Texas Public Charter Schools 101

Why public charter schools?

- Every student in Texas deserves to attend a school that prepares them for success—regardless of their ZIP code, income, learning style, or ability level.
- A one-size-fits-all education system leaves some families behind. We should empower parents to choose the learning environments and values they want for their children.

What are public charter schools?

- Charter schools are **tuition-free public schools** that are open to all students.
- The State of Texas grants charter schools the flexibility and freedom to **meet students' individual needs**—and in exchange, holds them to higher standards of academic and financial accountability than traditional school districts.
- The State Legislature created public charter schools in 1995 with bipartisan support. Charter schools are funded by the state on a per-student basis—just like traditional school districts—but receive **no local tax dollars**. On average, they receive 6% less funding from taxpayers than Independent School Districts (ISDs).
- All public charter schools in Texas are **non-profit**. They appoint school boards made up of skilled professionals. The Texas Education Agency holds these boards accountable.

What does it mean to have freedom and flexibility?

Children and families have diverse needs. Public charter schools create educational opportunities that help more students thrive, such as:

- **Classical education** for helping students understand truth, goodness, and beauty through the classics of Western literature
- **Specialized instruction for students with disabilities**, such as children on the autism spectrum or those with dyslexia
- **Multi-lingual experiences** where students learn additional languages before they graduate
- **Rigorous preparation for college,** including expanded access to Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses
- **Partnerships with employers** that give students hands-on experience before they graduate and empower them to earn industry certifications

How does accountability compare for public charter schools and traditional districts?

Public charter schools in Texas are authorized by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and must meet high standards for academic and financial performance—as well follow federal, state, and local regulations that ensure good governance and student welfare. In this respect, they share many traits in common with traditional school districts:

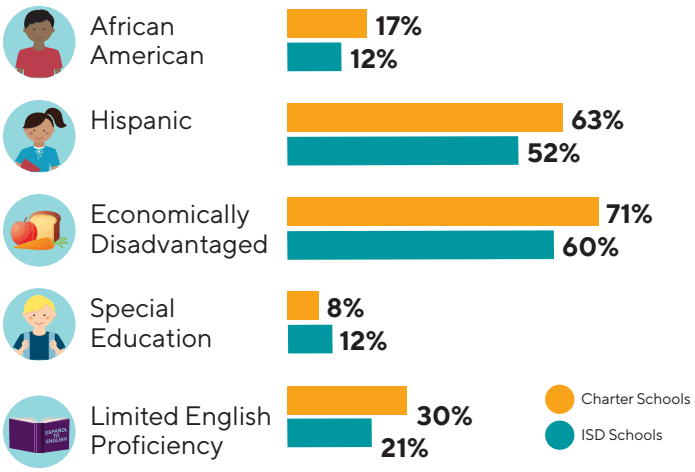
Texas Public School Traits	Traditional Public	Public Charter
School Board Transparency Required	✓	✓
Academic and Financial Accountability to State	✓	✓
Must use Texas graduation requirements	✓	✓
Subject to State Takeover or Closure	✓	✓
Must follow federal education and labor laws	✓	✓
Governed by the Texas Education Code	✓	✓
Receive State Funding	✓	✓
Mandatory contributions to Texas Retirement System	✓	✓

In fact, public charter schools are held to even higher standards than ISDs when it comes to transparency, expansion, and performance. That includes a "three strikes" rule that requires any charter school with a failing grade for three straight years to close—no appeals allowed.

Who do public charter schools serve?

Public charter schools in Texas enroll about 375,000 students from all kinds of different backgrounds. Overall, charter schools serve a higher percentage of high-needs and traditionally-underserved students than traditional districts.

CHARTER SCHOOL VS. ISD SCHOOL ENROLLMENT IN TEXAS



Are public charter schools getting results?

Public charter schools are raising achievement for students from all backgrounds:

- **Seven of the 10 highest-rated school districts** in Texas are charter school districts
- **78% of public charter school graduates** in 2022 were college, career, or military ready, compared to a statewide average of 66%
- Studies show that charter school students in Houston, San Antonio, and Austin achieved **more than one month's worth** of extra reading and math progress in a single year, compared to students with similar demographics statewide
- Traditional districts with public charter schools in their boundaries are more likely to improve. Over three years (from 2019 to 2022), **99% of ISDs with charter schools** boosted students' ELA/Reading STAAR scores in all grades — compared to 92% of ISDs without charters.