

**2009-10 Annual Report on the Operation of
Charter Schools in Connecticut**

Table of Contents

Introduction/Background Information.....	1
The Current Charter School Landscape.....	1
Accountability.....	3
School Performance.....	4
Charter Schools Facilities.....	5
Demographic Information.....	6
Recommendations.....	8
Conclusion.....	9

Introduction/Background Information

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

The State Charter School Grant: In 1996, the General Assembly passed legislation establishing charter schools in Connecticut. It was the belief of the legislature and the Governor that charter schools could serve as a catalyst for innovation in the state's public schools. It was also anticipated that charters could serve as another effective vehicle to reduce the racial and economic isolation of Connecticut's public school students. The funds to operate charter schools are provided through the state charter school grant.

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Amount</u>
FY 00-01	\$14,000,000	FY 05-06	\$22,469,000
FY 01-02	\$14,665,000	FY 06-07	\$29,832,500
FY 02-03	\$15,568,000	FY 07-08	\$35,274,700
FY 03-04	\$16,421,250	FY 08-09	\$41,654,700
FY 04-05	\$19,820,480	FY 09-10	\$48,081,000

Distribution of Funds: The statute awards state charter schools an annual amount equal to \$9,300 for each student enrolled for FY 2009-10. The payments are made in quarterly installments in July, September, January and April.

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 Current Charter School Landscape

The relatively small size of both charter schools and classes within charter schools, innovative instruction by a carefully selected staff and the high degree of parental involvement, have enabled charter schools to provide a unique educational environment. While, by law, the State Board of Education (SBE) gives preference to charter applicants that will serve students who reside in priority school districts, charter schools are found in many school districts, urban, suburban and rural. A total of 10 school districts host 18 charter schools. In total, 85 school districts or about 50 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	Hartford	Hartford
Amistad Academy	New Haven	New Haven, North Haven
The Bridge Academy	Bridgeport	Bridgeport, Stratford, Waterbury
Charter School for Young Children on Asylum Hill	Hartford	Avon, Bloomfield, Bristol, East Hampton, East Hartford, Enfield, Farmington, Glastonbury, Hartford, Hebron, Manchester, Meriden, Middletown, New Britain, Newington, Plainville, Rocky Hill, Somers, West Hartford, Wethersfield, Windsor

Charter School	Host District	Districts Served
Common Ground	New Haven	Ansonia, Bethany, Branford, Bridgeport, East Haven, Hamden, Meriden, Milford, New Haven, Orange, Shelton, Stratford, Wallingford, Waterbury, West Haven
Elm City College Preparatory School	New Haven	New Haven
Explorations	Winsted	Avon, Barkhamsted, Bloomfield, Canaan, Canton, Granby, Harwinton, Litchfield, New Hartford, Norfolk, Plymouth, Salisbury, Sharon, Simsbury, Thomaston, Torrington, Winchester
Highville	Hamden	East Haven, Hamden, Middletown, Milford, New Haven, North Haven, Wallingford, West Haven
Integrated Day	Norwich	Bozrah, Brooklyn, Canterbury, East Lyme, Franklin, Griswold, Ledyard, Lisbon, Montville, Norwich, Plainfield, Preston, Sprague, Voluntown, Windham
Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication (ISAAC)	New London	Groton, Ledyard, Montville, New London, North Stonington, Old Lyme, Preston, Waterford
Jumoke Academy	Hartford	Bloomfield, East Hartford, East Windsor, Enfield, Farmington, Glastonbury, Hamden, Hartford, Manchester, New Britain, South Windsor, Vernon, Wethersfield, Windsor
New Beginnings Family Academy	Bridgeport	Ansonia, Bridgeport, Derby, Stratford
Odyssey	Manchester	Andover, Coventry, East Hartford, East Windsor, Hampton, Hartford, Manchester, South Windsor, Vernon, Wethersfield, Windham, Windsor Locks
Park City	Bridgeport	Bridgeport, Stratford
Side by Side Community School	Norwalk	Bridgeport, Darien, Greenwich, Norwalk, Stamford, Stratford, West Haven, Westport
Stamford Academy	Stamford	Bridgeport, Norwalk, Putnam, Stamford
Trailblazers Academy	Stamford	Norwalk, Stamford

Source: Public School Information System (PSIS), October 2009

In the 2009-10 school year, six state charter schools had their charters renewed for an additional five years by the SBE. The schools whose charters were renewed include:

Name of School	District	Renewal Term
Common Ground High School	New Haven	5 years
Explorations Charter School	Winsted	5 years
Highville Charter School	Hamden	5 years
Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication (ISAAC)	New London	5 years
New Beginnings Family Academy	Bridgeport	5 years
Odyssey Community School	Manchester	5 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 Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) consultants and staff members from local school districts and other charter schools.

