

Durham People's Alliance
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www.durhampa.org

Expectations for Charter Schools in Durham County

Charters are public schools, funded with federal, state and local taxes. Charters should be accountable and transparent to the public.

In Durham, charter schools currently serve about 9% of children in our community. Durham currently has 9 charters and expects many more applications in the future. We are concerned about the lack of diversity and openness we see developing in some of Durham's charter schools. The Durham People's Alliance believes that all charters in Durham, like Durham Public Schools, should be inclusive institutions, open to all and serving all children. There should be no barriers to entry for any child since charters are funded by taxpayers' money.

Durham Public Schools serve thousands of children in poverty. We are concerned that the failure of some charter schools to help educate these children will result in a two-tiered system of public education in Durham, one serving predominantly poor African-American and Hispanic children who are de facto discouraged from attending some charters; the other serving predominantly white middle-class children and children of color who have the resources to negotiate the barriers to charter school entry. Specifically, we believe that all charter schools in Durham should eliminate barriers to entry and practice transparency and accountability.

Each of them should:

1. Provide free and reduced price breakfasts and lunches, that meet federal nutrition guidelines, for students who need them.
2. Provide safe, reliable, free transportation services for students within Durham County.
3. Ensure that there are no barriers to admittance such as placement exams, teacher recommendations, auditions, or course prerequisites.
4. Ensure that there are no barriers to participation such as frequent early release days, or fees for extended day, athletics, or extracurricular activities.
5. Ensure that parents, while encouraged to, are not required to, volunteer, attend meetings, or make donations so that they and their children cannot participate in the school.

6. Ensure that the schedule of the school, including access to before and after school care, is appropriate for working families with school-age children.
7. Conduct outreach for the charter that clearly demonstrates a desire to serve all in the community, including media in Spanish, open houses in a variety of communities and advertising geared to all groups.
8. Advertise for and provide services to special needs students, including students with significant disabilities, in accordance with the federal law.
9. Advertise for and provide services to ESL students, homeless, migrant, and undocumented children.
10. Set up a local third party grievance and appeal process for families who feel pressured to leave the school. Information regarding student discipline and suspension policies must be provided to all parents.
11. Provide to the public the number of students that leave the charter during the school year, by month, with the reason for the withdrawal of the student. Individual student privacy must be upheld.
12. Ensure that the schools are secular and that separation of state and church is upheld in all interactions with students and their families and in the curriculum.
13. Provide to the Durham County Commissioners an annual operating budget that explains the use of local tax dollars with respect to the total charter school budget.
14. Be locally governed, non-profit, and not managed by a for-profit entity.
15. Serve a student population and make efforts to employ a faculty that mirrors the student demographics in the county.
16. Innovate in ways that are different from what is offered in existing local and charter schools. Best practices and the challenge of poverty should be shared in a spirit of collaboration with local educational institutions.