

## OVERVIEW

### Charters:

Georgia is one of 43 states, including the District of Columbia, that permit charter schools. Georgia's charter law was enacted in 1994. There are currently 110 charter schools in operation, [enrolling an estimated 69,392 students in 2013-14](#).

Georgia does not place a cap on charter school growth, and state law allows charter start-ups, traditional public to charter conversions, and virtual charter schools.

### GEORGIA'S CHARTERS

Year of Charter Law – 1994

NAPCS Ranking of Charter Law – 22 of 43

Total Charters – 110

*The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS) ranks Georgia's charter law as average nationwide (22<sup>nd</sup> out of 43 states).*

### Vouchers or Other State Assistance for Private School Choice:

Georgia has both a voucher and a tax credit scholarship program. The *Special Needs Scholarship Program* provides private school vouchers to students with disabilities. Vouchers are equivalent to the funding the public school would have received for the student, minus federal funds.

Through the *Qualified Education Expense Tax Credit*, individuals and corporations can earn a tax credit for donations made to student scholarship organizations. Students are eligible for a scholarship to attend a qualified private school if they are currently enrolled in a public school or entering Kindergarten.

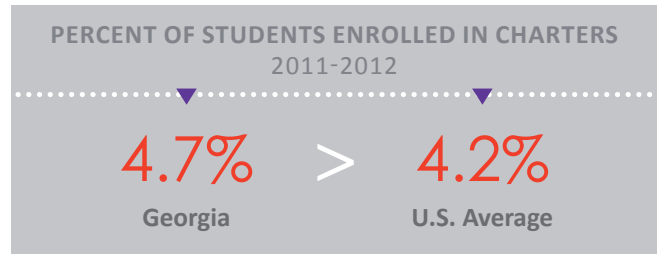
### State Laws on Other Forms of School Choice:

Georgia school districts are required to establish a process for open enrollment among schools within a district. The state has a voluntary interdistrict open enrollment program through which students may transfer with the agreement of both the sending and receiving districts.

## CHARTER SCHOOLS

**History**

- Public charters have been [allowed under state law since 1994](#).
- There is no cap on the number of charter schools that can be approved.
- Georgia's charter law allows new start-up charter schools, traditional public to charter conversions, and virtual charter schools.

**Details**

- There are currently 110 charter schools in Georgia, *not counting schools within charter systems*.
  - Of these, 80 are new start-up charter schools, and 30 are conversion charter schools that were formerly traditional public schools.
  - Georgia also has [14 charter systems \(with 107 schools\)](#) that operate under a contract between the State Board of Education and the local school district. Charter districts receive [flexibility from state regulations](#) regarding issues like class size, use of time, and staffing, in exchange for greater accountability for results.
- Charter schools may be authorized by local school boards, the State Board of Education, or the State Charter Schools Commission.
- Charters with a defined attendance area must apply to the affected local school boards and be approved by the State Board of Education.
- Schools seeking a statewide charter apply directly to the State Charter Schools Commission.
  - The commission is a state-level, independent charter school authorizer. It was re-established in 2012 by a vote to amend the state constitution.
  - Its members are appointed by the governor, lieutenant governor, and state house speaker. The board may approve charter school petitions previously denied by local school boards and the State Board of Education.
  - There were 16 statewide charter schools at the end of the 2012-13 school year.

### FINDINGS ON CHARTERS IN GEORGIA

The Center for Research and Education Outcomes at Stanford University conducted a [National Charter School Study](#) in 2013 to analyze the effect that enrolling in a charter school has on a student's academic performance. The study specifically measured how much academic growth charter students attained over the course of one year compared to similar students in traditional public schools. The study found:

- **Students attending charter schools in Georgia made gains equal to 14 more days of instruction in reading per year than similar traditional public school students.**
- **Charter school students experienced a loss in math equivalent to 14 fewer days of instruction per year than similar traditional public school students.**

A [2014 analysis](#) sponsored by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement found that **Georgia's charter schools perform significantly worse than average state public schools in elementary and middle school math, middle school science, and U.S. history**. Charters outperformed public schools in 9<sup>th</sup>-grade Literature and Composition.

