

## A "HOW TO" TOOLKIT

### HOSTING A SUCCESSFUL ELECTED OFFICIAL SCHOOL TOUR



It's likely that Congress feels very far away as you go about the important daily work of running a school. But building long-term relationships with your elected officials can be a game changer for your school and the larger charter school community. Your members of Congress, state legislators, and local elected officials all have the ability to influence how charter schools are funded and operate. They can also be powerful allies in supporting your students in the long term and in expanding access to charter schools for more students.

Elected officials hear and read data all the time, but a school visit can leave a lasting emotional impression that fundamentally alters their understanding of your school and charter schools more generally. Hosting your Members of Congress or other elected officials allows them to meet all the people who make your school amazing while they hear about the accomplishments of your students straight from the source.

You are the expert on your school and the students and families that you serve, so we built this toolkit to support you in sharing your story with elected officials. This toolkit offers guidance on planning a visit and includes sample materials. While the information that follows is geared toward inviting your Members of Congress to your school, the same tips and practices can be used when inviting state legislators, mayors, governors, and other leaders. If you have questions that aren't answered here, or if you just need a little more detail, feel free to contact the Tennessee Charter School Center at [learn@tnchartercenter.org](mailto:learn@tnchartercenter.org).

## SCHOOL VISIT CHECKLIST

Many elements go into making this visit a success. This checklist addresses the key elements of a visit. More detail is provided in each section.

Invite your federal representative or senator through National Alliance for Public Schools platform. If inviting state legislator or local policy maker, do so via email. You can reach out to TCSC's Director of Government Relations at [emily@tnchartercenter.org](mailto:emily@tnchartercenter.org) for help finding contact information for your school's policy makers.

Schedule a date for the tour when the legislator is in his or her district.

Coordinate a media plan with the policy maker or his or her staff.

Reach out to local press.

Share the agenda and other support materials with congressional staff.

Communicate with the school community and arrange for the policy maker to meet students and parents during the visit if possible.

Review materials and talking points for the visit.

Host the visit.

Follow up on media plan (press release and/or social media) and be sure to share photos and information from the visit with the Tennessee Charter School Center team.

Thank your legislator.

## Keep Us Posted!

If you have confirmed a school visit with your member of Congress, please email us and let us know!

- ◁ Email the Tennessee Charter School Center at [learn@tnchartercenter.org](mailto:learn@tnchartercenter.org).
- ◁ Be sure to include the email subject as "School Visit Confirmed: {Insert School Name} in {City, State}".
- ◁ Please list all relevant details about your school visit in the body of the email (who, what, when, where).

## 1. Invite the Official

Every school visit starts with identifying the elected official you want to invite, extending the invitation, and working with his or her office to find a time that works for everyone. The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools has set up a web page with a three-step process for you to find and invite your federal representative or senator to visit your school. When you [click here](#) you will be directed to a web page where you will:

1. Enter your information in order to identify your representative and senator.
2. Select the legislator you want to invite from the drop-down menu.
3. Customize the text of the invitation with your school's specific information.
4. Hit "Send" to invite that elected official.

*\*If you would like to invite more than one official, just repeat the process and choose a different legislator from the drop-down menu in step two.*

The Tennessee General Assembly web page allows you to search for your legislators by using your school's address. When you [click here](#) you will be directed to a web page where you will simply enter your schools address and click search. The team at the Tennessee Charter School Center can also help you identify and contact any local elected officials, just email us at [learn@tnchartercenter.org](mailto:learn@tnchartercenter.org) for more information. The site will display the representative and senator for your area along with their email addresses. You can then send them a customized invitation. A sample invitation is included on page 13.

This initial invitation will be sent to a general inbox. It might take a while for the office to respond to your initial invitation. You shouldn't be afraid to follow up. If you haven't heard back after two weeks, send a follow-up email. If you aren't getting a response via email, try sending a handwritten note from a student or group of students to the policy maker's office asking them to visit the school. If your students have twitter, perhaps a friendly tweet to the policy maker inviting them to the school would be effective. Add a photo of the students with a sign inviting the policy maker to your school. The possibilities are endless!

Since this process can take a while, you will want to send the invitation up to two months in advance of the planned visit. After someone from the office responds to your invitation, you can begin the more detailed scheduling and coordination process.

## 2. Schedule the Visit

It's best to schedule the school visit for when your legislators are home in their home states or districts. To see when they will be in your district, [check here](#).

For the House of Representatives:

- ◁ Click on the link to the current year session.

