

Who Can Enroll In A Tennessee Public Charter School?

In Tennessee, **all charter schools are public, free, and open to all**. According to Tennessee law, **any student within the district who applies on time can attend** the school, regardless of their academic achievement, behavior, or special need. Public charter schools in Tennessee are not allowed to recruit students based on ability or performance, and they can't turn away students for any reason.

If a school's demand exceeds its available seats, the school must use a **random lottery to enroll students**. The results of the lottery must be certified by an independent accounting firm or law firm to ensure they were compliant with Tennessee law. In some Tennessee districts with public charter schools, families can apply to many public charter schools using the same enrollment lottery used by other traditional public schools.

Tennessee law does allow charter schools to offer limited preferences in their enrollment lottery for the following students:

- Siblings of students already enrolled in the public charter school
- Children of the school's staff or board of directors, not exceeding 10 percent of total enrollment or 25 students, whichever is less
- Students who attended an affiliated pre-K program or public charter school
- Economically disadvantaged students

If the district allows, Tennessee public charter schools have the option of enrolling out-of-district students. However, the school must give priority to any in-district student who wishes to enroll, and out-of-district student enrollment cannot exceed 25 percent of the school's overall enrollment.



Enrolling Economically Disadvantaged Students



Tennessee public charter schools serve a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students compared to their district peers. In 2021-22, the **enrollment of economically disadvantaged students was, on average, 11 percentage points higher at charter schools than district-run schools** in districts with charter options (non-ASD).

In 2023, the Tennessee General Assembly passed a law to allow a **preference for economically disadvantaged students in charter school enrollment lotteries**.