

**Connecticut State Department of Education  
Biennial Report on the Operation of  
Charter Schools in Connecticut  
2020**

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## **Introduction/Background Information**

Since Connecticut's charter school law was first enacted 1996, charter schools have been one part of Connecticut's approach to closing the achievement gap. Charter schools are a tuition-free public school model available to Connecticut students, in addition to magnet schools, vocational-agricultural schools, career-oriented technical high schools, endowed academies and traditional public schools.

Charter schools are authorized and funded by the state. The term "charter school" refers to the state-issued governing document, or charter, that grants a non-profit board of directors the conditional authority to operate the school. Student enrollment is determined via lottery conducted at each school or district. Students who are not selected are placed on the school's waitlist.

In exchange for greater autonomy, charter schools are subject to heightened accountability. All charter schools operate on a strictly provisional basis, subject to continuous review and renewal by the State Board of Education every five years or less. The State Board receives reports from the Charter Renewal Team that evaluate charter school performance and operations related to the four core performance standards: School Performance; Stewardship, Governance, and Management; Student Population and Legal Compliance in addition to other factors that determines the length of a school's charter renewal.

**Statutory Reporting Requirement:** Section 10-66gg of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) requires the Commissioner of Education to review and report biennially, within available appropriations, on the operation of charter schools established pursuant to Sections 10-66aa to 10-66ff, inclusive, to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education. Such reporting must provide: (1) Recommendations for any statutory changes that would facilitate expansion in the number of charter schools; (2) a compilation of school profiles pursuant to Section 10-66cc; (3) an assessment of the adequacy of funding pursuant to Section 10-66ee; and (4) the adequacy and availability of suitable facilities for such schools.

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) issued a Request for Proposal on December 27, 2016, with a submission period of July 1, 2017, through August 15, 2017, to receive applications for charter schools. The CSDE received five applications: Community First School, Inc. (Hartford), Danbury Collegiate Charter School (Danbury), Danbury Prospect Charter School (Danbury), Norwalk Charter School for Excellence (Norwalk) and Winchester Academy (Winchester). Three of the applications were withdrawn. Two applications, Danbury Prospect Charter School and Norwalk Charter School For Excellence received initial certificates of approval for state charter schools from the State Board of Education (SBE) on October 3, 2018. Pursuant to Section 10-66bb(a) of the C.G.S. the SBE submitted copies of its approval documents and a summary of comments made at the local public hearing concerning the proposed new charter schools to the Education and Appropriation committees of the Legislature. Section 10-66bb(a) of the C.G.S. further provides that the Legislature may appropriate funds to CSDE to provide operating grants to charter schools, and, if such funds are appropriated, an initial certificate of approval for a charter shall be deemed effective as of July 1<sup>st</sup> of the first fiscal year for which such funds are appropriated. Presently the Legislature has not appropriated funding to open the two schools.

**Enabling Legislation:** C.G.S., Sections 10-66aa to 10-66ff.

## Charter School Landscape

At the onset of the 2018-19 school year, a total of 10 school districts hosted 23 charter schools serving approximately 10,807 students. In total, as of October 2018, CSDE's latest audited student enrollment data, 86 school districts (about 52 percent of all school districts in Connecticut) have students enrolled in charter schools. The next page is a list of charter schools, their host district and school districts served.

Two charter schools have closed since the last Biennial Report on the Operation of Charter Schools in Connecticut was published in March of 2018. Path Academy, a Willimantic charter school, voluntarily surrendered its charter to operate in Connecticut on July 3, 2018. This came after a vote in May 2018, by the SBE to initiate the charter revocation process after a state investigation found evidence that the school was operating unauthorized satellite schools and had discrepancies in student records and enrollment. Trailblazers Academy, a Stamford charter school, voluntarily surrendered its charter to operate in Connecticut, which the State Board of Education accepted on September 4, 2019. This came after Trailblazers governing board had voted on July 17, 2019 to cease operations and terminate the charter due to lack of financial viability.

**The State Charter School Grant:** The state charter school per pupil amount for the 2018-19 and 2019-20 fiscal years was \$11,250.

