

THE ASSOCIATION OF ALBERTA PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

Truth About Charter Schools

Misconceptions	Responses
<i>Charter Schools can deny access to students with disabilities.</i>	<b>False. Under Section 33 (1) (e) of the Education Act, public charter schools (as all other public schools) must “provide a continuum of supports and services to students that is consistent with the principles of inclusive education”.</b>
<i>Charter Schools have very few students with disabilities.</i>	<b>A recently conducted (2022) third party assessment confirmed that public charters have very slightly fewer cases of mild and moderate disability and significantly more cases of severe disability. Overall, the costs of providing a continuum of service in charters are equivalent to other public schools.</b>
<i>Charter Schools have fewer ESL students.</i>	<b>This is incorrect. Some charters are specifically oriented to ESL student populations. Some charters have a higher percentage of ESL students than the Alberta average. Numbers of ESL students in charters vary, as they do in all public schools in the province.</b>
<i>Charter Schools do not have First Nations, Metis, and Inuit students.</i>	<b>False. Some charters serve primarily FNMI students, while others are the same as all public schools, serving all students in an inclusive manner.</b>
<i>Charter Schools select their students.</i>	<b>Charter Schools do not select students. Students and families select charter schools - just the same as they do in all schools of choice in Alberta. Parents choose from among designated public schools in the local board jurisdiction, alternative public schools in the local board, their local Catholic school, their local Francophone school, or the public charter school that meets the needs and aspirations of their children.</b>

<p><i>Charter Schools do not have boards elected by the public.</i></p>	<p><b>Charter Boards are selected by the society members they serve, just as is every Francophone school in the province. They are duly elected and accountable to standards equivalent to all other Trustees in Alberta. Just like all public, separate, and Francophone boards, charter school boards are directly accountable to the publicly elected Provincial government which has the legal responsibility for education in Canada.</b></p>
<p><i>Charter Schools are not accountable to the public.</i></p>	<p><b>False. Public charters are more accountable to the public than regular schools. If charter schools are not successful, parents will simply leave. Charters have the exact same legal reporting requirements as other public schools, the same performance measures and reporting transparency. In addition to reporting on provincial goals, charters report on their charter goals. Public charters go through a rigorous application process, are evaluated by the Ministry of Education regularly, and give their parents &amp; families, to whom they are also accountable, an active voice in school operations.</b></p>
<p><i>Charter Schools charge tuition and fees.</i></p>	<p><b>False. Public charters do not charge tuition. Like any other public board, they may charge school fees in accordance with the Education Act.</b></p>
<p><i>Charter Schools teachers cannot unionize or belong to the ATA.</i></p>	<p><b>False. Public charter teachers are not required to unionize. Some have, and most are associate members of the ATA by choice.</b></p>
<p><i>Charter Schools divert funds from community schools, undermine and underfund our public education system.</i></p>	<p><b>False. Public charter schools serve public students within the public system. Most charter schools operate in schools that were closed due to insufficient enrollment. Parents choose among community schools, public alternative programs, Catholic schools, Francophone schools, and charter schools. Charters do not divert funds from public schools; they ARE public schools.</b></p>

<i>Charter School students are rich and elite.</i>	<b>False. Demographic evidence from public charter schools shows that our students have the same range of family income as all Albertans.</b>
<i>Charter Schools do not care for the most disadvantaged students.</i>	<b>False. Some charters provide expressly for disadvantaged student populations and charters are required to accept all students under section 33 of the Education Act.</b>  <b>There are charter schools that serve Indigenous students, English Language Learners, and specialized learner populations.</b>
<i>Charter Schools are like charter schools in the United States.</i>	<b>False. There are more than 50 different charter systems in the United States, and Alberta's Charter School Regulations are unique in North America. In Alberta, funding is provided equitably to students on the basis of need and rational fairness. Very high levels of public evaluation, reporting and parental engagement mean that Alberta charter schools are as accountable, if not more accountable, than any public jurisdiction in the province.</b>
<i>Charter Schools have not accomplished what they were designed to do.</i>	<b>Alberta public charter schools have a distinguished record of extraordinary success over the last 25 years. Alberta charters are hotbeds of innovation and engagement, with very high levels of satisfaction and excellent results on all accountability measures. All charter schools are successful given the populations they serve.</b>
<i>Allowing Charter Schools to own property transfers public funds into private hands.</i>	<b>False. In fact, the large public boards own many properties outright, which have been sold (and continue to be sold) to private entities. Public charter schools are managed by non-profit public charter societies in the same way property is managed by school boards. When public charters dispose of school facilities they revert back to the Government of Alberta, which cannot be said of regular public school boards, who actually can transfer public property to private interests.</b>

<p><i>There is less public transparency and accountability for public funds/</i></p>	<p><b>False. If parents aren't happy, they won't enrol their children - the ultimate in accountability. The financial details of public charter schools meet precisely the same transparency standards of all public schools, are audited once per year by certified accounting firms, and results are published in precisely the same place as all public schools.</b></p>
<p><i>Charters are hotbeds of exclusivity, and pathways to privatization.</i></p>	<p><b>False. Public charters are as inclusive and diverse as any other school system in Alberta, meeting student needs and parental aspirations for all who choose their unique focus and programming.</b></p>
<p><i>Several new charter schools have cropped up with no public consultation or notification.</i></p>	<p><b>False. Every charter approval is preceded by a notification and public consultation process, which includes local boards, other charters, parents, and other educational partners. This system has recently been upgraded and modernized to produce even higher quality engagement – all for the sake of bringing the very best educational opportunities to Alberta students.</b></p>
<p><i>Our board provides public education, we have some programs like public charter schools, so we can do anything a charter does. There is nothing special about a charter that we can't do as a large board.</i></p>	<p><b>This is simply not the case. People join charter schools "because" they are committed to engaging in a charter of education. That charter organizes all parts of the school community, focussing the engagement and innovation according to the charter. The charter board can focus resources on student learning within the charter. Large boards must meet a much wider variety of concerns and competing interests and cannot focus on a charter in the same manner as a charter board. To succeed, large boards must be highly pragmatic concerning a larger array of interests. No large board duplicates the performance of a public charter board.</b></p>
<p><i>Public Charter Schools will not collaborate or share infrastructure use with other public schools; they are elitist and only take care of themselves.</i></p>	<p><b>False. Public Charter Boards share infrastructure freely with any other entity who will engage in good faith and collaborate in the context of shared success. There are many examples of this collaboration, and it is dependent on having a partner also committed to shared success.</b></p>

<p><i>Public Charter Schools rob students from local division schools and decrease the financial ability of local boards to offer programming of a similar nature.</i></p>	<p><b>We do not rob students; we give them what they want. Every public charter school student/family has chosen to be part of a public charter school because they want to engage in programs that are totally focussed on a single charter. For a local board to offer this, they would also need to engage students from a wide geography to offer a school-wide focus on a single charter.</b></p>