

A young girl with dark skin and curly hair, wearing a light blue polo shirt and a purple backpack, is smiling at the camera. She is in a classroom setting with other students and a teacher in the background, who are slightly out of focus. The image is overlaid with a blue geometric design on the left side.

BRIEF

PORTFOLIO OF CHOICE

Charter Schools

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Choice » Strengthening the State of
Choice In America's Schools

Portfolio of Choice: Charter Schools

The National Comprehensive Center

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This publication is one of seven in a series of briefs on school choice from the National Comprehensive Center. See www.nationalcompcenter.org

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Robson, K., Graziano, L., & O'Neal Schiess, J. (2020). *Portfolio of Choice: Charter Schools*. Rockville, MD: National Comprehensive Center.

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Key Takeaways

- » Forty-five states and Washington, DC, have charter school laws in place
- » Approximately 6 percent of all public school students nationwide attend a charter school, and enrollment continues to increase at an average annual growth rate of approximately 9 percent
- » On average, charter schools enroll higher rates of low-income, Black, and Latino students compared to district schools; however, they enroll comparatively smaller rates of students with special needs
- » While most traditional public school students live in suburban and rural areas, most charter school students live in cities
- » Charter school performance varies widely within the sector; however, on average, charter schools produce superior outcomes for Black, Latino, and low-income students, and those living in urban communities, compared to their respective peers in district schools
- » Policymakers can strengthen charter school laws by focusing on developing transparent processes to open new schools and hold existing schools accountable for results; supporting high-quality authorizing practices; ensuring equity of access for all students, including those who are homeless or live in rural communities; and eliminating or mitigating known barriers such as access to facilities and equitable funding.

Introduction

For nearly three decades, charter schools have provided families with a public school alternative to traditional district schools, but they've not been without controversy. Charter schools often come under fire for “privatizing” education,¹ for “creaming” the best students,² or for taking money from district schools.³ The schools themselves—and the policies that govern them—are often misunderstood. The goal of this brief is to provide state policymakers with a clear baseline of information about charter schools: what they are (and are not), how they work, who they serve, and how the policies that shape them can be strengthened to ensure that the students attending charter schools receive a high-quality education.

¹ <http://www.nea.org/home/16355.htm>

² <https://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2016-08-25/public-schools-cherry-pick-just-like-charters-where-is-the-outrage>

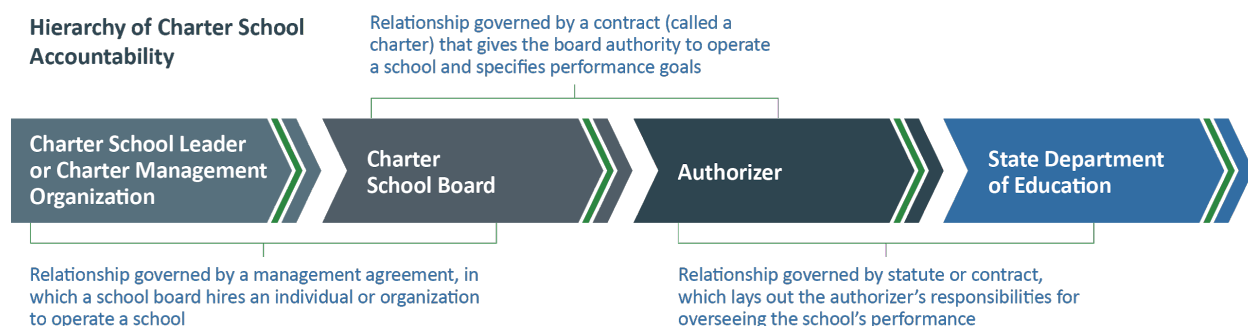
³ <https://chalkbeat.org/posts/us/2019/06/11/charter-schools-costs-districts-research/>



What are Charter Schools?

Charter schools are public schools governed by a charter, or contract, between two entities: those who run the school (typically the charter school's board) and an authorizer (an independent entity that approves the school's existence and holds it accountable). Charter schools operate independently from traditional public school districts and are granted autonomy from many of the rules and regulations that govern traditional district schools. As such, charter school leaders have the freedom to determine many of the core elements of the school's finances, operations, and academics—such as how much to pay teachers, what the school day schedules and school year calendars look like, and what curricula and materials to purchase and use. In exchange for this autonomy, authorizers hold charter schools accountable for their students' academic outcomes and can close them for failing to meet specified performance metrics. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between key charter school entities.

Figure 1. Charter school accountability relationships



Charter schools provide families with an alternative to traditional, district-operated public schools, and are based on the theory that families know best what kind of instructional environment their children need. The flexibility that state statutes grant to charter schools makes it possible for their leaders to implement educational programs that differ from those offered by local school districts, such as small class sizes, academics with a particular topical focus such as STEM or fine arts, or programming designed to meet the unique needs of student subgroups, such as those in military families or those in foster care.

