



**The Nelson A. Rockefeller Center at Dartmouth College**

*The Center for Public Policy and the Social Sciences*

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### **Charter Schools in New Hampshire**

#### *An Overview of Characteristics and Challenges*

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In recent years, much attention has been paid to the need to innovate and reform public schools. One response to this education reform movement was the creation of charter schools. This report looks at the charter school movement in New Hampshire and the current condition of charter schools in the state.

Our report compiles data about the unique characteristics and challenges of charter schools in New Hampshire. These challenges relate to New Hampshire's demographics and rural geography, educational metrics, funding sources available to charter schools in the state. Furthermore, the report examines available performance data and the success of charter schools in other states with characteristics similar to those of New Hampshire.

### **1. BRIEF HISTORY OF CHARTER SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED STATES**

Most attribute the first use of the phrase "charter school" to Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers, in a speech he made to the National Press Club in 1988.<sup>1</sup> Despite being a strong union leader, Shanker famously criticized public schools and their teachers stating that "It's time to admit that public education operates like a planned economy, a bureaucratic system in which everybody's role is spelled out in advance, and there are few incentives for innovation and productivity. It's no surprise that our school system doesn't improve. It more resembles the communist economy than our own market economy."<sup>2</sup> Shanker's call for better schools with "incentives for innovation and productivity," was the catalyst for the charter school movement.<sup>3</sup>

Charter schools were developed to create "nonsectarian public schools of choice that operate with freedom from many of the regulations that apply to traditional public schools."<sup>4</sup> The first charter school in the United States opened in 1992 to provide public school students alternative options.<sup>5</sup> Today, there are more than 5,400 charter schools serving more than 1.7 million students.<sup>6</sup> Interest in charter schools continues to grow, such that during the 2010-2011 school year, 465 new charter schools opened in forty states and the District of Columbia.<sup>7</sup> However, even as charter schools have grown increasingly popular and well known, they represent only a fraction of K-12 public school students. Charter schools comprise only "two percent of all public schools and slightly more than 1 percent of total enrollments."<sup>8</sup>

#### *1.1 A Brief History of Charter Schools in New Hampshire*

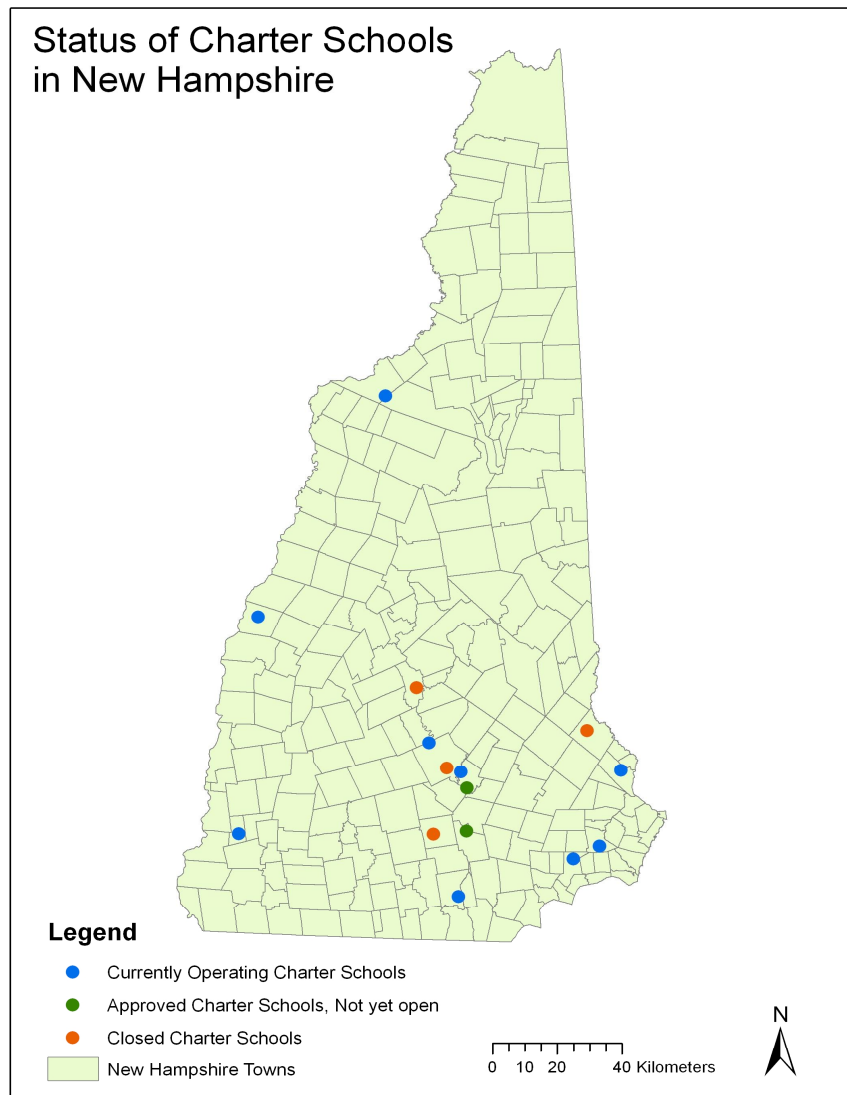
The history of charter schools in New Hampshire is longstanding, despite the fact that charter schools are often considered a contemporary approach to providing public education.<sup>9</sup> Archives suggest that well-known leaders of the state "supported, developed, and managed unique chartered public schools" beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> Today, New Hampshire has laws in place that support modern charter schools, with ten



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charter schools currently open in the state, four that have closed, and three soon to be opened.

