



Imagine the Possibilities

2018 Colorado Charter Schools Conference

President's Opening Address
March 1, 2018

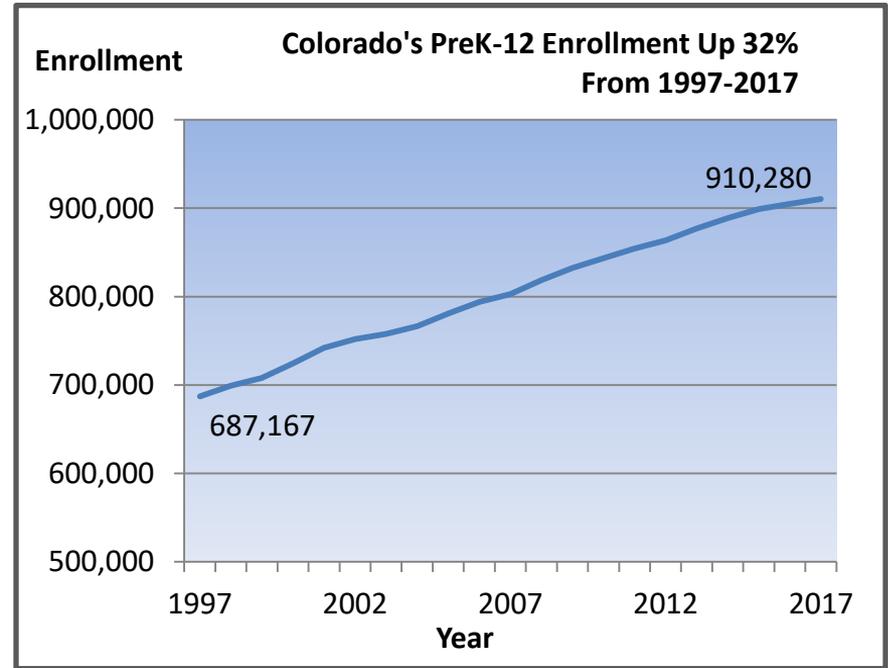
What's changed in Colorado education?

From 1997 to 2017, total enrollment in grades PreK-12 increased from 687,167 to 910,280 students – by 32 percent. As a result, Colorado taxpayers spent over \$2.0 billion more on education in 2017 than they did in 1997 just to support enrollment growth.

During that same 20-year period, the Colorado charter sector expanded from 51 to 250 schools. Last fall, 14 new charter schools opened their doors to 3,000 students. Today, charter schools serve 120,000 students – 13 percent of all students in grades PreK-12.

As PreK-12 enrollment expanded from 1997 to 2017, new public charter schools opened to serve approximately 50 percent of the students who entered education. Thus, charter schools – which are more flexible, of lower cost and provide new choices – proved very effective in creating the capacity to serve a rapidly growing statewide enrollment.

In 2030, Colorado is projected to have 1,199,337 residents ages 5 to 19 (<https://wonder.cdc.gov/>). Over the next 12 years, Colorado will continue to be one of the fastest growing states along with Florida, Texas, Utah and Washington, DC.



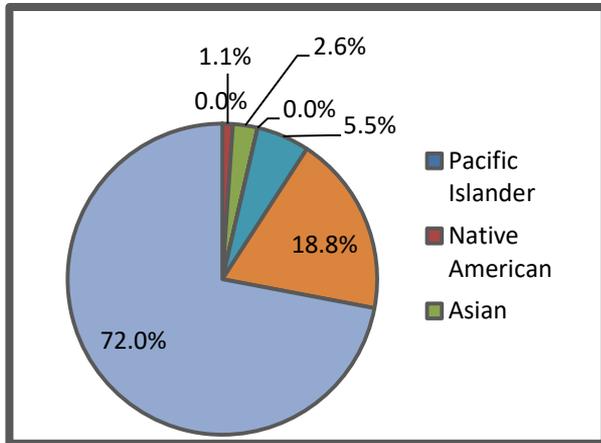
Northern Colorado and the Western Slope are projected to be the fastest growing regions of the state through 2050 including such cities as Fort Collins, Greeley and Grand Junction. Charter schools are needed to serve the continued influx of children into communities statewide.

