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ABSTRACT
        This text describes ways to increase awareness of the equity
issues embedded in operating a charter school. The guide discusses seven
specific equity challenges facing charter schools, examines key equity issues
confronting all schools and the strategies to address them, provides a
summary of relevant equity legislation, and includes a selection of basic
resources. The seven key challenges for equity are the impact on public
school districts, selection of students, family involvement, funding,
accountability, teacher certification, and special education. Equitable
practices are highlighted, and some of the components and strategies of
equality are addressed: access, instructional materials, attitudes, language,
interactions, learning and teaching styles, confronting bias and stereotypes
in the classroom, tracking and ability grouping, family involvement, respect
for diversity, and professional development, are addressed. Ways to assess
progress in each of these practices are outlined. Since equity is embedded in
many federal civil-rights laws affecting education, some of these laws,
including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX, Section 504 of the
Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Goals 2000, are covered. (Contains
organizational resources and 57 references.) (RJM)

MEETING THE EQUITY CHALLENGE IN PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

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October 1998

NORTHWEST REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY
Equity Center

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About the Equity Center

The Equity Center is one of 10 regional equity assistance centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education to provide equity training and technical assistance within the larger context of school improvement. The center serves public school personnel, school board members, students, parents, and other community members in Region X—the Northwest (Idaho, Oregon, and Washington), Alaska, and the Pacific, including American Samoa, Guam, Hawaii, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the Republic of Palau.

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PREFACE

Intended to improve educational outcomes for children, charter schools have demonstrated the capacity to positively affect student achievement, attendance, and attitudes. There are some who also believe they may act as a force to enhance educational opportunity. Many public charter schools serve lower-income students and students who have not experienced success in traditional public schools. Some are focused on meeting the needs of particular racial or cultural groups. As the number of public charter schools continues to increase, it is crucial that those involved at all levels—whether they are founders, teachers, or parents—focus on equity as they develop, implement, and participate in charter school programs.

Meeting the Equity Challenge in Public Charter Schools is designed to increase awareness of the equity issues embedded in operating a charter school as well as to assist charter school staff in ensuring equitable, high-quality education for all students. The guide discusses seven specific equity challenges facing charter schools, examines key equity issues facing all schools and strategies to address them, provides a summary of relevant equity legislation, and includes a selection of basic resources.

Upon request, the Equity Center provides equity training and technical assistance free of charge to K-12 public schools, including K-12 public charter schools. This work is performed under an equity assistance center grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

Meeting the Equity Challenge in Public Charter Schools is part of a series of publications produced by the Equity Center. Other titles that may be of interest include:

🔲 *Closing the Equity Gap in Technology Access and Use: A Practical Guide for K-12 Educators*

🔲 *The Fourth R: Responsibility—Ensuring Educational Excellence Through Equitable and Effective School Practices*

🔲 *Preventing and Countering School-based Harassment: A Resource Guide for K-12 Educators* (available in Spanish)

🔲 *Improving Education for Immigrant Students: A Guide for K-12 Educators in the Northwest and Alaska*

🔲 *Familias: Apoyo de Equidad y Que Necesitan Saber del Acoso* and *Estudiantes: Apoyo de Equidad y Que Necesitan Saber del Acoso* (audiotapes in Spanish on what families and students need to know to support equity in schools and to counter harassment)

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INTRODUCTION

I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble.

—Helen Keller

Public Charter Schools are nonsectarian public schools open to all interested students. Legislation prohibits charter schools from charging tuition, and in most states they receive 80 to 100 percent of district per-pupil funding. Charter schools are held accountable for student outcomes and risk school closure if established performance standards are not met. Depending on state legislation, charter schools can be freestanding or operate under the jurisdiction of a local district. As public schools, they must comply with civil rights, health, safety, public disclosure, and other federal and state regulations.

Frustrated by problems such as declining student performance, shrinking school budgets, and deteriorating and violent conditions in some schools, families and communities are increasingly searching for new options in education. The search is, in large part, a search for equity. The present-day problems besetting our public school system are disproportionately borne by students who have been traditionally shortchanged in the educational process: lower-income students, racial and ethnic minorities, limited-English-proficient speakers, students with disabilities, and female students. Equity in education remains part of our national agenda, a critical goal not yet realized.

Today charter schools represent only a small fraction of all public schools, less than 1 percent. But charter schools are among the fastest-growing education reform movements, spurred by federal start-up funding and a national goal to increase the number of charter schools from approximately 800 at present to 3,000 by the year 2002. A further goal is that 50 percent of all school districts in the near future will offer some avenue of choice—for example, charter schools, vouchers, or magnet schools. These goals reflect a consensus for structural change. But what kind of change is necessary? Already there is a spirited debate over different approaches to reform and how they will affect public education. Much of the debate revolves around issues of equity.

Educational equity has traditionally focused on two elements: obtaining equal access to high-quality education and equitable treatment within the school system. Less emphasis has been given and progress made in terms of a third element—obtaining equal outcomes. With an emphasis on accountability, especially in terms of raising achievement levels, charter schools are well-positioned to address this crucial third element of educational equity.

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Despite the potential for increasing achievement and extending new opportunity to traditionally underserved students, charter schools may not encounter an easy path to equity. Public schools have historically suffered from institutionalized patterns of racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination that exist in society at large. Charter schools are likely to be subject to the same influences and face both similar and unique equity challenges. Their long-term success will ultimately depend on whether they are able to act as a positive force within the public school system as a whole, accomplish their goals at a reasonable cost per pupil, and, perhaps most importantly, take comprehensive, proactive measures to achieve both equity and excellence for every student served.

SPECIFIC EQUITY CHALLENGES FOR PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

Theirs will be a better world. This I believe with all my heart.

—Mary McLeod Bethune

Although public charter schools have increased flexibility in how they are structured and are usually exempt from most state regulations, they are not exempt from either state or federal civil rights laws or state health and safety regulations. In meeting state and federal antidiscrimination requirements, charter schools must address equity challenges in the following seven areas: impact on public school districts, selection of students, family involvement, funding, accountability, teacher certification, and special education.

Impact on Public School Districts

Seven Key Areas

Most children are now educated in traditional public schools, which will continue to be the case into the foreseeable future. Charter schools may offer new opportunities to their own students, but the larger picture raises an important equity question: What impact will charter schools have on public school systems?

Ideally, advocates envision charter schools as laboratories of innovation, providing districts with successful ideas while offering students unique educational opportunities. In this way, charter schools may ultimately provide the necessary competition and incentive to spur change in the traditional system.

Five percent of all charter schools serve a disproportionately higher number of White students (by at least 20 percent) than their respective districts.*

But other voices in the charter school debate are less optimistic. Many critics cite possible negative effects on resources and the resulting quality of education in traditional public schools. Chief among these is the fear that charter schools may siphon off funding, leaving behind districts and schools with diminished budgets.

Charter schools will draw students and per-pupil funding away from some districts. The transfer of these students, however, should also result in proportionately less expense to the district. A more difficult question arises if former private schools convert to charter schools. In this case money may flow from the public school district to support students that were formerly supported by private funding.

