

The USDA has a unique opportunity to help rural students, families, and communities.

Rural Charter Schools At-A-Glance

One-in-ten charter school students attend a rural charter school. As of the 2022-23 school year, rural charter schools serve 368,464 students at 909 schools.

5-Year Trend in Rural Charter Schools



Source: NAPCS: Data Dashboard

In 13 states and territories, more than 25% of charter school students attend a rural charter school.

Why Charter Schools Are Critical for Rural Communities

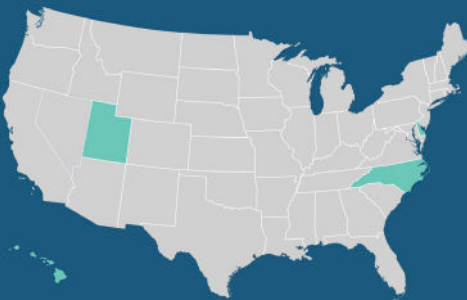
Charter schools are designed to serve unique community needs — whether that means educating a largely Native-American student body with a specialized curriculum, opening a school in a remote area so that students have a public school closer to home, or merging with district schools that would have closed but for the option of re-opening as a charter. In some rural communities, charter schools use their ability to create unique missions to serve especially high-needs students, such as those in the juvenile justice system, pregnant or parenting students, or students in foster care or experiencing homelessness.

Charter schools are the main avenue to bring public education options to remote areas of the United States. With the introduction of charter schools to rural communities, families that have historically had access to limited school options are able to choose the public education that is best for their child.

However, charter schools consistently face inequitable funding, especially when it comes to accessing school facilities in rural areas.

The USDA Rural Development Community Facilities (CF) Direct Loan and Grant Programs and the USDA Guaranteed Loan Program allow entities, including charter schools, to apply for a direct loan, grant, or loan guarantee to construct, purchase, or improve an essential community facility. These high-impact funding streams provide a lifeline to rural communities that need public school options but where charter schools cannot access affordable private capital to finance a building.

Two-thirds of CF funding is concentrated across four states.



North Carolina, Utah, Delaware, and Hawaii.

Source: NAPCS: USDA Financing of Rural Charter Schools

The Problem

A lack of clear and consistent guidance on eligibility and how to access the CF programs has led to uneven and inequitable access to these resources across states. Improved and proactive guidance will help USDA state offices work with charter schools to access CF funding so that more students can benefit from rural charter schools.

The Solution

The USDA's CF can help charter schools educate students by supporting school facilities in rural communities in all states. With a few tweaks, the USDA can transform public school options in rural areas and have an outsized impact on tens of thousands of students across the country.

Two Recommendations to Better Support Rural Families

Data Capture

The USDA should collect data on charter school participation and access to the programs. This will provide more insight into which entities are receiving funds and how these funds are being spent.

Clear Guidance

The USDA should issue guidance to USDA state offices to raise awareness of the CF. Guidance should communicate that rural charter schools are eligible to apply and include application best practices.

By capturing data on the CF program and ensuring state offices are aware of this funding stream, the USDA can increase public school choice for rural students in every state.