

TENNESSEE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION

CHARTER SCHOOL AUTONOMY

4.500

Purpose. The purpose of this policy is to affirm the autonomy of the charter schools authorized by the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission (“Commission”), under which the Commission serves as the chartering authority.

Policy Sections

1. Generally
2. Areas of Autonomy
3. Enhancing Autonomy and Minimizing Burden
4. Conflicts of Interest

1. **Generally.** A fundamental feature of charter schools is autonomy in exchange for accountability. The Commission will respect and preserve the core autonomies crucial to charter school success, including legal, educational and financial autonomy. It will assume responsibility not for the success or failure of individual schools but for holding schools accountable for their performance.

2. **Areas of Autonomy.**

- a. The Commission will articulate the autonomies to which charter schools in its portfolio are entitled based on statute, waiver, or Commission rule and policy.
- b. The Commission will promote the educational autonomy and flexibility of charter schools in its portfolio, including with respect to curriculum, facilities management, instructional approach, length of the school day, week, or year (though no fewer than 180 school days), and personnel management.
- c. The Commission will respect and support the independence of each charter school’s governing board from the Commission and allow charter school management to decide how best to operate its school within the limits of applicable laws and regulations.
- d. The Commission will honor the autonomy of the charter schools it authorizes and serves as the chartering authority regarding budget and financial matters, including the right to generate revenue and make expenditure decisions.
- e. The Commission will oversee the charter schools in its portfolio in such a way as to maximize the legal autonomy of these schools, consistent with Tennessee charter school laws and regulations.
- f. Charter schools in the Commission’s portfolio should not expect technical assistance from the Commission.

3. **Enhancing Autonomy and Minimizing Burden**

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- a. The Commission will only impose requirements on charter schools in its portfolio when there is a legal basis or compelling reason to do so. It will minimize to the extent possible administrative and compliance burdens on its charter schools and focus on holding schools accountable for outcomes rather than processes.
- b. The Commission will periodically review its existing policies, practices, rules and regulations to evaluate the potential to increase charter school autonomy and reduce requirements for all charter schools in its portfolio based on flexibility in the law and available efficiencies.
- c. The Commission will seek opportunities to enhance autonomy for individual charter schools in its portfolio that demonstrate high levels of performance.

4. Conflicts of Interest

- a. In accordance with the Conflict of Interest Disclosure established in Commission Policy 1.100, no employee, board member, agent, or representative of the Commission may simultaneously serve as an employee, board member, agent, representative, vendor, or contractor of a charter school authorized by the Commission.
- b. The Commission will not provide technical support to a charter school that it authorizes and serves as the chartering authority whenever said technical support will directly and substantially impact any authorizer decision related to the authorization, renewal, revocation, or nonrenewal of the charter school.
- c. The granting, revocation, or renewal of charter may never be contingent on the charter school being required to contract, lease or purchase services from the Commission.