CREATING AND SUSTAINING CHARTER SCHOOLS IN THE STATE OF

GEORGIA: POLICIES, OBSTACLES, AND TECHNICAL ISSUES

by

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(Under the Direction of Peter Smagorinsky)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to research charter school resource sites from various organizations, education departments and universities around the United States, and to examine examples of the best ideas from each, with the goal of developing a strong charter school resource website for the Georgia Public Policy Foundation. While "charter schools" are often discussed as a single movement, charter school laws, and therefore charter schools, vary from state to state, and the schools themselves are, by definition and design, unique entities. With all of this in mind, the project attempts to bring together the best ideas and practices from charter school organizations around the country to improve the resources for technical assistance support available to individuals and groups interested in creating high-quality charter schools in the state of Georgia.

INDEX WORDS: Accountability, Assessment, Charter Schools, Curriculum,
Governance, School Choice, School Finances

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## INTRODUCTION

### ■ What are charter schools?

Charter schools are public schools that are independent of the traditional public school governance structure. They are part of the public school system, but operate with near complete local control. Decisions concerning curriculum, school structure, discipline, staffing, and finances are made at the school level, through the terms of a school's **charter** – defined in the law as "a performance-based contract between a local board and a charter petitioner or between the state board and a charter petitioner" O.C.G.A. § 20-2-2062 (1) -- rather than mandated by a school district. Charter schools can be started by educators, parents, community groups, and other organizations. Attendance at charter schools is free, voluntary, and open to all students within a school's attendance area.

### ■ How are charter schools different?

The Center for Education Reform identifies three basic ways that charter schools differ from traditional public schools: **autonomy**, **accountability**, and **choice**.

Charter schools are **autonomous** in that, through the terms of their charters, they are freed from many of the procedural difficulties and paperwork burdens imposed upon regular public schools. Without long lists of rules to comply with, charter schools are able to focus their attentions on raising student achievement, rather than spending their time on burdensome regulations that have little to do directly with education. The goals

are improved achievement, higher-quality schools, and constituent satisfaction. The means are up to individual charter schools.

Charter schools are **accountable** to several constituent groups – students, parents, and the community – in ways that other public schools are not. The purpose of any charter school (and any other public school) should be to raise student achievement. Charter schools in Georgia must administer the same assessments as other public schools. If a charter school does not show the improvement it claims it will, or if it fails to meet other terms described in its charter, it can be given more guidance or oversight, it can be reconstituted or closed, or the students and parents can simply leave. If a traditional public school fails to improve or to serve its students in some important fashion, little can be done to change this, and the students are forced to stay there, regardless of what happens.

Charter schools are public schools of **choice**. Educators, parents, and other community groups choose to start charter schools. Parents choose to send their children to them. Parents can also choose not to send their children to them. Ultimately, charter schools provide the possibility for children to find the place that suits them best and can best fulfill their schooling needs.

■ **Do charter schools take money from public schools?**

Because charter schools are public schools, they receive public funding. Due to Georgia's QBE formula, this amounts to charter schools receiving between 30-90% of the per-student funding that other public schools receive. They remove 100% of the cost of educating any particular student from the system, but only get 30-90% of the money a

district would spend to educate that student. Charter schools draw on district funds, but they also leave school districts with fewer students to educate, and often bring in students who would not otherwise be on the district's or state's funding lists, such as dropouts, students who previously attended private schools or were homeschooled, and students from outside the district who choose to attend particular charter schools. The fundamental question is whether the dollars belong to children or to the system. In an educational environment where student achievement and constituent satisfaction are the ultimate goals, the money should "follow children to the schools their families select. Public dollars are meant to be spent for the education of a particular *student*. They are not entitlements for *school systems*" (*Charter Schools in Action* p. 152).

## a. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Technical Assistance section of the Charter School Resource Center has been developed to provide in-depth information about charter school operations in Georgia under six main topics: Mission Statements, Curriculum, Finances and Facilities, Accountability and Assessment, Governance and Leadership, and Students, Parents, and the Community. There are many links, examples, explanations, and other resources to help organizers through the difficult processes of creating and maintaining charter schools in the state of Georgia, but while the Technical Assistance resources explain many charter school issues in detail, there are four basic areas that must be addressed for a charter school to be successful: **Academics, Business, Legal,** and **Public Relations.**

**Academics**

A charter provides a school with more freedom to help students by implementing effective educational programs – it does not provide a way for schools to sidestep academic accountability. While charter schools have more flexibility in designing their curricula, they must still meet the state QCC's, and administer the same state-mandated assessments as traditional public schools.

**Business**

Many charter schools develop problems because of a lack of expertise in the financial area. While the Charter Schools Resource Center provides information and many references concerning charter school finances as guides, school organizers are strongly encouraged to hire a business manager/accountant to handle this side of school operations.

**Legal**

The Georgia Public Policy Foundation provides a charter school legal waiver checklist online. This resource, however, is intended only as a reference, and it is crucial that petitioners consult with an attorney regarding their charter petitions.

**Public Relations**

As schools of choice, charter schools do not have captive audiences; they must attract and retain students. Also, although they are more autonomous than other schools, charter schools are not self-sufficient, and so must rely on communities to support them.

Therefore, it is vital for a charter school to maintain a positive, active presence in its community, and to reach out to parents, the local school district, and community groups for support.

## b. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to research charter school resource sites from various organizations, education departments and universities around the United States, and to examine examples of the best ideas from each, with the goal of developing a strong charter school resource website for the Georgia Public Policy Foundation. While "charter schools" are often discussed as a single movement, charter school laws, and therefore charter schools, vary from state to state, and the schools themselves are, by definition and design, unique entities. With all of this in mind, the study/project attempts to bring together the best ideas and practices from charter school organizations around the country to improve the technical assistance, support and organizational practices available on the *The Charter School Resource Center*, a statewide resource for all charter schools in Georgia.

## c. LITERATURE REVIEW

■ **What are charter schools**?

Because charter schools are still such a relatively new phenomenon, much of the literature devotes time to defining what charter schools actually are, and how they are different from traditional public schools. A typical definition states that "Charter schools are independent public schools, designed and operated by educators, parents, community

leaders, educational entrepreneurs and others. They are sponsored by designated local or state educational organizations who monitor their quality and integrity, but allow them to operate freed from the traditional bureaucratic and regulatory red tape" (Center for Education Reform 2002). Charter schools are public schools, but they are independent of traditional school districts in many ways, and have a unique way of holding themselves accountable to the public. Schools are granted a charter for a set number of years. The charter includes educational goals to be attained in order for the charter school to prove it is operating effectively. If, at the end of the term specified in the charter, goals have been met, then the charter may be renewed; if not, the school can be retooled, or shut down altogether.

■ **Charter school laws**

37 states currently have laws allowing charter schools, and each is a bit different. Some issues that form and define charter school laws include the length of charters, the number of schools that may be created in a year, or total, who may run a school, who may grant a charter, etc. Because of varying state laws and situations, teachers' and administrators' reactions to charter schools in different parts of the country have been mixed. In New York, some see charter schools as a new permutation of the established bureaucracy, rather than a wholly independent movement (Ascher, Greenberg 2002), and in Ohio, one educator saw charter schools as lacking enough bureaucracy (Fox 2002). In New Mexico, charter schools have been described as providing "the promise of a high-quality education while remaining in the public school system [for] parents who could not afford private or parochial schools" (Casey, Andreson, Yelverton, Wedeen 2002).

Georgia's charter school law was first passed in 1993, then revised in 1998 to allow for more types of schools to be created, and to allow more bodies to grant charters (Georgia Public Policy Foundation 2001).  The Center for Education Reform, which supports charter schools, has graded all of the charter school laws across the country, according to how supportive they are in the creation and continuation of charter schools.

- **Charter school obstacles**

While different laws promote or discourage charter schools to varying degrees, nowhere is it easy to start a school from the ground up.  Common administrative concerns, even in states which actively encourage charter schools, include start-up funding, facilities (schools often operate in makeshift locations, or converted offices, restaurants, etc.), per-pupil expenditures (in many states, even though charter schools are public schools, money does not follow students from their district schools to their charter schools dollar-for-dollar), and governance issues (how much should parents be involved? How much are they actually involved?) (Finn, Manno, Vanourek 2000).

- **Charter school satisfaction/achievement (students/ parents/ teachers/ administrators)**

Even with such issues, however, reactions from those most closely involved with charter schools – students, teachers, and parents – have been mostly positive.  A survey done in Massachusetts found that "almost 90 percent of charter school parents prefer the [charter] school over their child's previous school, and 73 percent rate the charter school 'much better'" (Pioneer Institute 1998).  Another study, which took most of its data from

schools in California, Arizona, Michigan, and Colorado, found similar results, and identified safety and educational matters such as more personalized attention for students, as the most cited reasons for students and parents choosing charter schools over district schools (Hudson Institute 1997). In addition, this satisfaction is borne out by test statistics. The Charter Schools Development Center: California State University, Sacramento reports in their study of the results of the Academic Performance Index (API) and SAT 9 scores for California district and charter schools in 1999, 2000, and 2001, that "the results showed that charter schools are doing a more effective job of improving academic achievement of California's most difficult to serve students, those from low-income families" (2002). No such study was available for the state of Georgia's charter schools

■ **Best practices in charter schools**

Nearly two-thirds of the nation's more than 2000 charter schools have waiting lists. The Center for Education Reform recently completed a survey describing this phenomenon and discussing, in their key findings, the best practices of charter schools in general (2001). Their findings include:

■ Charter schools are accountable: 97 percent reported administering at least one standardized test, and are held to the same standards as traditional public schools in their respective states.

- Charter schools educate underserved students: charter schools serve a higher percentage of low-income, minority, and special needs/ "at-risk" students than traditional public schools.

- Charter schools are smaller: the average charter school size is less than half the average traditional public school size, providing students, teachers, parents, and administrators more intimate and personalized environments.

- Charter schools provide innovative choices: specialized teaching strategies used by charter schools as their primary focus include science/math/technology, core knowledge/back to basics, school-to-work instruction, arts education, bilingual/foreign language education, GED/HS equivalency, and International Baccalaureate.

Because the wide variety of educational approaches possible under the umbrella of "charter schools" has huge potential, it is important that educators and parents policymakers have resources available that will help them fully explore this potential.

## d. METHODS

To gather data and ideas for the *Georgia Charter School Resource Handbook*, I comparatively analyzed several charter school resource sites from around the country. Some city and state resource sites, as well as nongovernmental sites dealing with charter schools for specific states, such as the Pioneer Institute in Massachusetts, were studied and evaluated according to six specific criteria: resources for (1)creating mission statements, (2)developing curriculum, (3)funding facilities, and accounting systems,

(4)measures of accountability and assessment, (5)systems of governance and school leadership, and (6)resources for students, parents, and a school's surrounding community. After the best ideas and practices were examined from all of the sites studied, the information gathered was used to develop Georgia-specific resources and suggestions for parties who are interested in starting or are already involved with charter schools in the state.

**Importance of the Study**

Georgia's educational community will benefit from this study because it provides a direct, clear resource for individuals, groups and organizations, to more easily develop plans for conceptualizing and creating new and innovative charter schools in the state. The study also provides information for charter school advocates in other states who may be looking for quality resources in their own states. Best practices, according to the predetermined criteria, of the sites will be examined and explained in the study.

