

Just the Facts, Ma'am: Dispelling the Myths About Charter Schools

2019 CCSA CONFERENCE

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California
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Just the Facts, Ma'am: Framing the Discussion

Despite over 25 years of charter school education in California, misconceptions about charter schools abound on such topics as district budget impact, admissions practices, transparency, equity, and student achievement.

Charter school movement veterans with decades of experience will examine the facts, just the facts, behind common myths and will equip participants with cogent responses that paint the true picture of charter schooling in our state.

The Current Educational Environment



The thorny issue lurking behind the teachers' strike: charter schools

Editorial Board
The Los Angeles Times
Jan. 26, 2019



Why does the L.A. teachers union want to limit the options for poor children?

By Editorial Board
The Washington Post
Jan. 17, 2019



Bay Area district joins others in calling for moratorium on charter school expansions

By Theresa Harrington
EdSource
Feb. 28, 2019



I'm a charter school teacher. The LAUSD strike made me realize how I'm part of the problem

By Riley McDonald Vaca
The Los Angeles Times
Jan. 23, 2019



Betsy DeVos loves charter schools. But there's little love lost in lots of places.

By Valerie Strauss
The Washington Post
Feb. 11, 2019



Democrats Are United on Teacher Strikes. But They're in a 'Gladiator Fight' Over Education.

By Dana Goldstein
The New York Times
Jan. 18, 2019

THE SACRAMENTO BEE



California to require more transparency from charter schools

By Katleen Ronayne
The Sacramento Bee
Feb. 28, 2019



Newsom fast-tracks legislation to hold charter schools to same standards as public schools

By Taryn Luna
The Los Angeles Times
Feb. 28, 2019

2019 – Recent Headlines

Charter schools were once LAUSD’s ‘incubators.’ Now, they’re the competition.

They were a model for success in the classroom, and some still are. But, in the midst of union demands over a new teachers contract, they've gone from 'incubator' to instigator.

The Los Angeles Daily News

When charters were first approved in the early 1990s, they were conceived as incubators for new teaching methods. The goal was to feed those techniques back into the traditional public-school system, but that hasn’t happened, according to Los Angeles School Board Member Scott Schmerelson.

“I am unaware of a single practice that started in a charter school and was taken to scale in an LAUSD school,” he wrote in an email to Southern California News Group.

2019 – Recent Headlines

Proposed legislation would substantially curb growth of California charter schools

EdSource

The chairman of the Assembly Education Committee and several Democratic colleagues introduced a package of bills Monday that would impose severe restrictions on the growth of charter schools.

Three bills would eliminate the ability of charters to appeal rejected applications to the county and state, place a cap on charter school growth and enable school districts to consider the financial impact when deciding whether to approve them. A fourth bill would abolish the right of a charter school that can't find a facility to locate a school in an adjoining district.



2019 – Recent Headlines

I'm a charter school teacher. The strike made me realize I'm part of the problem

The Los Angeles Times

Jan. 23, 2019

It's a confusing time to be a charter school teacher in Los Angeles. Usually, I consider myself to have everything in common with friends who teach in Los Angeles Unified. We put in the same long hours, confront the same piles of ungraded papers and share similar worries and hopes for our students.

But the teachers' strike exposed a long-simmering rift between charter and district schools, and it made me confront my own role in the problems we face in Los Angeles education.

Early charter schools in Los Angeles were approved when the district was bursting at the seams, and the new schools served as a pressure valve for a struggling, overcrowded district. But the number of students LAUSD serves is declining as families are priced out of the city, yet new charters are still being approved, as mandated by state law.

I don't believe the charter industry's mission to increase its share of the educational marketplace in Los Angeles can solve the problems we all face. In fact, the strike has made me consider how charter school expansion is harming the city. As more money is invested in new campuses, fewer resources and students are left for the many great programs still trying to gain their footing.

