



DISTRICT-SPONSORED CHARTER SCHOOLS IN NEVADA

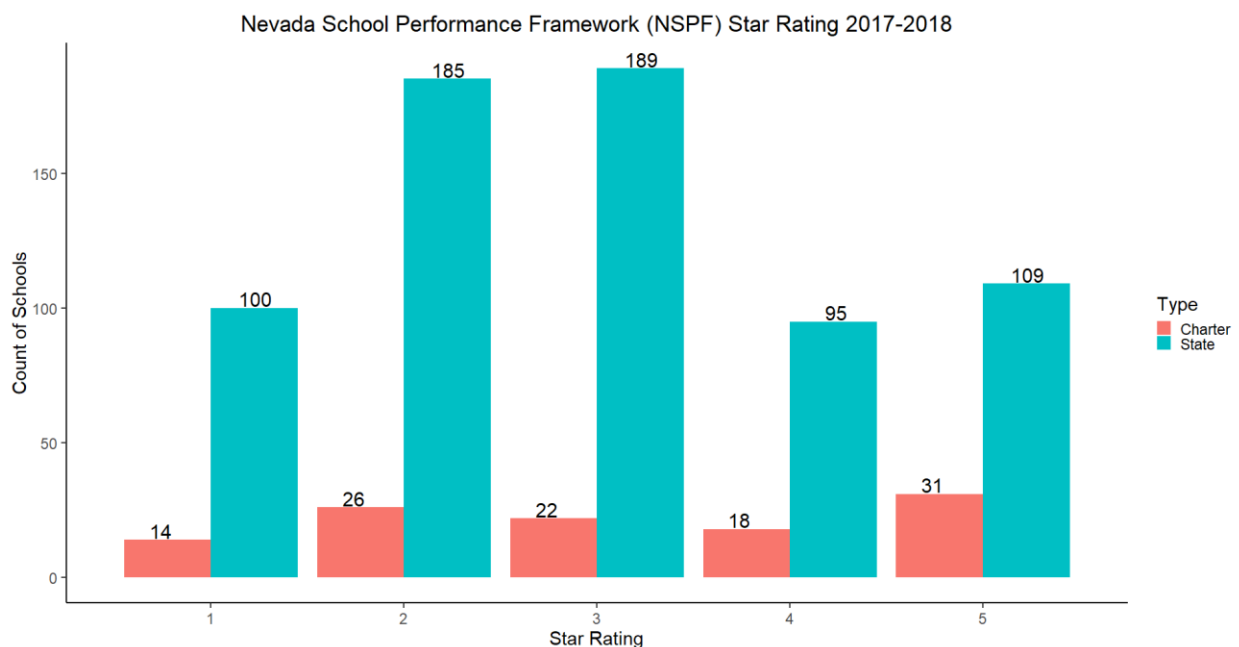
INTRODUCTION

While there are pockets of success, Nevada's educational landscape is characterized largely by dismal outcomes. Among the pockets of success are some of the State Public School Charter Authority (SPSCA)-sponsored charter schools.¹ An analysis of recent accountability data indicates that state-sponsored (SPSCA) charter schools have higher star ratings, on average, than traditional district public schools.²

Recent 2017-2018 Nevada State Performance Framework (NSPF) data reveals that charter schools had several schools on the upper bounds of the accountability system. As Figure 1 shows, 31 charter schools earned a 5-star rating (on NSPF) and 18 schools earned a 4-star rating, accounting for 44 percent of all charter schools. Conversely, only 30 percent of traditional public schools earned either a 4- or 5-star rating.

However, there is significant variation among charter schools. Specifically, virtual state-sponsored charter schools and district-sponsored charter schools, as a group, are among the lowest performing schools in the Silver State.³ This policy brief provides an overview of the performance of district-sponsored charter schools in the state's two largest urban school districts, the Clark County School District (CCSD) and Washoe County School District (WCSD).

Figure 1. Distribution of Traditional and Charter Public Schools, 2017-2018



BACKGROUND

Nevada's charter schools are public schools of choice operated by independent entities with their own governing boards. Charter schools receive funding through the Nevada Plan. Because charter schools do not have access to local tax revenue, the entire basic support guarantee is funded by the State. The allocation is based on the per-pupil funding rate of revenues inside the Nevada Plan and taxes outside the Nevada Plan in the county where each pupil resides, minus a charter school sponsorship fee (NRS 387.124). For some charter schools, all pupils reside in one county and there is a single funding rate per pupil. For other charter schools, students reside in multiple counties and generate multiple funding rates.⁴

Charter schools operate under a model of greater independence, flexibility, and control over curriculum, staffing, budget, and operations than traditional public schools. In exchange, charter schools are subjected to increased accountability for their performance.⁵ However, to operate, charter schools need a sponsor, who must approve the application in Nevada. The sponsor plays a crucial role in ensuring accountability and is responsible for evaluating and approving charter schools, monitoring performance, and determining whether to renew or revoke/terminate the charter. The formation process is different for regular charter schools and achievement district charter schools.

Traditional Charter Schools: To create a new traditional charter school, interested parties must establish a committee to form a charter school and must submit an application to a sponsor. Three entities are eligible to sponsor traditional charter schools: the State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA); school districts; and a college or university within in the Nevada System of Higher Education. Currently, only the SPCSA and school districts sponsor charter schools. The SPCSA can sponsor schools anywhere in the State while school districts can only sponsor schools within their boundaries or through online schools. CCSD currently has twelve district-sponsored charter schools; Washoe County School District has ten district-sponsored charter schools; and Carson City has one (see Table 1). Currently, school districts have a moratorium on sponsoring additional charter schools.

Achievement Charter Schools: In 2015, Nevada created the Achievement School District (ASD) to convert low performing schools into achievement charter schools. Operators for these schools are selected through a request for proposals process.

