

STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS COMMISSION MEETING

April 26, 2017, 10:00 a.m.

Oak Board Room, Department of Early Care and Learning Conference Room, Suite
East Twin Tower, Room, Atlanta, GA 30334

Meeting Minutes

1. The meeting was called to order by Chairman Jennifer Rippner at 10:00 a.m. All Commissioners were present, and Chairman Rippner verified that a quorum was present.
2. Also present were Commission staff members Bonnie Holliday—Executive Director, Gregg Stevens—Deputy Director and General Counsel, Lauren Holcomb – Director of Organizational and Resource Development, Terence Washington—Financial and Operational Accountability Manager, Morgan Felts—Associate General Counsel and Petitions Manager, Katie Manthey—Academic Accountability Manager, and Sarah Beck—Business Operations Manager.
3. Approximately 15 members of the public also attended the meeting including charter school staff and representatives, families of students attending state charter schools, charter school business representatives, and Georgia Charter Schools Association representatives.
4. Chairman Rippner called for an approval of the meeting minutes from the March 29th SCSC meeting. Commissioner Paul Williams made a motion to approve the minutes and Commissioner Tony Lowden provided a second. The minutes were unanimously approved.
5. Chairman Rippner asked Director Bonnie Holliday to provide an update on the SCSC’s next informal site visit. Director Holliday shared that Commissioners Clara Keith, Jose Perez, and Rippner would attend the next SCSC informal site visit at Brookhaven Innovation Academy on May 23, 2017. Brookhaven Innovation Academy is currently in its first year of operation.
6. Chairman Rippner then asked Ms. Lauren Holcomb to provide an update on organizational development. Ms. Holcomb reported that the SCSC recently conducted a webinar for schools about how to prepare for their upcoming performance presentations before the Commission. Ms. Holcomb reported that the next Carl Vinson Institute of Government training on Internal Controls will be on May 9th. In addition, Ms. Holcomb shared two upcoming trainings that are important for new schools and for new SCSC school administrators: 1) Teacher and Leader Keys Effectiveness Systems training May 9-11; and 2) LEA Reporting/MyGaDOE Portal training (date TBD). Ms. Holcomb concluded her presentation by sharing the April SCSC newsletter and highlighted the two Georgia Department of Education summer conferences that the SCSC highly recommends SCSC schools attend: 1) Federal Programs Conference June 20-22 in Atlanta; and 2) Data Collections Conference August 30-September 1 in Athens.
7. Chairman Rippner then directed Ms. Holcomb to update the Commission on the State Charter Schools Foundation (SCSF). Ms. Holcomb shared that the State Charter Schools Commission was charged with fundraising on behalf of state charter schools in its enabling legislation and received the statutory authority to establish a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 2015. The SCSF then created its initial Board of Directors, filed articles of incorporation and received approval from the Georgia

Secretary of State, and received IRS tax-exempt status in 2016. The SCSF submitted its first grant proposal to create a pilot project to support teachers in first-year SCSC schools. The current members of the SCSF Board of Directors include Chairman Rippner, Director Holliday, and Ms. Holcomb (the SCSF by-laws require that the SCSC Executive Director and Chairman be members of the SCSF Board of Directors). In addition, the SCSF will not accept donations from educational service providers or any other organizations who may have business before the SCSC to alleviate any potential conflicts of interest.

