



ATLANTA
PUBLIC
SCHOOLS

Making A Difference

Guidelines for Petitioners Proposing a Start-Up Charter School for the 2014-2015 School Year



December 12, 2012

Dear Charter School Petitioner:

Thank you for your interest in chartering a school in the Atlanta Public School District (APS). We believe that charter schools are not a panacea for all problems, but are one of many different approaches that the district uses to promote a variety of successful and innovative educational designs that create quality choices for families in our district.

We are happy to provide you with the information you'll need to get started with the charter application process. Our goal is to authorize quality charter schools that focus on excellence in student achievement, sound finances, operations, and governance, and sustainability.

After reviewing the guidelines, you should have a better idea of the components of a quality charter petition and the review and decision-making processes. The APS Office of Innovation stands ready to provide you with any additional information you need to submit a complete application.

While your application must reflect your original work, please feel free to reach out to the staff for more information, clarification, or referral to appropriate resources any time during the application process.

Thank you for your interest in creating positive choices for students in the Atlanta Public School District.

Sincerely,

Allen Mueller, Executive Director

Office of Innovation

APS 2014-2015 Petitioner Guide

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Introduction

Charter schools are public schools governed by nonprofit boards. They operate through a performance-based contract with the district. The Atlanta Public Schools Board of Education approved the district's first charter school in 1999. There are currently thirteen charter schools operating in the district.

Local governance tends to strengthen the bond between charter schools and their communities, although all charter schools are open to enrollment, via lottery, by anyone living within the school district. Parents may choose to send their children to their zoned school or to one of the city's thirteen charter schools, space permitting.

Charters are allowed to waive specific portions of state education law in return for accepting greater accountability. This means that they have greater flexibility in terms of their programming. This flexibility may result in smaller class sizes, longer school days, longer school years, themed programming emphasizing math and science, the arts, foreign languages and cultures or many other possible programs. Greater accountability means that charter schools are expected to set and meet high academic and other performance goals.

In addition to innovative programming, Atlanta Public Schools authorizes charter schools to increase positive educational outcomes for the children and parents of Atlanta.

APS will publish its annual charter school application in January for schools planning to open in the following calendar year. The application contains all local and state requirements. The application can be found on the APS website. Guidance, checklists, and cover sheets for required signatures are available on the Georgia Department of Education Charter Schools website.

The Charter School Act of 1998 states that private individuals or organizations, existing public schools, and state and local public entities may organize a public charter school as a "charter petitioner." Home study programs or schools, private for profit, sectarian, religious or existing private schools and private educational institutions not established, operated, or governed by the State of Georgia cannot start a charter school in Georgia.

Following the approval of a charter petition by APS, the petition is then submitted to the State Board of Education. It is the State Board of Education that then grants the charter

while APS sponsors the charter. The initial term of a charter shall be for a minimum of five years, not to exceed ten years, unless the charter petitioner consents to a charter term for fewer than five years.

The first step in this process is to file a letter of intent with the Atlanta Public Schools and with the Georgia Department of Education no later than February 1. A sample letter of intent is enclosed in this packet.

This packet will guide you through the steps of developing a quality charter school petition. Experience has shown that successful charter schools tend to have a number of common characteristics:

- A clear, focused, results-oriented mission statement that aligns all parts of the proposal
- An educational program that is likely to be effective for the target population; A comprehensive and research-based curriculum and assessment program designed to hold all students to high achievement goals, including differentiation to meet the needs of students with disabilities and specialized needs and abilities
- Demonstrated understanding of the population that the school is likely to serve; A strong understanding of the community the proposed school will serve
- Demonstrated community support
- Meaningful opportunities to involve parents and community along with a sustainable plan for maintaining strong parental and community participation in, and support of, the school.
- A strong, knowledgeable, diverse, stable, and committed board of governance or leadership team committed to best practices in school governance, business operations, and financial management.
- A strong and well-organized leader committed to educational choice.

We are eager to receive well-developed petitions from capable school developers who are committed to developing and implementing innovative educational approaches and improving the lives of children and families in the Atlanta Public Schools community.

