

CHARTER SCHOOLS

Purpose

In order to (1) encourage the development of innovative programs; (2) provide opportunities for innovative instruction and student assessment; (3) provide parents and students more choices; (4) provide innovative scheduling, structure and management; (5) encourage the use of performance-based educational programs; (6) establish high standards for teachers and administrators; and (7) develop models for replication in other public schools, the Westmoreland County School Board receives and considers applications for the establishment of charter schools.

Definition of Charter School

A charter school is a public, nonreligious or non-home-based alternative school located within the Westmoreland County School Division or operated jointly by multiple school divisions. A charter school may be created as a new school or by converting all or part of an existing public school. Conversions of private schools or home-based programs are not permitted. A charter school for at-risk pupils may be established as a residential school.

In establishing public charter schools within the division, the School Board gives priority to public charter school applications designed to increase the educational opportunities of at-risk students. At least one half of the public charter schools in the division must be designed for at-risk students. However, conversions of existing public schools into public charter schools that serve the same community as the existing public school do not count in the determination of school division compliance with the one-half requirement.

Enrollment in a charter school is open to any child who resides within the school division or, in the case of a regional public charter school, within any of the relevant school divisions, through a lottery process on a space-available basis, except that in the case of the conversion of an existing public school, students who attend the school and the siblings of such students are given the opportunity to enroll in advance of the lottery process. Students eligible to enroll in the school division pursuant to Va. Code § 22.1-3.B because they are the children of military personnel on active military duty who will reside in the division may participate in the lottery process for charter schools in the division at the same time and in the same manner as students who reside in the division.

Public charter schools are subject to all federal laws and authorities as set forth in law and the charter contract. Public charter schools are subject to the same civil rights, health and safety requirements applicable to other public schools in the Commonwealth, except as otherwise provided by law.

Public charter schools are subject to the student assessment and accountability requirements applicable to other public schools. Nothing precludes a public charter school from establishing additional student assessment measures that go beyond state requirements if the School Board approves such measures.

Management committees of public charter schools are subject to and shall comply with the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (§ 2.2-3700 et seq.).

No public charter school shall discriminate against any individual on the basis of disability, race, creed, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, national origin, religion, ancestry, or need for special education services or any other unlawful basis, and each public charter school shall be subject to any court-ordered desegregation plan in effect for the school division.

No public charter school shall discriminate against any student on the basis of limited proficiency in English and each public charter school shall provide students who have limited proficiency in English with appropriate services designed to teach such students English and the general curriculum, consistent with federal civil rights laws.

No public charter school shall engage in any sectarian practices in its educational program, admissions or employment policies or operations.

Application Process

Any person, group or organization may submit an application for the formation of a public charter school to the Westmoreland County School Board. A complete application includes the applicant's Virginia Public Charter School Application package submitted to the Board of Education, the result of the Board of Education's review of the application and the Charter School Application Addendum (LC-E Westmoreland County Charter School Application Addendum). Prior to submitting a charter school application to the School Board, a public charter school applicant shall submit its proposed charter application to the Board of Education for review and comment and a determination as to whether the application meets the approval criteria developed by the Board of Education. Charter School applications initiated by the Westmoreland County School Board must conform to the Virginia Public Charter School Application. However, such applications are not required to receive Board of Education review and comment prior to action by the School Board.

The Board of Education examines all applications, other than those initiated by the School Board, for feasibility, curriculum, financial soundness and other objective criteria it may establish, consistent with existing state law. The Board of Education's review and comment is for the purpose of ensuring that the application conforms with such criteria. The school division may work with a charter school applicant before the application is submitted to the Board of Education for review and recommendation.

All public charter school applicants, other than those initiated by the School Board, must also complete the application addendum in the format provided in Exhibit LC-E Westmoreland County Charter School Application Addendum. The School Board shall establish a “review team” consisting of appropriate school personnel, a local business representative and a resident charter school proponent to evaluate charter school applications. The School Board shall designate the chairman of the review team as the contact person for answering questions about the application process and receiving applications. The review team shall work cooperatively with applicants for charter schools. When an application is incomplete, the review team shall request the necessary information; an incomplete application is not grounds for denying a charter. However, if the applicant does not provide the necessary information within a reasonable timeframe (established by the review team) then the application may be denied.

The review team shall (1) recommend to the School Board appropriate criteria for reviewing charter school applications; (2) evaluate all charter school applications based on the review criteria adopted by the School Board; (3) recommend one of the following options to the School Board for each application: approve, reject, place on a waiting list or return with suggestions for improvement; (4) monitor charter school progress; and (5) make recommendations for revocation, renewal or non-renewal of charter contracts.

