

November 21, 2013

League of Women Voters of Volusia County (LWVVC)
Education Committee – Charter School Study

Introduction

Charter Schools were established in the State of Florida in May 1996. The law authorizing the formation and implementation of charter Schools took effect in July of the same year. The original statute created charters as part of the state’s program of public education with the stated purpose that the schools would provide improved student learning, increased learning opportunities, expanded learning experiences for students identified as low achievers and to encourage the use of innovative methods and teaching techniques. Florida Statute 1002.33 (<http://www.leg.state.fl.us>) contains the details of the 2012 description of this charter school legislation.

The LWVVC voted to participate in a statewide study of school choice. In the State of Florida, School Choice includes: McKay Scholarships, Virtual Schools, Charter Schools, Corporate Scholarships and Homeschooling. Led by the LWV of Alachua County, the scope of the study was narrowed and limited to Charter Schools. Twenty-two Leagues voted to participate in this study.

Data has been collected by the LWVVC through a variety of methods, including direct visits to district Charter Schools, internet research, Volusia County school data, and participation in a three person panel presentation in October 2013 represented by: a school district administrator, an elected member of the school board, and a current principal of a charter school. A question and answer period followed the three presentations.

The State of Florida reported 578 Charter Schools in 44 of Florida’s 67 counties with an approximate enrollment of 200,000 students at the end of the 2012-13 School Year (SY). At the present time (2013-14) the Volusia School District has 8 Charter Schools with a total enrollment* of 1841 students in grades PK to 12th. These are the schools the LWVVC Education committee studied.

Charter School	Grades	# of students	Targeted Curriculum
Burns Science and Technology	K-8	346	Science, Technology, Engineering, Math
Easter Seals (E&W Campus)	Pre K	33	Exceptional Student Education Mild
Ivy Hawn	K-8	396	Arts based curriculum
Richard Milburn Academy High School Daytona	9-12	175	Direct Instruction/Credit Retrieval
Richard Milburn Academy High School Deland	9-12	141	Direct Instruction/Credit Retrieval
Richard Milburn Academy Middle Daytona	6-8	36	Direct Instruction/Credit Retrieval
Richard Milburn Academy Middle	6-8	78	Direct Instruction/Credit Retrieval
Samsula Academy	K-5	213	General Ed
Reading Edge	K-5	310	General Ed
Chiles Academy	6-12	112	Teen Parent

All schools serve students in Exceptional Student Education programs and English Language Learners

*Enrollment numbers were based on 20 day count as of 9-16-2013.

Who do the charter schools serve:

Charter School Demographics

	Racial Diversity			Socio Economic
	%Black	%White	%Hispanic	%Free/Reduced Lunch
<i>State of Florida</i>	23	35	37	51
Burns Science and Technology	5.5	86.2	1.7	62.5
Easter Seals ((W)	12.5	62.5	18.8	NA
Chiles Academy	57.7	21	10.9	92.3
Easter Seals (E)	54.5	30.3	9.1	NA
Ivy Hawn	5.3	72.9	18.5	44.22
Reading Edge	13.3	54.6	28.3	30.35
Richard Milburn HIGH SCHOOL (E)	57	29.3	8.1	57.14
Richard Milburn HIGH SCHOOL (W)	41.2	35.3	22	63.87
Richard Milburn Middle (E)	38.3	53.2	6.4	87.2
Richard Milburn Middle (W)	23.8	33.8	35	80.7
Samsula Academy		95.8	2.3	25.5

Data sources: Charter School Office Volusia County Schools and Florida Department of Education

Statewide testing, grading and scores

Students attending Charter schools participate in statewide testing with the appropriate level of the FCAT administered. However, the charter schools do not have to report the scores nor do they receive a grade if the enrollment at the time of testing is below the requirement per grade level. Exceptions for Volusia Charter Schools are:

- Easter Seals –does not participate in FCAT testing, other appropriate assessments are administered based on the student’s Individual Educational Plan.
- Chiles Academy and Richard Milburn Academy: although their students are required to pass the FCAT to receive a standard HIGH SCHOOL diploma, these two schools do not meet the requirements of number of students per grade level to receive a grade.

No Child Left Behind Accountability Report and Grades School Year 2012-2013

The following grade distributions for the State of Florida are reported based on the NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND accountability Report for 2012:

A=54%, B=20%, C=15%, D=6%, & F= 5%

The Florida Department of Education reports the following data for the SY ending in 2013. Note that High School grades and data is still pending.

School	Percent Meeting High Standards		Progress of Lowest Quartiles		Grade
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	
Reading Edge	58	55	69	52	B
Samsula Academy	67	67	65	93	A
<i>Vol. Dist. Elementary Averages</i>	58.4	56	62.8	61.6	

School	Percent Meeting High Standards		Progress of Lowest Quartiles		Grade
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	
Burns Sci. & Tech.	57	34	57	57	D
Ivy Hawn	73	69	81	85	A
<i>Vol. Dist. Middle School Averages</i>	56	51.8	59.8	59	

Data obtained from FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Charter Schools Provisions for non-instructional services:

Volusia County charters contract food and transportation services with Volusia County schools. Students attending Richard Milburn High School are offered the use of bus passes to ride local public buses.

