

CHAPTER 256F

CHARTER SCHOOLS AND INNOVATION ZONE SCHOOLS

Referred to in [§257.6](#), [297.24](#)

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256F.1 Authorization and purpose.

1. Charter schools and innovation zone schools shall be part of the state's program of public education.

2. A charter school may be established by creating a new school within an existing public school or converting an existing public school to charter status.

3. The purpose of a charter school or an innovation zone school established pursuant to [this chapter](#) shall be to accomplish the following:

- a. Improve student learning.
- b. Increase learning opportunities for students.
- c. Encourage the use of different and innovative methods of teaching.
- d. Require the measurement of learning outcomes and create different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes.
- e. Establish new forms of accountability for schools.
- f. Create new professional opportunities for teachers and other educators, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site.
- g. Create different organizational structures for continuous learner progress.
- h. Allow greater flexibility to meet the education needs of a diverse and constantly changing student population.
- i. Allow for the allocation of resources in innovative ways through implementation of specialized school budgets for the benefit of the schools served.

4. An innovation zone school may be established pursuant to [this chapter](#) to encourage diverse approaches to learning and education within individual schools.

[2002 Acts, ch 1124, §1, 16; 2003 Acts, ch 79, §7, 8; 2010 Acts, ch 1001, §2 – 5](#)

Referred to in [§256F.3](#), [256F.5](#)

256F.2 Definitions.

As used in [this chapter](#), unless the context otherwise requires:

1. “*Advisory council*” means a council appointed by the school board of directors of a charter school or an innovation zone consortium pursuant to [section 256F.5, subsection 4](#).

2. “*Attendance center*” means a public school building that contains classrooms used for instructional purposes for elementary, middle, or secondary school students.

3. “*Charter school*” means a charter school established in accordance with [this chapter](#).

4. “*Department*” means the department of education.

5. “*Innovation zone consortium*” means a consortium of two or more school districts and an area education agency in which one or more of the school districts are located, that receives approval to establish an innovation zone school pursuant to [this chapter](#). In addition, the innovation zone consortium may receive technical assistance from an accredited higher education institution.

6. “*Innovation zone school*” means a public school administered by a principal that is, pursuant to an innovation zone school contract entered into by an innovation zone consortium pursuant to [section 256F.6](#), established as an innovation zone school.

7. “*School board*” means a board of directors regularly elected by the registered voters of a school district.

8. “State board” means the state board of education.

2002 Acts, ch 1124, §2, 16; 2003 Acts, ch 79, §7, 8; 2010 Acts, ch 1001, §6 - 9; 2010 Acts, ch 1069, §32; 2014 Acts, ch 1026, §62; 2015 Acts, ch 30, §89

256F.3 Application.

1. The department shall monitor the effectiveness of charter schools and innovation zone schools and shall implement the applicable provisions of [this chapter](#).

2. a. To receive approval to establish a charter school in accordance with [this chapter](#), the principal, teachers, or parents or guardians of students at an existing public school shall submit an application to the school board to convert an existing attendance center to a charter school. An attendance center shall not enter into a charter school contract with a school district under [this chapter](#) unless the attendance center is located within the school district. The application shall demonstrate the support of at least fifty percent of the teachers employed at the school on the date of the submission of the application and fifty percent of the parents or guardians voting whose children are enrolled at the school, provided that a majority of the parents or guardians eligible to vote participate in the ballot process, according to procedures established by rules of the state board.

b. To receive approval to establish an innovation zone school in accordance with [this chapter](#), an innovation zone consortium shall submit an application to the state board which demonstrates the support of at least fifty percent of the teachers employed at each proposed innovation zone school on the date of the submission of the application and fifty percent of the parents or guardians voting whose children are enrolled at each proposed innovation zone school, provided that a majority of the parents or guardians eligible to vote participate in the ballot process, according to procedures established by rules of the state board.

c. A parent or guardian voting in accordance with [this subsection](#) must be a resident of this state.

3. A school board shall receive and review all applications for converting an existing building or creating a new building for a charter school. Applications received on or before October 1 of a calendar year shall be considered for charter schools to be established at the beginning of the school district’s next school year or at a time agreed to by the applicant and the school board. However, a school board may receive and consider applications after October 1 at its discretion.