Apart from money matters, there are concerns that charter schools might have a detrimental effect on the composition of some schools

* Statistics for sidebars in this section are from: RPP International (1998). *A National Study of Charter Schools: Second-Year Report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

and districts by draining off what is referred to as the "best and bright-est" or by upsetting existing racial balances. See "Selection of Students" below for further discussion of these concerns.

To avoid any potentially negative effects on public school districts, charter school and local district staff should:

■ Develop a cooperative relationship to avoid an "us and them" situation that might prevent work towards resolving problems in mutually satisfactory ways

■ Be knowledgeable of and ensure compliance with district policies and plans, including voluntary or court-ordered desegregation plans

■ Develop a mechanism to share equity concerns and successful and innovative practices between the charter school and local district

■ Work together to ensure that the expansion of the charter school movement recognizes and accounts for its impact on public education overall

Selection of Students

Seventy-two percent of charter schools report more applicants than student openings available.

How will students be selected by charter schools? This is one of the most often cited equity issues—the fear that either overtly or subtly, the process of selecting students will work to exclude particular groups of students from entering the schools of their choice. Among the sometimes contradictory concerns expressed are:

■ Charter schools may cream off students, selecting the highest achievers or most motivated

■ Charter schools may focus solely on students at risk of dropping out or failing

■ Charter schools may result in the resegregation of lower-income and ethnic minority students

■ Subtle factors may prohibit participation of lower-income and ethnic minority children, including lack of transportation, unawareness on the part of families of their schooling options, or skepticism that their children will be welcomed by the school

Charter school legislation and guidelines at both the state and federal levels have been drafted to ensure equal access to all students and compliance with antidiscrimination laws. Governing boards of charter schools are legally obligated to comply with all federal civil rights laws, and those operated by school districts must act in accordance with any existing U.S. Office for Civil Rights (OCR) approved or court-ordered desegregation plans. Federal legislation specifies that any school receiving federal funding must be open to all students who apply or admit students via a lottery if applications exceed demand.

Many state laws also contain provisions to make sure that charter schools are open to all:

☐ Lottery systems

☐ Transportation for lower-income students

☐ Forbid exclusion of children based on intellectual or academic ability

☐ Enrollment must reflect the demographics of the student population in the district

☐ A certain percentage must target students who do not achieve to their potential in a traditional school setting

Despite such provisions, the charter school initiative has resulted in some schools that have virtually all-White or all-minority populations. This form of de facto segregation presents a dilemma for those committed both to improving student achievement for ethnic minority students and lower-achievers and to providing desegregated schools. For example, in July 1998, North Carolina's Healthy Start Academy, one of 34 charter schools in the state, faced closure by the State Board of Education because of a state diversity mandate for public schools. The K-2 school has a 98.8 percent Black student enrollment despite its open enrollment policy. Improved test scores and a 98 percent attendance rate have parents and staff pleased and ready to defend their school.

A recent study by the nonpartisan research group Public Agenda reports that African American and White parents want schools to put more emphasis on improving academics than on integration (Jones, 1998). This attitude, however, could have a negative effect on equal educational opportunity and the attainment of an integrated society. In the years ahead, short-term progress will have to be weighed against the potentially harmful long-term effects of resegregation.

To ensure equal access to all students, charter schools can use strategies that not only satisfy the letter of the law but also strive to make the educational opportunities they provide available to all. The OCR suggests that outreach efforts:

☐ Should effectively reach all groups in the parent community, including minority and limited-English-proficient (LEP) families. This may necessitate providing recruitment materials in languages other than English and providing translators at informational meetings.

☐ May include special efforts to encourage applications from minority and LEP students.

☐ Indicate that the school does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, or disability in its programs and activities.

In addition, schools should make sure that they can provide educational opportunities that are attractive to all the students they intend to serve. This might include:

- Multilingual instruction

- Hiring of minority staff

- Providing programs designed specifically to teach lower-achieving students effectively

Family Involvement

According to survey results, 68 percent of charter school personnel believe a "central parent role" to be a powerful feature in attracting parents and students to their schools.

A family's involvement in a child's education is one of the most important factors in achieving academic success. Since parents or guardians are often among the founders of charter schools, they are more likely to be involved in their child's school and education than parents at traditional public schools. This was confirmed in a study of California's charter schools (Becker & Corwin, 1995) that found that parents were significantly more likely to volunteer at their children's charter school or to participate in the school's governance than parents at other public schools in the same district.

There is, however, a troubling issue regarding equity and family involvement in charter schools. Some charters require parents or guardians to volunteer a certain number of hours at the school or fulfill some other requirement. In the California study, over 50 percent of schools surveyed required parents or guardians to sign contracts promising to participate in specified activities.

Such requirements may be particularly detrimental to parents who may differ from mainstream parents in their reactions to family involvement methods used by most schools. For example, some parents or guardians may be unable to participate in the typical involvement schools expect, such as volunteering in classrooms or participating on parent advisory committees or parent teacher associations. Supporting their children by monitoring their attendance and homework or setting high expectations for achievement may be the kind of involvement that some parents are able to provide given their job schedules or family situations. For this reason, family involvement contracts could have the effect of screening out students whose parents are unable to meet their provisions.

To avoid screening out families, charter schools need to be sure to:

- Define family involvement broadly

- Offer a wide range of activities at various times so that all families can participate in a manner that is comfortable for them

- Offer child care, transportation, and interpretation services as needed

Increasing family involvement of underrepresented groups is a pressing concern for both traditional and charter school staff. General strategies for addressing this issue are discussed further on page 21.

Fifty-eight percent of all charter schools report a lack of start-up funds as a significant obstacle to charter implementation; 41 percent cite inadequate operating funds as a significant obstacle.

Funding

Lack of adequate funding is the most often cited obstacle to starting up and running charter schools. Even though some charter schools receive start-up grants, many must operate with fewer resources than regular public schools. Most charter schools receive less per-pupil funding, and often their operating budgets are less than that of regular public schools. For example, regular public schools generally have separate funding (levies, bond issues, etc.) to cover capital costs. Charter schools, however, must pay for facilities out of their general operating budget.

Tight budgets can impact equity in a number of ways:

☐ Many charter schools have had to make compromises in their facilities budgets when buying, constructing or leasing space.

☐ Busing or other subsidized transportation for students whose parents cannot provide transportation may not be available.

☐ Resources for special education may not be adequate to address the individual needs of severely disabled students. In terms of applying for federal special education funding, however, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) specifies that charter schools must be treated in the same manner as other public schools or small local education agencies, depending on their legal status as determined by state legislation.

Lack of funding is not a valid reason for declining services to special populations such as students with disabilities or LEP students (see the "Special Education" section that follows for further discussion of educating students with disabilities). Like other public schools, charters schools are required by federal civil rights laws to provide necessary language services to ensure that students limited in their English proficiency can participate fully and effectively in the academic program offered by the school. According to OCR guidelines, if a charter school is operating within a district, that district is legally responsible for making sure adequate funding for appropriate services is available, unless state law designates another agency as responsible. If a charter school is a freestanding local education agency, the governing board of the charter school holds this responsibility. Both federal funds designated specifically for educating LEP students and Title I funds may be used to administer appropriate programs to meet these students' needs.

