

CHARTER SCHOOL UPDATE 2006

Charter schools (community schools in Ohio) are public nonprofit, nonsectarian schools that operate independently of any school district, instead they are under a contract with an authorized sponsor that is established in statute or approved by the State Board of Education. These schools were created in Ohio in 1997 and are public schools of choice funded by state and federal money, and indirectly by local property tax.

Sponsors (by Ohio Law) may be local school districts, county education service centers, public colleges and universities, and 501(c)(3) (non-profit) organizations. Ohio law permits for-profit Education Management Organizations to operate charter schools, but not sponsor them. Currently, 60% of charter school students are included in these organizations. In 2005, Ohio had 268 charter schools. Those run by for-profit or private organizations are 79%. During the past year some charter schools were closed either because of financial reasons, poor academic performance, or auditing problems.

Unfortunately there is very little oversight of charter schools and their sponsors. The Ohio Office of Educational Oversight (OOEO) was doing some research into charter schools. Unfortunately, 39% of these schools did not even turn in information requested (performance data). Of the 60% that did turn in reports, the majority were performing in the bottom 2 categories (Academic Emergency, Academic Watch). The OOEO was abolished in the budget bill of 2006. (HB 66)

Some bills before the Ohio Assembly are:

SB 197

Beginning in 2007, state payments for each student attending a community school not sponsored by the student's resident school district be made directly to the community school, instead of first being credited to the resident district.

SB 176 and HB 335

Prohibits new start-up community schools in "Big Eight" school districts (Cleveland, Cincinnati, Columbus, Akron, Canton, Youngstown, Dayton, Toledo) and Pilot Project Area (Lucas County) districts, unless the district is in academic watch or emergency.

SB 110

Creates a 2 year moratorium on the establishment of new community schools sponsored by entities other than the school districts in which the proposed schools would be located.

Requires teachers hired after 7/1/02 to teach core academic subjects in community schools that receive federal Title I funds be "highly qualified."

Imposes a civil penalty on the chief fiscal officer of a community school if it fails to report accurate Education Management Information System Data.

HB 295

Requires the Department of Education to request the sponsor with violations to terminate or not renew it's contract, and if not done, the Dept of Education will do so.

Dept of Education is required to conduct annual audits of each community school EMIS data regarding proficiency and achievement test scores.

If these schools don't cooperate, they may be fined \$1000/day.

Requires each school to report on number of students who have withdrawn from the school during the year.

SB 129 and HB 213

Extends the statewide cap on the number of new community schools sponsored by entities other than school districts till 7/07.

Eliminates the requirement that the community school's fiscal officer is responsible for reporting to EMIS.

Requires the Dept of Education to withhold 10% of state funding for first incident of non compliance with EMIS reporting and 20% more for second incident.

Requires Dept of Education to examine the proficiency and achievement data reported by community schools for completeness and accuracy.

HB 431

Creates special education scholarship program to provide scholarships for disabled children to attend alternative public or private special education programs.

References:

Office of Community Schools (OCS), Ohio Dept of Education Website
www.ode.state.oh.us

"Who Profits from Charter Schools?" Ohio Education Association Research Bulletin
March, 2005

League of Women Voters Conference on Charter Schools March 18, 2006
Ohio Assembly Website www.legislature.state.oh.us