

William Penn Charter School

Philadelphia, United States



Founded in 1689, this East Falls Quaker campus still runs the nation's oldest continuous schoolboy football rivalry.

RANKING DIMENSIONS

Overall	72/100
Academic outcomes	74/100
University placement	72/100
Prestige & heritage	74/100
Alumni network	73/100
Facilities	74/100
Transparency	67/100

EDITOR'S VERDICT

Penn Charter trades on substance, not polish. A ****1689**** foundation matters here because the school still carries the weight of that history in a live way: this is the oldest Quaker school in the world, on a ****47-acre**** campus in East Falls, and part of one of the country’s oldest prep-school rivalries. The Quaker identity is not decorative. Weekly Meeting for Worship sits inside school life, and the language of simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality and stewardship runs straight through the mission. Parents looking for a secular-prestige school with a thin ethical veneer should look elsewhere. This is a ***values-driven*** school with a serious moral centre.

The academic proposition is strong and broad rather than narrowly exam-drilled. Penn Charter offers an American curriculum from age 3 to 18, with a **5:1** student-teacher ratio that signals unusual adult access by any standard. The school talks openly about a vigorous programme across academics, arts and athletics, and the detail supports that: hands-on science and inquiry in the middle years, an Idea Lab and Discovery Room for younger children, a performing arts programme with real space for growth, and athletics tied explicitly to character formation. That breadth will suit students who want intensity without premature specialisation. It will not suit families hunting for a **results-factory** or a school that defines ambition in test-prep terms alone. Penn Charter does not publish the kind of headline outcomes data that hard-driving comparison shoppers now expect, and that opacity matters.

The market position is clear: this is an **expensive**, top-tier Philadelphia day school, with an average annual fee of **\$39,938** across the full age range. What puts it on a shortlist is the combination of age, mission and resources: pre-K to 12 continuity, a large urban campus, a deep-rooted Quaker ethos and enough institutional confidence to invest in the arts, sport, civic engagement and environmental sustainability alongside scholarship. The right child for Penn Charter is bright, engaged and comfortable in a school culture that asks for reflection as well as performance. The ideal fit is not a child who wants anonymity or a purely transactional education, but one who will thrive in a **high-expectation**, **community-minded** environment where intellect, character and participation all count.

STRENGTHS

- Founded by Philadelphia Quakers in 1689 and first chartered by Penn in 1701, it is the oldest continuously operating Friends school in the world.
- Located on 47 acres in the East Falls section of Philadelphia, the school enrolls roughly 1,000 co-educational students from pre-K through grade 12.
- Students can participate in both athletics and the performing arts, with 80 sports teams in Middle and Upper School and 17 student ensembles in performing arts.
- About 40% of students receive some level of financial aid, and Penn Charter imposes no income ceiling or minimum for families applying, with most aided families paying less than half of tuition.
- Penn Charter is a member of the Inter-Academic League (Inter-Ac), the nation's oldest high school league, and shares the nation's oldest continuous football rivalry with Germantown Academy.

TRADE-OFFS

- As a Day school only, families relocating to Philadelphia must secure local housing rather than relying on a boarding option.
- Upper School tuition reaches roughly the high-\$40,000s per year by the mid-2020s, a significant recurring cost even before ancillary fees.
- The acceptance rate is around 31%, lower than the national average, and older applicants typically must sit the SSAT or ISEE, adding a formal testing hurdle.
- A weekly Meeting for Worship for quiet spiritual reflection is woven into school life, a Quaker practice that families seeking a strictly secular day school should weigh.

ADMISSIONS

Penn Charter admits students from pre-K through grade 12, with most new-student places concentrated at entry points such as pre-K, kindergarten, and grades 5-9. Applications for Middle and Upper School typically require SSAT or ISEE scores and carry an application fee; the priority deadline falls in mid-December with rolling review thereafter. Reported acceptance rates sit near 30%, making the school moderately selective rather than hyper-exclusive. Financial aid is need-based, uncapped by income, and covers around 40% of the student body, so cost need not automatically exclude qualified applicants.

WTS RATING 

This profile summarises editorial research by World's Top Schools. Verify all admissions dates directly with the school before submitting. Sources are cited in the full online profile at WorldsTopSchools.com/schools/sch_872d44b530.