were established as a tool to help school districts promote voluntary school integration rather than using forced busing or mandatory student assignment policies.

The first school designed to reduce racial isolation by offering a choice to parents was McCarver Elementary School in Tacoma, Washington in 1968. One year later, Trotter Elementary School opened for the same purpose in Boston, Massachusetts. Both of these schools offered a different organizational model and allowed students to progress at their own rates. Neither of these schools was called a magnet school; rather, they were referred to as "alternatives."

In 1971 Skyline High School was founded in Dallas, Texas as the first "super" high school built around the concept of career strands. It is known as the earliest magnet school and attracted students from many different races, income

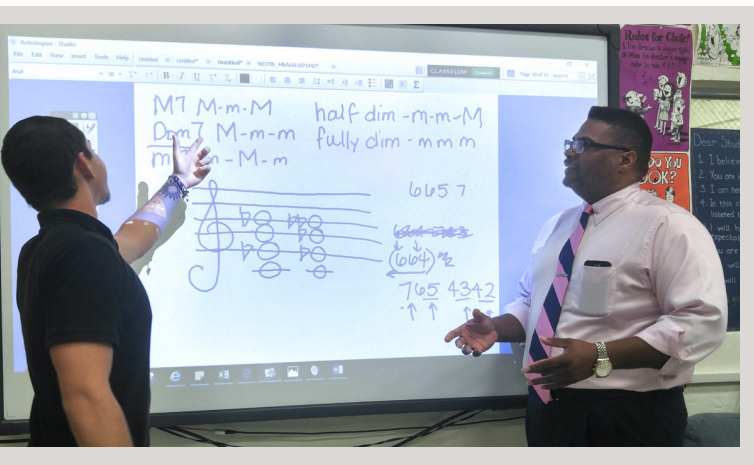
The number of school districts that are still implementing court-ordered school desegregation plans has declined and legal decisions made by the courts have limited their ability to pursue race-based student assignment policies. Nevertheless, magnet schools continue to be an important and popular form of public school choice used to promote school diversity and innovation in the classroom.

*By Dr. Donald Waldrip
Founder of Magnet Schools of America*

PRINCIPAL PROFILE

How One Educator Helped a Struggling School Make the Grade

Magnet Schools of America's 2016 National Principal of the Year, Martin T. Reid, has some principled advice for struggling schools: there's no such thing as a "microwave school." Instead, he says that "creating real, lasting change – both inside and outside the classroom – requires time, persistence, and education."



And most critically, it requires a leader who is prepared to do whatever it takes to help teachers and students reach their utmost potential.

With his exemplary background in education and teaching, Principal Reid was the right leader to revitalize one of Florida's lowest-performing schools. When Reid took over Arthur & Polly Mays Conservatory of the Arts in 2009, the school was doing a disservice to its talented pool of students, faculty, and staff. It received C and D ratings every year. A middle school with a complicated past (the school had previously operated as a black high school during segregation), Arthur & Polly Mays Conservatory of the Arts was plagued with daily behavioral issues that had a negative impact on student outcomes.

Magnet schools have been shown to boost graduation rates, reduce teacher turnover and discipline problems, and increase parent and community involvement, among other improvements.

However, Reid says that while many people focused on the school's failings, "I saw a great opportunity: to transform a struggling middle school into an award-winning magnet

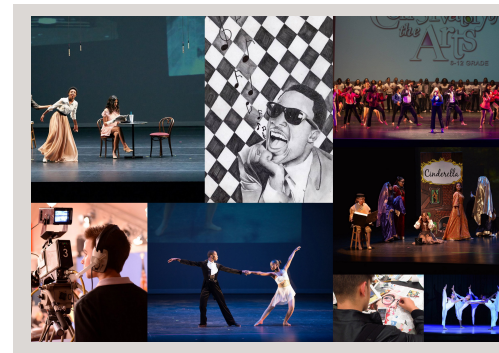
school for the arts."

