



Research
Division

TWO CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS, ONE MISSION:

Latino Academic Excellence 2021



This year, the California Charter Schools Association set out to better understand how charter public schools are performing with Latino students and whether there are best practices that charter and traditional public schools can adopt to collectively improve Latino academic performance in the state.

This research brief includes an analysis of key strategies adopted at two exemplary charter public schools – Libertas College Preparatory Charter and Santa Rosa Academy.

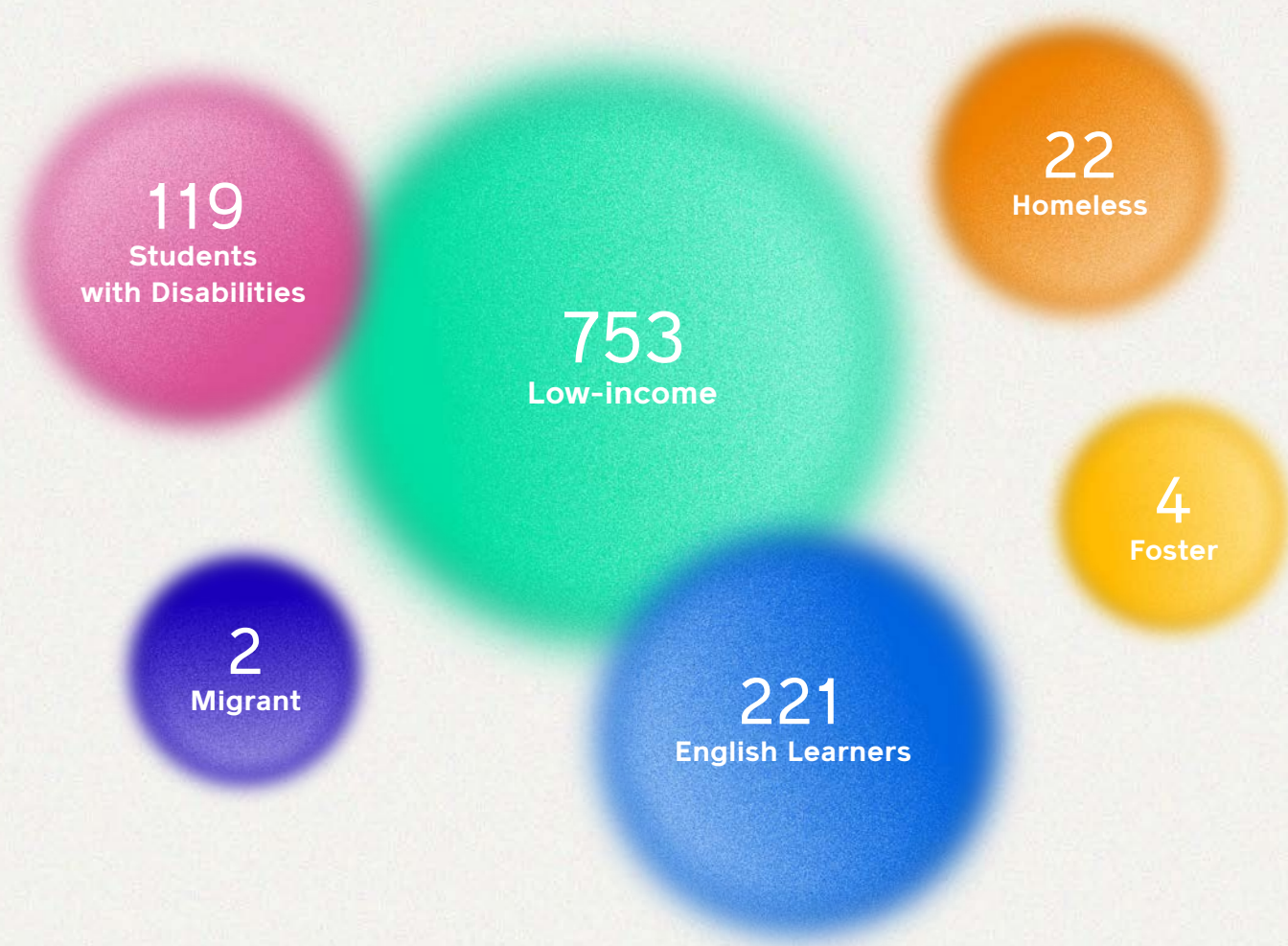
In addition, we provide an overview of the statewide composition of Latino students in California and their academic performance.

