

LOCALLY-APPROVED CHARTER SCHOOL RENEWAL MEMORANDUM (SCHOOL YEAR 2024-2025)

TO: Locally-Approved Charter School Renewal Petitioners and Local Authorizers

FROM: The Office of Charter School Compliance

RE: **Information for charter schools seeking renewal in the School Year 2024-2025 petition cycle**

The charter renewal process is the opportunity for a charter school to demonstrate the successful implementation of its current charter contract. It is also an opportunity for a charter school to describe new initiatives, if any, that will generate increased academic performance during its next proposed charter term. Additionally, the charter renewal process allows the Office of Charter School Compliance (OCSC) to assess whether the charter school governing board, school management team, and local authorizer have the capacity to operate and support a charter school that is in the public interest.

An approved charter renewal is more than simply adding years on to the term of a charter school's existing contract. Since a school's last charter petition, both statutes and regulations related to the operation of locally-approved charter schools have been created, amended, and repealed. Therefore, the new contract may be a different agreement than the last contract.

This memo presents requirements and guidance for locally-approved charter school renewal petitioners. Please read it carefully and be sure to comply with all requirements. Not complying with the renewal requirements may result in a delay in processing the charter school renewal petition.

REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL LOCALLY-APPROVED CHARTER RENEWAL PETITIONERS

- 1. Identify a petition contact person and keep that individual's contact information updated.**
 - Please email the name, email address, and title of your school's single point of contact

for your renewal petition to allen.mueller@scsc.georgia.gov by August 1, 2024. This single point of contact must match the name listed on the renewal petition.

- If the school's contact person changes during the 2024-2025 petition cycle, please provide updated information for the new school contact to allen.mueller@scsc.georgia.gov within five (5) business days of the change occurring.

2. File a renewal Letter of Intent at least six (6) months prior to submitting the renewal petition to the OCSC.

- If the charter school does not plan on seeking a charter renewal, please notify allen.mueller@scsc.georgia.gov no later than August 1, 2024.
- Please reference State Board of Education (State Board or SBOE) Rule 160-4-9-.05 for the Letter of Intent requirements. A sample Letter of Intent is also available on the OCSC website.

3. Use the current charter renewal petition materials.

- To file a petition for charter renewal, you must submit a Charter School Renewal Petition.

Use the current version of all petition materials, which can be found on the OCSC website.

4. Include the Locally-Approved Charter School Partners Roles and Responsibilities Chart with the renewal petition.

- All renewal petitioners are required to submit the Locally-Approved Charter School Partners Roles and Responsibilities Chart.
- This chart distinguishes the charter school's governing board 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 from the day-to-day management responsibilities of the school leader and the local district's role in providing oversight.
- Please note that this chart will become part of the renewal charter contract.
- The Locally-Approved Charter School Partners Roles and Responsibilities Chart and instructions for filling it out are also located on the OCSC website.

5. Include budget projections with the renewal petition.

- A completed budget template must be submitted by all charter renewal petitioners, including those seeking conversion charter renewals. The required budget template can be found on the OCSC website.

6. Ensure that the entity holding the charter is a Georgia nonprofit corporation.

- All charter school contracts (including conversion charter school contracts) must be held by a Georgia nonprofit corporation.

- A copy of the Certificate of Incorporation that is issued by the Georgia Secretary of State must be included as an exhibit in the renewal petition.
- Please note that the charter school is not required to have a federal 501(c)(3) nonprofit status.

7. Participate in a panel interview with the OCSC

- All charter renewal petitioners are required to participate in a panel interview with the OCSC. The charter school's governing board officers are required to attend the interview. All interview attendees must be approved, in advance, by the OCSC.
 - The panel will include OCSC representatives and at least one outside charter expert.
 - The goal of the interview is to gauge the governing board's continued capacity to operate and sustain a high-quality charter school with regard to academics, operations, governance, and finance.
 - Interviews will last up to 90 minutes, and questions will primarily stem from aspects of the renewal petition that require clarification or elaboration. However, please come prepared to discuss the charter school's strategic goals and how the governing board will ensure those goals are accomplished within budget.
- Petitions must be received at least three (3) weeks prior to the panel interview. To facilitate the scheduling process, please propose in the petition submission several dates and times when the majority of the charter school's governing board members will be available to participate in an interview. Note, however, that the OCSC may schedule the interview on a date and time not listed in your petition. The charter school's point of contact will be notified via email of the interview date.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Below is additional information for charter school renewal petitioners to consider as they are completing the renewal petition process.

1. *What is the term limit for charter school contracts?*

- Please note that the maximum term length for charter renewals is five (5) years.

2. *Where can petitioners find more information about the renewal requirements?*

- Please read the State Board's charter-related rules (160-4-9-.04 through 160-4-9-.06) carefully to find more detailed information about the petition process. Be sure to comply with all petition requirements.

