

A PRIMER ON MINNESOTA CHARTER SCHOOLS

OVERVIEW

Minnesota charter schools are tuition-free, independent public schools that are open to and welcome all students, no matter ability or need, and are governed and operated jointly by licensed teachers, parents and community members.

Minnesota was the birthplace of the charter movement with the enactment of the nation's first charter school law in 1991. **As of October 2023, there were 181 charter schools** in operation in the state. While 71% of charters are located in the greater Twin Cities metropolitan area, there are charters in communities across the state, from Grand Portage to Echo, and from Bemidji to La Crescent.

As of October 1, 2023, there were 69,766 PreK-12 students enrolled in Minnesota's chartered public schools (*just over 8% of the state's K-12 public enrollment*).

MINNESOTA CHARTER SCHOOL FACTS

BASICS

- Charter schools are **public schools**.
- Charter schools are **tuition free**.
- Charter schools **may not require entrance exams or requirements**.
- Charter schools **may not limit the admission of pupils on the basis** of intellectual ability, measures of achievement or aptitude, or athletic ability.
- Charter schools **must accept all students up to capacity**. If there are more students than slots, the school must conduct a lottery.
- Charter schools are subject to the Human Rights Law, Pupil Fair Dismissal Act, Public School Fee Law, Data Practices Law, General Employment Law, federal, state and local health and safety laws, state testing requirements, etc.
- Charter schools must follow the same federal and state requirements to provide special education services as other public school districts.
- Charter schools receive less per pupil funding than traditional public schools. Charters may not levy property taxes, and receive no funding from local property taxes.

OPERATIONS

- Charter schools are formed and operate as Minnesota non-profit corporations.
- Charter school boards are composed of parents, licensed teachers and community members.
- Charter school boards are elected by parents and school staff, and boards are subject to Minnesota's Open Meeting Law.
- Charter schools boards enter into a legally binding charter contract with an authorizer.
- Charter schools have an authorizer (college or university, a nonprofit organization, or a traditional school district) that is the authorizing authority and oversight body of the school.
- Charter school teachers must hold a valid Minnesota teaching license.
- Charter schools have the same financial audits, audit procedures, and audit requirements as traditional public school districts.

PROGRAMS

- Charter schools have specific program focuses such as language immersion, project-based learning, environmental education, arts education, expeditionary learning, online learning, etc.
- Charter schools are normally smaller in size than traditional public schools and usually have smaller class sizes.
- Charter schools are more diverse in enrollment than state averages.

AUTHORIZERS

- 12 Authorizers - Colleges/Universities, Non-profits, School Districts, and Single Purpose Authorizers.

CHARTER SCHOOL LEGAL REFERENCES

- Minnesota Statutes 124E

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MINNESOTA CHARTER SCHOOL STATISTICS

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

- **69,766 PreK-12 students enrolled** in charter schools (just over **8% of the statewide total**)
- Since 2004-05, the number of PreK-12 students enrolled in charter schools has **grown from 17,500 students to nearly 70,000 students.**
- Since 2021-22, charter school enrollment has increased roughly **6.2%.**
- Compared to state averages, charter schools enroll a **larger percentage** of students that:
 - **Are English Language Learners** (20% vs. 9% Statewide)
 - **Are Students of Color and American Indian** (59% vs. 38% Statewide)
 - **Qualify for Free or Reduced Lunch** (59% vs. 42% Statewide)
 - **Receive Special Education Services** (19% vs. 18% Statewide)
 - **Are Homeless or Highly Mobile (HHM)** (2% vs. 1% Statewide)

SCHOOLS (OPERATIONAL AND PRE-OPERATIONAL)

- **181** charter schools in operation
- **7** planning for 2024 opening

GRADE CONFIGURATION OF SCHOOLS

- | | | |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| • PreK-3 (1) | • K-5 (9) | • 5-8 (1) |
| • PreK-6 (6) | • K-6 (17) | • 5-12 (1) |
| • PreK-7 (1) | • K-7 (3) | • 6-11 (1) |
| • PreK-8 (9) | • K-8 (49) | • 6-12 (16) |
| • PreK-10 (1) | • K-11 (1) | • 7-12 (7) |
| • PreK-11 (1) | • K-12 (24) | • 9-12 (22) |
| • PreK-12 (6) | • 1-8 (1) | • 10-12 (1) |
| • K-4 (2) | • 1-12 (1) | |

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

- **30** schools in **Minneapolis**
- **36** schools in **St. Paul**
- **62** schools in the **7-county metro area** (excluding *St. Paul and Minneapolis*)
- **53** schools located in **Greater Minnesota** (excluding *the Twin Cities metro area*)

PROGRAM FOCUS

- **Arts Focused** (Recording, Performing, Visual, etc.)
- **Career & Technical Education**
- **Character Education**
- **Classical Education**
- **College Preparatory**
- **Core Knowledge**
- **Dual Language and Multicultural** (French, German, Hmong, Korean, Mandarin, Ojibwe, Russian, Somali, Spanish, etc.)
- **Environmental Education**
- **Expeditionary Education**
- **Global Citizenship**
- **International Baccalaureate (IB)**
- **Montessori**
- **Personalized Learning**
- **Project-Based Learning**
- **Service Learning**
- **Social Justice**
- **STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Math**
- **Target Populations** (Deaf, Autism, At-Risk, etc.)

STAFF COUNT FOR RETIREMENT

- TRA (Teacher Retirement Association) 2024 count: 7,223 charter school employees; 1,789 retirees
- PERA (Public Employees Retirement Association) count: 4,100+ charter school employees (2018)

FACILITIES (FY23)

- Total Leased Space: over **9.33 million sq. ft.**
- Average Square Footage Leased: **43,839 sq. ft.**
- Average Cost Per Square Foot Leased: **\$13.00**
- Average Lease Aid Per Square Foot: **\$9.85**

TRANSPORTATION (2022-23)

- 136 schools provided their own transportation
- 55 schools used district transportation
- 20 schools use public transportation