2019

portrait of the movement

CCSA
California
Charter Schools
Association

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introduction

As part of California's public school system, charter schools are helping to advance issues of equity, opportunity and access. Charter schools serve all students, all families, and all communities, with particular urgency to provide the state's most historically underserved and vulnerable students with a high-quality public education.

The California Charter Schools Association (CCSA) has documented the academic successes and struggles of California's charter public schools annually since releasing its first *Portrait of the Movement* report in 2011. Using CCSA's Accountability Framework, each report critically explored academic performance of students and schools across the state.

Since the last *Portrait of the Movement* was released in 2017 and focused on the transition to Common Core, California has made large strides with the implementation of federally mandated accountability systems resulting in the California School Dashboard and the identification of the "bottom 5 percent" of schools. The shifts in statewide accountability increased the visibility of school performance for subgroups of students in both traditional and charter schools.

This *Portrait of the Movement* highlights the fact that more work still needs to be done to achieve equity for all students, regardless of school model (charter or traditional public school). In the current climate, constructive conversations can become derailed into highly politicized, antagonistic charter-vs-traditional public school infighting instead of focusing on understanding and solving achievement gaps for vulnerable students and achieving equity for all. We believe great public schools are the driver that ultimately prepare all students for success in college, career, community and life. Closing achievement gaps is only possible when all public schools participate in creating and implementing solutions.

1 Independent charter schools serve proportionally more African American and low-income students than both dependent charter schools and traditional public schools (Figure 1).

2 In 2018 charter schools continued to outperform traditional public schools for most subgroups across English Language Arts (ELA) and underperform on Math when looking at Distance from Standard (Figure 8).

3 As validated by third-party researchers for years, including CREDO and Getting Down to Facts II, the outperformance of charter schools is most heavily concentrated in urban areas, particularly in Los Angeles and Oakland and for African American, Latinx, and low-income students (Figure 11).

introduction

This report paints a picture of the characteristics of public school options in California. Next, it discusses the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary performance of public-school options for all students, including traditionally underserved subgroups. We then focus on what K–16 achievement gaps exist, as well as how pervasive and persistent they are. Finally, we discuss these gaps in performance, suggest possible ways forward, and highlight how charter schools as a public school option contribute to closing these gaps. We conclude with three recommendations on how all California public schools, and the broader community that supports them, could do even more to close achievement gaps and ensure all students have a pathway to lifelong success.

While this report compares charter schools to traditional public schools to better understand educational options for all students, it is only when we look at student outcomes, regardless of school model, that we can understand the depth and pervasiveness of existing and persistent achievement gaps. This report therefore focuses on telling an accurate data story of student academic performance to inform how our public education sector can work together to ensure all students have access to a quality education.

charter school landscape

Public, free, and open to all, charter schools are a vital part of public education in California. Built on the belief that every student should have the chance to go to a great school that puts their needs first, regardless of zip code, income or ability level – charter schools serve a diverse population that mirrors traditional public schools (TPS).

A total of 1,323 charter schools, along with hundreds of thousands of educators, parents, students and advocates, made up the California charter school movement in the 2018-19 school year. Charter schools have grown at a rate of 3–6% annually over the past five years, serving 652,933 students in 2018-19.

Student Demographics and Autonomy

Over the last decade, charter schools have become increasingly reflective of the communities they serve, particularly independent charter schools. As shown in Figure 1, there are few differences between the students served by traditional and charter public schools. Where there are differences, the biggest gaps exist between white and Latinx proportions of students served by dependent charter schools and TPS. Demographic differences between charter schools and TPS are not always due to a negative discrepancy. For example, **independent charter schools serve proportionally more African American and low-income students than both dependent charter schools and TPS.**

When examining academic performance data, the autonomy of a charter school is an important consideration (Figure 2). The degree to which charter schools and charter school teachers have flexibility is defined as autonomy. Charter school autonomy can be further characterized as either "independent" or "dependent." (For full definitions, please see Appendix A).

Independent charter schools operate with the greatest level of autonomy. This means teachers at independent charter schools have greater flexibility to create dynamic lesson plans tailored to the individual needs of their students and school leaders have more control over the school's governance, staffing, and budget. Alternatively, dependent charter schools are typically run by their school district authorizer and have little-to-no control over their governance, staffing, or budget. Dependent charter schools often function more like traditional public schools, though they sometimes have specialized programming. Charter school enrollment data in Figure 1 is broken out by autonomy.

Figure 1: Demographics of Enrolled Students by Public School Option, 2018
*Percentage of test-takers (only data publicly available for this subgroup)

Student Group	Independent Charter	Dependent Charter	Traditional
African American	9%	5%	5%
Latinx	52%	45%	55%
Asian	4%	6%	10%
White	26%	37%	23%
English Learner	17%	14%	21%
Low-Income°	64%	48%	62%
Students with Disabilities*	9%	8%	11%
Total Enrollment	**475,169**	**153,680**	**5,578,789**

As illustrated in Figure 2, the majority of charter schools in the state operate as independent schools. Dependent charter schools make up a quarter of charter schools statewide and have slight differences in student demographics compared to independent charter schools. In addition to autonomy, charter schools vary in their site type and management model. Underneath the umbrella of non-classroom based charter schools (which includes independent study, virtual, and combination programs), there are many different types of models including homeschools, credit recovery programs, or project-based learning.

Figure 2: Charter School Characteristics

		School Count	Percent of Schools
Autonomy	Independent	967	73%
	Semi-Independent	40	3%
	Dependent	316	24%
Site Type	Classroom-Based	996	75%
	Non-Classroom Based	327	25%
Management Model	Freestanding	580	44%
	Network	183	14%
	CMO	559	42%

Regardless of autonomy or site type, charter schools can be structured as either freestanding (single-site), part of a Charter Management Organization (CMO) with a common philosophy and centralized governance/operations approach, or Network which are schools with a common philosophy but without the governance/operations centralization. In California, 100 percent of charter schools are non-profit organizations. After the passing of Assembly Bill 406 in 2018, for-profit charter schools were banned in the state.

There is also a proportion of charter schools that receive the Dashboard Alternative School Status designation or "DASS." These schools serve a majority of high-risk students and are held accountable for modified measures where appropriate. Around nine percent of charter schools and charter school students received DASS status in 2017-18 (Figure 3).

Figure 3:
DASS Charter Enrollment and School Count, 2017-18

		#	% Charters
DASS Status	Schools	109	9%
	Enrollment	54,135	9%

School Level and Urbanicity

Charter schools tend to have more expanded grade span schools, where they serve high school grades in addition to other grades like a 6-12 or K-12. Charter schools, on average, are smaller than TPS, with the exception of expanded grade schools (Figure 4). The number of schools and students served can look quite different by urban status, with a higher concentration of charter schools located in urban areas than in rural areas (Figure 5).

