

data brief

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A DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT OF ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL ENROLLMENTS IN SELECT CALIFORNIA URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS

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This brief provides a demographic snapshot of enrollment in the Continuation High Schools and district-operated Community Day Schools (“alternative schools”) for youth over the age of 16 in the following Unified School Districts: Long Beach, Los Angeles, Fresno, Oakland and San Francisco. Unless otherwise noted, these data are reported at the district level.

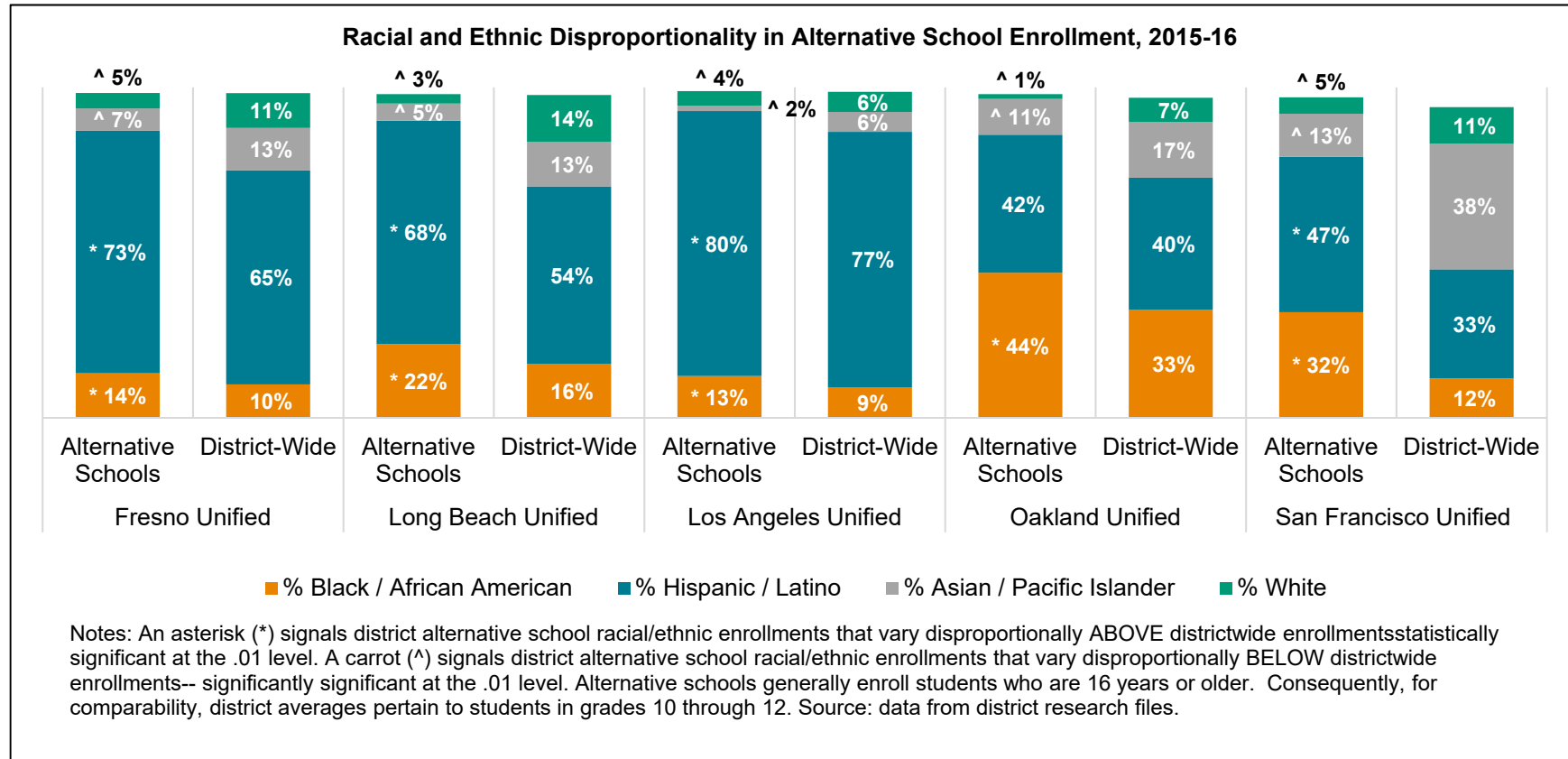
Key Takeaways

- The overwhelming majority of youth in the alternative schools examined are students of color, primarily Latino and African American.
- A significant number of district-enrolled foster youth over the age of 16 attend alternative schools.
- The percentage of youth in the alternative schools examined, who have been identified for special education services, is comparable to district-wide averages for high schools but is significantly higher in San Francisco.
