

STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS COMMISSION

MEETING MINUTES

February 26, 2020, 10:00 a.m.

SCSC Board Room
West Twin Tower, 5th Floor, Atlanta, Georgia 30334



Attendees: Commissioners Tom Lewis, Paul Williams, Jose Perez, Buzz Brockway, and Dr. Lina Millan. SCSC Staff members Lauren Holcomb – Executive Director, Morgan Felts – Chief Operations Officer, Cerrone Lockett – General Counsel, Kristen Easterbrook – Charter Development Manager, Katie Manthey – Director of Research and Evaluation, Rennie Laryea – Associate General Counsel, Sarah Beck – Associate General Counsel and Operational Accountability Manager, Terence Washington – Financial Accountability Manager, Darcy Callaway – Business Manager, Danielle Williams – Communications and Outreach Coordinator, and Lindsey Newton – Graduate Student Intern. Approximately 40 members of the public were also present.

I. Call to Order

- **Welcome-** Chairman Tom Lewis called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m.
- **Recognition of Tony Lowden** - Chairman Lewis thanked SCSC Commissioner Tony Lowden for his service to the commission. The SCSC will present Mr. Lowden with a letter of appreciation.
- **Public Comment Announcement** - Chairman Lewis announced there are two public comment signup sheets. There was an additional sheet for renewal recommendations.
- **Introduction of Danielle Williams – Communications & Outreach Coordinator** - Ms. Holcomb introduced and welcomed Danielle Williams, the Communications and Outreach Coordinator for SCSC.

II. Approval of SCSC Meeting Minutes

- **January 29, 2020 – Scheduled Meeting** - Chairman Lewis called for an approval of the meeting minutes. Commissioner Brockway motioned. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hill. Commissioner Williams asked to strike his second from the last meeting related to the appointment of the subcommittee. Chairman Lewis called for an approval to delete Commissioner Williams’ second. Commissioner Millan motioned. Commissioner Williams seconded. The motion passed. Chairman Lewis then called to approve the amended minutes. Commissioner Brockway motioned. Commissioner Hill seconded. The January 29, 2020 minutes were approved by unanimous vote subject to an amendment by Commissioner Williams.
- **January 23 – 24, 2020 – Policy Retreat** – Chairman Lewis called for an approval of the Policy Retreat minutes. Commissioner Brockway motioned. Commissioner Williams seconded. The January 23 – 24, 2020 Policy Retreat minutes were approved unanimously.

III. Commissioner School Visits

- Ms. Holcomb announced she is planning commissioner visits to the Academy for Classical Education, Ethos Classical, Baconton Community Charter School, and Spring Creek Charter School.

IV. **Legislative Update**

Ms. Holcomb provided a legislative update on the appropriations bill for the budget. The House passed the amended FY21 budget. A few changes to the original budget were noted. The harmless provision act was reinstated. There is a 4% reduction in administrative functions. HB 957, sponsored by Jan Jones, is moving to house education meeting. The bill clarifies specific state health benefit plan. It also clarifies that records are the property of the school. If a school closes, the board will be responsible for transferring any records to the school districts for one year, beyond that the commission will accept any remaining records. The bill also extends commissioner terms from two years to four years after but will not come into effect until July 1, 2020. The bill extends the deadline for academic performance measures to April 1 for a more complete audit.

V. **Petitions Updates**

- **Start-Up Update**

Ms. Easterbrook provided an update on early feedback applications, which were due February 3rd. Eleven schools participated in the early feedback review. Final applications are due April 10th.

- **Renewal Applications and Process Update**

Ms. Manthey provided an update regarding the renewal application and process. Nine charter schools applied to renew their charters, which are expiring at the end of the fiscal year. Ms. Manthey noted the renewal criteria differs from the initial charter approval. Four charter schools met the criteria to be eligible for the standard five-year renewal. Four schools were recommended for an abbreviated three-year renewal term and one school was recommended for a two-year renewal term.

VI. **Action Items**

- **DuBois Integrity Academy (DuBois)**

Recommendation: Ms. Manthey stated SCSC staff recommends DuBois Integrity Academy be approved for a five-year renewal charter contract.

Public Comment: Public comment was given by Craig Cason, Executive Director of DuBois Integrity Academy. He expressed his gratitude for operating in Clayton County and praised his staff for their work. Cason Thanked the SCSC staff and commission for the renewal.

SCSC Action: Chairman Lewis called for an approval of the SCSC staff recommendation. Commissioner Williams motioned for approval. Commissioner Brockway seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

- **Foothills Charter High School (Foothills)**

Recommendation: Ms. Manthey stated SCSC staff recommends Foothills Charter High School be approved for an abbreviated three-year charter contract.