3. *What performance goals are included in the charter school contract?*

- If renewed, the new charter contract will incorporate standard academic and organizational goals.
 - Academic goals include College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) Content Mastery, and Progress goals.
 - Organizational goals include economic sustainability and efficiency, governance, school climate, and legal compliance goals.
- These goals are also included in the renewal charter petition.
- Please note also that the local district and/or charter school may propose additional performance measures in the case that template goals do not sufficiently measure student, school, and/or board performance in schools with unique program elements or instructional approaches.

4. *What is substantial autonomy?*

- Substantial autonomy means that the charter school's governing board has authority to make, but is not limited to:
 - Personnel decisions, including selection of the principal or school leader;
 - Financial decisions and resource allocation decisions, including establishing the number and type of personnel, curriculum costs, supply costs, equipment costs, and maintenance and operations costs;
 - Selection of a curriculum and accompanying instructional materials;
 - Establishment and monitoring of the achievement of school improvement goals, including approval of the school improvement plan and oversight of its implementation; and
 - Operations that are consistent with school improvement goals.
- The local board shall only override decisions of a conversion charter school's governing board in those areas where the local board has constitutional authority and has a reasonable belief that the overridden decision would be substantially detrimental to students and not in the public interest.
- Please note that exercising substantial autonomy can include, for example, a charter school's governing board choosing to:
 - Receive school support and other services from the local district; and
 - Have its employee payroll handled by the local district.
- It is within each charter school governing board's discretion to secure services for the charter school on its own, rather than being required by the local district to rely on it to provide these services.

- Charter renewal petitioners not granted substantial autonomy by their local districts will be recommended for denial.

5. Why is it important that the charter school governing board, faculty, staff, and students are diverse?

- One of the key characteristics of a high-functioning governing board is that the members reflect the sociodemographic diversity of the community served by the charter school.
- The ideal governing board is comprised of 5-7 members, each of whom is able to substantively contribute to school governance.
 - A governing board with diverse skillsets should include members with experience in areas such as finance and accounting, real estate and facilities, legal and human resource services, fundraising and grant writing, marketing, community partnerships, and academic programming. Governing board members are not required to have expertise in all these areas, but they are expected to marshal their expertise, resources, and networks to help meet the charter school's needs and goals.
 - A governing board without representation in the areas of expertise noted above may lack the capacity to provide effective governance of their charter school. This may result in a recommendation for denial of a charter renewal.
- Charter school governing boards that do not reflect their community's sociodemographic diversity must include in their renewal petition a comprehensive plan to address this need for diversity, including a board member succession plan.
- A charter school's faculty, staff, and students should also reflect the sociodemographic diversity of the community served by the charter school.
- Charter renewal petitioners that do not reflect their community's diversity must include in their renewal petition a comprehensive plan to address this need for diversity. The plan may include use of a weighted lottery to provide an increased chance of admission for educationally disadvantaged students pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 20-2-2066(a)(1) and State Board Rule 160-4-9-.05(2)(g). Guidance on how to implement a weighted lottery can be found on the OCSC website.

6. Is the broad flexibility waiver included in the contract?

- All charter renewal petitioners are granted a broad flexibility waiver in their charter contracts.
- The charter renewal petition will still ask for examples of individual waivers used if granted another charter.
 - Please note such examples are just that – *examples* – and will not be incorporated into your new charter contract should you be granted a renewal.
 - You are being asked to provide such examples to determine whether you actually need a charter to accomplish your school's goals.

7. How is the charter school contract drafted?

- Prior to submitting the draft charter school contract to the OCSC, the local board and charter school must complete the draft contract using the template on the OCSC website. **Only those portions of the template clearly marked as editable may be changed.** If the local parties (local board and charter school) do not agree to the terms of the draft contract, this will delay processing of the renewal petition as the contract must be further negotiated.
- If one or both of the local parties propose changes to the contract template, this will also delay processing of the renewal petition since these proposed changes must be reviewed by the OCSC.
- Once the draft contract is ready and has been reviewed by both local parties and the OCSC, the OCSC will notify the petitioner when there will be a recommendation to the State Board for action. The draft version of the contract and renewal petition will be posted on the OCSC website. This is the local district and charter school's final opportunity to review the contract and identify any errors.
- Final comments on the proposed contract must be received no later than a week prior to the scheduled State Board meeting. If proposed revisions are received after the deadline, the Renewal Petition may be pulled from the current State Board agenda and placed on the agenda for a future State Board meeting or any proposed changes to the charter contract must be made through the formal charter amendment process.

8. How long is the petition review process at the state level?

Once the local board approves the charter renewal petition and the renewal petition is submitted to the OCSC, please plan for *at least* a three-month approval process at the state level. The length of the process primarily depends on contract negotiations and when the petition is scheduled for review.

Email Allen Mueller, Senior Director of the Office of Charter Compliance, at allen.mueller@scsc.georgia.gov with any questions.