The Westmoreland County School Board shall establish procedures for receiving, reviewing and ruling on applications for the establishment of charter schools. Such procedures must include a timeline for the application and review process and the means for reviewing and evaluating each application, including the criteria on which the decision to grant or deny a charter will be based. To provide appropriate opportunity for input from parents, teachers, citizens, and other interested parties and to obtain information to assist the School Board in its decision to grant or deny a public charter school application, the procedures will provide for public notice and the receipt of comment on public charter school applications. The School Board shall give at least 14 days' notice of its intent to receive public comment on an application. A copy of the procedures including the review criteria, shall be posted on the division's website and a copy shall be made available to any interested party upon request.

School Board Decision

If the School Board denies a public charter school application, or revokes or fails to renew a charter agreement, it shall provide to the applicant or grantee its reasons, in writing, for such decision, and it shall post such reasons on its website. A public charter school applicant whose application was denied, or a grantee whose charter was revoked or not renewed, is entitled to petition the School Board for reconsideration. The petition for reconsideration shall be filed no later than 60 days from the date the public charter school application is denied, or the charter agreement is revoked or fails to be renewed. Such reconsideration shall be decided within 60 days of the filing of the petition.

The School Board shall establish a process for reviewing petitions of reconsideration, which shall include an opportunity for public comment. The petition of reconsideration may include an amended application based on the reasons given by the School Board for such decision. Prior to seeking reconsideration, an applicant or grantee may seek technical assistance from the Superintendent of Public Instruction to address the reasons for denial, revocation or non-renewal.

Upon reconsideration, the decision of the School Board to grant or deny a public charter school application or to revoke or fail to renew a charter agreement is final and not subject to appeal. Following a decision to deny a public charter school application or to revoke or fail to renew a charter agreement, the School Board submits documentation to the Board of Education as to the rationale for the School Board's decision. The Board of Education has no authority to grant or deny a public charter school application or to revoke or fail to renew a charter agreement but may communicate any Board finding relating to the rationale for the School Board's denial of the public charter school application or revocation of or failure to renew the charter agreement based on the documentation submitted in any school division in which at least half of the schools receive funding pursuant to Title I, Part A.

Nothing in this policy prohibits an applicant whose application has been denied or a grantee whose charter has been revoked or not renewed from submitting a new application.

Charter Contract

Within 90 days of approval of a charter application, the School Board and the management committee of the approved public charter school shall execute a charter contract that clearly sets forth (i) the academic and operational performance expectations and measures by which the public charter school will be judged and (ii) the administrative relationship between the School Board and public charter school, including each party's rights and duties. The 90-day period may be extended by up to 30 days by mutual agreement of the parties. Such performance expectations and measures shall include applicable federal and state accountability requirements and may be refined or amended by mutual agreement after the public charter school has collected baseline achievement data for its enrolled students.

The academic and operational performance expectations and measures in the charter contract shall be based on a performance framework that clearly sets forth the academic and operational performance indicators, measures and metrics that will guide the School Board's evaluations of the public charter school. The performance framework shall include indicators, measures and metrics for:

- student academic proficiency;
- student academic growth;
- achievement gaps in both proficiency and growth between the major student subgroups based on gender, race, poverty status, special education status, English language learner status and gifted status;

- attendance;
- recurrent annual enrollment;
- postsecondary education readiness of high school students;
- financial performance and sustainability; and
- the performance and stewardship of the management committee, including compliance with all applicable laws, regulations and terms of the charter contract.

The performance framework shall allow the inclusion of additional rigorous, valid and reliable indicators proposed by the charter school to augment external evaluations of its performance, provided that the School Board approves the quality and rigor of such indicators.

The performance framework shall require the disaggregation of all student performance data by major student subgroups based on gender, race, poverty status, special education status, English language learner status and gifted status.

Annual performance targets shall be set by the public charter school and the School Board and shall be designed to help each school meet applicable federal, state and School Board expectations.

The charter contract shall be signed by the chairman of the School Board and the president or chairman of the public charter school's management committee. Within 10 days of executing a charter contract, the School Board shall submit to the Board written notification of the charter contract execution, including a copy of the executed charter contract and any attachments.

No public charter school shall commence operations without a charter contract executed in accordance with this policy and approved in an open meeting of the School Board.

