



## Charter School Myths vs. Facts

Over the past five years, student enrollment in charter public schools has grown by 62 percent. While charter schools enjoy tremendous bipartisan support among policymakers and the general public, they also have some vocal critics who perpetuate a number of myths.

**MYTH:** "Charter schools are not public schools."

**FACT:** As defined in federal and state law, charter schools are public schools. They must meet the same academic standards that all public schools are required to meet. They are:

- Tuition free and open to all students;
- Nonsectarian and do not discriminate on any basis;
- Publicly funded by local, state, and federal tax dollars based on enrollment, like other public schools; and
- Held accountable for meeting state and federal academic standards.

**MYTH:** "Charter schools cream or cherry-pick the best students from district-run public schools."

**FACT:** Charter public schools are generally required to take all students who want to attend. If there are more interested students than available seats, the schools are required to hold lotteries, which randomly determine which students will be enrolled. According to federal law, charter schools must accept all students, including students with disabilities and English Learners (ELs), regardless of previous academic performance.

In 2014, the U.S. Department of Education revised its long-standing policy requiring charter schools to use a "blind" lottery when they are oversubscribed. Where it is permitted by state law, charters can now use "weighted" lotteries to preference "educationally disadvantaged" students. This change will likely result in charter schools serving an even greater share of disadvantaged children than they already do.

**MYTH:** "Charter schools don't enroll children from underserved families."

**FACT:** Charter public schools enroll more students of color and from low-income backgrounds than district-run public schools.

According to the most recent national demographic data, charter schools enroll a greater percentage of:

Students of color:

- Black students comprise 27 percent of charter school enrollment versus 15 percent of the district-run public school student population.
- Charter schools have a 30 percent Hispanic population, while district-run public schools have a 26 percent Hispanic population.

Low-income students:

- 56 percent of charter students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, compared to 52 percent of district-run public school students.

**MYTH:** “Charter schools get more money than other public schools.”

**FACT:** On average, charter schools receive less public funding than district-run public schools.

Moreover, in many states, charter schools get no public funding for facilities. Across the country, charter schools receive nearly 30 percent less per pupil per year in funding than neighboring district-run public schools. According to a study published by the University of Arkansas, on average charter public schools receive 72 percent of the per-pupil funding that district-run public schools receive. This national funding discrepancy has grown in recent years, from 19 percent in Fiscal Year 2007 to the most recent gap of 28 percent in Fiscal Year 2011.

**MYTH:** “Charter schools are not held accountable.”

**FACT:** Charter schools introduce an unprecedented level of accountability into public education. If a charter public school is not improving student achievement as laid out in its charter agreement, it can be closed down. This is not the case for district-run public schools, where failing schools often undergo school improvement and turnaround measures for years, while generations of children continue to receive a subpar education.

Charter schools must operate within all state and federal laws. They must abide by health, safety and civil rights laws, as well as business regulations and public body rules. The charter school’s authorizer is responsible for enforcing these rules above and beyond the laws that all public schools must follow.

**MYTH:** “Charter school students do not perform any better than district-run public school students.”

**FACT:** The largest national study of charter school performance was conducted by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University in 2013. Researchers found that overall, students in charter schools are outperforming their district-run school peers in reading, adding an average seven days of learning per year, and performing as well as students in district-run public schools in math. A 2015 CREDO study by found that students enrolled in urban charter schools gained 40 additional days of learning in math per year and 28 additional days in reading compared to their district school peers. In both studies, results were more pronounced for minority students from low-income backgrounds, and the results increased the longer a student was enrolled in a charter school.