

# Idaho Public Charter School Commission 2017 Annual Report

## A Year in Review

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Thank you for your interest in Idaho's public charter schools. The Public Charter School Commission (PCSC) is Idaho's largest authorizer, with a portfolio comprising 73% of Idaho's 56 charters. Our mission is to protect student and public interests by balancing high standards of accountability with respect for the autonomy of public charter schools. We endeavor to implement best authorizing practices and fulfill the requirements of Idaho statute in order to ensure the excellence of public charter school options for Idaho families.

During 2017, the PCSC broadened the services it provides to public charter schools in its portfolio. By identifying and filling gaps in the support structures already available through other entities, the PCSC developed resources that enhance the ability of new and operating public charter schools to maximize their own effectiveness. The new tools and guidance opportunities are designed to assist schools without infringing on their autonomy.

With extensive input from stakeholders, the PCSC adopted a new performance framework. The updated framework dovetails with the state's new accountability system where possible, but can accommodate future policy shifts with minimal disruption. It evaluates schools' proficiency rates in light of meaningful comparison groups and recognizes individual student growth. The framework provides meaningful data regarding schools of all sizes, demographics, and missions.

Our portfolio has expanded to include four new schools: Future Public School (Garden City), Peace Valley Charter School (Boise), Project Impact STEM Academy (Kuna), and Gem Prep: Meridian (Meridian).

The PCSC is engaged in conversations regarding opportunities for increased autonomy for Idaho's high-performing charter schools. We look forward to supporting fulfillment of the vision on which Idaho's charter movement was founded twenty years ago.

We invite you to join us in supporting a high-quality charter school sector in Idaho.

Sincerely,

Alan Reed, Chairman

Tamara L. Baysinger, Director

January 2018



## Portfolio Overview

The PCSC's portfolio comprises 41 public charter schools. These schools are located all across the state, in both rural and urban communities, and served approximately 16,800 students during the 2016-17 school year. Their time in operation ranges from one to nineteen years. They offer an array of educational choices: Core Knowledge, Expeditionary Learning, Montessori, Waldorf, International Baccalaureate, and more. Several are alternative schools, and others focus on underserved or at-risk populations while welcoming all students who wish to attend. Eight are categorized as virtual schools, which together enroll about 4,900 students.

PCSC PORTFOLIO SCHOOL	YEAR	LOCATION	GRADES	METHOD
Alturas International Academy	2016	Idaho Falls	K-8	International Baccalaureate
American Heritage Charter School	2013	Idaho Falls	K-12	Core Knowledge
Another Choice Virtual School	2010	Treasure Valley	K-12	Virtual, Special Needs
Bingham Academy	2014	Blackfoot	9-12	STEM, Postsecondary Prep
Blackfoot Community Charter Learning Center	2000	Blackfoot	K-8	Brain-Based, Multi-Age
Chief Tahgee Elementary Academy	2013	Fort Hall	K-6	Native Language & Culture
Coeur d'Alene Charter Academy	1999	Coeur d'Alene	6-12	College Prep
Compass Public Charter School	2005	Meridian	K-12	Compass Method
Conner Academy	2006	Pocatello	K-8	Harbor
Falcon Ridge Public Charter School	2005	Kuna	K-8	Harbor
Future Public School	2018	Garden City	K-8	STEM
Gem Prep: Meridian	2018	Meridian	K-8	Blended
Gem Prep: Pocatello	2016	Pocatello	K-6	Blended
Heritage Academy	2011	Jerome	K-8	Schoolwide Enrichment
Heritage Community Charter School	2011	Caldwell	K-8	Classical, Dual-Language
Idaho Technical Career Academy	2014	Statewide	9-12	Virtual, Career Technical
Idaho Connects Online	2009	Statewide	6-12	Virtual
Idaho Science and Technology Charter School	2009	Blackfoot	4-8	Science & Technology
Idaho Virtual Academy	2002	Statewide	K-12	Virtual
INSPIRE Connections Academy	2005	Statewide	K-12	Virtual
iSucceed Virtual High School	2008	Statewide	9-12	Virtual
Kootenai Bridge Academy	2009	Coeur d'Alene	11-12	Virtual, Credit Recovery
Legacy Charter School	2011	Nampa	K-8	Harbor
Liberty Charter School	1999	Nampa	K-12	Harbor
Monticello Montessori Charter School	2010	Ammon	K-6	Montessori
North Idaho STEM Charter Academy	2012	Rathdrum	K-12	STEM
North Star Charter School	2003	Eagle	K-12	International Baccalaureate
North Valley Academy	2008	Gooding	K-12	Core Knowledge
Palouse Prairie Charter School	2009	Moscow	K-8	Expeditionary Learning
Peace Valley Charter School	2018	Boise	K-8	Waldorf
Project Impact STEM Academy	2018	Kuna	K-12	Blended STEM
Richard McKenna Charter School	2002	Mountain Home	K-12	Montessori K-8, Virtual Alt. HS
Rolling Hills Public Charter School	2005	Boise	K-8	Harbor
Sage International School of Boise	2010	Boise	K-12	International Baccalaureate
Syringa Mountain School	2014	Ketchum	K-6	Waldorf Inspired
Taylor's Crossing Public Charter School	2006	Idaho Falls	K-12	Harbor
The Village Charter School	2011	Boise	K-8	7 Habits & Leadership
Victory Charter School	2004	Nampa	K-12	Harbor
Vision Charter School	2007	Caldwell	K-12	Classical
White Pine Charter School	2003	Idaho Falls	K-8	Core Knowledge
Xavier Charter School	2007	Twin Falls	K-12	Classical

## Who We Are

The PCSC's seven members hail from all around the state. Commissioners are appointed by the Governor (3 members), Senate Pro Tempore (2 members), or Speaker of the House (2 members). They serve four-year terms, and officers are elected every two years in the spring.

*Our mission is to ensure PCSC-authorized public charter schools' compliance with Idaho statute, protecting student and public interests by balancing high standards of accountability with respect for the autonomy of public charter schools and implementing best authorizing practices to ensure the excellence of public charter school options available to Idaho families.*

Each commissioner adds to a broad scope of collective experience in public education, business, and governance. All bring to the table a strong desire to **contribute to quality school choice** for Idaho families.

The PCSC's FY 2018 budget is \$665,600, representing an increase of 34% from FY 2017. The legislature approved this increase in order to facilitate the engagement of independent experts in the charter renewal process. The PCSC's revenue comprises a combination of authorizer fees and state funds appropriated as part of the Office of the State Board of Education's budget.

The PCSC office is staffed by the Office of the State Board of Education and includes four FTE. In 2017, PCSC staff reorganized itself to increase its capacity to **develop services** for public charter schools. These services include extensive pre-opening support for newly approved schools, as well as new resources for charter school leaders and governing boards.

Additionally, the PCSC and its staff worked with stakeholders to **refine the charter renewal process**. These efforts streamlined the process, making it easier for schools to navigate while retaining the best practices that enable the PCSC to make informed, outcome-based decisions. Further development of the process will be undertaken in response to identified need.

The PCSC also engaged stakeholders in the development of an **updated performance framework**. Adopted in May 2017, the new framework is designed to provide meaningful data regarding the performance outcomes of schools within the context of their student demographics, size, and educational models.

The following pages of this report represent the initial data set gathered using the new framework. They offer new opportunities to consider how charter school outcomes compare to those of their surrounding communities and impact students across the state.

## OUR COMMISSIONERS

Chairman Alan Reed  
Idaho Falls  
Term: 2014 - 2018

Vice-Chairman Brian Scigliano  
Boise  
Term: 2016 - 2020

Commissioner Kelly Murphey  
Castleford  
Term: 2014 - 2018

Commissioner Wanda Quinn  
Coeur d'Alene  
Term: 2016 - 2020

Commissioner Sherrilynn Bair  
Firth  
Term: 2016 - 2020

Commissioner Nils Peterson  
Moscow  
Term: 2017 - 2019

Commissioner Kitty Kunz  
Boise  
Term: 2017 - 2019

We also thank former Commissioner Evan Frasure for his service.

## What We Do

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As an authorized chartering entity, the PCSC's role is to protect students and taxpayers by overseeing the quality of the charter schools it authorizes. We also endeavor to protect the autonomy of charter school boards, focusing on performance outcomes while giving schools as much freedom to direct their own inputs as the law allows.

Authorizing work can be divided into three phases: petition review, ongoing oversight, and charter renewal. Each of these phases demands a different focus, but our goals are always to encourage innovation and ensure quality.

### Petition Review

The petition review phase focuses on evaluating new charter petitions with the following question in mind:

*Is it likely that this proposal will result in a successful, high-quality school that fills a need in its community?*

Petition reviews consider:

- Quality of the educational program,
- Adequacy of financial resources, and
- Capacity of the founding board.

Upon approval of a new charter petition, the PCSC and school sign a performance certificate and framework detailing the academic and operational performance expectations and measures against which the school will be evaluated.

### Ongoing Oversight

The ongoing oversight phase focuses on keeping schools and stakeholders apprised of schools' performance outcomes relative to the standards contained in the performance certificate and framework.

The PCSC provides its portfolio schools with annual performance reports reflecting their academic, operational, and financial statuses. Schools are encouraged to use this information for strategic planning and to ensure that any identified weaknesses are addressed in advance of renewal consideration.

The PCSC endeavors to limit the reporting burden on its portfolio schools. Data contained in annual performance reports is gathered primarily through ISEE and independent fiscal audits. Most PCSC portfolio schools need to submit only a few, additional reports to the PCSC:

- Semi-annual financial updates,
- An annual board membership update, and
- Mission-specific performance data (optional).

### Charter Renewal

Charter renewal is an important process for both authorizers and schools. At the end of a school's performance certificate term, authorizers must evaluate performance outcomes in the light of contextual factors and determine whether or not the school should continue to be entrusted with students' time and taxpayers' resources for another five-year term. Schools are invited to make their cases for renewal, demonstrating either strong performance outcomes or clear evidence that their outcomes, despite room for improvement, still reflect success. This thoughtfully-applied bedrock of accountability is at the heart of the charter school concept.