If you have any questions regarding this application or the evaluation process, please contact:

Tara Mitchell
Research Associate
Office of Innovation
404-802-2881
tdmtichell@atlanta.k12.ga.us

Application Review Timeline

Process	Dates
Letter of Intent - Applicants must submit letter of intent to the APS Office of Innovation by due date in order for their petition to be accepted.	2/1/2013
APS Workshop - Applicants should attend an APS Petitioner's Workshop.	Mid February 2013
Application Due - Completed application must be submitted by due date in order to be reviewed. Applications submitted after the deadline will be returned to the Petitioner. No exceptions.	4/19/2013
Review of Complete Application - All completed applications will be reviewed for statutory requirements. Based upon review outcomes, capacity interviews will follow.	Late April 2013
Capacity Interview - Qualified applicants will meet with a charter school review panel to discuss the petition's components. While we understand that circumstances may change, interviews cannot be rescheduled.	May 2013
Recommendation to APS BOE - The review panel will make a recommendation to the APS Superintendent for approval or denial.	6/10/2013
Feedback to Applicants - Denied applicants will receive feedback within 60 days of submission.	6/19/2013
Recommendation to GADOE - The APS BOE will vote on the recommendation and the results will be submitted to the GaDOE.	8/1/2013

Letter of Intent to Apply for a Charter

Letter of Intent to Apply for a Charter to Atlanta Public Schools

If you plan to submit a charter school petition to Atlanta Public School District, please submit the following Letter of Intent to the Office of Innovation in advance. This will help the Office of Innovation to communicate better and more effectively with petitioners. Thank you.

Please submit by email to tdmitchell@atlanta.k12.ga.us or fax to (404) 802-1807 or mail to Atlanta Public Schools c/o Office of Innovation 130 Trinity Ave 8th Floor Atlanta, GA 30303 no later than **February 1, 2013**.

Make sure the following information is included in the letter of intent.

- Name of proposed school
- Lead petitioner
- Full mailing address (city, state, zip)
- Daytime telephone number
- Fax number
- E-mail address
- Proposed date of opening
- Grade levels to be served at full capacity
- Anticipated enrollment at full capacity
- Brief description of kind of school proposed (e.g. arts-, math-, or science-focused school or use a particular school/curriculum design).
- Brief explanation of proposed charter school. In one or two sentences, provide a clear statement that defines the purpose(s) and nature of your school.
- If you are planning to work with an Education Management Organization (EMO) or Charter Management Organization (CMO), please indicate name of CMO/EMO.

EXAMPLE: LETTER OF INTENT

Name of Charter School

Street Address

City, State Zip Code

Phone Number

Fax Number

Email

Date [no later than 6 months prior to date petition is due to the Georgia Department of Education]

Georgia Department of Education

Charter Schools Division

2053 Twin Towers East

205 Jesse Hill Jr. Drive, SE

Atlanta, GA 30334

and

Atlanta Public Schools

Office of Innovation

130 Trinity Ave 8th Floor

Atlanta, GA 30303

RE: Letter of intent to open **(name of Charter School)**

In accordance with Georgia State Board of Education Rule 160-4-9-.04, please accept our letter of intent to submit a petition for **(name of Charter School)** in the Atlanta Public School System.

Our vision for **(name of Charter School)** is _____.

The mission of **(name of Charter School)** is _____.

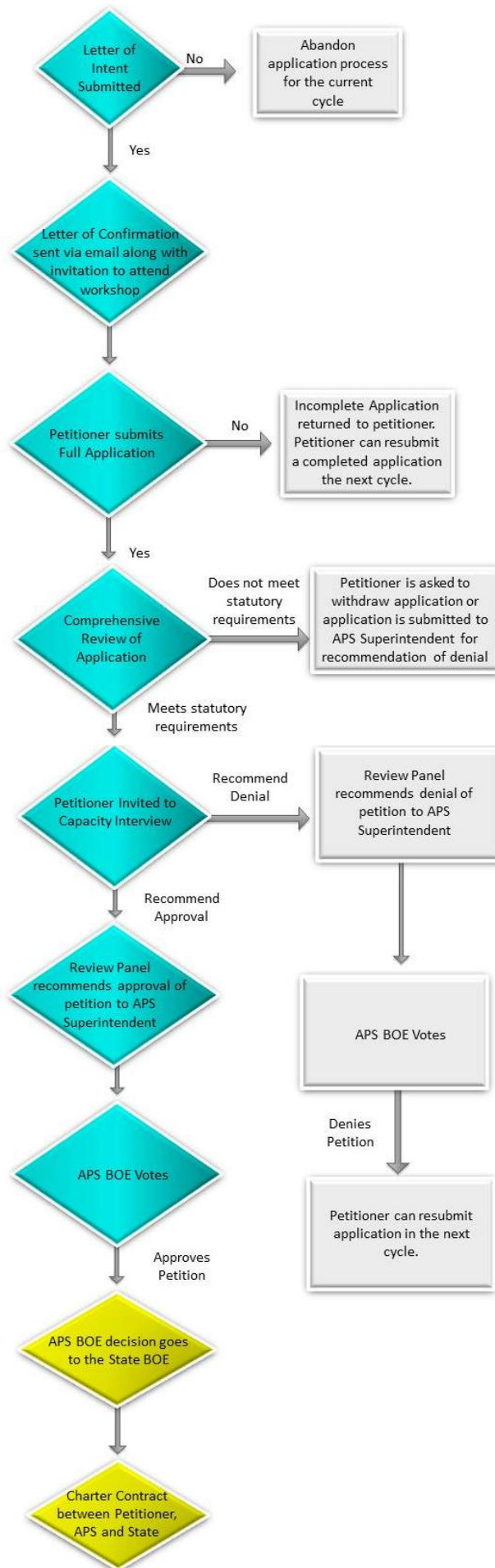
(Name of Charter School) proposes to open for the ____ - ____ school year, serving grades ____ increasing to grades [if applicable] in ____ number of years. The anticipated enrollment at maximum capacity is _____.

