

Charter schools are tuition-free, independent public schools exempt from most of the rules, regulations, and statutes that apply to other public schools. [Charter school legislation was originally passed in 1996](#) 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 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 if it has been “open for three years and has not been identified as inadequately performing.”
- 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 not required to protect students against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Are exempt from public bidding laws that protect how tax dollars are spent.

The cap on the maximum number of charter schools allowed (100) was lifted in 2012. In 2012, nearly 45,000 students were enrolled in charter schools. Currently, 148 charter schools operate in North Carolina, serving nearly 58,000 students, or 3.8 percent of the total number of students who attend traditional public schools.

An additional 14 charter schools will open in August 2015. Of the schools opening in 2015, three were previously approved and granted a delay, while 11 were approved in September 2014. The Office of Charter Schools received 40 applications to open charter schools in 2016; this is down from 71 applications received last year. Of the 40 applications, 14 will contract with for-profit educational management organizations to operate their schools.

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 has a small staff charged with evaluating applications and tracking charter success. Further, in September 2014, the Board approved a fast-track process for existing charters (including chains) to expand the number of schools they operate.
- **Student outcomes:** 34 of North Carolina's 100 charter schools failed to meet annual measurable objectives (2011-12).
- **Racial isolation:** The majority of NC charter schools are racially segregated and many serve lower proportions of low-income students. [2013 legislation](#) (HB250) eliminated 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 such as a private school, instead of being closed. The school's assets would then be transferred to the new operator, not back to the state taxpayers.

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.
- Protect students against discrimination on all accounts to promote a comfortable and just learning environment.

*Source: Please see our website for more research, citations and information on this topic.
Last revised: September 30, 2014*