





Fourteen years ago, GreatSchools Founder and CEO Bill Jackson recognized the potential of the Internet to engage parents more deeply in their children's education. He launched GreatSchools initially as a guide to Silicon Valley schools, reaching 3,000 visitors in the first year.

Today, GreatSchools is the leading national source of school information for parents, reaching **41 million unique visitors and 44% of American families with children**. Along with profiles of more than 200,000 PreK-12 schools and more than 1,000,000 parent and community ratings and reviews of schools, GreatSchools.org provides information, tips, activities, and tools that help parents get the best possible education for their children.

With broad reach and deep expertise in parent engagement, GreatSchools is well positioned to inspire and support millions of parents to raise their expectations, develop new skills, and access resources to lead their children to success.

Contents

Letter from Bill2
2011 at a Glance
Informed School Choice6
Parenting for Education Success 8
GreatSchools Locals 12
Finances in Brief 15
People
What's Next



Letter from Bill

Times have changed in America. Education that was good enough 50 years ago isn't good enough today. In addition to strong character, high school graduates need higher-level skills to find a path to a living-wage job and they need passion and sense of purpose to fuel an entrepreneurial attitude.

In response to this challenge, educators and entrepreneurs are working hard to improve K-12 schools. But there is another mighty force positioned to contribute to improving education outcomes in America. Decades of research shows that *parents* have as much impact on student learning as schools do. And despite their best intentions and aspirations for their children, many parents are not playing the full role that they could.

The gap between National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) proficiency rates and parents' assessments of their children's schools illustrates the problem. When averaged across NAEP's three subject areas—reading, math, and science—the proficiency rate among American high school seniors is 29%. Meanwhile, when asked by Gallup, 79% of American parents give an "A" or "B" grade to the school their oldest child attends. At GreatSchools, our mission is to inspire and support parents to reach their full potential as sponsors of their children's education. We help parents acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills—and access the resources—they need to guide their children to success.

Specifically, we help parents understand how their children are really doing; how to cultivate character strengths, academic skills and sense of purpose in their children; and how to choose schools that will serve their children well.

Soon, thanks to your support we will be able to say together that parents are emerging as a more powerful force for educational improvement in America. Thank you so much for travelling on this journey with us.

Sincerely,

Bill Jackson CEO & Founder



GreatSchools CEO Bill Jackson with College Bound graduates at KIPP Shine in Houston.

2011 at a Glance A Year of Research, Development, and Innovation

We work in two primary domains: **Informed School Choice** and **Parenting for Education Success**. In 2011, we launched two major new initiatives—one in each of these domains—setting the stage for growing impact in the years ahead.

In the domain of **Informed School Choice**, we launched a new initiative to improve the breadth and depth of our school information. We are developing new school ratings that encompass test score growth and measures of college readiness and school climate as well as performance on state tests. In addition, we are collecting and publishing richer descriptive information about school programs and culture. In 2012, our new and improved school profiles will surface first in Milwaukee, Washington, DC, and Indianapolis.

In the domain of **Parenting for Education Success** we're developing new tools and information to help parents understand how their children are doing and develop skills and access resources that will help their children thrive. Meanwhile, in 2011, we reached more than 5,000 parents with our College Bound program, designed to help parents become more knowledgeable and engaged in their children's education. Finally, in our Local programs in Milwaukee, Washington, DC and Indianapolis, we continued to discover new and better ways to help low-income parents make good school choices, serving thousands of families in those communities while using those experiences to help inform our work nationally.

What Drives Us

- Our vision: All children will have the family support they need to succeed in school and life.
- **Our mission:** Help millions of parents get a great education for their children.
- **Our strategy:** Leverage the power of digital media to inspire and support parents to solve education-related problems, raise expectations for their children's learning, develop educationrelated parenting skills, and access helpful resources online and in their community.
- Our two-fold impact: 1) children benefit directly as their parents become more effectively involved in their education;
 2) schools improve as parents demand and support higher-quality education.

2011 by the numbers:

- More than 41 million unique visitors accessed GreatSchools.org in 2011.
- Our visitors include approximately 44% of American households with children.
- Of parents who accessed GreatSchools.org to help them choose a school for their children,
 68% say the site influenced their choice.
- Our local programs continue to produce strong results: More than three-quarters of families served applied to at least one higher-performing school, and more than 80% researched two or more schools.
- We are also pleased to report strong reach in under served communities. African-Americans and Hispanics represent 15% and 9% of U.S. households with school-age children but 24% and 18% of our audience, respectively. Households with Internet access and less than \$20,000 in annual income represent 10% of the population but 14% of our audience.

