

Charter Schools 101: The Most Frequently Asked Questions

What are Public Charter Schools?

Charter schools are tuition-free public schools that are free to be more innovative and are held accountable for improved student achievement. There are currently over 4,900 public charter schools open in 40 states and D.C., serving more than 1.6 million students. Children have different ways of learning, and public charter schools simply offer families a wider variety of options to serve such differences.

How are Public Charter Schools Held Accountable to State Educational Standards?

Public charter schools are required to meet all state and federal education standards. In addition, they are judged on how well they meet student achievement goals established by their charter contracts. A quality public charter school must meet rigorous academic, fiscal and managerial standards.

How are Public Charter Schools Held Financially Accountable?

Yes. Since public charter schools are funded with public dollars, they are required by law to be held accountable for taxpayer dollars are spent through regular audits and ongoing reviews from their authorizing entities.

What are Some Successful Innovations within Public Charter Schools?

Across the country, public charter schools are creating a wide variety of innovations, including:

- Curriculum design (e.g., Montessori, Core Knowledge, Advanced Placement Courses, Foreign Language Immersion Programs, Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics)
- Extended learning time
- School cultures with high expectations for all students and adults
- More structured and disciplined learning environments
- Rewarding high-quality teachers with higher pay
- Parent contracts
- Multi-age programs

How Are Public Charter Schools Funded?

When a student transfers from a traditional public school to a public charter school, the funding associated with that student will follow him or her to the public charter school. Public charter schools do not add any new costs to the state's public education system. They simply represent a reallocation of resources from one school to another based upon the decisions of families across the state.

How are Public Charter Schools Performing?

In addition to increasing the number of public school options available to families, public charter schools are closing the achievement gap and raising the bar about what's possible – and what should be expected – in public education. These schools are shattering low expectations and breaking through long-standing barriers that have prevented large numbers of at-risk students from achieving educational success. Charter school studies that use the best data and the most sophisticated research techniques show charters outperforming comparable traditional public schools. Studies have also been clear

that the quality of a state's charter school laws is a critically important factor in the success of public charter schools.