Charter school operators often must be creative in finding ways to stretch resources and prioritize expenditures to avoid compromising equity or core values. One school, for example, was the beneficiary of donated portable classrooms, a cheap land lease, and volunteer labor to dig ditches and lay sewer and electrical lines.

Below are additional ways to stretch inadequate budgets:

▪ Seek business partners who are interested in helping out local schools. Some strategies to consider are: contacting the community relations department of large companies; approaching a CEO; encouraging local corporations to match each other's donations; suggesting that local corporations donate a percentage of their profits to your school; and soliciting in-kind contributions from companies.

▪ Identify a local foundation in your area that supports what you want to do.

▪ Write grants to receive additional support for specific programs.

▪ Conduct special purpose fund-raising events.

▪ If the charter school is autonomous from a local school district, consider filing for nonprofit status so that companies and individuals who donate equipment or services can receive a tax write-off.

▪ Find out what skills parents or guardians have that might be used on a volunteer basis by the school.

In 25 states and the District of Columbia, a charter can be revoked for one or more of the following reasons:

▪ *A material violation of the charter*

▪ *Financial mismanagement*

▪ *Failure to meet student-outcome goals*

▪ *Violation of the law*

▪ *Insolvency*

▪ *Unspecified good cause*

Accountability

Accountability is a complex issue for public charter schools. In the article "Charter Schools Struggle with Accountability" (*Education Week,* June 10, 1998), author Lynn Schnaiberg poses several questions that she says charter school operators are asking themselves. Below are the questions and the equity issues they suggest.

1. "How good is good enough? How many of the goals set in its charter must a school meet? Or how close to those goals must it come?" A school's charter is the mechanism by which it is accountable. The educational goals and outcomes defined in a school's charter established by the school's founders most often include state standards in addition to specific performance goals. Together, these embody the school's vision in terms of measurable outcomes. Goals must be specific and rigorous and accompanied by a well-defined assessment plan so that students' progress towards goals can be determined. Ensuring equity in terms of selection, enrollment, curriculum, assessment, instruction, and interactions should also be part of a charter's goals and accountability system.

2. "Should a charter school be judged on its own merits or in comparison with other public schools?" In the long term, if the performance of lower-achieving students in charter schools is not measured against the performance of their counterparts in traditional schools, then there is no way to determine whether these students are being equitably served.

3. "If charter schools exist in part to be innovative and free from traditional approaches, should they be held to traditional ways of measuring achievement?" Those committed to equity have long advocated for alternative assessment in addition to traditional assessment to accommodate the various learning styles of students, especially those from diverse cultural backgrounds.

4. "How much should 'market' accountability, as gauged by parent satisfaction, count in the equation?" Whatever the decision, charter schools must make every reasonable effort to obtain the participation of underrepresented families in any assessment of family satisfaction. This may require translation of materials, interpreters, home visits, or provision of child care and transportation.

Approximately 17 percent of all charter schools report union or bargaining unit difficulties as key challenges faced during implementation and operation.

Teacher Certification

While charter schools need highly trained, certified teachers, they also need the freedom to employ individuals with specialized expertise to pursue innovative educational programs. Should a NASA scientist or a multicultural artist or a successful businessperson be barred from teaching in a charter school if his or her experience applies to the subject at hand? Many states exempt charter schools from teacher-certification requirements, teacher's collective bargaining agreements, or both. This has proven to be one of the more contentious issues in the charter school debate. Many teacher unions view this aspect of the charter school movement as a threat to their existence and the hard-won gains that their members enjoy.

Some perceive equity implications in barring teachers from collective bargaining. They contend that teacher unions have traditionally been a force for equity in society and education and therefore should not be alienated from charter schools. Or, they claim that charter schools should promote equity by example. Denying teachers the right to bargain collectively is seen as conflicting with an individual's right to belong to a union. Others contend that because charter schools are pursuing innovation outside the mainstream—for example, those developing culturally relevant curricula for ethnic or racial minorities—they may have the greatest need to break away from traditional education methods. Employing noncertified teachers is one nontraditional method they may want to examine.

Fortunately there are signs that the discord between teacher unions and charter school advocates will be resolved. After opposing charter school legislation and charter schools in some states on the grounds that teachers would be unprotected and tax dollars spent on unproven experiments, in 1996 the National Education Association launched its own charter school initiative. Today, three of the five NEA-sponsored charter schools are operating and being closely watched. NEA guidelines obligate charters to hire certified teachers, provide job conditions equal to regular schools, and provide for a collective bargaining contract if allowed in the states where the charters operate.

Some charter school advocates are also suggesting ways to give schools enough flexibility while still honoring teachers' rights:

■ Specify that a certain percentage of teachers— perhaps two-thirds— must be certified.

■ Allow teachers to join the local teacher union, to bargain collectively as an independent unit, or to opt for no bargaining agent.

■ Be aware of local situations when specifying contract arrangements within a charter. Although some local unions voice support for charter schools, many continue to oppose charter school policies.

■ Pursue legislation that guarantees charter school teachers' participation in public school retirement systems.

■ *Eighty-one percent of a sample of 357 charter schools in 16 states serve a lower proportion of students with disabilities than all other public schools within those states.*

■ *Thirty-four percent of charter school personnel believe provision of services to students with disabilities to be a powerful feature in attracting parents and students to their schools.*

Special Education

According to Joseph McKinney, writing in *Educational Leadership* (October 1996):

> The evidence...nationwide demonstrates that children with disabilities do not have equal access to charter schools. Charter school operators are avoiding potentially high-cost students rather than serving them, and charter school operators are unaware of and unprepared to meet their responsibilities regarding children with disabilities.

Charter schools are legally and financially responsible for serving students with disabilities, including, at minimum, assessing each student's needs, developing individualized education programs (IEPs) for eligible students, and ensuring the provision of appropriate services, either through admittance to their schools or alternative placements. Federal civil rights laws mandate that all students with disabilities receive a "free appropriate public education" and prohibit exclusion of students from public schools, traditional and charter schools alike, solely on the basis of disability.

The extent of a charter school's responsibility for serving students with disabilities may vary depending on its legal status. Free-standing charter schools are likely to have a greater responsibility in the case of special education than those operating under the jurisdiction of a local district. From a legal standpoint, state educational agencies bear the ultimate responsibility for assuring the appropriate funding of special education services. Whatever the circumstances, however, a blanket refusal to serve students with disabilities is both prohibited by federal civil rights laws and counter to the goal of achieving educational equity.

Although there are some charter schools that specifically target students with disabilities, others may be only marginally capable of

accommodating the special education needs of their students. Some strategies for schools in the latter situation to consider include:

☐ If the district has bottom-line responsibility for special education, identify representatives from the charter school to coordinate with appropriate district staff how and where special education services will be delivered.

