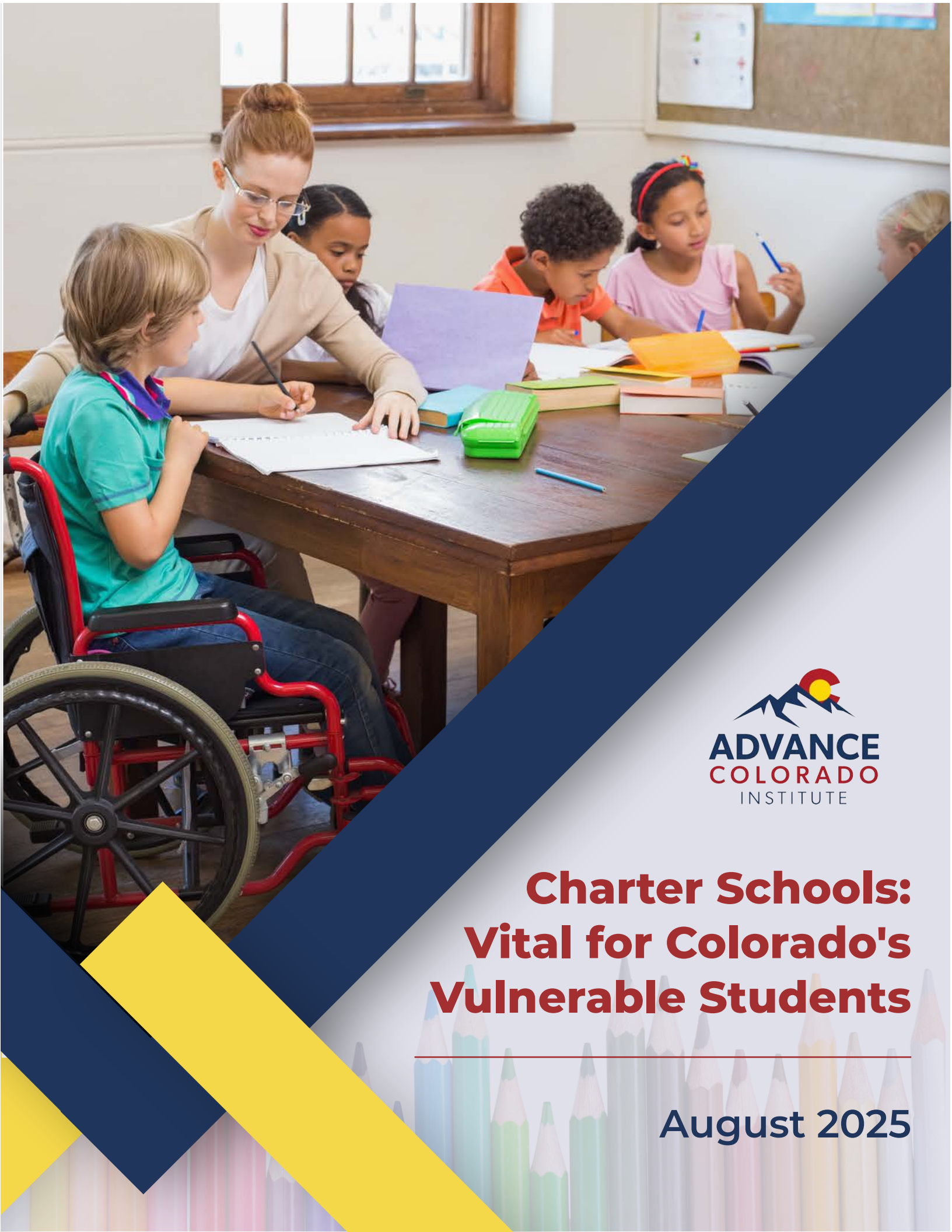
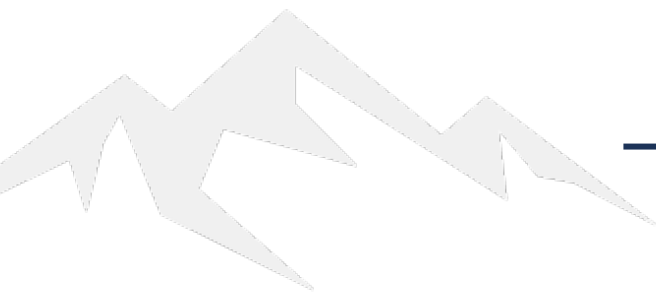




Charter Schools: Vital for Colorado's Vulnerable Students

August 2025



About the Authors

Yazmin Navarro



As an immigrant, Yazmin Navarro was taught the importance of a great education. Since then, she has strived to ensure the success of a strong education for generations to come. As an award-winning educator and American diplomat to El Salvador, Yazmin has served both students and families in both the United States and around the world, giving her a unique perspective on education. Yazmin has worked with children and families from all walks of life, including gifted and talented students, special needs students, at-risk youth, and English language learners. She has also worked with students in out-of-school-time programs. She has been hands-on in the classroom teaching, as well as creating programs that will improve education for children. As a Department of State employee, Yazmin never forgot her roots in education and continued serving youth through a Department of State-sanctioned program while stationed abroad in El Salvador. Yazmin continues to volunteer by teaching Spanish in her local community and serving as a volunteer at her daughter's school. Yazmin was the first in both her close and extended family to not only graduate from high school but to attend college. After graduation, she pursued her college degrees. She graduated with her bachelor's degree in English in 2012 and in 2015 finished her master's in public administration. Yazmin currently resides in Johnstown with her husband, who honorably retired from the Marine Corps after faithfully serving for 20 years, and her school-aged daughter who attends public school.



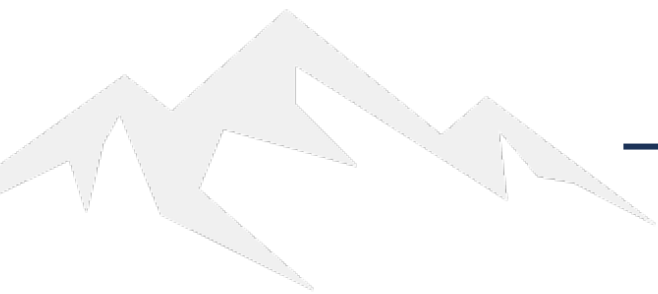
Kristi Burton Brown

Kristi is the Executive Vice President at the Advance Colorado Institute. She is also a member of the State Board of Education, representing Congressional District 4. Kristi is the former Chairwoman of the Colorado Republican Party – the first woman to be elected in 40 years and the youngest Chair in Colorado Republican history. Kristi is a constitutional attorney, focusing on First Amendment and Equal Protection issues and is admitted to the U.S. Supreme Court where she has submitted briefs in a number of landmark decisions, including *Loper v. Raimondo* (the case that overturned the Chevron Doctrine). She is a guest host for the Dan Caplis Show on 630 KHOW. Kristi lives with her family in Douglas County where she and her husband homeschool their children with a classical Christian education.



