

# Public Policy Notes

Southern Early Childhood Association

## Charter Schools and the South: How Do We Stack Up?

**Charter schools**—a topic of significant debate in state legislatures across the nation. As schools continue to “fail,” charter schools have been touted as one solution to changing the educational opportunities available to families and children.

**Advocates** of charter schools tout the following:

- ⇒ Charter schools promote flexibility and management practices that tailor educational practices to the needs of local students.
- ⇒ Released from state mandates and requirements (which advocates think stifle education), innovation and creativity are in the hands of administrators and teachers at the local level.

**Detractors** of the concept are afraid that:

- ◇ Charter schools compete unfairly with schools which are still under state rules and regulations.

◇ Charter schools are perceived as “superior” to regular schools and that has not necessarily proven to be the case.

◇ Relaxation of standards dilutes hard fought and long battles over “quality” educational requirements.

◇ Charter schools receive state funding, reducing funding to non-charter schools.

If you’re interested in how your state “stacks up” according to the **Center for Education Reform** (a pro-charter school group), just keep reading.

**5 (five) SECA states have Governors that were rated with an “A” for their support of the charter movement.** Governors Scott of Florida, Jindal of Louisiana, Perry of Texas, Haley of South Carolina, and McDonnell of Virginia achieved this score.

Those same states didn’t fare as well on other measures, including media reliability, the strength of

the state law and teacher quality. Digital learning and parent power are two measures coming soon.

If you’re interested in how the charter school movement is making its case, go to

<http://www.edreform.com>



Scott/  
Florida



Perry/  
Texas



Jindal/  
Louisiana



Haley/South  
Carolina



McDonnell/  
Virginia

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### What Is a Charter School?

A charter school is a tax-supported school established by a charter between a granting body (usually the state Board of Education) and an outside group which operates the school without most local and state educational regulations so as to achieve set goals.

[www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary)

# Georgia Leads the Way in Establishing “Charter Systems”



The Fulton County School District (located in suburban Atlanta) has become the largest district in **Georgia** to make the transition to a “charter school system” on June 1, 2012.

Georgia is one of the few states that allows entire districts, not just individual schools, to enter into a charter school contract with the state.

With the addition of the Fulton County Schools as a “charter system”, 16 school districts of 180 in Georgia have achieved that status since the law was passed in 2007.

**Florida** is another SECA state with a “charter systems” law. These systems can be public school districts that convert to charter status.

**Texas** allows groups to create charter districts from the ground up, as opposed to converting existing school districts.

According to an *Education Week* article describing the transfor-

mation of the Fulton County Schools, one of the major waivers granted by the state relates to the teacher-salary schedule. This waiver will allow the district to create a salary schedule that can differentiate pay for teachers in hard-to-fill areas and modify the teacher evaluation system to rely more on teacher performance and/or education and less on tenure.

Source: “Fulton District Becomes Largest Charter System in Ga.,” *Education Week*, May 23, 2012, p. 8.

## Alabama: The Education Options Act

The Education Options Act, one of Governor Robert Bentley’s legislative priorities, failed to leave the Alabama House Education Committee, effectively killing the bill.

This proposal would have allowed a rapid and significant expansion of charter schools within the state of Alabama which does not have a charter



Governor Bentley

school law.

This bill was also unusual in that it allowed the authorization of charter schools by local school boards, rather than a state level entity, which is the case in most states.

The Governor’s website posted a fact sheet on charter

schools at <http://governor.alabama.gov/downloads/CharterSchools.pdf> to try to address information being disseminated against the Act.

“The Education Options Act is a comprehensive effort to give teachers the flexibility they need while also giving students and their parents new options for success.” Governor Bentley

Source: <http://governor.alabama.gov>

## South Carolina: Universities Can Sponsor Charter Schools

Governor Nikki Haley signed a bill on Monday, May 14, 2012 that will expand charter schools in South Carolina.

The new law allows:

- ◆ Boys-only and girls-only charter schools.
- ◆ Requires traditional schools to allow charter school students to participate in extra-curricular

activities not offered by their school.

- ◆ Allows universities to sponsor their own charter schools.

According to Dr. Mick Zais, SC Superintendent of Education, “A one-size-fits-all model of education simply doesn’t work for many students. Public charter schools are laboratories of innovation where the

interests of students come first.”

South Carolina currently has 17,000 students in 47 charter schools.



Dr. Zais

Sources: <http://www.myrtlebeachonline.com> and <http://ed.sc.gov/agency/news>

## Three SECA States Without Charter School Laws

The previous three articles concerned activity in the SECA states to either initiate or strengthen charter school laws.

