

Idaho Public Charter School Commission 2016 Annual Report

A Year in Review

Thank you for your interest in Idaho's public charter schools. The Public Charter School Commission (PCSC) is Idaho's largest authorizer, with a portfolio comprising 71% of Idaho's 52 charters. Our mission is to protect student and public interests by balancing high standards of accountability with respect for the autonomy of public charter schools. We endeavor to implement best practices and enforce compliance with Idaho statute in order to ensure the excellence of public charter school options for Idaho families.

During 2016, the PCSC began its inaugural charter renewal cycle, developing new processes in accordance with 2013 legislation and conducting evaluations of schools scheduled for renewal consideration in spring 2017. While renewal decisions must be based on schools' outcomes on the performance framework, the renewal process also included multiple opportunities for schools to share additional performance data and contextual information.



Over the past three years, significant and ongoing changes to the state's school accountability system have impacted the ability of the performance framework to function as intended. The PCSC is in the process of developing a new framework that will both reflect the state's new accountability system and accommodate future policy shifts.

Our portfolio has expanded to include two new schools: Alturas International Academy and Gem Prep: Pocatello. AIA offers an International Baccalaureate program to Idaho Falls area students. GPP operates in Pocatello, providing students with a blended online and onsite educational program based on the successes of Idaho Distance Education Academy.

During 2016, the PCSC welcomed two, new Commissioners. We extend heartfelt thanks to outgoing Commissioners Gayle O'Donahue and Gayann DeMordaunt, both of whose service has proved invaluable to our state's charter school community over many years.

We invite you to join us in supporting a high-quality charter school sector in Idaho.

Sincerely,

Alan Reed, Chairman

Tamara L. Baysinger, Director

February 2017

Portfolio Overview

The PCSC's portfolio comprises 37 public charter schools. These schools are located all across the state, in both rural and urban communities. Their time in operation ranges from one to eighteen years. They offer an array of educational choices: Core Knowledge, Expeditionary Learning, Harbor, Montessori, Classical, Waldorf, International Baccalaureate, and more. Several are alternative schools, and others focus on underserved or at-risk populations while welcoming all students who wish to attend. Seven are categorized as virtual schools.

PCSC PORTFOLIO SCHOOL	YEAR	LOCATION	GRADES	METHOD
Alturas International Academy	2016	Idaho Falls	K-8	International Baccalaureate
American Heritage Charter School	2013	Idaho Falls	K-12	Core Knowledge
Another Choice Virtual School	2010	Treasure Valley	K-12	Virtual, Special Needs
Bingham Academy	2014	Blackfoot	9-12	Postsecondary Preparation
Blackfoot Community Charter Learning Center	2000	Blackfoot	K-8	Brain-Based, Multi-Age
Chief Tahgee Elementary Academy	2013	Fort Hall	K-6	Language Immersion
Coeur d' Alene Charter Academy	1999	Coeur d'Alene	6-12	College Prep
Compass Public Charter School	2005	Meridian	K-12	Compass Method
Conner Academy (formerly The Academy)	2006	Pocatello	K-8	Harbor
Falcon Ridge Public Charter School	2005	Kuna	K-8	Harbor
Gem Prep: Pocatello	2016	Pocatello	K-6	Blended Online/Onsite
Heritage Academy	2011	Jerome	K-8	Schoolwide Enrichment
Heritage Community Charter School	2011	Caldwell	K-8	Classical, Dual-Language
Idaho College and Career Readiness Academy	2014	Statewide	9-12	Career Technical
Idaho Connects Online	2009	Statewide	6-12	Virtual
Idaho Science and Technology Charter School	2009	Blackfoot	4-8	Science & Technology
Idaho Virtual Academy	2002	Statewide	K-12	Virtual
INSPIRE Connections Academy	2005	Statewide	K-12	Virtual
iSucceed Virtual High School	2008	Statewide	9-12	Virtual
Kootenai Bridge Academy	2009	Coeur d'Alene	11-12	Virtual, Credit Recovery
Legacy Charter School	2011	Nampa	K-8	Harbor
Liberty Charter School	1999	Nampa	K-12	Harbor
Monticello Montessori Charter School	2010	Ammon	K-6	Montessori
North Idaho STEM Charter Academy	2012	Rathdrum	K-12	STEM
North Star Charter School	2003	Eagle	K-12	International Baccalaureate
North Valley Academy	2008	Gooding	K-12	Core Knowledge
Palouse Prairie Charter School	2009	Moscow	K-8	Expeditionary Learning
Richard McKenna Charter School	2002	Mountain Home	K-12	Montessori K-8, Virtual Alt. HS
Rolling Hills Public Charter School	2005	Boise	K-8	Harbor
Sage International School of Boise	2010	Boise	K-12	International Baccalaureate
Syringa Mountain School	2014	Ketchum	K-6	Waldorf Inspired
Taylor's Crossing Public Charter School	2006	Idaho Falls	K-12	Harbor
The Village Charter School	2011	Boise	K-8	7 Habits & Leadership
Victory Charter School	2004	Nampa	K-12	Harbor
Vision Charter School	2007	Caldwell	K-12	Classical
White Pine Charter School	2003	Idaho Falls	K-8	Core Knowledge
Xavier Charter School	2007	Twin Falls	K-12	Classical

Approximately 16,175 students were served by the PCSC's portfolio schools during the 2015-16 school year. About 4,975 of these were enrolled in virtual charter schools. Idaho also offered 15 district-authorized charter schools. The total number of public charter school students in Idaho was approximately 20,340, representing only a slight increase from 2015.

Who We Are

The PCSC's seven members hail from all around the state. Commissioners are appointed by the Governor (3 members), Senate Pro Tempore (2 members), or Speaker of the House (2 members). They serve four year terms; statute provides for a two-term limit. Officers are elected every two years in the spring.

The PCSC office is staffed by the Office of the State Board of Education and includes 4 FTE: Director Tamara Baysinger, Charter Schools Program Manager Kirsten Pochop, Accountability Program Manager Jennifer Barbeau, and Administrative Assistant Chelsea Cantrell.

The PCSC's fiscal year 2017 budget is \$498,100, an increase of 6.4% from fiscal year 2016. The PCSC's FY17 revenue represents a combination of authorizer fees and state funds appropriated as part of the State Board of Education's budget.

In its October 2013 Authorizing Roadmap, the National Association of Charter School Authorizers provided a comparison of PCSC resources compared to those of similar authorizers. Below, that comparison has been updated to reflect FY16 data.

Authorizer	# of Schools	FTE	Budget
CO CSI	39	18	\$3,107,735
HI PCSC	34	18	\$1,815,700
Idaho PCSC	37	4	\$498,100

In recent years, the addition of 1.5 FTE has enabled us to spend more time visiting with school leaders, developing resources, providing training opportunities, and considering both hard data and "soft" observations to better understand the impact of each school on its students and community. We have also worked to develop a transparent and meaningful charter renewal process.

We are currently exploring opportunities for increased implementation of best practices, such as engaging teams of independent consultants to perform pre-renewal site visits. Such visits represent best authorizing practice, as they offer schools an additional opportunity to provide context for their performance outcomes. They also provide decision-makers with outside, expert opinions regarding individual schools' operations.

Additionally, we are engaging with professional colleagues and stakeholders to develop an updated performance framework. The new framework will dovetail with ESSA and the state's accountability system, provide additional opportunities to understand student growth, and consider schools' unique successes. It will also have the flexibility to remain functional in the event of statewide policy or assessment changes.

OUR COMMISSIONERS

Chairman Alan Reed
Idaho Falls
Term: 2014 - 2018

Vice-Chair Brian Scigliano
Boise
Term: 2016 - 2020

Commissioner Evan Frasure
Pocatello
Term: 2015 - 2019

Commissioner Kelly Murphey
Castleford
Term: 2014 - 2018

Commissioner Wanda Quinn
Coeur d'Alene
Term: 2016 - 2020

Commissioner Sherrilynn Bair
Firth
Term: 2016 - 2020

Commissioner Nils Peterson
Moscow
Term: 2017 - 2019

We also thank former Commissioners
Gayle O'Donahue and Gayann
DeMordaunt.