Michael Tsogt

Michael Tsogt is a Policy Analyst at the Advance Colorado Institute. His areas of policy and research include education, budget/fiscal matters, and public safety. He has testified on a range of bills at the State Capitol, including a bill proposing education savings accounts for special needs and foster care kids in Colorado. During undergrad, Michael was elected as the Academic Senator for student government, covered sports and entertainment for the student newspaper, and participated in several political fellowships and opportunities, including at the Center for the Study of Government and the Individual, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Intercollegiate Studies Institute. Michael graduated from the University of Colorado with a degree in political science. He and his wife live in Colorado Springs.



Introduction

Charter schools are public schools that provide alternative education opportunities to students who are looking for an option outside their neighborhood public schools. Often, parents who choose charters for their children do so because the neighborhood school's academic performance is lacking or because the charter provides a particular type of education that better fits that family – for example, a STEM-based program, a classical curriculum, or a dual-language option. Colorado was the third state in the nation to pass a charter school law in 1993, and the first charter school opened in Pueblo Rural County District 70 that September. (1)

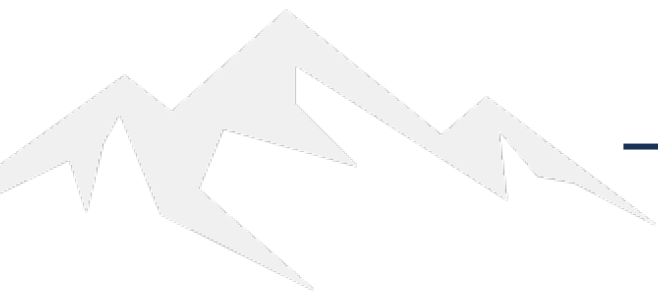
While support for charter schools is widespread and bipartisan, this particular public school choice continues to come under fire during legislative sessions. Under the guise of “accountability,” anti-choice legislators attempt to find creative ways to manufacture unnecessary standards for charter schools with the purpose of shutting them down. Numerous school boards across Colorado have become hostile to charter schools, despite long waiting lists of families who want to join.

While all parents should have the opportunity to choose whether to send their children to the neighborhood district school or to a public charter school, it's essential for policymakers, school board members, and citizens to understand how valuable charter schools are – specifically for Colorado's most vulnerable students. Colorado education data demonstrates that minority students, English language learners, and students from impoverished socioeconomic backgrounds thrive when given the opportunity to attend a quality charter school. When the traditional neighborhood school is their only option, their academic performance often falls far below their peers.

Evidence shows that charter schools are the way forward to adequately serve all children and to raise academic achievement scores and student success.

History of Charter Schools

While charter schools are a newer model than neighborhood public schools, they have been operating for decades with proven success rates. Charter



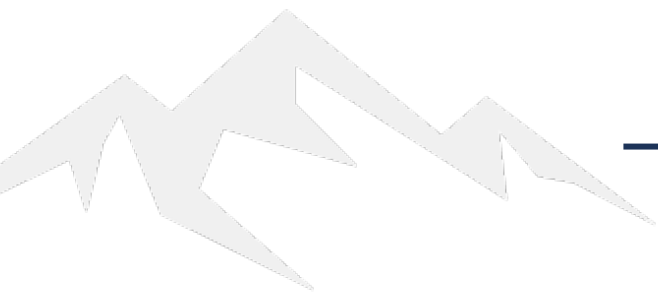
schools emerged because families had different needs than what every neighborhood school could provide, and because increasing numbers of families wanted more than one option in public education. Many neighborhood schools educated and operated too narrowly, lacked equity, and failed to meet the needs of Colorado's diverse student body. Perceptive educators saw the need for what we now call school choice and argued that there was a demand for alternative public education options.

In the early 1980s, the National Commission on Excellence in Education stated that complacency in education was “jeopardizing America’s global competitiveness.” (1) Upon hearing a speech by Al Shanker, who was the President of the American Federation of Teachers, Ted Kolderie, the leader of the Minnesota Citizens League, acted on the idea of the charter school, making his state the first in the nation to adopt this school choice innovation. (1) The first charter school to open in the United States was City Academy High School in St. Paul, Minnesota.

In 1992, Senator Gary K. Hart sponsored charter school laws in California, helping to spark the spread of the charter school movement throughout the United States. Colorado – which already had legislators like Senators Terry Considine and Bill Owens and Representatives John James Irwin and Peggy Kerns working hard to craft the best law – quickly followed in 1993, along with Massachusetts, Michigan, New Mexico, and Wisconsin. (1) “Today, 44 states, D.C., and the territories of Guam and Puerto Rico offer this educational option to students, families and communities.” (1)

By 2006, charter schools were reaching one million students across 40 states, demonstrating an appetite for educational options that offer flexibility and specialized focuses. Charter schools have proven to be both “scalable and sustainable,” as each new charter does not have to reinvent the wheel, but can instead replicate successful examples. (1)

One of the historical drivers behind charter schools is the belief that because children learn differently, public education should transform and rise to meet the diversity of needs. Neighborhood public schools cannot always meet these needs due to restrictions from school district leadership, a heavy administration burden, old curriculum and teaching styles that are no longer the best practice, or overpopulated classrooms. The educational experts who



launched charters in Colorado saw the need and boundless opportunity and began to offer school choice to increasing numbers of families – an effort that continues across the state today.

Colorado's Vulnerable Students

2024 data from the Colorado Department of Education demonstrates a wide achievement gap between white students and African American and Hispanic students. It also illustrates a substantial decrease in expectations being met among students who qualify for free and reduced lunch and among those who are English language learners.

After an examination of the data, Ready Colorado summarized the results:

“Achievement Gaps:

Proficiency gaps based on racial and ethnic groups, disability, family income levels and English-speaking ability remain extremely large, as they have for the past several decades. These gaps range from 20 and 35 points between most races and ethnicities at all grade levels. (Figure 2)

- Only 6% of English Learners are proficient in ELA in 5th grade, compared to 53% of their peers, a gap of 46 points.
- 55% of white 4th graders are on grade level in reading and writing, while just 22% of Black and Hispanic students are.
- Only 12.7% of Hispanic students and 13.5% of Black students are on track in math in 6th grade, compared with 40% of white students and 50% of Asian students.” (2)

