

Zoom and Victory Programs in Nevada

Recent analyses released by the State of Nevada Department of Education (jointly completed by ACS Ventures, the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV), and MYS Project Management, hereafter referred to as the “ACS Report”) and the Clark County School District (CCSD) presented overall positive results regarding Zoom and Victory schools.¹ While the findings were similar, there are distinct and important differences regarding the program reviews.

In particular, and perhaps most importantly, the ACS report was the product of a legislative mandate to conduct an external, independent evaluation of the Zoom and Victory schools.² The enabling legislation was the first time in our memory that legislation has required an external, independent evaluation of education programs. The 2019 ACS report was preceded by the 2016 ACS report, which provided a preliminary evaluation of the Zoom and Victory schools.³

Additionally, the ACS report emphasized rigorous statistical procedures but provided very little comparison of individual schools. CCSD focused on the overall performance of the programs but also neglected to provide an analysis of individual schools. The CCSD report also did not differentiate between high or low growth – only whether growth was exhibited in the schools. The Guinn Center believes additional comparative analysis of individual school performance data is needed to more accurately assess the effectiveness of Zoom and Victory programs.

Most importantly though, we believe the critical missing piece in the analyses offered (including our analysis, as presented here) is the focus on student-level growth. Both the ACS report and the CCSD study chose the school as the unit of analysis. However, the data used and presented in the reports includes different students in the year-over-year analysis. This is problematic for any multi-year, school-level investigation due to student transiency and students matriculating to new schools. In other words, the students that are included in the analysis in one school year are different from the group of students that are analyzed in the subsequent year, resulting in an “apples-to-oranges” comparison. Additionally, our research team believes the absence of clearly defined outcomes in the creation of these programs leads to inconsistent implementation at the school-level. The absence of clear outcomes complicates the evaluation process as it requires the evaluation team to select their own outcome measures to assess the program, which may differ from what the schools chose to address.

The Zoom Program

The Zoom program was created through approval of Senate Bill (SB) 504 during the 2013 77th Nevada Legislative Session.⁴ The intention of the program is to increase student achievement in schools with a high population of English Language Learners (ELLs) and low academic performance. In CCSD and the Washoe County



School District (WCSD), specific schools receive Zoom funding to provide additional services to students. Other districts across the state receive Zoom funding to provide the services districtwide. This section only provides data on CCSD and WCSD schools that receive Zoom funding.

The data for this analysis is obtained from the WIDA ACCESS assessment, which can be obtained from each school's Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF) Accountability Report for the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 school years. The data represents the change in each school's adequate growth percentile (AGP) on the WIDA ACCESS assessment. The WIDA ACCESS assessment is provided to ELL students in grades kindergarten through 12th grade. The AGP represents the percentage of students who are on track to be proficient in the English language within five years or 12th grade, whichever is sooner.⁵ Of the publicly available data, this metric best aligns with the goals of the Zoom Program, as students who are not proficient in the English language will face a linguistic barrier when assessed in both the English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics portion of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) summative assessment.

It is worth noting that the legislation creating the Zoom program did not specify clear benchmarks or measures against which participating schools would be compared. The language in SB 504 only requires an evaluation of "data regarding the academic and linguistic achievement and proficiency of children who participated in a program or received services."⁶ Because of this, the current analysis, as well as the ACS and CCSD evaluative reports, each present different metrics.

Zoom Schools Change in WIDA AGP

Figure 1 displays the change in AGP from the 2016-2017 to 2017-2018 school years of each CCSD Zoom elementary and middle school on the WIDA ACCESS Assessment. In addition, for comparison, the average change across all CCSD schools is presented (in yellow). As Figure 1 indicates, there are seventeen Zoom elementary schools performing above the CCSD average, and fourteen Zoom schools performing below. For the middle schools, three are outperforming the district average and three are underperforming.

Figure 1 suggests the change in WIDA AGP among schools varies widely, with Tate and Squires Elementary Schools exhibiting the largest growth in school AGP, at 27.1 and 24.7 percentage points, respectively. Edwards Elementary School increased its AGP, but only by 0.9 percentage points, and this growth was below the CCSD elementary school average of 5.1 percentage points. Alternatively, the CCSD analysis of Zoom schools reported the percentage of schools that experienced increases in WIDA ACCESS performance but did not differentiate between the amount of growth each school exhibited. CCSD's analysis assumes all increases are equal (e.g., a school that increases its AGP by 0.1 percent is the same as a school that increases it by 25 percent).

Figure 2 presents the data for the Washoe County School District. There, fifteen elementary schools and two middle schools outpaced the WCSD district average change in WIDA AGP over the period 2016-2017 to 2017-2018. Conversely, five elementary and one middle school experienced growth below the district average.

Figures 3-6 present similar data to that presented in Figures 1 and 2. However, these figures group schools by year of Zoom program implementation. Figure 3 only includes CCSD elementary schools, and Figure 4 only includes WCSD elementary schools. Figures 5 and 6 present CCSD and WCSD middle schools, respectively. These figures are presented to further investigate the ACS report's claim that "it is important to acknowledge that the longer a school is a Zoom school the more likely they are to illustrate gains in linguistic and academic growth over time."⁷ This analysis does not refute that claim, as all the figures suggest - with few exceptions - that the longest tenured Zoom schools demonstrate the largest year-over-year gains. This is especially true within CCSD Zoom schools, and to a lesser extent, at WCSD schools (note the overall positive results of WCSD's 2016 Zoom schools).

Based on the data presented in Figures 3-6, we propose an addendum to the conclusion presented by the ACS report: it is important to acknowledge that the longer a school is a Zoom school the more likely it is to illustrate gains in linguistic and academic growth over time, *but it does not guarantee that longer tenures as a Zoom school result in positive outcomes.*

Ultimately, Figures 1-6 provide evidence to strongly suggest that there are significant school-level determinants of success at Zoom schools. Unfortunately, data are not available to determine the specific strategies (e.g., school site leadership, differences in program implementation, professional development offerings, etc.) at each school that are driving or producing the positive results. We believe further research is warranted to investigate this conclusion further.



