



Charter System Application

DISTRICT NAME

Stephens County School System

DISTRICT ADDRESS

2332 Mize Road

Toccoa, Georgia 30577

Dr. John D. Barge

State School Superintendent

DECEMBER 2012

Stephens County School System

Introduction

The Charter Schools Act of 1998 established a flexibility option for Georgia school districts that wish to become a Charter System. A Charter System is a local school district that operates under the terms of a charter contract between the State Board of Education and the local Board of Education. The system receives flexibility in the form of waivers of certain state laws, rules and guidelines in exchange for greater accountability for increased student performance and an emphasis on school-based leadership and decision-making.

Your Charter System Application is a petition to the Georgia State Board of Education asking it to create or renew your Charter System. The evaluation of your Application will be led by the Charter Schools Division of the Georgia Department of Education, in partnership with others within the Department (including the Finance and Budget Office, the Office of School Improvement, the Office of School Turnaround, and the Accountability Division) and with the independent Charter Advisory Committee (CAC) that was also established by the Charter Schools Act.

The evaluation of your Application will focus on whether implementing the proposed in your Application will lead to the improved academic performance you are promising in exchange for freedom from much of Georgia's education law, rules and guidelines. It will also determine whether the proposed Charter System would comply with all applicable laws, rules, regulations, policies and procedures (including the Charter Schools Act of 1998, as amended [O.C.G.A. §§ 20-2-2060 through 20-2-2071], State Board of Education Rule 160-4-9-.04 et. seq., and Department of Education Guidelines accompanying the Charter School Rules); whether your proposed academic plans are viable; and whether the Charter System is in the public interest.

Please note that submitting a Charter System Application does not guarantee that a charter will be granted. It does guarantee, however, that the Georgia Department of Education will work closely with you to improve your chances of State Board of Education approval of your charter system contract.

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DEADLINE AND SUBMISSION PROCEDURES

Your Charter System Application must be approved by your local Board of Education in accordance with the rules and regulations of your local board. After local submission, review and approval, charter system applications must be received at the address below by November 1 of the year prior to the start of the July-June fiscal year in which the charter system contract would go into effect. Early submissions are encouraged.

Georgia Department of Education

Charter Schools Division

2053 Twin Towers East

205 Jesse Hill Jr. Drive, SE

Atlanta, Georgia 30334

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APPLICATION PACKAGE CHECKLIST

Your Charter System Application Package must comply with the following submission procedures.

- An Application Package includes an original and two copies of the following items:
- SYSTEM APPLICATION COVER SHEET** (Use the form on page 3; the form may not be altered in any way).
- CHARTER SYSTEM APPLICATION** (Your answers to the questions posed on pages 4-6).
- The Charter System Application is limited to 50 double-spaced pages using an 11-point Times New Roman font and one-inch margins with a header showing the school system's name and a footer showing consecutive page numbers.
- The original must be signed in blue ink. Stamped signatures will not be accepted.
- ASSURANCES FORM AND SIGNATURE SHEET** (Use the Assurances Form and Signature Sheet below on pages 7-9; the Form and the Sheet may not be altered in any way).
- The original must be signed in blue ink; stamped signatures will not be accepted.
- EXHIBITS** (See list of required Exhibits below on page 10).
- Required Exhibits should be as limited in size as possible (no more than 5 pages per Exhibit). The only exceptions to this size limitation for Exhibits are your most recent annual audit, accreditation report, and strategic plan (to which you will provide online links).
- All Exhibits must be tabbed.
- Your Application Package must be bound by a binder clip; do not enclose your Application Package in a notebook, binder, or folder.
- Your Application Package must also include a single CD or USB drive that includes a:
 - Microsoft Word version of your Charter System Application Cover Sheet
 - Microsoft Word version of your Charter System Application

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- PDF Version of your signed Assurances Form
- Microsoft Word version of your Exhibits (except for your annual audit, accreditation report, and strategic plan)
- PDF version of your most recent annual audit
- PDF version of your most recent accreditation report
- PDF version of your most recent strategic plan

Faxed or emailed copies will not be accepted. Only complete petitions that comply with these guidelines will be evaluated. Applications will not be returned; please keep a copy for your records.

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CHARTER SYSTEM APPLICATION
COVER SHEET

Proposed Charter System Information			
Full Name of Proposed Charter System Stephens County School System			
Please indicate whether this is a: New Petition X or a Renewal Petition		How many schools in total are you proposing to include in your charter system? 6	
How many of each of the following schools are you proposing to include in your charter system?			
Primary School(s)	0	Middle School(s)	1
Elementary School(s)	4	High school(s)	1
On July 1 of what year do you want your charter contract to be effective? 2014			
How many years are you proposing for the term of your charter contract? (Note that an initial charter cannot exceed five years) 5			
Charter System Street Address 2332 Mize Road	City Toccoa	State GA	Zip 30577
Contact Person Sherrie Whiten		Title Superintendent	
Contact Street Address 2332 Mize Road	City Toccoa	State GA	Zip 30577
Contact's telephone number 706-886-9415	Contact's fax number 706-886-3882	19.Contact's E-mail Address sherrie.whiten@stephens.k12.ga.us	

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CHARTER SYSTEM APPLICATION

The Charter System Application includes six questions grouped into four sections. The first section is “The Case”, where you justify your schools system’s need for a charter. The final three sections focus on your Academic Plan, Local Governance Plan, and Use of the Charter System Funding. Please note that the italicized bullet points after each question are included to clarify the question being asked and to provide guidance regarding what we will be looking for in your answers.

