

HB 473 -- Charter Schools

Sponsor: Jones (63)

This bill changes the laws regarding charter schools and establishes an eight-member Missouri Charter Public School Commission. In its main provisions, the bill:

(1) Allows a charter school to be operated in any school district. Currently, charter schools are permitted only in the St. Louis and Kansas City school districts;

(2) Expands those authorized to sponsor a charter school to include any public four-year college or university with an approved teacher education program; a community college with a service area that encompasses some portion of an eligible school district; any private college or university with its primary campus in Missouri that meets specified enrollment and program requirements; the newly established Missouri Charter Public School Commission; a nonprofit corporation that has existed for at least 10 years; and the mayor of St. Louis City;

(3) Requires a sponsor to develop policies and procedures for the review of a charter school proposal; the granting of a charter; ongoing oversight; and the closing of a charter school, including stakeholder notification, student record transfer, and asset disposition;

(4) Allows the State Board of Education within the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, when acting as an interim sponsor, to revoke the charter of the school that it is sponsoring if the school fails to meet academic performance or other goals as specified in the school's charter;

(5) Revises the required contents of charters to include an accountability plan that contains targets and measures for academic performance, operation and governance, and the school's mission when applicable. A grievance procedure as well as procedures for school closure must also be included in a charter;

(6) Requires a proposed charter to be submitted to the sponsor by October 1 of the year prior to the proposed opening date;

(7) Requires a charter school to conduct an employee criminal history background check and family care safety registry check on each of its employees;

(8) Requires the establishment of baseline student performance data during the first year of operation; collection of the data throughout the duration of the charter; and participation in the

statewide assessment system to the extent applicable based on the grade levels offered by the charter school;

(9) Allows a high-risk or alternative charter school to establish alternative ways for students to obtain credit for graduation, such as credit for off-campus instruction, work experience, or embedded instruction. The department, after three years, must conduct a study of a school which was granted alternative arrangements to assess student performance, graduation rates, educational outcomes, and entry into the workforce or higher education rates;

(10) Clarifies that the biennial operational review must be conducted during the first year of operation and every other year after the most current review;

(11) Removes the requirement that a charter school become a local educational agency for the sole purpose of direct access to federal grants and allows the school to become an agency if the sponsor and the governing board reach a written agreement to become an agency;

(12) Requires, beginning January 1, 2012, a charter school sponsor as part of the renewal process to demonstrate to the state board several specified areas of compliance if the school falls below the specified graduation rate or is in the lowest achieving 5% of Title I schools. If compliance cannot be established according to the deadlines in the bill, the state board may vote to close the school or to continue it under certain conditions;

(13) Requires a charter school to close if the charter is revoked by the state board or its sponsor, if the charter is not renewed by the state board, or if the charter is voluntarily relinquished;

(14) Allows a charter school whose mission includes dropout prevention or recovery to admit a nonresident student who is considered high risk or is a dropout from the same or an adjacent county when the student resides in a residential care facility, a transitional living group home, or an independent living program. Resident students must be given preference for admission over nonresident pupils;

(15) Requires a charter school operated by a management company to make a copy of the written contract between the governing board of the charter school and the educational or charter management organization available for public inspection and upon the request of specified district residents;

(16) Allows a charter school student who has moved out of the school district to finish the current semester at the charter school. If school district boundaries change so that a student attending a charter school no longer resides in the district, the student may complete the current school year. In both instances, the student's parent or legal guardian will be responsible for the student's transportation to and from the school;

(17) Specifies that foster children's educational rights are applicable to charter schools; and

(18) Allows the department to withhold funding during a charter school's last year of operation until it determines that school records, liabilities, and reporting requirements including a full audit are satisfied.