How has our PreK-12 population changed?

Over the past 20 years, students of color have grown from 28 to 47 percent of the school-age population. During that same time, the diversity of students has expanded dramatically – across many ethnicities, native languages, family values & home upbringings.

Today, 1-in-2 students are of color where only 1-in-4 students were of color 20 years ago. These students are from dozens of nations across several continents.

**Student
Ethnicity
2007**

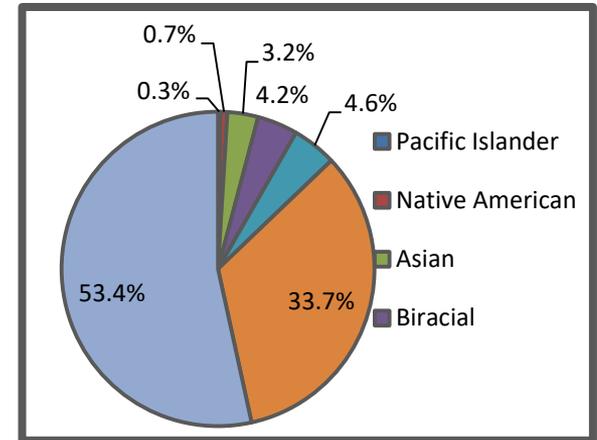


They are residents of rural, suburban and urban communities statewide. Ethnicity doesn't tell the full story, however.

Because of advances in education and science, many more students have known special needs from an early age – behavioral, psychological, cognitive, physical, socioemotional, gifted and talented.

Forty-four percent of Colorado students qualify for the Federal Free or Reduced Lunch Program. Many students are English Language Learners. Many are growing up in single-parent homes. Consequently, every student must benefit from a unique learning experience.

**Student
Ethnicity
2017**



How is Colorado performing vs. four comparable states?

When a state goes through the kind of radical change that Colorado has over the past two decades, it usually doesn't improve the quality of education for students.

To determine how well Colorado is performing, the League turned to the U.S. News' 2017 comparison of the Best States. When examining PreK-12 education quality, U.S. News considered 6 factors: (1) college readiness, (2) high school graduation rates, (3) NAEP Math scores, (4) NAEP Reading scores, (5) Pre-K quality and (6) preschool enrollment.

To get an apples-to-apples read, the League compared Colorado with four other states with similar population demographics, median household income, and college attainment rates. So how did Colorado stack up?

Overall, Colorado ranked lower than all 4 of its comparison states – Connecticut, Minnesota, Utah and Washington. Specifically, Colorado has lowest high school graduation rate of its 4 comparison states, and also has a low college readiness ranking.

2017 U.S. News & World Report Rankings: Colorado Vs. States with Similar Demographics

Overall PreK-12



High School Graduation Rate



College Readiness



What kept Colorado from declining more sharply?