8. Chairman Rippner then asked Ms. Morgan Felts to give an update on the 2017 SCSC petition cycle. Ms. Felts reported that the petition application window closed on April 17th and the SCSC received a total of 12 applicants. While this number is smaller than anticipated, SCSC staff attributes the decline in applications to the online system that requires petitions to be fully complete prior to submission. Previously, the SCSC would receive incomplete applications that would not progress beyond legal compliance review or the substantive review. Ms. Felts will contact Commissioners in the coming weeks to seek availability in July to schedule petition interview dates and to begin the process of selecting external reviewers.
9. Chairman Rippner then requested that Ms. Katie Manthey to provide an update on academic accountability. Ms. Manthey shared that the following last month's 2015-2016 State Charter School Accountability Update, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) and their research partners Georgia State University updated the code they used to generate the 2015-2016 value-added analysis pertaining to the inclusion and application of two controls related to student poverty and race/ethnicity. The update did not impact any school standings on the SCSC's Comprehensive Performance Framework (CPF). Next, Ms. Manthey discussed the upcoming school presentations that are a part of the SCSC's annual performance review cycle. Schools that are noncompliant in one or more areas of the CPF will be required to present at the SCSC's May 31st or June 28th meeting on the progress they are making to remediate and respond to questions from Commissions and staff. The presentation schedule will be finalized next week. Finally, the SCSC has been working with the Georgia Technology Authority to develop a new accountability website to display schools' CPF standings in an easy to navigate and visually appealing manner. The website is currently in structural development and is scheduled to go live within the next few weeks.
10. Chairman Rippner then directed Mr. Terence Washington to provide an update on financial accountability. First, Mr. Washington announced that the SCSC request for proposals for its 2017 Approved Auditor Program resulted in the selection of Bambo Sonaika CPA, LLC and Mauldin & Jenkins. Schools were notified that these two firms were approved and can be working select a firm to prepare for their upcoming audit should they so choose. Schools that do not select either of these two auditors or the state auditor must adhere to the SCSC's guidance to ensure that the school is not "audit shopping" and selects a high-quality, unbiased auditor. Lastly, Ivy Preparatory Academy's FY16 audit is still outstanding and the school notified the SCSC that it expects an initial draft to be complete by May 2017 and a final draft by June 2017.
11. Next, Chairman Rippner asked Mr. Gregg Stevens to provide an update on operational accountability. Mr. Stevens first provided an update about newly approved schools completion of the SCSC's Pre-Opening Checklist Milestones. Mr. Stevens shared that the upcoming May 1st deadline requires schools to obtain their facility code from the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE). Mr. Stevens reported that the facility code is of particular importance because schools

must have this number in order to receive funding through GaDOE's. Mr. Stevens then stated that SCSC staff recently learned that some key staff of the Georgia School for Innovation and the Classics recently resigned. Mr. Stevens believes that more information is necessary to determine if the staff change will have a positive or negative impact on the school, and that commissioners may want to ask the school about the staff changes at the upcoming school presentations. Mr. Stevens then provided an update on first-year schools. Southwest Georgia STEM Charter Academy is getting policies in place, but SCSC staff is still concerned about the school's governance practices. The school currently only has four board members, and the current board make up does not reflect the community the school serves, which was the school's goal when they petitioned the SCSC. Finally, Cirrus Academy recently had an Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) finding from GaDOE and is in the process of completing corrective action. Cirrus Academy continues to miss GaDOE reporting deadlines and is also receiving intensive governance support, yet, it did not have a quorum at its last governing board meeting. Mr. Stevens and Director Holliday are scheduling a meeting with Cirrus Academy to discuss the need for Cirrus to immediately remedy its deficiencies or SCSC staff will recommend to Commissioners to take further corrective action under Cirrus' charter contract, which may include terminating Cirrus' charter contract.

12. Next, Mr. Stevens presented the SCSC's new guidance on annual compliance monitoring. This guidance was developed to assist schools and stakeholders to understand how the SCSC monitoring and evaluation activities align through the Comprehensive Performance Review process. The guidance document shows the alignment of the SCSC's on-site monitoring, the annual publication of the CPF results, the SCSC's annual performance reviews for schools who are noncompliant in one area of the CPF, and the five-year performance review at the end of a school's charter contract. The annual CPF results to schools with detailed reports of performance ensure that each school has a clear understanding of its progress, and the annual performance review presentations provide an interim check of the remedial efforts that ultimately culminate in a review of performance reviewed every five years. Mr. Stevens noted that SCSC staff normally does not present guidance documents to Commissioners for administrative reasons, however, the SCSC wanted to provide further assurances to the United States Department of Education that its monitoring and evaluation activities combine to form a comprehensive review at least once every five years.
13. Chairman Rippner called for a motion to discuss the proposed amendments by the Commissioners. Commissioner Lewis made a motion and Commissioner Hogg provided a second. Chairman Rippner then directed Mr. Stevens to present on the charter amendments. The first action item is a charter amendment requested by Liberty Tech Charter School to reduce the grades it will serve from K-12 to K-8 and to reduce the number of instructional days to no fewer than 187 (from 210 days). The school requested the amendment because the prospective enrollment for its ninth-grade class for the upcoming school year was extremely low and the high costs of operating a high school would have hindered the overall viability of Liberty Tech. Further, when parents learned of the school's plan to eliminate high school grades, they requested that the school consider more closely aligning its calendar with surrounding districts to decrease the burden on families with students in multiple schools. Thus, the school developed a revised calendar that would allow it to meet the obligations under its charter contract in fewer days. Mr. Stevens noted that normally a school would not have to seek SCSC approval for changing the number of calendar days in the school year, however, one of Liberty Tech's essential and