Waivers of School Board Policy and State Regulation

A charter school may operate free from School Board policies and state regulations, except the Standards of Quality, the Standards of Accreditation and Standards of Learning, as agreed in the charter contract. The School Board shall request from the Board of Education, on behalf of its charter schools, waivers from state regulation contained in each approved charter application. If the charter school is designed to increase the opportunities of at-risk students, then the School Board shall request that the Board of Education approve an Individual School Accreditation Plan.

Management and Operation

A charter school shall be administered and operated by a management committee in the manner agreed to in the charter contract. The management committee shall be composed of parents of students enrolled in the school, teachers and administrators working in the school and representatives of any community sponsors, or

any combination thereof. A charter school shall be responsible for its own operations. However, a charter school may negotiate and contract with the School Board, or any other third party, for the provision of necessary services; services provided by the School Board must be provided at cost.

The applicant and members of the management committee, administrators, and other personnel serving in a public charter school must disclose any ownership or financial interest they may have in renovating, lending, granting, or leasing public charter school facilities.

Personnel

Charter school personnel shall be selected as agreed in the charter contract. Such personnel may, but are not required, to be employees of the School Board. However, all charter school personnel shall be subject to the provisions of Va. Code §§ 22.1-296.1, 22.1-296.2 and 22.1-296.4.

Professional, licensed employees currently employed by the School Board may volunteer for assignment to a charter school and may be assigned by the School Board to a charter school for one contract year and reassigned annually upon the request of the employee and management committee. Professional, licensed employees assigned to a charter school shall receive the same employment benefits as such personnel assigned to noncharter schools. Professional, licensed personnel who request assignment to a noncharter school or who are not recommended for reassignment in the charter school, other than for reasons cited in § 22.1-307 of the Code of Virginia, shall be transferred to a noncharter school according to School Board policy.

The School Board may employ health, mental health, social services and other related personnel to serve in residential charter schools for at-risk students as determined in the charter agreement. However, the School Board is not required to fund the residential or other services provided by a residential charter school.

The School Board has the final authority to assign professional, licensed personnel to charter or other schools within the division.

Funding

Charter schools shall be funded as provided by law and negotiated in the charter contract.

Revocation and Renewal of the Charter Contract

The School Board may revoke a charter contract if

- the charter school violates the conditions, standards or procedures established in the application;

- the charter school violates a material term of the charter contract (for example, failing to provide required reports to the School Board);
- the charter school fails to meet or make reasonable progress toward achievement of the content standards or student performance standards identified in the charter application;
- the charter school fails to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management; or
- the charter school violates any provision of law from which it was not specifically exempted.

A charter contract may be renewed for up to five years. The management committee must apply to renew the charter by the end of the first quarter of the school year before the charter expires.

The application for renewal shall contain

- a report on the progress of the charter school in achieving the goals, objectives, program and performance standards for students and other conditions and terms the School Board required in the charter
- a financial statement, on forms prescribed by the Board of Education, disclosing the costs of administration, instruction and other spending categories which is written in a way to allow the School Board and the public to compare such costs to the costs of other schools and comparable organizations
- other information the School Board may require

If a charter contract is revoked or not renewed, or a charter school is dissolved, the management committee shall be responsible for all financial obligations of the charter school.

Reports

The School Board reports the following to the Board of Education:

- the grant or denial of charter applications, applications for renewal, and the revocation of any charter contract; for any such denial, revocation or failure to renew, the report to the Board of Education contains documentation as to the reason for the denial or revocation
- whether a public charter school is designed to increase the educational opportunities of at-risk students

The Board of Education will report the number of public charter schools established in Virginia, and the number of charters denied, in its annual report to the Governor and the General Assembly.

Adopted: September 11, 2000

Amended: May 12, 2003

Amended: July 9, 2004

Amended: October 18, 2010
Amended: July 16, 2012
Amended: July 15, 2013
Amended: July 21, 2014
Amended: January 12, 2015
Amended: July 18, 2016
Amended: July 17, 2017
Amended: July 15, 2019
Amended: July 20, 2020
Amended: April 15, 2024

Legal Refs: 20 U.S.C. § 6311.

Code of Virginia, 1950, as amended, §§ 22.1-3, 22.1-212.5 et seq.

Cross Refs: KBA Requests for Public Records
KBA-F1 Request for Public Records
KBA-F2 Record of Inspection and/or Delivery of Copies
KBA-R Requests for Public Records
LC-E [School Division] Charter School Application Addendum