## Services We Provide

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During 2017, the PCSC broadened its provision of services to public charter schools. Portfolio schools were surveyed to gather feedback on their greatest needs and preferred methods of resource delivery. We also coordinated with other state agencies, the Idaho School Boards Association, and the Idaho Charter School Network to identify gaps in the supports already available. Based on this information, we developed resources designed to support our schools without infringing on the decision-making authority of their governing boards:

**New Charter Petitioner Guidance** Although statute and administrative rule provide information regarding the required contents of a charter petition, petitioners often request additional guidance regarding the scope and nature of information their charters should include. This friendly guide walks petitioners through the development of a high quality charter petition in order to maximize their chances of approval.

**Pre-Opening Guidance** The months between petition approval and opening day are busy and stressful for the leaders of a new public charter school. The PCSC's pre-opening guidance includes interactive project management tools, resources and advice on topics ranging from employee recruitment to governance training, and a series of one-on-one meetings to exchange information and receive support from PCSC staff.

**New School Leader Orientation** Many public charter schools hire administrators who have not previously worked in the charter sector. They face new challenges as they adjust to leading not only a school, but a charter LEA. The PCSC now offers written and in-person orientation materials to introduce new administrators to the role of the authorizer, charter-specific requirements, and resources available to support their work. The orientation materials have also proven helpful to incoming charter school board members.

**Charter Renewal Guidance** The PCSC provides ongoing guidance to schools whose charters will be considered for renewal in the upcoming year. From a one-on-one orientation meeting a year in advance, through optional auxiliary data submission opportunities and an onsite visit by independent experts, the process is designed to ensure that schools have the opportunity to share their perspectives regarding the success of their schools. A written Charter Renewal Guidance and Application document walks schools through the process, providing examples and detail regarding the types of information that will help them present strong renewal applications.

The PCSC looks forward to developing further resources in response to schools' requests. These will include an interactive, monthly Board Governance Guidebook and a series of webinars and self-guided exercises on topics such as branding, recruitment, and retention.

## Needs Schools Identify

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Throughout the course of its authorizing work, the PCSC seeks to enhance the operational autonomy that charter schools experience in exchange for the increased accountability represented by periodic renewals and the performance framework. During 2017, our conversations with schools have emphasized the following needs:

**Reduced Reporting Burden** Like many Idaho schools and districts, charter school leaders express a desire for a reduction in the volume of paperwork due to state agencies each year.

**Increased Funding Flexibility** Also like other schools and districts, charters often struggle with the confines of funding silos, expressing that they could better serve their students if they were free to allocate funds as needed.

**Increased Startup Funding** Charter petitioners frequently encounter difficulty securing the startup funds necessary to ensure the stable opening of a new school. The absence of such funds can result in reliance on expensive leases or high-interest loans, delayed opening, or even a petition denial recommendation.

**Other Funding Needs** Operating schools need increased funding for facilities, teachers, and classified staff.

## Summary of 2017 Performance Outcomes

The following chart summarizes each PCSC portfolio school's performance outcomes in the areas of academics, operations, and finance. Results are color-coded by schools' accountability designations as detailed in their individual annual performance reports. The four accountability designations are Honor (blue), Good Standing (green), Remediation (yellow), and Critical (red). Gray indicates not applicable.

PCSC PORTFOLIO SCHOOL	ACADEMIC	OPERATIONAL	FINANCIAL
Coeur d'Alene Charter Academy	Blue	Blue	Blue
Falcon Ridge Public Charter School	Blue	Blue	Blue
North Star Charter School	Blue	Blue	Green
Compass Public Charter School	Blue	Blue	Green
North Idaho STEM Charter Academy	Blue	Blue	Blue
Liberty Charter School	Blue	Blue	Blue
Victory Charter School	Blue	Blue	Blue
Xavier Charter School	Blue	Blue	Blue
Palouse Prairie Charter School	Blue	Blue	Blue
Vision Charter School	Blue	Blue	Blue
Taylor's Crossing Public Charter School	Blue	Blue	Blue
Legacy Charter School	Blue	Blue	Blue
American Heritage Charter School	Blue	Blue	Blue
Sage International Academy	Blue	Blue	Yellow
Alturas International Academy	Green	Blue	Blue
White Pine Charter School	Green	Blue	Green
Rolling Hills Public Charter School	Green	Blue	Blue
Monticello Montessori Charter School	Green	Blue	Yellow
Connor Academy	Green	Blue	Blue
Kootenai Bridge Academy (alternative)	Green	Blue	Blue
Richard McKenna Charter School (alternative)	Yellow	Gray	Gray
Idaho Virtual Academy	Yellow	Blue	Blue
Bingham Academy	Yellow	Green	Red
Idaho Science and Technology Charter School	Yellow	Blue	Red
Gem Prep: Pocatello	Yellow	Blue	Gray
Idaho Virtual Academy (alternative)	Yellow	Gray	Gray
Richard McKenna Charter School	Yellow	Green	Blue
INSPIRE Connections Academy	Yellow	Blue	Green
Idaho Technical Career Academy	Yellow	Blue	Blue
North Valley Academy	Yellow	Blue	Blue
Heritage Community Charter School	Yellow	Blue	Blue
The Village Charter School	Yellow	Green	Red
Idaho Connects Online (alternative)	Yellow	Gray	Gray
Blackfoot Charter Community Learning Center	Yellow	Blue	Green
Idaho Connects Online	Yellow	Blue	Blue
iSucceed Virtual High School	Yellow	Blue	Blue
Syringa Mountain School	Red	Green	Green
Another Choice Virtual School	Red	Green	Green
Heritage Academy	Red	Blue	Green
Chief Taghee Elementary Academy	Red	Yellow	Blue

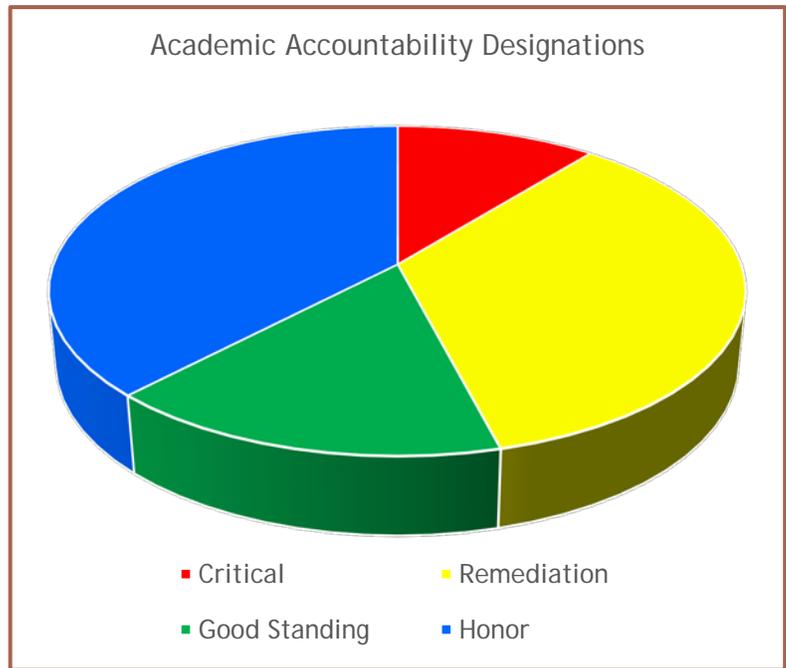
## Academic Outcomes

In 2017, 54% of PCSC portfolio schools met or exceeded the academic standard established in the performance framework. All 20 of these schools presently qualify for automatic or guaranteed renewal.

Accountability designations of Honor, Good Standing, Remediation, or Critical are based on the percentage of the total available academic points that each school earns. Points are awarded for measures designed to reflect:

- ISAT proficiency by comparison to the state;
- ISAT proficiency by comparison to the surrounding district;
- Student-level growth toward proficiency (K-8);
- Student-level growth by comparison to academic peers (high school); &
- Graduation rate.

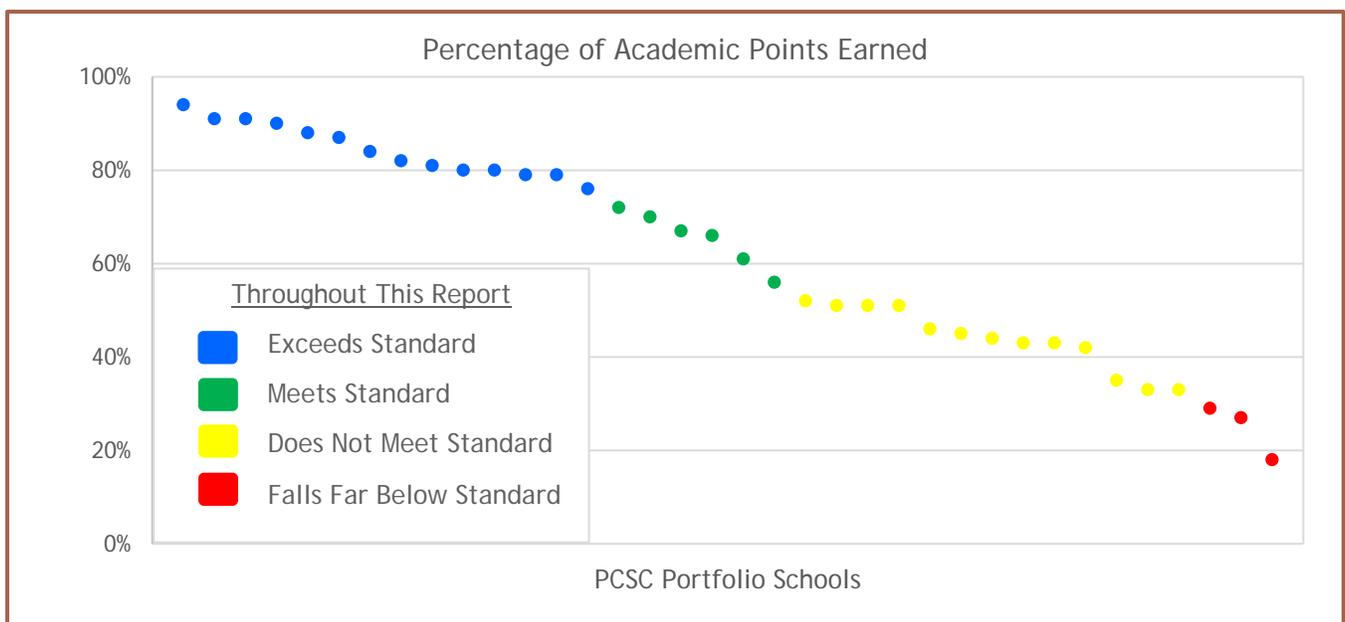
Certain measures are modified or eliminated for alternative schools, virtual schools, and schools serving limited grade sets.



