

the review

A Publication for Members of the Florida Consortium of Public Charter Schools

Volume I

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Issue 1

Working for You

The purpose of FCCS is to support, inspire and unite charter schools, and improve education in the state of Florida. To accomplish this, we assist new schools in their early stages, help strengthen low-performing schools and support the growth of high-performing schools.

FCCS now has three individuals "in the field" who regularly meet with charter schools and work one-on-one in the areas of academic improvement, facilities financing and management practices. Vickie Marble, Vicky Rowe and Richard Moreno travel constantly throughout the state. They hold regional workshops, visit schools and provide on-the-spot assistance. We also have an experienced staff based in our office in Ft. Lauderdale who are available to answer FCCS members' questions through our new HOTLINE help desk.

FCCS is growing! Consistent with our strategic plan, we have added staff and moved to a larger office in the Ft. Lauderdale area over the last several months. With an expanded organization and resources, we are now able to provide a wider range of services and more one-on-one assistance to Florida charter schools.

Continued on pg. 2

From the President's Corner

Dear Charter School Advocate:

We are excited to inaugurate the first edition of our newsletter for members of the Florida Consortium of Charter Schools.

As a fellow charter school founder and operator, I know how difficult it is for you to keep current in charter school areas such as start-up, accountability, financial reporting, facilities, finance management, or public relations. The Executive Board and I are aware that there has been no formalized mode of networking with successful and experienced Florida charter school operators. While there is a vast amount of information available, often it is not presented in an easy to understand, ready to use format—nor is it always accurate and current.

This tremendous need was the inspiration for the Florida Consortium of Charter Schools (FCCS).

The purpose of FCCS is to support the establishment and operation of high quality Florida charter schools. We are about supporting, inspiring, and uniting around improving education in Florida. This includes assisting new schools in their early stages, helping low-performing schools improve and supporting the growth of high-performing schools. Our concerns are your concerns. We provide individual relevant information and services that are on target and on time. This, in turn, allows you to focus on what is most important; running a successful high quality charter school.

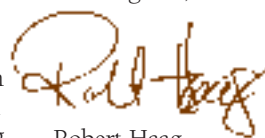
Equally important to operating a high quality charter school is ensuring that our voice is heard in Tallahassee. We are under attack from critics that would like to see education reform not happen. With the help of our high profile lobbyists, your support and a constant vigilant awareness of what is happening, we are aggressively working hard to protect your fair share of resources and align the support from the Department of Education and Florida legislatures.

We all have worked very hard to get to where we are and we will continue to be proactive about improving education. This commitment also drives FCCS. We have spent the past year reviewing what has worked and what changes are needed. This effort has been the catalyst to add the FCCS Hotline, the FCCS Help Center, and a more in-depth and comprehensive website.

I am personally excited about the future of the charter school movement in Florida and I am confident that together we will continue to be leaders in improving education.

We remain steadfast in our commitment to serve our members.

Best Regards,



Robert Haag
President

Meet the FCCS Specialists

Continued from pg. 1

Members of FCCS may contact the following individuals with questions and concerns. Email addresses and phone numbers are printed below each staff member's name.



Mary Levinson

Director of Membership Services

Contact her at
m.levinson@floridacharterschools.org

Mary Levinson oversees FCCS' services to member schools. She has been with FCCS since 2000, providing support, assistance and core services to FCCS stakeholders. Mary conducts needs assessments and disseminates information both individually and collectively to the charter school community. She also participates with other charter school associations to research best practices and national trends. Building new membership of schools and communicating with charter school boards of directors are part of her job.

Prior to coming to FCCS, Mary worked for the Broward County School District as a Program Coordinator for various Special Initiative Grants and as Program Manager for the Vocational Adult, Community Education Mobile Assessment Units.



