

Parents' Guide to Charter Schools 2008-09

Charter schools are independent public schools to which all New York City students may apply. Since 2002, the Mayor and Chancellor have worked to create high quality choices for New York City students and families. Charter schools are an important part of this work. In September 2008, 78 charter schools will be operating in New York City.

How are they operated?

Governance:

Charter schools are public schools, but rather than being overseen by the Department of Education, they are governed by their own not-for-profit boards of trustees in accordance with the terms of a "charter" granted by the State or the City. A charter school's board of trustees typically includes a mix of educational experts, business leaders, community members, and parents. Every charter school's board of trustees is responsible for hiring the principal and developing the school's academic programming.

Student Enrollment:

Any child eligible for admission to a traditional public school is eligible for admission to a charter school. If the number of applicants exceeds the number of available seats, a lottery is held. The Charter Schools Act, passed by the New York State Legislature in 1998 requires that charter schools give preference to siblings of students already enrolled in the school and to students living in the school district in which the school is located.

Accountability:

Charter schools are accountable, through the terms of five-year performance contracts, for ensuring student achievement. Charter schools must meet the Regents' performance standards established for all public schools, and must also meet the goals established in their charters. Furthermore, the City's Department of Education has set performance and compliance standards for all City-authorized charter schools.

Funding:

Charter schools in New York City receive roughly the same operational expense funding as traditional public schools. Unlike traditional public schools, charter schools do not receive facilities funding. Charter schools receive a per-student allocation from New York State, the most recent estimate of which can be found on the State Web site at: http://edlink.nysed.gov/charter/charter_0809_final_052008_for_web.htm. Additional funding is available to charter schools through Federal, State, and municipal allocations.

Facilities:

The charter schools funding formula in New York State does not provide financial support for facilities. The Chancellor has made it a priority to secure facilities for charter schools whenever possible. However, given the scarcity of New York City public school buildings, all charter applications must show that the school has pursued viable private facility options. Charter schools that use City buildings may be required to share space with existing schools or modify their proposed growth plans, enrollment, and admissions policies.

Partnerships:

The NYC Charter Center (www.nycCharterCenter.org) is a non-profit organization created to both help the spread of high quality charter schools across New York City and provide technical assistance and operational support for developing and existing charter schools. Additionally, many Charter Management Organizations and Educational Management Organizations have established formal partnerships with charter schools currently operating in New York City.

How have charter schools performed?

The 1998 New York State Charter Schools Act lists six primary objectives of charter schools. New York City charter schools have met or surpassed all of them:

Improve student learning and achievement.

- On average, charter school students demonstrate greater proficiency than students in traditional district schools. On the 2007-08 State exams for grades 3-8, charter students demonstrated higher proficiency in Math and ELA than their citywide peers (10.6 points better in Math and 9.6 points better in English).
- On average, charter school students demonstrate greater proficiency than students attending other schools in those same districts, or “host districts.” On the 2007-08 State exams for grades 3-8, charter school students demonstrated higher average proficiency in both Math and ELA compared to other students in their host districts (14.4 points better in Math and 13.5 points better in English).

Create opportunities for underserved students.

- In September 2008, 78 charter schools will be operating in New York City with a projected student population of 23,577.
- Nearly 80 percent of charter school students are eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch.
- African-American and Latino students account for over 90 percent of charter school students.

Encourage innovative teaching methods.

- Because of their regulatory freedom, charter schools can create schedules that enable common planning time and allow teachers to tailor instructional strategies to align with specific curricula.

Create professional opportunities for teachers, school leaders, and staff.

- Flexible calendars allow charters to hold summer training institutes for teachers.
- Charters affiliated with the same Charter Management Organization often organize into networks, enabling joint professional development and cross-school collaboration.

Provide parents and students with expanded choices and opportunities.

- Charters enroll students through a non-exclusive lottery that gives preference to students in the community school district and provides high-quality educational alternatives for families.

Shift from a rule-based to a performance-based accountability system.

- Charter schools are exempt from many state and local regulations and have the autonomy to shape instructional design, make staffing decisions, and allocate resources.
- In exchange for this autonomy, charter schools are held accountable for meeting the student performance goals outlined in their charters, in addition to applicable laws and regulations. A rigorous accountability framework, including annual site visits, audits, and frequent reporting of progress data, ensures that charter schools make progress toward their goals. If the schools do not meet these goals, their charters can be revoked and the schools closed. Most charter schools implement internal, value-added performance metrics to assess students’ performance over time.

How can I help to open a new charter school?

Parents, teachers, and school administrators can submit applications to create charter schools. A charter application may be submitted in conjunction with a college, university, educational institution, not-for-profit organization, or a for-profit or corporate entity authorized to do business in New York.

The Chancellor of the New York City Department of Education, the State University of New York, and the State Department of Education are the three New York entities authorized to approve, monitor, and renew charter schools in New York City. The Chancellor has authorized the operation of more than half of the existing New York City charter schools. If you are interested in applying to create a charter school, please review the application guidelines and timelines posted on the Department of Education Web site at www.nyc.gov/schools/ChoicesEnrollment/SpecialPrograms/CharterSchools/CharterSchoolCreation.