

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT CHARTER SCHOOLS

What are charter schools?

Charter schools are public schools. They are tuition-free and open to any student who wishes to attend. Charter schools allow parents, organizations, or community groups to restore, reinvent, and reenergize our public school system. Charter schools are designed, tailored, and governed by each local community, rather than by a central bureaucracy.

Are charters public schools?

Yes, charter schools are tuition-free, public schools that operate independently from the school district's central bureaucracy. Each charter school is governed by its own local school community, which often includes parents and teachers - rather than a district. This freedom allows teachers to be more innovative, and communities to shape their local school.

How can I apply for a charter school? Are there admission requirements?

Charter schools are open to ALL children and they are committed to serving a student body that reflects the local community. Research evidence shows that charter school students are just as diverse (racially and economically) as non-charter students.

By law, charter schools can never have selective admissions; anyone can apply and, if more students want to attend than there are seats available, there is a lottery to determine who is admitted.

Does it matter where I live? What is the attendance boundary?

As schools of choice, all charter schools are open to any student who wants to apply, regardless of where he or she lives, space permitting. Independent Study or non-classroom based schools have some geographical limitations such as only being open to students from a specific county.

How does the lottery system work?

Charter schools are open to all students who want to attend, regardless of where they live. If the school receives more students than for which it has spots available, it is required by law to hold a blind lottery to determine which students will have the opportunity to attend. Many charter schools have wait lists and may admit more students as spots become available.

SUMMARY

Charter schools:

- Are public schools
- Are tuition-free
- Participate in state tests
- Employ credentialed teachers
- Admit all students
- Offer quality and choice to students, families and teachers

For more information on charter schools, visit www.calcharters.org

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Why isn't our local charter school located in a traditional school building?

Under state law, school districts are required to provide adequate and equivalent facilities to charter public schools, but districts vary in their compliance with this law. Many charter schools secure their own facilities, using state financing or donations. In some cases, the charter school may build a full school campus from the ground up; in other areas, they may rent available space in churches, community centers or commercial buildings.

If charter schools are independent from the district, how are they held accountable?

Charter schools are actually more accountable to parents and students than conventional schools. Because they are governed by the parents, teachers and administrators that make up the local school community, charters are directly accountable to the community they serve. Local governance allows the school community freedom to innovate and make decisions based on the needs of their students. Additionally, charter schools are reviewed for renewal every five years by the school district or authorizer to ensure they have good academic results, and that they are operating in a fiscally and operationally responsible manner.

Will I be required to volunteer?

While parental involvement is a critical key to student success, no student would ever be punished or lose their place at a school based on a parent's volunteer hours. Decisions about parental involvement often involve an agreement between parents, teachers, and administrators.

What types of educational programs do charters offer?

Every charter school is allowed the freedom to create its own educational program. Teachers, students, parents and administrators all have a say in the types of instructional methods, materials and academic programs the school offers. Charter school models include but are not limited to: college preparation, bilingualism, performing arts, math, science, technology and much, much more.

What programs do charter schools offer for students with special needs?

Charter schools believe every student deserves to be in an environment where they have the best chances of success and charter schools are committed to serving all students, including those with special needs. In fact, because charter schools have more flexibility than traditional public schools, they are uniquely situated to provide innovative, high quality educational services to students with special needs. In order to support students with special needs, charter schools will often tailor their educational program or create specialized programs. Depending on a student's individual needs, offering appropriate special education services may result in the charter school working with a District program, a non-public school or agency, or another charter school to provide a level or type of service that is not available at the individual charter school site. Ultimately, in charter schools and other public schools, the student's parents and representatives (the IEP team) make the final determination of the best option for that student.

Do charter school teachers have to have credentials?

In California, charter schools are required to hire credentialed teachers for core and college preparatory subjects just like all other public schools.

Can charter schools be run by private corporations?

In California, some charter schools may be operated as or by nonprofit corporations, but these schools are not privately "owned." Rather, they are more akin to private-public partnerships, where the non-profit is held publicly accountable by many different state agencies. All California charter schools, no matter how they are operated and governed, are part of the public school system-- overseen by a school district, county office of education or the state Board of Education.