

**South Carolina Charter Schools:
Five-Year Evaluation Report**

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Introduction and General Comments.....	1
Brief Overview of Charter Schools Nationwide.....	2
Brief History of Charter Schools in South Carolina.....	4
Description of Individual Charter Schools in South Carolina.....	6
Charles Aiken Academy.....	6
Discovery School of Lancaster County.....	7
Greenville Technical Charter High School.....	7
Loop Charter School.....	8
McCormick Challenge Academy.....	9
Meyer Center For Special Children.....	9
The Phoenix Center.....	10
Youth Academy Charter School.....	10
Demographics, Student Performance and Other Charter School Data.....	11
Limitations of Evaluation.....	11
Methodology.....	13
Source of Data.....	13
Data Analysis.....	13
Demographics and Report Card Data.....	13
Demographics.....	14
Teacher Data.....	14
Certification of Teachers.....	15
School Grades and Ratings.....	16
Ratings of Satisfaction.....	16
Indicators of School Performance.....	17
Dollars Spent per Student.....	17
Instructional Time.....	17
Student-Teacher Ratio in Core Subjects.....	17
Student Attendance Rate.....	17
Student Retention.....	17

Teacher Professional Development.....	18
Teacher Attendance.....	18
Teachers with Advanced Degrees.....	18
Teachers with Out-of-Field Permits.....	18
Average Teacher Salary.....	18
Percentage Expenditures on Teacher Salaries.....	18
Parent Conferences.....	18
Opportunities in the Arts.....	19
Students Older than Usual for Grade.....	19
Students Suspended or Expelled.....	19
Students Gifted and Talented.....	19
Students with Disabilities other than Speech.....	19
Elementary School PACT Statistics.....	19
High School Exit Exam and LIFE Scholarships Statistics.....	20
Survey Data.....	20
Views of Charter School Directors: Results from Surveys and Interviews.....	20
Views of Local School District Superintendents where Charter Schools are Located.....	23
An Analysis of Key Components of the South Carolina Charter School Legislation.....	23
Racial Composition Requirement.....	24
Length of Charter.....	24
Chartering Entity (Sponsor) Issues.....	25
Accountability/Student Performance/Evaluation.....	26
Teacher Certification.....	27
Regulatory Relief.....	27
An Analysis of Key Charter School Issues Facing the State, Local Districts and Charter Schools.....	28
Issues from the State Perspective.....	28
Issues from the Local School District Perspective.....	29
Issues from the Charter Schools' Perspective.....	30
Policy Recommendations to the Legislature and the SC State Board of Education.....	30

A. Recommendations for Assistance to Charters, Local School Districts and Other Entities.....	31
B. Recommendations for Additional Study, Data Collection and Research.....	34
C. Recommendations for Establishing or Strengthening Relationships.....	35
D. Recommendations for Improving Efficiency.....	38
E. Recommendations for Anticipating and Preparing for the Future.....	38
Conclusion.....	42
References.....	100

List of Tables

Table 1. Charter Applications and Actions as of May 2002.....	5
Table 2. Profiles of Charter Schools.....	14
Table 3. Charter School Student Enrollment Data (04/09/02).....	14
Table 4. Profile of Teachers.....	15
Table 5. Certification of Teachers.....	15
Table 6. Ratings of Satisfaction.....	17

Appendices

APPENDIX A: Interviews with Directors and Summary of School Visits.....	45
APPENDIX B: Questionnaire Responses from School Superintendents.....	74
APPENDIX C: School Indicators from Report Cards.....	83
APPENDIX D: Elementary School Statistics Report Card Data.....	86
APPENDIX E: High School Statistics Report Card Data.....	89
APPENDIX F: Survey Instrument.....	92

“If we continue to do what we’ve always done, we will
continue to get what we’ve always gotten.”

W. Edwards Demming

“The art of progress is to preserve order amid change
and to preserve change amid order.”

Alfred North Whitehead

Introduction and General Comments

In South Carolina, and in the Nation, charter schools have the potential to create dramatic and fundamental change in public education. Charter schools can bring profound alterations in teaching methods, parental choice of schools, parental participation, student performance and many other aspects of schooling. Both proponents and opponents of charter schools recognize just how dramatic these shifts could be; because of this recognition, the proponents tend to be excited by this prospect whereas the opponents are often quite alarmed and concerned by the changes that could occur with this new, nontraditional sort of schooling.

Charter schools, in the classic sense, can be defined as public schools that are freed from many state and local regulations but that are held strictly accountable for improving student performance. Yet, while one can classify charter schools in this simplistic way, there is nothing simple about assessing the impact of charter schools. For example, the statutes and regulations that govern charter schools are different in every state, so it is difficult to compare these schools with their peers in other parts of the country. Also, it is difficult to compare fairly new charter schools that are just getting started with our traditional public schools that have been in existence for generations.

But despite the complexity of evaluating charter schools, policy makers are interested in having the best available information about how these new schools are performing. Thus, this evaluation report was prepared for the State of South Carolina for the purpose of evaluating the South Carolina charter school effort that was begun in 1996. This report was developed, specifically, to address the evaluation requirement in the SC charter school legislation (Chapter 40, Section 59-40-160,b) The key sentence from this legislation relating to evaluation is shown below:

“The State Board of Education shall review the implementation and effectiveness of this chapter (charter schools)...and issue a final report and recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly during the fifth year (2002) after the effective date of this chapter.”

In response to this legislation, our report reviews a variety of data and other indicators which shed light on how the charter school program has been implemented and to what degree it has been effective. In addition, this report includes our observations about various aspects of the program and our policy recommendations for consideration as future decisions are made regarding the South Carolina charter schools.

Brief Overview of Charter Schools Nationwide

To better understand and appreciate the charter school movement in South Carolina, it is helpful to review the history of charter schools in the United States.

Charter schools began to change the education landscape in America during the early 1990s. The first charter school law was passed in Minnesota in 1991, and the first charter school opened in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1992. In the past ten years, charter schools have steadily increased in numbers, with approximately 580,000 students currently enrolled nationwide in about 2,500 schools (Fiegel, 2002). While this growth has been significant over the past decade, it should be noted that charters still make up only around one percent of the public school enrollment nationwide; however, in some locations they are much more prevalent. For example, in Washington, DC, 14% of students are enrolled in public charter schools (Center for Education Reform, 2002). There are currently charter schools operating in 37 states. While two states, California and Arizona, have over 400 charter schools (Center for Education Reform Web Site), many states have relatively small programs. For the 37 states with charter school laws, there is an average of 71 charter schools per state. Some states, such as North Carolina, have statutory limits on the number of charter schools that may be operating at one time; the limit in North Carolina is currently set at 100 schools, but there have been some efforts to raise this cap.

From the beginning, the concept of charter schools has received widespread national attention, including both praise and criticism. Significantly, this attention has even come from the very highest levels of government. During his two terms in office, President Clinton repeatedly mentioned his belief in charter schools in several State of the Union Messages. President Clinton had, and likely still has, very high hopes that charter schools would bring major reform to public schools in America.

Likewise, President Bush is a very strong supporter of charter schools. His vigorous support was mentioned in a recent speech to the Manhattan Institute by US Secretary of Education Rod Paige. The Secretary noted President Bush's "solid support" for charter schools and he stated that, "Charter schools offer meaningful options for parents and their children—particularly for those children who would otherwise be left behind in low-performing schools." Dr. Paige went on to say that, "The good news is that charter schools do not just help the students they serve directly, they also prod the entire system to improve. New research from the US Department of Education shows that charter schools are helping regular public schools and districts to improve" (press release, US Department of Education, June 14, 2001).

The Congress has echoed this support from the Executive Branch and demonstrated its bipartisan support by providing significant Federal funding for charter schools. (It should be noted that the

South Carolina Department of Education prepared a grant proposal seeking a portion of these Federal funds. The Department was awarded a federal grant for \$4.1 million in 1997 to support the charter school effort in the State and another grant of \$6.2 million in 2000.)

In just a few years, charter schools have developed a strong and growing number of parent advocates and other local supporters who are willing to put forth enormous energy to create charter schools, and in some cases even literally construct the school buildings themselves. The support is both pragmatic and emotional. Some parents are so delighted to have the choice provided by charter schools they have called state education agencies in tears to express their gratitude for the legislation that created the charter option (Dr. Weaver Rogers, personal communication, 2001).

However, charter schools also have their skeptics (Wall Street Journal, 2002; Nathan, 1999). For example, traditional local school districts often worry that charter schools will skim off both their students and the financial funding associated with those students. (In reality, the experience of many charter schools is that they also tend to attract significant numbers of students from home schools and private schools.) And, many local districts also tend to feel that charter schools have unfair advantages over regular public schools, such as relief from regulations, which could help these schools' performance look better when compared to regular schools.

Still, some local school districts see charter schools as providing an excellent opportunity to provide educational programs or services that they might not be able to offer without the flexibility available to charter schools. Some districts have found charter schools to be a way to meet the special needs of hard to serve unique populations such as handicapped children. More districts may begin to explore charter schools due to new research just out this year (Slovacek, et al., 2002) indicating that, at least in some states, charter schools are doing a more effective job of improving the academic performance of students from low income families.

Some teacher associations worry that charter schools will reduce their memberships. Minority groups sometimes worry that charter schools supporters have a hidden agenda and want to re-segregate schools.

Advocates for traditional schools sometimes believe that charter schools are the first step toward vouchers and tax credits and may even represent the ultimate unraveling of the American public school system which has done so much for the development of our country. State Boards of Education and state legislatures, aware of their fiduciary responsibilities, may feel insecure in endorsing the enrollment of children in new, unproven schools run by parents and community leaders who may not have regular education credentials.

Thus, from a national perspective, charter schools have grown more quickly than some would have imagined, but at this point it is just too early to say whether they have either been as bad as their critics anticipated or as good as their supporters had hoped.

Brief History of Charter Schools in South Carolina

In 1996, after discussion and debate lasting almost seven months, the South Carolina General Assembly joined several other states in passing its own version of a Charter Schools Act (Act No. 447). The Act authorized charter schools to receive exemptions from various state regulations, but the statute also prescribed accountability standards that these new schools were required to meet in order to keep their charters.

By setting no cap on how many schools could exist, the legislation essentially permitted local boards of education to sponsor, at least theoretically, an unlimited number of charter schools. However, the charter school bill gives local school districts the full authority to determine whether a school can be chartered, and, like local districts across the country, some South Carolina school districts appear to be skeptical about charter schools. Thus, having a large number of charter schools in the near future under the existing South Carolina legislation is, in a practical sense, highly unlikely.

And, in fact, this practical limitation on numbers has been the experience in South Carolina, with only eight schools in operation as of May 2002, compared to neighboring states such as North Carolina where 100 charter schools have been created in approximately the same time period that the South Carolina law has existed.

In total, thirteen chartered schools have opened for business in South Carolina during the past five years. (Six additional charter schools have been approved or conditionally approved during March through May 2002, and are scheduled to open in the near future.)

However, three of the thirteen schools that opened have now been closed (Bethune Charter School, Education Redirection, and Harbor School for Arts and Sciences). The reasons for closing vary from school to school. They include (1) mismanagement (violations include allegations such as operating the school as a religious institution, denying access to its sponsor, irregularities with the governing body, excessive class sizes, questionable attendance policies, inaccurate enrollment information, falsifying data, invalid IEPs, etc.); (2) financial reasons (staff not being paid, excessive debt, IRS issues, etc); and (3) academic issues such as low student performance.

Since the South Carolina charter school law was passed, thirty-six schools have applied for approval, and some have applied to more than one district. As mentioned above, nineteen schools are either open or scheduled to open. Of the seventeen charter applications that were denied, ten have been appealed to the State Board of Education. Seven of the local board decisions have been upheld by the State Board of Education. In one appeal, *Beaufort County Board of Education v. Lighthouse Charter School Committee*, 335 S.C. 230, 516 S.E.2d 655 (1999), the State Board reversed the local board's decision. In two cases, the State Board reversed the decision on some issues and remanded some issues back to the local boards with instructions for reconsideration. Neither of these two applications resulted in approved charter schools. A summary of this information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Charter Applications and Actions Since Enabling Legislation (as of May 2002)

Applicants	36
Approved (includes 6 schools scheduled to open)	19
Chartered and opened since enabling legislation	13
Closed	5
Denied charter or not opened for other reasons	17
Appeals	10
Local board decision upheld by SBE	7
Local board decision reversed or remanded back by SBE	3

One of the major legal issues regarding charter schools has revolved around the proposed Lighthouse Charter School on Hilton Head Island. The Lighthouse Charter School has been the vehicle through which court challenges have been brought regarding the charter school law requirement that the racial composition of a charter school may not differ from the racial composition of the school district by more than 10%. The litigation basically addresses whether this requirement is lawful. Having proceeded through the lower courts, the matter is currently being considered by the South Carolina Supreme Court, and the final decision could certainly have a major impact on charter schools in South Carolina. If, for example, the court were to rule that the racial requirement invalidated the entire charter school statute, the status of both current and prospective charter school would be very uncertain. As we complete this report, a ruling has not yet been made by the Supreme Court.

In the time period since the initial charter school legislation was passed, there have been efforts to modify the provisions of the law. Proposed revisions to the South Carolina charter school law were introduced during the both the 2000 and 2001 Sessions of the South Carolina Legislature. One modification considered under H.B. 3386 (companion Bill S.B. 12) was changing the 10% restriction on how much a charter school could deviate from its sponsoring school district's racial composition. And while both bills passed in their respective chambers, with a last minute compromise reached on the racial-balance requirement just six minutes prior to adjournment of the Session, no further action was taken in the 2001 Session.

During the current 2002 Session of the Legislature a bill is pending, supported by the South Carolina Department of Education, which could make major changes in the Charter School law. However, as we finish this report, we do not yet know the outcome of this legislation.

Description of Individual Charter Schools in South Carolina

We recognize that some readers of this report will be unfamiliar with the charter schools in South Carolina. To assist these readers in having an overview of the schools currently chartered in South Carolina, and, thus, to help those readers to better understand the remainder of this evaluation report, the following brief narrative summary is provided. This material is taken directly from information on the South Carolina Department of Education Web-Site.

It should be noted that evaluative judgments contained in some of these descriptions were written by the school organizers in previous years and represent the "intent" of the school when it was established, rather than any conclusion of this report. For some schools, we have also provided a brief comment in italics at the end of the description related to recent data presented by the schools in annual reports or other documents.

Charles Aiken Academy

The mission of the Charles Aiken Academy is to provide acutely at-risk boys with a comprehensive environment for learning and personal/social development that will improve chances for entry into mainstream educational programs.

Charles Aiken Academy is a charter school established as a part of the Boys Home of the South. The home was founded in 1958 in Southern Greenville County to care for abandoned, abused, and neglected children. Located on the Boys Home grounds, the school is housed in three portable classrooms and an existing gym building.

Service is primarily to special education students of various classifications. Great emphasis is placed on core learning area and the mastery of fundamental functions. Emphasis is placed on real-world experiences. Students are almost weekly provided field trips to meaningful locations where not only career awareness and exploration can take place, but also where various aspects of social development can be observed and practiced. Individual Educational Plans are utilized. A great amount of individual attention is given plus the utilization of several volunteer tutors from the surrounding community. Boys Home staff are utilized, and the counseling and therapy services provided an immediate and effective guidance and counseling element to the educational program.

The Boys Home accommodates up to 46 boys of varying abilities and emotional and psychological levels. It was decided that an on-campus, whole school, integrated services approach would provide a better opportunity for this group of boys to prepare for future happiness and success. Charles Aiken Academy opened in January 1998.

Comment: In December, 2001, Charles Aiken Academy received a school grade of Average, an absolute rating of Below Average, and an improvement rating of Good.

Discovery School of Lancaster County

In addition to supporting the mission of the Lancaster County School District, Discovery School of Lancaster County provides services to a diverse population of students in a unique learning environment with special emphasis on academic innovation and flexibility while encouraging students to excel in one or more areas of intelligence and promoting professional development opportunities for educators throughout the district.

Discovery School serves students in grades K-4. Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, based on the belief that there is more than one form of cognition, provides the structure for a unique learning environment. Students are provided with challenging activities that have traditionally been reserved only for students identified as academically gifted and talented. Through problem-based learning, students have the opportunity to apply knowledge in new and different ways as they work to develop solutions to real-world problems through research, reasoning, and critical thinking.

A key feature of Discovery School is its emphasis on professional growth. Teachers and administrators from across the district have the opportunity to take part in staff development available through the school.

Discovery School of Lancaster County is the result of the efforts of a thirty-six member task force (composed of parents, teachers, administrators, business and community leaders, and representatives from local colleges and universities) who value student achievement, innovative teaching and learning practices, parental support and the atmosphere that a small school setting provides. Discovery School opened in August 2000.

Comment: Discovery School reports a high level of parental involvement and satisfaction. In 2000-2001 they report 97% of parents contribute 30 hours or more of volunteer service to the school. Seventy six percent of parents reported that they were satisfied with the progress their child was making at the Discovery School. The school received an absolute rating of excellent on their 2001 school report card.

Greenville Technical Charter High School

Greenville Technical Charter High School provides equitable opportunities for all students to acquire an education focused on linkages among rigorous academics, technology, and careers to produce graduates who are prepared for success in the global workforce of the 21st century.

Located on the main campus of Greenville Technical College, this high school provides a rigorous academic foundation, as well as technical and technology training necessary for employment and advancement in the contemporary economy. The project-based curriculum is modeled after prevailing practices in the workplace. Each student has an individualized academic roadmap to guide him or her through four years of high school. This process is accentuated by providing career and academic advisement with close association to adult mentors from the business community, as well as the college faculty and staff. Students are

required to participate in community services that culminate in a community involvement presentation. As high school juniors and seniors, the students will have the opportunity to enroll in transferable college credit.

Upstate business and industry, based on continuous employment needs, encouraged Greenville Technical College to design and develop a comprehensive technical high school uniquely positioned with career academic focus to train a highly skilled workforce with problem solving and critical thinking skills. Greenville Technical Charter High School opened in August 1999. It is supported by the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce and over thirty local businesses.

Comment: An independent research report concludes that students enrolled at Greenville Technical Charter High school, as of May, 2001, scored higher than the national average on the Stanford Achievement Test. Students scored slightly lower than the district average on the reading portion of the South Carolina Exit Examination, but equal to the district average on the writing and mathematics portion of the Exit Examination.

Loop Charter School

The mission of LOOP is to provide a stable environment through two-year cycles where students' academic achievement and character can be developed and enhanced in a technologically rich environment with an expanded curriculum and significant parental/community support.

LOOP is designed to increase the academic achievement of students who can benefit from a cycle in which the teacher remains with the same group of students for two years. It targets students whose social, emotional and cognitive growth needs to be nurtured through contact with a caring teacher who is trained in the concept of looping. LOOP is housed in McCormick Elementary School. Enrollment is no larger than 18 students per class.

The rigorous curriculum includes an integrated reading series, the Cunningham model, computer instruction, Everyday math, thematic units, and community tutors. LOOP students benefit from field experiences beyond those of their peers. They are exposed to dinner theatre, overnight explorations to places such as the Barrier Island, and family and extended family picnics and social outings. These experiences broaden cognitive and emotional development and enrich their learning. Parents must sign agreements that a certain amount of time will be devoted to connecting with teachers through conferences, school visitations, and volunteering in the classrooms.

The school was born out of a discussion with a group of educators and parents who were looking for ways to ensure high levels of success in the early grades. LOOP Charter School opened in August 1998.

Comment: A first year independent evaluation of LOOP indicated that "virtually all parents are actively involved with the charter school" and "...in general, parents were very satisfied with the program, the teachers and the progress being made by their children."