4. A school board shall by a majority vote approve or deny an application relating to a charter school no later than sixty calendar days after the application is received. An application approved by a school board and subsequently approved by the state board pursuant to [subsection 6](#) shall constitute, at a minimum, an agreement between the school board and the charter school for the operation of the charter school. A school board that denies an application for a conversion to a charter school shall provide notice of denial to the applicant in writing within thirty days after board action. The notice shall specify the exact reasons for denial and provide documentation supporting those reasons.

5. An applicant may appeal school board denial of the applicant’s charter school application to the state board in accordance with the procedures set forth in [chapter 290](#). The state board shall affirm, modify, or reverse the school board’s decision on the basis of the information provided in the application indicating the ability and willingness of the proposed charter school to meet the requirements of [section 256F.1](#), [subsection 3](#), and [section 256F.4](#).

6. Upon approval of an application for the proposed establishment of a charter school, the school board shall submit an application for approval to establish the charter school to the state board in accordance with [section 256F.5](#).

7. An application submitted to the state board pursuant to [subsection 2](#), paragraph “b”, or [subsection 6](#) shall set forth the manner in which the charter school or innovation zone school will provide special instruction, in accordance with [section 280.4](#), to students who are English learners. The application shall set forth the manner in which the charter school or innovation zone school will comply with federal and state laws and regulations relating to the federal National School Lunch Act and the federal Child Nutrition Act of 1966, 42 U.S.C. §1751–1785, and [chapter 283A](#). The state board shall approve only those applications that meet the requirements specified in [section 256F.1](#), [subsection 3](#), and [sections 256F.4](#) and

256F.5. The state board may deny an application if the state board deems that approval of the application is not in the best interest of the affected students.

8. The state board shall approve not more than ten innovation zone consortium applications.

9. The state board shall not approve a new charter school under [this chapter](#) on or after July 1, 2021.

10. The state board shall adopt rules in accordance with [chapter 17A](#) for the implementation of [this chapter](#). If federal rules or regulations relating to the distribution or utilization of federal funds allocated to the department pursuant to [this section](#) are adopted that are inconsistent with the provisions of [this chapter](#), the state board shall adopt rules to comply with the requirements of the federal rules or regulations. The state board shall identify inconsistencies between federal and state rules and regulations as provided in [this subsection](#) and shall submit recommendations for legislative action to the chairpersons and ranking members of the senate and house standing committees on education at the next meeting of the general assembly.

2002 Acts, ch 1124, §3, 16; 2003 Acts, ch 79, §1, 7, 8; 2006 Acts, ch 1152, §7, 17; 2010 Acts, ch 1001, §10; 2010 Acts, ch 1061, §180; 2010 Acts, ch 1193, §45; 2018 Acts, ch 1057, §7; 2021 Acts, ch 112, §13; 2022 Acts, ch 1011, §6

Referred to in [§256F.4](#)

256F.4 General operating requirements.

1. Within fifteen days after approval of a charter school or innovation zone school application submitted in accordance with [section 256F.3, subsection 2](#), a school board or innovation zone consortium shall report to the department the name of the charter school applicant if applicable, the proposed charter school or innovation zone school location, and the charter school or innovation zone school's projected enrollment.

2. Although a charter school or innovation zone school may elect to comply with one or more provisions of statute or administrative rule, a charter school or innovation zone school is exempt from all statutes and rules applicable to a school, a school board, or a school district, except that the charter school or innovation zone school shall do all of the following:

a. Meet all applicable federal, state, and local health and safety requirements and laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, religion, ancestry, or disability. A charter school or innovation zone school located within the boundaries of a school district subject to court-ordered desegregation at the time the charter school or innovation zone school application is approved shall be subject to the desegregation order unless otherwise specifically provided for in the desegregation order.

b. Operate as a nonsectarian, nonreligious public school.

c. Be free of tuition and application fees to Iowa resident students between the ages of five and twenty-one years.

d. Be subject to and comply with [chapters 216](#) and [216A](#) relating to civil and human rights.

e. Provide special education services in accordance with [chapter 256B](#).

f. Be subject to the same financial audits, audit procedures, and audit requirements as a school district. The audit shall be consistent with the requirements of [sections 11.6, 11.14, 11.19, 256.9, subsection 20](#), and [section 279.29](#), except to the extent deviations are necessary because of the program at the school. The department, the auditor of state, or the legislative services agency may conduct financial, program, or compliance audits.

g. Be subject to and comply with [chapter 284](#) relating to the student achievement and teacher quality program. A charter school or innovation zone school that complies with [chapter 284](#) shall receive state moneys or be eligible to receive state moneys calculated as provided in [section 257.10, subsections 9 and 10](#), and [section 257.37A](#) as if it did not operate under a charter school or innovation zone school contract.

