

Charter Schools



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Charter schools are publicly funded schools that are open to all students through an admissions lottery. These schools are governed by a board of trustees and they have the freedom to establish their own policies, design their own educational program, and manage their human and financial resources.

In theory, charter schools are accountable for high student achievement because if the school fails to meet the terms of the charter it can be closed—either by having the charter revoked during the charter term, or non-renewed at the end of the charter term.

Currently, 42 states have charter school laws permitting them to operate. In total there are approximately 6,400 charter schools enrolling 2,500,000 students. In addition, charter school proponents claim that there are over 600,000 students on charter school waiting lists.

There are 100 school districts across the country that have a charter school enrollment that exceeds 10 percent of their total public school enrollment

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in the district, including two in New York state—the Albany City School District at 26 percent and the Buffalo City School District at 16 percent. The New Orleans public school has the highest at 76 percent and Washington DC has the second highest at 41 percent. In the New York City School District there are over 70,000 students attending charter schools, but this represents less than 10 percent of their total public school enrollment.

The eight states that do not permit charter schools are: Alabama, Kentucky, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont and West Virginia.

Charter School Performance

The latest charter school research concluded that the performance of charter school students is extremely varied, but on average, students in charter schools learn at roughly the same rates as their peers in traditional public schools.

According to Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) 2013 National Charter School Study (<http://credo.stanford.edu>):

- In math, 29 percent of charter school students showed “significantly stronger learning gains” than their traditional public school peers; 40 percent performed “similar”; and 31 percent performed “significantly weaker.”
- In reading, 25 percent of charter school students showed “significantly stronger learning gains” than their traditional public school peers; 56 percent performed “similar”; and 19 percent showed “significantly weaker gains.”

Charter Schools in New York State

In New York state there are three chartering entities: 1) NYS Board of Regent, 2) SUNY Board of Trustees and 3) Local Board of Education (or the Chancellor in the New York City School District).

New York's initial charter school law that was adopted in 1998, set a cap of 100 charter schools. In 2007, the law was amended to increase the cap to 200 charter schools and in 2010 the law was again amended to increase the cap to 460 charter schools. Currently, there are approximately 235 charter schools operating in New York state.

Proposals for New Charter Schools

The SUNY Charter Schools Institute, on behalf of the SUNY Board of Trustees, recently reported that they have accepted 14 applications to create new charter schools. These 14 proposed charter schools would be located in: New York City (9), and one each in Rochester, Phelps-Clifton Springs, Elmira, Utica and Buffalo. If approved, these charter schools would begin operating in the 2015-16 school year. More information about these proposed charter schools has been posted at <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/ActiveProposals.htm>

In addition, the New York State Education Department has recently reported that they are reviewing 11 applications to create new charter schools. These 11 proposed charter schools would be located in: New York City (9), and one each in Buffalo and Niagara Falls. It is expected that following a review of the applications that the Board of Regents will take formal action at their June 2014 meeting. If approved, these charter schools would also begin operating in the 2015-16 school year. More information about these proposed charter schools has been posted at <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/psc/startcharter.html>

Changes to Charter Schools in the 2014-15 Enacted State Budget

- **The state comptroller and the comptroller of the city of New York will now be authorized to conduct financial audits of charter schools.**
- **Charter schools that are closing will now be required to distribute remaining public funds proportionately back to the districts, based on the tuition last paid by the districts.**
- Existing co-located charter schools in New York City that were approved for co-location prior to Jan 1, 2014 cannot be altered or withdrawn without the consent of the charter school unless the charter school is no longer authorized by law.
- In New York City, new charter schools or schools that are adding grades must be offered a co-location site in a public school building or offered space in a public or privately owned facility at no cost to the charter school. The New York City School District will be responsible for the cost of providing the space and once they have exceeded \$40 million in expenses they will be permitted to seek partial reimbursement through the state Building Aid formula.
- Charter schools will now be permitted to apply directly for universal Pre-K funding. Previously, charter schools could not offer Pre-K programs.
- For the next three years, tuition rates paid to charter schools will be frozen at the lesser of the 2010-11 tuition rate or the current tuition rate. However, if the current tuition rate is equal or greater than the 2010-11 tuition rate, the charter school will receive a supplemental tuition payment of \$250 per pupil in 2014-15; \$350 per pupil in 2015-16; and \$500 per pupil in 2016-17. If the current tuition is less than the 2010-11 tuition, the charter school will receive a supplemental tuition payment of the difference between these rates. School districts will initially pay for the cost of these supplemental tuition payments, but will be eligible to receive reimbursement from the state in the subsequent year.