

Bill on charters is backed

Senate panel OKs plan
allowing closure of
faltering schools

AUSTIN — A Senate committee on Thursday backed a bill that would overhaul the state's charter school system by closing failing programs and rewarding top performers.

The legislation, which also increases accountability measures, would give the state commissioner of education the option to close charter schools that received unacceptable ratings for two years.

The proposal, which passed the

Senate Education Committee 7-0, also would reward high-performing schools through money for building construction. Because the schools don't have a tax base to draw revenue, they often struggle to raise funds for buildings.

"This is an incentive program," said Sen. Florence Shapiro, R-Plano, the committee's chairwoman. "What we're saying is there are certain ... charter schools who have done outstanding jobs."

Charter schools, which were authorized by the Legislature in 1995, are designed to offer more choices in public schools for parents but are subject to fewer state laws than other public schools.

Many of the state's 191 charter schools have been plagued by low performance and mismanaged funds. Less than 2 percent of the state's public school students are enrolled in charter schools.

"This is for the state to say to these really fine charter schools, we think you're doing a great job," Ms. Shapiro said.

The cost associated with the bill also has been reduced from \$175 million to \$14 million.

The Associated Press