



# Charter Schools in Washington: The law passed. Now what?

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# Goals for the Day

- Charter school concept and background
- What's in our law and how does it compare nationally?
- Guidelines for successful implementation
- What role can the community play?

# What is a Charter School?

- New form of public school
- Authorized by performance-based agreement called a “charter”
- Deregulated, accountable for results
- Multiple developers (parents, teachers, etc.)
- Multiple authorizers (districts, state commission, etc.)
- Instructionally “neutral” & diverse
  - Wide range of instructional programs

# National Overview

- Rapidly-growing reform “movement”
- 42 states + Puerto Rico and D.C. with charter laws
  - Laws vary widely
- Ever-growing local and federal support
  - More than 35 districts now partner with charters
  - Major federal charter grant programs

# Washington's Charter Act: Intent

“...find solutions to problems that affect chronically underperforming schools and to better serve at-risk students who most need help.”

“...give parents more options to find the best learning environment for their child.”

“...free teachers and principals from burdensome regulations that limit other public schools...”

“...improve the quality of our public schools and the education and academic achievement for all schools throughout our state.”

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# WA Charter Act: Basics

- Cap of 40 schools over 5 years
  - Max 8 per year
  - Priority given to schools designed to serve “at-risk populations or students from low-performing public schools.”
- New and “conversion” schools allowed
  - Conversion schools cannot apply without majority staff or parent support
  - But support does not “trigger” conversion
- School districts can approve and sponsor but must apply first to State Board

# Washington's Charter School Act Basics (2)

- Charters are exempt from most laws governing school districts (“mega-waiver”)
- Charter is a 5-year contract, may be revoked or renewed depending on performance
- “Public, common schools” open to all children free of charge
- Operated as non-profit organizations only

# Charter Funding System

- Regular per pupil apportionment (basic ed) based on staff mix ratio
- Plus categorical, special education, transportation, and other non-basic funding
- Conversion charter schools are entitled to local levy monies and building

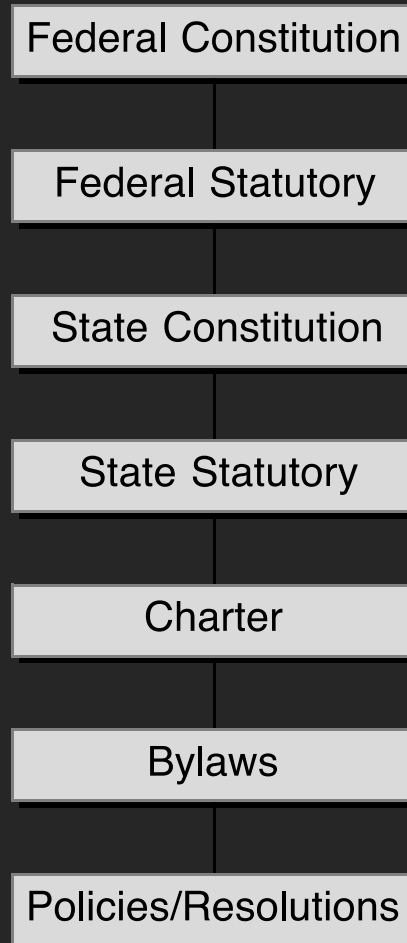
# Accountability Requirements

- Annual performance reviews
- Subject to same state standards, tests as all other public schools
- Automatic non-renewal for schools falling in lowest quartile of state accountability metric
- Authorizers held accountable for effective oversight

# Charter School Legal Status

- Must form as non-profit corporation
- Cannot be administered or managed through contract to for-profit
- May not be sectarian
- May not charge tuition

# Laws Governing Charter Schools



# Special Education

- Charter school may not discriminate in admissions
  - Many charters are “magnets” for SPED students
  - Others have few or none
- Charter is independent LEA



