



ANNUAL REPORT | 2019



WASHINGTON STATE
CHARTER SCHOOLS
ASSOCIATION



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Dear Advocates, Members, and Supporters:

As we look back to 2019, we'd be remiss not to acknowledge the unprecedented circumstances impacting our schools, communities, nation, and world as we pen this in fall of 2020.

In some ways, 2019 feels like lifetime ago — a time when “social distancing,” “new normal,” and “quarantine” were not part of our everyday vocabulary. 2020 has found us not only facing the COVID-19 pandemic, but also what many have described as a “reckoning” with systemic racism in America.

We recognize the shift in our national conversation around inequity and injustice and are encouraged by this wider spread acknowledgment of racism and its impact over centuries in America.

This is the complexity in which we are currently sitting. WA Charters sees the challenges of COVID-19 and systemic racism as opportunities to engage with you—parents, school leaders, community partners, advocates, and supporters—to dismantle inequitable systems and work together to co-create educational opportunities that amplify the brilliance of our students.

We are proud to share what we accomplished together in 2019: 100 percent of Washington's first cohort of graduating seniors graduated college-ready, and 100 percent were accepted into a four-year college. 100 percent of WA Charters' School Leadership and Design Fellows submitted applications and were approved to open innovative models with rigorous academics rooted in a deep commitment to diversity, racial equity, and inclusion. Additionally, increases in special education funding marked important progress that reduces inequitable resources for systemically underserved students.

With any initiative focused on change and innovation, there are both progress and setbacks, and 2019 was marked by the closure of three charter public schools in Washington. While school closure is never a desired outcome, one of the great hallmarks of the charter public school sector is that we are able to respond, adapt, and make improvements quickly when something is not working. Closure is difficult, and first and foremost our hearts go out to impacted families and communities. Yet these developments point to a sector that is focused on continuous improvement, quality, rigor, and equity. According to a 2019 Stanford University CREDO study, high performing charters in Washington are on par with highest performers in the country.

In partnership with our schools, and the families and communities that they serve, we persist to create educational opportunities that truly provide high-quality education for ALL. Disparities — and the need to address them — are all the more acute during a pandemic, when inequitable access to technology, inclusive learning spaces, reliable jobs, stable housing, and food security are disproportionately impacting the Global Majority (also called “people of color”).

Thank you for your partnership, advocacy, and support. By investing in Washington's charter public schools, you are joining thousands of Washingtonians who are investing in a better tomorrow for our students and communities.

**With gratitude,
The WA Charters Board of Directors and Team**

OUR PURPOSE



We are an **ADVOCACY** organization. We know that one size does not fit all learners, so we partner with schools, parents, and communities to promote policies that support all public school students.



We help **GROW** the number of high-quality public school options in our state by helping visionary leaders design, launch, and lead innovative and gap-closing schools.



