



Common Core Implementation: *An Unprecedented Opportunity to Review, Reduce and Improve Assessments*

Testimony before the New York State
Common Core Implementation Panel

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Teach Plus

The mission of Teach Plus is to improve the achievement of urban children by ensuring that a greater proportion of students have access to excellent, experienced teachers.

- Teaching Policy Fellowships = 700+ teachers
- T+ Network = 15,000+ teachers
- Core Collaborative (C2) = 150+ teachers
- Turnaround Teacher Teams (T3) = 200+
- Common Core conferences = 5,000+ teachers

Our programs focus on demonstrably effective teachers in the second stage of their careers (years 3 through 10) who want to continue teaching, while expanding their impact as leaders in their schools and in policy.

The more teachers get to know Common Core, the better they like it

- **79%** of teachers who have received training on Common Core say the new standards will improve student achievement.
- **68%** say the new standards will help them become better teachers.
- Teachers' enthusiasm for Common Core stems in part from the fundamental shift it requires in **how teachers think about, use, and prepare students for next-generation assessments.**
- Teachers think tests, when they are of high-quality and administered well, are a **useful tool.**

What Teach Plus has learned about testing

Assessment Advisor – teacher-developed ratings tool

Teachers want tests that:

- Are aligned to the standards they teach
- Capture the learning of students far above and below grade level
- Ask complex questions
- Return data quickly
- Connect to resources that help teachers improve

The Student and the Stopwatch – report on 32 districts

- There is no such thing as “testing in America” – rather a wide-ranging set of expectations that vary by district
- Most testing is not the result of state requirements, but due to additional tests required by districts

Teach Plus Recommendations

- 1) **Proceed** with Common Core implementation, recognizing that long-term gain from better standards and better assessments will exceed any short-term pain.
- 2) **Determine** how much testing is occurring in districts across New York, with an eye to reducing any unnecessary tests.
- 3) **Engage** teachers in reviewing current assessments and in making decisions about test adoption at the district level.

Proceed with Common Core implementation, recognizing that long-term gain from better standards and better assessments will exceed any short-term pain.

- New tests will be worth any initial bumps because they will satisfy teachers' need for better tests, especially those that align to what they teach. **Common Core assessments are to current tests what smart phones are to rotary phones.**
- They will also get us to the test parents want our kids to take and pass.
 - Will make it easier to evaluate students above or below grade level.
 - Will evaluate reading and writing at every grade.
 - Will be asked to explain how they got their answer.



Teachers Say...

“The first year of Common Core implementation wasn’t pretty. I struggled, and so did my students, and...my kids bombed [the first assessments.] My ego was bludgeoned and my students were frustrated by the new types of questions on the exams.

As I got used to the new curriculum I began to appreciate it. One key component is... the inclusion of more nonfiction texts...Moreover the new curriculum helps students build the kind of education scaffolding that will serve them well in high school and college.

