

## Charter Schools: **Myth** versus **Fact**

*Charter school opponents are distributing misleading and inaccurate information about charter schools. Alabamians deserve to have accurate and truthful information about charter schools so they can make up their own minds whether or not this reform initiative could be a beneficial option for their community.*

**☒ Myth: Charter schools will cost the state more money than traditional district schools.**

**☑ Fact: Charter schools will receive the same amount of money that traditional district schools receive.**

Every traditional district school receives a specific amount of money to educate a student (called the “per pupil allocation”). That money is intended to support the cost of educating that student. If a student chooses to go to a charter school, that charter school would receive that student’s per pupil allocation. The effect on the district school is the same as if that student had moved out of the district or gone to a private school. The charter school receives exactly the same amount of money as the district school.

**☒ Myth: Charter schools are not public schools.**

**☑ Fact: Charter schools are PUBLIC schools.**

Charter schools are public schools that accept all students who want to come. Charter schools cannot charge tuition, teach religion, or have admission requirements.

**☒ Myth: Charter schools “cherry pick” their students.**

**☑ Fact: Charters must be open to all students who wish to attend.**

If more students enroll than there are seats available, schools must conduct lotteries to fill seats.

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

**☑ Fact: Lawmakers and the Governor believe that we need a toolkit of strategies to address problems in Alabama’s education system.**

Both the Governor and legislative leadership believe strongly that there is no “one size fits all” solution to the problems in public education in Alabama. We need many different strategies to make sure all Alabama students are prepared for college and career. There is good work going on to address low-performing schools, including ARI, AMSTI and a commitment to give flexibility to all schools. Charter schools are an important piece of a larger, collaborative strategy intended to address educational inequity and chronic low performance.

**☒ Myth: Charter schools don’t work.**

**☑ Fact: Done right, charter schools can work well to improve student performance. BUT if they don’t meet stated expectations, they are closed.**

Of course not every charter school performs well. Just like with traditional schools, sometimes efforts to improve performance fall short. The difference is charter schools are held accountable for their results. If they don’t meet expectations, charter schools are closed down. Poor-performing, chronically failing traditional schools can go on underserving students for years or decades.

The states with the most successful charter schools are those with strong accountability language allowing authorizers to close low-performing charter schools.

Two peer states with charter schools laws are Tennessee and Louisiana:

- 52 percent or 14 of the 27 charter schools assessed in Memphis, Nashville and Chattanooga demonstrated significant student learning growth versus their traditional public school peers.

- In New Orleans, among 45 charter schools, 22 made significantly faster gains in reading, math or both compared with traditional schools.
- In both studies, some charters are left out because they aren't old enough to have produced enough scores, so the results may actually be even better.

**☒ Myth: Alabama charter schools legislation is meant to enrich corporations by redirecting public money to for-profit charter school companies.**

**☑ Fact: For-profit organizations will be expressly prohibited from chartering schools in Alabama.**

It's a sad, but predictable scare tactic to say that corporations want to come to Alabama and charter for-profit schools. Anyone who says that isn't telling the truth. Alabama's charter legislation will not allow for-profit operators to manage charter schools. Period.

**☒ Myth: Stanford University says charter schools are worse than district schools.**

**☑ Fact: Stanford University produced a study in 2009 that concluded that some charter schools outperform district schools and some do not.**

The CREDO study evaluated charter schools in 16 states. While this produced valuable information for crafting strong charter legislation, because charters exist in 41 states, the experience of charters in 25 states was not captured. In addition, the study concluded that in several of the states studied, low-income students and minority students performed significantly better in charter schools. Since the release of the study, there have been questions about the research methodology used, but ultimately, the study provides us valuable data about how to craft a strong charter bill and avoid the mistakes of other states. This report demonstrates the importance of how state laws address autonomy, accountability, and funding.

**☒ Myth: Charter schools do not serve students with special needs.**

**☑ Fact: Charter schools are open enrollment public schools and required to meet the needs of all students.**

Charter schools must serve the needs of all special education students who wish to attend. Alabama has the benefit of learning from other states' mistakes and has strengthened the language around special needs charter school students to ensure that charter schools are held accountable for meeting the needs of special needs students. It's worth noting that several charter schools around the country are focusing their models to serve specific populations of students, including students with autism.

**☒ Myth: Charter schools "deprofessionalize" teaching.**

**☑ Fact: Charter schools honor the profession of teaching by providing classroom-level flexibility and autonomy.**

A core tenet of charter schools is teacher autonomy. Charter schools embrace the notion that the teacher knows what's best for the classroom. Charter schools allow and support teachers to tailor instruction and strategies to the needs of students. Without having to adhere to strict salary schedules or requirements, some charter schools have implemented creative professional growth ladders, supporting teachers towards instructional leadership and administrative positions with appropriate compensation and responsibilities.

**☒ Myth: Charters undermine local control.**

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

In Alabama, only local boards will have the ability to authorize charter schools, except in extremely low-performing school districts.