

SCENARIO: FABER

THE CITY

Faber is an Eastern Seaboard city of 1.5 million residents. After years of job and population loss, it is enjoying a resurgence whose strength has surprised even city leaders.

Middle-class, educated homebuyers are flooding into the city's downtown and the adjacent neighborhoods – which have experienced a 32 percent population increase in the last five years. Thanks to this, for the first time in 15 years, the city's overall population did not drop last year.

The influx has two parts: 1) young professionals drawn by the city's nightlife, relatively low cost of living and the surging biotech cluster around the elite university at the downtown's western edge and 2) empty nesters moving in to enjoy the city's culture, upper-end high rises and elegant, walkable residential blocks. Each group has been bidding up housing prices in the urban core.

This turnaround is generally attributed to two factors: the power of the biotech cluster, and a set of tax cuts and abatements that fueled a spate of condominium conversions and new construction.

Faber's downtown is mature, with no major undeveloped tracts. But it has pockets of old industrial buildings and underused, pre-World War II office space. Many of these buildings are being eyed for residential conversions. The city has also successfully marketed its cultural and historic assets, including a top art museum, new symphony hall, theater district, and its science, American history and ethnic cultures museums.

As the downtown's residential boom has spilled into nearby working-class neighborhoods, raising housing prices, typical gentrification tensions have flared in these areas. Long-time residents resent the newcomers, complaining about the higher costs and traffic they bring. Newer residents respond with complaints about noise, crime and failure to maintain properties.

A staple theme of the city's politics is the outlying neighborhoods' envious sense that the glittering downtown receives preferential treatment from City Hall. Exploiting that resentment, which is often a proxy for racial tensions, has been a staple of the political career of John Boone, Faber's African American mayor.

The downtown has two ethnic enclaves, a large and insular Asian American community with a large immigrant population, and a newer enclave of West African immigrants near the university on the downtown's western edge.

THE SCHOOL SITUATION

The Faber schools have suffered for decades from typical symptoms of school malaise. Achievement faltered in schools whose racial segregation reflected the city's housing patterns. Truancy and dropout rates were high. Though the city schools spent \$2,000 less per student than nearby suburban schools, they traditionally were blasted as spendthrift by state politicians.

Four years ago, the state took over the city schools as a "failing" district, placing a five-member, state-appointed board in charge. The takeover law improved school funding slightly, and provided a \$1.1 billion state bond to fund school construction and renovation throughout the city. Actual capital needs are estimated at \$3 billion. (All public construction is union in this East Coast Democratic city.)

The law also gave the new board and new state-appointed schools CEO wide latitude to contract with nonprofits or businesses to run schools. The state has a charter school law, which offers great leeway, though the home district retains a right of review over charter applications. The central district has several small elementary charters, and one business-themed charter high school located in a strip shopping mall, which has struggled.

To retain middle-class families, a former superintendent created "magnet" schools, with competitive citywide admissions. Two of these – a college prep high school with the highest average SAT scores in the state, and a performing arts high school – are in the downtown, in two elegantly renovated buildings. The downtown proper has only one other public school, a troubled, cramped K-5 jammed onto a busy street corner, but it has several Catholic and elite private high schools.

The gentrifying adjacent neighborhoods have K-5 elementaries and middle schools – mostly pre-WWII, traditional brick and limestone buildings of three stories that have adequate room. This is partly because few of the new arrivals have school-age children or send their children to public schools. But these schools rank in the bottom half of the city for achievement and turbulence. None have grass play areas; some have blacktop playgrounds. At others, the blacktopped inner courtyards have been converted to teacher parking.

The middle schools regularly make headlines for violent incidents. The newest of those school buildings is 30 years old, but is a grim concrete-block bunker. The oldest is 100 years old; its windows were partly blocked to conserve energy after the mid-'70s energy crisis. It barely meets code.

The adjacent neighborhoods have two high schools, one to the north, one to the south of the downtown. The one to the south is one of the city's worst, an 80-year-old brick fortress with large, dark corridors, small classrooms, and an auditorium with crumbling plaster and a ventilation system so noisy that speakers on stage must shout to be heard. The high school to the north is '60s vintage, with a brutalist design that often spurs community gibes that it looks like "a prison in training". All secondary schools in the adjacent neighborhoods draw students from minority neighborhoods outside the extended downtown.

Faber's central district is blessed with higher education riches. Ivononia, the elite private university on the western edge, has a hospital and medical school that have spawned the biotech boom. At the northern edge is Butler State, a large state university with a major commuter contingent that has aspirations to move up the prestige ladder. The downtown also includes Samuel Community College, a strong two-year college that is bursting at the seams.

THE CHALLENGE

Signs are emerging that frustration with the public schools has begun to threaten the resurgence of the central district and adjoining neighborhoods. Many of the new, affluent, politically active young professional residents in the area complain about the schooling options for young children. Waiting lists at the private schools and charter schools in the urban core have hundreds of names.

