


# CHOOSING QUALITY

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*Creating equitable access to great schools for all  
Los Angeles families*



A close-up photograph of a young child with dark, curly hair. The child is wearing a light-colored straw hat and bright green sunglasses. They are blowing bubbles with a red bubble wand. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with green foliage. The child is wearing a grey t-shirt and a black and green beaded bracelet on their left wrist.

This report and the Choice4LA program are made possible through the generous support of The Walton Family Foundation, The California Community Foundation, The Wasserman Foundation, The Lisa and Maury Friedman Foundation, Kathrine and Frank Baxter, and Michael Schlesinger.

This report shares the experience of families in South Los Angeles as they try to find great schools and great opportunities for their children. We hope that this report highlights our respect and admiration for the many, many families who despite economic, racial and linguistic barriers, work and fight for their children's education and future. While acknowledging the long distance still to go to achieve education equity in Los Angeles, we are grateful for all of the educators who are already providing excellent opportunities to students and families.



## Executive Summary

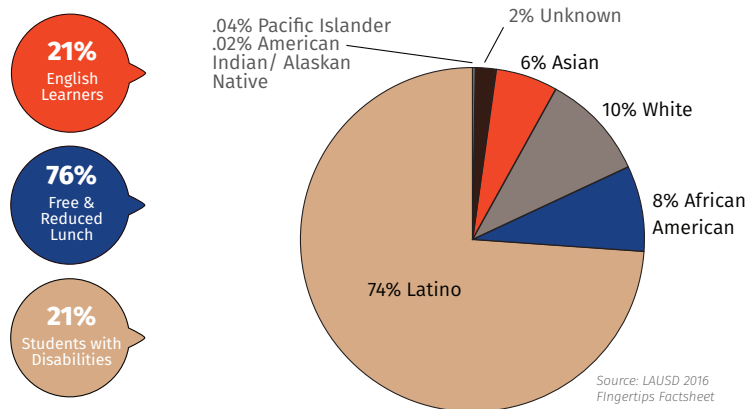
Parent Revolution’s Choice4LA program partners with community and non-profit organizations to provide families in Los Angeles with information and direct support to find and enroll their children in quality K-12 schools. Although there are almost 300,000 families utilizing various types of public school choice in Los Angeles, and many public schools providing an excellent education, there are still roughly 160,000 students attending persistently low-performing schools. The majority of these students are low-income, students of color.

This report examines and analyzes the qualitative and quantitative findings of the first year of Choice4LA, highlighting seven lessons learned from families attempting to access school choice. It also includes four subsequent recommendations for implementation by the Los Angeles Unified School District and Los Angeles’ charter school sector to increase accessibility to quality school choices for all families. Those recommendations include a greater focus on quality choices, simplifying all steps of the school choice process, improving families’ access to school quality data, and strengthening the role that interpersonal networks play in supporting families as they choose schools for their children.



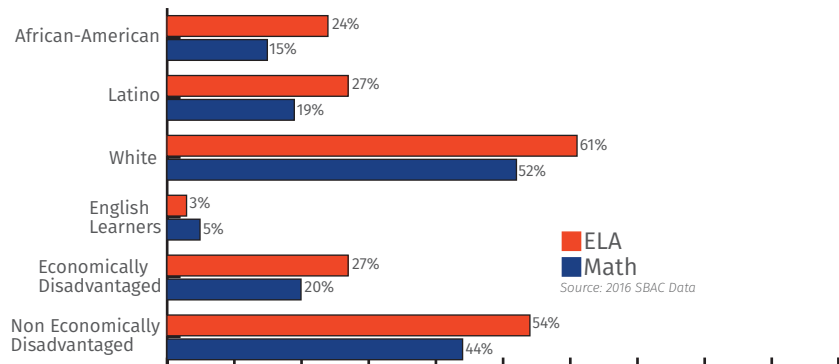
# Los Angeles Education Landscape

Los Angeles is home to the second largest public school student population in the country, enrolling approximately 664,000 children in over 1,100 K-12 public schools. Its students and the communities they live in are racially, economically, and linguistically diverse – LAUSD families collectively speak 94 different languages.



Los Angeles has long faced many of the same educational challenges as other large urban districts in the United States. Results from California's 2016 Smarter Balanced assessments and other measures show large achievement and opportunity gaps that disproportionately impact students of color, English Learners, and economically disadvantaged students.

Student Proficiency on 2016 Statewide Smarter Balanced Assessment, by subgroups



**College Readiness**  
 % of Students graduating having met A-G Requirements  
 Source: LAUSD Report Card Data, 2015-16





# School Choice in Los Angeles

Over the last two decades, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) has tried many different approaches to improve student achievement and close opportunity gaps. These efforts have included improving access to college-ready courses via the 2005 and 2015 LAUSD A-G Resolutions<sup>1</sup>, a \$20 billion investment in new and modernized school buildings<sup>2</sup>, and various attempts to increase school-site autonomy, including 2009's Public School Choice Resolution<sup>3</sup>, which created an RFP process for governance of hundreds of persistently failing and newly created district campuses.

The two largest school choice programs in Los Angeles are LAUSD's magnet school program and the independent charter school sector. LAUSD's magnet program was created in the early 1980's as part of a court-ordered desegregation plan and has grown to over 215 magnet programs district-wide, serving over 60,000 students from across the district. The first charter schools in LAUSD opened after the 1992 passage of the California Charter Schools Act - today, more than 230 independent charter schools are serving over 100,000 students throughout LAUSD.

