



ANNUAL REPORT | 2021



WASHINGTON STATE
CHARTER SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

Dear Community,

2021 was a pivotal and, we hope, a catalyzing year in American history and public education. Here in Washington state, we reflect on the strength and resilience of our communities in the face of the COVID pandemic and the co-occurring national reckoning with systemic racism. COVID changed daily life for nearly all of us, yet its impact, like systemic and structural racism, hit Global Majority (i.e., Black, Brown, Asian, Indigenous, and people of color) communities and folks who were already struggling the hardest.

2021 required a great deal of educators, who were tasked with designing and implementing a fundamentally novel learning delivery system, juggling unpredictable dynamics between virtual, hybrid, and in-person spaces. Parents and families in 2021 also took on new roles including IT and classroom management, all while balancing demands of widespread economic, physical, and mental hardships caused by COVID. The toll of COVID extended to students, who experienced, on a large scale, mental health and academic challenges. While months of ongoing isolation brought an array of challenges, returning to being in buildings brought others.

While charter public schools in Washington were not untouched by these challenges, we see strong evidence that our schools leveraged their flexibility and nimbleness to change course and meet a diverse range of student and family needs in 2021. One of the hallmarks of our state's charter public school sector is commitment to meeting whole-child needs. Using lessons from 2020, our schools intentionally focused on practices that would ensure that students were supported emotionally, had access to mental health resources, and had physiological needs met with access to free meals for families.

On the policy and advocacy front, 2021 was also a pivotal year – it marked the close of the five-year timeframe that the state's charter public school law allows for authorizing new schools, and the commencement of more intensive advocacy to change this inhibitive policy. During the legislative cycle, we secured important one-time funding and COVID relief for our sector. Supported by a powerful and growing base of advocates, we will continue to fight for what is right.

While we never want a school year to ask as much of our students, teachers, and families as 2021 did, we are in awe of the courage we've witnessed, with folks speaking up about the struggle, pushing for systems change, and toward equitable and antiracist solutions that disrupt the status quo.

Thank you for being part of our community, and for your continued belief and investment in WA Charters and our state's charter public school students. Let's keep pushing to challenge that status quo and to push for student-centered, antiracist, community-rooted schools, together

**Yours in the work,
The WA Charters Board of Directors and Team**



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NEW STRATEGIC PLAN ROOTED IN ANTIRACISM

No mission is achieved without action. As an aspiring antiracist organization, WA Charters' is committed to ensuring that our core values drive our actions, and that our actions align with our vision of an antiracist, student-centered public education system accessible to all students.

In February 2021, the Board of Directors adopted a new strategic plan for 2021-2024, and the work to achieve the ambitious goals set forth in this plan is already well underway. Developed with the input of **over 150 community stakeholders**, WA Charters worked diligently to **align our mission, vision, and goals** to be responsive to the demands of our dynamic sector.

VISION

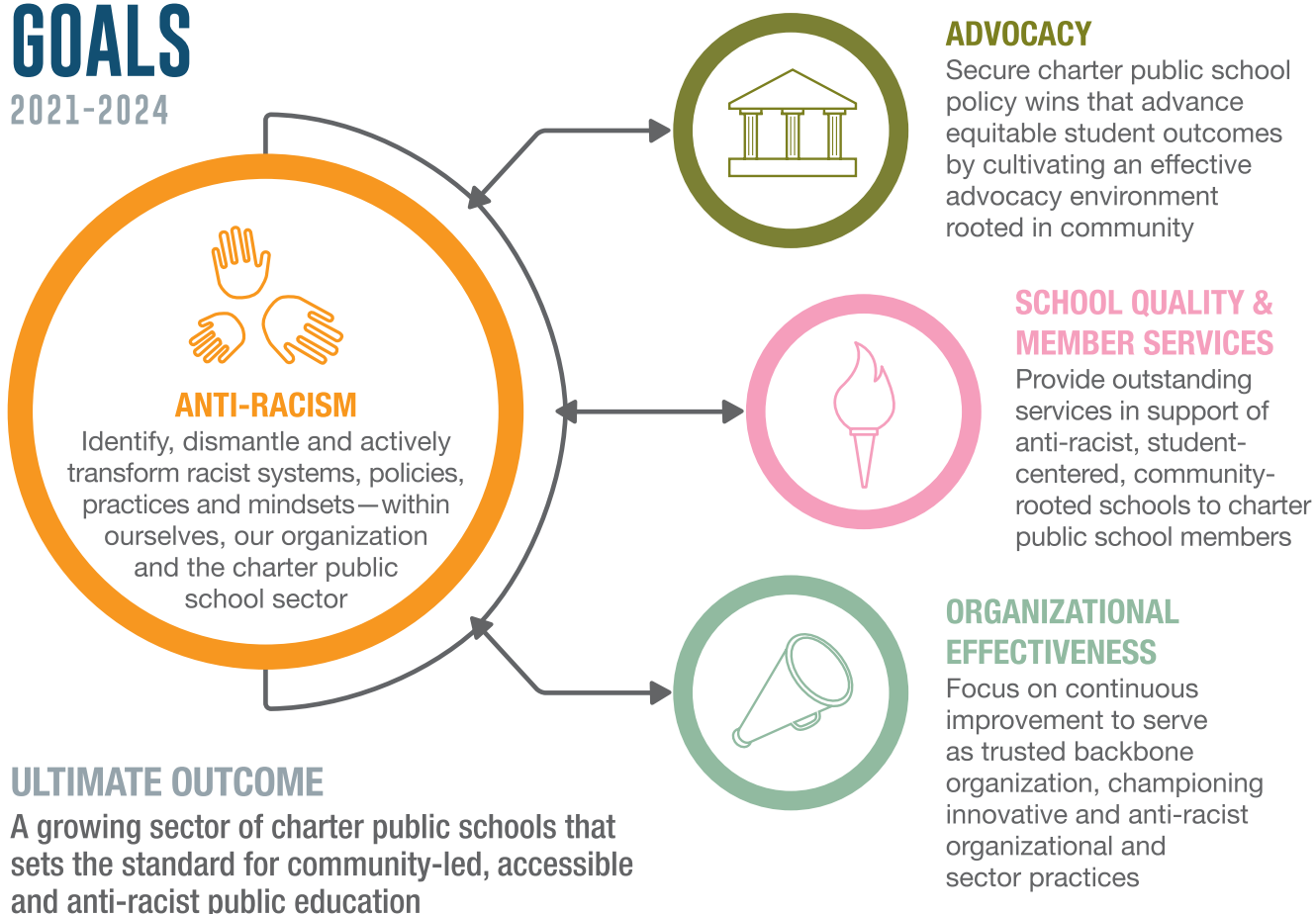
An anti-racist, student-centered public education system accessible to all students

