

**Connecticut State Department of Education
Biennial Report on the Operation of
Charter Schools in Connecticut
2018**

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Introduction/Background Information

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, as amended by Public Act 17-2 of the June Special Session; 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, for prospective applicants. 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).

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

The State Charter School Grant: The funds to operate state charter schools are provided through a per-student grant. The state charter school per pupil amount for the 2016-17 and 2017-18 fiscal years was \$11,000.

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Expenditures</u>
FY 14-15	\$87,296,000
FY 15-16	\$99,033,000
FY 16-17	\$103,499,000
*FY 17-18	\$108,537,000

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.

Fiscal Year	Initial Start-up Grant	Per Pupil Grant
FY 14-15	\$250,000	\$250,000
FY 15-16		\$306,000
FY 16-17		\$378,000
*FY 17-18		\$432,000

Charter School Landscape: Currently, a total of 11 school districts host 24 charter schools serving approximately 9,866 students. In total, 83 school districts (about 40 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.

*Estimated

Charter Schools

Charter School	Host District	Districts Served
Achievement First Bridgeport Academy	Bridgeport	Bridgeport
Achievement First Hartford Academy	Hartford	Hartford
Amistad Academy	New Haven	Derby, New Haven
Booker T. Washington	New Haven	East Haven, Hamden, Middletown, New Haven, North Haven, West Haven
Brass City Charter School	Waterbury	Waterbury
The Bridge Academy	Bridgeport	Bridgeport, Stratford
Capital Preparatory Harbor School	Bridgeport	Bridgeport
Common Ground High School	New Haven	Ansonia, Bethany, Branford, Bridgeport, Danbury, East Hartford, East Haven, Hamden, Meriden, Milford, Naugatuck, New Haven, North Haven, Orange, Seymour, Stratford, Waterbury, West Haven
Elm City College Preparatory School	New Haven	Hamden, New Haven
Elm City Montessori (local charter)	New Haven	Branford, East Haven, Guilford, Hamden, New Haven, Wallingford, West Haven
Explorations Charter School	Winsted	Barkhamsted, Canton, Colebrook, Goshen, Granby, Harwinton, Litchfield, Morris, New Hartford, Norfolk, New Canaan, Plymouth, Sharon, Simsbury, Torrington, Waterbury, Watertown, Winchester
Great Oaks	Bridgeport	Bridgeport, Mansfield, Stratford, Waterbury
Highville Charter School	New Haven	Branford, Bridgeport, East Haven, Hamden, Meriden, Middletown, New Britain, New Haven, North Haven, Norwalk, Wallingford, West Haven, Woodbridge
Integrated Day Charter School	Norwich	Bozrah, East Lyme, Franklin, Griswold, Lebanon, Lisbon, Montville, Norwich, Plainfield, Preston, Sprague, Stonington, Waterford
Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication (ISAAC)	New London	East Haddam, East Lyme, Franklin, Groton, Ledyard, Montville, New London, Norwich, Preston, Stonington, Waterford
Jumoke Academy Charter School	Hartford	Bloomfield, East Hartford, Hartford, Manchester, New Britain, New London, Rocky Hill, Simsbury, South Windsor, Torrington, Vernon, Waterbury, West Hartford, Willington, Windsor, Windsor Locks
New Beginnings Family Academy	Bridgeport	Bridgeport, Stratford
Odyssey Charter School	Manchester	Bristol, Coventry, East Hartford, East Windsor, Ellington, Hartford, Manchester, Middletown, South Windsor, Stafford, Vernon, Windham, Windsor
Park City Prep Charter School	Bridgeport	Ansonia, Bridgeport
Path Academy	Windham	Ashford, Chaplin, Colchester, Coventry, Hartford, Lebanon, Ledyard, Mansfield, Meriden, Montville, New Britain, New London, Norwich, Plainfield, Vernon, Willington, Windham
Side by Side Charter School	Norwalk	Bridgeport, Fairfield, Milford, Norwalk, Stamford, Stratford, Trumbull, Wilton
Stamford Academy	Stamford	Bridgeport, Norwalk, Stamford, Stratford, Waterbury
Stamford Charter School for Excellence	Stamford	Stamford
Trailblazers Academy	Stamford	Bridgeport, Norwalk, Stamford

Source: Public School Information System (PSIS) December 2017

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 State Board of Education (SBE) for up to five years. In accordance with C.G.S. § 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 2016-17 fiscal year, nine state charter school charters were renewed by the SBE:

Renewed for Five Years	Renewed for Four Years	Renewed for Three Years
Side By Side Charter School Norwalk	Integrated Day Charter School Norwich	Achievement First Bridgeport Bridgeport
		Amistad Academy New Haven
	Trailblazers Academy Stamford	Booker T. Washington Academy New Haven
		Elm City College Prep New Haven
		Jumoke Academy Hartford
		The Bridge Academy Bridgeport

Currently, four charter schools are up for renewal in the 2017-18 fiscal year: Brass City Charter School (Waterbury), Explorations Charter School (Winsted), New Beginnings Family Academy (Bridgeport) and Stamford Academy (Stamford).

