

Beyond One-Size-Fits-All Education Approaches: Rethinking California's Alternative Education System



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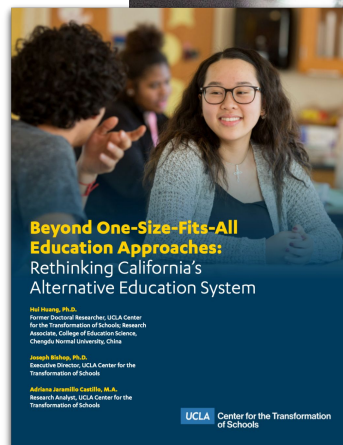


About the Data

CTS examined California's alternative education system, serving more than 150K students, and the critical role that DASS schools play in providing flexible, supportive pathways to graduation.

The report explores:

- **Student characteristics**
- **School climate patterns**
- **Academic outcomes**



Types of Alternative Schools

- **Continuation School:** Students are often credit-deficient or in need of a flexible schedule due to employment, family obligations, and/or other needs.
- **Community Day School:** Serves expelled students, students referred by a School Attendance Review Board (SARB) or probation. High-risk youth are referred through a district-level process.
- **County Community School:** Public schools operated by county offices of education to serve K-12 students who are expelled from their schools, referred by a SARB, requested by parent or guardian, referred by probation, on probation or parole, not in attendance in any school, and/or homeless.
- **Juvenile Court School:** Provides an educational placement for students who are under the protection or authority of the juvenile court system, referred and incarcerated, and/or expelled students.

Types of Alternative Schools

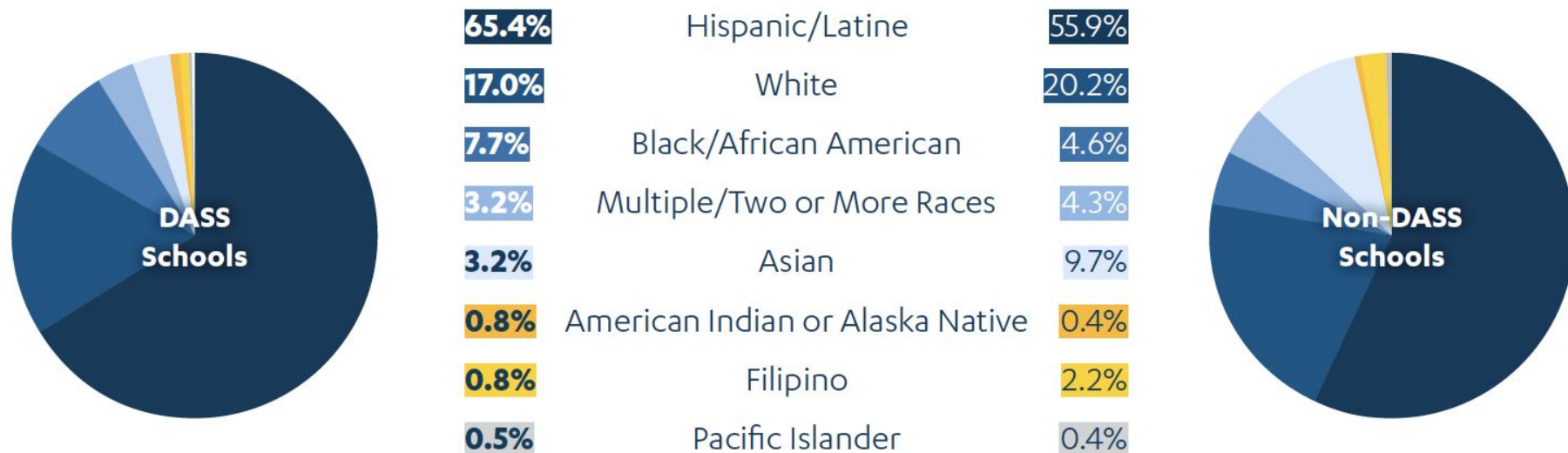
- **Opportunity School:** Provides additional support for students who are unsuccessful academically. This can be due to irregular attendance, behavior challenges, and more.
- **Alternative School of Choice:** Offers a different structure, learning philosophy, or academic emphasis to accommodate different student needs, interests, and learning styles.
- **Special Education School:** Serves students with disabilities who require specialized instruction, supports, and services that cannot be fully provided in traditional school settings.
- **District Special Education Consortia:** Collaborative partnerships among multiple school districts or local educational agencies (LEAs) that pool resources, funding, and specialized staff to provide comprehensive special education services.
- **Alternative Schools by Application:** Mostly charter schools.



Student Characteristics

Student Characteristics

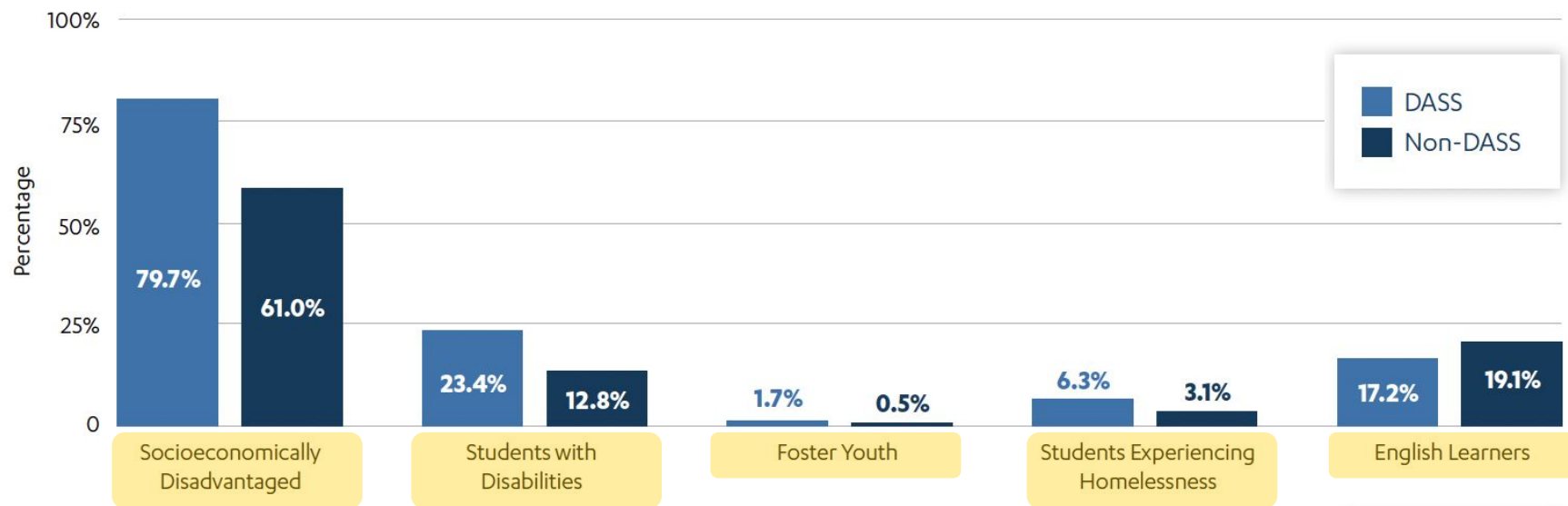
Finding 1: Black, Latine, and Indigenous students are overrepresented in DASS schools compared to non-DASS schools.