Figure 1 – CCSD Zoom Schools Change in WIDA AGP

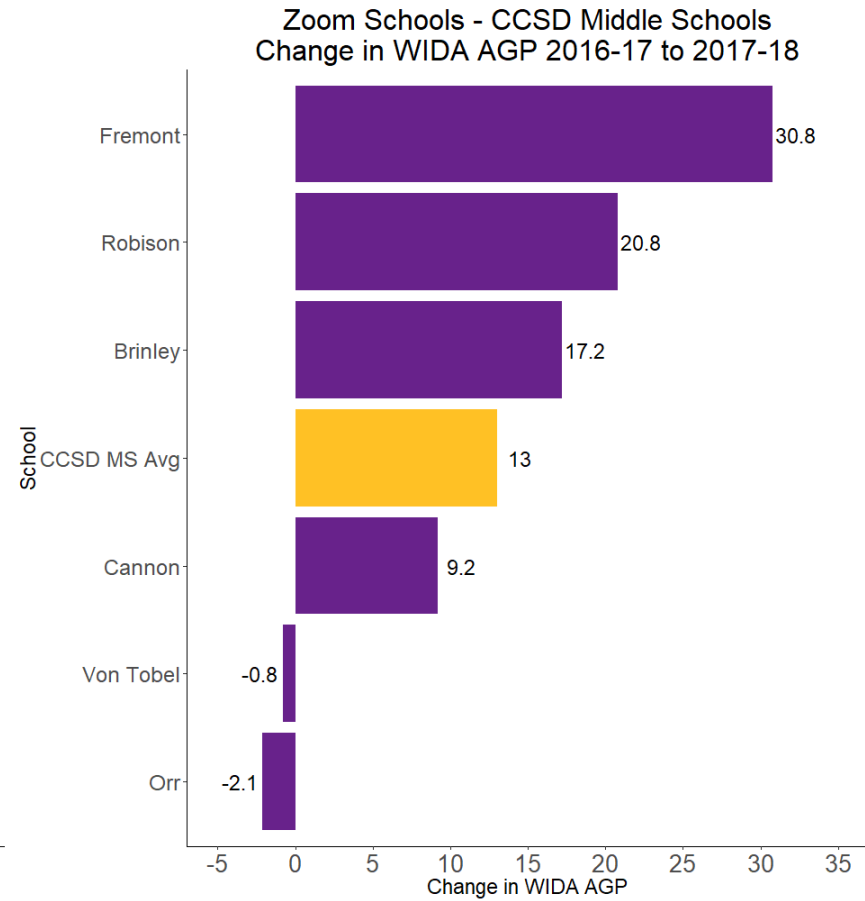
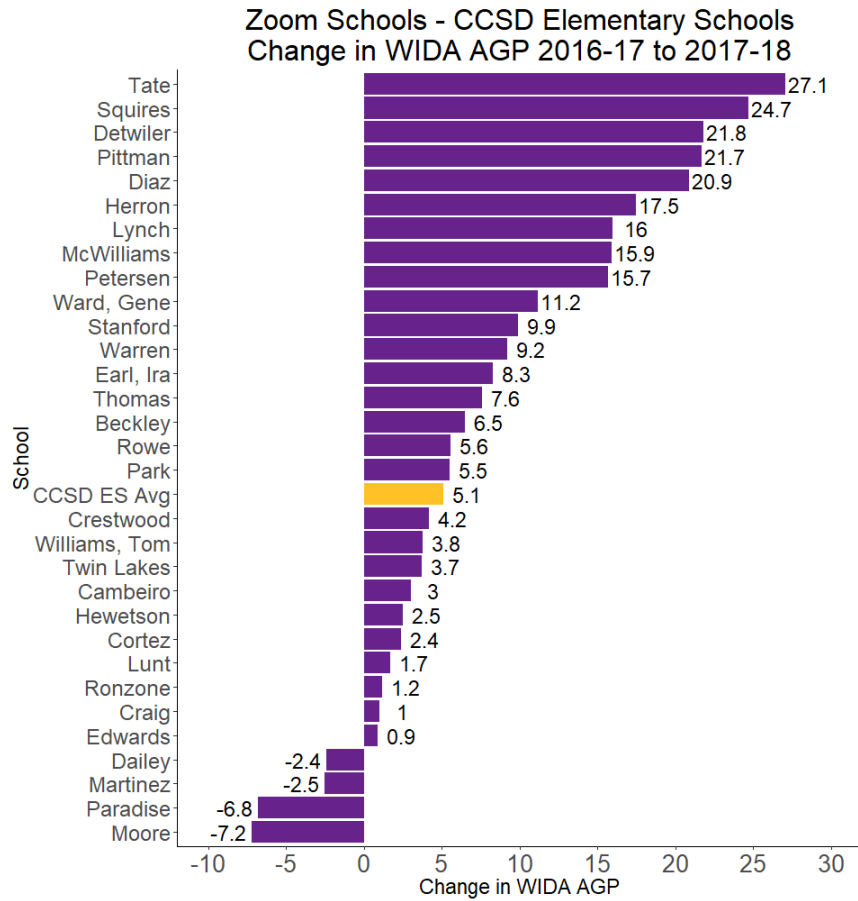


Figure 2 – WCSD Zoom Schools Change in WIDA AGP

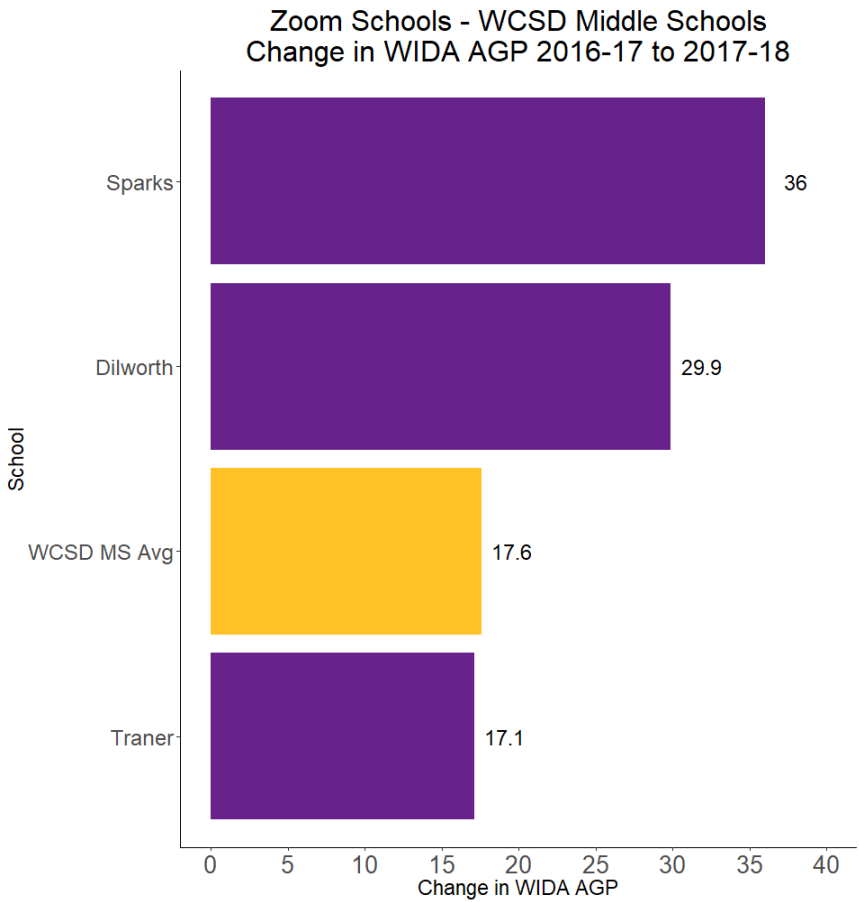
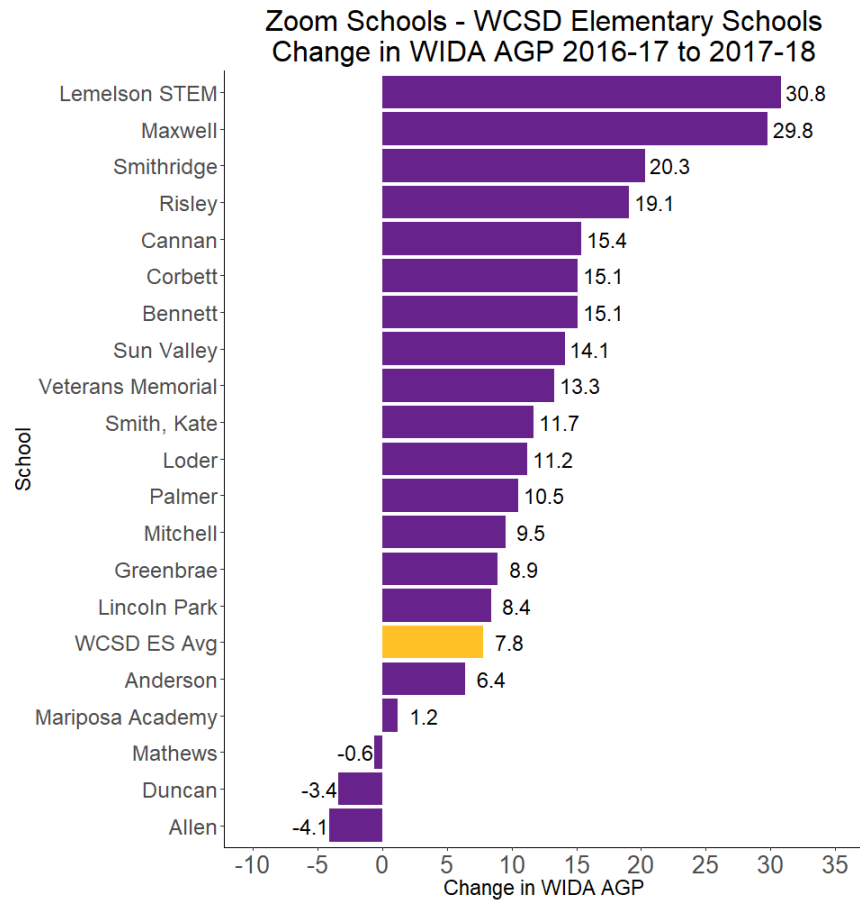