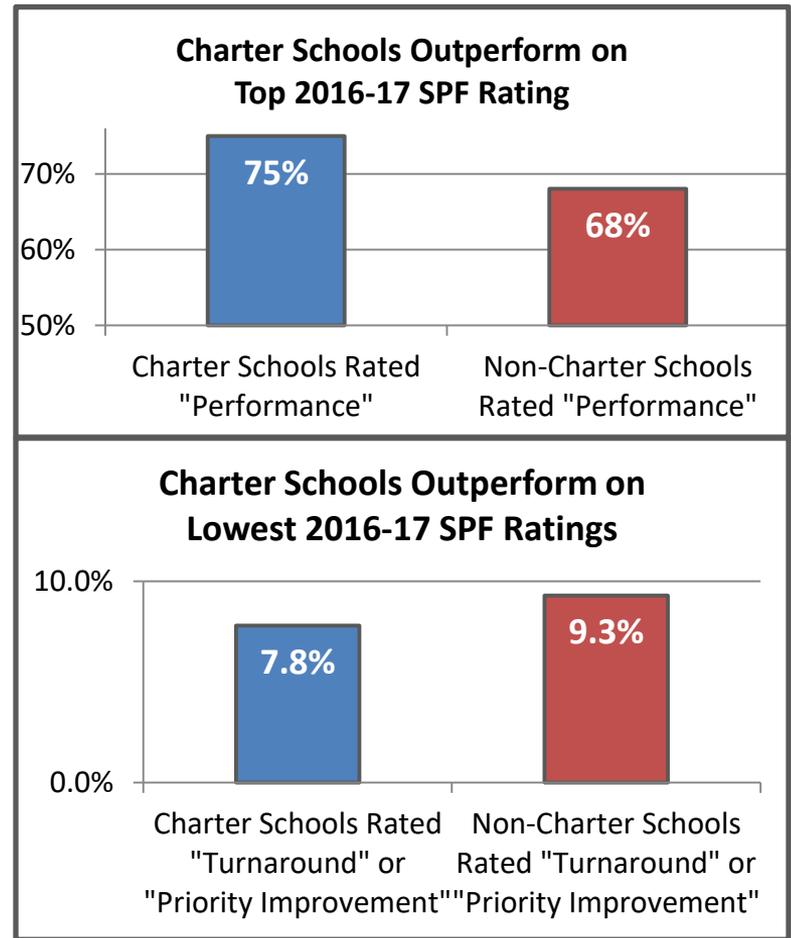
Colorado is contending with a 'perfect storm' – large-scale growth in PreK-12 enrollment, a rapidly changing school-age population, declining funding on a relative national scale, an aging voter populace increasingly unwilling to pay higher taxes, and other factors. So what enabled public education to defy the odds?

Colorado charter schools vs. non-charter schools

The 2016-17 School Performance Ratings, which are illustrated to the right, capture the high points. At the upper end of the curve, more charter schools obtained top ratings than non-charter schools. At the lower end of the curve, fewer charter schools obtained the lowest ratings versus non-charter schools.

Why is that performance so impressive?

Between 2012 and 2016, 45 of 236 charter schools, or 24 percent, opened their doors for the first time. These schools were navigating startup, adding grade levels, recruiting students and transitioning into permanent facilities. They were not in a good position to focus on performance. Nonetheless, even though one-quarter of charter schools were navigating startup, as a collective, charter schools still outperformed non-charter schools by a significant margin.



**Source: Colorado Department of Education*

Top reasons to be proud of charter schools

There are many reasons to be proud of Colorado's charter schools, but I want to highlight three here:

Reason #1: Charter schools serve a comparable population to non-charter schools. Frequently, charter schools are accused of selectively enrolling students, but the evidence simply doesn't bear that accusation out. As the chart to the right illustrates, charter schools serve a very similar population to non-charter schools. In fact, over the past 10 years, a growing number of charter schools have opened to serve historically underserved students.

2017-2018 Colorado Student Demographics		
Subgroup	Charter	Non-Charter
Free or Reduced Lunch Eligible	44%	47%
Students of Color	51%	45%
Students with Disabilities	9%	13%
English Language Learners	21%	16%
Number of Students Enrolled	120,000	789,000
<i>*Source: Colorado Department of Education</i>		

Top reasons to be proud of charter schools

Here is another reason Coloradans should be proud of our charter public schools:

Reason #2: Charter schools are at the vanguard of building a public sector of quality choices. To the right, the chart provides a sampling of charter school instructional models and populations.