MISSION

We advocate for and support a thriving, innovative charter public school sector that upholds quality via student-centered, community-rooted schools and aspires to disrupt a systemically racist and inequitable education system

GOALS

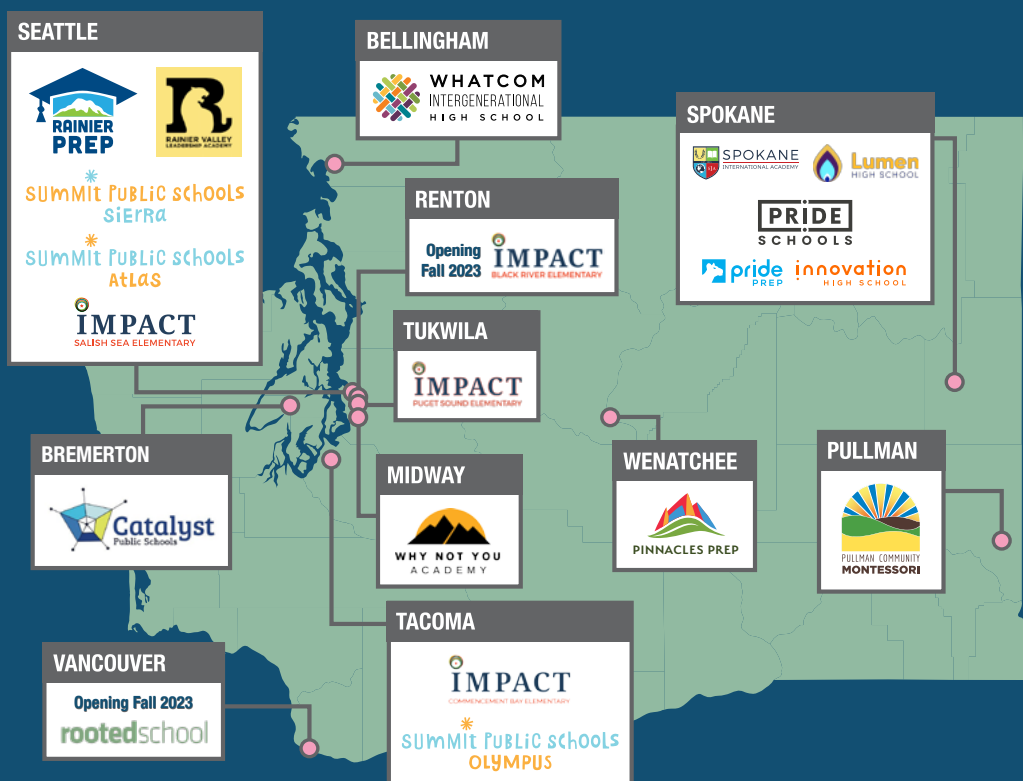
2021-2024



A DIVERSE AND MISSION-ALIGNED SECTOR

In 2021-22, sixteen charter public schools served 4,500 students across our state, including three new schools in response to community demand in three new regions – [Pinnacles Prep](#) in Wenatchee, [Pullman Community Montessori](#), and [Whatcom Intergenerational High School](#) in Bellingham. While each school or network offers a unique school model, all of Washington's charter public schools share a commitment to disrupting educational injustice and addressing systemic racism in our school systems and communities. The final two new charter contracts in the five-year charter authorization timeframe were issued in 2021 – [Rooted School](#) in Vancouver and Impact Public School's fourth school, [Black River Elementary](#), in Renton. These two schools are preparing to open their doors to students in Fall 2023.