THE CASE

1. What will you be able to do with a charter that you can’t do without a charter?

- *Use this question to present a brief executive summary that makes the case for your school system being granted a charter.*

Over the last eight months, Stephens County School System has garnered the support of our community and schools to operate under a system charter. This potential increased flexibility from the state’s requirements will allow for the development of a school system that will be more responsive to the local needs of the students. Stephens County School System will be able to provide more flexibility for developing programs that better meet the needs of our students and reflect the needs, wishes, and desires of the local community. The projected areas of flexibility that will be used in the Stephens County Charter include: instructional programming, opportunities for students to earn credits for class through experience and community-based instruction, opportunities for students to earn high school credits in middle school, flexible uses of technology for instruction, funding, scheduling, seat time, credit by exam, course requirements, graduation requirements, teacher certification requirements, and others. As the School Governance Teams are developed and trained, and they better understand the potential of students and the educational process, it is anticipated that more waiver areas will be requested.

A critical component of the charter is the accountability of the school system to the public. Since 2003, Stephens County School System has presented its annual report to the community at a luncheon sponsored by the Toccoa-Stephens County Chamber of Commerce. This comprehensive report outlines school system accomplishments as well as identified areas of need. The annual report details the

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accomplishments of our students and staff and reflects a strong foundation of excellence that serves as catalyst for continued school improvement. This report is available to the community in booklet form and is available on the school system's website. Additionally, accountability measures will be developed, articulated, and communicated by and with the School Governance Teams and to all internal and external stakeholders. Accountability measures will go beyond standardized test scores and include measures such as completion of career pathways; attendance rates; graduation rates; 21st Century Skills including problem-solving and technology; and post-secondary measures. Indicators will include proficiency in math, science, technology, problem-solving and career-readiness. The community is ready and able to support the school system in its efforts to graduate students who are ready to become productive citizens both locally and globally. Programming will need to be developed to match these outcomes. The School Governance Teams will be a part of this programmatic planning process.

Stephens County School System's motivation for applying to be a Charter System is driven by community, school, and system leadership. Stephens County is exploring innovative solutions to better serve our students by providing a rigorous and well-rounded curriculum for all students, as well as intensive and on-going remediation for those students who may be struggling. Stephens County's graduation rate has steadily increased since 2006. The graduation rate in 2006 was 63.1%. The new cohort graduation rate for 2012 was 87.3%. Increasing the graduation rate and ensuring that graduates are college and career ready are objectives contained in this petition. We want all of our schools to provide the highest quality and most meaningful educational experience possible for every child.

In January 2013, the Stephens County Board of Education submitted a letter of intent to the Georgia State Department of Education to become a Charter System. The Stephens County Charter System development process started immediately and involved approximately 400 community members, staff, and parents. The information was presented to all employees of the school system, including bus drivers, cafeteria staff, clerical, paraprofessionals, maintenance staff, teachers, administrators, and the

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school board members. Several Town Hall and community meetings were held to present Charter System information to parents and community members, and many community members served on the Governance, Innovations, and Waiver Committees who contributed to the charter application. The 10-month process involved many hours of meetings, presentations, surveys, discussions, visits, and conversations with other Charter Systems. During the Charter System planning meetings, the parents, community, and staff expressed concerns that students graduating from Stephens County School System are not always prepared for the level of problem-solving, team building, and critical thinking that are essential in today's fast-paced and complex work environments. The Charter System development process is chronicled on the district web site: www.stephens.k12.ga.us

During the ten months of study and planning, the community and staff provided input and discussed the decision to become a Charter System and were in full agreement that it was the right choice. The details for implementing the plan are not in place, since the School Governance Teams will be critical in developing the specifics to a well-rounded and rigorous experience for all students in Stephens County. The Charter System planning process revealed four priority areas for Stephens County students: a) to earn credit through work and community-based experiences, b) increase rigorous academic opportunities to challenge all students, c) ensure smooth transitions from prekindergarten through twelfth grade and beyond into post-secondary options and employment, and d) increase employability skills, including “soft” skills through technology and career awareness opportunities. The Charter System planning process allowed all stakeholders to be included in creating a collective vision and focus for all students in Stephens County.

Schools Committed to Student Success is not just a theme for our school system, but a genuine commitment to educate each and every student in our community. We've stated our beliefs as expectations and we do expect all students to learn and be valued. We also expect parents, teachers and community members to work together for the success of our students. Knowing that a high school

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education is not enough to compete in today's global economy, our students will benefit from the commitment to a rigorous and well-rounded curriculum that will improve their educational and vocational opportunities.