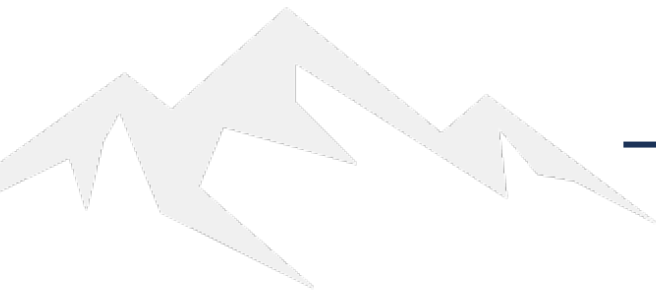
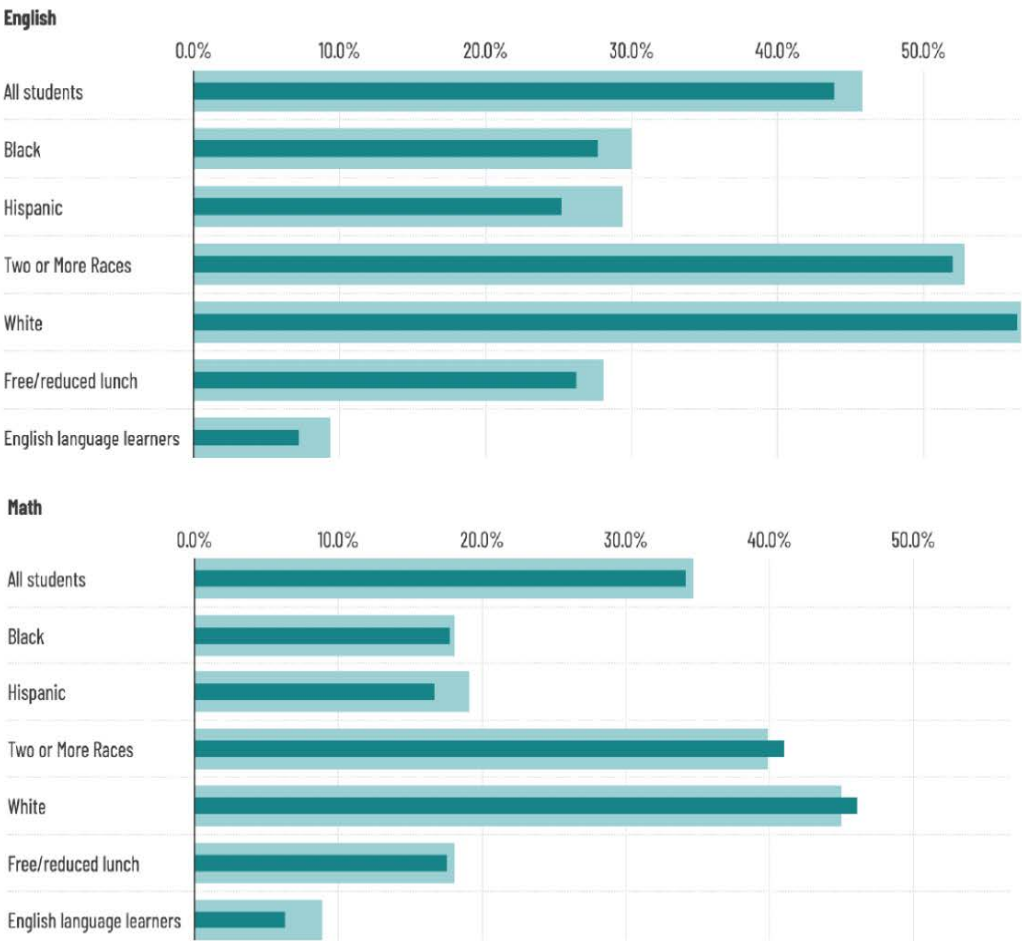


FIGURE 2: CMAS Performance, 3rd - 8th Graders by Student Group

Outer bars show the percentage of students who met or exceeded expectations in 2019. Inner bars show the 2024 rates.

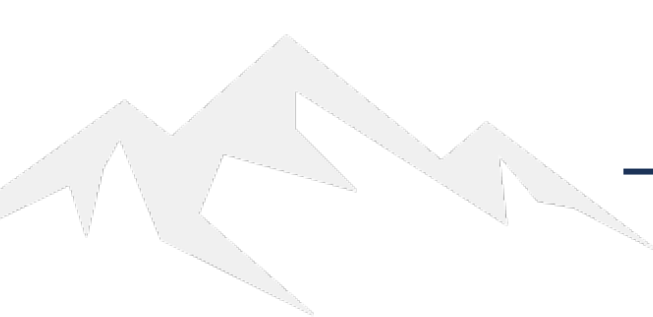


Source: Chalkbeat, 2024. Chart: Thomas Wilburn. Data: Colorado Department of Education

(2)

Vulnerable Students’ Improvement at Charter Schools

Charter schools have a record of improving outcomes for students across the board: “Looking at year-to-year academic progress from 2015 to 2019, the typical charter school student in our national sample had reading and math



gains that outpaced their peers in the traditional public schools (TPS) they otherwise would have attended.” (3)

Opponents claim that, despite some good results, charter schools do not provide access to low-income families and students of color. However, research contradicts these claims, showing that African American and Hispanic students show better academic advancement in charter schools, compared to their neighborhood school peers. The Fordham Institute reports that “dozens of studies have found that kids of color in urban charter schools learn significantly more on average than their district peers.” (4)

English-language learners and students whose families live in poverty also show strong growth when they attend charters. Charter schools are often specifically located in areas where the majority of students come from vulnerable and underserved populations, providing equitable access to families in need. This focused work has helped to close achievement gaps, illustrating the need for charter expansions.

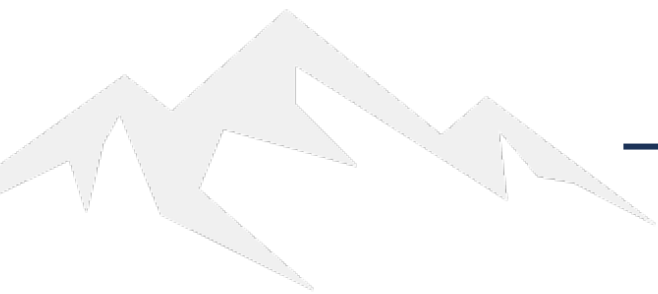
The 2023 National Charter School Study, conducted by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University, reported “accelerated learning gains for tens of thousands of students across the country” at charter schools in 31 states, explaining that “it is possible to dramatically accelerate growth for students who have traditionally been underserved by traditional school systems.” (3)

Specifically, the 2023 Study reported:

- “Black and Hispanic students in charter schools advance more than their TPS [traditional public school] peers by large margins in math and reading. ...
- Charter school students in poverty had stronger growth.
- English-language learner students attending charter schools had stronger growth.”