While summary data can give us a sense of the overall performance of PCSC portfolio schools, each school's story is different. It is important to reserve judgement until one has visited the school, spoken to its educators and the families they serve, and viewed the data in the context of the school's mission and student population.

Individual schools' 2017 annual reports, which include comparative demographic data and other contextual information, may be found on the PCSC's website.

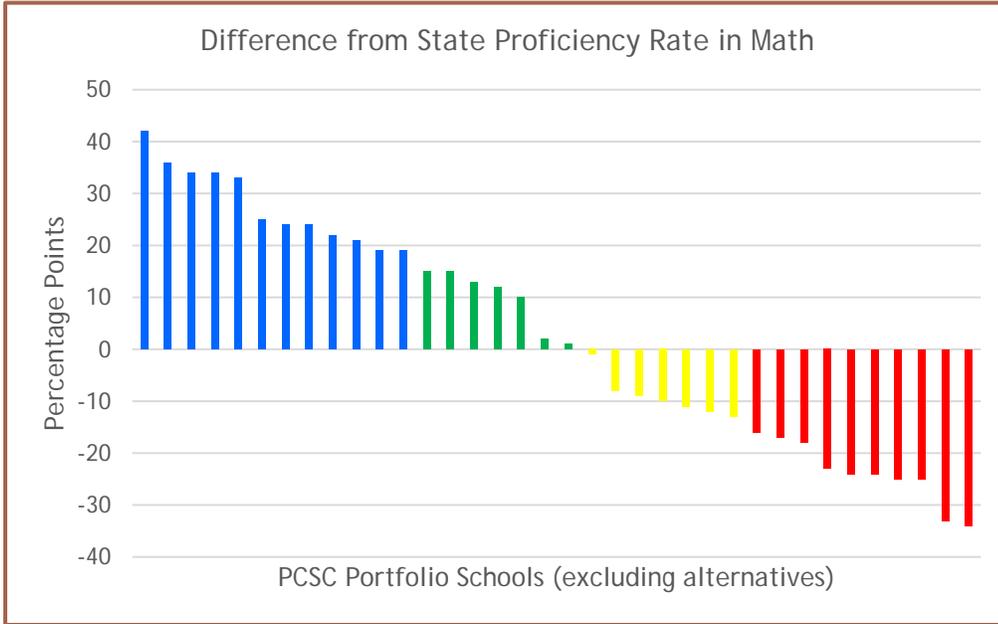
In 2017, the percentage of academic points earned by schools ranged from 15% to 94%, with a median of 61%.



## Proficiency

A school's proficiency rate is the percentage of its students that achieved a rating of "proficient" or "advanced" on the Idaho Standards Achievement Test (ISAT). One way to evaluate the effectiveness of the PCSC's portfolio schools is by comparing their proficiency rates to the state average.

The following charts compare each PCSC portfolio school's 2017 ISAT proficiency rates to the statewide average for students in the same grade set served by the public charter school.

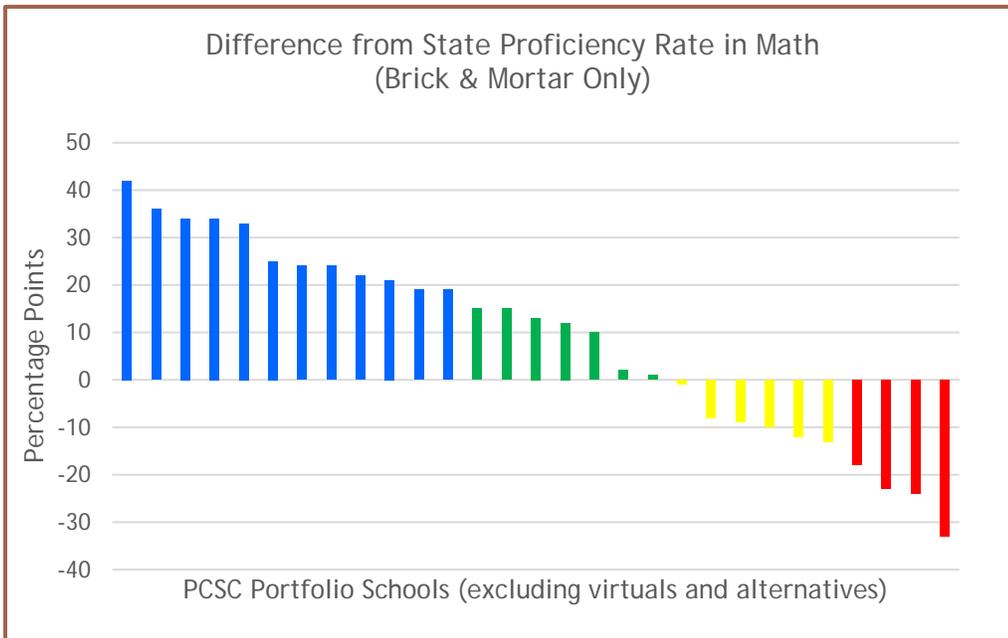


In math, 53% of PCSC portfolio schools exceeded the state average proficiency rate for the relevant grade set.

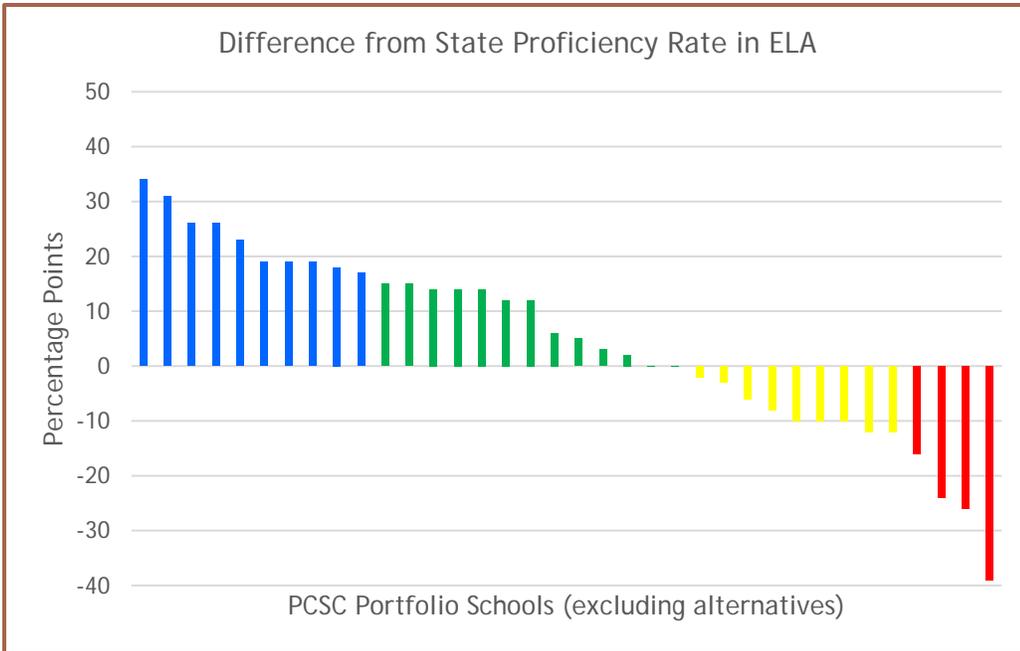
Two-thirds of these schools exceeded the state average by 15 or more percentage points.

Among the remaining 47% of schools whose math proficiency rates fell below the state average for the relevant grade set, more than half fell short by 15 or more percentage points.

The extent to which virtual schools' populations differ from those of most other types of schools is unknown. However, it is generally recognized that their student bodies tend to include somewhat higher percentages of mobile, at-risk, and academically struggling students than the state as a whole. When only brick-and-mortar charter schools are compared to their traditional counterparts statewide, the statewide comparative data shifts.



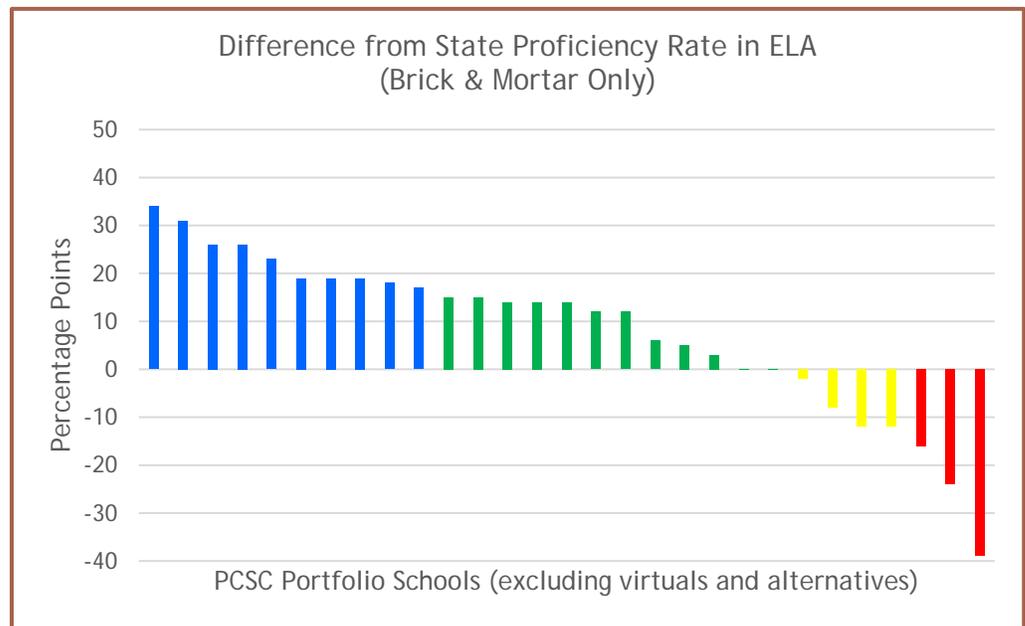
Among brick-and-mortar schools, **66%** exceeded the state average in math.



In English Language Arts, 64% of PCSC portfolio schools exceeded the state average proficiency rate for the relevant grade set. More than half of these schools exceeded the state average by 15 or more percentage points.

