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Interim State Superintendent of Schools

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December 1, 2015

The Honorable Thomas V. Mike Miller  
Senate Office of the President  
State House, H107  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

The Honorable Michael E. Busch  
Office of the Speaker of the House  
State House, H101  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Maryland Charter School Report (MSAR #10541)

Dear President Miller and Speaker Busch:

Education Article § 9-101 *et seq.*, establishes the Maryland Public Charter School Program. The statute requires that the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) report annually to the General Assembly in accordance with § 2-1246 of the State Government Article regarding any updates or amendments made to a public charter schools policy by local school systems; and implementation of Title 9 of the Education Article (ED).

Please find enclosed a report on the Maryland Charter School Program, as required by ED §9- 110 (c).

In addition to the requirements of the statute, this report provides to the General Assembly a general overview of Maryland's charter schools. Specifically the report includes:

- Summary information about Maryland's charter schools, including enrollment, demographics and 2014 performance data;
- Review of existing local policies and the availability of those policies on the local school system website;
- Summary of technical assistance provided by the Office of School Innovation in the Division of Student, Family and School Support; and
- Updates on implementation of Title 9.

Should you have questions or need additional information, please contact Carol Beck, Director, Office of School Innovations at (410) 767-3678 or by email at [carol.beck@maryland.gov](mailto:carol.beck@maryland.gov).

Sincerely,

Jack Smith, Ph.D.  
Interim State Superintendent of Schools

**Maryland's Public Charter Schools  
Report to the Maryland General Assembly  
Under Education Article Title 9**

**Maryland State Department of Education  
December 1, 2015**

**Larry Hogan  
Governor**

**Jack Smith, Ph.D.  
Interim State Superintendent  
of Schools**



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## **Background:**

Education Article (ED) § 9-101 *et seq.*, establishes the Maryland Public Charter School Program. The statute, ED §9-110(c), requires that the Maryland State Department of Education (the Department) will report annually to the General Assembly in accordance with § 2-1246 of the State Government Article regarding any updates or amendments made to a public charter schools policy by local school systems; and implementation of Title 9.

In addition to the requirements of the statute, this report provides to the Governor and the General Assembly a general overview of Maryland's Charter Schools. The report includes:

1. Summary information about Maryland's Charter Schools, including enrollment, and demographics.
2. Review of existing local policies as required by ED §9-110(a) and (c)(1) and the availability of those policies on the local school system websites ED §9-110(a)(3);
3. Summary of technical assistance provided by the Office of School Innovation in the Division of Student, Family and School Support; and
4. Updates on implementation of Title 9 of the Education Article.

## **1. Summary information about Maryland's Charter Schools, including enrollment, demographics and 2014 performance data.**

### **History**

The Maryland General Assembly established the Maryland Charter School program in 2003, "to establish an alternative means within the existing public school system in order to provide innovative learning opportunities and creative educational approaches to improve the education of students." ED§ 9-101 (b).

The key provisions of the Maryland Charter School Law include:

- Local school boards are the authorizers of public charter schools.
- Public charter schools comply with all state and local education laws and policies, unless waived.
- Employees of public charter schools are employees of the local school system.
- Charter schools receive an amount of public funding that is commensurate with the amount of funding expended on behalf of all public school students.
- Charter schools are open to all students. Admission is by lottery.

