

THE Center for Education Reform



Making Schools Work Better for All Children

Back-To-School News Alert
1st in a Series from CER

CER RELEASES OFFICIAL CHARTER SCHOOL NUMBERS FOR 1999-2000 SCHOOL YEAR **1,682 scheduled to open**

(August 30, 1999) As the kids go back to school nationwide, an unprecedented number of them will be attending charter schools. According to the Center for Education Reform's official numbers, 1,682 charter schools will open their doors to approximately 350,000 children in 31 states and the District of Columbia. Another five states have laws but will not have any charter schools this year (Arkansas, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Virginia and Wyoming).

"Since the first charter school opened its doors in 1992, public school systems have begun to respond and more children are getting the education they deserve," said CER president Jeanne Allen. "Our research proves that charter schools can and will set the example for the future of public education. Charter schools have created not just a ripple but a tidal wave on the educational scene," Allen added.

State laws in 36 states and the District - many of which CER helped establish - provide the opportunity to parents, teachers, and civic and community leaders to establish schools that meet the needs of families whose children don't fit a "one size fits all" system.

Charter schools now involve millions of Americans. Involvement in charter schools includes not only the families attending them, but the school staffs, the policymakers involved, the private resource centers and civic groups aiding charter schools and the research teams, authorizers and associations whose jobs involve charter school oversight and support.

Although charter schools are widely embraced by the general public, the majority of traditional education groups still fight to limit their scope and independence. In fact, at the National Education Association's summer meeting, even First Lady Hillary Clinton got a chilly reception to her vocal support for charter schools. It was the only policy line she used during the speech that didn't get wild applause from the NEA delegates.

The sharp rise in charter schools is a result in large part of strong law states. The Center for Education Reform officially ranks state charter laws on a continuum from weak to strong using 10 widely respected criteria. This analysis of charter laws, the four-part Charter School Progress Report series and other supporting information is available by contacting the Center or by surfing over to our [Charter Schools](#) page.



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In other news, school choice supporters are relieved by Ohio Judge Solomon Oliver's decision to finally allow Cleveland's choice children to return to their schools, but are not satisfied that new children are excluded. In protest of Oliver's legislating from the bench, choice activists are holding candlelight vigils in cities nationwide tomorrow, August 31st at 8 pm. For more information about the vigils, contact the Center. For more details on the recent court action visit our [School Choice](#) page.

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First in CER's Back-to-School Series.

The Center for Education Reform is a national, independent, non-profit advocacy organization providing support and guidance to individuals, community and civic groups, policymakers and others who are working to bring fundamental reforms to their schools. For additional information on school choice or education reform please call CER at (202) 822-9000.

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Alternative Public Schools Inc.

APS is a for-profit school-management company based in Nashville, Tenn. The company currently manages one 375-student public elementary school in Wilkinsburg, Pa. It seeks additional contracts with local school districts and other government entities to manage existing and newly created public schools. APS's fundamental purpose is to provide better education, particularly for high-needs children in urban areas.

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Beacon Education

Mike Ronan/CEO

left message
2:35

9/29/99

The Educational System in the United States: Case Study Findings, March 1999

**Chapter 5 - Teachers and the Teaching Profession
in the United States**
(Part 3 of 3)

Teachers' Relationships

Disruptive Students

Students who are difficult or unruly present a special type of problem for teachers because they can be an impediment to classroom instruction and organization. Disruptive students command more attention from the teacher thus making it more difficult to teach and manage the rest of the class. Despite the problems that students with behavior problems pose, there is no single way that these students are dealt with in the United States. Disciplinary policy is usually a composite of local school board policy and teacher and principal implementation. Schools visited as part of the Case Study dealt with issues of student behavior in a variety of ways.

Some of the schools we visited provided teachers with written disciplinary guidelines or suggestions for classroom management. In one Case Study school, the handbook distributed to teachers included classroom management guidelines. Aspects of this guideline placed a great deal of burden of student disruption on classroom mismanagement, quoting William Glasser's *Schools Without Failure*,

The climate of a classroom can be gauged by the words that are spoken between a teacher and student. There is a close relationship between the classroom atmosphere, almost entirely a product of the teacher, and the degree of disturbance among the individual children.

Some of the Case Study schools also provided guidelines for student conduct as part of either the student or student-parent handbook. For example, Vanderbilt Middle School's student-parent handbook presented a detailed account of the actions both the teacher and the school administration would take if students failed to adhere to both the classroom and school-wide expectations for behavior. At Springdale High School, the student handbook included an explicit code of student conduct that charted the punishments a student would receive for each infraction. The level of punishment ranged from verbal warnings and in-school suspensions to recommendations for expulsion and out-of-school suspensions. The level of punishment increased with the number of offenses the student committed.

Recently, some educators have pointed out the usefulness of alternative schools for disruptive students, thus allowing teachers in regular schools to focus on teaching students who do not have behavior difficulties (Hiraoka 1996). Others have suggested that schools should spell out a strict code of conduct with explicit punishments for students, beginning in elementary school (Shanker 1995).

Teacher Contact with Parents

The primary relationship that teachers have is with students, and only peripherally with their parents. The most frequent method of communication from schools to parents is through written materials, such as newsletters or flyers, which allow little opportunity for response (Tangri & Moles 1987). Face-to-face interaction with parents usually occurs during an annual school-wide open house and during periodic teacher conferences, fairly formal occasions for discussing student progress. Teachers or parents may schedule other conferences as needed; however, these generally occur in response to difficulties faced by students. Typically, teachers receive little or no training for interaction with parents.

Summary

Although a Case Study cannot be invoked to make sweeping generalizations, the Case Study Project was designed to capture experiences of teachers of math and science across regions, levels of schooling, and achievement levels in the United States. This chapter has reported on teachers' lives and working conditions in 3 regions of the country (southeast, midwest, and west) at 3 grade levels (4th, 8th, and 12th), and in schools rated as low-, middle-, and high-achieving according to students' performance on nationally normed tests. The schools we visited were in large metropolitan areas and included suburban and inner-city schools. Rather than selecting only "typical" schools, the Case Study Project included a broad range of schools.

The training of teachers in the United States occurs primarily in colleges or schools of education located in universities. Aspiring teachers enroll both in education courses and in courses in the basic academic disciplines. The former types of courses are thought to provide them with the information necessary to conduct classes successfully and the latter with the substantive knowledge that will comprise the content of the lessons they teach. In addition, all teachers undergo a period of student teaching. Although some teachers thought it was preferable for a student teacher to be left alone with a class early on, others thought it was important for them to be nurtured and supported by a skilled teacher during the initial weeks of learning to teach.

After graduating from college and obtaining the necessary teaching credentials, most teachers worked in relative isolation. Few had the time or opportunity to collaborate with other teachers, despite the fact that many of the current reform efforts seek greater involvement by teachers.

Reform initiatives in the United States are now aimed at trying to improve the teaching profession by setting higher entrance standards, requiring teachers to renew their certification, creating mentoring programs, and improving salaries and working conditions. Most schools we visited are involved in "site-based management." Teachers in these schools help to formulate a "School Improvement Plan" that sets objectives and holds the promise of giving teachers more of a voice in how schools are run. New instructional practices include team teaching, cooperative learning, and individualized instruction using computers and new types of performance assessments. Teachers in some of the schools visited were also trying to help their students meet new state-level performance standards. As the discussion in this chapter suggests, these innovations were present to varying degrees in the Case Study schools and affected teachers more strongly in some settings than in others. One unintended consequence of the sanctions incurred by the imposition of district and state standards was that they could encourage teachers to "teach the test." They could also be stated at such a high level of abstraction that teachers could—and did—teach very different curricula even at the same grade level in the same school.

The degree of autonomy granted to teachers varies greatly among schools. In some cases teachers had developed new curricula themselves and helped new teachers to understand these materials. More frequently, however, books were already purchased and teachers were required to teach what was available. New math and science curricula had been recently selected by a team of teachers from the district in one case, but other teachers found this particular science curriculum to be too difficult for the children. Although teachers in another school were given time to set grade-level objectives, the time allotted was only one half day, and the teachers were not able to plan together on a regular basis. Teacher involvement and satisfaction varied across schools.

There was great commonality among teachers' responses when they were asked questions that were related to desirable conditions for teaching. These included more flexible schedules, more opportunity to interact with other teachers, increased resources, and more assistance. Teachers in schools in low-income areas generally tended to face the greatest challenges and to be subject to more demands for accountability than teachers in middle- and high-income areas. Teaching in large urban districts was considered more difficult because of greater student diversity, relatively scarce

resources, bureaucratic demands, limited parental involvement, and low salaries, among other reasons. As a result, suburban school districts have often been successful in recruiting teachers from urban schools, since they offer more resources, greater flexibility, and better pay.

Schools in the United States were in a period of transition when this study was undertaken. In view of the many initiatives that have been introduced, it is not clear what teachers' lives will be like at the beginning of the next century. In the meantime, teachers are being asked to be the implementers of a host of innovations in instruction and school management. As federal, state, district, and school efforts at improvement occur, one thing becomes obvious: There will be increasing need for cooperation at all levels if teachers are to help members of the next generation meet the ambitious goals that have been set for them.

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[Teachers and the Teaching Profession in the United States (Part 2 of 3)]
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OCT. 9, 1996

EDUCATION WEEK on the WEB



IN CONTEXT

THE ARCHIVES

TEACHER MAGAZINE

THE DAILY NEWS

SPECIAL REPORT

Districts Scramble To Cope With Student Expulsions

By
Jessica Portner

For many state lawmakers, passing bills making it easier to expel gun-toting students was no trouble. But finding a place to give the troublemakers a second chance is proving to be a tough job for local school officials.

The 1994 federal gun-free-schools law directed states to adopt a "zero tolerance" policy on weapons at school or risk losing federal funding under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. All 50 states have now passed legislation that complies with the federal law, said William Modzeleski, the director of the U.S. Department of Education's safe- and drug-free-schools program.

Educators still back the idea of cracking down on students who bring weapons to school or become serious discipline problems. But some district leaders say the get-tough security rules are creating another problem: how to create alternative schools that serve a growing pool of students.

In Texas, lawmakers included strict expulsion policies as part of their 1995 rewrite of the state education code. Teachers can ask to remove problem students from their classes, and students who bring a weapon to school must be expelled with no exceptions. In many other states, zero-tolerance laws give superintendents or school boards power to alter the punishment.

"The intent of the law is right on, but the ability to deal with extenuating circumstances is not there," said Larry Guinn, the executive director for student management for the Plano, Texas, school district.

The law, Mr. Guinn said, does not distinguish between an 18-year-old who brings a weapon to school to kill someone, for example, and an elementary school student who brings a shiny object to school, barely realizing it's a knife.

Home Schooling

What is also worrisome for many educators is that there may not be enough alternative schools or programs to house all the students who are expelled from school under the new policies.

"School systems are running with their tongues out trying to catch up with the new wave of expulsions," said Ronald D. Stephens, the executive director of the National School Safety Center in Westlake Village, Calif.

Only seven states--Arkansas, Delaware, Hawaii, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oregon, and Texas--have passed laws requiring that alternative schools be created to handle the expelled young people, according to a survey by the Education Commission of the States. More often, states "encourage" districts to set up alternative schools, which many small and medium-size districts have started to do and many big districts have in place.

But in places where there are few alternative venues, some students are left with no place to go or depend on their parents to come up with a solution.

Kathy Brody is familiar with this scenario. In February, her 14-year-old son, George, was expelled from his middle school in Holly, Mich., for bringing a plastic toy gun to school and storing a kitchen knife in his locker.

The district had no alternative school or program for him to attend, according to Ms. Brody, so the 8th grader spent the next five months at home with his grandparents taking a correspondence course. The teenager was allowed to return to school last month after he was diagnosed with attention-deficit disorder. Under federal law, students with disabilities are entitled to an alternative placement, state officials said.

Enough Funds?

But even in states with mandates that alternative schools or programs be made available to students, some local educators say the efforts are half-hearted.

In Nebraska, for example, the state law requires that districts set up alternative schools to serve students who are barred from regular schools. But the state has provided no funding for construction costs.

As a result, many of the state's tiny rural districts are having to pool their resources to build regional alternative schools.

"School districts aren't too happy because funding [alternative schools] means taking away from normal programs, and they don't have unlimited means," said Jack Gilsdorf, a spokesman for the Nebraska education department. In Nebraska, districts are in a pinch without the issue of new alternative schools after a property-tax limit passed by lawmakers hampered local fund-raising abilities.

"It's a double whammy--the state gave them more to do and less money to do it with," Mr. Gilsdorf said.

Even in states where funding for alternative schools is provided, some school officials are concerned that there isn't enough to go around.

As in Nebraska, each district in Texas is required to have an alternative program or school for students who are expelled under the zero-tolerance law. The state has set aside \$18 million to defray the start-up costs of establishing the alternative programs.

But Jane Backus, the director of governmental relations for the Texas School Boards Association, said the state has not allocated funding for the maintenance of the facilities and operating costs.

Billy G. Jacobs, the director of school safety for the Texas Education Agency, said last week that the agency plans to recommend additional funding in January.

