



HOW ARE WASHINGTON'S CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS HELD ACCOUNTABLE?

Charter schools are public schools that are granted additional autonomy in return for additional accountability. Charter schools must:

Comply with most of the same accountability, oversight, and transparency laws applicable to traditional public schools.

- Charter teachers meet the same certification requirements as traditional public school teachers, including background checks.
- Students meet same academic standards and participate in same statewide assessment system as students in traditional public schools.
- Charter schools comply with local, state, and federal health, safety, parents' rights, civil rights, and nondiscrimination laws applicable to school districts.
- Charter schools are subject to the open public meetings act and the public records act. They comply with the annual school performance report required of all public schools and are subject to performance improvement goals adopted by the State Board of Education applicable to all public schools.
- The nonprofit organizations that operate charter schools are subject to annual audits for legal and fiscal compliance by the state auditor (and must comply with generally accepted accounting principles).

Be approved through a rigorous application process to assure the highest-quality schools.

- Charter school applications must address 32 required elements, including evidence of need and parent and community support for the proposed charter school, evidence that the educational program is based on proven methods, and a description of the school's financial plan and policies, including financial controls and audit requirements.

Be overseen by a local school board or a state commission.

- Charter schools are accountable directly to their authorizer (whether district or state) and are subject to annual performance reviews as well as ongoing oversight to be sure the school is complying with the terms of its charter agreement.
- All public charter schools in the state, and their authorizers, ultimately fall within the existing public school system that is overseen by the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education.

Demonstrate success and high-performance.

- Charter schools are subject to rigorous academic, financial, and organizational performance frameworks.
- Performance frameworks are incorporated into the charter contract and serve as the basis for holding schools accountable.
- Performance frameworks include measures of student academic proficiency; student academic growth; achievement gaps between major student subgroups; school financial performance and sustainability; and board performance and stewardship.

Must be reauthorized after five years and can be closed for poor performance.

- A charter contract may be revoked or not renewed if the charter school violates material terms of its contract, including insufficient progress toward academic performance expectations, fiscal mismanagement, and legal violations.
- Most importantly, a charter contract may not be renewed if the charter school's performance falls in the bottom quartile of schools on the state accountability index (!).

Submit to the most important and direct form of local control – keeping parents and students satisfied.

- Charter schools are the ultimate form of local control because they give control to parents to choose the school that best meets their child's needs.
- If the schools are not meeting community expectations, they will lose enrollment and have to close. This process keeps schools directly accountable to parents; concerned parents have direct access to charter leaders and boards and unsatisfied parents can “vote with their feet” by choosing not to enroll (or choosing to leave). There is a level of direct grassroots engagement and feedback that can be challenging, if-not-impossible, for districts to achieve simply because of their size.

Washington's law was one of the strongest in the nation, mandating strict accountability and oversight. The proposed bill maintains these strengths.

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools and the National Association of Charter School Authorizers both ranked Washington's law as one of the strongest charter school laws in the country.

- Experts agree that rigorous authorizing and oversight helps improve student performance.
- Washington's law draws on over 20 years of lessons learned and best practices nationally.

Authorizers are held accountable, too.

- School district authorizers are held accountable for their work by the State Board of Education. Authorizing is both a major public stewardship role and a complex profession requiring particular capacities and commitment, and our charter school law treats it as such—with standards-based barriers to entry and ongoing evaluation to maintain the right to authorize.

All schools will be evaluated after five years before additional schools could be authorized.

- The legislature then determines whether additional public charter schools should be allowed.

Charter public schools are subject to the same federal education laws and regulations as traditional public schools.

- Charter public schools are responsible for meeting the requirements of all public schools under federal laws and regulations, including but not limited to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.