

# History of Tennessee Public Charter Sector

## State Policy & Funding Timeline

2002

Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act introduces charter schools to provide an alternative for students in failing schools. The number of new charters cannot exceed the total number of schools failing to make adequate progress as defined by the state's accountability system.



First public charter schools open in Tennessee: one in Nashville and three in Memphis.

2003

2011

Cap on the number of charter schools that can open in Tennessee is removed to encourage the replication of high-quality schools and enrollment eligibility is extended to all students (open enrollment). If the number of students who apply to enroll exceeds the school's capacity for enrollment, a blind lottery is designated to determine enrollment. This lottery provision remains in effect today.

Legislation is passed to allow the State Board of Education (SBE) to act as an authorizer upon appeal. While charter schools could always appeal a decision by the local district to deny their application to the State Board, this law allows the State Board to serve as the authorizer for those schools approved on appeal. This appellate authorizer authority only applies to charter schools applying to a district with a priority school in the district.

2013

2016

For the first time, Tennessee receives a federal Charter Schools Program (CSP) grant for \$20 million to support the growth of charter schools.



The Tennessee High-Quality Charter Schools Act passes. This act modernizes the 2002 Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act, provides more clarity around application processes, and enables districts to charge an authorizer fee to cover the costs of charter oversight.

Beginning in 2017, a charter school consistently failing to meet academic expectations would be automatically closed under Tennessee law.

The Charter Facilities Fund is established to provide grants for public charter schools with facilities needs; a \$6 million nonrecurring investment is made.

2017

2019

Tennessee's Public Charter School Commission is created and becomes the state's appellate authorizer; the commission can hear appeals for any denial rather than just districts with a priority school.

The State Board becomes the formal charter authorizer accountability body.

The Charter Facilities Fund is increased to a \$12 million nonrecurring investment. Each of Tennessee's public charter schools receives per-pupil allocations, while the remaining funds are reserved for competitive grants. The two types of competitive grants include need-based facility grants for charter schools with demonstratable unmet facility needs and high-quality charter expansion grants for schools with a demonstrated record of student achievement that are opening or expanding.



2021

The Charter Facilities Fund is increased to \$24 million, \$6 million of which are recurring and \$18 million nonrecurring.



The state's new K-12 education funding formula, the Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement Act (TISA), includes an unprecedented direct allocation for charter school students and a new requirement for charter schools to receive state and local funding based on the characteristics of students enrolled.

2022

The Charter Facilities Fund is increased to \$38 million, \$22 million of which are recurring.

Tennessee receives a federal CSP grant of \$24 million.

2023

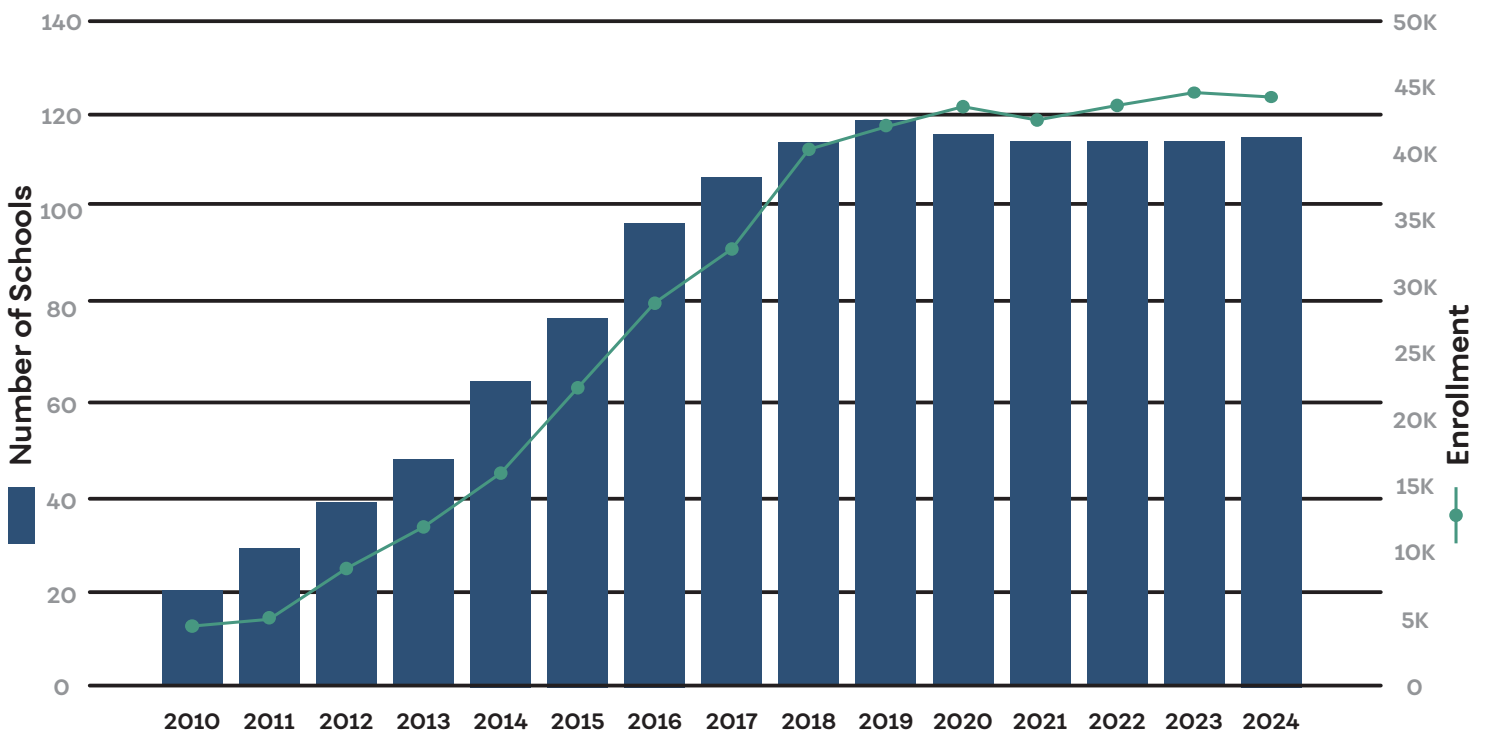
The \$22 million recurring investment transitions to fund the direct allocation for charter school students in TISA.

A \$15 million nonrecurring investment is made to the Charter Facilities Fund.

Legislation is passed that increases public charter schools' access to public facilities. This bill establishes clear definitions for underutilized and vacant facilities and gives public charter schools the right of first refusal to purchase or lease those facilities.

2024

### Tennessee's Public Charter School Sector Has Steadily Grown Over Time



Source: Tennessee Department of Education, 2024