

Connecticut State Department of Education
Biennial Report on the Operation of
Charter Schools in Connecticut
2014

Table of Contents

Introduction/Background Information.....	1
Charter School Landscape.....	2
Accountability.....	3
Charter Renewal.....	3
New Charters.....	4
School Profile Compilations.....	5
Adequacy of Funding.....	5
School Performance.....	6
Charter Schools Facilities.....	7
Demographic Information.....	8
Recommendations and Updates.....	10
Conclusion.....	11

Introduction/Background Information

Statutory Reporting Requirement: Section 10-66gg of the Connecticut General Statutes 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.

Overview: Connecticut's 18 public charter schools have demonstrated an ability to work towards closing the achievement gap for student bodies that are made up predominately of students of color and from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. The number of charter school seats is growing but is not yet keeping up with the demand.

In the 2012 legislative session, Governor Malloy introduced, and the Connecticut General Assembly passed, a landmark education legislative package that, among other elements, strengthens opportunities for public charter schools in Connecticut. To meet the demands of the legislation, the CSDE issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) in February 2013 and on April 1, 2013, received seven applications, five of which were for state charters and two for local charters. Brass City Charter School (Waterbury) and Path Academy (Windham) were approved by the SBE in June 2013. Elm City Montessori School (New Haven) was approved by the SBE in July 2013. In addition, the CSDE issued a new RFP on November 8, 2013 with a January 24, 2014 due date for prospective applicants.

Enabling Legislation: Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Sections 10-66aa to 10-66gg.

The State Charter School Grant: In 1996, the General Assembly and Governor enacted legislation establishing charter schools in Connecticut, seeking to catalyze innovation in the state's public schools, as well as to establish another vehicle to reduce the racial and economic isolation of Connecticut's public school students. The funds to operate state charter schools are provided through a per-student grant. This grant was funded at a level of \$10,500 in the 2013-14 fiscal year and will increase to \$11,000 in the 2014-15 fiscal year.

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Amount</u>
FY 00-01	\$14,000,000	FY 07-08	\$35,274,700
FY 01-02	\$14,665,000	FY 08-09	\$41,654,700
FY 02-03	\$15,568,000	FY 09-10	\$48,081,000
FY 03-04	\$16,421,250	FY 10-11	\$52,768,200
FY 04-05	\$19,820,480	FY 11-12	\$56,926,400
FY 05-06	\$22,469,000	FY 12-13	\$65,524,800
FY 06-07	\$29,832,500	FY 13-14	\$74,886,000

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 fund availability, initial start-up grants of up to \$500,000 and grants of up to \$3,000 per student.

Charter School Landscape

The relatively small size of charter schools, innovative instruction by a carefully selected staff and the high degree of parental involvement has enabled charter schools to provide a unique educational environment. Currently, a total of 11 school districts host 18 charter schools serving approximately 7,132 students. In total, 68 school districts (about 40 percent of all school districts in Connecticut) have students enrolled in charter schools. Below is a list of current charter schools, their host district and school districts served.