Student Characteristics

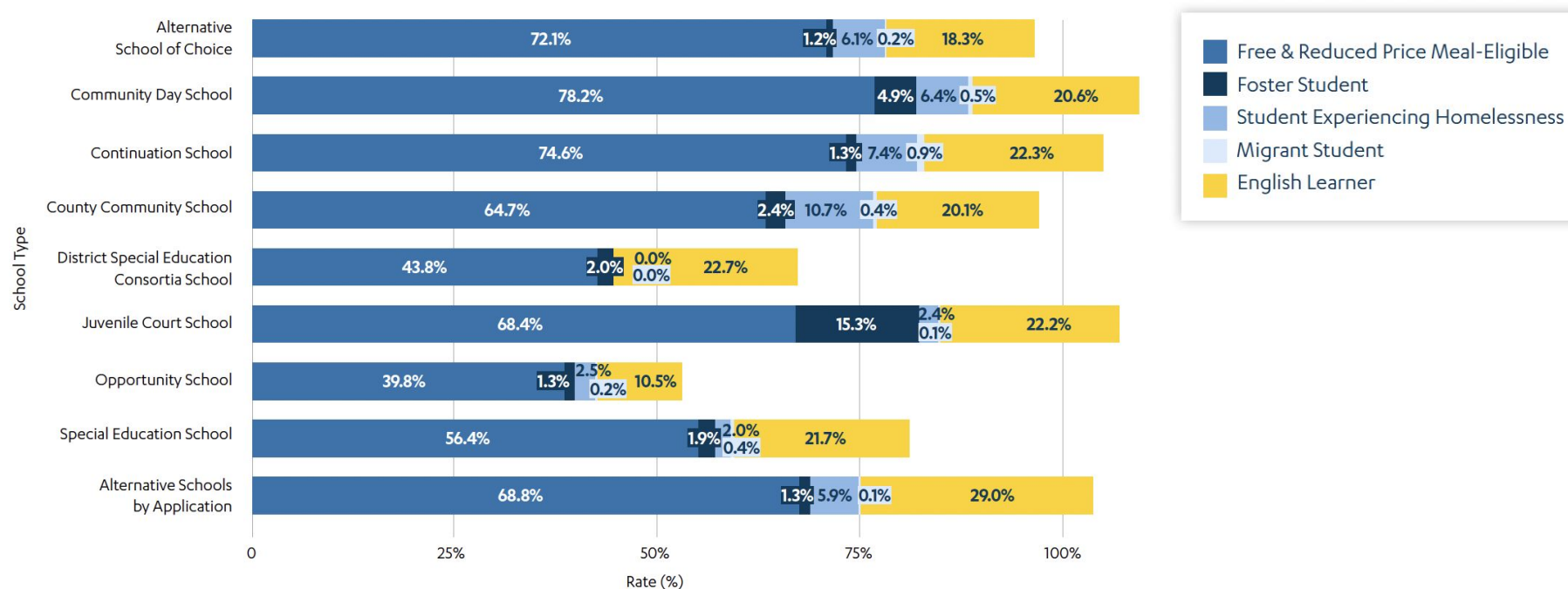
Finding 2: DASS schools serve a significantly higher proportion of vulnerable student populations compared to non-DASS schools.

This reflects the critical role DASS schools play in supporting students who experience significant educational instability and systemic barriers.



Student Characteristics

Finding 3: Student characteristics vary substantially across different types of alternative schools, highlighting the diversity of missions among alternative schools and the need for differentiated policies, equitable resource allocations, and support systems.



A photograph of two male students in a classroom setting, focused on a task. The student on the left is wearing a dark blue hoodie, and the student on the right is wearing a red hoodie with a Nike logo. They are both looking down at their hands, which are working on a colorful, possibly craft-related project. In the background, other students and classroom shelves are visible but out of focus.

Educational and School Climate Patterns

Educational and School Climate Patterns

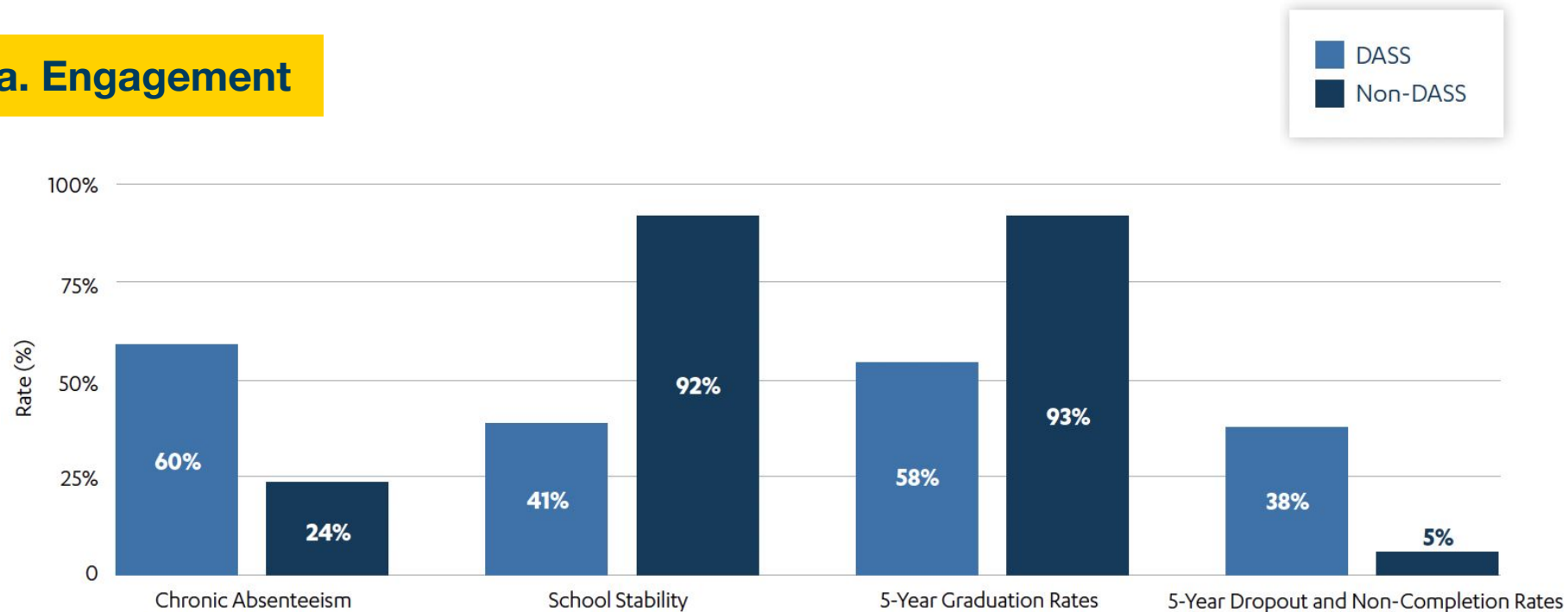
Finding 1: Students attending alternative schools face significant challenges related to learning engagement, school conditions and climate, and academic performance, often experiencing greater barriers compared to their peers in non-alternative school settings.

Suspensions, absenteeism, and dropout rates are higher while stability, graduation rates, and ELA/Math performance are lower compared to traditional schools.



