

Nashville Public Radio's Primer On Charter Schools:

Nationally:

- Minnesota passed the first charter school law in 1991, with 18 other states following suit by 1995.
- Over a million students are in charter schools in the U.S. today.

In Tennessee Law:

- The state passed its [law authorizing charter schools](#) in 2002.
- The law allowed charter schools here to recruit low-performing students, or students from low-performing schools.
- The law also limited charter schools to urban areas, with a total of 50 charters statewide.
- Memphis Academy of Science and Engineering opened in fall of 2003 as the state's first charter school.
- Charter schools must be nonsectarian.
- Chartering organizations must be non-profit.
- Charter school teachers are held to the same certification requirements as other public school teachers.
- State law gives charter schools "control of instruction," meaning they are able to set their own curriculum.
- All public schools, including charter schools, receive a set amount of state and local money each year for every student enrolled at the school. This year in Metro, the total amount is \$8100 per student. This is the main source of funding for charter schools.
- Charter schools may also apply for grants and accept donations from the private sector.

Legal Expansion:

- Last year the state legislature [expanded the law](#), allowing up to 90 charter schools statewide, up from the cap of 50.
- The change also extends eligibility to students on free and reduced lunch. That expands the original law, which only allowed low-performing students and those attending low-performing schools.
- The new law limits Memphis to 35 charters and Nashville to 20.
- To date only one charter school in Tennessee has lost its charter – Youth Organized Academy in Memphis in 2007.

Tennessee Today:

- Tennessee charter schools currently enroll 4,906 students. That's out of 930,525 students in public schools statewide.
- Tennessee currently has 22 charter schools; 15 are in Memphis, five in Nashville, and two in Chattanooga.
- Statewide, applications have also been approved for eight others.
- Of the five charter schools now operating in Nashville, four are run by completely local, independent organizations.
- The fifth, KIPP Academy, is affiliated with a national organization of 82 charter schools. Each KIPP school is independent in terms of budget, curriculum, and staffing, but they all follow an educational model developed by the national group.