Still, Mr. Jacobs added, despite the troubles in serving expelled students, there is a payoff in moving them out of public school classrooms.

"We have to give teachers the ability to control their classrooms," he said.

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JULY 8, 1998

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SPECIAL REPORTS

PRODUCTS & SERVICES

For-Profit Alternative Schools Are Hot Commodities

By Jessica Portner

Thompson Falls, Mont.

Private, for-profit alternative schools can't multiply fast enough for parents and principals anxious to find new venues for students cast out of public schools.

Read our story
"Districts Scramble
To Cope With
Student
Expulsions," Oct.
9, 1996.

Take the Spring Creek School. Just 1 1/2 years after entrepreneurs swung open their doors here, tractor drivers were heaving dirt to pave the way for several new log-cabin classrooms last month.

Set amid towering pine trees in the Rocky Mountain foothills, the 150-student school is bursting at the seams, and this multiple-classroom expansion is designed to welcome 90 more students.

"Even if we shut our marketing department, we'd keep growing by word of mouth," Cameron Pullan, the school's director, said as he patrolled Spring Creek's forested grounds, which look like a summer camp. The residential school charges \$2,990 a month.

Read our
commentary,
"Horizon
Alternative School:
Why Promising
Reforms
Disappear," Feb.
26, 1997.

Thousands of similar for-profit ventures have cropped up in the past decade. They're helping to fill the void left by states with insufficient funds or political will to set up public alternative schools for the increasing number of students expelled for carrying weapons or drugs on campus.

But while many parents are relieved to find places where their children can finish school and receive the psychological counseling they need, some educators contend that many of these costly enterprises put profit before academic quality and offer students a mediocre education at best.

"There's big money in bad kids," said Lon Woodbury, an education consultant in Bonners Ferry, Idaho, who helps parents choose private schools. "Some people are educational visionaries ... but it's easy to have a cookie-cutter formula and run kids through like a factory."

For background,
past stories, and
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Pages on
Privatization of
Public Education.

Many companies set up shop in this region, Mr. Woodbury added, because states like Montana and Utah tend to have fewer regulations on operating such enterprises. What's more, the beautiful, remote setting here discourages runaways and helps administrators control the environment of the young men and women in their care.

No Dominant Company

Many of these enterprises are large, established corporations with therapeutic facilities that serve hundreds of students in several states. Others are mom-and-pop operations where students are sent by exasperated parents to be home-schooled in surrogate families. Many schools, especially those that employ therapists, charge parents as much as \$40,000 a year for tuition and room and board. Companies that operate

as \$40,000 a year for tuition and room and board. Companies that operate nonresidential day programs serving local populations often earn their revenue by contracting with public schools for a per-pupil fee.

Although an exact tally of such schools can't be pinpointed, education market analysts say the growth of this niche is impressive. For-profit alternative schools now constitute a multibillion-dollar industry that is expanding at an annual rate of 25 percent, according to Michael Moe, an education industry analyst with NationsBanc Montgomery Securities, a San Francisco-based investment banking firm.

"The market is growing significantly, and without a large dominant player, there's room to make a reasonable profit," Mr. Moe said.

A large number of school districts, saddled with violent and disruptive youths, have been more than willing to give these businesses a try.

That's a trend Robert H. Crosby can happily attest to.

Since the federal government required states to pass zero-tolerance laws by 1996 requiring districts to expel students who brought weapons to school or risk losing federal funds, Mr. Crosby's business has taken off.

The chief executive officer of Richard Milburn High School Inc., which has been contracting with districts to run for-profit schools for at-risk youths for 23 years, said his company operated 10 schools in 1996; Today, the Salem, Mass.-based enterprise runs 42 schools in seven states. In the past three years, annual revenues for the high schools have jumped from \$1 million to \$5 million, he said. And while Mr. Crosby expects construction costs and staff development to eat into initial profits, he projects that annual earnings for the business will reach \$30 million in the next five years.

"We are the Edison [Project] of the at-risk school world," said Mr. Crosby, referring to the successful for-profit company run by Christopher Whittle that manages public schools under contracts and charters. With flexible schedules and smaller class sizes, Richard Milburn schools look a lot like their public-sector counterparts. All are accredited, employ certified teachers, and use essentially the same curricula as the local feeder schools.

Mr. Crosby argues that it makes financial sense for districts to engage his company rather than shell out money for construction, maintenance, and staffing themselves. And unlike some other private educational enterprises, he said, his schools are popular with teachers' unions because they remove the most disruptive students from the classroom.

"Our promise to schools is we'll take their worst kids and at no further cost to them," Mr. Crosby said.

Some state governments are even helping companies like Mr. Crosby's grow. Texas now requires its 22 counties with populations of 125,000 or more to set up alternative schools for expelled students. Seeing this as an opportunity to branch out into the alternative school field, Children's Comprehensive Services Inc., a \$90 million Nashville-based company that runs private treatment programs for children with severe emotional disturbances, recently won public contracts to set up three schools for at-risk youths in the state.

Paying the Bills

Day programs for at-risk youths are not the only growing sector. Residential schools like Spring Creek that advertise a broader array of mental-health services for drug-dependent and violence-prone teenagers are multiplying as well.

Spring Creek is the newest member of the Worldwide Association of Specialty Programs. The Laverkin, Utah-based organization that provides education and management services to a small group of independently owned private schools expects its membership to grow.

"In the last four years, more kids are getting in trouble for alcohol- and drug-related problems, and parents are turning to private boarding schools 'cause it's the only place to go," said Tony Pallotto, the president of Teen Adolescent Placement Services, a nonprofit parent-support group based in California's San Diego County. Mr. Pallotto founded the organization in 1994 after a fruitless search for a suitable placement for his son, who was addicted to heroin. "The hospitals that treat children are told they can't help anymore when insurance runs out," he said. And the local public alternative school reminded him of a juvenile hall.

Faced with similar choices, Mr. Pallotto said, many parents like him are often compelled to make a serious financial investment.

"We are in it for the duration no matter what it costs," Nancy C. Callahan said last month as she enrolled her 16-year-old son, Patrick, at Spring Creek School. She and her husband, who live in Carmel, Calif., have spent \$65,000 in the past four years on private, alternative schools for their son. A bright student who was failing school, Patrick had an eating disorder and was severely overweight and suicidal when he enrolled at another private school four years ago. Now, he is earning A's and B's and has dropped 150 pounds, said Ms. Callahan, exulting over a recent report card from an affiliated school.

"Our son is our only child. I'd rather spend it on this than a new Corvette," Ms. Callahan said.

Skimping on Academics?

Although a significant number of students at such high-priced schools come from highly affluent families, some parents mortgage their houses and tap into their children's college savings to pay the tuition.

"My mom literally sacrificed everything. She moved out of the house and in with my sister," said Ryan, an 18-year-old student at Spring Creek who has been enrolled here and at another private alternative school for nearly two years. He entered them after overdosing on drugs three times and doing time in drug-treatment centers. Now, he is sober and has college plans.

While graduation from high school is more than many parents of these teenagers expected, some educators who accredit for-profit alternative schools suggest that parents should be getting more academic bang for their bucks.

"A lot of the for-profit schools are in the business of getting kids and working on behavior and drug rehabilitation, and school is [just] something they have to do," said Connie Love Amos, an educational specialist with the Utah education department, who routinely reviews such schools' accreditation status. "Many are business people and not educators, and they don't understand the importance of education principles," she said.

Ms. Amos is specifically concerned about schools that offer "packet learning" in which students are handed curriculum materials to study on their own. She recalled one school that operated in a strip mall above a laundromat and used a curriculum that was "about as inviting as a tax form."

She also frowns on programs light on formal lectures.

In one of Spring Creek's log-cabin classrooms on a recent day, 13 students pulled out their assignments and began to study in silence. One girl penciled in answers on a U.S. history worksheet while another studied for a geometry test.

While each classroom at Spring Creek has a certified teacher, there are no classwide lessons and no group projects here. Each student works on a different lesson based on an individualized academic plan because every student entered school at a different time. The school plans to add periodic lectures on certain subjects when students need a refresher course on basic skills.

But Mr. Pullan, the school's director, maintains that this independent-study approach fits with the school's self-help philosophy.

For some students, it's a breeze.

"I took 65 tests last week: American Literature, a married-and-single class, and U.S. Government ..." said a 16-year-old girl, as she sped through a dozen more subjects.

She is one of the school's brightest students, Mr. Pullan explained, and her pace is hardly average. Students aren't asked to take more than 12 tests a week, he added.

But while students like her say the school is less than a challenge, others find it much harder. As 15-year-old Ryan flipped open the day's lesson, he admitted it would be easier to understand if he had been taught the material, especially because students must score 80 percent to pass an exam here.

"I like public school better. I was doing well, getting A's and B's. It's hard to give myself my own little lectures," he said.

"Independent study is not the best system for everybody," Mr. Pullan acknowledged. But he said his teachers are available to give students individualized tutorials, which is a benefit that most public school students don't enjoy. And in this disciplined environment--which rewards course completions with social privileges--many students perform far better than they ever did in public schools, he said.

'Prepared for Life'

Some smaller, family-run operations with low student-staff ratios have won praise from education consultants. But while most private alternative schools provide students opportunities to excel academically and go to college, they shouldn't be compared with top prep schools that churn out Ivy Leaguers, Mr. Woodbury, the private school consultant from Idaho, said.

"The number-one priority is to get their heads screwed on straight. The second thing is academics," he said.

"We aren't preparing them for Harvard. We are preparing them for life," added Mr. Pullan.

That couldn't be more true of 18-year-old Brook Tebbs. Little more than two years ago, she was a drug-addicted prostitute living on the streets of Santa Barbara, Calif. "I pawned everything to get heroin. I tried quitting, but I couldn't do it on my own." Finally, her mother hired escorts to take her to drug rehabilitation and then enroll her at Cross Creek School, a private alternative school in Laverkin, Utah, affiliated with Spring Creek. She took self-esteem seminars and participated in group therapy sessions, as well as academic classes. Now, she has an \$18,000-a-year job as a member of the staff at Spring Creek, where she helps usher other troubled adolescents toward graduation.

Ms. Tebbs' calls these schools lifesavers. "It's awesome, because you get credits and there's a lot of support. Now," she said, "I've got all the tools to start all over again from square one."

On the Web

The [Alternative Education Resource Organization](#) has links to other [alternative education sites](#).

PHOTO: Less than two years after opening the Spring Creek School in Thompson Falls, Mont., its owners are rapidly expanding the school's rural, mountainous campus. Similar private, for-profit alternative schools are opening across the country, offering a fresh start to students who have had trouble in public schools. While many states have passed zero-tolerance policies for drug and weapons violations, few have set up enough alternative programs to educate students who are expelled.

--Sandia Gubel

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Public Schools Called Charter Schools

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Outcome-based public schools that operate under a contract between the school and the local school board or the state are called charter schools. They usually have a sponsor, such as a school district, public university, state board of education, or state agency.

Charter schools are an option that 19 states have pursued, in part to encourage closer ties between schools and families. These schools are responsible for improving student achievement over a three- to five-year period. If a charter school does not show improved student performance, it can be closed by the sponsoring agency.

Because charter schools are responsible for improving achievement and because educators know that more involved parents help increase student achievement, many charter schools encourage parents to be deeply involved. A California study (Becker, Nakagawa, & Corwin, 1995) compared charter elementary schools with other elementary schools serving comparable students and found major differences in the ways charter schools work with parents. Although 19 states have adopted charter legislation, the idea remains controversial. Many teachers unions and their leaders express caution and concern about charter schools. For educators and parents seeking to learn more about this alternative, extensive information on charter public schools is available.



References



Charter Schools

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Charter schools are the newest approach designed to put flexibility into the system.

Since Minnesota enacted the first charter school law in 1991, other states have approved a version of the idea. California passed the legislation in 1992; Colorado, Georgia, Massachusetts, New Mexico, and Wisconsin did so in 1993; and Michigan, Kansas, and Hawaii passed legislation in 1994. (Missouri passed legislation allowing three pilots, but because of their pilot status, Missouri is not counted here.)

As of July 1994, at least 96 individual charter schools had been approved in six of these states (ECS Information Clearinghouse, June 1994, draft). Generally, the laws permit local school boards to approve a charter (i.e., a contract) for a local school. Most states require that 50 percent of the teachers within a building approve the idea, and often the charter must be approved by 10 percent of teachers within the whole district. Most states ask that the school be nonsectarian and that it not discriminate in admissions or employment. Colorado specifies that home schools are not eligible. Since the charter school is designed to encourage a wide range of ideas, very few additional rules are mandated. Teachers are usually allowed to retain tenure or employment rights in their home district, but evaluation of the instructional program is open to design by the charter school applicants.

Charter schools run independently of local school districts and are designed to exist outside of most rules and regulations. A charter is essentially a contract, negotiated between those starting the school and the official body in the state empowered to approve the charter. This contract spells out how the school will be run, what will be taught, how success will be measured, and what outcomes will be achieved by the students attending the school. As long as the school meets the terms of its charter, it is free from many of the rules and regulations under which most schools must operate. (Note that some cities - Philadelphia and New York, for example - have called their magnet schools charters. The focus of this discussion is not on magnet schools, but on state-empowered programs.)

