

## LOS ANGELES

## CITYWIDE EDUCATION PROGRESS REPORT

## Key Takeaways: June 2018

In recent years, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) has experienced declining enrollment, increased competition between its district and charter schools, and an often divided school board. However, education leaders instituted new reforms in the 2017-18 school year, resulting in simplified school enrollment and new talent pipelines. And the current school board is more aligned on strategy, including its selection of Superintendent Austin Beutner to lead LAUSD. Going forward, education leaders must develop a cohesive strategy for the city's many schools—district and charter—and ensure that citywide efforts to improve family access to high-quality options are sustained.

## Challenges Ahead

### ► Developing a cohesive vision for citywide improvement

The selection of a [new superintendent](#), which builds upon the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) school board election in 2017, provides an opportunity for education leaders to reset and establish a strategic vision for the city. Although many initiatives have launched over the last decade, superintendent turnover and an often-divided school board have led to a lack of clarity and urgency. Leaders must identify a school improvement strategy or comprehensive portfolio strategy for all schools in L.A. Charter schools can play a role in education improvement—the city has many that are high performing—but clarifying that role is a key effort. Education leadership in L.A. must make sure to align their next steps with an existing community-led reform movement and an active funding community.

### ► Helping families choose L.A. public schools

Los Angeles has a complex portfolio of schools: 260 magnet schools, 133 dual-language or bilingual programs, 150 Schools for Advanced Studies, 94 autonomous schools, 44 linked learning pathways, 7 International Baccalaureate programs, 277 public charter schools, and hundreds of traditional neighborhood schools. For all families to gain access to these options, education leaders in the district and charter sectors must first make sure they have information about high-quality public schools, and then simplify the application process. Encouragingly, in April 2018 the school board [voted](#) to create a common performance framework that will include a single summative rating for all LAUSD schools. The working group established by the board should learn from other cities to replicate successful strategies, such as providing simple cross-school comparison, including each school's availability of special education or English language learner services, and setting common criteria for what a particular curricular model encompasses. Additionally, the initial phase of LAUSD's [unified enrollment system](#) provides families with information about some schools, such as the district's magnet and dual-language programs. Families are using this system for some school applications as of spring 2018 for the 2018-19 school year. Education leaders should consider consolidating more school choice programs into this system and further aligning application timelines.

### ► Prioritizing school quality in the midst of a financial crisis

Facing declining enrollment and a fiscal cliff, LAUSD must maximize its financial resources. To revive enrollment and increase options, both the district and charter sectors have been opening new school models, but neither are closing schools at a similar rate. This process must be more strategic and data-driven to avoid duplication of efforts and keep the focus on increasing the availability of quality school options. LAUSD must clearly identify necessary central office costs and then prioritize resources for distribution to individual schools to support instruction and other student needs. Some district schools have significant flexibility over resources, staffing, and curriculum, but this has not been codified through district-level policy. To align with the spirit of California's weighted student funding system, LAUSD developed the [Student Equity Needs Index](#) with community input. This helps target resources to the school level, but currently reflects only a small portion of the LAUSD budget. Another opportunity is to reconsider accepting philanthropic dollars, which it has previously rejected.

## Spotlight

### Board Clarifies School Performance Ratings to Improve School Choice

How should parents determine which schools to attend? How should LAUSD determine where to prioritize improvement?

Until recently, this has been unclear in Los Angeles. Although the State of California publishes a school [dashboard](#), many community groups report that many families do not know how to use or interpret the data. The district lacks a clear way to identify its lowest-performing schools.

In April 2018 the Los Angeles school board [voted](#) to create a common performance framework that will include a single summative rating and allow parents to hone in on information they care about. “We’ve had numerous conversations about low-performing schools, but we haven’t acted as a system yet,” board member Kelly Gonez said. “We needed to do something as a system.” (*LA School Report*, 4/12/2018).

As a first step, a working group will be convened by the superintendent and will report back to the school board later in 2018.

