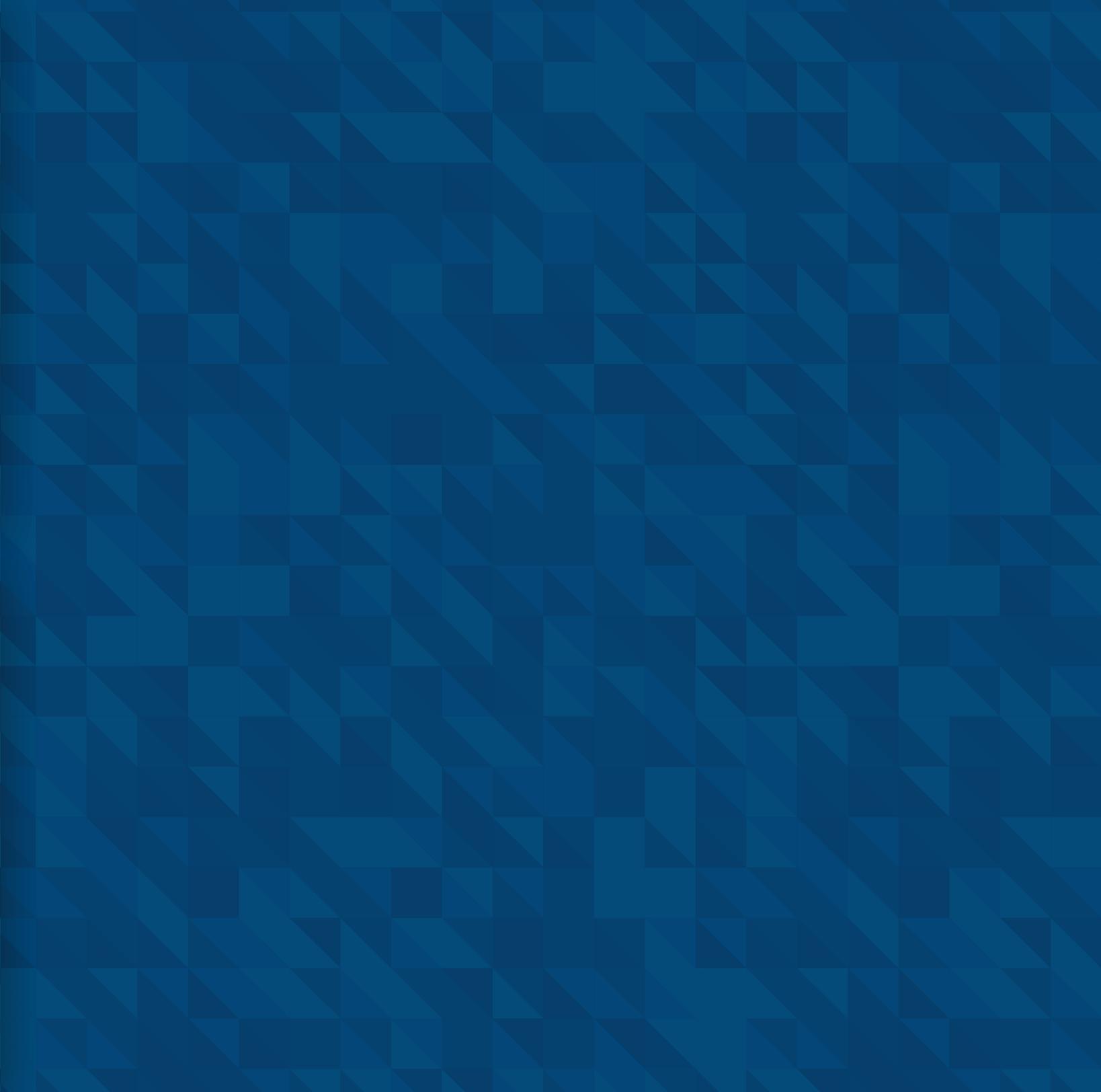


2025-26 IMPACT REPORT



Tennessee Charter
School Center







WELCOME LETTER



WELCOME TO THE 2025-26 TENNESSEE CHARTER SCHOOL CENTER IMPACT REPORT!

At the Tennessee Charter School Center, our team works every day to support and advocate for Tennessee’s public charter schools because of what these schools offer families in our state – the opportunity to choose a public school environment that meets each learner where they are and helps them build on their unique strengths to succeed.

Tennessee is home to some truly special public charter school environments, each offering something different to their school communities. From schools like Chattanooga’s Ivy Academy and Nashville’s Tennessee Nature Academy, with outdoor classrooms and environmental science curriculum, to schools like Libertas in Memphis and Montessori Elementary at Highland Park in Chattanooga, pioneering public Montessori environments in their communities, to schools like Nashville Classical, Purpose Prep in Nashville, and Leadership Prep in Memphis creating fresh strategies tailored to their school communities to help students achieve literacy rates at the top of the state, public charter schools are bringing new opportunities to Tennessee students.

TCSC is proud to support these schools and their students, and dedicated not only to supporting their work, but also highlighting and sharing their successes. Public charter schools are providing great learning environments, but they are also using the flexibility of the charter model to identify innovative approaches to education that can become replicable best practices with the potential to impact students beyond one school’s doors.

This report serves multiple purposes: sharing key facts about Tennessee’s growing public charter school landscape, highlighting great stories of the innovative work being done by educators in Tennessee’s public charter schools, and sharing the work TCSC’s team does to help these schools thrive. We’re grateful to you for engaging with our work, and thank you for joining us in supporting Tennessee’s public charter schools.

