

STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS COMMISSION

MEETING MINUTES

April 27, 2022, 10:00 a.m.

SCSC Board Room, 512 Twin Towers West

Meeting Link: <https://meet.goto.com/271761573>

Phone: +1 (872) 240-3311 **Access Code:** 271-761-573



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- I. **Call to Order** (Chairman Brockway)
- The meeting was called to order at 10:02 a.m.
 - The following Commissioners attended the meeting: Commissioners Brockway, Lowden, Perez, and Dudgeon. A quorum was formed.
 - Kristen Easterbrook's title has changed to Director of Charter Development. The SCSC is currently hiring a program coordinator to provide support to the charter development team.
- II. **Approval of SCSC Meeting Minutes** (Chairman Brockway)
- Vice-Chairman Lowden moved for approval of the February 23, 2022 Meeting Minutes and the April 11, 2022 Called Meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Dudgeon. The motion passed by unanimous vote.
- III. **Commissioner School Visits** (Executive Director)
- Commissioners visited Spring Creek Charter School, Liberty Tech Charter School, and Baconton Community Charter School in March.
 - There is an upcoming Commissioner school visit to Ethos Classical.
 - The State Charter Schools Foundation (SCSF) President announced that Ethos Classical and Spring Creek Charter Academy were awarded book vending machines. Ethos Classical's ribbon cutting ceremony will be Friday, April 29, and Spring Creek Charter Academy's will be Thursday, May 5. The SCSF will also be bringing the 'Book Wagon' to schools to deliver books to students and recognize outstanding teachers.
- IV. **Legislative Update** (Executive Director)
- The SCSC Executive Director provided an update on the Amended Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22) and Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) budgets and other legislation that passed in the 2022 Legislative Session. Legislation that impacts charter schools includes the Parents' Bill of Rights, the Charter Clean-Up Bill, and the Unmask Georgia Students Act.
- V. **Organizational Development** (Director of Charter Development)
- The SCSC hosted its final Governance Training and New School Orientation for FY22. As a reminder, board members had to attend one in-person session and one virtual session in order to satisfy their FY22 governance training requirement through the SCSC. Governing board members who did not attend an in-person session and a virtual session will need to complete their training for FY22 through an alternative provider. The SCSC will send full attendance reports to all schools in the coming weeks so they can be aware of which board members still need to complete training for FY22. All governance training for FY22 needs to be completed by June 30.
 - The LEA Reporting training will be held on July 13.
- VI. **Pre-Opening Schools** (Director of Charter Development)
- There are currently 8 new schools and 1 replication school in the pre-opening pipeline. Savannah Exploratory Charter Academy and Zest Preparatory Academy have officially decided to defer their openings until Fall 2023. The SCSC will continue to support those schools as they plan for an opening next fall.

- All pre-opening schools that are scheduled to open this fall were required to submit preliminary enrollment information as a part of the pre-opening checklist process. Of the 6 new schools currently in the pipeline, 4 met the enrollment targets required by April 1. On May 6, all pre-opening schools will need to submit evidence that they have received applications from students equivalent to 85% of their enrollment target and completed enrollment packets for at least 50% of the school's enrollment target. Schools that fail to meet their enrollment targets for the upcoming school year may be required to defer their opening until Fall 2023.
- Dekalb Brilliance Academy, Miles Ahead Charter, PEACE Academy, and Destinations Career Academy all met their New Schools Orientation (NSO) obligations. The SCSC is working with the schools that did not satisfy their NSO and governance training obligations to remedy their noncompliance.
- Commissioner Dudgeon inquired about how school staff would be affected if schools deferred this close to the new school year. The SCSC Director of Charter Development responded that the SCSC communicates to schools to monitor their progress during the pre-opening year so they are not making the deferral decision too late.

VII. **Petitions** (Associate General Counsel)

- The portal to accept petitions for new schools opened on November 1, 2021, and closed April 15, 2022. The SCSC received 11 petitions this year and is currently screening them for initial budget and legal compliance. After completing the initial screen, staff will begin a substantive review of the qualifying petitions. SCSC anticipates holding interviews on June 21-24 and presenting recommendations to the board in July.
- All 11 petitions seek a statewide attendance zone. Two of the petitions propose virtual schools, while the rest intend to serve students at brick-and-mortar locations in Clayton (2), DeKalb (1), Fulton (3), Henry (1), Savannah-Chatham (1), and Dougherty (1) counties.

VIII. **Accountability**

- **Audit Update** (Chief Operations Officer and Business Manager)
 - The SCSC received drafts of the 2 outstanding school audits. Once final audits are received, scores will be confirmed or adjusted as needed.
 - The RFP deadline for the Approved Auditor Program was on March 25. The SCSC approved four applications. Schools were notified on April 22 and have until May 6 to select their auditor if they wish to participate in the program for FY23.
- **Operational Accountability Update** (Associate General Counsel)
 - Schools received their operational monitoring letters on January 31, 2022. Any school receiving findings or adverse practices was required to submit a corrective action plan (CAP). CAPs were due on April 25, 2022, and the SCSC anticipates providing final results to schools this summer.

IX. **Charter Growth Initiative Update** (SCSF President)

- The SCSF President presented on the GEER II grant initiative.
 - Commissioner Dudgeon commented that he thought the leadership stipend was a great idea.
 - Commissioner Perez asked which schools would be eligible for the grant. The SCSF President said that all local and state charter schools in Georgia are eligible.
 - The SCSC Executive Director commented that the SCSC is excited for this grant to provide opportunities to underserved students.