Figure 4: School Level Breakdown by Public School Option
*Includes semi-independent **High school and other grades

		Elementary	Middle	High	Multi-Grade**
Independent Charter*	Percent of Schools	42%	12%	24%	23%
	Average Enrollment	389	347	538	738
Dependent Charter	Percent of Schools	53%	9%	24%	15%
	Average Enrollment	461	688	384	587
Traditional	Percent of Schools	62%	15%	23%	3%
	Average Enrollment	523	770	919	336

Figure 5:
Charter Enrollment Over Time by Urbanicity

- Urban
- Suburban/Town
- Rural

Charter Students

25,641
7%

68,386
10%

160,293
44%

244,428
36%

178,082
49%

350,119
54%

2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019
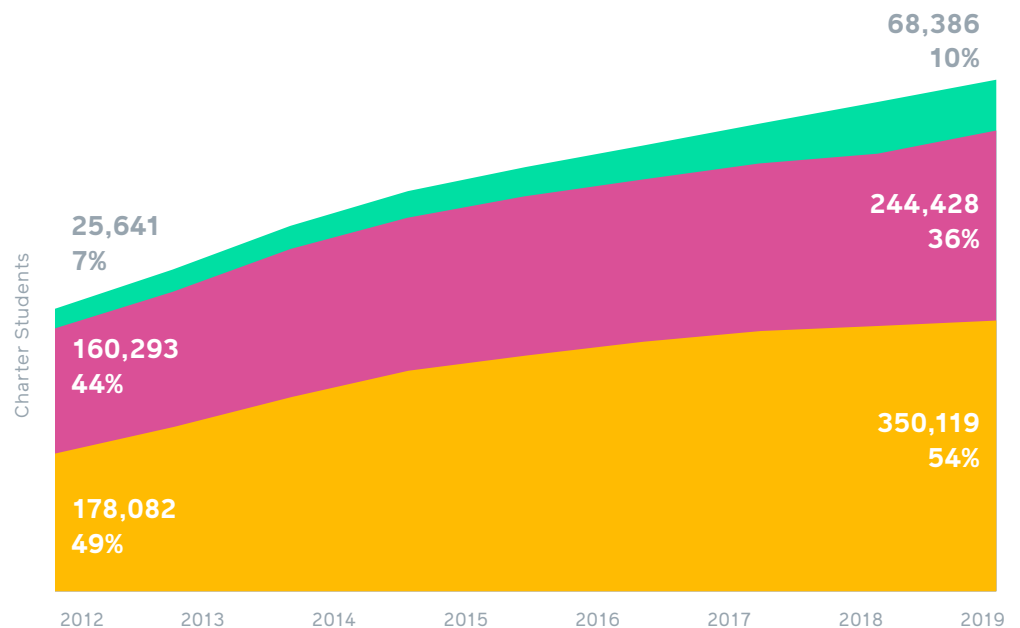
Authorizing Bodies

In California, regulation is unique in that there is a process of appeal that allows three bodies to authorize charter schools: local school districts, County Offices of Education, and the State Board of Education (Figure 6). There are no unifying authorizing practices or standards for these authorizing bodies, a concern noted by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.[i] Within California, authorization is largely decentralized with 83 percent of authorization happening across a thousand authorizers. There is little accountability for authorizers as the state's education code does not clearly outline renewal processes and many short-staffed authorizers are limited in their capacity for oversight.[ii]

Figure 6:
Charter School
Authorizer Types
2019

- 15% (195) County
- 3% (35) State
- 83% (1,093) Local
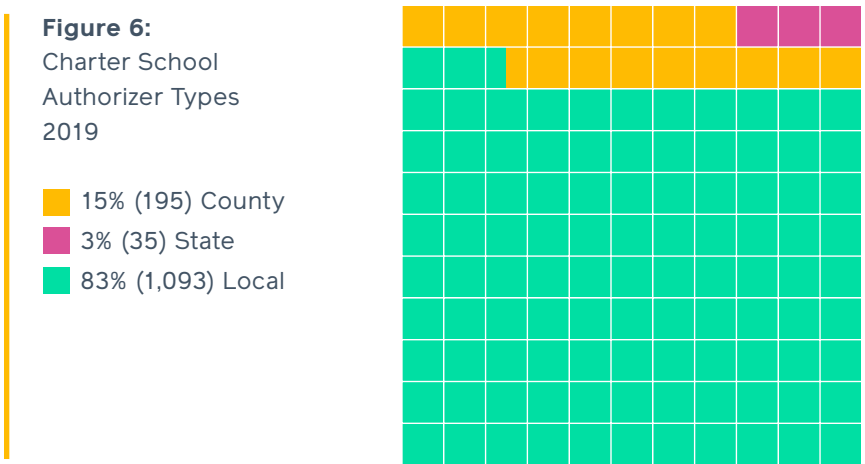
Chapter 1 Summary

Charter schools help strengthen California's public school system by offering all students an opportunity for a great public education that puts their needs first. Where charter schools are truly unique and add value to the education ecosystem is through their flexibility as school operators and their ability to offer robust education options for students and families. The data from this chapter offers a glimpse into the average charter public school in California but only scratches the surface on the many nuances that have made charter schools invaluable. Therefore, evaluating the quality of these diverse models must extend beyond "average performance" as is explored in the next chapter.

charter school performance

CCSA California Charter Schools Association

Nationwide, research on charter school performance is mixed, highlighting the need for context.[iii] Whether charter schools underperform or outperform depends largely on the state's laws, authorizing practices, and students served. However, the research is clear regarding who benefits most from California's charter schools: low-income, minority students in urban areas.[iv] Independent research, including a 2014 study from CREDO at Stanford University, found that low-income± African American students attending charter schools gained, on average, 36 days of learning in reading and 43 days of learning in math when compared to their traditional public school (TPS) peers (Figure 7).[v]

Figure 7: Impact of Charters on Subgroups Compared to TPS

Student Group	Additional Days of Learning Students Gain in Charters as Compared to Traditional Public Schools	
	Independent Charter Reading	Dependent Charter Math
African American	+22	+7
African American Poverty±	+36	+43
Latino	+7	-14
Latino Poverty±	+22	+29
White	-7	-72
Asian	-7	-29
Special Education	+14	+7
English Learner	+36	+50

Telling the Data Story

We explored publicly available statewide data, with a caveat that a sizable number of charter schools and TPS were not included in these analyses. Specifically, this report does not include DASS and small schools (schools serving less than 30 test-takers in the past two years) in any of our academic-focused analyses. These schools are excluded because DASS schools are specifically designed to serve high-need

students who struggle with standardized assessments and the results of small schools fluctuate too widely. A total of 125 charters and 963 TPS were not included due to these exclusion rules.

2018 CAASPP Results

In 2018, all California public schools – traditional and charter schools – were assessed on Common Core State Standards using the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) for the fourth consecutive year. By 2018, Californians hoped to see academic improvements in all grades. However, in reality, performance for all public schools remained relatively stagnant with modest gains made primarily in lower grades. Charter schools continued to outperform TPS for most subgroups across English Language Arts (ELA) and underperform on Math when looking simply at the academic indicators' "Distance from Standard" from the California School Dashboard (Figure 8). (For more detail on how Distance from Standard is calculated, see Appendix B.)

Figure 8 shows the gap between charter schools and traditional schools on ELA and Math for all subgroups. For African American students, charter schools on average were one scale score point higher in Math and eight scale score points higher in ELA. This image also shows that, **on average, charter schools are outperforming on ELA compared to TPS but have room for growth on Math.** Charter schools are underperforming with English learners in both ELA and Math in comparison to TPS.

