



AUTHORIZER EVALUATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

State Charter School Commission of Georgia | January 27, 2023

OVERVIEW

Georgia law requires an annual review of all charter school authorizers, to assess their “adherence to the principles and standards of charter school authorizing practices” approved by the State Board of Education (SBOE) (O.C.G.A. § 20-2-2063.3). The Georgia State Charter School Commission developed an evaluation tool based on the 15 standards of quality practices in the [Georgia Principles and Standards for Charter School Authorizing](#) approved in December 2021. This evaluation assesses the authorizer’s core responsibilities in the following areas:

1. Authorizer Commitment & Capacity
2. The Petition Process
3. Performance Contracting
4. Oversight and Evaluation
5. Renewal and Termination

The Commission partnered with the [National Association of Charter School Authorizers](#) in 2022-23 to revise its evaluation tool and undergo a pilot evaluation. The attached evaluation is the culmination of a process, which included an extensive document review, data analysis, surveys, multiple conversations and discussions with the authorizing staff, and a two-day site visit, during which the evaluation team interviewed authorizing staff, leadership, and board members.

This evaluation was designed to provide the Commission with a reflective, formative analysis of its primary strengths, priorities for improvement, and recommendations for moving forward. Use of this critical feedback is intended to strengthen existing practices and accelerate the adoption of others that will lead to stronger outcomes for students and communities.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The State Charter Schools Commission of Georgia (Commission) is a quality authorizer, imbued with commitment, leadership, and judgment. The Commission was rated exemplary on each standard. Most of the recommendations for growth for the Commission are within the advanced criteria included in the pilot evaluation tool.

The commitment of commissioners and staff were evident throughout the evaluation. They talk clearly and passionately about when, why, and how they make difficult authorizing decisions. They’re comfortable working diligently within the natural tension arising from the different interests, challenges, strengths, and weaknesses of all the stakeholders involved in the education of Georgia’s young people. Staff demonstrated deep understanding of their

role as an authorizer: to foster accountability, to protect schools' agency and autonomy, and, when appropriate, to serve as a support for schools. Staff works to connect schools to sources of deeper support (i.e., the Georgia Charter Schools Association) without providing them with the "how" and "what".

The commission staff is led by a respected and dedicated executive director. Staff members praised the executive director for creating an effective and supportive work environment. Commissioners take the time to evaluate the executive director and provide actionable feedback. And the executive director is continually building the capacity and effectiveness of the staff to carry out the Commission's authorizing work.

The Commission demonstrated strengths in each area of the charter lifecycle: petition process, performance contracting, oversight and evaluation, and renewal and termination. The judgment of commission staff is evident in each stage of the charter lifecycle. Extensive training and resources are provided to prospective charter school petitioners. Pre-opening expectations are communicated clearly. Staff partner with other organizations to help authorized schools navigate challenges inherent in opening a new school (e.g., facilities, enrollment). Neither staff nor commissioners shy away from gathering information necessary to determine whether a school is prepared to open and successfully serve students from the start.

The Commission can increase its short and long-term effectiveness and sustainability by making improvements in a few areas:

- Bringing critical expertise in house by filling currently open positions, particularly to increase the commission's capacity around areas regarding finance and facilities. (The Commission staff already work diligently to ensure that no one staff member's absence is a bottleneck for decision-making and oversight.)
- Adding staff members with school or network leadership experience.
- Making more of the pre-opening expectations actionable so petitioners focus their energies on work most likely to effect on time school opening.
- Systematizing training for staff and commissioners to ensure uniform understanding and competency.
- Improving transparency by making more resources accessible via the website.
- Commissioners and staff may also benefit from a review of the factors that affect staff recommendations and the ultimate decisions by Commissioners. Instances when the Commission votes contrary to staff recommendations provide opportunities for a review of the strategic direction of the Commission. Such reviews can productively inform future staff recommendations and foster increased understanding.