

# NATIVE STUDENTS AND PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

Expanding Educational Opportunity, Language & Community Voice in South Dakota

## Overview

Native students in South Dakota deserve access to public school options that reflect their culture and meet their academic needs. Public charter schools are free, open to all, accountable for results, and created based on community demand. South Dakota is one of only three states without a law allowing charter schools to open. Passing a charter school law in South Dakota will allow Tribes and Native educators to design schools rooted in their community priorities, language, and culture.

## BY THE NUMBERS

### National Landscape

Public charter schools serving Native students operate in multiple rural states, providing an important alternative in areas where educational choice is limited.

**26,000+**  
**Native students**  
currently attend public  
charter schools nationwide

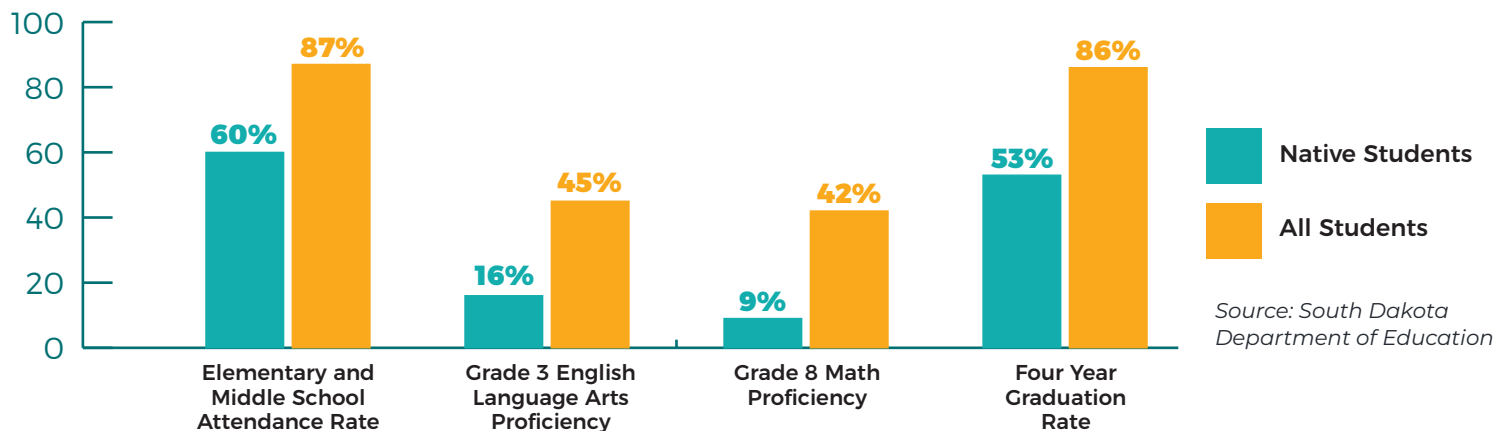
**86**  
**charter schools**  
operate on or  
near Tribal land

**69**  
**schools**  
enroll student  
populations that  
are 25%+ Native

### South Dakota Landscape

Native students are South Dakota's largest minority subgroup, accounting for 10% of the state's student population. Yet, many Native students continue to face significant opportunity gaps with existing public school options across key educational indicators. These gaps show why community-designed schools that reflect Native students' culture and ways of learning matter.

### FY25 Performance Measures



# TRIBAL PARTNERSHIP & SELF-DETERMINATION

The proposed charter law in South Dakota empowers Tribal communities to open schools that serve local priorities. The law is designed to expand opportunities for students with the greatest needs, including Native students who have historically been underserved by existing public school options.

The legislation includes provisions that ensure the following:

- Public charter school applicants seeking to locate within the boundaries of a Native nation must have the support of the local tribal government in order to be approved.
- Priority will be given to charter school applicants who propose serving students in accordance with the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings.
- All public charter schools must give priority enrollment to students at risk of academic failure.

## PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS WORK FOR NATIVE STUDENTS

Communities nationwide are designing public charter schools that strengthen cultural identity and academic success. Here are two models showing what is possible when Native communities are empowered to design their own public schools:

### **Pemayetv Emahakv “Our Way” Charter School**

*PreK–8 school in Okeechobee, Florida using a Creek language immersion model to preserve heritage and strengthen identity*

### **Native American Community Academy**

*K–12 school serving students from 60+ Tribes in Albuquerque, New Mexico; integrates Indigenous traditions and values with college-ready academics*



**South Dakota  
Charter Schools**

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