In order to realize our vision and incorporate our beliefs into the daily work of the Stephens County School System, we need to have greater flexibility in serving students and using state and local resources, greater community and parent involvement in decision making, and innovative and supportive solutions for students who may be falling behind or may need acceleration. With this flexibility, Stephens County School System will be able to provide a seamless schooling process that feeds into and supports the wider community of Stephens County, and greater accountability to the community in meeting our local outcomes.

After the initial community meeting, several committees were formed to examine both governance and education issues in order to develop the Charter System application. These committees researched other charter systems, held meetings and discussions, and provided input to each other, faculty, parents, the community, and the Charter Review Committee. In addition, the superintendent and staff attended a Charter System Foundation Superintendents' Workshop held in September to become more informed on aspects of the Charter System Application. The work that the committees compiled became the Charter System application as they determined the educational innovations, the governance structure, and the waivers and flexibility that would be needed to support the identified outcomes for Stephens County School System. A broad flexibility waiver will be sought so that as needs arise, requests for additional waivers will not be necessary. Some possible waivers that will be needed to realize our vision are: create high school course work that prepares students for work or post-secondary school; expanding and redefining both remedial and gifted options, ESOL and SPED delivery models; instituting performance-based measures; allowing a wide variety of technology that fits the needs of the students and community; redefining seat time and the school day and week; allowing credit for academic application

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of skills and knowledge; providing flexibility for use of state and local funds; examining alternatives for teacher certification; aligning resources to respond to the needs of all students; and providing support for students outside of formula funding guidelines.

ACADEMIC OBJECTIVES, PLANS, AND WAIVERS

2. What are your school system's student performance objectives for the proposed charter term?

System student performance objectives should:

- *Show the system's student performance during the past five years.*
- *Reflect where the system envisions itself academically at the end of the proposed charter term.*
- *Indicate the expected rate of student performance growth in each year of the proposed charter term.*
- *Exceed the rate of growth mandated by the State.*
- *Demonstrate compliance with Georgia's ESEA Waiver.*
- *You are encouraged to include all or some of the components of the current draft of the Georgia Department of Education's College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI).*
- *You are urged to include cohort measures that show the progress over time of a single cohort of students.*
- *You are also urged to include national norm-referenced test results among your performance measures.*
- *Be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based (SMART).*
- *Present graphs that show the past five years performance with the system student performance objectives for the each year of the proposed charter term plotted out to demonstrate graphically what the charter system is striving to achieve with its new innovations (see example below).*

Stephens County School System monitors student performance on standardized tests through School Improvement Plans and the District Strategic Plan in order to make instructional decisions to increase student achievement. As part of the District Strategic Plan, we developed a Balanced Scorecard to monitor the system's progress on goals in nine strategic areas: improve student achievement, increase student and stakeholder involvement, provide safe and timely student transportation, provide for the changing nutritional needs of students, improve the availability of technology resources, plan for a qualified workforce, maximize the efficient use of funds, improve facilities, and monitor college and career ready performance indicators.

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The student achievement goals are aligned with expectations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as well as goals for other areas. Many of the goals in our District Strategic Plan and School Improvement Plans are aligned with the Georgia Accountability System, College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI).

Equipped with the recently released CCRPI report, Stephens County will be better able to establish benchmarks and appropriate expectations regarding the rate of student performance growth for each year of the proposed charter. Included in the attached Exhibits are graphs of the student performance data for the past five years. By examining the student performance in the graphs, we are able to view grade level data which allows us to identify instructional concerns in grade/subject as well as cohort data which allows us to follow the progress of a group of students over time.

Overall our goal will be to consistently exceed the state percentage of students meeting or exceeding on standardized tests by the end of the charter term. In addition, we want to provide a rigorous educational program for our students and move more students into the exceeds category. The following SMART goals were written with these goals in mind.

Student Performance Goal 1: 3rd-8th grade students will meet or exceed state averages on each area of the CRCT.

Student Performance Goal 2: From a baseline established in Year 1 of the charter term, the Charter System will increase the percentage of students scoring in the exceeds category in each subject and grade level of the CRCT. If the baseline percentage is below 45%, then the system will increase by 2% each year up to 50%. Once 50% of students are exceeding by subject and grade level, the system will maintain that performance.

Student Performance Goal 3: High school students will meet or exceed state averages on each area of the EOCT.

Student performance goal 4: From a baseline established in Year 1 of the charter term, the Charter

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System will increase the percentage of students scoring in the exceeds category in each subject of the EOCT. If the baseline percentage is below 45%, then the system will increase by 2% each year up to 50%. Once 50% of students are exceeding by subject and grade level, the system will maintain that performance.

Student performance goal 5: From a baseline established in Year 1 of the charter term, the Charter System will increase the percentage of students scoring in the meets and exceeds categories on the 5th, 8th and 11th Grade Writing Test. If the baseline percentage is below 90% the Charter System will increase by 2% each year up to 90%. If the baseline is 90% or above, the Charter System will increase by 1% each year up to 95%. Once 95% of students are meeting and exceeding by grade the Charter System will maintain that performance.

