

TITLE 20. EDUCATION
CHAPTER 2. ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
ARTICLE 31. CHARTER SCHOOLS ACT OF 1998

§ 20-2-2060. Short title

This article shall be known and may be cited as the "Charter Schools Act of 1998."

HISTORY: Code 1981, § 20-2-2060, enacted by Ga. L. 1998, p. 1080, § 3.

§ 20-2-2061. Legislative intent

It is the intent of the General Assembly to increase student achievement through academic and organizational innovation by encouraging local school systems to utilize the flexibility of a performance based contract called a charter.

HISTORY: Code 1981, § 20-2-2061, enacted by Ga. L. 1998, p. 1080, § 3; Ga. L. 2002, p. 388, § 1; Ga. L. 2004, p. 107, § 19; Ga. L. 2005, p. 798, § 6/SB 35.

§ 20-2-2062. Definitions

As used in this article, the term:

(1) "Charter" means a performance based contract between a local board and a charter petitioner, the terms of which are approved by the local board and by the state board in the case of a local charter school, between the state board and a charter petitioner, the terms of which are approved by the state board in the case of a state chartered special school, or between a local board and the state board, the terms of which are approved by the state board in the case of a charter system. By entering into a charter, a charter petitioner and local board shall be deemed to have agreed to be bound to all the provisions of this article as if such terms were set forth in the charter.

(1.1) "Charter attendance zone" means all or any portion of the local school system in which the charter school is located and may include all or any portion of other local school systems if the charter school is jointly authorized pursuant to subsection (c) of Code Section 20-2-2063.

(2) "Charter petitioner" means a local school, local board of education, private individual, private organization, or state or local public entity that submits a petition for a charter. The term "charter petitioner" does not include home study programs or schools, sectarian schools, religious schools, private for profit schools, private educational institutions not established, operated, or governed by the State of Georgia, or existing private schools.

(3) "Charter school" means a public school that is operating under the terms of a charter.

(3.1) "Charter system" means a local school system that is operating under the terms of a charter pursuant to Code Section 20-2-2063.1.

(4) "Conversion charter school" means a charter school that existed as a local school prior to becoming a charter school.

(5) "Faculty and instructional staff members" means all certificated personnel assigned to the school on a full-time basis and all paraprofessionals assigned to the school on a full-time basis. The term "paraprofessional" shall have the same meaning as set out in Code Section 20-2-204.

(5.1) "Governing council" means a school level council of parents, teachers, administrators, and others who are involved in school level governance within a charter system.

(5.2) "High school cluster" means a high school and all of the middle and elementary schools which contain students who matriculate to such high school. The schools in a high school cluster may include charter schools, local schools, or a combination of both.

(6) "Local board" means a county or independent board of education exercising control and management of a local school system pursuant to Article VIII, Section V, Paragraph II of the Constitution.

(7) "Local charter school" means a conversion charter school or start-up charter school that is operating under the terms of a charter between the charter petitioner and the local board.

(8) "Local revenue" means local taxes budgeted for school purposes in excess of the local five mill share, combined with any applicable equalization grant and budgeted revenues from any of the following: investment earnings, unrestricted donations, and the sale of surplus property; but exclusive of revenue from bonds issued for capital projects, revenue to pay debt service on such bonds and local option sales tax for capital projects. Nothing in this paragraph shall be construed to prevent a local board from including a local charter school in projects specified in the ballot language of a local option sales tax or bond referendum.

(9) "Local school" means a public school in Georgia that is under the management and control of a local board.

(10) "Local school system" means the system of public schools established and maintained by a local board within its limits pursuant to Article VIII, Section V, Paragraph I of the Constitution.

(11) "Petition" means a proposal to establish a charter school or a charter system.

(12) "QBE formula earnings" means funds earned for the Quality Basic Education Formula pursuant to Code Section 20-2-161, including the portion of such funds that are calculated as the local five mill share in accordance with Code Section 20-2-164.

(12.1) "School level governance" means decision-making authority in personnel decisions, financial decisions, curriculum and instruction, resource allocation, establishing and monitoring the achievement of school improvement goals, and school operations.

(13) "Special school" means a school whose creation is authorized pursuant to Article VIII, Section V, Paragraph VII of the Constitution.

(14) "Start-up charter school" means a charter school that did not exist as a local school prior to becoming a charter school.

(15) "State board" means the State Board of Education.

(16) "State chartered special school" means a charter school created as a special school that is operating under the terms of a charter between the charter petitioner and the state board.

(17) "System charter school" means a school within a charter system.

HISTORY: Code 1981, § 20-2-2062, enacted by Ga. L. 1998, p. 1080, § 3; Ga. L. 2001, p. 148, § 22; Ga. L. 2002, p. 388, § 1; Ga. L. 2005, p. 798, §§ 7, 8/SB 35; Ga. L. 2007, p. 185, § 3/SB 39.

