

CHARTER SCHOOL FACTS

Charter schools, while publicly funded, ARE NOT part of the Fairfield Area School District (FASD). FASD taxpayers are responsible for tuition rates of students who choose NOT to attend FASD public school or FASD's cyber school. **The tuition rates for the 2018-1019 school year are \$711,825.90.**

Charter schools come in two different categories. One is a brick and mortar establishment that typically enrolls students living within 10 miles of a school district's boundary. The other is a cyber charter school which can be located anywhere within the commonwealth.

FASD educates approximately 1,000 students each year. While most families choose FASD for their child's education, charter schools account for about 18% of area students.

Below are PA charter schools located within the Fairfield Area School District boundaries, with FASD enrollment numbers:

BRICK AND MORTAR CHARTER SCHOOLS

- Vida Charter School – 3
- Gettysburg Montessori Charter School – 10

STATEWIDE CYBER CHARTER SCHOOLS

- 21st Century Cyber Charter – 1
- Achievement House Cyber – 1
- Agora Cyber Charter School – 5
- Commonwealth Charter Academy – 18
- Insight Pa Cyber Charter – 3
- Pennsylvania Cyber Charter – 4
- Pennsylvania Virtual Charter – 2
- Reach Cyber Charter – 4

An important difference between the school district and charter schools is accountability. Charter schools are led by appointed boards that do not have to answer to the community. In contrast, a publicly elected, nine-member Board of School Directors oversees FASD. Our board regularly holds public meetings and routinely engages with the community. If they are dissatisfied with the board's decisions, community members may choose new directors or run for a seat through public elections. No such options exist when charter boards are appointed.

One misconception is that charter schools save money for school districts by reducing enrollment. This is untrue because local charter school students come from multiple schools across the district. Losing a student here or a couple of students there doesn't change the overall costs of operating schools. For example, it would only save money if many students from the

same class in the same building left the district, but that's not happening. FASD can't decrease faculty sizes or trim operational costs based on these spread-out enrollment decreases.

Questions and Answers

Q: What is a charter school?

A: It's a privately run independent educational facility funded with public tax dollars.

Q: What are the differences between charter and public schools?

A: A charter school does not charge tuition and, like public schools, is funded by tax dollars. In that sense, it's a public charter school. But the board members or administrators who govern charter schools are not elected by community members and are not subject to public oversight.

Q: Are all charter school teachers certified?

A: According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education Teacher Certification Requirements for Charter Schools, only 75 percent of the professional staff members of a charter school must hold appropriate state certification. Every FASD teacher must hold state certification.

Q: Are charter schools required to accept all students?

A: No. Charter schools have a maximum number of seats and can cap admission. On the other hand, the district welcomes any child living within the geographic boundaries who desires to attend.

Q: Charter schools vs. public schools funding?

*A: By law, a school district must fund charter schools accepting students from within its boundaries on a per capita basis, according to a formula based on the district's expenses. In other words, the district pays according to its own costs, not the actual charter school's operational costs. **In 2018-19 FASD will pay \$711,825.90 for charter school tuition.***

Q: How are charter schools funded?

A: Charter student funding is determined by dividing a district's total expenditures, minus certain exclusions, by the district's average daily enrollment. Exclusions include federally funded expenditures and costs for transportation services, adult education programs and debt. For special education students, the charter school receives additional funding on top of the regular tuition.

Q: Are charter schools free?

A: Charter schools are tuition free to parents. However, FASD currently pays approx. \$11,762 in tuition annually for each regular education student and approx. \$27,100 for each special education student, regardless of the level of services provided by the charter school. The district pays the same rate to brick and mortar charter and cyber charter schools, despite cybers not having costs associated with traditional brick and mortar schools.

Q: Does all the money get spent on local students?

A: Not necessarily. Charters can spend less on direct instructional costs and use the surplus for

other purposes, such as marketing, without restrictions. Charter schools can allocate money for radio or tv commercials as well as an array of printed marketing materials, such as billboards.

Q: Do charter schools bus their own students?

A: No. By state law, FASD is required to transport all charter students according to the charter's schedule.

Q: Can charter school students participate on FASD athletic teams?

A: Yes, by law, any charter school student can fully participate on any FASD athletic team. The charter school does pay a fee to the district but the district is solely responsible for hiring coaches, paying their salaries, and maintaining athletic facilities.

Q: Do charter schools provide the same level of activities and gifted education as public schools?

A: No, FASD elementary schools offer music lessons for band and chorus. In middle school, students can participate in music and drama activities. Our elementary and middle schools have comprehensive, well-stocked libraries, as well as gifted education instruction through individualized plans for students. Charter schools are specifically exempt from the requirement to provide gifted education services.