

STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS COMMISSION MEETING

September 30, 2015, 10 a.m.

**Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning Conference Room
East Twin Tower, Room 854, Atlanta, Georgia 30334**

Meeting Minutes

1. The meeting was called to order by Vice Chairman Paul Williams. Vice Chairman Williams verified that a quorum existed as Commissioners Lewis, Werner, and Perez were also present. Commissioner Lowden joined the meeting at approximately 10:30. Chairman Rippner and Commissioner Hogg were not present.
2. Also present were Commission staff members Gregg Stevens—Deputy Director and General Counsel, Terence Washington – Finance and Operational Accountability Manager, Morgan Felts – Associate General Counsel and Petitions Manager, Lauren Holcomb – Director of Organizational and Resource Development, and Katie Manthey – Business and Operations Manager.
3. Approximately 20 members of the public also attended the meeting including charter school staff and representatives, charter school business representatives, and charter school petitioners. Representatives from the Georgia Charter Schools Association were also present.
4. After calling the meeting to order, Vice Chairman Williams called for approval of the meeting minutes from the August 26th SCSC meeting. Commissioner Lewis made a motion to approve the minutes, and Commissioner Perez provided a second. There was no discussion, and the minutes were unanimously approved by those present.
5. Vice Chairman Williams then asked Deputy Director Stevens to review the portion of the agenda pertaining to agency-wide updates. Deputy Director Stevens noted that he, Chairman Rippner, and Commissioner Lowden visited Ivy Prep Young Men’s Leadership Academy on August 27th. Mr. Stevens noted that the school’s new leadership demonstrated commitment to improving the school’s academic success. Mr. Stevens also highlighted that he and commissioners will be visiting Utopian Academy for the Arts on November 16th to learn about the school’s progress and tour its facility.
6. Deputy Director Stevens next provided an update on school openings. SCSC staff and Commissioners attended new school openings for Scintilla Charter Academy and Foothills Education Charter High School’s location at the Burruss Correctional Training Center. Vice Chairman Williams commended Foothills and the Department of Corrections for its commitment to innovation and dedication to serving students who would otherwise not have the opportunity for a high school education.
7. Vice Chairman Williams then asked Lauren Holcomb for an update on organizational development. Ms. Holcomb noted that the SCSC will host two governance training sessions in the 2015-16 year. The first session is November 5-6 at Little Ocmulgee State Park and the second is February 10-11 at the Atlanta Evergreen Marriott Stone Mountain. Ms. Holcomb highlighted that

the SCSC staff restructured the format of its Petitioner Bootcamp trainings to add a second day of budget training in response to common petition deficiencies. The Petitioner Bootcamp training for December will have a second day on December 16th devoted to budget development and the Petitioner Bootcamp in early 2016 will be followed by a series of webinars that will include the same material. Ms. Holcomb also noted that the SCSC will conduct a New School Orientation on December 2nd for the schools approved by the SCSC during the 2015 Petition Review Cycle.

