

THE CHARTER INSTITUTE AT

ERSKINE

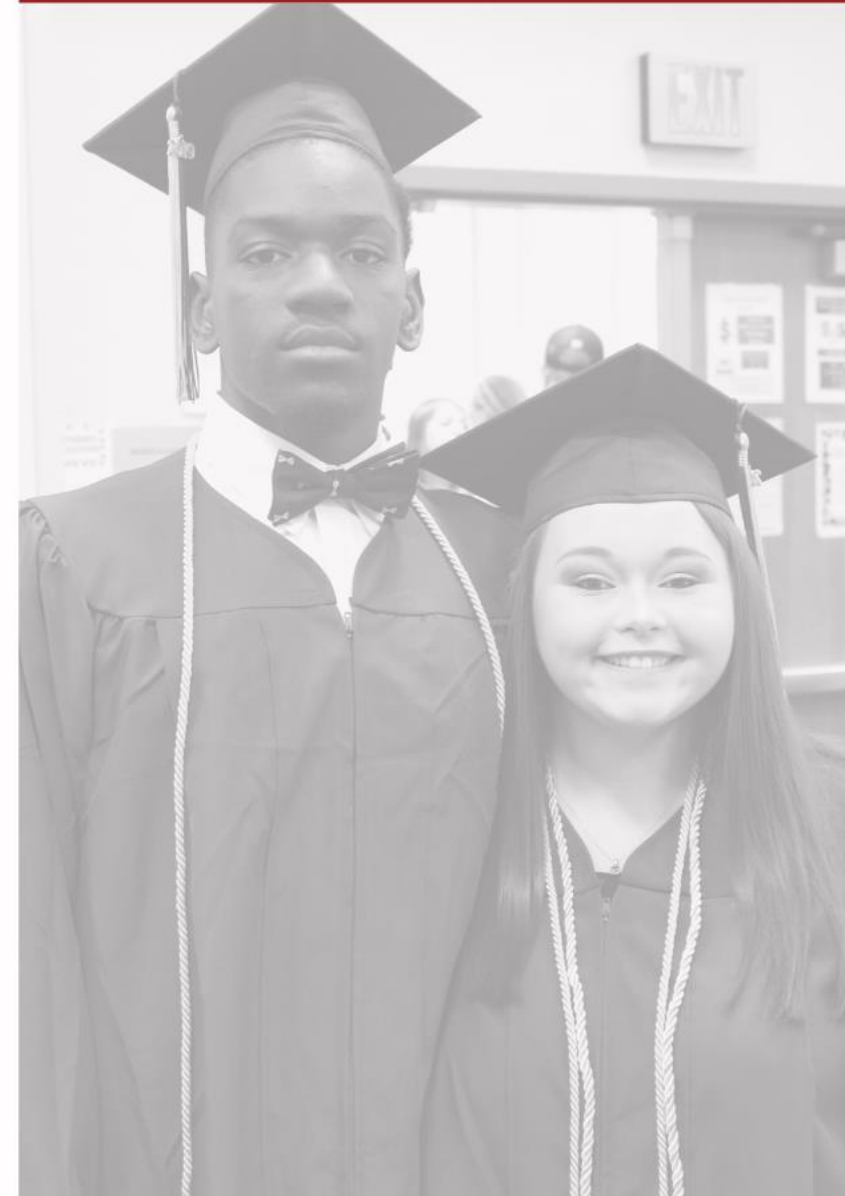
School Leaders Meeting

07/14/2021

CREATIVE MINDS
INNOVATIVE SCHOOLS
EFFECTIVE RESULTS

CHARTER INSTITUTE

@ERSKINE





SOUTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Legislative Audit Council

Independence, Reliability, Integrity

Presented by: Mike Sinclair

HISTORY

CAMERON RUNYAN

Superintendent

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OBJECTIVES FROM THE LEGISLATIVE AUDIT (PG 1)

Audit Objectives:

- Review South Carolina's state laws and regulations regarding charter schools to determine if the authorizer's role could be better defined.
- Review the relationship between the authorizers and its charter schools.
- Review the relationship between the authorizer and the S.C. Department of Education (SCDE).
- Review the authorizer's evaluations of charter schools.

DISCLAIMER

- The information contained in this audit reflects the previous SCPCSD leadership rather than the current administration
- References to the SCPCSD have been generalized and are referred to as “authorizer.”



