

Charter Schools

History of Charter School Measures in Washington – Charter school initiatives twice have been submitted to a vote of the people. In 1996, I-177, an initiative to the Legislature, gathered sufficient signatures. However, after the Legislature failed to take action the measure was subject to a general election vote where it failed. In 2000, I-729, an initiative to the people, qualified for the November general election ballot where it failed 51.83 percent to 48.17 percent. Charter schools have had a long road in the Legislature, but found success with the language of E2SHB 2295. In 2004, E2SHB 2295, authorizing charter schools in Washington, was passed and signed into law.

Details of the Legislature-Approved Law - The primary purpose of the charter school bill was to provide another option for parents and students, particularly educationally disadvantaged students, for meeting state and federal academic standards. Major provisions of E2SHB 2295 included:

- Charter schools are public schools, and are funded in the same manner. Additional federal money is available for planning, development, start-up, facilities, and supplemental services.
- Charter schools may be new or converted schools. New schools are limited to a statewide total of 45 over six years. Conversion schools are existing schools eligible for focused assistance, and schools failing Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for three consecutive years. (Please see Issue Paper on the federal No Child Left Behind Act.)
- Accountability to parents and sponsors is provided through a five-year contractual agreement defining how the school will be run. Charter schools are subject to state and federal laws regarding assessments, accountability, parents' rights and audits. A charter cannot be renewed if student academic progress is inferior to that of similar populations in the district.
- Applications for charter schools may be approved by a school board, and if the application is rejected, the applicant may appeal to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). If approved by OSPI, an Educational Service District (ESD) may become the alternate sponsor, but if no ESD agrees, OSPI gets the job.
- A charter school must conduct outreach to all families of educationally disadvantaged students in the district, and must admit all students that apply.
- Employees of a new charter school will form their own collective bargaining unit for the first five years of operation, after which they may join the district bargaining unit. For conversion schools, the school board and union representative negotiate variances to contracts according to a school's need. If no agreement is reached, the charter is not authorized.

Referendum 55 – Referendum 55, filed by the Washington Education Association, qualified for the November 2004 ballot. Unions reported contributing \$1,324,960 to overturn E2SHB 2295, and charter proponents spent \$3.8 million. Ultimately, the voters rejected the charter school law by a vote of 1,572,203 to 1,122,964 (58% to 42%). Since this rejection of the legislature-approved proposal, no charter school legislation has been introduced.

Charter Schools as an Accountability Measure – No Child Left Behind (NCLB) encourages charter schools as an accountability option for students in schools identified as needing improvement. Federal Title I moneys that must be reserved for supplemental services under NCLB would be available to charter schools providing such services. Charter schools are subject to all provisions of NCLB.