- We enrolled over 5,000 parents into our College Bound parent support program, positively impacting parental support of their children's reading and homework habits as well as motivation and persistence in completing challenging tasks. Furthermore, parents reported positive changes in their children's reading skills after having participated.
- Students also make up one in five GreatSchools.org visitors, while more than half of U.S. teachers visit GreatSchools annually. Other audience segments include extended family members such as grandparents, school staff, and researchers.



Informed School Choice

The aim of our **Informed School Choice** program is to inspire and guide parents to apply to highperforming schools that will be a good fit for their children and family. In 2011, we:

- Conceptualized new school ratings that encompass test score growth and measures of school climate as well as performance on state tests. A pilot of this new rating will roll out in the fall of 2012.
- Redesigned our main school search page, Find a School. As a result, searches from the Find a School page are up by more than 100%. Many more improvements will roll out in 2012 as part of our next-generation school choice interface work.
- Launched our School Finder iPhone app in June 2011. By the end of 2011, the app was installed on 70,000 iPhones, had an average iTunes rating of 4.5 stars, and had been used to view more than 600,000 school profiles.

 Saw significant demand for school information by people using mobile devices; mobile visits to our website increased from 4% at the beginning of 2011 to 15% by the end of the year. In 2012 we expect at least 6 million people will visit GreatSchools.org from a mobile device.

Measuring the national impact of GreatSchools.org on school choice behavior

In 2011, a survey of our site visitors showed that 68% of choosing parents said GreatSchools.org influenced their school choice decision. We also found that site visitors are more likely to view higher-performing school pages: 66% of our school page views were to schools with a GreatSchools Rating of 6-10.

Informed School Choice: Partnerships

Education Nation Scorecard-in partnership with NBC, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Univision

Designed to spur parents and citizens to take action to hold schools accountable for their performance, we developed the Education Nation Scorecard at nbcscorecard.greatschools.org, and conducted research into how parents use the information they learn from the Scorecard. We also released a Spanishlanguage version of the Scorecard, which Univision promoted on its Es el Momento website.







The 50 State Campaign for Achievement Now (50CAN)

50CAN is currently licensing our nationwide data to power their school and district report cards.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

In December of 2011 we partnered with HUD in an effort to increase access for HUD-assisted families to local school information that will help them make more informed decisions about where to send their children to school.





Realtor.com

In May 2011 we extended our partnership with Realtor.com to include the presence of our school performance data on their newly acquired platform, AOL Real Estate.

DC's Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)

For the third year in a row, we produced school performance report cards for OSSE.



Parenting for Education Success

The aim of our Parenting for Education Success program is to inspire and guide parents to be more effectively involved in supporting their children's educational success. Specifically, we help parents:

- Understand the high expectations they should have for their children's education.
- Gain insight into how their children are doing relative to high expectations.
- Build knowledge, skills and habits that will help them support their children's education success at home.
- Partner with teachers and schools to support their children's success.
- Discover resources like books, apps and websites that will help them support their children's success.

College Bound

In 2009, we launched **College Bound**, a Spanish-English bilingual, K-5 grade-based, online parent education program designed specifically for parents with lower levels of background knowledge about the US education system. Featuring brief videos that model effective parenting practices,



College Bound addresses both academic and social emotional development, providing parents with tips about what their children should be learning, how to cultivate character strengths such as persistence, and how to partner effectively with teachers. Since 2009, we have partnered with two dozen school systems and nonprofits to enroll more than 8,000 parents of K-5 children in College Bound.

In 2011, we worked with several partners to continue to pilot College Bound, learn about how to enroll and support parents and the program, and measure the program's impact on parent knowledge, attitude and behavior.



Molly Vitorte, Vice President of Local Strategy and Innovation, works with College Bound participants at Oakland elementary school Think College Now.

 Working with Rocketship Education, we enrolled more than 527 parents in 5 schools in Silicon Valley and tested a hybrid on-theground workshop and online model.



Working with KIPP Comienza in Los Angeles, we enrolled 161 Kindergarten parents and discovered a high level of persistence in the program when

the administration had a deep commitment to the implementation of College Bound. Spontaneously,



small groups of parents met regularly to discuss what they were learning and applying from the program. Working with Miami-Dade Public Schools we developed new approaches to leverage district websites to recruit parents into College Bound.



 Working with Univision, we developed a TV, radio and online campaign to recruit 538 Spanish-speaking parents into the Spanish language version of College Bound.