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Expenditures</u>
<b>FY 18-19</b>	\$114,930,000
<b>*FY 19-20</b>	\$119,328,750
*Estimated	

**Use of Funds:** Charter schools can use state charter school grant funds for any costs associated with the operation of a school, including the acquisition and maintenance of suitable facilities.

**The Local Charter School Grant:** CSDE may award, subject to funding availability, initial start-up grants of up to \$500,000 and grants of up to \$3,000 per student. There is currently one local charter school, Elm City Montessori School in New Haven.

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Per Pupil Grant</u>
<b>FY 18-19</b>	\$492,000
<b>*FY 19-20</b>	\$600,000
*Estimated	

## Charter Schools

Charter School	Host District	Districts Served
Achievement First Bridgeport Academy	Bridgeport	Bridgeport, Stamford
Achievement First Hartford Academy	Hartford	Hartford, Windsor
Amistad Academy	New Haven	New Haven
Booker T. Washington	New Haven	Ansonia, Branford, Derby, East Haven, Hamden, Meriden, Milford, New Haven, Stratford, Waterbury, West Haven
Brass City Charter School	Waterbury	Waterbury
The Bridge Academy	Bridgeport	Bridgeport, Stratford
Capital Preparatory Harbor School	Bridgeport	Ansonia, Bridgeport, Hamden, Middletown, Milford, Naugatuck, New Haven, Norwalk, Shelton, Stratford, Trumbull, West Haven
Common Ground High School	New Haven	Ansonia, Bethany, Branford, Bridgeport, Clinton, East Haven, Hamden, Meriden, Milford, New Haven, North Haven, Prospect, Shelton, Stratford, Waterbury, West Haven, Woodbridge, Woodbury
Elm City College Preparatory School	New Haven	New Haven
Elm City Montessori (local charter)	New Haven	Ansonia, East Haven, Hamden, New Haven, North Haven, Orange, Oxford, Stratford Wallingford, West Haven
Explorations Charter School	Winsted	Barkhamsted, Canton, Cornwall, Farmington, Goshen, Harwinton, Litchfield, Morris, New Hartford, Norfolk, New Canaan, North Canaan Plymouth, Sharon, Simsbury, Torrington, Waterbury, Watertown, Winchester
Great Oaks	Bridgeport	Ansonia, Bridgeport, Norwalk, Seymour, Shelton, Stratford
Highville Charter School	New Haven	Ansonia, Bridgeport, Derby, East Haven, Hamden, Hartford, Meriden, Middletown, Naugatuck, New Haven, North Haven, Southbury, Wallingford, , West Haven, Woodbridge
Integrated Day Charter School	Norwich	Bozrah, Columbia, East Lyme, Griswold, Ledyard, Montville, New London, Norwich, Sprague
Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication (ISAAC)	New London	Colchester, Griswold, Groton, Killingly, Ledyard, Montville, New London, Norwich, Sprague, Stonington, Waterford
Jumoke Academy Charter School	Hartford	Barkhamsted, Bloomfield, East Hartford, East Windsor, Hartford, Manchester, New Britain, Newington, Rocky Hill, Simsbury, South Windsor, Torrington, Vernon, Waterbury, West Hartford, Windsor, Windsor Locks
New Beginnings Family Academy	Bridgeport	Bridgeport, Derby, Shelton, Stratford
Odyssey Charter School	Manchester	Bolton, Bristol, East Hartford, East Windsor, Enfield, Glastonbury, Hartford, Manchester, Middletown, Tolland, Vernon, Windham, Windsor
Park City Prep Charter School	Bridgeport	Ansonia, Bridgeport, Stratford, West Haven
Side by Side Charter School	Norwalk	Bridgeport, Newtown, Norwalk, Stamford, Stratford, Westport
Stamford Academy	Stamford	Bridgeport, Fairfield, Naugatuck, New Haven, Norwalk, Shelton, Stamford, Stratford
Stamford Charter School for Excellence	Stamford	Stamford, Sterling
Trailblazers Academy	Stamford	Bridgeport, Norwalk, Stamford

Source: Public School Information System (PSIS) October 2018

## Charter Renewal

The charter school performance framework drives the CSDE's charter school accountability system and charter renewal determinations. Charters may be renewed by the SBE for up to five years. In accordance with C.G.S., Section 10-66bb(g), the CSDE and the SBE evaluate charter school performance and operations based on evidence of four performance standards outlined below.

