

# Charter School Fact Sheet



## Charter schools are:

- Tuition-free and open to all students,
- Non-sectarian, and do not discriminate on any basis,
- Publicly funded by state dollars based on enrollment, like other public schools.
- Held accountable to state and federal academic standards.

## How long have charter schools been operating in Florida?

Charter schools have been providing high quality education options for families in Florida since 1997 -- helping students make great academic strides and have provided quality education options where there once were none. There are more than 650 charter schools in Florida today with student enrollment exceeding 271,000 (2015-16).

## Who can attend a charter school?

Charter schools are open to all students; however, charter schools are allowed to target students within specific age groups or grade levels, students considered at-risk of dropping out or failing, Students wishing to enroll in a charter school-in-the-workplace or charter school-in-a-municipality, students residing within a reasonable distance of the school, students who meet reasonable academic, artistic or other eligibility standards established by the charter school, or students articulating from one charter school to another.

## How are charter schools governed?

Charter schools are governed by an independent, volunteer governing board and operate under a contract or “charter” with their sponsor, usually their local school district, that monitors progress, student achievement, and ensures the school meets academic and financial requirements.

## What role do alternative charter schools play in Florida’s system of public education?

Alternative charter schools give students a chance to complete their high school education in a nurturing environment that understands their particular needs and challenges. Alternative programs are graded by the state using the School Improvement Rating (SIR) matrix.

## Are charter schools graded?

Yes. Charter schools are evaluated and assigned a school grade by the Florida Department of Education using the same standards and criteria used to grade district-run public schools. Alternative charter schools are graded using the School Improvement Rating (SIR) matrix.

## What has caused the growth of charter schools?

Florida parents overwhelmingly support education choice and feel that finding the best education option for their child – whether district-run magnet, public charter, or private school – is important. A national survey revealed that 78% of parents with school-age children support having a charter public school open in their neighborhood. Support was even greater among low-income parents, with 88% in favor of having a charter school in their community.

## Do charter school students take state assessment exams?

Yes. Just like students attending a district-run public school, charter schools students must take standardized state exams (like the FSA) and meet federal academic benchmarks. According to reports by the Florida Department of Ed

## Are charter schools required to provide services to students with disabilities?

Yes. The responsibility to make a free appropriate public education (FAPE) available to all students with disabilities applies to all public schools under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Charter schools are public schools; therefore, they bear the same responsibility as district-run public schools.

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## Are charter school teachers certified?

Yes. Teachers employed by or under contract with a charter school must be certified like those working in a district-run school.

## Are charter schools making a difference?

Yes. Florida's charter schools are helping students achieve academically. According to a Florida Department of Education's report: Student Achievement in Florida's Charter Schools - A Comparison of the Performance of Charter School Students with District-run Public School Students (April 2017):

- In 65 of the 77 comparisons, students enrolled in charter schools demonstrated higher rates of grade level performance (scoring a level three or above on the statewide assessment).
- The percentage of students making learning gains was higher in charter schools in 82 of the 96 comparisons.
- In 22 separate comparisons, the achievement gap - used to analyze the learning gap between white students and African-American students, and white student and Hispanic students - was lower for charter school students in 20 of the comparisons.

The country's major charter school networks are seeing students finish college at a rate 3 - 5 times greater as the national average for low-income students in district-run schools, according a new Richard Whitmire series, "The Alumni."

## Charter School Students Graduating from College at 3 to 5 Times National Average



Charter schools are focusing on getting their students through college - ensuring they earn a four-year bachelor's degree within six years of graduating from high school. (<http://thealumni.the74million.org>)

## How are charter schools held accountable?

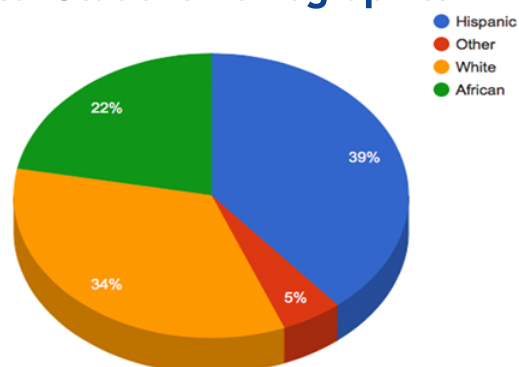
Charter schools are held accountable to the authorizer / school district that grants the charter, the parents who choose them, the students they serve, and the public that funds them. First and central to charter school accountability is the charter or contract between the school and their authorizer, usually the school district. The district may close a charter school if the school fails to meet the student performance outcomes agreed upon in the charter, fails to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management, violates the law, or shows other good cause. Florida's charter schools are very diverse and reflect the population in the state.



## When Charter Schools Open, Neighboring Schools Get Better

The closer a charter school is to a district-run public school, the stronger its positive impact says a 2017 Temple University study.

## Charter Student Demographics



## How Are Public Charter Schools Funded?

Like district-run public schools, charter schools receive per-student funding from the state through the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP). Facilities funding is provided through Public Education Capital Outlay (PECO) from the state or local capital mileage.

Statutory Reference 1002 1002.33, Florida Statutes, Charter schools  
1003 1002.331, Florida Statutes, High-performing charter schools  
1004 1013.62, Florida Statutes, Charter schools capital outlay funding  
1005 218.39(1), Florida Statutes, Annual financial audit reports



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