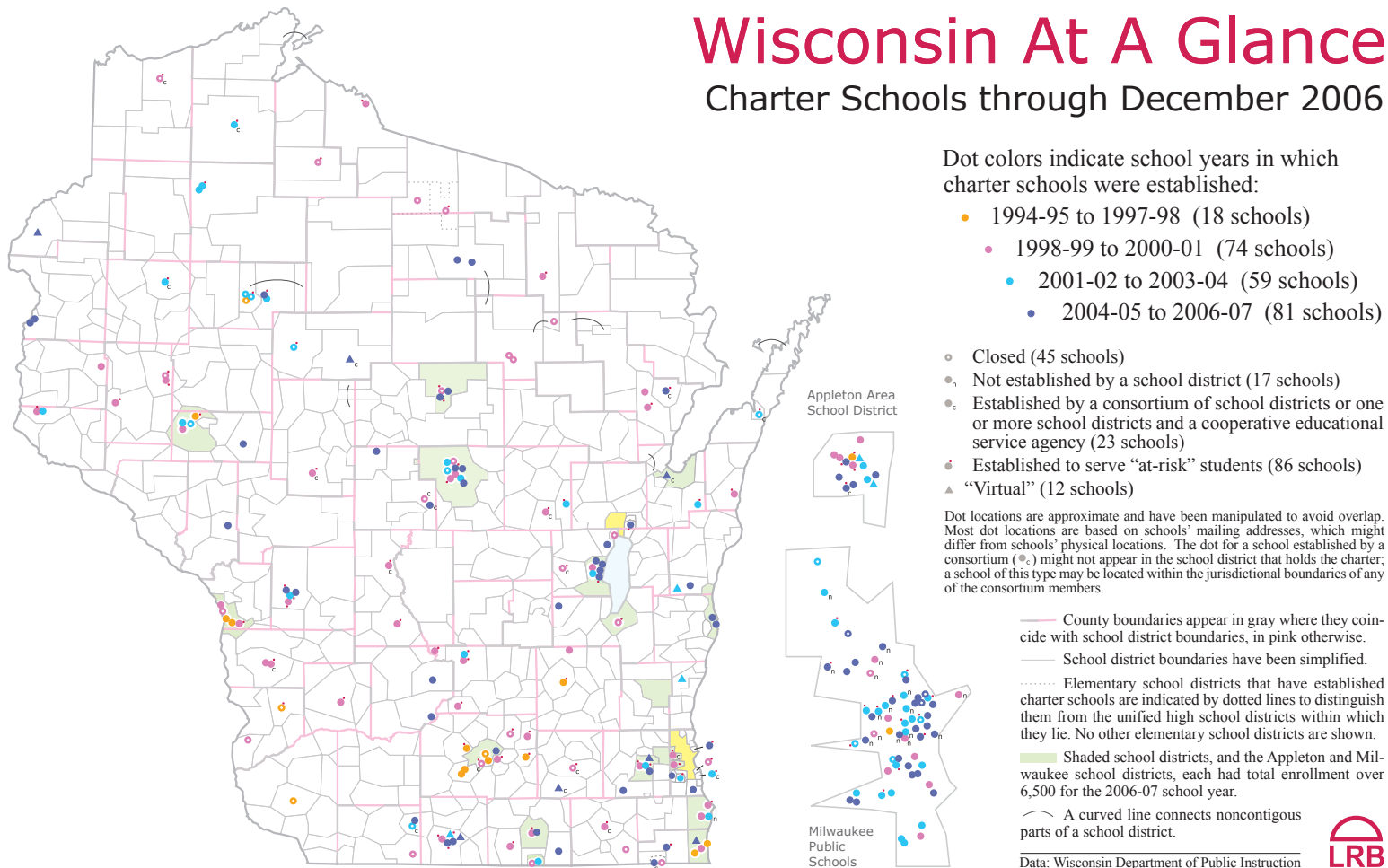


Wisconsin At A Glance

Charter Schools through December 2006



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Charter Schools through December 2006

Charter schools were developed to increase educational options for students in the public school system. A charter school is largely exempt from state (though not federal) laws and rules that apply to other public schools. Instead, it is subject to a contract—the “charter”—that it enters into with a school district (or other authorized entity, see below). The contract describes the school’s educational program, governance structure, and facilities and the amount of funding the school will receive from the school district—all of which, with certain limitations, can be anything that the school district agrees to. However, the term of the contract, and of any renewals, may not exceed five years. In addition, annual program and financial audits of the school are required. And the school district can revoke the contract if students at the school fail to make sufficient progress towards state educational goals and for certain other causes.

Wisconsin is one of 40 states that have authorized charter schools. Wisconsin enacted its original charter school legislation in 1993. In the 1994-95 school year, the Stevens Point Area Public School District established the first Wisconsin charter school, and, in the 1995-96 school year, six other school districts established seven more. Since late 1996, federal grant moneys have been available to aid charter school planning and start-up costs in Wisconsin.

In 1998, the city of Milwaukee, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and the Milwaukee Area Technical College were authorized to establish charter schools in the Milwaukee Public Schools school district. In 2001, the University of Wisconsin-Parkside was authorized to establish a single charter school, which it did in the following year in the Racine Unified School District. Funding for these charter schools is provided by the state directly, rather than by the establishing entities.

In the 2002-03 school year, the Appleton Area School District established Wisconsin’s first “virtual” charter school, and eleven more have opened since. These schools provide some or all of their course content and student-teacher interaction via the Internet. As a result, students from anywhere in the state can attend some of these schools, regardless of physical distance, under the Open Enrollment Program (and, when they do, state aid is reduced to their school districts of residence and increased to the school districts where they enroll).

Charter schools have opened in 97 of the state’s 425 school districts, and charter schools specifically designed for students at risk of not graduating from high school have opened in 62. In addition, some of these charter schools, including some of the “at risk” type schools, have been joint ventures involving multiple school districts.

Over one-half of Wisconsin’s charter schools (128 out of 232) have opened in school districts that had enrollments over 6,500 in the 2006-07 school year. (There are 20 such school districts in the state, and charter schools have opened in 18 of them.) Over one-fourth of Wisconsin’s charter schools (62 out of 232) have opened in the state’s largest school district, the Milwaukee Public Schools, and charter schools in that school district accounted for over one-half of all charter school enrollment in Wisconsin in the 2005-06 school year.