

2025 BRIGHT STAR SCHOOLS IMPACT REPORT

Strengthening Community



Nurturing the mind and the mindset

At Bright Star Schools, education is more than academics—it is a holistic journey that nurtures students' hearts as well as their minds. As Community Schools, our approach reflects the belief that students thrive when schools partner with families, local organizations, and communities to provide the full range of resources necessary for success.

From the earliest grades, Bright Star instills a college-ready mindset. Students are immersed in a culture where higher education is expected and achievable. Academic rigor is paired with individualized guidance and exposure to college and career pathways, creating a foundation of confidence and ambition. This report highlights how Bright Star Schools' whole-child approach and college-focused culture translate into lasting impact for students and the neighborhoods we serve.



FROM OUR LEAD EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Empowering Potential

Dear Bright Star Community and Supporters,

When I was eight years old, my teacher, Mrs. North, started a penpal program between our 3rd grade class and college students at Loyola Marymount University. We wrote letters to our penpals and visited the university campus. For our culminating project, we stood on a big lawn there and gave speeches in front of our penpals, other college students, and our families. It was the first time I'd given a speech.

That year, Mrs. North planted seeds in me: of confidence, of belonging at a university, and most importantly, of hope. I told everyone I knew I was going to college and I was going to attend LMU. I couldn't unsee that for myself.

There is power in seeing something that doesn't quite exist yet. It is even more powerful when others see it with you. Together, in our work at Bright Star Schools, we're seeing limitless possibilities for our students' success in college, career, and life. We will continue to partner with and listen to our parents and partners, so that we can provide robust, wraparound support for our students, families, and communities.

Ana L. Martinez
Lead Executive Officer



"There is power in seeing something that doesn't quite exist yet. It is even more powerful when others see it with you."

- ANA MARTINEZ, LEO

The *power of belief* is our foundation for success.

Ranked by
U.S. News & World Report

All three of our high schools, Rise Kohyang High School, Stella High Charter Academy, and Valor Academy High Schools, were recognized by *U.S. News & World Report* and ranked among the best high schools across the nation:



Top 9% of public high schools nationwide



Top 9% of public high schools nationwide



Top 14% of public high schools nationwide

When it comes to preparing young people for college, belief is as essential as curriculum. Research shows that students who believe they are capable of going to college—and who understand the steps required to get there—are far more likely to enroll and apply themselves. This confidence, known as *college-going self-efficacy*, can be intentionally developed through consistent school culture and sustained guidance. When children repeatedly hear that college is possible for them, those messages begin to shape their identity and aspirations.

The formula for success is simple but powerful: belief + guidance = access. Students need both inspiration and clear steps to transform potential into action. Effective counseling programs help students plan coursework, complete applications, secure financial aid, and adjust to college life. When these supports are embedded in a school’s daily culture—from kindergarten through high school—college prep transforms from a pipedream to a pipeline. In short, college success begins long before senior year. It begins when a student first hears, “*You can do this.*”



At Bright Star Schools, we ensure every student is prepared and eligible for college because it opens up opportunities for a better life, even if they choose a different higher education pathway. While the majority of our graduates choose 2- and 4-year colleges and universities, some choose trade schools, military service, and the workforce. Whatever pathway they choose after high school graduation, Bright Star is there to help them persist and thrive.



At Bright Star Schools, college success begins long before senior year. It begins when a student first hears, “**You can do this.**”



We've built a college-going culture.



“At Bright Star Schools, college isn’t a dream—it’s an expectation. For more than twenty years, we’ve built a culture that tells every student from the moment they enter kindergarten, that college is for them.”

**– JOHNNY GONZALEZ, COUNSELOR
RISE KOHYANG HIGH SCHOOL**

“This belief that college is for all our students,” adds Sue Chae, College Counselor and College Prep Instructor at Rise Kohyang High School, “is one of the driving forces behind our consistently high college matriculation rates, which are among the strongest in Los Angeles.”

From the earliest grades, Bright Star integrates college awareness into everyday school life. Classrooms are named after universities, hallways are lined with college pennants, and students begin visiting campuses in middle school. Alumni return to share their experiences, helping younger students see tangible examples of success. Equally essential is individualized advising. Bright Star maintains a student-to-counselor ratio of roughly 130:1—far better than the California average of 464:1—ensuring that every student receives personal attention.