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The logo features a stylized building with a central archway and a circular window, set against a circular background with a compass rose. Below the building is a banner with the text 'CHARTER INSTITUTE' and 'at ERSKINE' underneath.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY (PG 1)

Scope

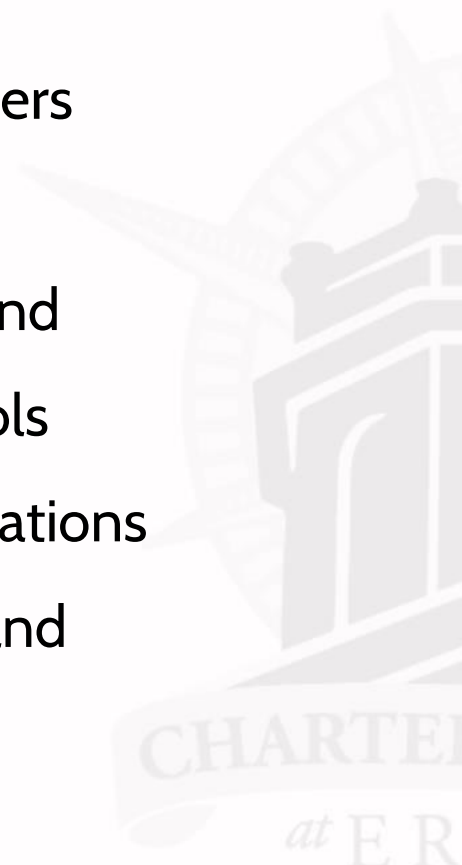
- The period of review was generally 2015 through 2020 with consideration of earlier or more recent periods when relevant

Methodology

- To conduct this audit, a variety of sources were used including:
- Interviews with the authorizer employees, employees of other state agencies, the leadership of charter schools, and interested parties.
- State laws and regulations.
- The authorizer's policies and procedures, including the School Performance Framework.
- The authorizer's administrative fees and costs.
- Minutes from the authorizer's board of trustees' meetings.
- External reviews of the authorizer.
- Charter school contracts with the authorizer.
- Email communications between the authorizer and SCDE.
- The authorizer's website.
- Information from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers and the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.
- Information from charter school authorizers in South Carolina and in other states.

FREEDOMS AND AUTONOMY (PG 4)

- As an LEA, authorizers are responsible for special education and ensuring that schools abide by their obligations under local, state, and federal law



EXAMPLES
Exemptions from state regulations for human resources and state travel.
May serve a single gender without regard to the gender makeup of the charter school.
Administered and governed by a governing body agreed to by the charter school applicant and the sponsor.
May exceed the minimum student attendance requirements that are applied to traditional public schools.
May hire noncertified teachers in a ratio up to 25% of the charter school's entire teacher staff. For a public school converted to a charter school, the ratio is 10%. However, core academic areas must be taught by a teacher certified in the appropriate area.
Hire or contract for, in its discretion, administrative staff, including a school leader, to oversee the daily operation of the school. At least one administrative staff member must be certified or experienced in school administration.
May <u>enter into a contract</u> with a school district or a private provider to provide transportation to the charter school students.

RECOMMENDATIONS (PG 11)

1. The General Assembly should amend state law to require an independent or state entity to regularly review the practices and performance of each charter school authorizer in the state.
2. The entity that the General Assembly assigns to conduct regular evaluations of each of the state's authorizers should ensure that there are consequences for authorizers with bad practices and/or a high proportion of poor performing schools.
3. The entity that the General Assembly assigns to conduct regular evaluations of each of the state's authorizers should publicly provide these evaluations.

ACCOUNTABILITY (PG 16-17)

In contrast to other authorizers, the Charter Institute at Erskine uses the measures below to hold schools accountable:

STATE COMPARISON	DISTRICT COMPARISON	SCHOOL-SPECIFIC GOALS	SCHOOL STATUS
Bottom 20% of S.C. Schools or Does Not Meet Expectations	Underperforms	Does Not Meet	Intervention towards Probation
Bottom 20% of S.C. Schools or Does Not Meet Expectations	Significantly Underperforms	Does Not Meet	Academic Emergency towards Revocation

ACCOUNTABILITY-RACIAL COMPOSITION (PG 20)

Erskine also has an accountability metric for whether a school meets the statutory 20% standard, as well as two other related metrics:

1. If the school is not meeting the 20% requirement for racial composition, has the school developed and executed a robust plan to meet the requirement?
2. Is the minority group(s) at a school that is not meeting the racial composition performing better than that of the local school district?

While authorizers cannot require schools to have a certain demographic composition, they can require them to create and execute a plan to achieve the 20% threshold, and they should not settle for simply an absence of explicit discrimination.

Although Erskine is a separate authorizer with a different focus than other authorizers, adopting additional accountability metrics like Erskine's would help fulfill the General Assembly's intent when passing the S.C. Charter Schools Act.

