

GAME CHANGERS:

How Washington's
Charter Public Schools
Produce Exceptional
Results for
Underserved Students



WASHINGTON STATE
CHARTER SCHOOLS
ASSOCIATION



Excellent Schools
Washington





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AMONG THE BEST PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN THE STATE

Charter public schools are relatively new to Washington, which was the 42nd state to adopt a charter school law. Ten years after the first school opened, **Washington's charter public schools are among the highest performing public schools in the state.** They provide an exceptional educational experience in the communities they serve, clearly demonstrating the quality and effectiveness of these unique public schools. Given their relatively small footprint—just 17 schools across the state—**charter public schools are making an outsized impact on student achievement,** especially among populations that have been historically and systemically underserved.

Charter public schools serve a higher rate of students with the greatest needs —multiple language speakers, students from low-income families, and kids who are several grade levels behind. **Even while serving so many students who have these challenges, charter public schools are still on par with other public schools in Washington.**

According to the most recent data on the 2023-2024 statewide annual standardized assessment, the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium test or SBAC, charter public schools are competitive with other public schools and show similar rates of academic performance overall. **This is an important finding, as it shows that charter public schools on average are holding their own against their peers across the state,** even when compared to affluent students and those who have not struggled academically.



Charter public schools serve a higher rate of students with the greatest needs—multiple language speakers, students from low-income families, and kids who are several grade levels behind—yet still perform on par with other public schools in Washington.

EXCEPTIONAL RESULTS FOR UNDERSERVED STUDENTS

A deeper look at these unique charter public schools reveals a far more impressive fact: **Charter public schools appear to be a real game changer** for students who come from low-income families, as well as for students of color and students receiving Special Education. It is even more remarkable, therefore, that Washington's charter public schools are performing well while serving a disproportionately high percentage of students who have been historically underserved.

Generally, schools receive praise for achieving strong academic results for all students, especially when their student population includes some proportion of systemically underserved students, including Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and low-income populations. **When these students are overrepresented, and the school still excels**, it suggests that something exceptional is occurring there, and we should aim to replicate those successful practices.

It is no wonder families seeking a high-quality public school option are overwhelmingly gravitating towards charter public schools across the country and here in Washington.

Charter public schools have the flexibility at the school level **to meet the unique needs of their students**, whether that means a specialized curriculum, more instructional time in each subject, or a more intimate learning environment.

In fact, charter public schools in Washington are the only public schools **growing in enrollment**. Over the past five years, Washington's district public schools lost 48,352 students (4.24% decrease). **During the same period, Washington's charter public schools gained 1,893 new kids (58.95% increase).**

KEY FINDINGS



WASHINGTON'S CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE HIGH PERFORMERS

- Excel in supporting underserved populations
- The only public schools growing in enrollment
- Outperformed district public schools in English Language Arts, Math, and Science

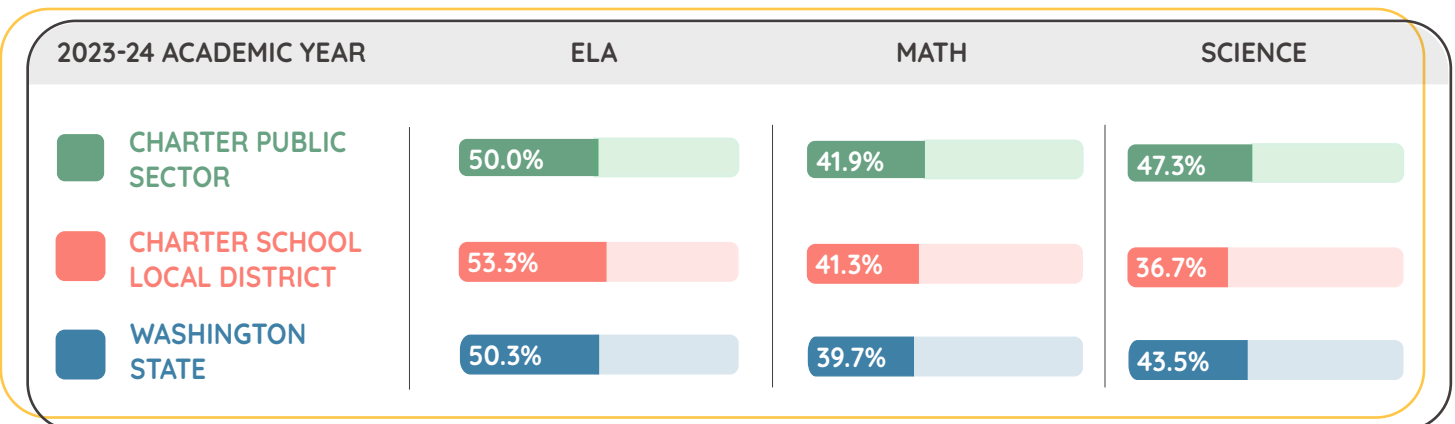
Data Source: OSPI Assessment - SBAC Proficiency Scores
Refreshed as of September 2024

CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL PROFICIENCY: ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS, MATH, AND SCIENCE FOR ALL STUDENTS

In the chart below, across the three subject areas measured by the SBAC, Washington’s charter public schools are performing generally **on par with states and districts**.

In English Language Arts, the scores are within three-tenths of a percentage point when compared to statewide averages and within 3 percentage points when compared to school districts.

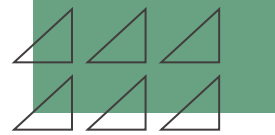
In Math, charter public schools are within six-tenths of a percentage point of school district scores and statewide averages are only 2 percentage points lower.



Data Source: OSPI Assessment - SBAC Proficiency Scores | Refreshed as of September 2024



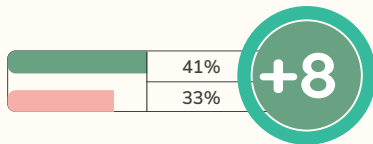
It is important to note that this is not disaggregated data, which would include the full range of racial, income, and geographic differences. Stated differently, this is not a matched comparison of students based on demographics. Charter public schools in Washington serve 65% who are Black, Latino, Indigenous, and students of color compared to 51% at district public schools. Charter public schools also serve 62% of students from low-income families, compared to 50% at district public schools.



HIGHLIGHTS OF CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL PERFORMANCE WITH UNDERSERVED STUDENTS | ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

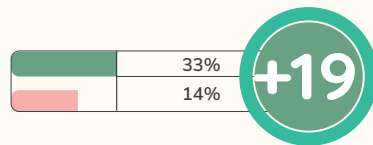
In English Language Arts, historically underserved students at charter public school students excelled, scoring better than their peers at district-run public schools.

■ Charter Public School ■ Charter District



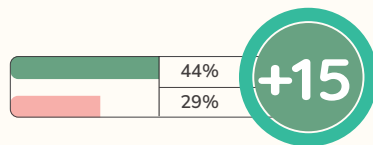
Low-Income Students

Overall, charter public school students from low-income families achieved proficiency **8 percentage points higher** than their peers in districts where charter public schools are located.



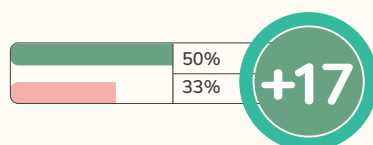
Multilingual Learners (MLL)

Overall, charter public school students achieved proficiency **19 percentage points higher** than their MLL district peers.



Black/African American Students

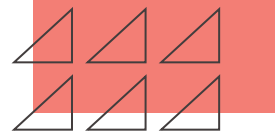
Overall, Black/African American charter public school students achieved proficiency **15 percentage points higher** than their district peers.



Hispanic/Latino Students

Overall, Hispanic/Latino charter public school students achieved proficiency **17 percentage points higher** than their district peers.

