



MCCSA

Michigan Council of Charter School Authorizers

2020-2021 Annual Report

**Innovation.
Purpose.
Success.**



MCCSA
Michigan Council of Charter School Authorizers

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From the Chair

Dear Friends,

For students and parents, education in a pandemic remained a significant challenge throughout the 2020-21 school year. And yet, in the face of adversity, Michigan's public charter schools persevered and continued delivering the quality educational results students need.

The unique role of the authorizer – the public bodies entrusted with building, overseeing, and supporting public charter schools – proved vital once again. With the Council's expertise and leadership, authorizers helped their schools navigate another unprecedented year and provide learning opportunities to thousands of children across Michigan – regardless of means, race, zip code, or needs.

Michigan authorizers and their public charter schools stepped up to support students in new ways, with open doors and innovative platforms.

In acknowledgement of their unique roles and expertise, authorizers were tasked by Governor Gretchen Whitmer and the Michigan Legislature to oversee continuity of learning plans for their schools. Authorizers led on these plans, and during this school year student outcomes kept growing.

Because of this work, parents chose to entrust their children's learning to public charter schools more than ever before. A study by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools found Michigan public charter school enrollment increased by 1.45 percent from 2019-20 to 2020-21 – an additional 2,200 students, and more than double the growth of previous years.

This past year presented us with opportunities to look at education differently, and reminded us of the commitment families, teachers, and school leaders share for students and for the charter school movement.

In this report, we capture the numbers, stories, and images of the challenging and rewarding work we do in fulfilling our mission to transform public education. I encourage you to read it and to join me in considering how we can all reach even higher and do even more.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Corey Northrop". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Corey" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Northrop".

Corey Northrop

Chair, Michigan Council of Charter School Authorizers

Executive Director, The Governor John Engler Center for Charter Schools,
Central Michigan University



About The Council

The Michigan Council of Charter School Authorizers (“The Council”) is a collaborative, non-profit, non-partisan professional organization dedicated to providing quality public charter school oversight.

For over a decade, The Council has coalesced and supported the public charter school authorizers, and represented the important work they do to advance educational excellence, innovation, choice, and accountability for Michigan K-12 students.

The Council’s ten members comprise its board of directors, who meet monthly to share best practices, updates, and resources, embracing a common vision based on these guiding principles:

- Choice is a necessary element in today’s system of public education.
- Quality must remain the most central focus for authorizers, school operators, and policymakers alike.
- Autonomy and innovation are essential to ensure the promise of Michigan’s public charter school movement and contribute to the success of K-12 education in general.
- Accountability is crucial. Quantifiable, data-driven results must be achieved and supported at all levels of K-12 public education.
- Public charter schools that fail to achieve adequate results pursuant to the terms of their contracts should face appropriate consequences, up to and including closure.
- Authorizers have a responsibility to provide input, advocacy, and support for public discourse on K-12 education issues.
- Policymakers and authorizers alike must ensure appropriate levels of accountability and oversight for all Michigan schools.

“Choice is a necessary element in today’s system of public education.”

Council Board Officers for 2020-2021

Chair **Corey Northrop**, Central Michigan University

Vice Chair **Chris Oshelski**, Lake Superior State University

Secretary **Dave Lewis**, Saginaw Valley State University

Treasurer **Jendayi Gardner**, Detroit Public Schools Community District





How The Council Leads

Educating in a Pandemic

Concerned about the pandemic's adverse impact on student achievement, The Council, in the fall of 2020, led statewide discussions about meaningful measures to combat student learning loss. Council representatives testified before state legislative committees, presenting transparent and reliable data about student impacts. Their recommendations focused on tools like benchmark assessments, established educational goals, and data analysis protocols – all practices public charter schools have employed for decades.

The governor and legislature agreed these educational practices, a prerequisite of charter contracts for nearly thirty years, made sense for all public schools. In acknowledgement

of their unique roles and expertise, Michigan authorizers were tasked to oversee their schools' Continuity of Learning Plans and COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plans, which ensured alignment with return-to-school roadmaps and precipitated state funding. Intermediate School Districts were given the same responsibilities for traditional public schools in their jurisdictions.

Meanwhile, Council authorizers led discussions and collaborations in support of schools, sharing learning loss reports and other valuable information to help schools understand and keep abreast of what was happening to students in their educational care.

Because of this critical work, Michigan's public charter schools were well-positioned to meet student needs, a fact parents recognized more than ever before. From 2019-20 to 2020-21, Michigan public charter school enrollment increased by 1.45 percent, according to a study by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. That's an additional 2,200 students, and more than double the enrollment growth of previous years.

