

Frequently Asked Questions

General Information

What are charter schools?

Charter schools are public schools that operate under a performance contract, or a “charter” which frees them from many regulations created for traditional public schools while holding them accountable for academic and financial results. The charter contract between the charter school governing board and the sponsor details the school’s mission, program, goals, students served, methods of assessment and ways to measure success. The length of time for which charters are granted varies but most are granted for five years.

The Florida Legislature, in authorizing the creation of public charter schools, established the following guiding principles: high standards of student achievement while increasing parental choice; the alignment of responsibility with accountability; and ensuring parents receive information on reading levels and learning gains of their children. Charter schools are intended to improve student learning; increase learning opportunities with special emphasis on low performing students and reading; and measure learning outcomes. Charter schools may create innovative measurement tools; provide competition to stimulate improvement in traditional schools; expand capacity of the public school system; and mitigate the educational impact created by the development of new residential units.

Who is eligible to attend charter schools?

Charter schools are open to all students in the state under the controlled open enrollment plan; however, charter schools are allowed to target students within specific age groups or grade levels, students considered at-risk of dropping out or failing, students wishing to enroll in a charter school-in-the-workplace or charter school-in-a-municipality, students residing within a reasonable distance of the school, students who meet reasonable academic, artistic or other eligibility standards established by the charter school, or students articulating from one charter school to another. Additionally, a charter school may give enrollment preference to the following student populations:

- Siblings of current charter school students
- Children of a charter school governing board member or employee
- Children of employees of the business partner of a charter school-in-the-workplace or resident of the municipality in which such a charter is located
- Children of residents of a municipality that operates a charter school-in-a-municipality
- Students who have successfully completed a voluntary prekindergarten program provided by the charter school during the previous year
- Children of an active-duty member of any branch of the US Armed Forces.

Charter schools must provide preferential treatment in their controlled open enrollment processes to:

- Dependent children of active duty military personnel whose move resulted from military orders;
- Children who have been relocated due to a foster care placement in a different school zone;
- Children who move due to a court-ordered change in custody due to separation or divorce, or the serious illness or death of a custodial parent; and
- Students residing in the district.

How are charter schools created, organized, and operated?

Charter schools are created when an individual, a group of parents or teachers, a business, a municipality, or a legal entity submits an application to the school district; the school district approves the application; the applicants form a governing board that negotiates a contract with the district school board; and the applicants and district school board agree upon a charter or contract. The district school board then becomes the sponsor of the charter school. The negotiated contract outlines expectations of both parties regarding the school's academic and financial performance.

A charter school must be organized as, or be operated by, a nonprofit organization. The charter school may serve at-risk students, or offer a specialized curriculum or core academic program, provide early intervention programs, or serve exceptional education students.

How does the application process work for a charter school?

As required in s.1002.33(6), F.S., a school board receives and reviews all charter school applications and, within 90 days of receipt, must approve or deny the application. All charter applicants must prepare and submit an application on a model application form prepared by the Department, which:

- Demonstrates how the school will use the guiding principles.
- Provides a detailed curriculum
- Contains goals and objectives for improving student learning.
- Describes the separate reading curricula and differentiated strategies.
- Contains an annual financial plan

If a school board denies an application, it must provide specific written reasons within 10 calendar days. The charter school applicant then has 30 calendar days to appeal the denial. The appeal is reviewed by the State Board of Education and the State Board's decision is a final action subject to judicial review.

What specific statutory requirements apply to charter school operations?

A charter school is statutorily required to (s.1002.33(9),F.S.):

- Be nonsectarian in its programs, admission policies, employment practices, and operations;

- Be accountable to the school district for its performance;
- Not charge tuition or fees;
- Comply with all applicable state and local health, safety, and civil rights requirements;
- Not discriminate on the basis of race, national origin, sex, handicap, or marital status;
- Subject itself to and pay for an annual financial audit;
- Maintain all financial records that constitute its accounting system in accordance with current law;
- Annually adopt and maintain an operating budget;
- Fully participate in the state's education accountability program.

Are there parental involvement requirements for charter schools?

Every charter school's governing board is required to appoint a representative to facilitate parental involvement, provide access to information, assist parents and others with questions and concerns, and resolve disputes. The representative must reside in the school district. The representative may be a governing board member, employee, or individual contracted to represent the governing board.

