

Report Card on Charter Authorizing:		Delaware
I. State Policy Environment		
A. Support for Charter Schools		C-
B. Support & External Accountability for Authorizers		B-
II. Authorizer Practices		
A. Application Processes		D
B. Approval Processes		B-
C. Performance Contracts		B+
D. Oversight		B
E. Renewal & Revocation Processes		B
F. Transparency & Internal Accountability		C-
<b>Overall Grade</b>		<b>C+</b>

## Delaware Charter School Law Overview

Delaware's initial charter law was enacted in 1995. It allows a local school board or the Delaware Department of Education to charter an unlimited number of schools. However, a local board has to vote to accept applications each year, and the State Department of Education may decide not to accept applications in any given year.

As of Fall 2002, 11 charter schools were open, with 10 authorized by the State Department of Education and one by a local district.

## State Policy Environment

**Support for Charter Schools:** Despite widening interest in the development and operation of charter schools, survey respondents gave Delaware a C- in this category. This stems from a lack of political support, weak understanding by the public, and lack of acceptance by districts. With a single exception (Red Clay Consolidated School District), school districts have not encouraged their development.

Delaware's Department of Education provides much technical assistance through in-service sessions and multi-day workshops. It also uses a series of

publications called the Integrated Evaluation/Support System, to address a number of legislative requirements. Expectations for Successful Charter Schools provides information for evaluating a charter application, monitoring a school's progress during its initial years, and evaluating it for charter renewal.

Expectations for Model Charter Schools is for charter schools to refer to in complying with Delaware's charter legislation. The Delaware Charter School Technical Assistance Manual shows administrators at new charter schools how to navigate state administrative and financial systems. Orderly as all this may seem to the Department, however, charter supporters view these publications as a focus on regulation and suggest that the Department does not encourage new charter schools. This impression is borne out by the state's low score for a "charter friendly" Department of Education.

Delaware received high marks for a well-developed charter network or association. For example, the Innovative School Development Company serves as a resource center and offers loan guarantee funds for charter facilities.

Chartered schools approved by the Department of Education are legally and financially autonomous.

**Support and External Accountability for Authorizers:** A B- in this category is driven by high

marks for periodic reports to the legislature, and by a state law which calls for an Accountability Committee, consisting of Department of Education staff members, that reviews concerns and makes recommendations to the State Board. It is also driven by Delaware's comprehensive school-based accountability system. However, there is concern about adequate funding for authorizing staff and activities.

## Authorizer Practices

**Application Processes:** Delaware received a D for its application processes. There are certain published requirements for an application (e.g., a plan to assure the health and safety of the students, employees, and guests of the schools), but survey respondents report a lack of information on how applications will be scored. The fact that the Department of Education and districts can "opt out" of accepting applications is reflected in low scores for efforts to get applications to a broad range of applicants.

Delaware received high marks, however, for having a detailed application timeline.

**Approval Processes:** A B– in this category is tempered by uncertainty over how new charter regulations, created as "clarifications" of the law, will play out in the approval process. Delaware received high marks for having an adequate time period for schools to prepare to open, as the charter law allows 17 months between approval and a school's opening. The state also received high marks for applicants' ability to respond to questions about their proposals.

**Performance Contracts:** With a B+, Delaware's highest score is in this category. The state received high marks for contracts that incorporate all the necessary information.

**Oversight:** Delaware received a B for its oversight processes. Authorizers rely on compliance-oriented practices along with performance measures, such as student achievement and parent satisfaction. Its highest marks were for site visits, schools' annual financial and progress reports, and notifying schools of

problems that emerge from the review of these reports.

**Renewal and Revocation Processes:** Delaware's B in this category is related to the procedures outlined in the Integrated Evaluation/Support System. The state received high marks for clear written criteria, decisions based on school progress, independent analysis of school data, and an overall quality process. Schools are initially chartered for three years, renewed every five years thereafter. As of Fall 2002, two charters had been revoked or non-renewed.

**Transparency and Internal Accountability:** Despite the Department of Education publication, *The Parent Guide to Charter Schools*, the state received a C– in this category. Most criteria were rated mediocre, with one—undertaking formal evaluations of their own practices—rating very low.

## Overall Grade

Based on scores for 56 criteria, Delaware earned a C for its policy environment and a C+ for authorizer practices, resulting in an overall grade of C+. When observer and school operator survey respondents were asked to provide a single "holistic" grade, the average grade given was also a C+.

Delaware's Department of Education has established extensive procedures and guidelines for charter schools, but these appear to have had both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand this proceduralism provides a good framework for evaluation. On the other, it focuses more on compliance with process, rather than a school's freedom to innovate. For more specifics on areas that could improve that balance, policymakers are advised to review the criteria in Appendix A, and on the web at <http://www.edexcellence.net/tbfinstitute/authorizers.html>.

Note: The survey data for Delaware came from two authorizer respondents (representing both authorizers in the state); 14 observer respondents; and five charter operator respondents (of 11 total operating charter schools, or 46%).

# Delaware

## Charter School & Authorizer Numbers

Year Initial Charter Law Enacted	1995
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### Total Charter Schools & Students (as of Fall 2002)

# Approved Charter Schools	13
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# Operating Charter Schools	11
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# Charter Students (% of Total Public School Students)	About 5,100 (4%)
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### Total Closures (to date)

# Revocations or Non-renewals	2
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# Voluntary Closures	6
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### Major Authorizers (those with three or more schools)

Name	# of Schools
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Delaware Department of Education	10
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Red Clay Consolidated School	
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District	1
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Data Sources: Delaware Charter Schools Network; closure data from Delaware Department of Education