



HAMILTON
COUNTY
SCHOOLS

Charter School Handbook

May 2022

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Introduction

Hamilton County Schools and the Department of Opportunity and Access, Charter Office, recognize that starting, managing, and sustaining a charter school is hard work, and requires tremendous commitment and determination, all within an often uncertain environment full of significant challenges. All of those who embark on this journey deserve our deepest respect for embracing the challenge of educating the next generation of students.

The power of charter schools to drive broader change is dependent on their ability to rise above the prevailing mediocrity. If charter schools serve only to expand parental choice without significantly raising the bar on student achievement, this innovative and ambitious reform will have little or no impact on the wider landscape of public education and it will only serve to ensure the neediest and most at-risk students will fall farther behind.

This handbook is designed to provide guidance and information for potential and current charter school operators in Hamilton County Schools in accordance with Tennessee charter law and the Quality Authorizing practices of the State Board of Education.

Our mission in Hamilton County Schools, in alignment with our Future Ready 2023, is to create pathways to bright futures for all students in our community, by helping to equip them with the skills, knowledge, and supports required to realize their full potential. Authorizing high quality charter schools is one of numerous strategies employed by the district to ensure fulfillment of this mission.

Our vision in Hamilton County Schools is to become the fastest improving school district in Tennessee, and we are certain that all of our authorized charter schools, as well as our traditional schools, are focused on every student reaching their full potential.

Our core values for charter authorizing are as follows:

- Keeping students and their needs the primary focus
- Defending the public trust with authorizing practices that are fair and transparent
- Striving for inclusive practices and engagement
- Holding all stakeholders accountable both to state law and best practice as defined in the NACSA Principles and Standards
- Developing and nurturing healthy relationships
- Modeling visionary and innovative leadership that empowers staff and students
- Communicating effectively with charter schools, potential applicants, district personnel, school board members, parents, and community
- Encouraging and creating an environment that promotes high quality schools and sharing

of best practices

It is our hope that this handbook will provide our charter schools and potential charter applicants with the assistance necessary to create and sustain high quality schools that will empower and encourage students to reach their highest potential.

Chapter 1: Relationship to the District

Charter School Office and Charter Schools

The charter school office of Hamilton County Schools serves as the charter school authorizing staff, as well as support for the district's current charter schools. The mission of the HCS Charter School Office is the office will practice rigorous charter school authorization, provide meaningful support, and protect school choice in order to uphold high academic standards, create fair and equitable opportunities, and improve outcomes for students and families in Hamilton County.

According to the Tennessee Quality authorizing standards, a quality authorizer sets high standards for approving charter applicants, maintains those high standards for the schools it oversees, effectively cultivates quality charter schools that meet identified educational and community needs, oversees charter schools that over time meet performance standards and targets on a range of measures and metrics set forth in the charter agreement, renews charter schools that meet those performance standards, and closes schools that fail to meet those standards, in accordance with state law.

The Hamilton County Board of Education makes all decisions related to approving, renewing, or closing charter schools within Hamilton County, with the charter school office providing them with the necessary information to make those decisions.

As an authorizer, our primary role is to hold schools accountable for student outcomes while preserving their autonomy which is granted under Tennessee charter law. We do this through our new school application and renewal processes, as well as ongoing progress monitoring and annual feedback. In addition to our authorizing role, we are also committed to helping ensure that all students in Hamilton County succeed, regardless of what type of school they attend. Therefore, the charter school office also offers optional supports to the charter schools it authorizes, including peer site visits and optional professional development opportunities that are offered through the district. Ultimately, however, it is a charter school's governing board that is responsible for, and will be held accountable to, student outcomes, regardless of the supports the district provides.

There are also other Hamilton County Schools departments that are assigned to both support and hold accountable our charter schools, including, but not limited to, finance, special education, and human resources.

