

## **CHARTER SCHOOLS VS TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS COMPARING APPLES TO ORANGES**

**Charter Schools** are **public schools** that operate under a contract or **charter**, with local school boards. The idea behind charter schools is to allow them to innovate with ideas to enhance academic performance. To that end, they have been given more autonomy to operate.

Since the first charters were authorized in Florida in 1996, concerns have been voiced about the flexibility charter schools have compared with traditional public schools, as there is no level playing field. Charter schools are exempt from many of the state's school laws. They have more flexibility with their personnel, including salaries, benefits, and rules on hiring and firing. They can increase the length of the school day or year, customize the curriculum, and operate under less restrictive building requirements and relaxed restrictions on class size.

Many are concerned that putting too much money into charter schools will create a two-tier education system. Needless to say, there is a definite impact on sustaining the current public school system. As charter schools grow and more students leave traditional schools, along with the associated revenue, there will be a need to reassess how best to structure local school districts. Most recently, there have been questions surrounding the parity in these educational choices. Many charter schools serve particular interest groups and focus on target marketing, which is allowable under current law. Others point to some charter schools that neglect special education students, have selective admission processes, unfair dismissal policies, and breach the separation of church and state.

### **National PTA Position on Charter Schools:**

National PTA acknowledges charter schools are one avenue to school reform. PTA supports the creation of charter schools based on a set of principles that are designed to keep the integrity of public schools intact.

### **Charter schools *must***

- Be open to all students
- Be supported by specifically allocated public funds in amounts that do not exceed and do not divert money from public schools
- Comply with federal and state laws governing public schools that require fiscal responsibility and accountability
- Adhere to federal and state laws that protect the health and safety of children
- Be accountable to local school boards in the districts where they are located

- Ensure staff are certified for their positions
- Involve parents in decision-making processes
- Have a mechanism for independent evaluation to determine if they are providing students with an education at least comparable to public schools and fulfilling their mission of innovation

### **Charter schools *must not***

- Be operated by for-profit organizations, nor be affiliated with a nonpublic, sectarian, religious, or home-based school
- Charge tuition or fees not charged by public schools
- Have a negative impact on public schools

### **Do students who attend charter schools perform better than students who attend the traditional public school?**

National research shows that 46% of students attending charter schools did not perform significantly better or worse than traditional public schools; 37% of students attending charter schools performed significantly worse than traditional public schools; 17% of student attending charter schools performed significantly better than traditional schools.

Overall, the majority of charter schools do no better or worse than traditional public schools.

Source: [DATA F1RST 2011](#)

It has been stated that our elected officials plan to bring forth legislation this 2012 session seeking increased funding earmarked for the creation of additional charter schools, including access to school district's discretionary property tax revenues used for school construction.

*Florida PTA believes parents have the right to choose how to best educate their children. As a resource to you, Florida PTA will continue to keep you informed of all legislative activity regarding Florida's education system.*