What We Do

As an authorized chartering entity, the PCSC's role is to protect students and taxpayers by overseeing the quality of the charter schools it authorizes. We also endeavor to protect the autonomy of charter school boards, focusing on performance outcomes while giving schools as much freedom to direct their own inputs as the law allows.

Authorizing work can be divided into three phases: Petition review, ongoing oversight, and charter renewal. Each of these phases demands a different focus, but our goals are always to encourage innovation and ensure quality.

Petition Review

The petition review phase focuses on evaluating new charter petitions with the following question in mind:

Is it likely that this proposal will result in a successful, high-quality school that serves a community need?

Petition reviews consider:

- Quality of the educational program,
- Adequacy of financial resources, and
- Capacity of the founding board.

Upon approval of a new charter petition, the PCSC and school sign a performance certificate and framework detailing the academic and operational performance expectations and measures against which the school will be evaluated.

Ongoing Oversight

The ongoing oversight phase focuses on keeping schools and stakeholders appraised of performance outcomes relative to the standards contained in the performance certificate and framework.

Each PCSC portfolio school receives annual performance reports reflecting its academic, operational, and financial status. Schools are encouraged to use this information for strategic planning and to ensure that any identified weaknesses are addressed in advance of renewal consideration.

The PCSC endeavors to limit the reporting burden on its portfolio schools. Data contained in annual performance reports is gathered primarily through ISEE and independent fiscal audits. Most PCSC portfolio schools need to submit only a few, additional reports to the PCSC:

- Semi-annual financial updates,
- An annual board membership update, and
- Mission-specific performance data (optional).

Charter Renewal

Charter renewal is an important process for both authorizers and schools. At the end of a school's performance certificate term, authorizers must evaluate performance outcomes in the light of contextual factors and determine whether or not the school should continue to be entrusted with students' time and taxpayers' resources for another five-year term. Schools must make their cases for renewal, demonstrating either strong performance outcomes or clear evidence that their outcomes, despite room for improvement, still reflect success. This thoughtfully-applied bedrock of accountability is at the heart of the charter school movement.

Charter Renewal

During 2016, the PCSC implemented a new, charter renewal process. Most of the schools whose terms were ending had earned low ratings on the state's former accountability system; many of them served challenging student populations. We placed a priority on providing schools with multiple opportunities to share contextual detail and auxiliary performance data to augment the information already captured by their annual performance reports. Site visits, while not a deciding factor in renewals, provided context and independent expertise.

The PCSC worked with schools beginning over a year in advance of the renewal decision deadline. Schools and the PCSC were able to overcome a tight statutory timeline, which begins in November and ends in March. Everyone's timely and thoughtful correspondence was much appreciated.

The renewal process is outlined below, with statutory requirements shown in blue text. Many additional steps were taken by the PCSC to ensure transparency and opportunity for schools to share their perspectives.

March of Pre-Renewal Year	PCSC staff meets with school leadership to introduce the renewal process and discuss any concerns regarding school outcomes.
May of Pre-Renewal Year	PCSC issues renewal application and guidance to schools. (Statutory deadline for issuance is November 15.)
July 15	Schools may submit auxiliary performance data (optional).
Fall of Renewal Year	Evaluation team, including independent expert, makes a site visit to the school. Their observations may inform, but cannot be the basis of, renewal recommendations.
November 15	PCSC issues performance reports to schools. Renewal application and guidance are provided again.
December 15	Schools submit completed renewal applications to PCSC.
January 15	PCSC issues recommendations to schools. Schools may sign consent agreements or request public hearings.
January 25	Schools respond with either signed consent agreements or requests for public hearings.
January 27	PCSC and any schools requesting public hearings exchange exhibits.
February PCSC Regular Meeting	Public hearings are held to consider evidence regarding renewal year schools. Schools may call witnesses and be represented by counsel.
Within 7 days of the February PCSC Regular Meeting	Parties may submit written closing arguments to PCSC office (optional).
By March 15	PCSC makes final renewal or non-renewal determinations.

In January 2017, all twelve schools under renewal consideration signed consent agreements, expressing their agreement with PCSC recommendations. All twelve were recommended for renewal, some with conditions crafted to reflect the need for improvement while respecting realities such as highly mobile, at-risk, low-income, or otherwise challenging student populations.

Summary of 2016 Performance Outcomes

The following chart provides an “at a glance” summary of each PCSC portfolio school’s performance outcomes in the areas of academics, operations, and finance.

Each academic subject is shaded according to whether the school’s ISAT proficiency rate exceeded or fell short of the state’s proficiency rate. Light gray shading indicates that the school’s results were higher than the statewide proficiency rate; dark gray indicates lower results.

In the operational and financial categories, results are color-coded by schools’ accountability designations as detailed in their individual annual performance reports. The four accountability designations are honor (blue), good standing (green), remediation (yellow), and critical (red).

For schools that offer both general and alternative programs, only general population results are reflected in this chart.

PCSC PORTFOLIO SCHOOL	MATH	ELA	SCIENCE	OPERATIONAL	FINANCIAL
American Heritage Charter School					
Coeur d'Alene Charter Academy					
Compass Public Charter School					
Falcon Ridge Public Charter School					
Legacy Charter School					
Liberty Charter School					
North Idaho STEM Charter Academy					
North Star Charter School					
Palouse Prairie Charter School					
Rolling Hills Public Charter School					
Sage International School of Boise					
Taylor's Crossing Public Charter School					
Victory Charter School					
Vision Charter School					
White Pine Charter School					
Xavier Charter School					
Connor Academy					
Bingham Academy					
INSPIRE Connections Academy (Virtual)					
iSucceed Virtual School (Virtual)					
Idaho Virtual Academy (Virtual)					
Monticello Montessori Charter School					
Richard McKenna Charter School					
Syringa Mountain School					
Another Choice Virtual School (Virtual)					
Blackfoot Charter Community Learning Center					
Chief Tahgee Elementary Academy					
Heritage Academy					
Heritage Community Charter School					
Idaho College and Career Readiness Academy (Virtual)					
Idaho Connects Online (Virtual)					
Idaho Science and Technology Charter School					
Kootenai Bridge Academy (Virtual Alt.)					
North Valley Academy					
The Village Charter School					

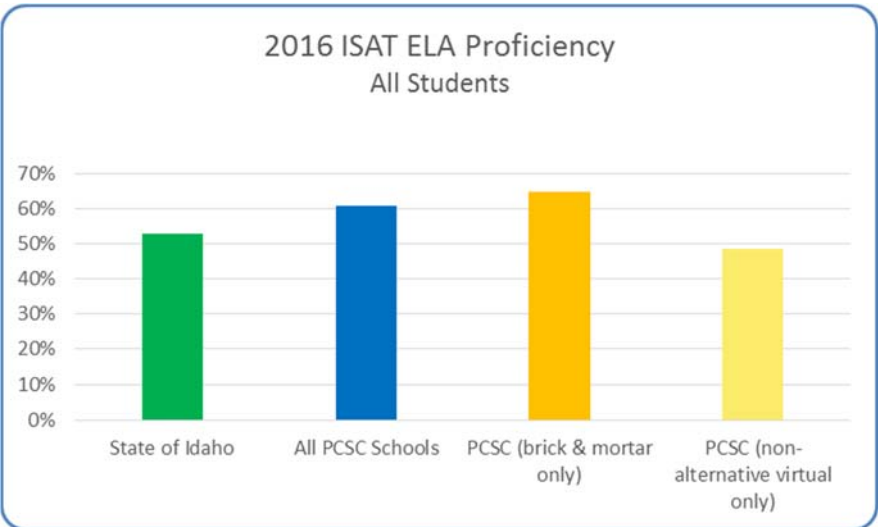
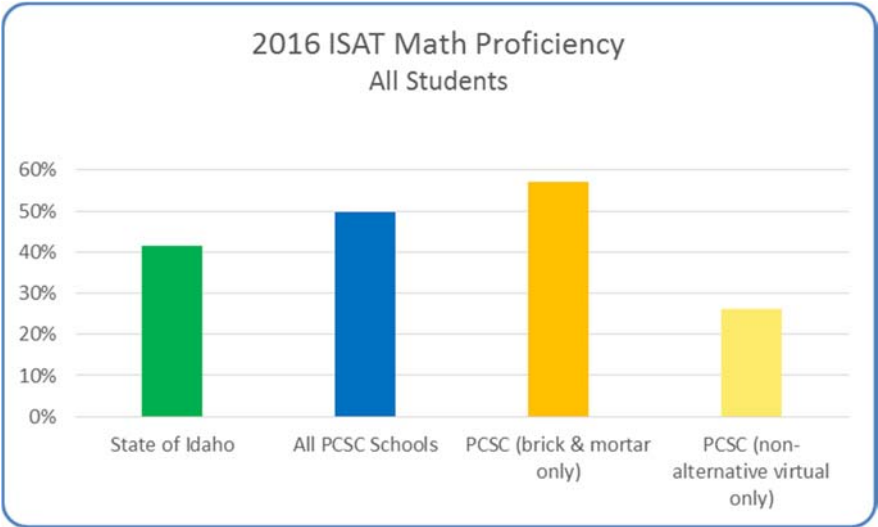
Academic Outcomes

