

## OVERVIEW

### Charters:

Oklahoma is one of 43 states, including the District of Columbia, that permit charter schools. Oklahoma's charter law was enacted in 1999. As of the 2013-14 school year, 25 charter schools were in operation, enrolling 16,137 students.

Under state law, charter schools may only operate in school districts on the state's school improvement list or in districts with at least 5,000 students and 500,000 residents.

### OKLAHOMA'S CHARTERS

Year of Charter Law – 1999

NAPCS Ranking of Charter Law – 36 of 43

Total Charters – 25

*The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS) ranks Oklahoma's charter law as among the weakest nationwide (36<sup>th</sup> out of 43 states).*

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

Oklahoma is home to two programs that offer options for nonpublic school enrollment.

- The *Oklahoma Equal Opportunity Education Scholarship* program provides tax credits to individuals and corporations for donating to scholarship granting organizations. The scholarships are available to students from low-income households, students with disabilities, and those zoned to attend a school "in need of improvement."
- The *Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarships for Students with Disabilities* program offers a voucher to students with disabilities to enroll in a nonpublic school of their choice.

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

Oklahoma has a voluntary open enrollment program for transfers between districts (interdistrict transfers). School districts may elect to participate, and transportation costs are covered by the receiving district.

## CHARTER SCHOOLS

**History**

- Public charters have been allowed under state law since 1999.
- As of the 2013-14 school year, 25 charter schools were in operation, enrolling an estimated 16,137 students.
- Charter schools are limited to operate in districts on the state improvement list or in districts with more than 5,000 students and 500,000 residents.

PERCENT OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN CHARTERS  
2011-2012

1.4%

Oklahoma

&lt;

4.2%

U.S. Average

**Details**

- State law allows new start-up charter schools, traditional public to charter school conversions, and virtual charter schools.
- Charter schools may be authorized by local school districts, technology center school districts, comprehensive or regional institutions in the Oklahoma State System of Higher Education, federally-recognized Indian tribes, the State Board of Education, and the Statewide Virtual Charter Board.
  - The majority of the state's charter schools are authorized by Oklahoma City Public Schools.
- Charter schools have flexibility from many state statutes. For example, charters are not required to follow state teacher and leader effectiveness standards. However, charters that do not meet performance standards may be closed by authorizers.

## FINDINGS ON CHARTERS IN OKLAHOMA

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools ranks Oklahoma's charter school law as one of the nation's weakest – 36<sup>th</sup> out of 43 states. Recommended areas for improvement include allowing charter schools in all school districts, increasing the transparency of the charter application process, and strengthening charter school monitoring and reporting of school achievement results.

In 2013, the Oklahoma Public School Resource Center released a “snapshot” of Oklahoma charter school demographics and performance. This report indicated that of the 21 charter schools that received grades as part of the A-F Report Cards, nearly 60 percent earned an A or B. Among all schools in the state, charters included, 20 percent of schools earned an A in 2013 while 28 percent received a B.

## VOUCHERS OR OTHER STATE ASSISTANCE FOR PRIVATE SCHOOL CHOICE

Oklahoma is home to two private school choice programs: a tax credit scholarship program and a voucher program for students with disabilities.

### ***Oklahoma Equal Opportunity Education Scholarships***

- The [program](#) was enacted in 2011 and launched in the 2012-13 school year.
- The tax credit is worth 50 percent of the total contribution, up to a maximum of \$1,000 for single individuals, \$2,000 for married couples, and \$100,000 for corporations.
  - [Legislation passed in 2014](#) expands the program to offer a tax credit worth 75 percent of the contribution if the taxpayer commits to contribute the same amount for two consecutive years.
- The program is capped at \$5 million; \$3.5 million is allocated for private school scholarships, and \$1.5 million is for organizations that distribute “educational improvement grants” to public schools.
- The scholarships are worth up to \$5,000 or 80 percent of the average per-pupil expenditure in the school district. Students with special needs who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) may receive a scholarship worth up to \$25,000.
- Students are eligible if they come from a household with an income up to 300 percent of the free and reduced-price lunch program threshold or if they live in the attendance zone of a school designated as “in need of improvement.”

### ***Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarships for Students with Disabilities***

- The [program](#) was passed by the state legislature and signed into law by Governor Brad Henry in 2010. The legislation was named in honor of the governor’s daughter, who died of a neuromuscular disease as an infant.
- Students are eligible if they have an IEP and if they attended a public school the prior year or are the child of active duty military stationed in Oklahoma.
- The voucher amount is equal to state and local dollars spent on the child in public school or the private school’s tuition and fees, whichever is less. The average voucher was worth \$7,831 in 2012-13.
- In the 2013-14 school year, 282 students and 33 schools participated in the program.
- A lawsuit was filed against the program in 2013, and in August 2014, the Oklahoma County District Court ruled that the [program’s use of public funds for private religious institutions violated the state constitution](#).
  - The judge’s order has been stayed pending the Attorney General’s appeal, and the program remains in operation at this time.

## FINDINGS ON VOUCHERS OR OTHER STATE ASSISTANCE IN OKLAHOMA

In a [2014 survey of Oklahoma voters](#), the Friedman Foundation (which works to advance school choice) found that 63 percent of survey participants were in favor of “tax credit scholarships,” compared to 28 percent who opposed the policy. Fifty-six percent of survey participants supported the idea of an education savings account, whereas 34 percent opposed the model. More than half of the survey participants (59 percent) also favored the concept of vouchers, compared to 35 percent who opposed vouchers.

## STATE POLICIES ON OTHER FORMS OF SCHOOL CHOICE

***Open Enrollment***

- Oklahoma has a [voluntary interdistrict open enrollment program](#) for transfers between school districts.
- If a local board of education elects to participate in open enrollment, it must adopt a policy that addresses the availability of programs, staff, or space as criteria for approval or denial of transfers.
- The receiving district is authorized to provide transportation within its district boundaries only, unless both district boards pass resolutions authorizing the receiving district to extend its transportation into the sending district.

***Virtual Education***

- Oklahoma offers a range of virtual education options including fully-online schools and district-run virtual programs.
- The Oklahoma Department of Education estimates that 7,010 students are enrolled in fully-online schools in 2013-14.
- There are four fully-online charter schools operating in the state in 2014-15. These schools are authorized by the Statewide Virtual Charter School Board. There are also two fully-online non-charter schools.
- State funding is allocated to school districts based on a standard per-pupil funding amount regardless of whether courses are delivered in person or online.
- The Oklahoma Supplemental Online Course Program (OSOCP) allows students to enroll in up to five hours of online instruction from approved providers free of charge. Funding is [prorated based on the previous year's per-pupil expenditure](#).

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

[Frequently Asked Questions, Oklahoma Charter Schools Program](#)

[Friedman Foundation Profile: School Choice in Oklahoma](#)

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

[National Alliance for Public Charter Schools: Oklahoma Charter Law Profile](#)

[Oklahoma Charter Schools Act](#)