

H. 3241 --- Charter School Bill

- Authorizes the formation of single gender charter schools.
- Provides that a charter school student is eligible to compete for, and if selected, participate in any extracurricular activities not offered by the student's charter school which are offered at the resident public school he would otherwise attend. A charter school student is eligible to compete for, and if selected, participate in an activity governed by the South Carolina High School League offered at the resident public school he would otherwise attend if the league-governed activity is not offered at the student's charter school. A charter school is eligible for federally sponsored, state-sponsored or district-sponsored interscholastic leagues, competitions, awards, scholarships, grants, and recognition programs for students, educators, administrators, staff, and schools to the same extent as all other public schools.
- Affords the state's public and independent institutions of higher learning the option of sponsoring a charter school.
- Establishes in the State Treasurer's Office a Charter School Facility Revolving Loan Program for the construction, purchase, renovation, and maintenance of public charter school facilities.
- Revises membership requirements for the boards of directors that govern charter schools. The legislation establishes two-year terms for electing board members and provides that half of a board's membership must be made up of individuals with K-12 education or business backgrounds, and at least half of the members must be elected by the employees and parents/guardians of students enrolled in the charter school, with parents/guardians having one vote for each child enrolled. Boards must have at least seven members all of whom must be South Carolina residents.
- Establishes new voting requirements that apply when there is a proposal to convert a traditional public school into a charter school and outstanding general obligation bond debt has been approved to construct or improve the facility within the previous ten years.
- Affords a converted charter school the right to occupy the facility and use the equipment, for the duration of its contract with a sponsor, in the same manner as before the school converted with no additional fees or charges.
- Provides that students who reside within the former attendance area of a traditional public school that is converted into a charter school must be given enrollment priority at the charter school.
- Allows a charter school to give enrollment priority to a sibling of a pupil who, within the last six years, attended the school for at least one academic year.
- Prohibits school districts from taking unlawful reprisals, such as pay reduction, dismissal, demotion, or suspension, against employees because of their involvement with an application to establish a charter school.

- Provides that the South Carolina Public Charter School District or public or independent institution of higher learning sponsor shall receive and distribute state funds to the charter school as provided by the General Assembly. The legislation includes other requirements for the timely distribution of funds to charter schools.
- Requires a county's local legislative delegation to be notified of charter school applications.
- Reduces from eleven to nine the membership of the board of trustees that governs the South Carolina Public Charter School District by eliminating two of the Governor's appointments.
- Establishes a mechanism that allows a local school district to create a school of choice that operates under exemptions from various state laws and regulations similar to the exemptions enjoyed by charter schools. Exemptions do not apply to: federal and state prohibitions on unlawful discrimination; pertinent health, safety, civil rights, and disability rights requirements; minimum student attendance requirements; state assessment requirements; and teacher certification requirements in the core academic areas, however, up to twenty-five percent of the teaching staff of the school may be employed if the individual possesses a baccalaureate or graduate degree in the subject he is hired to teach.