Accreditation and Assurance

In 2014, The Council established the nation's first statewide public charter school authorizing accreditation and assurance process, to demonstrate the commitment to quality that Michigan authorizers strive to achieve.

Partnering with nationally-recognized Cognia (formerly AdvancED), The Council set about moving beyond the basic practice known as “continuous improvement” to create a more rigorous definition of what it means to be an effective authorizer.

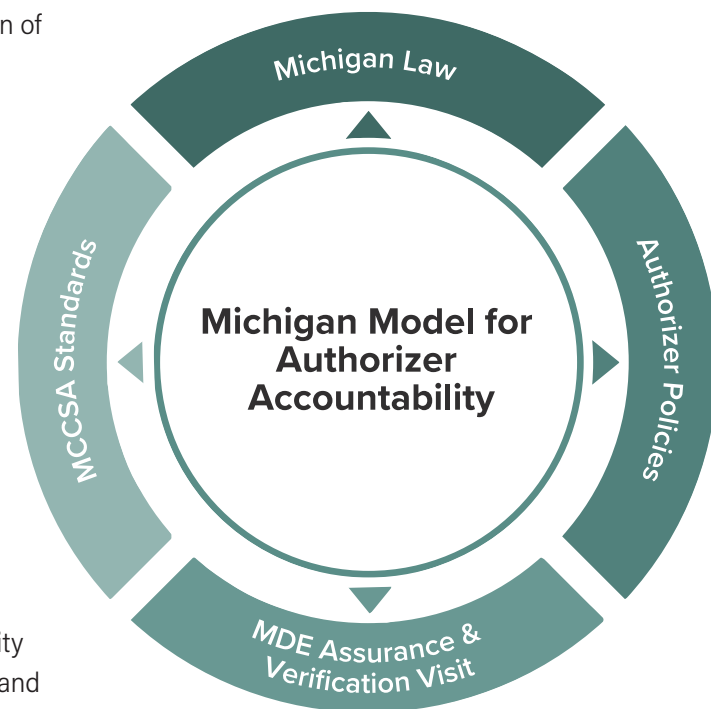
Today, **Michigan leads the nation with its authorizer accountability system** that not only includes the Cognia standards, but also The Council's thirteen assurances, demonstrated compliance, and Michigan Department of Education (MDE) assurance and verification visits.

The assurances are the first step; these standards adjust with changes in law, and must be met in order to begin accreditation. Accreditation functions typically, with documentation and review, to ensure an authorizer continually meets the standards. Every review includes recommendations for improvement and subsequent monitoring for implementation.

Central Michigan University, Detroit Public Schools Community District, Ferris State University, Grand Valley State University, and Saginaw Valley State University are fully accredited. Lake Superior State University and Oakland University have completed the assurance review and are qualified to begin the accreditation process.

Authorizer Roundtables

Since the fall of 2019, The Council, in partnership with the Michigan Department of Education, has hosted statewide roundtable discussions for all public charter school authorizers across Michigan.



These roundtables facilitate:

- Opportunities for dialogue and collaboration among all Michigan authorizers;
- Greater understanding of authorizers' needs by the organizations working to support them; and
- Technical assistance for all Michigan authorizing bodies, regardless of Council membership.

Funded by the federal Charter Schools Program (CSP) grant **aimed at promoting high-quality authorizing**, four virtual roundtables for existing and prospective authorizers were held during the 2020-21 school year, in September, March, April, and June, with as many as 24 attendees representing 16 authorizer offices.

The April and June sessions highlighted specific topics of Strict Discipline Academies and Cyber Charter Schools, respectively. At the September and March sessions, participants received information and updates on a broad variety of topics, including:

- Assessment and accountability during COVID-19
- Authorizer standards
- Authorizer resource and best practices sharing
- Authorizing challenges and opportunities
- Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) federal funding
- MDE policies, deadlines, and technical assistance
- Student learning supports

Special Education: School Supports and Interventions

The success of a public charter school depends on the quality of education services it provides to all children, with or without disabilities, as required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Each public charter school in Michigan provides free, appropriate, and challenging educational opportunities to children with IDEA-eligible disabilities who are enrolled in the school. **On average, about eleven percent of public charter school students have special education needs.**¹ Since 2018, The Council has published a guide called, "Special Education Services in Charter Schools: What Authorizers and School Leaders Should Know." This free resource serves as a reference manual for those involved in public charter school oversight.

"The success of a public charter school depends on the quality of education services it provides to all children."

Authorizing Best Practice Guides

The Council recently harnessed their more than 25 years of expertise in quality public charter school authorizing to create a set of best practice guides to help authorizers and aspiring authorizers perfect their craft. Using federal Charter Schools Program (CSP) grant monies, The Council created eleven Recognized Best Practice Guides covering topics ranging from Academic Oversight to Board Governance to Oversight & Evaluation and more. Complimentary resources include a video explaining the importance of a comprehensive oversight system to support and sustain high-quality authorizing practices.

