



Charter Schools in New Hampshire: A Webinar
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TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to the NH Charter School Webinar with RHNH. My name is Liz Canada, and I'm the Director of Policy and Practice at RHNH. We are a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization based in Concord, NH, and we serve as a public education policy and community engagement resource for NH families, educators, and policymakers.

In today's webinar, we're going to provide you with an introduction to NH charter schools, as well as details about the NHDOE's grant application, which resulted in a \$46 million award from the USDOE.

Before we dig in, I want to offer a clarification that is important about charter schools. Typically, when I talk about charter schools, folks ask, "What's the difference between a charter school and a public school?" And the answer is: a charter school *is* a public school. So in this webinar, I'm going to clarify when I'm referring to a charter school, and when I'm referring to a neighborhood school or a district school. Using charter school versus public school is misleading – like I said, charter schools are public schools.

But there are certainly differences between charters and neighborhood schools. And we'll start exploring that in this webinar.

The USDOE awarded the NHDOE with a \$46 million grant specifically for charter schools. This announcement came out on August 22, 2019. I'm going to go over a very brief introduction to the grant award to set the

context of this webinar, before we get into the details of NH charter schools.

First, the plan is to open 27 new charter schools over the next five years. When the NHDOE applied for this grant, there were 28 charter schools in NH. This means, that the grant will help to double the number of charter schools over a five year period.

You might be thinking, “I’ve heard that there are only 20 new charter schools opening,” so let me clarify where the number 27 comes from. The grant application states that the plan will be to open 20 “new” schools, but it also states that there will be 7 “replication” schools, and those will be based on current high-quality charter schools. So when we think about the number of additional schools that will open, the plan for the next five years will be to grow from 28 schools from the last school year, to an additional 27 charter schools.

Additionally, the charter school grant includes 5 expansions of charter schools, and that will be through a sub-grant process.

In their grant application, the NHDOE identified 7 current “high-quality charter schools,” and we’ve listed them here for you.

So let’s cover an overview of NH Charter Schools. Typically, when folks ask questions about charter schools in the state, the question pertains to one of these five categories:

Authorization of Charter Schools, Student Enrollment and Admissions, What does Testing look like, what does Accountability and Oversight look like in NH, and, finally, how are NH charter schools funded, and how that differs from neighborhood schools.

To be clear though, there is certainly much more information about NH charter schools, but the purpose of this webinar is to provide you with an introduction.

We'll cover each one basing all of our information with current Charter School Statute.

First, NH Charter school authorization. By authorization, we mean the application and approval process that a charter school must go through to open. There are two ways for a charter school to receive authorization. One is through a local school district, which means a charter school application can be submitted to a local school board, which would vote to approve and authorize the charter to operate in the district.

The second way is through the State Board of Education (SBOE). Charter schools applicants can apply directly to the SBOE, and the Board votes to approve and authorize a charter school. Currently, there is one charter school in the state that has been authorized by a local school district.

So who can apply to establish a charter school? Charter school statute identifies three groups that are eligible:

The first is a nonprofit organization, which could include a college, university, museum, and so on.

The second is a group of 2 or more certified NH teachers.

And then the third is a group of 10 or more parents.

Charter schools are authorized for five years; this is true for new charters, as well as for renewal applications of current charters. The one exception is for local school districts; they are able to renew for 7 years.

For NH Charter School Enrollment and Admissions, we're going to begin with what I shared up front, which is that Charter schools are public schools. But specifically, charter schools are also open enrollment schools, and "open enrollment" is defined in statute.

An open enrollment school is a public school that educates students that live in that district, and chooses to accept students from other attendance areas within its district and from outside its district.

This means that charter schools can choose to accept students from anywhere in the state. Let's use Manchester as an example. If your family lives in the Webster Elementary School attendance area, your elementary school student would attend Webster if you're enrolling into the neighborhood school, or your student could attend any charter elementary school – even if it isn't located in Manchester.

NH Charter schools cannot charge students or families tuition. They are public schools, so therefore, they are free to students and families.

Any student can attend a charter school, as they are open enrollment, which I just mentioned, but preference does exist for students residing in the district. You may have heard of charter schools that have a lottery process, if they have limited seats available, or more student applications than they have seats available. The lottery process would then prioritize students who live in the district in which the charter school is located.

Charter schools cannot discriminate or violate civil rights in any manner. So that covers most of enrollment, but admissions has a few details, as well.

