

Chattahoochee Hills Renewal Recommendation

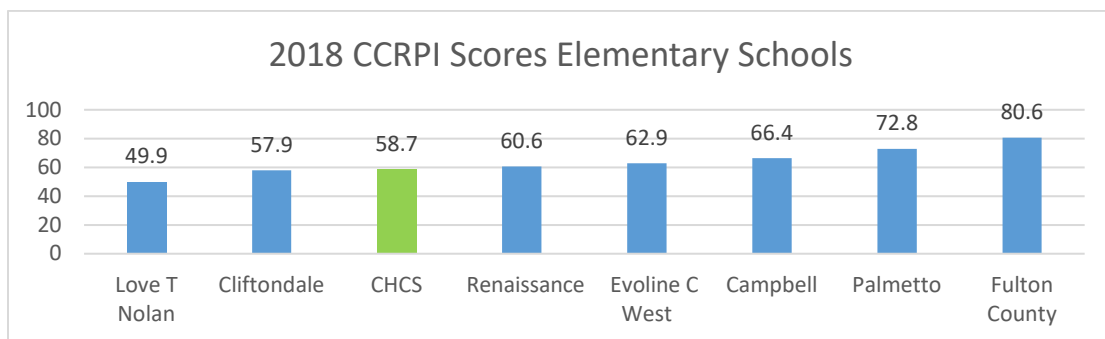
Chattahoochee Hills submitted a renewal petition per FCS policy deadlines. Chattahoochee Hills Charter School has been in operation under the control and management of Fulton County Board of Education. The start date for the original charter was July 1, 2014. The school proposes to continue operations in its current location (9670 Riverton Road, Chattahoochee Hills, GA 30213). The school is requesting another five (5) year charter term as a K-8 school with expected enrollment at the end of the charter term of 540 students.

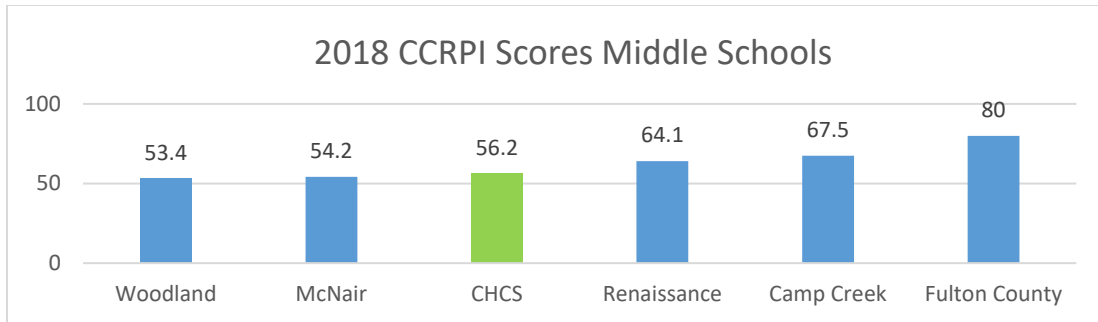
There were aspects of the petition which would benefit Fulton County students attending this charter school:

- Students are offered a trifocus in the arts, agriculture, and the environment.
- The campus design supports the mission and vision of the school.
- The school has garnered quite a bit of community support and maintains a lengthy wait list for admission.
- Since inception, Chattahoochee Hills has featured a hands-on, thematic instructional approach firmly rooted in giving children access to nature. Within the past few months, the CHCS formally voted to adopt an Expeditionary Learning educational framework in an effort to improve academics, infuse more character training thus impacting student behavior and further integrate the arts, agriculture and environment into CHCS school culture.

Academic Performance

CCRPI: The school has not met or exceeded state or the district CCRPI during the last five (5) years of its contract. In 2018 the school performed lower than most of the district comparison schools and FCS charter middle schools. The school has had four principals during its five-year charter term and in 2018 hired an Executive Director in the hope of setting straight the academic trajectory of the school. Though the school climate rating improved in SY18, academic performance did not improve as hoped.





