

California's Charter Schools

2009 Update on Issues and Performance



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EdSource® is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization established in California in 1977.

Independent and impartial, EdSource strives to advance the common good by developing and widely distributing trustworthy, useful information that clarifies complex K-14 education issues and promotes thoughtful decisions about California's public education system.

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EDSOURCE THANKS Reed Hastings for his support of our independent study and reporting on California's charter school movement.

The Charter School Balancing Act

During the past five years, EdSource has reported on California's charter schools, including their efforts to balance the goals of innovation on the one hand with high standards for educational quality on the other. We have examined how well charter students have scored on state tests compared with their noncharter counterparts and have also reported on how state policies have affected the charter movement.

In this publication, we consider both charter issues and performance, but we depart from our usual format. Rather than combining the information into a single report, we present several separate articles that each examines a different aspect of the charter movement in California.

The first article—**Focus on Quality: The challenges of defining, developing, and duplicating successful charter schools**—explains how different segments of the charter school community focus on different policy goals. We describe efforts to create definitions and indicators of “quality,” which often center on state test scores, and the challenge of increasing the number of high-scoring charter schools.

Two articles included in our **Performance Update 2009** form the centerpiece of this publication. The first focuses on **Charters vs. Noncharters**. Using a statistical method that adjusts for differences in student backgrounds, our analysis compares charter high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools with their noncharter counterparts based on several student achievement measures. Although the results are mixed, they are consistent with past reports in one respect: charter middle schools continue to have the strongest showing.

The second performance update article, **Spotlight on CMOs**, examines an important subset of charter schools—those operated by charter management organizations (CMOs). These organizations are playing a prominent role in efforts to expand the number of high-scoring charter schools. Our findings indicate that, in the aggregate, they have had modest success in this endeavor.

Finally, this publication looks at the ways in which President Barack Obama's charter-friendly rhetoric is being translated into policy. As

“We've got to experiment with ways to provide a better education experience for our kids, and some charters are doing outstanding jobs. So the bottom line is to try to create innovation within the public school system that can potentially be scaled up, but also to make sure that we are maintaining very high standards for any charter school that's created.”

—President Barack Obama, March 12, 2009

What began as a small experiment 17 years ago when California first authorized charter schools has grown into a significant alternative system. As described in our second article—**Vital Statistics**—the number of charter schools has grown from about 90 in 1996 to 688 in 2007-08, serving about 4% of the state's students today. Charter schools are found throughout the state and have reached critical mass in a few urban districts. Interestingly, high schools make up a disproportionate share of the charter sector in California. Meanwhile, the state's approach to charter governance continues to evolve as exemplified by the recent creation of statewide benefit charters.

described in the final article—**Washington Signals Support**—the new administration has proposed to both expand the number of charter schools and ensure that they are delivering a high-quality education. Federal funding increases for charters are also of note.

As pressure for improved student achievement continues to mount, charter schools will remain a high-profile and sometimes-promising reform strategy. Less clear is to what extent—and under what conditions—these public schools will be able to successfully balance the demands for both innovation and high educational standards.

—Mary Perry, Managing Editor

FOCUS ON QUALITY

The challenges of defining, developing, and duplicating successful charter schools

The 1992 law that authorized the creation of charter schools in California outlined several goals, including:

- Improving pupil learning.
- Increasing learning opportunities, especially for students identified as low-achieving.
- Encouraging the use of innovative teaching methods.
- Creating new professional opportunities for teachers, including being responsible for the learning program at a school.
- Providing parents and students with expanded school choices in the public system.
- Holding schools accountable for meeting measurable student outcomes and providing a method of switching from rule-based (certain things must be done) to performance-based (results are what matter) accountability systems.

All of these goals still stand in California's Education Code, and charter proponents, skeptics, and agnostics alike are interested in the extent to which charters have fulfilled those objectives. However, some of those goals have taken on more importance at various stages and for different stakeholders.

The focus of the movement has evolved

In the early years of California's charter movement, most observers focused on *what* charter schools were doing under this new, alternative form of education governance rather than on *how well* they were doing with respect to student achievement. Observers wondered about issues such as how quickly the original statewide cap of 100 charters would be reached—with charter proponents eager to see schools proliferate to maximize choices for families, and opponents

concerned about a stampede of low-quality schools. Issues of continuous interest are how charter schools affect districts' distribution of funding and which subgroups of students they serve.

Emerging accountability policies included charter schools

In those first years, the only measures of charter school performance were those the schools negotiated with their charter authorizer as part of their multiyear plans. This was partly because the state had not yet fully developed its system of standards, assessments, and accountability. In addition, most agreed that the charter concept had to be applied in practice for a few years before a valid performance evaluation could be done. Further, there were (and still are) questions about how to demonstrate a school's effectiveness beyond student test scores. Given these factors, many in the charter community concentrated on whether state and district policies allowed the freedom to innovate that charter proponents originally envisioned.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, there was increased attention on holding charter schools accountable. The state implemented its accountability system that holds all schools, including charters, responsible for their students' academic achievement as measured by standardized tests. The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), enacted in 2002, reinforced that emphasis. In November 2002, the Bureau of State Audits released a study of charter oversight, featuring four large urban districts. The bureau found that the districts were not making sure that their charter schools were attaining the agreed-upon student outcomes listed in their charters. The study's authors also said that the fiscal monitoring of the schools was weak.

Researchers compare charters and noncharters based on test scores

In July 2003, RAND published its state-funded evaluation of California's charter schools, concluding that charter and noncharter students generally performed similarly on statewide achievement tests, with some differences found by subject tested, grade level, and whether the charters had been converted from traditional public schools or started from scratch.

RAND was not alone in finding mixed results. For example, David Rogosa, a Stanford statistician, compared charter and noncharter scores and found that the comparisons favored charters in some grades and noncharters in other grades. Both charter skeptics and supporters found material in these studies to bolster their cases.

Charter advocates define success in various ways

Not all charter proponents react in the same way to the mixed test results in the body of studies on California's charter schools. Some charter advocates think that researchers overemphasize results from state tests and thus do not capture the complexity of the charter universe in their studies. They argue that some charters are designed to work with struggling students, which by definition are not likely to meet conventional measures of success. These people want to see the charter community emphasize breaking the mold on schooling to perhaps realize more than incremental test score gains. They recognize that not all attempts at innovation will succeed and that some charter schools will need to be closed. However, these advocates still see great value in creating a segment within the public school system that allows for reasonable experimentation.

Other charter advocates, including some very well-funded ones, have reacted to mixed achievement results by focusing energy and resources on helping charter schools do well on state and federal accountability metrics. These funders believe that innovation and success on accountability measures do not have to be mutually exclusive. For example, the Bill & Melinda Gates, Doris and Donald Fisher, Walton Family, and Broad foundations have provided millions of dollars to organizations that manage charters and groups that support charter schools with technical assistance and legislative advocacy. (For more on "charter management organizations" and "charter networks," see page 24.) They have also helped fund projects aimed at increasing the analytic rigor of studies of standardized test score data. (See the box at the top right of this page.)

Although definitions of success vary among charter supporters, they all share a strong desire to maintain

The National Charter School Research Project "aims to bring rigor to the debate"

The sophistication of the analytic techniques used in reports on charter school performance has varied significantly, according to the National Charter School Research Project (NCSRP). This project, conducted within the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington, "aims to bring rigor, evidence, and balance to the national charter school debate," according to its website. The project has sponsored papers recommending certain analytic techniques.

In addition, the NCSRP has compiled a list of achievement studies and summarizes and rates each one based on its use of the recommended techniques. However, some observers point out that the organization receives much of its funding from pro-charter foundations.

To learn more about the project, go to: www.crpe.org/cs/crpe/view/projects/1

the movement's viability, particularly given continuing resistance to charters from some quarters. In light of that, a group of organizations is trying to formalize indicators of charter school quality that charter proponents can agree on.

Organizations that support charters are working to develop indicators of "quality"

As part of a U.S. Department of Education–funded project, four organizations are leading an effort to develop a consensus on academic quality indicators they hope are nationally applicable and useful for all charter schools and authorizers to employ. The National Consensus Panel on Charter School Academic Quality consists of:

- The Colorado League of Charter Schools, a non-profit membership organization that provides technical support and advocacy services.
- Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO), which researches education reform and student achievement.
- National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, a national nonprofit organization that supports the charter school movement and aims to increase the number of high-quality charter schools available, particularly in disadvantaged communities.
- National Association of Charter School Authorizers, a professional membership organization that offers guidance to agencies that approve and oversee charter schools.

In June 2008, the panel published "A Framework for Academic Quality." According to the authors, the framework is broad in order to apply to the diverse community of charter schools throughout the country.

The document describes four indicators of academic quality: student achievement level, student progress over time, student engagement, and postsecondary readiness and success (for high schools). For each indicator, the framework provides three or four “measures.” For example, one of the measures of student achievement is proficiency levels on state assessments by grade and subject. The framework then specifies three “metrics” for that particular measure: percentage of students scoring at proficiency, percentage of students scoring at each state performance level (e.g., below basic, basic, proficient, advanced), and attainment of adequate yearly progress (AYP) under NCLB.

Finally, the panel suggests measuring a charter school’s performance on those metrics against certain

districts with similar per-pupil spending. CEG has issued annual reports since 2007. However, according to School Innovations and Advocacy, a Sacramento-based firm that consults and lobbies for school districts, some legislative staffers expressed skepticism about the initial report, wondering whether some of the measures were chosen because they put charter schools in a favorable light.

CEG has also developed parent, student, and staff satisfaction surveys that some charter schools use to monitor their own performance and make the case for charter renewal with their authorizing agency.

While these organizations have developed *measures of quality*, California’s largest charter school membership organization has created what it considers a certification of quality.

Some charter advocates think that researchers overemphasize results from state tests and thus do not capture the complexity of the charter universe in their studies.

benchmarks. For example, it recommends comparing the school’s performance with that of the best-performing nonselective public schools in a given area (e.g., district, state, and nation) and with schools that are demographically similar.

The framework’s reliance on measures stemming mainly from state tests may not please all members of the charter community. In addition, some school district officials have questioned the appropriateness of comparing charter schools with “nonselective” public schools because some charter schools ask students and/or their parents to commit to a certain level of effort toward the school, which generally does not occur in noncharters.

While this broad national effort has been going on, a California-based project has also tried to establish measures of charter school quality.

A USC research center has developed its own measures of “quality”

In this state, the Center on Educational Governance (CEG) at the University of Southern California has, with support from the charter community and foundations, developed performance indicators in four areas: 1) financial resources and investment; 2) school quality (staffing resources, teacher qualifications, and English learner reclassification); 3) academic performance on accountability metrics; and 4) academic “productivity.” The latter compares charters’ academic achievement on state tests with that of noncharters in the same district and

The California Charter Schools Association created a certification program

In May 2007, the California Charter Schools Association (CCSA), which provides legislative advocacy services and technical assistance, launched its Certified Charter Schools Program. The intent of the certification process is to help schools measure their alignment with the association’s Quality Standards for Charter School Operators.

The association says that it worked with more than 300 charter school leaders to develop these standards, which cover multiple areas, including student achievement, governance, and fiscal integrity. Certification occurs after a school performs a self-study and a third party visits the site and attests that the school’s program aligns with the association’s quality standards. The “third party” can be the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), Cambridge Education’s Charter Program Quality Review, or the Insight Education Group (IEG). More than 100 of the state’s charter schools have completed the process. However, the association announced in June 2009 that it will discontinue the program in 2009–10, though it will continue to encourage third-party reviews.

Although governance and fiscal integrity are important to the viability of a charter school, student achievement—generally measured by standardized test scores—is usually the primary indicator of quality. This is partly because one segment of charter community leaders insists that charter schools be able to prove

success using the same metrics—test scores—required of other public schools. Some charter schools serving disadvantaged students have posted high test scores, but questions remain as to how these schools are achieving such scores, whether they can be sustained over the long term, and whether a large number of other charters can attain similar outcomes.

Can high-scoring charters be replicated on a wide scale?

A relatively small number of charters throughout the country fare well in the types of benchmark comparisons described in the consensus panel's framework—i.e., against the scores of the best-performing nonselective public schools in a given area and schools with demographically similar student bodies. Some of these high-scoring charters are stand-alone schools, and others are part of a charter management organization or charter network. Whether their success can be sustained and replicated on a broader scale is an open question.

A “no excuses” model of high expectations may not be sustainable

Steven Wilson of Education Sector, a nonprofit, nonpartisan education policy organization, offers one perspective on this emerging “quality at scale” issue in a 2008 paper, *Success at Scale in Charter Schooling*.

Wilson's report focuses on eight Boston-area charter schools that are achieving test scores well above the city average with students who look like those in the city's other public schools. The schools that Wilson featured take a “no excuses” approach, meaning that they do not accept assertions from adults that students' backgrounds limit their ability, or excuses from students for not completing an assignment. These “no excuses” schools are small overall, but classes are relatively large and are led by generally young teachers providing animated, interactive “direct instruction” (the explicit teaching of skills or knowledge using lectures or demonstrations) to the entire class. These schools align their curricula tightly to state standards and embrace testing. The school day and year are long, and student discipline is strict. Parents sign contracts to stay informed and involved. Teachers are typically recent graduates of very selective colleges. The report asks 1) is this “no excuses” model sustainable, and 2) can it be widely reproduced?

Wilson questions the sustainability of the model, in large part because of the demands it places on teachers. He cites the example of one school at which teachers arrive before 7:30 a.m., work until 5:00 p.m., and are expected to be on call by pager or cell phone as their students do

two hours of homework. “[T]he long hours they are expected to work become unmanageable once these teachers (mostly young women) marry and take on family responsibilities,” he argues. “Anecdotal evidence indicates that ‘burnout’ and resulting staff turnover in many ‘no excuses’ schools are high. These limits impose a challenge to scaling the ‘no excuses’ model (and perhaps even to sustaining the results of existing schools).”