This project will be published both online and as a print handbook by the Georgia Public Policy Foundation. The study as published online as part of the GPPF's *Charter School Resource Center* will be organized in an efficient and practical way and will include links to all of the necessary manuals and guidelines for parties interested in setting up charter schools in the state of Georgia, as well as resources in other states.

# CHAPTER 2

# MISSION STATEMENTS

**Charter School Fact:**

**The basic mission of any charter school should be to improve student achievement.**

A well-crafted mission statement is vital to a new school. It provides founders with an opportunity to articulate their hopes and intentions for their school. This explicit articulation can help keep a school focused on student issues -- curriculum and student achievement outcomes. The mission statement should be highly visible around the school, in its publications and communications, and should influence all of the activities that occur at the school. US Charter Schools explains that,

"Parents, school employees, and students will scrutinize, reference, and utilize the mission statement, especially in the school's first year. Indeed, most charter schools include a mission statement in their marketing materials and web site. It explains to the rest of the world the intended purpose and standards for the school."

According to the Illinois Charter School Resource Handbook,

"Your mission statement must serve the following purposes, among others:

- Inform the public of your school's purpose and aims;

- Serve as the common motivator and focus for all staff and the entire school community;

- Drive every school program and decision;

- Provide meaningful guidance to the future leaders of your school in making important decisions and resolving conflict; and

- Provide clarity of purpose that will guide and sustain the school over the long term.

A vague or unfocused 'mission,' doing none of these things, is not truly a mission at all. Thus, in crafting the mission statement, charter school planners should avoid fuzzy, all-encompassing pronouncements, as well as the empty use of educational buzzwords and jargon. Sometimes charter developers are tempted to write their mission statement in broad, vague terms, thinking that it will give the school flexibility and leeway in the future and will thus be 'easier to fulfill' — or that an all-inclusive declaration is more likely to be approved by application reviewers, since there is 'something to please everyone.' Such ideas are seriously misguided and will result in non-mission statements."

The Pioneer Institute provides another explanation of what purpose a charter school's mission statement should serve:

"A mission statement is critical to giving substance to the dreams of charter school founders. The statement defines the school's purpose, sets forth specific objectives, and suggests initial strategies for the emerging school community. A mission statement shapes a school's character, provides a sense of direction and vitality, and is a source of stability through times of difficult decision-making."

A mission statement should provide a specific direction for a school and contain real substance, articulated in clear language, rather than focusing on vague hopes and ambiguous academic terms. A school should constantly be trying to *fulfill* its mission, and so should not have goals that are ill-defined, or are impossible to measure. The Pioneer Institute and the New York Charter Schools Resource Center suggest five elements that should be included in a mission statement:

- **Values**: the underlying philosophy of why the founders want to open the school

- **Educational Approach**: teaching and learning methods and expectations

- **Curriculum Focus**: general areas of curriculum focus; adopted models; key components that make the school unique

- **Customer Focus**: what the school uniquely provides to customers – students/parents/the public

- **Outcomes and Goals**: these should be explicitly stated in the mission statement

Some examples of mission statements from Georgia and around the country follow. Some address all of the five elements above, while some address only a few:

**Schools in Georgia:**

**Central Education Center; Newnan, Georgia**

Central Educational Center's function is to provide 1) technical and advanced instruction to students of the three public high schools in Coweta County; 2) a night high school, and 3) adult education classes leading to GED completion.

**MISSION:**  To ensure a viable workforce for the 21st century based on targeted needs within our community

**PURPOSE:** To develop, implement and offer innovative learning opportunities for residents of Coweta and surrounding counties to achieve economic and personal goals

**GOAL:** To create synergy among the educational, business, industrial and governmental entities that will favorably impact and enhance economic development and the quality of life in this region.

**WHY?** More than 40 percent of Coweta's business and industry responded to a needs assessment survey which covered 80% of the manufacturing and technical jobs in the county. Critical employee concerns included life skills, work ethics, and basic math and reading skills.

**Fulton Science Academy Middle School; Alpharetta, Georgia**

The mission of Fulton Science Academy Middle School is to execute the instruction of the middle school math-science curriculum with the help of proven successful methods in a stimulating and supporting environment to prepare the entire student body to their

maximum potential in these subjects so that on this basis they will get the most out of their high school math-science education, which is the key to future success.

**Oglethorpe Academy; Savannah, Georgia**

It is the mission of the Oglethorpe Academy to provide a safe, nurturing atmosphere in which to guide a diverse student body in the development of character and academic potential through a rigorous, content-rich, hands-on curriculum and on-going character-enrichment that lead to an understanding of virtuous behavior and civic responsibility. High standards of teaching, study and conduct are central to the mission of Oglethorpe Academy, standards that will lead to academic excellence and strong moral fiber. Parent involvement is critical to Oglethorpe Academy's mission.

**Schools around the country:**

**Benjamin Franklin Classical Charter School; Franklin, Massachusetts**

The Benjamin Franklin Classical Charter School's mission is to assist parents in their role as the primary educators of their children by providing a classical academic education coupled with innovative programs for character building and community service. The Core Knowledge Sequence, recently developed by renowned educator E.D. Hirsch in collaboration with educators throughout the country, provides a carefully planned and thematically integrated curriculum focusing on a body of classical knowledge of proved and lasting significance assumed in public discourse and known by a broad majority of literate Americans.

**City on a Hill Charter School; Boston, Massachusetts**

The mission of <u>City On A Hill Charter School</u> is to graduate responsible, resourceful, and respectful democratic citizens prepared to advance community, culture, and commerce.

**El Colegio; Minneapolis, Minnesota**

<u>El Colegio's</u> mission is to engage students in profound experiences that help them find meaning and purpose in their lives. The school does this through experiential-based education that uses the Latino, Chicano and Mexicano cultures as the context for studying the arts, environment and technology. We provide students the opportunity to succeed academically in all subject areas, as well as take pride in who they are and what they bring to the ongoing creation of the culture and society of the United States.

**Frederick Douglass Charter School; Hyde Park, Massachusetts**

<u>Frederick Douglass Charter School</u>, to be located in Boston, will be a middle and high school offering students from Boston a rigorous college preparatory education with a particular focus on research and public speaking. The mission of the school is to foster pride in academic achievement by requiring public demonstration of work in every subject area. We believe that to explain one's idea is to own it: students will learn to clarify their ideas through the process of research, writing, revision, and presentation.

**Guajome Park Academy; Vista, California**

By connecting knowledge, thinking and experience in an environment where all the world is a classroom, Guajome Park Academy is the school of choice for students who are committed to being responsible, thinking, communicating and contributing citizens.

**Liberty Common School; Fort Collins, Colorado**

The mission of Liberty Common School is to provide excellence and fairness in education through a common foundation. This is achieved by successfully teaching a contextual body of organized knowledge, the values of a democratic society, and the skills of learning.  In short, we teach common knowledge, common virtues, and common sense.

**Ronald H. Brown Charter School; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania**

Our mission at Ronald H. Brown Charter School is to open the portals of opportunity for children and adults in the community through excellence in public education: combining the beneficial rigors of a classical education with the latest technology and the best teaching and learning practices worldwide.

# CHAPTER 3

## CURRICULUM

**Charter School Fact:**

**Georgia charter schools must address the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) standards.**

Charter schools provide a unique opportunity to develop and/or implement creative, innovative, and proven educational models to improve students' achievement and educational experiences. This can be done in many ways, with many different models of instruction and school design. Excellent curriculum standards will "emphasize rigorous academics, yet [be] flexible enough to allow for pedagogical and intellectual diversity" (American Academy for Liberal Education).

Charter school director and longtime educator Wayne Jennings suggests keeping the following in mind when planning curriculum:

"Charter schools have the opportunity, if not the obligation, to create new practices as one of the purposes of the statute. Charter schools can draw from a variety of curriculum models and instructional practices. The charter statute encourages schools to depart from conventional school approaches. There is no need to simply reconstitute the standard school design. Take the time to front-end plan your school carefully. Examine the huge variety of different models of education to create a unique and powerful charter school" (Minnesota Charter Schools Resource Center).

**Mandated Minimum State Standards**

Even though a charter provides academic flexibility, schools are still accountable to the state for their curricula. A charter school's curriculum must address the state of Georgia QCC's.

**Practical Suggestions**

Some things to keep in mind while developing/adopting a school's curriculum:

- Decide what students need to know by the time they leave school
- Be sure there is continuity and some kind of connection between grades/levels
- Be sure that QCC's/state standards are met
- Evaluate whether the curriculum is working with the objectives of the school
- Allow time for teachers to develop and improve the curriculum
- Be mindful of teacher autonomy and individual styles
- Ask how the students' experiences might fit with the schools they might come from or go to
- Understand that educational models should follow from a school's mission statement
- Align the curriculum to **measurable** standards

**Developing Curriculum**

Some school founders choose to develop their schools' educational design and curriculum locally, while others may choose from the many published school and

curriculum models. The New York State Charter Schools Resource Center provides the following advice for curriculum design:

"A school's academic curriculum is the vehicle by which its standards for student achievement are reached. As such, a charter school's curriculum must be designed with a focus on the desired outcomes. For example, if a school's standard is that all children will be able to read a short story aloud to his or her class by the end of first grade, the curriculum must include both reading comprehension, storytelling, and public speaking instruction. If a school's goal is to ensure that each child is technologically skilled, it may mean that by the end of eighth grade instruction must have occurred in subjects such as computer software/hardware use, electronic communication, and using the Internet for research.

In all cases, a charter school's curriculum must be designed to achieve its stated goals for student learning -- its **academic standards** -- at each grade. Parents, students, and the public often will turn first to a school's curriculum and learning standards to make decisions about the quality of a school and whether to enroll their child. It is of ultimate importance, therefore, to ensure that statements about the school's standards and curriculum are clear, thorough, and readily available."

