

STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS COMMISSION MEETING

November 20, 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 at approximately 10:00 AM by Commission Chair Charles B. Knapp. Chairman Knapp verified that a quorum existed and that all members of the commission were present.
2. Also present were Commission staff members Gregg Stevens—General Counsel, Daniela Belton—Business and Operations Manager, Lauren Wright—Director of Organizational and Resource Development, Terence Washington—Accountability Manager. Morgan Felts from the Georgia Department of Education’s Charter School Division was also present.
3. Approximately 10 members of the public also attended the meeting, including charter school staff and representatives and charter school business representatives.
4. A motion was made by Commissioner Lowden and seconded by Commissioner Perez that the Commission approve the meeting minutes from the October 30th SCSC meeting. The minutes were unanimously approved.
5. Chairman Knapp then requested that Gregg Stevens address the items listed under Section II of the agenda. Mr. Stevens provided an update on recent state charter school site visits. On November 5th, Mr. Stevens visited Charter Conservatory for Liberal Arts and Technology (CCAT) in Bulloch County. Mr. Stevens noted the school’s recent achievement to be identified as a Title I reward school and that the school’s teamwork is a large factor in its success. Chairman Knapp remarked that CCAT was one of the first schools considered and approved by the SCSC’s predecessor and that its achievement as a reward school truly is an accomplishment. On November 13th, Director Holliday, Mr. Stevens, and Commissioner Lowden visited Georgia Connections Academy in Duluth. Commissioner Lowden commented on the passion of the staff at the school, particularly its dedication to its virtual physical education program.
6. Chairman Knapp requested that Terence Washington provide an overview of school accountability. Mr. Washington outlined that CCAT was designated as a 2013 Title I Reward School for High Progress and that Mountain Education Center was designated as a 2013 Alert school due to its graduation rate. Mr. Washington also outlined the criteria for those designations. Chairman Knapp commented that as all schools identified as Alert schools for their graduation rates were alternative high schools, the work of the SCSC to identify more accurate methods to hold alternative schools accountable takes even more importance.
7. Mr. Stevens then reported that the SCSC was invited to sit on the Data Management Committee for Georgia’s state longitudinal data system (SLDS), which will help ensure that state charter

schools have access to the (SLDS) and that the SCSC will be able to utilize the data to monitor schools and hold them accountable.

8. Mr. Stevens recapped the SCSC discussion at the policy retreat regarding charter school networks. Mr. Stevens explained that the Commissioners charged staff to create guidance for petitioners wishing to create charter schools that exist as part of a network and that staff had completed that task by creating a document that established evaluation priorities for petitions of charter schools that are part of a network. The evaluation priorities generally outline the expectation that each charter school that intends to replicate as part of a network will need to demonstrate its past history of student achievement, operational sustainability, and governing capacity to oversee multiple schools.
9. Chairman Knapp then explained that he and the SCSC staff were working to clarify aspects of a school's ability to seek and utilize a statewide attendance zone and that staff will be able to update the SCSC in the coming months.
10. Next, Lauren Wright provided an overview of the SCSC's November newsletter, and she highlighted the addition of a tentative schedule for upcoming trainings on the SCSC website and the following upcoming training opportunities:
 - Governance Training—December 9th & 10th, Emory University Conference Center
 - Accounting Training—January 14th & 15th, Floyd Veterans Building (East tower; DECAL Conference Room)
 - Boot Camp for New Petitioners —January 2014 (Date TBD)

Commissioner Rippner inquired as to the mandatory nature of the Governance Training. Ms. Wright explained that the SCSC is required by law to provide the training and that the boards of the state charter schools are required by law to attend. Ms. Wright also noted that, for this year only, the SCSC is providing some flexibility to state charter schools that identify they have or will be able to fulfill training requirements through other means. Commissioner Lewis requested that the SCSC provide attendees of the Governance Training certificates evidencing that they met the training requirements.