Regarding the second question, Wilson finds that charter schools' ability to widely reproduce the “no excuses” model is hampered by the necessarily limited availability of graduates from elite colleges. In the eight schools studied, 82% of teachers attended colleges rated as “very competitive” to “most competitive” by *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges 2007*. Other research suggests that a far smaller percentage of public school teachers in general graduated from such institutions. Wilson shows that a huge increase in the number of elite graduates entering the teaching profession would still reach only a fraction of urban K–12 students throughout the country.

Wilson says that a more promising strategy would be for schools to adopt comprehensive instructional systems, such as Core Knowledge (a specific, sequenced K–8 curriculum) or the SABIS schooling system, which is similar to the “no excuses” model but adds its own instructional materials. Wilson argues that teachers of varied abilities putting in normal workweeks could still greatly enhance academic outcomes using these programs. (Wilson discloses that he has started a charter management organization in New York City that uses the SABIS education system.)

This question of “scalability” merits further examination by more disinterested researchers. For example, probing whether students enter such “no excuses” schools with unusually high motivation levels would help illuminate how scalable the model is. In the meantime, organizations running multiple charter schools that have generally achieved high test scores are working to expand their operations.

Charter management organizations and networks are trying to increase the number of high-scoring charter schools

Charter management organizations and charter networks nationally and in California have produced some high-scoring schools and—with substantial financial support from foundations and private donors—have helped drive the overall growth of the state's charter sector in recent years. They face challenges to their expansion, however. The National Charter School Research Project interviewed executives of CMOs running 10 or more schools and published its findings in an August

2007 report, *Quantity Counts: The Growth of Charter School Management Organizations*.

Three examples of the difficulties they face, according to this report, are political risk, start-up overload, and uneven design implementation. Political risk arises because CMOs often try to start schools in large urban areas, which generally have complex and shifting politics that can affect how well charters are accepted. Start-up overload means that some organizations have failed to see from the outset that the challenge of developing a management organization requires different skills from those required to start a school or multiple schools. Finally, CMOs sometimes struggle to find leaders and staff who understand and can implement their designs well or who are willing to adopt their designs in total. This is what is meant by uneven design implementation.

Another concern regarding scale is that the supply of qualified people to lead charter schools may not match the demand during the next decade.

district effectively analyzes data, provides professional development for teachers and site leaders, and handles many of the administrative, personnel, and financial details of running schools. On the other hand, charter leaders say that they often encounter resistance from the district office without receiving services. (The law does not require authorizing agencies to provide support services, but they can enter in agreements with new charter schools regarding such things as facility maintenance.)

Charter school leaders enjoy freedom from many regulations and typically hire their own teachers. However, they may also be on their own to understand and implement the intricacies of the state and federal policies that do apply, and that means resolving issues that district administrators typically handle for traditional public schools.

Research from the National Charter School Research Project, published in September 2008, described areas of particular challenge for charter leaders. In *Working Without a Safety Net: How Charter School Leaders Can Best Survive on the High Wire*, Christine Campbell and

One segment of charter community leaders insists that charter schools be able to prove success using the same metrics—test scores—required of other public schools.

Will there be enough qualified people to lead the growing number of charter schools?

Altogether, 40 states plus the District of Columbia have charter schools. Across all these jurisdictions, the charter sector might need between 6,000 and 21,500 new leaders during the next 10 years, according to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS). If the number of new schools opening each year remains constant, 4,000 people will be needed to run them, and conservative estimates of turnover call for 2,000 replacement leaders. However, if the movement grows at the 15% compounded growth rate experienced since 2000, as many as 14,000 executives will be needed for new schools, plus 7,500 replacement leaders. Current projects to train future charter leaders prepare relatively few people. Finding the number and quality of leaders to sustain and enhance the movement will be a critical challenge, just as it is for public schools generally.

Leading any school—charter or not—is demanding. Heads of schools must be both operational managers and instructional leaders. One factor that separates charter from noncharter leaders is the involvement of a district central office. Principals of traditional public schools may at times feel hindered by school district policies and personnel decisions. But those same principals benefit if their

Betheny Gross summarize what they learned from surveying charter school leaders in six states, including California. When asked what organizational issues are problems at their school, 49% of respondents said that acquiring or managing facilities was a somewhat or very serious problem. For 37%, raising funds or managing finances is equally problematic, and 36% of respondents stated that attracting qualified teachers was a somewhat or very serious problem. Perhaps not surprisingly, those top three responses are issues that district offices typically handle.

The charter leaders also reported that they typically work about 60 hours per week and spend on average only 9% of their time on strategic planning, including developing school-improvement plans. The authors say that the lack of time devoted to long-term planning affects leadership transitions, with few current leaders able to spend time developing sound ways of sharing leadership or grooming a replacement. Although principals of non-charter schools can have similar workloads, leadership development is yet another task that district offices typically undertake. And, the authors say, although the turnover rate appears to be lower among charter school leaders, charters are also likely to have a more difficult time filling those slots because charter schools'

retirement and health care plans are often not as good as those in traditional public schools.

Why charter school quality matters

The population of charter school students has grown steadily, with no slowdown in sight. Although comprising only 4% of students and 7% of schools in California's public school system, the charter movement has taken root—especially in some of the large urban districts such as Los Angeles, San Diego, and Oakland. In addition, prominent state officials from both major parties—including governors Pete Wilson, Gray Davis, and Arnold Schwarzenegger and many of their appointees to the State Board of Education—have been strong charter supporters. Thus, the charter segment appears here to stay. For this reason alone, the quality of the state's charter schools matters.

There are other reasons as well. Conversations with officials from districts working with multiple charter schools indicate that at least in some areas, charters cause the “regular” public school system to reflect on, and experiment with, issues such as the level of autonomy for schools. And although many districts may not react to competitive pressures from the charter sector, officials from at least a handful of large districts with significant charter segments have expressed a desire to make district-run schools more attractive to their communities.

Charters can also provide an alternative approach to schooling that may fit some students' needs better than the local public school. This is not to say that all “traditional” public schools use a one-size-fits-all approach. But charters often sprout up in reaction to the local school district's offerings. For example, California has charter schools that have one or more of the following features:

- Are much smaller than the typical noncharter.
- Use a nonclassroom-based approach—some entirely home-based, but others in conjunction with work or internship opportunities.
- Center instruction around a particular theme or subject, such as arts or science and technology.
- Create an intense college preparatory culture for students who would be the first in their family to go to college.

These alternative approaches to educating students, though not unique to charter schools, arise partly from the relative autonomy that charters

A few organizations are working to develop charter leaders

A handful of organizations and projects have sprung up around the country in recent years to help develop charter school leaders. These include programs that feature online study, summer institutes, full-time residencies, and follow-up coaching. One example is Building Excellent Schools, which is based in Boston but places people in metropolitan areas throughout the country. Those who make it through a competitive admissions process enter an intensive training program lasting several weeks and then a year-long paid residency in a successful urban charter school. After that, participants are expected to design, start, and operate a charter school in an underserved urban area.

In California, the Sacramento-based Charter Schools Development Center holds weeklong “boot camps” to provide technical training for charter leaders. The organization also offers a 22-day training for charter business officers and a yearlong Governance Academy, funded by a state grant. Similarly, the California Charter Schools Association has seminars and training programs for people wishing to start schools and those already operating a charter.

In addition, two California CMOs help run programs that grant degrees or certifications to people wishing to lead schools. High Tech High, a San Diego-based CMO, began its master's program in educational leadership in the fall of 2008 as part of the recently created High Tech High Graduate School of Education. In the northern part of the state, Aspire Public Schools has partnered with San Jose State University to offer a principal-preparation program. Some Aspire employees serve as faculty members, and graduates of the program earn an administrative credential and a master's degree. Both High Tech High and Aspire open their programs to their employees as well as people outside the organizations.

enjoy. But with that freedom comes the responsibility to continually refine their approach so that parents and students—including English learners and those with disabilities—can choose these alternatives with confidence. Parents and students need to be assured that the educational services charters offer meet a standard for quality that is at least comparable to traditional public schools. And some argue it should be higher to justify charters' special privileges. ■

—by Brian Edwards



Vital Statistics

for Charter Schools in California



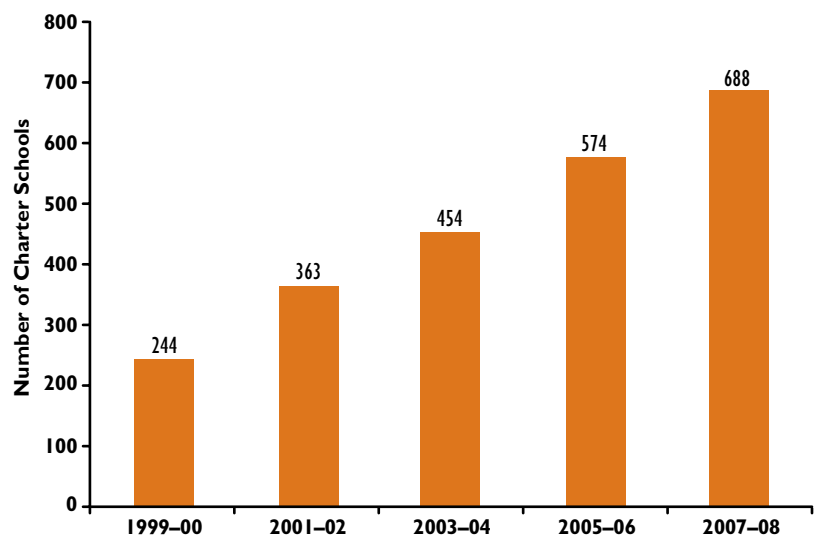
In 1992, California was the second state in the nation to authorize charter schools. Today, the state has the most charter schools and students enrolled in them in the country.

Charter schools and their enrollment

The number of charter schools in California has steadily increased since California's first 29 charter schools opened in 1993. By 1997–98, the number had grown to 123. The state saw significant growth after a cap on the number of charter schools was lifted in 1999. By the 2007–08 school year, 688 charter schools operated throughout the state, representing 7% of all public schools. That year, charter schools enrolled 4% of the state's students.

The charter school universe changes frequently compared with noncharter public schools. For example, between 2006–07 and 2007–08, 568 charters were in continuous operation. A total of 49 charters closed (8% of the charter schools that were open in 2006–07), and 120 new schools opened in 2007–08 (17% of the schools open that year). Of the 49 schools that closed, 43% were elementary, 10% were middle, and 47% were high schools. New schools opened in similar proportions: 49% were elementary, 11% were middle, and 40% were high schools.

Number of charter schools over time



Charter school enrollment over time

Academic Year	1999-00	2001-02	2003-04	2005-06	2007-08
Enrollment*	98,355	132,486	167,422	202,683	252,645
Percent of State's Enrollment	1.7%	2.2%	2.7%	3.2%	4.0%

* Enrollment data are not available for a few schools each year. EdSource began tracking charter enrollment in 1999–2000.

The distribution of schools and students

Among the 1,035 school districts and county offices of education in California, only 265 (25%) had authorized at least one charter school as of 2007–08. However, charters operate in all but 10 of California's 58 counties. (Those 10 counties have relatively small populations and are far from metropolitan centers.) In most districts, charters represent a small portion of their schools. Only five districts in the state have authorized 10 or more charter schools.

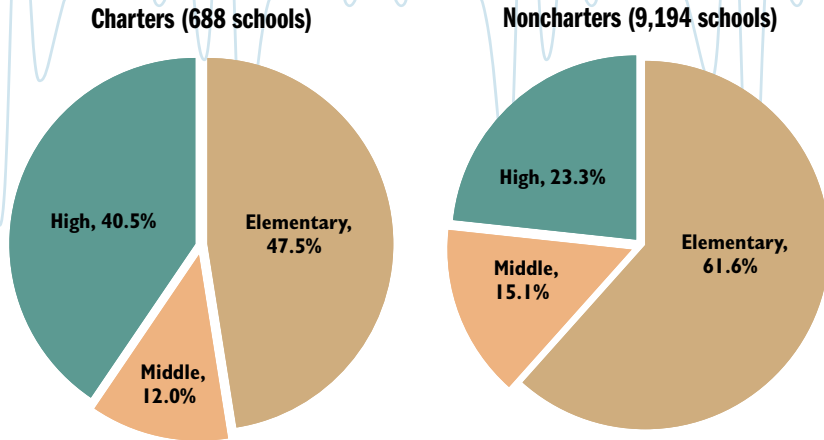
School districts with 10 or more charters, 2007-08

School District	Number of Charters
Fresno Unified	10
Sacramento City Unified	12
Oakland Unified	32
San Diego Unified	35
Los Angeles Unified	125

California's charters are more likely to be high schools

California's charters are less likely to be elementary schools and more likely to be high schools compared with California's noncharter public schools. As the following pie charts show, about 41% of charters are classified as high schools compared with 23% of noncharters.

