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:**

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

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

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

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

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

**Public perceptions of charter schools as of Fall 2019:**

- **50%** 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:**

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

Source: https://www.qualitycharters.org/authorizing-by-the-numbers/authorizer-demographics/
West Virginia becomes the 45th state, in addition to DC, Guam, and Puerto Rico, to allow charter schools.

Charter schools serve approximately 5% of all students.

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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.

1994
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1991
- Minnesota passes the first charter school law.

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.

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

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.

A Brief History of Charter Schools in America