



SCSC Accountability: Charter Renewal Process

For Charter Terms Ending on
June 30, 2022

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Introduction

State charter schools with charter terms expiring on June 30, 2022 will participate in the SCSC charter renewal process during the 2021-2022 school year. This guidance:

- 1) explains SCSC performance expectations for state charter schools seeking charter renewal, the SCSC charter renewal process, and possible outcomes and actions of the charter renewal process;
- 2) outlines how the SCSC utilizes a Comprehensive Performance Framework (CPF) to assess whether or not a state charter school established a track record of performance that warrants renewal and details the process by which a state charter school will report its CPF performance to request a renewed charter contract.
- 3) describes what a state charter school can expect following the SCSC's renewal decision.

The SCSC is committed to ensuring that its charter renewal process—including but not limited to the evaluation of state charter school performance—is completed in an equitable and timely manner. The SCSC seeks to make renewal and non-renewal decisions as early as possible during the final year of a school's charter contract to allow students, parents, and school personnel as much time as possible to prepare for the following school year. However, the timing of renewal and non-renewal decisions is contingent on when the SCSC receives all necessary academic, financial and operational performance data. This typically is in late fall. Performance data from the final year of a school's charter contract term is not considered during the renewal process as the data are lagging and not available until after the charter contract term expires.

All questions regarding the SCSC charter renewal process should be directed to Katie Manthey, SCSC Director of Research and Evaluation, at katie.manthey@scsc.georgia.gov.

SCSC Expectations for Charter Renewal

Comprehensive Performance Framework

Charter school authorizers utilize performance frameworks to establish standards for school performance that are clear, quantifiable, rigorous, and attainable. The SCSC Comprehensive Performance Framework (CPF) includes academic, financial, and organizational performance measures that establish expectations, guide practice, assess progress, and inform decision making over the course of the charter term and at renewal or revocation.

All state charter schools seeking renewal in 2022 will be evaluated based on the school's academic achievement, financial management, and organizational compliance as measured by the SCSC CPF. The CPF will serve as the primary consideration for the SCSC's decision to renew or non-renew the school's charter contract. During the charter renewal process, the SCSC will review each school's performance track-record to determine whether the school fulfilled its contractual obligation to provide its students with a better educational opportunity.

State charter schools are expected to meet academic, financial, and operational standards during every year of the charter term. However, schools that demonstrates a consistent track record of strong performance over multiple years may earn a standard five-year renewal. Additionally, schools that finish their first charter term strong (despite early struggles), and schools that consistently perform on par with the attendance zone they serve may earn an abbreviated three-year charter renewal. The intent of an abbreviated charter term is to assess the school's ability to sustain the requisite performance level.

SCSC renewal eligibility criteria are meant to serve as a guideline to inform renewal decisions. However, the SCSC may exercise discretion in approving renewal terms outside of these guidelines.

SCSC Renewal Criteria

A New School (i.e. a school concluding its first/initial charter term):

To earn a standard five-year renewal, a school must:

- A. meet financial and operational standards at least 50% of the time, OR
- B. meet financial and operational standards in the most recent year of the charter term for which data are available, AND
 - meet academic standards a majority of the charter term (3 of the first 4 years of a 5-year charter contract term).

To earn an abbreviated three-year renewal, a school must:

- must meet financial and operational standards in the most recent year of the charter term for which data are available, AND

- A. perform at least as well as* the attendance on any one or combination of the CCRPI indicators in all relevant grade bands in the most recent year of the charter term for which data are available, OR
- B. outperform on the VAM or be designated BTO in the most recent year of the charter term for which data are available, OR
- C. perform at least as well as the attendance zone on any one or combination of the CCRPI indicators outlined within the CPF, a majority of the charter term.

* The phrase “as well as” in terms of state charter school renewal eligibility equates to having a score that is no more than 3% below the comparison attendance zone score.

A Tenured School (i.e. a school concluding a second or subsequent charter term):

To earn a standard five-year renewal, a school must:

- meet academic, financial and operational standards for a majority of the contract term (3 of the first 4 years of a 5-year charter contract term or 2 out of 3 years of a 3-year charter contract term).

To earn an abbreviated three-year renewal, a school must:

- meet financial and operations standards a majority of the charter term, AND
- meet academic standards or perform at least as well as the attendance zone on any one or combination of the CCRPI indicators outlined within the CPF for a majority of the charter term.

External Dynamic Events

Although a school’s track-record of performance as measured by the CPF is the primary factor used to develop a recommendation for renewal or non-renewal, SCSC staff will give due consideration to any external dynamic events beyond the school’s control that may have contributed to a school’s failure to meet standards.

External dynamic events are circumstances that are outside the influence of the school and could not have been mitigated through school operations. Examples of external dynamic events include, but are not limited to, natural disasters, acts of terror or war, or other acts or interference by third parties in the school’s operation. Student body composition, difficulty of the school’s academic model, poor governance and/or leadership, teacher/staff/governing board turnover **do not** constitute external dynamic events that will be considered by the SCSC.

SCSC Charter Renewal Process

Overview

A state charter school's renewal application serves as the school's official request for a new charter term. The renewal process allows SCSC staff to collect and assess information pertinent to a renewal decision. This is also an opportunity for schools to present evidence of any dynamic external event that may have affected performance or to request changes for the upcoming charter term if the school is renewal.

Timeline

Please note that the following timeline is contingent on the timely acquisition of relevant data. The SCSC prefers to make renewal decisions as early as possible to allow students, parents, and school personnel adequate time to prepare for the next school year.

