

Chalkbeat

2017



# A Message From Our CEO

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Dear supporters,

This year, many of us began to think more carefully about where we get our news — and how our news gets made. We paid extra attention to local news, coverage of everything from what's going into our state budget to what happened at the zoning board yesterday. Staying informed is essential to our work as citizens. It's also a big part of what connects us to one another. But as news outlets thin their ranks — an erosion in reporting boots on the ground that's as apparent in New York City as in West Virginia and Montana — our civic community is threatened.

At Chalkbeat, we worry deeply about the devastating cuts to the state and local news organizations that are our partners and colleagues. But we also have hope. Because in our nine years of covering one of our most precious public institutions, schools, we've learned a powerful lesson: When an essential democratic resource begins to disappear, communities are fully capable of stepping up to rebuild it. They can even emerge stronger. Crisis has a way of breeding clarity of mission and purpose.

Our 2017 accomplishments, detailed in this annual report, make a case for such hope. Even as our sector faced unprecedented challenges, Chalkbeat's reporting corps grew, our relationships with readers strengthened, and our supporter ranks multiplied, increasing the odds that we'll be able to sustain this work in the long term.

Some highlights:

- **We drew attention to inequity**, from a virtual charter school in Indiana that [wasn't serving students](#) but was enriching the school founder's company— to a Colorado school district that was [suspending many young children](#), a policy disproportionately affecting boys of color.
- **We spurred action**. Indiana's governor [plans](#) to tighten regulations against the school, and in Colorado, the superintendent ordered the district to review its suspension policy.
- **We showed the stakes**. In the Senate debate over who to appoint U.S. education secretary, two senators cited Chalkbeat coverage. Then, the new secretary, Betsy DeVos, cited multiple Chalkbeat stories as she crafted federal education policy.
- **We expanded our reach**. Our work is regularly syndicated in the Denver Post, the Memphis Commercial-Appeal, the Detroit Free-Press, the Indianapolis Star, La Prensa Latina, and The Atlantic, to name just a sample. This year we also launched national coverage and teed up to launch coverage in Chicago and Newark in 2018.

The team that made this work possible gets bigger and stronger every day. We are grateful to every single member of that team, from the summer interns who throw themselves into the mission-work of newsgathering to the editors who donate their time to advise us to the readers and supporters who donate to make our work possible.

Thank you to all of you.



Elizabeth Green,  
Chalkbeat CEO  
& Editor-in-Chief



# A Year in Review

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## January

Chalkbeat Detroit launched! Chalkbeat Detroit has tracked 50 real-world impacts this year, including U.S. Senator Kamala Harris's citation of our coverage of Betsy DeVos's influence on Detroit charter schools during her confirmation hearing. We're thrilled to grow our Detroit team in 2018.

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## May

Reporter Matt Barnum joined editor Sarah Darville to kick off Chalkbeat's national coverage, tracing education trends across bureaus and the country. Nearly 4,000 readers now receive our national newsletter.

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## September

Chalkbeat Tennessee introduced office hours, which piggyback on community events, like Hispanic Heritage Month celebrations, and connecting us to new reader and sources, particularly low-income parents. Office hours have [inspired stories](#).

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## February

Chalkbeat featured more voices in 2017, and we've been overwhelmed by the positive response to the 100 First Person and How I Teach stories we've published. In fact, this [February piece](#) written by a Colorado teacher about her classroom culture, is our most-read piece ever, at 150,000 + opens.

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## June

Two Chalkbeat reporters were finalists for the Education Writers Association top award for beat reporting: Erin Einhorn of Detroit took home the top prize and Melanie Asmar of Colorado was a finalist.

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## October

Chalkbeat [announced](#) that we would be launching coverage in two new markets in the spring of 2018: Chicago and Newark. Both cities have important stories that the whole country can learn from, as well as deep local news needs that aren't being met.

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## March

PBS's Newshour ran an [8-minute broadcast](#) during a Tuesday education segment on [an inclusive preschool we profiled in a neglected Denver neighborhood](#). A PBS producer learned about the preschool after Googling "quality early education" and finding our story.