McCormick Challenge Academy

The mission of McCormick Challenge Academy is to increase achievement, promote responsible behavior, and develop good citizenship for high-risk students in a non-traditional setting, MCA will expose students to career opportunities and assist them in the decision making process.

Located in the Vocational Building on the McCormick High School campus, McCormick Challenge Academy is designed to increase achievement, promote responsible behavior, and develop good citizenship. Students are exposed to an array of career opportunities and receive assistance in the career decision-making process. The Academy's faculty uses a three dimensional approach of direct instruction, computer-assisted learning, and environmental learning to meet the South Carolina's academic standards in the four core areas and demonstrate appropriate citizenship.

To decrease the county dropout rate, the McCormick County School District board of trustees developed the McCormick Challenge Academy to reach high-risk students. They wanted to provide a positive educational experience for the students. The Academy opened in August of 2001.

Meyer Center For Special Children

The Meyer Center for Special Children provides quality education and therapy services to preschool children with disabilities.

The Meyer Center for Special Children is Upstate South Carolina's only integrative education-therapy setting. As a Greenville County Charter School, United Way Social Service Agency, and DHEC Rehab Facility, the Center has many unique opportunities to utilize combined federal, state, and community resources. An interdisciplinary team provides a comprehensive range of intensive developmental and family services, which promote growth in all developmental and family services, which promote growth in all developmental areas.

Certified teachers provide individual and group learning experiences based on a child's developmental age and specific needs. Speech-Language pathologists work to improve a child's communication; interventions include language stimulation, oral motor therapy, and use of assistive technology. Occupational therapists work with a child to improve his/her fine motor skills and ability to explore and adjust to his/her environment. Physical therapists work with a child to improve his/her gross motor skills in order to maximize quality of movement for functional activities. Social workers provide support for families and assist in coordination of services.

Dr. Leslie C. Meyer founded the Meyer Center in 1954. The Center began its charter school operation in August 1999.

Comment: As early as June, 2000, the Meyer Center Charter School reported early success in achieving 70% of education goals and 71% of therapy goals.

The Phoenix Center

By personalizing education in a small, supportive environment, the Phoenix Center empowers school-resistant students to become productive citizens in a ever-changing society. The success of the Center is determined by the success of individual students who develop positive attitudes and improved social behaviors and who can enter the workforce or post-secondary education with confidence.

The Phoenix Center serves students in grades 9-12 who are considered divergent learners. These school-resistant , non-traditional students have experiences little success in the traditional school environment. The divergent learner responds to supportive teachers in a small, nurturing environment. The Center's teachers are employed for their proven record of relationship building and patience with this population of hard-to-serve students. The curriculum is designed around the state standards, and it also incorporates lessons from the environment of surrounding farmlands and the Santee Cooper Lake system, making learning as relevant as possible. Students participate in vocational training, job skills development, character education, and volunteerism.

Students who have only known a history of failure in the traditional school system slowly begin to progress both academically and socially.

Frustrated by students who wanted to excel but lacked the necessary skill in reading and writing, a committee of teachers , coaches, and guidance counselors initiated the concept of the school. The Phoenix Center opened in August 1999.

Comment: The schools 2002 Annual Report notes some disappointment with test scores, but a plan for improvement in this area. The report also discusses encouraging employment figures and good attendance figures.

Youth Academy Charter School

The mission of the Youth Academy Charter School is to provide a quality educational experience for special needs students in a supportive environment specifically addressing academic preparedness, life skills, vocational readiness, and behavior management.

The Youth Academy Charter School is designed for non-diploma track ninth through twelfth graders who are emotionally handicapped, learning disabled, or home-based. Instruction is combined with a family-centered treatment approach. The curriculum emphasizes computer-based instruction in literacy remediation and GED preparation. Vocational training includes classroom instruction, hands-on experience, and career training development.

The major goals of the Youth Academy Charter School are: (1) to provide a learning environment which delivers a successful academic experience to special needs youth who have not been successful in a traditional school environment., (2) To afford individualized learning opportunities that enables students to function on at least an eight-grade level in basic reading, writing, and mathematics skills, (3) To enable students, given entry skill levels, to earn GED

certificates, (4) To promote students' self-sufficiency through instruction in basic life skill., (5) To provide vocational skills training which will result in job placement and retention, and (6) To give all students the opportunity through the behavior management component to build a strong sense of self-discipline and motivation.

The Youth Academy has delivered treatment services in a residential group setting since 1988. The Youth Academy opened as a charter school in October 1999.

Comment: Youth Academy has a limit of 15 student slots. The students are all classified as special education and are on a "certificate" track. The GED is the planned outcome for the students. The school reported a 10% gain in Pre-GED scores from school year 2000 to 2001.

Demographics, Student Performance and Other Charter School Data

In the previous section of this report, we provided a narrative description of the charter schools currently operating in South Carolina. In the next section, we analyze the implementation of the South Carolina charter school law by looking at student performance data and other measures of how the program is functioning.

Limitations of Evaluation

Before presenting the data for this section of the report, it is important to point out the following limiting factors which should be considered in tandem with the statistics. First, the South Carolina Charter Schools Act of 1996 requires an evaluation during the fifth year of implementation. However, in the fifth year (2001-2002) only eight charter schools are currently operating. Furthermore, only two of the eight charter schools have been enrolling and teaching students for three complete years. One charter school opened in the fall of 2001 so that an evaluation of student performance is not possible. Thus, it may be too early to determine the impact of the eight charter schools on student achievement and education.

Second, each of the charter schools has a unique mission and purpose, and several of the schools serve very special student populations. Schools with comparable student bodies simply do not exist for the following charter schools: Charles Aiken, McCormick Challenge, Meyer Center, The Phoenix Center, and Youth Academy. For example, the Youth Academy Charter School targets special needs high school students who have emotional, behavioral, and learning disabilities. Many of these students would be in alternative schools or in home placements if the Youth Academy were not available. The Phoenix Center serves high school students who are described as "school resistant" because of their history of failure in traditional schools. Although high schools across the state most likely have students who would be classified as "school resistant," there is no comparable high school in South Carolina whose entire student population consists of such pupils.

Third, a major limitation to the study is the small sample size. Eight charter schools, as compared to 1,000 public schools, is a very small sample. In addition, only one of the charter schools enrolls more than 100 students, and three charter schools have fewer than 20 students,

for a total of only 595 students (based on fall 2001 enrollment data). Because of the limited number of charter schools and the small student populations in each of the eight schools, it is inappropriate to draw broad conclusions about the potential benefits of charter schools from the analysis of the data from these eight schools.

Because of the unique student populations served by more than half of the existing charter schools and the small sample size, the most appropriate form of evaluation is a case study. Therefore, data will be presented separately for each of the eight charter schools, with limited summaries across the eight schools.

Fourth, other difficulties in evaluating the charter schools include the change in the South Carolina school testing program. The Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests (PACT) replaced the Basic Skills Assessment Program for grades 3 through 8 in the spring of 1999. A new Exit Exam, a requirement for graduation, was given to tenth graders in spring 2001. Consequently, the evaluation cannot compare scores for elementary schools prior to 1999 with subsequent scores; and the evaluation for high schools will be limited to the first administration of the exit exam in 2001.

Fifth, evaluation plans would normally be developed as a part of the overall planning process. Although charter schools have submitted required reports and data to the local districts and to the South Carolina State Department of Education, there has not been a systematic and ongoing evaluation. Each district has used the information to determine whether charters will be revoked or extended. However, the information has not been used for the purpose of a comprehensive examination of how charter schools are performing. A good plan needs to include both formative and summative evaluations. Formative evaluations would ensure that charter schools receive feedback on a regular basis so that mid-course adjustments can be made prior to the summative evaluation, which typically is used to make decisions about the program.

This evaluation was designed early in 2002 and implemented over the course of eight weeks. Ideally the evaluation would have begun in 1997 with the implementation of the first charter schools so that information would have been collected regularly and systematically for all charter schools, including those that are no longer in existence. This report primarily uses existing data, collecting new data through one administration of questionnaires, interviews, and a single on-site visit to each charter school. A more thorough evaluation would have included multiple and repeated measures to examine change over time.

Given these limitations, readers are cautioned not to generalize the findings in this report beyond the eight charter schools we studied; it would be inappropriate to make assumptions about how a larger charter school program might function based on only eight schools.

Based upon a case study approach, this report provides both quantitative and qualitative information about the performance of the eight charter schools and about the implementation of the charter school legislation.

Methodology

Source of Data. To provide background information, we reviewed a variety of studies and reports on charter schools from SC and from across the nation. For additional information, we met with John Fiegel, head of the office of charter schools in the US Department of Education, to discuss current charter school issues and trends from a national perspective. These reports, studies and discussions provided guidance to us as we designed a questionnaire (see Appendix F for a copy of this instrument) to administer to the directors of the South Carolina charter schools. This same information was also used to develop interview questions for the directors and the superintendents of the school districts which chartered the eight existing schools.

The South Carolina State Department of Education was very helpful in providing specific information about South Carolina charter schools, including enrollment and report card data, copies of the charter applications, renewal applications, and annual reports.

Principals of the eight charter schools responded to a 16-item questionnaire that included checklists and rating scales as well as some open-ended items. A member of the evaluation team conducted on-site visits to each of the charter schools and interviewed the directors. Telephone or mail interviews were conducted with superintendents of the districts where charter schools were located; however, we were unable to gather responses from one of the superintendents (Greenville County). We also conducted telephone interviews with key educators and government officials in the State of South Carolina who were especially knowledgeable about charter schools.

Data Analysis. All quantifiable data were entered into Excel spreadsheets for analysis. Summary statistics (frequencies, ranges, means, and medians) were computed when appropriate. Because of the disparity in size, grades and ages of students, and purposes of the eight charter schools, summarizing data across the schools was not always appropriate. Inferential statistics are clearly inappropriate for a data set so small and so different from the general student population.

Demographics and Report Card Data

A total of 595 students enrolled in the eight charter school in fall of 2001. However, the schools range in size from 280 students at Greenville Technical Charter High School to 15 each at Charles Aiken Academy and the Youth Academy. Small enrollments characterize the charter schools. Only three charter schools report a waiting list for enrollment, with the Discovery School having a waiting list of 50 students. The Phoenix Center and Youth Academy have six and two, respectively, on waiting lists, indicating that these charter schools have reached their capacity enrollment. Student attendance ranges from 63% at the Meyer Center to 100% at the Charles Aiken Academy. Five of the eight schools have average attendance over 90%.

Table 2.
Profiles of Charter Schools

Charter School	Date Established	Grades	Fall 2001 Enrollment	# on Waiting List	Average Attendance
Charles Aiken	January 1998	1-8	15	0	100%
Discovery School	August 2000	K-4	90	50	99.1%
Greenville Technical	August 1999	9-12	280	0	95%
LOOP	August 1998	1-4	80	0	98.0%
McCormick Challenge	August 2001	9	17	0	94.0%
Meyer Center	August 1999	PreK-2	53	0	63.0%
The Phoenix Center	August 1999	9-12	45	6	88.0%
Youth Academy	October 1999	9-12	15	2	80.0%
Total			595		

Source of information: www.myschools.com/offices/ssys/alternative_education/charter_schools

Demographics. In Table 3 are the 2001-2002 enrollment data by gender, race, and free lunch status. Overall 58% of the charter school students are classified as white, 38% as black, and 4% as other races. Slightly more males than females attend charter schools (56% and 44% respectively). Slightly less than one-third receive free lunches.

Table 3.
Charter School Student Enrollment Data (04/09/02)

CHARTER SCHOOLS	Enrollment	White Males	White Females	Black Males	Black Females	Other Males	Other Females	Free Lunch
Charles Aiken	12	7	0	5	0	0	0	12
% of Total		58.3%	0.0%	41.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Discovery	90	32	30	15	12	1	0	17
% of Total		35.6%	33.3%	16.7%	13.3%	1.1%	0.0%	18.9%
Greenville Tech	240	100	69	23	32	4	12	13
% of Total		41.7%	28.8%	9.6%	13.3%	1.7%	5.0%	5.4%
Loop	80	10	10	28	32	0	0	58
% of Total		12.5%	12.5%	35.0%	40.0%	0.0%	0.0%	72.5%
McCormick	14	2	0	12	0	0	0	10
% of Total		14.3%	0.0%	85.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	71.4%
Meyer	43	22	10	4	5	1	1	21
% of Total		51.2%	23.3%	9.3%	11.6%	2.3%	2.3%	48.8%
Phoenix	46	13	9	18	6	0	0	25
% of Total		28.3%	19.6%	39.1%	13.0%	0.0%	0.0%	54.3%
Youth Academy	15	1	0	6	8	0	0	15
% of Total		6.7%	0.0%	40.0%	53.3%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
TOTALS	540	187	128	111	95	6	13	171
		34.6%	23.7%	20.6%	17.6%	1.1%	2.4%	31.7%

Teacher Data. Greenville Technical Charter High School has the largest number of teachers: 15 full-time and two part-time. The Youth Academy has one full-time teacher and two teacher

assistants. The number of teachers and teaching assistants is clearly a function of the size of the school and the needs of the student population. All full-time teachers have teaching experience, with an average of 14.9 years. All except one part-time teacher has previous teaching experience, with an average of 11.6 years of experience.

Table 4.
Profile of Teachers

School	# FT Teachers	# PT Teachers	Average Years Exp. FT Teachers	Average Years Exp. PT Teachers	# Teacher Assistants
Charles Aiken	2	1	4	0	0
Discovery School	6	4	18	8	2
Greenville Technical	15	2	7	6	1
LOOP	5	0	14		0
McCormick Challenge	1	6	13	14	1
Meyer Center	5	0	15		10
The Phoenix Center	2	4	18	30	0
Youth Academy	1	0	30		2
Mean	4.6	2.1	14.9	11.6	2
Range	1-15	0-6	4-30	0-30	0-10
Median	3.5	1.5	14.5	8	1

Exp.=Experience

FT=Full-Time

PT=Part-Time

Certification of Teachers. Of the 37 full-time teachers, 33 are certified teachers, constituting 89% of the total. Sixteen of the 17 part-time teachers are certified teachers, for an overall percentage of 94%. These certification levels are significantly above the minimum standard of 75% required by the South Carolina charter school law. Part-time teachers are included, based upon the proportion of time they teach.

Table 5.
Certification of Teachers

School	% Full-Time Teachers Certified	% Part-Time Teachers Certified	# Full-Time Teachers Certified	# Part-Time Teachers Certified
Charles Aiken	50%	100%	1	1
Discovery School	100%	100%	6	4
Greenville Technical	87%	50%	13	1
LOOP	100%		5	0
McCormick Challenge	100%	100%	1	6
Meyer Center	100%		5	0
The Phoenix Center	50%	100%	1	4
Youth Academy	100%		1	0

School Grades and Ratings. The first annual report card was released December 2001 in accordance with the Education Accountability Act of 1998 and as amended in 2001. For specifics on the determination of school ratings and grades, readers should refer to the 2001-2002 Accountability Manual (published June 2001, pages 7-16). References in the following paragraphs are to this manual.

Each school is assigned three ratings: an absolute performance rating, an improvement performance rating, and the School Grade. As defined in the manual, "Absolute performance means the rating a school will receive based on the percentage of students meeting standard on the state's standards based assessment," and "Improvement performance means the rating a school will receive based on longitudinally matched student data comparing current performance to their previous year's for the purpose of determining student academic growth" (p. 10). The School Grade is an overall rating based on the absolute and improvement ratings. The five rating categories are excellent, good, average, below average, and unsatisfactory.

Ratings for schools enrolling students in grades two or below are based on the following criteria: student attendance, pupil to teacher ratio, parent involvement, professional development, and external accreditation. The Meyer Center is rated using these criteria.

For schools enrolling students in grades three through eight, student performance is measured by standards-based assessments. English language arts and mathematics tests (Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests, or PACT) have been developed for use in grades three through eight. Science and social studies tests will be added.

For high school students, an exit examination with subtests in reading, writing, and mathematics is used to measure longitudinal performance and passing rates for tenth graders. Additional criteria for high schools are the percentage of students eligible for LIFE scholarships (i.e., students meeting both the grade point average and SAT/ACT criteria established by the State) and graduation rate (to be implemented in 2003).

As allowed by the Charter School Law, Charles Aiken Charter School chose to release its own report card and received a School Grade of average with an absolute rating of below average and an improvement rating of good. Discovery School had a School Grade of excellent and an absolute rating of excellent. An improvement rating was not available because of a lack of longitudinal data. The Loop School received a School Grade of good and absolute and improvement ratings of good. McCormick Challenge Academy first opened in the fall of 2001 and therefore did not have 2000-2001 data on which the 2001 school report cards were based. Either because of small numbers of students or lack of data, the other charter schools do not have grades or ratings.

Ratings of Satisfaction. Limited survey data are reported on the satisfaction of teachers and students with learning environment, social and physical environment, and home-school relations. For charter schools with satisfaction data, the results are reported in Table 6.

Table 6.
Ratings of Satisfaction

	Discovery School	Greenville Technical	LOOP	Phoenix Center	Youth Academy
Satisfaction Ratings					
Teachers' satisfaction					
with learning environment	100.0%	73.7%			
with social and physical environment	100.0%	72.2%			
with home-school relations	100.0%	76.5%			
Students' satisfaction					
with learning environment		73.1%	66.7%	92.3%	100.0%
with social and physical environment		86.3%	64.7%	100.0%	80.0%
with home-school relations		89.7%	88.9%	100.0%	80.0%

Indicators of School Performance

Data for measures common to the six charter schools with report card data are presented in Appendix C.

Dollars Spent per Student. The charter schools vary greatly in combined federal, state and district funds spent per student. The Meyer Center reports an annual expenditure of \$12,655 per child. However, the Meyer Center employs speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and social workers, in addition to teachers, who provide intensive services for the children and their families. In contrast, the LOOP Charter School reports spending only \$1,990 per student. Greenville Technical Charter High School spends **less** per student than comparable schools, whereas The Phoenix Center has annual expenditures per student that exceed that of the median for the type of school.

Instructional Time. Charter schools report the percentage of instructional time when both teachers and students are present that is in line with comparable schools. Variations appear negligible.

Student-Teacher Ratio in Core Subjects. Charter schools consistently have lower student-teacher ratios in English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies classes than comparable schools or school of the same type. The Meyer Center and the Phoenix Center have the lowest ratios of 9 students per one teacher. The average for the six charter schools is 13.4 students per teacher.

Student Attendance Rate. The average number of students in attendance each day is consistent with the percentages of similar schools. The average for the five charter schools reporting is 95%.

Student Retention. The Phoenix Center is the only charter school that has a higher percentage of students repeating grade levels as compared to other high schools. However, there is no other high school that serves similar "school-resistant" students with behavioral problems, so a 13% retention rate should not be viewed negatively. In the previous year, the Phoenix Center had a

retention rate of 6.7%. Because of the small size of the school (n=45), two additional students retained increases the retention rate from 6.7% to 13.3% from 2000 to 2001. The two elementary schools reported no students retained, as well as the Youth Academy which serves special needs high school students.

Teacher Professional Development. The number of professional development days for teachers varies from 14.7 at Discovery School to 5.3 days at Youth Academy. Three of the six schools have as many or more professional development days as comparable schools.

Teacher Attendance. Overall teachers in charter schools have a slightly higher attendance rate for teachers than at comparable schools (95.31% compared to 95.1%). Variations among charter schools range from 88% at Youth Academy to 98.7% at Greenville Tech.

