

System Charter FAQ

What is a Charter System?

A Charter System is a local school system that is operating under the terms of a charter. The Charter Systems Act allows local boards of education to contract with the State Board of Education to become a Charter System. A Charter System provides the opportunity for teachers, administrators, parents, and school boards to have greater flexibility to determine the educational needs of students within their district and requires a degree of school level governance in the system. To become a charter system, the local school system must submit a charter school petition to the DOE, after such petition has been approved by the local board.

What is the duration of a charter?

The initial term of a charter system shall be for five years.

Can a System Charter be terminated before the five year period is completed?

Yes, the system charter can be terminated under the following conditions:

Upon the written request of a local board for termination of a charter for a local charter school located within its school system if, prior to making such request, the local board provided reasonable notice to the charter school and an opportunity for a hearing, and determined the existence of any of the grounds. For a system charter school, if the school council or governing council, as applicable, at such school within the charter system requests that:

- (1) The system charter be terminated; or
- (2) The system charter be amended with respect to such system charter school; the state board, after providing reasonable notice to the charter system and the system charter school, shall conduct a hearing. Based on the findings of the hearing, the state board may enter into negotiations with the charter system to amend the charter to address the concerns of the requesting system charter school. If negotiations fail and the state board finds good cause, the state board shall be authorized to terminate the system charter or to amend the system charter with respect to the requesting system charter school; provided, however, that the local board shall be authorized to terminate the system charter if it is unwilling to accept the amendments to such charter by the state board. 'Good cause' includes but is not limited to a local board's failure to comply with its obligations and duties under the system charter, state board rules, or other applicable law, or other good cause as determined in the sole discretion of the state board.

OR

If, after providing reasonable notice to the charter school or charter system, as applicable, and an opportunity for a hearing, the state board finds:

- (A) A failure to comply with any recommendation or direction of the state board with respect to Code Section 20-14-41;
- (B) A failure to adhere to any material term of the charter, including but not limited to the performance goals set forth in the charter;
- (C) A failure to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management;

- (D) A violation of applicable federal, state, or local laws or court orders;
- (E) The existence of competent substantial evidence that the continued operation of the charter school or charter system would be contrary to the best interests of the students or the community; or
- (F) A failure to comply with any provision of Code Section 20-2-2065;

Which state and federal laws and SBOE rules MAY NOT be exempted by a charter school?

Charter schools **may not** waive, and are not exempt from, federal law. Charter schools **may** waive state and local laws, rules, regulations, policies, and procedures relating to schools, with the exception of the following:

- Charter Schools Act of 1998
O.C.G.A. 20-2-2061 through O.C.G.A. 20-2-2071 State Board of Education Charter
- Schools Rule
IEB 160-4-9-.04
- School Accountability Provisions
Part 3 of Article 2 of Chapter 14 of Title 20
O.C.G.A. 20-14-30 through O.C.G.A. 20-14-41
- Shall Not Charge Tuition
O.C.G.A. 20-2-133
- Unlawful Conduct in or near a Public School
O.C.G.A. 20-2-1180 through O.C.G.A. 20-2-1182
- Reporting Requirements – Student Data Collection
O.C.G.A. 20-2-320
- Brief Period of Quiet Reflection
O.C.G.A. 20-2-1050, 20-2-1051
- Open and Public Meetings
O.C.G.A. 20-2-85
- Inspection of Public Records
O.C.G.A. 50-18-70
- Fingerprinting and Criminal Record Check of All Personnel Employed by the Charter School
O.C.G.A. 20-2-211

All federal, state, and local rules, regulations, court orders, and statutes relating to civil rights; insurance; the protection of the physical health and safety of school students, employees, and visitors; conflicting interest transactions; and the prevention of unlawful conduct.

What are the benefits of becoming a Charter System?

A Charter System provides the opportunity for teachers, administrators, parents and school boards to have maximum flexibility in designing their system to meet the educational needs of their students. The Charter, proposed by the local board of education, explains the structure, rights, and responsibilities of the principal, parents, school governing council, and local board of education with an objective of maximizing school level governance. This means that decision-making authority in financial decisions, curriculum and instruction, resource allocation, establishing and monitoring the achievement of school improvement goals and school operations is encouraged at the school house level with limited system oversight. It also permits the Board to utilize Title 20 waivers allowing for flexibility and innovation in exchange for greater system achievement.

Will tenure be abolished for teachers in a system charter?

No

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

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

Specifically what flexibility is the Muscogee County School District requesting?

The MCSD is requesting flexibility in:

- seat time for students
- class size requirements
- graduation requirements to allow students from outside Georgia to graduate without penalty
- teacher certification requirements
- staffing patterns
- budgeting
- school governance

How are students enrolled in a Charter System?

A charter system shall enroll students in its system charter schools per the terms of the charter and in accordance with state board rules.

What would happen to existing charter schools in the Muscogee County School District?

An existing conversion or start-up charter school within a local school system which is petitioning to become a charter system shall have the option of continuing under its own existing charter, not subject to the terms of the system charter, or of terminating its existing charter, upon agreement by the local board and state board, and becoming subject to the system charter as a charter system school.

What are the benefits of an existing conversion charter or start-up charter school remaining a charter school versus an existing conversion charter school requesting charter termination and then operating under the system charter status?

If the Charter System receives waivers that were not included in the original charter school application, the school may wish to terminate their conversion charter and operate under the system charter. However, the school may wish to retain their conversion charter status if it has waivers that the school district did not request, or if the conversion charter allows them to accept students not located in their attendance zone.

What are the funding opportunities offered to a Charter System?

Implementation Grants (State and Federal): The DOE may award Charter Systems approved prior to 30 June 2009 with \$125,000 to assist with implementation of their charter. (Amount subject to available funding)

Additional QBE funding: Effective 1 July 2008, any system who achieves Charter Status is eligible for additional funding under OCGA 20-2-165.1. This new formula adds an additional 3.785 percent for each FTE to the amounts earned by a charter system for their QBE FTE. This amounts to approximately \$100 in additional funds for each student enrolled in the system.

What is the difference between a charter school and a magnet or IB school?

The charter school concept is an organization model. The focus is on how the school is organized, governed, and managed. Instructional strategies will vary from one charter school to the next. A charter school cannot have admission criteria.

The magnet or theme school is an instructional model. The focus is on the instructional strategy implemented at the school, for example, a focus on technology or performing arts. Some magnet schools have admission criteria.

Will magnet programs and IB programs continue to exist in the MCSD if the district is approved as a charter system?

Yes.