☐ If responsibility rests with the school and the school is legally autonomous, make efforts to become connected to state systems that provide special education assistance to other small local education agencies. Federal funds may be sought in the same manner as other districts in the state.

☐ Consider entering into cooperative agreements with other charter schools to share special education staff members and/or facilities.

☐ Hire special education staff or consultant to assist with the identification and placement process.

☐ Seek technical assistance from the state or federal government. In the publication *Charter Schools and Special Education: A Handbook* (Lange, 1997), the National Association of State Directors of Special Education offers guidance to charter schools on special education rules (available online at http://www.uscharterschools.org/res_dir/res_primary/res_nasdse.htm)

How Charter Schools Are Doing So Far

Current data on the performance of charter schools with respect to equity is still incomplete. The four-year charter school study commissioned by the U. S. Department of Education is now in its third year. Recently released results from the second-year of the study (*A National Study of Charter Schools*) indicate that there is "no evidence to support the fear that charter schools as a group disproportionately serve White and economically advantaged students." In particular, the study found that charter schools:

☐ Generally have a similar racial/ethnic distribution as all public schools

☐ In several states (Michigan, Minnesota, Texas, and Wisconsin) have a higher proportion of schools predominately serving students of color

☐ Are similar to their districts on student racial/ethnic and income-level characteristics, but a third are more likely to serve students of color and lower-income students

☐ Serve about the same percentage of LEP students as other public schools (12.7 percent for charter schools, compared to 11.5 percent for public schools**)

☐ Serve a smaller percentage of students with disabilities than public schools (8 percent for charter schools, compared to 11 percent for public schools**)

**Based on 15 charter states plus Washington, D.C.

- Serve slightly fewer students eligible for free and reduced lunch than public schools (36 percent for charter schools, compared to 40 percent for public schools**)

The table below provides comparative data between charter schools and public schools on their estimated racial distribution.

Estimated Racial Distribution of Charter Schools (1996-97) and All Public Schools in 15 Charter States Plus Washington, D.C. (1994-95)

Racial Category	Percent from Public Schools	Percent from Charter Schools
White, not of Latino origin	52.0	56.1
Black, not of Latino origin	15.5	15.5
Latino	22.5	22.3
Asian or Pacific Islander	4.6	4.9
American Indian or Alaska Native	4.9	1.2
Other*	0.5	NA

*The National Center for Education Statistics does not report an "other" category.
Source: U.S. Department of Education. *A National Study of Charter Schools* (Executive Summary), 1998.

What these figures do not show, as mentioned earlier, is that individual charter schools may have a virtually homogeneous student population on the basis of race. This de facto segregation issue will need to be addressed in the years ahead for public charter schools to be in compliance with federal civil rights laws.

In their legislation authorizing charter schools, many states cite reaching lower-performing students and/or students with disabilities as one of the possible reasons for creating a charter school. This suggests that enhancing educational equity is one expectation of the charter school movement. Merely duplicating the performance of traditional public schools does not fulfill the promise of charter schools nor advance the agenda for meaningful systemic reform—reform that reaches and improves outcomes for all segments of the student population. While initial results from a variety of sources indicate increased student achievement in particular charter school settings, a full-scale national study has not yet been completed.

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With accountability for increased achievement and the flexibility to
structure and restructure schools to meet diverse and changing student
needs, charter schools hold the promise of contributing to the greatest
measure of equitable education—parity of achievement for all groups
of students.

EQUITABLE PRACTICES

You must begin wherever you are.
—Jack Boland

The following provides a general overview of key issues and strategies that have proven helpful in ensuring that students receive an equitable education. The information in this section will help staff plan for and assess their progress in incorporating equity strategies into their daily activities. For more indepth information, consult the publications mentioned in the preface or visit the Equity Center's Web site at http://www. nwrel.org/cnorse. The Web site contains helpful information as well as links to additional resources.

Planning for Equity

Equity is achieved through comprehensive planning, constant attention to both obstacles and progress, and, perhaps most importantly, an unyielding commitment to equity for all.

Planning is the first step toward achieving any goal. Good planning is especially important in striving for equity in charter schools given that charter schools are in their infancy and have a limited experience base from which to draw. There are no ready-made plans for setting up and running charter schools. Each state authorizing charter schools has unique laws—there are almost as many approaches as there are schools.

Equity in education is a complex, multifaceted issue. Many factors must be taken into account when planning for equity, including:

- Who are the students the school serves? How will their needs be met?

- How will the school ensure compliance with local and federal laws?

- How will the school's financial needs be met? Are there specific costs associated with achieving equity in your school? Are these included in the budget?

- How can staffing decisions facilitate equity?

- How will equity training be made available to teachers?

- What role will families play in achieving equity? How will families be informed and educated in equity issues?

- Are school policies in place to ensure access to high-quality education for all students?

- What outside resources can the school draw upon? Are there specific resources in the district the school can use to solve a particular equity problem?

Ideally, a detailed plan for achieving equity will be in place before a charter school begins operation. Early planning allows maximum flexibility to meet goals through staffing decisions, facilities planning, and other start-up decisions. But a plan can also be crafted to move an existing organization toward a future goal.

A formal written plan that is periodically evaluated and updated is an indispensable tool to ensure that goals are met and progress monitored. Key elements of a school's plan may be included in, or derived from, the accountability standards in its charter.

Steps to Developing an Equity Plan

1. Establish goals and objectives. Areas to consider include selection and recruitment, academic performance, curriculum, staffing, and facilities.

2. Identify the needs of individual students and specify resources necessary to meet these needs. Such resources might include instructors, curriculum and facilities for disabled students, or bilingual instructors and curriculum for LEP students.

3. Establish a process to recruit staff to achieve racial and gender balance, promote diversity, and provide diverse role models.

4. Determine financial resources necessary to accomplish equity goals as part of the overall budget process.

5. Develop policy to meet equity goals. Explicitly state the school's commitment to nondiscrimination and equal access to educational opportunities for all students. Prohibit racial and sexual harassment on the part of staff and students. Publicize your commitment to enforcing all policies. Specify and make available to staff and students enforcement and grievance procedures.

6. Establish a curriculum review process to ensure that curriculum is screened for bias and meets the needs of all students.

7. Make equity training available to all staff on an ongoing basis.

8. Form an equity committee to review equity policies, issues, complaints, and progress towards equity goals. Recruit parents and other members of the community to serve as committee members. Identify one or more staff to serve on the committee and to coordinate the school's equity policies and compliance with antidiscrimination laws. Include student representatives on the committee. (Designation of a staff member to monitor compliance with Title IX is a requirement under federal law.)

The classroom is the front line in the struggle for equity in education. On a daily basis teachers must confront and compensate for the effects of inequity in society so that all of their students realize their full potential for learning. This requires an awareness of equity issues and a resourceful approach to build upon the life experiences, strengths, and skills of all students to prepare them to succeed in our increasingly multicultural society.