Elizabeth Fiveash Rush | President and CEO
Tennessee Charter School Center

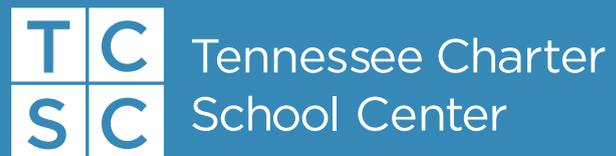
TABLE OF CONTENTS

- PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS IN TN 3
 - MISSION, VISION, VALUES 4
- WHO WE ARE - BOARD AND STAFF 5
- CHARTERS BY THE NUMBERS AND LOCATIONS 7
- THROUGH THE YEARS 9
- SCHOOLS BY AUTHORIZER 11
 - MEMPHIS 11
 - NASHVILLE 12
 - CHATTANOOGA 13
 - KNOXVILLE 14
 - RUTHERFORD COUNTY 15
 - TENNESSEE CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION 16
 - ACHIEVEMENT SCHOOL DISTRICT (ASD) 16
- TCSC IMPACT IN 2025 17
- CHARTER SCHOOL INNOVATION THROUGH CASE STUDIES 19
- THE PATH FORWARD 23
- CONTACT US 24

PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS IN TENNESSEE

ABOUT PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

Public charter schools are public schools that are free to attend and open to all students, but operate under an independent contract, or, “charter,” with an authorizing agency – in Tennessee, most commonly a local education agency (school district), though some are authorized by the Achievement School District (ASD) or the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission. Tennessee state law requires all public charter schools to be not-for-profit, and prohibits for-profit charter school operators. Public charter schools in Tennessee are required to meet the same academic standards and administer the same assessments as any other public school in Tennessee. Their business operations are subject to annual independent audits, as well as the oversight of their authorizers. If a public charter school fails to meet academic or operational standards, they can be closed.



IMPROVED EDUCATION FOR ALL STUDENTS

Public charter schools drive educational innovation that can benefit every student in the state through the development and sharing of new strategies and best practices



EDUCATOR INNOVATION

Public charter school teachers have the freedom to use uniquely-designed curriculum, customized schedules, and cutting-edge methods to create dynamic, personalized learning experiences that meet the needs of their unique school communities



TAILORED LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Public charter schools offer customized learning environments, often with small class sizes and carefully cultivated school cultures to ensure each school's unique student community receives the individualized attention necessary for success



OUR MISSION AND VISION

TCSC's mission is to create an environment where public charter schools can grow and thrive. TCSC's vision is that all Tennessee students have access to a great education that meets their unique potential and prepares them for a meaningful life.

ABOUT THE TENNESSEE CHARTER SCHOOL CENTER

The Tennessee Charter School Center (TCSC) is the state's primary charter school support organization, or CSO. A non-profit organization, TCSC engages in policy, advocacy, and school support work to ensure that Tennessee's public charter schools have an equitable environment to operate in and have the resources they need to ensure they are offering a high-quality public education to all of their students.

WHO WE ARE

TCSC BOARD AND STAFF

TCSC BOARD

The Tennessee Charter School Center Board members are committed to high-quality education for all of Tennessee's children. Along with the Center's chief executive officer, they lead the organization advising on policy, advocacy, programming, funding and communication.



CHRIS BARBIC
The City Fund
PARTNER
CHRIS@CITY-FUND.ORG



SUE ANNE WELLS
Chattanooga Girls Leadership Academy
FOUNDER
SWAN7543@GMAIL.COM



YETTA LEWIS *Board Vice Chair*
Gestalt Community Schools
CO-FOUNDER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
YLEWIS@GESTALTCS.ORG



LIN JOHNSON *Treasurer*
The New Teacher Project
CHIEF STRATEGIC GROWTH AND FINANCE OFFICER
LIN.JOHNSON@TNTP.ORG



HOLLY COLEMAN *Board Secretary*
Hyde Family Foundations
PROGRAM DIRECTOR
HCOLEMAN@HYDEFUNDATION.ORG



JAYME SIMMONS *Board Chair*
Bill and Crissy Haslam Foundation
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
JAYME.SIMMONS@BILLHASLAM.COM



PITT HYDE *Emeritus Board Member*
AutoZone
FOUNDER
PHYDE@PITTCOMANAGEMENT.COM



RICKI GIBBS II, ED.D.
LEAD Public Schools
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
RICKI.GIBBS@LEADPUBLICSCHOOLS.ORG



ELIZABETH FIVEASH RUSH
Tennessee Charter School Center
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
ELIZABETH@TNCHARTERCENTER.ORG



TIM WARE
Grizzlies Preparatory
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
TWARE@GRIZZLIESPREP.ORG

TCSC STAFF



ELIZABETH FIVEASH RUSH
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
ELIZABETH@TNCHARTERCENTER.ORG

Elizabeth leads and manages TCSC's team, developing strategy, spearheading fundraising, and creating and leading the organization's policy agenda.



KIM WEST
OFFICE MANAGER AND SPECIAL PROJECTS COORDINATOR
KIM@TNCHARTERCENTER.ORG

Kim supports the work of the entire TCSC team as well as providing critical support to member schools and team projects.