## 2. CHARACTERISTICS OF CHARTER SCHOOLS IN NEW HAMPSHIRE



**Figure 1: Map of Charter Schools in New Hampshire, May 2011<sup>1</sup>**

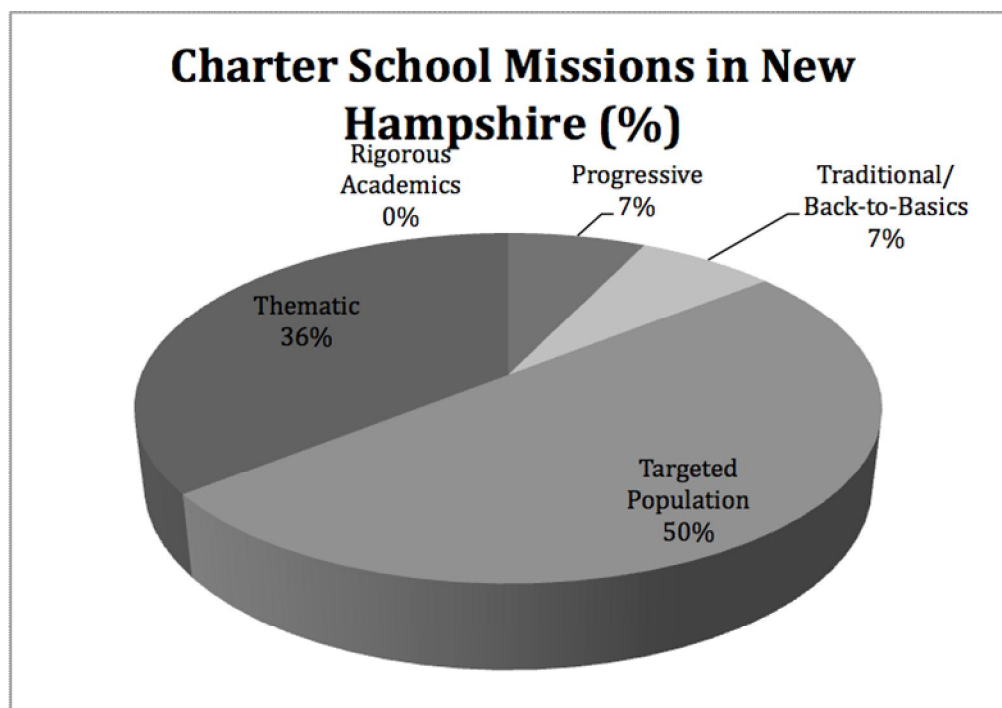
<sup>1</sup> Two currently operating charter schools share facilities, and one approved charter school has yet to elect its operating location.



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The authors of "The Charter Schools in New York City: Who Enrolls and How They Affect Their Students' Achievement," suggest that New York City charter schools fall into one of five categories: schools that offer progressive education, schools with a general or traditional educational mission, schools with a rigorous academic focus, schools that target a particular population of students, and finally schools with a thematic curriculum.<sup>11</sup> These categories dictate what type of students the school might be interested in educating and the style of curriculum they might choose to build. In New York City, 82 percent of charter schools fall into the first three categories, while only 18 percent target particular populations or offer a thematic curriculum.

In New Hampshire, on the other hand, the majority of charter schools fall into the final two categories: 50 percent of charter schools target particular populations, with many focusing on at-risk students, and 36 percent offer thematic curricula—for example, in the arts, design, or technology. One New Hampshire charter school has a progressive focus and one has a back-to-basics, traditional education approach. No existing charter schools in New Hampshire emphasize rigorous academics.



**Figure 2: Charter School Missions in New Hampshire, by percent**

The marked difference in charter school missions suggests that charter schools play different roles in these two locations. In New York City, 82 percent of charter schools stand in direct competition to traditional schools, offering intense academic curricula. In New Hampshire, 86 percent of charter schools provide alternate options for a targeted population or students who desire thematic curricula. Because traditional public schools



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do not often offer these options, they stand not as competitors, but alternatives for New Hampshire students. In this way New Hampshire can educate in alternative ways in an effort to best educate all children. This is one way in which charter schools in New Hampshire are unique.

#### 2.1 Inventory of New Hampshire Charter Schools

School Name	Mission	Grades served	Year Opened	Number of Students <sup>12</sup>	Student/Teacher Ratio <sup>13</sup>	Median Household Income of Town, 2009 unless otherwise noted	Population, 2009 unless otherwise noted <sup>14</sup>	Population Density people/ square mile, 2009
<b>Academy of Science and Design Charter School</b>	Thematic	7-12	9/17/2007	186	14.1:1	Merrimack = \$88,371	Merrimack = 26,683	806.1
<b>Cochecho Arts and Technology Academy</b>	Thematic	9-12	1/24/2005	76	19.2:1	Dover = \$58,756 <sup>15</sup>	Dover = 28,693	1081.6
<b>CSI Charter School</b>	Targeted Population	9-12	7/1/2007	40	22.8:1	Concord = \$52,592 <sup>16</sup>	Concord = 42,463	661.9
<b>Great Bay eLearning Charter School</b>	Targeted Population	8-12	1/3/2005	167	18.4:1	Exeter = \$61,089 <sup>17</sup>	Exeter = 15,038	746.3
<b>Ledyard Charter School</b>	Targeted Population	9-12	1/2009	38	28.9:1	Lebanon = \$57,982 <sup>18</sup>	Lebanon = 12,722	342.6
<b>North Country Charter Academy</b>	Targeted Population	7-12	7/1/2004	48	13.2:1	Littleton = \$43,069 <sup>19</sup> Lancaster = \$53,292 <sup>20</sup>	Littleton = 6154. Lancaster = 3219	Littleton = 125.7 Lacaster = 67.9
<b>Seacoast Charter School</b>	Thematic	1-6	7/1/2004	171	14.2:1	Kingston = \$70,063 <sup>21</sup>	Kingston = 6253	309.7
<b>Strong Foundations Charter School</b>	Traditional/ Back-to-Basics	K-4	9/2007	133	11.1:1	Pembroke = \$57,837 <sup>22</sup>	Pembroke = 7344	342.9