Student performance goal 6: The Stephens County graduation rate will increase from 87% in 2013 to 95% or better in 2019.

The performance of a subgroup, students with disabilities, has been and continues to be an area of concern for Stephens County. The performance of this group of students will be followed in the areas of reading, English language arts, and math. Using Georgia Department of Education's Student Longitudinal Data System (SLDS), cohorts of students will be followed over time to get a true measure of student performance over the charter petition period. Results will be posted.

3. What specific actions will your school system take to achieve your student performance objectives during the proposed charter term?

- *Describe the educational innovations that will be implemented.*
- *Provide a clear explanation of how the innovations will increase student achievement.*
- *Describe the anticipated timeline for implementation of the innovations.*
- *Describe why the innovations are appropriate for this unique system.*

Stephens County School System has several innovative instructional processes in place that have proven successful over the past few years but also has additional ideas that we would like to explore through the charter system process. Potential innovations that are being discussed include flexibility in

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scheduling and requirements for remedial and accelerated courses, expansion of course offerings through internships with local business partners, blending of curriculum with core content and technical courses offering hands-on application through course combinations, serve by need and not by label, increased collaboration between post-secondary and community opportunities, and increased technology integration at all grade levels. In order to fully implement these innovations the School Governance Teams along with the local Board of Education and the faculty and staff will need to identify and secure the necessary plans, resources, and waivers and develop an evaluation system for each of the innovations to ensure the most effective and efficient use of the school day. The timelines for each of the innovations will be driven by the needs of the students and the availability of the aforementioned plans, resources and evaluation systems to ensure the readiness of the schools to implement the plans. School level governance teams will provide input into the planning and implementation process for each of the innovations.

1. Graduation requirements will be examined.

The Stephens County School System and the community would like to provide alternative ways for students to earn credit through the use of courses that are not found in the list of state funded class offerings. Some possibilities include Carnegie Units high school course work offered at the middle school level, application of skills through community–project and work based experiences that would count as credits, and a variety of dual enrollment opportunities to best prepare students for whatever path they choose after graduation.

2. Applied interventions for students will be based on student need.

Interventions will be systematically targeted, implemented, reviewed, and revised based on student progress. The artificial boundaries of the classroom, materials, and seat time will be ignored. Student progress and mastery will be the criteria for credit or exemption of course work. More aggressive support will be implemented for struggling and advanced students.

3. Course work will be established for high school students that will prepare them for admission requirements to technical schools and colleges.

The business community will lend staff to the high school to help guide and instruct high school staff on areas where students need stronger preparation for the work force. Students will receive instruction on these identified areas of need. Staff from North Georgia Technical College, Piedmont College, and Toccoa Falls College will work with Stephens County School System to help develop course work and interventions that not only prepare students for entry into post-secondary options but will help ease the transition into the work place. An initial conversation is in place with local industries to provide instruction for high school students on the requirements of entry level jobs and hiring standards. Students will learn from those who are in the field practicing what they want to learn.

4. Flexibility in requirements and delivery of remedial and accelerated programs.

Stephens County School System uses the Georgia DOE's State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS). Stephens County School system also uses INSIGHT, a cohort comparison growth model methodology that shows the instructional value added by teachers, programs and various interventions over time. This analysis is provided by Pioneer RESA's Data Department and has been used by the school system for approximately 10 years. Teachers use these systems and the data teams' analyses in order to inform instruction. As students transfer in and out of the county, their performance and data is available immediately for teachers in order to provide targeted and individualized instruction for all students. The above innovations in data analysis allow for systematic application of targeted and individualized interventions. By providing flexibility in instructional programs to support and accelerate students, administrators are able to use this information quickly to make schedule and programming changes to provide immediate support or acceleration for students. By ensuring that a wide variety of teachers are trained and endorsed in gifted and math instruction, the schools are able to provide a variety of models for instruction, including advanced content gifted model and remedial programs outside of Special Education.

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In FY12, SPED teachers participated in a reading endorsement program offered by Stephens County School System in collaboration with Pioneer RESA. During FY14, a similar cohort hosted by a neighboring county for a gifted endorsement program has started. Stephens County School System is currently planning a cohort for K-5 math endorsement to begin during the second semester. By providing a variety of professional learning opportunities for teachers, they are better able to tailor instruction for their students and provide rigor and support through differentiation and full student engagement through performance tasks.

5. Performance-based assessments will be used at all grade levels to measure 21st century and career preparedness skills, including technology.

Currently active student engagement and rigor are goals accomplished through the use of performance tasks. Charter system innovations will allow us to provide rigor and engage students through experiential projects that currently do not fit into the state funded course offerings to provide relevant learning opportunities in the community.

Students at all grade levels will be involved in career and community awareness projects that will facilitate their transition to the next level whether that is middle school, high school, or college and career opportunities. The community may be involved in providing input and support of these instructional initiatives in a variety of ways. Community members may come in to provide onsite field trips, instruction in specific skills or through the College and Career Academy model. “Soft” skills such as responsibility, work ethic, and problem-solving ability will be emphasized across all curriculum areas. Technology instruction and integration will also continue to be a focus. To date, we have provided limited technology instruction in grade K-8 and wish to expand this and initiate a one-to-one blended learning initiative at the high school. Stephens County School System will continue to provide and inform students of the most current technology in education by leveraging support and expertise from the community. Stephens County School System plans to explore options to involve students in the College

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and Career Academy in the near future which will allow the system to expand training and educational opportunities in preparation for post-secondary endeavors either career or educational.