Stanford concluded:

“Perhaps the most revealing finding of our study is that more than 1,000 schools have eliminated learning disparities for their students and moved their achievement ahead of their respective state’s average performance. We refer to these schools as ‘gap-busting’ charter schools. They provide strong



empirical proof that high-quality, high-equality education is possible anywhere. ... Between the 2009 and 2023 studies, against a backdrop of flat performance for the nation as a whole, the trend of learning gains for students enrolled in charter schools is both large and positive.” (3)

According to a report by Education Next, African American charter school students demonstrate a more significant trend in improved test scores than their counterparts in neighborhood schools. (5)

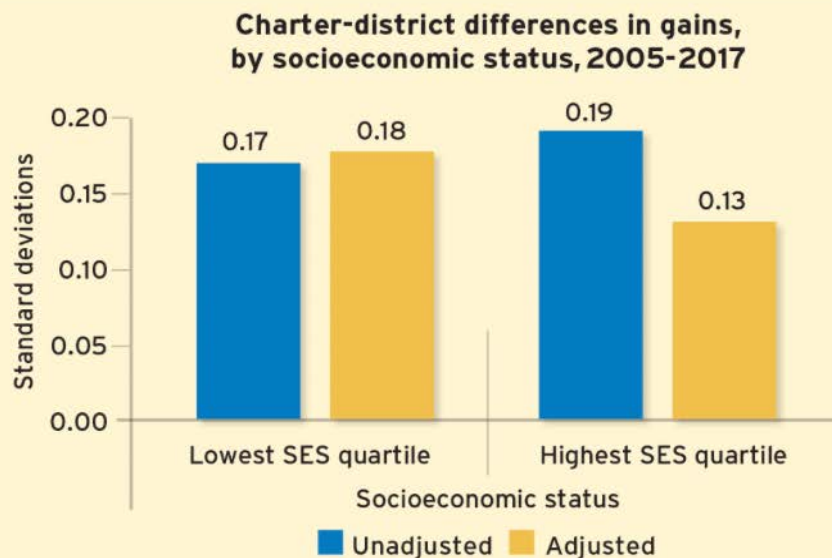
“In 2005, average test scores for African-American students in both sectors were the lowest of the four groups. Test performance for African Americans improved over time at both district and charter schools, but the trend was far more dramatic at charters. This is especially noteworthy as one in three charter students is African American.

At district schools, average scores on all tests for cohorts of African Americans in grades 4 and 8 improved by 0.14 standard deviations between 2005 and 2017. At charter schools, the combined average gain was more than twice as large, at 0.33 standard deviations. For African-American 8th-grade charter students, average math scores improved by 0.46 standard deviations, which was four times larger than for students attending district schools. In reading, average scores improved by 0.33 standard deviations for students at charters, twice those of students attending district schools. Given the importance of closing the Black-white test score gap, the much steeper upward trend at charters is particularly meaningful. The magnitude of the difference is roughly a half-year’s worth of learning.” (5)

The Education Next report also compared charter and district school students’ test scores based on their socioeconomic status. Opponents of charters claim that students who are successful in charter schools are children of parents who have the time to be extra-involved or who are economically advantaged. This could not be further from the truth. The chart below demonstrates that charter schools serve students from both ends of the economic spectrum more successfully than neighborhood schools.

An Additional Half-Year of Learning for Low Socioeconomic Status Charter Students (Figure 4)

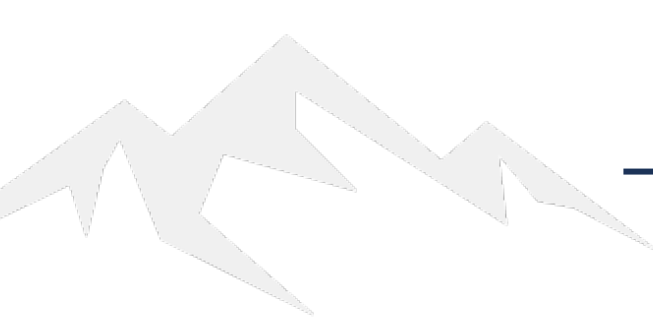
Compared to their district-school peers, the 8th-grade charter students in the lowest socioeconomic status quartile made more progress on reading and math tests from 2005 to 2017, with a difference equivalent to an additional half-year of learning. 8th-grade charter students from families in the highest socioeconomic status quartile also made more progress on tests than their counterparts attending district schools.



NOTE: Data are for grade 8 students only. Socioeconomic status (SES) quartiles are defined based on an index constructed from student reports of their parents' education, the number of books in their home, and the availability of a computer in their home. Adjusted differences control for gender, ethnicity, and eligibility for free and reduced price lunch.

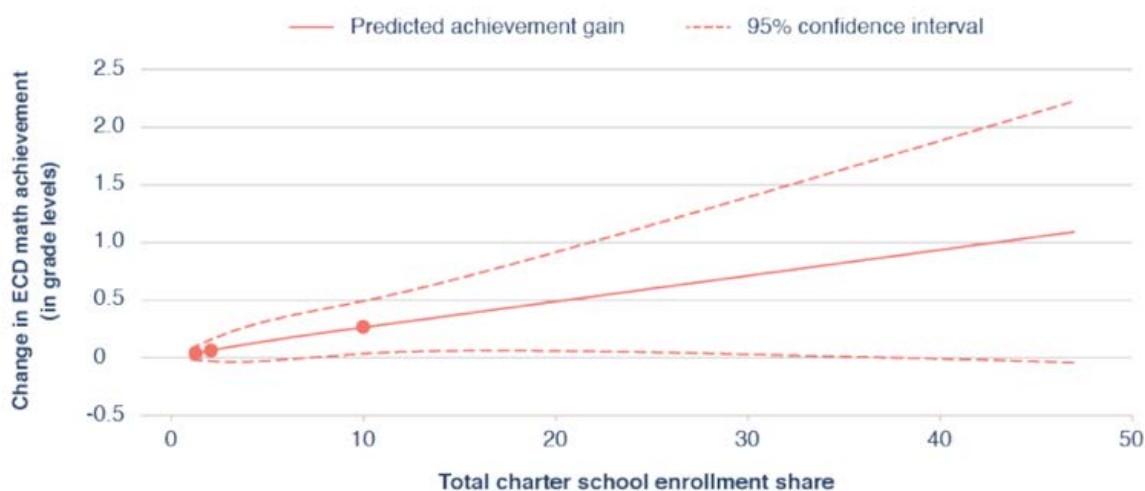
SOURCE: Authors' calculations using data from the NAEP, 2005-2017.

(5)



Another study, conducted in 2024 by the California Charter Schools Association (CCSA), found that “charter public schools...send substantially more socioeconomically disadvantaged, Latino, and Black students” to college. In California, site-based charter schools were “sending nearly triple the percentage of English learners and students with disabilities” to college, “compared to the public school average.” CCSA President Myrna Castrejón explained, “Charter public schools are closing post-secondary gaps among the most vulnerable students...and, in the process, creating positive generational change and breaking cycles of poverty in low-income communities.” (6)

Figure 5. On average, an increase in total charter school enrollment share is associated with a significant increase in economically disadvantaged students’ average math achievement.

