



# Charter System Application

DISTRICT NAME

Gilmer County School System

DISTRICT ADDRESS

134 Industrial Blvd.  
Ellijay, GA 30540

Dr. John D. Barge  
State School Superintendent

DECEMBER 2012

## Introduction

The Charter Schools Act of 1998 established a flexibility option for Georgia school districts that wish to become a Charter System. A Charter System is a local school district that operates under the terms of a charter contract between the State Board of Education and the local Board of Education. The system receives flexibility in the form of waivers of certain state laws, rules and guidelines in exchange for greater accountability for increased student performance and an emphasis on school-based leadership and decision making.

Your Charter System Application is a petition to the Georgia State Board of Education asking it to create or renew your charter system. The evaluation of your Application will be led by the Charter Schools Division of the Georgia Department of Education, in partnership with others within the Department (including the Finance and Budget Office, the Office of School Improvement, the Office of School Turnaround, and the Accountability Division) and with the independent Charter Advisory Committee (CAC) that was also established by the Charter Schools Act.

The evaluation of your Application will focus on whether implementing the charter system proposed in your Application will lead to the improved academic performance you are promising in exchange for freedom from much of Georgia's education law, rules and guidelines. It will also determine whether the proposed charter system would comply with all applicable laws, rules, regulations, policies and procedures (including the Charter Schools Act of 1998, as amended [O.C.G.A. §§ 20-2-2060 through 20-2-2071], State Board of Education Rule 160-4-9-.04 et. seq., and Department of Education Guidelines accompanying the Charter School Rules); whether your proposed academic plans are viable; and whether the charter system is in the public interest.

Please note that submitting a Charter System Application does not guarantee that a charter will be granted. It does guarantee, however, that the Georgia Department of Education will work closely with you to improve your chances of State Board of Education approval of your charter system contract.

## DEADLINE AND SUBMISSION PROCEDURES

Your Charter System Application must be approved by your local Board of Education in accordance with the rules and regulations of your local board. After local submission, review and approval, charter system applications must be received at the address below by November 1 of the year prior to the start of the July-June fiscal year in which the charter system contract would go into effect. Early submissions are encouraged.

Georgia Department of Education  
Charter Schools Division  
2053 Twin Towers East  
205 Jesse Hill Jr. Drive, SE  
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

## APPLICATION PACKAGE CHECKLIST

Your Charter System Application Package must comply with the following submission procedures.

- An Application Package includes an original and two copies of the following items:
  - SYSTEM APPLICATION COVER SHEET** (Use the form on page 3; the form may not be altered in any way).
  - CHARTER SYSTEM APPLICATION** (Your answers to the questions posed on pages 4-6).
    - The Charter System Application is limited to 50 double-spaced pages using an 11-point Times New Roman font and one-inch margins with a header showing the school system's name and a footer showing consecutive page numbers.
    - The original must be signed in blue ink. Stamped signatures will not be accepted.
  - ASSURANCES FORM AND SIGNATURE SHEET** (Use the Assurances Form and Signature Sheet below on pages 7-9; the Form and the Sheet may not be altered in any way).
    - The original must be signed in blue ink; stamped signatures will not be accepted.
  - EXHIBITS** (See list of required Exhibits below on page 10).
    - Required Exhibits should be as limited in size as possible (no more than 5 pages per Exhibit). The only exceptions to this size limitation for Exhibits are your most recent annual audit, accreditation report, and strategic plan (to which you will provide online links).
    - All Exhibits must be tabbed.
- Your Application Package must be bound by a binder clip; do not enclose your Application Package in a notebook, binder, or folder.
- Your Application Package must also include a single CD or USB drive that includes a:
  - Microsoft Word version of your Charter System Application Cover Sheet
  - Microsoft Word version of your Charter System Application
  - PDF Version of your signed Assurances Form
  - Microsoft Word version of your Exhibits (except for your annual audit, accreditation report, and strategic plan)
  - PDF version of your most recent annual audit
  - PDF version of your most recent accreditation report
  - PDF version of your most recent strategic plan

Faxed or emailed copies will not be accepted. Only complete petitions that comply with these guidelines will be evaluated. Applications will not be returned; please keep a copy for your records.

## CHARTER SYSTEM APPLICATION COVER SHEET

Please enter the requested information in the gray boxes following each question. Thank you!

Proposed Charter System Information			
1. Full Name of Proposed Charter System <b>Gilmer County School System</b>			
2. Please indicate whether this is a: New Petition <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> or a Renewal Petition	3. How many schools in total are you proposing to include in your charter system? <b>6</b>		
4. How many of each of the following schools are you proposing to include in your charter system? <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 5px;"> <div style="text-align: center;">Primary School(s)    1</div> <div style="text-align: center;">Middle School(s)    2</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 5px;"> <div style="text-align: center;">Elementary School(s) 2</div> <div style="text-align: center;">High school(s)    1</div> </div>			
5. On July 1 of what year do you want your charter contract to be effective? <b>2014</b>			
6. How many years are you proposing for the term of your charter contract? (Note that an initial charter cannot exceed five years) <b>5</b>			
7. Charter System Street Address <b>134 Industrial Blvd.</b>	8. City <b>Ellijay</b>	9. State <b>GA</b>	10. Zip <b>30540</b>
11. Contact Person <b>Bryan Dorsey</b>		12. Title <b>Superintendent</b>	
13. Contact Street Address <b>134 Industrial Blvd.</b>	14. City <b>Ellijay</b>	15. State <b>GA</b>	16. Zip <b>30540</b>
17. Contact's telephone number <b>706-276-5000</b>	18. Contact's fax number <b>706-276-5005</b>	19. Contact's E-mail Address: <a href="mailto:bryan.dorsey@gilmerschools.com">bryan.dorsey@gilmerschools.com</a>	

## CHARTER SYSTEM APPLICATION

The Charter System Application includes six questions grouped into four sections. The first section is “The Case”, where you justify your schools system’s need for a charter. The final three sections focus on your Academic Plan, Local Governance Plan, and Use of the Charter System Funding. Please note that the italicized bullet points after each question are included to clarify the question being asked and to provide guidance regarding what we will be looking for in your answers.