| Department | Contact | Email | Phone |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|--|----------|
| Charter Office | Kelly Coffelt, Coordinator | Coffelt_kelly@hcde.org | 498-6762 |
| Opportunity and Access | Dr. Neelie Parker, Chief | Parker_N@hcde.org | 498-7149 |

| | | | |
|--------------------------|---|--|----------------------|
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| Finance | Mary Ellen Heuton, Chief Kim Myers, Director | Heuton_M@hcde.org Myers_K@hcde.org | 498-7026 498-7154 |
| Federal Grants | Angelia Askins, Director LeAnn Plumlee, Acceleration Coordinator | Askins_A@hcde.org Plumlee_LeAnn@hcde.org | 498-7098 498-7350 |
| ESL | Diego Trujillo, Director | Trujillo_Diego@hcde.org | 498-7132 |
| Exceptional Education | Sarah Evans, Executive Director Dr. Stephanie Laymon, Director (Charters) | Evans_Sarah@hcde.org Laymon_Stephanie@hcde.org | 498-6778 498-7121 |
| Human Resources | Zac Brown, Chief Talent Officer | Brown_Z@hcde.org | 498-3438 |

Compliance

Each charter school is expected to comply with all applicable state and federal laws as outlined in Tennessee charter school law, and it is the responsibility of the charter school office to ensure that schools are aligned to those laws as well as requirements of both our team and other district departments.

There will be clear escalation procedures for each deadline not met, or non-compliance with established law or the charter agreement. We encourage you to proactively reach out to us for any support needed in order to meet reporting deadlines or established law.

Chapter 2: Charter School Legislation

Tennessee Charter School Act

The Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act of 2002 establishes nine (9) major purposes for the creation of charter schools. They are:

- Improve learning for all students and close the achievement gap between high and low students
- Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods, and provide greater decision making authority to schools and teachers in exchange for greater responsibility for student performance
- Measure performance of pupils and faculty, and ensure that children have the opportunity to reach proficiency on state academic assessments
- Create new professional opportunities for teachers
- Afford parents substantial, meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children
- Provide an alternative means within the public school system for ensuring accomplishment of the necessary outcomes of education by allowing the establishment and maintenance of public charter schools that operate within a school district structure but are allowed maximum flexibility to reach their goals
- Provide both the state department of education and local school systems with options relative to the governance and improvement of high priority schools failing to meet adequate yearly progress as outlined in both §49-1-602 and the Federal Elementary and Secondary Elementary Act (20 U.S.C. §6301 et seq.).
- Provide both the state department of education and local school systems with options relative to the delivery of instruction for those students with special needs as specified in the federal Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq.).
- Provide local school systems the option to work in concert with the state's public higher education institutions to establish charter school "laboratories of teaching and learning" as a means of fostering educational innovations for implementation statewide.

Legal Liabilities

As a charter school, the school retains primary legal liability. This liability does not transfer to the District, giving charter schools considerable autonomy. This includes the following areas as cited in Tennessee Charter Law and the Hamilton County Charter Contract:

- **Compliance** - The school's governing body shall have full authority and responsibility, including ultimate responsibility for school fiscal, legal and contractual compliance matters, as is appropriate to a Tennessee charter school and Tennessee nonprofit corporation and all authority and responsibility necessary or proper to exercise the powers granted by this Contract or by law.
- **Fiduciary Oversight** - The school's governing body shall have, understand, and meet

the fiduciary duties imposed on such bodies by operation of law and shall, conversely, enjoy all individual immunities from liability provided by law. Nothing in the [Charter] Contract may be construed as a waiver of individual immunity from liability, in any form, granted by law to a school director, employee, volunteer, agent or representative.

- **Operations** - The school will be fiscally responsible for its own operations and will have authority to independently exercise the following powers (together with such powers as provided for elsewhere in the Charter Contract or charter law: contracting for goods and services; preparation of budgets; selection, supervision, evaluation, and determination of compensation for personnel; promotion and termination of personnel; leasing facilities for school purposes; accepting and expending gifts, donations, or grants of any kind in accordance with such conditions prescribed by the donor as are consistent with law and the Charter Contract; and adoption of policies and bylaws consistent with the terms of the Charter Contract and Tennessee law.
- **Employment and Personnel** - Neither the school nor its employees, agents, nor contractors are employees or agents of the District; and neither the District nor its employees, agents, or contractors are employees or agents of the school. None of the provisions of the Charter Contract will be construed to create a relationship of agency, representation, joint venture, ownership, or control of employment between the Parties of the Charter Contract other than that of independent Parties contracting solely for the purpose of effectuating the Charter Contract. It is established law that Tennessee is a right-to-work state and charter schools as non-profits may establish their own pay scales, bonuses, merit increases, etc., without interference from the district. It is also established that teachers who work for a charter school work for that non-profit entity, and the district is not responsible for conditions of employment or termination of employment.
- **Legal Action** - The school agrees to indemnify and hold the District, its Board members, officers, employees, and agents harmless from all liability, claims and demands arising from any suit, action, grievance, charge or proceeding brought in connection with or related to the school's operation or the conduct of any of the school's employees, agents, or representatives.