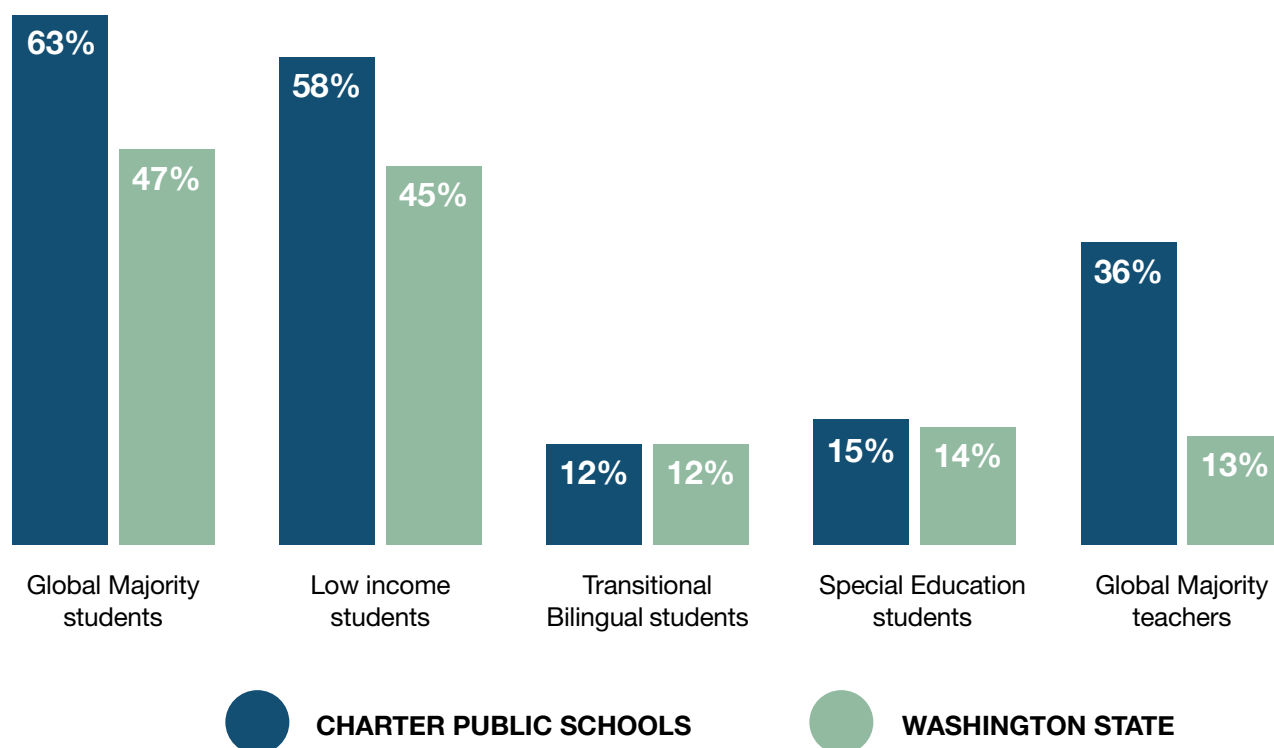
We help **SUSTAIN** a high-quality charter public school sector by providing key technical assistance and resources to operating schools, including policy and advocacy leadership, governance support, professional learning communities, and more.

WHO ARE WASHINGTON'S CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS ATTRACTING AND SERVING?

Charter public schools are free and open to all students. They do not have special eligibility or entrance requirements, and they are built on the belief that every student should have the chance to go to a great school that puts their needs first, regardless of zip code, income or ability level. If more students want to attend a specific charter school than there are spaces available, enrollment is determined by a random lottery.

Washington's charters attract and serve higher percentages of systemically underserved students, and employ 3 times the percentage of teachers of color, as compared to the statewide average.¹

¹OSPI 2019-20 Washington State Report Card [washingtonstatereportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/](https://www.washingtonstatereportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/)





PARENT PERSPECTIVE

Yadira Diaz Lemus

Yadira (front right) and fellow Impact parents on a recent visit to Olympia, where they shared with legislators what it means to them to have high-quality public school options.

“ Before Impact, I didn’t have a choice of where my daughter would go to school and that terrified me because our assigned school was not what I wanted. Impact has gone beyond the call of duty, not only are they teaching my daughter how to read, spell, and learn science and math. They are focused on her emotional well-being too. She loves her school! Every time she is picked up she always asks for five more minutes! ”

What Results Are Washington’s Charter Public Schools Delivering?

“Promising but not yet definitive”

A January 2019 study by Stanford University’s Center for Research on Educational Outcomes (CREDO)² summarized the performance of Washington’s charter public schools as “promising but not yet definitive . . . given the limited years of data available.”

