

## STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS COMMISSION MEETING

May 24, 2017, 10:00 a.m.

State Charter Schools Commission Conference Room  
East Twin Tower, Room 1470B, Atlanta, Georgia 30334

### Meeting Minutes

1. The meeting was called to order by Chairman Jennifer Rippner at approximately 10:00 am. Commissioner Tom Lewis attended the meeting in person, and Chairman Rippner, Commissioners Jose Perez, Clara Keith, Paul Williams, and Tony Lowden attended via conference call. Chairman Rippner verified that a quorum was present. Commissioner Jimmy Hogg was absent.
2. Also present were Commission staff members Bonnie Holliday—Executive Director, Gregg Stevens—Deputy Director and General Counsel, Morgan Felts—Associate General Counsel and Petitions Manager, and Sarah Beck—Business Operations Manager.
3. Approximately 10 members of the public also attended the meeting including charter school staff and representatives, charter school business representatives, and Georgia Department of Education representatives.
4. Chairman Rippner asked Ms. Morgan Felts to present on the action item. Ms. Felts presented the SCSC’s staff recommendation for approval of International Academy of Smyrna’s charter petition for a three-year probationary charter term. International Academy of Smyrna (IAS) is a locally-approved start-up charter school operating under the authorization of the Cobb County Board of Education (CCBOE) and the State Board of Education (SBOE). On April 20, 2017, the Cobb County Board of Education voted to deny a renewal of IAS’s charter contract citing academic and financial deficiencies. Following the district’s denial of this renewal request, IAS requested consideration by SBOE for authorization as a State Chartered Special School. The SBOE and GaDOE investigated the conditions under which IAS had been operating as a locally approved charter school and determined that the school’s appeal warranted further review. The SBOE also determined, however, that the SCSC was the most appropriate authorizer to review IAS’s petition application. As a result, the school submitted an application for renewal to the SCSC pursuant to the expedited petition process for existing schools. In response to the school’s request, SCSC staff evaluated the school’s petition to the SCSC and performance on the Comprehensive Performance Framework (CPF). The school did not meet in academics or finances under the CPF, and the SCSC was unable to evaluate the school under the operations section of the CPF since it has not operated as its own LEA. Ms. Felts explained that under typical circumstances, the school’s performance track record would not warrant SCSC authorization. However, the school cited (and provides evidence of) dynamic external events outside the school’s control as an explanation for poor performance. Upon special request from the SBOE in this very unusual circumstance, the SCSC has given additional consideration to the following issues:
  - The school experienced significant and documented funding discrepancies. For the last 3 years, the school received an average of \$1,853 per pupil less than the average brick-and-

mortar state charter school. The school alleges that this funding differential contributed to the loss of experienced teachers as well as the school's inability to fund and implement a comprehensive remediation program to curtail declining student performance.

- The school's local authorizer failed to abide by the National Association of Charter School Authorizer's (NACSA) identified Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing. The importance of authorizer integrity gained attention during the 2017 legislative session when the Georgia General Assembly passed and Governor Deal signed HB 430 which requires the creation of a code of principles to establish high-quality authorizing practices for all Georgia authorizers, including local districts. The implementation and application of such principles will help to prevent any future instances of inequitable treatment of charters by their authorizers. Unfortunately, the provisions of HB 430 do not apply retroactively, and IAS did not receive annual evaluations and/or written documentation of deficiencies until well after the time for remediation had passed. This left the school without the opportunity to demonstrate the capacity for the timely correction of identified issues.

5. Commissioners then discussed the action item and felt comfortable approving IAS because the school provided evidence and SCSC staff verified the presence of dynamic external circumstances beyond the school's control. The motion for approval was made by Commissioner Lewis and seconded by Commissioner Lowden. Chairman Rippner called for a vote and the recommendation was unanimously approved by those present.
6. There being no further business before the SCSC, Chairman Rippner adjourned the meeting at approximately 10:27 a.m.