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 students served as of Fall 2016: 3 million

Demographics of students served:

- Hispanic: 33%
- White: 32%
- Black: 26%
- Asian/Pacific Islander: 4%
- Two or more races: 4%
- American Indian/Alaskan Native: 1%

Source: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgb.asp

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

- Urban areas: 56%
- Suburban areas: 26%
- Rural areas: 11%
- Towns: 7%

Source: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cla.asp

Number and type of charter school authorizers as of 2017:

- Number of charter school authorizers: 999
- Number of LEAs/public school districts with authorizing capacity: 895
- Number of state education agencies with authorizing capacity: 19
- Number of other authorizing bodies, including NGOs and institutions of higher education: 85

Source: https://www.qualitycharters.org/authorizing-by-the-numbers/authorizer-demographics/
A Brief History of Charter Schools in America

1988
Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, introduces the concept of charter schools run by teams of teachers and charged with creating innovative solutions to the challenge of underserved students.

1991
Minnesota passes the first charter school law.

1992
The first charter school opens in St. Paul, MN by a group of teachers interested in supporting older teens and young adults.

1994
The Department of Education’s Charter School Program (CSP) was established by Congress to provide funds to State Education Agencies (SEAs) to create and support charter schools.

2005
Charter schools serve approximately 2% of all students.

2016
Charter schools serve approximately 5% of all students.

2019
West Virginia becomes the 45th state, in addition to DC, Guam, and Puerto Rico, to allow charter schools.
The Life Cycle of a Charter School

1. **STEP 1: Design and Planning**
   - START HERE

2. **STEP 2: Authorizing Period**

3. **STEP 3: Preparing to Open**

4. **STEP 4: Enrollment and Operations**

5. **STEP 5: Achieving and Sustaining Success**

6. **OPTIONAL STEP:** Replication and Expansion

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