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# Jasper County Schools

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## The Transition to a Charter School System

Several years ago, the Georgia General Assembly passed a law requiring all Georgia School Systems to select one of the following flexibility models by June 30, 2015: Investing in Education Excellence (IE2), Charter School System or System of Charter Schools. School systems could also opt out of choosing a flexibility model, sticking with the status quo; however, those schools would not be eligible for state waivers of any kind.

In Jasper County, the recent decision to become a

Charter School System was not made lightly. A considerable amount of time, study and planning was dedicated to the process.

It is my hope that this newsletter will answer any questions you may have about Jasper County's move to Charter System Status.

— Mike Newton,  
Superintendent



### *A Parent's Perspective: Why A Charter School System Is Good News for Parents*

Parents of students in Jasper County Schools are familiar and often uncomfortable with what seems to be constant change in our children's educational environment. A new test, like Georgia Milestones. A new technology, such as smart boards or tablets. New curriculum. New principals and teachers.

Now, Jasper County is transitioning to a Charter School System, and that is certainly a significant change. But if you're wondering what this re-

ally means, I think you're going to be excited by the possibilities this change opens up for us parents and our children.

First of all, I'm a fierce believer that a student's success depends on parents' involvement in our children's education. That's why I've served on school councils at three of our four schools, as well as the Superintendents Parent/Community Advisory Board. Participation in these groups has allowed me to keep a finger on the pulse of the school system—to understand what decisions are affecting my children, and let my opinion on such decisions be known.

Under our current structure, these councils are purely advisory. However, under our new Charter School System, we will be required to establish school-level governance councils that are given greater decision-making authority. This means that we—the parents of Jasper County students—will have a say-so in what happens in such areas as curriculum, personnel, finance and school governance.

Second, nobody understands the needs of Jasper

County students better than our parents. And as a Charter School System, Jasper County will receive waivers from certain state mandates, and therefore, greater flexibility and innovation in the types of programs we think our students need.

This freedom will allow us to adapt our curriculum to the diverse needs of Jasper County students, and expand or develop new programs in both college and career-ready platforms, such as Agriculture, Mechanical, Healthcare, Law Enforcement, or even Culinary Arts. These are just a few examples of the types of choices we will have under the Charter System.

While I am excited and optimistic about the benefits and opportunities the Charter System creates, I am aware that our success depends on parental involvement. Without our active participation in school governance teams, we will not fully realize the benefits we so often say that we want. This change is a change for the better, but it depends on you and me. And I think that's a good thing.

— By Bill Schilling

## What is a Charter School System?

A Charter School System may be created when a local system enters into a contract with the state permitting it to function without compliance to numerous laws, rules and guidelines governing education.

The local district gains flexibility to innovate in exchange for increased academic accountability. For example, a Charter School System can apply for waivers that allow students to move in a non-graded manner. In other words, once a student demonstrates mastery of a certain grade level set of standards, he or she may move on to the next grade level subject matter.

A Charter School System is governed by the existing, locally elected Board of Education which is accountable to the local voters and subject to state accountability rules. In addition, each school within the Charter System has a school-level governance team capable of greater decision-making authority.

The key differences between the various charter structures in Georgia centers on governance and local accountability. Charter School Systems and local start-up charter schools (such as Lake Oconee Academy in Greene County) work directly under local boards of education. Commission Charter Schools are independent of local board of education control and influence.



Charter Systems believe that teachers, parents and community partners, acting as a school governance team, should be empowered to make decisions at the school house level to best meet the unique needs of their school.

Jasper County will be joining some of the most innovative school systems in the state. School governance teams are being asked to address a variety of issues. How should the class schedule be changed and funding prioritized? Should students spend more time on math or learning a second language? After interviewing candidates for new principal, which candidate best meets the needs of the school?

Marietta and other systems use funding received from the state to fund innovations in the classroom as proposed by teachers. If a teacher's idea is funded, he/she is required to report on the success of the idea at the end of the year. The result is a publication entitled "Innovations and Inspirations" (<http://www.marietta-city.org/Page/2445>).

