



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

Charter Renewal Process

For a Polk County School Board sponsored
public charter school



Magnet, Choice, and Charter Schools

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Renewal Process
for a Polk County School Board Sponsored Public School Charter

Introduction

The Polk County School Board is committed to continued sponsorship of charter schools that demonstrate academic success, fiscal accountability and appropriate governance. To demonstrate a successful charter school program, the completion of the charter renewal process must present evidence of success in this format. A successful completion of the renewal of a charter will be an articulate, affirmative response, based on clear credible evidence, to the questions that guide charter school accountability. It must also offer compelling answers to questions about the school's plans for the future. This document should be a sound, well-supported explanation of why the Polk County School Board should renew a school's charter. Key questions include:

- Is the academic program a success?
- Is the school a viable organization?
- Is the school's program and operation faithful to the terms of its charter?

While an initial charter application addresses future plans, the renewal charter's process focuses on demonstrated, documented performance. A successful renewal documentation packet will be able *to stand on its own* as a clear and credible explanation, addressing both the school's strengths and weaknesses, of why the school's charter should be renewed. The explanation should be complete, and should not require further explanation or clarification by the school. The charter review committee reviewers of this process should not have to guess at the meaning of particular sections or statements, or make any assumptions about why the evidence presented is an appropriate or compelling answer to a question. Like a well-written business plan or legal brief, the renewal document should not leave to the reader any responsibility for deciphering the explanation or interpreting the evidence presented. Successful renewal documents will identify weaknesses, as well as strengths, and will explain why the weaknesses do not outweigh a school's strengths. In addition, plans to address major weaknesses will be clearly outlined.

The renewal document is not an annual report, nor a compilation of the school's first three or four annual reports. It is not a presentation of data in the way that an annual report is. Whereas an annual report is primarily a comprehensive presentation of data, the renewal document is a narrative response to questions about the school's performance and to questions about the school's future. While a school may very well review and draw on the data it has presented in prior annual reports, the mere rehearsal of accumulated data would be inappropriate and insufficient. The renewal document is not a substitute for the annual report. It is to be submitted in addition to the annual report.

Please provide the answers to the following questions:

1. *Is the academic program a success?*

1A. Has the school made reasonable progress in meeting internally established educational goals during the term of its charter?

What reviewers will look for:

Clear quantitative evidence that the school has made satisfactory progress in meeting the student academic performance objectives in its accountability plan.

As much as possible, the school's claim about student performance should be supported by evidence from impartial, independent assessments such as standardized tests, juried assessments, or audited portfolios – that is, assessments that credibly employ the impartial judgment of qualified individuals (or testing companies) outside the school's community. If some of the student performance evidence is based on internal staff evaluations of student performance, the renewal document should address the degree to which staff judgment is confirmed by objective assessment data. The renewal document should also describe the extent to which staff judgments are informed by documented criteria and methods that are consistently applied. Information should include disaggregated data that addresses, at a minimum, gender, socio economic and minority populations. A plan to address overall academic performance weaknesses, if identified, as well as increased performance for specific sub-groups should be detailed.

In supporting its response to this question, the school should strike a balance between presenting evidence that provides too simplistic an overview (e.g. "all of our students scored 'competent' or above in all subject areas on standardized test X".) and all data that is too detailed (e.g. "17% of 7th graders who took Standardized Test X without accommodation scored between the 30th and 40th percentile of the word recognition sub-section of the reading test.") The data presented should provide the reader with a comprehensive picture of how all of the school's students have performed relative to the school's specific academic performance objectives and should illustrate the range of performance and the variations in performance among those students.

A school may not have fully reached the standard called for by a particular academic performance objective. In that case, it should explain clearly why it considers the progress that it is has made to be reasonable, and, if appropriate, explain any circumstances that may have prevented the school's full attainment of the objective.

Suggested sources of evidence:

Promotion and graduation requirements and results of assessments that determine whether a student has met externally developed test results, internally developed test results, externally reviewed portfolios, or juried assessments.

1B. Has student performance significantly improved and/or been persistently strong on internal and external academic assessments?

What reviewers will look for:

Evidence of progress that the school's students have made over time while enrolled in the school. The academic performance of students at one point in time (such as at the time of renewal document for renewal) says nothing about their progress over time. The school must present evidence of students' longitudinal progress while at the school and make an argument for why that performance is evidence of significant improvement or persistent strength. Ideally, evidence should aggregate individual student progress over time. If such data are not available or are inconsistent, evidence regarding annual grade level performance should be provided.