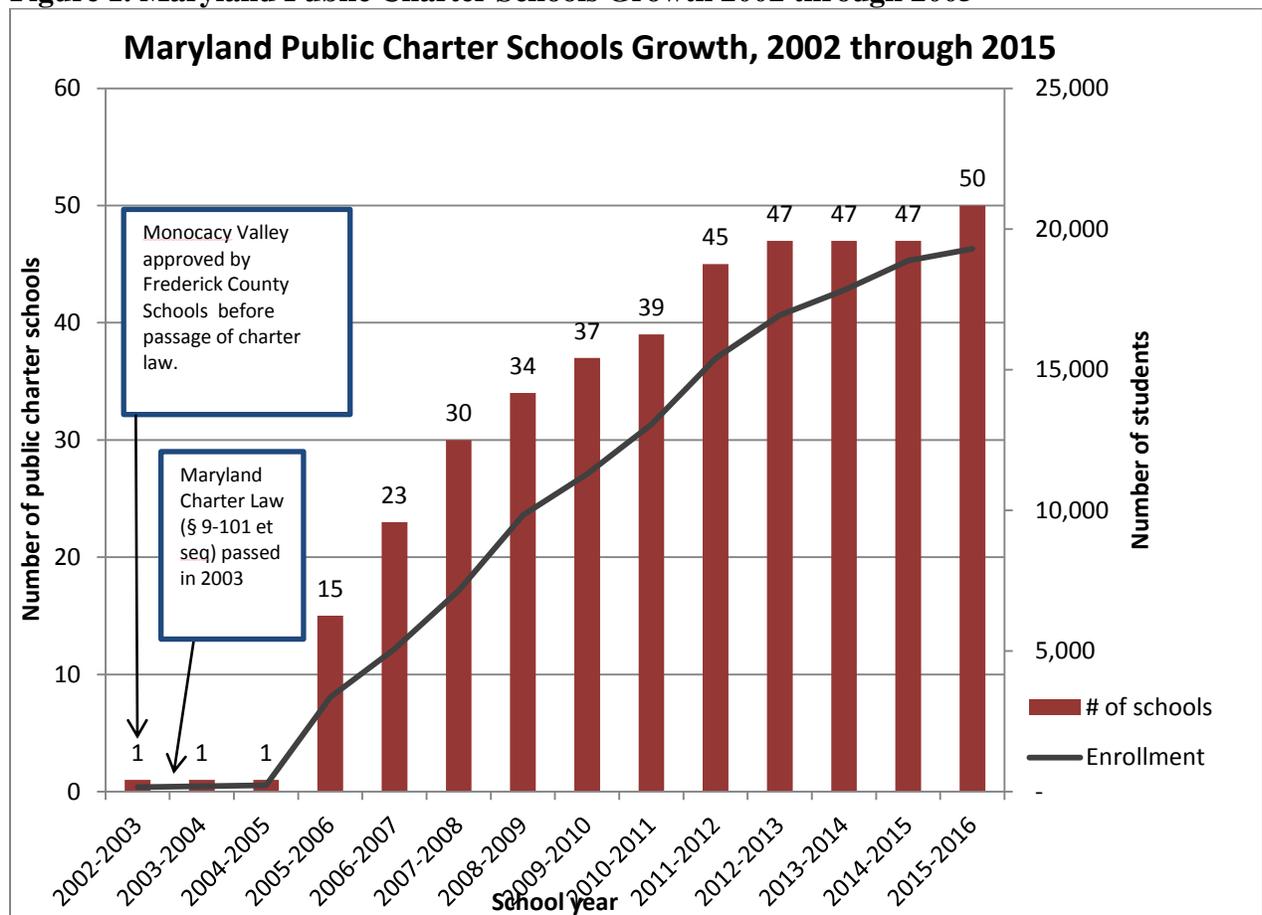
In the 2015 session of the Maryland General Assembly, the Legislature added provisions that empower local school board to approve proposals which would give greater weight in a lottery to disadvantaged students in some circumstances. In addition, under the revisions to the statute, the Maryland State Board of Education will establish criteria by which the local school board will assess charter schools to be eligible for additional operational autonomy. This provision is under review by the State Board (v. page 12).

The first public charter schools approved under the law opened in the 2005-2006 school year. In the 2015-2016 school year, 50 public charter schools are serving over 19,000 students in Maryland in five jurisdictions. There are 34 public charter schools in Baltimore City, 10 public charter schools in Prince George’s County, three in Frederick County, two in Anne Arundel and one in St. Mary’s County. **Figure 1** presents the number of charter schools and charter school enrollment by year. **Figure 2** shows the total number of students in public charter schools relative to the enrollment of Maryland’s local school systems.

In the 2014-2015 school year, there were 47 public charter schools. Since then one charter school closed, and four were approved. Specifically, Baltimore City did not renew one charter school contract and oversaw the opening of four new charter schools, bringing the total number of schools to 50.

