



Council For Lifelong Learning
Charter Schools

**Fact
Sheet**

September 2001

<p>1. What are charter schools?</p>	<p>Charter schools are public schools that operate under a performance contract, or a "charter" which frees them from most rules and state statutes created for traditional public schools. As part of the contract, charter schools are held strictly accountable for academic and financial results.</p>
<p>2. What is the purpose of charter schools?</p>	<p>Statutory provisions specify that the purpose of charter schools is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• improve student learning;• increase learning opportunities for all students;• encourage the use of different and innovative learning methods;• increase learning opportunity choices for students;• establish a new form of accountability for schools;• require the measurement of learning outcomes and create innovative measurement tools;• establish the school as the unit for improvement;• create new professional opportunities for teachers;• provide rigorous competition within the public school district in order to stimulate continued improvement in all public schools;• provide additional academic choices for parents and students; and• expand the capacity of the public school system.
<p>3. How are charter schools formed?</p>	<p>Statutory provisions specify that creating a new school or converting an existing public school to a charter school are methods that may be used to form a charter school.</p> <p>An individual, a group of parents or teachers, a business, a municipality, or a legal entity may submit an application to the school district in order to form a new charter school.</p> <p>If an existing public school that has been in operation for at least two years (including a school-within-a-school) wants to convert to a charter school, the school board or school principal, teachers, parents, and/or the school advisory council must submit an application to the school district requesting permission to convert the existing school to a charter school.</p>

<p>4. What key steps are involved in the charter school application process?</p>	<p>A school board is authorized to sponsor a charter school in the county over which the school board has jurisdiction. Specifically, a school board must receive and review all charter school applications. Within 60 days after receiving a charter school application, a school board must approve or deny a charter school application through a majority vote.</p> <p>If a school board denies a charter school application, it must express in writing the specific reasons for which the charter school application was denied within 10 calendar days after rendering its decision. A charter school applicant may appeal a school board's denial of a charter school application or its failure to render a decision on a charter school application to the State Board of Education within 30 calendar days after the receipt of the school board's denial of the application or failure to render a decision on the application. Within 60 calendar days after a charter school applicant files an appeal, the State Board of Education must accept or reject the school board's initial decision through a majority vote. Subsequently, the State Board of Education must remand the charter school application to the school board with its written recommendation specifying whether or not the school board should approve or deny the charter school application.</p> <p>Current law requires the school board to act upon the recommendation of the State Board of Education within 30 calendar days after receiving the recommendation. The school board may fail to act in accordance with the recommendation of the State Board of Education if it determines that the recommendation is contrary to law or contrary to the best interest of the students or the community. The school board's action on the State Board of Education's recommendation is a final action subject to judicial review.</p>
<p>5. Are there any limitations on the number of charter schools that can exist within a school district?</p>	<p>Yes. Current law does limit the number of newly created charter schools that can exist within a school district. The limits are based on the number of students that exist within a school district.</p> <p>Specifically, a school district that has at least 100,000 students can establish a maximum of 28 charter schools; a school district that has 50,000-99,999 students can establish a maximum of 20 charter schools; and a school district that has less than 50,000 students can establish a maximum of 12 charter schools.</p>

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	<p>Current law specifies that an existing public school that converts to a charter school must not be counted toward the aforementioned limits. Additionally, a charter school or a sponsor can seek approval from the State Board of Education to increase the limit on the number of charter schools that can exist within a school district.</p>
<p>6. How many charter schools are currently operating in Florida?</p>	<p>In 1996, the initial year in which charter schools were authorized, five charter schools were operating in Florida. During the 2000-2001 school year, 149 charter schools were operating in Florida and serving approximately 27,249 students.</p>
<p>7. What types of students are eligible to attend a charter school?</p>	<p>A charter school is required to be open to any student covered in an inter-district agreement or residing in the school district in which the charter school is located.</p> <p>Enrollment preference may be given to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a sibling of an existing charter school student; • a child of a charter school governing board member; or • a child of a charter school employee. <p>A charter school may limit the enrollment process in order to target the following student populations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students within specific age groups or grade levels; • students considered at risk of dropping out of school or academic failure; • students who wish to enroll in a charter school-in-the-workplace or a charter school-in-a-municipality; • students residing within a reasonable distance of the charter school; • students who meet reasonable academic, artistic, or other eligibility standards established by the charter school; and • students articulating from one charter school to another.
<p>8. Are there specific eligibility requirements for charter schools?</p>	<p>Yes. A charter school is statutorily required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be nonsectarian in its programs, admission policies, employment practices, and operations; • admit students as provided for in Question #7; • be accountable to the school district for its performance; • not charge tuition and fees; • comply with all applicable state and local health, safety, and civil rights requirements; • not discriminate on the basis of race, national origin, sex, handicap, or marital status; • subject itself to an annual financial audit; • maintain all financial records that constitute its

