

Charter System Mid-Year Visits-Charter Advisory Committee (CAC):

TO: State Board of Education (SBOE)

March, 2009

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1. Charter System Mid-Year Visits and Review-Summary and Recommendations

Summary

The Charter Advisory Committee (CAC) determined at its December 5, 2008 meeting that mid-year visits to all four Charter Systems would be conducted before the end of February. All four Charter Systems were contacted on Tuesday, December 16 to begin the scheduling of mid-year visits. Superintendents of the four Charter Systems were reminded of the CAC's role and that mid-year visits would be conducted with the goal of capturing answers to the following questions.

1. Since implementing Charter System status, what are your most measureable accomplishments?
2. What have been the biggest obstacles you have faced in implementing your Charter System plan?
3. Please compare your expected progress as a "Charter System" to actual progress. Are you where you thought you would be in your Charter System implementation plan at this point in time? Where do you expect to be by the end of this school year?
4. What can the CAC, State BOE, or State DOE do to help support you in your implementation efforts?

During visits, Charter System Superintendents and staff focused on these questions, and more specifically, on their efforts to maximize school-level governance, to introduce additional innovations allowed by Charter System flexibility, and to overcome implementation obstacles.

Charter Systems, in summary, mentioned the need for ongoing training of School Governing Councils/Boards, the need to teach internal staff more about the flexibilities allowed that expand capacities for additional innovation, and the need to work throughout the State DOE to better explain the level of freedom now granted to the entire System, now a "Charter" System.

We trust that the notes to follow might provide a sense of what we discovered through those mid-year visits. We commend Georgia's leaders who set the State apart from the nation by legislating and implementing SB 39, the Charter Systems Act, as it provides a robust avenue allowing Georgia to more fully implement "chartering" as a strategic approach to "leading the nation in improving student achievement."

Recommendations

CAC recommends that SBOE and CAC collaborate to take the following actions based on the observations gathered from these mid-year visits.

1. Locate additional training support for School Governing Councils/Boards.
2. Locate additional training support to help School-level leaders utilize new flexibility allowed by Charter System status.
3. Develop additional training support to help DOE staff better understand how internal processes impact Charter Systems.
4. Form a task force to support internal DOE process review suggested in number 3 (above).
5. Support a DOE effort to use a notation, on certain messages that are sent to “all School Systems,” to indicate that “Charter Systems are exempt from this requirement.”

2. Message inviting Charter Systems to be involved in mid-year visits with Charter Advisory Committee and Charter Division, State Department of Education

From: Charter Advisory Committee
Sent: Tuesday, December 16, 2008 12:12 AM
To: Charter Systems
Subject: Charter System mid-year 2008-9

Many thanks for your outstanding presentation to attendees at the annual conference of the Georgia School Boards Association and Georgia School Superintendents Association. More and more Systems are attracted to Charter System status. You helped many of those Systems learn more about the opportunity.

On behalf of the members of the Charter Advisory Committee (CAC), I'd like to once again congratulate your System on becoming one of Georgia's inaugural Charter Systems. Your leadership in innovation and school level governance is setting the standard for future Charter Systems and is helping to change the way Georgia's students are educated.

The CAC serves as a non-regulatory committee that is charged with supporting Charter Systems and advising the State Department of Education (State DOE) on charter-friendly rules and procedures. The CAC is currently reaching out to each of the State's four Charter Systems to offer our support. Our objective is to identify recommendations that help to clear the obstacles you may be facing. In short, we are another resource to help your System achieve the goals set forth in your strategic plan.

Our Committee would like to extend an offer to meet with you in person or over the phone to learn how we can assist you in your journey. This meeting will also help us to prepare recommendations to the State Board of Education (State BOE) that may assist you and future Charter Systems. During the meeting, we'd like to engage in a dialogue around the following questions:

1. Since implementing Charter System status, what are some of your measureable accomplishments?
2. What have been the biggest obstacles you have faced in implementing your Charter System plan?
3. Please compare your expected progress as a "Charter System" to actual progress. Are you where you thought you would be in your Charter System implementation plan at this point in time? Where do you expect to be by the end of this school year?
4. What can the CAC, State BOE or State DOE do to help support you in your implementation efforts?