Over the last ten years, both LAUSD and new state laws have created a variety of smaller school choice programs, including LAUSD's "Zones of Choice" for select high schools, LAUSD Open Enrollment, and the Romero Open Enrollment Act. Currently there are ten different types of in-district choice in LAUSD. Each of these programs has its own criteria, list of eligible schools, and separate application and enrollment processes. All told, nearly 300,000 of Los Angeles' 664,600 students are

exercising some type of public school choice. See table (1)

While many families in Los Angeles are exercising choice, there are several key challenges that currently prevent choice from playing a larger role in closing opportunity and achievement gaps.

The average academic performance of the independent charter and magnet sectors is significantly higher than other district schools. However, there is a wide range of academic performance at the individual schools that fall under these governance models. The highest quality schools receive a level of demand they cannot meet and many of these schools are not geographically accessible to low-income communities. Inequitable access to quality school choices is exacerbated by the lack of comprehensive and comparable school information and the absence of a common deadline, application and enrollment process. This leaves many families without the information necessary to choose the best schools for their children and facing a daunting landscape of more than 200 separate applications and deadlines. By surfacing, understanding, and addressing current challenges from the perspective of families in South Los Angeles, this report aims to ensure public school choice can become an even stronger lever for improving equity and student learning.

<sup>1</sup> <http://home.lausd.net/apps/news/article/473557>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.buildings.com/article-details/articleid/3190/title/growth-spurt-at-laUSD>

<sup>3</sup> <http://rossier.usc.edu/usc-rossier-researchers-present-findings-from-laUSDs-public-school-choice-initiative/>

**Table 1: The Many Types of School Choice in Los Angeles**

Type	Application Process	Application Timeline	# of Schools	# of Students Enrolled	Transportation
<b>Magnets</b>	Families apply through the Parent Portal of LAUSD's eChoices website or via mail. Students are accepted into Magnet programs based on the number of points they have. Points are given based on matriculation, if student was on a waiting list the prior year, the racial composition and population of the assigned school, and if a sibling already attends a magnet school.  There are many different types school programs and themes. There are also magnets reserved for those students classified as Gifted & Talented.	Early October to Early November	213 programs	67,000	Yes, within the following parameters: Students in <b>Grades K-5(6)</b> may be provided outside 2 miles  Students in <b>Grades 6-12</b> may be provided outside 5 miles except for Arroyo Seco Museum Science, Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies, Valley Alternative Liberal Arts and Westside Global Awareness Ecosystems/Environmental Science  Max one-way riding time for <b>K-12 students</b> is 90 minutes
<b>Permits with Transportation</b>	Program no longer in service. Students currently enrolled in program continue to receive services until they complete the highest grade level at their school.		1	469	Yes
<b>CORE PSMCP</b>	Program no longer in service. Students currently enrolled in program continue to receive services until they complete the highest grade level at their school.		183	218	Yes, within the following parameters:  Students registered to receive transportation services prior to July 1, 2015
<b>Zones of Choice</b>	ZOC is attendance boundary bound. Families living in a designated ZOC can select a HS within the same ZOC through the student's participating MS ZOC school.	August- End of January	37	17,480	No
<b>Open Enrollment</b>	Families apply through the Parent Portal of LAUSD's eChoices website, via mail, or in-person to schools with available seats.	2 weeks in May	214	20,021	No
<b>Inter-District Permit</b>	Families fill out a Permit Application online or in person and submit to the LAUSD Office of Permits and Student Transfers for review.	February 1st- April 30th	N/A	2,025	No
<b>Intra-District Permit</b>	Families fill out a Permit Application and submit to the LAUSD Office of Permits and Student Transfers for review. They must select from 14 different reasons as to why their child needs the permit.  The permit must be signed by the principal at the student's home school and the school the family is requesting a transfer to.	Year-Round	N/A	25,304	No
<b>School for Advanced Studies</b>	Families apply through LAUSD's Gifted and Talented Programs office.	SAS Student Permit Application Period: April  Deadline may be extended throughout the school year, as space permits.	130	9,654	No
<b>Romero Bill</b>	Currently not available.		95	9	No
<b>Independent Charter</b>	Families apply online, in-person, via mail, or all of the above, depending on each network or school's policy.	Unique to each network or school	238	101,060	No
<b>Affiliated Charter</b>	Once all children in boundary have been served, space is available to families outside boundary. Families apply online, in-person, via mail, or all of the above, depending on each school's policy.	Unique to each school	54	55,203	No



# Systemic Barriers to School Choice in Los Angeles

## Absence of Clear and Comparable School Information



In Los Angeles, there is currently no official resource, online or offline, where families can learn about and compare all of their public school options. For example, a family who wants to find information on independent charter schools can do so on the California Charter Schools Association website or on the website of an individual charter management organization or school. They can find information on magnet programs on LAUSD's eChoices website and information on the schools available within the Zones of Choice program by visiting one of seventeen separate Zone of Choice webpages.

Even if a family were to build their own spreadsheet or list to evaluate their options, they would find inconsistent school information and lack of quantitative data on student academic performance across the different school choice resources. When compared with an official system like Washington, D.C.'s "My School DC" - where families can find and compare both quantitative academic data and qualitative information such as curriculum, program availability and transportation for over **96%** of all PK-12 public schools – it becomes clear that a better information system is possible. Further, California currently lacks a statewide school rating system, creating an even stronger imperative for schools districts to provide families with actionable school information. While this lack of information is inconvenient for all families, it places a particularly high burden on low-income families, who often have less time to research school options and are less likely to have an Internet connection at home.