Combating Common Charter School Myths

The complexity of charter school policies and the fact that they exist in a political environment that can vary from one state to another has led to critical misunderstandings about what charter schools are and what they do. The table below offers explanations for some common charter school myths.¹

Myth	Fact
Charter schools are private schools	According to federal and state laws, charter schools are tuition-free public schools that run independently from traditional school districts. ²
Charter schools cream top-performing students	Charter schools must accept all students who apply. All state and federal civil rights protections apply to charter schools; they must comply with special education laws; and they cannot admit students based on test scores or performance. ³ If applications surpass available seats, charter schools typically must implement blind lotteries.
Charter schools don't serve students with disabilities or English language learners.	While charter schools serve students with disabilities at a slightly lower rate than district schools—10 percent versus 12 percent—charter schools are gradually serving higher rates of students with disabilities. ⁴ Charter schools serve approximately the same rate of English language learners as district schools (10% versus 9%, respectively). ⁵
Charter schools receive more public funding than traditional district schools	Charter schools typically receive <i>fewer</i> per-pupil dollars than traditional district schools. They also receive little to no help financing facilities, creating an even bigger funding gap between charter schools and district schools. On average, charter schools receive 72 percent of the per-pupil funding that districts receive. ⁶
Charter schools receive more private funding than traditional district schools	Due to the gap in public funding between district schools and charter schools, some charter schools turn to private funds, such as philanthropy, to help close this gap. Even so, research suggests that school districts receive more funding per pupil from “other non-public sources” than charter schools—\$571 compared to \$552 per student, respectively. ⁷

¹<http://www.publiccharters.org/sites/default/files/migrated/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Separating-Fact-from-Fiction.pdf>

²<https://charterschoolcenter.ed.gov/what-charter-school>

³<https://charterschoolcenter.ed.gov/what-charter-school>

⁴<http://www.publiccharters.org/sites/default/files/migrated/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Separating-Fact-from-Fiction.pdf>

⁵<http://www.publiccharters.org/sites/default/files/migrated/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Separating-Fact-from-Fiction.pdf>

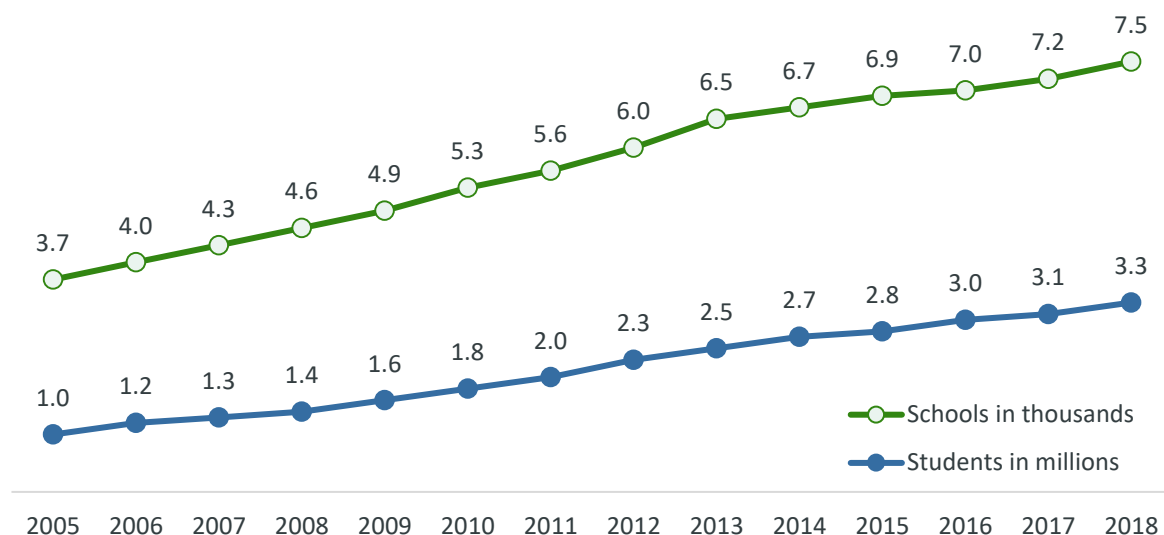
⁶<http://www.uaedreform.org/charter-funding-inequity-expands/>

⁷<http://www.uaedreform.org/wp-content/uploads/charter-funding-inequity-expands-appendices.pdf>

Trends

The first charter school opened in Minnesota in 1992. Today, 45 states and the District of Columbia have charter school laws on the books. As of 2018, more than 7,500 charter schools operated nationwide and served 3.3 million students—6 percent of all public school students nationwide.⁴ Figure 2 illustrates the growth in the number of charter schools and their student enrollment between 2005 and 2018.⁵

