

CHALLENGES & COMMUNITY RESPONSES IN OAKLAND'S PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

SCHOOL CLOSURES, CHARTER SCHOOLS, AND FINANCIAL MISMANAGEMENT ARE CONSTRAINING RESOURCES AND PROGRAMS FOR OAKLAND'S CHILDREN

School Closures

- School closures occur predominantly in low-income areas and communities of color, in Oakland and other cities.
- School closures do not academically benefit students; instead, they disrupt student experiences and community life.
- School closures can result from depleted resources due to charter schools and financial mismanagement.



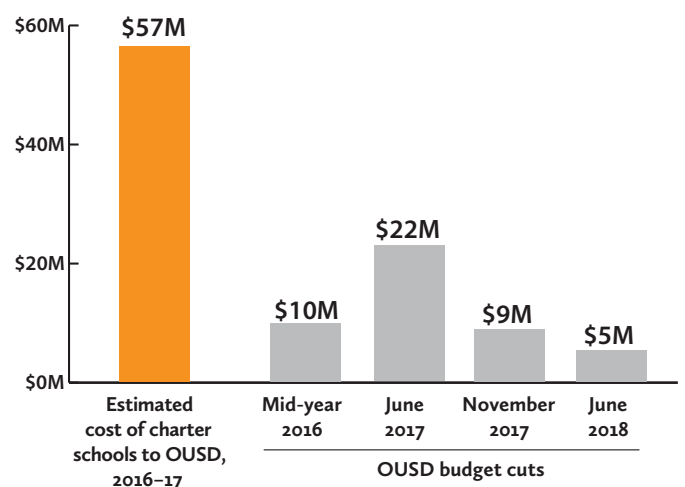
Charter Schools

- According to a 2018 ITPI report, charter school growth has steadily drained money from traditional public schools and districts.¹
- Separate from what charters spend, the net cost to Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) for students attending charter schools was \$57 million (M) in 2016–17.²
- Expanding charter schools means \$1,500 less per year for each child in a neighborhood OUSD public school.

Financial Challenges

- Oakland's school board authorized 4 budget cuts between 2016–18 with limited community input.
- In 2016, OUSD's superintendent left early after incurring a \$30M+ deficit and overseeing budget manipulation.
- Oakland still repays \$100M loan required by state in 2003, when estimated deficit was around \$35M. Charter schools, even those open then, do not repay debt.

OUSD FINANCES



1. Lafer, G. (2018). *Breaking Point: The Cost of Charter Schools for Public School Districts*. Oakland, CA: In the Public Interest (ITPI). Available from howmuchcharterscost.org

2. ITPI study estimates net cost of charter schools as additional money OUSD would have above the cost of educating students if all charter students attend district schools.

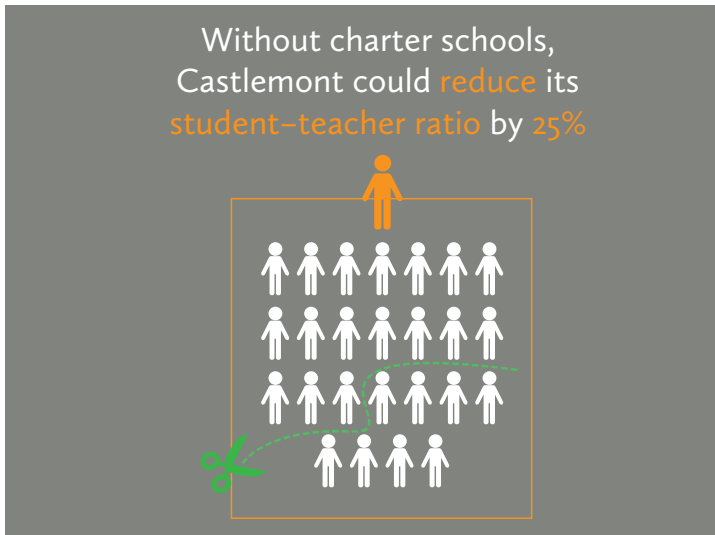
Photos: Above right: Protest at Lakeview School (© Courtney Harrop, fogcityjournal.com).

Above left: Oakland Charter Academy (© Mason_39, Wikipedia).

Graph: Data from ITPI (2018).

