

STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS COMMISSION MEETING

July 31, 2013, 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 except Commissioner Jennifer Rippner.
2. Also present were Commission staff members Bonnie Holliday--Executive Director, Gregg Stevens--General Counsel, Lauren Wright—Director of Organizational and Resource Development, Terence Washington—Accountability Manager, and Daniela Belton—Business and Operations Manager.
3. Approximately 30 members of the public also attended the meeting including charter school staff and representatives, Georgia Charter Schools Association staff, and charter school business representatives.
4. A motion was made by Commissioner Hogg and seconded by Commissioner Lowden that the Commission approve the meeting minutes from the June 26th Commission 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 gave a brief update on the petition review process and announced the recent conclusion of the legal compliance review. Currently, SCSC staff are completing the substantive review phase and finalizing the petitioner interview schedule. Petitioner interviews will take place Monday, September 9th – Thursday, September 12th.
6. Director Holliday then announced that the following state charter school site visits had been scheduled since the last meeting: Atlanta Heights Charter/ Atlanta, GA (September 23rd—10am-12pm), Coweta Charter Academy, Coweta Co., GA (October 1st—10am-12pm), and Heritage Preparatory Academy/ Atlanta, GA (October 23rd, 10am-12pm). Director Holliday will coordinate with commissioners who are able to attend.
7. Director Holliday reminded all in attendance of the upcoming SCSC retreat which is scheduled to take place in Athens, GA at the UGA Center for Continuing Education on October 9th and 10th. The Carl Vinson Institute of Government at UGA will be working with commissioners to provide governance training and to serve as facilitators during the retreat.
8. Mr. Gregg Stevens then updated commissioners on the SCSC's compliance review findings. He explained that after carefully reviewing all petitions and consulting with the Attorney General's office, SCSC staff determined that four (4) of the sixteen (16) applications submitted as part of the 2013 Petition Cycle failed to adhere to the legal requirements in submitting the petition or

presented a charter school that would be substantially noncompliant with legal requirements in its operation. Those schools were 1) St. Augustine Preparatory Academy of Excellence, 2) NOBLE Virtual School of Georgia, 3) Fulton Science Academy High School, and 4) Fulton Sunshine Academy Elementary School. Mr. Stevens shared a memorandum detailing the deficiencies of each petition with commissioners, and he explained that the authority to identify and exclude schools from further review based on legal compliance issues is afforded to staff in current SCSC rule.

9. At this point, Chairman Knapp also noted that Mr. Stevens and Director Holliday had briefed him via conference call on the decision to remove the four identified schools from further consideration based on legal compliance issues. Chairman Knapp voiced support for those decisions and agreed with the staff's analysis and findings.
10. Next, Mr. Stevens updated commissioners on changes to Title I funding to schools that do not offer or participate in the National School Lunch Program. Mr. Stevens explained that during its July meeting, the State Board of Education approved federal program funding allocations to LEAs including the state charter schools. The SBOE did not, however, approve the allocation for Odyssey school (and its Georgia Cyber Academy program); this school's allocation is on hold while the Georgia Department of Education works to follow recent guidance from the United States Department of Education related to data reliability. Because the Title I funding formula is based on the percentage of students that meet federal poverty guidelines, the Georgia Department of Education usually uses data from students eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Lunches to determine each school's respective allocation. Not all charter schools participate in the National School Lunch Program, however, which calls into question the reliability of that data for those schools. As a result, the Georgia Department of Education received guidance from the United States Department of Education to calculate Title I allocations for schools without lunch programs by using an alternate dataset. This affects three state charter schools – 1) Odyssey, 2) Georgia Connections Academy, and 3) Provost Academy. Initially, the Department changed its calculation method for these schools for FY14 only; however, the Department must now re-calculate past Title I allocations for the identified schools for each year the allocation was calculated with potentially unreliable data. This means that FY14 allocations as well as past allocations will be adjusted to reflect any reductions or additions that result from the recalculation. Because Connections and Provost are so new, it is unlikely that they would experience any significant change in the allocation. Odyssey, however, was temporarily withheld from this year's allocations because the Georgia Department of Education will need to recalculate the school's Title I allocations as far back as FY09. Mr. Stevens explained that these recalculations could have a significant effect on the current fiscal year allocation for the school. As a result, SCSC staff are closely monitoring the situation and are ready to help both the school and the Department ensure that the needs of the students are met while adhering to the legal requirements of Title I.
11. In response to Mr. Steven's overview, Chairman Knapp inquired as to whether there was any discussion or apparent intention of reducing Title I allocations to virtual schools. Mr. Stevens and Director Holliday indicated that no such discussion had taken place to their knowledge and that the guidance from US Department of Education requiring an alternate dataset for schools lacking school lunch programs was necessitated by a need to verify the appropriate Title I allocation amount to which each school is entitled.

12. Chairman Knapp then addressed the agenda item related to amending the conflict of interest (COI) policy to include sanctions for breach or non-compliance. He called for a motion to amend the COI policy by adding the following consequences which were discussed at the June SCSC meeting: 1) censure and 2) referral to appropriate authority for enforcement of other applicable laws (in the event a violation of the conflict of interest policy was also a violation of the state code of ethics in law). Commissioner Lowden moved to accept the amendment, and Commissioner Lewis seconded the motion. Chairman Knapp then called for discussion. Hearing none, he called for a vote, and the motion was approved unanimously.
13. Chairman Knapp then updated the commission on a conference call that had taken place subsequent to the June SCSC meeting regarding the SCSC communications policy. Participating on the call were Chairman Knapp, Commissioner Perez, Commissioner Rippner, Director Holliday, and Mr. Stevens. The purpose of the call was to ensure agreement on 1) the interim communications policy and 2) the process for developing a permanent communications policy. Chairman Knapp committed to providing time on the SCSC retreat agenda for a full and robust discussion of the communication issue. He noted the need to strike a balance between equity and accessibility in commissioners' communications with the public.
14. Prior to adjourning the meeting, Chairman Knapp invited members of the audience to speak during the public comment period, but no one had signed up or indicated a desire to speak.
15. There being no further business to come before the Commission, a motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Williams and seconded by Commissioner Lewis. The motion was unanimously approved, and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 10:25am.