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<b>Surry Village Charter School</b>	Progressive	K-8	9/5/2006	83	12.6:1	Surry = \$71,083 <sup>23</sup>	Surry = 667	47.3
<b>Virtual Learning Academy Charter School</b>	Thematic	9-12	1/2008	41	N/A	Exeter = \$61,089 <sup>24</sup>	Exeter = 15,038	746.3
<b>Franklin Career Charter Academy</b>	Targeted Population	9-12	Closed 8/2008			Franklin = \$46,644 <sup>25</sup>	Franklin = 8712	312.8
<b>Laurent Clerc Charter Academy</b>	Targeted Population (Deaf Students)	1-8	Closed 6/30/2006			Concord = \$52,592 <sup>26</sup>	Concord = 42,463	661.9
<b>New Hampshire Equestrian Academy Charter School</b>	Targeted Population (Equestrian)	9-12	Closed 6/2010			Rochester = \$50,382 <sup>27</sup>	Rochester = 30,957	693.6
<b>New Heights Charter Academy</b>	Thematic (Career Focused)	11-12	Closed 6/30/2007			Goffstown = \$75,868 <sup>28</sup>	Goffstown = 17,944	480.2
<b>Average for New Hampshire</b>					12.3:1	\$60,567 <sup>29</sup>	1,324,575 <sup>30</sup>	147

Figure 3: Inventory of New Hampshire Charter Schools

The New Hampshire Department of Education have approved fourteen chartered public schools since 1995, with four of them closing due to insufficient enrollment and financial problems. Many New Hampshire charter schools and their students are concentrated in the southern part of the state. In total, 983 students are enrolled in ten New Hampshire charter schools, each ranging from 38 to 186 students.<sup>31</sup>

Charter schools in New Hampshire vary in many aspects, but one thing nearly all of the charter schools have in common a location in a population dense area, as seen in Figure 3. With the exception of Surry Village Charter School and North Country Charter School, all schools are located in areas with over 300 people/square mile. This is far greater than the New Hampshire average of 147people/square mile. This suggests that high population density is conducive to the creation of charter schools.



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Additionally, it is worth noting that the average income of districts with charter schools varies greatly. Some fall below the average while others exceed the average. There is no correlation between the average income of a region and the prevalence of charter schools.

Finally, as discussed above, New Hampshire charter schools also tend to have curricula that are either thematic or focused on targeted populations. All of these details are relevant in considering the future of charter schools in New Hampshire.

### *2.2 Rural Charter Schools*

New Hampshire is predominantly rural and has a low population density. As a result, many of the characteristics of charter schools in New Hampshire significantly differ from those of urban charter schools. As mentioned previously, the majority of charter schools currently open in New Hampshire have one of two missions: Provide a general education to an at-risk population or other targeted groups of students, or provide thematic curricula to a select group of students. This unique set of charter school missions in New Hampshire relates to the rural geography and dispersed population of New Hampshire. Traditional charter schools that focus on academics and stand as direct competitors to other public schools often suffer from under-enrollment in the State of New Hampshire. This is because few families opt to travel long distances to other school districts to send their children to a charter school that might provide the same education. However, many New Hampshire charter schools provide an alternative option to the pre-existing public school. This can be attractive to parents with children who are not thriving in a traditional school setting. At Ledyard Charter School, for example, students within a fifty-mile radius enroll in a special program targeted for students at risk of dropping out. Charter Schools in rural areas must present an attractive and different model of school if they hope to attract a sufficient population of students.

## **3. CHALLENGES FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS IN NEW HAMPSHIRE**

The various charter schools of New Hampshire often suffer from financial difficulties, organizational limitations, and a lack of local support. Many of these challenges are due to the rural nature of the charter schools.

### *3.1 Funding and Financial Challenges*

Funding charter schools remains one of the biggest obstacles to charter schools nationally and in New Hampshire. According to the Center for Education Reform's *Accountability Report* from 2009, 41 percent of charter schools that close nationally cite insufficient funding as the reason.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, the four New Hampshire charter schools that closed all cited insufficient funding and lack of enrollment as the reason for their closure.<sup>33</sup> Nationally, charter schools operate on approximately 2,000 dollars less per student per year than their traditional, public counterpart.<sup>34</sup> In New Hampshire, this disparity





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increases greatly and charter schools receive 6,300 dollars less per year per student than the New Hampshire public school average.<sup>35</sup> Charter schools are asked to perform the same tasks with far less funding, leaving the schools with greater burdens than traditional public schools.