Schools by school type, 2007-08* (as classified for state and federal accountability programs)

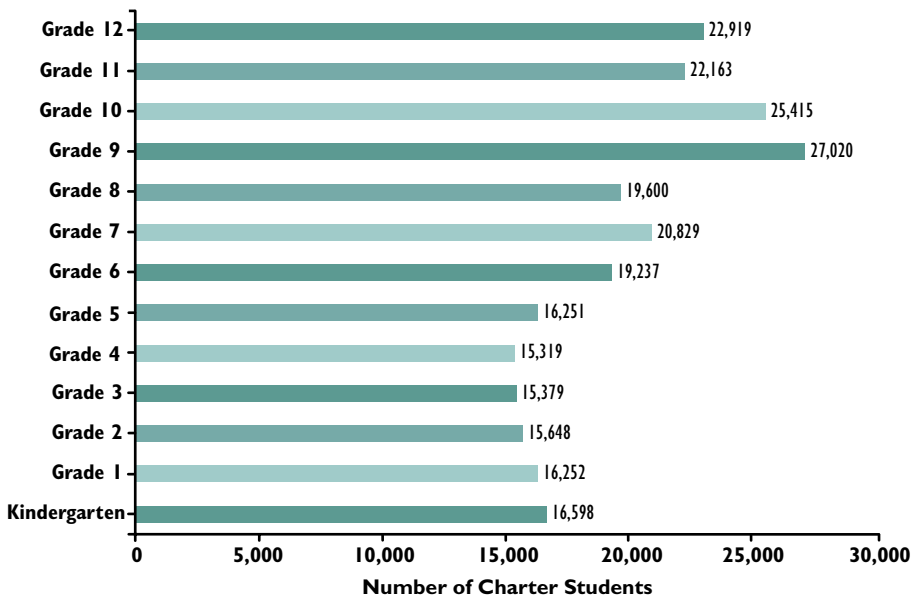


* Many charter schools have nontraditional grade configurations but have been categorized as one of the above school types for state and federal accountability programs. A few schools that were open in 2007-08 were not classified as elementary, middle, or high schools for state accountability programs because they did not have students in the grades tested (2-11) or for other reasons.

Charters educate more students in grades 9 to 12

Not surprisingly, given the high proportion of charter schools that are high schools, charters educate more students in grades 9-12 than in other grades. In particular, charter schools serve higher numbers of students in the 9th and 10th grades. In 2007-08, this can in part be explained by the fact that there were 17 charter schools serving only grade 9 students and 22 schools offering only grades 9 and 10. But the reduction in students between 9th and 11th grade has occurred consistently during the past five years. It is unclear whether the declining enrollment in grade 11 is due to students' leaving charter schools for noncharter schools, or whether those students drop out of school altogether. Enrollment between these two grades differs by almost 13% for charters, compared with only 5% for noncharters.

Charter school enrollment by grade, 2007-08*



* Enrollment data is not available for a few schools each year.

The state of the charter movement in California

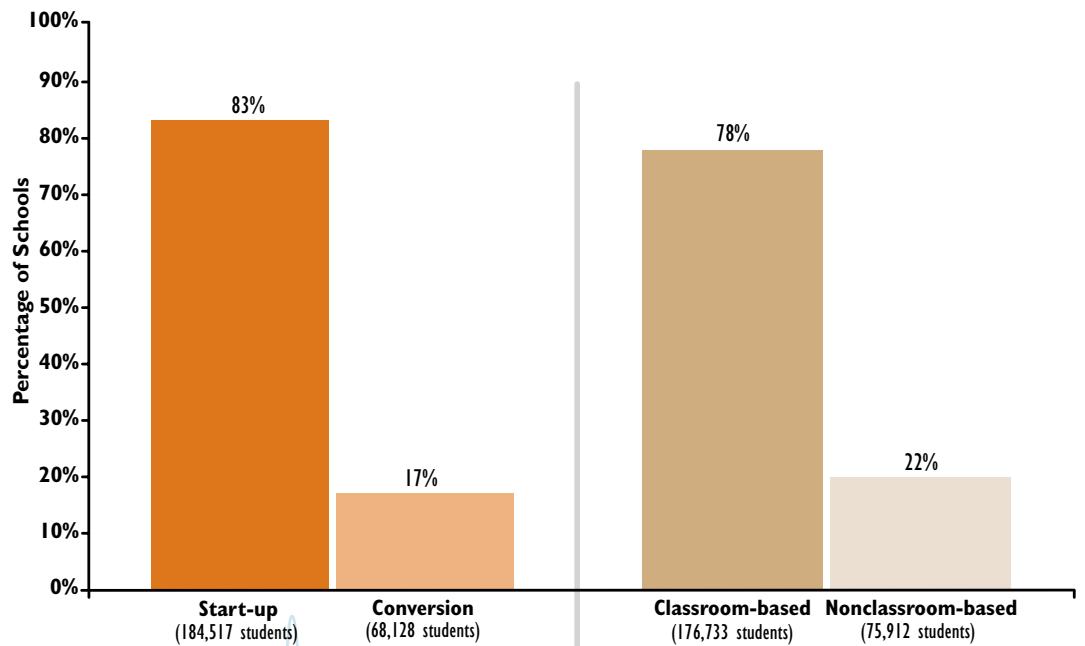
When California first began allowing charter schools, most of the schools were conversions—traditional public schools that converted to charter status. For the most part, these schools retained their facility, faculty, students, and staff when they became charter schools. Over time, starting new charter schools from the ground up has become more common.

In 2007–08, many more of the state’s active charter schools were start-ups than conversions (83% versus 17%). Start-ups served 73% of the state’s charter students, and conversions educated 27%.

Some charter schools develop education programs that are not based in traditional classrooms. Under Senate Bill (SB) 740, a charter school is considered nonclassroom-based when less than 80% of its instructional time occurs on site under the direct supervision of a teacher. A total of 151 of the state’s charter schools (22% of charters, serving 30% of the state’s charter students) were classified as nonclassroom-based during the 2007–08 school year. The percentage of nonclassroom-based charters operating in California has not changed much during the past five years.

The level of general funding that a nonclassroom-based charter school receives depends on a determination by the State Board of Education, pursuant to SB 740. Funding determinations are for up to five years. The board can set a school’s funding by as much as 30% below the normal charter rate based on the school’s lower operating expenses because of such things as its teacher-to-pupil ratio and how much it spends on school sites. However, such funding reductions are not the norm.

In 2007–08, most charter schools were start-ups and classroom-based



Charter school funding

The amount of operations funding that charter schools receive is derived from how much districts receive, but a greater percentage of charters' funding is discretionary.

School districts receive, on average, about two-thirds of their funds from the state in the form of revenue limits. The per-pupil amounts vary by the type of district (elementary, unified, or high school) and historical formulas. The table below shows the average per-pupil revenue limit amounts for each district type in 2007–08. Charters receive a general-purpose block grant, which is based on this revenue limit funding for districts.

2007–08 Average revenue limits by district type*

	Amount
Elementary (kindergarten–8th grade)	\$5,568
Unified (kindergarten–12th grade)	5,821
High school (9th–12th grade)	6,690

* The figures in this table are per-pupil amounts, which are multiplied by average daily attendance (ADA).

School districts also receive categorical funds—based largely on the students they serve and the programs they run. Charters get a categorical block grant that is discretionary and takes the place of some of these state categorical funds. However, the categorical block grant does not include some of the larger programs, such as K–3 Class Size Reduction. Charter schools that receive their funding directly from the state may apply for the categorical programs that are outside the block grant. Schools that receive their funding through their authorizing agency (usually a district or county office of education) can negotiate with that agency for a portion of the categorical funding it receives. Finally, charters also receive money for each student who is identified as low-income or an English learner in lieu of the Economic Impact Aid (EIA) that school districts receive.

2007–08 Estimated base charter school funding*

	K-3	4-6	7-8	9-12
General purpose block grant	\$5,587	\$5,672	\$5,836	\$6,772
Categorical block grant	500	500	500	500
In lieu of EIA	318	318	318	318

* The figures in this table are per-pupil amounts, which are multiplied by average daily attendance (ADA).

Not covered here is the amount of facilities funding that each segment receives. Districts can generate funding for repairing and constructing buildings through either state or local general obligation bonds. Charter operators creating new schools have access to those new construction funds. In addition, both start-up and conversion charters serving high-poverty areas can receive lease aid for existing facilities.

Governance of California's charter schools

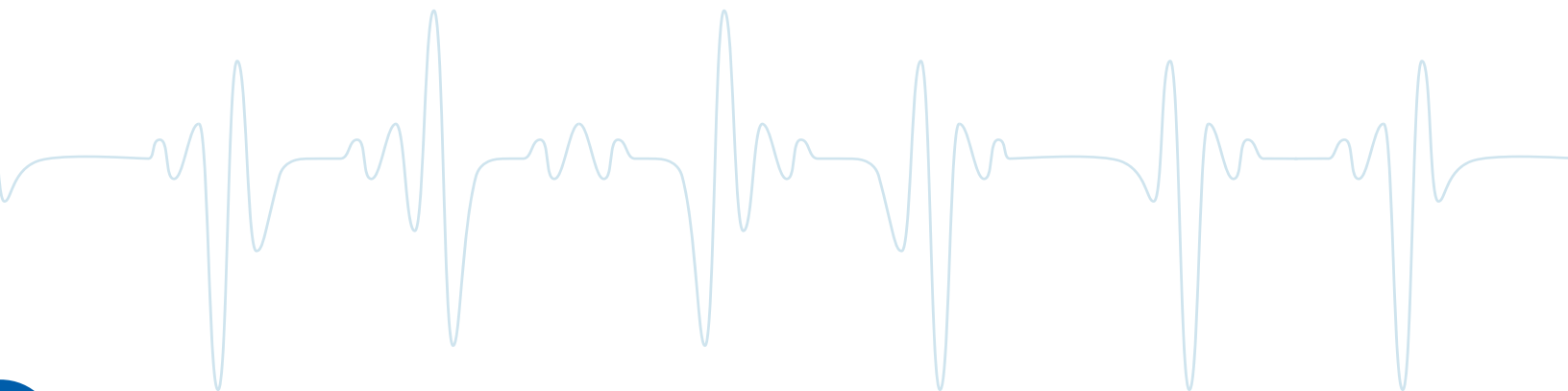
California's charter schools have developed a variety of ways of governing themselves during the past 15 years. By law, local school districts are under the oversight of a publicly elected governing board made up of local residents, and some schools also have a school site council. However, no such specifics cover the public oversight of charter schools. The Charter School Act simply states that every school is required to consult regularly with parents and teachers about its educational programs. In 1998, Assembly Bill (AB) 544 authorized charter schools to operate as—or be operated by—nonprofit corporations. It also guaranteed the charter authorizing agency one representative on the nonprofit's board.

The most common governance arrangement is for a single charter school to receive its authorization from its local district or county office of education. However, some other governance models have emerged as a means to streamline operations and leverage funding. One such example is the all-charter district. A district may choose to convert all of its schools to charters if at least half of the teachers in the district sign a petition and that petition is approved by the State Board of Education and the state superintendent of public instruction. Increased parental choice, smaller schools, and school site-based decision making are all cited as reasons that districts decide to go all-charter. However, the all-charter districts in California generally have lower per-pupil funding from revenue limit sources than the state average, according to district financial reports.

In California, the first district became all-charter in 2000. As of 2007–08, nine of the state's school districts are all-charter, together representing 2.3% of charter schools and 2.5% of charter students. These nine districts are relatively small, educating 6,731 students in 2007–08. Six of the nine districts have only one school, and the largest has seven schools.

All-Charter districts, 2007–08

District	County	Number of Schools	Total Enrollment
Ackerman Elementary	Placer	1	228
Alvina Elementary	Fresno	1	198
Delta View Joint Union Elementary	Kings	1	101
Hickman Community Charter	Stanislaus	3	1,060
Island Union Elementary	Kings	1	267
Jacoby Creek Elementary	Humboldt	1	395
Kings River–Hardwick Union Elementary	Kings	1	643
Kingsburg Elementary Charter	Fresno	7	2,250
Pioneer Union Elementary	Kings	2	1,589



Although a charter is most often authorized by the local school district or county office of education, the State Board of Education can also authorize charter schools under two different circumstances. The most common occurs when the local school district and/or the county office of education reject the charter application and the school appeals that decision to the state. Eight charter schools had the State Board of Education as their authorizer in 2007–08.

State Board of Education Charters, 2007–08

	County	Total Enrollment
Animo Inglewood Charter High	Los Angeles	525
Edison Charter Academy	San Francisco	473
Leadership Public Schools - Hayward	Alameda	313
Lifeline Education Charter	Los Angeles	214
Livermore Valley Charter	Alameda	855
New West Charter Middle	Los Angeles	319
Ridgecrest Charter	Kern	211
School of Arts and Enterprise	Los Angeles	387

The State Board of Education also authorizes multiple schools to operate under a single charter if that approach will offer instructional services of “statewide benefit” that cannot be provided by a charter school operating in only one school district or one county. The charter operator must open at least two schools in areas with struggling schools, and the schools must meet performance objectives for two years before more schools may open. In 2007–08, two statewide benefit charters were each operating two schools.

Statewide Benefit Charters, 2007–08

	Total Enrollment
Aspire Public Schools	364
High Tech High	292

Perhaps one of the highest-profile approaches to reproducing and expanding charter schools is the formation of charter networks and charter management organizations (CMOs). As is discussed in detail beginning on page 24, these organizations can take shape in various ways and can be hard to define. In general, these organizations operate more than one school and provide administrative support, a governance structure, and instructional guidance for their network of schools. Schools belonging to these organizations represent a growing minority of the state’s charter schools. ■

THE DATA IN THE CHARTS AND TABLES IN THIS ARTICLE COME FROM THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (CDE).

EDSOURCE 6/09

—by Heather Barondess



CHARTERS vs. NONCHARTERS

Measuring and comparing the test scores of schools is a complicated endeavor. But as California works to improve student and school performance—and as some look to the growing charter school movement to contribute—it is important to examine the extent to which charters are furthering such efforts.

The following EdSource analysis compares the test scores of charter schools with those of noncharters; and in the next article, the performance of charters run by a charter management organization (CMO) with those that are not. To make certain the conclusions of the work presented in both articles are as sound as possible, the analyses control for the measurable student background characteristics that are most strongly associated with academic achievement.