Table 1 is a sample locally-developed curriculum for a New York State K-6

Charter School from the New York Charter Schools Resource Center:

## Table 1: Sample Curriculum for a K-6 NYS Charter School

| Grade | Language Arts/ Literature | Mathematics | Science | History/ Geography | Arts/ Foreign Language | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K | Phonics; alphabet; printing and recognizing letters, numbers, and beginning words; vowel sounds; storytime (fables, fairy tales, poems, short stories, nursery rhymes); extemporaneous speaking; library skills. | Counting; sorting; simple graphs; ordinal; coins; comparative; halving. size; sets; beginning addition & subtraction; sets & classification; geometric shapes; time. | Color; shape; size; texture; odor; sound; comparatives; plant life/growth; animals. Observation; sense organs; topography; sun, earth, moon; heat/cold; light/shadow; colors; groupings. | Prehistoric NY; native Indians; Columbus; European settlement in NY; statehood; NY roll in independence; state symbols; famous NYers; industries; state geography; cities; capital; Hudson River & lakes; border areas; president/ White House; US holidays; distance/ direction. | **Arts:** Patriotic songs; folk songs; music & instrument identification; **Foreign Language:** count; recognize primary nouns, simple words. | **Civics:** American flag; pledge of allegiance. **Character:** respect; fable morals; heros; rules; manners; honesty; fair play. **Physical fitness/Health:** safety; body control; hygiene. |
| 1st | Phonics; consonants; long/ short vowels; blends; punctuation; spelling; sentence structure; letter-writing; reviews; headlines; vocabulary; silent/aloud reading (stories, folktales, poems, legends); beginning grammar; penmanship; library work; journal entries; speaking. | Dates; shapes: sides & angles; geometric solids; measurements; symmetry; create graphs; money; patterns; addition; subtraction; beginning multiplication & division; data collection graphs & charts; story problems; estimation. | Flotation; metal, rock, wood, plastic; comparing/ mixing substances; magnetics; electricity; sun/ shadow; day/night; water life; animal life; population; endangered species; plant growth: experimentation & data collection; stages; habitats; air; energy. | Colonies; colonial life; Washington; Lincoln; NY presidents; famous Americans; globe & maps; topography; American customs, culture, and contrasts; life in America's past; landforms; regions of US. | **Arts:** Basic ideas of music; create an art work; act out situations; painting, drawing & craftmaking. **Foreign language:** verbs, adjectives; stories; cultural similarities/ differences. | **Civics:** democracy fundamentals. **Character:** moral problems & solutions; individual responsibility **Physical fitness/Health:** sport skills; sportsmanship; diet & nutrition; |
| 2nd | Contractions; plurals; comparatives; prefixes & | Time; graphing/reading data & charts; halves, quarters | Materials; interactions; gears & pulleys; solar system; | Prehistoric age; dinosaurs; ice age; beginning civilization; | **Arts:** famous art/artists & music works/ | **Civics:** citizenship; voting & elections. |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | endings; synonyms; dictionary skills; grammar; cursive; spelling; poetry; editing; silent & group reading; interpretive skills; vocabulary; writing stories, poems, letters, and reports; library skills; speaking; journal entries. | & other fractions; addition; subtraction; multiplication; division; measurements; worth; predictions; writing checks & making change; negative numbers; parallel/ perpendicular; rounding; story problems; estimation; 3D geometric shapes; planes; sides/angles; relationships; math writing. | organisms; life cycle; plant cycles; animal birth & growth; seasons/ orbit; vertebrates/ invertebrates; tides; magnetism; motion; machines & inventors. | timelines; mapping exercises; hemispheres; continents; oceans; earth regions; countries; world explorers; trade routes; ancient beliefs vs. proof; countries in the news. | composers; color/ form/ texture.<br><br>**Foreign language:** vocabulary; stories; basic conversation. | elections.<br><br>**Character:** self-reliance; hard work.<br><br>**Physical fitness/Health:** Team/individual sports. |
| **3rd** | Grammar; penmanship; spelling; vocabulary; write analyses; writing/reading strategies; analyze authors' efforts; story-telling; oral presentations; history of speaking & language; other communication forms; writing reports and letters; distinguishing fact/fiction; group discussion of readings; reference skills. | Addition; subtraction; multiplication; division; rates; fractions; decimals; percent; word problems; scales; metric; angles; weights & liquids; graphs; polygons; circles; spreadsheets; data collection; patterns; measurements. | Solutions; separations; electric circuits; power; simple machines; animal food chain; plant responses to factors; famous scientists; growth stages; rocks/minerals; basic properties of matter; space exploration; data collection. | US history: colonization, Revolution, to Civil War; Columbus; native Indians; Decl.of Independence; Constitutional Convention; presidents; latitude/ longitude; boundaries/ borders; poles. | **Arts**: Perform on an instrument; singing accuracy; create accompaniment; clay modeling; create work of art.<br><br>**Foreign language:** Read/write stories; interact & question. | **Civics:** role of religious tolerance; Decl. of Independence; Constitutional Convention.<br><br>**Character:** friendship; integrity; self-respect.<br><br>**Physical fitness/Health:** team/indiv. sports; first aid; drug/alcohol abuse.<br><br>**Economics:** ancient trade games. |
| **4th** | Grammar; sentence patterns; spelling; critical reading; classic literature; structure of stories/reports; summarization; personal ancestral report. | Algorithms; story problems; angles; area; polygons; fraction & decimal arithmetic; common factors; division; rounding; finding information to solve a problem; | Weather; motion; sound; human body systems; dinosaurs; habitats; ornithology; chemical interactions; glaciers/ erosion; fossil fuels; heat. | US History: Civil War, slavery/abolition, to WWI; Western expansion; US explorers; "Wild West"; technological progress/ industrialization; canals & railroads; | **Arts:** music notation; instrument recognition; music lessons; composers; styles; cultural music/art.<br><br>**Foreign language:** reading/writing exercises; | **Civics:** branches of government; US constitution/ amend's.<br><br>**Character:** behavior evaluation; conflict resolution; individual morality |

| Grade | Language Arts | Math | Science | Social Studies | Arts / Foreign Language | Civics / Character / Economics |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | estimation; graphs & charts; statistics basics; lines & angles; polygons; probability. |  | immigration; presidents; states & capitals; mapping exercises; family ancestors & homelands. | interaction; oral presentations; study of culture. | morality.<br><br>**Physical fitness/Health:** team/individual sports; disease prevention.<br><br>**Economics:** today's businesses. |
| **5th** | Spelling; grammatical diagraming; etymology;<br><br>critical reading; biographies, short novels, essays; research skills; speaking exercises. | Scales & graphs; perimeters; multiplication; division; volume; ratio; square roots; geometric formulae; primes; factors; infinity; probability experimentation; angles; 3D shapes. | Stars; spheres; energy sources/receivers; color & pigments; sight; lenses & mirrors; erosion; reproduction; evaporation & condensation; ecosystems; explanation of phenomena; perform investigations; evolutionary history of earth; machines and work. | US History: WWI, Great Depression, WWII, reconstruction; urbanization; social changes; landforms; bodies of water; geology of NY; seasons/time zones; mapping: symbols&scales; ancient civilizations: Egypt & Greece. | **Arts:** purpose of music; musical styles; great artists; model styles of artists; individual art interpretation.<br><br>**Foreign Language:** reading/writing; vocabulary; oral presentations. | **Civics:** roots of democracy; democracy & adversaries.<br><br>**Character:** sexual development & responsibility.<br><br>**Economics:** taxes; unemployment. |
| **6th** | Parts of speech; word use; composition; vocabulary; spelling; classical mythology; poetry; writing essays, reviews, letters; speaking exercises; research reports. | Statistical terms; circumference & pi; probability; formulas. series; exponents; story problems; variables; geometry formulae and theories. | Energy transfer; radiation; circuits; magnetics; make energy source; chemicals & health; make ecosystem; gases; pollution; atomic theory; states of matter; physical relationships; optics; apply scientific process elsewhere; critique nonfact-based conclusions. | US History: WWII to present, cold war, civil rights movement, Korea, Vietnam; timelines; growth & influence of various religions; achievements of presidents; famous Americans; historical speeches & poems. | **Arts:** analyze art; dramatically interpret a literary work; media use comparison; present on aspects of art.<br><br>**Foreign Language** conversational speaking; group presentations; "daily life" exercises. | **Civics:** two-party system; politics; local government.<br><br>**Character:** charity; community service.<br><br>**Economics:** supply & demand. |

## Hispanic Charter Schools

Because the Hispanic population in the United States is growing at a fast rate, and because immigrant children often have unique educational needs, many civic groups are creating charter schools directed toward those specific needs. For example, the National

Council of la Raza's <u>Charter School Development Initiative</u> provides grants to develop charter schools with programs that serve the Latino community.  Below are links to several such schools around the country:

<u>Carlos Rosario International Career Center and Public Charter School</u>; Washington, D.C.

<u>Cesar Chavez Academy</u>; Pueblo, Colorado

<u>El Colegio Charter School</u>;  Minneapolis, Minnesota

<u>Latino College Preparatory Academy</u>; San Jose, California

<u>Raul Yzaguirre School for Success</u>; Houston, Texas


**Other Concepts**

Additionally, some charter schools have developed other unique curricular themes and instructional designs on their own:

<u>Cesar Chavez Public Charter High School for Public Policy</u>**; Washington, D.C.**

<u>Charter High School for Architecture and Design</u>; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

<u>Tempe Preparatory Academy</u>; Tempe, Arizona

<u>Vaughn Next Century Learning Center</u>; Los Angeles, California


**Curriculum Models**

Many school founders may not find it necessary, practical, or desirable to create an entire curriculum for their schools.  There are many design models available, and many of them have already developed materials to compose or to supplement a school's curriculum.  Some models are whole-school designs, while others focus on particular subjects.  Below are short descriptions of and links to some of them:

Core Knowledge

Core Knowledge provides a carefully sequenced curriculum and challenging body of knowledge in which to ground skills instruction.

Council for Basic Education

The Council for Basic Education (CBE), a national non-profit organization, advocates high academic standards for all students and exemplary teaching in every classroom in our nation's public schools.

Edison Project

The Edison Project is a private school management company whose program features longer school days and a standardized curriculum.

Foundational Approaches in Science Teaching

The Foundational Approaches in Science Teaching (FAST) program is a sequence of three inquiry science courses especially designed for middle-school students. The courses emphasize the foundational concepts and methods of the physical, biological, and earth sciences.

Great Books

The Great Books program includes a collection of literature based on high-level works and a reading program based on vocabulary building and critical thinking skills.

International Baccalaureate

This design features a rigorous academic curriculum, with emphasis placed on the ideals of international understanding and responsible citizenship.

KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program)

KIPP, the Knowledge Is Power Program, is a national non-profit organization which trains school leaders to open and run public schools dedicated to providing educationally underserved students with the knowledge, skills and character needed to succeed in top-quality high schools, colleges and the competitive world beyond.

Link Institute

Promotes virtue-based education; advocates and complements the Core Knowledge Sequence.

Mathematically Correct!

Advocates exposure to rigorous, content-rich mathematics, and systematic mastery of the fundamental building blocks necessary for success in the subject.

Modern Red Schoolhouse

This is a whole-school design featuring a traditional curriculum, with a comprehensive view of school restructuring, and use of a sophisticated instructional management system that allows for detailed tracking of student progress and continuous reflection on the curriculum.

<u>Mosaica Education</u>

This is a schoolwide model, featuring longer days and a prescribed curriculum emphasizing "traditional core subjects and essential skills."

<u>National Right to Read Foundation</u>

Advocates phonics reading instruction.

<u>PLATO Learning</u>

PLATO Learning, Inc. is a leading provider of computer-based and e-learning instruction, offering basic to advanced level courseware in reading, writing, math, science, social studies, and life and job skills. The PLATO Learning System and PLATO Web Learning Network provide more than 3,500 hours of objective-based, problem solving courseware and include assessment, alignment and management tools to create standards-based curricula and facilitate the learning process.

<u>Saxon Publishers</u>

Saxon Publishers, Inc. was founded on the premise that math was not being taught effectively and that it was not the fault of the teachers nor the students, but the textbooks they used. Most textbooks were divided into large chapters that took many days to cover. Saxon divided its textbooks into daily lessons, each containing a small increment of new learning. Every day's homework, called a problem set, contained problems that encompassed all the previous concepts and skills covered that year.

Other resources are available at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's

Catalog of School Reform Models.


For more model synopses, visit "Navigating New Waters In Public Education:

A Handbook on Innovative School Models" prepared by Susan J. Gillespie.

# CHAPTER 4

## FINANCES AND FACILITIES

**Charter School Fact:**

**Georgia charter schools receive between 30-90% of the money per-student for instruction that regular public schools receive.**

## FINANCES

Although charter schools should always be started for educational reasons – to raise student achievement, and/or to provide services not provided by school districts -- a charter school's financial condition is one of the most important factors in its creation, operation, and long-term survival. School organizers must either be proficient in the realms of education *and* finance, or they must put together a team that can understand and manage both aspects effectively. In part, the Georgia law regarding charter school finances states that:

-- One of the factors that may lead to the termination of a charter is a failure to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management. O.C.G.A. § 20-2-2068 (2) (c).

