

STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS COMMISSION MEETING

February 25, 2015, 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 Chairman Jennifer Rippner. Chairman Rippner verified that a quorum existed and that all members of the commission were present except Commissioner Lowden who was absent because of severe weather conditions.
2. Also present were Commission staff members Bonnie Holliday—Executive Director, Gregg Stevens—General Counsel, Lauren Holcomb—Director of Organizational and Resource Development, Katie Manthey—Business and Operations Manager, Terence Washington – Finance and Operational Accountability Manager, and Morgan Felts, Associate General Counsel & Petitions Manager.
3. Approximately 5 members of the public also attended the meeting including charter school staff and representatives and charter school business representatives.
4. After calling the meeting to order, Chairman Rippner introduced Suzanne Werner and welcomed her to the SCSC.
5. Chairman Rippner then called for approval of the meeting minutes from the January 28th SCSC meeting. Commissioner Williams made a motion to approve the minutes, and Commissioner Hogg provided a second. The minutes were unanimously approved.
6. Chairman Rippner then asked Director Holliday to review the portion of the agenda pertaining to agency-wide updates. Director Holliday discussed the SCSC staff's recent site visit to DuBois Integrity Academy for a groundbreaking ceremony February 10, 2015. She also noted that the following quarterly site visits to state charter schools are currently scheduled:
 - 1st Quarter Visit: March 23, 2015, Ivy Prep Academy in Gwinnett County
 - 2nd Quarter Visit: April 9, 2015, Charter Conservatory for Liberal Arts and Technology (CCAT) in Statesboro
 - 3rd Quarter Visit: August 2015 (Date TBD), Ivy Prep Young Men's Leadership Academy in Atlanta
 - 4th Quarter Visit: November 2015 (Date TBD), Utopian Academy for the Arts in Riverdale
7. Next, Director Holliday provided an update on the staff's progress with regard to topics covered at the SCSC's Governance and Policy Retreat that took place on September 4-5, 2014 at Brasstown Valley Resort. She announced that Phase I of the virtual school research report being conducted by Public Impact and NACSA is near completion, and staff plan to present findings at the March 2015 SCSC meeting.

8. Director Holliday also provided an update on legislative affairs and noted that the SCSC legislation which would establish a 501c3 is being carried by Senator Tippins in the Senate and Representative Belton in the House.
9. Director Holliday then updated commissioners on the Governor's proposal to amend the state constitution so as to allow for the creation of an "Opportunity School District" which would target the lowest performing schools in the state. There is an option within the OSD legislation that would allow an OSD school to apply for state charter status. In these instances, the Superintendent of the OSD would work with the petitioning group to identify high capacity board members, and the SCSC would work with the petitioning group to connect them with consultants, service providers, and/or potential operators. Director Holliday noted that once approved, an OSD-state charter school would operate just like any other state charter school and would be held to the same standards of accountability.
10. Finally, Director Holliday explained that two state charter schools appear on the list of low performing schools that are currently eligible for inclusion in the OSD. These schools are Ivy Prep Young Men's Leadership Academy and Atlanta Heights Charter School.
11. Next, Director Holliday apprised commissioners of the SCSC's continued outreach efforts. Lauren Holcomb recently visited a Lions Club meeting in Colquitt County to discuss charter schools and the role of the SCSC.
12. Next, Lauren Holcomb provided an update on recent SCSC trainings. One training was held since the January SCSC meeting: the second school Governance Training (Feb. 5th-6th) at Callaway Gardens. Ms. Holcomb reminded commissioners that the Governance Training is mandatory for schools and required by law. She also noted that 6 state charter school governing boards had at least one member who failed to attend either the October or the February Governance Training session. At the request of the commissioners, SCSC staff plan to bring recommendations for sanctions related to non-compliance to commissioners for discussion at the spring SCSC policy and governance retreat. Lastly, Ms. Holcomb announced that the second installment of the Charter School Financial Certification Program was scheduled to take place Feb. 25-27 but, due to the inclement weather, this training will be rescheduled to a future date that has yet to be determined.
13. Chairman Rippner then asked for an update on academic accountability. Director Holliday announced that a complete set of CCRPI scores was to be released by GaDOE in February 20, 2015. SCSC staff plan to present a complete academic accountability update next month that covers both CCRPI results as well as value-add results.
14. Next, Terence Washington provided an update on financial and operational accountability. Mr. Washington noted that staff recently conducted compliance monitoring visits to Odyssey Charter School in Coweta County and Pataula Charter Academy in Edison. He explained that the SCSC follows up with schools after each visit with a written letter detailing any issues or findings. The school then has an opportunity to remediate issues in real-time rather than being made aware of problems at renewal only.

15. Gregg Stevens then provided an update on school audits. He noted that the SCSC had 5 schools that missed the Oct. 1st submission deadline, and of those 5 schools—3 still have outstanding audits. These schools are Ivy Preparatory Academy (Gwinnett), Ivy Preparatory Academy (Kirkwood), and Ivy Preparatory Young Men’s Leadership Academy. The SCSC originally provided these schools with a deadline of February 15 to submit a finalized audit; however, this deadline would have precluded the auditor from conducting additional work with the schools to gain a better understanding of the schools’ finances. As the overall goal is to receive accurate audits that provide a complete picture of a school’s financial health, SCSC staff began to work with the schools and the auditor in an attempt to foster the collaboration needed to complete the audits in a quality way. While the audits are still outstanding, the SCSC staff is pleased with the progress that has been made over the past two weeks. The schools understand they are out of compliance with their charter contracts, and they are working diligently to come into compliance.
16. At this point, Chairman Rippner asked Director Holliday to explain the process items on the SCSC agenda. Director Holliday asked that commissioners approve the staff recommendation to award the 2015 SCSC Emergency Operations Grant to Utopian Academy. Commissioner Lewis made a motion to approve and Commissioner Hogg seconded. Commissioner Williams commented during discussion that the situation that occurred at Utopian Academy in August 2014 served as the impetus for creating the emergency fund in the first place. Following discussion, the motion was approved unanimously.
17. Next, Director Holliday asked that commissioners approve the staff recommendation to finalize and post the 2015 SCSC Petition Application. Morgan Felts then explained while the substantive process for this petition review cycle will remain the same as previous years, SCSC staff revised the petition application in order to better illustrate SCSC expectations and streamline the review of application materials. Specifically, the revised application is better aligned to the SCSC’s established petition review criteria as well as to the principles and methods outlined in the SCSC’s best practices research and trainings. Commissioner Williams made a motion to approve and Commissioner Perez seconded the motion. There was no discussion, and the motion was approved unanimously.
18. Chairman Rippner then announced that the annual SCSC governance and policy retreat would likely be scheduled for Spring 2015 so as to provide feedback to staff on the finalization of a comprehensive performance framework for state charter school performance evaluation. Director Holliday noted that potential retreat dates are forthcoming.
19. Chairman Rippner then called for public comment. Monty Green from Ivy Preparatory Academies updated commissioners on the status of the school’s audit and thanked SCSC staff – especially Gregg Stevens and Terence Washington—for their ongoing support throughout the last few weeks.
20. There being no further business before the SCSC, Chairman Rippner asked for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Lewis offered a motion, and Commissioner Perez provided a second. The motion was unanimously approved, and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:00 a.m.