We would like to conduct the meetings with each system by January 16, 2009. Please RSVP via email to Jason Martin (jmartin@doe.k12.ga.us) regarding your interest in participating along with possible dates for the meeting with your system. May we receive your response by Monday, December 22, in order to begin arranging meeting dates?

Congratulations on becoming a Charter System and thank you for your efforts to provide even more opportunity to Georgia's students.

Mark Whitlock, Chair, Charter Advisory Committee (CAC)

3. Summary of notes from the perspective of Charter Advisory Committee visitors

Charter Advisory Committee

Charter System Mid-Year Visits

January 2009

1. Since implementing Charter System status, what are your most measureable accomplishments?
 - School Governance Teams have been created and trained (all systems); elections held to select members; training conducted using different approaches; SGTs are diverse and represent makeup of student and community population; much more community and parental involvement; Marietta City developed Charter System Handbook to provide guidance and knowledge to SGTs
 - Two-way communications have been established between School Governance Teams and local communities using various media: websites, email boxes, videos, meeting minutes, surveys, etc. (all systems)
 - Increased flexibility and innovation by all systems:
 - Marietta City –
 - Waived required 55 consecutive minutes of planning time; helped with funding issues
 - Implemented advisory period at Marietta High School by reducing required seat time to 86 minutes from 90 minutes
 - Improved professional development for teachers by altering 180 required days of class to 178. This has increased instructional time.
 - SB123, 20-2-182—did not complete Board resolution on maximum class size
 - Alternative Education Waivers—did not submit
 - Implemented “Text A Cop” program utilizing cell phones. Changed Local Board policy because of work of SGT
 - Warren County –
 - Implementing all four aspects of application (fine arts, advanced curriculum, leadership K-12 using UGA model, career education/Career Academy); implementing block scheduling approach
 - Seeing academic improvements already
 - Dual enrollments with Sandersville Tech

- Phasing in the use of the following flexibilities; Class size, Seat time, Mastery learning, Certification
 - Gainesville City –
 - Expanding and innovating Gifted education
 - Providing more interdisciplinary learning
 - Gainesville Middle School is restructuring and reorganizing academic delivery as a result of parent, student, and faculty governance collaboration
 - Grading practices have been revised
 - Balanced Scorecard has been developed for district; all schools and School Governing Councils set their goals that drive the goals of the district.
 - Considering a 30-minute remedial math program during school day
 - City Schools of Decatur-
 - Class size flexibility
 - Highly Qualified flexibility
 - Finance expenditure tests flexibility
 - Validated evaluation instrument added
 - H.S. seat time flexibility
 - EIP eligibility
 - Gifted model
- School Governance Teams “freeing up” local school boards by taking on additional responsibilities; SGTs are able to better connect with local community and better engage citizens in decision making
 - Marietta City – System calendar surveys developed by SGTs to gather input from staff and parents; SGTs decided calendar based on survey results; uniform decisions; student achievement data assessments/reports; school-level budgeting; program proposals; evaluation of principals; SGTs are making decisions on Title 1 funds – staffing or equipment
 - Warren County – School Governance Councils are working on budgets and making recommendations for hiring decisions. Major decisions are coming from schools and their governing councils.
 - Gainesville City – School Governing Councils have selected two principals; SGCs have established regular stakeholder feedback methods (surveys, online suggestion box, etc.); SGCs from different schools are collaborating to solve problems together rather than compete against each other; Expanding and innovating the standard Gifted Education model with flexibility allowed; Middle School and High School restructuring of

instructional time is now possible with flexibility; Grading practices have been revised with flexibility; ; Local BOE is able to focus on higher level issues because of SGC; District refers items to SGC to be decided.