**Anacostia High School**  
DCPS School  
Grades: 9-12  
Address: 1801 18th St. SE, Washington, DC 20003-2130  
Phone: 202-699-2130

**2015-16 NAEP SCORES**

Subject	Met expectations	Approached expectations	Did not yet meet expectations
Math	40.8%	51.2%	7.2%
ELA	78.2%	18.4%	4.7%

**TOTAL 2015-16 ENROLLMENT: 597**

**STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS:**

- 99.3% Black, non-Hispanic
- 0.2% Hispanic / Latino
- 0.2% White non-Hispanic
- 0.3% Multiracial

**LOTTERY PREFERENCES:**

- Sibling Attending
- Sibling Offered

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

- LearnDC school profile
- Equity report

Washington, D.C.'s "My School DC" - where families can find and compare both quantitative academic data and qualitative information such as curriculum, program availability and transportation for over **96%** of all PK-12 public schools.

# Zones of Choice

**Bell High School** Website: [www.bellhs.org](http://www.bellhs.org)  
 Principal: Rafael Balderas Telephone: 323-832-4700

Bell High School opened its doors in 1925 as a 9th and 10th grade school with 800 students. At the present, we are the only multi-track Year Round comprehensive high school (grades 9-12) in LAUSD serving approximately 3,800 students from the communities of Bell, Cudahy, Huntington Park and Maywood.

Bell High School (BHS) is part of the Local District East Region in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). It is a comprehensive four-track year-round high school that serves approximately 3200 students grades 9-12 from the cities of Bell, Maywood, Cudahy and portions of Huntington Park. The communities served by BHS are generally characterized as predominately Hispanic, densely populated and economically disadvantaged.

The majority of students will be first generation high school graduates and college students. Parent education levels are low; 74% do not have high school diplomas. Only 27% list English as their home language. BHS offers a wide variety of extra-curricular activities, including sports and clubs.

Small Learning Communities  
 - AVID  
 - Bell High School Gifted STEM Magnet  
 - Multilingual Teacher Career Academy (MTCA)  
 - Equi-... Inclusive Education ... academically and technologi-

Mission  
 The mission of Bell High School is to provide a high quality education for all students, preparing them for college, career and citizenship.

**Advanced Placement Courses:** Biology, Calculus AB, Calculus BC, Chemistry, English Language and Composition, English Literature and Composition, Environmental Science, Macroeconomics, Microeconomics, Physics B, Psychology, Spanish Language, Spanish Literature and Culture, Statistics, U.S. Government and Politics, U.S. History, World History

**Extracurriculars:** Academic Decathlon, Arts Clubs, Community Service Clubs, Leadership, Newspaper, Science/Math/Technology Clubs, Yearbook

**Fine Arts:** Band, Dance, Drama, Drawing/Painting, Media, Music

**Foreign Language Classes:** Arabic, Spanish

**Program Highlights:** Adult School Classes, Afterschool Program, AVID Classes, College Credit Classes, Computer Lab, Gifted/Honors Classes, Internships, Mobile Laptop Carts, Project Based Learning, Parent Center, PTA, School-wide Wi-Fi, Tutoring, Weekend Classes

**Sports:** Baseball, Basketball, Cheer, Cross Country, Drill, Football, Golf, Lacrosse, Soccer, Softball, Swimming, Tennis, Track and Field, Volleyball, Water Polo, Wrestling

# Charter Schools - California Charter Schools Association (CCSA) Website

**Find a Charter School**  
 See full list of California charter schools, including virtual schools

Location: 90016 School Name: Enter school name  
 Select Grades: Click to select Grades Select Curriculum: Click to select Curriculum  
 CCSA Member Schools Only

SEARCH

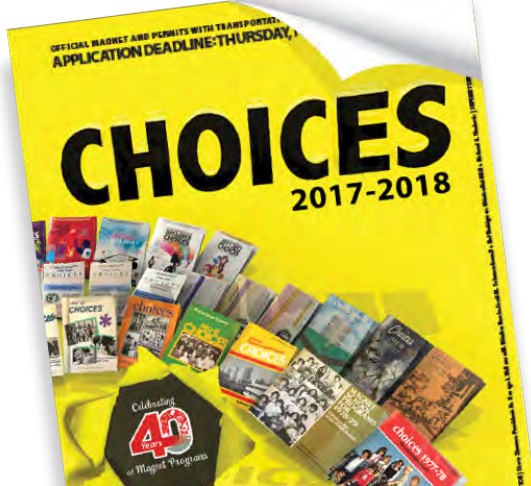
Displaying only 50 of 217 schools, edit your search or zoom in to refine results.

**Academia Avance**  
 115 N Avenue 53  
 Los Angeles, CA 90042  
 Grades 6-12  
 Curriculum N/A  
 View full profile

**Academia Moderna**  
 2410 Broadway  
 Walnut Park, CA 92655  
 Grades K-5

**Academia Avance**  
 CCSA Member School  
 115 N Avenue 53  
 Los Angeles, CA 90042  
 3232307270  
<http://www.AcademiaAvance.org>  
 Grades 6-12  
 Curriculum N/A

# Magnets



## LIBERAL ARTS (LA)

The Liberal Arts (LA) Magnet theme provides programs that prepare students to be knowledgeable citizens of the 21st century and empower them to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world. The programs are dedicated to the formation of knowledge in Humanities, Social Policy or World Languages or to utilize alternative pedagogies. Academic excellence and commitment to the values of diversity, community and collaboration provide the foundation in Liberal Arts Magnet schools.