EMILY LILLEY
VICE PRESIDENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
EMILY@TNCHARTERCENTER.ORG

Emily oversees TCSC's internal and external communication work, advises the TCSC policy team, manages external organization relationships, and represents TCSC in East Tennessee. She also supports both the work of the TCSC board and organizational development efforts.



DR. NATASHA MORELAND SPEARS
DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR
NATASHA@TNCHARTERCENTER.ORG

Dr. Natasha leads TCSC's development work, helping to strengthen the organization and bolster advocacy for public charter schools in Tennessee through her expertise in fundraising, event development, and strategic planning.



CARRA POWELL
SR. VICE PRESIDENT OF ADVOCACY
CARRA@TNCHARTERCENTER.ORG

Carra leads the organization's advocacy work, connecting stakeholders, coordinating local-level advocacy efforts, and supporting schools as they navigate application, renewal, and appeal processes.



CAMERON QUICK
CHIEF OPERATIONS OFFICER
CAMERON@TNCHARTERS.ORG

Cameron is an expert in facilities financing and real estate development. He helps bring real estate resources and support to the charter sector and assists schools in seeking and securing financing.



ROB VAGI
VICE PRESIDENT OF RESEARCH & MEMBERSHIP
ROB@TNCHARTERCENTER.ORG

Rob is TCSC's data expert, leading analysis and research work, developing and managing the organization's data dashboard resources, and leading school and corporate membership work.

OVERVIEW OF TN CHARTER SCHOOLS

Tennessee charter schools exist in five areas across the state. These schools are authorized by five traditional districts as well as the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission and the Achievement School District:

TENNESSEE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL LOCATIONS



TENNESSEE CHARTER SCHOOLS BY AUTHORIZER 2025-26

Achievement School District	2
Davidson County	26
Hamilton County	9
Knox County	2
Memphis-Shelby County Schools	54
Rutherford County	2
Tennessee Public Charter School Commission	24
Grand Total	119

TENNESSEE CHARTER SCHOOLS BY THE NUMBERS



119
TOTAL CHARTER SCHOOLS

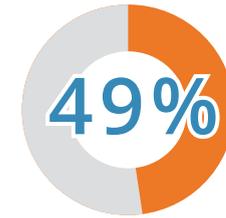


20+ Years
OF EDUCATION INNOVATION



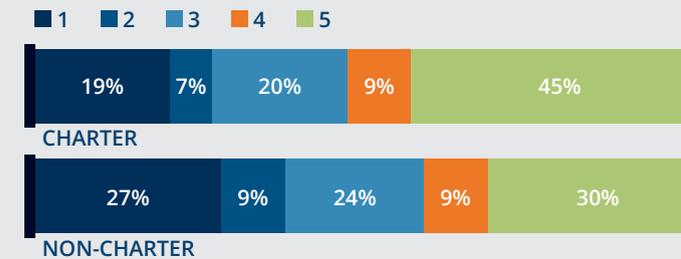
44,689
STUDENTS ENROLLED - 2025

BY THE NUMBERS



of students in **public charter schools are economically disadvantaged** compared to **27% of students** in traditional public schools.

CHARTERS EARNED TVAAS 4'S AND 5'S AT A HIGHER RATE THAN DISTRICT SCHOOLS



More than 50% of public charter schools are in the top two tiers for overall growth, compared to less than 40% of traditional public schools.

HOW TENNESSEE CHARTER SCHOOLS ARE PERFORMING

Tennessee charter schools are increasing proficiency rates among economically disadvantaged students at a faster rate than traditional district schools, statewide.

Source: SCORE & Tennessee Charter School Center. (2025). Tennessee Charter Sector Performance: 2025 Data Release

Charter schools in Tennessee are adding value for their students – offering the equivalent of significantly more additional days of learning for students enrolled in TN public charter schools than traditional public schools, according to a recent study.

Source: Kho, Adam, Shelby L. Smith, and Ron Zimmer. (2025). From Disruption to Recovery: Charter School Performance During and After the COVID-19 Pandemic. (EdWorkingPaper: 25-1225). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University: <https://doi.org/10.26300/53p1-jc12>

The percentages of students in public charter schools who are proficient have increased every year, and at a faster rate than traditional public schools.

Source: SCORE & Tennessee Charter School Center. (2025). Tennessee Charter Sector Performance: 2025 Data Release



CHARTER SCHOOLS THROUGH THE YEARS

Tennessee policymakers and education stakeholders have demonstrated a strong commitment to education reform by advancing significant policies and programs to support Tennessee's public education improvement and innovation. As a result, Tennessee's public charter school movement has gained strength and generated positive outcomes for students and communities.

Today, 119 charter schools are serving more than 44,000 Tennessee students - and our numbers continue to grow each year. Not only are charter schools promoting choice and opportunity in our K-12 education system, but they are also playing a pivotal role in helping the state address several critical education issues, including literacy and workforce development.

1998

The Tennessee Charter Schools Association (TCSA) was established to unite efforts and resources towards creating a local and statewide policy environment that enables the creation and growth of high-quality public charter schools.

2002

Tennessee Charter School Act passed. This act introduced charter schools as an "alternative means" within the public school system for ensuring the accomplishment of the necessary outcomes of education.

2003

First Tennessee charter schools opened in Nashville (1) and Memphis (3).

2005

Law amended to allow students zoned to "high priority" schools to attend charter schools.