When assessing the overall quality of the schools in its portfolio, the PCSC focuses primarily on academic outcomes. Because the state’s accountability system remains in flux, 2016 data is limited. Student growth data remains unavailable. Schoolwide change data indicates that, between 2015 and 2016, about half of PCSC portfolio schools saw an improvement in math and ELA proficiency rates, while the other half experienced a decline.

Comparisons of proficiency rates between PCSC portfolio schools and their surrounding districts give us some information about charter schools’ performance. Additional data, such as growth and extended cohort graduation rates, is necessary for a more complete understanding. The PCSC is presently working toward the adoption of a new performance framework that will reflect more fully the successes and challenges of individual schools.

Information regarding each school’s educational program, student demographics, and performance outcomes may be found in the school’s annual performance report, available at chartercommission.idaho.gov.

Overall, PCSC portfolio schools show higher math and ELA proficiency rates than the state averages. Brick and mortar charters in the PCSC portfolio tend to have higher proficiency rates than PCSC-authorized virtual schools.

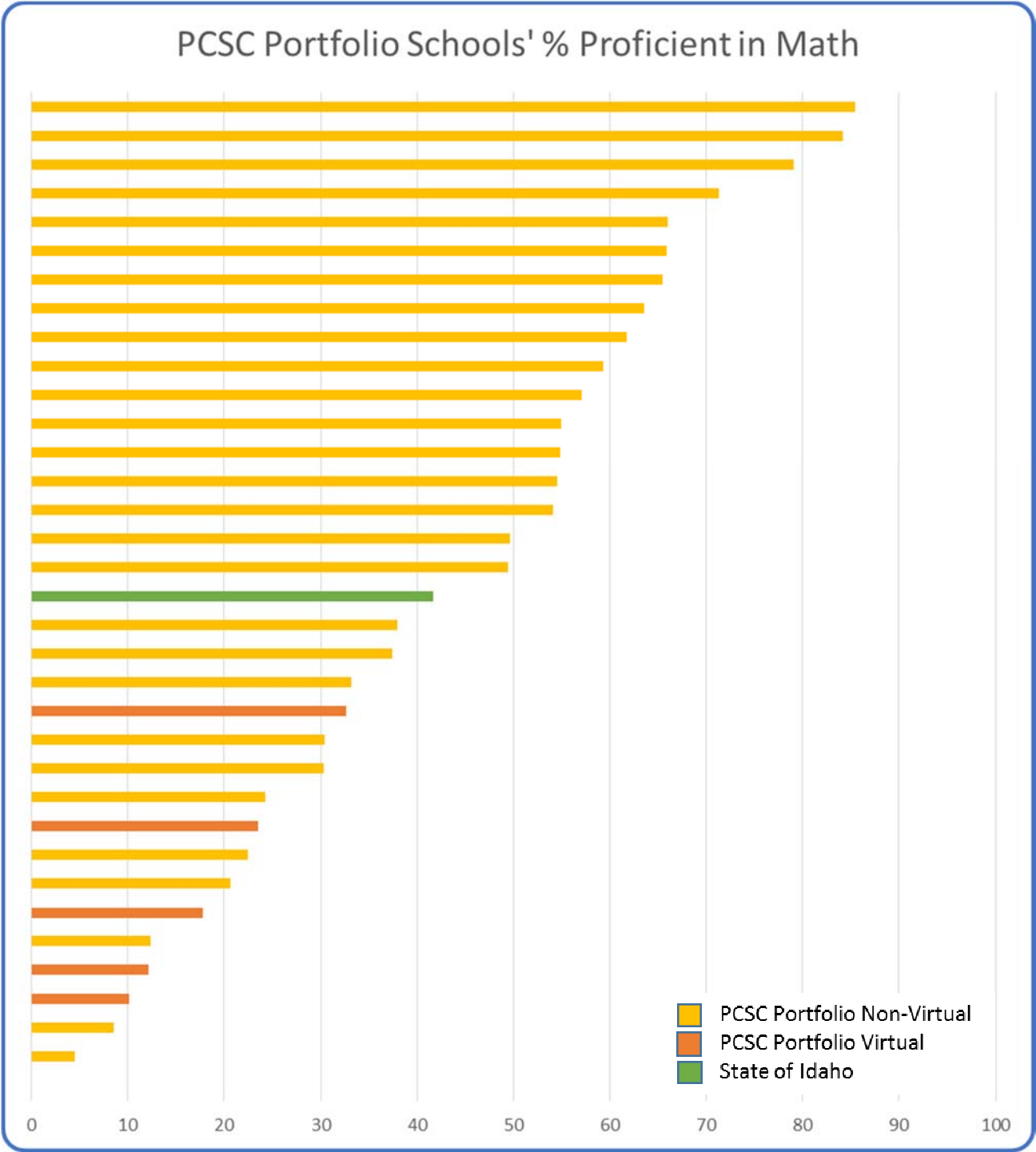


Math

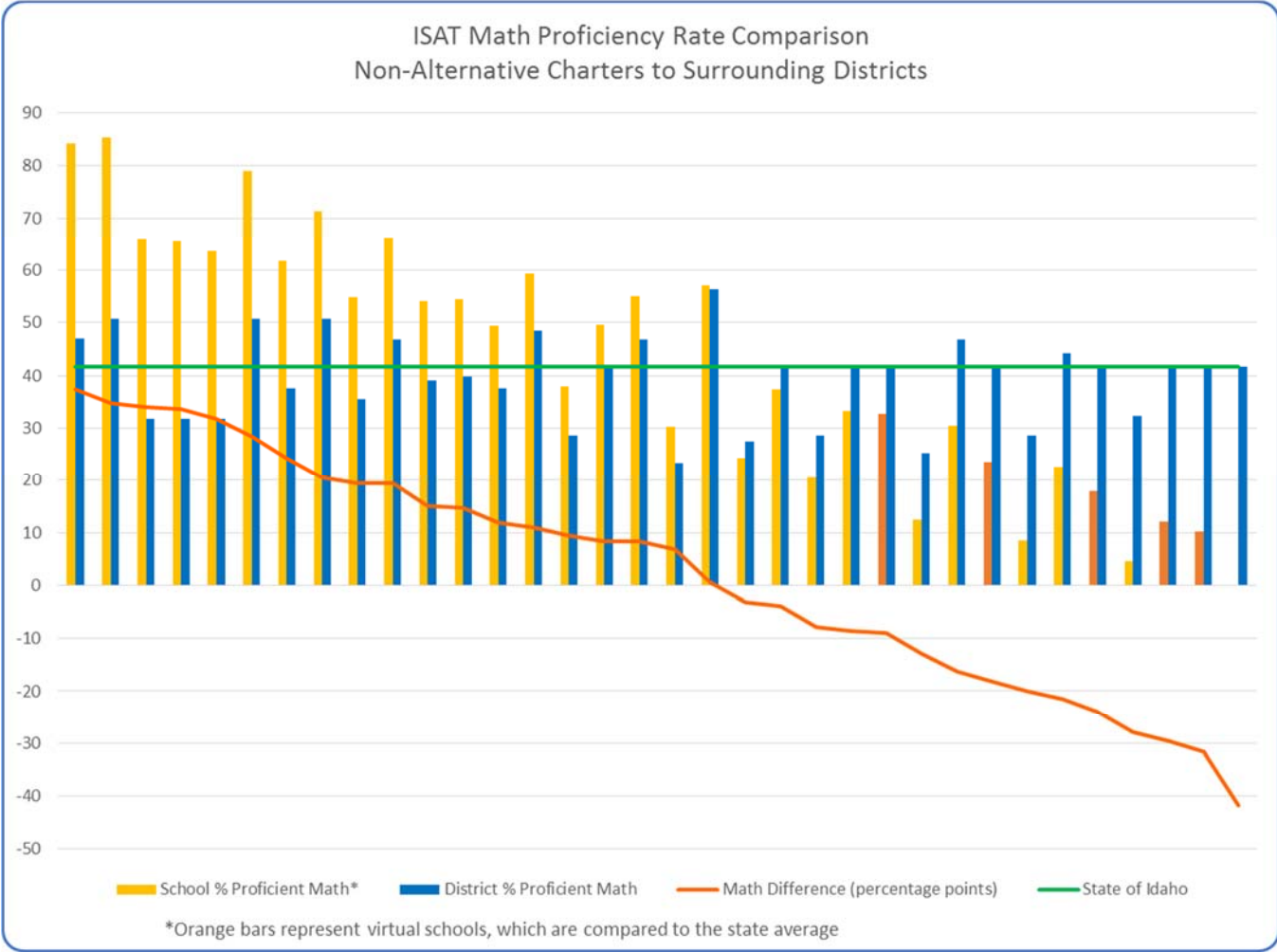