### THE CASE

**1. What will you be able to do with a charter that you can’t do without a charter?**

- *Use this question to present a brief executive summary that makes the case for your school system being granted a charter.*

Over the last eight months the Gilmer County School System has garnered the support of the local community, school staff and parents to operate under a system charter. This potential increased flexibility from the state requirements will allow for the development of a school system that will be more responsive to the local needs of the system’s students. Gilmer County Schools will be able to provide more flexibility for developing programs that better meet the needs of our students and reflect the needs, wishes, and desires of the local community. The projected areas of flexibility that will be used in the Gilmer County Charter include: instructional programming, opportunities for students to earn credits through experience and community-based instruction, high school credits earned in the middle school, flexible uses of technology for instruction, funding, scheduling, seat time, credit by exam, course and graduation requirements, teacher certification requirements, and others. School Governance Teams will be developed and trained, and over time they will better understand the potential of students and the educational process. As this develops it is anticipated that more waiver areas will be requested.

Gilmer County School System  
July 2013

A critical component of the charter is the accountability of the school system to the public. Accountability measures will be developed, articulated, and communicated by and with the School Governance Teams and to all internal and external stakeholders. Accountability measures will go beyond standardized test scores and include measures such as completion of career pathways; attendance rates; graduation rates; 21st Century Skills including problem-solving and technology; and post-secondary measures. Indicators will include proficiency in math, science, technology, problem-solving and career-readiness. Following the system's recent AdvancED (SACS) review in October 2012 it was apparent the community, parents and staff are ready and able to support the school system in its efforts to graduate students who are ready to become productive citizens both locally and globally. Programming will need to be developed to match these outcomes. The School Governance Teams will be a part of this programmatic planning process.

Gilmer County School System's motivation for applying to be a Charter System is driven by community, parent, school, staff and system leadership. Gilmer County is exploring innovative solutions to better serve our students by providing a rigorous and well-rounded curriculum for all students, as well as intensive and on-going remediation for those students who may be struggling. Gilmer County's graduation rate has increased from 2003 at 59.2% through 2010 at 87.9%. In 2011 under the new Georgia adjusted cohort graduation rate our graduation rate was 86.4%.

Gilmer County is a rural community of approximately 28,190, located in the mountains of North Georgia. The community places an emphasis on poultry production and apple farming. Employers in Gilmer County and are interested in supporting the system's efforts to build a solid local workforce around technology, science, and math, as well as "soft" skills such as work ethics, social skills, and responsibility. In January 2011, Gilmer County's unemployment rate was 11.2%. That number as of March 2013 had dropped to 9.3%. The school system is committed to working together with the community to continue to improve this rate by graduating students who will be viable and

Gilmer County School System  
July 2013

capable employees. In order to improve on our unemployment rate, we need to examine our community demographics as a whole. Gilmer County is behind the state average in many important categories regarding education attainment and income. In Gilmer County 75% of residents have a high school diploma or higher compared with 84% across the State of Georgia. Fourteen percent (14.3%) of Gilmer County citizens have a Bachelor's degree or higher compared to a state average of 27.5%. The median income for Gilmer County citizens is \$37,091 compared with the state average of \$49,736. Gilmer County School System is a high poverty district as evidenced by a free and reduced lunch rate of 69.70%. Demographically, our student population is made up of 88% White and 10% Hispanic. Gilmer County School System has an enrollment of approximately 4,300 students (Pre-K to 12th grade), and the school system has six schools: one primary school (PK-1); two elementary schools (one 2-4 and one K-4); two middle schools (one 5-6 and one 7-8); and a high school (9-12). Programs include: Standards-Based Instruction (Pre-K to 12); academic after-school tutoring (K-12); technology integration (Pre-K to 12); Georgia Lottery Pre-kindergarten; School-wide Title I (K-12); Technology courses (K-12); Career Tech and Agricultural Education (CTAE, 6-12); Advanced Placement (9-12); Post-Secondary Articulation (9-12); Work Based Learning and Youth Apprenticeship (9-12). In October 2012, the Gilmer County Board of Education submitted a letter of intent to the Georgia State Department of Education to become a charter system. The Gilmer County Charter System development process started immediately and has involved a wide array of community members, staff, and parents. Information regarding a "Charter System" was presented to all employees of the school system, including bus drivers, cafeteria staff, clerical, paraprofessionals, maintenance staff, teachers, administrators, and the school board members. Several Town Hall and community meetings were held to present Charter System information to parents and community members. Many community members and school staff served on the Education and Governance sub-committees. These sub-committees were created with the intent of educating participants regarding charter

Gilmer County School System  
July 2013

systems. Presentations were made by each sub-committee to inform those individuals present of best practices in current charter systems around the state that should or should not be included in the Gilmer County Charter System application. The eight-month process involved many hours of meetings, presentations, surveys, discussions and conversations with other Charter Systems. It is evident in the Charter System survey that respondents expressed concerns that students graduating from Gilmer County School System are not always prepared for the level of problem-solving and critical thinking that are essential in today's fast-paced and complex work environments. The Gilmer County Charter System development process is chronicled on the district web site at the following address:

<http://www.gilmerschools.com/district/charter-system>

During the eight months of study and planning, the community and staff provided input and discussed the decision to become a Charter System and were in full agreement that it was the right choice. The details for implementing the plan are not in place, since the School Governance Teams will be critical in developing the specifics to a well-rounded and rigorous experience for all students in Gilmer County. The Charter System planning process revealed four priority areas for Gilmer County students:

- Basic knowledge and skills
- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Social skills and work ethic
- Preparation for skilled employment

The Charter System planning process allowed all stakeholders to be included in creating a collective vision and focus for all students in Gilmer County. The system's vision, "The Gilmer County School System will be known as an exceptional school system for all students and staff, empowering every student to graduate prepared to enter the work force or pursue further education," demonstrates an on-going commitment to student achievement and academic excellence for all students through a continuous improvement process of collaboration with internal and external stakeholders who share

Gilmer County School System  
July 2013

accountability for a high-quality education. The system's mission, "The mission of the Gilmer County School System is to provide all students with educational opportunities that produce responsible contributing citizens who are lifelong learners in our ever-changing global society," ensures that our students will benefit from a commitment to a rigorous and well-rounded curriculum that will prepare them to compete in a global economy and improve the quality of life within their community, making it possible for graduates to secure a sustainable occupation wherever they so choose. Gilmer County's belief statements encompass our commitment to high expectations for all students and a committed community of learners and stakeholders working together for success in school and the community through continuous improvement:

- All students can learn.
- All students must be provided with the opportunity to learn.
- The individual needs of students must be met before learning can take place.
- All students must be provided a safe school environment.
- Students must be taught to be lifelong learners with an awareness of the importance of the connection between school and work.
- An exceptional education is the shared responsibility of school, family and community.
- The function of education is to develop productive citizens.
- The educational process must be responsive to change.
- A highly qualified, supportive, motivated staff is essential for student learning.