In the 2009-10 school year, 18 charter schools served 5,170 students.

Accountability

Accountability is one of the cornerstones of the national charter school initiative. 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 autonomy from local boards of education. 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, five state charter schools have closed:

- Village Academy’s (New Haven) charter was revoked by the SBE in the first week of school in 1999-00 due to the schools 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; and
- Cross Cultural Academy of Arts and Technology relinquished its charter to the SBE on May 25, 2007, citing insufficient funds to operate the program.

Like state charter schools, local charter schools are chartered by the SBE. However, local charter schools are funded by the district, not by the state. Based on a mutual agreement with the CSDE, one local charter school, Coventry Science Center Charter School, returned its charter before the 1999-00 school year. Two local charter schools in Hartford (Breakthrough and Sport Science Academy) transitioned to magnet schools in 2002-03. The nonviability of the local charter concept is largely based on funding entirely appropriated by the local school district.

In December 2010, the CSDE developed and presented a Results-Based Accountability (RBA) report card on charter schools to the General Assembly’s Appropriations Committee. Charts detailing school performance and enrollment trends follow.

School Performance

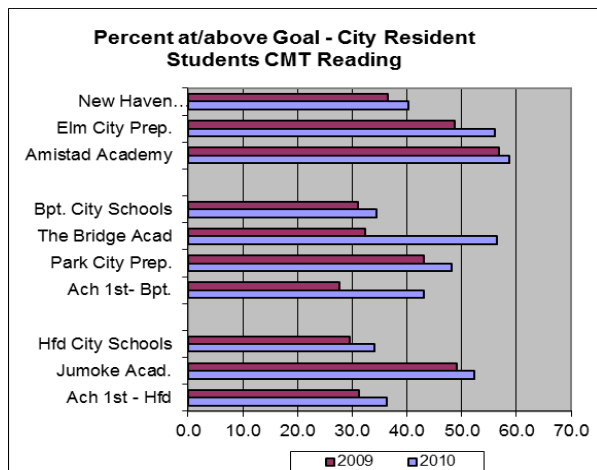
Percentage of students at or above goal in mathematics and reading in Grades 3-8

Percent at/above Goal CMT

Charter School	Math		Reading	
	2009	2010	2009	2010
Ach. 1st, Hfd	55.4	64.2	31.3	36.4
Amistad Acad.	63.4	75.0	56.8	58.7
Ach. 1st, Bpt	48.0	66.5	27.7	43.0
Elm City Prep	67.9	72.8	48.7	56.0
Highville	52.1	54.8	42.7	47.4
Integrated Day	54.6	54.4	63.7	64.8
ISAAC	29.9	34.9	52.0	61.8
Jumoke Acad.	50.9	61.3	49.1	52.3
New Beginnings	39.8	49.8	31.7	48.0
Odyssey Comm.	46.5	50.6	54.4	61.1
Park City Prep	37.8	46.2	43.1	48.2
Side By Side	34.9	41.3	43.7	52.9
The Bridge Acad.	32.6	39.6	32.3	56.5
Trailblazers	25.7	22.6	23.0	26.6
State	66.0	68.3	65.7	67.6

Charter schools are improving in the percentage of students at or above goal for both reading and mathematics. While charter schools have lagged behind statewide averages, they have demonstrated increases of several percentage points in the percent of students at or above goal in both reading and math. Comparatively, the students statewide demonstrate a more modest increase of approximately two percentage points. Such greater improvements are noteworthy given that the majority of charter schools’ students reside in the state’s priority school districts which serve academically high-risk students.

Percentage of Hartford, New Haven and Bridgeport resident students at or above goal in reading in both charter schools and the city’s public schools (noncharters)



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 charter schools serving significant numbers of city students from which to base valid comparisons.

