

Indiana University's Role In The Indiana Charter School Movement: Revisited

**A Report Submitted to the Policy Council of the
Indiana University School of Education**

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Charter School Task Force

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Introduction

Indiana University has a long-standing tradition of supporting K-12 public education within the state. The University's mission, *to provide high quality educational opportunities for men and women from Indiana and throughout the world through a community of scholars actively engaged in teaching, research and public service*, aligns with some degree of involvement in the charter school movement.

Currently, Indiana University is involved with charter schools through two main ways. First, a group of university faculty and students are working with a charter school in the Decatur Township school district in Marion County. Second, The Center for Evaluation and Education Policy is studying charter schools through several externally-funded projects in a range of states, with two of the projects funded by the Indiana Department of Education to provide evaluation technical assistance for the Department's charter school office. Other IU faculty and programs are considering other ways to support charter schools in Indiana, such as offering coursework in charter school management and finances, although these efforts are early in their development.

The 2002 IU Charter School Task Force

Indiana University was first asked to consider sponsoring charter schools in 2002. A Task Force was convened to study the prospect. In its report, submitted to the Indiana University Board of Trustees, the 2002 Charter School Task Force recommended that Indiana University not participate in sponsoring charter schools. The Task Force noted multiple reasons for this recommendation, namely:

- The Task Force concluded that the costs IU would incur in meeting sponsorship requirements would likely outweigh the legislatively-determined administrative fee the university could receive to offset these costs.
- The Task Force projected that the cost of rejecting charter school proposals could become prohibitive, resulting in the need to seek additional revenue sources to subsidize involvement.
- The Task Force had reason to believe that sponsorship could result in negative effects on IU-school corporation relations, particularly since charter schools potentially create consequences for the school corporations in which they operate, such as the closing of buildings; the firing of teachers, administrators, and staff; and forced redistricting. Any negative impacts on the IU-school corporation relationships could impede the university's ability to perform its other missions with that school corporation.
- The Task Force was concerned that initiating IU sponsorship of charter schools posed questions about duplication of effort and mission centrality, since Ball State University currently had accepted the authority (of five institutions of higher education who had the authority) to sponsor charter schools throughout the state.

For these reasons, the 2002 Task Force recommended that Indiana University work proactively to assume leadership for establishing a consortium on K-12 issues. It was proposed that the consortium consist of the five four-year, public universities in the state, so that it could draw

upon the unique attributes of each institution and thereby provide a broad range of services and information about the operation and effectiveness of charter schools. It was imagined that the consortium would, ideally, facilitate the coordination of resources and strengths of each participating institution while avoiding duplication of services. The official coordination of activities did not occur.

Purpose of the Current Task Force

In 2002, several public school superintendents strongly discouraged IU from becoming a charter sponsor. However, due to changing political and financial conditions, many of these same superintendents (predominantly in urban districts) suggested to Dean Gonzalez that Indiana University reconsider the possibility of sponsoring LEA-based charter schools. The superintendents gave several reasons for requesting this reconsideration of policy:

- Significant changes in Indiana charter law have minimized the negative financial impact of charter schools on traditional schools.
- Implementing innovative reforms would be less difficult than in traditional schools due to the regulatory flexibility available to charters.
- Charters could reverse enrollment declines by creating attractive, nontraditional education options for students living outside of a district or who are attending a private school or being homeschooled.¹

In November, 2005, the Indiana University School of Education Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC) voted unanimously to revisit the question of Indiana University's role in the Indiana charter school movement with specific attention to the question of whether or not Indiana University should sponsor such schools. On the recommendation of the LRPC, the School of Education Policy Council formed a Charter School Task Force and charged the group with gathering information and making a recommendation in answer to the question "Should Indiana University become a sponsoring agent of charter schools?"²

Methods

The Task Force met eight times during the months of January-April 2006 and corresponded extensively over e-mail. Members set four main goals at the initial meeting: 1) To make sure accurate information concerning this issue was available to faculty, specifically by creating a list of Frequently Asked Questions for dissemination that would address, for example, any misconceptions about Indiana's charter school law (See Appendix A); (2) To gather information from external stakeholders via brief letters and interviews addressing perceived costs and benefits of Indiana University sponsorship (See Appendix B); (3) To gather faculty reactions to the possibility of sponsorship; and (4) To answer the questions "What would be the costs and benefits for IU of sponsoring Charter Schools?" and "Should IU become a sponsoring agency?"