WASHINGTON STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION



4,500

NUMBER OF
STUDENTS ATTENDING
WA CHARTER
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

16

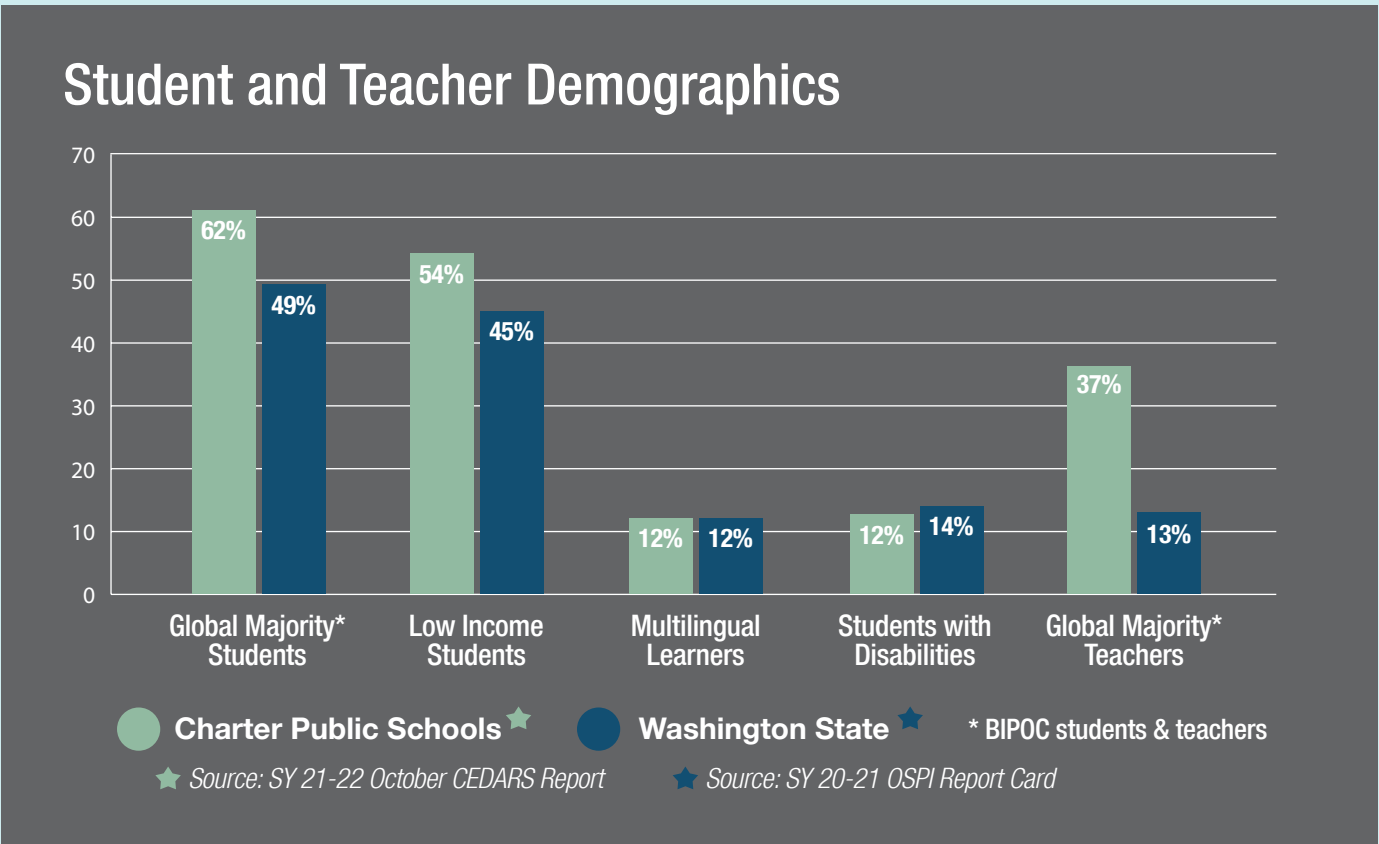
NUMBER OF
OPERATING CHARTER
PUBLIC SCHOOLS
IN WASHINGTON

Community-Rooted Schools Attract Diverse Teachers and Students

Charter public schools continue to attract higher percentages of Global Majority students and students from low-income households, suggesting that charter public school options are a desirable option for diverse and marginalized communities and families. In January 2022, the **Washington State People of Color Legislative Summit** named charter public schools as a priority, stating that charter schools are “a proven solution for [people of color] and immigrants.”

Educators in Washington’s charter public schools are more reflective of the communities they serve, with three times the percentage of teachers from the Global Majority as compared to the statewide average. There is work to do to close this representation gap, and programs like our Transformative Leader Fellowship are designed to address this effort.

Here is a snapshot of schools in the 2021-22 school year, as well as key information about who attends and works in our state’s charter public school sector.



PROMISING RESEARCH AND RESULTS ON A WHOLE-STUDENT APPROACH

During COVID, charter public schools were able to continue to pivot effectively to respond to needs on the individual level, adapting and evolving to support positive academic outcomes as well as whole student wellness. Several bodies of research were conducted during the pandemic to monitor the progress of charter public schools and students.

Note: Academic data is limited for 2021, as standardized tests were not administered in 2020-21 due to the constraints of the pandemic. Instead, students were tested in the fall of 2022 based on their 20-21 grade levels. Math, ELA, and science results on WA Charters online [Data Dashboard](#) include high-level sector stats from this data.

2021 RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



Charter Schools Report 2020-2021

In accordance with the state charter school law, the State Board of Education reports annually to the Governor, the Legislature, and the public regarding the performance of the state's charter public schools. The 2021 report looked at eight different academic measures, based on statewide assessments prior to the cancelled 2020 assessments, including academic proficiency across key subject areas of English Language Arts, Math, and Science, as well as performance across these areas by demographic subgroups. The SBE found that charter school groups performed higher than Traditional Public School (TPS) group on seven of the measures. On the remaining measure, the charter school group performed similarly to the TPS group.



**CHARTER PUBLIC
SCHOOLS SCORED HIGHER
THAN TRADITIONAL
PUBLIC SCHOOLS ON**

7 OF 8

ACADEMIC MEASURES

[READ FULL REPORT](#)

2021 RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

CENTER ON REINVENTING PUBLIC EDUCATION (CRPE)



CRPE conducted and published multiple studies on promising practices and outcomes in Washington's charter public school sector during COVID.