Meanwhile, the empty nesters aren't happy with how their property tax bills have grown along with the value of their homes.

The population influx promises a mini-baby boom in the area. The number of school-age children in the downtown proper is projected to grow from 3,200 in 2000 to 5,500 by 2010. In adjacent neighborhoods projections are similar. In the north, near Butler State, from 2,800 to 3,900. To the west, around Ivononia, from 1,600 to 2,500. To the south, near the cultural district, from 950 to 1,800.

Neither the shrinking Catholic school system nor the elite privates have capacity to absorb these numbers. Either the public schools figure how to offer the new arrivals educational choices they can embrace, or the renaissance will be short-lived, as parents retrace the steps of previous generations of middle-class city residents in moving to the suburbs once their children reach school age.

YOUR WORK TODAY

Imagine you are a blue-ribbon panel pulled together by the Faber school district to come up with a school strategy for the downtown area. You've been

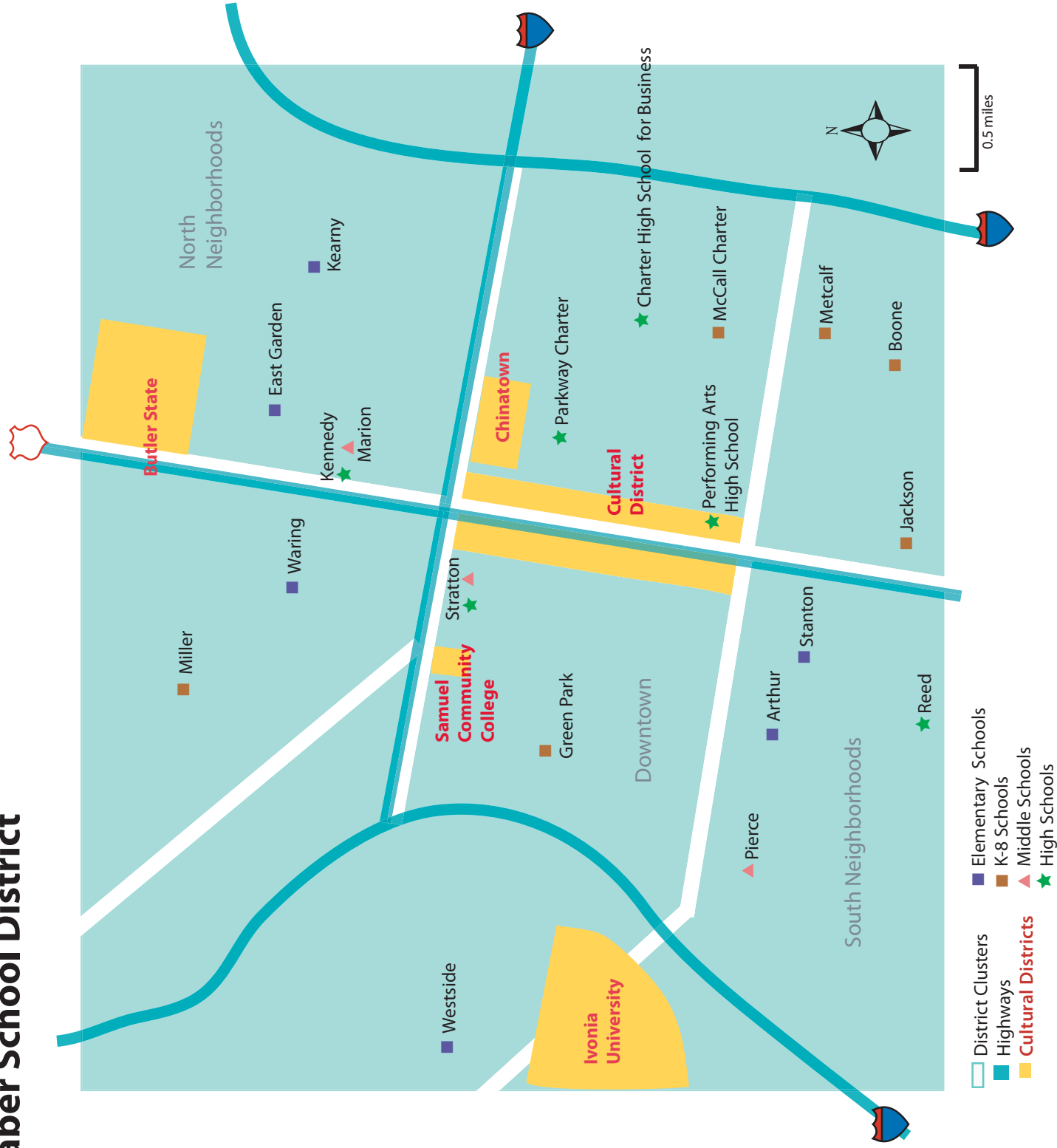
chosen for your varied expertise and civic spirit. The district has asked you to advise it on how to deal with the following challenges. You may decide to add others to this list.