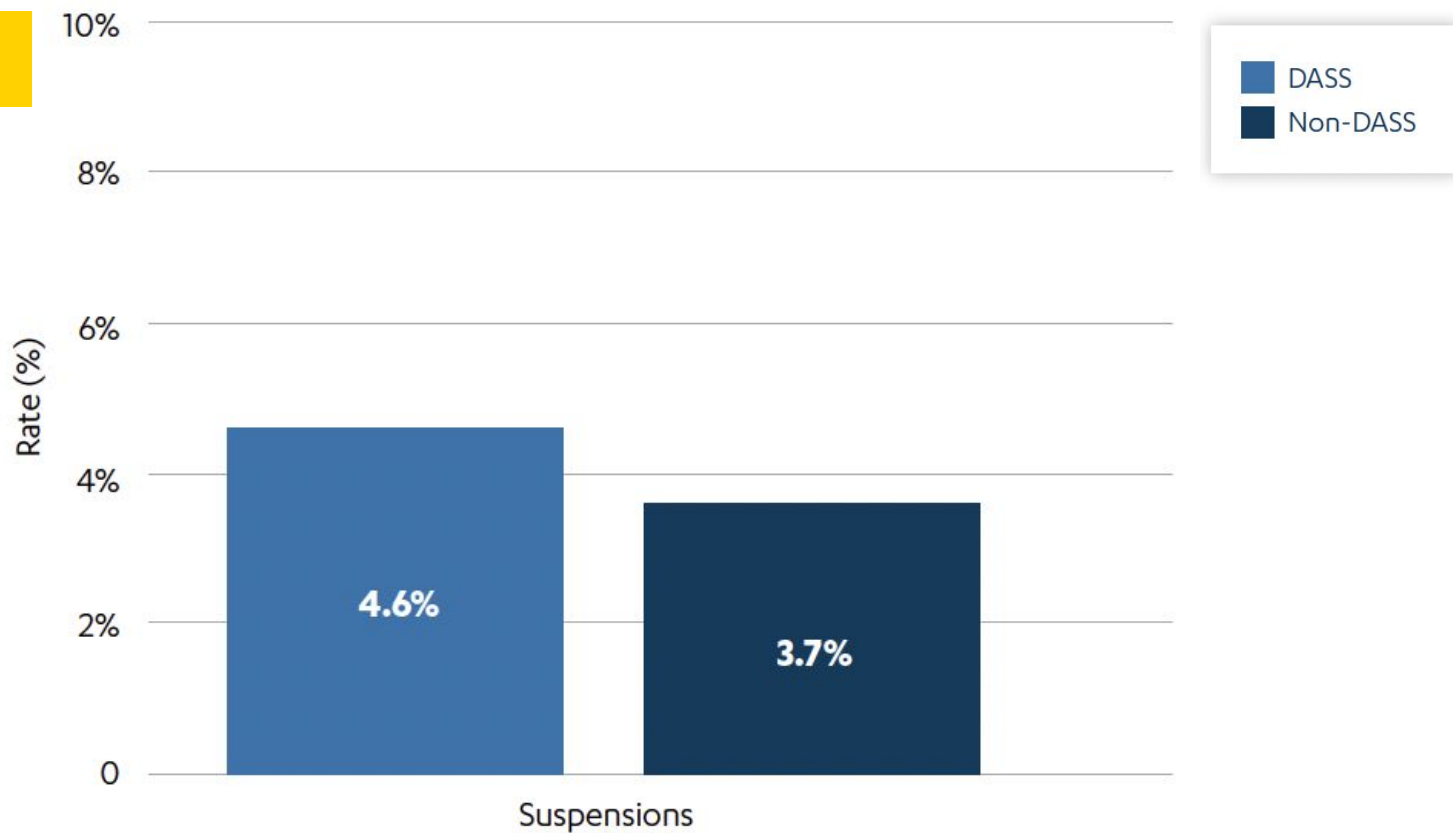
Educational and School Climate Patterns

1a. Engagement



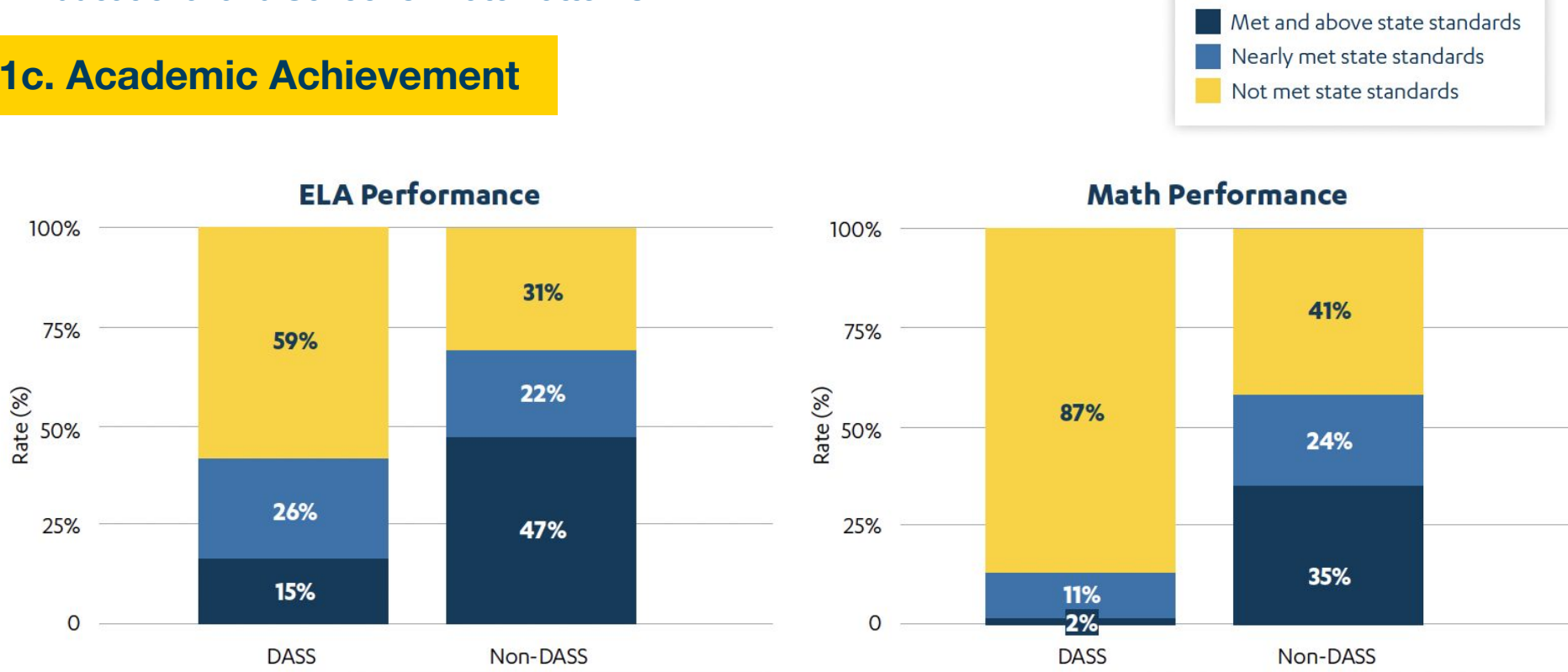
Educational and School Climate Patterns

1b. Suspensions



Educational and School Climate Patterns

1c. Academic Achievement



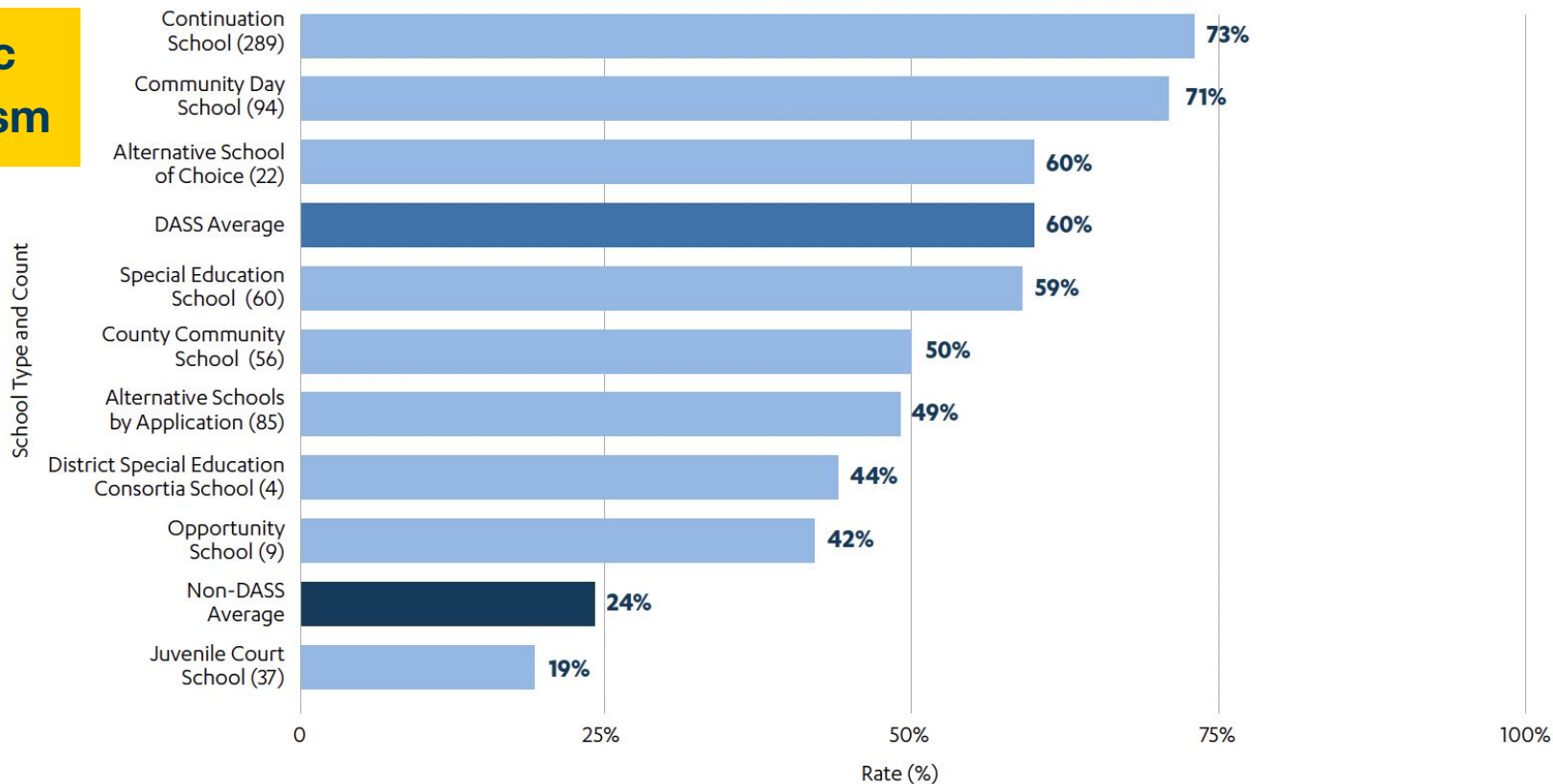
Educational and School Climate Patterns

Finding 2: The nature and extent of the educational challenges listed vary across different types of alternative schools, emphasizing the need for context-specific policies and support systems that align with each school's distinct mission and student population.