Promising Practices Drive Progress: Closing Learning Gaps for Students with Disabilities (CRPE, 2021)

In this study, researchers looked at three Washington charter public schools and identified six key practices, such as collaborating with families and leveraging new technology to support the needs of students with disabilities. The identified practices helped students with

disabilities – students most impacted by the pandemic – through streamlined and regular communication, maintain progress during COVID-19.

[READ FULL REPORT](#)

It Helps to Start Small: Lessons On Launching Schools of Choice in A Pandemic (CRPE, 2021)

In this study, researchers interviewed leaders from all ten of the charter public schools in Washington at some stage of the opening process (this included launching for the first time and expanding to serve new grade levels). They found that each tackled the challenge of remote learning, recruitment, and enrollment in different ways, but all leveraged the flexibility they are afforded as charter public

schools to adapt to pandemic-related challenges. In addition to starting small, researchers identified two other trends: Washington's charters effectively tapped community relationships to support COVID-19 challenges and found creative ways to overcome barriers to build school culture remotely.

[READ FULL REPORT](#)

In Washington State, Covid-19 Created A Unique Opportunity for Charter-District Collaboration (CRPE, 2021)

This study, which is part of a larger body of CRPE research on charter-district collaboration, looked at how a charter school network [Impact Public Schools](#) collaborated with the Rural Alliance, a consortium of PK-16 education partners, to overcome the challenges of working across traditionally boundaries to lead to tangible results

for students. While charters and traditional schools are often portrayed as at odds with each other, this collaboration shows that isn't always the case—and it shows promise for the future.

[READ FULL REPORT](#)

HATS OFF TO THE

The Class of 2021 overcame many challenges, including nearly two years of high school being impacted by the pandemic. With the unrelenting support of talented and committed teachers and flexible, responsive school models, these new graduates are leaving high school prepared to achieve great things in whichever postsecondary pathway they choose.



“If it wasn’t for teacher support and the fact that they care for us so much, I don’t know how college applications would have gone... I have gotten to see shocking similarities between poverty-stricken communities in Kenya and the homeless population in Seattle as they struggle for basic healthcare needs. It is not going to be easy, but we need to start thinking about solutions to these global challenges. I want to be part of an effective change that leaves a legacy on people.”

— ESTHER MUMBI,
Summit Atlas, Class of 2021, on her future plans and the support she received

SUMMIT PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Summit Public Schools Washington held three graduations – the third cohort of graduates for Summit Sierra (Seattle) and Summit Olympus (Tacoma) and the inaugural graduation for Summit Atlas (West Seattle)

93% of graduates were accepted to 4-year colleges or universities

95% of graduates were accepted to 4-year or 2-year colleges or universities

Summit Washington graduates were accepted to 122 colleges and universities including every public university in Washington, Columbia University, Johns Hopkins, Barnard College, Smith College, Whitman College, Whitworth College, and Spelman College. While access to college is a critical goal to advance equity, future success does not look the same for all students. Other post-secondary plans for graduates of the Class of 2021 included the military, trade schools, transitioning directly to work, or a gap year.

CLASS OF 2021



2021 was the inaugural graduating class at Innovation High School. Students were accepted to many colleges and universities, including Eastern Washington University, Gonzaga, Washington State University, Howard University, Boston University, New York University, University of Southern California, Spokane Falls Community College, and the Pacific Northwest College of Art.

innovation HIGH SCHOOL

“Our founding students helped us build a school community that’s innovative, supportive, and challenges the status quo. They have shown resilience in the face of a global pandemic and accomplished their goals and set themselves on a pathway for successful futures. I can’t wait to see what they do next, and the Innovation High School community is here to support them as they begin the next chapter in their lives.”

— Dr. BRENDA MCDONALD,
Pride Innovation Founder and CEO



Lumen High School launched in Fall 2020 and graduated its first

class of nine students in Spring 2021. Its innovative model is set up specifically to support the tenacity and courage of teens who are also parents. Lumen supports graduates to become ready to raise healthy children, contribute to their community, and advance into their future including higher education and careers.

All nine Lumen graduates were accepted into a college or technical program with career aspirations ranging from serving in the national park system, to early learning, to real estate, to forensics.



“Our students have persevered through the challenges of parenting and a remote start to the year due to COVID-19. This first cohort of nine students exemplifies the promise of Lumen – parenting and success through and beyond high school do not need to be at odds with each other.”

— SHAUNA EDWARDS, Lumen Founder and ED

WA CHARTERS PROGRAM OFFERINGS EVOLVE WITH SECTOR

With the closure of the five-year charter public school authorization window in 2021, the needs of the sector shifted from new school supports to a heightened focus on policy wins that would promote the growth and sustainability of the sector, and technical assistance to support the currently operating schools. In 2021, responsive to the needs of a sector in transition, WA Charters School Programs Team offered key services through the Strong Start Program, the True Measure Collaborative, the Fundraising Learning Series, and the Transformative Leader Fellowship.

Strong Start and Operational Supports

In 2021, we provided Strong Start Planning Year programming to schools, including Pinnacles Prep (Wenatchee), Pullman Community Montessori (Pullman), Whatcom Intergenerational

High School (Bellingham) and Why Not You Academy (Des Moines).

