



2025 Charter Schools Report

Based on data from the 2023-24 school year

Approved by the Washington State Board of Education on October 16, 2025



2025 PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS ANNUAL REPORT

Contents

Introduction	2
Background	2
Charter School Student Performance Comparison.....	3
Methodology	4
Data and Study Sample	6
Findings	7
Successes, challenges, and areas for improvement.....	9
Charter School Commission Key Developments.....	10
Spokane Public Schools Key Developments.....	10
Sufficiency of charter school funding.....	11
Startup funding:.....	12
Capital funding:	12
Authorizer oversight fee:.....	12
Timing of apportionment payments:	13
Authorizer funding formula efficacy	13
Noncertificated instructional staff	13
Suggested changes to strengthen charter schools	13
Charter School Commission Recommendations.....	13
Spokane Public Schools Recommendations.....	14
Proposed Board Recommendation.....	15
Conclusion	15
Appendix 1: 2023-24 and 2024-25 Enrollment, Operating Public Charter Schools	17
Appendix 2: 2023-24 Expenditure and Instructional Staff	18

Introduction

The State Board of Education (SBE) is required to annually issue a report on the performance of the state's charter schools (RCW 28A.710.250). This is the eighth annual report on the performance of charter schools in Washington. This report is based on reports submitted by each authorizer as well as additional relevant data compiled by the State Board of Education for the 2023-24 school year. It includes:

- A comparison of the performance of public charter school students with the performance of academically, ethnically, and economically comparable groups of students in other public schools.¹
- The Board's assessment of:
 - The successes, challenges, and areas for improvement in meeting the purposes of the public charter school law,
 - The sufficiency of funding for public charter schools, and
 - The efficacy of the formula for authorizer funding.
- Reporting of the number of noncertified instructional staff employed by public charter schools.
- Any suggested changes in state law or policy necessary to strengthen the state's public charter schools.

In addition, this year, with support from the Gates Foundation, SBE has contracted with Strobel Consulting to conduct a qualitative analysis to better understand the student, parent, and educator experience in public charter schools in Washington. A report on this research is expected in December 2025.

Background

The Washington State's Charter School Act (RCW 28A.710) took effect on April 3, 2016, for the primary purpose of allowing flexibility to innovate in areas such as scheduling, personnel, funding, and educational programs to improve student outcomes and academic achievement of historically underserved student populations.² A public charter school is defined in RCW 28A.710.010 as "a public school that is established in accordance with this chapter, governed by a charter school board, and operated according to the terms of a charter contract executed under this chapter." A charter school in Washington is a public school that is:

¹ In statute, the report is due March 1 of each year for the previous school year. However, the data needed to perform the student comparison is released by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction at about the same time. In 2025, the SBE decided to publish the report in October 2025 so that there was time to incorporate this data analysis.

² RCW 28A.710.010 uses the deficit-based term "at-risk student" instead of the term "historically underserved student," which more accurately reflects the systemic challenges these students face. The statute defines an "at risk student" as a student who has an academic or economic disadvantage that requires assistance or special services to succeed in educational programs. The term includes, but is not limited to, students who do not meet minimum standards of academic proficiency, students who are at risk of dropping out of high school, students in chronically low-performing schools, students with higher than average disciplinary sanctions, students with lower participation rates in advanced or gifted programs, students who are limited in English proficiency,

- Open to all children free of charge and by choice, and
- Operated separately from the common school system as an alternative to traditional common schools. (RCW 28A.710.020)

The State Board of Education has multiple responsibilities under the charter school law for administration, approval and oversight of authorizers, and reporting.

The Washington State Charter School Commission (CSC) and Spokane Public Schools (SPS) are the only charter school authorizers in the state. Authorizers are responsible for the approval and oversight of public charter schools. The Commission may authorize charter schools anywhere in Washington while approved district authorizers may authorize charter schools within the school district's boundaries. The two authorizers oversaw 18 public charter schools operating in Washington during the 2023-24 school year with a total enrollment of 4,965 students (see Appendix 1). One of the 18 schools, Pullman Community Montessori, closed at the end of the school year in June 2024. This left 17 schools operating in 2024-25 with a total fall enrollment of 4,866 students as shown in Appendix 1.³

RCW 28A.710.150 limits the total number of charter schools that may be authorized to 40 schools over the first five years after the enactment of the Charter School Act. The window to authorize new charter schools closed in April 2021. This means that new charter schools cannot be approved without a change to the law.

