

OVERVIEW

Charters:

California is one of 43 states, including the District of Columbia, that permit charter schools. California's charter law was enacted in 1992, making it only the second state in the country to adopt charter legislation. As of the 2013-14 school year, **1,130 charter schools were in operation, enrolling an estimated 519,000 students.**

California law caps the number of charter schools statewide at 1,750. The cap is increased by 100 schools each year. The law allows multiple types of charter school authorizers, including local school boards, county boards of education, and the State Board of Education.

CALIFORNIA'S CHARTERS

Year of Charter Law – 1992

NAPCS Ranking of Charter Law – 9 of 43

Total Charters – 1,130

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS) ranks California's charter law as among the strongest nationwide (9th out of 43 states).

Vouchers or Other State Assistance for Private School Choice:

California does not currently offer vouchers or tuition tax credits for private school choice.

Propositions to amend the state constitution to allow school vouchers were defeated by large margins in 1993 and 2010.

State Laws on Other Forms of School Choice:

California's open enrollment program was enacted in 2010. It allows students enrolled in 1,000 designated low-performing schools (known as **Open Enrollment schools**) to enroll in a higher-performing school within the same district or in another school district.

CHARTER SCHOOLS

History

- Public charters have been allowed under state law since 1992.
- California law caps the number of charter schools statewide at 1,750. The cap is increased by 100 schools each year.
- As of the 2013-14 school year, **1,130 charter schools are in operation, enrolling an estimated 519,000 students.**

PERCENT OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN CHARTERS
2011-2012

6.7% > 4.2%

California

U.S. Average

Details

- Charter schools can be **authorized by local school boards, county boards of education, and the State Board of Education.**
- California does not restrict the types of entities that can establish charter schools (for-profits are allowed).
- In 2013, the state enacted a new funding formula for public education that includes new accountability requirements for charter schools and public school districts.
- California has an **Advisory Commission on Charter Schools (ACCS)**, whose membership includes the State Superintendent and members appointed by the State Board of Education.
 - The ACCS advises the State Board of Education on issues related to charters including the granting of charters denied by local education agencies; the revocation of state-granted charters; and establishing appropriate funding levels for non-classroom based charter schools (which offer independent study, home study, and/or virtual learning opportunities).

FINDINGS ON CHARTERS IN CALIFORNIA

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools **ranks** California's charter school law as one of the nation's strongest — 9th out of 43 states. Strengths of its law include that California allows a range of charter school authorizers and permits a number of charter models including new start-ups, traditional public school conversions, and virtual schools.

The Center for Research and Education Outcomes at Stanford University conducted an **analysis of California charter school performance**. Their study considered the effect enrolling in a charter school had on a student's academic performance, specifically measuring how much academic growth charter students attained over the course of one year compared to similar students in traditional public schools. They found:

- **Between 2007- 2011, California charter school students attained annual academic gains in reading** equivalent to 14 additional days of learning in reading over traditional public school students.
- **On average, state charter school students learned less annually than traditional public school students, being outperformed by the equivalent of 14 days in math.**
- Charter schools affiliated with a Charter Management Organization (CMO) outperformed both traditional public school students as well as students in charters that were not affiliated with a CMO.
 - However, **students in charter schools that were not affiliated with a CMO lagged traditional public school peers by 29 days of learning in math.**

VOUCHERS OR OTHER STATE ASSISTANCE FOR PRIVATE SCHOOL CHOICE

History

- California does not currently have a voucher or tuition tax credit program in operation.
- Propositions to amend the state constitution to allow school vouchers were soundly defeated in 1993 and 2010.

Details

- In 1993, the state considered a constitutional amendment that would have allowed a statewide school voucher program. A voucher of \$2,600 would have been offered to families who enrolled students in a participating nonpublic school. Voters [rejected Proposition 174 by a two-to-one margin](#).
- In 2010, another constitutional amendment to establish vouchers was defeated 70.5 percent to 29.5 percent.
 - [Proposition 38](#) authorized a \$4,000 voucher for private and religious schools and required participating private schools to administer state standardized tests to participating students.
 - One study estimated that the program could cost \$3 billion annually by the fourth year.

FINDINGS ON VOUCHERS IN CALIFORNIA

An [analysis by the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice](#) (which works to advance school choice) suggests that programs to provide state assistance for private school are less likely to be implemented in California. According to the Foundation, state courts have a more restrictive interpretation of state constitutional amendments regarding the use of state funds at religious-affiliated schools. California's Constitution states that: "No public money shall ever be appropriated for the support of any sectarian or denominational school." (California Constitution, Article IX, S8)

STATE POLICIES ON OTHER FORMS OF SCHOOL CHOICE

Open Enrollment

- The *Open Enrollment Act*, passed in 2010, allows students in 1,000 designated low-performing schools (known as Open Enrollment schools) to enroll in a higher-performing school within the same district or in another school district.
- The receiving school must have a higher score on the Academic Performance Index (API).
 - The API is a numerical value given as part of the state’s accountability system and is an indicator of a school’s performance.
- School districts have the ability to [adopt specific standards for the acceptance or rejection of open enrollment students](#).
 - Considerations may include: the capacity of a program, class, grade level, or school building, or adverse financial impact.
 - A program *may not* base decisions on previous academic achievement, physical condition, English language proficiency, or family income.
 - In some instances, the sending or receiving district may reject a student’s application if changing districts would negatively impact a court-ordered or voluntary desegregation plan or the racial and ethnic balance of the district.
- Transportation is the responsibility of each student’s parent or guardian.

FINDINGS ON OPEN ENROLLMENT IN CALIFORNIA

A number of articles in academic journals have considered the implications of open enrollment programs on student outcomes. One [study of open enrollment in California](#) focused on the impact of schools being labeled as low-performing “choice schools.” It found that labeling a school as low-performing did not increase the performance of those students who remained and did not transfer. A school labeled as “low-performing” was also likely to see its school enrollment decline from the previous year relative to comparable schools. Although schools on the list for open enrollment were likely to have a number of students leave, the proportion of minority or low-income students remained stable.

Virtual Schools

- California does not have a statewide virtual school, but numerous school districts and charter schools in the state offer online or blended learning.
- The state is home to 42 fully-online virtual schools that serve groups of students in contiguous counties. These schools [enrolled an estimated 40,891 students in 2012-13](#).
- A number of charter schools offer innovative blended learning models, including Rocketship Education which [served 3,146 students in seven elementary schools](#) in the San Jose area in 2012-13.
- Virtual charter schools may obtain the same amount of funding as physical “brick-and-mortar” charters, but are required to apply to the State Board of Education for a “determination of funding.”
 - [A school must demonstrate that it meets designated funding thresholds for teacher compensation and instruction](#), as well as criteria involving school resources, special education services, and school performance. Virtual charters that do not meet all of the criteria receive less per-pupil funding than “brick-and-mortar” charters.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

[Charter School Performance in California](#)

[Keeping Pace with Online and Blended Learning: California](#)

[Open Enrollment Frequently Asked Questions](#)

[Title 5, CCR Open Enrollment Act](#)