The following sums up the findings of the charter vs. noncharter comparisons:

- Among **high schools** in the test score analysis, the parent education level is about the same in charters and noncharters, but charters have fewer English learners and students with disabilities. After adjusting for these differences in student demographics, charter high schools score modestly higher on the Academic Performance Index (API), a summary measure. Results from specific subject tests reveal that charter high schools outscore their noncharter counterparts in English but do not score as well in math. In both subjects, the differences are quite small.
- Charter **middle schools** tend to have higher parent education levels and fewer English learners and students with disabilities. With such demographic characteristics controlled for, charter middle schools outscore noncharter middle schools on all measures. However, the differences are still relatively small.
- Similar to charter middle schools, charter **elementary schools** have a higher overall parent education level and fewer English learners and students with

disabilities. After adjusting for these and other observable student background factors, charter elementary schools score lower than noncharter elementary schools on all measures, with differences in the small to moderate range.

These findings must be considered with some caveats

First, the research technique used in this study identifies differences in performance that are not attributable to measurable student background characteristics, but it cannot provide certainty that differences in achievement are attributable to a school's status as a charter (or as a CMO-run charter in the later analysis).

Furthermore, this analysis does not account for other “nonmeasurable” qualities students bring to their respective schools, such as their prior achievement or motivation levels. (See more on this topic in the box on page 15.)

In addition, this analysis is limited to state test measures and does not consider other outcomes that are important to educators and parents.

Finally, because school-site-level data on finances are not available, this analysis does not account for differences in schools' resources. Traditional public schools vary in the resources they have available to them. This is also true for charter schools, with some charters struggling with start-up funding and facilities challenges while others are supported by private philanthropic contributions that allow for services not commonly found in public schools, such as a school year of more than 180 days.

Even with these limitations, however, a third annual impartial analysis of how the state's charter schools are performing—after controlling for student background characteristics—provides California's education community with a sense of the performance trends. For example, charter high schools have consistently outscored noncharter high schools on the API, but charters' math performance has lagged or not been substantially different. In addition, charter middle schools have consistently outscored noncharters on all measures. And charter elementary schools as a whole have not done as well as noncharters on the API, due largely to lower scores on math tests.

The basics of the performance analyses

This section presents test score comparisons of charter and noncharter schools, with separate comparisons for elementary, middle, and high schools. Schools are classified according to how the California Department of Education (CDE) categorizes them for the Academic Performance Index. (See the box on page 15 for more information.)

The comparisons that follow include only those charter and noncharter schools that have data on all of the 2008 outcome measures covered in this report (see page 15). Altogether, this study excludes 18.5% of the state's 688 charter schools (serving 16,602 students) and 17.3% of its 9,194 noncharter schools (serving 218,295 students) that were open in 2007–08.

The primary analyses exclude some schools

The primary performance analyses in this report exclude nonclassroom-based charters,

all schools in the Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM), and Special Education schools. These schools are excluded under the rationale that they are substantially different from the “typical” charter and noncharter school in their instructional program and the students that they serve. In general, these schools tend to have lower test scores.

A charter school is considered nonclassroom-based when less than 80% of its instructional time occurs on site under the direct supervision of a teacher. Some nonclassroom-based charters are fundamentally networks for home-schooling families, and some provide distance learning only.

Schools in the ASAM have at least 70% “at risk” students. Examples of ASAM schools are continuation schools, county community schools, county court schools, Division of Juvenile Justice schools, opportunity schools, and alternative schools. They are more common among noncharters than charters and generally serve high school students. *Although it is possible for ASAM schools to have students whose observable demographic characteristics are not associated with low test scores, these schools are almost by definition low-scoring because students generally attend them because of difficulties succeeding in “mainstream” schools.*

Special Education programs, often run by county offices of education, specialize in serving students with special learning needs. They number about 135 throughout the state, but only a handful have the test score data needed to be considered for this analysis.

For comparison purposes, analyses were also done with all schools included. For the most part, the results of these all-inclusive comparisons are not substantially different from the primary comparisons. Nevertheless, the results are summarized and displayed in tables.

The analyses cover several measures of schools’ academic performance

The performance comparisons include the following indicators of schools’ academic achievement from the 2007–08 school year:

- The **Academic Performance Index (API)**, which reflects scores from Cali-

Perspectives on charter school students’ prior achievement and motivation

Because data on students’ achievement before entering their schools are not publicly available at the state level, this study’s comparisons cannot isolate the academic growth that students achieve while attending a given type of school. Two studies that examined charter students’ prior achievement levels shed some light, but one is relatively old and the other looks at a small set of schools.

RAND studied the composition of charter schools in six large districts in California from 1997–98 through 2001–02 and found that charters generally attract students from average-scoring noncharter schools, and the students who transfer to charters are about average students within those noncharters. RAND also found that the higher students’ math scores were, the less likely they were to move to a charter school; but reading scores did not have a strong association with transfers to charter schools.

In a 2008 study of Bay Area KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) middle schools, which generally post high scores, SRI International found high student attrition rates. The researchers found that, on average, students who left KIPP before completing 8th grade had lower test scores when they entered than the classmates who completed 8th grade.

In addition, this EdSource study is not able to account for possible variations in the motivation level of students attending different types of schools. This motivation level, which is obviously important to student achievement, may differ between students in noncharters and charters. Students attending charter schools are there because their parents have made that choice. This suggests to some that charter schools have a significant advantage in student motivation and thus in performance comparisons. Certainly, one can find examples of charter schools that serve students from traditionally lower-scoring groups but whose motivation to succeed is high. However, charter operators can also point to examples of students in their schools with low motivation levels for a variety of reasons. And many different factors can prompt families to choose a school. Sometimes the rigor of the instructional program is the major factor, but in other cases it may be the safety level, the ethnic make-up of the student body, or the school’s location. Or parents could choose a charter because their student has had behavioral or academic difficulties at other schools.

How the California Department of Education categorizes schools for the API

The CDE generally classifies schools for the API based on the number of grades a school has in the “core” grade spans of K–5, 7–8, and 9–12. For example, a K–8 school (a common charter school grade configuration) would be considered an elementary school because it has six grades in the K–5 span and two in the 7–8 span.

However, if a school has grades in all three spans, it is classified according to the largest enrollment in a core span served. For example, a school serving all K–12 grades (another common configuration among charters) would be classified as a high school if most of its students were in grades 9–12.

California Standards Tests (CSTs) in English, math, social science (for middle and high schools only), and science (in certain grades); and the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). The 2008 “Growth” API under analysis here does not indicate how much individual students’ achievement grew in 2008 but is a snapshot of schoolwide performance. In the state’s accountability system, Growth scores are compared with the prior year’s (Base) results.

- **Percent of students scoring proficient or above on CSTs in English language arts and math (the “adequate yearly progress” or AYP measure).** For high schools, percent proficient is based on grade 10 results on the CAHSEE.
- **Mean (average) scale score on the CSTs for grades 4 and 7 for English and math, as well as grade 10 for English.** (Because not all 10th graders take the same CST in math, the analysis does not include mean scale scores for a grade 10 CST in math.)

How to interpret the comparisons

This section explains certain concepts and terms used in the test score analyses. The explanations are keyed to the sample table (opposite page), which resembles the actual tables on pages 19 through 23.

The following analyses:

1 Present test score differences after adjusting for observable differences in student characteristics.

This study uses an analytic method that allows for statements about schools' test scores *after controlling for differences in observable student characteristics* as reported by schools and districts.

The study relies on individual control variables that pertain to students' backgrounds. The analyses use a technique called "stepwise ordinary least squares regression" to account for schools' differences in those variables.[†]

The analyses consider school size by isolating (with an "interaction term") test score differentials if achievement *within* the charter and noncharter sectors varies by school size. However, the study considers small school size as part of the charter school approach and thus does not control for it as a distinct variable *across* the charter and noncharter sectors.

2 Use two statistical terms.

a "Statistical significance" measures the likelihood that a result is not due to random variation. Statistical significance does not necessarily mean that a result is significant from a policy or practical perspective.

b "Effect size" expresses the performance differential between two groups in relation to the amount of variation in observed performance. For example, if most schools' scores are clustered within a few

points, a difference of several points between two groups will translate to a large effect size. Conversely, if scores range widely, then it would take a large difference between two groups to create a large effect size. To understand how effect size works, consider this analogy. You lose a race by 10 seconds. If that race was the 100-meter dash where a few hundredths of a second determines the winner, then you lost by a lot (the effect size was large). But if that race was a marathon—where differences are measured by minutes—then the effect size was small.

In addition, effect sizes put different measures such as API points and "percent proficient or above" on a common scale.

3 Describe how consistent the findings are across all performance measures.

Findings are more robust and defensible when they are consistent across measures. Consistency is given one of four possible ratings:

- None—Results on different measures conflict, or suggest different conclusions about performance.
- Low—Some results go in the same direction—i.e., favor one set of schools over another—with broadly similar magnitudes.
- Moderate—Most or all results on the measures go in the same direction but vary in the size of effects.

■ High—Results track each other in both direction and size.

4 Describe how stable the results have been over time.

Findings that hold consistently across multiple years are more credible than those from a single year. This research compares outcomes from 2008 with results from the previous two years where appropriate and notes whether the results have been stable over time.^{††} Stability is given one of four possible ratings:

- None—Results from the current year contradict previous years' results. For example, if charters scored higher than noncharters in one year but lower than noncharters the next year, the stability would be labeled "none."
- Low—Only some current results follow those of past years.
- Moderate—Current results tend to go in the same direction as past ones, but the magnitude of effects is different.
- High—Current results agree with past ones in both direction and magnitude.

Reporting on multiple annual schoolwide results is not the same as performing a longitudinal analysis, which tracks the same students over time. A longitudinal analysis is not currently possible with California's publicly available data.

The sample table on page 17 presents a basic guide to the test score comparisons that follow.

[†] Under this approach, control variables are a part of the regression analysis only if they help explain in a significant way differences in performance. Some variables are present in all comparisons because they prove to be significant in explaining differences every time. (See below.)

^{††} In EdSource's two previous reports, a variable called the School Characteristics Index (SCI), publicly available from the California Department of Education, was used in statistical regressions to account for differences in student demographics among schools. The SCI summarizes many factors controlled for in the current report such as parent education levels, percent of students with disabilities, and student ethnicity, as well as factors not statistically controlled for this year because schools may have some power to determine them—for example, the credentials of their teaching staff.

In addition, the two prior reports controlled for school size under the theory that some observers might attribute test score differentials more to schools' size than to their charter status. In contrast, this year's approach assumes that "smallness" is part of the charter approach and thus does not seek to isolate performance differentials independent of school size.

The English tests for 4th and 7th graders include a writing sample.

■ **Mean scale score of 10th graders on the CAHSEE** in English language arts and math. A mean score can provide information that a measure such as "percent proficient or above" cannot. For example, if a group of students has a large percentage who score near but not quite proficient on the CAHSEE, its mean scale score will indicate that the group's scores are better than the "percent proficient or above" measure might imply.

Some of these measures substantially overlap each other. For example, AYP and

API results are different ways of "packaging" CST (and, for high schools, CAHSEE) scores. However, each of the measures reported here is important to educators and policymakers in its own right because each gives a different look at performance. For example, AYP results indicate the percentage of students meeting the federal and state goal of proficiency in English and math only, but API scores indicate the distribution of scores across the spectrum of performance levels and all subjects tested on the CSTs. In addition, CST results from individual grades help address any problems arising from comparing schools that are considered the same

type but serve different grade spans—e.g., K–5 and K–8 elementary schools.

The comparisons control for differences in student characteristics

The performance analyses control for observable student characteristics. The variables are included in the regression analyses as controls whenever they significantly explain variations in school performance. The possible variables include:

- Average parent education level. (Values are assigned to a student based on his/her most highly educated parent according to a "1–5" scale, with "not a high school graduate"

This sample table uses *hypothetical* data. Its purpose is to orient the reader to the layout and concepts of the tables of results that follow.

Primary Comparison (excludes nonclassroom-based charters and all ASAM and Special Education schools)			
2008 Outcome Measure (These vary by elementary/middle/high school.)	Average Score for Noncharters (# of schools in analysis)	1 Charter Test Score Differential, After Adjusting for Student Demographics (# of charter schools in analysis)	Effect Size
Growth 2008 API	800	-10.0 API points***	-0.15
English			
AYP English—percent proficient or above (test taken and grades assessed vary by school type)	60.0%	<p>This column shows the estimated effect of being a charter on several performance measures if student demographics are held constant. For example, the “-10 API points” above means the average charter school would be estimated to score 10 points lower on the API than the average noncharter school if it had the same student demographics. (A “+” symbol would mean that charters score higher.)</p> <p>The number of asterisks indicates the test score differential's statistical significance:</p> <p>not significant Difference is not significant at .10 level. (More than 10% chance that difference is due to random variation.)</p> <p>* Significant at .10 level. (10% chance.)</p> <p>** Significant at .05 level. (5% chance.)</p> <p>*** Significant at .01 level. (1% chance.)</p> <p>**** Significant at .001 level (0.1% chance.)</p> <p>In this example, the result is statistically significant at the .01 or 1% level.</p>	<p>Effect size expresses the test score differential in relation to the amount of variation among schools' scores. It also puts performance differentials for several different outcome measures on one scale.</p> <p>The guidelines for interpreting effect sizes are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ about 0.20 = small ■ about 0.50 = moderate ■ about 0.80 = large <p>In this example, a test score differential of -10 API points equates to an effect size of -0.15, which is relatively small.</p>
CAHSEE English, Grade 10—mean scale score (high schools only)	300.0		
CST English—mean scale score for a single grade (4, 7, or 10)	310.0		
Scale scores take into account the difficulty of test questions, allowing scores to be added, averaged, or otherwise aggregated.			
Math			
AYP Math—percent proficient or above (test taken and grades assessed vary by school type)	50.0%		
CAHSEE Math, Grade 10—mean scale score (high schools only)	320.0		
CST Math—mean scale score for a single grade (4 or 7)	330.0		
Comparison Made with All Charter and Noncharter Schools Included			
The information shown here is similar to that displayed above, but the results reflect all relevant schools with the requisite test score data—e.g., all charter and noncharter high schools whether or not they are nonclassroom-based, ASAM, or Special Education schools. This information is provided for full transparency and because excluding broad categories of schools may not be precise enough to produce a true “apples-to-apples” comparison, especially given the diversity of schools in both segments.			
Strength of Findings (generalized for both comparisons)			
3 Consistency: The level of agreement across multiple performance measures in 2008 is summarized as none, low, moderate, or high.			
4 Stability: The level of agreement of results over time is summarized as none, low, moderate, or high.			

assigned a “1” and “graduate school” assigned a “5”. The school’s value is the average of these individual student-level values.)