6. Focus on priority goals identified from the Charter System survey of staff, community and parents.

As part of the planning process for the Charter System application staff, parents, and community members were asked to participate in a brief survey to identify their priorities for education in Stephens County. This survey was based on the eight identified goal areas of Georgia's Visioning Project. As mentioned before, the community has voiced its desires to combine local expertise to enhance student knowledge. This sentiment combined with the following priorities identified through survey results will guide decision making regarding potential course offerings that will include local community involvement. The top 4 priorities were:

- a. Critical thinking and problem solving,**
- b. Basic academic knowledge and skills,**
- c. Preparation for skilled employment, and**
- d. Social skills and work ethic**

School Governance Teams will keep their focus on these priorities when developing and improving instructional processes. Waivers will be granted in order to facilitate programs that support these priority areas. The task of the School Governance Team is to identify instructional processes, examine root causes, find solutions to barriers (which may include seeking waivers), look for resources, plan for implementation, and finally, implement these processes to work towards meeting these priority areas. The planning process will be a critical training area for all School Governance Teams. It is consistent with the district school improvement cycle and helps to ensure that all innovations are explored and monitored to ensure a positive impact on students.

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The business community will be involved by clearly articulating the desired entry level skills. They will be instructors to students and staff. They will communicate the strengths and weaknesses of Stephens County graduates work force. Benchmarks of skill achievement will be developed and applied in the high school setting.

Examples of education innovation in progress:

Upon entering the Stephens County School System in elementary school, students would be served by need and not by label with attention to their individual strengths and weaknesses. As they progress into middle school, students would be able to earn high school credit early setting them on a course to complete an accelerated path to post-secondary attainment. As students move into high school, they would not only complete the program of study required for a diploma but be prepared to enter the work force or a post-secondary institution.

Knowing that technology will play a huge role in not only high school academic courses but also through the preparation for a career, the Stephens County School System strives to prepare students as early as possible. The system has plans to implement a “Bring Your Own Technology” initiative. To further enhance student academic progress, credit will be received for courses not currently offered at the high school through the avenue of virtual learning opportunities.

4. Which of the specific actions in your academic plan require a waiver of state law, rule, or guidelines?

Although you will be granted a broad flexibility waiver if you are granted a charter, please list specific waivers needed to implement the educational innovations you have proposed.

There are several areas of potential waiver requests from Stephens County that were discussed during the charter system planning process. We are requesting broad flexibility for waivers as we know that flexibility needs will arise as we move through the five years requested for the charter term. As these needs arise, the School Governance Teams will examine current data and root causes and explore options

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for fully supporting student achievement and engagement. Through this problem solving process, waivers may be needed that were not evident during the initial planning process.

Required Waivers and Potential Impact on Student Achievement

Certification: O.C.G.A. §20-2-200; DOE RULE: 160-5-1.22

- EIP teacher certification (teacher with SWD certification teaching EIP students)
- Teacher certification (use of industry expertise to provide instruction for internship courses and high school courses)
- Teacher certification (use of NGTC personnel to assist in Compass preparation and testing)

Class Size: O.C.G.A. §20-2-182; DOE RULE: 160-5-1-.08

- Extending the class-size waiver granted 2013-2014
- Allow up to 7 additional students per class size K-12
- Allow up to 7 additional students per gifted segment at the middle and high school
- Allow up to 7 additional students per REP segment at the middle and high school
- Allow up to 7 additional students per EIP segment at the elementary school

Early Intervention Program, K-5: O.C.G.A. §20-2-153; DOE RULE: 160-4-2-.17

- Deliver service by need, not by model (may have student with disability, ELL students, or EIP students, the labels are blurred)
- Select and serve students by data team process not state guidelines
- Monitor student progress by data teams

English Learners Program, K-12: O.C.G.A. §20-2-156; DOE RULE: 160-4-5-.02

- Deliver service by need, not by model (may have student with disability, ELL students, or EIP students, the labels are blurred)
- Select and serve students by data team process not state guidelines

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- Monitor student progress by data teams

Middle School Program Funding, 6-8: O.C.G.A. §20-2-290; DOE RULE: 160-4-2-.05

- Middle school programming requirements (will review)

Remedial Education Program, 6-12: O.C.G.A. §20-2-154; DOE RULE: 160-4-5-.01

- Deliver service by need, not by model (may have student with disability, ELL students, or EIP students, the labels are blurred)
- Select and serve students by data team process not state guidelines
- Monitor student progress by data teams

Seat time/Attendance: O.C.G.A. §20-2-151, §20-2-160, §20-2-161.1, §20-2-165, §20-2-168;

DOE RULE: 160-5-1-.02

- Minimum hours offered to earn grade level and/or Carnegie Units towards promotion and graduation. Stephens County High School would like to explore different avenues in which students can earn credit such as credit by exam and credit by application of skills through community and work based experiences.
- Full credit and funding for any course work that is completed through alternatives.
- Carnegie Units for high school course work that is offered at the middle school level through acceleration and transition programs between 8th and 9th grade or summer school opportunities.
- Off-site attendance for virtual programs and internships.