Figure 3 – CCSD Zoom Elementary Schools Change in WIDA AGP by Year of Zoom Implementation

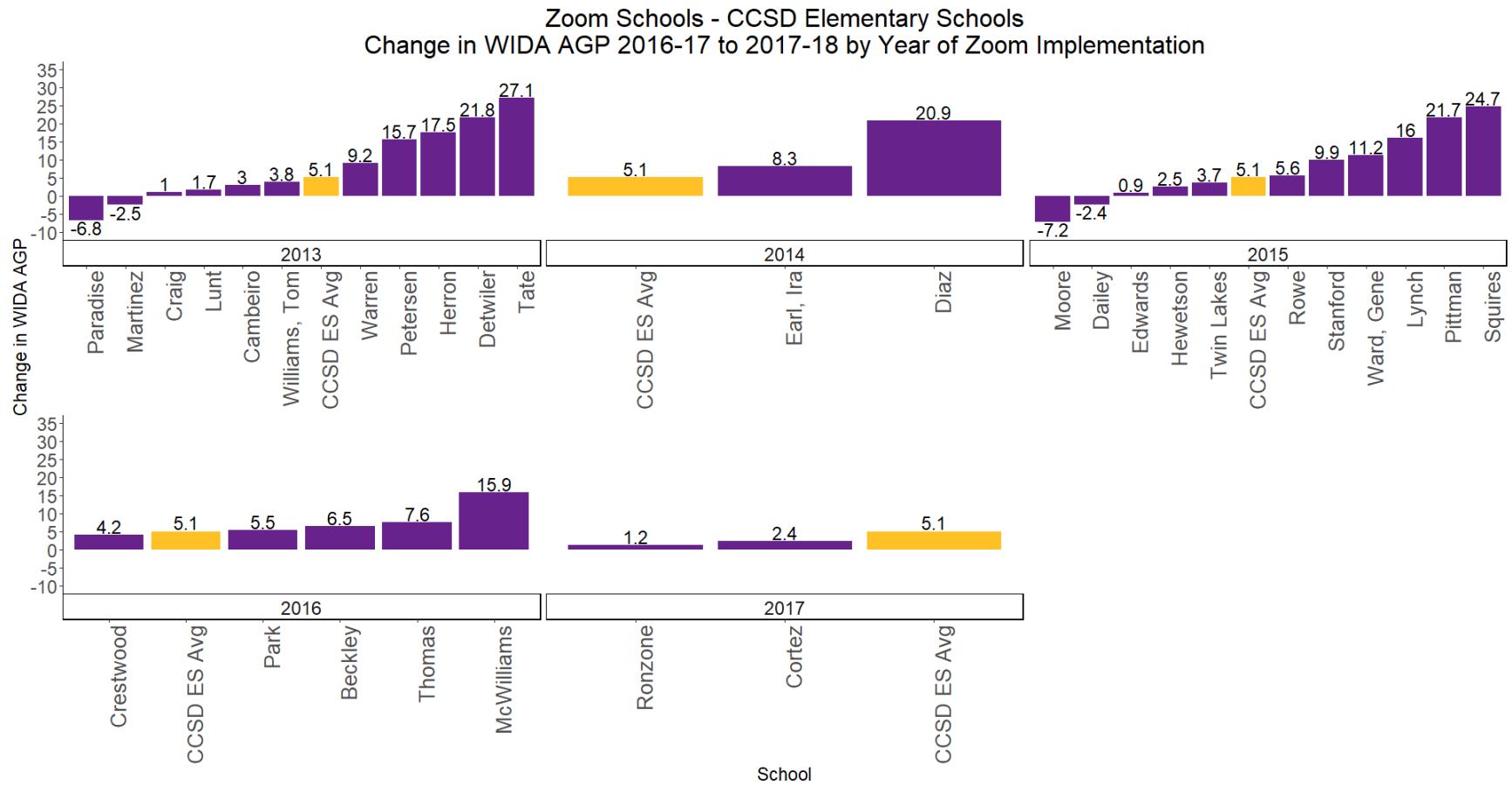


Figure 4 – WCSD Zoom Elementary Schools Change in WIDA AGP by Year of Zoom Implementation

