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# Overview of Charter Schools In California

Presented to:  
Senate Education Committee  
Hon. Carol Liu, Chair





## **Basic Rules for Charter Schools in California**

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### **California Established Charter Schools in 1992**

- State intended to offer parents an alternative to traditional public schools and encourage local leaders to experiment with new educational techniques.



### **Charter Schools Must Meet Three Basic State Requirements**

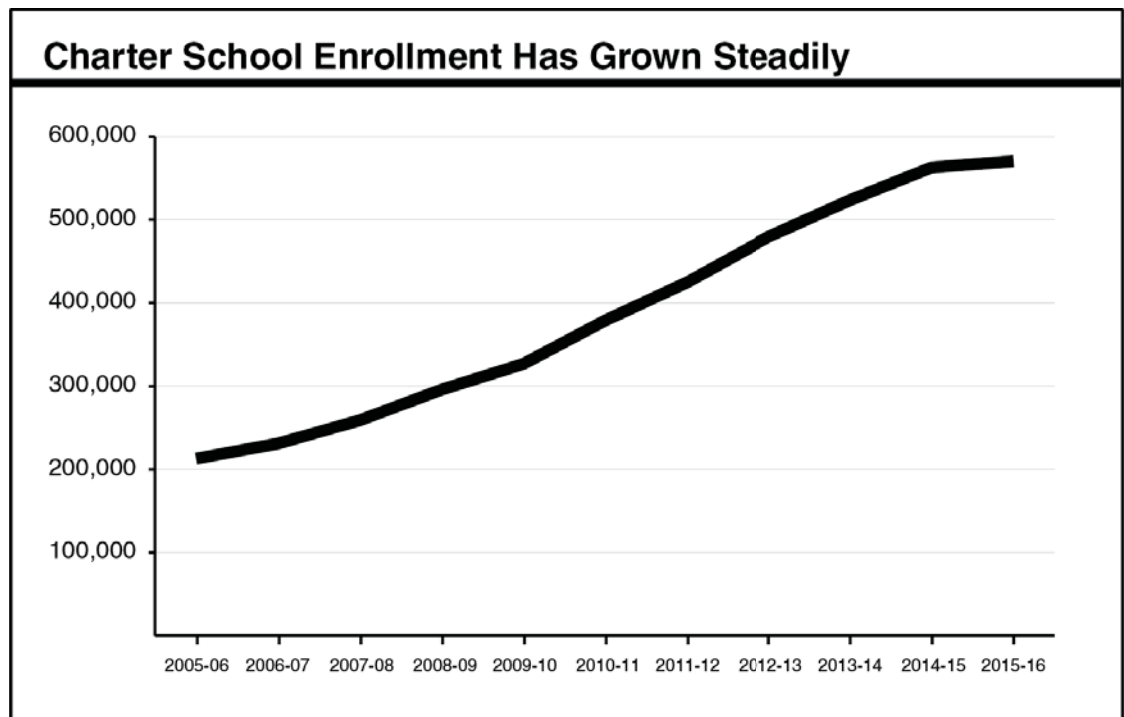
- All charter schools must: (1) provide nonsectarian instruction, (2) charge no tuition, and (3) admit all interested California students up to school capacity.



### **Charter Schools Subject to a Different Accountability Model**

- Charter schools are exempt from most state laws and regulations.
- Rather than being subject to a state-oriented compliance-based accountability model, charter schools develop local charters (legal agreements between schools and their authorizers) and must comply with the terms of their charters.

## Characteristics of California Charter Schools



- In 2005-06, 560 charter schools served about 200,000 students (3.4 percent of the state’s K-12 enrollment).
- In 2015-16, 1,207 charter schools served more than 550,000 students (9.2 percent of the state’s K-12 enrollment).



### **Most Charter Schools Are Small yet Located in Urban Areas**

- The median charter school has an enrollment of about 250 students, while the median noncharter public school has an enrollment of about 525.
- Together, the Bay Area, Los Angeles County, and San Diego County account for more than 60 percent of all charter schools and charter school enrollment in the state.



