

FAQ's Cornerstone Charter Academy

February 22, 2010

1. Why did the Cities decide to look into opening Charter Schools?

We began thinking about this venture in Belle Isle in 2007. In March 2009, we invited Edgewood to participate in the effort, and they accepted.

We want to be communities where people want to locate their family where they can have an excellent quality of life, can get their family a good education, and a good career. We have long been concerned about the effect that the lack of school choice has on our communities. In fact, this is often cited as a reason for moving from our cities.

We cannot have families feel compelled to move to a different neighborhood or buy a home in a different area only because they do not like our school options and want better schools. Rather, we want to be communities where for sale signs and for rent signs are not seen, and our property values are increasing because of the quality of our schools.

We believe very strongly that if we are going to provide long term sustainable, quality communities with a bright and strong future, we must take these innovative and proactive steps to provide top quality education opportunities for our current residents and the future generations of families. Having multi-generation families who stay here are what create the backbone of sustainability and livability for our communities. Quality of life and education are what keep them here.

In response to these concerns, we retained expert charter school consultants to assist us with due diligence effort and a feasibility study of opening charter schools. We studied and visited examples of charter schools that have been successful. After brainstorming sessions, meetings, presentations and evaluations, it was abundantly clear that not only was it feasible, but it is a great opportunity to create a successful future. So we filed applications for these charter schools to the School Board.

Simply put, our charter school effort is about:

- Building a long term, sustainable community with a top quality educational choice and opportunity for our children.
- Provide value and a residential benefit to living in our cities tied to our charter schools.
- Improving the existing schools through competition and by offering best practices learned from our charter schools.

2. What affirmative steps are the Cities taking today in their quest to open Charter Schools?

Belle Isle and Edgewood have succeeded in our efforts to pass the first step in establishing our new charter schools, winning the unanimous approval of our applications by the Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) Board of Directors on October 13th! This is a great step forward toward school choice, and the beginning of a new day and brighter future for our communities.

While there are still many other administrative steps to complete in the coming months, the approval and expected OCPS contract signing in March will allow us to be open in August 2010 with our first classes in each school, our K-8 and High School!

Our vision is to locate the schools in a single “academic village”, the center of education and youth extracurricular activity where our most vibrant and visible evidence is found of the improvements being made in our community. The academic village will provide a positive atmosphere, a gathering place where the moral character and attitudes of service to our community are being shaped and developed in our future citizens.

As of January 21, 2010, an opportunity has been given to the charter schools to begin discussions to lease the school facilities at Pine castle United Methodist Church.

Enrollment will be on a preferential basis to first seat the children of residents of Belle Isle and Edgewood. Remaining seats, within the established start up capacity of classes, will go to residents of surrounding Pine Castle / Orange County residents in open enrollment periods following the enrollment of Belle Isle and Edgewood residents.

3. What is the Mission Statement with respect to opening the Charter Schools?

The Belle Isle and Edgewood charter schools’ mission is:

- a. To provide public school choice for our communities’ children.
- b. To provide local control of the schools’ governance and operations
- c. To create an educational structure that requires parental participation in the schools’ activities and operations
- d. To create high academic standards with a defined academic theme at the high school level such as a biotechnology/life sciences electives
- e. To create a robust program of extracurricular activities including athletics and the arts.
- f. To infuse innovative approaches and proven successful teaching strategies into our schools
- g. To forge educational partnerships with specific community leaders, businesses, non-profits, colleges and other agencies.
- h. To create a campus life that encompasses a high level of moral integrity and respect along with a strict code of conduct and character.

4. What are Charter Schools?

Charter schools are public schools and sponsored by School Districts and governed by the Florida Department of Education. Charter schools are well regulated from the perspective of fiscal accountability, academic assessments and student health/safety/welfare. Charter schools have a high degree of

flexibility in terms of size, academic programs, uniforms, student life (e.g. code of conduct) and facilities. Charter schools are schools of “choice”, and when parents enroll their children in the charter, they are making a choice and a commitment to abide by the parental / student contracts, code of conduct and all accompanying standards.

5. How are Charter Schools created?

Charter schools are created when a stakeholder group applies to the School District for a charter to operate a public school, or when parents and faculty of an existing public school elect to “convert” their school to charter status. The two charters (K-8 and 9-12) in this case are municipal charters (see next question) applied for by the city of Belle Isle (and the City of Edgewood by future interlocal agreement) and are subject to the approval and award of contracts by the Orange County School Board.

