

Maine Charter School Commission

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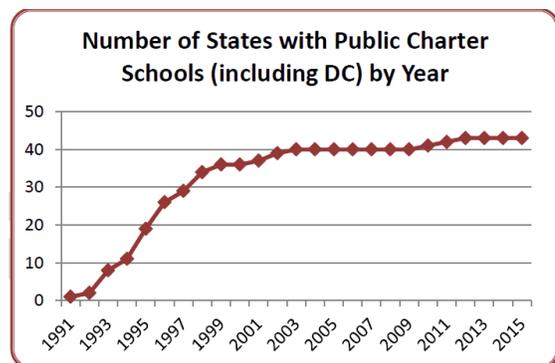
History of Charter Schools

The first enactment of charter school enabling legislation was in Minnesota in 1991. Currently, 43 states and the District of Columbia have adopted laws allowing voluntary public charter schools. According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2.9 million students were enrolled in 6,825 charter schools in the 2015-2016 school year.

What are Charter Schools?

Laws that govern public charter schools vary from state to state; however, they generally share the following three characteristics. Charter Schools are:

- **Public schools** - free to attend, publicly funded, part of the state school system, and accountable to public bodies for their results.
- **Schools of choice** - they do not enroll students solely based on where they live.
- **Independently managed** - by an organization that has a charter, or contract, with an authorizing agency.



Public Charter schools have more autonomy than traditional

public schools. They are freed from some state and local regulations, though the level of autonomy varies widely from state to state. Public Charter schools are held accountable for student performance. If the goals in the charter are not reached, the school could be closed or the charter not renewed.

State charter school laws differ as to what organizations can authorize public charter schools. The most common are local education agencies (31 states) and state education agencies (17 states). Maine is one of 15 states that have an independent authorizing agency.

Charter Schools in Maine

In September 2011, Maine became the 41st state to pass public charter school legislation. Two types of entities are permitted to authorize public charter schools in Maine: 1) the Maine Charter School Commission may authorize up to 10 public charter schools throughout the state during the first 10 years of Maine's charter school program; and 2) Local school boards and collaboratives of local school boards may authorize charter schools within their school administrative units at any time with no cap on the number.

Maine's first charter schools opened in the 2012-13 school year, and today the following charter schools are authorized to operate in Maine: Acadia Academy, Baxter Academy for Technology and Science, Cornville Regional Charter School, Fiddlehead School of Arts and Science, Harpswell Coastal Academy, Maine Academy of Natural Sciences, Maine Connections Academy, Maine Virtual Academy, and Snow Pond Arts Academy.

For more information, please visit: www.maine.gov/csc

Common *Myths* about Public Charter Schools

MYTH: Charter schools are private schools.

FACT: Charter schools are public schools, part of Maine's system of public education.

Maine public charter schools:

- must be nonreligious
- must be tuition-free;
- may not require entrance exams;
- must accept all students equally;
- if more students apply than there is room, a lottery must be held to ensure equal access.

MYTH: Charter school teachers do not need to be licensed.

FACT: A public charter school must comply with applicable federal laws and regulations regarding the qualification of teachers and other instructional staff. All full-time teachers in a Maine public charter school must hold an appropriate teaching certificate or become certified within 3 years of the date they are hired, except those with an advanced degree, with professional certification, or with unique expertise or experience in the curricular area in which they teach.

MYTH: Charter schools only serve gifted students.

FACT: Charter schools are open to all and may not have entrance requirements. Public charter schools may not limit admission to pupils on the basis of intellectual ability, measures of achievement or aptitude, or athletic ability.

MYTH: Charter schools are for "troubled" students.

FACT: Public charter schools are for all students. Charter schools are diverse in their missions, their programs, and in the populations they serve.

MYTH: Charter schools do not provide special education services.

FACT: Charter schools must provide special education services according to the same federal and state requirements that apply to district schools.

MYTH: Charter schools are "stealing money" from the public school system.

FACT: Since charter schools are public schools, the money that follows students who choose to attend charter schools remains in the public education system.

MYTH: Charter schools receive more state money than traditional public district schools.

FACT: State per-pupil education funds follow each student to a district or charter school according to the same "Essential Program Allocation" (EPA) formulas. District schools receive more state funding for teacher pensions, for facility construction and renovation, and for other capital expenses such as school buses.

Most districts schools also receive local funds through "supplemental allocations". Charters may not levy property taxes, which are additional sources of revenue to district schools.

MYTH: Charter schools do not have to meet the same educational standards as district schools.

FACT: Public charter schools are required to meet the same educational standards and Maine Learning Results as traditional public district schools. In addition, they must meet accountability measures in their contract with their authorizer.

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