- City Schools of Decatur-local television is capturing the change in the School System and making that available to the public; strategic changes in the School System are using input from School Governing Councils; extra training is being provided as District has hired a noted national charter governance training expert; survey of the local community is being accomplished to gain knowledge of the general public understanding of “Charter System.”

2. What have been the biggest obstacles you have faced in implementing your Charter System plan?

Time – short time period to get this first year going (all systems); paradigm shift having SGTs vs. only BOE

Understanding the vision of what you can do

Getting the Federal funding that was promised. They have concern about receipt of the Federal CSP grant funding. \$600,000 grants to each System not yet released by USDOE.

Training the SGTs and getting them comfortable in authority vs. waiting on others to make decision

First year is a building year for SGTs; getting them comfortable with making decisions and their responsibilities; consensus decision-making. They are working hard at the local school governance piece, still in the training process. School governance councils and local boards are still sorting out what this all means. School Governing Councils need continued training (GSBA, GSSA, and Charter School experts have been involved to date)

Funding issues have kept Warren County from getting an Art instructor

Warren County had a change in local school board members– election changed makeup of board; new board does not understand Charter System benefits yet

Gainesville City – audit of gifted funding generated lots of questions; got some discouragement on doing what they needed to do with gifted because of funding requirements despite having waiver.

Decatur-has encountered specific program manager prohibitions, within DOE, that seem to contradict the authority of the Charter

3. Please compare your expected progress as a “Charter System” to actual progress. Are you where you thought you would be in your Charter System

implementation plan at this point in time? Where do you expect to be by the end of this school year?

- Capacity has to be built over time – “Building the bridge as we walk across.”
- SGTs have been great to gather information from the community at the closest level possible to where the decisions will impact; drives down decision-making to SGTs; shared responsibility with BOE and SGTs; gives perspectives on each individual school and their needs rather than just looking globally
- Being a Charter System means building sustainability from the ground up.
- All systems indicated that they felt good about their progress thus far; on track compared to where they thought they would be at this point.

4. What can the CAC, State BOE, or State DOE do to help support you in your implementation efforts?

- FTE – make sure system is coded correctly
- Make sure all departments in DOE understand Charter Systems and waivers
They are experiencing difficulty at the DOE implementing the use of the blanket waivers afforded to them by chartering. At the program manager level, there appears to be a lack of understanding, and the charter systems are being asked to conform. This is an area where the CAC can advocate for them. Internally, DOE is just beginning to understand that blanket waivers apply to entire Systems rather than (only) to individual schools. Much more teaching needs to be done inside DOE so that all waivers can be applied.
- Flexibility – What does that really mean? How far does the flexibility extend related to funding usage?
- Eliminate redundancy in application document for Charter Systems
- Faster legal review of application by DOE
- Training – DOE could help us by developing generic training programs that a district can customize for training SGTs; narrated training modules; suggested modules: budgets, assessments, personnel, IDEA, policy
- Recommend DOE develop brochure like Marietta’s for others to use & customize
 - Suggestions to include in marketing information:
 - i. Keeping FTE dollars as charter school/system
 - ii. Still public school
 - iii. Strategic plan focus for charter system
 - iv. Allows flexibility (explain waivers)

- v. Keep brochure in common language
- vi. Give examples that are important at the community level
- Keep the \$125,000 grants in place for future systems
- Additional \$100/FTE (added late last session to HB 881) has not been appropriated
- Consider an IB model for implementation of Charter Systems (planning, notice to State BOE, implementation period, letter of intent, application) – gives opportunity to demonstrate school level governance and ensure buy-in prior to approval

When asked whether the lead time for implementation of their charter was adequate, both said it was not. In fact, the superintendent from Gainesville suggested we consider mirroring, or modeling ourselves after, the IB process for implementation.

- Guidance on expectations for annual review of Charter
- Guidance on amending the Charter as needed
- Guidance on funding flexibility

For future consideration, next time we plan these visits it would be useful to include a representative member of the governance council, a teacher, and a parent in the discussion.

