

THE CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM

2026 Parent Power Index

Charter School Law — State-by-State Quick Reference

Grades, ranks, and analysis for Authorizers, Growth, Operations & Equity in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

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Alabama

RANK #27
C - 75**FAST FACTS***Law enacted: 2015 | Amended: 2026 | Charter schools: 25 | Charter students: 9,042 | Cap: No*

SUMMARY

Alabama made incremental but meaningful changes to its charter school landscape in 2026 by expanding facilities financing and encouraging more local school boards to become charter authorizers. While these steps could strengthen long-term charter growth, and improves its ranking this year, the otherwise opportunity-friendly state's charter law is still just in the middle of the pack. This year's analysis recognizes Alabama's stronger financial support for charter schools.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

The Alabama Public Charter School Commission was established in 2015 to serve both as an authorizer for applicants whose local districts decline to authorize charter schools and as an appeals body for applications denied at the district level. Its members are appointed by state officials. While the Commission provides an important statewide pathway for charter approval, it has generally not operated as an entity that fosters bold growth in charter schooling and therefore has not generated the volume or diversity of applications often seen in states with more proactive authorizers. Local school districts have been eligible to serve as charter school authorizers since Alabama's charter law was enacted, but relatively few have exercised that authority. Although 16 districts have obtained authorizer status, only a small number have actively overseen charter schools, leaving the Commission as the primary driver of charter growth in the state. In 2026, the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) renewed efforts to encourage additional local boards to pursue authorizer status. Under the current process, districts seeking approval as authorizers by the November 1 deadline must issue Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for new startup or conversion charter schools.

GROWTH

There is no cap on the number of charter schools that may be established. Only one new school is approved to open in 2026 and two new schools are approved to open in 2027.

OPERATIONS

Charters receive a blanket waiver from regulations that apply to traditional district schools. However, the law also gives control to the State Board of Education to write regulations specific to charter schools, creating an environment where charter schools can be arbitrarily subject to regulations that impede their ability to operate effectively. This is not a best practice policy. Charters may offer enrollment preferences for students residing within specific geographical boundaries if the overall charter school enrollment includes a majority of at-risk students.

EQUITY

The law calls for charter schools to both be funded at parity with district schools and for charters to receive local dollars (in addition to state funds). When funds flow through the district however, it has considerable power over how much funding the charter eventually yields for per pupil costs, often less than what is expended on traditional schools.

Alaska

RANK #40
D • 65

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1995 | Amended: 2014 | Charter schools: 32 | Charter students: 7,349 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

The Last Frontier added two new charter schools in 2026, demonstrating that family demand continues to outpace the state's restrictive charter law. While recent improvements to facilities funding represent meaningful progress, Alaska's charter sector will remain limited until lawmakers create authorizing pathways beyond local school districts and give charter schools the autonomy they need to thrive.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Local school districts authorize charter schools, subject to approval by the State Board of Education. Applicants denied by a local district may appeal to the Commissioner of Education. If the Commissioner upholds the denial, applicants may then appeal to the State Board. Because charter school authorization remains entirely dependent on local school districts, opportunities to open new schools remain limited.

GROWTH

Alaska places no cap on the number of charter schools. However, growth has remained slow because local school districts are the only entities permitted to authorize new schools.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools are exempt from only a limited number of state requirements, primarily involving curriculum and scheduling. Schools must negotiate with their sponsoring districts for additional exemptions, including from collective bargaining agreements. As a result, charter schools often lack the operational autonomy needed to meaningfully differentiate themselves. Teachers remain covered by district collective bargaining agreements unless both the district and the union agree to an exemption, leaving charter schools with little independent authority over personnel decisions.

EQUITY

Alaska law requires school districts to provide charter schools with the state, local, and applicable federal funding generated by their enrolled students. Districts may retain administrative costs of up to 4%, subject to the state's approved indirect cost rate, and must provide an itemized accounting of those expenses. While charter schools still do not receive facilities funding on par with district-operated schools, a 2025 statutory change significantly improved funding equity by requiring districts to pass through state construction and major maintenance funds generated on behalf of charter schools.

Arizona

RANK #2
A- • 92

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1994 | Amended: 2022 | Charter schools:
580 | Charter students: 231,703 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

Arizona's charter school movement continues to thrive under one of the nation's strongest charter laws. Serving more than 230,000 students across hundreds of schools and representing 21% of public school enrollment, charter schools have become a mainstream public education option and a driving force behind Arizona's reputation as a national leader in educational innovation.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Arizona has one of the nation's most diverse charter authorizing systems. Charter schools may be authorized by the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools (ASBCS), the State Board of Education, public universities, community college districts, or groups of community college districts. The ASBCS authorizes the overwhelming majority of Arizona charter schools, while the State Board of Education rarely exercises its statutory authority. School districts seeking to convert district schools to charter schools must obtain State Board approval.

GROWTH

Arizona places no cap on the number of charter schools. While authorizers regulate growth through the application and renewal process, the law generally encourages expansion of successful schools, and legislative efforts to impose statewide growth restrictions have been unsuccessful.

OPERATIONS

Arizona grants charter schools broad operational autonomy through a general statutory exemption from the laws governing school districts, except where specific statutes or charter contract provisions apply. This framework provides substantial flexibility over governance, staffing, budgeting, curriculum, and school operations while preserving essential state requirements relating to health and safety, civil rights, financial accountability, and statewide assessments.

EQUITY

Through the state's Equalization Formula, charter schools receive Charter Additional Assistance (CAA) — approximately \$2,185 per pupil in FY2025—to help offset costs traditionally supported through district capital funding. As a result, Arizona is approaching foundation funding equity between charter schools and district schools. However, charter schools still lack access to local bond proceeds and other district capital financing mechanisms available to school districts. Consequently, while Arizona has largely addressed operating funding equity, significant structural inequities remain in facilities financing.

Arkansas

RANK #18
B- • 82

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1995 | Amended: 2023 | Charter schools: 102 | Charter students: 45,626 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

The Natural State has turned a corner on charter schools. Recent reforms—including eliminating the statewide cap on open-enrollment charter schools—have transformed Arkansas into a state that encourages rather than restricts educational opportunity. Those changes have significantly strengthened its charter law and improved its national standing, creating new opportunities for families across the state. This year's analysis recognizes that Arkansas provides more opportunities for charter schools to thrive, including modest facilities support and greater charter school autonomy.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

The Arkansas Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, through its Charter Authorizing Panel, authorizes open-enrollment public charter schools, while district conversion charter schools require approval by both the local school board and the State Board of Education. There is no formal right of appeal from an authorizer's decision. However, applicants, charter schools, and affected school districts may request discretionary review by the State Board of Education.

GROWTH

The 2023 LEARNS Act eliminated Arkansas's statewide cap on charter schools, significantly expanding opportunities for growth. High-performing charter operators demonstrating academic success and financial stability may receive additional campus licenses or expedited approval to expand. Charter growth is now governed primarily through the authorizing process rather than statutory limits.

OPERATIONS

Arkansas does not grant charter schools a blanket exemption from the laws governing traditional public schools. Instead, charter schools may receive specific waivers through their approved charter agreements while remaining subject to statewide academic standards, assessments, accountability requirements, health and safety laws, civil rights protections, and other applicable state and federal requirements.

EQUITY

Charter schools receive the same state foundation funding as traditional public schools but do not receive local property tax revenues, which constitute a significant share of district school funding. Arkansas does not provide a dedicated per-pupil facilities funding program, although the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education may provide facilities funding for open-enrollment charter schools through available appropriations. State law also requires school districts to report unused or underutilized facilities and gives eligible nearby charter schools the opportunity to purchase or lease those properties at fair market value.

California

RANK #32
C- • 72

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1992 | Amended: 2019 | Charter schools: 1,262 | Charter students: 725,646 | Cap: Yes, up to 100 new schools per year.

SUMMARY

Once a charter school pioneer, California has steadily lost ground as one of the nation's charter leaders. A series of restrictions championed by teachers unions and their political allies has narrowed pathways for charter growth and reduced opportunities for expansion, even as parent demand remains strong. The result is a state with some of the country's most successful charter schools operating within a policy environment increasingly hostile to innovation.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

School districts are California's primary charter authorizers, while county boards may authorize countywide charter schools and hear appeals from district denials. Since the enactment of AB 1505 (2019), the State Board of Education no longer serves as an independent charter authorizer and may overturn a denial only if both the district and county board abused their discretion. AB 1505 also expanded local authorizers' discretion to deny petitions based on broad statutory criteria, including findings that a proposed charter would "substantially undermine" existing schools.

GROWTH

State law retains a statutory limit of 100 newly established charter schools that may be approved each year. In practice, however, California has not reached this cap in recent years, and charter growth is constrained far more by the petition approval process established under AB 1505 than by the statutory limit itself.

OPERATIONS

California generally exempts charter schools from laws governing school districts except where statutes expressly provide otherwise. Charter schools remain subject to statewide accountability, civil rights, fiscal oversight, teacher credentialing, and other applicable legal requirements. State law also places significant restrictions on the approval and operation of new nonclassroom-based charter schools.

EQUITY

Charter schools are funded using the same formula as traditional district schools for state and local funds. Because they do not receive local property tax revenues directly, charter schools may request a transfer of in-lieu local property tax funds from their sponsoring district. However, this does not result in equitable local funding, and significant disparities remain. In some places, such as Los Angeles, charter schools receive as much as \$5,000 less per student than their counterparts in traditional public schools; in Oakland, the gap is even larger. While California requires districts to provide charter schools access to public facilities under Proposition 39, limited facilities funding and ongoing implementation challenges continue to disadvantage charter schools.

Colorado

RANK #11
B- • 82

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1993 | Amended: 2023 | Charter schools: 262 | Charter students: 136,218 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

The Mile-High State's charter schools continue to enjoy strong bipartisan and public support, serving more than 136,000 students in over 260 schools statewide. Just last year, charter enrollment grew while overall public school enrollment declined, reinforcing Colorado's reputation as a national leader in charter schooling and parent-driven innovation, though many families still lack the power and access needed to drive meaningful educational change in their communities.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Local school districts and the Colorado Charter School Institute (CSI), a statewide authorizer. CSI may authorize schools in districts that do not have exclusive chartering authority and, with district permission, in districts that retain it. Districts serving fewer than 3,000 students may obtain exclusive chartering authority through a streamlined process, while larger districts must apply to the State Board of Education. Applicants denied by a district may appeal to the State Board, which may remand the application for reconsideration. A second district denial may be appealed again, and the State Board's decision is final. Appeals from CSI decisions receive one State Board review, whose decision is final.

GROWTH

Colorado imposes no caps, although resistance from some districts continues to impede growth. Despite these barriers and declining statewide K-12 enrollment, Colorado's charter sector serves more than 136,000 students and remains one of the nation's largest and most established.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools receive automatic waivers from many laws and regulations governing school districts, providing a reasonable degree of operational autonomy.

EQUITY

Colorado law requires district-authorized charter schools to receive at least 95% of district per-pupil operating revenue unless otherwise agreed and requires districts to equitably distribute additional mill levy override revenue, or provide at least 95% of the applicable per-pupil share. Charter schools are eligible for Building Excellent Schools Today (BEST) facilities grants. Institute-authorized charter schools now receive full state-funded mill levy equalization, substantially improving funding parity.