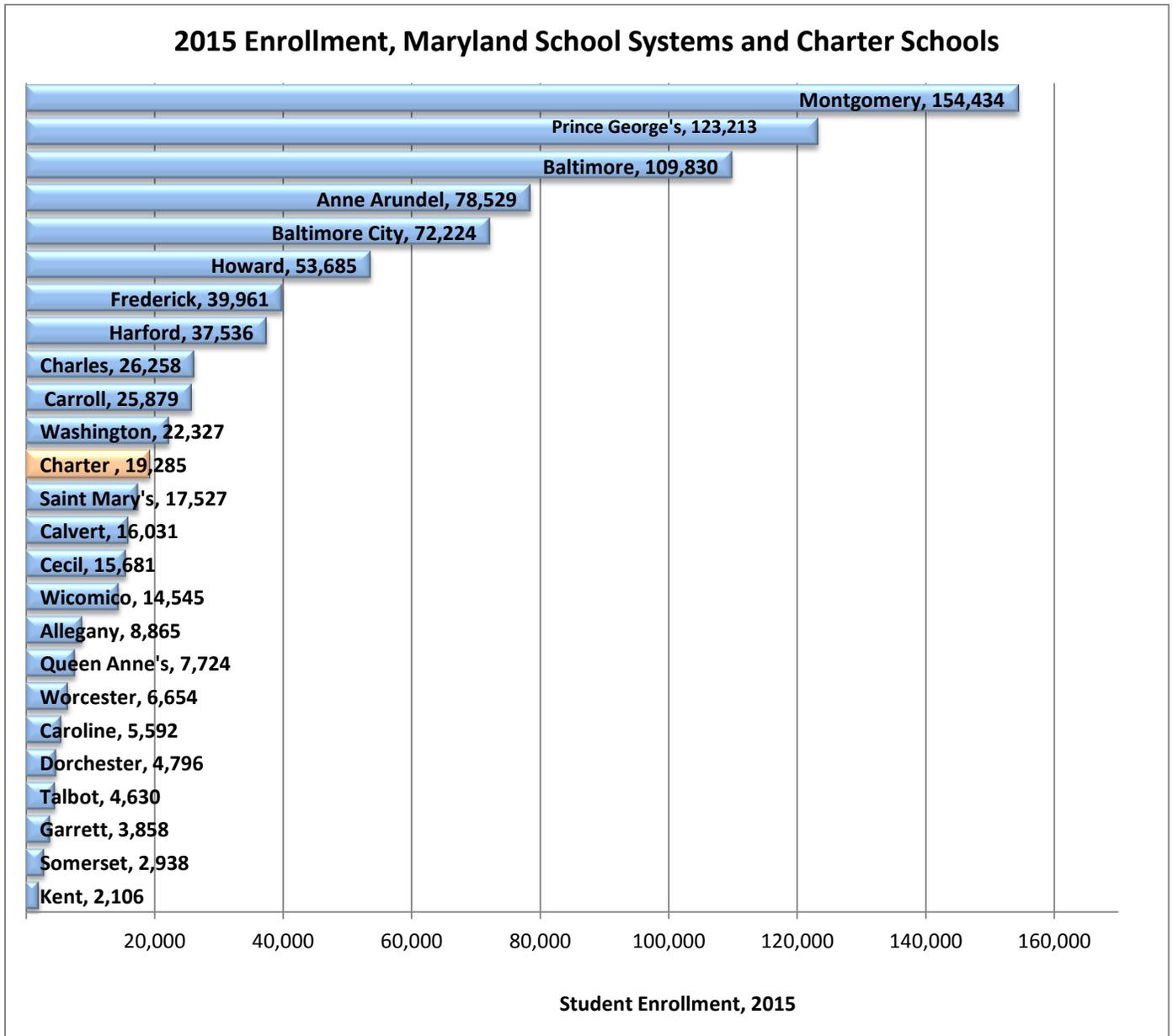
In the spring of 2015, Baltimore City reviewed six applications to establish a public charter school. One was approved to open in the 2016-2017 school year. No other jurisdictions received applications for consideration in the spring of 2015.

**Figure 1. Maryland Public Charter Schools Growth 2002 through 2005**



In the 2014-2015 school year, enrollment in public charter schools exceeded 19,000, or 2% of Maryland public school students.