Course Offerings: O.C.G.A. §20-2-140

- Funding for courses exceeding current state offerings. Some examples would be technology (CTAE) courses for 5th grade, internships with different businesses that provide a mechanism to measure skills and competencies based on career preparedness coursework that has 21st Century

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skills as a focus, and dual enrollment opportunities that provide for both high school and college credits.

Changes that do not require a waiver:

School councils O.C.G.A. §20-02-0210

- Terminate School councils
- Operate governance teams at each school as a Charter System

GOVERNANCE

A key characteristic of charter systems is their decentralized decision-making structure. It is imperative that local school governing councils demonstrate autonomy and decision-making authority.

5. What is the system's plan to maximize school level governance?

- *Highlight the differences between the current local school governance structure and the new structure your new charter system will implement.*
- *Address the formation of the local school governing councils, including how members are selected, the terms of members, and how and why members may be removed.*
- *Describe the general responsibilities for the principal at each charter system school, the local school governing council at each charter system school, the system governing council (if applicable), and the local Board of Education in the areas of budget, resource allocation, personnel decisions (primarily principal selection, evaluation, and termination), establishing and monitoring the achievement of school improvement goals, curriculum and school operations.*
- *Presenting this responsibility description in the form of a chart or a grid would be helpful to both you to ensure you've captured everything – and to us as we review your Application.*
- *Provide a timeline for governance training to be provided to principals and members of the local school governing councils in order to build the capacity needed to make decisions in the above-mentioned areas*

At present, there are seven elected Board of Education members. They are serving staggered four-year terms; 4 members are up for reelection in summer of 2014. BOE members work in conjunction with the Superintendent to approve policies and procedure, personnel, and facilities. The Stephens County Board of Education members are required to complete a self-assessment and participate in training on state board standards. The BOE is responsible for the approval of policy regarding

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instruction, personnel, students and facilities and ensuring that the policies align with federal, state, local and health/safety requirements.

Each of the 6 schools in Stephens County System has a school council. The schools created their councils based upon the guidelines that were set forth in 2007 General Assembly which changed the composition of school councils to include the following:

- The principal,
- At least 2 certified teachers elected by the teachers, and
- A number of parents or guardians elected by the parents so that parents make up a majority of the school council (2 parents must be local business owners).

The members of the school council serve 2 year terms, and their role is to serve in an advisory capacity. Each school is permitted to determine the parameters of their role through the council's bylaws. The councils must meet at least 4 times per school year and a quorum of members must be present in order to conduct business. All of the meetings are subject to the Open Meetings Act and the Open Records Act. The school councils are responsible for reviewing and providing input regarding the development and the monitoring of the School Improvement Plan, new policies and procedures, school budget, extracurricular activities, parent involvement, and academic progress. The school council members are offered training. The current councils have limited interaction with the local Board of Education. It is the hope of Stephens County School System that the new governing bodies will be more participatory and functional within their roles as School Governance Teams.

Stephens County's New Governance Structure

Upon receipt of charter system status, Stephens County will transition from school councils and to School Governance Teams. The School Governance Teams (SGTs) will have increased participation and input in providing recommendations for the local school administration and system leaders. The difference between school councils and the SGTs lies in the additional responsibility of making

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recommendations to the School Board regarding board policy, budgetary issues, school improvement plans, and personnel (specifically the principal). At present, school council members in Stephens County function primarily by attending “sit-and-get” meetings in which the principal relates pertinent school information: they discuss it, provide limited input, and adjourn. The School Governance Teams however will be asked to review pertinent school information, analyze it to the best of their ability, and provide the leadership with a recommendation which will then be taken to the Board of Education, thus creating a venue for local community members and parents to be heard.

Structure of the New School Governance Teams

School governance team guidelines will include the following requirements:

- 7 members-
 - the principal,
 - 2 staff members (one of which must be certified),
 - 2 parents that cannot be employed at the school and must have children in the school, and
 - 2 community members recommended by the principal.
- Middle School and High School SGT will include 2 students. Student representatives will be appointed for a one year term by members of the Organizational Leadership Team (OLT) from the middle and high school and recommended by the principal to the SGT. These student representatives will serve as de facto, non-voting, non-office holding members.
- 3 year terms of service July 1- June 30 of each year.
- Teachers and parents will be elected by the people they represent with nominations accepted in April/May and elections in May.
- Community members will be recommended by the principal and approved by the SGT.
- All members will sign a Conflict of Interest Statement.
- SGT members can be removed from their duty to serve due to:

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- Lack of participation
- Conflict of interest issues
- Lack of adherence to the bylaws
- Bylaws will outline responsibilities and requirements.