Vickie Marble

Director of Advocacy and Strategic Partnerships

Contact her at
v.marble@floridacharterschools.org

Vickie Marble travels frequently around the state to conduct needs assessments of low performing charter schools. She assists schools in identifying resources and developing action plans to improve school performance and student achievement. Vickie is responsible for creating opportunities for charter schools to share "best practices" through workshops, meetings and conferences.

Before joining the staff of FCCS, Vickie was a consultant with the Florida Charter School Resource Center. She founded and directed PAL Academy Charter Middle School, which opened in 1997, The Opportunity Charter School, which opened in 1999 and Manatee County Juvenile Justice Charter School, which opened in 2000. Vickie serves on the Florida Charter School Review Panel as a Governor's appointee. She is also an experienced teacher, having taught in public and private schools in Manatee County for 20 years.



Richard Moreno

Chief Financial Officer, FCCS and Resource Specialist, NCB Development Corporation

Contact him at
r.moreno@floridacharterschools.org

As a Resource Specialist for NCB Development Corporation, Richard assists charter schools in both Florida and Georgia with facilities development and financing through a government grant program. Rich has fifteen years of financial management experience and has been involved with real estate development throughout his working career. He previously served as Chief Financial Officer at Pacific National Bank where he was responsible for all aspects of the bank's financial management.



John Pace

Director of Corporate Partnerships and Fund Development

Contact him at
j.pace@floridacharterschools.org

As Director of Corporate Partnerships and Fund Development at FCCS, John's role is to cultivate and manage the strategic development and execution of business and philanthropic partners. By bringing these partners into the charter school movement, John's goal is to broaden the base of charter school specific products, services and support for school improvement in Florida. Creating value for both charter schools and socially investing corporations is his guiding principle for success.

Previously, John held the position of Vice President of Marketing and Public Relations for Chancellor Beacon Academies. John has also held senior level marketing and management positions for corporations, including PepsiCo and Proctor & Gamble. John's latest project is fatherhood; he and wife Simone have just welcomed Malia, their first baby, into the world.



Vicky Rowe
Regional Consultant

Contact her at
Vmannausa@aol.com

Vicky Rowe is on the move, traveling around Florida to visit charter schools and assist them with their needs. She has currently been focusing her efforts on “D” and “F” schools, but also conducts workshops for all charter schools in each of the state’s five regions.

As the former Director of Charter Schools for the State of Florida, Vicky has a unique perspective on charter school law and policy-making. Vicky is also an experienced educator, having taught Special Education students for seven years in Manatee County, where she was named Teacher of the Year.



Barbara Smith
Executive Assistant to the President

Contact her at
b.smith@floridacharterschools.org

The melodious voice that often answers your calls to FCCS is that of Barbara Smith, Executive Assistant to Bob Haag. Barbara is responsible for the day-to-day functions that keep the President on track and the office running smoothly. A seasoned Executive Assistant with twenty plus years of experience in administration and office management, Barbara worked for Stanford University in the Student Affairs Division for many years before moving to Florida. Throughout her career, she has helped many Vice Presidents, Presidents and CEO’s stay organized and productive.

Mark Your Calendars



OCTOBER 29 – 30, 2003:
The Center for Education Reform’s Tenth Anniversary Celebration and Salute to the Best of Education Reform, The Ritz-Carlton, Washington, DC



MAY 3 – 7, 2004:
Fifth National Charter Schools Week



JUNE 16 – 18, 2004:
National Charter Schools Conference, Fontainebleau Hilton, Miami Beach

New Group Represents Florida Charter School Parents



Margaret Wolter
President, ASTAR

ASTAR of Florida is a new grassroots, non-profit, charter school advocacy organization dedicated to providing information to charter school parents and enabling them to speak as one voice to elected officials. It was founded in 2003 by Margaret Wolter, an advocate for quality education and a parent activist in the Broward County

Public School system. According to Margaret, “reaching together for your child’s success,” is the principle theme surrounding ASTAR.