In 2011, we also conducted new research to assess the impact of College Bound on parent knowledge, attitude and behavior. Through a combination of multi-method ethnographic field research studies in Fairfield County, CT, as well as ongoing online survey research, we were able to show that the program positively impacts parent knowledge, attitude and behaviors in support of their children's reading and homework habits, including an increase in student motivation, confidence, and persistence in completing challenging tasks. Furthermore, parents reported positive changes in their children's reading skills after having participated in the College Bound program.

Innovation

2011 was also a year for experimentation in preparation for more radical innovation in our **Parenting for Education Success** program in 2012 and beyond. We tested new approaches to engaging parents with new digital media tools, text messaging, email, social media, quizzes and on-theground workshops. We learned a great deal from these experiments. Highlights of our work in 2011 include the following:



On Track. In 2011, we developed and began testing On Track, a Common Core Standards-based tool to help parents better understand the high expectations they should have for their children's education. We later piloted a version of On Track focused on K-3 reading at two San Francisco Bay Area elementary schools. Results indicate that parents find the tool a valuable way to gain insight into their own child's performance and progress. In addition, they found the follow-up activities and checklists a valuable starting place for what to do next to help their children.

- SMS. We piloted Read Better, a Spanish and English language, month-long text message program offering parents a daily tip to build new habits that increase the frequency and fun of reading with their children. Piloted in Miami and in Fairfield County, Connecticut, in fall 2011 with 186 parents, the program shows great promise. Of enrolled parents, 58% remained active throughout the four-week program, and between 5% and 19% responded positively to weekly questions regarding their children's reading habits. 100% percent of responses to satisfaction questions were "very satisfied" or "satisfied."
- Worksheets. During 2011, we piloted 400 worksheets in math, reading, and writing on GreatSchools.org. These worksheets now rank among our most popular editorial content.

GreatSchools Locals On the Ground

Six years ago, we began to augment our digital media programs with on-the-ground activities in several cities. Today, we operate GreatSchools Local programs in Milwaukee, Washington, DC, and Indianapolis. Our Local work informs and improves our national efforts, enhancing the depth, quality and impact of our information and programs.

Our Milwaukee and DC Local programs include the following elements:

 School Chooser—A convenient, comprehensive, annually produced printed guide to area public,

public charter, and private schools, the *Chooser* is distributed free to parents throughout the area using a network of libraries, schools and community partners. The *Chooser* helps parents plot their path to the right school for their child.



- Parent Workshops—Facilitated workshops to educate parents on what to consider when choosing a school and how to make the right school choice.
- Coach Corps—Volunteers from the community are trained to offer direct support to parents during the school choice process.
- Parent Hotlines—Available 6 days/week, 12 hours/day, in English and Spanish, hotlines provide a direct link for parents to reach out and receive immediate guidance.
- **Community Partnerships**—We partner with other area organizations serving our target population to increase the capacity of job training centers, health organizations, leadership programs, faith-based groups, and other groups to offer guidance and training around school choice or to gain referrals of parents needing our assistance.

Our Local programs have increasingly focused on building strong partnerships to expand our reach. Our teams train these partners to use the *Chooser* and GreatSchools.org to help parents understand the schools they can choose from. Darrell Finch of The Housing Authority in Milwaukee is one such partner. Each year, Darrell helps hundreds of families navigate the system using the *Chooser* and related information to not only find a school that is strong academically, but is the right fit for their family. Says Darrell, "The School Chooser is an amazing tool for helping students and families succeed."

In 2011, our Local programs continued to show strong performance:

- More than 75% of coached families applied to at least one higher-performing school, and more than 80% in each city researched two or more schools.
- We participated in 214 community partnerships.
- During 2011 we provided direct coaching to 6,023 families in Milwaukee and DC.

In late 2011, we expanded to **Indianapolis, IN**, testing a new model in which we limit our activity

to collecting and publishing school information while a local partner leads on-the-ground



efforts to distribute *School Chooser* publications and coach parents. In Indianapolis, we work with Stand for Children Indiana, a grass roots parent advocacy organization.



"I wish I had this a long time ago. The DC Chooser made it very easy for me to do a thorough search on the schools I was already interested in, seeing their trending test scores, where the school was located in the city, and most of all what extra-curricular activities and family programming the school offered the students and families. **GreatSchools helped give me what I needed to find the right fit**."

