

# The Antelope Valley: Over the hill and out of sight

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## I. Introduction

The typical image of California is one of coastal cities and urban centers. But this picture leaves out much of the state and many of its residents. For large numbers of policymakers, foundations, and education leaders, these parts of our large and diverse state are “invisible.” Over the past two decades, however, these communities have emerged as some of the fastest growing and neediest parts of our state.

Indeed, an increasingly significant percentage of California students live and attend school outside of large urban or suburban regions. While the student enrollment in urban school districts like Compton Unified has decreased over the past two decades, districts located in nearby desert and rural areas such as the Antelope Valley have seen steady increases in the number of students they serve.<sup>1</sup> These rural districts have also been experiencing demographic change, including growing numbers of Hispanic/Latino(a) and African American students, as well as considerable increases in the number of English Learners (ELs), foster youth and students living in poverty.

Yet attention from policy makers and researchers to the challenges faced by isolated and rural districts is rare. Without a proactive research and communications agenda, key leaders will continue to overlook these regions, leaving their school communities without the support they need. We believe that there should be a greater focus of state and philanthropic efforts on high need populations outside of urban centers, including foster youth, low-income youth, African-American students and English learners.

The goal of this report is to highlight and describe the Antelope Valley, identify its available resources, and call attention to the needs of districts, students and their families. To that end, we focus specifically on the Antelope Valley Union High School District and its seven largest K-8 feeder districts, situated in northern Los Angeles County<sup>2</sup>. The report also offers recommendations to support the development and implementation of systemic policy solutions to help better support students and the community.

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<sup>1</sup> Compton Unified’s K-12 enrollment declined from 28,839 in 1996-97 to 23,452 in 2016-17, while K-12 enrollment in the Antelope Valley Union High School District grew from 15,366 in 1996-97 to 23,905 in 2016-17. Source: District Enrollment, 1996-97, 2016-17. Retrieved from California Department of Education, DataQuest, <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> (July 2017).

<sup>2</sup> K-8 districts include Palmdale, Lancaster, Westside Union, Eastside Union, Keppel Union, Wilsona, and Hughes-Elizabeth Lakes Elementary Union. The Gorman Joint School District, which in 2016-17 had as K-8 enrollment of 91 students, is not included in this report.

## II. Methods

In addition to examining the eight focus districts, our research sought to illuminate the broader context in which these districts are located, and to map their common areas of strengths and needs. Our findings were informed by a variety of sources. We conducted in-depth interviews with twenty community leaders from various fields, including:

- Local school districts;
- County and municipal government;
- Social service; and
- Community-based organizations.

We also interviewed district stakeholders, including parents and school site staff, in order to understand the local context, learn about current programming within districts and the larger community, and to identify available resources and critical areas of need. For example, we asked interview participants about available community resources and which organizations are serving schools and families; the degree to which districts collaborate with community members to prepare students for success; and what additional resources are needed to support students both within districts and community-wide. We also asked interviewees, “What would you want to tell policymakers about your district and community?”

In addition to interviews, we looked at a variety of publicly available data including:

- Student demographic and outcomes data;
- District Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs);
- Community demographic and economic data; and
- Higher education resources in the region.

### III. Description of the Community

The greater Antelope Valley (GAV) is a region of approximately 2,800 square miles that lies seventy miles northeast of Los Angeles. The region—a mix of picturesque desert landscapes, poppies, and suburban tract homes on spacious lots—is spread across two counties, Kern and Los Angeles. It serves as the primary gateway to the California high desert and the Western Mojave Desert region. Although “just over the hill” (or mountain range) from Los Angeles, the weather and geography of the Antelope Valley differ dramatically from the Los Angeles basin and beaches. Winters are colder and summers are hotter and drier, and the area is often windy. Highs in the summer reach 90-100 degrees, with lows in the winter often below freezing at night.

The GAV includes many communities. The largest are the cities of Lancaster and Palmdale; smaller towns and communities include Quartz Hill, Rosamond, Lake Elizabeth and Lake Hughes, Pearblossom, Littlerock, and Leona Valley.

The region is host to a variety of community events ranging from the California Poppy Festival to outdoor concerts and the Los Angeles County Airshow. The area also has a number of museums and attractions, as well parklands, playgrounds, picnic areas and sports facilities, including the Lancaster National Soccer Center—the largest soccer complex in the West.

#### **Demographics**

The GAV has experienced tremendous population growth over the past two decades. A growing number of people moved to the area in search of affordable homes and a less urban environment in which to raise their families. Housing prices continue to be a fraction of those in other parts of Los Angeles County, and the area has some of Southern California’s most affordable home prices.<sup>3</sup> In addition, many low-income residents have been attracted by the availability of subsidized housing, particularly as rents have skyrocketed in other parts of Los Angeles County.

The two principal cities in the region, Lancaster and Palmdale, each experienced an approximately 35 percent increase in population from 2000 – 2016. Both cities have been ranked among the fastest growing cities in the nation as well as in California and Los Angeles.<sup>4</sup> The current population of the region is estimated to total just over half a million people, and is projected to grow to over 575,000 by 2022.<sup>5</sup> (See Appendix A.)

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<sup>3</sup> Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation. Retrieved from LAEDC.org (August 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Gorman, A. (2007, June 28). Four Southland cities are among the fastest-growing in the nation. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/jun/28/local/me-census28>

<sup>5</sup> Greater Antelope Valley Economic Alliance (GAVEA). (2017). Ready for business. [Report]. Lancaster, CA.

This increase in population has resulted in demographic and cultural shifts, including a sizeable increase in the percentage of Hispanic/Latino(a) residents, and in the number of Spanish speakers.<sup>6</sup> In the GAV as a whole, the percentage of Hispanic/Latino(a) residents in 2017 equaled forty-five percent.<sup>7</sup> The percentage of foreign born residents living in Lancaster (13 percent) and Palmdale (26 percent) is lower than the percentage in Los Angeles County (35 percent) and the state (27 percent).<sup>8</sup>

The supply of affordable housing has also led to an increase in the number of available foster placements. It is estimated that in 2014-15, there were more than 4,500 school-age foster youth enrolled in the fifteen school districts within the GAV.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Economics and Industry***

The GAV has a diverse range of industries including: aerospace, healthcare, manufacturing, agriculture, logistics/distribution, renewable energy, and the film industry. The region is also home to Edwards Air Force Base, the Mojave Air and Spaceport, and many supporting aerospace companies.

