



Office of
**MAGNET,
CHOICE &
CHARTER
SCHOOLS**
A Division of Polk County Public Schools

Charter School
Accountability Plan

A Division of Polk County Public Schools

**Ensuring rigorous, relevant learning experiences
that result in high achievement for our students.**

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Polk County
Office of Magnet, Choice and Charter Schools**

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Charter School Accountability Plans
Polk County
Office of Magnet, Choice and Charter Schools

Purpose:

A Charter School Accountability Plan outlines the goals and benchmarks for the school based on the school's application and contract. This accountability plan is not limited to the academic progress of students, rather an overarching document that addresses each of the essential components for success of the charter school. It should be designed to provide information needed to measure and track the school's progress toward its goals, make program adjustments when needed, and report to parents, the community, and the chartering authority on performance and progress. However, it is important to recognize that the performance of charter schools also will be compared by the public and the media to that of traditional public schools as well as other public charter schools. The design of your Accountability Plan needs to acknowledge and prepare for this inevitable comparison.

Duration:

Although the Accountability Plan should provide information needed to assure strong performance and continuous improvement over the foreseeable future of the school, the Plan should place a particular emphasis on documenting performance and progress over a period of time from receipt of the charter. The accountability plan should be completed during the first academic year a new charter school is in operation and submitted to the Office of Magnet, Choice and Charter Schools in final form by the last working day in June. Schools completing the renewal process should submit the final form by the January deadline as part of their renewal document. This process allows for input from all stakeholders and commonality of mission as well as agreement of the pathways to achieve the mission. A charter review that examines the progress of the school in meeting the achievement expectations set forth in the charter is held annually, after the first year of the charter's inception, by the Polk County School Board (PCSB) Charter Review Committee in conjunction with the annual reports received on or before November 1st.

Organizing Framework:

An Accountability Plan needs an organizing framework. Below is an example of one organizing framework that includes the areas in which a charter school is expected to be accountable. This framework mirrors the renewal process for charter schools in Polk County. However, the group may wish to organize the same concerns into a somewhat different set of categories.

1. Is the educational program a success?

Is there evidence of significantly improved or persistently strong student performance?

Is the school making satisfactory progress meeting both academic and non-academic goals?

2. Is the school a viable organization?

Are the distinctive programs of the school fully implemented and operating as intended? Do teachers and other staff have the training and resources necessary, and is performance effective?

Is the school maintaining effective leadership by the governing board, competent management of operations, and responsible use of the public funds under the institution's stewardship?

3. Is the school in compliance with the rules under which it operates?

Is the school meeting the requirements of applicable laws and regulations?

Is the school meeting the terms of the charter agreement and faithfully implementing the plans contained in the application?

Essential Elements:

If an Accountability Plan is to be conceptually sound and useful to the school, there are certain essential elements that must be present. These elements are related to one another in certain rational ways that are generally understood, but not always agreed upon in the technical fields of evaluation and assessment. The sponsor is interested in sound, though not necessarily elaborate, design. PCSB does not believe there is a single best way to design an Accountability Plan. Additionally, the sponsor is aware that each school is different with unique goals and strategies. Nevertheless, there are certain elements that the Charter Review Committee would like to see incorporated into each Accountability Plan. Each of these elements is listed below, along with statements of the kinds of information that should be included in the development of each element.

1. Mission Statement

The Accountability Plan should begin with a clear and decisive mission statement. A description (in one or two sentences) of what the school intends to do for whom and to what degree. Some schools also use the mission statement to (briefly) address *how* these intentions will be accomplished if methodology is a particularly important part of the vision.

As is the case with all sections of the Accountability Plan, the mission statement should be written for a general audience. Avoid educational jargon and technical terminology. Parents and members of the community who wish to know more about the school should be able to read the mission statement in the Accountability Plan and get a clear sense of the school and its vision. A mission statement that focuses on core elements and sets priorities will remind readers that the school is responsible for following through on a very specific array of promises and that some aspects of performance are more important than others.

