

# Nevada Charter Schools 101

## WHAT ARE CHARTER SCHOOLS?

Nevada's charter schools are state-funded public schools of choice operated by independent entities with their own governing boards. Like other public schools, basic education services are provided free of charge. Charter schools operate under a model of accountability in exchange for some flexibility. They are held to the same academic standards as traditional public schools, but have more flexibility and control over curriculum, staffing, budget, and operations. As of FY 2015, Nevada's charter schools served 28,432 students, which is 6.2 percent of Nevada's total public school enrollment.

## HOW ARE CHARTER SCHOOLS FORMED?

All charter schools in Nevada must be approved by an authorizer. The authorizer plays a crucial role in ensuring quality by evaluating and approving charter schools, monitoring performance, and determining whether to renew or revoke/terminate the charter. The formation process is different for regular charter schools and achievement charter schools.

**Regular Charter Schools:** To create a new regular charter school, interested parties must create a committee to form a charter school and must submit an application to an authorizer. Three entities are eligible to authorize regular charter schools: the State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA); school districts; and a college or university within in the Nevada System of Higher Education. There are currently 39 charter schools: 23 authorized by SPCSA, 16 authorized by school districts and zero authorized by colleges or universities. While the SPCSA is actively authorizing new schools, a school district has not authorized a new charter school since 2007. The SPCSA can authorize schools anywhere in the State while school districts can only authorize schools within their boundaries or online schools.

**Achievement Charter Schools:** In 2015, Nevada created the Achievement School District (ASD) to convert low performing schools into achievement charter schools. The ASD resides in the Nevada Department of Education and the Executive Director will report to the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Each year, the ASD will select up to six schools to be converted to achievement charter schools. Operators for these schools will be selected through a request for proposals process. The selection process is currently underway for schools to begin operation in fall 2016.

## HOW DO CHARTER SCHOOL ENROLLMENT PREFERENCES AND LOTTERIES WORK?

While charter schools are open to all Nevada students, there are limited spaces available and some schools have wait lists. If applications exceed available spaces, the school must conduct a lottery to select students.

Prior to conducting the lottery, enrollment preferences may be provided to several categories of students. In 2015, the Nevada

Legislature expanded allowable enrollment preferences.

Categories of students with enrollment preferences include:

- Siblings of current students;
- Students who were enrolled in the school's pre-K program;
- Children of employees, members of the committee to form the school, or members of the governing board;
- At-risk students, if the school targets this population;
- Students who reside close to a school if it is located in an at-risk area;
- Students connected to the military for a charter school located on a military installation (**New**);
- Students attending overcrowded public schools (**New**); and
- Students attending schools ranked with one or two stars on the Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF) (**New**).

The 2015 Legislature also adopted a provision requiring new and expanding charter schools to notify parents living near the school about the application and enrollment process.

Achievement charter schools will be prioritized for students residing in the attendance zone where it is located. If additional spaces are available, a lottery will be conducted.

## DO CHARTER SCHOOLS HAVE ACCESS TO THE SAME FUNDING AS OTHER SCHOOLS?

Charter schools receive most of their unrestricted funding through the State Distributive School Account. Each student is funded at the state and local funding rate of the school district where the pupil resides.

Charter schools have historically [received less State and Federal categorical funds than school districts](#). While charter schools are eligible to receive funding from most state categorical programs, they are not eligible for the largest program, which is Class Size Reduction. Currently, State special education funding is allocated based on "units" and charter schools have had significantly less access to these funds than school districts. In FY 2017, special education funding will be allocated at a uniform funding rate per special education pupil, which will improve funding equity. Charter schools can also receive Federal categorical funds such as Title I, but per pupil funding is lower than for school districts.

Charter schools [do not have access to local facilities funds generated by property taxes](#) but do have access to a \$750,000 State-sponsored revolving loan fund. In addition, charter schools can access the public bond market if they have received an NSPF rating of three, four, or five stars for two consecutive years.

## HOW ARE CHARTER SCHOOLS HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR STUDENT AND TEACHER PERFORMANCE?

Charter school students are subject to the same academic standards and assessments as students in traditional public

schools. Like public schools, each charter school meeting certain criteria receives a star rating of one to five under the NSPF.

