

# STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS COMMISSION

## MEETING MINUTES

July 28, 2021, 10:00 a.m.

SCSC Board Room

5<sup>th</sup> Floor, West Tower

Virtual Access: <https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/347131549>

Phone: +1 (408) 650-3123; Access Code: 347-131-549



Attendees: Commissioners: Buzz Brockway – Chairman; Dr. Lina Millan; Tony Lowden; Fitz Johnson; and Mike Dudgeon. SCSC Staff: Lauren Holcomb – Executive Director; Morgan Felts – Chief Operations Officer; Kristen Easterbrook – Charter Development Manager; Katie Manthey – Director of Research & Evaluation; Kathy Schieber – Financial Analyst; Erin Wright – Associate General Counsel; Kiara Thompson – Program Coordinator; and Elliott Race and Jae Yeon Jeong – SCSC Graduate Interns.

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### I. Call to Order (Chairman Brockway)

- Chairman Brockway called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.
- Chairman Brockway completed a commissioner roll call. Commissioner Millan attended virtually. Commissioners Perez and Hill were absent. A quorum was formed.

### II. Officer Elections (Chairman Brockway)

- **Commissioner Dudgeon nominated Chairman Brockway for the position of SCSC Chairman. Commissioner Lowden seconded the motion. Chairman Brockway was appointed to the position of SCSC Chairman by a unanimous vote. Commissioners Perez and Hill were not present for this vote.**
- **Commissioner Johnson nominated Commissioner Lowden for the position of SCSC Vice Chairman. Commissioner Dudgeon seconded the motion. Commissioner Lowden was appointed to the position of SCSC Vice Chairman by a unanimous vote. Commissioners Perez and Hill were not present for this vote.**

### III. Approval of SCSC Meeting Minutes (Chairman Brockway)

- **Commissioner Lowden moved for the approval of the June 30, 2021, Board Meeting minutes. Commissioner Johnson seconded the motion. The June 30, 2021, Board Meeting minutes were approved by a unanimous vote. Commissioners Perez and Hill were not present for this vote.**
- **Commissioner Lowden moved for the approval of the July 14, 2021, Called Board Meeting minutes. Commissioner Johnson seconded the motion. The July 14, 2021, Called Board Meeting minutes were approved by a unanimous vote. Commissioners Perez and Hill were not present for this vote.**

### IV. Commissioner School Visits (SCSC Executive Director)

- The commissioners are visiting schools with charter terms that expire in June 2022 and are up for renewal.
- The commissioners will visit Cirrus Charter Academy, Statesboro STEAM, Atlanta Heights Charter School, and Georgia Connections Academy this fall.
- The commissioners visited Brookhaven Innovation Academy, Southwest Georgia STEM, and Ivy Preparatory Academy in the spring.

## **V. School COVID Update (SCSC Executive Director)**

- SCSC Remote Learning Waiver
  - The waiver allows brick and mortar state charter schools to provide virtual instruction to up to 25% of students this fall. The purpose is to provide accommodations to students with exceptional situations.
  - Thirteen schools opted into the remote learning waiver.
  - The SCSC expects to receive reports and assessments from schools and plans to provide a status update to the commissioners in October.
  - The SCSC Executive Director noted that the new CDC guidance recommends students wear masks in schools while the governor's executive order prohibiting mask mandates in schools has expired.
  - Commissioner Lowden commented that the local schools need to meet to implement best practices to educate children.
  - Chairman Brockway noted that the Commission's goal is to provide the best education for students.

## **VI. Organizational Development (SCSC Charter Development Manager)**

- Past Trainings
  - Past trainings are now available via video recording.
- FY22 Training Calendar
  - SCSC will return to conducting in-person trainings.
  - The annual Petition Bootcamp will be held October 12 at the Georgia Tech Hotel and Conference Center. Any petitioners who are interested in opening charter schools are encouraged to attend.
  - The SCSC will split governance training into two parts: In-person sessions and live virtual sessions. The in-person trainings will be held in November, February, and April. The dates for the virtual sessions will be posted soon.
  - The Data Collections Conference has announced that it will be virtual this year but will be held in-person in 2022.
- Commissioner Lowden asked if there would be COVID informational training for schools. The SCSC Charter Development Manager answered that the SCSC conducted a training session for schools on legal obligations in the era of COVID-19 in October 2020.