Table 1. District-sponsored Charter Schools in Nevada, 2017-2018

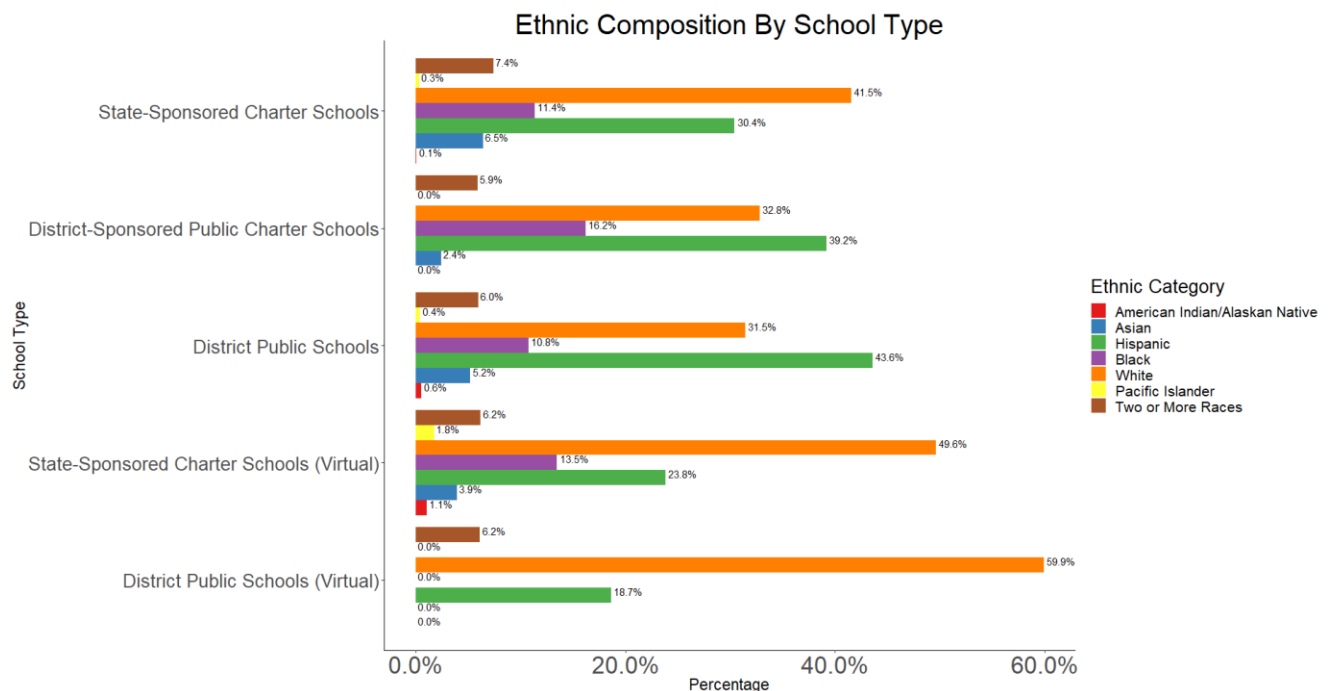
County	Name	Star Rating 2017-2018	Enrollment 2017-2018
Carson City	Carson Montessori Charter	★★	284
Clark	100 Academy Elementary	★	365
Clark	100 Academy Middle School	★★	140
Clark	Delta Academy	★	445
Clark	Explore Knowledge Elementary	★★★★★	476
Clark	Explore Knowledge Academy	★★	302
Clark	Innovations Charter	★★	345
Clark	Innovations International Elementary	★★	566
Clark	Odyssey Charter Elementary	★★	304
Clark	Odyssey Charter High School	★★	1,365
Clark	Odyssey Charter Middle School	★★★★★	565
Clark	Rainbow Dreams Academy Middle	★★	80
Clark	Rainbow Dreams Academy Elementary	★	272
Washoe	Academy for Career Education Charter	★★★★	184
Washoe	Bailey Charter School	★★	269
Washoe	Coral Academy of Science Charter Elementary	★★★★	493
Washoe	Coral Academy of Science Charter Middle School	★★★★★	555
Washoe	Coral Academy of Science Charter High School	★★★★★	254
Washoe	enCompass Academy Charter High School	★	85
Washoe	High Desert Montessori Charter	★★	411
Washoe	ICDA Charter High School	★	172
Washoe	Mariposa Academy	★★	214
Washoe	Sierra Nevada Academy Charter School	★★	358

Source: Nevada Report Card. 2018. <http://nevadareportcard.com/di/>

DEMOGRAPHICS

In the 2017-2018 school year, Nevada's charter schools served 45,919 students, representing 9.4 percent of Nevada's total public school enrollment. District-sponsored charter schools serve higher percentages of African-American students than traditional public schools (see Figure 2). The African-American student population at district-sponsored charter schools is higher than that at traditional public schools. At district-sponsored charter schools, 16.2 percent of students are African-American, compared to 10.8 percent at traditional district schools. In the Silver State, 67.2 in district-sponsored charter schools are students of color, compared to 68.5 percent of all students in traditional public schools.