Virtually every classroom contains students who are victims of discrimination on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, language ability, or physical and mental disabilities. The educator's charge is to develop teaching strategies that give each student the opportunity to overcome disadvantages and participate fully in the learning process. Below is a brief overview of key equity issues and strategies that charter school staff need to incorporate into their understanding and day-to-day activities.

To improve access to the instructional program and accommodate the varying needs of its students, one charter school provides after-school, weekend, and inter-session academic enrichment opportunities.

Access

Principles of equal access (see "Selection of Students" on page 4) in the school's charter or equity plan, even when accompanied by programs and facilities designed for equal access, are not enough. To ensure equal access, students' individual needs must be considered.

Following are some examples of teaching strategies that help each student overcome barriers that prevent him or her from achieving the same level of learning as the class as a whole:

☐ Make additional computer time available at school for those students who don't have access to a computer at home.

☐ Give extra encouragement to female and minority students, especially in subjects such as math, science, and computers, where they may be less confident.

☐ Give high-needs students the extra time and instruction they need to succeed. Support the social and academic resiliency of high-needs students.

☐ When students work together, make sure their groups are diverse and that all members have an opportunity to take active roles.

☐ Ensure that all students have a chance to answer questions that require reasoning or problem solving. Avoid asking technical questions only of certain students.

Instructional Materials

Textbooks, audiovisual, and other materials should be reviewed to minimize bias in their content, graphics, pictures, and language. Examples of subtle and not-so-subtle bias in materials range from science textbooks illustrated with only White male researchers to absent or mini-

Staff at one charter school indicate that administrative pressure from their former district to concentrate teaching solely on textbook information swayed them to create their own school. The new curriculum focuses on thematic learning and the integration of technology, values, and cultural relevancy into all instructional materials.

mal discussion of the historical contributions of some groups, such as African Americans or women of all races.

Some teaching strategies that help to minimize bias and the effect of bias in materials include:

☐ Screen all materials used in class for bias.

☐ Replace biased materials with bias-free materials.

☐ If bias cannot be eliminated, note its presence and use it as an opportunity to discuss bias and stereotyping in class.

☐ Include contributions from non-European sources to provide a balanced study of world cultures. Include the past and present experiences of people of color and women in studies of current events, economics, government, history, social studies, and science.

Attitudes

Ingrained attitudes are not changed overnight. Biased or prejudiced attitudes may be unintentional but nevertheless can result in discriminatory behavior that can affect student performance. Such attitudes may be exhibited on the part of everyone involved in the educational process. Holding lower expectations for some students can perpetuate lower academic performance and inhibit student success.

Examples of biased attitudes that can result in low performance include:

☐ Most lower-income, ethnic minority, LEP, and lower-achieving students will not go on to college

☐ Boys are more interested in mathematics, science, computers, and other technology than girls

☐ Lower-achieving students aren't really interested in school and consume valuable class time that could be more profitably spent on serious students

Some strategies to minimize the impact of biased attitudes are:

☐ Be aware of your own attitudes and how they may influence how you treat students.

☐ Make a conscious effort to prevent biased attitudes from influencing your interactions with students.

☐ Examine problematic relationships with students to determine whether bias is a factor.

☐ Educate yourself on how biased attitudes are formed. Seek out examples that counter stereotypes and biased attitudes.

☐ Model appropriate behavior and confront biased remarks and actions of students.

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Language

Bias in language is a subtle but powerful influence in creating or reinforcing prejudicial attitudes. Bias occurs in both vocabulary and usage. For example, using generic masculine occupational titles and pronouns presents an unreal picture of the workplace and can limit aspirations because people, especially children, tend to take language literally.

Language can convey biased or ethnocentric attitudes. For example:

- Identifying people by race or ethnic group unless it is relevant. One doesn't usually point out that an individual is White or of European American heritage. The same rule should apply to all groups.

- Using the term "non-White" for people of color, which sets up White culture as the standard by which all other cultures should be judged. When appropriate, use "non-minority" to refer to Whites.

- Using "culturally disadvantaged" and "culturally deprived." These terms imply that the dominant culture is superior to other cultures or that other groups lack a culture.

Some strategies for minimizing bias in language are:

- Watch your own language and usage in class—for example, using "girls" to refer to adult women. Become informed about nonbiased alternatives and use them at school.

- Screen materials used in class for biased language.

- Take advantage of opportunities to point out biased language and usage in a positive and nonblaming way.

Interactions

Interactions are perhaps the greatest influence on self esteem, self-confidence, and motivation. Interactions with classmates, staff, and especially teachers can have a profound effect on a student's enthusiasm and ability to learn. Interactions are shaped by attitudes, and teachers are often unaware that they relate to students differently depending on the student's race, gender, ethnicity, or abilities. Examples of biased interactions include:

- Displaying lower expectations for students of color or female students.

- Praising girls' work for neatness while remarking on the content of boys' work.

- Taking disciplinary action that is more frequently directed toward particular groups of students or avoiding discipline of certain groups. Inconsistent and disproportional discipline can lower student morale.

Some teaching strategies to avoid bias in interactions are:

☐ Demonstrate the same high expectations for all students. Communicate these expectations regularly and challenge all students equally in terms of both performance and effort.

☐ When asking questions in class, don't always call on the first students to raise their hands. Give less confident students, who tend to be female and minority students, more time to raise their hands and to respond. Also call on students who never raise their hands.

☐ Establish a routine for class discussions so that all students participate on a rotating basis.

☐ Encourage students to speak up if they feel excluded.

☐ Always apply discipline with an even hand, based only on misbehavior and not on other factors. Notice which students you tend to treat with leniency and adjust this behavior.

☐ Pay attention to your interactions with all students but especially with students who don't participate in class or those with whom you have a difficult relationship.

☐ Monitor your use of praise. Make certain all students are reinforced equally for their work and effort.

Learning and Teaching Styles

Several charter schools cite providing more hands-on, project-based learning, innovative techniques, and more advanced technology use as driving forces behind their schools' development and daily operation.

Some students may not be comfortable with the traditional style of teaching: lecturing at length from the front of a classroom. Many respond more readily to personal interaction, hands-on activities, and small-group discussions. Learning styles are often culturally determined. For example: American Indians in general are accustomed to learning by listening to elders and tend to conceal individual knowledge. Many African American and Latino students are used to a more social learning style, talking and interacting with family and community members in small groups.

A teacher's goal should be to explore various teaching styles to meet the needs of individual students and to further the learning of the class as a whole:

☐ Hands-on learning is a universal method that appeals to almost all students. Learning by doing works especially well for technical subjects such as mathematics or science where observable reality is used to explain abstract concepts or formulas. Hands-on experience is also effective in breaking down language barriers to learning.

☐ Small-group discussions and problem solving can also be an effective teaching strategy. Generally groups should be composed of students of mixed abilities and cultures, but groups can also be arranged to permit the use of home languages when appropriate.

■ Whenever possible teachers should make connections between subject matter and the lives of their students. This can be done by providing culturally meaningful examples and analogies to help students make the link between their prior experiences and their new knowledge.

