

Q&A Guide to The Florida Schools of Excellence Commission

Who will oversee the FSE?

The State Board of Education has direct supervision over the FSE. Additionally, the Chair of the Commission is required to annually report to the Board on the academic performance and the fiscal responsibility of all charter schools and cosponsors approved by the Commission.

When will the FSE commission start functioning?

FCCS estimates that it will take approximately 9 to 12 months before the FSE is fully functioning and able to carry out all of its designated responsibilities. The first meeting of the FSE was held in September 2006 and subsequent monthly meetings have been held.

According to the schedule outlined by the legislation, the timeline for establishment of the FSE commission and related responsibilities is as follows:

- By September 1, 2006, all commission members are to be appointed by the State Board of Education
- The commission is “encouraged” to hold its first meeting no later than October 1, 2006
- Funds must be raised from private and governmental grants to pay for the start up costs of the FSE commission office and staff

Among the FSE commission’s first activities:

- The FSE is actively seeking applicants for the position of Executive Director and is expected to hire someone by the end of 2006.

Responsibilities of the FSE

The FSE commission will have broad responsibilities to monitor and support the charter schools it sponsors and the cosponsoring agencies it approves. These responsibilities include the following:

- Authorize and act as a sponsor of charter schools
- Authorize municipalities, state universities, community colleges and regional educational consortia to act as cosponsors (with the FSE) of charter schools
- Conduct facility and curriculum reviews of FSE-approved charter schools
- Develop, promote and disseminate best practices for charter schools
- Develop, promote and require high standards of accountability for FSE-sponsored charter schools
- Monitor and annually review the performance of cosponsors
- Monitor and annually review and evaluate the academic and financial performance of FSE-sponsored schools
- Report the student enrollment of FSE-sponsored schools to district school boards
- Work with cosponsors to monitor the financial management of FSE charter schools
- Direct charter schools and persons seeking to support charter schools to private funding
- Actively seek supplemental revenues to support FSE operations
- Review and recommend to the Legislature revisions to the statutes regarding FSE-approved cosponsors
- Act as a liaison for cosponsors and FSE-sponsored charter schools with school districts to arrange for the use of excess space in public school facilities
- Collaborate with cosponsors to provide high quality education to low-income, low-performing, gifted, or underserved student populations, including enabling students to take college courses and receive high school and college credits; and exploring the establishment of charter schools for students with disabilities, including autism
- Support municipalities that intend to cosponsor charter schools
- Assist FSE-sponsored charter schools in contract negotiations with district school boards for administrative or transportation services
- Provide training for the governing board of FSE-sponsored charter schools

- By January 31, 2007: the FSE commission will begin accepting applications from potential charter school cosponsors, such as municipalities, state universities, community colleges and regional educational consortia

Can we try to switch the sponsorship of our charter school from our school district to the FSE commission?

Your school may apply to the FSE commission for sponsorship when its charter agreement with the local school board has expired, terms of the charter agreement have been met, or if your

local school board agrees to rescind your current charter agreement. Additionally, charter schools can only apply to the FSE in those districts that do not retain exclusive authority or in those districts that do retain exclusive authority but have approved that specific charter school applying to the FSE.

How does a local school district apply for “exclusive sponsorship authority?”

A school board can apply to the State Board of Education to retain its authority as the only sponsor of charter schools operating in its district. The district must submit a written resolution to the State Board of Education on or before March 1 of the fiscal year prior to the year in which it is applying for exclusive authority. In this resolution, the school district must provide evidence that it has provided “fair and equitable” treatment to its charter schools for the last four years. Specific requirements of the resolution are outlined in law.

The State Board of Education will make its determination on exclusivity after it has determined by adequate notice, in a public hearing, and by receiving input from any charter school sponsored by the district that the district has provided fair and equitable treatment to charter schools.

Can a charter school be sponsored by the FSE in a school district that retains exclusive authority?

Yes, only when the school district permits the establishment of one or more FSE charter schools by adopting a favorable resolution and submitting that resolution to the State Board of Education.

How can charter schools participate in the process for determining exclusivity?

First, the school district must notify its charter schools that it is applying for exclusive sponsorship authority by providing a copy of the resolution to all of the charter schools it has sponsored on or before the date that it submits its resolution to the State Board.

Forty-eight school districts have applied for exclusive authority from the State Board of Education. Charter schools are requested to submit their responses to the Department of Education by November 13, 2006. Additionally, the State Board will hold a public meeting and solicit input from the charter schools sponsored by that district to determine if a school district has demonstrated “fair and equitable” treatment.

Can the State Board of Education’s decision to grant exclusive authority to a school district be challenged?

Yes, charter schools in that district or any other party may file with the State Board of Education a “notice of challenge” within 30 days of the granting of exclusivity. The notice must be accompanied with a specific written description of the basis for the challenge. The challenging party must also provide a copy of the challenge to the school district. The State Board will provide the school district with the opportunity to respond to the challenge and will make a determination within 60 days of receiving the notice of challenge.

How will the FSE differ from local school boards as a charter school sponsor?

Most importantly, the FSE’s sole focus will be the development and sponsor-

ship of high quality charter schools in the state. Since the new law emphasizes that the FSE will develop high standards for charter school accountability, one can expect that it will play a more active role in both supporting and monitoring the charter schools it sponsors. The FSE is also expected to establish a rigorous and uniform system of reviewing, approving and denying charter school applications.

In addition, entities such as municipalities, state universities, community colleges, and regional educational consortia will be able to cosponsor charter schools with the FSE. This will likely increase the number of quality and innovative charter schools focused on meeting the specific needs of local communities. The cosponsors must demonstrate in their application their commitment to provide equal access to all students to maintain a diverse student population in the charter schools and to serving low income, low performing, gifted or underserved populations.

Do other states have multiple sponsor laws?

The concept of a statewide charter school sponsor is not new. In the 40 jurisdictions with charter schools, 27 jurisdictions allow multiple sponsors, including Texas, California, New York, Michigan, Colorado and the District of Columbia. In 2006, South Carolina and Florida were the last states to enact legislation establishing an independent statewide sponsor for charter schools. Florida will learn from these states and adopt best sponsorship practices and procedures for the FSE.