Charter School Student Performance Comparison

In each of the previous annual reports, SBE found that, as a group, students at Washington's public charter schools perform as well as or better than students at other public schools on traditional educational outcome measures. Most of the previous reports also found that charter school students in specific demographic groups outperformed their other public school (OPS) peers in various measures depending on the year. These findings are consistent with other charter school research conducted by nationally recognized organizations and researchers.⁴

students who are members of economically disadvantaged families, and students who are identified as having special educational needs.

³ At the end of the 2024-25 school year Summit Olympus closed, leaving 16 operating public charter schools in the 2025-26 school year.

⁴ Examples include Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes, which wrote a 2020 report on charter school performance in Washington State (https://credo.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/2020_report_wa_08232020.pdf) and a more recent national report in 2023 (<https://ncss3.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Credo-NCSS3-Report.pdf>). Another resource is a 2019 report from The Future of Children at Princeton University and the Brookings Institution (https://futureofchildren.princeton.edu/sites/g/files/toruqf2411/files/resource-links/charter_schools_compiled.pdf).

For the 2023-24 analysis, the SBE contracted with the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) to compare public charter school student performance with the performance of academically, ethnically, and economically comparable OPS students. WSAC found that, as a group, 4th – 8th grade charter school students slightly outperformed their comparable peers in math and English Language Arts (ELA) assessments. However, individual grade performance varied, as did performance by different demographic groups.⁵ WSAC submitted a more detailed technical report that is available at sbe.wa.gov/our-work/charter-public-schools. The report's methodology and findings are summarized in this section.

Methodology

WSAC used a one-to-one matching approach called Mahalanobis matching (otherwise referred to as a covariate match) to build a comparison group of OPS students that are observably similar across individual characteristics to charter school students.⁶ The matched characteristics were race, gender, student's primary language, Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL) eligibility status, as well as previous year standardized test scores where possible. WSAC also matched grade levels, as standardized tests have different scores by grade. After the two student groups were matched, the analysis compared standardized test score performance to estimate charter school effectiveness.⁷ Table 1 shows the standardized tests that were used in the analysis, including the grades the tests are administered and scoring information.

⁵ These are similar findings to those in SBE's 2024 Charter School Report. See https://sbe.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-08/2024%20SBE%20Report%20on%20Charter%20Schools%202022-23%20School%20Year-Final_041124.pdf.

⁶ The best method for comparing the two student groups would have been a randomized control trial where students are randomly assigned to a public charter school or an OPS and then compared. Because this was not possible, WSAC chose the matching methodology.

⁷ Because unobservable differences such as motivation, external resources, and parental support cannot be matched, there is a possibility of upward bias in WSAC's estimated findings. As such, the report results should be treated as the upper bound of potential public charter school effects on test performance.

Table 1: Standardized Tests Used to Estimate Charter School Effectiveness

Standardized Tests	Grades Taken	Scoring Scale	Proficiency Cut Score
Math and ELA Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA)	3 rd – 8 th grades; 10 th grade	Approximately 2000-3000	ELA: 2432-2577 depending on grade Math: 2436-2614 depending on grade
Washington Comprehensive Assessment of Science (WCAS)	5 th , 8 th , and 11 th grades*	Approximately 345-1190	700

*Analysis does not include 11th grade score comparisons

Source: <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/testing/state-testing/state-testing-scores-and-reports/scale-scores-state-assessments>. The minimum scores listed under Level 3 for each test are the proficiency cut (threshold) scores needed to meet grade level expectations.

