Georgia Charter Schools

A Brief Overview of Chartering in Georgia

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“We will lead the nation in improving student achievement.”
“We will lead the nation in improving student achievement.”
History of the Charter Movement

1983  “A Nation at Risk”

1980s-90s  School Reform Movement

Decentralization

1990s  Charter Schools

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“We will lead the nation in improving student achievement.”
NOT the goal

All schools are charter schools

“We will lead the nation in improving student achievement.”
“We will lead the nation in improving student achievement.”
Where is Georgia in this process?

• Not yet at critical mass of high-quality charter schools
• Concentrated in Metro Atlanta
• Added 22 new charter schools and 4 charter systems in 2010

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Move Georgia’s national ranking

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High student performance

- 100% proficiency before NCLB deadline
- Zero students in “does not meet”
- Annual growth in % of students in “exceeds”

High parent satisfaction

High-quality charter school option for every Georgia student

High student retention

High compliance schools

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What are charter schools?

They are public schools of choice

They are publically funded, but organized and governed by a private group of individuals, a private organization, or state and local public entities

They are free from many of the regulations that govern traditional public schools

They involve partnerships with local communities and businesses

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Federal Definition of a Charter School

1. Exempt from significant State or local rules
2. Created as a public school, publicly supervised and directed
3. Pursues a specific set of educational objectives
4. Elementary, secondary, or both
5. Nonsectarian and not affiliated with sectarian school or religious institution
6. No tuition
7. Complies with Federal mandates
8. School of choice with enrollment lottery if necessary
9. Complies with Federal and State audit requirements
10. Meets all health and safety requirements
11. Operates in accordance with State law
12. Written performance contract with authorizer with student performance measures

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What is a charter?

A performance-based contract between a charter school board and its authorizer(s)

It sets forth the agreement under which the charter school is governed

Charter schools are held accountable by the state and local boards of education for upholding the stipulations in their charter

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The Basic Bargain

Accountability
- Students outperform local districts/Georgia
- Increased accountability measures
- Increased academic expectations

Autonomy
- Flexibility to innovate
- Waivers from state laws and rules
- Autonomy from local control

Charter Schools

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“We will lead the nation in improving student achievement.”
Why charter schools?

- Freedom from many state and district regulations inspires creativity
- Advocates see charter schools as innovation opportunities where best practices will be discovered
- Charter schools provide choice to parents and students
- Serve as alternatives to failing schools
- Many have a specific focus or model that provides a better fit for some students

- Provide market competition to district public schools as an incentive for change
- District schools must improve in order to retain students, and consequently funding

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Charter schools are public schools

- They are publicly funded
- They must have fair and open enrollment
- They cannot charge tuition
- They must be secular
- They must serve all populations (e.g. English language learners)

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What is an authorizer?

Contracts
- An authorizer enters into two- or three-party contracts with a charter school petitioner

Decision making
- Determines if a petition to start and operate a charter school should be approved
- Determines if existing charter schools should be renewed

Monitoring
- Conducts ongoing oversight of charter schools to evaluate performance, monitor compliance and enforce contract terms
- Ensures that charter schools practice open enrollment and conduct fair and open enrollment lotteries

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Georgia Authorizers

State Board of Education

• Local Boards of Education (only if authorized by the SBOE)

Georgia Charter Schools Commission

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Local School Board Roles and Responsibilities

- Review and act on local charter school petitions
- Enforce clear expectations for performance goals set forth in charters
- Ensure that charter schools comply with state and federal accountability provisions
- Provide funds to local charter schools on the same basis that it provides funds to other local schools

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State Board of Education/GaDOE
Roles & Responsibilities

- Review and act on local charter school petitions and state-chartered special school petitions
- Technical assistance to local school systems
- Technical assistance to petitioners
  - Planning, implementation, facilities grants
  - Charter petitions
  - Petition renewal applications
- Strategic plan and policy for the state’s charter schools program
- Management of federal grants
- Annual report to the General Assembly
- Control and management of state-chartered special schools

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Georgia Charter Schools Commission

State-level charter school authorizer

- Members appointed by the State Board
- Nominated by:
  - Governor (3)
  - Lieutenant Governor (2)
  - Speaker of the House (2)

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Commission’s Roles and Responsibilities

- Review petitions for Commission charter schools
- Develop, promote and require high standards of accountability for Commission charter schools
- Monitor/annually review/evaluate academic and financial performance of commission charter schools
- Direct charter schools/petitioners to sources of private funding/support
- Provide training for Commission charter school governing bodies
- Authorize cosponsors (municipality, county, consolidated government, university or college, technical institution, or RESA) to participate in developing and supporting charter schools

