

LEARNS Charter School Work Group Meeting #3

September 14, 2023

Meeting Objectives and Norms

Today's objectives

- ❖ Review Legislative Intent for Charter Schools
- ❖ Review LEARNS Executive order
- ❖ Streamline Process:
 - >>> Discuss strengths and weaknesses of draft application
- ❖ Improve Policies:
 - >>> Review sample language from other states

Norms

Prior to Meeting

- ▶ ADE will send out agenda at least 3 business days in advance of each meeting.
- ▶ Members review all materials and come prepared to share feedback.

During Meeting

- ▶ Mute yourself when not speaking.
- ▶ Keep feedback centered on topic at hand.
- ▶ Stay engaged (e.g., actively participate and use the chat function).
- ▶ Be mindful of how much “air time” each member receives.
- ▶ All ideas are valued.

Materials (notes, slides) will be posted after the meeting for members who can not attend.

Legislative Intent

Universal Citation: [AR Code § 6-23-102 \(2020\)](#)

It is the intent of the General Assembly, by this chapter, to provide opportunities for teachers, parents, pupils, and community members to establish and maintain public schools that operate independently from the existing structure of local school districts as a method to accomplish the following:

- (1) Improve student **learning**
- (2) Increase learning **opportunities** for all students, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for students who are identified as low-achieving
- (3) Encourage the use of different and **innovative** teaching methods
- (4) Create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be **responsible** for the learning program at the school site
- (5) Provide parents and pupils with **expanded choices** in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system
- (6) Hold the schools established under this chapter **accountable** for meeting measurable student achievement standards



ADE shall empower parents by coordinating, alongside the State Board of Education, policies that streamline processes to continue, expand, and replicate effective charter schools (LEARNS Executive Order 1/11/23 (2a))

All Arkansas students should have access to high-quality educational choice opportunities, and the state's public charter schools are a key piece of the puzzle. Arkansas aims to align state policy and processes to national best practices in order to recruit, retain, and expand the best charter operators in America. Specifically, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) commits to:

- **Streamline charter application processes:** Create a more transparent charter approval and renewal process tied to academic, financial and organizational performance with clear, measurable standards and targets.
- **Improve charter policies:** Work with the State Board of Education to revise charter policy to codify a more transparent application process, tie charter renewal and expansion decisions to performance criteria, and remove barriers for high-quality, out-of-state charter operators to open in Arkansas.

[LEARNS - Reports \(arkansas.gov\)](#)

Engagement from this group and other stakeholders is essential to ensure that Charter School policies are representative of the perspectives of all part of the state's Charter system.



Streamline the process tied to academic, financial and organizational performance with clear, measurable standards and targets.

An effective application has seven core foundational components designed to provide the Charter Authorizing panel with essential information regarding the viability and sustainability of the school organization

- a clear and compelling mission
- a quality educational program
- a solid business plan
- effective governance and management structures and systems
- evidence of community and/or family demand and need
- a diverse founding member team with the necessary capabilities to lead the organization
- clear evidence of the applicant's capacity to execute its plan successfully

Streamline the process tied to academic, financial and organizational performance with clear, measurable standards and targets.

Based on the seven foundational components of an effective charter application, what did you consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of the application?



Improve charter policies to codify the application process and renewal decisions to performance criteria, and remove barriers for high-quality, out-of-state charter operators to open in Arkansas.

An effective charter school policy framework sets the conditions for charter schools' growing positive outcomes. The framework should offer a divergent approach from the conventional strategy for public schools. The "flexibility for accountability" concept is a distinctly different mode of operation. The "loose-tight" parameters of the framework create incentives to which schools and networks respond.

On the "loose" side of the approach, the framework establishes a policy of possibility where educators, leaders and boards of directors have the discretion to build and deliver curriculum and instruction that meets high standards for learning and is responsive to local needs.

The framework also aims to be "tight" at key points as schools open and mature. Authorizers are expected to behave as governors of quality. They set the bar high for initial permission to operate, which exerts quality and safety controls at the outset.

Improve charter policies to codify the application process and renewal decisions to performance criteria, and remove barriers for high-quality, out-of-state charter operators to open in Arkansas.

NEXT STEPS:

Review the following policy framework from two states with highly effective charter sectors. Be prepared to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of these policies.

Guiding Question:

**Would the policy framework presented improve the Arkansas Charter sector and remove barriers for high quality charters to enter the state?
Should Arkansas consider moving in this direction?**



Next Step - Review Policy Framework

Flexibility (Loose)

(Edited from multiple states' legislative policy)

Control. — A public charter school:

(A) Shall exercise exclusive control over its expenditures, administration, personnel, and instructional methods within the limitations imposed in this subchapter; and

(B) Shall be exempt from state statutes, policies, rules, and regulations established for the state public schools by the Superintendent, Board of Education, Mayor, City Council, or Authority, except as otherwise provided in the school's charter or this subchapter.
Exemption from Statutes and Rules. –

(i) A charter school is exempt from all statutes and rules applicable to a school, school board, or school district unless a statute or rule is made specifically applicable to a charter school.

However, a charter school shall be in compliance with the following statutes included in this section:

- (a) Those statutes pertaining to the student assessment program and school grading system;
- (b) Those statutes pertaining to the provision of services to students with disabilities;
- (c) Those statutes pertaining to civil rights;
- (d) Those statutes pertaining to student health, safety, and welfare; and
- (e) Those statutes relating to public meetings and records, public inspection, and criminal and civil penalties



Next Step - Review Policy Framework

Accountability (Tight)

(Edited and Summarized from multiple states legislative policy)

4) Annual report

(a) (1) Schools shall produce an annual report due by June 15 every year that provides evidence demonstrating their commitment to continuous improvement through the alignment of practices with the school's mission and philosophy.

(2) The annual report shall be a self-study, organized around six domains (purpose, relationships, teaching and learning, expertise, resources, and well-being) allowing the school to identify strengths and weaknesses by comparing evidentiary documentation to the Charter Standards approved by the State Board of Education. The self-study shall inform the school improvement plan which will be developed by each school and submitted to the Department of Education for evaluation.

(3) The school will participate in a site visit at a minimum of every five years. The external review team will evaluate the self-study annual reports, conduct on-site observations and interviews, and review the evidence provided by the school to "triangulate the data" provided by the school. Upon completion of the site visit, the team will collaborate with the school's leadership to inform the action plan for school improvement