Reid knew that his vision of transforming Arthur & Polly Mays Conservatory of the Arts into an award-winning magnet school could not be done overnight, so he started with small, incremental changes, such as ensuring the facility was clean and functional and addressing behavioral issues caused by minimal supervision before school. Day by day, week by week, Reid began to incorporate the principles of magnets into Arthur & Polly Mays Conservatory of the Arts' structure and image, from building community partnerships with the University of Miami's Frost School of Music and other parent and community groups to aligning the curriculum with the school's overall arts theme.

As Arthur & Polly Mays Conservatory of the Arts transitioned into a full conservatory for students in grades 6-12, the transformative impact on teacher satisfaction, student achievement, and parent engagement became palpable. In the seven years since Reid took the reins, Mays has created a rich, arts-infused educational experience for its students while giving teachers and parents the resources they need to spark excitement, creativity, and passion for the arts. By partnering with parents and community members, the school has also opened up new and inspiring learning opportunities for teachers, who now have the ability to incorporate free field trips, workshops, and private music lessons into their arts-themed curriculums.

Reid's success did not go unnoticed. Arthur & Polly Mays Conservatory of the Arts has received many accolades, including Magnet Schools of America's Merit Award of Excellence in 2017 and 2014, as well as the Merit Award of Distinction two years in a row. Under Reid's leadership, Arthur & Polly Mays Conservatory of the Arts has emerged as a shining example of what magnet schools can do for students and teachers alike. For example, its graduation rate has exceeded local, state, and national levels for the last three years.

Reid's strategic focus on parent and community partnerships also reflects one of Magnet Schools of America's five pillars of success.



SCHOOL PROFILE

Shaping the Next Generation of Health Care Professionals at a Houston Magnet School

Five years ago, Ryan Middle School was rated one of the worst performing schools in Houston with an F in the "Children at Risk" middle school ratings. Fast forward to today, and the once-troubled school has ascended to an A+ and is the sixth best middle school in the Houston Independent School District.

The key to its success? Becoming a magnet school. Ryan Middle School became one of six schools in the Houston Independent School District (HISD) to access a critical three-year, \$12 million grant from the U.S.



Department of Education, allowing it to transform itself into a magnet school. The school's founding principal, Dr. Jyoti Malhan, spearheaded this effort by building a partnership with Baylor College of Medicine. The goal of the partnership was to help guide more low-income and minority students into the medical and health professions and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) related fields.

"For Baylor to partner with us, and for us to be called the Baylor College of Medicine, it gives me goosebumps," says Dr. Malhan.

Students at Baylor College of Medicine Academy at Ryan (BCMAR) receive a rigorous, theme-based program of study, which includes cutting-edge and cross-curricular classes in neuroscience, cardiovascular science, and sports

medicine. BCMAR attracts students from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds – 60 percent of students received free and reduced lunch.

And the school is outperforming its more affluent peers. In 2015, virtually all students passed their math and reading state assessments and 40 percent passed the reading portion at an advanced level. According to Dr. Malhan, the school's focus is to "prepare students for the most rigorous high school or the most prestigious colleges" and "educate and prepare outstanding global citizens."

"The Baylor College of Medicine Academy at Ryan is a phenomenal school with faculty and students who have embraced a challenging STEM curriculum," said Dr. Paul Klotman, president and CEO of Baylor College of Medicine.

"Preparing students for successful biomedical careers is core to Baylor College of Medicine's mission and we believe that these students will become our future health care professionals and leaders."

"Baylor College of Medicine Academy at Ryan is the result of a wonderful partnership with a clear vision and commitment to student achievement," said Houston ISD Superintendent Richard Carranza. "These young scholars will be among the next generation to advance medical treatment and research in Houston. When our students succeed, the whole city benefits."

SCHOOL PROFILE

Building a Culture of Achievement at Advanced Technologies Academy

Imagine if high school were like a small liberal arts college: small classes, great teaching, and a culture of achievement that drives all students to reach their full academic potential.



That's the idea behind Advanced Technologies Academy (A-TECH), a career and technical magnet school near downtown Las Vegas. A-TECH defies the odds in an otherwise struggling school district. It is the top ranking public school in Nevada, a two-time National Blue Ribbon School, and in the top 300 public schools nationally out of 22,000 public high schools nationwide, according to U.S. News & World Report.