Contracting

Timeline

After the Hamilton County Board of Education approves the initial new school or renewal of a school's charter, the office of charter schools and the schools begin the process of negotiating the terms of a new contract. The process also includes setting conditions and/or benchmarks for which the school will be held accountable during the term of the contract. This process typically begins immediately after the Hamilton County Board of Education approves a school. The HCS School board must approve the charter agreement before it is signed by both parties.

Amendments

During the course of a contract term, a school may determine that modifications need to be made to its educational program. These modifications often dictate the need to modify their existing contracts. Schools may formally request amendments to existing contracts. The proposed amendments will need to go before the Hamilton County Board of Education for approval. For more information regarding contract amendments, please contact the Charter Schools Coordinator at Coffelt_kelly@hcde.org and see TN state guidelines at <https://www.tn.gov/education/school-options/charter-schools/amendment-to-charter-agreement.html>.

Chapter 3: Quality Assurance and Accountability

Initial Charter School Approval Process

As per Tennessee Charter Law, letters of intent to open a new charter school are due to the charter office on or before December 3 of each year, unless December 3 falls on a holiday or weekend. If that occurs, the letter of intent to submit a charter application is due the next business day.

Applications are due no later than February 1 of each year, by close of business. In accordance with Tennessee law, all applications that are considered complete will be reviewed by a review team chosen by the charter school coordinator, and representative of the community and the district. The team is chosen based on their knowledge of charter schools and expertise in each specialized area the team will review. Team members participate in mandatory training before beginning the review process.

Applicants interested in applying should look on the Tennessee Department of Education's website for the application and scoring rubric (<https://www.tn.gov/education/school-options/charter-schools.html>)

The timelines are as follows:

- December 1 - Letters of Intent are due to both the charter office and the state department of education.
- February 1 - Complete applications are due to the charter office and the state department of education. HCS requires 2 print copies and 1 electronic copy.
- The district review team has 90 days to initially review and make a recommendation to the Hamilton County Board of Education, who will vote to approve or deny the application within that 90 day period.
- If the recommendation is to approve the application, and the BOE votes to approve it, the district will immediately enter into contract negotiations with the charter school.
- In the event the BOE votes to deny the application, the applicant may choose to amend. The applicant has 30 calendar days from the day of the board vote to submit an amended application. The same review team will review the amended application and submit a new recommendation to the BOE for their consideration.
- In the event the recommendation is to approve the amended application, and the BOE votes to approve it, the district will immediately enter into contract negotiations with the charter school.
- In the event the BOE denies the amended application, the applicant has ten (10) days to

appeal to the Tennessee Charter Commission.

Strong charter school applications include a comprehensive educational program, a solid business plan, and a clear plan for effective governance and operations. They may also reflect an array of pedagogical philosophies and practices. Each application is treated as a separate and free standing proposal, and applications are not compared to each other or to prior applications.

It is the practice of the charter school office to engage the applicants throughout the review period in order to ensure that the review team has all the information necessary to make an informed recommendation to the Hamilton County Schools Board of Education.

Performance Framework

The charter school office has adopted the state's performance framework, which includes solid evaluation criteria for the schools. In accordance with Tennessee charter law and the state's quality authorizing standards, the performance framework accomplishes the following:

- Establishes the performance standards under which each charter school will be evaluated, using objective and verifiable measures of student achievement as the primary measure of school quality.
- Defines clear, measurable, and attainable academic, financial, and organizational performance standards and targets that the school must meet as a condition of renewal, including but not limited to state and federal measures.
- Includes expectations for appropriate access, education, support services and outcomes for students with disabilities
- Defines the source of academic data that will form the basis for ongoing and renewal evaluation, including state-mandated and other standardized assessments, student academic growth measures, and performance comparisons with other public schools in the district and state
- Defines sources of organizational data that will form the evidence basis for ongoing and renewal evaluation, focusing on fulfillment of legal obligations, fiduciary duties, operational goals that support the attainment of academic benchmarks, and sound stewardship of public dollars

The charter office will make school visits at least each semester, and will adopt a written reporting format that is transparent and specific, so schools will be aware of any deficiencies well in advance of the renewal year. It is the policy of the charter office to work with the schools to correct any deficiencies noted in the annual visits, as well as offer guidance and support to each school as needed. The HCS Performance Framework can be found [here](#).