11. Chairman Knapp then requested for Mr. Washington to discuss the financial outlook of Heritage Preparatory Academy (Heritage). Mr. Washington stated that SCSC staff met with the leadership of Heritage in early November to discuss the school's financial footing and possible future outcomes. Mr. Washington noted that the school has not submitted an audit that was due at the end of October and that SCSC staff is exploring retaining an independent consultant to examine the school's mid-year progress. Chairman Knapp urged SCSC staff to engage an independent expert as soon as possible and requested that the expert attend the SCSC's January meeting to provide an update. Commissioners and SCSC staff then discussed the potential consequences and outcomes that may ensue as a result of the school's financial situation. Mr. Stevens noted that termination of the school's charter was one possible action and that additional actions may be possible depending on the level of the school's cooperation. Commissioner Hogg noted that the financial difficulty of Heritage illustrated the need for the SCSC to apply a rigorous review of new schools. Commissioner Perez emphasized the need to also examine the educational product provided by the school given its economic troubles. Commissioners Rippner and Lowden inquired as to the staff's planning for various outcomes, and Mr. Stevens noted that SCSC staff is preparing for many scenarios, including school closure.

Chairman Knapp requested that staff be prepared to outline the options and outlook of the school at the January meeting.

12. Next, Mr. Washington outlined the work to finalize a report on funding for virtual schools that compares funding across several states and describes the funding needs and levels within Georgia. Mr. Washington indicated that the report will be finalized in the next few days and will be available to Commissioners as soon as possible.
13. Mr. Stevens then updated the Commissioners with the action taken by the State Board of Education to affirm the SCSC decision to grant a five year charter to Utopian Academy for the Arts, which will allow the school to proceed with its plans to open in the 2014-2015 school year.
14. Chairman Knapp requested that Mr. Stevens give a broad overview of the need and process to for reviewing petitions for charter renewal. Mr. Stevens noted that as the SCSC granted a one-year charter to Scholars Academy; thus, the SCSC must determine its process for considering a renewal of that charter. Mr. Stevens summarized that petitions for charter renewals focus largely on the school's history of student performance and its compliance with its charter and requirements of law. As a result, the SCSC can review petitions for renewal in a very expeditious manner. Mr. Stevens also remarked that SCSC staff proposes to utilize the renewal process to consider charter schools authorized by another authorizer that desire to be authorized by the SCSC. Mr. Stevens provided a brief legal overview as to how and why that transition may occur. Mr. Stevens then detailed the process that staff would utilize to make recommendations regarding petitions for charter renewal. He outlined that SCSC staff would review the school's original charter; a brief narrative by the school; a summary of the school's charter compliance; a proposed budget; existing financial reports and audits; input from the school's current authorizer; and publically available information. Mr. Stevens delineated the timeline for considering renewals would include a deadline for petitioners on December 20th, petition interviews in January, and SCSC decisions at the end of February. Chairman Knapp requested that Commissioners serve on the interview panels. Commissioner Rippner commended staff on proposing a process that would not overburden petitioners. Chairman Knapp called for a motion to approve the process for renewal as outlined by SCSC staff. Commissioner Lewis made a motion that was seconded by Commissioner Lowden. There was no discussion, and this motion was approved unanimously.
15. Chairman Knapp then addressed additional items from Commissioners and invited Commissioner Williams to discuss the potential for the SCSC to conduct another review of petitioners that were close to approval in the 2013 Petition Review Cycle. Commissioner Williams stated that he originally desired the SCSC to consider an additional review cycle following the 2013 Petition Review Cycle, but after further considering the matter with others and after receiving additional information from SCSC staff, Commissioner Williams was pleased to see that SCSC staff was planning to implement additional opportunities for petitioners in later petition cycles. Mr. Stevens emphasized that the staff's highest priority for change in the upcoming cycle is to afford petitioners a greater opportunity to resolve aspects of their petitions in certain instances. Commissioner Lewis noted that all parties must have a clear expectation of potential outcomes and expectations and that the SCSC will always face a point of hard decisions. Mr. Stevens commented that affording petitioners additional opportunities will inevitably delay the opening date of the proposed school and that all stakeholders need to be

aware of that possibility. Chairman Knapp requested that SCSC staff be prepared to discuss updates to the petition review process the January meeting.

16. Next, Chairman Knapp remarked that the SCSC will not meet in December and that the SCSC meeting schedule to meet on the final Wednesday of each month, except December, will continue for the 2014 calendar year. Accordingly, Chairman Knapp announced that the next meeting will occur on January 29, 2014, at 10:00 AM in the DECAL conference room.
17. Prior to adjourning the meeting, Chairman Knapp invited members of the audience to speak during the public comment period. No member of the audience chose to address the SCSC.
18. There being no further business to come before the Commission, a motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Perez and seconded by Commissioner Lowden. The motion was unanimously approved, and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:00 AM.