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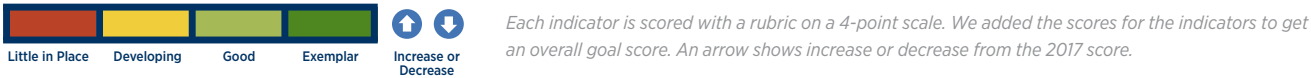
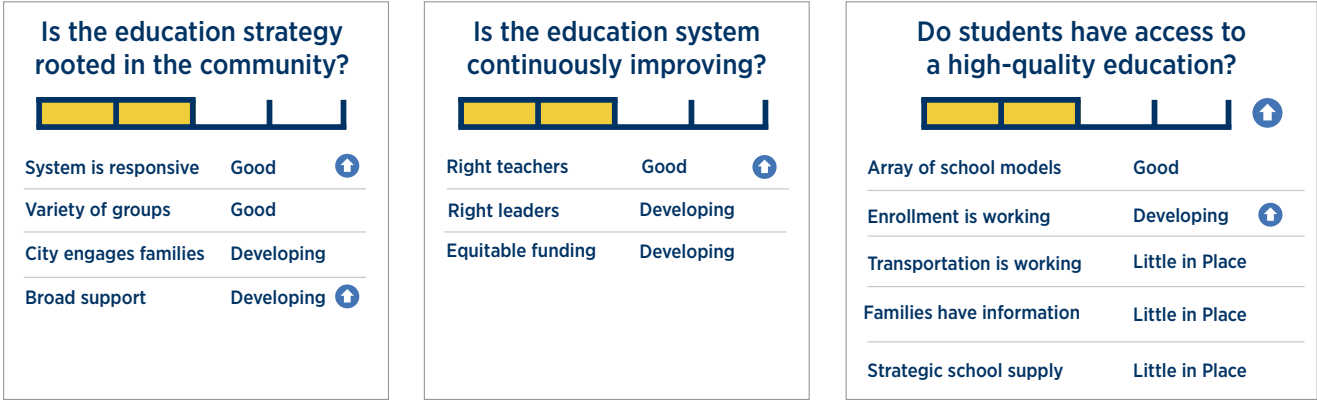
### Grassroots Groups Push Change Through Grants, Forums, and School-Application Assistance

An active grassroots coalition has emerged in Los Angeles in the absence of cohesive civic leadership. One of these groups, [Great Public Schools Now](#), is working across sectors to improve school performance. They provide grants to charter and district schools to replicate successful programs and improve teacher retention and teacher candidate pools. The group also holds community forums across the city to collect information about family needs.

[Parent Revolution](#), a local nonprofit, helped hundreds of families identify and submit applications to high-quality schools through a pilot program launched in 2016. Their support helped families facing multiple applications and no consolidated source of school information.

Parent Revolution is part of a larger coalition led by the [Partnership for Equitable Access to Public Schools in Los Angeles](#), which currently advises on the development of a school finder tool that will improve family access to information.

System Reforms



Key Takeaways: System Reforms

Los Angeles has a strong grassroots presence and the community regularly shapes the school opening process. But access to high-quality school options remains a significant challenge. Families lack consistent, comprehensive, user-friendly information about all their school options, and there is no citywide data-driven strategy to guide school siting and facilities access, or to hold schools accountable for poor performance and underenrollment. The board has taken initial steps to address these issues, but new Superintendent Austin Beutner must see them through.

Is the education strategy rooted in the community?



**Is the whole community engaged?** Education is a citywide endeavor. When families, community organizations, and city leaders have the opportunity to provide feedback and share in the vision, the strategy is more likely to be sustainable and meet the needs of all students. In this goal, we look at how well the city is doing with engaging key stakeholders.



