



# Charter Public Schools Serving Hispanic Communities

With over 12 million Hispanic children in American public schools today, it is clear that the Hispanic population will have a significant role in the country’s future.<sup>1</sup> While district public schools still continue to serve the majority of Hispanic students, an increasing number of Hispanic families are choosing to enroll in charter public schools. As new charter schools continue to open their doors in neighborhoods with concentrated Hispanic populations, they are also investing in the future of the Hispanic community.

The innovative and culturally responsive teaching practices provided in high-quality charter schools are not only providing Hispanic students with an excellent alternative to district public schools, but they are also yielding academic results that show neither race/ethnicity nor income level must determine a child’s future.

Currently the fastest growing racial subgroup in the United States, Hispanics now make up 17 percent of the nation’s population.<sup>4</sup> With one in three Hispanics in the United States today of school-going age, their presence is particularly pronounced in public schools.<sup>3</sup> Roughly one-quarter of all public school students in 2014 identified as Hispanic—a number that is predicted to grow to about 30 percent by 2025.<sup>4</sup>

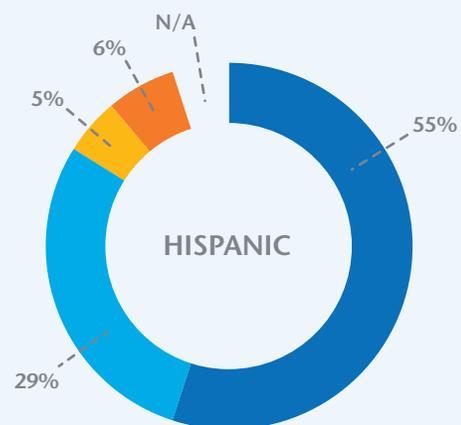
A recent parent survey commissioned by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools indicated Hispanics believe that, after the economy, education is the most important issue facing the nation. The same survey also found that school choice has become a significant priority within the Hispanic community. Almost 85 percent of Hispanic parents say they favor or strongly favor allowing parents to choose which public school their child attends, regardless of their address.<sup>5</sup>

The rising proportion of Hispanic students in charter schools tells us that Hispanic parents are beginning to recognize the advantages of charter schools

and are eager to choose them for their children. In 2004, Hispanic students made up 21 percent of all charter school enrollment. Today, charter schools are roughly 30 percent Hispanic and now hold a larger share of Hispanic students than the 25 percent share represented in district public schools.<sup>6</sup>

Do you favor or oppose allowing students and their parents to choose which public schools in the community the students attend, regardless of where they live?

- Strongly Favor
- Somewhat Favor
- Somewhat Oppose
- Strongly Oppose



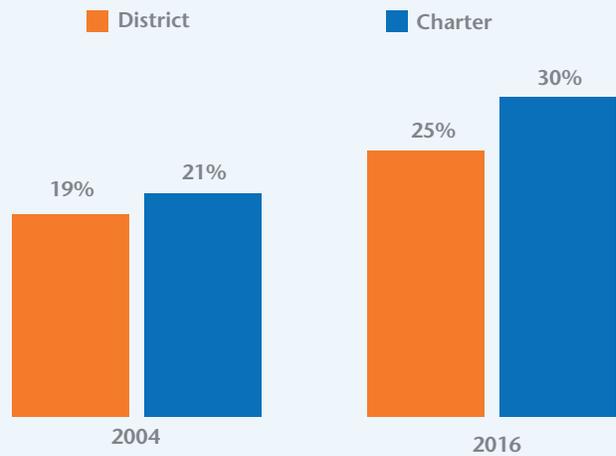
The desire of Hispanics to exercise school choice should come as no surprise in a time when metric after metric indicates that Hispanic students, particularly those in urban areas, are continuing to fall behind their white peers. Over one-quarter of Hispanic students attend schools that have been identified as underperforming, compared to only 9 percent of white students.<sup>7</sup> Hispanics are also 10 percent less likely to graduate from high school on time with a regular diploma than their white peers.<sup>8</sup>

Some states, such as California and Texas, are producing outstanding results in charter schools that serve high percentages of Hispanic students. In California, where 48 percent of the 545,000 charter school students are Hispanic,<sup>9</sup> more than half of the students attending a high-poverty charter school were enrolled in a school ranked within the top quartile statewide in 2014.<sup>10</sup> More notably, a Hispanic charter school student in California was 2.9 times more likely to be enrolled in a top 10 percent school in the state than a Hispanic student in a non-charter school.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, all seven high schools within the South Texas-based charter network IDEA Public Schools—which currently serves more than 30,000 students, 95 percent of whom are Hispanic—are ranked within the top 1 percent of the nation’s “most challenging high schools.”<sup>12</sup> And a consistent 99 percent of IDEA’s Hispanic high school students graduate on time with a regular diploma.