2009

Inspired by the success of high-quality public charter schools in other parts of the country, the Tennessee Charter School Incubator (TCSI) was started. TCSI focused on systematically identifying and training new charter leaders and managing school launch and early support activities. TCSI has launched nine charter schools in Tennessee, recruited and placed two high-impact Fellows into school leadership positions in the Achievement School District, and initially incubated five new public charter schools that opened in 2015.

Expansion of enrollment eligibility to "at-risk" students. Limit or "cap" on the number of charter schools raised to 90.

2011

Open Enrollment amendment passed to allow all students the option to attend a charter school, removing the "cap" on the number of charter schools. Achievement School District created.

2013

The Tennessee Charter School Incubator and the Tennessee Charter Schools Association merged to form the Tennessee Charter School Center. This new organization combines the resources and functions of both groups (charter school incubation and support and policy and advocacy) to better respond to the strong demand for high-quality public charter schools across the state. The new Center aims to provide ongoing, comprehensive support to the growing charter sector in Tennessee while also creating a unified voice among charter organizations.

2014

Legislation passed to allow the State Board of Education to act as an authorizer upon appeal for charter applicants in school districts with a priority school in their area.

2016

TCSC collaborates with TN Dept. of Ed. to secure a federal Charter Schools Program (CSP) grant to support the launch of new high-quality charter schools in TN.

2017

Legislation is passed that modernizes and strengthens the 2002 Tennessee Charter School Act. This law clarifies rules on everything from the application process to closure. Enables local districts to charge an authorizer fee to cover the cost of charter oversight. Established fund of up to \$6 million per year for facilities.

The Memphis Charter Compact was approved.

TCSC awarded a federal credit enhancement grant to support charter school facilities in TN.

2018

Legislation to ensure public charter schools are included in reimbursements for high-cost special needs students was passed.

2019

The Tennessee Public Charter School Commission--an independent commission with the authority to hear charter school appeals and authorize schools following successful appeal anywhere in Tennessee--was established. The State Board of Education was established as a formal accountability body for charter school authorizers, including the requirement for evaluation of authorizer compliance with state law and the Tennessee Quality Authorizing Standards, as well as the power to enforce compliance.

2022

Funding specifically for students enrolled in charter schools was included in the state's new funding formula, Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement (TISA).

2023

Legislation passed to allow charter schools the option to prioritize students who are economically disadvantaged, clarified out-of-district enrollment policies for charter schools, and added a corrective action plan provision that required authorizers to notify its charter schools of perceived problems and provide opportunities to remedy.

2024

Legislation passed to provide charter schools with the right of first refusal to purchase at or below fair market value any vacant or underutilized property put up for sale or lease by an LEA, along with legislation establishing Opportunity Public Charter Schools designed to serve at-risk students. 2024 also saw a \$15 million investment in the Public Charter School Facilities Fund.

2025

Critical budget investments for public charter schools including \$20 million in per-pupil funding for the Public Charter School Facilities Fund and \$5 million for the creation of a revolving loan financing option for charter schools. Legislation passed creating more direct pathways to authorization by the State Charter School Commission.

SCHOOLS BY AUTHORIZER - MEMPHIS

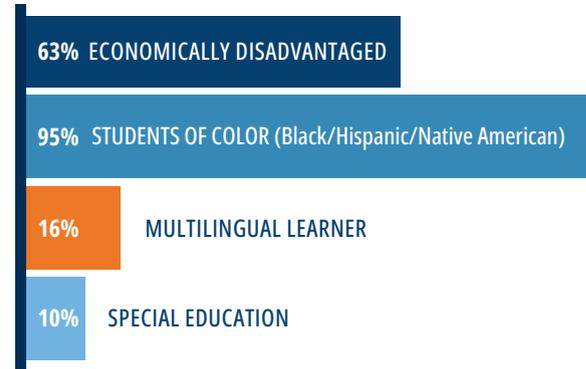
NASHVILLE

Home to Tennessee's first charter schools dating back to 2003, Memphis continues to host the largest public charter school sector in the state. Overwhelming parent demand for high-quality public school options and community engagement has spurred this growth. Public charter schools in Memphis continue to identify innovative strategies to increase student growth.

54
PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

19,944
STUDENTS ENROLLED - 2025

SPECIAL POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS



PERCENT OF SCHOOLS EARNING TVAAS SCORES 1-5

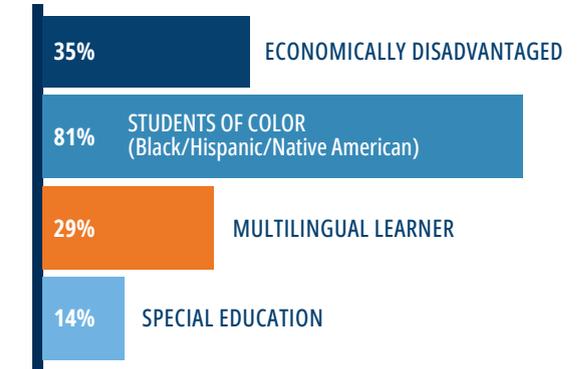
	5	4	3	2	1
CHARTER	40%	11%	27%	9%	13%
DISTRICT	35%	7%	23%	6%	29%

The city of Nashville has experienced a population boom in recent years, and a growing need for access to a high-quality public education has followed. Nashville's public charter schools are reimagining what's possible in public education and providing parents a new set of quality public school options to consider.

