



Georgia Charter Schools Association

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KEY CHARTER SCHOOLS QUESTIONS FOR GEORGIA'S GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATES

NAME Eric Johnson

ADDRESS PO Box 11530; Atlanta, GA 30355

TELEPHONE NUMBER (678) 732-9496 FAX (678) 732-9509

E-MAIL eric@forge Georgians.com

PARTY AFFILIATION Republican

NAME OF CANDIDATE COMMITTEE Johnson for Georgians, Inc

CAMPAIGN MANAGER/CONTACT Melame Stackwell, Policy Director, melame@forge Georgians.com

CAMPAIGN WEB SITE www.JohnsonForGeorgians.com

Georgia Charter Schools Association is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit membership organization for Georgia's charter school operators and petitioners. Our mission is to be an effective advocate, resource, and service provider for charter public schools in the state.

I understand that Georgia Charter Schools Association may use my responses to all questions as one of several other factors in consideration for endorsement of my candidacy and understand that my answers may be released at any time to the general public.

Name: ERIC JOHNSON

Signature: [Handwritten Signature]

Date: 4/22/10

PLEASE SIGN & RETURN COMPLETED FORM

Return options:

Email: alewis@gacharters.org
Andrew Lewis, Chief Programming Officer
Georgia Charter Schools Association
600 West Peachtree Street
Suite 1555
Atlanta, GA 30308

If you have any questions about this survey, please do not hesitate to contact Andrew Lewis at (404) 835-8902.

There are several important policy questions facing public charter schools across the country. The purpose of this document is to outline the key policy questions related to charter public schools for the state of Georgia.

Parent Choice

Background: Parents with a certain level of financial status have long exercised school choice through their choice of a residence and/or a private or parochial school in their community. Only a limited number of parents are able to make these kinds of choices, however. Over the past decade and a half, in an effort to increase the number of parents with the ability to choose their child's school, states and districts have been implementing a broad array of school choice programs, including public charter schools.

Question: On a scale of 1-5, please rate your response to the following statement:

I support a parent's right to choose the best public school, in their judgment, for their children.

- 1 – Strongly disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 3 – No position
- 4 – Agree
- √5 – Strongly agree

Please explain your answer:

Absolutely! I support a parent's right to choose the best school, public or private, secular or religious, charter, home or virtual. I support having as many options for families as necessary. Children are not the same and every child deserves the right to find the school that best fits their needs. I have supported every improvement to Georgia's charter school law. I have supported laws to give parents the right attend the public school of their choice, even if it is not the one to which they are assigned. I have supported tax credit scholarships and scholarships for special needs students—which allow students to choose private schools if they wish. And I have made every effort to provide vouchers to all students.

Public Charter Schools

Background: Charter schools are public schools that are open to all students, regardless of income, gender, race, or religion. Charter schools differ from traditional public schools in that they are free from burdensome rules and regulations, so teachers, principals, parents, and students can focus on learning. In exchange for this freedom, charters sign a contract detailing the school's mission, program, goals, students served, and ways to measure success. Charter schools are held accountable to parents and the community and to their sponsor/authorizer, to produce positive academic results and adhere to the charter contract. In Georgia, authorizing bodies are; local boards of education, the State Board of Education and the Georgia Charter Schools Commission. Charters are typically granted for 5-10 years. At the end of the term, the entity granting the charter may renew the school's contract.

Question: On a scale of 1-5, please rate your response to the following statement:

I support public charter schools.

- 1 – Strongly disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 3 – No position
- 4 – Agree
- √5 – Strongly agree

Please explain your answer:

Absolutely! I have co sponsored and supported every single effort to improve Georgia's charter school law. I worked very hard behind the scenes to ensure that the Georgia Charter Schools Commission law was passed. As Governor, I will do everything that is necessary to ensure that public charter schools thrive in Georgia.

Equitable Funding

Background: In most cases, public charter schools receive less funding per pupil than public non-charter schools. State and district officials seldom allow charters to receive facilities funding or local property tax dollars and sometimes fail to pass through federal and state program funding that charters are eligible to receive based on their student populations. As a consequence, public charter school students receive 22% less, on average, than other public school students.