The following chart compares PCSC portfolio schools' 2016 ISAT math proficiency rates to the state average.

50% of all non-alternative PCSC portfolio schools had ISAT math proficiency rates that exceeded the state average.

63% of non-virtual PCSC portfolio schools had ISAT math proficiency rates that exceeded the state average.



The following chart compares PCSC portfolio schools' 2016 math proficiency rates to those of neighboring or similar schools. The "surrounding district" data represented by the blue columns describes other public schools that are located in the same geographical area. In the case of virtual schools, which serve multiple districts or the entire state, the State of Idaho is used for comparison in place of the surrounding district. The red line represents the degree of difference between each school and its comparison group.



56% of all non-alternative PCSC portfolio schools had ISAT math proficiency rates that exceeded those of their surrounding school districts.

68% of non-virtual PCSC portfolio schools had ISAT math proficiency rates that exceeded those of their surrounding school districts.

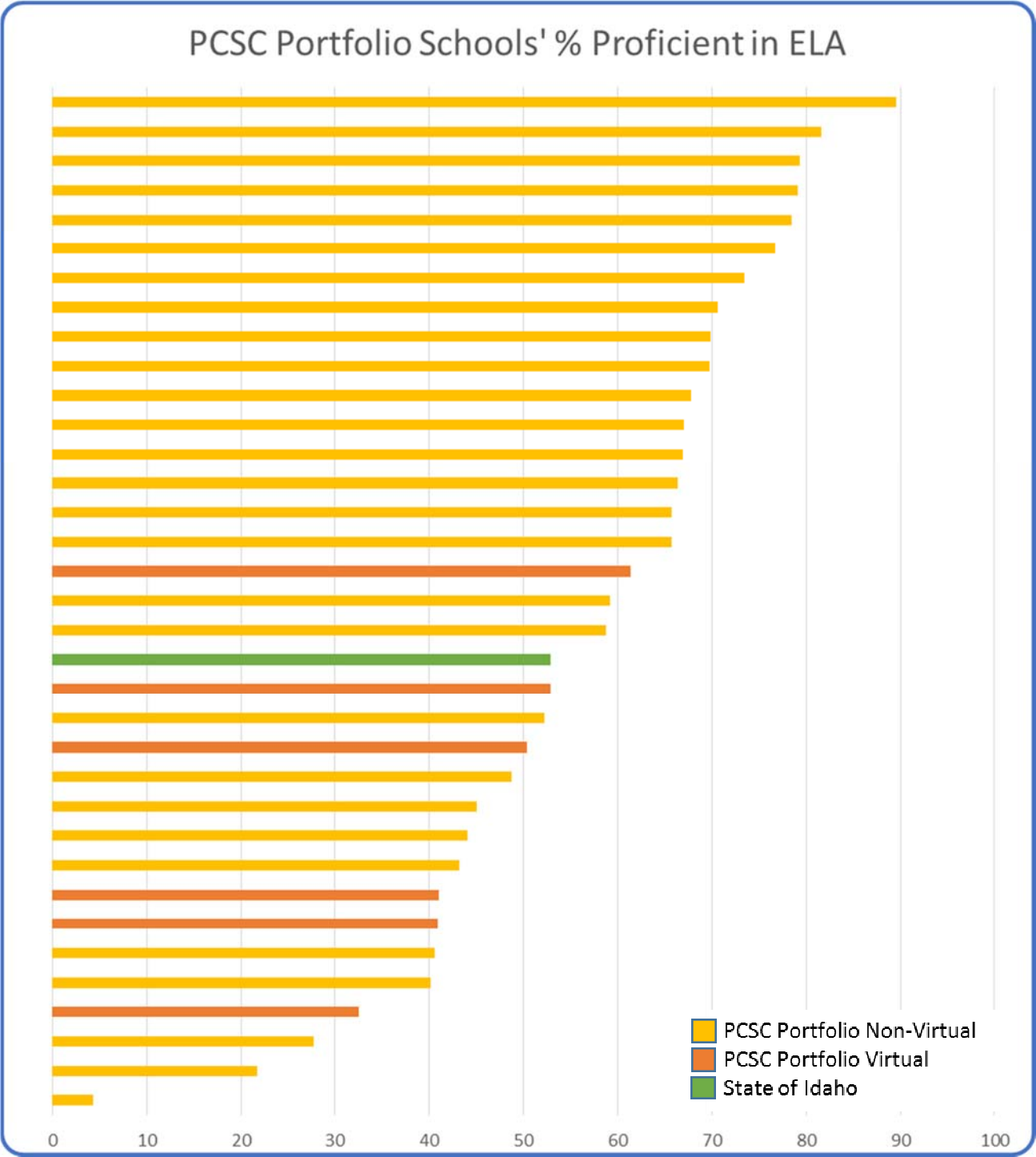
PCSC portfolio schools' outcomes ranged from 37 percentage points higher than the relevant comparison group to 42 percentage points lower than the relevant comparison group.

