



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

MEMORANDUM

TO: Renewal Applicants

FROM: Charter Schools Division

DATE: June 8, 2012

RE: Standards and Expectations for Charter Renewal Applications

The charter renewal process is an important opportunity for a charter school to demonstrate compliance with its current charter contract and an opportunity to describe new initiatives that will generate increased academic performance during the next charter term.

This memo addresses expectations during the renewal process, provides guidance for submitting a high-quality petition, and describes factors that will be considered during the renewal decision.

Please carefully review this memo and then participate in our charter renewal webinar, scheduled to take place on June 27, 2012 at 10 a.m. The webinar will give you the opportunity to ask questions about the standards and expectations you will be required to comply with in your charter renewal application.

Additionally, the Charter Schools Division has developed two tools for your use prior to submitting your renewal petition. The first is a checklist for submitting a successful renewal petition. Please note that the checklist is not exhaustive and petitions must comply with all other requirements. The checklist may, however, prevent you from making many of the common errors that can delay or negatively impact the renewal process.

The second tool is a high-quality charter school self assessment. Use this tool to assess the quality of your charter school. It may help provide you with insight on potential problem areas that could prevent a new charter from being granted and equip you to address those areas prior to the renewal process.

What do I need to know to be successful at applying for a charter renewal?

- **Application Components:**

- The current renewal application and required Renewal Charter School Addendum can be located on the Georgia Department of Education's website at <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Charter-Schools/Pages/Charter-Petition-Application.aspx> .
- Start-up renewal applicants are required to submit a five-year budget. The Charter Schools Division has developed a Budget Template that renewal applicants are required to use. This template is also found on the Department's website. Budgets should be submitted along with your renewal petition using the Budget Template, which is an Excel file. Please make sure that the electronic version of your budget is in the Excel file format. Please do not submit budgets in PDF form. Budgets submitted in the wrong format will be rejected, which will delay the renewal process.
- Conversion charter schools are *not* required to submit the Budget Template. Doing so, however, could help demonstrate that your governing board has financial autonomy.
- All renewal applicants will be required to submit an Accountability Spreadsheet. This spreadsheet is used to demonstrate the success or failure of applicants in meeting their current charter goals. The Accountability Spreadsheet and further instructions can also be located on the Department's website.

- **Application Process:**

- **Interviews:** All renewal applicants will also participate in a panel interview. The panel interview will include GaDOE representatives and at least one outside charter expert. Interviews are scheduled for the following dates: November 27 – 29 and December 18 – 19. For applicants that may want an earlier interview option, we are also happy to offer interviews on November 2 if a renewal petition is received prior to October 1.
- **Site visits:** Many renewal applicants will also be selected for a site visit from Charter Schools Division personnel. If your school is selected for a site visit, you will be notified at least forty-eight (48) hours in advance.

- Applicants will typically be sorted into 3 groups:
 - Approval Group: These applications demonstrate near-perfect quality and compliance. The Department will issue an approval recommendation for these applicants without further process.
 - Clarification Group: These applications demonstrate moderate quality and compliance, but may require clarification or supplemental information. The Department will issue a clarification letter that will inform applicants of their next steps. Please note that the clarification or supplemental information required is not negotiable.
 - Revision Group: These applications demonstrate minimum quality and compliance and would require substantial revision to be approved by the State. The Department will issue a recommendation letter that will inform applicants of their next steps. Applicants receiving a recommendation letter will be required to seek re-approval from their local district. If they choose to revise their application, applicants will have only one chance to make revisions. Please note that the revisions required to obtain a recommendation for approval are not negotiable.

- Applicants will be notified whether the Department will recommend their school to the State Board of Education for approval or denial. If your school is recommended for approval, the Department will share a draft version of your proposed charter contract with you. This will be your opportunity to provide comment and feedback on the performance measures in the charter contract or to identify any scrivener's errors that you might detect. Please note that charter contracts are not negotiable.

Submitting a Successful Renewal Petition Checklist

We have an electronic copy of our petition and all attachments to submit. The petition is in Word format.

We have downloaded and completed the Accountability Spreadsheet and attached it to our petition. We are also submitting an electronic copy of our Accountability Spreadsheet in Excel format.

We have downloaded and completed a Budget Template. We are submitting an electronic copy of our budget in Excel format.

We have answered the question regarding why we need a charter.

We have provided a clear articulation of what we are doing that requires a waiver of state law or rule.

We have provided examples of the waivers we would use with the power granted by a broad flexibility waiver.

We have provided a description regarding how we will use the broad flexibility waiver to increase student achievement.

- Our goals are reflective of our school's mission and what makes it unique.
- All goals are SMART.
- Our goals demonstrate compliance with federal requirements and State Performance Targets.
- Our goals measure CRCT and EOCT performance, as applicable.
- Our goals demonstrate increased rigor during the charter term, including out-performing our district or state.
- Our goals include some measure of college and career readiness.
- We have included organizational and financial goals, such as goals for stakeholder satisfaction or fiscal feasibility.