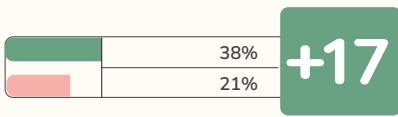
Data Source: OSPI Assessment – SBAC Proficiency Scores | Refreshed as of September 2024
Academic School Year: 2023-24 | English Language Arts



HIGHLIGHTS OF CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL PERFORMANCE WITH UNDERSERVED STUDENTS | MATH

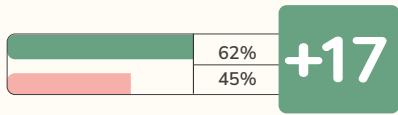
In Math, an even larger group of students, including Asian students and students with disabilities under Section 504, **excelled and significantly outperformed** their peers at district-run public schools.

■ Charter Public School ■ Charter District



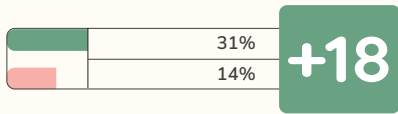
Low-Income Students

Charter public school students from low-income families **outperformed** their peers in local districts **by 17 percentage points** in proficiency.



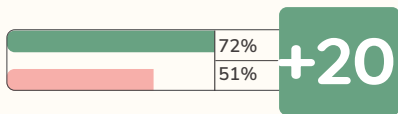
Section 504 Students

Charter public school students under Section 504 **outperformed** their peers in local districts **by 17 percentage points**.



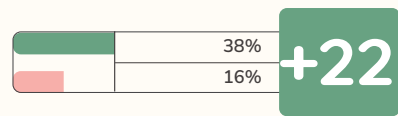
Multilingual Learners (MLL)

Charter public school MLL students have an **18-percentage point higher proficiency rate** than their local district peers.



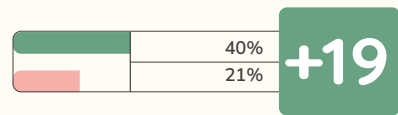
Asian Students

Asian students at charter public schools exceeded their local district peers **by 20 percentage points** in proficiency.



Black/African American Students

Charter public school students **outperformed** their Black/African American local district peers **by 22 percentage points**.



Hispanic/Latino Students

Charter public school students are **19 percentage points more proficient** than their Hispanic/Latino peers in local district schools.

Data Source: OSPI Assessment – SBAC Proficiency Scores | Refreshed as of September 2024
Academic School Year: 2023-24 | English Language Arts

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE GAME CHANGERS | ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

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CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL	DISTRICT COMPARISON	ALL STUDENTS	LOW INCOME	STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES	MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS	BLACK / AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC / LATINO
All Charter Public Schools	All School Districts with Charters	■ 50.0%	■ 41.4%	■ 22.6%	■ 33.2%	■ 43.6%	■ 49.6%
		■ 53.3%	■ 33.0%	■ 23.8%	■ 14.4%	■ 28.8%	■ 33.0%
		■ 50.3%	■ 34.6%	■ 18.7%	■ 15.5%	■ 35.0%	■ 33.6%
Catalyst Public Schools	Bremerton School District	■ 51.3%	■ 38.9%	■ 23.2%	N/A	■ 25.9%	■ 46.8%
		■ 33.7%	■ 25.9%	■ 14.0%		■ 20.6%	■ 18.7%
		■ 50.3%	■ 34.6%	■ 18.7%		■ 35.0%	■ 33.6%
Impact: Puget Sound Elementary	Tukwila School District	■ 49.5%	■ 44.4%	■ 16.7%	■ 38.2%	■ 45.1%	■ 49.0%
		■ 25.8%	■ 20.4%	■ 10.8%	■ 13.2%	■ 17.7%	■ 23.6%
		■ 50.3%	■ 34.6%	■ 18.7%	■ 15.5%	■ 35.0%	■ 33.6%
Rainier Prep	Highline School District	■ 64.5%	■ 60.9%	■ 13.8%	■ 38.5%	■ 61.2%	■ 63.3%
		■ 29.8%	■ 22.8%	■ 9.4%	■ 5.8%	■ 28.2%	■ 17.9%
		■ 50.3%	■ 34.6%	■ 18.7%	■ 15.5%	■ 35.0%	■ 33.6%
Spokane International Academy	Mead School District	■ 53.1%	■ 41.5%	■ 19.2%	■ 20.0%	■ 42.9%	■ 62.0%
		■ 60.4%	■ 45.0%	■ 22.6%	■ 18.5%	■ 31.1%	■ 55.3%
		■ 50.3%	■ 34.6%	■ 18.7%	■ 15.5%	■ 35.0%	■ 33.6%
Summit Atlas	Seattle Public Schools	■ 53.5%	■ 39.9%	■ 31.7%	■ 17.7%	■ 34.7%	■ 43.4%
		■ 64.1%	■ 36.9%	■ 30.5%	■ 14.0%	■ 29.0%	■ 42.3%
		■ 50.3%	■ 34.6%	■ 18.7%	■ 15.5%	■ 35.0%	■ 33.6%
Summit Olympus	Tacoma School District	■ 57.6%	■ 51.9%	N/A	N/A	N/A	■ 70.0%
		■ 45.4%	■ 35.6%				■ 34.8%
		■ 50.3%	■ 34.6%				■ 33.6%
Summit Sierra	Seattle Public Schools	■ 67.4%	■ 44.4%	■ 62.5%	N/A	■ 56.3%	N/A
		■ 69.5%	■ 44.4%	■ 32.7%		■ 40.8%	
		■ 50.3%	■ 34.6%	■ 18.7%		■ 35.0%	

