

WHAT IS A CHARTER SCHOOL?

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A charter school is a public school.

A charter school can provide instruction from kindergarten through 12th grade.

Charter schools are typically created by a group of parents, teachers, administrators, community leaders or a local community-based organization.

Charter schools are created when a group of parents, teachers and community leaders petition a local school board or county board of education for a charter to open an independent school in their community.

WHY ARE THESE SCHOOLS CALLED “CHARTERS?”

Charter school operators set forth their goals and operating procedures in a contract that is reached with the local school district, county board of education or the state. This contract is called a “charter.”

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WHO PAYS TO OPERATE CHARTER SCHOOLS?

You do, through the taxes you pay. Charter schools receive their funding directly from the state of California.

HOW ARE CHARTER SCHOOLS GOVERNED?

Charter schools have their own boards of education and operate independently of local school districts. Local school districts and county boards of education, however, have an oversight responsibility over charter schools and review the progress of charter schools. Local school districts, county boards of education and the state can revoke charters.

A charter school is generally exempt from most laws governing school districts, except where specifically noted in the law.

HOW DO WE KNOW IF THE STUDENTS ARE DOING WELL AT CHARTER SCHOOLS?

Charter schools in California are required to participate in the statewide assessment test, called the STAR (Standardized Testing and Reporting) program. Charter schools are accountable to their sponsor—usually a state or local school board—to produce positive academic results and adhere to the charter contract. The basic concept of charter schools is that they exercise increased autonomy in return for this accountability.

ARE CHARTER SCHOOLS PRIVATE SCHOOLS?

No. All charter schools are public schools. The charter law prohibits the conversion of a private school to a charter school.

CAN CHARTER SCHOOLS TEACH RELIGION?

No. Charter schools must be nonsectarian in their programs, admission policies, employment practices, and all other operations.

DOES IT COST EXTRA TO SEND MY CHILD TO A CHARTER SCHOOL?

No. Charter schools may not charge tuition and may not discriminate against any pupil on the basis of ethnicity, national origin, gender, or disability.

HOW MANY CHARTER SCHOOLS ARE THERE?

There are currently more than 470 charter schools operating in California, serving 170,000 students. There are more than 700,000 students attending 3,000 charter schools nationwide. The number of students attending charter schools is increasing at a rate of about 15 percent a year in the United States.

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WHY CHARTER SCHOOLS?

Public charter schools offer an important and timely public school option to address the challenges facing our traditional education system. Charter schools are an exciting and high-potential alternative for the following reasons:

Most efforts to reform high-need public schools in California have failed. Charter schools provide parents the opportunity to offer real input in their child's education.

Charter schools give educators freedom to try new strategies to inspire student achievement.

Charters schools, less encumbered by the bureaucratic barriers that face other public schools, have the potential to spark system-wide change.