**Figure 2. Total enrollment of Maryland Local Schools Systems and Maryland Charter Schools**



## Demographics

Maryland’s public charter schools serve all students. **Table 1** provides the percentage of students attending public charter schools who are eligible for Free and Reduced Price Meals (FRMS) and the percentage of students with disabilities (SWD). For each grade band, the percentage of students in public charter schools who are eligible for FRMS is greater than that of the state. For example, 65.1% of Maryland charter school elementary students are eligible for FRMS compared to 51.1% in Maryland. In Baltimore City, the percentages of students eligible for FRMS and the percent of Student with disabilities are comparable. For example, 80% of Baltimore City charter elementary students are eligible for FRMS and 89% for the City overall; 10.7 % of charter elementary students have disabilities and 12.9% for the City. Outside of Baltimore City, the trend is that a lower percentage of students eligible for FRMS or who have disabilities attend charter schools than in the school system. For example, in Prince George’s County, 57.5% of students are eligible for FRMS compared to 71.3% for the County.

**Table 1.**

Percent Students Eligible for Free and Reduced Price Meals and Students with Disabilities, 2015					
	Grade Band	Type	FRMS %		SWD %
<b>All Maryland (50 Charter Schools)</b>	<b>Elementary</b>	Charter	65.1		9.1
		All Schools	51.1		11.3
	<b>Middle</b>	Charter	62.6		11.5
		All Schools	44.8		11.7
	<b>High</b>	Charter	69.2		20.2
		All Schools	38.5		10.8
<b>Baltimore City (34 Charter Schools)</b>	<b>Elementary</b>	Charter	80.0		10.7
		All Schools	89.4		12.9
	<b>Middle</b>	Charter	83.8		15.5
		All Schools	87.9		18.5
	<b>High</b>	Charter	77.1		23.3
		All Schools	79.2		17.7
<b>Prince Georges County (10 Charter Schools)</b>	<b>Elementary</b>	Charter	57.5		5.2
		All Schools	71.3		10.4
	<b>Middle</b>	Charter	36.3		4.7
		All Schools	66.0		12.2
	<b>High</b>	Charter	19.1		7.8
		All Schools	56.4		11.6

Percent Students Eligible for Free and Reduced Price Meals and Students with Disabilities, 2015					
	Grade Band	Type	FRMS %		SWD %
Anne Arundel County (2 Charter Schools)	Elementary	Charter	25.9		11.8
		All Schools	38.1		9.4
	Middle	Charter	23.0		6.7
		All Schools	33.4		9.3
	High	Charter	20.9		5.6
		All Schools	28.5		8.5
Frederick County (3 Charter Schools)	Elementary	Charter	13.5		5.8
		All Schools	28.6		10.1
	Middle	Charter	9.1		10.5
		All Schools	22.4		11.0
St. Mary's County (1 Charter School)	Elementary	Charter	7.9		6.6
		All Schools	39.3		10.0
	Middle	Charter	8.8		3.0
		All Schools	31.4		9.5

**Table 2** provides the race/ethnicity of Maryland charter school students for each local school system. For all charter schools, the proportion of students who are African American and Hispanic is lower than that of the state. The race/ethnicity breakdown of charter schools compared to the local school systems varies.

**Table 2. Race/Ethnicity for Charter Schools, Local School Systems and State**

Race/Ethnicity of Students in Maryland Charter Schools and Other Public Schools, 2015 (Maryland Report Card - School System totals do not include the public charter schools)								
Local School System	Type	% Nat. Amer.	% Asian	% Afr. Amer.	% Hisp.	% Haw. Is/Pac.	% White	% 2 or more
Anne Arundel	Charter	0.0%	7.0%	29.9%	7.7%	0.0%	49.2%	8.2%
	Other Public	0.3%	3.5%	20.2%	12.0%	0.3%	57.9%	5.8%
Frederick	Charter	0.0%	6.9%	12.0%	10.1%	0.0%	67.0%	4.9%
	Other Public	0.4%	5.1%	11.4%	13.4%	0.2%	64.5%	4.9%
Prince George's	Charter	0.0%	1.4%	74.9%	4.1%	0.0%	5.6%	1.8%
	Other Public	0.4%	2.8%	62.2%	28.7%	0.2%	4.5%	1.6%
Saint Mary's	Charter	0.0%	4.0%	10.5%	7.6%	0.0%	74.6%	4.8%
	Other Public	0.4%	2.5%	18.5%	6.7%	0.2%	65.9%	5.9%
Baltimore City	Charter	0.0%	0.0%	84.6%	5.9%	0.0%	9.0%	0.9%
	Other Public	0.3%	1.2%	82.3%	7.7%	0.2%	7.9%	0.4%
Maryland	Charter	0.0%	4.0%	10.5%	7.6%	0.0%	74.6%	4.8%
	Other Public	0.3%	6.3%	33.7%	14.9%	0.2%	40.5%	4.2%