Sampling of Charter School Models & Target Populations	
Instructional Model	Target Population
Classical Academy	Suburban Communities
Early College	First Generation Immigrants
Expeditionary Learning	Pregnant Teens
Montessori	Low-income Minority Families
Multi-cultural Inclusion	Homeschool Families
Core Knowledge	Remote Rural Families
Virtual Education	Gifted & Talented Students
Project-based Learning	Dropout Recovery
Dual Language Immersion	Disabled Students
Spanish-English Bilingual	English language learners
Waldorf	Girls Single Gender
International Baccalaureate	Boys Single Gender
Arts Infusion	Socioeconomic Integration
STEM	Developmentally Delayed
Athletics/Health/Wellness	Remedial Needs

Top reasons to be proud of charter schools

Reason #3: Charter schools dominate the top rankings of all public schools in Colorado. To the right, the chart illustrates this fact in two ways. On the left hand side, 7 of the 10 schools with the highest average SAT scores in the 2016-17 year on an absolute basis were charter schools.

On the right hand side, 7 of the 10 schools with the highest average SAT scores in the 2016-17 year were charter schools *when controlled for student demographic attributes*. So, even when you factor in the percent of students who are English Language learners, have disabilities, and are low-income, 70 percent of the top schools are still charter schools.

Why is this reason so important? Charter schools have only been in existence for 25 years – and the average charter school has been in operation for less than 12 years. As a collective, charter schools only represent 15 percent of all public schools in the state.

Yet charter schools are have an outsized impact in setting the standard of excellence among all public schools. They are providing exemplary options to learners in rural, suburban and urban communities with a wide variety of attributes.

Top Performing Colorado Public High Schools in 2016-17		
Rank	Highest Average SAT Score	Highest SAT Controlled for Demographics
#1	D'EVELYN JUNIOR/SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL	VICTORY PREPARATORY ACADEMY HIGH
#2	LIBERTY COMMON CHARTER SCHOOL	DSST: GREEN VALLEY RANCH HIGH SCHOOL
#3	THE VANGUARD SCHOOL (HIGH)	D'EVELYN JUNIOR/SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL
#4	THOMAS MACLAREN STATE CHARTER	THE VANGUARD SCHOOL (HIGH)
#5	PEAK TO PEAK CHARTER SCHOOL	THOMAS MACLAREN STATE CHARTER SCHOOL
#6	FAIRVIEW HIGH SCHOOL	FAIRVIEW HIGH SCHOOL
#7	STEM SCHOOL HIGHLANDS RANCH	GIRLS ATHLETIC LEADERSHIP SCHOOL HIGH
#8	CHERRY CREEK HIGH SCHOOL	CHERRY CREEK HIGH SCHOOL
#9	DSST: STAPLETON HIGH SCHOOL	PEAK TO PEAK CHARTER SCHOOL
#10	RIDGEVIEW CLASSICAL CHARTER SCHOOLS	STEM SCHOOL HIGHLANDS RANCH

*Source: Colorado Department of Education

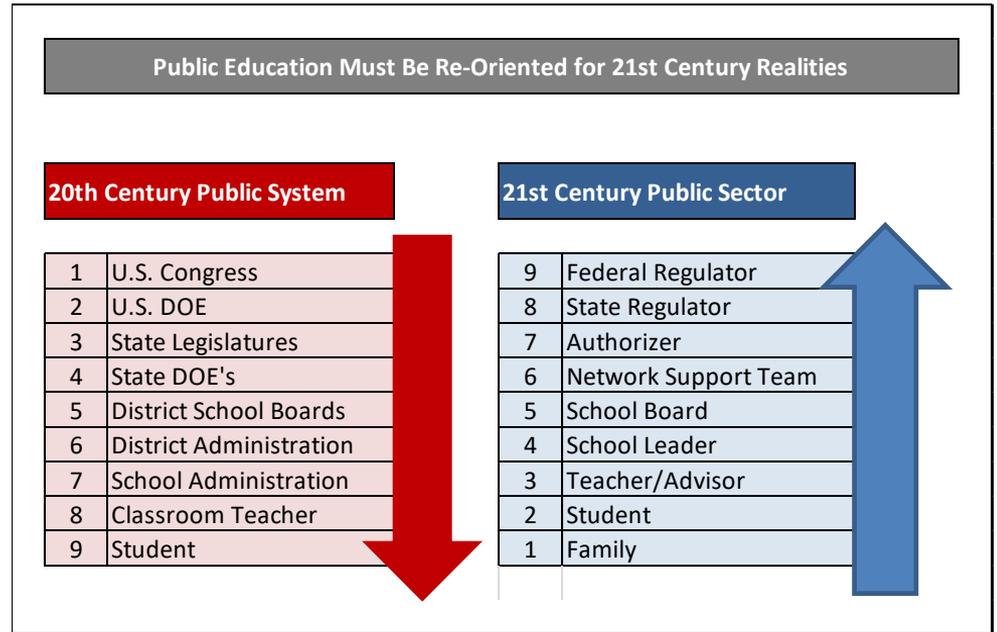
Opportunities for impact.

