

OPPORTUNITIES UNLIMITED CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

CALIFORNIA STATE BOARD EDUCATION
CHARTER PETITION RENEWAL APPEALS HEARING
SEPTEMBER 3, 2014

INTRODUCTION

The Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) first authorized Opportunities Unlimited Charter High School in 2009. In January 2014, Opportunities Unlimited Charter High School's charter petition was up for renewal. Opportunities Unlimited submitted a request for an extension to review its charter on January 31st, 2014. In its February meeting, the Los Angeles County Office of Education Board of Education voted unanimously to grant Opportunities Unlimited an extension.

As noted by LACOE Board Member Rudell Freer, who made the motion to grant the extension, "The school's new administrative team, has already made a number of improvements, we ought to give them the opportunity to fully get up to speed and to continue its plan for more improvements."

BACKGROUND

LACOE's Charter Schools Office (CSO) primary concerns were:

1. The petition provides an unsound educational program for pupils to be enrolled in the school.
2. The petitioners are demonstrably unlikely to successfully implement the program.
3. The petition does not contain a reasonably comprehensive description of all required elements.
4. The petition does not satisfy all of the required assurances of *EC* Section 47605 (c), (e) through (h), (l), and (m).

BACKGROUND CONT'D

The CSO was also seriously concerned about its working relationship with Opportunities:

- The relationship with the CSO and the previous school administration was adversarial and counter-productive.
- The CSO deemed previous Executive Director (ED) as non-compliant with requests made by LACOE. LACOE described the ED as defiant and often negligible in fulfilling her duties.
- The previous ED with the aide of the California Charter Schools Association (CCSA) initiated a law suite against CSO, citing 1) undue burden, 2) heavy handed and discriminatory practices, 3) false accusations, and 4) harassment. The legal action taken by the previous administration of Opportunities only worsened the relationship. The legal action and resulting investigation resulted in several staff changes within CSO's staff.

FALL 2014- SPRING 2015

With the new leadership team both on the Board and with school Administration:

- Enrollment went up by approximately 27%
- Numerous cost saving measures were taken
 - The new ED took a salary 50% less than the previous ED
 - The new ED reviewed all school's existing external vendor agreements ; replacing some and renegotiating others
 - The new ED renegotiated the terms and cost of the school's facility lease
 - The new ED eliminated wasteful spending by making necessary staffing decisions to reflect the needs of the school and its enrollment
- The new ED secured by unanimous vote from LACOE's Board of Education an extension for review of its charter to be given more time to continue the various robust changes and improvements.

FALL 2014- SPRING 2015

CONT'D

In the Fall of 2014 Opportunities' Board of Trustees underwent new leadership:

- The new leadership in Opportunities' Board, saw an immediate recognition of the toxic and counter-productive relationship between the school and the CSO.
- The new Board President took immediate action to initiate direct communications with the CSO outside of the ED in hopes of rebuilding a relationship with the CSO and repairing the overall relationship between the CSO and the school.
- The new Board President also began to initiate actions to remove the existing ED and school administration.

LACOE's REVIEW AND VOTE

The data below that demonstrates Opportunities progress and success, and more importantly serves as grounds for renewal under the law, was either ignored by LACOE or not compelling enough to mitigate the long seeded malice on the part of LACOE towards Opportunities.

- Since Opportunities new leadership became installed;
 - Enrollment went up by approximately 27% school-wide in the existing school year
 - Interest in Opportunities dramatically increased and as of June 1st, the projected enrollment was 146 students for Fall 2014

LACOE'S REVIEW AND VOTE

CONT'D

Opportunities met the renewal requirements pursuant to Ed Code, Section 47607, therefore LACOE's decision was not grounded in law

- Opportunities 2013 API was 579, surpassing CCSA's minimum criteria for a charter school's renewal
- Opportunities had a 3-Year API average was 603, again surpassing CCSA's minimum criteria for a charter school's renewal
- Of the nine local similar schools to Opportunities;
 - Three (Locke College Prep #3, Locke Academy, and Locke HS) did not have valid API's because they did not meet one or both of the following criteria: 1) A valid API in each of the last three consecutive years; and 2) 11 or more valid scores in each of the last three consecutive years
 - The other six schools had the following scores;
 - **George Washington Preparatory High School- 572**
 - **Amino Locke II College Preparatory Academy- 569**
 - **Susan Miller Dorsey Senior High School- 609**
 - **John C. Freemont Senior High School- 587**
 - **David Starr Johnson Senior High School- 564**
 - **Amino Locke I College Preparatory Academy- 657**

LACOE'S REVIEW AND VOTE

CONT'D

- Of the March 2013 ELA CAHSEE Passage rates, Opportunities with 63% outperformed George Washington Prep High School, Amino Locke II, Amino Locke I, and Amino College Preparatory
- Among Latino students Opportunities had a 3-Year API average of 612
- The 2013 API comparison with schools with similar demographics showed Opportunities outperforming:
 - Amino College Prep
 - Amino Locke Tech,
 - High School for Social Justice
 - Crenshaw High School
 - George Washington Prep
 - Alain L. Locke Prep
 - Jordan High School
 - High School for Manual Arts
- Among comparable schools with a subgroup of 10% or more Black students, only Susan Dorsey and Amino Locke College Preparatory I outperformed Opportunities' 3-Year API average of 583.

LACOES's REVIEW AND VOTE

CONT'D

- Opportunities serves a severely disadvantaged and marginalized student population that is:
 - 42% Black
 - 56% Latino
 - 80% Free and Reduced Meals
 - 36% English Language Learners
 - 20% Students with Disabilities
- Of the surrounding schools where Opportunities' students would otherwise be required to attend all serve a significantly smaller percentage of African Americans compared to Opportunities 42%:
 - Wallis Annenberg High School- 7.5%
 - Alliance College Ready High School #5- 13.5%
 - Synergy Quantum Academy- 5.8%
 - High School for Manual Arts- 18.2%

LACOE'S REVIEW AND VOTE

CONT'D

- Opportunities is designed to be a small school community so that it can better serve the specific student population that it targets:
 - 2014–15: 120 students
 - 2015–16: 160 students
 - 2016–17: 200 students
 - 2017–18: 240 students
 - 2018–19: 300 students
- Of the surrounding schools where Opportunities' students would otherwise be required to attend, all have a much larger student enrollment in which Opportunities' students would continue to be marginalized and not thrive;
 - Wallis Annenberg High- 359
 - Alliance College Ready High # 5- 608
 - Synergy Quantum Academy- 537
 - High School for Manual Arts- 1867

LACOE'S REVIEW AND VOTE

CONT'D

- Opportunities has graduated 100% of its senior class from 2009- 2012 and 95% have gone on to either a 2- or 4 year college each year. In 2014, 94% of seniors graduated.
- Of the surrounding schools where Opportunities' students would otherwise be required to attend, all have a much larger student enrollment in which Opportunities' students would continue to be marginalized and not thrive;
 - Wallis Annenberg High School- 97%
 - Alliance College Ready High School #5- 98%
 - Synergy Quantum Academy- 67 %
 - High School for Manual Arts- 74%

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION REVIEW

LACOE's Charter Schools Office (CSO) grounds for non-renewal, which is shared by the California Department of Education (CDE) :

1. The petition provides an unsound educational program for pupils to be enrolled in the school.
2. The petitioners are demonstrably unlikely to successfully implement the program.
3. The petition does not contain a reasonably comprehensive description of all required elements.
4. The petition does not satisfy all of the required assurances of *EC* Section 47605 (c), (e) through (h), (l), and (m).

