

STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS COMMISSION MEETING

March 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.
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 25 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. After calling the meeting to order, Chairman Rippner called for approval of the meeting minutes from the February 25th SCSC meeting. Commissioner Williams made a motion to approve the minutes, and Commissioner Perez provided a second. There was no discussion, and the minutes were unanimously approved.
5. Chairman Rippner then asked Director Holliday to review the portion of the agenda pertaining to agency-wide updates. Director Holliday discussed the SCSC's recent site visit to Ivy Prep Academy in Gwinnett County on March 23, 2015. Commissioner Hogg noted that he was very impressed with the school's college and career preparatory focus, and he highlighted the constructive use of project-based learning in classrooms. Commissioner Perez noted the positive aspects of the school's single-gender model, and he praised the school's atmosphere as being very engaging for students. Director Holliday then noted that the remaining quarterly site visits to state charter schools in 2015:
 - 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
6. 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 the completion of the SCSC's most recent research initiative: a Study of Virtual School Performance and Impact. This study was commissioned by the SCSC in response to commissioners' concerns about virtual school performance, and the research was conducted by Public Impact and NACSA. Director Holliday then presented findings from the

finalized research report, and she noted that the study represents Phase I of what she anticipates will be ongoing work in this area. She noted that the full report along with her summary presentation of findings will be posted on the SCSC website for public review.

7. Following the presentation, Chairman Rippner invited Matt Arkin, Principal of Georgia Cyber Academy, to provide comments on current virtual school performance and future virtual education research possibilities.
8. Director Holliday also provided an update on legislative affairs and noted that the SCSC's requested legislation which would allow the establishment of a dedicated nonprofit foundation passed the Senate and is scheduled for a vote in the House Education Committee on March 25th. She also 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. This legislation and the accompanying resolution passed the Senate and is scheduled for a vote on the House floor on March 25th. Director Holliday reminded commissioners about the option within the OSD legislation that would allow an OSD school to apply to the SCSC for state charter status. Next, Director Holliday updated commissioners on the progress of two bills that are scheduled for votes in the Senate Education committee on March 25th: one bill would allow charter schools to utilize weighted lotteries in order to increase their enrollment of educationally disadvantaged students, and the other bill would prohibit local municipal governments from requiring additional facilities inspections or regulations beyond those required by the GaDOE facilities division.
9. Next, Director Holliday apprised commissioners of the SCSC's continued outreach efforts. In order to encourage schools to locate in areas of high need, the SCSC included a letter of support with its 2015 application packet that highlighted the agency's commitment to providing high quality options to students who need them most. However, the letter makes clear that applicants from high-need areas—those areas ranking in the state's bottom quartile in terms of 2014 CCRPI performance—will not receive preferential treatment or scoring.
10. Next, Lauren Holcomb provided an update on recent SCSC trainings. She announced that the second installment of the Charter School Financial Certification Program (CSFCP) was scheduled to take place Feb. 25-27 but, due to the inclement weather, this training was rescheduled for April 28-30. Additionally, the third installment of the CSFCP is scheduled to take place on May 6-7. Lastly, Ms. Holcomb noted that a special TKES/LKES sustainability training for state charter schools will take place June 15-19.
11. Chairman Rippner then asked for an update on academic accountability. Director Holliday announced that the comprehensive accountability update will be delayed until the April meeting so that the staff can have additional time to present value-add accountability findings to schools prior to their public release. She also announced that in an ongoing effort to ensure the integrity of student assessments statewide, SCSC staff (in coordination with the Governor's Office of Student Achievement and the GaDOE) will conduct spot-check monitoring of state charters throughout the administration of state assessments. Monitoring will occur at various school testing sites—which will be selected at random—in order to assist GaDOE and GOSA in their efforts to maintain the validity and integrity of state assessments as well as student achievement results. Lastly, Director Holliday announced the release of new SCSC guidance

related to the 2014-2015 administration of the Georgia Milestones Assessments. This guidance is posted on the SCSC website.

