

20 Years of Charters

*A look at how the charter school
movement has shaped the education
landscape in Arizona.*



“Simply put,
*a charter is a contract to improve student
achievement.*”

Introduction

On June 17, 1994, Gov. Fife Symington signed into law House Bill 2002 – bringing charter-school education to Arizona and ushering-in a new era of school choice for parents and accountability for schools.

The law took effect 90 days later, making Arizona the 11th state in the country to allow charter schools, behind California, Colorado, Georgia, Hawaii, Kansas, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, and Wisconsin.

As “the hottest new concept in the world of education reform,” the *Arizona Republic* reported as many as “400 groups and individuals” requested applications in the first year. That fall, 67 schools opened across the state, authorized by school districts, the Arizona State Board of Education and the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools.

“Helping to create and pass the charter school law in Arizona was one of my life’s great privileges,” said Lisa Graham Keegan, 1994 House Education Chair and former Superintendent of Public Instruction. “But nothing can compare to the honor of seeing what our incredible Arizona teachers and school leaders have created over two decades for Arizona families. They have done nothing short of reshaping what we expect of our schools in the best possible ways.”

Charter schools are independently operated, but publically funded. School operators (such as parents, teachers or others from the public or private sector) sign a contract with an authorizer (the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools, the Arizona State Board of Education, universities, community colleges and local school districts) to provide education to K-12 students.

Hal Mattern of *The Arizona Republic* described charter schools best:

Their purpose is simple: to encourage the use of innovative teaching methods, to provide parents and students with another educational choice, and to give parents and teachers more control over the way schools are run. And, above all, charter schools are designed to boost student achievement.

Twenty years later, this description still holds true. Charter schools are public schools that are innovative while still being held accountable for improved student achievement. Today, 1 out of every 3 public school is a charter. They vary in mission and model, and serve about 190,000 students across Arizona.

Charter schools are held accountable for academic progress and taxpayer funding. State authorizers must review charters’ academic, fiscal and operational compliance. As outlined in this paper, schools are closed for failing to meet those standards.

With one of the highest percentages of students in charter schools in the country, Arizona charter schools continue to produce excellent results. In 2013, 21 of the top 30 public schools in Arizona are charter schools, according to Arizona Department of Education test scores. The [U.S. News and World Report](#) also ranked many of Arizona’s charter schools as some of the best in the nation.

Charter Stats

With one of the highest percentages of students attending a public charter school, Arizona continues to lead the nation in charter school growth. In the 2013-14 school year:

- Arizona has **602** charter schools.
- **190,000** students attend a charter school.
- About **30 percent** of the state's public schools are charter schools.
- An estimated **17 percent** of our public students attend a charter.
- Of the top **30** schools in Arizona, **21** are charter schools.

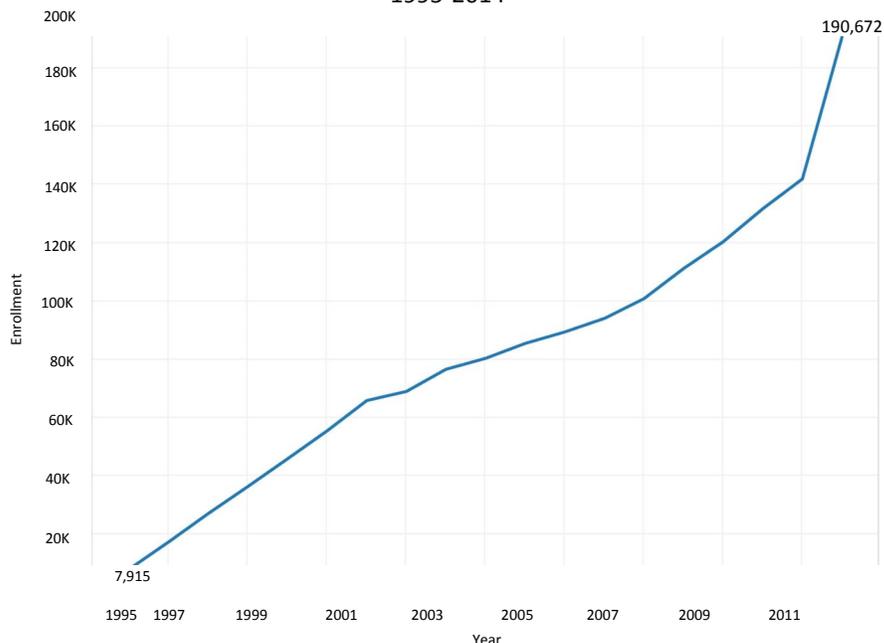
Enrollment Trends

With one of the highest percentages of students attending a public charter school, Arizona continues to lead the nation in charter school growth. Fully, 30 percent of the state's public schools are charter schools, and about 17 percent of our public students attend a charter. Arizona has 602 charter schools that enrolled about 190,000 students in 2013-14.