CHARTER SCHOOLS INCREASE OUSD'S CHALLENGES

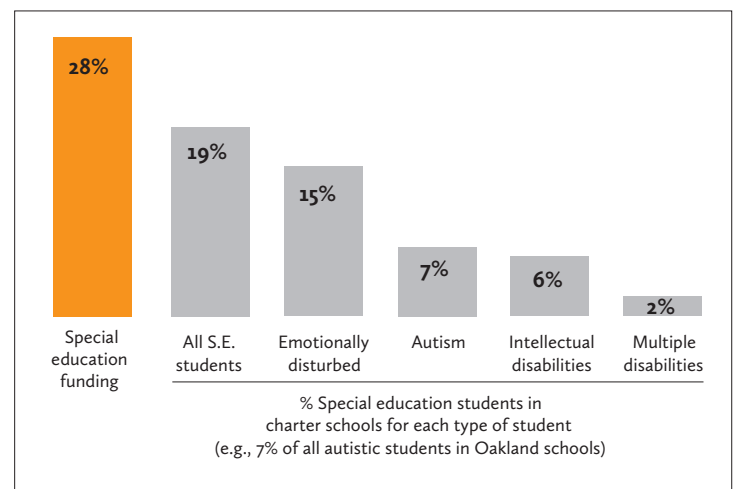
- In 2016–17, the **net cost** to OUSD was **\$5,705** for each student who attended a charter school, because of lost revenue per student, separate from what the charter school spent.⁵
- As an example, if the 347 charter school students on the Castlemont campus transferred to Castlemont High, the additional revenue could be used to increase the number of teachers and reduce average class size by **25%**. Maximum class size could be reduced from **32 to 24** (or less) and average class size could drop **below 20**.
- At the same time, this saved money could provide another assistant principal, another counselor, and serve the 347 in-district students currently enrolled at the charter school.⁶



CHARTER SCHOOLS SERVE FEWER SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

Charter schools **receive 28%** of special education funding (based on the percent of those students in the district), but **only enroll 19%** of the special education students, and an even lower percentage of the highest need students.

- Since charter schools receive funding for special education students they don't enroll, OUSD must serve these students without their full funding.
- OUSD has to divert money from its general fund to cover these shortfalls for special education, estimated at **\$51.5M** in 2016–17.
- This special education expenditure is separate from the **\$57M** that charters cost the district in general, making the overall cost of charters even higher.



5. Estimated net cost. These calculations use the OEA contract student/teacher ratio of 32/1 for core subjects and assume that the funds of \$5,705 were made available to the school (ITPI, 2018).

6. While saved money could be spent different ways, these figures represent within-budget allocations based on ITPI's estimates.

Above photo: School overcrowding (David Grossman, Alamy Stock Photo).

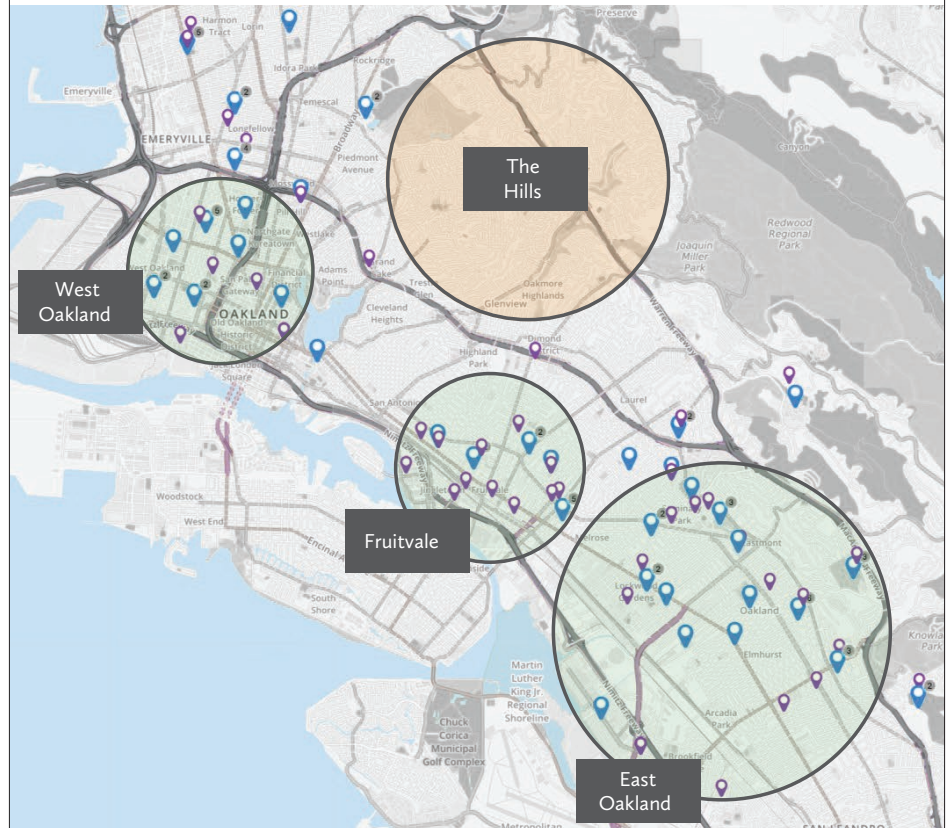
Graph: Data from ITPI (2018), p. 15.