Throughout the year, WA Charters continued to offer a [robust portfolio of services](#) to our member schools, including dedicated coaching and on-site technical assistance to schools in their first two years of operation; technical assistance for reporting related to state and federal programs; and ongoing support via a compliance calendar that tracks compliance deadlines. Additionally, WA Charters maintains the sector health and safety training platform to provide health and safety related professional development to school personnel.



Fundraising Learning Series

WA Charters launched the Fundraising Learning Series in the 2021-22 school year to provide equity-driven fundraising practices and tactical learnings to help schools raise more funds and tell ethical stories that center student and community voices. The series produced ten newsletters and 14 informational videos featuring 11 fundraising experts from across the sector and around the country, and dozens of articles and templates to support schools' fundraising efforts. All the videos are accessible [here](#) on the WA Charters website.





True Measure Collaborative (TMC)

In 2021, we provided Strong Start Planning Year programming to schools, including Pinnacles Prep (Wenatchee), Pullman Community Montessori (Pullman), Whatcom Intergenerational High School (Bellingham) and Why Not You Academy (Des Moines).

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TRUE MEASURE
COLLABORATIVE

Transformative Leader Fellowship

Launched in 2021, the WA Charters Transformative Leader Fellowship is a cohort-based program designed to strengthen relationships and the leadership capacity of exceptional school leaders in the Washington charter public sector whose current roles include principal, vice principal, or dean. Participants build intentional community through discussion, dialogue, and co-facilitated racial affinity breakout groups, engaging with meaningful and relevant professional development resources, and structured consultancies where fellows can workshop leadership challenges with trusted peers. Fellows share a commitment to antiracist leadership and approach the work with a sense of cultural humility. The goal of the fellowship is to equip school leaders with knowledge, skills, and vision to lead equitable schools where all children belong, succeed, and thrive and to build a strong bench of diverse future charter public school founders.

Learnings and experiences from this cohort have informed the fellowship's program for the second cohort of leaders, currently underway.



“As someone who is new to the Washington state charter sector, this fellowship has been a great opportunity for me to connect with leaders at other charter schools across the state and to better understand the unique charter landscape here. I’ve also appreciated a non-judgmental space to engage with folks who share similar daily experiences with me but can give me objective feedback because they are not at the same school as me. The dialogue we engage in as a cohort always gives me new ideas and perspectives to bring back to my school.”

— TIM TRAN, Rainier Prep

GRANTMAKING AND FEDERAL CHARTER SCHOOL PROGRAM

Startup funding for charter public schools in Washington was a significant body of work for WA Charters in 2021, including administration of the \$19.96M Charter School Program (CSP) grant award to Washington state, as well as intermediary grantmaking to the sector for school planning, launch, growth, scale, and emergency needs – in particular, COVID-19 response. These funds are critical for the healthy launch and success of charter public schools and their successful navigation of the pandemic as it dragged on through 2021. Explore our CSP webpage [here](#).

Charter School Program Grantmaking

90 percent of the CSP funds are distributed by WA Charters through sub-grants of up to \$1.5M over five years to Washington state charter public schools for startup and expansion. Remaining funds are used to provide resources to support the overall quality and growth of the Washington charter sector and administration of the grant. In 2021, WA Charters awarded five CSP grants to charters in Washington state; to date, the organization has awarded ten sub-grants through the program.

Intermediary Funding: WA Charters' intermediary funder role continues to be critical for schools as they have access to inequitable public funding. In 2021, WA Charters granted funds to the majority of charter sector's schools at various stages of planning, startup, and growth. We also administered a significant COVID-19 response fund, which – alongside the enormous amount of federal funding passed through to all public schools through federal relief packages - supported schools' response to and recovery pathways from the pandemic.

WA Charters continues to iterate and evolve its grantmaking practices to ensure high-quality grant compliance and support antiracist and equitable practices, including assessing our grantmaking practices on the Equitable Grantmaking Continuum developed by Vu Le and the Nonprofit AF team.

As WA Charters implements its 2021-24 strategic plan, it is working with partners to develop a potential pathway toward exiting the intermediary funder role. This work is ongoing and evolving alongside the sector's political and public funding landscape.



**WA CHARTERS
DISTRIBUTES**

90%

**OF THE CSP FUNDS FOR
STARTUP & EXPANSION**

Authorization Window Closes, Advocacy Takes Center Stage

Perhaps the most significant milestone in 2021 was the April closure of the five-year window that the state's charter school law allotted to authorize up to 40 schools. To date, only 24 schools have been authorized. For many communities, re-opening the timeframe for authorizing additional charter schools is a dream and opportunity that will never be possible until and unless the law is changed to allow for a finite number of new charter public schools to open beyond 2021. While we advocate for these communities seeking new charter schools, we also advocate for equitable resources and other policy enhancements for students attending existing charter public schools.

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PRIORITIES

Shaped by input from our member school leaders and advocacy and philanthropic partners, we have four ongoing legislative priorities. Our top two policy priorities for the 2021 legislative session were equitable funding and extension of the five-year authorizing window.

FUNDING EQUITY

CHARTER SCHOOLS ARE NOT ENTITLED TO LOCAL PROPERTY TAX LEVIES, CREATING A FUNDING GAP OF BETWEEN

\$1,500 TO \$3,000

PER STUDENT

AUTHORIZING WINDOW

THE CURRENT 5 YEAR AUTHORIZING WINDOW CLOSED IN APRIL 2021. WHILE THE CHARTER LAW ALLOWS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF

UP TO **40**, ONLY **24**

SCHOOLS HAVE BEEN AUTHORIZED TO DATE

FACILITIES

CHARTER SCHOOLS LACK ACCESS TO DEDICATED FUNDING FOR FACILITIES. CHARTER SCHOOLS SPEND APPROXIMATELY

10%

OF BASIC EDUCATION FUNDING ON FACILITIES

SPECIAL EDUCATION

ALONGSIDE THE STATEWIDE INVESTING IN STUDENT POTENTIAL COALITION, CHARTER SCHOOLS SUPPORT

FUNDING & POLICY

ENHANCEMENTS TO BETTER SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

CONTEXT FOR 2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Democrats held majorities in both the House and the Senate— in the House by a margin of 57-41 and in the Senate by a count of 28-21. This year, there were 16 new House members and four new Senate members.