An Overview

Latino students make up 55.3% of the **public school student population** in California – the single largest ethnic group in the state's K-12 system. Within California's charter public schools, the Latino student population has increased by 5% over the last 7 years. In 2021, 52.4% of charter public students are Latino or 361,537 students.

Latino public school students are multi-faceted with intersectional identities. In California, 26% are English learners, 13% are on specialized learning plans, 4% are homeless and 77% are considered low-income¹.

Latino Charter Student Enrollment Intersectionality 2020-21
Per 1,000 Latino Charter Students



Due to the pandemic, the last statewide test scores² were in 2019. At that time, the average public school student in California scored one point above the met standard in English Language Arts (ELA) and 29 points below the met standard in Math. When looking at the performance of all Latino public school students, there was a gap in both ELA and Math when compared to all students.

Charter school Latino students were 14 points below the met standard in English, whereas Latino students at traditional public schools were 25 points below. In Math, charter school Latino students were 50 points below the met standard, compared to traditional public school Latino students with 59 points in math.

CCSA believes this data serves as a wake-up call for all public schools to do a better job serving the unique academic needs of Latino students. That said, it is important to note that based on statewide academic growth data, a higher proportion of charter schools are accelerating the closing of opportunity gaps for Latino students.

The **2017-2019 CAASPP growth data** recently released by the California Department of Public Education shows that proportionally more independent charter schools had very high average growth with Latino students (26% had very high growth in ELA growth and 28% in Math). Only 20% of traditional public schools had similarly high growth.³ The next page provides a list of the 10 charter public schools that achieved the highest Latino student growth statewide in ELA and Math.

In addition, CCSA identified two “bright spot” schools that are performing in the 85th percentile or higher for Latino students statewide on the annual state assessment (CAASPP). In our search for these schools, we took the Latino scores for all public schools and did a weighted average for both ELA and Math test scores and put them on a 1-100 scale. We then interviewed the founders and leaders at the school to understand the kind of instructional “building blocks” they have been able to establish resulting in Latino academic excellence.

**Charter Public Schools with the
Highest Latino Student Growth
Statewide in ELA and Math**

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Wonderful College Prep
Academy – Lost Hills