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## July

Our third reader survey elicited 1,000 responses, and affirmed the service we provide for our readers. A favorite comment: "Chalkbeat covers the story the way you wish everyone had time and skill to do."

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## November

SXSW EDU officially approved our bold proposal to host the [Great American Teach-Off](#), a live teaching challenge- à la Iron Chef. We've since opened the challenge to teachers throughout the country and selected finalists to participate in live teaching demonstrations in March 2018.

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## April

Chalkbeat launched a national Reader Advisory Board (RAB) with a group of almost two dozen readers across our audience. Our RAB offers regular feedback on our coverage, asks questions, and holds us accountable to serving our mission and our readers.

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## August

Our three top-read stories in August were all scoops, which led to a new tradition: (ice cream) scoops for (story) scoops. So when our journalists break exclusives like the [expansion of NYC's renewal schools](#), they also get a sweet treat.

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## December

Elizabeth sparked national debate with her article about [Eva Moskowitz and Success Academy](#), co-published by Chalkbeat and The Atlantic in its January 2018 print edition. We then opened the floor for [continued dialogue](#) about the future of public schools as charter networks expand.



# Chalkbeat reporting impacted education in each of our communities.

In 2017, Chalkbeat has recorded more than **300** real-world impacts (as of the publication of this report) that have resulted from our stories.

Some highlights:



Detroit Public Schools teacher Robert Zoltowski, left, shows former student and current Bridge Magazine reporter Chastity Pratt Dawsey, right, a picture he found of her from when she was a student of his during "School Days," an evening of storytelling focused on the Detroit Public Schools hosted by Chalkbeat Detroit and The Secret Society of Twisted Storytellers on Friday, Mar. 17 at Detroit's Charles H. Wright Museum.



## Colorado

Chalkbeat Colorado's Ann Schimke reported [a story](#) about how the Jefferson County school district had the highest K-3 suspension rates in all of Colorado. Once new Superintendent Jason Glass started his position, he commissioned a report on the issue that included several recommended changes to early childhood discipline. In the report, Superintendent Glass extended his gratitude to Chalkbeat for raising this issue. Shortly after, as [Yesenia Robles reported](#), Jeffco changed its approach to discipline.



## Detroit

Chalkbeat Detroit's Erin Einhorn was on the ground as Detroit schools transitioned back to local control. Erin was in a classroom with [no music, art or gym](#) as new Superintendent Nikolai Vitti took his post. She spent three days with [unprecedented behind-the-scenes access](#) as Vitti he tried to breathe new life into Detroit's schools. At a community event, Vitti directly shouted out Chalkbeat, saying that our reporting led to "a dozen calls" from people inspired to join his efforts.





# Chalkbeat reporting impacted education in each of our communities.



## Indiana

Chalkbeat Indiana's Shaina Cavazos spent seven months reporting our [exclusive story](#) on the fast-growing Indiana Virtual School that paid millions of dollars to its founder's company but had a thin track record of helping students improve. Shaina scoured hundreds of pages of documents and conducted dozens of interviews as she established a pattern of ethical oversteps and deficient academic performance—including two years of F grades, low ISTEP scores and an alarmingly high student-teacher ratio of 222

students for every one teacher. As a result of our report, Indiana [Governor Eric Holcomb](#) said in an interview with Shaina that Indiana Virtual School's "unsatisfactory" performance requires policymakers to get involved. He told her that "I look forward over this next year, with the state board of education, to help put in place measures that hold schools accountable for poor performance." [Three bills aiming to crack down on virtual schools](#) have been introduced since the publication of this story.



## New York

Chalkbeat New York's Monica Disare wrote a series of stories spotlighting inequities in New York City's high school choice system, the process through which students are assigned to schools. The series exposed misinformation at [high schools fairs](#), [academic segregation](#) fueled by selective schools, and problematic [student vetting](#) at "limited unscreened" schools. Not long after our reporting, the city [eliminated the "limited unscreened"](#) category. To spur further conversation, Chalkbeat hosted a [community event](#) where we asked experts

and educators to envision a more equitable admissions system.