WSAC's background research found that using prior year test scores in the matching process provides a more reliable estimate of charter school effects (rather than only matching demographic characteristics). The math SBA and ELA SBA tests are the only tests where a student may have prior year test scores because the tests are taken over several consecutive years. Students first take the tests in third grade, skip ninth grade, and last take the tests in 10th grade. This report focuses on WSAC's findings for 4th through 8th grader performance on Math and ELA SBA tests since they are the only grades that have prior year test scores.⁸ For both subject tests, WSAC evaluated the estimated effect of charter school attendance (compared to OPS attendance) on two measures:

1. Test scores and
2. The proportion of students who meet the proficiency cut score for their grade.

WSAC analyzed the 4th through 8th graders' test performance as a group, by individual grades, and by specific demographic characteristics. For the test score comparison, WSAC standardized all 2023-24 school year test scores because score calculations and minimum cutoff scores are different across grades. Standardizing the test scores allows WSAC to report a value (standard deviation) that represents the effect of charter school attendance on test performance across all grades.⁹ WSAC then used Abadie & Imbens robust standard errors to estimate if the value was statistically significant. A statistically significant finding means that charter school attendance is a highly likely reason for the reported outcome.

⁸ Comparisons of 3rd and 10th grade SBA scores and 5th and 8th grade WCAS scores are available at sbe.wa.gov/our-work/charter-public-schools. The analysis of the additional grades and tests showed that charter school students performed the same or better compared to OPS students. However, because of the lack of prior year test scores, there is a lower confidence in the findings.

⁹ Standardizing the test scores means finding the average score on a specific subject within a specific grade and making it equal to 0 with a standard deviation of 1.

Data and Study Sample

WSAC used student-level data from the Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS) for the comparison. CEDARS has student enrollment, test performance, and program participation data reported by each school district to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI).

The 4th – 8th grade study sample consists of students from 9 of the 18 public charter schools that operated in the 2023-24 school year and their matched OPS counterparts (Table 2).¹⁰ OPS students were drawn from any OPS, so long as they matched the grade level, previous year test scores, and other observed demographics of their charter counterpart. Students who were missing demographic information, had no days of attendance, had a missing score in the subject and/or grade being matched, or who were missing their previous year's score are not included in the data.

Table 2: Public Charter Schools Included in 2023-24 Student Comparison Analysis

School Name	Grades Served in 2023-24
Catalyst Public Schools	K-8
Impact: Puget Sound Elementary	K-5
Impact: Salish Sea Elementary	K-4
Pinnacles Prep	6-9
Pullman Community Montessori	K-7
Rainier Prep	5-8
Rainier Valley Leadership Academy	6-12
Spokane International Academy	K-11
Summit Atlas	6-12

Due to test data availability, the sample used to compare SBA math score outcomes is slightly smaller than the sample used to compare ELA score outcomes, although most of the same charter school students are found in both samples.¹¹ The math sample compares 1,394 public charter school 4th through 8th graders and 1,394 matched OPS students. The ELA sample compares 1,402 public charter school 4th through 8th graders to 1,402 OPS peers.

¹⁰ WSAC's full analysis examined only 14 of the 18 operating charter schools. Impact: Black River and Rooted School were not included since they did not enroll grades that were required to take math, ELA, or science assessments. In addition, Lumen High School was not included because no students had recorded test scores in CEDARS and Innovation High School was not included because it reported no days of attendance to CEDARS for any student. However, WSAC created tables showing the difference in outcomes if Innovation High School's students were matched to OPS students. WSAC found no substantive difference in the estimated effect of charter school attendance between the sample with 14 schools and the sample with Innovation High School students. The findings that include Innovation High School's data are available at sbe.wa.gov/our-work/charter-public-schools. Finally, out of the 14 schools in the full sample, only nine had some combination of 4th – 8th grades.

¹¹ Their OPS counterparts are not necessarily the same students due to the larger pool to draw from.

Findings

As shown in Table 3 and Table 4, WSAC found that, as a group, 4th through 8th grade public charter school students earned scores that were .115 standard deviations higher than OPS students on the math SBA test and .081 standard deviations higher on the ELA SBA test. Both findings are statistically significant, meaning that charter school attendance is the likely reason for the higher scores. The tables also show that these findings may be driven primarily by 5th grader performance, whose scores were more than 0.2 standard deviations higher on both tests. The average scores for each group are also included in the tables to show that, although there were some statistically significant differences, the actual scale scores were fairly close for most grades. Furthermore, the proficiency cut score for each test and grade combination is included to show that, starting in 5th grade for math, and 6th grade for ELA, both student groups' median scores were lower than the SBA cut scores.