Figure 2. Number of charter schools and student enrollment



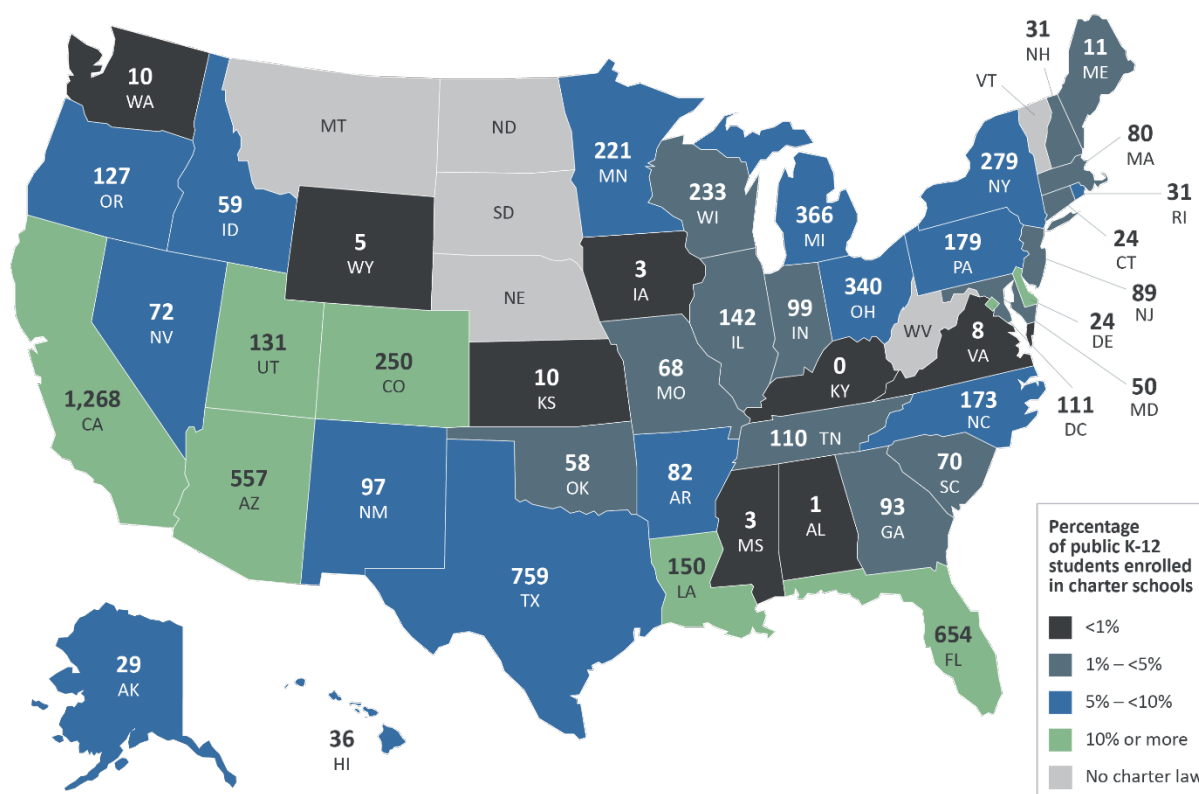
Source: Bellwether Education Partners, “[The State of the Charter Sector](#), slide 9.

The percentage of public school students enrolled in charter schools varies substantially by state. In California, Florida, and Louisiana, for example, one in 10 students is enrolled in a charter school. In other states, just a few hundred students attend charter schools (see Figure 3).

⁴<https://data.publiccharters.org/>

⁵https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/State%20of%20the%20Charter%20Sector_Bellwether.pdf;
<https://data.publiccharters.org/>

Figure 3. Number of charter schools and percentage of public school students enrolled in charter schools by state



Within states, some jurisdictions serve even higher percentages of public school students. In New Orleans, 93 percent of students attend a charter school. In Detroit and Washington, DC, 53 and 44 percent of students attend charter schools, respectively.⁶

The growth rate in the number of new charter schools has slowed in recent years. Between 2008 and 2014, the average annual growth rate for new schools was 6 percent; between 2014 and 2016, it was half that.⁷ Even as the pace of new school creation has slowed, charter school enrollment continues to grow rapidly: on average at about 9 percent annually. This is likely because many existing schools continue to expand enrollment incrementally (e.g., by serving additional grade levels each year.)

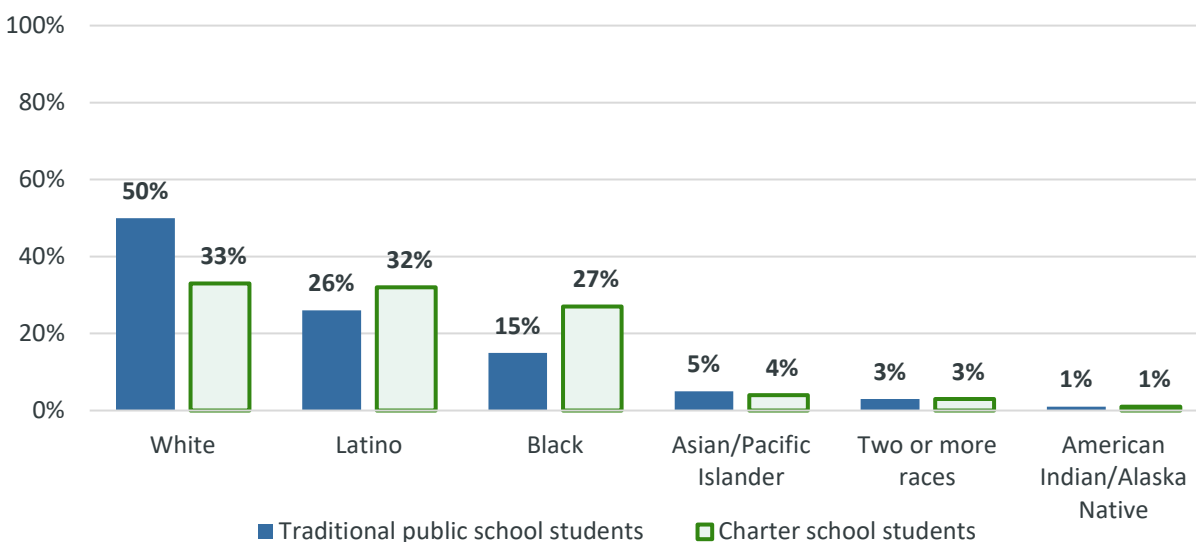
The students enrolled in charter schools tend to come from some of our nation's most historically marginalized groups: low-income students, Black students, and Latino students. As Figures 4 and 5 illustrate, charter schools serve a higher percentage of Black and Latino students compared to traditional public schools, as well as a higher percentage of students who are eligible for the federal