h. Be subject to and comply with [chapters 20](#) and [279](#) relating to contracts with and discharge of teachers and administrators.

i. Be subject to and comply with the provisions of [chapter 285](#) relating to the transportation of students.

j. Meetings and records of the advisory council are subject to the provisions of [chapters 21 and 22](#).

k. Be subject to and comply with [section 279.76](#) relating to physical examinations, health screenings, and formal examinations or surveys designed to assess a student's mental, emotional, or physical health in the same manner as a school district.

l. Be subject to and comply with the requirements of [section 279.78](#) relating to prohibitions and requirements related to the gender identity of students in the same manner as a school district.

m. Be subject to and comply with the requirements of [section 279.79](#) relating to student, employee, and contractor participation in surveys, analyses, activities, or evaluations in the same manner as a school district.

n. Be subject to and comply with the requirements of [section 279.80](#) relating to sexual orientation and gender identity instruction in kindergarten through grade six in the same manner as a school district.

o. Be subject to and comply with the requirements of [section 279.81](#) relating to prohibiting students from serving on any committees that determine, or provide recommendations related to, whether a material in a school library should be removed.

p. Be subject to and comply with the requirements of [section 256.11, subsection 5, paragraph "a"](#), relating to the use of instruction related to agriculture to fulfill a portion of the unit requirements related to science in the same manner as a school district.

q. Be subject to and comply with the requirements of [section 256.11, subsection 5, paragraph "e"](#), relating to the use of instruction related to applied sciences, technology, engineering, or manufacturing to fulfill a portion of the unit requirements related to mathematics in the same manner as a school district.

3. A charter school or innovation zone school shall not discriminate in its student admissions policies or practices on the basis of intellectual or athletic ability, measures of achievement or aptitude, or status as a person with a disability. However, a charter school or innovation zone school may limit admission to students who are within a particular range of ages or grade levels or on any other basis that would be legal if initiated by a school district. Enrollment priority shall be given to the siblings of students enrolled in a charter school or innovation zone school.

4. A charter school or innovation zone school shall enroll an eligible resident student who submits a timely application unless the number of applications exceeds the capacity of a program, class, grade level, or building. In this case, students must be accepted by lot. A charter school or innovation zone school may enroll an eligible nonresident student who submits a timely application in accordance with the student admission policy established pursuant to [section 256F.5, subsection 1](#). If the charter school or innovation zone school enrolls an eligible nonresident student, the charter school or innovation zone school shall notify the school district of residence and the sending district not later than March 1 of the preceding school year. Transportation for the student shall be in accordance with [section 282.18, subsection 10](#). The sending district shall make payments to the charter school or innovation zone consortium in the manner required under [section 282.18, subsection 7](#). If the nonresident pupil is also an eligible pupil under [section 261E.6](#), the innovation zone consortium shall pay the tuition reimbursement amount to an eligible postsecondary institution as provided in [section 261E.7](#).

5. A charter school or innovation zone school shall provide instruction for at least the number of days or hours required by [section 279.10, subsection 1](#).

6. Notwithstanding [subsection 2](#), a charter school or innovation zone school shall meet the requirements of [section 256.7, subsection 21](#).

7. a. A charter school shall be considered a part of the school district in which it is located for purposes of state school foundation aid pursuant to [chapter 257](#).

b. Students enrolled in an innovation zone school shall be counted, for state school foundation aid purposes, in the student's district of residence.

8. A charter school or innovation zone consortium may enter into contracts in accordance with [chapter 26](#).

2002 Acts, ch 1124, §4, 16; 2002 Acts, ch 1175, §81; 2003 Acts, ch 35, §46, 49; 2003 Acts, ch 79, §2, 7, 8; 2006 Acts, ch 1185, §127; 2010 Acts, ch 1001, §11 – 14; 2013 Acts, ch 121, §80, 85; 2021 Acts, ch 90, §1, 4; 2022 Acts, ch 1036, §2; 2023 Acts, ch 91, §7, 8; 2024 Acts, ch 1164, §3

Referred to in §256F.3, 256F.5, 256F.10, 282.9

Subsection 2, NEW paragraphs p and q

256F.5 Application — definition.