Now that the Colorado charter movement has progressed through the early phases of development and achieved significant scale and reach, it is possible for charter schools to serve as a key lever to transform public education for the 21st Century.

Why is systemic transformation possible?

In the 20th Century, public school systems were run in a top down manner, from federal to state to local government agency. As the diagram to the right illustrates, six layers of regulatory bodies handed down laws and rules to school administrators, whose job was to comply with all of those requirements regardless of unique learner & family needs.

These regulatory systems acted together to create and reinforce uniformity, standardization and compliance-driven management. The top-down approach to public education came to a head during the Bush and Obama administrations when the federal government played a more active role in defining acceptable performance and holding schools accountable than ever before.

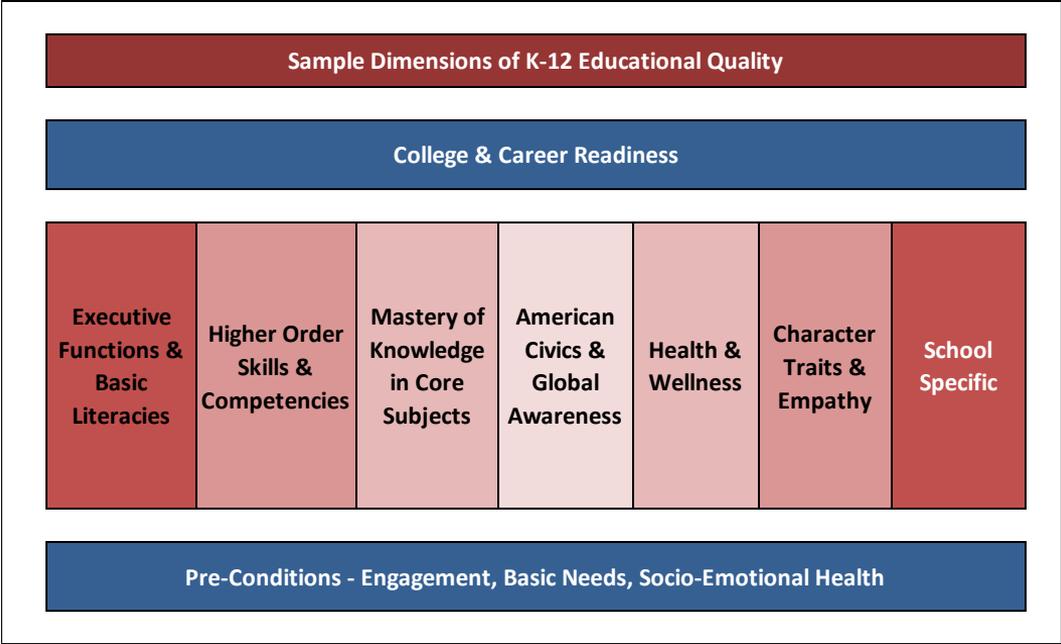


By contrast, charter schools are fundamentally rebuilding the structure of public education for the 21st Century by putting school design and management in the hands of educators and parents. As charter schools multiply, they are transforming the structure of public school systems from top-down to learner- and classroom-up. The right side of the diagram depicts what public education must look like to thrive in the 21st Century.