- October 2021 – GaDOE 2020-2021 School Year Achievement Scores Released
- November 1, 2021 – School Independent Financial Audits Due
- November 1, 2021 – Renewal Application Released
- December 2021 – Interview Scheduling
- January 3, 2022– Applications Due*
- January 24-28, 2022 – Renewal Interviews
- February 9, 2022 – Recommendations Letters Mailed to Schools
- February 16, 2022 – Recommendations Posted
- February 23, 2022 – Commission Votes on Recommendations

* If data for the 2020-2021 school year are not available at the time renewal applications are due, schools will submit the application with data that is available to allow the renewal process to proceed pending the release of pertinent data.

Application

The SCSC renewal application is far more streamlined than a school's original petition for authorization. The purpose of a renewal application is to allow the charter authorizer to evaluate a school's track record of performance in meeting obligations under its charter contract. Because state charter schools are obligated to meet the academic, financial, and operational performance standards outlined within the CPF, the school's performance track-record as measured by the CPF is the primary component of the school's renewal application. The renewal application consists of three sections:

- 1) **Applicant Information** – The school will designate one individual to serve as the official contact for the application. The applicant information section requires the applicant to identify key components of the school (such as its mission, innovative features, attendance zone, grades served etc.) and provides an opportunity to request changes to its educational and/or operational

programs if granted renewal;

- 2) **CPF Performance** – The school will complete a section that identifies the school’s academic, financial, and operational performance on the CPF during the relevant years of its charter contract; and
- 3) **Optional Narratives** – The school may identify mitigating factors and efforts to remediate previously identified performance issues if the school did not meet academic, financial, operational performance standards. Additionally, the school may describe other pertinent information, such as external dynamic events that affected school performance.

State charter schools will submit renewal applications through the online SCSC Administration Portal. SCSC staff are available to provide technical assistance on how to use the portal and submit the application.

Interview

Following submission of the school’s renewal application, SCSC staff will contact the school’s board chair and the school’s designated contact as identified in the renewal application to schedule an interview with the governing board and school administration. The SCSC interview panel will consist of SCSC staff and at least one SCSC Commissioner. The school’s interview contingency should include—at a minimum—the school leader, one board member who can speak to the school’s academic performance, one board member who can speak to the school’s financial performance, and one board member who can speak to the school’s operational performance. Although the SCSC will take special circumstances into account when possible, the availability of SCSC Commissioners and SCSC staff will largely dictate the scheduling of interview dates.

The primary purpose of the interview is to assess the school’s ability to meet the obligations of a future charter contract in light of its performance during the previous charter term. While this will necessitate discussion of the school’s prior performance, the interview panel will not entertain excuses or anecdotal evidence of success. Instead, the school will be expected to discuss its performance and any meaningful actions it took to improve performance.

Schools that met academic, financial, and operational standards for a majority of the contract term are not required to participate in an interview.

Recommendation

In accordance with SCSC Rule 691-2-.03 *State Charter School Monitoring*, the CPF will serve as the basis for academic, financial, and organizational accountability. Therefore, in the absence of an external dynamic event (unforeseen and beyond the school’s control) that significantly impacted a school’s performance, SCSC staff will base recommendations for renewal or nonrenewal on a school’s CPF performance during relevant years of the charter term. SCSC staff will formulate a recommendation after reviewing the school’s renewal application and conducting the interview. SCSC staff will provide the recommendation to the school prior to releasing the recommendation to the general public. Recommendations will

be published on the SCSC's website approximately one week prior to the SCSC meeting at which commissioners will make renewal and non-renewal decisions. Some petitioners may choose to withdraw their applications for renewal prior to the public dissemination of a nonrenewal recommendation and/or prior to action by the SCSC. A school may withdraw its application for renewal at any time.

Decision

The final decision to approve or deny a renewal application for a state charter school will be made by the SCSC at a public meeting. The SCSC typically allows one representative of a petitioning school to address the commission for up to five minutes prior to its vote on the application; however, the specific parameters of any public discussion of a petition remain within the discretion of the SCSC. A majority of SCSC commissioners must vote to renew a charter contract for the school to receive a new charter term.

The State Board of Education (SBOE) may overrule the renewal of a state charter school within 60 days of the SCSC's action to renew the school's charter contract. The SBOE may not overrule a decision to non-renew a state charter school. Additionally, Georgia law does not provide for an appeal of the SCSC's decision to not renew a state charter school.

Outcomes

Renewal

If the SCSC votes to approve a renewal application and the SBOE does not overrule the approval within 60 days, the school will be authorized to continue operation as a state charter school in the 2022-2023 school year. Additionally, SCSC staff will share with the school a draft charter contract for review. The charter contract for the new term may include additional provisions or conditions to address specific areas of performance identified during the school's previous charter term. Because the SBOE will not affirm the SCSC's approval of a petition without a finalized charter, the charter school will need to indicate agreement to its terms by a date as determined by SCSC staff.

Closure

In the event the SCSC votes to deny the school's renewal application, the school will need to prepare to discontinue operations at the end of the 2021-2022 school year. The governing board of the school will retain responsibility for the winding down of the school's affairs. The SCSC provides guidance to assist schools and governing boards in the closure process. The orderly transition of students to alternate educational options is paramount, but the school must also carefully manage staff and protect the school's assets throughout school closure. Although the SCSC understands that the closure of a school is a deeply emotional process, school governing boards and leadership must maintain their commitment to students and families to ensure a smooth closure process and the appropriate use of public resources.