§ 20-2-2063. Charter petitions

(a) The State Board of Education shall promulgate rules, regulations, policies, and procedures to govern the contents of a charter petition.

(b) The State Board of Education shall establish rules, regulations, policies, and procedures to provide for the receipt of charter petitions from a group of two or more local schools as a single charter petitioner to convert to conversion charter school status. An existing conversion charter school may join as part of a group charter petition, and if such group charter petition is approved, the new charter shall supersede the conversion charter school's previous charter. A group charter petition may be comprised of all the schools in a high school cluster as such term is defined in Code Section 20-2-2062.

(c) The State Board of Education shall establish rules, regulations, policies, and procedures to provide for charter petitions from two or more local school systems to

jointly authorize a local charter school.

(d) The State Board of Education shall establish rules, regulations, policies, and procedures to provide for a charter petition from a local school system to establish a charter system. Such rules, regulations, policies, and procedures shall require that a charter petition and the charter contain an explanation of the structure, rights, and responsibilities of the principal, governing council, and local board of education of the system charter school, with an objective of maximizing school level governance and the involvement of parents, teachers, and community members in such governance.

HISTORY: Code 1981, § 20-2-2063, enacted by Ga. L. 1998, p. 1080, § 3; Ga. L. 2002, p. 388, § 1; Ga. L. 2005, p. 798, § 9/SB 35; Ga. L. 2007, p. 185, § 4/SB 39.

§ 20-2-2063.1. Charter Advisory Committee established; members; duties

(a) The state board shall establish a Charter Advisory Committee to review charter petitions for compliance with established standards of the state board, to make recommendations to the state board on charter policy, and to provide recommendations to the state board regarding charter petitions. The committee shall be composed of nine members as follows:

- (1) Three members appointed by the chairperson of the state board;
- (2) Three members appointed by the Lieutenant Governor; and
- (3) Three members appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

All members shall serve at the pleasure of their respective appointing officials. The committee shall elect a chairperson from among its membership.

(b) The committee shall conduct itself in accordance with any rules and guidelines established by the state board with regard to timeframes, procedures, and protocol.

(c) The committee shall be authorized to request clarifying information from a charter petitioner and to receive input from interested parties on a charter petition.

(d) The committee shall:

- (1) Make recommendations to the state board of approval or denial on each charter petition and shall specify the reasons for such recommendations;
- (2) Periodically make recommendations to the state board regarding charter policy; and
- (3) Make recommendations to the state board on the disbursement of planning grants for charter systems, if funds are made available.

(e) The committee shall be authorized to enter into contracts, subject to available funding, with one or more consultants to assist the committee in its duties and if directed to do so by the committee, to do the following:

(1) Assist charter petitioners in the drafting of their petitions;

(2) Assist charter petitioners in the design and implementation of innovative education programs and school level governance based on research, model programs, or other credible information;

(3) Monitor and assist charter schools and charter systems; and

(4) Perform any other functions related to the support of the committee.

(f) The committee shall work in cooperation with the Office of Charter School Compliance, as established pursuant to Code Section 20-2-2069.

(g) The members of the committee shall receive no compensation for their services but shall be reimbursed for actual and necessary expenses incurred by them in carrying out their duties.

(h) The committee shall be assigned to the Department of Education for administrative purposes only, as prescribed in Code Section 50-4-3.

HISTORY: Code 1981, § 20-2-2063.1, enacted by Ga. L. 2007, p. 185, § 5/SB 39.

§ 20-2-2063.2. Charter systems

(a) The state board shall be authorized to enter into a charter with a local board to establish a local school system as a charter system.

(b) A local board seeking to create a charter system must submit a petition to the state board. Prior to submitting such petition, the local board shall:

(1) Adopt a resolution approving the proposed charter system petition;

(2) Conduct at least two public hearings and provide notice of the hearings in the same manner as other legal notices of the local board; and

(3) Send a notice to each principal within the local school system of the hearings with instructions that each school shall distribute the notice to faculty and instructional staff members and to the parent or guardian of each student enrolled in the school.

The local board may revise its proposed charter system petition, upon resolution, as a

result of testimony at the public hearings or for other purposes.

(c) Prior to approval or denial of a charter petition for a charter system, the state board shall receive and give all due consideration to the recommendation and input from the Charter Advisory Committee established in Code Section 20-2-2063.1. The state board shall approve the charter if the state board finds, after receiving input from the Charter Advisory Committee, that the petition complies with the rules, regulations, policies, and procedures promulgated pursuant to Code Section 20-2-2063 and the provisions of this title, is in the public interest, and promotes school level governance.

(d) All schools within an approved charter system shall be system charter schools except as otherwise provided in subsections (f) and (g) of this Code section.

