

Charter School Questions

Does ACE charge tuition?

No. ACE is a public school, and no tuition is charged. The same school fees that are also charged in other elementary schools of the Neenah Joint School District are charged at ACE. ACE will also charge a small fee each year for keyboarding. This fee covers necessary maintenance of the piano keyboards and student music books.

Who are the teachers?

ACE teachers are employed by the Neenah Joint School District, and are licensed by the state of Wisconsin, just like teachers in any other Neenah classroom. ACE teachers also have special training (provided by grant monies and school fundraising) to meet the requirements of the Charter.

Is this school religious?

No, there is no religious instruction at ACE. Montessori itself is not religiously oriented, although Montessori cultural education does include (and encourage) discussion and celebration of the beliefs and traditions of cultures from all over the world.

Some people say that charter schools only accept applications from certain types of students or families. Is that true?

No. Charter schools are required under state and federal law to recruit applicants and admit students from every background. Also, ACE planners firmly believe in the public schools. We believe that children from every walk of life and every ability level should learn together, and that it is the responsibility of the whole community to see that all children are well educated.

What is a charter school anyway?

A charter school is a public school that has received approval from the State Department of Public Instruction and the local district to teach children using a different approach than the traditional classroom that most of us grew up with. Research over the past 20 years has shown us what parents already knew: Each child has different strengths, and each learns differently. The state and federal governments have decided to allow the use of alternative approaches in hopes that every child will reach his or her true potential.

I always thought we had good schools here. What's wrong with the Neenah schools that we need a charter school?

Nothing at all! Neenah has excellent public schools and talented, dedicated teachers. A charter school simply offers a different instructional approach. Many children do not learn well, or as well as they could, in a traditional classroom, where most students are doing the same task and studying the same concepts at the same time. Teachers can't always allow a student to move far beyond the contents of the chapter in the book being studied or the

grade level's standard curriculum. Other students may be swept along faster than they should be to go on to the next unit with everyone else. In the traditional setting, the day is teacher-directed about 80% of the time, with 20% devoted to activities of choice. By contrast, in Montessori, education is child-directed about 80% of the time, with the 20% of teacher-directed instruction tailored to the individual or small groups. If we are to successfully educate every child, we need to have alternatives.

Don't charter schools take money away from public schools?

No. Charter schools ARE public schools. The federal government, as part of its efforts to improve education, has set aside federal grant funds to cover the start-up expenses for charter schools who have been approved by the State Department of Public Instruction. These grant funds can bring \$350,000 or more into the district. In the Neenah School District, one of the conditions for being granted a charter by the Board of Education is that operating costs for the charter school will not be more than the operating costs of other district schools. Our teacher-student ratio must be similar, and ongoing expenses no more than in other schools.

Charter schools also help to keep students inside their local district rather than open enrolling into a neighboring district that may have an attractive program, or enrolling in a parochial school or another alternative, all of which reduce the amount of state funds that that district receives. Additionally, charter schools often attract students from outside the local district, with their per-pupil state money following them.