

Founder of Georgia's First Start-Up Charter School Shares Recipe for Success

May 7-11 is National Charter Schools Week. 2018 marks 20 years since Georgia's start-up charter law.

ATLANTA, GEORGIA, USA, May 4, 2018 /EINPresswire.com/ -- May 7-11, 2018, is National Charter Schools Week. This commentary, available for your use, celebrates Georgia's first start-up public charter school and the 20th anniversary of the state's 1998 legislation. The commentary is based on remarks by Martha Nesbit at the [Georgia Charter Schools Association](#) Annual Conference on March 7, 2018.

Founder of Georgia's First Start-Up Charter School Shares Recipe for Success

By Martha Nesbit



The current campus of Savannah's Oglethorpe Charter School, Georgia's first start-up charter school, is a far cry from the neglected building presented to founder Martha Nesbit in 1999. (Photograph credit: Georgia Charter Schools Association)

The story I will tell you sounds like it could not possibly be true, but it is, because it happened to me!

From 1974 to 1986 I was food editor of The Savannah Morning News. Then I gave up my wonderful job to become a stay-at-home mom for our two little boys. But we really needed money, so I agreed to teach preschool at the church less than a mile from our home on Isle of Hope.

“

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Martha Nesbit

I made \$700 a month, but I got to take my children with me to school and come home at lunch time, so I thought it was the perfect job. Time went on, and suddenly I had a third-grader and a fifth-grader who attended Isle of Hope Elementary

School, a public neighborhood school.

A friend who was president of the school board called me in 1997 to serve for a year on something called the Middle School Task Force.

“Our middle schools are awful,” she said, bluntly.

After serving for a year on this committee, I told a fellow soccer mom (and a middle school teacher), “I know so much about middle school, I could start one myself.”

"You should," she replied. She told me she taught at a conversion charter school.

At one Middle School Task Force meeting, I brought up charter schools and got into a heated argument with the school superintendent, Pat Russo.

"OK, I'll give you a struggling middle school," he said in exasperation. "Let's see what you can do with that."

"I don't want to take over a school," I shot back. "I want to start one from scratch."

"Well," he said, "that's illegal."

A PLAN OF ACTION

My journalism training kicked in. I went home and called the Georgia Department of Education to see if, indeed, a start-up charter was illegal in Georgia. I wound up having a lengthy, frustrating conversation with Dr. John Rhodes, head of the charter school division. He patiently explained that there was no way that Georgia was ever going to have start-up charter schools. He passed me along to someone in his office, Beverly Schrenger, who may really be the mother of charter schools.

"We can't do it now," she said encouragingly, "but if the law were changed, we could."

"Well," I asked, "how do you change the law?"

[Continue reading here.](#)

Martha Nesbit is the founder of Oglethorpe Charter School, Georgia's first start-up charter school after the state passed enabling legislation in 1998. This commentary is based on Nesbit's remarks at the Georgia Charter Schools Association's 2018 annual conference and is published by the [Georgia Public Policy Foundation](#) with permission. The Foundation is an independent, nonprofit think tank that proposes market-oriented approaches to public policy to improve the lives of Georgians. Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the view of the Georgia Public Policy Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill



Martha Nesbit



"Most of the important innovations we implemented at our school were due to feedback provided by our students," says Oglethorpe Charter School founder Martha Nesbit.

before the U.S. Congress or the Georgia Legislature.

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