

Frequently Asked Questions:

Developing a Charter School in Michigan

Michigan Association of Public School Academies

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FAQS

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION WILL PROVIDE YOU WITH ANSWERS TO THE MOST COMMONLY ASKED OR MISUNDERSTOOD QUESTIONS AND TOPICS BY NEW CHARTER SCHOOL DEVELOPERS.

Are there charters available in Michigan?

Yes, there are charters available.

Isn't there a cap or restriction on charters expanding in this state?

Yes. University authorizers are capped in Michigan, under current law (as of March 2009). However, they have a few options to grant charters, including reissuing a charter from a school that was closed, granting an urban high school academy charter in the city of Detroit or granting a strict discipline academy charter anywhere in the state. Community colleges and intermediate and local school districts can also authorize in Michigan and they are NOT capped. Current law prohibits community colleges from chartering in the city of Detroit. This may change in the future.

What types of charters are available?

- ✓ Traditional charter public schools
- ✓ Urban High School Academies
- ✓ Strict Discipline Academies

You will also find that charters have certain focuses or structures to them, such as a middle college, college prep, Montessori, etc.

How many charters are there in Michigan?

As of March 2009, there are 232 charter public schools. The university authorizers charter 150 of those. The charters are located throughout the state. You can search for charters at www.charterschools.org.

Does it cost money to open a charter school?

Yes. Some developers and charter organizations in Michigan believe it costs an average of \$250,000 to \$500,000 to open a school. You will need to start with a development budget for creating a phase one authorizer application, the first step in developing the school.

Who can open a charter school?

Anyone can initiate the development process. It will take a team of people with varying expertise to develop a high quality charter school, including parents, educators, community leaders, budgeting and facility experts and legal counsel. You may also need to hire a consultant/developer or a management company to assist you in the process.

How long does it take to open a charter school?

The development process will take between two and three years on average. An authorizer, in a timeframe of their choosing, grants a charter. Some groups will require more time to complete the development process and obtain a charter from an authorizer. The process is competitive and will be conducted according to individual authorizer processes.

How do I choose a management company?

We recommend that you "shop" for a company much like you would for major purchases. It's important that your management company, regardless of role, and board/school work together well and

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share the same vision. [More resources on management companies are available in the MAPSA Resource Area for Founders at www.charterschools.org.](#)

How do I choose an authorizer, when I'm ready to submit my application?

You should take into account all possible authorizers for your proposed school, based on the type of charter and its location. From that point, you will work with your development team to evaluate your plans and approach the authorizer you have selected.

Can private universities charter a school?

No, under Michigan law, only public 4-year universities can issue a charter.

How are charters funded once opened?

Through state and federal funding for public schools. Charters receive a per-pupil foundation grant twice a year. They cannot receive funding from millages or local tax bases. They average less money per student than traditional public schools. Charters are required to do more with less.

Is there money to help with the development process, before state funding is received when the school is opened?

Yes, you can apply for planning and implementation grants. Read more about available sources at [www.charterschools.org](#).

What is the role of an authorizer?

The authorizer provides accountability and oversight to the charter school. The authorizer will assess up to a 3% fee for the extensive administrative work that goes into monitoring the activities of the school in meeting state and federal and authorizer requirements.

Can charter schools lose their contract from an authorizer?

Yes, charter schools are given a contract with a set expiration date on it, as defined by the authorizer. If requirements are not met of the charter agreement, authorizers can and do close down schools.

Can charters receive services from the ISD that they correspond to geographically?

Yes, they are entitled to certain services, including special education.

How are board members of a charter school selected?

The founding team will propose board members, but the authorizer has the final say and approves them.

Are charter schools allowed to have functions that raise "rainy day" funds or an endowment for the school?

Yes, it is quite fashionable these days for public schools to have their own supporting foundation or trust, which is basically the same thing as an endowment fund.

Do charters have to provide transportation to students?

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No. Charters will assess their need to provide this, and do so accordingly.

Can I open a virtual school in Michigan?

No. Current state law prohibits virtual schools (March 2009). Online classes are allowed, but must comply with state regulations on seat time.

Do charters have certified teachers?

Yes, by law, all charters are required to have certified teachers, according to NCLB requirements.

Can a private, traditional public or faith-based school convert to a charter? Can they retain their teachers?

Existing non-charter schools can convert. The process is the same as a new group applying to an authorizer. All teachers must be certified according to NCLB requirements if they wish to teach in a charter school.

Are charters required to unionize with their staff?

No, they are not required to unionize.

Can charter teachers participate in the state retirement system (MPERS)?

If teachers are hired by the board of the charter school, the teachers can enroll in the MPERS plan. If teachers are hired by a management company, they can participate in 401k-type plans.

Can I choose the students that will enroll in my school?

No. Charters are public schools and must follow public school laws. You cannot pick students or discriminate on any basis. You must accept any student that wishes to attend the school.

Who can answer questions and assist me with the development of my application?

Once you've finished the first steps, you will need to rely on the expertise of your team to research and find answers, hire a consultant/ESP or you can hire a coach through MAPSA (by the hour). MAPSA also offers a multitude of online resources and training, all of which can be purchased at reasonable prices for beginning developers. MAPSA has a menu of services with a variety of costs to meet your individual school development needs.

How do I locate a possible building or property for my school?

You should work with a local buildings expert or real estate developer to both research and secure a property.