¹ In the absence of statewide open enrollment, students cannot enroll in an LEA-sponsored charter school if it does not serve their corporation of legal settlement.

² The Board of Trustees alone has the authority to decide that IU will become a sponsoring agency; as such, the goal of the Task Force was to decide whether to recommend that the School request that the Trustees revisit their earlier decision not to sponsor charter schools.

Gathering Information from External Stakeholders

Major stakeholders throughout Indiana were contacted to elicit their responses to the issue. Primarily these responses were elicited through letters, although several individuals shared their comments during face-to-face interviews or phone conversations. The chart below illustrates those stakeholders and an indication of whether or not they responded with feedback.

Table 1: Input from Indiana Stakeholders

Stakeholder	Responded?
Indiana Association of Public School Superintendents	Via e-mail
Indiana Urban Schools Association	Via e-mail, letter, and meetings
Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction	Via interview
Indiana Department of Education, Division of Educational Options	Via e-mail and interview
Indianapolis Charter Schools, Office of the Mayor	Via e-mail
Ball State University Office of Charter Schools	Did not respond to several requests
Indiana State Teachers Association	Via letter
Indiana Association of School Business Officials	Did not respond
Indiana State Senators	Via interview
Charter School Association of Indiana	Via e-mail
Greater Educational Opportunities Foundation	Via interview and phone conversation
Superintendent of area school corporation	Via interview

At the request of Dean Gonzalez, the Task Force gathered information on whether other Big Ten universities are legally allowed to sponsor or operate charter schools (Table 2). A number of IU's Big Ten peers are legally permitted to sponsor, but no other Big Ten main campuses sponsor, although two University of Wisconsin regional campuses are involved in charter sponsorship.

Table 2: Big Ten University Sponsorship

State	Institution	Allowed to Sponsor or Operate Charters?	Does the University Currently Sponsor?
IL	University of Illinois	Cannot sponsor, can operate	Not applicable
IL	Northwestern University	Cannot sponsor, can operate	Not applicable
IN	Purdue University	Can sponsor and operate	No
IA	University of Iowa	Cannot sponsor or operate	Not applicable
MI	Michigan State Univ.	Can sponsor and operate	No
MI	University of Michigan	Can sponsor and operate	No
MN	University of Minnesota	Can sponsor and operate	No
OH	Ohio State University	Cannot sponsor, can operate	Not applicable
PA	Penn State University	Cannot sponsor, can operate	Not applicable
WI	University of Wisconsin	Only some universities can sponsor, but all can operate	UW-Madison doesn't sponsor and has no interest in doing so UW-Milwaukee has sponsored

			UW-Parkside in development
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Gathering Information from Indiana University Faculty³

The Long Range Planning Committee had solicited perspectives from faculty regarding the question of sponsorship; this information was given to the Task Force. This information indicated variation across faculty regarding knowledge about Charter school practices, legislation, and so forth. As the Task Force was beginning its activities, Policy Council asked department chairs to gather initial questions and concerns from faculty at their next department faculty meeting. Initial feedback from department meetings was that most discussion centered around questions regarding charter schools in general and Indiana's charter law in particular.

Based on this preliminary feedback, the Task Force decided it was important to provide information about Charter Schools to the faculty prior to gathering feedback on the question of sponsorship. Toward that end, the Task Force developed a draft list of Frequently Asked Questions which was circulated to faculty via email with a request for comment. After incorporating faculty input, questions were finalized and the responses to those questions were developed. The document of "Responses to Frequently Asked Questions" was emailed out to faculty.

