

STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS COMMISSION MEETING

February 24 2016, 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. Commissioners Tony Lowden and Suzanne Werner were not present.
2. Also present were Commission staff members Bonnie Holliday-Executive Director, Gregg Stevens—Deputy Director and General Counsel, Terence Washington – Finance and Operational Accountability Manager, Morgan Felts – Associate General Counsel and Petitions Manager, Lauren Holcomb – Director of Organizational and Resource Development, and Katie Manthey – Academic Accountability Manager.
3. Approximately 15 members of the public also attended the meeting including charter school staff and representatives, charter school business representatives, and Georgia Charter Schools Association representatives were also present.
4. After calling the meeting to order, Chairman Rippner called for approval of the meeting minutes from the January 27th SCSC meeting. Commissioner Lewis made a motion to approve the minutes, and Commissioner Hogg provided a second. There was no discussion, and the minutes were unanimously approved.
5. Chairmen Rippner asked Director Holliday to discuss the SCSC’s scheduled site visits. Director Holliday noted that she, along with Commissioners Hogg and Lowden, will visit the International Charter School of Atlanta on Monday, February 29th. Additionally, the site visit for DuBois Integrity Academy has been scheduled for April 16th.
6. Chairman Rippner then asked Director Holliday to provide an update regarding SCSC accountability. Director Holliday informed commissioners that SCSC staff had completed the annual compliance monitoring visits for each state charter school. Director Holliday noted that the SCSC uses its monitoring activities to help schools improve as well as to design its own training and supports to better meet the needs of state charter schools. Director Holliday thanked SCSC staff for their dedication and hard work for completing the site visits across the state.
7. Chairman Rippner requested that an update concerning the performance audit recently conducted by the Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts regarding the three virtual state charter schools. Director Holliday noted that the performance audit found results that were similar to the SCSC virtual school study, including that the virtual schools generally had difficulty meeting contractual performance goals and had higher student mobility rates than brick-and-mortar schools. Director Holliday also stated that the performance audit made suggestions for the Georgia Department of Education to provide a definition of “student attendance” in virtual schools to ensure the schools claim state funding in a consistent manner. The audit also suggested

that the state implement a better mechanism for ensuring that teachers in virtual schools meet Highly Qualified status. Director Holliday noted that two of the virtual schools responded to the audit with arguments that virtual schools should not be compared to brick and mortar schools because of their differing populations, but Director Holliday noted that the SCSC's Value Added Analysis expressly controls for many of the factors that contribute to the difference in population and can be used to provide an accurate analysis of all schools regardless of student characteristics. Finally, Director Holliday noted that the Walton Family Foundation has also called for reforms for virtual education.

