

**REPORT ON WORKSHOP IN SEATTLE WASHINGTON MAY 6-7, 1997**  
**Submitted by Josephine C. Baker, Chair, DC Public Charter School Board**

**CHARTER SCHOOLS** - A vehicle for improving education. Charter schools are an opportunity to work outside the box; an opportunity to rearrange time, resources and instructional strategies so that more children reach higher standards. CS provide avenues for achieving these standards/ gives more choice; there is not a single best way.

**Charter school law** empowers the board to carry out its mission. Deep structural reform is made available by charter laws.

Reasons for charter schools - CS allow people a chance to use their ideas to reach high levels. CS/public schools are looking at public school charters to help bring about systemic reform; they are a vehicle for improving education.

\* Conditions are created in which schools are in control \* All money reaches the building  
\* Free of board of education expenses \* Can hire and fire - suspends constraints \* Everyone is there by choice - teachers, administrators, students/parents.

**Authority -**

Chartering Board controls outcome/results. CB has to find the balance between control(board) and autonomy (school). Board should ere one the side of taking time to plan. Chartering authority can "recruit" organizations in the parts of the city where they feel that CS are needed. Part of the PR and Communication Campaign can concentrate on key areas. Motivate existing organizations in the parts of the city to join with grass roots groups in developing a charter school. It is imperative that the CS Board provide information sessions and training. This is a small business venture; small business administration might be a good resources for training session. There is a need to deliver quality technical assistance. How do you assess education plan, its quality, etc.? How do you develop leadership, avoid cult personality.

Application - On front end, background checks of major player in application a must.  
\* How do you handle the cry "Charter Now"?? Establish process; seek counsel if there is pressure to charter in fall "97. \* It seems presumptuous to think you can charter a school when no criteria is yet established. \* Charter mechanism may not help to provide the school you look

for; what's on paper may not work in reality. Quality and passion of people involved greatly influences success (see interview). \* There should be a down to earth mission (not pie in the sky rhetoric), consistency between application and mission should be reflected in education plan, staffing requirements; should see signs of the aspiration supported by curriculum standards. (Arizona requires 3 levels of curriculum submitted - ex. Gr. K thru 6 proposal might submit curriculum for gr. 1, 3 and 5. Application design should enable board to see clarity, coherence; application should be clear and precise - length of application is no advantage \*Chartering authority must make clear what it means by community support \*Authority should be truthful - do you want a show of political support or real resources indicated in the chosen board of trustees??

Reviewing - Viability from enrollment standpoint - are there enough children to make up the school? Use of a letter of intent is one option; Chicago used a petition - parents w/eligible aged children. How can you deal with a very nontraditional school in a very hierarical system? Avoid being seduced by the platitudes in a proposal; educational rhetoric of the moment. Look for solid academic design, accountability supports systemic reform; Don't be hasty, clarity of purpose and seriousness of education in forefront - avoid politics. **Charter schools can show system how it can adapt before it becomes extinct.** Use success of CS to apply to existing public schools.

**Funding** - All funds spent in system not just per pupil ratio would provide equitable funding of charter schools.

#### Application/applicants

Charter applications are very clearly written and specific; be proactive in how you're going to handle complaints that come in - be consistent. Applicants can look for allies in fringe areas such as high risk providers, title I, etc.

Information is power; form informal support networks; communicate directly w/ children's campaign, others who are supporters of children.

What kind of staff? \* paralegal - needs creative solutions of the law for applicants; needed to interpret the law \* evaluator - works w/schools to look at test data \* Encourage applicant organizers to have someone who is there to support them. \* Applicants need budget analyst - however an application is needed that does not institutionalize. \* The use of a petitions to show support is sometimes a part of the application. Parent signatures - Do parents know where the

school will be located? Are parents willing to enroll regardless of location? What affect will the number of students enrolled have on the ability of the school to function.? CS can negotiate use of services with the system - legal, financial etc. \*Parent initiated charters - Choose a director from other than the group that did the maneuvering to get the charter, avoid politics etc. Takes 2-3 generations of board members to work out all the kinks. A fair amount of turnovers is seen in the boards of parent initiated charters. \* Liability insurance purchased by the charter school through the school system.

**Start-up money** not for hiring someone to write application; make loans for start-up. Group could get charter - then hire a university to run the school. Promote facilities through pulling together developers, etc.

\* Access to those already on staff (NA) to DCPCSB. \* There is a common agenda between education staff and charter school authority (NA) Local district could have right of first refusal before a state board appeal (NA)?

**Public Hearings** - What should be in the hearing? Is this an opportunity for the opposition? How should the board approach this kind of hearing? " This is not a trial!" This may be an opportunity for opponents to share their views or it may be a chance for the Board/petitioner to see community support; petitioner shares info publicly; Chicago used this as a time to hear objections. Board has the petitions ahead of time; petitioners bring community support group, those who care basic planners; parents can be spokesperson, announcement is sent to the teacher's unions, community leaders etc.