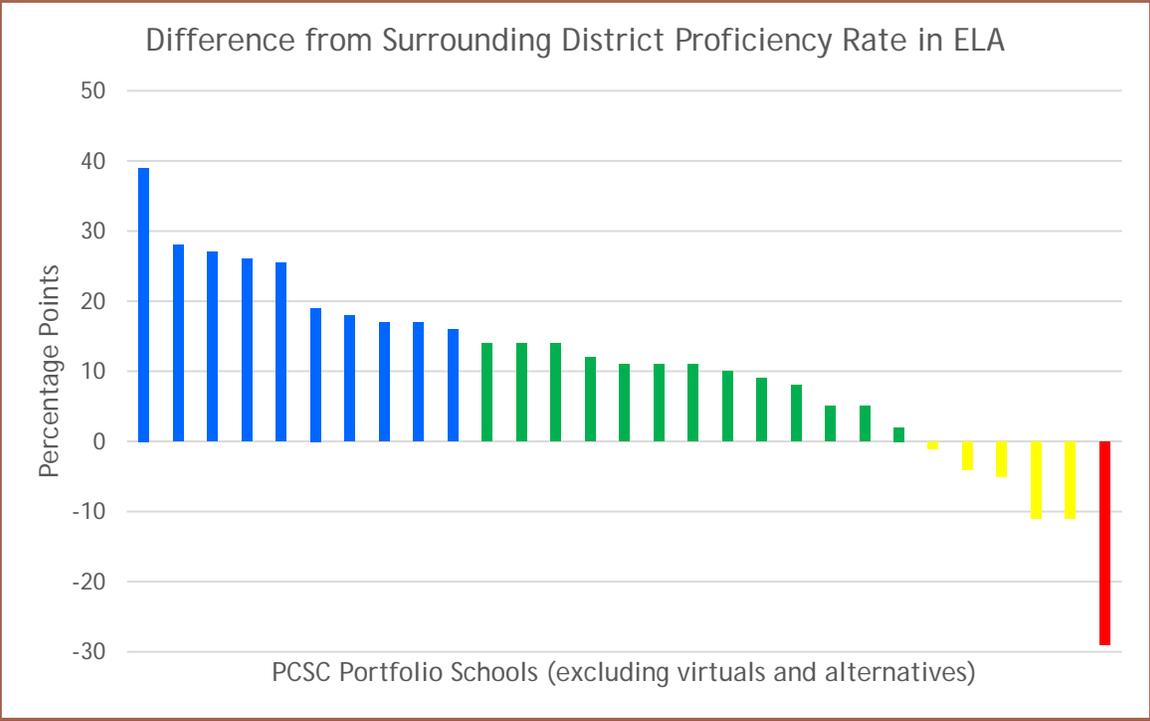
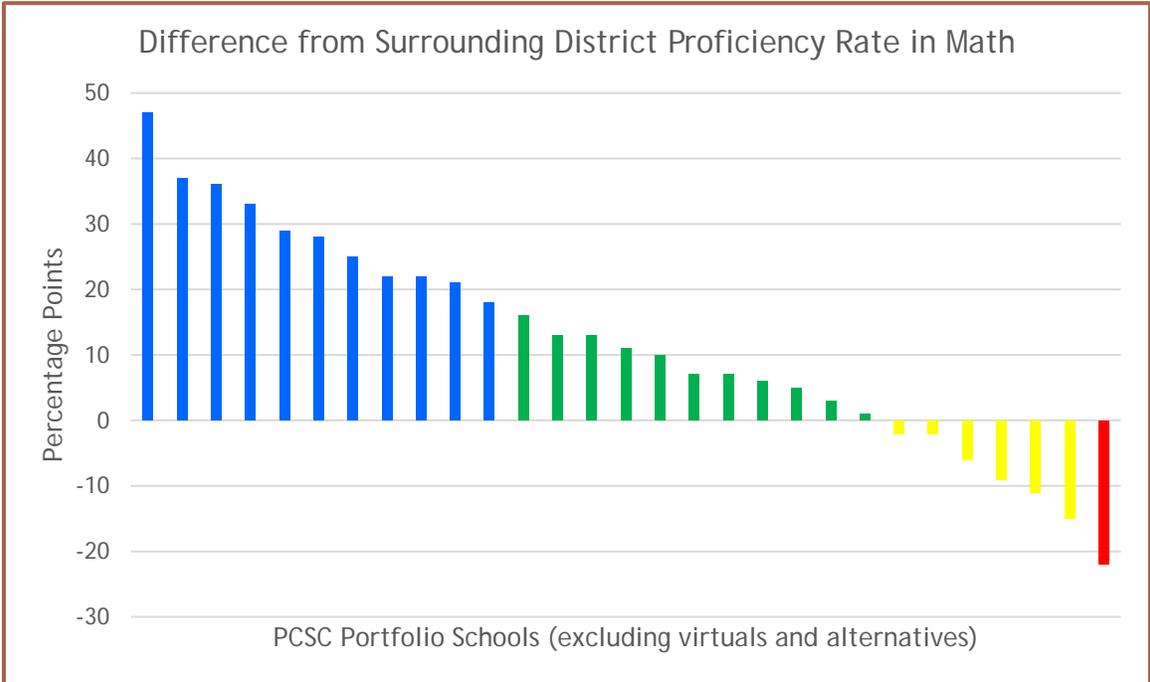
Among the remaining 36% of schools whose ELA proficiency rates fell below the state average for the relevant grade set, about one-third fell short by 15 or more percentage points.

**76%** of brick-and-mortar schools exceeded the state average in ELA.



**Communities across Idaho vary widely**, and comparisons to state averages can't tell the whole story of a charter school's success. The PCSC also considers how its portfolio schools' outcomes compare with those of their surrounding districts. This allows each school to be evaluated in the context of a community whose demographics - from ethnicity to mobility to socioeconomic factors - are typically more similar than those of the entire state.

As in the state comparisons above, PCSC portfolio schools are compared to the surrounding district average for the same grade sets they serve. Because virtual schools serve students across multiple districts or statewide, they are excluded from the district comparison charts that follow.



**75%** of PCSC portfolio brick-and-mortar schools had math proficiency rates that exceeded those of their surrounding districts.

**80%** had ELA proficiency rates that exceeded those of their surrounding districts.

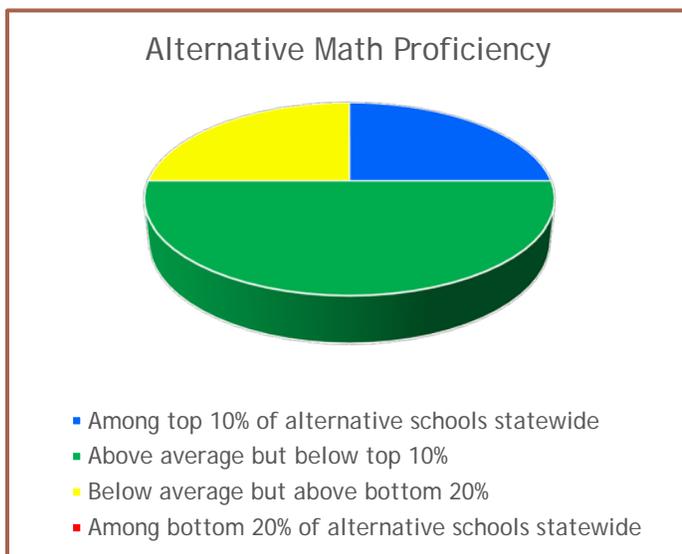
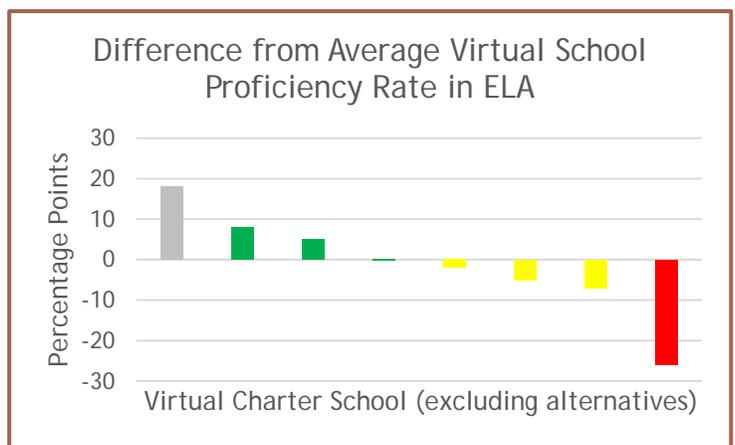
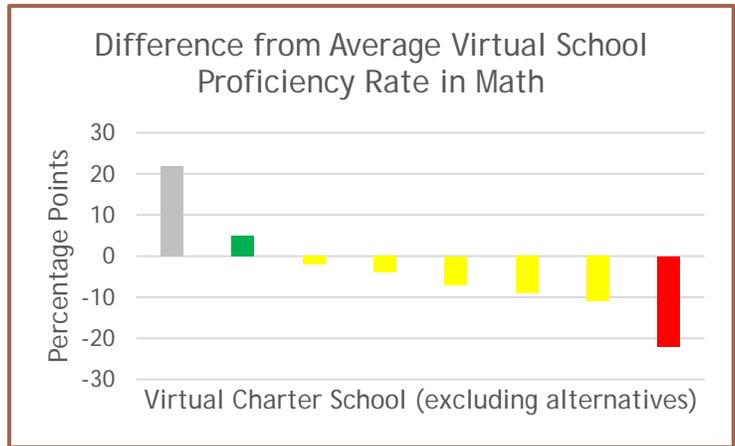
**Virtual schools** typically serve student bodies whose demographics are more similar to one another than to individual districts or the state. While most of Idaho’s virtual charter schools are authorized by the PCSC, these charts include one, district-authorized virtual school (indicated by the gray bars).

Virtual charter schools’ proficiency rates in math ranged from 22 percentage points above the virtual school average to 22 percentage points below the average.

Virtual schools’ ELA proficiency rates ranged from 18 percentage points above average to 26 percentage points below average.