Charter School	Host District	Districts Served
Achievement First Bridgeport Academy	Bridgeport	Bridgeport
Achievement First Hartford Academy	Hartford	Hartford
Amistad Academy	New Haven	New Haven
Brass City Charter School	Waterbury	Waterbury
The Bridge Academy	Bridgeport	Bridgeport, Stratford
Common Ground High School	New Haven	Ansonia, Bethany, Bridgeport, Derby, East Haven, Guilford, Hamden, Naugatuck, New Haven, Seymour, Trumbull, Waterbury, West Haven
Elm City College Preparatory School	New Haven	New Haven
Explorations Charter School	Winsted	Avon, Barkhamsted, Canaan, Canton, Hartland, Harwinton, Litchfield, Morris, New Hartford, Plymouth, Salisbury, Thomaston, Torrington, Winchester
Highville Charter School	Hamden	Branford, East Haven, Guilford, Hamden, Meriden, Middletown, Milford, New Britain, New Haven, West Haven
Integrated Day Charter School	Norwich	Bozrah, Brooklyn, East Lyme, Franklin, Griswold, Ledyard, Montville, Norwich, Plainfield, Preston, Salem, Sprague, Windham
Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication (ISAAC)	New London	Canterbury, Groton, Ledyard, Lyme, Montville, New London, North Stonington, Norwich, Preston, Stonington, Waterford
Jumoke Academy Charter School	Hartford	Bloomfield, East Hartford, Farmington, Glastonbury, Hartford, Manchester, Middletown, New London, Rocky Hill, Simsbury, South Windsor, Vernon, West Hartford, Windsor, Windsor Locks
New Beginnings Family Academy	Bridgeport	Bridgeport, New Haven, Shelton, Stratford
Odyssey Charter School	Manchester	Coventry, East Hartford, Glastonbury, Hartford, Manchester, Middletown, South Windsor, Stafford, Vernon, Windham, Windsor
Park City Prep Charter School	Bridgeport	Bridgeport
Side by Side Charter School	Norwalk	Bridgeport, Fairfield, Milford, Norwalk, Stamford, Stratford, Trumbull, Weston
Stamford Academy	Stamford	Bridgeport, Norwalk, Stamford
Trailblazers Academy	Stamford	Bridgeport, Norwalk, Stamford

Source: Public School Information System (PSIS), October 2013 (unaudited)

Accountability

Connecticut's charter school law and the accountability plan administered by the CSDE require charter schools to demonstrate their success and compliance with the law in exchange for their charters. While the majority of Connecticut charter schools have proven to be successful models of alternative public education, there have been some that have struggled and some that have closed their operations.

Since 1999, six state charter schools have closed:

- Village Academy's charter (New Haven) was revoked by the SBE in the first week of school in 1999-00 due to the school's failure to comply with health and safety laws;
- Ancestors Community High School (Waterbury) relinquished its charter to the SBE at the end of school year 2000-01 citing insufficient funds to operate the program;
- Charter Oak Preparatory Academy (New Britain/Hartford) relinquished its charter to the SBE on February 1, 2002, citing insufficient funds to operate the program;
- Brooklawn Academy's charter (Bridgeport/Fairfield) was not renewed by the SBE in 2003 due to its failure to demonstrate sufficient student progress;
- Cross Cultural Academy of Arts and Technology (Hartford) relinquished its charter to the SBE on May 25, 2007, citing insufficient funds to operate the program.
- Charter School for Young Children on Asylum Hill (Hartford) transitioned to an interdistrict magnet school on July 1, 2011.

Like state charter schools, local charter schools are chartered by the SBE. Based on a mutual agreement with the CSDE, one local charter school, Coventry Science Center Charter School, returned its charter before it opened in the 1999-00 school year. Two local charter schools in Hartford (Breakthrough and Sport Science Academy) transitioned to interdistrict magnet schools in 2002-03.

Charter Renewal

In the 2012-2013 school year one state charter school, Achievement First Hartford Academy, had its charter renewed by the State Board of Education (SBE) for an additional three years.

The renewal of a school's charter encompasses a rigorous application process, a public hearing presided over by a SBE member and a site visit conducted by a renewal team comprised of staff from the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), local school districts and other charter schools.

During a site visit, the renewal team assesses the quality of the charter school's teaching and learning by reviewing the school's educational model and curriculum, and by interviewing school stakeholders. The renewal team also ensures that the charter school is functioning in compliance with the law by verifying responses detailed in charter renewal applications based on eight areas: 1) financial management; 2) governance; 3) curriculum; 4) teaching staff; 5) enrollment and attendance; 6) facilities, equipment, books and materials; 7) special education; and 8) student assessment. The CSDE also considers school climate data, including student disciplinary and attendance information.

