

High Expectations And High Accountability: Tennessee's Charter School Sector

Across the country, 45 states and the District of Columbia have public charter schools. However, **not all charter sectors are created equal**. Unlike many other states, Tennessee's public charter school policies are defined by **rigorous standards and high accountability**. Over a decade of evolving public charter school policies, the state has created a high-quality sector driven by a clear expectation for charter schools to effectively **serve all students**.

All Tennessee charter schools are:

- ✓ Public, nonprofit, and free to attend for all students
- ✓ Authorized by either a school district or the independent state commission
- ✓ Required to follow a clear, rigorous process to open or renew a school
- ✓ Subject to automatic closure for failure to meet standards for student achievement and financial health
- ✓ Required to undergo an annual financial audit by an independent third party
- ✓ Accessible for all students within the district who apply, regardless of academic achievement, behavior, or special needs and required to use a random lottery if student demand exceeds supply
- ✓ In person, not virtual or with a hybrid attendance model *

Tennessee's public charter schools are allowed flexibility to choose their own curriculum, educators, schedules, extracurricular activities, and more. While traditional district-run schools can go through processes to have more flexibility, charter schools can do so more nimbly. All these flexibilities allow charter schools to design **innovative school models that uniquely meet students' needs**. However, Tennessee law requires some aspects of the public charter school student experience to be just like a traditional public school to maintain a **high bar for quality across all public schools**.

Students in Tennessee public charter schools are:

- ✓ Taught by teachers who meet the same licensing requirements as every other public school teacher
- ✓ Taught the same academic standards as every other public school student
- ✓ Required to take the same state tests as every other public school student
- ✓ Held to the same attendance expectations as every other public school student

** Many public charter schools operated virtually or hybrid during the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years due to the pandemic.*