Teachers with Advanced Degrees. Discovery, Greenville Technical, and LOOP charter schools all have a higher percentage of teachers with degrees above a bachelors than comparable schools. The Meyer Center is in line with other similar schools. The Phoenix Center and Youth Academy have a lower percentage of teachers with advanced degrees as compared to other high schools. However, these two schools have no schools that serve similar student populations with which to compare.

Teachers with Out-of-Field Permits. Greenville Tech, Phoenix Center, and Youth Academy have a significant percent of teachers employed to teach outside of their field(s) of certification. However, one would expect this to be the case, given the nature of the schools—technical education emphasis, non-diploma high school program, and life skills/behavior management program. The Discovery School, serving elementary students, LOOP and the Meyer Center have no out-of-field teachers. Data are not reported for Charles Aiken and McCormick Challenge.

Average Teacher Salary. Charter schools report average teacher salaries ranging from \$17,933 at Youth Academy to \$44,718 at Discovery School. However, the Youth Academy employs one full-time teacher who is retired and earning half of a teacher salary. Except for the Discovery School, charter schools have salaries that average less than that of comparable elementary or high schools.

Percentage Expenditures on Teacher Salaries. Only the Phoenix Center has a higher percentage of expenditures on teacher salaries than other high schools (94.3% as compared to 56.4%). Although this percentage is high, the student-teacher ratio of 1 to 9 is much lower than other high schools and the Phoenix Center has two full-time and four part-time teachers.

Parent Conferences. The percentage of students whose parents or guardians attended a parent conference was higher for most charter schools than students attending similar schools. Discovery School had 100% of parents participating in conferences. Greenville Tech reports participation of parents at 70.5%; however, this percentage is still higher than comparable high schools which have a participation rate of only 61.9%. Youth Academy Charter School reports only 5% parent participation, but the students' backgrounds and the nature of the school make the low figure not unexpected.

Opportunities in the Arts. Of the six charter schools rated on opportunities in the arts, based upon the number of arts disciplines offered and the percentage of arts classes taught by teachers certified in the arts, only the LOOP elementary school received a rating of good. The other five received poor ratings. Comparable schools had ratings of good to excellent.

Students Older than Usual for Grade. Only three charter schools reported data on this variable. Greenville Tech had only 3.9% of its students older than grade, down from 6.8% in the previous year. Schools similar to Greenville Tech had 5.4% of students older than grade. Youth Academy, with 64%, has almost two-thirds of its students, older than grade. However, given the mission of the Youth Academy, this high percentage is not unexpected; in fact, it indicates that the school is serving its targeted student population. The Phoenix Center reported 50% of its students older than grade.

Students Suspended or Expelled. The three charter schools serving high school students had a total of 16 students suspended or expelled. The numbers for each school are much lower than the median of 29 for high schools in general. Discovery, LOOP, and the Meyer Center had **no** suspensions or expulsions.

Students Gifted and Talented. Of the five charter schools reporting data, only the Discovery and LOOP schools reported any gifted and talented students, with over one-fourth (26.6%) of Discovery's students and 5.9% of LOOP's students classified as gifted and talented.

Students with Disabilities other than Speech. The Meyer Center has 100% of its students eligible for IDEA and receiving services. The Youth Academy reports that 24% of its students have disabilities other than speech. These are much higher percentages than comparable schools. Greenville Tech, with 9.1%, and LOOP, with 6.1%, have percentages more similar to comparable schools than the Meyer Center and the Youth Academy. The Discovery and Phoenix charter schools report **no** students with disabilities other than speech.

Elementary School PACT Statistics. Discovery and LOOP elementary schools reported student performance on the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests (PACT) in mathematics and reading/English language arts. Charles Aiken submitted PACT data in its report card, which will be discussed in a separate paragraph at the end of this section. In mathematics, both Discovery and LOOP had a slightly higher percentage of students in the proficient and advanced categories combined than did comparable schools. The Discovery School had 10% **fewer** students scoring below basic than comparable schools. In fact, 94% of students at Discovery School performed at the basic or above level on the math PACT, and two-thirds of students at LOOP scored at basic or above on the math PACT.

In the English/language arts, both schools had a lower percentage classified as advanced and proficient than comparable schools. However, both schools had a lower percentage classified as below basic than comparable schools. Both schools had high proportions scoring at the basic or above level: 94% for Discovery and 85% for LOOP. These results indicate that the schools are providing at least a comparable, if not better, education in mathematics and English/language arts as other similar elementary schools.

The Charles Aiken school had seven students who took the mathematics PACT examination. One scored at the basic level, and the other six scored at the below basic level. Charles Aiken reported English/language arts PACT scores for eight students. Two of the eight scored basic, and the remaining six scored below basic.

High School Exit Exam and LIFE Scholarships Statistics. Greenville Technical Charter School and The Phoenix Center report data on the tenth grade exit examination.

Greenville Tech had 73% of its tenth graders passing all three subtests, as compared to 76.3% for similar high schools. It must be noted that Greenville Tech showed improvement from 2000 to 2001, increasing by over 10% the proportion of tenth graders passing all three subtests.

The Phoenix Center had 36% of its tenth graders passing all three exams in 2001, an improvement from 11% in the previous year. Only 9% did not pass any of the exams. There are no high schools with a student population similar to The Phoenix Center, so no comparisons are possible.

The Phoenix Center and Youth Academy both report that **none** of their students were eligible for LIFE scholarships, based upon grade point average and SAT/ACT criteria. Given the high risk student populations served by these charter schools, this result is not unexpected.

Survey Data

As mentioned earlier, survey information was collected from the eight charter schools in SC and from local district superintendents where charter schools are located; data were collected in late March and early April, 2002.

Information from the charter schools was obtained by written responses to the survey questions (see Appendix F) and from personal interviews conducted on the charter school campuses. Data from local district superintendents were collected through telephone interviews and written responses; however, we were unable to get results from one superintendent (Greenville County). The results from these efforts are summarized below. (We would note that these findings are self-reports and should not be considered "audited" or verified results).

Views of Charter School Directors: Results from Surveys and Interviews. Results from the survey show that most (75%) of the charter school directors believe that their schools have achieved their purpose to a great extent. Twenty five percent (25%) of the schools (Greenville Tech and Youth Academy) believe that they have achieved their purpose as much as could be expected.

Most (75%) of the schools indicate that they used a planning committee as they worked to establish their school. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of the charter schools had funds available for planning and starting up their schools, with most of the schools obtaining funds through the state's federal grant program; two schools (Charles Aiken and LOOP) report that they had some private funding available for initial expenses.

As far as barriers to starting and operating their schools, 62% of the charter schools report that not having adequate finances for ongoing operations was the main barrier. They mention the need to seek and rely on grant or private funding to supplement the inadequate public funds.

Also, regarding barriers to operating their schools, several of the directors report that they encountered specific problems related to paying adequate salaries (Charles Aiken, Greenville Tech, Phoenix Center, and Youth Academy), recruiting qualified teachers (Charles Aiken, Greenville Tech, Phoenix Center and Youth Academy), and getting support from the local school board and administration (Charles Aiken, Greenville Tech, and the Meyer Center).

A number of the charter schools (50%) report that they have had some problems in knowing where to find answers to questions about operating their school. In addition, 37% of the schools state they have had some problems in providing transportation for students (Greenville Tech, Phoenix Center and Youth Academy).

We asked each school to list the one most difficult problem they had encountered in operating a charter school. While the responses varied greatly, 37% of the schools did identify some sort of significant difficulty in working with their local school district administration as the most challenging problem they had faced. These sorts of difficulties were more common and more pronounced in districts where the charter school(s) developed independently of the district.

The SC charter schools report a significant amount of participatory activities involving the charter school boards and parents. Over half report that their administrative operation of the school involves board committees or other types of committees in addition to the school director/principal. Three of the schools (Discovery, LOOP, and Meyer Center) report that over 95% of their parents are actively involved in the school. Phoenix Center reports 50% active involvement, and two other schools (Greenville Tech and Youth Academy) report that between 20% and 25% of parents are actively involved. Eighty seven (87%) percent of the charter schools report that parents participate in school governance, 75% report that parents attend school conferences and meetings, and 75% report that parents assist with special events or extra-curricular activities. In addition, 37% of the parents contribute financially to the school. And, not surprisingly in view of these statistics, most charter school directors believe that parents participate in school activities more than is common in regular schools.

The charter schools use a variety of organizational systems. Half the schools have summer programs, half have ungraded or multi-graded classes, and half report that students do independent study. About a third of the schools offer after school programs. Other approaches used less frequently include before school programs (12.5%), year round programs (12.5%), block scheduling (25%), partnering with a career center (12.5%), and keeping students with the same teacher for two years (12.5%).

Likewise, the SC charter schools use a wide array of instructional strategies with their students with most schools using several strategies. Examples of approaches that were reported by the schools include using objects that the children can manipulate (87%), cooperative learning (87%), thematic teaching (50%), discovery learning (37.5%), team teaching (25%), peer tutoring

(87.5%), whole class instruction (87.5%), project based learning (12.5%) and technology enhanced learning (computer labs, remedial software, etc.)(87.5%).

When we asked the charter schools about their curriculum emphasis, 75% report that the South Carolina curriculum standards are the primary emphasis. Other areas of emphasis and the percent of charter schools having that emphasis are character education (65%), core knowledge (25%), direct instruction (37.5%), ethnically focused (12.5%), GED preparation (12.5%), mastery learning (12.5%) and rehabilitative therapy (12.5%).

We also asked how student progress is documented. The charter schools report that teacher tests are the most common method used. Also 75% of the schools use portfolios and student demonstrations or performances. All the schools must administer the standardized tests required by the state, and half the schools also report using some other type of standardized tests.

Our survey asked charter school directors to rate the adequacy of their school on six dimensions: facilities, teaching quality, diversity of student population, community support, student transportation, and computers and equipment.

The results show that only one school (Meyer Center) rates its facilities as “outstanding,” but five other schools rate their facilities as “good” (Charles Aiken, Discovery, McCormick Challenge, Phoenix Center and Youth Academy).

Regarding teacher quality, all the charter schools rate their staff as either “outstanding” or “good.”

Regarding diversity of the student population, Greenville Tech and LOOP rate their school “outstanding” on this item; Charles Aiken, Discovery and Meyer Center rate their school “good” regarding diversity.

In terms of community support, Discovery, LOOP and Meyer Center rate themselves very highly; Charles Aiken and Phoenix Center say that community support for their schools is not adequate, and the other schools report only fair community support. It is clear from the surveys that “marketing” (or explaining) the charter school to the community is a major obstacle for several schools. The directors seem to be unsure about how to “get the word out accurately” about what the charter school is and that enrollment is open.

Computers and related equipment appear to be outstanding at five of the charter schools: Discovery, Greenville Tech, LOOP, McCormick Challenge and the Meyer Center. Charles Aiken reports good computer availability while Phoenix Center and Youth Academy report only fair computer access.

We asked the charter schools what kinds of relief from state regulations had been beneficial. Our survey indicates that relief from the state and local textbook and/or supplementary material requirements is perceived as probably the most important type of flexibility to the South Carolina charter schools. Flexibility with teacher certification requirements is also mentioned as useful.

Three schools (Charles Aiken, Greenville Tech, and The Phoenix Center) employ non certified teachers. For all the other charter schools, 100% of their teachers are certified. Other types of flexibility reported as beneficial to the charter schools were using their own grading system, having to deal with fewer layers of state and local bureaucracy, having smaller classes, having freedom to select their curriculum approach and using the GED as a goal versus high school graduation.

Finally we asked to what degree the charter schools have made progress addressing the six purposes of charter schools as described in the SC charter school law. The six purposes are (1) improving student learning for the student population; (2) increasing learning activities and opportunities for students; (3) using a variety of productive teaching methods; (4) establishing new forms of accountability for your students; (5) creating new professional opportunities for your teachers; and (6) assisting South Carolina in reaching academic excellence. Each of the eight schools reports making progress on these purposes to at least a moderate degree or greater.

We should note that it seems clear from reviewing the surveys of the eight directors, and from the personal interviews with them, that the South Carolina charter schools were all started with a sincere desire to meet the needs of children (many of whom were, for a variety of reasons, not performing well in the traditional school setting) and not just as a business venture.

Views of Local School District Superintendents where Charter Schools are Located. As mentioned earlier, we received survey responses from all superintendents in districts where charter schools were located except for Greenville County, where three charter schools are located and where these charter schools expressed some dissatisfaction with the local district. Because of the missing data, we do not have a complete picture of the views of superintendents in those districts which did not initiate their charter school(s).

Even though Youth Academy Charter School was not initiated by the school district, the responses from the Superintendent in Williamsburg County indicate that there is a fairly cooperative relationship with the charter school. He states that the charter school is monitored and assisted much as any other school in the district. He also believes that the Youth Academy Charter School is performing reasonably at the present time.

In the school districts where the district has initiated the charter school (McCormick, Clarendon 2 and Lancaster), the relationships seem very harmonious. These districts seem to view the charter schools as important components of their overall system, and they work with the schools much as they would their other schools.

An Analysis of Key Components of the South Carolina Charter School Legislation

Another reasonable way of evaluating the South Carolina charter school effort is to analyze the key features of the enabling statute. The specifics of the legislation will, to a very large degree, impact the state's charter school effort. The state's charter school law basically creates the foundation upon which this new educational effort is built.

Indeed, with a strong foundation the charter school program is more likely to flourish; with a weak framework the program will struggle. As Jeanne Allen, President of the Center for Education Reform, is quoted as saying, “A strong charter school law is the single most important factor in creating strong charter schools” (Manuel & McLaughlin, in press).

Based on the kinds of charter school issues that have been most crucial nationally, we reviewed the SC charter school law and selected six key components for review.

Racial Composition Requirement

The SC legislation states that “under no circumstances may a charter school enrollment differ from the racial composition of the school district by more than ten percent.”

The issue of the racial composition of charter schools has drawn much attention and created considerable controversy across the country. As charter schools were first starting, there were fears among some people that charter schools would become white flight academies that would move America back to segregated public schools. Some racial minorities believed, on the contrary, that charter schools presented them with an opportunity to recreate the minority-controlled schools that had served some minority students very well in the past. In fact, the experience across the country so far has been very mixed with no dominant trend toward either predominately white or predominately minority schools (Fourth Year Report on the State of Charter Schools, 2000).

Interestingly, the 10% deviation requirement in the SC charter school law does not apply to regular public schools in South Carolina. This provision is only applicable to charter schools. This is ironic because charter schools are usually intended to have more flexibility than local school districts. Thus the 10% requirement creates a circumstance in which the charter schools are required to meet a higher standard than regular public schools in their district. In addition, it should be noted that this requirement creates a significant hurdle for charter schools if the students needing their particular services happen to be predominately minority children.

Finally, we should note that the racial component of the SC charter school law has been the key issue challenged in the litigation involving the proposed Lighthouse Charter School on Hilton Head Island. This case is being considered by the SC Supreme Court as we write this report, and the outcome of the case could have a major impact on the future of charter schools in the State.

Length of Charter

The SC charter school statute states that, “A charter may be approved...not to exceed three years.”

Across the country the length of charters varies considerably. In Arizona, for example, they can be approved for 15 years while in many states they vary from three to five years. The advantage of a longer charter is that it gives parents, financial backers and others more confidence that the charter school will be in existence for some time. Shorter charters, and the need for frequent,

and non-guaranteed renewals give the impression that the charter school may not be a substantial institution.

Longer charters give a school time to become established and a more reasonable opportunity to demonstrate that it can improve student performance. It can certainly be argued that until a charter school has been in existence for more than a year or two, it is unfair to hold them to the same standards as a school that has been in existence for generations. Shorter charters make it more difficult for schools to show gains because they are simultaneously starting a complex new organization, retaining parental support, complying with state/local rules and trying to establish an effective educational program. Interestingly, in North Carolina, the Office of Charter Schools in the State Department of Public Instruction has examined achievement data and has found that, “when the difficult first year is excluded, charter schools outperformed their traditional public school counterparts in academic growth” (Manuel & McGlaughlin, p. 46, in press). This begs the question of whether more planning time may be a major key to creating a successful charter school.

In addition, shorter charters have made it difficult for charter schools in many states to borrow funds for facilities. Banks and other lenders are reluctant to underwrite loans when short-term charters give the appearance of lack of stability and lack of permanence.

Chartering Entity (Sponsor) Issues

According to the SC legislation, the chartering entity or sponsor means the “local board of trustees...from which the charter school applicant requested its charter....” The law also states that “ A charter may be revoked or not renewed by the sponsor....”

Most charter school advocates would prefer to have multiple chartering entities. Many states allow schools to be chartered by state boards of education, higher education institutions, local school districts or other entities. Having more opportunities is likely to create a more vibrant and larger charter school movement in a state. However, this potential for charter school growth is exactly what concerns many opponents of charter schools. If the state of SC decides that it wishes to expand the charter school program, it can accomplish this, at least to some degree, by enlarging the list of potential chartering entities. If the state policy makers prefer a very small program, fewer chartering entities will likely help to achieve that purpose.

Another complexity of the sponsorship issue is that often charter and local school districts see themselves as competitors (unless the charter schools are initiated by the district). Thus, to put the local school district largely in charge of both approval and revocation, as is the case in the SC law, can create friction, and it can make charter schools look skeptically at decisions and procedures put in place by the district (their competitor).

If charter schools do not receive funding as soon as it is due or if they are required to follow various procedures that do not seem necessary, the charter school tends to wonder whether the local district (its competitor) is trying as hard as it can to help the charter school operate smoothly. Likewise the local district must realize that if it vigorously assists the charter school in becoming successful, it may very well lose its own students to the charter school.

This is an awkward situation to say the least. The SC charter school legislation gives the local district the upper hand in many ways; if this is the intent of the legislation, this may not be seen as a problem. However, if there is a desire to create more neutrality between charter schools and their sponsors, policymakers may wish to reexamine this provision of the charter school law.

Accountability/Student Performance/Evaluation

The SC charter school statute makes many references to the responsibility that charter schools have for accountability, improving student performance, evaluation and related matters. The specific citations are as follows with key words underlined for emphasis:

Section 59-40-20 says that a purpose of the charter school legislation is to “improve student learning.”

Section 59-40-40 state that a charter school “...is accountable to the local school board of trustees....”

Section 59-40-60 states that the charter application shall include the “achievement standards to be achieved by the charter school” and that “pupil achievement standards “must meet or exceed any content standards adopted by the school district.” This section also requires that the charter school application include a “plan for evaluating pupil achievement and progress toward accomplishment of the school’s achievement standards in addition to state assessments” and the “timeline for meeting these standards.”

Section 59-40-110 requires that the charter renewal application contain “a report on the progress of the charter school in achieving the pupil achievement standards.” It further says that a charter may be revoked if it is determined that the charter school “failed to meet or make reasonable progress toward pupil achievement standards.”

Section 59-40-140 states that, “A charter school shall report to its sponsor and the Department of Education ...the success of students in achieving the specific educational goals for which the charter school was established....”

Section 59-40-150 says that the Department of Education shall provide on request information concerning “the success of each charter school in meeting its educational goals.”

Section 59-40-160 also mandates that the State Board of Education “compile evaluations of charter schools received from local school boards of trustees” and that the Board shall “review information regarding the regulations and policies from which charter schools were released to determine if the releases assisted or impeded the charter schools in meeting their stated goals and objectives. Further it requires the Board to “compare the academic performance of charter school pupils with the performance of ethnically and economically comparable groups of pupils in other public schools who are enrolled in academically comparable courses.”