Connecticut

RANK #43
D- • 62

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1996 Recently revised: | Charter schools: 30 | Charter students: 10,869 | Cap: Varies

SUMMARY

The Constitution State continues to maintain one of the nation's weakest charter school environments. While Connecticut may approve new charter schools, lawmakers routinely refuse to provide the funding needed for them to open or expand. As of 2026, at least five state-approved charter schools remain stuck in limbo awaiting legislative funding, including Capital Prep Middletown and Danbury Charter School. Home to high-performing schools such as Capital Prep, Connecticut demonstrates strong parent demand for charter options—but state policy continues to put politics ahead of opportunity, earning Connecticut a charter law ranking of just 43rd nationally.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

The State Board of Education is Connecticut's sole effective charter school authorizer. While local school districts may approve local charter schools, all charter schools ultimately require State Board approval, and there is no independent authorizer or appeals process.

GROWTH

Connecticut places no statewide cap on the number of charter schools, but growth is constrained by statutory enrollment limits and a highly centralized approval process. Enrollment increases for district-authorized schools are limited to the lesser of 250 students or 25 percent of district enrollment, while state charter schools are limited to the lesser of 300 students or 25 percent of enrollment. Expansion ultimately depends on State Board approval and legislative action.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools do not receive a blanket waiver from state laws or regulations. Instead, schools must apply for waivers from specific statutory or regulatory requirements, limiting their operational flexibility and increasing reliance on state approval.

EQUITY

Connecticut's charter schools are funded through annual legislative appropriations rather than a student-based funding formula, leaving funding levels uncertain and well below those of traditional public schools. Charter schools continue to receive substantially less funding than district schools serving similar students, with funding gaps exceeding \$5,000 per pupil in some communities. Although the State Board of Education approved five new charter schools in 2025—the largest approval round in years—none can open unless the General Assembly appropriates operating funds. The legislature has also declined to increase the state's per-pupil charter allocation, making legislative funding decisions the primary obstacle to both equitable funding and the expansion of new charter schools. Connecticut does not provide a dedicated per-pupil facilities funding program for charter schools, relying instead on a limited competitive capital grant program supported through state bond funds.

D.C.**RANK #5**
B+ • 88**FAST FACTS***Law enacted: 1996 | Amended: N/A | Charter schools: 142 |
Charter students: 47,564 | Cap: Yes, 10 yearly, rolls over***SUMMARY**

Few places demonstrate the power of charter schools more clearly than Washington, D.C., where nearly half of public school students attend charter schools and families benefit from one of the nation's strongest charter laws. The sector has helped drive academic gains, expand opportunity, and keep families invested in the city. Yet despite these results, some political leaders continue to challenge the very policies that made D.C.'s charter success possible, making the District's 5th-placed ranking a status worth protecting, not taking for granted.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS**AUTHORIZERS**

The DC Public Charter School Board (DCPCSB) is the District's sole independent charter authorizer. Although the original law permitted additional eligible authorizers, such as the Board of Education, museums, and universities designated by the City Council, no other authorizers have ever been established.

GROWTH

District law limits approval to 10 new charter local education agencies (LEAs) annually. Because existing charter LEAs may expand through additional campuses with authorizer approval, the statutory cap has not materially constrained charter growth in practice.

OPERATIONS

The congressional act establishing charter schools in the District granted the DC Public Charter School Board authority to authorize charter schools while providing them broad independence from District government. Charter schools generally operate free from the rules and regulations governing DC Public Schools. In recent years, however, the District Council, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), and other local entities have imposed increasing reporting, compliance, and oversight requirements outside the charter authorizing process, creating additional administrative burdens and raising concerns about erosion of charter autonomy.

EQUITY

The District provides one of the nation's most equitable charter funding systems, including the country's strongest per-pupil facilities allowance. Charter school students receive the same operating funding as district students under the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula. However, this parity applies only to funding distributed through the formula; DC Public Schools also receives substantial additional operating support through other District and federal sources that is generally unavailable to charter schools. In addition, recent budget actions have reduced the growth of the charter facilities allowance, raising concerns that facilities funding will increasingly fall behind actual facility costs and further erode funding parity.

Delaware

RANK #37
C- • 72

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1995 | *Charter schools: 24* | *Charter students: 19,050* | *Cap: Technically No*

SUMMARY

Once home to one of the nation's most promising charter school movements, Delaware has seen growth largely stall as district-imposed moratoriums and restrictive policies limit new opportunities for families. As a result, the First State now ranks among the nation's weakest charter environments, despite continued demand for high-quality options. Schools like Odyssey Charter School serving more than 2,200 students through its acclaimed dual-language immersion model—demonstrate what is possible when innovation is allowed to flourish and why Delaware families deserve far more choices.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Delaware authorizes new charter schools through the Department of Education with approval by the State Board of Education. Conversion charter schools additionally require approval by the local school board and satisfaction of statutory teacher and parent voting requirements. Delaware has no independent charter authorizers.

GROWTH

There is no cap technically in the law, however districts have self-imposed moratoriums. While school enrollment continues to grow modestly, and existing schools have added grades or new campuses, schools have not opened. In addition, schools must submit a new application for extra campuses, which limits expansion of successful schools, as opposed to being able to seek a modification of their charter.

OPERATIONS

The law grants charters a blanket waiver from regulations that apply to districts, but the state Department of Education can make new regulations for charters. Virtual charter schools are not permitted.

EQUITY

Delaware funds charter schools through the same state unit-count funding system used for district schools and requires districts to transfer local operating revenue on a reasonably equivalent per-student basis. Recent legislation directs implementation of a new hybrid education funding model intended to improve equity for both district and charter schools, although the impact of those changes remains to be seen.

Florida

RANK #1
A- • 92

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1996 | Charter schools: 739 | Charter students: 408,481 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

The Sunshine State continues to set the national standard for charter schools. Serving more than 406,000 students, Florida strengthened facilities funding again this year and is expanding opportunities for new schools through additional authorizers such as the University of West Florida. Decades of consistent legislative improvements have helped Florida maintain the strongest charter law in the nation.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Florida has one of the nation's most diverse charter authorizing environments. While local school districts remain the primary authorizers, public colleges and universities were empowered beginning in 2021 to authorize charter schools focused on workforce and industry needs. The Florida Charter Institute at Miami Dade College has emerged as a leading statewide authorizer, and in 2026 the University of West Florida became the latest university authorizer, expanding opportunities for high-quality schools to open and grow. State universities may authorize charter schools serving students across multiple districts within their service areas, creating additional pathways for innovation and expansion.

GROWTH

Florida places no cap on the number of charter schools that may be established. High-performing charter schools—those earning an A for the two most recent years and no grade lower than a C during the preceding three years—may replicate through the state's Schools of Hope and related expansion pathways with reduced barriers to growth. Serving more than 406,000 students, Florida's charter sector continues to expand through strong parent demand and a policy environment designed to encourage quality growth.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools are exempt from many regulations governing district schools and enjoy substantial operational autonomy in exchange for accountability for results. University-authorized charter schools operate as their own local education agencies (LEAs) for federal funding purposes, providing greater independence from district oversight. Schools of Hope may also receive LEA status from the state, further strengthening school-level flexibility and decision-making authority.

EQUITY

Florida has largely achieved operating funding parity for charter schools through the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP). Authorizers may retain limited administrative fees, but charter schools otherwise receive funding comparable to district schools for operating expenses. State lawmakers have also continued to strengthen facilities funding by appropriating approximately \$248.6 million for charter school capital outlay in FY2026. In addition, districts are required to share locally generated discretionary capital millage with eligible charter schools under a phase-in schedule that reaches full implementation in FY2027-28. Recent refinements to funding calculations for university-authorized charter schools have further improved access to local capital funding, while Schools of Hope continue to receive enhanced facilities and operational support. Although charter schools still lack the same access to local bonding authority and certain capital financing mechanisms available to school districts, Florida's funding framework is among the nation's most equitable.

Georgia

RANK #22
C+ · 78

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1994 | Amended: 2024 | Charter schools: 105 | Charter students: 75,266 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

Georgia's charter law is better than it used to be, but it remains average at best. Strong demand for high-quality charter schools continues to outpace the state's willingness to remove unnecessary barriers to their growth. With stronger leadership and a renewed commitment to educational freedom, Georgia could transform its charter landscape and compete with neighboring Florida as a leader in public school choice.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Local school districts, the State Board of Education, and the Charter Schools Commission of Georgia (CSCG) may authorize charter schools. Although the Commission was established as an independent statewide authorizer, charter applicants and operators have criticized its increasingly bureaucratic approval and renewal processes, arguing that they have limited high-quality charter growth and created unnecessary uncertainty for schools.

GROWTH

Georgia has no statutory cap on charter schools. However, charter growth continues to depend heavily on authorizer approval, and increasingly restrictive renewal and oversight practices have limited expansion despite a generally supportive statutory framework.

OPERATIONS

The law grants blanket waivers from most state and local laws and regulations that apply to district schools. However, teachers generally must hold state certification or otherwise meet statutory qualification requirements. While state-authorized charter schools operate as independent local education agencies and enjoy substantial autonomy, locally authorized charter schools remain subject to greater district oversight. Recent statutory changes have strengthened protections for charter school autonomy.

EQUITY

Funding for locally authorized charter schools is negotiated with their sponsoring districts, although state law requires that charter schools be treated "no less favorably" than comparable district schools. State-chartered special schools receive only state and federal funding and have no access to a local property tax base. Recent statutory amendments require funding to be based on actual enrollment, improving the potential for more equitable funding, but disparities remain.

Hawaii

RANK #36
C- • 72

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1994 | Charter schools: 40 | Charter students: 13,371 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

Although Hawaii's law permits multiple charter authorizers, the state has never approved one beyond the Hawaii State Public Charter School Commission. That failure—combined with an overly regulated operating environment—has constrained charter growth and autonomy, leaving Hawaii with the nation's fifteenth weakest charter law.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

The Hawaii State Public Charter School Commission (SPCSC) is the state's sole active charter authorizer. State law also permits accredited colleges and universities, county and state agencies, and eligible nonprofit organizations to apply to the State Board of Education for chartering authority. However, no additional authorizers have been approved, leaving the SPCSC as Hawaii's only charter authorizer. Appeals are heard by the State Board of Education.

GROWTH

Hawaii imposes no statutory cap on charter schools, but the state's highly regulated environment has contributed to slow charter growth and limited the expansion of new schools.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools receive a blanket waiver from most regulations governing district schools. However, the Commission exercises extensive oversight—particularly over financial operations—which significantly limits charter autonomy. Charter school employees also remain subject to the statewide collective bargaining agreement covering Hawaii's public school teachers.

EQUITY

Charter school funding is provided through a line item in the state budget rather than through a dedicated funding formula, leaving charter schools vulnerable to annual budget decisions, funding inequities, and political uncertainty.

Idaho

RANK #14
B- • 82

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1998 | Amended: 2025 | Charter schools: 78 |
Charter students: 43,034 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

Idaho continues to strengthen one of the nation's most steadily improving charter environments. While growth has been deliberate rather than rapid, the state has paired strong accountability with thoughtful expansion, creating high-quality schools and a stable climate for innovation. Continued efforts to broaden authorizing—particularly by encouraging eligible colleges and universities to participate—could help even more students benefit from Idaho's charter sector. Idaho remains one of the nation's stronger charter laws, but limited authorizer activity and other states improvements sent it down 7 spots.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

The Idaho Public Charter School Commission (IPCSC), which operates independently but is subject to limited oversight by the State Board of Education, remains the dominant statewide authorizer, overseeing the vast majority of Idaho's charter schools. A small number of schools are authorized by local school districts. Although state law also permits eligible public and private institutions of higher education to authorize charter schools, there is little evidence that this authority has been exercised in practice. The Commission continues to approve new schools and renewals at a measured pace but is generally more selective than authorizers in many of the nation's leading charter states.

