



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and fellow colleagues on the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I am Rep. Heidi Sampson serving the good people of HD 21 Alfred, Limerick, Shapleigh, Newfield and Parsonsfield. I present you today with LD 1259 *An Act To Restore a School District's Ability To Authorize New Types of Schools and Programs*

This bill offers a minor amending of 20-A MRSA §2405, sub-§10 which was changed last session. I propose it read as follows: "No more than 10 may operate at any time. Anytime that cap is reached, the Commissioner may not accept further registrations from the Commission." This change removes the rest of that sentence, "or from local school boards and collaboratives or local school boards."

For the sake of historical context allow me to lay out a vision most of us serving today would not be aware of. 10 years ago, in the 125<sup>th</sup> legislature, *An Act To Create Innovative Public School Zones and Innovative Public School Districts* passed into law. To this date, it has not been implemented. It addresses the idea of collaboration between local schools to produce "Innovative public school zones". The idea is simply: two or more school districts could work together to jointly authorize a charter school that would serve their mutual interests.

This law paves the way for schools to innovative, among "autonomous public schools or teacher-led schools operated by a school administrative unit that share common interests, such as their geographical location or educational focus, or that sequentially serve classes of students as they progress through elementary and secondary education and in which a school board implements an innovation plan approved pursuant to this section."

The key difference is how the eligible authorizer operates. The local school boards become the eligible authorizer and they collaborate to form a regional public charter school that would be located within the area managed and controlled by those two or more local school boards (LBS).

This bill offers superintendents, principals, and teachers an opportunity, but more importantly, a choice to explore these new ideas and options in the spirit of the original law. It also incorporates professional development and support as well as accountability for new initiatives. Neither of these options were available in 2011. With the now well established and successful Charter School Commission, LBSs have access to their experience and expertise. The Commission will be able to assist districts and local boards in the evaluation and accountability requirements for any new LBS authorized model or charter school. The Office of

Innovation within the Department of Education is the resource by which they serve as a hub for gathering learning and disseminating it to all Maine districts.

To be clear, adding the role of “authorizer of public chartered schools” to a Local School Board’s or group of Local School Boards' responsibilities does not change any of the LSB’s other roles. It will not change the way the chartered schools are governed. The chartered school's non-profit governing board makes a contract with the LSB or group of LSB's. That chartered school's governing board negotiates the specifics of how the chartered school is structured and its educational program directly with the LSB or group of LSBs.

Under this scenario, no statutes need to be altered in governance structure at all. I would however, suggest this bill include additional language that would allow for the LSB or group of LSBs to contract with the Charter Commission to advise and provide consulting services regarding application set up, review of the application and establishing benchmarks for success. The Commission could provide technical assistance in how to continue monitoring success and share the learning with other schools in the state. This new relationship gives more control to superintendents and LSBs on the one hand, while simultaneously leveraging the structural and technical assets of the state level Charter Commission to ensure high quality performance standards. This framework would encourage the sharing of successful innovations with the rest of the state.

No new funding is required to initiate the program since the new model described above is developed within the district schools. The districts and the LSBs may be challenged with finding creative use of existing budgets for these new structures, but no new money is needed to launch the programming. LSBs and superintendents along with the initiating teachers would develop a budget plan to support any innovations on the teaching and learning side. The Charter Commission’s financial advisors have resources for financing models within the charter schools which could prove helpful to the LSBs. The Commission’s focus is to ensure success.

Finally, building on already existing innovation for teacher-led school models, such as Reiche Elementary in Portland and Athens Community School in Athens, this bill would allow teachers in districts to establish MOU with their district to create new learning and teaching model in their current school. New approaches to curriculum delivery for example could be created among teachers from one or more districts with the intention of implementing the initial idea as a pilot at one of the schools. This way the selected school can incorporate active and ongoing assessment of outcomes and impact. These teacher-led schools have the option of being supported and assessed by the Charter Commission. Teacher-led efforts in concert with the Commission can access various platforms for fostering collaboration. This would further offer creative ideas between teachers which will enable innovations to be shared across districts. By creating a network of empowered educators and supplying districts with research results in collaboration with the Office of Innovation at the MDOE, this bill offers a host of options and opportunities to expand resources for students.

Thank you for your consideration.

Rep Heidi Sampson