Despite (and in some ways because of) these numerous and varied references to student performance, evaluation and accountability, it is difficult to say with clarity exactly what kind of academic achievement or other performance is expected or required of charter schools in South Carolina. The intent of the legislation with regard to which entity (local school district or State Department of Education) has the ultimate responsibility for determining whether the charter schools are performing adequately is not clear.

Perhaps the General Assembly expected State or local education officials to make these determinations about student performance simply by using their best judgement. The General Assembly may have reasoned that with such a new and unique program as charter schools, it would have been difficult to prescribe a particular accountability procedure that would be reasonable. It would likely be helpful if any future revisions to the statute will either provide more clarity or omit the statutory language regarding evaluation/performance and delegate the full responsibility for making such determinations to either the State or local school officials.

Teacher Certification

The SC charter school legislation (Section 59-40-50) permits a charter school to employ up to 25% uncertified teachers unless it is a converted school, in which case the limit is 10%.

While it is understandable that the SC charter school legislation would want to keep some control on the number of non-certified teachers permitted in charter schools, we believe that the real issue is teacher “qualification,” not necessarily “certification.” While certification is one widely accepted indicator of teacher quality, it is not the only measure. There may be other ways to assess a teacher’s credentials and his or her suitability for a charter school. This seems quite reasonable since regular public schools habitually allow teachers to teach out of the field of their certification, and they allow substitute teachers with minimum credentials. Teacher selection is perhaps the most important decision charter schools make, and the decision needs to be made with the utmost care and thoroughness. However, placing a restriction on the number of non-certified teachers who may be employed creates a limitation on charter schools, particularly at the high school level where there may be highly “qualified” technical specialists or former college faculty who could provide excellent instruction but who might not be traditionally “certified.”

Regulatory Relief

Since flexibility with selection of textbooks and supplementary classroom materials was mentioned most frequently, we can assume that this was one of the most important types of relief to the South Carolina charter schools.

Also, since several charter schools used their permitted flexibility to employ non-certified teachers, we can assume that this was also an important kind of autonomy to charter schools.

We would also note that using regulatory relief to make the GED--not the high school diploma--the desired outcome for Youth Academy charter school students is a significant policy issue. The charter school operators have explained their rationale for this decision and why they believe

it is the proper policy for the small number of students they serve. It is beyond the scope of this evaluation to say whether this approach is appropriate or inappropriate. However, we would encourage state officials, particularly legal staff, to study this issue more fully since it is a major policy change for any public school, including a public charter school.

In summary, while the use of regulatory relief did not involve a large variety of issues, it is clear from our survey that the relief granted was very important to the schools which used it.

An Analysis of Key Charter School Issues Facing the State, Local Districts and Charter Schools

To further understand the charter school program, it is helpful to look at certain issues that are of particular interest to various parts of the education family. The State Department of Education, the local school districts and the charter schools themselves have different issues about which they are concerned.

Issues from the State Perspective

One of the most fundamental charter school issues facing the South Carolina Department of Education is defining the agency's own official posture toward the charter school movement. The Department's position can be crucial for the success of charter schools. If the agency makes the charter school movement a high priority, places financial and human resources behind the movement, aggressively markets/publicizes the program, lobbies for legislative changes designed to grow the program and acts generally as an advocate for the program, it can be a powerful stimulus for the charter school movement. If, on the other hand, the state education agency is a reluctant supporter of charter schools, or even opposes the effort, it can slow the effort significantly in the state. Even a "hands off" or "wait and see" approach will have an impact on the charter school movement.

It appears that the Department's approach has varied over the five years since the South Carolina charter school law was passed. In the early years of the program, the State agency was clearly a charter school cheerleader and aggressively moved to get the charter school effort up and running. In more recent times, it seems that the State agency has continued to carry out all its legal responsibilities regarding charter schools, but its stance now seems to be more cautiously optimistic and more balanced, with a recognition that while the charter school program definitely deserves a fair chance to prove itself, it is a significant educational change that must be implemented very carefully to avoid disruption to the larger public schools system.

As the South Carolina Department of Education manages the charter school program, it must address a number of related key issues. For example, the department must decide to what degree it wishes to develop regulations to supplement the legislation. To date, the agency has determined that it is most appropriate to have very minimal agency-developed rules for charter schools and to ask schools to operate mainly based on statutory provisions. This approach is consistent with the intent of the charter school movement which is to have schools that are, insofar as possible, free from bureaucratic regulations. However, especially if the number of charter schools grows, the department may find that it needs more regulations, or at least more

guidance, to avoid having to answer a multitude of varied operational questions from charter schools and to provide more consistency.

The Department faces a challenge in providing various kinds of support or resources for charter schools. It takes staff time and considerable expense to provide significant support for even a small number of charter schools. The Department must collect data, arrange for evaluation reports, ensure that reports are done on time, ensure that audit reports have been done, deal with appeals, publicize the availability of the program and talk with individuals interested in starting new charter schools.

Issues from the Local School District Perspective

We were particularly interested in the views of school superintendents in districts where the charter applications were initiated independently of the district. While we did get a response to our survey from the superintendent of one such district (Williamsburg County School District), we were unable to get responses from the superintendent in Greenville where there are three such charter schools (Greenville Tech, Meyer Center and Charles Aiken). Thus, the following analysis of how these district superintendents may view charter school issues is our hypothesis based on our survey, on responses (or lack thereof) from the charter schools and on the kinds of concerns expressed by district superintendents in similar circumstances in other states.

Beyond the general uncertainty that local school districts often have toward charter schools, local school districts, particularly those who reluctantly approved charter schools, are likely to have more specific concerns about the funding that their traditional schools or administrative offices may lose if a new charter school opens within their district. These districts may also question the fairness of the charter school formula for distributing funds. These districts may also worry that the charter school could take some of their best students, jeopardizing the performance of some of their individual schools.

Further concerns center around the fact that the charter school is a competitor that has the potential to make the regular district schools look less appealing to the public; and, this "competitor" has an unfair advantage because it can get exemptions to certain rules and regulations that local districts must follow. Finally, these districts may be concerned about the amount of their staff's time that must be used to evaluate charter applications and provide oversight/reporting for charter schools once they are funded.

Local districts which actually initiate charter applications tend to have a very different view of charter schools, which tends, as one would expect, to be much more positive. They typically see the charter schools more as a unique appendage to their district, with the potential in some cases to be a demonstration school or a training ground for their teachers. They seem to have little concern about the administrative tasks related to managing the charter school, and the communication between the district office and the charter school is typically frequent and very cordial.

Issues from the Charter Schools' Perspective

Newly formed charter schools face many challenges, not unlike small businesses that are just getting started. For example, finding facilities is a major challenge since no special funding is provided for that purpose. In some cases, local districts may require a facility plan prior to approving the school. Thus the charter schools may face a dilemma: They can't get approval without a building, and they can't sign a contract to rent a building without approval.

Charter schools also find that each step in the process of starting a school takes longer than expected, and usually these activities are performed by a small group of part time volunteers.

Charter schools in SC seem to welcome accountability. They understand that they are schools of choice and that they must perform well to have credibility with parents and to keep their charter. However, they are concerned that they are being held accountable before they have had a chance to have a few years of experience. The fact that the present evaluation is being done with only two years of data for some schools is a good example of their concern. They are frustrated that they are being immediately held to the same standards as regular public schools that have existed for generations. They are also concerned that they could succeed in their unique mission (such as keeping students in schools who might otherwise drop out) but fail the state report card measures.

Another issue with some of the charter schools in SC is the element of local district oversight. Some schools believe that the local districts arbitrarily make it too difficult to become chartered and then, once a school is chartered, they impose unrealistic expectations on the charter school.

The racial quota prescribed in the legislation is a concern for some charter schools. The charter schools often have some difficulty in meeting the standard set by the law; charter schools often appeal to students with particular needs, and there is no guarantee that these kinds of children will always come in precise racial distributions. Thus, charter school operators find these racial constraints unrealistic. In addition, under the law, charter schools must meet a higher racial quota standard than that required of regular public schools. So, if a charter school observes that a regular public school in its community is not meeting the racial quota that the charter school is required to achieve, there is a natural tendency to feel that charter school is being treated unfairly.

Relationships with local districts have been a problem in some cases. Charter schools sometimes feel that they cannot get the information they need, and they are not always sure which person to ask for help in the local district.

Policy Recommendations to the Legislature and the SC State Board of Education

The SC Charter School legislation calls for recommendations to be included in the five-year evaluation report. Therefore, listed below is a wide assortment of recommendations for consideration by the State Department of Education, local school districts and the General Assembly. These recommendations were generated from our study of the SC charter school

program, from an analysis of data about the charter schools in the State, from a review of the national literature on charter schools, and from discussions with individuals knowledgeable about the charter school movement in the United States.

We recognize that some recommendations may be more appropriate or important than others, and we also know that due to lack of funding availability and time, it is not possible to implement each recommendation. However, we do present these as a set of choices to be considered as possible ways to strengthen the charter school program in South Carolina and as a way to stimulate creative thinking about charter school issues.

A. Recommendations for Assistance to Charters, Local School Districts and Other Entities

Recommendation A1: As mentioned earlier in this report, local school districts (unless they initiate the charter) are often somewhat wary of the charter school movement. They frequently see charter schools as competition, and perhaps unfair competition because the charter schools may have exemptions from rules that apply to the local school district. They also may see charter schools as taking away funding from schools in the school district or from the regular programs of the district as a whole.

However, rather than opposing charter schools, we believe that it is often smarter for local districts to look for ways to leverage the charter school law for their own advantage by establishing or co-sponsoring charter schools that can meet the needs of unique populations within the district. Charter schools offer special potential because of the freedom they have due to their exemptions from various state regulations.

Thus, we recommend that the state agency provide more training and assistance for local districts to help them brainstorm creative ways of using charters to for the benefit of youngsters in their district. Districts might, for example, want to try out new teaching approaches or other innovations within the small, more controlled context of a charter school.

Recommendation A2: To support local districts, and persuade them to view charter schools less negatively, it is recommended that the SC Department of Education seek to provide the same sorts of regulatory relief provided to charter schools to local districts if and when it has been shown to benefit the students in charter schools. We recognize that it may take some time to see which type of regulatory relief is beneficial, but once conclusions can be reached, we believe that the state should at least consider extending the same relief across the public school system. The state agency may be able to make this happen through its own internal procedures or through State Board of Education action, or it may require a special request to the General Assembly.

Recommendation A3: According to the charter school legislation, charter schools must receive their appropriate share of federal funds going to the local school district. Determining the equitable share of major federal formula grants that go to all local districts is usually not extremely difficult. However, there are other “discretionary” special purpose federal funds for which local districts may apply if they wish. These grants may be less well known and it may be more challenging to determine a fair share for the charter school. The same situation applies for foundation funds that the local district may seek.

Thus, we recommend that the state agency advise charter school operators to meet (and follow up in writing) with their local school districts and ask to be considered as co-applicants with them for all applications for federal discretionary or foundation funds. This will enable the charter schools to have a chance of accessing a portion of federal discretionary funds if their students meet the qualifications of the particular project.

Recommendation A4: We recommend, to the degree possible, that the SC Department of Education direct charter school operators to resources (such as the Foundation Center Website) that may help them understand how to proceed with seeking private funding. It is further recommended that the state agency direct charter schools to specific foundations that tend to support charter schools (such as the Gates Family Foundation, the Walton Foundation, La Raza, etc) and that may be able to provide them with financial support.

Recommendation A5: Even with knowledge of where to seek foundation funds and even with some information about the world of private funding, it may still be very difficult for charter school personnel to find the time and to develop the skills to write successful grant applications. Therefore, we recommend that the SC Department of Education encourage charter schools to find ways to employ one or more professional grant writers. This might be done through the Charter School Association, or on individual campuses or as a joint effort with the local district. While such services are expensive, they may more than pay for themselves if arranged carefully.

Recommendation A6: Since South Carolina is a dues paying member of the Southeast Regional Vision for Education (SERVE), the regional federal education laboratory, we recommend that the Department of Education make a strong effort to request any and all services from SERVE that might help its charter schools be successful. This assistance may include access to federal officials/contacts, information about federal resources, training, curriculum materials, policy advice, research findings and other support. Even if SERVE does not have the precise resources needed, they have a broad set of contacts with the other labs across the country and may be able to access some of these resources for South Carolina.

Recommendation A7: Probably no one understands the complexities of starting and operating a charter school better than those who are actually operating those schools. Thus, we recommend that charter school operators take every opportunity to communicate with operators of other charter schools, both in state and out of state, particularly those that have been shown to be exemplary. This can be accomplished through visits to schools, email, attendance at conferences, phone, video conferencing and other methods.

We recognize that charter operators are overwhelmed with their daily tasks and have limited funds, but whenever opportunity arises we encourage them to take advantage of being with their peers; there may be no better way to learn the ropes than from another operator. Likewise, through the SC Charter School Association, when individual operators make helpful contacts, they should be encouraged to share the information with their SC counterparts in association meetings, or through other means.

Recommendation A8: We recommend that the state education agency continue to support and advise the relatively new SC Charter School Association and generally do all it can to help the association thrive. There are many activities and advocacy needs of charter schools that cannot appropriately be addressed by State or local education agencies. There are also a multitude of specialized needs (training, networks, technical assistance, etc) that cannot always be provided by the existing education structure. With a stronger independent association, some requests for assistance can gradually be shifted there.

Recommendation A9: The SC Department of Education has sought to assist charter schools by providing a general set of questions and answers regarding general charter school issues, and a specific manual geared to the auditing process as it applies to charter schools. In all likelihood, these types of items are probably very useful to charter schools, and we would recommend, in addition, that the state education agency consider developing a comprehensive resource manual which can be used by potential charter applicants, charter operators and Local School Districts.

This recommendation is consistent with Section 59-40-150 (A) of the SC charter school law which states that the State Department of Education “shall disseminate information to the public, directly and through sponsors, on how to form and operate a charter school and how to utilize the offerings of a charter school.” However, the SC Department of Education must carry out this duty without any additional funding. If the Agency does not have the staff resources or state funding to develop such a manual, perhaps they can modify a manual being used in another state, or perhaps federal funds can be used for this purpose.

Recommendation A10: To assist local school districts in evaluating charter school proposals they receive, we would recommend that the SC Department of Education develop (or contract for the development of) a set of standards and guidelines for evaluating charter proposals. These could be modified as needed by each district, but at least there would be a general set of criteria upon which charter proposals would be evaluated. Thus, applicants would know what to expect and would likely believe that they were being treated fairly and reasonably by the local district.

B. Recommendations for Additional Study, Data Collection and Research

Recommendation B1: It is recommended that both the state education agency and local school districts begin to document carefully the staff time spent in dealing with charter school matters such as approvals, monitoring, reporting, financial services, on-site visits and appeals. Should the charter school movement begin to expand significantly, it will be helpful to have this information in case there is a need to approach the General Assembly for additional resources to support these activities, or if there is a need to reassess the deployment of existing staff and resources within either the state agency or the local district. This recommendation seems especially appropriate considering the fact that revisions to the SC charter school legislation might make an increase in the number of charter schools more likely.

Recommendation B2: As the General Assembly, state agency and local districts become involved with evaluating and reviewing the success of charter schools, they should consider whether it is really fair to make newly formed, start-up charter schools adhere to the same performance standards as public systems that have been up and running for generations and that have substantial academic infrastructure in place.

For example, should the charter schools be treated for accountability purposes like some of the other special schools in South Carolina, especially if they are serving particular student populations with unusual needs or from severe circumstances. If the decision is made to allow no accommodation in terms of accountability, then, for the well being of the charter school students, it seems incumbent on the State and local school officials to make every effort to provide reasonable advice and assistance to the charter school, particularly in its early years.

Recommendation B3: It is recommended that the SC Department of Education review its major goals for school district innovative practices (staffing, curriculum, parent participation) and consider whether Charter Schools might be uniquely positioned to serve as demonstration sites for such innovations. If the state agency determines that a charter school, due to its unusual flexibility, may be a likely candidate for this purpose, they can then search for a school district and/or potential charter operator who might want to start a school consistent with the innovation that the State Agency had in mind.

Recommendation B4: It is recommended that the SC Department of Education and the SC Charter School Association review literature and web pages, talk with the US Department of Education, and talk with operators of exemplary charter schools to gather ideas for refinements to be considered for addition to the charter school legislation or for incorporation into the administrative processes in South Carolina to strengthen the South Carolina charter school program.

Of particular focus in this review should be how exemplary or best practices charters have helped states or local districts meet the needs of particular categories of children or more effectively address certain state and local mandates. There may be particular opportunities for special populations (e.g. handicapped) to make especially good use of the flexibility offered by charter schools and to carry out programs or interventions that might be more difficult for traditional schools.

Recommendation B5: It is recommended that the SC Department of Education consider setting up a focus group of parents who have established charter schools in the state (or who intend to submit applications for charter schools). The purpose of the focus group would be to learn what parents are seeking from the regular public schools that they are not getting. Do these parents want more parental participation, smaller schools, more experimentation, a closer relationship with school staff or other characteristics?

If the state agency can learn what parents feel is missing from the traditional public school experience, then they can work in helping local districts in the state to find ways to offer more of the desired features within their regular schools. In addition, the state agency might want to encourage local districts to do more surveys of parents or parent focus groups on an ongoing basis to learn what parents are seeking that they do not find within the school system. Indeed, one of the healthy effects of having the competition of charter schools has been to cause this kind of self-examination on the part of local school districts.

Recommendation B6: Along these same lines, it is recommended that local districts and the state also consider charting their “holding power” on a yearly basis to see how many students, if any, are being lost to charter schools, home schools or private schools. These data are a powerful way to assess whether the local school district is being responsive to local parents.

Recommendation B7: It is also recommended that the SC Department of Education hold two other kinds of focus groups. One group should be comprised of founders of schools that were denied charters. The purpose of this focus group would be to gather detailed information that could be used to help inform other groups who are seeking charters about what to do, and not do, to increase their likelihood of success. The second focus group would be comprised of officials who monitored the schools that have now been forced to close; the purpose of this group would be to analyze carefully what lead to the types of problems (inadequate planning, financial management, etc.) that caused their demise.

C. Recommendations for Establishing or Strengthening Relationships

Recommendation C1: We strongly recommend that the SC Department of Education make every effort to develop and maintain strong contacts with individuals at the US Department of Education in Washington and with staff at the Regional Education Laboratories, especially the Southeast Regional Vision for Education (SERVE). We urge that these contacts be not only with the Charter School staff, but with individuals in other areas such as Special Education, which can impact charter school operations.

In addition to attending officially sponsored federal meetings, we recommend frequent contacts via email, phone or visits to keep federal officials aware of South Carolina’s progress with charter schools, and to learn, in advance, of possible funding or partnership opportunities. While there is some cost to the state agency for this assertive approach, these sorts of expenditures can often more than pay for themselves with the funding or other support that may be obtained. In addition, the federal offices are an excellent clearinghouse and resource for learning about the best charter school practices across the nation.

In preparing this report, we met (March 19, 2002) in Washington with Mr. John Fiegel, Head of the Office of Charter Schools in the US Department of Education. Mr. Fiegel indicated that his office would be very receptive to requests from states with charter school programs and would make every effort to provide technical assistance and other kinds of advice and support that might be available.

Recommendation C2: Similar to the previous recommendation, we suggest that the SC Department of Education and charter school operators also maintain and expand contacts with various national charter school associations. This can be done via memberships, visits to web sites, attendance at conferences when possible or utilizing written materials from these organizations to improve current practices and policies.

Recommendation C3: We strongly recommend that the SC Department of Education and charter schools make additional outreach to the higher education community and seek partnerships which will tap their resources and expertise to support charter schools in South Carolina. Higher education represents a vast resource of potential support for the state agency and for the charter school movement; professors and other staff have expertise in research, planning, curriculum, training and many other areas. It is even possible that an institution of higher education might want to be a partner in sponsoring/operating a charter school.