GROWTH

Idaho has no statutory cap on charter schools, but growth remains measured. Recent expansion has come primarily through the replication and enrollment growth of existing schools rather than the approval of large numbers of new charter schools.

OPERATIONS

Idaho charter schools continue to enjoy broad operational autonomy through a blanket exemption from most rules governing traditional public schools. Recent legislation has focused primarily on strengthening governance, accountability, and financial transparency rather than altering school-level autonomy. New requirements for virtual charter schools and education service providers increase oversight and reporting obligations, while the state's new Earned Autonomy program grants high-performing charter schools additional flexibility in spending state funds and meeting certain reporting requirements. Although these changes modestly expand flexibility for qualifying schools, Idaho's overall operational framework remains largely unchanged.

EQUITY

Charter schools receive state and federal funding but generally do not have access to local property tax revenues or other locally generated supplemental funding available to school districts. Charter schools receive only 60 percent of the transportation funding provided to district schools based on enrollment. Beginning in FY2025, Idaho provides \$400 per attending student in facilities funding for brick-and-mortar charter schools and has increased support for transportation and special education services. Despite these improvements, charter schools continue to operate with significantly fewer resources than traditional public schools, particularly with respect to facilities and locally generated revenues.

Illinois

RANK #41
D- • 62

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1996 | Charter schools: 128 | Charter students: 64,710 | Cap: Yes — see analysis

SUMMARY

Despite creating life-changing opportunities for thousands of students, Illinois charter schools operate in one of the nation's most hostile political environments. Organized labor and its political allies—particularly in Chicago—have repeatedly sought to restrict charter growth, increase regulation, and limit families' access to high-quality public school options. Until state and local leaders place students ahead of politics, Illinois will continue to have one of the nation's weakest charter laws.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Local school districts and the State Board of Education may authorize charter schools. The former State Charter School Commission, created after many districts demonstrated an unwillingness to authorize charter schools, has been abolished, and its responsibilities transferred to the State Board of Education.

GROWTH

Illinois limits charter growth by statute to 120 charter contracts, including no more than 70 in Chicago. Of the remaining contracts, no more than 45 may operate elsewhere in the state, with five reserved for schools serving students from low-performing or overcrowded schools. Nearly 97% of Illinois charter school students are students of color, approximately 14% receive special education services, and about 85% are economically disadvantaged. While more than 60,000 students attend charter schools in Illinois, they barely scratch the surface of need.

OPERATIONS

All charter schools operate as local education agencies, providing substantial authority over operations and finances. Although the law grants blanket waivers from most state laws and regulations governing school districts, locally authorized charter schools remain subject to district-imposed requirements. In particular, Chicago Public Schools heavily regulates the charter schools it authorizes, and Illinois law now requires newly authorized charter schools to recognize and bargain with a labor organization if a majority of employees choose representation, making unionization the default for new charter schools. Chicago Public Schools has also approved a teachers' union contract that includes a moratorium on new charter schools, further restricting charter growth and autonomy.

EQUITY

Funding for charter schools is set between a minimum of 97% and no more than 103% of the funding that districts receive (the previous minimum was 75%). Charters must apply for state grants distributed to school districts. Additionally, the state board can charge up to 3% of a school's revenue for administrative fees. Charter schools in Illinois do not receive per-pupil facilities funding.

Indiana

RANK #3
A- • 92

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 2001 | Amended: 2023 | Charter schools: 132 | Charter students: 62,829 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

The Hoosier state continues to demonstrate why strong charter school policy matters. One of the nation's strongest charter laws combines diverse, high-quality authorizers—including universities, the statewide charter board, the mayor of Indianapolis, and local school districts—with a commitment to continuous improvement. By strengthening funding equity, expanding facilities access, and maintaining multiple pathways for high-quality schools to open and grow, Indiana continues to expand innovative public school opportunities for families across the state.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Indiana has one of the nation's strongest and most diverse charter authorizing systems, including local school boards, the Indiana Charter School Board, the mayor of Indianapolis (through the Indiana Charter School Board), and eligible universities. University authorizers—including Ball State University, Grace College, Trine University, and Calumet College—authorize nearly 30% of the state's charter schools, contributing to a diverse and growing sector. There is no formal appeals process for denied applications, but applicants may apply to another eligible authorizer. Current law requires each charter school to operate under its own charter contract, although legislation has been proposed to allow multiple campuses under a single charter.

GROWTH

Indiana places no cap on the number of charter schools. A strong authorizing environment and supportive state policies have enabled steady charter growth and the continued expansion of high-quality schools.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools receive a blanket waiver from most laws and regulations governing district schools, providing substantial operational autonomy. Recent statutory changes extended the maximum charter contract term from seven to 15 years, strengthening long-term stability. Virtual charter schools, however, remain subject to extensive oversight and accountability requirements.

EQUITY

Charter schools receive the same state foundation funding as traditional district schools. Indiana has continued to improve funding equity by expanding charter schools' access to locally generated property tax revenues and, beginning in 2028, requiring statewide sharing of school corporation operations fund property tax revenues with eligible charter schools. Recent legislation also requires qualifying operating and referendum tax levies approved after the statutory effective dates to share proceeds with eligible charter schools. The Charter and Innovation Network School Grant continues to provide \$1,400 per eligible pupil to help offset remaining funding disparities. State law also strengthens facilities access by requiring many underutilized public school buildings slated for closure to be offered to eligible charter schools for \$1, while charter schools continue to have access to facilities grants and financing programs.

Iowa**RANK #8**
B - 85**FAST FACTS***Law enacted: 2002 | Amended: 2025 | Charter schools: 17 |
Charter students: 1,594 | Cap: No***SUMMARY**

Iowa has become the nation's most improved charter state. Thanks to the sustained leadership of outgoing Governor Kim Reynolds and lawmakers committed to expanding educational opportunity, Iowa has transformed a once-limited charter sector into one poised for significant growth. By expanding statewide authorizing, strengthening charter autonomy, and improving funding, the state has created new opportunities for innovative public schools and the families they serve. This year's analysis reflects Iowa's major new charter amendments, which created more plentiful charter authorizing, greater charter autonomy, and policies that better support substantial growth.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS**AUTHORIZERS**

Iowa provides two statewide charter school authorizers: the State Board of Education and, beginning in 2026, the University of Northern Iowa (UNI), which was designated as an independent statewide authorizer under HF 2754. Founding groups may apply directly to either authorizer to establish district-affiliated or independently operated charter schools, creating a second statewide pathway for charter authorization and significantly expanding opportunities for charter school growth and innovation.

GROWTH

Iowa's charter sector continues to expand following a series of major reforms that removed previous barriers to statewide growth. The number of charter schools increased dramatically after those reforms took effect, and approximately 10 additional schools are expected to open during 2026 and 2027. Iowa has rapidly transitioned from a state with limited charter opportunities to one experiencing sustained charter growth.

OPERATIONS

Iowa continued to strengthen charter school autonomy in 2026 by designating independently authorized charter schools as local education agencies (LEAs) for purposes of receiving federal funds directly. The law also allows newly approved charter schools up to two school years after contract execution to begin operations, with opportunities for additional extensions when approved by the authorizer. Charter schools may contract freely with private education service providers and operate virtual schools without significant restrictions. While Iowa does not provide a blanket waiver from state statutes and regulations, applicants may request specific waivers through the authorization process. Charter schools also do not have full freedom from district educator contract requirements.

EQUITY

Charter schools receive the same state per-pupil funding as district schools, with the state share paid directly to charter schools and corresponding reductions made to districts' aid payments. This structure helps prevent districts from withholding or limiting charter funding. Students with special needs are also funded by their district of residence. Recent legislation expanded the categorical funding streams that follow charter students to include the Teacher Salary Supplement—approximately \$684 per student—in addition to funding for teacher leadership, professional development, early intervention, English learner weighting, concurrent enrollment, and special education reimbursements. Like most states, however, local funding does not follow students to charter schools.

Kansas

RANK #47
F • 50

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1994 | Amended: 2023 | Charter schools:
9 | Charter students: 2,382 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

What we call a "law-in-name-only," Kansas has the second-weakest charter law in the nation, leaving school approval, operations, and funding in the hands of districts. The few charter schools that do exist largely function as extensions of their sponsoring districts, while educators and community leaders with new ideas are discouraged from opening the kind of life-changing public charter schools that families deserve. It is time for a new generation of leadership to reimagine charter schools in Kansas. If Iowa can transform its charter law in just a few years, there is no reason Kansas cannot do the same. Kansas continues to lag and decline because it continues to demonstrate that it cannot open and will not fund charter schools to make any meaningful progress.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Kansas remains one of only six states that limits charter school authorizing exclusively to local school districts. The absence of an independent statewide authorizer or appeals process has significantly limited the approval of new charter schools and remains one of the state's greatest barriers to charter school growth.

GROWTH

Kansas places no statutory cap on the number of charter schools. However, because local school districts are the sole authorizers—and often have little incentive to approve competing public schools—the charter sector has experienced virtually no meaningful growth in recent years.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools receive no blanket exemption from state laws or regulations. Instead, applicants must request individual waivers as part of the charter application process, including waivers from collective bargaining agreements where applicable. The lack of automatic operational autonomy creates a burdensome approval process and discourages the formation of new charter schools.

EQUITY

Kansas law contains no provisions governing charter school funding. Instead, funding is left entirely to negotiations with local district authorizers, resulting in inconsistent and often inequitable funding for charter schools across the state.

Kentucky

RANK #46
D- - 62

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 2017 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

Nearly a decade after enacting its charter school law, Kentucky still has no functioning charter school sector. In a state famous for the Kentucky Derby, lawmakers have managed to get the horse into the starting gate but never onto the track. Until state leaders enact and defend a constitutional funding system, Kentucky families will continue to watch the race for educational opportunity from the sidelines. Kentucky fell even more sharply in the rankings after the Kentucky Supreme Court struck down the state's charter school funding law, leaving charter schools without a valid operating funding mechanism.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Only local school districts, collaboratives of local school boards, and the mayors of Louisville and Lexington may authorize charter schools. Applications must be submitted simultaneously to the local authorizer and the State Board of Education. Approved applications require final approval by the Commissioner of Education, and denied applicants may appeal to the State Board of Education, which must jointly oversee any school it approves with the local authorizer for five years. However, because Kentucky currently has no constitutional funding mechanism for charter schools, the identity of the authorizer is largely a moot point until the General Assembly restores a lawful means of funding charter schools.

GROWTH

Kentucky places no statutory cap on the number of charter schools. However, until a constitutional funding mechanism is enacted, meaningful charter school growth cannot occur.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools receive a blanket waiver from most laws and regulations governing traditional public schools, providing significant operational flexibility.

EQUITY

When Kentucky enacted its charter school law in 2017, it failed to establish a funding mechanism, preventing any charter schools from opening. In 2022, the General Assembly enacted House Bill 9 to create a statewide funding mechanism, but in 2026 the Kentucky Supreme Court unanimously ruled that law unconstitutional. As a result, Kentucky once again has no lawful mechanism to fund charter schools, leaving its charter school law effectively inoperative until the General Assembly enacts a constitutional solution.

Louisiana

RANK #20
C+ • 78

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1995 | Amended: 2014 (and a State Supreme Court decision in 2018) | Charter schools: 148 | Charter students: 99,190 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

Louisiana's charter movement has demonstrated what is possible, particularly in New Orleans, where public charter schools have reshaped public education and expanded opportunity for thousands of families. As the charter sector continues to grow elsewhere in the state, policymakers should focus on ensuring equitable funding, protecting charter autonomy, and creating accountability systems that recognize the diverse missions of Louisiana's charter schools.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Local school boards and the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) may authorize charter schools. Applicants denied by BESE have no statutory right of appeal, limiting the recourse available to charter applicants challenging adverse state authorizing decisions.

