**Charter Schools in Pennsylvania**

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**Abstract**

The charter schools in Pennsylvania have been reviewed in this work. Charter schools are one of the alternatives to public schools. Though they are public schools themselves, but independent. They are funded by government and come in two categories, “Brick and mortal” charter and cyber charter. The number of charters in the state has risen tremendously with few closing down due to poor enrolment. They are governed by less mandatory regulations than the district schools and this might be part of the reasons they are the preference of some parents.

**Introduction**

Charter schools are primary or secondary schools that do not charge fees to students who take state mandated examinations. Fewer regulations are applicable to them than do traditional district schools. Funds released to charter schools by government also are less compared to what is released to [public schools](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_school).

Opportunities open to parents, teachers and general community members to establish and manage schools that operate with autonomy from the traditional school district as a means to promote students learning; improve learning opportunities; encourage the use of modern technology in teaching; create new professionalism advantage for teachers; provide alternatives for parents and students in opportunities that are available in education within the public school system; and accountability in meeting measurable academic standards.

Some educational mandates are not applicable to charter schools. Those that are applicable to them include safety and health, special education, civil rights, attendance, instructional time, open meetings, freedom of information requirements, generally accepted accounting principles, discrimination, employee criminal history checks, civil rights and student accountability

Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) and local school boards are independently vested with the jurisdiction to review and take action with respect to applications for opening new charter schools, to oversee and coordinate charter schools. They could renew, revoke or not renew charters.

The charter school, the regional charter school, and cyber charter school are the three types of charter there are. Although they are collectively referred to as "charter schools". They are autonomous public schools founded and operating under a charter office in the local school board or school district. The first two are generally known as "brick-and-mortar" charter schools in which teacher impart knowledge to students through face-to-face student- teacher interaction at the schools' physical structure located within the catchment of the school district that granted the establishment of the school. A cyber charter school, however, is an independent public school established and operating under a charter from Pennsylvania department of education (PDE) in which the school uses modern technology to provide and deliver a significant instruction of the curriculum virtually to its students. This could either be through the internet or other electronic medium without necessarily having the students present at a physical building designated as school. The students only come physically within a limited time in physical structure basically for events like standardized test.

As of 2016-2017 school year, about 6,900 public charter schools were recorded in 42 states of the United States including the District of Columbia. This resulted in approximately 3.1 million students altogether, a six-fold increase in enrollment over the previous 15 years. About 400 new charter schools were opened in 2015 with about 270 of them closing as a result of poor patronage.

Some charter schools are unique in that they provide specialized [curriculum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curriculum) in mathematics, arts and vocational training. It should be noted that charter school attendance is by choice.

**How Charter Schools are Funded**

Charter schools being public schools are mostly funded by government. They receive funding from the school district(s) where their students are residents. The district only removes a portion of its per pupil spending (for example, special education, adult education, federal funds, transportation costs, debt service, facility and construction improvement). In Pennsylvania for example, the per-pupil allotment is usually in the order of 75-80% of the student's mother school district's overall per-pupil allocation. This is to means that charter schools get less public funding than the schools governed directly by the school district. Furthermore, charter school must fund all its facilities like purchase, lease and building maintenance from this fixed stream of funding since it cannot raise taxes. The basic local funding to a charter school is thus the per-pupil allotment received from the school district. Form PDE 363 is usually used in the calculation of the allotments to the charter schools. A regular allotment is determined for children without special education services. However, there is usually an extra special education allotment which is calculated in order to fund special education services for students with Individual Education Plans.

**Charter School Policy**

In Pennsylvania, the charter is for a period of 3 to 5 years and may be renewed for 5-year periods. A local school board may renew a charter for a period of 1 year once if the board determines that there is insufficient data adequately assess the charter school's academic performance and determines that an additional year of performance data is needed.

**Reasons Parents consider charter school**

The following reasons may account for why parents prefer charter school for their children:

Charter school provides an affordable alternative to private school, they provide option to parents to enroll their children in a school within or outside their district, diverse student population can study in a charter school and the teaching approach in more innovative. Other reasons are that one can find charter school that caters for one’s unique need, the school population is usually small and favorable character of student is ensured.

**My Opinion**

Several allegations have been raised against the operators of charter school that they are not showing high level of accountability of the fund released to them by the school district. I will rather suggest that government should make effort to have officers who will continually inspect these schools unannounced to see their operations. The officers should keep track of such visit. Any charter fallen short of expectation in about three consecutive visits should be revoked. The teachers and operators of charter should be involved in mandatory professional development from time to time, this will assist them build a strong career. They should also be certified as do public schools.

**References**

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