⁶Slide 25: https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/State%20of%20the%20Charter%20Sector_Bellwether.pdf

⁷https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/State%20of%20the%20Charter%20Sector_Bellwether.pdf

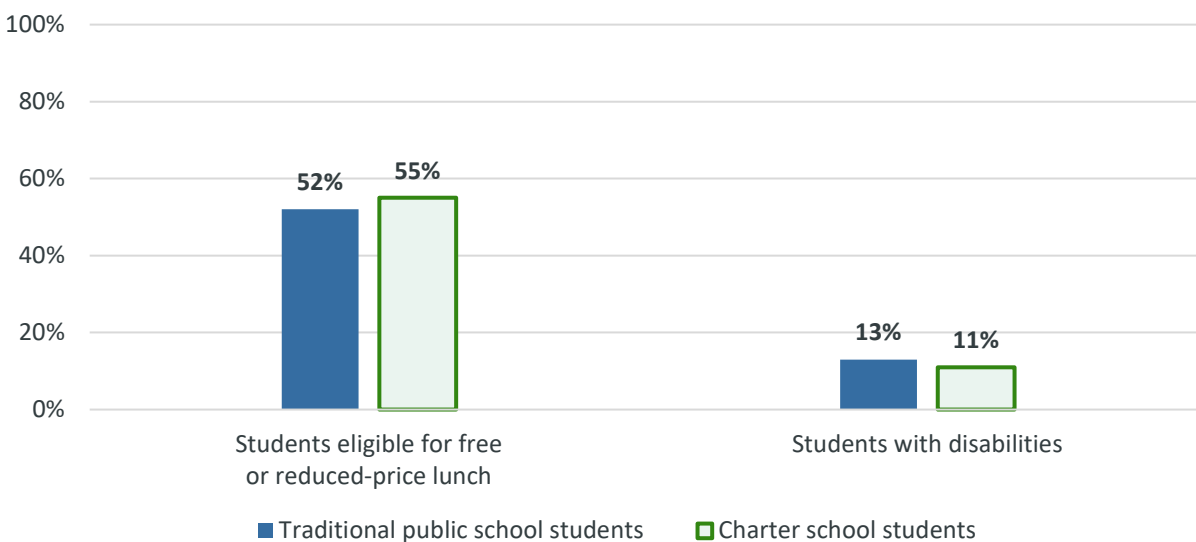
free or reduced-price lunch program (FRPL), a proxy measure for low income. Moreover, 57 percent of charter school students live in urban communities compared to just one-quarter of traditional public school students (see Figure 6.)