RECOMMENDATIONS (PG 22)

1. Other authorizers should ensure that the documentation of their School Performance Framework and Core Performance System are up-to-date
2. The General Assembly should amend S.C. Code 59-40-110(E) to accurately reflect the state accountability system and clarify the level of academic performance at which charter schools must automatically be closed
3. Other authorizers should formally communicate in writing their concerns to schools regarding academic, financial, and/or organizational performance
4. Other authorizers should establish a written policy stating what forms of communication with schools are appropriate for different circumstances
5. Other authorizers should require schools to enact plans to meet the 20% statutory racial composition requirement if they are found to not meet it
6. The General Assembly should amend state law to clarify the timeline for notifying schools of a proposed closure

AUTHORIZER SHOPPING (PG 23)

According to the NACSA, “authorizer shopping” occurs when an underperforming charter school “attempts to transfer to a new authorizer to avoid accountability measures,” such as school closure. This phenomenon presents a serious challenge to accountability efforts and overall charter school quality. To prevent authorizer shopping, NACSA recommends states explicitly regulate school transfers and closures in the following ways:

- 1.) Limiting the conditions for school transfers, such as requiring approval from a third party (such as SCDE) or prohibiting or imposing conditions on the transfer of chronically underperforming schools.
- 2.) Making closure the default action for chronically underperforming schools and ensuring that schools closed for low performance remain closed and cannot be reopened under a new authorizer.
- 3.) Designating an entity to handle exceptions.

NACSA also suggests that communication and collaboration between charter authorizers can reduce authorizer shopping.

SCHOOL BOARD COMPOSITION (PG 30)

Other authorizers do not regularly monitor their charter schools' board member composition and qualifications, for which there are specific requirements in state law. By not monitoring for this information, there is less assurance that the authorizer's charter school boards are compliant with state law and charter school students are adequately represented.

	STATUTORY REQUIREMENT	ADDITIONAL BYLAW REQUIREMENT
COMPOSITION	Seven or more members	Number specified
	Serve two-year term, with additional terms allowed	N/A
COMPOSITION & ELECTION REQUIREMENTS	50% with K-12 or business background	Requirement itself
	Boards with odd-numbered membership: extra member with K-12 or business background	Manner of selection
ELECTION REQUIREMENTS	≥50% of members elected by parents and employees	Percentage specified
	One vote per child enrolled	Manner of selection
	Choice of membership to occur every two years	N/A

Furthermore, S.C. Code §59-40-55(B)(4) requires authorizers to monitor the legal compliance of their charter schools. Such monitoring would include charter school compliance with board composition and qualifications.

RECOMMENDATIONS (PG 32)

1. Authorizers should monitor their charter schools for compliance with all the board governance requirements in S.C. Code §59-40-50(B)(9).
2. Authorizers should ensure their charter schools' bylaws include the governance requirements in S.C. Code §59-40-50(B)(9).

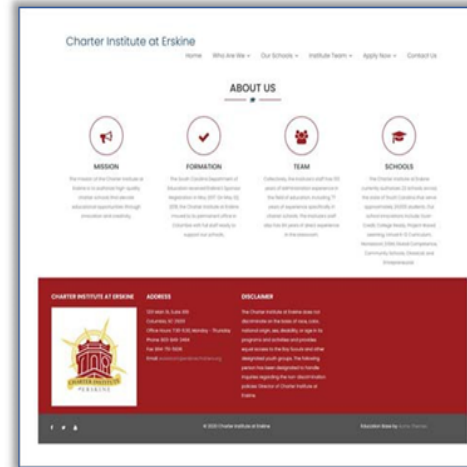
ADEQUACY OF SUPPORT SERVICES (PG 37)

- We were asked to review whether other authorizers provide adequate support to their charter schools in the context of its designation as an LEA. We found that state law does not require authorizers to provide support.

WEBSITE COMPARISONS (PG 64)

In addition to reviewing another authorizer’s website, we also reviewed the website for Erskine, the only institution of higher education that sponsors charter schools in South Carolina. Additionally, we reviewed websites of charter school authorizers in other Southeastern states. We compared the information available on one authorizer’s website to the information available on the websites of other authorizers

The website for Erskine had more resources available to users than that of other authorizers



WEBSITE RESOURCES AVAILABLE
Erskine’s organizational chart.
Erskine’s bylaws.
A listing of holidays.
Charter applications for each of its charter schools.
Direct reporting by charter schools of COVID-19 cases.
Details about its Leadership Development Program.
Notification of a new mentorship program to begin in 2020-2021.
Hyperlinks for Destiny Textbook Manager, a textbook inventory tracking system for schools.
The memorandum of agreement between the District and Erskine reflecting a commitment by the two authorizers to work together to prioritize positive outcomes for students and families.
Reporting protocol for school concerns, including notification that all phone calls and emails would be recorded internally, whether made by parents, students, or community members, with the outcome to be documented.
Institute Insights, the weekly email Erskine sends to its charter schools listing data submission information and deadlines, announcements for upcoming training opportunities, and other general information. The information includes a departmental contact person.

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CLOSING

- Student Performance (Formative Assessment)
- Prepare of the General Assembly as the Charter Act is open
- New policies and procedures will be put in place to meet the recommendations of the general assembly

(They will be discussed as part of the operations and Legislative committee by the Institute)



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