

Public Charter Schools



The Big Idea:



Every child has the fundamental right to attend an excellent school. High-quality charter schools provide opportunities to students and families that don't have access to great schools.

What are charter schools & how can they lead to better outcomes for students?

A charter school is a tuition-free public school that is independently run. It receives greater flexibility in exchange for increased accountability. The school is established by a “charter,” which is a performance contract describing key elements of the school.

- Charter schools have the ability to make their own decisions regarding their operation, including but not limited to their curriculum, schedule, and hiring practices. Because of this freedom, charter schools are able to quickly adjust to meet the needs of their students.
- In districts with persistently failing schools, high-quality charter schools provide a choice for students and families that might not otherwise have access to a great school.
- All students are allowed to apply and enroll in a charter school. When there are more applicants than seats available, a random lottery system is used to determine who may enroll. This is different from magnet schools that often have academic requirements or entrance exams. While open to all students in the state, preference is given to those residing in the district where the school is located.
- Charter schools can operate as a single independent campus or within a network of other charter schools. They are governed by a separate board and managed independently of the local school district.
- Because charter schools are public schools, they are publicly funded, partially by state and federal education dollars, and sometimes local education dollars (though this is not always the case in Alabama). Most charters also raise private funds, as well.

What are the types of charter schools in Alabama?

Through the School Choice and Student Opportunity Act that was passed in 2015, there are two types of charter schools that operate in Alabama:

- **Start-Up Charter School:** Start-up charter schools are created by nonprofit organizations independent from a local school district. The organization must enter a contract, or charter, with a charter authorizer (the body that governs charter schools in their area), which can be either a local school district or the Alabama Public Charter School Commission (APCSC). Most charter schools in Alabama are start-up charter schools authorized by the APCSC.
- **Conversion Charter School:** Conversion charter schools are created when local school districts that are charter authorizers identify a struggling school and allow a separate organization to govern and operate the school, even as the school stays part of the local district. 5 local districts serve as charter authorizers in Alabama.

As of the 2021-2022 academic year, there are 7 start-up charter schools in Alabama, with 3 more scheduled to open in the 2022-2023 school year. In addition, the Montgomery Education Foundation has launched one conversion charter school in Montgomery Public Schools this year, with two more opening next year. These are the first conversion charter schools in Alabama.