A charter is written by a team of individuals interested in establishing the new school. Charters have been granted to parents, teachers, and community organizations. The entity that approves a charter varies from state to state. In some states, the state superintendent approves charters; in other states, the local school board approves charters; and in still other states, such as Michigan, many institutions can approve charters, including institutions of higher education. The school then receives per-pupil funding at or near the level of funding a student in that district would have received in a traditional school. Charter schools:

- Must be nonsectarian
- Are not allowed to violate rules and regulations governing civil rights or health and safety issues
- Are not allowed to charge tuition
- Are not allowed to use admission requirements, in most cases

Questions to Consider

Policymakers or those writing charters should consider the following questions:

- Will these schools serve at-risk students?

- Will the school provide transportation?
- What are the costs to districts of establishing charter schools?
- Will the state allow admission requirements for students (including academic performance, past achievement, or parent participation)?
- Will the schools be allowed to hire nonlicensed and nonunion teachers?
- What support is needed to ensure that potential charters are as strong as possible?
- What mechanisms exist to maintain the accountability of charter schools without curtailing their innovation?
- How will facilities for charter schools be secured?

Charter schools can generate broad political backing. In some states, they have been approved after voucher initiatives failed - appearing to operate as a compromise that strengthens people's choices among schools, while ensuring that resources and students go to public schools. Charter schools effectively empower teachers and parents who are not satisfied with current schools for a variety of reasons.

Charter schools also are intended to encourage innovation and experimentation in education systems that need competition to drive wider reform; however, preliminary data on the types of schools approved suggests that the bold innovations that were expected generally have not materialized.



See also NCREL's Policy Briefs "[Charter Schools Update.](#)" or "[Charter Schools: A New Breed of Public Schools.](#)"



References



Differences in the Ways Charter Schools Work with Parents

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Becker, Nakagawa, and Corwin (1995) compared charter elementary schools with other elementary schools and found differences in the ways that schools worked with parents. In 54 percent of the charter schools, all teachers sent information home to parents explaining school lessons, compared to 24 percent of the other schools. Forty-six percent of the charter schools had all teachers provide suggestions for activities parents can do at home with their children, compared to 16 percent of the other schools. Sixty-one percent of the charter schools had three-fourths or more of the teachers create homework assignments requiring parental involvement, compared to 37 percent of the other schools. Seventy-one percent of the charter schools had a parent contract committing parents to help at school or at home, compared to 8 percent of the other schools.



References

Policy Briefs

Charter Schools: A New Breed of Public Schools

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by R. Craig Sautter, School of New Learning, De Paul University

Editor's Note: In response to increasing regional and national demands for information about Charter Schools, we have developed this special issue of Policy Briefs. The term "Charter School" currently describes an assortment of school organizations. It has become evident that there are many differing opinions and strong feelings about Charter Schools. This Policy Briefs attempts to clarify the definition of Charter Schools and to explore their place in school restructuring and reform efforts by describing existing Charter Schools in Minnesota and California, examining legislative and contract guidelines, and discussing future possibilities of Charter Schools.

During the writing of this report, state legislation about Charter Schools was changing rapidly. A number of states were considering or passing Charter School legislation. Aware of these ongoing changes, NCREL made every attempt to make the contents of this Policy Briefs as accurate and up to date as possible. This Policy Briefs is not intended to be an exhaustive report or an evaluation of the charter concept. We will leave those tasks for future writers to undertake as Charter Schools mature.

The author is R. Craig Sautter of the School of New Learning, De Paul University, who conducted interviews and research. Genevieve Sedlack of NCREL provided extensive copy editing and additional research. External reviewers checked the text for accuracy and clarity, and NCREL thanks them for their time and effort.

Overview

When the City Academy in St. Paul opened its doors to 35 inner-city high school "drop-outs" in September 1992, the Minnesota school became the nation's first legislatively authorized "Charter School."

Charter Schools are sponsor-created and -administered, outcome-based public schools that operate under a contract between the school and the local school board or the state. To establish a Charter School, certified (in Ohio's case, certificated) teachers and/or other individuals or organizations, such as colleges, cultural institutions, government bodies, or parents, draw up plans for an innovative, outcome-based** school. (Minnesota's 1993 charter legislation allows for sponsors other than teachers.)

Originally, Minnesota granted "charters" to new schools if the plans were approved by a designated sponsor, such as a city council, county commission, or university board of regents. As of 1993, local school boards have the authority to approve charters. If a local school board declines to approve a charter, the school may appeal to the state board of education if at least two school board members support the charter. The state board then may authorize--and therefore sponsor--the school. The renewable charters are in effect for three to five years, and the schools are held accountable for achieving their designated outcomes during this time period. The sponsor and the state monitor the process.

Charter Schools are exempt from most state and local laws and regulations, but to gain charter renewal the schools must prove that their students have gained the educational skills that the school and its sponsor specified in the initial contract.

The Nation's First Charter School

With the blessing of St. Paul's mayor and city school system, parents, and private donors, City Academy set up folding tables and chairs in a recreational center on St. Paul's East Side, and began offering

intensive, year- round classes in standard high school subjects ranging from English to physics. Most of the students were minority males who had permanently left the traditional school system.

In that part of the city, as many as 40 percent of the urban youth are unemployed and out of school. City Academy is exploring new ways to retrieve, support, and educate a portion of the students who are considered the hardest to reach and teach.

City Academy's teachers want to help students learn foundation skills and to guide them through traditional subjects such as algebra and composition so that the students are prepared for advanced study. Toward this end, City Academy teachers improvise an interdisciplinary approach within the standard academic divisions and use multiculturally sensitive texts.

City Academy's innovation lies in its approach. The Charter School reaches youngsters through personal appeals and individual attention in a small, intimate setting. This strategy is reinforced through each student's interaction with a student support group at the school.

"One of the keys to our early success is our size," says Milo J. Cutter, a City Academy founding teacher. "We are small enough to give these students the attention they need and deserve. It makes a big difference." (see Reflections on Nation's First Charter School)

Early Progress

The students at the St. Paul City Academy are actively involved in setting school rules and running the program. Many of the students even assisted in the design of City Academy's charter plans and application. Since City Academy opened in the fall, every one of the former "dropouts" has made academic progress.

All of the students have elevated their sights toward postsecondary education after City Academy. The small Charter School and its teachers have rekindled academic and personal ambitions; several of the former "at-risk" students are already taking part-time college courses through the Minnesota Postsecondary Education Option Program while they complete their high school diplomas at City Academy. City Academy has given students both the skills and the confidence to succeed.

From a founding teacher's perspective, Charter Schools deliver several benefits. "Besides having the chance to create a school that takes into account the approaches we know will work," Cutter says, "the biggest benefit is that we are held accountable. For us, accountability is a daily concern. We listen to what the students want and need, because we ask them. And each day we ask ourselves if we are doing things the best way we can.

"We also have the flexibility to respond," she adds. "We can change the curriculum to meet these needs as soon as we see them. Anywhere else it would take a year to change. It is much better than anything we have known in the traditional setting."

Reform Impact

The concept of Charter Schools may be one of the most powerful and promising to emerge from the school reform movement of the past decade, and the lessons learned by City Academy should prove valuable for redefining educational roles and stimulating change in other public schools. Charter Schools provide a real mechanism for change by creating new kinds of schools within the public domain. With Charter Schools, policymakers trade regulations and direct administrative control for genuine innovation and measurable results as outlined in the charter contract. As one of the legislative authors, Minnesota state Representative Becky Kelso expresses it, "The gift of Charter Schools is the gift of freedom."

If student outcomes are not satisfactory to the sponsor that granted the original charter, the charter need not be renewed. A new plan and a new charter can be granted by the board to a new group of sponsors. Accountability is a central issue.

"The Charter School idea offers a way to broaden quality choice within public education," says Ted Kolderie, senior associate at the Center for Policy Studies in Minneapolis. "It offers a middle way between traditional public education and the 'choice' proposals that use vouchers for private education."

Some public education veterans agree. "Public schooling should not be the exclusive domain of school districts," argues Carlos M. Medina, the former New York City School District #4 superintendent who helped establish innovative schools such as Central Park East. "There are many institutions within school district communities that can educationally serve children well," says Medina, who is now a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute's Center for Educational Innovation, where he helps develop new kinds of public schools. "Community institutions like schools of education and museums and others should be given an opportunity to be part of the school community."

"Charter Schools are a small piece of the reform strategies we are using in Minnesota--not a cure-all," notes Gene Mammenga, Minnesota Commissioner of Education. "If charters divert our attention and reformers believe that they don't have to devote as much energy to systemic change in the public schools, then they will not have served a good purpose."

It is unlikely that every student who attends a Charter School over the next decade will aspire to college or trade school, or even successfully graduate with the skills that he or she needs to survive in today's hyper-competitive economy, where knowledge and skills are key to social autonomy or financial prosperity. And over the next few years, some Charter Schools may utterly fail at the innovations they try to introduce. Personalities, financial strains, and social forces could intervene to blur the goal of a better education for all charter students. However, with renewable charters, the schools that do not meet their goals can be replaced by other charters that have learned from past mistakes.

Support for Charters

Leading National Government Officials

In addition to state-level interest, Charter Schools are gaining the attention and support of the nation's leading government officials. Both President Clinton and Secretary of Education Richard Riley advocate public Charter Schools. Additionally, in 1992 Senators David Durenberger (R-Minn) and Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn) introduced bipartisan congressional legislation to help fund Charter School start-ups. The legislation, along with the entire school reform package, was overshadowed by the Presidential election and died in Congress in 1992.

Durenberger and Lieberman have reintroduced Charter School legislation to the 103rd Congress as the Public School Redefinition Act.*** House sponsors of the bill include Representatives Dave McCurdy (D-Okla), Tom Petri (R-Wis), Tim Penny (D-Minn), and Tom Ridge (R-Pa). Major provisions of the bill include the following:

- States that have charters may receive grants to help finance start-up costs for new charter schools.
- Grants can be used for planning, equipment, and other start-up costs, including minor building renovation to meet local health and safety requirements, but not for major renovation.
- Grants may last up to three years.
- Schools must provide a 10-percent match for the grant in the first year and a 25-percent match in both the second and third years.
- States must have the power to revoke grants from schools that are not making adequate progress toward meeting outcomes.
- The Public School Redefinition Act would seek \$50 million for fiscal year 1994 and \$75 million for FY 1995, and "such sums as may be necessary" in succeeding years.

In 1993, Congress considers the comprehensive Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Public School Redefinition Act, which is folded into it. Establishing Charter Schools was explicitly included as one permissible use of funds proposed for state reform efforts in Clinton's Goals 2000: Educate America Act, submitted to Congress in spring 1993 with the statement that a state may use funds toward "promoting public magnet schools, public 'Charter Schools,' and other mechanisms for increasing choice among public schools."

Reform Advocates

"Charter Schools represent a very appealing idea for legislators," asserts Kolderie, an early charter advocate. "Legislators are frustrated about the difficulty of getting change or improvement in public schools. They don't know how to get change in a system that they don't own and control. They basically buy education from these districts. They set certain specifications and provide money and, in effect, have a contract with the district to do this job on behalf of the state and its constitutional responsibility.

"But it doesn't happen to the state's satisfaction and state people don't know what to do about it. When they put out more money, it is taken up. But not much changes. Getting angry--giving orders--doesn't work either.

"The states have always been told that the only choice they have is between sending checks to superintendents and giving vouchers to parents. All of a sudden they discover that is not true. It is possible to have very different schools still within the principles of public education. This has been a real liberating idea for them. All it takes is to say it is O.K. for someone else to offer public education in the community."

Although the concept is evolving, Charter Schools also hold potential for unleashing teacher creativity and yielding new ideas about how to restructure the educational experience of elementary and secondary students. Within a decade, literally hundreds of Charter Schools could offer public education new approaches to teaching and learning.

The work of these Charter Schools is certain to influence the next phase of education reform and school restructuring as educators try to redefine the American public school for the next century by giving other public schools real incentive to improve.

"The object of Charter Schools is not just to create a few good new schools," Kolderie insists. "The object is to improve all schools. Districts do not want to lose kids and the money that comes with them. They will make improvements themselves to attract kids back from Charter Schools, or they may make improvements before a charter even appears."

Charter School Possibilities

During the next decade, Charter Schools could be established to promote a number of important educational goals, including increased access to innovative programs for traditionally underserved students, improved quality, and significant classroom restructuring. Here are a few other possibilities:

- **Reaching dropouts.** Following the City Academy example, whole school districts or independent Charter Schools could establish small learning centers with intensive teacher/student interaction as a way to bring back students who have walked away from traditional classrooms.
- **Replacing failing schools.** Policymakers could aggressively use Charter Schools to replace decimated and low-performing schools. The state could shut down failing and mediocre schools and take bids from groups of teachers, parents, public institutions like museums, or other educational entrepreneurs. They could then open one public Charter School with tough new standards of quality for every public school they close. Some states already put their worst performing schools and/or districts on probationary lists (e.g., Iowa puts the district on probation); the next step is often the threat of a state takeover. (Actually, states seldom have taken over failing schools or districts, because most states do not have the time, staff, or resources to do so, but some

states are considering the idea.)