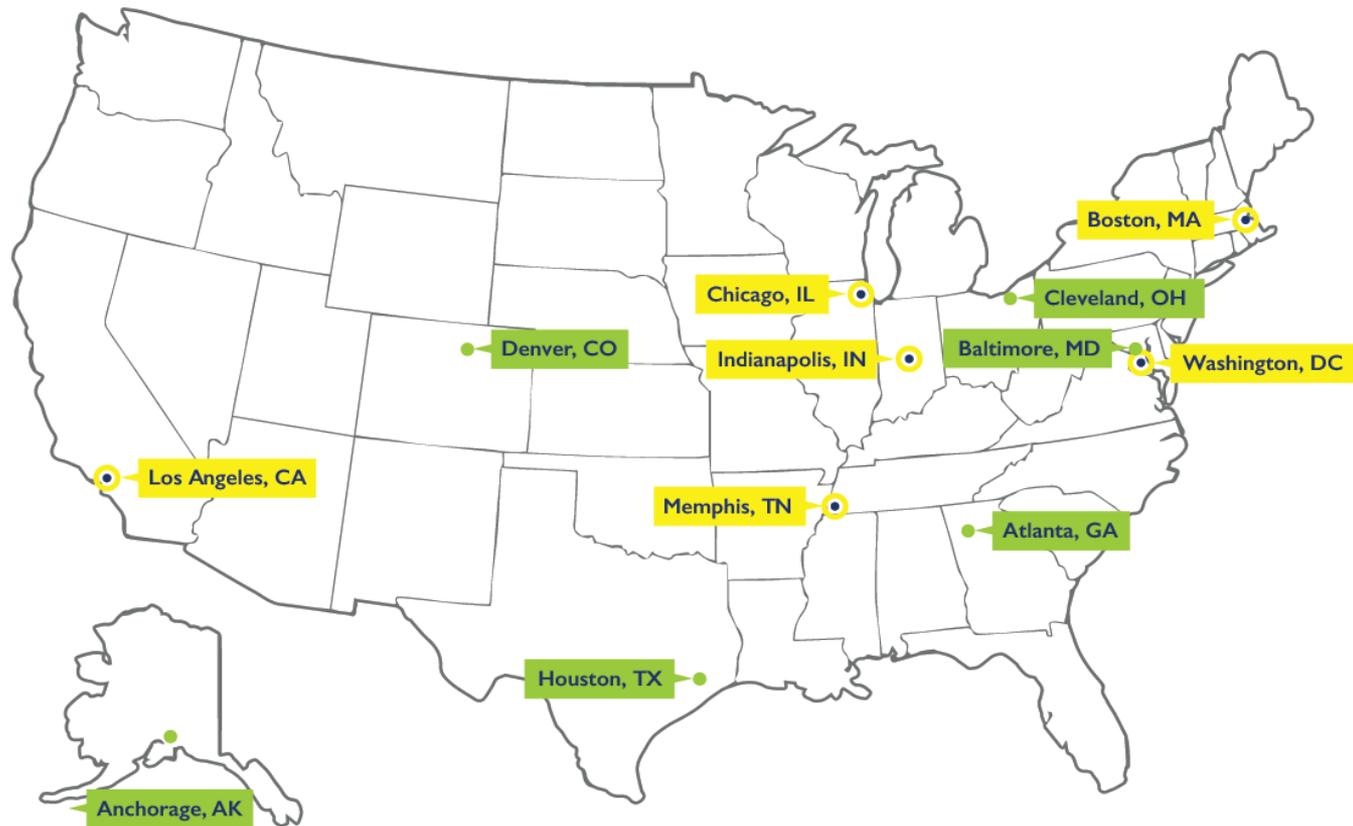
I’m convinced the kinks will work themselves out and that teachers shouldn’t fear Common Core. What I’m doing in my classroom now just feels so much better, and two years into the Common Core, I am a better – and happier – teacher than I’ve ever been.”

**Andrew V.
Math Teacher, Orchard Gardens
Boston, MA**

Student and the Stopwatch: Methodology

- The time on testing data comes from district assessment calendars and district staff.
- Analyzed time-on-testing for district- and state-mandated assessments in English language arts (ELA) and math.

