

# What are Public Charter Schools?

## **Very simply, charter schools are independent public schools of choice.**

They are designed and operated not by the local school district, but by a group of founders like parents, educators, and community leaders. Founders must obtain a *charter*—the specific contractual authority to run the charter school—from an *authorizer* established under Maryland’s state law, in our case, the local school board. Public school funding follows the students enrolled in the charter school, and founders have a great deal of independence to decide the school’s budget, staff, curriculum and teaching methods. Charter schools can seek waivers from most state and local regulation, with important exceptions like laws and rules dealing with health and safety, special education and civil rights.

## **Though independent, charter schools ensure accountability.**

Schools must meet strict academic performance standards and other goals agreed to in the charter, and must successfully manage school finances and operations. It’s simple: no results, no charter. If charter schools don’t perform, they are closed. That’s *greater* accountability than is generally required of district public schools.

## **Charter schools offer different choices within public education.**

Charter schools are all of these: one grade or 12 grades; year-round or extended-days; back-to-basics or state-of-the-art technology; environmental mission or arts focus; business/labor partnership; specialized teaching strategies or use of culturally appropriate curricula.

## **Charter schools expect parents to be involved.**

It is not unusual to see parents painting the school corridors or laying the carpet before the charter school opens. Some schools expect parents to volunteer a certain number of hours at the school; and others have parents sign contracts committing them to read aloud to their children or review their homework at home.

## **Charter schools offer opportunities to innovate.**

The Public Charter School Act of 2003 gives charter schools the freedom to make quick and effective changes to respond to students’ needs. Innovation in charter schools is evident in their structure, governance, curriculum, partnerships and strength of engagement both at the classroom and school-wide level.

To learn more, visit [www.mdcharternetwork.org](http://www.mdcharternetwork.org)