Figure 8:
Average Difference in CAASPP DFS Performance Compared to TPS, Statewide by Subgroup 2018

*Statistically different scores p<.001

■ Math
■ ELA
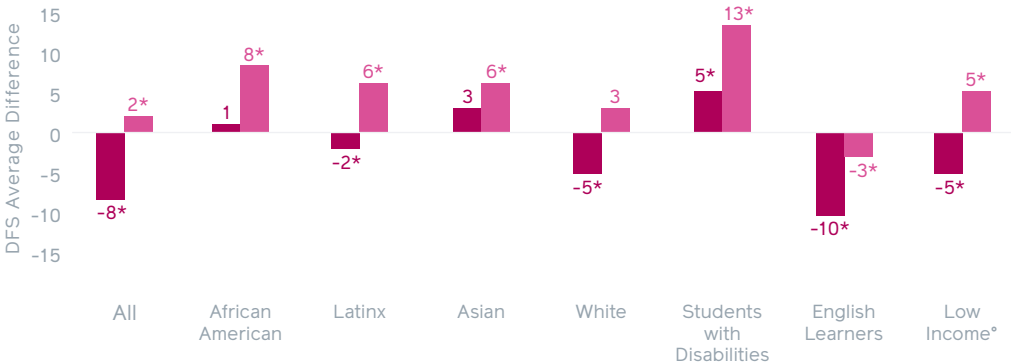
Measuring Student Growth

As has been a significant critique of California's public education system in recent years, there is no available student growth metric statewide. A student growth metric would enable stakeholders to better make programmatic and resource changes in response to how individual students perform academically over time.[vi] Most growth metric options include consideration of student demographics and mobility of students, based on research that shows these factors are related to student performance.

In the absence of a growth metric statewide, CCSA produced its own proxy over the past decade to look at the performance of schools serving similar student demographics. The aptly named Similar Students Rank (SSR) uses demographic data to identify schools that are outperforming or underperforming compared to other public schools across the state given the students they serve. (For a full breakdown of SSR, see Appendix B). The relative out/under performance is ranked on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being high and 1 being low.

Figure 9:
Schools Distribution on SSR, Statewide by Public School Choice, 2018

Traditional
(n=7,483)
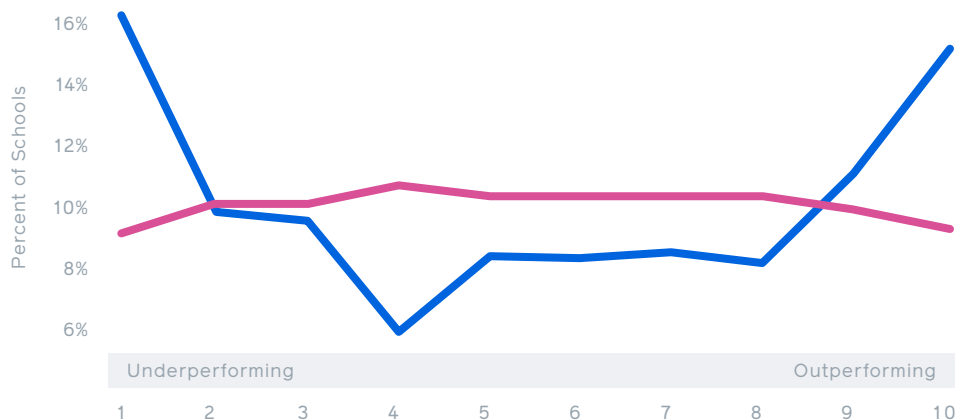
Charter
(n=1,013)

In 2017–18, charter schools consistently outperformed TPS statewide in the top three ranks and in the bottom three ranks creating a "U-shape" (Figure 9), but not nearly to the same degree as five years ago (Figure 10). Prior to the transition to Common Core, charter schools trended upward academically. The number of underperforming charter schools dropped from 21 percent in 2007-08 to 15 percent in 2012-13. Then,

the state went dark on assessments in its transition in both standards and accompanying assessments. This resulted in not only outdated charter school state law yielding a vacuum in standards of academic accountability, but also a set-back in performance for all public schools. The public education system had to start over in its fundamental understanding of how an accountability system could support student learning.

By the time the first standardized test scores were released in 2014–15 (post-Common Core), the charter school sector found itself with a similar proportion of underperforming schools as in 2007-08. While CCSA is hopeful about the upward trend in academic performance that has occurred since 2008, there is simultaneously a need for sharper and quicker progress to ensure that all students' lives are enriched by a quality education.

Figure 10: Longitudinal Performance of Charter Schools on Similar Students Rank

	School Year	Bottom 10%	Bottom 30%	Top 30%	Top 10%
CAASPP	2017-18	16%	35%	34%	15%
	2016-17	17%	35%	38%	16%
	2015-16	16%	33%	37%	17%
	2014-15	17%	33%	34%	18%
API	2012-13	15%	31%	40%	21%
	2011-12	18%	37%	39%	23%
	2010-11	18%	35%	40%	22%
	2009-10	18%	37%	39%	22%
	2008-09	19%	38%	37%	21%
	2007-08	21%	40%	34%	22%

Urban Areas Where Charter Schools Outperform

As validated by third-party researchers, the outperformance of charter schools is most heavily concentrated in urban areas.[vii] This is also the case when comparing combined Math and English Language Arts Distance from Standard (DFS) scores. **Charter schools tend to outperform in urban areas like Los Angeles and Oakland (Figure 11). This is particularly the case for African American, Latinx, and low-income° charter school students.** For example, in Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), Latinx students, on average, had a DFS score that was 25 points higher than their TPS counterparts. While we saw In Figure 8 that statewide charter schools do worse with English learners, in both LAUSD and Oakland, charter schools are outperforming with this subgroup by an average of 17 and 25 CAASPP scale score points closer to grade-level met standards in LAUSD and OUSD respectively.

Figure 11:
Average Difference in CAASPP Performance Compared to TPS for Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), 2018

	LAUSD Independent Charter (n=215)	OUSD Charter (n=39)
All Students	+7	+35
African American	+5	+23
Latinx	+10	+25
White	+14	-48
Asian	+17	+60
English Learners	+17	+25
Low Income°	+8	+34
Students with Disabilities	+15	+19

Charter Schools Difference Making for Underserved Students

These aforementioned data points look at the status scores of individual subgroups but do not give perspective as to how students perform compared to one another. Realizing this was a gap in available data, CCSA converted all DFS scores into percentiles (1-100) and ranks (1-10) by lining up all the DFS scores from lowest to highest and binning them (where 1 is lowest). While statewide charter schools are doing better than TPS (median scores of 6 versus 5), CCSA went one step further to understand the impact of public school options for low-income students. As depicted in Figure 12, proportionally more low-income[±] students in charter schools attend higher ranked schools than their TPS peers. **A majority (51 percent) of all low-income[±] students enrolled in charter schools attend schools ranked 6-10 when compared to other low-income[±] students. In contrast, only 40 percent of low-income[±] students in TPS attend similarly strong schools.**

Figure 12:
Performance on State Rank by Percent of Low-Income[±] Students, 2018

■ Traditional Public Schools

■ Autonomous Charters

We see a similar pattern when looking at our SSR distribution, this time for low-income[±] students (Figure 13). The SSR shows there are a greater number of minority students in schools that outperform their demographically similar peers. While the charter schools that are on the right side of the graph or outperforming side for State Rank and Similar Students Rank are not necessarily the same, both measures illustrate

that there are quality options available for students. The distribution shape looks similar when weighted by the number of African American and Latinx students (Figure 14).