This was a crucial step in moving the work of the CAC forward, as we advocate for quality charter systems. The information we glean from these visits will assist us as we work with the four existing charter systems as well as future charter systems.

In conclusion, these review meetings left us feeling very hopeful about the potential of the charter system movement in Georgia, and the future of the children attending school in these districts.

Unexpected consequence—Local Boards of Education are experiencing more support from empowered School Governing Councils who now understand the “magnitude” of decision-making that accompanies school and system governance. The School Governing Councils are less parochial than anticipated. The School Governing Councils are working to support System goals rather than merely protect “their” school.

4. Summary of specific obstacles from the perspective of a Charter System

1. Middle school program assurances. The QBE program requires schools in Georgia that house 6th-8th graders to claim either “middle school” or “middle grades.” An assurances document is the only documentation required of systems. When this requirement came to our offices, we notified the State Superintendent’s office to remind them that we would not need to complete this requirement, due to our charter system status. When it was time for FTE to be collected, we claimed “middle school” but were denied by the DOE technology department because [we were] not on a list of districts that submitted an assurances document. After five harried days of communication and frustration, the DOE charter division intervened, and our FTE was properly documented.
2. Gifted programming. We wish to provide gifted programming that is a best-fit to our students. Although the SBOE has approved our petition, it has been shared with us that we must abide by the approved program models. The Innovative Program Division contends that they currently have an “innovative model” that we could utilize - however, an important difference emerges: the division must approve our model, even though the SBOE has already approved the petition. This sequence does not make sense to us.
3. Gifted eligibility. Long-term, this is an important step we wish to take to accomplish our goal of closing the achievement gap. We wish to have tiered eligibility requirements for under-represented groups. In our district, these under-represented groups are students that are not white, and students that live in poverty. Florida has utilized varied eligibility requirements for some years. We have been told by the Innovative Program Division that this will not be allowed.
4. Expenditure tests. Our finance director received multiple emails and messages from DOE accounting that we had not submitted expenditure test reports. Our Superintendent was also notified that the finance director had not complied. Our petition clearly articulates that under the blanket waiver granted by the SBOE, expenditure tests do not apply to us.
5. Highly qualified. The CPI (Certified personnel Information) report is a requirement of systems to report the experience and certification of all teaching staff. Our blanket waiver allows us to hire individuals who are highly qualified but not necessarily Georgia certified. The CPI process will not allow us to submit these names – thus jeopardizing our ability to collect funding for these teachers.

These are a few snapshots into our world as a charter system. We think there are a few possible solutions to consider:

1. What if...the DOE kept track for one fiscal year every time they asked the district for information (on a side note, often for information that they already have), then categorize that data: federal mandates, state law, SBOE rule. The next step would involve examining the state law and SBOE rule data.
2. This idea is quite intriguing and based on an experience we had in our district. One of our retired teachers and our HR Director had a miscommunication with state health. The benefits for this teacher were denied. Our HR Director appealed, arguing that state health customer service representatives were unclear on this process and, therefore, gave faulty information. State health reacted strongly: they offered every customer service representative a quiz on this content, which almost all failed. State health decided to grant our retired employees the benefits based on their inability to be consistent. What if DOE employees were asked, "What would need to change in your job if certain schools and school districts didn't need to follow state law and SBOE rules?"

Although these are specific examples, I do think that these are symptomatic of two much larger questions:

1. What do charter systems assume to be true about the role of DOE program managers in the implementation of SBOE-approved petitions?
2. And viewed another way, what constitutes the authority and purview of DOE program managers?

5. Appendix

A. Charter System Goals from Charters

Marietta

Charter system goals

Ongoing, incremental increases for students in the Exceeds category represent our commitment to academic progress for students at every level of achievement. Marked decreases in the DNM category for various grade level/content areas highlight our intention to demonstrate immediate progress for students who are not meeting standards.

Please see page 46 of their charter for specific numbers.