(e) (1) Subject to appropriations by the General Assembly or other available funding, the state board, after receiving input and recommendations from the Charter Advisory Committee, shall disburse planning grants to local school systems which desire to become charter systems. Such grants will be disbursed in accordance with any applicable guidelines, policies, and requirements established by the state board.

(2) Subject to specific appropriations by the General Assembly for this purpose, the state board shall disburse implementation grants in the amount of \$125,000.00 or such other amount as determined by the state board to each charter system. The state board shall be authorized to approve up to five petitions for charter systems during fiscal year 2008, and may approve up to a maximum number of petitions in following years as may be established pursuant to board rules and as subject to availability of funding for implementation grants.

(f) A system charter school shall not be precluded from petitioning to become a conversion charter school, in accordance with Code Section 20-2-2064, not subject to the terms of the system charter. In the event a system charter school becomes a conversion charter school, the system charter shall be amended to reflect that such school is no longer bound by the system charter.

(g) 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.

HISTORY: Code 1981, § 20-2-2063.2, enacted by Ga. L. 2007, p. 185, § 5/SB 39.

§ 20-2-2064. Approval or denial of petition

(a) A charter petitioner seeking to create a conversion charter school must submit a petition to the local board of the local school system in which the proposed charter school

will be located. The local board must by a majority vote approve or deny a petition no later than 60 days after its submission unless the petitioner requests an extension; provided, however, that a denial of a petition by a local board shall not preclude the submission to the local board of a revised petition that addresses deficiencies cited in the denial; and provided, further, that the local board shall not act upon a petition for a conversion charter school until such petition:

(1) Has been freely agreed to, by secret ballot, by a majority of the faculty and instructional staff members of the petitioning local school at a public meeting called with two weeks' advance notice for the purpose of deciding whether to submit the petition to the local board for its approval; and

(2) Has been freely agreed to, by secret ballot, by a majority of parents or guardians of students enrolled in the petitioning local school present at a public meeting called with two weeks' advance notice for the purpose of deciding whether to submit the petition to the local board for its approval.

This subsection shall not apply to a system charter school petitioning to be a conversion charter school.

(b) A charter petitioner seeking to create a start-up charter school must submit a petition to the local board of the local school system in which the proposed charter school will be located. The local board must by a majority vote approve or deny a petition no later than 60 days after its submission unless the petitioner requests an extension. A denial of a petition by a local board shall not preclude the submission to the local board of a revised petition that addresses deficiencies cited in the denial.

(c) A system charter school's school council or governing council, as applicable, may petition to become a conversion charter school. The petition shall be submitted to the local board of the charter system in which the school is located. The local board must by a majority vote approve or deny a petition no later than 60 days after its submission unless the petitioner requests an extension; provided, however, that a denial of a petition by a local board shall not preclude the submission to the local board of a revised petition that addresses deficiencies cited in the denial.

(d) A local board shall approve a petition that complies with the rules, regulations, policies, and procedures promulgated in accordance with Code Section 20-2-2063 and the provisions of this title and is in the public interest. If a local board denies a petition, it must within 60 days specifically state the reasons for the denial, list all deficiencies with respect to Code Section 20-2-2063, and provide a written statement of the denial to the charter petitioner and the state board.

(e) The state board or the Charter Advisory Committee, if directed by the state board to do so, may mediate between the local board and a charter petitioner whose petition was denied to assist in resolving issues which led to denial of the petition by the local board.

HISTORY: Code 1981, § 20-2-2064, enacted by Ga. L. 1998, p. 1080, § 3; Ga. L. 2000, p. 618, § 74; Ga. L. 2002, p. 388, § 1; Ga. L. 2004, p. 107, § 19B; Ga. L. 2007, p. 185, § 6/SB 39.

§ 20-2-2064.1. Review of charter by state board; charters for state chartered special schools

(a) Prior to approval or denial of a charter petition under this Code section, the state board shall receive and give all due consideration to the recommendation and input from the Charter Advisory Committee established in Code Section 20-2-2063.1.

(b) The state board shall approve the charter of a charter petitioner if the petition has been approved by the local board of the local school system in which the proposed charter school will be located and the state board finds, after receiving input from the Charter Advisory Committee, that the petition complies with the rules, regulations, policies, and procedures promulgated in accordance with Code Section 20-2-2063 and the provisions of this title and is in the public interest. If the state board denies a petition, it must within 60 days specifically state the reasons for the denial, list all deficiencies with regard to Code Section 20-2-2063, and provide a written statement of the denial to the charter petitioner and to the local board.

(c) No application for a state chartered special school may be made to the state board by a petitioner for a conversion charter school that has been denied by a local board. Upon denial of a petition for a start-up charter school by a local board and upon application to the state board by the petitioner, the state board shall approve the charter of a start-up charter petitioner for a state chartered special school if the state board finds, after receiving input from the Charter Advisory Committee, that such petition meets the requirements set forth in Code Section 20-2-2063 and the provisions of this title, and is in the public interest.