The greater Antelope Valley Economic Alliance’s (GAVEA) 2017 Economic Roundtable Report notes that the Great Recession hit the region particularly hard: “The subprime mortgage crisis hit the region’s population base harder than almost anywhere else in the nation, and thus, the subsequent recovery lagged the greater Los Angeles area substantially.”<sup>10</sup>

In 2015, the unemployment rate in the greater Antelope Valley was 7.7 percent as compared with 6.8 percent statewide and 7.5 percent in Los Angeles County, and the rate of poverty was significantly higher, as Table 1 shows.<sup>11</sup> Homelessness has also become an increasing problem.

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<sup>6</sup> From 2000 to 2015 the percentage of Hispanic/Latino(a) residents grew from 24 percent to 38 percent in Lancaster City, and from 38 percent to 57 percent in Palmdale City. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder, <https://factfinder.census.gov> (August 2017); the number of residents in the Greater Antelope Valley who primarily speak Spanish is approximately 25%, GAVEA (2017).

<sup>7</sup> GAVEA (2017), p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> US Census Bureau American Community Survey 2011-2015 <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs> (September 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Count of Matched Foster Students by School and Grade, 2014-15. Retrieved from California Department of Education, DataQuest (August 2017), This includes the AVUHSD and its feeder districts; and Southern Kern, Muroc, Mojave, Acton, Sierra Sands and Tehachapi school districts.

<sup>10</sup> GAVEA (2017). p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.(December 2015); U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/losangelescountycalifornia,palmdalecitycalifornia,lancastercitycalifornia/BZA010215> (August 2017).

The 2017 homeless count found that the number of homeless people in the Antelope Valley had risen by fifty percent, to 4,559, from 3,038 in 2016.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 1. Estimated Percent of Residents Below Poverty Line 2015**

Lancaster City	23.5%
Palmdale City	21.3%
Los Angeles County	16.7%

Source: US Census American Community Survey, 2011-2015 5 yr. estimate, 2015.

The region has lately started to bounce back, both in terms of employment and the real estate market, according to GAVEA. In Lancaster, for example, unemployment declined to 5.7 percent in October 2016 from 6.7 percent in October 2015.<sup>13</sup>

Despite recent growth in local industry, however, an estimated sixty percent of Antelope Valley residents currently commute to jobs out of the area, with daily commuting times as high as two hours and forty-five minutes each way, and the typical commute totaling ninety minutes each way. The region is continuing to develop initiatives to attract more jobs to the area and to provide more education and training opportunities for younger workers.

### **Public Transportation**

The Antelope Valley Transit Authority (AVTA) provides local bus routes and dial-a-ride service for the residents of Lancaster and Palmdale as well those in the unincorporated portions of northern Los Angeles County. AVTA also provides commuter bus service to Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley during the week, along with two supplemental school routes for students who rely on public transportation to get to and from school. In Fall 2016, the AVTA initiated a pilot program—Campus Connect—to provide free bus passes for Antelope Valley College students.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the Antelope Valley Union High School District provides bus passes to students who qualify for free and reduced priced meals and are attending a school other than their home school, homeless students, and to students who attend their Community Day School in Lancaster.

### **Health**

The region experiences high rates of mental illness, substance abuse, and domestic violence, and a corresponding lack of available services to address these and other community health

<sup>12</sup> *Los Angeles Times*. (2017, July 3). <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/editorials/la-ed-antelope-valley-homeless-20170703-story.html> (August 2017).

<sup>13</sup> GAVEA (2017). p. 18.

<sup>14</sup> Antelope Valley Transit Authority, retrieved from [www.avta.com](http://www.avta.com) (August 2017).

issues. As one non-profit leader described it: “Obesity, diabetes, depression, child abuse, infant mortality, STDs, you name it, we’re up there in health disparities.”

Access to mental health care providers remains a top concern for many in the region, with significantly fewer providers per capita in the GAV service area as compared to the state. Approximately twenty-eight percent of adults in the GAV do not have adequate social or emotional support. In addition, the region struggles to recruit primary care, dental and other health professionals to the area.<sup>15</sup>

Some communities in the region are working to increase healthcare resources, access and employment, including the expansion of facilities and services (e.g., the Palmdale Regional Medical Center) and other major investments in healthcare provision.

### ***Community Resources***

There are many established non-profit and faith-based organizations serving the GAV, along with numerous county and municipal agencies. A broad range of services is available, including drug and alcohol treatment, counseling, parenting classes, violence prevention, employment resources, and more. The 2016 *LA County Resource Guide for the Antelope Valley* lists more than eighty community resource organizations operating in the region.<sup>16</sup> Community and district leaders frequently mentioned the Antelope Valley Partners for Health as a key community resource partner.

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<sup>15</sup> Olubukola, O. and Ochoa, P. (2016). 2016 Community Health Needs Assessment. [Report]. Kaiser Foundation Hospital Panorama: Panorama City, CA. p. 8, 53. Retrieved from [https://share.kaiserpermanente.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2016-KFH-Panorama-City-CHNA\\_Final.pdf](https://share.kaiserpermanente.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2016-KFH-Panorama-City-CHNA_Final.pdf) (August 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Retrieved from: [http://dcfs.co.la.ca.us/kinshippublic/documents/001617\\_Resource\\_Guide\\_Antelope\\_Valley.pdf](http://dcfs.co.la.ca.us/kinshippublic/documents/001617_Resource_Guide_Antelope_Valley.pdf) (August 2017).

## IV. Education

### ***Educational Attainment***

Approximately three quarters of Lancaster and Palmdale residents had earned a high school diploma or higher in 2015, which is roughly on a par with residents of Los Angeles County. However, the percent of Lancaster and Palmdale residents with a bachelor's degree or higher (approximately 15 percent) was half that of Los Angeles County and the state (30 percent), with significant gaps in degree attainment between white residents and Hispanic/Latino(a) residents. (See Appendix B.)

