



## ANNUAL REPORT | 2020

## Dear Members, Advocates, and Community,

2020 was truly a year unlike any other. Globally, the year was defined by the COVID-19 pandemic, while nationally, the public health crisis – which disproportionately impacts systemically marginalized communities – collided with a reckoning with systemic racism that changed our national conversation around equity and sparked a wider acknowledgment of racism and its centuries-long impact in America.

In the Washington state charter public school sector, 2020 was a year characterized by nimble responsiveness to families amidst complex uncertainties and a health crisis that was directly impacting school communities. Our schools rose to the challenge and reached a new bar for innovation that helped to advance equity and center students during an unplanned and suspended period of virtual learning, relying on new virtual methods to communicate with families, and developing creative new ways to meet the social-emotional needs of scholars, keeping them engaged, safe, and supported during an isolating and extended period.

WA Charters, in our role as a backbone support and advocacy organization, partnered with schools to support families through COVID relief grants to ensure that schools could meet their students' needs.

In the absence of typical annual testing data, enrollment, attendance, and graduation data indicate that Washington's charter public schools drove positive results in 2020. A study by the Center on Reinventing Public Education study showed that while enrollment dipped in public schools statewide – in keeping with national trends – enrollment rose 35 percent in Washington's charter public schools between March and September 2020. Impressively, our state charter sector maintained daily virtual attendance of 95 percent. 2020 also saw the second cohort of Washington charter public school graduates – 99 percent of whom were accepted to a four-year college.

On the policy and advocacy front, 2020 saw increases in special education funding, marking important progress that reduces inequitable resources for systemically underserved students. We continue to work on an extension of the time frame for new charter school authorization and increasing funding for charter public schools. Supported by a passionate and growing base of advocates, we will continue to fight for what is right.

Thank you for your continued investment in our organization and our sector of charter public schools. Together we supported a sector of schools and families that capably navigated a most challenging year with ingenuity, a mindset for equity, and approaches that kept students on track to become tomorrow's leaders. Let's keep working together to create transformative, student-centered, antiracist, community-rooted schools.

**With gratitude,  
The WA Charters Board of Directors and Team**



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# OUR PURPOSE



We are an **EQUITY-DRIVEN ADVOCACY** organization. We know that one size does not fit all, and that inequities create harm in our systems. We work to identify and dismantle systemic racism and inequities in education, and partner with schools, families, and communities to promote policies that advance equity and support all students.



We help **GROW** a sector of innovative schools that give families more options by helping visionary, equity-focused leaders design, launch, and lead gap-closing schools.