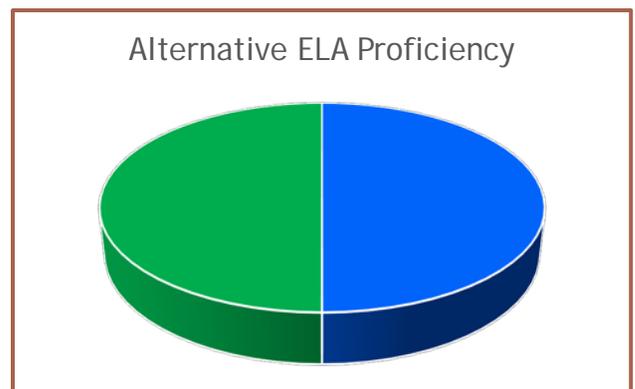
The PCSC continues to **engage in conversation and data collection** to better understand to what extent factors such as student mobility and off-cohort enrollment impact virtual school populations.

In the meantime, stakeholders are invited to view individual virtual schools’ annual reports, available on the PCSC’s website, to learn more about their missions, student demographics, and academic outcomes.



**Alternative schools** also serve significantly different demographics than the state as a whole.

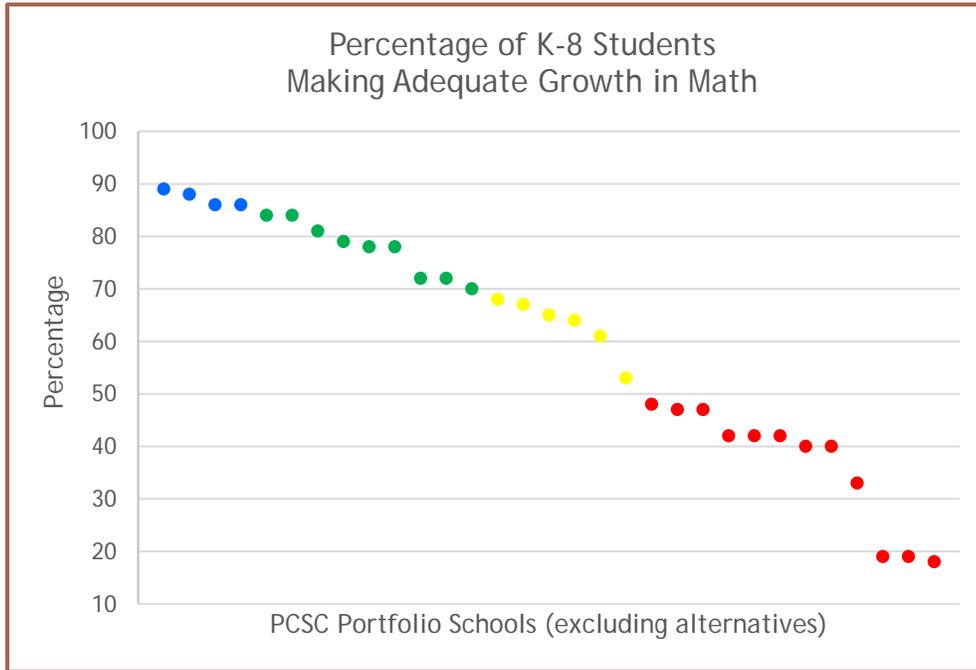
In 2017, the four alternative schools in the PCSC’s portfolio, all of which are virtual, had proficiency rates that **trended above** those of the statewide averages for alternative schools.



All four alternative schools showed above average student-level growth in ELA. Two exceeded the standard in math growth, while two did not meet the standard.

## Student-Level Growth

The PCSC also assesses its portfolio schools on the basis of individual student growth. A criterion-referenced growth measure looks at the percentage of students in grades K-8 who are growing at a rate sufficient to reach proficiency within three years or by 10<sup>th</sup> grade, whichever comes first. Schools with at least 70% of students showing adequate growth receive a “meets standard” or higher rating on the performance framework.



In 2017, 50% of brick-and-mortar schools in the PCSC’s portfolio met or exceeded the standard in math.

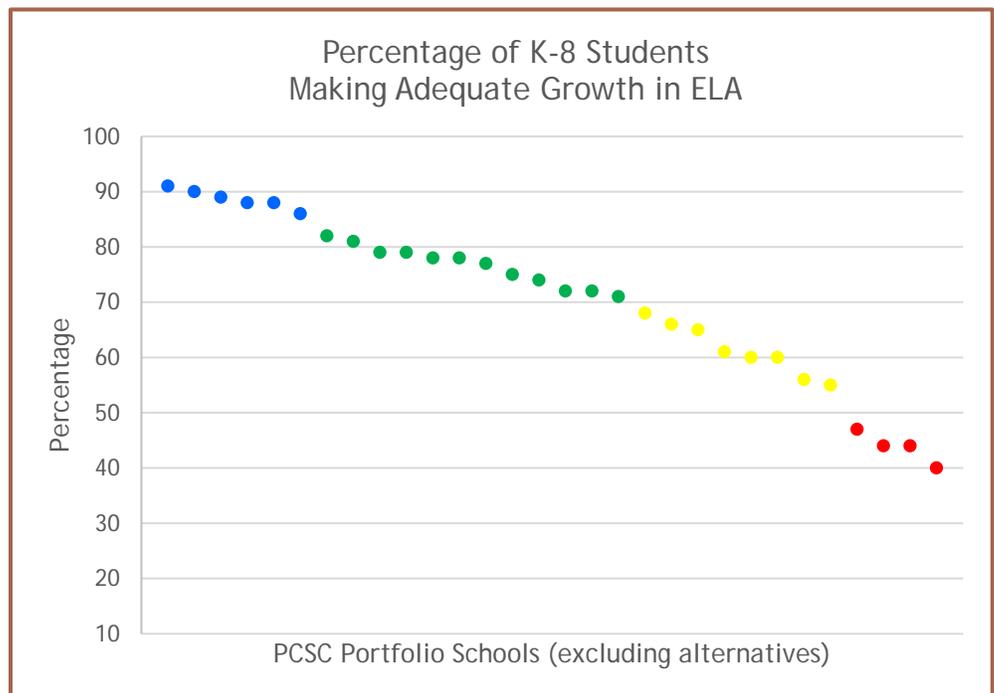
Another 20% came within ten percentage points of meeting the standard.

Eight brick-and-mortar schools, in addition to the four virtual schools serving grades K-8, fell far below the standard in math. In these cases, fewer than 50% of students were making adequate growth.

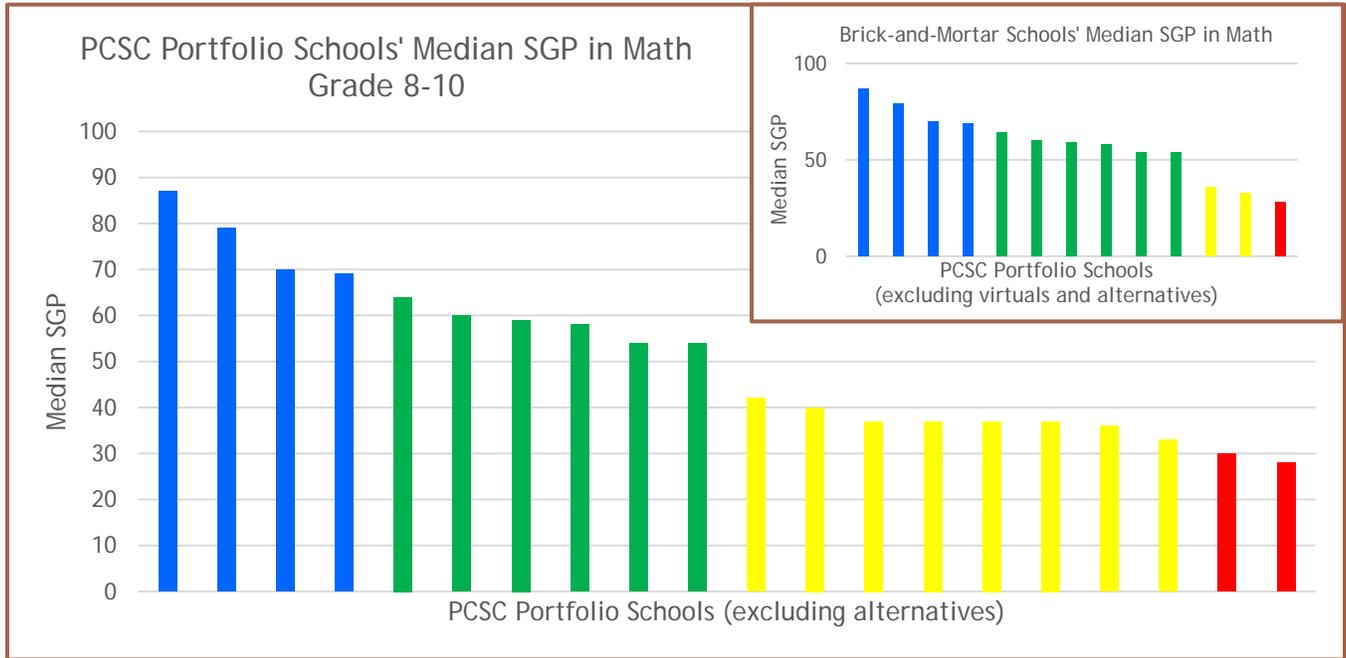
Two-thirds of brick-and-mortar schools in the PCSC’s portfolio met or exceeded the standard in ELA.

Another 20% of brick-and-mortar schools, plus two virtual schools, came within ten percentage points of meeting the standard.