<p><b>1206802 ALLESANDRO ES (1-6)</b>  <b>Cooperative Learning</b>                      2210 Riverside Dr., L.A.                      (323) 666-7162  <a href="http://allesandro-laUSD-ca.schoolloop.com">allesandro-laUSD-ca.schoolloop.com</a>                      2016-17 Openings: 30                      2015-16 Applications: 67                      Program Capacity: 192</p>	<p><b>1517802 MARVIN ES (1-5)</b>  <b>Language</b>                      2411 Marvin Ave., L.A.                      (323) 938-3608  <a href="http://marvinstations.com">marvinstations.com</a>                      2016-17 Openings: 61                      2015-16 Applications: 121                      Program Capacity: 216</p>	<p><b>1852902 BANNING HS (9-12)</b>  <b>College Incentive</b>                      1527 Lakme Ave., Wilmington                      (310) 847-3700  <a href="http://banninghs.org">banninghs.org</a>                      2016-17 Openings: 84                      2015-16 Applications: 143                      Program Capacity: 345</p>
<p><b>1209602 AMESTOV ES (1-5)</b>  <b>Trilingual</b>                      1048 W. 149th St., Gardena                      (310) 327-5592  <a href="http://amestov-laUSD-ca.schoolloop.com">amestov-laUSD-ca.schoolloop.com</a>                      2016-17 Openings: 30                      2015-16 Applications: 85                      Program Capacity: 132</p>	<p><b>1588901 OPEN MAGNET CHARTER ES (K-5)</b>                      5540 W. 77th St., L.A.                      (310) 568-0735  <a href="http://openmagnet.org">openmagnet.org</a>                      2016-17 Openings: 71                      2015-16 Applications: 1,019                      Program Capacity: 410                      Full School Magnet</p>	<p><b>1857106 CANOGA PARK HS (9-12)</b>  <b>World Languages/International Business/Trade</b>                      6850 Topanga Canyon Blvd., Canoga Park                      (818) 673-1300  <a href="http://www.canogaparkhs.org">www.canogaparkhs.org</a>                      2016-17 Openings: 49                      2015-16 Applications: 20                      Program Capacity: 231</p>

Although there are many different websites disseminating information on schools, there is no official site that contains comparable school quality information for all public schools.





## **Too Many Applications and Deadlines**

Unlike other major cities like New York, New Orleans, Washington DC or Denver, Los Angeles has not yet implemented any attempts to make school choice accessible through common applications, deadlines and enrollment processes. Each of LAUSD's 10 school choice processes has its own application, timeline, and enrollment process running from the magnet deadline in November to the open enrollment period in May. The more than 200 independent charter schools each have their own application, deadline, and enrollment process, oftentimes even amongst schools that belong to the same charter management organization. Across all types of public school choice, there are over 200 unique applications and processes. This situation favors families who have the most time, education, and resources and disadvantages many of the very families whose children currently attend low-performing schools.

LAUSD has recognized the barriers presented by the application landscape and is in the early stages of aligning its choice programs to a single website and deadline. It remains to be seen if the district's "common enrollment" initiative will include a common, parent-friendly application for all district choices or if families will still be required to navigate multiple systems with distinct application and qualifications.

Many individual charter schools recognize the challenges created by the application landscape and make outreach efforts to families of students currently attending chronically low-performing school. However, potential solutions to simplifying and consolidating the charter school application processes are discouraged in part by current LAUSD policy, which classifies a change in application dates as a "material revision" requiring a vote of the entire LAUSD board of education for approval. In the charged political climate of Los Angeles education policy, an additional vote before the school board serves as a barrier for charter schools to make some of the changes necessary to their application processes for a more equitable system.



## **Lack of Transportation**

Of the many different types of school choice available to Los Angeles families, District-paid transportation is generally only available for students attending LAUSD magnet programs. Given the sprawling nature of Los Angeles, its relatively weak systems of public transportation, and the higher concentration of car-free households in low-income communities<sup>4</sup>, this means that many low-income families are, in practice, shut-out from attending schools that are technically open to them. California's Home-to-School Transportation program limits funding only to those school districts that were operating in the 1980's, automatically shutting out all charter schools and the more than 100,000 students they serve. Without any dedicated funding, the majority of charter schools are unable to provide transportation options for students.

<sup>4</sup> National Household Travel Survey Policy Brief, 2014 <http://nhts.ornl.gov/briefs/PovertyBrief.pdf>



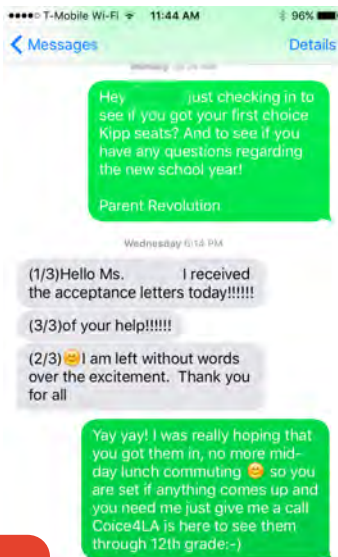
## Too Few High Quality Options

The goal of school choice should not simply be that all families choose where to send their children to school, but that those choices all result in a high quality education. Many current options for Los Angeles families fall short of this goal.

Magnet programs collectively outperform traditional district schools, but there is large variation in quality between the highest and lowest performers. The lowest performing magnet programs have a high acceptance rate (91%) but perform academically well below the district average. Meanwhile, the highest performing magnet programs produce impressive results, but admission is difficult, with a **33%** acceptance rate. Similar dynamics exist within charter schools: lower performing charters are often under enrolled, while high performing schools like KIPP LA Prep and KIPP Iluminar receive three applications for every available seat, and over 40,000 students sit on charter school waitlists throughout Los Angeles.<sup>5</sup>

LAUSD's "Zones of Choice" program for high schools allows over 17,000 students to choose between multiple high school options; **93%** of eligible students complete an application for a school and **97%** are accepted into their first or second choice. However, less than half of the high schools within these zones are performing above average when compared to schools serving similar students<sup>6</sup>, making it unclear how many of these choices are resulting in quality academic offerings.

