

THE RENEWAL RECORD

California Charter Renewal Risk Report | 2026

A renewal petition can be written in months.

A renewal record is built over years.

A data centered guide for charter leaders and governing boards navigating the first major renewal cycle under AB 1505 and AB 1507.

Prepared September 2026

Renewal is now a data cycle

The school is being evaluated long before the petition is submitted.

California’s current framework places every non DASS charter school into a performance category based on two years of Dashboard data. That category shapes the renewal path, but it does not contain the full renewal record.

2026 statewide signal	Schools	Share
High performing	187	16.1%
Middle performing	917	79.1%
Low performing	55	4.7%
Middle or low	972	83.9%

The implication is simple: most schools do not enter renewal with a presumptive high category pathway. They must be prepared to explain mixed results, subgroup performance, organizational choices, and whether the total record demonstrates benefit to pupils.

What changed for leaders

- Dashboard status, performance levels, and subgroup results now organize the academic inquiry.
- Enrollment and student exit patterns can become part of the authorizer’s evidence.
- Substantial fiscal or governance factors can support denial when statutory notice and cure conditions are met.
- Appeals are record centered. The State Board standard asks whether the district and county abused their discretion.
- Facilities and authorizer alignment matter because AB 1507 tightened location rules at renewal.

The strategic shift

The old model asked who would write the petition. The current model asks what the record already proves, what it leaves exposed, and whether the school can correct the exposure before a public decision.

Source: CDE Performance Categories, updated April 2, 2026; Education Code sections 47605, 47607, and 47607.2.

Before and after AB 1505 and AB 1507

Two 2019 laws changed the center of gravity for charter approval, renewal, appeal, and location.

Issue	Earlier environment	Current environment
Renewal test	Five year renewal structure with academic performance historically given primary emphasis.	Three performance paths anchored in Dashboard results, with additional fiscal, governance, access, and implementation considerations.
Evidence	Petition narrative and academic results drove much of the case.	Two years of state data, subgroup results, enrollment patterns, fiscal records, governance evidence, and cure documentation can all matter.
Appeal	State review functioned more like a fresh review of the petition.	County review remains available. State review is constrained by an abuse of discretion standard and the documentary record.
Local discretion	The statewide system placed stronger limits on local denial theories.	AB 1505 expanded specified local findings and made the quality of the authorizer record more consequential.
Location	Some schools operated outside authorizer boundaries under statutory exceptions.	AB 1507 generally required alignment with the district where the school or site is physically located, with limited exceptions and transition rules.
Operating implication	Renewal preparation could be concentrated near submission.	Renewal readiness must connect academic, enrollment, governance, fiscal, facilities, legal, and public process work throughout the charter term.

