

STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS COMMISSION MEETING

January 27 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. Commissioner Suzanne Werner remains on maternity leave and was 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 – Business and Operations 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 November 18th SCSC meeting. Commissioner Perez made a motion to approve the minutes, and Commissioner Lowden provided a second. There was no discussion, and the minutes were unanimously approved. Chairman Rippner then called for the approval of the renewal interview meeting minutes from January 11th and 13th. Commissioner Lowden made a motion to approve the minutes, and Commissioner Hogg provided a second. There was no discussion, and the minutes were unanimously approved.
5. Chairman Rippner then asked Executive Director Holliday to review the portion of the agenda pertaining to agency-wide updates. Director Holliday recognized two new SCSC interns who were in the audience and noted that SCSC Business and Operations Manager, Katie Manthey, will be transitioning into a new role within the agency as Academic Accountability Manager and the SCSC will be looking to fill the newly vacant role. Director Holliday continued with agency updates noting that SCSC staff and Commissioners are scheduled for their first quarter school site visit on Feb. 29th to International Charter School of Atlanta. The second quarter school site visit will be to DuBois Integrity Academy in April, however, the exact day is not yet scheduled.
6. Chairman Rippner then asked Lauren Holcomb for an update on organizational development. Ms. Holcomb stated that the SCSC hosted a new school orientation training for governing board members and administrators of newly approved schools on December 2nd in the Twin Towers. Ms. Holcomb also noted that since the last commission meeting two petitioner boot camps were held, one on December 15-16 at the Georgia Tech Hotel & Conference Center and one on January 20 at the Macon Marriott Center. A second day was added to the Atlanta boot camp that focused solely on budgetary and financial issues. Ms. Holcomb noted the upcoming governance training opportunity, February 10-11 at Atlanta Evergreen Marriott Stone Mountain.

7. Next, Chairman Rippner asked for an update on academic accountability. Director Holliday shared that Georgia Milestone Assessment results were released in November. A brief overview of state charter schools results were included in commissioners' folders. Director Holliday noted that of schools serving elementary or middle grade bands, only three schools: Coweta Charter, Pataula Charter and Utopian Academy, outperformed their comparison district in the majority of grade levels served on all or a majority of subject areas tested. However, of the schools serving high school grade bands, seven schools, Cherokee Charter, Fulton Leadership, Georgia Connections, Ivy Prep at Gwinnett, Ivy Prep at Kirkwood, Ivy Prep Young Men's, Mountain Education, and Pataula, outperformed their comparison districts in the majority of grade levels served on all or a majority of subject areas tested.
8. Gregg Stevens then provided an update on SCSC on-site monitoring. Mr. Stevens noted that SCSC staff have visited 16 schools thus far and have 4 schools remaining. He explained that after the visit staff write the schools a letter with any findings. Those findings are will be used to determine the school's score on the operational component of the framework. Generally, schools have improved in operational performance over the last year.
9. Next, Terence Washington provided an update on financial accountability. Mr. Washington noted that all but four schools, Utopian Academy, Ivy Prep Young Men's, Ivy Prep at Kirkwood, and Ivy Prep at Gwinnett, submitted their audits by the contractual deadline and the added flexibility provided. Each of these schools had issues with their record keeping but have transitioned financial staff, which should hopefully prevent the problem from reoccurring.
10. Chairman Rippner then asked Lauren Holcomb and Katie Manthey for a research update. Ms. Manthey informed commissioners that the annual Value-Add Analysis is underway and staff hope to report the findings at the March commission meeting. Ms. Holcomb updated commissioners on the progress of the Value-Add and Beating the Odds Alignment study. After numerous data delays and researchers changing institutions, completion of the analysis is scheduled for the end of the month. Ms. Holcomb also informed commissioners that the SCSC selected Georgia State University to conduct an economic impact study of charter schools in Georgia. Although, some of the work is contingent on data availability we hope to have some deliverables by the end of the calendar year. Ms. Holcomb noted that the contract terms were being negotiated and work will begin as soon as it is executed.
11. Next, Chairman Rippner asked Mr. Stevens for an update on the Education Reform Commission (ERC) recommendations. Mr. Stevens explained that the ERC made its recommendations to Governor Deal to adjust the state's educational funding formula and key educational policies to improve and streamline K-12 education. The Governor and his staff are working to finalize legislative proposals that will implement some of those recommendations. SCSC staff is following the situation very closely and will work the Governor's staff and the legislature to formulate policies that will benefit public education generally and charter schools specifically.

12. Chairmen Rippner inquired into the progress of the State Department of Audits review of the virtual schools. Director Holliday explained that she had received some preliminary findings and would provide an update at the next commission meeting.
13. Next, Chairman Rippner asked Ms. Felts for an update on the SCSC renewal process. Ms. Felts explained that SCSC staff are currently reviewing two renewals- Ivy Prep young Men's Leadership Academy and CCAT. Renewal interviews were held on January 11th and 13th in which commissioners participated. Ms. Felts stated that SCSC intends to bring recommendations for action at the March SCSC meeting if not before. Ms. Felts noted that while we would like to evaluate the 2014-2015 CCRPI scores for IPYM 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 60% of a school's CCRPI score is based solely on performance on state tests, SCSC staff has good idea of how both IPYM's and CCAT's CCRPI score will look. This information was already shared with commissioners.
14. Chairman Rippner then asked Mr. Stevens to explain the first SCSC recommendation, to amend the contracts of both Pataula and FLA to adopt the performance framework as their accountability metric. Chairman Rippner called for a motion to approve the recommendation. Commissioner Hogg provided a motion, and Commissioner Williams provided a second. Commissioners unanimously approved the motion.
15. Next Mr. Stevens explained the second recommendation, to amend Cirrus' charter contract to omit String Theory Schools as an educational service provider. Cirrus is now requesting a charter amendment to operate the school under the complete management of the governing board without the assistance of an educational service provider. The Cirrus board meet with SCSC staff and provided additional documentation demonstrating that the school can operate successfully in this manner. SCSC staff believes the school will provide a better educational opportunity to its students without the assistance of an educational services provider. Accordingly, SCSC staff recommended that the SCSC approve this amendment. Commissioner Rippner called a motion to approve the recommendation. Commissioner Lewis provided a motion and Commissioner Williams provided a second. The motion was open for discussion. Commissioner Williams asked the Cirrus Board Chair, Sheldon Hart, who was in attendance, if the school had a school leader. Mr. Hart said they currently have a temporary person on contract and hope to have a permanent leader by the end of the month. With no other discussion the recommendation came to a vote and was approved unanimously. Commissioner Lowden abstained from the vote.
16. Next Director Holliday informed commissioners that they are required to annually elect a board chairman and vice-chairman. Commissioner Lowden made a motion to re-elect Chairman Rippner as Chairman and Commissioner Williams as Vice Chairman. Commissioner Perez provided a second. The motion passed unanimously.
17. Chairman Rippner asked for additional items from commissioners, and she shared that the SCSC received the highest score possible on NACSA's state-level charter school authorizer rankings.

Chairman Rippner congratulated staff and commissioners on their hard work. Chairman Rippner shared that this is National School Choice week and for anyone interested a rally would be held outside the Capitol building today.

18. Chairman Rippner next called for public comment. There was none.

19. There being no further business before the SCSC, Chairman Rippner adjourned the meeting at approximately 11:00 a.m.