THE 2021 LEGISLATURE WAS THE MOST RACIALLY DIVERSE IN WASHINGTON STATE HISTORY.

We planned our outreach strategy accordingly, meeting with members or staff of six of eight Senate Members of Color Caucus members, 12 of 19 House Members of Color Caucus members, and eight of nine members of the Legislative Black Caucus.

THE 2021 SESSION WAS LARGELY REMOTE. Legislators for the most part did not convene in person, with most legislative activities conducted virtually. Lobbyists and members of the public were not permitted on the Capitol grounds, so all legislator meetings and interactions were conducted virtually. On one hand, the virtual session limited our ability to make an in-person impact with legislators and establish a visible presence in the hallways, hearing rooms, and grounds of the Capitol; on the other hand, the virtual meetings allowed for many charter school advocates – including parents, students, and school leaders who might otherwise have been unable to take a full day to travel to Olympia – to participate in legislator meetings.

FINALLY, ONE OF THE STATED LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FOR THE SESSION WAS NARROWING SYSTEMIC INEQUITIES. While equity has always been an integral part of our advocacy message, during this session we were very intentional and explicit about detailing the racial equity implications of our policy priorities.

PROGRESS AND OUTCOMES

DURING THE SESSION, WITH THE SUPPORT OF OUR ADVOCACY PARTNERS, WE MADE IMPORTANT PROGRESS:

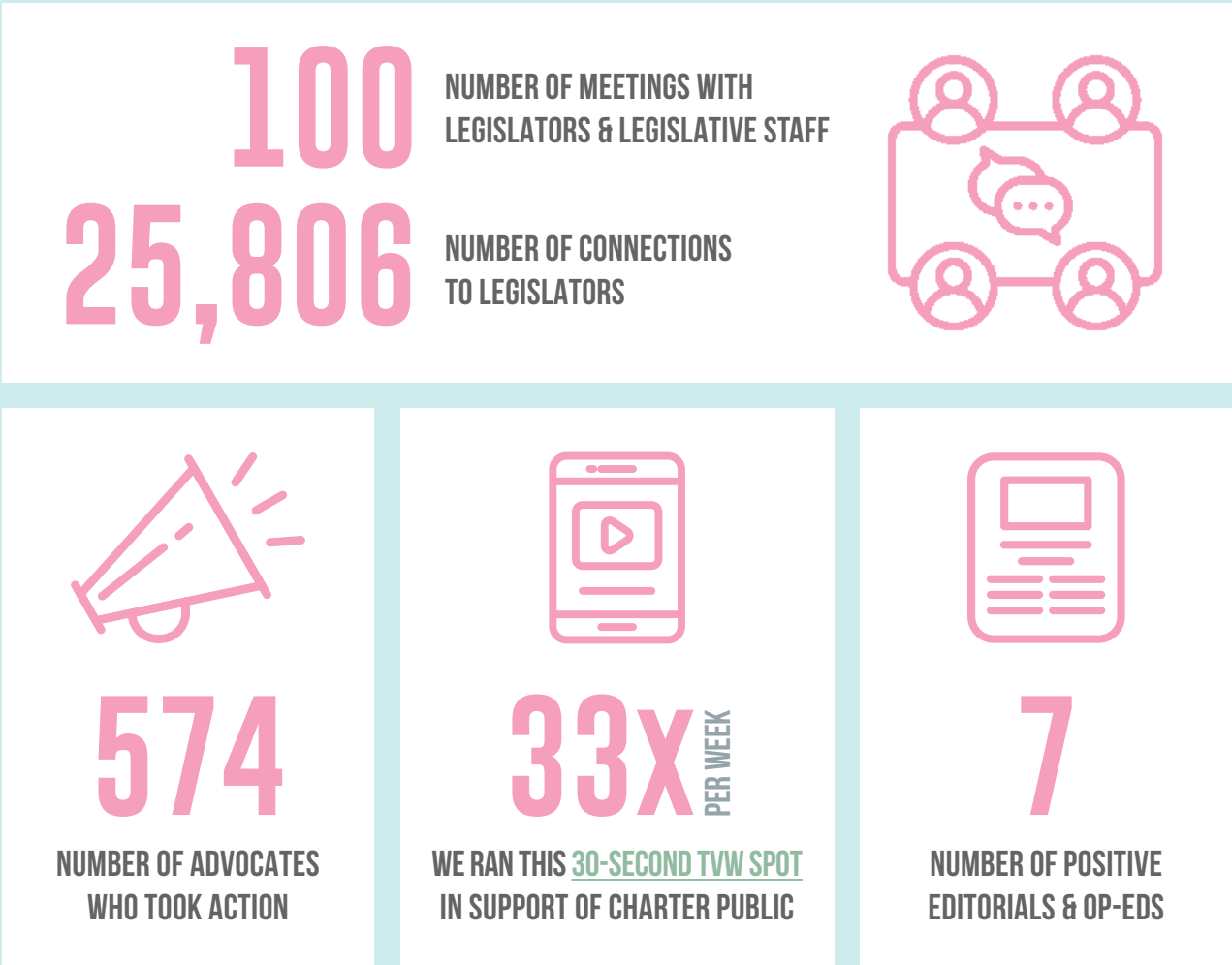
- 1 we engaged in a robust and aggressive advocacy effort centered on racial equity;
- 2 we made significant gains in building relationships with and growing support among legislators;
- 3 we cultivated and elevated the voices of new advocates; and
- 4 as a result of these efforts, a bi-partisan group of legislators sponsored a bill to extend the five-year authorizing window and the House of Representatives included our charter school funding equity provision in its budget proposal. However, the bill to extend the authorizing window died in committee after the committee chair denied the bill a vote, while the funding equity provision was stripped out of the final budget by House and Senate budget negotiators.