Figure 13:
2018 Statewide Percent of Schools by SSR, Weighted by Percent of Low-Income± Students
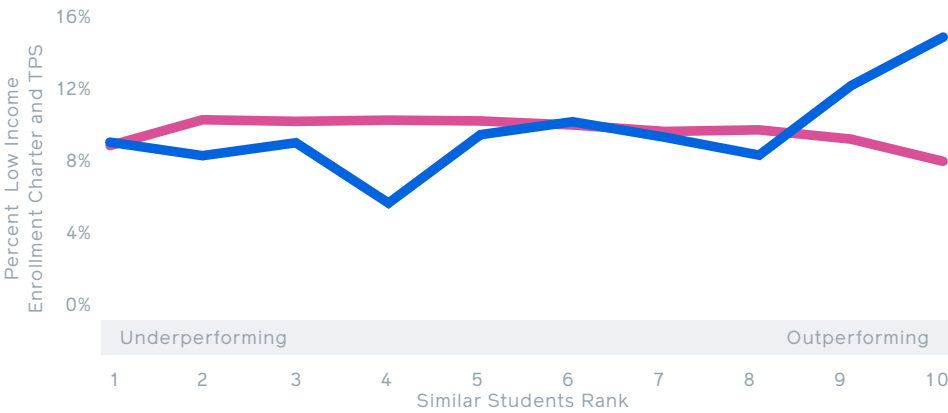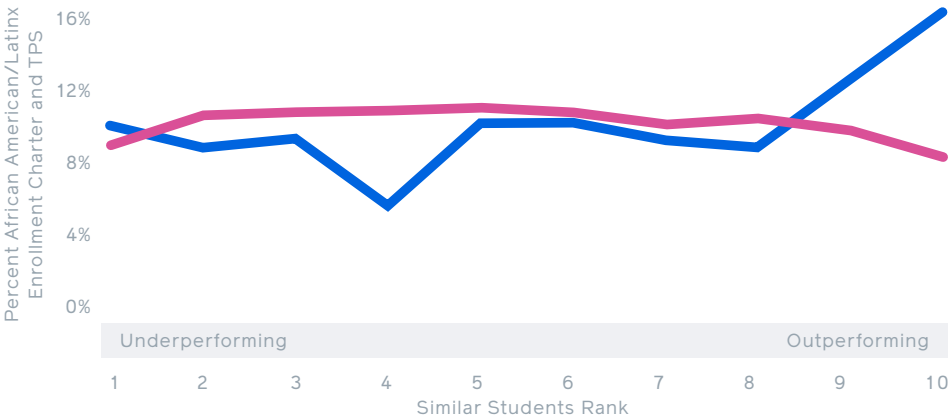
■ Traditional (n=7,483)

■ Charter (n=1,013)

Figure 14:
2018 Statewide Percent of Schools by SSR, Weighted by African American and Latinx Students

■ Traditional (n=7,483)

■ Charter (n=1,013)

Latinx and African American Charter School Students More Likely to Access Post-Secondary Education

This trend also stands when looking at post-secondary access. An analysis of University of California, California State University, and National Student Clearinghouse data showed that charter schools had better outcomes in terms of access and admittance to postsecondary two- and four-year universities for minority students when compared to TPS (Figure 15).

Figure 15:
University of California Acceptance Rates by Public School Option for Latinx and African American Students

■ Charter
■ Traditional Public School
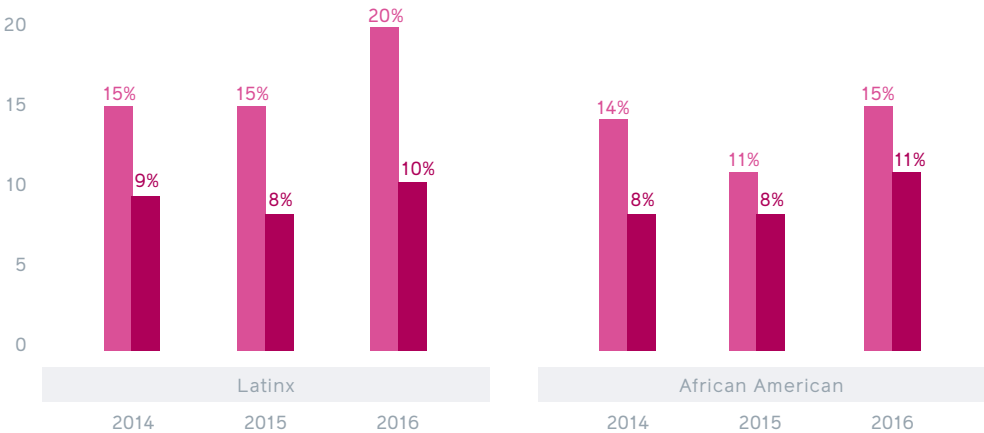
Chapter 2 Summary

Charter schools are providing better options for students. While charter schools have mixed results statewide – as evidenced by the continued "Shape of the U" – bright spots of performance are also clear and persistent. California charter schools help low-income, African American, and Latinx students particularly in urban areas achieve stronger academic performance. While this is promising and warrants further investigation and understanding statewide (as is discussed in Chapter 4), it is also true that all public schools – charter and traditional – have more work to do. Many of the figures in this chapter provide sobering evidence that too many historically disadvantaged students – particularly low-income and minority students – are far behind their white and more affluent peers. Chapter 3 delves into the important issues surrounding the academic achievement gap in California.

public school achievement gaps

A majority of California public school students are from low-income households. Public schools also enroll more Latinx and African American students than white and Asian students. This has been the reality in California for well over a decade, yet the achievement gaps between each of these student groups persist. For example, while Chapter 2 examined school performance comparing subgroups and statewide performance, these data points looked at the status scores of individual subgroups but did not give perspective as to how they perform compared to one another. While chapter 2 showed evidence of the ways that charter schools have been difference making for low-income minority students, all public schools need to do a better job at improving K-12 outcomes and providing access to post-secondary education.

K-12 Outcomes

Highlighting the subgroup contrast, Figure 16 lines up the averages for each subgroup based on their mean DFS score. In line with historic trends, on average, white students score above the met standard at four DFS (with Asian students scoring even higher). Students with disabilities and English learners are the lowest performing subgroups with -101 and -92 DFS points respectively. The gap between each of the subgroups is glaring. This data does not look at charter school versus TPS, but calls out the evident inequities across all public schools.

