

# 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 1, 2020 there were 173 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, 2020, there were 65,987 K-12 students** enrolled in Minnesota's chartered public schools (*about 7.5% 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

- 14 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 (2020-2021)

- **65,987+ K-12 students enrolled** in charter schools (about 7.5% of the statewide total)
- Compared to state averages, charter schools enroll...
  - **A larger percentage of English Language Learner** students (21% vs. 8% Statewide)
  - **A larger percentage of Students of Color and American Indian students** (62% vs. 36% Statewide)
  - **14% Students with Disabilities** vs. 16% Statewide
- Since 2004-2005, the number of students enrolled in charter schools has **grown from 17,500 to almost 66,000.**

### SCHOOLS (OPERATIONAL AND PRE-OPERATIONAL)

- **173** charter schools in operation
- **10** approved for 2021 opening (as of October 2020)

### GRADE CONFIGURATION OF SCHOOLS (2020-2021)

- |               |             |             |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| • PreK-K (1)  | • K-4 (1)   | • 1-12 (1)  |
| • PreK-5 (3)  | • K-5 (6)   | • 5-8 (2)   |
| • PreK-6 (10) | • K-6 (15)  | • 5-12 (2)  |
| • PreK-7 (1)  | • K-8 (39)  | • 6-12 (17) |
| • PreK-8 (18) | • K-9 (2)   | • 7-12 (6)  |
| • PreK-12 (6) | • K-12 (21) | • 9-12 (21) |
|               | • 1-8 (1)   |             |

### GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION (2020-2021)

- **34** schools in **Minneapolis**
- **37** schools in **St. Paul**
- **53** school in the **7-county metro area** (excluding St. Paul and Minneapolis)
- **49** schools located in **Greater Minnesota** (excluding the Twin Cities metro area)

### PROGRAM FOCUS

- **Dual Language and Multi-Cultural** (Hmong, Mandarin, Spanish, German, Ojibwe...)
- **Core Knowledge**
- **International Baccalaureate (IB)**
- **Target Populations** (Deaf, Autism, At-Risk)
- **Service Learning**
- **Environmental Education**
- **Montessori**
- **Project Based**
- **Art Focused** (Performing and Visual)
- **Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)**
- **Technical/Career Education**
- **Classical Education**
- **Service Based Learning**

### STAFF COUNT FOR RETIREMENT (January 2018)

- TRA (Teacher Retirement Association) count: 4,900+ employees in charter schools
- PERA (Public Employees Retirement Association) count: over 4,100+ employees in charter schools

### FACILITIES (FY19)

- Total Leased Space: over **7.6+ million sq. ft.**
- Average Square Footage Leased: **45,743 sq. ft.**
- Average Price Per Square Foot Leased: **\$12**

### TRANSPORTATION (2018-19)

- 130 schools provided their own transportation services. Of these, 25 also use public transit.
- 44 schools used district transportation

### Minnesota Association of Charter Schools

Website: [mncharterschools.org](http://mncharterschools.org)  
Facebook: [facebook.com/mncharterschools](https://www.facebook.com/mncharterschools)  
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