- Percent of students tested in spring 2008 who had been continuously enrolled in the same school since October 2007.
- Percent of students by ethnic categories. (For technical reasons, the sum of percentages from all categories must not sum to 100% so it is customary to exclude one group. In this study, “white” is excluded.)
 - African American
 - Asian
 - Hispanic/Latino
 - Filipino

- Pacific Islander
- Other/multiple (does not have significant explanatory power in any comparisons that follow)
- Percent of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals.
- Percent of English learners.
- Percent of redesignated fluent English proficient (RFEP) students.
- Percent of students by gender.
- Percent of students with disabilities.

Although there is considerable variation in which specific demographic control variables are significant in the comparisons that follow, four variables always emerge as

significant: average parent education, percent of students continuously enrolled in the school, percent African American, and percent Asian. These four factors explain, on average, 70% of the variance in test scores. (In statistical terms, the “adjusted R²” is about 0.70). Across all analyses, the inclusion of all significant variables explains, on average, about 78% of the variance in the data (the “adjusted R²” is about 0.78). Controlling for these demographic variables allows the research team to hone in on, but not completely isolate, the impact of being a charter school or a particular type of charter school on students’ test scores.

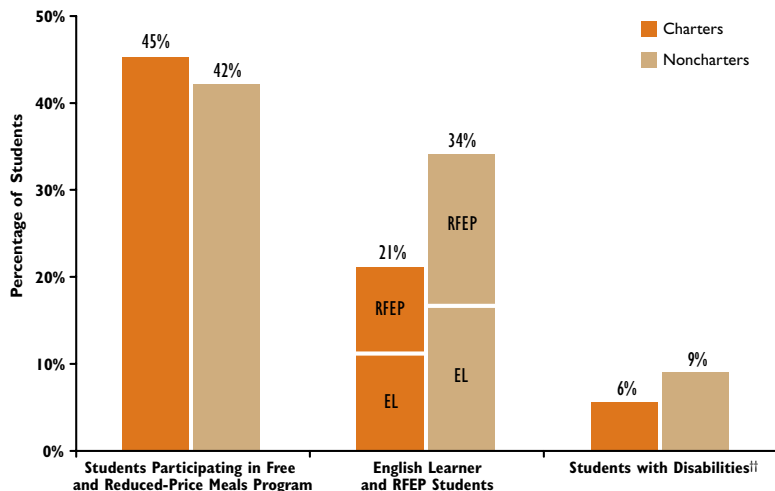
HIGH SCHOOLS

The primary analysis for high school performance includes 123 charters that educate 47,550 students—about 2.7% of all California high school students. The average enrollment of these charter high schools is 386 students, which is about a quarter of the size of the average noncharter high school (1,660 students) in this analysis.

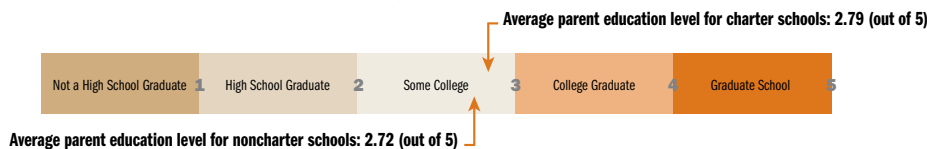
This primary analysis *excludes* 95 of California’s charter high schools, 70 of which are nonclassroom-based and 25 of which are Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM) schools. It also *excludes* 218 noncharter high schools, of which 211 are ASAM schools and 7 are Special Education schools.

Of the charter high schools that are included in this primary analysis, only 5.7% converted from traditional, noncharter public schools, which means that the vast majority of charter high schools were started from scratch (“start-up” charters). About two-thirds of the charter high schools in this report are less than five years old.

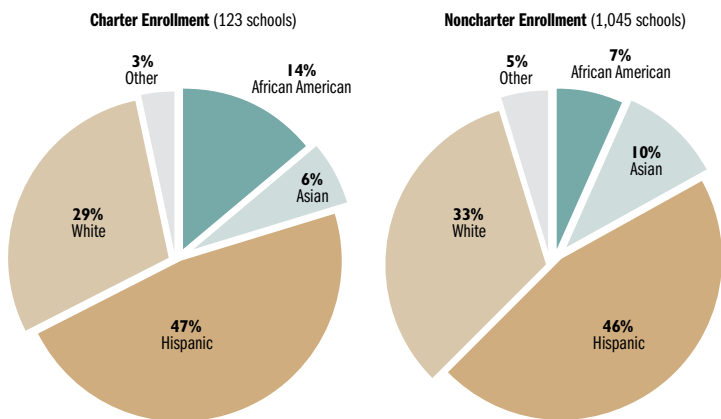
Special program participation rates in high schools†



Average parent education levels in high schools†



Student ethnicities in high schools†



Compared with noncharter high schools, the charter high schools included in this analysis have higher rates of participation in the federal free and reduced-price meals program but lower proportions of students with disabilities. According to some charter school experts, however, charter schools are less likely to run meals programs and thus may under-report how many students are eligible for subsidized meals. Charters enroll a lower proportion of students who are either English learners or redesignated as fluent English proficient (RFEF) students. Of those students, about half are English learners and half are RFEF students in both charters and noncharters.

On average, the parent education level in charter high schools and in noncharter high schools is about the same. This is reflected in the percentage of parents who are college graduates—charters 32% versus noncharters 31%—as well as in the averages shown in the adjacent figure.

The charter high schools in this analysis enroll a greater proportion of Latino and African American students than their noncharter counterparts. They are less likely to enroll white and Asian students and those of other ethnicities. Charter high schools educate a slightly greater proportion of female students than noncharters (51.6% and 49.3%, respectively).

† Only the schools included in the primary performance analysis are represented here. If all charter high schools were combined into one school and all noncharter high schools were combined into another school, these percentages would result.

†† As defined by the State Testing and Reporting program (STAR).

Note: In the pie charts, the percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Test scores: After adjusting for these differences in student demographics, charter high schools score modestly higher than noncharters in English but lag in math

When the variations in student demographics described above are held constant, the charter high schools in the analysis do modestly better on some state tests than the noncharters but score somewhat lower than noncharters on other measures.

In the primary comparison—i.e., excluding nonclassroom-based charters and ASAM

and Special Education schools—charter high schools score almost 9 points higher on the API than noncharter high schools. This finding is statistically significant. (For this particular finding, there is less than a 5% chance that the difference in scores is due to random variation.) But API scores mask the fact that charters do slightly better on English tests and not quite as well on math tests. On all measures except “AYP math,” the effect sizes are very small.

When the lower-scoring ASAM schools (211 noncharters and 25 charters) and

nonclassroom-based charters (70 schools) are included in the comparison, scores for both groups drop. Because the charter segment takes on a much greater percentage of generally lower-scoring schools in the all-inclusive comparison than the noncharter segment does, the charters’ scores decrease more. As a result, charters’ statistically significant 9-point advantage on the API disappears. In addition, charters’ grade 10 math scores lag even further than in the primary comparison.

High Schools Only—Primary Comparison (excludes nonclassroom-based charters and all ASAM and Special Education schools)			
2008 Outcome Measure	Average Score for Noncharters (1,045 schools)	Charter Test Score Differential, After Adjusting for Student Demographics (123 schools)	Effect Size
Growth 2008 API	715.4	+8.5 API points**	+0.08
English			
AYP English —percent proficient or above (CAHSEE, Grade 10)	54.6%	-0.2 percentage points <small>not significant</small>	-0.01
CAHSEE English, Grade 10 —mean scale score	380.2	+2.0 scale score points***	+0.10
CST English, Grade 10 —mean scale score	338.3	+4.1 scale score points***	+0.13
Math			
AYP Math —percent proficient or above (CAHSEE, Grade 10)	52.3%	-5.6 percentage points****	-0.29
CAHSEE Math, Grade 10 —mean scale score	383.1	-0.2 scale score points <small>not significant</small>	-0.01
Comparison Made with All Charter and Noncharter High Schools Included			
2008 Outcome Measure	Average Score for Noncharters (1,263 schools)	Charter Test Score Differential, After Adjusting for Student Demographics (218 schools)	Effect Size
Growth 2008 API	683.7	+3.3 API points <small>not significant</small>	+0.03
English			
AYP English —percent proficient or above (CAHSEE, Grade 10)	48.7%	+0.0 percentage points <small>not significant</small>	+0.00
CAHSEE English, Grade 10 —mean scale score	374.7	+1.2 scale score points*	+0.06
CST English, Grade 10 —mean scale score	328.9	+3.2 scale score points***	+0.10
Math			
AYP Math —percent proficient or above (CAHSEE, Grade 10)	45.9%	-6.6 percentage points****	-0.29
CAHSEE Math, Grade 10 —mean scale score	377.0	-2.1 scale score points***	-0.10
Strength of Findings (generalized for both comparisons)			
Consistency: <i>None</i> —Though nearly all of the effect sizes are negligible, some (API and English measures) are positive and others (mathematics) are negative.			
Stability: <i>Low</i> —The 2008 outcomes in the primary analysis differ from the prior year’s most comparable results. Last year’s EdSource report showed that classroom-based charters scored higher than noncharters on all 2007 measures (with all ASAM schools excluded from both segments). One stable finding across years, however, is that the least favorable measures for charter high schools have been math scores.			

MIDDLE SCHOOLS

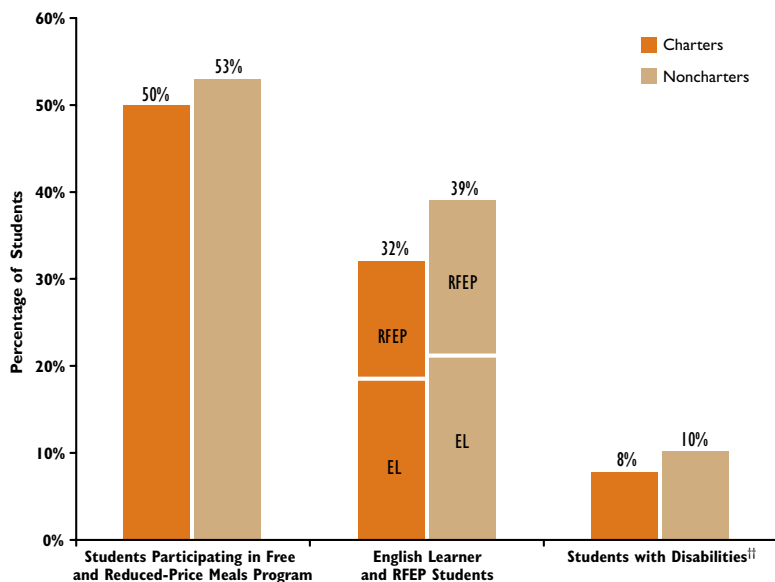
The primary performance comparison below includes 76 charter middle schools that serve 27,797 students—about 2.4% of all California middle school students. The average size of a charter school at the middle school level is 366

students, about 40% of the size of the average noncharter middle school in this analysis (894 students).

Of the charter schools included in this primary analysis, 22% converted from traditional,

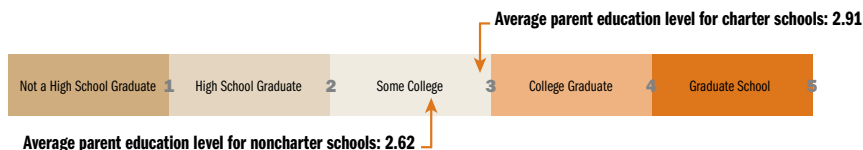
noncharter public schools. Thus, nearly 8 of 10 charter middle schools represented here are “start-ups.” Regarding the “age” of charter middle schools, 24 (31%) have been in operation for at least five years.

Special program participation rates in middle schools[†]



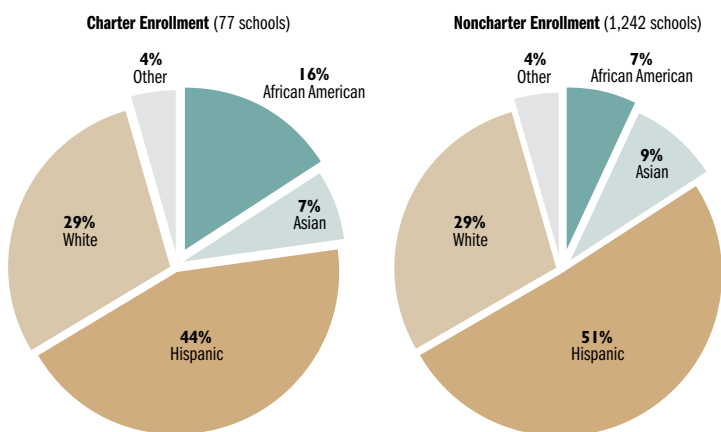
The charter middle schools included in this analysis report a substantially lower proportion of students in the federal free and reduced-price meals program and students with disabilities than noncharters. As stated earlier, however, the figures for the subsidized-meals program may not be accurate for charters. Charter middle schools also enroll English learner and RFEF students at a lower rate, with RFEF students making up a smaller percentage of these students in charter schools than in noncharters (42% to 45%).

Average parent education levels in middle schools[†]



On average, the parent education level in charter middle schools is higher than in noncharter middle schools. Reflected in that average is the difference in the percentage of parents who are college graduates—36% in charters and 28% in noncharters.