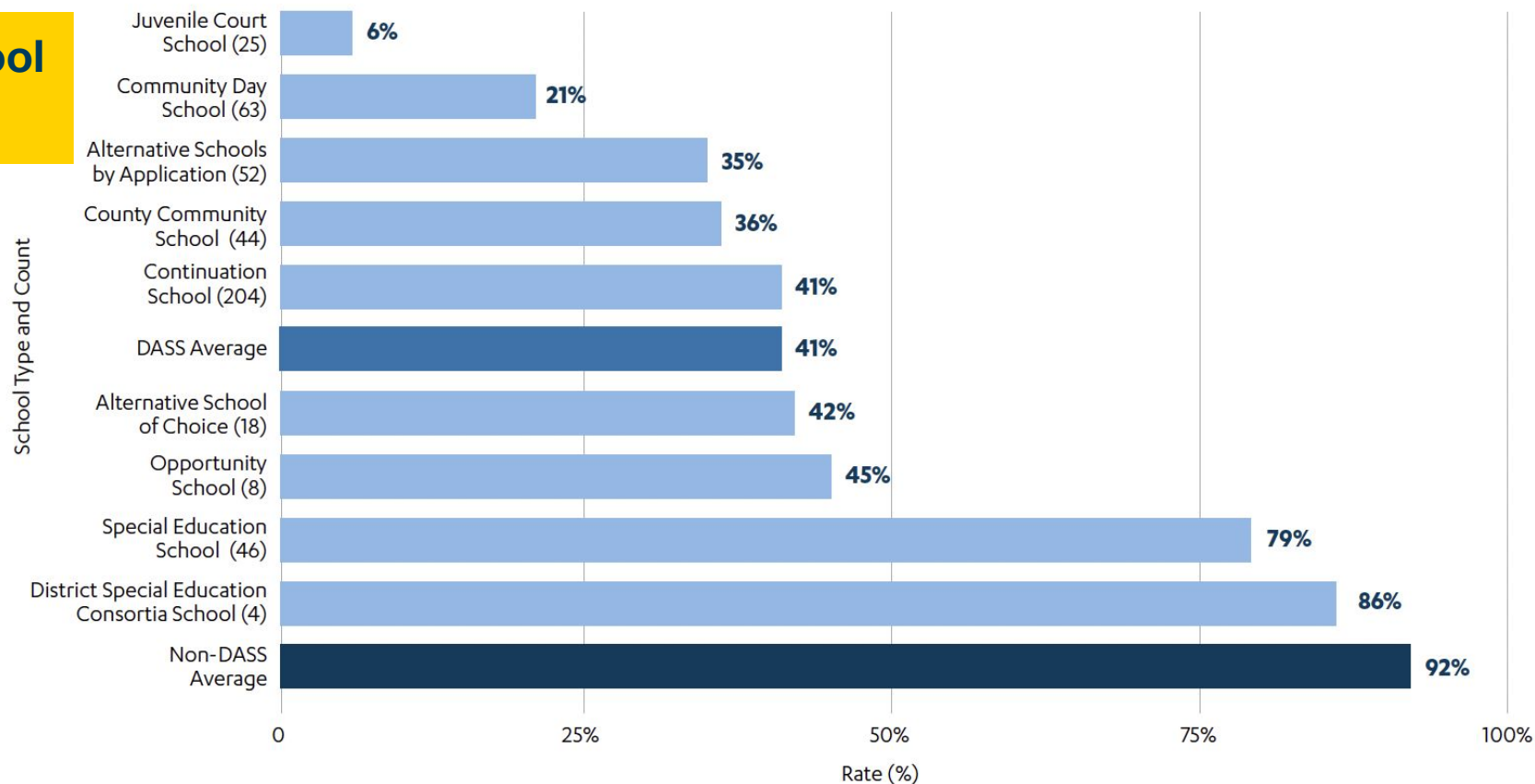
Educational and School Climate Patterns

2a. Chronic Absenteeism



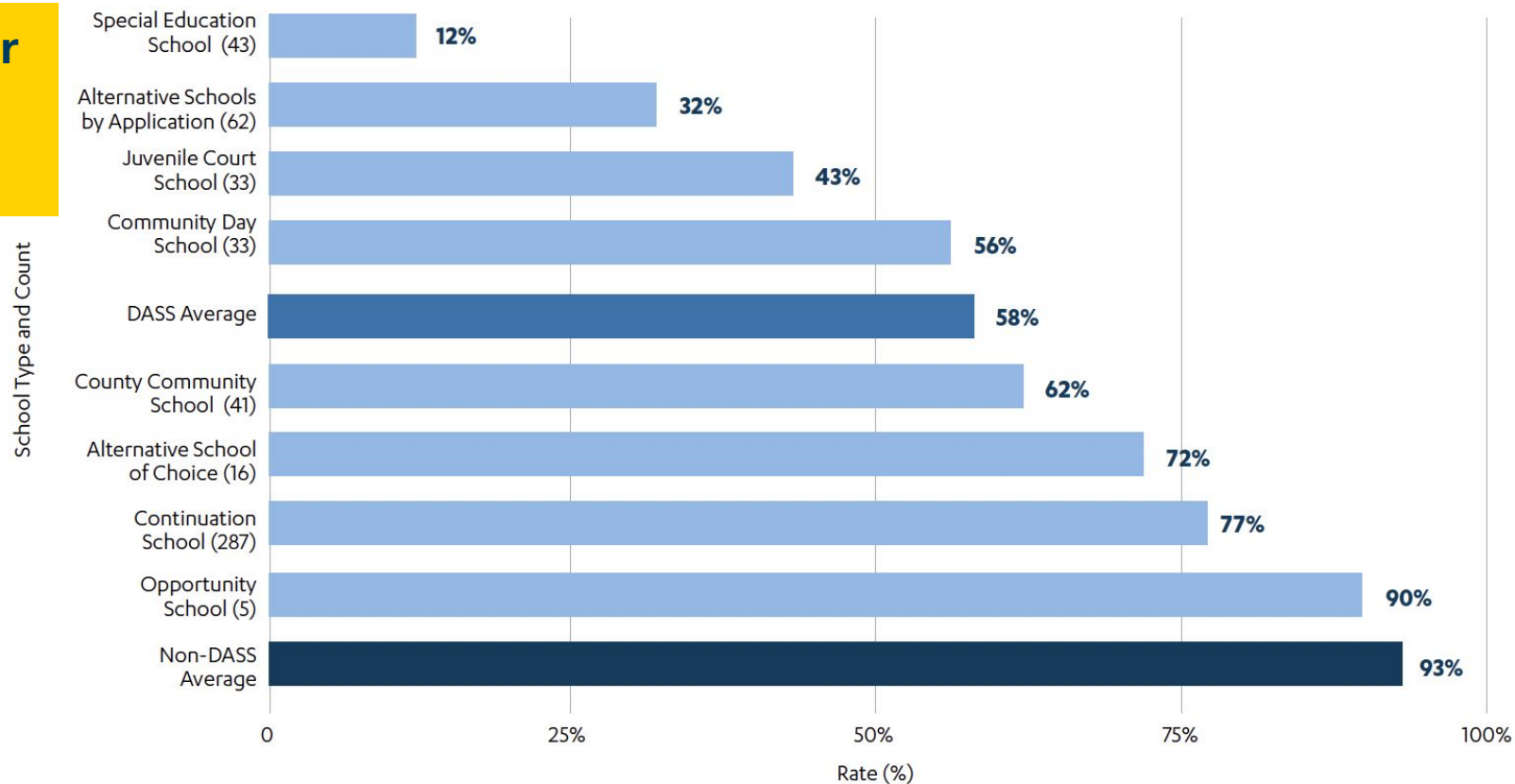
Educational and School Climate Patterns

2b. School Stability



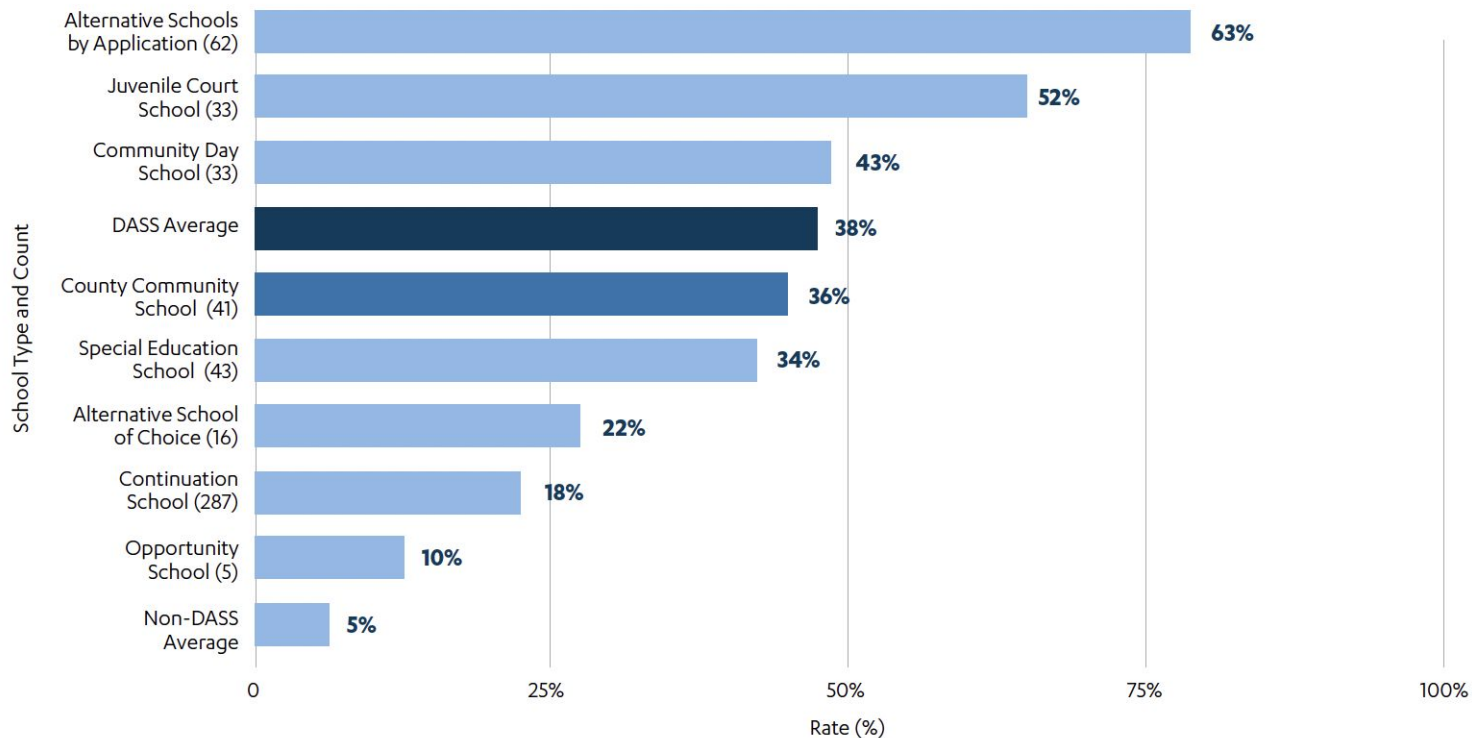
Educational and School Climate Patterns

2c. Five-Year Graduation Rates



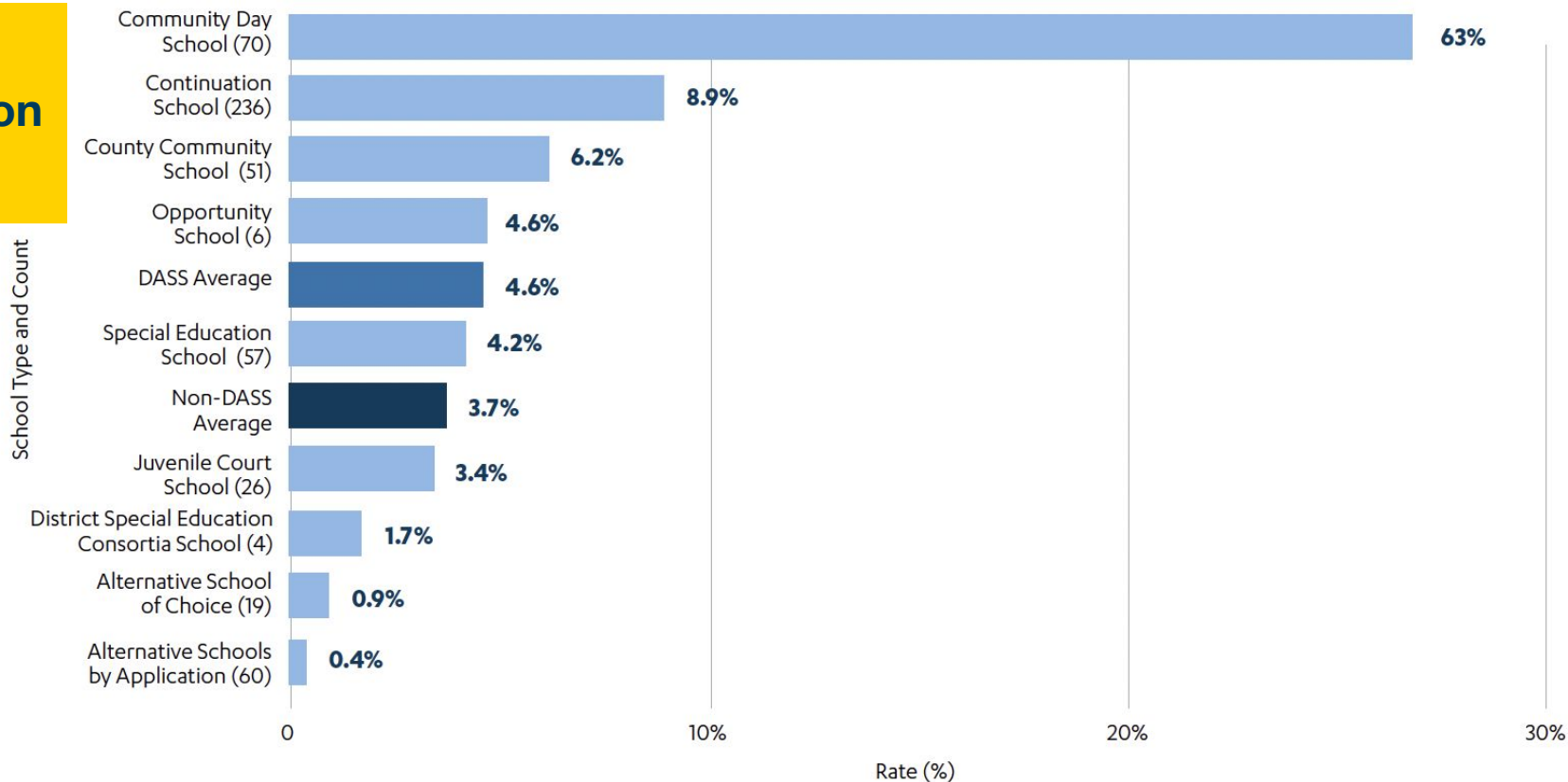
Educational and School Climate Patterns