Bright Star’s support continues long after graduation through its six-year Alumni Support and College Success Program. “We maintain relationships with our graduates, assisting them through college transitions, academic challenges, and financial aid renewal,” says Kyle Petrie, Alumni Success Coordinator. “This continuity helps ensure that our alumni not only enroll in college but stay to complete their degrees.”



Advanced Placement Recognition

Bright Star Schools’ Valor Academy High School in North Hills and Rise Kohyang High School in Koreatown were recognized on the College Board’s 2024 AP (Advanced Placement) School Honor Roll. The AP School Honor Roll recognizes schools that have done outstanding work to welcome more students into AP courses and support them on the path to college success.

2024 AP School Honor Roll

Rise Kohyang High School



Platinum – College Optimization
Gold – College Credit
Silver – College Culture

Valor Academy High School



Platinum – College Optimization
Gold – College Culture, College Credit

A group of approximately 25 students, mostly young adults, are walking along a wide, light-colored dirt path that winds through a desert canyon. The canyon walls are made of layered, reddish-brown rock, showing signs of erosion. Some students are wearing backpacks, and others are wearing hats. The path is flanked by low, rough stone walls in some areas. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day. The overall atmosphere is one of exploration and outdoor activity.

At Bright Star Schools,
we believe the path to college
should be well-worn and crowded.

All students deserve an opportunity to go to college, and we do everything we can to ensure it. Last year **we achieved a 95% graduation rate** (with Valor Academy High School at 100%). And **our preliminary college matriculation rate was 88%**, compared with the nationwide average of 51% of students from similar schools. This is the expectation for every senior class, because it is central to our school culture



Bright Star Schools are Community Schools.

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY SCHOOL AND WHY DO THEY MATTER?



Across California, we see the rise of community schools, where student success is shaped by far more than what happens during the school day. Health, safety, family stability, and community belonging all influence how a child learns and grows. Community schools respond to this reality by weaving together academics, social services, family engagement, and enrichment opportunities into one integrated support system—right on campus.

Rather than operate in isolation, community schools form deep partnerships with local organizations, health providers, businesses, and government agencies. These partnerships bring critical supports—such as mental health counseling, after-school programs, food assistance, and family workshops—directly to students and their families. In doing so, they remove barriers that often stand between students and their potential.

The California Department of Education defines community schools as a whole-child, whole-family, whole-community approach to education. Backed by the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP), the state has invested billions of dollars to expand this model across the state. The goal is to ensure that every child—regardless of ZIP code—has access to not only strong academics, but also to the safety nets and enrichment that nurture long-term success.

This model is particularly powerful in diverse, high-need regions such as Southern California. In many neighborhoods, schools are among the few stable institutions families can count on. When schools open their doors beyond the traditional school day—to host health clinics, community meetings, food drives, or college workshops—they cultivate trust, belonging, and shared responsibility between educators, families, and local partners.

(Above left) Rise Kohyang students learn the meaning of community as they join their teachers in a neighborhood cleanup in Rampart Village. (Below left) Stella Elementary students can see their bright futures more clearly, thanks to Vision to Learn, which operates a mobile eye exam van that visited the school.

The goal of a community school is to ensure that every child—regardless of ZIP code—has access to not only strong academics, but also to the safety nets and enrichment that nurture long-term success.



(Above) The mobile unit from St. John's Community Health provides free medical exams for students. (Below) Faculty host a community breakfast for Rise Kohyang Elementary and Middle Schools.

A model for Community Schools *in action.*

In 2025, all nine Bright Star schools became official, state-recognized Community Schools and were awarded a \$12 million grant from the state of California to continue providing robust wraparound support and services to students, families, and communities. This is a testament to our deep commitment to serving students, families, and neighborhoods as interconnected communities of care.

Bright Star Schools has been intentional about the communities we serve. Our Community School models serve three distinct and amazing communities of LA County. In each cluster we serve, we have an elementary, middle, and high school to ensure our students stay with Bright Star from TK through 12th grade.

Our most recent impact includes:

- Establishing over 50 partnerships with community organizations focusing on health, housing, well-being, mental health, and more
- Providing free eye exams and over 200 pairs of free eyeglasses to our students
- Providing new shoes, backpacks full of school supplies, holiday toys, and laptops to students and families
- Facilitating Community School Advisory Councils at each site where students, families, staff, and partners collaborate



Each Bright Star community helps ensure our students' essential needs are met - from our Big Sunday Book Donation (above) to free shoes and backpacks (right). Thanks to leadership teams of parents, teachers, students, and community partners, there is continuous involvement throughout the year.



