



**FFLIC**

# WHAT IS A CHARTER SCHOOL?



Some parents don't even realize their children are attending charter schools because in New Orleans, our public school system has changed into an all-charter system. So if your child is in a public school in New Orleans, they are in a charter school. And if they are in a charter school, they are in a public school.

**CHARTER SCHOOL**



**PUBLIC SCHOOL**

**PUBLIC SCHOOL**



**CHARTER SCHOOL**

## **What our charter system looks like**

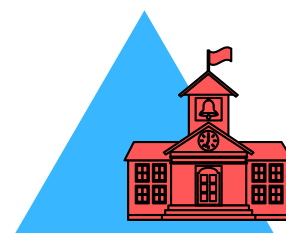
In New Orleans, because our public schools are charter schools, they are no longer run by the public. Charter schools are allowed to choose their own bosses, and so our public schools are free to operate without much input from the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB). Additionally, because they are our public schools, charter schools are funded by the state and must be tuition-free and open to all students. But, even though they are funded by the state, our public schools are allowed to create many of their own rules and regulations.

So, to review, in our old public school system (pre-Katrina), OPSB used to be responsible for all of the schools in New Orleans. Now, most of our schools have their own board that they can choose (even if the person has no qualifications), with some support and guidance from OPSB. We do not have a "central" public school system where there is one clear governing authority. Instead, each school has its choice of who it wants in charge.

You can go to your charter school's website for information about board members and board meeting dates, or ask the school principal. Additionally, some school boards have an opportunity for parents to serve as a member of the board, which is something to think about if you have the time to give to it.

## **Who governs the charters**

All schools in New Orleans are under the authority of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), which creates and implements policies and laws for all schools in the State of Louisiana. BESE was created by the Louisiana constitution and has to follow state laws passed by the state legislature. (For more information about how a bill becomes a law, see the Louisiana State Legislature's website.)





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Some of BESE's members are elected and others are appointed by the Governor. Additionally, the State Superintendent of Education is appointed by the Governor, but BESE has to approve the appointment. (See BESE's website for more information about their structure, responsibilities, and members.)

## Who a charter answers to

As you can see, charter schools are purposely designed so that they can do what they want. In a perfect world, this would allow teachers and administrators to create new approaches to education. But if charter schools aren't responsible to the government, it can create an environment where schools aren't responsible to parents and children either. This is often what we see happening in New Orleans. The Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) website states, "Charter school leaders and boards are free to make decisions about staffing, curriculum development, and other factors to meet the needs of their students." Needless to say, this combination of self-rule—where schools choose their own board members—and little oversight has created a lot of tension between parents and the schools.



Governor / BESE  
State Superintendent  
Orleans Parish School Board  
OPSB Superintendent  
Charter School Boards  
School Leaders

## Opening, renewing, and closing

OPSB and the Department of Education have guidelines that determine when to open and close charters, when to renew and not renew a charter, and other "frameworks" or rules to hold them accountable. While OPSB and the Department of Education hire companies to assess schools according to these frameworks, they still get to make the final decisions. So there is still a lot of room for discretion.

## To learn more

For more information about charter system accountability, visit the Dept. of Education website to view types of charter schools and their document "Charter School Performance Compact," and OPSB's website for their "Charter System Accountability Framework." Any time BESE or OPSB is making a determination regarding a school, such as opening, renewing the charter, or closing a school, you might look at these documents to make your own assessments of how the school does or does not meet the state and local standards. To connect with community efforts to hold charter schools more accountable, call the New Orleans Community Accountability Project at 504-322-6582.

**Need help advocating for your child?**  
**Call or Email 504-708-8376 or [fflic@fflic.org](mailto:fflic@fflic.org)**