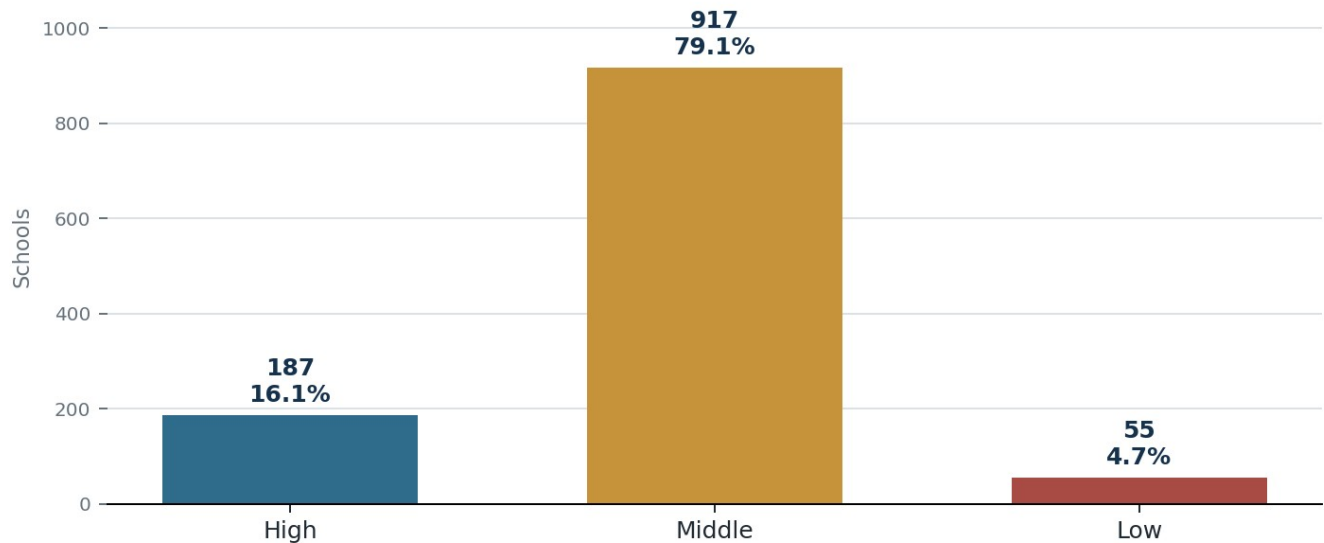
What AB 1505 changed most

It did not merely add a form or a new calculation. It changed which evidence controls, which decision makers matter, and how difficult it is to reverse an adverse record on appeal.

Source: AB 1505, Chapter 486, Statutes of 2019; AB 1507, Chapter 487, Statutes of 2019; current Education Code sections 47605 and 47607.

Most schools occupy the contested middle

The middle category is not a safe category. It is the category in which the quality of the record matters most.



Of the 1,159 charter schools in CDE's 2026 category file, 917 are middle performing. Another 55 are low performing. Together, those schools represent 83.9 percent of the categorized sector.

Three cautions when reading the categories

- DASS schools are excluded and follow a separate framework that includes Dashboard indicators and mutually determined alternative metrics.
- A category describes the statutory academic path. It does not immunize a school from fiscal, governance, pupil access, petition, or implementation findings.
- Criterion 2 drives most high and low classifications in the current file. It compares school and student group status to statewide reference points across academic indicators.

Data point

CDE's file shows low category schools in 20 counties. Renewal exposure is not confined to one region or one type of charter school.

Source: CDE Charter School Performance Category Data File for the 2025 Dashboard year, released January 7, 2026 and updated April 2, 2026. DASS schools are excluded.

What will the record say?

A defensible renewal case connects six evidence domains rather than treating them as separate compliance projects.

Domain	Evidence an authorizer may see	What a ready school can demonstrate
Academic performance	Dashboard colors and status, CAASPP, science, English learner progress, graduation, college and career readiness, local assessments	Results are disaggregated, trends are understood, and improvement claims match the governing standard
Engagement	Chronic absence, suspension, school climate, family participation, student persistence	Leadership can explain causes, interventions, implementation, and measurable response
Enrollment and access	Demand, enrollment trend, subgroup representation, admissions, departures, involuntary removals	Processes serve all pupils and records explain who enters, who leaves, and why
Governance	Board minutes, conflicts, training, evaluation, corrective action, complaint handling	The board governs actively and can prove timely oversight of material risks
Organizational capacity	Staffing, credentials, special education, safety, facilities, compliance systems	The operating model matches the approved petition and can be implemented reliably
Fiscal condition	Budgets, cash, reserves, enrollment assumptions, audits, multi year projections	The financial plan is credible under realistic enrollment and cost conditions

The record test

Can an independent reviewer trace every major claim to reliable evidence, see that the board understood the risk, and confirm that corrective action occurred before the renewal hearing?

Source: CDE California School Dashboard; Education Code sections 47605 and 47607; CDE Enrollment Data and Charter School Renewals pages.

Stability can disappear quickly

These cases have different outcomes. Together, they show how academic interpretation, appeal limits, authorizer alignment, and public process now interact.

