

2. Charter Schools

Statutory Requirements: Section 1111

Overview

Charter Schools are innovative public schools providing choices for families. They are accountable for both academic results and fiscal practices to several groups: the sponsor that grants them, the parents who choose them and the public that funds them.

A charter school

- Is exempted from most local and state educational laws
- Provides a program of elementary and secondary education or both
- Is non-sectarian, not affiliated with a religious school in any form
- Does not charge tuition
- Complies with federal laws related to special education and discrimination
- Admits students on the basis of a lottery, if more apply than can be served
- Complies with state and federal audit requirements
- Meets all local, state and federal health and safety requirements

Charter schools are created with the best elements of regular public schools in mind. Wisconsin established charter schools to foster an environment of creativity. Charter schools are, in essence, living laboratories that influence the larger public school system and introduce an element of entrepreneurship within that system. Charter school leaders may experiment with different instructional theories, site-based management techniques, and other innovations. They learn, sometimes by trial and error, what works best for their student population. Regular schools can observe and learn from what happens in the charter school and make similar improvements without having to experience “growing pains.” Through this process, the entire public school system is continually challenged to improve itself.

A charter school is developed to fit the special needs and interests of its community, parents, and students. This is what makes each charter school unique. While many goals for educating and preparing children are similar, each charter school fulfills a specific local need in education. Charter schools offer a choice to parents and students in the area of curriculum, teaching methodology, and classroom structure. Many who serve at risk populations work hard to keep their small population of students from falling through the cracks, offering counseling and personal attention and support. In districts with charter schools, the community, school boards, and parents have identified their public education needs and established charters that meet them.

Again, charter schools are public schools. They are freed from most state rules and regulations in exchange for greater accountability for results. Charter schools may receive federal funding pending eligibility as any other public schools.

Charter Schools in Wisconsin

- Must participate in the state assessment system
- Must participate in the annual School Performance Report (SPR)
- Must be open to all students in the district
- Must apply the health and safety requirements of all public schools
- Must provide for voluntary attendance
- Must be different enough to require a charter

- Teachers must be licensed by the Department of Public Instruction

Resources

For more information Department of Public Instruction website for Charter Schools:
<http://dpi.wi.gov/sms/csindex.html> or

Federal guidance website:
<http://www.uscharterschools.org/pdf/fr/cspguidance04.pdf>