Question: On a scale of 1-5, please rate your response to the following statement:

I support public charter school students receiving the same amount of public funding as students in other public schools.

- 1 – Strongly disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 3 – No position
- 4 – Agree
- √5 – Strongly agree

Please explain your answer:

I supported the creation of the Georgia Charter School Commission and the new funding formula for charter schools that was contained in that bill. I am hopeful that the court will uphold this formula. However, should the law get struck down, I will do whatever is necessary to “fix” the law to ensure that charter schools get full funding.

Charter Facilities

Background: Although charter schools cannot levy taxes, they are still public entities. Therefore, they should be eligible to receive facilities assistance from state and district officials. Without it, charters must devote precious operational dollars to cover building costs instead of teacher salaries, textbooks, and tutors.

Question: On a scale of 1-5, please rate your response to the following statement:

I support charter schools being eligible to receive facilities funding from state and local capital budgets to address their critical facilities needs.

- 1 – Strongly disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 3 – No position
- 4 – Agree
- √5 – Strongly agree

Please explain your answer:

I have supported the efforts to include charter schools in local school system SPLOST referendums, and to make sure charter schools have access to other public school system buildings that are no longer being used. We must continue ways to fully utilize any federal funding options and I will explore the state's current facility funding system to see if there are ways we can ensure that local systems do not shut charter schools out of their allocation.

Quality Charter Authorizing

Background: Charter applicants should have access to rigorous but supportive authorizers – those entities that approve and monitor charter schools. Having access to multiple authorizers, including non-district authorizers such as the Georgia Charter Schools Commission, forces all districts to take their authorizing role seriously and non-district authorizers to set a high bar for quality charter schools.

Question: On a scale of 1-5, please rate your response to the following statement:

I support allowing local boards of education, the State Board of Education and the Georgia Charter Schools Commission to approve and monitor charter schools.

1 – Strongly disagree

2 – Disagree

3 – No position

4 – Agree

√5 – Strongly agree

Please explain your answer:

I was a strong supporter of HB 881 and worked behind the scenes in the Senate to make sure that HB 881 passed. I hope that local boards of education will cease to feel threatened by charter schools. However, if local school districts continue to block the creation of successful charter schools, I will continue to support efforts to work around them.

Quality Charter Authorizing #2

Background: In 2008, Governor Sonny Perdue signed into law House Bill 881 creating the Georgia Charter Schools Commission, a statewide alternative authorizer of charter schools. The seven members of the Commission recommended by the Governor, Lt. Governor and Speaker of the House were appointed by the State Board of Education in December 2008. In accordance with state statute, the Georgia Department of Education releases state funds to Commission approved charter schools that are an approximation of the amount raised by local taxes for students from their respective districts. The school district's state funds are then reduced by this amount, ensuring the equal and equitable funding for students attending the Commission charter school.

Question: On a scale of 1-5, please rate your response to the following statement:

I support House Bill 881.

- 1 – Strongly disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 3 – No position
- 4 – Agree
- √5 – Strongly agree

Please explain your answer:

See my answers above.

Charter Autonomy

Background: One of the fundamental components of the charter school concept is that individual schools receive more autonomy in exchange for being held to a higher degree of accountability. This autonomy extends across the full range of decisions that a school must make – from staff to budgets to curriculum to schedules. When an individual charter school runs into problems, however, policymakers are tempted to re-regulate all charter schools instead of dealing directly with the struggling school.

Question: On a scale of 1-5, please rate your response to the following statement:

I support charter schools getting and keeping the autonomy to make key decisions that affect a school's daily operations.

- 1 – Strongly disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 3 – No position
- 4 – Agree
- √5 – Strongly agree

Please explain your answer:

We must be careful that we do not turn charter schools into a shadow public school system by creating a one size fits all system for charter schools. Charter schools need to be free to create their own unique environment for the unique students that come to them. We must create an environment that allows for creativity and innovation. I will create an environment where all schools are judged on their own merits according to the terms of their own charter. However, starting a school is not easy and it shouldn't be easy. I support the efforts of the Georgia Charter Schools Association to provide technical assistance and best practices to potential charter schools. While we want charter schools to be innovative and independent, we also want potential schools to have access to the best advice possible.