26
PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

12,734
STUDENTS ENROLLED - 2025

SPECIAL POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS



PERCENT OF SCHOOLS EARNING TVAAS SCORES 1-5

	5	4	3	2	1
CHARTER	63%	8%	8%	0%	21%
DISTRICT	29%	8%	26%	13%	24%

(Source: TDOE, 2024-2025)

(Source: TVAAS Composite file, 2024-2025)

*All data reflect 2024-2025. Schools with missing data are excluded from this analysis.

School counts reflect 25-26



(Source: TDOE, 2024-2025)

(Source: TVAAS Composite file, 2024-2025)

*All data reflect 2024-2025. Schools with missing data are excluded from this analysis.

School counts reflect 25-26



SCHOOLS BY AUTHORIZER - CHATTANOOGA

KNOXVILLE

Hamilton County continues to see a significant demand for more public school options. The sector continues to expand this innovative and effective education model in the community.

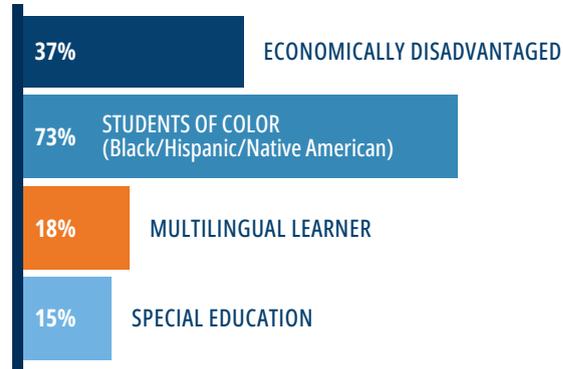


9
PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS



2,910
STUDENTS ENROLLED - 2025

SPECIAL POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS



PERCENT OF SCHOOLS EARNING TVAAS SCORES 1-5

	5	4	3	2	1
CHARTER	13%	0%	13%	38%	38%
DISTRICT	26%	12%	21%	11%	30%

Knox County Schools opened its first public charter school, Emerald Academy, in 2015 as community leaders turned to public charter schools as a way to expand education options for more families. The Emerald Youth Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting underserved youth in Knoxville, helped open the school to focus on promoting a college-going culture for students. Knoxville's second charter school, Knox Prep, opened in 2024.

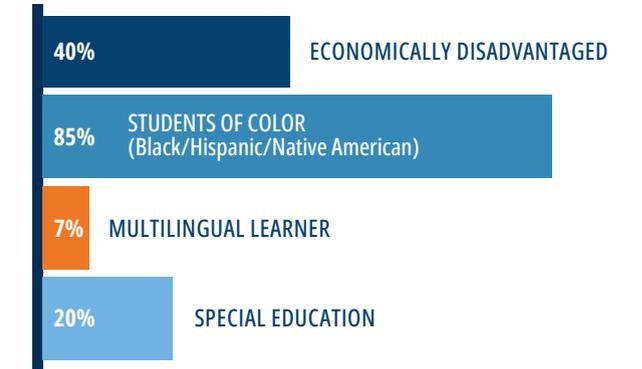


2
SCHOOLS



542
STUDENTS ENROLLED - 2025

SPECIAL POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS



PERCENT OF SCHOOLS EARNING TVAAS SCORES 1-5

	5	4	3	2	1
CHARTER	50%	0%	0%	0%	50%
DISTRICT	36%	8%	36%	10%	11%

(Source: TDOE, 2024-2025)

(Source: TVAAS Composite file, 2024-2025)

*All data reflect 2024-2025. Schools with missing data are excluded from this analysis.

School counts reflect 25-26



(Source: TDOE, 2024-2025)

(Source: TVAAS Composite file, 2024-2025)

*All data reflect 2024-2025. Schools with missing data are excluded from this analysis.

School counts reflect 25-26



SCHOOLS BY AUTHORIZER - RUTHERFORD COUNTY

American Classical Academy Rutherford and Springs Empower Academy were the first two charter schools authorized by Rutherford County Schools, and opened in 2024. Additional Rutherford County-based charter schools have been authorized by the TN Public Charter School Commission, and others will open in 2026.



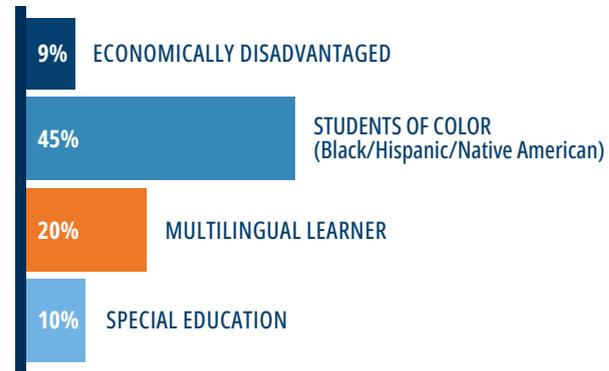
(Source: TDOE, 2024-2025)

(Source: TVAAS Composite file, 2024-2025)

*All data reflect 2024-2025. Schools with missing data are excluded from this analysis.