Figure 2: Ethnic Composition (School Demographics), By School Type, 2017- 2018

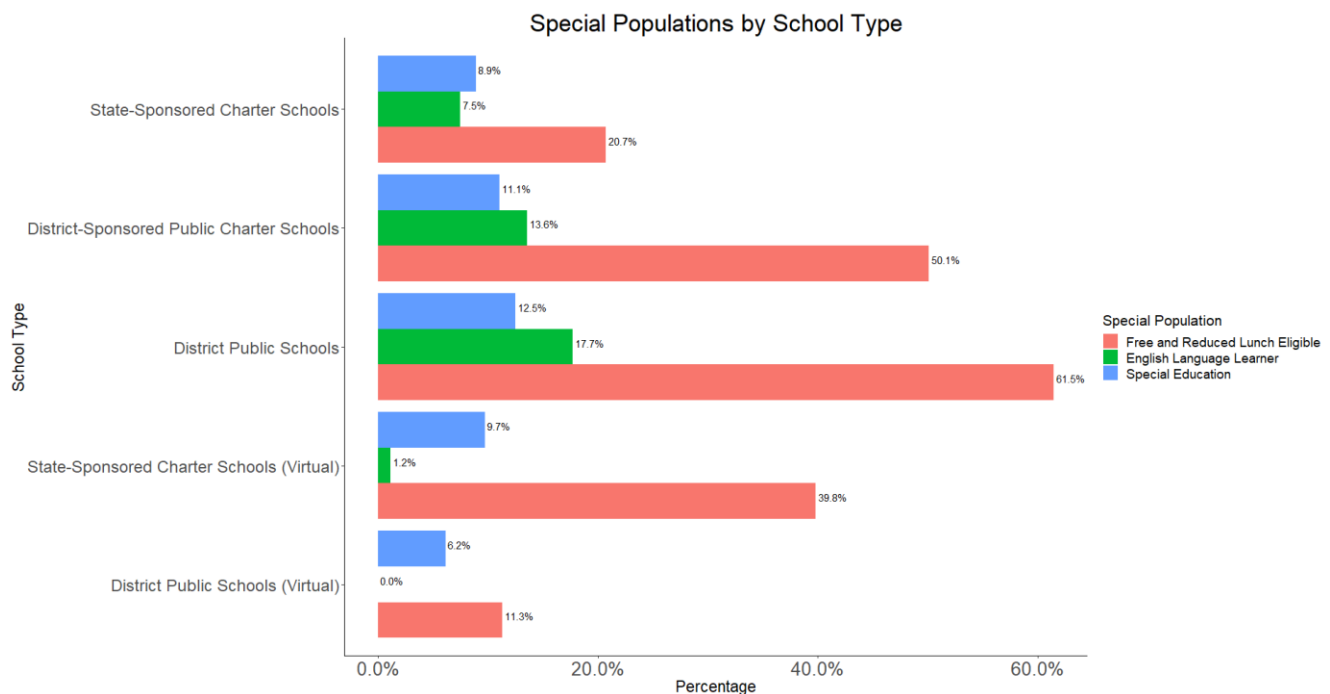


Source: Nevada Report Card. 2018. <http://nevadareportcard.com/di/>

Special Populations

Similarly to traditional public schools, district-sponsored charter schools also serve special populations (under-resourced students). Across the Silver State, more than half of students (50.1 percent) at district-sponsored charter schools qualify for Free-and-Reduced Price lunch (FRL), while 61.5 percent of students in traditional public schools qualify for Free-and-Reduced Price lunch (FRL) (see Figure 3). Approximately 13.6 percent of students at district-sponsored charter schools are classified as English Language Learners (ELLs), while 17.7 percent of students at traditional public schools are classified as ELLs. And 11.1 percent of students at district-sponsored charter schools have Individual Education Programs (IEPs) and qualify for special education services, while 12.5 percent of students at traditional public schools have IEPs.

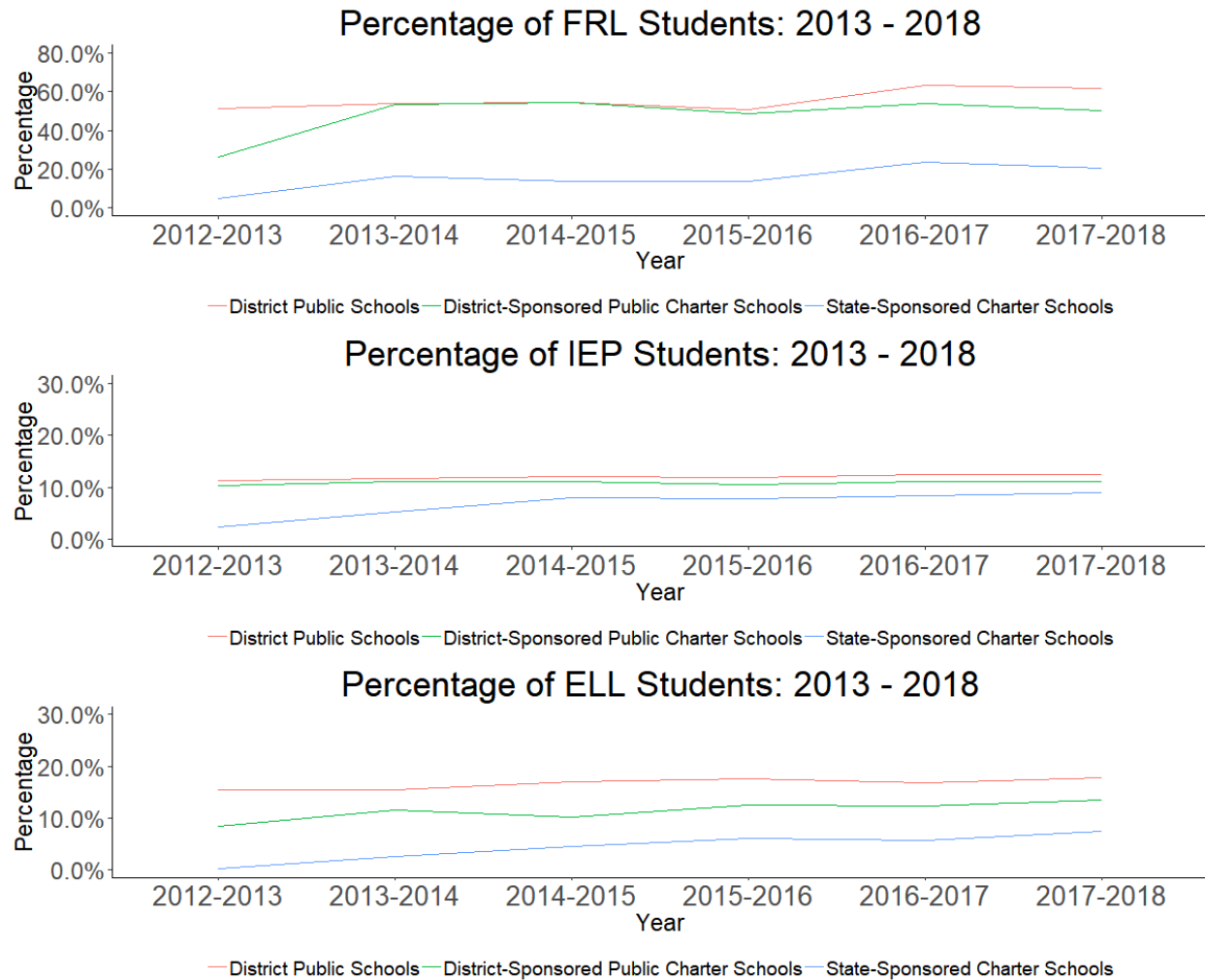
Figure 3: Special Populations, By School Type, 2017-2018



Source: Nevada Report Card. 2018. <http://nevadareportcard.com/di/>

Figure 4 presents data on the enrollment of FRL, IEP, and ELL students over time in traditional public schools, district-sponsored charter schools, and SPSCA schools.

Figure 4: Special Populations, By School Type, Over Time, 2013-2018



Source: Nevada Report Card. 2018. <http://nevadareportcard.com/di/>

Table 2 provides a summary of the demographic composition and percentage of special populations that are served by the district-sponsored charter schools in Nevada. In some cases, district-sponsored charter schools serve more diverse populations than their district. For example, in the Clark County School District, the African American student population accounts for approximately 14.1 percent of total enrollment. In eight of the 12 CCSD district-sponsored charter schools, the percentage of African American students enrolled exceeds the district average. For example, at Rainbow Dreams Academy Elementary School, 78.3 percent of the enrolled students are African American.