- △ Click to download the full calendar PDF.
- △ Look for dates labeled District Work Period. For the Senate:
- △ Click on the link to the current year session.
- △ Look for dates labeled State Work Week.

Finding a time that works well for both your school and your elected official can be one of the hardest parts of hosting a school visit, so it can be helpful to offer a block of days or a few different calendar options. You can offer the office these options after they respond to your initial invitation in Step 1.

If an office declines your invitation, don't be discouraged! Your federal legislators are busy people, and sometimes scheduling can prevent them from getting to see schools. If an office declines the invitation due to scheduling, thank them for their response and offer to follow up in the future. You have already made contact with the office – this is a success on its own. In the future, you can contact this staff person directly to invite the legislator to graduations, community celebrations, etc.

### 3. Coordinate on Communication

If the office does confirm a visit with you, contact the office one week out to confirm the meeting and who will be in attendance, and to share the agenda. Ask for day-of contact information for the staff member who will accompany the legislator on the visit and the best person with whom to coordinate media outreach.

When hosting a legislator at your school, it is ultimately his or her decision if press should be involved. You should work with the legislator's communications staff to coordinate these efforts and ensure alignment on media strategy. Here are a few questions you may want to ask in advance of the visit:

- △ **Does the legislator want press coverage of the visit?**
- △ **Photography:** Will the official bring a photographer? Are they OK with photographs being taken and shared on social media?
- △ **Media Engagement:** Is the official willing to provide a quote to the press or for use in a press release? Is he or she willing to speak to reporters on the record or on background?
- △ **Coordination:** Will the official's staff need to review a list of press invited to the event? Does the office have relationships with reporters or additions to the press list? Will the office be releasing its own media advisory or press release?

If the legislator would like to invite members of the press, here are some materials you may need to produce (examples are provided at the end of this section). It's a good idea to put all of these on the school's letterhead and to have approval from the legislator's office prior

to distribution.

- ◁ **Media Advisory:** A brief notice to the media about an upcoming event or announcement. The advisory will concisely list the date, time, location, and purpose of the event, participants, and on-site contact information. This should be sent out the day before the event.
- ◁ **Press Release:** A written communication announcing news that is sent to media. This usually contains a point of contact for further media inquiries or requests, and quotes from those associated with the event. This should be sent out the day of the event.

## 4. Reach Out to Local Press

Reaching out to your local press can be a good way to amplify the impact of the visit. The following section offers guidance if you are interested in working with the media. Below are the options you can consider as you begin to map the media landscape in your area:

- ◁ Follow coverage of charter schools and education to identify key journalists in your area, and build a spreadsheet of local media reporters and contacts.
- ◁ Remember to include small media outlets! Community radio stations, local TV programs, weekly newspapers, local podcasts, and community newsletters are all options to consider.
- ◁ If your school serves a community of people who speak languages other than English, be sure to consider local media in those languages. These outlets can be critical sources of information for the community.

### PRESS KITS 101:

The purpose of a press kit is to provide journalists with key information about your school, the event, and the background information they need to effectively write their story. Once you've put together the key documents, consider putting them on your website so journalists on deadline can easily find the information they need. Be sure to date the documents so journalists will know that they are current and to update them whenever significant changes occur.

Sample Press Kit Contents:

- ◁ Media advisory (on page 14)
- ◁ Biography of the elected official visiting the school
- ◁ One-page fact sheet or a brochure on the school (sample on page 18). Be sure to include:
  - An "About Us" paragraph
  - Year founded, number of schools run by the organization (if part of a CMO or network), and students served
  - Highlights of what makes your program unique, honors you've received, or your academic results
  - Contact information for follow-up—it's especially important to have an on-site contact for an event!

## GET IN TOUCH

To spread the word about your school visit, send the press kit for the event to your media list. Email the materials to journalists a few days before the event, then follow up with a phone call to the reporter or the news desk of the outlet. Try to be cognizant of when reporters are rushing to meet deadlines as they will often not be able to accept calls immediately prior to a broadcast or after 3 p.m.

Samples for all of these materials are included on pages 14-18.

## 5. Share the Agenda

It is common practice to send the legislators an agenda for the visit in advance. The creation of the agenda is your opportunity to showcase what makes your school special. Use this visit to demonstrate all the great work of your students, teachers, and school community. A sample agenda is included on page 17.

When you send the schedule to the office, include other materials about your school to help the legislator learn more before they arrive. These other materials can be some of the same materials you used in the press kit about your school: a brochure, a one-page summary of your history, your recent results, etc. Samples of these biographical and promotional school materials are included on page 18.

