

State of Arizona
Senate
Forty-eighth Legislature
Second Regular Session
2008

SENATE BILL 1215

AN ACT

AMENDING SECTION 15-183, ARIZONA REVISED STATUTES; RELATING TO CHARTER SCHOOLS.

(TEXT OF BILL BEGINS ON NEXT PAGE)

1 Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Arizona:

2 Section 1. Section 15-183, Arizona Revised Statutes, is amended to
3 read:

4 15-183. Charter schools; application; requirements; immunity;
5 exemptions; renewal of application; reprisal

6 A. An applicant seeking to establish a charter school shall submit a
7 written application to a proposed sponsor as prescribed in subsection C of
8 this section. The application shall include a detailed business plan for the
9 charter school and may include a mission statement for the charter school, a
10 description of the charter school's organizational structure and the
11 governing body, a financial plan for the first three years of operation of
12 the charter school, a description of the charter school's hiring policy, the
13 name of the charter school's applicant or applicants and requested sponsor, a
14 description of the charter school's facility and the location of the school,
15 a description of the grades being served and an outline of criteria designed
16 to measure the effectiveness of the school.

17 B. The sponsor of a charter school may contract with a public body,
18 private person or private organization for the purpose of establishing a
19 charter school pursuant to this article.

20 C. The sponsor of a charter school may be either a school district
21 governing board, the state board of education or the state board for charter
22 schools, subject to the following requirements:

23 1. For charter schools that submit an application for sponsorship to a
24 school district governing board:

25 (a) An applicant for a charter school may submit its application to a
26 school district governing board, which shall either accept or reject
27 sponsorship of the charter school within ninety days. An applicant may
28 submit a revised application for reconsideration by the governing board. If
29 the governing board rejects the application, the governing board shall notify
30 the applicant in writing of the reasons for the rejection. The applicant may
31 request, and the governing board may provide, technical assistance to improve
32 the application.

33 (b) In the first year that a school district is determined to be out
34 of compliance with the uniform system of financial records, within fifteen
35 days of the determination of noncompliance, the school district shall notify
36 by certified mail each charter school sponsored by the school district that
37 the school district is out of compliance with the uniform system of financial
38 records. The notification shall include a statement that if the school
39 district is determined to be out of compliance for a second consecutive year,
40 the charter school will be required to transfer sponsorship to another entity
41 pursuant to subdivision (c) of this paragraph.

42 (c) In the second consecutive year that a school district is
43 determined to be out of compliance with the uniform system of financial
44 records, within fifteen days of the determination of noncompliance, the
45 school district shall notify by certified mail each charter school sponsored

1 by the school district that the school district is out of compliance with the
2 uniform system of financial records. A charter school that receives a
3 notification of school district noncompliance pursuant to this subdivision
4 shall file a written sponsorship transfer application within forty-five days
5 with the state board of education, the state board for charter schools or the
6 school district governing board if the charter school is located within the
7 geographic boundaries of that school district. A charter school that
8 receives a notification of school district noncompliance may request an
9 extension of time to file a sponsorship transfer application and the state
10 board of education, the state board for charter schools or a school district
11 governing board may grant an extension of not more than an additional thirty
12 days if good cause exists for the extension. The state board of education
13 and the state board for charter schools shall approve a sponsorship transfer
14 application pursuant to this paragraph.

15 (d) Beginning July 1, 2000, a school district governing board shall
16 not grant a charter to a charter school that is located outside the
17 geographic boundaries of that school district.

18 (e) A school district that has been determined to be out of compliance
19 with the uniform system of financial records during either of the previous
20 two fiscal years shall not sponsor a new or transferring charter school.

21 2. The applicant may submit the application to the state board of
22 education or the state board for charter schools. The state board of
23 education or the state board for charter schools may approve the application
24 if the application meets the requirements of this article and may approve the
25 charter if the proposed sponsor determines, within its sole discretion, that
26 the applicant is sufficiently qualified to operate a charter school. The
27 state board of education or the state board for charter schools may approve
28 any charter schools transferring charters. The state board of education and
29 the state board for charter schools shall approve any charter schools
30 transferring charters from a school district that is determined to be out of
31 compliance with the uniform system of financial records pursuant to this
32 section, but may require the charter school to sign a new charter that is
33 equivalent to the charter awarded by the former sponsor. If the state board
34 of education or the state board for charter schools rejects the preliminary
35 application, the state board of education or the state board for charter
36 schools shall notify the applicant in writing of the reasons for the
37 rejection and of suggestions for improving the application. An applicant may
38 submit a revised application for reconsideration by the state board of
39 education or the state board for charter schools. The applicant may request,
40 and the state board of education or the state board for charter schools may
41 provide, technical assistance to improve the application.