English Language Arts

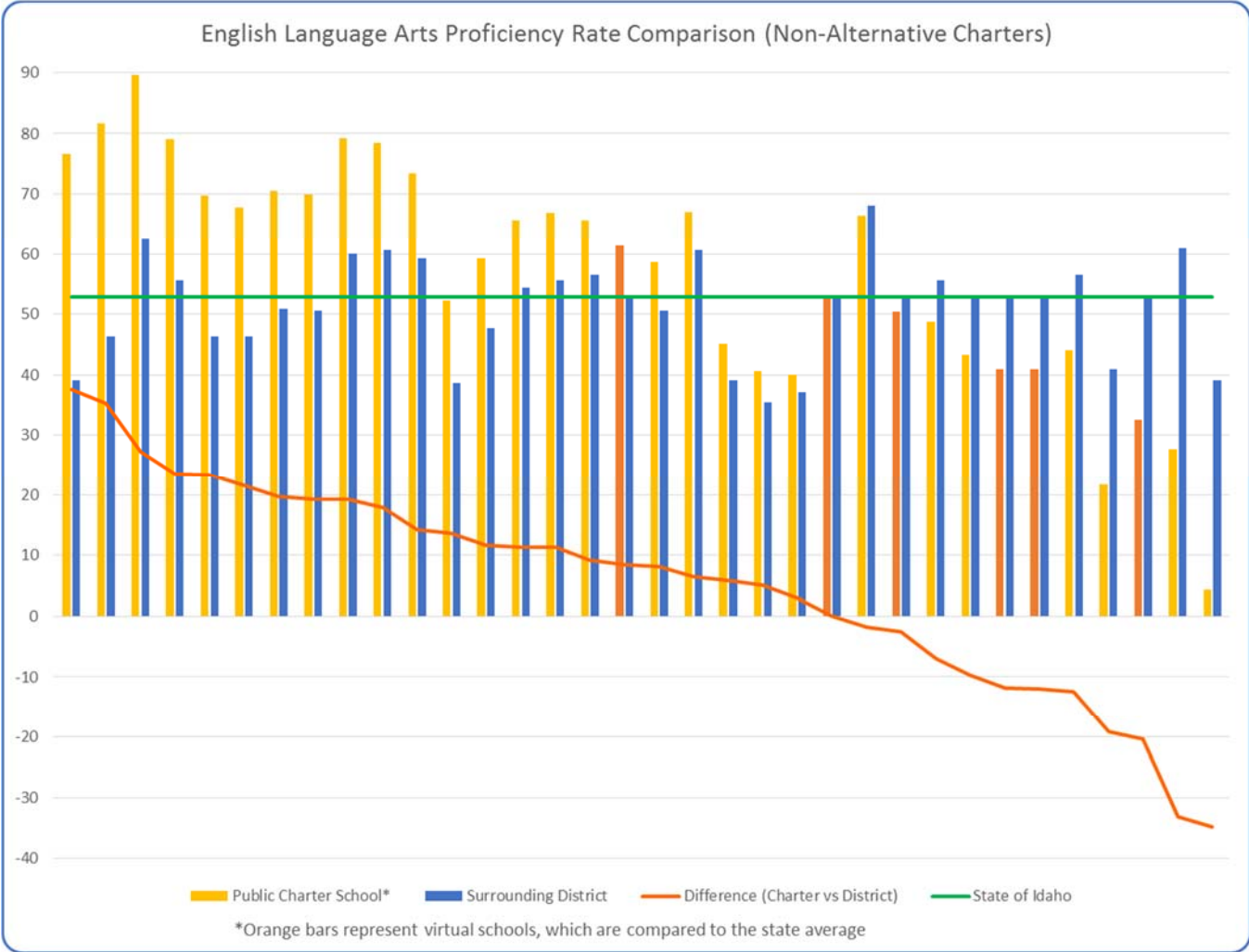
The following chart compares PCSC portfolio schools' 2016 ISAT ELA proficiency rates to the state average.

59% of all non-alternative PCSC portfolio schools had ISAT ELA proficiency rates that met or exceeded the state average.

67% of non-virtual PCSC portfolio schools had ISAT ELA proficiency rates that exceeded the state average.



The following chart compares PCSC portfolio schools' 2016 ELA proficiency rates to those of neighboring or similar schools. The "surrounding district" data represented by the blue columns describes other public schools that are located in the same geographical area. In the case of virtual schools, which serve multiple districts or the entire state, the State of Idaho is used for comparison in place of the surrounding district. The red line represents the degree of difference between each school and its comparison group.



68% of all non-alternative PCSC portfolio schools had ISAT ELA proficiency rates that exceeded those of their surrounding school districts.

75% of non-virtual PCSC portfolio schools had ISAT ELA proficiency rates that exceeded those of their surrounding school districts.

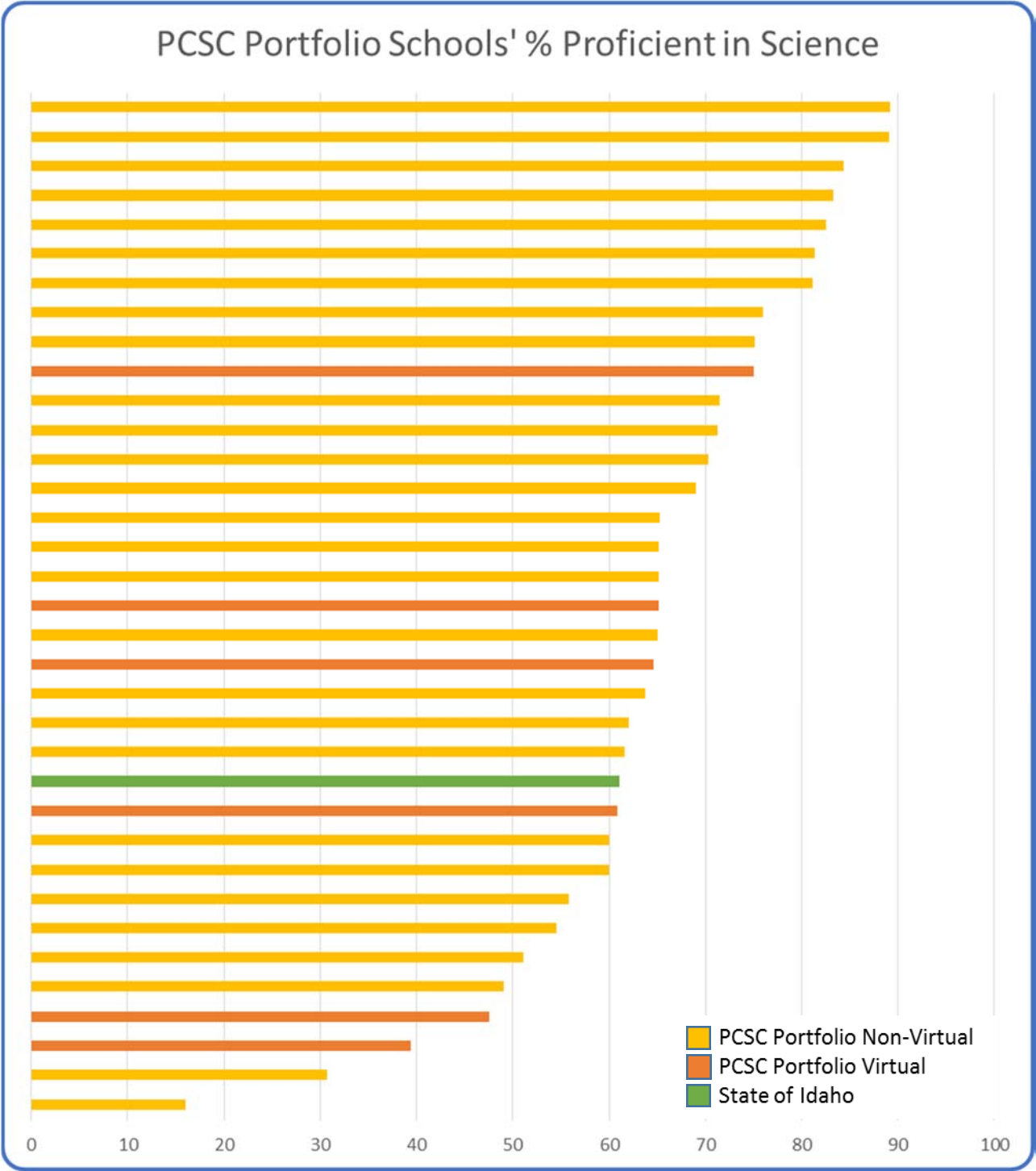
PCSC portfolio schools' outcomes ranged from 38 percentage points higher than the relevant comparison group to 35 percentage points lower than the relevant comparison group.

