

STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS COMMISSION MEETING

September 25, 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 Jose Perez. Commissioner Perez arrived at approximately 10:15.
2. Also present were Commission staff members Bonnie Holliday--Executive Director, Gregg Stevens--General Counsel, and Daniela Belton—Business and Operations Manager. Staff member Lauren Wright—Director of Organizational and Resource Development was offsite attending the Georgia Charter Schools Association’s Educator Conference that day in Gwinnett County and Terence Washington—Accountability Manager was offsite conducting enrollment head count visits.
3. Approximately 25 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 Lewis and seconded by Commissioner Williams that the Commission approve the meeting minutes from the August 28th SCSC 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 provided an update on recent state charter school site visits. On September 17th, Director Holliday, Mr. Stevens, Chairman Knapp and Commissioners Hogg, Perez and Lowden visited Ivy Preparatory Academy at Kirkwood (single-gender girls’ school) and Ivy Preparatory Young Men’s Leadership Academy (single-gender boys’ school). Chairman Knapp noted recent leadership changes at the school and commended the new school-level leadership team. Commissioner Lowden voiced support for a boys’ school in an inner-city environment, and Commissioner Hogg commended both schools’ commitment to adapt various aspects of operations and curriculum in order to improve previously identified deficiencies or issues. On September 24th, Mr. Stevens, Ms. Wright, and Commissioners Williams and Hogg visited Atlanta Heights Charter School. Commissioner Williams commented that the Atlanta Heights student ambassadors with whom he interacted during the visit displayed strong soft skills and leadership traits, and Commissioner Hogg commented that he was impressed with the student support systems that the governance board had implemented at the school.
6. Director Holliday then reminded Commissioners that the following state charter school site visits had been scheduled: Coweta Charter Academy, Coweta Co., GA (October 1st—10am-12pm), and Heritage Preparatory Academy/ Atlanta, GA (October 23rd, 10am-12pm), Charter Conservatory for Liberal Arts and Technology (CCAT)/ Statesboro, GA (November 5th, 11am-1pm), and

Connections Academy/ Atlanta, GA (November 13th, 10am-12pm). Director Holliday will coordinate with commissioners who are able to attend.

7. Director Holliday then updated commissioners on the upcoming governance and policy retreat scheduled for October 9th and 10th in Athens, GA. She walked through the retreat agenda which focuses on how the commissioners function as a board (Day 1) and how the commission can further the work of the agency (Day 2). The retreat will be facilitated by representatives from the Carl Vinson Institute of Government.
8. Next, Daniela Belton provided an overview of the SCSC's August September newsletter. She emphasized the completion of the consolidated reporting timeline which is posted on the website and highlighted in the newsletter, and she announced the governance board training that will be provided to all state charter schools free of charge in November 2013.
9. Director Holliday next gave a brief update on the commission staff's work on developing a comprehensive accountability plan that will aid in annual evaluations and renewal decisions. The SCSC is in the process of contracting with the state accountability agency (GOSA) for a sophisticated analysis which will use both student and school-level data to explore state charter school performance. This analysis will yield unique insight into A) student growth, B) value-add, and C) overall achievement for each SCSC approved school. GOSA is exploring partnerships with various IHE's to conduct this work and plans to complete the analysis by the end of December, 2013.
10. Chairman Knapp then requested Mr. Stevens discuss the funding items in Section E. of the agenda. Mr. Stevens announced that the SCSC is currently conducting school-level head-count visits to verify the enrollment projections previously submitted by schools for forward funding purposes. Mr. Stevens also announced that GaDOE recently recommended to the State Board of Education the award of facility grant funds to three SCSC approved schools: Fulton Leadership Academy, Pataula Charter Academy, and Atlanta Heights Charter.
11. Next, Mr. Stevens encouraged schools to review the consolidated reporting timeline that is posted on the SCSC website and included in the September newsletter to ensure they meet deadlines as required by their charter contracts.
12. Mr. Stevens also provided an overview of a financial issue that recently came to light with regard to Heritage Preparatory Academy (HPA). HPA recently withdrew from the State Health Benefit Plan with an outstanding financial obligation to the Department of Community Health. As authorized by state law, DCH requested cessation of all appropriations from the State Board of Education until they the school fulfilled their payment to the DCH. The school has fulfilled this obligation, and SCSC staff will work closely with the school to determine ongoing financial viability. In light of this situation, commissioners asked staff to develop an overall monitoring and oversight plan to ensure the commission is proactive in identifying and preventing these types of issues in the future. Staff will present this plan at the October SCSC meeting.
13. Mr. Stevens then discussed the recent petitioner interviews that took place earlier in September as part of the petition review process. Each interview panel was comprised of SCSC staff members, at least one commissioner, various state-level education and policy actors, and a national charter school expert. Following interviews, the panel held a thorough discussion of

the proposed school, its plans, and the progress it had made to date, and the SCSC staff formulated a recommendation based on the consensus of the interview panel. The SCSC staff and SCSC then discussed the staff recommendations for each petitioner.

14. At this point, Chairman Knapp emphasized that statewide attendance zones were not a mechanism through which applicants could avoid petitioning local districts for approval, and he reiterated that schools claiming statewide attendance zones must demonstrate their capacity to serve multiple districts and/or large portions of the state. Commissioner Perez then questioned what the Commission might do to better prepare applicants in light of the pending recommendations for denial. Commissioner Rippner noted, however, that the proportion of denials relative to overall submissions was not atypical from a national perspective, and Commissioners Lewis and Lowden cautioned against lowering standards in an effort to approve more schools.
15. Chairman Knapp then reported that the SCSC meeting schedule had been adjusted for November and December. The November meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, November 20th and the December meeting is currently cancelled.
16. Prior to adjourning the meeting, Chairman Knapp invited members of the audience to speak during the public comment period, and Danielle LeSure, Director of Education Policy at Georgia Center for Opportunity requested additional guidance on how to craft a successful state charter school petition.
17. There being no further business to come before the Commission, a motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Williams and seconded by Commissioner Perez. The motion was unanimously approved, and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:45am.