

# Frequently Asked Questions for Charter School Parents

## Accreditation

### How are charter schools accredited?

Charter schools are not required to be accredited, but may elect to become accredited. Accreditation is a process performed by special outside private associations. Charter schools are approved by the State Board of Education to open and operate a public school.

## Background

### What is a charter school?

Charter schools are public schools operated by private nonprofit boards. The primary funding sources for charter schools are local, state, and federal tax dollars. The schools have open enrollment with no discrimination, no religious associations, and no tuition. In short, charter schools are public schools serving public students with public dollars for the public benefit.

### What are the six legislative purposes of a charter school?

- Improve student learning;
- Increase learning opportunities for all students, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for students who are identified as at risk of academic failure or academically gifted;
- Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods;
- Create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunities to be responsible for the learning program at the school site;
- Provide parents and students with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system; and
- Be accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results.

## Concerns or Issues

### What do I do if I have an issue with a charter school or its board?

First, talk to your child's teacher and/or school administration. Schedule an appointment so that you have sufficient time to talk with the teacher or school administrator. Each school must have a grievance process, so if the issue remains unresolved, inquire about the grievance process and follow it as outlined in the policy. Copies of the grievance policy are typically located in the Parent Handbook, the school's website, and/or in the school's main office. Ultimately, the charter school board is responsible for all aspects of the school's operations, including resolution of disputes or concerns brought forth by parents. The decision of the nonprofit board, much like that of an elected school district board, is final. If after all

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concerns have been exhausted, there is still not a satisfactory resolution, you may contact the Office of Charter Schools and ask for the consultant that is assigned to the school.

## Employment

### How can I find out about employment at a charter school?

Each board for each charter school makes employment decisions. Inquire directly at the school in which you are interested in being employed. Read about their mission and educational program to ensure that you have the requisite skills to work at that particular school (e.g., some schools utilize the Montessori method, so that training may be required to apply).

### Are criminal history checks required at charter schools?

Yes. The charter school is required, by statute, to do criminal background checks in a fashion similar to that of the LEA in which the charter school is located. The policy shall be applied uniformly as a requirement for all applicants before an unconditional job offer is given. An applicant may be employed conditionally while the charter school board of directors is checking the person's criminal history and making a decision based on that.

## Enrollment

### How do I enroll my child in a charter school?

Parents should contact each individual school to inquire if it has openings and what the application process is for the school. If the school has more applicants than available slots, a lottery must be conducted to fill the slots. Charter school lotteries are required to be publicly conducted and may be attended by any member of the public. For a list of schools and locations, please visit the following link for more information: [www.ncpublicschools.org/charterschools/schools/](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/charterschools/schools/).

### If I am interested in enrolling my child in a charter school, what questions should I ask?

- What is the school's mission?
- May I schedule an appointment to tour the school?
- Show me your school's testing data and any other academic results you have available.
- How often does the board meet?
- How often, and in what manner, do teachers communicate with parents?

### What are the requirements for acceptance into a charter school?

Any child who qualifies to attend a NC public school under the laws of NC is also eligible to be accepted into a charter school. Parents must apply for the school they are interested in having their children attend by the stated application deadline. Parents should be aware that, based on the number of applicants for the available school slots, a lottery may be used by the school to determine who is accepted. In that case, acceptance is not guaranteed for all applicants.

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**Am I permitted to enroll my child in a charter school that is not located in the local school district in which I live?**

Yes. Students enrolling in charter schools are not restricted to one local school district. Parents may choose the school that they feel is most appropriate for their child. Charter schools in North Carolina must admit any child residing in North Carolina who is qualified to attend North Carolina schools regardless of in which school district the child resides.

**For the purposes of sibling preference, what is the definition of a “sibling?”**

The law defines a sibling to include any of the following who reside in the same household: “half siblings, stepsiblings, and children residing in a family foster home.” Charter schools, by law, are permitted to offer sibling preference, but are not required to do so. Each school should have a board policy defining which legally permitted preferences it will grant. The provisions of the law may be found at G.S. 115C-238.29F(5a)(a).

**Can Foreign Exchange Students enroll in charter schools?**

G.S. 115C-238.29F(g)(1), states, “Any child who is qualified under the laws of this State for admission to a public school is qualified for admission to a charter school.” The NC School Attendance and Student Accounting manual states, “Foreign Exchange students coming to North Carolina are not domiciles of North Carolina and must be enrolled as Visiting Students.” Therefore, Foreign Exchange students cannot enroll in charter schools because they are not domiciled in North Carolina.

**Fees****How much does it cost to attend a charter school?**

Charter Schools are public schools and are, thus, tuition free. Funding for the schools come from federal, state, and local taxes. Charter schools may not charge tuition, but may charge any fees to students and parents that are charged by the local school district in which the charter school is located, according to G.S. 115C-238.29F(b). Inquire directly with the charter school about any fees it may charge.

**Instructional Program****What standards govern charter schools instructional program?**

Schools must design their programs to at least meet the student performance standards adopted by the State Board of Education and the student performance standards contained in the approved charter application. Charter schools are held to the same accountability model as traditional public schools. They have autonomy in their education programming.

