

What are charter schools? How do they operate in NH? Feb. 4, 2018 fact sheet.

Prepared by the LWVNH education study committee in Nashua. They used Nashua as an example in several places.

www.education.nh.gov; New Hampshire Department of Education

Title XV Education Ch. 194-B:3 Public Charter Schools

There are currently two charter schools in Nashua. Both are state-approved. The Academy for Science and Design was approved in March of 2006 and renewed for 5 years in January of 2013. It currently has an enrollment of 525 students. Micro-Society Academy's serves students in grades K-8. Its charter was approved in August of 2014. [In NH currently there are about 26 public charter schools]

I. Do state standards apply to charter schools?

"I. (a) Except as otherwise provided in law, chartered public schools shall be fully exempt from state laws and rules which otherwise apply to public or nonpublic schools, or local school boards or districts. Notwithstanding the foregoing, chartered public schools shall have all the rights and privileges of other public schools.

II. Except as expressly provided in this chapter, the duty and role of the local school board... shall be to approve or disapprove the proposed chartered public school application based upon whether or not the proposed application contains in specific detail the following required elements:"

[a list of 29 requirements, plus sub-requirements, follows, including:

Curriculum offered in a charter must meet or exceed state standards.

The local board needs to approve proposed achievement measures.

The local board must approve the staffing overview in the charter application, including qualifications.]

II. How are teacher qualifications for charters established?

According to Education Commission of the States, at least 50% of a New Hampshire charter school's teaching staff must be certified [HB 1333 is a bill going thru the legislature to increase that to 80%] or have 3 years' teaching experience. MicroSociety Charter currently has 63% of its teaching staff licensed in their subject areas. Two of their teachers are licensed in MA and working toward NH certification.

III. What is the process, what are the criteria for establishing a charter in NH?

In 1995, New Hampshire enacted public charter school legislation. In 2003, the New Hampshire Legislature adopted a "pilot" program for public charter schools, allowing the State Board of Education to authorize up to 20 public charter schools in the next 10 years.

In 2003, New Hampshire received a \$7.1 million federal grant to evaluate the formation of public charter schools. [research needed: was that study done and what did it show?]

In 2010, New Hampshire received a \$10.8 million federal grant to establish high-quality public charter schools.

Public charter schools are granted a charter for a term of five years. The school's charter outlines the mission statement, educational program, student achievement goals and objectives, methods of assessment and measures of success. Charter schools are held accountable for meeting academic, financial, organizational and programmatic goals and objectives as outlined in its charter.

Persons or entities eligible to submit an application to establish a public charter school include: a nonprofit organization including, but not limited to, a college, university, museum, service club, or similar entity; a group of 2 or more NH certified teachers; a group of 10 or more parents.

Requirements for Submitting an Application

- An applicant seeking state board approval for a charter school submits a letter of intent to submit a proposed charter school application.
- An applicant submits an application to the NH Department of Education for review.
- Applications should not exceed 50 pages (not including appendices, i.e., letters of support, proposed five-year budget).

There are two forms of charter school authorization in New Hampshire:

1. Local Authorization
2. State Board Authorization

Local Authorization (an existing school district that directly supports the establishment of the charter school): Locally authorized charter schools receive approval to open from the local legislative body (voters or city council)

- Proposed applications to establish a charter school are submitted to the prospective school board where the school intends to be located. The local school board grants or denies the proposed application.
- The proposed application is then forwarded, by the local school board, to the New Hampshire State Board of Education for authorization to establish a charter school.
- Upon receiving charter authorization from the State Board of Education, the school board submits a warrant article to the school district legislative body for ratification or denial to fund the school.

- Funding is received directly from the school district. The amount of funding is determined by an agreed upon contract between the charter school and the local school board.

State Board of Education Authorization:

- Proposed applications to establish a charter school are submitted directly to the New Hampshire Department of Education.
- Authorization to establish a charter school is given by the State Board of Education.

The renewal of a charter school takes place every five years. The renewal process consists of a comprehensive on-site review conducted by a team of educators to determine if the school has adequately fulfilled the promises outlined in its charter.

The on-site review team conducts focus group interviews with school leadership, teachers, parents, students and members of the Board of Trustees.