Data Source: OSPI Assessment – SBAC Proficiency Scores | Refreshed as of September 2024
Academic School Year: 2023-24 | English Language Arts

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE GAME CHANGERS | MATH

■ Charter Public School
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CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL	DISTRICT COMPARISON	ALL STUDENTS		LOW INCOME		STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES		MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS		BLACK / AFRICAN AMERICAN		HISPANIC / LATINO	
All Charter Public Schools	All School Districts with Charters	■ 41.9%	■ 37.6%	■ 21.4%	■ 31.3%	■ 38.4%	■ 40.2%	■ 41.3%	■ 21.0%	■ 20.1%	■ 13.5%	■ 16.4%	■ 20.7%
		■ 39.7%	■ 24.1%	■ 15.0%	■ 15.2%	■ 22.0%	■ 22.4%						
Catalyst Public Schools	Bremerton School District	■ 46.0%	■ 36.1%	■ 17.9%	N/A	■ 18.5%	■ 40.4%	■ 26.2%	■ 19.5%	■ 19.1%	■ 14.0%	■ 14.9%	
		■ 39.7%	■ 24.1%	■ 15.0%		■ 22.0%	■ 22.4%						
Impact: Puget Sound Elementary	Tukwila School District	■ 47.5%	■ 41.3%	■ 25.0%	■ 40.0%	■ 46.2%	■ 36.7%	■ 21.6%	■ 17.0%	■ 10.8%	■ 12.7%	■ 20.4%	
		■ 39.7%	■ 24.1%	■ 15.0%	■ 15.2%	■ 22.0%	■ 22.4%						
Impact: Salish Sea Elementary	Seattle School District	■ 51.4%	■ 47.1%	N/A	■ 42.9%	■ 29.7%	■ 53.8%	■ 63.1%	■ 33.8%	■ 33.4%	■ 29.3%	■ 42.1%	
		■ 39.7%	■ 24.1%		■ 15.2%	■ 22.0%	■ 24.4%						
Impact: Commencement Bay Elementary	Tacoma School District	■ 40.5%	■ 34.4%	■ 36.4%	N/A	■ 41.7%	■ 45.5%	■ 44.5%	■ 32.1%	■ 14.4%	■ 25.8%	■ 32.2%	
		■ 39.7%	■ 24.1%	■ 15.0%		■ 22.0%	■ 24.4%						
Rainier Prep	Highline School District	■ 56.4%	■ 55.8%	N/A	■ 37.7%	■ 53.4%	■ 51.6%	■ 18.6%	■ 12.3%	■ 3.9%	■ 15.3%	■ 8.2%	
		■ 39.7%	■ 24.1%		■ 15.2%	■ 22.0%	■ 22.4%						
Spokane International Academy	Mead School District	■ 52.3%	■ 44.7%	■ 23.1%	N/A	■ 57.1%	■ 54.0%	■ 48.9%	■ 32.8%	■ 21.2%	■ 33.3%	■ 41.8%	
		■ 39.7%	■ 24.1%	■ 15.0%		■ 22.0%	■ 22.4%						
Summit Sierra	Seattle Public Schools	■ 41.3%	■ 27.8%	■ 31.3%	N/A	■ 18.8%	N/A	■ 43.8%	■ 18.7%	■ 11.9%	■ 11.5%		
		■ 39.7%	■ 24.1%	■ 15.0%		■ 22.0%							

