

Alabama Public Charter School Commission
June 24, 2020 1:00 P.M.
Via Zoom

MINUTES

The Alabama Public Charter School Commission (APCSC) met on Wednesday, June 24, 2020, in a Zoom meeting to consider matters relevant to duties of the Alabama Public Charter School Commission outlined in the *Alabama School Choice and Student Opportunity Act* for public charter schools in Alabama.

Welcome, Introductions, Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Henry Nelson welcomed everyone to the meeting. Roll call of the Alabama Charter School Commission (APCSC) was taken. Seven members were present which represented a quorum. David Marshall made a motion to approve the agenda and the June 9 minutes; Allison Haygood seconded this motion. Roll call for the adoption of the agenda and minutes from the June 9 meeting was taken and all seven members who were present voted to approve. Members of the Commission who participated in the meeting via Zoom were as follows:

Henry Nelson

Allison Haygood

David Marshall

Paul Morin

Sydney Raine

Kim Terry

Jamie Ison

Marla Green – late due to technical difficulties

Lisa Williams and Eddie Hill were absent.

Summary Report Tyler Barnett New Schools for Alabama

Henry Nelson invited Tyler Barnett from New Schools for Alabama to provide a summary report. Mr. Barnett relayed that the previous legislature had passed a line item to increase funding from \$200,000 to \$800,000, with \$400,000 going to New Schools for Alabama to support charter school start up programs. Mr. Barnett explained that the New Schools for Alabama's Founder's Program provides the vehicle to utilize this money thorough a year-long incubator program. This program chooses two aspiring leaders, high-quality candidates, and assists them in meeting their start-up needs in the communities in which they are working. This assistance may include developing an application or aligning the school leaders with experts in specific fields in order to launch a highly effective new charter school. New Schools for Alabama also provides a leadership residency. Mr. Barnett explained that the first section shares the language in the MOU between New Schools for Alabama, the commission, and the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE), describing deliverables (term report and summary report), and training components. These reports describe progress in the pilot cohort and the future for the next cohort. Mr. Barnett further described the School Founders Program, partnering with the ALSDE, as "as good as any other program around the country." The second section of the report describes New Schools for Alabama's mission to support the growth of excellent charter schools, ensuring that every child in

Alabama has the opportunity to receive a quality education. One component, New School Development, incubates local and regional talent to provide application assistance which translates to technical assistance to persons who are interested in starting a charter school. He explained that his agency intentionally keeps the cohorts small in order to develop a personal relationship with the schools and their leadership. Mr Barnett also mentioned a networking component yet expressed his desire to strengthen this component. Mr. Barnett introduced two representatives from the first cohort - Kia Debnam, representing Life Academy in Montgomery, the first charter school to be approved by a local school board, and Darren Ramalho representing Breakthrough Academy in Perry County which is in the application cycle. Anthony Oliver and Reuben Morris, Alabama Aerospace and Aviation High School, also spoke. Following this presentation Chairman Nelson asked if there were any questions from commissioners. He also asked if a vote was needed. Mrs. Searcy replied that no vote was needed since no action was taken and Lane Knight, the commission’s attorney, concurred. The presentation was accepted as a deliverable.