New Charters

On February 7, 2013, the SBE requested applications for state and local charter schools. Five state charter applications were received. Of these state charter applications, the SBE granted two state charters, Brass City Charter School, which will serve Grades PK-8 in Waterbury, and Path Academy Charter School, which will serve Grades 9-12 in Windham. Two local charter applications were received. One application was approved by the SBE, chartering Elm City Montessori School, which will serve Grades PK-8 in New Haven.

Brass City Charter School (BCCS) opened in September 2013. The school's mission provides a rigorous academic and holistic social emotional learning program to eliminate the achievement gap for underserved students in Waterbury. As part of the charter approval, BCCS received the following preferences:

1. Serving high-need populations – specifically students who receive free or reduced price lunch;
2. Reduction of racial, ethnic and economic isolation;
3. Priority School District or District with at least 75 percent racial or ethnic minority enrollment; and
4. Serving underserved geographic location – there is currently no other charter school in Waterbury.

Path Academy Charter School (PACS) will open in September of 2014. The school's mission is to reengage the Windham region's overage, under-credited students for success in college, career and community. The school will also specialize in language acquisition for English language learners (ELL). As part of the charter approval, PACS received the following preferences:

1. Serving high-need populations – specifically students who receive free or reduced price lunch;
2. Reduction of racial, ethnic and economic isolation;
3. Priority School District or District with at least 75 percent racial or ethnic minority enrollment; and
4. Serving underserved geographic location – there is currently no other charter school in Windham region.

Elm City Montessori School (ECMS) will open in September of 2014. The school's purpose is to offer New Haven families a high quality, public Montessori program for children between the ages of three and 13. As part of the charter approval, ECMS received the following preferences:

1. Serving high-need populations – specially ECMS plans to serve a high-need student population characterized by a high percentage of students who received free and reduced priced lunch, a high percentage of students who are ELL and a district with a history of low academic performance;
2. Reduction of racial, ethnic and economic isolation; and
3. Priority School District or district with at least 75 percent racial or ethnic minority enrollment

The State Board of Education remains the sole authorizer of state charter schools pursuant to subsection (f) of section 10-66bb of the C.G.S. State charters are funded at the level specified in subsection (d) of section 10-66ee. A local charter school means a public school or part of a public school that is converted into a charter school and is approved by the local or regional board of education of the school district in which it is located and by the State Board of Education pursuant to subsection (e) of section 10-66bb. Pursuant to subsection (c) of section 10-66ee, the SBE may

approving funding of up to \$3000 per pupil for local charter schools. The local school district provides the remaining funding so as to ensure commensurate funding for local charter schools as other public schools in the host district.

School Profile Compilations

Strategic School Profiles for each charter school are available at:
<http://sdeportal.ct.gov/Cedar/WEB/ResearchandReports/SSPReports.aspx>

School Performance Index (SPI) Reports are available at:
<http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/performance-reports/20122013reports.asp>

Adequacy of Funding

The 2013-2015 Biennial Budget provides funding for state charter schools at \$10,500 per pupil in fiscal year 2014 and \$11,000 in fiscal year 2015.

The Budget 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.

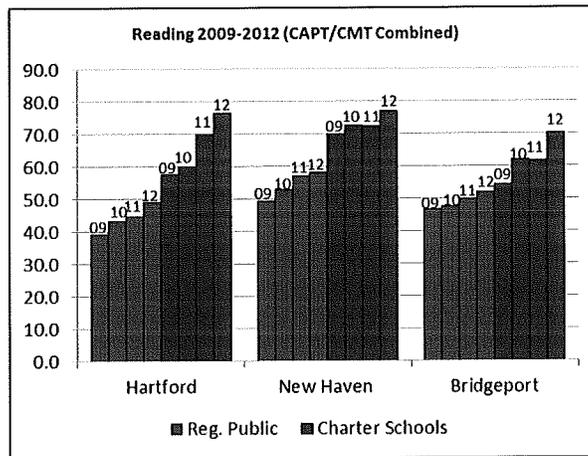
Funding levels for charter schools should be sufficient to enable these schools to provide high-quality alternatives for families located in school districts with a dearth of high-quality options. Per-student charter funding should compare equitably to the total funding levels of other public schools serving similar populations. Other states' charter school formulas should be studied in order to determine how such equity as compared to local district funding can best be accomplished.