GROWTH

Louisiana places no statutory cap on the number of charter schools. However, expansion is constrained because each additional campus generally requires a new charter application and approval rather than a simple amendment or replication of an existing high-performing charter.

OPERATIONS

Charter school autonomy varies depending on the authorizer, with BESE-authorized schools generally enjoying greater independence than locally authorized schools. Charter schools receive a blanket exemption from most state board rules and regulations applicable to traditional public schools, subject to specified exceptions, including the state's accountability system. As a result, charter schools serving students with significant disabilities or specialized populations remain subject to the same accountability framework as traditional schools, with limited recognition of their unique educational missions or the differing needs of the students they serve.

EQUITY

Louisiana classifies charter schools into several categories, with funding varying somewhat by charter type. All charter schools receive state funding through the Minimum Foundation Program based on weighted student membership and are eligible for applicable state and federal funding. While charter schools are generally entitled to local funding, those funds are distributed through the charter's authorizer, and the amount ultimately received can vary significantly by district and charter type. Louisiana does not provide dedicated per-pupil facilities funding for charter schools.

Maine

RANK #39
D+ · 68

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1873 | Amended: 2022 | Charter schools: 9 |
Charter students: 2,846 | Cap: Yes, 10

SUMMARY

The Pinetree state's charter law remains constrained by a restrictive statewide cap, a limited authorizing environment, and barriers to school growth. Until state leaders expand opportunities for more to open and replicate, too many Maine families will continue to have limited access to innovative public school options. Maine moved up as this year's analysis better reflects more parity in funding charter students, though facilities funding remains limited.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Local school districts and the Maine Charter School Commission may authorize charter schools. The Commission, while independent in its chartering decisions, is administratively housed within the state. There is no appeals process for decisions made by either authorizer, leaving charter applicants with little recourse to challenge arbitrary or capricious denials.

GROWTH

Maine limits the state to no more than 10 charter schools at any one time. Combined with a cautious authorizing environment, this cap has significantly constrained the growth of the state's charter sector despite continued interest from families and educators.

OPERATIONS

Maine exempts charter schools from most laws and regulations governing school districts, providing a reasonable degree of operational autonomy. However, the state maintains a highly regulated application and approval process that makes it difficult for successful charter schools to replicate or expand. The Maine Charter School Commission is the only entity authorized to approve virtual charter schools.

EQUITY

State and local operating funds generally follow students to the charter school they attend, with resident districts permitted to retain up to 1% for administrative costs. This creates a comparatively equitable operating funding structure and is stronger than that found in many northeastern states. However, charter schools receive no dedicated facilities funding or capital support, leaving significant gaps in overall funding parity despite relatively equitable operating revenue.

Maryland

RANK #44
D- • 62

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 2003 | Amended: 2024 | Charter schools:
50 | Charter students: 24,904 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

The Old Line State continues to draw the line against educational opportunity. Despite the success of charter schools—particularly in Baltimore—Maryland's leaders have preserved one of the nation's most restrictive charter laws, keeping approval, regulation, and control largely in the hands of the very districts charter schools were created to challenge. Until policymakers put students ahead of systems, too many Maryland families will continue to be denied access to life-changing public charter schools.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Local school districts remain the primary charter school authorizers in Maryland. The State Board of Education may authorize restructured charter schools and may approve charter schools on appeal after reversing a local district denial. Because authorizing authority remains overwhelmingly concentrated in local school districts, opportunities to open new charter schools remain limited.

GROWTH

Maryland places no statutory cap on the number of charter schools. However, because local school districts serve as both authorizers and competitors, charter school growth remains constrained in practice. Although charter enrollment continues to grow modestly—reflecting strong family demand—the state's authorizing structure has prevented meaningful expansion of high-quality charter schools.

OPERATIONS

Maryland subjects charter schools to nearly all of the same laws and regulations that govern traditional public schools, including collective bargaining agreements, although schools may seek individual waivers from the State Board of Education. These extensive regulatory requirements significantly limit charter school autonomy, innovation, and operational flexibility.

EQUITY

A 2007 Maryland Court of Appeals decision affirmed that charter schools must be funded on a commensurate basis with traditional public schools. Local school systems continue to calculate and distribute charter funding, and recent State Board decisions have strengthened enforcement by clarifying that charter schools are entitled to applicable Blueprint and other eligible funding streams. In 2026, Maryland enacted HB 1430, creating the state's first dedicated charter school facilities funding program, which will provide a statewide capital appropriation beginning in FY2028 at \$200 per charter student. While this represents a nice step in hardly helps the enormous equity gap.

Massachusetts

RANK #28
C - 75

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1993 | Charter schools: 72 |
Charter students: 48,472 | Cap: Yes, 120 total,
72 Commonwealth charters

SUMMARY

The Bay State was once a national charter school leader, producing some of the best charter schools in America. Today, however, Massachusetts has allowed one of the nation's most successful charter sectors to stagnate. An arbitrary cap on Commonwealth charter schools and a restrictive authorizing environment have left thousands of families without access to schools that have repeatedly demonstrated outstanding results. It's time for Massachusetts' leaders to stop protecting the status quo and once again lead the nation in educational opportunity.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education is the sole authorizer for Commonwealth charter schools. Horace Mann charter schools require approval from the local school committee, the local collective bargaining unit, and the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. This multilayered approval process makes Horace Mann charters particularly difficult to establish and leaves Massachusetts without the diverse authorizing environment found in many leading charter states.

GROWTH

Massachusetts has reached its statutory cap of 72 Commonwealth charter schools, and repeated legislative and ballot efforts to lift the cap have failed. Although up to 48 Horace Mann charter schools are permitted, their cumbersome approval process has resulted in relatively few schools. Growth also remains constrained by district tuition caps, which generally limit charter tuition to 9% of a district's net school spending (18% in certain districts).

OPERATIONS

Charter schools operate free from most laws and regulations governing traditional public schools, one of the principal reasons Massachusetts charter schools have consistently ranked among the nation's highest performers. While virtual charter schools are not generally authorized by law, groups of two or more school committees or charter school boards may jointly propose a virtual school for state approval.

EQUITY

Charter schools are entitled to applicable state and federal categorical funding, including pre-kindergarten funding. School districts receive state reimbursement for charter tuition transfers, with the state currently funding 100% of the statutory reimbursement obligation. Charter schools also receive per-pupil facilities reimbursements of \$1,188 in FY2026 and \$1,288 in FY2027. Horace Mann charter school funding is determined through the local budget process, with appeals available to the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education when funding is deemed inequitable. Districts must also provide transportation to charter school students on the same basis as other public school students.

Michigan

RANK #4
B+ • 88

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1993 | Charter schools: 374 | Charter students: 155,868 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

The Great Lakes State helped pioneer one of the nation's strongest charter authorizing systems, proving that diverse, independent authorizers can create a thriving public charter sector. Michigan's universities continue to play a vital role in fostering innovation and expanding educational opportunity across the state. While funding inequities and facilities support remain unfinished business, Michigan's commitment to multiple authorizers, meaningful school autonomy, and statewide access has made it a model that many states would do well to follow.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

State public universities authorize the majority of Michigan's charter schools, although community colleges, local school districts, intermediate school districts, and certain joint authorities may also serve as authorizers. Michigan remains one of the nation's strongest examples of a diverse authorizing environment, with active university authorizers including Bay Mills Community College, Central Michigan University, Eastern Michigan University, Ferris State University, Grand Valley State University, Lake Superior State University, Northern Michigan University, Oakland University, and Saginaw Valley State University.

GROWTH

Michigan places no cap on the number of charter schools that may be approved. Virtual charter schools are subject to enrollment limits of 2,500 students in their first year, 5,000 in their second year, and 10,000 thereafter, with total statewide virtual enrollment capped at 2% of Michigan's public school population.

OPERATIONS

Rather than receiving a blanket waiver from state laws and regulations, charter schools may request waivers from specific requirements through their authorizers. Nevertheless, Michigan's independent authorizing system provides charter schools with substantial operational flexibility, and authorizers exercise oversight independently of the Department of Education.

EQUITY

Charter schools receive a state foundation allowance and generally have equal access to categorical state funding, with intermediate school districts required to share regional enhancement property tax revenues on an equitable basis. However, because charter schools receive the lesser of the local district's foundation allowance or the statewide maximum foundation allowance, many receive less operating funding than the district in which they are located. Charter schools also receive no dedicated local or per-pupil facilities funding, leaving an important funding gap despite Michigan's comparatively strong operating funding framework.

Minnesota

RANK #6
B+ - 88

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1991 (first law in the country!) |
Charter schools: 169 | Charter students: 73,149 |
Cap: No

SUMMARY

The Land of 10,000 Lakes gave birth to the modern charter school movement and still maintains one of the nation's strongest charter laws. Yet while families continue to benefit from high-quality schools and one of the country's most diverse authorizing systems, the state's charter sector has entered a period of slower growth. Revitalizing authorizing, reducing unnecessary regulatory burdens, and closing persistent funding gaps would help Minnesota reclaim its role as the nation's charter school innovator.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Local school boards, intermediate school districts, education district cooperatives, nonprofit organizations, public universities, and private colleges may authorize charter schools, subject to approval by the Commissioner of Education. Minnesota continues to have one of the nation's most diverse authorizing environments. Active university authorizers include St. Catherine University, Bethel University, and the University of St. Thomas, which together authorize 17 charter schools.

GROWTH

Minnesota's charter sector continues to grow steadily, adding nearly 10,000 students since 2018. Most of that growth, however, has come through the expansion of successful existing schools rather than the approval of significant numbers of new charter schools. Although the state has numerous active authorizers, the total number of charter schools has declined in recent years, suggesting that the authorizing environment has become increasingly cautious.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools are exempt from most laws and regulations governing traditional public schools, providing substantial operational flexibility. However, the state has layered on additional statutory and regulatory requirements over time that have reduced some of that autonomy and increased administrative burdens.

EQUITY

Minnesota charter schools receive substantially less total funding than traditional public schools, despite receiving the same basic operating formula funding. The state provides lease aid to help offset facilities costs because charter schools cannot issue bonds, levy taxes, or use state funds to purchase land or buildings. Minnesota also provides transportation funding, allowing charter schools either to operate their own transportation systems and retain the funding or to have the resident district provide transportation and receive those funds. Despite these provisions, charter schools continue to receive significantly less overall revenue than district schools.

Mississippi

RANK #38
C- • 72

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 2010 | Amended: N/A | Charter schools: 10 | Charter students: 4,232 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

Mississippi's remarkable gains in student achievement demonstrate what strong education policy can accomplish. Yet charter schooling remains one of the state's greatest untapped opportunities. With only a single statewide authorizer, additional local approval requirements, and a relatively small charter sector serving just a few communities, the Magnolia State has yet to create the conditions for charter schools to flourish. This year's analysis more accurately reflects Mississippi's limited authorizing environment, despite strong charter school operational flexibility.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

The Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board is the state's sole charter authorizer. Charter schools proposed in school districts not designated as low-performing must also obtain approval from the local school board, creating an additional hurdle to opening new schools.

