

STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS COMMISSION

MEETING MINUTES

June 24, 2020, 10:00 a.m.

SCSC Board Room

West Twin Tower, 5th Floor, Atlanta, Georgia

Teleconference: 1-888-808-6929; Access Code: 5206746



Attendees: Commissioners: Tom Lewis-Chairman; Paul Williams-Vice Chairman; Carmen Dill; Jose Perez; Buzz Brockway; Hunter Hill; 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; and Danielle Williams – Communications and Outreach Coordinator. Approximately 30 members of the public were also present.

I. **Call to Order** (Chairman Lewis)

- The meeting was called to order at 10:08 a.m.
- All commissioners were present.
- Chairmen Lewis announced that in accordance with the most recent public health guidance and the Governor’s Executive Order limiting public gatherings to 50 people, the SCSC permitted several commissioners and staff members to gather in person for this meeting, implementing social distancing and masks. He stated that the SCSC streamed the meeting for the public to attend virtually.
- The SCSC Executive Director announced public comment procedures and noted that the meeting materials are posted on the website for attendees to follow during the meeting. She also shared a baby announcement on behalf of the Charter Development Manager.

II. **Approval of SCSC Meeting Minutes** (Chairman Lewis)

- Chairman Lewis called for the approval of the April 29, 2020 meeting minutes. Commissioner Perez motioned. Commissioner Dill seconded. The April 29, 2020 meeting minutes were approved by unanimous vote.
- Chairman Lewis called for the approval of the May 21, 2020 called meeting minutes. Commissioner Williams motioned. Commissioner Perez seconded. The May 21, 2020 called meeting minutes were approved by unanimous vote.

III. **Officer Elections** (Chairman Lewis)

- Chairman Lewis called for a motion for a person to serve as chair of the SCSC. Commissioner Dill nominated Commissioner Paul Williams. Commissioner Perez seconded. The SCSC approved Commissioner Paul Williams as its Chairman by unanimous vote.
- Chairman Lewis called for a motion for a person to serve at vice chair of the SCSC. Commissioner Hill nominated Commissioner Buzz Brockway. Commissioner Perez seconded. The SCSC approved Commissioner Buzz Brockway as its Vice-Chairman by unanimous vote.

Chairman Lewis congratulated the new chair and vice chair of the SCSC and thanked each of the SCSC board members for their dedication to the board. Commissioner Paul Williams thanked Chairman Lewis for his service to the SCSC and presented him with a gift on behalf of the SCSC.

IV. **School Re-Start Update** (SCSC Executive Director)

- The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and Georgia Department of Public Health's (GaDPH) Path to Recovery for K12 Schools back-to-school have issued a guidance document. The GaDOE and GaDPH guidance document provides a tiered approach for safely re-opening schools during the COVID-19 pandemic based on levels of community spread, as determined by local boards of public health. The document contains guidance, not mandates and each LEA, and each state charter school, has the autonomy to determine a reopening plan that best fits the needs of their community.

The SCSC will require schools to submit a pandemic plan for review in late July. The SCSC staff will email school leaders and board chairs with more information. The SCSC staff's intention is to ensure that schools are complying with state and federal requirements and to support schools in developing a plan.

- Governor Brian Kemp and GaDOE Superintendent Richard Woods created The Governor's K-12 Restart Committee, which includes six committees to focus on K12 restart as the state considers school and community need this summer and fall. The six committees are School Meals; Distance Learning/Professional Learning; Connectivity & Devices; Mental Health and Wellness; Supplemental Learning; and Facilities, Transportation & Equipment.

The SCSC Executive Director serves on the Supplemental Learning committee. The committee is focused on facilitating and rethinking partnerships with supplemental learning providers and schools in light of COVID-19. The committee began meeting and will continue to meet through October.

Commissioner Brockway asked if the committee addressed tools to assess students academically and he also requested information on Georgia's testing waiver recently requested by GaDOE and the state.

The SCSC Executive Director explained that schools conduct benchmark testing through the school year. The SCSC plans to address the learning gaps with schools in requesting pandemic plans in July. She noted the SCSC staff would address Georgia's testing waiver later in the meeting.

Commissioners held additional discussion with the SCSC Executive Director regarding the Georgia's testing waiver and the pandemic plans for state charter schools.

V. **Legislative Update** (SCSC Executive Director)

- **HB 957** – HB 957, sponsored by Rep. Jan Jones, is awaiting the Governor's signature. HB 957 is SCSC agency legislation. The bill clarifies state charter school State Health Benefit Plan eligibility; allows charter schools flexibility in managing school lottery eligibility – option of requiring proof of residency at the time of application OR at the time of enrollment, based on the needs of the community that the school is intending to serve; extends state charter school board member terms from two to four years (for appointments after July 1, 2020); addresses two provisions related to student records: Clarifies that records are the property of the school, even if created through an agreement with a third-party vendor; outlines that in the event of state charter school closure, the school will maintain records for one year and facilitate record transfers. After that period, the SCSC will take any unclaimed records; and shifts the deadline

for the virtual school performance audit from Dec. 1st to April 1st to allow for the inclusion of academic performance data.