What defines quality within a sector of public school options?

Under the Federal *No Child Left Behind* law, which was in place from 2002 to 2015, the federal government defined performance as scoring proficient or advanced in reading and mathematics in grades 3-8. The thinking was that – if we narrowed our focus – we could stage a campaign to enable 100 percent of students nationally to achieve proficient or advanced. The problem is that, to try to achieve NCLB requirements, public schools narrowed their core curriculum, eliminated “non-essential” subjects, and became testing machines that only valued the development of basic literacy skills.

As public education becomes a sector of choices, we have an opportunity to redefine educational quality in broader, more effective, and more aspirational, motivating ways. To the right, the chart illustrates what a definition of quality could be based upon 8 different dimensions of student learning, development and postsecondary preparation. This framework is not authoritative, but serves as one sample of how we could redefine quality within a 21st Century paradigm.

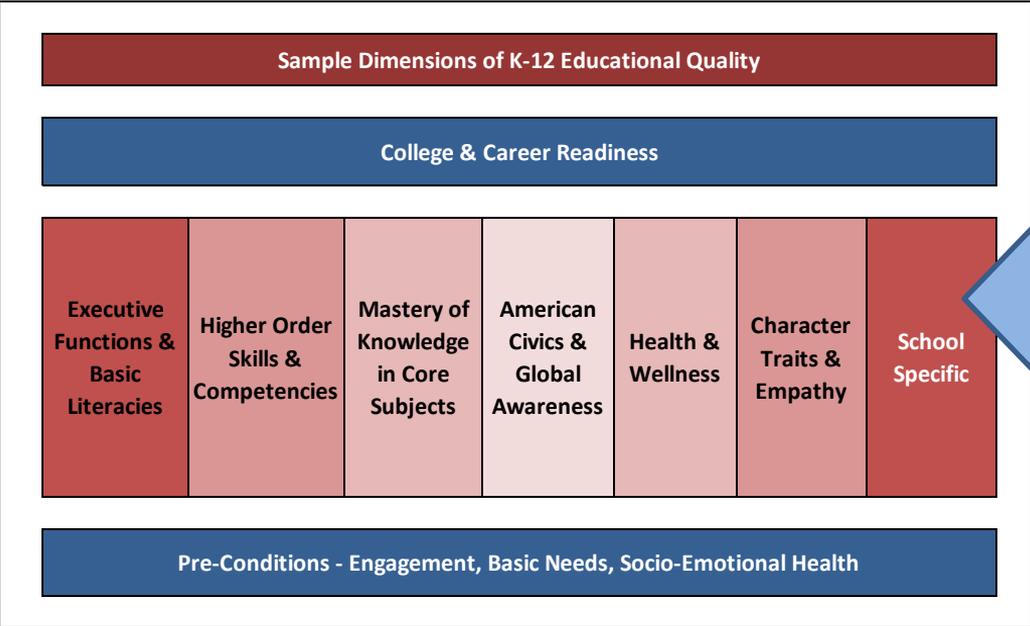


However we decide to define public school quality for the 21st Century, educators and parents should be the primary decision-makers, not policymakers and bureaucrats. We must trust parents and educators to decide because they are the ones best positioned to understand and meet the individual needs and gifts of each child. They always have been.

Different schools offer unique value propositions within a sector of quality options.

In the 21st Century paradigm, there can no longer be one narrow way to define school quality. Instead, we must identify, measure and examine quality across different dimensions of childhood learning, skill building, knowledge mastery, character formation and holistic development. Public schools will deliver different value propositions to students and families with different needs and preferences.