Clearly not all of the almost 300,000 Los Angeles families exercising school choice, have secured academic success for their children. The highest quality schools, of all governance types, are in extremely short supply and are difficult for most families to access. At a time when efforts are underway to expand and improve both district and charter options in Los Angeles, it is important that we examine the current challenges that families face in finding, applying, and enrolling in **quality schools**, so that collective efforts to expand school choice result in increased student success.



### STACY'S STORY

While conducting a school choice clinic, we met Stacy, a single mom with twin boys in Pre-K. She shared with us that she leaves work everyday at noon in East Los Angeles to pick up her boys from a half-day preschool on the other side of town and then takes a taxi to her mom to drop them off so she can watch them while Stacy goes back to work. After working with her, she was able to secure seats for both of her sons at a charter school in her community. Above is a screenshot of the communication between a Choice4LA Navigator and Stacy.

<sup>5</sup>Admission rates according to a Parent Revolution analysis of LAUSD data, which also showed that the bottom 10% of magnet programs have proficiency rates less than half of the LAUSD average in ELA (17% proficient) and math (10% proficient)

<sup>6</sup>CCSA Similar School Ratings: <http://www.ccsa.org/2016/10/2016-17-state-ranks-and-similar-schools-ranks-spreadsheet.html>



# Choice4LA Program: Overview



Parent Revolution launched its newest program, Choice4LA, in January 2016 with the aim of increasing educational equity by addressing school choice barriers facing the highest need communities. Choice4LA reaches families in South Los Angeles primarily by partnering with diverse organizations that are already engaging low-income families and have developed long-standing relationships of trust in their community. The Choice4LA team then assists families in navigating the school choice system through a series of partner co-hosted information sessions, one-on-one conversations, and customized application support.

## **Process Overview**



**Information in a Trusted Setting:** The Choice4LA team presents information to families at sessions co-hosted with community-based partner organizations. This ensures a wide-reach to families in high-needs communities that may not normally attend school informational meetings.



**Customized Guidance:** Once a family opts-in to the program, a Choice4LA staff member – a “Choice Navigator” – begins a dialogue to learn the various concerns and interests pertinent to each child. This allows the staff member to provide information on quality school options that match each family’s needs.



**Referrals Through Service Providers:** To ensure the program reaches families who may not be aware of its services, Choice4LA provides a comprehensive referral process for service providers, enabling caseworkers, advocates, and others to connect program staff with the families they serve.



**Direct Support:** Many families engaged through Choice4LA have demanding schedules and transportation is often a barrier to accessing quality information pertaining to their child’s education. Choice Navigators meet each family at a time and place convenient for them, answer a family’s questions and highlight specific school choice options unique to the family’s needs. Navigators further provide direct support in completing and submitting all applications.



**Follow Up:** The process of enrolling in a great school doesn’t end with the application, so Choice Navigators provide continuous follow up and case management throughout the acceptance and enrollment processes. This often includes, among other things: attending lotteries, speaking with school administrators, and sending reminders for enrollment deadlines.

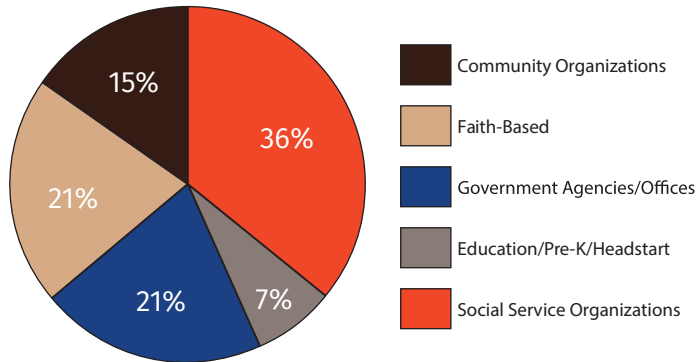


**PARTNERSHIP SPOTLIGHT**

Crystal Stairs is one of the largest private, nonprofit child care and child development agencies in California. Founded in 1980, their mission is to improve the lives of families through child care services, research and advocacy. During our pilot year, we conducted over 25 events in partnership with Crystal Stairs Early Head Start, engaging many of their families for public school options.

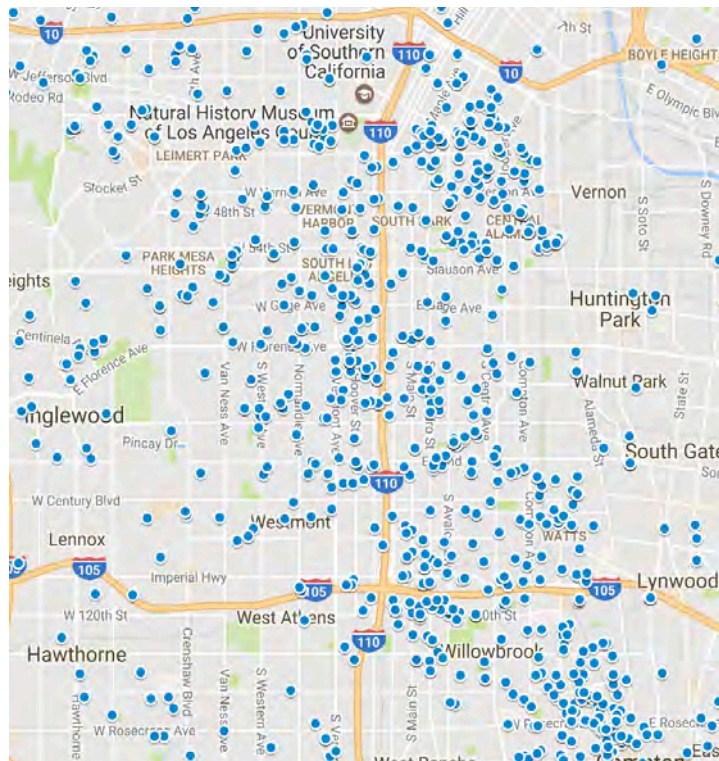
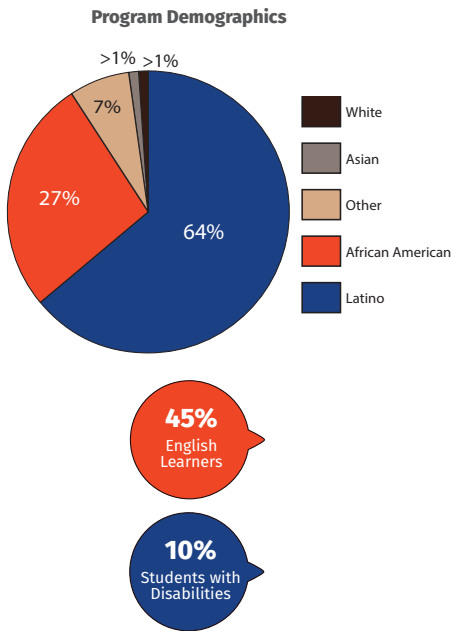
**Partnerships**