HISTORY: Code 1981, § 20-2-2064.1, enacted by Ga. L. 2002, p. 388, § 1; Ga. L. 2005, p. 798, § 11/SB 35; Ga. L. 2007, p. 185, § 7/SB 39.

OPINIONS OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

A STATE CHARTER GRANTED UNDER SUBSECTION (D)(1) (NOW SUBSECTION (B)) OF O.C.G.A. § 20-2-2064.1 must meet the same requirements and definitions as other charter schools in the Charter Schools Act, O.C.G.A. § 20-2-2-6- et seq. 2001 Op. Att'y Gen. No. 2001-9.

§ 20-2-2065. Waiver of provisions of this title; requirements for operating; control and management

(a) Except as provided in this article or in a charter, a charter school, or for charter systems, each school within the system, shall not be subject to the provisions of this title or any state or local rule, regulation, policy, or procedure relating to schools within an applicable school system regardless of whether such rule, regulation, policy, or procedure is established by the local board, the state board, or the Department of Education; provided, however, that the state board may establish rules, regulations, policies, or procedures consistent with this article relating to charter schools. A waiver granted pursuant to this Code section for a charter system shall apply to each system charter school within the system. In exchange for such a waiver, the charter school agrees to meet or exceed the performance based goals included in the charter and approved by the local board or, for the charter system, the system agrees to meet or exceed the system-wide performance based goals included in the charter and approved by the state board, including but not limited to raising student achievement. For a charter system, the charter shall delineate the performance based goals that the system and each school will be expected to meet as well as the criteria by which a system charter may be revoked in addition to those contained in Code Section 20-2-2068.

(b) In determining whether to approve a charter petition or renew an existing charter, the local board and state board shall ensure that a charter school, or for charter systems, each school within the system, shall be:

(1) A public, nonsectarian, nonreligious, nonprofit school that is not home based, provided that a charter school's nonprofit status shall not prevent the school from contracting for the services of a for profit entity and that nothing in this Code section shall preclude the use of computer and Internet based instruction for students in a virtual or remote setting;

(2) Subject to the control and management of the local board of the local school system in which the charter school is located, as provided in the charter and in a manner consistent with the Constitution, if a local charter school;

(3) Subject to the supervision of the state board, as provided in the charter and in a manner consistent with the Constitution, if a state chartered special school;

(4) Organized and operated as a nonprofit corporation under the laws of this state; provided, however, that this paragraph shall not apply to any charter petitioner that is a local school, local school system, or state or local public entity;

(5) Subject to 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;

(6) Subject to all laws relating to unlawful conduct in or near a public school;

(7) Subject to an annual financial audit conducted by the state auditor or, if specified in the charter, by an independent certified public accountant licensed in this state;

(8) Subject to the provisions of Part 3 of Article 2 of Chapter 14 of this title, and such provisions shall apply with respect to charter schools whose charters are granted or renewed on or after July 1, 2000;

(9) Subject to all reporting requirements of Code Section 20-2-160, subsection (e) of Code Section 20-2-161, Code Section 20-2-320, and Code Section 20-2-740;

(10) Subject to the requirement that it shall not charge tuition or fees to its students except as may be authorized for local boards by Code Section 20-2-133; and

(11) Subject to the provisions of Code Section 20-2-1050 requiring a brief period of quiet reflection.

HISTORY: Code 1981, § 20-2-2065, enacted by Ga. L. 1998, p. 1080, § 3; Ga. L. 2000, p. 618, § 75; Ga. L. 2002, p. 388, § 1; Ga. L. 2005, p. 798, § 12/SB 35; Ga. L. 2006, p. 488, § 1/SB 610; Ga. L. 2007, p. 185, § 8/SB 39.

OPINIONS OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS ARE SUBJECT to the control and management of the local board of education. 2001 Op. Att'y Gen. No. 2001-9.

TEACHERS AT CHARTER SCHOOLS shall be members of the Teachers Retirement System. 1999 Op. Att'y Gen. No. U99-4.

§ 20-2-2066. Admission, enrollment, and withdrawal of students

(a) A local charter school shall enroll students in the following manner:

(1)(A) A start-up charter school shall enroll any student who resides in the charter attendance zone as specified in the charter and who submits a timely application as specified in the charter unless the number of applications exceeds the capacity of a program, class, grade level, or building. In such case, all such applicants shall have an equal chance of being admitted through a random selection process unless otherwise prohibited by law; provided, however, that a start-up charter school may give enrollment preference to applicants in any one or more of the following categories in the order of priority specified in the charter:

(i) A sibling of a student enrolled in the start-up charter school;

(ii) A sibling of a student enrolled in another local school designated in the charter;

(iii) A student whose parent or guardian is a member of the governing board of the charter school or is a full-time teacher, professional, or other employee at the charter school; and

