

# Charter schools: friend of foe

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The initial objective for establishing charter schools was to increase the professional self-sufficiency of teachers in order to find other innovative methods of educating children and youth. Is there the likelihood that there is a deviation from the primary agenda? The nature of charter schools increases their vulnerability to accountability loopholes. Charter schools receive public funding, although they are not confined to the rules, regulations and statutes that are applicable to public schools. This implies that charter schools lack accountability for specific educational outcomes. Furthermore, the opening and attending of charter schools depends on choice. Despite the fact that charter schools are part of the larger education system and provide a substitute for public schools, they are not supposed to impose tuition charges.

In order to determine whether charter schools make significant improvements on the educational system, it is important to assess whether the policies of charter schools depends on market ideologies or aim at improving classroom practices, which is one of the core objectives of forming charter schools. This requires an analysis of the structure and characteristics of charter schools and their contributions towards the achievement of educational goals of US. Evidence suggests that the performances of charter schools are not any better than public schools (Jack and Mark 102). In addition, research points out that the policy makers are focusing on the management and structure of charter schools, instead of focusing on the improvement of classroom practices. This paper argues that charter schools do not make any significant contributions that improve the overall effectiveness of the educational system.

The paper discusses the origin of charter schools, debates surrounding them, opinion towards charter schools, and their pros and cons. A conclusion will be derived after the analysis of the collected evidence. Origin of Charter Schools

The concept of charter school in the US was first proposed by Ray Budde and Albert Shanker, the president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), during 1988. The establishment of charter schools served to reform the public education sector through the establishment of schools of choice (Brouillette 112). At the time, there were few schools that used the principles of charter schools, in the sense that they were autonomous public schools that did not charge tuition fees, lacked religious affiliations, and used open selection.

Their operations were similar to private schools, which did not operate under the confines of the state and district regulations. Initially, charter schools had high levels of accountability for student performance, rather than inputs. The first guiding principle for the operation of charter schools is that they function with autonomy since they are confined with the procedural requirements, associated with public schools. Despite these waivers, charter schools are supposed to achieve the same educational standards, established by the state or district (Jeane 89). Autonomy of charter schools is considered essential in the creation of a school environment that aims at maximizing the student performance by focusing on high expectations, student discipline, and academic strictness.

Charter schools were perceived as the solution to students, whose academic performances were inhibited by social factors. This is because autonomy facilitates the creation of a balanced school environment that meets the

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students' requirements for every particular context. Teachers hold the view that flexibility and control is needed to improve academic outcomes. The second principle of charter schools is accountability for student achievement. At present, approximately 12.5 percent of 5000 charter schools in the US have faced closure for numerous factors, including district interference, academic problems, financial and management difficulties (Welch 58).

The rules and structure, used in charter schools, vary in different states. Charter schools have accountability towards their sponsors to observe the charter contract and produce positive educational outcomes. Proponents of charter schools cite this accountability; however, the statistical evidence, collected by the United States Department of Education, points that charter schools do not have higher accountability standards than public schools (Welch 59). This assertion is likely to be refuted by the advocates of charter schools by an assessment of the closure of public schools because of poor academic performance. However, public schools are allowed to operate amidst poor performance under new leadership and elimination of charges. Advocates of charter schools hold the opinion that charter schools do not have the chance of restructuring and are subject to closures in the event of poor academic performance.

The primary objective of forming charter schools is to offer unique academic experience that is not comparable to the traditional public schools. There are reported cases of some charter schools achieving this objective; however, there are many cases of charter schools, facing the same pressure, experienced by public schools. Welch (63) argues that charter schools have accountability to the state mandates, student test scores and other

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conventional provisions that are likely to result in the model and design of charter schools similar to public schools. Debate, Surrounding Charter Schools There are numerous debates, facing the implementation of charter schools. Debate, relating to the funding of charter schools, takes center stage since all charter schools are vulnerable to financial obstacles.

Advocates for charter schools suggest that the schools have control on all-per-pupil funds since charter schools do not get sufficient funding as in the case of public schools. In actual sense, this is not the case in the context of school financing. For example, charter schools in California were allocated district funding that amount to \$800 per student annually more than the public schools (Welch 65). Advocates for charter schools claim that such schools do not have access to funding needed for facilities and special programs, which are distributed under districts. Irrespective of supplementary funding from the government, Jeane (145) points out that there are cases, whereby charter schools are still behind the public schools in terms of academic performance. Despite the fact that charter schools get less public funding than public schools, they are beneficiaries of other sources such as private donations.

A research by AFT pointed out that private funding contributed \$780 per student (Welch 64). The second debate, surrounding charter schools, involves the difficulties, associated with accountability. The fundamental principle of charter schools is autonomous operation for higher accountability. Brouillette (78) argues that charter schools are supposed to be accountable for positive academic outcomes and contract requirements

for their sponsors, parents and the public. Theoretically, charter schools are subject to closure for failing to meet the contract requirements.