Choice4LA has partnered with over 40 different community-based partners to reach thousands of low-income families who are interested in finding better public school options for their children, with an emphasis on partners working in the highest need communities. Current partners include organizations working with homeless families (Imagine LA), foster youth (Department of Children and Family Services), special education students (Learning Rights Law Center), and faith-based institutions such as West Angeles Church of God and Christ, and many others.



**Who We Serve**

Although the Choice4LA program supports families from across the Los Angeles, the majority of families served reside in the program’s South LA focus area:





## Program Results: Choice Support

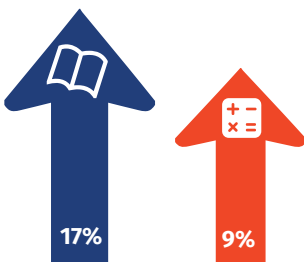
**47%** of families applied to both district & charter schools

**79%** of families who applied to 2 or more schools received at least one acceptance.

### Enrollment by School Type

**53% Charter** **47% District**

The average school families enrolled in was a **7.6** on the CCSA similar school ratings.



Students enrolled in schools with average proficiency 17% higher in ELA & 9% in MATH than their current or assigned schools

Over the past year, Choice4LA staff provided targeted support for families looking to find quality K-12 public school options for their children. The Choice4LA team advised families on the schools that had the best academic performance, met parent preferences like school themes or learning environment, and were accessible by families' available modes of transportation. The Choice4LA team also advised families on where they were most likely to receive acceptances, based on the previous years' demand. In total, families submitted over 800 applications, **43%** of which resulted in an acceptance.

Given high demand for Los Angeles' best schools, Navigators provided families with information on multiple school options and also encouraged families to apply to multiple schools. Despite transportation challenges and lack of quality options in many communities, almost half of families (**44%**) applied to two or more different school options. When families did apply to more than one school, almost half (**47%**) applied to both charter and district schools.

Almost **80%** of families who applied to two or more schools received at least one acceptance, and **65%** of the families who applied to only one school received an acceptance. A slight majority (**53%**) of families who received one or more seat offers ultimately enrolled in an independent charter school, while **47%** of families ultimately enrolled in a school governed by LAUSD. Qualitative and quantitative data shows that families were interested in exploring both charter school and LAUSD options, with much more emphasis on factors like academic performance, school safety, and curricular themes than governance models.

The schools that families enrolled in via Choice4LA had significantly stronger academic performance than children's previous or assigned schools— **the new schools had proficiency rates that were, on average, 17 percentage points better in ELA and 9 percentage points better in math than the child's former or assigned school.** Students' new schools had an average rating of 7.6 out of 10 on CCSA's similar schools rating, which compares academic performance at schools with similar student populations across California.



# Lessons Learned From Year One: Seven Key Takeaways

## MARIA'S STORY

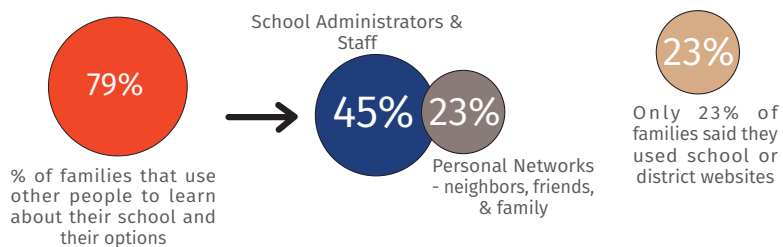
Maria received the contact information of a Parent Revolution Choice Navigator from a parent who had stopped by our table at the Exposition Park Community Center, where we had been sharing information with families the previous week. Maria has a son who is in 3rd grade and was attending a school where only 20% of students were meeting standards in either ELA or Math. One of our Choice Navigators called Maria, learned about her son, the type of school she was looking for and set up an appointment to meet Maria during her lunch break from work. Together they looked at many school options and Maria decided to apply to four schools. At the end of the meeting, Maria asked for duplicates of the applications for her sister who was also looking for high quality school options. Ultimately Maria chose to enroll her son in a school with significantly higher academic performance, with 46% of student meeting standards in ELA and 48% in Math.

During the 2015-2016 school year, Choice4LA engaged over 1,000 families – primarily in South Los Angeles – with school choice information and directly supported over 400 students in submitting school applications. While providing this service, Choice4LA staff aimed to learn: how families think about their school options; where they collect information; what motivates them to look for a school; what they hope to find in a school; and what challenges they identify in finding a school. In addition to the extensive qualitative data gleaned by the program staff, Choice4LA also conducted a survey of families engaged by the program to further inform the direction of school choice in Los Angeles.

