



Charter School Frequently Asked Questions

Prepared by the Policy & External Affairs

What is a Charter School in Georgia?

A charter school is a public school that operates according to the terms of a charter, or contract, that has been approved by a local board of education and the State Board of Education. The charter school may request waivers from provisions of Title 20 of Georgia state law and any state or local rule, regulation, policy, or procedure relating to schools in the school district. In exchange for this flexibility, the charter school is bound by contract to be held accountable for meeting the performance-based objectives specified in the charter.

How many charter Schools are there in Georgia?

Currently, Georgia has **71** operational charter schools (2007-2008 school year). In addition, the State Board of Education has approved several new charter schools that are scheduled to open in Fall 2008, with dozens of locally approved charter school petitions currently being reviewed.

How do I enroll my child in a charter school?

A charter school is a public school that must as a condition of its charter have an open enrollment policy.

What is CAC?

The Charter Advisory Committee is a state-level body that reviews charter petitions for compliance with established standards of the state board, makes recommendations to the state board on charter policy, and provides recommendations to the state board regarding charter petitions.

Do charter schools serve children with special needs?

Yes, charter schools, like all public schools, are required by law to serve students with special needs in accordance with their Individualized Educational Plan. For additional information please read the Special Education Primary for Petitioners, Authorizers and Districts found in the Technical Assistance section of our website.

What is the difference between a charter school and a traditional public school?

A traditional public school is organized according to federal laws, state school laws, State Board of Education rules, and local board of education policies. A charter school is organized according to federal laws, applicable state school laws and SBOE rules that cannot be waived, and the terms of the charter contract.

What is the difference between a charter school and a private school?

A charter school is a public school that is organized and operated according to the terms of the charter, or contract. A charter school cannot have admissions criteria or charge tuition.

A private school is not subject to state school laws, local board of education policies, or State Board of Education rules. Private schools may have admissions criteria and charge tuition.

Who may start a charter school in Georgia?

The Charter Schools Act of 1998 provides that 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.

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.

What is the approval process for granting a charter?

After a charter petition has been approved by a local board of education, the petition may be submitted for approval to the State Board of Education. The State Board of Education grants the charter. The local board of education sponsors the charter.

If a local board of education denies a charter petition, the State Board of Education may grant a charter for a state chartered special school.

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 which describes the proposed school according to the elements identified in the Charter Schools Act of 1998 and the State Board of Education Charter Schools Rule 160-4-9-.04. 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/pea_charter.aspx.

Who can attend a charter school?

Any student who resides in the school district in which the charter school is located and who submits a timely application may attend a charter school. If the number of applications exceeds the capacity of the school, all applicants will have an equal chance of being admitted through a random selection process or lottery.

Enrollment preference may be given to students who reside in the school's attendance zone, which is defined in the charter contract. A sibling of a resident student currently enrolled in the charter school may also be given enrollment preference. A charter school cannot have admission criteria.

How can a student enroll in a Georgia charter school?

If the charter school is located in the school district where the student resides, call the charter school or the local school system to inquire about registration procedures. If the charter school is located in a school district where the student does not live, call the charter school or the local school system to inquire about registration procedures for accepting students out of district.

How are charter schools funded?

Charter schools are public schools. The Georgia Charter Schools Act of 1998 states that a charter school shall be included in the allotment of funds to the local school system in which the charter school is located. The local board and state board shall treat the charter school no less favorably than other local schools in the school district with respect to the provision of funds for instructional and school administration and, where feasible, transportation, food services, and building programs.

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How are charter schools funded?

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The amount of money the charter school will receive from the local board will be determined according to the provisions of the Charter Schools Act of 1998. In addition, the charter school will receive federal funds for special education services and for other categorical program services to the extent to which any pupil is in the charter school is eligible to participate. If additional revenues are needed, the charter school must depend on independent means.

How are charter school facilities funded?

The State Board of Education has created a facilities fund for local charter schools and state chartered special schools to establish a per pupil, need based facilities aid program. The moneys from the fund can be used to purchase real property, construct school facilities, purchase or lease school facilities, purchase vehicles to transport students to and from the charter school, and renovate, repair, and maintain the school facilities. The Department of Education has specified procedures for submitting and approving requests for funding.

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How are charter school facilities funded?

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Local boards are required to renovate, repair, and maintain the school facilities of charter schools in the district to the same extent as other public schools in the district if the local board owns the charter school facility.

Charter schools may access property designated surplus by a local board of education on the same basis as it makes such available to other public schools under the control and management of the local board of education.

How are charter school facilities funded?

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Prior to releasing moneys from the facilities fund, the DOE shall ensure that the governing board of the local charter school and the local board shall enter into a written agreement that includes a provision for the reversion of any unencumbered funds and all equipment and property purchased with public education funds to the ownership of the local board in the event the local charter school terminates operations.

Are grants available for planning and implementing a charter school?

Charter petitioners are eligible to apply for a charter school planning grant prior to the time a charter is approved. The grants are competitive and limited to availability of state funds. Planning grants are \$5,000. Charter petitioners are eligible to apply for charter school implementation 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 \$200,000 for conversions, \$400,000 for start-ups, and \$600,000 for state chartered special schools.

What is the duration of a charter?

The initial term of a charter shall be for a minimum of five years and shall not exceed ten years. A petitioner may consent to a charter term fewer than five years.

May a charter be amended?

Yes, upon approval of all parties to the charter.

May a charter be terminated?

Yes, the State Board may terminate a charter if called for by a majority of parents at the school, a majority of faculty and instructional staff employed by the school, or the written request of the school system. The State Board may also terminate upon its own findings. Reasons for termination are defined in the Charter Schools Act of 1998.

Who is the employer of the faculty and staff of a charter school?

The charter petition defines who will be the employer of the faculty and staff at a charter school. Conversion charter schools often continue to name the local board of education as the employer with no change to benefits and the salary schedule. Start-up charter schools may designate the governing board of the school, the non-profit governing board, or an education management organization (EMO) as the employer.

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Who is the employer of the faculty and staff of a charter school?

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In the case of the latter, the salary schedule may or may not be the same as the Georgia Annual/Monthly Teacher & Administrator Salary Schedule. Various arrangements are made to provide benefits packages to employees. For example, the charter school's governing board may contract with a private company to provide benefits to employees of the charter school.

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

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

Must teachers in charter schools be certified?

Georgia law does not require teachers at charter schools to be certified. The certification levels of proposed teachers may be considered by the local and state board when voting on the petition.

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.

If a student decides to leave a charter school, may that student re-enroll in a traditional public school?

Yes

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

Yes

For more information, contact:

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