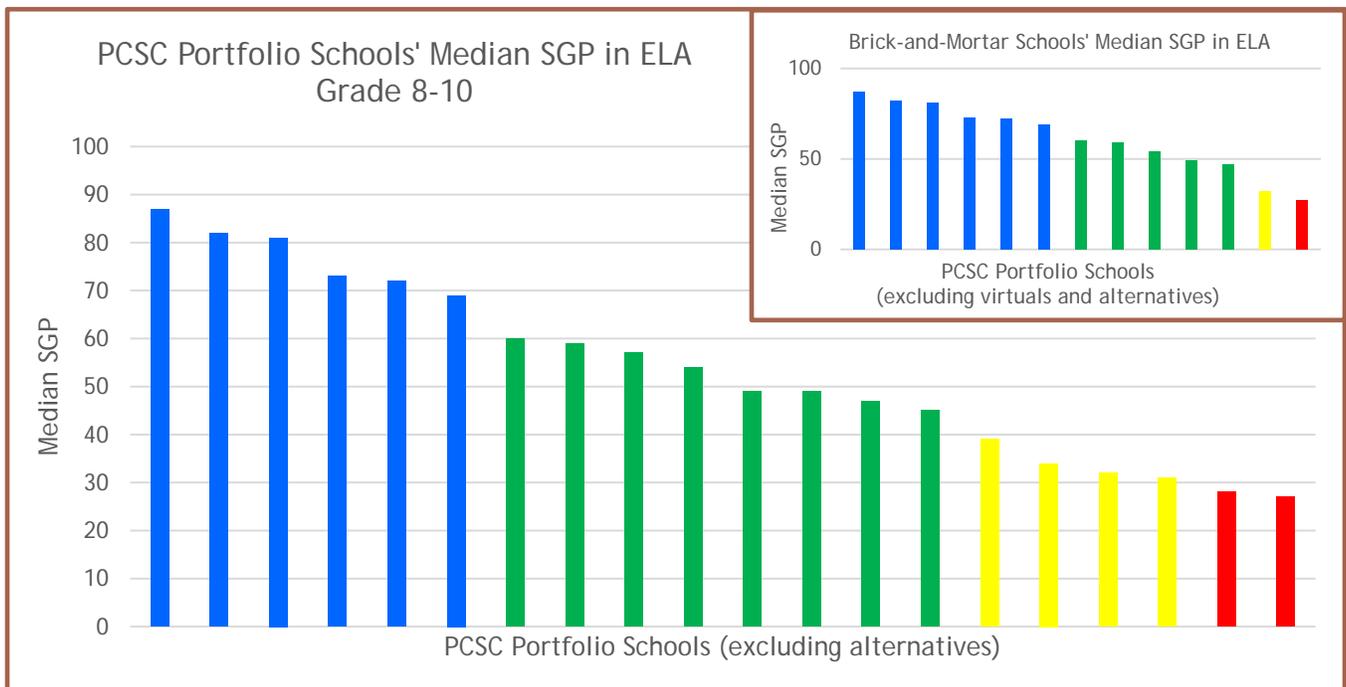
Three brick-and-mortar schools and one virtual school fell far below the standard in ELA.



High schools in the PCSC’s portfolio are evaluated using a norm-referenced growth measure. This measure compares the growth of individual students to that of their academic peers. It examines growth from grade 8 to grade 10. For example, charter school tenth graders who scored “below basic” in 8<sup>th</sup> grade are compared to other students statewide who also scored “below basic” in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, while students who scored “proficient” are compared to other students who scored “proficient.” The charts below reflect median student growth percentiles.



Among brick-and-mortar high schools in the PCSC’s portfolio, 77% met or exceeded the standard in math and 84% met or exceeded the standard in ELA, with median SGPs above the 43<sup>rd</sup> percentile. Virtual schools’ median SGPs generally fell between the 30<sup>th</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> percentile, though two virtual schools did meet the standard in ELA.



## Graduation Rates

Graduation rates at Idaho's public schools are calculated using a four-year-plus-summer Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR).

40% of high schools in the PCSC's portfolio had graduation rates that exceeded the state average by 15 percentage points or more.

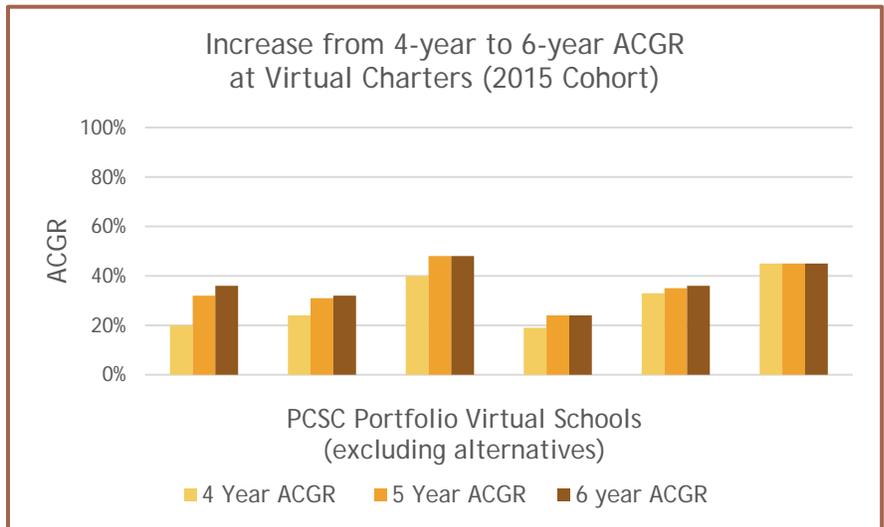
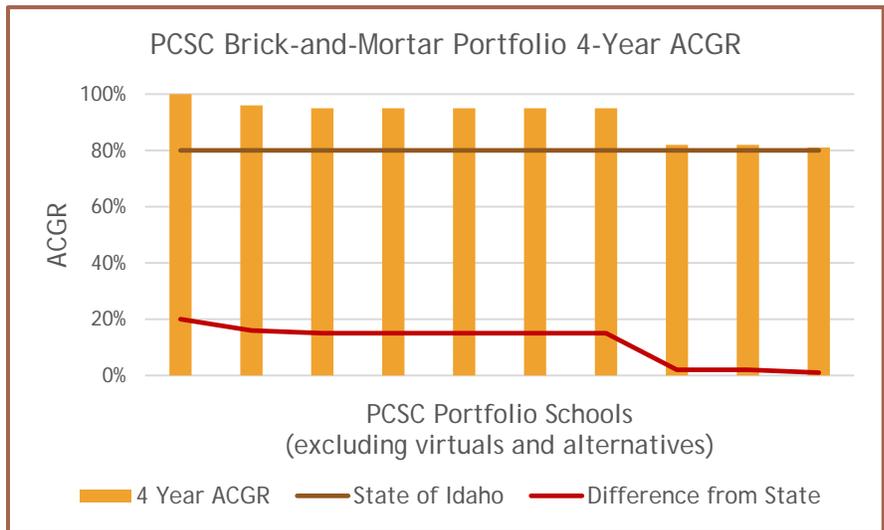
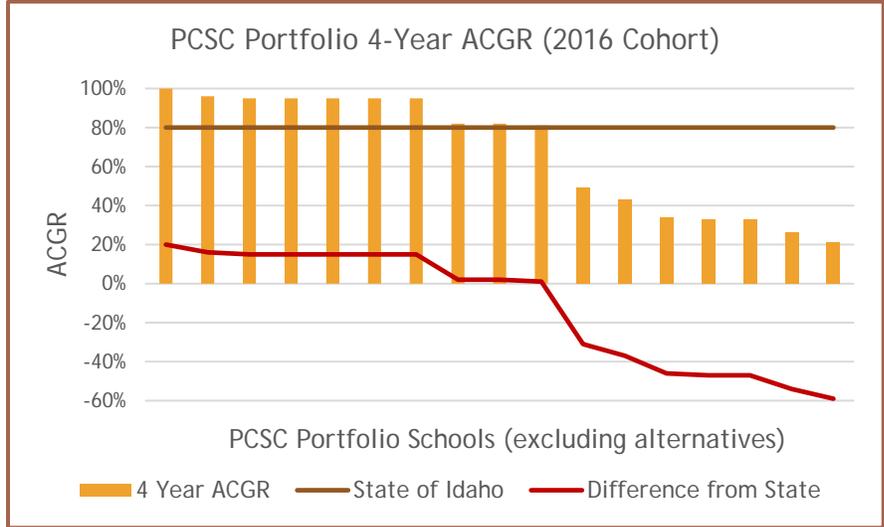
Both alternative and non-alternative PCSC-authorized virtual charter schools had low four-year ACGRs, ranging from 21% to 49%. (Idaho offers one other virtual charter school, whose ACGR was 67%.) The state average ACGR was 80%.

Virtual school leaders indicate that many students who enroll at virtual schools are already behind their cohorts. Some of their students are able to graduate in five or six years, rather than the traditional four.

Additional research and conversation are underway to examine how many students are credit deficient when they enroll at virtual schools, how far behind cohort they are, and the rate at which they recover credits after enrollment.