School counts reflect 25-26

SPECIAL POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS



PERCENT OF SCHOOLS EARNING TVAAS SCORES 1-5

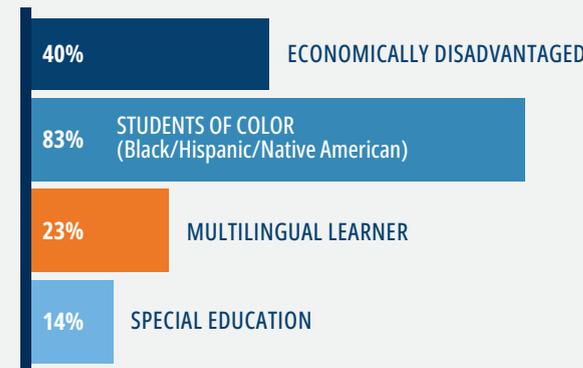
	5	4	3	2	1
CHARTER	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
DISTRICT	67%	6%	15%	2%	10%

TENNESSEE CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION

The Tennessee Charter School Commission was established in 2019 to operate as an independent authority to hear charter school appeals and authorize schools following successful appeal. In 2025, the Commission was also granted authority to receive direct applications from schools in districts with low-quality authorizers. The Commission has now approved high quality schools in four counties across Tennessee.



SPECIAL POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS



PERCENT OF SCHOOLS EARNING TVAAS SCORES 1-5

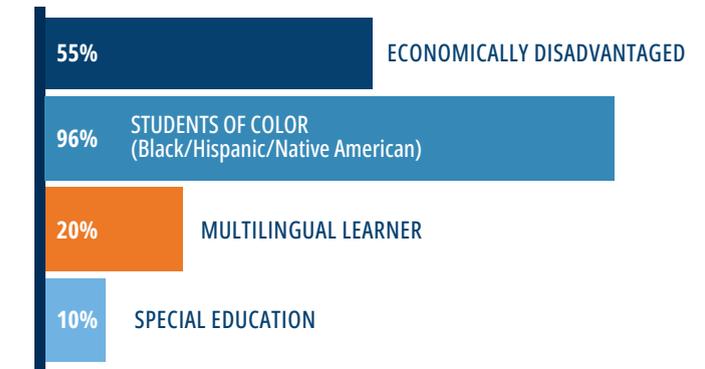
	5	4	3	2	1
CHARTER	56%	13%	19%	0%	13%

ACHIEVEMENT SCHOOL DISTRICT (ASD)

Established in 2011, the Achievement School District (ASD) was a state-run turnaround system implemented to intervene in the state's lowest-performing schools. As of Fall 2026, all schools will be transitioned out of the ASD.



SPECIAL POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS



PERCENT OF SCHOOLS EARNING TVAAS SCORES 1-5

	5	4	3	2	1
CHARTER	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%



IMPACT FOR PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS IN 2025

2025 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

TCSC SUCCESSFULLY ADVOCATED FOR:

\$20M

in Charter School Facility Funding to be distributed to schools on a per-pupil basis.

\$5M

for the creation of a Tennessee Equitable Facilities Fund to provide a low cost revolving loan fund for charter schools in the state.

\$20M

to ensure access to \$20 million for school safety grant funding for public charter schools.

TCSC's team actively engaged in more than 20 pieces of impactful education legislation during legislative session and monitored more than 200 bills, as well as hosted regular legislative update calls for member schools.

TCSC developed and shared long-term policy charter policy recommendations designed to make Tennessee the best state to open, grow, and operate a charter school with the 2026 Gubernatorial candidates.

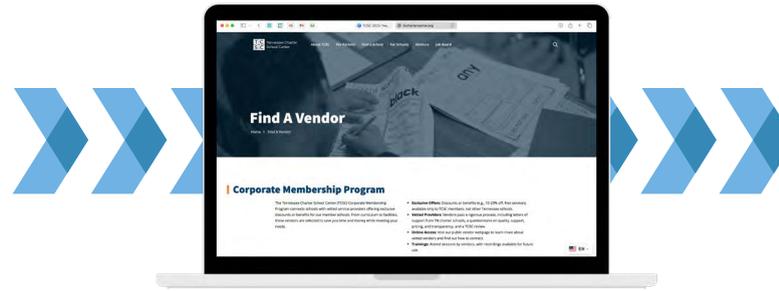
ELEVATING TCSC'S VOICE

TCSC was highlighted in multiple public and media platforms, including Op-Ed by Sr. Dir. of Research and Membership Rob Vagi sharing the results of a University of Kentucky study about public charter school success in Tennessee in multiple news outlets, a Charterfolk feature on TCSC's approach to combining research and advocacy, a TN Firefly feature on TCSC TVAAS analysis, coverage on WREG Channel 3 for a National School Choice Week event co-hosted in Memphis, and participation by TCSC team members on SCORE panels regarding the University of Kentucky study and two panels at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools national conference.

LOCAL ENGAGEMENT

The TCSC team led efforts in Memphis-Shelby County around facilities access, charter school growth, policy recommendations on the Memphis Charter Compact, and local partnership development. The TCSC team hosted a National School Choice Week event in partnership with NSCW, Star Academy, and Fedex Aviation. In Chattanooga, TCSC held regular school leader round tables, coordinated visits with elected officials, and school tours. TCSC worked in close partnership with the Nashville Charter Collaborative (NCC), including, coordinated advocacy efforts, school visits, and co-hosting a Tennessee state night at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools Conference as well as a FRED Charter School Facilities Conference in Nashville.

