

Nevada charter schools improving

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – Nevada’s charter school law was strengthened in 2011, seeing its ranking among the states moving to 20 from 23 as a result, a national group reported last week.

Nevada’s overall score improved from 97 points to 111 out of a potential of 208 points in the report issued by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.

Keith Rheault, state superintendent of public instruction, said the primary reason for the improved ranking was the 2011 Legislature’s adoption of Senate Bill 212, which created an entity to focus exclusively on reviewing and approving charter schools in Nevada.

The State Charter School Authority makes Nevada one of eight states to have a statewide authorizing agency focused on building high quality charter schools, said Gov. Brian Sandoval in August when he appointed Steve Canavero of Reno as director of the organization.

The bill eliminated the previous approval process using a subcommittee of the state Board of Education.

The improvement is good news for those who support increased school choice, and comes as National School Choice Week is set to get under way on Sunday.

Nevada has 31 charter schools serving about 8,000 students. Nevada passed its first charter school law in 1997.

Potential areas for improvement in Nevada’s law include increasing operational autonomy and ensuring equitable operational funding and equitable access to capital funding

and facilities, the assessment said.

The organization said that following one of the most positive years for state charter school legislation in recent memory, there were numerous changes in the rankings. Sixteen states saw their charter school law scores increase, 22 states' overall scores remained the same, and four states fell in their overall score.

Maine's law, which passed last year, vaulted to the top of the rankings. Of the states that allow charter schools, Mississippi's law remains at the bottom of the list.

In its third year, "Measuring Up to the Model: A Ranking of State Public Charter School Laws" ranks each of the country's 42 state charter school laws. Each state received a score on its law's strength based on the 20 essential components from the NAPCS model law, which include measuring quality and accountability, equitable access to funding and facilities and limited caps on charter school growth.

"What's most encouraging about the charter school movement's legislative efforts is that they are more frequently marrying growth with quality and accountability," said lead author of the report and NAPCS Vice President for State Advocacy and Support, Todd Ziebarth. "The long-term viability of the charter school movement is primarily dependent on the quality of the schools that open. It's critical that state lawmakers recognize the importance of charter school quality and accountability – and the impact that their laws have on it. We are glad to see that they are increasingly doing so."

In the 2011 rankings, the average score of all states with a charter school law was 100 (out of a maximum possible 208), and in this year's rankings the average state score rose to 107, demonstrating that state charter laws are increasingly improving. The top 10 states with laws best positioned to support the growth of high-quality charter schools are Maine,

Minnesota, Florida, New Mexico, Massachusetts, Indiana, Colorado, New York, California and Michigan.

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools describes itself as the leading national nonprofit organization committed to advancing the charter school movement.