Confronting Bias and Stereotypes in the Classroom

Teachers cannot control all of the messages students receive but they can confront bias and stereotyping in their schools and classrooms:

■ Establish a clear policy prohibiting racial or sexual harassment and enforce it.

■ Point out other instances of cultural or sex discrimination or bias as they occur in class and correct them. Discuss them in a non-threatening, supportive way.

■ Use examples of bias found in classroom materials as prompts for discussing discrimination and bias. Bring in materials such as newspaper or magazine articles or advertising to use as examples of bias. Involve students by asking them to identify examples of bias and discrimination they observe inside and outside class.

One K-12 charter school has eliminated all forms of tracking and provides a common core curriculum (meeting or exceeding graduation requirements of the host district), supplemented by intensive instruction in the sciences and world languages.

Tracking and Ability Grouping

Despite prevailing practices, research over the last two decades has demonstrated the negative results of sorting students according to perceived motivation or ability. Placement of students in low-track, remedial classrooms and groups denies access to equal educational opportunities. It fails to improve academic achievement and may also take an emotional toll, undermining student competence and self-esteem. Further, research indicates that lower tracks tend to be disproportionately composed of lower-income and ethnic minority students, thus compounding the disadvantage many students already face. Data also show that in some cases students of color with the necessary scores for high-track placements are less likely to be placed in those classes than their European American peers.

While tracking can be clearly detrimental to low-track students, detracking and learning in heterogeneous classrooms is beneficial for all. As schools across the country increasingly begin to detrack, often to adhere to their commitment to high standards for all students, results show that previously high-track students continue or exceed their achievement levels and previously low-track students are likely to increase their achievement levels substantially.

Detracking involves comprehensive changes not only in daily practices but also in the school culture. Following are strategies to aid in successful detracking and structuring schools for teaching in heterogeneous classrooms:

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□ Educate staff and the surrounding community on the effects of tracking and create a climate of support for offering high-quality instruction and demanding curricula to all students.

□ Ensure that a commitment to high expectations is reflected in the school's mission. Align all school decisions with the stated mission and regularly assess progress toward goals.

□ Implement coordinated changes in curriculum, instructional strategies, assessment, and classroom environment. Offer all students a common challenging, advanced curriculum and use instructional techniques, such as cooperative learning, that capitalize on students' strengths and treat learning as a complex, active process.

One charter school established a Family Center as a separate nonprofit entity for donation purposes. The center provides services and resources ranging from computers and child care to ESL and Spanish literacy courses.

Family Involvement

An influential factor in determining a student's academic success is the extent that his or her parents are actively involved in the learning process. As their child's principal teacher, parents or guardians serve as role models and mentors and are a key influence in forming a child's educational aspirations.

Teachers can collaborate with parents or guardians to maximize students' academic achievement. It is especially important for school staff to reach out to racially and culturally diverse parents, who may have been victimized by discrimination and therefore may be less inclined to become involved. One can't assume a "one-size-fits-all" or "business-as-usual" approach. Creative strategies need to be developed to make sure that all parents feel welcomed by the school and their child's teacher.

Parents, like teachers and school staff, also need to be educated in equity issues to participate most effectively in maximizing their child's educational opportunities. Research shows that because of gender and cultural stereotypes, parents are often more willing to accept their child's underachievement in math and science than they are in other subjects. For example, they may give less encouragement to their daughters than their sons in these subjects. Some ethnic minority parents may have lower expectations for their children based on their own schooling experiences.

Strategies for improving family involvement of underrepresented groups include:

□ Take the time to get to know families. Successful family involvement efforts involve staff in becoming familiar with the strengths and needs of families.

□ Use a variety of ways to invite families to school:

□ Flyers and handwritten notes

□ Posters or notices posted at school, in neighborhood stores or meeting places, and at social service agencies

- Announcements in traditional media and in community-oriented newspapers, radio, or television
- Telephone calls
- Home visits

In the handbook *Together is Better: Building Strong Relationships Between Schools and Hispanic Parents*, the authors conclude: "The personal approach, which means talking face to face with the parents, in their primary language, at their homes, or at the school, or wherever a parent could be 'engaged,' was the strategy deemed most effective by 98 percent of project coordinators." And meeting once was not always enough. Sometimes it takes several visits to persuade reluctant parents or guardians to become more involved in their children's education.

- Make written materials available in the home languages of your student population.
- Provide transportation, interpreters, and child care, if possible. Let parents know that these services are available.
- Provide equity training for all parents or guardians during parent-teacher meetings or in special equity seminars.

Respect for Diversity

Teachers in multicultural classrooms can take advantage of the diversity of their students to enrich their learning experiences. Some ways to accomplish this include:

- Celebrate diverse cultural, religious, and national holidays such as Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, International Women's Day, Cinco de Mayo, Christmas, Kwanzaa, and Hanukkah. Involve students in preparations and presentations.
- Explore cultural celebrations or observances of life transitions or rites of passage, such as weddings, graduations, bar mitzvahs, first rice celebrations (South Asia), birthdays, wakes, and so forth. Enlist the aid of students who experience these celebrations as part of their own culture.
- Explore different cultural expressions in the arts, such as music, dance, drama, film, and visual arts. Invite local multicultural artists to make presentations in the class.
- Involve the whole class in discussions and appreciation of these presentations. Ask students whether they see similarities to their own culture.
- Be sure to emphasize that all people have a culture. Include all students in discussions of cultural heritage and background.

Some General Equity Questions for Schools

Does your school's student population mirror the same diversity found in the population of the geographic area the school serves? If not, what are recruitment steps or other actions that could be taken to make the educational opportunities at your school available to underrepresented groups?

Who are the students the school serves? What are their individual needs? Does the school presently have the facilities and staff to meet these needs? Does the school have instructors and facilities to effectively teach LEP or special needs students who are enrolled? If not, what steps can be taken to remedy this situation?

Do students in the school participate equally by gender, race, ethnicity, and economic status in special elective courses, such as high-technology or accelerated-learning courses? If not, how can these courses be made more accessible to underrepresented groups.

Do students participate equally in extracurricular activities? If not, what steps can be taken to increase access to these activities, such as providing transportation or other support?

Who are the staff, teachers, and consultants employed by the school? Does their diversity reflect that of the students? If not, what changes can be made to expose students to greater diversity among instructors and role models?

Is the school in compliance with local and federal civil rights laws? If not, how can the school comply?

Are teachers and staff getting the equity training they need? If not, how can this training be provided?

Are curriculum and materials used by the school evaluated for bias?

Do the school's equity policies need revision? Is there a grievance procedure in place? Have there been any incidents or complaints that indicate the need for new or revised policies? If so, what are the changes needed and how will they be implemented?

What is the level of equity-related problems or incidents in the present review period compared to previous reviews? Are there specific problems that are unresolved?

Teachers can use the questions that follow as a starting point to monitor their behavior in the classroom. They may wish to videotape a class and conduct a self-evaluation or invite another teacher to critique their interactions. A good video will also reveal facial expressions or body language that convey unconscious messages to students.