Table 2. Summary of Demographic Composition and Other Information, by School, 2017-2018

County	Name	Star Rating 2017-2018	Enrollment	% Asian	% Latino	% African American	% White	% Two or More Races	% IEP	% ELL	% PRL	Notes
Carson	Carson Montessori Charter	2	284	4.2	13.7	.	74.3	6.0	10.2	.	17.3	
Clark	100 Academy Elementary School	1	365	.	18.1	71.8	3.0	5.8	6.3	8.2	100.0	Rising Star 2016, 2018
Clark	100 Academy Middle School	2	140	.	21.4	72.1	.	.	.	7.9	100.0	Rising Star 2016
Clark	Delta Academy	1	445	.	32.1	29.7	30.6	4.9	17.5	9.0	55.7	Rising Star 2016, 2017, 2018
Clark	Explore Knowledge Elementary	5	476	4.8	39.3	6.5	36.1	10.5	7.6	11.6	23.5	
Clark	Explore Knowledge Secondary	2	302	.	37.4	4.6	43.1	9.3	14.2	6.0	.	
Clark	Innovations Charter Secondary	2	345	.	67.8	16.8	10.1	.	20.0	31.9	67.3	Rising Star 2017
Clark	Innovations International Elementary	2	566	.	65.4	16.8	10.1	5.0	11.3	38.7	76.7	Rising Star 2017, Victory
Clark	Odyssey Charter Elementary	2	304	.	31.6	15.1	38.5	9.5	9.9	8.9	35.9	
Clark	Odyssey Charter High School	2	1,365	3.0	40.5	9.6	39.1	6.2	11.1	7.9	28.4	Rising Star 2017
Clark	Odyssey Charter Middle School	5	565	2.5	36.5	13.3	35.8	10.6	13.1	7.1	99.7	
Clark	Rainbow Dream Academy Middle	2	80	.	-	78.8	100.0	
Clark	Rainbow Dreams Academy Elementary	1	272	.	9.9	78.3	.	9.9	.	.	100.0	Rising Star 2018
Washoe	Academy for Career Education Charter High School	4	184	.	37.0	.	54.9	.	16.3	8.7	12.0	
Washoe	Bailey Charter Elementary School	2	269	.	77.7	4.1	8.9	.	11.2	46.8	100.0	Victory
Washoe	Coral Academy of Science Charter Elementary	4	493	14.2	28.2	3.0	44.0	8.1	4.3	10.1	12.4	
Washoe	Coral Academy of Science Charter Middle	5	555	13.7	34.8	3.2	40.9	5.8	4.7	9.9	14.8	
Washoe	Coral Academy of Science Charter High School	5	254	17.3	32.3	.	39.4	7.9	3.9	7.5	14.2	
Washoe	enCompass Academy Charter High School	1	85	.	56.5	.	40.0	.	27.1	11.8	48.2	Rising Star 2018
Washoe	High Desert Montessori Charter	2	411	2.7	29.4	.	60.1	5.1	13.6	7.8	14.1	
Washoe	ICDA Charter High School	1	172	.	36.1	.	51.2	6.4	7.6	5.8	25.0	Rising Star 2017, 2018
Washoe	Mariposa Academy Elementary	2	214	.	93.9	.	.	.	12.6	53.3	100.0	Zoom
Washoe	Sierra Nevada Academy Charter School	2	358	4.5	28.8	.	58.7	5.0	14.8	7.5	43.3	

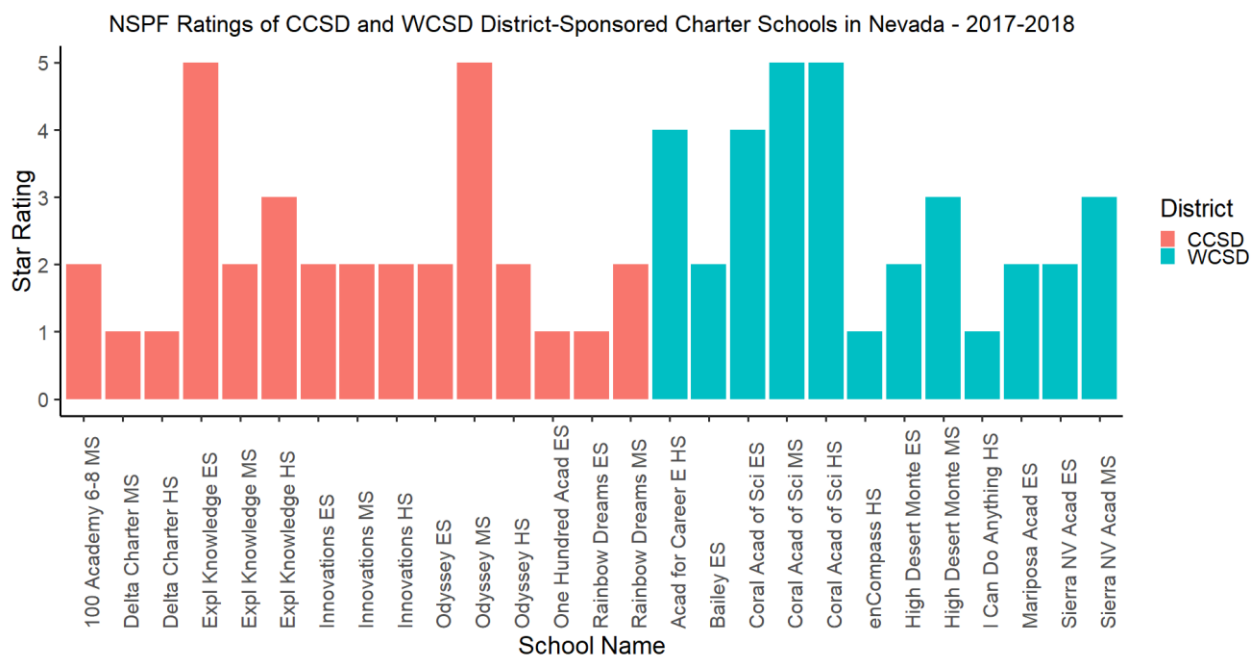
Source: Nevada Report Card. 2018. <http://nevadareportcard.com/di/>

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA

There is tremendous variation in performance among district-sponsored charter schools. However, several of the Silver State's district-sponsored charter schools are among the state's worst performing schools. In 2017-2018, several district-sponsored charter schools were included in the Nevada Department of Education's Rising Stars list, which makes the schools eligible for additional support and interventions. Rising Stars Schools must meet one of the following criteria: it is in the lowest 5 percent of schools based on their Index Score on the NSPF; it received a 1-star rating on the NSPF; and, if a high school, it has a graduation rate below 67 percent. Three CCSD-sponsored charter schools were included in the 2018 Rising Stars Schools list: 100 Academy Elementary, Delta Academy, Rainbow Dreams Academy Elementary. Three WCSD-sponsored charter schools made the list as well: enCompass Academy Charter High School, and I Can Do Anything (ICDA) Charter High School.⁶

Figure 5 presents data from the state's accountability system – the 2017-2018 Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF) star rating – for district-sponsored charter schools in both Clark County and Washoe County.⁷

Figure 5: NSPF Ratings of CCSD and WCSD District-Sponsored Charter Schools, 2017-2018