Table 3: Estimated Effect of Charter School Attendance on Math SBA Scores by Grade, 2023-24 School Year

Grade	Estimated Effect (Standard Deviation from 0)	Proficiency Cut Score	Charter School Average Score	OPS Average Score
Grade 4	0.099*	2485	2489	2478
Grade 5	0.293*	2528	2526	2494
Grade 6	0.001	2552	2516	2516
Grade 7	0.117*	2567	2532	2517
Grade 8	0.116*	2586	2555	2539
All Grades	0.115*	N/A	N/A	N/A

*Statistically significant at 1% or 5%.

Source: SBE staff analysis of WSAC's technical report and <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/testing/state-testing/state-testing-scores-and-reports/scale-scores-state-assessments>.

Table 4: Estimated Effect of Charter School Attendance on ELA SBA Scores by Grade, 2023-24 School Year

Grade	Estimated Effect (Standard Deviation from 0)	Proficiency Cut Score	Charter School Average Score	OPS Average Score
Grade 4	0.014	2473	2473	2471
Grade 5	0.229*	2502	2524	2499
Grade 6	0.046	2531	2526	2522
Grade 7	-0.014	2552	2542	2543
Grade 8	0.163*	2567	2564	2545
All Grades	0.081*	N/A	N/A	N/A

*Statistically significant at 1% or 5%.

Source: SBE staff analysis of WSAC's technical report and <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/testing/state-testing/state-testing-scores-and-reports/scale-scores-state-assessments>.

WSAC also found that charter school attendance had a statistically significant effect on meeting proficiency cut scores for both tests. Table 5 and Table 6 show that the proportion of 4th through 8th grade charter school students who met the math proficiency cut score was 6.1 percentage points higher than their OPS peers. Further, the proportion of charter students who met the ELA proficiency cut score was 5.2 percentage points higher than their OPS peers. Again, 5th grade outcomes appear to be a major reason for this finding, with fifth graders having double digit percentage point increases in both subject tests. The tables also show the proportion of charter school and OPS students who met the tests' proficiency cut scores.

Table 5: Estimated Effect of Charter School Attendance on Meeting Math SBA Proficiency Cut Scores by Grade, 2023-24 School Year

Grade	Estimated Effect on Meeting Cut Score (Percentage Point Difference)	Proportion of Charter School Students Who Met Cut Score	Proportion of OPS Students Who Met Cut Score
Grade 4	3.3	54.3%	51.0%
Grade 5	15*	56.0%	41.0%
Grade 6	1.2	40.0%	38.8%
Grade 7	6.8*	41.5%	34.8%
Grade 8	6.5*	43.9%	37.4%
All Grades	6.1*	46.2%	40.1%

*Statistically significant at 1% or 5%.

Source: SBE staff analysis of WSAC's technical report and OSPI's Report Card. The estimated effect for each grade may not equal the difference between the two student groups due to rounding.

Table 6: Estimated Effect of Charter School Attendance on Meeting ELA SBA Proficiency

Cut Scores by Grade, 2023-24 School Year

Grade	Estimated Effect on Meeting Cut Score (Percentage Point Difference)	Proportion of Charter School Students Who Met Cut Score	Proportion of OPS Students Who Met Cut Score
Grade 4	-0.4	49.4%	49.8%
Grade 5	10.9*	63.3%	52.4%
Grade 6	7.2*	53.9%	46.7%
Grade 7	-0.3	47.9%	48.2%
Grade 8	8.3*	53.4%	45.1%
All Grades	5.2*	53.1%	47.9%

**Statistically significant at 1%*

Source: SBE staff analysis of WSAC's technical report and OSPI's Report Card. The estimated effect for each grade may not equal the difference between the two student groups due to rounding.

WSAC also analyzed the test outcomes of specific student populations and found that almost all charter school student groups performed the same or better than their OPS peers. These results are found on the SBE website.

Successes, challenges, and areas for improvement

Since the Charter School Act became law, 24 charter schools have been authorized to operate. Of those:

- Eighteen schools operated in the 2023-24 school year with a total enrollment of 4,965 students. Two of the schools were SPS-authorized and 16 schools were CSC-authorized.
- Six schools voluntarily closed, including Summit Olympus, which closed at the end of the 2024-25 school year. At least one of the closed schools has re-opened as a private school.
- One school, Pullman Community Montessori, had its charter revoked and subsequently closed at the end of the 2023-24 school year.
- One school ended its charter and returned to private school status.