-- In addition, charter schools will be subject to an annual financial audit in the manner specified in the charter. O.C.G.A. § 20-2-2065 (7).

**QBE/FTE Funding**

A school's main source of income will be the per-pupil payments it receives from the state and district. Other possible funding sources include public and private grants, federal entitlements, some types of fees, contracting out services, and loans. Georgia law states in O.C.G.A. § 20-2-2068.1:

"(a)A local charter school shall be included in the allotment of QBE formula earnings, applicable QBE grants, applicable nonQBE state grants, and applicable federal grants to the local school system in which the local charter school is located under Article 6 of this chapter. The local board and the state board shall treat a conversion charter school no less favorably than other local schools located within the applicable local school system unless otherwise provided by law. The local board and the state board shall treat a start-up charter school no less favorably than other local schools within the applicable local system with respect to the provision of funds for instruction and school administration and, where feasible, transportation, food services, and building programs.

(b) QBE formula earnings, applicable QBE grants, applicable nonQBE state grants, and applicable federal grants earned by a local charter school shall be distributed to the local charter school by the local board; provided, however, that state equalization grant earnings shall be distributed as provided in subsection (c) of this Code section. The local charter school shall report enrolled students in a manner consistent with Code Section 20-2-160.

(c) In addition to the earnings set out in subsection (b) of this Code section local tax revenue shall be earned by a local charter school and calculated as follows:

(1) Determine the amount of funds earned by students enrolled in the local charter school as calculated by the Quality Basic Education Formula pursuant to Code Section 20-2-160;

(2) Determine the amount of funds earned by all students in the public schools of the local school system, including any charter schools that receive local tax revenue, as calculated by the Quality Basic Education Formula;

(3) Divide the amount obtained in paragraph (1) of this subsection by the amount obtained in paragraph (2) of this subsection; and

(4) Multiply the quotient obtained in paragraph (3) of this subsection by the school system´s local tax revenue.

The product obtained in paragraph (4) of this subsection shall be the amount of local funds to be distributed to the local charter school by the local board; provided, however, that nothing in this subsection shall preclude a charter petitioner and a local board of education from specifying in the charter a greater amount of local funds to be provided by the local board to the local charter school if agreed upon by all parties to the charter. Local funds so earned shall be distributed to the local charter school by the local board. Where feasible and where services are provided, funds for transportation, food service programs, and construction projects shall also be distributed to the local charter school as earned. In all other fiscal matters, including applicable federal allotments, the local board shall treat the local charter school no less favorably than other local schools located within the applicable school system.

(d) QBE formula earnings, applicable QBE grants, applicable nonQBE state grants, and applicable federal grants that are earned by a state chartered special school shall be

distributed to the local board of the local school system in which the state chartered special school is located which shall distribute the same amount to the state chartered special school; provided, however, that a state chartered special school shall not be included in the calculation and distribution of the local school system´s equalization grant unless the voters of the local school system have approved the use of local tax revenue to support the state chartered special school in accordance with subsection (e) of this Code section. If such approval has been given, state equalization grant earnings shall be earned for the state chartered special school and shall be distributed as provided in subsection (f) of this Code section. The local board shall not be responsible for the fiscal management, accounting, or oversight of the state chartered special school. The state chartered special school shall report enrolled students in a manner consistent with Code Section 20-2-160. Any data required to be reported by the state chartered special school shall be submitted directly by the school to the appropriate state agency. Where feasible, the state board shall treat a state chartered special school no less favorably than other public schools within the state with respect to the provision of funds for transportation and building programs."

**Calculating FTE**

Predicting the amount of money a school will be allotted is one of the most difficult, yet crucial aspects of a charter school's operation. There are sixteen funding categories for students in Georgia, and the amounts of funding in each are determined by students' age, cost to educate, special needs, etc. The Georgia Department of Education provides yearly FTE Guidelines and Documentation through the Office of Budget Services. Below is a general FTE overview of funding:

**FTE Weight   X   #of FTE's   X   Base Amount FY 2002 ($2292.90)   =   Allotment**

Exact payment dates and procedures may vary between school systems.  In the Atlanta Public School System, for example schools are required to submit monthly invoices by grade of their actual monthly enrollment. They are then supposed to be paid the actual enrollment amounts based on the FTE program codes.  If reports are timely, payments should be made within about 10-15 days.  An example of a fictitious 105-student Atlanta middle school's funding process (for an entire year) follows:

| **FTE Weight** | | **# of FTE's** | | **Base Amount $2292.90** | | **Allotment** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grades 6-8<br>1.1114000 | X | 105 | X | $2292.90 | = | $267,574.55 |

Most QBE funding will not be available until after the school opens (this does not include money obtained specifically for start-up purposes).  Significant expenses are incurred, however, long before the school opens.  The Charter Schools Development Center at California State University Sacramento has developed a chart detailing the hypothetical start-up costs of a school after its charter has been approved.

**Other sources of Funding:**

QBE funding is the main source of a school's revenue for day-to-day operations. Charter schools, however, as opposed to traditional district schools, have many special projects such as facility acquisition/upkeep, growth of the school, special curricular programs, etc., that they have to pay for, usually with less money than traditional district

schools. Therefore, schools may need additional income sources. In a 1999 study, the Center for Washington Area Studies at George Washington University stated that,

"There are four outlets that public charter schools potentially can utilize to secure additional financial support. The options are (1) exert pressure on government to raise the funding levels; (2) find ways to supplement regular governmental funding, e.g. through the pursuit of grants, donations and private loans; (3) discover efficiencies that allow them to provide comparable services at a lower cost (e.g. contracting out; economies of scale; new technologies); or (4) reduce costs by sacrificing some of the range or quality of services they initially promised."

Some of these options are discussed below:

**Grants**

There are many state and federal grant programs available for charter schools. Additionally, private organizations, especially ones located in the school's area, may have an interest in supporting a school's educational program. The Georgia Department of Education provides the following list of <u>funding sources</u>, which charter school organizers may pursue to secure additional funds.

**Federal Entitlements**

Federal money is also available if a school serves certain student populations (Title I money for low-income, bilingual, or special ed students, for example). The U.S.

Department of Education has published a guidebook entitled <u>"Accessing Federal Funds"</u> which details federal funding programs useful specifically to charter schools.

**Fees**

      As public schools, charter schools may not charge tuition for attendance, as private schools do. It may be possible, however, to raise additional funds in creative ways, such as charging fees for special activities, athletics, or trips, just as traditional public schools do.

**Contracting Services**

      It is important to remember that schools are responsible for services not only at the school building level, but also for support services provided at the district level. These services must either be provided and paid for by the charter school or negotiated with the school district.

      Schools may be able to have outside companies, or nearby school districts provide services cheaper than a school would be able to provide itself.  Some examples are accounting, custodial, business, and food services.  Douglas County Public Schools, in Colorado, for example,

"adopted a businesslike approach to its charter schools.  The charters were obliged to buy only a few services (such as liability insurance and fiscal audits) from the system; the rest were displayed on a menu with a dozen and a half items priced on a per-student basis,

from intra-district mail service for $2.62 per pupil per annum to special education at $355" (*Charter Schools in Action* p.194).

**Loans**

Because of the nature of charter schools, good loans may be hard to come by. Uncertain futures and no credit history make charter schools look risky to potential investors, but local banks may be willing to work out some type of arrangement. Another important factor to consider here is the start-up cost involved with a charter school. While accruing some debt to acquire a facility may be unavoidable, it is best to try to avoid deficit spending in the daily operation of a school.

**Facilities rental**

In some cases, it may be possible to rent out space in the school to community groups on nights and weekends when the school will not be in regular use. School property would have to be secured, and possibly parts of the building locked, but this could help maximize the use of the facility and provide an additional source of income.

**FACILITIES**

One of the most difficult factors in starting a school is finding the facility in which to house it. Some start-up money is available to school organizers in Georgia, but not enough for the outright purchase of a building. Therefore, finding the best possible facility demands creativity on the part of the school organizers. Following are some suggestions for finding and acquiring a suitable facility:

**Share existing but unused district school space**

Often it is possible to find some space that a district no longer uses to house a charter school. This may require some renovation/adaptation to fit the charter school's purpose, but such a building should already be in compliance with school building codes. Sometimes it may be possible to share space with a private school as well. For example, the Neighborhood Charter School in Atlanta is located in one of Atlanta Public Schools' oldest buildings, Slaton Elementary School in Grant Park, though the charter school itself must pay for renovations.

**Use other vacant municipal or state buildings**

Other spaces may exist that could house a school, but these may also need to be altered to meet building code requirements for schools, in addition to other renovations.

**Form partnerships with nearby facilities**

Nearby recreational facilities, such as pools, or the YMCA, may allow schools to use their facilities during the school day, when they are not very busy. In selecting a site, school organizers should definitely take into consideration any area facilities or organizations they could form partnerships with to provide activities/services/space, and save the school the little money it has.

**Form partnerships with local colleges and universities**

A school may be able to be housed in unused classrooms at a local college or university. In addition, such institutions have excellent human and material resources to

supplement what a school can provide its students itself.  The Central Education Center in Newnan, for example, shares space and a program with West Central Technical College.

Another main problem regarding facilities, especially with start-up charter schools, is the fact that neither local, state, nor federal funds can be used for capital funding for buildings.  Some companies, for example the NCB Development Corporation, are willing to work with charter schools in developing facilities.  Another resource is SchoolFacilities.com, which provides knowledge and resources to facility professionals and suppliers in the educational facilities industry.

John Dolan of the Pioneer Institute has published a very helpful paper on charter school facilities and finance entitled "Charter School Facility Financing: Constraints and Options" which provides detailed information about finding, choosing, and affording suitable spaces for charter schools.


**BUSINESS PLAN**

While charter school founders often have their educational ideas firmly in mind, and possess the skills to implement them, the business side of running a charter school is often neglected or misunderstood.  In any case, every charter school should hire an accountant/business manager to handle financial issues.  The Charter Friends National Network has developed a sample business plan, annual operating budget, and long-term plan to assist charter organizers with this important facet of charter school creation, operation and survival, that may be used as a general guide:

**A Basic Business Plan for Charter Schools**

The charter school business plan is a management tool. When developed and used properly, it is one of the most effective communication tools used to obtain grants or loans for your charter school whether it comes from traditional lenders or the philanthropic community. It also can assist the school developer(s) in achieving his/her goals by identifying financial needs and/or problems early in the school planning process. The charter school business plan should reflect the school's developers' ideas clearly and succinctly and/or could be a component of a larger school wide strategic plan that addresses the school's short and long-term plans in more detail.

Before you start developing your business plan you might ask yourself the following questions. Although some of these questions may seem too simple for some, they might be helpful to newer charter school developers. <u>Do not attempt to answer these questions as part of your written Business Plan.</u>

1. Have you worked in a school and/or educational setting similar to the one you want to start?

2. Have you had any business and/or education training in school?

3. Do you know how much money you will need to get the school started?

4. Have you decided on a marketing plan?

5. Have you talked with other school developers/operators about what they think of the school?

6. Can you determine the amount of money you should receive in terms of revenues per student?

7. Have you tried to find out how well schools similar to the one you want to open are doing in your community and in the rest of the country?

