

# Chartering 101 for Newbies *and* Veterans

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Are you a new charter school teacher or board member? Are you thinking about founding a charter school in your community? Whether you are new to chartering or a long-time veteran, you will find something new in this **Chartering 101 Q & A**.

That's because as charter schools grow, so do the myths about chartering. Opponents can be intentional in creating and perpetuating myths, and they are different in every state. As the former Minnesota state senator who authored the first charter school law in 1991 in Minnesota and the nation, I've prepared this paper to demystify chartering and provide the facts. If you want more information about the origins of chartering and how "ordinary people took an extraordinary stand for change," my book *Zero Chance of Passage: The Pioneering Charter School Story* will be helpful.



Former Minnesota state senator Ember Reichgott Junge is author of the first charter school law in Minnesota and the nation, and the book, *Zero Chance of Passage: The Pioneering Charter School Story* (ZeroChanceOfPassage.com). A member of the National Charter Schools Hall of Fame, she is a national leadership and education policy coach, presenter, trainer and messenger.

## **Q: Are charter schools public schools or private schools?**

**A:** Charter schools are public schools, just like district public schools. Yet, over one-third of America believes they are private schools. No tuition may be charged. No religious teachings are allowed. They are not "privately-run," they are "independently-run." Here is the best description: charter public schools and district public schools. If you ever hear the phrase "charter schools and public schools," push back!

## **Q: How are charter public schools funded?**

**A:** Charter public schools are funded with public dollars, just like district public schools. The money follows the student it is intended to educate. If a child moves from District A to District B, the money follows the student. If a child moves from District A to charter school B, the money follows the student.

## **Q: Do charter public school students receive the same amount of funding as district public school students?**

**A:** In most states, charter public school students receive less money. Charter schools, on average, receive only 70% of the student funding as district schools. Charter schools do more with less! Usually, charter schools do not receive local property tax revenues, which are often dedicated to facility costs. Those costs then must be paid from state educational funding.

## **Q: How is a charter public school different from a district public school?**

**A:** Charter school parents and teachers are given permission to create a charter school that is not district-controlled. The charter school leaders independently decide key issues like budget, curriculum, and staffing that they believe will best serve their students. They usually choose to be independent of district-controlled contracts like collective bargaining agreements and purchasing agreements. Charter school leaders have autonomy as to school leadership, not just classroom leadership.

**Q: Are charter public schools held accountable?**

**A:** Yes. In return for independence, charter school leaders commit to accountability in their performance contract. They must live up to their performance commitments or the school may be closed. This is greater accountability than for district public schools.

**Q: What about accountability to the public?**

**A:** Every charter public school is accountable to a state-endorsed “authorizer” through its charter performance agreement. Authorizers approved by state legislatures include local school districts, state charter school boards or commissions, independent charter school boards, large nonprofit organizations, higher education institutions, and even local municipal or county governments.

**Q: Who is “in charge” of a charter public school?**

**A:** All charter public schools are governed by a nonprofit board of directors, which usually consists of community members, educators, and parents. The nonprofit board enters into the charter performance agreement with the authorizer, and holds the school leader accountable for performance results required by the charter.

**Q: What about for-profit charter schools?**

**A:** All charter public schools are governed by a nonprofit board of directors. There are no “for-profit” charter schools. In some cases, the nonprofit board may choose to hire a management company with expertise to effectively manage school operations. This can be either a nonprofit or for-profit company. A management company is always subject to authority of the nonprofit board of directors.

**Q: Are charter public schools “unregulated”?**

**A:** Charter public schools must meet the same state and federal academic standards as district public schools. However, they have freedom from regulation in achieving those standards in ways they think best for students. Chartering trades regulation for results.

**Q: Can charter public schools refuse certain students?**

**A:** No. Charter public schools must enroll students first come, first served, including students with special needs, ESL students, and students of all ethnic backgrounds. If there are more students than openings, the charter school must conduct a public lottery, and a waiting list of students is created.

**Q: Do charter public schools perform as well as district public schools?**

**A:** There is a study to support every point of view. The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools says that 15 of the last 16 studies show charter public school students outperformed peers in district public schools and closed the achievement gap ([publiccharters.org](http://publiccharters.org)). A recent Mathematica study showed that charter school graduates are more likely to attend and graduate college and earn more income in the first years post-graduation—about 12% more!



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