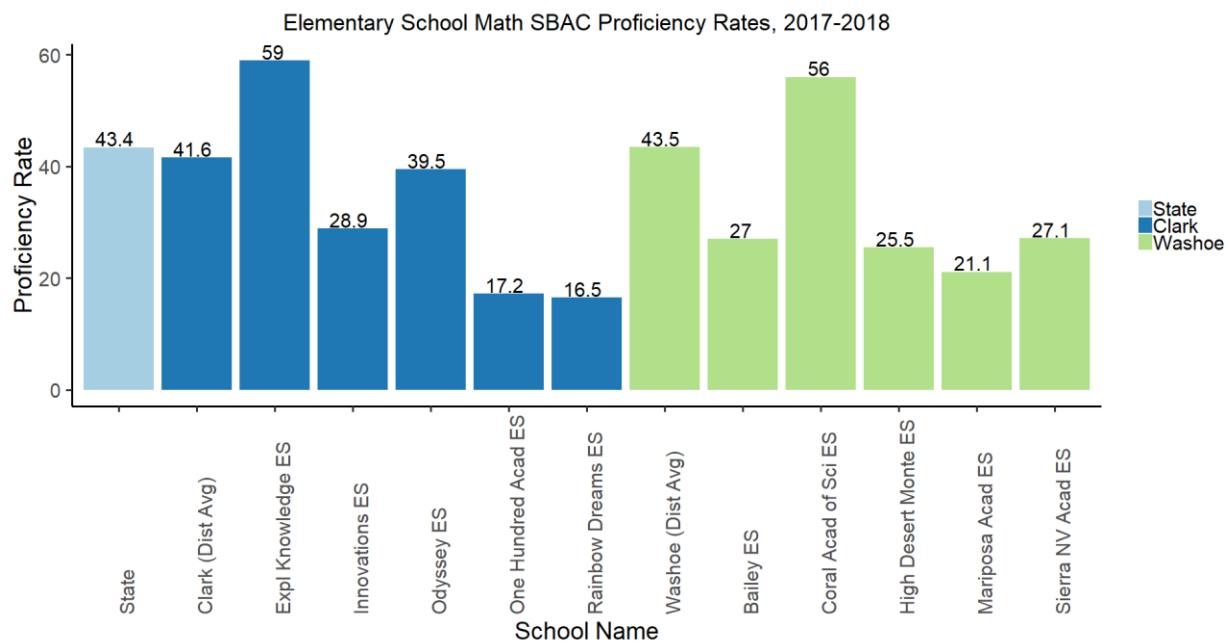
Source: Nevada Report Card. 2018. <http://nevadareportcard.com/di/>

Elementary School Proficiency Data

Math

On average, district-sponsored charter elementary schools also reveal dismal academic performance. Figure 6 presents data on Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) proficiency rates in math. The SBAC assessment is one Nevada's primary tools for measuring student progress in grades 3-8 and results are included in the state accountability framework (NSPF). As the data reveals, four of the CCSD district-sponsored charter elementary schools have SBAC proficiency rates in math that are lower than the state and district averages; similarly, four of WCSD district-sponsored charter schools have SBAC proficiency rates in math that are lower than the state and district averages. These eight district-sponsored charter schools had SBAC math proficiency rates lower than 40 percent.

Figure 6. Elementary School Math SBAC Proficiency Rates, 2017-2018

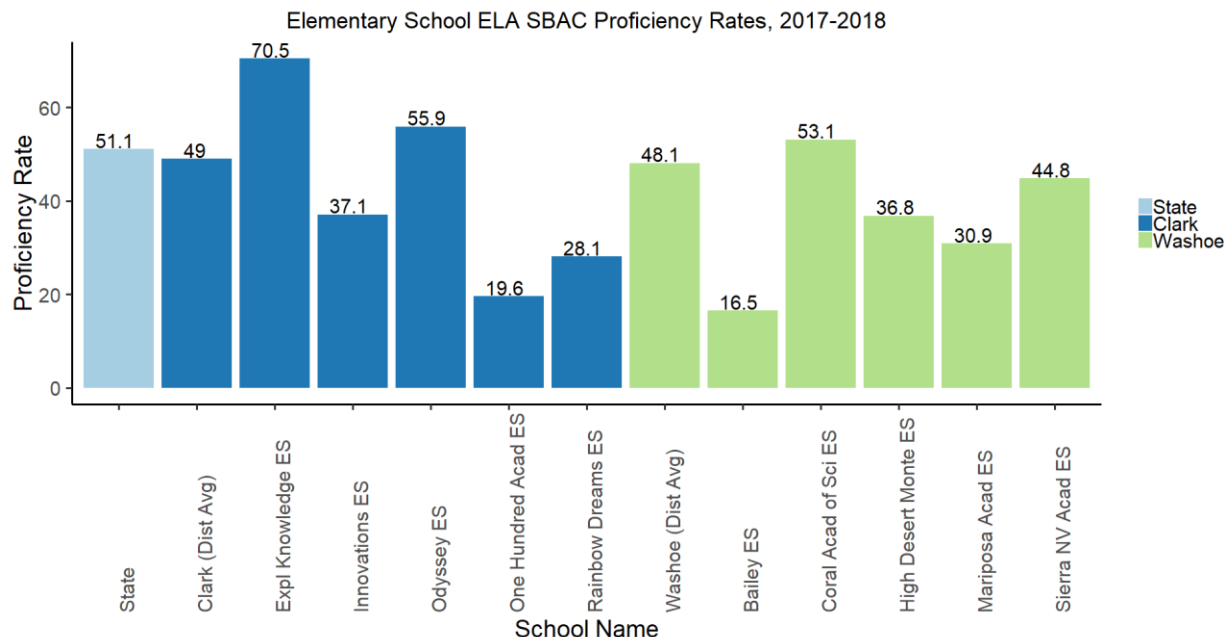


Source: Nevada Report Card. 2018. <http://nevadareportcard.com/di/>

English Language Arts

Performance is comparable when examining proficiency in English language arts (ELA). Figure 7 presents data on Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) proficiency rates in English Language Arts (ELA). As the data reveals, three of the CCSD district-sponsored charter elementary schools have SBAC proficiency rates in ELA that are lower than the state and district averages; four of WCSD district-sponsored charter schools have SBAC proficiency rates in ELA that are lower than the state and district averages. These seven schools had SBAC ELA proficiency rates lower than 45 percent. Among the district-sponsored charter schools, Explore Knowledge Charter (CCSD) and Coral Academy of Science Elementary (WCSD) outperform the state and district in both math and ELA proficiency rates.