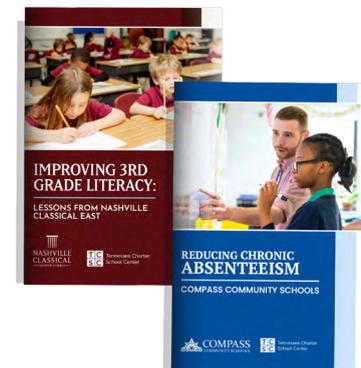
2025 YEAR IN REVIEW



TCSC launched the organization's first Corporate Membership Program, connecting schools with fully vetted, qualified vendors to help schools find services they need, provide discounts, and connect TSCS with corporate partners.

TCSC partnered with SCORE to conduct a statewide landscape analysis to help guide future charter school growth in Tennessee.

The TCSC team traveled the state in January to present awards to 2024 Charter Champion Award winners and gathered nominations in December for the 2025 Charter Champion Awards, including the Changemaker Charter School List, recognizing the top performing charter schools in the state



TCSC released two case studies focused on unique areas of success at TN charter schools: Compass Community Schools Reducing Chronic Absenteeism and Improving Attendance Case Study and Nashville Classical Third Grade ELA Success Case Study. Each release was accompanied by a webinar about the case study with 35+ attendees and 100+ video views each.

SHARING CHARTER SCHOOL INNOVATION IN TENNESSEE THROUGH CASE STUDIES

IMPROVING 3RD GRADE LITERACY: LESSONS FROM NASHVILLE CLASSICAL EAST CASE STUDY

UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGE

In the face of low and slow-improving ELA proficiency in public schools across the state, in 2024 Tennessee fully implemented the Literacy Success Act (LSA), which aims to ensure that all students achieve foundational reading proficiency by the end of third grade. Using TCAP ELA scores as a benchmark, the LSA mandates that students scoring below or approaching expectations must participate in summer learning or tutoring, with some exemptions allowed.

EXAMINING THE SOLUTION – NASHVILLE CLASSICAL EAST

This law pushed all schools to renew a focus on literacy instruction and seek out strategies to help students reach proficiency. The case study focuses on one notably successful charter school, Nashville Classical East, which has an emphasis on literacy as a part of their school mission and ranked in the top 14% of all schools in the state for their 3rd grade ELA scores in 2024.

Through interviews with leaders and staff from both school campuses and an analysis of TCAP ELA data, the case study uncovers the policies and practices that drove this unique success in literacy for students by answering three questions:

- 1 What policies and practices have contributed to Nashville Classical East's success in 3rd grade ELA?
- 2 What challenges has the school faced in pursuit of this goal, and how have they addressed them?
- 3 How has the charter school model, specifically, supported Nashville Classical East's success?

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – POLICIES AND PRACTICES DRIVING SUCCESS:

Nashville Classical Charter Schools provide a rigorous, joyful, and classical education for students from kindergarten through 8th grade. The schools emphasize character development through core values—focus, integrity, resilience, scholarship, and teamwork—while delivering a curriculum centered on great books, fine arts, and foreign languages. This study focuses on the original Nashville Classical East campus, opened in 2013.

Nashville Classical East's leadership emphasizes that there are no "silver bullets" for improving student achievement. Rather, the combined effects of several policies and practices have contributed to the school's success. Through this study, several practices were identified that helped drive ELA proficiency at Nashville Classical East:

- Educators who are committed to the school's students and mission has been critical. To retain these staff members, the school offers competitive salaries, a supportive professional environment, summer professional development focused on the Science of Reading, and clear career pathways and leadership opportunities.
- Staff members are supported by strong leadership and coaching through a dedicated team that works with teachers to rework schedules, share responsibilities, and solve problems, contributing to teacher retention.
- The school uses an "arc-of-the-year" model for goal-setting that is foundational to school culture, breaking the school year into six week chunks where teachers set personal goals and collaborate with students to set individual learning goals aligned with data.
- Nashville Classical East was an early adopter of the Science of Reading, now mandated statewide, a research-based framework emphasizing explicit instruction in foundational literacy skills like phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.
- Each class at Nashville Classical East includes three structured literacy blocks known as integrated humanities blocks: Knowledge, Writing, and ELA/Phonics/Decoding. These blocks are taught consecutively, seamlessly reinforcing skills and knowledge.
- Continuity with Teachers at Nashville Classical East is incentivized through teacher stipends to "loop up" with their students – teaching them in two consecutive grades, ensuring continuity in relationships and reducing time needed to understand student needs.



To learn more about the effective strategies outlined in these two case studies, and to find case studies on other critical challenges like graduation readiness, academic success for economically disadvantaged students and English language learners, use the QR code here to visit TCSC's Data & Research page.

SHARING CHARTER SCHOOL INNOVATION IN TENNESSEE THROUGH CASE STUDIES

In the more than 20 years since public charter schools began to open in the state, Tennessee's charter sector has shown tremendous promise as these public schools have utilized the flexibility inherent to the public charter school model to find innovative ways to meet student needs. Through our Case Studies Series, TCSC continues to highlight unique areas of success and replicable best practices uncovered in Tennessee's public charter schools, offering a roadmap for other schools facing similar challenges.

In 2025, TCSC released two studies focused on Compass Community Schools Reducing Chronic Absenteeism and Improving Attendance and Nashville Classical Third Grade ELA Success. Each release was accompanied by a webinar about the case study with more than 100 views each.