Rural charter schools in particular tend to struggle to finance their schools. This is because many rural areas are resource poor, and shortages of start-up or operating capital and inadequate facilities [can] cause problems for a charter school.<sup>36</sup> When a student opts to go to a charter school, the per-pupil expenditure given out by the state to public schools is theoretically dispensed to the charter school for each student. In urban settings, the funding burden is widely distributed across many districts because districts are close together and transportation allows for easy-access to other districts. In rural communities where districts are much larger and more spread out, and the distribution of funding becomes more convoluted and sparse.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, sending school districts are not required to provide funds for students who opt to attend a nearby charter school, thus contributing to the financial problems of rural charter schools.

Because charter schools are usually granted funding based on the number of enrolled students, attracting a significant number of students is often crucial, especially for rural charter schools. However, unlike successful urban charter schools attract more students than they can educate, rural charter struggles may struggle to attract enough students to continue operations due to a dispersed population and a low population density in the area. Furthermore, schools targeting a specific population of students particularly struggle to find enough students given that they work with just a small subset of the public school population. Of the four charter schools that have closed in New Hampshire, three of them targeted particular students ó at-risk behavior, deaf or hard of hearing, and equestrian. These charter schools closed due to under enrollment. The fourth charter school to close in New Hampshire provided a thematic curriculum for business technology careers. All four of the charter schools closed due to under-enrollment and therefore lack of funding.<sup>38</sup>



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Closed School Name	School Enrollment at the Closed School Year	School District Enrollment at Correspondent Grades and School Year
Franklin Career Charter Academy <sup>39</sup>	27	440
Laurent Clerc Charter Academy <sup>40</sup>	6	3062
New Hampshire Equestrian Academy Charter School <sup>41</sup>	23	1615
New Heights Charter Academy <sup>42</sup>	2	1316

Figure 5: Closed Charter Schools in New Hampshire

3.1.1 Method of Funding:

Currently, New Hampshire charter schools can go through one of two processes to receive funding. Charter schools receive different amounts of funding depending on which approval process the school follows. Schools can choose to go through a local approval process or apply for approval directly through the state. If a charter school is approved by a local school district it receives a minimum of 80 percent of the per-pupil expenditure of the school district.<sup>43</sup> Schools approved by local districts must be approved by both a local school board and the state board of education. If a charter schools is approved locally it is required to comply with local public school regulations, thus they have decreased autonomy.<sup>44</sup> Alternatively, a charter school approved solely by the state receives a \$3,450 adequacy grant and \$2,000 in disparity aid, or a total of \$5,450 per student.<sup>45</sup> While there are two options for approval, currently only one is being utilized. Of New Hampshire’s ten existing charter schools none were locally approved. Furthermore three of the four charter schools that were closed were also approved through state, not local, authorizers.<sup>46</sup> We have been unable to determine the status of the fourth closed school, the New Heights Charter School.

While public schools in New Hampshire average approximately \$11,753 per student<sup>47</sup>, under current policies, state authorized charter schools in New Hampshire are funded at a rate of \$5,450 per student.<sup>48</sup> The per pupil costs of educating a student at New Hampshire charter schools ranges from \$5,500 to \$9,500, leaving the charter schools to make up the additional costs in the form of fundraising and grants.

Additionally, according to New Hampshire charter school funding regulations, charter schools are required to take students from any district, regardless of the tuition received from the sending school district.<sup>49</sup> Certain districts do not have schools of their own and



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must send their students to other districts to be educated. Students in these districts may elect to go to school in one of the public schools of the surrounding districts. The sending district finances the students' educations at the public school of choice. As it stands, if a student from a sending district elects to enter a charter school, the sending district is not required to provide the capital they would be required to put forth if the student had chosen to enter a traditional public school. Some school districts choose to support charter schools by allowing district funding to follow a student, however this is not a mandate. Students with special needs are the exception to this, and if a special needs student chooses to attend a charter school the sending district is required to provide funding for their education.

<b>School</b>	<b>Cost per student (\$)</b>
Academy of Science and Design Charter School	9,500
Coheco Arts and Technology Academy	8,600
Ledyard Charter School	9,500
North Country Charter Academy	11,833
Seacoast Charter School	6,000
Strong Foundations Charter School	6,500
Virtual Learning Academy Charter	8,500

**Figure 9: Per Pupil Costs of NH charter schools**

As public schools, charter schools are also eligible for federal funding. All federal funding available to chartered public schools under the No Child Left Behind Act, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or other federal source of funds should be applied to charter schools, assuming that they comply with federal regulations.<sup>50</sup>

### *3.2 Educational and Organizational Challenges*

#### *3.2.1 Student-Teacher Ratio:*

Many charter schools in New Hampshire have higher student/teacher ratios compared to other public schools in the state. The student/teacher ratio at charter schools ranges from 11:1 to 29:1, with an average value of 17 students to 1 teacher; This is five students higher than the state average. Larger class sizes may require increased teacher effort as well as decreased individual attention for each student, thus the increased class size has the potential to negatively impact education outcomes.<sup>51</sup>



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Charter School	Student to Teacher Ratio
Academy for Science and Design Charter School	14.1:1
Cocheco Arts and Technology Charter	19.2:1
CSI Charter School	22.8:1
Great Bay eLearning Charter School	18.4:1
Ledyard Charter Academy	28.9:1
North Country Charter Academy	13.2:1
Seacoast Charter School	14.2:1
Strong Foundations Charter School	11.1:1
Surry Village Charter School	12.6:1
Virtual Learning Academy Charter School	N/A
<i>NH Charter School Average</i>	17.2:1
<i>NH State Average</i>	<b>12.3:1</b>

**Figure 6: Student to Teacher Ratio for New Hampshire Charter Schools, 2009-2010**  
**Data Source: NH DOE Staffing and Salary Report<sup>52</sup>**

3.2.2 *Teacher Attainment:*

Five schools out of the ten currently active New Hampshire charter schools have a larger percent of teachers with a Master’s Degree or higher compared to the state average. On the other hand, four charter schools have a lower percent of teachers with advanced degrees. Overall, charter schools and traditional schools have remarkably similar numbers pertaining to teacher higher education attainment: On average, 52.24 percent of charter school teachers have a Master’s Degree or beyond, whereas 51.9 percent of public schools teachers in the state have advanced degrees.