Interim Review (5 year)

In accordance with Tennessee charter law, the charter office will also conduct a high stakes review of the charter school in year five (5) of operation. (T.C.A. 49-13-121(d) [Tennessee Authorizer and Charter School Interim Review Guidance](#))

Renewal of the Charter School

In accordance with Tennessee charter law, each charter school is initially awarded a contract for ten (10) years, beginning with the year the school opens.

No later than April 1 of the year prior to the renewal year in which the charter expires, the governing body of the charter school will submit a renewal application. Three months prior to that submission, the Hamilton County charter school office will submit to the charter school a performance report reflective of the renewal evaluation.

All charter schools undergo a rigorous renewal process led by the charter school office during the final year of their charter term. Renewal recommendations are made based upon a body of evidence around the school's academic and organizational performance.

Evidence Collection

The charter school office bases the renewal process on thorough analysis of a comprehensive body of evidence defined by the performance framework and the charter contract. That evidence includes, but is not limited to:

- The renewal application
- The performance report submitted to the charter school three months prior to the renewal application due date
- A renewal site visit that includes classroom observations, teacher and leader interviews, and student and parent focus groups
- An examination of school governance and financial sustainability, including a board meeting visit, board chair interviews, and a comprehensive financial analysis. The financial analysis will include a review of past audits, plus an in-depth look at any financial discrepancies noted by the finance team.
- A comprehensive analysis of student academic outcomes
- An in-depth evaluation of student, parent, and community satisfaction with the school.

The most important criteria in renewal decision making is student growth and achievement as measured on the performance framework. The renewal process gives charter schools the opportunity to present clear and compelling evidence regarding how well they are serving

their students. It also provides the school an occasion to examine progress towards meeting its mission and vision, assess both its strengths and its needs, and plan a strategy for continuous improvement and future needs.

The charter school office will summarize the renewal findings with recommendations in a report to the school and will submit those recommendations to the Hamilton County Board of Education for a decision no later than February 1 of the renewal year, as required by Tennessee Charter law (§ 49-13-121).

Process Differentiation

While all schools must go through renewal, there are a few ways in which the process may be differentiated as follows:

- For schools operating with a CMO/EMO, the renewal process will also include an assessment of the CMO/EMO organizational capacity as it applies to the school(s) up for renewal.
- Consistently high-performing schools can expect a shorter site visit and a streamlined renewal application.

While Tennessee charter law does not allow partial or conditional renewal, the summary document may include recommendations from the review evaluation to the school for their consideration.

Charter School Closure

School closure is never an ideal outcome, and it is never the first response to a charter school that might be struggling. However, it is sometimes necessary in order to improve student access to high-quality schools. HCS is committed to high expectations for all schools, district-run and charter, and will take action if necessary, based on low academic performance, financial mismanagement, or severe operational deficits.

However, prior to taking such a drastic measure as closure, the charter school office will closely work with the charter school leadership and governing board to remediate any deficiencies. Our procedures for working with struggling schools are as follows:

Procedures for Addressing Deficiencies in Charter School Performance

| Status* | Possible Triggers | Possible Actions/Consequences |
|----------------------|--|---|
| Notice of Concern | Signs of weak performance: identified through routine monitoring, through implementation, compliance, or performance review, or by other means identified by HCS | Letter to the governing board detailing areas of concern |
| Notice of Deficiency | Failure to meet multiple performance targets; Failure to comply with applicable state laws and/or district policies; | Letter to the governing board detailing areas of deficiency with a requirement that a Performance Improvement Plan is developed |