Since charter schools overwhelmingly serve poor and minority students, the most valid 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 those who remained in the city public school systems. City resident students who attend charter schools outperform students in the city public schools in reading and mathematics (not shown), and have increased percentage at/or above goal at a greater rate between 2009 and 2010 in both subject areas.

Charter School Facilities

Until the close of the 2001 legislative session, facility costs represented a major financial burden for charter schools. The legislature addressed this issue, in part, by providing charter school building project grants up to \$500,000 per school for state charter schools renewed by the SBE in the preceding fiscal year. Nine of 10 eligible charter schools applied and received such construction grants. While the grant was limited to 10 of 14 state charter schools, it presented an important acknowledgement by the legislature that financial support to facilities is crucial for charter schools.

In the 2005 special session, the general assembly authorized \$10 million in bonding for the fiscal years 2006 and 2007. The new bill, unlike its predecessor, did not limit eligibility to schools whose charters had been renewed and did not limit the number or size of grants to a single school. On August 18, 2006, the Bond Commission approved the release of the first \$5 million in grants under this program. In September 2006, the CSDE approved \$5 million in grants under this program to allow charter schools to make general improvements to school buildings and repay debt incurred for prior school building projects. On May 30, 2008, the Bond Commission approved the release of the second \$5 million in grants and in July 2008, the CSDE approved \$5 million in grants. This program allowed charter schools to make general improvements to school buildings and repay debt for school building projects.

In the 2007 special session, the general assembly adopted Public Act 07-7, which authorized \$10 million in bonding for fiscal years 2008 and 2009. On August 17, 2010, the Bond Commission approved the release of \$2,529,154 of the \$5 million in grants. On September 9, 2010, the CSDE requested the Bond Commission approve the remaining balance of \$2,470,846 in grants. Recognizing the ongoing need to maintain charter school facilities, the General Assembly made the charter school facilities grant permanent in the 2010 legislative session. Under prior state law, the grant was available only for FY 08 and FY 09. Grants remain subject to available bond authorizations.

In addition, the general assembly created a pilot school construction grant that will provide 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 November 30, 2005. The CSDE approved the application. The renovation of the building is scheduled to be completed August 1, 2011.

Demographic Information

The following tables represent charter school demographic information taken from the most current data available.

Charter Grantees 2009-10

State Charter School	Actual Enrollment	Final Payment as of April 2010
Achievement First Bridgeport Academy	235	\$2,185,500
Achievement First Hartford Academy	415	\$3,859,500
Amistad Academy	744	\$6,919,200
The Bridge Academy	260	\$2,418,000
Charter School for Young Children on Asylum Hill	185	\$1,720,500
Common Ground	155	\$1,441,500
Elm City College Preparatory School	547	\$5,087,100
Explorations	80	\$ 744,000
Highville	300	\$2,790,000
Integrated Day	330	\$3,069,000
Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication (ISAAC)	180	\$1,674,000
Jumoke Academy	432	\$4,017,600
New Beginnings Family Academy	360	\$3,348,000
Odyssey	180	\$1,674,000
Side by Side Community School	232	\$2,157,600
Park City Prep	240	\$2,232,000
Stamford Academy	131	\$1,218,300
Trailblazers Academy	164	\$1,525,200
	5,170	\$48,081,000

Information taken from the final charter school grant calculation dated April 2, 2010.

Charter Student Data 2008-09

State Charter School	2008-09 Grade Levels	2008-09 Actual Enrollment	**Minority Percentage
Achievement First Bridgeport Academy	5-6	160	98.7
*Achievement First Hartford Academy	K-1,5	53	100.0
Amistad Academy	K-2, 5-11	641	98.1
The Bridge Academy	7-12	260	98.5
*Charter School for Young Children on Asylum Hill	PK-K	136	66.9
Common Ground	9-12	150	83.2
Elm City College Preparatory School	K-9	509	99.0
Explorations	10-12	85	7.1
Highville	PK-8	300	98.3
Integrated Day	PK-8	330	28.8
Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication-ISAAC	6-8	180	62.6
Jumoke Academy	PK-8	412	100.0
New Beginnings Family Academy	K-8	358	98.3
Odyssey	4-8	175	53.4
Park City Prep	6-8	220	98.2
Side by Side Community School	PK-8	229	74.7
Stamford Academy	9-12	131	94.7
Trailblazers	6-8	150	96.0
TOTAL		4,479	80.9

*Charter school opened in the 2008-09 school year.