## Performance

State assessment data at the school level for the first administration of the PARCC (Partnership for Assessment for Readiness for College and Careers) is not yet available. PARCC replaces the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) which was last administered in 2014. Because Maryland public charter schools participate in the State’s accountability program, the Department will be able to track the performance of public charter schools compared to the local school systems and to that of the state.

Of 40 charter schools with MSA data for 2014, 33 (83%) had a higher rate of students scoring proficient and advanced than the local school system in reading; 30 schools (75%) outscored the local school system in math. Nineteen charters (48%) had a higher proficiency rate than the state average in reading; 16 or 40% of charter schools outscored the state in math.

**Table 3** lists graduation rates for public charter schools with high school grades and for their local school systems.

**Table 3. Charter High School Graduation Rates**

Maryland High School Assessments and Graduation Rate, 2013 -2015, % Passing for Charter Schools and Local School Systems (Maryland Report Card)				
Local School System	SCHOOL_NAME	2013 GRAD RATE	2014 GRAD RATE	2015 GRAD RATE
Anne Arundel	Chesapeake Science Point	NA	100%	100%
<b>Anne Arundel</b>	<b>All Anne Arundel Schools</b>	<b>85.6%</b>	<b>87.7%</b>	<b>87.4%</b>
Baltimore City	ConneXions	80.0%	77.1%	65.0%
Baltimore City	MD Acad of Tech and Health	94.9%	76.8%	86.7%
Baltimore City	Independence School Local I	56.7%	69.6%	75.0%
Baltimore City	City Neighbors High School		90.0%	84.7%
Baltimore City	Baltimore Freedom Acad	50.0%	CLOSED	
Baltimore City	Coppin Academy	90.0%	87.0%	92.6%
<b>Baltimore City</b>	<b>All Baltimore City Schools</b>	<b>68.5%</b>	<b>69.7%</b>	<b>66.3%</b>
<b>State</b>	<b>All MD Charter Schools</b>	<b>76.4%</b>	<b>84.9%</b>	<b>84.6%</b>
<b>State</b>	<b>All Maryland Schools</b>	<b>85.0%</b>	<b>86.4%</b>	<b>85.8%</b>
<b>Yellow shading =</b>	Graduation rate greater than Local School System			
<b>Green shading =</b>	Graduation rate greater than State			

## Sample of practices in Maryland Public Charter Schools

Charter schools in Maryland employ a variety of models. These are approaches that one can find in public charter schools, traditional public schools and private schools.

Maryland charter schools include:

- Sponsorship by an Institution of Higher Education – Coppin Academy
- Montessori Education – Monocacy Valley Montessori

- Conversions of existing public schools - City Springs
- STEM – Chesapeake Science Point
- Language Immersion - Baltimore International Academy
- Arts Integration and Project Based Learning – City Neighbors
- Expeditionary Learning – The Crossroads School
- All Girls – Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women
- All Boys – Baltimore Collegiate School for Boys

As a result of an inquiry to charter school operators, the following specific examples of practice emerged, among many others. This small sampling suggests that mining the public education landscape - both charter schools and traditional public schools - for practice linked to outcomes for students, would provide policy makers with a robust list of innovations in all sectors.

*Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women, Baltimore City (BLSYW)*

*Performance Note: BLSYW students outperformed the state average in reading for the last 2 years of the MSA. 85% of students are eligible for FRMS and these students outperformed non-FRMS students in the City.*

BLSYW created the Destination College Program to work with young women starting in the sixth grade to set their goals for college. This includes implementation of a college readiness curriculum. Students in every grade visit a college every year. Over 80% of rising juniors and seniors attended pre-college summer programs. Destination College Camp is a two-day camp for rising seniors to complete college applications over the summer. BLSYW has an early college partner and has had three cohorts of students qualify to take college classes at BCCC.

