

STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS COMMISSION MEETING

February 26, 2014, 10 a.m.

**Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning Conference Room
East Twin Tower, Room 854, Atlanta, Georgia 30334**

Meeting Minutes

1. The meeting was called to order by Commission Chair Charles B. Knapp. Chairman Knapp verified that a quorum existed and that all members of the commission were present.
2. Also present were Commission staff members Bonnie Holliday—Executive Director, Gregg Stevens--General Counsel, Daniela Belton—Business and Operations Manager, Lauren Wright Holcomb —Director of Organizational and Resource Development, Terence Washington—Accountability Manager. Louis Erste from the Georgia Department of Education’s Charter School Division was also present.
3. Approximately 75 members of the public also attended the meeting including charter school staff and representatives and charter school business representatives. Representatives from GCSA were also present.
4. A motion was made by Commissioner Perez and seconded by Commissioner Lewis that the Commission approve the meeting minutes from the November 20th SCSC meeting. The minutes were unanimously approved.
5. Chairman Knapp next requested that Bonnie Holliday address the items listed under Section II of the agenda. Director Holliday provided an update on recent state charter school site visits. On January 16th, Director Holliday and Commissioner Hogg visited Odyssey School in Coweta County. Commissioner Hogg commended the school for their positive school culture and engaging extracurricular offerings. On February 20th, Director Holliday and Commissioners Lowden and Hogg visited Pataula Charter Academy in Edison, Georgia. Commissioner Hogg noted the commitment of the school’s leadership to make Pataula a successful state charter school, and he commented on the unique agricultural programs the school has implemented. Commissioner Lowden also cited the school’s focus on agricultural science as having a positive impact on the surrounding community.
6. Director Holliday then reminded Commissioners a state charter school site visit had been scheduled for Cherokee Charter Academy in Cherokee County on March 6th from 10am-12pm. Director Holliday will coordinate with commissioners who are able to attend.
7. Director Holliday then provided an update on pending legislation impacting state charter schools. She highlighted HB 897 which presents standards for quality charter school authorizing, requires the SCSC to review petitions twice a year, creates a new enrollment preference so that charter schools can afford enrollment preferences within a tiered attendance zone structure, and provides legislative authority to the SCSC for the establishment of a non-profit 501(c)(3). Director Holliday then summarized HB 405 which requires annual governance trainings for

charter school boards, HB 886 which requires charter schools to hold 2 public hearings prior to passing a budget. Finally, she noted the recent appearance of HB 964—which is unlikely to make it out of the House before crossover day—but would establish charter-schools-in-municipalities and charter-schools-in-the-workplace

8. Next, Terence Washington explained that the release of the CCRPI (state accountability tool) was further delayed until late March/early April 2014.
9. Director Holliday then introduced Dr. Tim Sass of Georgia State University and Mr. Sam Rauschenberg of the Governor's Office of Student Achievement in preparation for a presentation on the SCSC's recently completed analysis of state charter school performance. Director Holliday explained that the analysis assesses the impact of state charter schools in comparison to other schools at the district and state level. By controlling for student characteristics and demographics, the value-add portion of the report allows the SCSC to make fair comparisons between state charters and traditional public schools even though many state charters serve disproportionately more disadvantaged or at-risk students. Dr. Sass then provided a 25 minute presentation on the report and findings.
10. Next, Lauren Wright Holcomb provided an overview of the SCSC's February newsletter, and she highlighted the following training opportunities which took place since the November meeting:
 - Governance Training—December 9th & 10th, Emory University Conference Center
 - Accounting Training—January 14th & 15th, Floyd Veterans Building (West tower; GA Dept. of Ed. Training Room)
 - Boot Camp for New Petitioners —January 27th, 2014, Georgia Tech Hotel & Conference CenterMs. Holcomb noted the positive feedback provided by training attendees through post-training evaluation forms and surveys. She also reviewed the following upcoming training opportunities for state charter schools:
 - Teacher Keys Evaluation System (TKES) Training—March 25th -28th
 - Leader Keys Evaluation System (LKES) Training—April 14th-15th
11. Terence Washington next provided a status update on the SCSC's financial monitoring of Heritage Preparatory Academy. Mr. Washington explained that because of significant financial deficits occurring at Heritage Prep, the SCSC contracted with an independent auditor to review the financial state of the school. While the SCSC will not receive the final audit report until the end of the month, Mr. Washington noted the auditor's serious concerns about the school.
12. Mr. Washington then explained that because the SCSC has had several issues with schools not meeting annual audit deadlines and because the quality of audit varies greatly from school to school, the SCSC is covering the cost of the required annual financial audits for any interested state charter school in Fiscal Year 2014. Schools have been instructed to contact Mr. Washington by the end of February to opt into the free audit.
13. At this point, Chairman Knapp along with Commissioners Williams and Lewis voiced support for the SCSC's willingness to cover audit costs for schools in order to ensure the receipt of timely and accurate financial information. Additionally, all commissioners agreed that strict oversight is needed for those schools choosing not to take advantage of the SCSC's offer.

14. Chairman Knapp then requested Mr. Stevens discuss the recent recommendation for denial of Scholars Academy Charter School's renewal petition. Mr. Stevens discussed the staff recommendations for each petitioner and addressed questions from commissioners.
15. Next, Chairman Knapp made a motion to consider the recommendation, and Commissioner Rippner provided a second. At this time, representatives from Scholars Academy Charter were allowed to address the SCSC prior to commissioners' votes on recommendation. Representatives from the school included Mechelle Brown (board chair) and Craig Cason (board member) who spoke in support of their charter renewal petitions.
16. Chairman Knapp allowed Director Holliday and Mr. Stevens to respond to questions of fact presented by petitioners and the Commissioners. Upon conclusion of discussion, Chairman Knapp called for a motion to approve the recommendation of denial for the Scholars Academy renewal petition. Commissioner Lewis made the motion, and it was seconded by Commissioner Hogg. There was no discussion, and the motion was approved unanimously.
17. Next, Chairman Knapp requested that Mr. Stephens provide an overview of the charter amendment request submitted by the Ivy Preparatory Academies to separate into three entities. Following a review of the amendment request, Commissioner Lewis made a motion that was seconded by Commissioner Lowden to approve the recommendation to grant the charter amendment. There was no discussion, and this motion was approved unanimously.
18. Chairman Knapp then called for a motion to approve the 2014 Petition Application as presented by SCSC staff. Commissioner Williams made a motion that was seconded by Commissioner Rippner to approve application. There was no discussion, and this motion was approved unanimously.
19. Prior to adjourning the meeting, Chairman Knapp invited members of the audience to speak during the public comment period. Several parents and the school principal spoke in favor of Scholars Academy Charter School's renewal petition.
20. There being no further business to come before the Commission, a motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Lewis and seconded by Commissioner Lowden. The motion was unanimously approved, and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:50am.