PORTRAIT of the MOVEMENT 2017: Oakland Spotlight

A Closer Look at Charters in the Oakland Unified School District

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Executive Summary
In 2015-16 Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) was home to 133 schools enrolling over 50,000 students, 44 of which were autonomous charter public schools serving over 14,000 students. This figure grew to nearly 15,500 as of the 2016-17 school year. In Oakland, 28% of all public school students were enrolled in charter schools in 2015-16, rising to 30% as of 2016-17.¹ Oakland’s charter schools serve similar proportions of students by race, ethnicity, and other key subgroups as their traditional public school (TPS) counterparts in OUSD’s public schools. Charters consistently outperform traditional public schools on academic assessment results and postsecondary readiness measures within subgroups as well as on a schoolwide basis. These results stand even as charters are serving similar student populations and, in some cases, populations that are traditionally regarded as more challenging. This regional report elaborates on the findings of the 2017 Portrait of the Movement report to provide a first look at how Oakland schools are performing using the state’s new academic performance indicator. It highlights the significant achievements of Oakland charter schools, while acknowledging areas of continued need across the city to ensure all students in Oakland receive a high quality education.

Key Findings
- Oakland charters performed on average in the 45th percentile of state wide performance on the SBAC tests, while Oakland traditional public schools performed at the 25th percentile of all school performance in the state.
- 86% of Oakland charter students graduate on time compared to 75% in traditional public schools (when using a four-year cohort graduation rate as a measure).
- All charter student subgroups are completing A-G subject requirements at rates of nearly 30% or higher than traditional public school students, including over twice as many African-American students.
- More Oakland charter students apply (51% vs. 40%) and are accepted (35% vs. 22%) at UC schools than students attending traditional Oakland public schools.
- Instead of the traditional achievement gap for minority students, we see African American and Latino students in Oakland charter schools performing higher than the entire Oakland district.

¹ During the production of this report, the CDE released an updated 2016-2017 enrollment file. The majority of the enrollment information in this report reflects 2015-2016 enrollment numbers. The latest data now show that a full 30% of Oakland’s students (15,487 of 52,162) attend charter public schools as of the 2016-17 school year. The analyses in this report, including the SSM, use the CAASPP datafile posted by the California Department of Education on 10/18/16. For more information, see CCSA’s Similar Schools Measure Technical guide: www.ccsa.org/2016%20CCSA%20Technical%20Guide%20041417.pdf
average for college preparation, with 34% of African American and Latino students being accepted to college, outpacing the percentage of students accepted into UC schools from traditional Oakland public schools (15%).

- When comparing schools serving demographically similar students statewide, CCSA’s Similar Students Measure (SSM) shows that charter schools authorized by OUSD far outperform other public schools across the state, with 28% performing in the top 10th percentile statewide (nearly three times the predicted proportion) and 38% in the top quartile (Figure 1).
- The median Similar Schools Rank for OUSD charters is a 6 out of 10, while the median Similar Schools Rank for traditional schools in OUSD is a 2 out of 10.

**Figure 1: Oakland's Charters and Traditional Public Schools Similar Students Measure**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of Schools</th>
<th>Traditional Public Schools</th>
<th>Charters authorized by OUSD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bottom 5%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom 10%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom 25%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 25%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results demonstrate that Oakland’s robust and diverse charter sector is achieving remarkable academic results for all students yet, the city still has a long way to go to ensure the needs of all students are met. Oakland Unified School District should work closely with its authorized charter schools to ensure they have the resources they need to grow and thrive. We encourage greater partnership and collaboration between the district and its charter schools such that all students in Oakland have high quality public school options in every neighborhood.
Introduction

The 2017 Portrait of the Movement shows us that California’s charter schools are successfully transitioning to the Common Core State Standards and surpass district performance at disproportionately high rates. This supplemental report details the extent to which charter schools authorized by Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) have also accomplished these goals. Evidence suggests that charters are outperforming their district peers, particularly with traditionally underserved student groups. This is particularly important in urban school districts like OUSD, where larger percentages of students tend to be from historically disadvantaged backgrounds and the achievement gaps are particularly stark. Encouragingly, not only are charter schools achieving significantly higher results for all students, they also continue to bolster achievement of historically disadvantaged student subgroups.