Science

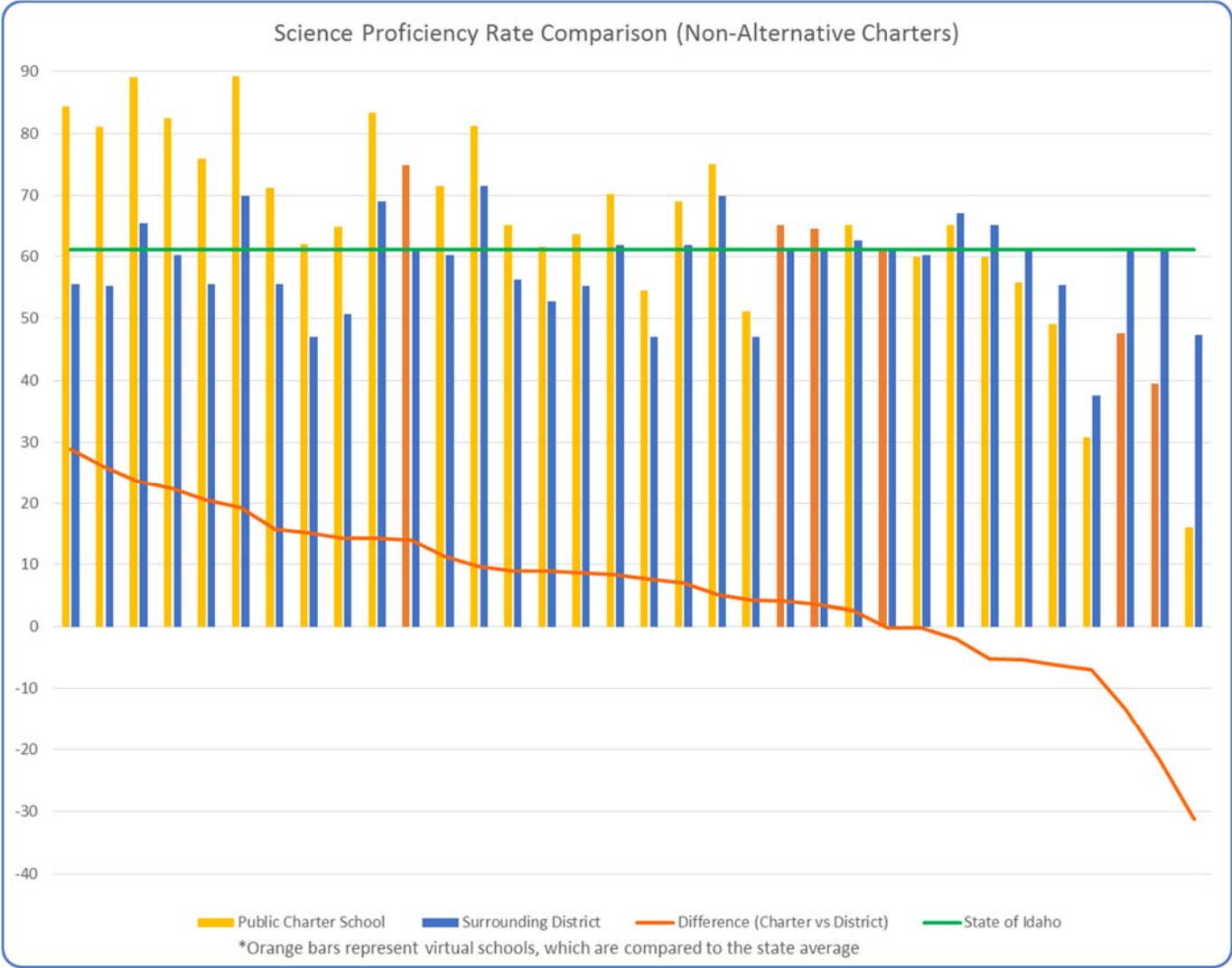
The following chart compares PCSC portfolio schools' 2016 ISAT science proficiency rates to the state average.

68% of all non-alternative PCSC portfolio schools had ISAT science proficiency rates that met or exceeded the state average.

71% of non-virtual PCSC portfolio schools had ISAT science proficiency rates that exceeded the state average.



The following chart compares PCSC portfolio schools' 2016 science proficiency rates to those of neighboring or similar schools. The "surrounding district" data represented by the blue columns describes other public schools that are located in the same geographical area. In the case of virtual schools, which serve multiple districts or the entire state, the State of Idaho is used for comparison in place of the surrounding district. The red line represents the degree of difference between each school and its comparison group.



71% of all non-alternative PCSC portfolio schools had ISAT science proficiency rates that exceeded those of their surrounding school districts.

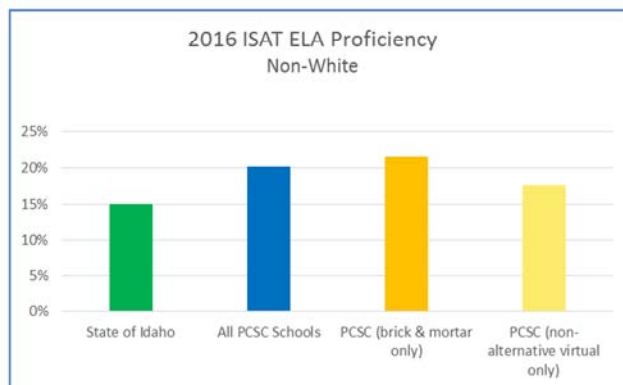
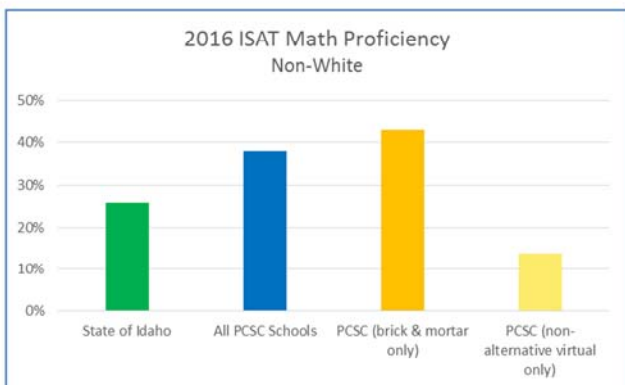
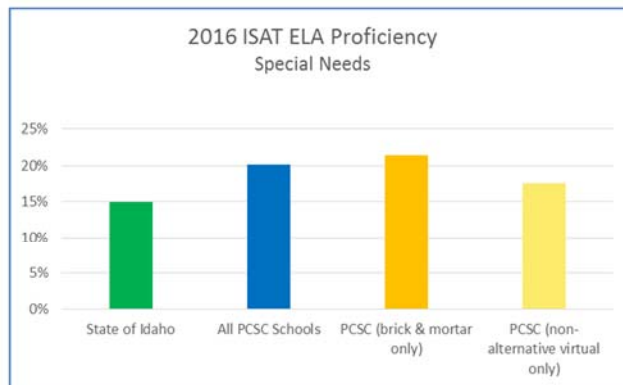
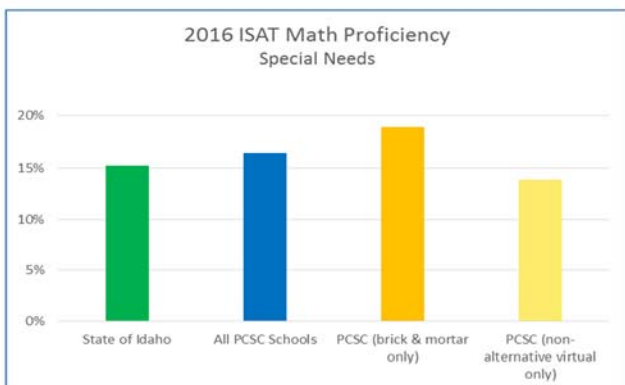
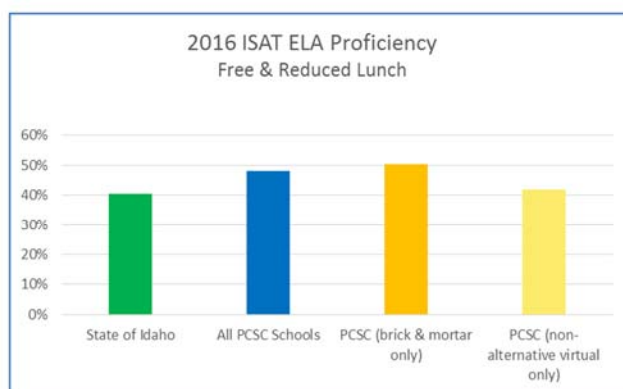
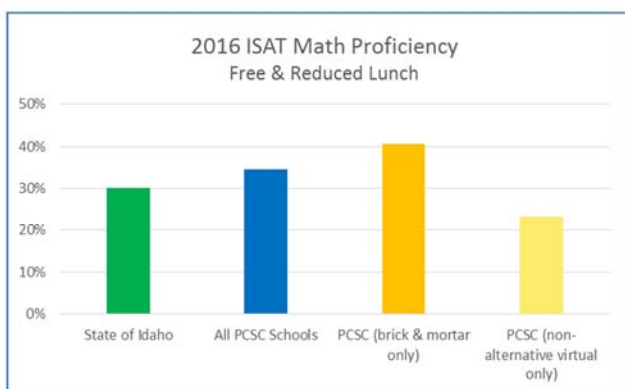
75% of non-virtual PCSC portfolio schools had ISAT science proficiency rates that exceeded those of their surrounding school districts.

