

STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS COMMISSION

MEETING MINUTES

May 26, 2021, 10:00 a.m.

SCSC Board Room

5th Floor, West Tower

Virtual Access: <https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/722377061>

Phone: +1 (646) 749-3122; Access Code: 722-377-061



Attendees: Commissioners: Buzz Brockway – Chairman; Hunter Hill – Vice-Chair; Jose Perez; Dr. Lina Millan; Fitz Johnson; and Mike Dudgeon. SCSC Staff: Lauren Holcomb – Executive Director; Morgan Felts – Chief Operations Officer; Kristen Easterbrook – Charter Development Manager; Kathy Schieber – Financial Analyst; Erin Wright – Associate General Counsel; Kiara Thompson – Program Coordinator; Erica Acha-Morfaw – Administrative and Communications Coordinator; and Elliot Race, Jae Yeon Jeong, and Claire Maloney – SCSC Graduate Interns.

I. Call to Order (Chairman Buzz Brockway)

- Chairman Brockway called the meeting to order at 10:06 a.m.
- Chairman Brockway completed a commissioner roll call. Commissioner Fitz Johnson attended virtually. Commissioner Tony Lowden was absent. A quorum was formed.
- The newly appointed Commissioner Mike Dudgeon was introduced and welcomed.

II. Approval of SCSC Meeting Minutes (Chairman Buzz Brockway)

- Chairman Brockway called for the approval of the April 2021 SCSC meeting minutes.
- **Commissioner Millan moved for the approval of these minutes. Commissioner Perez seconded the motion. The April 2021 meeting minutes were approved by unanimous vote. Commissioner Lowden was not present for this vote.**

III. Commissioner School Visits

- The SCSC commissioners spoke about their visits to charter schools this month. Chairman Brockway and Commissioner Lowden visited Brookhaven Innovation Academy and Ivy Preparatory Academy at Kirkwood. Commissioner Millan visited Yi Hwang Academy of Language Excellence. The commissioners each expressed how impressed they were with the schools' facilities and performance.
- The SCSC plans to schedule more visits to charter schools that have summer programming. The SCSC encourages schools with summer programs to reach out to the SCSC to schedule visits.

IV. School COVID Update (SCSC Executive Director)

- There is no mask mandate for Georgia public schools currently. Charter schools may use their discretion to continue implementing or not implementing their own mask policies. The SCSC encourages schools to work with their local health departments in this decision-making process.
- The SCSC encourages charter schools to resume in-person instruction, if that instruction was contemplated in their petitions.

V. Legislative Update (SCSC Executive Director)

- The governor signed SB 153 (the GOAL Act). The legislation will transition system collaborative schools away from SCSC authorization toward GaDOE authorization. The SCSC emphasized that this legislation is not a penalty on these schools. Instead, the GOAL Act aims to bring more local control, which is outside the SCSC's purview, over schools that serve at-risk students who are better served by non-traditional educational models.
- The governor signed SB 59 (the Charter Omnibus bill). The legislation allows state charter schools to opt into the State Benefit Health Plan upon renewal of their charter contract. Previously, schools could only opt in at the time of authorization. The Charter Omnibus bill will allow schools to make that decision at renewal. The bill will go into effect next year.

VI. Organizational Development (SCSC Charter Development Manager)

- The SCSC held its final live governance training on April 13. All schools have 8 remaining modules to complete for FY21. These modules will be available on the SCSC website for the remainder of the fiscal year.
- The deadline to complete governance training is June 30.
- The SCSC encourages schools to reach out to the Commission with recommendations for specific training topics to cover.

VII. Petitions (SCSC Associate General Counsel)

- The SCSC received nine start-up charter school petitions for the FY21 petition cycle. Four petitions were disqualified in an initial budget screen.
- The SCSC has begun substantive reviews of the remaining five petitions.
- The SCSC has scheduled interviews for June and expects to present formal recommendations at the July board meeting.
- The SCSC Associate General Counsel explained the disqualification factors, which mainly included major issues with the petitions' failure to meet formatting requirements for budget reports.
- Vice Chairman Hill asked if petitioners are given a second chance to correct formatting errors. The SCSC Chief Operations Officer explained that it depends what the error is, but petitioners are typically given a chance to correct errors if there is a clear intention to follow the format.
- Commissioner Dudgeon remarked on the importance of charter school petitioners following templates to ensure their budgets account for every necessary item.

