



# New Jersey Department of Education

## Charter School Fact Sheet

**This document has been modified from its original version to be more accessible.**

### What are charter schools?

- Charter schools are free, open-enrollment, independent public schools of choice that are open to all students within a designated school district or region of residence, including students requiring special education services, students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, English Language Learners, and other underserved or at-risk populations – on a space available basis.

### How are charter schools opened?

- The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) is the sole charter authorizer in the state, which means it is the only entity with the authority to approve a charter school in New Jersey.
- An individual interested in opening a charter school must submit an application (known as “Phase One”) to the Commissioner by the March or October deadlines set by the NJDOE. These applications undergo a comprehensive review by the NJDOE.
- If applicants meet the state’s standards they are permitted to submit “Phase Two” of the application with greater detail. If the Phase Two application meets the standards, based on a comprehensive review, the founding team of the proposed charter school is invited to an interview with the NJDOE.
- Following the interview phase, successful applicants are awarded an initial charter, which allows the applicant to begin implementing its start-up plan.
- Successful applicants must complete a preparedness process (including 13 regulatory criteria) before being granted a final charter.
- Charter schools are granted a charter by the Commissioner of Education for an initial period of 4 years and may be renewed for 5-year terms thereafter.

### How are students enrolled in charter schools?

- If the number of students interested in enrolling exceeds the number of available seats in a charter school, the charter school will hold a lottery to select students for admission.
- The process of admitting and enrolling students is outlined in NJDOE’s Guidelines for Access and Equity, regulations, and New Jersey statute.
- By law, charter schools are permitted to give an enrollment preference to siblings of current students. By regulation, charter schools may give an enrollment preference, through a weighted lottery, to educationally disadvantaged students including, but not limited to, economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, migrant students, limited English proficient students, neglected or delinquent students, or homeless students.
- Charter schools in Newark and Camden have the opportunity to participate in a universal enrollment system, which provides a single application and lottery process for participating district and charter schools.
- Students not selected in the lottery are placed on a waiting list for a period of one year.

### How are charter schools expanded?

- Requests to expand enrollment must be made to the NJDOE prior to December 1<sup>st</sup> of the preceding school year.
- Charter schools also may request an expansion through their renewal applications, due by October 15<sup>th</sup> of the last school year in the charter term.
- Charter schools must copy the district of residence on any amendment request. The district of residence may submit public comments regarding the amendment request to the Commissioner within 60 days of receipt.
- Requests for expansion are analyzed based on the academic and organizational performance of the school, and the fiscal impact on the district or region of residence.

### Who is responsible for transportation to charter schools?

- Transportation services for charter school students are the responsibility of the resident school districts. For students residing in the school district or region of residence in which the charter school is located, these services are provided under the same

guidelines as transportation provided to students attending other public schools located within the district of residence. A student residing outside of the charter school district or region of residence may be transported by the school district where the student resides or paid aid in lieu of transportation.

## How are charter schools held accountable?

- Charter school accountability is set by New Jersey statute and NJDOE regulations. Charter schools are required to comply with Electronic Violence Vandalism Reporting, NJ SMART, and school safety and security reporting. Charter schools must also comply with:
  - Renewal Process:
    - Every five years after the initial four year charter term, charter schools undergo a comprehensive review for renewal. This process includes, among other elements, the completion of a renewal application and on-site visits. NJDOE conducts document review, stakeholder interviews, and classroom observations. No charter school is guaranteed a renewal of its charter.
  - Annual Budget Summary, Itemized Narrative, Cash Flow Statement and Board Resolution Submission
    - All charter schools must submit an annual budget reviewed by the Office of Charter and Renaissance Schools to assess the on-going fiscal viability and financial impact of the charter school
  - Student Demographic Submission
    - On an annual basis, charter schools submit student demographic composition by gender and ethnicity, disaggregated by the student's district of residence. This information is also captured via NJ SMART and is used to inform future decisions regarding the charter school.
  - Annual Report Submission
    - Annually, charter schools must submit a report detailing the charter operations of the school from the previous year. These reports are reviewed by representatives of the Office of Charter and Renaissance schools and used to inform future decisions regarding the charter school.
  - Annual Audit Submission
    - All schools must demonstrate completion of an independent fiscal review measuring compliance with generally accepted accounting principles.
  - Board Meeting Minute Submission
    - Charter schools must post their board meeting minutes publicly on their website, as well as submitting them to the NJDOE on a monthly basis.
- Charter Schools that fail to comply with the above requirements, or schools that present concerns based on submissions, are subject to additional oversight including, but not limited to, probation, non-renewal, or revocation of the charter.

## How are charter schools financed?

- Charter schools are funded by the state and the district or region in which it is located.
- Charter schools receive public funding through three aid streams:
  1. Under state law, funding from the local district includes the following:
    - 90% of the per pupil cost from the student's district of residence.
    - 100% of security categorical aid.
    - Special education aid
    - Preschool education aid
  2. Funding directly from the state (hold harmless and nonpublic aid).
  3. Funding directly from the federal government.
- Funding follows the student, so the amount of money a charter school receives is based on enrollment in the school. There are three (3) enrollment counts that occur during the year that trigger the calculation of school aid through the Charter School Enrollment System (CHE):
  1. Projections – charter schools project the anticipated enrollment for the coming school year.
  2. October 15 enrollment count – charter schools report actual enrollment count for the school year.
  3. Final enrollment count – charter schools update actual enrollment count to reflect enrollment changes between October 15 and school year-end.
- For purposes of federal funding, a charter school is considered to be a school district that can apply directly to the federal government for federal grants (IDEA, Title I, etc.).

## Do charter schools receive facility funding?

- All charter school operational expenses, including facilities, are covered by revenues received from the charter school's enrollment. A charter school cannot use public funds other than Federal funds for the construction of a facility. By regulation however, a charter school may use State and local funds for the expansion or renovation of a facility, provided the charter school submits to the NJDOE a statement assuring adequate funds are allocated to the classroom.