Figure 1: Map of focal and comparison districts



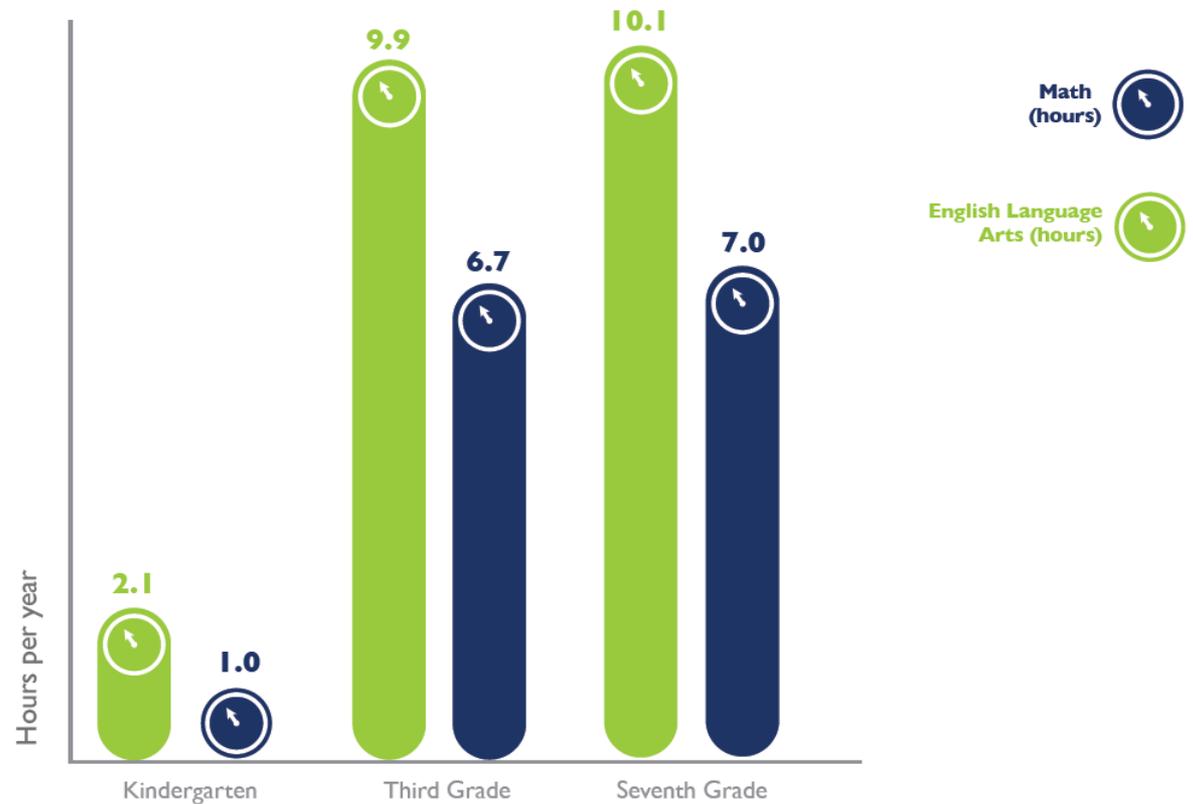
Student and the Stopwatch: Key Findings

1. Across 12 urban districts, the average amount of time students spend on state and district tests equals **1.7 percent** of the school year in third and seventh grades and substantially less in kindergarten.
2. The variation in test time across urban districts is large, with high-test districts spending **3.3x as much** time-on-testing as low-test districts.
3. Urban districts spend, on average, more time than their suburban counterparts on testing. Suburban districts in this study average **1.3 percent or less** of the school year on testing.
4. Teachers calculate test administration time to be more than **double the length** reported in district calendars in elementary grades.

Question 1. How much time do students spend on state- and district-mandated tests in English language arts (ELA) and math at three key grade levels (kindergarten, third grade, and seventh grade)?