Recommendation C4: The passage of the SC charter school law has appeal to certain parents seeking smaller schools and more parental involvement in their child's school. While this appeal is mainly a benefit to current residents of SC, we believe that the Charter School law could be used to some extent as a recruiting tool that could help persuade families to choose to relocate to SC. We believe that having at least the potential option of starting a charter school will appeal to certain families contemplating a move. Because of this, we recommend that the SEA work with state tourism officials to familiarize them with this option and to suggest that they consider adding information on the charter school option to appropriate brochures publicizing South Carolina.

Recommendation C5: We recognize that budget limitations restrict the ability of state and local school personnel (including charter school personnel) to visit charter schools in other states. Nevertheless, recognizing that such visits can be extremely valuable ways of finding out both what works and what doesn't work, we recommend that efforts be made to find ways to at least visit charter schools in neighboring states such as North Carolina. In some cases, such visits can occur on a one day trip, with no overnight stay required. We would suggest that such visits include both teachers and administrators. Another way to build relationships with charter schools in other states is through the internet and email. Charter schools can have a "sister school" program with a charter school in another state, with interchanges occurring among administrators, faculty and even students working on joint projects.

Recommendation C6: Across the country, charter school laws continue to be revised and refined as we learn more about what makes a successful charter school initiative. We would predict that this will also be the experience in South Carolina. In fact, looking at recent years, there have been various legislative initiatives to change and improve the SC charter school law.

Therefore, we encourage the SC Department of Education to continue to maintain close relationships both with legislators and key legislative staff so that these individuals will be able to stay informed about the aspects of the law that are working well and those statewide policy issues that might need to be addressed by revised legislation. Likewise, we would encourage charter schools themselves to develop relationships with legislators from their district, invite them to visit their schools, add them to their mailing list and otherwise keep them well informed about the progress of the charter school.

Recommendation C7: If the SC Department of Education wishes to increase the number of charter schools across the state, one approach for doing this is to do more widespread publicity and to create more awareness among educators, parents and the general public across the state. There are several ways in which this might be approached. The state agency can continue its efforts at adding charter school topics to the agendas of statewide conferences. The SC Department of Education can develop stronger alliances with education associations such as PTA, which reach parents. The state education agency could offer articles and press releases for the media. The communications office in the SC Department of Education could be asked to generate a list of possible publicity actions to be taken.

Recommendation C8: Due to the statewide organizational structure of schools, state education agencies are, for the most part, accustomed to dealing with school districts rather than individual schools. The unique nature of charter schools and the attention they draw creates a demand for information about those individual schools. This situation has created a circumstance across the country in which state education agencies are having to learn a new approach for dealing with individual charter schools, and not just with the school district within which the charter school resides. Since the SC law makes the charter schools a part of their local school district, this issue is not as pronounced in SC as in some states.

However, gearing up to provide data and information about individual charter schools, communicating with these schools and ensuring that charter schools are full participants in the range of programs and services offered by the state are challenges for a state agency. It is easy to overlook the charter schools (particularly when they are so few in SC and they are so small) as statewide agencies do planning, communicate and offer services.

Thus, we recommend that the charter school office in the Department of Education continue to reach out to other sections/divisions/offices in the Department to raise their consciousness about charter schools and to help agency staff understand the unique and complex need of charter schools and the children they serve. This effort will take time, but it should eventually result in not just compliance, but in creative thinking by agency staff about new ways to serve the charter schools.

Recommendation C9: As we have noted earlier, local school districts are often reluctant to become involved in the charter school movement. Part of this reluctance often comes from a fear of losing students from the regular school program. However, experience has shown that charter schools often bring home schoolers and private school students back into the public charter school. Thus, if a local district initiates a charter, which then becomes a part of their own district, they may actually increase the enrollment of the district if they pull in students who may

have left earlier for options such as home school or private school. We recommend that the SC Department of Education make local district superintendents aware of the fact that charter schools can actually be a recruitment tool for the district to recapture lost students.

D. Recommendation for Improving Efficiency

Recommendation D1: Appeals to the State Board of Education can take considerable time both for SC Department of Education staff and Board members. The state education agency may wish to establish an external committee that can process appeals and make recommendations to them. On the other hand,, the State Board may prefer to establish a standing committee of Board members to review appeals and to make recommendations to the full Board.

E. Recommendations for Anticipating and Preparing for the Future

Recommendation E1: Looking to the future, perhaps the most fundamental issue that will impact the charter school program in South Carolina is the philosophy of the State Board of Education and the SC Department of Education toward the charter school initiative. As we noted earlier, the SC Department of Education has a major role in implementing this program. Indeed, the success of a state's charter school effort largely depends on how the Department proceeds to publicize, manage and regulate the program.

A positive stance by the Department toward charter schools tends to lead to a stronger, larger program that will likely prove of more benefit to the students in the charter schools. In contrast, if the Department takes a negative or reluctant stance toward these schools, they may find more support among local district administrators, but the charter school program will likely remain small and the charter schools will likely not provide as strong a program for students who enroll.

This is a difficult political dilemma. State departments of education must serve the entire state, and must juggle many interests and withstand many pressures. The SC Department of Education must keep a strong relationship with local school administrators because they operate the vast majority of schools and serve most students in the state. However, the Department is also expected to play a key leadership role in education, and leadership means helping people to grow, leave their comfort zone and find new and better ways of serving students.

If the Department believes that competition is healthy, that charter schools are small laboratories that enable us to know more about what works best for children, and if the Department believes that a charter school program can be operated in an orderly way without damaging programs in regular schools, and if the Department has the resources to support the charter school program, then we would recommend that the Department take a more assertive role as an advocate for charter schools. This would necessitate a commitment of time, energy, personnel and public relations.

On the other hand, if the Department sees potential harm from the charter school program, then we cannot recommend more than lukewarm support.

In the course of conducting this study, we have looked for indicators of strong or weak support for charter schools coming from the state education agency. And while all indications are that the agency has conscientiously carried out its duties regarding charter schools, it is difficult to determine whether this has been done with great enthusiasm or with reluctance. If it is difficult for us to make this assessment, we assume that it is equally difficult for other entities to know what degree of support exists for charter schools in Columbia. Thus, whatever the SC Department of Education determines its position to be (positive, neutral or negative) regarding charter schools, we recommend that the agency make its views known very publicly and clearly and that it follow its beliefs consistently in managing the program.

Recommendation E2: We recognize that revisions to the SC charter school law are being considered by the SC legislature during the time we are writing this report. At this point, we do not know whether revisions will pass nor do we know how lawmakers might improve the charter school program in SC if legislation is successful.

In the event that the law is not revised as desired by the State Department of Education, we recommend that, in preparation for the 2003 Session of the General Assembly, the state education agency review its experience with charters over the past five years; consider the results of our evaluation report; consider the views of charter operators, unsuccessful charter applicants, local districts, parents, and successful charter school programs in other states; review other available information; and develop a comprehensive set of recommendations to be proposed as a revisions to the charter school law.

We recommend that any such planning and preparation for the next Session of the General Assembly be started immediately and that discussions be held with key legislative members and/or legislative staff as early as possible to keep them advised of upcoming recommendations.

Recommendation E3: To judge the success of charter schools in SC there are two basic sorts of measures being used. One measure is the report card approach for the individual schools to measure progress at the school building level. The second kind of measure is the program evaluation which examines the success of the entire charter school movement statewide. Much of the credibility of charter schools depends on the quality and nature of these evaluations.

Regarding the school level report cards, we urge the SC Department of Education to analyze whether these are alternative but reasonable ways to evaluate small charter schools which have just begun to operate. We assume that the report card program was primarily designed for the traditional schools in the state that have been in existence for generations, and we assume that imposing these requirements on special schools such as charter schools was an afterthought and an accommodation. It appears that there may be special exemptions/treatment for some special schools in SC such as the school of the arts/science. We would recommend that the SC Department of Education consider whether some sort of alternate assessment may be appropriate for charter schools, particularly in their early years. It may be possible to have a school level report/assessment that is just as rigorous as the traditional report card, but more appropriate for the charter schools.

Regarding the statewide program evaluation of charter schools, we encourage considerable advance planning from the SC Department of Education for the next five year evaluation cycle. To make the charter school program evaluation more efficient, we suggest that charter school data be integrated into the normal school data collection process whenever and wherever appropriate.

Finally, since there are at least seven different references to accountability expectations in the SC charter school law, we would suggest that any legislative rewrite seek to clarify and to consolidate these varied and somewhat contradictory references. Otherwise, both the charter schools and the taxpayers will be uncertain about what is expected from the charter school experience.

Recommendation E4: In some states, notably California, the virtual charter school movement is significant and growing, often involving home schools. In other states, such as North Carolina, the State Board of Education has received two charter school application from a virtual charter school, one of which was affiliated with Sylvan Learning as a partner. A distance learning application was submitted in 1998. We predict that South Carolina will receive other virtual charter school proposals.

Therefore, we recommend that the SC Department of Education make plans for such a possibility by anticipating the key issues a virtual charter would pose. Once the key issues are identified, the Department can assess whether such a school could be approved and how it might impact both the charter school program and education across the state. It is preferable to be prepared for the possibility for such a proposal instead of waiting for a proposal to be submitted to begin to address the issues.

Recommendation E5: With any relatively new initiative such as charter schools, it is difficult to anticipate what impact state policies or legislative changes might have on individual charter schools or on individual school districts. One way of determining which policies are likely to work well is to use an approach called “backward mapping.” This approach, conceived by Richard Elmore, involves developing policies upward, rather than from the top down. In other words, go to the lowest level in the organization and through observation and interviews determine where bottlenecks and problems exist; then work upward through the system, step by step to determine where policy change can be imposed to correct the problem.

We recommend that the State Department of Education examine the backward mapping approach and consider whether this method is appropriate to develop charter school policies. If agency staff is inadequate for this effort, perhaps education graduate students could be solicited to take on this effort as part of an individual research project.

Recommendation E6: The new reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) “No Child Left Behind” makes major changes in public school accountability. While all the regulations for this initiative have not yet been finalized, we recommend that the SC Department of Education consider how the revisions might impact the charter school program.

Recommendation E7: According to John Fiegel (March 19, 2002), Head of Charter Schools in the US Department of Education in Washington, there is current federal legislation that could potentially provide funding to help pay for charter school buildings. The problem is that this legislation has not, to date, received any Congressional appropriation. Nevertheless, since funding for buildings is one of the most difficult problems that charter schools face, we urge the SC Department of Education to continue to stay in close touch with the charter school staff in Washington to learn about any funds which might be made available for this program in the future.

Recommendation E8: Since the SC Charter School legislation permits new charter schools to have up to 25% non-certified teachers, it is likely that professional development (training) could be a major need for those charters who choose to exercise this option. Therefore, we suggest that the SC Department of Education provide the charter schools with a suggested list of materials and training opportunities that they might be able to take advantage of at minimal cost.

Recommendation E9: Regarding the 25% restriction on the number of non-certified teachers that a new charter school is allowed to have, we would recommend that the state consider whether this limit could be raised to 50% if the school could document that a teacher had “comparable” skills and abilities to a certified teacher. For example, if a nationally recognized retired college instructor who was non-certified wished to teach in a charter high school, could this be considered to be “comparable” to a certified teacher? Decisions in this area are complex, but we believe they should at least be considered.

Recommendation E10: Across the country, one of the major difficulties facing charter schools is finding appropriate facilities that are affordable, and it is likely that this will continue to be a frustrating issue for new charter schools in the future. The capability of obtaining funding for buildings often depends on the wealth and connections of the charter school founders.

If the founders are prominent and wealthy and have the trust of banks, for example, they are more likely to secure funding for charter school facilities. Less affluent and less well-connected sponsors will likely have much more difficulty convincing banks to loan money for a charter school facility.

The South Carolina charter school statute wisely anticipated that facilities would be a major problem. To help address the issue, the statute asks the SC Department of Education to prepare a statewide list of all available buildings. However, producing such a list that could be usable was not practical due to its length.

Thus, we recommend that, for the future, other ways be explored to help charter schools locate good facilities. Perhaps abandoned school buildings could be designated specifically for use by charter schools. If possible, the State could appropriate some funds to at least partially offset the cost of facilities for charter schools.

Recommendation E11: As we noted earlier, charter schools in South Carolina have found that considerable planning is required to get a school up and running. Thus, our recommendation is that ways be found to extend the planning process for opening a charter school and that charter

applications be evaluated carefully regarding the extent to which planning has been done and problems anticipated. The proposed changes to the South Carolina charter school law currently being considered by the General Assembly add time to the planning phase. We applaud this effort and hope that it is approved by the General Assembly.

Recommendation E12: Increasingly potential charter school applicants and current charter school operators will rely on the internet for information. In recognition of this fact, the SC Department of Education has wisely provided a web page for charter schools. We would encourage the Department of Education to continue to expand and enhance the amount of information available on its web page pertaining to charter schools. Looking at web pages from the US Department of Education and from other State Education Agencies across the country will provide ideas for additional material. Possible items to add include additional contacts/links to direct users to other helpful web pages and statistics for the existing charter schools.

Recommendation E13: The South Carolina charter school statute says that the State Board of Education shall “promulgate regulations necessary to implement the provisions of this chapter.” The State Board and the Department have determined that, at this time, and to allow maximum flexibility for charter schools, there are no formal regulations needed to carry out the charter school legislation. As an alternative, the Department has issued a set of questions and answers to help applicants and school districts understand what is allowable under the charter school statute. We see the merit in this approach and believe that it can work well as long as the number of charter schools remains small. However, if the number of charter schools increases significantly, we would encourage the Board and the Department to consider adopting formal regulations which must be developed with public input and which can more readily stand up to any eventual legal challenges.

Recommendation E14: Perhaps the major issue that can create controversy between local districts and charter schools is money. There is the perception in local districts, and the reality, that funds are “taken away” from the local district and “given” to the charter school. There is also confusion among some charter school leaders about the criteria on which funds are distributed. The ultimate solution to this problem is, of course, to establish a separate funding stream for charter schools, and we recommend that this avenue be given some consideration. Whether this solution is affordable in the current South Carolina budget we cannot say. Nor can we say whether the public will support an extra appropriation for a new innovation such as charter schools. However, if separate funding is possible, it will lessen animosity and lessen the competition between districts and charter schools. However, we must note that one rationale for the establishment of charter schools is to create healthy competition between districts and charters, so that both will work harder and smarter to provide schooling that works. Separate funding would clearly reduce the competition dynamic from the South Carolina charter school program.

Conclusion

In summary, and for a variety of reasons, we believe that it would be premature at this time to draw ultimate conclusions about the success of the charter school experiment in South Carolina.

One reason that we think it is too early to make a final assessment is that the South Carolina charter schools have existed for just a few years (the average is 2.9 years). Moreover, as this report is being prepared in May of 2002, final test data are not yet available for the 2001-2002 school year. In addition, having only eight charter schools to study makes it even more challenging to ascertain the potential for this program.

Even though we do not believe it is proper to draw final conclusions at this time, there are a number of statements we can make about the South Carolina charter school effort. First, despite the program's short duration, and despite its being a small program with only eight existing schools, it is evident that the SC Charter School program has evolved and made progress over its five year history. The evidence of this progress is demonstrated in a number of ways. For example, there is now a SC Charter School Association that is beginning to independently represent the concerns of the charter schools in the state. The organization is sponsoring a statewide conference in June of 2002 and will likely provide more support to the State's charter schools as the organization matures.

Second, (based on the number of inquiries that have been made to the SC Department of Education) parents, educators, and community members are all showing increasing interest in learning about how to apply for charters.

Third, while a number of charter school administrative processes still need to be streamlined and clarified, both the local school districts and the State Department of Education have learned more about how to manage the charter school program.

Fourth, significant growth has taken place in the charter schools themselves; they have started with basically a blank slate and have created fully functioning schools in a very short period of time.

Finally, even as we are completing this evaluation report, the evolution of the South Carolina charter school program can also be seen at the policy level. Based on the experience of operating under the initial legislation, state leaders in the General Assembly are considering a package of improvements to the current law. We do not know at this time the exact nature of the changes which might be made to the law, but it is clear that policy makers are genuinely interested in improving the provisions of the law in a variety of ways.

In conducting this evaluation study, it is evident to us that the South Carolina charter school program has provided a welcome public school alternative to many parents. It is also clear that the charter school program has allowed teachers and administrators to work on behalf of students under a somewhat different set of regulations from the traditional public school.

As noted earlier in the report, it is obvious that charter schools are complying with the legislative intent that they "use...a variety of productive teaching methods." They demonstrate this by experimenting with approximately 12 different instructional approaches and seven different organizational strategies; this is quite a bit of variety for only eight schools.

What is less clear about charter school in South Carolina is what are commonly referred to as the “bottom line” issues related to whether the program has been “successful” in South Carolina. Because of the restriction that only local districts can be charter sponsors, there are a very limited number of charter schools in South Carolina, and this small sample makes it particularly difficult to draw firm conclusions about success or failure of the program. Plus, to some extent, success is in the eye of the beholder.

Clearly the program has been somewhat successful because it has offered an alternative to citizens who want a public school option that is different from traditional public education. Also it has created alternative settings for many students who were not doing well in traditional schools. As we note earlier in this report, there is preliminary evidence that some of the charter schools are serving students in ways that appear to be as good as the traditional public schools. However, it is still premature to make a definitive judgment about this because there are so few charter schools and they have existed for such a short time.

Likewise it is early to assess the impact of the charter schools on the regular public schools, but we do have some information. For example, on the negative side, charter schools have claimed funds that would have otherwise gone to the school districts, and the charter schools have caused some extra administrative and oversight efforts. But, as a positive impact, in one instance specially-trained charter school teachers are actually training other teachers in their school district.

Charter schools are often touted in the national press for the healthy “pressure” they put on regular public schools to compete or be left behind. While this may be true in other states, with the small number of charter schools in South Carolina, we do not find evidence that regular schools have yet felt much pressure to innovate in order to compete with the charter schools. It may be that since local districts in South Carolina have so much control over whether a school is chartered, the districts do not yet have to worry too much about competition.

In summary, even though we now know a good bit about the charter school experience in South Carolina, we do not yet know enough. Because we still lack important data, we believe that the South Carolina charter school experience must be viewed very much as a work still in progress. We do know that, as shown by the data presented earlier in the report, some of the charter schools appear to be doing an excellent job, and others are doing less well. Future evaluations, with larger numbers of schools and more data, will be needed to make a clear assessment of the performance of the charter schools in South Carolina.

APPENDIX A

Interviews with Directors and Summary of School Visits

Charles Aiken Academy

1. How did you and others involved in planning the school determine that there was a need for this charter school?

Mrs. Glynda Taylor Caddell is the Executive Director of the Boys Home of the South. Charles Aiken Academy is a small charter school on its campus. The 12 member board recognizes that many of the boys in grades 1 through 8 were not being adequately served. Many of these boys were abandoned, abused and/or neglected children. The school provides services primarily to special education students.

2. Describe what evaluations you have conducted, if any, to determine the effectiveness of the school in achieving its purposes.

The PACT 2000 School Summary Report was used for purposes of evaluation and accountability. Assessment of behavior and social skills is documented. A treatment plan for each student is also used.

3. How effective is the school in improving student learning? What evidence do you have that student learning is occurring?

The report indicates that 96% of the students are below basic levels with only 9.1% at grade level.

