

School District Responsibilities to Oversee Charter Schools

Charter schools by their very nature are independent public schools. They are designed and operated not by a local school district, but by a group of founders like parents, educators, and community leaders. Public school funding follows the students enrolled in the charter school, and founders have a great deal of independence to decide the school's budget, staff, curriculum, and teaching methods.

The independence of charter schools, however, does not mean total autonomy. Founders first must obtain a charter from a local school board or from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (if they are a cyber charter school). When a school board grants a charter, they assume an ongoing responsibility to monitor the performance of the new school to assure compliance with the conditions of the charter application, delivery of the promised educational program and the law.

More particularly, the Public School Code directs that school boards annually assess whether each charter school is in compliance. Additionally, each school board must conduct a comprehensive review prior to granting a renewal of a charter. To facilitate these assessments, each charter school is required to submit an annual report no later than August 1 of each year to the local school board and the Pennsylvania Secretary of Education. Furthermore, the law grants school boards ongoing access to the records and facilities of charter schools within their school district.

To safeguard student education and the tax dollars received by charter schools, school boards must ensure that charter schools are in compliance with their charter and other requirements. If a charter school fails in its responsibilities, the Public School Code gives school boards the authority (and arguably, the duty) to revoke a charter and/or to refuse to renew it.

Clients who have questions regarding issues discussed in this article, or any education law matter, should feel free to call us at 215-345-9111.