2c. Five-Year Dropout and Non-Completer Rates



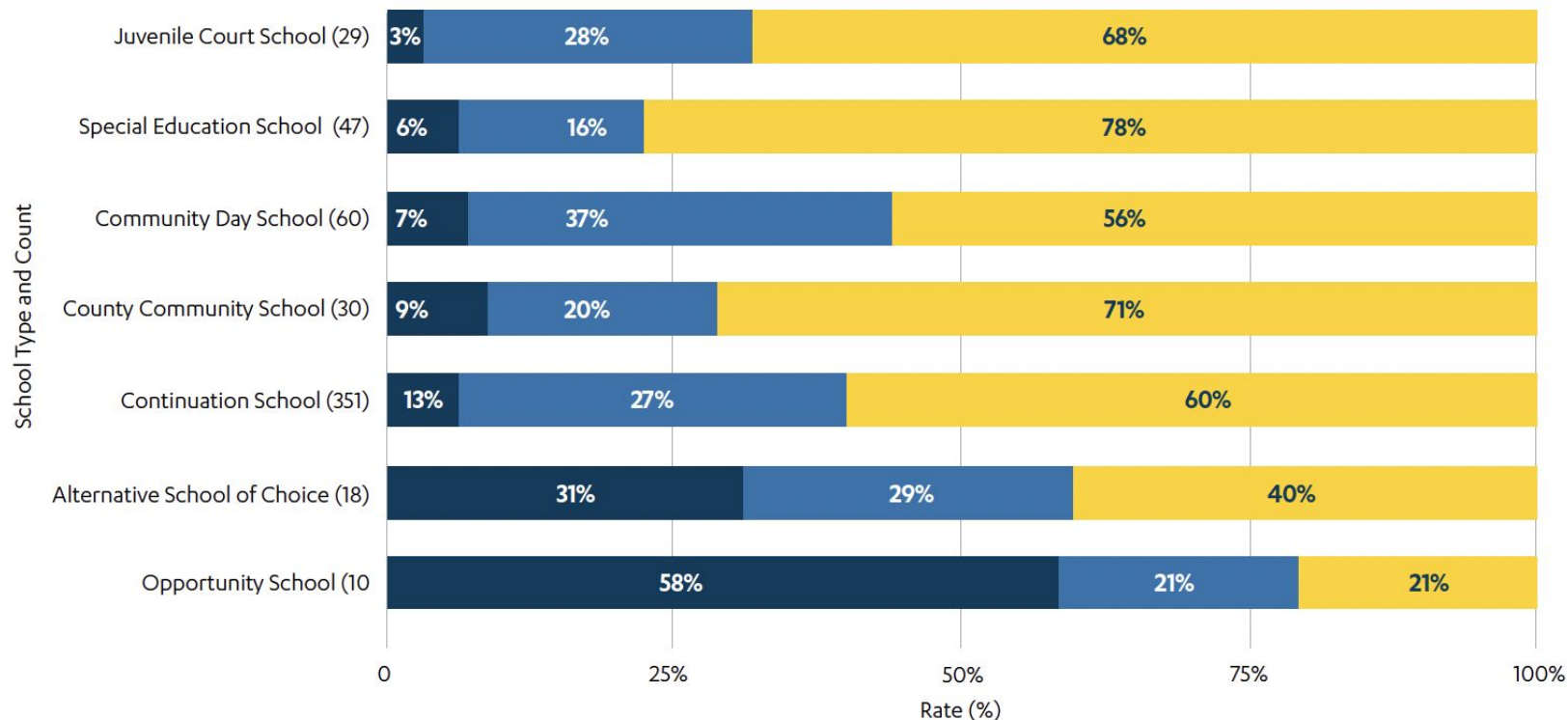
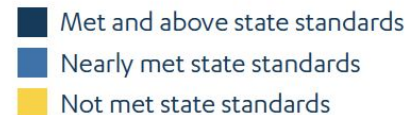
Educational and School Climate Patterns

2d. Suspension Rates



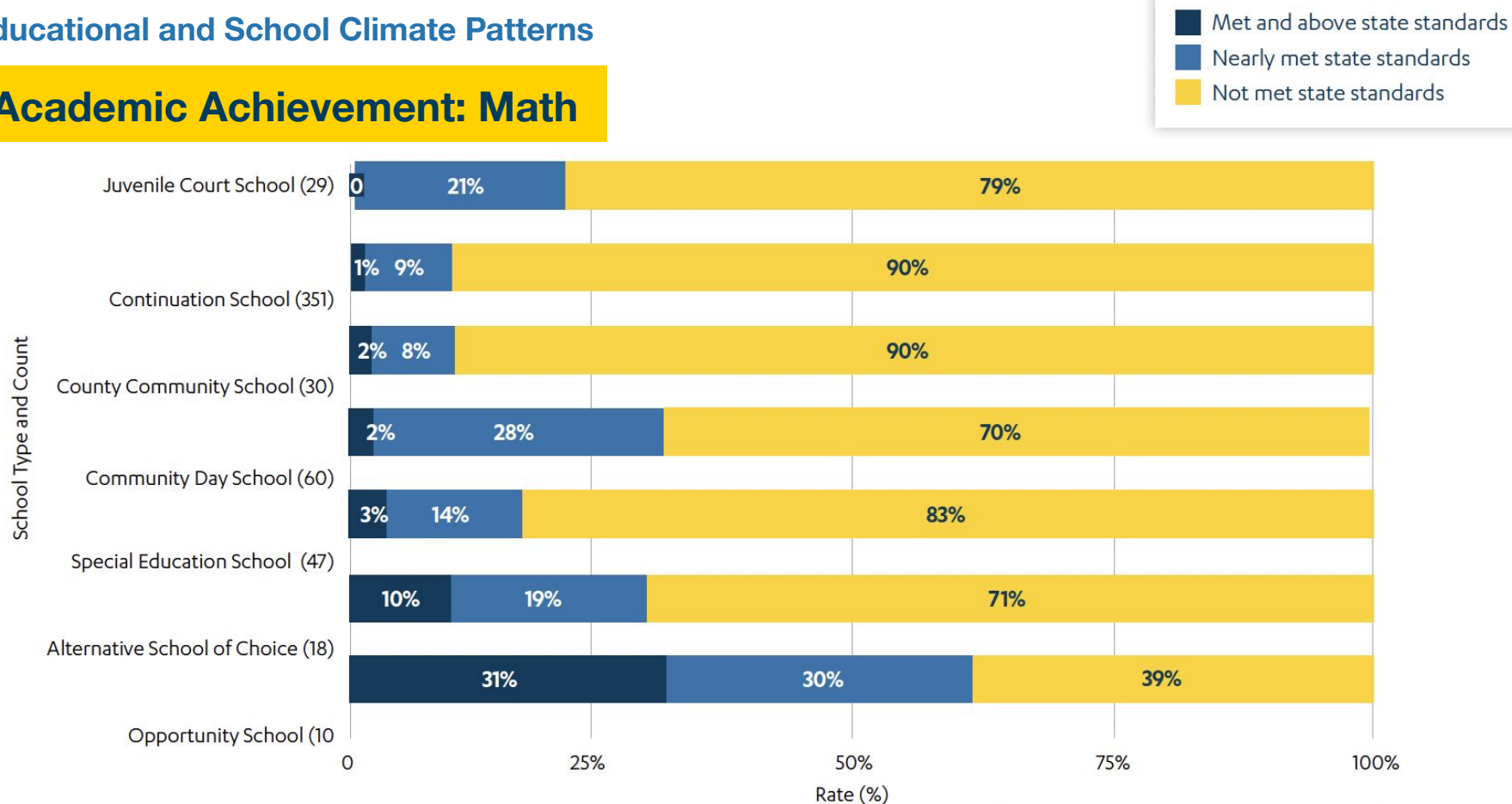
Educational and School Climate Patterns

2e. Academic Achievement: ELA



Educational and School Climate Patterns

2f. Academic Achievement: Math