The previous sections all address different types of coordination with the official's office, and it is possible that you may communicate with a few different staff members. Below is a chart that explains the possible roles of the staff members you might come into contact with as you plan and host your visit.

Of course, it is important to build relationships with all staff members, but it is most important to build a lasting relationship with the education legislative assistant. The Education Legislative Assistant is the staff member who will have the most information and influence on policy.



## 6. Communicate with Your School Community

In addition to reaching out to the media, it's important to communicate with your local school community about an upcoming visit from your legislator. As you regularly communicate with your board members, make sure to share the plans for this visit early in the process. Board members can be helpful in getting a visit confirmed, and they can be excellent additions to the visit itself if available.

Parents and family members should also be notified that a legislator will be visiting. Inform them of the purpose of the visit and any activities in which children will participate. Family involvement can be a great element of a visit, so consider including a few family members to share their experiences. A sample letter to families is included on page 19. Also, make sure all release forms are signed in advance if there will be photos and possibly media present.

Your students and staff should also be included in the preparation for this visit. Be sure that they know the agenda, talking points, and activities planned during the visit to make sure everyone is engaged. A best practice is to perform a walk-through with school staff the day before the school visit so that they know all the details, including the route of the tour and the schedule of events. As with all other events and large projects, it is always helpful to map out roles and responsibilities for key staff members who will be involved.

### Why should we host a legislator at my school?

Federal legislators are responsible for making policy decisions that impact the entire charter school community. Too often, they have to make these decisions without ever stepping foot in a charter school. As advocates for charter schools, we can ensure that Members of Congress understand the important role that charter schools play in the communities that they represent. Visiting a charter school helps elected officials make informed decisions when they vote on education issues and helps build relationships between the charter school community and Congress.

### As a school employee, am I allowed to talk to elected officials about charter schools?

Absolutely! As a charter school employee, you have the knowledge and expertise that all elected officials are looking for. You can talk to elected officials about your school, your experience, and how policies and funding impact charter schools. If you're worried about crossing lines, it's always best to keep it personal by talking about your experience with your school.



## 7. Review the Materials

### YOUR STORY

You and your team are the experts on your school's story, and this is your opportunity to share it. Legislators enjoy connecting with their communities, so create opportunities for students and staff to share their individual stories as well. Below are a few tips on how to start crafting your school's narrative and a link to a video of Maya Woods Cadiz telling the story of American Indian Model School as an example. You can find the video at <http://bit.ly/charter-video>.

#### TIPS FOR TELLING YOUR STORY

- **Keep it personal:** What brought you to this work? What keeps you coming back every day?
- **Share what makes your school special:** What community does your school serve? What unique programs do you offer?
- **Highlight the successes:** What has your school community achieved? What goals have your students surpassed?
- **Involve the audience:** How can your audience help your students to continue to succeed? What obstacles did your school have to overcome and how can the audience get involved?
- **Demonstrate demand:** Does your school have a waiting list? If it does, talking about it can underscore the need to support efforts to allow you to expand and/or to help others start new schools.
- **Address the surroundings:** Did your school face challenging in finding and financing space? Most legislators are unaware that this challenge is unique to charter schools. Help educate your legislators on this issue by sharing the story of your building.

In addition to sharing the story of your school, this visit is also a great time to share more about charter schools in general. Your legislator may have a few questions for you, so we have included some resources to help you prepare for the conversation. General FAQs, information about the Charter Schools Program, and information on facilities challenges can be found in the appendix on pages 20-24.

During the visit there can be a lot of information to share, so consider dividing up that responsibility among staff members, students, or board members. If you have multiple people sharing different parts of the story with the official, a best practice is to assign different topics to specific people. You can incorporate assigned speakers practicing their part of the story during the run-through mentioned in the previous section.

## 8. Host the Visit

With so much planning and coordination, it is easy for the day of the visit to become stressful. However, it's helpful to remember that legislators are just people, and visiting your school is likely an exciting break from their normal routine. As much as possible, the day of the visit should be a light, fun, and exciting day for everyone involved. Each school has its own traditions and culture; whatever your school normally does to get excited about a big moment should be incorporated into this visit.

The legislators and their staff will be your guests for the day. Have bottles of water ready, assign someone to show them where to park, have students create a welcome sign—all are great small touches to make your honored visitors feel welcome.