Using findings from Chapter 2 regarding the impact of income status° and minority status, Figure 17 illustrates these average scores in terms of percentiles statewide. All DFS scores were converted into percentiles (1-100) for the "all students" group and for subgroups statewide and the average scores of each low-income° subgroup and not low-income° subgroup were used to place the averages within statewide percentiles.
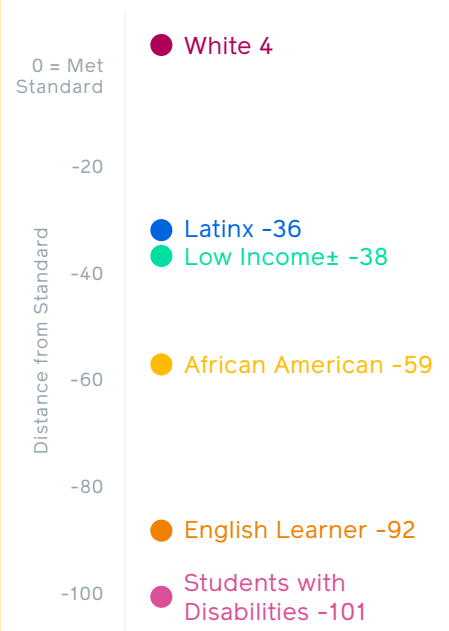
Figure 16:
Average DFS for each subgroup, 2018

0 = Met Standard

Distance from Standard

- White 4
- -20
- Latinx -36
- Low Income± -38
- -40
- African American -59
- -60
- -80
- English Learner -92
- -100
- Students with Disabilities -101

Figure 17: DFS Percentile by Ethnicity, Income level, and Public School Option, 2018

🟡 African-American
🟢 Latinx
🔵 White

Not Low-Income
- Charter: 🟡 41 🟢 58 🔵 81
- Traditional: 🟡 45 🟢 67 🔵 90

Low-Income°
- Charter: 🟡 16 🟢 35 🔵 42
- Traditional: 🟡 4 🟢 22 🔵 45

DFS Percentile: 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90
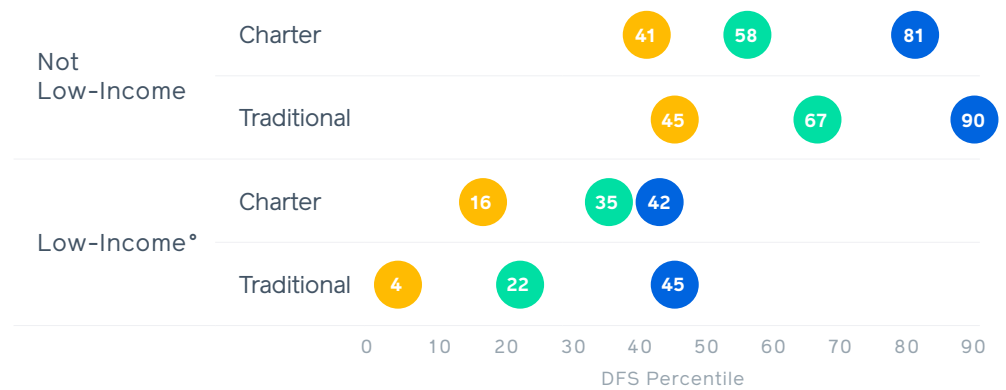
This modeling once again shows charter schools typically better educate low-income° African American and Latinx students. However, regardless of income, these subgroups perform worse in comparison to white students. Despite the overhaul of the state's education funding model (the Local Control Funding Formula – LCFF), curriculum, and accountability standards over the past decade, these concerning achievement gaps still exist and are particularly present for those who are low-income and minority.

These gaps are also evident in the statewide subgroup performance across subjects with particularly large gaps on Math as analyzed by the California Dashboard performance (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Math Academic Indicator Performance Across Subgroups, 2018

🔵 Blue (Highest)
🟢 Green
🟡 Yellow
🟠 Orange
🔴 Red (Lowest)

Percent of Schools in Color

Asian
- 51% | 57
- 41% | 46

White
- 20% | 95
- 36% | 173
- 21% | 102
- 20% | 97

Latino
- 17% | 134
- 33% | 256
- 35% | 272

English Learners
- 14% | 73
- 32% | 174
- 33% | 177
- 17% | 91

African American
- 28% | 43
- 45% | 69
- 22% | 34

Students with Disabilities*
- 18% | 54
- 34% | 103
- 45% | 134
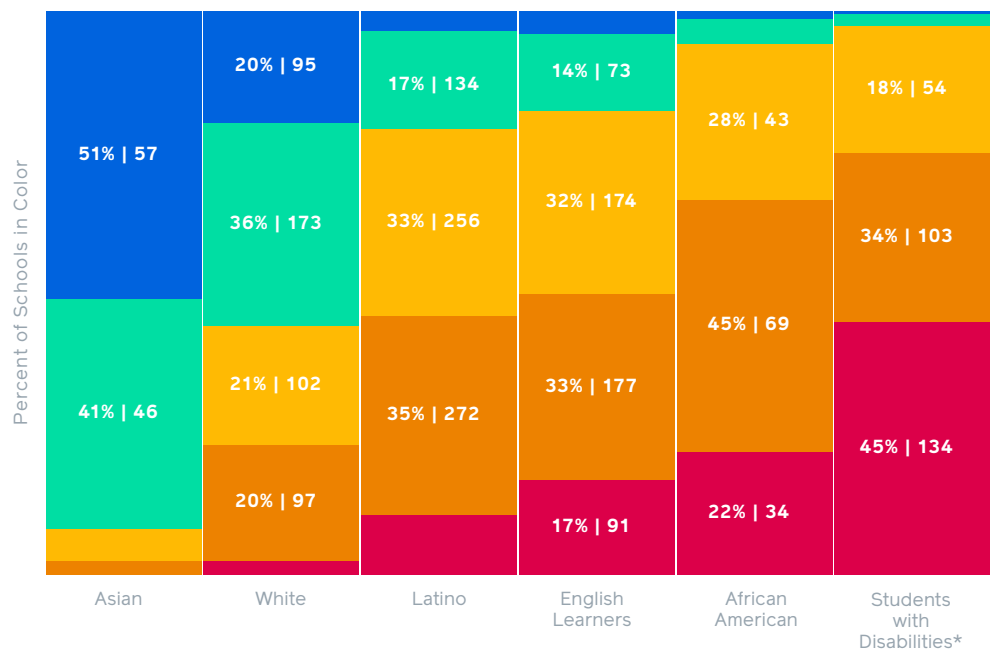
On the California Dashboard, "red" is considered on the low end of performance with "blue" marking the high end of performance. It is clear from the discrepancies in orange and red distribution that African American students, overall, are doing worse than white students and the gap is staggering. Math is the lower performing of the two major tested areas which also includes English Language Arts. Students who fall in the red color band typically have much more improvement to make to become proficient.

As displayed in Figure 19, Asian students were the top performing subgroup in 2018, with seven out of 10 students meeting proficiency. On the opposite end, only three in 10 low-income° students met state standards, which alone is remarkably low and yet is still a higher rate of proficiency than was achieved in Math for African American students, English learners, and students with disabilities. To state this in relative terms, in 2018 Asian students performed 3.7 times better than African American students at reaching proficiency in Math.