3.2.3 *Faculty Salary:*

Charter schools may not operate under state unions. Therefore, charter schools can set teacher salaries without regard to collectively bargained seniority and tenure provisions that constrain such decisions in most public schools.<sup>53</sup> The New Hampshire Department of Education provides data on the average charter-school teacher salary. Only one charter school provided teachers with a higher salary than the overall state average. The pay difference is due to both the Charter Schools inability to opt into state teachers unions, and the generally lower operating budget. This discrepancy in teacher pay may decrease charter schools ability to attract highly qualified and effective teachers. Six charter schools provide teachers with a higher salary than the average minimum starting salary for New Hampshire public school teachers. However, teachers with advance degrees are paid more than those with Bachelor’s Degrees alone. Thus given that five charter schools



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have higher education attainment than the state average the real income for charter-school teachers may be lower.

Charter School	Percent Master's Degree or Beyond
Academy for Science and Design Charter School	55.2
Coheco Arts and Technology Charter	25.0
CSI Charter School	66.7
Great Bay eLearning Charter School	62.5
Ledyard Charter Academy	100.0
North Country Charter Academy	50.0
Seacoast Charter School	73.8
Strong Foundations Charter School	1.2
Surry Village Charter School	38.5
Virtual Learning Academy Charter School	N/A
<i>NH Charter School Average</i>	52.54
<b><i>State Average</i></b>	<b>51.9</b>

**Figure 7: Teacher Attainment of Charter Schools in New Hampshire, 2009-2010**  
**Data Source: NH DOE Staffing and Salary Report<sup>54</sup>**

Charter School	Teacher Average Salary (\$)
Academy for Science and Design Charter School	37,500
Coheco Arts and Technology Charter	35,977
Great Bay eLearning Charter School	52,899
North Country Charter Academy	34,000
Seacoast Charter School	37,321
Strong Foundations Charter School	30,128
Surry Village Charter School	35,000
<i>Charter School Average Teacher Salary</i>	32,853
<b><i>State Average Teacher Salary</i></b>	<b>51,443</b>
<i>State Average Teacher Start Salary for B.A.</i>	33,120

**Figure 8: Teacher Salaries in New Hampshire, 2009-2010**  
**Data Source: NH DOE Staffing and Salary Report<sup>55</sup>**



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### *3.3 Local Challenges*

#### *3.3.1 Local District Control:*

New Hampshire has long been a proponent of small school districts with power localized in each district school board. While the New Hampshire Department of Education oversees all school districts<sup>56</sup>, it is the responsibility of local school boards to determine the tangible details of public schools in the district such as the number of schools in the area, the manner in which students come to school, the quality of the school facilities, and many other details pertaining to schooling.<sup>57</sup>

New Hampshire's 191 school districts are generally analogous with the borders of cities and towns, making the population of each district fairly small. This can make the creation of charter schools difficult, because the local districts often do not have the population to support two schools or may feel the need to put all resources into local public schools that have been long established. The director of Schoolcraft Learning Community Charter suggested, for example, that such a smaller town that's built upon a more traditional, established school district is probably going to be less interested in creating a different school environment.<sup>58</sup> Other states with largely rural populations, such as Minnesota and Wisconsin, have governance that operates on the county level, which helps create the necessary population to support charter schools. Though New Hampshire does have some county governance in place, taxes are paid directly to the town government thus with fiscal control towns make decisions about school operations and functions.

Operating on the local school board level is not conducive to the creation of charter schools in New Hampshire. Although there is an option for local approval of charter schools, none of the ten charter schools currently operating in New Hampshire was approved by a local district.<sup>59</sup> Instead, every school was approved directly by the state. Legislation allowing local districts to approve charter schools was enacted in 1995, and fifteen years later there are still no cases in which a local charter has been approved.

#### *3.3.2 Local Authorization of Charter Schools<sup>60</sup>:*

The local authorization of charter schools in New Hampshire basically warrants the permission of the local legislative body to open the locally authorized charter school. Within this system, the charter school would be funded directly from the district, the amount of funding being determined by a contract between the charter school and the local school board. The charter school must also receive a State Board-approved charter. Finally, the school submits a warrant to the voters for authorization to fund the school.



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### **4. A UNIQUE MODEL: NORTH COUNTRY CHARTER ACADEMY<sup>61</sup>**

North Country Charter Academy (NCCA) in Littleton, NH has created a unique funding and operating model that allows the school to circumvent many of the difficulties experienced by other charter schools in New Hampshire. NCCA was created by superintendents from ten school districts from the area surrounding Littleton. Each district agrees to support the school financially based on the number of their students attending NCCA. Districts can opt out of the contract from year to year. The school districts currently supporting NCCA are Berlin Public Schools, Colebrook School District, Colebrook Cooperative, Haverhill Cooperative, White Mountains School District, White Mountains Regional Cooperative, Northumberland School District, Lincoln-Woodstock Cooperative, Monroe School District, and Littleton School District.