### ***Postsecondary Education***

The GAV has more than twenty-five non-profit and for-profit providers of postsecondary education and vocational training, including satellite campuses of both CSU-Long Beach and CSU-Bakersfield. However, access to baccalaureate degree-granting programs from public institutions of higher education is limited. Community leaders have expressed a strong desire to keep local students in the region to complete their undergraduate education, and to develop more partnerships with nearby colleges and universities.<sup>17</sup>

### ***K-12 Education***

There are fifteen school districts located in the Antelope Valley. There are also seventeen private schools, most of which are religiously affiliated. Private school enrollment in Lancaster and Palmdale, which ranges from 5-7 percent for K-8 and 9-12, is somewhat lower than in Los Angeles County overall (8-10 percent).<sup>18</sup>

Enrollment in independent charter schools has been growing since 2000. There are ten active independent charters in the region, along with several dependent charter middle school academies authorized by the Antelope Valley Union High School District.

### ***Focus Districts***

For the purposes of this report we have focused our research on eight districts: the Antelope Valley Union High School District (AVUHSD) and the seven largest elementary and middle school districts that feed into the AVUHSD. In 2016-17, these districts enrolled a combined total of 78,374 students and operated ninety-four schools, academies and centers. The eight districts vary in size and, to some degree, in economic status, with two of the districts (Westside Union and Hughes-Elizabeth Lakes Union) serving lower percentages of economically disadvantaged students. The number of campuses also varies, ranging from thirty in the Palmdale School District to just one campus in Hughes-Elizabeth Lakes Union Elementary.

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<sup>17</sup> GAVEA 2017. p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 American Community Survey. Retrieved from [www.towncharts.com](http://www.towncharts.com) (August 2017)

The two largest K-8 districts—Lancaster and Palmdale—are located within the suburbs of those communities, while the districts of Westside, Eastside, Wilsona—and Keppel and Hughes-Elizabeth Lakes in particular—incorporate more remote areas. AVUHSD enrolls the largest number of students in the region and covers the greatest geographical area of any district in Los Angeles County. Figure 1 presents a map of the area and the location of the focus districts, while Table 2 provides basic data on the districts included in the study.



**Figure 1. A map of Antelope Valley focus school districts.**

**Table 2. District Enrollment Characteristics 2016-17**

District	Campuses	2016-17 Enrollment	2016-17 % Economically Disadvantaged	2016-17 % African American	2016-17 % Hispanic/Latino(a)	2016-17 % White
Antelope Valley Union High School	16	23,905	72%	18%	61%	14%
Palmdale School K-8	30	22,412	85%	15%	75%	7%
Lancaster School K-8	23	15,213	83%	29%	52%	13%
Westside Union K-8	13	9,302	45%	11%	45%	35%
Eastside Union K-8	6	3,397	86%	23%	64%	8%
Keppel Union K-8	7	2,628	86%	5%	78%	14%
Wilsona School K-8	3	1,315	93%	11%	69%	16%
Hughes-Elizabeth Lakes Union Elementary School K-8	1	202	21%	1%	28%	65%

Source: District Enrollment, 2016-17. Retrieved from California Department of Education, DataQuest, <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> (August 2017).

**Enrollment.** Population growth and demographic shifts in the AV region over the past two decades are also reflected in school enrollment. In the three largest districts included in this report (AVUHSD, Palmdale and Lancaster), student enrollment between the 1996-97 and 2016-17 school years increased by fifty-five percent in the AVUHSD, twenty percent in Palmdale, and twelve percent in Lancaster. Westside Union and Eastside Union experienced similarly large increases in enrollment (fifty-five percent and fifty-one percent respectively), while the three remaining districts saw decreases in enrollment during this same period.

The socioeconomic, cultural and racial composition of the student population also shifted during this period. All eight districts saw substantial increases in the number of economically disadvantaged students, English learners and Hispanic/Latino(a) students, and about half of the districts also saw an increase in the percentage of African American students. As shown in

Table 3, and discussed in more detail below, these demographic shifts made the local districts more reflective of the urban districts in other parts of Los Angeles County in terms of population and need.

**Table 3. Focus District 2016-17 Enrollment Comparisons<sup>19</sup>**

District	All students	African American	Hispanic/Latino(a)	White	English Learners	Economically Disadvantaged	Special Education	Foster Youth	Homeless Youth
Antelope Valley Union High School	23,905	18%	61%	14%	10%	72%	13%	2%	.9%
Palmdale School	22,412	15%	75%	7%	25%	85%	12%	3%	.8%
Lancaster School	15,213	29%	52%	13%	17%	83%	12%	3%	5%
Westside Union	9,302	11%	45%	35%	7%	45%	12%	2%	5%
Eastside Union	3,397	23%	64%	8%	27%	86%	12%	3%	--
Keppel Union	2,628	5%	78%	14%	32%	86%	16%	2%	0
Wilsona School	1,315	11%	69%	16%	30%	93%	13%	3%	.9%
Hughes-Elizabeth Lakes Union	202	1%	28%	65%	5%	21%	6%	.5%	7%
Inglewood Unified	12,750	39%	58%	.6%	29%	83%	13%	.9%	.9%
Compton Unified	23,452	19%	79%	.5%	36%	88%	11%	2%	2%
Los Angeles Unified	633,621	8%	74%	10%	25%	81%	13%	.8%	2%

Source: District Enrollment 2016-17. Retrieved from California Department of Education, DataQuest, <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> (September 2017).

Between 2000-01 and 2016-17, all eight districts saw increases in the percent of economically disadvantaged students, with the majority experiencing double-digit increases. In the high school district the percentage of disadvantaged students nearly tripled, increasing from twenty-six to seventy-two percent. (See Appendix B.)