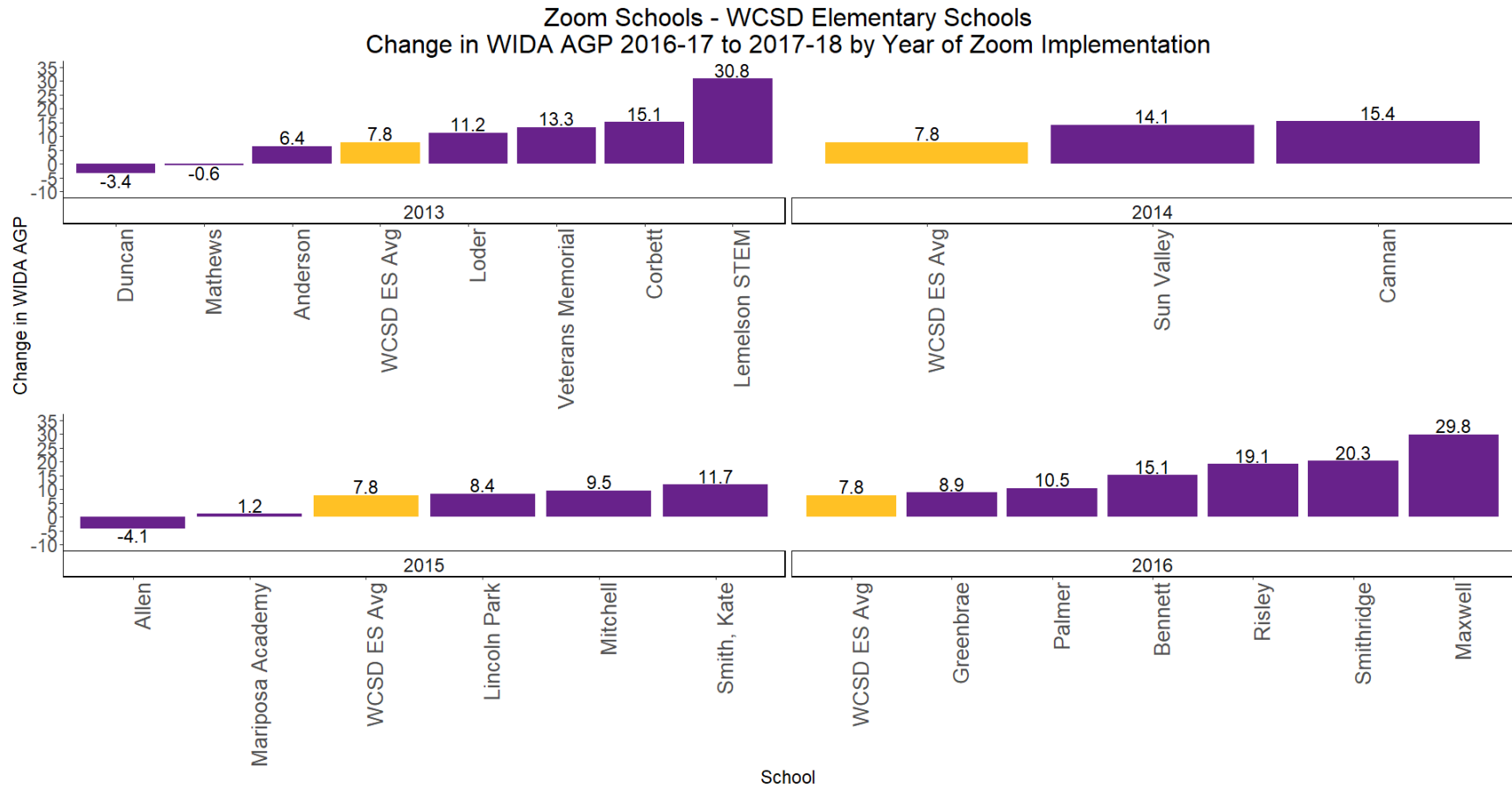


Figure 5 – CCSD Zoom Middle Schools Change in WIDA AGP by Year of Zoom Implementation

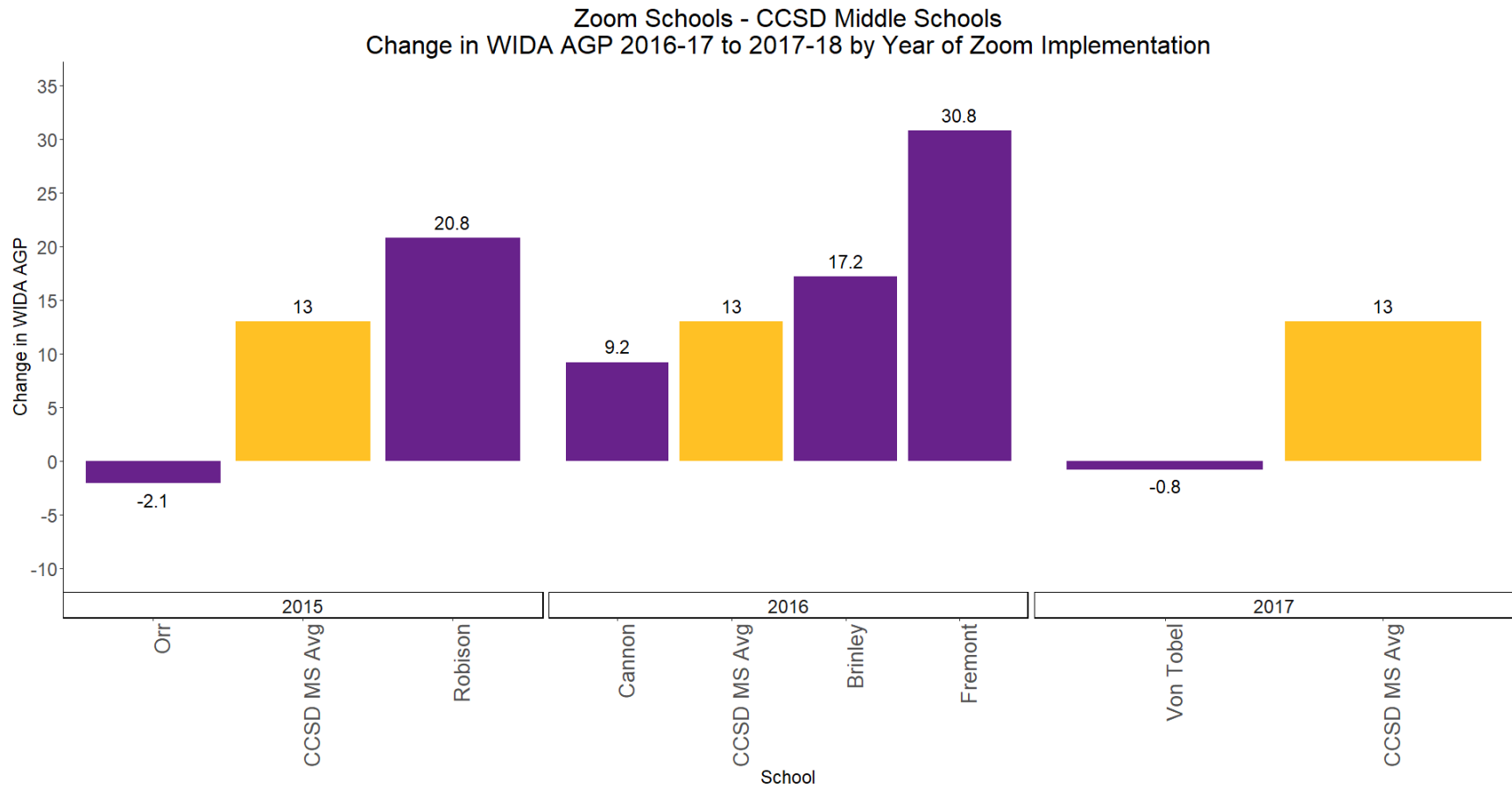
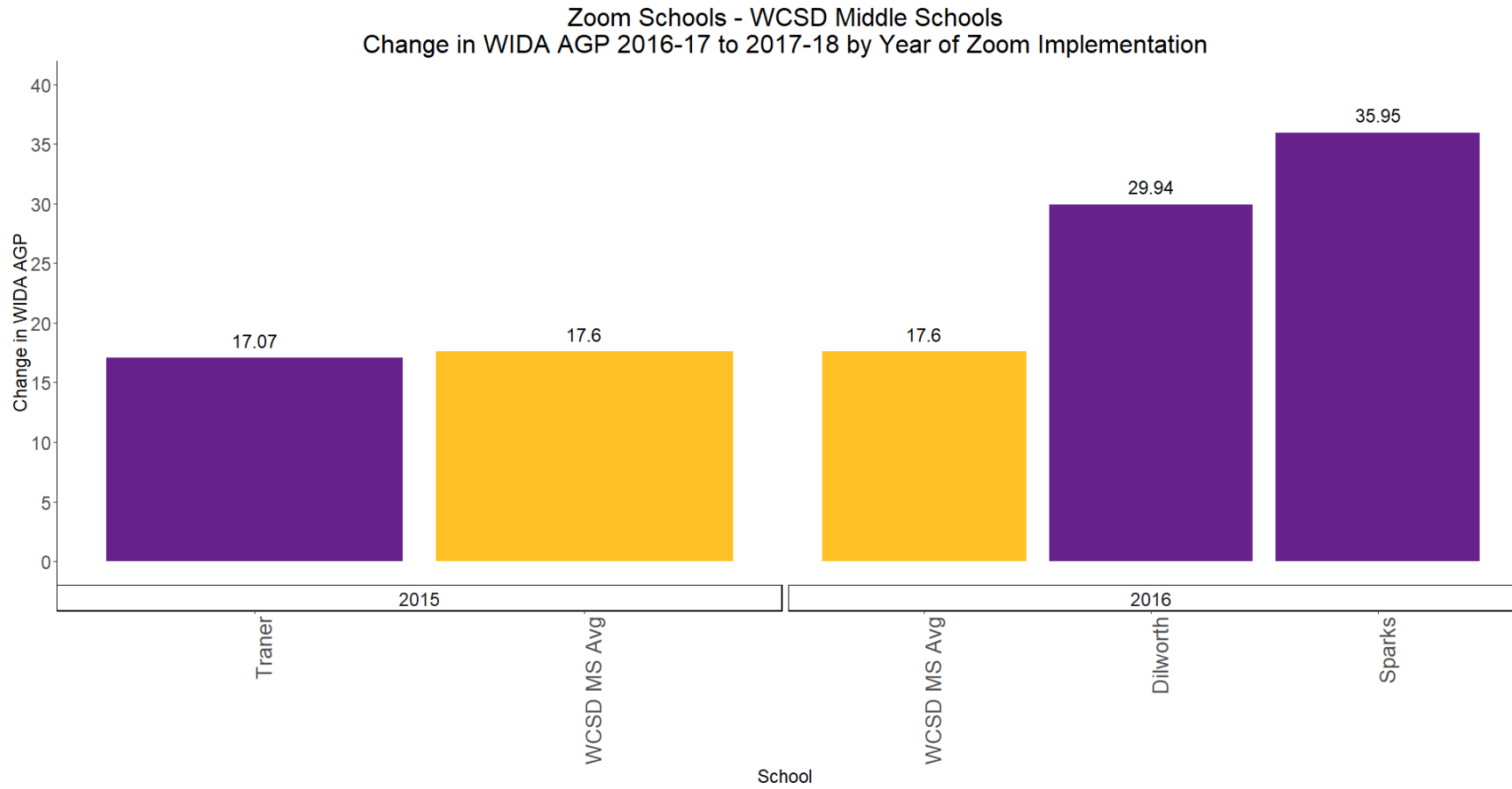