- Our petition demonstrates the autonomy and decision-making authority of the school's governing board over such things as personnel, budgets, school scheduling and, if applicable, the education management organization (EMO), charter management organization (CMO), or other third party with whom we contract or will contract.
- Our petition demonstrates a plan for Board Member recruitment and continuous governing board training.
- Our petition demonstrates that the governing board, not our school's management team, engages in oversight of the charter school.
- Our petition demonstrates that the governing board has a viable plan in place to avoid conflicts of interest.

Our petition demonstrates independence and autonomy from the education management organization (EMO), charter management organization (CMO), or other third party with whom we contract or will contract.

Our EMO contract is not a "sweep" contract and our EMO fee is reasonable.

If our EMO or CMO provides a facility, we have a separate lease which allows the school to remain in the facility without an increase in cost if the EMO or CMO is terminated.

If our EMO or CMO provides a facility, the cost of rent is fair market value or less and does not exceed 15% of total revenues.

Employees are employees of the charter school, not the EMO or CMO.

Our EMO/CMO agreement articulates how property will be split or disposed of should the management and/or charter contract be terminated or non-renewed. This split or disposition is consistent with federal and state law and regulations.

We have attached my student admission application to our petition. The application only requests a student's name, grade level, contact information and information required for any enrollment preferences.

Our petition enumerates any enrollment priorities we wish to use. These priorities are allowed by O.C.G.A. § 20-2-2066 and our priorities mirror those in the statute. Our priorities are ranked by the order they will be applied.

Our petition and budget demonstrate that the school is utilizing an adequate internal control framework that is documented at all levels. We use Governmental Accounting Standards and our most recent audit should have contained an audit of internal controls.

Our budget does not include any revenue streams from non-government sources unless we have attached a corresponding grant letter.

Our budget reflects revenue from government sources that is consistent with current funding mechanisms.

We have reviewed the GaDOE Financial Review Workshop (found at the following link) for all funding changes and these changes are reflected in our budget. (<http://www.gadoe.org/Finance-and-Business-Operations/Financial-Review/Pages/default.aspx>)

Our school has a dual signature policy for all financial commitments, including checks, and we have described that policy in our petition.

Our total EMO compensation, if applicable, is discernible to anyone viewing the Petition Budget Template.

Our petition and budget demonstrate that our school uses modified accrual basis accounting for reporting.

Our CFO meets the requirements for a CFO pursuant to Charter Schools Rule and accompanying Guideline 160-4-9-.05 and we have included a resume that clearly demonstrates the compliance of this individual.

Our per-pupil funding revenue complies with the QBE formula, and if applicable, the local funding formula prescribed by Georgia law (O.C.G.A. §20-2-2068.1). We understand that funding estimates must be conservative and overestimates are not acceptable.

Our total facilities expenditures are reasonable and cannot exceed 15% of total expenditures except under extreme and temporary circumstances. If total facility expenditures exceed 15% we have included a reasonable explanation in the Notes section of the Petition Budget Template.



We understand that negative cash balances are not acceptable on the 5-Year Budget Projection or the Cash Flow Projections for any fiscal year. While negative changes in net assets are allowable, it is not allowable for a petitioning school to plan to have insufficient cash balances.

High-Quality Charter School Self Assessment

Version 1.0

Please mark one box for each standard below. Please provide additional explanation for any standard for which you mark "disagree".

Standard	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	
Academic Results				Additional Comments
School made AYP in each year of the charter term	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Absolute Student Performance - Exceeded state expectations in all subject areas in all grade levels	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Student Growth - Student performance grew on average at least 1.26 grade levels during the school year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Comparative Student Performance - School performed better than their district and/or state on all state tests by subject area and grade level	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

If you mostly selected "Agree" your school is on its way to being a high-quality charter school. If you mostly selected "Somewhat Agree" we encourage you to perform a gaps analysis to determine those areas that need work and submit a comprehensive plan to address those areas with your renewal petition. If you mostly selected "Disagree" then you should prepare to provide a comprehensive plan with your renewal petition that would address these areas.

Financial Sustainability				Additional Comments
School has a balanced budget for current school year with realistic assumptions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
School has created a balanced budget for the duration of their proposed charter term. The budget uses realistic funding assumptions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Financial reserves (cash on hand divided by average monthly expenses) is greater than or equal to 3.0	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
School has a qualified CFO that meets GaDOE minimum requirements	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
School has limited debt or sustainable debt service with no delinquency	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
School always meets GaDOE and local board financial reporting deadlines	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

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Governance Capacity				Additional Comments
Governing board contains a variety of stakeholders and reflects the diversity of the community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Governing board meets at least 9 times a year and complies with Open Records and Open Meetings Laws	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Governing board limits involvement to governance and oversight and does not stray into management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Governing board receives regular updates on academic, operational and financial progress of the school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Governing board has an active governing board recruitment plan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Governing board participates in regular governing board training each year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

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Legal and Regulatory Compliance				Additional Comments
School has had no issues associated with federal Title programs or special education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
School has had no issues with compliance with the Charter Schools Act, Rules, Guidelines or charter contract	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
School's lottery and application processes are fair and legal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
School is incorporated as a Georgia non-profit, if applicable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
School participates in TRS and makes payments on time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
School's EMO (if applicable) does not employ teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

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