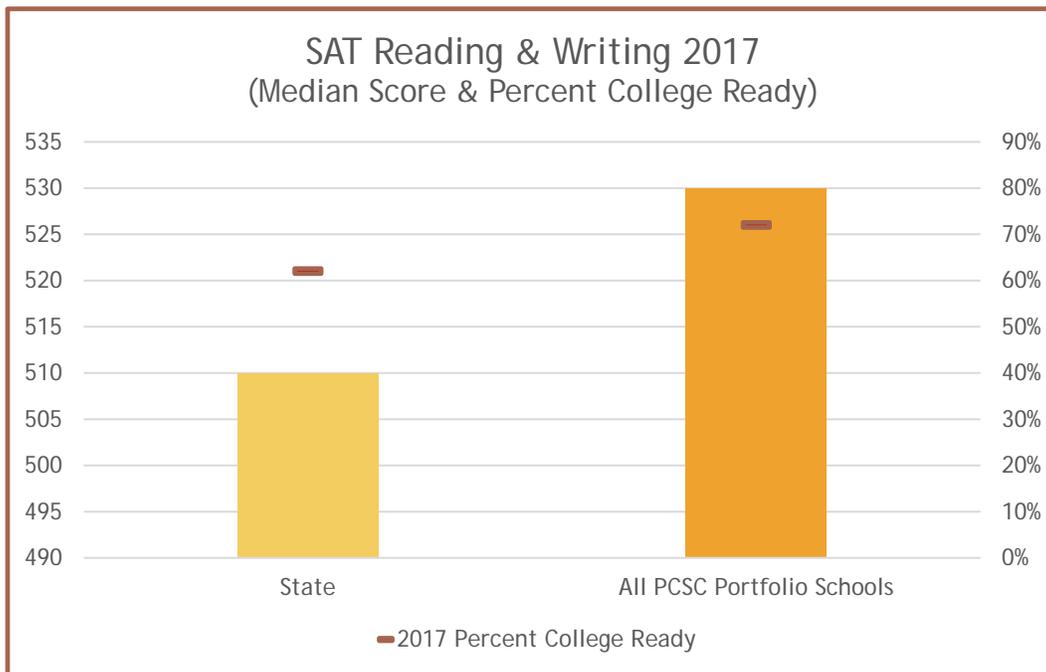
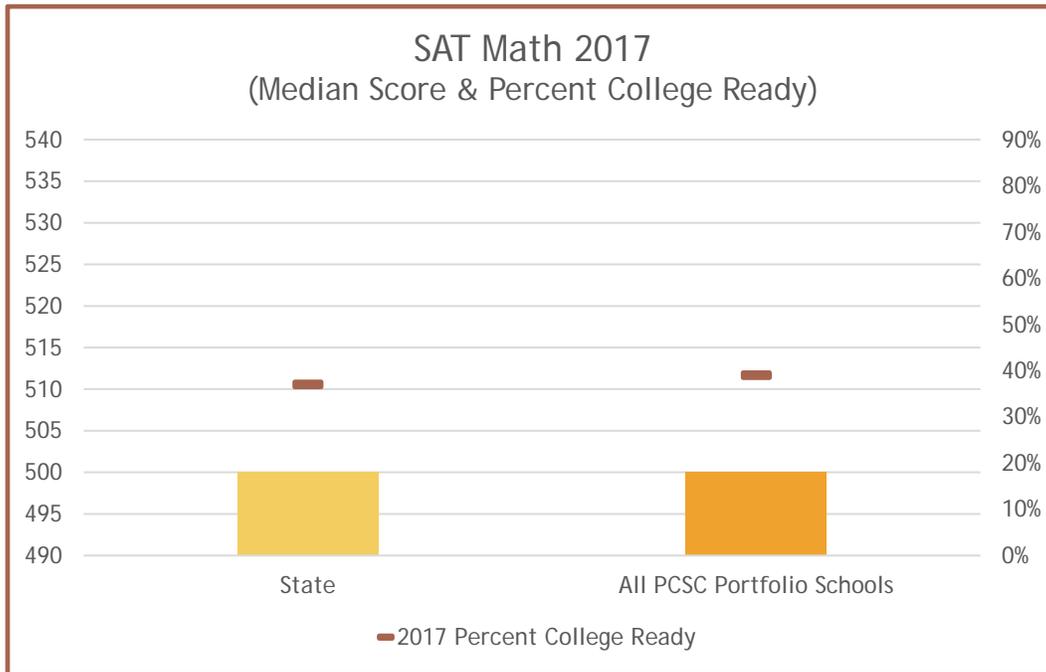
2015 cohort data indicates that non-alternative virtual schools graduated an additional 0% to 16% of students between a four-year and six-year cohort.

Alternative virtuals graduated an additional 4% to 11% of students.



## SAT Results and Go-On Rates

SAT results offer additional perspective regarding schools' academic outcomes. The following charts compare SAT results for PCSC portfolio schools to those of the state. The data reflects all 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students who took the SAT during the 2016-17 school year; participation was not required. It is important to note that the State category reflects a much larger sample than the PCSC Portfolio category. The left axis refers to median score, while the right axis refers to the percentage of students whose scores indicate college readiness.



The state's 2016 cohort Go-On rate was 49%. The rate for PCSC portfolio schools was 47%.

## Operational & Financial Outcomes

The PCSC assesses its portfolio schools on a range of management and compliance outcomes. We also review schools' near-term financial health and long-term viability, bearing in mind that Idaho's public charter schools received \$118,965,210 in state funding during FY 2017. \$90,176,645 was disbursed to PCSC portfolio schools.

As in prior years, most PCSC portfolio schools demonstrated operational and fiscal strength. When weak areas did appear, they tended to be in the areas of late reporting and independent financial audit findings. A small minority of schools evidenced fiscal distress. In these cases, the PCSC has taken steps to protect taxpayer resources while allowing the schools every opportunity to regain stability.

## Student Demographics

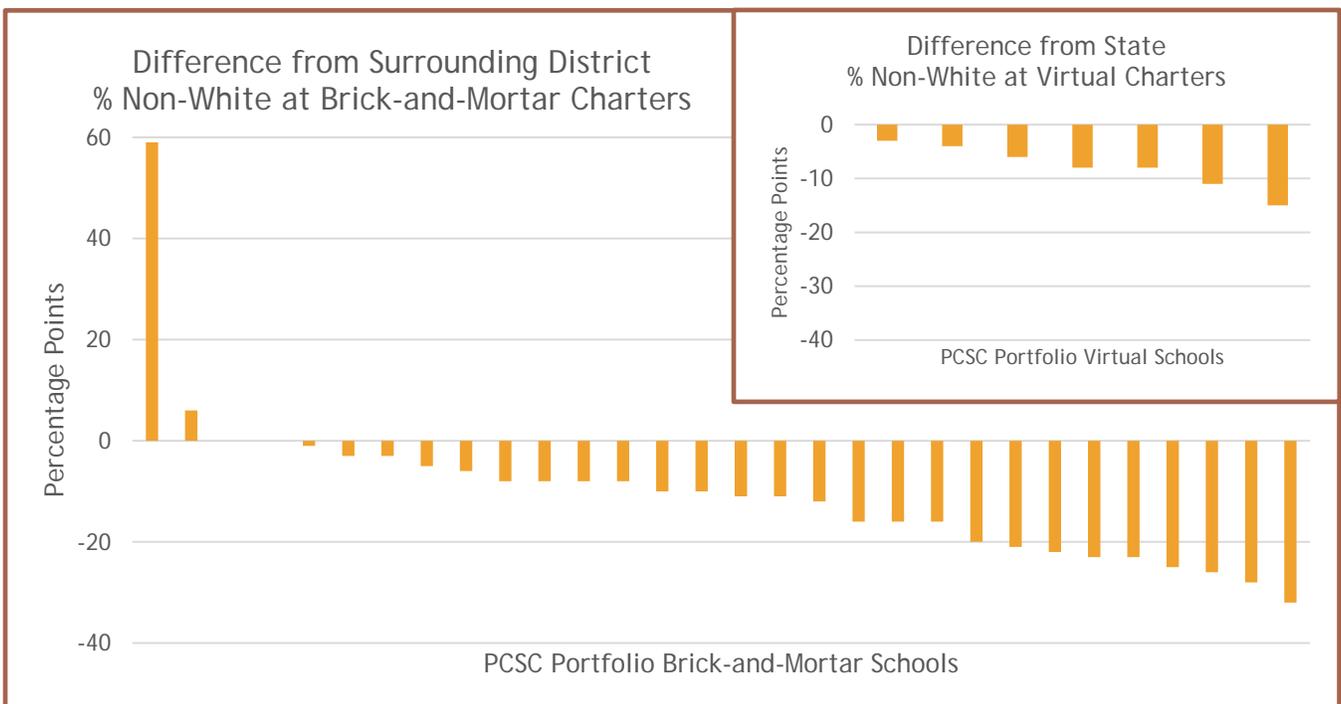
Though all students are welcome to attend Idaho's public charter schools, these schools do tend to be less demographically diverse than the state's traditional public schools.

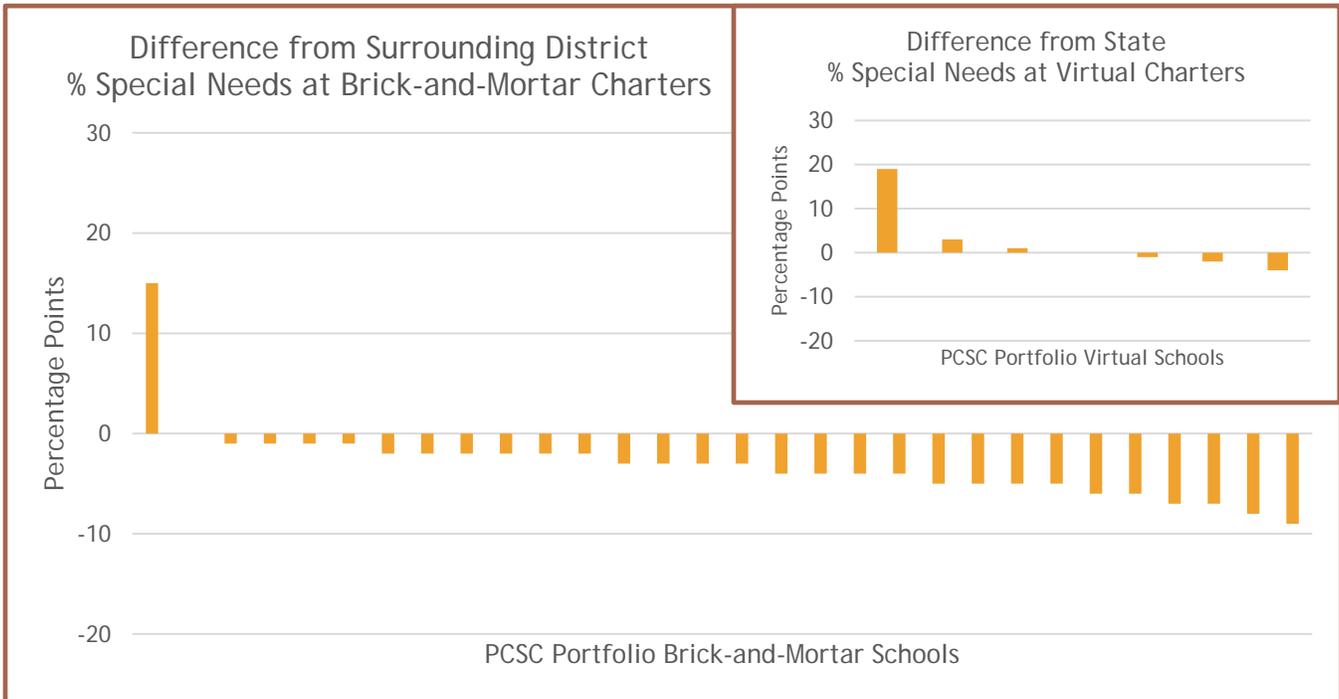
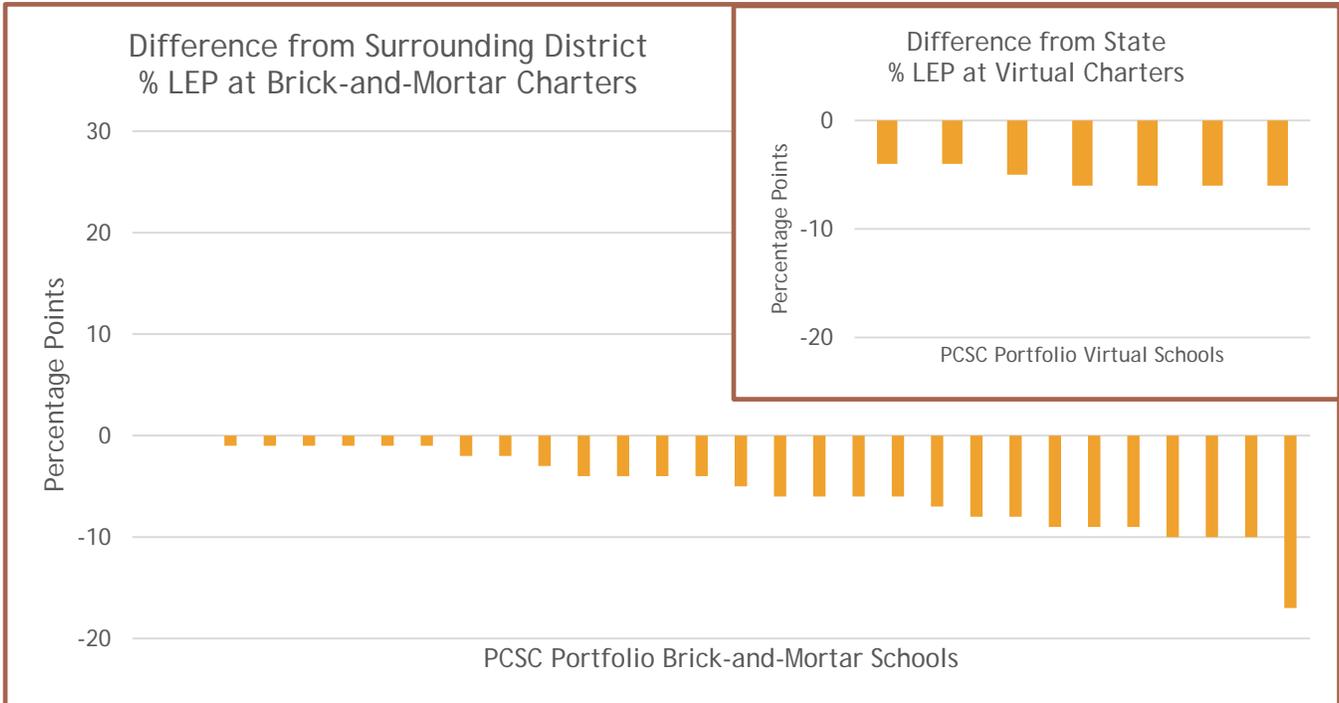
Despite notable exceptions, most PCSC portfolio schools enroll smaller percentages of non-white students, students with limited English proficiency (LEP) or special needs, and free & reduced lunch (FRL) qualifying students than do their traditional counterparts.