Finally, remember that Florida Charter Law explicitly makes improving student learning and academic achievement a primary goal of all Florida charter schools. An effective mission statement should demonstrate the understanding of the enabling legislation by including a direct assertion of the school's goals for the students' academic progress.

Sample mission statements written by several charter schools are included below. These mission statements are especially clear and focused. The statements may be helpful in providing general context for your school's own mission statement though as unique representations of schools that authored them, they should not be used as literal models.

- The mission of the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Charter School is to produce students who meet or exceed the Sunshine State Standards in English Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies. Our students will be able to communicate in both English and Spanish. Staff and students will view themselves as self-reflective, continuous learners. Parents will view themselves as partners in their child's education.
- At the Community Partnership Charter School, families, educators and community members join together in creating a strong academic base in which students learn to read, write and perform mathematically at levels that exceed citywide averages. Students will be expected to achieve these high levels in an environment that values kindness and respect.
- The mission of the Academic Rigor Charter School is to provide a high quality public education that will prepare students to enter college. To do this, the Academic Rigor Charter School provides a rigorous curriculum that develops children's strong basic skills and abilities to think critically and solve problems.

In addition, a wide variety of resources that can help in writing or refining a mission statement can be found on-line:

An organization called the Internet Non-profit Center publishes an especially helpful overview of the craft and importance of writing good mission statements. This site may be found at: <http://www.nonprofits.org/npofaq/03/21.html>

Also, the Alliance for Non-Profit Management provides an especially clear guide to drafting mission statements at <http://www.allianceonline.org/faqs/spfaq6.html>

2. A statement of challenging, measurable, and attainable goals.

Writing an Accountability Plan requires a definition of the school's goals and an outline to plan for measuring the progress in achieving those goals. Lastly, the plan should specify exactly how much progress that indicates success.

One should start by describing what success will look like at the school that has been designed. For example, consider these questions: How will the determination be made as to whether or not the school has succeeded? What will students know and be able to do? How will the students act? What will parents say about the program?

Outline the goals in precise, declarative sentences. To start with the basics, for example, a school might state, "All students at the Accountability Charter School will become proficient readers of the English language." Using a series of similarly straightforward goals, address critical aspects of the school's design, and organize those goals around three specific areas of operations - Academics, Organizational Viability and Unique Programmatic Areas - while placing the greatest emphasis on student learning in core academic areas.

While there's no ideal number of goals to include in an Accountability Plan, **seek to limit the number of ways the school will measure itself in order to focus on what's most important.** Articulating a dozen (or fewer) clear, carefully measured goals should provide a convincing story of progress and will be more effective than using a score of vague, trivial or redundant criteria.

An Accountability Plan should contain:

- Goals that are a natural outgrowth of the mission of the school;
- Goals that focus on outcomes that are measurable, or that are accompanied by objectives that specify measurable outcomes for each goal;
- One or more goals that are related to each of the categories in the framework;
- Student performance goals that are linked to a well-defined set of academic standards that specify both content and performance; and
- Non-academic goals for the school that are related to such indicators as student attendance, graduation rates, types and frequency of disciplinary incidents (e.g., suspensions, expulsions), parent participation, etc.

3. A statement of student academic content and performance standards.

An Accountability Plan should be keyed to a comprehensive statement of academic standards that specifies for each subject or content area and for each grade, age, or other grouping level what students should know and be able to do. The plan should clearly tie to the Sunshine State Standards and provide documentation of compliance with these standards. Additionally, the accountability plan should demonstrate student academic progress as related to state requirements of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) and FCAT Norm Referenced Test (NRT).

Although the student academic standards need only to be referenced in the Plan, standards represent the foundation on which the school's academic program is based. These standards should be challenging, clear, and measurable. Some schools already have developed or adapted a set of standards against which they have designed (or intend to design) their instructional and assessment programs. Other schools have adopted an existing instructional program that is standards based, while others have a planning schedule that calls for the adoption, adaptation, or creation of academic content and performance standards over the coming months.

Whatever the process may be, the Board expects that every school, will in the near future, have in place a systematic, comprehensive statement of student academic standards that provides a solid foundation for the educational program and an anchor for the Accountability Plan.