In 2015, the Legislature also authorized creation of an alternative performance framework for public schools that have a mission to serve certain at-risk populations, including expelled or suspended students, students with disciplinary problems, academically disadvantaged students, and students who have been adjudicated.

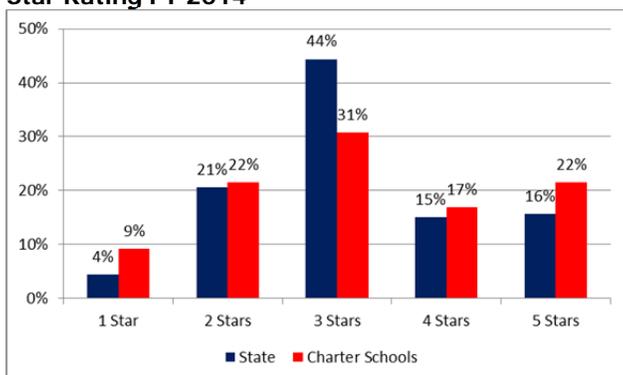
Charter school authorizers also play a key role in holding schools accountable for student performance. Charter contracts entered into after June 11, 2013 are subject to a performance framework, which covers the areas of academics, finances, and operations. In 2015, the Nevada Legislature modified the accountability tools available to charter school authorizers. If a school receives a one star rating for any three out of five years (after FY 2013 and excluding FY 2015), authorizers are required to revoke a written charter, terminate a charter contract, or restart the charter by replacing the charter operator. Authorizers also have new authority to reconstitute a charter school's governing board, and to recruit another Nevada charter school to take over a failing or closed charter school.

Charter schools must also hold teachers accountable. They are required to evaluate teachers using either the Nevada Educator Performance Framework (NEPF) or a system approved by their authorizer.

### HOW DOES THE PERFORMANCE OF NEVADA'S CHARTER SCHOOLS COMPARE TO TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

The most recent year of NSPF data reveals that charter schools had a higher percentage of schools on the lower and upper bounds of the accountability system than the State as a whole. As Figure 1 shows, nine percent of charter schools had the lowest rating of one star compared to four percent statewide. Conversely, 22 percent of charter schools had the highest rating of five stars compared to 16 percent statewide.

**Figure 1: Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF) Star Rating FY 2014**



Source: Nevada Department of Education, NSPF

### WHAT ARE THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF NEVADA'S CHARTER SCHOOLS?

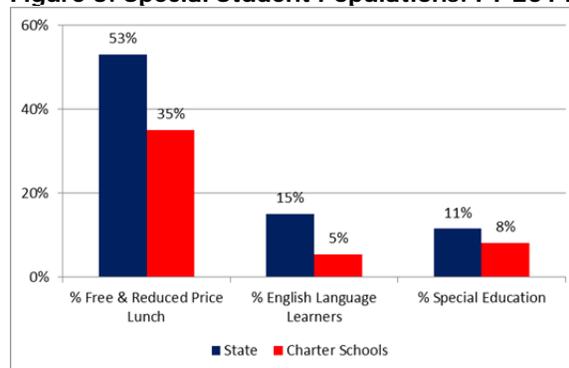
**Figure 2: Nevada Charter School Campuses FY 2016**



Nevada currently has 39 charter schools operating at 55 campuses. Figure 2 illustrates the geographic distribution of these campuses across the State. Charter campuses are concentrated in the urban counties of Clark and Washoe. There are also charter campuses in four rural counties. Eleven counties lack a charter school campus, but there are six online schools based in Clark County (five) and Washoe County (one) that serve the entire State.

Charter schools are open to all students, regardless of race, gender, religion, ethnicity, or disability. Charter schools are required to serve special student populations, such as low income students eligible for free and reduced price lunch, English Language Learners, and special education students. Figure 3 shows that charter schools serve a smaller percentage of these special populations than the statewide average.

**Figure 3: Special Student Populations: FY 2014**



Source: Nevada Department of Education, Nevada Report Card

### CONCLUSION

Charter schools have become a key component of education choice. Recent legislative changes aim to encourage formation and retention of high performing charter schools and to provide new accountability tools to address low-performing charter schools. In September 2015, Nevada was awarded a \$16.5 million Federal grant for creation and expansion of high quality charter schools. In addition, creation of the ASD breaks new ground by using charter schools to turn around underperforming public schools and encourages growth of high performing charter school operators in traditionally underserved areas.

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