

# What is a Charter School?

A charter school is a public school that operates as a school of choice. Charter schools commit to obtaining specific educational objectives in return for a charter to operate a school. Charter schools are exempt from significant state or local regulations related to operation and management, but otherwise adhere to regulations of public schools – for example, charter schools cannot charge tuition or be affiliated with a religious institution.

In other words, charter schools are publicly **accountable** – they rely on families choosing to enroll their children, and they must have a written performance contract with an authorized public chartering agency. Charter schools are also **autonomous** – they have more flexibility in the operations and management of the school than traditional public schools.

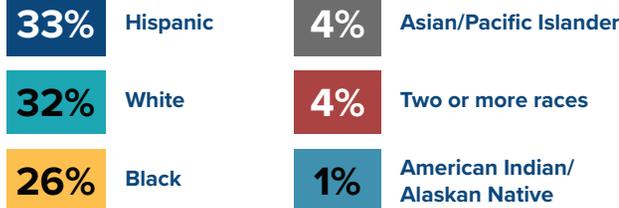
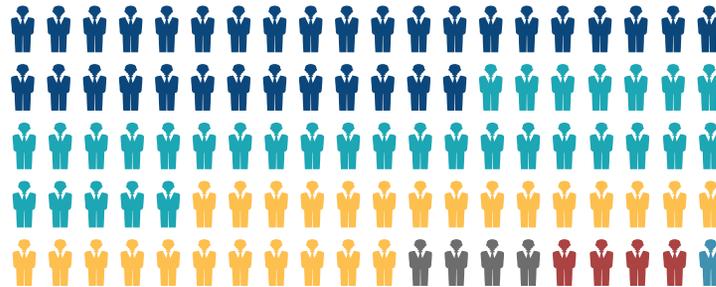
Number of charter schools as of 2018–2019

7,486



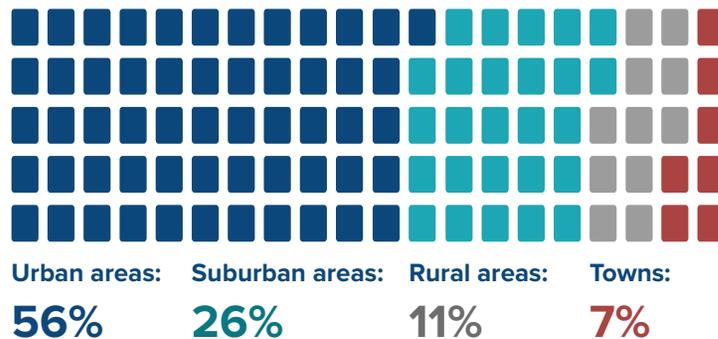
Number of students served as of Fall 2016:  
**3 million**

Demographics of students served:



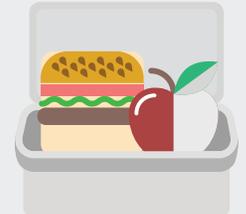
Source: [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cgb.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgb.asp)

Geographic areas served by charter schools as of SY 2016–2017:



Source: [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cla.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cla.asp)

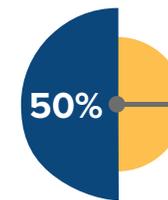
Percentage of charter schools serving high proportions of Free- and Reduced-Price Lunch (FRPL)-eligible students in SY 2016-2017:



**58%**

Note: High proportions as defined by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).  
Source: [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cla.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cla.asp)

Public perceptions of charter schools as of Fall 2019:



Percentage of parents who support the formation of charter schools



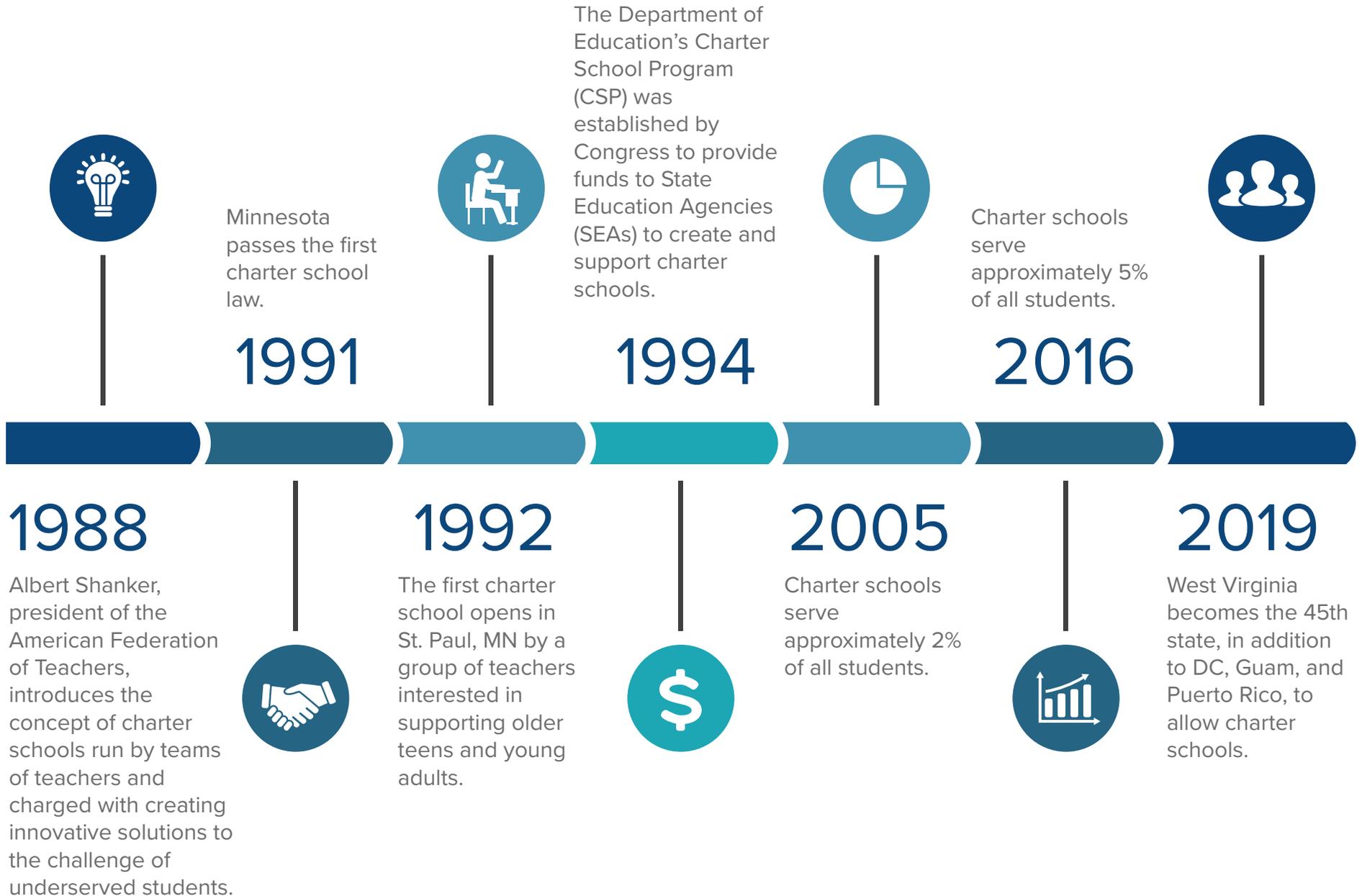
Source: <https://www.educationnext.org/2019-ednext-poll-interactive/>

Number and type of charter school authorizers as of 2017:



Source: <https://www.qualitycharters.org/authorizing-by-the-numbers/authorizer-demographics/>

# A Brief History of Charter Schools in America



# The Life Cycle of a Charter School