In addition, CDE has agreed with the LACOE that Opportunities has an educational program that is not likely to be of benefit its students and that Opportunities is unlikely to successfully implement the program. CDE also finds the financial plan for Opportunities to be neither fiscally balanced nor sustainable with a projected negative balance for 2014–15.

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

CONSIDERATIONS

An authorizer of public charter schools may approve and / or renew a charter school that has met one or more of the aforementioned criteria. Opportunities contends that meets both Requirement 3 and Requirement 4 for renewal.

- **Requirement 3:** Ranked in deciles 4 to 10, inclusive, on the API for a demographically comparable school API in the prior year or in two of the last three years.
- **Requirement 4:** The authorizer determines that the academic performance of the school is at least equal to the academic performance of the schools that its pupils would otherwise attend, as well as the academic performance of the schools in the district which the charter is located, taking into account the composition of the pupil population that is served at the charter school.

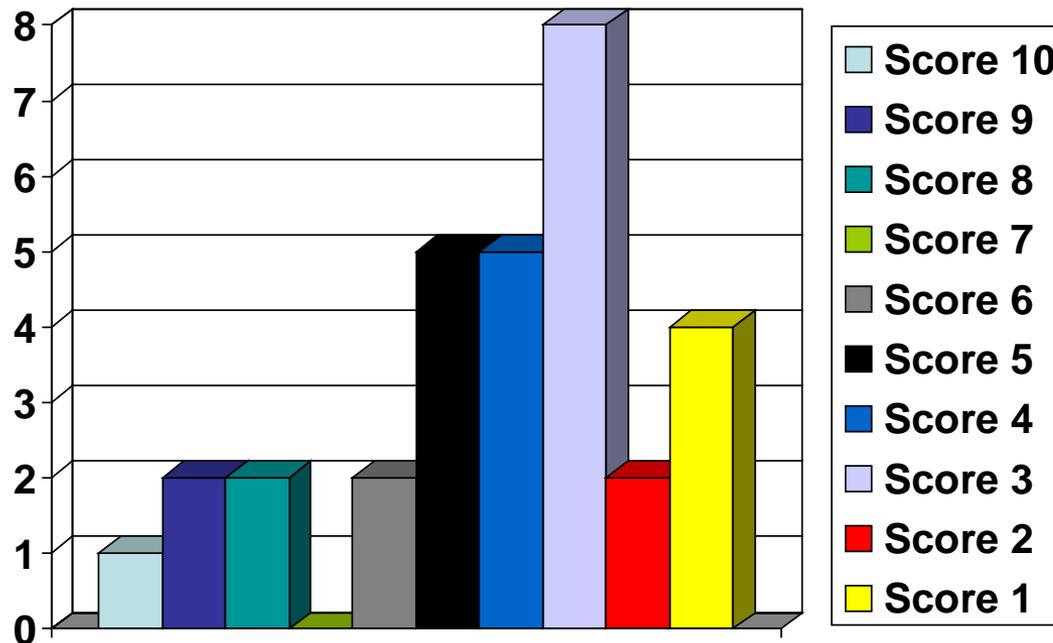
SBE CONSIDERATIONS- A

Requirement 3

Based on the data previously mentioned and below, Opportunities is at least equal to the academic performance of the schools that its students would otherwise attend. The following information is based on the list of 2012 similarly ranked schools that the Los Angeles County Office of Education used to compare Opportunities' performance. Opportunities had a decile rank of 4 on that list. There are 31 schools located in the Los Angeles Unified School District on the list including Opportunities Unlimited. Opportunities outranked 14 of those schools and was equal in rank to four (4). Twelve (12) schools had higher rankings. The following chart summarizes several measures focused on the pupil population served by the school.

SBE CONSIDERATIONS- A.1

Requirement 3



In 2012, Opportunities had a similar schools ranking of 4 on the CDE list. Opportunities outranked 14 of the 31 schools in the LAUSD and was equal in rank to four (4). Twelve (12) schools had higher rankings. This means that ***it's performance exceeded or was equal to 61% of the schools on the list.*** Twelve schools (38.7%) had rankings higher than Opportunities.

SBE CONSIDERATIONS- A.2

Requirement 3

Percent	96-100	91-95	86-90	81-85	76-80	71-75	66-70	61-65	55-60	Total
No of Schools	10	1	4	6	3	1	3	3	0	31

Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Students

In 2012, One hundred per cent (100%) of Opportunities Unlimited students received Free and reduced lunch. Only Five (5) other schools have an equal percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch. This is the measurements which makes most of the schools on this list comparable.

Though not on the similar schools list for 2012, Alain Leroy Locke 3 College Prep is very similar demographically to Opportunities, and we have, there-fore, included it.

SBE CONSIDERATIONS- A.3

Requirement 3

Schools	% Black Students
1. Alliance Health Services	19%
2. Animo Locke Charter # 1	15%
3. Animo Charter # 1	17%
4. Animo Watts Charter	25%
5. Manual Arts	17%
6. Fremont	10%
7. Jordan	17%
8. Animo Locke Technology	27%
9. Social Justice Global	10%
10. Social Justice Fine Arts	12%
11. Crenshaw Senior HS	70%
12. Alain Leroy Locke College Prep # 3	44%

Opportunities is 43% black students and 55 % Latino. Only two schools Dorsey and Washington Prep have a similar percentage of black and Latino students. Crenshaw Senior High School has 70% Black and 28% Latino. Only 12 Schools have 10 percent or more black students.

