

Short head: Ball State takes action on 20 charter schools

Summary: Ball State University will not renew seven charter schools, will extend contracts by three years with performance conditions for seven and renew full five-year contracts for four. Two schools withdrew requests for renewal.

Ball State takes action on 20 charter schools, chooses to not renew seven

MUNCIE, Ind. — Ball State has notified 20 of the 42 charter schools it currently authorizes of decisions regarding their charter school renewal status with the university. These decisions were based upon a careful review of each school as part of its scheduled renewal process. The process included an extensive review of academic, financial and organizational performance and compliance. It also provided each school a meaningful opportunity to present additional information about its overall performance in a charter renewal application. Based on the review, the university will take the following actions with each of the charter schools due for review this year.

Five-year contract renewal

21st Century Charter School at Gary	Gary, Ind.
Dr. Robert H. Faulkner Academy	Marion, Ind.
Options Charter School-Noblesville	Noblesville, Ind.
Veritas Academy	South Bend, Ind.

Three-year contract extension, with performance conditions

Anderson Preparatory Academy	Anderson, Ind.
Aspire Charter Academy	Gary, Ind.
East Chicago Lighthouse Charter School	East Chicago, Ind.
East Chicago Urban Enterprise Academy	East Chicago, Ind.
Gary Lighthouse Charter School	Gary, Ind.
Geist Montessori Academy	McCordsville, Ind.
Hoosier Academy-Indianapolis	Indianapolis, Ind.

Nonrenewal—contract expires June 30, 2013

Charter School of the Dunes	Gary, Ind.
Imagine Indiana Life Sciences Academy-East	Indianapolis, Ind.
Imagine MASTER Academy	Fort Wayne, Ind.
Imagine Schools on Broadway	Fort Wayne, Ind.
Kenneth A. Christmon STEMM Leadership Academy	Richmond, Ind.
LEAD College Preparatory Charter School	Gary, Ind.
Timothy L. Johnson Academy	Fort Wayne, Ind.

Request for renewal withdrawn — contract expires June 30, 2013

Hoosier Academy-Muncie	Muncie, Ind.
West Gary Lighthouse Charter School	Gary, Ind.

Five-year renewals were approved based upon academic progress. Three-year renewals were extended to schools with additional performance conditions identified by the university's Office of Charter Schools (OCS) that the school must address. Nonrenewals were based on schools' academic performance and failure to present additional information that demonstrated they could achieve academic standards. Nonrenewed school charters will expire June 30, 2013.

"We take our authorizer responsibility for ensuring academic quality very seriously," said Bob Marra, executive director of OCS. "While we prefer to see these schools succeed, we have determined that their current success or progress isn't sufficient for seven of our schools. It is our responsibility to not renew the school, which usually leads to closure. While I understand it may cause some short-term difficulty for families, it is a decision made in the long-term best interests of their students."

The decisions, affecting approximately half of Ball State's charter schools, were determined using a new accountability framework finalized by OCS last summer. The framework, developed over the course of two years, was presented by OCS to all Ball State authorized schools on June 27, 2012. OCS held subsequent regional meetings with officials at all schools to review performance data considered in the new framework. It also held meetings with individual schools to review key data points. Every school had at least three substantial meetings with OCS to review the data, and many had considerably more.

"None of these schools should be surprised," said Marra. "We've advanced through methodical and iterative steps over the last two years to develop a framework that we believe will drive strong performance in our charter schools. And we've been transparently communicating with the schools about it since the summer."

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) assisted OCS with aligning its policies and procedures to national principles and standards for quality charter school authorizing. The new accountability framework focuses on assessing charter schools in the areas of academics, finance and governance. Specific enhancements include:

- o increasing the frequency of formal school review from every five years to annually, based on performance measures and metrics schools must meet every year
- o providing more performance assessment information gathered by OCS to school leaders and boards regarding their status in meeting, exceeding or falling below OCS standards
- o strengthening the rigor of charter approval criteria.

Marra added, "It is my vision that our framework could now stand as a useful example of rigorous standards and accountability for others in authorizing. It provides a foundation upon which we can adapt our efforts and become even more rigorous over time. I think we are well on our way. In fact, in the last submission cycle we received nine applications and denied all of them because they did not meet the new standards. Quality is our priority."

The renewal review process allows for the schools to request reconsideration of the university's decision. Schools must request reconsideration within 10 business days. For those making such a request, a hearing will be held with the Ball State University Charter Schools Hearing Panel.

The panel would submit recommendation(s) to the president of the university in early March. The president's decision, based on the panel's recommendation, is final.

Previously, Ball State has terminated authorization for one school, Urban Brightest in Fort Wayne, in 2004.

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1/22/2013