Figure 4. Student enrollment by race

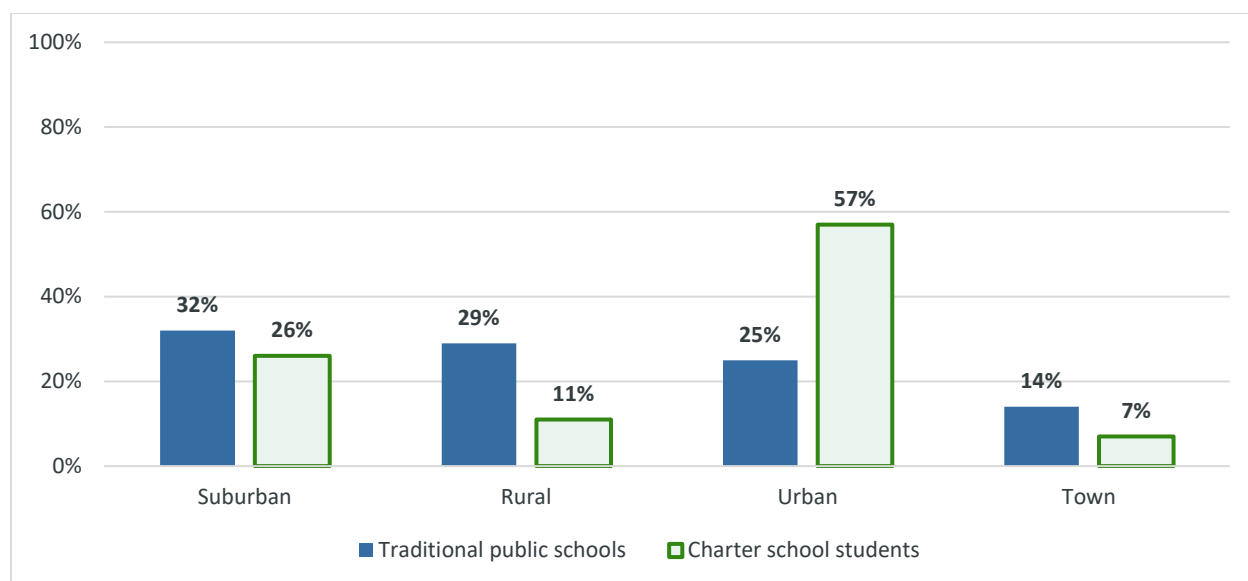


Source: Bellwether Education Partners, [The State of the Charter Sector](#), slide 18

Figure 5. Student enrollment by subgroup



Source: Bellwether Education Partners, [The State of the Charter Sector](#), slides 18, 20

Figure 6. Student enrollment by geography

Source: [National Center for Education Statistics](https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/ipedsreports/2016/ipeds2016_010101.pdf)

Charter schools do serve relatively fewer students with disabilities than traditional public schools—though the gap has narrowed over time. And while charter schools may serve fewer students with disabilities overall, they tend to serve those students in more inclusive environments. In district schools, 68 percent of students with disabilities are served in inclusive classroom settings for at least 80 percent of the school day. In charter schools, 84 percent of students are.⁸ Due to data limitations, it is unclear whether the needs of students and the services that schools provide vary significantly between the two sectors of schools.

Charter School Management

Early supporters envisioned charter schools as small, independent schools run by teachers and community members (rather than school districts) to meet the unique needs of local students.⁹ Today, these so-called “independent” charter schools make up nearly two-thirds of all charter schools in operation across the country (see Table 1).¹⁰

The other 35 percent of charter schools are operated by either nonprofit charter management organizations (CMOs) or for-profit education management organizations (EMOs). CMOs and EMOs are organizations that operate two or more charter schools. They often provide back-office supports, such as payroll or human resources services, which enable the multiple schools in their portfolios to take advantage of economies of scale for these essential non-instructional functions.

⁸Slide 20: https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/State%20of%20the%20Charter%20Sector_Bellwether.pdf

⁹<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/ed/17/05/battle-over-charter-schools>

¹⁰<https://www.publiccharters.org/latest-news/2019/01/16/are-charter-schools-profit>

Table 1. Charter school management type: Schools and students by number and percentage, 2016–17

Type of management	Total number of schools	Percent of all charter schools	Total number of students	Percent of all charter students
Independent	4,518	65%	1,724,536	57%
CMO	1,607	23%	733,555	24%
EMO	869	12%	550,015	18%

Source: [National Alliance for Public Charter Schools](#)

The key difference between CMOs and EMOs is their tax status. Importantly, this tax status refers to the management organization itself, not the school it operates. With the exception of Arizona, state laws require charter schools to be nonprofit entities.¹¹

Although independent, CMO-operated, and EMO-operated charter schools are legally and functionally the same, there are some differences worth noting:

- » **Finances.** A charter school's finances can be affected by their management structure. As unknown and untested entities, independent charter schools may struggle to attract the kind of philanthropy that is often available to well-known CMOs like the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP). As far back as the late 1990s, major philanthropies invested heavily in CMOs rather than independent charter schools. This was due largely to the existence of a proven model and the greater ability of CMOs to scale quickly—and with quality.¹² Today, organizations that invest venture and philanthropic capital in charter schools, such as NewSchools Venture Fund or Charter School Growth Fund, invest almost exclusively in CMOs.¹³

This means that independent charter schools are often operating solely on the per-pupil funding they get from the state, which is typically less than district schools receive. Tight finances can make it difficult for independent charter schools to hire staff to manage their non-instructional operations, requiring their school leaders to execute these tasks. CMOs and EMOs, created

¹¹<https://www.publiccharters.org/latest-news/2019/01/16/are-charter-schools-profit>

¹²https://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/pub_ncsrp_cmo_jun10_2_0.pdf

¹³https://charterschoolcenter.ed.gov/sites/default/files/files/field_publication_attachment/MappingTheLandscape-SupportingReplication_0.pdf and <https://chartergrowthfund.org/portfolio/>

specifically to alleviate some of these challenges¹⁴, can pool financial resources to hire staff that can be shared across the schools in their portfolio. Schools managed by CMOs and EMOs benefit from economies of scale in a way that independent charter schools cannot.