In more recent years, these districts have experienced an increase in the number of foster and homeless youth. In the 2014-15 school year, there were 4,100 foster youth enrolled across the eight school districts. As shown in Table 4, the percentage of foster youth enrolled throughout the school year in each of the eight districts in 2014-15—approximately nine percent in two districts—exceeded the percentage of school age foster youth enrolled in Los Angeles County, and was substantially higher than the percentage of foster youth enrolled in the Los Angeles

<sup>19</sup> This table presents the percentage of foster youth who were enrolled on norm day in each of the districts and doesn't account for those students who enroll later in the school year. See footnote 20 below.

Unified School District. In 2016-17 there were also close to 1,700 homeless students enrolled within the eight districts.<sup>20</sup>

**Table 4. Percentage of All Foster Youth Enrolled throughout the 2014-15 School Year<sup>21</sup>**

District	Percent of Total Enrollment
Antelope Valley Union High School	4.0%
Palmdale School	5.6%
Lancaster School	6.5%
Westside Union	4.0%
Eastside Union	8.9%
Keppel Union	5.0%
Wilsona School	9.1%
Hughes-Elizabeth Lakes Union Elementary School	2.2%
Los Angeles County	1.7%
LAUSD	2.0%

Source: Count of Matched Foster Students by School and Grade, 2014-15. Retrieved from California Department of Education, DataQuest, <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> (August 2017).

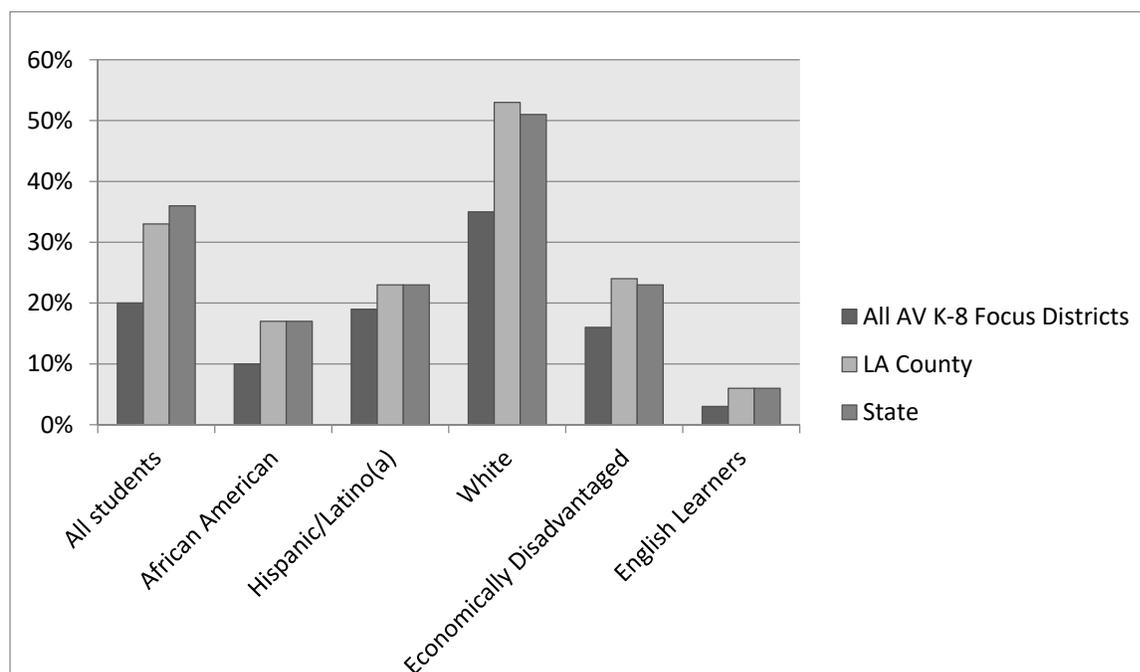
**Student Outcomes.** With some exceptions, students in the K-8 and high school districts scored below students in Los Angeles and the state on the 2016 California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) in reading, English Language Arts (ELA) and math. In most of the districts, African American, Hispanic/Latino(a), economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and in some instances, white students, performed below their county and state peers. Within the eight districts, foster youth scored well below non-foster youth in math and ELA, and had much lower high school graduation rates.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> District Enrollment by Subgroup for Charter and Non-Charter Schools, 2016-17. Retrieved from California Department of Education, DataQuest, <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> (August 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Data on foster youth enrollment reflects the total number of students enrolled throughout the school year and therefore differs from enrollment data collected on districts' norm day enrollment. 2014-15 is the only school year for which these matched data are publicly available.

<sup>22</sup> We did not include student achievement data for independent charter schools or the dependent charter middle schools in the AVUHSD district; however the percentage of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students enrolled in AVUHSD's charter middle schools who met and/or exceeded proficient on the 2016 CAASSP math assessment was the second highest (30%) within the focus districts.

As shown in Figure 2, students in the majority of the seven the **K-8 districts** scored below Los Angeles County and the state in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading proficiency and eighth grade math as measured by the 2015-16 CAASPP assessments.<sup>23</sup>



**Figure 2. CAASPP 2016 8th grade math achievement: Percent of students who met and/or exceeded standard.**

Source :CAASPP.Test Results, 2015-16. Retrieved from California Department of Education, DataQuest, <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> (September2017).

In reading proficiency, the percentage of all third grade students who scored near or above standard in five of the seven K-8 districts lagged behind percentages in Los Angeles County and the state. In general, African American and Hispanic/Latino(a) students and economically disadvantaged students also scored below county and state averages, and also below white peers in their home districts. Students with disabilities and white students in six of the districts scored lower than county and state students. In four districts, however, English learners showed higher levels of achievement than Los Angeles County and the state.

<sup>23</sup> Third grade reading scores are a key indicator for future student success, as is eighth grade math achievement. See Hernandez, D.J. (2011). *Double jeopardy: How third-grade reading skills and poverty influence high school graduation*. Baltimore: Annie E. Casey Foundation, and *Predictors of Postsecondary Success* (2013). Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.

Eighth grade math achievement, as measured by the percentage of students who met or exceeded standard, showed similar trends in all but one district, and white students again lagged behind their county and state peers in six districts. In two districts, economically disadvantaged students posted math scores equal to or greater than in county and state averages. (See Appendix B.)