However, in reality, their closure is usually controversial, divisive and difficult. According to a 2009 report by Center for Education on charter school closures, 657 of at least 5250 charter schools were closed for district interference to attract pupils (Welch 63). The study pointed out that 41 % of charter school closures are attributed to financial deficiencies that arise from low student enrollment and inequitable funding, 14 percent closed because of poor academic outcomes. The study also highlighted lack of achievement data in some charter schools in Virginia, Wyoming and Mississippi. This indicates the weakness of charter school law.

The third debate, surrounding charter schools, involves their scalability. Issues have been raised, concerning the scaling of the charter school model, design to the size of public schools, especially when teaching poses the demand for more teachers, and non-charter teachers do not have the capability to teach in accordance with the requirements of charter schools (Herbst 103). Other debates, surrounding the issue of charter schools, include the misuse by profit-making entities. Critics of charter schools claim that profit-making entities and private foundations undermine public education by incorporating a business model in the public education system. Such an educational model perceives public education as a business opportunity, resulting in policies and practices that are market driven, instead of embarking on improving classroom practices (Zimmer and Buddin 845). Another debate, facing the charter schools, is the transformation from progressive to conservative movements.

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Initially, charter schools were established with the main objective of exploring the best academic practices in the absence of bureaucracy. This is not the case in the existing charter schools, which currently aim at privatizing education and opposing teacher unions. Welch (65) reports that approximately 95 percent of charter schools in the US do not belong to teacher unions. In addition, the charter schools use an unsustainable practice that compels teachers to work for extended hours. According to Zimmer and Buddin (840), charter schools are a controversial topic because of low test-scores and numerous teacher issues. Teachers in charter schools depict higher quitting rates than teachers in public schools.

A 2004 study by the US Department of Education reported that charter schools are more likely to employ teachers who do not meet state certification requirements than public schools (Welch 65). Other controversial issues, surrounding charter schools, include admissions lottery, collective bargaining, racial segregation, and excessive power, allocated to teachers and parents. Opinion towards Charter Schools Since the introduction of charter schools, members of the public are hesitant and resistant towards their implementation. Members of the public are of the opinion that charter schools must be accountable to the states. Charter schools are a substitute for educators, students, families and communities who are not satisfied with the quality of education and bureaucracies at public schools (Jeane 145). The charter schools use similar market principles, deployed in private schools, including accountability and consumer options.

Charter schools are workable only if they remain true to their autonomy and accountability. In addition, charter schools can serve as an opportunity to <https://assignbuster.com/charter-schools-friend-of-foe/>

improve schools and education without the need to oppose the teachers' union. Both advocates and critics of charter schools accept the fact the models of individual schools of public choice can turn out to be successful or unsuccessful. Pros and Cons of Charter Schools The ongoing debate, surrounding charter schools, is not taking into consideration the fact that school governance mode does not make any significant contributions towards improving academic outcomes. Research points out that success of schools is influenced by communities and families who value education, committed teachers, and schools administrators who establish a productive learning culture (Brouillette 74).

This is a need for success of any school system, including public, private and charter schools. The following paragraphs highlight some of the pros and cons of charter schools model. Advocates for charter schools claim that they offer families with school choice options. As a result, charter schools offer parents with the ability to select the suitable schools for their children. The second pro of charter schools is that it fosters competition, which, in turn, creates avenues for educational reforms.

Charter schools can be used as a framework for recognizing successful educational practices that can be implemented in public schools. In addition, prohibitive policies can be recognized and abolished in all schools. The third pro is that charter schools increase the pressure on school districts to reevaluate the educational practices constantly; this is achieved through fostering competition and school choice. Charters have the capacity of initiating systematic reform, using increased competition and pressure, imposed by school choice mechanism (Jeane 148). There are numerous <https://assignbuster.com/charter-schools-friend-of-foe/>



arguments against the charter school model, with the most prominent citing fiscal inefficiency.

The funding of schools depends on enrollment, which is not favorable for charter schools because of their smaller size than public schools. Charter schools are also an instance of unfair playing field (Welch 65). Theoretically, charter schools should not be restrictive during selection. This is not the case in reality since charter schools target their students. For example, rigorous educational curriculum is likely to put off academic slackers; absence of transports eliminates low-income families. Another setback, associated with charter schools, is that there is less transparency since they are operated by private institutions.

The Freedom of Information Act does not apply to such institutions. Another setback of charter schools is that the local community has limited control and accountability; this is because the school administrators are selected by the charter organizations, instead of being elected by the public. The inference from this is that parents and the community have limited avenues for protesting against the school if they fail to achieve their expectations. Charter schools are also characterized by less diversity since they are based on racial and socio-economic segregation because they have a target student market. Conclusion It is evident that charter schools have failed in achieving their initial objectives, and they are increasingly incorporating the business model in the education system.

In reality, charter schools are aiming at reinventing their school management and governance practices, instead of focusing on improving classroom

activities. The policy makers must prioritize the improvement of academic outcomes instead of school governance. Therefore, charter schools do not make any significant improvements in public education.