Each school engages parents, staff, and partners through advisory councils that shape priorities. Families aren't just recipients. They are co-creators of the school community.



Partnerships that Strengthen Communities

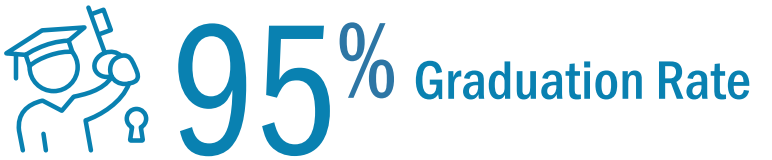
“Community schools are powered by partnerships with health providers, local nonprofits, mental health agencies, and local organizations” says Ruth Kim, Principal of Rise Kohyang Middle School. “Through these collaborations, Bright Star connects families to resources that address housing insecurity, nutrition, and access to healthcare.”

Family engagement is central to the model. Gene Castro, Principal of Stella Elementary Charter Academy explains, “Each school maintains community advisory councils that bring together parents, staff, and local partners to shape priorities and programming. Families aren’t just recipients of services. They are co-creators of the school community.”

A Continuum of Support from TK–12 and Beyond

Another core component that sets Bright Star apart is its comprehensive TK–12 continuum, paired with a unique Alumni Support Program that continues for six years after graduation. Bright Star’s support doesn’t end with a diploma. It extends into college and career, ensuring that graduates have the guidance and stability they need to persist and succeed.

This long-term investment has produced exceptional outcomes. Bright Star boasts high graduation rates—consistently above 90%—and nearly universal UC/CSU eligibility for its graduates. Jennifer Anaya, Principal of Valor Academy High School, says, “A lot of our students are the first in their families to attend college, and hundreds have gone on to succeed in higher education and professional careers, carrying their community’s hopes with them.”



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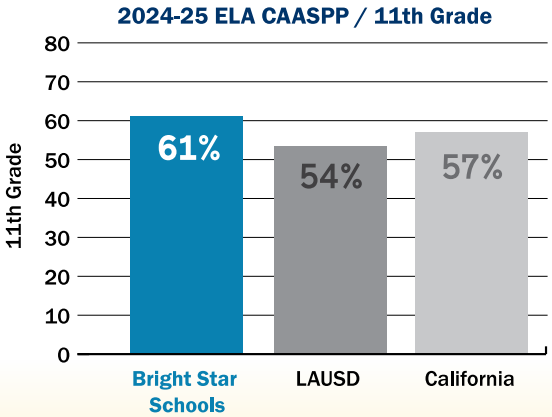
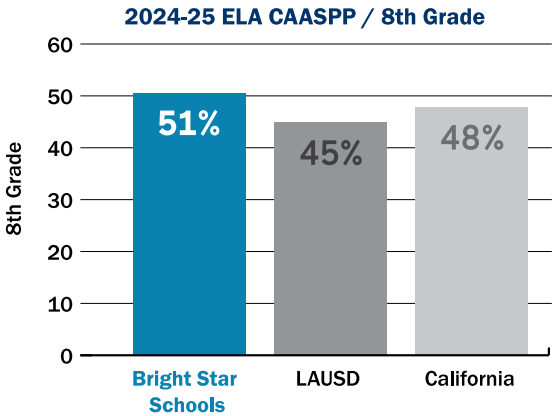
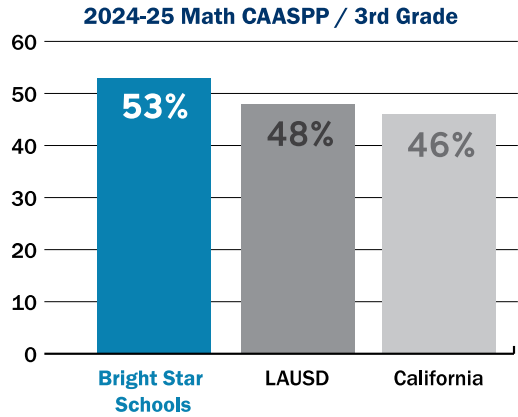
Elementary Schools – Our first time testers, Bright Star 3rd graders, outperformed LAUSD and California in Math CAASPP proficiency (2024-25).

Middle Schools – Bright Star 8th graders outperformed LAUSD and California in ELA CAASPP proficiency (2024-25).

