



STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT CHARTER SCHOOL CLOSURE

Q. What is a charter school?

A. Charter schools are publicly funded independent schools established by teachers, parents, or community groups under the terms of a performance contract. Some charter schools are stand-alone institutions, while others operate as part of larger school networks. Unlike traditional public schools, charter schools have significant independence from their local school district. The combination of freedom and accountability for success allows charter schools to try new approaches, respond to community and student needs, and put student learning first. Charter schools are held accountable for advancing student achievement; if they do not meet their goals, a charter school can be closed.

Q. What is a charter school sponsor or authorizer?

A. Every charter school has an authorizer, a sponsoring entity which, subject to state law, may be a local school board, a public university, or an independent charter board like the State Public Charter School Authority. All Nevada authorizers are public entities. Authorizers are responsible for holding charter schools accountable for academic, organizational, and financial performance and their failure to hold schools accountable can result in losing their right to sponsor charter schools.

Q. Are charter schools accountable to the public?

A. Yes. While members of charter school boards are not elected or appointed officials and some charter schools choose to contract with private organizations, including for-profit companies, charter schools are held accountable for academic, organizational, and financial performance under state and federal law and the requirements of the school's charter or charter contract. One of the primary ways that authorizers can hold schools accountable is by revoking the charter or terminating the charter contract. This action can result in closing the school or making a significant governance and management change.

Q. Why would a charter school authorizer close a charter school?

A. Charter schools are expected to meet academic, organizational, and financial standards set in state and federal law and regulation or the school's performance contract. If the school does not meet its obligations to the state, the authorizer may close the charter school. The National

Alliance for Public Charter Schools reports that 272 charter schools closed in 2015. The Alliance's list of states with the largest number of charter public school closures in 2015 included:

- Florida: 35 schools closed
- California: 32 schools closed
- Arizona: 30 schools closed
- Texas: 15 schools operating 62 campuses closed
- Wisconsin: 14 schools closed

While some of these schools closed voluntarily, the vast majority were closed by their authorizers due to academic, organizational, or financial performance issues.

Based on national studies, Nevada has one of the nation's lowest performing charter school sectors. Despite the chronic poor performance of a number of charter schools in Nevada, no Nevada charter school has closed due to revocation or the charter or termination of its contract since 2007.

Q. Are charter schools growing in Nevada?

A. Yes. The State Public Charter School Authority is dedicated to the growth of a high quality charter school movement in Nevada. The Authority has supported the expansion of its charter schools from 11,000 students in 2011 to over 30,000 students in 2016. New schools authorized by the Authority since 2011 include online schools like Leadership Academy, arts-focused schools like Doral Academy of Northern Nevada, and more back-to-basic options like Legacy Traditional Schools. The Authority has set a goal of expanding to 60,000 high quality charter school seats by 2020.

Q. Is it fair that charter schools can be closed when the state has never closed a poor performing traditional public school.

A. In his 2015 State of the State address, Governor Sandoval addressed the issue of low-performing public schools, asking the Legislature to draw a line in the sand and create an Achievement School District to intervene in low-performing district schools and open up additional high performing charter schools. The Legislature also improved charter school accountability and changed the law to give authorizers similar tools to either close charter schools or take other steps to improve their performance.

Q. Are there other options instead of charter school closure?

A. Yes. Recognizing that many parents value their child's charter school, the State Public Charter School Authority worked with the Legislature in 2015 to give authorizers the option to take other measures, like restructuring a charter school's board, instead of closing schools. To date, the Authority has worked with two schools with serious academic, organizational, or financial performance issues and has replaced their governing boards with receivers accountable for improving school performance. These measures have allowed the state to hold poor performing adults accountable while minimizing the disruption to students and families who deserve better from those who are trusted with serving them. In some cases, authorizers have offered to give schools more time to improve in exchange for the school's agreeing that the authorizer can make governance and management changes if the school does not meet its goals. Under such an agreement, the authorizer would agree not to impact students and families by closing the school if the school allows the authorizer to make changes to hold board members accountable for underperformance. For example, the authorizer might replace the governing body of a low performing charter school with the governing body of a higher performing charter school.

Q. How does an authorizer make a decision to close a charter school?

A. Nevada law requires that an authorizer or sponsor provide a charter school with notice of its intent to revoke the charter or terminate the contract. The law also requires that the authorizer give the school a specific period of time to fix the deficiency that prompted the sponsor to issue the notice. Once that period of time is up, the authorizer holds a hearing to determine if the deficiency has been cured. The authorizer may determine that it is satisfied that the deficiency has been cured or it may determine that the deficiency has not been cured. If the sponsor determines that the deficiency has not been cured, it may vote to revoke the charter or terminate the contract.

Q. Is it true that a charter school can be closed in the middle of the year?

A. Closing a charter school in the middle of the year is incredibly disruptive to students, families, and other schools. It happens only under very limited circumstances, such as when a charter school had serious financial problems that prevent it from paying teachers or covering other expenses or there are serious safety issues that endanger students and teachers.

Q. I've heard that my charter school's authorizer may close my child's school. What can I do?

A. Parents should know that every charter school has an independent board which governs the school and is ultimately accountable to parents and to the authorizer for the school's performance. These boards are required by law to have regular public meetings. Parents have every right to demand the school improve or to call for the adults governing the school to step aside if the authorizer notifies the school of its intent to revoke the charter or terminate the school's contract for poor performance. Parents are also urged to take steps to ensure that their children have a seat at a new school for the next school year. Many charter schools are recruiting students and scheduling lotteries in the early winter, so it is important to families to make other arrangements in case the school is closed.

Q: If a charter school my child is attending closes, what options are available for my family?

A: Parents may seek new educational options for their children at:

- other charter schools
- the traditional school district in which the student resides
- private schools
- home-school options

Parents may also work with community leaders to start a new, high quality charter school in their community. The most recent Call for Quality Charter Schools can be found at http://charterschools.nv.gov/OpenASchool/Application_Packet/.

Q. I live in an area where there are no other public school options and everyone attends their neighborhood schools. What can I do about this?

A. Some school districts are responding to parent demand for more options by creating additional options, including magnet schools and statewide online schools. As a citizen, you can advocate for your district to bring options like that to your community. Additionally, parents and local leaders can also explore the opportunity to apply to open a charter school. Across Nevada and the country, even in rural areas, families and communities are banding together to develop their own public charter schools. Some have even gone as far as to issue RFPs to solicit

charter school leaders and charter school networks to develop new schools based on the needs of their children and their shared vision for what is possible in public education. While the process of developing and applying for a charter school is extremely rigorous, those who have persisted despite setbacks and opened new high quality public school options in their communities can attest that the effort was well worth it.

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