While these were incredibly frustrating and disappointing outcomes, it is worth noting a few gains that resulted from the efforts of many of our allies and reflect the continuing, gradual softening of the ground with respect to charter schools in the legislature:

- We were able to re-insert a provision into the budget that allows for a less burdensome and less costly accountability audit to satisfy the time-consuming and extraordinarily expensive performance audit requirement, and clarifies that SAO rather than the school pays for these audits;
- The capital budget provided \$2.5 million in funding for a Pinnacles Prep (Wenatchee) school facility project;
- The final budget appropriated approximately \$2.6 billion in federal COVID relief funding for all public schools, including charter public schools.

OUR ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

While we did not achieve our two top priorities this session, as we look back on the session, we feel that we left nothing on the table. With the support of our contract lobbyists, advocacy partners, political and communications contractors, and philanthropic partners, we engaged in a robust, aggressive, and wide-ranging set of activities.



2021 Positive Editorials and Op-Eds




Charter public schools need fair funding to serve the students they were designed to benefit

By Shauna Edwards, Travis Franklin and Brenda McDonald
Published: March 26, 2021, 10:01 AM



[READ ARTICLE](#)



Charter schools deserve equitable funding

Tatiana Epandem and Amanda Gardener Your turn
Published: March 26, 2021, 10:01 AM

We are leaders at three Puget Sound charter public school networks. Charter schools are a type of public school that are non-profit, publicly funded, staffed by certified teachers, and held accountable to state and national standards. In exchange for higher levels of accountability, our schools have more flexibility than traditional public schools to take creative approaches, personalize learning, and give students from all backgrounds the chance to go to a great school that works for them.

[READ ARTICLE](#)




Fix unjust funding for Washington state charter schools including ours in Tacoma

By Shauna Edwards and Travis Franklin
Published: March 26, 2021, 10:01 AM



CURRICULUM OFTEN EMPHASIZES A THEME

[READ ARTICLE](#)



Shauna Edwards, Travis Franklin and Brenda McDonald: Educational justice for charter public school students requires equitable funding

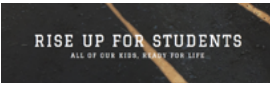
March 26, 2021 | Updated Tue, March 26, 2021 at 1:41 p.m.

[Twitter](#) [Email](#) [Reedit](#)

By Shauna Edwards, Travis Franklin and Brenda McDonald

We are leaders at three Spokane charter public schools. Charter schools are a type of public school that are non-profit, publicly funded, staffed by certified teachers, and held accountable to state and national standards. In exchange for higher levels of accountability, our schools have more flexibility than traditional public schools to take creative approaches, personalize learning, and give students from all backgrounds the chance to go to a great school that works for them.

[READ ARTICLE](#)



My daughter deserves an equitably funded public education

March 26, 2021 | Eljah Faria

By Eljah Faria

Eleven years ago, my daughter came into my life. I looked down into her little face and made a commitment that I would do whatever is in my power to give her the best life possible.

At first, I was just worried about getting her to sleep through the night and leaving the house in the morning without spilling up on my shirt. As she grew, my worries grew. My heart was walking around outside of my body on a daily basis and all I wanted to do was to protect it.

[READ ARTICLE](#)



Extend window of opportunity for new public charter schools



Best-in-class health plans.

[READ ARTICLE](#)



Supporting Progress in Washington State Charter Public Schools



[READ ARTICLE](#)



