

Charter Schools and Special Education

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers for Families

Do charter schools serve students with special needs?

Yes. Charter schools are public schools that are open to all students who may choose to enroll. Like all public schools, charter schools understand their responsibility to serve all students, and charter schools are committed to serving students with exceptional needs. In fact, because charter schools are designed to have more flexibility than traditional public schools, they are uniquely situated to provide innovative, high-quality educational services to students with unique learning needs.

If my child has an IEP, can I enroll him/her in a charter school?

Yes. Charter schools are open to all students, including those with special needs. If you are interested in enrolling in a charter school, check with the school about the enrollment process. Some schools may request information about your child's IEP at the time of enrollment in order for the school to plan how they will meet your child's needs; however, a school may not refuse to enroll your child based on the existence or contents of the IEP. In addition, schools may enroll students through a lottery system if they receive more applications than they have available space. A child with an IEP has the right to participate in the lottery or drawing in the same manner as other students.

Can I expect comparable special education services in a charter school?

Created as an alternative to traditional public schools, charter schools are designed to offer innovative educational strategies. Unique to charter schools is the flexibility to truly individualize the educational program, or, when appropriate, create specialized programs, at the charter school site. Depending on a student's individual needs, offering appropriate special education services may also result in the charter school working with a District program, a non-public school or agency, or another charter school, to provide a level or type of service that is not available at the individual charter school site. Similar to the process for serving students in a traditional District school, the IEP team makes a determination for the best option based on the needs of the student. Depending on the charter school and the unique needs of the student, these services may be similar to what is offered at a traditional school, or they may be different. In any case, charter schools are committed to providing quality and compliant special education services that are tailored to meet the unique needs of each child.

Who do I talk to if I have a disagreement with the services?

If you are unhappy with the special education services being offered at your charter school, start by contacting the school staff or administrators. Your charter school is committed to ensuring that all students receive quality and compliant special education services, and will make sure that you are confident that the services your child is receiving are appropriate to meet his or her needs.

For more information please visit: www.calcharters.org

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