

Charter Schools

A charter school is a public school that may provide instruction in any of the grades K-12. A charter petition may be initiated by parents, teachers, or community members and is usually approved by a local school district governing board. The law grants chartering authority to county boards of education and the State Board of Education in cases in which a petition has been previously denied by the school district governing board.

The specific goals and operating procedures for a charter school are detailed in the agreement between the board and the organizers (the charter). Charter status frees the school from most state statutes and regulations that normally apply to school districts. The purpose of these schools is to improve student learning, encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods, create new professional opportunities for teachers, and provide parents and students with expanded educational opportunities within the public school system. Charter schools also provide an opportunity to shift from a rule-based to a performance-based system of accountability.

California is the second state in the nation to have adopted charter school legislation, and California's charter schools are growing rapidly in popularity. California is home to over 600 public charter schools. These schools are found throughout the state, in rural, suburban, and urban areas. Student populations are very diverse.

Innovative charter schools are providing programs that offer everything from an emphasis on foreign languages to an emphasis on performing and fine arts. Many develop partnerships with such agencies as the California Conservation Corps as well as county government agencies. Some schools offer a component placing middle school students in work-experience settings, and some offer comprehensive family services. There are also home-study, museum-based, back-to-basics, and distance-learning charter schools. Charter schools operate successful dropout recovery programs and can provide a "second chance" to expelled students. While a variety of methodologies exist, the most common threads are the tremendous energy of those involved in the schools and the very high level of parent participation.

To find out more, visit the following websites:

- California Charter Schools Association—<http://www.myschool.org>
- Charter Schools Development Center—<http://www.cacharterschools.org>
- U.S. Charter Schools—<http://www.uscharterschools.org>
- The Center for Education Reform—http://edreform.com/charter_schools/websites/