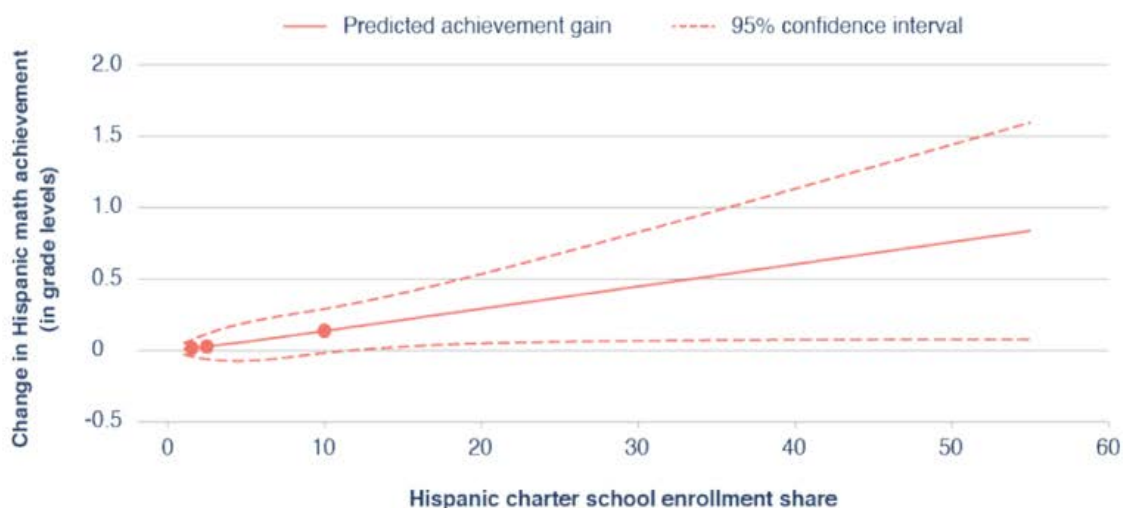


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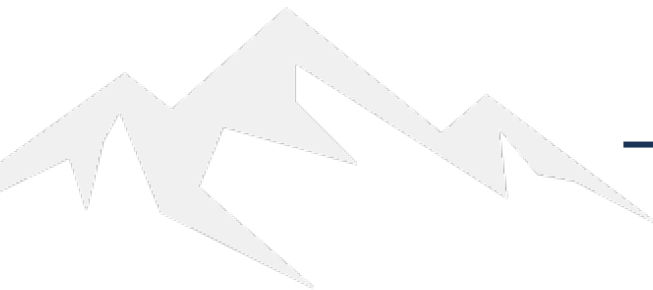
According to the figure above provided in the 2022 Still Rising report by the Fordham Institute, there is a positive association between the total percentage of charter school enrollment in an area and the average math achievement of economically disadvantaged students.

This is also true when there is an increase in charter school enrollment share among Hispanic students and African American students. According to the Fordham Institute, when more Hispanic students enroll in charter schools in a metro area, there is a significant increase in math achievement for Hispanic students. And, “In major urban areas, higher charter market share among black and Hispanic students is associated with significant gains in both English language arts (ELA) and math.” (4) A rising tide lifts all boats, especially in our public schools.

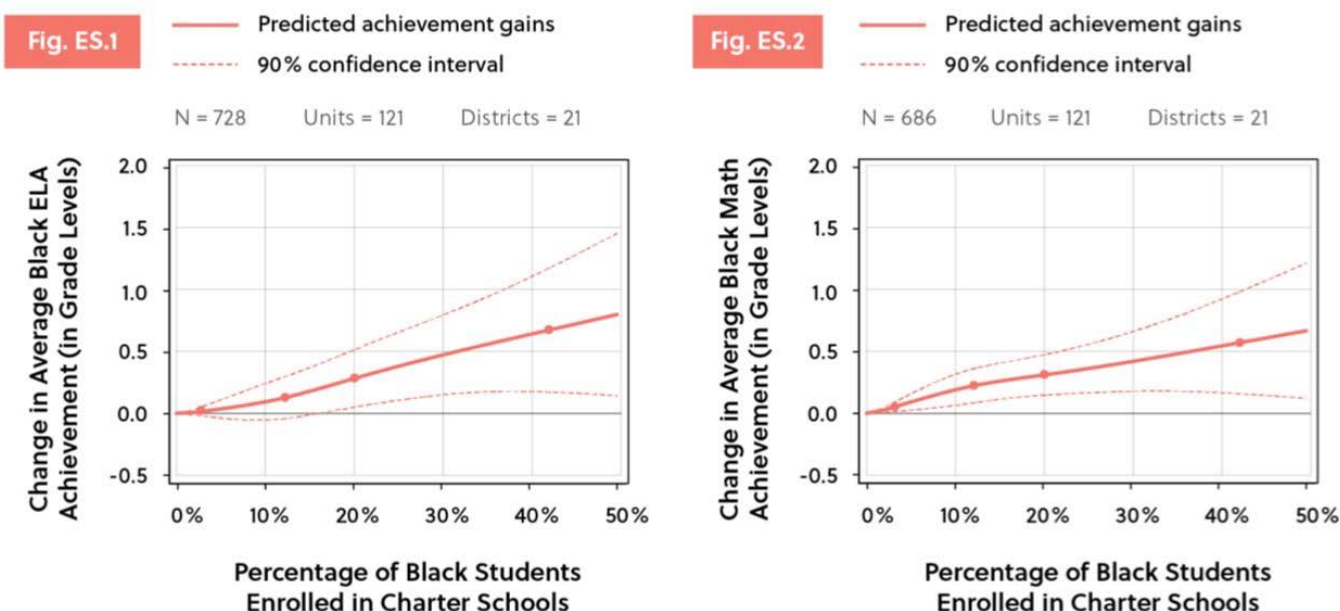
Figure 7. On average, an increase in Hispanic charter school enrollment share is associated with a significant increase in the average math achievement of Hispanic students.



(7)



Figures ES.1–ES.2. In the largest urban districts, higher “black charter market share” is associated with significant achievement gains for black students.



Note: Figures show the predicted changes in the average ELA and math achievement of grade 3–8 black students in charter and traditional public schools as district-by-grade-level charter market share increases among black students. Estimates were generated using a cubic spline with knots at the 5th, 35th, 65th, and 95th percentiles (see red dots) and controlling for student demographics, district-by-grade-level unit and year fixed-effects, and district-specific quadratic time-trends. Sample includes all urban units with 0 to 50 percent black charter market share and average black enrollment >2500 between 2009 and 2015.