- » **Name recognition.** From a public perception standpoint, large CMOs and EMOs have brand names, reputations, and track records that can help attract families—a major benefit to enrollment and funding. But public perception can also work against large CMOs and EMOs. The for-profit status of EMOs can be particularly damaging in terms of public opinion, as “profiting off of children” is generally frowned upon by the media and politicians across the spectrum. Similarly, the reputations of CMOs can be double-edged swords. Large networks like KIPP and Success Academies, which led the so-called “no excuses” movement, may struggle with that association as “no excuses” charter schools have fallen out of favor in recent years.¹⁵
- » **Performance.** The Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford found that schools managed by CMOs produce the strongest student outcomes when compared to both other management models and traditional public schools. Independent charter school students typically perform on par with their traditional school counterparts, while students attending EMO-operated schools performed worse than their peers in traditional schools.¹⁶ More research is needed to understand the effect of management structure on charter schools’ outcomes and longevity.
- » **Enrollment.** CREDO also found that independent charter schools educate the majority (57%) of students attending charter schools in this country and more than two-thirds of all charter schools that opened in 2016 were independently managed.¹⁷ That said, enrollment in the charter sector as a whole is being driven largely by the demand for CMO-operated schools,¹⁸ even though CMOs accounted for just 23 percent of new school openings in 2016. If these trends continue—with demand for CMO-operated charter schools exceeding the supply—overall enrollment in the charter sector may slow substantially. It is impossible to know how enrollment trends might shift in the coming years, but policymakers ought to keep a close eye on enrollment patterns in their own states and adjust charter policies and incentives as needed.

¹⁴https://charterschoolcenter.ed.gov/sites/default/files/files/field_publication_attachment/MappingTheLandscape-SupportingReplication_0.pdf

¹⁵<https://www.qualitycharters.org/research/pipeline/analysis/#section1>

¹⁶https://credo.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj6481/f/cmo_final.pdf

¹⁷Slide 34: https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/State%20of%20the%20Charter%20Sector_Bellwether.pdf

¹⁸Using the NAPCS definition of CMO, we define high-performing CMOs as those included in the CSFG Portfolio, KIPP, and Harmony but recognize there are other high-performing CMOs outside of this list.



What do we know about Charter School Performance?

The performance of charter schools varies widely within the sector, but research points to some broad trends:

- » Although dated, national analyses of the charter sector (from 2008–2011) suggested charters produced larger effects in reading and smaller effects in math when compared to traditional public schools.¹⁹ On average, over **four in five charter schools outperformed traditional public schools in reading, and nearly seven in ten charter schools did so in math.**²⁰
- » More recent analyses look at performance within cities, states, and operator types; these analyses also tend to show that **charter schools outperform traditional public schools.**²¹
 - › There is wide variation in performance based on region and locale:
 - In New York, charter schools in all geographies outperform their peers in traditional public schools.²² In Texas, on the other hand, students in urban charters outperform their peers in district schools, but those in towns do worse.²³
 - Urban charter sectors far outperform their traditional public school counterparts. In particular, Black and Hispanic students, students with disabilities, and students in poverty who attend urban charter schools tend to outperform their peers in urban district schools.²⁴
 - › There is variation in performance by management type:
 - Online charter schools produce much weaker student outcomes compared to traditional public schools in reading and math.²⁵
 - Charter schools managed by CMOs produce the strongest outcomes compared to both other charter management models and traditional public schools.²⁶
 - Students attending independently operated charters perform about the same as their peers in traditional public schools in math and outperform their peers in reading.²⁷
 - Students attending charters operated by for-profit EMOs perform worse than their traditional school peers in math.²⁸
 - › There is variation in performance by student subgroup:
 - In general, learning outcomes for Black students, ELL students, those with disabilities, and those living in poverty who attend charter schools tend to exceed those in traditional public schools.
 - White students generally fare worse in charter schools than their peers in district schools.
 - Hispanic students attending urban charters specifically outperform their peers, however, they perform about the same or worse in other geographic locales.²⁹

Charter School Authorizing

In addition to differences in management, charter authorizers hold schools accountable for their performance. Authorizers are responsible for approving applications for new schools, conducting

¹⁹https://credo.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj6481/f/ncss_2013_final_draft.pdf

²⁰Slide 44: https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/State%20of%20the%20Charter%20Sector_Bellwether.pdf

²¹https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/State%20of%20the%20Charter%20Sector_Bellwether.pdf

²²https://credo.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj6481/f/ny_state_report_2017_06_01_final.pdf



regular, thorough reviews of existing schools, and putting in place supports and sanctions for struggling schools—up to and including closure (see Figure 1 above).

Each state’s charter policy establishes the type of organizations or entities permitted to authorize and oversee charter schools. Typically, eligible entities include school districts or Local Education Agencies (LEAs), independent boards, universities, or nonprofits. There are approximately 1,000 authorizers nationwide, though the vast majority are LEAs (see Table 2).³⁰

Table 2. Charter school authorizer types

Authorizer type	Description	Percent of all authorizers	Percent of all charter schools
Local Education Agency (LEA)	Local or countywide school districts	89.5	50.7
Institute of Higher Education (IHE)	Colleges, universities, etc.	4.5	8.5
Nonprofit organization	Local organizations or other nonprofits	1.7	3.9
State Education Agency (SEA)	State departments of education or public instruction	1.8	21.1
Independent chartering board (ICB)	Statewide bodies such as charter “commissions” or “institutes”	2.1	15.1
Non-educational government entity (NEG)	Mayors, municipalities, etc.	0.3	0.7

Source: Bellwether Education Partners, [The State of the Charter Sector](#), slide 70.

