

**Alabama Public Charter School Commission**  
**June 7, 2019 9: 30 A.M.**  
**Teleconference and Face to Face**

**MINUTES**

The Alabama Public Charter School Commission (APCSC) met on Friday, June 7, 2019, via teleconference and face to face 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.

Members of the Commission who participated in the meeting and via teleconference meeting were as follows:

Mac Buttram

Absent: Charles Jackson

Tommy Ledbetter

Melissa McInnis

Henry Nelson

David Marshall

Allison Haygood

Ibrahim Lee

Lisa Williams

**Welcome, Approval of Agenda and Minutes**

Mac Buttram opened the meeting by welcoming everyone. He asked Allison Haygood to introduce herself. She is the new commissioner. He asked for a roll call of the Alabama Charter School Commission (APCSC). Mac Buttram asked for a motion to approve the minutes from May 23, 2019. Tommy Ledbetter made the motion and Lisa Williams seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous to approve. Mac Buttram asked for a motion to approve the agenda. Ibrahim Lee made the motion, and Tommy Ledbetter seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous to approve.

**Public Comment**

Mac Buttram introduced the time for public comment for those who have signed up and asked if Curtis Robinson would make his comments. Mr. Robinson stated he was from Birmingham and said he was a volunteer for political coordinator for Community for Addressing School Issues. Please explain the posted notice and why its description just has the word request and is the Woodlawn Prep contract available and he stated that he sees that it is on the agenda.

**Request from Woodlawn Prep**

Mac Buttram stated that he received a letter from the attorney for a request for an extension on its opening date for one year allowing them to open in 2020 and also open its doors for Pre-K through 8<sup>th</sup> which adds a year with an enrollment of 260 students. He asked for Woodland Prep to introduce themselves and explain their roles. Nash Campbell, the attorney for Woodland Prep addressed the Commission. He addressed the need for the one year delay due to construction and permitting. They had a pre-k -7<sup>th</sup>, so the wanted to use the Pre-K through 8<sup>th</sup> due to the intent for an eight grade in year2. They spoke to subcontracting issues due to negative pressure in the community. Logan Searcy addressed the issue around Pre-K. The Commission has no authority in regards to Pre-k that falls to the Department of

Early Childhood, so the enrollment numbers should be in K-8<sup>th</sup> grade and should not include Pre-K numbers. Nash Campbell stated that it was their understanding that they have already received the Pre-K grant. Dr. Soner Tarim stated that the Pre-K number would be taken out, but with the addition of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade the enrollment number would be 264. Mac Buttram asked for questions from the Commission. Mac Buttram stated that he had received a letter from Dr. Mackey addressing concerns around the approval of Woodland Prep. He asked the representatives from the charter school to address the concerns. Henry Nelson asked about the issue with the subcontractors and about the rumors around bullying and asked for information in writing. Nash Campbell stated that they did not have it in writing from the subcontractors. The subcontractors had directly stated to it to the contractors who reported it. He stated they had available information collected from social media posts. Mac Buttram stated if the extension were to be granted then at a certain date 80% of the enrollment preopening condition had to be met, and if not met, it would be unlikely that the Commission would allow the charter school to open. What if the building is completed and the 80% enrollment is not met? Soner Tarim stated that he was confident that the enrollment would be met. He stated that they had a robotics camp during spring break that was well attended and that once the building was complete, the numbers would increase. The robotics camp was held at the Washington County library and the BASF Organization. Henry Nelson asked they were willing to take a six million dollar risk of building a school and no one enrolls? Soner Tarim stated yes that American Charter Development was willing to take that risk. Henry Nelson stated that was a high risk. A representative from the American Charter Development stated they do this work all over the country and have seen this before. The contractor for the charter school stated that it would be ready to complete milestones and ready for school tours. Lisa Williams asked about the number of students who are enrolled and if they still have them. He stated that they have not fully enrolled the students at present. Mac Buttram asked about the insufficient number of school administrators. Soner Tarim stated that all preopening conditions of the charter contract have been met except from some missing information of the safety plan due to the fact that the school has not been built. He stated they had hired someone, but the constant bullying had made her say that she could not take the pressure and resigned. Interviews are ongoing and there are many applicants who are local. Henry Nelson asked about the funding in the budget. Soner Tarim stated that they could manage by making the certain the money is spent wisely. Mac Buttram asked about what happens to the \$300,000 that would go to his company. He said 70% goes to salaries to people who will work to run the school. At present, he is paying his own staff. Tommy Ledbetter stated that it sounded like a central office. Allison Haygood expressed concerns around the low enrollment numbers and stated that they cannot earn an assistant principal with 240 students. He stated that he understands that, but he plans to hire one regardless. Tommy Ledbetter asked if teachers would be paid by the state salary matrix. Soner Tarim expressed that they will be. Tommy Ledbetter asked whose responsibility is it for the preopening conditions to be met. Soner Tarim stated that it was his responsibility. Henry Nelson expressed concerned that none of the people with concerns from the community had come to the meeting. Lisa Williams stated she had 15 emails and one was from the local Board of Education and based on what was said, most was uninformed. Mac Buttram asked about the parental makeup for the board. Nash Campbell stated that the process is ongoing since they had a resignation. Thad Becton stated they had followed the open meeting law. Nash Campbell assured the Commission that since he has been hired that all laws had been followed. Mac Buttram asked about the inaccurate information in the application. One issue was the number (900) of students who left the county to go to other schools. Nash Campbell stated that a founding member who was the economic director had compiled the information, but was deceased. Another board member, Jacob Snow, stated that he had spoken with the economic director and the numbers were addressed in their conversation. He did