School	Status	What happened	Operational lesson
Aspire Golden State College Preparatory Academy	Completed closure	A long operating Oakland school in the middle category emphasized college and career outcomes. Oakland Unified and Alameda County denied renewal. In July 2026, the State Board declined to disturb the result under the AB 1505 appeal framework. The school closed.	A mixed academic record cannot be rescued late by a broader success narrative. The district and county record must be answered at each stage.
Oasis Charter Public School	Disruption and survival	AB 1507 required the school to seek renewal where it was physically located. Salinas City Elementary denied the 2021 petition. Oasis later continued under Monterey County authorization and remains active.	Facilities and authorizer alignment are renewal issues. A strong community and longstanding program do not eliminate location risk.
Grace Hopper STEM Academy	Active denial	Inglewood Unified denied renewal in June 2026. After a county remand, the district reconsidered and denied the petition again on September 9. The school remains in an active decision period as of this report.	Knowing the hearing date is not the same as controlling the hearing. Presentation readiness, attendance, public support, and the appellate record require one command structure.

Why these examples matter

The surprise is rarely one new fact on decision day. It is the accumulated effect of unresolved data, fragmented ownership, missed procedural opportunities, and an authorizer narrative that became more coherent than the school's own.

Source: Aspire Public Schools report of the July 2026 State Board action; Monterey County Now, February 10, 2021; CDE and school directory records; Inglewood Unified public meeting record, September 9, 2026. Status checked September 11, 2026.

Build the record before the petition

The exact calendar depends on the charter term and authorizer. The operating disciplines do not.

Window	Leadership objective	Required work
24 to 18 months before decision	Classify the path	Confirm category, term expiration, DASS status, location, appeal route, data gaps, subgroup exposure, and authorizer concerns
18 to 12 months	Correct the record	Adopt improvement priorities, assign owners, repair governance and compliance gaps, stabilize enrollment assumptions, and document implementation
12 to 9 months	Test the case	Run an independent renewal diagnostic, map every claim to evidence, review the petition against current law, and model denial findings
9 to 6 months	Build alignment	Prepare the board, meet with authorizer staff, organize family and community support, and rehearse difficult questions
6 months to submission	Control execution	Finalize the petition and appendices, maintain one evidence index, coordinate counsel, and plan hearing participation
Denial or remand	Protect the record	Calendar every deadline, preserve the exact petition, answer findings with citations, prepare equal time presentation, and keep the board and community mobilized

The failure pattern to avoid

- Academic data lives with instruction, enrollment data with operations, fiscal data with a back office provider, and governance evidence with the board secretary.
- Counsel receives issues after they have hardened into the public record.
- Community engagement begins after a staff recommendation is published.
- No single leader owns deadlines, evidence, narrative, rehearsal, and escalation.

Source: CDE recommends beginning with sufficient time for appeals before the charter term expires. Education Code section 47605 establishes petition hearing and decision procedures.

A board level diagnostic

The board should be able to answer these questions without waiting for the renewal petition draft.

	Area	Board question
1	Category and standards	What renewal path applies, which data years control, and what exact findings could support denial?
2	Subgroups	Which numerically significant student groups are driving the school's strongest and weakest results?
3	Enrollment	Do enrollment, retention, exit, and representation patterns create an access or credibility concern?
4	Improvement	Can the school prove that interventions were adopted, implemented with fidelity, monitored, and adjusted?
5	Governance	Do minutes and board materials show informed oversight of academic, fiscal, legal, and operational risk?
6	Fiscal	Are projections credible under realistic enrollment, staffing, special education, facilities, and cash assumptions?
7	Compliance	Are credentials, safety plans, audits, policies, admissions, discipline, and special education records current and consistent?
8	Petition	Does the petition accurately describe the current program and every new legal requirement since the last approval?
9	Authorizer	What concerns has staff raised in oversight reports, correspondence, site visits, cure notices, or informal conversations?
10	Public process	Who will present, who will attend, who will speak, and how will the school respond if the agenda changes?

A useful rule

If the answer depends on one person's memory, an email search, or a document that has not been reconciled with the petition, the answer is not yet renewal ready.

