



Georgia Charter Schools Association

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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: ___Thurbert Baker_____

Signature: _____

Date: ___6/23/10_____

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:

4. Charter schools are not a replacement for traditional schools, and ideally parents would not have to worry about the quality of their local public school. But given the current realities charters schools present a viable alternative for some parents. Even more importantly charter schools represent a laboratory where dedicated educators can more easily try different methods to best educate our children. This provides hard data to use as we all try to figure out how to make our education system the best in the world.

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:

4. I am a supporter of good public charter schools and co-authored the legislation bringing them to Georgia. While charter schools will never fully supplant the public school system, they provide laboratories to attempt innovative and creative ways of educating our children.

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:

3. There remains a substantial dispute as to what "equal" funding would actually constitute. Georgia needs to resolve these issues as soon as possible.

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:

3. When the state originally created public charter schools we envisioned them as being different from traditional public schools. In exchange for increased freedom charter schools are obligated to increase their responsibility. Part of that responsibility is handling the facilities costs and startup costs with private funds.

To date many charter schools have succeeded without state facilities support. Georgia should however continue to review this issue.

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:

Unfortunately I have been forced to deal with this issue in my official capacity as Attorney General, and very likely will be required to do so again in the near future. As a result it would be legally inappropriate for me to comment on this situation.

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:

Unfortunately I have been forced to deal with this issue in my official capacity as Attorney General, and very likely will be required to do so again in the near future. As a result it would be legally inappropriate for me to comment on this situation.

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:

4. If an individual charter school is failing then it has broken its fundamental promise to the people of Georgia and should be dealt with accordingly. This failure, however, is not an indictment of all charter schools. All schools should be judged on individual performance. Policy makers must address failures at any Georgia school, but in doing so should focus on the failing school rather than the way the school is funded.

Short of a clear systemic failure of charter schools in this state I see no reason to re-regulate all charter schools.