8. If you need to hire someone to help you, do you know where to look?

9. Do you know what benefits to provide?

10. Do you have a plan for training your employees?

11. Have you talked with the parents and schools (both public and private) in the area?

12. Have you determined the type of payment you intend to accept for student fees, etc.?

13. Have you talked with an insurance agent about what kind of insurance you need?

14. Do you know what equipment and supplies you will need and how much they will cost?

15. Can you save money by buying second hand equipment?

16. Have you compared the prices and credit terms of different suppliers?

**SAMPLE BUSINESS PLAN OUTLINE**

(Suggested length: no more than 3 pages)

NOTE: <u>The following section to the Business Plan is not required as part of your charter school grant application. However, it is encouraged that you develop such a plan for your school. Traditional lenders and others who are requested to support your school over time will be impressed with such a plan.</u>

I. Summary

A. School Description

*1. Name and address*

*2. School description (grade levels, etc.)*

*3. Mission statement*

*4. Instructional focus*

*5. Governance/Administrative structure*

- *Charter accountability (describe briefly how your school plans to remain viable at renewal)*
- *Relationship with charter granting agency*

II. Market Analysis

A. Description of the area or market/ district(s) that the school will serve

B. Target market/student population (what segment of district's population you plan to serve?)

C. Competition - other school(s) seeking the same student population to include private, public, magnet, parochial and other charter schools


III. Marketing Strategy

A. Overall strategy (awareness for students and parents)

B. Specific admission and recruiting plans and policies


IV. Management Plan

A. Form of business organization (e.g., for profit or nonprofit corporation)

B. Board of Directors (Owners, partners, or governing board)

C. Administrator(s): organization chart and responsibilities (if applicable)

D. Resumes of key personnel (omit if included with your application)

E. Staffing plan/number of employees.

F. Facility plan/ planned capital improvements (omit if included with your application)

G. Operating plan/schedule of work for next year.


V. Financial Data

    A.  The appropriate financial statements described below. Your Business

        Plan will include at least the Annual Operating Budget and the Three-to-

Five Year Projections.

B. Explanations of assumptions underlying the budget and projections

C. Explanation of use and impact of new funds (if seeking a loan or grant)

**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR BUSINESS PLAN**

When preparing projected financial statements for your charter school business plan you must start with basic assumptions for income and expenses. These assumptions for income and expenses should be detailed in your charter school business plan with supporting documentation derived from the market study and the market strategy. The projected financial statements should indicate financial changes in your revenue cycle. For instance, if your school receives fees and funds from the state during a specific time, i.e. quarterly, revenue during that period will be greater. Your financial projections should indicate the fluctuation in income and expenses.

There are four types of financial statements that should be included in your business plan:

**1. * Annual Operating Budget (required in your business plan)**

The annual operating budget will take your income minus expenses and equal either a surplus or a deficit. The budget would show revenues by source (e.g., state aid, federal aid, grants, fees, etc.) and expenditure by object (e.g., salaries, benefits, rent, materials, books, services, professional training, utilities, insurance, etc.) for the first year of operations (or current fiscal year for a preexisting school).

<u>Sample Annual Operating Budget</u>

**2. * Cash Flow Statement (required with this application <u>unless your annual budget</u> <u>above is broken into monthly columns).</u>**

The cash flow statement will show the cash generated and collected from school operations. This statement will utilize the same income and expense as the annual operating budget, however, it breaks the information down into monthly or quarterly columns showing whether the school will have enough money to pay its bills at the end of each month or quarter. Naturally, if the school's annual revenues arrive at the school later than its expenditures must be paid, the school will need "working capital" (e.g., a short-term loan) in order to pay its expenses on time.

<u>Sample Monthly Cash Flow Projection</u>

**3. * Three-to-Five Year Projections of income and expenses --(required in your business plan).**

A three or five year projection of anticipated income and expenses will show the planned growth, development and needs of the school over time.

A rule of thumb when forecasting; "be as conservative and as realistic as possible."

<u>Sample Five Year Projection</u>

**4. * For those schools that are independent of their charter sponsor: An Audited Balance Sheet of the most recent year, prepared by an external, certified public accountant (if the school has been open and audited after its first year).**

Schools that are in the planning state, or the first year of operations, and do not yet have an annual audit report, should develop a set of financial management policies. These policies would specify who is responsible for preparing and monitoring the school's budget and how the "powers of the purse" are distributed within their school among board members, staff, and others.

During the budget planning process, it is helpful to perform "what if" analyses to determine the effects of different enrollments. For example, a break even analysis would determine the lowest enrollment that would still allow the school to be financially viable. In addition to overall student enrollment, variation in the enrollments of different grade levels should also be contemplated.

For a Georgia-specific example, a <u>revenue and salary summary</u> for the Neighborhood Charter School, a K-5 charter school in Atlanta, are available online. As the law states, charter schools will be subject to financial audits to ensure proper use of public funds, though schools should make their financial states publicly available on their own. The Florida Charter School Resource Center has developed a <u>financial audit checklist</u> for charter schools, to help them be prepared when the time comes for their school's financial order to be assessed.

# CHAPTER 5

## ACCOUNTABILITY AND ASSESSMENT

**Charter School Fact:**

**Charter schools in Georgia are required to administer all the same state assessments as traditional public schools.**

"The genius of the charter school concept is that it is demanding with respect to results but relaxed about how those results are produced; tight as to ends, loose as to means. Yet success in attaining results can only be found if there are clear standards, good assessments, and consequences for everyone" (*Charter Schools in Action* p.71).

The main appeals of the charter school movement are the ability to organize a school around a core educational plan and curriculum, to control the local school budget and staff, and to be free from constraining district and state regulations. With this freedom, however, comes a responsibility to ensure that public money is being spent on quality educations for students. Rather than the traditional system of quality control, or what Chester Finn, Bruno Manno, and Gregg Vanourek call "accountability-via-regulation," or compliance with myriad rules, charter schools have the opportunity and the responsibility to provide what Finn, Manno, and Vanourek call "accountability-via-transparency":

"That means a regimen in which so much is known about each school that its various watchers and constituents (including families, staff, board members, sponsor, the press, and rival schools) can and do routinely 'regulate' it through market-style mechanisms rather than command-and-control structures.  If flaky people are operating a dubious school with a weird curriculum, classrooms are out of control, money is being squandered (or pocketed by the school head), or test scores are sagging, this will be no secret to its community.  Either the school changes its ways or it finds itself without students (or without its charter renewal).  Conversely, a school that works well will find people beating a path to its doors" (*Charter Schools in Action* p.128).

**No Child Left Behind**

Though charter schools allow for a great deal of local control, they will be held accountable to parents, to their authorizers, and to the federal government.  As public schools, the No Child Left Behind Act will have significant effects on charter schools. "Charter Schools and the New Accountability provisions in NCLB," describes some of these effects specifically:

"…while all public schools, including charter schools, will be subject to the new accountability requirements, NCLB maintains traditional federal deference to state law when it comes to determining exactly how charter schools should be held accountable. The Act provides in Section 1111(b)(2)(K), that:

*The accountability provisions under this Act shall be overseen for charter schools in accordance with State charter school law.*

This clear statement is amplified by report language that deals more directly with the complicated question of charter oversight. Congressional negotiators approved a framework for state and authorizer action reflecting four discrete, but connected, strands of thought about what Congress intends.

First, the language reinforces the important point that charter schools are encompassed within the Act and subject to its provisions on standards, assessments, reports, "Adequate Yearly Progress" (AYP), and corrective actions (as indicated by references to the specific sections of the Act) on these points:

Charter schools are public schools and therefore subject to the same accountability requirements of this Act as they apply to other public schools, including Sections 1111 and 1116, as developed in each state.

Second, the report directly acknowledges the role of authorizers as the governing bodies directly overseeing charter schools, in effect saying that nothing the Act says about state or LEA authority should supersede the authorizer role:

However, there is no intent to replace or duplicate the role authorized chartering agencies, as established under each state's charter school law, in overseeing the Act's accountability requirements for the charter schools that they authorize.

Third, the report reminds authorizers that they, too, have important performance obligations under the Act:

Authorized chartering agencies should be held accountable for carrying out their oversight responsibilities as determined by each state through its charter school law and other applicable state laws.

Fourth, the paragraph ends on a cautionary note – that in holding authorizers accountable, states should avoid a cookie-cutter approach that would inhibit the very purposes for which charter laws were passed:

*This should be done in ways that do not inhibit or discourage the approval or oversight of innovative, high-quality charter schools."*

Charter schools are accountable to the public for test scores and progress toward the goals laid out in their charters – they must be "transparent". The Georgia Charter School Act states that,

"A charter school shall provide an annual report to parents or guardians, the community, and the state board which indicates the progress made by the charter school in the

previous year in implementing its charter goals. A local charter school shall also provide an annual report to the local board." O.C.G.A. § 20-2-2067.1 (c).

**Accountability Plans**

In order for this transparency to be possible and meaningful, schools must set standards and goals for students according to the philosophy laid out in the charter, measure student progress toward those goals, and report their findings publicly. An accountability plan will help make this process more clear, and will lay the groundwork for renewal of the charter. The US Charter Schools website identifies four components for an accountability plan:

- *Student performance*: Is the academic program a success? Do students demonstrate satisfactory achievement on state or district tests and other measures? Are students making academic gains?

- *Goals in the charter*: Is the school faithful to the terms of its contract, including its mission, goals, and objectives?

- *Operations*: Is the school a viable, well-managed organization? Is it responsibly using public funds? Is it in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations (such as public health and civil rights) not waived for charter schools?

- *Continuous improvement*: Does the school recognize clearly where growth is most essential, and is the total program committed to discovering areas of self-improvement?

**Academic Accountability**

It is important to set standards for students as individuals and the school as a whole. Besides following the Georgia QCC's, a school should have its own explicit academic accountability system.

Generally, an academic accountability system requires three parts: (1) setting measurable standards and goals, (2) assessing and monitoring progress towards those goals, and (3) using the data to identify strengths to be improved upon and weaknesses to be corrected. (US Charter Schools).

The Massachusetts Charter School Resource Center offers the following process to assist charter school founders, planners, and community groups as they create an assessment system:

- Create realistic, measurable, and publicly known student standards for the school.
- Develop a sequenced curriculum that is aligned to the school's standards.
- Select and align appropriate measurement tools--external and internal--and benchmarks for the standards.
- Develop an internal data management system to provide staff with information for curricular and instructional decision-making.
- Develop a communication system for informing and educating the entire school community about the school standards, curriculum, and performance measurement.

Additionally, the Charter Schools Development Center offers the following suggestions in designing standards, aligning them to the curriculum, and measuring them for success:

"The outcomes should be relatively few in number, between five to ten, in order to provide a focused set of targets for learning.

Ideally, the outcomes will call for critical thinking and actual application of learning, and combine traditional academic outcomes with communication and lifelong learning competencies. Clear outcomes will allow for evaluation and reporting based on whether or not students can successfully demonstrate significant learning results; not on the activities, assignments, attendance, and aptitudes that lead up to them."

