

Improving Arkansas Charter Sector

October 11, 2023

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 to recruit, retain, and expand the best charter operators in America.

Specifically, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) commits to:

- **Improve charter school processes:** Establish clear charter policies that guide a more transparent charter approval and renewal process tied to academic, financial and organizational performance with clear, measurable standards and targets.
- **High Quality Choices:** Work with the State Board of Education to tie charter renewal and expansion decisions to performance criteria and remove barriers for high-quality charter operators to open in Arkansas.

[LEARNS - Reports \(arkansas.gov\)](https://www.arkansas.gov)



Review Policy Framework

**The goal is to develop policy that will reshape the
Arkansas Charter Landscape**

- **Improve family access to quality choice**
- **Provide educational autonomy for schools to excel**
- **Hold schools accountable for their performance through a continuous improvement process**
- **Arkansas Charter Schools become the standard by which quality is measured**



Review Policy Framework

Greater autonomy coupled with increased accountability will infuse all aspects of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's oversight of charter schools, beginning with the rigorous application process that groups must go through to receive a charter. Once the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education has awarded a charter on the basis of a successful [Application for a Public School Charter](#) (step 1), the new charter school has the freedom to organize around the core mission, curriculum, theme, or teaching method described in the application. In return for this freedom, a charter school must demonstrate good results within five years or risk losing its charter.

Charter life cycle :

1. Once the charter has been approved, it enters the implementation phase of development
2. School must complete pre-opening checklist requirements to begin school
3. Once open, the school enters into a five-year continuous improvement accountability cycle
 - >>> Annual report /School improvement plan due every year by August 1
 - a. *End of Year 1 - School Improvement Strategic Plan* defines the school's internally set performance objectives and how progress will be measured. A charter school creates an Accountability Plan at the end of year one of its first charter term to articulate to the community and the State what goals the school will use to measure its success in subsequent year. years.
 - b. Annual Improvement Plan submitted to DESE for review and evaluation of school performance and progress for the past academic year which is corroborated by evidence and possible site visit
4. Renewal after 5 years – based on school performance and external peer review site visit (3/5/7 year renewal)



Review Policy Framework

Application

Improve charter school processes with more transparent charter approval beginning with a rigorous application process.

The **application process** should be based on a detailed plan with performance-based criteria and learning outcomes aligned with its unique mission.

- > 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 founding member team with the necessary capabilities to lead the organization
- > clear evidence of the applicant's capacity to execute its plan successfully



Review Policy Framework

Autonomy

A charter school has the freedom to organize around the core mission, curriculum, theme, or teaching method described in the application. In return for this freedom, a charter school must demonstrate good results within five years or risk losing its charter.

By providing assurances of compliance a charter school may be exempt from all statutes and rules applicable to a school, school board, or school district unless a statute or rule requires compliance such as:

- (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
- (e) Those statutes relating to public meetings and records, public inspection, and criminal and civil penalties



Review Policy Framework

Monitoring - Continuous Improvement Model

Once approved, the new charter school can be organized around its core mission, curriculum, theme, or teaching method. It is allowed to control its operation except for required compliance statutes. In return for this freedom, a charter school must demonstrate good results within a specified number of years or risk losing its charter.

Annual monitoring would consist of an initial 5-year Strategic Improvement Plan, followed by a DESE-evaluated, annual school improvement plan in each subsequent year leading up a peer reviewed site visit in year 5.

Annual reports will provide evidence to show progress and improvement in areas such as:

- * Documentation (strategic plans, action plans, policies and processes)
- * Observations (effective learning observations, general observations)
- * Perceptions (surveys, focus groups, interviews)
- * Performance (organizational data, student academic performance and non-academic performance data)
- * ESSA / A-F state grading



Next Step

Review rules and statutes from other states that provide for the implementation of a continuous improvement model

Florida, Louisiana, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina (Charter SchoolsUSA)

Alabama

(adopted Cognia's continuous improvement model for all public districts and schools in the state - developing annual school improvement planning and compliance monitoring for federal and state legislative requirements, allowing for consistent school improvement planning using a model aligned to rigorous performance standards for effectively managing districts and schools with overall emphasis on supporting student learning

North Dakota

Integrated Cognia Continuous improvement model with state and federal accountability (*Annual review reports shared with state, *strategic planning model serves as ESSA accountability measure, *student engagement survey serves as an accountability measure under ESSA, *Title 1 districts use performance standards as part of annual reporting, *plans are incorporated into growth plans as a measure of academic performance and grads for annual accountability

Kentucky

Promote continuous improvement through Diagnostic Review for schools needing comprehensive support and improvement



Next Step

Review rules and statutes from other states that provide for the implementation of a continuous improvement model

Determine what rules, processes, and legislation would need to be adopted by Arkansas to develop a continuous improvement model for monitoring

Write new rules and suggest potential changes in legislation