Suggested sources of evidence:

Externally developed test results, internally developed test results, externally reviewed portfolios, and juried assessments.

2. *Is the school a viable organization?*

2A. Is the school financially solvent and stable?

What reviewers will look for:

A clear, concise narrative statement providing sufficient evidence that the school has competently and effectively managed its finances. The statement should address any negative findings from independent audits and/or budget deficits in a fiscal year, and how the school responded to either. Future major expenditures should be included, as well as the academic benefit(s) of said expenditures.

Suggested sources of evidence:

Results from independent financial audits, financial audits, and financial statement.

2B Is enrollment stable and near capacity?

What reviewers will look for:

A clear concise statement about the history of its enrollment during the term of its charter. It should comprehensively document demand and turnover, with a clear explanation of the reasons for turnover. It should call attention to any significant trends in enrollment (such as increases or decreases in demand, increases or decreases in turnover) and provide evidence that supports the explanation of such trends. Specific attention and detail should be included regarding minority population numbers, both overall and by grade level. A plan should demonstrate overall enrollment is reflective of the community in which the school is located.

Factors to be considered when determining if the school's population is reflective of the community in which the school resides should include, but not limited to, Free and Reduced Lunch status, racial make up of the community, and ESE and ESOL populations.

Suggested sources of evidence:

Enrollment data, turnover data, waiting list data, exit interviews or surveys.

2C. Is the school governance sound and professional in performing the governance duties of the charter school?

What reviewers will look for:

Evidence that governance has been responsible and effective, that it has handled organizational challenges competently, that it has implemented a clear and fair procedure for evaluating teacher performance, and that it has responded effectively to complaints. It should provide evidence that the school's board has performed capably and independently.

Suggested sources of evidence:

Evaluations, surveys, formal complaints, board turnover, leadership changes, examples of governance issues and how they were addressed.

2D. Are the professional staff of the charter school competent and resourceful?

What reviewers will look for:

Evidence that the professional staff are fully qualified and have performed capably. Evidence that the staff has met or made significant progress relative to the school performance goals of the school's accountability plan. Demonstrate evidence of ongoing staff training and a plan to address teacher retention and training in the upcoming renewal charter period.

Suggested sources of evidence:

Sources may included, but are not limited to: evaluations, surveys, formal complaints, teacher turnover rates, qualifications of teachers and staff, administrative leadership changes, examples of staff issues and how they were addressed.

3. *Is the school faithful to the terms of its charter?*

3A. Have the school's program and operation been consistent with the terms of its charter?

What reviewers will look for:

A restatement of each of the school's measurable performance objectives, and concise evidence that the school has made reasonable progress in meeting each of the objectives. If the renewal document has already explicitly addressed any of these objectives earlier in the document (e.g. student performance), those sections may be cited. The renewal document should also restate the school's major programmatic elements as described in the charter and should indicate the extent to which each has been successfully implemented.

Please attach an Accountability Plan Progress Report that clearly addresses 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.

Suggested sources of evidence:

Accountability plan and relevant performance data (e.g. attendance, parental participation, safety, mobilization of non-state resources, staff development, plant improvement, parent surveys) and the school's Academic Design Evaluation conducted by the Office of Magnet, Choice and Charter Schools.

3B. Is the school within the bounds of applicable statutory and regulatory requirements?

Provide a clear explanation of how the school has complied with each of the following areas of state and federal regulations. Include in your reporting any complaint filed in regard to any of these program areas. Listed below are the program areas and documentation which should be included to support your narrative response.

What reviewers will look for:

A clear explanation of how the school has complied with each of the following areas of state and federal regulation, and should address any complaints made regarding its compliance:

- Special Education

Describe how your program has met the needs of disabled students enrolled in your school. Include information regarding special education staffing, numbers of students receiving special education services, the number of special education students that have left the school and their stated reason for leaving.

Documentation should include an overview of your ESE services and compliance documentation, as well as a summary of any state program review audits that have been performed at your school, and/or any complaints which have been filed against the school with regard to ESE and their findings. Proposed expansion or

modification of ESE programs and services as well as other future plans for ESE students should be detailed.

- Limited English Proficiency

Describe what steps your school has undertaken to provide support to students who are limited English proficient. Documentation should include summaries of home language survey data and English language assessments conducted by the school. (i.e. number of students assessed, number found to be limited English proficient)

- Student Learning Time

Summarize your school calendar as provided in previous annual reports that demonstrates that your school meets time and learning requirements. If your school serves high school students, describe how high school graduation requirements are met and opportunities for remediation are afforded to students. Describe any after school tutoring programs, intercessions, summer learning opportunities or other learning extension activities as well as any planned expansion or changes during the upcoming charter renewal period.