GROWTH

Mississippi limits approval to 15 new charter schools per year, and charter schools receiving an "F" during the final year of their five-year charter are ineligible for renewal. While the statutory cap permits some expansion, the combination of a single statewide authorizer and additional local approval requirements has kept growth modest. Mississippi's charter sector remains small, with just over a dozen schools serving approximately 4,000 students, primarily concentrated in a handful of communities.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools are exempt from many—but not all—laws and regulations governing traditional public schools. They remain subject to numerous requirements governing curriculum and student discipline, all teachers must hold traditional certification after a school has operated for three years, and virtual charter schools are not permitted. These restrictions limit charter school autonomy and innovation.

EQUITY

Charter schools receive local funding based on the same local tax rate applicable to district schools, and the state directs each school's proportionate share of eligible federal and state categorical funding to charter schools. Charter schools receive no dedicated per-pupil facilities funding. A 2026 law clarified charter schools' right of first refusal for closed or unused public school facilities by establishing timelines for notification, purchase, and lease agreements, while also limiting when districts may transfer surplus facilities to other entities.

Missouri

RANK #24
C+ · 78

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1998 | Amended: 2024 | Charter schools: 84 | Charter students: 25,749 | Cap: No, but restrictions apply

SUMMARY

The Show-Me State has expanded charter school opportunities by creating additional authorizers and gradually extending where charter schools may operate. Yet the law continues to restrict charter growth to designated areas of the state, leaving many Missouri families without access to high-quality public charter schools. The next step is to build on these reforms by removing unnecessary geographic restrictions, streamlining the approval process, and allowing successful charter schools to serve students wherever there is demand. This year's analysis more narrowly recognizes Missouri's authorizing environment, reflecting fewer active, independent authorizers than previously credited.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Missouri permits multiple charter school authorizers, including local school boards, the Missouri Charter Public School Commission, community colleges, vocational and technical schools, and universities. Active university authorizers include Saint Louis University, Southeast Missouri State University, the University of Missouri–St. Louis, and Washington University, which together authorize 14 charter schools. While Missouri has expanded beyond its original system that largely confined charter schools to Kansas City and St. Louis, the state's authorizers have remained relatively cautious, resulting in a charter sector of only about 84 schools statewide. The Missouri Charter Public School Commission was created to expand charter opportunities but also added another layer of bureaucracy, as all approved applications must ultimately be submitted to the State Board of Education for final approval. Applicants denied by a local authorizer, university, or the Commission may appeal to the State Board.

GROWTH

Missouri's charter sector remains concentrated in Kansas City and St. Louis because of longstanding statutory restrictions. Although charter eligibility has expanded beyond its original geographic boundaries, charter schools in accredited districts enrolling 1,500 or more students may not serve more than 35% of the district's public school enrollment, limiting opportunities for expansion. Recent charter approvals outside the state's traditional charter markets suggest progress, but significant barriers to statewide growth remain.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools receive a blanket waiver from most laws and regulations governing traditional public schools, except those relating to health, safety, and academic standards. Up to 20% of a charter school's teachers may work toward certification while teaching in their area of expertise. Recent legislation added governance and transparency requirements for charter governing boards and charter management organizations, modestly increasing regulatory oversight.

EQUITY

School districts must transfer to charter schools the per-pupil operational funding attributable to each enrolled student, along with applicable state and federal funding. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education retains 1.5% of state and local funding for authorizer administrative fees. Missouri provides no dedicated per-pupil facilities funding, leaving charter schools at a continuing disadvantage in acquiring and maintaining school facilities.

Montana

RANK #25
C+ • 78

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 2023 | Amended: N/A | Charter schools: 22 | Charter students: 1,979 | Cap: Technically No — see analysis

SUMMARY

The Big Sky State finally became the 47th state to enact a charter school law, creating "Community Choice Schools" and opening the door to new educational opportunities for Montana families. Yet legal challenges brought by opponents of charter schools have delayed implementation and prevented the new statewide authorizer from fully launching the sector. Montana has taken an important first step, but until parents—not the education establishment—are allowed to drive the future of public education, the promise of Community Choice Schools will remain just over the horizon.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

The Community Choice School Commission serves as Montana's statewide charter school authorizer and may approve local school boards to become charter school authorizers. Applicants denied by a local school board may appeal to the State Board of Public Education as provided by law. Although Montana has now established a statewide charter school framework, implementation has been slowed by ongoing litigation challenging portions of the law.

GROWTH

Montana places no statewide cap on the number of charter schools. However, school districts with fewer than 1,000 students are generally ineligible to establish charter schools, creating a de facto cap across much of this rural state and limiting opportunities for early charter growth.

OPERATIONS

Community Choice Schools receive a blanket waiver from most state laws and regulations governing traditional public schools and operate as independent local education agencies (LEAs), providing broad authority over finance, personnel, scheduling, curriculum, and instruction as defined in their charter contracts. They are also exempt from most teacher certification requirements and participation in the state retirement system, providing one of the nation's stronger operational autonomy frameworks.

EQUITY

Community Choice Schools receive 80% of the district's base per-pupil funding together with 100% of applicable categorical funding, including funding for at-risk students, Indian Education for All, and other designated student populations. They also receive the special education allowable cost payment provided under Montana's school funding formula. Community Choice Schools have a statutory right of first refusal to acquire surplus public school facilities. While the funding formula represents a significant step toward equity, providing only 80% of base funding leaves charter schools at a continuing operating disadvantage.

Nebraska

NOT RANKED*No charter school law*

SUMMARY

Nebraska does not have a charter school law.

Nevada

RANK #21
C+ • 78

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1997 | Amended: N/A | Charter schools: 90 | Charter students: 70,534 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

The Silver State's charter schools have become an important part of Nevada's public education landscape, serving thousands of families seeking options. Yet demand continues to outpace supply. Despite having no statutory cap on charter schools, an increasingly centralized authorizing process, growing regulatory burdens, and limited operational autonomy have slowed the expansion of successful schools. If Nevada hopes to meet growing family demand, policymakers should focus less on regulating charter schools and more on removing the barriers that prevent golden opportunities from opening and growing. This year's analysis better reflects Nevada's strong authorizing environment and charter autonomy.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Local school districts and the State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) may authorize charter schools, with the SPCSA overseeing the vast majority of the state's charter sector. Nevada law also permits institutions within the Nevada System of Higher Education, as well as certain cities and counties, to become charter authorizers, though those provisions have rarely been used. State law requires authorizers to evaluate community and student needs before approving new schools, creating a more regulated and centralized approval process than is found in many leading charter states. Authorizers may retain up to 2% of charter revenues for administrative costs, although qualifying charter schools may request that the fee be reduced to 1%, and authorizers may seek reimbursement for certain administrative expenses.

GROWTH

Nevada places no statutory cap on the number of charter schools. Nevertheless, charter growth has remained modest despite strong family demand, particularly in Southern Nevada, where waiting lists continue to demonstrate the need for additional high-quality public school options.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools do not receive a blanket waiver from the laws and regulations governing district schools. Instead, they must seek exemptions from specific requirements, and many operational decisions require authorizer approval. Charter schools must employ state-certified teachers but are exempt from collective bargaining requirements. This combination of centralized oversight and regulatory requirements limits charter school autonomy.

EQUITY

Charter schools are entitled to a proportionate share of available federal, state, and local funding, with charter students included in district funding calculations. Nevada periodically appropriates state funds to support charter school facilities and capital needs, but because those appropriations are discretionary rather than permanent, charter schools do not benefit from a predictable, formula-driven facilities funding program.

New Hampshire

RANK #30
C - 75

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1995 | Amended: 2023 |
Charter schools: 41 | Charter students: 6,321
| Cap: No

SUMMARY

The Granite State has chipped away at many of the barriers to opening charter schools, but inequitable funding continues to keep the sector from reaching its full potential. Charter schools may enjoy the freedom to innovate, but they cannot be expected to do more with substantially less. If New Hampshire wants its charter sector to become rock solid, lawmakers must finally ensure that public funding follows public school students. This year's analysis reflects slightly weaker operating funding equity for charter schools.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Charter schools may apply to local school districts, but district-authorized schools also require approval from the State Board of Education and the voters of the district. Applicants may instead apply directly to the State Board of Education, although state-authorized charter schools receive no local funding. As a result, the State Board authorizes the overwhelming majority of New Hampshire's charter schools.

GROWTH

New Hampshire places no statutory cap on the number of charter schools, but the state's charter sector remains small and has grown only modestly. Limited funding and the lack of meaningful local support continue to discourage expansion.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools receive a blanket waiver from most laws and regulations governing traditional public schools, providing substantial operational autonomy.

EQUITY

State law guarantees charter schools at least 80% of the per-pupil funding provided to district schools, although this level of funding is not always achieved in practice. Charter schools also report inconsistent access to certain federal categorical funds because of unclear distribution policies. Despite recent improvements in state funding, charter schools continue to receive substantially less funding than district schools because they have no access to local property tax revenue and receive no comparable facilities support.

New Jersey

RANK #35
C- • 72

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1995 | Charter schools: 84 |
Charter students: 63,535 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

The Garden State isn't a bed of roses for charter schools. For too long, New Jersey's political leadership has chosen to protect the traditional public school establishment rather than expand educational opportunities for families. While a new charter school facilities loan program is a welcome step, it is only a small one—and it must be fully funded. New Jersey deserves leaders willing to cultivate opportunity, not continue to prune it back.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

The Commissioner of Education is New Jersey's sole charter school authorizer. Charter applications may be submitted to both the local school board and the Commissioner. If the local district is under state intervention, applications may instead be submitted to the State District Superintendent. Local school boards and superintendents serve only in an advisory capacity; the Commissioner makes the final decision on all applications. Denied applicants may appeal to the Appellate Division of the Superior Court.

GROWTH

New Jersey places no statutory cap on the number of charter schools. However, the state has historically approved few new schools and has often denied renewals or limited expansion, resulting in one of the nation's slowest-growing charter sectors despite strong family demand.

OPERATIONS

Rather than receiving a blanket waiver from state laws and regulations, charter schools must request exemptions from specific requirements as part of the charter application process. This approach creates uncertainty for applicants, discourages schools from seeking greater autonomy, and leaves charter schools more vulnerable to changing political priorities. In addition, teacher certification requirements cannot be waived.

EQUITY

New Jersey law requires school districts to transfer to charter schools 90% of either the district's per-pupil program budget or the "thorough and efficient" funding amount for resident students. In practice, charter schools often receive substantially less total funding than district schools because they do not receive adjustment aid and districts may retain up to 10% of per-pupil funding for administrative costs. Charter schools also receive no dedicated per-pupil facilities funding. A recently enacted Charter School and Renaissance School Facilities Loan Program provides eligible schools with access to financing for facility improvements and construction, but because it is a limited loan program rather than a permanent facilities funding source, it does little to close the state's longstanding facilities funding gap.

New Mexico

RANK #34
C- • 72

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1993 | Charter schools: 110 |
Charter students: 30,264 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

The Land of Enchantment has made modest progress in improving charter school funding, but its charter law remains weighed down by excessive regulation, arbitrary growth restrictions, and a compliance-driven approach to oversight. Families continue to demonstrate strong demand for charter schools, yet policymakers have been far slower to expand opportunities. Until New Mexico shifts its focus from regulating charter schools to enabling them to grow, educational opportunity will remain out of reach for too many students.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Both local school districts and the Public Education Commission (PEC) may authorize charter schools, giving applicants two pathways to approval. The PEC serves as the state's independent charter authorizer but maintains extensive oversight of the schools it authorizes. Applicants denied by either authorizer may appeal to the Secretary of Public Education. New Mexico also permits Charter School Districts—district-operated conversion charter schools—which remain under the supervision of the Public Education Department.