ASTAR was founded on the belief that involved, informed parents are an essential element to the success of a child. The organization will develop initiatives with parents, guardians, and other interested supporters from a variety of public school options representing the entire spectrum of school choice. ASTAR’s newsletters, electronic communications (e-mail, web sites, etc.), training sessions, workshops, legislative updates, and other activities will keep members informed of issues affecting their children and their schools.

If you would like to learn more about ASTAR, please contact Margaret Wolter, President, ASTAR by telephone at 866-71A-STAR or by e-mail at mswolter@astar-csc.org.

SACS Accreditation: How Much Is It Worth to Your School?

A few years ago, only a handful of Florida charter schools pursued accreditation by SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools), the primary accreditation agency for public (and many private) schools in the southern United States. Now, charter schools throughout the state are becoming accredited or are at least looking into it.

Charter schools have learned that accreditation from SACS gives them a stamp of approval that is widely recognized throughout Florida and the southeast region. That stamp of approval can be extremely important for successful charter schools that receive little or no positive recognition for their achievements from their own school districts.

If a charter school is struggling to make ends meet, the cost of the accreditation process may seem prohibitive. The school must first submit a \$500 application fee. Then, SACS sends teams of experts to visit the school and assist with the application process. The school is responsible for paying a \$150 fee plus travel expenses per member of the “readiness” visitation team. Later, a Peer Review Team visits the school. The cost of the visit is \$400 for the Peer Review Chair, plus the costs of travel, hotel and meals for all of the members of the team. SACS also offers the services of a facilitator to assist the school in preparing for the review, something which most schools request when applying for the first time. The facilitator’s services require a \$400 fee plus any travel expenses.

Schools must also figure in other expenses, including the time of faculty and staff who participate in the application and self-study process, and incidental costs such as photocopying and postage. Altogether, a charter school might spend around \$3,500 to \$5,000 for the accreditation process.

What’s the Payback?

SACS accreditation is considered to be “the” gold standard for quality public schools in this region. A charter school that receives accreditation achieves new status in the eyes of parents, district and state educational officials, and the general public. As an accredited school, the charter school is in the same league as any accredited traditional public school in terms of quality and accountability.

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SACS accreditation can help charter schools when they apply for a bank loan or long-term lease. Richard Moreno, Resource Specialist with the Technical Assistance Project for Charter School Facilities, notes, “A school with SACS accreditation seeking financing will be viewed more favorably than otherwise. SACS accreditation provides lenders with an independent assessment of the school’s educational program. Financial institutions generally do not have the internal resources to ascertain a school’s non-financial programs properly.”

The application process also provides charter schools with an excellent “how-to” lesson in good accountability practices. Every applicant school must participate in a period of self-study, called the “Quality School Improvement Process,” during which a committee made up of faculty, administrators, staff, students and trustees work together to identify the school’s strengths and weaknesses and present strategies for improvement in specific areas.

The Self Study is similar to developing a school improvement plan, but requires a more comprehensive and detailed analysis of school operations.

FCCS President Bob Haag believes that every charter school should consider applying for SACS accreditation: “All charter schools should set their sights on SACS accreditation. It gives them a solid structure for self-improvement and once they have been accredited, it puts them in the same league as the best traditional public schools. This can only help them become strong and successful charter schools.”

Some in the charter school community are predicting that the Florida Legislature will eventually require that charter schools must be accredited by SACS to qualify for the state’s rapidly diminishing capital outlay funds. Although it is difficult to foresee the actions of the legislature, this scenario would have a major impact on the financial stability of Florida’s charter schools.

Elementary and Middle Charter Schools Follow Special Accreditation Process

In recognition of charter schools’ special characteristics, SACS uses a slightly different accreditation process for charter elementary and middle schools. All elementary and middle charter schools are classified as “Special Purpose Schools,” which allows them to bypass some accreditation standards such as having a fully-equipped library and Media Specialist. Charter high schools, however, must follow the same accreditation process as traditional public schools.

