

Druid Hills High School Charter Cluster Petition Review
Executive Summary

Brief Synopsis: On August 16, 2013, Druid Hills Charter Cluster, Inc. (“Cluster”) delivered a charter school petition to the DeKalb County School District (“District”) for review. Since this date, the District has completed its due diligence to review every aspect of the Cluster’s responses in the petition and determine if it is in the best interest of the public. This executive summary is a succinct explanation of the District’s findings after reviewing the Cluster’s petition. However, this document is not all inclusive of the detailed information found in the full *Charter Petition Review Results* located at www.dekalb.k12.ga.us, on the Charter School webpage.

Financial Impact: The District has determined that the Cluster’s financial impact for the 2014-2015 school year will be approximately 29 million dollars in District revenue during its first year of operation. It has also been estimated that the Cluster will utilize nearly 150 million dollars of District funds for all five years of operation, 2014-2019. Transportation and facility costs are not included in this estimation.

Initial Review Determination: The petition contains assertions and statements that raise questions of concern for the District in the areas of Innovation, Flexibility, Governance, Academic Performance, and Fiscal Responsibility. Some of the responses in the 76-question petition need improvement or do not meet guideline requirements, either because the Petitioner did not address the question, or made statements that need further clarification. The following sections of the petition highlight some of the District’s findings with the petition:

I. Charter School/Petitioner Information

- **Finding:** The Petitioner has not identified a Pre-Kindergarten program for any of the five (5) cluster elementary schools.
- **District Inquiry:** How does the Petitioner plan to implement Pre-Kindergarten within the Cluster schools?

II. Statement of Intent

- **Finding:** The Petitioner’s proposed curricular program appears to duplicate programs currently offered in DeKalb Schools, such as the International Baccalaureate, Montessori, or Science, Technology, Engineering & Math (STEM) programs.
- **District Inquiry:** What role will this Cluster play in the community?
- **District Inquiry:** Does the Cluster offer an innovative option not currently available to parents and students? Please describe.
- **District Inquiry:** How does the Cluster propose to serve a segment of the community in a unique way or draw students not currently being served into the Cluster or School District?

III. Description of the Educational Program

- **Finding:** The Petitioner did not provide a description of the planned curriculum, or how it will be implemented.
- **Finding:** The proposed low teacher-to-student ratio may impact the Cluster’s annual budget.
- **Finding:** The Petitioner’s assertions and statements regarding how the gifted program, special education, and alternative program will be implemented present points of concern regarding legal compliance and fiscal responsibility.
- **Finding:** The Petitioner asserted in the petition that “Students with *additional supports* [emphasis added] in 9th grade will be better set up for entry to Cross Keys or similar program and to meet graduation requirements and basic competency in subject matter.”
- **District Inquiry:** How would the Petitioner define categories of “additional supports?” Please explain the rationale for the proposed Cluster’s intent to transfer students who need additional educational support to other DeKalb schools?

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- **District Inquiry:** How will the Cluster plan to implement curriculum for all programs in a manner that will be legally compliant and fiscally sound?

IV. State & Federally Mandated Services

- **Finding:** The Petitioner's assertions and statements regarding how state and federally mandated services (e.g. ADA/504, IEPs, Physical/Occupational Therapy, etc.) will be implemented present points of concern regarding legal compliance and fiscal responsibility.
- **District Inquiry:** How will the Cluster be legally compliant with state and federally mandated services?

V. Performance-Based Goals and Objectives

- **Finding:** The Petitioner must align the charter contract goals with Georgia's new "Accountability System." The Cluster must meet and exceed "State Performance Targets."
- **District Inquiry:** Please explain how these goals or measures will be met.

VI. Waivers

- **Finding:** The Petitioner desires broad flexibility from state law, rule, and regulation, as permitted. While the Petitioner has essentially requested a blanket waiver, the required statement asserting that the Petitioner would meet all requirements of Georgia's Accountability System was not included.
- **District Inquiry:** Will the Petitioner meet all requirements of Georgia's Accountability System? Please explain how.

VII. Description of Assessment Methods

- **Finding:** The Petitioner's response to how the Cluster will obtain student performance data needs improvement.
- **Finding:** The Petitioner's proposed academic calendar needs improvement, and the Petitioner should identify a bell to bell schedule for each school.
- **Finding:** It was not apparent in the petition that costs associated with the purchase of assessments/standardized tests were considered.
- **District Inquiry:** How does the Cluster plan to obtain student performance data and monitor student achievement?
- **District Inquiry:** Does the Cluster plan to follow the District's academic calendar?
- **District Inquiry:** Has the Cluster considered the costs associated with the purchase of student assessments?

VIII. Description of School Operations

- **Finding:** The Petitioner must describe an adequate student admissions process and outreach plan to ensure that the student population will reflect demographics of the DeKalb County School District.
- **Finding:** The Petitioner's assertions and statements regarding the Cluster's Human Resource operations and processes present points of concern regarding legal compliance and fiscal responsibility.
 - Employees will not receive tenure or rights afforded pursuant to the Fair Dismissal Act, if terminated or non-renewed for the following school year.
 - The Petitioner was not clear in describing employee health and retirement benefits.
 - The Petitioner plans to compensate employees above the state's current salary schedule.