(4)

A Colorado Example: James Irwin Charter Schools

James Irwin Charter Schools strive to ensure that “all students can benefit from a rigorous educational program that challenges them to achieve their academic potential.” (8) James Irwin Charter High School, which operates in Harrison School District No. 2 in Colorado Springs and is the crown jewel of their charter network, serves a 72% minority student population, making it the 29th most diverse public high school in Colorado. (9)(10)

James Irwin Charter High School’s students read at 77% proficiency, which is explained as “the percentage of students that scored at or above proficiency



levels on their state reading/language arts assessment test.” (11) The local neighborhood high school, Harrison High School, has a student reading proficiency rate of 27%. (12)

Additionally, students at James Irwin Charter High School have a 95% graduation rate, an average SAT score of 1160, and an average ACT score of 25. (11) In contrast, students at Harrison High School have a 75% graduation rate, an average SAT score of 1040, and an average ACT score of 21. (12)

Despite serving a greater percentage of traditionally underserved minority students in the same community, James Irwin Charter Schools prove that charter schools are educating minority students with higher academic success than their traditional neighborhood school counterparts.

Top-Ranked Colorado Charter: Liberty Common School

With a strong curriculum and a focus on a classical education, Liberty Common School is a set of K-12 charter schools in Northern Colorado. The school’s mission is simple: to “provide excellence and fairness in education for schoolchildren through a common foundation,” and it “recognizes the value of inclusiveness, or providing access to a broad cross-section of the community, so that students from all backgrounds can benefit from the school’s educational offering.” (13)(14) Liberty Common’s curriculum was specifically designed for inner-city schools with the goal of moving all students, no matter their economic, racial, or ethnic backgrounds, towards academic success.

In 2024, U.S. News and World Report ranked Liberty Common Charter School as the third best high school in Colorado and #145 in the nation. 71% of Liberty Common’s students passed at least one AP exam, math proficiency is at 90%, reading proficiency is at 98%, and the school has a graduation rate of 97%. (15) Colorado’s own rankings have placed Liberty Common’s high school in the top five Colorado schools for decades, typically at the number one spot.

In addition to its flagship high school, Liberty Common also operates two elementary school campuses and was named the runner-up for the 2024 Fort Collins Human Relations Award based on its work at the new Aristotle

elementary campus which was intentionally located next to a mobile-home park in Fort Collins. Liberty Common extended its proven track record of academic success to vulnerable students whose neighborhood schools were not adequately serving them.

The school's third grade class received the school district's top academic score for reading and the second-highest in math, with a student population that includes 22% minority students, which is reflective of the community. Academic gaps were quickly closed for fourth graders at Aristotle as well. Within months of beginning classes at the new school, the class's language proficiency increased drastically from 45% to 87%. (16) Liberty Common's elementary schools have over 1,000 children on the waitlist.

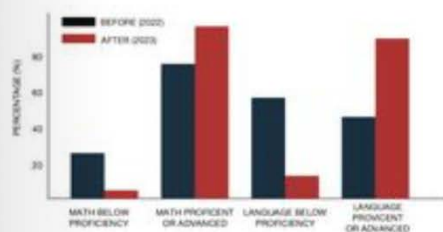
The Great Equalizer

Closing Achievement Gaps for the Underserved

Liberty Common students have once again demonstrated the power of a robust education rooted in the Core Knowledge® Curriculum and high academic standards. The success story of Liberty Common School's Aristotle campus serves as a testament not only to the dedication of its instructors but to the vital role of parental and donor support shaping student achievement.

When the campus welcomed its inaugural class in August 2022, the challenges were clear: 25% of fourth-grade students were performing below proficiency in math and reading, and 55% struggled with language usage. These numbers reflected the significant learning gaps students were facing elsewhere.

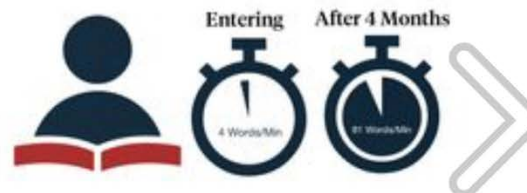
In just one school year, these same students experienced a remarkable transformation. The percentage of students performing below proficiency in math plummeted to only 5% with an astounding 95% of the class achieving advanced or proficient levels. In language usage, proficiency soared to 87% from 45%. These dramatic improvements weren't confined to only one grade level—they were mirrored across the board, closing achievement gaps which seemed insurmountable.



The impact of Liberty's curriculum is perhaps most strikingly illustrated through individual success stories. Take, for example, a third-grade student who began the journey at Liberty in the 24th percentile for math. After only four months of instruction, this student catapulted to the 61st

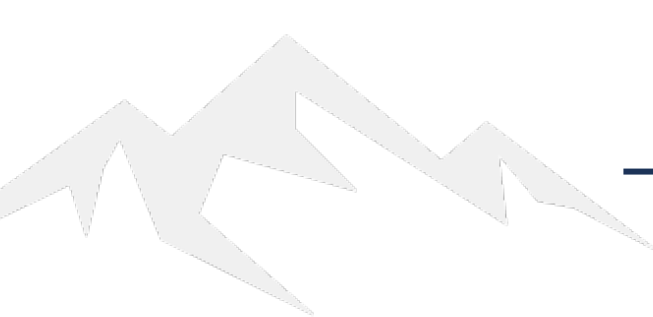
percentile growing at a rate in the 99th percentile compared to national norms. The same student also made tremendous strides in reading moving to the 84th percentile from the 37th percentile in only four months, once again growing at the 99th percentile. These growth figures are not outliers; they represent the majority of students at the school's Aristotle campus.

In the Fall of 2022, 18% of incoming second graders were reading below the 50th percentile, with two students qualifying for the Colorado Read Act. By the start of third grade, only 5% remained below the 50th percentile, and no students qualified for the Read Act.



In another instance, a student who entered Liberty reading only four words per minute in first grade was identified as having a significant learning disability in reading at a previous school. After seven months of focused instruction at Liberty, this child is now reading 81 words per minute, above the 50th percentile in oral reading fluency. Because of the significant growth achieved, this student no longer qualifies for special education.

These stories, backed by concrete data, demonstrate the profound impact Liberty Common School's curriculum and philosophy have on closing achievement gaps and fostering academic excellence. The growth students experience is not just incremental—it is transformational. Liberty Common School is more than a place of learning; it is a place where students are empowered to reach their full potentials no matter where they start.