4. A set of performance indicators that specify what will be measured, counted, etc.

An Accountability Plan should contain:

- At least one indicator specified for each goal, with multiple indicators specified for some goals; and
- Indicators that are aligned with goals as well as provide a reasonable basis upon which to judge the degree to which the goal has been met.

Some issues to consider in designing measurements:

- Measuring important goals in several different ways (using 'multiple-measures') is a particularly effective way to ensure that the Accountability Plan is accurate and measures the full breadth and depth of what occurs at school. (See below for more information on using multiple measures)
- An effective Accountability Plan should focus on measurability and should be cautious in setting up challenges that cannot be met. While teaching students to enjoy reading is an admirable goal, for example, measuring "enjoyment" is tricky at best. A goal of teaching students to comprehend and describe what has been read might be a more measurable goal. Regardless of what measures chosen to use, include a description of the means of assessment in which the lack of success would be as objectively apparent as the attainment of success.
- The Accountability Plan should focus on outcomes. The accountability part of the charter school bargain is based on the assumption that measuring what actions schools take (inputs) as opposed to what they actually achieve (outcomes) is part and parcel of the problem with ineffective schools. Outcome measures don't describe how much time students spent reading, how much money was spent on reading programs, or even what students read (all input measures) but rather assess the end product: how much the students improved in their ability to read, for example.
- Try to design measures that will allow for assessment of success over differing time frames. A school may want to describe the job skills the first graduating

class will have five years down the road, or consider scheduling watershed assessments at the end of specific years. At the same time, the school should also plan to document how to know if progress is on the right track at the end of this year. In short, the Accountability Plan should provide adequate means to demonstrate progress at any time in the school's existence.

Using Multiple Measures to Chart Academic Success

To adequately measure an important goal, student progress in reading for example, a school might measure progress in three different ways. The following example shows how three measures, all of which describe how progress will be assessed and how much progress will constitute success, can be attached to a single goal. The third measure, in particular, allows the school to assess skills beyond those measured on standardized assessments; such measures are most compelling when used in addition to externally validated tests.

Goal:

All students at the Accountability Charter School will become proficient readers of the English language.

Measures:

- Students at the Accountability Charter School will improve their performance on the reading portion of the Stanford-9 by at least three percent per year, on average.
- Students at the Accountability Charter School will perform at a level higher than their peers in the Accountability City School District on the FCAT in all grades, as demonstrated by a greater percentage of students achieving a higher overall average student score.
- All students at the Accountability Charter School will read aloud and discuss an essay of literary significance before a panel of teachers and outside experts at the end of their 8th and 10th grade years, achieving a "proficient" rating (or higher) from the panel for each of the following skills: elocution, comprehension and analysis.

5. Annual and long-term performance targets (benchmarks).

An Accountability Plan should contain:

- Provisions for establishing baseline performance levels for each goal and with respective associated indicator(s).
- One-year and five-year performance targets, as well as annual intermediate benchmarks for each performance indicator.

REQUIREMENTS: the assessment of the school's academic program should use three kinds of measures: absolute, value-added and comparative.

- *Absolute Measures* - These are assessments based on absolute standards, that is, on mastery of specific skills and knowledge and are often referred to as "criterion referenced" assessments. On

absolute measures, students must be able to perform at a given level that is determined in advance and remains the same no matter how students do on the tests. In our state, the FCAT and FCAT NRT are current absolute measures. Rightly or not, these scores, more than any others, are used by the public to measure overall school quality. By administering the mandated exams, as required by state law and by the charter school statute, this requirement is automatically satisfied though of course additional criterion referenced assessments may be utilized.

- *Value-Added Measures* - These assessments chart student progress over time and almost always involve the use of standardized, norm-referenced tests to compare student performance on key skills to hypothetical national averages. Examples of norm-referenced tests include the Terra Nova, the Stanford Achievement Test, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills. Using one of these tests to show added value is fairly simple but requires advanced planning. Essentially, it means giving the tests on two occasions and looking at the progress of *the same group* (or cohort) of students from one administration of the test to another. Since a report is required on the progress of the students from the time they entered the school, an assessment should be given as soon as (or just before) they arrive. This is called establishing a "baseline." Baseline scores can be compared to scores on the same test given at a later date to reveal how much children have learned in the interim.