Figure 7. Elementary School ELA SBAC Proficiency Rates, 2017-2018



Source: Nevada Report Card. 2018. <http://nevadareportcard.com/di/>

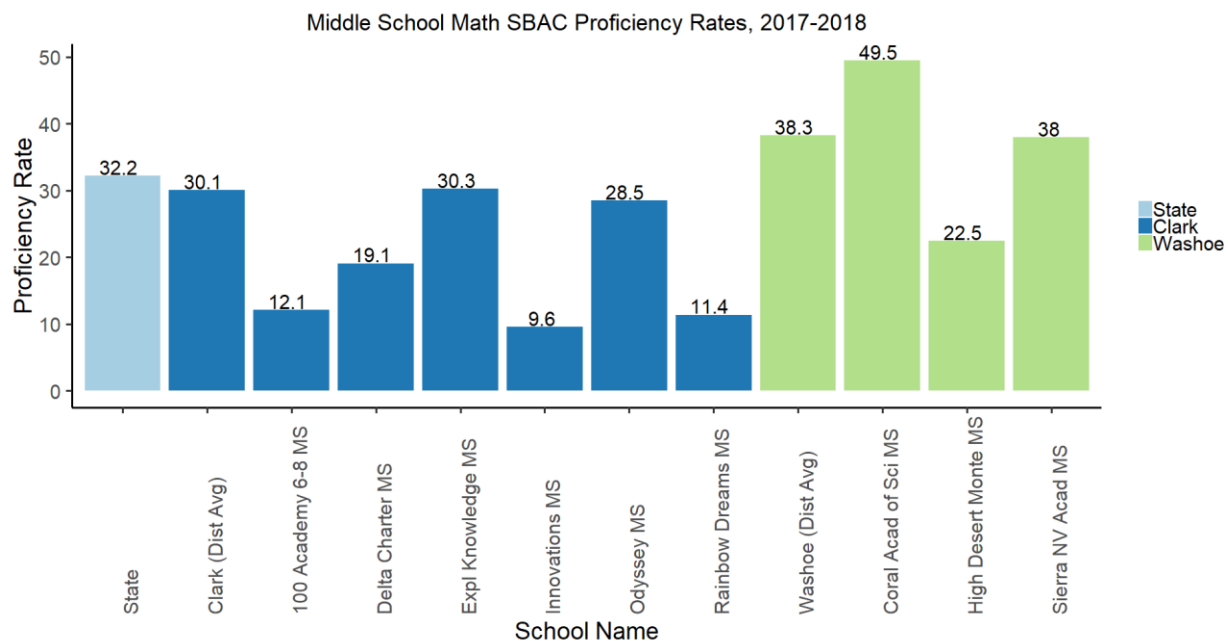
Middle School Proficiency Data

Math

Academic performance among CCSD and WCSD district-sponsored charter middle schools varies. Based upon data in Figure 8, Charter middle schools sponsored by CCSD fare worse than district-sponsored elementary schools when it comes to academic performance. All six of CCSD-sponsored charter middle schools have lower SBAC proficiency rates in math than the state average. Five of the CCSD district-sponsored charter schools have lower SBAC proficiency rates in math than the state and district averages. Not a single CCSD-sponsored charter middle school had proficiency rates in math above 31 percent; and four CCSD district-sponsored charter middle schools had proficiency rates below 20 percent.

In contrast, two of WCSD district-sponsored charter middle schools outperform the state in SBAC math proficiency scores. Two either outperform or are on par with the WCSD average. All had math SBAC proficiency rates above 20 percent.

Figure 8. Middle School Math SBAC Proficiency Rates, 2017-2018



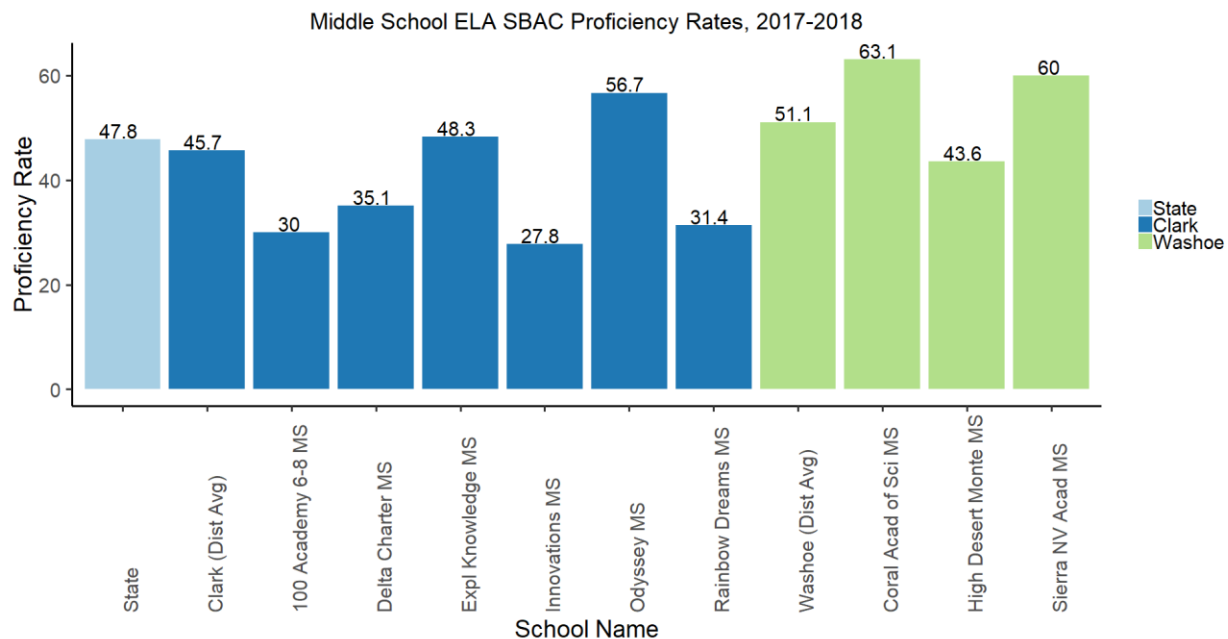
Source: Nevada Report Card. 2018. <http://nevadareportcard.com/di/>

English Language Arts

ELA proficiency rates varied among district-sponsored charter schools (see Figure 9). In Clark County, district-sponsored charter middle school ELA SBAC proficiency scores were significantly lower than the state and district averages, on average. Only two schools – Explore Knowledge and Odyssey Middle Schools – outperformed both the state and district averages.

In contrast, WASHOE-sponsored charter middle schools registered stronger performance. Two of the district-sponsored middle schools outperformed the state and district averages in ELA SBAC proficiency rates.

