

DID YOU KNOW?

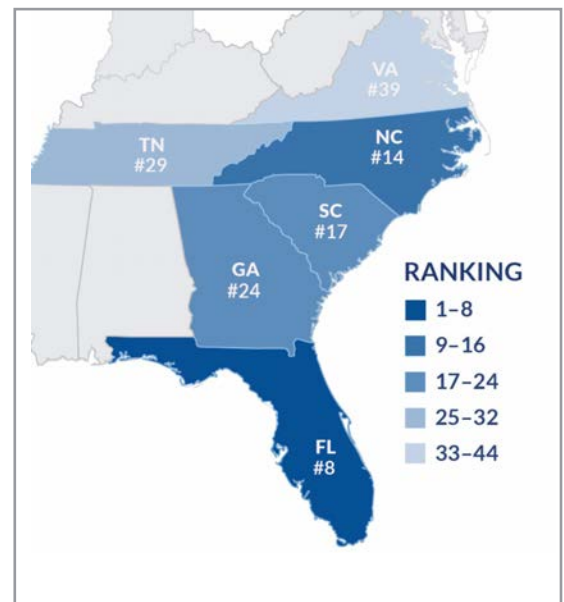
North Carolina's charter school policy ranks 14th in a national comparison

Did you know that North Carolina's charter school policy ranks 14th (of 44 states) in a national comparison to the model law developed by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (National Alliance)?

Annual Charter Policy Rankings: Purpose and Methodology

Each year the National Alliance compares state charter laws against the 21 essential components of their model charter public school law. These [components were originally developed](#) in 2009 by a working group of individuals with deep expertise in public charter school law. The model law was [updated in 2016](#) to reflect the challenges and opportunities of today's charter policy environment. The resulting [annual rankings](#) are intended to guide states in designing and implementing charter policies that promote robust accountability, adequate flexibility, equitable funding, and responsible growth for charter schools.

In North Carolina, over 91,000 students attend approximately 175 public charter schools. In 2017, the National Alliance ranked North Carolina's charter school policy 14th, out of 44 states, higher than each of its border states and second in the southeast. North Carolina's high rating is largely attributable to the balance state law creates between allowing charter school autonomy while also instituting strong accountability measures for those schools.



Strengths of North Carolina Charter Policy

North Carolina's charter school policy has undergone many changes since its enactment in 1996. Chief among those changes [was the elimination of the 100-school cap by the General Assembly in 2011](#). Since then, the State Board of Education and the North Carolina Charter School Advisory Board have authorized approximately [75 new charter schools](#) to begin operation. The National Alliance recognizes the lack of a cap on charter school growth as one of the state's strengths.

Additional strengths include:

Variety of Types of Charter Schools

- North Carolina allows a **variety of types of public charter schools**, including new startups and public school conversions.

Accountability and School Monitoring

- North Carolina scored **high marks for the accountability measures it has put in place for charter schools and charter school authorizers**. The State Board of Education is currently required to review and evaluate the educational effectiveness of charter schools and report to the General Assembly on its findings. The National Alliance also finds that the state has established adequate financial accountability and oversight for charter schools. Moreover, the state has the ability to review and evaluate the performance of its authorizers.

Autonomous Schools

- North Carolina allows for the creation of **fiscally and legally autonomous schools** that are led by independent charter school boards and are fully independent from local education agencies (LEAs).

Clear Enrollment Procedures

- North Carolina policy requires charter schools to provide **open enrollment to any student in the state**. The law also prohibits enrollment discrimination on the basis of intellectual ability, aptitude, athletic ability, disability, race, creed, national origin, religion, or ancestry.

Access to State Retirement System

- State policy also allows charter schools to **opt-in to the Teachers and State Employee Retirement System**, if they so choose.

Areas for Improvement

Though North Carolina's charter school policy has moved up in the rankings from **23rd in 2013** to 14th in 2017, the National Alliance contends that the state has multiple areas for improvement. To begin, North Carolina only allows charter schools to be authorized jointly by the State Board of Education and the Charter School Advisory board. The National Alliance suggests that there should be two or more pathways for charter schools to receive authorization.

Additional areas for improvement include:

Funding

- State policy **does not require LEAs to transfer funds used for transportation to charter schools**, as the National Alliance suggests.
- North Carolina also **fails to provide facilities funding to charter schools**. The National Alliance's model law includes a per-pupil facilities allowance for charter schools and a state grant program to provide capital funding for charter schools.

Performance-Based Contracts

- According to the National Alliance, North Carolina **charter school contracts do not adequately define the academic, financial, and operation performance expectations by which schools are to be judged**.

Extracurricular Access

- The National Alliance suggests that charter school students who attend schools that do not offer extracurricular or interscholastic activities **should have access to those activities at non-charter public schools nearby**. North Carolina law does not explicit allow for such access.

Special Education Responsibilities

- While North Carolina law indicates that the State Board of Education must allocate per-pupil special education funds to charter schools, state policy does not provide clarity regarding funding for low-incident, high-cost services for charter schools. Nor does the policy clarify that **charter schools have access to all regional and state services available to traditional districts.**

Virtual Charter Schools

- Though North Carolina has recently authorized two full-time virtual charter schools, state policy **fails to base permissible enrollment increases on whether the school meets its performance requirements**, as is suggested by the National Alliance.

Considerations for Policymakers

Though a strong charter school law is necessary to driving positive results for charter schools in our state, the National Alliance acknowledges that **state policy is just one of five key ingredients of a successful charter school environment**, as evidenced by strong student results:

- Supportive laws and regulations;
- Quality authorizers;
- Effective charter support organizations;
- Outstanding school leaders and teachers; and
- Engaged parents and community members.