

State Charter Schools Commission of Georgia

Summary of Findings and Recommendation Commission Charter Application for Expedited Review

School: Scholars Academy located in Riverdale, Georgia

Scholars Academy opened as a state-chartered special school in 2008.

The mission of Scholars Academy is “to provide creative, hands-on learning environment that increases academic achievement, ownership of learning and community involvement in the development of global learners.”

Attendance Zone: Clayton County

Grade Levels Served: Kindergarten – Grade 5

Recommendation: It is recommended that the State Charter Schools Commission **approve** a one-year charter for Scholars Academy to run from July 1, 2013- June 30, 2014.

Note: Scholars Academy is concluding a five-year term that ran from 2008-2013, and the school was granted a renewal for subsequent five-year charter term to run from July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2018 by the State Board of Education in 2012. A shorter term is recommended for approval by the Commission because of the school’s performance track record. The school has a history of governance issues and mixed academic results (more details included in the summary of findings below); however, the school remains comparable to Clayton County in the areas of English Language Arts and Social Studies. As a result, a one-year term is recommended to allow the Commission to evaluate whether the recent governance changes and remediation/intervention plans result in significant improvements in 2012-2013 data.

Summary of Findings: Academics (Educational Plan)

Scholars Academy serves Kindergarten through fifth-grade students with the Expeditionary Learning model in which students are actively engaged in learning in a hands-on learning environment. Additionally, Scholars Academy is implementing a Spanish program where all students receive 30 minutes of Spanish instruction daily. Finally, the school has adopted a longer school day so as to spend more time on core subjects without sacrificing other areas of learning.

While Scholars Academy maintains rigorous performance-based goals and measurable objectives designed to improve student achievement that directly relate to increased performance on the CRCTs and the ITBS, the school’s academic performance record is generally substandard. In 2012, the school performed below the Clayton County district average (which is also below the State average) in every CRCT content area except English/Language Arts. However, Scholars Academy made AYP for the 2010-2011 school year, and although AYP was not calculated for 2011-2012, Scholars Academy demonstrated moderate growth in all areas except Math.

Capacity (Organizational Plan)

Scholars Academy has maintained consistent enrollment since it opened in 2009. The school recently completed an admissions lottery for the 2013-2014 school year as demand exceeded current enrollment capacity.

In 2011, the school’s governing board found evidence that funds were mismanaged. As a result, the principal, CFO, and Title I Coordinator were replaced. Additionally, the school was out of compliance with the highly qualified teacher certification requirement. As a result, all teachers that were not

highly-qualified (70% of whom were hired by the ex-principal) were not re-employed at the end of the 2011-2012 school year. Scholars Academy has since hired a new principal and a new CFO were hired, and the principal has also assumed the role of Title 1 Coordinator to ensure compliance with all state mandated policies and procedures. The president of the governing board also resigned at the end of the third year and a new president was appointed.

Significant Changes from Previous Charter

All academic goals have been updated to reflect the state-wide change in federal accountability. New goals are aligned with the state performance targets and the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI).

Additional Assurances:

Scholars Academy completed GaDOE's full petition review process (requesting renewal) within the last year, and was recommended for renewal by GaDOE staff in 2012.