(iv) Students matriculating from a local school designated in the charter;

(B) A conversion charter school shall enroll any student who resides in the attendance zone specified in the charter and who submits a timely application as specified in the charter. If the number of applying students who reside in the attendance zone does not exceed the capacity as specified in the charter, additional students shall be enrolled based on a random selection process; provided, however, that enrollment preferences may be given to applicants in any one or more of the following categories in the order of priority specified in the charter:

(i) A sibling of a student enrolled in the charter school or in any school in the high school cluster;

(ii) Students whose parent or guardian is a member of the governing board of the charter school or is a full-time teacher, professional, or other employee at the charter school;

(iii) Students who were enrolled in the local school prior to its becoming a charter school; and

(iv) Students who reside in the charter attendance zone specified in the charter; and

(2) A student who resides outside the school system in which the local charter school is located may not enroll in that local charter school except pursuant to a contractual agreement between the local boards of the school system in which the student resides and the school system in which the local charter school is located. Unless otherwise provided in such contractual agreement, a local charter school may give enrollment preference to a sibling of a nonresident student currently enrolled in the local charter school.

(b) A state chartered special school shall enroll any student who resides in the attendance zone specified in the charter and who submits a timely application as specified in the charter unless the number of applications exceeds the capacity of a program, class, grade level, or building. The period of time during which an application for enrollment may be submitted shall be specified in the charter. In such case, all such applicants shall have an equal chance of being admitted through a random selection process unless otherwise prohibited by law; provided, however, that a state chartered special school may give enrollment preference to a child of a full-time teacher, professional, or other employee of the state chartered special school as provided for in subsection (b) of Code Section 20-2-293 or to a sibling of a student currently enrolled in the state chartered special school.

(b.1) A charter system shall enroll students in its system charter schools per the terms of the charter and in accordance with state board rules.

(c) A charter school shall not discriminate on any basis that would be illegal if used by a school system.

(d) A student may withdraw without penalty from a charter school at any time and enroll in a local school in the school system in which such student resides as may be provided for by the policies of the local board. A student who is suspended or expelled from a charter school as a result of a disciplinary action taken by a charter school shall be entitled to enroll in a local school within the local school system in which the student resides, if, under the disciplinary policy of the local school system, such student would not have been subject to suspension or expulsion for the conduct which gave rise to the suspension or expulsion. In such instances, the local board shall not be required to independently verify the nature or occurrence of the applicable conduct or any evidence relating thereto.

HISTORY: Code 1981, § 20-2-2066, enacted by Ga. L. 1998, p. 1080, § 3; Ga. L. 2002, p. 388, § 1; Ga. L. 2005, p. 798, § 13/SB 35; Ga. L. 2007, p. 185, § 9/SB 39.

§ 20-2-2067. Reprisals by local boards or school system employees prohibited

A local board of education or a school system employee who has control over personnel actions shall not take unlawful reprisal against another employee of the school system because such other employee is directly or indirectly involved with a petition to establish a charter school. A local board of education or a school system employee shall not take unlawful reprisal against an educational program of any school or school system because a petition to establish a charter school proposes the conversion of such educational program to a charter school. As used in this Code section, the term 'unlawful reprisal' means an action taken by a local board of education or a school system employee as a direct result of a lawful petition to establish a charter school which action is adverse to another employee and which is not lawfully taken in response to any action or behavior of such employee or is adverse to an educational program of the school or the school system and:

- (1) With respect to such other employee, results in one or more of the following:
 - (A) Disciplinary or corrective action;
 - (B) Transfer or reassignment, whether temporary or permanent;
 - (C) Suspension, demotion, or dismissal;
 - (D) An unfavorable performance evaluation;

(E) A reduction in pay, benefits, or awards;

(F) Elimination of the employee's position without a reduction in force by reason of lack of moneys or work; or

(G) Other significant changes in duties or responsibilities that are inconsistent with the employee's salary or employment classification; or

(2) With respect to an educational program, results in one or more of the following:

(A) Suspension or termination of the educational program;

(B) Transfer or reassignment of the educational program to a less favorable department;

(C) Relocation of the educational program to a less favorable site within the school or school system; or

(D) Significant reduction or termination of funding for the educational program, unless necessitated by unfunded mandates from federal or state decisions which result in a significant reduction in funds available to the local board of education and which result in a proportionate loss of funding for all schools in the system.

HISTORY: Code 1981, § 20-2-2067, enacted by Ga. L. 1998, p. 1080, § 3; Ga. L. 1999, p. 81, § 20; Ga. L. 2002, p. 388, § 1.