**Assessment Mandates**

No standardized test can give a complete picture of a school or of an individual student – tests are not perfect measures. They are, however, powerful indicators of a school's progress and can be useful tools in the process of school evaluations. According to the Charter Schools Development Center,

"Assessments are sources of data. The options include multiple choice tests, essays, portfolios of work samples, exhibitions, projects, and actual performances, as well as data sources such as attendance records and community service logs. Each data source has utility for a specific purpose. While it is increasingly evident that the old, standardized, norm-referenced test provides an incomplete and even inaccurate measure of student progress, moving to performance tests or portfolios alone is not the answer. No one assessment tool is perfect; some may even be simply trendy. Given the research on

various styles of learning, an argument can be made that the most effective system of assessments will depend on multiple data sources, matched to complete tasks.

Most charter schools intend to use portfolios or performances in some form, but their charters reveal little evidence of the depth of their understanding of these assessment techniques. Portfolios are useful to provide a picture of a student's work overtime, particularly written or visual work; performances are useful for demonstrations involving oral presentations and problem solving situations. A mix of tools rounds out the picture of the achievement of the student. By utilizing a variety of assessment instruments and data sources, schools increase the likelihood of gaining accurate information for a particular student and, therefore painting a defensible picture of student and school performance."

**Measurement**

Georgia charter schools are required to administer the same <u>state-mandated assessments</u> as other public schools.  Regarding such testing, the law states:

"A charter school must participate in the state mandated accountability assessment program as required in O.C.G.A. § 20-14-30 through 41 and specifically described in O.C.G.A § 20-2-281." O.C.G.A. § 160-4-9-.04 (5) (c).

While how the results are initially interpreted should be fair, taking into account the short history of many charter schools and the fact that many target low-achieving students specifically, charter schools' student achievement gains (or losses) *will be measured*, and the schools *will be held accountable* for their results.  This is a safeguard,

but it is also an opportunity for charter schools to prove their value and educational integrity. Regarding student performance and measurement, Georgia law states:

"The State Board of Education shall promulgate rules, regulations, policies, and procedures to govern the contents of a charter petition, provided that the following shall be required at a minimum:

(1) The state board shall require that a petition designate the performance to be improved and how it will be improved through the waiver of specifically identified state and local rules, regulations, policies, and procedures, or provisions of this title other than the provisions of this article;

(2) The state board shall require that a petition describe how it will measure the improvement in such performance and over what period of time, provided that such requirement shall not waive the accountability provisions of Part 3 of Article 2 of Chapter 14 of this title; and

(3) The state board shall require that a petition demonstrate how any such waiver does not undermine and is consistent with the intent of the waived state and local rules, regulations, policies, and procedures, or the provisions of this title." O.C.G.A. § 20-2-2063.

Data collection will be necessary to accurately assess a school's performance and improvement, and to be sure that standards are correctly aligned to the curriculum, so additional studies may be useful. Some examples of assessment tools include:

- External tests (for example, Stanford Achievement Tests, Metropolitan Achievement Tests, California Achievement Tests, Iowa Test of Basic Skills)

have been created by an outside group and are not specifically designed for the curriculum. Such tests are commonly administered to large numbers of students across the state or country. They are useful in evaluating mastery of core skills, tracking performance over time, and providing a larger context by which to evaluate students and school performance.

- Internal tools are often designed by teachers and closely tied to the individual school's standards and curriculum. They include such options as portfolios, juried assessments/exhibitions, and diagnostic tests.

Schools should utilize both external and internal assessments, and should try to make internal assessment tools as rigorous, valid, and reliable as external tests (Pioneer Institute).

Each charter school will be, by design, unique, and different in some ways from traditional public schools, but they are all still accountable for results and will ultimately be judged facing higher stakes than traditional public schools (i.e., possible revocation of their charter). Therefore,

"It is important to note that the accountability responsibilities of charter schools do not end with drafting the charter proposal. After the charter is approved and the school is open, charter school operators should continually amass school performance data, adding this information to their file and presenting interim reports (i.e. annual reports) to their [authorizer, the school community, funders, the media, and the general public]. Then, when facing renewal or otherwise undergoing scrutiny, there

will be no need to scramble for    evidence of school performance nor create an accountability document from scratch.

Many charter school educators believe that exclusive reliance on standardized test results in an accountability plan offers a constricted view of student and school performance, and fails to describe the ambitious range of learning goals that charter schools commonly set for their students. Schools that do not wish to be judged solely on the basis of standardized test scores, however, must develop additional, concrete learning standards and valid ways of measuring and demonstrating student performance against these standards" (Illinois Charter School Resource Guide).

**Financial Accountability**

Under the law, charter schools in Georgia are subject to annual financial audits just as traditional public schools are.  According to  O.C.G.A. § 20-2-2065 (7), a charter school will be "subject to an annual financial audit in the manner specified in the charter."  Schools' financial reports should be made available to the public.  Parents, government entities, and the community all have a right to know how public money is being spent, and financial transparency provides charter schools with yet another opportunity to prove their integrity.

**Accreditation**

A charter school may apply for accreditation with any organization its leaders choose. The state does not administer accreditation. Following are links to some accreditation agencies:

American Academy for Liberal Education (AALE)

Georgia Accrediting Commission, Inc. (GAC)

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS)


**Other Resources**

In 1999, the Colorado League of Charter Schools developed a year-by-year Accountability Plan to guide schools from drafting their proposals through charter renewal after five years. The report gives a timeline and outlines ways to set initial goals, collect data, respond to deficiencies, and report findings to the public, and can be viewed here.

Massachusetts' Pioneer Institute has published the Charter School Accountability Action Guide, a handbook which provides instructions for setting up and implementing an accountability plan.

True accountability is one of the key differences between charter schools and traditional public schools, and is vital to the integrity of the charter school movement in Georgia and across the nation. "Compromises on accountability and public openness should not be tolerated" (New York Charter School Resource Center).

# CHAPTER 6

## GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

**Charter School Fact:**

**Georgia charter schools must have a board of directors to oversee policy decisions.**

**Boards of Directors**

Generally, there will be three boards involved with a charter school:

1. the local school board, to which the school's board and the school itself are accountable

2. the nonprofit entity that applies for, receives, and holds the charter

3. a policy-making board that governs the school's operations

The governing/policy-making board may be partially made up of the school's founding group, but it is a separate group from the nonprofit entity that actually holds the charter.

The members of a charter school's policy-making board of directors are the primary stewards of the school, both for educational and financial purposes. According to several charter school resource centers around the nation, some general responsibilities of a board of directors may include (but are not limited to):

■ **Defining, ratifying, and promoting the school's mission statement.** Authorize curricular guidelines or specific programs, or delegate such authority, and evaluate the organization's overall effectiveness.

- **Setting school policies.**  Approve any management, operational, and service contracts, and set personnel policies, including: establishing qualification criteria for employees, forming dismissal procedures, approving codes of conduct, and authorizing and approving collective negotiations.

- **Planning and financial oversight.**  Review and approve the organization's programs annually and engage in longer-range planning to establish the school's general direction for the future (and possible changes in that direction); establish fiscal policies and boundaries; approve the budget; exercise financial control; review and approve major commitments of funds.

- **Fundraising.**  Ensure that the school has adequate funds to meet its commitments, oversee fundraising committees, and approve an annual fundraising plan.

- **Hire and supervise the administration.**  Hire and supervise (and fire, if necessary) the chief executive/school director/principal.

- **Community relations.**  Represent the school to the larger community; develop and maintain a relationship and communications with the public to promote the work of the school; hear complaints from any individual or group alleging any violation of the of the Charter Schools Act, the charter itself, or any other provision of law relating to the management or operation of the charter school.

The Charter Friends National Network gives the following models as examples of ways to structure a charter school board:

**1.School committee or council composed of parents, teachers, administrators and others.**

This model draws inspiration from school shared decision-making structures and site based management councils that have operated in various forms in traditional district public schools. According to Gruber, this model may be among the most democratic and representative as it is inclusive, fully representational and delegates management and oversight to one or more of its members. Those in charge have a clear understanding of procedural matters and full inclusion in the decision-making process is essential for this model's effectiveness. Shared leadership with a division of labor according to talent and expertise is seen as the best way to serve the needs of students, families and the community as a whole. The committee or council meetings are usually open to the community and anyone is welcome to attend. This spirit of openness and inclusion are guiding principles in this form of governance and in many cases decisions are reached through consensus rather than taking a formal vote. Members may be elected and/or appointed by various groups (teachers, parents, administrators, school district officials, union representatives and others) and serve at the pleasure of those constituents. They may have defined or rotating terms of service so that others may participate in the governing process. Among the criteria for membership is the desire to implement the mission of the school and the commitment to be actively involved in the decision making process that bears responsibility for the success of the program.

**2. A board of directors with a structure of officers, by-laws, and delegation of management to a principal, chief administrator/director or head of school.**

This model draws inspiration from the approach to board governance traditionally found in nonprofit organizations. In this model, there is a clear distinction made between the governance work of the board of directors and the administrative/management work of the paid staff.

In this model, the charter school is a legally incorporated entity governed by state statutes and IRS regulations governing nonprofit, tax-exempt organizations. The board of directors is responsible for governing the school. The Trustees each have a personal fiduciary duty to look out for the long-term well being of the school. The Board is responsible for addressing major matters including: setting the school's general policies and overall curriculum policies; approving and monitoring the annual budget and financial procedures; fund-raising; hiring and evaluating the school's principal; approving personnel policies and monitoring their implementation by the principal; assuring that the charter school fulfills its charter contract; and, strategic planning.

The board is composed of a broad cross-section of the school community and community-at-large and, in addition to professionals and community leaders. In some charter schools, the board will also include the principal, representatives of teaching staff, students and parents leadership. The board generally meets as a whole on a monthly basis. It operates through various committees, including an executive committee consisting of officers elected to manage the board and help monitor school policies.

The board is not involved in handling the day-to-day details of running the school, dealing with specific personnel issues, or addressing individual student needs. Consistent

with the best practices of nonprofit corporation management, the board delegates the responsibility for running the charter school and implementing the board's policies to a principal or charter school administrator.  Where appropriate, the charter school administrator will delegate some responsibility to other administrators, teachers, and students.

**3.Owner/Operator, either non-profit foundation or for-profit, with or without a board or committee.**

In some cases, in this model, an advisory committee functions to provide information and support or a board of directors of the corporation or foundation serve in that capacity. Often a larger holding group or company may operate several schools in different locations but still depend upon a local group for advice and guidance. However, decisions rest with the chief executive officer who is the one responsible for the operation of the school. This individual is hired with a job description that outlines areas and lines of responsibility and accountability. This model follows a more structured chain of command that is akin to a business/corporate model of organization. The flow of responsibility follows a chart in which responsibilities are assigned or delegated to specific departments. The managers or directors of those divisions are accountable for what happens within their respective department or division.

The full text of the Charter Friends National Network's Creating an Effective Charter School Governing Board Guidebook is available online.

**Planning Ahead**

In developing a governance structure for a school, the Illinois Charter School Resource Handbook suggests that:

"By planning ahead, you can help ensure an effective and healthy governance structure for your school, which should focus on students' needs and interests, rather than on adults' divergent agendas and interpersonal conflicts. Following are some ideas for how to do so:

1. Clear articulation and constant reiteration of the school's mission statement will reinforce the school community's common vision, and thus minimize disagreements regarding the school's direction. However, above and beyond the mission statement, the charter proposal should include carefully designed governance processes and structures aligned with the school's legal, operational, and organizational systems.

