



GEORGIA'S PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

What are public charter schools?

Charter schools are tuition-free, locally grown public schools that are held accountable for improved student achievement in exchange for the freedom to be flexible and innovative. They are nonsectarian, offer open enrollment and cannot discriminate based on race, religion or disability.

Are charter schools for-profit companies?

All public charter schools are nonprofit organizations. Just like a traditional public school system, public charter schools may contract with companies to provide services (e.g. buses, food, management, textbooks, etc.).

Who can approve public charter schools?

Currently, school boards and the State Board of Education can approve charter school applications. If a school board refuses to approve a high-quality independent charter application, the school can seek approval from the state. If the state approves the school, however, it loses its share of local funding and operates on about half of the funding of similar schools. Thirty-two states have created alternative authorizers for charter schools so that charter schools are treated objectively. Almost half of all the nation's charters are authorized by entities other than local school systems.

Are there different types of public charter schools?

Independent charter schools are created by community members – including parents and local organizations – and dependent charter schools are created by school boards and education agencies. Independent charter schools are governed by boards of community members, parents and teachers. These schools, though independent, must answer to their authorizer (the local school district or the state) and must demonstrate strong academic outcomes, financial accountability and legal compliance or face closure. Dependent charter schools have school-level advisory boards with less decision-making authority. Ultimate governance is still vested in the school board. Accountability is less stringent than independent charters: If they don't meet objectives, they can lose the charter and return to a traditional public school model instead of seeing the school closed.

How do charter school students perform?

Students at the majority of independent public charter schools in the state exceed the performance of students at traditional public schools in their districts (2010-11).

Who attends independent public charter schools in Georgia?

Independent charter schools serve a higher proportion of minority students than traditional public schools, and more than half the students qualify for free or reduced-price school meals based on the federal poverty level.

What happens to poor-performing charter schools?

Charter schools are held accountable for raising student achievement and, unlike traditional public schools, are at greater risk of closure for poor performance.

Will having more public charter schools hurt public school teachers?

Public school teachers will have additional job opportunities if there are more public charter schools. At charter schools, the greater flexibility gives teachers more tools to use their expertise to help children learn.



THE CHARTER CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

What is the charter constitutional amendment question on the November 6, 2012 ballot?

SHALL THE CONSTITUTION OF GEORGIA BE AMENDED TO ALLOW STATE OR LOCAL APPROVAL OF PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS UPON REQUEST OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES?

What does the charter amendment do?

If the amendment passes, a local community can appeal to the state if its charter school application is denied by the school board. The amendment creates checks and balances within Georgia's education system, and it ensures that communities requesting high-quality charter schools have a fair chance and a "second opinion."

What will happen if the charter amendment does not pass?

If the amendment does not pass, it will limit the growth of independent charter schools in Georgia and reduce options for parents. Local school boards are less likely to approve quality independent charter school applications when there is no realistic appeals process: They approved an average of three start-up charter schools annually from 1994 to 2007; all start-up charter school applications were rejected in 2007.

Why was this amendment proposed?

In 2008, the Georgia General Assembly created an appeals process and funding mechanism for charter schools through a state commission. School systems sued, and in a controversial 4-3 decision, the Georgia Supreme Court ruled that local boards of education have "exclusive" authority over K-12 public education in Georgia. In 2012, the General Assembly voted to allow citizens to decide whether the state can authorize state charter schools originating from local communities.

What will happen to current state-approved charter schools if the amendment does not pass?

Since the Supreme Court ruled that local school boards have "exclusive" authority over K-12 education, all state-approved charter schools remain vulnerable to legal challenge if the amendment does not pass.

Is the state trying to take away local control?

All charter school applications MUST originate at the

community level and go through the local school board. The state can only be involved if members of the community believe the local board unfairly denied the application. Nothing in the amendment allows the state to initiate the creation of charter schools.

Will my school system lose funding if the amendment passes?

The amendment ensures funding for state-approved charter schools MAY NOT reduce a school system's local funds either directly or indirectly.

Will my school system gain financially if the amendment passes?

If the charter amendment passes, local funding for traditional public school students will not follow the child to a public charter school. Local school systems will have the same amount of local money to educate fewer students, meaning they will have higher per-pupil funding.

Will charter schools take the best students away from traditional public schools?

Unlike magnet schools, charter schools cannot restrict access to certain types of students, but must be open to all students. Parents who are satisfied with their child's performance in the traditional public school will not want to transfer their child to a different public school. Typically, it is parents who are dissatisfied with their child's performance in their traditional public school who choose to transfer to a public charter school.

Will the state approve all charter school applications, even low-quality applications?

The state has shown in the past that it carefully considers charter applications and approves high-quality community applications. In its 2½ years of operation prior to being shut down, the state commission reviewed a total of 56 public charter school applications that had been denied by a school system. Of those, it approved just 17 high-quality applications.

Don't we have enough charter schools in Georgia?

The thousands of parents on public charter school waiting lists show that Georgia parents want more high-quality public school options – including charter schools – for their children.