## **Types of Charter Schools**

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### **Charter Schools Can Be Conversions of Existing Public Schools or New Startup Schools**

- About 15 percent of charter schools are conversions.
- About 85 percent of charter schools are startups.



### **Charter Schools Offer Two Types of Instruction**

- About 80 percent of charter schools offer traditional, classroom-based instruction.
- About 20 percent of charter schools offer some form of independent study, such as distance learning or home study.



## Charter School Authorization

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### **Charter Schools Are Established Through a Petition Process**

- Petitions must be signed by a sufficient number of interested teachers or parents.
- Petitions must set forth a comprehensive vision for the school, including: its educational program, student outcome measurements, student discipline policy, employee policies, governance structure, and fiscal plans.



### **Each Petition Must Be Approved by an Authorizer**

- Charters can be authorized by the district where the charter school will be located, its county office of education (COE), or the State Board of Education (SBE).
- An authorizer may deny a petition for one of five reasons: (1) proposed educational program is unsound, (2) petitioners are unlikely to successfully implement their program, (3) insufficient signatures, (4) proposed school violates one of the three basic requirements for all charter schools, or (5) petition does not include a reasonably comprehensive vision for the school.
- A charter school that is rejected by its district may appeal to its COE or the SBE.
- Initial authorization is for a period of up to five years.

## Charter School Oversight

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### **Variation Exists in Charter Schools Per Authorizer**

- More than half of all authorizers in California oversee one charter school.
- Together, California's two largest districts (Los Angeles and San Diego Unified School Districts) oversee more than one-quarter of all charter schools in the state.



### **Authorizers Are Responsible for Ongoing Oversight**

- At a minimum, each authorizer must fulfill five basic responsibilities: (1) identify a contact person at the charter school; (2) visit the charter school at least annually; (3) ensure the charter school completes all required reports, including the Local Control and Accountability Plan; (4) monitor the charter school's finances; and (5) notify the SBE if a charter is renewed, revoked, or the school closes.
- Authorizers typically charge a fee of up to 1 percent of charter school revenue to cover the cost of their oversight activities.



### **Charter Schools Are Subject to Regular Review and Renewal**

- At the end of the initial authorization period, the authorizer must decide whether to renew the charter. The renewal process generally is similar to that for approving a new charter.
- State law requires charter schools to demonstrate a minimum level of academic performance before they can have their charters renewed.
- These performance standards have not been updated to reflect changes to the state assessment and accountability system.

## Major Statutory Changes to Charter School Oversight

Year	Chapter	Bill	Change
1998	34	(AB 544, Lempert)	Clarified criteria for approving or denying charter petitions. Allowed charter schools to appeal a rejected petition to the COE or SBE. Authorized SBE to grant and revoke charters under specified conditions.
1999	162	(SB 434, Johnston)	Required independent study programs run by charter schools to provide a minimum number of instructional minutes.
2000	160	(SB 326, Lewis)	Allowed charter schools to appeal a revoked charter to the COE or SBE.
2001	344	(SB 675, Poochigan)	Required charter schools to submit annual financial and compliance reports to CDE in addition to their authorizer.
2001	892	(SB 740, O'Connell)	Authorized the SBE to reduce funding for nonclassroom based charter schools that spend below a certain threshold on instruction.
2002	1058	(AB 1994, Reyes)	Increased financial reporting requirements for charter schools. Limited ability of charter schools to locate anywhere in the state.
2003	892	(AB 1137, Reyes)	Required charter schools seeking renewal to meet minimum academic performance standards at the school level.
2012	576	(AB 1290, Alquist)	Required charter schools seeking renewal to meet minimum academic performance standards for student subgroups.
2013	49	(SB 91, Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review)	Required charter schools to develop Local Control and Accountability Plans similar to those required of districts.

COE = county office of education; SBE = State Board of Education; and CDE = California Department of Education.