A review of foster youth outcomes for 2014-15 revealed large gaps in ELA and math achievement as compared with non-foster students in the majority of the K-8 districts. In the two largest K-8 districts (Lancaster and Palmdale), foster youth scored as much as twenty percentage points lower than non-foster students in eighth grade ELA, and ten percentage points lower in third grade math, as shown on Table 5.

**Table 5. CAASPP 2015: Percent of Foster and Non-Foster Students who Met and/or Exceeded Standard**

	Lancaster School District				Palmdale School District			
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade ELA	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade ELA	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade Math	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Math	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade ELA	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade ELA	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade Math	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Math
<b>Foster Youth</b>	8%	10%	10%	8%	15%	15%	12%	4%
<b>Non-Foster Youth</b>	21%	31%	20%	12%	25%	35%	22%	22%

Source: 2014-15 CAASPP Test Results for Foster and Non-Foster Students, 2014-15. Retrieved from California Department of Education, DataQuest, <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> (August 2017).

For the *high school district*, the percentage of district students who met or exceeded standard on the 2015-16 ELA and math CAASPP assessments was lower for all students and in all district subgroups as compared to the county and state, and we again saw gaps between African American and Hispanic/Latino(a) students and white students.

In 2015-16, AVUHSD had a cohort graduation rate of 81.4 percent, which compares favorably with Los Angeles County (81.3 percent) and is just slightly below the state’s rate (83.2 percent). Over the past five years, AVUHSD has reduced its dropout rate from 12.7 percent to 8.7 percent. Graduation rates have also improved over this same period for most subgroups.

Within the district, however, there were substantial gaps in both graduation rates and drop-out rates between white students and African American and Hispanic/Latino(a) students. Economically disadvantaged students, English learners, and students with disabilities all had lower graduation rates and higher dropout rates than the student body as a whole. Foster youth had the lowest graduation rate (58.6 percent) and the highest dropout rate (27.2 percent).

The percentage of AVUHSD students completing the minimum requirements to attend UC/CSU campuses (“a-g”) has increased from 23.5 percent in 2010-11 to 31.5 percent in 2015-16. Rates for African American and Hispanic/Latino(a) students increased by seven and ten percentage points respectively during this period, but are still lower than rates for white students. Male students in all groups have persistently low rates of a-g completion. In 2015-16, only 13.8 percent of African American males, 25.4 percent of Hispanic/Latino males, and 20.3 percent of white males met UC/CSU “a-g” requirements upon graduating from high school. Their female counterparts have markedly higher rates of a-g completion. (See Appendix B.)

**District Initiatives.** All of the districts included in this report have been working to respond to changing demographics and the demands of a 21<sup>st</sup> century education by developing programs to address students’ social-emotional needs and to prepare them for college and careers. Districts have been creating more educational choices and options such as themed academies, academic and career pathways, dual immersion/biliteracy programs, and online education. Many of the districts—the AVUHSD, Palmdale, Lancaster, and Eastside Union in particular—have also put in place initiatives and policies to better support their foster youth including dedicated staff and partnerships with community organizations.

The community and the region have also been investing in STEM education and employment opportunities through partnerships between education and industries such as aerospace and engineering. This has led to an expansion of STEM-related curricula, organizations, clubs and projects. As part of this effort, local high school students designed and built unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and solar and electric cars, which they successfully entered in national and international competitions.<sup>24</sup> Districts including Lancaster, Eastside Union, and Keppel Union have also been putting a strong emphasis on professional development and training for teachers, staff and administrators.

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<sup>24</sup> GAVEA 2017. p. 10.

## V. Key Findings

### **Focus Areas**

We found much agreement among district and community leaders stakeholders as to some of the focus areas for the region. These are:

- Talent
- Transportation
- Special Populations
- External Support
- Inter-agency Coordination

*“I would like someone to realize that we struggle on a lot of fronts.”*  
–Community leader

### **Talent**

- Community agencies and school districts alike face the challenge of **recruiting and retaining personnel** in the region, especially teachers, counselors and social workers. One district reported losing 25 percent of its teachers in one year alone.

### **Transportation**

- A **lack of transportation** was frequently mentioned as a challenge, particularly for the more spread out, unincorporated areas. There can be as many as 40 miles between cities, and accessing services, especially by bus, can take an entire day. Students and families also find transportation to access district programs and resources to be a challenge, especially in the more remote districts.

*“We’re really spread out, not much is easy to walk to. You have to have a car to get around. And it’s hot!”* –District Parent

### **Special Populations**

- There is not enough capacity to meet the need for **mental health services** both within the broader community and in schools. Support for students who have experienced trauma was also cited as a growing need.
- More programs and resources are required to meet the needs of **foster youth**, and to help increase districts’ capacity to support them.

- The increasing number of **homeless individuals** is exceeding the capacity of the community to respond, and presenting great challenges for the districts that serve school-aged homeless youth.
- Nearly seven percent of the population ages five and older live in **linguistically isolated households**, and therefore may be further limited in accessing health and social service related services.<sup>25</sup>

### External Support

- An insufficient number of free or low-cost **extracurricular programs for youth** is also a critical need, especially after school and summer programs. The large number of residents commuting to jobs “down the hill” leaves many children unsupervised throughout the year.
- **Smaller districts in remote settings face unique challenges**, including a lack of resources and adequate staffing, yet they are charged with providing the same education and supports for students as larger districts. As one district leader put it, “We all have to do the same thing whether we’re big or small.”
- There is also a strong perception that this area of the Antelope Valley, which lies within Los Angeles County, **does not receive equitable resources** on a county-wide basis for community programs and services. District personnel also indicated that they have challenges accessing resources from the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE), due to the great distance they must travel to attend meetings and workshops at LACOE offices. Teachers, in particular, have difficulty traveling to access these resources, as substitute teachers are in short supply. It should be noted that LACOE is charged with serving a very large, spread out geographic area that has more than 2,000 schools and 1.5 million students.

