

# FAST FACTS



## LESSONS FROM 25 YEARS OF PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

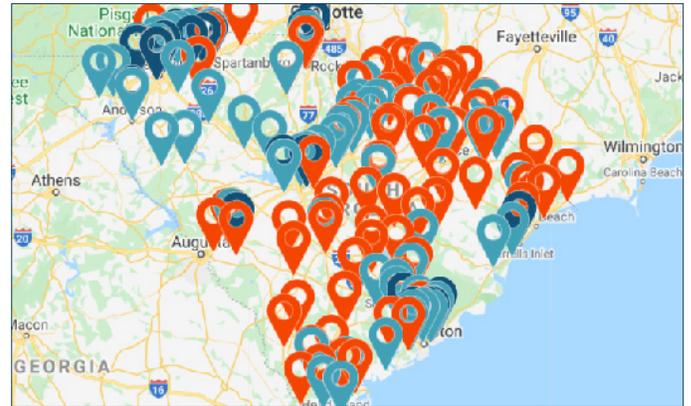


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2021 marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of South Carolina's original public charter school law. In this anniversary year, Palmetto Promise Institute has published *Charting the Course: The Future of South Carolina K-12 Education Funding: Lessons from 25 Years of Public Charter Schools*. The over 100-page report is available on the Palmetto Promise website. Here are the key facts and our top recommendations from that study.

## POLICY FACTS

- 🎓 The South Carolina General Assembly passed the state's first charter school statute in **1996**.
- 🎓 There are **81** total charter schools in South Carolina. **22** are authorized by local school districts, **33** by the SC Public Charter School District and **26** by the Charter Institute at Erskine.
- 🎓 There are **5** virtual charters, **4** of which are sponsored by the Charter Institute at Erskine. Approximately **42%** of all charter students are enrolled in a virtual charter school (2020-21).
- 🎓 Public Charter schools now enroll approximately **40,000** students.
- 🎓 Overall, charter school students account for **5%** of total public school enrollment in South Carolina.
- 🎓 Since the Governor declared a State of Emergency due to the spread of COVID-19, charter school enrollment has grown dramatically. The S.C. Revenue & Fiscal Affairs Office shows 135-day Average Daily Membership for 2019-20 across charter school districts to be **30,311**. Projected enrollment for 2021-22 was **45,354** pupils.
- 🎓 **10** new charter schools opened in 2021-2022.
- 🎓 Since 2012, **8** charter schools have had their charters revoked.

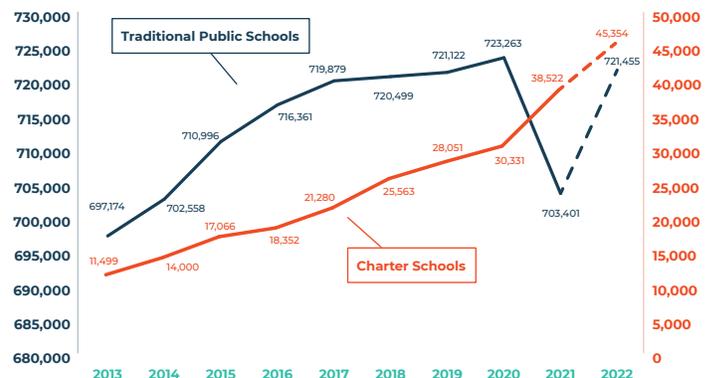


**Charter School Locations.** View the interactive map at [palmettopromise.org/public\\_charters](http://palmettopromise.org/public_charters)

## FINANCE FACTS

- 🎓 Funding for public schools is a state-local partnership. But only charter schools sponsored by local school districts receive local revenue support.
- 🎓 South Carolina public charter schools **do not** receive dedicated funding for **transportation** or **capital/facility** expenses.
- 🎓 South Carolina's public charter schools are forced to spend operating dollars on facilities, sometimes as much as **9%**. Traditional public school districts spend \$0 of their per-pupil operating (classroom) revenues on capital projects.

**Booming Charter Growth.** Average Daily Membership (ADM) numbers reflect the strong growth of the charter movement.



Sources: SC Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office, SC Department of Education.

## STATUS CHECK

-  The charter movement started slowly in South Carolina, but new statewide authorizers have facilitated **strong enrollment growth**.
-  The SC charter statute ranks **#19 of the 45** states with statutes by neutral charter law experts. Multiple authorizers is one of the strongest attributes.
-  Student outcomes in **virtual charter schools** trail brick and mortar charters and will require new approaches if to be leveraged to greatest impact.
-  Lack of access to designated **facility** and **transportation funding** presents a challenge for state authorized charters, cannibalizing precious classroom dollars.
-  South Carolina's education funding formula results in **funding levels that vary dramatically by student and by district**. For example, the Education Finance Act's "Weighted Pupil Units" calculation shows that state and local pupil operational funding ranges from **\$5,626** in Dillon 3 to **\$13,895** in Fairfield, although these districts exhibit similar levels of poverty and student performance. As for statewide charter school districts, total support for these students falls below the state median of **\$7,288**.
-  In that current ad hoc, piecemeal system, students and public schools, both traditional and charter, are not funded **uniformly** by any measure.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

**Equalize Funding.** Adopt an Education Finance Act 2.0 as outlined in the report, to lay the funding foundation necessary to solve South Carolina's charter funding equity problem by addressing the needs of all public school students.

**Refresh Statute.** Update legal framework to set funding sources in statute, allow non-profit managers, and adopt selected recommendations from recent reports.

**Include Facilities.** Provide a per-pupil facilities allowance, guarantee equal access to all education capital funding programs, give priority access to surplus school properties, and

assist charters with enhancing their credit and other access to bond markets.

**Incubate & Replicate.** Develop a statewide school incubation plan focusing on the I-95 corridor, encourage businesses to host charter schools, encourage multiple schools to operate under one board, and harness forthcoming expanded broadband for expanding virtual charters.

**Prioritize Outcomes.** Consider piloting new measurements for grading virtual charter schools.

**Engage the Public.** Educate South Carolina citizens about how charters work and the high level of charter school growth and parent satisfaction.

**Charter Revenue Per Pupil. Statewide Charter Districts** ■ trail Traditional Public School Districts ■ in Revenue Per Pupil (2020 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars). Source: RFA, Acuitas Economics.