Student ethnicities in middle schools[†]



At the middle school level, charters and noncharters differ substantially in the percentage of African American and Latino students they serve. Charters enroll more than double the proportion of African American students (16% versus 7%) but substantially fewer Latino students (44% versus 51%). The proportions for other major ethnicities are similar, however. Charter and noncharter middle schools educate roughly the same proportion of female students (49.0% and 48.8%, respectively).

[†] Only the schools included in the primary performance analysis are represented here. If all charter middle schools were combined into one school and all noncharter middle schools were combined into another school, these percentages would result.

^{††} As defined by the State Testing and Reporting program (STAR).

Test scores: After adjusting for these differences in student demographics, charter middle schools outscore noncharters

When the variations in student demographics described above are held constant, charter middle schools do better on state tests than noncharters. In the primary comparison, which excludes few schools, the score differentials are all statistically significant;

but the effect sizes are small. For example, charters outscore noncharters by nearly 27 API points. There is less than one chance in a thousand that this difference is due to random variation; but at 0.28, the effect size is still small.

In the all-inclusive comparison, seven ASAM schools are included in the noncharter segment and two nonclassroom-based schools

are present among charters. Adding this small number of schools does not change the results much. However, on the AYP math measure, the already small difference between charters and noncharters loses statistical significance. In both the primary and all-inclusive comparisons, the 7th grade results are somewhat more favorable for charters than the schoolwide results are.

Middle Schools Only—Primary Comparison (excludes nonclassroom-based charters and all ASAM schools)			
2008 Outcome Measure	Average Score for Noncharters (1,242 schools)	Charter Test Score Differential, After Adjusting for Student Demographics (77 schools)	Effect Size
Growth 2008 API	746.0	+26.7 API points****	+0.28
English			
AYP English —percent proficient or above (CST, all tested grades)	48.1%	+3.8 percentage points****	+0.21
CST English, Grade 7 —mean scale score	348.6	+7.9 scale score points****	+0.28
Math			
AYP Math —percent proficient or above (CST, all tested grades)	42.1%	+2.6 percentage points*	+0.15
CST Math, Grade 7 —mean scale score	339.5	+6.4 scale score points***	+0.22
Comparison Made with All Charter and Noncharter Middle Schools Included			
2008 Outcome Measure	Average Score for Noncharters (1,249 schools)	Charter Test Score Differential, After Adjusting for Student Demographics (79 schools)	Effect Size
Growth 2008 API	744.7	+26.1 API points****	+0.28
English			
AYP English —percent proficient or above (CST, all tested grades)	47.9%	+3.9 percentage points****	+0.21
CST English, Grade 7 —mean scale score	348.3	+8.0 scale score points****	+0.28
Math			
AYP Math —percent proficient or above (CST, all tested grades)	42.0%	+2.1 percentage points <small>not significant</small>	+0.12
CST Math, Grade 7 —mean scale score	339.2	+6.9 scale score points***	+0.24
Strength of Findings (generalized for both comparisons)			
Consistency: <i>High</i> —The performance differential on all measures favors charters, and the effect sizes are similar—small—for all measures.			
Stability: <i>Moderate</i> —As in prior years, middle charters in 2008 score higher on all measures; but prior effect sizes were larger—in the moderate range.			

DATA: CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (CDE)

EDSOURCE 6/09

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

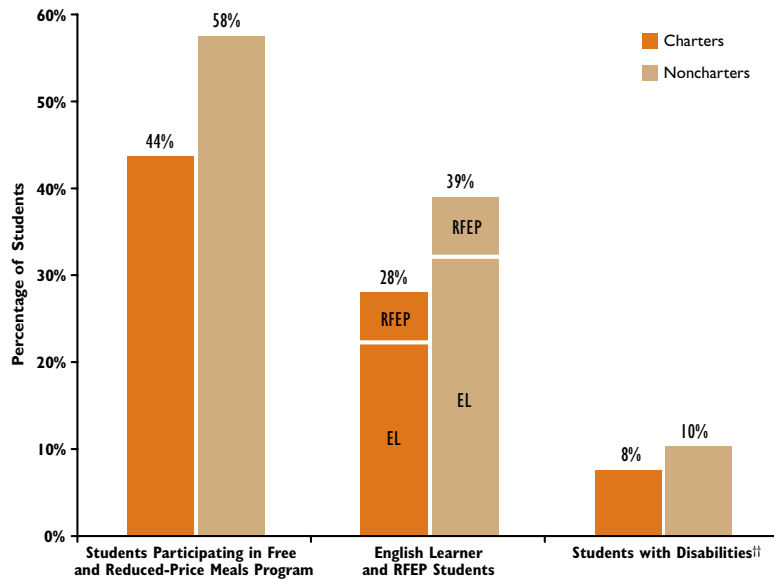
The primary analysis includes 226 charter schools that educate 84,000 students—about 2.9% of the state’s elementary school students. The average size of a charter school at the elementary level is 372 students, about two-thirds the size of the average non-charter elementary school in this analysis (563 students).

The primary analysis *excludes* 1 ASAM and 37 nonclassroom-based schools from the charter segment, and 2 ASAM and 3 Special Education schools from the noncharters.

Of the charter schools included in this primary analysis, 30% were converted from traditional, noncharter public schools. Thus, elementary charters are more likely than

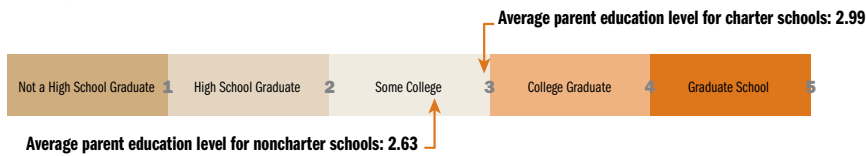
charter middle and high schools to be “conversions,” but a large majority of charter elementary schools are still start-ups. More than half (54%) of the elementary charters represented here have been in operation for at least five years, making this group more established than either the middle or high school charters.

Special program participation rates in elementary schools†



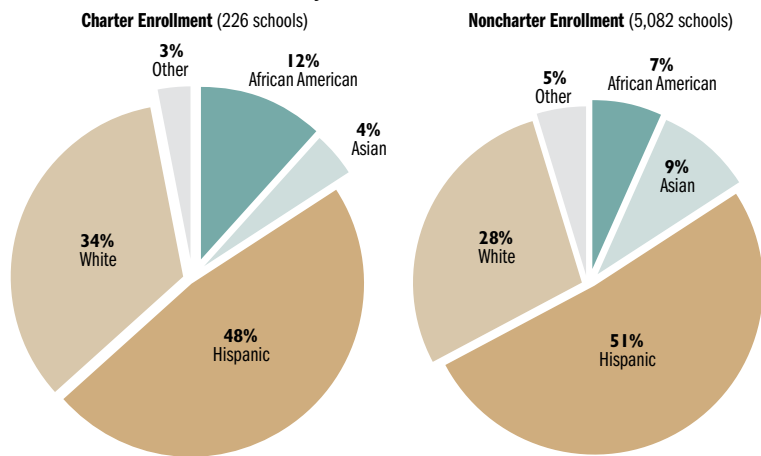
The charter elementary schools included in this analysis report substantially fewer students in the federal free and reduced-price meals program and have a lower percentage of students with disabilities than noncharter elementary schools. Elementary charters as a whole also enroll fewer English learners and RFEP students than noncharters. Unlike middle and high school students, the vast majority of students in that category in both charters and noncharters are English learners, not yet having attained RFEP status.

Average parent education levels in elementary schools†



On average, the parent education of students in elementary charters is higher than students in elementary noncharters. For example, about 38% of the charter parents are college graduates, compared with 28% of noncharter parents.

Student ethnicities in elementary schools†



The charter elementary schools in this analysis are more likely to enroll African American and white students than their noncharter counterparts, but they are less likely to enroll students from every other ethnic background. A greater proportion of students enrolled in elementary charters is female (50%) than in noncharter elementary schools (48.6%).

† Only the schools included in the primary performance analysis are represented here. If all charter elementary schools were combined into one school and all noncharter elementary schools were combined into another school, these percentages would result.

†† As defined by the State Testing and Reporting program (STAR).

Note: In the pie charts, the percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Test scores: After adjusting for these differences in student demographics, charter elementary schools lag behind noncharters

On all measures in both the primary and all-inclusive comparisons, charter elementary schools score lower than noncharters. All score differentials are statistically significant, and the effect sizes range from small to moderate.

In the primary comparison (with ASAM and nonclassroom-based charters excluded),

charters score almost 28 points lower on the API. On the CSTs in English and math, the percent of charter students scoring proficient or above and charters' mean scale scores trail the performance of noncharters. The test results for only 4th graders show the same patterns.

When 37 nonclassroom-based charter schools, 1 ASAM charter, and 5 ASAM noncharters are included in the performance

comparison, the differences grow. For example, the gap on the API increases from nearly 28 points to almost 38 points. With most of the additional schools in the all-inclusive comparison being nonclassroom-based charters, the wider score gaps seem to indicate that nonclassroom-based charter elementary schools as a group score lower than classroom-based charters and even lower when compared with noncharters. ■

Elementary Schools Only—Primary Comparison (excludes nonclassroom-based charters and all ASAM and Special Education schools)			
2008 Outcome Measure	Average Score for Noncharters (5,082 schools)	Charter Test Score Differential, After Adjusting for Student Demographics (226 schools)	Effect Size
Growth 2008 API	785.5	-27.6 API points****	-0.35
English			
AYP English —percent proficient or above (CST, all tested grades)	49.0%	-4.9 percentage points****	-0.27
CST English, Grade 4 —mean scale score	358.1	-4.4 scale score points****	-0.16
Math			
AYP Math —percent proficient or above (CST, all tested grades)	58.0%	-7.9 percentage points****	-0.50
CST Math, Grade 4 —mean scale score	374.3	-11.5 scale score points****	-0.35
Comparison Made with All Charter and Noncharter Elementary Schools Included			
2008 Outcome Measure	Average Score for Noncharters (5,087 schools)	Charter Test Score Differential, After Adjusting for Student Demographics (264 schools)	Effect Size
Growth 2008 API	785.3	-37.7 API points****	-0.47
English			
AYP English —percent proficient or above (CST, all tested grades)	49.0%	-5.7 percentage points****	-0.32
CST English, Grade 4 —mean scale score	358.1	-5.7 scale score points****	-0.21
Math			
AYP Math —percent proficient or above (CST, all tested grades)	58.0%	-10.9 percentage points****	-0.68
CST Math, Grade 4 —mean scale score	374.2	-16.5 scale score points****	-0.50
Strength of Findings (generalized for both comparisons)			
Consistency: <i>High</i> —The performance differential on all measures favors noncharters, and the effect sizes vary moderately.			
Stability: <i>Low</i> —In contrast to this year's findings, charter performance in past years was generally higher than noncharter performance on English measures. There is some stability in math measures, however.			

DATA: CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (CDE)

EDSOURCE 6/09

—by Brian Edwards and Heather Barondess
Eric Crane led the test-score analysis.



SPOTLIGHT ON CMOs

Defining and analyzing charter management organizations

Charter management organizations (CMOs) represent a relatively recent, but growing, phenomenon in the state's charter school movement. These organizations can vary substantially in their operation, but typically they provide administration, facility, and instructional support systems for a group of charter schools that share an instructional approach or school model.

Certain charter management organizations have received substantial public attention for creating conditions under which their schools excel, but not all charter schools operated by CMOs are high achievers. Determining how well students in CMO-affiliated charter schools score compared with their non-CMO counterparts can be a challenge. In part, this is because the definition of what constitutes a charter management organization—and therefore which schools should be compared—is still evolving, even among CMO operators and advocates.

“Charter management organization” can be defined broadly or narrowly

Although the terms “charter network” and “charter management organization” have been in the education policy lexicon for several years, a clear consensus about what characteristics define an organization as a network or CMO does not yet exist. Part of the challenge is that these organizations themselves are evolving, taking a wide variety of forms with different missions, structures, and approaches.

A broad definition includes a wide variety of organizational models

The term CMO can be defined broadly as an organization, or branch of an organization, that:

- operates not-for-profit or for-profit.
- operates, or plans to operate, more than one school, even if only one is currently open. (If an organization is already running two or more schools, it would not have to plan to grow to qualify.)
- provides significant ongoing administrative support, instructional coherence, and leadership for its school(s). The organization facilitates information sharing among its schools (e.g., on best practices) and streamlines administrative costs.

This broad definition allows nonclassroom-based charter schools, families of charter schools (e.g., a middle and high school that serve largely the same students as they progress through their academic careers), and charters run by for-profit organizations to be counted as part of CMOs. It also includes charters belonging to networks, which are schools that share an instructional model and philosophy but are not directly managed by a central authority. (The Knowledge Is Power Program, or KIPP, is probably the best-known charter network. What started in Houston in 1994 is now a group of 66 schools, including one noncharter school, spread across 19 states and the District of Columbia.)

There are other organizations that meet the broad criteria, but most observers would still not count them as CMOs: 1) all-charter districts and 2) agencies created to serve a different or broader purpose but that also run one or more charter schools as part of that broader mission—e.g., a Conservation Corps office running schools as part of a youth-development program or a university that supports charter schools. The list of organizations in California that qualify as a CMO/network under this broad definition may be found on page 26.

More narrow definitions include only nonprofit organizations and those already operating multiple schools

Researchers studying CMOs have tended to define these entities more narrowly, including only nonprofit organizations, (thus excluding for-profit educational management organizations or EMOs) and those that have already achieved some scale in their operations. For example, the Center on Educational Governance (CEG) at the University of Southern California recently published a study on CMOs that included only organizations that have three or more schools in operation during the 2008–09 school year, with plans for further expansion. CEG's report excluded nonclassroom-based schools but did include networks such as KIPP.