Figure 19:
Proportion of Student Subgroups Meeting Standards in Math, 2018

Number of Every 10 Students Meeting Standards
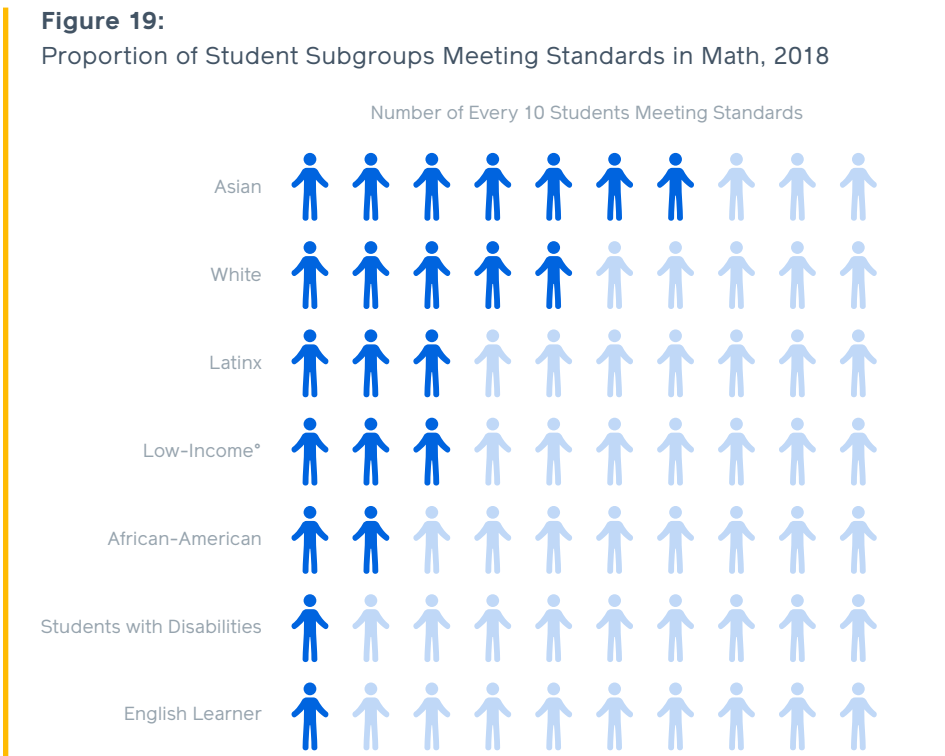
Post-Secondary Education

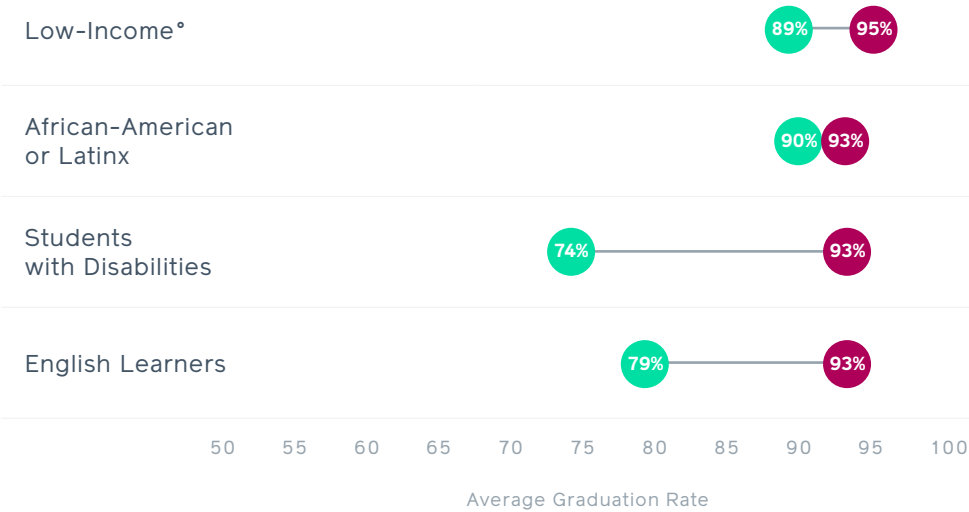These gaps exist within post-secondary access and completion as well. For example, when looking at graduation rates, students from a historically underserved subgroup are less likely to graduate within four years at a non-DASS school (Figure 20). In this figure we have broken down subgroup status by whether or not students identify in each of the listed categories. For example, only 74 percent of students with disabilities graduate within four years as compared to 93 percent of students without disabilities within the same period of time. The largest disparities are for low-income°, English learners, and students with disabilities.

Figure 20:
Four-year Graduation Rate by Subgroup Status, 2018

■ Yes
■ No

Low-Income°		89% — 95%
African-American or Latinx		90% 93%
Students with Disabilities	74% ———————— 93%	
English Learners	79% —————— 93%	

50   55   60   65   70   75   80   85   90   95   100

Average Graduation Rate

The National Student Clearinghouse data, which looks at completion rates at two and four-year universities, illuminates the same graduation discrepancies. This data breaks down schools based on their population composition, with designations as "low" and "high" based on their proportions. While charter schools are doing a better job of getting minority students into University of California schools, as displayed in Figure 15, it is not enough to ensure college graduation for either charter school or TPS college enrollee (Figure 21).

For example, around 25 percent of college students who come from TPS high schools that serve high proportions of low-income◊ or high-minority students were shown to graduate in six years compared to 45-47 percent of students who are from high-income or low-minority schools. For charter schools the gap is smaller but still exists, with higher graduation rates for low-income◊ and high-minority population schools and similar rates as TPS for high-income and low-minority schools. Interestingly, as was detailed in Figure 20, minority status appeared to be less impactful on high school graduation rates than income status, but within Figure 21 it appears that similar gaps in college graduation rates occur for minority status and income status for both charter schools and TPS.

Figure 21: National Student Clearinghouse 6-year College Graduation Rate, 2016

🟧 Low-Income / High-Minority Schools
🟩 High-Income / Low-Minority Schools

Population Income Status◊	Charter	28%	Gap = 16%	45%
Traditional	25%	Gap = 20%	45%
Population Minority Status	Charter	29%	Gap = 16%	46%
Traditional	26%	Gap = 21%	47%

20%   25%   30%   35%   40%   45%   50%

Percent of Students Completing College
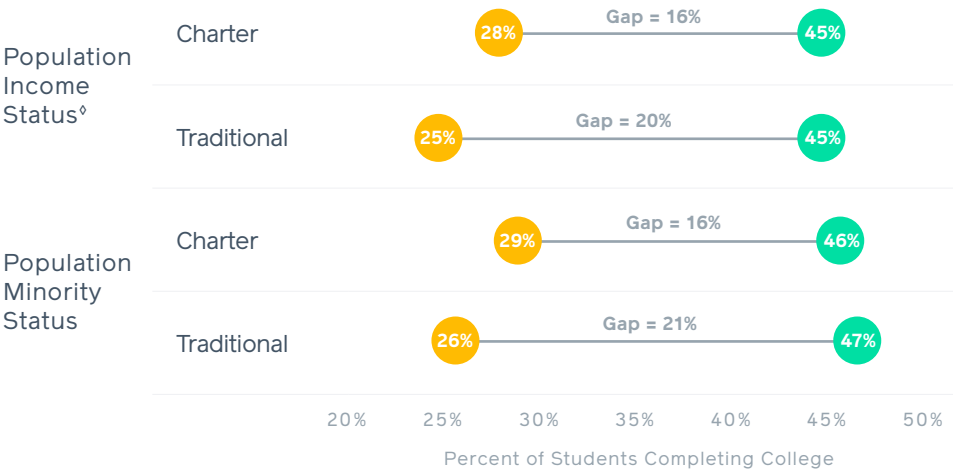
Chapter 3 Summary

Overall, gaps in performance exist for historically underserved subgroups in California regardless of public school option. While charter schools on average are more effective at closing these gaps – the entire public school system must do more. It is merely a distraction to focus on charter school versus TPS when a majority of students who are African American, Latinx, English learner, low-income, or receiving special education services are not meeting standards statewide and more broadly – are not being adequately prepared for college, career, community, or life. In the next chapter we discuss key recommendations and highlight a school of promise.

conclusion and recommendations

The issue of achievement gaps is not new, and many robust reports exist from organizations solely focused on this issue.[viii] What this *Portrait of the Movement* illustrates is the promise of charter schools as a vehicle for change and that poverty does not have to define destiny. Because of their flexibility, charter schools are able to successfully partner with families and communities to meet the unique needs of each individual student. Cornerstone Academy, profiled after our recommendations, is an example of a school that could be studied deeply to understand the conditions that contributed to high achievement with all of its subgroups.