SBE CONSIDERATIONS- A.4

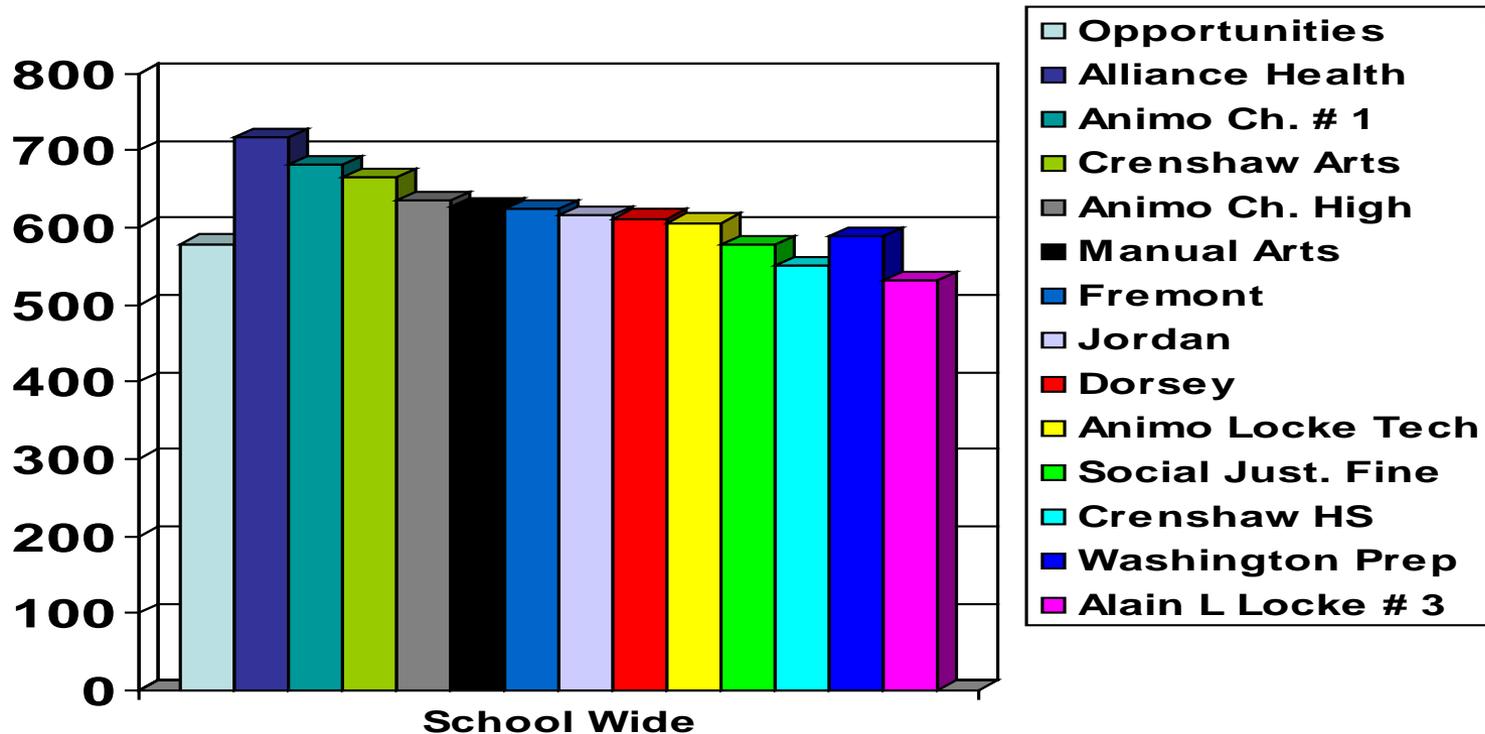
Requirement 3

Why is the Ethnic Composition Important?

1. The fact is that there is a significant gap between the achievement of black students and other racial and ethnic groups. Even English Language Learners are generally outperforming Blacks.
2. It must be noted that the achievement of Opportunities' Black students is generally higher than in many of the comparable schools, which also includes schools that Opportunities' students would otherwise have to attend.
3. In some instances, Opportunities Latino students also outperform Latino students in comparison schools. These charts only compare those schools with 10% or more black students.
4. Opportunities believes that this is a more realistic and accurate comparison of Opportunities to LAUSD district schools because it accurately takes into account the composition of the population served by the charter school.

SBE CONSIDERATIONS- A.5

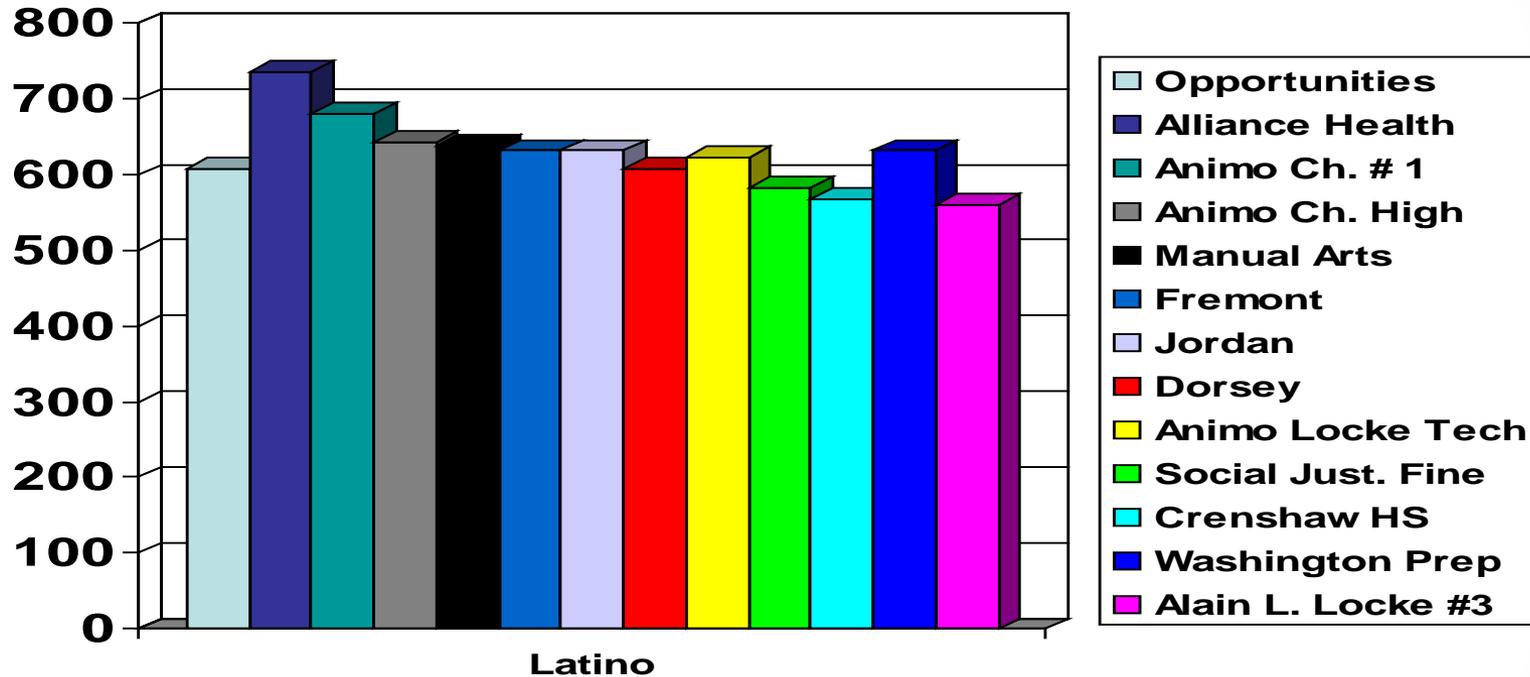
Requirement 3



Opportunities falls within the average to low average API range. The standard deviation of this data for socio-economically disadvantaged students is 44 points, meaning the 9 point API difference for Washington and Opportunities is not meaningful as the report states.