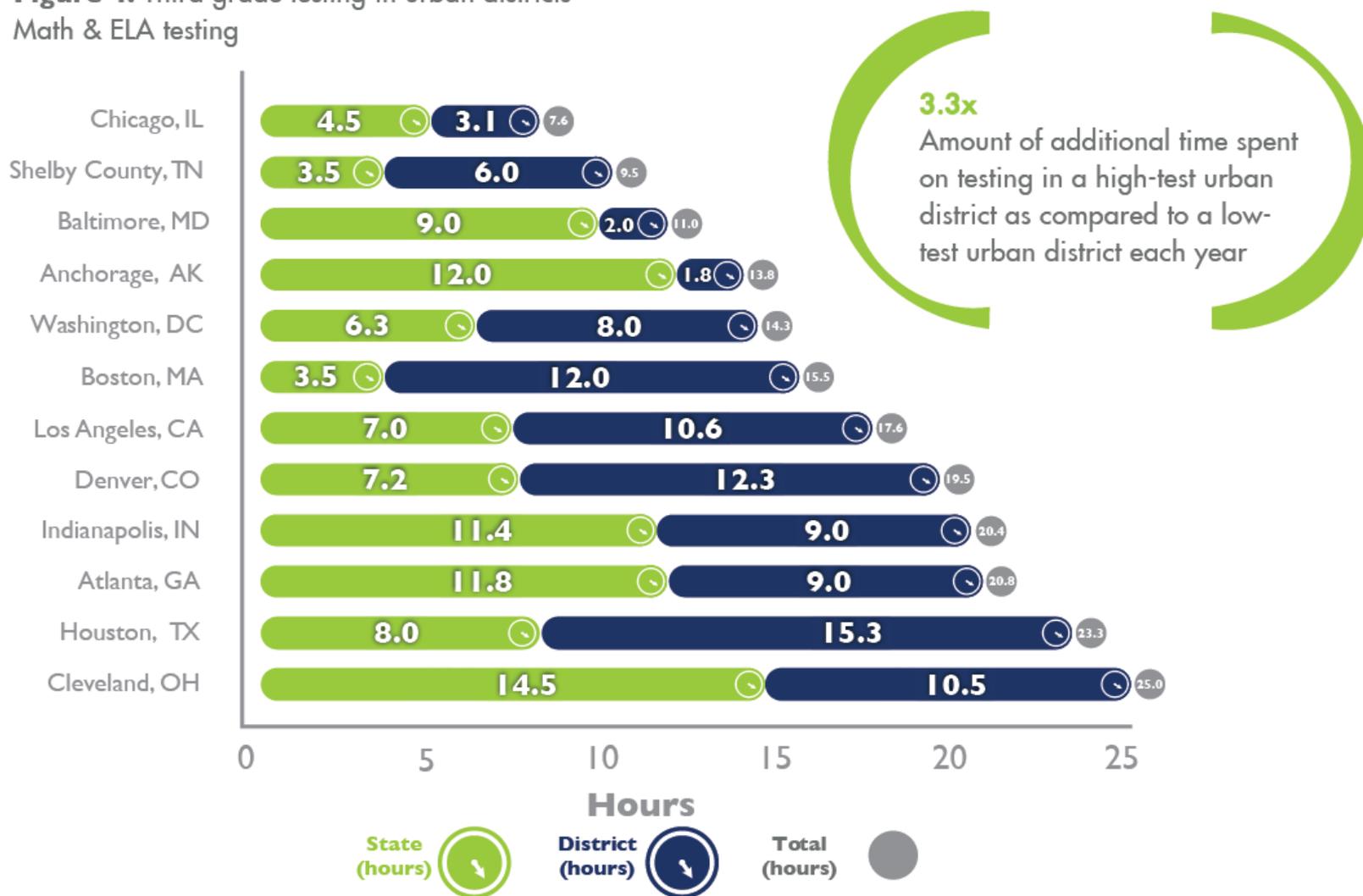
Figure 2: Average time spent on district & state testing per year in urban districts by grade and subject