§ 20-2-2067.1. Amendment of terms of charter for charter school; initial term of charter; annual report

(a) The terms of a charter for a local charter school may be amended during the term of the charter upon the approval of the local board, the state board, and the charter school. The terms of a charter for a state chartered special school may be amended during the term of the charter upon the approval of the state board and the charter school. The terms of a charter for a charter system may be amended during the term of the charter upon approval of the state board and the local board.

(b) The initial term of a charter, except for a charter system, shall be for a minimum of five years, unless the petitioner shall request a shorter period of time, and shall not exceed ten years. The local board and the state board, in accordance with Code Section 20-2-2064.1, may renew a local charter, upon the request of the charter school, for the period of time specified in the request, not to exceed ten years. The state board may renew a state chartered special school, upon the request of the school, for the period of time specified in the request, not to exceed ten years. The initial term of a charter for a charter system shall not exceed five years. The state board may renew the charter of a

charter system, upon the request of the local board, for the period of time specified in the request, not to exceed ten years.

(c) Each start-up and conversion charter school and each charter system shall submit an annual report outlining the previous year's progress to the authorizing local board or state board, as appropriate; to parents and guardians of students enrolled in the school, or, for a charter system, to parents and guardians of students enrolled in school within the local school system; and to the Department of Education no later than October 1 of each year. The report submitted by a charter system shall include, but not limited to, data on all of its system charter schools. The report shall contain, but is not limited to:

(1) An indication of progress toward the goals as included in the charter;

(2) Academic data for the previous year, including state academic accountability data, such as standardized test scores and adequate yearly progress data;

(3) Unaudited financial statements for the fiscal year ending on June 30, provided that audited statements will be forwarded to the local board and state board upon completion;

(4) Updated contact information for the school and the administrator, and for charter systems, each system charter school and its respective administrator;

(5) Proof of current nonprofit status, if applicable;

(6) Any other supplemental information that the charter school or charter system chooses to include or that the state board requests that demonstrates that school or system's success; and

(7) For charter systems, an on-site external evaluation of the system at least once every five years, as determined by the state board.

HISTORY: Code 1981, § 20-2-2067.1, enacted by Ga. L. 2002, p. 388, § 1; Ga. L. 2005, p. 798, § 14/SB 35; Ga. L. 2007, p. 185, § 10/SB 39.

§ 20-2-2068. Termination of a charter

(a) The state board may terminate a charter under the following circumstances:

(1) (A) If a majority of the parents or guardians of students enrolled at the charter school vote by a majority vote to request the termination of its charter at a public meeting called with two weeks' advance notice and for the purpose of deciding whether to request the state board to declare the charter null and void; or

(B) If a majority of the faculty and instructional staff employed at the charter school vote by a majority vote to request the termination of its charter at a public meeting called

with two weeks' advance notice and for the purpose of deciding whether to request the state board to declare the charter null and void.

This paragraph shall not apply to system charter schools;

(2) 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; or

(3) 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 described in paragraph (2) of this Code section.

(b) 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. The term "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.

HISTORY: Code 1981, § 20-2-2068, enacted by Ga. L. 1998, p. 1080, § 3; Ga. L. 1999, p. 81, § 20; Ga. L. 2002, p. 388, § 1; Ga. L. 2007, p. 185, § 11/SB 39; Ga. L. 2008, p. 324, § 20/SB 455.

OPINIONS OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS COULD QUALIFY FOR STATE GRANTS pursuant to subsection (d) of former O.C.G.A. § 20-2-2068, and a local system was required to treat a state charter school no less favorably than other local schools located within the applicable school system. 2001 Op. Att'y Gen. No. 2001-9.

§ 20-2-2068.1. Quality basic education formula applies; grants, local tax revenue, and funds from local bonds

(a) A local charter school shall be included in the allotment of QBE formula earnings, applicable QBE grants, applicable non-QBE state grants, and applicable federal grants to the local school system in which the local charter school is located under Article 6 of this chapter. The local board and the state board shall treat a conversion charter school no less favorably than other local schools located within the applicable local school system unless otherwise provided by law. The local board and the state board shall treat a start-up charter school no less favorably than other local schools within the applicable local system with respect to the provision of funds for instruction, school administration, transportation, food services, and, where feasible, building programs.

(b) QBE formula earnings, applicable QBE grants, applicable non-QBE state grants, and applicable federal grants earned by a local charter school shall be distributed to the local charter school by the local board; provided, however, that state equalization grant earnings shall be distributed as provided in subsection (c) of this Code section. QBE formula earnings shall include the salary portion of direct instructional costs, the adjustment for training and experience, the nonsalary portion of direct instructional costs, and earnings for psychologists and school social workers, school administration, facility maintenance and operation, media centers, additional days of instruction in accordance with Code Section 20-2-184.1, and staff development. The local charter school shall report enrolled students in a manner consistent with Code Section 20-2-160.

