

EXITING GRACEFULLY: CONSIDERATIONS IN CHARTER SCHOOL CLOSURE

OREGON SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION
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Welcome

- Who is in the room?
- Why did you come to this session?



HOW do charter schools close?

- Charter schools typically close for one of three reasons:
 - Voluntary closure
 - Non-renewal of the charter by the authorizer
 - Termination of the charter by the authorizer
- Each of these processes is covered in ORS 338:
 - Voluntary closure: ORS 338.105(6)(a) and (7)
 - Non-renewal of the charter: ORS 338.065(5)(f) and (6-7); ORS 338.105(6)(a)
 - Termination: ORS 338.105(1-7)

WHY do charter schools close?

- Financial instability is the number #1 reason charter schools across the state and the country close.
 - ▣ Declining enrollment
 - ▣ Lack of fundraising or diversifying revenue
 - ▣ Expenditures outpace revenues
 - ▣ Lack of financial management expertise on staff or governing board
 - ▣ Financial mismanagement

Voluntary Closure

- Charter schools sometimes close for voluntary reasons:
 - Governance and organizational issues
 - Convert to a public school or program
 - Fiscal insolvency
 - Avoid termination

Closure Process

Charter school notifies sponsor of its intent to close at least **180 days** prior to the proposed closure date.

Charter school governing board may only close the charter school at the **end of a semester.**

All **assets** purchased with public funds are disbursed through ODE; all **student records** go back to the district.

Charter school closes

Non-Renewal

- Charter schools can be non-renewed by the authorizer for failing to meet any of the statutory renewal criteria:
 - ▣ Compliance with all applicable state and federal laws
 - ▣ Compliance with the contract
 - ▣ Meeting or working toward meeting student performance goals and agreements specified in the charter
 - ▣ Fiscal stability and a sound financial management system
 - ▣ Compliance with any additional renewal criteria in the contract*

* ORS 338.065(8)(A)(a-e)

Non-Renewal Process

Sponsor notifies the charter school of its **intent** to non-renew the charter. The sponsor states in writing the reasons for denial.

The charter school **MAY** address the reasons for non-renewal and submit a revised request for renewal.

The charter school may **appeal** the termination to the SBE, which will review **ONLY** the grounds and process.

A charter school may seek **judicial review** of an upheld non-renewal decision.

Charter school closes

Termination

- Charter schools can be non-renewed by the authorizer for failing to meet any of the statutory renewal criteria:
 - Failure to comply with charter
 - Failure to meet student performance requirements in charter
 - Failure to correct violation of state or federal law
 - Failure to maintain insurance
 - Failure to maintain financial stability
 - Failure to maintain a sound financial management system
- If the public charter school is endangering the health or safety of the students the authorizer may terminate and close the school immediately.

Termination Process

Sponsor notifies charter school of intent to terminate at least **60 days** prior to termination. Grounds for termination are stated.

If grounds include **financial stability**, the sponsor **MAY** offer the opportunity to complete a plan to correct deficiencies.

The charter school may **appeal** the termination to the SBE, which will review **ONLY** the grounds and process.

Charter school closes

Sponsor may terminate and close school immediately if health or safety of students is endangered.

Considerations for closure: timing

- According to the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), good timing of a closure announcement involves several essential principles:
 - Put students first: avoid mid-year closure when possible, announce closure with enough time for families to find other options
 - Balance practical concerns with political realities: waivers may need to be sought for statutory timelines, closure announcements too early could prompt families to flee mid-year. Know the school's calendar, the board meeting schedule, and the timeline of the statutory process
 - Stay informed: know the school's updated financial status, create and utilize shared checklists of closure duties and hold all parties accountable.

Considerations for closure: **accountability**

- Managing accountability for required processes during the closure process protects both the authorizer and the charter school.
- Create a timeline of events for the closure process and an outline of which parties are responsible for what duties. Share this with the charter school.
- Align the process with statute and the school board's policy.
- Fully document all communication about the closure and evidence (if applicable) for any termination or non-renewal decisions.

Considerations for closure: **communication**

It's critical to stay in close communication with the charter school, families, and, if necessary, the media.

School

- Minutes should be taken at all meetings with school personnel.
- Check in by email or phone frequently.
- Share collaborative planning documents for closure duties, student transitions, etc.

Families

- Formally inform all families of the coming closure, even if the school has already done so.
- Ensure that families know who they can call with questions, and who will help them find their next school.
- Ask the school to copy you on all communication to families, and do the same.

Media/public

- Develop a plan to communicate to the media, including who will be the contact.
- Where possible, work collaboratively with the school to release statements and press releases either jointly or in the same time frame.
- Prepare documentation that will be easy to access when the media calls.

Closure procedure checklist (example)

Charter School _____	Date of Closure _____
Charter School Contact _____	District Contact _____
Contact Information _____	Contact Information _____
_____	_____
(Phone) _____	(Phone) _____
(E-Mail) _____	(E-mail) _____

Activity	Person/Department Responsible	Date Due	Notes
Student Records			
1. Send letter to parents re: transfer of records			
2. Contact out-of-district school districts notifying them of school closure			
3. Transfer student records as requested by transfer request			
4. Student records not requested as of school closure must be transferred to the school district administrative office in which the charter school located.			
5.			
6.			
Reporting to ODE			
1. Review early leaver data			

Other considerations

Stay connected: agreeing to put students at the center can help keep communication lines open between the authorizer and the school.

Meet in person: face-to-face conversations can help you avoid tone/meaning misunderstandings.

Involve ODE: keep ODE up to date and ask for assistance when there are questions.

Document everything: make a file just for the closure process. Put everything relevant in the file. Take minutes at all meetings and take notes during all phone calls related to the closure.

Reach out: don't hesitate to ask for advice and lessons learned from your authorizer colleagues that have been through the same processes.

Assure families: charter school closures are emotional. Make families feel heard, understood, and assured that they will be supported through the transition to the next school.

Discussion



- Stories of success/lessons learned
- Questions?

Thank You!



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