When NCCA first opened in 2004, participating districts contributed \$2,300 per pupil. The sum of money that districts supply per pupil is determined on a yearly basis. Today the districts match the tuition given by the state. This means that while most districts receive \$5,450 in tax dollars, NCCA is receiving \$10,900 in combined local and state tax financed contributions. This greatly reduces the amount of money NCCA make up through fundraising and grant writing. New Hampshire students from districts outside of these ten are able to enroll at NCCA free of charge, however it is unlikely that students would do this given the amount of time they would have to spend commuting.

In addition to sharing NCCA, these ten districts are all a part of North Country Educational Services (NCES). NCES contracts some of the services that these districts need, such as in-service teacher training and resources for special needs students, and allows the districts to collaborate in an effort to reduce costs for all parties involved. The principal of NCCA believes that their collective involvement in NCES leads to the continued involvement and commitment to NCCA because NCES encourages all ten school districts to support NCCA.

NCCA primarily works with students who are at risk of dropping out. This is important to note, because while this model has been successful for NCCA it might not be applicable to schools of a different variety, for example thematic curriculum schools. Since NCCA's creation, dropout rates in the participating districts have decreased greatly. Since 2004 Berlin's dropout rate was reduced from 21.9 percent to 4.6 percent, Hollbrook's dropout rate was reduced from 16.8 percent to 7.6 percent, and Haverhill's dropout rate was reduced from 15.4 percent to 2.9 percent. To its credit, NCCA has a similarly low dropout rate at 4 percent.

The model of NCCA is interesting to consider because it demonstrates an alternative that simplifies problems surrounding funding for rural charter schools.



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### **5. SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE DATA**

Charter schools, particularly in urban environments, often play the role of competitors to traditional K-12 public schools. As a result, a great deal of research has focused on whether or not charter schools outperform traditional public schools. However, this literature is messy at best. First, almost all studies focus on urban charter schools. Secondly, many of the studies are poorly designed, lacking randomization and matched controls. Lastly, many researchers trying to document charter school performance also have vested and biased interests in the field.

The best studies on academic performance in charter schools use lotteries as a way to form an intention-to-treat variable in students who do not get chosen in the lotteries.<sup>62</sup> These losers become the control group to the winners of the charter school lotteries. Researchers are then able to track student performance data pre- and post-intervention to determine the effects of charter school enrollment per year on both groups: The logic of randomization is that, owing to the law of large numbers, the average lotteried-in and lotteried-out students should not only be comparable on observable characteristics but also on unobservable ones.<sup>63</sup>

Studies show small to moderate improvements in academic performances by students in charter schools. One study on New York City charter school finds that in relation to expected progress made in traditional schools, charter schools raised their third through eighth graders' math scores slightly (3.75 to 3.98 points) and reading scores slightly (1.53 to 1.61 points) for every year spent in the schools.<sup>64</sup> Other well-designed studies report positive effects, though they vary by grade and subject.<sup>65</sup> Although charter schools have not proven to be significantly beneficial in improving the performance of students, they do seem to provide a marginally better education, in terms of delivering better test scores.

The charter school movement is markedly different in New Hampshire: Charter schools provide less in the way of competition and more in the way of alternatives. New Hampshire's more rural environment and dispersed population also makes a comparison to urban settings like New York City and Boston less than ideal. Still, demonstrating the effectiveness of urban charter schools for some students is critical to motivating policymakers and other stakeholders in New Hampshire to look seriously at charter schools as potentially useful and appealing options.

Determining if charter schools in New Hampshire improve student performance outcomes proves more difficult. Charter schools in New Hampshire do not hold lotteries like in New York City or Boston, so using the lottery as a methodological instrument is not an option. It might be possible to compare students currently in charter schools to students who are on charter school waiting lists. If that data is not available, then comparing students in charter schools to similar students in traditional public schools





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could provide a useful comparison. Furthermore complicating statistical collection and analysis, the population of students enrolled in charter schools is very small, leading any comparison between students enrolled in charter schools with students enrolled in traditional public schools to be weak at best. We have provided NECAP testing results in the appendix, however many charter schools do not have the necessary number of tested students to report data.

### **6. CASE STUDIES**

In order to contextualize the charter school system in New Hampshire, we examined the Charter School Systems in Massachusetts and Minnesota. Both states out perform New Hampshire when looking at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools rankings, with Minnesota being the best state in the US with regards to Charter Law Components, Massachusetts ranking third, and New Hampshire ranking sixteenth.<sup>66</sup> These states offer a closer comparison than most other states, Massachusetts because it offers similar town based legislation and Minnesota because it also has a rural geography.

#### *6.1 Massachusetts*

Each charter school is granted a five-year charter by the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.<sup>67</sup> In return for much leeway and independence in the running of charter schools, each school must produce tangible results that show academic improvement (or other measures of success) within five years; if the school neglects to produce such results, its charter is not renewed.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, the focus of the charter school system in Massachusetts, unlike in New Hampshire, is simply to improve the academic performance of the pupils. Through evaluation of the statewide mandatory MCAS test results among charter school pupils, the academic success of a charter school is often critically evaluated in this accountability process.