In the first year of implementation, the current school council members will elect new members as they have in the past, and then undergo governance team training which will give them an understanding of their role and responsibility as a SGT member. Should the Stephens County School System be approved for Charter System Status at the end of the current school year, the school system will immediately begin the process of transitioning to SGT with elections held at all schools prior to the last day of school. Training will begin in June of that year. In the second year these teams will make a full transition to becoming an SGT. Members will receive formalized training through the GADOE Charter System department, the GSBA, or another training agency. The training topics will be determined at a later date and may include the following: Robert's Rules of Order, Sunshine Laws, School Improvement Plans, progress monitoring, school budget, curriculum, instructional technology, personnel, and strategic planning. Prior to becoming a SGT, each team will draft and gain approval for their bylaws. SGT will meet monthly and the meeting dates and times will be determined and posted by each school locally. Each SGT will determine if there will be a pre-designated time length for meetings with the understanding that meetings should be efficient and meaningful. All recommendations from the SGT will be made with regard to the current BOE meeting schedule.

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Responsibility	Principal	School Governance Team	Board of Education
Budget	Recommend school annual budget for use of discretionary funds authorized by SCBOE	Set school budget spending priorities	Provides oversight to budget process; approves annual budget for school system
Resource Allocation	Present information to the SGT about resource allocation	Analyze past allocations and make improvement recommendations to principal/BOE	Makes informed decisions
Personnel	Recommends personnel for employment, evaluates, and recommends termination	Recruit candidates, interview and select candidates from an approved list provided by HR	Approves personnel recommendations
School Improvement	Organizes and directs goal setting and SIP development	Collaborative process with the SIP providing principal/BOE with recommendations	Holds superintendent, staff and school accountable for ensuring high reliability organization and satisfactory performance
Curriculum	Ensure effective implementation of curriculum and assessment programs. Ensures highly reliable and effective instruction in every classroom	Collaborative process regarding monitoring of the curriculum, curriculum changes, curriculum issues	Approves system curriculum and assessment program and provides oversight of implementation. Monitors student and staff performance
School Operations	Creates organization's structure that results in a highly reliable school with low variability in performance in all areas	Develop proposed innovations that are responsive to community needs, recommends options to improve school operations	Provides resources and establishes policies that support a high level of school autonomy in school operations
Parent Involvement	Presents all parent involvement activities and plans to the SGT	Makes decisions regarding improvement of parental involvement	Makes informed decision

The bylaws will be amended as it becomes necessary. The minutes of each meeting will be available to the community members and parents. Stephens County Charter System will publicize the

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dates, times, and minutes of the School Governance Teams' meetings through eBoard. This will allow the system to remain transparent in their intention and action.

Timeline for governance Training

Stephens County will provide governance training to all members of SGTs on a three year training cycle. The training will be based upon structures provided by the GADOE Charter System Department, GBSA, or other training agent. The proposed schedule and outline of topics is below:

- **August 2014-** Purpose, Parliamentary Procedure, Protocol, Sunshine Laws, Etiquette
- **September 2014-** By-laws
- **October 2014-** School Improvement Plan/SACS process
- **November 2014-** Report of Progress, CCRPI/Standards
- **January 2015-** Budget
- **February 2015-** Effective Decision Making
- **March 2015-** Personnel
- **April 2015-** Conflict Resolution/Team Building/Reaching Consensus
- **May 2015-** Technology Integration

Year Two Topics:

Assessment, Hiring Practices, Parent and Community Engagement, Special Education Law, Federal Programs, Strategic Planning, School Operations, SACS Recommendations

Year Three Topics:

Topics will be based on the Needs-Assessment of the School Governance Teams and the schools.

FUNDING

6. If funds are appropriated for the QBE weight for charter systems, for what purposes would you use the additional funds you would earn as a charter system?

- *A school system's decision to become a charter system should not be based on the expectation of additional funding, since the funding is not guaranteed.*
- *There are no limitations or requirements on the use of such funds.*

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Should the legislature decide to provide additional funds per pupil for charter systems, this money would be used to provide additional resources for the educational innovations prescribed in the charter. The SGTs would be able to decide on a use of these expenditures in a manner that would best support the goals, priorities and needs of Stephens County School System students.

ASSURANCES FORM AND SIGNATURE SHEET

The law requires your school district to provide assurances that it will do certain things and comply with certain laws. This Assurance Form enumerates all of these requirements and, when you submit this signed Signature Sheet with this Assurance Form as part of your Charter System Application Package, you are providing the legal assurance that your charter system understands and will do these things. This form must be signed by a duly authorized representative of the school system.