Authorizer Funding & School Financial Support

State law allows authorizers to collect up to three percent of the state funding allotted to their public charter schools. Funds collected are used for oversight and support functions, to ensure that all legal, regulatory, and performance measures are met. The vast majority of authorizers, however, collect only a portion of the state aid to which they are entitled, leaving millions of dollars for their schools to use.

Authorizers also typically invest a significant portion of their own operational fees in their schools, via numerous supports and services.

In 2020-21, Council authorizers gave back over \$7.4 million.

Here's where the money went:

\$1,871,957	Authorizer fee discount
\$1,476,342	Student scholarships
\$1,275,250	School grants/awards
\$851,519	Testing support
\$560,290	Compliance and accountability support
\$506,187	Educator professional development/continuing education
\$430,045	Board development
\$113,900	Board policy services
\$46,665	Business manager professional development
\$300,137	Other
\$7,432,292	Total

Other areas of financial support included camps, college visits and resources, educator awards, data management, outreach, school closure, schoolbooks and supplies, and test analysis.



Council Practitioner Workgroups

To share information and best practices, four **Council workgroups meet several times a year on academics, finance, governance, and special education.** These workgroups host legal and regulatory experts, such as the state departments of Education and Treasury, to ensure authorizers are up-to-date on current laws and policies and to build strong working relationships across sectors and networks. The workgroups also provide a valuable peer network for problem-solving and capacity-building within authorizer teams.

Detroit Authorizer Meetings

Detroit authorizers convene regularly to coordinate with partners across the city's broad education spectrum. Formed in response to the concern that public charter school leaders are often busy in their schools and also geographically distanced, **these collaborative meetings provide a one-stop place where concerns or opportunities can be reliably communicated throughout the chartering community.** Detroit's nine authorizing bodies, representing approximately 75 school buildings, meet monthly with philanthropy and other key stakeholders, including the mayor's office, Detroit Public Schools Community District, and the Community Education Commission, to stay connected and aware of happenings that impact Detroit students and families. From school openings and closings, to relocations, reconfigurations, authorizer changes, and more, partners at the table share valuable information and perspective that promote healthy dialogue and ensure all voices are represented in authorizing decisions.

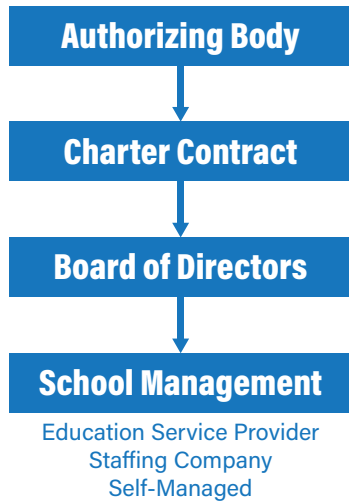
"These collaborative meetings provide a one-stop place where concerns or opportunities can be reliably communicated throughout the chartering community."

University Value-Add

University authorizers **leverage campus resources to benefit their public charter school communities** in a number of ways:

- Administrator professional development
- College credit opportunities
- College exposure
- College preparation/advising
- Educator degree awards
- Faculty-teacher partnerships
- Media partnerships
- Research
- School board professional development
- Student scholarships
- Student summer camps/outreach programs
- Teacher preparation/placement
- Teacher professional development





An Authorizer’s Work

Academic Performance

State law explicitly requires public charter schools to contract with their authorizers, and these legally binding agreements define and protect a school's autonomy and governing authority, while clearly specifying performance expectations and conditions for renewal.

Academic oversight is an authorizer’s paramount focus.

In 2018-19 (the most recent year for which data is available), Michigan public charter schools performed at the 49.6 percentile on the Michigan School Index System², despite far outpacing the statewide average for Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) student populations:

- Public charter school FRL: 75%
- Statewide FRL: 50%
- Non-charter FRL: 47%

Public charter schools in Detroit outperformed their counterparts on the state system:

- Detroit charter average: 40%ile
- Detroit average: 37%ile
- Detroit non-charter average: 34%ile

Also, seventy-one (71) public charter schools ranked in the top 25th percentile on the state system.

Michigan public charter schools average a graduation rate of 58% compared to the state non-charter average of 67%.³ In 2020-21, Byron Center Charter School, authorized by Grand Valley State University, had a 100% graduation rate.

