

# NEWS RELEASE

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Office of Performance Evaluations  
Idaho Legislature  
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FOR MORE INFORMATION:  
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Meeting Location: Lincoln Auditorium  
Meeting Day and Time: March 18, 2013 at 4:00 p.m.

(BOISE) In a report to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee today, evaluators said the distinctions between charter and traditional schools are less clear than they were when charter schools were created in 1998. Charter schools were established to expand educational choices to students and families. Legislative intent, as written in Idaho Code, was meant to identify specific elements distinguishing a charter from a traditional school. As the public education system has evolved over the past 15 years, however, districts are fulfilling many of those elements, such as online education opportunities, magnet schools, and curricula changes.

Charter schools continue to grow in Idaho, in both the number of schools and the number of students enrolled. Charter schools currently enroll approximately 18,000 students statewide, representing 6 percent of the state's total enrollment. The Legislature's nonpartisan Office of Performance Evaluations suggests that policymakers consider whether the elements of legislative intent continue to be relevant in today's public education system and if so, consider creating a formalized, statewide mechanism to measure those differences between charter and traditional schools.

Evaluators were asked to determine how policy differences between charter and traditional schools add value to the K-12 public education system, but they found that data to measure and compare the two school options often did not exist. To supplement limited or nonexistent data, evaluators interviewed and surveyed state officials and public education stakeholders. Evaluators found mixed perspectives among stakeholders, concluding that "value added" is subjective and difficult to quantify.

In its response to the report, the State Board of Education acknowledges "...sufficient data is not available to measure the effectiveness of charter schools as part of Idaho's public education system." As a next logical step, evaluators suggest that policymakers consider commissioning a comparative study of student performance between charter and traditional schools.

The eight-member Joint Legislative Oversight Committee is equally divided between the two political parties and the two chambers of the Legislature. At the end of the 2012 legislative session, the committee voted to direct the nonpartisan Office of Performance Evaluations to conduct this study. Senator Dean Mortimer (R) and Representative Shirley Ringo (D) co-chair the committee.

The report is on the Office of Performance Evaluations' website at <http://www.legislature.idaho.gov/ope/>.