1.7
Percent of a typical urban student's school year spent on testing in third and seventh grades



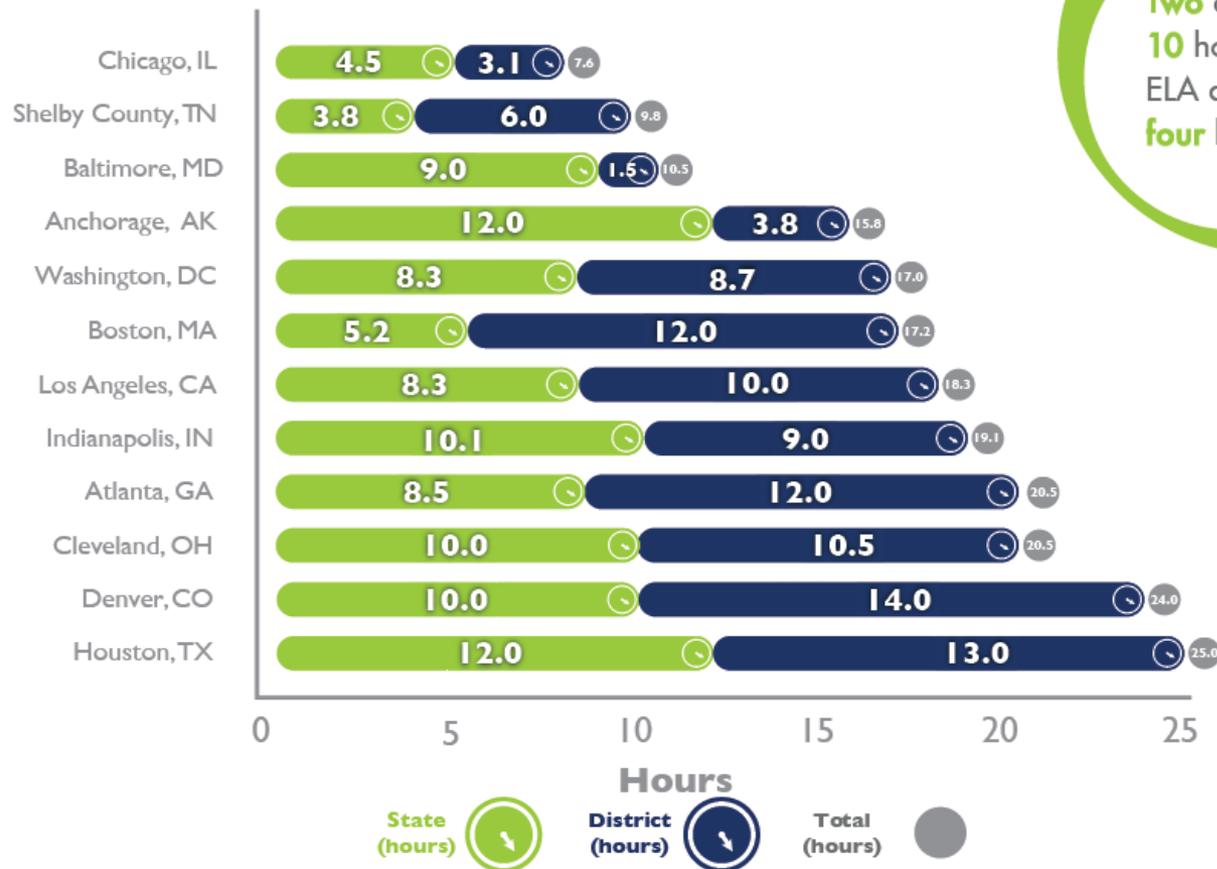
Question 2. How does test time vary across 12 major urban districts in America? Third grade results

Figure 4: Third grade testing in urban districts
Math & ELA testing



Question 2. How does test time vary across 12 major urban districts in America? Seventh grade results

Figure 5: Seventh grade testing in urban districts
Math & ELA testing



Two districts have less than 10 hours of seventh grade ELA and math testing while four have more than 20

Question 2. How does test time vary across 12 major urban districts in America? *Cumulative low-test and high-test urban district comparison*

Figure 6: Cumulative effect of differences in testing
Low-test and high-test urban district comparison