*“Our needs are high—we get lumped in with LA County, and that eliminates some of our unique needs.” –District leader*

### Inter-agency Coordination

- **Lack of coordination** among districts, social services and community organizations, and city and county agencies was identified as a critical challenge to ensuring that students and their families have knowledge about and access to existing programs and services.
- However, our interviews also highlighted some **examples of successful collaboration** within local communities and across districts:

<sup>25</sup> Olubukola, O. and Ochoa, P. (2016). 2016 Community Health Needs Assessment. [Report]. Kaiser Foundation Hospital Panorama: Panorama City, CA. p. 8, 53. Retrieved from [https://share.kaiserpermanente.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2016-KFH-Panorama-City-CHNA\\_Final.pdf](https://share.kaiserpermanente.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2016-KFH-Panorama-City-CHNA_Final.pdf) (August 2017).

- In 2012, the City of Lancaster partnered with the Antelope Valley Partners for Health, Lancaster-based school districts, and the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health to develop and implement the **Safe Routes to School** (SRTS) program—a national program that makes it safer and easier for children to walk, bike and roll to school. This multi-year initiative created a City-wide SRTS Master Plan to support students in the thirty public schools in the Lancaster area.<sup>26</sup>
- **Districts routinely share resources** with each other, such as professional development opportunities, support for new teachers, special education and transportation. District superintendents, educational services staff, and technology staff hold regular cross-district meetings throughout the year to collaborate, and to share information and ideas. The Antelope Valley Articulation Council meets monthly to share resources and to plan collaboratively around common issues as well as to support the transition and placement of the K-8 districts’ middle school students into the high school district. A more recent effort is utilizing the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accreditation process to increase and formalize articulation and alignment of feeder schools and high school campuses. Also, with the support of the California Community Foundation, Pivot Learning has worked with district leaders to recently launch a network of districts in the Antelope Valley, focused on identifying and solving a shared problem of practice.
- Over the past few years, prior to the start of school, there have been a series of **community-wide backpack giveaways** throughout the region. As many as 10,000 backpacks containing school supplies were distributed at the start of the 2017-18 school year. These events also help to connect families with a host of services and regional employers, and bring together the school districts, community and faith-based organizations, and businesses that collaborate to organize these events. This annual effort, which was highlighted by many of the district and community representatives we interviewed, could serve as a model for organizing and addressing other issues in the community.

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<sup>26</sup> Antelope Valley Partners for Health: <http://www.avph.org/campaign/safe-routes-to-school/> (August 2017).

## VI. Recommendations

- **Coordination of services**

While there are strong examples in the region of community collaboration around specific programs and events, students and their families would greatly benefit from a more formal, coordinated approach to providing services. This could be accomplished through the establishment of community resource coordinating councils or teams that include representatives from districts, nonprofit and faith-based organizations, philanthropy, and city and county agencies. These councils could work to identify duplication of services within designated communities, address gaps, ensure more efficient use of resources, and advocate for increased support throughout the region.

*“The synergy of all the district and community organizations working together could change the landscape of outcomes: academic or health.”*

—Non-profit leader

Councils could also explore the potential for school sites to be available beyond the school day and to serve as a hub for on-site services such as counseling, health screenings and referrals, and after school and summer programs. They could also help to address existing barriers to community use of school facilities.

- **Expand services and resources for foster youth**

District and community leaders alike identified increasing support for foster youth as a critical need. FosterEd, a non-profit that works to improve educational conditions and opportunities for youth in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, has been partnering with three districts (Palmdale, Eastside Union and AVUHSD) to support the foster youth enrolled in their schools. FosterEd has also documented the lack of education- and employment-focused programs in the community, noting that only one higher education provider in the region, Antelope Valley College, has begun to invest resources for foster youth and other system-involved youth.<sup>27</sup>

Districts need more community support to ensure that foster youth are positively engaged in school and learning, and that supports are coordinated across systems. Foster and kinship families must also be engaged in this process and should receive the necessary

<sup>27</sup> FosterEd. (n.d.). *Landscape Analysis of System-Involved Youth Needs and Resources in the Antelope Valley*. Unpublished internal document.

training and support to help them navigate the education system to be effective advocates for their children.

*“What stands out the most is the absolute need for all districts to be vested in foster youth and to be accountable for ensuring success.”*

–Social services provider

- **Develop incentives to attract and retain teachers and social service providers**

This could include providing subsidies for housing to encourage relocation to the area, and/or transportation subsidies for those commuting into the region. Some districts have also worked with their labor partners to lift caps on salaries offered to veteran teachers who transfer into the district. Other strategies could include offering a bachelor’s program in social work at the local community college, and partnering with public schools of education to increase the number of teacher training programs offered in the area so as to create a pool of local residents to fill these positions.

- **Expand transportation throughout the region**

While a long term, regional strategy is needed to adequately address this issue, shorter-term solutions could include housing transportation fleets in remote areas to cut down on the time and cost to reach these communities and their school districts. The AVTA has also launched a demonstration project to utilize commuter vanpool vehicles during non-commuting hours as a public car-share program, which, if successful, could be expanded to provide transportation for families to participate in school programs and activities.

*“If we could afford to pick up our parents for events, we’d have a lot more parent engagement.”* –District principal

- **Provide more localized support for districts**

Districts leaders and staff pointed to the value of the training and support they receive from the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE). However, there is a strong need for more programs to be offered locally, especially for teachers and school leaders. There is also a need for smaller districts to receive differentiated support, particularly for administrators whose positions are cross-functional.

*“Where do small districts go and how do we get what we need?”* –District leader

## VII. Conclusion

*“It’s been a constant conversation with lawmakers: Pay attention to us, pay attention to us!” -District leader*

The Antelope Valley has long been an after-thought in the education dialogue in Los Angeles County. But in the last two decades, the student population in this immense region has continued to grow and change as the rest of county has experienced declining enrollment. Some of the shifts such as the out-migration of the African-American, Hispanic/Latino(a), English learner, foster, homeless, and low-income populations from greater Los Angeles areas have been dramatic. Yet, this shift has been largely invisible to state and local leaders who continue to focus primarily on school districts and communities that were traditional centers of these populations in central and southern Los Angeles County. In addition, the increasing cost of living and gentrification of the Los Angeles metropolitan area is leading to even more significant shifts to the county’s populations. The goal of this report is to make these students, their families and the educators who support them visible to policymakers, funders and researchers. Armed with the data from this report, we believe that key thought leaders in California can begin a new dialogue focused on bringing long overdue resources and supports to communities, students and families of the Antelope Valley.

