

League of Women Voters of Illinois  
Charter Schools Position  
[2001, updated in 2015]

The League of Women Voters of Illinois supports accountability, transparency, and equity in the use of public funds for education, including charter schools.

A. The League of Women Voters of Illinois believes that

1. Adequate and equitable funding is needed for all public schools, including charters. The financial impact on traditional public schools must be evaluated before charters are granted.
2. Charter school authorizers should evaluate the performance of existing charters before granting new charters or approving additional campuses
3. Existing charter schools should be evaluated in incremental periods not to exceed five years (and preferably more frequently) for purposes of charter renewal.
4. Charters should be revoked or not renewed if a school repeatedly or egregiously a) Failed to meet content standards, pupil performance standards, or school climate standards identified in the charter contract. b) Failed to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management. c) Violated any provision of state or federal law from which the charter school was not exempt. d) Discriminated against students based on characteristics such as family economic circumstances, disability, race, creed, color, national origin, religion, ancestry, (*add gender(?)*) or need for special education services. e) Used curriculum or instruction that failed to maintain the separation of church and state. f) Failed to admit prospective students periodically throughout the year as space became available. g) Failed to enforce truancy laws.
5. Employees should have the right to organize Unions at charter schools (Illinois has different union laws than Virginia.)
6. The authority for approving and renewing charters should reside exclusively in the local school board.
7. Local voters should be able through referendum to request their school board to establish a charter schools.
8. There should be adequate provisions for education of the public and participation in the authorizer's decision-making process.
9. If the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) or a body appointed by ISBE, such as the State Charter School Commission, has the power to reverse a decision by a local school board, local voters should be able through referendum to override the decision of ISBE or the appointed commission.
10. There needs to be good communication among all public schools regarding effective innovations.

B. The League of Women Voters of Illinois has identified the following areas of concern about charter schools:

1) Financial impact on school districts. For example:

- Charters can place financial pressure on districts by drawing money out of the traditional public schools.
- When a student transfers between traditional public and charter schools, funding for that pupil should be prorated and transferred in a timely fashion.
- All property, equipment, and materials purchased by a charter school with public dollars should be surrendered to the local district if the school closes for any reason.

2) Privatization and profit-making

The LWVIL opposes the presence of private, for-profit companies in the governance of public education. Subcontracting most of the management of a school to a for-profit organization should be prohibited.

3) Lack of transparency.

Like other public schools, charter schools should be subject to disclosure of

- Potential conflicts of interest of members of the governing board
- Sources of revenue
- Salaries and benefit packages
- The identity of the owner of any property and buildings
- Admission processes

4) Virtual education (provided by computers off-site , with students spending little if any time in a brick-and-mortar school). Virtual education is not appropriated for elementary-aged students except in rare circumstances. Funding for virtual schools should be based on actual costs, rather than the same level of funding provided to other charter schools.