The Task Force identified three mechanisms for generating feedback from faculty:

- (a) soliciting feedback via individual email messages to all faculty,
- (b) holding two faculty forums with video conferencing connections to all campuses, and
- (c) requesting that department chairs provide responses representative of their faculty perspectives.

Faculty response was small to moderate in each case. The Task Force deliberated on the information provided through these various means and decided to invite one more response from faculty. The following note was emailed April 25, 2006:

The Charter School Task Force is interested in identifying faculty members who would like to be involved in work with Charter Schools in some capacity. If you are interested, we would appreciate it if you would send Barbara Korth a response to the following questions at bkorth@indiana.edu. We need your responses quickly. As always, thanks for taking time in your busy lives to provide us with important information. Remember that we only need you to respond if you would actually be interested in working with Charter Schools in some capacity.

1. *In what way(s) would you be interested in working with Charter Schools in the state of Indiana? What do you envision yourself doing?*
2. *How do you envision this affecting your current work or workload?*
3. *What resources do you imagine yourself needing?*

Finally, input was gathered from stakeholders before, during, and after the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy's October 31, 2006, Policy Chat event on charter schools in Indiana.

³ Faculty always refers to all IU System education faculty.

Findings

The findings are presented in two subsections. First, we provide a summary of the findings related to responses from external stakeholders. Second, we review and analyze the responses from faculty.

Summary of the Findings Related to Responses from External Stakeholders

Most external stakeholders who responded to our query supported the idea of IU becoming a sponsoring agency of Charter Schools. In this section, we provide summaries of the responses from each group of stakeholders. The Task Force decided not to include copies of responses or interview summaries in an appendix, primarily because many of the stakeholders provided us the courtesy of speaking very frankly and directly, and also because this topic is highly politicized and some of the stakeholders were worried about the political implications of some of their observations and opinions. Therefore, the decision was made not to provide the detailed feedback in a public document. The Task Force co-chairs will share the feedback with interested members of the IU Community upon request and when relevant.

Elected officials and other governmental policymakers. Each policymaker and governmental employee emphatically stated that she or he (1) was not making a formal recommendation to IU and (2) hoped that IU would sponsor “for the right reasons.” Some interviewees were concerned that the urban superintendents wanted to use charter schools (and, therefore, IU) as a way to avoid NCLB or PL221 accountability sanctions or otherwise act “not in the spirit of charters.” The Task Force, after extensive discussions with IUSA and individual superintendents, determined that superintendents were aware that converting traditional schools to charters did not obviate NCLB or PL221 classifications. Furthermore, the Task Force became convinced that the urban superintendents have truly come to believe that charter schools provide a unique opportunity for school reform.

Of the elected officials who were interviewed, several concerns were raised about IU sponsorship. However, other than the “I hope IU would do this for the right reasons” concern mentioned above, nearly all of the remaining issues dealt with implementation and were not directly relevant to the Task Force’s mission. Indeed, a few policymakers (from both parties) specifically noted that they would welcome IU sponsorship, which is how the Task Force generally interpreted policymakers’ collective feedback.

Public school superintendents. Feedback from superintendents was mixed but generally positive: Urban superintendents are unquestionably supportive of IU sponsorship, hence their request that resulted in the formation of this Task Force. Yet Dr. John Ellis, the executive director of the Indiana Association of Public School Superintendents, indicated that not all superintendents share the urban superintendents’ enthusiasm for charter schools.⁴ However, Task Force members noted that urban superintendents traditionally have felt as though they had the most to lose with

⁴ Dr. Ellis also noted that Ball State has paid a price for their sponsorship activities among superintendents regarding participation in research, collaboration with BSU, etc.

the expansion of charters in Indiana; that pessimism has turned to optimism. For this reason, the Task Force gave more weight to the urban superintendents' recommendation than to the general superintendent concerns, although Task Force members noted and agreed with Dr. Ellis' recommendation that a decision to sponsor charter schools be clearly communicated to school leaders around the state.