*Baltimore Montessori, Baltimore*

*Performance Note: Baltimore Montessori students outperformed the state average for proficiency in both reading and math in 2014.*

In addition to implementation of the Montessori model, Baltimore Montessori highlights its Seed to Table Program - a student kitchen and outdoor space complete with chickens and bees - where students can engage in a different way to build skills and confidence that transfer to the classroom.

*Baltimore Curriculum Project, operator of 4 converted Baltimore City traditional public schools.*

*Performance Note: Wolfe Street Academy serves a student body that is 79% Hispanic and 59% English Language Learner. Over 95% receive FRMS. Wolfe Street's students exceed the state average in both reading and math in the 2013 MSA. In 2014, they outperformed the state in math and, at 81%, missed the state average by 1 percentage point.*

BCP implements Direct Instruction, a research-based comprehensive school reform model. It is supported by over 40 years of research. BCP incorporates Core Knowledge into its program and develops lesson plans for Core Knowledge. These lesson plans are freely available to educators in Baltimore City.

BCP implements numerous instructional support strategies for its schools. For example,

Coaches work one-on-one in the classroom to mentor teachers. Once a week the BCP coaches meet to discuss student progress, teacher challenges, and overall school improvement.

Restorative Practices is an integral part of the school culture at all BCP Schools and provides a constructive alternative to suspensions. Restorative practices provide a proactive approach for building a school community based on cooperation, mutual understanding, and respect.

### Baltimore International Academy, Baltimore (BIA)

*Performance Note: BIA consistently outperform the Baltimore City average in reading and math. In 2014 BIA students outperformed the state average in math.*

BIA combines the International Baccalaureate Early Years program and full language immersion (Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Russian, or French).

### City Neighbors, Baltimore

*Performance Note: City Neighbor's two elementary schools have outperformed the City average in MSA reading and math for 2013 and 2014. Its first class graduated in 2014, with a 4-year cohort graduation rate of 90% compared to 69.7% for Baltimore City and 86.4% for Maryland.*

City Neighbors High School employs a small advisory model (called 'pods') to focus on the 9<sup>th</sup> grade transition to high school. The High School has built a "fab lab" or maker space and is developing a high school course based on this resource.

City Neighbors hosts an annual Progressive Education Summit. The summit offers professional development through teacher-led workshops and is becoming a staple of the Baltimore education landscape. Attendance exceeds 500. Every workshop is created and lead by teachers. Presenters and attendees represent traditional public schools, public charter schools and private schools.

City Neighbors raised private funds to enable the leaders to consult over a year with a traditional public school to build capacity for implementation of project based learning.

## **2. Review of existing local policies**

The state law requires each local school system to adopt a policy on charter schools and to post the policy to the local school system website. The policies should also be provided to the Maryland State Department of Education. In addition, each local school system has named a charter school liaison.

Each local school system adopted a charter school policy after passage of the Maryland charter law in 2003. Several have reviewed and updated their policies and regulations. In a review of every local school system policy, MSDE found that all adapted the Model Policy. Each contains the key elements – definition of a public charter school; eligibility requirements for operators of charter schools; an overview of the local school system process for evaluation of applications to operate charter schools; and the process for earning a renewal of the charter. In most cases the initial term of a charter contract is five years, with renewal terms of three or five years. In two counties the initial terms are three and four years. None are longer than five years.

**Table 4** lists each County and Baltimore City, availability of the charter school policy on the school system website as a result of a website review in September 2015.