Since value-added measures compare a school's students to themselves at an earlier point in time, they factor out demographic issues that influence performance and allow administrators to assess progress with a minimum of distortion. This makes value-added measures among the most useful forms of assessment, particularly for schools dealing with at-risk students. A school where 80% of students fail to pass the Regents Exam may be making tremendous progress that has yet to show up on criterion referenced tests or is lost amidst the larger discrepancies among students. Value-added testing can validate such progress. **For these reasons, all schools should at least plan to use a normed, standardized test to make a value-added assessment of student learning each year in reading and math or develop a similarly reliable and independently verifiable measure of student growth over time.**

A note on reporting standardized test scores: Major test-makers will report test score data in a variety of formats. Prior to

completion of your accountability plan, we recommend that you contact the PCSB Office of Accountability to discuss reporting formats and measures. Please use the following guidelines in reporting your scores to the Office of Magnet, Choice and Charter Schools:

In all official capacities, data should be reported using normal curve equivalents (NCE) or national percentile rank. Please be aware, however, that percentile ranks cannot be used to *compute* aggregate data. This means that reporting aggregate scores in percentile rank is preferred; scores must be converted from NCE *only after performing all calculations (i.e. adding or averaging scores)*. Whichever method of reporting data, please submit raw data on all tests to PCSB Office of Accountability.

Test makers will also report scores to you in grade-level equivalents (GE). These scores are appealing because they are translated into an intuitive measure, the grade level and month corresponding to a student's performance on a given test. A grade-level equivalent of 4.3, for example, means that the test-taker performed as one would expect a student three months into the fourth grade to perform on the test. These scores are less exact than other measures, however, and cannot be used for aggregated calculations. Therefore, while grade level equivalents may be used to describe progress informally to parents, donors, and members of the school community, *grade-level equivalents should not be used* to formally report scores to PCSB. This includes score reporting in Progress Reports or any other documents submitted to the sponsor.

Important: To make a valid value-added assessment, always compare *the same students* over time. A common pitfall in using tests to assess student progress lies in using the same test to compare different students. A school that compared the math scores of this year's third grade to the scores of last year's third grade, for example, would be making an invalid measure. Only by comparing the math scores of students in this year's third grade to the scores of those same students (and only those same students) when they were in the second grade can a school measure how much progress has been fostered in the students.

- *Comparative Measures*- Once students' progress has been measured against previous performance, an evaluation of that group's progress may be made against a comparable population.

While Florida Charter law requires charter schools to compare students' progress to that of students in the school district, please work closely with the PCSB Office of Accountability to make

these comparisons. The district, as sponsor, is responsible for identifying like populations and providing comparative data.

In short, the Accountability Plan should find a way to demonstrate whether the school is providing an improved educational alternative in comparison to local educational options or comparable populations at other schools.

6. Measurement tools capable of supplying the information needed to judge performance.

An Accountability Plan should contain:

- A design for measuring student performance that—
 - will provide credible evidence of academic progress,
 - use corresponding assessment tools annually so as to produce longitudinal data over the term of the charter,
 - employ multiple tools for assessing student performance (which must include any required district-wide assessments, but may also include other norm referenced tests, criterion referenced tests, authentic or performance assessments such as student portfolios, tests that measure the mastery of academic standards, etc.);
- A schedule for administering assessment instruments and gathering other data; and
- A plan for arraying and analyzing data so that results can be presented in technically sound, understandable, and useful forms.

For each goal outlined, determine how progress will be measured, and for each of those measures **indicate the level of performance expected of the school or the students to achieve**. It is not enough to give students a certain assessment; an explanation of how those students are expected to perform on that assessment, if making progress should be defined.