As with the Portrait of the Movement, this report serves to shine a spotlight on the Oakland charter movement’s many successes and reasons to continue charter school growth. It first shows the growth of charter schools and students, demonstrating a continued high demand for quality public school options, and then explores the average demographics of charter students to illustrate that charters are increasing learning opportunities for all types of students. This leads to an analysis of academic achievement and post-secondary readiness, in which clear evidence is provided that charter schools improve pupil learning on all measures across nearly all subgroups. Charter schools provide valuable opportunities for all students and open doors of possibility for their futures; we’re excited to provide a deeper dive into the Oakland experience where as of 2016-17, 30% of families who send their students to public schools have chosen charter schools as their best option.

Schools and Students

OUSD has 133 schools serving over 50,000 students within its borders, representing around 3% of California’s public education system. In the 2015-16 school year, 89 of Oakland’s schools were traditional public schools (TPS) and the other 44 were public charter schools. As shown in Figure 2, since 2008-09 there has been a net positive trend in both the development of new charter schools and enrollment. The 2015-16 academic year in particular saw a historic rise with six new charter schools opening, as parents increasingly choose to enroll their children in charter schools. The number of Oakland area charters has grown by 42% since 2009. Overall, OUSD has grown by 12% since 2009 with most of that growth attributed to parents’ choice of charters, as charter enrollment has doubled in the past eight years to over 14,000 in 2015-16. Since 2009, the percentage of OUSD students attending charter schools has increased by an average of 1.6% per year, from 17% in 2009 to 28% in 2016 (Figure 3).

This graphic is built off Fall 2015 enrollment and does not reflect the closure of Castlemont Primary Academy.
This growth in charters, both in Oakland and across the state, is the direct result of parent demand. Many Oakland charters have been founded and led by lifelong Oakland residents that were frustrated with the options available to their families who then either founded schools or worked with established operators to open schools to better meet the needs of their students. All of Oakland’s charter schools are autonomous (i.e. operating independent of the district) rather than non-autonomous (i.e. affiliated with the district), with 37 receiving authorization from OUSD and 7 receiving authorization by the county either directly or on appeal.3 As this report focuses on OUSD as a charter authorizer, the data presented below includes only charter schools authorized by OUSD.

Demographics

Observers typically analyze school demographics in one of two ways: by race and ethnicity, or by other key characteristics (e.g. low-income, English Learner, students with disabilities). It is important to know the extent to which charter schools serve students who are demographically reflective of the diversity of California’s population. As shown in Figure 4 below, whether comparing by ethnicity or other key characteristics, charter schools have comparable enrollment to traditional public

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3 **Autonomous charters**: 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 charters**: 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 charters**: Schools that appoint their own board and is 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.
Charters authorized by OUSD differ from traditional schools in that they serve higher percentages of Latino students (55% vs. 41%) and slightly lower percentages of White students (6% vs 11%), English Learners (29% vs 33%), and African American students (21% vs 27%).

Figure 4: Percent of OUSD Student Enrollment (2015-16)

![Bar chart showing percent of OUSD student enrollment](chart)

It is important to note that rates of enrollment of students with disabilities is dependent on participation in a Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA). Reporting a single number for the charter school sector’s enrollment of students with disabilities can be misleading as it masks some key differences in how schools operate. Under California law, charter schools have the option of operating as part of an existing Local Education Agency (LEA) or as its own independent LEA for special education purposes as a member of a SELPA. The charter school’s legal identity and autonomy in special education has major implications for its access to special education funding, infrastructure, and authority over placement decisions for students with disabilities, which in turn have a significant impact on the enrollment of students with disabilities.