**Oversight** How much of the burden of reporting does authority want to put on the charterer. Period between charter and opening day - How much oversight should a board have over a school that has been chartered? Be sure to protect the creativity, innovation.

A. Info - collect and act on it so that they can use it themselves and share with you. What do they need to be successful. B. Contract signed - must provide basic data - # of students to be registered/ allows for payment from school board.

**Charter** Need to be sure that there is language in the charter that protects board in case of need for probation, revocation. Work out final charter (contract) with input of legal staff (or pro bono) However, authority (board) doesn't want to be a regulator. put into contract language beforehand. In application - definition of what a charter school is and where the records go it a

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school closes, require charterers to describe have guideline for how transcript will be executed for need to transfer back into a traditional PS. Provide records to parents, not just report cards, how credits equate to traditional system.

### **Horror Stories**

\* At the first sign of trouble, act on immediately. \* Watch out for vindictive individuals. should see positive signs \* Organizational viability in question - infighting etc. (school on probation in Mass.) \*Charterer used money for a GED program already in place; not clear academic plan \* Checklist for county/city health requirement. Accountability became important because of a mismanagement problem - school closed.

## APPLICANTS

How do you provide for applicant (parent) to be able to charter a school?? Will there be charter schools that will be screened out by detail requirements???

\*\* Parent group can hire people to implement the objectives; some parent groups are being screened out by the requirement for detail; how do we help them to transfer their aspiration into strong design for their school?? Possibly - A university to provide training sessions for applicants in aspects of running a charter school. Note: As pre-support - foundation tend not to come forward: too risky! **Outside support** - Individual charter schools can use a contractor to provide for bookkeeping and other needs. Provide a prospective charter schools a list of those who would provide technical assistance; charter organizer's don't have any money; some technical assistance people may vanish.

How does applicant determine teacher salary component? It can serve as incentive for teacher to work for successive years. \*\* One school reduced staff cost by 50% - used funds to enrich the school ie. books, computers, etc. Applicant can use standard in place by the school system for hiring school personnel.

Applicant to comply with written statues (by state counsel); this is part of the charter that they sign.

Admissions - dependent on state laws etc. - except, no discrimination by race, ethnicity, handicapping conditions etc. Lottery - Modified lottery - preference giving to founding parents, then fist come fist served.

**BOARD** Develop conditions for approval which cover the essential regulations - this seems to be taken care of in our present application (draft).

**BACKGROUND CHECKS / DISCLOSURES:** Credit report, IRS Problems; history or poor finances; important because governing board handles funds. Look for shyster! How public should results of credit checks be - **STRICT CONFIDENCE, NOT PUBLIC!!** What is the resolution of poor credit information?

Remember - poor person may have poor credit, don't lock out the poor.

## **Business Plan**

Budget - At <sup>least</sup> a one year budget - business plan is rudimentary; how is the money going to

support the plan; require cash flow analysis. Applicant needs to understand the range of variation - if fewer students then what? The budget should show a reserve fund (in L.A. 3% required, start-up fund?) The small business administration plan is a good prototype for what is needed. Business plan should show clarity, consistency - must relate to education plan. What uncertainties?? \*\*Cost of facility Renovation cost? One applicant submitted three budgets showing different levels of income.

**Governance**

\*By-laws - incorporated by reference into the charter; may be developed after charter has been granted - provide them with samples. ex. Procedure for getting a governing board, how governing body is going to work.

\*Who is responsible for decision making? Who is the leader of the school - a must!! Strong governance is a plus.

**Interview**

Formal meeting with applicants at beginning of process - interaction process gives insight into the applicants chance for success.

Check reference; check roles as defined by applicant.. Applicants pay for fingerprinting; credit checks paid for by state (Ariz.)

Disclosure statement - Form for founder(s) to sign; Have your been in litigation? bankruptcy? Look carefully at relationships (members of the same family etc.) on the board.

In the interview pay special attention to how well they answer question; confirm/verify information on application. BAD SIGN - Only one person know about the details of the application; bad chemistry noted between individuals; applicants make profound statement/contrary to what they must do; no follow through after meeting. GOOD SIGN - Applicants show fluency on subtle questions; can fill in the blanks on application; all member at interview share the vision; there to create a job for themselves, commitment only in global terms. application/charter = what the mission statement is all about. Can see the desire to do good things for kids. Process already developed for making decisions.

Note: geographic diversity - location can be a priority. Staff development - develop a base to encourage the process in the needed area, ex. Anacostia. State up front - any geographic preference; any requirements. Empower parents, church groups, community groups.

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