

**STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS
COMMISSION
MEETING Minutes**

July 14, 2021, 2:00 p.m.

Virtual Meeting

Virtual Access:

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Phone: +1 (669) 224-3412; Access

Code: 911-482-037



Attendees: Commissioners: Buzz Brockway-Chairman; Hunter Hill-Vice Chairman; Fitz Johnson; Tony Lowden; Dr. Lina Millan 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 Elliott Race, Jae Yeon Jeong, and Claire Maloney – SCSC Graduate Interns

I. Call to Order

- Chairman Brockway called the meeting to order at 2:02pm.
- Chairman Brockway completed a commissioner roll call. Commissioner Jose Perez was absent. Commissioner Millan was absent during roll call. A quorum was formed.
- Commissioner Millan joined the meeting at 2:08pm.

II. Harriet Tubman School of Science & Technology

- Three individuals designated by Harriet Tubman School of Science & Technology (“Harriet Tubman” or “school”) were permitted to provide comment, with a five-minute time limit per individual. As an introduction, SCSC Executive Director Lauren Holcomb provided background information on the action item to be proposed at the meeting:
 - The Commission approved Harriet Tubman in 2018 to open in 2019. The school deferred for a year due to facility challenges, then opened this past fall and were operational for one year. SCSC found transparency issues regarding the school’s facility and placed the school on a probationary system to ensure it was in a position to serve students. SCSC staff do not believe that the school is a viable option for students.
 - Last week, SCSC staff called a meeting with several commissioners so that the school could present a plan. The staff were not convinced that the plan presented would result in the school becoming a viable option for students this year.
- **Ms. Heather Robinson, Ms. Lela Howard, and Ms. Angela Chambliss spoke on behalf of the school.**
 - Ms. Robinson stated that she believes the school should move forward through a

year of suspension, rather than termination, so that the school can get its policies and procedures straight and open its doors to serve students next year.

- Ms. Howard requested that the board provide the school an opportunity to do right by the students in their district.
- Ms. Chambliss requested a suspension for this year instead of termination so that the school can take a year to build a school that the students deserve.
- **Chairman Brockway opened the floor to questions from the Commissioners.**
 - Chairman Brockway stated that during the meeting with the school last week, Ms. Chambliss was the board chair, although next week a new board chair will be elected. Chairman Brockway asked Ms. Chambliss what role she envisions herself playing with the school moving forward. Ms. Chambliss responded that she plans to be available to provide support if needed but will be working to transition off the school board.
 - Commissioner Dudgeon stated that the suspension would be very unusual given that the school has been open and asked about the message to and plan for the school's students, specifically, whether it a good idea for students to leave and then come back. Ms. Robinson responded that the school knew this would be challenging and that it would try to partner with other schools in the area to support families throughout the year until the school can bring the students back. The school plans to keep in touch with any families that are unable to return and would look to support them.
 - Commissioner Dudgeon asked if anyone was left on the board from when the school opened, or if there had been a full turnover. Ms. Chambliss answered that everyone from the original board has transitioned. Ms. Robinson added that a teacher and the Director of Operations have both been present since the beginning.
 - Commissioner Lowden asked how many teachers were under contract for the upcoming year. Ms. Robinson answered that they have two and anticipated hiring more this week but did not want to extend offers at this time.
 - Commissioner Lowden asked how the school reached this point. Ms. Chambliss answered that a vision brought them all to this school, but they have had issues understanding how to best lead the school in the right direction with a lack of background.
 - Vice Chairman Hill asked if SCSC had confidence when it first approved this school, as the approval happened prior to his time on the board. Additionally, he asked if the school received money in the year that they were in deferment. Executive Director Holcomb answered yes, SCSC had confidence in the school when the board first approved them. SCSC's confidence lessened as things went on, including due to the facility problems and other organizational issues. The school may have received an initial payment, but it did not receive further payments.
 - Vice Chairman Hill asked whether the school would receive money if it underwent another delay. Executive Director Holcomb stated the school would not receive money because it would not be hosting students.
 - Vice Chairman Hill asked if Ms. Robinson receives payment for her work during a suspended year. Ms. Robinson answered that she will get paid this year but will restructure her contract with the school.
 - Vice Chairman Hill asked SCSC staff if the school board could present a new charter petition if it is suspended and terminated. Executive Director Holcomb stated the

school could present a new petition and she would recommend that the school do so once they have things put together.

- Commissioner Johnson asked Mr. Washington, CFO of Harriet Tubman School, where the school stands financially and how it would be impacted by a year of not operating. Mr. Washington answered that the school would end the year in the green because it has no bonds or debt and has significant cash on hand. Mr. Washington ran a few models to look at what a suspended year would look like and put together a budget to allow the school to reach June 2022.
- Executive Director Holcomb asked if the school plans to draw any federal relief funds this year. Mr. Washington answered that their model did not include any relief funds.
- Vice Chairman Hill stated that the school's facilities are currently not what is needed and asked whether the proposed budget would allow the school to bring facilities up to standards prior to reopening in 2022. Ms. Chambliss answered that the school board is trying to pull down a grant to allow them to add some ADA compliant portions to the building and other areas that need to be updated.

III. Action Item- Suspension of Operations & Notice of Hearing to Terminate Harriet Tubman School of Science & Technology

- SCSC Associate General Counsel Erin Wright read the SCSC Staff Recommendation regarding Suspension of Operations and Notice of Hearing to Terminate Harriet Tubman School of Science & Technology.
- Chairman Brockway asked for questions or comments from the commission regarding the recommendation.
 - Commissioner Dudgeon stated that the best interest of the community would be served by suspension and termination, and the school board would be best served by returning with a new charter contract.
 - Commissioner Lowden stated this hearing is difficult for him as well because of how hard this is on the children.
 - Chairman Brockway expressed his agreement.
 - Vice Chairman Hill encouraged the school leaders to continue working to bring this idea to a reality.
- **Commissioner Dudgeon moved to approve the recommendation for suspension of operations and a notice of hearing to terminate Harriet Tubman School of Science and Technology. Commissioner Lowden seconded the motion. The motion passed by a unanimous vote. Commissioner Perez was absent for the vote.**
- SCSC Associate General Counsel Erin Wright provided information related to next steps, including that SCSC staff will communicate with the school regarding suspension guidance, the SCSC will issue a notice of hearing, and that a hearing officer will be selected for the board.
- Commissioner Lowden expressed that this decision is important because SCSC wants good schools, and the children deserve good choices. He expressed his desire to have the school board come back with a stronger plan to bring the school to life.

IV. Adjourn

- Chairman Brockway adjourned the meeting at 3:12pm.