Washington State Report Card shows gains for charter public school students

Per OSPI (2019), **students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch outperformed their state and/or district peers at seven of the eight charter public schools** that administered statewide tests in at least one subject area.³ **Every single charter public school that has been operating for two or more years has shown typical to high growth for its students as compared to the state average for growth.**⁴

A study conducted by the Washington State Charter School Commission showed that on average, **median rates of growth were higher at Commission-authorized charter public schools**, as compared to the schools where students would have been assigned, based on their home address.⁵

² CREDO (January 2019). *Charter School Performance in the State of Washington*. credo.stanford.edu/publications/charter-school-performance-state-washington

³ OSPI (Accessed September 10, 2019). *Washington State Report Card*. washingtonstatereportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Washington State Charter School Commission (Accessed Jan. 2020). *2018-19 Growth Results*. charterschool.app.box.com/s/ag3anpfubzvsjgr3rhwr9ciwzyidw8o/file/603611933170

SPOTLIGHT ON 2019 GRADS

2019 marked the first charter public high school graduations in Washington state.

100% of Washington's first graduating charter high school class graduated college-ready

100% of graduates were accepted to at least one four-year college.



OSCAR CORTES

*Summit Sierra,
Class of 2019*

“

I always wanted to go to college, but before Summit, I didn't know how I'd go about that. When I came here, it instantly felt different. The big goal behind everything that we do is to get accepted to a four-year university. I was actually accepted to five different colleges! I'll be starting the University of Washington in the fall, and I'll be the first person in my family to go to college.

”



ASHLEY CLARK

*Summit Sierra,
Class of 2019*

“

Charter public schools like Summit are changing futures – now. I've taken my education very seriously, determined to not only be the first to graduate college in my immediate family but to also prove to myself that my fate is controlled by me and me only – not a vicious cycle. I'm so excited to see what the future holds for so many more students like me. I'm grateful for the opportunity to leave a legacy. I hope to come back in five or ten years and tell you how much I've accomplished.

”

2019 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

In preparation for the 2019 session, WA Charters staff met with 40 state elected officials and hosted school visits for 20 legislators and legislative staffers. During session, WA Charters facilitated small group parent meetings in Olympia with 24 legislators.

We advocated alongside fellow members of the Investing in Student Potential coalition for increasing special education funding, while also focusing on continuing to build relationships with legislators to increase understanding of charter public schools. We also looked for opportunities to address other charter priorities, including: more equitable funding for charter public schools, extension of the five-year charter authorization window, and more equitable access to affordable and sustainable facilities options.

The most significant positive outcome of the 2019 legislature was \$151 million in increased special education funding for public schools overall, including charters, which translated to approximately \$250-\$380 per student increase for charter public schools for the 2019-



20 school year. We also secured a budget provision that allowed for a less expensive and less burdensome audit to satisfy a particular charter school audit requirement.

An amendment that would have provided \$1,500 per student in local property tax levy equalization advanced to literally the final hour of the legislative session before being struck from a broader bill addressing local levies for traditional school

districts. A separate provision that would have extended the five-year authorization window for charter schools passed out of committee and was under consideration until the final weekend of the session. While we were ultimately unsuccessful, having both issues in play so late into the process represents important progress, and sets us up to continue conversations with legislators moving forward.



THIRD STRONGEST CHARTER SCHOOL LAW IN THE NATION

Washington's charter public school law is unique for its explicit focus on serving "at-risk" or systemically underserved students. In 2019, Washington's charter school law was ranked third strongest in the nation for the second year running by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools for its high level of accountability in exchange for a high degree of flexibility.

www.publiccharters.org/ranking-state-public-charter-school-laws-2019

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2019 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

continued from page 7

Looking Ahead: WA Charters Priorities



**ERIC
PETTIGREW**
*Washington State
Representative (D)*



*Charter
schools are
an equity
issue.*



AUTHORIZATION WINDOW

In April 2021, the five-year authorizing window for new charter public schools to be established under our current charter school statute is scheduled to close. To date, only 23 charter schools have been established (12 are operating, six are authorized and yet-to-open, and five have closed), while the law allows for a maximum of 40. Implementation has been more deliberate than originally anticipated, due largely to the extremely high bar for charter application approval (e.g., 700-page applications) and uncertainty created by litigation (two separate lawsuits within the first five years of implementation). Extending the five-year authorizing window would provide additional time to fulfill the intent of the legislature (in 2016) and the voters (in 2012) to allow for the establishment of up to 40 charter public schools and to expand opportunities for systemically underserved students.

