

STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS COMMISSION MEETING

September 24, 2014, 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 Tom Lewis.
2. Also present were Commission staff members Bonnie Holliday—Executive Director, Gregg Stevens—General Counsel and Petitions Manager, Lauren Holcomb—Director of Organizational and Resource Development, Daniela Belton—Business and Operations Manager, Terence Washington—Financial and Operational Accountability Manager.
3. Approximately 80 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. A motion was made by Commissioner Hogg and seconded by Commissioner Williams to approve the meeting minutes from the August 27th SCSC meeting as well as the Sept. 4th and 5th SCSC Governance and Policy Retreat. The minutes were unanimously approved by all commissioners present (6-0 vote).
5. Director Holliday then introduced two new SCSC interns: Thomas Price (Georgia State University's Master of Economics Program) and Eulen Jang (University of Georgia's School of Law).
6. Director Holliday also announced that the State Board of Education officially affirmed the SCSC's approvals issued at the August SCSC meeting of Byron-Peach Charter High School, Foothills Education Charter High School, International Charter School of Atlanta, and Georgia School for Innovation and the Classics.
7. Next, Director Holliday reported on the topics covered at the SCSC's Governance and Policy Retreat that took place on September 4-5, 2014 at Brasstown Valley Resort. She noted that policy discussions during the retreat were guided by the overarching question "What will be the long-term impact of the SCSC on the education landscape in Georgia?", and areas of focus included school accountability for brick-and-mortar as well as virtual schools, succession planning for both commissioners and staff, and overall communication efforts.
8. Chairman Knapp then reiterated the SCSC's commitment to upholding high accountability standards, closing low performing schools, and providing students a better educational opportunity than they would otherwise receive. Commissioner Lowden echoed these sentiments and added that if charter schools don't provide a high quality choice option, they are serving to perpetuate the status quo in education. Commissioner Williams also noted that state charter

schools have a responsibility first to their students and second to the reform movement as a whole, and strong performance at the school-level is the key to sustaining the charter school sector.

9. Chairman Knapp then asked Terence Washington to provide an update on upcoming financial submission deadlines for state charter schools. Mr. Washington reminded all who were present that the deadline for state charter schools to submit completed FY14 financial audits is October 1, 2014. Additionally, the deadline for schools to submit required DE046 reports is September 30th. Any school that does not meet these deadline will be issued a letter that will ultimately be placed in the school's accountability folder.
10. Next, Lauren Holcomb provided an update on organizational development. She reviewed the monthly newsletter and provided an overview of the SCSC's first training of Fall 2014: a Resource Development training held on September 16th in the West Tower of the Floyd Government Building. She also announced upcoming trainings which include: Federal Grant Management Training on October 2 in the DECAL Conference room of the Floyd Government Building, and the School Governance Training on October 9-10 at Callaway Gardens. Ms. Holcomb reminded all who were present that attendance at the school governance training is mandatory for all state charter school boards, and there will be two chances to fulfill the requirement—October and February.
11. Ms. Holcomb then announced the completion of the SCSC's latest research project titled *Starting Strong: Best Practices in Starting a Charter School*, and gave an overview of findings from the final report. This study was commissioned by the SCSC and conducted by researchers from Peabody College at Vanderbilt University, and it focuses on academic and operational practices commonly employed by high-performing start-up charter schools. The report is available on the SCSC's website. Additional SCSC research projects currently underway include: 1) a national virtual school impact and performance assessment and 2) a state-specific economic impact study that identifies the impact of charter schools on the communities they serve. Additionally, the SCSC is also preparing to contract with GOSA and GSU to conduct the 2nd annual Value Add Analysis; however, data will not be available for the study until late fall so the VAA completion date will likely be February 2015.
12. Director Holliday then announced that the timing of GaDOE's data upload to the GA AWARDS data system will not likely happen until after the 2014 CCRPI scores are released (late fall 2014), and as a result—the SCSC's plans to roll out a performance framework will also be delayed. The performance framework and individual school accountability profiles will not likely be published until Spring 2015.
13. Chairman Knapp then requested Mr. Stevens discuss the recent recommendations for approval of three new schools that applied to the SCSC during the 2014 petition cycle. Mr. Stevens discussed the staff recommendations for each petitioner and addressed questions from commissioners.
14. Next, petitioners were allowed to address the SCSC prior to commissioners' votes on the recommendations. Representatives from Cirrus Academy Charter School (Pam Brown), DuBois Integrity Academy (Craig Cason), and Scintilla Charter Academy (Zachary Cowart) spoke in support

of their respective charter petitions. Upon conclusion of petitioner comment, Chairman Knapp announced that votes would be taken individually by school.