By respecting and celebrating diversity, all students have a broadened appreciation of culture and experience the positive side of diversity. Students also experience an affirmation of their own culture and can take pride in sharing that culture with the rest of the class.

Professional Development

To provide quality education for all students, professional development activities must focus on educational equity issues, as well as provide teachers with opportunities to increase their expertise and learn from colleagues. The Eisenhower Programs requires activities using its funds to "incorporate effective strategies, techniques, methods, and practices for meeting the educational needs of diverse groups of students, including girls and women, minorities, individuals with disabilities, limited English proficient individuals, and economically disadvantaged individuals."

The U.S. Department of Education funds several regional assistance centers that are able to provide professional development at no cost to K-12 charter school staff in equity-related issues. These include: equity assistance centers, comprehensive regional assistance centers, Eisenhower regional math/science consortia, and regional resource centers for special education. Information on centers can be found at http://www.ed.gov/programs.html. Select *Education Resource Organizations Directory*, and then select a state from the map or list provided. A list of the above organizations should appear.

Assessing Progress

One of the best ways to combat both unconscious and conscious prejudice is to perform equity audits of a school's organizational behavior and one's own conduct as an educator. Ideally, this is an ongoing, day-by-day process. To reinforce this continuous, informal assessment, periodically schedule a formal or semi-formal equity audit. Create a checklist of questions or equity indicators that are tailored to the goals in the school's charter and that reflect general practices of equity. Use this checklist to monitor progress and to pinpoint specific problems as they occur.

The questions that follows may serve as a starting point for conducting an audit. All staff should participate because each person has a unique perspective and knowledge. The audit may be carried out by querying staff members in a special meeting or more formally by distributing written questionnaires. Individual staff members may not have sufficient knowledge to answer all questions in the audit; teachers, for example, will have a different experience base relative to administrators. The results may be compiled by the equity committee or the staff's equity representative. The final summary should be presented to the equity committee, staff, families, and the school board.

Some General Equity Questions for Classroom Teachers

1. Who are your students? Do they all have equal access to the learning process? If not, what can be done to improve access for individual students?

2. Are you aware of your own your own biases and stereotypes? Do you try to prevent them from influencing your interactions with students?

3. Do you have the same expectations for all of your students or do you discount the abilities of some students and give them less attention?

4. Do you allow adequate time for all students to answer questions or raise their hands?

5. Do you try to provide positive role models for all students in your class through selected teaching materials and diverse guest lecturers?

6. Have you screened materials used in your class for bias? Do they depict a broad range of individuals in various roles? Are they free of stereotypes? Do they include the contributions of all people?

7. Are your disciplinary actions based only on students' misbehavior and not influenced by their race, gender, ethnicity, or other perceived difference?

8. Do you have difficult relationships with certain students that may be influenced by your racial or cultural differences? If so, have you looked for ways to bridge the gap, such as seeking outside help or other resources that may lead to better understanding and an improved relationship?

Depending on their ages, students may be surveyed in class on their perceptions of their own experiences. Analysis of their responses may reveal patterns associated with certain groups of students that indicate bias, or specific problems of individual students originating inside or outside the classroom.

IT'S NOT JUST GOOD TEACHING, IT'S THE LAW

The foundation of every state is the education of its youth.
—Diogenes

Principles of equity are embodied in national, state, and local laws governing education. Charter schools are subject to all state and federal antidiscrimination laws governing public schools. The major federal laws affecting equity in education are described in this section. An outline of the legislation authorizing funding for charter schools contains several provisions that address equity in education as outlined below:

Federal Charter Schools Legislation

- Establishes the goal of reaching "educationally disadvantaged students" as one of the primary reasons for creating charter schools

- Prohibits charter schools from charging tuition

- Requires admission of students on the basis of a lottery if more students apply than can be accommodated

- Requires that charter schools be nonsectarian in their programs, admissions policies, employment practices, and all other operations, and prohibits affiliation with a sectarian school or religious institution

- Requires compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Major Federal Civil Rights Laws Affecting Education

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

Title VI prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in any education program receiving federal financial assistance. Title VI and related case law prohibits discrimination in student admissions, student access to courses and programs, and student policies and their application.

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) within the Department of Education has the responsibility of enforcing Title VI. Title VI discrimination complaints may be filed with the Office for Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C.; regional offices for civil rights; or state departments of education.

Under the Department of Education's Title VI regulations, practices of discrimination based on race, color, or national origin that are prohibited include:

☐ Providing services, financial aid, or other benefits that are different or provided in a different manner

☐ Restricting an individual's enjoyment of an advantage or privilege enjoyed by others

☐ Denying an individual the right to participate in federally assisted programs

☐ Defeating or substantially impairing the objectives of federally assisted programs

In *Lau v. Nichols (1973)*, the Supreme Court found that Title VI requires a meaningful opportunity for limited-English-proficient (LEP) students to participate in public educational programs. This decision is the legal basis for the LEP policy of the Office for Civil Rights. The policy, originally stated in a May 25, 1970, memorandum issued to school districts with more than 5 percent national origin children, states in part:

Where the inability to speak and understand English excludes minority group children from effective participation in the educational program offered by a school district, the district must take affirmative steps to rectify the deficiency in order to open its instructional program to these students.

The memorandum further states that Title VI is violated if:

☐ Students are excluded from effective participation in school because of inability to speak and understand the language of instruction

☐ Minority students are misassigned to special education classes because of their lack of English skills

☐ Programs for LEP students are not designed to teach them English as soon as possible, or operate as a dead-end track

☐ Parents whose English is limited do not receive notices and other information from the school in a language they can understand

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

This law prohibits employers of 15 or more employees from discrimination in employment based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972

☐ Prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex against students and employees in educational programs that receive federal funds. Prohibits sex discrimination in such areas as participation in most courses; admission to vocational, graduate, professional, and public undergraduate schools; counseling and guidance tests, materials, and practices; physical education and athletics; student rules and policies; and extracurricular activities.

- Requires designation of at least one employee to coordinate compliance with Title IX, including the investigation of alleged non-compliance

- Requires notification to "all students and employees of the name, office, address, and telephone number" of its Title IX officer

- Requires adoption and publication of "grievance procedures providing for prompt and equitable resolution of student and employee complaints"

- Requires dissemination of policy on an ongoing basis

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

This section prohibits discrimination on the basis of handicap in any education program receiving federal funds. Employers of 15 or more persons are required to:

- Designate at least one person to coordinate efforts to comply with the law

- Adopt "grievance procedures that incorporate due process standards and that provide for prompt and equitable resolution of complaint"

- Notify students and employees of the prohibition against discrimination

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The IDEA requires each state to have a plan that ensures that "all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that includes special education and related services to meet their unique needs."

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

- Prohibits employers of 15 or more employees from discriminating against disabled employees

- Requires public services to be available to persons with disabilities

- Requires public entities with 50 or more employees to designate at least one employee to coordinate compliance with the ADA and to adopt grievance procedures providing for prompt and equitable resolution of complaints

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 closely followed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to provide support for schools through state educational agencies to improve the teaching and learning of chil-

dren who are at risk of not meeting challenging academic standards and who reside in areas with high concentrations of children from lower-income families.