EQUITABLE FUNDING FOR CHARTER SCHOOL STUDENTS

Public schools are funded by a combination of state and local dollars. By law, charter public schools receive the same amount of per-pupil state funding as traditional public schools. However, charters are not eligible to receive local property tax levy funds. This means charter schools typically receive between \$1,500 - \$3,000 less per student than other public schools in the same community. At the same time, charter schools are serving disproportionately more systemically underserved students (e.g., 63 percent of students attending Washington's charter public schools in 2019-20 identified as students of color, as compared to 47 percent statewide, while 58 percent of charter public school students received free or reduced price meals compared to 45 percent statewide). This disparity in funding that disproportionately impacts students, families, and communities of color is a concrete example of systemic racism. We remain firm in our commitment to advocate for equitable funding as a key step toward educational justice for systemically underserved students.

PROGRAMS OVERVIEW

In 2019, WA Charters successfully saw cohorts through two fellowship programs focused on creating leadership pathways in Washington's growing charter public school sector.

ASPIRING LEADERS

Rooted in the belief that community-driven solutions are the best ones, Aspiring Leaders is a fellowship designed to address inequities in our education system by creating leadership pathways and providing resources for community stakeholders to generate ideas and solutions together.

Aspiring Leaders is a cohort fellowship program launched in 2019 that supports community, business, education, and policy professionals of color curious about finding ways to lead within the Washington charter public school sector.

We know that racial representation influences academic and non-academic outcomes for students, and that diversity within teams

catalyzes innovation. Aspiring Leaders is one way that WA Charters is working to ensure that charter public school leaders reflect the students and communities that our sector serves. Upon completion of the program, Aspiring Leaders can pursue one or more of the following:

- Apply to join a founding or existing charter public school team or board
- Apply for 4.0 Schools' Tiny / Essential Fellowships
- Apply for an operations or community engagement school position, or other roles at operating charter public schools
- Be an advocate for the charter public school sector

ASPIRING LEADER SPOTLIGHT

“

As a migrant myself, I can relate to the struggles that families face. I want to be a part of the solution. I want to see that all students, regardless of their race, history or ethnicity, get the opportunity to reach their highest and true potential. I've taken my learnings from Aspiring Leaders and am now leading Pinnacles Prep's Family and Community Engagement (FACE) committee. Today, I recognize that I have a huge role in the charter public school coming to my community—and I am not taking it lightly. There is a lot of work to be done, but I feel supported every step of the way.

”



**KARLA SOTO
MULLINS**

*2019 Aspiring Leader
and Pinnacles Prep
Founding Board
Member*

School Leadership and Design Fellowship

WA Charters' School Leadership and Design Fellowship (SLDF) is a small, cohort-based incubation experience for individuals/teams ready to participate in the first phase of a multi-phase series of supports to design and open a high-quality school.

The fellowship year culminates in the submission of a charter public school application. If approved, that school benefits from two subsequent years of intensive support, including school startup grants, Charter School Program grant administration, and member trainings and bespoke school supports.

SCHOOL OPENING PATHWAY



Applied and Approved in 2019

Cascade Public Schools: Midway (Des Moines)

Catalyst Public Schools: Bremerton

Whatcom Intergenerational High School (Bellingham)

Lumen High School (Spokane)

Received WA Charters start-up grants/support

Cascade Public Schools: Midway (Des Moines)

Catalyst Public Schools: Bremerton

Whatcom Intergenerational High School (Bellingham)

Lumen High School (Spokane)

Impact I Salish Sea Elementary (south of Seattle)