Of the 29 boys in Charles Aiken Academy for 1999-2000 school year, 13 were transitioned to public schools, 11 were discharged to other facilities and 5 continued in Charles Aiken Academy.

4. How would you describe the financial status of the school?

Because of low enrollment and less dollars, Charles Aiken Academy will be facing some financial problems.

5. How would you describe the facilities and grounds? Food services? Physical education facilities? Classrooms? Science labs or other specialized labs? Computers and technology?

Facilities and Grounds The facility is excellent. The campus recently underwent a 1.2 million dollars renovation program.

Food Services Food services are excellent.

Physical Education Facilities **The gym has been recently renovated and is in good shape.**

Classrooms **The Charles Aiken Academy occupies three modular classrooms and has use of the gym and other campus facilities.**

Science Labs or other Specialized labs

Computers and technology **There are computers in the three classrooms.**

6. What have been the greatest rewards in establishing and implementing the charter school? From the teachers' perspective? From the Charter School Board perspective?

The greatest reward is seeing students in transition back to regular public school and maintaining self-confidence.

Teachers' perspective **The teachers believe that the charter has inspired student self-confidence and improved their academic achievement.**

Board perspective **The board is pleased and well satisfied with the school.**

7. What have been the greatest benefits to the students from having attended this charter school?

The greatest benefit has been gaining confidence of students and seeing improvements in behavior i.e. less "acting out" in the school. The federal IEP review was excellent.

8. What were the greatest challenges in establishing the charter school?

The greatest challenge is the school district.

9. Describe the major innovations that your charter school has implemented. Have you evaluated the effectiveness of these innovations? Results?

The major innovations have been having an aide and a therapist assist the teachers. Truancy and cutting school does not exist at Charles Aiken Academy.

Evaluations conducted to study effectiveness:

- **Our effectiveness is best seen from the therapeutic side of our work.**

10. One of the purposes of charter schools is to provide relief from many State laws and regulations so that charter schools can be more innovative and creative. How has the school benefited from the relief from some State laws and regulations?

n/a

11. Describe the major requirements or regulations that have made it difficult to establish and run charter schools.

n/a

CHARLES AIKEN CHARTER SCHOOL

Charles Aiken Charter School is residential and is a part of Boys Home of the South located in Belton, South Carolina. The school is an elementary charter for special education students in grades 1-8. The charter calls for 45 students. Mrs. Glynda Taylor Caddell is the Executive Director for the Boys Home and is excited about the charter school. Because most of the students at the Boys Home have serious emotional and social problems, the regular school has been problematic for them. This charter allows these students to remain on the campus and receive their schooling. Mrs. Taylor notes that attendance and behavior are now non-issues. The charter school is housed in three modular units and the students use the recently renovated gym. The entire campus received a 1.4 million dollar renovation. The campus is modern and well maintained. The dining hall prepares excellent meals. The staff and teachers provide academic training and therapy for the students. Mrs. Taylor is concerned about student enrollment for next year.

Discovery School of Lancaster County

1. How did you and others involved in planning the school, determine that there was a need for this charter school?

Mr. Thomas H. McDuffie is the Coordinator for the Discovery School of Lancaster County as well as the Director for the District Gifted and Talented Program. A seven member executive committee drafted the charter. The district sponsored and supported the committee's work because of the need to improve student achievement. The intent of the district is to use the findings of this endeavor to improve school achievement in all schools in the district.

2. Describe what evaluations you have conducted, if any, to determine the effectiveness of the school in achieving its purposes.

An annual report is available. The Discovery School of Lancaster County used the following evaluations:

- **The Metropolitan Achievement Test (2nd graders)**
- **The Otis-Lennon School Abilities Test**
- **The Raven Standard Progressive Matrices**
- **Surveys**
- **Personal Observances**
- **Portfolios**

3. How effective is the school in improving student learning? What evidence do you have that student learning is occurring?

The school is very effective. Because Discovery School uses Howard Garner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, student learning has soared.

Test scores show that 96% of the students at Discovery School are performing at grade level and above. The test scores are also the best in the school district.

4. How would you describe the financial status of the school?

The financial status of the school is good. The school has received over \$300,000 in grants. This includes a \$90,000 grant from the Challenge Foundation and an \$11,000 grant from Lancaster Youth Endowment. The Simms Foundation funds the Homework Center.

5. How would you describe the facilities and grounds? Food services? Physical education facilities? Classrooms? Science labs or other specialized labs? Computers and technology?

Facilities and Grounds	Discovery School is housed in a well-preserved former elementary school.
Food Services	Parents provide lunch for their children. The school has milk and sandwiches on hand for special situations.
PE Facilities	There is a multi-purpose room and a paved playground area.
Class rooms	Discovery School uses five classrooms, two portable buildings, a multi-purpose room, a Media Center and a Creative Flow Room.
Science Labs or other Specialized labs	There is a music lab but no science lab.

Computers and technology Each classroom is equipped with a TV/VCR and there are eighteen lap top computers. The new computers were purchased from funds obtained through the Challenge Grant.

6. What have been the greatest rewards in establishing and implementing the charter school? From the teachers' perspective? From the Charter School Board perspective?

The greatest reward is being able to work with a supportive group of parents, eager students, and dedicated competent teachers.

Teachers perspective	The teachers say that they enjoy the flexibility of the program and the strong administrative support. They also like the CORE Knowledge Curriculum.
Board perspective	The Executive Committee is indeed proud of Discovery School and they provide excellent leadership for the school.

7. What have been the greatest benefits to the students from having attended this charter school?

The greatest benefit to the students has been individual instruction based on Multiple Intelligences. Likewise, the positive discipline and the CORE Knowledge Curriculum have been beneficial to the students.

8. What were the greatest challenges in establishing the charter school?

The greatest challenge is gaining community awareness. Many people still think that this school is only for gifted and talented students.

9. Describe the major innovations that your charter school has implemented. Have you evaluated the effectiveness of these innovations? Results?

The major innovations have been:

- **The Multi-Intelligences Program**
- **The CORE Knowledge Program**
- **The Brain Booster Program**
- **The technology**

Evaluations conducted:

- **Test scores**
- **Surveys**
- **Teacher observations (both formal and informal)**

Results:

- **Parental satisfaction**
- **Number of applicants**

10. One of the purposes of charter schools is to provide relief from many State laws and regulations so that charter schools can be more innovative and creative. How has the school benefited from the relief from some State laws and regulations?

The benefits include flexibility in using the CORE Knowledge Curriculum. It also includes the ability to employ creative teachers who might not have state certification. They are also able to train other district schools in using their model.

11. Describe the major requirements or regulations that have made it difficult to establish and run charter schools.

Discovery School has not had any problems with the charter legislation.



DISCOVERY SCHOOL OF LANCASTER COUNTY

This K-5 school is located in a well-maintained former elementary school in Lancaster, South Carolina. The school presently houses not only the Discovery School but the Gifted and Talented Program for the County. In addition, adult basic education and special services also have offices in the building.

The Discovery School is an innovative and creative school. The halls and classrooms are adorned with excellent student projects, displays, and student art. Most impressive is a hall mural that contains the pictures of the 90 K-4 students displayed as artistic characters. Some of the pictures have the actual hair of the students in the design.

Also impressive are actual rural mailboxes positioned outside of each classroom that serve as the functional communication system for a school wide writing project. Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, based on the belief that there is more than one form of cognition, provides the sub-structure for the school's learning environment. These 90 students are provided with challenging activities that have traditionally been reserved for students identified as academically gifted and talented.

Mr. Thomas McDuffie, the school's principal, wears two hats at this school. He is the Director of the Discovery School as well as the Coordinator for the District's Gifted and Talented Program. The school has outstanding test results and strong parental support.

Greenville Technical Charter High School Interview Questions

1. How did you and others involved in planning the school, determine that there was a need for this charter school?

Dr. David A. Church, principal of the school was recruited by the Board of Directors to establish GTCHS. The application was written by Greenville Technical College. The high school is located on the main campus of Greenville Technical College. The college previously spent too much time and effort in remediation. This high school provides a rigorous academic foundation as well as technical and technology training necessary for employment and advancement in the contemporary economy.

2. Describe what evaluations you have conducted, if any, to determine the effectiveness of the school in achieving its purposes.

GTCHS has taken innovative steps to ensure that students have a strong foundation and meet high standards. All grades except As and Bs have been eliminated so students work at a skill until they master it. Students have the unique opportunity to enroll in a wide range of transferable college credit courses. Standardized tests are used to determine the effectiveness of the school in achieving its purposes. These tests include the Stanford 9, PSAT, Compass, ASVAB and the BSAP.

3. How effective is the school in improving student learning? What evidence do you have that student learning is occurring?

Standardized test scores in 2000-2001 exceeded the averages of South Carolina and, more specifically, Greenville County.

Of the 280 students enrolled, 25 seniors have earned straight As or As and Bs and have earned 422 college credits. Thirty-three juniors have earned straight As or As and Bs with 165 earned college credits. Twenty-two sophomores have earned straight As or As and Bs with 155 college credit earned. Freshmen and transferred student grades are not currently finalized.

4. How would you describe the financial status of the school?

The school has over \$100,000 in its fund balance. The school budget is balanced and has received excellent audit reports since its inception.

5. How would you describe the facilities and grounds? Food services? Physical education facilities? Classrooms? Science labs or other specialized labs? Computers and technology?

Facilities and Grounds **The school has an excellent facility as it is housed on the Greenville Technical College campus. It is one of the better charter school facilities South Carolina.**

Food Services **The students use the Student Union.**

PE Facilities **The students use campus facilities.**

Classrooms **There are thirteen modern classrooms in the main high school building.**

Science Labs or other Specialized labs **Fully equipped science labs are in place in the high school.**

Computers and technology **Every classroom has computers and there are two additional computer labs.**

6. What have been the greatest rewards in establishing and implementing the charter school? From the teachers' perspective? From the Charter School Board perspective?

The greatest reward is giving the students the opportunity to have a senior high school with a focused college atmosphere. The high school honors student freedom and independence.

Teachers perspective **The teachers love the freedom of the campus and appreciate the use of mastery learning.**

Board perspective **The Board has been faced with some political issues involving the charter school.**

7. What have been the greatest benefits to the students from having attended this charter school?

Benefits include:

- **Being housed on a college campus**
- **Technology**
- **Mastery learning**
- **College transfer courses**

8. What were the greatest challenges in establishing the charter school?

The greatest challenge is dealing with the politics of the Board of Directors. The Board wanted to relinquish the charter at one point. The parents elected a new Board of Directors.

9. Describe the major innovations that your charter school has implemented. Have you evaluated the effectiveness of these innovations? Results?

In addition to mastery learning, there is a fully qualified professional staff. Of the professional staff, two have Doctorates, one Doctorate is in progress and ten have Master's degrees. Ten teachers are certified to teach at Greenville Technical College.

The accountability study has demonstrated the success of the high school.

10. One of the purposes of charter schools is to provide relief from many State laws and regulations so that charter schools can be more innovative and creative. How has the school benefited from the relief from some State laws and regulations?

The benefits include:

- **Having their own grading system**
- **Being free from the bureaucracy of the local school system**
- **Freedom in textbook selection**

11. Describe the major requirements or regulations that have made it difficult to establish and run charter schools.

One difficulty is being required to count time in class rather than student performance.

GREENVILLE TECHNICAL CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Dr. David Church, Principal of Greenville Technical Charter High School states that he very much enjoys his work, despite the many challenges that he has encountered. The school is located on the large and attractive campus of Greenville Technical College in Greenville, South Carolina. The school is home to 230 ninth through twelfth grade students. There are 17 full time teachers who are fortunate to work in a well-equipped technical high school. Dr. Church indicates that the students, who wear uniforms, love the college atmosphere of their campus, and he states that records indicate that this is a high performing high school. According to Dr. Church, the school finances are excellent, as is parental support.

The school's mission is to provide its students with equitable opportunities to acquire an education. It focuses on linkages among rigorous academics, technology, and global career preparation. The college established the school because it wants to train a highly skilled workforce with problem solving and critical thinking skills.

According to Dr. Church, the Board of Directors has undergone a transition. He believed that the Board became involved with the politics of the school district and wanted to backtrack and

sought to relinquish the charter. The parents were outraged and immediately voted to elect the present Board of Directors.

The mission of the school is unique as a school reform model. One parent stated that her son has truly been awakened academically at this school and is now an honor student.

Loop Charter School

1. How did you and others involved in planning the school, determine that there was a need for this charter school?

Mrs. Eleanor Rice is the principal at Loop charter school. Loop Charter is a school within a school. The mission of Loop is to provide a stable environment through two-year cycles where students' academic achievement and character can be developed. The teacher therefore remains with the same group of students for two years.

2. Describe what evaluations you have conducted, if any, to determine the effectiveness of the school in achieving its purposes.
- 3.
4. How effective is the school in improving student learning? What evidence do you have that student learning is occurring?

The school has been quite effective in improving school learning.

Test scores are up. Parent satisfaction is positive. PACT, MAT7 and CSAB Test indicate improvement in student learning.

5. How would you describe the financial status of the school?

The Planning Grant was very beneficial to the school. The \$150,000 grant enabled the school to purchase much needed resources including school computers.

6. How would you describe the facilities and grounds? Food services? Physical education facilities? Classrooms? Science labs or other specialized labs? Computers and technology?

Facilities and Grounds The charter school is located in five classrooms of the elementary school.

Food Services The Loop students receive the same food service as the other elementary school students.

PE Facilities The regular gym is used along with the school playground.

Classrooms The five classrooms are adequate. Two are modular classrooms.

**Science Labs or other
Specialized labs The regular science curriculum is used.**

Computers **At least sixteen new computers were purchased for the school.**

7. What have been the greatest rewards in establishing and implementing the charter school? From the teachers' perspective? From the Charter School Board perspective?

The school has been able to ensure high levels of success in the early grades.

Teachers perspective **Because teachers have to learn two separate grade level curricula, they are better able to help students prepare for the next grade. Parent participation has been extremely positive.**

Board perspective **The 12-member committee is pleased with the progress of the school.**

8. What have been the greatest benefits to the students from having attended this charter school?

The students have formed better friendships. Academics have improved because of the improvement in technology.

9. What were the greatest challenges in establishing the charter school?

The greatest challenge has been getting information out to the parents and getting them to take a risk on this school within a school. Some parents were reluctant to have the children with the same teachers for two years in a row.

10. Describe the major innovations that your charter school has implemented. Have you evaluated the effectiveness of these innovations? Results?

The major innovation has been the two-year cycle.

Evaluations conducted:

- **Test scores**
- **Parent comments**
- **Teacher observations**

The result that was noted was the improved discipline in the classrooms.

11. One of the purposes of charter schools is to provide relief from many State laws and regulations so that charter schools can be more innovative and creative. How has the school benefited from the relief from some State laws and regulations?

The major relief is in having smaller class sizes.

12. Describe the major requirements or regulations that have made it difficult to establish and run charter schools.

The most difficult problem was creating an awareness of the school among the parents.

LOOP CHARTER SCHOOL

Loop Charter is a school within a school housed at the McCormick Elementary in McCormick, South Carolina. The school serves grades 1 through 4 and has five full time teachers. The school provides a stable environment through two-year cycles where students' academic achievement and character can be developed. The teacher remains with the same group of students for two years. The school targets students whose social, emotional, and cognitive growth needs to be nurtured through contact with a caring teacher trained in the concept of looping. The curriculum includes an integrated reading series, Saxon mathematics units, computer instruction and community tutors.

McCormick Elementary School is the former high school for the district. Although it is an older building, it is well maintained. The Loop School has three classrooms in the main building and two rooms housed in modular units.

Since the current principal, Mrs. Eleanor Rice, is new to the school, I interviewed one of the teachers, Mrs. Jennifer Jenning and the guidance counselor, Mrs. Toye Willis. They are excited about the charter school and are especially appreciative of the funds that have allowed them to get much needed resources, including 16 new computers. They report that the test scores are up and that discipline among the Loop students is better than students not in the program. They believe the program has provided stability for the students and are proud of the parental involvement that the school has generated.

McCormick Challenge Academy

1. How did you and others involved in planning the school, determine that there was a need for this charter school?

Mr. Rex Ward is the Director of the McCormick Challenge Academy. The District Superintendent along with six initial board members drafted the application. The mission of this school within a school is to serve 9th grade male students. The mission is to increase academic achievement, promote responsible behavior and develop good citizenship for these high-risk students.

2. Describe what evaluations you have conducted, if any, to determine the effectiveness of the school in achieving its purposes.

This is the school's first year. Therefore, the evaluations are not complete. There is also no annual report at this time.

3. How effective is the school in improving student learning? What evidence do you have that student learning is occurring?

For the first five weeks, students were taught basic discipline. It was stated that participation in a "Ropes Course" helped the students to focus and to develop self-confidence.

4. How would you describe the financial status of the school?

The school was funded by the \$150,000 Federal Planning Grant.

5. How would you describe the facilities and grounds? Food services? Physical education facilities? Classrooms? Science labs or other specialized labs? Computers and technology?

Facilities and Grounds The school is located in the local high school.

Food Services Regular school food services are provided.

PE Facilities The students participate in the regular physical education program.

Classrooms These fifteen students have their classes together and are given one-on-one instruction on a regular basis.

**Science Labs or other
Specialized labs The school purchased 20 lap top computers.**

Computers These students have access to the regular computer lab at the school.

6. What have been the greatest rewards in establishing and implementing the charter school? From the teachers' perspective? From the Charter School Board perspective?

The one-on-one attention has been a strong component of the program.

Teachers' perspective The teachers think that the program has enabled these students to focus and therefore their behavior has improved.

Board perspective The board is enthusiastic about the concept. The local superintendent has visited the program and thinks that it is moving forward.

7. What have been the greatest benefits to the students from having attended this charter school?

The greatest benefits to the students are:

- **The Rope Course**
- **Individual instruction**
- **Career training**
- **Guest speakers**

8. What were the greatest challenges in establishing the charter school?

The greatest challenge is being able to sell the program to school community.

9. Describe the major innovations that your charter school has implemented. Have you evaluated the effectiveness of these innovations? Results?

Innovations that have been implemented include individualized instruction for the students along with self contained student classes.

Results:

- **Improvement in discipline**
- **Early test data**

10. One of the purposes of charter schools is to provide relief from many State laws and regulations so that charter schools can be more innovative and creative. How has the school benefited from the relief from some State laws and regulations?

The school has benefited by the flexibility allowed in the curriculum and the optimum use of textbooks.

11. Describe the major requirements or regulations that have made it difficult to establish and run charter schools.

n/a

McCORMICK CHALLENGE ACADEMY

McCormick is a school within a school directed by Rex Ward. The Academy is housed at the McCormick High School in McCormick, South Carolina. There are 15 ninth grade males in the program. Its mission is to increase academic achievement and promote responsible behavior for these high-risk students. Parents sign students up for the Academy and must participate in conferences and four scheduled meetings. Mr. Ward said that because this is the first year for the program, the first semester was devoted to basic discipline. The students engage in a Ropes Course and will participate next year in a wilderness program. One seventeen-year old student that I interviewed likes the program because his participation allowed him to move from the 7th grade to the 9th grade.

Teachers volunteer specifically to teach in the program and therefore Mr. Ward says that they are very committed to assisting these high-risk students. The school was able to purchase 20 lap top computers from the federal planning grant. These computers along with the one on one attention from the teachers have provided a positive environment for these students. The students are self-contained and have classes in the regular high school.

Meyer Center for Special Children

1. How did you and others involved in planning the school, determine that there was a need for this charter school?

Mrs. Louise Anthony is the Executive Director for this licensed Greenville County Charter School. Meyer Center is also a DSS Childcare Facility and a Rehabilitation Agency. The school serves 53 Pre-K-2 children with disabilities. It is South Carolina's only integrative educational therapy center.