Recommendations

1 Uncover more schools that have closed the achievement gap to learn from and replicate.

Research focused on Massachusetts, which arguably has one of the highest performing charter school sectors in the nation, indicated that charter schools in urban areas had such large average effects on state testing that continuously enrolled years of charter school attendance for African American students could eliminate their performance gap with white students.[ix,x] Similar findings came out of New York, indicating that this is a phenomenon that can exist in multiple settings.[xi] We need more research to uncover and propel the best practices coming from urban charter schools in California in order to plant those seeds at other public schools across the state.

2 Increase funding for the lowest performing student groups.

Over the past several decades, California has tried to impact the achievement gap through a variety of ballot initiatives and changes in resource allocation like the Local Control Funding Formula, which has shown some early promise.[xii] Most recently, funding to address the achievement gap was achieved through a block grant of funding for the lowest performing students statewide. According to recent research, this is a step in the right direction, but much more funding is needed to fully close these gaps.[xiii] As Los Angeles Unified Board Member Nick Melvoin argued at a school board meeting in January 2019, (to paraphrase) "it is baffling that California has the fifth largest economy in the *world*, yet we are nowhere near the top in per pupil funding nationwide." [xiv,xv] The one-time block grant represented a step forward, but it was a band aid on a much deeper cut. Statewide, we need more funding so schools can

allocate resources and staffing for special education, English learners, African American, and Latinx students in order to reach equitable levels of education.

3 Ensure historically underserved students have equitable access to a quality education.

High-quality charter public schools exist across California (as highlighted in the Cornerstone Academy example), as do high-quality traditional public schools. The concentration of these schools is mixed and often influenced by the socioeconomics of the surrounding community. However, until every student has access to a great public school, more options for underserved students will continue to be needed.

Public schools that chronically fail to help students learn, even after intervention from the state or with the implementation of recommendations one and two outlined above, should be closed. New schools should open in their place, free from admittance requirements (such as those found in many magnet programs), with the support of parents, community members and staff experienced in school turnarounds.

Since 2011, CCSA has advocated for the closure of underperforming charter schools through a process that examines achievement gaps and the academic growth of all students. If no evidence of improvement using public and internal high-quality data is found, CCSA advocates on behalf of the students who deserve a better education and calls for the non-renewal of the low-performing school. Why does a process like this not exist for all public schools? We cannot continue to trap students in low-performing schools.

More must be done to improve access to high-quality public schools in order to expedite the closure of achievement gaps and ensure all students have a pathway to lifelong success.

school profile: cornerstone academy

Marion Dickel, principal at Alpha: Cornerstone Academy, could credit her school's success to the school's extensive coaching program. But there is a stronger element that she believes keeps this K–8 school in East San Jose atop California's educational institutions: "It's the feeling of being a supportive family: teachers, families and scholars are here to learn and to support each other in learning. It's that sense of community that makes Cornerstone special," she says. It was this sense of community that convinced her to serve as the school's principal in the 2019 school year.

In an urban environment facing gentrification and families transitioning out of their neighborhoods for more affordable housing,East San José is a prime example of a community with the socioeconomic challenges that demand a vision of achievement for its more vulnerable members —it's children. Today, 73% of Cornerstone students are from low-income families, 96% identify as Latinx or Asian, 27% as English Learners, and 10% students with disabilities.

"The community in East San José was calling for a school that provided a high-level of academic rigor and that really focused on proficiency in literacy and math and we delivered on that request by opening Cornerstone," says Shara Hedge, who submitted the charter's petition in 2009 and now oversees the larger Alpha Public Schools Network which Cornerstone joined in 2016 in order to offer a K-12 grade continuum for families in the area.

Alpha Public Schools was formed, according to its website, in 2010 in response to a group of parents. "Mothers approached John Glover... a leader and former teacher in a high-performing charter network in Oakland. They convinced him to help them found a public charter school, one that would help their children acquire the academic skills they needed to go to college and thrive."

Ms. Acda provides one-on-one support during Reading Power Hour.

Today students at Cornerstone are high achievers. 2018-2019 data shows Latinx students performed in the 78th DFS percentile, socioeconomically disadvantaged students performed in the 96th percentile, students with disabilities performed in the 88th percentile, and English learners performed in the 95th percentile. School-wide, Cornerstone has maintained a DFS percentile in at least the 85th percentile for the last three years, as well as an SSR of 10.

Cornerstone's rigorous coaching program does play a big role in achieving these results. The school sets yearly priorities and targets and works at the individual, classroom, and school level to meet them. Assistant Principals, says Dickel, receive training and work as Instructional coaches meeting with teachers in their classrooms and doing observations every week. "Teaching and what's going on in our classrooms is the most Important area we can focus on."

Ask students, and it's the joyful environment that sets Cornerstone Academy apart: "They let us work together to bounce ideas off each other. Also, they let us play games which are educational," says Kaden, a six-grade student who spoke in favor of the charter renewal petition earlier this year. "I want this school to stay because of the teachers. They are very nice, and they try to connect with us," he added.v

For parents, the future of their children matters most: "Because of the seeds planted at Cornerstone, [my son] has the skills and mindset needed to succeed in high school to get into a top college," says Madia, a mom who has participated in the leadership of the Parent Association since the school's inception. "I am proud of the culture, values and diversity that are offered at Alpha: Cornerstone Academy.

"That culture, that sense of community, says Dickel, is felt all around. "We work really hard, but we really care about each other and we support each other and that is what makes Cornerstone a special place to grow and learn."

Mrs. Do builds teamwork and collaboration amongst her students

It's easy to spot joy in classes all over Alpha: Cornerstone

acknowledgements

appendix a: definition of key terms

LOW INCOME

±Low-income (California Department of Education "CDE" Definition)
Students who qualify for the federal Free/Reduced Price Lunch program.

°Low-income (CDE Definition)
Students who received the designation of socioeconomically disadvantaged. These are students who qualify for the federal Free/Reduced Price Lunch program or whose parents did not receive a high school diploma.

◊Low-income (National Student Clearinghouse "NSC" Definition)
Schools where 50 percent or more of students are reported eligible for the federal Free/Reduced Price Lunch program.

MANAGEMENT MODEL (CCSA Definition)

CMO School
School that is part of a charter management organization (CMO), which is an organization that operates three or more schools linked by a common philosophy and centralized governance or operations.