PCSC portfolio schools' outcomes ranged from 29 percentage points higher than the relevant comparison group to 31 percentage points lower than the relevant comparison group.

Special Populations

Idaho's public charter schools tend to be less demographically diverse than the state's traditional public schools. Although there are notable exceptions, most PCSC portfolio schools enroll smaller percentages of free & reduced lunch qualifying students, non-white students, and students with special needs than their traditional counterparts. Very few students with limited English proficiency are enrolled in PCSC portfolio schools, a discrepancy many schools are working to reduce.

All students are welcome to attend Idaho's public charter schools. The data shown below indicates that subpopulations are well served by the majority of PCSC portfolio schools.



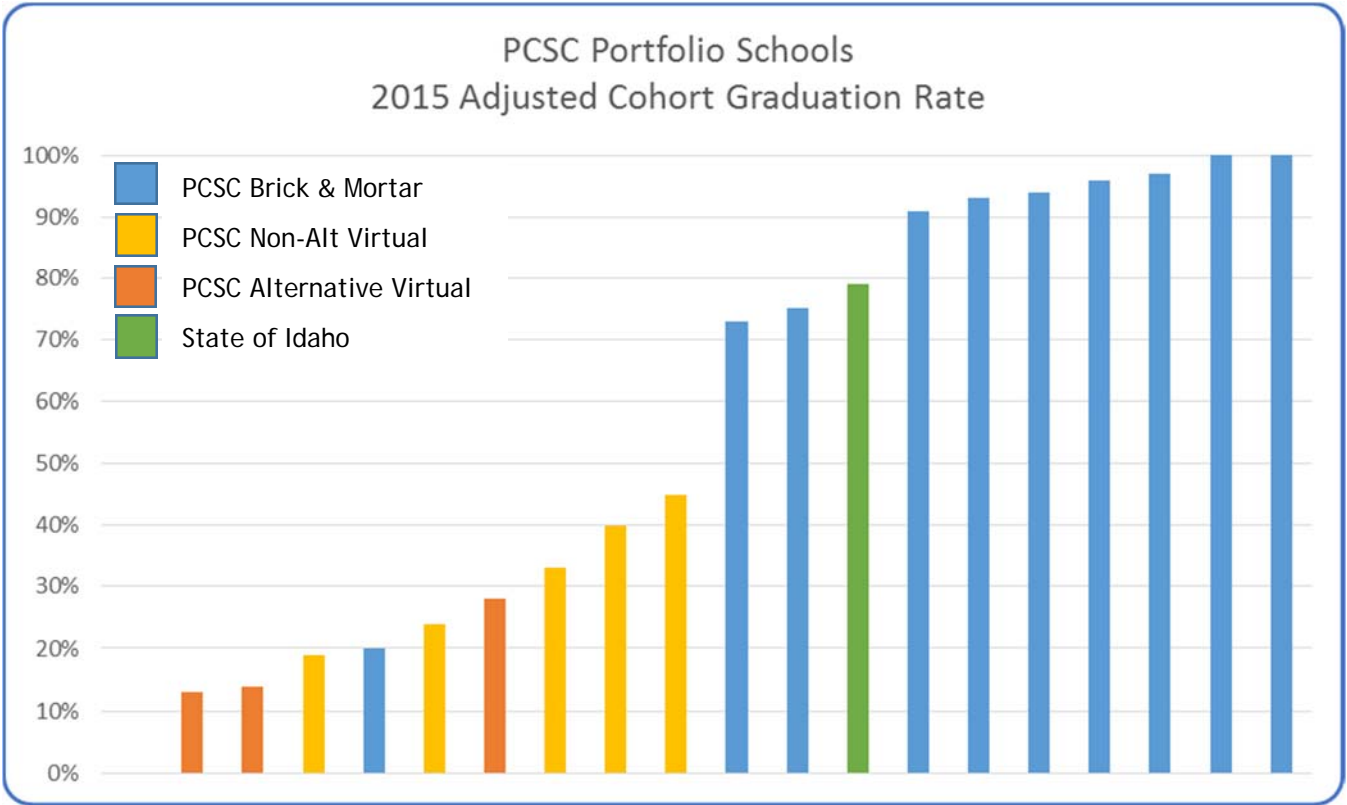
Graduation Rates

The majority of non-virtual charters in the PCSC’s portfolio have 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rates (ACGRs) that exceed the state average, often by a significant margin. However, both alternative and non-alternative PCSC-authorized virtual charter schools have very low ACGRs, ranging from 0% to 45%. (Idaho offers one other virtual charter school, whose ACGR is 81%.) The state average graduation rate is 79%.

Five-year cohort graduation rate data, presently available for only one year, suggests that some virtual schools’ extended cohort graduation rates are up to 10% higher than their 4-year ACGRs. Because the state’s method of calculating graduation rates changed in recent years, six-year and longer cohort graduation rates are not yet available, though it is clear that some virtual schools are committed to serving students in these groups. Accumulation of data over time will help facilitate understanding of how much virtual schools are able to assist struggling students in obtaining diplomas.