The vast majority of Oakland’s charter schools operate as independent LEAs for special education purposes. However, for the 11 schools that remained part of the OUSD SELPA in 2015-16, the district was responsible for providing services to the students enrolled at the charter schools. In many cases, rather than building supports for students on a charter campus, the district required students to transfer back to a more restrictive district-operated program. As a result, the enrollment rate of students with disabilities in the 11 charter schools that remained part of the OUSD SELPA is approximately 4% (Figure 5). According to the 2015-16 CAASPP file of students tested, in schools that serve as their own LEA the enrollment rate of students with disabilities doubles, which may still be an underestimation of actual enrollment. This discrepancy artificially drives down the overall special education enrollment rate in charters. Furthermore, a higher proportion of students with disabilities may be indicative of a lack of effective interventions. Research tells us that charter schools are less

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4 Percent of students with disabilities is provided in the CAASPP testing file by the CDE. It is representative of the percentage of test-takers in 2016 and may not be a direct reflection of actual student enrollment.
likely to identify students for special education, more likely to provide pre-referral interventions, and more likely to exit students from special education compared to traditional public schools.  

**Figure 5: 2016 OUSD Charter Special Ed enrollment by SELPA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authorized by OUSD and LEAs in El Dorado Charter SELPA</th>
<th>Schools</th>
<th># Special Ed Students</th>
<th>Special Ed %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authorized by OUSD and in OUSD SELPA</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorized by OUSD and in OUSD SELPA</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Academic Performance**

Oakland Unified charter schools consistently outperform their district school counterparts on state assessments and postsecondary readiness outcomes, schoolwide and for all subgroups. First, it is worthwhile to explain the measures used to interpret state assessment results allowing for fair comparisons across grade-spans and subgroups.

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**Academic Results Preview**

- **Oakland charters outperform district schools across all subgroups.**
- **Oakland charter students average 38 scale score points closer to meeting state standards than district schools.**
- **Oakland charter schools far outperform TPS given their student demographics.**
  - We find 28% of charters performing in the top 10th percentile statewide – nearly three times the expected proportion.
  - Traditional public schools have far fewer schools outperforming, with only 4% in the top 25th percentile, compared to 38% of OUSD-authorized charter schools.
  - The traditional public schools also have a disproportionate percentage of underperforming schools with two-thirds of schools performing in the bottom 25% statewide.
  - The median Similar Students Rank for OUSD charters is 6, while the median Similar Students Rank for traditional schools in OUSD is 2.

Beginning with the first statewide administration in spring 2015, the district measures student achievement with Smarter Balanced assessments (SBAC), computer-based tests measuring student achievement on Common Core standards in English language arts/literacy (ELA) and mathematics for students in grade three through eight and grade eleven. After students take the SBAC, their results are reported in two primary ways: scale scores and performance levels. A scale score reports the number score a student earned on the assessment, while the performance levels are broader proficiency categories students are placed into based on their scale scores.

To help schools and parents better understand SBAC scale scores and interpret growth, CCSA created the Average Point Difference (APD). As of January 2017, the state academic indicator is based in the same methodology as CCSA’s APD measure, calculating a weighted average of school performance using the average student’s distance from Level 3, or the “met” standard level. The APD score means that the average student in the school scored that many scale score points

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above or below the proficiency cut point. While much of the early reporting of schools’ performance on SBAC only included the percent of students meeting and exceeding standards, research has criticized use of “percentage of proficient students” trends as being misleading. We assert that rather than using only a “percent met or exceeded” measure that incentivizes schools to focus on students close to the proficient level, APD instead encourages schools to help each student raise his or her score as high as possible each year. The APD is a student-weighted average by grade and subject, allowing comparisons across all grade spans and subgroups. It also enables us to compare scores year to year and schools’ growth toward proficiency for all students.

The APD tells us how students performed relative to the met standard; in California overall in 2015-16, all public school students average about 23 scale score points below the met standard cut point. To understand how schools performed relative to other schools, we use the APD to place all schools in a percentile ranging from 1 (lowest-performing) to 100 (highest performing). By definition, the average school statewide is in the 50th percentile. In 2015-16, Oakland’s traditional public schools averaged in the 25th percentile in the state, or in the bottom quartile overall, while OUSD charters, on the other hand, averaged the 45th percentile statewide.