**Table 4. Local School System charter school policies**

Local School System	Charter Policy on Website	Date of Approval or most recent revision	Charter Liaison identified	Contact Listed on Website for charter school inquiries
1. Allegany County	✓	10/13/11	✓	
2. Anne Arundel county	✓	5/5/2010	✓	✓
3. Baltimore City	✓	11/13/2012	✓	✓
4. Baltimore County	✓	6/10/2014	✓	
5. Calvert County	✓	6/3/2013	✓	
6. Carroll County	✓	11/14/2012	✓	
7. Caroline County	✓	2008	✓	
8. Cecil County	✓	10/9/2008	✓	
9. Charles County	✓	9/9/2003	✓	✓
10. Dorchester County	✓	8/16/2008	✓	
11. Frederick County	✓	11/9/11	✓	
12. Garrett County	✓	6/15/05	✓	
13. Harford County	✓	8/9/10	✓	✓
14. Howard County	✓	4/10/2008	✓	✓
15. Kent County	✓	10/6/2004	✓	
16. Montgomery County	✓	2/2/2015	✓	
17. Prince George's County	✓	4/29/10	✓	✓
18. Queen Anne's County	✓	2/6/2013	✓	✓
19. Somerset County	✓	11/18/2008	✓	
20. St. Mary's County	✓	5/25/2010	✓	✓
21. Talbot County	✓	2/13/2013	✓	
22. Washington County	✓	11/4/2014	✓	
23. Wicomico County	✓	11/13/2012	✓	
24. Worcester County	✓	10/1/2003	✓	

### 3. Technical Assistance provided

The Department's staff person for charter schools meets with the local school system liaisons six times a year. Attendance includes representatives from local school systems with and without operating charter schools. This provides a forum for collaborative review of aspects of the charter law, and challenges that arise in overseeing charter schools. At the September 2015

meeting, this group continued to review the amendments to the charter law made in the 2015 Session of the Maryland General Assembly. Specifically, this group provided input into the task given to the State Board in the 2015 amendments to the charter law, which is to set standards by which a local school board will determine a charter school “eligible” for additional operational flexibility. ED§ 9-104.1.

In June of 2015, the Department was able to provide 20 people the opportunity to attend the National Charter Schools Conference.

The Maryland attendee group included:

- MSDE staff (3)
- Local School System Charter School Liaisons (9 from 8 local school systems)
- Department of Legislative Services (1)
- Governor’s Office (1)
- Charter Schools (6)

The School System Charter Liaisons met once during the conference in addition to their participation in a wide variety of workshops on policy and practice. A Maryland meeting was held with 80 participants, as others from the state who attended the conference on their own joined the group. This meeting included guests who are national experts in areas of public school policy as well as charter schools.

- Sarah Yatsko – University of Washington, study of district/charter collaboration and portfolio districts
- Parker Baxter - National Alliance of Charter School Authorizers
- Paul O’Neill – Tugboat Educational Services and NACSA consultant, expertise in special education and accountability systems for charter schools

The Department regularly responds to requests for information, technical assistance and referrals from local school systems, charter school operators and the public. For example, currently the Department is consulting with St. Mary’s County on implementation of the weighted lottery provisions in the charter law. Chesapeake Charter School and the school system are working together, with a goal of increasing the number of poor students who attend that charter school. The Department is supporting Frederick County during its renewal review of a charter schools. In Prince George’s County, a letter of intent has been received to establish an all girls charter school. The Department will assist with working through the legal issues, including outreach to the US Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights.

Inquiries include potential operators seeking guidance on the application process; and parents looking for information about enrollment in charter schools.

## 4. Implementation of the Charter Law.

### **ED § 9-104.1: Eligibility and Flexibility**

The Maryland State Board of Education (MSBE) must determine measures by which a Maryland charter school meets ‘eligibility’ to implement certain provisions of the Maryland charter law.

Section § 9-104 states that:

- (a) In this section, “eligible public charter school” means a public charter school that has been in existence for at least 5 years and demonstrates to the public chartering authority a history of:
  - (1) Sound fiscal management; and
  - (2) Student Achievement that exceeds the average in the local school system in which the public charter school is located on:
    - (i) Statewide assessments; and
    - (ii) Other measures developed by the State Board.

The State Board of Education has appointed a workgroup which is reviewing options for criteria. Members of the workgroup met with a group of stakeholders representing local school systems, and charter schools to start its work. The Department is supporting the Board in its work to develop eligibility standards. The State Board will determine what measures to be used and will also provide guidance as to how it intends the measures to be employed.

### **Section 2: Study of Public School Funding at traditionally managed and public charter schools.**

MSDE has worked closely with the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) to develop a Request for Proposals (RFP) based on the requirements of the statute. The RFP was posted on November 17, 2015 with a projected start date in February, 2016. The work of the contractor will be monitored by MSDE in collaboration with DLS. The report is due to the General Assembly in October 2016.

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