42 3. Each applicant seeking to establish a charter school shall submit a
43 full set of fingerprints to the approving agency for the purpose of obtaining
44 a state and federal criminal records check pursuant to section 41-1750 and
45 Public Law 92-544. If an applicant will have direct contact with students,

1 the applicant shall possess a valid fingerprint clearance card that is issued
2 pursuant to title 41, chapter 12, article 3.1. The department of public
3 safety may exchange this fingerprint data with the federal bureau of
4 investigation. The criminal records check shall be completed before the
5 issuance of a charter.

6 4. All persons engaged in instructional work directly as a classroom,
7 laboratory or other teacher or indirectly as a supervisory teacher, speech
8 therapist or principal shall have a valid fingerprint clearance card that is
9 issued pursuant to title 41, chapter 12, article 3.1, unless the person is a
10 volunteer or guest speaker who is accompanied in the classroom by a person
11 with a valid fingerprint clearance card. A charter school shall not employ a
12 teacher whose certificate has been revoked for a violation of section 15-507
13 or 15-550 or for any offense that placed a pupil in danger. All other
14 personnel shall be fingerprint checked pursuant to section 15-512. Before
15 employment, the charter school shall make documented, good faith efforts to
16 contact previous employers of a person to obtain information and
17 recommendations that may be relevant to a person's fitness for employment as
18 prescribed in section 15-512, subsection F. The charter school shall notify
19 the department of public safety if the charter school or sponsor receives
20 credible evidence that a person who possesses a valid fingerprint clearance
21 card is arrested for or is charged with an offense listed in section
22 41-1758.03, subsection B. Charter schools may hire personnel that have not
23 yet received a fingerprint clearance card if proof is provided of the
24 submission of an application to the department of public safety for a
25 fingerprint clearance card and if the charter school that is seeking to hire
26 the applicant does all of the following:

27 (a) Documents in the applicant's file the necessity for hiring and
28 placement of the applicant before receiving a fingerprint clearance card.

29 (b) Ensures that the department of public safety completes a statewide
30 criminal history information check on the applicant. A statewide criminal
31 history information check shall be completed by the department of public
32 safety every one hundred twenty days until the date that the fingerprint
33 check is completed.

34 (c) Obtains references from the applicant's current employer and the
35 two most recent previous employers except for applicants who have been
36 employed for at least five years by the applicant's most recent employer.

37 (d) Provides general supervision of the applicant until the date that
38 the fingerprint card is obtained.

39 (e) Completes a search of criminal records in all local jurisdictions
40 outside of this state in which the applicant has lived in the previous five
41 years.

42 (f) Verifies the fingerprint status of the applicant with the
43 department of public safety.

1 5. If a charter school operator is not already subject to a public
2 meeting or hearing by the municipality in which the charter school is
3 located, the operator of a charter school shall conduct a public meeting at
4 least thirty days before the charter school operator opens a site or sites
5 for the charter school. The charter school operator shall post notices of
6 the public meeting in at least three different locations that are within
7 three hundred feet of the proposed charter school site.

8 D. A board that is authorized to sponsor charter schools pursuant to
9 this article has no legal authority over or responsibility for a charter
10 school sponsored by a different board. This subsection does not apply to the
11 state board of education's duty to exercise general supervision over the
12 public school system pursuant to section 15-203, subsection A, paragraph 1.

13 E. The charter of a charter school shall ensure the following:

14 1. Compliance with federal, state and local rules, regulations and
15 statutes relating to health, safety, civil rights and insurance. The
16 department of education shall publish a list of relevant rules, regulations
17 and statutes to notify charter schools of their responsibilities under this
18 paragraph.

19 2. That it is nonsectarian in its programs, admission policies and
20 employment practices and all other operations.

21 3. That it provides a comprehensive program of instruction for at
22 least a kindergarten program or any grade between grades one and twelve,
23 except that a school may offer this curriculum with an emphasis on a specific
24 learning philosophy or style or certain subject areas such as mathematics,
25 science, fine arts, performance arts or foreign language.

26 4. That it designs a method to measure pupil progress, toward the
27 pupil outcomes adopted by the state board of education pursuant to section
28 15-741.01 including participation in the Arizona instrument to measure
29 standards test and the nationally standardized norm-referenced achievement
30 test as designated by the state board and the completion and distribution of
31 an annual report card as prescribed in chapter 7, article 3 of this title.

32 5. That, except as provided in this article and in its charter, it is
33 exempt from all statutes and rules relating to schools, governing boards and
34 school districts.