innovative features in its charter contract was that it would provide 210 instructional days, thus, it needed to seek SCSC approval to decrease its calendar.

14. Chairman Rippner amended the agenda and moved public comment to be directly after Mr. Stevens presented Liberty Tech's charter amendment. The first two comments were from Mr. Alan Gilbert and Ms. Denise Cramer whom spoke against the charter amendment. The final comment was from Ms. Mary Taylor who spoke in favor of the charter amendment.
15. Chairman Rippner then asked Liberty Tech's Principal Mike Stewart to speak on the amendment. Mr. Stewart shared that Liberty Tech had every intention of opening a high school, however, once it received survey results back from students indicating that they would only have about 19 ninth graders, it was financially impossible for Liberty Tech to operate a high school. Parents then reached out to the board and asked to decrease the number of calendar days to better align with the traditional school system. Liberty Tech conducted a survey and found over 70% of parents supported decreased the calendar from 210 days to 187 days. Additionally, Liberty Tech plans to offer a summer enrichment program at no cost that will occur for three weeks over the summer.
16. After public comment, Director Holliday thanked the speakers for their time and efforts to speak at the meeting and that it shows their dedication to the school's success. Director Holliday then explained that it is the SCSC's role to deny charter amendments when they would compromise the school's ability to fulfill the obligations under its charter, and Liberty Tech has demonstrated that it would still be able to fulfill these obligations despite a shorter calendar.
17. Chairman Rippner called for a motion to approve the amendment. Commissioner Williams made a motion to approve the amendment, and Commissioner Hogg provided a second. The amendment was unanimously approved.
18. Mr. Stevens then presented on the Byron-Peach Charter High School amendment. Byron-Peach Charter High School requests for its charter contract to be terminated. The school was originally approved by the SCSC in fall 2014, but due to federal desegregation litigation, it was unable to open as planned in fall 2015 and again in fall 2016. Delays in the schools opening, coupled with additional challenges, led to the governing board to send a letter to the SCSC in December 2016 requesting to withdraw their charter. The letter states that the rationale for this decision was the belief of the governing board that it was unable to open and offer a high-quality school given the funding challenges the school faced. Chairman Rippner called for a motion to approve the charter amendment. Commissioner Lewis made a motion to approve the amendment, and Commissioner Williams provided a second. The amendment was unanimously approved.
19. The final process item was to initiate rule making. Mr. Stevens explained that the new rule amends 691-2-.03 State Charter School Monitoring and brings further clarification the SCSC's current monitoring practices. Specifically, Mr. Stevens stated that the new rule provision clarifies that the SCSC conducts a comprehensive performance review of state charter schools every five years. Chairman Rippner called for a motion. Commissioner Lowden made the motion, and Commissioner Williams seconded the motion. There was no discussion, and the motion unanimously passed.

20. Chairman Rippner made a motion to begin Executive Session to discuss personnel matters and Commissioner Lewis provided a second. Chairman Rippner left the meeting and Vice-Chairman Williams presided.
21. Vice-Chairman Williams called the meeting back to order following the Executive Session at approximately 12:25 p.m.
22. Vice-Chairman Williams adjourned the meeting at 12:26 p.m.