- State Testing Requirements

Provide summary data on the number of students who were tested using FCAT, SAT/10, and other required Florida state testing. Include the number of students who received testing accommodations, the types of accommodations provided, the number of students who received an alternative assessment, if any, and the type of alternative assessment administered.

- Student Discipline

Include summary data on the number of suspensions issued including both in house and out of school suspensions and suspensions from transportation and general categories under which the suspensions were issued (i.e. “cutting class”, “foul language” etc.)

- Health and Safety

Provide copies of documents indicating that your school holds current inspection certificates for fire, health, safety and building inspections, and has been inspected for asbestos and radon presence as necessary. Indicate how many suspensions or other disciplinary action has been taken in regard to smoking or the use of tobacco products on campus, on account of violence (school fights, assaults on staff etc.) or students bringing weapons or illegal drugs to school. Indicate how many complaints have been received regarding allegations of harassment or discrimination.

- Legal

Provide information concerning any and all pending and threatened legal actions involving the school, including an estimate of potential exposure

- Miscellaneous

Is the school utilizing and upgrading technology in the management of the school and in the classroom? Is the school compliant with copyrighted material and software licenses?

Is the school following any procedures regarding maintaining the confidentiality of student records and/or responding to subpoenas?

Has the school developed a code of conduct that is different than the sponsor's?

Has the school maintained an atmosphere free from discrimination for both students and staff? What protocols are in place?

Suggested sources of evidence:

Implementation of approved three-year plan for special education; relevant data regarding enrollment and services provided to special needs and bilingual student; school schedule and calendar; dates of and participation in SAT/10, FCAT; suspension and expulsion numbers; a description of internal procedures for student discipline; description of health services; record of safety issues during the term of the charter; presuit notices, written demands, or lawsuits; adopted policies and procedures; codes of conduct; protocols.

4. If the school's charter is renewed, what are its plans for the five years of the next charter?

4A. Please describe how your founding charter has served the school during its initial contract term. What has the school learned during its first term about the strengths and weaknesses of its charter, and what changes in the charter does this experience suggest?

4B. Please attach an accountability plan that defines the school's student and school performance objectives for its next charter term. Describe how these objectives are aligned with the current state curriculum frameworks.

4C. How will the school evaluate and disseminate effective elements of the school's structure or program?

4D. What facility or facilities do you plan to use during the term of the next charter? Please submit written documentation that the school remains in compliance with all building, health, safety, and insurance requirements as described in Florida Statutes, and that all related inspections and approvals are current.

4E. Please attach a projected budget for the requested length of term requested by the renewal. If requesting a long-term contract, please attach a comprehensive Business Plan that demonstrates support for the request.

What reviewers will look for:

An honest and reflective self-appraisal of strengths and weaknesses of the school's charter, with credible and compelling plans for building on success, maintaining momentum, and making necessary changes for improvement of the school.

5. Please attach the results of any independent review of the school (studies, surveys, SACS accreditation documentation or other evaluations) that may shed light on the school's performance during the term of its charter.

FORMAT

- The renewal document should not exceed 25 pages, excluding the renewal accountability plan, accountability plan progress report, projected budget for the requested contract term, and business plan, if applicable.
- Attachments should not exceed 25 pages, excluding the renewal accountability plan and accountability plan progress report.
- The renewal document and attachments should use standard margins and be clearly paginated.
- Any attachment should be explicitly referred to in the text of the renewal document and directly relevant to that part of the text.
- The renewal document should be free of jargon, undefined terms, and unexplained references.
- Renewal document should be easily read and grammatically correct.
- Tables, graphs, and other data in the renewal document must be clearly presented, clearly explained, and directly relevant to the text.
- Renewal document should not include any photographs or pictures unless they are directly relevant to the text.

General Instructions

The deadline for receipt of all materials is October 1, 2009 for all charter schools who are in their final year of a charter contract. Each school must submit 15 unbound copies of all documentation in final format to Office of Magnet, Choice and Charter Schools. In addition, an electronic copy of the entire renewal document and all attachments is to be emailed to the Office of Magnet, Choice and Charter Schools by the October 1, 2009 submission deadline.

A Renewal Site Visit and Academic Design Evaluation will be scheduled with each charter school after submission of the Renewal Document.

A charter contract may be negotiated concurrently with the renewal document process; however, a charter contract will not be finalized and recommended for public hearing until school board approval of renewal document.

Acknowledgements

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