

### **Charter School Facts**

Charter schools are K-12 public schools that provide choice for parents and students within the public school system. Charter schools are:

- Operated independently from the school district in which they are located
- Incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization or as a teacher cooperative
- Staffed by teachers who have appropriate state licensure
- Funded primarily by state general education revenue with start-up funding in the first three years provided by the federal government
- Located in leased facilities, funded in large measure by lease aid, a state program that provides per pupil funding to compensate for the fact that charter schools cannot own property, levy taxes, or issue bonds
- Open to all who apply, except if the school is over-subscribed, in which case a lottery is held for all of the students who applied before the deadline. Once a student is enrolled, siblings are given preference in admission.
- Free of charge
- Accountable for academic and non-academic outcomes
- Sponsored by a school district, an institution of higher learning, a nonprofit organization, or a foundation
- Reviewed every three years by the sponsor to determine whether the charter will be renewed
- Governed by a board of directors made up of parents, teachers, and community members elected by the school community

**Minnesota Statistics** (Last update March 2005)

**Number of Charter Schools:** 104 in spring 2005

**Number of Enrolled Students:** Over 17,500

**Year of Charter School Law:** In 1991, Minnesota was the first state to pass charter school legislation. The first charter school in the United States, City Academy, opened in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1992.

**Resources:**

MN Association of Charter Schools - [www.mncharterschools.org](http://www.mncharterschools.org)

Center for School Change - [www.centerforschoolchange.org](http://www.centerforschoolchange.org)

MN Department of Education - [http://education.state.mn.us/html/intro\\_charter.htm](http://education.state.mn.us/html/intro_charter.htm)

## Frequently Asked Questions About Charter Schools

### What is a charter school?

Charter schools are public K-12 schools started by parents, teachers, and/or community members who apply for a "charter," which defines the school's specific mission and goals, and how these goals will be measured. Charter schools must be authorized by a sponsor, who then files an affidavit of intent to sponsor a charter school with the state for approval. Sponsors of charter schools may be non-profit organizations, foundations, local school districts, intermediate school districts, or post-secondary institutions. Charter schools are accountable to their sponsors, parents and families, the state, and the public for achieving measurable results in student achievement and for implementing fiscally sound management. Charter schools are extremely diverse in their focuses. From project-based high schools to arts-intensive schools to online learning and technology-focused schools, the missions of charter schools in Minnesota vary widely. Since charter schools are public schools, they are open to anyone, free of charge. If you are interested in finding out about a specific charter school, please visit the **Profiles of Minnesota Charter Schools** - <http://www.centerforschoolchange.org/main.asp>.

### What is the difference between a charter school and other public schools?

Charter schools are public schools that are site-based and managed, meaning that parents, teachers, and local community members choose the people who govern the operation of the school. Charter schools elect their own school boards to oversee all aspects of the school's mission, goals, and operations. The autonomy charter schools enjoy creates an environment where creativity and innovation in teaching and learning flourish. In addition, charter schools often have a particular approach to education or focus for their program that differentiates them from other schools. For example, some charter schools focus on experiential learning, or Core Knowledge, or project-based learning, or technology. Often, charter schools have smaller enrollments than neighboring district schools offering smaller class sizes and lower student to teacher ratios.

### How are charter schools doing in Minnesota?

The charter school sector in Minnesota continues to grow. In the spring of 2005, over 17,500 students in Minnesota attend 104 charter schools. As charter schools continue to succeed in serving students and families who seek innovative, unique, and creative environments for teaching and learning, the charter school sector will continue to grow. The performance of individual schools has been documented in the **Profiles of Minnesota Charter Schools** - <http://www.centerforschoolchange.org/main.asp>. The Minnesota Department of Education has also released a report card for every public school in the state outlining a school's performance in academic achievement, school safety, student participation, parent satisfaction, and overall financial management.

### Do charter schools have admissions policies?

Charter schools are public schools and are, therefore, bound by public law that defines public school admission policies as nonsectarian, nondiscriminatory, and tuition free. Charter schools are open to all students free of charge.

### Where can I find a complete list of Minnesota's charter schools?

Go to [http://mncharterschools.org/aboutmacs\\_memberschools.htm](http://mncharterschools.org/aboutmacs_memberschools.htm) on the Minnesota Charter Schools Association's (MACS) web site. A complete list of Minnesota's charter schools with links to their individual school web sites, their locations of operation, and their telephone numbers can be found. In addition, on the Center for School Change website the **Profiles of Minnesota Charter Schools** - <http://www.centerforschoolchange.org/main.asp> page provides a complete list of schools currently in operation in Minnesota with specific details about each school.

### How are charter schools funded?

Charter schools are funded by the State of Minnesota on a per-pupil basis. In addition, charter schools receive state support for their facilities expenses because they cannot issue bonds or raise taxes through levies like other school districts. Charter schools currently receive up to three years of federal charter school start-up funding. Charter schools can qualify for federal title funding, English Language Learning, and special education funds.