X. **Action Items**

- **Atlanta Heights Charter School** (Director of Research & Evaluation)

- The SCSC Director of Research and Evaluation recommended that Commissioners approve Atlanta Heights Charter School’s renewal petition by authorizing the SCSC Chairman to execute a five-year charter contract for the operation of a state charter school.
- Vice-Chairman Lowden moved for approval of the recommendation. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Dudgeon. The motion passed by unanimous vote.
- **Genesis Innovation Academy for Boys & Girls (General Counsel)**
 - The SCSC General Counsel recommended that Commissioners approve an amendment to Genesis Innovation Academy for Boys and Genesis Innovation Academy for Girls charter contracts to expand grades served from K-10 to K-12; and, revise the schools’ essential and innovative features to supplement its single-gender environment by offering co-educational options for students in grades 8 through 12 for accelerated courses, honors courses, advanced placement courses, and undersubscribed high school elective courses.
 - Vice-Chairman Lowden inquired about the progress of the schools’ single-gender model. The School Leader responded that parents enroll their children in Genesis Innovation Academy specifically for the single-gender model and have indicated that they appreciate how the school implements the model.
 - The SCSC General Counsel added that the school polled their community and the received responses showed support for these changes.
 - Vice-Chairman Lowden moved for approval of the recommendations. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Dudgeon. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

XI. **School Performance Reviews** (Director of Research & Evaluation)

- Annually, the SCSC requires schools that are not meeting standards in any section (academics, operations, or finances) of the CPF to present plans for improvement to Commissioners.
- Atlanta Heights Charter School presented their improvement plan for finances and operations.
- Georgia Fugees Academy Charter School presented their improvement plan for academics.
 - Vice-Chairman Lowden asked how this year’s benchmark scores are compared to last year. The school responded that the scores have improved from last year.
 - Vice-Chairman Lowden asked if the school was currently hiring support for the academic team. The school responded that they have hired language support specialists.
 - Commissioner Dudgeon asked how the school deals with English language proficiency and how they are addressing academic challenges. The school responded that they are at 85% proficiency compared to neighboring schools. They are currently building strategies to close this gap. Students in middle school are receiving two English classes daily.
 - Commissioner Dudgeon asked if the school felt confident that they are on track with meeting academic goals for this year. The school responded that they were confident, and they are increasing the frequency of team meetings and teacher development opportunities.
 - Commissioner Dudgeon asked if the school has good teacher buy-in. The school responded yes.
 - Vice-Chairman Lowden commended the school for meeting financial and operational standards and expressed the importance of meeting academic standards.
 - The SCSC Executive Director asked if the school has administered Milestones. The school responded that last year it was difficult to administer Milestones because of the hybrid model they had to implement due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This year, they are on track to test 100% of their students. They will be administering the test the first week of May.
- Fulton Leadership Academy presented their improvement plan for operations.
 - Vice-Chairman Lowden asked about the school governing board’s role in correcting findings. The school responded that findings are brought to the regularly scheduled board meetings. If the finding requires immediate action, then there will be a called meeting scheduled.
 - Vice-Chairman Lowden inquired about the succession plan of the school governing board. The school responded that the bylaws enumerate terms for board leadership. The board has an annual meeting to discuss term limits and who will fill leadership roles. The board chair can

serve up to two to three terms depending on the needs of the board. The school currently has 7 board members.

- Vice-Chairman Lowden asked how the school was able to meet financial standards this year. The school responded that the reason they did not meet financial standards last year was out of their control. Because they were not held harmless, they had to repay funds. This year, they are debt-free which has allowed them to meet standards.
- Vice-Chairman Lowden asked if Milestones had been administered yet. The school responded that they will be administered in the next two weeks.
- Commissioner Dudgeon asked what steps the school is taking to ensure they will not fall behind operationally again. The school responded that they previously fell behind due to nuances with certain policies, including their current credit card policy.
- Commissioner Dudgeon inquired about the school's enrollment numbers. The school responded that enrollment is trending upwards. They previously lost enrollment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They have also hired a new enrollment coordinator who has helped increase enrollment.
- Vice-Chairman Lowden commented that it is important for the school governing board to oversee the school operations to ensure issues do not slip through the cracks. He then asked about the school's progress towards completing governance training. The school responded that all board members have completed governance training except for one due to health issues. That individual is seeking training through an alternative provider.
- International Academy of Smyrna presented their improvement plan for finances.
 - Vice-Chairman Lowden asked the school governing board's progress on completing governance training. The school responded that all board members have completed governance training.
 - Vice-Chairman Lowden inquired about the school governing board's turnover rate. The school responded that they have recently extended their board to include members who have students at the school and have experience in different fields.
 - Vice-Chairman Lowden asked about the school's progress towards completing Milestones testing. The school responded that they are on day three of testing.
 - Vice-Chairman Lowden inquired about the impact COVID-19 has had on the school. The school responded that they were heavily impacted because they had to serve students in a virtual environment and their instructional model relies heavily on face-to-face instruction. Their partnership with National Heritage Academy will help provide support for these issues.
 - Vice-Chairman Lowden commented that the pandemic has affected everyone, and we will be better from it as we recover.

XII. Additional Items from Commissioners

- None

XIII. Public Comment

- Kelly Bradley Swinks and Katherine Kelbaugh provided public comment in support of The Museum School of Avondale Estates transitioning to the SCSC.
 - Chairman Brockway thanked The Museum School for their comments and said he hopes this issue will be resolved soon.
 - Commissioner Dudgeon apologized on behalf of their local school system.
 - Vice-Chairman Lowden expressed that he was moved by the emails of support he has received.

XIV. Adjourn

- The meeting was adjourned at 11:48 a.m.