**Are a variety of groups engaged in education?**

Los Angeles has ongoing, nonprofit community efforts supporting education. The Communities for Los Angeles Student Success (CLASS) coalition, established in 2013 and led by United Way, MALDEF, Inner City Struggle, and others, has long championed equity and accountability. They have been joined more recently by groups like the Partnership for Equitable Access to Public Schools (PEAPS-LA) and [Great Public Schools Now](#). They and other nonprofits continue to build a strong grassroots community in Los Angeles that includes churches, foster youth organizations, and local community service organizations, and they often work together to reach a wider group of parents. These groups represent families most impacted by low-performing schools, but some neighborhoods still lack organized representation. Coalitions tend to be regional, but there has been increased citywide collaboration on issues like unified enrollment and equitable funding.



Good



### Does the education system respond to community feedback?

In response to community interest in 2016 and 2017, former LAUSD superintendent Michelle King held town halls at neighborhood schools across the city. Community groups reported that families in Los Angeles are actively engaged in understanding and improving school options. Additionally, they reported that the school board increasingly recognizes the role of parents in the policymaking processes. Community groups, such as [Parent Revolution](#) and Speak UP, have helped parents be active at school board meetings and board members have subsequently made requests to meet with the parents to resolve issues such as funding and school information.



Developing

### Does the city engage families in educational decisions that impact them?

LAUSD does not have a set protocol for communicating information to families about school openings, closures, or school improvement efforts. This results in decreased transparency in both the district and charter sectors. The district has moved away from a structured approach in favor of what they consider an organic feedback process with individual school communities. In the charter sector, there are no unified engagement standards; rather, as independent entities, their strategies around family engagement remain tailored and localized to each school.



Developing



### Is there a strong and deep coalition of support for the education strategy?

In recent years LAUSD has had a divided school board, uncertainty over who would lead the district as superintendent, and a mayor who was not actively involved in education. At times, relationships between charter school supporters and LAUSD has been openly contentious. Grassroots coalitions have been guiding coherence around education efforts, although LAUSD has much to do to improve low-performing schools and right-size district operations. Following a school board election in May 2017, the majority of members now support a reform agenda. The selection of civic leader Austin Beutner as superintendent in May 2018 may lead to a fully articulated education strategy that the city can rally behind.

## Is the education system continuously improving?



Developing

**Do schools have the resources they need?** School improvement happens at the school level, but making sure resources are available requires sound, citywide policy. Having the right talent in a city is critical for schools to be able to provide students with a quality education. Schools should also have control over their budgets so they have the resources to address the needs of their student population.



Good



### Do schools have the kinds of teachers they need?

While both district and charter schools experience problematic teacher shortages, LAUSD has made significant improvements in teacher placement and retention in recent years. LAUSD's [career ladder](#) program provides guidance and financial support to paraprofessionals and other classified staff members seeking to become teachers; it currently serves nearly 400 members training in high-need areas such as special education and bilingual education. District officials also reported strong pipelines from local California State University campuses, UCLA, Loyola Marymount, USC, and Pepper-

dine. In 2017 the charter sector reported facing challenges with recruiting and retaining teachers—regularly losing teachers who leave for more lucrative positions in district schools—with no sector-wide strategy to address this. Nevertheless, smaller charter schools tried innovative solutions like recruiting from among student alumni, while larger charter management organizations relied on independent pipelines.



Developing

### Do schools have the kinds of leaders they need?

Citywide leadership vacancies are low in Los Angeles, but the quality and fit of leaders varies across sectors and turnover at district schools can be a problem. An [internal district pipeline](#) has helped LAUSD increase the number of applications for open positions and allows them to develop a strong bench of future school and non-school leadership. Charter leaders reported in 2017 that leadership recruitment was not a problem, but also said that quality and fit within the current leadership pool was lacking.



Developing

### Does funding equitably follow students?

The LAUSD school board voted in April 2018 to revise its [Student Equity Needs Index](#) to include additional student characteristics, such as asthma rates, gunshot injuries, and test scores. However, the index represented slightly less than 5% of LAUSD's overall operating budget in 2017-2018, according to the Partnership for LA Schools, and relatively little funding is provided to schools on a strict per-student basis.