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Warren County

Charter System Goals

-The system will maintain accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Maintaining high expectations for our schools has and should continue to increase student achievement.

-The system will make AYP beginning in 2007-2008, but no later than by the end of the 2010-2011 school year (three years). Therefore, the goal is that there is an 18% increase in the percent of students making 516 in math each year from 2008- 2009 through 2010-2011.

-Leadership, fine arts, rigorous academic and vocational tracks that are aligned from elementary through high school will be established beginning in 2008-2009, which will result in a future increase in the graduation rate. The graduation rate had held between 68%-75% for several years but dipped to a low of 55% in 2006- 2007. The goal is that the graduation rate will return to 75% immediately in 2008-2009, but no later than the 2010-2011 school year through 5% increases each year.

-Local governance will continue to be maximized through the development and implementation of school governing councils beginning in 2008-2009. Maximizing that ability of parents and guardians as well as community members to participate in the decision –making processes of the school should result in an increase in participation of parents/guardians/community members on the governing councils. This can easily be contrasted to the total lack of involvement in past years on the school councils where a quorum was rarely met.

-The system's goals include the consistent and effective use of technology, balanced assessments, performance assessments, remediation and extension opportunities, professional learning communities, differentiated instruction, intervention strategies, and discipline procedures in all classrooms, which will be monitored by walkthroughs and analyzed using the appropriate checklists beginning in 2008-2009. The ratings from our voluntary GAPSS analysis in 2007- 2008 will serve as the baseline. The system will effectively use data to improve instruction. The system will use the data room consistently beginning in 2008-2009. The balanced scorecard will be used to rate school performance and communicate with stakeholders.

Structures will be put in place to more effectively communicate with parents/community members/stakeholders regarding the progress of schools in making AYP. All AYP information will be kept updated on the school website, posted in the local newspaper, articulated in the Superintendent's newsletters, shared through superintendent-staff email updates, shared through school newsletters and websites, shared through community meetings held by the superintendent and at meetings held by the school principals. Parent approval surveys regarding the school system will be administered during the next SACS visit in 2011-2012 and the goal is an 85% approval rate.

Individual school goals can be found in their charter.

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Decatur

These measurable targets stem from the Single Statewide Accountability System. Therefore, the accountability system for City Schools of Decatur that will be put in place will comply with the intent and practice of the Single Statewide Accountability law and accompanying SBOE rule.

Goals:

1. All students will meet academic standards by 2013-2014.
2. All students will experience work they consider to be engaging.
3. All students will meet the minimum assessment level of Novice-Mid (ACTFL range) in communicating a language other than English.
4. The racial achievement gap will be closed by 50%.
5. 85% of families will rate the City Schools of Decatur as a "B" or higher in overall satisfaction.

Detail on Goal 1: All students will meet academic standards by 2013-2014.

Each cell represents a separate objective. Like high-performing school districts around the country, City Schools of Decatur has set two targets for each content area: one that the system seeks to decrease – percentage of students not meeting standards – and one that the system seeks to increase – percentage of students exceeding standards.

Detail on Goal 2: All students will experience work they consider to be engaging.

Objective 1: By 2008-2009, City Schools of Decatur will create/adopt grade-level specific engagement surveys and pilot them in 10% of City Schools of Decatur classrooms for usability and baseline data.

Objective 2: By 2009-2010, City Schools of Decatur will increase engagement levels by 4%.

Objective 3: By 2010-2011, City Schools of Decatur will increase engagement levels by 8%.

Objective 4: By 2011-2012, City Schools of Decatur will increase engagement levels by 12%.

Objective 5: By 2012-2013, City Schools of Decatur will increase engagement levels by 16%.

Detail on Goal 3: All students will meet the minimum assessment level of Novice-Mid (ACTFL range) in communicating a language other than English.

Objective 1: By 2008-2009, City Schools of Decatur will create an articulated plan to purchase electronic norm-referenced assessments for assessing foreign language.

Objective 2: By 2009-2010, City Schools of Decatur will collect baseline data on 5th and 8th graders and compare nationally.