35 6. That, except as provided in this article, it is subject to the same
36 financial and electronic data submission requirements as a school district,
37 including the uniform system of financial records as prescribed in chapter 2,
38 article 4 of this title, procurement rules as prescribed in section 15-213
39 and audit requirements. The auditor general shall conduct a comprehensive
40 review and revision of the uniform system of financial records to ensure that
41 the provisions of the uniform system of financial records that relate to
42 charter schools are in accordance with commonly accepted accounting
43 principles used by private business. A school's charter may include
44 exceptions to the requirements of this paragraph that are necessary as
45 determined by the district governing board, the state board of education or

1 the state board for charter schools. The department of education or the
2 office of the auditor general may conduct financial, program or compliance
3 audits.

4 7. Compliance with all federal and state laws relating to the
5 education of children with disabilities in the same manner as a school
6 district.

7 8. That it provides for a governing body for the charter school that
8 is responsible for the policy decisions of the charter school.

9 9. That it provides a minimum of one hundred seventy-five
10 instructional days before June 30 of each fiscal year unless it is operating
11 on an alternative calendar approved by its sponsor. The superintendent of
12 public instruction shall adjust the apportionment schedule accordingly to
13 accommodate a charter school utilizing an alternative calendar.

14 F. The charter of a charter school shall include a description of the
15 charter school's personnel policies, personnel qualifications and method of
16 school governance and the specific role and duties of the sponsor of the
17 charter school. A charter school shall keep on file the resumes of all
18 current and former employees who provide instruction to pupils at the charter
19 school. Resumes shall include an individual's educational and teaching
20 background and experience in a particular academic content subject area. A
21 charter school shall inform parents and guardians of the availability of the
22 resume information and shall make the resume information available for
23 inspection on request of parents and guardians of pupils enrolled at the
24 charter school. Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to require any
25 charter school to release personally identifiable information in relation to
26 any teacher or employee including the teacher's or employee's address,
27 salary, social security number or telephone number.

28 G. The charter of a charter school may be amended at the request of
29 the governing body of the charter school and on the approval of the sponsor.

30 H. Charter schools may contract, sue and be sued.

31 I. An approved plan to establish a charter school is effective for
32 fifteen years from the first day of operation. At ~~the conclusion of the~~
33 ~~first fourteen years of operation~~ LEAST EIGHTEEN MONTHS BEFORE THE EXPIRATION
34 OF THE APPROVED PLAN, THE SPONSOR SHALL NOTIFY THE CHARTER SCHOOL THAT the
35 charter school may apply for renewal. A CHARTER SCHOOL THAT ELECTS TO APPLY
36 FOR RENEWAL SHALL FILE AN APPLICATION FOR RENEWAL AT LEAST FIFTEEN MONTHS
37 BEFORE THE EXPIRATION OF THE APPROVED PLAN. In addition to any other
38 requirements, the application for renewal shall include a detailed business
39 plan for the charter school. The sponsor may deny the request for renewal
40 if, in its judgment, the charter school has failed to complete the
41 obligations of the contract or has failed to comply with this article. A
42 sponsor shall give written notice of its intent not to renew the charter
43 school's request for renewal to the charter school at least twelve months
44 before the expiration of the approved plan to allow the charter school an
45 opportunity to apply to another sponsor to transfer the operation of the

1 charter school. If the operation of the charter school is transferred to
2 another sponsor, the fifteen year period of the current charter shall be
3 maintained. A sponsor shall review a charter at five year intervals and may
4 revoke a charter at any time if the charter school breaches one or more
5 provisions of its charter. At least ninety days before the effective date of
6 the proposed revocation the sponsor shall give written notice to the operator
7 of the charter school of its intent to revoke the charter. Notice of the
8 sponsor's intent to revoke the charter shall be delivered personally to the
9 operator of the charter school or sent by certified mail, return receipt
10 requested, to the address of the charter school. The notice shall
11 incorporate a statement of reasons for the proposed revocation of the
12 charter. The sponsor shall allow the charter school at least ninety days to
13 correct the problems associated with the reasons for the proposed revocation
14 of the charter. The final determination of whether to revoke the charter
15 shall be made at a public hearing called for such purpose.

16 J. After renewal of the charter at the end of the fifteen year period
17 described in subsection I of this section, the charter may be renewed for
18 successive periods of fifteen years if the charter school and its sponsor
19 deem that the school is in compliance with its own charter and this article.

20 K. A charter school that is sponsored by the state board of education
21 or the state board for charter schools may not be located on the property of
22 a school district unless the district governing board grants this authority.