Charter School Commission Key Developments

In 2024 the Charter School Commission saw a leadership change with the appointment of Marcus Harden as the new Executive Director. In addition, the Commission adopted a new Strategic Plan and Equity in Education Policy in October 2024. It centered on three key goals:

1. Increase the visibility of the Commission's role within Washington's charter public school system.
2. Strengthen and align statewide systems to support equitable educational outcomes.
3. Sustain a high-quality charter sector by identifying and addressing school performance trends, opportunities, and vulnerabilities

Overall, in the 2023-24 school year, the Commission's charter public school portfolio served approximately 4,487 students, the majority of whom meet the at-risk definition under the Charter Schools Act. The Charter School Commission renewed three schools (Impact | Salish Sea Elementary; Impact | Puget Sound Elementary; Catalyst Public Schools) during the 2023-24 school year. Additionally, the Commission approved the request for expansion of grades for Catalyst Public School from K-8 to K-12. Finally, as previously noted, the Commission revoked Pullman Community Montessori's charter due to the school's capacity to maintain financial viability among other violations. The school closed in June 2024 after serving 118 K-7 students in the 2023-24 school year. Looking ahead, the Commission will oversee eight school renewals in 2025-26, ensuring that all renewal decisions uphold the principles of high-quality education, equity, and transparency.

The Commission noted a number of data limitations in its report to the Board. Updated financial and performance data for the 2023-24 school year is found on the Commission's Oversight and Accountability page at charterschool.wa.gov/oversight-accountability.

Spokane Public Schools Key Developments

During the 2023-24 school year, two district-authorized charter schools were in operation: Lumen High School and Pride School.

Lumen High School

Lumen High School opened in the fall of 2020-21 and has created strong community partnerships in support of their mission to "offer educational pathways for teen parents leading to high school graduation, positive parenting, and future life success." Lumen continues to support social and emotional learning strategies to keep students engaged and attending school.

With Lumen up for renewal during the 2024-25 school year, SPS began discussions with Lumen in the spring of 2023 to evaluate how to better measure academic performance framework effectiveness considering the very high needs student population they are serving and the lack of data in Lumen's academic framework. To provide additional measures, the school has fully implemented NWEA Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment and Lumen's new Academic Performance Framework has been finalized.

Pride Schools (name changed to Innovation Spokane Schools in 2024-25)

2023-24 was the final year in which Pride Schools (also known as Pride Prep) were under a conditional renewal. As a result, SPS and Pride worked extensively on the renewal of the new contract term. Additionally, Pride's Academic Performance Framework was adjusted with NWEA MAP Growth data incorporated into the framework. After completing the renewal process, a five-year nonconditional renewal was issued on July 1, 2024, with an expiry of June 30, 2029.

Financially, Pride Schools have missed some of their sustainability metrics on the Financial Performance Framework as they spend down their fund balance. The district's sizeable fund balance will sustain the school in the near term but reducing expenditures in line with their continued loss of revenue from lower enrollments, and loss of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding in 2024-25 need to be addressed to ensure that the school is financially viable.

In the month prior to the issuance of the new contract, Pride made the decision to close its middle school. With the loss of grades 6-8, 2024-25 enrollment levels are currently half of the 2023-24 full-time equivalent (FTE) student counts. As a result of this and concerns about the charter schools' marketing efforts, a Notice of Perceived Problem was issued by SPS, asking for a Financial Strategy Plan and Marketing and Enrollment Strategy Plan.

Pride Schools changed its name to Innovation Spokane Schools (or Innovation High School) at the beginning of the 2024-25 school year.

Sufficiency of charter school funding

In prior reports the Board noted that public charter schools face four unique funding challenges related to startup costs, capital expenditures, authorizer oversight fee, and timing of apportionment payments. While the fund source differs, the state apportionment for public charter schools is similar to other public schools. However, the public charter schools do not receive funding through local school district enrichment levies. While a permanent solution has not been established to mitigate this funding challenge, the legislature has provided funding to address this in prior budgets. For example, in 2024 the legislature appropriated \$7.8M in the supplemental budget from the Washington Opportunity Pathways Account to charter schools to provide an additional \$1,500 per student for enrichment during the 2023-25 biennium (ESSB 5950 – 2024). This policy is continued for the 2025-27 biennial budget (ESSB 5187 - 2025).