7. Strategies for supporting program improvement and continuous system renewal.

An Accountability Plan should contain:

- Strategies for using information produced by the Accountability Plan to strengthen the performance of the school.
- Procedures for assuring that accountability information is available and regularly considered in—
 - the management of the school;
 - the policymaking processes of the Board of Trustees;
 - plans for teacher professional development activities; and
 - the design of program and management adjustments that is intended to improve the future performance of particular programs, and of the charter school.

8. Procedures for reporting progress and for gauging customer satisfaction.

An Accountability Plan should contain:

- Sound plans for getting the views of students, parents, teachers, and the community on perceptions of how school is performing and how the school can be improved;
- Strategies for reporting annually to students, parents, teachers, the community, as well as providing the stakeholders with timely, credible, understandable, and useful information;
- Plans that offer an opportunity for constituencies to raise and get answers to questions that may arise from the information that is reported.

Organizational Viability:

Beyond demonstrating academic success, the school needs to demonstrate that it is school is and will remain a viable organization; trustworthy, responsible, open, and well run. Some of the issues to address under viability include financial management, quality of governance, strength of community, and market demand. As with the section on academics, plan to focus on measurability and outcomes.

REQUIREMENTS: The section on organizational viability must include the following measures:

- Enrollment levels, student turnover rates and any waiting lists in each grade-level your school serves on at least two dates (of your choosing) during the school year in addition to data on their status at the close of the school year.
- Attendance rates (reported in average percentage of enrolled students present)
- A budget for the most recently completed fiscal year
- A proposed budget for the next fiscal year
- A balance sheet for the most recently completed fiscal year
- The results of an independent audit.
- A survey assessing parent satisfaction and opinion, compiled during the most recent school year. Other data that you might use in discussing organizational viability include faculty turnover rates, daily attendance rates, teacher satisfaction, professional evaluation results, internal use of rewards to support performance, and responsive Board of Trustees decision-making. Again, it is important to think in terms of outcomes for your measurements and this may mean generating data through surveys (of parents, teachers or students), for example, or by careful daily record keeping of student data (behavior, attendance) throughout the year.

Unique Programmatic Areas:

Most charters promise to achieve more than just academic success. The following list outlines some unique programmatic areas: emphasis on character education or citizenship; additional instruction in technology or foreign languages; and provide student experiences related to global awareness or public service. The final section of the Accountability Plan (and in some ways the most difficult) asks for a measurement of the

results of these important projects. Measuring these goals is often difficult and requires some creativity. It is easy to fall back on inputs -- with the ease of doing so perhaps best demonstrated by the prevalence of the practice -- but, as is the case with academic subjects, sitting through a dozen classes on citizenship does not ensure that children will act like citizens. Scheduling regular visits by community members, parents or experts to assess behavior might work, however, as might polling parents in September and again in June about their students' understanding of their responsibilities as citizens. Giving students an authentic assessment on the topic twice a year to show where they started and how much they've grown could be another option. Again, it is up to the school to generate creative and reliable ways to measure the progress against the core elements of the charter.

This section of the Accountability Plan offers the best opportunity to highlight the unique and unusual elements that the school adds to the education market in a district. If the school is the only place that teaches a certain foreign language for example, or if it offers a bilingual program that most other schools don't, be sure to demonstrate how much progress students have made in those areas in addition to their other academic progress. In short, this is the area of the Accountability Plan where a particular emphasis can be placed on showing what's unique about the school.

Timeline for Production of Accountability Plans:

The timeline for writing and implementing Accountability Plans has been designed to encourage schools to develop goals and measures with the input of the full faculty and also to allow schools to begin addressing the challenges of measuring progress as early in the first year as possible. Interim and final deadlines will be determined soon after a charter is issued, but will include:

New Charter Schools:

- All school administrators required to submit an accountability plan must attend a Technical Assistance Workshop when scheduled.
- The last working day in March of the first operating year - All new schools must submit a draft Accountability Plan to the Office of Magnet, Choice and Charter Schools.
- April of the first operating year - All new schools meet with the PCSB staff to review their draft Accountability Plan.
- Last working day of June during the first operating year - All new schools submit final Accountability Plan to the Office of Magnet, Choice and Charter Schools.

