

# Would Charter Schools Be Good For AISD?

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A high turnout of parents crowded AISD headquarters Monday as school board members juggled with the decision to partner up with IDEA public schools to bring their teaching models into two east Austin schools, essentially making them charter schools.

"There are nearly 500 charter schools in Texas educating over 133,000 kids in Texas." said Texas Charter Schools Association Executive Director David Dunn.

There are almost two dozen campuses in the Austin area. Dunn says there are many misconceptions about these non traditional schools. The most common is that charter schools are private.

"Charter schools are public schools funded by the state, virtually 100 percent of the funds come from the state," said Dunn.

Charter schools are their own entity, their own district. They have more freedom with teacher contracts and even curriculum.

"Cannot charge tuition, they are open enrollment schools so they cannot be selective than they take, if more students show up then they have the capacity to have a lottery," Dunn said.

It's how NYOS, or Not Your Ordinary School works. Executive Director Kathleen Zimmerman says another difference between traditional and her charter school is class size. At NYOS an 18 students to one teacher ratio is maintained.

"We think it's critical for the teachers to understand their students, what their learning styles are and how diverse those can be. Modifying curriculum with more freedom," said Zimmerman.

Like traditional schools, charter schools must also meet academic state standards.

Debbie Ratcliffe is with the Texas Education Agency. She says it's a relatively new system, less than two decades old in Texas. In-district charters, like the one AISD is contemplating is actually a popular trend in the Houston area.

Ratcliffe says it's could be the alternative to a failing campus, which is the case for some of the schools AISD is considering to make the transition.