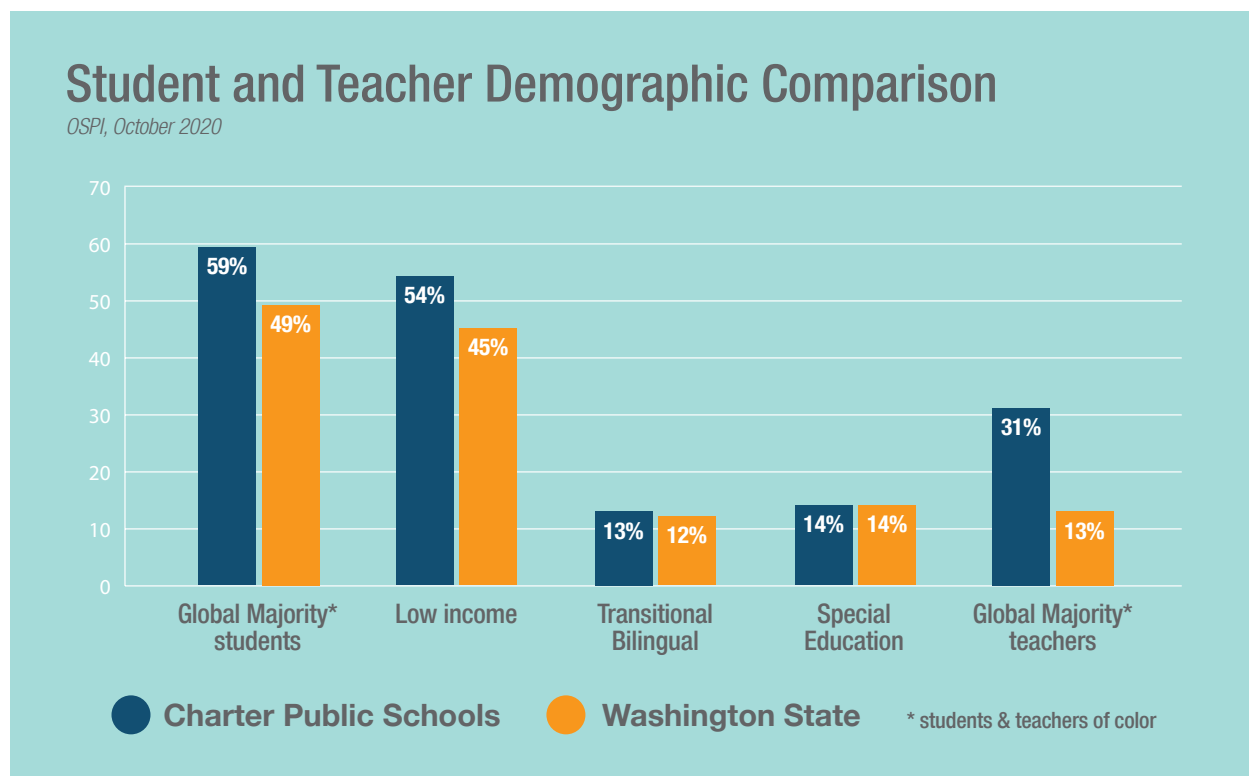


We help **SUSTAIN** an equity-driven, high-quality charter public school sector by providing key technical assistance and resources to operating schools – including policy, advocacy, and communications, governance support, professional learning communities, and more.

# A Diverse Sector Focused on Disrupting Systemic Injustice

Washington state charter public schools attract and serve a higher percentage of systemically marginalized students and teachers as compared to traditional public schools, and advocacy and demand for charter public schools comes predominantly from Global Majority communities (a.k.a. communities of color).

Here is a snapshot of student and teacher demographics captured in October 2020.



3,600

NUMBER OF STUDENTS  
SERVED BY WA CHARTER  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN 2020

# WASHINGTON'S CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS: ON THE LEADING EDGE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

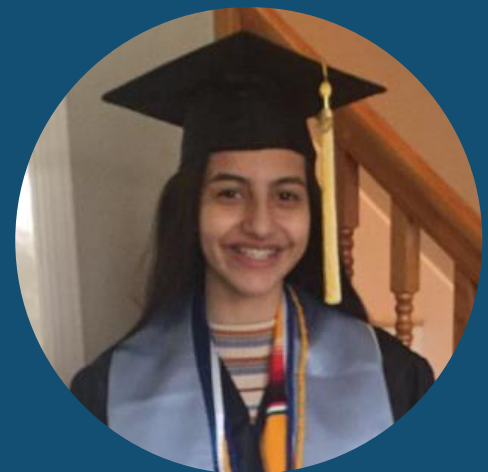
Washington's charter public school leaders and educators – in partnership with their families and communities – leveraged their flexibility and innovation to address COVID challenges in real time. With a **99%** college acceptance rate, **95%** attendance rate, and **35%** increase in overall enrollment, Washington's charter public schools also earned recognition for strong advances in antiracist education, inclusive practices, and social-emotional learning. Altogether, these data points show a sector on the leading edge of public education.

## College Acceptance

In 2020, Washington's charter public school sector graduated its second cohort of students. And the results are promising.

**99%**

GRADUATES  
ACCEPTED TO A  
4-YEAR COLLEGE



**JIMENA TALAMANTES,**  
Summit Sierra, Class of 2020





## Enrollment

Charter school enrollment jumped in 2020, while districts saw losses: Across charters, **enrollment increased by 35 percent** from March 2020 to September 2020, compared to a loss of 3 percent in local districts 🌐 (CRPE, 2021)

### Percent change in enrollment from March 2020 to Fall 2020

Evidence of demand for charters was particularly sharp for students receiving special education and transitional bilingual services during this period.