- **Dealing with the next boomlet.** Between 1993 and 2003, total elementary school enrollment is predicted to rise by 12 percent, to 38.5 million students. (Projection of Education Statistic to 1993, DOE) Secondary school enrollment could increase by 25 percent, to 15.7 million students by 2003. Instead of developing more of the same old kinds of schools, we can use this enrollment bubble as a perfect opportunity to introduce hundreds of Charter Schools into the public system mix--and Charter Schools could prove far less expensive than current schools.
- **Innovating learning.** Charter Schools offer a controlled testing ground for developing a new kind of public school for the new century and introducing new educational models and options for educators. They may provide electronic learning rooms or small learning clusters spread across distances and electronically linked into homes and the world. They may prepare students for a multilingual society, incorporate internships and apprenticeships, overcome the problems of resource depletion and rural isolation or urban decay, or spawn a new literacy and new pride in learning. We don't know yet. But Charter Schools can test these and other alternative learning suggestions in real world situations.
- **Solving problems flexibly.** Because they are adaptable and most often small, Charter Schools can be designed specifically to address any of the problems that diminish student success. For example:
- **Reading academies.** Reading academies could address problems such as "the fourth grade reading slump" to make sure students gain the skills they need at this critical time to progress in school. Likewise, charter teachers might create reading academies for high school students to increase their exposure to the variety of American and world literature and to challenge them to become critical readers instead of minimal performers who are overwhelmed if they go on to college. Charter high school reading academies might be well-suited to either high- or low-achievers who take a year to explore as many books as they can.
- **Parent learning partners.** Research shows that parental involvement is a key to learning. A new Charter School might bring parents into the classroom every day to work with their young children from the beginning of the child's school experience. Parents who want to spend more time with their young children might become their permanent teachers and co-learners in the years ahead.
- **Corporate towers and city hall.** Instead of simply participating in an "Adopt-A-School" program, businesses could house small charters in their corporate towers and develop real-life apprenticeships with their workers during part of the day. City Hall might have a few meeting rooms for a junior year civics courses as part of the Charter School program, where students follow city legislation and explore how government agencies work.

Educators have scores of good ideas that can now be tested in small charter environments. Charter Schools, with their small sizes and flexibility, hold many possibilities for future schools. Public schools will be able to choose from the best methods. Charter Schools' success may prove to be limited only by the creators' ingenuity and willingness to change and restructure our "traditional" schools.

Pressure for Change

In the past, it has taken as long as 27 years--a whole generation of teachers--for some major teaching innovations to take hold in the current system of U.S. classrooms. However, at this point, the public has invested in reform for a decade. Citizens want to see improved schools, and pressures are building to accelerate education reform or abandon it altogether. Letting "somebody else" offer public education through Charter Schools could accelerate that rate of change and have enormous impact on how all schools operate. How charters are used in the future, however, may depend upon their success in states where they are first being tested. A closer look at these states may provide clues for the future of Charter Schools:

Minnesota's Legislation

City Academy came into existence as a result of Minnesota's historic 1991 Charter School legislation, the first in the nation. The pioneering charter law called for up to eight teacher-created and -operated, outcome-based Charter Schools across the state that would be free of most state laws and state and local education rules. Renewable Minnesota charters would be granted for three years.

In 1993, new Minnesota charter legislation authorized existing public schools to become charters if 90 percent of a school's teachers supported the action. A 1993 amendment now allows the state board to approve Charter Schools without local board approval in some situations.

Choice Context

The idea of Charter Schools arose, in part, out of the statewide debate over school choice. Between 1985 and 1988, Minnesota began to enhance its reputation as an educational innovator when it became the first state to pass statewide public school choice legislation. Minnesota legislators hoped that Charter Schools would expand the number of real educational choices available to students and their parents. Charter Schools were intended to complement Minnesota's parental choice system to create a choice option not dependent on vouchers.

In spring 1993, Minnesota Governor Carlson sent legislators a letter urging them to "take the cap off" charter schools and authorize an unrestricted number. The legislature expanded the number of available statewide charters from 8 to 20. With this limit, the choice options still will not directly affect the vast majority of Minnesota students, but the legislation has opened the way for a school board on its own initiative to convert an existing school from administered to charter status.

Minnesota's First Charter Schools

By spring 1993, more than 20 Minnesota Charter School proposals had been designed by groups of teachers and their supporters. The first 8 slots allowed by law were approved by local school boards and the state board of education. Other than City Academy, the Charter Schools are:

- The Bluffview Montessori School (Winona) for K-6 students was the first school to receive charter approval. It was a private school for three years before converting to a public Charter School, and its application caused considerable controversy. Parents tried to convince the school system several years ago to have a Montessori option as in Minneapolis and St. Paul, but the Winona district wasn't interested. (In California, private schools are prohibited from converting to public charters.) It opened in spring 1993.
- Metro Deaf School (Wyoming) will allow students to learn in American Sign Language with English as a second language. The school also will offer families courses in deaf language, culture, and history. It is planning to open in fall 1993.
- New Heights Schools, Inc. (suburban Stillwater area) for "at-risk" pre-K-12 students will include a strong parent component of daily home lessons developed by parents and teachers. Teachers will be paid based on merit. It will open in fall 1993.
- The Skills of Tomorrow Charter High School (Minneapolis) will concentrate on vocational/technical skills applied in the context of business and industry apprenticeships. The school has the backing of the Teamsters Service Bureau and will open in fall 1993.
- St. Paul Community School--its temporary name--will serve students in grades 1-12 with a holistic approach to learning. Students will help design their own courses of study and use the community as a classroom. The school will open in fall 1993.
- The Toivola-Meadowlands School (rural northeastern Minnesota) is designed to serve K-12

students, with a multi-age, multi-activity program focused on environmental themes. It is an existing school that will convert to charter status in fall 1993.

- West Bank Community School (Minneapolis) will be a K-8 school with a parent-friendly environment. It will affirm the values of its multi-ethnic and cultural community and draw upon community members' skills and knowledge, as well as the resources of two local universities, to enhance the students' educational experiences. It seeks to hire teachers who agree to live in the neighborhood. The school is scheduled to open in fall 1993.

"The people who come together to form a charter are extremely committed," says Peggy O. Hunter, Enrollment Options Coordinator for the Minnesota Department of Education and Director of the state charter program. "They have overcome many barriers and have been very persistent and resourceful. Some have remained part of a Charter School network even after their charter requests were turned down by the local school board. They show commitment and tenacity for improving the learning environment for learners. They have an incredible excitement about learning and are so student-centered. It is wonderful to work with people who are determined to improve the education opportunities for children."

Initial Problems

One of the legislative purposes of charters is to stimulate competition between public charter and traditional schools. Critics charge that several strong charter proposals were denied by local Minnesota school boards who hold the power to block charters and reputedly feared this competition.

Local boards may block new charters because they do not want state funds to be diverted from their existing public schools on an average daily per pupil basis to the Charter Schools. In these cases, school boards can vote to block the new charters. In one case, the state board of education denied a charter request by a group of rural parents and teachers who were trying to save their small school from closing.

"The school boards are not really ready to let go of mainstream kids they want to keep," explains Kolderie, "so they tend to kill proposals for Charter Schools that move toward mainstream kids. However the boards are not reluctant to let others try with kids with whom they haven't succeeded."

Minnesota legislators want a variety of Charter School models that will influence change in existing public schools. But the majority of the first wave of Minnesota charters went to schools that, like City Academy, want to educate children and teens who have not been well-served by traditional programs. Approximately half of the original charter proposals were targeted toward these youngsters.

Charter Issues, Charter Interest

Some of the characteristics of the Charter School idea are now being extended to other schools. In spring 1993, the Minnesota state board of education and the state legislature decided to free an entire school district that applies for waivers from all but the most basic state regulations. The waivers are from state board rules--not state or federal law; therefore, health, safety, civil rights, and special education regulations have not been waived. The state board can revoke the waivers at any time. Districts can take actions such as altering class sizes, the school day, and teacher work rules. The state board actually has been waiving rules for several years, but more schools and districts are beginning to ask for waivers.

One district experimenting with this new freedom is North Branch, approximately 40 miles north of Minneapolis-St. Paul. After petitioning for waivers in response to the Charter School legislation, the district was granted three-year waivers to prompt innovation. The school district argued that it could compete with any Charter School, but needed a level playing field. Other districts are watching the results closely.

Some Minnesota legislators want to find additional ways to authorize charters so that local school boards cannot block innovation. In states that are considering charter legislation, central issues of debate include the number of charters that should be granted, types of charter sponsorships, and appeal processes for blocked or rejected charters.

Two additional changes have been made in Minnesota with the 1993 amendment:

- If an application is rejected by a school board but does have two votes of the school board, the applicants can appeal to the state board. If the state board approves, it sponsors the school.
- A Charter School may not be a means to keep open a school that would otherwise be closed.

California's Charter Law

As early as 1983, the California legislature mandated higher standards, revamped curriculum frameworks, lengthened the school day and year, established mentor teacher programs, improved textbooks, and set up teacher accountability systems. In recent years, the state also has passed laws to create more school-based management systems and teacher career opportunities and to promote school restructuring.

Yet, legislators and educators were dissatisfied with student learning progress resulting from these changes. The charter originally was proposed in 1987-88 by California public school educators frustrated by bureaucracy and eager to have real freedom with accountability. A year after Minnesota enacted its charter law, California passed legislation authorizing up to 100 Charter Schools beginning in 1993.

California's charter law seeks to:

- improve student learning
- increase learning opportunities for all students, particularly for academically low-achieving students
- encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods
- increase professional opportunities for teachers
- provide students and families with expanded educational choices
- hold schools accountable for meeting measurable outcomes
- shift from a rule-based to a performance-based system of accountability.

However, a referendum on tax-financed vouchers that will be on California's general election ballot in November is threatening the future of California's Charter Schools. The referendum would allow parents to pay for private schooling with vouchers. If the referendum passes, it may make the current California law on charters obsolete, according to Les Martisko, Executive Director of the South Central Education Cooperative Service Unit (SC/ECSU) in North Mankato, Minnesota. A July 8 article from the "Report on Education of the Disadvantaged" also notes that the National Education Association (NEA), which opposes vouchers on the basis that they would prompt the removal of the most advantaged pupils from public schools and isolate at-risk students, is spending \$1 million to battle the voucher referendum in California.

New and Converted Charters

In some cases, California Charter Schools might be entirely new schools, but the legislature tends to assume that they will be converted from current public schools, based on an approved plan of significant change.

Minnesota now allows persons other than teachers to form and operate an outcome-based Charter School. But teachers still must make up the majority of the school's board of directors. Teachers can

form a cooperative that negotiates a contract with the Charter School to provide instruction. California law allows other responsible groups such as parents and business and community leaders to organize a school, but at least 50 percent of teachers in a school must sign a petition to charter before a school can be considered for charter conversion.

Renewable California charters are granted for five-year periods, and the charter can be revoked by the local board if a school does not live up to its agreement. The Charter Schools do not become legally independent school districts as in Minnesota. They are, however, relieved of local rules and regulations, and entire school districts in California can petition to become charter districts.

The California State Board of Education, unlike the state board in Minnesota, cannot veto a charter proposal that gains local approval. The state simply publicizes the charter initiative and keeps track of charter applications, giving each a number and cutting off applications after 100 have received local approval (10 within a single district). The responsibility for quality control rests at the local level. California law also allows the sponsor of a proposal that is denied at the local level to appeal to the county board of education.

"This is the most important education reform measure to be enacted in recent years," says California State Senator Gary K. Hart (D-Santa Barbara), the law's chief sponsor. "It will give our educators a real opportunity for innovation by allowing them to create new public schools which focus on student outcomes without compromising the integrity of the public education system."

However, only a few of the first California charter applications to the state demonstrated much innovation, perhaps because some were "placeholder" applications. Potential charter teachers and local school districts put in quick applications so that they could be among the first 100, and are spending a year working out their plans. It is expected that at least four California Charter Schools will open in 1993.

California Models

Here is a glance at some early charter plans submitted to the state:

- The San Carlos School District was the first to register a Charter School with the state. It proposes to create the San Carlos Community School, a small K-8 charter where schooling is "viewed as one aspect of education, the entire community serves as the campus, and the school acts as a headquarters." The school will open in the fall of 1994.
- The Bennett Valley Charter School will educate K-6 students through home-based independent learning programs, cooperative schools, and supplemental learning projects.
- Cotati-Rohnert Park Unified School District plans to create a new school for grades 6 through 12 to develop skills and proficiencies in general education, computer literacy, physical education, community service, global awareness, environmental awareness, citizenship, daily survival, and the workplace. The school will take a thematic, project-oriented approach, which will make use of cross-grade level and cross-generational tutoring, apprenticeship programs, and programs coordinated with local institutions of higher education and business. Classes will be conducted four days a week, with a fifth day devoted to tutorials, parent conferences, workshops, and teacher planning. Parental involvement will be required. The school will open in spring 1994.
- The El Dorado Charter Community School in Placerville will be a converted school with a "Differentiated Educational Plan" for each student, and project-oriented, technology-based learning. The Charter School will be aimed at students who are not successful in traditional education environments. It will open in September 1993.

