

Ideas for Study on Charter Schools

North Carolina ranks 31st of states in the effectiveness of its charter school law, according to The Center for Education Reform's 2012 annual ranking of charter school laws.

(http://www.edreform.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/CER_2012_Charter_Laws.pdf).

The top 10 charter school laws (according to CER) are:

1. DC
2. MN
3. IN
4. AZ
5. MI
6. NY
7. CA
8. FL
9. CO
10. UT

Here are some leading charter school issues to consider for study:

1. Best practices by states to encourage the growth and success of charter schools
2. Authorizers of schools
3. Approval process and replication of successful models
4. Startup process and funding
5. Equitable funding
6. Digital learning, online and blended learning schools
7. Governance (who oversees charter schools)
8. Staff and support for charters (state departments or private organizations)
9. Regulations and regulatory relief
10. Mechanism to support and ultimately shut down failing schools, and its effectiveness

Some specific questions for consideration:

- In which states are charter schools having the most success in terms of numbers of schools created and academic achievement, and why?
- How does North Carolina's charter school law and regulatory environment compare to states with leading charter school laws and regulatory environment?
- Charter schools were originally started with the premise of relieving schools from burdensome regulations in exchange for accountability (results). Aside from some budgetary flexibility, from what regulations are charter schools in NC exempt any more? How do leading states protect charter schools from regulatory creep and micromanagement?

- How equitably are charter public schools funded compared to traditional public schools in NC? They do not receive capital funding or lottery funding. What is the exact percentage of deficit received by charters? How do other leading states handle funding compared to NC?
- What do leading states do to ensure that quality charter schools are created and replicated?
- Which authorizer structure seems to work best (i.e. some states allow for more authorizers than NC, creating more competition and empowering more groups to oversee schools)?
- What is the best process to approve new charter schools?
- How can the process of approval be streamlined to allow charter boards to start schools faster while maintaining quality?
- How do startup grants work in some states such as Florida to help schools bridge the funding gap from the time of approval to the time when they begin to receive funding (the July prior to August startup), and how could NC implement such a program?
- Based on best practices in other leading charter school states, who should govern charter schools, and where in state government should it live? (i.e. should it remain as the State Board of Education with an Office of Charter Schools buried in the bureaucracy, should it move out as a separate group accountable to the Governor or State Board Chairman within the oversight of the State Board but separate from or higher up in DPI, should it move to another agency altogether such as the Governor's Office or Community Colleges, etc.?) What is the relationship of the State Board in these states to charter schools, since they are considered public schools and subject to the same accountability system?
- How should oversight of charter schools be organized in terms of staff and support?
- Which states have adopted Digital Learning legislation to promote the growth of online learning, online schools and blended learning (based on the bipartisan recommendations of Jeb Bush and Bob Wise <http://digitallearningnow.com/>)? What specific legislation have they adopted to speed adoption of online learning, and how does this fit with charter schools (i.e. online schools, blended schools, etc.)?
- How do charter schools perform and what are the best measures of success? The number of parents who choose them and are satisfied by keeping students in the schools? Test scores? How do they compare with schools of similar demographics in their region? How do they perform for the amount of money invested by taxpayers compared to surrounding traditional schools?
- Consider talking with organizations such as The Center for Education Reform (with its president, Jeanne Allen), the NC Alliance for Charter Schools, the Foundation for Florida's Future (foundationforfloridasfuture.org), Dr. Tony Bennett, outgoing superintendent of instruction for the state of Indiana (considered by many reform leaders as having established one of the most comprehensive new reform agendas of any state), Students First (<http://www.studentsfirst.org/>) led by former D.C. schools leader Michelle Rhee.