



Dr. John D. Barge, State School Superintendent
"Making Education Work for All Georgians"

CHARTER SCHOOLS DIVISION

DATE: December 29, 2010
TO: Interviewers - 2010-2011 Locally Approved Applicant Review Cycle
FROM: Morgan L. Felts
RE: Interview Information and Suggested Interview Questions

I. Interview Information

A. Purpose. The applicant interview is a crucial piece in the charter school authorization process. The primary goal of the interview is to elicit information to determine whether a petitioning group has the capacity to implement solid educational and business plans to improve student achievement.

B. Interview Structure and Team Expectations

1. Pre-Interview. Each interviewer will be provided with a list of their fellow interviewers, a tentative schedule of the interview date, a list of schools they will interview, their respective petitions and school summaries. Interviewers should allot adequate time to review petitions, school summary sheets and think critically about possible interview questions.

2. Interview Days. Interviews are scheduled to take place on January 18, 2011. The day will consist of 4 interviews which will take place in Training Center C of the West Tower. The interview team will gather at 7:30 a.m. and the first interview will begin promptly at 8 a.m. Subsequent interviews will be scheduled for 10 a.m., 1 p.m., and 3 p.m. Each interview will be scheduled for one hour with time in between for debriefing and a lunch break scheduled from 11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. The day should conclude around 4:30 or 5:00 p.m.

3. Interview Team. Each interview team will consist of 4 interviewers, including Charter Schools Division Petition Evaluation Specialist, Morgan Felts. Each team member was carefully selected based upon their area of expertise. Team members are not expected to have a background in chartering but should familiarize themselves with basic knowledge, which can be found on the charter schools division webpage.

C. Preparation and Focus Areas.

1. Petition. Review the petitions to understand the basic elements of the proposal (academic goals and measurable objectives, waivers and flexibility, governance, community involvement, budget). Petition development is an important piece of the process, and we encourage you to make notes of questions or concerns you have about specific responses to ask during the interview.

2. School Summary. Review the school summary sheet along with the petition. The school summary should provide you with basic information about the proposed charter school as well as highlight potential problem areas.

3. Capacity. In addition to petition-specific questions, we have listed below suggested questions to gauge the charter school's capacity to effectively operate a high-quality charter school. While time may not permit all questions, it is important to address some questions from each area and to follow up where necessary based on the responses received.

4. EMO Considerations. Many applicants have chosen to contract with a for-profit education management organization (EMO) to provide various services to the charter school. It is crucial in these interviews to evaluate the governing board's independence, whether it is operating at arm's length from the EMO, and its capacity to negotiate, oversee and enforce the EMO contract. It also is critical to evaluate the fairness of the EMO contract for the charter school and the effectiveness of the EMO in other jurisdictions. Expect EMO representatives to be present in some interviews and make note whether you direct your EMO-specific questions to a charter school member or an EMO representative and who answers your questions.

II. Suggested Interview Questions

A. Academics and Educational Plan

1. Describe the academic goals and measurable objectives for the charter school and explain how they were developed.
2. Describe the process by which you selected the curriculum to be used at the school.
3. Charter schools, like all public schools, serve students with varying abilities and instructional needs. What are your plans to differentiate instruction among students?
4. What specific assessments will the charter school administer?

5. How specifically do you intend to use waivers to help increase student achievement?
6. How will the charter school ensure that students with disabilities will receive the full range of services available to those students in a traditional public school district?
7. Assume a child with severe mental and physical disabilities, who requires extraordinary services, seeks to enroll the child in the charter school. How will the school respond to this child's interest in attending the charter school?
8. Describe the school plans to offer students with disabilities appropriate supplementary instruction and alternate programs in math and reading for those who require those services in the critical academic areas?
9. Describe how the charter school will ensure that the staff understands the obligations of federal and state law regarding students with disabilities and English language learners.
10. Assume that in the first year of operation, you meet your reading goals, but experience lagging achievement in math. How do you address this challenge?
11. What are your plans for addressing the needs of students who arrive at the school well above grade level? Do you plan to have separate gifted classes? What is the school's general approach to inclusion of students with varying abilities in a single class?
12. Describe any outreach you have done in the community in which your school plans to locate. Do you have any partnerships with local community organizations, business, faith organizations?

B. Budget and Business Plan

1. Describe your facility arrangement and backup plan, if any. What percentage of your operating revenue do you plan to allocate for facilities costs.
2. Describe your marketing plan and efforts made to date for student recruitment.
3. Describe your understanding of how school funding will flow to the school if your petition is approved.
4. What is the process for setting the charter school's annual budget? Who at the school will be responsible for financial management?

5. When the board is presented with the budget for approval, how will board members know whether to approve it, deny it, or make changes to it?
6. When the initial budget was prepared for this application, what items were discussed at length and what items were passed on without comment or discussion?
7. Have you secured any private foundation, philanthropic, corporate, or individual support for your proposed school? Will members of your board be expected to fundraise for the school?

C. Capacity and Organizational Plan

Questions for All Applicants:

1. Describe the qualifications of the board members and identify any skill sets that are not currently present (financial, legal, educational, real estate, *etc.*).
2. Describe any training that the governing board members have received. If none, do you plan to provide any board training?
3. What do you see as the proper role for the board in governing the school? What sorts of decisions will the governing board make and what sorts of decisions will be left to the school leader?
4. What have been the major organizational challenges for the board so far and how have those challenges been addressed?
5. What is the process for hiring and evaluating the charter school leader?
6. What is the process for dismissing the charter school leader or teachers?
7. What is the process for identifying new board members? How did the founding board form?
8. Assume that in the second year of your charter, a vocal group of parents at the charter school denounce the principal and call for her removal. How would you as a board handle this situation?
9. Apart from meeting the student achievement goals set forth in the charter, how does the organization plan to assess successful board governance?
10. What is the school leader's plan for identifying and dealing with underperforming teachers?

11. Describe the ideal relationship between the governing board and the local board of education.

Questions for Applicants Contracting with an EMO:

1. Describe the board's process in identifying and selecting the EMO. [If the EMO recruited and selected the board, describe how the EMO identified the board members and how the EMO explained the relationship between the board members, the EMO and the charter school.]
2. Did the board research the EMO's operation of other schools? If so, what specifically did the board research and determine? Academic performance?
3. Describe the management fee in terms of percentage of revenue with the EMO and tell us how the governing board arrived at that number.
4. Describe the steps that the governing board plans to take to oversee the EMO and to ensure that the EMO is complying with the agreement.
5. How would you characterize the negotiations of the contract that will bind the charter school and the EMO?
6. Who will employ the teachers at the school? [If the answer is the EMO, describe the rationale for this decision.]
7. Assume that in the third year of the charter, the board and the EMO develop differing philosophies concerning the direction of the school and decide to part ways. How would this be accomplished? Who owns the building and physical property? How would the assets of the school be distributed?
8. Describe how the contract was negotiated between the EMO and the governing board.

III. Post-Interview Procedures

A. Interview Questionnaire. Complete the interview questionnaire and return to Morgan Felts within two (2) business days following your interview day. Please keep in mind that the quality of your comments will assist us in making a recommendation determination.

B. Thank you. Thank you for your help and input in this extremely vital aspect of our petition review process.