The prior reports also note that public charter schools often seek out and receive grants from outside organizations to help address some of these challenges. So, while in many cases per student expenditures exceed the state average for all schools, both the expenditures and revenues differ significantly for public charter schools and common schools. Appendix 2 shows charter school expenditures.

The unique funding challenges for public charter schools include:

Startup funding: because funding is provided to charter schools based on enrollment, there are substantial front-end costs that must be addressed through other sources (e.g., private philanthropy, local fundraising, federal grants, or some combination of these sources). This makes it challenging for schools to start-up, particularly as schools move from the planning phase to implementation, finding and outfitting a space, and hiring staff.

Capital funding: charter schools do not have access to local bonds or state capital funds typically used to finance the purchase of land and school construction. As a result, charter schools generally acquire leased space paid for through their operating budget. Both CSC and SPS note that inability to access capital funding creates a substantial challenge for public charter schools.

Authorizer oversight fee: Charter schools receive an allocation through OSPI based on average, full-time student enrollment and the prototypical school funding model. A portion of the per pupil funding allotment (currently three percent for both CSC and SPS) is also provided to the authorizer for specified oversight purposes outlined in RCW 28A.710.100. SPS has advocated for greater flexibility in how those funds could be used so they could provide additional support to the public charter schools they authorize.

Timing of apportionment payments: Another concern raised by SPS in their annual report relates to disbursement policies rather than sufficiency. They note that apportionment is paid out unevenly across the 12 months. School districts receive a lower amount from the state in November and May because they receive tax levy dollars in those months. Public charter schools receive appropriations in this same uneven fashion, but they do not receive levy funds. This creates a cash flow challenge for public charter schools.

Authorizer funding formula efficacy

In accordance with RCW 28A.710.110, the SBE establishes a statewide formula for an authorizer oversight fee paid by OSPI to the authorizer, not to exceed four percent of each charter school's annual funding (WAC 180-19-060). SBE is required to review the authorizer fee annually in consultation with the authorizers. The authorizer fee is currently three percent for both charter school authorizers. Neither authorizer has indicated a need for a change to the authorizer fee.

State law (RCW 28A.710.110 (4)) stipulates that an authorizer must use its oversight fee exclusively for fulfilling its charter school authorizing duties (under RCW 28A.710.100). As noted above, SPS continues to advocate for a statutory change that would allow more flexibility in the allowable uses of the authorizer fee to enable the authorizer to assist the charter schools in areas of mutual benefit to both the authorizer and the school if excess funds are available.

Noncertificated instructional staff

Charter schools are required to employ certificated instructional staff as required in RCW 28A.410.025. However, RCW 28A.710.040 states that charter schools "may hire noncertificated instructional staff of unusual competence and in exceptional cases as specified in RCW 28A.150.203(7)." Charter schools must also report to the Board and OSPI the number of noncertified staff hired in the current and preceding school year for inclusion on the annual charter school report.

In its annual report the CSC reported that seven of its 16 authorized schools operating in 2023-24 employed at least one noncertificated teacher, with the most (four instructors) employed at Pullman Community Montessori. In all cases a certified teacher supervised the noncertificated staff. Across all CSC-authorized schools 11 out of 362 instructional staff (3.0%) were reported as noncertificated. SPS reported that no noncertificated instructional staff were employed by the schools it authorizes. Additional details are provided in Appendix 2.

Suggested changes to strengthen charter schools

Each authorizer, along with the SBE, has a set of recommendations to strengthen charter schools.

Charter School Commission Recommendations

Extending Charter School Authorizing Window

Amend the Charter School Act (RCW 28A.710) to allow more time for charter schools to be established in Washington.

- Families are looking for more public school options that serve the unique educational needs of their children.
- There is increased local interest by communities to establish public charter schools to serve the students who are often the furthest from educational justice.

Fiscal Restructuring for Equity and Sustainability

Allow public charter schools access to public funding streams that traditional schools currently receive, such as levy funds or the state's School Construction Assistance Program (SCAP). This leads to inequities that hurt public charter school students.

