

Charter schools are tuition-free, independent public schools exempt from most of the rules, regulations, and statutes that apply to other public schools. Charter schools were created to:

- Provide increased choice and learning opportunities (with special emphasis on students who are at risk of academic failure or academically gifted).
- Encourage creative teaching methods.
- Share best practices with traditional public schools.
- Offer new professional opportunities for educators.

Charter schools are required to participate in the state's accountability program and administer end-of-grade and end-of course tests, and provide all data needed for NC School Report Cards.

However, unlike traditional public schools, charter schools:

- Are not governed by an elected board. For-profit companies may manage them, and there is no requirement that board members reside in North Carolina.
- Have no curriculum requirements.
- Have no restrictions on class size.
- Can expand by one grade level beyond what is currently offered without approval from the NC State Board of Education.
- Are not required to have *all* teachers licensed—only 50 percent of teachers must be licensed.
- Are not required to hold teacher workdays for professional training and development.
- Are not required to provide transportation to students, and those that do provide transportation are not subject to the same safety standards as are traditional public schools. Are not required to provide free and reduced price lunches for students living in poverty.
- Are exempt from public bidding laws that protect how tax dollars are spent.

Since the lifting of the cap on the maximum number of charter schools (formerly 100), North Carolina has begun to see exponential growth in these schools. Today, 65,000 students currently attend North Carolina's 127 charter schools, while traditional public schools educate more than 1.5 million children. However, 26 new charter schools will open in 2014, and another 170 letters of intent have been submitted for schools hoping to open in 2015.

### *What are the concerns about Charter Schools?*

- **Impact on local public school districts:** Reducing funds from public schools often forced to reduce staff, programs, and other basic expenditures.
- **Oversight:** the State Board of Education lacks adequate staff and a sufficiently rigorous process for evaluating applications and tracking charter success.
- **Student outcomes:** 34 of North Carolina's 100 charter schools failed to meet annual measurable objectives (2011-12).

*Source: Please see our website for more research, citations and information on this topic.  
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- **Racial isolation:** In North Carolina, the majority of charter schools are racially isolated and serve lower proportions of low-income students. New legislation eliminates the requirement that charter schools “reasonably reflect the racial and ethnic composition” in the area where the school is located; charters are only required to “make efforts” to match the demographics of the school’s location. Further students of color are suspended at two to three times the rate of other students.
- **Public assets can become private assets:** a failing charter can be taken over by a new entity, instead of being closed. The school’s assets would then be transferred to the new operator, not back to the state.

It is for these reasons that many education experts advocate for a limited number of truly innovative, not-for-profit charter schools designed to work with local school districts, managed with careful local and state oversight.

### *Best Practices for charter schools:*

- Only be granted a charter if the proposed school will offer an educational experience that is qualitatively different from what is available in traditional public schools.
- Maintain fidelity to the original concept of charters, including the sharing of best practices with traditional public schools.
- Not be operated by private, for-profit entities.
- Work in partnership with local school districts. Charter schools should have limited impact on long-term planning including capital, facilities, and enrollment.
- Be held to the same careful oversight, accountability, and transparency regarding academic standards and financial review as traditional public schools.
- Be required to offer free and reduced lunch, safe and reliable transportation, and services for students with disabilities, limited English proficient students, and academically gifted students.
- “Reasonably reflect the racial and ethnic composition” in the area where the school is located.

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