Figure 6 – WCSD Zoom Middle Schools Change in WIDA AGP by Year of Zoom Implementation



The Victory Program

The Victory program was created with the adoption of SB 432 during Nevada’s 2015 78th legislative session.⁸ This program provides additional funding to schools that meet two criteria. First, the schools must have a high number of students living in poverty, as measured by the school’s percentage of the student population qualifying for Free-and-Reduced Price Lunch (FRL). Second, the schools must be rated in the two lowest categories of school rankings under the Nevada School Performance Framework (currently, this is one- and two-star schools). Victory funds given to schools can be used at the discretion of each principal, with the sole requirement that the funds are used to improve student achievement. Additionally, the school’s plan to increase student achievement must be submitted to the Nevada Department of Education.

Because of the inherent flexibility of the Victory program - which allows school leadership teams to choose what interventions they believe are best to improve student achievement - determining the most appropriate measure to evaluate Victory schools is difficult. The CCSD report presented SBAC ELA and Mathematics proficiency rates and Median Growth Percentiles (MGP), as well as student achievement on the WIDA ACCESS assessment measured by AGP. The ACS report incorporated the SBAC measures included by CCSD but excluded WIDA ACCESS results.

For this report, the Victory schools’ median growth percentile will be used to evaluate student achievement. This is because comparing SBAC proficiency rates across years assesses a different cohort of students each year (as students matriculate to the next grade level). Additionally, one of the requirements for Victory school qualification is that schools have relatively low academic achievement, so students may display tremendous growth but also may have begun the school year far below the proficiency threshold. This growth, however, would not be reflected in the proficiency rate, which is why our research team is concerned with using this measure.⁹

However, Nevada also calculates a growth score for each student based on students that performed similarly on the previous year’s SBAC test. Then, it determines an MGP for each school by including only those students who were enrolled at the school for the entire year. Because of this, MGP provides an appropriate comparison to determine if students in Victory schools are, on average, growing faster than their peers at other schools.¹⁰

It is difficult, however, to determine what is a “good” MGP at the school level. An MGP above 50 indicates that the median student performed above 50 percent of their peer group. However, because of random fluctuations over years, it would be problematic to suggest a school whose MGP was 48 in one year and 51 in another year showed significant growth (several more years of data would be needed to make any definitive conclusions). The Nevada Department of Education has suggested on the accountability report card that an MGP between 35 to 65 indicates “typical” growth, whereas anything below 35 or above 65 suggests “low” or “high” growth, respectively.

Figure 7 displays the MGP for CCSD Victory elementary schools in both SBAC ELA and Mathematics. Figure 8 displays the same data for all other Victory elementary schools in Nevada. The figures have been color-coded so that if a school's MPG is 50 or above, it is grey, and purple indicates an MGP below 50. For CCSD Victory elementary schools, every school is performing in the "typical growth" range on the SBAC ELA assessment. However, Long and Hollingsworth Elementary Schools are performing at the threshold between low and typical growth. On the SBAC mathematics assessment, West Prep Academy is exhibiting high growth and Lowman, McCall, Long, and Woolley Elementary Schools are all exhibiting low growth. For all other Victory elementary schools in Nevada, on the SBAC mathematics assessment, Humboldt County's McDermitt Elementary School's growth is classified as high and Booth Elementary School (Washoe County) is performing with low growth. Additionally, McDermitt (Humboldt County), Booth (Washoe County), and Amargosa Valley (Nye County) Elementary Schools all exhibited low growth on the SBAC ELA assessment.