Fiscal Performance

The expectation for public charter schools to be fiscally solvent is spelled out in their contracts and required by law. **Council authorizers have developed rigorous processes to review quarterly and audited financial statements in order to identify financial challenges and help schools make adjustments to avoid a deficit.** For public charter schools, a deficit likely will lead to a notice of intent to revoke the contract and a requirement that the school create a corrective action plan, which includes a deficit elimination plan required by law. The number of public charter schools in deficit has declined significantly over the years thanks to these proactive practices.

Reporting Compliance and Oversight

During the 2020-21 school year, Council **authorizers processed a total of 27,316 compliance items** related to school operations and support. Examples include transparency reporting, measures of academic progress, teacher certification, special education reviews, quarterly financial statements, audited financial statements, student counts, school schedules, board meeting schedules, budgets, and more.

Law/Policy Implementation

Authorizers ensure the schools in their portfolios properly implement new laws or policies enacted at the state and federal levels. In this regard, public charter schools are subjected to an extra layer of accountability, compared to their conventional school counterparts, due to the legally binding performance contracts that authorizers administer.

“Council authorizers have developed rigorous processes to review quarterly and audited financial statements in order to identify financial challenges and help schools make adjustments to avoid a deficit.”



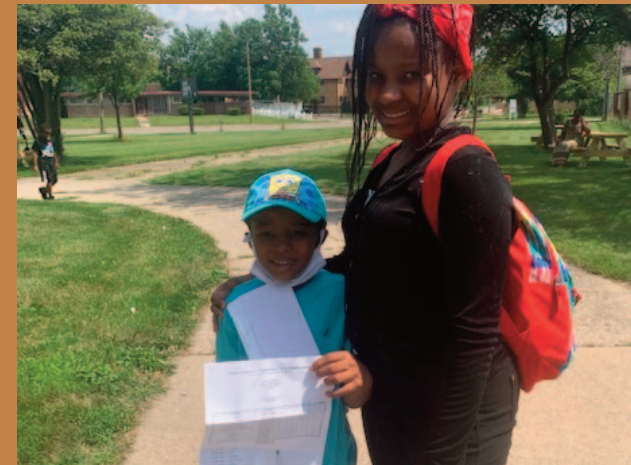
School Opening **Center Line Preparatory Academy**

Center Line Preparatory Academy, a charter public school in Macomb County authorized by Central Michigan University, opened its doors in 2020-21 offering Young Fives through tenth grade, and will expand over the next two years to serve grades K 12. The academy utilizes an established educational model that has produced some of the highest-performing schools in Michigan. With an emphasis on college preparation and moral focus programming, students are challenged to reach their full potential.



School Opening **Sigma Academy for Leadership and Early Middle College**

Authorized by Saginaw Valley State University, the Sigma Academy opened serving grades kindergarten through ten, and will add a grade every year to become a K 12 school. The academy has formed partnerships with Cleary University's Detroit campus and Wayne County Community College District, which allow students to earn college credits while they're still in high school. In addition to this early-middle college feature, the Sigma Academy offers a broad-based program that includes athletics, performing arts, robotics, STEM programs and more.





School Opening **PrepNet Virtual School**

PrepNet Virtual Academy (PVA), authorized by Grand Valley State University (GVSU), is a K-12 online school structured to give Michigan students the experience of a traditional classroom within a virtual space. As part of the National Heritage Academies portfolio of schools, PVA creates a thriving online community where students are encouraged to learn and grow while teachers challenge each child to achieve. These compassionate, dedicated teachers accomplish this work via a character-based approach that connects both head and heart. Instilling virtues such as respect, wisdom, courage, and perseverance, PVA gives families the choice they seek in a safe, welcoming, connected, and supportive learning environment.

Growth.



School Opening **Fostering Leadership Academy**

Authorized by GVSU, Fostering Leadership Academy (FLA) represents true innovation in education as the only school in the state to use a trauma-informed education model. Located in Redford, the academy currently serves students in grades four through eight, with plans to grow into a K-8 school. The academy's specific focus is to provide a stable learning environment to at-risk children who have experienced abuse or neglect, homelessness, parental loss, and poverty. The school meets its students' significant needs through small class sizes, frequent instructional breaks, clinical therapists, a focus on social-emotional learning, and restorative practices. Prior to being a public charter school, FLA educated boys in the foster care system who lived at the Methodist Children's Home Society.



Who Authorizes in Michigan?