Two schools, Chiles Academy and Samsula lease older schools from Volusia County Schools at a very discounted yearly rate. Easter Seals and Burns Science and Technology own their buildings. All other Charters lease from private entities.

All schools report that they operate on a Non Profit basis. All report that payroll, and financial/procurement departments are managed though contracted services.

Student Admission/Dismissal Procedures:

All charter Schools admit students based on an application method. Ivy Hawn, Samsula Academy, Burns Science and Technology, and Reading Edge have a random selection process identified in their Charter if they receive more applications for admissions than the number of available slots.

All Charter schools report that they follow procedures established for dismissal based on the code of Student Conduct established by Volusia County Schools, however, students who are dismissed are asked to return to their zone school. For all students receiving services from an Exceptional Student Program through an Individual Educational Plan, charter schools must follow all guidelines of due process as established by Federal and State law.

Governing Boards

School	Members	Local	Out of State
Burns Science and Technology Charter	11	11	
Easter Seals	20	20	
Ivy Hawn	5	5	
Richard Milburn H.S, and Middle*	4	2	2
Samsula Academy and Reading Edge	10	10	
Chiles Academy	10	10	

*Head and Curriculum Director for these schools are located out of State.

Teacher Certification

All Charter schools report that all teachers are certified by the State of Florida. Richard Milburn Academy H.S. reported that they might hire Certified teachers working out of area.

The Administrator at Chiles Academy is not certified.

Teacher Salary, Compensation and Retention:

Due to the wide range of teacher compensation, please refer to the Florida Department of education report for salaries in Volusia County. Employees of Charter schools do not participate in the Florida Retirement System. Other benefits such as retirement plans or health insurance vary from school to school.

Teacher retention data is not available as Charter School teachers are “employees at will”

Closed Charter schools

Three Charter schools have closed in Volusia County.

- *The Frank Sganga Charter School*, which opened in 1998, closed in 2001. The Volusia County School Board cited for its closure, among others, the following concerns: lack of up to date textbooks, poor organization of special education programs and lack of certification of some teachers.
- *The Reading Start Academy of Excellence in Orange City* was closed in 2012. This school was found to lack a library, was not following guidelines and procedures for their Exceptional student population and English Language Learners were not receiving appropriate instruction. The school also failed to provide the School Board with background checks for governing board as required by law.
- *Boston Avenue Charter School* closed in June 2013 after losing their appeal to the Fifth District Court. This school had earned a grade of “F” from the State on two out of its three years in operation. Volusia County School Board officials cited poor academic performance of students enrolled, deficiencies in the Math curriculum and incomplete check of employment histories of school workers.

Request for information

The following questions were submitted to Mr. Robert Moll, Deputy Superintendent for Financial and Business Services. His responses are in italics:

What is the cumulative financial impact of charter schools having here in Volusia?

General Fund Charter School Expenditure History 1999-2013 shows cumulative expenditures of \$63.8 million.

Are there issues that you would advise us to check out as we study charter schools?

Issues resulting in the closing of Reading Star Charter School and Boston Ave. Charter School.

Report on Significant Financial Trends and Findings Identified in Charter School and Charter Technical Career Center 2011-2012 Fiscal Year Audit Report from the State of Florida, Auditor General, which can be obtained from the Auditor General's website <http://www.myflorida.com/audgen/>.

Are charter schools audited by the state for compliance as well as financial soundness?

Pursuant to Chapter 218.39, Florida Statutes, charter schools are required to have an annual financial audit of its accounts and records by an independent certified public accountant retained by the charter schools and paid from their public funds.

What services are offered to Charter School that are not reimbursed?

Services offered to charter schools, include, but are not limited to:

- Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) student and data reporting services,
- contract management services,
- Exceptional Student Education (ESE) services,
- services related to eligibility and reporting for school lunch services,
- test administration services,
- processing of teacher certificate data services,
- information services,
- student performance data,
- charter application review,
- charter contract negotiation,
- annual charter school review,
- financial services,
- facilities services, and
- curriculum and human resources support.

Pursuant to Chapter 1002.33(20)(a)2., Florida Statutes, the district withholds a 5% administrative fee from the charter schools' Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) funding for school with populations of 251 or more students. The cost of services provided to the charter schools over the administrative fee would be the amount not reimbursed.

What oversight does Volusia County school district have over Charter School Finances?

Section 1002.33(5)(b), Florida Statutes, requires the district to monitor the revenues and expenditures of the charter school. Section 1002.33(9)(g)2., Florida Statutes, requires charter schools to provide a monthly financial statement to the district.

What impact do Charter Schools have on the allocation of funds from the State and or Federal Government?

Charter schools are public schools that operate under contract with school boards. They receive the same basic student allocations, categorical, and federal funds share as traditional public schools. Here are some notable distinctions...All public education capital outlay (PECO) funds were allocated to the charter schools (none to the traditional public schools) over the last three fiscal years. Charter schools are not subject to the class by class compliance requirements of the constitutional amendment. They are subject to school wide averages for class size compliance. That means that traditional schools are assessed a penalty for class by class noncompliance, while charter schools are not.