## 9. Follow Up on Media

### SOCIAL MEDIA

Depending on the media coordination you established with the legislator's office, taking pictures for social media during the visit can be a great way to raise the profile of your school and the event. Social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn are great outlets on which to share photos and information from the event.

Make sure someone on your team is dedicated to taking photos and creating content to share online. You can use these resources to thank the legislator for visiting. If you want to show off your social media savvy with an engaging video, you can record an interaction of the official with students during the event (with permission), or shoot a short-and-sweet video of students thanking the official after the event. Video can be shared on any platform, but it is especially good for Twitter and Facebook. Sample Facebook and Twitter posts are on page 16.

Don't forget to have the official's social media account handles at the ready so you can tag in real time. If the official is planning to post content from the visit on social media, provide your school's account handles so they can tag you as well. While you're at it, tag the Tennessee Charter School Center @tncharters and use the hashtag #TNCharters.

## PRESS RELEASE

After the event, you may want to issue a press release announcing that the event took place and recapping key moments. This allows the opportunity to share photos from the event, include a quote from the elected official and/or your school leader, and keep the conversation going with your media contacts. You should prepare the release in advance and aim to send it out shortly after the event concludes. Be sure to monitor the media for coverage. A sample press release is on page 15.

## 10. Thanking the Legislator

After the visit is complete, send a formal hard copy thank-you letter to the legislator's district office within 24 hours. An email thank-you to the staff that supported the coordination of the visit is a nice additional touch. Be sure to include any photos, recap highlights of the visit, and restate any requests made for improving federal charter school policy. Also, be sure to include any additional questions that were not asked and/or provide answers to any questions asked during the visit that need follow-up. A sample thank you letter is on page 25.

Most importantly, continue to cultivate your relationship by staying in contact with your legislators. You can do this by periodically sending a personal note that includes positive stories about your school. You can also do this by including them on your school's mailing lists for newsletters and other correspondence.

Use the email address of the staff member who attended the visit with the legislator for electronic communications. Send them announcements, press releases, and information about major accomplishments to keep them fully informed about your school's successes and of issues facing the school and community.

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## SAMPLE INVITATION LETTER TO LEGISLATOR

[DATE]

Dear [Rep/Sen. \_\_\_\_],

On behalf of the YOUR SCHOOL'S NAME, I am writing to invite you and your staff to visit us during the next congressional constituent work week. YOUR SCHOOL'S NAME serves X students in grades X-X. (SHARE ANY OTHER NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL HERE) It would be an honor to show you first hand the school's many achievements.

Charter schools are unique public schools that are allowed the freedom to be more innovative while being held accountable for advancing student achievement. Because they are public schools they are open to all children, do not charge tuition, do not have special entrance requirements, and they are subject to the same educational accountability requirements as traditional public schools.

Please let me know if you have any questions, or if you need any additional information. Thank you for your time and consideration, and we look forward to planning a visit with you soon.

Sincerely,

YOUR NAME  
YOUR SCHOOL ADDRESS  
Nashville, TN 37203  
YOUREMAIL@EMAIL.COM

## SAMPLE MEDIA ADVISORY

For Immediate Release

[Month and day]

2018 Media Contact:

[Name of Communications Liaison], Communication Liaison, [Name of School] [phone number]/[email address]

### MEDIA ADVISORY

U.S. Senator [name] to Visit [Name of Public Charter School]

Nashville, TN – On [day of week], [month, day] at [time], U.S. Senator [name] will visit the [name of school] to tour the school and contribute to a mural in the school building lobby designed by ninth grade students. The one-hour visit will include a tour of the school and an opportunity for Senator [name] to interact with parents and staff. Members of the media are welcome to attend but are asked to register in advance.

**WHO:** U.S. Senator [name], [Insert abbreviated party and state in parentheses. For example, (R-NY)]

**WHAT:** Senator [name] visits [name of school] to celebrate the grand reveal of a new mural painted by students

**WHEN:** [day of week], [month, day] at [time]

**WHERE:** [name of school] | [street address of school]

**RSVP:** Media covering the event must register with [name] at [phone number] or [email address]

About [Name of school]

[Insert boilerplate language if desired]

###

## SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

[Month and day],  
2018 Media Contact:

[Name of communications liaison], Communications Liaison, [Name of School] [phone number] / [email address]

### U.S. Senator [Name] Visits [Name of Charter School]

[City, State] – Today, U.S. Senator [Name], [Insert abbreviated party and state in parentheses. For example, (R-NY)] visited with students and staff at [name of school] for the grand reveal of the new hallway of murals painted entirely by students.