(Name of Charter School) will be working with _____ name of EMO/CMO.
(if applicable)

We look forward to working with you towards the completion of our petition and the successful start of our school year.

Sincerely,
(name, title)

APS Petitioner Application Process Flow



Required Petitioner Components

LETTER OF INTENT - Ensure a Letter of Intent has been submitted to Atlanta Public Schools Office of Innovation and Georgia Board of Education Charter Office by the due date.

APPLICANT WORKSHOP - Attend an APS workshop for new petitioners.

APS PETITIONER COVER SHEET - Include the completed APS Petitioner Cover Sheet.

APS PETITIONER CHECKLIST - Include the APS Petitioner Checklist.

DOE START-UP CHARTER SCHOOL CHECKLIST - Include the completed DOE Start-Up Charter School Checklist with required signature in blue ink.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - Include the completed GDOE Executive Summary Sheet. This section should be no more than three (3) pages.

Mission - This section should describe the vision of how the charter school will look once it's in operation and the mission should describe how the school intends to make the vision a reality.

Community Support/Educational Need for this School - This section should describe the need for this school in the immediate community it will serve and the areas of concentration on which the school intends to focus.

Governance and Organization - This section should include any evidence of community involvement in the school governance and if applicable an outline of the EMO/ESP relationship.

EDUCATION PROGRAM - This section should include a description of the school's educational program, research-based evidence as well as its alignment with Common Core Standards.

Academic Standards and Curriculum – Provide a general description of curriculum. Explain how it will align with Common Core Standards.

Students with Disabilities - Describe the processes to address the needs of students with special needs to ensure compliance with all aspects of IDEA.

Student Assessment - This section should describe the plan to obtain student performance data for each student, plans to formally and informally assess student

performance, and how the charter plans to comply with state and federal accountability requirements.

School Achievement Goals and Nonacademic Performance Goals - This section should detail clear and measurable academic performance-based goals and objectives. Also, APS has developed the *Charter School Performance Framework*. The framework addresses 3 broad categories of charter school performance – academic, financial and operational. In addition, it defines the metrics for evaluating school performance during the term of the charter. The requirements for satisfactory performance can be found within the *Performance Goals* section of the application.

Support for Learning - This section should include the school's core values, discipline policy, bullying policy, counseling and health services, extra-curricular activities and grievances/complaints.

Community Partnerships - Provide a list of partnering organizations and the nature of the partnership, how the community and parents were involved in developing charter and the contributions of parents and community after approval.

School Characteristics - Include an annual calendar in compliance with Georgia attendance requirements. Also include a daily schedule sample.

Grade Structure - Explain your grading configuration, your accreditation process if any, and if high school requirements for graduation.

Student Information System - Describe how you will collect and submit data to APS and how the school will maintain accurate enrollment and attendance records.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT - This section should describe the governance structure, the process involved in appointing or electing board members, and the timetable for implementation

Profile of the Founding Board and/or Initial Incorporators - Provide summary of qualifications for each founding board member and provide two references for each member. Include résumé for each member.

Relationship of Founders to Charter Governing Board and Management - Describe the corporation, how it's structured, it's officers, their role, who controls its, any business arrangements, partnerships, contracts with ESP/EMO, and the oversight of the school.

School Governance - Provide a description of how the school will be governed, the governing board functions, governing board training and meeting, process for resolving complaints/grievances and compliance with state statutes.

Charter School Implementation Timetable - Describe the duration of the charter and how will the program will be phased in over time and the steps to implement the program.

FACILITY - This section should include location options, as well as a plan for the proposed space that includes fund allocation and needs assessment.

FINANCE - This section should include a plan for revenues and expenditures, as well as a plan for compliance with local, state, and federal accounting and reporting requirements.

Financial Management - Describe who will manage the school's finances, the financial management of the charter, and who will conduct the annual audit.

Budget - Provide a monthly cash flow projection, a balanced budget, budget narrative and a contingency plan.

Fundraising - Describe the fundraising efforts and explain any contributions or in-kind donations.