Radical Deregulation

California's charter legislation already has bipartisan support, but Pete Wilson, the state's Republican

governor who signed the law, doesn't want to stop at 100 Charter Schools. He would like to see all of the state's public schools converted to outcome-based Charter Schools.

According to Governor Wilson (January 1993, "California Reports" speech), "There are a lot of rules we need to change, because to fix our schools, we must free our schools We want to free imaginative and dedicated educators to provide a charter for an individual school unfettered by the more than 7,000 pages of code requirements.

"Last year, I signed legislation creating up to 100 such Charter Schools," the governor explained. "This year, I propose we expand that program to move from Charter Schools to charter districts. And if charter districts succeed, let California become a charter state and again lead the nation in reform and innovation."

Given the turmoil in California schools resulting from a decade of budget problems, more legislators could find themselves voting for the Governor's plan. But for now, most California legislators simply want to know how well the first group of Charter Schools work and what new models and suggestions they offer for school restructuring.

Trading Flexibility for Outcomes

"For California, the essence of Charter Schools is the notion of trading flexibility for accountability," observes Merrill Vargo, director of regional programs and special projects at the California Department of Education. "We are not cutting schools free and saying, 'Anything goes, here's a check from the state and good luck.' The idea is to free schools from some of the regulations, especially those that focus on process and procedure, and instead hold schools accountable for outcomes.

"Charter Schools will have to meet ambitious goals of student learning," she continues. "We hope that schools will find a way to do that. We also want to find a way to hold schools accountable for outcomes. If we can't, then we really need to live with the rules and tune them up. The California experiment is about shifting from a rule-based to an outcome-based accountability system."

Cautions and Concerns about Charter Schools

Charter Schools are not without their critics or cautionary arguments. Policymakers need to be sensitive to these often legitimate fears when they craft legislation or act on a charter request.

Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), was an early proponent in 1988 of the concept of charter schools:

Districts could create joint school board-union panels that would review preliminary proposals and help find seed money for the teachers to develop final proposals. The panels would then issue charters to these groups and commit themselves to trying to waive for the charter schools certain regulations that legitimately stand in the way of implementing their proposal, if the faculty so argue. The faculty also would be allocated their share of the per pupil budget spent in other schools, as well as the space and resources they might ordinarily have. All of this would be voluntary. No teacher would have to participate, and parents would choose whether or not to send their children to a charter school.

Since then, numerous teachers' union members and their leaders have supported the charter concept or helped create charters, but their support often is restricted by questions about the definition of Charter Schools, which schools are involved, and regulations.

Many teachers' unions at state and national levels also fear that Charter Schools are just another covert attempt by enemies of public education to break up a system that is still the best in the world at educating students of diverse backgrounds and multiple needs. (This concern was noted earlier in the NEA's opposition to California's proposed voucher legislation).

The unions wonder whether the benefits of Charter Schools have been over-promised. And while some

Minnesota Education Association (MEA) members have sponsored Charter School proposals, Robert E. Astrup, president of the MEA, warns that Charter Schools "may turn out to be the biggest boondoggle since New Coke."

Both NEA and AFT worry that charters will be used to reverse years of hard-earned gains for the millions of students and teachers who benefit from the tradition of universal public education. "Charters could be used as a tool to try to bust teacher unions," says Janet Bass, an American Federation of Teachers spokesperson who notes that the union's position on Charter Schools is still evolving.

Although charters promise certain forms of teacher empowerment, they also could lead to greater teacher impoverishment. Charter teacher salaries and benefits are not bound by previous collective bargaining agreements. Unions caution policymakers to resist any effort to make Charter Schools part of a tactic to reduce teacher pay to save money. Given the relative inequity that already exists between teacher pay and that of other professions, that scheme can only have negative long-term educational consequences.

Astrup also argues that a decade of school reform has already generated plenty of innovations that will eventually reach most students and teachers. He says that schools are changing and need more financial aid, not a fancy program that diverts money from under-funded schools and personnel. "Charter Schools drain state resources and attempt to duplicate the efforts that are currently under way in many existing districts," Astrup warns.

What would be the result if a state like California turned all of its schools into charters? Such a move would represent an instant and radical deregulation that could work against state efforts to improve schools in other ways. Complete deregulation could mark a loss of state accountability and could trap individual schools in funding inequities that deprive many poorer children of their educational right to equal access to quality learning.

Are charters on the leading edge of a back to greater local control movement? Can decentralization on the state level work without significant abuses of the public trust? These are issues that policymakers must study in detail as the first wave of Charter Schools rolls over the nation.

A National Trend

In addition to California and Minnesota, at least 15 states from coast to coast have already introduced, debated, or passed charter legislation, including Alaska, Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, Massachusetts, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Washington, and Wisconsin. In 1993, Colorado, Georgia, and New Mexico adopted Charter School laws. In late May, the Massachusetts legislature was very seriously considering the idea. In the NCREL region, the governors of Michigan and Wisconsin have strongly urged action on the charter experiment.

Other north central states such as Indiana, Iowa, and Ohio, are devising or have enacted new routes that allow current schools to receive waivers from state laws and regulations when they redefine their missions and educational methods to reinvent their schools. Ohio is implementing both interdistrict and intradistrict open enrollment, and grants waivers for innovative programs. In Iowa, the school district must define performance outcomes and a way to measure the expectations in order to receive a waiver.

St. Paul City Academy is the nation's first state authorized Charter School, but it certainly won't be the last. So much interest is being shown in Charter Schools across the nation that they clearly have become an instrument of public education policy.

But the real debate has just begun over how best to use Charter Schools as a strategy for public school change, how to stimulate the most innovation, how to protect charter students and teachers, and what charters teach all schools about redefining their missions of teaching and learning.

Les Martisko, executive director for the South Central Educational Cooperative Service Unit (SC/ECSU) in North Mankato, Minnesota, agrees with others who feel that the greatest benefit from Charter Schools is the pressure placed on the rest of the system. Whether Charter Schools themselves

will meet their expectations is questionable. "It's like the mosquito biting the elephant. It keeps the elephant moving but it doesn't change the elephant. And the mosquito dies after a few bites."

In the end, Charter Schools may be able to inspire ambitious teachers, educators, and reformers who are looking for models of innovation to give students valuable and exciting educational experiences. One thing is certain, Charter Schools offer policymakers what could turn out to be a dynamic tool for public education experimentation and change.

What are Charter Schools? A Definition

What exactly are Charter Schools? The strict definition is rather straightforward. State-legislated Charter Schools are legally independent, innovative, outcome-based, public schools. Common characteristics include:

- **Legislatively authorized**

Independent Charter Schools require state legislation to authorize their existence. The legislation outlines general specifications and requirements for establishing a Charter School in a state, and regulates the number of Charter Schools permitted statewide. The process may be used to create a new school or to empower an existing school.

- **Teacher initiated**

Teachers or organizers follow state guidelines when they submit their plans for a Charter School to a local board of education or other sponsor. The sponsor grants or denies a "charter" to operate. These agreements may or may not require the final approval of the state board of education.

- **Independent school districts**

In some states, once these schools receive their charters they organize as a discrete legal entity--often but not always a nonprofit corporation--and operate almost as an autonomous school district. Some advocates say that this aspect of Charter Schools is a key to differentiating a Charter School from an existing district's alternative school.

- **Public schools**

Charter Schools are public schools. They are mandated to teach all students, not just gifted or well-financed students. They may not charge tuition. Admission cannot be limited by any intellectual or athletic characteristic. They are bound by all civil rights provisions. And when demand for admission exceeds the number of slots, students are chosen randomly by lot. They may not have a religious affiliation.

- **Not magnets**

Charter Schools are not magnet schools. Students don't have to show special skills or pass tests for admission as is the case in some magnets. However, Charter Schools may target certain enduring learning problems, developmental needs, or educational possibilities. They have specific organizing themes and educational philosophies that guide their work. So, like magnet schools, students may be attracted by the educational idea and vision that guides the learning experience offered by a Charter School.

- **Outcome-based**

The original charter, which is negotiated and signed between a Charter School's founding teachers and supporters and the sponsor, sets forth detailed conditions and expectations for an outcome-based school.

Outcome-based means that students must demonstrate what they have learned and know before they move forward in their diverse studies. The goal is to prove active student competence and knowledge in diverse subjects rather than merely record attendance and effort at learning.

- Models for change

From the legislative point of view, innovation is a key component of the Charter School strategy. In Minnesota, for example, the legislative intent is that charters be signed only for innovative school plans or for schools that more effectively reach out to educate students who have been underserved in the past. Thus, Charter Schools are intended to be labs of educational experimentation in these areas aimed at developing new teaching and learning strategies and approaches that can be utilized in other traditional public schools.

- Waivers

In exchange for their innovative and carefully outlined outcome-based plans and community support, Charter Schools receive waivers from state laws and from many state and local administrative rules that can hamper innovation, such as rules mandating the amount of time that a class must spend on a particular subject or how the subject is taught. Since Charter Schools are treated as independent entities, they are not required to report on a daily basis to the local school board that grants them the charter. Charter Schools do not receive waivers from safety, health, dismissal, or civil rights regulations, nor do they escape state testing and report card mechanisms that can keep track of their real progress. However, charters set their own conditions for teacher work rules and salaries.

- Revenue

The basic idea is for students to bring the average funds per pupil with them from their previous district for Charter School to use. Thus, when students move from traditional public schools to charter public schools, money follows. The old school districts lose those dollars to the Charter Schools. To retain that money, legislative advocates say, the traditional public schools will have to improve their educational programs so that they are more attractive to students and their families.

Conversely, when students who have dropped out or have gone off to private schools come back into a Charter School, as in the case of City Academy, their old district is unaffected. Then the Charter School brings additional dollars into the local education arena. The 1993 Minnesota legislation prohibits raising funds for start-up costs through grants or contributions.

- Limited term

Charter Schools are performance-oriented. Renewable charters usually are granted by the local school board for a period of three to five years, depending upon state legislation. Charter Schools must produce student improvement and performance or perish.

Local Charter Schools-Within-Schools

It is worth noting that another version called Charter Schools is not directly related to the legislatively authorized Charter Schools described in this brief. These are local charter schools-within-schools. At local levels throughout the country, education reformers have launched schools-within-schools that predate the legislatively authorized independent Charter Schools.

For example, since 1989, charter schools-within-schools fever has swept through the old high schools of Philadelphia. In just four years, 95 charter schools- within-schools have been opened in the city's 22 comprehensive high schools.

"We were here first," notes Michelle Fine, a professor at City University of New York's Graduate Center. She served as the designing consultant for the Philadelphia Collaborative, which assists in

charter formation. "We were using the language of Charter Schools before state legislation was passed in Minnesota or California."

Joe Nathan, Senior Fellow and Director of the Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota and an expert on choice, makes a distinction: Choice is central to the concept of Charter Schools in California, Minnesota, and other states where they are authorized by the legislature. However, this concept represents a big difference from Philadelphia's charter schools-within-schools. "Many of Philadelphia's schools-within-schools are not options. Students are assigned to them," says Nathan.

AFT-Inspired

The Philadelphia charter movement began with a reform mandate from Superintendent Constance Clayton. Fine borrowed the Charter School terminology from American Federation of Teachers President Albert Shanker, who used the term in a 1988 National Press Club speech calling for a new kind of public school in which teachers make curriculum decisions, team-teach, and have a greater role in school management.

Shanker urged a move to "charter schools" that would concentrate on professional development, cooperative learning, and teacher-as-coach, and that would exhibit a strong commitment to producing improved student outcomes.

Philadelphia charter schools-within-schools break the large, comprehensive urban high schools into manageable learning families of 200 to 400 students. Students work with the same 8 to 12 teachers over a four-year period. According to the Philadelphia Public Schools Student Information office, as of July 1993 approximately 65 percent of all high school students and 1,500 teachers are learning and teaching in these charter schools- within-schools.

Charter Themes

Some of the Philadelphia charter schools-within-schools are connected to the Coalition of Essential Schools, which tries to simplify the number of course offerings, but teaches the courses in greater depth. Some schools work with corporations and businesses to study themes such as international relations and tourism. Some are linked to local universities. Some focus on the school's relationship with its community, and students conduct community surveys, ethnic analysis, and multicultural studies. Others focus on marketing, horticulture, writing, arts, or science.

Teachers work with regular and special education students and multiple academic levels together. The teacher team has common preparation time--unusual in most schools. All of the charter schools-within-schools use interdisciplinary teaching and learning strategies.

"Most of the Charter Schools get their teachers involved in professional development around outcome-based assessment," says Fine. "They decide exactly what they want their graduates to know and then work in those areas. Charter teachers are experimenting with much more collaborative work and performance-based assessment than before the charters arrived."

Similarities and Differences

The Philadelphia charter schools-within-schools are created and planned by teachers, but the Minnesota Charter Schools are no longer so restricted as to their sponsors. Both strive for innovation and a student-centered learning experience.

However, Philadelphia charter schools-within-schools are not independent legal entities. Teachers do not sign a formal agreement based on their plans, nor are the Philadelphia charter schools-within-schools limited by time or held more accountable for student outcomes than other public schools. Philadelphia's charter schools- within-schools also are not bound by a renewable performance-based contract, so there is no mechanism for revoking the charter when it is not living up to anticipated results.