NH charter schools may set maximum enrollment, though this is not required. This is typically done in the charter school application to the

local school board or to the SBOE. For example, a charter school might cap their enrollment at 200 students. In their first year, they may have 50 students attend, and then grow their student enrollment over the course of a few years – but not to exceed 200 students.

This, of course, is notably different than school districts, which cannot cap enrollment – there is always a seat for that student, even if they transfer in mid-year.

NH charter schools may limit enrollment, based on a few factors – and this language is directly from statute.

Charter schools may limit enrollment to specific grade or age levels, pupil needs, or areas of academic focus, including, but not limited to, at-risk pupils, vocational education pupils, mathematics, science, the arts, history, or languages.”

That first phrase is very straightforward: if you open a charter high school, for example, you would likely limit enrollment to 9-12 graders. The other areas listed in statute pertain to the charter school’s mission and goals. If you open an Arts school, you might prioritize enrolling students who are interested in the Arts.

This next bullet point also comes directly from statute: charter schools may select pupils on the basis of aptitude, academic achievement, or need, provided that such selection is directly related to the academic goals of the school.

This is similar to the bullet above: charter schools are able to select students based on their school’s mission and goals, as defined in their charter school application.

Next, we'll cover charter school testing, which is pretty straightforward. The question comes up of whether charter school students take the same tests as students in neighborhood schools, and the quick answer is yes: NH charter school students take the same statewide assessment, currently the NH SAS or the SAT, just like students in neighborhood schools. Charters can also offer *additional* tests – some charters administer the NWEA, for example, which would be in addition to the statewide test, not a replacement. And just like neighborhood schools, the costs of the statewide assessment is covered by the state.

For NH charter school accountability and oversight, there are a few systems established in statute. Before I get to the bullet points, it's important to know that a charter school has its own governing board, a board of trustees. So they, of course, are an important part of the accountability and oversight of a charter school.

Beyond each charter school's governing board, there is the authorizing body – the group that approved the charter in the first place. So that would either be the local school board – which, again, is different than the charter's governing board, or the State Board of Education.

There is also a Legislative Oversight Committee, established in statute. This committee consists of three state senators, three state reps, and a member of the SBOE. The last Legislative Oversight Committee convened in October of 2015. The intent of this committee is to review what is happening in current charter schools, and to provide guidance and recommendations to the department and the SBOE.

Charter schools are subject to a first year program audit by the DOE, and a program audit once every three years thereafter.

Summary reports created annually or periodically must be provided to the family of every student enrolled at the school AND to the legislative

body – and when I say legislative body, I mean the local district’s school board, or the SBOE, depending on where the charter school was authorized.

Now the charter school funding and finance is a question that comes up quite a bit, [CLICK SLIDE] and it looks different based on where the charter school was authorized.

Let’s start with charter schools that are authorized through a local school board. And we need to back up to the authorization process. Part of the locally-authorized charter school process involves a warrant article for districts with annual meetings in order to raise and appropriate funds for the charter school for the five years of initial adoption.

For districts without an annual meeting, the legislative body makes that decision.

For locally-authorized charter schools, the district must pay the charter school 80% of the district’s cost-per-pupil, as determined by the DOE (if the student resides in the district in which the charter is located). Statute also identifies the warrant article language for community’s with annual meetings, and specifies that the legislative body makes the decision for communities without annual meetings.

Let’s use a specific example: PACE Career Academy is a locally-approved charter high school, located in Pembroke. Okay, and they used to be located in Allenstown – but for the purposes of this example, we’re going to stick with Pembroke. In 2017-2018, the Department of Education listed Pembroke’s high school cost per pupil as \$14,147.35. If a student living in Pembroke attends PACE career academy in 2017-2018, the Pembroke district would send the charter school at least 80% of that amount, which would be \$11,317.88.

If a student is attending a locally-authorized charter school outside of the district, the state pays the cost of an adequate education and differentiated aid directly to the charter school.

So that's the funding model for locally-authorized charter schools – and it looks completely different than charter schools that are authorized through the State Board of Education.

SBOE-authorized charter schools receive their funding directly from the state, specifically the Education Trust Fund – or, if there isn't money in the Education Trust Fund, from the state's General Fund.

SBOE-authorized charter schools, unlike neighborhood schools, receive an additional \$3,411 from the state per student.