Funding Necessary to Implement Requirements of Engrossed Substitute House Bill (ESHB) 1744

Additional funding is necessary to implement the Commission's new complaint process and to provide the level of technical assistance directed by the Legislature.

Access to Basic Education Waivers

Create a path to add public charter schools to the list of entities that may receive basic education waivers from the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education.

Administrative Services Flexibility

Explore solutions for meeting the Commission's administrative needs, to streamline operations and increase efficiency. The Charter School Act (RCW 28A.710) establishes the Charter School Commission as an independent state agency with administrative services provided by OSPI. Since the passage of the Charter School Act, additional solutions are available to independent state agencies to receive administrative support and services.

Spokane Public Schools Recommendations

Authorizer Fee Flexibility

SPS continues to advocate for previously highlighted flexibility in the allowable use of the authorizer fee to enable the authorizer to assist the charter schools in areas of mutual benefit to both the authorizer and the school.

Technical Assistance Funding

SPS provides technical assistance to charter schools in areas requested and reports assistance via the SBE Annual Reports but does not receive additional funds to cover this cost. With the adoption of 2023's Engrossed Substitute House Bill (ESHB) 1744, the duties of charter authorizers were expanded to include technical assistance (28A.710.183) and to "Hold charter school boards accountable for: Ensuring that students of public charter schools have opportunities for academic success; and exercising effective educational, operational, and financial oversight of charter public schools." (28A.710.070, 28A.710.190)

Apportionment Timing

The timing of school district apportionment has lower payments in the months that levy dollars are received by traditional districts. Given charter schools do not receive levy dollars this creates cash flow challenges in those months. SPS recommends an evaluation of the payment schedule and making an adjustment to the payment schedule.

School Facility Funding

Both charter schools that SPS authorizes had previously reported their facilities lease as an operating lease. With the introduction of the Governmental Accounting Standards Board Statement No. 87, each charter school was required to capitalize their operating lease. This has greatly increased the long-term debt reported by each charter school. SPS recommends additional funding for school facility construction or acquisition, as this would greatly assist with charter school fiscal stability.

Academic Performance Framework

Small charter schools often have no Washington School Improvement Framework (WSIF) scores due to an insufficient number of students, leading to a sizable portion of the current Academic Performance Framework that is not applicable. The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), “recommends that authorizers prioritize disaggregated student growth and mission-specific goals—especially those that focus on student accelerated growth and wellness—in their AF (academic framework) measures of school quality.” The 2023 NACSA Guide to Performance Frameworks includes new approaches that could expand the Academic Performance Framework indicators and measures so they are applicable to all schools, including small charter schools.

Proposed Board Recommendation

Amend RCW 28A.710.250 to change this report’s due date from every March 1 to December 1 of every odd-numbered year. In addition, change the annual authorizer report due date from January 21 to June 30 in WAC 180-19-210. SBE’s report would focus on the two school years prior to the immediately preceding year. For example, the December 2027 report would include findings and updates from the 2024-25 and 2025-26 school years. The SBE proposes this timeline for two reasons:

- The data needed for this report are released at the same time as the report’s current deadline of March 1. Waiting until December 1 will give the SBE time to compare the performance of charter school students to other public school students and give time for the Board to review and approve the report. Changing the authorizer report deadline will give authorizers time to report on prior year academic performance.
- Changing the report from annual to biennial acknowledges that the current report has similar findings year after year and allows more time for deeper analysis.

Conclusion

The 2025 Public Charter Schools Annual Report highlights the ongoing efforts and developments within Washington's charter school system. Despite facing unique funding

challenges and operational hurdles, charter schools continue to provide educational opportunities for students in Washington.

The report identifies recommendations for legislative changes from the Charter Schools Commission and Spokane Public Schools intended to enhance the sustainability and equity of charter schools, ensuring they can continue to serve students effectively.

As noted earlier, another report will be issued in December 2025. With support from the Gates Foundation, a qualitative analysis is underway to better understand the experiences of students, parents, and educators in public charter schools. This analysis will provide valuable insights into the unique challenges and successes faced by charter school communities.