15. Prior to taking up the Cirrus Academy recommendation, Commissioner Lowden recused himself from the vote. At that point, Commissioner Rippner made a motion that was seconded by Commissioner Williams to approve the recommendation of approval for Cirrus Academy Charter School. There was no discussion, and the motion was approved by a 5-0 vote (Commissioner Lowden recused; Commissioner Lewis absent).
16. Commissioner Lowden then made a motion that was seconded by Commissioner Hogg to approve the recommendation of approval for DuBois Integrity Academy. Prior to voting, Chairman Knapp called for discussion, and Commissioner Lowden congratulated the petitioner for working hard to clarify technical information for SCSC staff following the petitioner's interview. Chairman Knapp then called for a vote, and the motion passed by a 6-0 vote (Commissioner Lewis absent).
17. Prior to taking up the recommendation for Scintilla Academy Charter School, Commissioner Williams recused himself from the vote. Commissioner Rippner then made a motion that was seconded by Commissioner Perez to approve the recommendation of approval for Scintilla Academy Charter School. Prior to voting, Chairman Knapp called for discussion, and Commissioner Rippner inquired about the meaning of the school's name. SCSC staff explained the name means "a little spark". Chairman Knapp then called for a vote, and the motion passed by a 5-0 vote (Commissioner Williams recused; Commissioner Lewis absent).
18. Next, Chairman Knapp asked Gregg Stevens to discuss rulemaking procedures. Mr. Stevens presented a recommendation to initiate rulemaking procedures in accordance with the Georgia Administrative Procedure Act. He noted the staff's intent to amend four of the SCSC's existing rules. The proposed rule amendments are intended to clarify existing SCSC practice and procedure— particularly with regard to the petition review process. Additional proposed amendments include changes in wording and phrasing to improve readability, clarification of trainings required for state charter schools, and outline school enrollment priorities to incorporate applicable law. Mr. Stevens reminded commissioners that rulemaking procedures require a public comment period of at least 30 days prior to adoption of the rule changes, and the SCSC's approval of the staff recommendation would allow the SCSC to begin the administrative process of initiating the public comment period required for subsequent rule adoption at the SCSC's October 29th meeting. Mr. Stevens also noted that SCSC staff already sought feedback on existing rules from all the state charter school leaders and board members, GCSA, and GaDOE.
19. At that point, Commissioner Lowden made a motion that was seconded by Commissioner Hogg to approve the staff recommendation to initiate rulemaking procedures. There was no discussion, and the motion as approved by a 6-0 vote (Commissioner Lewis absent).
20. Mr. Stevens then announced that the SCSC needs to amend its bylaws to require SCSC approval of the Executive Director's proposed budget for the upcoming fiscal year. The amended bylaws were provided to commissioners, and they included the requested change for budget approval in future fiscal years as well as other minor changes to streamline SCSC operation.

Commissioners were asked to review the proposed amendments and to provide feedback to SCSC staff prior to the October meeting. The SCSC will be asked to vote on the amended bylaws at its October 29th meeting.

21. During the public comment portion of the meeting, Artesius Miller—Executive Director of Utopian Academy for the Arts—introduced the school’s student ambassadors for the month of September. Ambassadors are selected based on positive track records in academics and behavior, and they are rewarded with a field trip to the monthly SCSC meeting. The students addressed commissioners to communicate their satisfaction with the fine arts curriculum offered at Utopian Academy.
22. There being no further business before the SCSC, Chairman Knapp asked for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Perez offered a motion and Commissioner Rippner provided a second. The motion was unanimously approved, and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:40 a.m.