School Profile Compilations

EdSight, Insight Into Education and District Profile and Performance Reports, can be accessed using the following link: <http://edsight.ct.gov/SASPortal/main.do>

Funding

Pursuant to section 10-66ee(d), as amended by Public Act 17-2 of the June Special Session, for the years ending June 30, 2015 to June 30, 2018, inclusive, \$11,000 per-student grant to state charter schools, and for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2019, and each fiscal year thereafter, a grant of \$11,250.

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

Charter School Facilities

In the 2013 special session, effective July 1, 2014, the General Assembly authorized another \$10 million in bonding to fund competitively awarded facility grants to charter schools. This program allowed charter schools to make general improvements to school buildings and repay debt for school building projects. In January 2015, the Bond Commission approved the release of the first \$5 million in grants under this program.

Recognizing the ongoing need to maintain charter school facilities, in the 2015 legislative session, effective July 1, 2016, the General Assembly authorized an additional \$5 million in bonding to fund competitively awarded facility grants to charter schools.

On April 3, 2017, the CSDE issued a Request for Proposals to provide funding to assist charter schools in financing school building projects, general improvements to school buildings, and/or the repayment of debt incurred for school building projects. The application submission due date was April 28, 2017. The Department received 16 applications, and funding was approved for eight schools. On November 29, 2017, the Bond Commission approved the release of the funds under the program.

Demographic Information

The following table represents current charter school eligible enrollment information for 2017-18:

Charter Grantees 2017-18

State Charter School	Eligible Enrollment	2017-18 Projected Grant Payment
Achievement First Bridgeport Academy	1,042	\$11,462,000
Achievement First Hartford Academy	1,149	\$12,639,000
Amistad Academy	1,057	\$11,627,000
Booker T. Washington Academy	300	\$3,300,000
Brass City Charter School	253	\$2,783,000
The Bridge Academy	279	\$3,069,000
Capital Preparatory Harbor School	404	\$4,444,000
Common Ground High School	200	\$2,200,000
Elm City College Preparatory School	719	\$7,909,000
Elm City Montessori School	160	\$480,000
Explorations Charter School	92	\$1,012,000
Great Oaks Charter School	400	\$4,400,000
Highville Charter School	502	\$5,522,000
Integrated Day Charter School	330	\$3,630,000
Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication (ISAAC)	270	\$2,970,000
Jumoke Academy Charter School	753	\$8,283,000
New Beginnings Family Academy	497	\$5,467,000
Odyssey Community School	328	\$3,608,000
Park City Prep Charter School	360	\$3,960,000
Path Academy - Windham	157	\$1,727,000
Side By Side Charter School	235	\$2,585,000
Stamford Academy	148	\$1,628,000
Stamford Charter School for Excellence	273	\$3,003,000
Trailblazers Academy	118	\$1,298,000
Total State Charter	9,866	\$108,526,000
Total Local Charter	160	480,000

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

Recommendations and Updates

Recent Statutory Changes

To make local and state charter schools more accountable and transparent, during the 2015 legislative session the state Legislature passed Public Act 15-239. As indicated earlier in this report, the CSDE has developed processes to ensure the charter schools comply with the new law. As the law is far reaching and increases charter school accountability, the CSDE does not recommend any statutory changes at this time.

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 EL, or who are at an existing school in need of academic improvement. This process will continue into the future.

Conclusion

Connecticut charter schools continue to provide public school choice options for students and their families. While the number of charter schools has increased by seven new schools since the fall of 2013, the need for additional seats remains strong. Over the last two school years, 2016-17 to 2017-18, the demand for seats has grown to a waitlist of over 13,000 students and an enrollment of approximately 9,866 students.

Connecticut saw an increase in charter school accountability through the passage and implementation of new legislation in the 2015 session. The law is wide ranging, encompassing financial audit and reporting, background checks and training of charter school board membership and strengthening the terms of charter management contracts between the schools and charter school management organizations. The increase in charter school accountability has led to greater transparency and will ideally lead to improvements in student achievement and financial viability of charter schools going forward.