In order to realize our vision and incorporate our beliefs into the daily work of the Gilmer County School System, we need to have greater flexibility in serving students and using state and local resources, greater community and parent involvement in decision making, and innovative and supportive solutions for students who may be falling behind or may need acceleration. With this flexibility, Gilmer County School System will be able to provide a seamless schooling process that

Gilmer County School System  
July 2013

feeds into and supports the wider community of Gilmer County, and greater accountability to the community in meeting our local outcomes.

Two committees were formed to examine both governance and education issues in order to develop the Charter System application. These committees researched out to other charter systems, held meetings and discussions, and provided input to each other, faculty, parents and the community. The two committees were broken down into smaller sub-committees and the work completed by the sub-committees became the evidence by which the Charter System application has been developed. Key components in the sub-committees review included: educational innovations, the governance structure, and the waivers and flexibility that would be needed to support the identified outcomes for Gilmer County School System. A broad flexibility waiver will be sought so that as needs arise, requests for additional waivers will not be necessary. Some possible waivers that will be needed to realize our vision are: experience and community-based instruction; expanding and redefining remedial, gifted, and ESOL options and delivery models; redefining seat time and the school day and week; allowing credit for academic application of skills and knowledge; providing coursework that prepares students for 21st Century careers and post-secondary education; providing flexibility for use of state and local funds; examining alternatives for teacher certification; aligning resources to respond to the needs of all students; and providing support for students outside of formula funding guidelines.

A focus of the Charter Application for Gilmer County will revolve around the four main areas that were identified previously: basic knowledge and skills, critical thinking and problem solving, social skills and work ethic and preparation for skilled employment. These four areas have continually been the hallmark of parent and community member concerns regarding student achievement and capacity. Recently the county's Strategic Plan has been tailored to address these needs and community concerns.

## ACADEMIC OBJECTIVES, PLANS, AND WAIVERS

### 2. What are your school system's student performance objectives for the proposed charter term?

*System student performance objectives should:*

- *Show the system's student performance during the past five years.*
- *Reflect where the system envisions itself academically at the end of the proposed charter term.*
- *Indicate the expected rate of student performance growth in each year of the proposed charter term.*
- *Exceed the rate of growth mandated by the State.*
- *Demonstrate compliance with Georgia's ESEA Waiver.*
- *You are encouraged to include all or some of the components of the current draft of the Georgia Department of Education's College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI).*
- *You are urged to include cohort measures that show the progress over time of a single cohort of students.*
- *You are also urged to include national norm-referenced test results among your performance measures.*
- *Be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based (SMART).*

*Present graphs that show the past five years performance with the system student performance objectives for the each year of the proposed charter term plotted out to demonstrate graphically what the charter system is striving to achieve with its new innovations.*

Gilmer County School System monitors student performance on standardized tests through School Improvement Plans and the District Strategic Plan in order to make instructional decisions to increase student achievement. As a part of the District Strategic Plan, we developed a Balanced Scorecard to monitor the system's progress on the SMART goals in five strategic goal areas – student achievement; highly effective and qualified workforce; communication; community involvement; and operational efficiency. The student achievement goals included goals aligned with the expectations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as well as goals for other areas. Many of the goals in our District Strategic Plan and School Improvement Plans are aligned with the new accountability system, College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI); however, there are some

Gilmer County School System  
July 2013

areas in this new accountability system that we have not been tracking. With the implementation of CCRPI, the transition to Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS), and the accompanying assessments to be administered during the 2014-2015 school year, Gilmer County School System will be examining the student achievement goals and adjusting the goals to meet all federal and state accountability measures. Equipped with the recently released CCRPI report, Gilmer County Schools will be better able to establish benchmarks and appropriate expectations regarding the rate of student performance growth for each year of the proposed charter. Included in the attached statistics is a table of the student performance data for the past five years. By examining the student performance in the table, we are able to view grade level data which allows us to identify instructional concerns in a grade/subject as well as cohort data which allows us to follow the progress of a group of students over time. Using the attached statistics one can see how a group of students has scored on standardized assessments through a given time of 5 years. Also included is a graph showing the trend based on the historical student performance data with a combination of CRCT and EOCT scores that represents the “meets and exceeds” in all tests grades 3-12 over a five year period. These graphs demonstrate the growth we are striving to achieve with the innovations and flexibility allowed by becoming a Charter System.

Overall, our goal will be to exceed the state percentage of students meeting or exceeding on standardized tests by the end of the charter term. In addition, we want to provide a rigorous educational program for our students and move more students into the “exceeds” category on standardized tests in order to meet or exceed the state rate. In addition to standardized test results Gilmer County Schools would like to assume accountability for student’s preparedness for entering, college and/or the workforce, providing safe school environments, economic sustainability and proper local school governance. The following SMART goals were written with these objectives in mind:

Gilmer County School System  
July 2013

Goal 1: The Charter System will demonstrate improvement as defined by Georgia requirements and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended.

Measure 1: In each year of the charter term, the Charter System will meet or exceed the State Performance Targets for all subjects on all Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCTs), all End Of Course Tests (EOCTs) and all other minimum requirements as set by the Department.

Measure 2: In each year of the charter term, the Charter System shall exceed the state averages on the CRCT and EOCT by subject and grade.

Measure 3: If in any year of the charter term less than 100% of Gilmer County Schools fail to meet or exceed a State Performance Target in any subject, each year thereafter, the Charter System shall increase by 10% each year the scores on those subjects in those schools until 100% of schools meet and exceed State Performance Targets.

Goal 2: The Charter System will demonstrate that all students are college and career ready.

Measure 1: In each year of the charter term, the Charter System will meet or exceed the State Performance Targets for graduation rate using the Department's cohort-based calculation.