## Do students have access to a high-quality education?



Developing ↑

**Do school choice and supply meet family needs?** This goal addresses how well the city is doing with providing families access to quality schools. We look at what the city is doing to ensure quality schools are in every neighborhood, and how well the choice process is working for families who want to use it.



Good

### Does the school supply represent an array of models?

Ensuring that school models are responsive to community needs is a top priority for both district and charter leaders. Due to recent enrollment challenges, LAUSD is not opening many new schools, but it is encouraging pilot schools to experiment with new governance models, reimagine academic programs, and convert existing school seats to magnet seats. The charter supply represents a fairly even mix of small local charter schools and large charter management organizations, although leaders reported concern that burdensome administrative requirements, politics, and facility availability are limiting the expansion of small, innovative charter schools.



Developing



### Is the enrollment process working for families?

Community groups reported that the enrollment process is a challenge for Los Angeles families and that affluent families who have the resources to navigate the system have an unfair advantage. As a step forward, in spring 2018 LAUSD launched a [unified enrollment system](#) for multiple in-district choice programs, embedded outreach support in local district offices, and plans to open “Welcome Centers” later this year. LAUSD reported

that the new system has led to increased applications, including an almost 100% increase over the past year during the second enrollment window for magnet schools. The enrollment system does not include all schools, notably excluding independent charter schools, and uses different deadlines and applications for various in-district choice programs. The charter sector is exploring developing a separate system.



**Little in Place**

### Is transportation working for families?

Busing is available for students to attend residential traditional schools in LAUSD, but options diminish considerably when traveling farther out and vary by school choice program. Many charter schools cannot provide transportation. Discounted metro cards are available for students through LA Metro, but no free public transit option. Community members also reported frustration that no solutions have been proposed to address this problem.



**Little in Place**

### Do families have the information they need and know how to use it?

Community groups reported that most Los Angeles families are making school choice decisions based on word of mouth or are relying on school principals to tell them about available options when advancing to middle or high schools. Groups like [Parent Revolution](#) have tried to fill some of these gaps by providing families guidance through the process. The State of California publishes a school [dashboard](#) using an accountability framework, but community groups reported that many families do not know how to use or interpret the data. In April 2018 the LAUSD school board [voted](#) to create a school performance framework that will include a single summative rating for both district and charter schools.



**Little in Place**

### Is the city strategically managing its school portfolio?

Enrollment is declining within LAUSD boundaries, yet education leaders report that chronically underperforming and underenrolled schools remain open. New schools are opening in response to community demand, but there is a perception that school closures and consolidations citywide don't happen in parallel with school growth. Education leaders cited different reasons for the current school supply problem, including community politics, a lack of strong leadership or collaboration across sectors, perceived oversaturation, and limited facilities. The city lacks clear or consistent processes to guide school opening or closing and does not have an intentional school supply strategy. A district official explained that, under current procedures, regional administrators work to identify schools in need of improvement and then create interventions.

## Data & Scoring

### Where did we get this information?

- ▶ Interviews with district, charter, and community leaders
- ▶ Policy documents from district, charter, and state websites
- ▶ School data from each city
- ▶ A 400-parent survey administered in March, 2017 in Cleveland, Denver, Indianapolis, Memphis, New Orleans, Oakland, and Washington, D.C.

### How did we score the system reforms and goals?

- ▶ Each indicator is scored with a rubric on a 4-point scale. We added the scores for the indicators to get an overall goal score. See the [Methodology & Resources](#) page for details.