School Performance

Percentage of Hartford, New Haven and Bridgeport resident students at or above proficiency in reading, in both charter schools and the traditional public schools (latest available):

Tested in Reading (2009 - 2012 CMT/ CAPT)

	Hartford	New Haven	Bridgeport
Charter '09	250	721	706
Traditional '09	7559	5443	9742
Charter '10	334	793	788
Traditional '10	7009	4995	9449
Charter '11	491	865	877
Traditional '11	6310	4866	9088
Charter '12	589	974	1039
Traditional '12	6596	4798	8920



Tested in Reading (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 CMT/ CAPT)¹

Source: 2012 Program Report Card: Public Charter School Program (CSDE)

The data reflects students in tested grades only (Grades 3-8, 10). Resident students from these three cities are chosen, as they are the only urban areas with at least two charter schools serving significant numbers of city students, from which to base valid comparisons.

Since charter schools largely serve poor and minority students, one way to base comparisons is by comparing “like-students” with similar academic risk factors of urban communities. In this case, the performance of city resident students who opted for charter schools were compared to the performance of students in traditional district schools. City resident students who attend charter schools outperform students in the city public schools in reading and have achieved at or above proficiency at a greater rate than city public school students between 2009 and 2012.

¹ Note: These data reflect students in tested grades only (Grades 3-8). Resident students from these three cities are chosen as they are the only urban areas with at least two PCSs serving significant numbers of city students from which to base valid comparisons.

Charter School Facilities

In the 2005 special session, the General Assembly authorized \$10 million in bonding to fund competitively awarded facility grants to charter schools in the 2006 and 2007 fiscal years. This program allowed charter schools to make general improvements to school buildings and repay debt for school building projects. In August 2006, the Bond Commission approved the release of the first \$5 million in grants under this program. In May of 2008, the Bond Commission approved the release of the second \$5 million in grants.

The General Assembly created a pilot school construction grant during the 2005 legislative session that provided a grant to one state charter school to buy and renovate a building for use as a charter school facility. Amistad Academy applied for this grant in November of 2005. The project was authorized for \$34.25 million and has allowed Amistad to purchase and renovate the former Dwight School in New Haven. The new school opened in August of 2011, serving Grades K-8.

In the 2007 special session, the General Assembly authorized a second \$10 million in bonding to fund competitively awarded facility grants to charter schools in the 2008 and 2009 fiscal years. In August of 2010, the Bond Commission approved the release of \$2,529,154 of \$5 million in grants. The Bond Commission approved the release of the remaining grant funding as follows: \$686,000 in April of 2011 and \$1,452,316 in July of 2011. This left a balance of \$332,530 due to the reduction of principal of awards granted for the repayment of debt incurred for school building projects. The balance was added to the next round of awards.

Recognizing the ongoing need to maintain charter school facilities, in the 2010 legislative session the General Assembly made the competitively awarded facilities grant to charter schools permanent. On August 2, 2012, the CSDE released an Application for State Funds for Charter School Building Projects, Improvements and Debt Repayment for grant funding totaling \$5,332,530 approved by the Bond Commission. State charter schools, which are not entitled to local funding or facilities, struggle to fund suitable facilities.

The CSDE has released a new application for state grants totaling \$5 million in 2014. This additional funding will help meet the needs of state charter schools to develop or maintain adequate school facilities.

Demographic Information

The following tables represent charter school demographic information taken from the final charter school grant calculations dated March 2013.