Network School
School that is part of a Network, which is a group of schools linked by a common philosophy but not centralized governance or operations. Networks are also entities that would otherwise fit definition of CMO but have fewer than three schools.

Freestanding
Freestanding schools include both start-up single-site schools and traditional district schools that have converted to charter schools that are not part of a network or CMO affiliation.

AUTONOMY (CCSA Definition)

Autonomous/Independent Charter Schools
Schools that appoint their board of directors, do not use the local school district's collective bargaining agreement, are directly funded and are likely to be incorporated as a 501(c)3.

Non-autonomous/Dependent Charter Schools
Schools that either have the majority of their board appointed by their authorizer or are under a school district's collective bargaining agreement, are indirectly funded, and are not incorporated as a 501(c)3.

Semi-autonomous/Semi-independent Charter Schools
Schools that appoint their own board and are incorporated as a 501(c)3. In addition to these characteristics, a semi-autonomous charter school either uses their authorizing district's collective bargaining agreement and is directly funded or is indirectly funded and does not use the district's collective bargaining agreement.

SITE TYPE (CDE Definition)

Non-classroom Based
Schools where less than 80 percent of instructional time is offered at the school site when students are, "engaged in educational activities required of those pupils and are under immediate supervision and control of an employee of the charter school who possesses a valid teaching certificate" (EC 47612.5).

Classroom-based
Schools where at least 80 percent of instructional time is offered at the school site.

VIRTUAL SCHOOLS (CDE Definition)

Virtual and online charter schools are those schools that offer nearly all or all of their educational content delivery via the Internet. For this analysis, in order for a school to be identified as "virtual," CCSA looked for schools classified as virtual in the California Department of Education Charter Schools Directory, or clearly identified as "virtual" or "online" in the school's name or non-profit incorporation name.

DASS SCHOOLS (CDE Definition)

Specific school types are automatically placed into DASS or are considered Alternative Schools that are: Continuation, County or District Community Day, Opportunity, County Community, Juvenile Court, California Education Authority, Division of Juvenile Justice, or County-Run Special Education Schools. In addition, any district-operated special education schools that have at least 70 percent of the students enrolled in grades three through eight and grade eleven participating in the California Alternate Assessments (CAA) will also be automatically placed into DASS.

CALIFORNIA DASHBOARD (CDE Definition)

The Dashboard contains reports that display the performance of local educational agencies (LEAs), schools, and student groups on a set of state and local measures to assist in identifying strengths, challenges, and areas in need of improvement.

appendix b: performance metrics

Distance from Standard "DFS", CCSA's State Rank and Percentiles

Since the transition to Common Core in the state of California, CCSA has created and used the **Distance from Standard (DFS)** to help schools and parents better understand SBAC scale scores and interpret growth. In 2017, the California State Board of Education adopted the same methodology used by CCSA to create this metric statewide as one of several accountability metrics. DFS is a measure that compares a school's Smarter Balanced (SBAC) English Language Arts and Mathematics scale scores by grade to the state standard for "met". The score that is produced means that the average student in the school scored that many scale score points above or below the "met" standard.

Rather than just looking at the percent of students who have crossed the proficiency threshold, this "distance from standard" measure tells you how far above or below that threshold students are. It's far more useful for measuring student progress along the entire spectrum of proficiency. Rather than using a percent met or exceeded measure that incentivizes schools to only focus on "bubble students" the DFS encourages schools to help each student raise his or her score as high as possible each year. To further operationalize this information and increase its use and understanding by stakeholders, CCSA has translated the DFS scores at the school level into decile ranks which we refer to as **State Rank**. These decile ranks allow for an immediate understanding of how each school is performing relative to other schools in the state on standardized tests with a 1–10 score or ranking.

How is Distance from Standard Calculated?
Because DFS is averaged by grade and subject, this enables fair comparisons across all grade spans and subgroups. Students receive a score on SBAC assessments, which fall into one of four levels. Level

3 is called "Standard Met" which has been set as the goal for all students to achieve by the state. The scores reported publicly by the state give school and grade level averages. For the calculation of DFS, a school's average SBAC scale scores are compared across grade and subject to the minimum standard scale score for the achievement level 3 or Standard Met (see more on the SBAC scale score ranges). The difference between a school's actual average score and the met score is then weighted by the percent of test-takers in each grade. These weighted differences are averaged across subject and grade to obtain a single DFS per school.

The DFS produced by the state is for grades 3-8 and separated by subject. CCSA's estimation of DFS occurs after raw SBAC scores are released and prior to the release of the confirmed DFS. This is referred to as DFS* in this report. This estimation includes a weighted average of grades 3-8 and 11 and combines both subject tests to produce an overall school level score. CCSA's estimated DFS can be slightly different than the DFS published in the California Dashboard, as CCSA's measure is calculated based off of the CAASPP raw files released by the state in the fall of each school year and does not account for students' continuous enrollment status. The Distance from Standard calculation accounts for student mobility and is calculated from the data files released with the update of the California Dashboard in the winter. In order to get charter school data to be used toward renewal petitions, and because the estimated DFS and DFS are highly correlated, CCSA produces an estimated DFS when the data is available and updates all data points with DFS at the point we are able to do so.

How are State Rank and Percentiles Calculated?
After DFS is calculated, CCSA then places all schools in a lowest to highest rank order to produce a statewide percentile on a scale of 1 to 100. It is from this percentile that we determine the bottom 5 percent of all schools which are asked to participate in a Multiple Measure Review regardless of their performance on the other

metrics within our performance framework.

We then take these percentiles and bin them into 1 to 10 ranks. For example, if a school is in the 6th percentile, it would be given a **State Rank** of 1. Whereas a school in the 92nd percentile would be given a **State Rank** of 10.

CCSA does not produce DFS percentiles or State Rank for schools that are DASS, Alternative, or that have fewer than 30 valid scores.

Similar Students Rank (SSR)

SSR is a measure that tells you how your students' actual scores compare to their expected performance based on demographics. In other words, it answers two questions.

1. Based on what we know about how school performance varies by student demography, what is the predicted performance of a school given its student body?

2. Is this school meeting or surpassing its predicted performance?

How is Similar Students Rank Calculated?
The process uses publicly available data from the California Department of Education (CDE), including each school's average SBAC scale score and the demographic characteristics of the students tested at the school. We then input those test scores and demographics for each school (charter and traditional) into a series of regression models by grade and subject. The regressions then generate a predicted scale score for each school. In other words, SSR takes into consideration the average parent education level, mix of ethnicities, percentage of low-income students+, and other factors for the portfolio of students in a school and predicts how the school should perform based on how schools serving similar students performed statewide.

We then compare each school's actual scale scores to their predicted scale scores. Looking at actual versus predicted scores we use the gap to determine if, given a school's portfolio of students, the school is outperforming what the regression would predict considering how every other school in the state performed with similar student demographics. We then rank all schools in the state by this gap score and school type as categorized by the state (Elementary, Middle, High and Elementary-High) and divide the list into ten equal groups of ten percent. These equal the Similar Students Ranks for 1-10 with 1 representing the lowest and 10, the highest.

In the example below, School B receives a rank of 3 out of 10, which is on the lower end of performance on this metric. School A receives a 7 out of 10 SSR, which is on the higher end of performance.

School B

School A

School Rankings Based on Average Gap Scored

Underperforming   Outperforming

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