**What are the special reading proficiency and promotion requirements at third grade?**

According to G.S. 115C-238.29F(d1), “Students in the third grade shall be retained if the student fails to demonstrate reading proficiency by reading at or above the third grade level as demonstrated by the results of the State-approved standardized test of reading comprehension administered to third grade students. The charter school shall provide reading interventions to retained students to remediate reading deficiency, which may include 90 minutes of daily, uninterrupted, evidence-based reading

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instruction, accelerated reading classes, transition classes containing third and fourth grade students, and summer reading camps. “

**Is it possible for students to be exempt from mandatory retention in third grade (see question above)?**

There may be certain exemptions from mandatory retention in third grade according to the law. You must inquire of the charter school related to their student promotion policies and practices. The charter school statute, in G.S. 115C-238.29F(d1), states: “Students may be exempted for good cause, but shall continue to receive instructional supports and services and reading interventions appropriate for their age and reading level. Good cause exemptions shall be limited to the following:

- Limited English Proficient students with less than two years of instruction in an English as a Second Language (ESL) program;
- Students with disabilities, whose Individualized Education Program (IEP) indicates the use of alternative assessments and reading interventions;
- Students who demonstrate reading proficiency appropriate for third grade students on an alternate assessment of reading comprehension (The charter school must notify the State Board of Education of the alternative assessment used to demonstrate reading proficiency.);
- Students who demonstrate, through a student reading portfolio, reading proficiency appropriate for third grade students.
- Students who have (i) received reading intervention and (ii) previously been retained more than once in kindergarten, first, second, or third grades.”

**Do charter schools take the state mandated tests?**

Yes. All charter schools are required to take the state mandated tests. Information about all state tests is located [here](#). For charter school test results, please click [here](#). Depending on when your charter school opened, data from 2012-13 and before is located [here](#).

**What are the requirements for physical activity during the school day?**

Charter schools do not have to follow the state curriculum guidelines. Creating their own curriculum is part of their autonomy. While it is best practice for them to include physical activity, both formal and informal, throughout the day, it is not mandatory.

**What restrictions exist for charter school calendars?**

The start and end dates contained in general statute for traditional public schools do not apply to charter schools. Charter schools must provide 185 days or 1025 hours of instruction. Each school is different in how it chooses to meet this requirement, so asking about its calendar is important.

**Do charter schools have pre-K or after school programs?**

A charter school serves students in grades K-12 only, so if it has a pre-K, it must be separate from the approved public school (with no preference to get into the lottery). Parents that choose to enroll in the preschool must be informed from the beginning of the separation between the charter school and the

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preschool. In the event preschool parents decide to apply for enrollment in the charter school, their children will go through the same enrollment and lottery process as any other student seeking admission. Preschool parents are not afforded an exemption from the lottery or any type of immediate entry into the school.

After school programs are offered according to the school's charter. Inquire with the individual school about its program offerings.

### **Additional School Services**

#### **Is a charter school required to provide transportation?**

The charter school may provide transportation for students enrolled at the school, but is not required to. The charter school must, however, develop a transportation plan so that transportation is not a barrier to any student who resides in the local school district in which the school is located. The charter school is not required to provide transportation to any student who lives within one and one-half miles of the school. Charter schools must provide transportation to students who enroll and have transportation on their IEP as a "related service."

### **Students with Disabilities**

#### **Must charter schools serve students with disabilities?**

Yes. Since charter schools are public schools, they must provide special education and related services to all eligible students. Charter schools must provide all special education supports identified through the IEP process to students with disabilities determined eligible for EC services (including adapted PE and transportation). For further information please read the following:

#### **Right to Attend**

[\(pdf, 105kb\)](#)

#### **Are charter schools required to follow my child's IEP from the previous school?**

When a child enrolls in a charter school with an IEP from a previous school, the charter school must follow that IEP until the charter school IEP team meets to review and revise the IEP or develop a new IEP.

#### **Can a charter school only offer special education services after the school day has concluded?**

No, except in rare circumstances where exceptional student needs, as stated in the IEP, require otherwise. Special education must be delivered within the typical hours of the school day and school calendar. Special education is part of the student's educational program - not an add-on such as tutoring, homework club, etc.

### **Teachers**

#### **Are charter school teachers required to be licensed by the State?**

Not necessarily. The law requires 50% of charter school teachers to be licensed. However, charter

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school teachers must follow No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements for highly qualified staff. All teachers who are teaching in the core subject areas of mathematics, science, social studies, and language arts shall be college graduates. Exceptional Children (EC) teachers must be licensed in North Carolina with a specialty in the EC service area of delivery.

### **Transcripts**

#### **My child's former charter school has closed. How do I get a copy of his or her transcript?**

All student records, including transcripts, should have been returned to the local education agency in which the charter school was located or school district in which the student resided. Please make a request directly to that school system.

***Note: Many responses are taken directly from G.S. 115C-238.29.***

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