Then we continued the discussion online, asking readers to send us admissions questions, which led to a story explaining the [arguments](#) for and against selective schools.



# Chalkbeat reporting impacted education in each of our communities.



## Tennessee

A source led Chalkbeat Tennessee reporter Laura Faith Kebede to Anisah Karim, a recent high school graduate in Memphis who described how her school pressured her to apply to 100 colleges — all to gain bragging rights that the school had earned millions of dollars in scholarships. Karim said the experience left her depleted and confused —

and even contributed to a poor decision on where to go to college. To share Karim's story, we worked with her to create a [First Person](#) account of her alma mater's "obsession" with churning out "million-dollar scholars." The story garnered widespread attention from readers, including school board members who now are [investigating](#) "million dollar scholar" campaigns.



## National

In his first months at Chalkbeat, national reporter Matt Barnum has [chronicled secret meetings](#) of education reform leaders and identified important new trends, like how new certification rules are keeping would-be teachers of color [out of America's classrooms](#). He's also created digestible guides for policymakers and parents that answer pressing questions like whether [school vouchers](#) really work.





# Chalkbeat: By the Numbers

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## We're growing:

**\$4,834,931:** Our operating budget for 2017-2018, which accounts for expanded local and national coverage, and for a more sophisticated editorial structure that will help us maximize our impact.

**37:** The size of Chalkbeat's staff, which now includes an executive editor, a digital producer, and an additional Detroit reporter. Learn more [here](#).

**2:** The number of new Chalkbeat sites that are teed up to launch by the end of the 2017-2018 school year. That will bring the our total number of our local sites up to 7!

## We are reaching and engaging our core audience:

**270,000+:** The number of people who visit Chalkbeat each month

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

**~26,000:** Facebook followers who receive Chalkbeat news in their feeds

## Responses in a recent reader survey about behavior in the last month:

**61:** Percentage of readers who reported in a survey that they'd discussed something they read in Chalkbeat with colleagues

**39:** Percentage of readers who said they directly applied knowledge gained from Chalkbeat in their professional life

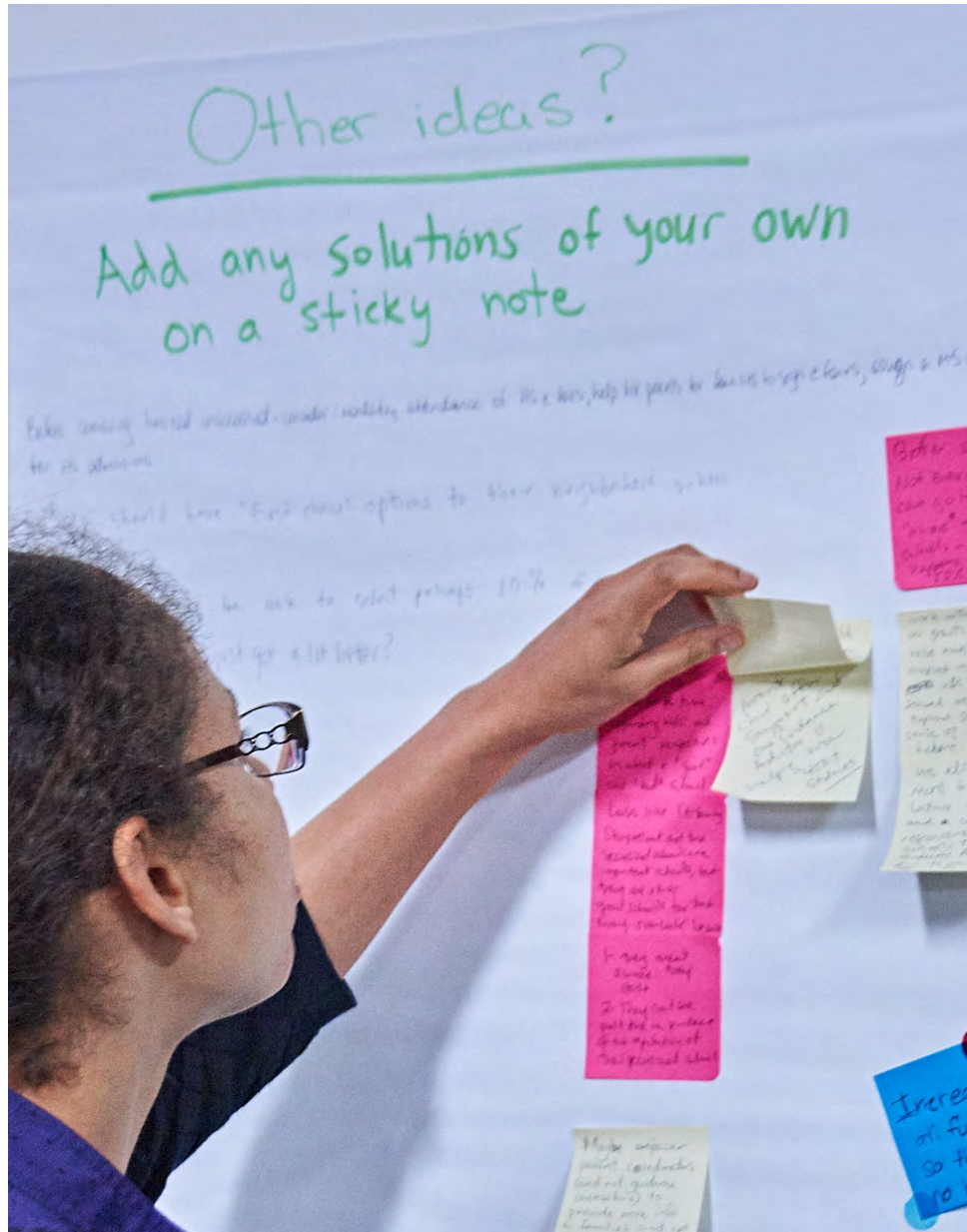
**34:** Percentage who shared an article or information from Chalkbeat on social media, or wrote a blog post inspired by our coverage