STUDENT BODY - This section should include plans for recruiting, registering and admitting students.

Recruiting and Marketing Plan -This section should include 5 year enrollment projections, rationale for size, target population, evidence to support interest in school and method used to recruit students.

Admissions and Registration Plan - Provide calendar for recruiting, registering, admitting students; policies and procedures for admission, enrollment and withdrawal; maintenance of student records; policy for enrollment verification.

HUMAN RESOURCES - This section should include plans for recruiting, hiring, and training staff as well as recruiting and training volunteers

School Staff - Describe plans for selecting, developing professional development, evaluation of staff. Include sample of a teacher schedule, plans for staffing Special Ed and ELL, and compensation package which includes TRS of Georgia, and State Health Benefit participation.

Volunteers – Describe plans of recruitment, training and the mandated abuse reporting requirement for school volunteers working with children.

OPERATIONS PLAN - This section should include plans for the operation of the school which includes insurance, legal, transportation, and food services.

Insurance / Risk Management - A list of the types of insurance the school will contract, as well as a reflection of its impact on the school budget.

Legal Services - Identify the board's legal counsel and how the school will ensure compliance with the law.

Transportation - Describe plans for transporting students and account for it in the budget.

Food Services - Include plans for meeting the nutritional needs of the students and plans for participating in the National School Lunch Program.

SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS - This section should summarize school plans. The applicant summarizes in 300 words or less your group's plan to create an excellent school.

WAIVERS - This section should include whether or not the petitioner will seek full flexibility waiver and rationale for either.

APPENDICES AND ATTACHMENTS - This section should include only materials referenced in the application.

Conflict of Interest Forms - All founding members need to complete this form.

Sample Lesson Plans - This section should include sample lesson for one teacher, a year-long scope-and-sequence for one subject, for one grade

Letters of Partnership and Support - This section should include letters of support from partners, NPU, and community.

Annual school calendar and weekly school schedule - An actual school calendar and weekly school schedule should be included.

Résumés - Résumés for all board members, school leader (if available), and business manager/CFO.

Organizational chart - Copy of your proposed school's organizational chart that describes the hierarchy of the board and the school administration. If applicable include EMO/ESP on the chart.

EMO/ESP (If Applicable) - Include a signed copy and fully executable of the EMO/ESP contract.

Budget forms - Include in this section initial year, 5 year, contingency (initial year and 5 year) budgets.

Parent/student handbook - A complete parent/student handbook

Certificate of Incorporation - A copy of the certificate of incorporation from the Secretary of State of Georgia

Organization by-laws - A signed copy of the organization's by-laws.

EXISTING OPERATORS (If Applicable) If you are replicating an existing program, a copy of the APS Replication Supplement is included.

Atlanta Public School Board Policy

Charter Schools Descriptor Code: IBB

The Atlanta Board of Education supports student success and school choice by authorizing charter schools that provide innovative, high quality learning opportunities for students who reside in the City of Atlanta. It is the Board's intent that by authorizing high quality charter schools, the district can learn from innovative and unique programs that advance student achievement.

In keeping with state statutes (O.C.G.A. §20-2-2060 through §20-2-2071) and subsequent legislation, the board may approve a petition from:

- An existing local school in the Atlanta Independent School System to convert to a charter school.
- A Georgia non-profit corporation that submits a petition to establish a local start-up charter school.
- An existing Atlanta Public Schools charter school for a renewal term.
- A district-sponsored start-up charter school.

The petition must contain a detailed plan that demonstrates all of the following information:

1. A distinctive element or a unique program that is research-based and standards driven.
2. An instructional program that will enable students to meet or exceed state standards for Adequate Yearly Progress pursuant to the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), and charter school performance goals as described in the petition.
3. Securing and adhering to accreditation from an agency recognized by the Georgia Student Finance Commission for HOPE (Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally) scholarship eligibility. This requirement applies only to schools that offer grades 9, 10, 11, and/or 12.
4. Financial independence from the school system using state and local funds and a feasible plan to supplement those funds with other funding sources on a yearly basis as required.
5. Compliance with all local, state, and federal legal, regulatory and insurance requirements.
6. Organizational viability including, but not limited to, action plans for governance, substantive initial and ongoing board training, staff recruitment and retention, student enrollment and attendance, student discipline, safety, appropriate facilities, and insurance.
7. Organization and operation of the charter school as a Georgia non-profit entity.
8. Evidence of community and parental outreach, involvement and support, such as letters of support from the Neighborhood Planning Unit (NPU) in which the charter school shall

be located and the neighborhood association(s) active in the area(s) from which the school plans to draw the majority of its students.