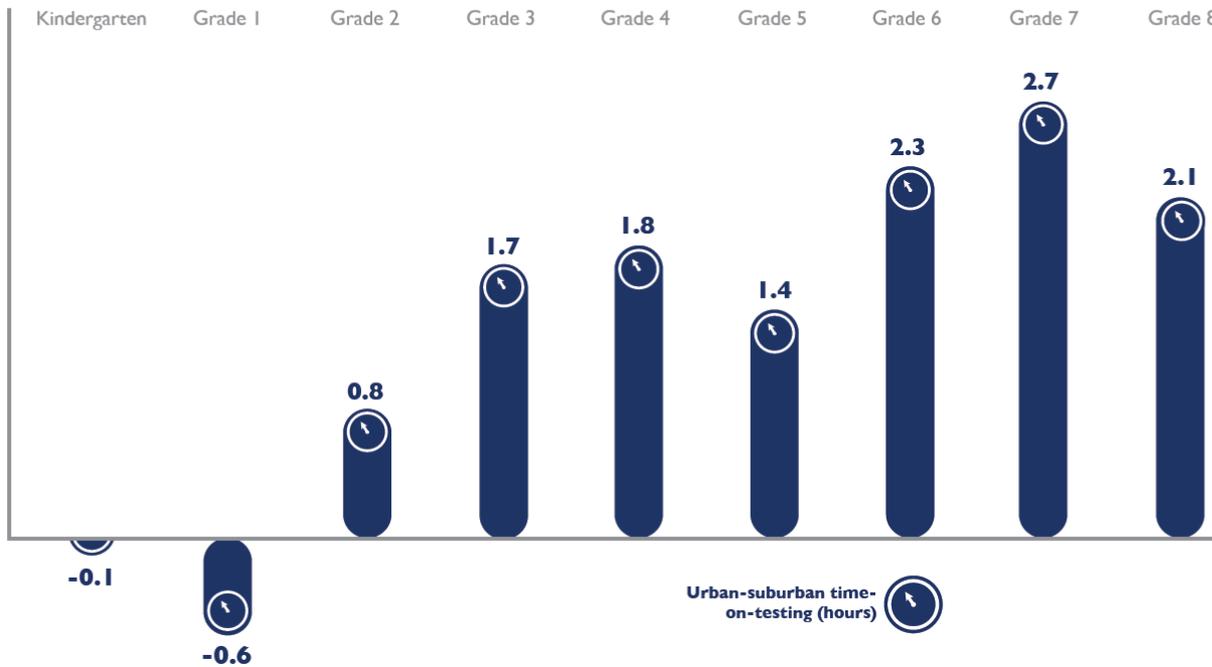
105
Number of additional hours a student in a high-test urban district would spend on testing as compared to a student in a low-test urban district by eighth grade



Question 3. How does test time vary between urban districts and the suburban communities that surround them?

Figure 7: Difference in math and ELA testing by grade in urban and suburban districts

1.3
Average amount of additional testing in hours that an urban district requires as compared to surrounding suburbs each year



Determine how much testing is occurring in districts across New York, with an eye to reducing any unnecessary tests.

- There is considerable amount of testing in schools because districts are choosing to add **additional assessments** beyond those required by the state.
 - More than a dozen third-party vendors provide additional assessments for districts in NY.
 - With more than 700 districts in the state, the variation of testing experiences could, and likely do vary widely.
 - How and what assessments districts choose in addition to state tests can have enormous impact on how much and what types of testing occur in schools.
 - How much (or little) teachers value those assessments can, and does, vary widely.
- New York school districts could make a **different choice** and require significantly less testing than is their current practice.
- Districts could choose differently and once Common Core assessments are in place many districts may choose to **drop some of their other tests**.

Engage teachers in reviewing current assessments, and in making decisions about test adoption at the district level.

- **When we asked teachers what policymakers need to know about testing the first thing they said is all tests are not created equal. Teachers want tests that include:**
 - **Essays**
 - **Short-answer items**
 - **Other assessments of high-order skills**
- **Districts should evaluate the current testing regime, asking teachers which district-mandated tests are useful, which aren't and why.**
- **Teachers calculate test administration time to be more than double the length reported in district calendars. District leaders need to understand:**
 - **Test prep/reviews**
 - **Scoring**
 - **Planning and re-assessments**

Teachers Say...

“I have worked in a district where the district micromanaged our instruction and assessment by giving us district-wide standardized tests that we had to give every 2-3 weeks. It did not allow me to adjust my pacing to meet my students where they were at, to re-teach when it was needed, or to order skills in a way that allowed students to gain confidence and build on what they already knew.

Because teachers found it almost impossible to stay on pace with that arbitrary schedule, the tests were measuring skills we hadn't even taught yet, which made them totally useless to my instruction and demoralizing to my students and to the teachers in our building.”

**Christina L.
Elementary teacher
Indianapolis**

Thank you!

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