CHCS vs FCS and GA Middle School CCRPI				
	2015	2016	2017	2018
CHCS	61	68	64	58.7
All GA Middle	75	74	75	77
All FCS Middle	75	75	78	81

Academic Achievement: The school only met one out of five academic goals in its contract. Two places where the school’s performance was disappointing includes scoring lower than FCS in each content areas (Math, ELA, Science, and Social Studies) on the Milestones exam and the low percentage of students in the distinguished category in all content areas. CHCS has lacked a consistent structure and leadership. Their first charter was voided due to a State Supreme Court ruling. Early on, much of the founding Board left the organization including the original principal. With their departure, much of the knowledge about the instructional framework and the needed “how to” regarding merging the arts, agriculture, and the environment with state standards. In SY2018, a new principal started and was only at the school a few months before departing, and the Executive Director with the board’s approval chose to serve both the role of the Principal and the Executive Director.

Student Progress: Last year the school met the majority of their growth targets. With the implementation of guided reading and close reading across the school, they saw gains in the past year.

	2015	2016	2017	2018
Kindergarten	79	70	63	66
1st Grade	60	57	29	46
2nd Grade	67	45	40	43
3rd Grade	48	55	53	36
4th Grade	48	56	53	52
5th Grade	48	39	45	48
6th Grade		59	69	FastBridge Cannot Locate Data

BTO: Out of the last five years, CHCS has not Beat The Odds.

Academic Goals and Objectives: Regarding the academic goal of educating students with critical thinking skills, it is rather difficult to evaluate school performance. The school has struggled over the life of the contract with technological issues which inhibited collecting data or due to changes in leadership the school cannot locate data. However, in SY 2018, the school experienced a 2% increase vs. the baseline year for most measures.

Operational Performance

Educational Program Compliance: On the Charter School Accountability Report the school indicated that it did not provide individualized learning plans or learning in multi-age contexts in year three and four of their charter. The school shared that it does not know if those plans were carried out and they could not share those documents at this time with FCS.

FCS expects that an essential part of educational programming is the delivery of a high-quality education. To fulfill this obligation, the school submitted a corrective action plan and a strategic plan with their renewal application. It should be noted that when doing a return to home school analysis, there were CHCS students that would be returned to lower performing home schools within the FCS portfolio.

Governance - Ultimately, the CHCS Board leadership must create the conditions for the school to be successful over the term of the charter. The CHCS board must be committed to monitoring Chattahoochee Hills schools' academic performance more closely. As the stewards of the school, it is CHCS board's responsibility to develop, maintain and annually review the strategic and school improvement plans. It is important that the school's mission is routinely monitored, that the board provides visionary thinking while ensuring the programs in place are evaluated for effectiveness. In the past, the CHCS board may have taken on too many new initiatives at one time and made too many changes in leadership making it difficult for the school to make real academic progress.

The CHCS board may delegate total responsibility for the implementation of the strategic plan to the leadership team, but it must have established direction and oversight through its policies and

procedures. The ultimate academic success or lack thereof rest squarely on the shoulders of the CHCS Board.

Student and Employees – The school must protect the right of all students. Further, the school ensures that all staff is qualified to further the education and welfare of students: CHCS has had challenges throughout the charter with implementing a compliant special education program and in SY2018 received a letter of directive from the Charter School Department. CHCS has addressed the concerns outlined in the letter. However, the school leadership must remain committed to providing and meeting their legal requirements of providing a high-quality program for all their students.

The school has seven (7) teachers with provisional certifications and twenty-two (22) teachers who are non-certified. In SY19, the school began a collaboration with Mercer to have classes on campus to allow non-certified personnel to become certified. CHCS also offers a small incentive to those who participate in the classes.

School Environment: The School complies with all applicable laws, rules, regulations, and provisions of its charter contract relating to safety and the protection of student and employee health, by providing a physically safe and secure environment.

Additional and Continuing Obligations: The school has struggled with complying with all other legal, statutory, regulatory, or contractual requirements, including those contained in its charter contract and annual letter of assurances. The school has corrected noncompliance but the corrective action has been slow and burdensome to FCS. For example in the case when the school used an additional student information system.

