



**KEY CHARTER SCHOOLS QUESTIONS FOR  
GEORGIA'S GUBERNATORIAL 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: Karen Handel

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: April 30, 2010

**PLEASE SIGN & RETURN COMPLETED FORM**

**Return options:**

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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

**X 5 – Strongly agree**

Please explain your answer:

I strongly support the right of parents to choose the best public school for their child(ren), and I will be a strong advocate for the expansion of school choice within our state's public school system. Georgia must adopt a "no more excuses" approach to education in order to achieve meaningful results and improved educational outcomes. Our primary focus must be what is in the best interest of educating our children and then aligning the funding accordingly. Educational choices should not be constrained by the outdated thinking and approaches of yesterday – where financial status, geographic locations and traditional bricks and mortar were the determining factors for which public school a child attends. Rather, we must embrace 21<sup>st</sup> Century educational opportunities – charter schools, on-line learning, and virtual classroom settings – where education can be more individualized and learning opportunities can be expanded.

## **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
- X 5 – Strongly agree**

Please explain your answer:

I support public charter schools in the strongest possible terms, and I will aggressively pursue and support the expansion of high-quality charter schools in our state. High quality charter schools – those with strong management, high accountability, tangible measurements, rigorous curriculum, and high student expectations, have shown tremendous success. My goal – our goal as a state – should be to replicate the successes, taking those programs and initiatives that are working and improving educational outcomes, across 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
- X 5 – Strongly agree**

Please explain your answer:

Georgia's education funding formula needs to be re-evaluated in Georgia. The QBE formula developed and implemented in the 80's – before charter schools, virtual academies and the expanded dual-enrollment programs with technical colleges. Just as we need to embrace a modern, more effective approach to educating our young people, we need to re-evaluate and adjust the funding formula to meet today's educational needs. As Governor, I will work to bring a more equitable approach to per-pupil funding between charter schools and traditional public schools. Our goal in funding education must be identifying first what is in the best interest of educating the child and then aligning the funding accordingly.

### **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

**X5 – Strongly agree**

Please explain your answer:

Far too often charter schools have to rely on the generosity, and the charity, of their local communities, parents and business leaders to make up for the lack of facilities funding and support from the local school systems and the state. This funding disparity is an obstacle that limits charter schools – and, more importantly, the students. As Governor, I am committed to addressing this issue. As mentioned above, we simply cannot continue with the same old approaches (including funding) for education. The needs of today's students require that we change and adjust to meet the needs of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### **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
- X 5 – Strongly agree**

Please explain your answer:

The creation of the Georgia Charter Schools Commission, as well as other changes in state law, have helped level the playing field for public charter school applicants by creating an environment where local school systems need to negotiate ‘in good faith’ – ‘or better faith’ -- with petitioners because of the potential for state and/or GCSA approval of the schools. I applaud and fully support these significant changes. Our goal – at the local and state level – must be doing what is in the best interest of providing better educational opportunities for Georgia’s children.

## **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
- X 5 – Strongly agree**

Please explain your answer:

I fully support HB 881.

## **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
- X 5 – Strongly agree**

Please explain your answer:

As the preceding paragraph suggests, the failures of individual charter schools have been used by policy makers to re-regulate charter schools as a whole and I reject that approach. One of the key benefits of charters is the autonomy and accountability that is inherent in their creation and operations. It is ineffective and stifles the key components of successful charter schools to attempt to regulate all charters based on the performance of a particular charter school. As Governor, I will reject proposed regulations and changes on charter schools as a whole based on the real or perceived failures of individual schools.

Additionally, I believe it is important for the state to identify specific successes within our state's charter schools and work to replicate these approaches in other schools – charters and public – throughout the state. In high quality schools – charter or traditional public – administrators, teachers, parents and students work together to create an environment where accountability, tangible measurements, strong management, high expectations, and rigor are embraced by parents, teachers and administrators, with the right balance of structure and flexibility. This is the model that has proven to be very successful in charter schools throughout Georgia and it is one that I embrace and will aggressively support as Governor.