



For Immediate Release:

August 11, 2014

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State Department of Education Announces Improvements to Charter School Oversight Policies

(HARTFORD, CT)—The Connecticut State Department of Education today announced improvements to its administrative policies pertaining to the oversight of charter schools.

The goal of today's set of actions is to ensure that all charter schools operate according to high standards of educational excellence, organizational governance, accountability, and transparency. Implementation of the policy changes will begin immediately.

The changes developed by the State Department of Education fall within three categories:

1. **Improved Governance and Operations**: Improve charter school boards of directors' supervision of charter schools by requiring background checks for all board members and employees, the adoption of board policies for preventing conflicts of interest and nepotism, trainings for board members, and other practices designed to foster effective, responsible governance.
2. **Clear Expectations for Student Performance and Equity**: Strengthen and clarify charter schools' responsibility to produce strong student outcomes and to enroll representative student bodies, in keeping with the foundational premise of the operation of charter schools: increased autonomy in exchange for heightened accountability.
3. **Greater Public Transparency**: Ensure that charter schools and charter management organizations (CMOs) adhere to important rules governing public meetings and public information.

In July 2014, Governor Malloy directed the Department to conduct a review of existing charter school policies and to develop recommendations for improving the state's oversight of these schools.

Commissioner Pryor said, "Charter schools are part of our state's public education system. As such, they have a responsibility to continue providing excellent educational options to thousands of low-income families while adhering to high standards regarding governance and transparency. With today's administrative actions, charter schools will emerge stronger, better governed, and more accountable for producing top-notch results."

The policy changes related to improved charter school governance and operations include the following administrative actions and recommendations:

- Require background checks of charter school staff and board members, as well as charter school management organization (CMO) staff.
- Mandate that charter school boards and CMOs adopt and adhere to anti-nepotism and conflict of interest policies.

- Require all charter school board members to attend trainings on board responsibilities and best practices in charter school governance.
- Develop clearer rules governing the fees charged by CMOs.
- Require annual reporting by charter schools in key areas.
- Strengthen the Department's role in the annual random audit process.
- Expand the Department's charter school office to enable more effective oversight.

Regarding creating clearer expectations of student performance and equity, the Department announced it would take the following steps:

- Require that charter documents set explicit expectations for student outcomes and school operations.
- Establish clear expectations for the recruitment of vulnerable student populations.
- Develop clearer criteria for awarding new charters and allow for planning years.
- Convene a workgroup to examine ways to improve special education services delivery.

In the domain of public transparency, the Department included the following steps:

- Require the incorporation of language in CMO-charter school contracts stating that CMOs performing functions that render the CMO the functional equivalent of a public agency are subject to the FOIA. In addition, all CMO-charter school agreements in excess of \$2.5 million must include language specifying that documents related to the performance of the contract are subject to the FOIA, pursuant to section 1-218 of the Connecticut General Statutes.
- Monitor schools' compliance with the FOIA's requirements related to open, public meetings.

The Department engaged local and national experts including the National Governors Association (NGA), the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE), the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS), other state-level departments of education, and Connecticut charter school operators during this process.

Currently, there are 18 state charter schools in operation in Connecticut serving approximately 7,100 students, which represents 1.3% of public school students. In total, there are 1,151 public schools and programs serving 545,614 public school students in Connecticut. By the 2015-16 school year, there are expected to be 23 state charter schools and one local charter school in operation in Connecticut.

The full text of the Department's recommendations are contained in the attached fact sheet, [available here](#).

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