# RESULTS FROM 2020

Attendance


+95%

WASHINGTON CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL'S  
DAILY ATTENDANCE & ENGAGEMENT  
RATES DURING VIRTUAL LEARNING


Attendance is also a key marker of engagement and learning. An October 2020 national Bellwether study reported that in March 2020, *“approximately 3 million of the most educationally marginalized students in the country, March might have been the last time they experienced any formal education — virtual or in-person.”*

**BELLWETHER**  
EDUCATION PARTNERS

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The same study estimated that while in Washington state, school districts struggled to account for the learning and the presence of **75,000 students** from the most vulnerable populations, the state's charter public schools saw over **95% daily attendance and engagement rates** during virtual learning  (Bellwether, 2020 and self-reported charter public school data).

## Academic Achievement

In the absence of statewide academic assessment data due to the public health crisis, we look at other studies for measures of growth and achievement. A 2020 Stanford University study showed that Black students and students from low-income households attending Washington charter public schools experienced **one-to-two months-worth of additional learning** time in reading and math, as compared to their traditional public-school counterparts, while Latinx and multilingual learners experienced between **one-to-four months-worth of additional learning** in both subjects  (CREDO, 2020).

**CRPE**  
REINVENTING  
PUBLIC EDUCATION

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Researchers from the Center for Reinventing Public Education looked at three Washington charter public schools and identified six key practices they were utilizing that helped students with disabilities — most impacted by the pandemic — maintain progress during COVID-19  (CRPE, 2021).

# 2020 LEGISLATIVE SESSION: PROGRESS AND POTENTIAL

In 2020, a diverse bipartisan group of co-sponsors introduced a bill that would have provided charter public schools with \$1,550 per student in local effort assistance (or “levy equalization”) funding to help offset the local levy gap. The bill received a public hearing in the House appropriations committee but was not scheduled for a vote and thus died in committee.

As a parallel tactic to address the funding equity issue, champions introduced a budget proviso into the 2020 supplemental budget that

would have provided one-time funding of \$1,000 per student to small school districts, tribal compact schools, and charter schools for the 2020-21 school year.

As concerns over a COVID-19-related budget crisis had become even more dire, the governor vetoed the budget proviso, along with 146 other new spending items totaling \$445 million in spending over three years.

While we made progress in the 2020 session, at the end of the day it was not enough. Our students still lack access

to equitable funding, and we continue to push to do more. Moving forward, we are growing stronger grassroots support and parent advocacy capacity.

As we look toward future legislative sessions, we know that COVID-19 continues to create complex circumstances and impact state policy, and we also know that students and families can’t afford for us to wait, so despite the shifting and uncertain budgetary, policy, and political landscape, we must continue to work with our schools and families to secure policy wins.

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## Third Strongest Charter School Law in the Nation

Washington’s charter public school law is unique for its focus on serving systemically underserved students. In 2020, for the third year running, Washington’s charter school law was ranked third strongest in the nation by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. The high level of accountability in exchange for flexibility helps Washington’s law measure up to the “model” charter school law, while adverse policy positions continue to create barriers to impact.



[www.publiccharters.org/our-work/publications/measuring-model-ranking-state-public-charter-school-laws-2021](https://www.publiccharters.org/our-work/publications/measuring-model-ranking-state-public-charter-school-laws-2021)