Analyzing this data is admittedly difficult, but trends do emerge. Within CCSD elementary schools, West Prep and Lake Elementary Schools have the two top MGPs in both ELA and Mathematics. Long and McCall Elementary Schools are both performing near the bottom of the range. Additionally, Booth Elementary School (Washoe County) is performing near the bottom of both ELA and Mathematics. However, many schools have MGPs that vary across assessments. Manch Elementary School (Clark County) has an MGP of 55.5 in ELA and 42.0 on Mathematics. McDermitt Elementary School (Humboldt County) has an MGP of 33.0 in ELA and 66.0 in Mathematics.



Figure 7 – CCSD Victory Elementary Schools Median Growth Percentiles – SBAC ELA and Mathematics

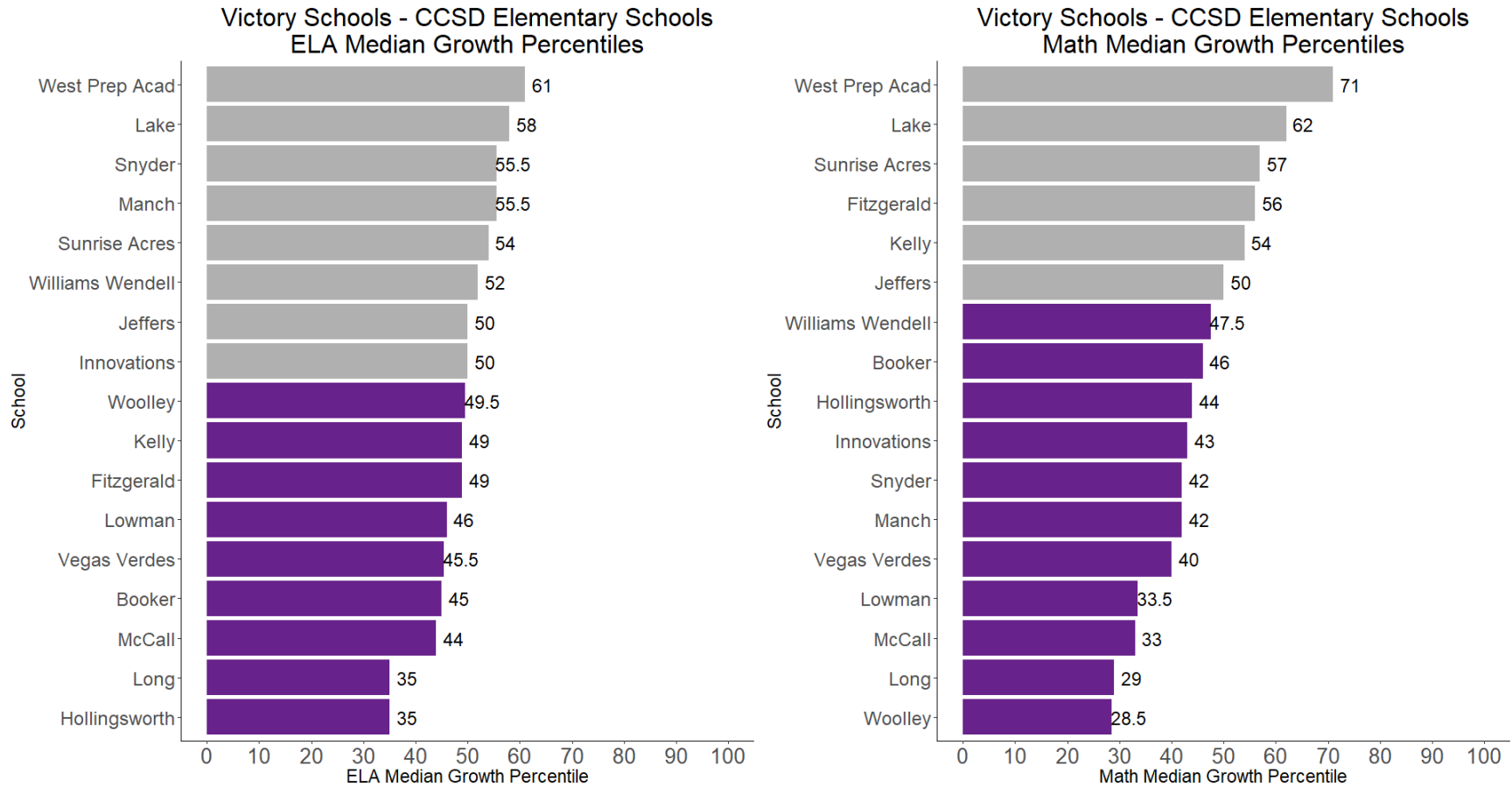
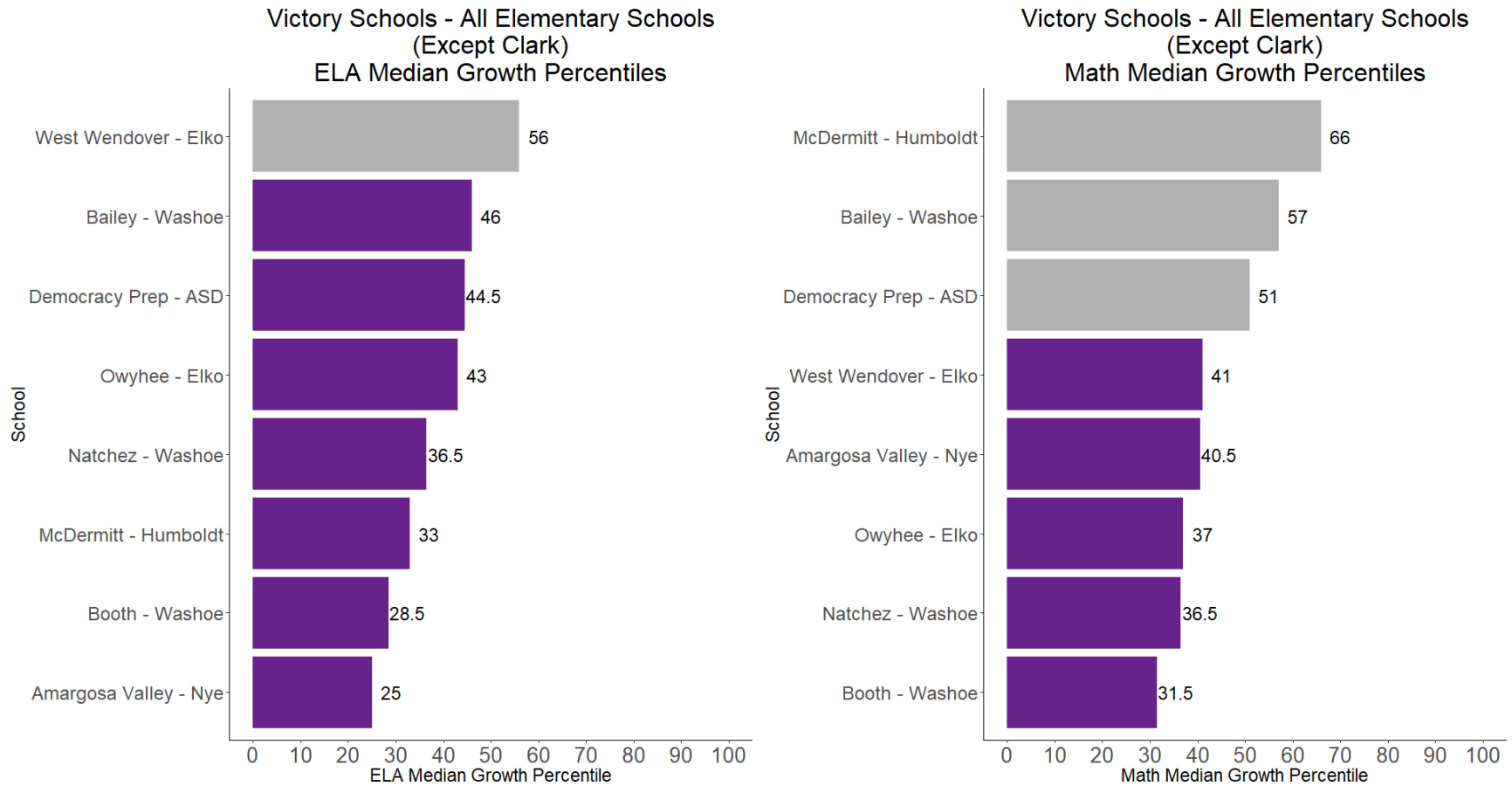