The other major sponsors. The former head of Mayor Peterson's charter office was cool to the idea of IU sponsorship, questioning the need for another major sponsor. Ball State did not reply to several attempts to gauge their opinion on this matter, but it is assumed that both major sponsors would prefer that IU not become a sponsor – in part because both sponsors have worked behind the scenes to oppose legislative attempts to widen the number of potential sponsors. The Task Force sees this opposition as primarily a concern about competition, one that is not consistent with the idea of charter schools: How can one oppose competition when that concept is used as a reason for authorizing charter schools?

The charter community. The Task Force received input from two politically-active members of the Indiana charter community. Both people enthusiastically endorsed IU sponsorship, with one providing a detailed (and impassioned) case for the addition of a new sponsor. This person noted that although the two major sponsors are doing an acceptable job, there is always room for improvement. Also, this person noted that even if the two major sponsors were perfect, there is no guarantee that their support for charters will continue indefinitely. The Task Force concluded that support within the charter community for IU sponsorship is strong, with few qualifications.

Review and Analysis of Responses from Faculty

As noted above, faculty members were provided numerous avenues through which to provide feedback. There was a distinct difference in the responses of faculty across IU's campuses. Bloomington faculty were, by and large, willing and interested in being involved in the sponsorship of charter schools, while faculty at other campuses did not express this same level of willingness and excitement.

Most respondents were faculty at IUB. Several full professors expressed their interest in working with charter school sponsorships. Other faculty also stated that charter school sponsorship could provide important opportunities for research and development of educational innovations in their particular fields of expertise. There were two waves of response from IUB faculty. Initially, a number of concerns were lodged – many of these were the effect of misconceptions. Once misconceptions were addressed, a largely new body of faculty began responding. These responses ranged from positive to exuberant.

Two broad sets of reasons for supporting IU sponsorship were articulated. First of all, IUB faculty responses had everything to do with faculty articulating a vision of possibilities for their research and expertise, innovations for public schools, and effects for their students. Faculty identified very specific ways they imagined themselves involved with charter schools through sponsorship and the Task Force was impressed with the breadth of commitment and interest, spanning research, teaching, and service. Secondly, faculty valued opportunities for engagement with public school movements for political and ethical reasons. There was a keen sense of

responsibility expressed by faculty to play a part in major educational efforts across the state, promoting best practices and democratic social ethics. For example, faculty expressed both reservations and optimism over the possibility that public charter schools could further a social concern for diversity and social justice. These seemingly divergent perspectives were informed by a common moral commitment – namely, faculty identified an important role they thought IU should hold in relation to informing and studying Indiana public school movements, like the Charter School movement. Being involved in studying schooling practices toward the aim of better understanding and informing educators and law makers was considered an important responsibility. By and large, IUB faculty saw the sponsorship of public charter schools as an important and potentially powerful way to accomplish this.

Important conditions surfaced through faculty input. Faculty were resistant to any possibility of sponsoring public charter schools in a rubber-stamp fashion. IUB clearly saw faculty as its greatest potential contribution and it was the view of faculty that sponsorship ought to facilitate faculty involvement in charter schools so faculty members clearly opposed the idea of sponsoring as a solely administrative task. Also, faculty members voiced the need to secure adequate institutional support for both the administration and the faculty involvement in sponsorship. This would require budget support from Indiana University. Without adequate financial support, faculty involvement would be restricted and this, in turn, would diminish what faculty saw as the strength of sponsorship.

The responses from faculty at other IU sites were not so positive. Faculty at other sites expressed concerns about being overworked with resources already stretched thin. They do not want to be forced either to work with charter schools or to be involved in the sponsorship, though they were quick to add, “If Bloomington wants to do that, that’s okay – so long as all of our campuses don’t have to do it.”

The Task Force honors campus variation in faculty commitment and interest through the particular specifications of its recommendation. The recommendation tries to capture the enthusiasm and vision put forward by IUB faculty while acknowledging the differential constraints experienced by faculty at other IU campuses which serve to limit their interest in charter school sponsorship.