**2008-09 Strategic School Profiles (latest data available).

Other Charter School Demographic Indicators 2008-09

State Charter School	**Percentage of Free/Reduced Lunch	**Percentage of Special Education Students
Achievement First Bridgeport Academy	71.9	8.1
*Achievement First Hartford Academy	64.4	6.5
Amistad Academy	57.6	3.7
The Bridge Academy	72.1	12.6
*Charter School for Young Children on Asylum Hill	***39.50	3.7
Common Ground	67.7	16.8
Elm City College Preparatory School	66.8	5.1
Explorations	29.4	25.9
Highville	63.3	0.3
Integrated Day	20.6	8.8
Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication (ISAAC)	63.2	10.4
Jumoke Academy	48.5	2.9
New Beginnings Family Academy	75.1	5.0
Odyssey	33.7	8.4
Park City Prep	54.5	5.4
Side by Side Community School	45.0	10.5
Stamford Academy	85.5	16.0
Trailblazers Academy	72.0	20.0

*Charter school opened in the 2008-09 school year.

**2008-09 Strategic School Profiles (latest data available).

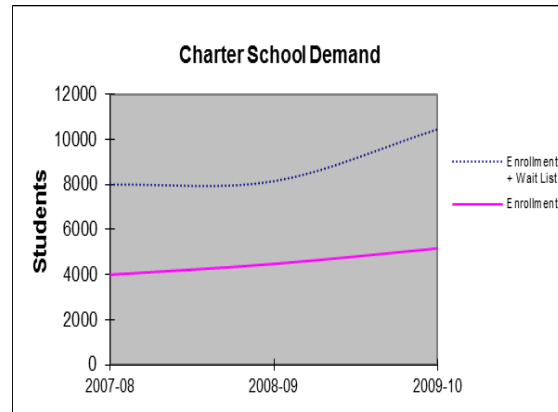
***The data on the 2008-09 Strategic School Profile was reported by the Charter School for Young Children on Asylum Hill incorrectly as zero. The correct figure is 39.5%.

Charter Enrollment Growth

State Charter School	2008-09 Grade Levels	2008-09 Actual Enrollment	2009-10 Grade Levels	2009-10 Authorized Enrollment	Change
Achievement First Bridgeport Academy	5-6	160	5-7	235	75
*Achievement First Hartford Academy	K-1,5	53	K-2, 5- 6	415	362
Amistad Academy	K-2, 5-11	641	K-3, 5-12	744	103
The Bridge Academy	7-12	260	7-12	260	0
*Charter School for Young Children on Asylum Hill	PK-K	136	PK-1	185	49
Common Ground	9-12	150	9-12	155	5
Elm City College Preparatory School	K-9	509	K-10	547	38
Explorations	10-12	85	10-12	80	5
Highville	PK-8	300	PK-8	300	0
Integrated Day	PK-8	330	PK-8	330	0
Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication-ISAAC	6-8	180	6-8	180	0
Jumoke Academy	PK-8	412	PK-8	432	20
New Beginnings Family Academy	K-8	358	K-8	360	2
Odyssey	4-8	175	4-8	180	5
Park City Prep	6-8	220	6-8	232	12
Side by Side Community School	PK-8	229	PK-8	240	11
Stamford Academy	9-12	131	9-12	131	0
Trailblazers	6-8	150	6-8	164	14
TOTAL		4,479		5,170	701

*Charter school opened in the 2008-09 school year.

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



While enrollment has grown from 4000 to 5170 between 2007-08 and 2009-10, an increase of 29%, the number of students on wait lists has increased 42% between 2007-08 and 2009-10. The number of students on wait lists in 2009-10 exceeded the number enrolled in 2009-10 by 116 students. Essentially, charter school enrollment would double if there were enough space and state subsidy to accommodate all on the wait list as of 2010.