Measure 2: If in any year of the charter term, the Charter System fails to meet or exceed the State Performance Target for graduation rate, each year thereafter, the Charter System shall reduce the percentage of students not graduating by an amount equal to 10% the difference between the current graduation rate and 100%. The Charter System shall use the Department's cohort-based calculation to establish the current graduation rate.

Measure 3: From a baseline established in Year 1 of the charter term (2014-2015), the Charter System will increase the percentage of graduates earning high school credit(s) for accelerated enrollment via at least one of the following options Accel, Dual HOPE Grant, Move On When Ready,

Gilmer County School System  
July 2013

Early College, Gateway to College, Articulated Credit, Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses by 3% each year.

Measure 4: In each year of the charter term, the Charter System will increase the number of students seamlessly entering colleges and technical schools by 3% and decrease the percentage of students needing Learning Support (LS) by 3% each year as measured through the National Student Clearinghouse data and the Georgia Student Finance Commission.

Goal 3: The Charter System will increase student performance of all students so that all students are high performing.

Measure 1: From a baseline established in Year 1 of the charter term (2014-2015), the Charter System will increase the percentage of students scoring in the Meets and Exceeds categories in each subject and grade level on the CRCT and EOCT. If the baseline percentage is below 90%, the Charter System will increase by 2% each year up to 90%. If the baseline is 90% or above, the Charter System will increase by 1% each year up to 95%. Once 95% of students are Meeting or Exceeding by subject and grade, the Charter System will maintain that performance.

Measure 2: From a baseline established in Year 1 of the charter term (2014-2015), the Charter System will increase the percentage of students scoring in the Exceeds category in each subject and grade level on the CRCT and EOCT. If the baseline percentage is below 40%, the Charter System will increase by 2% each year up to 40%. If the baseline is 40% or above, or once 40% of students are Exceeding by subject and grade, the Charter System will increase by 1% each year thereafter.

Measure 3: From a baseline established in Year 1 of the charter term (2014-2015), the Charter System will increase the percentage of students scoring in the Meets and Exceeds categories on the 5th, 8th and 11th grade Writing Tests. If the baseline percentage is below 90%, the Charter System will increase by 2% each year up to 90%. If the baseline is 90% or above, the Charter System will increase

Gilmer County School System  
July 2013

by 1% each year up to 95%. Once 95% of students are Meeting or Exceeding by grade, the Charter System will maintain that performance.

Measure 4: From a baseline established in Year 1 of the charter term (2014-2015), the Charter System will increase the percentage of students scoring in the Exceeds category on the 5th, 8th and 11th grade Writing Tests. If the baseline percentage is below 40%, the Charter System will increase by 2% each year up to 40%. If the baseline is 40% or above, or once 40% of students are Exceeding by grade, the Charter System will increase by 1% each year thereafter.

Goal 4: The Charter System will increase performance on national assessments.

Measure 1: From a baseline established in Year 1 of the charter term (2014-2015), each year thereafter the Charter System shall increase the average total SAT score of the district by a minimum of 0.4 percent.

Measure 2: From a baseline established in Year 1 of the charter term (2014-2015), each year thereafter the Charter System shall increase the average district composite score on the ACT by 0.1 points.

Measure 3: From a baseline established in Year 1 of the charter term (2014-2015), each year thereafter the Charter System shall increase percentage of students taking either the SAT or ACT by 2% until the system reaches an 80% participation rate and then maintain while trying to improve.

The State Board shall hold the Charter System accountable for the full performance of each of the operational goals listed below.

Goal 1: Promote a positive school experience by providing a safe school environment.

Gilmer County School System  
July 2013

Measure 1: According to data reported by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement Report Card, from a baseline established in Year 1 of the charter term, the Charter System shall decrease the percentage of students absent 15 days or more by at least 1% per year until the percentage of students missing 15 or more days reaches 9%. At that point, we will continue to try to improve.

Measure 2: From a baseline established in Year 1 of the charter term (2014-2015), the charter system will increase parent satisfaction annually by 5% as measured on the annual parent perception survey until parent satisfaction measures 90% at which time the Charter System shall maintain the 90% satisfaction rate.

Measure 3: From a baseline established in Year 1 (2014-2015) the Charter System will increase parent participation annually by 5% up to 90%.

Goal 2: The Charter School will be economically sustainable.

Measure 1: Each year, the charter system will operate in a fiscally sound manner as measured by an external audit.

Measure 2: Actual and proposed budgets for each school year will demonstrate effective allocation of resources.

Measure 3: Yearly balance sheets will demonstrate that the charter system maintains adequate cash reserves.

Measure 4: The charter system will meet all Generally Accepted Accounting Practices (GAAP) as demonstrated by external, annual audit reports.

Goal 3: The Charter System will foster individual school-level governance.

Measure 1: All School Governing Boards will undergo annual governance training.

Measure 2: All School Governing Boards will meet 6 times during the school year.

Measure 3: All School Governing Boards will have representation from a variety of stakeholders, such as teachers, parents and community leaders.

Gilmer County School System's vision is to "empower every student to graduate prepared to enter the work force or pursue further education." With this in mind, we endeavor to increase student achievement for all students and strive to close the achievement gap among the subgroups. The performance of the students with disabilities and English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) subgroup has been, and continues to be, an area of concern. The performance of this group of students will be monitored in the areas of reading, English/language arts, and math. Performance for all students as well as the subgroups is closely monitored through a web-based data management system, STAR Enterprise, and the State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) provided by the Georgia Department of Education.

