



CHARTER SCHOOLS

Charter schools are designed to offer choice and opportunity for students within the public school system. Many of these schools are highly desirable for parents of students with disabilities because of the special curriculum, individualized instruction, and inclusive approach of teaching all students, including those with learning disabilities (LD). However, studies have identified an under-representation of students with disabilities among charter school enrollees, indicating a lack of equity for this group of students.

The establishment of charter schools designed exclusively for students with LD in particular also presents problems, notably the isolation of these students from their peers, which undermines the “least restrictive environment” principle of educating students with disabilities as prescribed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

While charter schools may be exempt from many state and/or local requirements, they are part of the public education system and are therefore subject to *all* federal laws and regulations related to students with disabilities. ESEA needs to clarify the responsibility of charter schools in meeting special education responsibilities, as outlined in the following policy recommendations:

- 1. Proactively monitor and regulate charter schools that receive federal funds.**
 - Enforce current law that requires that students with disabilities are included in enrollment in the same manner as all other students.
 - Include a study by the Institute for Educational Sciences that examines the causes of reduced enrollment of students with disabilities in charter schools as compared to other student groups.
 - Encourage/require charter school authorizers to focus on quality improvements at their charter schools and close down those that are not improving student achievement for students with disabilities and other at-risk subgroups.
- 2. Establish a virtual technical assistance center as a central point of information on teaching special education.**
 - Provide charter schools, charter school service groups, and charter authorizers common standards on the complex issues of special education delivery.
 - Facilitate communication between schools and the assistance center through regular standards updates and teaching guidelines.
- 3. Fund research on the academic achievement of students with disabilities in charter schools.**
 - Support research to identify practices that contribute to positive results, allowing for replication in both charter schools and traditional schools.
 - Assess academic achievement levels of students with disabilities currently attending charter schools.
 - Ensure all charter schools receiving federal funds report on state assessments, regardless of the amount of enrolled students with LD.

NCLD Resource:

Charter Schools and Students with Learning Disabilities