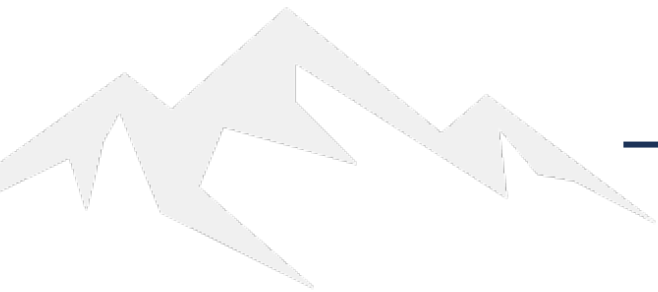
The Autonomy to Develop Innovation with Flexibility

All students perform better when schools are allowed to innovate and when flexibility is encouraged, but this can be particularly true for vulnerable students whose performance is sinking at neighborhood public schools. One of the major reasons charters are quite successful is their ability to be mostly autonomous, flexible, and innovative. Charter schools generally provide a higher level of flexibility than neighborhood public schools and often allow teachers more freedom to utilize various teaching methods, curricula, and innovative classroom styles, which in turn gives students the ability to think outside the box and perform at a higher academic level. Every year, when charter schools show greater success in academic achievement, it provides evidence for neighborhood public schools to be similarly innovative. Sadly, few choose – or are allowed to choose – the same type of creativity and flexibility for their students.

One example where innovation and flexibility are needed is in supporting multilingual learners. Ensuring that these students can not only learn an entirely new language, but also keep up with a curriculum, can prove difficult. All public schools are required to have some type of English Language Learner (ELL) program or services for ELL students; however, not all ELL programs are built the same. Some have proven successful, while others keep these vulnerable students stuck below grade level.

At charter schools, the flexibility afforded teachers and classrooms makes it much easier to shift the focus from what is not working for ELL students to a new innovation. At a traditional neighborhood school, there is a large amount of red tape staff and administrators must navigate through if they want to change a failing ELL program or add necessary ELL services. The changing needs of this student population and the increasing numbers of these students in public schools make it essential for schools to innovate and respond rapidly.

Where possible, ELL families are choosing charter schools over neighborhood schools due to the higher level of innovation and success. “[P]ublic charter school English learners have historically outperformed their traditional public school peers in growth in math and reading...English learners account for



14.3% of students enrolled in public charter schools (compared to 11.9% in traditional public schools).” (17)

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools detailed a variety of the innovative strategies charters across the country are able to use with ELL students to maximize their academic growth (see chart below). When students and parents are connected to the resources they need and experience greater growth in a more condensed time period, it provides

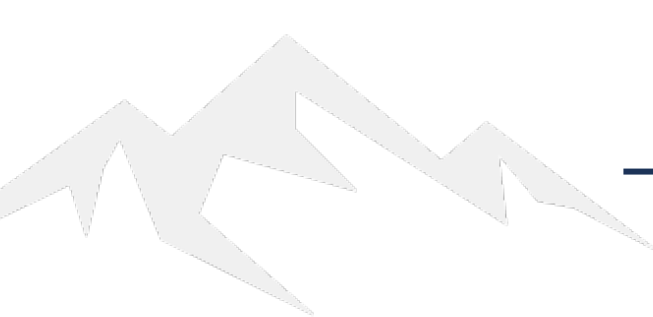
greater flexibility to teachers and other administrative staff to offer after-school clubs and strategic ELL programs, where multilingual students can speak their native tongues and work on their English language acquisition in a more relaxed environment. This provides greater success and satisfaction for everyone involved.



STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT ENGLISH LEARNER STUDENTS

Strategy	Examples
Adding staff in core instruction to support English learners	Schools provide individual support for EL students. Schools hire teacher aides to support large numbers of EL students in core courses. Schools hire a substantial number of multilingual staff.
Creating intentional coordination with classroom teachers	Schools assign social workers for students, and the social workers also coordinate with students’ teachers to ensure that students have all the resources and support they need to fully access instruction.
Using language acquisition strategies	Schools train teachers using programs that include various strategies such as hand gestures, which help increase comprehension by connecting an action with a word, and anchor charts, which are visual representations of learning that students can refer back to later.
Offering 1:1 devices	Schools provide students with devices such as laptops or Chromebooks.
Holding celebration activities	Schoolwide celebrations of students passing their English proficiency assessments.
Offering casual, informal, student-run language clubs	In an effort to ensure that students feel affirmed in speaking in their native languages, schools have adopted after-school language clubs where students can gather and speak in their native language while working on English acquisition, in a more relaxed, informal setting.
Providing support for parents	Schools offer services to help families address basic needs. Schools offer formal programs committed to outreach to families in crisis.

(17)



The Freedom to Provide Equity and Access

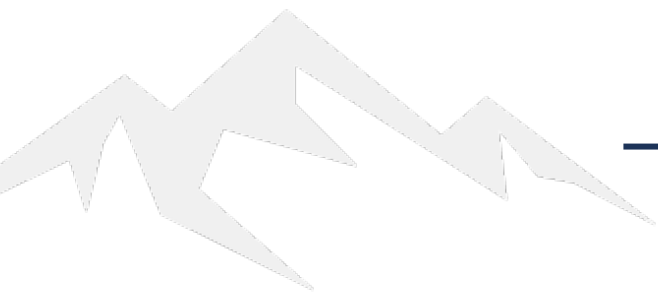
Too often, students fall through the cracks in neighborhood schools, especially low-income and minority students. Because of the achievement gap these students experience, many charter schools have made it their mission to ensure these students are well-supported through equitable access to successful academic programs.

Additionally, studies show that when a student is facing a crisis at home, studies are usually not the priority, and the student's academic growth suffers. Many charter schools understand this problem and have made it a goal to ensure that all students and families are supported, preventing crises before they occur so that students can come to school ready to focus on their academics and a bright future.

There are varying strategies adopted by charter schools to help families in poverty navigate difficulties. Examples include offering grocery store gift cards to families with food insecurity, no-cost uniforms, laundry services, after-school programs, and allowance for families (not just students) to use materials offered at the school library to promote literacy.

One excellent example of a charter school supporting equity and access is Rocketship Mosaic, an elementary school in San Jose, California. The majority of the student population at Rocketship is made up of low-income Asian and Latino students. The school prioritizes ensuring students and their families are supported outside of the classroom by ensuring they have food, housing, and mental health services.