3. **What specific actions will your school system take to achieve your student performance objectives during the proposed charter term?**

- *Describe the educational innovations that will be implemented.*
- *Provide a clear explanation of how the innovations will increase student achievement.*
- *Describe the anticipated timeline for implementation of the innovations.*
- *Describe why the innovations are appropriate for this unique system.*

Gilmer County School System has several innovative instructional processes in place that have proved successful over the past few years, but also have additional ideas that we would like to explore through the Charter System process. Some of the innovations that we already have in place are online courses at the high school level, which was implemented in FY13, a waiver for class size, data teams, performance-based assessments, and the Governor's Reading Initiative (SY 12-13). Potential innovations that are being discussed include opportunities for students to incorporate aspects of a College and Career Academy, flexibility in scheduling and requirements for remedial and accelerated

Gilmer County School System  
July 2013

courses, course offerings through internships with local business partners, a blending of curriculum with core content and technical course work offering hands on application through course combinations such as construction and mathematics ensuring applied use of core content while receiving double credits with demonstrated competencies for both courses, tele-commuting for students including service to current home school or private school students, serve by need and not by label, extended day hours for schools to offer courses, increased collaboration between post-secondary and community opportunities and increased technology integration at all grade levels. In order to fully implement these innovations, the School Governance Teams, along with the local Board of Education and the faculty and staff, will need to identify and secure the necessary plans, resources, and waivers, and develop an evaluation system for each of the innovations to ensure the most effective and efficient use of the school day. The timelines for each of the innovations will be driven by the needs of the students and the availability of the aforementioned plans, resources, and evaluation systems to ensure the readiness of the schools to implement the plans. The school-level governance teams will provide input into the planning and implementation process for each of the innovations.

**1. Flexibility in requirements and delivery of remedial and accelerated programs.** Beyond state standardized test scores, to appropriately identify student needs for either remediation or acceleration, data teams have been established which continually examine a variety of data which include benchmarks, standards-based grades, performance assessments, and progress monitoring. This system provides information for specific elements and standards for each student in which they may need further remediation or acceleration. As data teams evolve, a primary focus has been on examining student work to see where teachers can improve the engagement level for all students. Gilmer County School System has also begun using the Georgia DOE's new State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS). Instruction has been informed and guided using this approach to progress monitoring and the use of SLDS. As students transfer in and out of the county, their performance and data will be available immediately for teachers in

order to provide targeted and individualized instruction for all students. The above innovations in data analysis have and continue to allow for systematic application of targeted and individualized interventions.

By providing flexibility in instructional programs to support and accelerate students, a waiver from seat and class time restrictions and requirements is required to more accurately project student needs so that administrators will be able to quickly use information to make schedule and programming changes to provide immediate support or acceleration for students. By ensuring that a wide variety of teachers are trained and endorsed in gifted and reading instruction, the schools are able to provide a variety of models for instruction, including advanced content gifted model and remedial programs outside of Special Education. By providing a variety of professional learning opportunities for teachers, they are better able to tailor instruction for their students and provide rigor and support through differentiation and full student engagement through performance tasks.

**2. Performance-based assessments will be used at all grade levels to measure 21st Century and career preparedness skills, including technology.** Currently, active student engagement and rigor are goals accomplished through the use of performance tasks. Charter System innovations will allow us to provide rigor and engage students through experiential projects that currently do not fit into the state funded course offerings to provide relevant learning opportunities in the community. Students at all grade levels will be involved in career and community awareness projects that will facilitate their transition to the next level, whether that is middle school, high school, or college and career opportunities. The community may be involved in providing input and support of these instructional initiatives in a variety of ways. Community members may come in to provide on-site field trips, instruction in specific skills, or through the College and Career Academy model. “Soft” skills such as responsibility, work ethic, and problem- solving ability will be emphasized across all curriculum areas. Technology instruction and integration also will continue to be a focus. To date, we have provided technology instruction in grades K-

8, and a one-to-one blended learning initiative at the high school. Gilmer County School System will continue to provide and inform students of the most current technology in education by leveraging support and expertise from the community. Gilmer County School System plans to explore options to involve students in a College and Career Academy in the near future which will allow the system to expand training and educational opportunities in preparation for post-secondary endeavors, either career or education.

**3. Graduation requirements will be examined.** The Georgia DOE provides for minimum competencies that are required for students to graduate. The Gilmer County School System and the community feel that students need a broader education and perspective to be fully prepared for the world of work and post-secondary education. Towards this end, the Gilmer County School System and the community would like to provide alternative ways for students to earn credit through the use of courses that are not found in the list of state funded class offerings. Some possibilities include Carnegie Units high school coursework offered at the middle school level, application of skills through community-project and work-based experiences that would count as credits, credit by exam for those students who have already mastered the curriculum, and a variety of dual enrollment opportunities to best prepare students for whatever path they choose after graduation.

**4. Increase collaboration between the post-secondary institutions, business and industry members, community, and the schools.** As evidenced by surveys completed by community members and opinions shared at the open charter forum regarding educational priorities, Gilmer County School System sees a need to bring in expertise from the wider business, industry, and post-secondary institutions in our area. The community and staff listed priorities such as basic knowledge and skills, and critical thinking among others. Some ideas for collaboration that the charter planning team discussed were inviting business and industry members to provide training for teachers or for students on application of skills in the workplace. Also to collaborate with college and university faculty on the

necessary skills and dispositions needed for success in post-secondary education, as well as working closely on dual enrollment initiatives for students while they are still in high school. To accomplish this initiative the need for a waiver exists to combine for instance the community's expertise in the apple and poultry industries to create courses that would match the hands on approach that would generate a course in horticulture that does not currently exist in the list of state fund course offerings.

**5. Focus on priority goals identified from the charter system survey of staff, community, and parents.** As part of the planning process for the Charter System, staff, parents, and community members were asked to participate in a brief survey to identify their priorities for education in Gilmer County. This survey was based on the eight goal areas of Georgia's Visioning Project. As mentioned before, the community has voiced its desires to combine local expertise to enhance student knowledge. This sentiment combined with the following priorities identified through survey results will guide decision making regarding potential course offerings that will include local community involvement.

The top four priorities from this survey were:

- Basic knowledge and skills
- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Social skills and work ethic
- Preparation for skilled employment

School Governance Teams will keep their focus on these priorities when developing and improving instructional processes. Waivers will be granted in order to facilitate programs that support these priority areas. The task of the School Governance Team is to identify instructional processes, examine root causes, find solutions to barriers (which may include seeking waivers), look for resources, plan for implementation, and finally implement these processes to work towards meeting these priority areas. The planning process for innovative practices will align with the district planning process which is a Plan, Do, Check, Act cycle of improvement. Through this cycle, innovations will

be carefully planned, and implemented, then monitored and data analyzed to make decisions on how to improve instructional processes. The first step in the planning process is to ask community members to provide input regarding career-ready outcomes that graduates will need to be successful in the work place. Workforce skills and dispositions will be emphasized throughout the K-12 curriculum with community providers providing support and instruction to students and staff. Performance assessments and skill application benchmarks will be developed in the high school to ensure career preparedness for graduates.

