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Charter Public School Students in Focus: Asian American & Pacific Islanders

In this brief, CCSA provides demographic and academic information about California's AAPI student population enrolled in charter public schools.

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California's Large and Growing AAPI Population

California is home to the largest Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) population in the country with over 6.7 million AAPI people representing over 30% of the country's Asian population. While other demographic groups are leaving the state, California's Asian population has grown by 25% in the past 10 years and is projected to keep growing. Demographers predict that AAPI Americans will become the largest immigrant group in the country, surpassing Latino Americans in the next 40 years.

California's AAPI Population Represents Diversity in All Areas

When we talk broadly about Asian people, we obscure the wide range of experiences, circumstances, and cultures of AAPI Americans. "Some are the products of war and displacement. Others are the product of immigration, of people making the choice to come here..." In fact, academic opportunities and outcomes differ as widely within the AAPI population as they do between other groups, like white and Black Americans.



AAPI communities differ in many ways including socioeconomic status, educational attainment, and educational access in grades K-12. While AAPI adults tend to do well economically compared to national averages, this is not the case for all AAPI groups. In fact, only Indian and Filipino Americans have higher average household incomes than the Asian average. Other groups, like Mongolian and Burmese Americans have some of the highest poverty rates in the country. Similarly, Asian Americans are much more likely than the general U.S. population to have a college degree, yet groups like Bhutanese adults have very low educational attainment. Research has shown that, access to a quality K-12 public school is strongly correlated with economic well-being, regardless of students' ethnicity. It follows that more economically disadvantaged groups like Cambodians, Laotians, and Hmong students are less likely to attend high-quality schools than their Korean, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian counterparts.

AAPI Enrollment in Charter Public Schools

In 2021-22, there are about 37,000 AAPI students in California charter public schools, about 5.5% of all charter school students. Forty-three percent of AAPI students in charter schools are socioeconomically disadvantaged, compared to 38% in traditional public schools (TPS).

AAPI students in California reflect the wide range of experiences and backgrounds of broader AAPI communities. In charter public schools, AAPI students that are English learners (EL) or who are no longer ELs and have been reclassified as “Fluent English Proficient” (FEP) had over 40 native languages in 2021-22. The most common native languages among these students were: Vietnamese, Arabic and Mandarin (See Figure 1).



Figure 1: AAPI Common Languages (2021-22)

Charter		TPS
Vietnamese	1	Mandarin
Arabic	2	Vietnamese
Filipino	3	Cantonese
Mandarin	4	Filipino
Korean	5	Arabic
Punjabi	6	Korean
Cantonese	7	Punjabi
Farsi	8	Farsi
Hebrew	9	Hindi
Japanese	10	Hmong

In comparison to TPS, charter schools tend to serve a higher proportion of students from West Asia, while TPS serve a larger proportion of students from East Asia (See Figure 2). For example, 39% of AAPI EL and FEP students at TPS had a native language originating from an East Asian country, compared to 28% at charter public schools. Similarly, Mandarin and Cantonese were the 1st and 3rd most common languages among EL and FEP students in TPS but were only the fourth and seventh most common among their charter public school counterparts.

In California, charter public schools serve students with ties to countries as different as Syria, India, Samoa, China, Vietnam, and Nepal. Therefore, conversations that paint “Asian student performance” with a broad brush often ignore the individual and group-level variations within AAPI students. Later in this research brief, we will highlight some examples of excellent California charter public schools serving AAPI students.

Figure 2: Regional Breakdown by Charter Status (2021-22)¹

	Pacific Islander	India	East	Southeast	South	West
Non-Charter	1%	16%	39%	28%	3%	13%
All Charters	1%	15%	28%	26%	4%	26%
Independent Charter	0.5%	14%	29%	27%	4%	24%
Total	1%	16%	38%	28%	3%	14%

AAPI Academic Performance in Charter Public Schools

In the aggregate, the Asian student subgroup outperforms all other subgroups in the state on English Language Arts (ELA) and Math tests, college and career readiness, and college access, and the