9. Evidence that the petition is in the public interest.

If the charter petitioner intends to contract or has contracted for the services of another entity to manage the school or any of its operations, this information shall be included in the charter petition, including a copy of the contract. Employees of the charter school or employees of any entity supplying services to the school and immediate relatives (as defined in policy GAG Staff Conflict of Interest) of such employees may not sit on the governing board of the charter school. The charter petitioner may not through any contract abrogate its responsibility as a charter holder or otherwise limit its obligation to be subject to the management and control of the Atlanta Board of Education and the Atlanta Public Schools.

The board shall consider petitions for approval once each calendar year in accordance with state timelines. The board shall approve or deny all properly submitted petitions within sixty (60) days after the petitioner's submission, unless an extension is requested and granted. After an initial review, applications found to be incomplete will be returned to the petitioner with instructions for resubmission in a subsequent petition cycle if desired.

Petitions that are approved by the board for a conversion, local start-up charter school, district-sponsored start-up, or renewal term will be delivered to the Georgia Department of Education for review by the State Board of Education. Petitioners whose petitions are denied by the board will be provided a written statement of the reasons for denial within sixty (60) days of the board action. A denial of the petition by the board does not preclude the submission to the board of a new or revised petition by the petitioner during a subsequent petition submission cycle.

For each locally approved start-up or renewal petition receiving approval from the State Board of Education, the board and the petitioner will execute a legal agreement to operate the charter school. The agreement will incorporate, but not be limited to, the entire content of the approved petition.

The board may terminate a charter legal agreement if the charter school does not meet one or more of the following requirements during the charter term:

1. Offer a distinctive or unique instructional program that is research-based and standards driven.
2. Meet or exceed academic performance goals including state standards for Adequate Yearly Progress as required by NCLB and charter school performance goals described in the petition.
3. Obtain and maintain appropriate accreditation for HOPE scholarship eligibility (for schools containing grades 9, 10, 11, and/or 12).
4. Sustain financial solvency and independence from the school system.
5. Comply with all legal, regulatory, and insurance requirements.

6. Exhibit documented evidence of organizational viability as proposed in the petition.
7. Operate as a Georgia non-profit entity.
8. Demonstrate non-discriminatory practices in hiring and enrollment.
9. Meet and sustain annual enrollment goals proposed in the petition (within 20 percent).
The charter school may not exceed maximum stated enrollment goals.
10. Remain in the public interest.
11. Comply with all other material terms of the charter legal agreement.

Termination requests originating with the local board will be in accordance with local hearing procedures, State Board of Education rules, and applicable state law.

In accordance with state law, Atlanta Public Schools shall make its unused facilities available to charter schools authorized by the board. The Superintendent shall develop a process for selecting the most appropriate charter school tenant for any unused facility based on a number of selective criteria including, but not limited to:

1. Whether or not the charter school currently occupies a facility
2. The suitability of the facility for the specific school program
3. Evidence of community support, such as letters of support from the Neighborhood Planning Unit (NPU) in which the facility is located and the neighborhood association(s) active in the area in which the facility is located.

The terms of the use of such a facility by any charter school shall be subject to negotiation between the district and the local charter school and to approval by the board and shall be memorialized as a separate agreement. A local charter school that is allowed to use such a facility under such an agreement shall not sell or dispose of any interest in such property without the written permission of the board. Charter schools will not be charged a rental or leasing fee for the existing facility or for property normally used by the public school which became the local charter school. A local charter school that receives property from the board may not sell or dispose of such property without the written permission of the board. This provision shall not be construed to supersede the terms of existing contractual agreements.

The superintendent is authorized to develop regulations to implement this policy.

APS Charter School Frequently Asked Questions

Are charter schools public schools?

Yes.

What is a charter school?

A charter school is a public school that operates under contract with a local authorizer such as Atlanta Public Schools. Charter schools are governed by their own independent, non-profit boards with oversight from the authorizer and the state Department of Education. Charter schools have district-wide enrollment zones and are allowed flexibility in their programming in exchange for specific performance goals.

How many charter schools are currently operating within APS?

Twelve charter schools currently operate with APS, with two more schools approved to open in 2013. A list of these schools with addresses and contact information can be found on the Atlanta Public Schools webpage. Approved charter applications are posted at the Department of Education's website.

What are the Atlanta Board of Education's policies regarding charter schools?

The Atlanta BOE's policies regarding charter schools can be found on the BOE website.

Who runs APS charter schools?

Each charter school is governed by its own independent board. Charter school boards are incorporated as Georgia nonprofit corporations. Some charter schools contract with Educational Management Organizations to run their schools, but all legal and fiduciary responsibility for a charter school rests with its independent governing board. The district is charged by the state with "control and management" of the charter schools it authorizes, though both the authorizer and the Department of Education mainly provide oversight and support to charter schools rather than actively managing them.