| | | |
|---------------------|---|--|
| | Failure to comply with terms of the charter contract. | and implemented (with specific improvements, objectives, timelines, measures). The Performance Improvement Plan must be approved by the charter school office. |
| Notice of Probation | Continued failure to meet performance targets; failure to meet objectives set forth in the Performance Improvement Plan; continued failure to comply with applicable state laws and/or district policies; continued failure to comply with conditions of the charter agreement | Letter to governing board to serve as notification of probationary status and outlining terms of probation; charter school office creates a Corrective Action Plan with the charter school that addresses deficits and has measurable outcomes, and a timeline with <u>very specific improvement expectations.</u> |
| Charter Review | Failure to successfully address the terms of the probation; material violation of any conditions, standards, or procedures set forth in the charter agreement; flagrant disregard of the charter agreement; failure to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management; extended pattern of failure to comply with applicable law. (TCA 49-13-122(b)(1-3). Additionally, an expanded pattern of failure to comply with the terms of the charter, or inclusion on the Priority list of the bottom 5% of schools in the state may trigger a review or a closure. | Recommendation to revoke, or not to revoke, the charter, or impose lesser sanctions (at this, or any point in the process, a school may also voluntarily surrender its charter). |
| Charter Revocation | Charter Review results in recommendation to revoke or school has done any of the following: committed a material violation of any conditions, standards or procedures set forth in the charter agreement; failed to meet or make adequate yearly progress toward achievement of the state's accountability system; failed to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management. Except in cases of fraud, misappropriation of funds, | Letter stating reasons for proposed revocation to governing board. Revocation to take place at the end of the school year unless an immediate closure must take place under the terms outlined in charter law § 49-13-122. |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| | flagrant disregard of the charter agreement or the provisions of chapter 49-13-122 or similar misconduct, a decision to revoke shall become effective at the close of the academic year. | |
| *NOTE: The outlined procedures are <i>not</i> a step by step process. The Charter School Office reserves the right to put schools at any status without going through the steps if more immediate actions are warranted. | | |

If the HCS Board of Education or the school decides to close a charter school, the charter school office and the school work closely together to protect the interests of students and families, as well as to ensure public funds are managed appropriately.

According to Tennessee charter law § 49-13-122, an authorizer may revoke a public charter school agreement if the school receives identification as a priority school, and this revocation may take place immediately following the close of the school year in which the school is identified as a priority school.

A charter school may be revoked at any time for the following reasons:

- Committed a material violation of any conditions, standards, or procedures set forth in the charter contract
- Failure to meet or make sufficient progress toward the performance expectations set forth in the charter contract
- Failure to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management

Upon reaching the decision to close a charter school, the charter school office has three primary goals to accomplish:

- Provide educational services in accordance with the charter contract until the end of the school year, or the agreed upon date when instruction will cease.
- Reassign students to schools that meet their educational needs.
- Address the school’s financial, legal and reporting obligations.

These goals have the highest priority during the closure process. The charter school office will work closely with the school’s governing board prior to the beginning of closure proceedings to agree on which tasks are necessary and outline how it intends to supervise the closure. Responsible parties and completion dates will be agreed upon to ensure a transparent and smooth closure, and the charter school office staff will attend parent and community meetings to explain not only the mechanics of the closure process, but exactly why the school is being closed.

Data and Assessments

All public charter schools are held accountable for student academic performance through both state law and the performance framework. The performance framework considers measures of student academic growth, academic proficiency status, college and career readiness, and improvement in college and career readiness over time. HCS may also consider student engagement, enrollment rates, student attrition, and parent and community satisfaction.

Testing Requirements

As a part of their accountability all charter schools, regardless of any waivers, must administer the required state accountability assessments to monitor student academic performance. They are:

- TCAP (grades 3-8)
- ACT and SAT (ACT is required for all Tennessee 11th graders prior to their senior year; SAT is optional)
- TCAP End of Course assessments
- MSAA for Students with Disabilities
- TCAP-Alt for Students with Disabilities
- ACCESS for English Learners
- National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) - required for grades 4,8, and 12 at select schools annually)

Furthermore, all charter schools in Tennessee must have:

- A plan for evaluating student performance throughout the school year
- Assessments that will be used to measure student progress towards achievement of the school's student performance standards with a rationale that explains how the assessments were chosen based on the population of students served by the school
- The timeline for achievement of academic goals and standards as outlined in the charter contract
- The procedures for taking corrective action in the event that pupil performance at the charter school falls below such standards, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners

Annual Reporting Requirements

Tennessee charter law §49-13-120, the governing body of a charter school must make an annual progress report to the authorizer and to the commissioner of education.

The report must contain the following information:

- The progress of the charter school towards achieving the goals outlined in the school's charter contract
- Financial records of the charter school including revenues and expenditures
- A detailed accounting, including amounts and sources, of all funds received by the charter school other than the funds received under § 49-13-112(a).