Using the APD measure, we find that students at charters authorized by Oakland scored an average of 28 points below the met standard, compared to students attending traditional public schools who averaged 66 points below met. As seen in Figure 6 below, this higher performance holds true across subgroups, as charters show higher APD scores compared to traditional public schools across demographic and status categories. A significant proportion of Oakland area schools serve students of low socio-economic status (74% for both charter and traditional public schools), and students of that demographic who attended charters authorized by the district had a higher APD (-36) not only higher than district schools (-76) but also higher than the state average for socio-economically disadvantaged students (-42).

As illustrated in Figure 6, certain demographics tend to perform better than others, this gap is consistent and persistent. To explore this, CCSA developed the Similar Students Measure (SSM) to identify schools that outperform or underperform compared to other public schools across the state given the students they serve. CCSA created the Similar Students Measure to assess school performance while filtering out many of the non-school effects on student achievement. When the SSM is scaled into percentiles, it is clear that Oakland charter schools far outperform their predicted scores considering how other schools in the state performed with similar student demographics. We find 28% of charters performing in the top 10th percentile statewide – nearly three times the predicted proportion.

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7 For more on the Similar Students Measure and how it is calculated, see ttp://www.ccsa.org/advocacy/accountability/ ssm.html
Traditional public schools have far fewer schools outperforming, with only 4% in the top 25th percentile, compared to 38% of OUSD-authorized charter schools. The traditional public schools also have a disproportionate percentage of underperforming schools with two-thirds of schools performing in the bottom 25% statewide. These proportions are evident in Figure 7, which emphasizes the overperformance of OUSD charter schools and underperformance of OUSD traditional schools. You can see this overperformance especially in the far right of the table. The lone red bar shows that only charter schools in Oakland are the top 5% of performance statewide. The tall grey bar on the far left demonstrates the many Oakland traditional schools in the lowest 5% of performance statewide.

**Figure 7: Oakland’s Charters and Traditional Public Schools Similar Students Measure**
CCSA’s SSM and APD measures aim to improve understanding of academic achievement for the general public. In an attempt to help schools and the public better understand the SSM and APD metrics as well as to more easily contextualize performance in the context of the statewide big picture, CCSA also translated its APD and SSM measures into decile rankings. The APD was divided into ten “state ranks” and the SSM into ten “similar school ranks.” CCSA then publicly released a sortable spreadsheet of all schools’ results. For the Similar Schools Ranks, we see in Figure 8 a distribution similar to the SSM above, with Oakland-authorized charter schools achieving a median rank of 6 – a full decile above the state median of 5 and a substantially (and statistically significantly) higher rank than Oakland traditional public schools (median=2).

### Postsecondary Readiness Outcomes

For high schools, many people consider measures of post-secondary readiness to be at least as important as performance on state assessments. This has come to the forefront particularly as the state no longer tests 9th and 10th grades and is developing a College and Career Indicator as part of the California Schools Dashboard. In spring 2016, CCSA released a report, *A Step Up: How Charter Schools Provide Higher Levels of California Public University Access*, which demonstrated that charter schools are helping increase access to college for thousands of historically disadvantaged youth in California, including minority, low income, and first-generation college-going students. Here, we look at the three most recent years for three types of data: cohort graduation rates, A-G completion rates, and rates of application and acceptance into the University of California system. Charters authorized by OUSD outperform traditional public schools on all measures, both schoolwide and for subgroups.

#### Cohort Graduation Rates

OUSD charter schools are achieving cohort graduation for all students at rates about 10% higher than neighboring peers attending traditional public schools. Analyzing trends over time reveal that the gap between charters and traditional public schools is widening. The gap has increased from 3 percentage points in 2013 (76% vs. 79%) to 11 percentage points in 2015 (86% vs. 75%).

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9 For more information on state level findings, view the full report here: [http://www.ccsa.org/2016/04/a-step-up-how-charter-schools-provide-higher-levels-of-california-public-university-access.html](http://www.ccsa.org/2016/04/a-step-up-how-charter-schools-provide-higher-levels-of-california-public-university-access.html)
A-G Completion

In order to be eligible to apply to California’s four-year public universities, students must earn a grade of at least C in fifteen courses across seven categories (called “A-G” courses). Figure 10 shows that Oakland charters have much higher A-G completion rates for all subgroups. Charter school graduates are much more likely to complete A-G coursework than their TPS peers (93% vs. 60%). All charter student subgroups are completing A-G subject requirements at rates higher than TPS students, including twice as many African-American students.