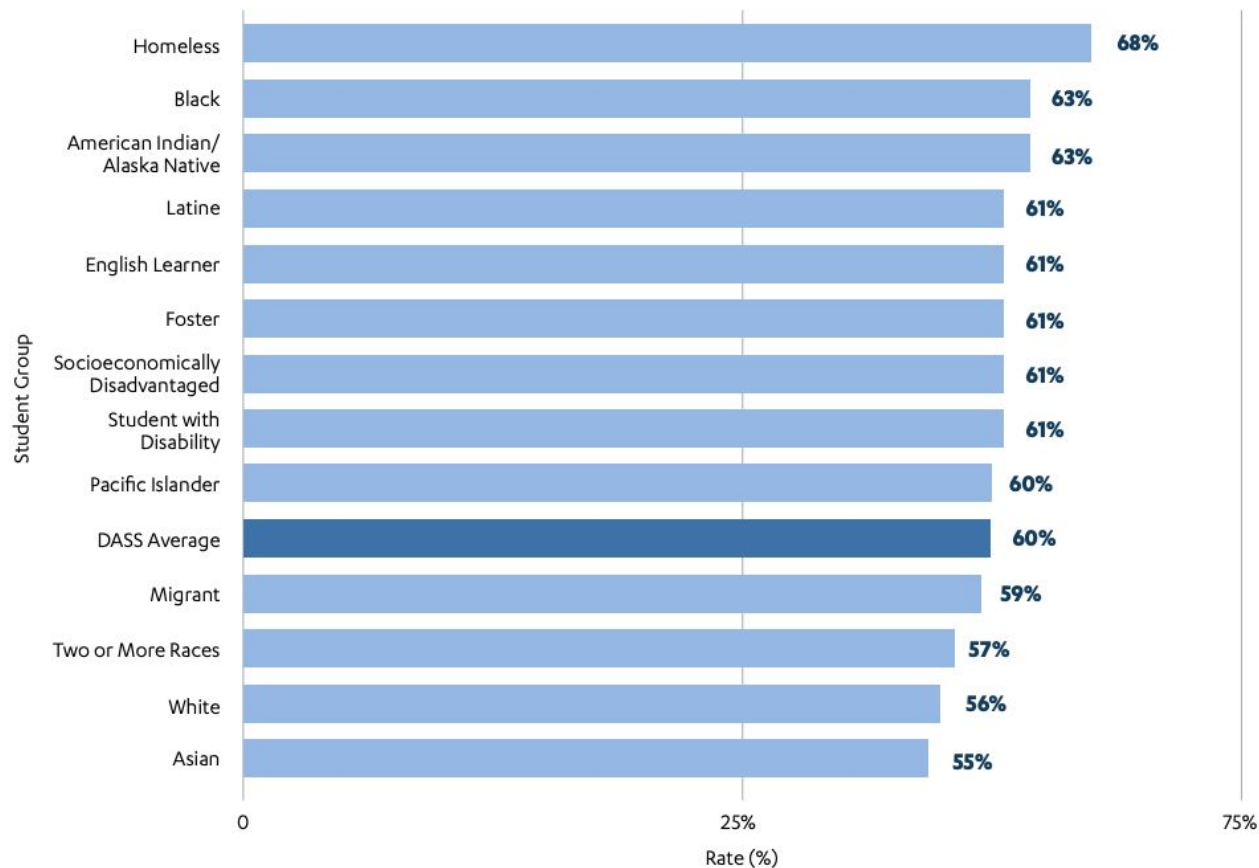
Educational and School Climate Patterns

Finding 3: Students from **historically marginalized communities**—including highly mobile youth, racial minority students, English Learners, socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities—**experience systemic barriers that significantly impact their educational outcomes** in alternative schools.