In order to offer families a unique value proposition, schools will offer distinctive programs, services and offerings. Such flexibility and differentiation should be recognized and encouraged. Below, the list illustrates some of the ways in which charter schools are serving students and families unique to each school's particular value proposition.



- Visual & Performing Arts
- Dual Language Fluency
- Experiential Learning
- Gifted & Talented
- Multi-Cultural Studies
- Evolution of Human Civilization
- Athletics / Sports
- S.T.E.M.
- Technology & Design

So what can the Colorado charter movement do to transform public education for the 21st Century?

Opportunity #1: Close achievement gaps.

Last year, our public school systems were ineffective in meeting the needs of student with 4 attributes: (a) Free & Reduced Lunch eligible students; (b) English language learners; (c) students with disabilities; and (d) students of color. See the chart below.

The argument can be made that test scores represent only one way of looking at student learning – which is true – but that doesn't mean that we should ignore obvious and compelling evidence.

There are four ways that the charter movement can help close achievement gaps:

- Implement practices that close sub-group gaps within charter schools;
- Expand & replicate charter schools that have proven highly effective in serving students with these attributes;
- Open more specialized charter schools that attract & serve students with these needs.

Public School Students that Did Not Achieve Proficient by Subgroup 2016-2017 CMAS Tests				
Subject Area	English Language Arts		Mathematics	
Subgroup	Students	Percentage	Students	Percentage
FRL Eligible Students	137,571	74.6%	157,212	84.0%
English Language Learners*	49,858	94.1%	53,060	94.9%
Students with Disabilities	38,578	93.3%	37,524	90.3%
Students of Color	110,097	62.0%	133,534	66.2%

**Includes both NEP and LEP.*

*Source: Colorado
Department of
Education*

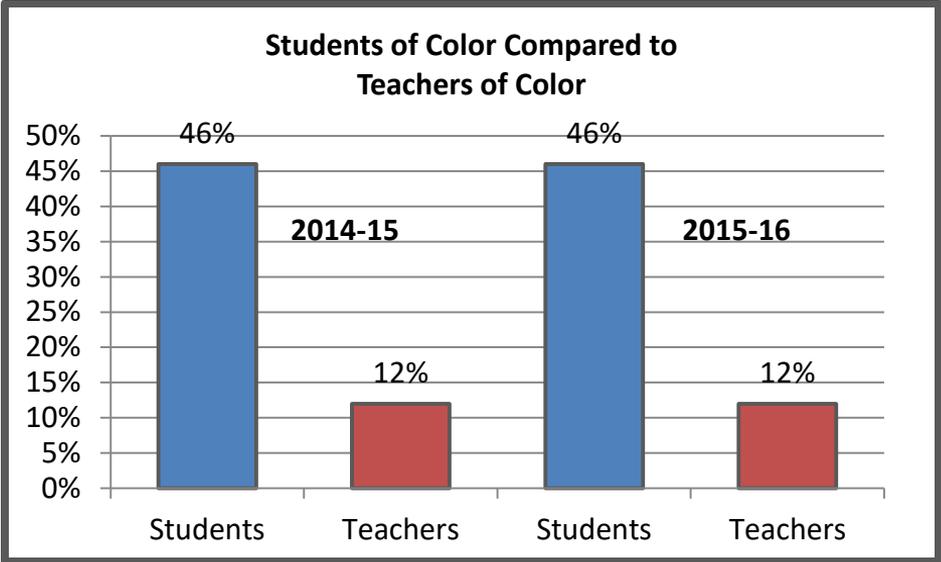
Opportunity #2: Close talent gaps.

Nationally, public schools are struggling to attract and retain educators of color. This challenge is acute in Colorado. In the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years, 46 percent of students were students of color, but only 12 percent of teachers were teachers of color. That means that 1 of 2 children are students of color, but only 1 of 9 teachers are teachers of color. As a consequence, many students are passing through our public schools without ever being taught by a teacher who has deep firsthand knowledge of their cultural traditions, ethnic background & unique upbringing.

