



Your advocate for better schools.

September 23, 2015

Dr. Melvin Johnson
DeKalb County School Board Chair
1701 Mountain Industrial Blvd.
Stone Mountain, GA 30083



Dr. Stephen Green
CEO and Superintendent
DeKalb County School District
1701 Mountain Industrial Blvd.
Stone Mountain, GA 30083

DeKalb County Board of Education
1701 Mountain Industrial Blvd.
Stone Mountain, GA 30083

Dear Dr. Johnson, Dr. Green and School Board Members,

The Georgia Charter Schools Association is writing this open letter to express our deep concern regarding the new charter policy adopted by the DeKalb County School Board on September 14, 2015. We believe the district's new policy is at odds with the State Board of Education and could be in violation of state law. We're also fearful this signals decreasing support for start-up charter schools at a time when the district wants to become a charter system.

We echo the suggested changes to the board's policy stated by Lou Erste of the Georgia Department of Education, especially with regards to the standard that charter schools must be "innovative" to be approved. The proposed changes were mentioned in a recent Atlanta Journal Constitution editorial by Maureen Downey and DeKalb County Commissioner Nancy Jester's blog.

As we have seen in the past, districts that have included a requirement that charter schools be "innovative" have often used it as an excuse to deny charter school petitions. Unfortunately, in many of these cases the definition used for "innovative" is impossible to attain: the school must propose something that has never been offered or never done by anyone, anywhere. Some districts have even reasoned that if other schools in the district could possibly duplicate what the charter school proposes in its petition, then the idea is not considered "innovative."

Charter schools, at their best, may indeed be innovative. However, the primary consideration should not be whether the proposed school offers some novel approach to learning, but if they have the capacity to meet student needs and raise student achievement and graduation rates.

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Even though Lou Erste's letter with 36 proposed corrections was received by district officials prior to last week's vote, it was not made available to board members. The Association believes this was irresponsible and cannot fathom why such guidance was "withheld." It caused the board to vote without being fully informed.

The Association strongly urges the board to reconsider its new charter policy, so the DeKalb County School District can fully align the policy with state statute, State Board of Education rules and Georgia Department of Education guidelines. We believe that DeKalb's charter schools have contributed greatly to student success and have high hopes that the district will continue to see their value.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony Roberts". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Tony Roberts, President/CEO
Georgia Charter Schools Association