**Examples of educational innovation in progress:**

Currently Coordinate Algebra, a ninth grade course offering is being offered in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade at Clear Creek Middle School to 57 students who should earn that credit prior to enrolling in Gilmer High School in the fall of 2013.

Mountain Education Center (MEC) a collaborative charter school in North Georgia has had a campus in Gilmer County for numerous years and currently is housed at Ellijay Primary School. A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) exists between MEC and the Gilmer County School System. The Superintendent of Gilmer County Schools sits on the governing board for MEC. MEC offers the ability for students to earn their high school diploma at “the student’s pace” or to make up credits through credit recovery with the option to pick up additional credits over the summer or during the school year at night. This option afforded to the students in Gilmer County provides an additional avenue by which students may earn credits and/or graduate through a collaborative process with other neighboring counties.

Gilmer County School System participates in a multi-county alternative school to provide instruction for those students who are not successful in the traditional school environment for Grades 6-12. The alternative school has modified seat time hours which differ from state requirements but is able to serve the educational needs of the students with an alternate schedule.

Gilmer County School System  
July 2013

At Gilmer High School a virtual lab was instituted in school year 2012-2013. Currently this lab allows for credit recovery and the acquisition of new foreign language credit. Next school year the virtual lab will expand to allow students to acquire new credit in available course offerings. Initially this school year the lab contained seats for 70 students per block and next school year will be expanded to contain 100 seats per block. It is the system's hope to continue to expand these opportunities at the high school and in lower grades through different technology grant opportunities and Bring Your Own Technology (BYOT) initiatives. Also at Gilmer High School technological opportunities have been afforded to students in the form of "Google Chromebooks". This technology is very similar to a laptop but runs off of an Internet browser platform to allow students access to document editing programs that provide sharing features with teachers and staff that encourages simple submission of assignments and ease of collaboration.

As Gilmer County School System continues to explore new and creative ways to present curriculum to the students, we will work with the School Governance Teams and the community to help us formulate plans and processes to prepare our students for post-secondary options. In Gilmer County the post-secondary options include technological, agricultural, and manufacturing career opportunities, as well as educational opportunities at Dalton State College within the community and Chattahoochee Technical College (CTC) only 20 miles away in Jasper, GA. Communications have been made between the Gilmer County School System and CTC regarding the possibility of collaboratively allowing for students enrolled in both institutions to take courses on the Gilmer County Schools campus to avoid driving to the CTC campus for courses. This would enhance dual enrollment purposes for Gilmer County School's students and afford a more economical approach to earn credits for Gilmer residents taking classes at the CTC campus in Jasper, GA.

**4. Which of the specific actions in your academic plan require a waiver of state law, rule, or guidelines?**

Gilmer County School System  
July 2013

- *Although you will be granted a broad flexibility waiver if you are granted a charter, please list specific waivers needed to implement the educational innovations you have proposed.*

There are several areas of potential waiver requests from Gilmer County that were discussed during the Charter System planning process. We are requesting broad flexibility for waivers as we know that flexibility needs will arise as we move through the five years requested for the charter term. As these needs arise, the School Governance Teams will examine current data and root causes and explore options for fully supporting student achievement and engagement. Through this problem-solving process, waivers may be needed that were not thought of during the initial planning process.

**Required Waivers and Potential Impact on Student Achievement:**

**Certification:** O.C.G.A. §20-2-200; DOE RULE: 160-5-1.22

- Food and nutrition manager certification (potentially hire new food and nutrition manager without certification based on experience)
- EIP teacher certification (teacher with SWD certification teaching EIP students)
- Teacher Certification (use of industry expertise to provide instruction for internship courses)

**Class-size:** O.C.G.A. §20-2-182; DOE RULE: 160-5-1-.08

- Extending the class-size waiver granted in 2012-2013
- Allow up to 4 additional students per class size K-12 (i.e., CTAE, EIP, general education, gifted, REP, special education)
- Allow up to 14 additional students per gifted segment at the middle and high school
- Allow up to 10 additional students per REP segment at the middle and high school
- Allow up to 10 additional students per EIP segment at the elementary school

**Early Intervention Program, K-5:** O.C.G.A. § 20-2-153; DOE RULE: 160-4-2-.17

Gilmer County School System  
July 2013

- Deliver service by need not by model (may have students with disability, ELL students or EIP students, the labels are blurred)
- Select and serve students by data team process not state guidelines
- Monitor student progress by data teams

**English Learners Program, K-12:** O.C.G.A. § 20-2-153; DOE RULE: 160-4-5-.02

- Deliver service by need not by model (may have students with disability, EL students or EIP students, the labels are blurred)
- Select and serve students by data team process not state guidelines
- Monitor student progress by data teams

**Middle School Program Funding, 6-8:** O.C.G.A. § 20-2-290; DOE RULE: 160-4-2-.05

- Middle school program requirements (will review)

**Remedial Education Program, 6-12:** O.C.G. A. § 20-2-154; DOE RULE: 160-4-5-.01

- Deliver service by need not by model (may have students with disability, ELL students or EIP students, the labels are blurred)
- Select, serve, and monitor student progress by data team process not state guidelines

**Seat Time/Attendance:** 160-5-1-.02 SCHOOL DAY AND SCHOOL YEAR FOR STUDENTS

- Minimum hours offered to earn grade level and/or Carnegie Units towards promotion and graduation. Gilmer High School would like to explore different avenues in which students can earn credit such as credit by exam and credit by application of skills through community and work-based experiences.
- Full credit and funding for any coursework that is completed through alternatives.
- Carnegie Units for high school coursework that is offered at the middle school level through acceleration and transition programs such as an 8 ½ grade level or summer school opportunities.

- Off-site attendance for virtual programs and internships

**Course Offerings:** O.C.G.A. §20-2-140;

- Funding for courses exceeding current state offerings. Some examples would be technology (CTAE) courses for 5th grade, internships with different businesses that provide a mechanism to measure skills and competencies based on career preparedness coursework that has 21st Century skills as a focus, and dual enrollment opportunities that provide for both high school and college credits.