Discussion	Meeting the Reporting Requirement	School Works Representatives
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<p>Mrs. Searcy explained to the commission that, according to law, all school authorizers are to submit an annual report to the legislature by November 1. Due to the Covid epidemic, on-site school reviews have not been done as contracted, and thus the data has not been gathered. Mrs. Searcy explained that School Works was under contract until October 30 to evaluate applications and to perform the quality reviews. She asked the commission for direction on how to proceed with their contract and how to perform the quality reviews. Mrs. Searcy explained that in previous years, the reviewers have submitted reports outlining successes, challenges, data, teacher development, and opportunities for learning to the commission and these reports were then submitted to the legislature. Mrs. Searcy questioned the best way to secure the needed information from the school without creating additional burdens during these very challenging times when schools are modifying their schedules to adjust to the Covid epidemic. Mrs. Searcy asked David Hartman and Kim Perron, representing School Works, to provide ideas. Mr. Hartman and Ms. Perron provided many examples of reviews and various ways of conducting these reviews in numerous places. Mrs. Perron detailed how information would be collected over two days utilizing four questions in four different domains: 1. Students’ opportunity to learn, 2. Educator’s opportunities to learn, 3. Instruction, and 4. Leadership and Governance. The representatives explained that School Works uses a variety of methods and flexibility to meet the needs in various situations, especially in this era of Covid. For instance, they could use randomly selected virtual reviews to provide information related to classroom instruction. School Works described a review that could be conducted on-site in two days. Chairman Nelson asked if the commission’s options included having a site review, a modified review, or no review. Mr. Lane Knight clarified that an on-site review is not required, yet an annual report to the legislature is required. Mr. Nelson solicited questions from the commission. Commissioner David Marshall commended School Works on their willingness to respond to the present challenges. He asked what the two-day process looks like for schools, for parents, and for students. Mrs. Perron responded that it would take school leaders 2 to 3 hours of preparation to gather documents and submit them to the School Works team to review. She also explained that School Works would need 2 to 3 hours with a focus group of teachers, 2 to 3 hours with a focus group of students from third grade up, and 1 to 2 hours with the school leader or school team. Mrs. Perron explained that this virtual review would be at a reduced rate since there is no travel cost involved. Commissioner Green also expressed her gratitude to School Works for their willingness to work with the commission to meet their needs. Commissioner Raine asked the representatives if they would be able to complete this process by September 30 and Mrs. Perron responded affirmatively. Commissioner Marshall then asked if, through their experience, School Works</p>		
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had found this type of review easier on the school than completing a report. Mrs. Perron replied that she had personal experience in a charter school and that she found the reports to be quite time consuming. Mrs. Searcy stated that the two requirements by law for authorizers were sent to the commissioners and the commissioners could decide how to meet these requirements.

Commissioner Green asked if Superintendent Mackey had released the starting dates for schools and Mrs. Searcy responded that this information would be released the next day. Mrs. Searcy stated that the students may be brought back in stages – some in the classroom and some working virtually from home. Commissioner Haygood proposed that the commission proceed with the annual review as described by School Works. She stated that, as a principal, she could set up the focus groups fairly easily if she had the domains and the questions provided by School Works. Commissioner Morin agreed with Ms. Haygood, stating that he believes in accountability but he did not want to create an additional burden on the schools. Mr. Morin stated that he preferred the schools to interact with School Works. Ms. Haygood stated that if a school is a successful charter school, then its simply a matter of uploading documents to fulfill the requirements of the review. Ms. Searcy informed the commission that she had sent out the compliance monitoring self-assessment, a Yes/no questionnaire, that week which enables school leaders to know what is required of them. No documentation is required yet this questionnaire could make school leaders aware of the technical assistance that they might need. Chairman Nelson stated that he is still concerned about the additional burden on charter schools and he invited Mr. Jeremiah Newell to provide feedback on what the charter schools would prefer to do. Mr. Newell reported that he had received a “road map” from Dr. Mackey and that schools would not be closed next year even if the instruction is provided virtually. Mr. Newell reported that the compliance monitoring schedule had been released and charter schools would be monitored for a week in August. Commissioner Marshall thanked Mr. Newell for his perspective and then asked School Works about the reduced pricing for the modified reviews. He also asked if there was a possibility of reducing the amount of focus groups to make it less burdensome on schools. Mrs. Perron replied that there would be a \$10,000 savings across four schools. She then stated that they do not recommend reducing the amount of focus groups which would affect the amount of information gathered. Chairman Nelson stated his concern regarding Covid “hot spots” and the inability of some families to access Zoom. He asked Mrs. Perron what would happen if the participation was insufficient. She responded that a survey would then be used but School Works would need email addresses for parents. Commissioner Ison asked how Auburn University gathered their information last year and how it was used. Mrs. Searcy stated that Auburn gathered a great deal of information, created a report, and then each member of the legislature was given a copy of the report as a part of the ALSDE annual report. Ms. Ison expressed her respect for Mr. Newell and stated that she would like the commission to do anything that they can do to assist the schools. She asked the attorney to verify that a site visit was not needed yet a report was required; Mr. Knight affirmed. Ms. Searcy reminded the commission that certain components, such as those included in the Performance Framework and a data comparison, were required in the report. Mr. Knight affirmed that certain components were required yet an on-site visit is not. Mr. Raine stated that he would like all four schools to express their preference for submitting data since there were only four schools. Mr. Tyler Barnett stated that Dr. Wedgeworth was on the phone and several attempts were made to obtain Dr. Wedgeworth’s feedback on her preference for obtaining the needed information from the schools. Commissioner Ison asked if a decision was needed today and Mrs. Searcy replied that a decision was not needed today yet the schools need time to respond to the requests. She stated that Legacy Prep and LEAD will not go through compliance monitoring; they just receive technical assistance. Mr. Marshall expressed his appreciation and stated that it’s a question of logistics, not accountability so it would be beneficial to get input from the other schools in these