Charter Grantees 2012-13

State Charter School	Eligible Enrollment	Final Payment as of April 2012
Achievement First Bridgeport Academy	671	\$6,844,200
Achievement First Hartford Academy	803	\$8,190,600
Amistad Academy	881	\$8,986,200
The Bridge Academy	275	\$2,805,000
Common Ground High School	164	\$1,672,800
Elm City College Preparatory School	597	\$6,089,400
Explorations Charter School	73	\$ 744,600
Highville Charter School	340	\$3,468,000
Integrated Day Charter School	330	\$3,366,000
Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication (ISAAC)	191	\$1,948,200
Jumoke Academy Charter School	589	\$6,007,800
New Beginnings Family Academy	399	\$4,069,800
Odyssey Community School	324	\$3,304,800
Park City Prep Charter School	250	\$2,550,000
Side by Side Charter School	233	\$2,376,600
Stamford Academy	136	\$1,387,200
Trailblazers Academy	168	\$1,713,600
Total	6,424	\$65,524,800

Information taken from the final charter school grant calculation dated March 2013.

Charter Student Data 2012-13

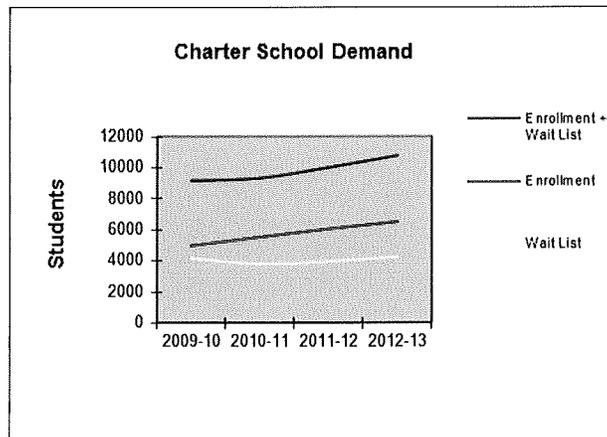
State Charter School	Percentage of Free/Reduced Lunch	Percentage of Special Education Students	Minority Percentage	ELL
Achievement First Bridgeport Academy	82.19	7.98	98.86	9.54
Achievement First Hartford Academy	100.00	7.77	100.00	5.10
Amistad Academy	81.08	4.98	98.12	8.30
The Bridge Academy	80.80	14.49	99.28	0.36
Common Ground High School	57.99	12.43	79.29	0.59
Elm City College Preparatory School	74.01	6.46	98.84	4.97
Explorations Charter School	30.14	23.29	9.59	0.00
Highville Charter School	70.97	2.64	99.12	0.00
Integrated Day Charter School	30.30	9.70	38.48	10.00
Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication (ISAAC)	66.49	16.23	72.25	13.61
Jumoke Academy Charter School	58.06	3.23	99.66	0.00
New Beginnings Family Academy	82.96	7.27	98.75	0.25
Odyssey Charter School	42.90	9.57	54.63	0.00
Park City Prep Charter School	69.37	9.56	92.02	1.20
Side by Side Community School	36.05	5.15	78.97	5.58
Stamford Academy	96.43	11.43	96.43	0.00
Trailblazers Academy	87.50	23.81	95.83	0.00

Source: October 2012, Public School Information System (PSIS).

Charter Enrollment Growth

Table 1 - 2011-13 Charter School Enrollment Summary					
Charter School Name	2011-12 Grade Levels	2011-12 Eligible Enrollment	2012-13 Grades Added	2012-13 Eligible Enrollment	Enrollment Increase
Achievement First Bridgeport	K-1, 5-9	536	2,10	671	135
Achievement First Hartford	K-8	755	9	803	48
Amistad Academy	K-12	855	None	881	26
The Bridge Academy	7-12	275	None	275	0
Common Ground High School	9-12	164	None	164	0
Elm City College Preparatory School	K-11	592	12	597	5
Explorations Charter School	10-12	85	9	85	0
Highville Charter School	PK-8	337	None	340	3
Integrated Day Charter School	PK-8	330	None	330	0
ISAAC	6-8	191	None	191	0
Jumoke Academy	PK-8	488	9	592	104
New Beginnings Family Academy	K-8	360	PK	400	40
Odyssey Community School	K-8	313	None	324	11
Park City Prep	6-8	250	None	250	0
Side by Side Community School	PK-8	236	None	236	0
Stamford Academy	9-12	135	None	136	1
Trailblazers Academy	6-8	169	None	176	7
Total		6,071		6,451	380