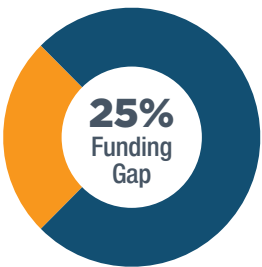




# Looking Ahead: Our Policy Priorities

## Funding Equity

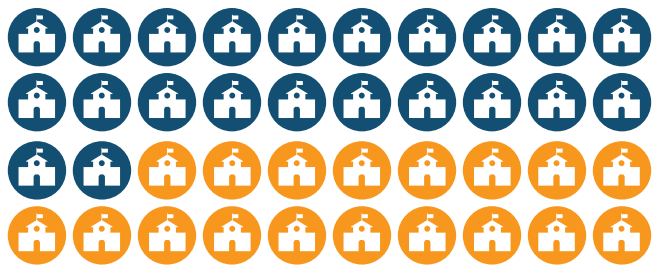
Washington's charter public schools attract and serve disproportionately high percentages of Global Majority students (i.e., students of color) and students from low-income households, and they also serve high percentages of students who receive special education services and Transitional Bilingual students. However, charter public school students receive up to \$3,000 less per student each year than their peers who attend traditional public schools. The **average student at a Washington charter public school receives 25% less in funding** than a student at a traditional public school.



Because charter public schools educate a higher percentage of systemically underserved students, this funding gap means fewer resources for students who need that funding most. This is fundamentally unfair.

## More Time to Open New Schools

State law allows for up to 40 charter public schools to be established over 5 years. This five-year window is coming to a close in 2021, and we need the legislature



