



The Charter School Movement

Definition: Charter schools are nonsectarian public schools of choice that operate with freedom from many of the regulations that apply to traditional public schools in return for strict standards of accountability.

The “charter” contract is a performance contract, usually for 3-5 years, that details

- ▶ School mission, programs and goals
- ▶ Students served
- ▶ Methods of assessment of student growth
- ▶ Ways to measure overall school success

The school leadership is accountable for academic results and fiscal practices to:

- ▶ The sponsor that grants the charter, usually a state agency or local school board
- ▶ The parents who chose the school
- ▶ The public which funds the school

The basic concept is that charter schools may exercise increased autonomy to use creative, innovative methods to achieve student education outcomes and manage or budget finances in return for this accountability to its audiences.



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History of charter schools is intertwined with the movement of “school choice” for parents and students:

- ▶ In the 1950s – concern about academic outcomes for children, especially the disadvantaged and disaffected
- ▶ Milton Friedman, famous economist, first author of a voucher proposal (1955)
- ▶ Authors of charter school concept (1988):
 - ▶ Ray Budde, a professor of educational administration – teams of teachers apply for a charter to run an innovative school within a school district
 - ▶ Al Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers – groups of teachers apply for a charter to run a school within a school to pursue innovative ways of educating disaffected students

Three kinds of legally authorized school choice emerge by the 1990s:

- ▶ Voucher schools - a free market competition model in which parents can use public money to enroll their children in other public schools or districts, private schools and religious schools - Nation’s first voucher program in Milwaukee (1990) followed by Cleveland (1995) and D.C. (2003)
- ▶ Privately managed public schools – authorized by district or state to contract with private enterprise, usually for-profit. If desired results not achieved, district can cancel the contract.
- ▶ Charter schools – MN, first state to authorize charter schools (1991) – First school, The City Academy in St. Paul (1992)
- ▶ By 2009, 4600 charter schools with over 1.4 million students in 40 states and D.C.



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State of New Mexico Charter Schools:

- ▶ Established by the Charter School Act of 1993 “to create more innovative, flexible ways to educate children.”
- ▶ Act amended in 1999 to state “a charter school is a public school developed by one or more parents, teachers or community members authorized by the local school board or the NM Public Education Commission (PEC) to provide an alternative education setting to parents and students in the public system.” (NMSA-22-8a-b)
- ▶ Management cannot be contracted to a for-profit enterprise
- ▶ Must have a school governance board
- ▶ Must achieve the same state “average yearly progress” and “common core curriculum” standards as other public schools
- ▶ Selection of students by lottery
- ▶ Currently 82 charter schools

Potential Drawbacks of Charter Schools:

- ▶ Nepotism in hiring staff
- ▶ Conflict of interest on part of staff and board of directors
- ▶ Financial mismanagement
- ▶ Inadequate facilities
- ▶ Often attract the best students in poor neighborhoods leaving the other public schools worse off in terms of student role models (claim of opponents)



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Potential Benefits of Charter Schools:

- ▶ Some charter schools that serve students in urban disadvantaged neighborhoods achieve extraordinary results, like the Knowledge is Power Program (known as KIPP schools)
 - ▶ KIPP teaches a rigorous schedule of academics, good behavior and discipline
 - ▶ KIPP students typically spend 60% more time in school
 - ▶ Students who remain more than 4 years achieve large test score gains which they maintain over time and a high rate of H.S. graduation and entry into college
- ▶ Disaffected students, who move from a traditional school to a charter school, graduate from H.S. at much higher rates and go on to post secondary education at much higher rates than would be expected if they remained in a traditional school.

The Reality: Large studies show that there are exceptional, average and poorly performing charter schools at about the same rate as found in traditional public schools.

Local Las Cruces Charter Schools:

- ▶ Alma d' arte High School – specializes in visual, performing, literary and culinary arts (chartered in 2004 by LCPS, re-chartered in 2009 by PEC)
- ▶ Las Montanas High School – offers two career education tracks: 1) hospitality and tourism and 2) pre-teaching and early childhood education (chartered through LCPS)
- ▶ La Academia Dolores Huerta Middle School – is a bilingual school with a specialized multi cultural curriculum focused on social justice and peace studies (chartered through LCPS)
- ▶ J. Paul Taylor Academy Elementary – will open in the fall of 2011 and will be a dual language, project based program of instruction serving K-6th grades the first two years and expanding to 8th grade by the third year (authorized by PEC)