Charters Have Been Negatively Defined

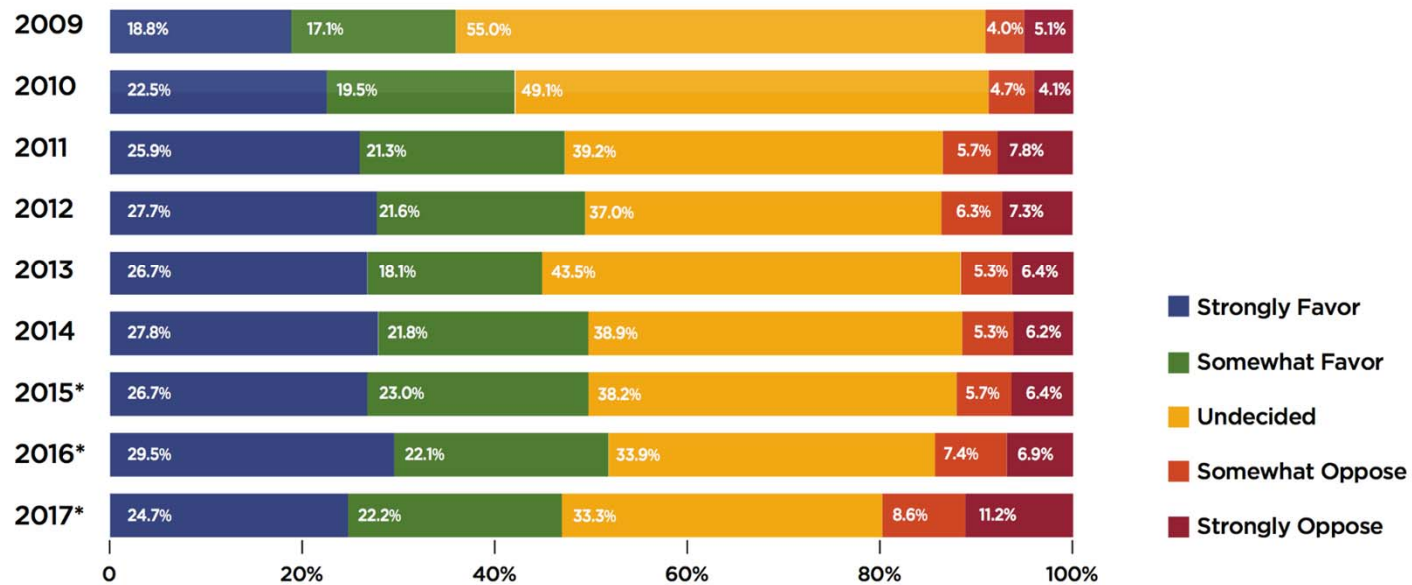
“Reform”



“Establishment”

Which Has Impacted Public Support


Favor/Undecided/Oppose 2009 - 2017



* Surveys comprised of likely voters

Leading to Negative Charter Legislation

Introduced in 2019

- **AB 1505** by Assemblymember O'Donnell violates charter schools' due process right to appeal the denial of a petition, non-renewal or revocation to the County or State.
 - **AB 1506** by Assemblymember McCarty establishes a cap on charter school growth.
 - **AB 1507** by Assemblymember Smith removes the right of a charter school to locate their facility outside their authorizing district due to temporary need or the inability to find a facility within district boundaries.
 - **AB 1508** by Assemblymember Bonta would allow authorizers to deny a charter petition based on facilities, fiscal and academic impact on the district.
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We Must Overcome These Challenges

Current Context: The current environment towards charter schools faces these three challenges, which must be overcome, and ideally pre-empted in order to change the landscape:

1. Charter schools don't work.

We must raise awareness of the current outcomes while drawing attention to the fact that most charter schools are in fact working.

2. Charter schools are bad for broader public education.

We must convince the public that charter schools are good for all students while drawing home a narrative that charters inspire the entire system to improve, rather than the current misperception that charters may benefit a few students but leave too many others behind.

3. The charter school movement is too divisive.

District and charter skirmishes, plus context where politics are placed ahead of positive outcomes for kids has helped lead to a poisoned environment that the status quo is successfully exploiting.

But in Particular, These Five Myths

○ **Draining Money**

- Privatization.
- Perceived as outsiders.
- 'Corporate agenda.'

○ **Learning Doesn't Improve**

- Poor performance.
- Reform strategies on par/behind
- Testing at the expense of learning.

○ **Weakens Teacher Rights**

- Poor working conditions/protection.
- Inexperienced teachers.
- High turnover/low retention.

○ **Creaming**

- Cherry picking the best students.
- Not serving special education kids.
- Racial isolation.
- Discipline/expulsion policies.

○ **Weakens Accountability**

- No local control.
- Governance/conflict of interest.
- Misspending of taxpayer money.

