



MYTH VS. FACT

Myth: Charter schools are not public schools

Fact: Charter schools ARE public schools.

PUBLIC charter schools are public schools that must accept every student who wants to attend. They cannot have enrollment requirements. Public charter schools cannot charge tuition.

Myth: Public charter schools are not held accountable.

Fact: Public charter schools are held to the highest levels of accountability.

If a public charter school does not meet its contract standards, or is a low-performing school for three years in a row, it is automatically closed. It cannot remain open if it does not perform – the highest standard of accountability.

Myth: Public charter schools will take money away from traditional public schools.

Fact: Public charter schools are public schools and will receive the same amount of money that traditional district schools receive.

Traditional district schools receive a specific amount of money to educate each student (called the “per pupil allocation”). This per pupil allocation supports the cost of educating that student. If a parent chooses to send their child to a public charter school, the public charter school would receive the student’s per pupil allocation. The School Choice and Student Opportunity Act protects school systems by only allowing up to 10 mills of local money to follow a child to a public charter school – any local funds above the 10 mills remains with the local school system.

Myth: Public charter schools undermine local control.

Fact: By giving power to parents, teachers, and principals to run schools to best meet student needs, public charter schools represent the strongest form of local control in public education.

Local school boards have the first say when it comes to bringing a public charter school to their community. They have the final say if the application is from a

traditional public school that wants to transition to a public charter school. Public charter schools are simply another tool local school boards can utilize to provide educational options to families and educators in their community.

Myth: Public charter schools “cherry pick” their students

Fact: Public charter schools are open to all students who wish to attend. Public charter schools accept every student who wants to attend. If more students enroll than there are seats available, schools must conduct a public random selection process to fill seats.

Myth: Lawmakers believe that public charter schools are the only way to improve public education.

Fact: Lawmakers believe that we need a broad toolkit of strategies to address problems in Alabama’s education system.

There is no “one-size-fits-all” solution to the problems in public education in Alabama. Many different strategies are needed to ensure that all Alabama students are prepared for future education or the workforce. Great work is going on to address low-performing schools, including ARI, AMSTI, First-Class Pre-K, and a commitment to give flexibility to all schools. Public charter schools are simply an addition to the educational toolkit in Alabama to give parents another choice and to ensure every child is receiving the best possible education we can offer.

Myth: Public charter schools are never successful.

Fact: Public charter schools are successful. When they aren’t, unlike traditional public schools, they close.

Unlike traditional district schools, public charter schools that are not successful are not allowed to continue serving children. States with the most successful public charter schools are those with strong accountability language allowing authorizers to close low-performing charter schools. The School Choice and Student Opportunity Act holds public charter schools to the highest levels of accountability.

Myth: All public charter schools are run by for-profit organizations.

Fact: Public charter schools must be governed by 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organizations.

Only non-profits can hold a charter. If the nonprofit chooses to contract with a public charter school operator to manage the school, that contract (and its terms) must be laid out in the public charter school’s application.

Myth: Public charter schools do not serve students with special needs.

Fact: Public charter schools are open enrollment public schools and are required to meet the needs of all students.

Public charter schools must serve the needs of all special education students who wish to attend, and there is strong language in this bill that holds schools accountable for meeting the needs of these students. It's worth noting that several public charter schools around the country are focusing their models to serve specific populations of students with special needs, including students with autism.

Myth: Public charter schools "deprofessionalize" teaching

Fact: Public charter schools honor the profession of teaching by providing classroom-level flexibility and autonomy.

Public charter schools support teacher autonomy, embracing the notion that the teacher is best equipped to make decisions for his/her individual classroom. Public charters allow teachers to tailor instruction and strategies to meet the needs of their students. There is nothing that prevents public charter schools from making a school-level decision to hire only certified teachers – the difference is that decision is the school's decision, not the decision of a state-level agency.

Myth: Public charter schools will be used as a recruiting tool for high school sports programs.

Fact: Any athletic teams at a public charter school would be under the authority of the Alabama High School Athletics Association and subject to their rules and regulations.

Public charter schools are not required to offer athletics, but if they do, they must register with the Alabama High School Athletics Association.

Myth: Public charter schools are just another vehicle to deliver the Common Core standards to our students.

Fact: Public charter schools have the flexibility to choose their own curriculum.

Public charter schools have unprecedented flexibility over the state's education statutes including the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards. Public charter schools can utilize whichever curriculum they choose. In return, they are held to the highest level of performance standards.

Myth: Public charter schools take money away from transportation which is already underfunded in our schools.

Fact: Public charter schools are public schools and receive transportation funding in the same manner it is paid to school systems.

Public charter schools can choose whether to provide transportation services but must lay out the school's plans for providing transportation in their application. If the school does not provide transportation they will not receive any federal, state, or local funds earmarked for transportation-related expenses.

Myth: My school system will be forced to have a public charter school, even if we don't want it.

Fact: The Alabama Public Charter School Commission can hear appeals of denials by local school boards, but it can only overrule the decision of a local school system if certain criteria are met.

The purpose of the Alabama Public Charter School Commission is to ensure that strong public charter school applications are not denied for political reasons. In order to overturn the decision of a local school system, the Commission must do all of the following:

1. Find evidence of a high-quality public charter school application;
2. Hold a public hearing on the application;
3. Take into consideration the local board's stated reasoning for denying the original charter application;
4. Take into consideration the quality of school options existing in the affected community;
5. Find evidence that the local school system erred in its application of nationally-recognized authorizing standards.

In addition to all of these checks and balances, one of the Commissioners will be appointed by the local school system where the application was denied. This ensures that no decision of a local school board will be overturned without clear and thorough consideration of the local school system.