*"It's our diversity that brings kids together,"
said A-Tech Principal Jonathan Synold.*



A-TECH's mission is "Academics Plus Technology." It provides students with access to 1,100 computers, 210 iPads, and numerous technology-based programs such as Google Classroom, the Khan Academy, and Albert.io. Throughout the school day, students learn with 3-D printers, Computer Aided Design (CAD) software, and Makerspaces that allow them to creatively invent. A-TECH's engineering program also uses Project Lead the Way, an engineering curriculum that promotes critical thinking and problem solving. Upon graduation, students are prepared for an ever-changing world that demands an educated, tech-savvy workforce.

Last year, the STEM Council and the Governor's Office of Science, Innovation and Technology named A-TECH one of only eight Governor STEM Schools. This designation signifies that it meets the highest standards of STEM instruction and is a model for schools around the state.

To help students gain career-ready skills, A-TECH collaborates with community partners to provide job shadowing and internship opportunities. For example, computer programming interns work along side computer science engineers at local technology companies. Students in the legal studies program gain practical training for law-related occupations during capstone projects such as moot court, where students serve as attorneys before real judges and their classmates participate as expert witnesses.

This "hands on - minds on" learning leads to academic success. In 2016, 100 percent of A-TECH's 1,000+ students demonstrated proficiency in math and English, and its senior class of 249 students took in more than \$9.7 million in college scholarships.

Reflecting one of the core tenets of magnet schools, A-TECH has a firm commitment to serving the district's diverse student population. The school's demographics reflect the district as a whole: 77 percent of students are minorities.

In addition to its commitment to diversity, A-TECH holds both its teachers and students to a high standard. Teachers help students build a four-year plan focused on classes within their choice of study area: architectural design, business management, engineering, graphic design, IT networking, legal studies, computer science, and web design/development. Class sizes are small, so that every student—no matter their background—has the opportunity to succeed.

"At A-TECH, it's not a question of whether you will graduate high school — it's an assumption," Synold said.

STUDENT PROFILE

Whitney M. Young Magnet High School Creates Success One Student at a Time

Magnet schools have been a springboard for the careers of so many students looking to achieve their dreams. Many alumni have gone on to have major achievements in fields such as government, medicine, journalism, the arts - and more.

Just ask Maya Rhodan, an avid storyteller who grew up on the south side of Chicago and graduated from Whitney M. Young Magnet High School. After graduating from Whitney Young, Maya attended Howard University in Washington, D.C., where she proved her writing chops at various media outlets, from Washingtonian Magazine to Essence Magazine, Ebony, and Washington City Paper. These experiences jump-started her current role as a full-time reporter and writer at Time Magazine. Her two older brothers, who are also both products of Chicago's magnet schools, have achieved similar career success: her older brother is a former web producer for Ebony Magazine who now calls his own shots as a freelance journalist in NYC. Her other brother is a mechanical engineer.

Maya's love of language can be traced all the way back to Murray Language Academy, a K-8 magnet school offering courses in French, Japanese, Mandarin, and Spanish. In 7th grade, Maya started at Whitney Young, a magnet school known for its academic rigor. There, she dove headfirst into the school's many courses and extracurricular offerings, including law, journalism, and creative writing. Her 8th grade English class, in particular, gave her the freedom to develop her own voice and learn the art of storytelling, skills that have stayed with her throughout her career. Maya, like so many others, benefited from the student-centered, collaborative and innovative approach of magnet schools, which give parents the opportunity to choose the school that best fits their child's learning needs.

According to Maya, her magnet school experience is very much a part of who she is today. "Attending Whitney Young was a privilege, both because of its great legacy and because of the unique ways it formed my thinking moving forward, she said"

In addition to academic excellence, one of the cornerstones of magnet schools is their commitment to diversity – and

Whitney Young is no exception. With diversity as one of its central pillars, Whitney Young has created a welcoming and safe space for different races, cultures, sexual identities, learning abilities, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The school's commitment to fostering cultural understanding, self-expression, and acceptance helped prepare Maya for the differences she would encounter among her peers at Howard University and throughout her writing career.