- **HB 755** – HB 755, sponsored by Rep. Dave Belton, passed the Senate Education Committee. The bill requires that local school systems provide annual allotment sheets to locally approved charter schools itemizing the state, local, and federal funds. This action will improve transparency between local charters and local boards of education and allow local charters to better prepare their budgets each year (by knowing what their funding will be).

VI. **2020 Petition Cycle** (SCSC Executive Director)

- The 2020 petition cycle was suspended by the SCSC on May 21, 2020. The state is facing a \$2B revenue shortfall, which is leading to significant education funding cuts. State charter schools are entirely reliant on state funding. Pending state revenues, the SCSC will resume the petition cycle this fall or in spring 2021. The SCSC staff will make an announcement at the August 26th board meeting. Additional information is available on the SCSC website.

VII. **School Openings** (SCSC Charter Development Manager)

- Six new state charter schools will open during the 2020-21 school year. Those schools are Atlanta Unbound Academy (Fulton); Delta STEAM Academy (Douglas); Furlow Charter School (Sumter); Georgia Fugees Charter School (DeKalb); Harriet Tubman Charter School (APS); and Yi Hwang Charter School (Gwinnett). Five schools have deferred their 2021-22 school year openings due to facility and COVID-related challenges.

VIII. **Organizational Development** (SCSC Charter Development Manager)

- The SCSC will hold several upcoming trainings. The trainings include Georgia Center for Assessment Webinar Series – July 9th and 14th; LEA Reporting Training – July 15th; and Assessment Coordinator Training – July 23rd. The governance training deadline was extended to Sep. 30, 2020.

IX. **Action Items**

- **School Accountability** (SCSC Director of Research and Evaluation)

Charter Term Extensions - Due to COVID-related school closures and the resulting statewide summative assessment cancellation in the 2019-20 school year, state charter schools will not have academic performance data for the 2019-20 school year.

The SCSC is recommending extending charter contract terms (for eligible schools) by one year to provide for a full academic performance assessment prior to charter renewal. SCSC staff shared the recommendation with schools via email on April 8 and publicly at the April 29, 2020 SCSC board meeting. The proposed recommendation was open for feedback through May 8th. Ten state charter schools provided feedback regarding the proposal, all in favor of the one-year extension. If approved, the SCSC staff will begin drafting charter amendment contracts for all applicable schools.

Schools are concerned with academic performance scores for the 2020-21 school year. Gov. Kemp and GaDOE issued a joint statement noting they will seek an assessment and accountability waiver for the upcoming (2020-21) school year as well (this would mean no Georgia Milestones assessments and no CCRPI score). The SCSC is keeping a close watch to see if and when that waiver will be approved by the U.S. Department of Education.

The SCSC will adjust the CPF to align with solutions, recommendations or adjustments provided by GaDOE. While the current proposed recommendation is meant to address the present situation in terms of available academic data, it does not preclude the SCSC from making future recommendations regarding academic performance scores to account for the disruptions of the COVID-19 crisis on the school year to come. The SCSC will consider additional adjustments and recommendations once we have more information.

Recommendation: The SCSC recommends that the State Charter Schools Commission approve the staff proposal to extend charter terms for eligible schools to provide for adequate academic performance data prior to renewal decisions.

SCSC Action: Chairman Lewis called for a motion to approve the SCSC staff recommendation. Commissioner Williams motioned. Commissioner Brockway seconded. By unanimous vote, the SCSC adopted the SCSC staff recommendation to extend charter terms for eligible schools to provide for adequate academic performance data prior to renewal decisions.

Commissioner Williams left the meeting at 11: 23 a.m. Commissioner Williams returned to the meeting at 11:25 a.m.

Commissioner Perez left the meeting at 11:29 a.m. Commissioner Perez returned to the meeting at 11:31 p.m.

- **FY21 Budget Presentation** (Chief Operations Officer)

The SCSC agency budget reflects the 11 percent funding reduction required of all agencies. Additionally, the SCSC will take steps to ensure that as much funding as possible flows to state charters in FY21. The two options we are exploring are reducing the administrative withhold (preferable) OR issuing the withhold return grant to schools in early FY21.

The SCSC Executive Director stated that this year’s budget presentation is an anomaly. In a typical year, the General Assembly would pass the fiscal year budget in March/April and the SCSC would have a much better picture of school revenue and agency revenue. The SCSC staff presented the agency revenue and budget based on the best available information.

Recommendation: The SCSC recommends that the State Charter Schools Commission adopt the FY21 SCSC agency budget as presented by SCSC staff.

SCSC Action: Chairman Lewis called for a motion to approve the SCSC staff recommendation. Commissioner Brockway motioned. Commissioner Hill seconded. By unanimous vote, the SCSC adopted the FY21 SCSC agency budget as presented by SCSC staff.

X. **Additional Items from Commissioners**

- There were no additional items from commissioners.

XI. **Public Comment**

- Beth McCamy spoke about school choice options during public comment.

XII. **Executive Session**

- Chairman Lewis called for a motion to close the meeting to conduct annual staff evaluations. Commissioner Williams motioned. Commissioner Brockway seconded. By unanimous vote, the SCSC closed the meeting for executive session to conduct annual staff evaluations.

XIII. **Adjourn**

- The Chairman announced that no action was taken during executive session and adjourned the meeting at approximately 12:48 p.m.