

# Overview: Charter Law and Landscape

---

## What is a charter school?

Charter schools first came on the scene in America in the 1990s and were originally envisioned as “laboratories of innovation” to allow groups of teachers, parents, and community members to offer an education with freedom from some regulations and transfer innovations to the surrounding traditional public schools. Forty-five states and the District of Columbia now have laws allowing charter schools to operate and to serve approximately 3.6 million students at over 7,000 charter schools.

In essence, charter schools are public schools of choice that are independently run. Eligible students opt to attend charter schools, which receive a charter to operate from an authorizing body. Charter schools are given certain freedoms from traditional public school regulations and are governed by independent school boards. In exchange, authorizing bodies may revoke or not renew schools’ charters if they fail to comply with the law or the terms of their performance contracts.

---

## What does Mississippi’s charter law say?

In Mississippi, an initial charter is five years and is based upon a performance contract with the Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board.

### ***A charter school must:***

- Be a non-profit and operate as its own Local Education Agency (LEA).
- Only open in districts rated “D” or “F” (without local school board approval).
- Accept students who reside in the district or in districts rated “C,” “D,” or “F” at the time the application is approved or the student enrolls.
- Enroll all students who wish to attend (with certain enrollment preferences) and hold a lottery if interest exceeds capacity ([Miss. Code Ann. § 37-28-23](#)).
- Have a student body that reflects the “underserved students” of all ages of the district (underserved = special education and at-risk/FRPL students), but may not otherwise limit admission based on ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, income level, special needs, English language proficiency, or academic or athletic ability ([Miss. Code Ann. § 37-28-23](#)).

- Be in session for the minimum number of days public schools must be in session during a scholastic year: 180 days, at minimum 330 minutes.

### ***A charter school may***

- Be limited to a given age group or grade level.
- Be organized around a special emphasis, theme, or concept.
- Focus on serving students with disabilities, students of the same gender, students with severe disciplinary problems, or students at risk of academic failure.
- Employ some unlicensed teachers.
- Determine staff compensation terms.
- Opt to participate in the Public Employees' Retirement System.

Though charter schools are exempt from many regulations, they must still participate in state testing and abide by certain minimum requirements, such as:

**Testing:** Charter schools are subject to the student assessment and accountability requirements applicable to traditional public schools in the state, though this does not preclude a charter school from establishing additional student assessment measures if the authorizer approves those measures.

- For charter high schools, students must meet minimum requirements to graduate.
- Annual state accountability ratings are primarily based on student performance on state tests. If a charter school is rated an "F" under the state's accountability system for three consecutive years, it must show that there were "exceptional circumstances," and a charter must be revoked if an "F" rating occurs in the final year.

**Staffing:** Charter schools have flexibility to determine their own staffing needs and compensation terms. Apart from minimum requirements, administrators are exempt from state administrator licensure requirements, and some teachers are exempt from teacher certification requirements.

- Administrators must have at least a bachelor's degree.
- Teachers must have at least a bachelor's degree and demonstrate subject area competency.
- No more than 25% of teachers may be exempt from state teacher licensure requirements and within 3 years of employment teachers must have at least alternative licensure.

[Miss. Code Ann. § 37-28-45](#) clarifies which regulations charter schools are still subject to.

---

## What is the relationship between the charter school and the authorizer?

The Mississippi Charter School Authorizer board is the sole authorizer of charter schools in the state and is responsible for

- Developing chartering policies and practices.
- Approving quality charter applications and denying weak applications.
- Negotiating and executing charter contracts ([Miss. Code Ann. § 37-28-29](#)).
- Monitoring the performance and legal compliance of charter schools.
- Determining whether charter schools merit renewal, non-renewal, or revocation.

The board uses a [performance framework](#) to assess schools' financial, organizational, and academic performance annually and during charter renewal ([Miss. Code Ann. § 37-28-31](#)).

---

## What does Mississippi's charter landscape look like?

Since Mississippi's charter law passed in 2013, eleven schools have been authorized. Eight are currently operating in Jackson, Clarksdale, and Greenwood and serving over 3,000 students.

School	Opening Year	District	Current Grades	At Capacity
Midtown Public Charter School	2015-2016	Jackson	5-8	5-8
Reimagine Prep	2015-2016	Jackson	5-8	5-8
Smilow Prep	2016-2017	Jackson	5-8	5-8
Clarksdale Collegiate	2018-2019	Clarksdale Municipal	K-7	K-8
Smilow Collegiate	2018-2019	Jackson	K-3	K-4
Ambition Prep	2019-2020	Jackson	K-5	K-8
Leflore Legacy Academy	2020-2021	Greenwood Leflore	6-8	6-8
Revive Collegiate	2022-2023	Jackson	K-1	K-4
SR1 College Preparatory and STEM Academy	2023-2024	Canton	N/A	K-5
Instant Impact Global Prep	2024-2025	Natchez-Adams	N/A	K-8
RePublic High School	2025-2026	Jackson	N/A	9-12

The annual application cycle takes place between March and September. To date, applications on average have had a 19% success rate.

The disruption in learning and assessment that occurred due to the pandemic resulted in [2021-22 district accountability ratings](#) shifting upwards across the board, and it is unclear

how long it will take for these ratings to return to a more accurate representation of student performance. As a result, only 13 districts are eligible for charter application in the 2023 cycle without school board approval:

- Noxubee County School District (D)
- Hollandale School District (D)
- Greenwood-Leflore Consolidated School District (D)
- West Bolivar Consolidated School District (D)
- East Tallahatchie Consolidated School District (D)
- West Tallahatchie Consolidated School District (D)
- Coahoma County School District (D)
- North Panola School District (D)
- Wilkinson County School District (F)
- Amite County School District (F)
- Humphreys County School District (F)
- Yazoo City Municipal School District (F)
- Clarksdale Municipal School District (F)