6. Can a city hold a charter and operate a Charter School?

Cities have special status and can apply for a charter to operate schools that only serve the residents of the applying cities. Such cities enroll students based upon a random lottery that involves all of the children of the residents of that municipality who are seeking enrollment. Enrollment of students must be in accord with the racial/ethnic balance of the community from which the student population is being drawn. If the local charter school board so elects, enrollment beyond the cities’ boundaries in order to help populate the schools may occur in an open enrollment period (following the cities’ open enrollment period) through an application process for admission for non-residents.

7. Who will be on the board of the Charter Schools?

The Founding Board of the charter schools will consist of the Mayor and City Commissioners of the City of Belle Isle and will transition via an interlocal agreement between the cities of Belle Isle and Edgewood to a seven member Governing Board prior to the opening of the charter schools, which will include the Mayor of Belle Isle together with three members appointed by the City Council of the City of Belle Isle and three members appointed by the City Council of the City of Edgewood, one of whom will be the Mayor. In the event an interlocal agreement between the cities is not entered, the three Governing Board seats which would have come from Edgewood will be appointed by the City Council of Belle Isle.

The elected officials on the Governing Board of the schools will have the option of either serving as the permanent governing board of the charter schools or appointing a board to serve on their behalf as the governing body of the schools. The cities will establish School Advisory Councils for the charter schools, which will be comprised of representatives from the communities of Belle Isle, Edgewood and other stakeholders in the school, including parents, business partners and surrounding areas outside of the cities that have students attending the schools. The board will be comprised of

representatives of various technical and professional backgrounds and areas of expertise as outlined by the Florida Dept. of Education.

8. Will the students in the Charter Schools wear uniforms?

Yes.

9. Who will be responsible for day-to-day operation of the Charter Schools?

The Principal will be in charge of the day to day operation of the school. Academica, one of the top education service providers in the industry, will assist us with “back of house” administration operations in our charter schools. Academica is one of Florida’s largest and longest-serving charter school service providers. Serving over 50 high-performing and fiscally-sound charter schools, Academica serviced schools achieved an average grade of "A" in 2009 under the State of Florida Accountability Program.

A cooperative agreement with Somerset Academy, Inc. will also allow us to benefit from being part of an established, SACS accredited, and high performing charter school network. Somerset will provide professional development, new teacher/principal training and conferences, and will share best practices with our faculty and administration. (Academica website – www.academicaschools.com and the Somerset Academy, Inc. website – www.somersetacademy.com)

10. How are Charter Schools funded?

Charter schools are funded by the state in the same way as all other public schools in the School District. The charter school receives operating funds from the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) based on the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) students enrolled. Charter school funding includes gross state and local funds, discretionary lottery funds, and funds from the School District’s current operating discretionary millage levy; divided by the total funded weighted FTE students in the school district; multiplied by the weighted FTE students in the charter school. Charter schools are entitled to their proportionate share of categorical program funds for eligible students and programs. Charter schools also receive certain capital outlay funding on an annual basis in accordance with a state funding formula.

The operations of the schools will need to be managed on a “self-sustaining” basis from state revenues derived from the operation of the educational programs, including charter operational and capital revenues, together with certain other revenues including student activity fees, before/after/summer school program revenues, grants, donations and facility rentals.

Quick Facts:

- ▶ Annual charter school funding is approximately \$6,000 per student (net of a 5% administrative fee withheld by the School District in accordance with statute)

- ▶ Additionally, charter capital outlay funds (\$500/student) will be provided in year 2 of operations since Somerset is SACS accredited. (Other new, non-accredited charters would have to wait until year 4.)
- ▶ Funds are provided by the State but are paid to the School District and then to the charter school
- ▶ Actual funding depends on profile of individual students (ESE students and ESOL students receive additional funds)
- ▶ \$300,000 (average grant size) is available for start-up expenses, beginning in first year of operations (Federal Grant)
- ▶ Funding is provided on a per student basis (5% of the funds up to the first 500 students are paid to OCPS as an administrative fee)
- ▶ OCPS retains 100% of the locally collected 2 mils (capital dollars) and 100% of the local ½ penny sales tax dollars for schools

11. Can charter schools operate on a church's property?

Yes. Florida State Statutes specifically allow charter schools to be operated on the properties of churches. As public schools funded with public dollars, charter schools must be nonsectarian in their programs, admission policies, employment practices and operations. However, as a general rule, the charter school's academic program is limited to 180 days of instruction each year. The instructional day is 6 hours. Traditional parochial school programs can be offered by a church before and after school to the community at the facility. Extracurricular activities conducted before or after school hours are considered as such and are not governed by the public school requirements for the school hours. We encourage continuation of such extracurricular activities of the church before and after the "6 hour" charter school day.