Goals 2000: Educate America Act

Goals 2000: Educate America Act was passed by Congress to create a vision to guide America's schools into the next century.

Goals 2000 eight basic goals are:

Goal 1   By the year 2000, all children in America will enter school ready to learn

Goal 2   The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent

Goal 3   All students will be competent in the core academic subjects

Goal 4   All teachers will have the opportunity to acquire the knowl-edge and skills needed to prepare students for the next century

Goal 5   U.S. students will be the first in the world in mathematics and science achievement

Goal 6   Every adult will be literate and possess skills to compete in the global economy and participate as citizens in American democracy

Goal 7   Schools will be free of drugs, violence, unauthorized guns, and alcohol and will offer disciplined environments of learning

Goal 8   Schools will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emo-tional, and academic growth of children

Improving America's Schools Act of 1994

The Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) of 1994 reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and provides sup-port for schools to help them meet the goals defined in Goals 2000. The legislation supports equity in education by articulating equity-based goals. IASA encourages innovative approaches to education, such as charter schools and provides increased support for technology, compre-hensive technical assistance, and professional development.

IASA includes the following titles:

Title I   Helping Disadvantaged Children Meet High Standards
Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies

Even Start Family Literacy Program
Education of Migratory Children
Education of Neglected and Delinquent Youth

Title II   Dwight D. Eisenhower Professional Development Program

Title III   Technology for Education
Technology for Education of All Students
Star Students

Title IV   Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities

Title V   Promoting Equity
Magnet School Assistance
Women's Educational Equity

Title VI   Innovative Educational Program Strategies

Title VII   Bilingual Education, Language Enhancement, Language Acquisition Programs

Title VIII Impact Aid

Title IX   Indian Education

Title X   Programs of National Significance
Fund for the Improvement of Education (FIE)
Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act
Public Charter Schools
Arts in Education Program
Civic Education Program

Title XI   Coordinated Services

Title XII   School Facilities Infrastructure Improvement Act

Title XII   Support and Assistance Program to Improve Education

Title XIV   General Provisions: to promote program integration, coordination, equal educational opportunity, flexibility, state and local discretion, efficiency, and improved accountability

For further information on federal civil rights provisions affecting charter schools, contact the Office for Civil Rights for a copy of "Questions and Answers on the Application of Federal Civil Rights Laws to Public Charter Schools." Office for Civil Rights Headquarters, U.S. Department of Education, Customer Service Team, Mary E. Switzer Building, 330 C Street SW, Washington, DC 20202; (202) 205-5413 or (800) 421-3481; or e-mail OCR@ED.Gov.

State and Local Laws State and local laws addressing charter schools and equity vary widely. In 1996 the Center for Policy Research conducted a survey of 19 states' charter school laws. It revealed that all but six had general antidiscrimination clauses forbidding discrimination on the basis of disability, race, color, gender, religion, or national origin. Several states go beyond this, targeting specific student populations in the enrollment process to achieve a racial and ethnic balance that reflects that of a district at large, or to enroll students who are at risk of dropping out, have limited English proficiency, or have disabilities. An individual school's charter may also contain antidiscrimination clauses or proactive measures to ensure equity. To the extent that such provisions exist, they reaffirm or add to federal antidiscrimination law and provide for enforcement at the state and local levels.

State laws governing creation of charter schools differ and can be roughly divided into "expansive" and "restrictive" laws. States with expansive charter school laws encourage start-up of charter schools and allow a high degree of autonomy. Their characteristics include:

- No limits or minimal limits on the number of charter schools that can be formed

- No restrictions on individuals or groups permitted to submit charter school proposals

- Choice of several sponsoring agencies—for example, a local school board, state education agency, or university

- An appeals process for declined proposals

- Automatic exemption from state and local education laws and regulations (except safety, health, and civil rights)

- Fiscal autonomy

- Legal autonomy—teachers are employees of the school, not the district

- Ability to hire noncertified teachers without a waiver

- Conversion of existing public and private schools to charter status

Examples of states considered to have generally expansive laws include: Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas.

States with restrictive laws place limitations on the formation of charter schools and allow less autonomy. Examples of states considered to have generally restrictive laws include: Alaska, Arkansas, Georgia, Hawaii, Kansas, New Mexico, Rhode Island, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. (Based on a survey by RPP International and the University of Minnesota of the 25 states and the District of Columbia that had enacted charter school legislation as of August 1996.)

SELECTED RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

> *It takes a deep commitment to change and an even deeper commitment to grow.*

—Ralph Ellison

The U.S. Department of Education administers the Public Charter Schools Program, which provides financial assistance for the design and initial implementation of charter schools created by teachers, parents, and other members of local communities. For more information, contact the Public Charter Schools Program, U.S. Department of Education, 600 Independence Avenue SW, Portals Building, Room 4500, Washington, DC 20202-6140, or call John Fiegel at (202) 260-2671.

The following represents a few of the many organizations that provide current information on charter schools.

Charter School Resources

Organizations

Center for School Change, Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota, Rt. 1, Box 39-A, Henderson, MN 56044.
Contact: Doug Thomas, (507) 248-3738

Center for Policy Studies, 59 West Fourth Street, St. Paul, MN 55102.
Contact: Ted Kolderie, (612) 224-9703

Charter Schools Development Center, CSU Institute for Education Reform, California State University,-Sacramento, 6000 "J" Street, Sacramento, CA 95819-6018.
Contact: Eric Premack, (916) 278-4611

Charter Friends National Network, 1355 Pierce Butler Route, Suite 100, St. Paul, MN 55104.
Contact: Jon Schroeder, (612) 644-5270

Online Resources

U.S. Charter Schools. A very comprehensive and well-organized site with lists of schools, sample charters, advice on setting up a charter school, reports, links to many other sites, and more. The place to start a Web search on charter schools.
Internet: http://www.uscharterschools.org/

Center for Education Reform. A national, nonprofit education advocacy group that provides resources, support, and guidance for school reform to communities across the United States. Includes an online directory of charter schools.
Internet: http://www.edreform.com

Charter Schools Research (CRS) Project. Provides links to other resources and recent publications; maintains a listserv and is a launching site for searches on charter schools.
Internet: http://csr.syr.edu/

Education Week. Maintains a Web site that provides information on issues, states, and organizations. The page on charter schools points the reader to *Education Week* articles on the subject as well as relevant organizations.
Internet: http://www.edweek.org/context/topics/charter.htm.

Michigan Resource Center for Charter Schools, Central Michigan University. Provides information on the Michigan charter school initiative as well as links to other state and national Web sites.
Internet: http://charter.ehhs.cmich.edu/html/chart.html

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Provides information on charter schools published by NWREL, news on Northwest charter schools, national charter school web sites, and national charter school information and research.
Internet: http://www.nwrel.org/charter/

References

The following items were used in preparing this publication. The list includes basic resources for those interested in becoming more knowledgeable about educational equity issues.

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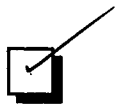Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

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