FLORIDA

(Law passed in 1996; last amended in 2011;
8th strongest of the nation's 42 charter laws)

517 charters serving 179,254 students.

120 charter schools closed as of December 2011.

NOTEWORTHY

The successful Pembroke Pines system of charter schools has asked parents to chip in what they can to close a budget shortfall this year. The Pembroke Pines charters consistently earn A's in Florida's school-grading system, and the hugely popular system, with its seven schools ranging from elementary to high school, has 11,000 students currently on the waiting list.

INDEPENDENT OR MULTIPLE AUTHORIZERS – NO

APPROVAL	School boards
APPEAL	Yes. Applications denied by the school board may be appealed to the State Board of Education whose decision is binding.

OPERATIONAL AUTONOMY

STATE	Yes. Blanket waiver from most state rules and regulations governing traditional public schools. Specific statewide statutes, such as class size limitations, apply to charter schools with no exemptions. Virtual schools are allowed. Management contracts with ESPs are not restricted. High-performing charters can replicate one a year and open new schools upon request (virtuals ineligible).
LOCAL	Charter schools are exempt from most local school rules and regulations with certain exceptions as prescribed by the district.
TEACHER FREEDOM	Yes. Teachers are exempt from district work rules and negotiated agreements unless otherwise agreed to in district-awarded charter. Teachers on approved leaves of absence must participate in state's retirement system.

NUMBER OF SCHOOLS ALLOWED

CAP	No legal limit on number of schools that may be approved.

EQUITY

STUDENT FUNDING	Funds pass through the district. Funding for charter schools follows same formula used for all other public schools minus administrative fees retained by school boards. Administrative fees are five percent for all charters, or two percent for those considered "high-performing."
	"Students enrolled in a charter school, regardless of the sponsorship, shall be funded as if they are in a basic program or a special program, the same as students enrolled in other public schools in the school district. (b) The basis for the agreement for funding students enrolled in a charter school shall be the sum of the school district's operating funds from the Florida Education Finance Program as provided in s. 1011.62 and the General Appropriations Act, including gross state and local funds, discretionary lottery funds, and funds from the school district's current operating discretionary millage levy; divided by total funded weighted full-time equivalent students in the school district; multiplied by the weighted full-time equivalent students for the charter school. Charter schools whose students or programs meet the eligibility criteria in law shall be entitled to their proportionate share of categorical program funds included in the total funds available in the Florida Education Finance Program by the Legislature, including transportation. Total funding for each charter school shall be recalculated during the year to reflect the revised calculations under the Florida Education Finance Program by the state and the actual weighted full-time equivalent students reported by the charter school during the full-time equivalent student survey periods designated by the Commissioner of Education." [Fla. Stat. § 1002.33(17)(b)]
FACILITIES FUNDS	Yes. The state has appropriated $57 million in its capital outlay program for per pupil facilities funding, which may be used for purchasing, construction, or maintenance of facilities. It is limited to charters that meet certain criteria, including: operation for at least three years, accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, financial and academic stability, and is an expanded feeder chain or charter within the same district (meaning an elementary charter that serves a middle school that serves a high school charter.) Charters receive between $500 and $750 per pupil. [Fla. Stat. § 1013.62(e)]

LINK TO THE FLORIDA CHARTER SCHOOL LAW