2. Describe what evaluations you have conducted, if any, to determine the effectiveness of the school in achieving its purposes.

The school evaluates each student to identify areas of need. A strategy of goals is then developed with the family to promote growth in all developmental areas.

3. How effective is the school in improving student learning? What evidence do you have that student learning is occurring?

The effectiveness of the school is documented by the IEP for each student.

Results from intensive therapy demonstrates that student learning is occurring. The physical therapist's goal is to improve gross motor skills and maximize the quality of movement. Increasing the fine motor and visual perceptual skills are also goals. The role of the speech language pathologist is to maximize a child's communication skills.

4. How would you describe the financial status of the school?

The charter dollars are inadequate to fully serve the special needs students. Other collaboration of program services and resources enable the school to be successful financially. These include United Way, DSS and Rehabilitation funds.

5. How would you describe the facilities and grounds? Food services? Physical education facilities? Classrooms? Science labs or other specialized labs? Computers and technology?

Facilities and Grounds The facility is excellent. The center is presently adding another 2,500 square feet to the existing building.

Food Services The food services are catered.

PE Facilities Physical therapy rooms are provided for special needs students.

Classrooms There are presently six large special needs classrooms.

**Science Labs or other
Specialized labs** n/a

Computers There are special software programs for some students.

6. What have been the greatest rewards in establishing and implementing the charter school? From the teachers' perspective? From the Charter School Board perspective?

The greatest reward is having a no fee program for parents with special needs children.

Teachers' perspective The teachers and therapists along with the social workers love the equipment and the caring atmosphere of the center. The therapists are a part of a team and are here daily.

Board perspective 23 board members are committed and supportive of the center.

7. What have been the greatest benefits to the students from having attended this charter school?

The benefits include having a 3:1 adult/student ratio. Also a benefit is being able to transition back to a regular public school program. There is transportation to and from school with five bus routes. There are over 200 community volunteers who provide more than 4,000 hours of service to the center.

8. What were the greatest challenges in establishing the charter school?

The greatest challenge is the opposition that comes from the district.

9. Describe the major innovations that your charter school has implemented. Have you evaluated the effectiveness of these innovations? Results?

The major innovation has been in the position to help students learn to use their special wheelchairs and other equipment prior to their school experience.

One result is the increasing number of students who graduated and transitioned into the public school setting. 23 students graduated in 2000-2001.

10. One of the purposes of charter schools is to provide relief from many State laws and regulations so that charter schools can be more innovative and creative. How has the school benefited from the relief from some State laws and regulations?

11. Describe the major requirements or regulations that have made it difficult to establish and run charter schools.

Being sponsored by the district has been a difficulty. If Meyer Center were its own Local Education Agency, they believe that they could make even more progress.

MEYER CENTER FOR SPECIAL CHILDREN

Two leaders, who have worked to provide quality education and therapy services to preschool children with disabilities, head this charter school. Louise Anthony is the Executive Director and is assisted by Susan Cervantes. They are well prepared to continue the struggle with the district in an effort to serve their special education students. The Meyer Center has been in existence for over 45 years and received a charter in August 1999. The unique feature about this school is the multi-disciplinary team of family, teachers, therapists, social workers, and physicians who work together to create the IEP for every child. The center and the school comprise a facility that is well equipped and maintained. The training and therapy rooms are large and spacious and each has a viewing window for parents and visitors. The center is adding another 2,500 square feet to the facility. Newsletters and brochures document the various ways that volunteers have contributed more than 4,000 hours at the center this past year. The Center is a work of collaboration between United Way, Social Services, and the charter school. Parents and students have benefited from the creative way that the Center has been able to combine federal, state, and community resources.

The Phoenix Center

1. How did you and others involved in planning the school, determine that there was a need for this charter school?

Mrs. Anne Darby is the Lead Teacher and Director of the Center. The District Office and a 7-member Board wrote the original application. The Phoenix Center is designed for divergent learners. They define a divergent learner as one who doesn't learn well in the traditional environment. These students, they believe, respond better to a more nurturing setting. These students often have a history of academic failure.

2. Describe what evaluations you have conducted, if any, to determine the effectiveness of the school in achieving its purposes.

Ten items are used as criteria in determining the success of the Phoenix Center. They are:

- Attendance
- Test Scores
- Employment
- Diplomas
- Discipline
- Law Enforcement
- Parental Involvement
- Parental Outreach
- Civic Involvement
- Civic Outreach

3. How effective is the school in improving student learning? What evidence do you have that student learning is occurring?

The school has seen student improvement in each of the above areas. In addition, the Phoenix Center uses student profiles and examines pre and pro test results.

The students are attending school and passing their courses. In addition, some student profiles display growth the school has provided for the students over the past year. Eight students were profiled. Except for the six graduating seniors, thirty-eight students plan to return to the Phoenix Center.

4. How would you describe the financial status of the school?

The state and local dollars are barely adequate. The school still needs good partnerships, grants, and other outside support systems.

5. How would you describe the facilities and grounds? Food services? Physical education facilities? Classrooms? Science labs or other specialized labs? Computers and technology?

Facilities and Grounds **The Phoenix Center is located in an old elementary school that presently houses the local Head Start Program.**

Food Services **The Center contracts with the District and gets food services from the local high school.**

PE Facilities **Physical Education is taught in county facilities. Tennis, basketball and golf are included as school activities.**

Classrooms **The Center has four classrooms, one computer lab, an office area, and a multi-purpose room.**

Science Labs or other Specialized labs **There is no science lab. However, there is a partnership with the local community college for these students needing advanced science.**

Computers **There are seventeen computers for the forty-five students. There is also a partnership with a nearby vocational school.**

6. What have been the greatest rewards in establishing and implementing the charter school? From the teachers' perspective? From the Charter School Board perspective?

The greatest reward is being able to see students begin to change their behavior and attendance. They begin to want academic success.

Teachers' perspective **Teachers at the school have benefited from this experience. They learn about school administration and how to engage in community outreach and public relations.**

Board perspective **The Board is well pleased with the progress that the school has made.**

7. What have been the greatest benefits to the students from having attended this charter school?

The greatest benefit is seeing the students get a new vision of themselves. They now engage in:

- **Small group and individualized instruction**
- **Hands on non traditional learning experiences**
- **Occupational training and job skill**
- **Participation with parents**

8. What were the greatest challenges in establishing the charter school?

The greatest challenge is the lack of administrative experience for this teacher managed school. Transportation has also been a challenge.

9. Describe the major innovations that your charter school has implemented. Have you evaluated the effectiveness of these innovations? Results?

The major innovations have been the development of good relations with the students and the building of a trusting and nurturing school environment.

The results that have been seen are improved relationships. The school sees the results from the before and after student profiles. In addition, the school's ten focus items that are used as criteria for school success have been positive.

10. One of the purposes of charter schools is to provide relief from many State laws and regulations so that charter schools can be more innovative and creative. How has the school benefited from the relief from some State laws and regulations?

The school is free to use other resources rather than traditional textbooks. Swamps, farmland and area lakes often serve as the texts for courses at the Phoenix Center.

11. Describe the major requirements or regulations that have made it difficult to establish and run charter schools.

Achieving the 10% racial balance has been difficult for the school.

THE PHOENIX CENTER

The Phoenix Center is a small charter housed in a former elementary school that presently is the home of the District's Head Start Program. The school is located in the small community of Alcolu, South Carolina. The mission of this charter school is to serve the needs of high school students who are considered divergent learners. These students have experienced serious adjustment problems with the traditional high school. In this small school setting, 45 students encounter a caring staff of 6 teachers who work with them on an individual basis.

The staff is directed by Mrs. Ann Darby, who is the lead teacher and school principal. She notes the success of this school in helping students improve their behavior and increase school attendance. Several students that were interviewed spoke highly of the school and said that they

have improved their grades. They indicated that they have become focused in this family environment and like the academic success that they are experiencing. The students have undertaken various school projects, including a hall mural that is creative and well presented.

The school is part of a well-maintained campus and has formed partnerships with several county agencies, including the local community college and the vocational high school.

Youth Academy Charter School

1. How did you and others involved in planning the school, determine that there was a need for this charter school?

Mrs. Stephanie B. Tisdale is the Administrator for Youth Academy. The six member Board of Directors hired a consultant to write the application. The Board saw that group home students were not being adequately served in the district. These students with a history of emotional abuse were not making it in the regular school setting.

2. Describe what evaluations you have conducted, if any, to determine the effectiveness of the school in achieving its purposes.

GED testing is the evaluation used to determine the school's effectiveness. An Annual Report is available. The evaluation shows that the academic, vocational and behavior gains experienced by Youth Academy students continued during this past school term.

3. How effective is the school in improving student learning? What evidence do you have that student learning is occurring?

Of the twelve students currently enrolled at Youth Academy, four are at grade level.

Two students last years received GED certificates and four others should be on target for this academic year.

4. How would you describe the financial status of the school?

The present funding is inadequate. Because the parent organization is state funded, some additional funds have been received. Parents and the Board have written grant applications.

5. How would you describe the facilities and grounds? Food services? Physical education facilities? Classrooms? Science labs or other specialized labs? Computers and technology?

Facilities and Grounds The facilities and grounds are not in ideal condition.

Food Services The students are sent by bus to another site for food services.

PE Facilities	There are no physical education facilities. The students take physical education at the local recreation center. The students are supervised but the program is not structured.
Classrooms	There are two classrooms, two offices, 1 conference room and one computer lab in this modular building, along with two bathrooms.
Science Labs or other Specialized labs	There is no science lab.
Computers	There are six computers for the twelve students presently enrolled.

6. What have been the greatest rewards in establishing and implementing the charter school? From the teachers' perspective? From the Charter School Board perspective?

The greatest reward is being able to help students have another chance at getting their GED.

Teachers' perspective **The teachers think that Youth Academy has provided a safe place for these special students.**

Board perspective **The Chairman of the Board is the local police chief. He believes that the school is well needed because it keeps students in a safe education environment and off of the streets.**

7. What have been the greatest benefits to the students from having attended this charter school?

Four students expressed their appreciation to the staff for providing them with a supportive and caring environment.

8. What were the greatest challenges in establishing the charter school?

The greatest challenge is finding certified teachers willing to work at Youth Academy. Funding the program was the next challenge. Transportation also has been a major problem. Presently, the school is using a local church van.

9. Describe the major innovations that your charter school has implemented. Have you evaluated the effectiveness of these innovations? Results?

The major innovations have been:

- **Individual instruction for the GED**

- **Job readiness**
- **Vocational training**
- **Behavior management**
- **Life skills**

Evaluations conducted:

Since inception, one student has gone on to enroll at the Community College and one has applied to a local college

Results:

There were two students who received the GED from Youth Academy.

10. One of the purposes of charter schools is to provide relief from many State laws and regulations so that charter schools can be more innovative and creative. How has the school benefited from the relief from some State laws and regulations?

The benefits include being able to provide the students with a setting to pass and obtain their GED.

11. Describe the major requirements or regulations that have made it difficult to establish and run charter schools.

Trying to achieve the 10% racial balance as prescribed in the law that reflects the school district has been difficult.

YOUTH ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL

Youth Academy Charter School is located in Kingstree, South Carolina. The school serves non-diploma track 9th through 12th graders who are emotionally handicapped, learning disabled, or home-based. The curriculum emphasizes computer-based instruction in literacy remediation and GED preparation. Vocational training includes classroom instruction, hands-on experience, and career training development.

The school is housed in an old modular unit that is not an adequate facility for its mission. The school is located on a campus that also needs major improvements. The van that is used for student transportation is old and in need of repair. The teachers want additional supplies and resources. Nevertheless, the fifteen students are appreciative of the staff's efforts in assisting them with their GED preparations.

The principal, Mrs. Stephanie Tisdale, is a caring administrator and works hard to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of her fifteen students. She says that the major goals of her school are:

- To provide a learning environment which delivers a successful academic experience to special needs youth who have not been successful in a traditional school environment.
- To afford individualized learning opportunities that enable students to function on at least an 8th grade level in reading, writing, and mathematics.
- To enable students' self-sufficiency through instruction in basic life skills.
- To provide vocational skill training which will result in job placement and retention.
- To enable students, given entry levels, to earn GED certificates.
- To give all students the opportunity, through the behavior management component, to build a strong sense of self-discipline and motivation.

The local sheriff is the Chairman of the Board of Directors for the school and according to Mrs. Tisdale knows that the school is valuable to the community. I also spoke with several teachers and four students. The students recognize that this school offers them a second and possibly last chance at getting a basic education. They also enjoy the family atmosphere of the school. Although the faculty needs additional training and resources are inadequate, the teachers are fully committed to working with these fifteen young people.

APPENDIX B**Questionnaire Responses from School Superintendents**

Clarendon 2

Interview with Mr. John Tindal

1. In general, how do you perceive the role of the district office as it relates to charter schools?

The District Office helps monitor and also advises the School Board on the charter school effectiveness.

2. What criteria are used in judging the charter school applications? How are judgments made?

The District Office made its decisions based on the charter school legislation.

3. Who judges the charter school applications? How are the persons selected?

The District makes recommendations to the School Board. The School Board will have the final decision.

4. How will the renewal of the charters be carried out? What criteria will be used?

Every year the Director of the charter school will present to the School Board an overview of their past year performance, budget, student performance, student enrollment, and goals. The School Board will approve the charter school for one year only. Any concerns the School Board has will be addressed to the charter school director.

5. How frequently is staff from the district office contacted by the charter school(s) in your district? What is the nature of the contact?

They are contacted weekly. The contact might include such issues as finances, paperwork for the State Department (such as attendance reporting, computer assistance, or help with SASA) providing advice regarding staff issues or dealing with student suspension and expulsions.

6. How frequently does district staff contact charter school(s)? What is the nature of the contact?

They are contacted weekly. The answer is the same as above except with students and teachers.

7. Are on-site visits of the charter schools conducted by district staff? If so, for what purpose? What has been learned from these visits?

Yes, there are visits. The purpose is to help to get an overview of what is actually going on in the charter school and to make sure all testing is conducted under state law.

The District has not found any problems with this school in carrying out its goals or objectives.

8. What is your understanding as to the mission of this charter school?

To provide an alternative approach for divergent learners in a small school setting.

9. What is your assessment of how well the charter school is achieving its mission and purpose?

At the present time, we feel that the charter school is achieving its mission and purpose.

10. What is your assessment of how well the charter school is doing in improving student performance?

The charter school has improved student performance for these potential dropouts because students receive more individual attention.

11. Have you received complaints about the charter school? How do you respond? Do you investigate to determine the legitimacy of the complaint? What is the nature of the complaint(s)?

There have been very few complaints. If there are complaints, we determine if the complaints are legitimate and if so we call the Director of the school and let them know the nature of the complaint. These complaints are centered on student suspension, teacher conduct and student enrollment.

12. In general, what impact would you say charter schools have had on your district? On the state?

We feel that we have a very unique situation in Clarendon Two regarding the charter school. They serve a group of students who would be potential high school dropouts. The charter school and the District worked together when the charter school was being formed. The charter school accommodated most of our concerns. The charter school staff is mostly former Clarendon 2 employees. This makes it very smooth in regards to working conditions.

Our major concern is the impact of state budget cuts. Because Phoenix Center's mission is in line with our school district, we have experienced few problems.

Lancaster District

Interview with Dr. John S. Taylor

1. In general, how do you perceive the role of the district office as it relates to charter schools?

The District Office is very involved with the Discovery School. It is a part of the District's long-range plan. The school is unique and is supported by research.

2. What criteria are used in judging the charter school applications? How are judgments made?

Our district Board reviewed judged the application based on the charter school law.

3. Who judges the charter school applications? How are the persons selected?

The applications are judged by the members of the School Board.

4. How will the renewal of the charters be carried out? What criteria will be used?

We will use the legislation as the guide in reviewing this school. We will therefore use academic data measuring results.

5. How frequently is staff from the district office contacted by the charter school(s) in your district? What is the nature of the contact?

We treat the Discovery School as a regular district school. We have weekly and sometimes daily contact. We assist with technology and offer all kinds of support services.

6. How frequently does district staff contact charter school(s)? What is the nature of the contact?

Contact is made weekly and sometimes daily.

7. Are on-site visits of the charter schools conducted by district staff? If so, for what purpose? What has been learned from these visits?

Our staff members are in and out of the school on a regular basis. We use this school as a demonstration site.

8. What is your understanding as to the mission of this charter school?

The mission of the school is to serve as a demonstration site for the district.

9. What is your assessment of how well the Discovery School is achieving its mission and purpose?

The school is on track. Test scores are good. We would like to expand the concept to our other elementary schools.

10. What is your assessment of how well the Discovery School is doing in improving student performance?

It is a little early to determine. The school has only been in operation for two years.

11. Have you received complaints about the charter school? How do you respond? Do you investigate to determine the legitimacy of the complaint? What is the nature of the complaint(s)?

There are not many complaints. A few parents were disappointed that their students did not get selected for the program. There were some concerns about racial balance.

12. In general, what impact would you say charter schools have had on your district? On the state?

It has served as a demonstration site in using the concept of Multiple Intelligences. It has truly been a cooperative venture between the charter school and the District.

Loop Charter/McCormick Challenge

Interview with Dr. Lloyd Hunter

1. In general, how do you perceive the role of the district office as it relates to charter schools?

The District Office has the role of helping our two charter schools meet the needs of their students. These schools serve students who have not been successful in the traditional school.

2. What criteria are used in judging the charter school applications? How are judgments made?

The District Office made its decisions based on the charter school legislation.

3. Who judges the charter school applications? How are the persons selected?

The Assistant Superintendent along with the School Board reviewed the applications.

4. How will the renewal of the charters be carried out? What criteria will be used?

The Board will determine how well the schools have performed academically.

5. How frequently is staff from the district office contacted by the charter school(s) in your district? What is the nature of the contact?

Because the District supports these schools, the contact is on a regular basis. We provide information, resources, and technical assistance.

6. How frequently does district staff contact charter school(s)? What is the nature of the contact?

Because the District supports these schools, the contact is on a regular basis. We provide information, resources, and technical assistance.

7. Are on-site visits of the charter schools conducted by district staff? If so, for what purpose? What has been learned from these visits?

The District Superintendent as well as other district staff has visited both schools. We viewed our charter as a part of our district schools.

8. What is your understanding as to the mission of this charter school?

Loop's mission is to serve students who have not experienced academic success. The high school program (McCormick Challenge) serves 9th grade at-risk males.

9. What is your assessment of how well the charter schools are achieving its mission and purpose?

Loop Charter

This school is doing very well. The students have performed well academically.

McCormick Challenge

We need to make more progress at this school.

10. What is your assessment of how well the charter schools is doing in improving student performance?

Loop Charter

This school is doing very well. The students have performed well academically.

McCormick Challenge

We need to make more progress at this school.

11. Have you received complaints about the charter school? How do you respond? Do you investigate to determine the legitimacy of the complaint? What is the nature of the complaint(s)?

No complaints have been received.

12. In general, what impact would you say charter schools have had on your district? On the state?

Both Loop Charter and McCormick Challenge have provided another option for students experiencing academic difficulty. Parents are especially involved with the Loop School.

Youth Academy Charter School

Interview with Dr. Kenneth Gardner, District Superintendent

1. How do you perceive the role of the district office as it relates to charter schools?

The Youth Academy Charter School is one of fifteen schools in our district and is accountable to the district. The district must insure that the charter school is administered and governed in the manner agreed to in the Charter School Agreement established between the district and the charter school.