As mentioned above, it is also important to the cities to maintain a high level of integrity and respect along with a strict code of conduct and character. Further, since we are working closely with Academica, which has incomparable experience in Florida transitioning parochial schools to charter public schools, if church-state issues were to come up, Academica has access to a prominent church-state law firm based in Washington D.C.

12. Are there plans for a preschool or other before and after school programs ?

It is a possibility if sufficient interest. As of now, all Somerset schools offer a Pre-K fee based program.

We understand that before and afterschool activities may continue to be conducted by PCUMC.

13. Will a Christian elective be introduced into curriculum or extra-curricular activities?

There are courses on the FL DOE website that are religion based and will be explored based on student interest.

14. Will there be ROTC and sports?

That too is dependent upon interest. That is clearly our goal. Sometime there is a waitlist for a school to have an ROTC program. We can do a student survey and if enough interest is generated, then there is a possibility. State law provides that if such extracurricular or sports activities are not offered by the charter but they are offered at the public school which the student would otherwise have attended, then that student may continue to participate in that activity at the public school.

15. Will you be offering IEP services ESE, Speech, etc.?

Yes.

16. Will students with known behavioral issues be denied acceptance?

While building the school culture, we realize that students sometimes make poor choices. We bring family in for conversation explaining that poor conduct will not be tolerated. We can also bring a student in with behavioral contract.

17. Will there be free lunch demographics and a ratio of ethnics?

In order for a school to be eligible for Title I, 40% of the students, and higher, would need to fall under the free/reduced guidelines. The demographics need to be reflective of the surrounding community.

18. You mentioned the selection of a Principal. Is there only one Principal?

At this point we are anticipating one principal and a two Assistant Principals.

19. Will you have arts established?

That depends on grade level as to the content. Elementary will have the traditional well-rounded Art, Music, Media, PE. Upper grades geared more toward student interest.

20. Will the school offer all grades K-12 first year?

Yes, and we will make sure that the transition for high school students will be smooth. We will make every effort to provide the resources and attention to each individual student's needs to help them to meet graduation requirements. As a small, community charter school, we will be in a much better position to help any student compared to very large student populations with more strained resources.

21. What is the target enrollment for 1st year and future?

We are targeting a minimum of 500 students with a maximum of 750. Broken down as 500 K-8 and 250 High School students the first year. After that, we hope to stay at capacity although we are approved up to a maximum of 1600 students.

22. Will this charter school use the same books as Orange County for core courses?

Somerset generally uses the same with variations depending on grade level. As a public school we must use state adopted textbooks. This is chosen together with Principal and core leadership and is also based on needs of the school. We will use supplements such as Carnegie and Jamestown Reading Navigation. There is a variety to choose from. We are not limited to what we are required to use.

23. Will the school offer foreign languages? If so, which one?

Yes, again depends on student interest. We have a lot of experience with languages, including but not limited to Spanish, French, Mandarin Chinese. Florida Virtual School also offers online foreign language courses.

24. Will High School Seniors have ability to do dual enrollment?

We plan to offer dual enrollment as soon as possible, hopefully in year one. We will need to establish the relationship with the college ASAP to provide dual enrollment the first year.

25. If the nearby elementary school students attend this charter school, will that facility become charter or part of this school?

That is up to Orange County Public Schools. If it closed and we need the capacity, we would request such consideration with OCPS. We are not pursuing this option at this time as OCPS has indicated the school will remain open.

26. Is the gifted program comparable to the district?

Yes, Gifted and AP will be offered. The structure of the gifted and AP programs will depend on number of students. The program could be a pull out, or fused with AP, etc.

27. Transportation?

Not planned to be offered at this time. Our intent is to serve Belle Isle and Edgewood and the Pine Castle area inside a four mile radius. If any transportation were to be required, we would likely seek to work with parents for that need, and not through the use of school vehicles.

