

Colorado Charter Public School Basics

What is a charter school?

A charter school is a **tuition-free public school** that operates under a performance contract (a.k.a. "charter contract") with its school district or the Charter School Institute that defines regular performance targets the school must reach.

Through this contractual relationship, charter public schools are not run directly by the district school board or the Charter School Institute but rather by an independent governing board, which does grant the charter public school certain flexibilities in the areas of staffing, budget, and curriculum.

But while charters do have flexibility over certain inputs, it is important to note that they **do not have flexibility over outputs**. In other words, if a charter public school is not hitting its performance targets and getting positive results for its students, the district can revoke or non-renew its contract.

In this way, charter public schools are **more accountable** than other public schools in that they must regularly reach their performance targets or risk having their contract revoked and their doors closed by the district.

Other facts about charter public schools:

- ✓ Charter public schools **are accountable to the same standards and assessments** as other public schools in the state (CRS 22-30.5-104(6)(c)(II)).
- ✓ Charter public schools are **bound by the same state and federal laws** barring discrimination in enrollment practices; charters are open to all and may not request entrance exams (CRS 22-30.5-104(3)).
- ✓ Charter public schools serve a statewide student population that is just as diverse as non-charters:
 - Currently, **47.3% of Colorado charter public school students** identify as students of color compared to **46.1% of the state's traditional PreK-12 public school students**.
 - Additionally, **15.4% of Colorado charter public school students** identify as English Language Learners compared to **13.9% of the state's traditional PreK-12 public school students**.
- ✓ All charter public schools must be set up and run as **nonprofit entities** (CRS 22-30.5-104(4)(a)).
- ✓ Charter public schools must complete **an independent financial audit each year** (CRS 22-30.5-104(4)(a)); all charter public schools are subject to the same "Public School Financial Transparency Act" as every district in the state, which requires them to regularly post detailed financial information online for free public access.
- ✓ Charters **are subject to the same sunshine laws** regarding open meetings and open records as other schools in the state.
- ✓ Charters **must undergo annual performance reviews** by their districts examining the school's academic progress as well as its most recent financial audit (CRS 22-30.5-110).
- ✓ If charters continually underperform, the timeline for districts to begin closely examining and considering action against them is **just two years** (CRS 22-30.5-110(3.5)); this same timeline can be as much as five years in the case of other poor-performing public schools.

Learn more about charter public schools at www.CharterPublic.org.

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