Figure 8 – All Other Districts’ Victory Elementary Schools Median Growth Percentiles – SBAC ELA and Mathematics



Figures 9 and 10 provide data similar to the previous figures but include only middle schools. In Clark County School District middle schools, Monaco Middle School is exhibiting low growth on the SBAC ELA assessment, but the math portion of the assessment shows all CCSD Victory middle schools exhibiting typical growth. In the non-CCSD Victory middle schools, West Wendover Middle School's (Elko County) results suggest students are performing at the high end of typical growth in both ELA and mathematics, whereas McDermitt Middle School (Humboldt County) is nearing, and has, the low growth classification on the mathematics and ELA portion of the SBAC, respectively.

The Victory program has several schools that are exhibiting exceptional academic growth, but there are also several schools that have low growth in both ELA and Mathematics. However, because there are so few restrictions on Victory funding, and the law does not identify the specific metrics upon which Victory schools should improve, it is difficult to fully understand what the Victory program is or is not accomplishing. Yes, Victory schools are selected because of low student achievement, but does that mean schools should focus on ELA or Mathematics, growth or proficiency, eliminating achievement gaps, etc.? Requiring that a school focus on all these outcomes seems incredibly daunting, especially if progress must be demonstrated within a couple years. Unfortunately, by not explicitly stating the desired outcome, combined with the inaccessibility of school-level Victory plans, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to accurately assess the performance of Victory schools.



Figure 9 – CCSD Victory Middle Schools Median Growth Percentiles – SBAC ELA and Mathematics

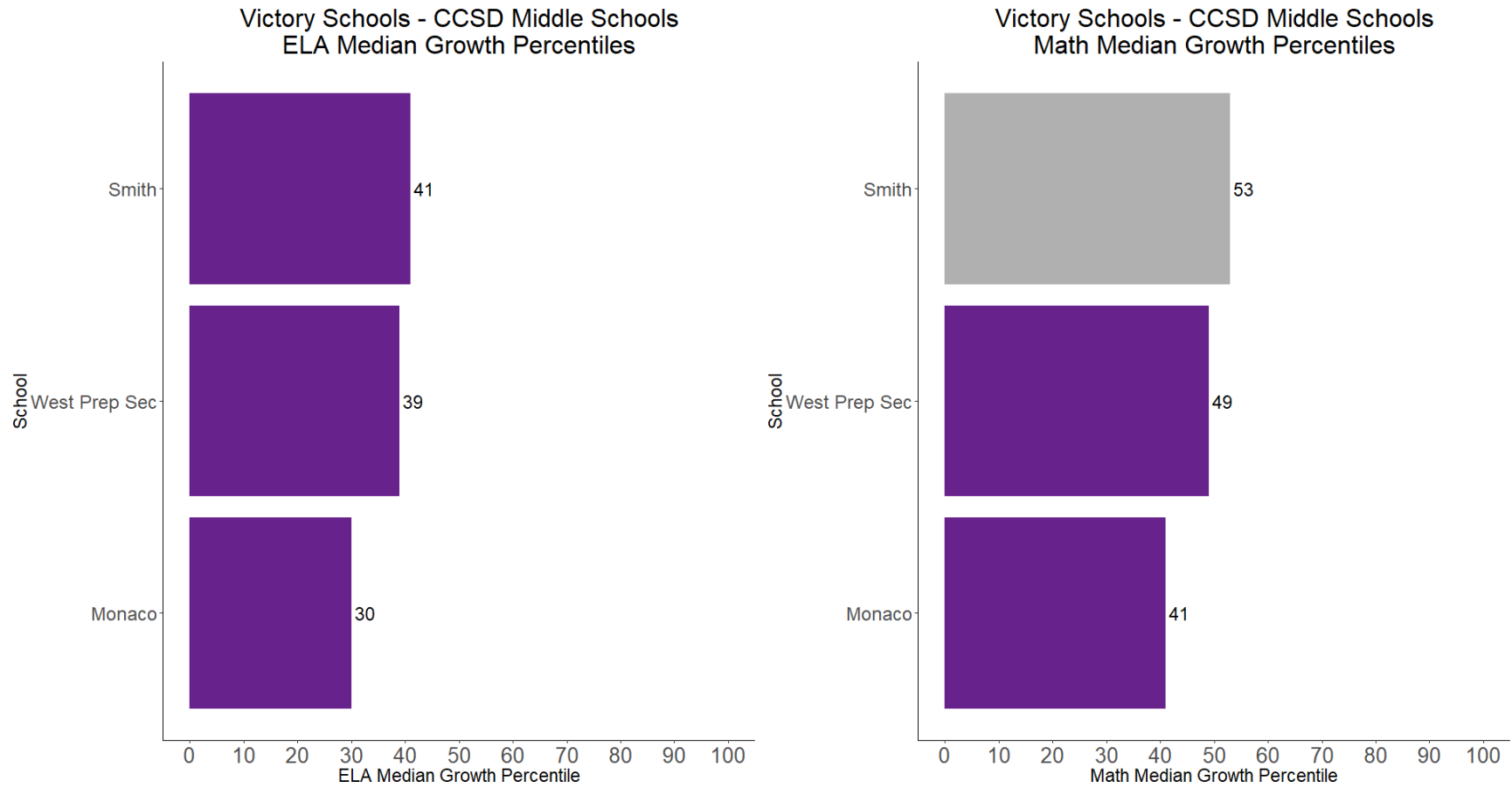
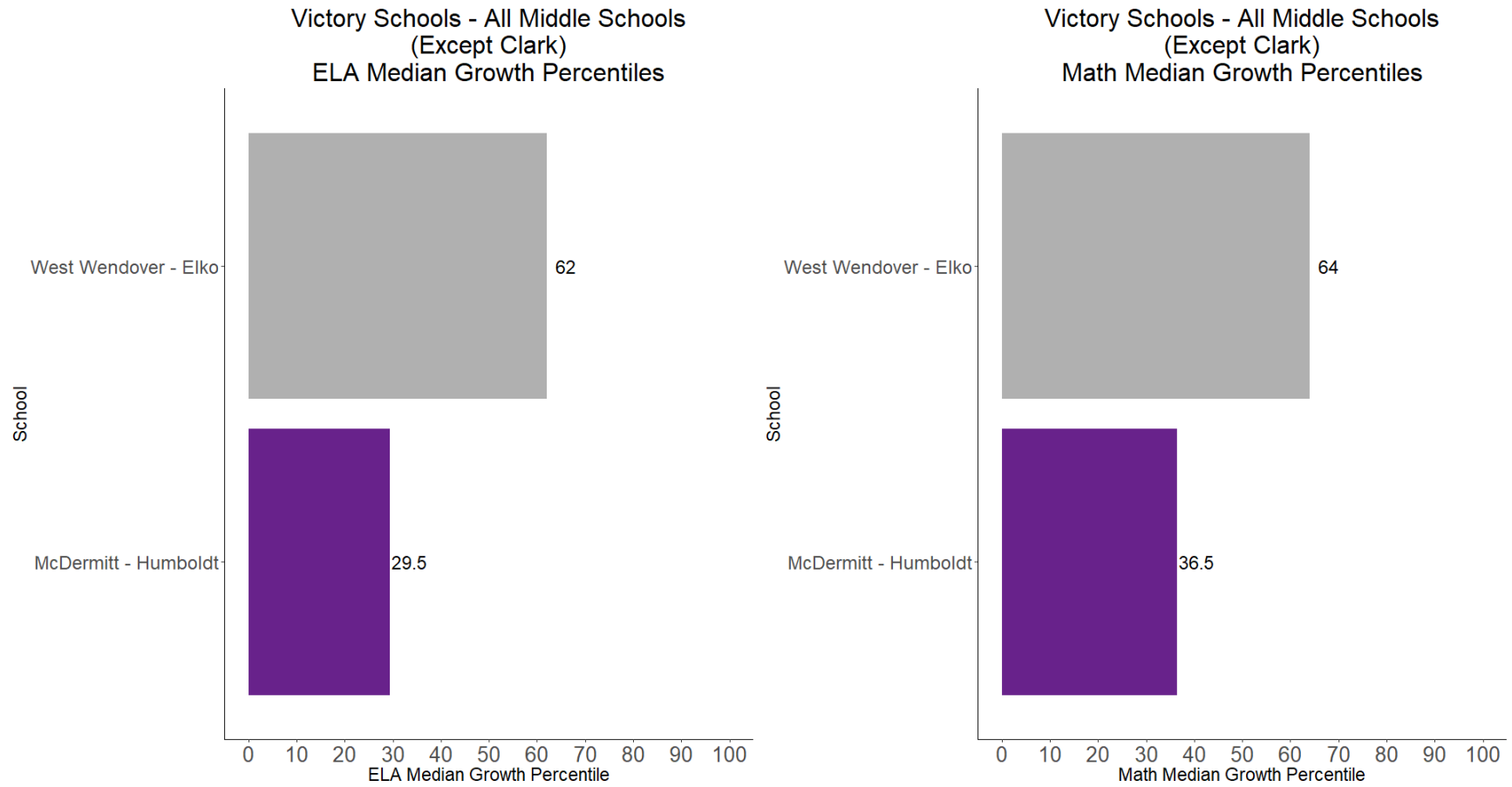