During the visit, Senator [name] toured the school and participated in creating a mural with ninth grade art students. [Name of school's] art program was recognized last year by the state for sending the most blue-ribbon winners to the state art competition. Senator [name] met with the top three school finalists and congratulated them on their recognized projects.

[Insert Quote from Senator] [Insert Quote from Principal]

[Insert a brief description of your school]

Charter schools are public schools that have the flexibility to customize methods of learning and are held accountable for improving student achievement. Charter schools strive to share successful models of innovation with the broader public school system in order to benefit all students. Like district public schools, charter schools are tuition-free, receive federal, state, and local funding, and are subject to the same educational accountability requirements.

In [name of state], there are [insert number] charter schools serving [insert number] children.

###



## SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA

*Note: "MOC" below stands for Member of Congress. Substitute the social media handle of your own representative or senator for MOC.*

### Sample Tweets

We're thrilled to have @MOC join us today for a campus tour and to meet with students!  
#TNCharters

.@MOC sits in for a math lesson with eighth-grade teacher Ms. Scott. #TNCharters

The [Name] Charter School board sits down with @MOC to discuss how federal  
#CharterSchools Program funding helped open our school. #TNCharters

.@MOC answers parent questions about Congress and asks a few of her own about how  
our school works. #TNCharters

Thank you @MOC for meeting with our students and teachers today and talking about  
how Congress can support #charterschools like ours. #TNCharters

We're talking to @MOC about what makes our school unique! From our focus on STEM to  
our college prep classes, we're certain there's no other school out there just like ours.  
#TNCharters

### Sample Facebook Posts

Today, U.S. Senator [name] visited our school to meet with students and teachers and take  
a tour of the campus. He then sat down with our board members as they explained how  
federal Charter Schools Program funding was critical to opening our school and discussed  
how Congress can continue to support charter schools like ours. Thank you, Senator, for  
the opportunity to share the story of our schools and families with you! #TNCharters

Why do families choose [Name] Charter School for their children? The same reason that  
U.S. Senator [name] came to visit us today—because we have something unique to offer!  
He saw our art rooms, theater, and science lab, making it a full STEAM visit. Thank you so  
much, Senator, for coming to learn more about our students, teachers, and families!  
#TNCharters

## SAMPLE AGENDA

*Note: Names and times below are examples only*

Schedule for [Name of representative or senator] Tour of the [Name of Charter School]  
[Street address, city, state]

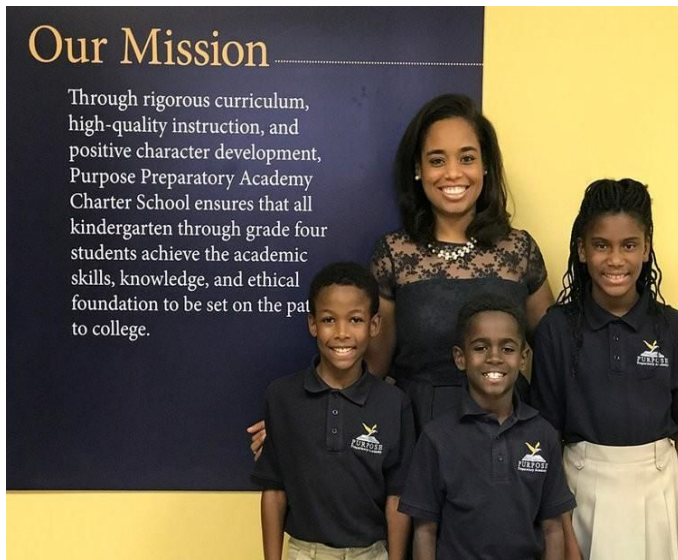
[Date]

9:00 AM	Senator arrives at main entrance.
Main Entrance	[Staff lead] will greet Senator [name] and briefly introduce staff, student ambassador, other VIPs invited to the tour.
9:05 AM	Senator and [staff lead] will begin tour of school Main Entrance
9:10 AM	Senator will visit the science laboratory to speak with Science Lab graduating seniors about their interest in STEM careers and their college plans.
9:30 AM	Senator will meet with parents and families of the [name Auditorium of school] in the auditorium to discuss their experiences with charter schools
9:45 AM	Senator and [staff lead] (as well as any other staff or VIP School Leader's Office on tour) will discuss the achievements of [name of school] and the role policy makers can play in supporting charter schools.
10:00 AM	Tour ends and Senator exits through main entrance.
Main Entrance	

## SAMPLE PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

Welcome to Purpose Prep!

