

# Overall Education Points

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## Conducting a Fair Charter School Lottery

Open-enrollment charter schools must conduct lotteries if more students apply for to attend the school than can be accommodated. In order to ensure fair access, the Arkansas Department of Education has outlined rules governing the enrollment process for open-enrollment charter schools. Best practices go above and beyond these rules and are recommended to enhance the transparency and accountability of Arkansas charter schools.

### Arkansas Department of Education Rules (August 2014)

- Priority enrollment is allowed for: children of founding members and siblings of students currently enrolled in the school.
- If oversubscribed, a charter school must conduct a “random, anonymous student selection method” (a lottery).
- Discrimination on the basis of gender, national origin, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, or academic or athletic eligibility is prohibited.
- A weighted lottery can only be used when necessary to comply with certain federal or state laws or court orders.
- Students who have been expelled from another public school may be excluded.

### Best Practices

#### *Before the Lottery*

- Create lottery applications that request only the information needed to enter prospective students into lottery: Student name, grade entering, Parent/Guardian contact information and questions relevant to priority enrollment and prior expulsion. Include submission instructions and deadline on the application.
- Ensure that lottery applications are widely available to the public, in both paper and electronic formats. Consider translating into multiple languages.
- Inform the public, parents, and other stakeholders of the upcoming lottery, including deadlines, procedures, and requirements. Consider translating into multiple languages.
- Consider conducting a practice lottery in front of impartial observer.

#### *Conducting a Fair Lottery*

- Must be transparent, random, and at a time and location where public can attend.
- Consider using numbers rather than names to protect privacy of students and parents.
- Ensure randomization through either computer-generation or adequate mixing.
- Document the results carefully throughout the lottery.

#### *After the Lottery*

- Records of lottery must be maintained, updated and available by request of ADE.
- Students should be added to the wait list using the same randomization technique.
- Students admitted from wait list should be noted distinctly from those “lotteried-in”.

### Conclusion

Charter schools are accountable to the State Board of Education, but it is currently questionable whether there are any repercussions for failure to conduct a fair lottery. One requirement for the charter is that it describes the methods for applying for admission, enrollment criteria, and student recruitment and selection processes. The State Board of Education should consider requiring more detailed descriptions of the process for conducting and providing data based on the lottery so that equity can be ensured and a more rigorous evaluation of charter school effectiveness can be done. Requiring thoughtful lottery planning before a charter is authorized could ensure transparency and equity for Arkansas students.

**Resource:** [http://www.arkansased.org/public/userfiles/rules/Current/Charter\\_Schools\\_Final.pdf](http://www.arkansased.org/public/userfiles/rules/Current/Charter_Schools_Final.pdf)

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