GROWTH

New Mexico places multiple statutory limits on charter school growth, including annual and five-year approval limits. In sparsely populated districts, charter schools may enroll no more than 10% of the resident district's students, an arbitrary restriction that further limits educational opportunity. Combined with a highly regulated approval process, these barriers have slowed charter growth, although enrollment has continued to increase steadily in recent years because of strong parent demand.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools receive only limited statutory exemptions from laws and regulations governing traditional public schools and must negotiate additional waivers with their authorizers. The Public Education Commission also exercises extensive compliance oversight of the schools it authorizes, limiting operational autonomy and innovation.

EQUITY

Charter schools receive 98% of per-pupil operational funding, with authorizers retaining 2% for administrative costs. Authorizing school boards must also pass through the applicable state and federal funding generated by charter school students. Charter schools receive some per-pupil facilities funding, but it remains substantially below the level of facilities support available to traditional public schools.

New York

RANK #13
B- • 82

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1998 | Charter schools: 369 | Charter students: 190,602 | Cap: Yes — see analysis

SUMMARY

The Empire State helped define the modern charter school movement through strong independent authorizing and a commitment to school autonomy. Yet despite overwhelming family demand and decades of success, artificial caps on charter growth and increasing political resistance—particularly in New York City—continue to deny thousands of students access to better public school opportunities. New York has shown what charter schools can accomplish; now its leaders should allow more families to benefit from them. New York's ranking declined not because its law weakened, but because other states improved or received greater recognition.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

The State University of New York (SUNY) Board of Trustees serves as an independent statewide charter school authorizer, although all SUNY-authorized schools require final approval by the Board of Regents. Local school districts may also authorize charter schools, subject to the same final approval by the Board of Regents. The New York City Chancellor has historically authorized many charter schools on behalf of the Mayor. There is no statutory appeals process for denied applications.

GROWTH

New York limits the number of charter schools statewide to 460. Additional restrictions further constrain growth in New York City, including limits on the number of new charters that may be approved and prohibitions on approving new charter schools in geographic districts where charter enrollment exceeds 55% of public school students. While charter schools may operate multiple campuses, these statutory caps continue to restrict educational opportunities despite strong family demand.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools enjoy broad operational autonomy, allowing school leaders and authorizers substantial flexibility to innovate and create outstanding public schools. This freedom remains one of the principal reasons for the success of New York's charter sector.

EQUITY

Charter schools receive operating funding through a statewide per-pupil formula that has gradually narrowed funding disparities with district schools. New York City also provides one of the nation's stronger charter school facilities support systems through its Facilities Access Process, under which eligible charter schools may receive co-located space in district buildings, privately leased space at public expense, or rental assistance when public space is unavailable. The state has also appropriated supplemental Charter School Facilities Aid. Nevertheless, facilities support remains uneven, particularly outside New York City, where many charter schools continue to finance facilities from operating funds while lacking access to local capital funding and bond revenues available to district schools.

North Carolina

RANK #7
B - 85

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1996 | Amended: 2023 |
Charter schools: 221 | Charter students:
158,177 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

The Tar Heel State continues to show that educational opportunity isn't confined by geography. Charter schools have flourished in rural towns, fast-growing suburbs, and major cities alike, becoming an increasingly important part of North Carolina's public education system. Recent reforms have strengthened an already solid charter law by making it easier for successful schools to expand. Now it's time to finish the job by ensuring that charter schools have equitable access to facilities funding and the resources they need to serve even more students. North Carolina's growth is owing to the increased opportunities to grow and the strength of charter school funding mechanisms, which was hard fought by advocates for decades.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

The Charter School Review Board serves as North Carolina's primary charter school authorizer, while the State Board of Education retains oversight responsibilities, including rulemaking, funding oversight, and final approval authority as provided by law. This structure provides a more independent authorizing process than existed previously while preserving statewide accountability.

GROWTH

North Carolina places no cap on the number of charter schools. Recent reforms allow approved charter schools to expand enrollment without additional state approval, add or remove a grade level, and enroll out-of-state students, foreign exchange students, children of active-duty military personnel, and certain preschool students under specified circumstances. These changes have strengthened opportunities for charter growth and replication.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools continue to receive a blanket waiver from most state laws and regulations governing traditional public schools, providing broad operational autonomy. Recent reforms also removed the requirement that the potential financial or enrollment impact on local school districts be considered during charter approval or renewal decisions, ensuring that district interests cannot be used to impede charter school expansion.

EQUITY

Charter schools are entitled by law to receive per-pupil local funding equal to that provided by the school district in which they operate. The law includes mechanisms to enforce this funding parity, and counties are expressly authorized to use property tax revenues to support charter school capital and operational needs. However, North Carolina still does not provide a dedicated statewide per-pupil facilities funding program, leaving many charter schools to finance facilities through operating revenues or local initiatives.

North Dakota

RANK #26
C+ • 78

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 2025 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

North Dakota has taken an important first step by enacting its first charter school law and drawing on lessons learned from other states. The new framework creates a strong foundation for innovative public schools, broad operational freedom, and statewide access. The challenge now is turning that promise into reality by encouraging new schools to open, expanding authorizing over time, and ensuring charter schools receive the resources they need to serve families across the Peace Garden State. North Dakota's score now better reflects the reality that, despite a promising law, no charter schools have yet been approved or opened.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

The Superintendent of Public Instruction serves as North Dakota's sole charter school authorizer. No local school districts, universities, or independent chartering entities may authorize schools, and the law provides no appeals process for denied applications. While this centralized structure may simplify administration, it limits authorizing capacity, independence, and opportunities for growth.

GROWTH

North Dakota places no statutory cap on the number of charter schools. Each charter school must enter into a performance contract with the Superintendent of Public Instruction establishing academic, operational, and financial expectations. Although the absence of a numerical cap provides room for growth, the law does not establish a streamlined process for replicating successful schools or expanding existing charter networks.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools receive broad operational autonomy over curriculum, staffing, budgeting, and school governance. They operate as independent local education agencies (LEAs) for special education purposes and may contract with outside providers to serve specialized student populations, including students involved in the juvenile justice system and English language learners. Charter schools must meet state academic standards and instructional time requirements but may not operate primarily as virtual or online schools.

EQUITY

Charter schools receive the same state per-pupil funding as traditional public schools but, like charter schools in many states, receive no local property tax revenue. The law also does not provide access to the state's school construction fund or a dedicated facilities funding program, limiting capital support. Charter schools may, however, receive access to available state-owned facilities through a right-of-first-refusal process and are exempt from property taxes.

Ohio**RANK #9**
B- • 82**FAST FACTS***Law enacted: 1995 | Amended: 2023 | Charter schools: 346 |
Charter students: 125,514 | Cap: No***SUMMARY**

Ohio's charter movement has come a long way from its early struggles. Today, families across the Buckeye State have access to charter schools through one of the nation's most active multi-authorizer systems. But the state's response to past challenges has produced an increasingly complex regulatory environment that can burden even high-performing schools. The result is a sector that continues to create opportunity and innovation, but often in spite of the rules rather than because of them. This year's analysis recognizes Ohio's stronger operating and facilities funding, helping propel the state into the Top 10.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS**AUTHORIZERS**

Ohio has built one of the nation's most active and diverse charter authorizing environments, with universities, educational service centers, and nonprofit organizations sponsoring charter schools statewide. However, extensive state oversight—including annual evaluations, certification requirements, and performance-based accountability—limits the independence of authorizers and adds layers of bureaucracy not found in some of the nation's strongest charter laws.

GROWTH

Community (charter) schools may now be established anywhere in Ohio. Legislation enacted in 2021 eliminated the previous requirement that most new start-up charter schools be located only in "challenged" school districts, opening the entire state to charter school growth. There is no cap on the number of schools an exemplary-rated sponsor may authorize, and exemplary sponsors are no longer subject to territorial restrictions. Growth is now governed primarily by sponsor quality and the authorizing process rather than geographic limitations.

OPERATIONS

Community (charter) schools do not receive a blanket statutory waiver from state and local laws. Instead, Ohio law prescribes specific exemptions while maintaining extensive statutory and regulatory requirements governing charter school operations. Over time, the state has layered hundreds of compliance, reporting, and accountability requirements onto charter schools and their sponsors, creating an operational environment that is more regulated than many of the nation's leading charter states. Virtual charter schools are permitted but must be authorized by sponsors meeting the state's quality standards and receive approval from the Department of Education and Workforce. State law also limits virtual charter school enrollment based on statutory enrollment thresholds.

EQUITY

Ohio has taken meaningful steps toward funding equity. Recent reforms have narrowed—but not eliminated—the funding gap between charter schools and district schools. Most Ohio charter schools still operate with fewer overall resources than their district counterparts, requiring many schools to do more with less while delivering educational opportunities across the state. The state provides \$1,000 per pupil in facilities funding to all brick-and-mortar community schools and STEM schools, while internet-based schools receive a smaller facilities allotment. Ohio also provides an Equity Supplement for eligible brick-and-mortar community schools, although that supplement is now \$500 per pupil in FY2026 and \$400 in FY2027. Despite these improvements, charter schools continue to lack equitable access to local property tax revenues and capital funding available to traditional school districts.



Oklahoma

RANK #16
B- • 82

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1999 | Amended: 2023 | Charter schools: 62 | Charter students: 55,021 | Cap: Yes — see analysis

SUMMARY

Ranked 16th nationally, Oklahoma has some aspects of a strong charter law with multiple authorizers. The addition of an independent statewide charter board has strengthened opportunities for expansion, yet relatively few new schools have opened in recent years despite the state's flexible framework. While charter schools continue to thrive in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, many rural communities remain largely excluded from these opportunities, leaving the Sooner State with unfinished work to do in ensuring educational options are available to all families.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

The state's creation of the Statewide Charter School Board in 2024 established an independent charter authorizer and oversight body, replacing the authorizing role previously held by the State Board of Education, which remains the accrediting authority. The Statewide Charter School Board serves as the sole authorizer of virtual charter schools and oversees charter school accountability statewide. Its members are appointed by the Governor, President Pro Tempore of the Senate, and Speaker of the House, with the Superintendent of Public Instruction and State Auditor serving as ex officio members, making it substantially independent from the State Department of Education. Oklahoma also permits local school districts, colleges and universities, community colleges, Native American tribes, and certain regional universities with teacher preparation programs to authorize charter schools. While Oklahoma's authorizing framework is among the nation's most diverse on paper, charter growth remains concentrated among a relatively small number of active authorizers, suggesting the state's multiple pathways have yet to translate into widespread new-school creation.

GROWTH

Charter schools are permitted statewide via multiple authorizers, including local school districts, higher education institutions, tribes, and the Statewide Charter School Board (which can authorize statewide, including virtual). No restrictions prohibit openings in rural or smaller counties, though the Statewide Charter School Board is limited to sponsoring no more than 5 new charters per year in counties under 500,000 population. Several rural charters have been approved or expanded in recent years. Enrollment peaked during the pandemic but has stabilized around 50,000 students, with moderate ongoing growth in brick-and-mortar and some virtual options post- pandemic.

OPERATIONS

Charters get a blanket waiver from many state regulations that affect district schools unless authorized by districts.

EQUITY

Charter schools receive weighted student funding, applicable federal funds and state grants intended to match the funds that districts receive for their students but still at least 10-15% less in operational overhead. They are eligible and receive modest pre-K funds. The law provides that eligible charter schools may qualify for "redbud" grants, a form of funding to make up for a lack of property taxes, paid by the state's marijuana sales tax.