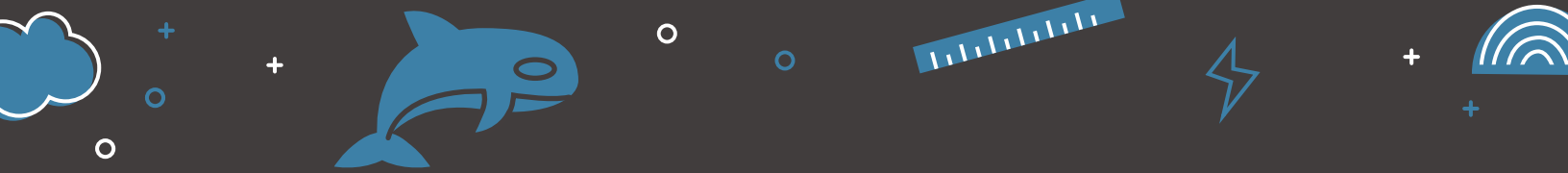
Data Source: OSPI Assessment – SBAC Proficiency Scores | Refreshed as of September 2024
Academic School Year: 2023-24 | Math



Note: Data is suppressed when <10 students have tested.

There is no perfect public school model – either district or charter. And yet, in aggregate charter public schools are clearly punching above their weight with Black and Latino students, as well as students from low-income families and multi-language learners. Many schools in this small group of independently run, open-boundary public options are doing something right. Especially among a population of students who tend to have historically struggled academically, the data shows charter public schools are offering a quality education option that delivers results.

There is performance variability among schools in both sectors; some will perform better than others. Transparency and flexibility in exchange for greater public accountability are hallmarks of the charter public school sector. **This data shows that by delivering excellent outcomes for students with the greatest needs, Washington's charter public schools are making good on our promise to meet high standards and improve public education for students and communities in Washington through a strong charter public school sector.**



CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE DOING SOMETHING SPECIAL WITH BLACK AND LATINO STUDENTS

Black students in Washington state charter public schools met proficiency in Math and Science at a rate **more than double** of that in the districts in which they are located.

- ELA: **43.6% vs 28.8%** in the districts where they are located and 35% statewide.
- Math: **38.4% vs. 16.4%** in the districts where they are located and 22% statewide.
- Science: **38% vs. 15.6%** in the districts where they are located and 25.4% statewide.

Hispanic/Latino students in Washington state charter public schools met proficiency in Math and Science at **nearly double** the rate of their district peers.

- ELA: **49.6% vs. 33%** in the districts where they are located and 33.6% statewide.
- Math: **40.2% vs. 20.7%** in the districts where they are located and 22.4% statewide.
- Science: **52.5% vs. 20.2%** in the districts in which they are located and 27.5% statewide.

SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT | CATALYST PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Students who
struggled at
other schools
are thriving at
Catalyst.



Catalyst opened its doors in Fall 2020, right in the middle of the pandemic. Their commitment to serving students would not be dampened by the uncertainty of mass closures. They pushed forward and created an exceptional school. That spirit of determination in the face of challenges is what makes this school so special. Today, Catalyst is doing what many thought was impossible. They are educating a diverse, high-need population and outperforming peers in their school district and across the state.



“Students who struggled at other schools are thriving at Catalyst.”

Nearly half the students at Catalyst qualify for free or reduced-price lunch and 20% are receiving special education services, either with an Individual Education Plan or a 504 plan.