2019 SLDF SPOTLIGHT

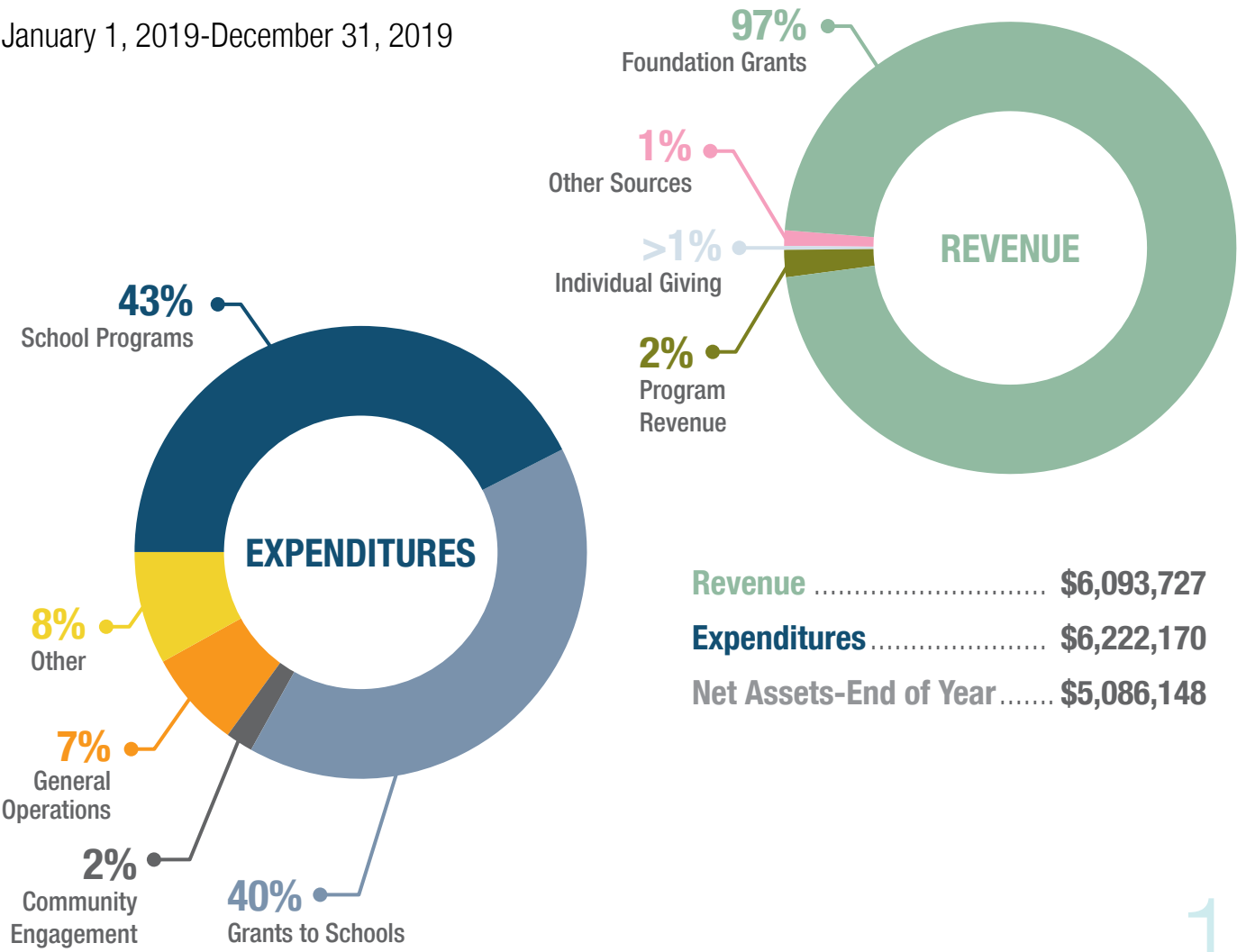
“ Because of the support of the WA Charters SLDF, I have been given the gift of developing this robust model in community with teen parents and we believe it will be a life-changing school for our students and their families. I am grateful to be a part of such an amazing organization and truly wouldn't be making this dream a reality without WA Charters. ”



SHAUNA EDWARDS
Founder and Executive Director, Lumen High School, Spokane

FINANCIALS

January 1, 2019-December 31, 2019





**Invest in a more equitable education sector through
advocacy, giving, in-kind support, or volunteerism!**

Visit www.wacharters.org/take-action/ to learn more.

wacharters.org / info@wacharters.org / 206.832.8505