Appendix 1: 2023-24 and 2024-25 Enrollment, Operating Public Charter Schools

School	Opened	Authorizer	2023-24 Grades Served	2023-24 Enrollment	2024-25 Grades Served	2024-25 Enrollment
Catalyst Public Schools	2020-21	CSC	K-8	485	K-9	507
Impact Black River ES	2023-24	CSC	K-2	135	K-3	214
Impact Commencement Bay ES	2021-22	CSC	K-3	261	K-4	235
Impact Puget Sound ES	2018-19	CSC	K-5	485	K-5	507
Impact Salish Sea ES	2020-21	CSC	K-4	316	K-5	396
Lumen High School	2020-21	SPS	9-12	32	9-12	33
Pinnacles Prep	2021-22	CSC	6-9	221	6-10	235
PRIDE Prep (2023-24) / Innovation HS (2024-25)	2015-16	SPS	6-12	446	9-12	235
Pullman Community Montessori (closed June 2024)	2021-22	CSC	K-7	118	n/a	n/a
Rainier Prep	2015-16	CSC	5-8	333	5-8	360
Rainier Valley Leadership Academy	2017-18	CSC	6-12	165	K, 6-12	120
Rooted School Vancouver	2023-24	CSC	9	24	9-10	59
Spokane International Academy	2015-16	CSC	K-11	756	K-12	830
Summit Atlas	2017-18	CSC	6-12	550	6-12	568
Summit Olympus (closed June 2025)	2015-16	CSC	9-12	149	9-12	112
Summit Sierra	2015-16	CSC	9-12	222	9-12	215
Whatcom Intergenerational HS	2021-22	CSC	9-12	69	9-12	108
Why Not You Academy	2021-22	CSC	9-11	198	9-12	132
<i>Total Enrollment</i>				4,965		4,866

Source: OSPI Report Card, accessed September 30, 2025.

Appendix 2: 2023-24 Expenditure and Instructional Staff

School	Authorizer	Per Student Expenditure*	Class Size*	Teacher Count*	Teacher Experience (years)*	Noncertificated Instructional Staff**
<i>Statewide Average (all public schools)</i>	-	\$18,649	19.4	-	13.2	-
Catalyst Public Schools	CSC	\$16,633	16.2	37	1.9	2 – SPED, K (5.4%)
Impact Black River ES	CSC	\$25,788	12.5	11	1.7	0
Impact Commencement Bay	CSC	\$21,390	29.2	31	.5	1 – SPED (3.2%)
Impact Puget Sound Elementary	CSC	\$19,910	30.5	40	2.3	1 – SPED (2.5%)
Impact Salish Sea ES	CSC	\$18,603	30.9	29	2.3	1 (3.4%)
Lumen High School	SPS	\$83,049	11.2	6	7.4	0
Pinnacles Prep	CSC	\$19,888	28.5	16	5.1	1 – Humanities (6.3%)
PRIDE Prep (23-24) / Innovation HS (24-25)	SPS	\$18,329	16.3	31	5.8	0
Pullman Community Montessori (closed June 2024)	CSC	\$25,293	22.7	9	3.8	4 (44.4%)
Rainier Prep	CSC	\$21,731	21.2	28	6.1	0
Rainier Valley Leadership Academy	CSC	\$41,513	18.4	15	9.5	0
Rooted School Vancouver	CSC	\$70,764	13.8	5	4.4	0
Spokane International Academy	CSC	\$17,730	18	55	8.5	0
Summit Atlas	CSC	\$18,773	29	29	2.8	0
Summit Olympus (closed June 2025)	CSC	\$22,729	22.1	11	4.1	0
Summit Sierra	CSC	\$20,964	25.5	15	3	0
Whatcom Intergenerational HS	CSC	\$34,079	14.9	8	6.8	1 – Algebra / CS (12.5%)
Why Not You Academy	CSC	\$24,504	21.5	17	0	0
<i>Totals</i>	-	-	-	393	-	11 (2.8%)

*Source: OSPI Report Card 2023-24 School Year, accessed September 30, 2025.

**Source: Washington State Charter School Commission 2024 Charter Authorizer Annual Report; Spokane Public Schools Annual Report did not include information regarding non-certified teachers. In an email follow-up SPS confirmed that none were reported.