

STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS COMMISSION MEETING

February 22, 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 Vice Chairman Paul Williams at approximately 10:00 a.m. Chairman Jeniffer Rippner was absent. Vice Chairman Williams verified that a quorum was present.
2. Also present were Commission staff members Bonnie Holliday—Executive Director, Gregg Stevens—Deputy Director and General Counsel, Lauren Holcomb – Director of Organizational and Resource Development, Terence Washington—Financial and Operational Accountability Manager, Morgan Felts—Associate General Counsel and Petitions Manager, Katie Manthey—Academic Accountability Manager, and Sarah Beck—Business Operations Manager.
3. Approximately 20 members of the public also attended the meeting including charter school staff and representatives, charter school business representatives, and Georgia Charter Schools Association representatives were also present.
4. Vice Chairman Williams called for approval of the meeting minutes from the January 25th SCSC meeting. Commissioner Tom Lewis made a motion to approve the minutes, and Commissioner Tony Lowden provided a second. The minutes were unanimously approved by those present.
5. Vice Chairman Williams then asked Executive Director Holliday to review the portion of the agenda pertaining to agency-wide updates. Director Holliday recognized three new SCSC interns who were in the audience: Quynh Ngo, Antoinette Rochester, and Laurin Vonada.
6. Vice Chairman Williams then introduced Ms. Clara Keith as the newest SCSC Commissioner joining the State Charter Schools Commission. Commissioner Keith was nominated by Governor Nathan Deal and filled the vacancy created by Suzanne Werner’s term expiring. Commissioner Keith has served the Georgia Department of Education for twenty-six years in various roles, including Associate Superintendent for Federal Programs, Deputy Superintendent for Policy and External Affairs and Associate Superintendent for Georgia’s Race to the Top grant.
7. Vice Chairman Williams asked Director Holliday to discuss the SCSC’s scheduled site visits. Director Holliday then noted that the 3rd quarter informal site visit is scheduled for Liberty Tech Charter School on either March 27th or March 30th, 2017 from 10:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m.
8. Vice Chairman Williams then asked Director Holliday to provide legislative updates. Director Holliday discussed HB 139, which requires the disclosure of schools’ financial data, HB 338, which provides a system of support for failing schools, HB 423, which allows state charter schools to have access to unused facilities at no cost, and HB 430, which provides implementations from the Governor’s Education Reform Commission with respect to charter schools.

9. Next, Vice Chairman Williams asked Ms. Lauren Holcomb to provide an update on organizational development. Ms. Holcomb reported that the recent Fraud Prevention training by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government on January 9th had a successful turn out. The SCSC also hosted a New School Orientation that took place on January 26th with all the recently approved schools from the last petition cycle. The SCSC also provided its second Governance Training for the 2016-2017 school year in Macon on February 7-8. Ms. Holcomb reminded Commissioners that all governing board members of SCSC schools are legally required to attend annual governance training and board members who have not attended the SCSC's free governance trainings must receive alternate training from an approved training provider on the SCSC's website. Governance Training was held in Macon on February 8th, and the number of attendance has increased this year. The Financial Management Certification: Budgeting and Policies was also recently held from February 21-22 via webinars. The 2017 Petition Overview via webinars were held on February 1st and February 14th. The Funding and Budget Template Overview were held on February 9 and 16 and have been posted on the commission's website. There is an upcoming Financial Management Certification: Internal Controls training to be held on May 9, 2017. All information regarding trainings can be found in the SCSC February Newsletter.
10. Vice Chairman Williams then asked Ms. Lauren Holcomb and Ms. Katie Manthey to update on the research progress of the Economic Impact Study. Ms. Holcomb presented the study and findings on the effects of charter schools on property values in the city and suburbs, and Ms. Manthey presented the study and findings on the effects of Pataula Charter Academy on property values within its districts. The commission will continue to work with Georgia State University to finalize Report 2 and share the findings with the public. The commission will also work on the final phase of the Economic Impact Study, which will analyze the impact of charter schools on academic achievements, life outcomes, and Georgia's economy as a whole.
11. Next, Vice Chairman Williams asked Ms. Katie Manthey to provide updates on Academic Accountability. Ms. Manthey stated that the 2015-2016 VAM is scheduled to be completed at the beginning of March, which will include many improvements to the analysis. The results of the full report as well as the schools' results on the CPF for the 2015-26 school year will be shared with Commissioners at the March meeting.
12. Vice Chairman Williams then asked Mr. Terence Washington for the financial updates. Mr. Washington provided the RFP Process for the SCSC's Auditing Program, which includes the timeline and qualifications for applicants. The application will be released on February 24, 2017 and responses from auditors will be due by March 27, 2017. The selection notices will be sent to the SCSC selected auditors by March 31, 2017. The SCSC staff has developed a rubric that will measure the qualifications of the auditors. This list includes but is not limited to the following: number of A-133 audits performed in the past 3 years, whether the auditor has an active Georgia CPA license, the cost of services provided relative to the scope of services, GAGAS peer review rating, the number of charters audited in the past 3 years, the number of late audit reports submitted by charter school clients.
13. Mr. Washington continued with an update on Ivy Preparatory Academy's financial audits. He stated that Ivy Preparatory Academy has made a lot of progress with their new CFO, and the FY16 audit is scheduled to be completed in March. The SCSC has been monitoring Ivy Preparatory Academy's financial statements monthly as well as sending support specialist to help with management.