In Philadelphia, local charter schools-within-schools remain part of the central system and must contend with central administrative regulations, work rules, and power struggles. "The bureaucracy is the big problem in all these large cities," observes Fine.

The Philadelphia charter schools-within-schools know from the data they have assembled that their approach is starting to work. More students come to class and more students pass their subjects in the charter environment than before. A district study showed that the 20,898 students in the smaller charter units attended class more frequently and gained better grades than their 18,905 fellow students attending traditional comprehensive high schools. Charter students had a daily attendance rate of 79.3 percent versus the 73.5 percent for other comprehensive high school students. Approximately 71 percent of the charter students passed their English classes, compared to approximately 62 percent of noncharter comprehensive high school students. In mathematics, 65 percent of charter students gained passing grades, versus 60 percent of noncharter comprehensive high school students. Both kinds of charter schools clearly offer important lessons for school reformers and policymakers.

*This *Policy Brief* was written by R. Craig Sautter, who teaches courses in philosophy, politics, literature, and creative writing in the School for New Learning at DePaul University in Chicago. He cowrote "An Agenda for the Reform of the Chicago Public Schools," the final report of Mayor Harold Washington's Education Summit. He also collaborated with Edward Fiske and Sally Reed on *Smart Schools, Smart Kids*, Simon and Schuster, 1991.

**Note: Ohio does not use the term outcome-based, but prefers performance-based.

***The bill went to the House floor in July. Based on an interview by R. Craig Sautter

A Governor Speaks on Charter Schools

Tommy G. Thompson, Governor, State of Wisconsin Excerpted from the January 21, 1993, address to the Wisconsin Education Convention

In 1993, Wisconsin officially joined the growing list of states debating Charter Schools as a way to promote greater innovation in public education. Governor Thompson introduced provisions for charters as part of his 1993- 1994 state budget recommendations. Here are some of his thoughts on Charter Schools.

"I want to give school districts and teachers flexibility in designing innovative schools," the Governor said. "My budget includes a Charter Schools initiative to allow school districts to design innovative educational programs.

"Under the initiative, a school district could contract with a Charter School, or convert all its schools to Charter Schools. These new schools would be exempt from many state laws, with the exception of the school report card and state wide assessments. Existing private schools will be prohibited from becoming Charter Schools.

"Currently, Minnesota and California are experimenting with Charter Schools, and at least nine other states have proposals pending. We don't want to be left behind.

"I envision Charter Schools to be what former education secretary Lamar Alexander described as 'breaking the mold schools.' Our schools really haven't changed all that much since the days that many of us went to school. Yet, the work force and the world have changed dramatically.

"School boards, administrators, and teachers too often find themselves stymied as they attempt to bring our schools into the 21st century. As a result, children are left behind. As leaders, we need the flexibility that Charter Schools offer . . . opportunities virtually free of mandates.

"Charter Schools say to parents, teachers, principals, administrators, and boards, 'We trust you. You know what's best for your children. Let's place real decisionmaking power into your hands.' This proposal will help schools be more innovative and therefore more responsive to student needs."

Wisconsin Legislation

Wisconsin just passed legislation on Charter Schools in July 1993, as the Governor had urged in his January 1993 address. This legislation authorizes a school board, on its own initiative or by a petition meeting certain conditions, to request approval from the state superintendent to establish one or more Charter Schools in the school district. A Charter School would be exempt from all laws governing public schools except the requirement to participate in the state's pupil assessment program and to be included in the school district's annual school performance report. The Charter Schools are allowed to be established in no more than ten school districts. The students enrolled in a Charter School also would be included in a school district's membership for state aid purposes.

Requirements

If a Charter School replaces a public school in whole or in part, the school must give preferences to any pupil residing within the attendance area of the former school. Charter Schools also must be nonsectarian in their programs, admissions policies, employment practices, and other operations. Charter Schools may not charge tuition, discriminate in admission, or deny participation in any program or activity on the basis of a person's sex, race, religion, national origin, ancestry, pregnancy, marital or parental status, sexual orientation or physical, mental, emotional, or learning disability.

Establishment of Charter Schools

A school board, upon its own initiative and with the state superintendent's approval, may contract with an individual or group to operate a Charter School. A school board may apply to the state superintendent to establish a Charter School upon the receipt of a petition signed by at least 10 percent of the teachers employed by the school district or by at least 50 percent of the teachers employed at one school. The school board must, upon the receipt of the state superintendent's approval and within 30 days of receiving the petition, hold a public hearing on the petition to consider the level of employee and parental support for the establishment of the Charter School. The school board may grant the petition after the public hearing. A school board may convert all of the public schools in the district to Charter Schools if a petition is signed by at least 50 percent of the district's teachers and the board provides alternative public school attendance arrangements for pupils who do not wish to attend or are not admitted to a Charter School.

Charter Contract Provisions

School boards are required to give preference in awarding contracts for Charter Schools to those schools that serve children at risk. A school board is prohibited from contracting with a Charter School outside of its district or for the conversion of a private school into a Charter School. The contract also must:

- include all of the provisions specified in the petition;
- specify the amount the school district will pay the Charter School each year
- not be for a term longer than five school years and may be renewed for one or more terms not exceeding five school years

A school board may revoke a contract with a Charter School if the board finds that the pupils enrolled failed to make sufficient progress toward achieving state goals or that the Charter School violated the contract, failed to comply with generally accepted accounting standards, or violated the law authorizing the establishment of Charter Schools. The employees of a Charter School are authorized to be eligible for certain benefits under the Wisconsin retirement system.

Some of the other provisions of the charter law include the following:

- The number of Charter Schools in a school district can be no more than two.
- No pupil may be required to attend a Charter School without parental approval.
- Pupil expenditures for a Charter School may not exceed the average per pupil expenditures for the school district in which the Charter School is located.
- All instructional staff in a Charter School must be certified by the Department of Public Instruction.
- The state superintendent must approve the applications no later than July 1, 1994.
- The Charter School is an instrumentality of the district and must employ all Charter School personnel.
- If a school district fails to operate or demonstrate significant progress toward operating a Charter School within a year after approval, the state superintendent must withdraw approval.

Major provisions of the Minnesota law

- A school board may authorize up to five outcome-based schools.
- Up to 20 Charter Schools may be authorized statewide.
- The school must be located in the sponsoring district, unless the board agrees to allow another district to sponsor a school within its boundaries or unless the state board is sponsoring the school.
- Organizers may appeal to the State Board of Education from a negative decision by a local board if at least two members of the local board have voted in favor.
- Charters last for three years, but can be renewed.
- Outcome-based schools are public and cannot charge tuition.
- Outcome-based schools are exempt from all state rules applicable to a school board or district.
- Outcome-based schools must meet all applicable health and safety requirements.
- Outcome-based schools must focus on comprehensive instruction for at least one grade or age, but can be limited to one grade or age group.
- Schools must be nonsectarian in program and admission policies. They cannot hold admissions tests. (Some do develop performance contracts.) They cannot be associated with a nonpublic sectarian school or religious institution.
- Teachers must hold valid state teacher licenses.
- If 90% of the teachers say "yes," an existing public school can be converted to a Charter School.
- The school is subject to financial audit, the pupil fair dismissal law, and fee law.

Starting a Charter School

- Charter Schools need state authority.

- School boards may authorize one or more licensed teachers to form and operate outcome-based schools, subject to approval by the state board of education.
- The Charter School will organize as a cooperative or nonprofit corporation.
- Charter teachers elect a board of directors and must hold a majority of the positions on the board. Parents may participate in the election and serve as board members.
- Charter Schools must comply with state fair dismissal provisions.
- The Charter School may lease space from a school board or from other public or private nonprofit, nonsectarian organizations or in the general commercial market if the state approves the lease.
- A teacher employed by the school district may take an extended leave of absence to work in an outcome-based school without loss of seniority and other associated benefits, including participation in the retirement plan.

Three-year contract provisions between the charter board and board of education include:

- description of the educational program
- specific outcomes students are expected to achieve
- admission policies and procedures
- management and administration of the school
- procedures for financial audit
- assumption of liability and types of insurance coverage.

Admissions:

- Charter Schools may restrict admissions to:
 1. an age or grade level
 2. students "not doing well" in regular school
 3. residents of specific geographic areas, "if the percentage of the population of non-Caucasian people in the geographic area is greater than the percentage of non-Caucasian population in the Congressional district in which the geographic area is located, as long as the school reflects the racial and ethnic diversity of that area"
- Students are drawn by lot if the number of student applications exceeds capacity
- The school may not limit admission on the basis of "intellectual ability, measures of achievement or aptitude, or athletic ability."

The charter of an outcome-based school can be terminated or not renewed, for:

- failure to meet the requirements of pupil performance articulated in the contract
- failure to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management
- violations of law

- other good causes shown

Immunity:

- The state board of education, members of the state board, a sponsor, and members of the board of a sponsor are immune from civil and criminal liability with respect to outcome-based schools.

An Urban Superintendent Speaks on Charter Schools

Howard L. Fuller, Superintendent, Milwaukee Public Schools

Based on an interview by R. Craig Sautter

Milwaukee's superintendent is known as an innovator in touch with his urban school system. He has been an active proponent of Charter Schools, but has waited for the Wisconsin legislature to take action before granting any charters to schools in his district.

"Last year, the Milwaukee Board of School Directors took an official position supporting Charter Schools," Fuller says. "We put it in the legislative package that we took to the state last year because we felt that we needed statutory authority to develop Charter Schools. This year, the governor has included a provision for Charter Schools in his budget and we support his effort.

"I believe that Charter Schools give us a way to be innovative within the public school rubric. They give us a way to move forward on a new notion of a system of public schools. I think it is an innovation worth trying.

"Charters would present a wide variety of opportunities. My hope is that teachers, community groups, and other sponsors would help develop Charter Schools in Milwaukee. I visualize teachers coming forward with some new ideas and approaches. I visualize the possibility of Charter Schools-within-schools. Charter Schools are another way to create models out here that will work for the benefit of the kids.

"Charters give teachers an opportunity to create new models without being bogged down by some of the restraints that are already in existence. While people in the current schools are trying to be innovative, they keep running into barriers. Some are contractual. Some are state mandates. Some are board policies and procedures.

"Superintendents have some authority to move these barriers, but not nearly the authority that people believe we have on the playing field on which we are operating.

"The issue is how much flexibility will teachers have. To me, anything that we can put into motion to provide more flexibility, so different models are created that benefit kids, is worth pursuing.

"I think that, ultimately, those of us who work in public school systems had better get the message that because we exist today doesn't mean we will exist tomorrow.

"To sum up, the value of Charter Schools is that it allows for innovation within the control of the elected public school board. If people believe in public schools and they want to maintain a public school system, then they better understand that the old ways of doing things are not enough."

A Rural Superintendent Speaks on Charter Schools

Daniel E. Mobilia, Superintendent, District 2142, St. Louis County, Minnesota Mobilia has been

superintendent of District 2142, St. Louis County Schools, for six years, where his main priority is keeping the rural schools within his district, which covers almost 5,000 square miles, operational and competitive.

"We have a rural K-12 high school in our district that declined in enrollment to the point that it became difficult to provide financial or academic services for the kids. So we decided to close it. This school only has 160 students with a graduating class of about 10 kids. As with the closing of any school, but particularly a high school, people were very upset. However, the new Charter School legislation gave them an option to try to run the school themselves.

"The advantage, of course, is that as a Charter School they are exempt from the majority of the rules that our district has to follow, other than fire, safety, and health issues. Thus, they can pursue different types of organizational options.

"For example, the state mandates the type of curriculum public high schools must follow, including foreign language and elective components. For a small rural school, it is very difficult to meet those criteria.

"Another example is the certification of teachers. Our district is required to have certified teachers. Charter Schools are exempt from this as well. Nor is the Charter School required to have a principal. So they have a lot of leeway that public schools don't have. Given these exemptions, I agreed that maybe they could make a go of the Charter School, where we couldn't make it go as a traditional public school.

"Right now it is impossible to say if this is a good thing or not, because we simply don't know yet. The Toivola-Meadowlands Charter School is only now in the process of hiring their teachers. The core group is made up of parents and community leaders. I do not see much innovation about the school. They basically adopted the outcomes we have for our school system.

"The law allows teachers employed by the district to gain a leave of absence if they want to teach in the Charter School. But not one of my teachers chose to participate. They would have to take a cut in pay, and why would they do that? And many of them see nonprofessionals making key decisions that should be made by professionals. They feel that it is more like a private school than a public school. Many feel that this is just another step toward privatizing public education. I don't know if that is true or not. How can you project at this point?

"To me, Charter Schools are like the choice option. These are gimmicks that are trying to fix the system of public education without getting at the core problems, which are societal problems. Adding a few Charter Schools is not going to fix public education.

"The biggest plus in the case of Toivola-Meadowlands Charter School is that it has mobilized a community that was very complacent and had allowed their school system to erode. This brought them together and they worked very, very hard to save their school. It was very healthy in that sense because it brought their community together. The old saying used by our Governor, 'It takes a whole community to educate a child,' is happening there in this case.