Universities

Central Michigan University
 Eastern Michigan University
 Ferris State University
 Grand Valley State University
 Lake Superior State University
 Northern Michigan University
 Oakland University
 Saginaw Valley State University

Community Colleges

Bay Mills Community College
 Jackson College
 Washtenaw Community College

Intermediate School Districts

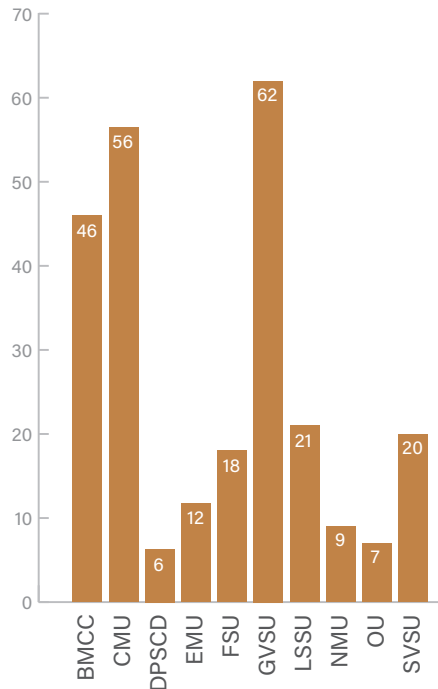
Allegan Area Educational Service Agency
 Bay-Arenac ISD
 C.O.O.R. ISD
 Eaton RESA
 Hillsdale ISD
 Iosco RESA
 Kalamazoo RESA
 Macomb ISD
 Manistee ISD
 Midland County Educational Service Agency
 St. Clair County RESA
 Washtenaw ISD
 Wayne RESA
 West Shore Educational Service District

Local School Districts

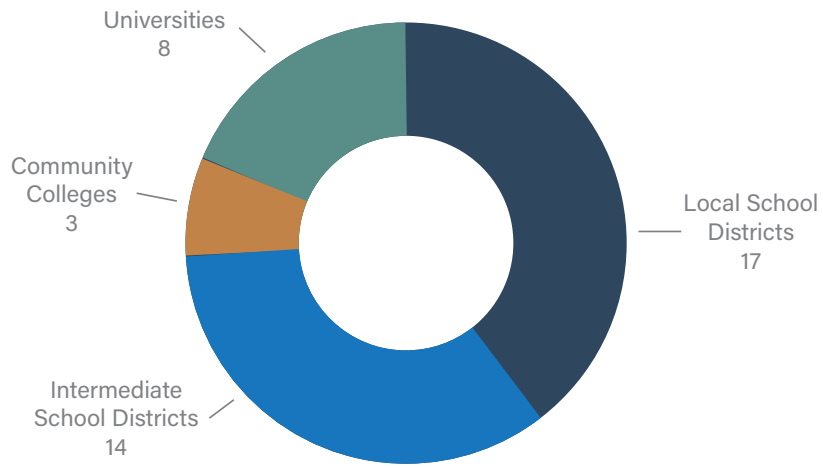
Center Line Public Schools
 Detroit Public Schools Community District
 Eaton Rapids Public Schools
 Gobles Public School District
 Grand Rapids Public Schools
 Hazel Park School District
 Highland Park City Schools
 Madison District Public Schools
 Manistee Area Public Schools
 Mesick Consolidated Schools
 Muskegon Heights School District
 Ovid-Elsie Area Schools
 Oxford Community Schools
 Port Huron Area School District
 Stephenson Area Public Schools
 Vestaburg Community Schools
 Whitmore Lake Public School District

Schools Authorized by Council Members

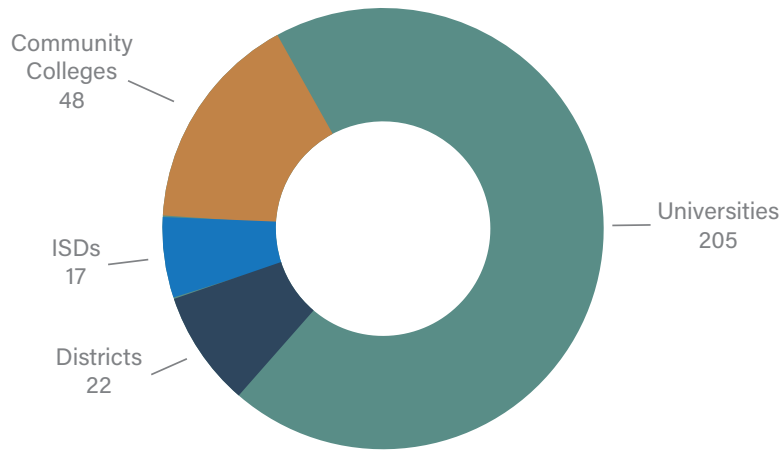
257 Total



Authorizer Types



Schools by Authorizer Type



Council School Boards

Board Member Appointment Process

Quality governance is one of the foundations of high performing schools, and **authorizers have established rigorous processes for making qualified public charter school board appointments.** Prospective candidates must be nominated by a school board, complete an application for board service, undergo extensive vetting, and pass a criminal history background check. If appointed by the authorizer, they must swear an Oath of Public Office at the first meeting following their appointment. The Oath must be administered in the presence of a Notary Public and filed with the authorizing office.

