

Overview of Tennessee Charter Schools



Charter schools are publicly-funded schools that operate independently from the traditional public school system. Guided by the two philosophies of autonomy and accountability, these public schools have greater freedom to develop their own mission and values, educational programs, governance models and organizational structures in return for heightened systems of accountability.

The *Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act of 2002* (Public Chapter 850), the state's initial charter school legislation, allowed for the creation of charter schools to serve students from schools failing to make adequate yearly progress. In 2005, the General Assembly expanded the eligible student population for charter school attendance. The eligible charter school population now includes students from failing schools and students who, in the previous school year, failed to test proficient in reading or mathematics on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) or Gateway examinations. Tennessee currently has 12 charter schools, including five that opened in the fall of 2005.

Report Findings:

Charter schools may out-perform, under-perform, or perform similarly to traditional public schools.

- Diverse charter school characteristics and contextual factors contribute to the variance in charter school performance outcomes.
- Differences in charter school research contribute to variation in performance outcomes.

In "successful" charter schools, their mission drives their practices; however, the nature of these practices is not always similar.

Charter school policies can impact the likelihood of school success.

Recommendations:

- The Department of Education and local education agencies should continue working to improve the process of charter school authorization, planning, and oversight.
- The Department of Education, local education agencies, and the Tennessee Charter School Resource Center might collaborate to disseminate information about successful charter school and authorizer practices.
- The General Assembly, the Department of Education, local education agencies, and other policymakers should consider whether achievement outcomes are influenced by policy more than by school type.
- The Department of Education should track performance of individual students both before and after their entry into charter schools and collect and analyze more comprehensive measures of charter school performance.
- Instead of asking are charter schools performing better or worse than traditional public schools, policymakers should ask ...
 - Why are some charter schools succeeding while others are not?
 - How does Tennessee's charter school policy impact the success of the state's charter schools?
 - What is innovative about charter schools, such as governance, school organization, curriculum and instruction?
 - How are charter schools impacting education in the traditional public school sector?

Charter schools are as diverse as the states and legislation that permit them.

View the full report at <http://www.comptroller.state.tn.us/cpdivorea.htm>

Comptroller of the
Treasury
EA-00-06

For more information, contact Jessica Lewis at (615) 401-7879/
Jessic.Lewis@state.tn.us or Erin Lyttle at (615) 401-7889/
Erin.Lyttle@state.tn.us