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Legislative Committee Services
State Capitol Building
Salem, Oregon 97301
(503) 986-1813

Background Brief on ...

Charter Schools

Overview

Charter schools have become a popular approach nationally to education policy, generally enjoying bipartisan support from governors, state legislators, and constituents. The charter school movement has roots in a number of other reform ideas, including the alternative school movement, site-based management, magnet schools, public school choice, privatization, and community-parental empowerment.

Chartering allows schools to run independently of the traditional public school system. A charter school operates under a performance contract, the charter, made between the sponsor and the board of the school.

In Oregon, a charter school is a comprehensive public school operated by a group of parents, teachers, and/or community members as a semi-autonomous school of choice. The charter school operates under a performance contract or “charter” between the members of the charter school community and the sponsoring board of education. In Oregon, charter schools may be sponsored by school districts, public institutions of higher education, and the State Board of Education. Charter schools must offer a comprehensive education that includes curriculum covering all Oregon academic content standards and courses necessary to allow students to meet high school diploma requirements. This program is often implemented through education models, platforms, and schedules that are distinct from, and alternative to, the traditional public school model.

Once a charter school is sponsored and approved for operation, the school receives money from the State School Fund as outlined in the charter school contract. State law sets the minimum payment through a formula based on school enrollment. For students in K-8, that amount is at least 80 percent of the sponsoring school

district's General Purpose Grant (per weighted average daily membership or **ADMw**), and 95 percent for students in grades 9-12.

The U.S. Department of Education has provided grants to support states' charter school efforts, starting with \$6 million in fiscal year 1995. Since 2005, the Oregon Department of Education (**ODE**) awarded Charter School Program (**CSP**) grants to charter developers annually. The CSP funds were distributed from ODE to the charter school through a competitive, reimbursable grant process. In 2011, the federal grant competition resulted in only two state grants, for Florida and New York. Oregon was not awarded a federal CSP grant during the latest round, although the U.S. Department of Education also allows charter schools to apply directly for local education grants to support charter school implementation.

Program Results

Oregon's first charter school began operating in 1999. The following year, an additional six charter schools opened. Since that time, on average, eight charter schools have opened each year. During the 2013-14 school year, 124 charter schools were in operation in Oregon.

Some charter schools have grown out of public and alternative schools providing communities with school choice options to attend publicly funded schools with specific programs targeting at-risk and underserved youth. Charter schools in Oregon provide a variety of instructional approaches, such as Direct Instruction, Montessori, Core Knowledge, Project-based Learning, Natural Resources, Place-based, and Career and Technical Education. Additional information is available at the [Oregon Charter School Program](http://www.ode.state.or.us/go/charterschools) website.

Oregon Charter School Numbers

124 charter schools were in operation for the 2013-14 school year including:

- 17 single-school school districts with charter school as only school;
- 12 virtual state-wide charter schools; and
- Four charter schools sponsored by the State Board of Education.

Oregon charter school enrollment has grown 276 percent since 2007 totaling 27,070 students in 2012-13:

- Charter schools account for about 5 percent of public school enrollment in the state

In the 2012-13 school year, 76.6 percent of charter school students met or exceeded reading standards and 55.2 percent of charter school students met or exceeded math standards.

Effective Practices and Models

Charter school student progress is measured by the same assessment system as other public schools. In addition to the required state assessment system, charter school accountability may include additional measures, as articulated by the sponsoring entity to determine renewal criteria for the charter contract.

In a 2010 report, the Center for Education Reform (**CER**) postulated that since low-income and minority families make up the bulk of the parents seeking entrance into charters, new charter schools may primarily benefit low-income children and children of color. Already, more than 54 percent of students in charters are classified as economically disadvantaged, while half of America's charter schools serve student populations where 60 percent or more of the children are poor, and children of color comprise 52 percent of charter school attendees.

Related Links and References

ODE Charter School webpage – <http://www.ode.state.or.us/go/charterschools>

National Charter School Resource Center - <http://www.charterschoolcenter.org/>

A charter school website with a national perspective, developed through a partnership with the US Department of Education.

National Alliance for Public Charter Schools <http://www.publiccharters.org/>

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools is a national nonprofit organization committed to advancing the charter school

movement. Their goal is to increase the number of high-quality charter schools available to all families, particularly in disadvantaged communities that lack access to quality public schools.

National Association of Charter School Authorizers

<http://www.qualitycharters.org/>

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (**NACSA**) is the professional membership organization that supports the work of authorizers (sponsors). NACSA serves the needs of the full range of chartering authorities: local school boards and districts of all sizes, state boards and departments of education, universities and colleges, municipal bodies, independent chartering boards, and qualified non-profit organizations.

Staff and Agency Contacts

Richard Donovan
Legislative Committee Services
richard.donovan@state.or.us
503-986-1664

Kate Pattison, Program Analyst
Office of Learning,
[Oregon Department of Education](http://www.oregon.gov/EDUCATION/)
503-947-5691

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