SUMMARY OF REDUCING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM: COMPASS COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGE

Chronic absence, defined by the Tennessee Department of Education as a student missing 10% or more of enrolled school days for any reason, is a key measure of engagement that profoundly impacts academic outcomes. Consistent attendance drives success in core subjects like reading and math, with research showing that chronically absent students fall behind as early as kindergarten and face higher dropout risks by high school, particularly in underserved communities where transportation or health challenges amplify the issue. Particularly since the disruptions to in-person learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, chronic absenteeism has become a significant barrier to educational success. Though schools across the state have made significant progress toward reducing chronic absenteeism, the statewide average remains high at 18.9% in 2024.



EXAMINING THE SOLUTION – COMPASS COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AT BERCLAIR AND HICKORY HILL

The fifth case study in the Tennessee Charter School Center's "Success Stories" series, examines how two public charter schools, Compass Community School Berclair and Compass Community School Hickory Hill, implemented replicable strategies to achieve remarkable reductions in chronic absenteeism. Berclair's chronic absenteeism rate dropped from 55.5% in 2021-2022 to 7% in 2023-2024 (a 48.5-point decline, Tennessee's highest decrease), and Hickory Hill's rate fell from 35.6% in 2021-2022 to 6.8% in 2023-2024. Additionally, both of these schools earned level 5 TVAAS scores during the 2023-2024 school year, underscoring the important connection between attendance and achievement. Both schools now boast some of the lowest chronic absenteeism rates in the state.

Through interviews with leaders and staff from both school campuses and an analysis of chronic absence data, the case study uncovers the policies and practices that drove these extraordinary reductions in chronic absence by answering three questions:

- 1 What strategies have Compass Berclair and Compass Hickory Hill implemented to boost attendance among their students?
- 2 What challenges have their leadership teams encountered, and how have they overcome them?
- 3 And how has the charter school model facilitated their success in addressing chronic absence?

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – POLICIES AND PRACTICES DRIVING SUCCESS:

The Compass Community Schools network was determined to find a solution to a chronic absenteeism challenge that they had been battling since the school closures of the pandemic. In 2023, the Compass Community Schools network launched a partnership with the Hyde Family Foundation, a Memphis-based organization dedicated to improving education and community outcomes, to address chronic absence. The partnership enabled Compass schools to join an Attendance Works cohort, a national initiative offering evidence-based tools and training to improve attendance, and equipped the network with advanced attendance-tracking software, professional development for staff, and resources to engage families and students directly.

Through this study, several practices were identified that helped drive such impressive reductions in chronic absenteeism.

- **Structured interventions** played a critical role: attendance teams at both schools convened regularly to analyze data, categorize students into tiers based on absence patterns, and develop targeted interventions. Daily outreach by office staff to parents of absent students facilitated immediate follow-up, identifying absence reasons and encouraging attendance when possible.
- **Fostering an engaging school culture** ensured students felt valued and motivated to attend, achieved through daily community meetings, personalized greetings for each student, and consistent emphasis on core values.
- **Educating staff and parents** was equally vital—staff were trained on the academic consequences of chronic absenteeism, while parents were informed through letters, family meetings, and community events about the importance of regular attendance.
- Lastly, the **charter model's flexibility** allowed these small schools to implement strategies consistently, enabling rapid problem-solving and staff collaboration to share best practices effectively

THE PATH FORWARD

IN 2026, THE TENNESSEE CHARTER SCHOOL CENTER'S POLICY TEAM IS FOCUSED ON:

AN INCREASE IN TISA DIRECT FUNDING FOR CHARTER STUDENTS

Public charter schools in Tennessee are serving public school students, but they do not receive local capital dollars for facilities, and so rely on philanthropy and operational funds to meet ongoing facilities costs and provide for long-term growth in facilities. Facilities related costs have steeply risen over the past several years and are the number one barrier to new charter growth in the state. In 2026, TCSC supports Governor Lee's proposed \$40 million allocation to the State Charter School Facilities Fund and seeks an increase in the current TISA allocation.

A CHARTER SCHOOL STATUTE CLEAN-UP

To ensure charter schools continue to have maximum flexibility TCSC supports legislation that will:

- Allow charter school students to be nominated to serve as the student member of the State Board of Education
- Allow charter schools to adopt an enrollment lottery policy that allows more flexibility than the current required preference order
- Requires local funding bodies to transparently report to LEAs and charter schools on local revenue collections
- Allows schools authorized by the Charter Commission to apply for replication directly to the Commission.
- Establishes automatic charter renewal for high-performing charter schools

MAINTAINING ASSESSMENTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The vision of charter schools is greater operational autonomy in exchange for greater accountability. Tennessee's current charter sector is one of the highest performing in the nation, and we believe this is, in large part, the result of our strong accountability system which measures both student achievement and growth. To maintain high performance, we believe it is imperative that all public charter schools continue to be held accountable through the use of state assessments and a fair and robust accountability model.

AN EXPANDED DEFINITION OF ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED

When the state shifted to a direct certification process for defining economically disadvantaged students, the state saw a significant shift in the number of students deemed eligible for needed resources. With recent changes to SNAP and TANF at the federal level, this decline in eligibility has become even more significant and less predictable. In the TISA funding formula, students identified as economically disadvantaged are a main driver of funding. Many charter schools serve low-income students who, for many reasons, aren't directly certified; this negatively impacts charter school funding. TCSC supports expanding the definition of economically disadvantaged to include all children eligible for Medicaid in addition to SNAP and TANF to ensure that students who most need additional resources are able to access them.



OUR OFFICE

1033 Demonbreun St., Suite 300,
Nashville, TN 37203

CONNECT

www.tnchartercenter.org
learn@tnchartercenter.org
   @TNcharters