Figure 9. Middle School ELA SBAC Proficiency Rates, 2017-2018

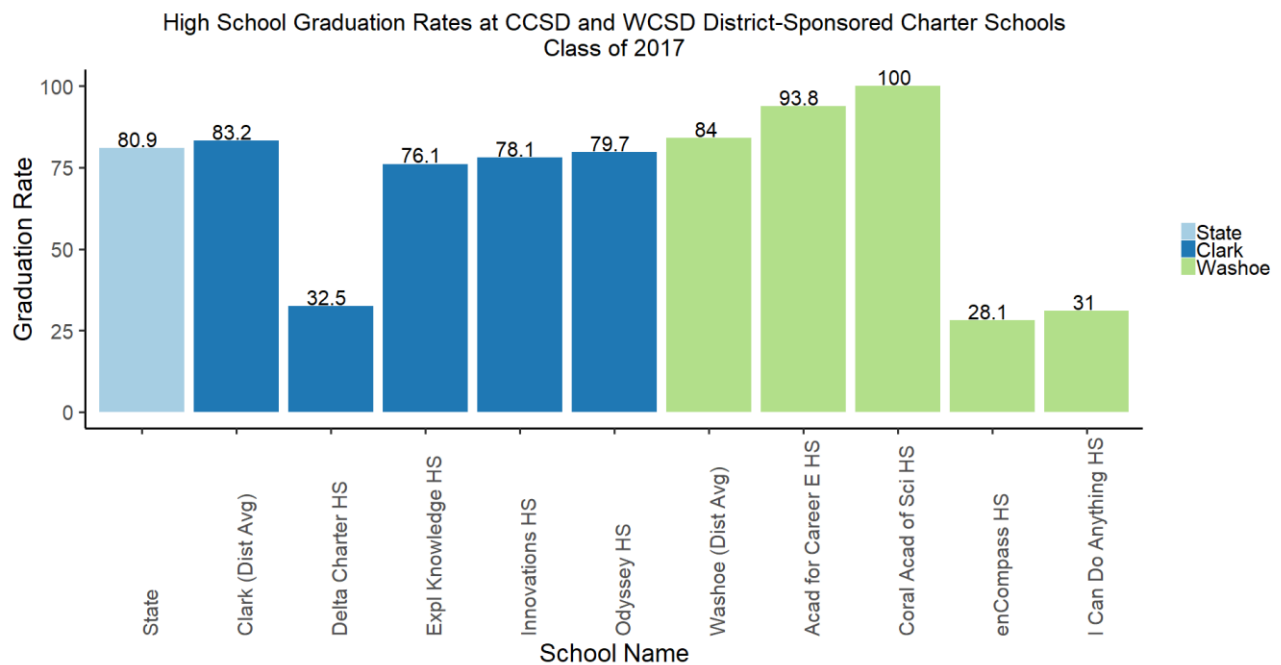


Source: Nevada Report Card. 2018. <http://nevadareportcard.com/di/>

High School Graduation

High school graduation rates for district-sponsored charter schools vary greatly, but several schools have alarmingly low graduation rates. Three high schools reported graduation rates below 35 percent for the 2017 cohort, one in CCSD and two in WCSD. Six high schools had graduation rates below the graduation rate for Nevada overall and for the district in which they are located (see Figure 10).

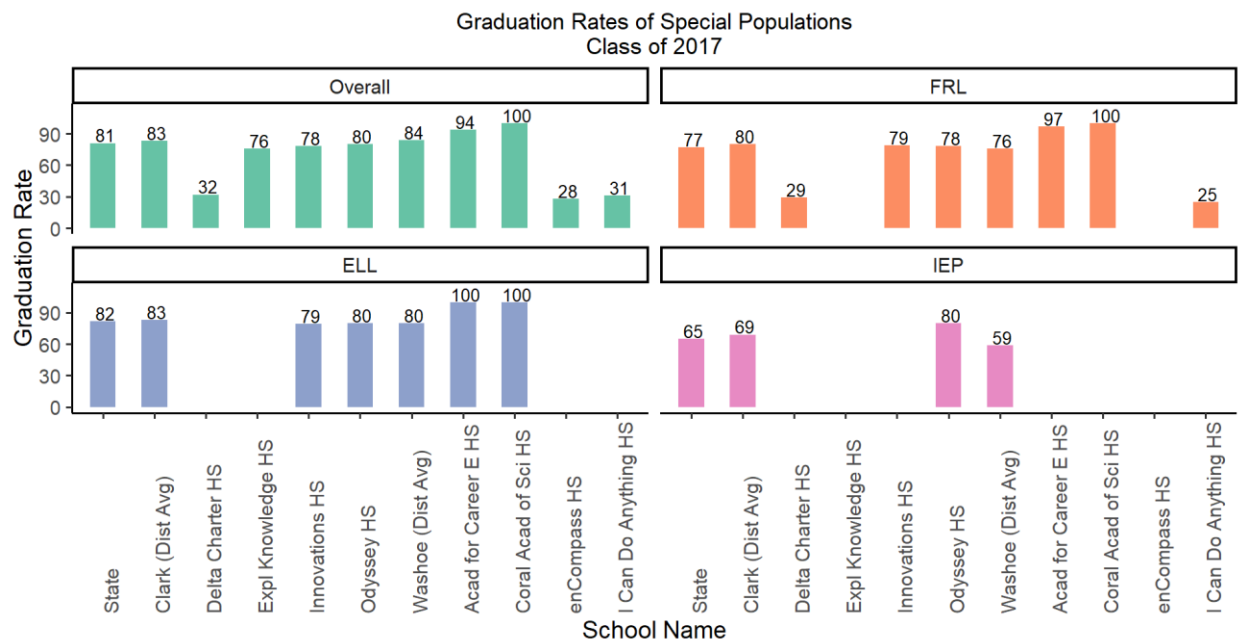
Figure 10: High School Graduation Rates at District-Sponsored Charter Schools, 2017



Source: Nevada Report Card. 2018. <http://nevadareportcard.com/di/>

Figure 11 reveals that the high school graduation rates for English Language Learners (ELLs) and Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL)-eligible students at CCSD- and WCSD-sponsored charter high schools may be lower than the school-wide, district-wide, and statewide graduation rates for all schools. Students who qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch at Delta Academy have a graduation rate of 29 percent, which is lower than the CCSD average of 80 percent for all FRL students.