Charter systems are also creating alternative career pathways for students. Madison County uses its flexibility

to partner with local farmers and industry to prepare students for alternative career pathways. Dublin City has implemented an IB program and school choice to attract economic development from overseas.

— By Daniel Weber,  
Charter System Foundation



Jasper County Schools Board of Education Members, who will retain ultimate decision-making authority, include Bobby Norris, Erin Lynch, Chair Shannon Barton, MD, Superintendent Mike Newton, EdD, Lewis Rice and Vice Chair Paul Kelly

## What is School Level Governance?

Currently, each school in Jasper County has a School Council comprised of the building principal, teachers and parents elected by their peers. Business/Community representatives also serve on the school councils.

School Councils are currently strictly advisory.

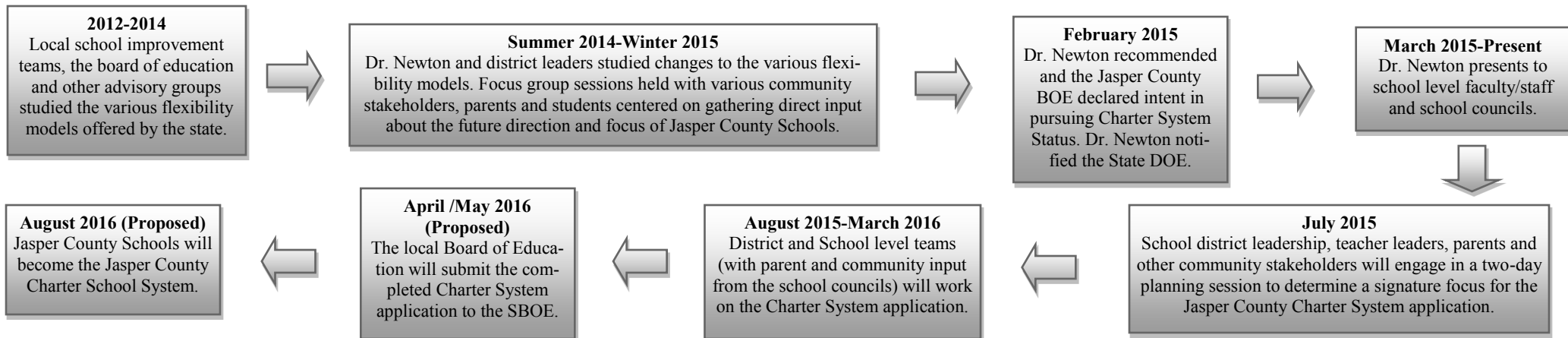
Charter System Status recognizes the importance of in-

creased school-level governance. A charter system must maximize school level governance by granting greater decision-making authority in personnel, financial, curriculum/instructional decisions to the school governance teams. School-level governance teams will also establish and monitor the achievement of school improvement goals and

operations.

While a greater emphasis is placed on school-level governance in the Charter System model, the locally elected Board of Education (BOE) and appointed school superintendent still retain ultimate decision-making authority as outlined in the State's Constitution.

## Timeline for Transitioning to a Charter School System



## Impact on Education

The transition to Charter System status will require a great deal of planning over the next year (see timeline above). Any significant changes to instructional programs are not expected until August 2016, when the district enters into Charter Status.

Information gathered from the focus group sessions (feedback from parents, staff, students and community members) revealed the following areas of attention:

⇒ Preparation for life and work beyond the schooling years;

- ⇒ Quality;
- ⇒ (Creation and expansion of) innovative learning experiences for students; and
- ⇒ (Strengthening of) Relationships between the staff, students and community.

Planning teams will also examine student achievement and other strategic planning data in an effort to develop initiatives, instructional programs and supports for students that will further enhance their total educational experiences, including extracurricular activities.



Putnam County High School Culinary Arts Students prepared and served a superb lunch at the Charter System Schools Application & Petition Writing Workshop on January 28, 2015. Putnam County is a Charter School System.

**More questions? Contact Dr. Mike Newton at (706) 468-6350 ext. 101 or visit [www.charter-system.org](http://www.charter-system.org)**