Board Member Professional Development

Council authorizers provide regular enrichment opportunities for school board members, and many require participation in new member orientations and ongoing professional development.

Training sessions on academics, fiscal oversight, good governance, and a host of other topics equip board members to fulfill their oaths of office and lead their schools effectively.

A number of Council authorizers pool their resources to provide professional development webinars to board members located across the state, and others maintain timely and pertinent online resources to educate members on topics that affect their boards.

264 Boards

1,269 Board members

176 New board members
appointed 2020-21

3,295 Board meetings per year

60% of board members have served 3 years+

306 Founding board members

53% of board members hold bachelor's degrees or higher

33% of board members hold a master's or doctorate degree

School Management

Michigan's public charter schools utilize a variety of management structures to ensure well-run operations in their school buildings.

Education Service Providers (ESP) & Charter Management Organizations (CMO)

In most instances, public charter school boards contract with an ESP or CMO to supply some or all of the necessary educational, financial, and personnel services. The board holds the ESP/CMO accountable to the terms of a contract, and does not provide human resource functions. Typically, the ESP/CMO handles daily managerial decisions.

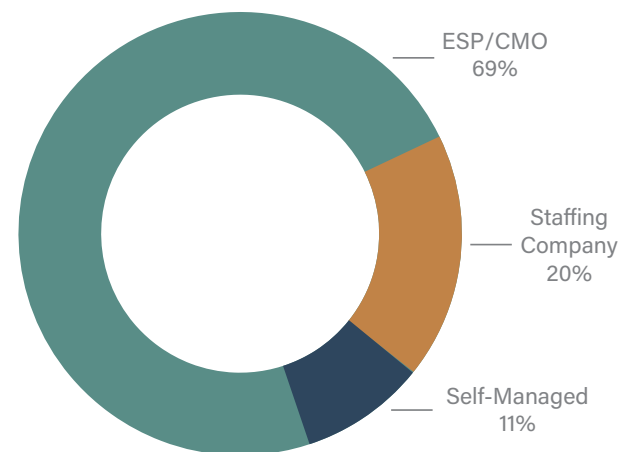
Staffing Companies

These providers contract with a public charter school board to supply staffing and some limited managerial services. The board does not provide human resource tasks, but oversees a contract with the provider who employs the staff. The board typically works in partnership with the provider on daily managerial issues.

Self-Managed Schools

Under this management structure, a public charter school board relies on administration and employees they hire directly, and the school operates similarly to a conventional district in terms of human resources and managerial decisions.

Council Schools' Management



About Michigan Charter Schools

What is a public charter school?

Public charter schools are free, independently operated schools that have the flexibility and autonomy to meet their students' needs. They have existed in Michigan since 1994, and they operate under legally binding charter contracts issued by public authorizing bodies (universities, community colleges, school districts, or intermediate school districts).

Public charter schools may not charge tuition, and must accept all students who apply, up to their enrollment capacity. This means they are prohibited from screening students based on race, religion, sex, or educational ability, and must randomly select students for admission if the number of applicants exceeds available space. They may not be religiously affiliated.⁴

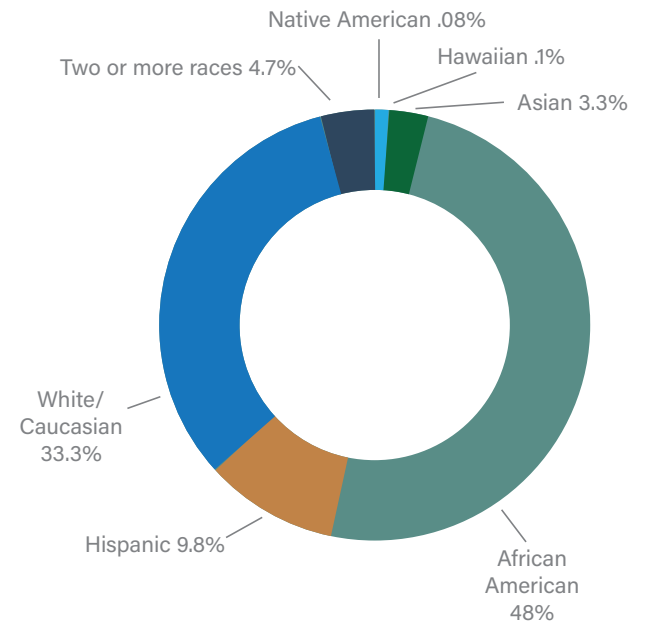
Michigan law requires all public charter school educators to be certified, and all students to be assessed annually.⁵