Watts Learning Center
Charter Middle

Aspire Inskeep
Academy Charter

Mountain View
Montessori Charter

Accelerated Achievement
Academy

Community Montessori

ISANA Palmati Academy

Wilder's Prep Academy
Charter Middle

Rocketship Alma Academy

Capitol Collegiate Academy

MATH

Wonderful College Prep
Academy – Lost Hills

Alpha: Cornerstone
Academy Preparatory

James Jordan
Middle School

Mountain View
Montessori Charter

Rocketship
Rising Stars

Magnolia Science Academy 5

Palm Lane Elementary Charter

Multicultural
Learning Center

Integrity Charter

Anahuacalmecac International
University Preparatory of
North America

LIBERTAS

COLLEGE PREP

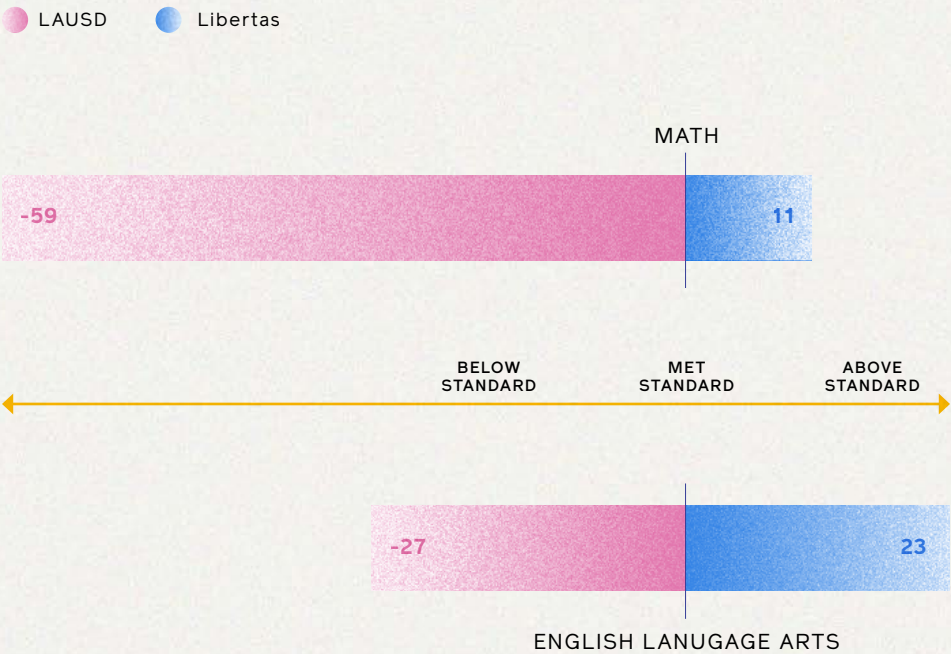
- + Founded: 2015
- + Serves: 284 Students
- + Grades: 4-8
- + Authorized By:
Los Angeles Unified
School District
- + 80% Latino Students
- + In the Top 10%
of Latino Students
in California