Recommendation

The 2006 Charter School Task Force offers the following general recommendation to the Policy Council. Given a specific set of conditions, Indiana University should consider sponsoring charter schools. First of all, this decision is based on the conclusion that the reasons for the 2002 Task Force’s recommendation have changed. Specifically:

- Sponsorship would have negative effects on IU-school corporation relations: Given the improving attitude toward charters among educators and the fact that superintendents are the impetus behind the request for IU sponsorship, adverse reaction to such sponsorship is no longer a major concern.

- Sponsorship would duplicate the efforts of Ball State: This concern was valid at a time when the number of charters within the state was capped, but this is no longer the case. Furthermore, there is no major sponsor of LEA charter schools, which the Task Force members suggest should be the focus of any IU sponsorship activities (see below).
- Sponsorship is not consistent with IU's mission: The stark majority of faculty believes this is no longer the case. Concerns about conflicts of interest with the School's charter research activities were not judged to be insurmountable.
- Sponsorship would be financially prohibitive: This remains the Task Force members' major concern about sponsorship. The urban superintendents were confident that they could find ways to keep sponsorship costs low, but this is admittedly speculative. Moreover, the Task Force had no way to assess the financial attributes of sponsorship because no data on finances were collected.

In addition to the above arguments against sponsoring charter schools, the current Task Force was positively persuaded that the university's obligation for involvement in significant movements affecting public schools required some engagement with the state's charter schools. This engagement should be aligned with the university's mission, promote inquiry, and extend the impact of IU's School of Education in very particular ways. It was concluded that sponsorship could provide the administrative and communicative infrastructure necessary to facilitate the involvement of faculty with charter schools.

Furthermore, the Task Force believes sponsorship is only plausible under the following conditions:

- Sponsorship should be properly resourced by the university. This would require Indiana University to make a commitment to supporting the costs of sponsorship. The Task Force recommends against attempts to use soft monies for the purposes of financing sponsorship. One possibility is to house sponsorship activities at an existing, well-known center, such as the Center for Urban and Multicultural Education at IUPUI or the new P-16 Center at IUB.
- The sponsoring process should be piloted, with an initial cap on the number of charters sponsored each of the first two years. The Task Force suggests that no more than three charter schools be sponsored during this pilot period, with no more than two per year.
- Any approved charters should be innovative in order to enhance Indiana University's reputation as an advanced research university in the area of educational improvement. Approving run-of-the-mill charter schools would be contrary to the purpose of charter schools and IU's reputation for innovation. The Task Force agreed that faculty of Indiana University is its biggest resource with respect to sponsorship and, thus, charters should draw on the expertise of Indiana University faculty.
- The charters should be limited to LEA-organized charters. There is increasing evidence that LEA charter schools are as effective as non-LEA charters, if not more so, in increasing student achievement. However, the growth in charters within Indiana has largely occurred through an increase in non-LEA charters. In the judgment of the Task Force (and several stakeholders), there is reason to believe that the Indiana charter system needs more district-organized schools, and that the lack of a major Indiana sponsor of district-organized charters is a reason for the slow growth of these schools. LEA charters

are also underdeveloped in most other states, providing IU with a unique opportunity to become a national leader in a promising area of education that is growing in importance.

- Indiana University should appoint an official charter “point person” to oversee IU involvement in charter schools. In addition to overseeing sponsorship activities, this person would be responsible for maintaining communication with the charter community, ensuring the consideration of charter issues during discussions of teacher preparation, research, etc. These activities occur infrequently yet should occur regardless of the final decision regarding sponsorship. This point person would ideally be housed in a system-wide center, such as the new P-16 Center, or an established campus center with a reputation for excellence in urban education, such as the Center for Urban and Multicultural Education at IUPUI.

This limited piloting of charter school sponsorship would provide Indiana University with the opportunity to determine fiscal impact, examine the effectiveness of policies/procedures, identify needs for infrastructure, and evaluate impact on K-12 schools, IU faculty, and the university more broadly.