Oregon

RANK #33
C- • 72

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1999 | Charter schools: 130 | Charter students: 47,283 | Cap: Only on virtuals

SUMMARY

Oregon's charter schools receive a blanket waiver from most laws and regulations governing district schools. In practice, however, because local school districts remain the primary authorizers, charter schools are rarely afforded the operational autonomy envisioned by the law. Oregon's score reflects a stronger statutory operating funding formula than previously recognized, although charter schools—particularly K-8 schools—still receive less operating funding than district schools and have little dedicated facilities support.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Local school boards remain Oregon's primary charter school authorizers. Applicants must also submit their proposals to the State Board of Education. If a local school board denies an application, the applicant may appeal to the State Board of Education, which may choose to become the sponsor of the charter school. This structure leaves charter school authorizing largely in the hands of local school districts, with the State Board serving as the principal avenue for appeal.

GROWTH

Oregon places no cap on the number of brick-and-mortar charter schools. However, virtual charter schools may enroll no more than 3% of the students residing in a district. The state also discourages expansion by requiring successful charter schools to submit new applications to open additional campuses and requiring each campus to maintain its own governing board.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools receive a blanket waiver from most laws and regulations governing district schools. In practice, however, because local school districts authorize the overwhelming majority of charter schools, operational autonomy often depends on the willingness of the sponsoring district to allow schools to exercise the flexibility intended under state law.

EQUITY

Charter schools receive 80% of the weighted average daily membership funding for students in grades K-8 and 95% for students in grades 9-12. Because this formula does not fully reflect the student populations many charter schools serve, funding inequities persist, particularly for schools serving larger numbers of low-income students. Oregon provides no dedicated per-pupil facilities funding for charter schools.

Pennsylvania

RANK #31
C- - 72

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1997 | Amended: 2017 |
Charter schools: 222 | Charter students:
174,017 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

The Keystone State was one of the nation's early charter school pioneers, yet years of political opposition and state-imposed barriers have prevented the sector from reaching its full potential. Despite repeated efforts to limit charter school growth and funding, nearly 200 charter schools continue to serve Pennsylvania families, with thousands more students seeking seats each year. It's time for state leaders to stop protecting the status quo and start expanding educational opportunity.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Local school boards authorize brick-and-mortar charter schools, while two or more local school boards may jointly authorize regional charter schools. The State Board of Education serves as the authorizer only for cyber charter schools. Applicants denied by a local school board may appeal to the State Charter School Appeal Board (CAB). If the CAB approves an application and the local board still refuses to grant the charter, the Chair of the CAB is authorized to execute the charter.

GROWTH

Pennsylvania places no statutory cap on the number of charter schools. However, many school districts have imposed informal limits on the number of charter schools or students they are willing to authorize. In larger districts—particularly Philadelphia—bureaucratic resistance continues to limit new schools, enrollment growth, and funding. Despite these barriers, statewide charter school enrollment has increased by approximately 11% in recent years, reflecting continued family demand.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools receive a blanket waiver from most state and local laws and regulations governing district schools. In practice, however, because local school districts authorize the overwhelming majority of charter schools, many impose additional operational requirements and oversight that reduce the autonomy the law was intended to provide.

EQUITY

Pennsylvania's charter school funding system remains one of the nation's most inequitable. Operational funding is calculated separately by each school district, resulting in wide disparities in funding levels and frequent disputes over payments. Although the state may intervene when districts fail to make required payments, charter schools generally receive fewer resources than comparable district schools and have limited access to many federal, state, and local funding streams available to traditional public schools. Facilities funding remains particularly weak. Unlike district schools, charter schools generally lack access to local capital revenues, bond proceeds, and major public construction programs, forcing many schools to use instructional dollars to pay for buildings. As a result, Pennsylvania remains one of the nation's weakest states for charter school funding equity despite having one of the country's largest charter sectors.

Rhode Island

RANK #45
D- - 62

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1995 | Amended: 2016 |
Charter schools: 40 | Charter students: 13,851
| Cap: Yes, 35

SUMMARY

The Ocean State continues to keep educational opportunity bottled up. A statewide cap on charter schools, a centralized authorizing process, and repeated political efforts to curb charter growth have left Rhode Island families with far fewer public school options than they deserve. Existing charter schools have demonstrated what is possible. Now state leaders should remove the barriers that prevent more outstanding public charter schools from opening and serving students.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Rhode Island maintains a highly centralized charter school approval process. Charter schools require approval by the State Board of Education following review by the Commissioner of Education, with local school boards participating in certain applications. Unlike many leading charter states, Rhode Island does not permit multiple independent authorizers, leaving approval authority concentrated at the state level and limiting opportunities for new schools to open.

GROWTH

State law caps the total number of charter schools at 35, making Rhode Island one of the nation's more restrictive states for charter growth. While the law recognizes District Charters, Independent Charters, and Mayoral Academies, most expansion in recent years has occurred through the Mayoral Academy model rather than through the approval of new schools. Legislative efforts to impose additional moratoriums and restrictions on charter growth illustrate the continuing political resistance to expanding educational opportunities, despite strong parent demand.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools receive limited autonomy under Rhode Island law and must apply for waivers from specific statutes or regulations rather than receiving broad automatic exemptions. The Commissioner of Education retains extensive rulemaking authority over charter schools, and full-time virtual charter schools are not permitted.

EQUITY

Rhode Island funds charter schools through the same student-based funding formula used for district schools, including additional funding for higher-need students but it doesn't always work that way. Charter schools may apply for reimbursement of up to 30% of eligible facilities costs. However, because reimbursement is not guaranteed and charter schools generally lack access to the local capital funding and bonding authority available to district schools, significant facilities funding inequities remain.

South Carolina

RANK #12
B- · 82

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1996 | Amended: 2020 |
Charter schools: 111 | Charter students:
66,627 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

The Palmetto State has climbed into the nation's charter laws, aided by the addition of university authorizers that should help expand educational opportunity across the state. But South Carolina shouldn't be satisfied. Without equitable transportation and facilities funding, too many communities—especially rural ones—will continue to face unnecessary barriers to opening and expanding outstanding public charter schools.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Local school districts, public and independent universities, and the Public Charter School District of South Carolina (PCSD) may authorize charter schools. The PCSD served as the state's only statewide authorizer until Erskine College began authorizing schools in 2017 and now oversees nearly 30 charter schools. In 2025, Voorhees University became the nation's first Historically Black College or University (HBCU) approved to authorize charter schools, further diversifying South Carolina's authorizing landscape. Applicants denied by an authorizer may appeal to the Administrative Law Court.

GROWTH

South Carolina places no cap on the number of charter schools. New campuses generally require authorizer approval, although the state has established a replication pathway that allows successful charter operators to expand more efficiently.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools receive a blanket waiver from most state and local laws and regulations governing traditional public schools, providing broad operational autonomy. Virtual charter schools are permitted, although at least 25% of instruction must be delivered through real-time interaction with a teacher.

EQUITY

Funding for charter schools flows through their authorizers rather than directly from the state. District-authorized charter schools may receive local funding available through their sponsoring school districts, while statewide-authorized charter schools generally do not have access to local property tax revenues. South Carolina does not provide a dedicated statewide per-pupil facilities funding program or guaranteed transportation funding, leaving significant funding disparities between many charter schools and their district counterparts.

South Dakota

NOT RANKED*No charter school law*

SUMMARY

South Dakota does not have charter schools.

Tennessee

RANK #23
C+ - 78

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 2002 | Amended: 2025 | Charter schools: 119 | Charter students: 44,690 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

The Volunteer State continues to build a stronger charter school environment by making it easier for successful schools to expand and by creating new opportunities for charter schools in some of Tennessee's most challenged communities. But too much authority remains concentrated within state and local education bureaucracies. Expanding independent authorizing and providing more equitable facilities and transportation funding would help Tennessee realize the full promise of its charter school movement.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Charter schools may apply to the local school board in any Tennessee school district. If denied, applicants may appeal to the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission, which may authorize the school to operate within the geographic boundaries of that district. In addition, recent legislation allows applicants proposing to open charter schools in certain statutorily defined underperforming local education agencies to apply directly to the Commission rather than first seeking local approval. The Commission, which operates as an LEA, also gains direct authorizing authority in districts that repeatedly have charter application denials overturned, as provided by law.

GROWTH

Tennessee places no statutory cap on the number of charter schools. Recent legislation has streamlined the replication of successful charter schools and expanded opportunities in certain circumstances, but charter growth still depends largely on local authorizer decisions and remains more limited than in many leading charter states.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools must request waivers from specific statutory and regulatory requirements rather than receiving a blanket exemption from state law. This approach creates unnecessary hurdles for applicants and limits operational flexibility. Tennessee also prohibits operators organized as for-profit corporations from managing charter schools, a restriction found in relatively few states.

EQUITY

District-authorized charter schools are entitled to receive per-pupil local, state, and applicable federal funding. Commission-authorized schools receive the per-pupil state funding generated by their students through the resident local education agency. Tennessee provides competitive facilities grants through the Charter School Facilities Fund, although funding depends on annual legislative appropriations rather than a permanent formula. The state recently doubled its commitment to the Fund to \$40 million. Transportation funding is permitted but not guaranteed, and proposed legislation would give charter schools a right of first refusal for vacant or underutilized district school buildings.

Texas

RANK #17
B- • 82**FAST FACTS***Law enacted: 1995 | Amended: 2021 | Charter schools: 958 |
Charter students: 442,840 | Cap: Varies***SUMMARY**

The Lone Star State has built an expansive charter sector that provides great opportunities to hundreds of thousands of students, but Texas still places nearly all statewide authorizing authority in the hands of the Commissioner of Education and the Texas Education Agency. That centralized system has allowed established charter holders to grow, while leaving credible institutions such as universities unable to independently approve new schools. Texas has shown that charter schools can flourish at scale; broadening authorizing authority would allow even more educators and community leaders to create life-changing opportunities for students.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS**AUTHORIZERS**

Local school districts and the Commissioner of Education are Texas's principal chartering authorities: districts authorize campus charters, while the Commissioner authorizes open-enrollment charter schools, the state's primary charter model, subject to State Board notification and veto authority. Texas also permits home-rule district charters and charters operated by eligible colleges and universities, though institutions of higher education do not serve as independent authorizers. There is no formal appeals process for denied applicants.

GROWTH

Texas limits the number of open-enrollment charter holders but does not cap the number of campuses that an approved charter holder may operate. University charters and open-enrollment charters primarily serving students with disabilities are exempt from the general charter cap. District-authorized campus charters remain subject to separate statutory enrollment restrictions. Although the state approves relatively few new charter holders, existing networks continue to expand through additional campuses, and district partnership schools have created another avenue for growth. Texas currently has 188 open-enrollment charter holders operating 958 campuses and serving approximately 8% of the state's public school students.

OPERATIONS

Open-enrollment charter schools are exempt from many laws and regulations governing traditional public schools, but they do not receive a complete blanket waiver. Texas also imposes automatic closure and revocation provisions tied to academic and financial accountability measures, which may not fully account for the populations particular charter schools serve or for demonstrated improvement over time. State law requires a common charter school admissions application and a publicly available waiting-list system.

EQUITY

Open-enrollment charter schools receive state funding through the Foundation School Program based largely on student attendance and participation in weighted programs. District-authorized campus charters remain part of the sponsoring district's finance system rather than a separate statewide charter formula. Texas does provide a facilities allotment for eligible open-enrollment charter schools, though it is limited by appropriation and remains far below district capital support through local taxes and bond financing. Open-enrollment charter schools may also access tax-exempt bond financing and the state's Permanent School Fund bond guarantee program.