Public Comment: Public comment was given by Sherrie Sherman, Superintendent of Foothills Charter High School. She expressed appreciation to SCSC staff and the commission for the renewal recommendation. She asked the board to consider approving a five-year charter contract.

Commissioner Williams stated there is a misconception that alternative schools with district collaborations exist for students who have learning issues or cannot perform well in a normal environment, but that is not the case. Williams stated these schools serve an important role for those students.

SCSC Action: Chairman Lewis called for an approval of the SCSC staff recommendation for an abbreviated three-year charter contract for Foothills Charter High School. Commissioner Hill motioned. Commissioner Brockway seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

- **Georgia Cyber Academy (GCA)**

Recommendation: Ms. Manthey stated SCSC staff recommends Georgia Cyber Academy be approved for a three-year charter contract renewal.

Public Comment: Public comment was given by Angela Lassetter, Superintendent of Georgia Cyber Academy, and Kenneth Asher, Board Chair. Lassetter and Asher expressed their appreciation to the commission and staff for the recommendation for renewal. Asher expressed gratitude to current and former board members volunteering their time at the school.

SCSC Action: Chairman Lewis called for an approval of the SCSC staff recommendation for a three-year charter renewal for Georgia Cyber Academy. Commissioner Williams motioned. Commissioner Brockway seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

Chairman Lewis expressed his appreciation for the work the school is doing to earn a three-year renewal and to SCSC staff. Additionally, Ms. Holcomb expressed her gratitude for each of the schools' hard work throughout the renewal process.

- **Georgia School for Innovation & the Classics (GSIC)**

Recommendation: Ms. Manthey stated SCSC staff recommends Georgia School for Innovation and the Classics be approved for a five-year renewal contract.

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

SCSC Action: Chairman Lewis called for an approval of the SCSC staff recommendation for a five-year charter renewal term for the Georgia School for Innovation and the Classics. Commissioner Perez motioned. Commissioner Brockway seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

- **International Academy of Smyrna (IAS)**

Recommendation: Ms. Manthey stated SCSC staff recommends International Academy of Smyrna be approved for an abbreviated three-year charter contract renewal.

Public Comment: Public comment was given by Katrina Brinker, Head of School of International Academy of Smyrna. She expressed gratitude to the SCSC staff and commission for the opportunity to continue operating.

SCSC Action: Chairman Lewis called for an approval of the SCSC staff recommendation of a three-year charter renewal for International Academy of Smyrna. Commissioner Brockway motioned. Commissioner Williams seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

- **International Charter School of Atlanta (ICS Atlanta)**

Recommendation: Ms. Manthey stated SCSC staff recommends International Charter School of Atlanta be approved for a five-year charter contract.

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

SCSC Action: Chairman Lewis called for an approval of the SCSC staff's recommendation for a five-year charter contract for International Charter School of Atlanta. Commissioner Williams motioned. Commissioner Brockway seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

- **Odyssey Charter School (Odyssey)**

Recommendation: Ms. Manthey stated SCSC staff recommends Odyssey Charter School be approved for a five-year charter renewal contract.

Public Comment: A member from the Odyssey Charter School expressed their gratitude to the commission and the SCSC staff for their guidance.

SCSC Action: Chairman Lewis called for an approval of the SCSC staff's recommendation of a five-year charter contract term for Odyssey Charter School. Commissioner Perez motioned. Commissioner Brockway seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

- **Scintilla Charter Academy (Scintilla)**

Commissioner Williams recused himself from any deliberations or voting on Scintilla Charter Academy due to a conflict of interest.

Recommendation: Ms. Manthey stated SCSC staff recommends Scintilla Charter Academy be approved for an abbreviated two-year charter renewal contract.

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

SCSC Action: Chairman Lewis called for an approval of the SCSC staff's recommendation for Scintilla Charter Academy. Commissioner Perez motioned. Commissioner Brockway seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

Commissioner Perez commended the school staff on their hard work. He noted how a two-year charter term shows how critical one year in a child's education is.

- **Utopian Academy for the Arts (Utopian)**

Recommendation: Ms. Manthey stated SCSC staff recommends Utopian Academy for the Art be approved for an abbreviated three-year charter contract. The school met academic and operational expectations but is not currently meeting financial expectations.

Public Comment: Public comment was given by Dr. Miller, Founder and Executive Director of Utopian Academy for the Arts. Dr. Miller expressed gratitude to the commission and SCSC staff. He noted the school has had some financial challenges. He asked the board to consider approving a five-year charter renewal.