Appendix A

Feedback on Frequently Asked Questions

Questions about the 2006 Task Force Activities

1. Why did Indiana University decide not to sponsor charter schools in 2002?

In their report submitted to the Indiana University Board of Trustees, the 2002 Charter School Task Force did not recommend that Indiana University sponsor charter schools. Reasons included:

- The costs sponsors would incur in meeting sponsorship requirements would likely outweigh the legislative administrative fee they would receive.
- The cost of rejecting charter school proposals could become prohibitive. University sponsors would thus need to seek additional revenue sources to subsidize their involvement.
- Since charter schools potentially create consequences for the school corporations in which they operate, such as the closing of buildings; the firing of teachers, administrators, and staff; and forced redistricting, the school corporation's attitude toward the university may be negatively affected and may impede the university's ability to perform its other missions with that school corporation. (Several superintendents strongly discouraged IU from becoming a sponsor during the first Task Force's deliberations.)
- Sponsorship by Indiana University could raise questions about duplication of effort and mission centrality, since Ball State University currently has the authority to sponsor throughout the state. It was stated that it would be better for Indiana University to have a role that complimented, but did not replicate, Ball State's role.

As a result of these perceived issues, the Task Force recommended that Indiana University work proactively to assume leadership for establishing a consortium on K-12 issues. The consortium would consist of the five four-year, public universities in the state and would draw upon the unique attributes of each institution to provide a broad range of services and information about the operation and effectiveness of charter schools. Ideally, the consortium would allow coordination among the universities to pool the resources and strengths of each while avoiding duplication of services. The official coordination of activities has yet to occur.

2. Why is IU sponsorship of charter schools being revisited?

Several urban public school superintendents have requested that Indiana University consider sponsoring LEA-based charter schools. Reasons for this change of heart are numerous and include:

- Indiana charter law has changed significantly, with most changes minimizing the negative financial impact of charter schools on traditional schools.
- Implementing innovative reforms would be less difficult than in traditional schools due to the regulatory flexibility available to charters.

- Charters would reverse enrollment declines by creating attractive, nontraditional education options for students living outside of a district or who are attending a private school or being homeschooled.

Faculty have asked the following related questions:

2a. Is it likely that sponsorships will be sought for failing schools, the most problematic schools?

Sponsorships may be sought for a wide range of schools; we wouldn't know what types of schools until the applications were received. Many of the superintendents appear to be considering the creation of new, unique schools (i.e., not conversion schools), but again this is no guarantee of the types of schools that will be proposed.

2b. Why don't school districts sponsor their own charter schools?

Districts currently have the legal authority to charter their own schools. When the superintendents have been asked about this point, they have provided several reasons for seeking IU sponsorship. The major reasons appear to be (1) the considerable experience and resources for school improvement that exist at IU and (2) the strong reputation of Indiana University, which would bring some legitimacy to the charter schools.

3. What would IU sponsorship of charter schools entail?

At a minimum, sponsorship would include the follow responsibilities:

- Creation, implementation, and use of a charter application process.
- Creation and use of negotiated, binding charters between IU and the school organizers.
- Monitoring of accountability provisions included in the charter.

Additional potential activities and responsibilities are discussed in response to Question 12.

Background Questions

4. How are charter schools different from other public schools, including traditional public schools and public magnet schools?

Charter schools are automatically exempt from Indiana's education regulations, with the exception of the regulations listed in the following table.

Statutes and Rules Applicable to Charter Schools⁵

IC 5-11-1-9	Audits by state board of accounts
IC 20-35	Special education

⁵ For a complete listing of statutes and rules applicable to charter schools, refer to Indiana School Laws and Rules. (2005-2006). IC 20-24-8-5.