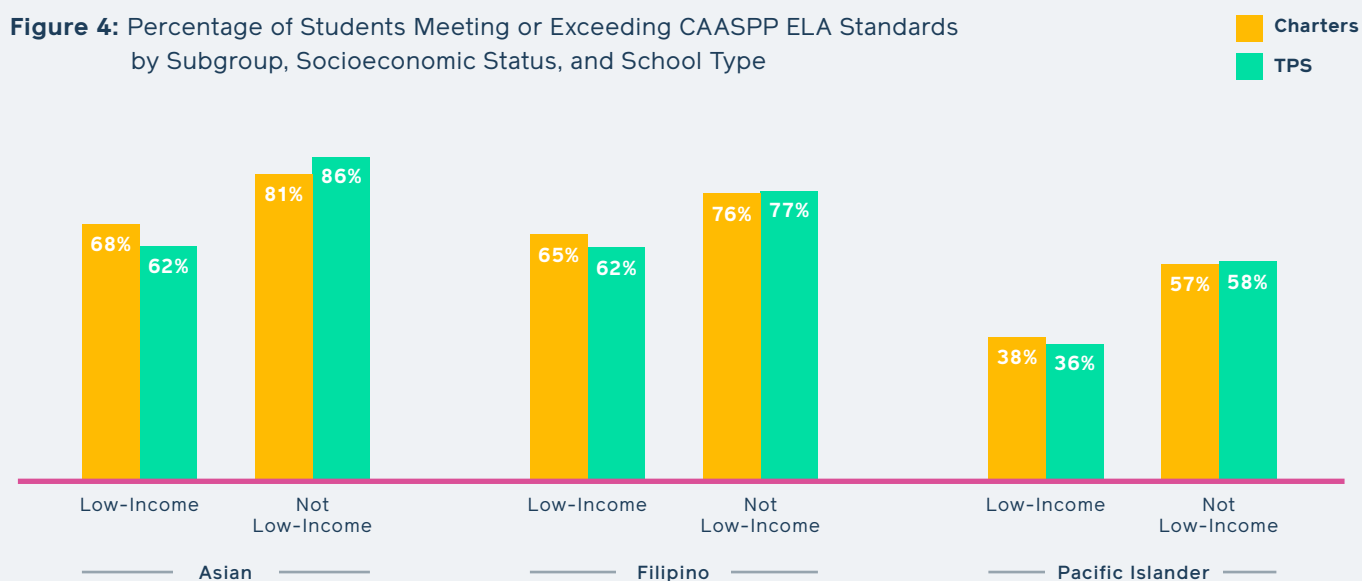
Filipino subgroup performs similarly well compared to other subgroups (See Figure 3). However, Pacific Islander students, on average, underperform on these measures compared to other subgroups.

Figure 3: Academic and Post-Secondary Results by Subgroup

	College and Career Indicator (2020)	Graduates Meeting UC/CSU Requirements (2021)	ELA Status (2019)	Math Status (2019)
Asian	74%	78%	65	60
Filipino	65%	71%	47	18
Pacific Islander	36%	48%	-20	-50
State Average	46%	56%	-2.5	-34

Digging deeper into state testing data, we see that AAPI students at charters and TPS perform similarly in both ELA and Math. However, when we look at the subgroup data available, and separate it out by socioeconomic status, we find that low-income Asian, Filipino, and Pacific Islander students in

charter schools outperform their TPS counterparts in both ELA and Math, on average (See Figure 4). Conversely, Asian, Filipino, and Pacific Islander students in TPS that are not low-income tend to outperform their charter school counterparts.

Figure 4: Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding CAASPP ELA Standards by Subgroup, Socioeconomic Status, and School Type



Bright Spot Charter Public Schools Serving AAPI Students

1 The O'Farrell Charter School

AAPI Populations Served:

Filipino

Lao

The O'Farrell Charter School is a K-12 charter school in San Diego that provides a "multi-cultural, linguistically, and racially diverse learning environment in which students experience educational equity and are encouraged to celebrate their own individuality." Ranked in the top 3% of high schools in the country according by US News & World Report, the O'Farrell Charter had a 74% Advanced Placement (AP) participation rate, a 100% a-g completion rate, and a 99% graduation rate in 2020-21. In 2018-19, the school had a Similar Students Rank of 9 out of 10 in 2018-19, meaning they were in the top 20% of schools in the state on state tests, when demographics were considered.



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2 Yav Pem Suab Academy

AAPI Populations Served:

Hmong

Mien

Lao

Cambodian

Chinese

Yav Pem Suab Academy, which translates to “Preparing for the Future,” is a K-6 charter school in Sacramento. The school was founded by a grassroots team of parents and educators who came together to examine the problem of low academic achievement among Hmong scholars in Sacramento in 2008. At the time, Hmong students had the lowest achievement when compared to all other subgroups in the district with only 12-15% of students scoring “proficient” on state tests. In contrast, in 2018-19, a majority of English-proficient Hmong students met English and Math standards. The school also affirms Hmong language and culture by offering Hmong language development and culture courses, leveraging three full-time Hmong language teachers. While 94% of non-native English speaking AAPI students at the school are Hmong, the school also serves students who are Mien, Lao, Cambodian, and Chinese.

3 Sacramento Valley Charter School

AAPI Populations Served:

Punjabi

Sacramento Valley Charter School was the first charter school in the country to be established by the Punjabi Community. The school serves 266 students in grades K-8 who are mostly Punjabi (81%), low-income (84%), and/or Asian (90%). All students at the school take Punjabi language studies every year. From 2017 to 2019, Sacramento Valley Charter were in the top 10% of all public schools in the state on Asian student growth in ELA and in the top 20% in Math.

¹ Pacific Islander languages: Samoan, Marshallese, Ilocano, Malay, Chamorro

Indian languages: Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu

East Asian languages: Cantonese, Hmong, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Taiwanese, Toishanese, Chaozhou, Mien

Southeast Asian languages: Burmese, Indonesian, Khmu, Lahu, Lao, Thai, Vietnamese, Filipino, Karen, Khmer

South Asian languages: Nepali, Pashto, Urdu, Sinhala

West Asian languages: Arabic, Assyrian, Chaldean, Farsi, Hebrew, Uzbek