Figure 10 – All Other Districts’ Victory Middle Schools Median Growth Percentiles – SBAC ELA and Mathematics



Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

If asked to provide a final judgement on the effectiveness of the Zoom and Victory program, the only conclusion that feels appropriate given the data limitations is, “it depends.” Many Zoom and Victory schools are performing well; others are not. And given the availability of data, it is impossible to know if and/or how Zoom and Victory funding is contributing to the successes of many of these schools. Because of these limitations, we do not disagree with the recommendations and conclusions that were stated in the multi-year external evaluation conducted in the ACS report or CCSD’s recent in-house evaluation. We do provide several recommendations to assist in future evaluation efforts and efforts to strengthen the Zoom/Victory Programs.

- **If the programs are targeting student-level results, the evaluations need to be completed at the student-level.** This recommendation applies to the current analysis as well, but student-level data is not publicly available to determine how students are affected by the Zoom/Victory programs. Future analyses conducted by a school district and/or the Nevada Department of Education would benefit from analyzing the achievement trends in students who participate in Zoom/Victory programming, rather than using trends in school performance. *Analyzing school outcomes to determine the effectiveness of the Zoom/Victory programs ignores several important factors that can impact a year-over-year analysis, – specifically transient students, as well as students transitioning from elementary to middle or middle to high school.* Completing a student-level analysis would also allow researchers to determine the actual impact of the Zoom/Victory program on a student that may have attended a Zoom/Victory school in one year but not in a subsequent year.
- **Program outcomes should be explicitly stated at the outset and prior to implementation of the program to ensure schools and evaluators are analyzing the appropriate metrics.** CCSD’s report included measures of proficiency, growth, and results from an English-language learner assessment (the WIDA ACCESS) for both Zoom and Victory Schools. The ACS report included the WIDA ACCESS results for Zoom schools and SBAC results/proficiency rates for Victory schools. Our report used WIDA ACCESS information for the Zoom analysis and SBAC growth results for the Victory analysis. *It is impossible to know which accountability measure is the most appropriate as the legislation creating the Zoom and Victory programs does not specify the desired goals and outcomes of the programs.* We do believe school leaders ultimately know what is best for their schools. If legislation continues to allow schools to use Zoom/Victory funding to target school-specific challenges, then school plans for using and disbursing those funds need to be available to evaluate each school’s program.
- **Like so many educational programs, the Department of Education, school districts, and school leadership teams should learn from successful Zoom/Victory schools so those achievements can be replicated at other schools.** This is not to suggest that Zoom/Victory schools require a one-

size fits all model to improve student performance, but a network for school leaders to share what works and does not work would benefit all education stakeholders in Nevada.

This policy report seeks to mediate or reconcile the findings of the analyses completed by CCSD and the Nevada Department of Education. By providing additional data, we seek to provide some context to the discussion. Unfortunately, for reasons discussed above, it is impossible at this time to decisively label the Zoom and Victory educational programs either a uniform success or failure.

About the Guinn Center

The Kenny C. Guinn Center for Policy Priorities is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit 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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- ⁷ ACS Ventures, LLC., University of Nevada, Las Vegas Center for Research, Evaluation, and Assessment, MYS Project Management, Nevada External Outcomes Evaluation. December 2018. Page 10. <http://www.acsventures.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/2018-Nevada-External-Outcomes-Evaluation-Report-20190113-REVISED.pdf>
- ⁸ Nevada Legislature. 2015 78th Legislature. Senate Bill 432. <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/App/NELIS/REL/78th2015/Bill/2101/Text>
- ⁹ The ACS report includes proficiency rates by grade and compares increases/decreases in grade-level proficiency rates between Victory and Non-Victory schools. This is a positive step, but still compares the performance of two different cohorts of students. Most prior year third graders are current year fourth graders, so comparing year-over-year third grade performance includes two different groups of students. Perhaps a better analysis would be comparing grade-level cohorts grouped Victory/non-Victory schools to see if students in Victory schools become proficient at a greater rate than do students in non-Victory schools.
- ¹⁰ Each student who took the SBAC assessment in the current and prior year is provided a growth score. The median growth percentile is the median student growth score for each school.