8. Vice Chairman Williams then asked for an update on academic accountability. Deputy Director Stevens shared that the Georgia Department of Education released the results of the Georgia Milestones Assessment System, Georgia's new assessments aligned to its new performance standards. Mr. Stevens noted that the results indicated that most students needed were not exhibiting expected proficiency in most subjects but that the Georgia Department of Education was working to provide resources to schools that will ultimately increase student achievement. Additionally, Mr. Stevens highlighted recent changes to the calculation methods for the CCRPI. Mr. Stevens noted that the new method of calculating CCRPI scores will place a greater emphasis on student growth. Commissioner Perez inquired as to the possibility of retroactively calculating CCRPI utilizing the new formula and Deputy Director Stevens stated that the SCSC will work with the Georgia Department of Education to determine the possibility of reexamining previous years' scores.
9. Next, Terence Washington provided an update on financial and operational accountability. Mr. Washington noted upcoming deadlines for schools to submit budget forms to the Georgia Department of Education and annual audits to the SCSC. Mr. Washington noted that most state charter schools are meeting these deadlines and that compliance has steadily increased over the last year. Mr. Washington also highlighted that Georgia applied but did not receive a federal Charter School Program Grant. As a result, charter schools may apply directly to the United States Department of Education for planning, implementation, and expansion grants. SCSC hosted the first in a series of web meetings to facilitate the dissemination of fiscal best practices among charter schools. Mr. Washington also shared that the SCSC was able to closeout FY15 after satisfying its remaining obligations from the close of the year.
10. Vice Chairman Williams then asked Morgan Felts for an update on the 2015 Petition Review Cycle. Ms. Felts explained that there was one petition remaining for consideration by the SCSC but that school, Brighten Academy, was continuing to work with its local board of education for possible approval by the local board. The SCSC will only consider that petition if the local district denies the petition. Ms. Felts also noted that the three schools approved by the SCSC at its August meeting were affirmed by the State Board of Education at its September meeting. As a result, if the SCSC approves the proposed Comprehensive Performance Framework, the SCSC will execute contracts for those three schools.
11. Vice Chairman Williams asked Deputy Director Stevens to discuss the staff recommendation to approve the SCSC Comprehensive Performance Framework. Mr. Stevens noted for the commission that SCSC staff initiated the process of developing a performance framework as its primary tool for holding schools accountable at the suggestion of NACSA following its independent evaluation of the SCSC's authorizer practices. Mr. Stevens stated that the purpose

of the framework is to provide schools and the public a clear standard and picture of school performance as it contains relevant and quantifiable measures by which schools can be assessed on an annual basis in the areas of academics, operations, and finance. Deputy Director Stevens noted that the Commission discussed the performance framework at length during its policy retreat in May, and that SCSC staff has been working since that time to finalize the performance framework with its schools and other stakeholders. Mr. Stevens then provided a brief summary of the academic, financial, and operational components of the framework. Mr. Stevens stated that the performance framework, if approved, will be incorporated into the contracts for new schools, including those approved last month, and charter renewals going forward, and that existing schools will have the option to amend their contracts to include the framework in lieu of existing goals once the performance framework results from the 2014-2015 school year are available. Vice Chairman Williams emphasized that existing charter schools will have the option to utilize the framework for accountability purposes and reiterated that the timeline and options have been clearly communicated to the schools. SCSC staff recommended that the commission approve the SCSC Comprehensive Performance Framework as presented. Commissioner Perez made a motion to approve the staff recommendation and Commissioner Lowden provided a second. The motion was unanimously approved by those present.

12. Next, Vice Chairman Williams asked if there were any additional items from the Commissioners. Mr. Lowden commended the work of Foothills Education Charter High School and Mountain Education Charter High School for their commitment to at-risk students, particularly those within the correctional system. Vice Chairman Williams echoed that sentiment highlighting the reforms made by Assistant Commissioner Buster Evans in his short time at the Department of Corrections.
13. Vice Chairman Williams then called for public comment. Heather Robinson, Executive Director for Georgia Connections Academy, addressed the Commission regarding the SCSC Comprehensive Performance Framework. Ms. Robinson stressed her commitment to accountability but noted that virtual schools were unique and did not fit the mold of laws and standards that were designed for traditional brick-and-mortar schools. Ms. Robinson requested that the Commission consider adjusting its performance framework for virtual schools to utilize different measures of success and to compare results to other virtual schools rather than to the performance of brick-and-mortar schools. Mr. Stevens noted for the Commission that Ms. Robinson had shared this input with him but that SCSC staff declined to incorporate that feedback into the performance framework given the Commission's commitment to holding all schools to the same standard that is consistent with its mission of providing better educational opportunities for students than is otherwise available in their traditional school districts. Vice Chairman Williams emphasized that the performance of virtual schools has been frequently discussed by the Commission, and that the Commission's expectations for virtual school performance have been constant. Commissioner Lewis noted that the Commission maintains a high standard for all schools so as not to create a second class of schools but that the Commission is dedicated to reviewing and adapting to meet its needs and the needs of the schools.
14. There being no further business before the SCSC, Vice Chairman Williams asked for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Lowden offered a motion, and Commissioner Perez provided a second. The motion was unanimously approved by those present, and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 10:50 a.m.