## Bios

**Laura Steen Mulfinger** is a research associate with Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) and a research project manager at the University of Southern California's (USC) Rossier School of Education. She is currently part of a research team working to understand the portfolio management model in three large city school districts, and was also a member of the external evaluation team for the Los Angeles Unified School District's Teacher Incentive Fund grant. Prior to joining PACE and USC, she served as Director of Policy and Research at Communities for Teaching Excellence. She holds a Ph.D. in Education from Claremont Graduate University, and is co-author of *Learning From L.A.: Institutional Change in American Public Education* (Harvard Education Press, 2009).

**Allison Carter** is the Vice President, Networks and Innovation at Pivot Learning. In that role, Allison manages a network of grant-funded projects, which include three networks of school districts working together to identify and solve shared problems of practice and research-focused projects, like the Invisible California series. In her first five years at Pivot, Allison served as a Program Manager focused on designing and implementing large-scale change projects with school districts, including Los Angeles Unified School District (USD), Chicago Public Schools, Seattle Public Schools, and Sacramento City USD. Prior to joining Pivot, Allison was a Fellow at Alameda USD with Education Pioneers, and an elementary school teacher in New York City. Allison has an MA in Education Policy, Organization, and Leadership Studies from Stanford University and an MST in Elementary Education from Pace University in New York.

**Hannah Melnicoe** is a Program Associate at Pivot Learning. In that role, she has supported the development of this first paper in the Invisible California paper series. Hannah is a second year MPP student at the UC Berkeley Goldman School of Public Policy. She has four years of experience in social impact consulting at Learning for Action (LFA) in San Francisco, where she worked on evaluation, strategy, and technical assistance projects. Prior to attending UC Berkeley, she was an Education Pioneers Analyst Fellow in Marin County, where she worked on strategic data projects. She received a B.A. in Public Policy Studies from the University of Chicago.

## Appendices

### Appendix A.: Demographic and Economic Data

**Table A-1. Total Population: 2000 - 2016**

	2000	2016
Lancaster City	118,718	160,106
Palmdale City	116,670	157,356

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder, <https://factfinder.census.gov> (August 2017).

**Table A-2. Greater Antelope Valley  
Population by Age 2017**

0-17 years	26.6%
18-54 years	50.2%
55-64 years	12%
Over 65 years	11.2%

Source: GAVEA 2017, p. 14.

### Appendix B: Education Data

**Table B-1. Educational Attainment: Percent of High School Graduates or Higher**

Lancaster City	81.4%
Palmdale City	74.2%
Los Angeles County	77.3%

Source U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 American Community Survey. Retrieved from [www.towncharts.com](http://www.towncharts.com) (August 2017).

**Table B-2. Educational Attainment: Percent with Bachelor's Degree or Higher**

	TOTAL	Hispanic/ Latino(a)	African American	White
Lancaster City	15.1%	6.6%	11.8%	15.1%
Palmdale City	15.0%	6.5%	17.8%	16.6%
Los Angeles County	30.3%	10.9%	23.8%	32.3%

Source U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 American Community Survey. Retrieved from [www.towncharts.com](http://www.towncharts.com) (August 2017).

**Table B-3. Percent of Private School Enrollment 2016**

	K-8	High School
Lancaster City	7%	7%
Palmdale City	5%	6%
Los Angeles County	10%	8%

Source U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 American Community Survey. Retrieved from [www.towncharts.com](http://www.towncharts.com) (August 2017).

**Table B-4. Student Enrollment Characteristics 1996-97 to 2016-17**

District/Grade Span	Total Enrollment		African American		Hispanic		White		English Learners	
	96-97	16-17	96-97	16-17	96-97	16-17	96-97	16-17	96-97	16-17
Antelope Valley Union High School (7-12)	15,366	23,905	15%	18%	27%	61%	53%	14%	3%	10%
Palmdale School (K-8)	18,631	22,412	15%	15%	38%	75%	40.9%	7%	16%	25%
Lancaster School (K-8)	13,598	15,213	20.2%	29%	25.6%	52%	49.7%	13%	9%	17%
Westside Union (K-8)	5,995	9,302	9%	11%	15.4%	45%	70%	35%	3%	7%
Eastside Union (K-8)	2,248	3,397	17%	23%	32%	64%	49%	8%	20%	27%
Keppel Union (K-8)	3,008	2,628	11%	5%	43%	78%	44%	14%	15%	32%
Wilsona School (K-8)	2,022	1,315	16%	11%	33%	69%	48%	16%	17%	30%
Hughes-Elizabeth Lakes Union Elementary (K-8)	502	202	1%	1%	4%	28%	94%	65%	1%	5%

Source: District Enrollment, 1996-97, 2016-17. Retrieved from California Department of Education, DataQuest, <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> (July 2017).

**Table B-5. Student Enrollment Characteristics 2000-01 to 2016-17**

District	Economically Disadvantaged		Students with Disability	
	00-01	16-17	00-01	16-17
Antelope Valley Union High School	26%	72%	11%	14%
Palmdale School	59%	85%	13%	13%
Lancaster School	59%	83%	13%	12%
Westside Union	22%	45%	11%	11%
Eastside Union	58%	86%	12%	10%
Keppel Union	72%	86%	13%	15%
Wilsona School	71%	93%	19%	10%
Hughes-Elizabeth Lakes Union Elementary	18%	21%	5%	5%

Source: District Enrollment, 2000-01, 2016-17. Retrieved from California Department of Education, DataQuest, <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> (July 2017).

