



NEW JERSEY CHARTER SCHOOL BASICS

1. **What are charter schools?**

Charter schools are publicly funded but privately managed schools. Charter school laws vary significantly by state.

2. **Who governs a charter school?**

A charter school is directed by a private Board of Trustees, initially chosen by the founders of the school. Charter Board members do not have to have children in the school or to live in the communities from which the charter school draws its students.

3. **How does a charter school open?**

Charter school founders apply to the New Jersey Department of Education for a charter. The Commissioner of Education has sole authority to approve or deny charters.

4. **Do members of the host community or the local school district have a say in the charter school approval process?**

The sending district administrations are allowed to comment on the application, but the Commissioner of Education is not required to consider their opinions when granting a charter.

5. **How are charter schools funded?**

Charter schools receive funding from the school districts that send children to the charter school. Charter schools also may raise private grants and donations. New Jersey law forbids charter schools from charging tuition.

6. **How do children enroll in a charter school?**

Each charter school has its own enrollment process. In general, a student has to be enrolled in their home school district and then apply to move to the charter school. If more students want to attend a charter school than the school has space to accommodate, the school must hold a lottery and create a wait list. Charter schools are allowed to give admission preference to siblings of existing charter students.

7. **Do charter schools provide transportation?**

Transportation to charter schools is provided by the home school district of each student, and is governed by that district's transportation policies. Some districts provide busing, others provide money in lieu and parents must make their own arrangements.

8. **Does a charter school teach the same curriculum as traditional public schools?**

Charter schools are required to meet the same State Standards as traditional public schools are implementing in New Jersey. Like school districts, charter schools may choose specific text books and methods to teach those requirements.

9. **Can a charter school teach religion?**

No, a charter school cannot teach religion.

10. **Do charter schools give standardized tests?**

Yes, charter schools are required to administer the same state assessments as district schools.

11. Do charter schools accept students with special needs and English Language Learners?

New Jersey law requires charter schools to offer admission to all children, regardless of their income, race, special needs, or language proficiency. In practice, however, most charter schools serve many fewer students with Limited English Proficiency, fewer very low-income students, and fewer special needs students, especially those with high needs.

For example, in 2010-11, Newark’s charter schools educated 15.3% of Newark’s public school students but only

- **0.8%** of Newark’s **Limited English Proficient** students
- **2.0%** of Newark’s **higher-need special education** students
- **8.3%** of Newark’s **low-need special education** students
- **13.0%** of Newark’s **lowest income** students

In fact, Newark's charter schools are so segregated, that they have significantly increased the concentration of the most challenging students in the Newark district schools.¹

	Newark District including charter students (as a %)	Newark District without charter students (as a %)	Change in District enrollment due to charter segregation
Free Lunch	76.5%	78.5%	+2.0%
Limited English Proficient	6.2%	7.3%	+1.1%
Low-Need Special Education	8.3%	8.9%	+0.6%
Higher-Need Special Education	6.1%	7.0%	+0.9%

12. Are charter schools better than district schools?

No. Charter schools are simply privately managed schools. Some charter schools have produced higher test scores than their sending school districts. Many charter schools have similar or lower test scores as district schools. However, the most successful charter schools generally have an easier to educate population of students than their sending districts and often have additional private resources to pay for longer school days, smaller class sizes, or specialized instruction. With some exceptions, New Jersey charter schools overall have performed somewhat worse than comparable public schools.²

13. What changes need to be made to the New Jersey charter school law?

Save Our Schools NJ advocates for three changes to our State’s charter school law:

- 1) The admission and funding processes must be changed to stop the segregation between charter and traditional public schools by income, ability and language proficiency;
- 2) New charters should be approved through a local, democratic process in each of the sending communities, rather than by a political appointee in Trenton;
- 3) The NJ Department of education must make data on charter school enrollment, performance and finances more readily available to the public.

14. How can I help to ensure that every child in New Jersey has access to a high quality public education?

Join Save Our Schools NJ at <http://www.saveourschoolsnj.org> and follow us on Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/SaveOurSchoolsNJ> and Twitter <https://twitter.com/SavOurSchoolsNJ>. In addition to charter reform, we advocate for fair funding and against vouchers and high-stakes testing.

¹ <http://schoolfinance101.wordpress.com/2012/08/06/effects-of-charter-enrollment-on-newark-district-enrollment/>

² <http://schoolfinance101.wordpress.com/2012/11/27/the-secrets-to-charter-school-success-in-newark-comments-on-the-nj-credo-report/>
<http://www.njspotlight.com/stories/12/12/06/opinion-credo-s-study-of-charter-schools-in-nj-leaves-many-unanswered-questions/>