*There are currently 18 authorized and operating schools.*

to extend it. **Extending the five-year authorizing window would provide additional time to fulfill the intent of the legislature and the voters, and would expand opportunities for systemically underserved students.**

## Facilities Funding

Unlike traditional public schools, WA's charters do not have dedicated funding for facilities. As a result, about 10% of charter budgets, **intended to support teaching and learning, go to facilities.**

## Special Education

Together with other public education advocates, **we are passionate about improving special education services** for all students in our state who qualify for them.

## Voters Support Charter Public Schools

An October 2020  
poll of WA voters  
found that:

# 78%

A large majority of voters (58%) are supportive of charter public schools. After hearing basic facts about charter schools, support **jumps 20 points to 78%.**

# 75%

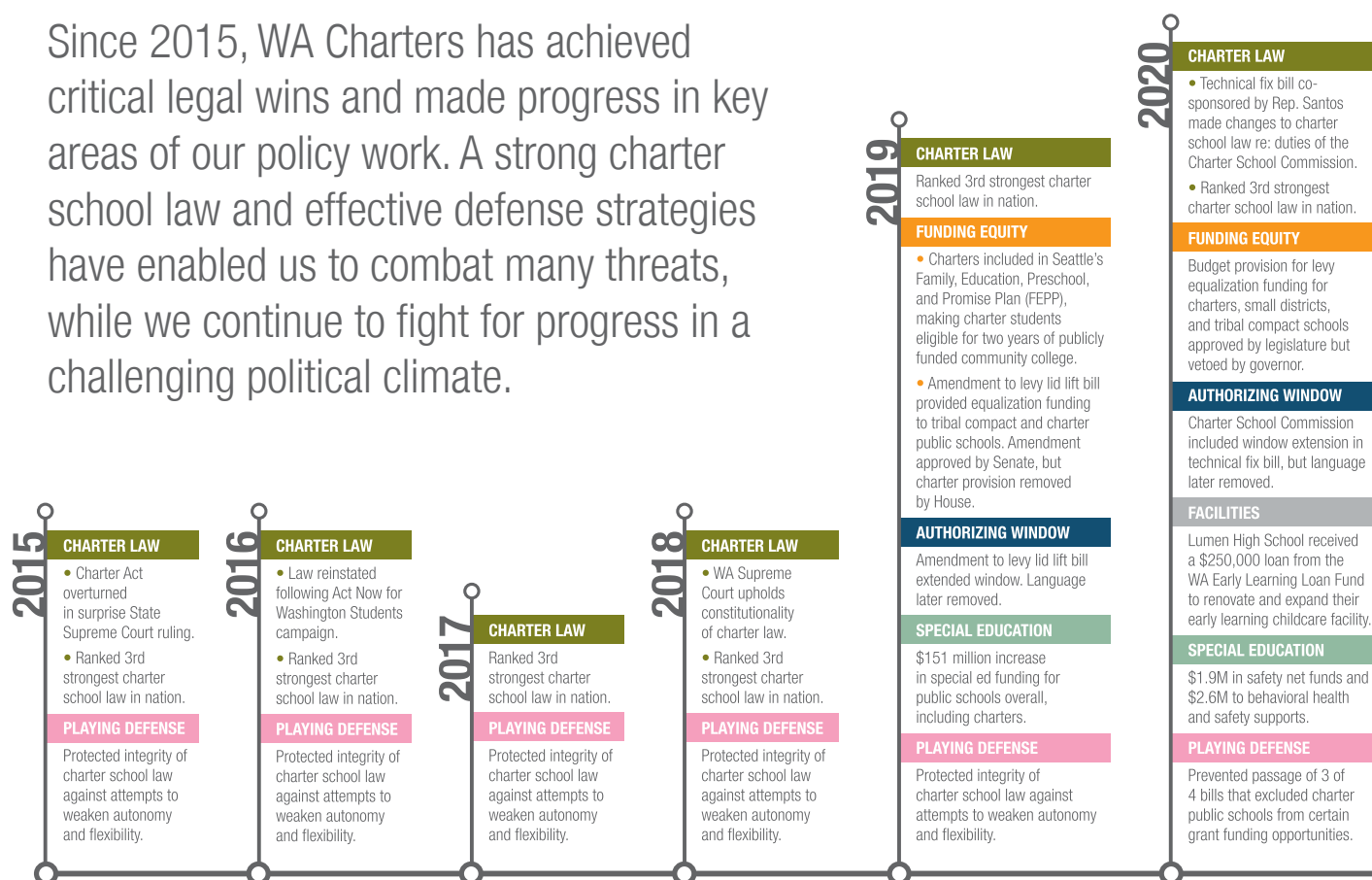
Two-thirds of voters (67%) also support additional state funding for charter schools. This **increases to 75%** after voters learn more about why funding equity matters.