Bonita Allen Washington, DC parent

Looking ahead

Our Local work continues to have a strong influence on our national efforts. In 2012 and beyond, we'll be expanding into key markets to collect data, enroll parents in our programs, enable innovation, and facilitate research in the domains of informed school choice and parenting for education success. Some of our proposed initiatives include:

Innovating at the frontier of education performance data. We plan to work with selected states, school systems, and communities to acquire powerful new data points that will improve our school profiles and ratings. For example, some states like Florida have longitudinal records for students that span post-secondary and K-12 schooling. That means that it will be possible to judge high schools in part by how their graduates do in college.

Building tools to support local partnerships. Partnerships in places like Washington, DC, Houston and New Orleans have enormous potential to increase our value to parents by connecting our school performance information to local school application processes, enabling local partners to print and distribute school information and enabling new services for parents like text messages alerts about impending deadlines related to school choice. As we pursue these and other initiatives, we'll continue to build closer relationships with schools, parents, and other stakeholders in markets across the country.



"The School Chooser is definitely a winner. That book can really make a difference. I'm just thankful for that. **GreatSchools is my** resource. It was the first time I had seen anything like that: all the numbers laid out, from green schools to test scores, locations and maps."

Yvette Fields Milwaukee parent

Finances in Brief

Statement of Activities

	2011	2010
Support and Revenue		
Foundations	7,164,993	5,606,208
Website activity	2,671,405	2,419,553
Licensing	726,296	876,785
Fees for service	95,496	128,000
Donated good and services	58,012	69,758
Investment income & other	35,062	42,960
	10,751,264	9,143,264
Expenses		
Program services	7,082,611	7,229,694
Management and general	762,635	670,863
Fundraising	513,090	468,558
Total expenses	8,358,336	8,369,115
Change in net assets	2,392,928	774,149
Net assets, beginning of year	4,960,828	4,186,679
Net assets, end of year	7,353,756	4,960,828

We remain in strong financial condition, thanks to solid operating revenue and improved growth fund-raising results. 2011 was a strong year for fund-raising and operating revenue growth. Total revenue was \$10.7M, representing 18% YOY growth.

Growth funding for new product development amounted to \$5.74M, while operating revenue from website and on-the-ground activities brought in \$4.98M.

GreatSchools spent a total of \$8.36M in 2011 to carry out its programs and activities.

Thanks to broad reach, we are able to sell millions of dollars' worth of advertising on GreatSchools.org every year. We also reap nearly \$1M in licensing and partnership revenue. **GreatSchools.org operating revenue covers over two-thirds of operating expenses.**

2011 Funders

National Funders

- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- Goldman Sachs Gives
- Robertson Foundation
- Target
- Walton Family Foundation
- Zoom Foundation

Milwaukee, WI

- The Joyce Foundation
- The Kern Family Foundation
- The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation

Washington, DC

- Fight for Children
- GEICO Philanthropic Foundation
- NewSchools Venture Fund
- Venable LLP Foundation
- Verizon Foundation

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In September 2011, we were selected through a competitive process to participate in the Talent Initiative, a program provided by the nonprofit AchieveMission. The Talent Initiative is designed to help nonprofits improve their talent management practices, including strategy development, identifying critical competencies required across the organization and in specific positions, and improving professional development and performance management processes. This initiative will help us develop and support our people so we can continue to realize our financial goals and grow our impact.

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Molly Vitorte Vice President, Local Strategy and Innovation

What's Next

All parents want their children to succeed in school, work, and life. Yet parents have widely different levels of expectations, knowledge, and skills when it comes to guiding their children to success.

With our broad reach into millions of America's K-12 families, GreatSchools is seizing the opportunity to deepen our impact while continuing to extend our reach. To accomplish this in a scalable and sustainable way, we will continue to further evolve our industry-leading school guide, **GreatSchools.org**, to help millions of parents find schools that have strong academic programs and a healthy climate for learning.

Building on our expertise in serving parents, we will also explore new ways to influence parent behavior. GreatSchools is in the early stages of launching a bold new platform, to help millions of parents raise young people with the skills, character, and sense of purpose necessary to thrive in the world. This multifaceted mobile-friendly digital-media platform is designed to raise parents' expectations for their children's education and help parents build the skills and access the resources they need to guide their children to educational success. With your support, we will build the strongest possible foundation for high-quality education in America: parents who expect, demand and support excellence from their children and schools.

A mobile version of our national site is now available, and is accessible from at least 70% of smartphones (Apple and Android), with an enhanced school-matching function for families in Indianapolis, Milwaukee, and DC. Mobile is growing fast as the communications technology of choice. At the beginning of 2011, about 4% of visits to GreatSchools.

org were coming from mobile devices. By the end of the year, this had grown to 15%. The parents we want to serve are increasingly reachable via SMS and smartphones.



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