IC 20-26-5-6	Subject to laws requiring regulation by state agencies
IC 20-33-2	Compulsory attendance
IC 20-33-8-16	Firearms and deadly weapons
IC 20-34-3	Health and safety measures
IC 20-30-3-2	
IC 20-30-3-4	Patriotic observances
IC 20-31	Accountability for school performance and improvement
IC 20-32-(4, 5, 6, 8)	All statutes related to standardized assessment (ISTEP+)

It is worth noting that some of these waivers are available to traditional schools, although the district must apply for the waivers (i.e., they aren't automatic as is the case with charter schools). Pending legislation in the General Assembly would extend many of the waivers (and many, many others) to all traditional public schools. It is uncertain how this wave of deregulation would impact charters, traditional public schools, or superintendents' interest in creating charter schools.

Prior to 2001, charter funding was structured in a way that did take money away from the child's local, traditional public school. However, this led to a situation in which districts were paying for students who had never attended public schools to attend charter schools. For example, many homeschooled and private school students in Indianapolis attended charter schools. IPS was required to shift the local share of revenue for these students to the charter schools, which was problematic given that the students never attended IPS schools. For this reason, both the state and local share of education funding for charter schools is paid by the state.

5. Do charter schools follow the same rules and guidelines as public schools?

Yes and no. Charter schools are public schools that are nonsectarian and nonreligious and operate under charters. They are exempt from some state and school district regulations and tend to have more autonomy than a traditional public school. Although charter public schools are exempt from some state and district regulations, they are held to extremely high levels of accountability. In addition to meeting state accountability requirements, charter schools must also meet the requirements set out in their charter and agreed to by their sponsor. A sponsor may revoke a school's charter at any time if the school is not producing results or fulfilling its charter. Like traditional public schools, charter schools must have open enrollment policies and cannot discriminate based on disability, race, color, gender, national origin, religion, or ancestry. Indiana law requires that any teacher in a charter school must hold a license to teach in a public school in Indiana. However, a charter may also employ a teacher who is in the process of obtaining a license under the state's transition to teaching program. Such a teacher must complete the transition to teaching program no more than three years after beginning to teach at a charter school (the ability to teach while participating in a T-to-T program is likely to be extended to all Indiana public schools during this legislative session).

6. *When and why did charter schools come on the scene?*

Charter schools first came on the national scene in the early 1990s. In Indiana, charter school law was passed in 2001, and the first Indiana charter school opened in 2002. As described in the Indiana Code, charter schools were created to provide innovative and creative educational choices for students and their parents. Indiana charter law has been modified in most subsequent legislative sessions, with major changes in 2003. The Center for Evaluation and Education Policy has written a report detailing these changes. Please contact the Center at ceep@indiana.edu for a copy of this and other charter-related reports.

7. *How many charter schools currently exist in Indiana, and who sponsors them?*

28 charter schools currently operate in Indiana. These schools are spread throughout the state, with the largest concentration located around the Indianapolis area, where 17 schools currently in operation, or approved to begin operating in 2006-2007, are located. The following table includes the number of charters opened, approved, and closed by the sponsor.

Charter Schools Authorized, Operating, and Closed by each Indiana Sponsor

Sponsor	Schools Currently Operating	Schools Approved But Not Yet Operating	Schools Closed
Ball State University	14	4	1
Mayor's Office of Indianapolis	12	5	1
Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation	2	0	0
Metropolitan School District of Steuben County	0	0	0
Metropolitan School District of Decatur County	0	0	0
Carmel-Clay School District	0	0	0
TOTAL	28	9	2

Questions about Performance

8. *How are Indiana's charter schools doing compared to other public schools?*

The state's charter schools have yet to be evaluated, although each sponsor evaluates its charter schools according to provisions in each charter contract (the Indy mayor's office is widely considered to have a very good accountability system above and beyond that of NCLB and PL221). The Center for Evaluation and Education Policy gathered ISTEP data roughly 18 months ago in response to a legislative request, and the data provided evidence that, at the school level, charter student achievement is similar to achievement by students in traditional public schools (i.e., some schools have excellent results, others bad results, with most in between).