Utah

RANK #10
B- • 82**FAST FACTS***Law enacted: 1998 | Amended: 2024 | Charter schools: 147 |
Charter students: 85,204 | Cap: No, but see analysis***SUMMARY**

While charter school funding continues to depend on annual legislative appropriations, the Beehive State has steadily strengthened one of the nation's better charter school laws. A strong statewide charter board, multiple university authorizers, and one of the country's most equitable charter funding systems have created an environment where innovative public schools continue to thrive. Utah's rise to number 10 reflects the policy environment's independent authorizing environment and increased operational autonomy for charter schools.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS**AUTHORIZERS**

Local school boards, the Utah State Charter School Board (SCSB), and designated institutions of higher education may authorize charter schools. The SCSB remains the state's primary charter authorizer, overseeing the overwhelming majority of Utah's charter schools. State law also permits public colleges and universities—including Utah Valley University, Weber State University, Southern Utah University, Snow College, Salt Lake Community College, and others—to authorize charter schools, although that authority has been exercised only sparingly. Local school districts may also authorize charter schools. The SCSB operates independently in carrying out its statutory chartering responsibilities while remaining accountable under state law.

GROWTH

Utah places no cap on the number of charter schools that may be approved. Growth has been driven primarily by the expansion and replication of successful charter schools rather than large numbers of new charter holders. While charter school growth ultimately depends on annual legislative appropriations, Utah's statutory framework generally encourages expansion rather than restricting it through arbitrary caps.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools do not receive a blanket waiver from state laws and regulations. Instead, they may request waivers from specific statutory or regulatory requirements, creating additional administrative burdens for schools seeking greater operational flexibility. Utah law also permits charter schools to give enrollment preference to children of military families and other student groups authorized by statute.

EQUITY

Utah has made significant progress toward funding equity through its Local Replacement Funding program, which helps offset the local property tax revenues available to district schools. As a result, charter schools now spend approximately \$10,855 per pupil, compared with \$11,571 for district schools—a gap of only about 6 percent, one of the smaller funding disparities. State law also requires that at least 10 percent of Local Replacement Funding be directed toward facilities. Although charter schools still lack full access to district bonding authority and certain capital funding streams, Utah's funding framework is among the nation's strongest and most equitable.



Vermont

NOT RANKED*No charter school law*

SUMMARY

Vermont does not have charter schools.

Virginia

RANK #48
F • 50

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1998 | Amended: 2023 | Charter schools:
7 | Charter students: 1,273 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

A politically resistant landscape for charters continues in the Old Dominion state, but the creation of Lab Schools, which operate in a similar fashion, foster new educational approaches and engage universities in an opportunity to oversee innovative public schools that parents can choose. While it's far from the freedom and access to great education that charters offer in many other states, the new program may build confidence in having more public school options. This year's analysis reflects Virginia's continued lack of equitable charter school funding.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Districts are the only charter authorizers but applications must be submitted to the state board of education for review prior to authorization by the local district. There is no appeals process. Applicants may resubmit a revised application or reapply later to the local board only. Lab schools, which function similarly to charters, can be created by any public institution of higher education, public higher education center, institute, or an eligible private institution of higher education. While there's a large list of applicable authorizers, as of 2023 only four schools have been approved.

GROWTH

Though there is no cap on the number of schools, the few charter schools are entirely dependent on districts for expansion, which rarely happens. There are only 7 charter schools, with the sector experiencing stalled growth. Lab schools, however, are growing in popularity; 16 have already approved and an additional 20 applicants in the pipeline.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools here have no operational autonomy. Districts create them more as programs than full fledged independent public schools. Each must negotiate waivers from their districts.

EQUITY

Charters applying for authorization must negotiate on the terms and conditions for funding. This policy financially hampers the charter school's independence as there is no guarantee of equality of funding.

Washington

RANK #42
D- • 62

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 2012 | Amended: 2016 | Charter schools: 16 | Charter students: 4,817 | Cap: Yes, 40

SUMMARY

The state with the most legally battled law - and which took a 10 year fight to even establish - was finally vindicated in a state supreme court decision in 2018, but schools can only access funds from a lottery-funded entity, compromising sustainability and growth. Now recognized for stronger state funding support than previously reported, charter schools still lack access to local levy and facilities funding and experienced cuts in enrichment funding this past year.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Charter schools may be authorized by either the Washington State Charter School Commission or public school districts that have received state approval to serve as authorizers. In practice, however, the Commission authorizes the vast majority of Washington's charter schools. Spokane Public Schools remains the state's only active district authorizer and oversees a small portfolio of schools. As a result, Washington operates much closer to a single-authorizer system than its law would suggest. There is no formal appeals process for denied charter applications.

GROWTH

The current cap on the total number of charter schools allowed is 40 and only 8 are permitted each year. Slow but steady growth, with number of students attending up to more than 3,000, from 1,300 two years ago.

OPERATIONS

Charter schools are exempt from most rules and regulations that apply to traditional district schools. However, authorizers have the ability to write rules and regulations into charter contracts, which can create burdens on schools.

EQUITY

Charter school funding was found unconstitutional (a grave error) so they are funded by the Opportunity Pathways Account in Washington, which is funded by the state lottery. The statute states that funding for charter schools should be equitable to the state funding for other public schools, but it does not mandate equity. The state superintendent allocates funding to charter schools and calculates it by using a statewide average of a variety of funding categories. Authorizers can retain a four percent oversight fee. For facilities, charters have the first right of refusal to lease or purchase any unused or closed facility put on the market by local school districts. Charter schools do not receive per-pupil facilities funding.

West Virginia

RANK #19
B- · 82

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 2019 | Amended: 2025 |
Charter schools: 8 | Charter students: 4,243 |
Cap: Yes

SUMMARY

West Virginia has quietly assembled the building blocks of a strong charter school law. With an independent statewide authorizer, meaningful operational autonomy, improving funding, and expanded opportunities for growth, the state has the framework needed for a vibrant charter sector. The challenge has not been the law itself, but attracting enough high-quality applicants to capitalize on it. West Virginia slipped slightly as this year's analysis more accurately reflects the state's funding provisions, though it remains with a solid charter law.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

The West Virginia Public Charter School Board serves as an independent statewide authorizer with authority to approve charter schools throughout the state, including virtual charter schools. County boards of education may also authorize charter schools, and the State Board of Education serves as an authorizer only in limited circumstances prescribed by law, such as when requested by a county board or when the state has assumed control of a county school system. There is no independent appeals process for denied applications, and West Virginia does not authorize universities or other nongovernmental entities to approve charter schools. The statewide Charter School Board has authorized the overwhelming majority of charter schools since the law's enactment. Although litigation challenging the Board's authority remains pending, the West Virginia Supreme Court has permitted it to continue operating while the case proceeds.

GROWTH

West Virginia's charter sector has grown more slowly than many advocates originally envisioned, but lawmakers have continued strengthening the statutory framework for expansion. Senate Bill 63, enacted in 2026, allows high-performing charter schools to establish additional campuses, creates new opportunities for rural charter expansion, grants a right of first refusal for vacant public school buildings, and lets colleges and universities establish charter microschools on campus.

OPERATIONS

West Virginia provides charter schools with a high degree of operational autonomy. Charter schools authorized by the West Virginia Public Charter School Board operate as independent local education agencies (LEAs), giving them broad authority over governance, budgeting, curriculum, contracting, staffing, and day-to-day operations. The charter law limits the ability of county boards and the State Board of Education to impose requirements that conflict with or exceed those authorized by statute, helping protect schools from unnecessary bureaucratic interference while preserving appropriate oversight for health, safety, accountability, and other legal requirements.

EQUITY

State law requires 99 percent of the per-pupil foundation allowance to follow charter students, a marked improvement over the original formula. The Charter Schools Stimulus Fund provides startup grants up to \$300,000. Recent legislation also grants a right of first refusal on vacant public buildings, though charter schools still lack full parity in local capital access.

Wisconsin

RANK #15
B- • 82

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1990 | Amended: 2023 | Charter schools: 221 | Charter students: 50,379 | Cap: No, with exceptions

SUMMARY

Concentrated in the cities but also expansive throughout, chartering in the Badger State has been a vital link to giving parents all sorts of options, from experiential to classical, from career focused to college prep. Wisconsin's law remained largely unchanged, but other states gained ground in this year's rankings.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

Wisconsin maintains one of the nation's most diverse authorizing structures. Charter schools may be authorized by local school districts, the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee, the Chancellor of any institution within the University of Wisconsin System, technical college district boards, the Waukesha County Executive, the College of Menominee Nation, Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College, and the University of Wisconsin System's Office of Educational Opportunity. While Wisconsin's law provides a broad array of multiple authorizers, charter activity remains concentrated among a relatively small number of entities, particularly Milwaukee-area authorizers and a handful of university-based sponsors.

GROWTH

Wisconsin's charter sector continues to expand, though more slowly than its broad authorizing framework would suggest. In 2025, schools across the state received nearly \$10 million in federal grants supporting the planning, opening, and expansion of 10 charter schools, while additional proposals continue to move through university and local authorizer pipelines. Yet much of this activity remains concentrated among a handful of active authorizers.

OPERATIONS

Schools have a blanket waiver from most rules and regulations that apply to traditional district schools, but many charters are authorized by districts and micromanaged. Virtuals are only permitted if authorized by local districts.

EQUITY

Specified in statute, districts are required to pay charters similar to their funding and all other authorizers are provided for in law but that did not always happen. A permanent change in state law in 2023 saw a historic increase in funding for independent charter schools, rising from \$9,264 in 2022-23 to \$11,385 in 2023-24 and increasing to \$11,729 in 2024-25. There is no facilities funding provided in the law for any charters.

Wyoming

RANK #29
C · 75

FAST FACTS

Law enacted: 1995 | Amended: 2023 | Charter schools:
9 | Charter students: 1,472 | Cap: No

SUMMARY

After nearly 30 years of having a law, chartering still feels like a new frontier in Wyoming. Parent and community efforts to open new schools face a ridiculous cap of three schools, and an authorizing set up has changed several times since its inception. A newly created Wyoming Charter School Authorizing Board, could be a positive step when it starts its work in '26, but without additional changes in law is unlikely to result in any educational stampedes. This year's analysis more accurately reflects Wyoming's authorizing and funding provisions.

CHARTER LAW ANALYSIS

AUTHORIZERS

The Wyoming Charter School Authorizing Board is the state's sole independent authorizer, yet only started to exercise their authorizing authority in 2026. Denied applicants may first appeal to the State Board of Education's Office of Administrative Hearings and subsequently to the state district court in the county where the proposed charter school would be located.

GROWTH

Charter school enrollment in Wyoming has increased in recent years, but the sector remains very small relative to the state's overall public school population. Only a limited number of new charter schools have opened, and overall growth has been gradual. Although there is no statutory cap on district-authorized charters, expansion has been modest, reflecting a cautious pace of authorization across much of the state.

OPERATIONS

Charters do not receive a blanket waiver from typical rules and regulations that apply to traditional district schools. Instead, they are dependent on district authorizers and/or the State Board to exempt them from regulations.

EQUITY

Wyoming law states that charter schools are entitled to 100% of the foundation program funding amount computed under state law, based on "average daily membership," and 100% of the charter's proportion of major maintenance payments. Because of vague wording in law, however, charters often were not funded equitably. Legislators addressed this via statute in 2023 by creating a specific budget for charter schools, clarifying the 100% average daily membership funding requirement and ensured that charters are entitled to 100% of transportation funds.



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