

# FAQs

## **What is a charter school?**

Charter schools are publicly funded and are not private schools. They are open to all students, are committed to improving public education, demonstrate a record of student achievement, and have specific educational missions and focuses. Charter schools are public schools created by a group of parents, teachers, or community leaders who see an educational need in their community and want to meet that need. To operate, charter founders must submit an application for approval by the State Charter School Board or the board of a school district. Like other public schools, charter schools may serve students from Kindergarten through 12th grade.

## **What is the purpose of a charter school?**

Charter schools offer parents and students additional choices about where students attend school and the school's curricular emphasis. They allow educators freedom to try new strategies to inspire students and to experiment with innovative ways of educating students. Also, charter schools allow individuals and organizations outside of the traditional education system to create and run public schools.

## **How do charter schools benefit the community?**

Besides offering choice in education, charter schools relieve some of the overcrowding in existing district schools without placing undue burdens on taxpayers. As non-profit organizations, charter schools raise funds or secure private financing for their facilities without bonds or tax levies. A charter school is one less school a district needs to bond for. Charter schools also contribute to the local levy by paying property tax, which remains with the school district since charter schools do not receive it as part of their funding.

As schools of choice, meaning parents choose them, charter schools provide a beneficial and healthy pressure within the public education system to be more responsive to parents and students, and evaluate improvement. The presence of charter schools in a community often results in increased performance across all surrounding schools.

Charter schools typically engage local businesses and other organizations to help provide resources and services to the school and its families, and utilize volunteer service and parent involvement which saves money and encourages stronger working relationships among educators, parents and the community.

## **How do charter schools offer enhanced academic programs with the same (or fewer) resources than public schools?**

Charter schools utilize volunteer service and parent involvement combined with autonomous, community-based operations which saves money. Through the combined efforts and hard work of dedicated parents, teachers, and administrators, charter schools can use their funds effectively and creatively to educate students well.

## **Can anyone attend a charter school?**

Yes, like other public schools, charter schools must be open to every child regardless of race, religion, disability or academic ability. However, many charter schools have

specific educational missions focusing on particular topics or students with particular needs. Also, charters have a cap on enrollment. JA will use a randomized lottery process for the enrollment and registration of students.

### **Why would/should a parent choose a Charter School for their child?**

Charter schools, by design, offer innovative curriculum, greater flexibility and accountability, and more opportunities for parents to participate significantly in school governance and operation.

### **What are the main differences between Charter Schools and traditional public schools?**

A Charter School becomes its own school district which provides greater flexibility in curriculum adoption, local input, more parental involvement, and a need to specialize in the academy's area of chosen focus. Students tend to be motivated by an interest in the focus or teaching method of the school instead of proximity to the nearest traditional public school. Charter Schools have a cap on enrollment legislated by the State of Utah, which leads to more flexibility in the classroom.

### **Does Jefferson Academy charge tuition?**

No. Charter schools are public schools and as such may not charge tuition or require students or parents to make monetary contributions (although donations are accepted and appreciated). Charter schools are subject to the same rules regarding school fees as other public schools.

### **How are Charter Schools funded?**

Charter schools are funded on the principle that state funds follow the student. A differentiated WPU is applied to Charter School students. In distributing funds under the Minimum School Program Act, to charter schools, charter school pupils shall be weighted, where applicable, as follows:

The vast majority of funding comes through the WPU. In addition, the legislature appropriates funds each year to replace some of the local property tax revenues that are not available to charter schools. Charter schools may also apply for state and federal start-up funds and specialized funds if qualifying students are served in approved programs.

A charter school may not charge tuition or require students or parents to make donations and is subject to the same rules regarding school fees as other public schools.

### **Is charter schools funding subject to changes in legislation?**

Utah public schools are partially funded from revenue collected through property taxes. Much of the state of Utah, however, is federal land and property tax revenues are not collected from federal lands. The U.S. Congress, in exchange for not taxing federal land, gave lands to Utah schools at statehood to help compensate for the lost property tax revenue. The lands are held in a legal trust for Utah public schools. Utah public schools own 3.3 million acres of Utah land. The lands are managed by the School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration and must, by law, be used to generate money for public schools. The money is put in a permanent savings account, which is never spent, but invested by Utah's State Treasurer. An Investment Advisory Committee

appointed by education representatives act in an advisory capacity to the State Treasurer. The interest earned from the permanent fund now goes to each public school in the state. School and district-level committees prepare plans, approved by local school boards that identify an academic need and a proposed solution using the annual dividend. Distribution of the funds is based upon student enrollment numbers. The program reimburses schools based upon the previous school year's enrollment.

### **How much parent involvement is required?**

Parent involvement is a crucial element in student success. Jefferson Academy asks that families volunteer a minimum of 30 hours per academic year. Please note this expectation is per family, and not based on the number of students enrolled per family.

### **Do Charter Schools have the same testing requirements as traditional public schools?**

Yes. Charter Schools are public schools and therefore have the same requirements as all Utah State public schools in regards to student testing. JA will participate in state testing and is responsible to meet AYP and applicable NCLB accountability requirements.

### **What are JA's credential requirements for teachers?**

Consistent with all public schools in Utah, all of our teachers will be licensed, certified teachers or be qualified to teach under the USOE's Alternative Route to Licensure Program, or otherwise authorized through the Utah State Office of Education.

### **How can I find out what qualifications my child's teacher holds?**

Parents have the right to request and receive information on the qualifications of their child's teacher. If you have any questions or want more information please contact the Director or refer to the school information system.

### **Does Jefferson Academy operate on a standard or year-round schedule?**

The enrollment of JA is limited to a specific capacity, making a year-round schedule unnecessary. JA will operate on a standard school schedule of 180 days per school year.

### **Will there be bus transportation for JA students?**

Jefferson Academy enrollment is open to students from communities near and far, subsequently, transportation cannot be provided by the school or the local school district. With the exception of field trips, parents are responsible for the transportation of their student to and from the school and are encouraged to participate in carpools.

### **Who is managing the services and support for Jefferson Academy?**

Academica West provides charter schools with comprehensive services and support. The company maintains a reputation of excellence and currently serves twelve operational and two planned charter schools throughout Utah. Academica West ensures that each of its client charter schools is professionally managed and operated in compliance with local, state and federal laws/regulations. This begins with facilitating the completion and timely filing of all financial and programmatic reports to proper governmental agencies.

In addition, Academica West provides human resources development, board trainings, payroll, annual financial audit support, professional accounting services, internal control development, and curriculum support along with a list of many other services. Most importantly, Academica West will work diligently to ensure the vision of Jefferson Academy is faithfully and effectively implemented.

### **Where can I get additional information on Charter Schools?**

Further information about charter schools can be found at the following websites:

- Utah State Office of Education (<http://www.schools.utah.gov/charterschools/>)
- US Dept of Education, Public Charter Schools Program  
(<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/charter/index.html>)
- National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (<http://www.publiccharters.org/>)
- Utah Association of Public Charter Schools (<http://www.utahcharters.org>)