

## State Charter Schools Commission of Georgia

### *Onboarding New Charter Schools: Planning Year – Year 2 of Contract*

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#### **Authorizer Background**

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The State Charter Schools Commission of Georgia (SCSC) is a state-level, independent charter school authorizer. The SCSC has the power to approve or deny petitions for state charter schools and renew, non-renew, or terminate state charter school contracts in accordance with Georgia law.

The SCSC is comprised of 7 commissioners who are nominated by the Governor, Lt. Governor, and Speaker of the House and appointed by the State Board of Education. The executive director of the SCSC reports directly to the commission (in general) and to the commission chairman (in particular). SCSC staff report directly to the executive director.

The SCSC was established by way of a constitutional amendment in 2012 and became operational in March 2013. Since then, the SCSC has authorized the following actions:

- approval of charters for 15 existing schools (authorized by the “old commission” that was deemed unconstitutional in 2011);
- approval of charters for 8 new start-up schools (1 of which opened in Fall 2014; 7 of which will open in Fall 2015);
- closure of 2 schools in 2014 for poor performance.

Overall, the SCSC currently oversees 15 existing schools, and 7 additional schools are approved to open in Fall 2015.

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#### **Importance of Onboarding**

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Given the relationship between the ability of school leaders to “organize a school to be excellent on Day One” and the long-term academic success of a charter school (Peltason & Raymond, 2013), the SCSC prioritized the “onboarding” of newly approved state charter schools. Specifically, the SCSC developed a standard suite of supports and resources for school-level leadership teams working in and with new start-up charter schools in an effort to build capacity and preparedness among founding board members and principals. To ensure alignment between the onboarding program and the unique needs of start-up charter schools, SCSC staff 1) internally assessed the track records of existing schools to identify deficiencies in academic performance, operational compliance, and governance capacity, 2) surveyed school leaders about the types of supports they would find most useful, and 3) partnered with Peabody College at Vanderbilt University to research academic and operational practices commonly employed by high-performing start-up charter schools (Cannata, Thomas & Thombre, 2014).

#### References

Cannata, M., Thomas and Thombre, Z. (2014). *Starting strong: Best practices in starting a charter school*. Peabody College: Vanderbilt University.

Peltason, E. and Raymond, M.E. (2013). *Charter school growth and replication, Vol. 1*, CREDO: Stanford University.

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#### **Implementation**

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After synthesizing the needs of state charter schools and the research-based findings regarding best practices for start-up charter schools, the SCSC staff developed the following suite of supports that will be available to future petitioners and newly approved schools beginning in December 2014. These supports will be offered to schools free of charge, and participation in the program is completely voluntary.

**PLANNING YEAR SUPPORT**  
(Year 0: Post-Approval/Pre-Opening)

<i>Support</i>	Strategic Planning & Capacity Building
<i>Frequency</i>	Various components offered throughout the year
<i>Location</i>	Most supports will be offered to schools at their “home” locations; some will occur at SCSC offices in Atlanta
<i>Description</i>	<p>Support during the planning year is designed to orient newly approved schools to actions required to ensure the school opens according to schedule and in an organized fashion. Available resources and supports in ‘Year 0’ include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New School Orientation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provider: SCSC Staff</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Strategic Planning (Plan Development) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provider: Carl Vinson Institute of Government at UGA</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Budget Preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provider: Georgia Charter Schools Association</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Pre-Opening Checklist</li> <li>• SCSC Guidance Documents</li> <li>• SCSC Research</li> <li>• Access to all trainings** and resources available to existing state charter schools</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>**Training agenda for existing schools is included. See Appendix.</i></p>
<i>Cost to participant</i>	Free of charge

**START-UP SUPPORT**  
(Year 1 & 2: First Charter Term)

<i>Support</i>	Strategic Development & Ongoing Guidance
<i>Frequency</i>	Various components offered throughout the year
<i>Location</i>	Most supports will be offered to schools at their “home” locations; some will occur at SCSC offices in Atlanta
<i>Description</i>	<p>Support during the first two years of the charter school’s first contract term is designed to ensure newly operational schools establish policies, procedures, and practices that will enable both short-term and long-term success. Available resources and supports in Years 1-2 include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Membership in Principal Leaders Cohort <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Providers will be selected based on needs identified by SCSC staff as well as on the results of the cohort’s needs assessment survey.</li> <li>○ Modeled after NACSA Leaders Program</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Strategic Planning (Implementation Support) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provider: Carl Vinson Institute of Government at UGA</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Principal Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provider: Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement</li> </ul> </li> <li>• SCSC Guidance Documents</li> <li>• SCSC Research</li> <li>• Comprehensive Reporting Timeline</li> <li>• Access to all trainings** and resources available to existing state charter schools</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>**Training agenda for existing schools is included. See Appendix.</i></p>
<i>Cost to participant</i>	Free of charge