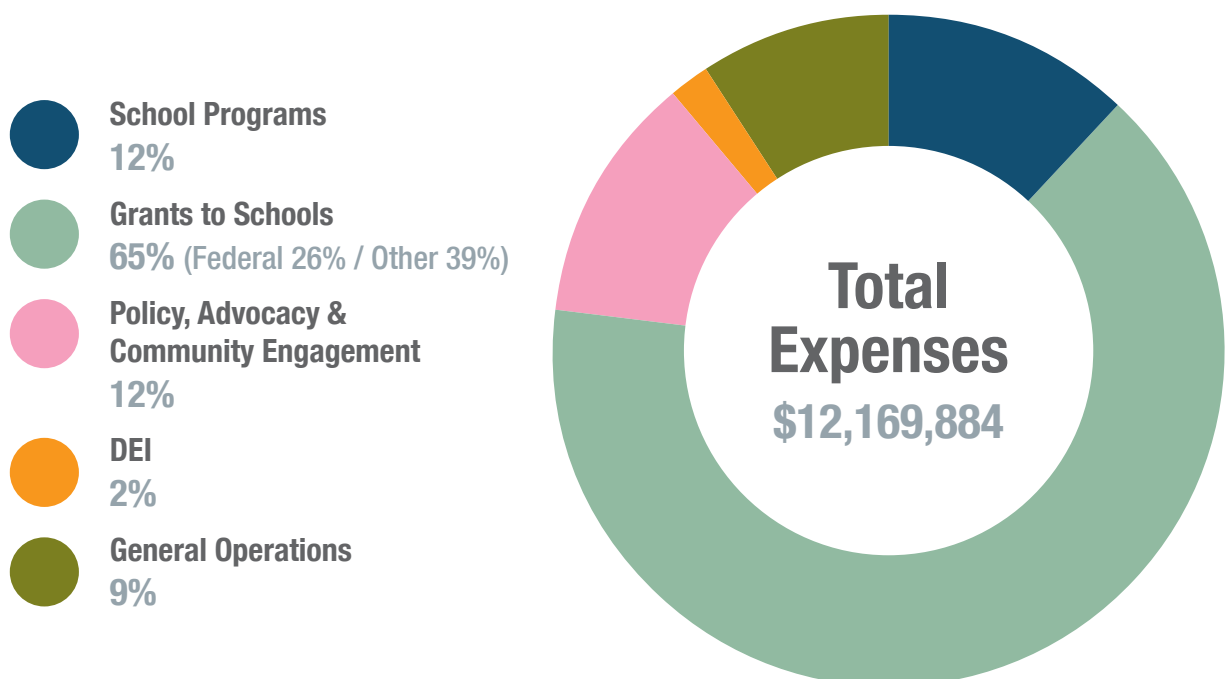
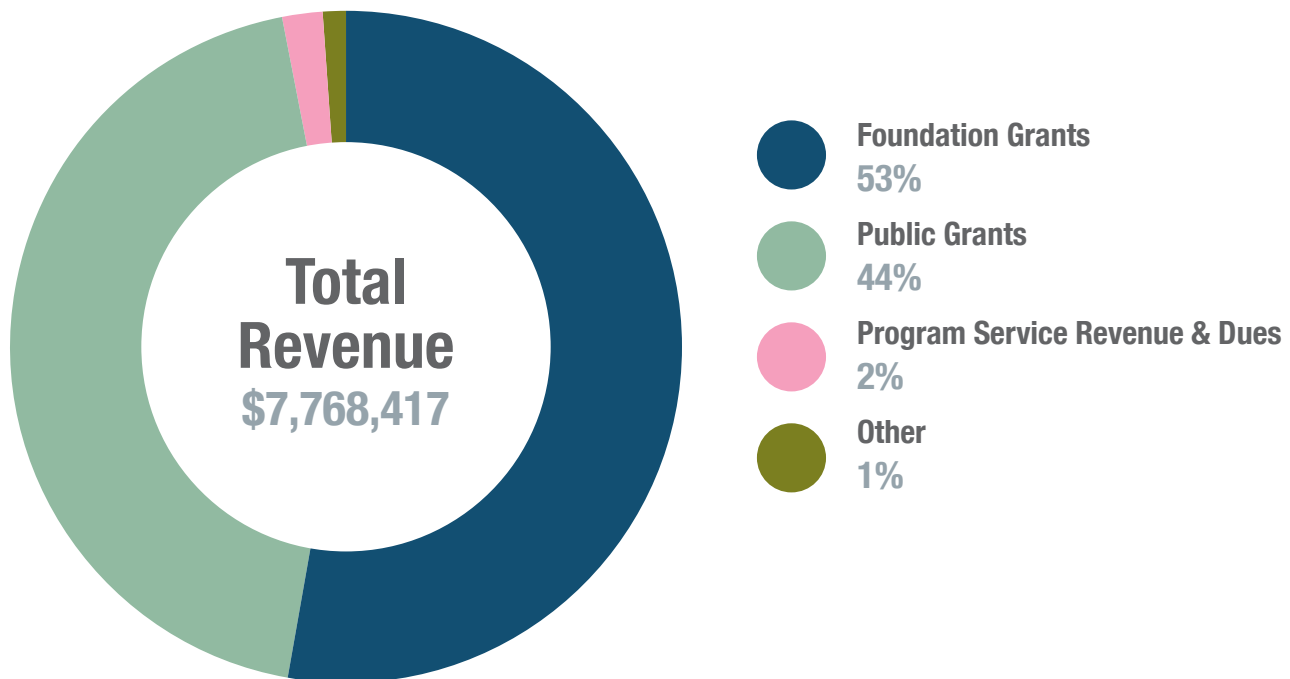
“I am a Black parent raising a Black boy in the public education system that has not treated him fairly and has been riddled with the trap doors of the school to prison pipeline. Because our family had access to [a] quality public charter school in the middle school grades, my son is on a trajectory to a post-secondary experience that includes college. He now attends a STEM public high school in the public school system in the 30th legislative district.”

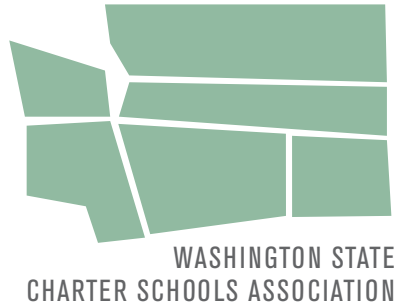
— SHIRLINE WILSON, Advocacy Partner, then-State Director for Democrats for Education Reform, and former Rainier Prep parent

The WA Charters team, our member schools, and our advocacy and philanthropic partners remain fiercely committed to building on the progress we made this session and continuing to fight for the equitable policies and public funding that our students and families deserve.

FINANCIALS

January 1, 2021-December 31, 2021





**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

