

OVERVIEW

Charters:

Mississippi is one of 43 states, including the District of Columbia, that permit charter schools. Mississippi's charter law was enacted in 2010 and significantly overhauled in 2013. Under state law, charter schools must be authorized by the Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board. Up to 15 new charter schools and/or traditional public to charter conversion schools may be opened each year.

MISSISSIPPI'S CHARTERS

Year of Charter Law – 2010

NAPCS Ranking of Charter Law – 14 of 43

Total Charters – 0

The changes to Mississippi's law increased its rank by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS) from the lowest (43rd out of 43 states) to 14th out of 43 states in 2013.

Vouchers or Other State Assistance for Private School Choice:

Mississippi has two statewide voucher programs for students with speech-language impairments and dyslexia. Governor Phil Bryant has also expressed support for implementing a statewide voucher/opportunity scholarship program for low-income students currently enrolled in failing schools.

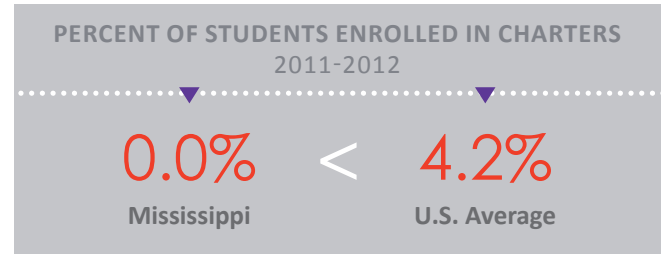
State Laws on Other Forms of School Choice:

Mississippi does not have a statewide open enrollment program. Currently, it has a limited, voluntary interdistrict choice program which requires the consent of both the sending and receiving district. Governor Bryant has expressed support for establishing a statewide open enrollment program.

CHARTER SCHOOLS

History

- Public charters were allowed under state law since 2010, but **no charters were in operation**.
- The state enacted a [significant overhaul of the charter law in 2013](#).
- The first charter school approved to open is a Jackson middle school that will [enroll students beginning with the 2015-16 school year](#).

**Details**

- Under the previous charter law, Mississippi could authorize up to 12 chronically low-performing schools to convert to charter schools.
- The 2013 law established the [Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board](#) to solicit charter applications and serve as an authorizer.
- As part of the new legislation, up to 15 new charter schools and traditional public to charter school conversions are allowed each year. **The first charter schools are expected to open in fall 2015.**
- Charter school applicants from districts rated “D” or “F” on the state accountability system can apply directly to the Charter School Authorizer Board without local board approval.
 - The Charter School Authorizer Board can authorize charter schools from districts with “A,” “B,” or “C” ratings only if the district school board has endorsed the application or has voted to initiate a charter school application.
- Charter contracts are required to include performance guidelines, including student academic proficiency and growth, postsecondary readiness, and financial performance and sustainability.
- Charter schools are independent local education agencies (LEAs) under law and are thereby exempt from district regulations.
- A charter school’s enrollment of underserved students [must be equal to at least 80 percent of the percentage of underserved students served](#) in the school district where the charter is located.

FINDINGS ON CHARTERS IN MISSISSIPPI

The legislative changes to Mississippi’s charter law have significantly strengthened it, according to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. Mississippi experienced the greatest jump in ratings in the five-year history of the NAPCS report, [moving from 43rd in 2013 to 14th in 2014](#). Strengths of the new law include the variety of charter school models allowed, a transparent charter application and review process, and the comprehensive data collection process required to monitor student results.

VOUCHERS OR OTHER STATE ASSISTANCE FOR PRIVATE SCHOOL CHOICE

Mississippi has two voucher programs for students with speech-language impairments and dyslexia.

Nate Rogers Scholarship for Students with Disabilities Program

- The [Nate Rogers Scholarship for Students with Disabilities Program](#) was enacted in 2013 and provides students with speech-language impairments with vouchers to attend private schools.
- The voucher is equivalent to the base per-student cost in the state funding formula (\$5,104 in 2013-14).
- The program is open to students in grades K-6 who have been [diagnosed with a speech-language impairment](#) such as a stutter, difficulty making certain sounds, or difficulty understanding or using words in context.
- Eligible students must have attended a public or state-accredited school in the year prior.

Dyslexia Therapy Scholarship

- Enacted in 2012, the [program](#) provides scholarships to students in first through sixth grade who have been screened and diagnosed with dyslexia.
- The voucher is equivalent to the base per-student cost in the state funding formula (\$5,104 in 2013-14).
- Students are eligible if they previously attended a public school or attended a private school that “emphasizes instruction in dyslexia intervention.”
- In 2013, 71 students and three schools participated in the program.

FINDINGS ON PRIVATE SCHOOL CHOICE IN MISSISSIPPI

In the 2014 legislative session, legislators considered the [Equal Opportunity for Students with Special Needs Act](#). Eligible students with disabilities would receive \$6,000 in an Individualized Education Fund. Parents would have the discretion to allocate funds in approved ways including toward private school tuition, tutoring, or fees for Advanced Placement exams. Parallel bills passed the state House and Senate, but the House conference report [failed to earn enough votes](#). While supporters argued the bill would support families with special needs, opponents argued that the program would drain funding from already stretched public schools.

Governor Phil Bryant has also expressed support for implementing a statewide voucher/opportunity scholarship program for low-income students currently enrolled in failing schools.

STATE POLICIES ON OTHER FORMS OF SCHOOL CHOICE

Open Enrollment

- **Mississippi has a limited interdistrict choice program.**
- The current interdistrict enrollment program allows students to transfer only by mutual agreement of both the sending and receiving school districts.
- Governor Phil Bryant's education reform agenda in 2012 included a proposal to [establish statewide open enrollment](#). However, in 2013, legislators failed to include open enrollment in a package of bills that included other components of the governor's education reform agenda.
- Legislation ([HB 592](#)) that would establish a statewide open enrollment program was proposed in the 2014 legislative session, but it died in House Committee.

Virtual Education

- Mississippi's primary virtual learning program is the [Mississippi Virtual Public School \(MVPS\)](#), which was established by legislation in 2006. The school is run by Connections Academy through a contract with the Mississippi Department of Education.
- The MVPS offers online courses to students in grades 9-12, who must receive permission from their local school districts before enrolling. Homeschooled students must pay tuition.
- There were [3,121 course enrollments in the MVPS in 2012-13](#).
- The MVPS initially received \$1.8 million in state appropriations in 2009-2010; in each of the following two years the school received \$500,000.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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

[National Alliance for Public Charter Schools: Mississippi](#)

[School Choice in Mississippi](#)

[Understanding Mississippi's Charter School Law](#)