#### Score Levels

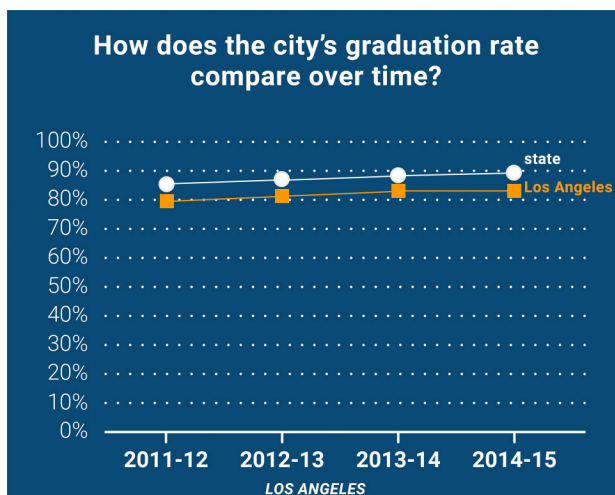


Increase or Decrease

## Key Takeaways: Student & School Outcomes

Graduation rates in Los Angeles have kept pace with the state, with rates at about 6 percentage points below state averages in 2014-15. Low-income students perform slightly worse on reading and math assessments when compared to low-income students nationally, but their relative performance did improve between 2010-11 and 2014-15. Our measure of student access to high-quality educational opportunities indicates some disparities: Hispanic students were enrolled in high school advanced math coursework at rates below their enrollment, while Asian American and Pacific Islander students had disproportionately high enrollment.

### Is the education system continuously improving?

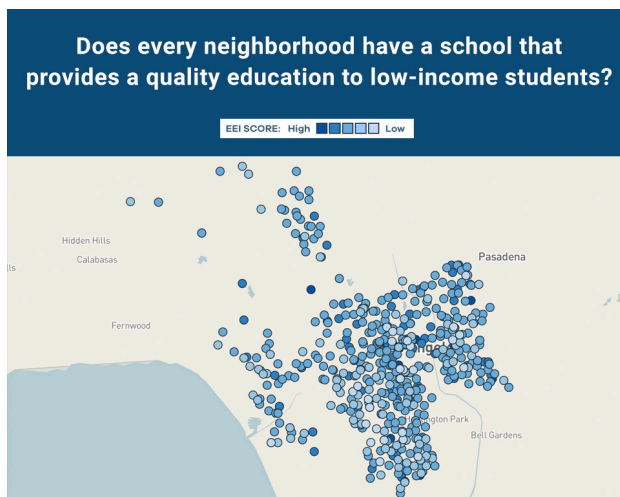


► In 2014-15, the city's graduation rate was slightly below the state's.

Data: Percent of first-time 9th grade students graduating in four years, citywide and statewide.

Source: EDFacts Initiative, U.S. Department of Education, Assessment Data and Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates, 2011-12 to 2014-15.

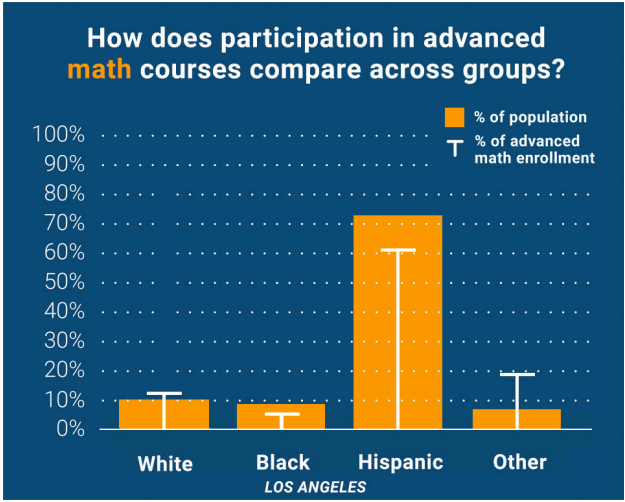
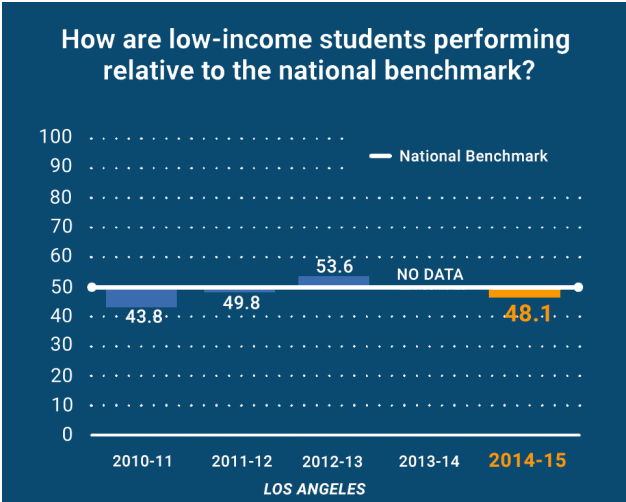
### Do students have access to a high-quality education?