9. *How are Indiana's charter schools doing compared to charter schools in other states?*

Research on achievement effects of charter schools is mixed. Recent media reports have sensationalized studies that provide evidence of strong positive or negative achievement effects, but most of these studies have significant limitations or design flaws. Several studies relying on random assignment of students to charter and traditional schools are underway, but results are not yet available.

Roughly 7% of charter schools nationally have closed, with the large majority of the closures due to financial and management problems. In Indiana, the data are nearly identical: 2 of 29 (7%) have closed due to financial and management problems.

10. *Can districts convert traditional public schools to charter schools to avoid sanctions under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)?*

No, districts cannot convert traditional public schools to charter schools to avoid sanctions under NCLB. A conversion charter school, for the purposes of Indiana's NCLB accountability system, is the same school it was before the conversion. Converting does not "buy time" or avoid sanctions.

Questions about Indiana University Involvement with Charter Schools

11. *How is Indiana University currently involved with Indiana charter schools?*

Involvement has been limited. Charlie Reigeluth has led a group of IU faculty and students who have worked with the Decatur charter school. The Center for Evaluation and Education Policy has an Educational Choice and Options Team, co-led by Suzanne Eckes and Jonathan Plucker, that has received three externally-funded projects to study charter schools, two from the Indiana Department of Education and one from the Georgia Department of Education. It is unclear how this existing work would be impacted by IU sponsorship.

12. *What roles could Indiana University play in sponsoring charter schools (i.e., are there different levels of sponsorship, and if so, what are they)?*

The sponsor-organizer relationship is based on the charter, which IU would be able to (and would have to) design. This control would allow IU to follow a number of different paths, ranging from limited involvement, in which IU reviews applications and grants charters but does not provide any additional support, to high engagement, in which IU is involved in nearly every aspect of each charter school. Superintendents appear to favor the middle ground, in which IU and the districts work as partners (but with day-to-day operations the primary responsibility of the district).

Faculty have asked the following related question:

12a. *What financial considerations are involved in monitoring for compliance, etc. that must be undertaken by IU when sponsoring charter schools?*

Again, this depends on the conditions stipulated in the charters. Sponsors are allowed to take 3% of per pupil state funding for administration, which may or may not cover IU costs. Anecdotal reports suggest that is not enough to cover the costs (Current sponsors have not replied to the Task Force's repeated requests to talk about their charter experiences, fiscal or otherwise). Superintendents have responded to cost concerns by noting that they are more experienced at school administration than most current charter organizers, so administrative costs for the sponsor can be minimized. However, without sponsoring charter schools, there is no way to know if this will come to pass.

Appendix B

Letter to Stakeholders

Template Letter to Stakeholders

January 18, 2006

Dear (Stakeholder):

Recently, several public school superintendents approached Indiana University's School of Education with a request that IU reconsider the 2002 decision not to sponsor charter schools. In response, Dean Gonzalez and the School's Policy Council convened a Task Force to reexamine issues related to sponsorship of charter schools.

The Task Force met earlier this month and, as part of its activities, decided to collect information from a wide range of potential stakeholders. The Task Force also established an ambitious timeline for this information gathering, in large part so that any recommendations can be considered by the end of the semester by Policy Council and, if a change in policy is recommended, the IU Trustees.

You are being contacted as a potential stakeholder in this matter, and your input is valued by the Task Force. If possible, we would like you to prepare a one- to two-page letter that addresses the perceived benefits and costs of Indiana University sponsorship of charter schools from your perspective. Please consider the benefits and costs from financial, political, and engagement perspectives. In addition, we would be interested in any other comments or issues you feel we should consider.

Our current plan is to include the solicited feedback verbatim in the appendix of the Task Force report. However, our primary goal is to obtain your input, so we can include your comments anonymously or not include them in the final report at all if you wish.

In order to move things along, we would appreciate receiving feedback by February 1st, 2006. You can e-mail your response to Jonathan Plucker at jplucker@indiana.edu.

Thank you in advance for your input. We appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule to participate in this process.

Sincerely,

The IU Charter School Task Force
Co-chairs, Jonathan Plucker and Barbara Korth