Where to Start

If you would like to learn more about SACS accreditation, visit the SACS website at www.sacscoc.org or call Dr. Pat Wentz at the Florida SACS office at 800-865-9068. William Henderson, a former charter school administrator and current SACS site reviewer, is also available to answer your questions. You may contact him by email at hendersw@bellsouth.net.

Preferred Partner in Focus

We are very pleased to announce our Preferred Partner Program. As an FCCS member, you now have the ability to receive preferred products and pricing from providers that have met FCCS's high standards and have been identified as the best organizations to provide charter schools with high quality products and services. These partners have completed

successfully FCCS's comprehensive and rigorous process and have agreed to special pricing and packages that meet your unique needs.

Highlighted in this issue is PrimePay. PrimePay offers a wide array of products and services to accommodate your company's payroll, banking, compliance, employee benefits, insurance, and human resources needs.

Case Study

Dr. Rosa Lawson asked the PrimePay team to do an analysis of Central Charter School's health care benefits, business insurance policies and current payroll processing methods. PrimePay identified several areas where it could increase coverage levels, in addition to offering the employees greater flexibility in their health benefit choices. PrimePay was also able to increase Central Charter's payroll processing efficiency and accuracy by providing a point-to-point processing solution. Most notably, PrimePay identified several thousands of dollars in Workers Compensation savings, thus eliminating the need for a large down payment by obtaining a pay-as-you-go program for Central Charter School.

PrimePay administrators are professionals. They give many hours of personal time, which indicates their commitment to our need; are sensitive to our concerns; and respond in a timely fashion when requested. Our business relationship has generated significant savings compared with other similar products used in previous years. We are indeed happy to do business with such a refreshing group.

— Dr. Rosa Lawson, Central Charter School Founder and President/CEO

We are always looking for ways to bring value to our members. We know our members are passionate about educating their students, yet don't always have the time to identify the right products and services. This is why the Preferred Partner Program was created. If you have any questions, please contact John Pace, (954-463-9595), Director of Corporate Partnerships. He is equally passionate about helping you get what you need to improve education in Florida.

For more information, please contact PrimePay at 1-800-763-0415.

Ask Dr. Ruth



Question: I am a new teacher and the principal just left a note in my mailbox: *Open House will be in two weeks on Tuesday night at 7:00 p.m. Please be there at 6:30 p.m., prepared and ready to greet the parents.* My stomach just turned into knots. I have never faced a group of parents before. I am terribly worried about that all important, first impression. Help!

Dear New Teacher,

Follow these simple tips and suggestions and you will be just fine.

Prepare an Open House Packet to distribute to the parents. Materials that may be included are:

- Letter of Introduction about yourself and your classroom goals
- Classroom Rules/Policies
- Open House Sign-In Form that asks for student name, parent name, and contact numbers
- Transportation Information Form that asks how the child gets to and from school and who is allowed to pick up the child in case of emergencies
- Volunteer Sign Up Sheet that asks when parents can come in, how often and the best phone numbers to reach them
- Medical Information Form that includes allergies, daily medications, and any other information the parent may wish to share

Have your classroom ready. Remember to include the following:

- Students' work folders on their desks
- Classroom rules posted in a positive light for review ("Raise Hand," instead of "Do Not Call Out.")
- Up-to-date bulletin boards showcasing good work and curriculum. Remember to display at least one sample of work from each student
- A display of curriculum books in front of the room for parents to view

Share the following tips with parents:

- Encourage reading at home. Turn the television off and designate a family reading time
- Establish a school night routine
- Breakfast is important. Make sure your family is eating healthy
- Let your children know that school is important. Regular attendance and punctuality are a must

**Be positive.
Be encouraging and be sure to SMILE.
Have a great evening!**

Capital Outlay Funds No Longer Guaranteed to All Charter Schools

The Florida Legislature enacted significant changes in the laws governing the state's charter schools in its last session. On May 27, 2003, the Legislature passed HB0055A during a special session. The changes made to capital outlay eligibility criteria are perhaps the most significant in the bill.

