



Nevada Charter Schools: Improving Access to Categorical & Facilities Funding

Executive Summary

The Nevada Plan for school finance is the main funding source for operations for school districts and charter schools. There are also State and Federal categorical grants, which provide funding for specific activities or populations. Under current State law, charter school students are supposed to receive comparable funding from all sources. In practice, charter school students have experienced limited accessibility to State and Federal categorical funds compared to school districts. Charter schools also have limited access to funding available for facilities and must use their operations funding to meet these needs. This policy brief provides data showing funding disparities between school districts and charter schools and recommends ways to improve access to funding for charter school students.

Recommendations

1. Create State categorical block grants:
 - a. Ensure charter school students receive a proportionate share of any State categorical funding outside the main funding formula by providing charter schools with a categorical block grant in lieu of separate categorical grants. The block grant would have two components:
 - i. General block grant: Per-pupil rate multiplied by total enrollment; and
 - ii. Targeted block grant for at-risk students: Per pupil rate multiplied by the count of Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) students and English Language Learners.
 - b. Adopt State performance goals and allow funds to be used for any educational purpose to meet these goals. Create benchmarks and monitor performance.
2. Maximize access to Federal categorical funds:
 - a. Require sponsoring agencies to provide technical assistance to charter schools to maximize receipt of Federal funds.
 - b. Encourage charter schools to place greater emphasis on collection of FRL eligibility data to maximize State and Federal funding for at-risk students.
 - c. Ensure that sponsoring school districts provide charter schools with equal access to Federal grants administered at the district level.
3. Create new options for charter school facilities funding:
 - a. Explore requiring school districts to set aside a proportionate share of any new bond proceeds for charter schools located within the district, regardless of whether the school is sponsored by the district.
 - b. Create a State funding mechanism for charter school facilities funding to avoid taking scarce local resources away from school districts.
 - c. Allow facilities funds to be used for leasing costs at charter schools.
 - d. Create incentives for charter schools to use capital funding to build cafeteria facilities in order to expand charter school opportunities for low-income students.