Recommendations

Outlined below are a series of recommendations pursuant to Section 10-66gg of the C.G.S. which require, within available appropriations, the Commissioner of Education to annually provide to the joint standing committee of the general assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education a report on the operation of the charter schools, including: (1) an assessment of the adequacy of funding pursuant to Section 10-66ee; (2) the adequacy and availability of suitable facilities for such schools; (3) recommendations for any statutory changes that would facilitate expansion in the number of charter schools; and (4) a compilation of school profiles pursuant to Section 10-66cc.

1. Adequacy of Funding

The SBE voted on June 2, 2010, to approve the proposal to form an Ad Hoc Committee to study education cost sharing and school choice funding including charter schools.

At its February 2, 2011, the SBE voted to table the recommendations from the Ad Hoc Committee. Therefore, funding proposals associated with charter schools are not included in this report.

2. Adequacy and Availability of Suitable Facilities

Pursuant to Public Act 10-111, the general assembly made the charter school facility grant permanent. Under prior state law, the grant was available only for FY 08 and FY 09. Grants remain subject to available bond authorizations. This grant assists state charter schools in financing school building projects, general improvements to school buildings and repayment of debt incurred for prior school building projects.

In the fall of 2009, the CSDE requested that the Bond Commission authorize the release of \$5 million in grants under the program. On August 17, 2010, the Bond Commission approved the release of

\$2,529,154 of the \$5 million in grants. On September 9, 2010, the CSDE requested the Bond Commission approve the remaining balance of \$2,470,846 in grants.

3. Statutory Changes:

On November 4, 2009, the SBE voted to support a legislative proposal to amend C.G.S. Section 10-66gg to require the Report on the Operation of Charter Schools in Connecticut to be submitted every two years concurrent with the beginning of the state biennial budget cycle.

The Connecticut General Assembly did not act on this statutory change in the 2010 legislative session. The SBE resubmitted the proposal for the 2011 legislation session. The statute requires that this report address four issues, three of which result in potential increases to the state appropriation. The legislature does not ordinarily address such funding issues during the second year of the biennium but is open to such adjustments prior to the start of a biennium. For this reason, CSDE proposes that the submission of this report be scheduled every two years concurrent with the beginning of the state biennial budget cycle.

4. A Compilation of Strategic School Profiles:

The 2008-09 Strategic School Profile for each charter school is included in the following link. These are the most current profiles available:
<http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/cedar/profiles/about.htm>

Conclusion

In 2009-10, state charter schools in Connecticut served 5,170 students and their families. 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, there continues to be long waiting lists of more than 5,286 students according to the 2009-10 annual reports. The public demand for charter schools in the public school system in Connecticut remains strong.

In most cases, charter school CMT scores (at Goal) rose between 2009 and 2010. Achievement results for charter schools that specifically serve high-risk populations vary from year to year. In comparing city residents in charter schools and their host districts, charter schools perform much better from school to school, including some that serve specifically high-risk populations.

Financial resource limitations are a challenge to maintaining charter schools in Connecticut. The Federal Start-Up Grant for charter schools has supplemented the financial means of these schools. However, the term of the start-up grant expires following the first three years of the charter school's operation. Only two of the 18 state charter schools remain eligible for federal start-up grants in the 2009-10 school year: Achievement First Hartford and the Charter School for Young Children on Asylum Hill. In spite of financial resource limitations, CSDE solicited applications for new state and local charter schools based on changes in state law eliminating the requirement that the SBE may only issue charters within available appropriations.

The recommendations in this report serve as a statement of the evolution of the charter school program. The general assembly has recognized this demand by funding charter schools at a higher level and providing greater equity in school construction. Despite these strides, there are opportunities to expand the reach of charter schools and attract more students to the program. As

detailed in the Charter School RBA report card, city resident students who attend charter schools outperform students in the city public schools in reading and mathematics, and have increased percentage at/or above goal at a greater rate between 2009 and 2010 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.

As a result of these positive academic outcomes, enrollment demand for charter schools has increased 29 percent between 2007-08 to 2009-10. The number of students on wait lists in 2009-10 exceeded the number enrolled in 2009-10 by 116 students further demonstrating high demand for charter schools. Through greater investment both in the operations and facility needs of charter schools, the successes documented in Connecticut will continue.