Renewal Charter Schools:

- All school administrators required to submit an accountability plan must attend a Technical Assistance Workshop when scheduled.

- October 1 of the renewal year, all schools in the final year of contract term submit a draft Accountability Plan with their Renewal Document to the Office of Magnet, Choice and Charter Schools.

Reporting Back:

A comprehensive Accountability Progress Report regarding performance on all goals discussed in the Accountability Plan must be made to the Office of Magnet, Choice and Charter Schools as a part of the School's Annual Accountability Report due to the Department of Education.

- Renewing charter schools in the first year of their renewal contract must report performance on the goals discussed in the prior year's Accountability Plan using outcomes from the prior year of the previous contract term.
 - *Example:* Progress report for 2008-2009 should include goals written in previous contract term's Accountability Plan showing baseline from 2007-2008 and outcome for 2008-2009.
- New charter schools in their second year of their contract must report all goals discussed in their approved Accountability Plan stating that each goal is new and provide baseline data.
 - *Example:* Progress report for 2007-2008 should include all goals written in approved Accountability Plan showing baseline from 2007-2008 and stating outcome is undetermined as goal is new.

The Accountability Progress Report may contain additional information beyond what is required in the Accountability Plan, including a section assessing the school's progress in narrative terms, but **all Accountability Progress Reports must contain data explicitly addressing each goal and measure in the Accountability Plan** and should also include an index describing where each goal and measure is addressed if this is not readily apparent.

Additional reports on progress against specific accountability goals may be filed with the Office of Magnet, Choice and Charter Schools at any time as "Interim Accountability Progress Reports," though partial submissions during the year should not replace part or all of the comprehensive report due with the School's Annual Report. The Office of Magnet, Choice and Charter Schools may require Interim Accountability Reports with specific deadlines as part of probationary or other action.

A comprehensive Renewal Accountability Progress Report regarding performance of all goals discussed in the Accountability Plan covering the term of the contract must be submitted as an attachment with the Renewal Document. This progress report must clearly address each objective in the school's approved Accountability Plan as attached to their charter. This progress report must demonstrate the progress made toward each objective annually and if the objective was met annually. If an objective is not met at any time during the charter, the report should summarize the plan of action that was put in place or will be put in place.

Filing an Amendment to an Accountability Plan:

Should experience prove that the goals and/or measures originally set for the school were unrealistic, inadequate, or imprecise, or there is a need to revise the Accountability Plan for any other reason, the school may file a proposed amendment to the existing Accountability Plan with the Office of Magnet, Choice and Charter Schools. Amendments may be filed in writing between June 1 and October 1 of any calendar year and may be approved, amended or denied, in whole or in part, by the sponsor.

Contingency Plans:

Should the Accountability Progress Report indicate that the school has not met one or several of the goals in its Accountability Plan, the school may be asked to file a Contingency Plan. This document will ask the school to use data and critical inquiry to further assess the causes of the insufficient progress and develop a plan and timeline with which to improve performance. The Office of Magnet, Choice and Charter Schools will work with the school to develop an approved Contingency Plan and may provide additional resources or expertise to help ensure that the Contingency Plan is effectively implemented. Since a Contingency Plan should respond to specific causes and be informed by original data and analysis, it should be written in informed response to a missed goal. Therefore, no Contingency Plans will be required of schools at the present time.

Authority to Require the Implementation of an Accountability Plan:

Florida Charter School Statute (5) SPONSOR (b) 1.a. The sponsor shall monitor and review the charter school in its progress toward the goals established in the charter.
e. The sponsor shall ensure that the charter is innovative and consistent with the state education goals established by s. 1000.03(5).

(7) CHARTER (b) 1. A charter may be renewed provided that a program review demonstrates that the criteria in paragraph (a) have been successfully accomplished and that none of the grounds for nonrenewal established by paragraph (8)(a) has been documented. In order to facilitate long-term financing for charter school construction, charter schools operating for a minimum of 3 years and demonstrating exemplary academic programming and fiscal management are eligible for a 15-year charter renewal. Such long-term charter is subject to annual review and may be terminated during the term of the charter.

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