

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Charter School?

Charter schools are public schools that operate independently according to the terms of a five-year performance contract or "charter." Charter schools commit to meet specific goals for academic performance and their charter can be revoked if agreed-upon results are not attained. Like all publicly funded schools, charter schools must meet Regents requirements and state laws for health, safety, civil rights and student assessment. In addition, charter schools must accept all students and cannot discriminate in their admission policy.

What are the Benefits of Enrolling a Child in a Charter School?

Charter schools provide an innovative alternative to conventional NYC public schools. With their high degree of autonomy, performance-based education models and strict accountability, charter schools:

- enable teachers to be more creative and innovative in their teaching methods, length of school day and year, and subject matter;
- provide an added education resource in areas underserved by public schools;
- tend to be smaller in overall student body for more personalized attention;
- allow parents to choose a school based on what they think will work best for their children; and
- are held accountable for meeting and exceeding academic, operational, and fiduciary goals.

How are Charter Schools Different From Conventional Public Schools?

Charter schools can be started by educators, parents, community leaders and not-for profit organizations, and are approved only after a rigorous review process. Once schools open, they are governed by a not-for-profit board of trustees. They are exempt from many state and local regulations regarding curriculum development, personnel hiring and financial management, but must succeed in meeting or exceeding the goals established for their academic programs.

What is the Application Process?

Each spring charter schools accept applications and hold a lottery where applicants are selected at random to attend. After the requisite number of students for each grade is selected, the remaining applicants are placed on a wait list according to the order in which their names were called. Students living in the same community school district (CSD) of the charter school are given preference in the lottery process.

How are Charter Schools Funded?

Each charter school receives state funding for each student it educates. For the 2008-2009 school year, the "per pupil" allocation (PPA) for charter schools in New York State is \$12,432. In addition to the PPA, several state and federal grants are available, and charter schools are welcome to fundraise from private sources as well. Charter schools do not receive any city, state, or federal funding for facilities.

How Did Charter Schools Get Started?

In December 1998, the New York State Charter Schools Act (Education Law § 2850-2857) allowed the creation of independent public schools, operating based on the terms of a five-year performance contract or "charter." The law states that "[a]n application to establish a charter school may be submitted by teachers, parents, school administrators, community residents or any combination thereof. Such applications may be filed in conjunction with a college, university, museum, educational institution, not-for-profit corporation exempt from taxation under paragraph 3 of subsection (c) of section 501 of the internal revenue code or for-profit business or corporate entity authorized to do business in New York state. For charter schools established in conjunction with a for-profit business or corporate entity, the charter shall specify the extent of the entity's participation in the management and operation of the school."

Why Are Charter Schools Innovative?

By giving educators more autonomy and evaluating schools by their student achievements, charter schools provide an innovative solution to achieve, among other things, the following educational goals:

- Increase the learning opportunities and scholastic achievement for all students, especially those at-risk of academic failure
- Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods
- Provide parents and students more educational choices within the public school system
- Create new opportunities for motivated teachers, school administrators and personnel

At the same time, charter schools are held accountable for meeting specific student performance goals and a charter may be revoked or not renewed if results are not attained. In return, charter schools are exempt from many public school regulations for curriculum development, staffing and budgeting.

How Are Charter Schools Similar to Public Schools?

Like all public schools, charter schools must meet state standards and Regents requirements, as well as state and federal laws regarding health, safety, civil rights and student assessment. In addition, charter schools must accept all students and cannot discriminate in their admission policy.