► The Education Equality Index (EEI) identifies how students from low-income families are performing in cities and schools across the country. See [this interactive tool](#) to explore individual school performance.

Data: The Education Equality Index (EEI) was supplied by Education Cities and GreatSchools. See [their site](#) for more detail.

Sources: California Department of Education, 2010-11 to 2014-15; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2010-11 to 2014-15.



► Students from low-income families in Los Angeles are performing somewhat worse in math and reading than low-income students in the average city. EEI scores in Los Angeles have improved by 3% over time.

Data: The Education Equality Index (EEI) was supplied by Education Cities and GreatSchools. See [their site](#) for more detail.  
Sources: California Department of Education, 2010-11 to 2014-15; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2010-11 to 2014-15.

► In 2013-14, Hispanic students were enrolling in high school advanced math coursework at rates below their enrollment, while Asian American and Pacific Islander students (shown here as “Other”) have disproportionately high enrollment.

Data: Enrollment of students in math courses above Algebra II. Rates calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled in advanced math by the number of students in the school. Sub-group rates determined at the school level.  
Source: U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2013-14.

Data & Scoring

Where did we get this data?

- Publicly available state and federal data, making our results comparable and reproducible.
- The most up-to-date data available for all 18 cities at the time of our data collection. See [Methodology & Resources](#) for more information.

What makes the data citywide?

- We include all charter and district schools within the municipal boundary of a city.
- In Houston, Indianapolis, Memphis, New Orleans, and San Antonio we use school data from multiple districts within the municipal boundary.

## About Los Angeles

The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) has the second-largest public school system in the nation. District boundaries are somewhat larger than the city of Los Angeles; for example, the district also serves the city of West Hollywood. Since the 1990s, the education system has undergone various reforms to decentralize decisionmaking at the school and regional levels and provide families with more choice over school options. A strong coalition of third-party organizations has long been guiding education efforts across the city.

## School Choice in the City

Students are assigned to a neighborhood school. Families can opt into other schools using any one of LAUSD's broad array of in-district choice programs or apply to a charter school.

## Governance Model

The LAUSD school board is a democratically elected 7-member body that oversees district schools and authorizes the majority of the city's charter schools. It recently selected Superintendent Austin Beutner to run the system. LAUSD has six local districts with regional superintendents who oversee day-to-day operations and report to the superintendent. Some oversight and support of the district is provided by the Los Angeles County Office of Education, which also directly authorizes charter schools under certain circumstances.