VIII. Pre-Opening Schools (SCSC Charter Development Manager)

- The SCSC anticipated opening four new schools this fall. Two schools have elected to defer their opening until Fall 2022 due to facility challenges.
- Of the two remaining schools, both are currently considered on track to open. The SCSC is actively monitoring each school's remaining pre-opening requirements and is conducting school visits.
- Commissioner Dudgeon asked about how the SCSC staff approve schools in this stage of the process. The SCSC Charter Development Manager explained that the SCSC applies a checklist and has the ability to stop a school from opening if it has not met the checklist requirements for readiness.

IX. Accountability (SCSC Chief Operations Officer)

- An accountability presentation update for state charter schools was presented, containing an overview of state charter school performance across the three areas of Comprehensive Performance Framework (CPF) accountability: academics, operations, and finance.
- Four schools will present performance reviews next month. Responses to the performance review questionnaire are due June 9.
- The SCSC has selected four approved auditors for FY22. The SCSC will cover the cost of the audit for any school that selects one of the approved auditors.
- The SCSC has provided three opportunities for governing board members to receive 12 hours of governance training, which is required each fiscal year, at no cost. The FY21 certification process to ensure governing board members met training requirements will open in mid-June, and schools will have six weeks to complete the certification process.

X. Authorizer Standards (SCSC Executive Director)

- The SCSC and GaDOE are close to completing the authorizer standards required by legislation. The standards are based on the National Association of Charter School Authorizers principles and standards for quality authorizing and informed by best practices in other states.
- The SCSC plans to present these standards for feedback to local charter schools at the GSCA Conference and make it available to anyone not in attendance.
- There are 15 standards focused on five core functions of authorizing: authorizer commitment and capacity, the petition process, performance contracting, oversight and evaluation, and renewal and termination.
- The SCSC and GaDOE plan to present these standards to the State Board of Education this summer for adoption. SCSC staff also anticipates presenting the standards to the SCSC board for formal adoption.
- Local charter schools authorized by local districts that fail to meet the authorizer standards for two years will have the ability to apply to the SCSC to transfer.
- Chairman Brockway expressed his hope that local districts authorizing charter schools that previously had no workable framework will now have an instructive handbook to guide them in their authorization procedures.

XI. Action Items

- **2021-22 COVID Remote Learning Waiver (SCSC Executive Director)**
 - SCSC staff recommended to allow schools to opt into a waiver to provide a remote learning option to up to 25% of students in the 2021-22 school year. The percentage was determined in consideration of schools' proposals to the SCSC.
 - Vice Chairman Hill said that remote learning makes it difficult to achieve the same outcomes as in-person learning and expressed a preference for tighter parameters around the waiver.
 - Commissioner Millan expressed concerns with asynchronous learning and said that schools implementing this waiver should have a dedicated virtual staff because it is difficult for teachers to manage in-person and virtual students simultaneously.
 - SCSC Executive Director agreed with Commission Millan but expressed concern about state charters' ability to dedicate virtual staff due to their small size.
 - Commissioner Dudgeon said that if COVID cases continue to decrease and vaccinations increase as projected, the need for virtual instruction will not be so important by the time schools reopen in the fall.

- Vice Chairman Hill advocated for allowing schools to implement this waiver for the fall semester and reassess the need for the waiver for the spring semester at a later time. If the need for staying home in September is low, he said, then the SCSC should not allow schools to implement this waiver for the entire school year.
- Chairman Brockway said that this proposed amended waiver should be reviewed at the middle of the fall semester.
- **Commissioner Millan moved to amend the COVID Remote Learning Waiver to limit the waiver period to the Fall 2021 semester with a review midway through the semester to determine whether to extend the waiver. Commissioner Dudgeon seconded the motion.**
- **By a unanimous vote, the SCSC approved the amendment to the COVID Remote Learning Waiver. Commissioner Lowden was not present to vote.**
- **By a unanimous vote, the SCSC approved the amended staff recommendation to adopt the COVID Remote Learning Waiver. Commissioner Lowden was not present to vote.**
- **FY21 Administrative Withhold Return (SCSC Chief Operations Officer)**
 - The SCSC will administer its annual return of unused agency funds to schools.
 - **Commissioner Perez moved to adopt the withhold return. Commissioner Dudgeon seconded the motion. By a unanimous vote, the SCSC approved the FY21 Administrative Withhold Return. Commissioner Lowden was not present to vote.**

XII. Additional Items from Commissioners

- There were no additional items from the commissioners.

XIII. Public comment

- Approximately 28 people attended the meeting virtually and one person attended in person.
- There was no public comment.

XIV. Adjourn

- Chairman Brockway adjourned the meeting at 11:12 a.m.