



SERVING DIVERSE STUDENT NEEDS IN THE GOLDEN STATE

Practices and Programs of Nonclassroom-based Charter Public Schools

Nonclassroom-based At-A-Glance

The California Charter Schools Association report on nonclassroom-based charter public schools (NCBs) offers lawmakers and public education leaders a breakdown on the variety of instructional delivery models available to families within NCBs that are different than what is offered at conventional schools. The flexibility of NCBs allows them to offer students a tailored blend of distance learning, independent study, home study, site-based instruction, other services at resource center facilities, and/or access to career technical education pathways.

NCBs have recently faced increased pressure in California including a two-year moratorium on new NCBs, a freeze on funding for new NCB enrollment in the 2020-21 school year and calls for wider reform. There is much to be learned from the innovations of NCB operators, particularly during a global pandemic that has forced traditionally site-based educators into a distance learning model.

Report Findings

Since the inception of charter schools in California in 1993, nonclassroom-based charter schools (NCBs) have played a consistent and crucial role in meeting the needs of students and families seeking an alternative to site-based public schools.

NCBs Offer a Wide Variety of Programmatic Specialties

Including numerous offerings under the headers of career-focused, personalized learning, college-ready, reengagement offerings for at-promise and adult students, constructivist, content focused, and 21st century learning options.

Nonclassroom-based is a catch-all term for schools with a variety of instructional delivery models.

Some NCBs are online-only, others require students attend a site-based classroom four of five days in the week. To qualify as NCB, students spend less than 80% of their time in a physical classroom.

NCBs have grown and adapted their offerings to meet a wide variety of student needs in a **personalized learning environment.**

Now serving more than:

190,000+

California students in 2020

About 33% of all NCBs are Classified as Dashboard Alternative Status Schools (DASS).¹

This is much higher than the proportion of site-based charter schools that are DASS (only 4%).

NCBs with Reengagement/Adult Programs Tend to Enroll Higher Proportions of Historically Underserved Student Groups

While NCBs overall enroll fewer low-income and minority students than do site-based charter schools, NCBs with reengagement/adult programs tend to enroll more Latinx and Black students and more low-income students than site-based charters and traditional public schools.

NCBs Have a 17% Student Mobility Rate

Compared to 3% in site-based charters. NCBs meet an important need for students who are more mobile (moving from one school to another after the start of the school year).

Eight Best Practices of NCBs

1

High Level of Individualization or Personalization for Students

NCB curriculum and instructional style and timing are adapted to fit into the lives of each student. The personalized learning model provides choice and flexibility in curriculum, learning environments, and pacing for every student and can include a tailored blend of distance learning, independent study, home study, site-based instruction or other services at resource center facilities, community and project-based learning, internships and career technical education pathways.

2

Combination of Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning Models

At Compass Schools, every subject has a live instructional component, but attendance is not mandatory. According to NCB school leaders, research has shown the combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning models can be more effective.

3

Strong Teacher and Student Relationships

Given that teachers are not seeing most NCB students in a physical classroom five days a week, NCBs are required by law to sign written agreements with each student's family outlining the division of responsibilities between school staff and the family, and NCBs must maintain a 25:1 student-teacher ratio (*EC 51745.6*). NCBs have turned this requirement into an opportunity, assigning teachers a group of students to connect with regularly outside of class. As a result, NCB leaders say their teachers have a stronger connection with students compared with site-based teachers.

4 Flexibility of Instruction Timing and Style

NCBs provide the flexibility to choose the time, pacing, and delivery method of instruction. Every school leader interviewed for this report mentioned the importance of students being able to design their own schedule. Especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic, NCB students are contributing to the family income or helping to raise brothers and sisters. This flexibility enables students to have more work options during the day. As another example, at schools serving at-promise youth or adults, students may opt into an intensive schedule where courses are taken one at a time every 3-4 weeks.

5 Parents/Guardians are Active Participants In Students' Learning

NCB operators recognize that students will most likely need the support of an adult if they are to stay on track with schoolwork. In fact, this type of engagement between a parent and their child's education has been shown to result in higher student achievement. Many NCBs host trainings for new parents/guardians when students first enroll.

6 Emphasis on Students' Responsibility

The independence offered by this instructional approach means that students have to assume personal responsibility for their learning. NCBs focus on developing an infrastructure and process that will guide students to lead their own instruction. It is then up to the teachers and staff to give students the supportive structures that will help the student succeed.

7 Adapted to Meet Diverse Student Needs

Families appreciate the NCB model because of the possibility for a high degree of accommodation for special or unique needs. NCB leaders say that some students arrived at NCB programs because of bullying or emotional distress. Students who had children of their own or who had already dropped out of several site-based programs may also turn to an NCB to continue their education. NCBs have adapted their programming to meet the needs of these students, and the leaders all believed that this reputation of support and flexibility had led to an increase in short-term attendance from students who were fleeing difficult situations at their site-based schools.

8 Providing Needed Educational Options

NCB leaders saw their schools as an integral part in a suite of potential educational opportunities for their community. Over the years, many NCB's authorizing school districts grow to see the local NCB as an important supplement to the traditional school system.

¹ DASS is a designation given by the California Department of Education to schools that serve a high proportion of at-promise students (students with multiple expulsions, or are chronically absent, high school dropouts, adults, or teen parents).