

## OVERVIEW

### Charters:

New Jersey is one of 43 states, including the District of Columbia, that permit charter schools. New Jersey's charter law was enacted in 1995. There are currently 87 charter schools in the state, enrolling an estimated 31,743 students.

New Jersey does not place any caps on charter school growth, but only the Commissioner of Education may authorize charter schools. New start-up charters and traditional public to charter school conversions are allowed, but virtual charter schools are not.

### NEW JERSEY'S CHARTERS

Year of Charter Law – 1995

NAPCS Ranking of Charter Law – 32 of 43

Total Charters – 87

*The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS) ranks New Jersey's charter law as among the weakest nationwide (32<sup>nd</sup> out of 43 states).*

### Vouchers or Other State Assistance for Private School Choice:

New Jersey does not have a statewide private school choice program, although legislation to establish vouchers has been repeatedly proposed in recent years.

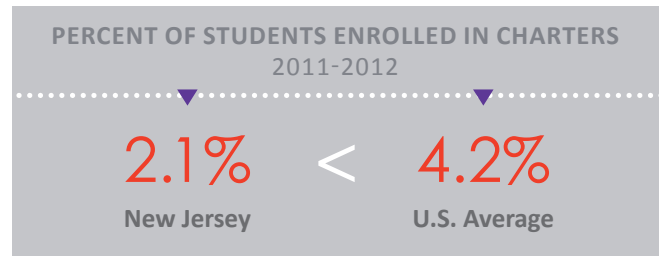
### State Laws on Other Forms of School Choice:

New Jersey has a voluntary choice program for transfers between school districts (interdistrict choice). The New Jersey Department of Education annually approves a list of "choice districts" that are able to enroll students who reside in other school districts.

## CHARTER SCHOOLS

**History**

- Public charters have been [allowed under state law since 1995](#).
- There is no cap on the number of charter schools that can be approved.
- As of September 2014, 87 charter schools were in operation, [enrolling more than 33,500 students](#).

**Details**

- New Jersey law allows new start-ups and traditional public to charter school conversions but not virtual charter schools.
- [All charter schools must be authorized by the State Commissioner of Education](#) and are managed by the charter school's board of trustees.
- Charter school applicants may include private organizations, institutions of higher education, parents, and teachers.
- Charters are open to all students, as space is available. [Enrollment preference is given to students from a charter school's district or region of residence](#).
- The state has created a Performance Framework which provides academic, organizational, and fiscal standards used to evaluate charter schools. A charter school's academic performance has the greatest weight for decisions involving the replication, expansion, renewal, and revocation of a charter.

## FINDINGS ON CHARTERS IN NEW JERSEY

The Center for Research and Education Outcomes at Stanford University conducted a [National Charter School Study in 2013](#) to analyze the effect that enrolling in a charter school has on a student's academic performance. The study specifically measured how much academic growth charter students attained over the course of one year compared to similar students in traditional public schools. The study found that **New Jersey charter school students made larger gains in both reading and math than their peers in traditional public schools.**

- On average, New Jersey charter school students made annual academic gains equivalent to an additional two months of learning in reading over peers in traditional public schools.
- In math, charter school students attained academic growth equivalent to three months of additional learning over peers in traditional public schools.
- Students in Newark charter schools had greater annual learning gains than the state average in both reading and math.
- **Students enrolled in charters in Camden, Trenton, Jersey City, and Paterson learned significantly less than peers in traditional schools in reading.**
  - There was **no difference in math achievement** between charter schools in these cities and their traditional public school peers.

# VOUCHERS OR OTHER STATE ASSISTANCE FOR PRIVATE SCHOOL CHOICE

## **History**

- **New Jersey does not currently have a private school choice program.**
- Legislators have put forth different types of voucher programs since 2006, but none have successfully passed.
- Governor Chris Christie has advocated for vouchers as part of his education reform agenda and stated that passing a voucher bill, known as the *Opportunity Scholarship Act*, would be a priority. His proposal would establish a tax credit scholarship program for students to attend private schools.

## **Details**

- In 2011, attempts to pass parallel *Opportunity Scholarship Act* bills in the Assembly and Senate were blocked by the Democratic-controlled legislature. Some Democrats expressed concern about the scale of the program, which would have operated in 13 districts and was estimated to cost \$840 million in the first five years. The vouchers also received [strong opposition from the New Jersey Education Association](#).
- In 2012, [bills were proposed in both the Assembly and Senate](#) to establish an *Opportunity Scholarship* program. The bills remained in committee and rolled over into the 2013-14 legislative session.
- In 2013, Governor Chris Christie [included funding for an \*Opportunity Scholarship\* program in his annual budget proposal](#). Proposed as a pilot program, it would have provided \$10,000 scholarships for up to 200 low-income students at “chronically failing” schools. The Democratic-controlled legislature [did not include the program in the final approved budget](#).

## STATE POLICIES ON OTHER FORMS OF SCHOOL CHOICE

***Interdistrict Choice Program***

- The [Interdistrict Choice Program](#) allows a selected group of districts, known as “choice districts,” to enroll students who reside in other school districts.
- The program has been in effect since 2010 when legislation expanded and permanently established what had been a pilot interdistrict choice program (in operation since 2000).
- There are [136 approved choice districts for the 2014-15 school year](#), and as many as 5,500 students are expected to participate.
- Participation is voluntary for school districts, but they must first be approved by the New Jersey Department of Education. Any student living in New Jersey may participate.
- To encourage districts to participate, the [state has covered the up-front per-pupil costs](#) for students in the program – approximately \$10,000 per student in 2013, with a total cost to the state of over \$49 million.
  - Because of rising costs, [the state capped growth in additional state funding at five percent](#) for 2014. Districts may accept additional students beyond that rate, but won’t receive additional state aid.
- Choice districts have the autonomy to [designate the seats in grades and programs that are available](#) for choice students.
  - If a choice district receives more applications than available spaces, [it must hold a public lottery](#).
- Districts are forbidden from basing enrollment decisions on a student’s academic aptitude, athletic ability, behavior record, English language proficiency, or other basis prohibited by law.
- Transportation costs are covered by the district in which a student resides for up to 20 miles if the student meets eligibility requirements. The total per-pupil amount is [capped at \\$884](#).

***Virtual Schools***

- There are no fully-online schools in New Jersey.
- Two fully blended charter schools [opened in the Newark area in 2012-13](#). These charters offer a mix of in-person and online instruction.
  - The [blended learning charters have been challenged in court](#) by the New Jersey Education Association, which argued that the state charter law only permitted in-person, “brick-and-mortar” schools. Ultimately, the court ruled in favor of the charters.
- Two virtual charter school applicants were approved for planning years in 2011 and 2012; however, their applications were ultimately rejected by the Department of Education in 2013.
- The New Jersey Virtual School offers tuition-based courses – including credit recovery and Advanced Placement – to students in grades 6 through 12.

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

[Charter School Performance in New Jersey](#)

[Charter School Program Act of 1995, N.J.S.A. 18A:36A](#)

[Interdistrict Public School Choice](#)

[New Jersey Charter Performance Framework](#)

[New Jersey's Opportunity Scholarship Act: A Step in the Right Direction](#)