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## **Impact of Program**

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The SCSC expects the onboarding program to result in stronger overall performance of state charter schools during their first charter terms. Based on research findings that identify a charter school's early performance as a predictor of long-term academic and operational success (Cannata, Thomas & Thombre, 2014; CREDO, 2013) the SCSC is hopeful that improving front-end supports (through the provision of research, training, and strategic planning) will decrease the need for back-end remediation or sanctioning.

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## **Next Steps for SCSC**

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The full suite of onboarding supports will be available to schools starting in December 2014; although, certain trainings will be offered prior to that date. Next steps for SCSC staff include:

- (Short-term)--Finalizing contracts with certain providers; (some providers charge per school and the SCSC just approved its newest cohort of schools in September 2014);
- (Short-term)--Communicate training opportunities to petitioners and new schools;
- (Long-term)--Compare the performance of new schools participating in the onboarding program to those that did not participate to determine the program's efficacy and adapt/adjust resource offerings accordingly.

## **Appendix: SCSC 2014-2015 Annual Training Agenda**

### **Grant Writing and Resource Development**

**October 2, 2014**

**Location TBD**

*Invited: Governing board members, relevant school personnel, relevant community members*

- How to identify grant opportunities and write a successful grant application
- Fundraising and developing community partnerships
- Presenters: Dr. Bruce Sliger and Mr. Marshall Ginn

### **Federal Grant Management**

**October 2, 2014**

**DECAL Oak Room, Atlanta, Georgia**

*Invited: School administrators, school business managers, grant managers*

- Presenters: Brette Kaplan, Brustein and Manasevit

### **School Governance**

**October 9-10, 2014**

**Callaway Gardens, Pine Mountain, Georgia**

*Invited: Governing board members and administrators*

- Roles and responsibilities of school board members and administrators
- Ethics
- School funding and budgets, audit requirements

- Strategic planning and succession planning
- Presenters: SCSC, GCSA,

### **Charter School Financial Management Certification Program**

#### ***Eight Courses throughout the year***

*Invited: School business managers, administrators*

- Basics of governmental accounting for state charters
- Presenter: Carl Vinson Institute of Government

### **Boot Camp for Newly Approved Schools**

**December 2014**

**Location TBD**

*Invited: Newly approved state charter board members, administrators, relevant personnel*

- Handbook for new schools
- Mentor Program for new schools
- Presenters: TBD

### **Petitioner Boot Camp**

**December 11, 2014**

**Georgia Tech Hotel & Conference Center, Atlanta, Georgia**

*Invited: Potential SCSC Petitioners*

- What makes a successful charter petition?
- Presenters: SCSC, external consultants, successful state charters

### **Petitioner Boot Camp**

**January 27, 2015**

**Macon Marriott, Macon, Georgia**

*Invited: Potential SCSC Petitioners*

- What makes a successful charter petition?
- Presenters: SCSC, external consultants, successful state charters

### **School Governance**

**February 5-6, 2015**

**Callaway Gardens, Pine Mountain, Georgia**

*Invited: Governing board members and administrators*

- Roles and responsibilities of school board members and administrators
- Ethics
- School funding and budgets, audit requirements
- Strategic planning and succession planning
- Presenters: TBD

### **How to be an LEA**

**Early March 2015**

**Location TBD**

*Invited: Administrators and relevant personnel*

- Accountability
- Special Education laws
- Funding/Auditing
- Data Collections
- Title Programs
- Facilities and School Safety
- Presenters: SCSC, GaDOE, GOSA

### **Student Learning Objectives**

**Date TBD**

**Location TBD**

- How to develop SLOs
- Sharing of SLOs among state charters
- Presenters: GaDOE

**Best Practices in Chartering**

**June 2015**

**Location TBD**

- Presentation of SCSC Research
- Application for state charters to present
- Presenters: SCSC