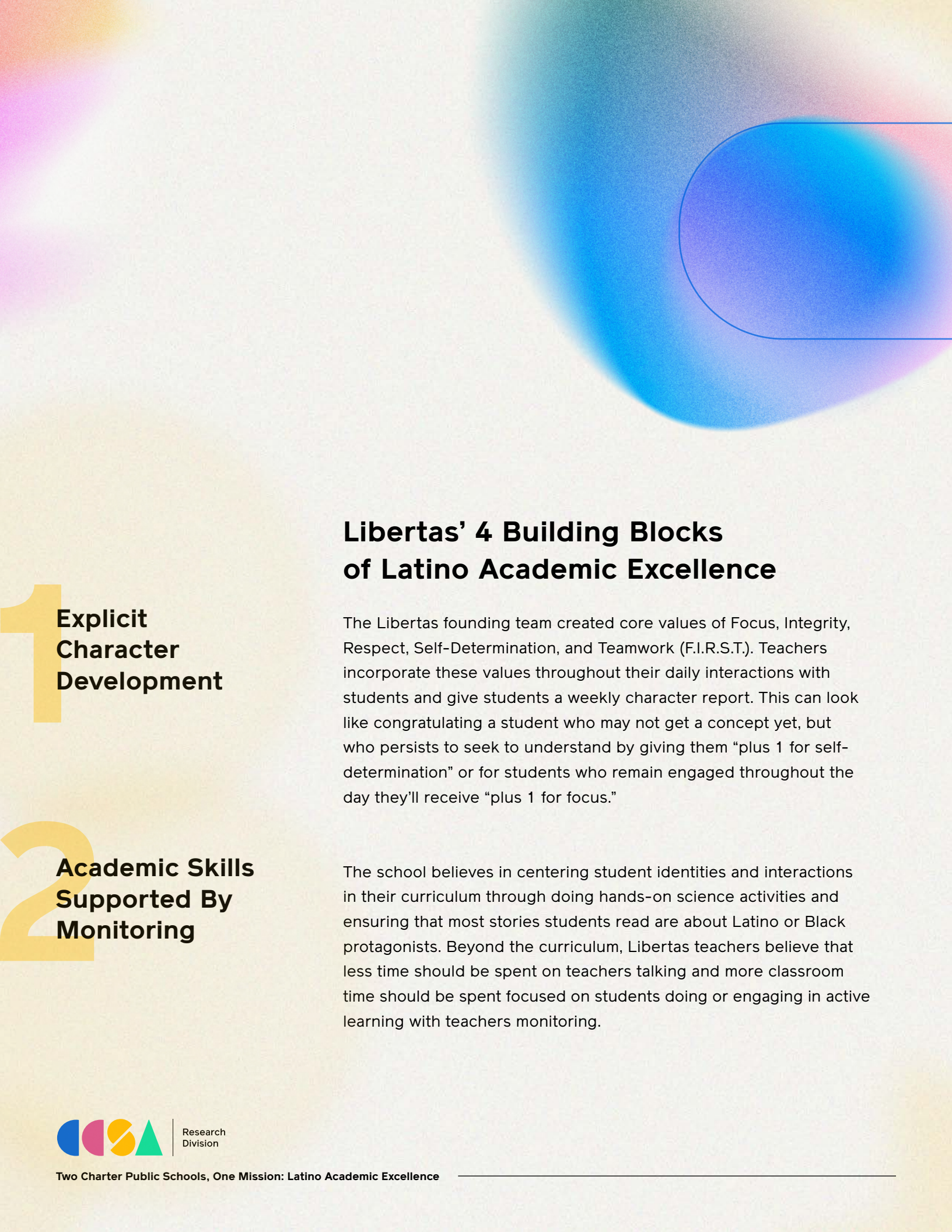


Libertas was founded in 2015 in South Los Angeles by members of the community, teachers who believed in the mission, and parents looking for middle schools that pursued academic excellence while providing a supporting and safe environment for their students.

While the school has only been open for six years, the intentionality of their model translated into the outcomes they achieved with students almost immediately. Data show that, on average, Latino students at Libertas are not only performing above standard but are performing leaps and bounds above the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) average in both English Language Arts and Math. As shown in the figure below, Latino students at Libertas scored, on average, 50 points higher than the LAUSD average for Latino students in ELA and 70 points higher in math.

Latino Student Distance from Standard on CAASPP (2018-19)





1 Explicit Character Development

Libertas' 4 Building Blocks of Latino Academic Excellence

The Libertas founding team created core values of Focus, Integrity, Respect, Self-Determination, and Teamwork (F.I.R.S.T.). Teachers incorporate these values throughout their daily interactions with students and give students a weekly character report. This can look like congratulating a student who may not get a concept yet, but who persists to seek to understand by giving them “plus 1 for self-determination” or for students who remain engaged throughout the day they’ll receive “plus 1 for focus.”



2 Academic Skills Supported By Monitoring

The school believes in centering student identities and interactions in their curriculum through doing hands-on science activities and ensuring that most stories students read are about Latino or Black protagonists. Beyond the curriculum, Libertas teachers believe that less time should be spent on teachers talking and more classroom time should be spent focused on students doing or engaging in active learning with teachers monitoring.

3 Intentionally Diverse Educators

To ensure that students are making progress, the school uses NWEA MAP as an interim assessment three times a year, using the information to identify students who need additional supports. Teachers also use a technique in the classroom called “aggressive monitoring.” This is when the teacher completes the problems or questions they will be assigning students in class ahead of time, and breaks down where students might get confused. They choose the questions that will have the most student misconceptions, model it for students, and check every child’s paper throughout the class to see if the concept is mastered or if the misconception needs to be addressed or retaught.

4 Removing Language As A Barrier To Engage With Caregivers

Four years ago, Libertas made an intentional focus to recruit and retain more teachers and board members of color. The school’s leaders believe that when the teacher reflects the students in the classroom, there is more engagement and students feel more supported. These hypotheses are backed by CCSA’s own research, [Charting the Course to Equity](#), which highlighted the importance of racially and ethnically diverse leadership to promote positive outcomes for children of color.

Parents and caregivers are an essential component of a student’s success, making communication between the school and families critical. Libertas believes that the burden of communicating in effective ways is chiefly on them and not on others. In addition to purposeful recruiting of Spanish-speaking staff members, all team members translate materials and information into Spanish as well as encouraging parents to speak or write back in Spanish.



- + Founded: 2005
- + Serves: 1,686 Students
- + Grades: K-12
- + Authorized By:
Menifee Union Elementary
School District
- + 39% Latino Students
- + In the Top 15%
of Latino Students
in California



Santa Rosa Academy was founded by educators who wanted to expand educational options focused on developing the whole child for the students of Riverside County. As “Rangers,” the students and dedicated educators push the limits of the public education and environmental friendliness frontiers.

Though it is a nonclassroom-based charter public school, Santa Rosa Academy recently opened a world-class facility where students can meet with teachers, engage in hands-on activities, and participate in sports.

The new school site is situated across a thoroughfare from Mount San Jacinto Community College, allowing Santa Rosa Academy to develop unique partnerships and opportunities with the college to further advance the academic progress of Latino students at Santa Rosa Academy.