Contact information for the representative must be provided in writing to parents each year, and must be posted prominently on the charter schools web site if a web site is maintained by the charter school.

Also, each charter school's governing board must hold at least two public meetings per school year in the school district. The meetings must be noticed, open, and accessible to the public. Attendees must be provided an opportunity to offer input regarding the schools operations and receive information about the school. The representative appointed by the governing board must be physically present at the two required meetings.

Are charter schools exempt from state statutes?

Charter schools are generally exempt from the Florida K-20 Education Code (Ch. 1000-1013, F.S.), except those statutes specifically applying to charter schools; pertaining to the student assessment program and school grading system; pertaining to the provision of services to students with disabilities; pertaining to civil rights; pertaining to student health, safety, and welfare; and relating to maximum class size, except the calculation for compliance shall be the average at the school level.

Charter schools must also comply with any statute governing public records; public meetings and records; public inspection; and penalties (Ch. 119, F.S.). In addition, charter schools must use facilities that comply with the Florida Building Code (Ch. 553, F.S.) and Florida Fire Prevention Code (s. 633.025, F.S.), but are exempt from compliance with the State Requirements for Educational Facilities (SREF).

A local governing authority may not impose local building requirements more stringent than those in the Florida Building Code and charter schools are exempt from ad valorem taxes and fees charged for building licenses.

[Are charter school teachers required to be certified?](#)

Teachers employed by or under contract to a charter school are required to be certified (Ch. 1012, F.S.).

[Are charter school administrators required to be certified?](#)

Charter school administrators are not required to be certified.

[What is a high-performing charter school?](#)

According to s. 1002.331, F.S., a high-performing charter school is a school that has met each of the following criteria:

- Received at least two school grades of "A" and no school grade below "B" for the last three years
- Received an unqualified opinion on each annual audit in the most recent three years for which such audits are available
- Did not receive a financial audit that revealed one or more of the financial emergency conditions set forth in s. 218.503, F.S., in the most three recent fiscal years for which audits are available. (Exception: Charter school-in-the-workplace can meet this criteria if the audit determines that the school has the monetary resources available to cover any deficiency, or that the deficiency does not result in a deteriorating financial condition)

[How do the instructional and administrative personnel of a charter school compare with the personnel of a traditional public school?](#)

Florida Statutes require that teachers employed by or under contract with a charter school be certified in the same manner as all other public school teachers in Florida.

Accountability

[How are charter schools held accountable?](#)

First and central to charter school accountability is the charter or contract between the charter school and the sponsor, usually the school district. The sponsor may close a charter school if the school fails to meet the student performance outcomes agreed upon in the charter, fails to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management, violates the law, or shows other good cause.

Charter schools are evaluated and assigned a school grade using the same standards and criteria as traditional public schools.

The Department of Education is statutorily required to annually provide an analysis and comparison of the overall performance of charter school students to traditional public school students. The comparison is to be based on the statewide assessment program and information

reported by the charter school to the school district. Current and [archived reports](#) are available on the School Choice web site.

Funding

How are charter school operations funded?

Charter schools are funded through the Florida Education Finance Program in the same way as all other public schools in the school district. The charter school receives operating funds from the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) based on the number of full-time (FTE) students enrolled.

Charter school funding includes gross state and local funds, discretionary lottery funds, and funds from the school district's current operating discretionary millage levy; divided by the total funded weighted full-time equivalent (FTE) students in the school district; multiplied by the weighted FTE students in the charter school. Charter schools are entitled to their proportionate share of categorical program funds, for eligible students and programs.

Charter schools may also access federal funds through a competitive grant process that awards funds to charter schools for the following purposes:

- **Planning and Implementation** - the Florida Department of Education administers the Charter Schools Program (CSP) Planning and Implementation grant through a request for proposals (RFP) process each year. The general purpose of this grant is to provide financial assistance for the planning, program design, and initial implementation of charter schools and expand the number of high quality charter schools in Florida.
- **Dissemination** - This competitive grant aids successful charter schools in the dissemination of best practices and other information about charter schools. Charter schools in operation for at least three years who have not previously received a dissemination grant may be eligible to apply. Additional eligibility criteria may be established by the Department and may vary with each application cycle.

Virtual charter schools are funded in accordance with s. 1002.45(7), F.S.