Financial Performance

- CHCS has total net assets of \$878,936 as of June 30, 2018, and rents the facilities from the Chattahoochee Hills Charter Foundation.
- Chattahoochee Hills has met all Generally Accepted Accounting Practices (GAAP) on their external, annual audit reports. This past year there were no findings in the annual audit. This may indicate that Chattahoochee Hills is turning a corner as it improves and systematizes its policies and procedures. In years past there have been findings, and in the last year, the governing board and the new leadership team were able to institute practices that eliminated any audit findings.
- During the planning year (2013-2014), the school's original DOO stole \$10,000 from the school. He was removed and later working with the FC District Attorney was made to pay restitution for this crime. CHCS immediately put additional financial controls in place to prevent future fraudulent behavior.

- In years past, CHCS has not met all the financial reporting deadlines in a timely manner. The school has made a shift in the finance departments personnel and the CFO on the board, and for FY18 100% of the financial reports have met the deadlines.
- CHCS has raised over \$190,000 through its fundraising efforts since September 2017

Sustainability ratio is measured as unrestricted net assets divided by average monthly expenses. Sustainability ratio should indicate more than a 2-month reserve. Chattahoochee Hills Charter’s sustainability ratio of 1.87 is due to the following increases in the operational expenditures:

- 1) Addition of an Executive Director role
- 2) Addition of school leadership team members
- 3) Addition of curriculum resources

Chattahoochee Hills is currently adding funds into their reserve account on a monthly basis, as well as analyzing their personnel and resources that may release some additional funding to the reserve account.

Amana	CHCS	FAST	Hapeville	KSFA	LGS*	LCP*	Skyview	TMSA
2.31	1.87	1.23	3.27	7.81	2.83	2.34	1.19	4.91

Liquidity ratio is measured as (current assets less current liabilities) divided by total expenses. Liquidity ratio should be greater than zero (0) and less than one (1). The school is in the acceptable range.

Amana	CHCS	FAST	Hapeville	KSFA	LGS*	LCP*	Skyview	TMSA
0.06	0.15	0.09	0.26	0.02	0.22	0.28	0.09	0.40

Occupancy costs are defined two ways: (1) like rent, taxes and insurance on building, depreciation, and amortization expense:

Amana	CHCS	FAST	Hapeville	KIPP	LGS*	LCP*	Skyview	TMSA
4.76%	13.58%	17.27%	6.73%	8.84%	5.69%	3.73%	10.89%	3.70%

- (2) Additionally, utilities, repairs and maintenance, and interest on the mortgage.

Amana	CHCS	FAST	Hapeville	KIPP	LGS*	LCP*	Skyview	TMSA
14.16%	16.88%	19.38%	14.09%	11.22%	7.27%	5.91%	14.33%	6.93%

Occupancy costs should be less than 15%. CHCS occupancy expense is above the desired level.

Debt to Asset Ratio is measured as total liabilities (excluding net pension liability) divided by total assets. Debt to asset ratio should be less than 0.90. CHCS is within the acceptable range.

Amana	CHCS	FAST	Hapeville	KIPP	LGS*	LCP*	Skyview	TMSA
0.93	0.06	0.25	0.52	0.06	0.06	0.56	0.88	0.32

Recommendation:

The CHCS board and the school’s leadership are keenly aware of the importance of establishing a positive trajectory. We recommend that Chattahoochee Hills be given a three (3) year provisional charter with the expectation that it will increase its CCRPI scores to align with district expectations and meet operational performance standards. The contract goals during the next three (3) years will reflect CHCS meeting and exceeding the performance of district and the state on Georgia State assessment tests. Further, the percentage of students who meet or exceed state standards on each content on the Milestones will need to be greater than the state or local district average. The third academic goal is that the percentage of students scoring in the distinguished category on the Milestone exam in all grade levels and subject areas will exceed the baseline average by 2%. FCS will closely monitor the school’s corrective action plan and the school’s strategic progress in the upcoming three (3) years.

FCS will also require no further new campus development during the next three (3) years of the contract.