

Principles for Charter School Reform

The Education Law Center is a non-profit legal advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all of Pennsylvania's children have access to a quality public education.

Charter schools are public schools and must follow laws that protect the rights of public school students. Ensuring that charter schools, as well as traditional public schools, provide quality education to *all* students is an important part of ELC's mission.

The following principles are an outgrowth of ELC's work with and on behalf of thousands of families throughout Pennsylvania.

1. **Educate All Students:** The choice to attend a charter school belongs to parents and students, not to the school. Charter schools must welcome and serve all students, including Pennsylvania's most vulnerable students. Charter schools cannot exclude or discourage students from enrolling, and must help them to succeed.

The most vulnerable students include minority students, students with disabilities, students in foster care, students experiencing homelessness, students living in poverty, students for whom English is a second language, students connected to the juvenile justice system, and undocumented students.

2. **Operate With Integrity:** Charter schools must be operated with integrity and without conflict of interest. They should be authorized and operated by public entities and should not serve to enrich individuals, organizations, or businesses.
3. **Provide Innovative Educational Opportunities:** Charter schools should provide innovative and engaging curricula and pedagogies that serve to complement, supplement, and inform traditional public schools, rather than to compete with, replace, or duplicate them.
4. **Ensure Adequate and Equitable Funding:** All public schools, traditional and charter, must be provided adequate and equitable funding to allow all students to succeed.

5. **Meaningfully Include Parents, Students, and the Community in Governance:** Charter schools should operate in a manner that actively engages parents, students, and the community and informs them of all aspects of charter school operations.

6. **Local Creation and Oversight of Charters:** Charter schools should be authorized and monitored by local school districts and elected school boards which have the primary role in partnering with charter schools and deciding whether or not to authorize, renew, expand, or close any and all charter schools, with fair appeals to state officials.

7. **Ensure Accountability:** Charter schools, like all public schools, must be held accountable for the quality of education provided to students. Charter schools which, after adequate support, guidance, and opportunity to improve, persist in materially violating the law should have their charters revoked.

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