- The number of youth in these alternative schools, who are identified as English Learners, is comparable to district-wide averages in Los Angeles, Oakland and San Francisco, but is significantly higher in Fresno and Long Beach.

About the California Alternative Schools Data Series

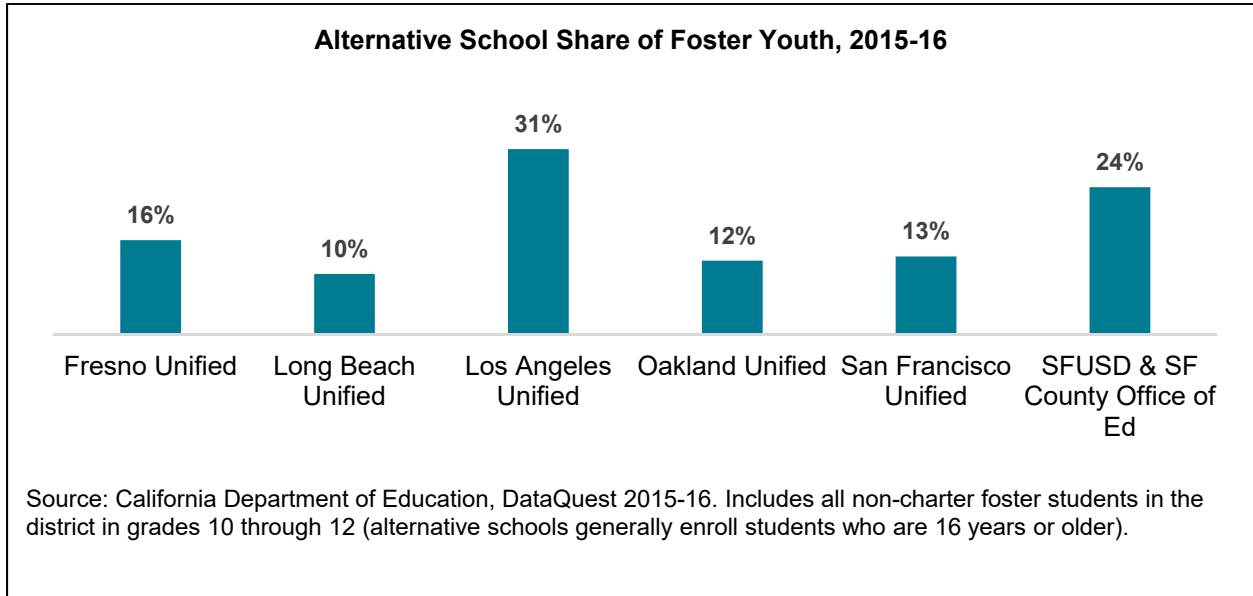
The California Department of Education (CDE) identifies more than 800 public alternative schools across the state (predominantly high schools) designed to meet the needs of credit-deficient and other youth who are vulnerable to dropping out before completing the minimum requirements for a regular high school diploma. Some of these schools, including Continuation High Schools and Community Day Schools, are defined by legislative statute, while others may self-identify as alternative schools if they meet minimum eligibility criteria set by the State Board of Education (SBE) for the enrollment of youth at risk of dropping out of school. California law contemplates more intensive services and accelerated credit accrual strategies in these schools so that students might have a renewed opportunity to complete the required academic courses of instruction to graduate. Currently, the CDE is developing a new school- and district accountability framework and data dashboard for alternative schools that are aligned with Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAP) for all public schools.

