

Editorial - Why can't state figure out how to fund voter-approved charter schools?

By [Editorial Board](#)

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Funding charter schools should not be that difficult. After all, 41 other states have figured it out.

Yet, Washington state continues to allow the voter-approved charter schools to flap in the breeze in the wake of a state Supreme Court ruling striking down the wording of the law as unconstitutional. The nine charter schools open don't have secure funding to get them through the school year.

The court has blocked the spending of tax dollars on charter schools because they aren't "common schools" governed by an appointed board of directors. Therefore, Chief Justice Barbara Madsen wrote, "money that is dedicated to common schools is unconstitutionally diverted to charter schools."

Lawmakers should have already taken action to fix this flaw or, at the least, had a plan ready to move on when the Legislature convenes in January.

But there seems to be little agreement on how to proceed. That's not of much comfort to the students and their parents now attending the nine charter schools operating this year.

They should be focused on learning rather than how to keep the lights on.

Charters schools are public schools run independently with more freedom to take different approaches to learning.

Allowing independent schools simply provides options for students who need a different style of learning or who want to focus on a specific area of study such as math and science or the arts.

This week the state Charter School Commission voted to make preparations to lay off its staff and send its records to the state archives.

But eight of the schools are hoping to avoid the same fate by linking themselves to a public school district so that, at least on paper, their funding will be flowing through a constitutional conduit. According to the association that supports state charter schools, the most likely solution is transforming the schools into so-called Alternative Learning Experiences. That program is used mostly for online schools hosted by school districts, but officials with the superintendent's office and the association believe it also could work as a stopgap for charter schools.

This can be done by joining into a relationship in the Mary Walker School District in Stevens County, which is located in Northeastern Washington. The charter schools are located far from Stevens County but that doesn't matter.

It's unfortunate that this type of relationship, like some sort of offshore banking scheme, is necessary to keep these schools open for the year.

But, given the dire situation, it is necessary.

Lawmakers need to get come up with a long term plan to keep the current charter schools operating and make it possible for the approved charter school in Walla Walla — Willow School — to open its doors.