Charter school growth over time has been steady, with the greatest percent increases in charter enrollment occurring in the late 1990s and in the last school year. From 2007-2012, charter enrollment increased at an average rate of 8 percent, according to the Center for Student Achievement's report, *Oh, The Places They'll Go! Arizona School Choice and its Impact on Students*. "Charter school enrollment could double by 2020 and approach one-quarter of all public school students."

Arizona Charter School Enrollment

1995-2014



Campus Growth

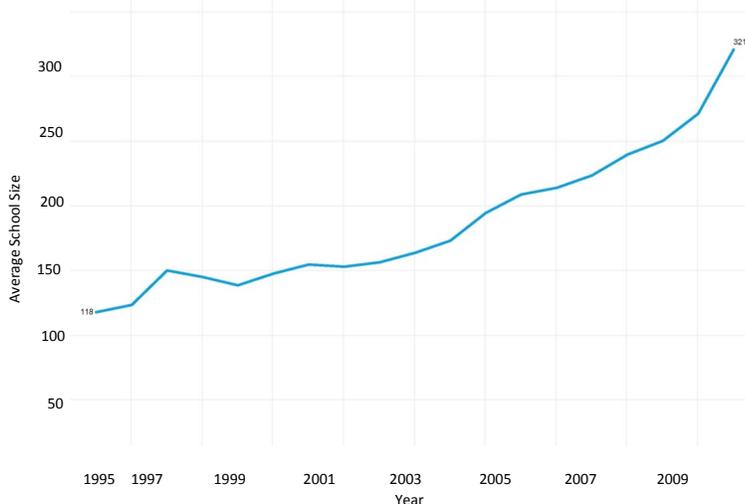
Charter schools started small, initially opening in strip malls, church basements, and empty industrial buildings. Overtime, as the average enrollment of a charter school has grown and leaders have built a presence in the bond market, schools have grown out of those smaller spaces.

Kingman Academy of Learning, which opened its doors in 1995 with 202 K-6 students, has grown exponentially due to parent demand.

"We felt that if we provided a strong elementary foundation, our students would be successful anywhere they went," said Susan Chan, Kingman Academy leader. "But our parents kept demanding more grades, and more programs."

The A-rated school that started small, leasing spaces in local churches, now has four campuses that serve 1,430 K-12 students.

Average Size of Arizona Charter Schools



"When I look back, I can't believe it's been 20 years. We now have all of our schools on one city block, surrounding a city park," Chan said. "We have great agreements with the city of Kingman, and a community that has supported and demanded our growth."

Charter Accountability

Simply put, a charter is a contract to improve student achievement. Arizona laws provide public charter schools more autonomy in exchange for greater accountability for improved student achievement. Charters are held accountable for students' academic performance, compliance with state laws and management of public funding.

Charters in Arizona can be authorized by the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools, the Arizona State Board of Education, school districts, and Arizona universities and community colleges. Arizona provides families the opportunity to choose the school that best fits the needs of their child.

Applications started pouring in to authorizing agencies once the charter law passed in 1994. Of the first group of schools that opened in 1995, 32 are still open and 21 of the schools have an 'A' or 'B' letter grade. Anecdotally, it looks like many of the first charters closed due to low enrollment, but as Arizona's primary charter authorizer grew, the Charter Board started closing schools for poor academic performance and fiscal issues.

- 67 schools opened in the first year (fall 95) sponsored by a school district, State Board for Charter Schools or State Board of Education
- Of the 67 schools, 32 are still open and 21 of the schools have an 'A' or 'B' letter grade.

In 2010, many of the first charters came up for renewal. We see now that many schools are being closed for not meeting their statutory mandate to improve student achievement. In fact, every charter that has received an 'F-rating' has closed, surrendered, or received their notice of intent to revoke by the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools, according to Board records.