**Changes that Do Not Require a Waiver:**

**School Councils:** O.C.G.A. §20-02-0210

- Terminate school councils
- Operate governance teams at each school as a charter system

## GOVERNANCE

A key characteristic of charter systems is their decentralized decision-making structure. It is imperative that local school governing councils demonstrate autonomy and decision-making authority.

### 3. What is the system's plan to maximize school level governance?

- *Highlight the differences between the current local school governance structure and the new structure your new charter system will implement.*
- *Address the formation of the local school governing councils, including how members are selected, the terms of members, and how and why members may be removed.*
- *Describe the general responsibilities for the principal at each charter system school, the local school governing council at each charter system school, the system governing council (if applicable), and the local board of education in the areas of budget, resource allocation, personnel decisions (primarily principal selection, evaluation, and termination), establishing and monitoring the achievement of school improvement goals, curriculum and school operations.*

Gilmer County School System  
July 2013

- *Presenting this responsibility description in the form of a chart or a grid would be helpful to both you to ensure you've captured everything – and to us as we review your Application.*
- *Provide a timeline for governance training to be provided to principals and members of the local school governing councils in order to build the capacity needed to make decisions in the above-mentioned areas*

### **Gilmer County's Current Governance Structure**

At present, there are five elected Board of Education members. They are serving staggered four year terms; two members are up for reelection summer of 2014. The BOE members work in conjunction with the Superintendent to approve policies and procedures, personnel, and facilities. The Gilmer County Board of Education was recognized as a SACS/CASI Board of Distinction in October 2012. In order to qualify for this award, the BOE members were required to complete a self-assessment and to participate in training on the state board standards. The BOE is responsible for the approval of policy regarding instruction, personnel, students, and facilities and ensuring that these policies align with federal, state, local, and health/safety requirements.

Each of the six schools in Gilmer County School System has a School Council. The schools created their councils based upon the guidelines that were set forth in the 2007 General Assembly, which changed the composition of school councils to include the following:

- The principal
- At least two certificated teachers elected by the teachers
- A number of parents or guardians elected by the parents, so that parents make up a majority of the school council (two parents must be local business owners)

The members of the School Council serve two-year terms, and their role is to serve in an advisory capacity. Each school is permitted to determine the parameters of their role through the council's bylaws. The councils must meet at least four times per school year and a quorum of members

Gilmer County School System  
July 2013

must be present in order to conduct business. All of the meetings are subject to the Open Meetings Act and the Open Records Act. The School Councils are responsible for reviewing and providing input regarding the development and monitoring of the School Improvement Plan, new policies and procedures, school budget, extra-curricular activities, parent involvement, and academic progress. The School Council members are offered training. In past years, the agenda topics for council meetings have been limited to little more than operational concerns and policy changes. The current councils have limited interaction with the local board of education. It is the hope of Gilmer County School System that the new governing bodies will be more participatory and functional within their roles as advisory School Governance Teams.

**Gilmer County's New Governance Structure**

Upon receipt of Charter System status, Gilmer County will move away from School Councils and toward School Governance Teams. The School Governance Teams (SGTs) will have increased participation and input in an **approval process based on recommendations** of administration and/or SGT. The difference between School Councils and the SGTs lies in the additional responsibility of **approving decisions/recommendations** to the school board regarding board policy, budgetary issues, school improvement plans, and personnel. At present, School Council members in Gilmer County function primarily by attending "sit-and-get" meetings in which the principal relates pertinent school information; they discuss it, provide limited input, and adjourn. The School Governance Teams, however, will be asked to review pertinent school information, analyze it to the best of their ability, provide decisions to school leadership concerning certified employment, and budget and resource allocations at the school level which will then be taken the board of education. It creates a venue for local community members and parents to *really* be heard.

**Structure of the New School Governance Teams**

School Governance Team guidelines will include the following requirements:

Gilmer County School System  
July 2013

- 5-7 members- the principal, at least one of each of the following: teacher, parent, community member
- 2-year staggered terms of service (if approved by the SGT a parent may serve one year past student exiting school to complete 2 year service)
- Teachers and parents will be elected by the people they represent; teachers will elect teachers, and parents will elect parents
- Community members will be elected by the existing governance team members
- Technology will be utilized to gain public participation in the electoral process and the meetings
- All members of the SGT will sign a Conflict-of-Interest statement, as it will be mandated by BOE policy
- Examples of governance team approval authority include but are not limited to the following:
  - Certified staff employment
  - Final school-level budget approval
- SGT members can be relieved of their duty to serve due to:
  - Lack of participation
  - Conflict of Interest issues
  - Lack of adherence to the bylaws

Prior to the first year of implementation, the current School Council members will elect new members as they have in the past, and then undergo governance team training, which will give them an understanding of their role and responsibility as a School Governance Team member. SGT members will be trained in the few months leading up to full implementation to begin July 1, 2014. Members will receive formalized training through the GADOE Charter System department, the GSBA, or another training agent. The training topics will be determined at a later date and may include the following: Robert's Rules of Order, sunshine laws, school improvement plans, progress monitoring, school budget,

Gilmer County School System  
July 2013

curriculum, instructional technology, personnel, and strategic planning. Prior to becoming a SGT, each team will draft and gain approval for their bylaws. School Governance Teams will meet monthly and the meeting dates and times will be determined and posted by each school locally. The meetings will take place on the school campus and will last no longer than an hour. **All approved decisions/recommendations** from the SGT will be made with regard to the current BOE meeting schedule.