Photo courtesy of Time Magazine

Maya's success is backed up by evidence: magnet schools, which were originally created in the 1970's with the explicit goal of desegregation, enroll a larger share of black and Hispanic students than traditional public schools, as well as a higher proportion of low-income students. As a result, students who graduate from magnet schools have shown increased cultural competence.⁵ They learn to model empathy, respect, and collaboration, even among people who have different perspectives and viewpoints. They are ready for the workforce, ready for higher education, and ready for the world.

For Maya, her magnet school experience prepared her for her college and career and allowed her to pursue her passion. Magnet schools can help millions more do the same.

OUR METHODOLOGY

Magnet Schools of America commissioned University of North Carolina-Charlotte's Urban Institute to assemble a more current and comprehensive state-by-state count of all the magnet schools in the United States.

For the purposes of this research, 'magnet school' was defined by the following explicit characteristics:

- 1. Choice component (students selected to attend the school)***
- 2. Common theme or curricular focus***
- 3. Broad student assignment boundary often encompasses the entire district***

Many districts explicitly utilize the term 'magnet school' to describe a school this way. Some districts have schools that meet all three criteria, but these schools are labeled another way, such as an 'academy.' If a school was not labeled a 'magnet' by the district, but met these criteria, it was included in the directory.

About the Research Team

The University of North Carolina Charlotte Urban Institute is a nonpartisan, applied research and community outreach center at UNC Charlotte. The research team was led by Dr. Amy Hawn Nelson, an expert in K-12 Education, long-term schooling outcomes, data-based decision making, school composition and schooling outcomes and integrated data systems.

Endnotes

- 1 Ayscue, J., Frankenberg, E. & Siegel-Hawley, G. (2017). The complementary benefits of racial and socioeconomic diversity in schools. Washington, DC: The National Coalition on School Diversity.
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- 3 Gavarkavich, D., Hawn Nelson, A., Marcus, A., & Alvarado, L. (2016). Magnet school identification by state. Charlotte, NC: UNC Charlotte Urban Institute. On behalf of Magnet Schools of America
- 4 Polikoff, M., & Hardaway, T. (2017). Don't forget about magnet schools when thinking about school choice. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.
- 5 Magnet Schools of America. (2017). National survey examining magnet schools. Washington, DC
- 6 Kahlenberg, R. D. (2009). Turnaround schools that work: Moving beyond separate but equal. Washington, DC: The Century Foundation. Orfield, M. (2013). Integrated magnet schools: Outcomes and best practices. Minneapolis, MN: Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity.
- 7 Siegel-Hawley, G., & Frankenberg, E. (2011). Magnet school student outcomes: What the research says. Washington, DC: The National Coalition on School Diversity. Cobb, C., Bifulco, R., & Bell, C. (2009). Evaluation of Connecticut's interdistrict magnet schools. Storrs, CT: The Center for Education Policy Analysis, University of Connecticut.

ABOUT **MAGNET SCHOOLS OF AMERICA**

Magnet Schools of America was founded in 1986 and authorized as a 501(c)3 not-for-profit education association in 1994. It is guided by a Board of Directors that represents all regions of the country and magnets with diverse student populations. MSA represents approximately 4,340 magnet schools and 3.5 million students. MSA supports and serves the leaders and teachers of magnet and theme-based schools, while promoting the development of new magnet programs and public schools of choice.

MSA sponsors a national awards program, hosts professional development activities, and provides technical assistance through the National Institute for Magnet School Leadership. It also connects with other professional organizations and encourages partnerships to support our nation's magnet schools.

MSA is the only association to develop national standards and criteria for certifying that magnet schools meet the pillars and standards of success that ensure all students receive an educational opportunity held to higher expectations than any other school choice option.

We ascribe to the following pillars of magnet school success:

- *Diversity*
- *Innovative Curriculum and Professional Development*
- *Academic Excellence*
- *High-Quality Instructional Systems*
- *Family and Community Partnerships*



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