High Schools – Bright Star high schools outperformed LAUSD’s and California in ELA and also continue to compete with LAUSD’s and California’s outcomes in all other areas (2024-25).

How students see themselves empowers their success.

We begin preparing students for college in elementary school by making sure they are building strong academic foundations. During the 2024-2025 school year, our students outperformed neighborhood schools, the Los Angeles Unified School District, and the state of California in key subject areas at critical grade levels. (See tables at right for more insight.)





A bright future for L.A.'s First Suburb



The West Adams, Baldwin Hills and South Los Angeles communities are diverse and historically rich neighborhoods, home to a vibrant mix of Latino, Black, and immigrant families who bring deep cultural pride and community spirit. Yet, like many urban areas, these communities have long faced systemic inequities—under-resourced public schools, economic instability, and barriers to academic opportunity. Our Stella schools were founded here to help close those gaps, offering residents high-quality, college-preparatory education within their own community. The Community School approach strengthens family partnerships, creates access to social supports, and fosters a sense of belonging that empowers the entire neighborhood.



We believe in creating positive energy for our students from the beginning of elementary school through high school graduation. (Middle left) @TheHoopBus came to Stella Elementary, teaching students gratitude, teamwork, self-love and discipline. (Top left and below) High school graduation is a moment for students to be recognized for their accomplishments.



(Above) We teach our Stella Middle students that the beauty of nature is all around them by taking them on a fall field trip to Franklin Canyon Park in the heart of Los Angeles.



7 Stella High Charter Academy Grads Graduate with Dual Degrees

This year, Bright Star's high school graduations were even brighter! In early June, seven Bright Star Schools graduates from Stella High Charter Academy (SHCA) received college degrees along with their high school diplomas.

Our students – six seniors and one junior – participated in SHCA's dual-enrollment program with LA Southwest College. During high school, they worked hard to excel in both their high school and college courses. All grads earned associates degrees, with some students earning multiple associates degrees. Additionally, they were all accepted into top four-year universities:

- **Zuleimy C.**, 2 AA degrees, attending UC Berkeley
- **Angelina D.**, 3 AA degrees, attending UCLA, then medical school
- **Alexandra E.**, 1 AA degree, attending UC San Diego
- **Brianna R.**, 1 AA degree, attending UCLA
- **Keily R.**, attending 1 AA degree, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo
- **Tyler S.**, 1 AA degree, attending UC Berkeley
- **Julio T.**, 1 AA degrees, attending UC Davis



Bringing diversity together

Koreatown, or “K-Town,” is a densely populated and culturally rich neighborhood in central Los Angeles. Home to over 100,000 residents, the area boasts a diverse demographic: approximately 37% Asian (primarily Korean), 31% Latino, and smaller percentages of Black and White residents. While the community boasts cultural vibrancy, Koreatown families face challenges such as high-density living, limited green spaces, and a high cost of living. All of these factors contribute to the need for the accessible, high-quality education and wraparound support provided by Rise Kohyang schools. Our Community School approach is particularly vital in Koreatown.



5 Students Receive \$1.6 million in Scholarships to Attend Top Universities

Five top students from Bright Star Schools' Rise Kohyang High School in Koreatown have received full college scholarships to attend top universities. Selected as QuestBridge scholars, our students will each receive a full college scholarship worth over \$325,000 – over \$1.6 million in scholarships combined! Here's where our students are now:

- Jackie O.: Yale University
- Emanuel A.: Boston University
- Rena L.: Stanford University
- Joseph K.: Davidson College
- Jayden S.: Rice University



Parents, families and community members support and participate in Rise Kohyang events throughout the year. Our schools are hubs of community activity and spirit.





