

PRPE Charter School Approving Authority Workshop
Workshop Objectives, Approach, and Agenda
Tuesday, May 6th and Wednesday May 7th, 1997

Background:

In the fall of 1996, the US Department of Education contracted with Dean Millot at RAND to produce a Guidebook for Chartering Agencies. This report, scheduled for nationwide distribution by the Department, is intended to help chartering agency personnel develop and implement a charter schools program in their jurisdiction. It was written specifically for personnel in an agency that has not yet implemented a charter schools program. Although, it should be useful to anyone in a chartering agency. It is a general, "top-down" paper which:

- provides an introduction to the charter school concept and statutes.
- identifies the types of charter applicants and their capabilities to operate an autonomous school.
- explains the functions of a chartering agency and the expertise required to carry out those functions.
- describes the system of relationships that develop among charter schools, the traditional public school system, those for-profit and non-profit entities providing technical and material support to charter schools, and the role of the chartering agency in that system.
- provides agency personnel with basic advice on the implementation of charter school programs.

Although pleased with the guidebook, the Joint Program's Director, Dr. Paul Hill, and the Associate Director, Robin Lake, and Dean agreed that personnel in agencies that have just received chartering authority need access to the experience of their counterparts in other states. General guidance based on policy analysis is useful, but most people value the "real world" experience of others who have faced similar problems. Paul, Robin and Dean resolved to begin to develop that access by holding a small workshop with experienced personnel from both chartering agencies and the state education agencies that deal with chartering agencies. This workshop is intended to give some people from agencies recently granted chartering authority an opportunity to interact with their more experienced counterparts, and to publish the results in a report for general distribution to charter agency personnel.

People With Real World Experience.

Effective chartering agencies are as important to the ultimate success of the charter school concept as the schools themselves and face problems at least as challenging as those experienced by the schools. Yet chartering agencies lack the attention and support that have been given to the charter schools; the networks of charter agency personnel are informal; there are no regional or national meetings for chartering agencies; and technical assistance for chartering agencies is virtually nonexistent.

Paul, Robin and Dean wanted people from a range of states with different chartering agencies. They sought personnel from agencies that had chartered with a large number of schools, who had been in the chartering business long enough to have made mistakes, and had recognized and reflected on those mistakes to change their approach. They sought people in agencies that had confronted the difficult decision to terminate a charter. They sought people in state education agencies who had the responsibility of creating a supportive environment for charter programs at the state level. The result is a mix of workshop participants who are current and former officials from state and/or chartering agencies in Arizona, California, Colorado, Georgia, Massachusetts, and Michigan.

Personnel from Agencies About to Implement a Charter Program.

A report aimed at people in agencies that have recently been granted chartering authority is likely to be enriched if representatives of such agencies are present at the workshop. Therefore, representatives from the District of Columbia and Washington state (legislation is still pending), jurisdictions where we are located, and where agencies have recently been given the power to charter schools have been invited.

The Workshop Approach.

The workshop will draw upon and distill the knowledge of experienced agency personnel through a hypothetical case study of a chartering agency. The approach is simple, straight forward, and quite powerful. Dean Millot will play the role of an official in an agency with chartering authority, who has been given the responsibility to develop, lead, and implement the agency's charter schools program. As that official, Dean will bring up issues and problems he is facing as he gains experience in the charter school phenomenon. It will be your role to offer your advice and insights, and to engage in debate and discussion with other participants.

Dean will attempt to bring up issues that are unique aspects of the type of charter school law your state represents or the type of chartering agency you represent. He may do so to

follow an interesting line of discussion, to see where the logic of an argument begins to break down, or to stimulate debate.

The Report.

In the fall of 1995, PRPE held a similar expert workshop for charter school applicants. The project resulted in *So You Want to Start a Charter School: Strategic Advice for Applicants*, a 36 page report available in hard copy and on the PRPE Website. We expect the expert workshop for chartering agency personnel to result in similar materials. Subject to the agreement of all participants, we will make the transcript available to the participants. The transcript will serve as the basis of the report, but the report will be a distillation of issues and advice -- not an edited transcript. A draft will be made available for participant review and comment prior to the release of any report.

The Workshop Agenda.

The workshop will be broken into three parts, covered in three workshop sessions of three hours and fifteen minutes. Approximately two hours of each session will be devoted to Dean's role play. During this period, invitees from Washington state and the District of Columbia will be observers. Roughly the last hour of each session will be given over to questions from the observers and general discussion. The balance of time will be consumed by session breaks. All sessions will be recorded and transcribed.

Tuesday, May 6th.