On a broad scale, the faith that many Hispanic parents are placing in charter schools to educate their children is not unfounded. Recently released data tell us that charter schools are creating positive outcomes for Hispanic students. A 2015 study conducted by researchers at Stanford University’s Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) found that urban charter schools generate learning growth equivalent to roughly 22 extra days of math and six days of reading for their Hispanic students. For Hispanic students in poverty, these numbers rose to 48 extra days in math and 25 extra days in reading. However, the most significant gains seen in charter schools are for Hispanic English learners (EL). These students gained 72 extra days of math and 79 extra days of reading when enrolled in charter schools, advancing at levels in math that are on par with their white non-EL peers.<sup>13</sup>

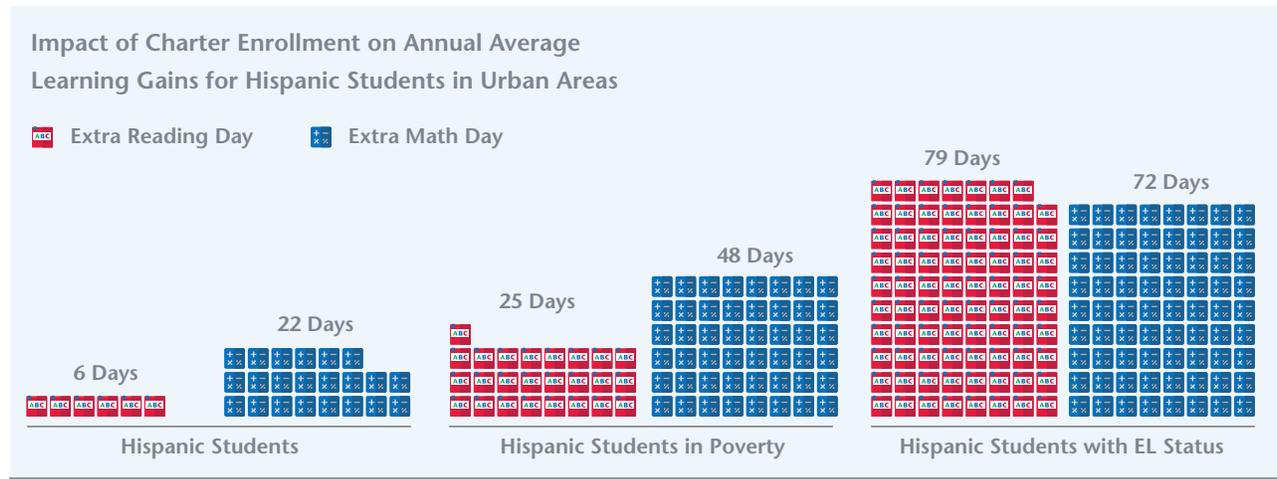
A study conducted by the National Council of La Raza and Center for American Progress that profiled high-performing charter schools with significant

Growth of Hispanic Enrollment in District and Charter Public Schools



portions of Hispanics and EL students concluded that these charter schools tend to be better positioned to serve such populations. Researchers attributed this to a charter school’s ability to implement new and innovative learning structures tailored to specific needs of students. Not only are charter schools allowed to provide extended learning time, but they also tend to accelerate the pace at which EL students engage with grade-level content by providing second-language support in tandem with their content curriculum.<sup>14</sup> Each of the charter schools profiled also showed elevated levels of cultural responsiveness and family engagement as they used a variety of strategies to establish and nurture relationships with parents, including those who are non-English speaking.<sup>15</sup> In general, charter school teachers are also more racially diverse than teachers in district public schools, creating a better likelihood that teacher demographics in charter schools will more closely mirror the demographic of charter students.<sup>16</sup>

Aside from fostering academic growth for Hispanic and EL students, charter schools are also weakening the link between historical disadvantages and access to higher education. Beginning with high school graduation, charter schools are outpacing district public schools in their quest to enroll more students in higher education. A 2014 study by the Mathematica Policy Research found that students enrolled in public charter high schools are 7 to 11 percentage points more likely to graduate from high school compared to their peers in district-run schools.<sup>17</sup> In Los Angeles, charter schools enroll only 19 percent of high school students but deliver