**Responsibilities of the Principal, the School Governance Teams, and the Board of Education**

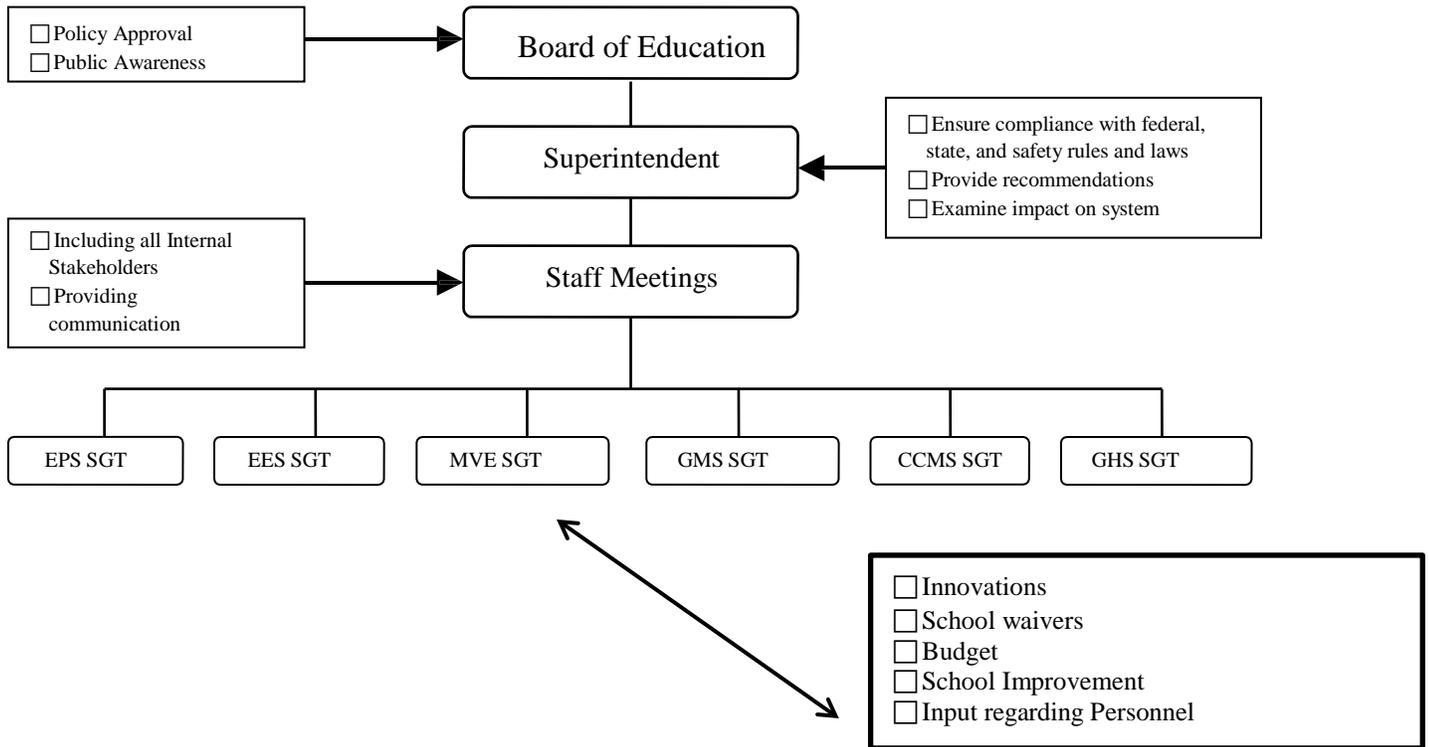
Responsibility	Principal	School Governance Team	Board of Education
Budget	Create school budget with local leadership team; implement the budget	Approve budgets for charter supplemental funding at school level, and advisory capacity concerning funding areas such as Title I, QBE, and general operations of the school	Make informed decisions with principal/ SGT <b>approved</b> recommendations
Resource Allocation	Present information to SGT about resource allocation	<b>Approve recommendations of principal allocations and improvements on use of resources</b>	Make informed decisions with principal/SGT <b>approved</b> recommendations
Personnel	<b>Principal will interview applicants and make recommendations to SGT to be forwarded to the superintendent for consideration by the BOE</b>	<b>Approve recommendations for certified employment</b>	Make informed decisions with principal/ SGT <b>approved</b> recommendations on certified employment
School Improvement	Create School Improvement Plan with local leadership team and faculty/staff input; present SIP to the SGT for corrections or changes	<b>Collaborative process with the SIP providing system with recommendations</b>	Make informed decisions with principal/ SGT <b>approved</b> recommendations
Curriculum	Present information to the SGT regarding curriculum changes or issues	<b>Curriculum discussions providing input and/or approval of recommendations to the system</b>	Make informed decisions with principal/ SGT <b>approved</b> recommendations

Gilmer County School System  
July 2013

School Operations	Present all fieldtrip and fundraisers to the SGT	Provide input on feasibility and effectiveness of school related activities	Make informed decisions with principal/ SGT recommendations
Parent Involvement	Present all parent involvement activities and plans to the SGT	Provide recommendations to the system regarding improving parental involvement capacity	Make informed decisions with principal/ SGT recommendations

As it is described in the chart above, the responsibilities, duties, and authority of the principal, the superintendent, and the Board of Education will remain consistent. It will become incumbent upon the principal to seek and encourage a new level of participation from School Governance Team members who have become accustomed to the “sit-and-get” style of school councils. The duties and responsibilities of the School Governance Team will continue to change and adapt to the needs of the school it serves. As deemed necessary, revisions may be made to each level of governance authority in this application through continued conversation by way of community and committee input. The bylaws will be amended as it becomes necessary. The minutes of each meeting will be available to the community members and parents. Gilmer County Charter System will publicize the dates, times, and minutes of School Governance Team meetings through eBoard. This will allow the system to remain transparent in their intention and action.

**Gilmer County Communication Chart**



## Timeline for Governance Training

Gilmer County schools will provide governance training to all members of SGTs on a two-to-three year training cycle. The training will be based upon structures provided by the GADOE Charter System Department, GSBA, or other training agent. The topics for training may include, but are not limited to: Robert's Rule of Order, sunshine laws, open records act, school improvement plans, progress monitoring, school budget, curriculum, instructional technology, personnel, strategic planning, federal and state programs, effective schools, and special education law. Training modules will be available to new members of the SGT. Training will be continually offered because the terms of members are staggered. Training will begin school year 2013-2014 to allow School Governance Teams to begin exercising authority and be operational beginning July 1, 2014.

*The proposed schedule and outline of topics is below:*

**April – May 2014:** School Governance Training annually, topics will vary based on legal requirements and individual SGT needs. SGTs will be operational year one.

## Funding

- 6. If funds are appropriated for the QBE weight for charter systems, for what purposes would you use the additional funds you would earn as a charter system?**
  - *Our decision to become a charter system is not be based on the expectation of additional funding, since the funding is not guaranteed.*
  - *We are requesting no limitations or requirements on the use of such funds.*
  - *As notated under #5 in the Governance table all School Governance Teams will be allowed to make decisions regarding the use of funds, these funds will be used to supplement local school level decisions rather than using them for local system budgetary decisions.*