SBE CONSIDERATIONS- A.6

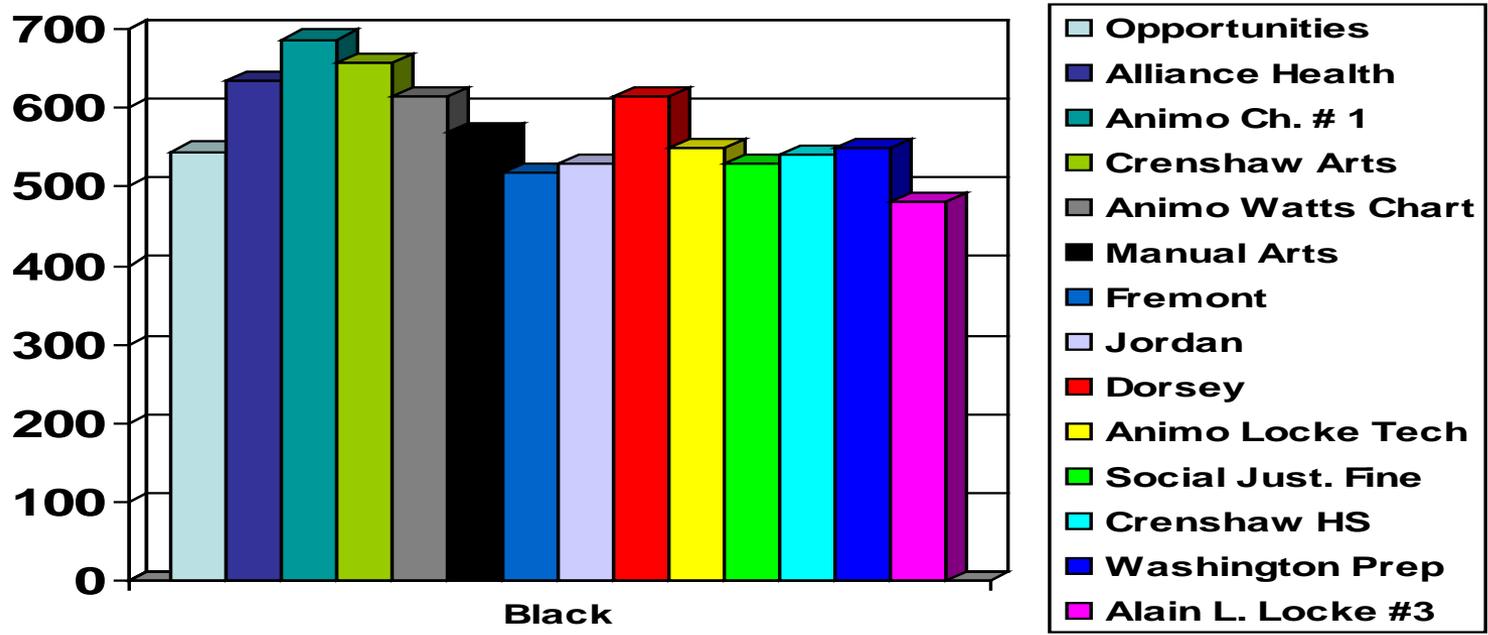
Requirement 3



In 2013 Opportunities' Latino students had an API of 608. Latinos student made up 55% of the student population. When comparing this group's performance to other LAUSD schools, that are more accurately comparable, their performance is higher than the following schools: Social Justice, Alain Leroy Locke College Prep. #3, and Crenshaw HS. Dorsey's API was 1 point higher which is not significant.

SBE CONSIDERATIONS- A.7

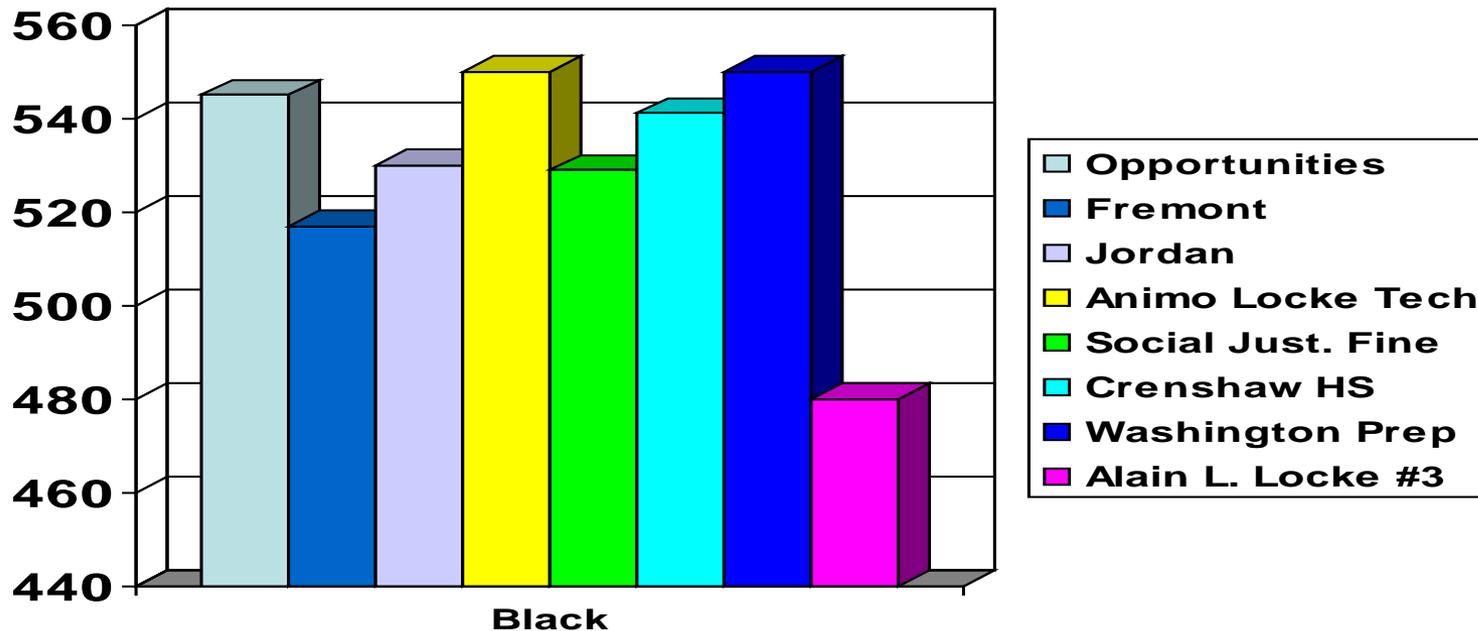
Requirement 3



Opportunities API for black students is comparable to or higher than Fremont, Jordan. Animo Locke Tech, Social Justice, and Crenshaw High school and Alain L. Locke # 3. Washington Prep's API for this group was 5 points higher than Opportunities. Please note that most of our students have traditionally attended Fremont, Locke, Jordan and Washington Preparatory.

SBE CONSIDERATIONS- A.8

Requirement 3



Opportunities API is comparable to or higher than the schools with 10% or more black students. Washington and Animo Locke's API for this group is only 5 points higher and is statistically no significant. Most of these schools are in communities where our students are most likely otherwise to attend.