Total charter school enrollment and the number of students on wait lists:



Source: 2009-2013 total charter enrollment (PSIS) and wait list data (CSDE)

Total charter school enrollment has grown from 4,985 to 6,518 between 2009-10 and 2012-13, an increase of 32 percent. The number of students on wait lists has also remained high from 4,186 to 4,273 between 2009-10 and 2012-13. In 2012-13, the number of students on waitlists was 66% of the students enrolled. The demand for charter schools is high while the rate of future expansion is dependent on legislative support.

Recommendations and Updates

Statutory Changes

To make local and state charter schools more accountable and transparent, the SBE adopted the following legislative proposals at its December 4, 2013, meeting. These proposals are being pursued in the 2014 legislative session.

- A. Equalize state and local charters in the following ways:
 - Posting of public information
 - Chances for random annual financial audit
 - Opportunity for cooperative agreements
 - Eligibility for state assistance for capital expenses.

- B. Define, clarify and lower the town contribution for local charter funding, and assign an amount to be allocated for pre-K students. This proposal clarifies the funding stream for local charter schools in two ways. First, it replaces “net current expenditures” with a more specific funding formula. Second, it specifically addresses pre-kindergarten students in the context of the overall funding formula.

- C. Technical correction to the State’s statutory due date for the April state and local charter school grant payments. This proposal provides a technical correction to the State’s statutory due date for the April state and local charter school grant payments.

Charter School/District Partnerships

Legislation passed in the 2013 session, PA 13-206, allows districts and charter schools to form additional partnerships within Alliance Districts to report student achievement data passed during the 2013 legislative session. In the Commissioner’s Network, effective charter management organizations are collaborating with districts to turn around traditional public schools that are in need of assistance. We should work to foster more partnerships between effective charter schools and the traditional public school system.

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 new legislative provisions requiring the State to offer certain preferences to eligible charter applicants (pursuant to section 10-66bb of the C.G.S.). 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 ELL, or who are at an existing school in need of academic improvement. As mentioned previously in the report, in June and July of 2013, the SBE approved three charter schools that received preferences for serving many of these disadvantaged populations. This process will be continued into the future.

Conclusion

State charter schools served a total of 6,518 students in school year 2012-13 and 7,097 in 2013-14. Charter schools are successfully meeting the needs of those seeking educational programs or settings not provided by their district schools. In spite of steadily growing enrollments, the public demand for charter schools in Connecticut remains strong and there continue to be waiting lists for entrance into these schools.

As detailed in the CSDE 2012 Program Report Card: Public Charter School Program² developed pursuant to the agency results based accountability (RBA) methodology, city resident students who attend charter schools outperform students in the city public schools in reading and mathematics, and have achieved at or above proficiency at a greater rate than city public school students between 2009 and 2012 in both subject areas. These results are noteworthy given that the majority of charter school students reside in the state's priority school districts, which serve academically high-risk students.

Connecticut saw an enrollment increase of ten percent from the 2012-13 to 2013-14 school year. In large measure, demand for charter schools emanates from positive academic outcomes. In addition, there is an opportunity for new charter schools to address language acquisition for English language learners. In summary, charter schools continue to provide promising public school choice opportunities to parents and families throughout Connecticut.

² Available at http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/rba/RBA_CSDE_Charter_Schools_022112.pdf