23 L. A governing board or a school district employee who has control
24 over personnel actions shall not take unlawful reprisal against another
25 employee of the school district because the employee is directly or
26 indirectly involved in an application to establish a charter school. A
27 governing board or a school district employee shall not take unlawful
28 reprisal against an educational program of the school or the school district
29 because an application to establish a charter school proposes the conversion
30 of all or a portion of the educational program to a charter school. ~~As used~~
31 ~~in~~ FOR THE PURPOSES OF this subsection, "unlawful reprisal" means an action
32 that is taken by a governing board or a school district employee as a direct
33 result of a lawful application to establish a charter school and that is
34 adverse to another employee or an education program and:

35 1. With respect to a school district employee, results in one or more
36 of the following:

- 37 (a) Disciplinary or corrective action.
- 38 (b) Detail, transfer or reassignment.
- 39 (c) Suspension, demotion or dismissal.
- 40 (d) An unfavorable performance evaluation.
- 41 (e) A reduction in pay, benefits or awards.
- 42 (f) Elimination of the employee's position without a reduction in
43 force by reason of lack of monies or work.
- 44 (g) Other significant changes in duties or responsibilities that are
45 inconsistent with the employee's salary or employment classification.

1 2. With respect to an educational program, results in one or more of
2 the following:

3 (a) Suspension or termination of the program.

4 (b) Transfer or reassignment of the program to a less favorable
5 department.

6 (c) Relocation of the program to a less favorable site within the
7 school or school district.

8 (d) Significant reduction or termination of funding for the program.

9 M. Charter schools shall secure insurance for liability and property
10 loss. The governing body of a charter school that is sponsored by the state
11 board of education or the state board for charter schools may enter into an
12 intergovernmental agreement or otherwise contract to participate in an
13 insurance program offered by a risk retention pool established pursuant to
14 section 11-952.01 or 41-621.01 or the charter school may secure its own
15 insurance coverage. The pool may charge the requesting charter school
16 reasonable fees for any services it performs in connection with the insurance
17 program.

18 N. Charter schools do not have the authority to acquire property by
19 eminent domain.

20 O. A sponsor, including members, officers and employees of the
21 sponsor, is immune from personal liability for all acts done and actions
22 taken in good faith within the scope of its authority.

23 P. Charter school sponsors and this state are not liable for the debts
24 or financial obligations of a charter school or persons who operate charter
25 schools.

26 Q. The sponsor of a charter school shall establish procedures to
27 conduct administrative hearings on determination by the sponsor that grounds
28 exist to revoke a charter. Procedures for administrative hearings shall be
29 similar to procedures prescribed for adjudicative proceedings in title 41,
30 chapter 6, article 10. Except as provided in section 41-1092.08, subsection
31 H, final decisions of the state board of education and the state board for
32 charter schools from hearings conducted pursuant to this subsection are
33 subject to judicial review pursuant to title 12, chapter 7, article 6.

34 R. The sponsoring entity of a charter school shall have oversight and
35 administrative responsibility for the charter schools that it sponsors.

36 S. Charter schools may pledge, assign or encumber their assets to be
37 used as collateral for loans or extensions of credit.

38 T. All property accumulated by a charter school shall remain the
39 property of the charter school.

40 U. Charter schools may not locate a school on property that is less
41 than one-fourth mile from agricultural land regulated pursuant to section
42 3-365, except that the owner of the agricultural land may agree to comply
43 with the buffer zone requirements of section 3-365. If the owner agrees in
44 writing to comply with the buffer zone requirements and records the agreement
45 in the office of the county recorder as a restrictive covenant running with

1 the title to the land, the charter school may locate a school within the
2 affected buffer zone. The agreement may include any stipulations regarding
3 the charter school, including conditions for future expansion of the school
4 and changes in the operational status of the school that will result in a
5 breach of the agreement.

6 V. A transfer of a charter to another sponsor, a transfer of a charter
7 school site to another sponsor or a transfer of a charter school site to a
8 different charter shall be completed before the beginning of the fiscal year
9 that the transfer is scheduled to become effective. An entity that sponsors
10 charter schools may accept a transferring school after the beginning of the
11 fiscal year if the transfer is approved by the superintendent of public
12 instruction. The superintendent of public instruction shall have the
13 discretion to consider each transfer during the fiscal year on a case by case
14 basis. If a charter school is sponsored by a school district that is
15 determined to be out of compliance with this title, the uniform system of
16 financial records or any other state or federal law, the charter school may
17 transfer to another sponsoring entity at any time during the fiscal year.

18 W. The sponsoring entity may not charge any fees to a charter school
19 that it sponsors unless the sponsor has provided services to the charter
20 school and the fees represent the full value of those services provided by
21 the sponsor. On request, the value of the services provided by the sponsor
22 to the charter school shall be demonstrated to the department of education.