SBE CONSIDERATIONS- B

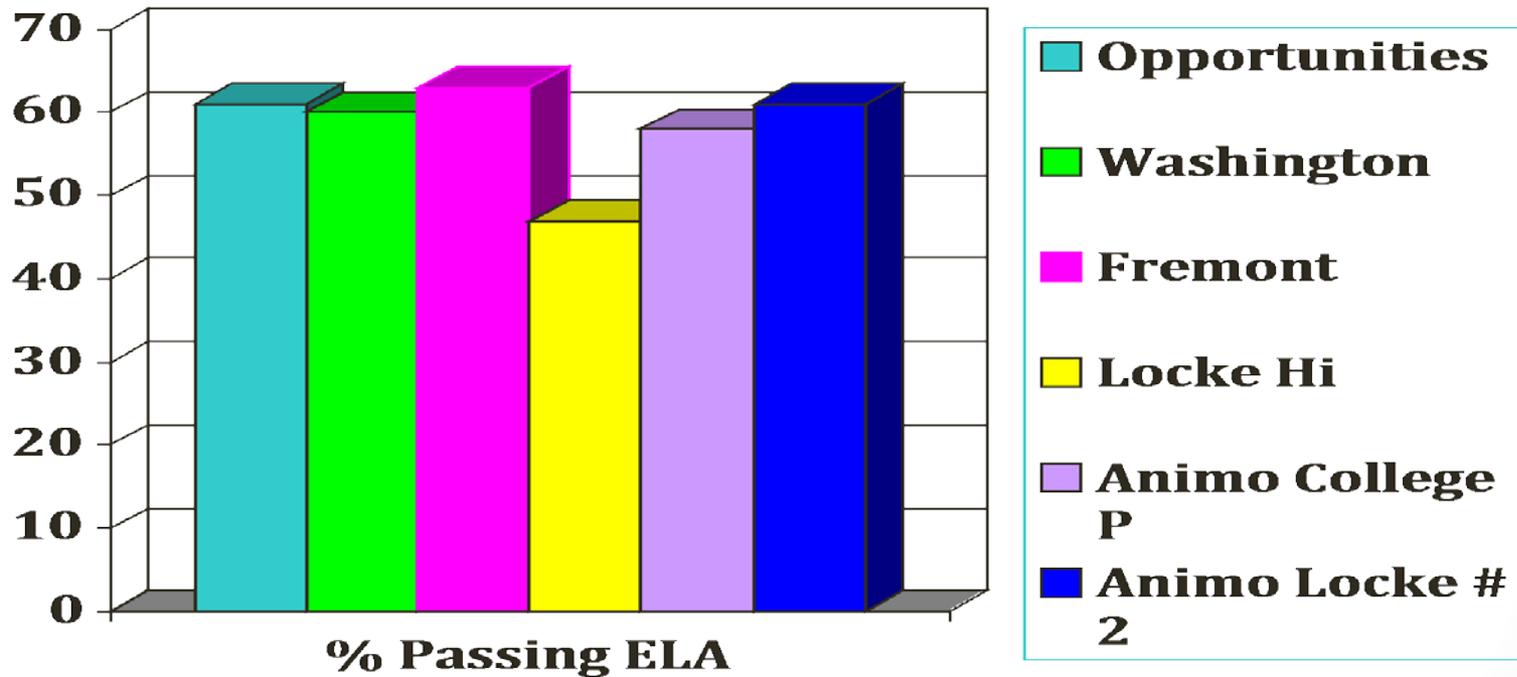
Requirement 4

The authorizer determines that the academic performance of the school is at least equal to the academic performance of the schools that its pupils would otherwise attend, as well as the academic performance of the schools in the district which the charter is located, taking into account the composition of the pupil population that is served at the charter school.

Based on the data previously mentioned and below, Opportunities is at least equal to the academic performance of the schools that its students would otherwise have attended.

