HOW ARE WASHINGTON’S CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS HELD ACCOUNTABLE?

Charter schools are public schools that are granted additional autonomy in return for additional accountability. Charter schools must:

Comply with most of the same accountability, oversight, and transparency laws applicable to traditional public schools

- Charter teachers meet the same certification requirements as traditional public schoolteachers, including background checks.
- Students meet same academic standards and participate in same statewide assessment system as students in traditional public schools.
- Charter schools comply with local, state, and federal health, safety, parents’ rights, civil rights, and nondiscrimination laws applicable to school districts.
- Charter schools are subject to the open public meetings act and the public records act. They comply with the annual school performance report required of all public schools and are subject to performance improvement goals adopted by the State Board of Education applicable to all public schools.
- The nonprofit organizations that operate charter schools are subject to annual audits for legal and fiscal compliance by the state auditor (and must comply with generally accepted accounting principles).

Be approved through a rigorous application process to assure the highest-quality schools

- Charter school applications must address 32 required elements, including evidence of need and parent and community support for the proposed charter school, evidence that the educational program is based on proven methods, and a description of the school’s financial plan and policies, including financial controls and audit requirements.

Be overseen by a local school board or a state commission

- Charter schools are accountable directly to their authorizer (whether district or state) and are subject to annual performance reviews as well as ongoing oversight to be sure the school is complying with the terms of its charter agreement.
- All public charter schools in the state, and their authorizers, ultimately fall within the existing public school system that is overseen by the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education.
Washington’s law was one of the strongest in the nation, mandating strict accountability and oversight. The proposed bill maintains these strengths.

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools and the National Association of Charter School Authorizers both ranked Washington’s law as one of the strongest charter school laws in the country.

- Experts agree that rigorous authorizing and oversight helps improve student performance.
- Washington’s law draws on over 20 years of lessons learned and best practices nationally.
- Authorizers are held accountable, too.
  - School district authorizers are held accountable for their work by the State Board of Education. Authorizing is both a major public stewardship role and a complex profession requiring particular capacities and commitment, and our charter school law treats it as such—with standards-based barriers to entry and ongoing evaluation to maintain the right to authorize.

All schools will be evaluated after five years before additional schools could be authorized.

- The legislature then determines whether additional public charter schools should be allowed.

Charter public schools are subject to the same federal education laws and regulations as traditional public schools.

- Charter public schools are responsible for meeting the requirements of all public schools under federal laws and regulations, including but not limited to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.