While the vast majority of charter school authorizers are LEAs, they tend to be relatively small, overseeing just one or two schools. As a result, LEAs authorize only about half of all charter schools. Policymakers looking to drive substantial growth in the charter sector ought to ensure there are multiple types of authorizers operating in their states.

High-quality authorizing is fundamental to a high-quality charter sector. Authorizers make decisions about which schools will open and hold those schools to the expectations in their

²³ <https://credo.stanford.edu/publications/charter-school-performance-texas>

²⁴ <https://urbancharters.stanford.edu/download/Urban%20Charter%20School%20Study%20Report%20on%2041%20Regions.pdf>

²⁵ <https://credo.stanford.edu/publications/online-charter-school-study>

²⁶ https://credo.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj6481/f/cmo_final.pdf

²⁷ https://credo.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj6481/f/cmo_final.pdf

²⁸ https://credo.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj6481/f/cmo_final.pdf

²⁹ Slide 44: https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/State%20of%20the%20Charter%20Sector_Bellwether.pdf

³⁰ Calculation based on data from: <https://www.qualitycharters.org/authorizing-by-the-numbers/authorizer-demographics/>; <https://www.publiccharters.org/our-work/publications/measuring-model-ranking-state-public-charter-school-laws-2018>

performance contracts. If schools are not producing outcomes for students, or if they have serious operational or financial challenges, authorizers are responsible for providing interventions up to and including closing the school if it fails to improve. The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) has compiled a set of best practices that all authorizers, regardless of entity type, should implement. Table 3 summarizes these 12 practices, which represent the minimum expectations for successful authorizers

Table 3. Essential practices for high-quality charter school authorizing

Practice	Explanation
Mission	Have a published and available mission for quality authorizing
Staff	Have staff assigned to authorizing within the organization or by contract
Contracts	Sign a contract with each school
Application criteria	Have established, documented criteria for the evaluation of charter school applications
Application timeline	Publish application timelines and materials
Application interview	Interview all qualified charter applicants
External expert panel	Use expert panels that include external members to review charter applications
5-year term length	Grant initial charter terms of 5 years only
Financial audit	Require and/or examine annual, independent financial audits of its charter schools
Renewal criteria	Have established renewal criteria
Revocation criteria	Have established revocation criteria
Annual report	Provide an annual report to each school on its performance

Source: National Association of Charter School Authorizers, "[12 Essential Practices](#)"

Holding charter schools accountable is a core element of the charter school theory of action, and authorizers are responsible for implementing that accountability. High-quality application review policies and procedures can help ensure that only the schools with the strongest potential for success are able to open. Rigorous renewal policies help ensure that only high-quality charter schools continue to operate. Not all charter schools will ultimately be successful, and it is up to the authorizer to take the steps necessary to intervene with those that are persistently low-performing. This includes being willing to close schools that continue to perform poorly—whether for academic, financial, or operational reasons. Closure is the ultimate form of accountability, and is a large part of what distinguishes the charter sector from the district sector. Failing district schools

close at a statistically significantly lower rate than charter schools. In 2012, for example, nearly 6% of low-performing charter schools closed, compared to just 3% of low-performing district schools.³¹ Research suggests that closing low-performing charter schools can lead to achievement gains for students,³² as well drive improvement in the sector overall.³³

That said, closing schools should be a last resort. School closures are politically challenging and are disruptive to students' education trajectories.³⁴ They can be particularly destabilizing in communities that lack other school options. Closures must happen when charter schools fail to perform, in order to ensure that the charter sector is continually improving and that families have access to high-quality options. However, policymakers must ensure that the policies and procedures surrounding school closures mitigate disruption to the extent possible and ensure that students end up in higher-performing schools as a result.³⁵



Best Practices for Designing High-Quality Charter School Policy

With nearly three decades' worth of knowledge about charter school laws, policies, and implementation and states and localities across the nation, the field has a large body of research and information to inform high-quality charter school policy design and implementation.

- » **Develop transparent processes to open new schools and hold existing schools accountable for results.** High-quality charter school laws and policies establish transparent processes for core components of charter school creation, including the application requirements, approval criteria, and decision-making processes. State laws must also ensure that schools are reporting academic, financial, and operational data and information on an annual basis to inform authorizers' decision-making processes. The academic, financial, and operational expectations ought to be codified in a performance contract, which should include escalating interventions up to and including closure for schools that fail to meet expectations.³⁶
- » **Support high-quality authorizing practices.** Authorizers are responsible for approving charter school applications and holding existing charter schools accountable to the expectations outlined in their contracts. As a result, state policy must create the conditions for high-quality authorizing. This includes providing adequate funding for authorizers to ensure they have the capacity to execute on their mandates; allowing non-district entities, such as statewide charter commissions or institutes of higher education to authorize charter schools in the state; and creating systems to hold authorizers accountable. Policymakers ought to develop processes to