Objective 3: By 2010-2011, City Schools of Decatur will assess 4th – 8th graders on a normreferenced assessment.

Objective 4: By 2011-2012, 60% of 8th graders will score Novice-Mid on the assessment.

Objective 5: By 2012-2013, 100% of 8th graders will score Novice-Mid on the assessment.

Detail on Goal 4: The racial achievement gap will be closed by 50%.

City Schools of Decatur will use two calculation methods for the achievement gap:

1. Average reading, ELA, and math scores for 4th, 6th, and 8th graders on the CRCT

2. Average reading, ELA, and math scores for 3rd, 5th, and 8th graders on the CRCT;
English and math scores for 11th graders on the GHSGT

Two methods will be used because of the schools' configurations. The first method only touches two schools (Glennwood Academy and Renfroe Middle School). Although the second method contains two different tests which cannot be compared, it is the only measure that cuts across all of the schools in the system and contain K-12 students.

Objective 1: By 2008-2009, City Schools of Decatur will decrease the achievement gap by 30%*.

Objective 2: By 2009-2010, City Schools of Decatur will decrease the achievement gap by 35%*.

Objective 3: By 2010-2011, City Schools of Decatur will decrease the achievement gap by 40%*.

Objective 4: By 2011-2012, City Schools of Decatur will decrease the achievement gap by 45%*.

Objective 5: By 2012-2013, City Schools of Decatur will decrease the achievement gap by 50%*.

*Baseline data =2003-04 school year student achievement data

To accomplish the goal of closing the racial achievement gap, City Schools of Decatur uses separate goals and objectives for black students (% indicates performance on the Georgia CRCT). This goal is in conjunction with Goal 1 which monitors the academic achievement of all students, thus all students are held to high expectations. The Board has considered disaggregated data by race in all internal and external representations of data.

Specific data and charts can be found on page 46 of their petition.

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Gainesville

In addition to the Gainesville City School System's performance accountability plan, the system will use the following performance goals in meeting grade level expectations prior to 2014. Our performance goals and objectives are more rigorous than state annual measurable objectives.

Please see page 49 of their petition for specific numbers.

5. Appendix

B. CAC Recommendations to SBOE and outcomes to date

RECOMMENDATION 1: a request that SBOE move November 1, 2007 Charter System petition deadline to January 2008.

Outcome: SBOE moved the deadline to January 2008 and allowed initial group of petitioners the chance to submit and (ultimately) receive approval for Charter System status.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Petitioners for Charter School (System) District status should include/attach a statement ensuring the System will become accredited as a Charter School (System) District or has already received District (School System) Accreditation.

Outcome: All Charter Systems, and all current Charter System petitioners, are SACS District Accredited. SACS has agreed to work with CAC and SBOE to provide a “Charter District Accreditation.”

RECOMMENDATION 3: The Charter Advisory Committee (CAC) supports the approval of charter school system petitions for five school systems based on the following criteria:

1. Intent to be innovative; and
2. Intent to maximize local school governance.

The CAC understands that the State Department of Education is analyzing the technical adequacy of these five petitions. The five school systems supported by CAC include:

1. Chattahoochee County School System;
2. City Schools of Decatur;
3. Gainesville City Schools;
4. Marietta City Schools; and,
5. Warren County Public Schools.

Outcome: Four of the five Systems became Georgia’s first “Charter Systems.”

RECOMMENDATION 4: The Charter Advisory Committee (CAC) recommends that no cap be placed in State Board Rule(s) regarding a maximum number of Charter System petitions that might be approved annually. Currently, the proposed State Rule allows the State Board to approve only three Charter System petitions per year, regardless of the number of quality petitions received.

Outcome: SBOE chose to place no cap in the rule.

RECOMMENDATION 5: (Waive letter of intent only for May 1, 2008)

Outcome: SBOE chose to waive letter of intent allowing three timely petitioners the opportunity to move forward with their plans.