



Frequently Asked Questions about Charter Schools

What is the Idaho Department of Education's role and involvement with charter schools?

The Idaho Department of Education has a specific team that works with charter schools and those who want to start a charter school. The Idaho Department of Education provides technical assistance to people or groups preparing or revising charter petitions. The department also conducts charter school workshops for those who want to start a charter school. Additionally, the Idaho Department of Education works with charter school boards and authorizers to provide support or information as needed.

What is the Idaho Public Charter School Commission?

The Idaho Public Charter School Commission (IPCSC) was created by the Idaho Legislature in 2004 to serve as an alternative, statewide authorizer of public charter schools. The Commission consists of seven (7) appointed members and is staffed by the State Board of Education. The IPCSC has the authority to approve or deny charter school applications and monitors charter school operations.

Are charter schools accredited?

Public secondary schools serving grades 9-12, including alternative and charter schools, are required to attain accredited status through Cognia. Public elementary, middle schools and private schools may voluntarily seek accreditation. Charter schools are subject to all accreditation requirements.

Do charter schools charge tuition?

Charter schools do not charge tuition. They receive state funding similar to school districts, however they do not receive additional funds from public levies or bonds.

How does charter school enrollment work?

A charter school is a public school that must, as a condition of its charter, have an open enrollment policy. Charter schools have a cap or limit the number of students they can accept. If the number of applications to a charter school exceeds the capacity of the school, all

applicants will have an equal chance of being admitted through a random selection process or lottery. A lottery is conducted in the spring before the school opens and the charter school governing board is required to hold the lottery in a public space. There are certain preferences that must be applied before the lottery is conducted. For example, Idaho Statute allows a charter school to give enrollment preference to children of founders and full-time employees, provided that this preference does not exceed 10%. The students not chosen to attend the charter school by the lottery process are placed on a waiting list. Once a space becomes available, the charter school will contact the first name on the waiting list to fill the empty spot. The waiting lists are redone every year.

Do charter schools serve students with special needs?

Yes. As a public school, a charter school must comply with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and any state special education laws.

To whom is a charter school responsible?

A charter school is accountable to the students and families in the school, their authorizer (the local school district or the Idaho Public Charter School Commission), and Idaho taxpayers. The charter school authorizer oversees the charter school and holds them accountable for fulfilling the charter and following all state and federal laws. Charter schools are also required to participate in state-mandated assessments. It is through the state assessments and graduation rates that charter schools, along with all other public schools in the state, are measured.

Charter schools must follow state and federal laws governing public schools; however, there is some flexibility in rules for charter schools.