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Background Brief on ...

# Charter Schools

## Overview

Charter schools are one of the fastest growing innovations in education policy, enjoying broad bipartisan support from many governors and state legislators, as well as past and present secretaries of education. The charter school movement has roots in a number of other reform ideas, such as alternative schools, 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 and to tailor programs to community needs. While some school operations may mirror those of traditional public schools, many policymakers, parents, and educators see chartering as a way to increase educational choice and innovation within the public school system.

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 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 comprehensive program is often implemented through innovative education models, platforms, and schedules.

Once a charter school is sponsored and approved for operation, the school receives State School Fund as outlined in the charter school district contract.

State law sets the minimum payment through a formula based on school enrollment. For students in grades K-8, that amount is at least 80% 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, ten charter schools have opened each year. During the 2010-2011 school year, 115 charter schools were in operation in Oregon. To better articulate trends across the state, ODE initiated a typology system, grouping general types of charter schools for efficiency in providing trend analysis and general data on the characteristics and outcomes of various types of charter schools.

Some charter schools have grown out of public and private 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](#) website.

### **Oregon Charter School Numbers**

For the 2011-2012 school year there are 115 charter schools in operation; they include:

- 16 single-school school districts with charter school as only school
- 9 virtual state-wide charter schools
- 4 charter schools sponsored by the State Board of Education

Oregon charter school enrollment has grown 165 percent since 2008 totaling 24,302 students in 2011-12:

- Charter schools account for about 4 percent of public school enrollment in the state

In the 2010-12 school year, 71 charter schools "Met" Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) and 69 rated "Satisfactory" or "Outstanding" on the Oregon School Report Card.

### **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.

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