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California State Senate

GARY K. HART

SENATOR
EIGHTEENTH DISTRICT

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SB 1448 (HART)

CHARTER SCHOOLS
QUESTION & ANSWERS

Listed below are questions and answers about SB 1448, the new "charter schools" proposal authored by Senator Gary K. Hart (D-Santa Barbara).

Q: What is a "charter school"?

A: A charter school is a school which is organized by a group of credentialed teachers and sponsored by an existing local public school board or the State Board of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The specific goals and operating procedures for the charter school would be spelled out in the agreement between the board and the organizers, but the school could be freed from many state statutes and regulations.

Q: What is the purpose of a "charter school"?

A: The purpose of these schools is to improve pupil learning; encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods; create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site; and provide parents and students with expanded educational opportunities within the public school system without the constraints of traditional bureaucratic rules and structure.

Q: How can charter schools be started?

A: A group of credentialed teachers circulates a petition for a charter. The petition may be cosponsored by private, nonprofit agencies. The petition must be signed by either 10% of the teachers in the school district or 50% of the teachers at a specific school site. The petition is then submitted to the local school board for sponsorship. The school board has 30 days to act on the charter petition request. If the local board refuses to grant the charter, the petitioners may seek a charter from the state which would be jointly granted by the State Board of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Q: What are the minimum requirements necessary to obtain a charter?

A: The charter petition must contain the educational objectives for pupils of the school, and specify the assessments which will be used to ensure that these objectives are met. The petition must also outline the procedures the school will follow to ensure the health and safety of pupils and staff and a statement of how the school will achieve a racial and ethnic composition reflective of the school district's population. In addition, the charter petition must certify that the school will be nonsectarian in its programs, admission policies, employment practices and all other operations, will not charge tuition, and will not discriminate against pupils based on ethnicity, national origin, gender or disability.

Q: How long can a charter school operate?

A: School boards or the State Board of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction can issue a charter for 5 years, which can be renewed for another 5 year period.

Q: Can charters be revoked?

A: Yes. Either the local school board or the State Board of Education/Superintendent of Public Instruction (depending on which entity granted the charter) can revoke the charter if the school fails to (1) meet or pursue the educational objectives (2) maintain the health and safety standards outlined in its charter petition, or (3) meet generally accepted accounting standards of fiscal management.

Q: How will charter schools be funded?

A: Charter schools will be funded through the existing public school apportionment system and will receive an amount equal to the statewide average revenue limit for unified school districts (approximately \$3200) per pupil enrolled. The funds will be generated within the existing Proposition 98 minimum funding guarantee for K-14 public education.

Q: How many charter schools can be created?

A: The bill specifies that no more than 100 charter schools can be established in the state.

Q: How are charter schools different from a private school voucher system?

A: Under a voucher system parents would receive a specified amount of money to "buy" educational services, at either a public or private school. Private schools who participate in such a system would not be accountable to any public agency and would not be required to operate in a nonsectarian, nondiscriminatory manner. Funds which flow to private schools would diminish the amount available to public schools under the Proposition 98 minimum funding guarantee. Conversely, charter schools would be public schools which are operated in a nontraditional manner. That is, they would be freed from bureaucratic constraints, but would be required to maintain specified standards. Funding would come from regular school funding and would not dilute the minimum funding guaranteed provisions of Proposition 98.

Q: Would charter schools be required to comply with employment practices and procedures specified in statute; e.g. would teachers be required to hold a credential, would they be granted tenure?

A: No, unless these practices were spelled out in the charter petition granted through the local or state process. Although the charter petition process requires the approval of a specified percentage of currently employed teachers, it is important to note that none of these teachers would be required to teach at the new charter school. Teachers who are hired at the charter school, would be bound by the terms and conditions of employment specified in the charter. In addition, parents who opt to send their children to the charter school could review the charter petition to understand the conditions under which the teaching staff are employed.