Dear Purpose Prep Families, Friends, and Supporters,



We are honored to welcome you to Purpose Preparatory Academy Charter School. Purpose Prep is an academically challenging, disciplined, and joyful school in Nashville, TN. Unanimously authorized by the Metropolitan Board of Education, Purpose Prep opened its doors to an inaugural class of 90 Kindergarteners in fall 2013. We now educate kindergarten, first, and second grade scholars, and we will add a grade level every year thereafter to educate Kindergarten through fourth grade students by 2017. Purpose Prep is committed to being one of the best elementary public schools in our nation. We will achieve our mission by ensuring every scholar achieves the academic skills, knowledge, and ethical

foundation that will set them on the path to college.

We appreciate your interest in Purpose Prep. We know that our success as a school depends on the support of our families, friends, and supporters far and near. We have high expectations for the Members of our community, and in turn, you can expect a lot from us. Purpose Prep upholds a high standard for excellence, and every school Member understands and is driven by our mission.

Our school model ensures an intensive focus on the acquisition of essential literacy skills, providing targeted and rigorous instruction in each core subject to meet the academic needs of every scholar. Purpose Prep holds scholars accountable for demonstrating excellent behavior by teaching them the character skills necessary for their success, specifically the school's RISE with Purpose values – Purpose, Respect, Integrity, Self-Determination, and Excellence. By instilling in scholars a strong academic and character foundation that firmly underpins school and life success, Purpose Prep sets a foundation toward high levels of learning throughout middle and high school and on the road to college.

On behalf of the founding team of Purpose Prep, we look forward to partnering with you and working together to ensure that the children of Nashville receive the excellent education they deserve to achieve their future goals and dreams.

With purpose, 

## SAMPLE LETTER TO SCHOOL COMMUNITY

[Date]

Dear Students and Families of [name of school],

We are pleased to share with you that on [date], we will be welcoming U.S. Senator [name] to tour [name of school]. Hosting Senator [name] is a great way to share all of the great achievements of the [name of school] community, and we are proud to tell our story. Senator [name] will join us for a tour of the new science laboratory to learn more about our STEM programming and our college and career readiness track.

When Senator [name] visits, there will be a short period of time for the Senator to meet with family members to discuss their experiences with [name of school]. We want you to join us to tell Senator [name] the story of [name of school]. If you are interested in participating in this discussion, please contact [name and contact information].

If you have questions about this visit or would like to learn more, please contact [name and contact information].

Thank you,

[Name] [Title]

[Name of school]

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### How many students attend charter schools? Where are these schools located?

In 2016-17, more than 6,900 charter schools served more than 3 million charter school students in 44 states and the District of Columbia. Nationally, these students account for approximately 6 percent of all K-12 enrollment, though the percentage is much higher in many communities.

In the 2016-2017 school year, Tennessee had a total of 111 charter schools located throughout Memphis, Nashville, Chattanooga and Knoxville. Public charter schools serve more than 35,000 students and our numbers continue to grow each year.

### What makes charter schools unique?

Just like district schools, charter schools are public, tuition-free, open to all students and are subject to the same local, state, and federal laws as are district operated schools. However, charter schools operate independently from the school district, which allows their teachers greater autonomy to design a classroom instruction that fits their students' needs. Charter schools have more flexibility to create a culture that fosters student performance and parent satisfaction.

### Are all charter schools public schools?

Yes! Tennessee's charter schools are public schools. In fact, Tennessee law states that public charter schools are part of the state public education system and receive public funding through the Basic Education Program. Charter schools are opened after reaching an agreement with the local school district. Test scores and performance results from charter school students count toward the results of the school district they are a part of.

### Are charter schools non profit?

The overwhelming majority of charter schools are nonprofit organizations. In the state of Tennessee, the law requires the governing body, which operates the charter school to be "a not-for-profit organization" with 501(c)(3) exemption. Some states allow for-profit organizations to manage charter schools, but they account for fewer than 15% of charter schools across the country. Regardless, all charter schools are free to attend.

### Do charter schools have admission requirements?

No, charter schools do not have admission requirements or entrance exams. However, many charter schools are in high demand. When that demand exceeds the spaces available in the school, a charter school may hold a randomized, blind lottery to determine which students are admitted.

### Do charter schools charge tuition?

No, charter schools are tuition-free, public schools.

