

## Examining California's charter school appeals process

**The California Charter Schools Act currently enables** prospective charter school operators to appeal a local school district's application denial to the local county board of education and then to the State Board of Education (SBE). If either grants the appeal, they become the charter school's authorizer.

This appeals process—deemed “robust” and “relatively generous” compared to other states by education researchers at Harvard University—has helped allow charter schools to rapidly increase in number statewide. In some cases—some of which are listed below—the potential issues in an application identified by a district came to fruition after the operator was granted an appeal. Statewide, 38 percent of charter schools authorized by the SBE between January 2002 and May 2018 are no longer open, while the failure rate of district-approved charter schools for the same period was 27 percent.

*This is a brief excerpt of a full report, which can be downloaded at: [bit.ly/CAAppeals](http://bit.ly/CAAppeals)*

### **Paramount Collegiate Academy**

In February 2018, Sacramento's Paramount Collegiate Academy charter school closed during the school year to initiate bankruptcy proceedings. Despite concerns about financial issues from both the San Juan Unified School District and Sacramento County Board of Education, the SBE had approved Paramount's appeal in an 8-1 vote. The school's operator notified parents with a letter posted on the front door, citing “low enrollment, facility problems, and overall limited fiscal resources.”

### **Livermore Valley Charter School**

In November 2004, the SBE granted the Tri-Valley Learning Corporation a charter for Livermore Valley Charter after it was denied by both the Livermore Valley Joint Unified School District and Alameda County Office of Education. In 2017, a state audit exposed an entrenched culture of self-dealing that had presumably been allowed for years. Internal controls were so weak that Tri-Valley's former CEO was able to divert \$2.7 million in public funds without any supporting documents over a span of five years. Tri-Valley soon filed for bankruptcy and abruptly closed its schools for good, displacing some 1,500 students.

### **Synergy Education Project**

In 2012, the SBE granted a charter to Synergy Education Project after it was denied by both the Pittsburg Unified School District and the Contra Costa County Board of Education. Three years later, the SBE revoked the charter due to a pattern of deficit spending, causing the school to close a week later and leave some 150 students scrambling. “That was devastating, that was heartbreaking,” said the grandmother of a student. “Why would they open the school for two months [at the beginning of the school year] and then just close it? It doesn't make sense. It's leaving everybody a little bit hopeless.”