The school's performance described in the renewal application, yearly assessment results and charter accountability documents provide, along with the on-site review, the evidence needed to monitor progress toward the charter school's academic performance, financial and organizational goals and sustainability.

Annual Progress Report -- Four Key Questions to Answer:

- 1. Is the charter school making progress toward achieving its mission?**
- 2. Is the charter school responsibly using public funds?**
- 3. Is the charter school promoting student attainment of expected knowledge and skills?**
Are students meeting proficiency standards as measured by state assessments? Are students making progress toward and/or meeting state proficiency standards? Are students making progress toward any non-academic goals established within its Charter?
- 4. Is the school sustainable?**

The DOE Office of Accountability determines whether the charter merits renewal after 5 years. Five charters are reported to have closed between 2006 and 2017. Two applications are listed as denied between 2011 and 2017. The schools that closed listed “lack of enrollment and finances” as the reason.

IV. What are the admission criteria?

Criteria are established by the school’s charter. For the Academy for Science and Design, students are admitted based on prerequisites, including attendance and completion of

requirements for previous schools attended and completion of an application. If there are more applicants than spaces available, students are chosen by lottery. Siblings of current ASD students are given preference, as are children of school founders (up to 4 spaces), children of ASD employees (up to 5 spaces), and children of board members (up to 4 spaces), in that order. Out of state applicants are only accepted if there are slots available after all eligible students described above have been admitted.

Costs

The committee looked into some of the costs of financing public charter schools, using Nashua as the example.

Under the state's funding formula to provide an "adequate education" public charter schools authorized by the NH Bd. of Education get \$6,636 per pupil attending a charter school.

Italicized information below is from the NH Alliance for Public Charter Schools website:

Can charter schools charge tuition?

No, charter schools are public schools and tuition-free for residents of New Hampshire. Out-of-state students may be charged tuition. While there is no charge for tuition, charter schools (like all public schools) may charge small fees for specific services and support.

How are charter schools funded in New Hampshire?

New Hampshire's State Authorized charter schools are funded directly by the state at approximately \$6,636 per student. This is far less than the statewide average expenditure of \$15,000-\$16,000 per student.

Locally authorized charter schools are funded at approximately 80% of the average cost per pupil by their local district. Example – Average cost per pupil is \$10,000 per student, locally authorized charters would receive \$7,000-\$8,000 per student.

What kind of federal support is there for charter schools?

Through the Public Charter Schools Program, the U.S. Department of Education offers grants to states, which then award sub-grants to individual schools to assist them in planning, design, and initial implementation of new charter schools. Dissemination grants are also available to successful charter schools with three or more years of experience. These grants are used to support activities through which they help other groups improve existing public schools by sharing successful practices. Charter schools are also eligible for funding under other federal programs.

The above explanation leaves us with two questions:

How much additional funding is typically assumed by parents through fund-raising events?

How are the additional costs of providing services to children with special needs taken care of in locally authorized charter schools? Do the local special education teachers provide these services in the charter school? How does that impact the overall school budget?

Note: The provisions of SB193, the Education Freedom Savings Account bill, if it passes do not apply to public charter schools. SB193 applies only to families choosing home schooling or private or religious schools. Charter schools do, however, have a tangential role in the bill: if a student is denied admission at a charter school to which he/she applied, he/she is eligible for an Education Freedom Savings Account if the family opts for home or private schooling.

Transportation:

Kim was able to find some data from 2 years ago about how many Nashua students are attending charter schools. Because the district has agreed to provide transportation for the two schools in Nashua and one in Merrimack, busing is an expense taken on that isn't paid for by local taxes. It isn't clear from the data she was able to get how many charter school students are using district transportation.

A growing trend:

In 2015-2016, 464 Nashua students attended public charter schools. Of those, 451 in total went to Nashua's Academy for Science and Design (257), Microsociety (75), and Merrimack's Gate City School for the Arts (119). The remainder went to charters in Manchester, Salem, and Derry. In the two previous fiscal years, the totals were 329 and 191. As noted above, the current enrollment just for Academy of Science and Design is 525 students, so the trend is increasing sharply.