See [Annual Report Guidance](#) from the Tennessee Department of Education.

Chapter 4: Finance

Financial Reporting Requirements to the District

The charter school shall comply with state financial and budget rules, regulations, and financial reporting requirements as set forth in Tennessee Charter Law.

TCA §49-13-127 requires that the governing body of each charter school shall conduct an independent audit of all accounts and records, including internal school activity and cafeteria funds.

The audit is to be completed as soon as is practical after June 30 of each year and is to be submitted to the comptroller of the treasury, the local board of education, and the commissioner of education.

The comptroller of the treasury will ensure that each audit is prepared in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards and determine if the audits meet minimum audit standards and regulations. The comptroller of the treasury also has the authority to audit any books and records, including internal school activity and cafeteria funds of any charter school when it deemed necessary or appropriate.

A charter management organization (CMO) may comply with the audit requirement by submitting one (1) audit for all the charter schools it operates in Tennessee provided that such audit includes all the information required under TCA § 49-13-127.

In the event that a school is put on probationary status due to financial issues, the district may require additional financial documents in order to assess the fiscal picture and to determine if the governing body is fulfilling their fiduciary responsibilities.

Annual Authorizer Fee

In accordance with TCA § 49-13- 128, HCS, as authorizer, will receive from each charter school an authorizer fee that is a percentage of the charter school's per student state and local funding as allocated under § 49-13-112. This annual authorizer fee shall be the lesser of three percent (3%) of the annual per student state and local funding or \$35,000 dollars per school.

Approved Yearly Budget

A governing board approved yearly budget is due to the HCS district no later than July 15 of each year.

Closure of a Charter School

In the event of a school closure, whether through revocation or voluntary closure, the charter school's governing body will work with the district to submit the following financial documents:

- Financial statements to date that include all revenues and expenses, and all anticipated revenues and expenses up to and after closing. **NOTE: It is prohibited under Tennessee law for a district/authorizer to assume any debt from a charter school.**
- The disposition of school funds
- The disposition of school assets
- A closing audit pursuant to § 49-13-112

The governing body of a charter school that is closing shall continue to meet as necessary to close down school operations, manage school finances, allocate resources, and facilitate the closure. All vendor invoices, bank loans, lines of credit, grant funding, and federal funds are the sole responsibility of the governing body of the charter school.

Chapter 5: Human Resources

Teachers and Personnel

Under Tennessee charter law, teachers in a charter school are employees of the charter school or CMO, and not the district. Charter schools must be non-profit organizations in Tennessee, and as such can hire their own personnel and set their own wage and benefit packages.

However, Tennessee charter law does require that teachers be licensed in Tennessee. See the Tennessee educator website <https://www.tn.gov/education/licensing/educator-licensure.html> for information on licensure requirements.

Background and Fingerprinting

As per Tennessee law, every employee of a charter school must undergo a background check and fingerprinting. It is up to each individual school whether or not they pay for this service or require the applicants to pay for their background checks.

In addition, any vendor, volunteer, bus driver, or person who regularly provides services within the school and has direct contact with students will also require a background check and fingerprinting.

Chapter 6: Operations

Enrollment and Allocation of Funds

Participation in a public charter school is based on parent and student choice. The school is open to any student residing within the geographic boundaries of the authorizing LEA. Any student who submits a timely application shall be enrolled, unless the number of applications exceeds the capacity of the school. If a lottery must be conducted, enrollment preference must be given in the following order, as per TCA § 49-13-113:

- Students enrolled in a pre-K program operated by the charter school
- Students enrolled in a charter school that has an articulation agreement with the enrolling charter school, providing that the articulation agreement has been approved by HCS.
- Siblings of students already enrolled in the charter school
- Students residing within the geographic boundaries of HCS who were enrolled in another public school during the previous year

Preference may also be given to children of a teacher or member of the governing board of the charter school, not to exceed ten percent (10%) of total enrollment or 25 students, whichever is less.

In accordance with TCA § 49-13-112, funding is allocated to charter schools based on an amount equal to the per student state and local funds (the exact amounts change each year, particularly as the legislature just passed a new funding formula to replace the BEP). Charter schools are also allocated federal funds such as Title I and ESEA funds.