### **Key Learning #1: Most families get information on their school options through interpersonal relationships rather than online research.**

79% of Choice4LA families previously used their personal and school-based relationships to learn about their child's school and options available to them. Almost half (45%) of families said they relied on school staff and administrators, and an additional 23% referenced their personal networks – neighbors, friends, and family – as a valuable source of information in assessing their child's education. Meanwhile, only 23% of families had previously used school or district websites.

To the extent that improved technology can increase school choice accessibility, mobile-friendly resources would be most valuable to families. Far more families from the Choice4LA program regularly access the Internet using their smartphones (75%) than using computers (40%). There are few if any resources currently available that enable families to easily assess school quality in mobile-friendly formats and many application information sites are not mobile-friendly. This is yet another example of how the status quo advantages wealthier families, who are more likely to have many other families in their social networks already attending high quality schools of choice.





Of families said they knew “a little” or “not very much” about their school options and almost the same percent said they didn’t know about the quality of their child’s school.

## Key Learning # 2: Families need and want better access to school quality information

The vast majority (79%) of Choice4LA families said they knew “a little” or “not very much” about their school options before working with Choice4LA, and almost the same amount said they didn’t know about the quality of their child’s current or assigned school. When asked open-endedly about the most useful aspects of Choice4LA, the most common answer was “providing information about the performance of their child’s current or assigned school.”

## Key Learning # 3: Families are looking for customized, individualized support

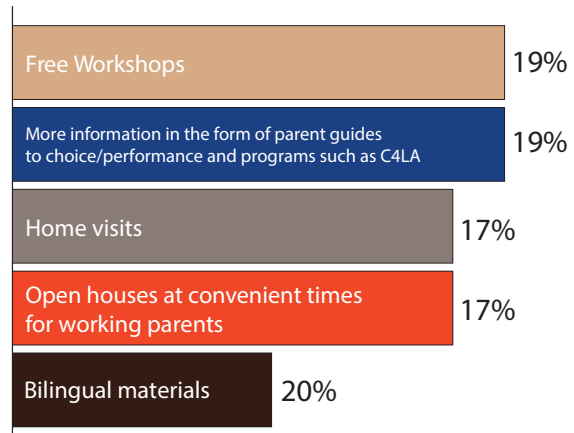
When asked what aspects of the Choice4LA program they found to be the most helpful when choosing a new school, families selected highly individualized aspects of the program: identifying specific schools they were eligible to apply to (28%); meetings at convenient times and locations (17%); technical support and reminders for application and enrollment deadlines (14%); and assisting them in their preferred language (7%). School choice supports must be tailored to the unique needs of each family and are challenging to provide with solutions that provide only a broad over-view of processes.



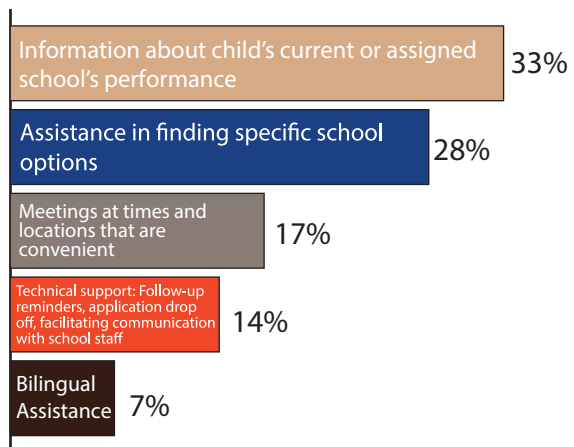
### PARTNERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

The West Angeles Church of God in Christ - Education & Enrichment Program is one of our strongest faith partners that provide educational and after-school services to the community. During our pilot year we conducted many events with West Angeles and remain strong partners. As we work with families and assess their educational needs, West Angeles refers them to Choice4LA for further assistance.

When asked about additional supports they would like all families to have access to, they said:



When we asked the families that we worked with what aspects of the Choice4LA program they found to be the most helpful when choosing. They said:

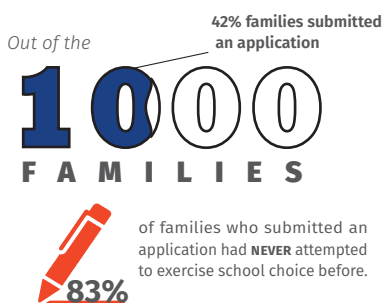


**Only 5%**  
of families reported previously receiving information from community organizations.



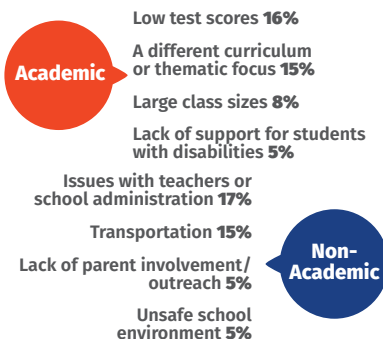
**Key Learning #4: Non-profits and community organizations are being underutilized and are uniquely well positioned to provide that support**

Given the strong demand for personalized support and unbiased information, non-profit and community organizations can be a valuable resource to fill the current gap in school choice navigation support for families. However, only 5% of families from Choice4LA said they ever received school choice information from such an organization prior to joining the program. Given the strong networks of non-profit and community organizations throughout Los Angeles with pre-existing relationships amongst families, investing in and building the capacity of non-profits and community organizations to support choice navigation should be a focus of any comprehensive strategy to make access to school choice more equitable.



**Key Learning #5: Many families who have never attempted to exercise choice will do so if provided support**

The vast majority of the families who submitted an application with Choice4LA (83%) had never before tried to exercise school choice. However, of the roughly 1,000 families engaged in the program, over 40% of those families ultimately submitted applications for one or more schools. Improved access to school quality information and the offer of support in the choice navigation process appears to have significantly increased the percentage of families who became active choosers.