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Conversion Charter School

Definition

- Traditional public school that becomes a charter school
- Gains additional flexibility in exchange for higher levels of accountability

Facts & Features

- 32 conversion charter schools in Georgia
- Strategy for turning around low performing schools

Relative Advantages:

- Student population, building, and operational systems and structures are already in place

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Start-up Charter School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>• Started by private individuals, private organizations, or state and local public entities</th>
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| Facts & Features | • Did not exist prior to the petition  
• Most common type of charter school in Georgia |
| Relative Advantages | • Opportunity to build school culture from the ground up |

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LEA-Sponsored Start-up Charter School

**Definition**
- A new school started as a charter school by a school district (LEA)

**Facts & Features**
- Popular option for petitioners to work collaboratively with local districts
- 18 in Georgia

**Relative Advantages**
- Local District has significant input into the curriculum and innovative features of the charter school
- Local District can set academic priorities and achievement goals

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Career Academy

**Definition**
- Type of LEA-sponsored Charter School
- Partnership between local district, technical college and local businesses

**Facts & Features**
- Focus on preparing students for workforce
- Multiple districts may partner to develop one career academy

**Relative Advantages**
- Increase district graduation rates
- Partnerships with local businesses and communities can increase resources available for students

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How can a Career Academy benefit your community?

- Students are prepared for college and career
- Small learning community environments provide supportive atmospheres
- Curriculum is sequenced and integrates academics and career-based learning
- Dual credit courses give students the opportunity to earn high school and college credits
- Each academy links high school to business, civic community, and higher education
- Each academy measures and shows impact on student performance and achievement
- Career themes reflect local economy

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How can your district benefit from having a charter school?

- Provide parents with choices
- Increased academic accountability
- Turn around failing schools
- Increased flexibility can lead to innovative teaching and educational opportunities

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State-Chartered Special School

**Definition**
- Authorized by the State Board of Education after having been denied by a local Board of Education

**Facts & Features**
- State-Chartered Special Schools do not receive any local funding. They only receive state funding

**Relative Advantages**
- The local board is free from having to provide funding to the charter school

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Commission Charter School

**Definition**
- Approved by the Georgia Charter Schools Commission
- Can serve multiple counties

**Facts & Features**
- Nine commission charter schools
- 23 petitions submitted in 2010
  - 19 “brick and mortar” schools
  - 4 virtual schools

**Relative Advantages**
- Local District does not have any responsibility in monitoring Commission schools physically located within its district

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Charter System

Definition
- A local school system that operates under the terms of a charter

Facts & Features
- Charter is a contract between the LEA and the SBOE
- System gains flexibility to innovate in exchange for increased academic accountability
- Emphasis on school-based leadership and decision making

Relative Advantages
- Increased school-level autonomy and accountability
- Additional per-pupil funding in QBE

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How can a Charter System benefit your community?

- Increase in school-level governance
- Possible financial savings through flexibility
- Increase academic standards for all schools
- Assist districts with turning around failing schools
- Increase parental involvement in local schools

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Charter Advisory Committee

A nine-member committee established by the State Board of Education to make recommendations regarding:

- Approval or denial of charter petitions
- Charter policy
- Disbursement of planning grants to charter systems

Members appointed by

- State Board chair (3)
- Lieutenant Governor (3)
- Speaker of the House (3)

Focus is on charter systems

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Petition Process and Deadlines

**Deadlines**
- Aug 1 for start-ups
- Nov 1 for conversions, renewals, charter systems

**Petition Reviewed**
- Legal review to ensure eligibility
- Substance review

**Deficiency Letter**
- Core focus
- Compliance

**Interview Panel**

**Response to deficiency letter**

**Staff Recommendations**

**SBOE receives items for Information**

**SBOE receives Action Item**

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GaDOE Petition Evaluation

Legal Compliance

- IDEA
- NCLB
- Georgia Charter School Statute
- SBOE Charter Schools Rule

Quality

- High academic goals, objectives, and performance measures
- Strength of educational program
- Evidence of innovation
- Governance capacity
- Fiscal feasibility

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We will lead the nation in improving student achievement.

Assess performance of all charter schools → Letters of intent to revoke charter if not meeting charter obligations → Short time period to allow for remediation → Use information gleaned from this project to improve authorizing → Close schools failing to remediate

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Questions?

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