



KEY CHARTER SCHOOLS QUESTIONS FOR
GEORGIA'S STATE SUPERINTENDENT CANDIDATES

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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: Joseph G. Martin, Jr.

Signature: /s/ Joseph G. Martin, Jr.

Date: June 6, 2010

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

PLEASE SIGN & RETURN COMPLETED FORM

Return options:

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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:

5 - I have always supported parental choice in the education of their children, while realizing that it is necessary to ensure that parents have enough information for a wise choice. The biggest advantage is that parents and even the students feel a greater personal investment and often a greater sense of responsibility for the success of their children's schools if they have made an affirmative choice to be there. Having worked for local school systems, I know there are planning needs and facility considerations that have to be addressed at the same time. There is also a potential equity issue if certain choices are available only to some families who can meet unusual requirements or afford extra costs and not to others.

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:

5 - I strongly support locally approved charter schools because they offer alternatives which are still public schools. Although they have to be properly structured and operated, they can be a very effective way to introduce new approaches and increase the involvement of parents and others. I have provided direct assistance to several successful charter schools and drafted the section in Georgia law to ensure proportional funding for locally approved charter schools.

In contrast, I am a staunch opponent of vouchers, which drain needed funds from our public schools, including charter schools. As a practical matter, vouchers are not available to the students who cannot afford the rest of the tuition at a private school or may not be admitted for any reason.

As evidence of my support of charter schools, I have provided extensive assistance to the KIPP Academies in Atlanta and South Fulton, the International Community Charter School in Clarkston, and the Imagine Wesley Charter School in Atlanta, especially in terms of financial planning, system relationships, and site selection. I was the sole member of the Atlanta Board of Education to support the creation of the Charles Drew Charter School when it was initially proposed, but eventually my colleagues on the school board and the school administration came to see the value of the position I was taking.

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:

5 - I support full funding for charter schools, as evidenced by my actions in this regard, but should clarify the premise to this question. Except for transportation, school construction and renovation, and certain federal programs, charter schools are supposed to receive at least proportional funding as a statutory minimum. If a charter school is treated "less favorably" than other local schools in the system, the local school system is not following the provisions of the law originally set forth in HB 1200 and then amended in SB 35. Some local systems do not follow the law, in which case the affected charter schools are entitled to a correction of the problem; and in other instances, students are not properly reported by the charter school or the local system according to the QBE program in which they are being served. I've intervened on behalf of specific charter schools to ensure that they were receiving all of the funding they were supposed to receive and would not hesitate to do so as State School Superintendent.

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:

5 – I support facilities funding for charter schools, but since the total amount of funding for the facilities for all traditional and charter schools is limited, we need to be sure the available funds are used in the most cost-effective way. The most rational and effective approach is to include charter schools in the Local Facilities Plan adopted by each local school system, which is a prerequisite for state capital outlay funding and is usually the first step in being listed as an eligible project in a local ESPLOST referendum.

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 district authorizers to set a high bar for quality

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

I support allowing local boards of education, the Georgia Charter Schools Commission to approve

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

Please explain your answer:

1. RFP which the Comm. has identified as "need" areas.

2. Approval of charters has been problematic in good times and bad.

2 - As much as I support charter schools, I do not favor the unsettled situation that can occur if charter schools are authorized without any recognition of local needs. The ultimate problem is that we as a state have not provided enough funding for the schools we already have; so we have to be very careful in using the funds that are available in the most cost-effective way possible.

The funding formula used by the State should be sufficient to support a basic instructional program in every public school, including both charter schools and traditional public schools. If this were done, the local supplement could then be used for its intended purpose of increasing salaries and adding local programs to meet local needs instead of covering basic costs. It would then be feasible for the State to provide the extra funding that is equivalent to the local supplement for a state-chartered or State Charter Commission school without having to go through a complicated process of offsetting state funds for the instruction of some students to tap local funds for other students.

In any event, there must be a clear and simple way for a charter school applicant to appeal an adverse decision by a local board of education if that decision was made for political, institutional, or other non-justifiable reasons instead of the best interests of the affected students.

I also favor a way to extend substantive charter school status to current schools (beyond the current conversion model, which does not go far enough). The goal should be to grant more autonomy to local schools and communities in exchange for academic results. In effect, local schools that are doing well should be unleashed from unnecessary and crippling rules so that they can do even better.

Further, I see the need for a way to approve charters for a virtual school or other schools which serve students statewide. There should be legislation to make sure that such schools can operate in a reasonable way without an extremely complicated and laborious mechanism for assessing local school systems for the cost associated with each student.

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:

2 – As a strong and committed advocate of charter schools and as a person who understands the way in which all of our schools are financed, I have to say that **the technical defects in the financing provisions in HB 881 are such that they will lead to a number of unintended consequences that will not benefit the charter school movement.** There is also a danger in having local schools with no oversight or little accountability.

My preference is that all of us who are promoting charter schools – of whom I have been a leader – should rally around the merits of charter schools and **foster a cooperative relationship with the traditional public schools instead of the confrontational approach represented by HB 881, which will ultimately work to the detriment of charter schools.** The challenges facing all of us who are involved in public education are so huge that we must unite in meeting the basic needs. The immediate task is to ensure adequate funding for all traditional and charter schools.

At the same time, however, I want to stress that I do not want local boards to reject worthy applications for indiscriminate reasons or treat their charter schools unfairly or less favorably than other schools in the district, as I know has happened. The best solution is to correct the present problems and not to create new ones that divert us from improving the status of charter schools generally.

The charter movement is too important to be sidetracked by arguments over procedure. We will not have truly succeeded in this effort until local school systems

see the enormous value of charter schools and support them enthusiastically, until charter schools are able to operate with total support by their host systems and no interference, and until those charter schools that do not meet their commitments are terminated.

These are the goals that I will pursue with great conviction and determination as State School Superintendent. My efforts to gain adequate funding for all of our public schools, charters and traditional public schools alike, will accrue to the direct benefit of charter schools.

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:

5 – This question relates to the essence of charter schools. They must have the flexibility and autonomy granted by their charter so long as they achieve the agreed-upon results. In fact, the real test of the charter school movement is whether local school boards and other authorizers will have the backbone to terminate charters when the stated commitments have not been met.