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accounting system in accordance with current law; and • annually adopt and maintain an operating budget.
<p>9. What criteria must a school district consider in order to approve a charter?</p>	<p>Current law specifies the criteria that must be used to approve a charter. The criteria used for the approval of a charter must be based on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the charter school's mission, the students and the ages of students that will be served, and the grades that will be included in the charter school; • the focus of the charter school's curriculum, the instructional methods that will be used, any distinctive instructional techniques that will be employed, and the identification and acquisition of technology needed to improve educational and administrative performance; • the current incoming baseline standard of student achievement, the outcomes that will be achieved, and the method of measurement that will be used; • the methods that will be used to identify the educational strengths and needs of students; • a method for determining if a student satisfies high school graduation requirements; • a method for resolving conflicts between the governing body of the charter school and the sponsor; • the charter school's admission and dismissal procedures, as well as its student conduct code; • the methods by which the charter school will achieve a racial/ethnic balance reflective of the community it serves or other public schools in the same school district; • the financial and administrative management of the charter school; • the charter school's description of procedures that identify various risks and its plan to ensure the safety and security of its school population; • the manner in which the charter school will be insured; • the term of the charter; • the facilities that the charter school will use and their location; • the qualifications that will be required of the charter school's teachers; • the governance structure of the charter school; • a timetable for implementing the charter; and • the development of alternative arrangements for current students that choose not to attend a charter school that was converted from an existing public school.

<p>10. How are charter schools evaluated and assessed?</p>	<p>Every charter school must be evaluated on academic progress and the outcomes agreed upon in the school's binding contract. In addition, individual charter schools are evaluated and assigned a school grade using the same standards and criteria as traditional public schools. (See the School Grading System Fact Sheet.)</p>
<p>11. Are charter schools exempt from state statutes?</p>	<p>Yes. Charter schools are exempt from the Florida School Code (Ch. 228-246, F.S.), except those statutes specifically applying to charter schools; pertaining to the provision of services to students with disabilities; pertaining to civil rights; and pertaining to student health, safety, and welfare.</p> <p>Charter schools <i>are not</i> exempt from any statute governing public records; public meetings and records; public inspection; and penalties.</p>
<p>12. Are charter schools required to employ certified teachers?</p>	<p>Yes. Statutory provisions require teachers employed by or under contract with a charter school to be certified as required by current law.</p>
<p>13. How are charter school student enrollments funded?</p>	<p>Students enrolled in a charter school must be funded as if they are enrolled in a basic program or a special program at any other public school in the school district. Each charter school must report its student enrollment to the school district and the school district must include each charter school's student enrollment in the school district's report of student enrollment that is submitted to the state.</p>
<p>14. Does the state provide any charter school capital outlay funding?</p>	<p>Yes. Statutory provisions provide for charter school capital outlay funding and specify that unless otherwise provided in the General Appropriations Act, the capital outlay allocation for each charter school must be determined by multiplying the charter school's projected student enrollment by one-fifteenth of the cost-per-student station for an elementary, middle, or high school. If the appropriated funds are not sufficient, the Commissioner of Education must prorate the funds among the charter schools. The 2001 Legislature appropriated \$27.7 million to fund charter school capital outlay purposes for the 2001-2002 fiscal year.</p>
<p>15. What are charter schools-in-the-workplace and charter schools-in-a-municipality?</p>	<p><i>Charter schools-in-the-workplace</i> may be established when a business partner provides the school facility to be used; enrolls students based upon a random lottery that involves all of the children of the employees of the business; and enrolls students according to the racial/ethnic balance reflective of the community or other public schools in the same school district. Any portion of a facility used for a charter school is</p>

	<p>exempt from ad valorem taxes.</p> <p><i>Charter schools-in-a-municipality</i> may be established when a municipality possesses a charter; enrolls students based upon a random lottery that involves all of the children of the residents of the municipality; and enrolls students according to the racial/ethnic balance reflective of the community or other public schools in the same school district. Any portion of the land and facility used for a charter school is exempt from ad valorem taxes.</p>
<p>16. What are the applicable statutes and rules?</p>	<p>Section 228.056, F.S. -- Charter Schools. Section 228.0561, F.S. -- Charter schools capital outlay funding.</p> <p>Rule 6A-6.0781, F.A.C. -- Procedures for appealing a district board decision.</p>
<p>17. Where can I get additional information?</p>	<p>Florida Department of Education Office of Public School Choice (850) 488-5011 or DOE Hotline (800) 447-1636 www.floridaschoolchoice.org</p> <p>The Florida House of Representatives Committee on Education Innovation (850) 488-7451</p>