Types of Performance Contracts for Georgia School Districts

Georgia offers a structured framework for performance-based governance and accountability in education, primarily through the **Charter Systems**, **Strategic Waivers School Systems (SWSS)**, **Local and State Authorized Charter Schools.** Here's how performance contracts typically apply in the state:

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1. **Charter System Contracts**

   - **Definition**: A performance contract between the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and a local school district to operate as a **Charter System**.
   - **Focus**: School-level governance, innovation – meeting individual student needs, and broad flexibility from state rules in exchange for increased accountability.
   - **Performance Measures**: Academic achievement, closing achievement gaps, graduation rates, and stakeholder engagement through local governance teams. **Measures documented in Annual Report.**
   - **Duration**: 5-year contract with performance targets.
   - **Example**: Fulton County Schools is a Georgia Charter System educating 87,998+ students, as is Chattahoochee County educating 962 students.

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2. **Strategic Waivers School System (SWSS) Contracts**

   - **Definition**: Formerly known as IE2 systems, these are agreements between a district and the State Board of Education granting flexibility from specific state laws in exchange for improved performance.
   - **Focus**: Innovation through specific waivers from Title 20 (Georgia's education code), while achieving specific academic outcomes.
   - **Performance Measures**: CCRPI (College and Career Ready Performance Index), subgroup performance, graduation rates. **As of 2024-2025 no Annual Report was required.**
   - **Duration**: 5 years with renewable terms based on performance.
   - **Example**: Cobb County School District operates under an SWSS contract educating 106,358+ students, as is Clay County School District educating 205 students.

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3. **Charter School Contracts**

   - **Definition**: Contracts between local districts and start-up or conversion charter schools, or between the State Charter Schools Commission and state charter schools.
   - **Focus**: Autonomy in exchange for meeting specific academic, financial, and operational benchmarks.
   - **Performance Measures**: Georgia Milestones scores, financial audits, enrollment targets, governance effectiveness. **Measures documented in Annual Report.**
   - **Example**: KIPP Metro Atlanta Schools operate under a locally authorized charter contract. Pataula Charter Academy in Edison, GA operates as a state commissioned charter school.

Charter System Foundation

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the difference between a charter system and a strategic waiver system? The charter systems and strategic waiver systems are both educational models designed to give public school districts more flexibility in exchange for increased accountability. However, they differ in structure, autonomy, and the degree of innovation allowed.

Key Differences at a Glance

Feature	Charter System	Strategic Waiver System
Governance	Decentralized – school governance teams	Centralized – district-level decisions
Flexibility	High – broad waivers	Moderate – selected waivers
Innovation Focus	Encouraged at school level	Focused on district-wide goals
Accountability	High – tied to charter contract - Annual Report and 5 yr Renewal Process	High – tied to performance goals
Legal Status	Operates under a state-approved charter contract	Operates under a performance contract
Required Training	Annually	Not required

A Charter System empowers individual schools with greater autonomy and is designed to foster innovation through site-based governance and flexibility. There is a contractual agreement between the State BOE and the Local BOE. The SBOE grants FLEXIBILITY (waivers of state laws and rules) in exchange for LBOEs commitment to improved student performance.

A Strategic Waiver System provides moderate flexibility for the district as a whole to meet specific selected performance targets but does not require or emphasize school-level governance or innovation in the same way.

Why is flexibility important for school systems?
Flexibility is important for school systems because it allows schools and districts to adapt to the unique needs of their students and communities, rather than being restricted by one-size-fits-all state policies. It allows school systems to innovate and encourages customized learning experiences without bureaucratic constraints.

What are the most common uses of flexibility among school systems?

1. Curriculum and instructional practices
2. Certification
3. Scheduling/Seat time
4. Budget and resource allocation

Why is broad flexibility important for charter systems? Every community is different. Flexibility in school systems is a tool—not a goal. It matters because it enables local solutions to local challenges, supports educational equity, and creates the conditions for continuous improvement. The right kind of flexibility, paired with strong accountability, can lead to transformational changes in student learning and outcomes.

Are there limits to charter system flexibility? Charter systems enjoy more flexibility than traditional systems, especially in areas like curriculum, staffing, and scheduling. But that flexibility is not absolute—it's balanced by legal obligations, performance accountability, and state oversight.

How is flexibility balanced with accountability? Flexibility allows innovation, but accountability ensures results. The best systems balance the two by setting clear expectations, allowing schools to choose their own path to meet them, and holding them responsible if they fall short. This approach respects local control and creativity, while ensuring students are not left behind.

Does flexibility mean lower standards? No, flexibility does not mean lower standards—in fact, it often means higher accountability for outcomes, even if the path to achieving those outcomes is less prescriptive. The right kind of flexibility frees schools to be more effective while maintaining or even raising expectations for student learning.

Do Charter Systems and Charter Schools earn extra money from the state? Yes, both Charter Systems and Charter Schools in Georgia can receive additional funding from the state, but the funding mechanisms and purposes differ:

Charter Systems

- **Extra State Funding**: Charter systems receive charter system grants based on FTE (Full-Time Equivalent) student counts. OCGA sec. 20 2 165.1(a) provides for 3.785% QBE supplement, up to $4.5M per system. This is approximately $100 per FTE.
- **Purpose**: These dollars are meant to support flexibility, innovation, and local governance. They are used to implement performance-based innovations and support goals agreed upon in the charter contract.
- **Example**: **Dawson County Charter System**: Uses funds for teacher performance incentives.

Charter Schools (Local or State Commissioned)

- **Local Charter Schools**: May receive start-up or implementation grants as seed money, often through federal CSP (Charter Schools Program) grants or other state-administered innovation funds. In 2021 the General Assembly provided, in OCGA sec. 20 2 165.1(a), 3.785% QBE supplement, up to $4.5M per local charter school. This is approximately $100 per FTE.
- **State Charter Schools** (authorized by the State Charter Schools Commission): Receive a Quality Basic Education (QBE) allotment plus a state supplement to make up for the lack of local tax revenue.

For More Information and Guidance Please Contact

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