

Charter Schools

AFT Pennsylvania is actively engaged in organizing teachers and other employees in publicly funded charter schools. Charter schools should embody the core values of public education and a democratic society, offer equal access for all students; be transparent and accountable to parents and the public; submit to regulatory oversight like regular public schools and allow unionization of teachers and staff. Where charter schools exist, they should

- **Be tuition-free, not-for-profit and open and accessible to all students on an equal basis.** Charter schools shouldn't use selective admissions to "cherry pick" top performers. And, just like other public schools, they should serve special needs students and English language learners.
- Any school established on separatist, discriminatory, anti-government or anti-public school philosophies should not be granted a charter.
- **Operate transparently by fully disclosing their finances, curriculum, student demographics and academic outcomes to parents and the public.** Charter schools, like other public schools, must be subject to ongoing public input and regulatory oversight.
- **Meet or exceed the academic standards and assessment requirements** that apply to other public schools.
- **Hire fully certified, highly-qualified teachers.** Teachers should be fully certified, or on a path to certification as permitted under the PA School Code, and be assigned to teach only within their areas of certification.
- **Work cooperatively with local school districts.** One of the original goals of charter schools, as envisioned by AFT President Albert Shanker, was to try out new instructional practices so that the lessons learned can be used to improve all public schools. This sharing of ideas should be a two-way street.
- **Permit their employees to freely form unions.** Every teacher deserves a strong voice and due process at work, supported by a union, to achieve fairness in the workplace and improve academic outcomes. Charter school teachers and staff should be able to choose union representation without harassment or fear of dismissal.

- **Have equitable and sustainable funding.** Charter schools, which educate only 5.9% of public school students in Pennsylvania, must not divert excessive tax dollars away from traditional public schools, which educate 94.1% of public school students. Schools/operators should not be permitted to maintain reserve fund balances in excess of those permitted for traditional public schools. The General Assembly should pass legislation that adjusts the funding formulas for charter and cyber charter schools that close administrative loopholes and end double-dipping in pension payments through the calculation of tuition rates.
- **Be held to high standards.** In Pennsylvania, not a single cyber-charter school makes adequate yearly progress under federal law. AFT Pennsylvania opposes the creation of cyber charter schools. Where they exist, they must be funded based on a separate formula than brick-and-mortar public and charter schools.
- **AFTPA opposes a, statewide single-charter authorizer.** Charters should be granted by the school district in which a school is located and from where it draws most of its students.
- **Should not replace neighborhood public schools.** AFTPA does not support the conversion of public schools into charter schools. Charter conversions often occur in a vacuum without parental, student, staff or community input. Charter conversions often undermine neighborhood cohesiveness, and charter schools replace family-sustaining jobs with lower-paying jobs with little to no job security.
- **Should be required to provide the same salaries and benefits that** workers receive in the public school system where the charter is located, per the original charter school statute.