

## Public Charter Schools (CFDA No. 84.282)

### I. Legislation

Title X, Part C of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (20 U.S.C. 8061-8067) (expires September 30, 1999).

### II. Funding History

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Appropriation</u>
1995	\$ 6,000,000
1996	18,000,000

### III. Analysis of Program Performance

#### A. Goals and Objectives

The purpose of the Public Charter Schools Program is to increase national understanding of the charter schools model by providing financial assistance for the planning and initial implementation of charter schools and by evaluating the effects of such schools on school effectiveness and student achievement. Charter schools are designed to free communities and schools of unnecessary rules and regulations in return for accountability for results, and to provide increased educational options to parents, students, and teachers.

#### B. Strategies to Achieve the Goals

##### Services Supported

Grants are awarded on a competitive basis to state education agencies (SEAs) in states with charter school laws. An SEA receiving these funds must conduct a subsequent competition and award subgrants to eligible applicants within the state. If an eligible SEA elects not to apply for these funds, or applies and is not successful, an eligible applicant from that state may apply directly to the Department. An eligible applicant receiving a grant or subgrant may use the funds for planning and design of the educational program and for initial implementation of the charter school. The program currently provides grants to 19 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, which in turn are providing subgrants to more than 400 charter schools (including both schools that are now operating and those that are approved but still in the planning stage).

##### Strategic Initiatives

The Department is conducting a wide range of national activities designed to increase public understanding of the charter school option, disseminate models and materials to assist in the development of charter schools with high-quality educational programs and strong accountability systems, and provide technical assistance to charter schools. These efforts are focusing on eight areas: sharing of lessons learned; cross-fertilization to noncharter schools; business management for educators; assessment and accountability; building of bridges to strengthen the entire education systems; aggressive outreach to organizations and constituencies; achievement of equity; and

development of leadership. Specific projects include a Web site to provide information on charter schools, workshops for potential charter schools, a guidebook for charter school developers, and model materials for chartering authorities to provide guidance on ways to ensure that only the highest-quality applicants receive charters. In addition, a national study of charter schools will provide comprehensive information on charter schools and their impact on school quality and student achievement (see Section IV below).

### **C. Program Performance—Indicators of Impact and Effectiveness**

#### **Objective 1: Expand the number of charter schools and states with charter school laws.**

In the spring of 1997 there were approximately 491 charter schools operating in 17 states, nearly double the number operating in 1995-96 (252 schools). In addition, another 206 charter schools have been approved to open in the fall of 1997. Laws authorizing the creation of charter schools have been enacted in 27 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

#### **Objective 2: Evaluate the effectiveness of charter schools.**

The Department has awarded a four-year contract for a national study of charter schools and their impact on school quality and student achievement (see Section IV below); the first report was issued in May 1997. In addition, existing and ongoing research will be analyzed to determine the effectiveness of charter schools in areas such as school governance, school finance, and assessment and accountability.

#### **Objective 3: Increase national understanding of charter schools.**

In 1996, program funds supported a wide range of outreach activities designed to increase understanding of charter schools: five informational and technical assistance sessions at three regional conferences, two national meetings to enable people from around the country to discuss ways to overcome obstacles and develop successful charter schools, three regional workshops to provide assistance to charter school operators and developers, and 15 informational meetings in states with new charter laws.

### **IV. Planned Studies**

A four-year evaluation study includes annual surveys of all charter schools for four years (beginning with the 1995-96 school year) and a more intensive study of 72 charter schools and 28 comparison schools, to include site visits and analysis of student achievement data. The first report from this study, which provides descriptive information based on the first annual survey of all charter schools, was released in May 1997.

## **V. Sources of Information**

1. Program files.
2. A Study of Charter Schools: First-Year Report (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1997).

## **VI. Contacts for Further Information**

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