In Massachusetts, charter schools may not be located in any community with a population of less than 30,000, unless the school is to be a regional charter school.<sup>69</sup> This contrasts New Hampshire's charter schools, many of which are located in communities of less than 30,000. Only three out of the currently functioning ten New Hampshire charter schools are located in districts with a population of over 30,000. Therefore, Massachusetts charter schools remain operate in urban settings and have a different focus than New Hampshire charter schools.

There are two types of charter schools in the state of Massachusetts: Commonwealth charter schools and Horace Mann charter schools.



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### *6.1.1 Horace Mann Schools<sup>70</sup>:*

Horace Mann schools must have their charters approved by the local school committee, as well as the state board of education. Sometimes, the local teachers' union must also approve these schools for the charter schools to be granted a charter.

Funding for these schools come directly from the school district. The schools cannot receive less than they would have under the district's standard budgetary allocation rules; furthermore, they must receive their share of federal and state grant funds. Finally, schools may apply for private grants and receive individual contributions. Given the many financial supports of Horace Mann Schools, usually these schools do not face as many financial burdens as many of the charter schools in New Hampshire.

### *6.1.2 Funding<sup>71</sup>:*

Charter schools in Massachusetts are funded through federal, state, and local means using a specific formula to calculate the tuition rate per pupil:

1. A Foundation Budget is calculated from various factors, such as administration, teaching, guidance services, maintenance, grade levels, low-income status of students, etc. This is then divided by the number of pupils from each school district, for each charter school, to create the Foundation Base Rate.
2. Each school district's net school spending (NSS), without factoring in such costs as out-of-district special education costs, is weighed against the Foundation Budget. If the NSS is greater, the difference is calculated as a percentage of the Foundation Budget and then as a per-pupil spending rate, which is added to the original Foundation Base Rate.
3. Finally, Facilities Tuition Rate (building costs) is factored in per-pupil terms, and added to the Foundation Base Rate, to create the total Charter Tuition Rate.

Under this system, Massachusetts charter schools are given more financial and structural support by the state than New Hampshire charter schools.

### *6.2 Minnesota*

In Minnesota, each charter school acts as its own school district, without geographical boundaries.<sup>72</sup> Each school also has an "authorizer," often traditional school districts, colleges and universities within the state, or a non-profit organization, who is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the fiscal, operational and student performance of each school.<sup>73</sup> The charter schools establish a "charter contract" with this authorizer, outlining the purposes and expected outcomes of the school and its students.<sup>74</sup>



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In the 2010-2011 academic year, there were 149 operating charter schools in the state, serving over 37,000 students. Each charter school requires its students to take state and national tests, to measure student performance levels and assure academic accountability.

### *6.2.1 Funding<sup>75</sup>:*

Charter schools of Minnesota receive the majority of their revenue from the state. Because Minnesota's charter schools serve 2.8 percent of the state student population, they also receive the proportional amount of 2.8 percent of the total revenue.

As with state district schools, the charter schools are funded by the state essentially through a formula that determines an Adjusted Marginal Cost Pupil Unit (AMCPU). However, charter schools lack the access to local property tax revenue that district schools have. Instead, charter schools receive additional state funding based on the statewide average property tax and other limited equalization money from the state. Charter schools are able to receive additional funding because they serve a greater portion of at risk and/or disadvantaged students. For example, over half of charter school students were eligible for free or reduced price lunch, while less than a third of district school students were eligible. This is an indication of the relative poverty levels of the students in the two different school systems. On the other hand, district schools receive more funds for students in need of special education services than charter schools.

Overall, district schools receive, on average, about \$169 more per pupil than charter schools. However, when the figures are weighed and adjusted for charter enrollment, district schools receive \$1,639 more per pupil than charter schools. In other words, district schools would have actually received \$12,720 per pupil for the same students that attend charter schools and receive \$11,081, indicating an actual value of \$1639 or 12.9 percent difference in state funding received per pupil between district schools and charter schools of Minnesota.

## **7. Conclusion**

This report has examined the current state of charter schools and charter school policy in New Hampshire. New Hampshire presents unique challenges with regard to the charter school movement given the rural nature of many New Hampshire school districts and the localized control of school policy. These two elements greatly affect the viability of charter schools because often schools struggle to obtain a population necessary to support the schools continuation and they cannot find local support.

Charter schools in New Hampshire play a different role than they do in urban environments. Based on our assessment, New Hampshire charter schools, unlike their urban counterparts, are not in direct competition with other schools. Instead, they act as an alternative for kids who are not thriving in the traditional public school environment.



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	Statewide		Statewide, Weighted	
<b>Per Pupil Revenue (\$)</b>				
District	11,250		12,720	
Charter	11,081		11,081	
Difference	169 (1.5%)		1,639 (12.9%)	
<b>Per Pupil Revenue by Source (\$)</b>				
	District	Charter	District	Charter
Federal	617	1,039	1,080	1,039
State	7,657	9,430	8,646	9,430
Local	2,467	489	2,689	489
Other	658	129	535	129
Indeterminate	-149	-5	-5	-5
Total	11,250	11,081	12,720	11,081
<b>Percentage of Revenue by Source</b>				
	District	Charter	District	Charter
Federal	5.5	9.4	8.5	9.4
State	68.1	85.1	68.0	85.1
Local	21.9	4.4	21.1	4.4
Other	5.9	1.2	4.2	1.2
Indeterminate	1.3	0	1.8	0

**Figure 9: Revenue of Minnesota District and Charter Schools**  
**Data Source: “Charter School Funding - Inequity Persists”<sup>76</sup>**

Based on NECAP scores, charter school students perform at about the same level as public schools, however it is difficult to accurately assess the successes or failures of charter schools given the very small sample size. Under the current system charter schools received \$5,450 per student. On average, traditional New Hampshire schools spend \$11,753 per pupil. This disparity highlights the largest challenges that New Hampshire charter schools face. Future legislation pertaining to charter schools may consider addressing the financial challenges in some manner.