SBE CONSIDERATIONS- B.1

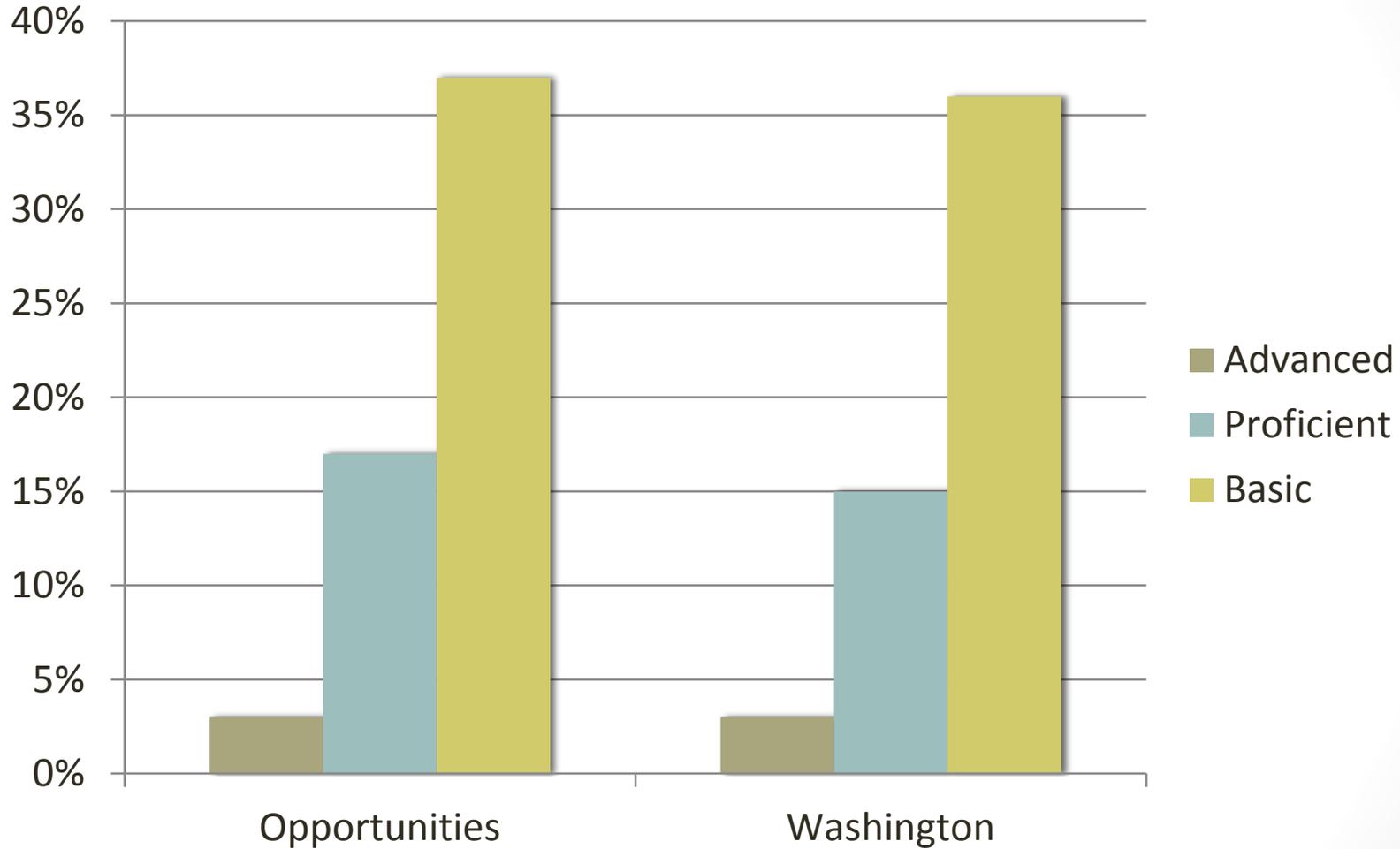
Requirement 4



56% of Grade 10 Students
Passed 2014 ELA CAHSEE

SBE CONSIDERATIONS- B.2

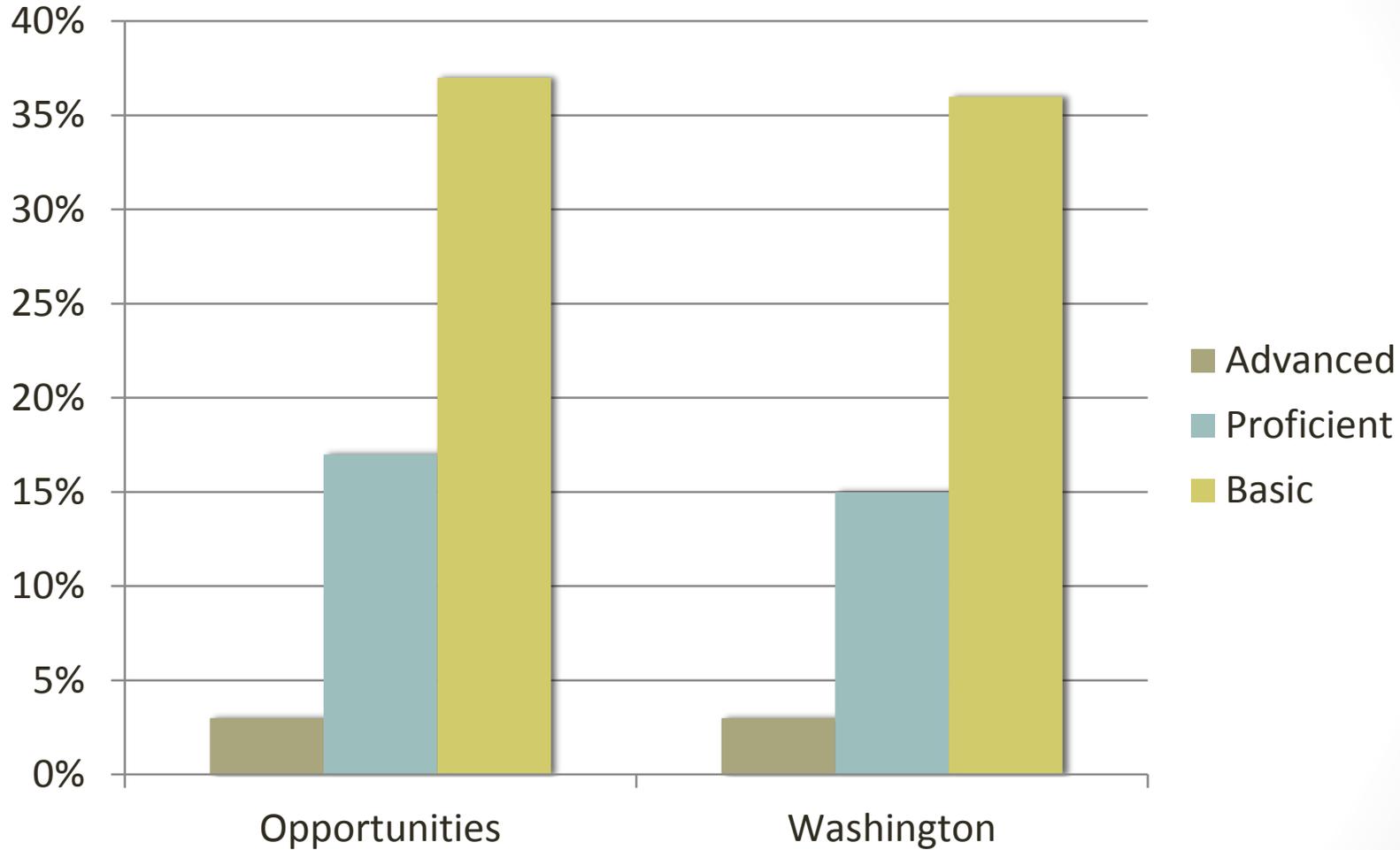
Requirement 4



CST 9th ELA 2012-2013

SBE CONSIDERATIONS- B.3

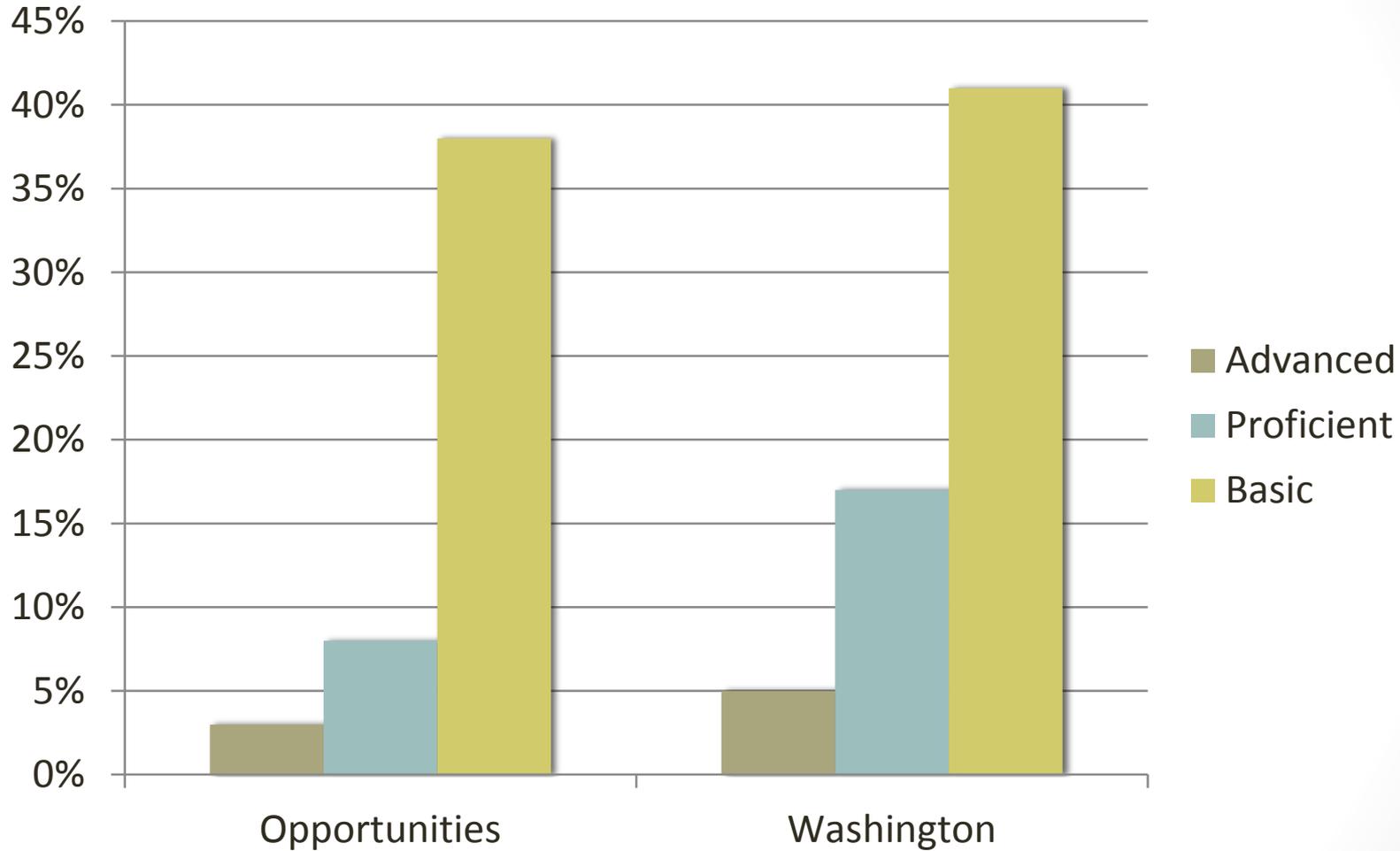
Requirement 4



CST 10th ELA 2012-2013

SBE CONSIDERATIONS- B.4

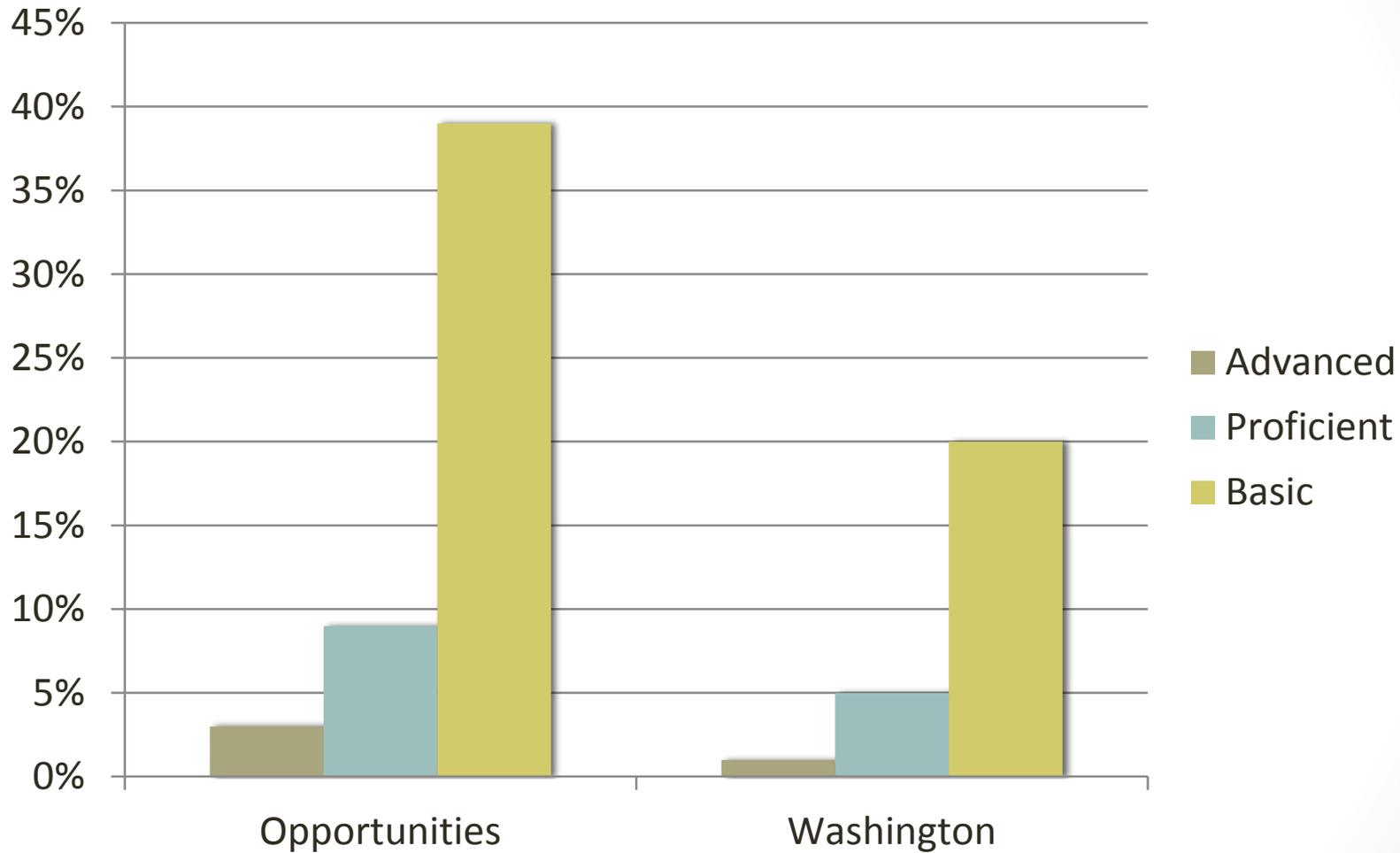
Requirement 4



CST 11th ELA 2012-2013

SBE CONSIDERATIONS- B.5

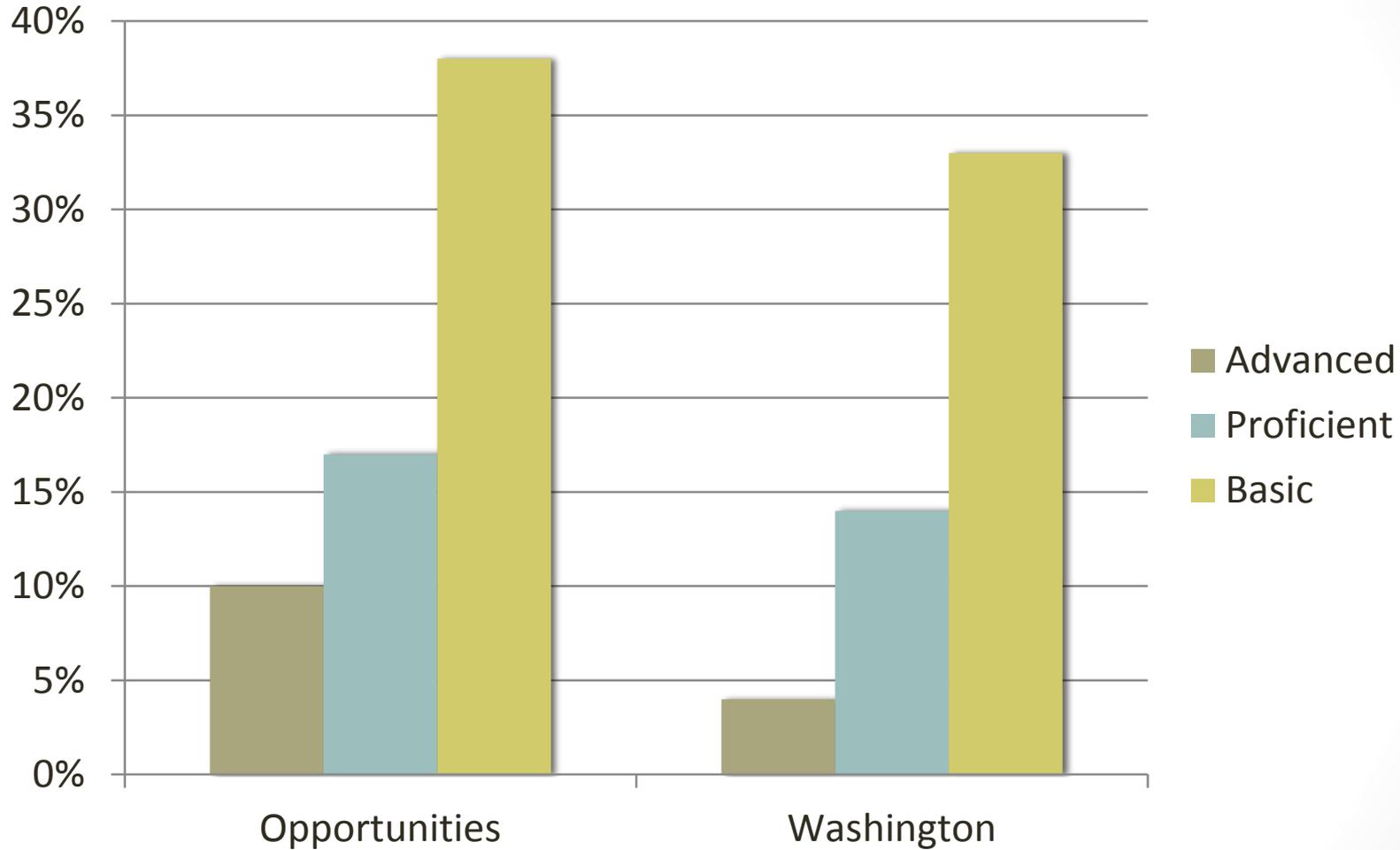
Requirement 4



CST 10th World History 2012-2013

SBE CONSIDERATIONS- B.6

Requirement 4



CST 10th Life Science 2012-2013

SBE CONSIDERATIONS- C

Both LACOE and CDE contend that Opportunities should not be approved due to:

1. The petition provides an unsound educational program for pupils to be enrolled in the school.
2. The petitioners are demonstrably unlikely to successfully implement the program.
3. The petition does not contain a reasonably comprehensive description of all required elements.
4. The petition does not satisfy all of the required assurances of EC Section 47605 (c), (e) through (h), (l), and (m).
5. The financial plan for Opportunities is neither fiscally balanced nor sustainable with a projected negative balance for 2014–15.

SBE CONSIDERATIONS- C.1

Other Considerations

Opportunities does not accept that it provides an unsound educational program for its students.