Students can pursue dual or concurrent enrollment at Mt. San Jacinto College, earning over 30 college credits prior to graduation, participate in one of the Career and Technical Education programs offered, or simply complete the newly revamped **a-g course pathway** offered.

Latino Student Four-Year Graduation Rates (2019-20)

Santa Rosa Rangers

100%

California State

90%

From Executive Director Dr. Robert Hennings' perspective, the main goal of the school is to prepare students for that “next thing” regardless of what it is. In addition, the nonclassroom-based charter public school is intently focused on developing, supporting, and nurturing the whole child. This is achieved through a specific focus on community service and engagement, crafting the school as a safe zone, and utilization of a student success team.

1 Community Service and Engagement

Santa Rosa Academy's 3 Building Blocks of Latino Academic Excellence

Civic responsibility is a core tenet to the way things work at Santa Rosa Academy. As a result, the school has community partnerships with the City of Menifee, Boys & Girls Clubs, and Mount San Jacinto Community College. This has enabled the school to have after school programs, summer enrichment, and further flesh out their student capstone projects. All freshmen are asked to do a capstone project that is a community service project. Students work on this throughout their first three years in high school and do a culminating presentation on the project in their senior year of high school. Parents are a core partner as well, not only as a key component to the academic program, but also as a conduit to the community to help bring community partners in and connect students with service projects.



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Crafting a Safe Zone

Character development is the base upon which all the school's decisions are based. Santa Rosa Academy believes that it is their job to address all aspects of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. For physiological needs, the school has a universal feeding program as well as deep community connections as mentioned above. From esteem to safety, the school has employed many different strategies which range from a universal dress code so that all students have a sense of belonging, to the everyday conversation with students about how they can be good peers, respecting and connecting with students from different backgrounds or with divergent beliefs. Self-actualization is achieved through the different pathways students have to success in their "next step" after Santa Rosa, where all choices are respected.

Utilizing a Student Success Team

Fundamentally, educators at Santa Rosa Academy believe that each student has needs that can and should be catered to at an individual, personalized basis. To better cater to and understand these needs, all students are given assessments at the beginning of the year, and a Student Success Team (SST) is employed. The underlying belief is that each student needs a team of caring adults to ensure the interventions are tailored to the student's needs. At a whole school level, Dr. Hennings monitors the needs of all students and brings on staff as needed to fit their needs. For example, this past year the school employed two full time counselors and in this most recent year, paraprofessionals in the lower grades to help with literacy gaps.

Conclusion

This research brief underscores that although Latino students make up 55.3% of the public school student population in California – the single largest ethnic group in the state’s K-12 system – Latino students are not achieving at the rate of other ethnic groups, and public schools must do a better job at supporting Latino students so that they succeed academically.

Students at California charter public schools score higher than traditional public schools on ELA and Math but more work is needed to close the achievement gap.

CCSA is committed to advancing educational opportunities for all students. By highlighting the “building blocks” of two top-performing charter public schools for Latino students, other schools can now consider applying these practices that best fit their school model and student body, thereby advancing academic success for Latino students and graduates in the Golden State.

Libertas College Preparatory Charter and Santa Rosa Academy are two exemplary charter public schools that are producing equitable educational outcomes for Latino students by implementing different approaches for different grade levels. These two schools have identified and established fundamental building blocks that emphasize the importance of:

- + Laying the foundation of character education
- + Implementing responsive social-emotional strategies and staffing structures
- + Adopting data-informed interventions
- + Ensuring literacy for students by 4th grade

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¹ Low-income (CDE Definition)
Students who received the designation of socioeconomically disadvantaged. These are students who qualify for the federal Free/Reduced Price Lunch program or whose parents did not receive a high school diploma.

² California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP).

³ In September 2021, the California Department of Education released CAASPP student growth data from 2017-2019. This data includes a “growth score” for every subgroup at a school, as well as decile rankings from 1 (low growth) to 10 (high growth). Proportionally more independent charter schools received a Latino decile ranking of “9” or “10.” CCSA typically assesses the performance of “independent charters” separately from district-dependent charters. Independent charters appoint their board of directors, do not use the local school district’s collective bargaining agreement, are directly funded, and are typically incorporated as a 501(c)3.