Charter School Funding

Public charter schools receive state funding through a per-pupil foundation allowance. Michigan law stipulates that this amount cannot exceed the per-pupil allowance received by the local school district where the public charter school is geographically located.⁶

On average, Michigan public charter schools receive about 20% less funding per pupil than conventional public schools, yet are 32% more cost-effective than the average conventional public school in the same city.⁷

Student Race/Ethnicity⁸



Specialty Schools and Curriculum

- A World in Motion STEM
- African-Centered
- Aviation
- Classical Studies
- College Preparatory
- Credit Recovery

- Early/Middle College
- Environmental Science
- Homeless Students
- K-8 Language Study/Arabic ESL
- Language Immersion
- Leadership Emphasis
- Math and Science
- Media Arts
- Montessori

- Moral Focus
- Multicultural and Arabic Language
- Performing Arts
- Pregnant/Parenting Teens
- Project Based
- Self Paced
- Strict Discipline
- Trades and Career & Technical Education
- Virtual/Cyber

By the Numbers

292 Public Charter School Districts (365 Buildings)

4 School Openings Fall 2020

2 School Closings Spring 2021

146 Buildings with High School Grades (9-12)

40% of Buildings are High Schools, compared to 32% for non-charter⁹

10,509 Teachers (sector wide)

23,137 Staff (includes teachers)

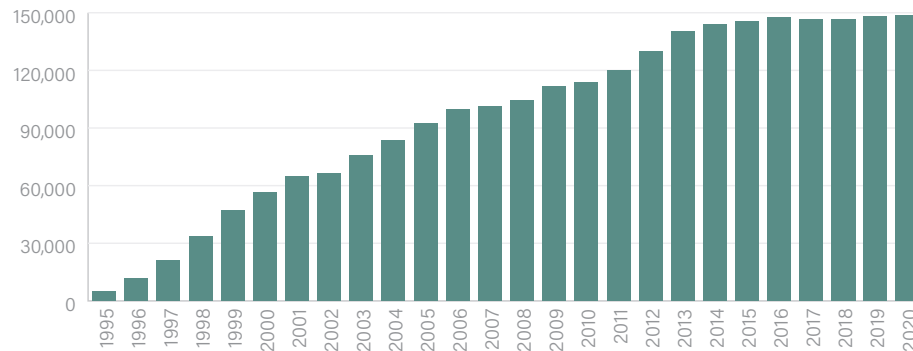
149,549 Students (approximately 10.4% of total statewide public K-12 enrollment)¹⁰

76% Free and Reduced Lunch,¹¹ compared to statewide 51% and non-charter 47%

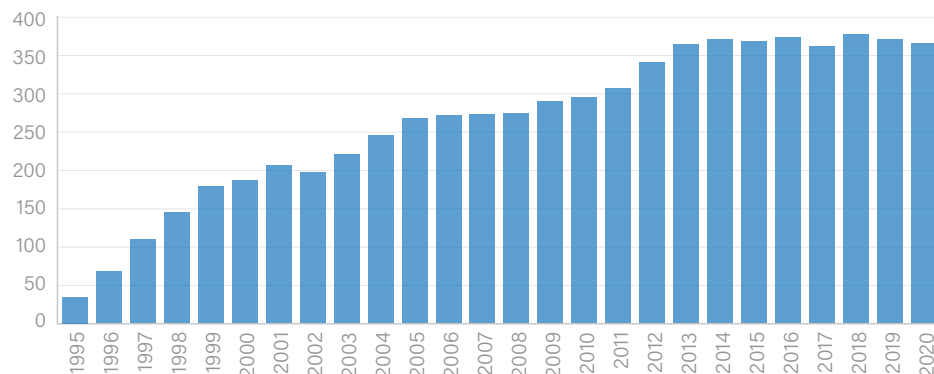
11% English Language Learners,¹² compared to statewide 6% and non-charter 6%

11% Special Education,¹³ compared to statewide 14% and non-charter 13%

1.5% Enrollment Increase over Previous Year (more than 2,200 additional students)