1. Opportunities is fully accredited by the Western Association for Schools and Colleges (WASC)
2. Opportunities has graduated 100% of its senior class from 2009-2012 and 95% have gone on to college. In 2014, 94% seniors graduated.
3. Opportunities 2013 API was 579, surpassing CCSA's minimum criteria for a charter school's renewal
4. Opportunities had a 3-Year API average was 603, again surpassing CCSA's minimum criteria for a charter school's renewal
5. Opportunities API for both Black and Latino students outperformed schools where its students would otherwise attend.

SBE CONSIDERATIONS- C.2

Other Considerations

Opportunities does not accept that it provides an unsound educational program for its students.

Opportunities has modified its academic program to reflect the following for 2014 and moving forward:

1. More rigor and alignment to A-G requirements
 1. Four years of ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies and Electives
 2. Two years of College Readiness, Art, Foreign Language, and P.E
 3. Advanced classes; Physics and Pre-Cal/Trigonometry
 4. Mandatory Summer Programs (Bridge classes for incoming 9th graders, internships and apprenticeships, remediation, and pre-college programs)
 5. Web-based individualized curricula; Achieve3000, Khan Academy, and Rosetta Stone
2. More rigorous and more frequent standards based assessments
 1. Beginning of the year baseline assessment for data
 2. NWEA MAP assessments
3. Curricula fully aligned to Common Core

Please see attached student handbook

SBE CONSIDERATIONS- C.3

Other Considerations

Opportunities does not accept that it is demonstrably unlikely to successfully implement its program.

Opportunities has now developed a hard working and dedicated team of the right teachers, administrators, counselors and staff to be successful.

- 100% of teachers are credentialed and/or are completing a CTC approved credentialing program
- Full time instructional staff of 12 with approximately 61 years of experience
- A new full Social-Emotional, and College and Career Counselor who will partner with CSU to develop and implement School-Based Family Counseling
- A new full time Special Education teacher
- A diverse and experienced administrative team and consultants
 - Opportunities' former Assistant Principal who oversaw 2009-2012 100% graduation rate
 - A Former LACOE Curriculum Specialist
 - A Former LACOE Charter School Director
 - A Former KIPP and Achievement First Administrator
- A larger and more diverse and experienced Governance team
 - Opportunities is also still reviewing approximately 10 new resumes for additional Board members

SBE CONSIDERATIONS- C.4

Other Considerations

Opportunities does not accept that it is demonstrably unlikely to successfully implement its program.

Opportunities has now made a significant investment in technological and other material resources of the school in order to successfully implement its program.

- A new computer lab, complete with new computers donated by community partners
- Each classroom will now have projectors and document cameras
- More web based and online curricular
- Its first Student Information System (Infinite Campus) which will offer both a student and parent portal, which will be 100% operational by November 1st
- A revamped website that will offer school assigned email addresses for students to use on their resumes, etc. The website will also allow for online enrollment.
- An increased internet and network bandwidth to further support the school's emphasis on technology to improve student success.

SBE CONSIDERATIONS- C.5

Other Considerations

Opportunities does not accept that it does not contain a reasonably comprehensive description of all required elements.

Opportunities contends that the LCAP is meant to be prospective: a description of what a school will do with additional LCFF monies received. Therefore as Opportunities was not renewed by LACOE, it would not at the time be receiving those extra LCFF monies. As the LCAP was not required by LACOE as a part of the renewal process, Opportunities contends that the lack of an LCAP at the time could not be held negatively against the school. This is further supported by CDE's decision not to request an LCAP as a part of its review for the SBE appeals hearing. As no reason was provided by LACOE on the question of the LCAP, Opportunities can only deduce that because LCFF monies will not be made available until t2014-15 school year, that LACOE did not request an LCAP because activities undertaken during 2013-14 would take place prior to the LCFF monies being made available.

However, Opportunities has engaged in several communications with both CDE and SBE staff around its LCAP and understands and accepts the need to submit an approved LCAP to CDE by an agreed upon date were its charter to be renewed by SBE. Please see attached email between Opportunities and CDE documenting that communication.

SBE CONSIDERATIONS- C.6

Other Considerations

Opportunities does not accept that it does not satisfy all of the required assurances of *EC* Section 47605 (c), (e) through (h), (l), and (m).

- As demonstrated both in its charter petition, in this document, and its Student-Family Handbook which is attached, Opportunities has clearly identified how student progress will be measured
- Opportunities has a staff that is properly qualified and credentialed per the CTC requirements
- Opportunities has clearly defined through its charter petition and its Student-Family Handbook as well as its Employee Handbook (attached) has outlined its procedures for ensuring the health and safety of its students and staff
- Opportunities has clearly defined through its charter petition, its admission requirements and procedures, as well as how it will maintain racial and ethnic balance.
- Opportunities has clearly illustrated its annual financial audit through the use of an independent financial auditor, GYL Decauwer LLP, which is attached.
- Opportunities has clearly defined the rights of its employees in both its charter petition as well as its Employee Handbook, which is attached.

SBE CONSIDERATIONS- C.7

Other Considerations

Opportunities does not accept that it does not have a financial plan that is either fiscally balanced nor sustainable with a projected negative balance for 2014–15.

- Opportunities will have an increased student enrollment from its previous years, at the end of the school year the projected enrollment was 146 students, after the denial by LACOE and with LACOE's communication to students about said denial, the enrollment declined. The current enrollment is 86 students and the current projected enrollment by October 1st is 120 students.
- Opportunities' Board and Executive Director has already demonstrated by the aforementioned, numerous sound financial practices to ensure a long term and sustainable model
- Opportunities' Board and Executive Director has also made an investment in the school through several financial development initiatives including private and corporate gifts and donations pending its charter renewal by the SBE.

CONCLUSION

As noted by LACOE Board of Education Member Rudell Freer, the only Black member of the Board of Education, “The school’s new administrative team, has already made a number of improvements and we ought to give them the opportunity to fully get up to speed and to continue its plan for more improvements.” She further urged the Board to delay the vote pending additional data by the CSO. This motion by Board Member Freer to delay the vote and do more fact-finding was also shared by Board Members Reisler, Calderon, and Braude. In particular these Board Members who urged greater prudence and patience wanted more specific data on:

- The number of LACOE authorized charter schools that served predominantly Black students.
- The performance of Black students at Opportunities as compared to other schools with similar demographics.
- The likelihood for continued progress at Opportunities given the many improvements and gains already made by the school’s new leadership team in such short time.

CONCLUSION CONT'D

Opportunities may not be one of the state's best performing schools, but that is not the standard. Opportunities is serving a population and community that as demonstrated by the racially comparable schools, has relatively few good choices. The population served by Opportunities has a limited track record of college entrance and success, so the fact 100% its seniors graduated from 2009-2012 and that 95% went on to college, speaks volumes!

Not only was LACOE's decision unfounded and in keeping with the charter renewal criteria as set forth in Ed Code, Section 47607. The renewal of Opportunities is in the best interest of the students, staff, and the wider South Los Angeles community. Its renewal would mean:

- The continued operation of a local, safe and rigorous high school, that's is successfully serving a predominantly Black and Latino student population, and that is graduating those students and getting them into college.
- The continued positive impact on the South LA community and economy, as each year Opportunities will hire additional staff; most of whom will be from, reside in and/or are committed to the success of the South LA community.
- The renewal would result in new work and economic opportunities for local construction, plumbing, carpentry, and all other such services, as the school grows and expand, and will need to make improvements and/ or expand.
- The expansion will result in continued and increased patronage and support of neighboring stores and small businesses by school staff, students and families.