

# California State Treasurer's Office has an overview of Charters and their history in the state of California:

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**CALIFORNIA SCHOOL FINANCE AUTHORITY**

## Overview

Charter schools are public schools that provide instruction in any combination of grades kindergarten through 12. As noted in the Chronology, in 1992, the state enacted legislation allowing charter schools in California to offer parents an alternative to traditional public schools and encourage local leaders to experiment with new educational programs. Except where specifically noted otherwise, California law exempts charter schools from many of the statutes and regulations that apply to school districts.

Generally, all charter schools must (1) provide nonsectarian instruction, (2) charge no tuition, and (3) admit all interested students up to school capacity. To both open and continue operating, a charter school must have an approved charter setting forth a comprehensive vision for the school.

Over the last decade, charter school enrollment has grown steadily.

In 2006, 560 charter schools served about 200,000 students (3.5 percent (3.5%) of the state's K12 enrollment). By 2016, over 1,200 charter schools served about 580,000 students (almost 10 percent (10%) of the state's K-12 enrollment). As of the beginning of the 2018–19 school year, 1306 charter schools and seven all-charter districts are operating in California. Significant trends over the last five years show an overall 0.8 percent (0.8%) decline in student enrollment statewide, from 6.2 million in 2014-15 to 6.19 million in 2018-19. Meanwhile, charter school enrollment grew from 544,980 students to 652,933 students during the same time period.

Most charter schools are small, compared to traditional public schools, and located in urban areas. The median charter school enrolls about 250 students, whereas the median traditional public school enrolls about 525 students.

Together, nine Bay Area counties, Los Angeles County, and San Diego County account for more than 60 percent (60%) of all charter schools and charter school enrollment in the state. Charter schools can be conversions of existing public schools or new startup schools. About 15 percent (15%) of charter schools are conversions, with the remaining 85 percent (85%) being startups. Of these, about 80 percent (80%) offer traditional, classroom-based instruction and 20 percent (20%) offer some form of independent study, such as distance learning or home study.

<https://www.treasurer.ca.gov/csfa/cschronology.asp>