

CALIFORNIA

Where are the charter school deserts in California?

We detail the distribution of schools in California in order to provide educators and policymakers with information about communities that provide no access to charter schools. Many families lack the financial means to move out of neighborhoods when dissatisfied with their schooling options, so the location of schools is key to ensuring access and equity for all students. Policymakers and parents can use this information to better understand the supply of schooling options in their states and cities—and to press for changes that would improve that supply. Charter operators and authorizers may also find this analysis helpful as they consider where to establish new schools.

What is a charter school desert?

The following maps display where elementary charter schools are located in California. A **charter school desert** is three or more contiguous census tracts that have poverty rates greater than 20 percent but that have no charter schools.

Results

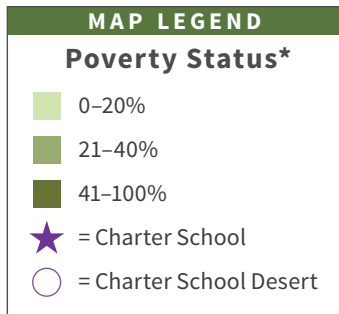
California has 5,920 public elementary schools, of which 874 are charter schools. The state as a whole has a 14.4 percent poverty rate. California has eighteen charter school deserts, representing 3 percent of mid- to high-poverty census tracts,¹ located in the far northern (just west of Fresno) and southeastern parts of the state, and many in the Los Angeles, San Francisco Bay, and Sacramento metro areas. In total, fourteen of the eighteen charter deserts are in urban areas.

California Charter School Deserts by the Numbers

% of the state population living in poverty.....	14.4%
# of public elementary schools.....	5,920
# of charter schools.....	874
# of census tracts.....	8,057
# of charter school deserts.....	18
Approximate proportion of mid- to high-poverty census tracts that charter school deserts comprise.....	3%

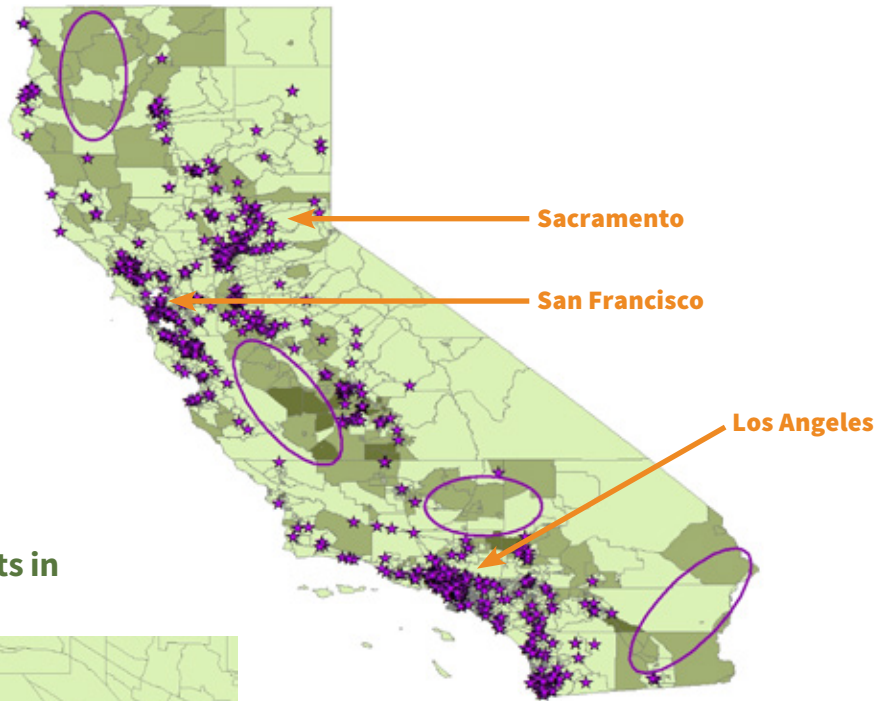
1. Meaning those census tracts in which more than 20 percent of the population lives at or below the poverty line.

Map 1 shows the census tracts and charter schools in California. Darker green highlights indicate areas in which more than 20 percent of the population lives in poverty. The statewide map depicts four charter school deserts in rural areas in the northernmost area, just west of Fresno, and in the central and southeast parts of the state;² the charter school deserts in the Los Angeles, San Francisco Bay, and Sacramento metro areas appear in Maps 2-4. There are four charter school deserts in the Los Angeles metro area, concentrated in the eastern part of the city.

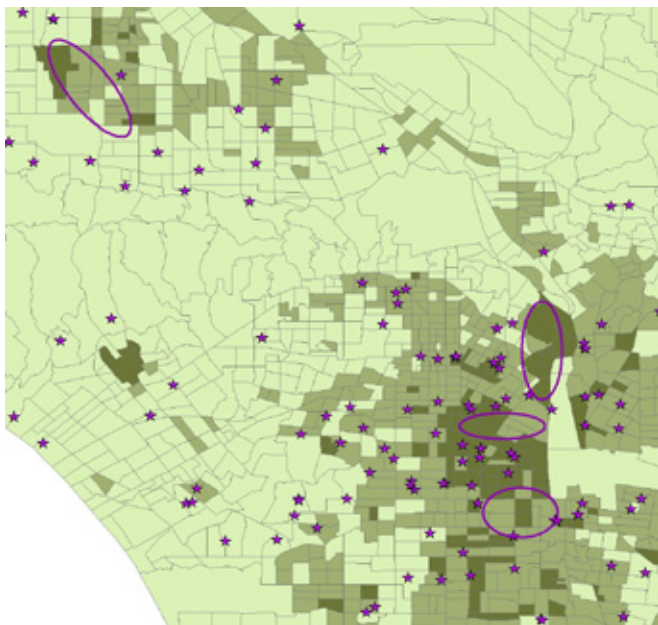


*Percentage of the population within each tract that lives at or below the poverty line.

Map 1: Overview of charter school deserts in California



Map 2: Charter school deserts in the Los Angeles metro area



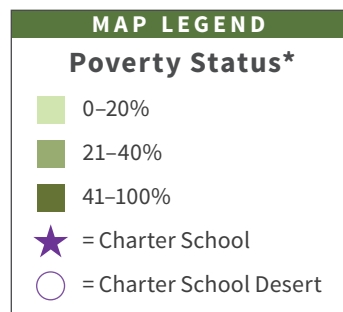
2. Due to the necessarily diminished scale on the state map, all charter school deserts do not appear on it, though they are included on the city metro maps.

There are four charter school deserts in the San Francisco Bay metro area, including three in the east bay region. There are six charter school deserts spread throughout the Sacramento metro area.

Map 3: Charter school deserts in the San Francisco Bay metro area



Map 4: Charter school deserts in the Sacramento metro area



**Percentage of the population within each tract that lives at or below the poverty line.*

Five Things to Keep in Mind

Readers should note several points. First, we have not tried to describe, analyze, or infer how state policies may impact the distribution of charter schools in California—simply to show which high-poverty areas lack such schools. Second, although we focus on school locations, location alone is insufficient to ensure that families have viable access to schools. Nearby schools may not be available to families if they’re filled to capacity, if policies prohibit transfer, or if transportation is unavailable. Third, some rural areas may lack charter schools simply because the population is too thin to support them. Fourth, our report does not address school quality, but the companion website allows users to view schools’ math and English language arts proficiency data. Finally, visually identifying charter school deserts is inevitably vulnerable to human error, as they may be identified differently based on how contiguous census tracts are positioned and how “desert circles” are drawn.