"On the other side of the coin, I see a Charter School being developed in an area that is very economically depressed. It will be very difficult to maintain enrollment. I see some hard times ahead for them."

Reflections on the Nation's First Charter School

St. Paul City Academy, the nation's first charter school, is making a big impression for such a small school. With just 35 students, the school still finds itself in the national spotlight in the debate over Charter Schools.

Milo Cutter, who teaches English and social studies, cofounded City Academy with teacher Terry Kraabel. "I was educated as a teacher," says Cutter. "But most of my working years were spent in the business world. I returned to teaching four years ago, first in Puerto Rico and then in a St. Paul alternative school with Hispanic students who were not well served by the traditional classroom.

"After years of experience in a system that was substantially different from the structure of schools, I was intrigued by Minnesota's new Charter School law, which gave teachers a chance to create different kinds of schools.

"It became apparent to us that some other alternative should be explored," Cutter recalls. "We wanted to create something with a traditional curriculum, but not traditional delivery system and definitely not a large setting.

"The charter legislation seemed to suit the needs of these students and gave us a real opportunity to create a program specifically for them. So we proposed a Charter School aimed at unenrolled youth ages 16 to 21. We got the support of the city and the mayor as well as private industry and tried to pull in all the concerned people."

City Academy is very small, with four full-time teachers, a full-time clerical aide, one part-time teacher/aide, and a part-time psychologist. The Academy's 35 students represent a mix of African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, American Indians, and European-Americans. Most students are male, though the Academy is seeking more women. Many of its students haven't been in school for quite a while. All have experienced frustration with other systems, even though several are only a few credits short of graduation.

"Many of these young people feel alienated much of the time," notes Cutter. "But they are regular teenagers who simply seem to have stronger feelings. It is potential to be tapped. That has worked against them in other education circumstances. One of the things I like about our students is that they are not quiet. They are very active. They have very strong opinions. Their sense of what is fair and what is good is very clear, so that is good for us.

"There is a dramatic range of student abilities from second grade to college level," Cutter observes. "But I am amazed that students, whom some call elementary readers, when given encouragement from other students, do an excellent job. What they are willing to do is a whole lot better than where they tested in the past.

"We are learning a lot just watching how the students respond," Cutter says. "Because this is our first year, we are still experimenting. In our charter application, we outlined general curriculum we planned to use. But students helped develop our specific curriculum and the atmosphere for learning. They articulate the kinds of things in, say, consumer law that they want to learn. It is an exciting experience."

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Information on Charter Public Schools

[Pathways Home Page](#) | [Critical Issues for this area](#) | [Beginning of this Critical Issue](#)

The following resources contain further information on charter public schools:

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Pathways Home Page | Critical Issues for this area | Beginning of this Critical Issue

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Creating Safe and Drug-Free Schools: An Action Guide - September 1996

Alternative Education Programs for Expelled Students

A defining feature of life in America's schools today is the increasing incidence of violence. Nearly 3 million crimes take place in or near schools annually--one every 6 seconds of the school day.¹ These increases are occurring nationwide. Eighty-two percent of school districts surveyed by the National School Boards Association (NSBA) reported increasing violence within their schools during the past 5 years. Increasingly, incidents of violence reported in schools involve deadly weapons. More than 60 percent of school districts have reported weapon violations among their students.²

One prominent legislative and policy measure to ensure a safe school environment has been to require removal of disruptive and dangerous students. Typically this is accomplished through expulsions and long-term suspensions. For example, the Federal Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 requires a minimum 1-year expulsion for any student found to have carried a firearm on school grounds (See Preventing Juvenile Gun Violence in Schools.).

School districts across the country report experiencing significant increases in both the number of students expelled and the length of time they are excluded from their schools. The consensus among educators and others concerned with at-risk youth is that it is vital for expelled students to receive educational counseling or other services to help modify their behavior and possibly other support services while they are away from their regular school. Without such services, students generally return to school no better disciplined and no better able to manage their anger or peaceably resolve disputes. They will also have fallen behind in their education, and any underlying causes of their violent behavior may be unresolved. Research has shown a link between suspension/expulsion and later dropping out of school, with resulting personal and social costs.

One reservation about providing services to expelled students has been the cost. However, data show it is less costly to address the problem behavior and its underlying causes as quickly as possible than to wait until the student becomes involved with the criminal justice or welfare systems later in life. The American Federation of Teachers has estimated that "for the [\$1,750] additional dollars spent on each [disruptive] student attending an alternative school, the public annually gains \$14,000 in student learning time that would have been lost, \$2,800 in reduced grade repetition costs, \$1,750 in reduced welfare costs, and \$1,500 in reduced prison costs."³ This is a total savings of \$18,300 per student.

Promising Practices

School systems across the country are turning to alternative education programs to deliver educational and other services to expelled students. Some school systems are modifying existing programs to accommodate the larger numbers of students expelled for disruptive behaviors, while others are creating new programs, often in collaboration with social agencies or nonprofit service organizations.

he programs typically differ from the expelled students' regular schools in these dimensions: the ratio of students to teachers, the way academic subject matter is presented, the setting of the program, the linkage of the school to the community or workplaces, the emphasis on behavior modification, the emphasis on counseling for conflict resolution and anger management, and the availability of comprehensive support services. Programs have been created for students as young as elementary age. Some seek to prepare students to return to their regular schools, and others prepare students to graduate from high school and enter the workforce or postsecondary education directly from the

alternative program.

Components of Effective Alternative Education Programs

The components of effective alternative programs are:

- Lower student-to-staff ratio.
- Strong and stable leadership.
- Highly trained and carefully selected staff.
- A vision and set of objectives for the program that are shared by all staff and integrated into how staff and administrators interact with the program.
- Districtwide support of programs.
- Innovative presentation of instructional materials with an emphasis on real-life learning.
- Working relations with all parts of the school system and with other collaborating agencies that provide critical services to youth.
- Linkages between schools and workplaces.
- Intensive counseling and monitoring.

Examples of Alternative Education Programs

The following programs provide some examples of the varied alternative education programs that have been created for expelled students.

City-As-School Program, Buffalo, New York

The City-As-School (CAS) program in Buffalo, New York, places students as interns in dozens of sites across the city. Students earn academic credits for the work they perform--an English credit for work involving the theater, a newspaper, or other type of communication; a social studies credit for work at the local courts or community action agency. Students rotate through three or four internships each semester, becoming familiar with a variety of work environments and being exposed to a variety of role models. Throughout the program, each student also works on his or her Learning Experience Activity Packet (LEAP), a set of goals and activities customized for each student and each internship. The LEAP includes weekly assignments as well as a semester-long final product. The student's progress is monitored by his onsite supervisors and program teachers. Students attend weekly seminars at CAS offices. The program elected to locate its offices on a college campus to expose the students to the possibilities of postsecondary education.

The CAS program has developed extensive support within the community. Because many businesses and agencies have volunteered to sponsor interns, the program has been able to serve more students. Program staff feel the experience produces major changes in the students. The students become more motivated and their negative behaviors are reduced. Sixty-five percent of the students are able to maintain 100 percent attendance for as long as 2 years, complete all their internships, and earn their high school diplomas. The staff point out that this graduation rate is considerably higher than that of comparable students who remain in the regular school program.

Community Academy, Boston, Massachusetts

The Community Academy (CA) is located in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston, Massachusetts. CA is designed to provide students with a safe and challenging academic learning environment in order to help them become successful and productive citizens. CA is housed in leased space in the Roxbury Boys and Girls Club. In working with students, CA uses a cognitive approach that focuses on modifying inappropriate behavior and enhancing academic potential. CA emphasizes small class size, low student-teacher ratios, and parental involvement. In addition to academic instruction, the

program provides a vocational component and an advanced placement program, and students are eligible to earn dual enrollment credits at area colleges and universities. CA has also established community partnerships with several area businesses, civic organizations, and social service agencies for providing services to students.

The academic component of the program assigns students to small classes to work intensively with highly skilled and experienced teachers on core academic subjects. Teaching is individualized to each student's abilities and learning style, with the goal of bringing the student up to grade-level performance. Students are required to participate in a counseling program conducted by the program's staff psychologist that focuses on personal growth and development. The psychologist is also available to meet with students individually on an as-needed basis. However, students who may need intensive counseling are referred to area community health centers. Additionally, assessments, counseling, and drug awareness education are provided by the substance abuse clinicians. These staff meet with students on both an individual and group basis, but those students needing intensive/long-term treatment are also referred to the local community health center. Students are encouraged to participate in community service activities, work with a mentor, complete job-training classes, and explore advanced academic course work and post-secondary education.

Staff closely monitor student progress. Ratings for each student are based upon attendance, academic performance, disciplinary incidents, and clinical assessments. Although the program was designed under the assumption that the average student would require 2 years of service before returning to the regular school, nearly 45 percent are judged ready after 1 year. Fewer than 15 percent of students entering the program are unable to complete it. More than 25 percent are able to complete some college-level work before leaving the CA program.

Borough Academies, New York, New York

The Borough Academies, located in New York City, serve students from the entire metropolitan area. The Borough Academies are designed primarily to help students develop positive behavior skills and secondarily to prepare students for entrance into college or a job. Students are provided with the opportunity to earn credits through vocational internships with employers throughout New York City. The key concept at the Borough Academies is behavior change through positive reinforcement and flexibility. Faculty are instructed to always use positive incentives and to present students with attainable goals. Students are told only what they can do, not what they cannot. The Borough Academies encourage flexibility not only from students but also from faculty and administrators. The program's three campuses are located in nontraditional settings--offices or apartment buildings.

The program provides students with a combination of academic and behavior management skills. The model initially focuses on teaching students how to manage their behavior positively. The principal feels that once students are able to manage their behavior they will be better prepared to reach their potential both as students and as citizens in the workplace. Students earn credits toward a New York City High School degree through the three components of the program: academic, guidance, and internship/vocational. Students choose their schedule each day under a program called "free options" whereby they can change the set of classes they attend every day. Students can earn credits as quickly as they want to and work at their own pace.

Since the inception of the Borough Academies, two classes have graduated. The Academies have an 86-percent graduation rate, and the majority of the students have gone on to college.

Resources

Alternative Schools for Disruptive Youth. National School Safety Center (NSSC) Resource Paper, 1987. This research paper presents background information on reasons some youth are disruptive, approaches to alternative education, and alternative schools as a way to provide services to suspended

or expelled students.

Joy G. Dryfoos, *Adolescents at Risk: Prevalence and Prevention*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. *Adolescents at Risk* provides an overview of prevention programs, practices, and components that appear critical to success regardless of the high-risk behavior the program strives to prevent.

Alternative Schools for Disruptive Youth, School Safety, NSSC (winter 1991), pp. 8-11.

School Safety, NSSC (winter 1995). This special issue is devoted entirely to alternative education and provides several articles on a range of issues including early identification of problems, State initiatives, adult mentoring, and apprenticeship learning.

More information is available from:

Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program
U.S. Department of Education
600 Independence Avenue, SW.
Washington, DC 20202-6123

National School Safety Center
4165 Thousand Oaks Boulevard
Suite 290
Westlake Village, California 91362
805-373-9977

National School Boards Association
1680 Duke Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
703-838-6722

National Association of State Boards of Education
1012 Cameron Street
Alexandria, Virginia, 22314
800-220-5183

Endnotes

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[Uniforms]  [Conflict Resolution]

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THE FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

September 30, 1999, Thursday FINAL AM EDITION

SECTION: EDITORIAL/OPINIONS; Pg. 9, Editorial

LENGTH: 828 words

HEADLINE: Expect more from parents as well as the schools

BYLINE: Jeff Rodriguez, Special to the Star-Telegram

BODY:

The Fort Worth schools have gotten some pretty bad report cards lately. Despite having made real progress, some people still believe that the school district needs higher grades and fewer absences, and even needs improvement in its citizenship. With all the terrible things being said, it's a wonder the district isn't suffering from low self-esteem, too.

That's not to say that the school district doesn't have problems.

But the administration is not solely to blame for its situation. And no matter how many bond issues the district gets passed, it won't solve what is a central problem for many of our schools: lack of parental support.

Nearly every major challenge facing the district - truancy, test scores, safety - comes back to the parents. Simply put, parental involvement is essential to a school's operation. It's even more important than the Coke machine.

Nowhere is the role of parents more important than in the area of discipline. In my job as a guest presenter, I've taught at schools throughout the district, at all grade levels. In that time, I've known a ninth grader who was truant more than a third of the semester, seen a sixth grader grab his crotch and taunt a teacher, and twice had students say That Very Bad Word to me. And I'm not even there full time.

The immediate reaction is to blame the teachers. But with some exceptions, blaming teachers for bad **behavior** is like blaming the theater for a bad movie. **Schools** do attempt to discipline students - they may send them to detention (where they can visit with friends), issue them a ticket (which will never be paid) or suspend them (also known as a three-day vacation). Really "bad" kids get sent to **alternative** schools, which have shorter schedules. And at each step, the schools must be wary of having their funding cut because of reduced enrollment.