One renewal command system

The school does not need more disconnected advisors. It needs clear ownership of the entire record.

Function	What disciplined execution looks like
Signal	Monthly or quarterly review of Dashboard measures, local data, enrollment, cash, audit, compliance, oversight, and political conditions
Evidence	One indexed repository that connects each renewal claim to source documents, board action, implementation proof, and results
Decision	A risk register with owners, dates, thresholds, board reporting, and defined escalation to leadership and counsel
Narrative	A factual explanation of performance, causes, response, progress, pupil benefit, and the school's current program
Public process	Prepared presenters, equal time response, board participation, community voices, media discipline, and contingency planning
Appeal	A preserved documentary record, exact deadlines, citation based responses, and coordinated legal and operational strategy

Why the old model fails

A petition writer can organize language. A lawyer can protect legal rights. A back office provider can produce financial reports. None of those roles, standing alone, owns the integrated work of finding risk early, correcting operations, building the evidence, preparing the board, aligning stakeholders, and managing the public decision.

Renewal is no longer an event.

It is a data cycle. Schools must understand what the record says, correct what the record reveals, and present evidence that authorizers can trust.

What to do in the next 30 days

A board does not need to wait for a renewal year to reduce renewal risk.

Timing	Action
Week 1	Confirm category, charter expiration, authorizer, facilities status, and all known renewal deadlines.
Week 1	Collect oversight reports, notices, audit findings, board minutes, academic data, enrollment and exit data, and current financial projections.
Week 2	Create a six domain risk map and identify the three issues most likely to concern an independent reviewer.
Week 2	Assign one accountable owner to each corrective action and require dated evidence of completion.
Week 3	Reconcile the current operating program with the approved petition and identify material changes or outdated language.
Week 3	Prepare the board to explain the data, the improvement plan, and its own oversight decisions.
Week 4	Meet with authorizer staff before positions harden, document every concern, and update the risk register.
Week 4	Run a hostile review: draft the denial findings an authorizer could write today and answer them with evidence.

Board decision

Choose now whether renewal readiness will be a recurring governance function or a last minute project. The first choice creates options. The second transfers leverage to the authorizer.

Source: This action framework is a management tool, not legal advice. Schools should coordinate legal questions and formal filings with qualified counsel.

External command for charter survival

Unidos Charter Leadership Group helps schools connect evidence, operations, governance, enrollment, and public process before risk becomes irreversible.

How we support schools

- Renewal risk review and evidence map
- Board and petition diagnostic
- Thirty day renewal sprint
- Full renewal command and authorizer preparation
- Enrollment strategy and organizational capacity
- Coordination with the school's legal counsel

Our team brings experience as charter leaders, executive directors, researchers, enrollment strategists, and elected school board members. We work as an operating partner. Counsel retains responsibility for legal advice, legal filings, and legal deadlines.

Start with the record

We offer a complimentary 20 minute conversation to identify the school's renewal path, immediate exposure, and the first evidence questions the board should ask.

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Scope and caution

This report summarizes public information available as of September 11, 2026. It is intended for strategic planning and does not constitute legal advice. Statutes, guidance, school status, and appeal posture can change. Schools should verify current requirements and consult qualified counsel about their facts.

Primary references

The accompanying workbook contains the full 2026 CDE category file and auditable calculations.

- [CDE Performance Categories](#)
- [CDE 2026 Performance Category Release Letter](#)
- [CDE Charter School Renewals](#)
- [CDE Enrollment Data](#)
- [CDE State Board Appeals](#)
- [Education Code section 47605](#)
- [Education Code section 47607](#)
- [AB 1505 bill text](#)
- [AB 1507 bill text](#)
- [Aspire report on State Board appeal](#)
- [Oasis renewal report](#)
- [Inglewood Unified public meeting record](#)

Data note

The statewide calculations use 1,159 records in the CDE file titled Charter School Performance Category Data File, 2025, released January 7, 2026 and updated April 2, 2026. The file is based on the 2024 and 2025 California School Dashboards. DASS schools are not included.