While the Board is holding poor performing schools accountable, they are making it easier for excelling schools to replicate. Founded in 2007, the A-rated Legacy Traditional Schools network has rapidly expanded to eight campus locations serving more than 8,000 students throughout metro Phoenix, Pinal County and northwest Tucson.

School Choice

The market has shown that Arizona parents take advantage of their right to choose the best public school, in their judgment, for their children.

The pie chart to the left shows that Arizona charters provide a much needed choice in the type of school they offer parents. These enrollment patterns suggest that a significant portion of charter schools are attracting students that may not have a comparable district option. Almost a quarter of charter schools are alternative schools serving students that require credit recovery, dropped out or are at risk of dropping out, and a variety of other reasons that require a non-typical school setting.

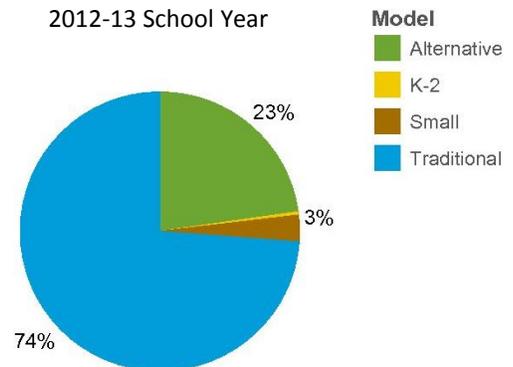
Charter schools not only provide a different configuration of school, but can also be specialized to meet the needs of their communities.

Arizona School for the Arts, which opened its doors in 1995 with 158 students in grades 7-10, was the first tuition-free, arts-focused school in Arizona.

"The founder decided to open the school because he saw a need in Arizona that no other school was providing: an opportunity for college bound students to expand and develop their artistic talents," said school leader Leah Fregulia Roberts.

Types of Charters

2012-13 School Year



The A-rated school now has 822 students in grades 5-12, and hundreds on their wait list.

"I think that the very best of the school choice movement is the ability for schools to provide specialized programs, the autonomy to do that, and the freedom for parents to select what is best for their children," Fregulia Roberts said.

Education Evaluator

The Arizona Charter Schools Association's Education Evaluator is an easy, transparent way to view and compare enrollment information, student achievement and student funding data for all public schools in Arizona.

Parents can find schools using a variety of filter options including searching for schools by grade, number of students, zip codes, academic achievement labels and much more. Lawmakers will also find it useful, as the map as the ability to filter by legislative and congressional districts.

The Association's public school map utilizes a number of sources to provide an easy, transparent way to view and compare enrollment information, student achievement and student funding data for Arizona's public schools.

Below is a search example. There are 77 'A-rated' high schools in Maricopa County, district and charter. Simply select your filters, and the map will produce the results.

Find a School
 Type school name, zipcode, or city
 Search Clear All

Select Legend

- AZ LEARNS A-F Rating
 - A / A-ALT
 - B / B-ALT
 - C / C-ALT
 - D / D-ALT
 - F / F-ALT
 - N/A
- School Type

Total Schools: 2024
 Based on Filtering Criteria & map bounds.
 Map pins are limited to 300.
 Try narrowing your search.

Filter Results

School Info

- Grades Served
- Number of Students
- School Types
- Select County
- Select Legislative District
- Select Congressional District
- Free/Reduced Lunch
- Per Pupil Funding
- School Specialties

Test Results

- Math Proficiency (AIMS)
- Reading Proficiency (AIMS)
- Math Median Growth
- Reading Median Growth

Accountability

- AZ LEARNS A-F Rating

Filter Clear All

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Arizona School for the Arts
 1410 N 3rd Street Phoenix, AZ 85004
 (602) 257-1444
<http://www.goasa.org>
 Grades: 12, 11, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5
 Compare

Total Schools: 77
 Based on Filtering Criteria & map bounds.

Filter Results

School Info

Grades Served

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
KG	5	9
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1	6	10
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2	7	11
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3	8	12
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4		

www.azcharters.org/maps

About the Association

Arizona Charter Schools Association is a nonprofit organization who believes that all Arizona students should have access to a high quality public school. We are focused on creating and sharing innovative programs designed to support leaders and teachers as they work to improve student achievement. The Association supports student achievement through high quality charter schools, advocates for student equity and charter school autonomy, and leads Arizona charter schools as a sustainable, strong, credible organization. Find out more at www.azcharters.org.

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