Note: All these arguments are made with 'zero sum' logic.

And Recognizing a Major Need Exists

Despite the recent funding increases towards public education, these facts remain:


1. Today, roughly 3 million of California's 6.2 million students cannot even read at grade level.

- California's fourth-graders rank 46th in the country in reading – and the majority are low-income.

2. In math, California's schools are last in the nation.

- California's fourth-graders rank 50th in the country in math – and the majority are low-income.

3. For too many students of color, California's schools aren't working.

- 8 of 9 African American students and 5 of 6 Latino students can't perform math at grade level.
 - 4 of 5 African American students and 3 of 4 Latino students can't read at grade level.
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Pre-Butting Charter Criticisms

What Critics Say:

“Charter schools span the spectrum, but many are run to make money, many exclude English language learners and children with disabilities, charters take resources away from neighborhood public schools, and many are run by corporate chains.”

- Diane Ravitch, The New York Times

As the charter school movement grows, the public is naturally concerned about the kids left in the traditional public school system. Combat that with a message that is:

- Positive sum, rather than zero sum.
- Teacher and student focused.
- Outcomes oriented.

Academic Outcomes – Jennifer Reyes, EdTec

Nationwide, students enrolled in urban public charter schools outperformed their traditional public school peers in math and reading.

- Overall gains—40 days in math and 28 days in reading.
- Student groups with gains: Hispanic English language learners, students living in poverty, black students in poverty, and students with special needs.

Source: CREDO at Stanford University

In California, many students are making stronger gains over traditional public schools in math and reading.

- Students of poverty, student in urban areas, students in elementary and middle schools, students in schools under CMOs.
- In California as a whole, charter schools make larger learning gains in reading and learn less in math.
- Seven of Top 10 high schools in California are charter schools.

Sources: CREDO at Stanford University, US News and World Report

Academic Outcomes – Jennifer Reyes, EdTec

In Los Angeles, charter schools outperform district schools by many measures.

- A typical L.A. charter school student gains 50 days of learning in reading and 79 days in math.
- 48% of L.A. charters are in the state's top quartile, compared to just 19% of district schools.

Source: CREDO at Stanford University

Charter school students are more likely to go to college.

- Students attending charter high schools are more likely to graduate from high school and enroll in college.
- Students attending charter high schools are more likely to persist in college and in their mid-20s they experience higher earnings.

Source: Sass, Zimmer, et. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management

Charter school students graduate from college at three to five times the national average for children from the lowest-income families.

- Only about nine percent of children from the lowest-income families complete college within six years.
- Charter networks profiled in the report are showing rates 32-50%, and overall data aligns with these examples.

Source: Whitmire, the 74 Million

Refuting the Academic Outcomes Myth

In Many Charter High Schools, Graduation Odds Are Slim

Education Week
February 26, 2019

At nearly 1,000 U.S. high schools, the chance of students graduating on time is no better than the flip of a coin. And charter schools—which were born to create more options for students—make up an outsized share of the number of public schools persistently graduating less than half of their students.

An analysis of federal data by the Education Week Research Center identified 935 public high schools with four-year graduation rates of less than 50 percent in 2016-17, the most recent year available. Of those, 54 percent are charter schools. That's one-quarter of all U.S. charter high schools, and nearly 3 percent of all public high schools.


These numbers aren't just a one-time blip. Many charter schools have suffered from chronically low graduation rates of below 50 percent since 2010-11.

Policy Environment – Colin Miller, CCSA

- **Statewide level/climate:**

- Governor Newsom and State Superintendent Tony Thurmond.
- A challenging political environment for charter schools.

- **Community level/climate:**

- Calls to halt the growth of charters or even outright moratoriums.
 - Greater blame towards charters for districts' woes.
 - Co-locations and Prop 39s will become increasingly difficult and will be rife with misinformation.
 - Greater likelihood for non-renewals – charter schools will need to bring their A-Game.
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Policy: Charter Schools Stand for All Students

Fulfilling Equitable Access & Funding for California's Most Vulnerable Students


- **AB 1360- Admissions and Discipline**
 - **AB 1871- Meals for Low Income Students**
 - **SB 126- Transparency and Governance**
 - **AB 2635, now AB 575- African American Achievement Gap**
 - **SB 614 (to be amended) Special Education Inclusion**
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- The legislative approach to myth-busting must show how charters are working for all students, and becoming more transparent, public and accessible.
 - Legislative advocacy in support of these goals can bust these myths.