SCHOOL CLOSURES IMPACT COMMUNITIES

Specific Neighborhoods and Populations are Targeted by School Closure and Conversion

- The map shows the clustering of school closures and charter schools in specific neighborhoods in Oakland.
- The greatest number of school closures has occurred in East and West Oakland, while the Fruitvale neighborhood has seen the largest influx of charter schools.
- CA's prop 39 requires OUSD to offer "contiguous space" to charters. That can include closed schools or co-located classrooms, both of which disrupt neighborhood schools.
- Citing budget constraints, OUSD and the Oakland School Board continue to propose school closures in the future, even though closing schools will likely cost the district money if they are taken over by charter schools.

All Oakland School Closures (2003–Current) and Current Open Charter Schools



Purple dots indicate public and charter school closures since 2003.
Blue dots indicate current charter schools in operation.



What are the Effects of School Closures?

Research shows that closing schools is not likely to help students or communities.

School closures:

- have, at best, weak and mixed benefits; at worst, detrimental repercussions for students;
- present social, emotional and other non-academic challenges for 1–2 years for transferred students;
- have hidden costs for closing buildings and transferring teachers and students, possibly leading to a less diverse teacher labor pool;
- “tend to differentially affect low-income communities and communities of color that are politically disempowered”;³
- “may work against the demand of local actors for more investment in their local institutions.”⁴

TIMELINE OF OUTSIDE INFLUENCES

2000	CA Proposition 39 amended Education Code Requires districts to provide space to charters.	2015	Some common enrollment aspects instituted Outside organizations fund insertion of charter schools into public school enrollment processes.
2003	State takeover CA appoints state administrator after years of dispute and requires Oakland to borrow \$100M when debt was estimated around \$35M.	2016–2018	School Board budget cuts OUSD has four rounds of budget cuts for nearly \$50M trying to recover from budget deficit
2003–2016	Four different State Administrators/Oakland Superintendents trained at the Broad Foundation. The Broad Foundation supports school choice, charter schools, and reducing the role of government.	2018	State auditor reports serious issues FCMAT report describes the growth of charter schools, special education costs, and weak internal budget control as contributors to Oakland’s financial issues, alongside patterns of intentional budget manipulation
2014 & 2016	School Board elections influenced by outside spending. Almost \$250K in 2014 and almost \$750K in 2016 spent by pro-charter groups on certain candidates		

COMMUNITY RESPONSES

Community members and organizations have mobilized to voice their opinions about preserving and improving their neighborhood schools instead of losing space and money to charter schools. At one such school, Prescott School in West Oakland, community members successfully organized to voice their support and keep their school, which was identified for co-location.

This co-location proposal occurred (based on attendance) despite Prescott having the highest achievement scores of any school in West Oakland – public or charter. According to one source, Prescott’s success has happened in spite of many challenges – including gentrification, trauma in both the parent and student populations, and lack of resources, including teachers or necessary supplies.

These are long-standing issues, but one community member said, “we are doing everything possible to work with the people around us that want the public school to stay,” because Prescott “is the heart of where I grew up.” Community voice is not only an important element of education decision-making, it is also mandated by both CA and federal law.



Photo: Oakland’s Prescott School

What You Can Do To Take Action:

- **Participate** – get involved with the school board decision-making processes and ask questions about the financial and community cost of school closure and charter schools
- **Connect** – engage with community organizations working to improve neighborhood schools instead of shutting them down
- **Vote** – 2018 is an election year and votes count, especially in local elections

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

This infographic was compiled by Frank Adamson, Ph.D., based on input from community organizations listed below and others about Oakland’s education system.