A pending study of CMOs by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. has defined a CMO

even more narrowly in that it excludes networks. It defines a CMO as a nonprofit organization with central operational authority over multiple charter schools that is responsible for delivering the educational program and supervising the school leaders.

Aspire Public Schools is an example of a CMO under both the narrow and broad definitions. Headquartered in Oakland, Aspire manages 21 schools throughout California and plans to open three to four additional schools each year.

For the purposes of its study, Mathematica defines a CMO as an organization that:

- operates not-for-profit and manages public charter schools;
- has intent to expand (as demonstrated by having at least three schools open by a given year—for this study, 2007–08); and
- has a unified management team responsible for delivering the educational program and supervising the school leader.

According to the Mathematica definition, a CMO is not 1) an organization that provides only back-office support, such as accounting and payroll services; 2) a network of schools that involves voluntary affiliations but lacks central operational authority; or 3) a for-profit entity. Although Mathematica’s definition may not specifically exclude nonclassroom-based charters, no organization running a school of that type is on Mathematica’s list. The organizations in California that qualify as a CMO under this definition are listed on page 29.

Performance analyses focus on CMO charters

Given the complexities of defining a CMO, this study includes two comparison analyses using different definitions of the term. The first is based on the broad definition, which includes organizations that intend to scale, even if they have not yet opened multiple schools. The second definition of a CMO is the narrow definition used by Mathematica. Because both the broad and narrow definitions do not align with the definition used in EdSource’s two prior annual reports, indicators of the stability of results over time are not provided.

General results of test score comparisons[†] using narrow and broad definitions of CMO

	Results with Broad Definition (128 CMO Charters)	Results with Narrow Definition (59 CMO Charters)
Within Charter Comparisons—CMO Charters vs. Non-CMO Charters		
High Schools	Primary comparison: Mildly favorable for CMO charters. All-inclusive comparison: Favorable for CMO charters.	No difference between CMO charters and non-CMO charters.
Middle Schools	No difference except that CMOs score higher in 7th grade math.	No difference.
Elementary Schools	Moderately favorable for CMO charters.	Generally favorable for CMO charters.
CMO Charters vs. Noncharters		
High Schools	Favorable.	Favorable except math.
Middle Schools	Favorable.	Mildly favorable.
Elementary Schools	Little difference.	Mostly favorable.

[†] Test scores are adjusted for student demographics just as they were in the “charters vs. noncharters” section. ED SOURCE 6/09
(See pages 16–17 for an explanation.)

Both the broad and narrow analyses compare the test scores of CMO charter schools with non-CMO charter schools, and then with noncharter schools. This article presents the primary comparison, in which nonclassroom-based charters and all Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM) and Special Education schools are excluded. When relevant, the all-inclusive comparison—which includes the schools excluded from the primary comparison—is also presented. For more information about the methodology and a guide to interpreting the tables below, see “The basics of the performance analyses” on page 14.

Summary of findings: Defining CMO differently yields different results

When a broad definition of CMO is used, 128 schools are included in the analysis as CMO charters. Narrowing the definition reduces the number to 59. That means that 69 charters move from the CMO category to the non-CMO category.

The table above summarizes the results of test score comparisons using the broad and narrow definitions of CMO. Two types

of comparisons are featured—CMO charters vs. non-CMO charters and CMO charters vs. noncharters. All analyses use the same statistical techniques—i.e., controlling for differences in student demographics through stepwise regression—as those used in the charter vs. noncharter test score comparisons on pages 14–23. In addition, the analyses include only schools with all the relevant test score data.

As one can see from the side-by-side comparison in the table above, the broadly defined group is generally higher-scoring at the middle and high school levels and lower-scoring at the elementary level than the narrowly defined group.

Both CMO groups perform at least as well as charters generally. The separate comparisons of these CMO groups against noncharters—particularly the one for elementary schools—illuminates the extent to which the definition of a CMO can affect conclusions about their performance.

CMOs are worthy of further study

Because both the narrow and broad groups have low-, mid-, and high-scoring schools,

more information about CMOs' resources and operations is needed to explain the reasons behind these differences in results. Perhaps most important would be looking at how differences in the instructional practices of these organizations correlate

with their performance. Beyond that, other areas of interest could include the level of motivation required to work at or attend the school, the monetary and physical assets of the organization, the governance structure, the experience level of its leadership, and the

stage of the organization's development. Like the charter movement as a whole, the CMO segment is an interesting and complex population to explore, and answers to these research questions could bear fruit for charters and noncharters alike.

Test score analyses using a broad definition of CMO

Altogether, 33 organizations and 128 schools are included in the analyses using the broad definition of a CMO/network described on page 24. The table on the right lists the organizations and the number of schools from each that are included in the test score analysis.

Results of test score comparisons are expressed in terms of statistical significance and effect size

Similar to the tables on pages 19-23, the tables of test score comparisons that come next use the following convention for indicating various levels of statistical significance (or a lack thereof):

not significant Difference is not significant at .10 level. (More than 10% chance that the difference is due to random variation.)

* Significant at .10 level. (10% chance.)

** Significant at .05 level. (5% chance.)

*** Significant at .01 level. (1% chance.)

**** Significant at .001 level. (0.1% chance.)

The guidelines for interpreting effect sizes are as follows:

- about 0.20 = small
- about 0.50 = moderate
- about 0.80 = large

Organizations in this analysis that fit the broad definition of CMO[†]

CMO/EMO/Network	Number of Schools			
	Elementary	Middle	High	Total
Albert Einstein Academies	1	1	0	2
Alliance For College-Ready Public Schools	0	1	6	7
American Indian Public Charter School	0	1	1	2
Aspire Public Schools	12	3	1	16
Bright Star Schools	0	1	1	2
California Montessori Project Charter School Network	4	0	0	4
California Virtual Academies	8	0	0	8
Camino Nuevo Charter Academy	1	0	1	2
Celerity Educational Group	3	0	0	3
CHIME Institute	1	1	0	2
Connections Academy	1	0	1	2
Crescendo Schools	3	0	0	3
Downtown College Preparatory	0	0	1	1
EdisonLearning, Inc.	3	1	0	4
Education for Change	2	0	0	2
Envision Schools	0	0	3	3
Green Dot Public Schools	0	0	10	10
High Tech High Communities	0	2	3	5
Inner City Education Foundation Public Schools	1	2	2	5
Innovative Education Management, Inc.	2	0	2	4
King/Chavez Public Schools	3	1	0	4
Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP)	0	8	0	8
Leadership Public Schools	0	0	2	2
Magnolia Foundation	0	2	0	2
New City Public Schools	1	0	0	1
Oakland Charter Academies	0	1	0	1
Opportunities for Learning	0	0	4	4
Options for Youth	0	0	5	5
Partnership to Uplift Communities (PUC) Schools	1	4	2	7
Semillas Sociedad Civil	1	0	0	1
St. HOPE Public Schools	1	0	1	2
The Accelerated School	2	0	1	3
Willow Education	0	1	0	1
Total	51	30	47	128

[†] Rocketship Education meets the broader definition but does not have any schools with the requisite test score data.

CMO/network charters vs. non-CMO charters
Charter high schools under broadly defined CMOs/
networks modestly outscore other charter high schools

When CMO and non-CMO charter high schools are compared using a broad definition of CMO/network, the results mildly favor the CMO/network charters, with some results not statistically significant, some results significant at only the 0.1 level, and effect sizes generally small.

A comparison involving all charter high schools is not displayed in the table below. However, it is worth discussing because the broadly defined CMO group includes some nonclassroom-based schools. Specifically, 12 nonclassroom-based and/or ASAM schools are in the CMO group, and 83 such schools are in the non-CMO group. This all-inclusive comparison yields more positive results for

CMO charters—for example, the CMO charters outscore non-CMO charters by a statistically significant 23 API points (versus 16 points in the primary comparison, which is not statistically significant).

At the middle school level, charter schools under broadly defined CMOs perform about the same as non-CMO charter schools

The only significant difference between broadly defined CMO charter middle schools and non-CMO charters is in grade 7 math. CMO charters score more than 24 scale score points higher, which is statistically significant at the .001 level and large in terms of effect size (about 0.75). With 7th grade math being an important factor in students' ability to excel in higher-level math courses and thereby gain admission to college, further

research into CMO charter middle schools' approaches to the subject could be useful.

When a broad definition of CMO is used, CMO elementary charters generally outscore non-CMO elementary charters

The broadly defined CMO charter elementary schools outscore their non-CMO counterparts on schoolwide measures of API and AYP. For example, CMO charter elementary schools score nearly 25 points higher on the API, after adjusting for differences in student demographics.

The all-inclusive comparison is not displayed below, but it yields results that are very similar to those of the primary comparison. It includes 11 nonclassroom-based schools in the CMO group, and 26 nonclassroom-based schools and one ASAM school in the non-CMO group.

Within Charter Comparison—CMO Charters (broad definition) vs. Non-CMO Charters

High Schools Only—Primary Comparison (excludes nonclassroom-based charters and all ASAM schools)			
2008 Outcome Measure	Average Score for Non-CMO Charters (88 schools)	CMO Test Score Differential, After Adjusting for Student Demographics (35 schools)	Effect Size
Growth 2008 API	685.9	+16.0 API points <small>not significant</small>	+0.15
English			
AYP English —percent proficient or above (CAHSEE, Grade 10)	48.0%	+4.9 percentage points*	+0.22
CAHSEE English, Grade 10 —mean scale score	377.0	+4.9 scale score points*	+0.26
CST English, Grade 10 —mean scale score	333.8	+8.7 scale score points*	+0.27
Math			
AYP Math —percent proficient or above (CAHSEE, Grade 10)	39.9%	+7.3 percentage points**	+0.33
CAHSEE Math, Grade 10 —mean scale score	375.1	+3.5 scale score points <small>not significant</small>	+0.18
Strength of Findings (generalized for both comparisons)			
Consistency: <i>High</i> —The effect sizes are all small, and they all favor charter high schools that are part of CMOs.			

Elementary Schools Only—Primary Comparison (excludes nonclassroom-based charters and all ASAM schools)			
2008 Outcome Measure	Average Score for Non-CMO charters (186 schools)	CMO Test Score Differential, After Adjusting for Student Demographics (40 schools)	Effect Size
Growth 2008 API	785.2	+24.6 API points**	+0.30
English			
AYP English —percent proficient or above (CST, all tested grades)	52.1%	+4.9 percentage points**	+0.27
CST English, Grade 4 —mean scale score	364.1	+0.2 scale score points <small>not significant</small>	+0.01
Math			
AYP Math —percent proficient or above (CST, all tested grades)	55.3%	+9.8 percentage points***	+0.55
CST Math, Grade 4 —mean scale score	370.2	+8.0 scale score points <small>not significant</small>	+0.22
Strength of Findings (generalized for both comparisons)			
Consistency: <i>Moderate</i> —Although CMO charters outscore non-CMO charters on all measures, some findings are not statistically significant and the effect sizes vary considerably.			

DATA: CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (CDE)

EDSOURCE 6/09

CMO/network charters vs. noncharters

In addition to comparing this broad group of CMO charters to other charters, this study compares the same CMO charters with non-charter public schools. That comparison, at the high school level, favors CMO charters

over noncharters, with effect sizes in the small to moderate range.

At the middle school level, CMO charters score higher on all indicators. All results are highly significant and effect sizes are moderate.

Among elementary schools, little difference is found between CMO charters and noncharters.

Only the primary comparison is shown below because the CMO group has few nonclassroom-based schools and no ASAM schools.

CMO Charters (using broad definition) vs. Noncharters

(All comparisons displayed below exclude nonclassroom-based charters and all ASAM schools.†)

2008 Outcome Measure	Average Score for Noncharters	CMO Test Score Differential, After Adjusting for Student Demographics	Effect Size
High Schools Only (1,045 noncharters; 35 CMO charters)			
Growth 2008 API	715.4	+41.8 API points****	+0.38
English			
AYP English —percent proficient or above (CAHSEE, Grade 10)	54.6%	+6.1 percentage points****	+0.33
CAHSEE English, Grade 10 —mean scale score	380.2	+6.6 scale score points****	+0.33
CST English, Grade 10 —mean scale score	338.3	+11.7 scale score points****	+0.37
Math			
AYP Math —percent proficient or above (CAHSEE, Grade 10)	52.3%	+4.4 percentage points**	+0.23
CAHSEE Math, Grade 10 —mean scale score	383.1	+5.6 scale score points****	+0.27
Middle Schools Only (1,242 noncharters; 30 CMO charters)			
Growth 2008 API	746.0	+45.4 API points****	+0.49
English			
AYP English —percent proficient or above (CST, all tested grades)	48.1%	+5.9 percentage points****	+0.33
CST English, Grade 7 —mean scale score	348.6	+14.6 scale score points****	+0.52
Math			
AYP Math —percent proficient or above (CST, all tested grades)	42.1%	+7.8 percentage points****	+0.43
CST Math, Grade 7 —mean scale score	339.5	+19.1 scale score points****	+0.67
Elementary Schools Only (5,082 noncharters; 40 CMO charters)			
Growth 2008 API	785.5	+5.1 API points <small>not significant</small>	+0.06
English			
AYP English —percent proficient or above (CST, all tested grades)	49.0%	+0.9 percentage points <small>not significant</small>	+0.05
CST English, Grade 4 —mean scale score	358.1	-3.0 scale score points <small>not significant</small>	-0.11
Math			
AYP Math —percent proficient or above (CST, all tested grades)	58.0%	+3.2 percentage points*	+0.20
CST Math, Grade 4 —mean scale score	374.3	-0.5 scale score points <small>not significant</small>	-0.01
Strength of Findings			
Consistency: <i>High</i> at the middle and high school levels. None at the elementary level.			