Possible policy changes that would encourage the success and proliferation of charter schools include: creating legislation that would increase the financial obligations of sending districts (see pages 12, 13); increasing the amount of state funding given to charter schools, particularly during a school’s initial years (see pages 6, 7, 8); and simplifying the procedure for local school district approval (see pages 8, 12, 13). Possible policy changes that would discourage the creation of charter schools include placing a minimum population requirement on charter school creation locations (see page 16).



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**APPENDIX A: Fall 2010 NECAP Scores for New Hampshire Charter Schools**

4= proficient with distinction, 3= proficient, 2=partially proficient, 1= substantially below proficient

Note: Throughout this report, percentages may not total 100 since each percentage is rounded to the nearest whole number.

Fall 2010 NECAP Writing Test Results, students beginning 11th grade						
	Number of Student tested	Percent achieving at level four	Percent Achieving at level three	Percent achieving at level two	Percent achieving at level one	Mean Score
<b>State</b>	14,975	1	44	48	7	6.2
<b>Academy for Science &amp; Design</b>	7	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>CSI charter</b>	2	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Chochocho Arts and Technology Charter</b>	15	0	40	53	7	5.9
<b>Great Bay eLearning Charter</b>	26	0	12	69	19	4.8
<b>Ledyard Charter</b>	8	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>North Country Charter</b>	7	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Virtual Learning Academy</b>	7	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Fall 2010 NECAP Reading Test Results, students beginning 11th grade						
	Number of Student tested	Percent achieving at level four	Percent Achieving at level three	Percent achieving at level two	Percent achieving at level one	Mean Score
<b>State</b>		25	49	18	9	1146
<b>Academy for Science &amp; Design</b>	7	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>CSI charter</b>	2	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Chochocho Arts and Technology Charter</b>	15	33	47	13	7	1147
<b>Great Bay eLearning Charter</b>	27	11	56	30	4	1143
<b>Ledyard</b>	9	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>North Country Charter</b>	7	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Virtual Leaning Academy</b>	7	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA



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Fall 2010 NECAP Math Test Results, students beginning 11th grade						
	Number of Student tested	Percent achieving at level four	Percent Achieving at level three	Percent achieving at level two	Percent achieving at level one	Mean Score
<b>State</b>	15027	3	33	29	36	1136
<b>Academy for Science &amp; Design</b>	7	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>CSI charter</b>	1	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Chochoeco Arts and Technology Charter</b>	15	0	27	20	53	1134
<b>Great Bay eLearning Charter</b>	28	0	14	25	61	1130
<b>Ledyard Charter</b>	8	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>North Country Charter</b>	7	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Virtual Learning Academy</b>	6	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Fall 2010 NECAP Reading Test Results, students beginning 8th grade						
	Number of Student tested	Percent achieving at level four	Percent Achieving at level three	Percent achieving at level two	Percent achieving at level one	Mean Score
<b>State</b>	15173	23	55	17	4	850
<b>Seacoast Charter Academy</b>	20	30	65	5	0	852
<b>Academy of Science and Design</b>	45	36	62	2	9	855
<b>Great Bay eLearning</b>	18	6	53	33	6	845



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Fall 2010 NECAP Math Test Results, students beginning 8th grade

	Number of Student tested	Percent achieving at level four	Percent Achieving at level three	Percent achieving at level two	Percent achieving at level one	Mean Score
<b>State</b>	15208	21	45	19	16	843
<b>Seacoast Charter Academy</b>	20	55	20	5	0	845
<b>Academy of Science and Design</b>	45	69	29	2	0	856
<b>Great Bay eLearning</b>	18	17	50	22	11	843

Fall 2010 NECAP Writing Test Results, students beginning 8th grade

	Number of Student tested	Percent achieving at level four	Percent Achieving at level three	Percent achieving at level two	Percent achieving at level one	Mean Score
<b>State</b>	15125	12	52	29	7	842
<b>Seacoast Charter Academy</b>	20	10	50	35	5	844
<b>Academy of Science and Design</b>	45	20	67	13	0	848
<b>Great Bay eLearning</b>	18	0	28	61	11	835

Fall 2010 NECAP Reading Test Results, students beginning 3rd grade

	Number of Student tested	Percent achieving at level four	Percent Achieving at level three	Percent achieving at level two	Percent achieving at level one	Mean Score
<b>State</b>	13959	17	63	14	6	348
<b>Surrey Village Charter</b>	5	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Seacoast Charter Academy</b>	21	5	71	19	5	346
<b>Strong Foundations Charter School</b>	13	15	31	46	8	343



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Fall 2010 NECAP Math Test Results, students beginning 3rd grade

	Number of Student tested	Percent achieving at level four	Percent Achieving at level three	Percent achieving at level two	Percent achieving at level one	Mean Score
<b>State</b>	13995	28	48	16	8	1136
<b>Surrey Village Charter</b>	5	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Seacoast Charter Academy</b>	21	29	67	0	5	350
<b>Strong Foundations Charter School</b>	13	15	54	23	8	345





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