Race / Ethnicity



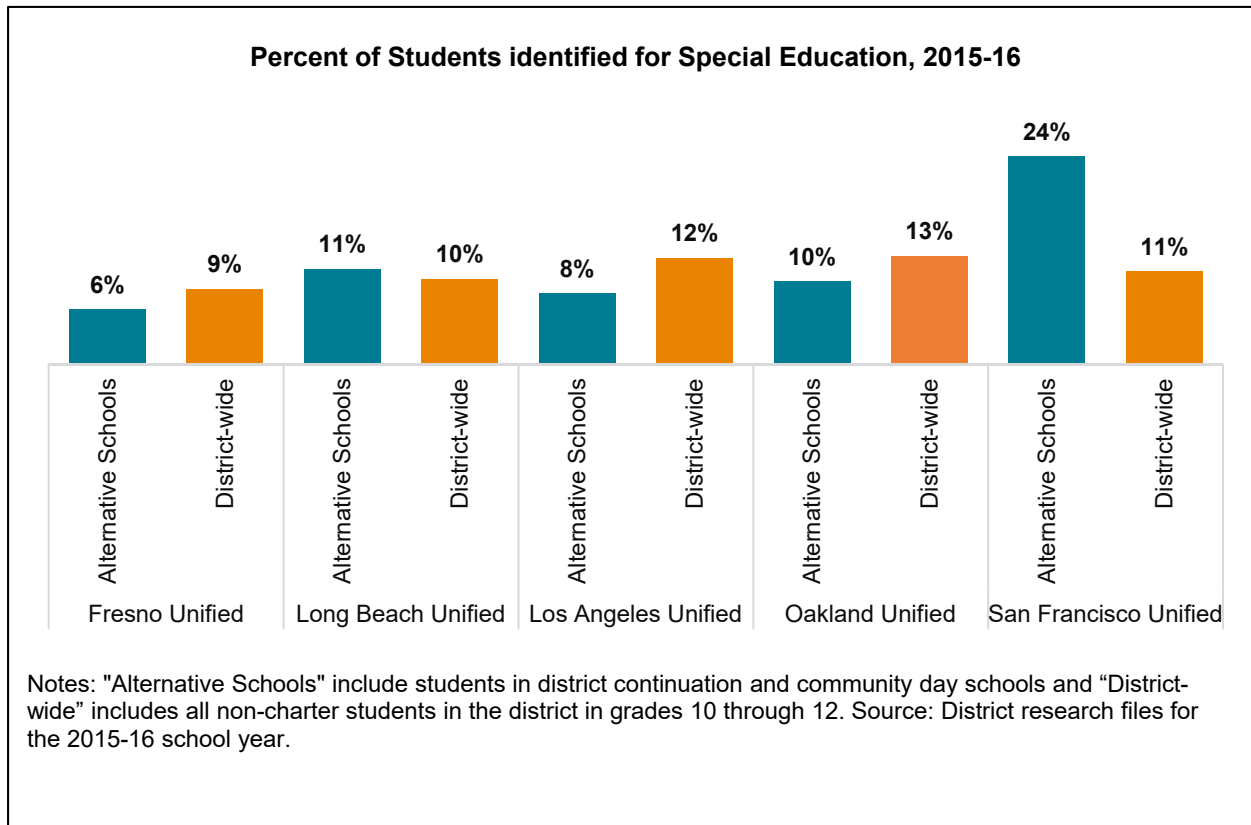
The overwhelming majority of youth in alternative schools (Continuation High Schools and District-operated Community Day Schools for youth over age 16) are students of color, primarily Latino and African American, in the large urban districts examined. Compared to district enrollment averages, African American and Latino students are statistically overrepresented in these alternative schools, whereas Asian/Pacific Islander and White students are statistically underrepresented.

