



## Quick Guide: Charter Schools and Service-Learning

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*For additional resources on these and other service-learning topics visit the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse Website at [www.servicelearning.org](http://www.servicelearning.org)*

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Charter schools are public schools created as an alternative to traditional public schools. They operate free from many traditional district and state rules regarding curriculum, hiring practices, and administration. Charter schools are most often created by a group of teachers, parents, and community members. In some states existing public or private schools, public or private institutions of higher education, non-profit organizations or governmental entities may also create a charter school. These organizers must approach a sponsor, usually the local school district, a non-local district, or a State Board of Education to grant them charter status. This 'charter' serves as a performance contract detailing the school's mission, program, goals for students served, methods of assessment, and ways to measure success. Charter schools must demonstrate improvement in student achievement to retain their status. In addition, these schools are financially accountable to their sponsors, the parents who choose them for their children, and the public that funds them. As of 2003, charter school laws were present in 41 states and the District of Columbia with schools operating in 37 states.

Many charter schools have been developed that include service-learning in their mission, as a primary instructional strategy to improve student performance (see City on a Hill Charter School in Boston - <http://www.cityonahill.org/home.htm>).

Service-learning programs and charter schools both feature:

- Innovative and energetic teachers;
- Active collaboration among teachers, students and the community;
- Alternative approaches to assessment, such as portfolios and public display of work, to determine both individual student success as well as school success;
- A focus on increasing student achievement and satisfaction in school; and
- Involvement of community partners in the educational process through school-based activities.

The following sources will provide you with more facts regarding the creation, administration, and success of charter schools across the nation as well as state specific information.

### **Web Resources**

### **The Center for Education Reform**

<http://www.edreform.com>

The Center provides information about charter schools, school choice, and state specific reports.

### **The Colorado League of Charter Schools**

<http://www.coloradoleague.org>

The League serves as a clearinghouse for information and resources that charter school groups can draw upon, as a technical support group, providing everything from legal advice to assistance in writing a charter proposal, and as an advocate for the overall charter schools movement.

### **Minnesota Charter School Research Center**

<http://www.hhh.umn.edu/centers/school-change/handbook/what.htm>

The Resource Center helps increase student achievement and graduation rates for children throughout Minnesota, as well as providing free, high quality technical assistance to people wishing to start and operate public charter schools.

### **National Charter School Clearinghouse (NCSC)**

<http://www.ncsc.info>

NCSC provides an interactive website, a newsletter and journal, and a compilation of funding resources and research. Their goals are to improve public charter schools' access to and understanding of federal and private funds, to provide technical assistance, mentoring and collaboration opportunities for public charter schools across the nation, and to collect, catalog, summarize, and disseminate research on issues relevant to public charter school operations to administrators, parents, and any other interested parties.

### **United States Charter Schools (USCS)**

<http://www.uscharterschools.org>

This site provides information regarding charter school legislation, recent research, resources for parents, ideas for those interested in starting charter schools, and resources for obtaining grant and other financial assistance.

### **Print Resources**

Anderson, Lee, Nancy Adelman, Kara Finnigan, Lynyonne Cotton, Mary Beth Donnelly, and Tiffany Price. *A Decade of Public Charter Schools: Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program: 2000-2001 Evaluation Report*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2002. <http://www.sri.com/policy/cep/choice/yr2.pdf>

Boyd, William Lowe, Debra Hare, and Joe Nathan. "What Really Happened?" Minneapolis, MN: Center for School Change, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota, 2002. <http://www.hhh.umn.edu/centers/school-change/docs/wrhc.pdf>

Braunlich, Christian, and Melanie Looney, eds. *Charter Schools 2002: Results from CER's Annual Survey of America's Charter Schools*. Washington, DC: The Center for Education Reform, 2002.

Colorado Department of Education. *1998-99 Colorado Charter Schools Evaluation Study: The Characteristics, Status and Performance Record of Colorado Charter Schools*. Denver: 2000.

Greene, J.P., G. Forster, and M.A. Winters. *Apples to Apples, An Evaluation of Charter Schools Serving General Student Populations*. New York: Center for Civic Innovation at the Manhattan Institute, 2003.

Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. *The State of Charter Schools 2000: National Study of Charter Schools*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2000.

Zimmer, Ron, Richard Buddin, Derrick Chau, Glenn Daley, Brian Gill, Cassandra Guarino, Laura Hamilton, Cathy Krop, Dan McCaffrey, Melinda Sandler, and Dominic Brewer. *Charter School Operations and Performance: Evidence from California*, Santa Monica: The RAND Corporation, 2003. <http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1700/>