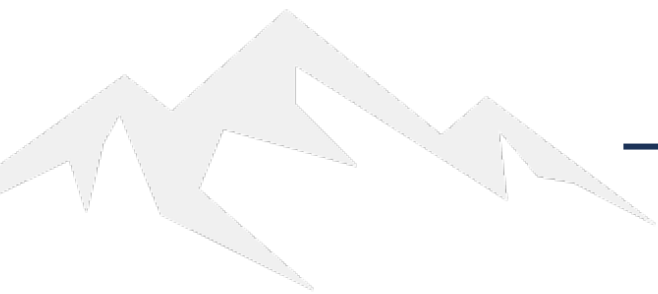
One Rocketship Mosaic parent explained how the school served her son: "It was just a really tough time for him that whole year. [The Care Corps coordinator], she's always been there, just a message away or call away. To myself, I'm a single parent, whenever I speak to [the coordinator] about some type of situation that I'm having, she'll always immediately get on the computer and start looking for resources. I was struggling with rent. She was able to give me resources for that. I was struggling for food; she gave me resources for that. I mean, even with my son, she'll say, 'Oh, I'll pick him up and I'll drop him off.'" (18)



While it is understandable that not all schools have these types of resources available – especially staff members who can provide personal transportation – there are many other ways that charter schools support and ensure their low-income and minority students have their needs met. The foundational point here is that charter schools have the autonomy to create programs and services that benefit their student population and families, and charters are able to transform in real time to meet needs as they arise due to the lack of red tape generally attached to neighborhood public schools. (18)

A Colorado mother detailed the level of access to success her daughter receives at a charter school that focuses on partnerships with parents and basic human thriving:

“Parents should be treated as partners with their students’ schools because it truly is a partnership when it comes to ensuring the success of a child’s education. What many parents have been feeling is that they are excluded from decision-making and the overall tone of their child’s education, and that should never be allowed. ...[T]he schools should be partnering and listening to the needs of the family and not that of the administration, the school boards, or the teachers’ unions. Parents are entitled to demand accountability. All students aren’t created equal; they come with their own unique abilities, lifestyle, experience, and so forth, and schools should have the ability to capture these students, so they do not fall through the cracks. Hence the reason why charter schools have exploded in popularity, and it is not a fad that will eventually simmer down, but a new way to look at education across the board. Many parents have realized that their traditional public schools are not serving their students as they hoped and are thankful for choices to move them somewhere their student will not only succeed academically but thrive on a human level. ... My husband and I moved [our daughter] to a public charter school where she is now thriving. The students are challenged; teachers expect academic and behavioral success and help them achieve those goals. The quality of education is top notch, and I wish all traditional public schools would look toward successful charter schools as a guiding example to replicate the success they are having with students and make it their own.”



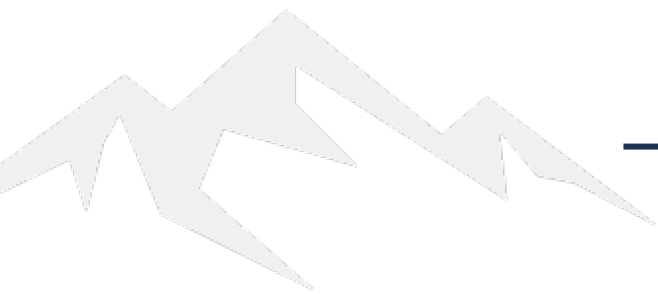
The Gift of a Specialized Focus

Not all charter schools are created equal – and that is largely the point. Many are created with certain specializations, which are designed to serve the diverse student populations in their specific communities. These specialized focuses include a classical education, the arts, bilingual education, vocational training, and STEM. Success Academy explains that the ability to have a specialized focus “allows the school to tailor their curriculum” and this “can benefit students by providing them with unique opportunities to explore their interests or develop skills in particular fields.” (19)

Charter schools must also continually answer to the community in Colorado, as their authorization is up for renewal, generally every two to five years. This provides an extra layer of accountability, where charters must show that their specialized focus, innovative teaching methods, and access to particular services are needed and wanted by families in their district. Littleton Public Schools reports that “there are more than 20,000 students on charter school wait lists across Colorado,” proving that many more families want their children to experience the academic rigor, specialized focus, and accountability to parents that charter schools provide. (20)

Charters also provide a specialized focus on each individual child, as Nancy Perry, a Colorado mother of two charter students, describes:

“My husband graduated from a traditional public school, and I went to school on a military post, which operated much like a traditional public school off-post. As parents, my husband and I decided to enroll our children in a charter school because we had many concerns about the direction traditional public schools were heading. I also had friends who were frustrated or unsure about what was happening in their children’s public-school classrooms – things like too much screen time, larger class sizes, and less one-on-one time with teachers, just to name a few. In contrast, our experience with the charter school has been much more hands-on and student-centered. The kids benefit from small-group instruction, very limited screen time during the school day, and engaging, hands-on learning activities. As a mom and someone studying to become a teacher, I truly value the kind of environment that supports each child’s learning and gives teachers the time and space to connect with their students. ... I’ve come to really value the way charter

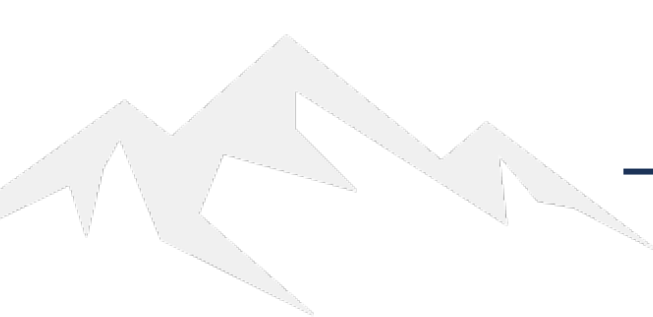


schools focus on meaningful learning and strong teacher-student relationships.”

Conclusion

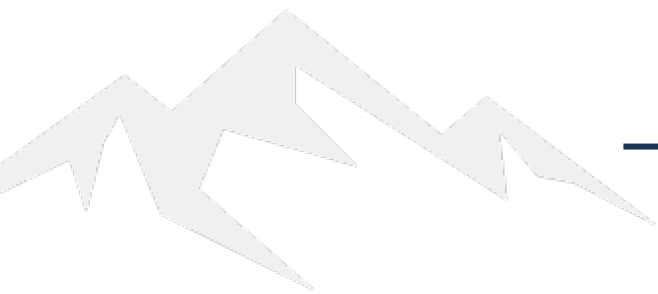
Children are our nation’s most important asset, and public education should provide them with the best schools and tools to ensure a successful future.

Colorado’s students thrive when they are provided with an education most suited to their specific needs. Charter schools have a proven track record of meeting these needs more effectively, and the results are clear when it comes to our most vulnerable students: they are most likely to succeed when enrolled in quality charter schools. One size does not fit all, and public education should protect a variety of options for families across Colorado.

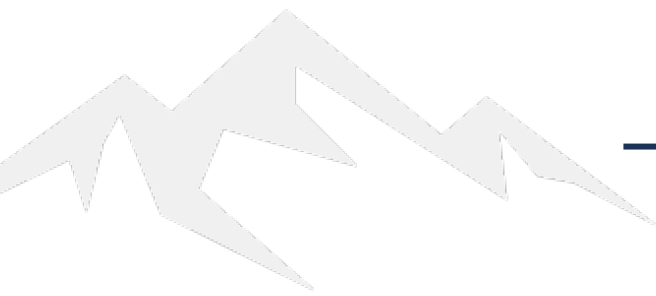


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