An application to the state board for the approval of a charter school or innovation zone school shall include but shall not be limited to a description of the following:

1. The method for admission to the charter school or innovation zone school.
2. The mission, purpose, innovation, and specialized focus of the charter school or innovation zone school.
3. Performance goals and objectives in addition to those required under [section 256.7, subsection 21](#), by which the school’s student achievement shall be judged, the measures to be used to assess progress, and the current baseline status with respect to the goals.
4. The method for appointing or forming an advisory council for the charter school or innovation zone school. The membership of an advisory council appointed or formed in accordance with [this chapter](#) shall not include more than one member of a participating school board.
5. Procedures for teacher evaluation and professional development for teachers and administrators.
6. The charter school or innovation zone school governance and bylaws.
7. The financial plan for the operation of the charter school or innovation zone school including, at a minimum, a listing of the support services the school district or innovation zone consortium will provide, and the charter school or innovation zone school’s revenues, budgets, and expenditures.
8. The educational program and curriculum, instructional methodology, and services to be offered to students.
9. The number and qualifications of teachers and administrators to be employed.
10. The organization of the charter school or innovation zone school in terms of ages of students or grades to be taught along with an estimate of the total enrollment of the charter school or innovation zone school.
11. The provision of school facilities.
12. A statement indicating how the charter school or innovation zone school will meet the requirements of [section 256F.1](#), as applicable; [section 256F.4, subsection 2](#), paragraph “a”; and [section 256F.4, subsection 3](#).
13. Assurance of the assumption of liability by the charter school or the innovation zone consortium for the innovation zone school.
14. The types and amounts of insurance coverage to be obtained by the charter school or innovation zone consortium for the innovation zone school.
15. A plan of operation to be implemented if the charter school or innovation zone consortium revokes or fails to renew its contract.
16. The means, costs, and plan for providing transportation for students enrolled in the charter school or innovation zone school.
17. The specific statutes, administrative rules, and school board policies with which the charter school or innovation zone school does not intend to comply.

2002 Acts, ch 1124, §5, 16; 2003 Acts, ch 79, §7, 8; 2010 Acts, ch 1001, §15, 16; 2011 Acts, ch 34, §65

Referred to in §256F.2, 256F.3, 256F.4, 256F.6

256F.6 Contract.

1. *a.* An approved charter school or innovation zone school application shall constitute an agreement, the terms of which shall, at a minimum, be the terms of a four-year enforceable, renewable contract between a school board, or the boards participating in an innovation zone consortium, and the state board. The contract shall include an operating agreement for the

operation of the charter school or innovation zone school. The terms of the contract may be revised at any time with the approval of both the state board and the school board or the boards participating in the innovation zone consortium, whether or not the stated provisions of the contract are being fulfilled.

b. A contract may be renewed by agreement of the school board or the boards participating in an innovation zone consortium, as applicable, and the state board.

c. The charter school or innovation zone consortium shall provide parents and guardians of students enrolled in the charter school or innovation zone school with a copy of the charter school or innovation zone school application approved pursuant to [section 256F.5](#).

2. The contract shall outline the reasons for revocation or nonrenewal of the contract.

3. The state board of education shall provide by rule for the ongoing review of each party's compliance with a contract entered into in accordance with [this chapter](#).

[2002 Acts, ch 1124, §6, 16; 2003 Acts, ch 79, §7, 8; 2010 Acts, ch 1001, §17; 2010 Acts, ch 1193, §46; 2013 Acts, ch 90, §64](#)

Referred to in [§256F.2](#)

256F.7 Employment and related matters.

1. A charter school or the boards participating in an innovation zone consortium shall employ or contract with necessary teachers and administrators, as defined in [section 256.145](#), who hold a valid license with an endorsement for the type of service for which the teacher or administrator is employed.

2. The school board or innovation zone consortium, as specified in the application, in consultation with the advisory council, shall decide matters related to the operation of the charter school or innovation zone school, including budgeting, curriculum, and operating procedures.

3. a. Employees of a charter school shall be considered employees of the school district.

b. Employees of an innovation zone school shall be considered employees of a board participating in the innovation zone consortium.

[2002 Acts, ch 1124, §7, 16; 2003 Acts, ch 79, §7, 8; 2010 Acts, ch 1001, §18](#)

256F.8 Procedures for revocation or nonrenewal of contract.

