



1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Suite 204 • Washington, DC 20036

Tel 202-822-9000
Fax 202-822-5077

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

**Contact: Mary Kayne Heinze
(202) 822-9000**

NATIONAL GROUP RANKS CHARTER SCHOOL LAWS *Nineteen States Get High Marks*

(Washington, DC 4/28/2000) The grades are in for charter school laws, with just over half the state's 37 charter laws receiving *As* or *Bs*, according to the state-by-state analyses conducted and released today by the Center for Education Reform. This release comes just in time for National Charter Schools Week.

Only 19 states have laws that would be considered strong, earning them grades of *A* or *B*. Strong laws foster the development of numerous, genuinely independent charter schools. The 18 remaining states are weaker across the spectrum, precluding parents and children to fully benefit from the inclusion of charter schools in the public education system and meriting them grades of *C* or below.

Charter School Laws Across the States reinforces existing research that charter schools are only likely to thrive in states that offer an open and less restrictive chartering environment. Among states with the strongest laws is Minnesota (earning a solid *A*) where the nation's first charter law was enacted in 1991 and has since undergone numerous improvements. Minnesota's law now allows for a variety of sponsors to approve charters, ample funding and legal autonomy, and operating independence from traditional school districts. Charters in the Land of 10,000 Lakes have had a significant impact on how traditional schools operate, according to national experts.

Conversely, Connecticut — with a low *C* — restricts the number of charters permitted. The degree of autonomy and funding those few charters receive is heavily dependent upon state and local mandates.

According to CER's *National Charter School Directory 2000* (also released this week), 1,689 charter schools are currently serving more than 430,000 children. Arizona, home to nearly 21 percent of the nation's charters, continues to have the strongest law in the land. Florida improved its relative ranking among charter laws (now 9th out of 37) after amending its law last year to increase access to capital and allow for new charter districts. New to CER's ranking, both with moderately strong showings (each earning a B) are Oregon and Oklahoma, having passed legislation in 1999.

The national charter rankings are determined by evaluating each of ten major components that contribute to the development of charter schools. Once the totals were established, each law received its rank, from strongest (Arizona, 1st) to weakest (Mississippi, 37th). Grades were assigned on the traditional A-F scale. These grades help clarify how likely it is that charter schools will grow and thrive under a particular state's law. Laws that earned As or Bs have supported and are likely to continue to cultivate the creation of innovative, autonomous and accountable charter schools. Laws in states earning C's or below aren't likely to bear much charter fruit so legislators and advocates in those states still have much work to do.

Charter School Laws Across the States provides not only a snap shot of the viability of charter laws but in-depth, individual profiles of each law as well.

"This analysis of charter school laws serves as a guide to evaluate the effectiveness of each existing charter law and to help state leaders who are looking at charter school issues for the first time or are revisiting them with an eye toward making improvements. It will also serve as a primer to help charter activists in the remaining 14 states working to get it right the first time," said CER president Jeanne Allen.

"Unfortunately some laws are DOA on passage and they provide few opportunities or incentives for charter school development. We'd like to see all fifty states participating, and every one of them meriting an A for their support of this vibrant movement."

The Rankings Score Card can be seen on our website at www.edreform.com. For more information or to obtain a copy of the report, contact the Center for Education Reform by calling (202) 822-9000. Copies are available for \$19.95 plus \$3.00 shipping.

#

The Center for Education Reform is a national, independent, non-profit advocacy organization founded in 1993 to provide support and guidance to individuals, community and civic groups, policymakers and others who are working to bring fundamental reforms to their schools.