

## **STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS COMMISSION MEETING**

**October 28, 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 Chairman Jennifer Rippner. Chairman Rippner verified that a quorum existed. Commissioner Jose Perez participated via telephone. Commissioner Tom Lewis was 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 40 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, Chairman Rippner called for approval of the meeting minutes from the September 30th SCSC meeting. Commissioner Lowden made a motion to approve the minutes, and Commissioner Hogg provided a second. There was no discussion, and the minutes were unanimously approved by those present.
5. Chairman Rippner then asked Deputy Director Stevens to review the portion of the agenda pertaining to agency-wide updates. Deputy Director Stevens noted that staff and some commissioners would conduct a quarterly site visit on November 16, 2015 at Utopian Academy for the Arts in Riverdale.
6. Chairman Rippner then asked Lauren Holcomb for an update on organizational development. Ms. Holcomb stated that the SCSC hosted a webinar for newly approved schools on October 14. Ms. Holcomb noted several upcoming training opportunities, including governance training November 5-6 at Little Ocmulgee State Park, New School Orientation on December 2 in the Twin Towers for newly approved school boards, and Petitioner Boot Camps on December 15-16 at the Georgia Tech Hotel and Conference Center and January 20 at the Macon Marriott City Center in Macon. Ms. Holcomb also noted that the December 16 training would specifically focus on budget and finance and that the SCSC would host webinars in January for those who are unable to attend trainings in person.
7. Chairman Rippner then asked for an update on academic accountability. Deputy Director Stevens shared that the GaDOE is still finalizing results of the 2014-15 Georgia Milestones Assessment and data should be available soon. Mr. Stevens noted that the SCSC has begun its compliance monitoring activities for the 2015-2016 school year. SCSC staff will conduct unannounced site visits to each school, attend some governing board meetings, and review each school's website

to ensure that the information it provides to stakeholders is consistent with the law. Schools will be notified of any findings. The findings, if any, will be used to determine the school's score on the operational component of the SCSC Comprehensive Performance Framework. Lastly, Mr. Stevens provided an update on the Georgia Department of Audits review of Georgia virtual schools.

8. Next, Terence Washington provided an update on financial and operational accountability. Mr. Washington noted that the SCSC received draft versions of most schools' audit reports by the October 1<sup>st</sup> deadline in their charter contracts. Most of the audits that we received will not be finalized until additional information is released by the Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts and the Georgia Department of Education.
9. Chairman Rippner then asked Morgan Felts for an update on the SCSC 2015 Petition Review Process. Ms. Felts explained that Brighten Academy received approval from their local board of education to continue to operate for another year. As a result of that approval, the SCSC is not authorized to approve its petition. No further action by the SCSC is needed regarding the petition for Brighten Academy and no other petitions remaining from the 2015 SCSC Petition Review Cycle. Ms. Felts then explained that two state charter schools – Ivy Preparatory Young Men's Leadership Academy and CCAT – are in the final year of their charter contracts. At the November meeting, SCSC staff will share with commissioners a plan for reviewing those schools for renewal. Consistent with past SCSC renewal decisions, the process will be driven by the data regarding the school's academic, financial, and operational performance. Staff and commissioners will interview each school's leadership to discuss performance and prospect for a future term. The goal is to have a recommendation for action to the SCSC at its February meeting, however, it is not yet clear given the ambiguity of when the SCSC will receive CCRPI data for the 2014-2015 school year.
10. Next, Chairman Rippner asked Ms. Felts to explain the first SCSC Process Item, the charter amendment for Cirrus Charter Academy. Ms. Felts explained that Cirrus requested a charter amendment to adjust its educational and operational models given the loss of the educational service provider it contemplated in its petition. Cirrus Charter Academy planned to contract with String Theory Schools; however, complications arose regarding String Theory's tax-exempt status that necessitated the termination of that partnership. In its amendment request, Cirrus proposed to contract with Prestige Charter Solutions to provide many of the services previously provided by String Theory Schools. The remaining services will be provided by Cirrus. The school also requested a charter amendment to add a year to the charter to ensure that they have five years of operation in this charter term. SCSC staff recommended approval of this amendment. Chairman Rippner called for a motion and Commissioner Hogg provided a motion to approve the amendment with Commissioner Perez providing a second. Commissioners unanimously approved the motion.
11. Chairman Rippner then asked Deputy Director Stevens to explain the next process item, a charter amendment for the Charter Conservatory for Arts and Technology (CCAT). Deputy Director Stevens explained that CCAT requested to utilize the SCSC Comprehensive Performance Framework as the basis for its academic, financial, and operational accountability for its current charter term. SCSC staff recommends approval of this amendment. Chairman Rippner called for

a motion and Commissioner Lowden provided a motion to approve the amendment with Commissioner Hogg providing a second. Commissioners unanimously approved the motion.

12. Chairman Rippner asked Deputy Director Stevens to explain the final process item, amendments to Ivy Preparatory Schools' charter contracts to eliminate the high school program from the expected grades served by the schools. Mr. Stevens explained that the governing board of Ivy Preparatory Academies voted to close the high school programs and that the SCSC did not have the authority to overturn the governing board's decision. Mr. Stevens noted that the requested charter amendments would determine whether the schools were authorized to conduct a high school program or and that approval of the amendments would help ensure that students utilized educational opportunities of better quality than those previously provided by the schools. Deputy Director Stevens noted that the school provided an array of evidence to justify the decision to close the school – including academic and financial data – and that the staff recommendation to approve the amendment is based solely on the academic data that indicated the students would be better served elsewhere. Chairman Rippner called for a motion and Commissioner Williams made a motion to approve the amendment with Commissioner Hogg providing a second. Chairman Rippner called for discussion and Commissioners Williams, Lowden, Werner, and Hogg expressed disappointment at the decision of the governing board to close the school mid-year and questioned why action wasn't taken prior to the beginning of the school year. Commissioner Rippner called for public comment on the item and representatives from Ivy Preparatory Academy leadership teams and the governing board provided comment, as did school supporters and parents. After discussion and questions of school leaders, commissioners unanimously voted to approve the amendments to reduce the grade spans of the Ivy Preparatory Academies to not include high school grades.
13. Chairman Rippner asked for additional items from commissioners and there were none.
14. Chairman Rippner next called for public comment and there was none.
15. There being no further business before the SCSC, Chairman Rippner adjourned the meeting at approximately 11:45 a.m.