ask about the source. The 900 was a compilation of the population decline and those leaving the county. Jacob Snow stated that he considered her information to be from a reliable source. Mac stated that the other issue was the name of the advisory board member who said she had not agreed to be part of the advisory team. Nash Campbell stated that they had agreed to redact her name, but the State cannot allow it to be redacted from the original applications. Nash Campbell stated they have emails and minutes that reflect her participation and had sent those to Dr. Mackey showing that she was part of the team. They respect her right to disassociate, but she had been a part of the team at the time. Mac Buttram wanted to make a comment about the National Association Charter School Authorizers and Auburn Center of Evaluation. The Commission employed NACSA for several applications early on and NACSA did extensive face to face interviews and the reports were thorough, and then they started doing the interviews by phone calls. After that, he felt like the reports were not as thorough. The Commission used the NACSA reports to interview the applicants, and the applicants reported that the concerns were not addressed in the interviews. Logan Searcy stated they did not want to review the Montgomery Education Foundation twice. She stated that the Commission wanted an external reviewer to complete annual reviews of the two open charter schools and if needed, reviews of applications. A request for proposal was not needed due to the exemption in the bid law for government entities. Mac Buttram stated that they voted to use ACE prior to David Marshall being appointed to the Commission. Logan Searcy explained that David Marshall had been a team member for an annual evaluation of an open charter school and for the Montgomery Education Foundation which falls under the Montgomery Board of Education as an authorizer and not the Commission. Mac Buttram stated that the ACE reports have been quality work. Mac Buttram stated that they were less expensive and located in Alabama. The question around the misquoting of data from the local school system from Soner Tarim. (2 % and 4 %). Soner Tarim stated that April 30<sup>th</sup> he quoted *U.S. News and World Report* showing the data. He stated that he had quoted a source and were not made up by him, but his point was that the data was below the state average. Lisa Williams said she watched the recording and that it lacked context to what Mr. Tarim was responding. Soner Tarim stated he was referring to the applicants. Mac Buttram stated that when he attended, the public hearing in Washington County they were people strongly for and against the charter school. Lisa Williams stated that she had looked into the Gulen Movement and that she felt that those comments showing a connection were not correct and that she completed her due diligence, and Mac Buttram stated that he had conversations with Soner Tarim and also had completed due diligence and that the Commission has done their due diligence in this regard. Soner Tarim spoke to his past experience and from day one he has completed his due diligence and every record has always been public, and he can assure the Commission that there is no association and that this school is not connected to any religion. Mac Buttram stated that he is available after the meeting for discussion from anyone who wants to discuss the charter school. Henry Nelson stated he was also available after the meeting. Lisa Williams stated that she was glad the State Superintendent wrote the letter, so the concerns could be addressed. Aaron McCloud introduced himself as legal counsel for the Commission. Mac asked for a motion to approve or disapprove the extension and grade addition request. Lisa Williams made the motion and Henry Nelson seconded the motion to approve the extension of one year, 8<sup>th</sup> grade addition, and renegotiating of preopening conditions.

The vote was five to approve the motion with one no vote from Allison Haygood.

### **Charter School Update**

Logan Searcy stated that Lead Academy and Legacy Prep were scheduled to open in August. She stated that the preopening conditions are located in Charter.Tools and that University Charter had a review from ACE. They will go through Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) Compliance monitoring the

next week and that Accel is also going through both review from ACE and the ALSDE. Two charter schools are on schedule to open in 2020. The new schools are working with the Guide to New Charter Schools to ensure that they are compliant and that the charter contract becomes effective the first day of operations. Tommy Ledbetter expressed the importance of timeliness and that three commissioners will be closely monitoring the reopening conditions and that if Woodland misses one, the school will be in violation and that although he understands the situation, the Commission won't be reminding them, but will expect them to be completed. They will expect this of all charter schools. He wants the deadlines to be met early.

#### **Education Trust Fund Budget**

Mac Buttram stated that the Commission received \$800,000 in the Education Budget. Part of it will go to New Schools for Alabama for startup schools and will be discussed at another meeting. Aaron McCloud stated the Commission needs to adopt revocation procedures and processes to empower the legal counsel to draft these procedures. Mac Buttram asked for a motion to adopt these procedures and processes for revocation to be developed. Tommy Ledbetter made the motion and Henry Nelson seconded the motion. The vote to approve was unanimous. Logan Searcy recommended a meeting in July and August because two new schools will be opening in August. She also stated new recommendations are due to come before the State Board of Educations for reappointments or appointments.

#### **Motion to Adjourn**

Mac Buttram asked for a motion for adjournment. Tommy Ledbetter made the motion to adjourn, and Henry Nelson seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous to approve. The meeting was adjourned.