Commissioner Hill expressed gratitude to Dr. Miller and asked for further details that would allow the school to upend its financial struggles.

Dr. Miller noted the school receives financial support from donors and the school is no longer in the financial position they were once in.

Commissioner Hill asked for clarification on the approval process. He asked if the SCSC staff is examining only previous financial data or current data. Ms. Holcomb stated the process looks at the current data as well and noted there were student enrollment decline concerns.

The board and SCSC staff further discussed the school's enrollment and financial concerns.

Chairman Lewis asked Commissioner Hill for a motion to approve the SCSC recommendation. Commissioner Hill questioned how an additional two years in the charter renewal contract will be beneficial.

Dr. Miller, the board and SCSC staff further discussed the consideration for a five-year charter term.

Commissioner Millan left the meeting.

Chairman Lewis called for an approval for the three-year charter renewal contract. Commissioner Perez motioned. Commissioner Brockway seconded.

The board and SCSC staff further discussed the school's financial status.

SCSC Action: Chairman Lewis called for an approval of SCSC staff's recommendation of the abbreviated three-year charter renewal term. Commissioner Perez motioned. Commissioner Brockway seconded. The motioned passed by a unanimous vote by voting members.

Chairman Lewis expressed the differences between the terms of the charter renewals. He thanked commissioners, SCSC staff, and schools for their hard work. He noted charter schools were created to give students, who are being failed by the system, a better opportunity.

- **SCSC Recommendation to Initiate Rulemaking – SCSC Rule 691-2-.01** - Amend existing SCSC rule by adding definitions for the terms “Charter school replication” and “Charter school expansion.”

SCSC Recommendation to Initiate Rulemaking – SCSC Rule 691-2-.08 - A new rule which will require each charter between the SCSC and a state charter school to specifically state the total maximum number of students that the state charter school can enroll at any point during its charter term. The rule will also provide that charter enrollment limits may only be modified after SCSC approval through amendment of the charter.

SCSC Recommendation to Initiate Rulemaking – SCSC Rule 691-2-.09 - A new rule which will align charter school transfer petition requirements with SCSC start-up petition requirements. The rule will require that local charter schools seeking transfer to the SCSC face non-renewal or early termination from their local school district authorizer prior to SCSC approval, until such time that the state authorizer standards are implemented.

Recommendation: Ms. Lockett stated the staff recommends the board to initiate rulemaking procedures for SCSC Rules 691-2-.01, 691-2-.08, and 691-2-.09. The start of the process is to provide notice. Make publicly available of exact rules that will be proposed. Ms. Lockett stated the public will have at least 30 days for comment on rules.

Ms. Holcomb stated recommendations are stemming from better control for strategic growth. She noted an increase in students wanting to attend state charter schools. She explained the rule is to ensure enrollment limit, but the enrollment limit can be increased if a school wants to amend that part of their contract.

Chairman Lewis reminded everyone the vote is to initiate the rulemaking procedures and stated the changes would not be implemented until April.

SCSC Action: Chairman Lewis called for an approval to initiate rulemaking procedures for SCSC Rules 691-2-.01, 691-2-.08, and 691-2-.09. Commissioner Perez motioned. Commissioner Brockway seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote of all voting members.

Commissioner Perez exited for a different meeting.

VII. **Organizational Development Update**

Past Trainings - February Governance Training (February 4th – 5th)

Upcoming Trainings- New Schools Orientation: Legal and Operations (Mar 17th)

Ms. Easterbrook stated the last governance training for FY20 was this month. The upcoming training is the new schools training, which is geared toward schools in their preopening year.

VIII. **Academic Accountability Update**

- CPF Briefing – March meeting

Ms. Manthey provided an academic update on the March meeting.

IX. **Financial Accountability**

- Auditor Program RFP

- Mr. Washington announced that the RFP for the SCSC's approved auditor program was released last week. Interested parties have until March 20th to submit for consideration. Approved auditors will be selected and notified by April 3rd.

X. **Additional Items from Commissioners**

- Chairman Lewis announced the Charter School Subcommittee is meeting after this meeting. He stated his appreciation for Commissioners Williams, Brockway, and Hill for being a part of the subcommittee.
- Chairman Lewis announced Commissioner Buzz Brockway will replace Commissioner Paul Williams as the commissioner representative on the State Charter Schools Foundation Board. Chairman Lewis thanked Commissioner Williams for his service.
- Ms. Holcomb announced the SCSC office is moving to the West Tower.

XI. **Public Comment** - There was no public comment.

XII. **Adjourn** - The meeting adjourned at 11:56 a.m.