**Key Learning #6: Families are motivated to explore school choice for a wide variety of reasons**

Although families supported by Choice4LA were almost entirely transitioning from low-performing schools, they cited a wide variety of reasons, both academic and non-academic, that they looked for in a better school. When asked open-endedly, only 16% volunteered low test scores as the primary catalyst for their search. Other academic issues included frustrations with teachers or administrators (17%); desire for a different curriculum or thematic focus (15%); and desire for smaller class sizes (8%). The most common non-academic issues were unsafe school environments (6%) and lack of parent involvement or outreach (5%) at their current or assigned school.

**Key Learning #7: There are not enough quality schools to meet parent demand**

Despite strong support and encouragement from the Choice4LA team to apply to as many quality options as possible, roughly half of the families in Choice4LA were unable to find and apply for more than one quality school option that was accessible to them. Given the competitive nature of many quality school options and the transportation challenges that limit many families, it is clear that a shortage of quality school options in South Los Angeles (and other low-income communities of Los Angeles) is one of the biggest barriers inhibiting the public school choice system from benefiting more students and families.





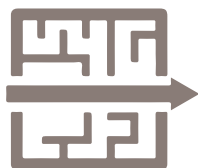
# Recommendations



## ***Focus On Quality Choices, Not Just Choice***

The goal of public school choice must be to improve equity and academic outcomes for all students, rather than merely increasing the number of families making a choice, regardless of quality. Education leaders, policymakers, community organizations, and philanthropic leaders should focus on increasing the number of high-quality schools and the accessibility of these schools to all students. These efforts should include:

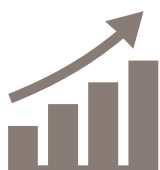
- Adopting standard school quality indicators so that all families can easily comprehend and compare school quality.
- Support the replication and growth of high-performing schools.
- Move to either phase out or rapidly improve the lowest performing schools via evidence-driven strategies, with turnaround plans clearly communicated to families at these schools.
- Take into account the unique transportation challenges of Los Angeles when replicating quality schools; work cross sector to find creative ways to make transportation available to all types of schools through cost sharing and saving programs. The MTA should follow the lead of many other major American cities and provide free bus passes for all students that need to travel significant distances to get to school.



## ***Simplify At All Steps Of The Process***

All parts of the education sector should work progressively towards a single application and enrollment system with a common application and deadline. This does not need to be achieved all at once, but rather, through thoughtful interim steps. Several important principles should guide this work:

- LAUSD’s “common enrollment” system must include school quality data and should function with a common application for all district choices.
- In the short term, independent charter schools should begin to align their own deadlines and applications to the greatest extent possible, looking to models like New York City’s Common Charter School Application
- LAUSD and other charter authorizers should agree to automatically approve any charter petition amendments that are intended to improve access and equity by aligning application deadlines within the charter sector and/or with district deadlines
- Despite the clear political challenges, representatives from the charter school sector and LAUSD should engage in continued dialogue about creative, collaborative solutions that could remove barriers for families accessing both district and charter school applications.



## **Improve Access to School Quality Data for Families**

Too many families are effectively denied access to actionable school quality information, forcing them to rely heavily on factors like school branding. There are several steps that both LAUSD and the charter school sector can take to immediately improve families' access to school quality information:

- All school information websites and brochures must contain a comparable set of quality information for schools. In addition to other indicators of quality, this must include quantitative academic performance data, including but not limited to student growth and comparisons to similar schools, disaggregated for sub-groups.
- Websites and brochures for families should include all public school options, must be mobile friendly, and have clear links or instructions on how to submit applications.
- All schools - district and charter - should be proactively engaging families with individual, sub-group, and aggregate academic performance data to ensure that they understand the implications for their children at their current schools.



## **Strengthen The Role Of People To Provide Customized And Actionable Support**

Consistently providing school quality data and simplifying the application and enrollment system will support many families in making better choices for their children. However, many of the families who are not currently exercising school choice will continue to rely on both professional relationships and informal social networks for advice and guidance in navigating the school choice landscape. There are several concrete steps that LAUSD and the charter sector can take to strengthen the role of people in supporting families to effectively exercise school choice:

- School staff and administrators should be mandated and empowered to share school quality and application information on all available public schools with families in terminating grades. Both LAUSD and charter schools should ensure that schools have the personnel and the expertise to provide this information to families.
- School information sessions and support aimed at helping families navigate the school choice landscape must be flexible, customized, language-appropriate and focused on the specific school options available to each family, rather than general information about choice system or governance models.
- Non-profits and community organizations are an important and largely untapped resource for helping families choose quality schools. LAUSD and charter school operators should work collaboratively with these organizations to build their capacity to support quality school choice.

### **JACKIE'S STORY**

We met Jackie at a School Choice Clinic we presented at an event hosted by the Learning Rights Law Center. Jackie's daughter has Down Syndrome and Jackie felt like her current school was not appropriately serving her daughter. Jackie was looking for a middle school that would both support and challenge her daughter, but she had heard that there were not many options available for her daughter. A Choice4LA navigator helped schedule several school tours and went with Jackie and her daughter to visit potential schools. Together they decided on a school that felt like a good fit. They applied and got in. So far, Jackie reports that she has a great relationship with the new school and that there is clear communication and collaboration to meet her daughter's strengths and needs.

***Interested in learning more about your public school options?  
Know a family that could benefit from Choice4LA services?***

***Call 1 (855) 4CHOICE or visit [www.choice4la.org](http://www.choice4la.org)***

*At Parent Revolution, we organize, train, and work side-by-side with families to support their use of power to secure a quality education for their children, children in their communities, and for all children.*

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