

Fact Sheet on California Charter Schools

About Public Charter Schools

Charter schools are independent public schools that are allowed to be more innovative and are held accountable for improved student achievement.

Why Charter Schools

Charter schools give teachers the flexibility to innovate and try new ways to improve student achievement. This flexibility gives charter schools the ability to develop successful new models that work. Charter schools also hold teachers and the local community accountable: if student achievement isn't improving, charter schools can make quick, effective changes like modifying curriculum or making appropriate staff changes to improve student achievement.

Number of California Charter Schools in Operation

There are currently 574 public charter schools in operation, serving over 212,000 students. Over three hundred charter schools operate in urban or inner-city areas.

California Legislation

In 1992, California was the second state to enact charter legislation after Minnesota in 1991. The charter school law was authored by then-Senator Gary K. Hart.

Student Achievement

Recent studies have shown that charter schools are performing as well as, and in many cases better, than the broader public school system. A 2005 student achievement analysis commissioned in October by the *Los Angeles Times* found that California's charter schools are outperforming in middle and high schools. EdSource, a respected, non-partisan education research organization, recently found that charter schools are more likely to meet their academic achievement goals than non-charters.

Students Served

According to the California Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO), charter schools serve a higher percentage of low-income students, twice the percentage of African-American students and a higher percentage of students with academic difficulties than traditional public schools. The LAO concluded that "charter schools are a viable reform strategy—expanding families' choices, encouraging parental involvement, increasing teacher satisfaction, enhancing principals' control over school-site decision making, and broadening the curriculum without sacrificing time spent on core subjects."

School Type: Start-up vs. Conversion

Eighty-two percent (473 of 574) of charter schools currently in operation are "start-up" schools. A "start-up" charter school is created from scratch by educators, parents and community leaders. The other 18 percent (101 of 574) are "conversion" schools. A "conversion" charter school is a public school converted to a charter by existing faculty.

Recent Trends

Charter schools' five largest urban school districts account for 29 percent of the charter school movement. Currently, Los Angeles Unified has 86 charter schools, San Diego Unified has 34, Oakland Unified has 26, Sacramento City Unified has 12 and San Francisco Unified has 10. This fall, almost half (40 percent) of all new charter schools opened in three urban school districts: Los Angeles, San Diego and Oakland.

About the California Charter Schools Association

The California Charter Schools Association is the membership and professional organization serving the 574 charter schools in the state of California. Our mission is to increase student achievement by strengthening and expanding public charter schools throughout California.