Charter schools can lead the way in attracting a more diverse talent pool for at least 4 reasons:

1. Charters have waivers from employee licensure & certification requirements;
2. When they open, charters can establish new human capital networks instead of relying on the same networks that districts have for decades;
3. New charter schools can open with founding teams that include leaders of color with access to unique talent pipelines;
4. Charter schools can open with unique themes, norms & practices that support the retention of educators of color.

The League has hired a director of talent who is uniquely qualified to build a diverse talent pool and is launching a new program called talent services. We have also launched a new initiative to map the landscape and build the collective capacity to address the recruitment, professional development and retention of diverse teachers, administrators, school leaders & board members.



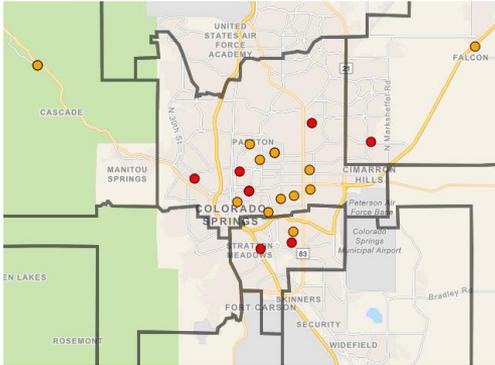
Where are Schools on Accountability Clock Located?

Chronically low performing schools are spread throughout the state. Most – although not all – are located in cities with significant concentrations of high-poverty families. For example, there are 19 schools in Colorado Springs, 12 schools in Pueblo, and 11 schools in Greeley.

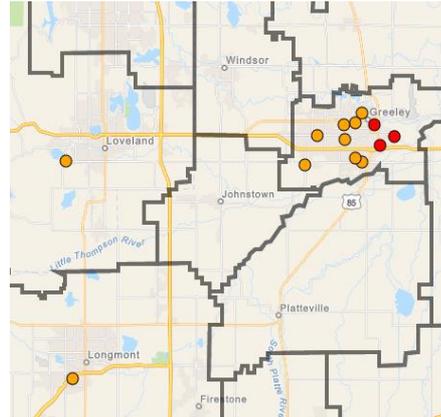
Because the charter movement has a presence in rural, suburban and urban areas of the state, it is well positioned to lend managerial expertise, organizational capacity and professional supports to low performing schools in many areas.

Charter schools ARE public schools. Like districts and traditional public schools, they exist for the purpose of serving the public. A growing number of charter operators want to contribute to the public good by helping communities struggling to serve historically underserved populations and fixing chronically low performing schools.

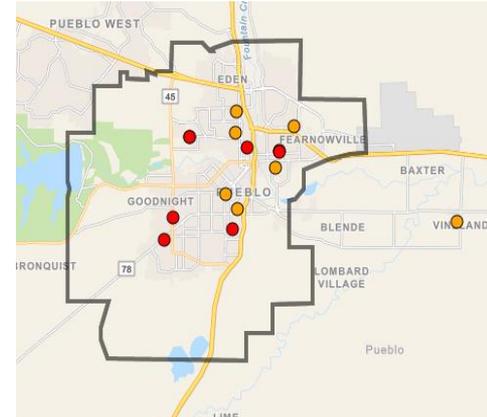
Colorado Springs



Greeley



Pueblo



Schools

SPF Plan - 2016-17

- Performance
- Improvement
- Priority Improvement
- Turnaround
- others

Source: CLCS Colorado School Quality Map



Imagine the Possibilities

As we move deep into the 21st Century, are we really imagining the possibilities?

Hallmarks of the League's Vision for the Colorado Charter Movement:

- **QUALITY** options for a diversity of learners
- **CHOICE** for educators & parents
- **INNOVATION** towards excellent performance
- **EQUITY** for all learners, families & communities
- **OPPORTUNITY** for college & career in a rapidly changing workplace and society