Now this is a lot of text for one slide, but I want you to take notice of the letters on the left-hand side, and I'll walk us through each one. This funding is similar to a neighborhood school, with a noticeable difference.

Letter A is the funding per student enrolled. Every SBOE-authorized charter school receives this money, and every neighborhood school receives this money per student.

B is the additional funding per student who qualifies for free and reduced price lunch.

C is the additional funding per student who is identified as an English Language Learner.

Notice that D is missing – I'll get there in a moment.

And E is the additional funding for each third grade student with a score below the proficient level on the reading portion of the statewide assessment, as long as the student isn't covered in B, C, or D.

Okay. So what is D?

That's the funding for students with special education needs, those with an IEP.

Special education funding is not sent to the charter school where the student is enrolled, but is instead sent to the school district where the student lives. Charter schools then bill the neighborhood school or school district where the student resides for special education services in the charter.

So that covers our brief overview of what currently exists in NH charter schools and charter school statute.

Let's return to the \$46 million charter school grant awarded to the NH Department of Education. In their grant application, which they wrote in the spring of 2019, they identified five objectives for this grant funding to achieve over five years:

- Obj. 1: Increase, expand, or replicate the number of high-quality charter schools, especially those aiding at-risk, educationally disadvantaged students in rural and urban settings.
- Obj. 2: Use CSP grant funds to improve student growth and achievement among charter school students, increasing student graduation for college and career readiness.
- Obj. 3: Broadly disseminate charter school best practices to other NH public schools and LEAs to increase quality educational options statewide.
- Obj. 4: Empower current and new public charter schools to become fiscally strong, independent, laboratories of innovation.

To date, the only charter schools that have closed in NH were closed due to financial challenges, whether due to enrollment, fundraising, or other financial difficulties.

- Obj. 5: Strengthen and support authorizer quality and promote adoption of best practices for authorizers.

As I mentioned in Objective 1, the goal for this charter school money is to support what the department has referred to as “at-risk students.” So we’ve gone ahead and identified three cohorts of students that are most often used to determine if a student is “At risk.”

The first is Free and Reduced Lunch Eligibility, which is a federal designation for families that make up to 185% of the federal poverty level. In the 2019-2020 school year, a family of 4 with an annual household income of \$33,475 or less would qualify for free lunch, and a family of four that makes more than that, but less than \$47,638 would qualify for reduced lunch.

This first bullet point comes directly from the charter school application, specifically on page 14: “The statewide average of NH students who qualify for free and reduced-price meal eligibility is 26.43%. A higher proportion of charter school students qualify for free and reduced-priced meal eligibility” (p. 14).

But, according to our analysis of DOE data, 20% of charter school students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch.

The next cohort of students is identified in the grant application as “diverse populations.” This is also from page 14: “Although NH is not traditionally thought of as a language-diverse state, the NH public charter school population is ethnically more diverse than the state average.”

But, according to our analysis of DOE data, there are currently zero charter schools with more than 10 full-time admitted students who are identified as English Language Learners.

The third cohort of students are those with special education needs, those with an IEP. From the grant application on page 15: “Dr. Rhim’s research has shown that NH is one of the few states in which charter schools enroll a slightly higher percentage of students with disabilities than district public schools.”

But, according to our analysis of DOE data, 14% of students in charter schools qualify for SPED services, below the state average of ~17%.

The other component that we want to cover in our webinar today is the priority funding for opening charter schools over the next five years: NH’s highest priority for awarding CSP funds will be to charter school developers that target educationally disadvantaged student populations and focus on increasing student academic achievement who are at greatest risk of not meeting challenging state academic standards.

All proposed charter school applications that meet this priority will receive a competitive scoring advantage and be eligible to receive a larger award than those applications that do not specifically target these populations” (p. 16).

So the funds will be awarded based on the charter application, and that’s true whether they are authorized through the local school board or the State Board of Education, and they will receive more funding if they are targeting educationally disadvantaged student populations.

We’ve covered a lot of ground today in this webinar – and there’s more information to come. A few examples include teacher credentialing at charter schools versus neighborhood schools, Special Education services which we alluded to briefly today, and transportation. And, of course, if you have additional questions, please contact us – you can

visit our website at www.reachinghighernh.org or email us at staff@reachinghighernh.org

Thanks for joining Reaching Higher NH for this introduction to NH Charter Schools.