Figure 10: Subgroup Percent of Graduates Completing A-G Courses in 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Traditional Public Schools</th>
<th>Autonomous Charters authorized by OUSD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Learner</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UC Application and Acceptance Rates

A main goal of K-12 education is to prepare students for college and careers. The University of California Office of the President generously provided CCSA with data that links UC information to the high schools from which students came. Figure 11 shows application and acceptance rates from 2013, the most recent year provided. Student confidentiality necessitated that the UC data combine African-American and Latino students into one combined subgroup, so we report data for them as well as for all students. Continuing the trends seen above, Oakland charters have much higher application and acceptance rates than traditional public schools. Perhaps most impressively, charter schools are closing the attainment gap for college, achieving acceptance rates of 34% for African-American and

Note: The state does not report rates for English Learners, low-income students, or students with disabilities.
Latino students – a rate higher than the overall student average acceptance rate for TPS students (22%).

**Figure 11: Application and Acceptance Rates to UC System in 2013**

Charter schools have thrived, in part, because clear minimum performance standards for schools have created an environment of freedom and autonomy in exchange for accountability, where high performing charter schools have flourished and many underperforming schools have closed. With these accountability measures in place, the Oakland community can be confident that new charter school growth in the region will continue the successes already seen in their remarkable charter schools. Oakland Unified does have a history of holding the charter schools it authorizes to high standards, from the initial authorization review, to the yearly review and the renewal process. While we applaud OUSD’s commitment to high standards for charter schools, we want to ensure it is aligned with state law that allows the creation of new charter schools even without a prior track record of success in Oakland or other communities. We believe that the charter movement is enhanced by the innovation and variety brought forward by new charter operators, and the strong track record of success of Oakland’s charter schools merits further expansion of their success and embracing new innovations and educational models to meet families’ needs.

**Conclusion**

As we embark on the 25th anniversary of California’s Charter Schools Act, we celebrate the continued success of California’s charter schools, particularly in serving the most historically disadvantaged and vulnerable student groups, with high levels of success. The strength of the charter sector, in particular, is evident in the trends discussed in this report which have also persisted over numerous years. Autonomous charters authorized by OUSD are growing quickly, serving students of all demographics, and attaining impressive levels of academic performance. The findings for Oakland further highlight the benefits of charter schools in providing an alternative to failing traditional public schools. We hope this report will help OUSD leaders see charters as the law intended: not as a
combative enemy, but as a competitive ally who can spur continuous improvement in all aspects of our collective work to educate the next generation.

Oakland’s charter schools are providing a top-quality education to the students who have chosen to attend them. They consistently outperform OUSD’s traditional public school. This is especially meaningful given that OUSD charter students are demographically reflective of Oakland’s student population as a whole. The high performance of OUSD charters is obvious in the high graduation rates in Oakland’s charter high schools and the high rates at which their students are accepted into top-tier public universities. Latino and African American students particularly are benefitting from these high college acceptance rates. The continuous growth of charter schools in Oakland speaks to the demand for charter schools in OUSD. Parents continue to choose charter schools in higher and higher numbers indicating the opportunity for further growth.

This report helps provide further evidence that the Oakland charter school sector is robust, diverse and high quality. Charter schools in Oakland continue to achieve results for the most disadvantaged populations at high levels and are helping closing the achievement gap: a feat California’s public schools have struggled to achieve for decades. Despite these strong results, Oakland charter schools have to continuously fight for equitable access to resources such as parcel tax funding and high-quality facilities. Oakland families choosing charter schools are exercising their right to a high-quality public education and should be allowed to attend schools that are equitably funded and resourced. We therefore urge the Oakland Unified School District to work closely with charter schools to ensure that families can find a high quality public school in every neighborhood of Oakland. Oakland’s charter schools are a strong asset for the city and its families – for the 30% of all students in Oakland who have chosen to attend these public schools of choice and for the broader community as of 2016-17. Whereas many charter schools have been demonized and demoralized, charters should be celebrated and learned from for these impressive results for Oakland’s families.