

Public School Charters

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Note: The text below references Initiative 1240, available [here](#).

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1. What is a Washington State public charter school?

Initiative 1240 defines a "public charter school" as a public school governed by a charter school board and operated according to the terms of a charter school contract. The charter school contracts with an authorizer, through which the charter school agrees to provide educational services that at a minimum meet basic education standards in return for an allocation of public funds.

A charter school may be a conversion charter school, in which an existing non-charter public school is converted to a charter school.

Charter schools are defined in Section 201 of Initiative 1240.

2. What is a charter school authorizer?

An authorizer is an entity with the powers and duties to review, approve, or reject charter school applications; enter into, renew, or revoke charter contracts with nonprofit corporations seeking to operate charter schools; and oversee the charter schools the entity has authorized.

Two entities are eligible to be charter school authorizers:

- 1) School district boards of directors approved by the State Board of Education, for charter schools located within a school district's own boundaries.
- 2) The Washington Charter School Commission, a new state agency created by the act, for charter schools located anywhere in the state.

3. What is the Washington Charter School Commission?

The Washington Charter School Commission is an independent state agency created by Initiative 1240 with the power to authorize public charter schools located anywhere in the state and the duty, through its management, supervision and enforcement of

charter contracts, to administer the charter schools it authorizes. The Commission is made up of nine members, appointed to four-year, staggered terms as follows:

- Three members appointed by the Governor.
- Three members appointed by the President of the Senate.
- Three members appointed by the Speaker of the House.

4. What is the State Board of Education's (SBE) role for public charter schools?

The SBE has several responsibilities for implementation and oversight of the charter school law:

- Approve school district boards of directors applying to be authorizers of charter schools.
- Oversee the performance of school boards as authorizers, with the power to revoke districts' chartering authority.
- Set an annual timeline for charter application submission and approval or denial by authorizers.
- Ensure adherence to the limits on the number of charter schools that may be established under the law.
- Issue an annual report, in collaboration with the Washington Charter School Commission, on the state's charter schools for the preceding school year.

A more complete list of the State Board's duties can be found in I-1240.

5. How does SBE's role differ from Washington State Charter School Commission?

There are two main differences between SBE and the Charter School Commission.

The Washington Charter School Commission is an authorizer of charter schools, while the State Board of Education is not. SBE is an approver of local school boards of directors as authorizers per Section 209 of the Initiative.

SBE does not oversee the Charter School Commission; however, the Commission must follow the timeline for charter applications established by SBE and follow certain other procedures set by the SBE.

SBE has no role for approving, administering, managing, or supervising charter schools. Its principal role, beyond its duties to set the process in place, is one of oversight.

6. How many charter schools may be established under the law?

A maximum of 40 public charter schools may be established over a five-year period. No more than eight may be established in any year during the five-year period. If in any year, however, fewer than eight charter schools are established, then additional charter schools equal to the difference between the number established in that year and eight may be established in subsequent years during the five-year period. The five-year period begins with the first year there have been charter schools operating for a full school year. The limits on the number of charter schools apply to both conversion charter schools and new charter schools.

7. How do I go about starting a charter school?

Applicants to operate a charter school must first be a nonprofit corporation, established as either a public benefit nonprofit corporation as defined in RCW 24.03.490 or a nonprofit corporation as defined in RCW 24.03.005 that has applied for tax-exempt status under Section 501(3)(3) of the federal IRS code. The nonprofit corporation may not be a sectarian or religious organization.

An applicant meeting these requirements must then submit a charter application to an eligible authorizer, which is a school district board of directors approved by SBE or the Washington Charter School Commission, according to an annual timeline to be set by SBE. Charter applications are made in response to a request for proposals issued by the authorizer, and must consist include all of the elements specified in Section 213 of the Initiative.

After a charter application has been approved by an authorizer, the authorizer and the governing board of the approved charter school must execute a charter contract for a term of five years, in which the public charter school agrees to provide educational services that at a minimum meet basic education standards in return for an allocation of public funds for that purpose. The charter contract sets out the performance expectations and measures that will guide the authorizer's evaluation of the charter school and its decision whether to renew the charter contract for another five-year term.

8. Whom should I contact with more questions?

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