**VALOR ACADEMY
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**
A BRIGHT STAR SCHOOL



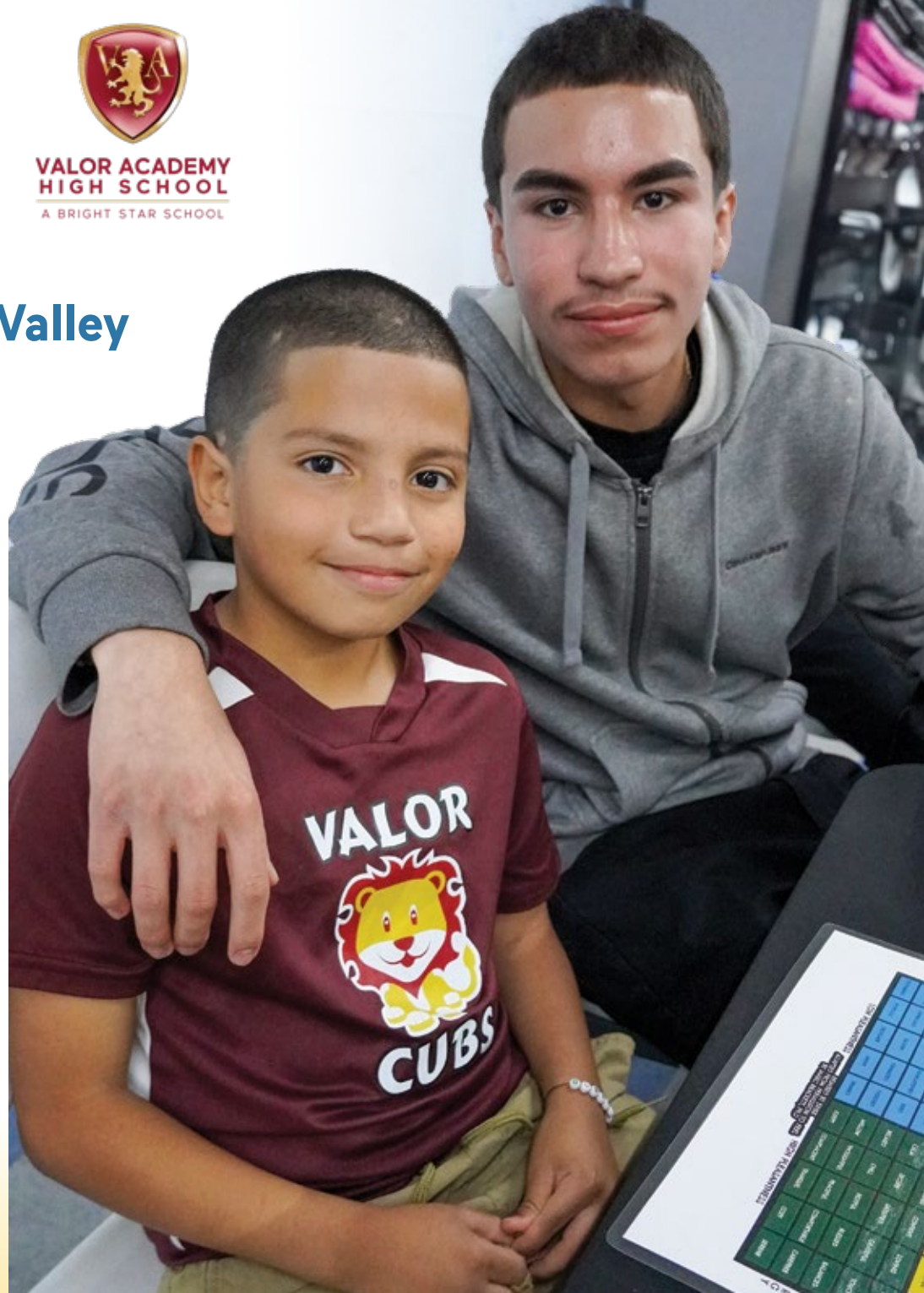
**VALOR ACADEMY
MIDDLE SCHOOL**
A BRIGHT STAR SCHOOL



**VALOR ACADEMY
HIGH SCHOOL**
A BRIGHT STAR SCHOOL

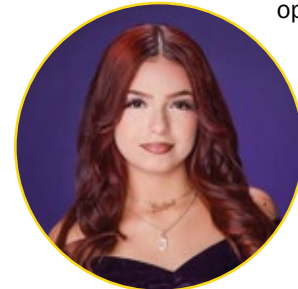
Tending to a Fertile Valley

North Hills is a community characterized by its rich cultural diversity and resilience. The neighborhood is predominantly Latino, with a significant portion of the population being foreign-born or from immigrant families. Many residents face economic challenges, including housing instability and limited access to educational resources, which can impact students' academic success. The establishment of Valor Academy was driven by the need to offer accessible, rigorous education within a supportive and inclusive environment. Valor Academy aims to bridge educational gaps and empower students to achieve their full potential by integrating academic support with cultural understanding and community engagement.



