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Illegal Admission Policies in California Charter Schools Detailed in ACLU Report

By Arianna Prothero on August 3, 2016 12:18 PM | [No comments](#)

Twenty percent of California charter schools use illegal admissions practices, according to a [report released Tuesday by the American Civil Liberties Union](#) of Southern California.

The group analyzed admission policies on websites, in handbooks and other public materials for around 1,200 charter schools, categorizing at least 250 as having exclusionary admissions standards.

Some of the admissions policies flagged in the report:

- Requiring certain grades or test scores to get into a school;
- Admitting students based on their proficiency in English;
- Selecting students based on essays or interviews by the students or their parents;
- Asking for proof of students' citizenship;
- Requiring parents to volunteer at the school or donate money.

Some iterations of those policies may not be strictly illegal, the report says, such as asking for a student's social security number or requiring a student to write an essay so long as the student's admission to the school does not hinge on fulfilling those requests. However, the report argues that those policies may have a chilling effect on families and ultimately function as selective admissions policies.

"Regardless of whether this failure is caused by a lack of resources, a misunderstanding of the law, or inadequate procedures for reviewing charter policies, it is troubling that so many authorizing entities have missed these clear violations of the law, all of which are publicly posted on the schools' websites," the report says.

Authorizers are the groups that decide which charter schools are approved to open. They also have the power to shut down poorly performing schools. School districts authorize charter schools in California, although a denied charter application can be appealed up to the state board of education.

The report calls on the California Department of Education to clarify that such admissions requirements for charter schools are breaking the law and to order schools with those policies to change them immediately, among other recommendations.

In its response to the report, the [California Charter Schools Association issued a statement](#) saying that it agreed with the "overarching principle" of the report, but took issue with some of the details. Specifically, the CCSA believes that not all admissions policies highlighted in the report are equally egregious.

"We are encouraged that the report identified a small number of charter schools which have the most clearly exclusionary practices based on academic performance," Jed Wallace, the president and CEO of CCSA said in the statement. "We believe there is an urgency to work with these schools to make changes immediately to these policies to ensure that students are not unlawfully excluded from applying or being admitted to the charter school program."

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