Are charter schools better than traditional schools?

Charter schools are intended to give parents living within the district additional educational options for their children. Charter schools, like traditional schools, use curriculum aligned to state standards and student performance at charters is measured using the same state tests used at traditional schools. Some charter schools outperform traditional schools and many traditional schools outperform charter schools. The decision to attend a specific school should be made only after a thorough investigation of all available options and programs.

Do charter schools serve children with special needs?

As public schools, all charter schools serve students with special needs. As district schools, charter schools participate in the district's Special Education program and services are

monitored by the district. As is the case with traditional schools, due to facilities and staffing limitations, the most appropriate program for every student may not be offered at every charter school.

How are charter schools funded?

Like all public schools, charter schools receive a combination of federal, state and local funding. The state Department of Education calculates a funding sheet for each individual charter school, based on the school's student and employee composition. The local authorizer then develops a proportional local funding amount based on the average amount each student in the district receives from local dollars. The formula for each of these calculations can be found in Title 20, Georgia School Law.

Do charter schools receive less funding than traditional schools?

The formula used to fund charter schools in Georgia was designed to give charter schools a proportional funding level based on 100% of the per-pupil amount received by traditional schools. Any new school, traditional or charter, tends to receive a lower funding amount, because the state's QBE funding formula assigns additional dollars for teachers with advanced training and experience.

The Petition

Where can I get an application to start a charter school?

The charter petition itself is the application. A copy of the guidelines, application and rubric can be found on the Atlanta Public School Website at <http://www.atlantapublicschools.us/Page/783>

What happens if my petition is approved?

The Office of Innovation makes a recommendation to the Atlanta Board of Education for approval. If the board approves the recommendation, then the application is submitted to the Georgia Board of Education for final approval. The State Board of Education approves a contract that the Charter Schools Division drafts that encompasses elements of the petition. The charter contract is a legally binding document between the following parties: the petitioner, the local authorizer and the State Board of Education. Until the Charter Schools Division receives an executed contract with all appropriate signatures, the petitioner may not legally open their charter school.

What happens if my petition is denied?

If the Atlanta Public School Office of Innovation makes a recommendation to deny a petition to the Atlanta Board of Education, they have 60 days to provide the petitioner with the reasons for their denial. If the ABOE approves the denial, the petition is submitted to the State BOE for final decision. Denied petitioners can either apply to the state as a state special charter school or are encouraged to think critically about the reasons for denial, revise their petition accordingly and resubmit the following year.

Petition Deadlines

When is the Letter of Intent due?

Start-ups: February 1

When are petitions due to the Atlanta Public Schools Office of Innovation?

Start-ups: April 19

If a deadline falls on a weekend, when is my document due?

The document is due on the business day prior to the deadline, or must be postmarked by the deadline.

How can I find out more about a specific charter school?

Contacting charter schools directly is the best way to find out more about them. Charter school board meetings are open to the public and meetings are posted on each school's web page. Calling the district charter office at 404-802-2881 is a good way to get general information about the district's approach to its charter school program.

Please contact APS Office of Innovation at (404) 802-2881 Tara Mitchell
tdmitchell@atlanta.k12.ga.us or

GDOE Frequently Asked Questions for New Petitioners*

Qualifications for Opening a Charter School

Who may start a charter school in Georgia?

Existing local schools, private individuals, private organizations, and state and local public entities may organize a charter public school subject to a performance-based contract approved by both the state and local boards of education or by the state board of education alone.

Who cannot start a charter school in Georgia?

The term "charter petitioner" does not include home study programs or schools, sectarian schools, religious schools, private for-profit schools, private educational institutions not established, operated, or governed by the State of Georgia, or existing private schools.

The Petition Process

How do I start a charter school?

An application, commonly referred to as a petition, must be submitted to and approved by a local authorizer. After approval by a local authorizer, the petition must be submitted to the Charter Schools Division at the Georgia Department of Education. Petitions will then be subject to an evaluation process and will ultimately be approved or denied by the State Board of Education.

What happens if my local authorizer does not approve my petition?

Upon denial by a local authorizer, applicants may submit their petitions to the State Board of Education. Petitions approved by the State Board of Education alone, known as state-chartered special schools, receive only state funding.

What does the evaluation process by the State Board of Education entail?

When a petition has been received by the Georgia Department of Education, it is first read and evaluated by qualified reviewers at the Department. These reviewers evaluate the overall capacity of the petitioner to develop, launch and sustain operation of a high-quality charter school. Second, petitioners are invited to participate in a formal interview. Third, the Charter Schools Division provides a list of recommendations to the petitioner and gives the petitioner an opportunity to revise the petition. Revised petitions must first be newly approved by the local board of education before re-submission. The revised petition is reviewed and the Charter Schools Division makes a recommendation of either approval or denial to the State Board of Education. The State Board of Education receives the petition as an Item for Information at its monthly meeting, then as an Action Item the following month.