### What is a charter school authorizer?

Authorizers are the institutions that decide who can start a new charter school. Authorizers also set expectations and oversee school performance. They decide whether a school should continue to operate or not. Depending on state law, authorizers can be school districts, education agencies, independent boards, universities, mayors and municipalities, and not-for-profits.

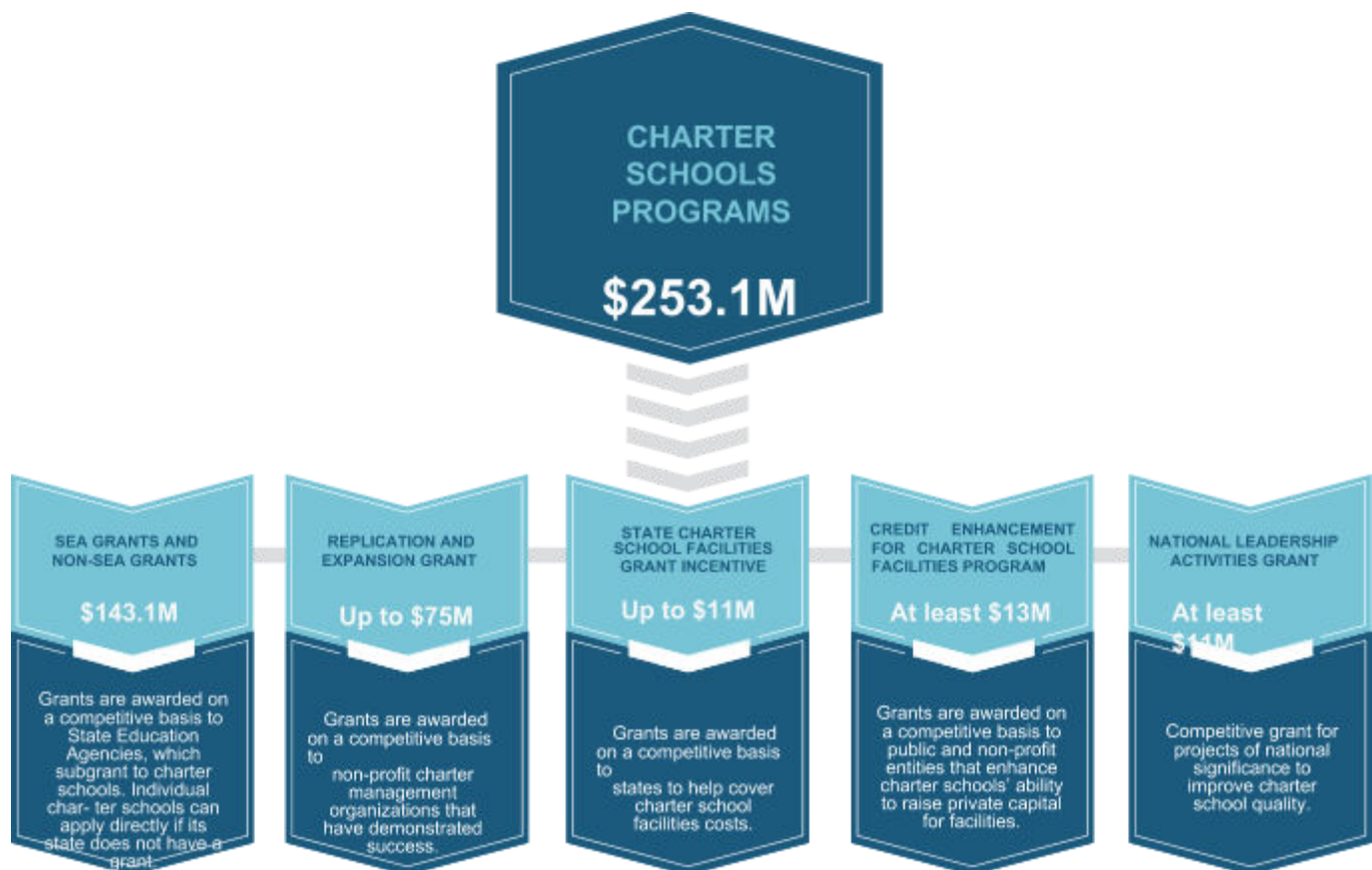
### What impact does the U.S. Congress have on charter schools?