2. What criteria are used in judging the charter school applications.? How are judgments made?

Criteria used to judge applications include: statement of mission and purpose, goals and objectives, curriculum, admission procedures, students to be served (enrollment, grade, service area), building, and signatures of support. Judgments are made based on the application process outlined by the state.

3. Who judges the charter school applications? Howa are the judges selected?

The district administration reviewed the Youth Academy Charter School Application and made recommendations to the Williamsburg County School Board of Trustees. The Board of trustees held a meeting to review the application and to discuss the charter school. The application was voted on during a regular board meeting.

4. How will the renewal of the charters be carried out? What criteria will be used?

A request to renew the charter will be made to the Williamsburg County School Board of Trustees. The same criteria that were used to approve the original charter will be used for renewal.

5. How frequently are staff from the district office contacted by the chatter school in your district? What is the nature of the contract?

The staff of the charter school contacts staff in the district office monthly concerning monthly reports, student concerns, and student attendance logs.

6. How frequently do district staff contact charter schools? What is the nature of the contact?

District staff personnel contact the charter school on an as needed basis. Contacts are related to school concerns, students and quarterly meetings.

7. Are on site visits of the charter schools conducted by district staff? If so, for what purpose? What has been learned from these visits?

District staff members visit the charter school just as they visit other schools in the district. These visits are for monitoring instruction, checking the facility, and establishing rapport with staff of the charter school.

8. What is your understanding of the mission of this charter school?

The mission of the Youth Academy Charter School is to provide educational experiences in a structured, supportive environment for special needs students. These experiences include academic, life skills, competencies, vocational readiness, and behavior management.

9. What is your assessment of how well the charter school is achieving its mission and purpose?

The Youth Academy Charter School is achieving its mission. We recognize that this mission is long term. Attendance reports indicate that the school is serving an average of fourteen students whose ages range from 14 to 19.

10. What is your assessment of how well the Youth Academy Charter School is doing in improving student performance?

The Youth Academy Charter school is doing a commendable job in improving the performance of the special needs students they serve. The school uses computer assisted instruction to improve the basic skills of students. This along with the life skills training is an asset.

11. Have you received complaints about the charter school? How do you respond? Do you investigate to determine the legitimacy of the complaint? What has been the nature of the complaints?

No complaint has been received.

12. In general, what impact would you say charter schools have had on your district? On the state?

The charter school is serving a group of students who had numerous problems when they were enrolled in the junior high and/or high school. In this structured, supportive environment the needs of these students are being addressed.

APPENDIX C

School Indicators from Report Cards

School Indicators from Report Cards

	Discovery School	Greenville Technical	LOOP	Meyer Center	Phoenix Center	Youth Academy
Dollars spent per student--Charter School		\$ 4,400	\$ 1,990	\$ 12,655	\$ 5,944	
Schools with students like charter school	\$ 4,826	\$ 4,951	\$ 5,175	\$ 6,753		
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	\$ 5,347	\$ 5,668	\$ 5,347	\$ 5,569	\$ 5,668	\$ 5,668
Prime instructional time--Charter School	87.5%	92.4%	94.5%	91.7%	94.5%	
Schools with students like charter school	90.2%	91.1%	89.5%	91.5%		
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	90.2%	90.1%	90.2%	89.6%	90.1%	90.1%
Student-teacher ratio in core subjects--Charter School	14.6	17.6	17.0	9.0	9.0	13.0
Schools with students like charter school	20.2	26.6	18.6	13.9		
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	18.7	25.1	18.7	18.5	25.1	25.1
Student attendance rate--Charter School	97.3%	94.3%	98.5%	87.2%	97.8%	
Charter attendance rate last year		94.9%	95.7%	85.0%	95.8%	
Schools with students like charter school	96.7%	95.7%	95.9%	96.2%		
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	96.2%	95.3%	96.2%	95.7%	95.3%	95.3%
Student retention rate--Charter School	0.0%	2.3%	0.0%		13.3%	0.0%
Charter retention rate last year					6.7%	
Schools with students like charter school	1.7%	7.2%	3.3%	6.0%		
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	3.6%	10.0%	3.6%	5.9%	10.0%	10.0%
Professional development days for teachers--Charter	14.7	10	6.8	7.9	5.5	5.3
Schools with students like charter school	8	7.4	7.5	7.3		
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	7.6	7.5	7.6	7.9	7.5	7.5
Teacher attendance rate--Charter School	94.3%	98.7%	98.5%	93.4%	98.6%	88.0%
Schools with students like charter school	95.0%	95.8%	95.0%	94.6%		
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	95.1%	95.7%	95.1%	95.1%	95.7%	95.7%
Teachers with advanced degrees--Charter School	100.0%	70.6%	50.0%	40.0%	16.7%	33.3%
Schools with students like charter school	55.1%	56.9%	44.8%	40.9%		
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	47.7%	49.4%	47.7%	40.9%	49.4%	49.4%
Continuing contract teachers--Charter School	100.0%		100.0%	80.0%	83.3%	33.3%
Schools with students like charter school	88.8%	82.9%	84.0%			
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	83.8%	81.0%	83.8%	81.8%	81.0%	81.0%
Teachers with out-of-field permits--Charter Schools	0.0%	23.5%	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	100.0%
Schools with students like charter school	0.0%	3.7%	0.0%	0.0%		
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	0.0%	3.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.0%	3.0%
Teachers returning from previous year--Charter School		72.7%	50%	92.0%		
Schools with students like charter school	89.1%	87.0%	88.5%	85.6%		
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	87.2%	85.2%	87.2%	87.4%	85.2%	85.2%
Average teacher salary--Charter School	\$ 44,718	\$ 33,933	\$ 35,402	\$ 32,000	\$ 25,000	\$ 17,933
Schools with students like charter school	\$ 39,765	\$ 39,257	\$ 37,184	\$ 37,350		
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	\$ 37,520	\$ 38,125	\$ 37,520	\$ 36,605	\$ 38,125	\$ 38,125
Percentage \$ spent on teacher salaries--Charter School		55.1%	40.0%	62.0%	94.3%	
Schools with students like charter school	65.9%	56.9%	65.3%	61.8%		
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	65.3%	56.4%	65.3%	66.3%	56.4%	56.4%
Principal's years at the school--Charter School	1	2	2	6	2	2
Schools with students like charter school	5.5	3	4	4		
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	4	3	4	4	3	3

Parents attending conferences--Charter School	100.0%	70.5%	99.0%	97.8%	88.9%	5.0%
Schools with students like charter school	97.1%	61.9%	96.5%	91.4%		
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	95.6%	60.1%	95.6%	94.5%	60.1%	60.1%
Opportunities in the arts--Charter School	Poor	Poor	Good	Poor	Poor	Poor
Schools with students like charter school	Good	Excellent	Good	Good		
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	Good	Excellent	Good	Good	Excellent	Excellent
Students on academic plans--Charter School			19%			
Schools with students like charter school	25.5%		41.2%			
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	43.1%		43.1%			
Students on academic probation--Charter School			0.0%			
Schools with students like charter school	0.0%		0.0%			
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	0.0%		0.0%			
Students older than usual for grade--Charter School	0.0%	3.9%	0.0%		50.0%	64.0%
Students older than grade last year—Charter School		6.8%	0.0%			
Schools with students like charter school	0.4%	5.4%	1.1%	1.1%		
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	1.1%	10.1%	1.1%	0.5%	10.1%	10.1%
Students suspended or expelled--Charter School	0	7	0	0	3	6
Schools with students like charter school	0	24	1	1		
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	1	29	1	0	29	29
Students gifted and talented--Charter School	26.3%	0.0%	5.9%		0.0%	0.0%
Schools with students like charter school	26.6%	10.0%	12.6%			
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	11.5%	7.4%	11.5%		10.7%	7.4%
Students with disabilities other than speech--Charter	0.0%	9.1%	6.1%	100.0%	0.0%	24.0%
Schools with students like charter school	6.8%	8.8%	9.4%	7.6%		
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	8.4%	10.7%	8.4%	2.6%	10.7%	10.7%

APPENDIX D

**Elementary School Statistics
Report Card Data**

	Discovery School	LOOP
PACT Results		
Charter School—Mathematics		
% Advanced	24.0%	15.0%
% Proficient	29.0%	15.0%
% Basic	41.0%	38.0%
% Below Basic	6.0%	32.0%
Schools with Students Like Ours—Mathematics		
% Advanced	25.0%	10.0%
% Proficient	24.0%	16.0%
% Basic	35.0%	42.0%
% Below Basic	16.0%	32.0%
Charter School--English/Language Arts		
% Advanced	6.0%	0.0%
% Proficient	29.0%	38.0%
% Basic	59.0%	47.0%
% Below Basic	6.0%	15.0%
Schools with Students Like Ours--English/Language Arts		
% Advanced	6.0%	2.0%
% Proficient	50.0%	32.0%
% Basic	35.0%	44.0%
% Below Basic	9.0%	22.0%
Percent of Students Basic and Above on Math PACT		
All students	94.1%	67.6%
N	17	34
N Students with disabilities other than speech	0	0
		0
N Students without disabilities	17	30
% with disabilities	0%	72.8%
Male		
N	7	15
%	41.2%	82.7%
Female		
N	10	18
%	58.8%	69.5%
African American		
N	6	18
%	35.3%	63.3%
Hispanic		
N	0	0
%		
White		
N	11	14
%	64.7%	87.5%
Other		
N	0	0
%		

Free/reduced-price lunch		
N	3	17
%	17.6%	63.9%
Pay for lunch		
N	14	16
%	82.4%	81.3%
Percent of Students Basic and Above on English/LA PACT	94.1%	85.3%
All students		
Students with disabilities other than speech		
%		0.0%
Students without disabilities		
%		86.2%
Male		
%		93.8%
Female		
%		80.2%
African American		
%		78.8%
Hispanic		
%		0.0%
White		
%		100.0%
Other		
%		0.0%
Free/reduced-price lunch		
%		73.0%
Pay for lunch		
%		100.0%
Students with disabilities other than speech taking	0.0%	9.1%
PACT (English/LA) off grade level—Charter School		
Schools with students like charter school	2.6%	4.2%
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	4.1%	4.1%
Students with disabilities other than speech taking	0.0%	9.1%
PACT (math) off grade level--Charter School		
Schools with students like charter school	1.8%	3.3%
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	3.1%	3.1%
First Graders who attended full day kindergarten--	88.9%	100.0%
Charter School		
Schools with students like charter school	93.8%	95.9%
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)	96.3%	96.3%
Meeting grade 1 and 2 readiness standards—Charter		100.0%
Schools with students like charter school		
Median for type of school (elem., high school, etc.)		

APPENDIX E

**High School Statistics
Report Card Data**

	Greenville Technical	Phoenix Center	Youth Academy
Tenth Grade Passage Exit Exam--Charter			
Year 2000			
Passed all 3 subtests	73.0%	36.4%	
Passed 2 subtests	12.7%	27.3%	
Passed 1 subtest	12.7%	27.3%	
Passed no subtests	1.6%	9.1%	
Year 2001			
Passed all 3 subtests	62.2%	11.1%	
Passed 2 subtests	20.3%	22.2%	
Passed 1 subtest	9.5%	22.2%	
Passed no subtests	8.1%	44.4%	
Tenth Grade Passage Exit Exam-- Schools with Students Like Charter			
Year 2000			
Passed all 3 subtests	76.3%		
Passed 2 subtests	14.1%		
Passed 1 subtest	6.7%		
Passed no subtests	2.9%		
Year 2001			
Passed all 3 subtests	76.7%		
Passed 2 subtests	13.6%		
Passed 1 subtest	6.6%		
Passed no subtests	3.1%		
Eligibility for LIFE Scholarships			
Charter School			
% of seniors eligible		0.0%	
% of seniors who met SAT requirement		0.0%	
% of seniors who met the grade pt. require.		0.0%	
Schools with Students Like Charter			
% of seniors eligible	30.5%		
% of seniors who met SAT requirement	32.5%		
% of seniors who met the grade pt. require.	56.2%		
School Dropout Rate			
Charter School	1.3%	2.2%	4.0%
Last Year's Dropout Rate	1.7%		
Schools with Students Like Charter	1.8%		
Median High School	2.9%	2.9%	2.9%
Career/Tech. students in co-curricular organiz.			
Charter School		0.0%	
Change from Last Year			
Schools with Students Like Charter	2.1%		
Median High School	4.5%	4.5%	4.5%
Enrollment in career and tech. center courses			
Charter School		25%	
Change from Last Year			
Schools with Students Like Charter	572		

Median High School	350	350	350
Career students participating in work-based exp.			
Charter School		0	
Change from Last Year			
Schools with Students Like Charter	18.1%		
Median High School	23.1%	23.1%	23.1%

APPENDIX F
Survey Instrument

Weaver B. Rogers, Ph.D. and Associates
1401 Kershaw Drive
Raleigh, NC 27609
(919) 783-8473

March 19, 2002

Dear :

The South Carolina Department of Education has contracted with our consulting firm to conduct a legislatively mandated evaluation of the South Carolina charter school program. The purpose of this questionnaire is to obtain information from the head of each charter school to use in evaluating the effectiveness of charter schools in meeting the goals of the South Carolina legislation, in identifying barriers in implementing the legislation, and in recommending policy changes. Your candid responses to our questions will assist in this evaluation.

Please complete the questionnaire to the best of your ability. If you have questions about the questionnaire or the evaluation, you may contact us directly. Please fax to (919) 788-8260 or mail the completed questionnaire to us within five days of receiving it in the enclosed envelope. The address, email, telephone, and fax numbers for our consulting firm are listed below:

Dr. Weaver B. Rogers and Associates
1401 Kershaw Drive
Raleigh, NC 27609
Email: wbrogers@mindspring.com
Telephone: (919) 783-8473
FAX: (919) 788-8260

As part of the evaluation, Dr. Grova Bridgers, one of our consultants, will be contacting you to schedule an interview with you and a visit to your school to gather additional information and comments. During the interview you will have the opportunity to modify or clarify your responses to the questionnaire. Some of the questions and issues that will be discussed in the interview are listed on Attachment I. Please review these in preparation for the interview.

Both the questionnaire and the interview will provide you with a valuable opportunity to communicate your successes and your concerns to State policy makers. Your cooperation will be greatly appreciated.

Very truly yours,

Weaver B. Rogers, Ph.D.

c: Ms. Catherine Samulski
South Carolina Department of Education

South Carolina Charter School Program Evaluation Questionnaire

1. To what degree has the school achieved its purpose given the length of time the school has been in existence?

To a great extent
 As much as can be expected
 Not as much as expected

2. Did you have a planning committee?

No
 Yes. If Yes, then briefly describe the composition of the planning committee.

3. Did you have any funds to assist in planning for and starting up the charter school prior to opening the school?

No
 Yes

If Yes, check all sources of funds.

Federal
 Private donations
 Grants
 Other _____

4. The following items are barriers that some charter schools across the nation have experienced. Check **all** those that have been barriers in starting and running this charter school.

Having adequate finances for ongoing operations
 Paying staff adequate salaries
 Recruiting qualified teachers
 Meeting the SC requirement of 25% certified teachers
 Providing transportation for students
 Having adequate time to plan for implementing the charter school
 Lack of support from the local school board and administration
 Lack of or inadequacy of facilities
 Lack of parental support
 Complying with State reporting requirements
 Complying with federal regulations
 Administering and managing day-to-day operations
 Handling internal processes and conflicts
 Communicating and working with the school's Charter Committee
 Communicating with parents

- Complying with health and safety regulations
 - Achieving enrollment with the racial composition similar to that of the school district's racial composition
 - Assessing student progress toward accomplishing the school's achievement standards
 - Knowing where to find answers to questions
 - Getting clear answers to questions about state rules and regulations
 - Others (Describe)
-

5. What has been the most difficult problem encountered in starting and running this charter school?

6. Describe the administrative organization of the school. Check all that apply.

- Principal or director as chief administrator
 - Team functions as administrative unit
 - Board/committee oversees administration
 - Other (Describe)
-

7. Approximately what percentage of parents is actively involved in the charter school?

8. Are parents **required** to be involved?

- No
- Yes

9. If yes, describe the requirements for parental involvement.

10. Check all of the ways that parents are involved in this charter school.

- Attend teacher conferences and other school meetings for parents
- Participate in school governance (serves on board/committee)
- Assist with special events or extra-curricular activities
- Have a written contract with the school
- Provide instruction or instructional support in the classroom
- Assist their child in learning through out-of-school activities
- Provide support services to the school (clerical, grounds, etc.)
- Contribute financially
- Attend parent education workshops
- Other (describe)_____

11. In your opinion, how would you compare charter school parents' involvement in their child's school and education with those of parents of children in regular public schools?

- involved to the same extent
 more involved
 less involved

12. What school organizational strategies does this charter school use? Check all that apply.

- After school program
 Before school program
 Summer school program
 Ungraded/multi-age classes
 Year-round
 Independent study
 Block scheduling
 Other Please describe below.
-

13. What are some of the instructional strategies used at this charter school? Check all that apply.

- Hands-on/manipulatives
 Cooperative learning/groups
 Thematic teaching
 Discovery learning
 Team teaching
 Peer tutoring
 Whole-class instruction
 Technology-enhanced learning (Describe)
-

Other Please describe below.

14. What is the curriculum emphasis? Check all that apply.

- South Carolina curriculum standards
 Character education
 Core knowledge
 Direct instruction
 Padeia
 Ethnically focused
 GED preparation
 Others Please describe
-
-

15. How is student progress documented? Check all that apply.

- Teacher tests and assessments
 Student portfolios
 Standardized or commercial tests
 Student demonstrations/performances
 Other
 Please describe.
-
-

16. Rate the adequacy of this charter school on the following dimensions using a four-point scale:

- 1=not adequate
 2=fair
 3=good
 4=outstanding

	1	2	3	4
Facilities				
Teaching quality				
Diversity of student population				
Community support				

17. The South Carolina Charter School Law (Chapter 40) identifies the following six purposes of charter schools. How would you rate the degree to which your charter school has made progress in accomplishing each of these purposes? Check the block corresponding to your rating.

1= no progress

2=limited progress

3=moderate progress

4=great deal of progress

	1	2	3	4
Improving student learning for the student population your school has served				
Increasing learning activities and opportunities for your students				
Using a variety of productive teaching methods				
Establishing new forms of accountability for your students and your school				
Creating new professional opportunities for your teachers				
Assisting South Carolina in reaching academic excellence				

Interview Questions
ATTACHMENT I

The following questions will be discussed during the interview. You may want to think about these questions and be prepared to discuss.

1. According to the charter, _____ School was established for the purpose of _____ . How did you and others involved in planning the school determine that there was a need for this charter school?
2. Describe what evaluations have been conducted to determine the effectiveness of the school in achieving its purposes. **(Please have data/information available when interview is conducted.)**
3. How effective is the school in improving student learning? What evidence do you have that student learning is occurring?
4. How would you describe the financial status of the school?
5. How adequate are the facilities and grounds? Food services? Physical education facilities? Classrooms? Science labs or other specialized labs? Computers and technology?
6. What have been the greatest rewards for you in establishing and implementing the charter school? From the teachers' perspective? From the Charter School Committee directors' perspective?
7. What have been the greatest benefits to the students from having attended this charter school?
8. What were the greatest challenges in establishing the charter school?
9. Describe the innovations that your charter school has implemented. Have you evaluated the effectiveness of these innovations?
10. One of the purposes of charter schools is to provide relief from many State laws and regulations so that charter schools can be more innovative and creative. How has the school benefited from the relief from some State laws and regulations?
11. Describe the major requirements or regulations that have made it difficult to establish and run charter schools.

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