



**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:

Roy E. Barnes

Signature:

Roy E. Barnes

Date:

7.22.10

PLEASE SIGN & RETURN COMPLETED FORM

Return options:

Email: alewis@gacharters.org
Mail to: Andrew Lewis, Chief Programming Officer
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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
- 5 – Strongly agree**

Please explain your answer:

I strongly support parents having choice within the public school system. Anyone who has followed my career in public service knows of my longstanding belief that every child should be afforded the opportunity for a quality public education, that the local and state communities have a responsibility to provide that opportunity, and that it is ultimately a primary right and even duty of parents to decide whether that fundamental promise of public education is being fulfilled. Marie and I never relinquished that right as our children attended public schools, and no other parent should have to because of the happenstance of geography or finances. It is the responsibility of elected officials at both the state and local levels to recognize this primary role of parents, and to empower rather than impede the creation of quality alternatives that enable parents to make the best education decisions for their children. I have done precisely that as an elected official, first, in my legislative career in the House and Senate, and later as Governor.

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:

I strongly support public charter schools, as demonstrated through my advocacy over the years. First, as a member of the General Assembly, I supported the earliest charter school legislation. Later, as Governor, I consistently used the platform of the office to voice my support for charter schools, I visited many charter schools including the dedication of several, and I am especially proud of legislation which I had introduced in 2000 (HB 1187) and in 2002 (HB1200) that dramatically shifted the momentum in favor of the charter school movement. Key points in those bills required local school systems to approve a petition if it met the requirements, required a local board to expedite a response, gave charter schools the right to an explanation when they were turned down for an application, and gave charter schools increased access to QBE funding, including both state and local monies, as well as many grants programs. These bills were the foundation for the next wave of legislation in subsequent years, further improved support for charter schools and access to public funding for these institutions.

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:

Students who attend charter schools are attending public schools and should receive the same financial support as all other public school students. Not only is there a disparity in funding between charter schools and “traditional” schools, there is also a wide disparity of funding among charter schools. Conversion charter schools, LEA supported charter schools, and start-up charter schools all may receive vastly different amounts of funding from the local board of education. Further, there is wide disparity from school system to school system depending upon the amount of local funds provided. I am proud that as Governor I listened to the advice of charter school advocates such as GCSA and introduced HB 1200 as my major education initiative in the 2002 session. This bill was devoted entirely to the expansion and support of charter schools in Georgia. Among the funding provisions, there was inserted for the first time in statute a requirement that “a local charter school shall be included in the allotment of QBE formula earnings, applicable QBE grants, applicable non-QBE state grants, and applicable federal grants... [and those] shall be distributed to the local charter school by the local board.” (20-2-2068.1). At the time, this was a politically hard-won piece of legislation which drastically improved the funding landscape on behalf of charter schools; since then, more has been done on behalf of getting funds to charter schools, but in practice there still remains a gap in the funding for charter schools, especially in the funding of facilities. If we want to encourage successful charter schools that are financially sustainable, we must fix Georgia law to allow a more reliable, predictable, sustainable funding model.

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:

The cost for facilities has, regrettably, proven to be one of the largest single impediments for startup charter schools, and if this can be solved, there could be an entirely new wave of charter schools working to strengthen public education in Georgia. Local boards of education should include charter schools in their strategic plans, especially their facilities plans. Local school systems should be encouraged to provide charter schools with facilities that are comparable to traditional school facilities and should be encouraged to include the capital needs of charter schools in their SPLOSTs (Special Purpose Local Option Sales Taxes). It is always important to remember that students who attend charter schools are attending public schools and should be assured a level of quality in their school buildings. Taxes are raised to educate students in the public school system and that includes students educated in charter schools.

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:

As long as all authorizers are using the same rigorous criteria to authorize charter schools, multiple authorizers should not be an issue. If the focus is on student achievement and accountability measures are in place, it should not matter who authorizes a charter school as long as it is done fairly and consistently by all authorizers. It is important to make sure that different authorizers do not have different motivations or incentives to approve or disapprove a charter petition.

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:

As indicated in prior questions, I support both the equitable funding of all charter schools and additional authorizers of charter schools. However, as a lawyer, I do have concerns about the constitutionality of HB 881, which is currently being appealed in our court system. I would support legislation to allow a more equitable system of funding of all types of charter schools, but it must not violate existing provisions of the Georgia Constitution. Under our state constitution, local boards of education have the constitutional mandate to control and manage local schools, including charter schools. We must find ways to incentivize local boards of education to support charter schools so that they receive full and equitable funding.

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:

Autonomy and accountability go hand in hand. By very definition, charter schools enter into a performance contract with the State Board of Education to provide certain educational outcomes for students in return for flexibility and autonomy. The charter itself should provide for consequences when performance goals are not met. The ultimate consequence is that the charter is not renewed. No additional regulation should be necessary. Also, there should be a differentiated response depending on the nature of the performance goals not met – financial goals, while important, should not take precedence over student achievement goals. Too often, charter schools are struggling financially but are succeeding academically and that academic success is not rewarded and supported. This is an untenable outcome. Successful charter schools should be financially supported.