2. Consult with experienced school developers or consultants to:

■ Establish comprehensive bylaws for governing body

■ Determine and articulate how policy and administrative decisions will be made and implemented

■ Establish clear and agreed-upon processes to govern and guide board selection, training, and ongoing development; board/school communications and decision-

making; and the respective roles and responsibilities of board members and the school principal or director.

- Define the roles of staff, parents, and community

**Board Membership**

Suggestions for choosing and recruiting board members:

- An effective board of directors is built upon a number of key practices. The first is a thoughtful nominations and recruitment process that is viewed as part of a broader effort to identify, involve, and develop board leadership. The second is the presence of an executive committee that facilitates effective decision-making on the part of a board is a whole. The third practice is establishment of a committee structure. The fourth is a process for periodic evaluation of board performance. These processes and structures reinforce each other and lay the groundwork for board effectiveness (Charter Friends National Network).

- A charter school Board of Directors can have as many or as few members as its founders feel is appropriate and necessary to provide proper oversight and guidance. While it may be important to have representatives for each stakeholder in the school (educators, parents, school administrators, financial backers, founders, community leaders, etc.) on the Board, the Board shouldn't be so large that decisions on policy are unmanageably divisive and constantly hard to reach (New York Charter School Resource Center).

■ Carefully consider membership of the board. Look for a range of personal and professional skills and potential contributions from board members, and expand slowly. (Many groups begin with the founders as the board and gradually add new members) (Pioneer Institute).

■ It is critical that your school be served by a board of directors who bring a wide range of knowledge and experience, including **educational, financial, legal, management, fundraising, and political expertise.** Avoid constructing boards that lack experience or are composed entirely of school "insiders" (e.g., staff and parents) or the opposite extreme, only "outsiders" (Illinois Charter School Resource Handbook).

**Decision-making**

Though much of it is delegated, the board is ultimately responsible for and has authority over decisions made regarding the charter school.  Additionally, the board may only meet for a few hours a month, which means the time for making vital decisions that concern the school is limited.  Therefore, effective and efficient decision-making practices and procedures are essential for a charter school's success.  US Charter Schools suggests some strategies to aid in this process:

■ Form an **executive committee** to plan meeting agendas, make decisions on behalf of the full board, and serve as a communication link with the full board.

- Effectively **delegate** to committees and the school director/principal to allow the board to focus on major policy decisions.

- Create a **decision-making flowchart** and clear bylaws outlining exactly who is responsible for what.

- Create an **annual calendar of major board decisions** so the board can maintain focus on important issues in a timely fashion.

US Charter Schools also provides a list of <u>general governing board resources</u> for building the board foundation, identifying, recruiting, orienting, and training board members, and board member motivation, accountability, and assessment.

**Conflicts of Interest**

School honesty and integrity are important both to individual charter schools, and to the charter school movement as a whole. Regarding conflicts of interest, the law states that charter schools will be:

"Subject to all federal, state, and local rules, regulations, court orders, and statutes relating to civil rights; insurance; the protection of the physical health and safety of school students, employees, and visitors; conflicting interest transactions; and the prevention of unlawful conduct" O.C.G.A. § 20-2-2065 (5).

Maintaining a high level of ethics in the overall governance of a school will help refute arguments that charter school leaders take advantage of their freedoms and so need

more oversight and regulation.  An important aspect of this endeavor is avoiding conflicts of interest, about which the Illinois Charter School Handbook gives the following advice: "In establishing your governance structure and executing your school plans, you must scrupulously **avoid conflicts of interest**. This responsibility is the essence of integrity and public accountability in a nonprofit organization and public enterprise. Thus, **board members should not have any financial interest in the school or profit financially from its operations, either directly or indirectly**. If situations arise where this cannot be avoided, board members must abstain from voting on issues in which they may have an economic interest. Similarly, the requirements of checks and balances and adequate fiscal controls prohibit board members from performing certain functions or services for the school, such as accounting and bookkeeping.

Some charter schools may choose an unconventional governance structure in which certain staff members also serve on the board of directors. Conflicts of interest can occur very easily in these situations, so if you are planning such an arrangement, you will have to devote scrupulous attention and care to avoid them, through written policy as well as actual practice. (Also, note that in order to obtain tax-exempt status, your school must have at least three board members who are not drawing a salary from the school.) As a simple example, staff who are serving on their governing boards should not vote on issues relating to their own compensation. Likewise, the board of directors must have the authority to remove the school director or principal for cause, regardless of whether that person also sits on the board."

**Local Leadership**

Charter schools have the unique opportunity in public education to produce results, however they are accomplished, rather than to simply comply with lists of procedures. Unlike traditional public schools, they will rise or fall based on these results. Unfortunately, "government often follows the opposite formula: it is rigid about how things get done but laid back as to whether the desired results are produced. It is more concerned with procedures than outcomes. Its institutions last forever" (*Charter Schools in Action p. 68*). In order for a charter school to function effectively, its founders and operators must set up some kind of management/administrative structure. This is an opportunity for a school to rework the management aspect of education to fit its mission and philosophy, and to serve students in a more effective fashion than traditional public schools do.

According to the Illinois Charter School Resource Handbook,

A management structure that is common to many successful organizations includes three or four people at the top, such as along the following lines:

Director/Executive

Business/Controller * Program * Operations

or

Director/Executive

Business/Controller * Program * Operations * Fundraising

The Pioneer Institute also provides descriptions of four types of organizational structures as examples:

**School A:** A principal serves as the instructional leader of the school. She is in each class at least briefly each day. Most of her time is spent with faculty on curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. A full-time director of operations manages the school; a director of development works closely with the principal and the board of trustees to develop strategies to support the school's strategic plan. For specific curricular issues, the school hires an education consultant to address specific areas with teachers. The school uses education experts just as it uses lawyers or accountants--for defined projects of limited duration.

**School B:** An executive director manages the school, works closely with the board of trustees and with the external communities in which the school operates. Her work includes fundraising as well as making visible to the public the mission of the school and its academic progress. A curriculum expert works closely with the teaching staff on the school's curriculum, the pedagogy in each classroom, the development of school standards, and the use of assessment data to inform instruction. A business manager performs payroll and related budgetary functions.

**School C:** A rapidly growing school has outgrown its initial administrative structure, and now the principal of the school has asked classroom teachers to take on leadership roles with grade clusters (K-3, 4-6, etc.). She meets with these lead teachers but much of her time is focused on the big picture tasks of strategic planning and the acquisition of

resources and personnel for school programs. She is often asked to speak about charter schools in public forums. Budgetary responsibilities such as payroll are contracted out to a separate business organization.

**School D:** The school is one program within a large social service organization. The executive director of the agency, the principal, two lead teachers, a business manager, parent coordinator, and the development director make up the school's leadership team. The executive director deals with fundraising and the general public; the principal and her staff work closely with the teachers and the parents. The executive director and the principal work together with the board.

**Above all, the goal of both the Board and the school administration, whatever their makeup, should be to maintain the school's focus on student achievement:**

"Revisit the school's mission often. The mission serves to guide decision making. The goal of student achievement remains constant; the strategies used to achieve that goal may change" (Pioneer Institute).

# CHAPTER 7

## STUDENTS, PARENTS, AND COMMUNITY

**Charter School Fact:**

**Georgia charter schools must not charge tuition, require certain test scores or other application criteria, or otherwise discriminate concerning admissions. In case demand exceeds the enrollment capacity of a school, the school must conduct a lottery to determine who will be admitted.**

**Student Admissions**

Charter schools are public schools, and may not "discriminate on any basis that would be illegal if used by a school system." O.C.G.A. § 20-2-2066 (c). Concerning student admissions to charter schools, Georgia law (O.C.G.A. § 20-2-2066) states:

"(a) A local charter school shall enroll students in the following manner:

(1) A local charter school shall enroll any student who resides in the school system in which the local charter

school is located and who submits a timely application as specified in the charter unless the number of

applications exceeds the capacity of a program, class, grade level, or building. In such case, all such applicants

shall have an equal chance of being admitted through a random selection process unless otherwise prohibited by law; provided, however, that a local charter school shall give

enrollment preference to such students who reside in the attendance zone specified in the charter and may give enrollment preference to a sibling of a resident student currently enrolled in the local charter school.

(2) A student who resides outside the school system in which the local charter school is located may not enroll in that local charter school except pursuant to a contractual agreement between the local boards of the school system in which the student resides and the school system in which the local charter school is located. Unless otherwise provided in such contractual agreement, a local charter school may give enrollment preference to a sibling of a nonresident student currently enrolled in the local charter school.

(b) A state chartered special school shall enroll any student who resides in the attendance zone specified in the charter and who submits a timely application as specified in the charter unless the number of applications exceeds the capacity of a program, class, grade level, or building. The period of time during which an application for enrollment may be submitted shall be specified in the charter. In such case, all such applicants shall have an equal chance of being admitted through a random selection process unless otherwise prohibited by law; provided, however, that a state chartered special school may give enrollment preference to a child of a full-time teacher, professional, or other employee of the state chartered special school as provided for in subsection(b) of Code Section 20-2-293 or to a sibling of a student currently enrolled in the state chartered special school.

(c) A charter school shall not discriminate on any basis that would be illegal if used by a school system.

(d) A student may withdraw without penalty from a charter school at any time and enroll in a local school in the school system in which such student resides as may be provided

for by the policies of the local board. A student who is suspended or expelled from a charter school as a result of a disciplinary action taken by a charter school shall be entitled to enroll in a local school within the local school system in which the student resides, if, under the disciplinary policy of the local school system, such student would not have been subject to suspension or expulsion for the conduct which gave rise to the suspension or expulsion. In such instances, the local board shall not be required to independently verify the nature or occurrence of the applicable conduct or any evidence relating thereto."

The admission and enrollment process should, as always with charter schools, be open, fair, and transparent. In case demand exceeds the numbers of available spaces at a school, and a lottery must be conducted, the Illinois Charter School Resource Handbook recommends that schools

"Conduct a well-publicized, public lottery. Schools may wish to have public officials present to supervise or attest to the fairness of the lottery, or to have an outside firm (such as an accounting or auditing firm) conduct the lottery. Applicants who are not admitted should be placed on a waiting list in the order in which they were selected in the lottery."

**Special Education**

A common charge against charter schools is that they do not serve students with disabilities adequately. Because charter schools are public schools, open to all students, they are still responsible for addressing students with special needs. Some schools, such

as the <u>Metro Deaf Charter School</u> in Minnesota, cater specifically to students with certain disabilities.  Most, however, must address the same issues as traditional public schools, with less personnel and resources.  The Pioneer Institute suggests that:

"Parents and children who choose a charter school are choosing a unique program that is explicitly described in the school's charter. All parents, and especially those with a special needs child, should be encouraged to examine a school's curriculum and program very carefully before choosing to apply.  A parent may wish to consider the possibility that the program could replace his or her child's current Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) (a specific written educational plan that must be developed for each special needs student). Parents of a special needs student, however, are not required to give up or modify their child's IEP as a condition for admission to a charter school."

The Georgia Department of Education provides a <u>sample IEP form</u>, as well as <u>questions and answers about IEP's</u>.

To avoid any misunderstandings and to ensure that a charter school will be able to fulfill its mission to all students, it is important that both charter granting agencies and school founders "make sure *before* issuing [or receiving] a charter that the school has addressed this issue in a reasonable way – it has the staff it needs to do what it says it will do and no one is denied admission because of a disability.  That  does not mean that every charter school must accommodate every need of every disabled child.  Regular public schools don't do that either; they may well send a youngster with particular

disabilities to a school across town that is better suited to that child's needs" (*Charter Schools in Action* p. 159).