- 1. School Performance:** Is the school a successful model resulting in strong student outcomes and a positive school climate?
- 2. Stewardship, Governance, and Management:** Is the school financially and organizationally healthy and viable?
- 3. Student Population:** Is the school promoting equity by effectively attracting, enrolling, and retaining students, particularly among targeted populations?
- 4. Legal Compliance:** Is the school acting in compliance with applicable laws and regulations?

The CSDE and the SBE carefully evaluate qualitative and quantitative evidence and longitudinal data when making charter renewal decisions. The renewal process begins with an eligible charter school's submission of a charter renewal application to the CSDE. A successful application provides clear and compelling evidence for renewal of the charter, focused primarily on student outcomes. The application must offer a vision for the school's future plans, and identify and offer solutions for any weaknesses or gaps in the current program.

A review team comprised of CSDE staff with expertise in curriculum and instruction, student assessment, teacher certification, school administration, school finance, English learners (EL) and special education review the renewal application. The review team conducts a site visit at the school. The site visit is designed to collect data to confirm and supplement the review of the schools' renewal application. The review team conducts interviews and focus groups with diverse school stakeholders, including school leaders, governing board members, teachers, and family members of students.

Additionally, the CSDE solicits comments on the charter renewal from the superintendent of the school district where the charter school is located and superintendents of contiguous districts. A public hearing on the charter renewal is held in the school district in which the school is located. Evidence collected through the site visit observations, interviews and focus groups, superintendent letters and public testimony inform a renewal report prepared by the CSDE and submitted to the Commissioner and the SBE.

The SBE uses findings from the renewal process to determine the length of the renewal and any necessary conditions and/or reporting requirements. In accordance with state law, a charter may be renewed for a maximum of five years. In order to be eligible for a five-year renewal, the charter school must meet all performance indicators outlined in the charter school performance framework. Conversely, a school's charter will not be renewed if the school does not apply for renewal or if the school fails to meet critical charter performance standards. In the case of non-renewal, the charter school will be closed upon the charter's expiration.

In the 2017-18 fiscal year, three charters were renewed by the SBE and in 2018-19 fiscal year, four state charters and one local charter were renewed by the SBE:

School Name	Renewal Date	Renewal Period
Brass City Charter School, Waterbury	May 2, 2018	4 years
Explorations Charter School, Winsted	May 2, 2018	3 years
New Beginnings Family Academy, Bridgeport	May 2, 2018	3 years
Achievement First Hartford Academy	May 1, 2019	3 years
*Elm City Montessori, New Haven	May 1, 2019	3 years
Great Oaks Charter School, Bridgeport	March 6, 2019	2 years
Park City Prep Charter School, Bridgeport	May 1, 2019	3 years
Stamford Academy	March 6, 2019	2 years

\*Local Charter School

Currently, twelve charter schools are up for renewal in the 2019-20 fiscal year: Achievement First Bridgeport, Amistad Academy (New Haven), Booker T. Washington Academy (New Haven), Capital Prep Harbor, (Bridgeport), Common Ground High School (New Haven), Elm City College Prep (New Haven), Highville Charter School (New Haven), Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication (New London), Jumoke Academy (Hartford), Odyssey Community School (Manchester), Stamford Charter School for Excellence, and The Bridge Academy (Bridgeport).

## **School Profile Compilations**

EdSIGHT-INSIGHT INTO EDUCATION, includes Profile and Performance Reports (formerly known as Strategic School Profiles). These reports can be accessed by using the following link:

<http://edsight.ct.gov/SASPortal/main.do>.

## **Funding**

Pursuant to Section 10-66ee(d), for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2019, and each fiscal year thereafter, a grant of \$11,250 per student is issued to state charter schools.

Legislation also provides, within available appropriations, a per-student grant to local charter schools of \$3,000 for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2014, and each fiscal year thereafter.