Foster Youth



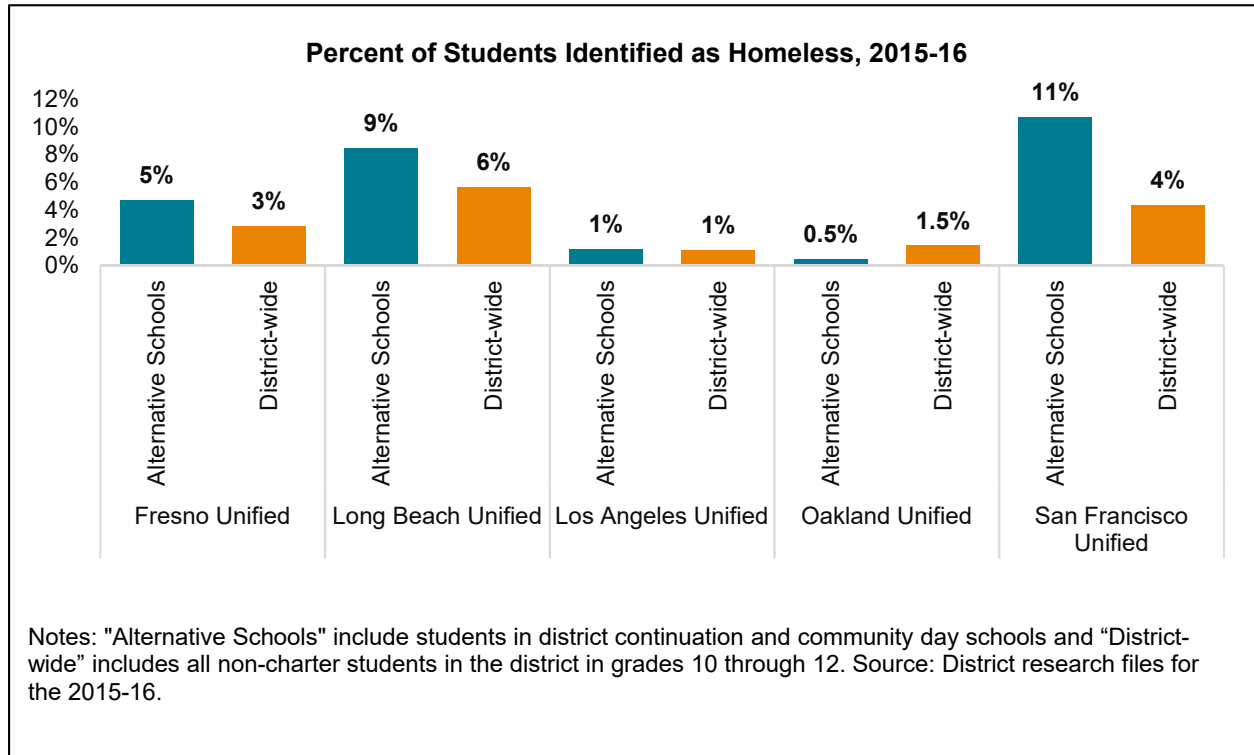
When we examine only district-level data for Continuation and Community Day Schools, we find that 10-16 percent of district-enrolled foster youth over age 16 are in alternative high schools (except in Los Angeles). When we pair district- and county-level enrollment data for foster youth in San Francisco (where the district and county are geographically co-extensive), the number of foster youth over age 16 who are in alternative schools in goes up to 24 percent.