This does not mean that schools should counsel special education students out, but that they should keep the following in mind while still in the planning stages:

**Table 2: Starting a School with Special Education in Mind**

| **Starting a School with Special Education in Mind** | |
| --- | --- |
| To meet the requirements of students with special needs (learning, developmental, behavioral, emotional, physical), schools will need to plan around the following issues: | |

| | |
| --- | --- |
| **Identification of special needs:**<br><br>• Screening<br>• By whom?<br>• When?<br>• With what tools?<br>• Timeline<br><br>**What type of program:**<br><br>• Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs)<br>• Section 504 Accommodation Plans?<br>• In-class<br>• Pull-out<br><br>**Identification of essential support services:**<br><br>• Reading<br>• Math<br>• Speech/Language and Writing<br>• Occupational Therapy<br>• Special Health Care Support<br>• Group Counseling<br>• Behavioral Counseling<br>• General Guidance Counseling/Vocational Planning<br>• Transportation<br><br>**Identification of staff:**<br><br>• Internal (full- and part-time staff)<br>• External (contracting out) | **Time/Schedule:**<br><br>• Before, during, after school?<br>• Prior to beginning of school year/extended school year<br>• Substitute for other electives<br><br>**Financial/Funding:**<br><br>• State and Federal Startup<br>• State and Federal Allocations<br>• Partnerships/Collaborations<br>• Development<br><br>**Space:**<br><br>• Accessibility<br>• Do you have the space for services to be provided?<br>• On-site/Off-site<br>• Transportation<br>• Partnerships/Collaborations with other local establishments<br><br>**Design and implementation of policies:**<br><br>• Discipline/Suspension (and how it is applied to students with special needs in particular)<br>• Promotion/Retention/Graduation |

| | |
|---|---|
| • On-site/Off-site?<br>• Nurse for distribution of medication (essential)<br>• Partnerships/Collaborations with other agencies/schools<br>• Volunteer support, internships (be careful) | --Eric Friedman, MEd, MSW<br>Academy of the Pacific Rim<br>1 Westinghouse Plaza<br>Hyde Park,MA 02136<br>(617) 361-0050 x22 |

Following are special ed resources from the U.S. Department of Education's website:

Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability

Office of Special Education & Rehabilitative Services

Organizations that can help

Publications

Special Education & Rehabilitative Services

**Family/Community Involvement**

The following is a list of strategies for building strong relationships with the families of students in charter schools and with the surrounding community, and has been compiled from suggestions in the Illinois and  Massachusetts Charter School Resource Handbooks, the New York and Minnesota Charter School Resource Centers, and US Charter Schools:

**Opportunities for Families at School**

**Schools can:**

Create opportunities for volunteering (in the library, games night, fundraisers, field trips, lunch assistance).

Identify particular skills or knowledge that individuals can share with particular classes.

Consider how to include the history of families, the neighborhood, and local community in the school curriculum.

Establish a variety of ways to gather the thoughts and opinions of families on new or changed school policy.

Plan student performances well in advance and give families lots of notice so they can attend.

Invite families to hear outside speakers or to attend other special programs for students.

Hold a family orientation each year prior to the opening of school.

Seek to involve families in the design and start-up phases, learning about their needs and expectations.

**Parents/family members can:**

Share information with a student or class about a hobby or career.

Share information with students about a country you have visited or lived in.

Help coach an athletic team.

Help build something (such as a loft in a classroom, playground, outdoor garden or other project to beautify the outside of the school).

Help coach students competing in an academic competition (such as Odyssey of the Mind, Future Problem Solving, Math Masters, etc.).

## Opportunities Around the Community

**Parents/family members can:**

Help set up an internship or apprenticeship or community service opportunity for a student at your business, organization or agency.

Host a one-day "shadow study" for one or a small group of students about your career.

Contact a particular local business or organization regarding a possible partnership with the school.

## School-to-Family Communication

**Schools can:**

Provide families with a clear description of school rules and expectations; create a Family Handbook.

Take photos of students at work in school and send them home as postcards.

Publish school calendars, notices of events and activities, etc., well in advance of the activities.

Create a one-page listing of school staff for families to call regarding specific issues.

**Advocate for the School**

**Parents/family members can:**

Write a letter to legislators about the school.

Write a letter to school board members and a local newspaper about the school.

Advocate for the school at a district school board meeting.

Help translate information about the school into a language other than English.

Write an article for publication in a magazine or newspaper about the school's activities.

Help write a proposal that would bring new resources to the school.

Donate materials or services to the school.

Arrange for a business or other organization to donate materials to the school.

Additionally, the following link contains a list of online resources for family and community involvement.

**Public/Community Relations**

No student is ever forced to attend a charter school, and any student can return to a district school at any time without penalty. Schools, then, must find and recruit their own student populations, and then provide quality services that will persuade them to stay. While a group of school founders may have an excellent educational plan for a charter

school, they must first find the students to fill the seats. The New York Charter Schools Resource Center suggests that:

**"Charter school applicants should develop as part of their overall application a comprehensive marketing plan that is designed to evaluate the demand for and promote their school to area parents and students, and includes plans on how best to market their plans to charter school sponsors, the media, local community groups, and civic leaders. Goals -- such as informing as many people as possible about the school, achieving certain rates of inquiry for more information about the school, etc. -- should be specifically stated and should become a foundation of the plan."

The New York Charter Schools Resource Center also lists three questions charter organizers should ask themselves in determining their target markets:

1. "What types of parents and students will be attracted to our school?"
2. "What chartering entity will we seek approval from (local or state)?"
3. "What businesses, community groups, and civic leaders should be sought for support?"

In a sense, a charter school will have to be "sold" to all of these groups: parents and students to populate it, a chartering entity to approve it, and community groups and individuals to support it. After determining whom to target, schools should then decide in what ways they will approach these groups. Some media include:

- Print media/radio/television advertising
- Phone banks

- Public announcements

Following are some suggestions from the Illinois Charter School Resource Handbook and the Minnesota Charter School Resource Center on charter school marketing strategies:

Develop and widely distribute marketing materials and events that explain the goals and mission of the school and provide prospective students and families with more information about how to enroll their children.

Use neighborhood schools and community organizations—social service agencies, churches, youth-serving agencies, etc—as resources in recruiting students.

Use community media—local newspapers and free Public Service Announcements (PSAs) on local radio to publicize your school.

Set up a committee to coordinate community outreach and marketing efforts.

Designate a contact person (director, board member, or other supporter) to respond to media and other official inquiries. This person should be widely familiar with the school at all levels and savvy to media and other public-relations concerns.

Reach out to a broad cross-section of the population.

Build a list of media contacts and develop a positive rapport with each one.

Create materials to "get the word out" about your school using clippings, posters, flyers, brochures, newsletters, and an Internet web site, if possible. Provide positive, clear, accurate messages about your school.

Establish and publicize mechanisms to facilitate and respond to questions, concerns, and suggestions from the community. Schedule meetings during convenient times and provide refreshments, childcare help, and language translation where needed, to make people feel comfortable and welcome.

Remember to recognize those that have helped or supported your school in any way.

Contact social workers, probation officers, welfare officials and people in similar occupations and give them information that they in turn can give to families with whom they work.

Join your local chamber of commerce, and/or attend meetings of a local business association in order to build ties to the business community.

Contact real estate agents so they will have information on your school to give to potential home-buyers who are often interested in area schools.

Seek attention in the local media. This can include calling and sending information on your program to newspapers and radio and TV stations serving your target area. A new school starting up is likely to be considered noteworthy enough to merit some attention. When interviewed by the local press, it's best to avoid negative comments, i.e., don't

bash the existing school system. Clearly state your purposes in starting the new school and how your program will help children learn.

Encourage current parents and older students to spread the word about your school. A good word from a neighbor or friend will mean more to a parent than any message coming directly from the school.

In *Charter Schools in Action,* the authors provide a fictional example of a city and state with a large and vibrant network of charter schools.  As a part of this system, they describe a large "school fair," conducted several times a year, where parents can come and meet representatives from many schools face-to-face, and so get information to help them in making the best decisions for their children.  In reality, several nearby charter schools could get together to conduct a similar "school fair" (and even invite regular district schools to send representatives), advertising the event to the general public. This would raise the public's awareness about the charter schools in general, give individual schools a forum to showcase their programs and their successes, and provide more students with the opportunity to apply to different schools.

**Local District Relations**

Another group with which any charter school should maintain positive relations is the local school district.  Even though in Georgia a charter may be granted without the approval of the local district, maintaining a positive relationship with the district will benefit the charter school.  The Illinois Charter School Resource Handbook uses Chicago as an example:

Although the Chicago Public Schools has demonstrated substantial support for the city's charter schools, recent media coverage has featured a degree of resistance and competition between charter applicants and local school districts in other areas of the State. Since the amendment to Illinois' charter law allowing for applicants to appeal district rejection of their charter to the State Board of Education, local district support is no longer required for charter approval. Nonetheless, a positive relationship with the local school district is greatly desirable and beneficial for a charter school, and charter applicants would be wise to seek out district support from the beginning of their planning process. Whether or not the district authorizes your school's charter, your school can benefit from a positive relationship with the district – in, for example, searching for school space, obtaining needed information, and coordinating critical services such as special education, transportation, and food service.

Here are some ideas about how to turn this potential antagonism into a productive and mutually beneficial relationship throughout the charter development process;

**1. Meet with the local superintendent (where possible) and/or top district staff before you start.** Seek out ways to work collaboratively with the district, complement/supplement programs that the district offers, and share or contract for services. Also, consider and discuss how the charter school could pool professional resources and knowledge with district teachers.

**2. Do not criticize the district publicly.** Focus on the positive aspects of your charter, not the negative aspects of the local district or its schools. The message to stress is this: Charter schools are not "better than" district schools – they simply provide new educational options for students and the community. They represent another way of providing public education, and while the district does not manage these schools directly, charter schools are strictly accountable to the public for delivering quality services. The district and the public at-large should thus view and treat charter schools as a valuable addition to the district's overall school-reform strategies.

**3. Maintain open, courteous lines of communication.**

**4. Provide clear, accurate information** to the local board and superintendent about charter schools in general and your proposal in particular.

**5. Attend school board meetings**, show sensitivity to the district's perspective and needs, and respond to questions and concerns as they arise.

Charter schools are public schools, but unlike traditional public schools, they are schools of choice, accountable to and dependent on several constituencies for their creation, survival, and improvement. All of these groups – students, parents, the community, and the local and state governments – can be of help to a school's continued success, and should be valued and sought out accordingly.

**CONCLUSION**

While there is not general public agreement about charter schools' academic effectiveness, or what role they should play (if any) in the larger context of the American public school system, the number of these schools is growing rapidly, as is public interest about them. Even if charter schools are not actively supported by lawmakers or the educational establishment in Georgia to the extent they are in places like Arizona or Washington, D.C., new founding groups and existing charter school constituencies in this state need a technical resource to help them attempt to navigate the system. This handbook is meant to be that instrument. There is, at least, a critical mass of interest in charter schools that makes it worthwhile to attempt to test them out as a viable way to reform the educational landscape in a more individualized way, rather than by simply tinkering with the existing lethargic and centralized structure of public education in America.

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