(c) In addition to the earnings set out in subsection (b) of this Code section, local revenue shall be allocated to a local charter school on the same basis as for any local school in the local school system. In the case of a start-up charter school, local revenue earnings shall be calculated as follows:

(1) Determine the total amount of state and local five mill share funds earned by students enrolled in the local start-up charter school as calculated by the Quality Basic

Education Formula pursuant to Part 4 of Article 6 of this chapter including any funds for psychologists and school social workers but excluding 5 percent of system-wide funds for central administration and excluding any categorical grants not applicable to the charter school;

(2) Determine the total amount of state and local five mill share funds earned by all students in the public schools of the local school system, including any charter schools that receive local revenue, as calculated by the Quality Basic Education Formula but excluding categorical grants and other non-QBE formula grants;

(3) Divide the amount obtained in paragraph (1) of this subsection by the amount obtained in paragraph (2) of this subsection; and

(4) Multiply the quotient obtained in paragraph (3) of this subsection by the school system's local revenue. The product obtained in paragraph (4) of this subsection shall be the amount of local funds to be distributed to the local start-up charter school by the local board; provided, however, that nothing in this subsection shall preclude a charter petitioner and a local board of education from specifying in the charter a greater amount of local funds to be provided by the local board to the local start-up charter school if agreed upon by all parties to the charter. Local funds so earned shall be distributed to the local start-up charter school by the local board. Where feasible and where services are provided, funds for construction projects shall also be distributed to the local start-up charter school as earned. In all other fiscal matters, including applicable federal allotments, the local board shall treat the local start-up charter school no less favorably than other local schools located within the applicable school system and shall calculate and distribute the funding for the start-up charter school on the basis of its actual or projected enrollment in the current school year according to an enrollment counting procedure or projection method stipulated in the terms of the charter.

(c.1) The adjustments in each program for training and experience used in calculating the start-up charter school's QBE formula earnings shall be calculated in the same manner as for any local school within the local school system; provided, however, that the adjustments in each program for training and experience used in calculating the start-up charter school's QBE formula earnings shall not be less than one-half of the comparable percentages for the local school system in which the charter school is located.

(c.2) For newly approved local charter schools, including charter renewals, the local board of education may retain an amount of the charter school's per pupil share of state and local funding not to exceed 3 percent of the total funds earned by the charter school to reimburse the local school system for administrative services actually provided to the charter school.

(d) QBE formula earnings, applicable QBE grants, applicable non-QBE state grants, and applicable federal grants that are earned by a state chartered special school shall be distributed to the local board of the local school system in which the state chartered special school is located which shall distribute the same amount to the state chartered

special school; provided, however, that a state chartered special school shall not be included in the calculation and distribution of the local school system's equalization grant unless the voters of the local school system have approved the use of revenue from local tax levies and funds from local bonded indebtedness to support the state chartered special school in accordance with subsection (e) of this Code section. If such approval has been given, state equalization grant earnings shall be earned for the state chartered special school and shall be distributed as provided in subsection (f) of this Code section. The local board shall not be responsible for the fiscal management, accounting, or oversight of the state chartered special school. The state chartered special school shall report enrolled students in a manner consistent with Code Section 20-2-160. Any data required to be reported by the state chartered special school shall be submitted directly by the school to the appropriate state agency. Where feasible, the state board shall treat a state chartered special school no less favorably than other public schools within the state with respect to the provision of funds for transportation and building programs.

(e) The state board may require a local referendum of the qualified voters in the local school system in which the state chartered special school will be located. Such referendum shall be held at the next regularly scheduled general election or as may otherwise be authorized at an earlier date by the local board or boards of education affected. Such referendum shall be held for the purpose of deciding whether the local board of education shall provide funds from school tax levies to support such state chartered special school or incur bonded indebtedness to support such state chartered special school or both. The ballot question shall be approved by the state board.

(f) The local board shall treat a state chartered special school for which the use of funds from local bonded indebtedness and local school tax levies has been approved by qualified voters in the system in accordance with subsection (e) of this Code section no less favorably than other public schools located within the applicable school system.

(g) The local board shall not distribute funds from local bond indebtedness and local school tax levies to a state chartered special school unless such use has been approved by qualified voters in accordance with subsection (e) of this Code section.

(h) For system charter schools, funds including federal, state, and local revenue shall be distributed to each such school by the charter system in a manner and in such amounts as are provided in the terms of the charter with an objective of maximizing spending at the school level.

HISTORY: Code 1981, § 20-2-2068.1, enacted by Ga. L. 2002, p. 388, § 1; Ga. L. 2005, p. 798, § 15/SB 35; Ga. L. 2007, p. 185, §§ 12, 13/SB 39; Ga. L. 2008, p. 603, § 2/HB 881; Ga. L. 2009, p. 8, § 20/SB 46.

OPINIONS OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

State charter schools can qualify for state grants and a local system is required to treat a state charter school no less favorably than other local schools located within the applicable school system. 2001 Op. Att'y Gen. No. 2001-9.

