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**LENGTH:** 969 words

**HEADLINE:** Georgians Want Fundamental Change in State's Charter School Law;  
New opinion studies released today show overwhelming public support for expanded public education options

**DATELINE:** ATLANTA Jan. 24

**BODY:**

ATLANTA, Jan. 24 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- A new study released today by the Georgia Charter Schools Association and My School My Choice Georgia, a new statewide grassroots charter school advocacy group, shows that a majority of Georgians are demanding fundamental change to state laws, creating more and better education opportunities for students and families.

"Georgians are speaking loud and clear - they overwhelmingly support more educational choices when it comes to public education," said Tony Roberts, chief executive of the Georgia Charter Schools Association. "A strong charter school law will help create innovative, accountable education solutions for families across the state."

The study consisted of polling and focus groups with Georgia voters. The results were presented today at a news conference at the state Capitol.

"Today's results confirm what I've heard time and again from Georgia families - they want better and more public education choices than an attendance zone," said State Representative Jan Jones (R-Alpharetta). "As customers of the state and local school boards, their mandate demands action. I've introduced legislation that will give families more opportunities to choose public schools that fit their children's needs. It's time to move beyond 'one-size-fits-hardly-anyone' education."

Major findings of the study include:

- 52 percent of people surveyed are not satisfied with Georgia public schools.
- An overwhelming majority - 72 percent - feel other groups beyond local school boards (as current Georgia law dictates) should have authority to approve the creation of charter schools.
- Many Georgia parents fear they or their children will be labeled troublemakers if they attempt to interfere with "school board politics."
- Georgians strongly support tax-dollars following children to charter schools. This means that charter schools are public schools open to all children and do not create added financial burden on families.

Parents of charter school students tend to be more involved in their children's education, something that the focus group showed Georgians believe is vital to student success. By authorizing more charter schools, families currently stuck in failing schools with no other options will have a chance to improve their children's educational future.

Under current state law, only local school boards have the authority to approve the creation of charter schools. Because charter schools are funded with public dollars that would otherwise go to regular public schools, charter proponents advocate state laws that provide for an independent authorizing authority. This sentiment is backed by Georgia voters, 78 percent of whom believe that because of this, school boards would be more likely to vote against approving a charter school in their district. Rep. Jones has introduced legislation (HB 881) that would create an "independent authorizing commission" in the state of Georgia.

Georgians Want Fundamental Change in State's Charter School Law; New opinion studies released today show overwhelming public support for expanded public education options PR Newswire January 24,

Eighty percent of the nation's 4,150 charter schools exist in states with multiple authorizers. Currently, 17 states have multiple chartering authorities. States that allow only local school boards to authorize charter schools are home to the least amount of charter schools and thus, the fewest public education options.

States with "school board-only" laws limit the nature and scope of charter schools, and often limit their innovation and funding. School boards have also proven to be lax on accountability. An audit of California's school districts found that they were not properly monitoring both the conventional public schools and charter schools.

Other states have created alternate authorizers including:

- The Florida Schools of Excellence Commission (2006).
- The South Carolina Public Charter School in District (2006).
- New York, through the State University of New York (1998).

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices recognizes that multiple authorizers are a key component of strong charter school legislation.

The poll's results show that the idea of independent charter school authorizers receives strong tri-partisan support among Georgia voters, with more than 70 percent of Republicans, Democrats and Independents agreeing that other groups should have the authority to approve the creation of charter schools. More than 80 percent of both Blacks and Hispanics were more likely to favor authorizers other than school boards.

Alternate authorizer legislation also enjoys strong support from national education groups including **The Center for Education Reform** and the Black Alliance for Educational Options.

The poll was commissioned by My School My Choice Georgia and conducted by Majority Opinion Research of Atlanta. Random telephone interviews were conducted with 659 registered voters throughout the state of Georgia between December 13 and December 15, 2007. Data were weighted for age, race, gender, and political party affiliation. Maximum sampling error is +/- 3.7 percent.

Focus groups were commissioned by My School My Choice Georgia and conducted by The Polling Company Inc. of Washington, D.C. in Vidalia, Ga. and Alpharetta, Ga. Participants varied in terms of age, political party and ideology, education level, household income, and marital and family status.

My School My Choice Georgia is a new grassroots organization spearheaded by the Georgia Charter Schools Association and dedicated to expanding the opportunity for more families to have quality educational options through charter schools. Today's announcement comes as the Association gathers in Atlanta for its annual conference. For more information, visit <http://www.georgiaschoolchoice.org/>.

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**SOURCE Center for Education Reform**

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January 24, 2008 Thursday 6:22 PM EST

**SECTION: STATE EDITORS****LENGTH:** 957 words**HEADLINE:** Georgians Want Fundamental Change in State's Charter School Law**BODY:**

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