challenging times in order to meet requirements in the least burdensome manner. Mr. Nelson asked if the commission needs to take a vote on the issue involving money and Mrs. Searcy said no vote was needed at this time because the contract does not end until September 30. Commissioner Ison suggested a time frame with a September 30 deadline for a decision and Chairman Nelson asked School Works' representatives if this timeline would work. Mr. Hartman stated that the initial contract would need to be adjusted if there are more than two additional applicants because there were only five initial applications and they have already completed three. Mr. Nelson stated that he would like to reduce the focus groups and use the available data. Ms. Haygood stated that the information needed by School Works would go along with compliance monitoring and it is required. In regards to Covid safety, Ms. Perron stated that there would not be ten people in the room for the focus groups. Mr. Nelson still feared that too many people would be barred from participation due to their lack of Zoom capabilities. Ms. Haygood suggested that the commission wait to decide until they get feedback from Dr. Wedgeworth.

Discussion Committee Report on Modification of the Rubric

Commissioner Marshall explained the committee work that had been discussed to modify the rubric. Mr. Marshall stated that the committee recommends that some of the items on the rubric be moved to the Statement of Assurances because they were not good predictors of quality schools, such as the development of a discipline policy. Mr. Marshall further explained that the rubric was consolidated with some items weighted more heavily than others. Mr. Marshall explained that with some sections would not be scored, such as Conflict of Interests, and that there would not be a cut score in year one or until the data was normed. Mr. Marshall stated that the modified rubric would give strengths and weaknesses and provide a better process of evaluating applications. Commissioner Green concurred. Commissioner Ison had a question regarding the financial stability of a candidate. Mr. Marshall stated that the financial sections had been combined yet that section has the highest rating/scoring points. Ms. Ison asked if the commission needs to set a minimum dollar amount of money that a school should have at the time of application. Mr. Marshall stated that a specific dollar amount was not needed yet the financial stability would become apparent through the application, the interview, and the other components of application. Mr. Marshall added that the modified rubric could not be used for this year's summer applicants. He relayed that David Hartman said that the summer process should be about dialogue, trying to ascertain if the school has the ability to become a viable school. Commissioner Ison asked if there would be any adjustment for the summer applicants. Mr. Marshall stated that it would be unfair to School Works if the schools have a second chance for feedback. Ms. Haygood stated that they need to be mindful of the financial threshold when evaluating applications because the external evaluators are costly for each review. Mr. Nelson asked if there would be enough money to add applicants since there was savings due to the modified reviews. Mrs. Searcy stated that there is a possibility of a fourth or fifth applicant coming in. Mr. Tyler Barnett stated that he understands the financial limitations, yet he relayed that his agency knows of only four applicants that are at different levels of application. He stated that it is late notice to make schools aware of a financial threshold for this cycle. He also recommended that the commission be careful how high the threshold is set as "philanthropy comes and goes." [Attempts were made to include Dr. Wedgeworth's opinion regarding on-site reviews via cell phone yet it was not possible.] Chairman Nelson suggested that the commission vote on the rubric.

Jamie Ison made the motion to accept the revised rubric as David Marshall presented it, including the change that the rubric will not include a recommendation and that assurances will be added. Ms. Green

seconded the motion. The motion carried with 8 Yes votes and 0 No votes from the participating commissioners. The votes were as follows:

Henry Nelson - Yes	Paul Morin - Yes
David Marshall - Yes	Sydney Raine - Yes
Kim Terry - Yes	Allison Haygood - Yes
Marla Green - Yes	Jamie Ison – Yes

Lisa Williams and Eddie Hill were Absent on this day.

Ms. Ison asked if the commission needed to send out a call for proposals for evaluators 30 days prior to the time that an external evaluator would be needed. Mrs. Searcy replied affirmatively unless it involves a state university. She added that the rubric needed to be developed prior to sending out the RFP. Mr. Raine asked if there were provisions for extending the present contract (for School Works). Mrs. Searcy stated that the present contract would end September 30.

Adjournment

Jamie Ison made a motion to adjourn and the motion was seconded by Allison Haygood. The meeting was adjourned with all commissioners agreeing to adjourn.