§ 20-2-2068.2. Facilities fund for charter schools; purposes for which funds may be used; upkeep of charter school property; availability of unused facilities

(a) From moneys specifically appropriated for such purpose, the state board shall create a facilities fund for local charter schools, state chartered special schools, and commission charter schools as defined in Code Section 20-2-2081 for the purpose of establishing a per pupil, need based facilities aid program.

(b) A charter school or commission charter school may receive moneys from the facilities fund if the charter school or commission charter school has received final approval from the Georgia Charter Schools Commission or from the state board for operation during that fiscal year.

(c) A charter school's or commission charter school's governing body may use moneys from the facilities fund for the following purposes:

(1) Purchase of real property;

(2) Construction of school facilities, including initial and additional equipment and furnishings;

(3) Purchase, lease-purchase, or lease of permanent or relocatable school facilities;

(4) Purchase of vehicles to transport students to and from the charter school or commission charter school; and

(5) Renovation, repair, and maintenance of school facilities that the school owns or is purchasing through a lease-purchase or long-term lease of five years or longer.

(d) The Department of Education shall specify procedures for submitting and approving requests for funding under this Code section and for documenting expenditures.

(e) Local boards are required to renovate, repair, and maintain the school facilities of charter schools in the district to the same extent as other public schools in the district if the local board owns the charter school facility, unless otherwise agreed upon by the petitioner and the local board in the charter.

(f) (1) Prior to releasing moneys from the facilities fund, the Department of Education shall ensure that the governing board of the local charter school and the local board shall

enter into a written agreement that includes a provision for the reversion of any unencumbered funds and all equipment and property purchased with public education funds to the ownership of the local board in the event the local charter school terminates operations.

(2) Prior to releasing moneys from the facilities fund, the Department of Education shall ensure that the governing board of the state chartered special school and the state board shall enter into a written agreement that includes a provision for the reversion of any unencumbered funds and all equipment and property purchased with public education funds to the ownership of the state board in the event the state chartered special school terminates operations.

(3) Prior to releasing moneys from the facilities fund, the Department of Education shall ensure that the governing board of the commission charter school and the Georgia Charter Schools Commission shall enter into a written agreement that includes a provision for the reversion of any unencumbered funds and all equipment and property purchased with public education funds to the ownership of the Georgia Charter Schools Commission in the event the commission charter school terminates operations.

(g) The reversion of property in accordance with subsection (f) of this Code section is subject to the complete satisfaction of all lawful liens or encumbrances.

(h) Each local board of education shall make its unused facilities available to local charter schools. The terms of the use of such a facility by the charter school shall be subject to negotiation between the board and the local charter school and shall be memorialized as a separate agreement. A local charter school that is allowed to use such a facility under such an agreement shall not sell or dispose of any interest in such property without the written permission of the local board. A local charter school may not be charged a rental or leasing fee for the existing facility or for property normally used by the public school which became the local charter school. A local charter school that receives property from a local board may not sell or dispose of such property without the written permission of the local board.

HISTORY: Code 1981, § 20-2-2068.2, enacted by Ga. L. 2004, p. 107, § 19C; Ga. L. 2005, p. 798, § 16/SB 35; Ga. L. 2009, p. 727, § 1/HB 555.

§ 20-2-2069. Office of Charter School Compliance

There is established within the Department of Education an Office of Charter School Compliance, the responsibilities of which shall be to:

(1) Prepare charter school and charter system guidelines to be approved by the state board;

(2) Distribute charter school and charter system petition information to inquiring parties;

(3) Process all charter school and charter system petitions and coordinate with the Charter Advisory Committee established pursuant to Code Section 20-2-2063.1 to facilitate its review and recommendations to the state board;

(4) Administer any state or federal charter school implementation grant program;

(5) Contract with an independent party to evaluate the performance of charter schools and charter systems, as such performance relates to fulfilling the terms of their charters; and

(6) Compile information necessary to produce the annual report required by Code Section 20-2-2070.

HISTORY: Code 1981, § 20-2-2069, enacted by Ga. L. 1998, p. 1080, § 3; Ga. L. 2007, p. 185, § 14/SB 39.

§ 20-2-2070. Annual report to General Assembly

The state board shall report to the General Assembly no later than December 31 of each year on the status of the charter school program.

HISTORY: Code 1981, § 20-2-2070, enacted by Ga. L. 1998, p. 1080, § 3; Ga. L. 2005, p. 798, § 17/SB 35.

§ 20-2-2071. Validity of charters in effect on July 1, 1998

Any charter which was granted pursuant to Code Section 20-2-255 and is in effect on July 1, 1998, shall continue to be valid until such charter expires according to its terms.

HISTORY: Code 1981, § 20-2-2071, enacted by Ga. L. 1998, p. 1080, § 3.