8. Chairman Rippner then asked Director Holliday for an overview of legislation affecting charter schools. Director Holliday discussed a variety of legislation pending in the General Assembly, including new requirements for charter schools to provide public hearings prior to adopting a budget, additional training requirements for charter school board members and personnel to protect against financial fraud and abuse, as well as a bill that would limit training hours that are required for charter school governing board members. Director Holliday noted that the General Assembly is approaching the deadline for which a bill must be approved by one chamber and that SCSC staff is working closely with legislators to provide sound policy for the future of charter schools.
9. Next, Chairman Rippner requested an update regarding recent trainings provided by the SCSC. Ms. Lauren Holcomb stated that the SCSC hosted its second governance training for members of a state charter school governing board. Ms. Holcomb noted that each member of a charter school governing board is required by law to attend annual governance training, and because training was the final opportunity provided by the SCSC directly, any governing board member that had not fulfilled his or her training requirement would need to do so through an alternate provider. Ms. Holcomb directed those still requiring training to the SCSC website for additional details regarding approved training providers and training content. Ms. Holcomb then detailed that courses that are part of the Carl Vinson Institute of Government's Financial Management Certification Program are currently underway. Finally, Ms. Holcomb discussed that SCSC staff would be conducting a series of webinars in March to assist potential charter school petitioners in understanding the petition application and process.
10. Chairman Rippner asked Mr. Terence Washington for an update on the receipt of annual audits from state charter schools. Mr. Washington stated that the contractual deadline for submitting audits to the SCSC was October 1st, but there are four schools that have not yet turned in their audits for the 2015 fiscal year. Those four schools, Ivy Preparatory Academy at Gwinnett, Ivy Preparatory Academy at Kirkwood, Ivy Preparatory Young Men's Leadership Academy, and Utopian Academy for the Arts, had experienced staff turnover the previous year that contributed to disorder in recordkeeping and resulted in the delay of the audits. Director Holliday noted that these schools missed their audit deadlines and are out of compliance with their contracts, but because of the need to have an accurate and high-quality audit, the schools should continue to work to receive a precise analysis. Several commissioners expressed concern that schools have outstanding audits remaining. Commissioners Lewis and Williams encouraged SCSC staff to monitor the financial progress of the schools very closely as they complete their audits. Commissioner Perez asked SCSC to be wary of the future financial viability of the schools that could not complete their audits in a timely manner, and Commissioner Hogg stated that the inability to complete an audit by the contractual deadline raises strong suspicions.

11. Next, Lauren Holcomb and Katie Manthey provided an update regarding the SCSC's research programs. Concerning the SCSC Value-Add and Beating the Odds Alignment Study, Ms. Holcomb discussed that there were some delays with getting data from the Georgia Department of Education to the researchers, but that the study's results are almost final. Preliminary results indicate that the SCSC's Value-Add analysis will have stronger results given the use of student-level data rather than the school-level data utilized by Beating the Odds. Ms. Manthey then provided an update regarding the SCSC Value-Add Analysis, stating that Georgia State University has received all but one necessary data file and that preliminary results will follow shortly after the completion of all required data. Finally, Ms. Holcomb quickly summarized that the SCSC Economic Impact study is underway and the researchers are reviewing available data.
12. Chairman Rippner then asked Morgan Felts to discuss the current status of pending charter renewals. Ms. Felts stated that SCSC intends to bring recommendations for action at the March meeting. Ms. Felts noted that while we would like to evaluate the 2014-2015 CCRPI scores for Ivy Preparatory Young Men's Leadership Academy (IPYMLA) and CCAT prior to SCSC action, the SCSC should not postpone SCSC decisions beyond March since we want to provide families, teachers, and school staff enough time to make alternate arrangements in the event a non-renewal decision is issued. However, SCSC staff does have access to 2014-2015 Georgia Milestones assessment data for both schools. Since 50% of a school's CCRPI score is based solely on performance on state tests, SCSC staff has good idea of how both IPYMLA's and CCAT's CCRPI score will look, and that such information has already been shared with commissioners.
13. Next, Chairman Rippner requested that Ms. Felts inform the commissioners regarding the 2016 SCSC Petition Application. Ms. Felts discussed the 2016 SCSC Petition Application, highlighting changes from the 2015 petition, which include greater clarity regarding expectations for partnerships, financial solvency, and statewide attendance zone. Ms. Felts stated that the SCSC would release the application upon approval and that applications would be due on May 16, 2016. Commissioner Lewis made a motion to approve the 2016 SCSC Petition Application as presented. Commissioner Williams provided a second. There was no discussion, and the application was unanimously approved by those present.
14. Chairman Rippner asked for additional items from commissioners, but no commissioners had additional items.
15. Chairman Rippner next called for public comment. Sharon Daniel, governing board chair for Utopian Academy of the Arts, commended the SCSC for seeking additional auditors to provide services to state charter schools.
16. There being no further business before the SCSC, Chairman Rippner asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Williams provided a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Perez provided a second. The motion was approved unanimously by those present. The meeting adjourned the meeting at approximately 11:00 a.m.