14. Vice Chairman Williams then asked Ms. Morgan Felts to give updates on the 2017 Application Cycle. Ms. Felts announced that the 2017 petition cycle is currently open with approximately 25 applications in progress. Ms. Felts also mentioned that there had been four webinars conducted to assist petitioners in completing the applications. Ms. Felts reminded that the applications are due April 17, 2017, and the interviews will be conducted from July 10-14 and July 17-21.
15. Next, Vice Chairman Williams asked Mr. Gregg Stevens to provide updates regarding the newly approved charters schools. Mr. Stevens stated that the SCSC has developed a more comprehensive pre-opening structure in school charter school contracts that requires the schools to demonstrate significant progress on a pre-opening checklist to evidence their readiness to serve students. With regard to this checklist, Mr. Stevens reported that DREAM Academy Charter School has decided to defer their opening date to Fall 2018 to provide additional time for facility development, fundraising, building an operational infrastructure, and community engagement. Resurgence Hall Charter School will operate in the East Point/College Park and has been receiving a great amount of student and staff applications. The School for Arts-Infused Learning (SAIL) is scheduled as planned to open in Fall 2017 with its newly constructed site, and the school has received more applications than available, thus the school will have a waitlist for each grade. The Genesis Innovation Academy for Boys and Genesis Innovation Academy for Girls are continuing to work on the finalization of its facility transaction with the goal to close on the transaction in mid-March. SCSC staff will work closely with the schools to ensure that the facility is finalized in a timely manner and will discuss the need to the delay the opening of the schools if the closing is delayed.
16. Mr. Stevens continued with the updates on First Year Implementation Support for Pilot Schools with regard to Southwest Georgia STEM Charter School (SOWEGA) and Cirrus Academy Charter School. SOWEGA made a leadership change following the SCSC's official monitoring visit and the conclusion of the school's first semester. SCSC staff has met with the school's new leadership and discussed the expectations for increased improvement regarding operational and financial compliance. Mr. Washington has led the effort to prepare SOWEGA for a significant cut in funding, and the school has expressed that it has the ability to operate on its reserves. The SCSC staff are in the process of reviewing that assurance as well as monitoring the school's finances. With regard to Cirrus Academy Charter School, the school faces a similar need to improve its finances and board governance. Cirrus's budget adjustment due to under-enrollment is manageable and can be mitigated through additional planning and budgeting. The school was able to obtain a loan to assist with cash flow, and it is working closely with the GCSA implementation specialist to identify problematic operational systems and to improve board governance.
17. Vice Chairman Williams asked Mr. Stevens to give an update on the annual compliance monitoring visits. Mr. Stevens reported that the SCSC staff has completed its on-site monitoring visits for this school year with the exception of one school. The SCSC staff has observed significant improvements in operational compliance. The areas of concern continue to be special education compliance, student discipline, and adherence to financial policies. To help improve school performance in these areas, the SCSC staff has engaged the Georgia Department of Education's Division for Special Education Services and Supports to develop a specialized program of technical assistance, as well as additional trainings and guidance on student discipline. With regard to financial policies and practices, the SCSC staff has made headway to guide school governing

boards and administrators towards more comprehensive policies that ensure the adopted policies are followed.

18. Vice Chairman Williams then asked Mr. Stevens to present any SCSC Process Items. Director Holliday informed commissioners that they are required to annually elect a board chairman and vice-chairman. Commissioner Lewis made a motion to re-elect Chairman Rippner as Chairman and Commissioner Williams as Vice Chairman. Commissioner Perez provided a second. The motion passed unanimously by those present.
19. Mr. Stevens presented Coastal Plains Education Charter High School and that Coastal Plains will be replicating Foothills Education Charter High. Foothills has been working alongside SCSC staff and other stakeholders to assist in creating a successful replication at Coastal Plains Education Charter High School. Coastal Plains Education Charter High School will be serving Georgia's coastal region starting with Glynn and Candler counties. Coastal Plains is expected to enroll 500 students and serve grades 9-12. Coastal Plains will serve students from Camden to Savannah which is approximately 18 counties and already has 4 counties on board with 2 more approaching. Coastal Plains will have a statewide attendance zone with a regional focus including brick-and-mortar sites within participating LEAs. Executive Director Holliday clarified the difference between charter expansion and charter replication and stated that Coastal Plains is a charter replication that will result in the new charter school will having its own charter board and governance structure that will work with the existing school for a period of time before becoming completely independent.
20. Commissioner Hogg made a motion to approve replication of Foothills Education Charter High School at Coastal Plains and indicated that during the presentation of Coastal Plains, representatives from Foothills were very prepared and it was clear that they understood and relayed that information to Coastal Plains about what lies ahead of them. Commissioner Lowden second the motion to approve Coastal Plains. The motion passed unanimously by those present.
21. No additional items from the Commissioners were presented.
22. Next Vice Chairman Williams asked if anyone signed up for public comment. Mr. Andrew Lewis from the Georgia Charter Schools Association spoke during the public comment period and stated that GCSA conference is on March 14-15. Mr. Lewis also encouraged commissioners to read and support HB 430, and Mr. Lewis urged the SCSC to discuss the recent State Board of Education Rule changes that limit charter contracts to 5-year terms.
23. Superintendent Sherrie Gibney-Sherman of Foothills also spoke during the public comment period. Dr. Gibney-Sherman introduced Dr. James Pulos, the Assistant Superintendent of Glynn County School District, and Mr. Rickey Rentz who will be the superintendent at Coastal Plains Education Charter High School. Superintendent of Foothills Dr. Sherrie Gibney-Sherman indicated Foothills serves approximately 134 Glynn county students, and there will and is a student population that will be enrolling in Coastal Plains and enrollment will start March 1, 2017. Dr. Gibney-Sherman thanked the SCSC and its staff for its assistance in the replication of Foothills through Coastal Plains.
24. There being no further business before the SCSC, Vice Chairman Williams adjourned the meeting at approximately 11:31 AM.