Most affected by these new eligibility criteria are new charter schools opening in 2003. Unless they are part of an expanded feeder pattern of charter schools or have long-term financial obligations or began construction on their facilities before December 31, 2002, these schools will not receive any capital outlay funds.

Under the new law, a charter school is eligible for capital outlay funds in this fiscal year if it meets one or more of the following criteria:

1. It is part of an expanded feeder pattern of schools that received capital outlay funds in 2002-03. The feeder pattern of the schools must be linked within the charters of the schools. If the charter school is opening in 2003-04, it must be paired directly with a school that received capital outlay funding in 2002-03.
2. It received capital outlay funding during the fiscal year 2002-03.
3. It has incurred long-term financial obligations prior to January 31, 2003 or began construction of educational facilities prior to December 31, 2002.

In addition, ALL schools seeking capital outlay funds must also show that they:

- Have the financial stability to permit continued operation as a charter school

- Have satisfactory student achievement based upon the state accountability standards applicable to charter schools
- Have received final approval for its sponsor to operate as a charter school during the fiscal year for which capital outlay funds are to be distributed
- Serve students in facilities that are not provided to the charter school by its sponsor.

Uses of Capital Outlay Funds Further Defined

The legislature has also further defined exactly how capital outlay funds can be used by charter schools. Beginning July 1, 2003, charter schools may apply their funds to the following purposes. The first two items were added to the list for the first time this year:

- Construction of new facilities
- Renovation, repair, and maintenance of school facilities that the charter school owns or is purchasing through a lease-purchase or long-term lease of five years or longer
- Purchase of real property
- Purchase, lease-purchase, or lease of permanent or relocateable school facilities
- Purchase of vehicles to transport students to and from the charter school

To learn more about the capital outlay program, you can download the eligibility requirements and instructions for applying for funds at <http://www.firn.edu/doe/oef>. Click on "Charter School Capital Outlay Program," "Charter School Capital Outlay 2003-04," then "Charter School Capital Outlay Procedures."

FCCS Creates Blue Ribbon Grant Committee

A Blue Ribbon Grant Committee has been created recently to review proposals and award grants for programs administered by FCCS. The Committee consists of six individuals who have extensive experience and expertise in the Florida charter school movement. Their role is to provide an impartial review of charter school grant applicants. Amy McClellan is serving as the Committee's administrative coordinator.

The Blue Ribbon Grant Committee's first assignment is to award a series of grants to new and existing high quality charter schools in Florida for one of the nation's largest foundations. Under the foundation's guidelines, schools must be preselected and screened for eligibility before being invited to submit applications. Charter schools are asked to PLEASE NOT call FCCS about these grants. This grant program requires FCCS to contact potential candidate schools directly.

Power Standards Project Takes Hold in Florida

It all started with the buzzword “accountability.”

In 1997, back in the “pioneer” days of the charter school movement, a group of new charter school operators from Florida huddled together at the National Charter School Conference in Washington, D.C. They talked about what everyone else was talking about: charter school accountability. The message delivered to them was that if the Florida charter school movement was going to survive, it needed to become accountable – to students, to parents and to the general public.

The group, which included Dr. Rosa Lawson from Central Charter School, Bob Haag from the Charter School of Excellence, Fred Damianos from Miami Shores/Barry University Charter School and Katrina Wilson-Davis from Liberty City Charter Schools, made a decision that day: they would form an alliance to create their own model of charter school accountability.