These allocations are based on one hundred percent (100%) of the state and local funds received by the authorizing district, including funds for capital outlay purposes.

HCS will distribute the portion of local funds it expects to receive in no fewer than nine (9) equal installments to the charter schools. Funds may be adjusted, at a minimum, in October, February, and June, based on changes in revenue, student enrollment, or student services. All funds received by a charter school will be spent according to the yearly budget submitted by the governing body, subject to the requirements of federal and state law.

Each year, the HCS district releases enrollment projections for the following year for each school in the district. These projections are based on both school and district enrollment trends, as well as building capacity. Schools are asked to review these projections and provide any feedback prior to them being finalized. Charter schools are funded based on projections for the August and September funding payments, with a true-up in October, February, and June.

It should be noted that most districts, and the state, consider the October enrollment numbers to be the official student count. Students who enroll near the end of a 20 day count may not be officially “counted” for that months’ payment, thereby creating discrepancies at times.

Facilities

Charter schools may use capital outlay funds for purchasing, leasing, or lease-purchasing school facilities. If HCS has underutilized or vacant properties that have been reported as such to the Department of Education, those properties will be made available for any charter school for which they are suitable. If a charter school leases a district property, a lease will be executed with appropriate rent and a description of the responsibilities and obligations of both HCS and the charter organization under the terms of the lease.

Food Service

It is important to give our children healthy and nutritious meals to improve their chances of success and improve their learning opportunities. Research indicates eating habits affect learning. The USDA's school meals programs help ensure all students have access to nutritious meals.

All charter schools are eligible to participate in the National School Lunch Program offered by the state of Tennessee and may choose their own vendors from the state approved list to provide breakfast, lunch, and snacks to students who qualify.

All children in households receiving benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Families First can get free meals regardless of income. Also, children can receive free- or reduced-price meals if their household's gross income is at or below 130 percent of the poverty level. Those families with incomes between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals, which cost no more than 40 cents. For additional information, please see the school nutrition website at <https://www.tn.gov/education/health-and-safety/school-nutrition.html> .

Transportation

Tennessee charter law TCA § 49-13-114 ensures that if a charter school offers transportation, then that transportation must be provided by the charter school and becomes its sole responsibility. HCS will not be responsible for transportation of charter school students.

If the charter school chooses to provide transportation, it may not refuse to provide transportation to any student based on costs. For example, if a child requires a lift bus due to being in a wheelchair, the school cannot refuse to provide that accommodation because of its added costs.

If a charter school does provide transportation and chooses to contract with a third party provider for school buses, the buses and drivers must meet Tennessee requirements for safety and security as found on the Tennessee health and safety web site. <https://www.tn.gov/education/health-and-safety/school-safety/transportation.html> .

In electing to provide transportation services to students, the charter school becomes eligible for all funds that would have been spent by the district to provide such transportation to those students.

Chapter 7: Student Support Services

English Language Learners

Tennessee Rules and Regulations require that students whose first language is other than English and who are limited in their English language proficiency be provided with a specially designed alternative language program. [Rule 0520-1-3-.056. a. 1 and 2 ii.].

This specially designed language program is English as a Second Language (ESL). ESL programs must be delivered by an endorsed ESL teacher using the ESL curriculum. The ESL curriculum is a general set of English language acquisition standards that should be used in conjunction with content standards. These standards address the language support necessary to enable the English Learner (EL) to access the grade level content curriculum by providing a bridge for ELs to the academic content curriculum. Tennessee adopted the WIDA standards in 2013.

Charter schools are expected to adhere to the English Language learner WIDA framework and associated assessments. See <https://www.tn.gov/education/instruction/academic-standards/english-as-a-second-language.html> for additional information.

Special Education

Students with disabilities are to be educated in the least restrictive environment that is beneficial to their academic advancement. Special education services are both state and federally mandated and charter schools are expected to serve students with disabilities in accordance with those laws. Please see <https://www.tn.gov/education/student-support/special-education.html> for additional information about Tennessee standards for serving students with disabilities.

Further information can be found in the Tennessee Special Education Framework here: https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/special-education/framework/sped_framework.pdf

Summary

It is the policy of the charter school office to be collaborative with our charter schools and to encourage their success. It is our hope that the guidance found in this handbook will provide helpful information to our schools as they accept the challenge of educating the next generation.

We hope you will reach out to the charter office with any questions or concerns.