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- The petition lacked pertinent information regarding employee and volunteer background checks and fingerprinting.
- **Finding:** The Petitioner reported that an employee survey was conducted at the current proposed Cluster schools. There were approximately 482 employees eligible to be surveyed at the impacted schools. The petition indicates only 82 employees responded to the survey. The majority of these employees represented Druid Hills High, Druid Hills Middle, and Fernbank Elementary.
- **Finding:** The Cluster seeks to contract with the District for transportation services, but the Petitioner should also identify other potential vendors, should the DCSD be unable to provide transportation to the Cluster Schools for lack of buses, personnel, or prohibitive costs, due to the School Choice Options the Petitioner has proposed.
- **Finding:** The Petitioner asserts that the Cluster will seek to contract with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation/Healthy Schools program, to provide food service for Cluster schools. However, the Petitioner subsequently asserts that it will contract with the District for the first year.
- **District Inquiry:** Has the Petitioner considered the financial impact their proposal to minimize class sizes may have on their plan to compensate employees above the state's current salary schedule? Please explain.
- **District Inquiry:** What evidence exists to confirm a sufficient interest among faculty to support the proposed Cluster?
- **District Inquiry:** Has the Petitioner clearly defined the plan to implement food services, in compliance with federal law and regulation, including associated costs?

IX. Facilities

- **Finding:** The Petitioner should acknowledge state law, O.C.G.A. § 20-2-2068.2(e) in its entirety, which allows negotiations in the charter for renovations, repairs, and maintenance of leased school buildings, for the proposed locations.
- **District Inquiry:** Has the Cluster planned, within its budget, for the renovation, repair, and maintenance of the proposed locations? Please provide evidence.

X. Parent and Community Involvement

- **Finding:** The Petitioner must provide substantial evidence of parent, community, and business support or representation in the development of the petition.
- **Finding:** The Petitioner must demonstrate formal business and community partnerships in the petition.
- **District Inquiry:** Is there sufficient interest among parents to support the Cluster? Please provide evidence.
- **District Inquiry:** Please provide a rationale as to why this Cluster would not have the potential of dividing the community in an adverse way, i.e. racially, by national origin, by neighborhood, or disability?

XI. Demonstration of Fiscal Feasibility and Controls

- **Finding:** The Petitioner did not describe in detail the employee health and retirement benefits that will be offered.
- **Finding:** The Petitioner's projected five year budget may be understated in many of the line items, some of which no projections were calculated for items or services such as office furniture repair or additions, bookkeeping, phone or internet service, pest control, utilities, fire and safety compliance, etc.
- **Finding:** The Petitioner did not identify a named Cluster Financial Officer, as required.
- **Finding:** The Petitioner asserted that the Cluster plans on securing loans, if necessary.

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- **District Inquiry:** Does the Cluster plan to offer the same benefits to employees as the District? If yes, please describe.
- **District Inquiry:** What type of loan(s) does the Petitioner plan to apply for? If the Cluster takes out a loan, for what purposes(s) would it be used? How does the Cluster plan to repay these loans?

XII. Description of Governance Structure

- **Finding:** The Cluster's Board of Directors roles and functions were developed. However, the proposed bylaws should reflect the assertions made in the petition. The draft bylaws provided require substantial revisions and additional information.
- **Finding:** Although the governance structure meets requirements, it is unclear how the current Board was selected.
- **Finding:** Like the petition vote, parents or guardians will receive votes for the School Leadership team, based on the number of children they have enrolled in the school. The Petitioner may want to consider how internal voting procedures may create unequal voting power and representation.
- **District Inquiry:** How was the Board of Directors selected?
- **District Inquiry:** Will parents and stakeholders have access to express their opinion regarding the selection of the Cluster Board of Directors? Please describe the process.
- **District Inquiry:** Has the Cluster considered a more democratic voting process for the School Leadership teams?

XIII. Statement on Annual Report

- **Finding:** The cluster currently has a legal representative, but plans to publish a request for proposals for legal services. The projected annual budget of \$50,000/per year for legal services should be considered in regard to employee relations, discrimination complaints, special education complaints or violations, workers' compensation, tort, contracts, and other potential litigious situations, etc.
- **Finding:** The Petitioner must provide proof of insurance policies with the mandatory indemnification language by July 1, 2014, if approved.

XIV. Conversion Charter School Section

- **Finding:** The Petitioner must provide the required statement that a secret ballot vote was conducted, with a description of the voting procedure and outcome of those votes.
- **Finding:** The Petitioner estimated that 5,420 students were currently enrolled in the DHCC cluster at the time of the August 13, 2013 petition vote. (The cluster currently has 4,878 students enrolled as of 10/9/2013.) There were at least 4800 potential votes available, per each child enrolled, according to O.C.G.A §20-2-2064. Only parents or guardians, who resided in the Cluster attendance zone only, received one ballot for each child enrolled. The Petitioner indicated that 997 qualified parent/guardian votes were cast. This number represents 20% of the eligible 4800 potential ballots. It is unknown how many parents or guardians voted, because theoretically one household could have multiple votes. The District is cognizant that, pursuant to state law, **60%** of the actual **20%** of the votes cast were sufficient to approve the submission of the petition. Therefore, it appears that the parents, guardians, and/or communities of these proposed Cluster schools were overwhelmingly underrepresented during the voting process, notwithstanding the fact that parents/guardians of students currently enrolled in the impacted schools, who reside outside of the attendance zone, were not afforded a vote.
- **District Inquiry:** Was the vote conducted in a way that would provide confidence to the Local Board and the community that the faculty and parents, as a whole, have been truly heard and had an opportunity to express themselves?

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- **District Inquiry:** Is there sufficient interest among parents to support the Cluster? Please provide evidence.
- **District Inquiry:** How was input from parents and guardians who reside outside of the attendance zone received?

XV. High School Cluster Section

- **Finding:** The Petitioner must describe how each school, and how the Cluster, would be held accountable for performance goals as stated in the charter so it complies with Georgia's new Accountability System.