

Jasper County Schools Charter School System FAQs

Why did Jasper County Schools consider becoming a Charter System?

GA lawmakers provided school districts with three options for management frameworks. By June 2015, every school system in Georgia had to make a decision as to whether it would become:

1. An IE2 (Investing in Excellence in Education) system
2. A charter system
3. Or had to publicly acknowledge it was content with its current status of operation under the rules, processes and practices of the Georgia Department of Education (Status Quo) After exploring the merits of the IE2 (Investing in Excellence in Education) system the Jasper County Board of Education determined it was more interested in the Charter System model. After gathering significant community input, it was determined that such a reform model was warranted and worth thoughtful consideration.

When have the details of the Charter System Application process been discussed?

The JCBOE has posted information about the entire process on eBoard following each board meeting. There were also opportunities for input from stakeholders through engagement in a series of forums held by the JCBOE.

What is a charter system?

A charter system is a local school district that operates under the terms of a charter between the State Board of Education and the local school district. The system receives flexibility from certain state rules and regulations in exchange for greater accountability. There is an emphasis on school-based leadership and decision-making.

How will the district become a charter system?

To become a charter system, the local school system must submit a charter school petition, in the form of an application, to the Department of Education after such petition has been approved by the local board.

As the Charter System remains under the control and management of the local Board of Education, what will be different for local schools?

If the school system becomes a charter system, the Board of Education may require that all schools implement innovative practices through waivers from state law. In addition, local school governance teams (SGTs) can be given authority to exercise waivers and to make decisions in specific areas that are determined through the charter application.

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What is meant by School Governance or an SGTs?

A charter system is a local school system that is operating under the terms of a contract between the local Board of Education and the State Board of Education as provided by the Charter Systems Act.

A Charter System provides the opportunity for teachers, administrators, parents, and school boards to have greater flexibility to determine the educational needs of students within their district and requires a certain degree of school level governance in the system.

An SGT (School Governance Team) works collaboratively with the school leadership to offer input into certain decision-making processes.

How is a charter system different from what we do now?

Under a Charter System, there is a five-year performance contract which identifies particular waivers from state law and requires the system to describe the specific practices that will be used in the system and/or schools.

All Jasper County Schools would be:

- 1) included in system-wide waivers,
- 2) allowed to choose specific waivers in some cases, and
- 3) able to apply for additional waivers. A consistent expectation found in the charter system alternative is meaningful decision-making authority for governing bodies at the local schools. All schools participate in the system and may fine tune their own levels of flexibility. The consequence for poor performance is reverting to non-charter system status for the system.

What is broad flexibility under the Charter System?

Broad flexibility refers to the ability to waive most aspects of state education law. This is commonly referred to as a “blanket waiver.” These include, but are not limited to seat time in courses, class size, teacher certification requirements, requirements for course credit and other practices.

On what standards (state vs. national) will waivers be based?

Only state laws can be waived. The majority of these are covered under Title 20. Some state laws are not eligible for waiver including the following: 1) Unlawful Conduct, 2) Reporting Requirements, 3) Brief Period of Quiet Reflection, 4) Open and Public Meetings/ Inspection of Public Records and 5) State Assessments (i.e. GA Milestone, Writing, End-of-Course Tests). Federal laws cannot be waived under the Charter System.

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What impact will there be on sports programs and/or extra-curricular activities?

The charter system would not necessitate any changes to sports or other extra-curricular activities. If significant suggestions for revisions to sports programs emerge from the charter system forums and ongoing discussions, or once the charter system is implemented, the SGTs could give input on suggested changes for consideration.

What will constitute success of the Charter System? How will the charter system be measured? What is system level accountability under the Charter System?

The charter petition would include specific areas for performance improvement and measureable results that would be targeted over the five years of the charter contract. The school system is accountable to the state for achieving these results. These would constitute success for the charter system.

What determines failure of the Charter system?

The state Board of Education would determine if the charter system fails to sufficiently achieve its performance results. The system could also fail to properly implement the waivers and innovations it requested. However, over the course of the five year contract the waivers and performance targets can be re-negotiated and revised based upon the realities of the charter implementation.

What happens after the five-year contract if charter system is deemed unsuccessful?

If the Georgia Board of Education deems the charter system has been unsuccessful, the school system would revert to non-charter status and operate according to state laws and regulations. This is what is meant by “current status”, operating under the state laws and regulations.

What are the details of the five-year contract with the state?

Once the Board of Education determines to accept the charter system application process, all the details developed will be made available for community review.

Can Jasper County lose its accreditation if the charter system fails and if so who would take over the system?

Accreditation from SACS/CASI is a separate process from the charter system. Accreditation is based upon specific quality standards that the school system would continue to adhere to with or without charter system status.

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Are there any downsides to becoming a charter system?

Any systemic change brings a learning curve. Since the Board of Education has elected to pursue Charter System status it will be important to phase in the components gradually to ensure the change does not disrupt system operations and to ensure clear communication and understanding among system staff at all levels and among the community. A proposed detailed timeline is included in the charter application. This framework will be a vital tool in implementing this process systematically and with transparency for all stakeholders.