Valor High School: A Life-Changing Experience

"My name is Jazlyn G., and I'm a proud senior at Valor Academy High School, part of Bright Star Schools. I transferred to Valor in 11th grade, and in just a little over a year, it's completely changed my life. Nothing felt like home until I came to Valor. From the moment I walked through the doors, I could feel the difference, the energy, the care, and the community. At Valor, you're not just another student sitting in a classroom, you're part of a family that genuinely wants to see you succeed.



Through Bright Star, we've had amazing opportunities like College Experience Lessons and Life Experience Learning Trips, where we visit colleges and explore new environments. Those experiences make college feel real and possible, especially for students who might be the first in their families to go, like me.

I'm proud to say I'm Senior Class President, something I never imagined I'd be. That's what Valor does, it pushes you to grow into the best version of yourself and gives you confidence, leadership, and purpose. Bright Star Schools create spaces where students find their voice and build a future they're proud of. It's not just about academics, it's about growth, opportunity, and community.

As I get ready to graduate, it's bittersweet. I'll miss Valor deeply, but I'm so grateful to be part of something that's changed my life in every way."

Opposite page: Valor Academy Schools' Mentorship Program creates powerful connections between Valor Elementary School and Valor High School students to support their collective success.



Valor Academy Middle School is a model for supportive academic environments including our team of Parent Ambassadors and Community School Manager Brian Martinez (directly above). Counselors provide one-on-one social-emotional support to students (bottom right). And middle school band (middle right) provides a nurturing environment for students to learn how to combine creativity and collaboration with disciplined practice.

Continuous Improvement is Another Important Part of Our Culture

We're proud of our achievements, yet we're always looking for ways to improve. In fact, for the 2025-2026 school year, we selected five outcomes to work toward:



Student Voice & Belonging

"We want every student to feel part of a community that sees and honors them. We help our young people know their voices matter and they belong," says Breana Baskerville, Assistant Principal, Stella Middle Charter Academy.



Daily Attendance

"Attendance reflects the students, parents, and teachers," says Marni Parsons, Senior Vice President of Student and Family Services. "When we foster a positive culture and engaging curriculum, students want to be here."



Strong Literacy

"We make this a top priority in elementary school," says Laura Gaboudian, Director of Literacy. "Strong reading skills by 3rd grade is a good predictor of academic success, graduation, and life outcomes."



Math Achievement

"Foundational math ability builds confidence and critical thinking skills," says Dayna Rosso, Math Teacher, Stella Elementary Charter Academy. "It clears a path to advanced coursework and future career opportunities."



Excellent Educators

"We want to help our current teachers grow and have the ability to attract new teachers who are committed to excellence, our students and our communities," says Liliana Bustos, Chief Instructional Officer.

"We want every student to feel connected to a community that sees them, hears them, and honors who they are."

- BREANA BASKERVILLE, ASST. PRINCIPAL, SMCA

Stella Elementary Charter Academy Teacher named 2026 Regional Teacher of the Year—Los Angeles

Dayna Rosso's student-centered approach to mathematics instruction at Stella Elementary Charter Academy empowers learners to take ownership of their learning and develop both computational skills and mathematical reasoning.



Her innovative practices—including differentiated small-group instruction, student leadership roles, and targeted support for multilingual learners and students with disabilities—have driven remarkable academic growth, with 74% of students meeting or exceeding state standards. Beyond the classroom, Dayna mentors colleagues and fosters a culture of inclusion, celebration, and high expectations across the school community.

"At the heart of every thriving charter public school are the teachers and volunteers whose dedication uplifts entire communities," said Myrna Castrejón, President and CEO of CCSA. "This year's Hart Vision Award honorees embody excellence, compassion, and the spirit of service that define California's charter movement. Our teachers are transforming lives through their leadership and innovation in the classroom. Together, they remind us of the extraordinary impact individuals can have when they put students first."



Magnify the Positive Impact ON OUR COMMUNITIES



The impact of Bright Star Schools extends beyond individual success. Graduates return as educators, mentors, and community leaders, multiplying the impact. By supporting students through college completion and into meaningful careers, Bright Star strengthens neighborhoods and inspires future generations. And you can make an impact too.

Investing in our children is an investment in our communities. Their future is our future. We are closing opportunity gaps and cultivating a generation of leaders prepared to lead both inside and outside the classroom. We ask you to support our life-changing work. As a collective we are a strong force with the power to create hope and change for our students and our communities.

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brightstarschools.org

