



LD 1553

An Act to Create A Public Charter School Program in Maine

Key Components

LD 1553 is based on the experience and best practices that have evolved nationally since 1992. The legislation incorporates the ideas of the many stakeholders from Maine. It is designed to reflect current realities in our state and to address public education needs unique to Maine.

1. **Eligibility for Federal Charter School Grants** – LD 1553 qualifies Maine for the federal start-up and planning grants for charter schools and Maine’s Department of Education - no state match is required.
2. **Multiple Authorizers** – LD 1553 designates as authorizers: 1) local and regional school districts; and 2) a State Charter Commission, operating as an expanded subcommittee of the State Board of Education. A prospective charter school may only submit a proposal to authorizers that announce they are accepting applications.
3. **Implementation Phase** - LD 1553 limits the number of charter schools authorized by the State Commission to ten in the first ten years. No charter schools may open until July 1, 2012.
4. **Accountability for Authorizers** – LD 1553 contains detailed provisions to enhance the quality of charter school authorizers and their oversight of the charter schools that they approve and monitor. LD 1553 also gives Maine’s Department of Education more responsibility for overseeing the authorizers.
5. **Performance Contracts for Operators** – LD 1553 requires detailed performance contracts between authorizers and operators.
6. **Funding** – For annual operating funds, the same per-pupil allocations that towns now spend on each child follows each child to the public district or public charter school that he or she attends, but the amount is limited to the EPS figure designated for each town. For facilities, charter schools do not participate in the state school construction fund, but can apply for private loans or grants, and they have access to un-used or under-used public facilities.
7. **Teachers** – All full-time teachers in charter schools must either hold an appropriate teaching certificate or become certified within three years of the date they are hired, excepting those with an advanced degree, professional certification, or unique expertise and/or experience in the curricular area they teach. Teachers at a charter school will be able to choose to bargain collectively or form a professional group.
8. **Contracting for Services** – LD 1553 allows charter schools to contract with not-for-profit or for-profit entities for services such as school assessment, online curriculum, technology support, food, transportation, cleaning, maintenance, office functions, etc.
9. **Virtual Chartered Schools** – LD 1553 adopts the language of the national model bill that defines and allows virtual chartered schools.
10. **Protection for Small Districts** – LD 1553 prohibits charter schools from enrolling more than 10% of children in a grade level within a district with over 500 students, and 5% if a district has less than 500 students, although this prohibition would not apply to conversions of existing public schools or programs.
11. **Protection for Small Towns** – If a local board approves the conversion of its only public school to a charter school, the conversion has to be approved by the voters in that school administrative unit.
12. **Increased Role and Responsibility of Maine’s Department of Education** - The MDOE is directed to 1) adopt "major substantive" rules by November 1 (which means further Legislative review next session); 2) develop guidelines and clarification of implementation processes and applicability of state laws and rules to charter schools; and 3) draft legislation to clarify or amend statutes as needed to implement the charter school program.