Virtual schools, though also less diverse than the state, tend to show a smaller discrepancy than many of the brick-and-mortar charter schools do by comparison to their surrounding districts.

Most PCSC portfolio schools actively encourage diverse students to enroll, but Idaho statute does not permit them to offer priority enrollment to these groups. An increasing number of new charter petitioners intend to **specifically target diverse students** through their educational programs. Many existing charter schools focus on serving low-income, special needs, LEP, at-risk, and other challenging populations.

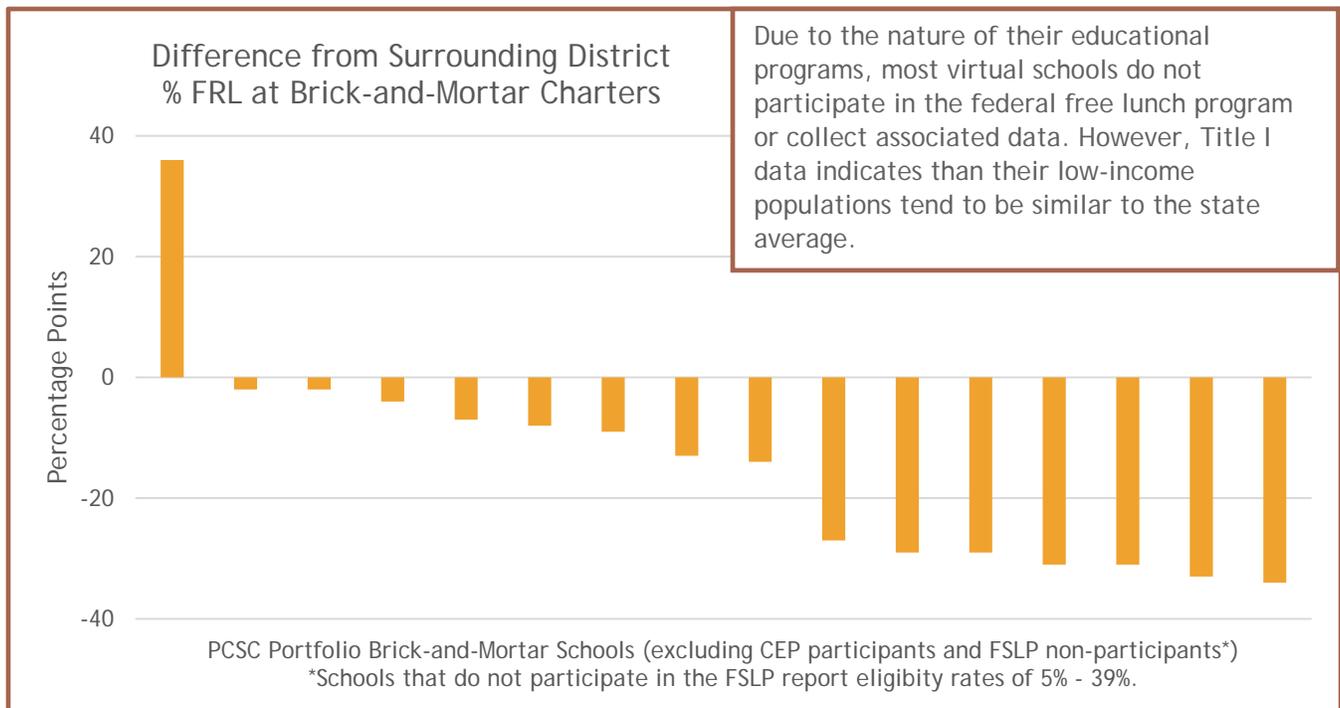
*Building public awareness of enrollment opportunities for all is a responsibility shared by the entire charter sector.*





In 2017, PCSC portfolio schools’ collective proficiency rates for non-white, FRL, and special needs subgroups **exceeded state averages** in both math and ELA. LEP subgroup outcomes were comparable.

Individual schools’ 2017 annual performance reports, available on the PCSC’s website, contain additional demographic comparison data. This information provides **important context** for understanding each school’s academic outcomes and is considered by the PCSC when making renewal decisions.



## Charter Renewals

In 2017, the PCSC completed its initial cycle with the renewal of twelve charters. Seven of the twelve were renewed with conditions for necessary improvement. The PCSC took great care to ensure that such conditions would be both reasonable and effective in **promoting improved outcomes** for Idaho students.

Upon publication of this report, the 2018 renewal cycle remains underway. Two out of the thirteen schools under consideration qualified for automatic renewal; five more were recommended for unconditional renewal. The remaining six were recommended for renewal with conditions.

Ten of the twelve schools looking ahead to renewal in 2019 qualify for automatic or guaranteed renewal.

As the PCSC continues to converse with stakeholders and stay abreast of national best practices, we bear in mind that **success does not look the same at every school**, nor does every school succeed. Meaningful renewal requirements are crucial to the long-term health of the charter school sector, and the PCSC does not take lightly the impact of its decisions on students, families, and communities.

While school quality is of utmost importance for Idaho students, the PCSC also places high value on school choice. It is our sincere hope that Idahoans can work together to promote the development of more, high-quality new and replication public charter schools so that while a few may come and go, plentiful choice will remain.

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*We must be willing both to give promising ideas a chance, and to let go of them when reality falls short of expectations.*

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## Looking Back, Looking Ahead

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Twenty years ago, Idaho's charter school movement formed around a central concept: the exchange of increased autonomy for increased accountability. Time has witnessed a struggle to find an appropriate balance between these factors. Changing legislation, authorizer policies, and stakeholder experience have often tipped the scales in one direction or another, leaving half of the so-called "charter bargain" underrepresented.

In 2013, new legislation established a clear charter accountability structure based on national best practice. It also promoted school autonomy by removing the requirements that once forced authorizers to micromanage school inputs and charter petitioners' proposals.

As a result, the PCSC has been able to eliminate nearly all of its reporting requirements, as well as take risks on exciting proposals for new public charter schools. Implemented with fidelity, the structure centered around outcome-based standards and periodic renewals is both fair and effective.

Meanwhile, however, Idaho's public charter schools have seen their autonomy diminished by an increasing volume of other requirements. Public charter schools are responsible for essentially all of the same reporting obligations as are their traditional counterparts.

In addition to being time-consuming, the majority of these reports are linked to funding silos that further limit charter schools' ability to adapt to their students' needs.

Generally speaking, the purposes of funding silos and required reports are:

- 1) to ensure appropriate use of taxpayer dollars and
- 2) to encourage improved student academic achievement.

Put another way, the silos and reports are inputs intended to improve outcomes.

Public charter schools are already held to rigorous, outcome-based standards established in the performance framework. Chronic failure to meet these standards can result in a charter school's closure.

This high-stakes, outcome-based accountability structure serves to protect students and taxpayers. Conversation is underway regarding whether it should also earn public charter schools autonomy from state-mandated inputs that are directed toward the same goal.

We appreciate the increasing interest of our legislature and state agencies in seeking additional means of enhancing autonomy for all public schools. Public charter schools are particularly well suited to lead the way.

Idaho's public charter schools were intended to provide opportunities for innovation, safeguarded by a commitment to quality results. To this end, autonomy and accountability are not opposing forces, but different sides of the same coin. With twenty years behind us and a bright future ahead, the Public Charter School Commission stands ready to support the charter sector in finding the balance that allows it to thrive.

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*Funding silos and required reports are inputs intended to improve outcomes, but public charter schools are already held to outcome-based performance standards.*

*This level of accountability serves to protect students and taxpayers. Should it also earn public charter schools increased autonomy?*

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