

Charter Schools
Questions and Answers
with
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1. What are Charter Schools?

Charter Schools are public, non-religious schools open to all children tuition free. They are created through a contract (or “charter”) between the operators of the school and the sponsoring school board or other authorizer. These schools bring innovation to Wisconsin public schools and work to revitalize public education in our state. These schools serve students most in need and provide educational options and opportunities to families.

In exchange for more flexibility to develop innovative curriculums, Wisconsin charter schools have greater accountability than traditional (non-charter) public schools for student performance, financial matters, and effective school operations. Charter school students take the state tests required of other public school students.

2. Are Charter Schools private? Can they be?

No, all Wisconsin charter schools are and must be public schools. They are all tuition-free.

3. Can any child in the state attend a Charter School?

Yes, any child can attend a charter school. Some charter schools are at capacity and have waiting lists; in these situations a lottery system is used to determine which students can attend. In cases where a student wishes to cross district lines to attend a charter school, district approvals may be required.

4. How is a Charter School different from a Magnet School and from school vouchers?

Magnet schools are highly competitive, highly selective public schools known for their special programs, excellent facilities, and high academic standards. Students who apply to these schools go through a rigorous testing and application process. These schools are designed to attract students outside their immediate neighborhood. They generally have a joint purpose of racial balance and a distinctive academic focus (such as arts or sciences).

A school voucher gives a student some of the tax money the school would have spent to educate that student and allows the student to use the money to pay for tuition at a private or religious school. The voucher program only exists in Milwaukee and targets low-income families.

5. Do Charter Schools provide a benefit to students who do not attend them?

Charter Schools bring cutting edge curriculums to our state’s children and are “innovation labs”, usually within existing school districts. Charter Schools serve as a “testing ground” for these new curriculums, and as they are modified and developed into successful models, these curriculums can be rolled out to conventional (non-charter) schools. In the long-run, *all* Wisconsin students benefit from the innovative methods found in the state’s Charter Schools.

6. Is there data that shows state-wide support for Charter Schools?

In August 2008, a state-wide poll showed that close to two-thirds of Wisconsin voters (64 percent) favor creating more public school options for parents. This poll, conducted by the Glover Park Group, based in Washington D.C., also found that Wisconsin voters believe that allowing parents to choose the most appropriate public school for their child will improve the entire public school system. And voters in the

city of Milwaukee demonstrated they are even more strongly in favor of more public school choices, with three-in-four voters (75 percent) favoring giving parents more public school options.

More than eight in 10 Wisconsin voters were in favor of many of the things that charter schools do, including holding students, teachers and parents accountable for improving student achievement (91 percent); providing a more structured learning environment, more student discipline and requiring more parental involvement (90 percent).

7. How do Charter Schools benefit Wisconsin?

In addition to serving as a testing ground for innovative curriculums that can be rolled out to all public schools across the state, Wisconsin's Charter Schools support the public school systems and local communities in which they are located, and provide other long-term benefits to our state.

- **Charter schools increase property values and tax revenues.** Charter schools generate new property tax revenue when they increase property values of dilapidated buildings they renovate and rehabilitate to use as public schools. Property values may also increase in the communities where high quality charter schools are established.
- **Quality charter schools produce more high school and college graduates.** While some charter schools are still too young to produce long-term data, many charter schools are producing more high school graduates, fewer high school drop outs, and more college attendees and graduates, thus reducing a community's investment in social services and ultimately increasing its tax revenue.
- **Charter schools also hone students' skills and prepare these students to enter the workforce** and begin successful careers in high-technology, biotechnology, or other fast-growing fields in our state that require well-trained workers.

8. Are Wisconsin Charter Schools expensive?

Since charter schools are public schools, the money that they receive comes from the same source of funding for all public education. The money is simply moved from one provider of public education (the district), to another (the charter school). Charter schools often bring new resources into a community's public school system through foundation, state, and federal government grants and community partnerships.

Many areas of the country have actually seen per-pupil funding increase when charter schools open. Charter schools that educate the highest-cost students for less than the district average per-pupil expenditure relieve district budget pressures and serve as a fiscal boon for districts. Nationally, charter schools enroll higher proportions of minority students, low-income students, and students limited in their English proficiency. Charter schools also often produce a net gain in teaching opportunities in the community.

9. How are teachers impacted by Charter Schools?

Most Charter Schools in Wisconsin are part of their school districts, and these teachers are employees of the district and retain all of their benefits. In the select areas of the state where Charter Schools do not remain a part of their school district, teachers are employees of the Charter School with negotiated benefits.

10. Are there certain areas in Wisconsin where Charter Schools have thrived?

While there are excellent charter schools across the state, districts such as Appleton, Sheboygan, Kenosha, Janesville and Milwaukee have implemented Charter Schools with great success. Wisconsin parents embrace this choice and are sending their children to Charter Schools.