## **Charter School Facilities**

Legislation authorizes grants to state charter schools to assist them in financing building projects, general improvements to school buildings and repayment of debt incurred for school building projects. To fund the program, section 10-66jj of the C.G.S. states that the State Bond Commission has the authority to approve the issuance of state bonds not to exceed 45 million dollars. Since the grant went into effect in July 2005, the CSDE has issued seven requests for proposals (RFPs) resulting in \$37.7 million dollars in competitively awarded grants to state charter schools. In November 2018 the CSDE issued an RFP with a January 2019 due date. The Department received applications from 10 schools totaling \$6.8 million in requests, applications from six schools were approved by CSDE, totaling \$3.8 million. The Department awaits the Bond Commission's approval to release the funds.

## Demographic Information

The following table represents current charter school eligible enrollment information for 2019-2020:

### Charter Grantees 2019-2020

State Charter School	Eligible Enrollment	2019-20 Projected Grant Payment
Achievement First Bridgeport Academy	1,094	\$12,307,500
Achievement First Hartford Academy	1,125	\$12,656,250
Amistad Academy	1,098	\$12,352,500
Booker T. Washington Academy	420	\$4,725,000
Brass City Charter School	325	\$3,656,250
The Bridge Academy	280	\$3,150,000
Capital Preparatory Harbor School	765	\$8,606,250
Common Ground High School	225	\$2,531,250
Elm City College Preparatory School	765	\$8,606,250
*Elm City Montessori School	200	\$600,000
Explorations Charter School	92	\$1,035,000
Great Oaks Charter School	560	\$6,300,000
Highville Charter School	502	\$5,647,500
Integrated Day Charter School	352	\$3,960,000
Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication (ISAAC)	276	\$3,105,000
Jumoke Academy Charter School	765	\$8,606,250
New Beginnings Family Academy	499	\$5,613,750
Odyssey Community School	328	\$3,690,000
Park City Prep Charter School	360	\$4,050,000
Side By Side Charter School	236	\$2,655,000
Stamford Academy	148	\$1,665,000
Stamford Charter School for Excellence	392	\$4,410,000
<b>Total State Charter</b>	<b>10,607</b>	<b>\$119,328,750</b>
<b>*Total Local Charter</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>600,000</b>

Source: Public School Information System (PSIS), October 2017.

## **Recommendations and Updates**

### **Statutory Changes**

Recognizing that education costs continue to rise, the Legislature passed language increasing state funding to charter schools. The new language that went into effect for fiscal year ending June 30, 2019 and each fiscal year thereafter, replaced the old per-pupil grant award amount of \$11,000 with \$11,250.

### **Prioritize School Models Serving Disadvantaged Populations**

To ensure that high-quality public education is available to all our state's students, we will continue to work to realize the intent of legislative provisions requiring the State to offer certain preferences to eligible charter applicants. Statutory preference is given to applicants whose primary purpose is the establishment of education programs serving disadvantaged populations, including but not limited to, students with a history of low performance, who are educationally disadvantaged, who are English Learners (EL), or who are at an existing school in need of academic improvement. This process will continue into the future.

## **Conclusion**

While the number of charter schools has decreased by two schools since the spring of 2018, the interest for additional seats remains strong. Since the 2017-18 fiscal year charter school enrollment has increased by 398 students and the number of students on charter school waitlists stands at over six thousand students.

Connecticut has seen an increase in charter school accountability since the passage and implementation of new legislation in the 2015 session. In an effort to provide greater public transparency, the Department continues to work with charters to improve Governance and Operations and strengthen and clarify charter schools' responsibility to produce clear expectations for student performance and equity. The Department annually reviews oversight in the four performance areas. All school staff, charter school board members and charter school management organizations (CMO) are required to go through a criminal background check process. Board members are required to attend trainings on board responsibilities, and adopt and adhere to anti-nepotism and conflict of interest policies. Language has been incorporated into CMO-charter school contracts that monitor compliance pertain to Freedom of Information Acts and open, public meetings.

The Department will work to remain focused on oversight, school quality, accountability and transparency to ensure schools are operating in accordance to Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Sections 10-66aa - 10-66uu.