## **VII. Pre-Opening Schools (SCSC Charter Development Manager)**

- The SCSC has authorized the openings of two new charter schools this fall.
- Northwest Classical Academy will operate in Cobb County, initially serving grades K-6 but ultimately plans to serve grades K-12.
- Atlanta SMART will operate in the Atlanta Public Schools district, initially serving grades 5-7 but ultimately plans to serve grades 5-8.
- The SCSC Executive Director noted that Northwest Classical had to hold a lottery for enrollment due to high interest.
- Commissioner Lowden advised that it would be beneficial to take pictures of the school openings to share with the public. The SCSC Executive Director said that the SCSC Administrative & Communications Coordinator is eager to do so this fall.

## **VIII. Petitions (SCSC Associate General Counsel)**

- The SCSC finished substantive review of the FY21 petitions. Four of the five schools withdrew their petitions, and staff will make a recommendation on the remaining one petition to the board.
- The SCSC Associate General Counsel encouraged schools to remedy deficiencies and re-submit petitions.
- Chairman Brockway acknowledged the hardships brought on by COVID and hoped to see growth in charter school petitions in the future.
- The SCSC Executive Director expects the SCSC will receive more petitions in the next cycle as the pandemic comes to an end.
- The SCSC anticipates that the next cycle of FY22 petitions will open in October.

**IX. Authorizer Standards (SCSC Director of Research & Evaluation)**

- Last month, the SCSC shared the draft set of standards for quality charter authorizing with state and local charter schools. These were the same standards staff presented to commissioners at the June SCSC board meeting. The standards were open for public comment and feedback until July 15.
- The SCSC received feedback from multiple charter schools and a couple of charter and education consultants. Staff are in the process of compiling the feedback and believe the suggestions will be informative during the next stage of this work, which will include developing specific criteria and processes for evaluating authorizers on the standards.
- Chairman Brockway asked if there was a general timeline for the process.
- The SCSC Executive Director explained the SCSC still needs to meet with the Department of Education and is hopeful to present to the state board in September.
- The SCSC Director of Research & Evaluation said that the SCSC anticipates this data compilation to be done by the end of the week.

**X. Accountability (SCSC Director of Research & Evaluation and SCSC Associate General Counsel)**

- 2020-21 Georgia Milestones Assessment Results
  - The SCSC is expecting results from the Georgia Milestones Assessments at the end of the week and hopes to present some results in the August board meeting.
  - The SCSC Director of Research & Evaluation said that, due to low participation rates of schools in the assessment, there may be some issues with reliability of the data.
- 2021-22 Onsite School Monitoring
  - The SCSC is finalizing schedules to monitor schools and will open the portal for schools to submit monitoring materials in August. Monitoring visits will likely occur in September and October with priority given to schools up for renewal and schools in their first year of operations.
  - The primary feedback that the SCSC received was that schools would like to be made aware of changes to the laws that might affect their policies and how they could incorporate those changes into their school policies. The SCSC is preparing a legislative summary for schools, which will be posted on the SCSC website.
  - Chairman Brockway commented that the SCSC needs to assist schools in using incoming federal money for learning gaps.
  - The SCSC Executive Director explained that the Department of Education will be hosting a webinar on that subject next month, which some staff plan to attend and relay the information to schools.
  - The SCSC Executive Director highlighted that onsite monitoring visits are different from commissioner visits in that staff are actively involved and evaluating schools.

