



# Imagine Schools

## Frequently Asked Questions

### ➤ What is Imagine Schools?

- Imagine Schools is a national family of public charter schools that empowers educators in partnership with parents to prepare students for lives of leadership, accomplishment, and character.
- Imagine Schools operates 71 schools in 11 states and the District of Columbia.
- Over 37,000 students are receiving an education in Imagine schools, similar to the size of the Minneapolis or Buffalo school districts.

### ➤ How is Imagine Schools different from other schools?

- As charter schools, Imagine's schools offer parents a choice in the education of their children. We work in communities to increase opportunities for learning and access to quality education for all students. Imagine's schools create choice within the public school system, provide accountability for results, encourage innovative public-private partnerships, and encourage greater parental and community involvement.
- Imagine's schools offer a variety of curricula and approaches – freedom within a framework of strong programs and accountability. As charter schools, we have flexibility to find solutions to problems and continually improve.
- Imagine uses five Measures of Excellence to evaluate the effectiveness of each school. The measures are parent choice, shared values, academic achievement, character development, and economic sustainability. Each school's achievement on these measures is publicly reported annually.
- Our work is guided by three shared values: integrity, justice, and fun.
- Imagine operates in a decentralized fashion based on the organizational philosophy described in Dennis Bakke's business best seller, *Joy at Work*. Imagine has 80

regional and national staff supporting the schools – of those only 22 people are in the Arlington headquarters office.

- Imagine Schools is gaining attention because we are a fast-growing organization that is bringing friendly competition to traditional public schools. We believe that friendly competition will lead to more innovation and better performance in all schools, which will benefit students and their parents.

➤ **Are parents satisfied with Imagine?**

- Imagine’s mission is to serve families with high quality public charter schools. We believe that parents are the best judge of a school that meets their child’s educational needs. Our average enrollment on our 71 campuses is over 90%, and many schools have waiting lists. 75,000 parents can’t be wrong.
- According to the Imagine Schools 2009 Family Survey,
  - 88% of parents agreed that the schools offer them opportunities to get involved in their children’s education.
  - 87% of parents stated that the teachers and staff model and teach positive character attributes to students.
  - 85% of parents were satisfied with the quality of education their children were receiving and would likely recommend the school to others.
- We envision great education much like a three-legged stool: engaged parents, purposeful students, and committed Imagine educators. The three-legged stool reminds us that we teach one child at a time in partnership with parents.

➤ **How are Imagine students doing on standardized tests?**

- Academic programs at Imagine’s schools are tailored to local needs, but every Imagine school does pre- and post-testing to drive instruction and to track each student’s academic gains.
- In the 2008-2009 school year, 89% of Imagine’s schools that did fall and spring testing exceeded average nationwide public school math and reading learning gains.
- In the 2008-2009 school year, over two-thirds of Imagine students demonstrated average reading and math learning gains of one year or more.

- Based on pre-testing, about two-thirds of students entering Imagine's new schools are below grade level. Historically, most of these students enter Imagine more than a full grade behind, indicating that their previous learning gains averaged much less than a full grade per year in other schools.
  - Imagine Schools is just as interested in helping students become better brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, citizens, leaders and friends as we are in their academic accomplishments. We recognize that in order for our communities and nation to prosper, we must raise the next generation to be good as well as smart.
- **Is Imagine Schools not-for-profit?**
- Imagine Schools does not operate for-profit. We operate exclusively for educational purposes consistent with the requirements for federal tax-exempt organizations. Our application for federal tax-exempt status is currently under review by the IRS. We hope to have a determination soon.
  - Imagine spends 100% of the money it receives on the students and schools it operates. Economic sustainability is one of our five measures of excellence. Our schools live within their means.
  - We demand the highest levels of accountability for results and outcomes.
- **How does Imagine Schools pay for school buildings?**
- Government-operated schools do not pay for their buildings out of operating funds. Most charter schools receive NO monies for facilities, so we must use the per student allocation received at each school to pay for everything: textbooks, teachers, administration, and buildings. Our charter schools deliver a high quality education for less money than is being spent on government-operated schools.
  - We believe that a high quality school building is an important ingredient in fulfilling our mission to help parents educate their children. Our school buildings provide safety, stability, a long-term presence, and a high-quality learning environment for children.
  - Just as government-operated schools use bonds to finance schools, Imagine Schools (through Schoolhouse Finance) uses its credit to provide the financial backing for long-term leases and building purchases. Each school's lease rate is based on the

actual costs to purchase, construct or renovate the school building and associated land.

- Schoolhouse Finance generally leases the buildings for at least 15-25 years in order to provide a long-term, stable location. The individual school then sub-leases the building from Schoolhouse Finance only for the period that its individual charter is valid (usually 3-5 years). Therefore, the school is not taking on a bigger or longer term obligation than it can handle, and the financial burden needed to secure a stable, long-term and high quality building is shouldered by Schoolhouse Finance.
- Schoolhouse Finance does not generate a net surplus (it lost \$2.5 million in SY 2009) and is operating solely to provide quality school buildings for Imagine schools. Its purpose is to “bridge the gap” between the financial market’s credit requirements and the minimal credit quality of stand-alone charter schools.

➤ **How does Imagine compare with other schools and districts in regard to indirect or administrative costs?**

- Imagine Schools provides support services, just as every public school district allocates funding to pay for leadership, support, and administrative expenses.
- We have yet to find another similarly sized public school district that spends the same as or less on administrative costs.
- Imagine is well within charter school industry standards regarding administrative costs. For example, a study of 46 charter schools in New York reported that fees charged in 2008-2009 by non-profit charter management organizations (CMO) and for-profit educational management organizations (EMO) ranged from 7% to 17% of the school’s total revenues. ([curious2.typepad.com](http://curious2.typepad.com), Feb. 2010).
- Imagine’s indirect or administrative support services include (but are not limited to) accountability, budgeting, finance, legal, marketing, educational services, teacher and staff recruiting, grant applications, compliance, professional development and supervision, lease oversight, procurement assistance, insurance, instructional technology, and assessment scoring and reporting. The administrative services are tailored to the needs of each school.