U.S. representatives and senators have influence over the federal Charter Schools Program (CSP). The CSP provides funding to help cover charter school start-up costs and the costs of replicating and expanding successful schools. Research suggests that funding from the CSP is the most powerful driver in the growth of charter schools. The CSP also has funds that allow schools, districts, or charter management organizations to apply for competitive grants for innovative practices and facilities funding. This year, CSP is funded at \$400 million.

## FACTS ABOUT THE CHARTER SCHOOLS PROGRAM (CSP)

The federal Charter Schools Program (CSP) provides financial assistance for start-up activities of a charter school, which include planning and program design. The CSP also provides funding for the replication of high-quality charter schools.

Federal funds are also available to share promising practices, help charter schools finance facilities, and invest in national activities and initiatives that support charter schools.





## 5 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT CHARTER SCHOOL FACILITIES

Congress needs to think about the school buildings that kids are walking into. That's because most charter school leaders have to jump over serious hurdles to cobble together the funding to provide their students with an adequate school building. Here are the five things we think you need to know about charter school facilities:

**Charter schools rarely have access to taxpayer-funded facilities, even when they're vacant.**

Taxpayers own public school buildings and they should be available to all public school students, but that's not the reality. Unlike district schools, charter schools don't have an inventory of buildings to choose from. And in many places – like [Detroit](#), [Indianapolis](#), and [Minneapolis](#) – districts refuse to allow charter schools to lease or purchase buildings even when they're vacant. As a result, you can find charter schools operating in [shopping malls](#), office buildings, repurposed factories, or co-located with other schools.

**Charter schools on average spend about 10% of per-pupil funding on facility space.**

While some charter schools access federal or state programs these initiatives have limited funding and reach. They don't work for all charter schools. Moreover, many of these programs simply reduce the cost of borrowing money – schools still need to cover the debt which shifts much needed funds from the classroom and to the building.

**Charter school facilities often lack amenities like gymnasiums, libraries, or science labs.**

Specialized instructional spaces, such as science labs, libraries, and computer labs, are an important part of a comprehensive educational program, but about 40 percent of charter schools do not have the right amenities or specialized classrooms to best implement their educational model.

Access to school buildings is one of the biggest obstacles to expanding charter school options.

Charter school leaders report that lack of access to adequate facilities is one of their primary concerns and one of the biggest barriers to growth. In fact, nearly one in five charter schools had to delay their opening date by a year or more due to facilities related issues. Even [celebrities](#) can't avoid the facilities challenge.

5 million parents want to send their child to a charter school, but don't have the option.

Based on parent demand, [estimates suggest](#) that the potential number of charter school students is 8.5 million – almost three times larger than today's actual enrollment. Thirty percent of parents surveyed would be interested in sending their child to a charter school, with 10 percent saying that a charter school would be their top choice. Of interested parents with charter schools in their community, over half cited access problems – such as the school is too far away or has a wait list – as the reason their children do not attend a charter school.

*What can members of Congress do? Check out our suggestions for [federal policymakers](#).*

## SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER TO LEGISLATOR

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The Honorable [name]

ATTN: [name], District Director [Street address]

[City, state, ZIP]

Dear [Senator Name, for U.S. Senator; Ms. Or Mr. Name, for U.S. Representative]:

On behalf of the students and staff at the [name of school], I would like to thank you for taking your time to visit. The students and staff were thrilled to host you, and we hope you can visit us again soon.

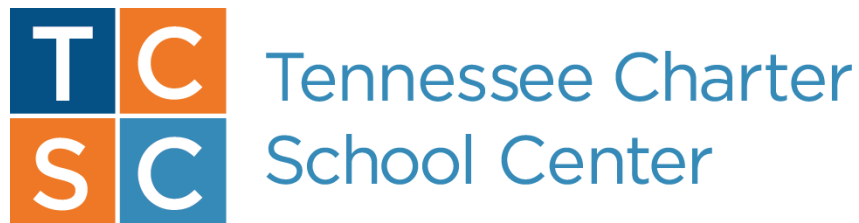
I hope you enjoyed your visit, the tour of the school, and working with our ninth grade students to create a mural in the building lobby. More importantly, I hope you have learned more about the importance of public charter schools and the benefits they bring to students and parents. Particularly, I hope you are more familiar with the successes of the [name of school] and the significance the school brings to the families in your community.

I want to reiterate how important your support for public charter schools is to our school, students, and the community.

Again, thank you for taking your time to visit the [name of school]. We look forward to hosting you again and working towards our mutual goal of providing quality educational options to families and growing the charter school movement. Sincerely,

[Name] [Title]

[Name of school]



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Nashville, TN 37203

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