

STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS COMMISSION MEETING

March 26, 2014, 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 Commission Chair Charles B. Knapp. Chairman Knapp verified that a quorum existed and that all members of the commission were present.
2. Also present were Commission staff members Bonnie Holliday—Executive Director, Gregg Stevens--General Counsel, Daniela Belton—Business and Operations Manager, Lauren Holcomb—Director of Organizational and Resource Development, Terence Washington—Accountability Manager.
3. Approximately 15 members of the public also attended the meeting including charter school staff and representatives and charter school business representatives. Representatives from GCSA were also present.
4. A motion was made by Commissioner Perez and seconded by Commissioner Lowden that the Commission approve the meeting minutes from the February 26th SCSC meeting. The minutes were unanimously approved.
5. Chairman Knapp next requested that Bonnie Holliday address the items listed under Section II of the agenda. Director Holliday provided an update on recent state charter school site visits. On March 6th, Director Holliday and Commissioner Rippner visited Cherokee Charter Academy in Cherokee County. Commissioner Rippner noted the school's recent organizational changes including the onboarding of a new principal as well as the discontinuation of high school grade levels, and she reported that the school's new principal cited increased freedom and flexibility as the most significant benefits associated with operating as a state charter. On March 18th, Director Holliday and Commissioner Hogg visited Fulton Leadership Academy in Fulton County. Commissioner Hogg noted the school's academic achievement and the leadership's commitment to hiring content area specialists to teach math and science.
6. Dr. Knapp then asked how future site visits would be conducted since the SCSC commissioners and staff have completed a full round of visits to all existing state charter schools. Director Holliday explained that additional site visits would be conducted as needed and that future visits will likely be much more focused and strategic than previous visits. She also requested that schools continue to alert the SCSC staff when hosting special events.
7. Director Holliday then provided an update on pending legislation impacting state charter schools. She highlighted HB 405 which requires annual governance board training for charter school boards as the only charter-related legislation that passed during the 2014 legislative session.

8. Next, Director Holliday explained that in an ongoing effort to ensure the integrity of Georgia's standardized assessment program, the SCSC staff (in coordination with the Governor's Office of Student Achievement and the GaDOE) will assist in the monitoring of state charters during the upcoming spring administration of statewide standardized assessments. Monitoring will occur at various school testing sites—which will be selected at random—in order to assist GaDOE and GOSA in their efforts to maintain the validity of state assessments as well as student achievement results. The full cooperation of state charter school staff and leadership is expected and appreciated.

9. Next, Lauren Wright provided an overview of the SCSC's March newsletter, and she highlighted the following training opportunities for state charter schools:

- Teacher Keys Evaluation System (TKES) Training—March 25th -28th
- Leader Keys Evaluation System (LKES) Training—April 14th-15th
- "How To Be an LEA" Training—May 8th – 9th

Additionally, Lauren announced an opportunity for strategic planning and budget development sessions this summer for those state charters that are interested in participating. She will be sending additional information to schools soon.

10. Terence Washington next provided a status update on the SCSC's financial monitoring of all state charter schools. Mr. Washington reminded commissioners that because the SCSC has had several issues with schools not meeting annual audit deadlines and because the quality of audit varies greatly from school to school, the SCSC is covering the cost of the required annual financial audits for any interested state charter school in Fiscal Year 2014. Nine (9) of the fifteen (15) schools have chosen to take advantage of this offer. These schools are: CCAT, Pataula Charter Academy, Odyssey/GCA, Heritage Charter School, Fulton Leadership Academy, Ivy Prep Academy Gwinnett, Ivy Prep Kirkwood Boys, Ivy Prep Kirkwood Girls, and Scholars Academy.

11. At this point, Chairman Knapp requested Mr. Stevens discuss the recent recommendations for charter amendments as listed in section III of the meeting agenda. Mr. Stevens first discussed the staff recommendation to approve the request from Heritage Preparatory Academy to amend the school's charter contract so that the end of the current charter term coincides with the end of the current fiscal/academic year. After addressing questions from commissioners, and reviewing the financial issues contributing to governing board's request, Chairman Knapp asked for a motion to consider the amendment. Commissioner Lewis made a motion that was seconded by Commissioner Williams and, as there was no further discussion, the staff recommendation to approve the school's request for an amendment was approved unanimously. Mr. Stevens next discussed the staff recommendation to approve the request from Pataula Charter Academy to amend their charter contract with regard to the proprietary curriculum model Expeditionary Learning. After addressing questions from commissioners, Chairman Knapp asked for a motion to consider the amendment. The motion was provided by Commissioner Hogg and seconded by Commissioner Lowden. There being no further discussion, Chairman Knapp called for a vote, and the staff's recommendation to approve the charter amendment was approved unanimously.

12. Next, Chairman Knapp requested Director Holliday review the staff recommendations related to a reduction in administrative withholding amounts. Director Holliday first reviewed the staff's recommendation related to the remainder of Fiscal Year 2014. She explained that the recommendation to approve a reduction of withholding from 2% to what equates to slightly

below 2% for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2014 was based on the fact that—according to the *Amended* FY14 allotment sheet—the 2% withhold for the commission is set to increase in proportion to our schools’ earnings following the midterm budget adjustment. Because the SCSC’s annual operating budget is based on the original (pre-midterm adjustment) amount, SCSC staff recommend that commissioners approve the redistribution of the “overage” amount to state charter schools on a pro rata basis. Chairman Knapp then called for a motion which was provided by Commissioner Perez and seconded by Commissioner Rippner, and there being no further discussion, the staff recommendation to further reduce the administrative withholding for the remainder of FY14 was unanimously approved.

13. Director Holliday then reviewed the staff’s recommendation related to a reduction in administrative withholding during Fiscal Year 2015. She explained that the intent of the recommendation is twofold: 1) to reduce the administrative withholding for existing state charter schools from 3% to 2% during Fiscal Year 2015, and 2) to reduce the withholding for new schools in their first year of operation from 3% to 1% in an attempt to offset some of the start-up costs schools incur during Year 1. These costs include, but are not limited to, facility procurement, furniture and technology purchases, and lack of T&E funding. After Director Holliday addressed questions of commissioners, Chairman Knapp called for a motion which was provided by Commissioner Lewis and seconded by Commissioner Hogg, and there being no further discussion, the staff recommendation to approve a reduction of withholding for the Fiscal Year 2015 was unanimously approved.
14. Chairman Knapp then inquired about the actual savings that the approved reductions in withholding would yield for state charter schools. Mr. Stevens explained that for Fiscal Year 2014, the reduction of withholding from 3% to 2% (approved by the SCSC in the spring of 2013) combined with the additional reduction of withholding following the midterm budget adjustment (approved at today’s meeting) equaled \$1,674,146. For Fiscal Year 2015, the projected savings for schools equals \$1,329,726.
15. Prior to adjourning the meeting, Chairman Knapp verified that no members of the public signed up to speak during the public comment period.
16. There being no further business to come before the Commission, a motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Williams and seconded by Commissioner Perez. The motion was unanimously approved, and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:35am.