What happens if I decide to revise my petition?

Petitioners who chose to revise their petition must have their local authorizer reapprove the revised petition. Revised petitions must undergo another review by the Charter Schools Division.

What happens if my petition is approved?

The State Board of Education does not approve petitions. The State Board of Education approves a contract that the Charter Schools Division drafts that encompasses elements of the petition. The charter contract is a legally binding document between the following parties: the petitioner, the local authorizer and the State Board of Education. Until the Charter Schools Division receives an executed contract with all appropriate signatures, the petitioner may not legally open their charter school.

What happens if my petition is denied?

If the State Board of Education denies a petition, they have 60 days to provide the petitioner with the reasons for their denial. Denied petitioners are encouraged to think critically about the reasons for denial, revise their petition accordingly and resubmit the following year.

Must I apply to the local board first, or may I apply directly to the State Board of Education (SBOE)?

Petitioners are required to first submit a petition to the local board(s) of education.

What if my school proposes to serve multiple counties/districts?

Applicants/petitioners who desire to serve students living in an area that includes more than one county or city school system must submit either a jointly-approved application/petition -- which is approved by the local board of education in each county and/or district your school wants to serve -- or submit an application/petition approved by the county or city school system in which the charter school will be physically located (the school's home district) and include a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the home school district and each county and/or district your school wants to serve regarding how they will share money and resources for students that live outside the school's home district.

The Petition

Where can I get an application to start a charter school?

There is no "charter application" in the sense of a fill-in-the-blank form. The charter petition itself is the application. Guidance, cover sheets for required signatures, and checklists are available on the Georgia Department of Education Charter Schools web site at <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Charter-Schools/Pages/Charter-Petition-Application.aspx>.

What must be included when I submit my completed petition?

Three hard copies and one electronic copy of the petition must be submitted to the Georgia Department of Education. The petition must include properly completed cover sheets and

checklists and the petition and appendices must be clearly marked by alphabetical or numerical tabbed dividers. The Georgia Department of Education reserves the right to not accept incomplete submissions.

Petition Deadlines

When is the Letter of Intent due?

Start-ups: February 1

When are petitions due to the State Department of Education office?

Start-ups: August 1

If a deadline falls on a weekend, when is my document due?

The document is due on the business day prior to the deadline, or must be postmarked by the deadline.

Grants

Are grants available for planning and implementing a charter school?

Planning and Implementation Grants are available through the State Department of Education via the Federal Public Charter Schools Program. The grants are competitive and limited to the availability of funds. Charter petitioners are eligible to apply for these grants once a charter has been approved by the State Board of Education. The grants are competitive and limited to availability of federal funds. Absent extraordinary circumstances, implementation grants are limited to the amounts outlined in the application.

Where can I find charter school grant applications?

All charter school grant applications are posted on the Georgia Department of Education's website on the Charter Schools Divisions homepage under "Grant Applications."
<http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Charter-Schools/Pages/Grant-Applications.aspx>

I don't see the Planning/Implementation Grant budget form online, what should I do?

First, consult our website under Charter School Grant Programs. If you still cannot find what you are looking for, contact the Charter Schools Division at jclarkedodd@doe.k12.ga.us.

Rules and Regulations Governing Charter Schools

Which state laws and State Board of Education rules MAY be waived by a charter school?

A charter school may waive most state laws and SBOE rules, with the exception of those pertaining to health and safety, funding formulas, and accountability provisions.

Which state and federal laws and State Board of Education rules MAY NOT be waived by a charter school?

Charter schools may not wave state laws or SBOE rules pertaining to health and safety, funding formulas, or accountability provisions. In addition, charter schools may not waive any aspect of federal law. This includes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (also known as No Child Left Behind), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and all applicable civil rights legislation.

Are charter schools subject to “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) and other accountability requirements of No Child Left Behind?

Yes.

May a charter school focus on a special population of students?

Provided that a school adheres to the laws regarding open admissions, a charter school may, through its educational focus, target a particular population of students with a specific need, such as students with disabilities, English language learners, or students at risk for dropping out of school. Petitioners considering such a model are advised take the necessary precautions and to work closely with their authorizer to ensure compliance with state and federal laws.

Non-Profit Status

Are start-up charter schools required to organize and operate as a non-profit organization?

Yes.

Teacher & Staff Qualifications, Certification, and Compensation

Must teachers in charter schools be certified?