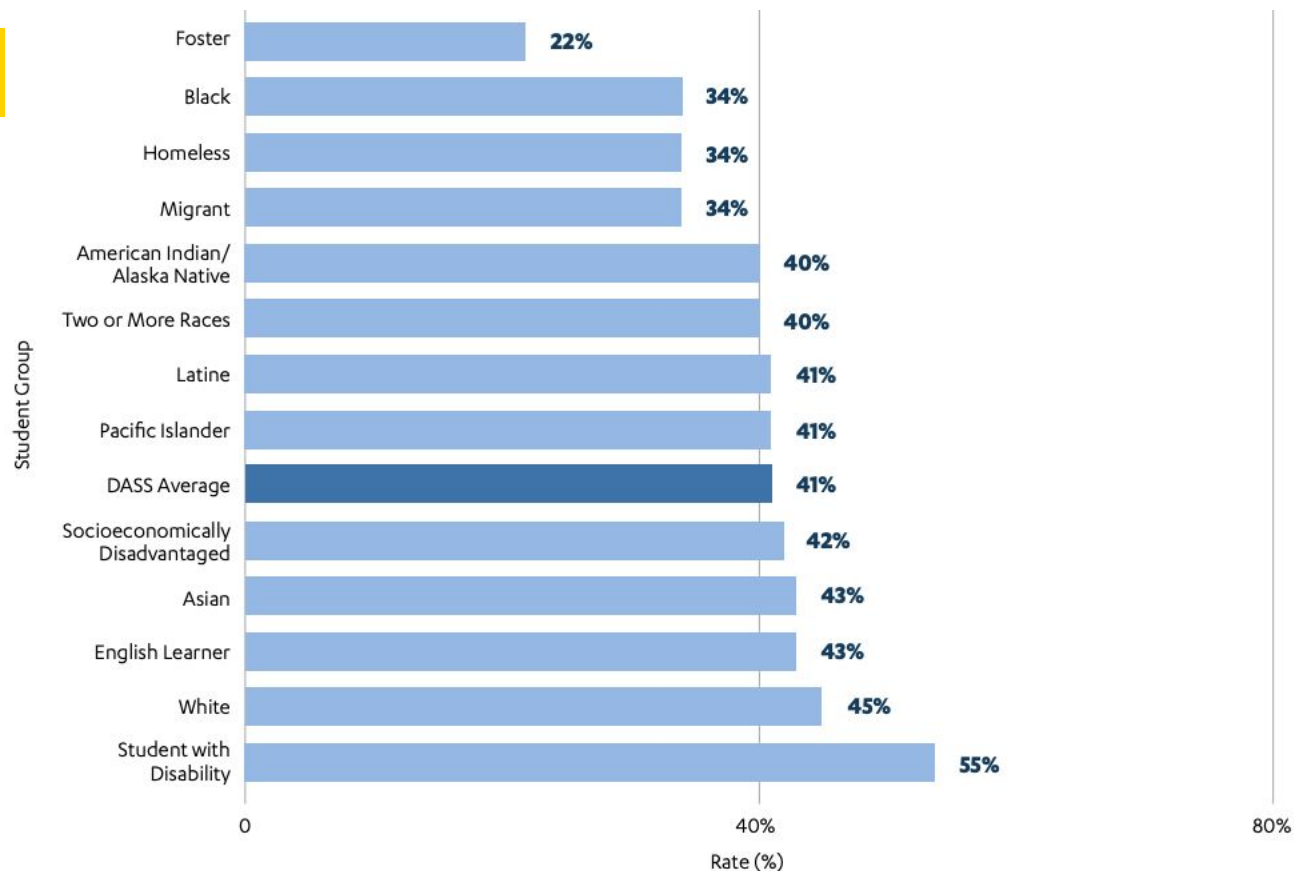
Educational and School Climate Patterns

3a. Chronic Absenteeism



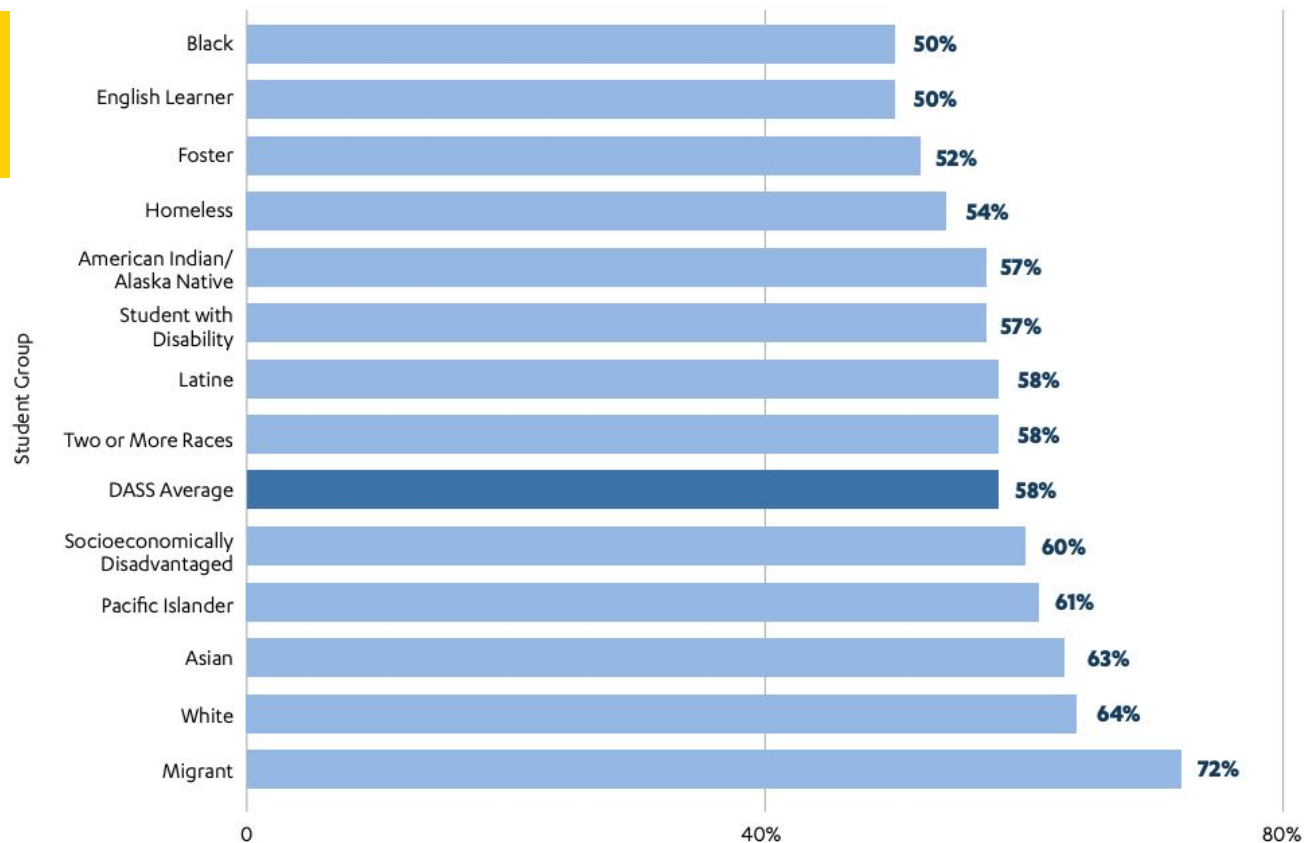
Educational and School Climate Patterns

3b. Stability Rates



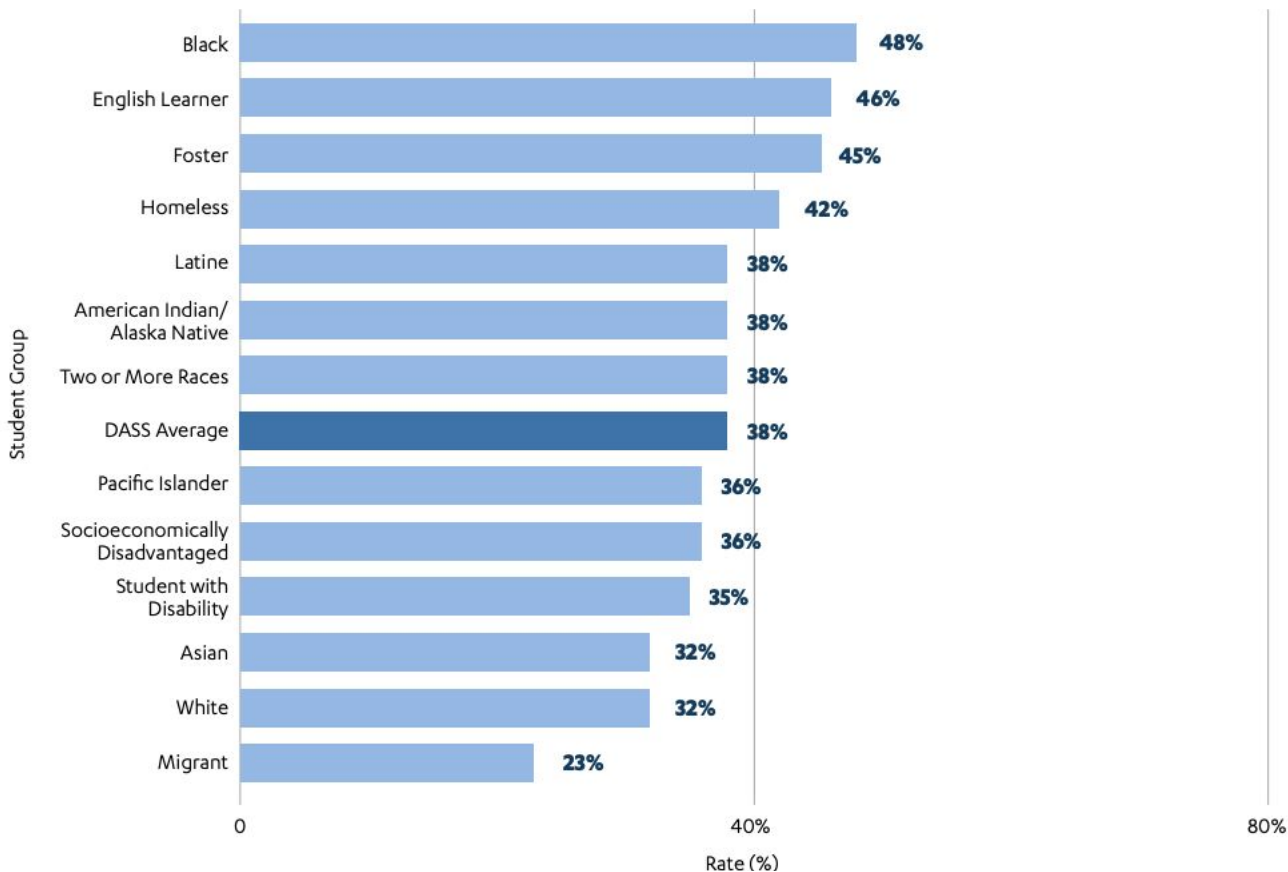
Educational and School Climate Patterns

3c. Five-Year Graduation Rates



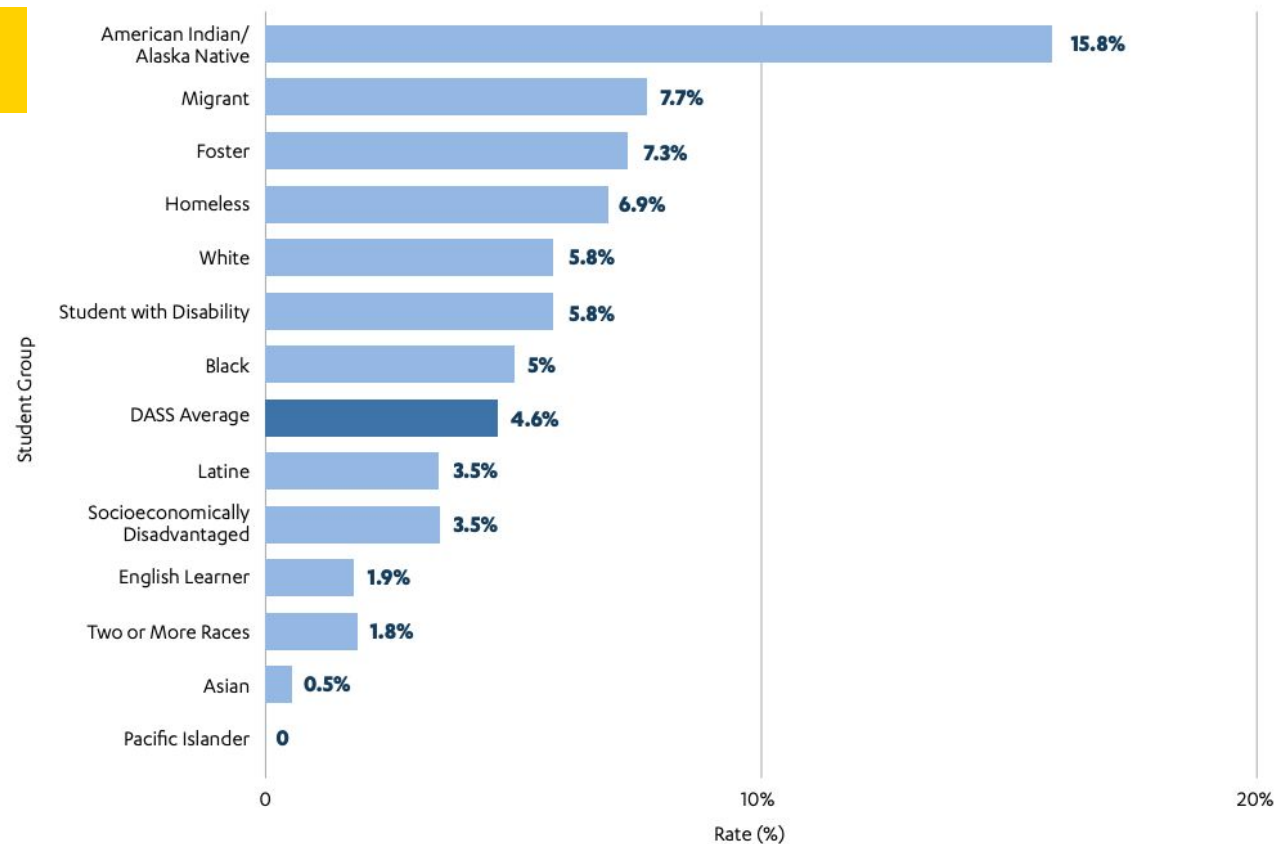
Educational and School Climate Patterns

3c. Five-Year Dropout and Non-Completer Rates



Educational and School Climate Patterns

3d. Suspension Rates



**Where does current alternative school design
fall short for students?**

**How should redesign efforts
address those gaps?**

Recommendations

1. **Develop a Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) category** for alternative schools.
2. **Build and sustain a specialized educator workforce** for alternative schools.
3. **Prioritize school stability and reduce student mobility with targeted Technical Assistance** for alternative education schools as part of the Statewide System of Support.
4. **Establish meaningful measures and accountability systems** unique to alternative education schools.
5. **Expand access to high-quality, differentiated instruction** that matches school type, grade level, student, and staffing needs.



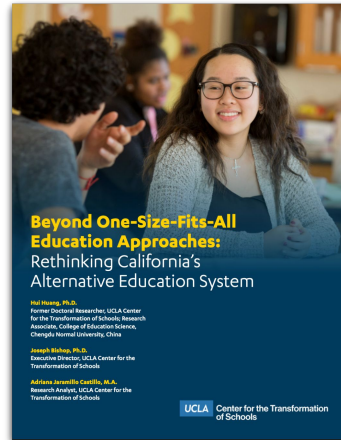
Q&A

Thank you!

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