



## Texas Senate votes to increase number of charter schools

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AUSTIN — The Senate voted Wednesday to license more independent charter schools, giving the State Board of Education authority to grant up to 10 new charters a year.

If the legislation is approved by the House, the measure would lift a cap on charter school operators — now set at 215 — that has been in place for several years. The bill was approved, 24-7.

Charter schools receive public funds but are privately managed and aren't subject to numerous state requirements for regular public schools such as class size limits.

The bill by Sen. [Dan Patrick](#), R-Houston, also would give the state education commissioner greater authority in dealing with charter schools that have persistent academic or financial troubles.

One change in the law provides for a three-year provisional charter for new schools. Those schools would have to receive academically acceptable ratings from the state during two of those three years to retain their state license.

"Charter schools are meeting a critical need in Texas," Patrick said. "The legislation will encourage the growth of good charters while increasing the accountability of poor-performing charters."

The bill also would allow two additional charters per year for schools that serve students with disabilities and allow current charter school operators to establish new campuses without applying for state authorization.

A state report on charter schools last fall indicated there were 207 active open-enrollment charter operators educating nearly 120,000 students at 511 campuses. The first charter schools in Texas opened in 1997.

The track record for charter schools in the state has been mixed, with a small number of schools doing very well academically, while many charter schools have trailed regular public schools in student test scores. In addition, at least 15 charters have been revoked, rescinded or denied renewal by the state — mostly for financial reasons.

Charter schools receive about \$1,200 a year less per student than regular public schools because they get no state aid for their facilities. Bills are pending that would help charter schools with their facility needs.