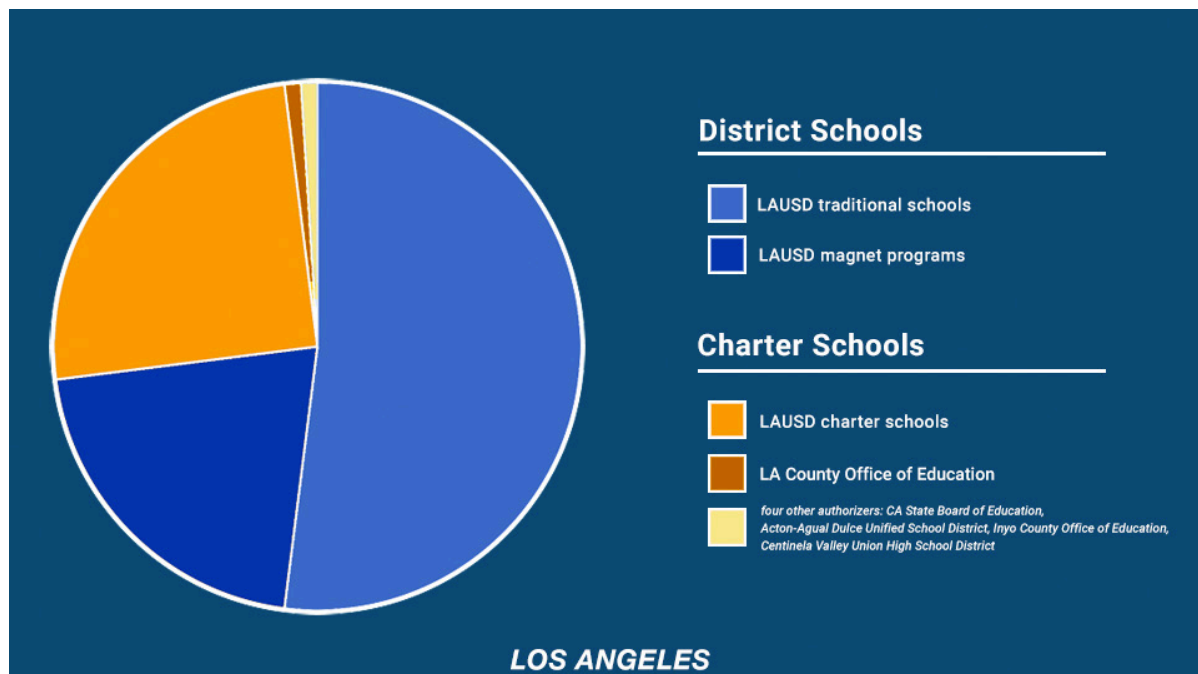
## 2017 District and Charter Student Body

**Enrollment:** 664,774 students

**Race and ethnicity:** 74% Hispanic, 10% black, 8% white, 8% other

**Low-income:** 79% free and reduced-price lunch

## 2017 School Composition



*Note: Enrollment and demographics data for LAUSD district schools and LAUSD-affiliated charter schools.  
Source: Los Angeles Unified School District and ED-Data, 2016-17.  
School data from researcher analysis of public records, 2016-17.*

## About This Project

**The Citywide Education Progress Report looks at how a city is doing across three goals:**

- The education system is continuously improving
- All students have access to a high-quality education
- The education strategy is rooted in the community

Across each goal we present indicators of what the cities are doing (what we call “system reforms”) and how they are doing (what we call “outcomes”).

Our city reports focus on education strategies for the 2017-18 school year. Our analyses reflect developments through June 2018. These are updates to our original reports from the 2016-17 school year.

To understand how well cities are doing, we used state and federal data to track school improvement, graduation rates, and student access to high-quality schools. Our student and school data cover the 2011-2012 to 2014-2015 school years. To understand city strategies and identify early progress, we relied on interviews, surveys, public documents, and news articles from 2014-2015 to the present. This analysis uses data for district and charter schools to look at all schools within municipal boundaries, rather than just one sector or district.

We cannot say that employing a certain strategy will lead to a particular result, or even whether a particular strategy is effective in these cities. But the reports can help us to see how a strategy is working, what problem areas remain, and which cities are seeing promising results.

The 18 cities in this study include Atlanta, Boston, Camden, Cleveland, Chicago, Denver, Houston, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Memphis, New Orleans, New York City, Oakland, Philadelphia, San Antonio, Tulsa, and Washington, D.C.

To learn more about the project, compare other cities, and read the cross-city analysis, visit:  
[research.crpe.org/projects/stepping-up](https://research.crpe.org/projects/stepping-up)



The Center on Reinventing Public Education is a research and policy analysis center at the University of Washington Bothell developing systemwide solutions for K–12 public education. Learn more about our work at [crpe.org](https://crpe.org).