**Table B-6. CAASPP 2016 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading Proficiency: Percent of Students Near and Above Standard**

	State	LA County	Palmdale	Lancaster	Westside	Eastside	Keppel	Wilsona	Hughes-Elizabeth Lakes
All students	63%	61%	49%	53%	64%	45%	49%	48%	69%
African American	50%	50%	43%	42%	54%	33%	35%	36%	N/A
Hispanic/Latino(a)	54%	56%	49%	51%	62%	47%	50%	50%	N/A
White	78%	81%	63%	64%	69%	63%	46%	46%	N/A
Economically Disadvantaged	53%	54%	46%	48%	53%	44%	46%	48%	67%
Students w/disability	36%	33%	18%	18%	32%	27%	17%	7%	N/A
English learners (12 mos. +)	42%	38%	29%	44%	36%	47%	44%	52%	N/A

Source :CAASPP Test Results, 2015-16. Retrieved from California Department of Education, DataQuest, <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> (May 2017).

**Table B-7. CAASPP 2016 8th Grade Math Achievement: Percent of Students who Met and/or Exceeded Standard**

	State	LA County	Palmdale	Lancaster	Westside	Eastside	Keppel	Wilsona	Hughes-Elizabeth Lakes
All students	36%	33%	17%	15%	37%	11%	24%	12%	22%
African American	17%	17%	10%	8%	21%	5%	20%	0%	n/a
Hispanic/Latino(a)	23%	23%	17%	15%	33%	14%	23%	9%	n/a
White	51%	53%	25%	26%	44%	13%	33%	28%	34%
Economically Disadvantaged	23%	24%	15%	12%	27%	10%	24%	11%	n/a
Students w/disability	7%	6%	1%	1%	6%	0%	0%	10%	n/a
English learners (12 mos. +)	6%	6%	2%	3%	5%	4%	6%	0%	n/a

Source :CAASPP Test Results, 2015-16. Retrieved from California Department of Education, DataQuest, <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> (May 2017).

**Table B-8. CAASPP 2016 11<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA and Math Achievement Percent who Met and/or Exceeded Standard**

	State		LA County		AVUHSD	
	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	ELA	Math
All students	59%	33%	58%	30%	43%	15%
African American	41%	14%	39%	14%	26%	6%
Hispanic/Latino(a)	50%	20%	53%	22%	44%	13%
White	71%	44%	72%	47%	60%	24%
Economically Disadvantaged	49%	21%	52%	24%	40%	12%
Students w/disability	16%	5%	16%	4%	7%	1%

Source :CAASPP.Test Results, 2015-16. Retrieved from California Department of Education, DataQuest, <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> (May 2017).

**Table B-9. AVUHSD Cohort Graduation and Dropout Rate**

	AVHUSD Cohort Grad Rate 2010-11	AVHUSD Cohort Dropout Rate 2010-11	AVHUSD Cohort Grad Rate 2015-16	AVHUSD Cohort Dropout Rate 2015-16	LA County Cohort Grad Rate 2015-16	LA County Cohort Dropout Rate 2015-16	State Cohort Grad Rate 2015-16	State Cohort Dropout Rate 2015-16
All Students	77.3%	12.7%	81.4%	8.7%	81.3%	10.6%	83.2%	9.8%
Hispanic/Latino(a)	77.4%	11.8%	81.0%	8.4%	79.3%	11.5%	80.0%	11.6%
African American	68.3%	19.8%	76.2%	12.8%	72.5%	16.0%	72.6%	17.1%
White	84.6%	8.0%	87.7%	5.4%	86.5%	8.2%	88.1%	6.9%
English Learners	73.4%	14.2%	65.8%	15.8%	67.3%	17.9%	72.1%	15.8%
Foster Youth	N/A	N/A	58.6%	27.2%	47.1%	32.2%	50.8%	30.7%
Students w/Disability	52.0%	13.2%	62.4%	13.3%	63.7%	14.7%	65.5%	13.8%
Economically Disadvantaged	72.8%	14.6%	78.8%	10.0%	78.5%	11.9%	79.3%	11.9%

Source: Cohort Outcome Summary, 2010-11, 2015-16. Retrieved from California Department of Education, DataQuest, <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> (August 2017).

**Table B-10. Percent of Graduates Meeting UC and/or CSU Requirements “a-g” Requirements in AVHUSD**

	AVHUSD 2010-11	LA County 2010-11	State 2010-11	AVHUSD 2015-16	LA County 2015-16	State 2015-16
All Students	23.5%	38.2%	36.9%	31.5%	49.6%	45.4%
Hispanic/Latino(a)	20.4%	30.9%	26.7%	30.8%	44.5%	37.2%
African American	16.9%	32.0%	27.5%	23.6%	38.7%	34.4%
White	30.6%	48.0%	43.9%	38.1%	57.5%	51.7%
Economically Disadvantaged	21.2%	32.5%	27.4%	29.8%	45.2%	36.7%

Source: # of Grads and Grads meeting UC/CSU Entrance Requirements, 2010-11, 2015-16. Retrieved from California Department of Education, DataQuest, <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> (August 2017).

**Table B-11. Percent of Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Male/Female Students Meeting UC and/or CSU “a-g” Requirements in AVHUSD**

	AVHUSD 2010-11	AVHUSD 2015-16
Hispanic/Latino(a)	21.5%	31.5%
Males	15.9%	25.4%
Females	26.0%	37.0%
African American	17.1%	20.1%
Males	12.9%	13.8%
Females	19.8%	25.6%
White	23.0%	30.5%
Males	16.7%	20.3%
Females	29.6%	39.4%

Source: # of Grads and Grads meeting UC/CSU Entrance Requirements, 2010-11, 2015-16. Retrieved from California Department of Education, DataQuest, <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> (August 2017).

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## About

Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) is an independent, non-partisan research center based at Stanford University, the University of Southern California, and the University of California – Davis. PACE seeks to define and sustain a long-term strategy for comprehensive policy reform and continuous improvement in performance at all levels of California's education system, from early childhood to postsecondary education and training. PACE bridges the gap between research and policy, working with scholars from California's leading universities and with state and local policymakers to increase the impact of academic research on educational policy in California.

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- Works with local school districts and professional associations on projects aimed at supporting policy innovation, data use, and rigorous evaluation



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