## VOUCHERS OR OTHER STATE ASSISTANCE FOR PRIVATE SCHOOL CHOICE

### ***Special Needs Scholarship Program***

- Established in 2007, the [Special Needs Scholarship Program](#) provides private school vouchers to students with disabilities. In the 2013-14 school year, 3,416 students and 245 schools participated in program.
- Eligible students must have attended a public school the previous year. The student also should have received special education services in that year.
- There is no cap on program participation.
- The voucher is equal to what a public school would receive for the student, not including federal funds. In 2013-14, the average voucher value was \$5,386.

### ***Tuition Scholarship Program/Qualified Education Expense Tax Credit***

- The [Qualified Education Expense](#) credit was established by HB 113 in 2008.
- Individuals and corporations can earn tax credits for donations made to student scholarship organizations.
- Corporations are limited to a credit worth 75 percent of total income tax liability. The credit is [limited to \\$1,000 for individuals and \\$2,500 for married couples](#).
- Students currently enrolled in a public school or entering Kindergarten are eligible to receive a scholarship to a qualified private school. There is no income requirement for eligibility.
- There is no requirement that students receiving scholarships take a standardized test.
- In [2012, 13,285 students participated in the program](#). The average scholarship was valued at \$3,388.
- Thirty-one student scholarship organizations have been approved for 2014; policies for allocating scholarship funds vary. Some organizations require that a private school recommend a student for a scholarship, others allocate scholarship funds based on student need.
- A [lawsuit was filed in 2014](#) alleging that the scholarship tax credits violate the state constitution and tax laws. Oral arguments were heard in September, and a decision is pending.

## FINDINGS ON STATE ASSISTANCE FOR PRIVATE SCHOOL CHOICE IN GEORGIA

The [2012-13 End of School Year report](#) for the *Special Needs Scholarship Program* found that enrollment in the program increased over the previous school year, with a total of 3,220 students enrolled in private schools. Program participants were less likely to be eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, and male participants outnumbered females by two to one. According to student achievement results self-reported by private schools:

- 25 percent of students showed progress of less than one year in reading and math.
- 38 percent of students had one year of progress in math; 37 percent had one year of progress in reading.
- 24 percent had more than one year of progress in math; 26 percent had more than one year of progress in reading.

## STATE POLICIES ON OTHER FORMS OF SCHOOL CHOICE

**Open Enrollment**

- Districts are required to establish a process for open enrollment among schools within a district.
  - Parents may request a transfer if there is classroom space available after assigned students have been enrolled.
  - Schools must inform the public of available space by July 1<sup>st</sup> of each year.
  - Parents cover the cost of transportation.
  - Students may continue to attend the school until they complete all grades, or until the family requests a transfer back to the original school.
- Georgia has a [voluntary interdistrict transfer program](#) for transfers between school districts.
  - School districts can contract with one another for the care, education, and transport of students.
  - Families are responsible for covering transportation costs.

**Virtual Schools**

- Georgia also offers flexible school choice through online education. Available options include fully-online schools, district-run virtual programs, and a statewide virtual school.
- Local school districts and charter schools may offer online courses to students in other school districts.
- The statewide virtual school, the Georgia Virtual School (GaVS), was established in 2005. It expanded to serve grades 6-12 in 2012-13, and will serve grades 3-12 by 2014-15. In the 2013-14 school year, it had [33,041 course enrollments](#).
- Three fully-online schools in the state enrolled 18,035 students in 2013-14.
- GaVS [receives line-item funding for operations](#) (\$3.1 million in 2014-15) and charges school districts \$250 per student per online course.
- Legislation passed in 2012 (HB797) [revised the funding formula](#) for virtual charter schools and provides them with the same per-pupil funding amount as “brick-and-mortar” schools.

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

[Georgia Charter Schools and Charter Systems Annual Report, 2012-2013](#)

[Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program End of School Year Report \(2012-13\)](#)

[Keeping Pace with K-12 Online and Blended Learning](#)

[The National Charter School Study: 2013](#)

[The Performance of State Charter Schools in Georgia, 2012-13](#)

[School Choice in Georgia](#)