- Given the age and density of Faber’s building stock, and the school district’s budget limitations, what is the right mix of the various options: 1) renovating existing schools 2) closing some and building new 3)) adapting non-traditional spaces? What advice on school size would you offer? What best practices from elsewhere should the district consider?
- If renovations are done at some of the schools described, what advice would you give about design and materials to improve the quality of the learning environment?
- What partnerships could the school district make with other institutions in the downtown area to help meet the school needs of the new arrivals, and what choices for school siting and design might they imply? What role might charters play in all this?
- What steps should the district take to respond to and calm the community tensions swirling around the schools issue? How should it address concerns about equity between neighborhoods, race and varying expectations of parents?

For each of these challenges, you can suggest several possible strategies or solutions. Do not get hung up seeking the one perfect solution. With each suggested solution, be honest and clear about the tradeoffs it entails. And wherever possible, offer examples of real places where your ideas have been tried successfully.

Good luck. Have fun. Be creative. In talking through this scenario, please do not change any of its basic facts, but feel free to go beyond the stated situation to introduce ideas or players who could help bring about a good result – as long as the additions are realistic.

Faber School District



Faber School District Facts

	District	Downtown Area
Adult Education Levels	2004	2004
Adults with a High School Diploma (%)	71.2	22.4
Adults with a Bachelor's Degree (%)	17.7	81.9
Household Characteristics		
Number of Households	590,071	52,124
Single-Parent Households with Children (%)	17.5	9.3
Income and Wealth (\$)		
Median Household Income	32,803	\$60,106
Income Per Person	18,356	\$40,880
Median Home Value	60,943	\$107,000
Household Income Distribution (%)		
Less than \$15,000	25.9	4.3
\$15,000-\$29,999	20.5	8.3
\$30,000-\$49,999	21.5	18.8
\$50,000-\$74,999	16.0	22.4
\$75,000-\$99,999	8.3	19.5
\$100,000-\$149,999	5.4	10.9
\$150,000 or More	2.3	15.7
Population		
Population	1,517,550	89,344
Population Density	10,292	462
Median Age	35	43
Population Distribution by Age (%)		
4 Years or Younger	6.8	1.3
5-19 Years	21.0	8.3
20-44 Years	36.2	7.9
45-64 Years	22.3	7.5
65 Years or Older	13.7	39.7
Ethnicity Facts		
White persons, percent	45.0%	75.70%
Black or African American persons, percent	43.2%	13%
American Indian and Alaska Native persons, percent	0.3%	0.2%
Asian persons, percent	4.5%	9%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, percent	n.a.	0
Persons reporting some other race, percent	4.8%	1.90%
Persons reporting two or more races, percent	2.2%	n.a.
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, percent	8.5%	2.80%
Foreign born persons, percent	9.0%	4.1%
Language other than English spoken at home, pct age 5+	17.7%	8.4%

Faber School District Facts

	District	Downtown Area
Enrollment of Racial/Ethnic Groups	2004	2004
White (%)	14.2	77.1
Black (%)	65.3	15.5
Hispanic (%)	14.2	5.2
Asian/Pacific Islander (%)	5.2	2.2
American Indian/Alaska Native (%)	0.2	0.1
Enrollment of Students with Special Needs		
Economically Disadvantaged (% receiving free lunch)	70.8	9.1
English Language Learners (%)	7.0	n.a.
Students with Disabilities (%)	12.2	13.4
Enrollment Distribution by Grade		
Kindergarten (%)	6.9	6.4
Grade 1 (%)	7.7	7.1
Grade 2 (%)	7.7	7.1
Grade 3 (%)	8.2	7.4
Grade 4 (%)	8.3	7.6
Grade 5 (%)	8.1	7.8
Grade 6 (%)	8.0	8.1
Grade 7 (%)	7.8	8.3
Grade 8 (%)	7.5	8.1
Grade 9 (%)	10.7	8.9
Grade 10 (%)	8.1	8.1
Grade 11 (%)	5.8	7.5
Grade 12 (%)	4.7	7.0
How Students Performed on State Reading Tests	2004	2004
Grade 5 Reading Proficiency (%)	31.4	63.0
Grade 8 Reading Proficiency (%)	40.7	69.0
Grade 11 Reading Proficiency (%)	26.7	61.0
How Students Performed on State Math Tests		
Grade 5 Math Proficiency (%)	30.5	61.0
Grade 8 Math Proficiency (%)	30.6	58.0
Grade 11 Math Proficiency (%)	22.6	49.0
How Students Performed on State Writing Tests		
Grade 11 Writing Proficiency (%)	47.5	74.0
Graduation Rate (%)		
All Students	63.1	86.9
School Statistics		
Number Students	217,405	9,534
Number Schools	273	20