

Facts about Charter Schools and Magnet Schools

What is a charter school?

A charter school is a public school that operates independently of the district board of education. A group of people—educators, parents, community leaders, educational entrepreneurs or others—write the charter plan describing the school's guiding principles, governance structure, and applicable accountability measures.

Who governs a charter school?

The charter school is governed by an annually elected charter school committee. The committee's duties include hiring employees; contracting for services; developing performance criteria and discharge policies; adopting a budget; and approving curriculum and operating procedures.

Can a charter school be created to serve a specific student population?

Yes, provided the charter school adheres to the same health, safety, civil rights, and disability rights requirements of the district. Further, the charter school must admit all students eligible to attend public school in the district subject to space limitations.

How do charter schools differ from traditional district public schools?

Accountability: Charter schools are judged on how well they meet the student achievement goals established by their charter, and how well they manage the fiscal and operational responsibilities entrusted to them. Charter schools must operate lawfully and responsibly, with the highest regard for equity and excellence. Because they are schools of choice, they are held to the highest level of accountability—consumer demand.

Choice: Parents, teachers, community groups, organizations, or individuals interested in creating an additional educational opportunity for children can start charter schools. Local and state school boards can sponsor them. Students choose to attend, and teachers choose to teach at charter schools.

Autonomy: Charter schools are freed from the traditional district bureaucracy and regulations. Proponents of charter schools argue that instead of jumping through procedural hoops and over paperwork hurdles, educators can focus on setting and reaching high academic standards for their students.

How are charter schools funded?

A charter school is entitled to receive local, state and federal funds based on its student population. The governing body of a charter school may also receive gifts, donations or grants. In South Carolina, charter schools may be funded through a local school district or by the statewide Public Charter School District (SCPCSD). SCPCSD schools do not receive local funds like local district schools do.

Do charter schools have admission policies? Can they “pick” who attends?

By law, charter schools must have a fair and open admission process, conducting outreach and recruitment to all segments of the community they serve. They are public schools and therefore cannot “choose” which students attend. Like other public schools, charter schools are nonsectarian and nondiscriminatory in admission and employment practices. Charter school students are admitted on a first-come, first served basis, or by lottery when applicants exceed available slots. No tuition may be charged.

What is a magnet school?

Magnet schools are designed to attract students from diverse social, economic, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. They focus on a specific subject, such as science or the arts; follow specific themes, such as business/technology or communications/humanities/law; or operate according to certain models, such as career academies or a school-within-a-school. Some magnet schools require students to take an exam or demonstrate knowledge or skill in the specialty to qualify to go to the school,

What is the difference between a charter school and a magnet school?

The charter school concept is an organization model. The focus is on how the school is organized, governed, and managed. Instructional strategies will vary from one charter school to the next. A charter school cannot have admission criteria.

The magnet school is an instructional model. The focus is on the instructional strategy implemented at the school, for example, a focus on technology or performing arts. Some magnet schools have admission criteria.