This model, they realized, should put their charter schools on a path toward higher standards of accountability than the typical public school; i.e., “beyond the FCAT.” To do this, they would need to create a system that enabled them to:

- Set specific goals and measure their success in meeting those goals
- Identify each student’s needs through continuous assessment
- Address that student’s needs with targeted instruction on the spot, rather than relying on feedback from the FCAT once a year

- Use data to document their students’ progress while they attended the charter schools

Soon thereafter, Dr. Ruth Jacoby from Somerset Neighborhood School joined the group. It applied for and received three South Florida Annenberg Challenge grants

The Power Standards Project is proof that charter schools can help ALL students make strong academic progress.

over a period of four years to implement these ideas. With the grants, the schools contracted with a nationally recognized organization, the Center for Performance Assessment in Denver, Colorado, to deliver extensive training to teachers and administrators. The group learned to identify the “power standards” among the Florida Sunshine State Standards, develop new student assessment procedures, employ data driven decision making, and create detailed accountability plans for their charter schools.

Schools Reaping Benefits of New Accountability System

Since their involvement in the Power Standards Project, the five schools have experienced major gains in their own student achievement levels. All five schools met the “Adequate Yearly Progress” standards of the No Child Left Behind Act. All of them have increased their grades by at least one letter (or kept an “A” grade) in the

State’s grading system, with two of the schools receiving “A’s” in 2003.

The Power Standards Project is proof that charter schools can help ALL students make strong academic progress. Two of the schools serve predominantly low-income minority students. All of the schools have worked extensively with students who were performing far below grade level when they came to the schools.

What began as a lunch table discussion has now become a state-wide movement to upgrade charter school accountability. Today, the schools are disseminating their knowledge through charter school dissemination grants and other conferences. Six administrators received certification to train others in the techniques developed by the Center for Performance Assessment: John P. Drag (Charter School of Excellence), William Henderson (formerly of Miami Shores/Barry University Charter School), Dr. Ruth Jacoby (Somerset Academy), Tracy Nessler (Central Charter School), Valarie King-Thompson (formerly of Central Charter School), and Katrina Wilson-Davis (Liberty City Charter School). Most recently, these charter school leaders and other teachers provided training to more than 120 charter school personnel at the Leadership II Charter School Conference in Lake Buena Vista.

Materials developed through the Power Standards Project are available to the public on the FCCS website, www.floridacharterschools.org, under “Resources.” These include lists of the “Power Standards” identified for grades K-8 in language arts and math, samples of student performance assessments created by charter school teachers, standards-based progress reports, and a manual for charter schools on creating a school accountability plan.

What's in It for Your School? The Value of FCCS Membership



FCCS is both a catalyst for positive change and a voice for improving education. It is the only *wholly independent* charter school organization in Florida that dispenses information and provides technical assistance to individual Florida charter schools.

By joining FCCS, you will receive all the benefits of being “in the loop” of Florida’s premier independent charter school organization. These benefits include:

- On-the-spot e-communications and copies of *The Review* newsletter about the

latest news in charter school financing, legislation and other issues important to your school’s operations

- Access to the FCCS confidential Hotline when you need answers fast to your individual concerns and questions
- Time- and money-saving services at group rates for business needs such as school insurance, payroll and financing
- Free copies of other publications valuable to charter schools, such as *School Reform News* and *Education Next*

- Online access to exclusive information through FCCS’ website

- Access to *Preferred Products and Services* that meet FCCS’ high quality standards

To join FCCS, just complete the membership form enclosed with the newsletter and fax it to 954-463-9594. If you’d like to learn more about the benefits of membership, please call Mary Levison, Director of Membership Services, at 954-463-9595.

About Turtles and the Charter School Movement



FCCS has adopted a new mascot, the sea turtle, one of Florida’s endangered animals. Baby sea turtles march resolutely from their nests in the beach sand into the ocean, facing many dangers along the way. Sea turtles are capable of swimming huge distances across the ocean but they always return to their ancestral beach to breed.

The sea turtle symbolizes how FCCS envisions itself: as a steady, progressive, dependable organization, unwavering in its course to support, inspire and unite Florida’s charter schools.

We welcome your comments on the articles appearing in *The Review*.
Please email them with your name and school name to:
Amy McClellan, Editor, at a.mcclellan@floridacharterschools.org.