1. A contract for the establishment of a charter school or innovation zone school may be revoked by the state board, the school board that established the charter school, or the innovation zone consortium that established the innovation zone school if the appropriate board or consortium determines that one or more of the following occurred:

a. Failure of the charter school or innovation zone school to abide by and meet the provisions set forth in the contract, including educational goals.

b. Failure of the charter school or innovation zone school to comply with all applicable law.

c. Failure of the charter school or innovation zone school to meet generally accepted public sector accounting principles.

d. The existence of one or more other grounds for revocation as specified in the contract.

e. Assessment of student progress, which is administered in accordance with state and locally determined indicators established pursuant to rules adopted by the state board, does not show improvement in student progress over that which existed in the same student population prior to the establishment of the charter school or the innovation zone school.

2. The decision by a school board or an innovation zone consortium to revoke or to fail to take action to renew a charter school or innovation zone school contract is subject to appeal under procedures set forth in [chapter 290](#).

3. A school board or a board participating in an innovation zone consortium that is considering revocation or nonrenewal of a charter school or innovation zone school contract shall notify the advisory council, the parents or guardians of the students enrolled in the charter school or innovation zone school, and the teachers and administrators employed by the charter school or innovation zone school, sixty days prior to revoking or the date by which the contract must be renewed, but not later than the last day of classes in the school year.

4. If the state board determines that a charter school or innovation zone school is in

substantial violation of the terms of the contract, the state board shall notify the school board or innovation zone consortium and the advisory council of its intention to revoke the contract at least sixty days prior to revoking a contract and the school board or the school boards participating in the innovation zone consortium shall assume oversight authority, operational authority, or both oversight and operational authority. The notice shall state the grounds for the proposed action in writing and in reasonable detail. The school board or innovation zone consortium may request in writing an informal hearing before the state board within fourteen days of receiving notice of revocation of the contract. Upon receiving a timely written request for a hearing, the state board shall give reasonable notice to the school board or innovation zone consortium of the hearing date. The state board shall conduct an informal hearing before taking final action. Final action to revoke a contract shall be taken in a manner least disruptive to students enrolled in the charter school or innovation zone school. The state board shall take final action to revoke or approve continuation of a contract by the last day of classes in the school year. If the final action to revoke a contract under [this section](#) occurs prior to the last day of classes in the school year, a charter school or innovation zone school student may enroll in the resident district.

5. The decision of the state board to revoke a contract under [this section](#) is solely within the discretion of the state board and is final.

6. A school board revoking a contract or a school board, innovation zone consortium, or advisory council that fails to renew a contract under [this chapter](#) is not liable for that action to the charter school or innovation zone school, a student enrolled in the charter school or innovation zone school or the student's parent or guardian, or any other person.

[2002 Acts, ch 1124, §8, 16; 2003 Acts, ch 79, §7, 8; 2010 Acts, ch 1001, §19, 20](#)

Referred to in [§282.18](#)

256F.9 Procedures after revocation — student enrollment.

If a charter school or innovation zone school contract is revoked in accordance with [this chapter](#), a nonresident student who attended the school, and any siblings of the student may submit an application to another school district according to [section 282.18](#). Applications and notices required by [section 282.18](#) shall be processed and provided in a prompt manner.

[2002 Acts, ch 1124, §9, 16; 2003 Acts, ch 79, §7, 8; 2009 Acts, ch 133, §234; 2010 Acts, ch 1001, §21; 2022 Acts, ch 1153, §32, 41](#)

256F.10 Reports.

1. A charter school or innovation zone school shall report at least annually to the school board or innovation zone consortium, advisory council, and the state board the information required by the school board or innovation zone consortium, advisory council, or the state board. The reports are public records subject to [chapter 22](#).

2. Not later than December 1 annually, the state board shall submit a comprehensive report with findings and recommendations to the general assembly. The report shall evaluate the state's charter school and innovation zone school programs generally, including but not limited to an evaluation of whether the charter schools and innovation zone schools are fulfilling the purposes set forth in [section 256F.4, subsection 2](#). The report also shall contain, for each charter school or innovation zone school, a copy of the charter school or innovation zone school's mission statement, attendance statistics and dropout rate, aggregate assessment test scores, projections of financial stability, the number and qualifications of teachers and administrators, and number of and comments on supervisory visits by the department of education.

[2002 Acts, ch 1124, §10, 16; 2003 Acts, ch 79, §7, 8; 2010 Acts, ch 1001, §22](#)

256F.11 Future repeal. Repealed by 2010 Acts, ch 1001, §23.

256F.12 Operation of existing charter schools.

Charter schools established under [this chapter](#) prior to July 1, 2021, shall continue to operate under and be subject to the requirements of [this chapter](#) and shall not be subject to [chapter 256E](#).

[2021 Acts, ch 112, §14](#)