37 percent of the city’s graduates, the majority of whom are Hispanic.<sup>18</sup> The previously mentioned IDEA Public Schools, a charter network located in the Rio Grande Valley with a predominately high-poverty Hispanic population, boasts a 100 percent college acceptance rate. Many IDEA graduates are accepted into Ivy League, tier 1, and tier 2 colleges, despite the fact that over two-thirds of network students are first-generation college students.<sup>19</sup>

The National Council of La Raza has listed education as one of the top four issues affecting Hispanics this election season and has placed a significant focus on opening the gates to higher education for more Hispanics.<sup>20</sup> This preference matches the focus that many charter schools, particularly those serving minority and low-income communities, place on college readiness. When examining 28 charter management organizations with significant populations of low-income students and students of color,<sup>21</sup> almost 90 percent of their charter schools were found to have some sort of

college-readiness component worked into their campus culture or curriculum. With the high volume of first-generation college students coming out of these schools, it is critical that almost half also offer some type of alumni support program that promotes college persistence and graduation.<sup>23</sup> Nationally, 30 percent of all charter schools have identified college preparation as their founding purpose and primary goal of their curriculum.<sup>24</sup>

Charter schools provide parents with a choice. For many Hispanic parents, charter schools are an accessible alternative to the district public schools in their community. The chance to enroll their children in a charter school creates an opportunity for parents to provide them with an education that is on par with that of their more advantaged peers. In many cases, the charter school alternative is not only better than the neighborhood public school, but it surpasses more affluent schools in terms of quality.

## Resources

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD). State Nonfiscal Public Elementary/Secondary Education Survey, 2013-2014. Report Generated June 22, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division. Annual Estimates of the Resident Population by Sex, Age, Race, and Hispanic Origin for the United States and States: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2014. (June 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Pew Research Center. Hispanic Trends Project Tabulations of 2012 American Community Survey. (April 2014).

<sup>4</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. Racial/Ethnic Enrollment in Public Schools. (May 2016).

<sup>5</sup> National Alliance for Public Charter Schools commissioned a nationally representative parent survey from interviews with 1,003 parents across all race, gender, income, and age lines. The survey was released in April 2016.

<sup>6</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. Charter School Enrollment. Racial/Ethnic Enrollment in Public Schools. (May 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Lazarin & Ortiz-Lincon. Next Generation Charter Schools: Meeting the Needs of Latinos and English Language Learners. The Center for American Progress. National Council of La Raza. (September 2010).

<sup>8</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. Public High School Graduation Rates. (May 2016).

<sup>9</sup> National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. Data Dashboard. California enrollment data. (2014).

<sup>10</sup> California Charter Schools Association. 2014 Portrait of the Movement. (August 2014).

<sup>11</sup> California Charter Schools Association. 2014 Portrait of the Movement. (August 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Idea Public Schools. U.S. News and World Report. National Rankings: America's Most Challenging High Schools. (April 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO). Urban Charter School Study Report on 41 Regions. Stanford University. (March 2015).

<sup>14</sup> Lazarin & Ortiz-Lincon. Next Generation Charter Schools: Meeting the Needs of Latinos and English Language Learners. The Center for American Progress. National Council of La Raza. (September 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Lazarin & Ortiz-Lincon. Next Generation Charter Schools: Meeting the Needs of Latinos and English Language Learners. The Center for American Progress. National Council of La Raza. (September 2010).

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of Education. Characteristics of Public and Private Elementary and Secondary School Teachers in the United States. National Center for Education Statistics. (August 2013).

<sup>17</sup> Mathematica Policy Research. Charter Schools: Are They Effective? (2010).

<sup>18</sup> California Charter Schools Association. 2014 Portrait of the Movement. (August 2014).

<sup>19</sup> IDEA Public Schools. Application of Grants Under the Grants for Replication and Expansion for High-Quality Charter Schools. U.S. Department of Education. (July 2014).

<sup>20</sup> Natalie Gross as cited by National Council of La Raza. Latinos Rank Education No. 1 Issue at the Polls. (November 2014).

<sup>21</sup> The 28 charter management organizations surveyed were all CMOs eligible for the Broad Prize for Public Charter Schools with at least one high school in their network. Qualifications for the Broad Prize eligibility are CMOs with five or more schools in operation and at least 2,500 students enrolled as of 2013-2014, at least 40 percent of students with free or reduced price lunch eligibility, and at least 33 percent students of color.

<sup>22</sup> Data based on charter management organizations that identify college prep as a component of their organization's curriculum or campus cultures, via the organization website.

<sup>23</sup> Data based on charter management organizations that explicitly state they have an alumni support program for alumni enrolled in higher education, via the organization website.

<sup>24</sup> The Center for Education Reform. The Essential Guide to Charter School Operations: Survey of America's Charter Schools. (2014).