

Idaho Charter Schools **Frequently Asked Questions**

If you're interested in starting a charter school in Idaho, please go to our website:

http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/charter_schools/cs_developers.htm

Did you know?

- Charter schools are public schools operated by a group of parents, teachers and/or community members.
- Charter schools operate under a charter (or contract) between the charter school and its authorizer. In Idaho the authorizer is either a local school district or the Public Charter School Commission (PCSC).
- A charter school is a semi-autonomous public school of choice. The local school district will not automatically assign students to the school.
- Charter schools do not receive additional funds from public levies or bonds.
- Parents must apply to charter schools if they choose to enroll their child(ren) in a charter school.
- Charter schools generally have more flexibility than traditional public schools in areas such as curriculum, fiscal management and overall school operations. They may offer an education program that is more innovative than traditional public schools.

Definitions

- Founders – A group of people who want to create a new charter school.
- Petition – the document written by the Founders that is reviewed by the State Department of Education and authorizers.
- Charter – once a petition has been approved by the authorizer it is then called a Charter.

To whom is a charter school responsible?

- A charter school is accountable to the students and families in the school, the local school district or the PCSC, and Idaho taxpayers. The charter school authorizer oversees the charter school and holds them accountable for fulfilling the charter and following all state and federal laws.
- Charter schools are also required to participate in the state-mandated Idaho Student Assessment Test (ISAT). It is through the ISAT that charter schools, along with all other public schools in the state, are measured. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) results can be found at:
<http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/assessment/ISAT/ayp.htm>.

Do charter schools have to follow the same rules and regulations as traditional public schools?

- Yes. They are public schools, so they must adhere to the same state and federal laws. For more information on Idaho Education Statutes go to <http://www.legislature.idaho.gov/idstat>Title33/T33.htm>.

How do I find out how a particular charter school is doing?

- Attend charter school board meetings. The dates of the meetings are posted on their website and are open to the public.
- Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) results can be found at:
<http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/assessment/ISAT/ayp.htm>.

If a parent has a concern with their child's school, where should that concern be directed?

- The parent should begin by contacting the personnel within the charter school, specifically the Administrator. If that does not satisfactorily address the issue, make the governing board of the charter school aware of the issue. If unresolved there, the next step would be to contact the organization that authorized the charter school, either the local district or the Charter School Institute. The Idaho

Department of Education does not authorize charter schools nor oversee the operation of charter schools within the state.

What questions should a parent ask a charter school representative before choosing to send their child to that school?

- All charter schools are different even if they use the same curriculum. Ask questions about the school's educational program, leadership (governing board and administration), faculty, and policies. Most schools will provide a Parent/Student Handbook, which includes general information. As you learn more about specific charter schools, keep in mind your particular child. What type of educational approach best suits your child's needs? Think about what you are looking for in a school (geographical proximity, a specific curriculum, or a particular focus). An additional resource for information on specific charter schools is their website. For a complete list on charter schools visit

http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/charter_schools/idaho_charter_schools.htm

How do I enroll my child in a charter school? What is the lottery?

- A charter school is a public school that must as a condition of its charter have an open enrollment policy. Charter schools have a cap or limit as to the number of students they can accept. If the number of applications to a charter school exceeds the capacity of the school, all applicants will have an equal chance of being admitted through a random selection process or lottery.
- The lottery is conducted in the spring before the school opens and the charter school governing board is required to hold the lottery in a public space. There are certain preferences that must be applied before the lottery is conducted. For example, Idaho Statute allows a charter school to give enrollment preference to children of founders, provided that this preference does not exceed 10%. T
- Those students that were not chosen to attend the charter school by the lottery process are placed on a waiting list. There is a separate list for siblings of an enrolled charter school student. Once a space becomes available, the charter school will contact the first name on the waiting list to fill the empty spot.
- For more details, go to Idaho Statute 33-5205(3)(j).

<http://www.legislature.idaho.gov/idstat>Title33/T33CH52SECT33-5205.htm>

What is the role of the Idaho State Department of Education in regards to Charter Schools?

- The State Department of Education (SDE) has a specific team that works just with the charter schools and those who want to start a charter school.
- The SDE provides technical assistance to persons or groups preparing or revising charter petitions.
- The SDE conducts charter school workshops to those who want to start a charter school.

What is the Public Charter School Commission?

- The Public Charter School Commission was created by the Idaho Legislature in 2004 to serve as an alternative, statewide authorizer of public charter schools. The Commission consists of seven Governor-appointed members and is staffed by the State Board of Education
- The PCSC has the authority to approve or deny charter school applications and monitors charter school operations. <http://chartercommission.idaho.gov/>

How many charter schools are there and is there a limit on the number that can be approved?

- For the 2010-2011 school year, there are 43 charter schools that are operating in the state of Idaho.
- Idaho Statue states that not more than 6 new public charter schools may begin educational instruction in any one school year.
- Idaho Statue states that not more than 1 new public charter school may begin educational instruction within any 1 school district in any one school year.

What are Virtual Charter Schools?

- Idaho is unique in that it has 7 virtual charter schools and 1 distance education charter school.
- A virtual school is a school that delivers a full-time, sequential program of synchronous and/or asynchronous instruction primarily through the use of technology via the internet in a distributed environment.
- Virtual schools are authorized by the Public Charter School Commission.

Who may submit a petition?

- Any person, or group of persons, may submit their petition to the SDE.
- The SDE must review the petition first to make sure it is legally sufficient.
- Once the SDE deems the petition as legally sufficient, the founders submit the petition to either the local school district or the PCSC if it is a virtual school.
- If a private school wants to convert to a charter school, they must close first.

How long is the petition process?

- From the draft petition to implementation, it usually takes two years for a charter school to open.
- For a more in-depth flowchart, go to http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/charter_schools/flowchart.htm.

If a charter school petition is denied, can it be appealed?

- Yes, a denied charter school applicant may appeal to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction within 30 days of the date of the written decision. A hearing officer will be appointed to review the charter petition and convene a public hearing. Details to the denial process can be found in Idaho Statute 33-5207.

How is a charter school funded?

- Funding for public education follows the student. If a student chooses to attend a charter school the funding will follow that student.
- The funding formula is based on three things 1) average daily attendance, 2) experience and education of teachers, and 3) type of students taught. The formula is consistent for all public schools.

Do charter schools receive startup funding?

- Charter schools can apply for the Federal Government Charter School Program grant for startup and implementation needs. This is a competitive grant process and the funds are limited to availability of federal funds.

Are charter schools eligible for local funds for facility needs?

- No.

Are charter schools allowed to conduct fundraising events?

- Yes. Most charter schools have fundraising events to raise money for their school to offset costs.

Do charter schools serve students with special needs?

- Yes. As a public school, a charter school must comply with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and any state special education laws.

Do school teachers need to have a certificate in order to teach?

- Yes. Although teachers may apply for a waiver or any of the limited certification options as provided by the State Board of Education.

Who provides transportation to a charter school?

- Due to finances some charter schools do not provide bus transportation for students. Parents often organize car pools to provide transportation. Other charter schools have agreements with their school district to share bus service. Whenever this is done, the agreement is in the written contract.

Are charter schools accredited?

- Public secondary schools serving grades 9-12, including alternative and charter schools, are required to attain accredited status through the Northwest Accreditation Commission (NAC). Public elementary and middle schools and private schools may voluntarily seek NAC accreditation. Charter schools are subject to all accreditation requirements.