

FANNIN COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

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Charter System Initiative Questions and Answers

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1. Who decided that school systems had to make a decision to must choose to operate under a charter system, Investing in Educational Excellence (IE2), or be status quo?

Our legislation asked that school district choose to operate as an Investing in Education Excellence (IE2), Charter System, or remain status quo.

2. What is the difference between approving a charter system petition and approving a start-up charter petition?

A charter system is an agreement between the local board of education and the state board of education on how to operate schools. School districts are given broad flexibility on most state rules in exchange for increased student achievement and school level governance. All public schools in Fannin County, unless otherwise noted, will be part of the charter system petition that will be developed and submitted in 2014.

Start-up charter schools create their own petition and present it to the local board of education in the attendance zone of potential students. The local board of education had the option to approve or deny the start-up charter petition pursuant if O.C.G.A. Section 20-2-2064(d).

3. Can the public participate in the petition planning process?

Yes. Contact Cynthia Panter, Planning & Evaluation Coordinator, cpanter@fannin.k12.ga.us if you are interested. A planning structure is in place and input is welcomed and encouraged.

4. When will the Fannin County charter system be operational?

The plan is to submit the final petition to the Georgia DOE by November 2014. It takes several months of review before the petition is approved. July 1, 2015 it the target date for Fannin County to operate as a Charter System (2015-2016 School Year).

5. Will Fannin County Schools continue to be assessed under CCRPI and not NCLB?

All charter systems must set goals based on the state assessment instrument(s). All required state assessments will continue to be administered. The state of Georgia filed a waiver from NCLB that was approved. There are not any school districts being assessed by NCLB benchmarks in Georgia.

6. Will the CCRPI standards remain the same when we operate as a charter system?

Yes. Charter Systems are held to a higher standard than non-charter systems. The higher standards are reflected in the contract between the local board of education and the state board of education.

7. What are the consequences if a school does not meet the accountability measures?

Each charter system submits an annual report reflecting the progress of charter system goals. If a charter system is not meeting their benchmarks support is offered by the DOE. At any point during the 5-year contract either party – the DOE or Fannin County – can ask to modify the charter. Systems also have the option at the end of the charter petition to not to renew their charter. A charter can be revoked at any time causing the system to revert to a status quo status with no waivers.

8. Will the charter system improve the graduation rate in Fannin County? Have the first four charter system's graduation rates improved?

There are no guarantees that charter system status will impact anything. The first four charter systems – City Schools of Decatur, Gainesville City Schools, Marietta City Schools, and Warren County School System – just completed their five year renewal application. They all experienced significant academic and program growth including graduation rates. See the DOE website for the renewal applications.

9. Will going to a charter system relieve any requirement of Professional Learning for continued PSC Certification?

Certification is a function of the Georgia Professional Standards Commission not the state Board of Education. Certification requirements for non-high Q positions can be waived.

10. With the flexibility of learning, especially in 9-12, with regards to virtual and/or distance learning, could there be a reduced need for facility? Have there been examples of this lessened need of facility in other systems?

With the broad flexibility from waivers available to charter systems there are many opportunities to be more efficient in serving students. It is up to each school district to determine what format works best for each school and system.

11. Will the charter system ensure a better education for our students?

There are never any grantees. What is guaranteed, however, is that each school system has the flexibility to design an educational program that meets the needs of their own students and community.

12. How does the Common Core GPS Curriculum fit in the process?

Common Core GPS is a state curriculum that can be waived. However, waiving Common Core GPS is problematic since all charter systems must be measured on the Common Core accountability measures.

13. *Who will control the program of study for students? Will we have to make more programs or add classes? What about the achievement standards?*

The achievement standards are set by Georgia DOE and approved by the federal department of education. No one can control those standards. It is up to Fannin County to change the program of study to meet the needs of students using the new broad flexibility allowed under the charter system.

14. *What type of unfunded mandates can you get waivers for?*

Anything in Title 20 can be waived with limited exceptions. Common areas waived by charter systems include: class size, certification, service delivery of state programs – gifted, EIP, REP, seat time, and financial flexibility.

15. *What mandates cannot be waived?*

Anything federal cannot be waived, all accountability measures in the state of Georgia must be followed (CRCT, writing, EOC T, writing) and teacher evaluation. All rules related to drug free and safe environment must be followed. We must still offer a moment of silence each morning.

16. *What waivers will Fannin County ask for?*

Most charter systems request broad flexibility form all waivers. The implementation of these waivers, however, is left to each system. Broad flexibility allows systems to use the waivers as needed without having to make the request –which is a lengthy process – each time a waiver is needed.

17. *What is the make-up of the school committee (teachers, administrators, parents, community leaders)?*

The Fannin County charter system petition development committee(s) will determine who is on the governance committees at each school. Representation must be staff, parents, and the community. Student representation is optional. Membership selection, terms of the members, member removal, and qualifications are set by the charter system planning committees. These terms become part of the by-laws that are adopted by each governance committee.

18. *What are the powers/duties of the school committees?*

There are five areas of authority that must be defined in the charter petition. These areas are: budget, resource allocation, curriculum, personnel, and school improvement. The level of authority is determined by the Fannin County charter system planning committee and approved by the Fannin County Board of Education.

19. *Is training available or the school committee members to ensure they are familiar with Georgia requirements?*

Yes. In the petition Fannin County will need to describe the training plans for the governance teams. The Georgia DOE currently provides training free of cost to systems, if requested, for governance teams. The free training is contingent on available resources. Training is a very important part of the charter system process.

20. Is there some type of oversight for these members to ensure they do not violate state laws or overstep their authority?

Each Charter System must submit an annual report to the DOE. In this report will be updates on the governance process. Each charter system is responsible for setting up a monitoring system to ensure the integrity of the governance process. All school districts are still accountable to accrediting agencies.

21. What is meant by being a Status Quo System?

It means a school district will operate *without any waivers* granted by the Georgia Department of Education.

22. Will being a charter system raise our taxes?

No. Being a charter system has nothing to do with setting the tax rate.

23. Is it true that charter systems get less money than regular public schools?

No. In fact the first 15 charter systems have received about \$100 per student each year with the flexibility to spend in the way the systems felt would best impact student achievement. It is hoped that this budget allocation will continue.