# 78%

More than 7-in-10 (72%) of voters believe in extending the five-year authorizing window to allow additional time to open new charter schools. After hearing more, **support rises to 78%.**

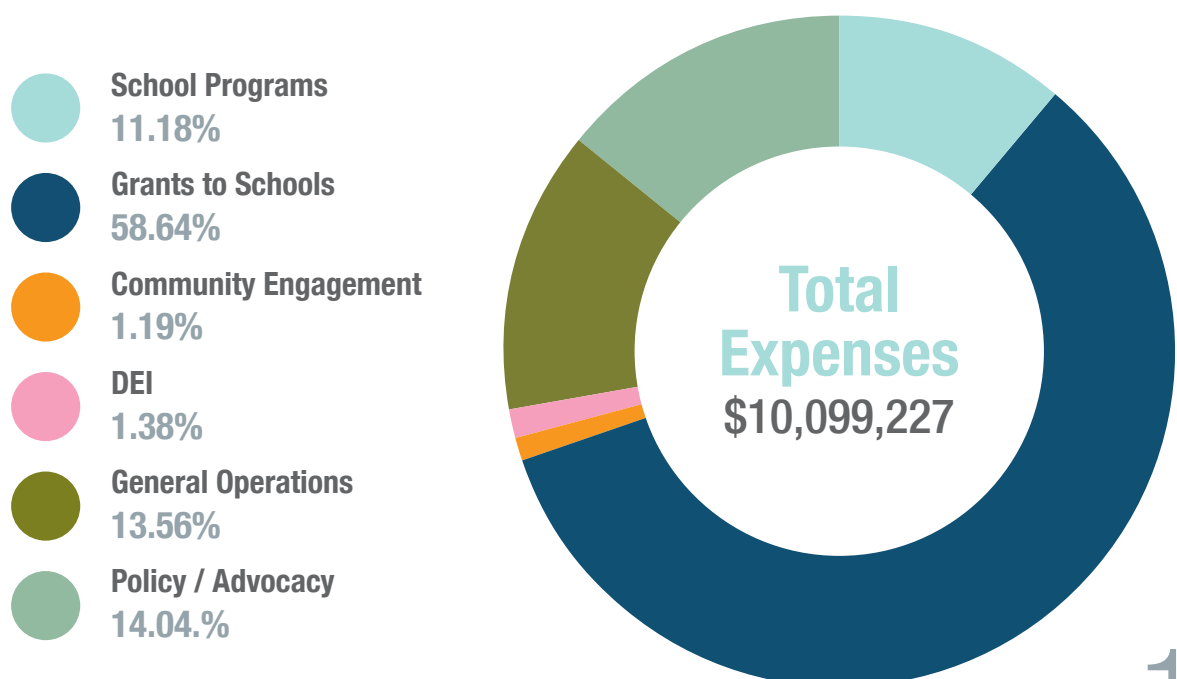
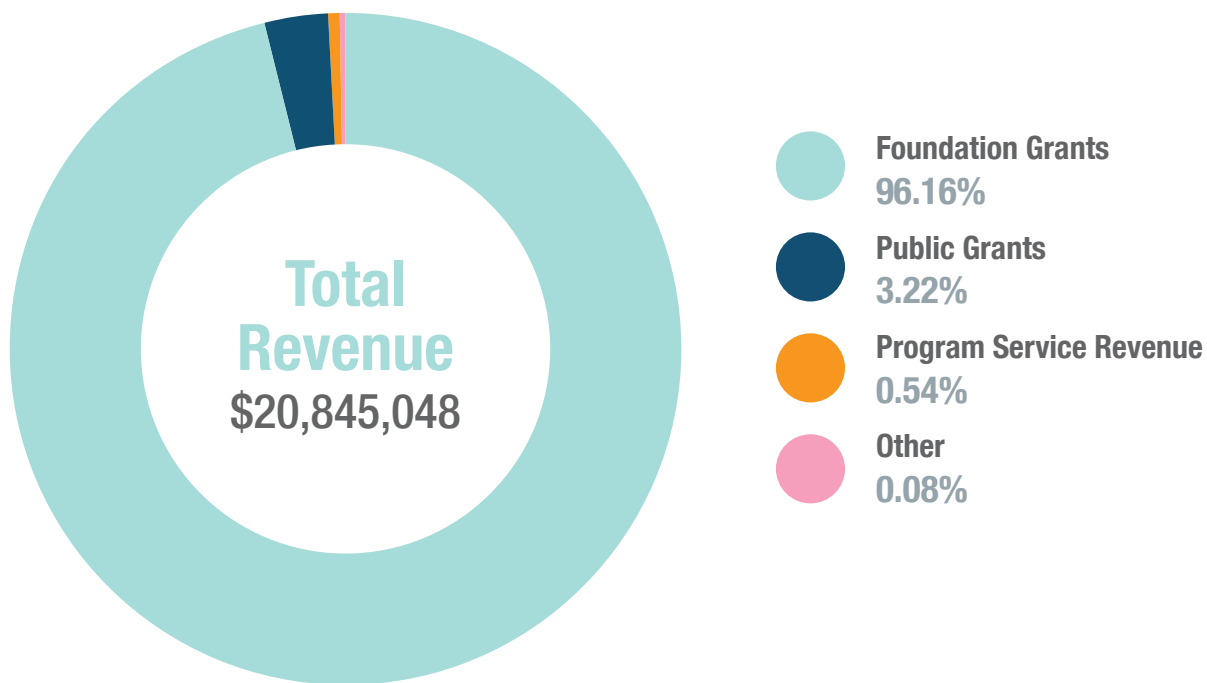
# WASHINGTON STATE CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS POLICY MILESTONES

Since 2015, WA Charters has achieved critical legal wins and made progress in key areas of our policy work. A strong charter school law and effective defense strategies have enabled us to combat many threats, while we continue to fight for progress in a challenging political climate.



# FINANCIALS

January 1, 2020-December 31, 2020





**Invest in a more equitable education sector through  
advocacy, giving, in-kind support, or volunteerism!**

Visit [\*\*www.wacharters.org/take-action/\*\*](http://www.wacharters.org/take-action/) to learn more.

wacharters.org / info@wacharters.org / 206.832.8505

