



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

MEMORANDUM

TO: Renewal Applicants
FROM: Charter Schools Division
DATE: August 1, 2011
RE: Standards and Expectations for Charter Renewal Applications

The charter renewal process is an important opportunity for a charter school to show it has met the requirements of, and the commitments made in, its current charter contract. The renewal process is also an opportunity to describe new initiatives that will generate increased academic performance during the next five years.

This memo introduces the key standards and expectations you will need to address in your charter school renewal application. It also presents some of the common issues you are likely to encounter as you go through the renewal application review process in 2011-2012. Together, these standards, expectations, and issues will give you the framework for describing your past performance and future goals and initiatives – as well as your need for a charter to ensure increased academic performance is achieved moving forward.

Please carefully review this memo and then participate in our charter renewal webinar, scheduled to take place on August 23, 2011. The webinar will give you the opportunity to ask questions about the standards and expectations you will be required to comply with in your charter renewal applications.

1. Educational Program and Waivers

The Educational Program and the Waivers sections of your charter renewal application are where you answer the question, "Why do you need a charter?"

The charter "deal" gives to charter schools increased autonomy to increase student performance in exchange for increased accountability for achieving those performance gains. The autonomy is granted through waivers from state law and rules that give the flexibility a school needs to implement its innovative education initiatives.

Be sure to answer the following questions:

- What educational innovations or other initiatives are you proposing that require a waiver of state law or rule?
- What code section(s), state or local rule(s) or regulation(s) do you need waived to be able to implement your innovative educational or other initiatives?
- What flexibility or autonomy does each waived law or rule give you to increase student achievement?

2. **Goals and Objectives**

Your goals and objectives must be SMART – specific, measurable, attainable, rigorous, and time-bound – and must be directly connected to your innovative educational model and other initiatives.

Academic goals and objectives, at minimum, should demonstrate four things:

- Compliance with the federal requirement of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (currently called No Child Left Behind);
- Compliance with State Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs);
 - Since public charter schools are expected to perform better than their traditional public school counterparts, be sure to include a separate goal, objective and measure that compares your charter school’s performance to traditional public schools.
- Measure outcomes on all state-mandated tests in all subjects and grades.
 - High school applicants should include a goal/measure for EOCT performance in addition to GHSGT performance.
- Increased rigor during the course of the charter term.
 - Many schools set a goal to increase the number of students scoring in the “Exceeds” category on the CRCT to demonstrate increased rigor.

Goals and measures must also:

- Include organizational goals and measures (e.g., student retention, teacher retention, stakeholder satisfaction, and fiscal feasibility and sustainability);
- Be reflective of a school’s mission and what makes it unique; and
- Include multiple indicators of success.

3. **Governance**

The Governance section is where you must demonstrate the autonomy and decision-making authority of the school's governing board over such things as personnel, budgets, school scheduling and, if applicable, the education management organization (EMO). Be sure to show how your charter school's governing board meets the following minimum expectations:

- Undergoes continuous training to improve capacity;
- Meets monthly and keeps minutes that documents discussions and decisions made;
- Receives monthly reports detailing student academic progress
 - These reports must be used by the governing board for early identification and remediation of failure to meet interim academic targets;
- Adheres to internal control policies (e.g., separation of duties) and review financial statements and bank statements monthly;
- Allocates time annually or quarterly to review the charter contract
 - All governing board members must know what the charter contract allows, prohibits, and requires and the level of accountability for which the school is responsible;
- Governs rather than manages the charter school; and
- Avoids conflicts of interest.

4. Schools Partnering with an Education Management Organizations (EMO)

Schools partnering with EMOs must address the following minimum expectations:

- The renewal petition must demonstrate that the schools governing board is independent from, and autonomous of, the EMO
 - Governing boards must demonstrate the capacity to terminate the EMO;
- EMO fees will be carefully scrutinized and sweep contracts will not be allowed.
 - Fees must be reasonable and evidence must be provided that they were negotiated by the governing board;
- If the EMO provides a facility
 - There must be a separate lease which allows the school to remain in the facility without a change in cost for the lease term in the event that the EMO is terminated
 - The cost of rent must be fair market value or less;
- Everyone in the school must be an employee of the charter school, not the EMO;
- EMO agreements must articulate how property will be split or disposed of should the charter contract be terminated or non-renewed; and
- Allocates time annually or quarterly to review the management agreement

- All governing board members must know what the management agreement requires and prohibits of both parties.

5. Accountability

Charter schools seeking renewal of their charter contract must demonstrate sufficient accountability, including compliance with the terms of the school's current contract.

As part of the accountability section, you must submit an Academic Performance Chart that details your school's academic performance during its last charter term, including AYP status.

If your school has met or exceeded academic targets, you must submit a High Performance Education Plan that describes what you will do to ensure that current academic achievement levels are exceeded in future years.

If your school has not met academic targets, including making AYP each year, or has exhibited a decline or problem areas, you are highly unlikely to have your charter renewed.

- The only chance you have for renewal in the case of such failure is to submit a strong Remedial Education Plan (REP) that explains why each target was not met and describes the specific, focused solutions you have implemented to ensure success – along with evidence that the REP worked, including student academic performance improvements in the year after the REP was implemented.

6. What to Expect During the Charter Renewal Process

Renewal applications are due November 1 to the Charter Schools Division (CSD) at the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE). CSD's evaluation includes the following:

- Initial Petition Review: CSD staff will thoroughly review the petition and determine areas you must elaborate on or clarify should you desire a recommendation for approval.
- Petitioner Interviews: You school will participate in a panel interview including GaDOE representatives and at least one outside charter expert. Interviews will be scheduled sometime in November, most likely mid-month.
- Recommendation Letter: Applicants will receive a letter enumerating items in the petition which need clarification, revision or about which additional information is required.
- Revision Webinar: Applicants who want to submit a revised petition are required to attend the CSD webinar on common issues in the 2011 petitions and suggestions on addressing these issues.

- **Revision, Resubmission and Reconsideration:** Applicants will have a single chance to revise and resubmit their renewal petition. CSD's review of your revised petition will determine whether your charter renewal is recommended or not.

For additional information, please see the CSD website at www.gadoe.org or email Morgan Felts, Staff Attorney and Petition Evaluation Specialist at mfelts@doe.k12.ga.us.