

The Ins and Outs of Converting a Public School to a Charter Public School

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Goals for this Presentation

- To review existing conversion schools in this state – Overview
- To understand the laws and process for the creation of a conversion charter school
- To understand the funding difference for a conversion charter school
- To review the pros and cons of public school conversion
- Discuss lessons learned from existing conversion school operators

Conversion Statistics

- 84 percent of operating charter schools are start-up schools and 16% are conversion schools.
- Of the first 100 charter schools (through 1995), 40 were conversion schools.
- Approximately 12% of conversion schools are incorporated (16 of about 135 (not including all charter districts))
- 26% are direct funded (35 out of 135)
- Of 135 conversion schools, 36 are no longer conversions (noted as “closed, vacated, or revoked”) (26%)

Conversion Statistics (cont.)

- 9 school districts have converted all of their public schools to charter schools – known as an “all charter district.”
- 10 out of 135 are approved by County Boards of Education
- 1 out of 135 is approved by the State Board of Education
- 34 out of 135 are approved by LAUSD (17 have been closed)
- The most prolific converting schools districts are San Diego Unified (direct funded), Los Angeles Unified School District (see above), Campbell Union (most recent), Cambrian, and Chula Vista Elementary



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Common Reasons for Conversion

- Underperforming Schools (II/USP, NCLB provide for charter conversion as an option) to avoid state take over
- Drop in enrollment using traditional attendance boundaries
- Drop in enrollment using traditional school grades (adding a middle school to a K-5)
- Desire for more control over educational program and site budget
- Gains in flexibility in labor design and enrollment/expulsion
- EMO/CMO take over
- Parent effort to avoid school closure by school district



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Conversion School Petition Process:

- A petition to convert an existing public school (or program) to a charter school may be circulated by any one seeking to establish the charter school;
- May be dependent or independent
- The petition may be submitted to district after the petition has been signed by not less than 50% of the permanent status teachers currently employed at the public school (or program) to be converted.
- Other standards charter petition requirements are applicable (i.e., 16 elements, impact statement, financials etc.)
- Public hearing, action by board
- Appeal rights/politics

Conversion School Petition Process **(cont.)**

- Admission to a public school converted partially or entirely to a charter school must adopt and maintain a policy given admission preference to pupils who reside within the former attendance area of that public school.
- No charter shall be granted that authorizes the conversion of any private school to a charter school.
- No teacher or student can be forced to attend charter school
- Can not apply to the county board as a “county-wide” charter, although county schools can apply to their own county board of education for approval.

Conversion School Funding

- **Important:** Conversion schools in unified school district:
 - General Purpose Entitlement funding (State aid and in-lieu property tax) limited to the amount actual unrestricted revenues expended per unit of ADA for that school in the year prior to conversion and adjusted by inflation, equalization, deficit reduction, and other state general purposes increases. (SB 319/Ed Code 47660(c))
 - N.B. Determined by district
 - Will receive categorical block grant and other funding (e.g., lottery)
- All other conversion schools – normal block grant funding

Laws Relating to All – Charter Districts

- **Signatures:** 50% of the teachers within the school district sign the charter petition.
- Charter petitioner must contain all of the requirements set forth in Education Code Section 47605(b), (c), (d), (e), (f) (and multi-year fiscal projections)
- Charter to include provision that specifies:
 - Alternative public school attendance arrangements for pupils residing within the school district who choose not to attend charter schools
 - Alternative employment for teachers
- Include reasons for conversion (projected programmatic/fiscal effects of change)



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Laws Relating to All – Charter Districts (cont.)

- Must be approved by joint action of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education (after ACCS recommendation).
- Can be funded through the charter school funding model if the district chooses (irrevocable)
- Overseen by CDE staff
- Normal revocation and renewal provisions apply (e.g., AB 1137)

Pros of Charter Conversion

- Local governance and control
- Control over school budget (possibly more revenue – e.g., Title I)
- School districts often consider conversion of their own schools as a way to potentially increase revenue to the District
- Control over educational programming at the school site

Pros of Charter Conversion (cont.)

- *Potentially* more control over employee selection and employee terms
- More control over school environment and student enrollment/discipline
- Facilities/FF&E in place from the outset of the charter – new Prop. 39 regs

Cons of Charter Conversion (or perhaps better referred to as “the trickier aspects of conversion”)

- SB 319 has made conversion charter school funding a negotiation with the chartering district – for unified school districts
- No charter school revolving loan
- Retention of API/AYP
- Corporation Code limits board to less 49% interested directors
- Public Charter Schools Grant - \$250,000 maximum (whereas start up schools may get up to \$650,000).

Cons of Charter Conversion (cont.)

- 50% of permanent teachers must sign in favor of the conversion – likely union influence
- Negotiation of employee selection and rights can be difficult
- Some facilities issues unresolved by regulations:
 - Who controls pre-existing special day programs on the campus?
 - Who controls any unused facilities?

Lessons Learned from Prior Conversion Experiences

- If possible, try to work positively with the school district
- Hold multiple information forums with staff/public
- Prepare for appearances in the press – public relations must be considered throughout the process
- Prepare for objections from the unions/district
- Consider start-up charter school

Lessons Learned from Prior Conversion Experiences (cont.)

- If school closure is a possibility, ensure that the charter is submitted as early as possible if seeking a conversion – Sac High case
- Can begin as dependent and transition to independence
- If district considering conversion, realize that neighboring school districts, and/or county may not view the conversion favorably

Lessons Learned from Prior Conversion Experiences (cont.)

- Academic performance will be viewed under a microscope – school district and public will be looking for a “quick-fix” – make sure you are only promising what you can deliver in a reasonable time period
- Assign a site team leading the conversion effort and one point person if possible for all communication with third-party providers (i.e. legal), the District, and the press.