Financial Issues – Peter Laub, EdTec

1. Privatizing, corporate profiteers skimming public funds:

- Even before the recent law was passed that forbids for-profit organizations from running charters, very few charters in California were run by for-profit entities. The non-profits that run over 99% of charters in California have been forbidden from distributing “profits” and have audited financial statements every year to ensure compliance with charter and non-profit corporate guidelines.
- In California, most of the large “corporate” CMOs began as successful single-site schools started by local educational leaders.

2. Charter schools take money from districts:

- State public school funding follows the students whether they move to another district or charter, but districts are given a one-year reprieve when students leave.
 - Local parcel taxes and bonds stay local and are rarely shared with charter students.
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Financial Issues – Peter Laub, EdTec

3. Charters and districts operate on an uneven funding playing field:

- Nationwide, charters receive on average over \$3,500 less per pupil than traditional public schools.
- In major cities, the average disparity between traditional public schools and charter schools is more than \$5,700.
- In Oakland, the funding gap is over \$7,100; in Los Angeles the gap is over \$6,600.
- Districts can tap into state and federal funds unavailable to charters (e.g. transportation, facilities) and typically receive local parcel taxes not shared with charters.

Source: University of Arkansas, 2014, 2017

4. Charters underpay teachers:

- Most charters pay teachers more competitively than their local districts.
- Comparisons of “average” salaries at districts and charters misses the fact that most districts have an older – and therefore higher paid – teacher corp. Seniority privileges dissuade most older teachers from working at charters.
- Under LCFF, charter schools can make a strong equity argument.

The Public Relations Basics – Gary Larson, LC

Tell Your Story on Your Own Terms

Owning Your Own Narrative is the Most Effective Way to Overcome these Myths

Create a Plan of Action

1. Tell your story first; be proactive and responsive
2. Tell your story your way
3. Always tell the truth; focus on the long term
4. Be responsive; get all the facts out about your program's successes
5. Define yourself before you're defined

"A government can be no better than the public opinion that sustains it."

- President Franklin D. Roosevelt



How to Overcome Major Myths

- We're too often refuting or responding. When we're responding, we're losing.
- Opposition is throwing stones from a big, brittle glass house. Outcomes need to matter.
- The best defense is a good offense. Don't wait until you're hit with a myth; tell your story on your own terms.
- The 'us vs. them' context can be overcome with positive sum messaging: "How are charter schools good for public education?"
- Choice, accountability and innovation – hallmarks of charters – are all popular with the public.
- We need to embolden our saints, win over our skeptics and neutralize the 'sinners.'

Can You Own Your Narrative?

Instead Of (Defense):		Lead With (Offense):
Charters drain money.	→	We need another great public school option.
Growing too quickly.	→	Expanding to meet demand.
We don't need a charter school.	→	Families are voting with their feet/oversubscribed.
Not doing any better.	→	Serving the most under-served kids.
Outsiders who don't know our needs.	→	Community- and teacher-led.
Lacks accountability.	→	Introduces unprecedented accountability.
Weakens the public school system.	→	Inspires all schools to improve by sharing what works.
Creaming kids.	→	Serving the most needy families.
Taking away students.	→	Providing greater opportunities.
Let's stop the growth of charters.	→	Let's empower parents to choose.

Visibility Best Practices

School Best Practices Can Include:

Academic Model/Programmatic

- Arts and athletics
- Charter-incubated programs
- Organizational goals and unique vision
- Wraparound services/programs

Milestone Announcements

- School celebrations/anniversary
- Grant awards
- Graduation rates; college acceptance rates
- Systemic, citywide impact
- School/teacher awards and recognition opportunities
- Partnerships with community organizations

Events

- Alumni day
- Charter renewals
- College signing day
- Charter family enrollment fairs
- Elected official/VIP visits
- Graduation day
- Students visiting colleges

Other Ideas

- Family engagement opportunities
- School expansion/replications
- Solving community problems – homeless/housing/food
- Personalized learning

Just the Facts Ma'am: Dispelling the Myths

Dispel These Myths through:

- Arming Your School with the Real Academic Outcomes
- Dealing with the Current Political and Policy Realities
- Overcoming Financial Concerns
- Incorporate Effective Storytelling

Questions and Answers?