



Charter School 101

There are many common misconceptions and misinformation used by opponents to argue against charter schools. The following are some quick facts you can use to clarify the truth about charter schools and provide others with a better understanding of what charter schools do and how they operate.

What is a charter school?

Charter schools are independent public schools that operate under a contract or charter. With their rigorous curriculum programs, and unique educational approaches such as: longer school days and a longer school year, charter schools offer quality and choice in the public education system.

Charter schools trade operational freedom and flexibility for higher levels of accountability than traditional public schools. Charter schools are held accountable to the parents and students they serve based on how well they meet the academic performance goals established in their charter, and how they manage their fiscal and operational responsibilities.

How are students admitted to charter schools?

Any child eligible for admission to a traditional public school is eligible for admission to a public charter school. All charter schools must enroll students through a blind lottery.

Can charter schools charge tuition?

No. As public schools, charter schools cannot charge tuition.

How are charter schools funded?

As public schools, charter schools are funded by public tax dollars that pass through the student's school district of residence. A portion of the per-pupil amount that a school district spends follows a student to the charter school. It is important to note that because not all monies received by a school district are included in the calculation, charter schools receive only between 60-80% of what school districts actually spend on a per-pupil basis.

Do public charter schools receive state building aid or other public funds that public school districts receive for capital purposes?

No. State building aid is not included in the formula for identifying per pupil aid, nor are charter schools eligible to receive other public funds that school districts have access to for capital construction and renovation.

Is there a time limit to a charter?

Yes. Charters are issued for a period not to exceed five years. A charter may also be renewed for up to five years.

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Who can approve applications for charter schools?

The New York Charter Schools Act provides three routes to apply for a charter: the Board of Regents, local boards of education, and the State University Board of Trustees (SUNY).

Is there a limit to the number of charter schools that can be created?

Yes. The Charter Schools Act allows up to 200 charters to be issued for new charter schools by an authorized charter entity.

Can a public school convert to a public charter school?

Yes. An unlimited number of existing public schools may convert to a charter school.

An existing public school seeking to convert to a charter school must first apply to its local school district board of education, or, in the case of a school in New York City, the New York City Schools Chancellor.

Can an existing non-public school convert to a charter school?

No. The law specifically prohibits an existing non-public school from converting to a charter school.

Do charter schools have required performance or achievement standards?

Yes. Charter schools must demonstrate that their educational programs meet or exceed the student performance standards adopted by the Board of Regents for other public schools. As part of their assessment program, charter school students are required to take existing state exams required of students in other public schools, including Regents exams.

Are public charter school employees unionized?

Instructional staff of a new charter school with enrollment exceeding 250 students on the first day of instruction will be certified automatically as a separate collective bargaining unit.

If employees of a new charter school do not automatically become union employees, do they have the right to organize?

Yes. Instructional and non-instructional staff who do not become union members, can choose to organize and if successful have the right to collectively bargain. In any organization drive, the charter school must remain neutral and provide reasonable access to employee organizations. Additionally, a charter school may also choose to offer the terms of any collective bargaining agreement to its employees.

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