8:00am: Continental breakfast served in Terrace Room, 4th Floor.

8:30-11:45am: Morning Session in Terrace Room. *mm 372-lunch*

During the first morning session, participants will cover the periods when: 1) a law is first considered likely to pass, and 2) the agency's development of a system for reviewing applications, to 3) the point at which that system is in place and the agency is ready to receive applications. We will discuss answers to such questions as:

- How is my agency likely approach impending legislation?
- What risks and opportunities does this new job bring to my career?
- Who are my allies and adversaries within and outside my agency?
- What issues will be raised within and outside my agency after the bill passes?
- How should I think about the charter schools that will be formed and their role in the larger system of public education?
- What is my role in this process? Advocate for charter schools? Enforcer of charter law? Friend or critic of charter applicants? Will I face conflicts of interest? How can I resolve them?
- What kind of performances should my agency expect applicants to promise? Which are measurable?
- How many applications is my agency likely to receive? Who will submit applications?
- How should my agency review charter applications? What process? What criteria for approval?
- How should the existence of an appeals process or an alternative chartering agency affect my plans?

- What expertise will be required to operate an effective chartering agency? Where will I find it? What kind of a budget do I need? How much can I expect?
- When should my agency be ready to accept charter applications? When is too early? How do I know if we've waited too long?
- Will there be pressures to charter schools before the process is in place? How should I handle those pressures?

12:00-1:00pm: Lunch in Waterview Suite #372.

1:05-4:45pm: Afternoon Session. Meeting in Terrace Room, 4th Floor.

After lunch participants will explore the periods when: 1) the first potential charter school operators submit their applications for consideration by the chartering agency, through 2) the process of deciding on charters, to 3) the final decision to grant the last charter for the next school year. Questions for discussion will include:

- To what extent will my agency's decision makers be guided by political factors when they consider charter applications? To what extent will they focus on the capability of applicants to deliver the proposed programs?
- Will my agency's decision makers be competent to judge charter applications? How much help will they need? What weight will my agency's decision makers give to staff recommendations? Who else will they turn to for advice and assistance?
- Will my agency come under political pressure to charter particular schools? To deny particular applications? From where? For/against whom?
- Should my agency adopt a rolling decision process on charter applications or consider all applications at the same time?
- Are there applications that look good on paper but will fail in implementation? What are the warning signs?
- Are there applications that look bad on paper but will succeed in implementation? What are the indications?
- To what extent should I investigate applicants and their claims?
- How should I and my agency interact with applicants and potential applicants? Who should I be dealing with from the applicant team? What amount of time can I reasonably expect to make available to applicants during this time?
- Should my agency reject incomplete applications or work privately with the applicant to improve them? How much work and what conditions of privacy are appropriate?

- Should charters be granted with the condition that certain requirements are met? or should charters only be granted after such conditions are met? What are those conditions?
- What kind of public hearings process is fair to the applicant and the public? What constraints exists on public hearings? What kind of public hearings are likely to be instituted?
- How will an appeals process or an alternative chartering agency affect my agency's decision makers?

Dinner.

On the evening of the first day, participants will have an informal dinner at a restaurant in the famous Pike Place Market. There is no agenda. This is an opportunity for participants to experience one of Seattle's landmarks, enjoy Pacific Northwest cuisine, relax, and socialize.

Wednesday, May 7th.

8:00am: Continental Breakfast in Terrace Room, 4th Floor.

8:30-11:45am: Morning Session.

During the morning session of the second day participants will cover the periods: 1) following the decision to grant the first charters, through 2) oversight of the first charter schools, to 3) the decision to terminate and/or renew a charter. Questions for this session include:

- How should my agency carry out its oversight responsibilities?
- What kinds of reporting/access requirements are reasonable to impose on charter holders?
- Which of the performance promises made by charter holders should my agency focus on?
- How much time and what resources should my agency devote to oversight? How much time and what resources are likely to be made available for this purpose?
- Will any other agency or entity be overseeing the schools my agency chartered? Who else will be keeping an eye on these schools? Why? How will/should I and my agency relate to these organizations and/or individuals?
- What problems should I watch out for during early implementation of a charter? What are the warning signs of trouble?
- How should my agency investigate a potentially problematic charter? When and how should my agency intervene in a problem school? What incentives, assistance, and sanctions should I consider to keep my agency's charter program on track?
- When should I recommend that my agency terminate a charter?
- What role, if any, is politics likely to play in the decision to investigate, intervene in, or terminate a charter school?

12:00-1:00pm: Lunch and Wrap-Up.

Following this session, participants will wrap up the proceedings at a working lunch. The workshop will conclude by 1:00.