**13:** Percentage who changed their minds about an education related topic because of something they read in Chalkbeat



# Chalkbeat: By the Numbers

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**2,093:** Original Chalkbeat stories published this year

**300+:** The number of real-world impacts – instances of informed conversations and actions – that we’ve tracked back to our reporting this year

**20+:** Number of local and national distribution partners sharing Chalkbeat’s reporting. These partners include The Atlantic, Slate, Vox, 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.





# Chalkbeat: By the Numbers

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**26:** The number of local and national grants made to Chalkbeat in the 2016-2017 fiscal year.

**430:** Individual readers who contributed to our 2017 end-of-year campaign

**47:** Companies and organizations who sponsored Chalkbeat this year

**199:** Organizations and companies who posted jobs on our jobs board in 2017



# Chalkbeat: By the Numbers

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**\$3,139,000: Expenses**

**77%: Program services**

**14%: Management and general**

**9%: Fundraising**

**\$2,572,000: Net assets**

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





# Support Us

If you are interested in supporting Chalkbeat, we'd love to hear from you!

## Make a tax-deductible donation

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Your support makes our journalism possible. You can [give a monthly or one-time donation here](#). Or contact Bethanie Glaser, our senior development manager, at [bglaser@chalkbeat.org](mailto:bglaser@chalkbeat.org).

## Post on our jobs board

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Get your open position in front of jobseekers across America by [posting it on our jobs board](#)—where people in education go to find jobs.

## Become a Sponsor

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Get your message in front of education decision-makers across America. [Learn more here](#) or reach out directly to Frank Rowe, director of sponsorships, at [frowe@chalkbeat.org](mailto:frowe@chalkbeat.org).

## Submit a First Person piece

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Share your education story by emailing a pitch to [firstperson@chalkbeat.org](mailto:firstperson@chalkbeat.org). Not sure what to write? [Check out recent pieces here](#).

## Attend a Chalkbeat event

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Meet like-minded people who care about education just as much as you by attending a Chalkbeat event. [View our upcoming events here](#).

## Send us a tip

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Got something you think we should cover? Send us a tip at [contact@chalkbeat.org](mailto:contact@chalkbeat.org).