12. Next, Terence Washington provided an update on financial and operational accountability. Mr. Washington noted that staff recently conducted compliance monitoring visits to Georgia Cyber Academy, Georgia Connections Academy, Coweta Charter Academy, Cherokee Charter Academy, Ivy Prep at Kirkwood, Ivy Prep Young Men's Leadership Academy, and Ivy Prep Academy in Gwinnett. He explained that the SCSC has visited all but three of the SCSC's operational schools to date. Next, Mr. Washington updated commissioners on the SCSC's financial auditing program. He noted that the three Ivy Prep Academies submitted completed financial audits following the February 2015 SCSC meeting. He also noted that—to date—12 of 15 SCSC schools have chosen to participate in the SCSC's auditing program for FY16.
13. Morgan Felts then provided an update on legal compliance. She noted that the SCSC released its 2015 petition application on February 26th, and the deadline for submission is May 15, 2015. Ms. Felts explained that the SCSC staff would begin compiling interview panels once all applications are submitted.
14. Next, Gregg Stevens provided an update on Byron-Peach Charter High School's attempt to obtain clearance from the U.S. Department of Justice to open in fall of 2015. Mr. Stevens noted that the school sought to intervene in the desegregation case pending in the United States District Court for the Middle District of Georgia. Mr. Stevens informed the SCSC that the judge currently presiding over that case scheduled a hearing for March 31st to hear arguments from the parties regarding the need for the continuation of the current consent order that has been in place since 1974.
15. 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 recommendations to amend the attendance zones of three SCSC schools: 1) Ivy Preparatory Academy in Kirkwood, 2) Ivy Preparatory Young Men's Leadership Academy, and 3) Ivy Preparatory Academy in Gwinnett. The two Ivy Prep Academies currently serving DeKalb County (Ivy Prep Kirkwood and Ivy Prep Young Men's) hope to expand their respective attendance zones so as to include the Atlanta Public Schools (APS) attendance zone. The Ivy Preparatory Academy in Gwinnett hopes to expand its existing attendance zone to include the Fulton and DeKalb county school attendance zones.
16. At this point, Chairman Rippner took up the recommendation to approve a charter amendment for Ivy Preparatory Young Men's Leadership Academy. Commissioner Williams made a motion to approve the recommendation, and Commissioner Lowden seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.
17. Chairman Rippner then took up the recommendation to approve a charter amendment for Ivy Preparatory Academy in Kirkwood. Commissioner Lewis made a motion to approve the recommendation, and Commissioner Hogg seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

18. Chairman Rippner then took up the recommendation to approve a charter amendment for Ivy Preparatory Academy in Gwinnett. Commissioner Hogg made a motion to approve the recommendation, and Commissioner Hogg seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.
19. Next, Gregg Stevens explained three staff recommendations related to SCSC administrative withholdings. These recommendations are summarized as follows:
 - Regarding the amended budget for Fiscal Year 2015 (AFY15): According to the Amended FY15 allotment sheet, the 2% withhold for the commission has increased—in proportion to SCSC school earnings—following the midterm budget adjustment. Because the SCSC’s annual operating budget is based on the original (pre-midterm adjustment) amount, SCSC staff recommend that commissioners approve the redistribution of the “overage” amount (approximately \$ 424,000) to state charter schools on a pro rata basis.
 - Regarding the budget for Fiscal Year 2016 (FY16): State law provides that the SCSC is authorized to withhold a 3% administrative fee from existing schools to cover operational costs. For the last two years, the SCSC has voted to decrease that withholding so as to keep as many dollars as possible in the hands of state charter schools. As a result, the SCSC staff again recommends that commissioners reduce the amount of withholding from 3% to 2% (for existing schools) and to 1% for new schools in their first year of operation during FY16.
 - Regarding end-of-year closeout procedures for the current fiscal year (FY15 Closeout): As the SCSC finishes out the final quarter of FY15, the SCSC staff requests permission to return any remaining funds (as of June 30, 2015) to schools on a pro rata basis. Since QBE funds do not lapse, the schools will be able to carry over any dollars that are returned to them.
20. At this point, Chairman Rippner took up the recommendation to approve the redistribution of the FY15 “overage” amount (approximately \$ 424,000) to state charter schools on a pro rata basis. Commissioner Lewis made a motion to approve the recommendation, and Commissioner Williams seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.
21. Chairman Rippner then took up the recommendation to reduce the amount of withholding from 3% to 2% (for existing schools) and to 1% for new schools in their first year of operation during FY16. Commissioner Lowden made a motion to approve the recommendation, and Commissioner Perez seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.
22. Lastly, Chairman Rippner then took up the recommendation to return any remaining funds (as of June 30, 2015) to SCSC schools on a pro rata basis. Commissioner Williams made a motion to approve the recommendation, and Commissioner Lewis seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.
23. Chairman Rippner then congratulated Commissioner Hogg for receiving the J.L. McGarity Citizenship Award from the Walton County Chamber of Commerce. Several commissioners thanked him for his work within his community.
24. Next, Chairman Rippner announced that the annual SCSC governance and policy retreat is scheduled to take place May 12-13, 2015.

25. Chairman Rippner then called for public comment. Kendra Shipmon and Monty Green from Ivy Preparatory Academies thanked commissioners for approving the Ivy Prep charter amendment requests.
26. There being no further business before the SCSC, Chairman Rippner asked for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Perez offered a motion, and Commissioner Williams provided a second. The motion was unanimously approved, and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:45a.m.