## XI. State Charter Schools Foundation (SCSF President)

- The State Charter Schools Foundation gave a presentation on the programs, resources, and guidance it provides to schools as well as its upcoming strategic goals.
- Commissioner Johnson asked how many board members are in the foundation. The State Charter Schools Foundation responded that it currently has 12 board members but would like to expand.

## XII. Action Items

- **FY21 Petition Recommendations (SCSC Associate General Counsel)**
  - The SCSC staff recommended denial of Infinity Charter School's petition as there are concerns with the school's academic model, teacher recruitment, and financial clarity.
  - An Infinity Charter School representative attended the meeting virtually and spoke on the recommendation. The representative questioned the reasons why SCSC denied the petition. The representative said that the SCSC did not give definitive answers to her questions and that there was a lack of clarity in standards. The representative said that a simple request for additional information would have resolved the SCSC's concerns.
  - Chairman Brockway apologized to the Infinity Charter School representative for feeling that the SCSC did not act professionally. He said he thought that the staff expresses and conducts itself clearly and professionally.
  - Commissioner Lowden said that the SCSC is in the business of opening schools and not closing them down and asked the Infinity Charter School representative to have faith in the SCSC's objective process.
  - Commissioner Dudgeon commented that the SCSC staff are objective and that the standards did not change and are objective.
  - The SCSC Executive Director stated that reasons for denial included in SCSC's letters to petitioners are intended to identify weaknesses that the school should remedy to strengthen future petitions. The SCSC Executive Director also acknowledged the representative's recommendation to record petition interviews and said that the SCSC will consider doing so in the future.
  - **Chairman Brockway motioned to adopt the staff recommendation to deny Infinity Charter School's petition. Commissioner Dudgeon seconded the motion. The staff recommendation was adopted by a unanimous vote. Commissioners Perez and Hill were not present for this vote.**
- **Amana Academy Charter Petition Surrender (SCSC Charter Development Manager)**
  - The SCSC staff recommended acceptance of Amana Academy's charter contract surrender.
  - Amana's governing board identified a facility in a new attendance zone and voted to surrender its charter contract so that it could operate in the new attendance zone under a new charter contract.
  - **Chairman Brockway motioned to approve the staff recommendation to accept Amana Academy's charter contract surrender. Commissioner Dudgeon seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a unanimous vote. Commissioners Perez and Hill were not present for this vote.**
- **Amana Academy Charter Petition Approval (SCSC Charter Development Manager)**

- The SCSC staff recommended approval of Amana’s petition for a new charter contract.
- An Amana representative attended the meeting virtually and said the school is excited to begin this new chapter on a new campus.
- Commissioner Lowden asked if the school lost students from the petition’s approval in 2019 and the school’s deferral to open. An Amana representative responded that the school mainly lost students in the third grade.
- **Commissioner Dudgeon motioned to accept the staff recommendation to approve Amana Academy’s new charter contract. Commissioner Lowden seconded. The motion was approved by a unanimous vote. Commissioners Perez and Hill were not present for this vote.**
- **Harriet Tubman School of Science and Technology Petition Surrender (SCSC Associate General Counsel)**
  - The SCSC staff recommended acceptance of Harriet Tubman’s surrender of its charter contract.
  - The Harriet Tubman school board voted and advised SCSC staff of its contract surrender on July 27.
  - Commissioner Lowden commented that the SCSC needs to ensure all funds are accounted for students during this transition period.
  - A Harriet Tubman representative attended virtually and briefly spoke on the school’s closure activities.
  - **Commissioner Lowden motioned to accept the staff recommendation to accept Harriet Tubman’s surrender of its charter contract. Commissioner Dudgeon seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a unanimous vote. Commissioners Perez and Hill were not present for this vote.**

**XIII. Additional Items from Commissioners**

- There were no additional items from the commissioners.

**XIV. Public Comment**

- Approximately 35 people attended the meeting virtually.
- There was no public comment.

**XV. Adjourn**

- Chairman Brockway adjourned the meeting at 11:41 a.m.