28. What will it cost to send our child to the charter school?

The charter school has no tuition!

29. I know Teachers cannot pray with students, but will students be penalized for praying?

No, but teachers, coaches and staff cannot lead prayer.

30. Will the school have Guidance Counselors, especially in high school?

Yes, quality Guidance Counselors.

31. AP classes, will we continue?

All AP will remain the same.

32. What is dual enrollment?

The student attends class at the high school, as well as a local community college. The student will graduate with an Associates degree. Florida Virtual School has that option too.

33. We understand that enrollment is limited to target Edgewood and Belle Isle residents. What about PCCA students not in those zones?

The school may limit enrollment to municipalities by law. We should have plenty of room. It is important to do the pre-enrollment survey material (student application) so that when open enrollment opens, and we have your contact information, we will be able to inform you of the dates that open enrollment will be conducted.

34. Will there be out of county consideration?

Not unless there is an agreement which OCPS has for out of district transfers.

35. Do we teach evolution? The law says it must be taught as one of a number of theories. Thus, it will be clearly stated that it is just that – a theory. The students will be exposed sooner or later. By law it is required, and what a better environment to learn about this as a theory than in our charter school.

36. The district Magnet programs have a certain focus. This charter school is leaning toward academic programs. What is the focus?

To build our community and where we want to take our city. We will soon have the surrounding medical community in the area. This is an opportunity to capitalize on “medical city” and the new residents they are going to bring with them. We would like to move toward life sciences and bio-technology focus in our electives and honors courses.

37. What is the student teacher ratio?

Charter schools are required to follow the same class size requirements. In K-3rd the ratio is 18:1. In 4th-8th the ratio is 22:1. In 9th-12th the ratio is 25:1.

38. Will current PCCA students be pushed out in subsequent years as more city students are accepted? Once a student is accepted, they

are in until graduation unless their status which granted them eligibility changes (such as moving out of the cities). Siblings will be given priority enrollment privileges.

39. Is there a certain percentage that must be met before deciding on level of interest for added activities such as ROTC or Arts?

There is not an exact percentage. There is also the factor of teacher certifications and skills as well. Our goal will be to meet the desires of our students and parents in activities. Obviously, that means there will need to be sufficient interest.

40. Is there a budget for facility changes or improvements?

If anything needs to be upgraded for safety, yes. We will be adding technology, including Promethean Boards. As well as general improvements to landscaping, paint, etc. There is also Race to the Top program funding set aside for charters, grants, etc.

41. Will the coaches be hired separately from the teachers?

We will try to hire coaches from internal staff based on willingness or skills that are needed, but if needed we will seek coaches from the outside community. If that happens, they must meet district security requirements. Mostly willingness, but it is up to the Principal. High School sports are different, as coaches need certain certifications.

42. With our new partnership with the district can we utilize sports field at Pine Castle Elementary?

We will ask that question to the district.

43. What kind of timeline do you have for classes, grades and capacity?

We will begin enrollment after the School Board approves our contract in March. The Principal will be selected in February and teachers will begin to be selected by the Principal beginning immediately thereafter. We will be developing a guide of course offerings as soon as practical.

44. Do most Somerset schools feed into HS?

All Somerset schools are either already K-12 or are growing at one grade per year toward the full K-12.

45. Who do they compete with in sports?

This will be decided with governing board. Charters can choose to play against public or private. This is a school decision, which is also driven by size as well.

46. If my son gets in to the school would his siblings have to go through a lottery?

Siblings are a priority after initial student accepted.

47. The Powerpoint mentioned mixed classes, does that mean mixed grades?

It can. Advanced and gifted, can mean multi-grades. Sometimes with lower enrollment in one grade can have mixed.

48. Is character development taught in classroom and by Guidance Counselors?

Yes, character development is going to be a very strong emphasis. Core values are infused into curriculum each month. Cyber bullying, drug awareness, etc. are taught by the Guidance Counselor.

49. My child is currently PCCA student, but not a Belle Isle or Edgewood resident. When will enrollment open up to all?

Enrollment will be open at the same time. Please ensure you give your contact information to our registration table or at city hall to allow us to add you to our mailing / emailing list for all information dissemination by the charter school.

50. Are there a certain number of students for each grade level?

Up to 100 per grade level in K-8th and a maximum of 200 per grade level in 9th-12th. All Somerset schools have waiting lists. It is very important to get application in now. Do not delay!!