Students who struggled at other schools are thriving at Catalyst. Latino students scored **nearly 20 points higher** than the state average in math on the annual statewide assessment and 25 points higher than their peers at neighboring schools. Also in Math, students at Catalyst from low-income families scored more than 10 points higher than the state average and more than 15 points higher than the district average. The numbers are equally impressive in science for Latino students and students from low-income families. **Both groups scored 20 points higher than state averages.**

What is the secret to their success? Tatiana Epanchin, Co-Founder and Head of the Elementary School, says it’s **“a really strong commitment from faculty.”** She added, **“All of our faculty believe in all of our kids. Not just teachers, everyone in the building has**



taken up the challenge of knowing, seeing and loving every student.” At Catalyst, the team believes students are better able to learn because they know they are in a safe environment.

Core components of Catalyst’s instructional design are their co-teaching model and inclusive instructional supports. Newer teachers are paired with more senior teachers, creating multiple benefits. Students have more one-on-one instructional time; teachers are able to offer more differentiated instruction; and students with special needs can get the supports they need

without being pulled out of the classroom. So, if a

student needs reading support, it doesn’t come at the expense of time in math class.

Located in the Bremerton community, Catalyst serves many military families. Students may have a parent deployed, or they might be adjusting to a new community, which can create additional stress. For these students especially, a caring school environment is important. The school has a very diverse staff, mirroring their student population. Nearly 50% are Black, Latino, Indigenous or Asian, compared to just 9% in the school district.

Epanchin believes their culture of belonging and support creates the foundation that allows students to soar. **“We make a promise to families that the kids will be loved.”**

SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT | RAINIER PREP

Rainier Prep
meets diverse
students
where they
are.



As one of the first charter public schools to open in Washington state, Rainier Prep recently celebrated its 10th anniversary, marking a decade of pioneering and community-driven education. This exceptional public school has not only set a high academic standard but also fostered a nurturing, family-like atmosphere for its diverse students.

"We believe in the potential of every young person who walks through our doors."

Rainier Prep's academic outcomes as measured by the SBAC are equally impressive. Latine students at Rainier Prep are exceeding both district and state averages, with 63.3% achieving grade-level proficiency in English Language Arts (45.4 points above the local district average) and 51.6% in math (43.4 points above the district). Multilingual students and students from low-income families also demonstrate similar success across ELA, math, and science, underscoring Rainier Prep's commitment to providing an exceptional education to all students.

Rooted in a culture of support and high expectations, Rainier Prep leaders and staff are dedicated to knowing, supporting, and advocating for every student, creating a school environment where all students are prepared to excel.



"Our success at Rainier Prep is deeply rooted in the unwavering commitment of our faculty and staff to each student," says Karen Lobos, Executive Director of Rainier Prep. "We believe in the potential of every young person who walks through our doors. Our team works together every day to create a space where students feel supported, seen, and celebrated. This isn't just a school—it's a community that empowers students to reach new heights and prepares them for a future full of possibility."

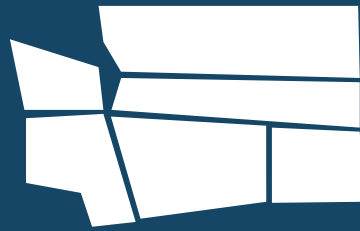
At Rainier Prep, the team is dedicated to empowering every student to excel academically, embrace their unique strengths, and feel a profound sense of belonging in a supportive community.

ABOUT THE SBAC

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) is a standardized statewide test consortium that creates tests to be used in several states, including Washington. Scores from the SBAC provide a comparable way of measuring student achievement on a set of consistent indicators aligned to state standards.

Although a standardized assessment score is not the only measure of student achievement, SBA also offers important data about growth: how students are progressing toward proficiency and college readiness, and how they are performing against their peers state-wide and within a school district. Because charter public schools are run independent from the school district, individual school scores are compared to the school district boundaries where the school geographically sits.





WASHINGTON STATE
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Every student in Washington State deserves a public education that puts them on a path to a successful future, but one size does not fit all, and many students do not get the opportunities they deserve.

Washington's charter public schools are FREE, OPEN TO ALL, DELIVER PROVEN RESULTS, and are an important part of a public school system that meets the needs of all students in Washington State.

Learn more at www.WAcharters.org



Excellent Schools
Washington

Excellent Schools Washington is an organization based in Washington state, dedicated to supporting the growth and sustainability of charter public schools.