For disciplinary measures to have any real meaning, they must be reinforced at home. Unfortunately, many parents are "too busy" to meet with the administrators; others come but just shrug, saying that the child is beyond their control, too. And some parents aggressively contradict the school authorities. We hear a lot about the teacher shortage and how they're not paid enough money. But maybe the real

issue is that they're not paid enough respect.

We all know that parents have the primary responsibility for their children's success. But no one is willing to say it. Instead, we blame the school, the social workers, the racist teachers, corporate America - anyone but the people who are actually raising the child.

Speaking of racism, I don't mean to belittle this issue; as a Hispanic, I'm greatly troubled by these accusations of discrimination in the district. But I'm even more troubled by the apparent disregard of some minority parents. Our children already face long odds, yet too many receive little or no support at home. Whatever you think of the TAAS, it doesn't have nearly the harmful impact on a child as a negligent parent. (Come to think of it, maybe we can get a group of protesters to picket some of those people for a while.)

Once, when I was in the fifth grade, I said That Very Bad Word.

Unbeknownst to me, one of the teachers, Mrs. Burken, heard me say it.

Her response was immediate: She slapped me, gave me a lecture and then encouraged me to tell my parents what she had done, because she would be happy to discuss it with them. With my cheek still stinging, I assured her that I would tell them.

Of course, I never did. And we all know why: The punishment I would have gotten at home would have been even worse than the one I had gotten at school. And if my parents did call her, it would only have been to say, "Thank you."

Today, that scenario would play out a bit differently. First, angry neighbors would rally outside the school, and then Mrs. Burken would be suspended, or fired outright. My parents would sue the district for discrimination and also demand compensation because the resulting trauma had caused me to fail the TAAS - four months later.

That's not to say that we should put slapping back into the schools - the times have changed. But kids haven't. They still need parents who play an active role in their education, getting them to **school** prepared and on time, regularly monitoring their progress, and setting clear standards of **behavior**.

We understand that many parents today must work, but isn't the job at home equally important?

Maybe the Fort Worth school district's report cards haven't been perfect, but the district seems committed to bringing up its grades.

We're not sure how much improvement we can expect, but one thing is certain: Without more commitment from district parents, we can expect even less.

Jeff Rodriguez is director of education for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Inc. in Fort Worth.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: October 1, 1999

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Educating for Employment

September 28, 1999

SECTION: Vol. 5, No. 9

LENGTH: 184 words

HEADLINE: Continue educational services during disciplinary removals

BODY:

A superintendent expressed concern that the federal requirements for disciplining students with disabilities in IDEA 1997 constrain school administrators. OSEP commented that IDEA 1997 expands the authority of school officials to protect student safety while ensuring students with disabilities receive rights and protections. Students who are suspended or expelled must be provided FAPE in an **alternative** setting, although the IDEA does not specify the setting in which **alternative** educational services must be provided. The U.S. Department of Education believes eliminating the provision of educational services to students with disabilities is not an effective means of punishment, and rather, providing educational programs in **alternative** settings increases a student's chances of becoming a productive and law-abiding member of society. Additionally, continued educational services during disciplinary exclusions from school ensure that a student does not fall behind and acquires skills necessary to modify **behavior** upon return to **school**. Letter to Spiropulos, 30 IDELR 709 (OSEP 1998).

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: October 4, 1999



Search: General News;alternative or charter and schools w/behavior

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Example: House of Representatives

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Special Education Law Monthly

September 30, 1999

SECTION: Judicial Decisions; Vol. 3, No. 5

LENGTH: 862 words

HEADLINE: Court appoints special master to rule on educational program

BODY:

Recognizing that FAPE was not being provided to a 17-year-old student with Tourette syndrome, a conduct disorder, and other neuropsychological disorders, a court appointed a special master who was to make determinations regarding the student's educational program.

Background . . . A 17-year-old student with Tourette syndrome, a conduct disorder, and other neuropsychological disorders was originally placed at a local high school, but was transferred to the county's **alternative** school. The student's mother was dissatisfied with the IEP developed for her son, and sought an administrative hearing. An administrative law judge awarded the following relief: placement at the **alternative** school; payment for a thorough neuropsychological evaluation of the student; a consultant to develop a **behavior** modification plan for the student working with **school** staff and training staff in the needs of children with Tourette syndrome, and an immediate IEP meeting to address the student's placement in the **alternative** school and the need for ancillary services such as counseling and transportation. The administrative law judge also ruled that if it were appropriate to address compensatory education provisions immediately, such issues should be addressed in the IEP; otherwise, compensatory education would be addressed in a subsequent IEP meeting after the completion of the neuropsychological exam. The board appealed from the ALJ's order, seeking the following determinations: an order that it not be required to provide compensatory education; that the board not be required to pay for an independent evaluation; that the board not be required to obtain an outside consultant with expertise in Tourette syndrome to develop a behavior plan for the student, and an order that the student was not a prevailing party entitled to attorneys' fees. The parent filed a counterclaim to obtain implementation of the ALJ's final order as well as attorneys' fees and litigation expenses. Additionally, the student sought a range of private services including private tutors, private speech/language services, occupational and assistive technology evaluations, private occupational therapists, necessary assistive technology, retention of a qualified behavioral consultant with expertise in Tourette syndrome and other neurological disorders, transportation, psychotherapy, a social worker, as well as the following services at a public high school facility: physical education, access to a science lab, and ESOL services. The student also sought an order of reimbursement for private speech therapy, follow-up to a neurological evaluation and affirmance of an administrative decision that an evaluation was necessary, and affirmance of the administrative decision that the board violated the student's procedural rights and failed to provide FAPE, two years of compensatory education, and consideration of a placement in a full-time private school. In preliminary motions, the board was ordered to pay for a neuropsychological evaluation of the student, subject to the right to seek reimbursement of the cost of the evaluation, should the board prevail on the merits. Pursuant to an interim order, the student also received tutoring and other services pending a final decision.

Special Master Appointed . . . Initially, the district court observed that subsequent events in the case had rendered some of the board's objections to the administrative order moot. Significantly, neurological testing had already occurred as well as evaluations for speech language services, occupational therapy, and assistive technology, and an outside consultant had been retained to develop an appropriate behavior management plan for the student. Those issues raised by the board which were still in dispute were narrowed down to a challenge to the provision of compensatory education and the entitlement to attorneys' fees. The court vacated the administrative decision's findings with regard to the issue of compensatory education, finding that the vague references in the decision to after school tutoring and summer school did not adequately define what was meant by compensatory education. The court held that the student would be entitled to whatever services were necessary and appropriate, which may

include current or future compensatory education. The ALJ's decision was affirmed in other respects. The court viewed the remainder of the parent's requests regarding the student's education to be attempts to short-cut the administrative process and have the court draft the student's current IEP, which the court refused to do. Recognizing the student was still not receiving a free appropriate public education, the court instead elected to appoint a special master who would assist the parties in preparing a new IEP for the student and ensuring that FAPE was provided and then monitor those efforts. Counsel for the parties was directed to confer and agree on an appropriate selection. The court retained jurisdiction over any motions for fees and costs in the case.

School Board of Osceola County, Florida v. M.L., 30 IDELR 655, 97-1139-Civ-Orl-3ABF(22), [M.D. Fla. 1999]]

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: October 4, 1999



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The Times-Picayune

October 13, 1999 Wednesday, ORLEANS

SECTION: METRO; Pg. B2

LENGTH: 642 words

HEADLINE: TROUBLED STUDENTS' SCHOOL PLANNED;
SCHOOL FOR 9TH- TO 11TH-GRADE STUDENTS

BYLINE: By Anand Vaishnav Staff writer

BODY:

Now that New Orleans public schools have more stringent discipline regulations in place, administrators are looking at a related issue that parents and educators have said needs scrutiny: **alternative** schools for expelled or constantly disruptive students.

On Monday, the Orleans Parish School Board unanimously approved tougher discipline policies that give principals more authority to suspend students and more ways to intervene in misbehavior before it spirals out of control. But the new rules raise a new question: If principals kick more students out of school, will the students be better served in nontraditional settings with closer supervision than they were at the school where the trouble arose?

A task force of educators and community members is trying to answer that question as it develops a plan for an **alternative** school for expelled ninth- through 11th-graders.

"When we remove kids from school, we don't remove the problem. We just put it in another place," said Principal Ronald Taylor of Booker T. Washington High School, the principals association representative on the task force. "We're long overdue for an **alternative**-school setting."

About \$800,000 for the **alternative** high school was included in the 1999-2000 school system budget.

Cynthia George, director of the student hearing commission, said she expects the school to open by the end of 1999. In addition, a search is being held for someone to oversee **alternative** schools systemwide.

Last year, 87 elementary school students, 310 middle school students and 446 high school students were expelled, which means they were kicked out of school for at least 90 days, according to reports from George's office.

To be expelled, students either have been suspended four times in the same school year or have committed a Class III infraction, such as bringing a gun to school or making bomb threats. Principals recommend students for expulsion, then students get a hearing at which the recommendation is accepted or rejected.

As part of the 1998-99 budget, the School Board allocated \$700,000 to beef up **alternative** education at existing sites.

State law requires schools to send expelled students to an **alternative** school, but for years, the School Board received waivers of the requirement from the state. That ended last year, when the board voted 5-2 against requesting a waiver and committed to starting **alternative** schools. The system has not asked for a waiver this year, George said.

Eight **alternative**-program sites in the school system serve a variety of students, George said. Some, such as Arthur Ashe School and the East New Orleans Educational Center, cater mostly to special-education students with **behavior** problems. Others, such as the Middle Level **Alternative**

School, serve expelled middle-school students. And some, such as Dynasty Place at the Dryades YMCA, are operated by outside groups in conjunction with the public school system.

St. Mark's Street Academy, formerly at St. Mark's Community Center, used to accept only expelled students. But it became a **charter** school this fall and now takes at-risk students, leaving expelled middle schoolers with one less educational venue.

There is no place now for elementary school students or regular-education high **school** students who are expelled or demonstrate at-risk **behavior**. And parents have criticized the existing sites, saying they are poorly run and inadequately staffed.

Parent Karran Harper Royal said the **alternative** programs need to do a better job of using social workers, anger-management training and one-on-one supervision.

"A lot of times, people don't like to do that because it's a smaller number of children being served and you're spending a lot of money," Royal said. "But think about all the money you're wasting because these children are disrupting the classroom."

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

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HEADLINE: Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency Announces Grants To House Police Officers in Schools

DATELINE: HARRISBURG, Pa., Oct. 8

BODY:

The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency today announced \$787,555 in grants to nine municipalities to hire police officers to work inside the schools.

The school resource officer program seeks to reduce violence on school property. The officers educate students about the dangers of substance abuse; discourage gang affiliation and the carrying of weapons; mentor the students, particularly "at-risk" youths; promote personal safety; enforce the law; and serve as a liaison between the school, police department and district justice.

"The school resource officer program is one of the many ways that Pennsylvania's law-enforcement community and educators are working together to combat the growing concern of school violence, drug use and gangs," said Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) Chairman Thomas W. Corbett Jr. "No single program can eliminate these problems, but the presence of a police officer in a school - mentoring the students every day - provides an added dimension to prevention."

Since the PCCD began backing the program in 1997, 25 municipalities have been awarded grants to hire a federally funded school resource officer. The most recent grants span three years, with the municipality contributing a 25 percent match the first year, 50 percent the second year and 75 percent the third year.

These police departments were awarded grants:

Department	County	Total Three-Year Grant
Bensalem Township	Bucks	\$119,949
Beaver Falls	Beaver	\$74,605
Bethlehem Township	Northampton	\$86,384
Carlisle Borough	Cumberland	\$83,607
Lebanon City	Lebanon	\$98,417
Lower Salford Township	Montgomery	\$50,414
Mount Lebanon	Allegheny	\$102,637
Titusville	Crawford	\$81,546
Whitehall Township	Lehigh	\$89,996

Total: \$787,555

Gov. Ridge has made school safety and violence prevention top priorities. Since 1995, the Ridge Administration has invested more than \$104 million in state and federal funds to support these critically important programs.

In addition to new investments in school safety, other initiatives include:

-- establishing the Office of Safe Schools in the Department of Education to help coordinate anti-violence efforts between schools and community organizations, and to help schools develop programs to combat school violence;

-- creating a safe-schools website on the Internet that provides links to school-safety and violence-prevention resources and organizations in Pennsylvania and across the country;

-- providing hands-on training for educators, giving them the critical skills and information they need to implement successful programs in their schools;

-- convening the first-ever Pennsylvania Safe Schools Summit to enable schools and communities across the state to share successful prevention and intervention strategies to reduce violence in their schools and communities;

-- investing more than \$24 million in **alternative** education programs, which earmarks funds to enable schools to remove chronically disruptive students from regular school programs while providing specialized instruction and counseling to help disruptive students change their **behavior**;

-- investing \$5 million for intensive supervision, **school**-based probation and after-care services for troubled youth; and

-- creating the Governor's Community Partnership for Safe Children, chaired by First Lady Michele Ridge, to encourage community-based initiatives that promote the reduction of child abuse, academic failure, illiteracy and other factors that make children more vulnerable to crime.

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SOURCE Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency

CONTACT: Alison Delsite, Press Secretary of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, 717-705-0888, Ext. 3002

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