Special Education



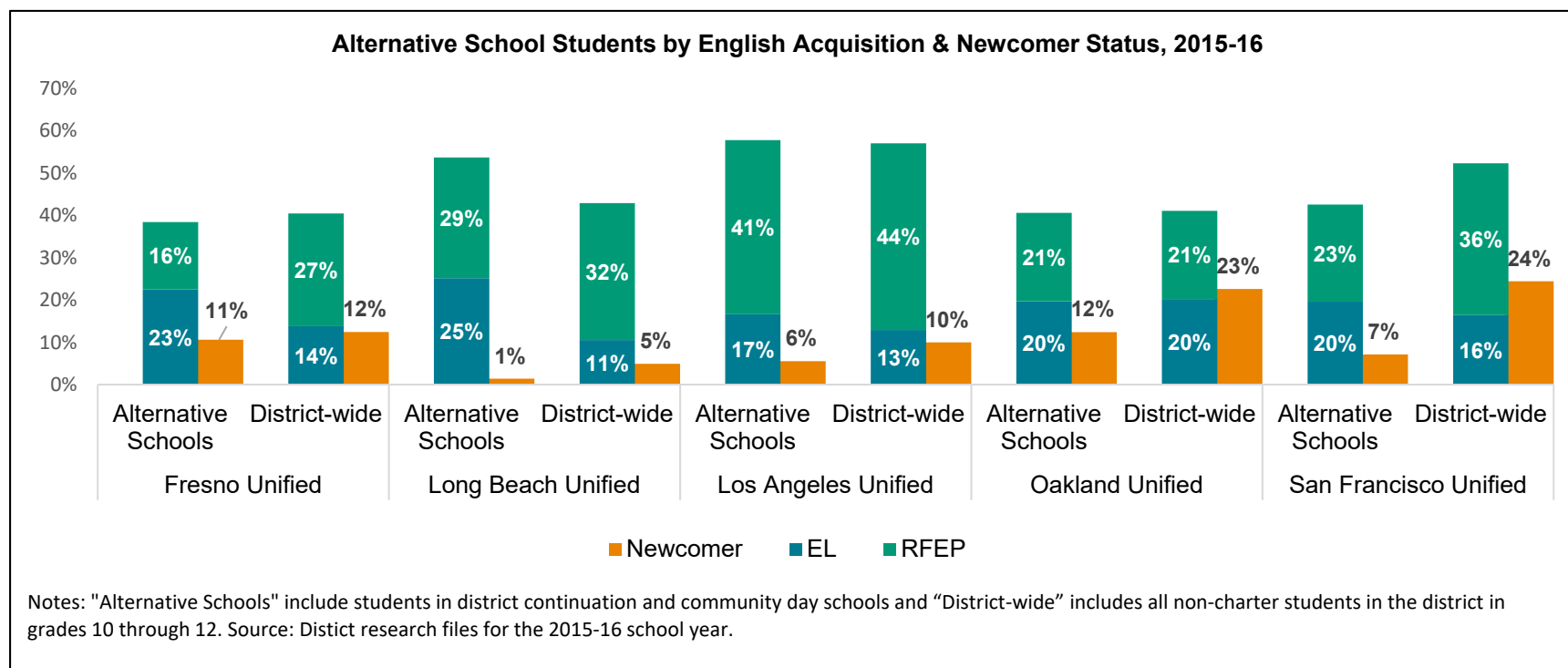
In most cases, we found that 6-11 percent of youth in alternative schools have been identified for special education services, a ratio that is within range of the district-wide distributions. The exception was in San Francisco, where almost a quarter of youth in alternative schools were identified for special education services.

Homelessness



The proportion of youth identified as homeless and enrolled in alternative schools (Continuation and district Community Day Schools) is similar to district averages in Los Angeles and Oakland. However, in San Francisco, Long Beach, and Fresno, the rate of homelessness among youth in alternative schools is at least one and half times higher than district averages. SFUSD youth in alternative schools had the highest rate of homelessness among the districts, with 11 percent of youth in alternative settings flagged as homeless during the 15-16 school year. This compares to about 4 percent district-wide in San Francisco.

English Acquisition & Newcomer Status



In the large urban districts we examined, 17-25 percent of youth in alternative schools were identified as English Learners (EL). These numbers are comparable to districtwide averages in Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Francisco, but much higher in Fresno and Long Beach.

During the 2015-16 school year, 1-12 percent of EL students in the examined alternative schools were newcomers to the United States (i.e., entered the U.S., or were first identified as EL, at age 11 and up).

The available data also indicates that 16-41 percent of students in the alternative schools of the examined districts were identified as Redesignated Fully-English Proficient (RFEP) students.