³¹https://credo.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj6481/f/closure_final_volume_i.pdf

³²http://glenn.osu.edu/educational-governance/papers/papers/CL_RDClosure.pdf

³³See <https://educationresearchalliance.org/files/publications/Bross-Harris-Liu-The-Effects-of-Performance-Based-School-Closure-and-Charter-Takeover-on-Student-Performance.pdf> and <https://credo.stanford.edu/publications/school-closure-study-2017>

³⁴<https://www.progressivepolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/06.2012-Osborne-Improving-Charter-School-Accountability-The-Challenge-of-Closing-Failing-Schools.pdf>

³⁵<https://www.chalkbeat.org/2019/2/5/21106771/17-studies-that-tell-us-something-about-how-school-closures-affect-students>

³⁶<https://www.publiccharters.org/our-work/charter-law-database/components>



regularly review the quality of authorizers and ensure the state has the ability to intervene when authorizers do not meet expectations.³⁷

- » **Ensure equity of access for all students.** On the whole, charter schools serve higher percentages of low-income, Black, and Hispanic students than do traditional public schools; but they tend to serve English language learners, students with special needs, and rural students at lower rates than school districts. There is less data on the extent to which charter schools serve other vulnerable populations, such as homeless students or those in foster care. Ensuring that all students have equitable access to charter schools ought to be a priority for state policymakers, and there are several steps they can take to craft charter policies that support access:

Available, reliable transportation can increase access to charter schools for geographically isolated students. It can also help charter schools meet the needs—and state and federal requirements—to provide transportation to homeless students and those in foster care.³⁸ At a minimum, state law should require all charter schools to have a transportation plan in place. Policymakers may want to consider requiring schools to provide transportation to students and providing funding to support transportation services.

Policymakers might also want to consider providing incentives for schools to ensure equity, such as giving priority to applicants whose school plans meet demonstrated needs in the state (e.g., high-quality programs for students learning English). Communicating information in multiple languages can help ensure that families have access to information about charter schools in their native languages.

Finally, policymakers should prioritize collecting outcomes data linked to demographics, which can provide valuable information about which schools are serving students equitably, and which may need some additional support.

- » **Eliminate or mitigate funding equity differences.** Facilities and funding are two of the biggest challenges facing charter school leaders, and two of the biggest barriers to the growth of the sector. Charter schools receive an average of \$6,000 less per student than traditional public schools,³⁹ and spend approximately \$748 of their per-pupil funding on facilities payments⁴⁰ (traditional school districts have other mechanisms for funding facilities; district schools are not responsible for facilities payments.) To help combat these challenges, policymakers should ensure that the state provides charter schools with the same per-pupil funding amount as traditional district schools. To address the gap related to facilities funding, state policymakers can offer facilities assistance in a number of ways, including by providing additional per-pupil funding, credit enhancements, state grant programs, or including charter schools in district construction levy requests.⁴¹

³⁷<https://www.publiccharters.org/our-work/charter-law-database/components>

³⁸https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/The%20Challenges%20and%20Opportunities%20in%20School%20Transportation%20Today_Bellwether.pdf

³⁹<https://www.the74million.org/article/analysis-new-analysis-shows-how-a-13-billion-funding-gap-between-charter-schools-traditional-public-schools-hurts-underserved-students/>

⁴⁰<https://www.publiccharters.org/latest-news/2017/12/13/top-5-facilities-struggles-charter-schools>

⁴¹<https://www2.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/charterfacilities/charterfacilities.pdf>





Key Resources

Forty-five states and Washington, DC, have charter school laws in place

» [National Alliance for Public Charter Schools \(NAPCS\)](#)

- › Leading national nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing the public charter school movement. Their mission is to “lead public education to unprecedented levels of academic achievement by fostering a strong charter movement.”
- › NAPCS work includes model charter school law, research and publications, federal policy advocacy, data and analysis, and legal advocacy.

» [National Association of Charter School Authorizers \(NACSA\)](#)

- › Independent nonprofit advocacy organization for best practices and policies in charter school authorizing.
- › Provides research, advocacy, and support to authorizers to enhance smart charter school growth and oversight.
- › Education Commission of the States: 50-State Comparison of Charter School Policies
- › Operating arm of the Compact for Education, approved and endorsed by representatives of all 50 states and approved by Congress. Created in 1967.
- › Serves as a partner for education policy leaders to address issues in education.
- › Provides research and reports on myriad issues in education, all designed for quick overview and understanding of each state and the District of Columbia.

» [The State of the Charter Sector: What You Need to Know About the Charter Sector Today](#)

- › Comprehensive overview of the state of the charter sector (January 2019), including changes over time and challenges faced.
- › Resource created by Bellwether Education Partners as an update to a similar overview in 2015.

» [Center for Research on Education Outcomes \(CREDO\)](#)

- › CREDO, at Stanford University, produces rigorous, nonpartisan research and evaluation increasing available empirical evidence to drive education policy decisions designed to improve student outcomes.
- › Established in 1999, CREDO is a leading independent voice in discussing education improvements in America through rigorous program and policy analysis.
- › Supports educators and policymakers.