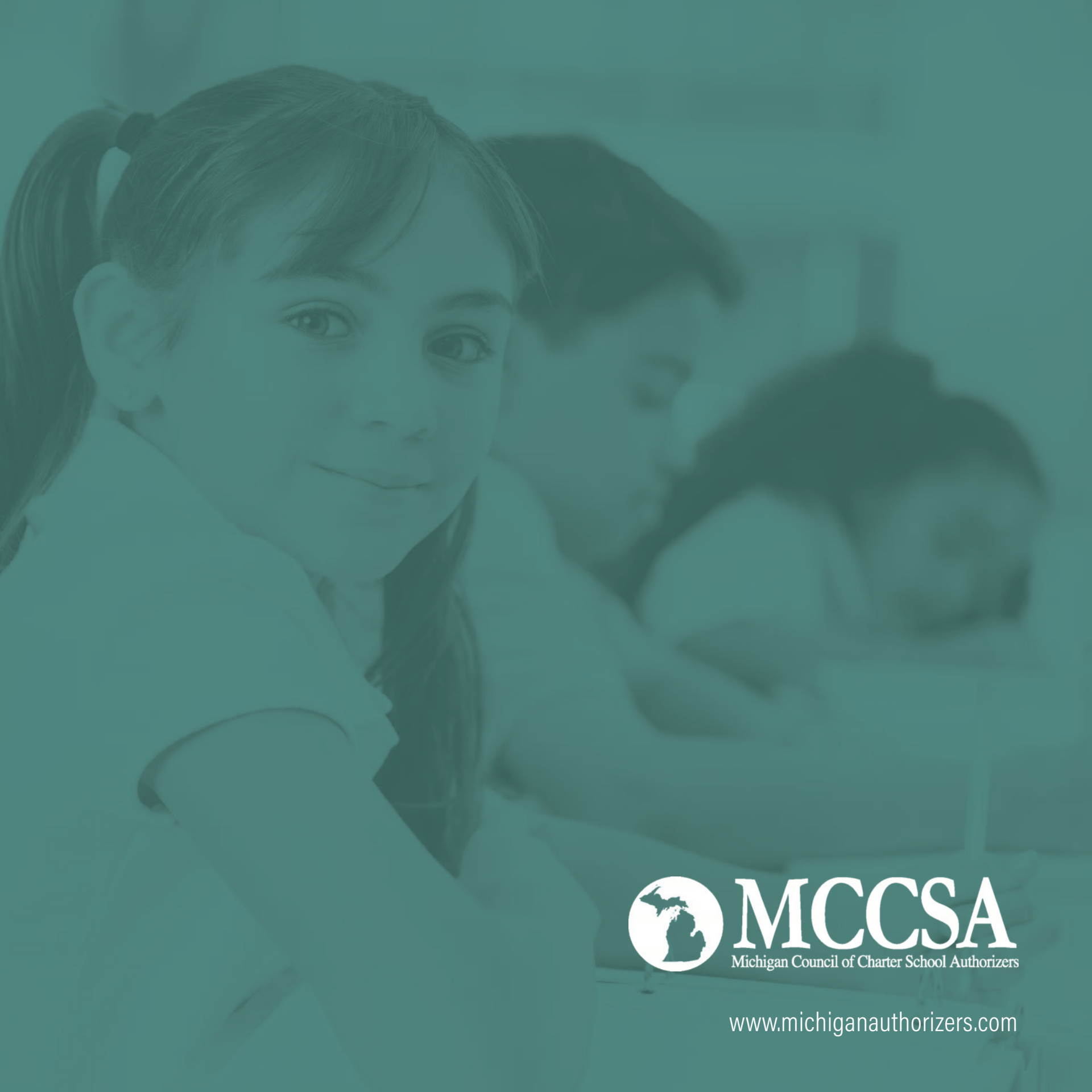
Enrollment history



Public charter school growth

CITATIONS

- ¹ Michigan Center for Educational Performance and Information, MI School Data.
- ² Michigan Center for Educational Performance and Information, MI School Data, School Index System.
- ³ Michigan Center for Educational Performance and Information, Graduation/Drop Out Rates.
- ⁴ Michigan Department of Education, "Michigan Charter Schools - Questions and Answers." November, 2017.
- ⁵ Michigan Department of Education, "Michigan Charter Schools - Questions and Answers." November, 2017.
- ⁶ 1979 PA 94, as amended, Article 2 §388.1620(6).
- ⁷ DeAngelis, Cory and Ben DeGrow, "Doing More with Less: The Charter School Advantage in Michigan." Mackinac Center for Public Policy, 2018.
- ⁸ Michigan Center for Educational Performance and Information, MI School Data.
- ⁹ Michigan Center for Educational Performance and Information, Educational Entity Master for 2020-21.
- ¹⁰ Statewide K-12 enrollment was 1,398,361 in 2020-2021, per Michigan Department of Education Bulletin 1014.
- ¹¹ Michigan Center for Educational Performance and Information, MI School Data.
- ¹² Michigan Center for Educational Performance and Information, MI School Data.
- ¹³ Michigan Center for Educational Performance and Information, MI School Data.



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