As the authorized representative of the applicant, I hereby certify that the information submitted in this application for a charter for Stephens County School System located in Stephens County is true to the best of my knowledge and belief; I also certify that if awarded a charter the school system:

1. Shall be nonsectarian in its programs, admissions policies, employment practices, and all other operations;
2. Shall not discriminate against any student or employee on the basis of race, color, ethnic background, national origin, gender, disability or age;
3. Shall be subject to all federal, state, and local rules, regulations, court orders, and statutes relating to civil rights; insurance; the protection of the physical health and safety of school students, employees, and visitors; conflicting interest transactions; and the prevention of unlawful conduct;
4. Shall be subject to the provisions of O.C.G.A. § 20-2-1050 requiring a brief period of quiet reflection;
5. Shall ensure that the system and the system charter school's governance boards are subject to the provisions of O.C.G.A. § 50-14-1 et seq. and O.C.G.A. § 50-18-70 et seq.;
6. Shall ensure that the system charter school governance board members may only receive compensation for their reasonable and actual expenses incurred in connection with performance of their duties;
7. Shall ensure that all teachers will be certified or highly qualified in compliance with No Child Left Behind;
8. Shall comply with the accountability provisions of O.C.G.A. § 20-14-30 through § 20-14-41 and federal accountability requirements, and participate in statewide assessments;

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- 9. Shall adhere to all provisions of federal law relating to students with disabilities, including the IDEA, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1974, and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as applicable;
- 10. Shall provide state and federally mandated services for English Language Learners, as applicable;
- 11. Shall provide for supplemental educational services as required by federal law and pursuant to SBOE Rule 160-4-5-.03, and for remediation in required cases pursuant to SBOE Rule 160-4-5-.01;
- 12. Shall notify the state of any intent to contract with a for-profit entity for education management services;
- 13. Shall be subject to the requirement that it shall not charge tuition or fees to its students except as may be authorized by local boards by O.C.G.A. § 20-2-133;
- 14. Shall comply with federal due process procedures regarding student discipline and dismissal;
- 15. Shall be subject to all laws relating to unlawful conduct in or near a public school;
- 16. Shall have a written grievance procedure to resolve student, parent, and teacher complaints;
- 17. Shall have a written procedure for resolving conflicts between the system charter schools and the local Board of Education;
- 18. Shall comply with the provisions of O.C.G.A. § 20 -2-211.1 relating to fingerprinting and criminal background checks;
- 19. Shall remit payments to TRS on behalf of employees;
- 20. Shall ensure that if transportation is provided for its students, the system shall comply with all applicable state and federal laws;
- 21. Shall ensure that if the charter system participates in federal school meals programs, then each participating system charter school shall comply with all applicable state and federal laws;
- 22. Shall prepare a safety plan in accordance with O.C.G.A. § 20-2-1185 and submit and obtain approval from the Georgia Emergency Management Agency;
- 23. Shall comply with the state facility requirements regarding site codes, facility codes, the submission of architectural plans for any new facility that the system may build or occupy during the charter term and all other facility requirements as established by the Department;
- 24. Shall be subject to all reporting requirements of O.C.G.A. § 20-2-160, subsection (e) of O.C.G.A. § 20-2-161, O.C.G.A. § 20-2-320, and O.C.G.A. § 20-2-740;
- 25. Shall be subject to an annual financial audit conducted by the state auditor or, if specified in the charter, by an independent certified public accountant licensed in this state;
- 26. Shall acknowledge that all criteria used to calculate QBE funding may not be waived; and
- 27. Shall follow any and all other federal, state, and local laws and regulations that pertain to the applicant or the operation of the charter system.

This Charter System Application, Assurance Form, and attached Exhibits were approved by the Stephens County Board of Education on the 15th day of October, 2013.

Superintendent

Date

Chair, Local Board of Education

Date

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If a Charter is granted, all Petitioners assure that the proposed charter system programs, services, and activities will operate in accordance with the terms of the Charter and all applicable federal, state, and local laws, rules, and regulations.

Superintendent

Date

Chair, Local Board of Education

Date

E X H I B I T S

The following Exhibits are required to complete your Charter System Application Package. Please tab the Exhibits to match the item numbers below. Exhibits should be as limited in size as possible (no more than 5 pages per Exhibit). The only exceptions to this size limitation for Exhibits are your most recent annual audit and your most recent accreditation report.

1. Signed local Board of Education resolution approving the creation of the charter system.
2. Notice that was sent to each principal within the proposed charter system regarding required hearings on the charter system application.
3. Description of how stakeholders, including parents and community members, were involved in the development of the Charter System Application.
 - *This is where you can describe the process you used to develop your Application.*
4. A list of all schools to be included in the charter system, including new schools or college and career academies that will be formed throughout the life of the charter, with an indication of which existing schools are currently in Needs Improvement status.
5. A brief description of the charter system that includes the name, the mission, grades served, the focus of the curriculum, instructional methods to be used, including any distinctive or unique instructional techniques or educational programs to be employed, and other pertinent information.
 - *Your description will be used by the Department to provide information to the public about applicants and new charter systems.*
6. Local school governance training timeline including training topics.
7. Conflict of interest policy for local school governing councils.
8. A list of business arrangements or partnerships with existing schools, educational programs, businesses and non-profits and the nature of the services provided, including disclosure of any potential conflicts of interest.
9. A brief description of the system's fiscal history and whether the system is or has ever operated under a fiscal deficit.
10. Online link to the school system's most recent annual audit.
11. Online link to the school system's most recent accreditation report.
12. Online link to the school system's most recent strategic plan.