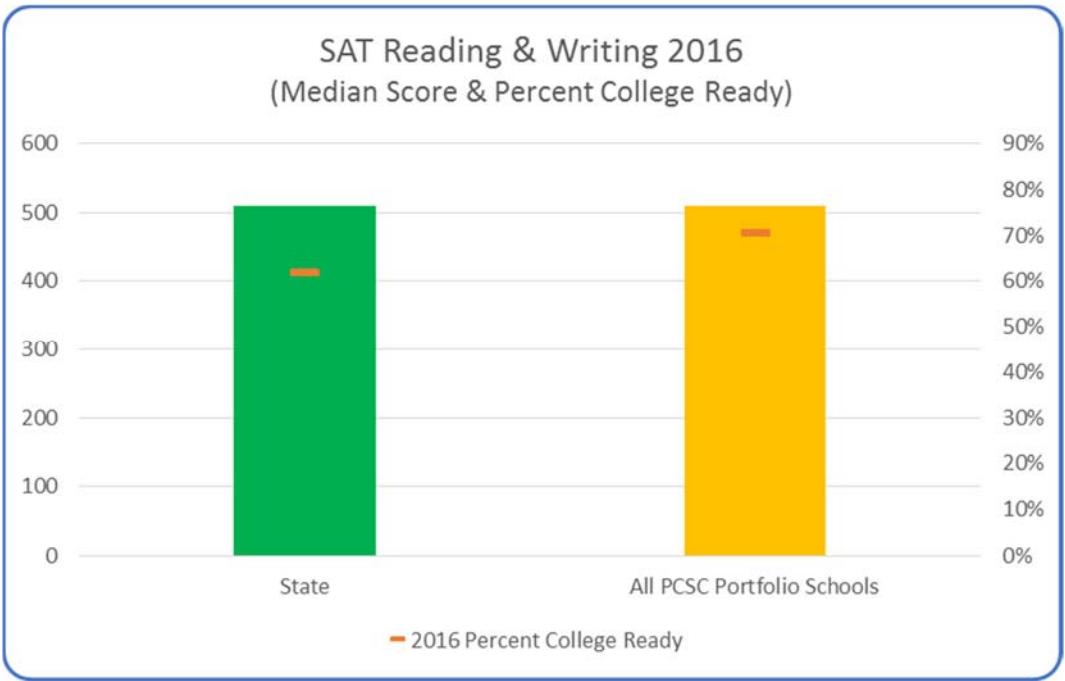
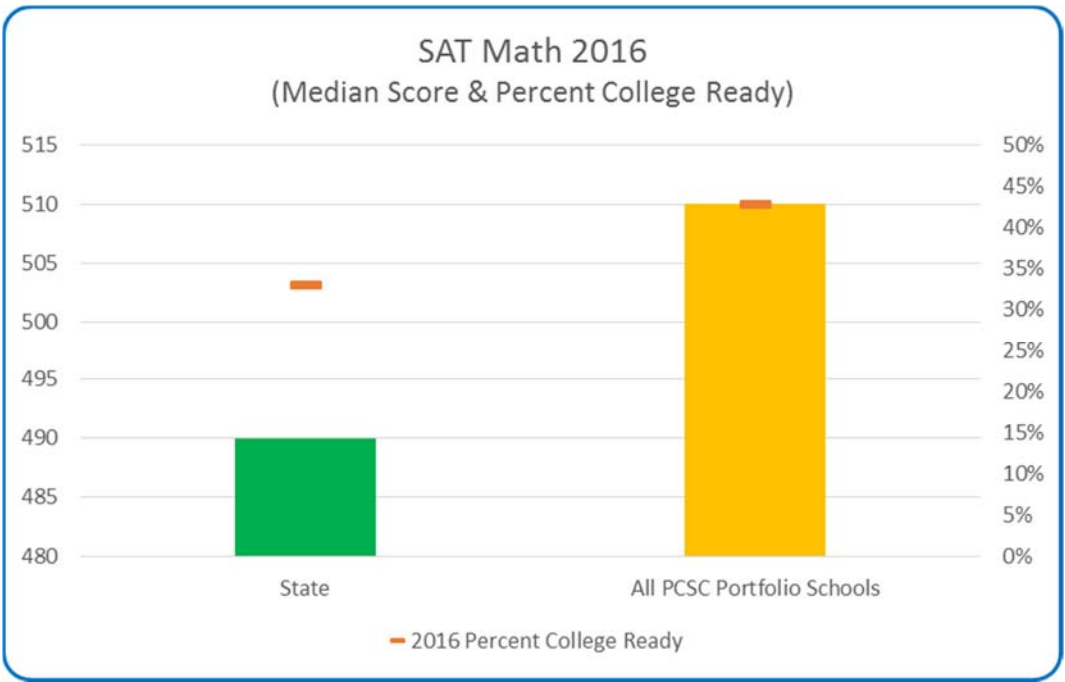
Virtual school leaders report that their student populations are highly mobile, shifting between schools more frequently than typical high school populations. They also indicate that many students who enroll at virtual schools are already behind their cohorts. Little comprehensive data is available regarding the extensiveness of these factors, the reasons they occur, or their degree of impact on virtual schools’ graduation rates. Additional research is underway to examine the degree to which students are credit deficient when they enter virtual schools and rate at which they recover credits after entry.

Six of the schools under consideration for renewal in 2017 had graduating classes during their performance certificate terms. Most had low graduation rates. In several cases, renewal was recommended with conditions targeted at increasing graduation rates at a pace sufficient to promote their ability to achieve a 5-year cohort graduation rate of 48% within five years. 48% is the 2014 median 5-year cohort graduation rate for Idaho alternative schools. Although the schools in question are not alternative schools, their student populations face some similar challenges.



SAT Results

SAT results offer additional perspective regarding schools’ academic outcomes. The following charts compare SAT results for PCSC portfolio schools to those of the state. The data reflects all 11th and 12th grade students who took the SAT during the 2015-16 school year; participation was not required. It is important to note that the State category reflects a much larger sample than the PCSC Portfolio category. The left axis refers to median score, while the right axis refers to the percentage of students whose scores indicate college readiness.



Operational & Financial Outcomes

The PCSC assesses its portfolio schools on a range of management and compliance outcomes. We also review schools' near-term financial health and long-term viability, bearing in mind that Idaho's public charter schools received \$106,302,841 in state funding during FY16. \$89,303,084 was disbursed to PCSC portfolio schools.

As in prior years, most PCSC portfolio schools demonstrated operational and fiscal strength. When weak areas did appear, they tended to be in the areas of late reporting and independent financial audit findings. A small minority of schools evidenced fiscal distress. In these cases, the PCSC has taken steps to protect taxpayer resources while allowing the schools every opportunity to regain stability.

Looking Back, Looking Ahead

In 2013, stakeholders from across Idaho's charter school community worked together to draft new charter legislation that reflected best practices identified by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, and other leaders in the field. Idaho's legislature agreed that authorizers and schools should commit to established performance standards that the schools would be responsible for meeting. Failure to meet these standards could, but would not necessarily, result in non-renewal of the charter.


The 2013 legislation provided welcome relief from an old structure that required authorizers to oversee schools' inputs rather than focusing on performance outcomes. It supported both halves of the so-called "charter school bargain," that is, the exchange of increased autonomy for increased accountability.

Over several years and with continued stakeholder engagement, the PCSC implemented the 2013 legislation. A performance framework was adopted with the understanding that it would be used in conjunction with contextual information about individual schools. Annual performance reports were issued to schools in order to ensure they were advised of any areas of weakness; schools were invited to respond with contextual detail. Even in cases of low performance outcomes, schools did not face sanctions but rather were given time to effect improvement. Not until the ends of their terms would schools be evaluated for renewal or non-renewal, based on documented performance outcomes and the context in which they accrued.

The PCSC's consideration of 2017 charter renewals reflected the limited viability of the performance framework. Between elimination of the Star Rating System and the statewide switch to the ISAT by SBAC, framework outcomes no longer offered the intended scope and accuracy of data on which to base high-stakes decisions. Partly for this reason, the PCSC recommended renewal of all twelve schools in the initial cycle, in some cases with conditions for necessary improvement. Great care was taken to ensure that such conditions would be both attainable and effective in promoting improved outcomes for Idaho students. All twelve schools expressed agreement with the recommendations.

As the PCSC again works with stakeholders to develop an updated framework, we bear in mind that success does not look the same at every school, nor does every school succeed. It is realistic to expect that, from time to time, chronically underperforming schools will be considered for non-renewal. The PCSC does not take lightly the impact of these difficult decisions on students, families, and communities. However, meaningful renewal requirements are crucial to the long term health of the charter school movement.

While school quality is of utmost importance for Idaho students, the PCSC also places high value on school choice. We must be willing both to give promising ideas a chance, and to let go of them when reality falls short of expectations. It is our sincere hope that Idahoans can work together to promote the development of more, high quality new and replication public charter schools so that while a few may come and go, plentiful choice will remain.

A decorative graphic element consisting of several overlapping blue triangles and polygons, creating a layered, geometric effect. It is positioned on the left side of the page, extending horizontally across the middle section.

"Performance-based accountability is the cornerstone of charter schools."

~ Allison Consoletti, The Center for Education Reform