

Richard Milburn Academy

CHARTER SCHOOLS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

·Charter schools are public schools. They are open to all students; they do not selectively enroll or discriminate against students. Charter schools do not serve as vouchers for private schools and do not charge tuition. They are public schools funded with public dollars.

·Charter school laws exist in 40 states and Washington, D.C. More than 1 million students were enrolled in approximately 3,625 schools during the 2005/2006 school year. The number of charter schools increased by 424 (13%) that year; charter schools now represent four percent of schools nationwide. The first charter school opened in Minnesota in 1992.

·Charter schools do not drain resources or funds from the district. They often receive less per-pupil funding than traditional public schools and must hire and pay their own teachers. Charter schools are responsible for finding and maintaining their own facilities, so they actually cost the district less than a traditional school.

·Charter schools are highly accountable. They must meet state testing benchmarks, pass site reviews by the district and receive good reports from independent auditors. Charter schools that fail to perform are subject to probation or charter revocation. They are held to higher standards of accountability than traditional public schools.

·Charter schools are committed to improving public education. They often address the needs of traditionally underserved students, giving them the opportunity to receive a quality education. Charter schools strive for success by challenging students in innovative ways that improve student performance, critical thinking skills and self-confidence.

·Charter schools are established by individuals or groups with a deep commitment to public education, experience in delivering quality educational services and a strong background in management and organization. Parents, teachers, management companies, charitable foundations and religious groups are a few of the entities who may run a charter school.

·Charter schools enjoy freedom, flexibility and autonomy that traditional public schools lack. They may set their own hours, design a special curriculum, follow a specific mission or philosophy, limit class size and otherwise cater their program to their students' needs.

·Charter schools may be established two ways: as new start-up schools or as traditional public schools converting to charter status. New schools are created to add an educational element the district lacks. Traditional schools that convert to charter schools do so to improve their program and utilize the flexibility and ingenuity charter schools allow. Failing traditional schools may convert to charter status in order to alter their program to improve academic performance.

·Charter schools are an important and enduring part of national education reform; they are not a trend. They are a necessary part of educational choice and student-centered educational programming. Charter schools are also an important part of No Child Left Behind.