Charter Schools – Commonly Asked Questions

Is a charter school a public or private school?
Charter schools are defined in the Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) as public schools.

How are charter schools funded?
Charter schools are funded by the state just like other public schools. The state gives the charter school the same amount per student that it gives other schools in Clark County. In addition, the school district forwards to each charter school a proportionate share of any federal money the district receives to serve special populations, if the charter, in fact, has students who qualify as members of those special populations. (Special populations could include special education students, at-risk students, and others.)

Who can enroll in a charter school?
Because charter schools are public schools, supported with tax dollars, they must be open to all students. If there are more applicants than seats, charters are to conduct a lottery, or some other non-discriminatory selection process, to ensure that all interested students have an equal opportunity to attend the charter. If space is available, students residing in other Nevada counties may attend a charter school located in Clark County.

How does a charter school operate?
Charter schools are relatively autonomous schools of choice. They operate under a charter, or contract, issued by a public entity such as a local school district or State Board of Education. Individual states determine in their charter school legislation, which rules must be adhered to, which rules may be waived, and which procedures must be followed to obtain a charter. In return for their autonomy, charter schools are held accountable for student performance. If the goals of the school set forth in the charter are not reached, it is the right and obligation of the sponsor to revoke the school’s charter.

Can a charter school charge tuition?
Charter schools cannot charge tuition. However, they may charge any fees that other public schools are allowed to charge. For example, some schools charge a small materials fee for classes such as shop or computers.

Can a charter school be affiliated with a special group, such as a church?
No. A charter school may lease space from a church, but it cannot be associated with a specific religion, ethnic group, or other select group of students. However, the law does permit the establishment of charter schools that exclusively serve special education populations.

Can charter schools grant credit and give diplomas?
Charter schools can grant credit and offer diplomas. The charter school must minimally follow the requirements for graduation from high school as set forth by Nevada statutes and regulations, but not necessarily those of the school district. A school district high school diploma may be earned if the charter school requirements meet or exceed those of the district. To earn a diploma, the student must pass the high school proficiency exams.
How does a charter school’s curriculum compare with the curriculum in other public schools?
Charter schools are required to follow the state’s academic content standards for public schools. They also may add other courses or emphasize certain subjects.

Do charter students take the same tests as students in other public schools?
Charter students are required by law to participate in the criterion-referenced testing that is given in specific grades throughout the district every year, and charter students must also pass the state’s high school proficiency exam to earn a diploma. This provides a meaningful common measure of student achievement.

Do charter schools have to provide services for special education students?
Charter schools are required by law to provide educational and related services for students with special needs. In cases where students have extreme needs, however, the law does permit the charter and the sponsoring district to work together to place the student in an appropriate program in a district school.

Are charter teachers licensed?
Charter teachers in elementary classrooms and those teaching in the subject areas of English, reading or language arts; mathematics; science; foreign language; civics or government; economics; geography; history; or the arts must be licensed as public school teachers. Some teachers in charter schools may not have to be licensed.

Are people employed at charter schools considered school district employees?
No. They are charter school employees. However, because charter schools are public schools, charter employees are considered to be public employees and participate in Nevada’s Public Employee Retirement System.

Does the district own the charter school facilities?
No. Charters are responsible for their own facilities. Charter schools must have the appropriate fire/safety/health/occupancy permits, as issued by the city or the county.

If I have a complaint about a charter, whom should I contact?
You should work with the charter school to resolve your concerns, since the charter school functions independently of the district. Each school has their own complaint process that needs to be followed. It starts with contacting the teacher and/or school leader. However, if you feel there is a violation of law, it is appropriate to contact the school’s sponsor.

What oversight authority does the district have over charter schools?
Law prohibits the local district from interfering with charter operations. At the same time, the district is expected to ensure that the charter program is in compliance with state standards; follows the NRS; that tax dollars are properly accounted for; and that there are no threats in the school environment to the welfare and safety of students and staff. The sponsoring district must submit a year-end report on each charter school’s progress in achieving its goals.
Does the school district’s **Board of School Trustees** have **policy-making authority** over charter schools?

No. Each charter school has its own governing body. Governing bodies have the same statutory requirements as the school board. For example, they must comply with the open meeting law, approve budgets, approve contracts, and establish policy consistent with the NRS.

**How does the application process work?**

In Nevada, the establishment of a charter school emphasizes academic achievement and business operation. A committee to form a charter school must be established by the applicants. The application process starts at the state level, with the State Public Charter School Authority. The phone number for the State Public Charter School Authority is 775-687-9174. The Charter School Application manual is available at [http://charterschools.nv.gov/OpenASchool/Open_a_School/](http://charterschools.nv.gov/OpenASchool/Open_a_School/).

**Where can I find additional information?**

NRS 386.500 to NRS 386.610 inclusive contains most of the laws applicable to charter schools. It can be found at [http://www.leg.state.nv.us/Nrs/NRS-386.html](http://www.leg.state.nv.us/Nrs/NRS-386.html). The Nevada Administrative Code (NAC) Chapter 386 also can be accessed via the Nevada Legislature’s website; the NAC specifies how the laws of the state are to be implemented. The phone number for the State Public Charter School Authority is 775-687-9174.