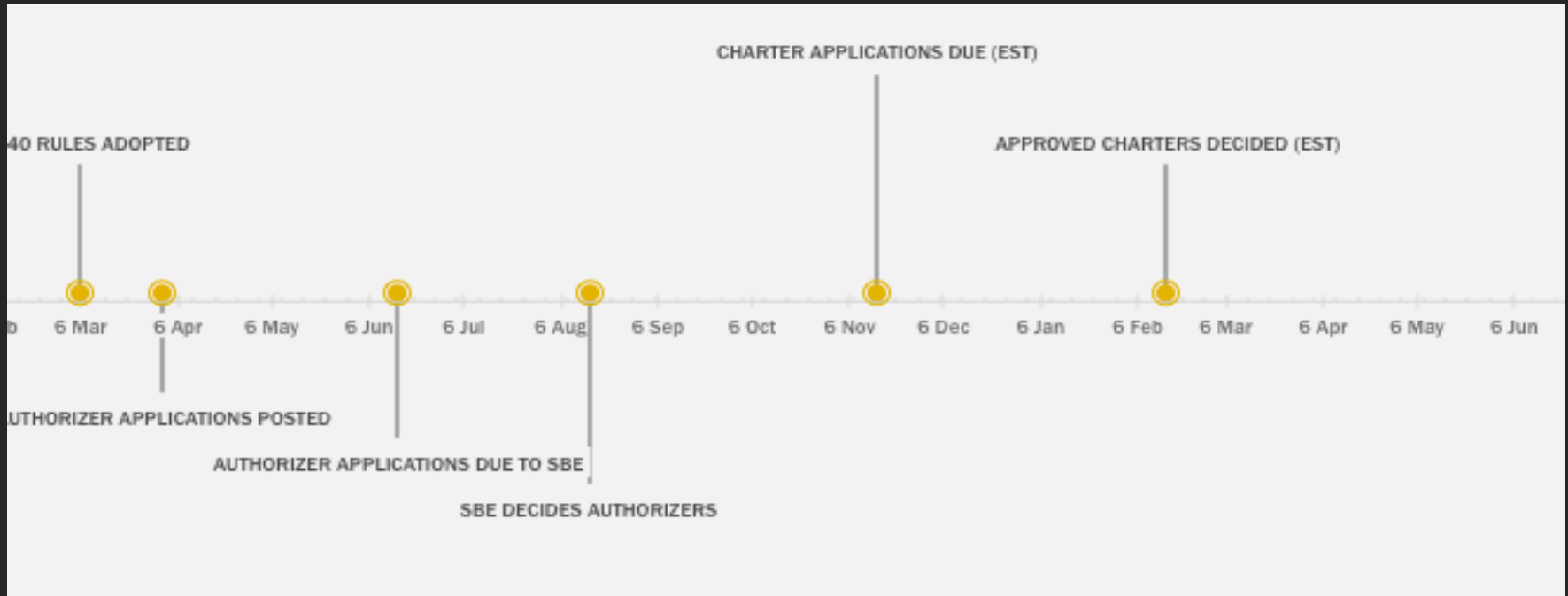
# Charter Authorizer Key Roles

- Charter petition review
- Establishing operational relationship(s)
- Oversight & monitoring
- Renewal (non-renewal/revocation)

# Application Process

- State Board must establish an annual statewide timeline for charter application, which must be followed by all authorizers.
- Authorizers must give preference to schools designed to enroll and serve at risk student populations.
- Grant charters only to applicants that have “demonstrated competence” in authorizers’ approval criteria.
- Process will include evaluation of merits of application, interview with applicants, public forum.

# The first schools likely won't open until 9/14



# Comprehensive Review: Required Charter Elements

- Mission and vision, target student population
- Location, grades served
- Evidence of need, community support
- Governance, management team
- Educational program, including evidence of proven methods, track record of success
- Plan for serving students with special needs
- Plans, if any, for partnering with school districts
- Financial management plan
- Parent involvement
- Liability/insurance
- Student discipline procedures
- Health and safety

# Avoiding Other States' Mistakes

# Common Charter Struggles

- Lack of start-up funds & facilities
- Unclear goals, limited performance data
- Internal governance disputes
- Inadequate planning
- Legal, political and labor relations disputes
- Inexperienced leadership and staff
- Inadequate, non-existent, or “overkill” oversight

# Common Charter Successes

- Increased student performance
- Innovative curriculum and instruction
- Innovative management, operations, and facilities
- High staff satisfaction and empowerment
- High parent/student involvement and satisfaction

# Keys to Success for School Developers

- Realistic plan and timeline with clear autonomy
- Detailed school design up front, before charter drafting/approval
- Clear, common, & coherent vision
- Positive relationship w/ granting agency
- Strong team with broad expertise and successful track records
- Money for planning, start-up, and facilities
- Training, support opportunities



# Keys to Success for Policy, Advocacy

- Strong authorizing is key to quality
- You cannot get good schools without paying for them
- Caps should be about quality, not politics
- Good schools can and should be replicated
- Time and investment ease start-up pains
- Provide strong autonomy *and* accountability
- Do not expect to get everything right the first time
- Do not expect the law alone will take care of quality

# 1240 has Nearly Element of Best Charter Laws

No Caps	no
Variety of Public Charter Schools Allowed	x
Multiple Authorizers Available	x
Authorizer and Overall Program Accountability System Required	x
Adequate Authorizer Funding	?
Transparent Charter Application, Review, and Decision-making Processes	x
Performance-Based Charter Contracts Required	x
Comprehensive Charter School Monitoring and Data Collection Processes	x
Clear Processes for Renewal, Nonrenewal, and Revocation Decisions	x
Educational Service Providers Allowed	no

# 1240 has Nearly Element of Best Charter Laws (cont'd)

Fiscally and Legally Autonomous Schools with Independent Public Charter School Boards:	x
Clear Student Recruitment, Enrollment, and Lottery Procedures:	x
Automatic Exemptions from Many State and District Laws and Regulation	x
Automatic Collective Bargaining Exemption	x
Multi-School Charter Contracts and/or Multi-Charter Contract Boards Allowed:	x
Extra-Curricular and Interscholastic Activities Eligibility and Access:	x
Clear Identification of Special Education Responsibilities:	x
Equitable Operational Funding and Equal Access to All State and Federal Categorical Funding	x
Equitable Access to Capital Funding and Facilities	x
Access to Relevant Employee Retirement Systems	?

# What can you do to help ensure success?

- ✓ Fight for equitable funding for charter kids
- ✓ Help create a welcoming local environment for promising school founders
- ✓ Help educate people about the facts
- ✓ Celebrate charter successes as they come
- ✓ Be the first to speak up if a charter school doesn't perform!

# New Leadership Opportunity

- District no longer limited to “in house” providers
- May use charter as vehicle to buy “education” from multiple providers
- Shift to role as “broker” and “purchaser” of educational services
- Leverage “in house” providers into more performance-based relationships