If you are interested in finding out more about the charter laws in your state, the **National Alliance for Public Charter Schools** has an informative website that includes an interactive map. You can click on your state, and you'll find information about your state's activities in regard to implementing charter schools.

The map can be found at

<http://www.publiccharters.org/law/>

If you go to this website, you'll also discover that three SECA states do not have a charter school law in place:

**Alabama**  
**Kentucky**  
**West Virginia**

Why would you, as early childhood educators be concerned with charter schools? The two biggest issues are standards and funding: 1) How



accountable are charter schools for student performance in comparison with public schools? and 2) Since public school funds finance these schools, what is the financial impact on the traditional public school? **It's important for you to find out how pre-K fits into this new education movement.**

## Where Will You Get Your News in the Future?



The *Times-Picayune* of New Orleans, one of the nation's oldest newspapers, will cut its print edition

from daily to three days per week and will begin to offer significantly increased on-line content.

With this announcement on Thursday, May 24, 2012, we also learned that the *Birmingham News*, the *Press-Register* in Mobile and *The Huntsville Times*, all Alabama newspapers, would follow suit.

This announcement follows a trend of decreasing readership of print

media and an increased presence by most news organizations on the Web.

It remains to be seen how extensive this trend will be, but it appears that the news "business model" is changing quickly to reflect the increasing sophistication of technology and an ability to provide news "in real time."

## New Reports of Interest

The Spring 2012 edition of *Future of Children* contains articles and information on children with disabilities. The journal states that during the past several decades, the type of disabilities has shifted from predominantly physical to mental health disorders. For a copy of the journal, go to <http://futureofchildren.org/>

*Prekindergarten Participation Rates in West Virginia* was released in April 2012 and is an update of a previously published report. The update found that participation rates more than doubled between 2002-2003 and 2010-2011 from 26% to 63% of eligible students. For a copy of the report, go to <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=REL2012021>

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) published *Fact Book Bulletin: Growing Proportion of Children in Poverty Means More Education Challenges* in April 2012. New data show that the South continues to have a higher percentage of children in poverty than the rest of the country. For a copy of the report, go to [http://www.sreb.org/cgi-bin/MySQLdb?VIEW=/public/docs/view\\_one.txt&docid=1787](http://www.sreb.org/cgi-bin/MySQLdb?VIEW=/public/docs/view_one.txt&docid=1787)

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"A Voice for  
Southern Children"

We're on the Web!  
[www.southernearlychildhood.org](http://www.southernearlychildhood.org)

## How to Use This Newsletter

If you're interested in advocacy, one of the most effective tools that you can have is access to information. This newsletter is provided as a service to locate and share information that we think will be helpful to you in your work at the state level and to keep you updated on what's happening in public policy.

You'll find information that:

- **Compares your state to other SECA states**—how you're doing, what issues you have in common, what the hot topics are in your states.
- **Brings the national scene to your fingertips** and gives you a perspective on how national events might impact you...You'll also receive information about where to find additional information.

We hope you'll find it helpful. Children need you to be their "voice" in your community and state.

## NCLB Waivers: Need Work

In the second round of state applications for waivers from the accountability measures of the No Child Left Behind Act, the U.S. Department of Education is pushing for:

- ⇒ "More ambitious goals for student achievement.
- ⇒ A sharper focus on students who historically have been overlooked.
- ⇒ More specific sets of remedies for perennially struggling schools."

According to *Education Week*, the following issues have been identified in the SECA states.

**Arkansas:** A better explanation for how schools will be held ac-

countable for the graduation rates of **subgroup** students.

**Louisiana:** Concern that the state's emphasis on the lowest-performing third of students doesn't do enough to look out for the **subgroup** students.

**Mississippi:** Concern that the state's proposal to create a single **subgroup** of "at-risk" students could obscure the performance of traditional **subgroups**.

**North Carolina:** A call for the state to bolster its "exit criteria" for schools to get out of "priority" (bottom 5%) or "focus" (other low-performing) status.

**South Carolina:** The need for the state to do more to provide outreach to districts on its waiver request.

**Virginia:** Concern that the proposed accountability system fails to do much for **subgroup** students beyond requiring schools to report their progress. Source: "Round-Two NCLB Waiver Bids Critiqued," *Education Week*, May 16, 2012, p.21.

### So What's a Subgroup?

According to NCLB, subgroups identified for estimating AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) are: Students with Disabilities, Limited English Proficient, Economically Disadvantaged, and Multi-Racial/Multi-Ethnic.

For more info on waivers, access the *August 2011 issue of Public Policy Notes*.