State certification requirements are one of the provisions that charter schools are permitted to waive if they so choose. A charter school must request either this specific waiver or have the broad flexibility allowed under the Charter Schools Act to exercise this option. However, charter schools must comply with federal requirements for “highly qualified” teachers under Title IIA of No Child Left Behind. The certification levels of proposed teachers may be considered by the local and state authorizers when evaluating the petition.

What qualifications do charter school paraprofessionals have to meet?

At a minimum, paraprofessionals must pass a criminal background check and are subject to the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind act.

Are teachers employed by a charter school paid according to Georgia's Salary Schedule?

The charter petition defines the salary schedule for certified teachers. The salary schedule may or may not be the Georgia Annual/Monthly Teacher & Administrator Salary Schedule for teachers. Conversion charter schools often continue to name the local board of education as the employer with no change to benefits and the salary schedule.

Do teachers participate in the Georgia Teacher Retirement System (TRS)?

Teachers at charter schools are required to be members of the Teachers Retirement System.

Budget

How specific should the petition budget be?

The budget included in the charter petition should be as specific as possible to ensure the maximum amount of transparency. Petitioners should include average teacher salaries and conservative revenue projections. Competitive grants should be purged from the petition budget. The petitioner must also make sure that charitable contributions have been reasonably assured before adding them to the budget projections.

Can the Charter Schools Division provide me with examples of good budgets?

Past petitions are posted on the charter website for the public to view. This is a good opportunity to learn from former petitioners.

Educational Program and Academic Goals

How do I know if the academic and performance-based goals in my petition are rigorous?

Petitioners should do their research in order to establish rigorous and appropriate academic goals and objectives. Petitioners should become familiar with the academic performance of other schools in their area, as well as the academic goals of successful schools, in order to determine that they are setting goals that will raise student achievement.

What are SMART goals?

Where can I find information about serving special populations of students, such as English language learners, students with disabilities, and gifted students?

Charter schools, as public schools, must serve all students, including populations with unique needs, such as English language learners, students with disabilities, and gifted students. A successful petition demonstrates that the petitioners are capable of adequately and appropriately serving these populations. Petitioners should research state and federal requirements regarding the identification, service, and assessment of special student populations. Resources include the Georgia Department of Education's website, and the United States Department of Education website. The Georgia Department of Education also provides training opportunities with regard to serving special student populations.

Charters

What is the duration of a charter?

Pursuant to O.C.G.A. Sections 20-2-2067.1(b), the State Board of Education typically grants 5-year charters. At the request of the petitioner, this term may be shorter. Charter terms may not exceed 10 years.

May a charter be amended?

Yes, a charter contract may be amended pursuant to O.C.G.A. Section 20-2-2067.1. Amendments are subject to local and state board approval.

May a charter be terminated?

Yes, a charter contract may be terminated pursuant to O.C.G.A. Section 20-2-2068.

Under what circumstances can a charter be terminated?

A charter may be terminated under the following circumstances.

A majority of parents guardians of enrolled students OR a majority of faculty and instructional staff vote to request that the state board of education terminate the charter.

The state board finds that a school has failed to adhere to terms of its charter, has failed to comply with generally accepted standards of fiscal management, or has violated applicable laws, or finds evidence that the continued operation of the school would be contrary to the best interests of the students or the community.

Upon the written request of a local board of education, provided that the local board provided reasonable notice to the school and an opportunity for a hearing.

Please consult O.C.G.A Section 20-2-2068 for more details regarding the termination of a charter.

Additional Questions

Whom can I contact if I did not find the answer to my question here?

Please contact the Charter Schools Division at (404) 657-0515 jclarkedodd@doe.k12.ga.us.

* <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Charter-Schools/Pages/Frequently-Asked-Questions-for-New-Petitioners.aspx>

Acknowledgements

Much of the information provided in this Guideline was derived from exemplar materials created by charter school authorizers and other supporting organizations that are nationally recognized for their policies and procedures aimed at increasing the number of high quality charter schools. The Atlanta Public Schools Office of Innovation wish to acknowledge and thank the following organizations for their contributions in creating this Charter School Petitioner's Guideline.

Charter School Institute

1580 Logan Street, Suite 210 Denver, CO 80203

www.csi.state.co.us

Charter Schools Institute

The State University of New York

41 State Street, Suite 700 Albany, NY 12207

www.newyorkcharters.org

Charter School Office

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

75 Pleasant Street

Malden, MA 02148

www.doe.mass.edu/charter

Office of Charter Schools

Oakland Unified School District

1025 Second Ave. Rm. 206

Oakland CA, 94606

www.ousdcharters.net

National Association of Charter School Authorizers

105 West Adams Street, Suite 3500

Chicago, IL 60603-6253

www.qualitycharters.org