Figure 11: High School Graduation Rates of Special Populations at District-Sponsored Charter Schools, 2017

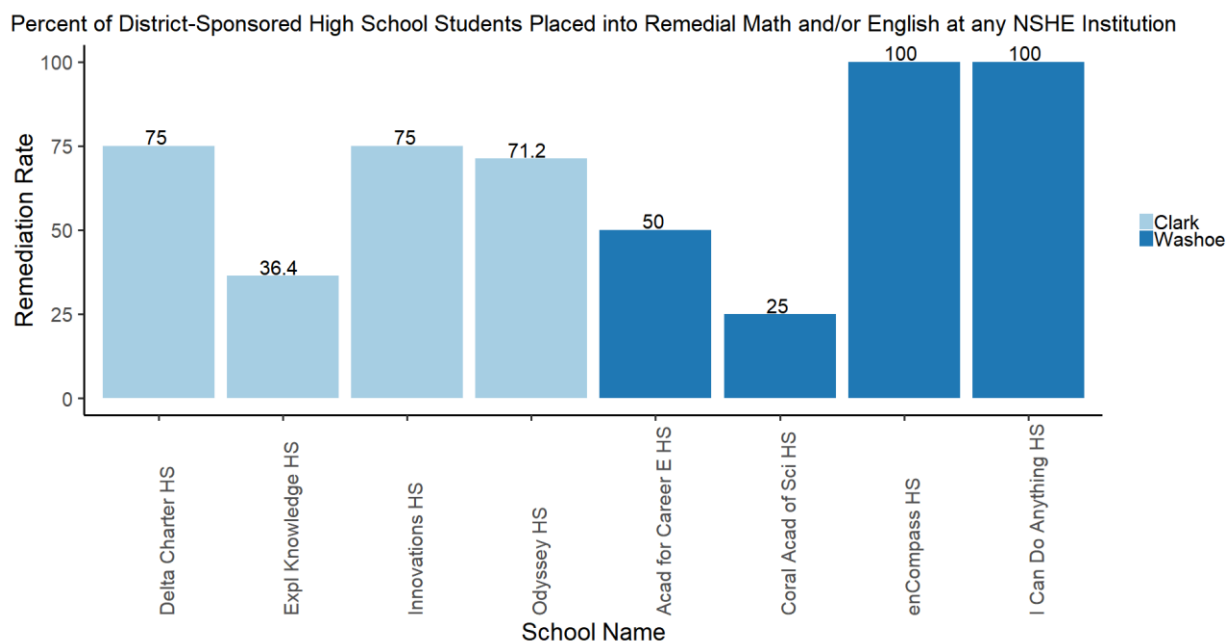


Source: Nevada Report Card. 2018. <http://nevadareportcard.com/di/>

Post-Secondary Outcomes: Remediation Data

Data also reveals that remediation rates are high among several district-sponsored charter schools. Remediation rates, as presented below, are defined as the percentage of high school graduates that are placed in English and/or math remedial classes at any Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) institution. At least 75 percent of graduates from four district-sponsored charter schools across both Clark County and Washoe County are placed in remedial math and/or English classes at NSHE institutions (see Figure 12).

Figure 12: Remediation Rates at CCSD and WSCD District-Sponsored Charter Schools, 2016



Source: Nevada System of Higher Education Institutional Research Office. Accessed on October 16, 2018.

https://www.nevada.edu/ir/dashboard.php?d=remedial_reports

RECOMMENDATIONS

The data reveal the need for greater accountability for the oversight of district-sponsored charter schools, particularly the under-performing schools. In addition, the need for greater attention, interventions, and reforms in these largely underperforming district-sponsored charter schools is clear. According to Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS), the charter sponsor is responsible for monitoring the performance of the charter school, holding the school accountable for serving its students in the best possible manner, and intervening when such actions by the school are not evident.⁸ The chronic under-performance of charter schools sponsored by the State's urban districts prompted the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) issued a formal inquiry to the CCSD and WCSD Boards of Trustees.⁹ NDE asked the districts to provide a detailed response showing its accountability actions and its plan to help bolster academic achievement at these schools. Specifically, NRS 388A.351 requires that a school district that sponsors charter schools must submit an annual report of charter school performance to NDE on or before October 1, 2018. Under NRS, the school district's failure to intervene in its failing charter schools can result in the state revoking its authority to monitor charter schools. WCSD submitted its report to NDE in July 2018; CCSD submitted its report in October 2018.¹⁰

The Guinn Center offers the following recommendations to address the needs of underperforming district-sponsored charter schools and to improve student achievement, especially for our highest-need students.

1. **Allow another authorizer to sponsor existing CCSD- and WCSD-sponsored charter schools.** District-sponsored charter school officials should explore transferring sponsorship to a different authorizer (e.g., Achievement School District, State Public Charter School Authority, or a Nevada college/university).¹¹
2. **Encourage underperforming district-sponsored charter schools to partner with a state approved authorizer.** Under Nevada Administrative Code, charter schools cannot join the State Public School Charter Authority (SPSCA) unless they are rated three stars or higher on the Nevada State Performance Framework.¹² Schools that have made the Rising Stars list released by the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) should consider partnering with the Nevada Achievement School District or Opportunity 180 to undergo a transformation or enter into a performance compact that will enable them to receive additional support and funding to boost student achievement. By way of example, Andre Agassi College Preparatory Academy partnered with the Achievement School District in fall 2016 and reopened in 2017 under the management of a new charter management operator, Democracy Prep.
3. **Encourage the school to partner with a high-performing charter management organization (CMO) to manage the academic program.** Short of transferring management of the district-sponsored charter, officials could encourage a district-sponsored charter school to partner with a high-performing charter management organization (CMO) to manage the school's academic program.

4. **Provide performance incentives to highly-effective teachers who choose to work at district-sponsored charter schools.** Highly effective teachers are directly linked to higher student achievement. The state and districts should explore ways to provide performance incentives to highly effective and experienced teachers who work at district-sponsored charter schools. Certainly, this recommendation can also be applied to traditional public schools.
5. **Partner with universities and teaching colleges.** District-sponsored charter schools could work with university faculty and teaching programs to provide additional support and assistance in areas of instruction and leadership development.
6. **Leverage community programs and partnerships.** District-sponsored charter schools should explore ways to leverage existing evidence-based programs designed to support and serve some of our state's most under-resourced students. For example, Jobs for America's Graduates – Nevada (JAG Nevada) is working in 53 schools around the Silver State with students who are significantly under-resourced. In 2017, JAG Nevada students had a 94.2 graduation rate, which is significantly higher than the state average of 81.0 percent.¹³ District-sponsored charter high schools should explore ways to work with JAG Nevada and other evidence-based programs that provide academic and/or instructional support.



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The Kenny C. Guinn Center for Policy Priorities is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, bipartisan, independent policy institute focused on providing fact-based, relevant, and well-reasoned analysis of critical policy issues facing Nevada and the Intermountain West. The Guinn Center engages policy-makers, experts, and the public with innovative, data-driven research and analysis to advance policy solutions, inform the public debate, and expand public engagement.

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