DATA: CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (CDE)

EdSource 6/09

†Exclusions from the noncharter segment of high schools outnumber exclusions from the charter segment by a factor of 18 to 1. Among the CMO charter high schools, there were only two ASAM high schools to exclude. In addition, 10 nonclassroom-based charter high schools were excluded. These 12 charter high schools that were excluded contrast with 218 noncharter high schools that were excluded. The numbers of elementary and middle schools that were excluded from either segment are small.

Test score analyses using a narrow definition of CMO

For this analysis, 10 organizations are considered CMOs under the narrow definition. Three of these organizations met Mathematica’s three-schools rule; but in each case, at least one of its schools did not have all the relevant test score measures. Thus, three CMOs have only two schools in the analysis. The 10 organizations meeting the narrow definition, and the number of schools that each has in the analysis, are displayed in the table on the right.

Organizations in this analysis that fit the narrow definition of CMO

CMO	Number of Schools in the Analysis			
	Elementary	Middle	High	Total
Alliance for College-Ready Public Schools	0	1	6	7
Aspire Public Schools	12	3	1	16
Education for Change	2	0	0	2
Envision Schools	0	0	3	3
Green Dot Public Schools	0	0	10	10
High Tech High	0	2	3	5
Inner City Education Foundation	1	2	2	5
Leadership Public Schools	0	0	2	2
Partnerships to Uplift Communities	1	4	2	7
St. HOPE Public Schools†	1	0	1	2
Total	17	12	30	59

† St. HOPE has a third school outside of California.

CMO charters vs. non-CMO charters

Using the narrow definition of CMOs, virtually no statistically significant test-score difference is found between CMO and non-CMO charters at the middle and high school levels. (The data from these analyses are not displayed below but are available at: www.edsource.org/pub_CharterPerf6-09.html)

By contrast, charter elementary schools run by CMOs (as defined narrowly) outscore

other charter elementary schools on most measures. For example, in the primary comparison (excluding nonclassroom-based and ASAM schools), the average CMO charter scores nearly 45 points higher on the API than the average non-CMO charter. Although 12 of the 17 CMO charters in this comparison are managed by Aspire Public Schools, it appears that the group’s results are not driven purely by schools run by that

organization: all but one of the 17 CMO schools score well on the API when compared with demographically similar charter and noncharter schools.

The all-inclusive comparison for elementary schools is not displayed below. The results are even better for CMO charters, though by a small margin. This comparison includes 1 ASAM school and 37 nonclassroom-based schools in the non-CMO group.

Within Charter Comparison—CMO Charters (narrow definition) vs. Non-CMO Charters

Elementary Schools Only (excludes nonclassroom-based charters and all ASAM schools)			
2008 Outcome Measure	Average Score for Non-CMO Charters (209 schools)	CMO Test Score Differential, After Adjusting for Student Demographics (17 schools)	Effect Size
Growth 2008 API	779.9	+44.9 API points***	+0.54
English			
AYP English —percent proficient or above (CST, all tested grades)	50.7%	+8.7 percentage points***	+0.47
CST English, Grade 4 —mean scale score	362.0	+0.6 scale score points ^{not significant}	+0.02
Math			
AYP Math —percent proficient or above (CST, all tested grades)	54.5%	+16.5 percentage points****	+0.92
CST Math, Grade 4 —mean scale score	368.5	+17.1 scale score points**	+0.47
Strength of Findings			
Consistency: <i>Moderate</i> —The score differential on all measures favors charters that are part of CMOs, but the effect sizes vary and the insignificant difference on the CST grade 4 English test is out of line with other results.			

DATA: CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (CDE)

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CMO charters vs. noncharters

After adjusting for differences in student demographics, CMO charters (narrowly defined) generally outscore noncharter schools. But on some measures—and particularly for middle schools—there is no

statistically significant difference. On one high school measure, the percent of 10th graders scoring proficient or above on the CAHSEE math test (AYP math), noncharters score higher. Effect sizes range from negligible to large.

Only the primary comparisons are shown below because the CMO charters fitting the narrow definition are all classroom-based and generally not comparable to ASAM and Special Education schools in the populations they serve. ■

CMO Charters (using narrow definition) vs. Noncharters

(All comparisons displayed below exclude nonclassroom-based charters and all ASAM and Special Education schools.†)

2008 Outcome Measure	Average Score for Noncharters	Charter Test Score Differential, After Adjusting for Student Demographics	Effect Size
High Schools Only (1,045 noncharters; 30 CMO charters)			
Growth 2008 API	715.4	+28.0 API points****	+0.25
English			
AYP English —percent proficient or above (CAHSEE, Grade 10)	54.6%	+3.1 percentage points*	+0.17
CAHSEE English, Grade 10 —mean scale score	380.2	+3.9 scale score points***	+0.19
CST English, Grade 10 —mean scale score	338.3	+7.3 scale score points***	+0.23
Math			
AYP Math —percent proficient or above (CAHSEE, Grade 10)	52.3%	-2.0 percentage points*	-0.11
CAHSEE Math, Grade 10 —mean scale score	383.1	+1.1 scale score points ^{not significant}	+0.05
Middle Schools Only (1,242 noncharters; 12 CMO charters)			
Growth 2008 API	746.0	+26.6 API points**	+0.29
English			
AYP English —percent proficient or above (CST, all tested grades)	48.1%	+0.6 percentage points ^{not significant}	+0.04
CST English, Grade 7 —mean scale score	348.6	+4.6 scale score points ^{not significant}	+0.16
Math			
AYP Math —percent proficient or above (CST, all tested grades)	42.1%	+6.0 percentage points ^{not significant}	+0.33
CST Math, Grade 7 —mean scale score	339.5	+10.5 scale score points**	+0.37
Elementary Schools Only (5,082 noncharters; 17 CMO charters)			
Growth 2008 API	785.5	+31.8 API points****	+0.40
English			
AYP English —percent proficient or above (CST, all tested grades)	49.0%	+4.9 percentage points**	+0.28
CST English, Grade 4 —mean scale score	358.1	1.7 scale score points ^{not significant}	-0.06
Math			
AYP Math —percent proficient or above (CST, all tested grades)	58.0%	+11.3 percentage points****	+0.71
CST Math, Grade 4 —mean scale score	374.3	+10.7 scale score points**	+0.32
Strength of Findings			
Consistency: <i>Moderate</i> —The results favor CMO charters overall, but there are exceptions and effect sizes range widely.			

DATA: CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (CDE)

EDSOURCE 6/09

†Exclusions were from the noncharter segment only.

—by Brian Edwards and Heather Barondess
Eric Crane led the test-score analysis.



California charters could benefit from a federal infusion of dollars

During the 2008 presidential campaign, few issues drew the endorsement of both President Barack Obama and Senator John McCain. But both candidates and their respective political parties did voice their commitment to innovation and choice in the nation's public schools and promoted charter schools as an approach that could improve public education.

During the campaign, Obama's education platform called for the expansion of successful charter schools. He also said he wanted to improve charter accountability, intervene in struggling charter schools, and close down chronically underperforming ones. As president, he reiterated his position at his first press conference on education at the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce's Annual Legislative Conference on March 10, 2009.

Just months into his presidency, Obama has acted upon his campaign promises about charter schools through two policymaking avenues: including charter schools as part of the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (stimulus package) and recommending increased funding for the federal Charter Schools Program grant in his 2010 budget proposal. Both of these actions have the potential to significantly affect the charter school landscape in California, the state with the most charter schools.

The American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) supports schools and encourages reform

The federal stimulus package includes more than \$100 billion in new education funding to be spent during two years, almost doubling the annual allocation of funds to the U.S. Department of Education (ED). In California, most of these funds will be used to backfill cuts made due to the state budget crisis.

Charters get their share of stabilization funds

California is slated to receive approximately \$8 billion in stimulus funds overall, much of which will be distributed to local education agencies (LEAs) through the state's existing funding formulas. In

California, some charter schools function as their own LEAs (known as direct-funded charter schools) and are eligible to receive stimulus funding directly. Other charter schools are locally funded, receiving their funding through their local school district. However, in both cases, the state's funding formula treats charter schools differently from traditional public schools (see page 11).

In order to ensure that direct-funded charter schools get their fair share of federal stimulus funding, the ED explicitly called upon the state education agencies (in California, the California Department of Education) to adjust their allocations in order to equitably distribute funding to charter schools based on the best available data on how many children the school serves. At this writing, it is unclear how CDE will carry out this charge.

Federal support for innovation could particularly help charters

The ARRA also introduces new sources of competitive grant funding that charter schools may be eligible to receive. The stimulus package includes a \$650 million Innovation Fund, with the goal of supporting successful models or programs that are making gains to close the achievement gap. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and his department have discretion over the distribution of these funds, which may be in the form of direct grants to schools, LEAs, nonprofits, or partnerships of eligible entities. This definition includes direct-funded charter schools. The ED is expected to release guidance on the competitive grant process in June 2009.

Another federal source of competitive funding that has the potential to benefit charter schools is the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF). This \$200 million competitive grant program supports the

If history is any indication, California's charter movement is well positioned to benefit from an increased federal appropriation to the Charter Schools Program.

development and implementation of merit-based pay programs. State education agencies can apply for these funds, as can nonprofits and LEAs. Because many charter school teachers do not participate in collective bargaining—and might therefore be more receptive to the idea of merit-based pay—charter schools could be more likely to apply for these funds than traditional public schools.

One major policy message about charter schools is embedded in the ED's guidance regarding the distribution of stimulus funds. The first round of federal funds for education began flowing to states at the beginning of April 2009. In order to receive the second round of Stabilization Fund dollars—expected to be available at the end of September 2009—states must meet four “assurances.” These include improving teacher quality, strengthening standards and assessments, turning around low-performing schools, and enhancing data systems.

California must demonstrate its commitment to quality charter schools

As part of their assurance to work to turn around low-performing schools, states must be able to report to the federal government:

- 1) whether they have a cap restricting the number of charter schools currently operating, and
- 2) the number of charters that have closed in the past three years for academic reasons. This language suggests that federal officials are interested in state policies regarding the expansion of charter schools, as well as in ensuring the quality of existing ones.

The state's positioning vis-à-vis these assurances is somewhat unclear. California law specifies a moving cap, which boosts the number of charter schools the state will allow by 100 each year even if no new charter schools have opened. In 2008–09, the state cap is 1,250 charter schools. California has approved a total of 1,085 charter petitions and currently has 688 operating charters, so the cap does not appear to constrain the creation of new charter schools.

In 2003, the state enacted Assembly Bill (AB) 1137 as a strategy to ensure the quality of charter schools. AB 1137 set specific academic performance criteria for charter renewal. However, according to an analysis completed by EdSource in 2008, although charters have

been revoked and schools closed or not renewed, the state has yet to close a charter school because of failure to meet the AB 1137 academic performance benchmarks.

President Barack Obama's 2010 budget proposal increases funding for charter schools

The president's proposal for the 2010 federal budget further signals his commitment to charter schools as an important piece in the public education puzzle. The proposal increases funding for the federal Charter Schools Program (CSP), which supports the expansion of successful charter school models. It would also require increased state oversight aimed at monitoring and shutting down low-performing schools.

The stated goal of the CSP funds is to enhance parent and student choices among public schools and give more students the opportunity to meet challenging standards. According to the U.S. Department of Education, CSP grant funds may be used for two main purposes: 1) planning and program design of the charter school educational program, and 2) initial implementation of the charter school. However, the ED has recently limited the scope of planning and program design for which CSP funds may be used.

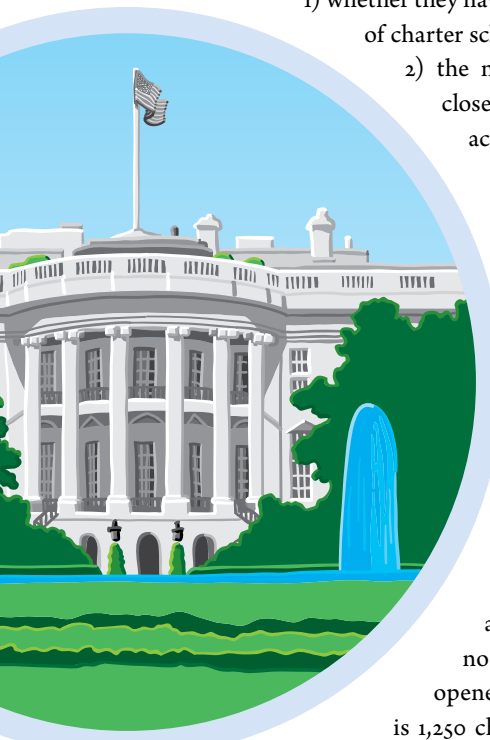
In fiscal year 2009, the federal government allocated \$216 million in charter school grant funding, \$195 million of which was for planning, start-up, and implementation grants. Obama's proposed fiscal year 2010 budget has requested \$268 million for charter schools grants, which includes a facilities incentives grant of \$12.7 million. This overall figure represents an increase of \$52 million, 24% higher than 2009. During his campaign, Obama pledged to double funding for the program.

California has received grant funding from the CSP since its inception in 1994. In June 2007, California received its most recent grant—almost \$102 million to be used over three years. Grants are awarded on a per-school basis; and in 2007–08 alone, the state made one-time planning and implementation grants of between \$250,000 and \$600,000 to 65 charter schools. California will be eligible to apply for a new federal grant in 2010.

In addition to the increase in CSP funding, the president's 2010 budget proposal includes funding for other programs that support and affirm the efforts of charter schools. The budget proposal provides funding for a new Promise Neighborhoods program, modeled after the Harlem Children's Zone—a birth-to-college effort that utilizes charter schools to provide K–12 education. The budget brief also commits to research on “promising educational innovations that focus on improving student learning and achievement.”

It is still early in the 2010 federal budget process; but if history is any indication, California's charter movement is well positioned to benefit from an increased federal appropriation to the Charter Schools Program. ■

—by Heather Baronciss



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