

Alabama Public Charter School Commission
April 11, 2023 11:00 A.M.
In Person and Via Zoom

MINUTES

The Alabama Public Charter School Commission (APCSC) met on April 11, 2023, at 11:00 A.M. in a in person and 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

Vice Chairman Ferrer welcomed everyone to the meeting. Roll call was taken by Mrs. Logan Searcy. Seven Commission members were present, which represented a quorum. Members of the Commission who participated:

Louis Ferrer
Marla Green
Ryan Kendall
Ty Moody (absent)
Julie Ann McCulley

Paul Morin
Anthony Overton (absent)
Sydney Raine
Lakeshia Wheeler

Vice Chairman Ferrer asked if there was any discussion regarding the minutes or today's agenda and if not, was there a motion to approve today's agenda and the minutes from the February 14, 2023 meeting. Commissioner Kendall made a motion to approve today's agenda and the minutes. Commissioner Raine seconded. The vote was unanimous. The minutes and agenda were approved.

Subcommittees Reports

Vice Chairman Ferrer as the chairman of the Policies and Procedures Subcommittee shared that the subcommittee has been discussing two subjects. One is creating a strategic plan and the other is making suggested changes to the commission's bylaws. For the strategic plan the subcommittee is discussing either contracting it out or to ask the State Department to help the commission to create a five year plan. Vice Chairman Ferrer said should be done in a professional way and create actual goals and strategies that align with the commission's mission and goals as well as with those of the stakeholders that we provide services. He said that since the 2015 beginning of the commission we now better understand how we can help the charter schools. Not to just hold them accountable but how to help them grow as a school. Vice Chairman Ferrer continued that the subcommittee also is also considering recommending a policies committee that collaborates with the other stakeholders from around the state to have inclusive conversations in public, so we have transparency with and input from all stakeholders. He said the subcommittee has also discussed some recommendations for changes to the bylaws. One of the suggested changes will be to communication. How we communicate with each other, the schools, and the public. That might be a procedural thing rather than a bylaw amendment. The subcommittee is also looking at paragraph 4-3 which outlines the responsibilities of the Commission Chairman. We are looking at transparency and that decisions are made in the best interest of the commission as a whole and not an individual. One of the suggestions will be a change to the ability of the chairman or vice chairman to enter into contracts on behalf of the commission without having a vote of the commission. The suggested change will be to bring it to the commission first and then enter into the contract. Vice Chairman Ferrer asked if any of the proposed changes were ready for today? The commission's attorney Mr. Knight asked

if they had been circulated? The response was no. Mr. Knight said he would collaborate with Commissioner Morin on the proposals and will be presented to the Commission at a later date. Vice Chairman Ferrer asked Commissioner Wheeler chairman of the Organization Subcommittee is they anything to share with the commission. Commissioner Wheeler said the subcommittee has also been discussing changes in communication procedures. They have also been discussing suggesting monthly meetings and that those meetings be at Charter schools and have time to visit the schools, get to know the staff, and see the students. Also, possibly having quarterly “listening” meetings. To hear from the students, parents, and community members. The organization subcommittee also would like to add a standing agenda item regarding accountability with discussion of scores, school operations, and audit updates. Commissioner Green asked would it be of value to have outgoing commissioners make a statement to the commission about what they’ve learned, saw or suggestions for the commission going forward? Vice Chairman Ferrer shared that other boards do a self-assessment survey every year and that might be something to consider. Vice Chairman Ferrer asked if there was any other questions or comments for the two subcommittees.

Consideration of the Amendment to the Bylaws

Discussion from the subcommittees was shared. No formal proposals were presented for a vote.

Charter School Status Discussion

Vice Chairman Ferrer moved to Charter School Status Discussion. He turned the floor over to Mrs. Logan Searcy and she explained that this discussion would be a combination of what’s going on in the schools, good things and also hearing common hurdles that all charters have. The State Department has people waiting to help all the charter schools. One of the things the department does and shares the results from with the commission is Comprehensive Monitoring. Mrs. Searcy stated that she has invited the leader of the State Department’s Federal Programs section, Dr. Molly Killingsworth, to share how Federal Programs can support the charter schools and some of the struggles she has seen charter schools have. Dr. Killingsworth explained that Federal Programs is in charge of the federal funds that come to the schools, such as Title I, Title II, and most recently the ESSER funds. Federal programs education specialists provide technical assistance for pre-monitoring, monitoring, and self-assessment. Each education specialist has between 10 to 12 school systems including charter schools. Moving forward Dr. Killingsworth said that Yolanda Averett is going to be the federal programs contact for all of the charter schools. Dr. Killingsworth shared that federal programs are going to have regional meetings designed especially for charter schools and encourages all charter schools to attend the meetings. Mrs. Searcy said the commission needs to encourage the charter schools all meetings or conferences that the State Department suggests is important. Even if they are using other organizations to help them, they do need to use the department’s available resources. Mrs. Searcy asked Dr. Killingsworth to share some of the findings from Comprehensive Monitoring that the charter have had. Usually there are not a lot of findings, and the department will help the charter schools correct the findings. If the findings continue the department will continue to monitor until the school gets it right. The monitoring process is the same for all schools not just the charter schools. The department wants to help build capacity with all schools and it has been more challenging with the charter schools because of the turnover of charter schools’ staff. Mr. Searcy said that recently a charter school was monitored and there were some findings that the commission should be concerned about. She said that they were all sent copies of the monitoring report and the commission should reinforce with schools that the commission is behind the Department of Education and expect that findings be corrected as soon as possible. Dr. Killingsworth shared that one of the findings that they see in just about all charter schools is the lack of internal controls. Making sure there are check and balances, for example what is your procedure for competitive bids. We ask them to show them to us most times they cannot. Another finding from many schools is

paying for food with federal money. You can't buy food with federal funds. Another thing they don't understand is the difference between a stipend and a bonus. You can pay stipends for certain work, but you can't pay bonuses. We can help them understand that. Dr Killingsworth said that federal programs now had an accountant in the section and if schools have trouble with any if that the accountant can help them. Dr. Killingsworth strongly suggested that all charter school attend MEGA Conference and also the Federal Programs Fall Conference. If some of the schools aren't coming because of cost, there is a fund that could help pay the conference registration. Mrs. Searcy thanked Dr, Killingsworth for her time and the information. Mrs. Searcy said that LEA Account would be providing assistance to the new and soon to be opening charter schools on local accounting problems on April 26th and 27th. She also asked the commission to reinforce with the charter schools to notify herself and the department when there is staff turnover and to place the name of the new staff member in the education directory. Commissioner Raine made a statement that he has concerns that the commission needs more staff in order to help the commission stay on top of problems. State Board of Education member Dr. Wayne Reynolds asked to address the commission and Commissioner Raine's statement. Dr. Reynolds stated that Logan does a fantastic job being a conduit to the entire department and that the entire board and department support her. He continued that she is doing a fantastic job when legal, or federal programs and other things get involved she is conduit to get the information to the rest of us. She also has an open and direct line to the superintendent and every board member. So, if you have concerns about what she should do or what information you have she is very open and very available to put you in contact with anybody. Commissioner Raine thanked Dr. Reynolds for his and said that he's award of all the good work that Logan is doing and that I have just heard a lot of conversation about reviews and communication and if that communication is getting to our board so we can take appropriate actions to make sure that there are corrective actions. Commissioner Raine also said that perhaps once or twice a year that the State Board of Education and the Charter School Commission could sit down to have discussion about education of all our kids. He said that discussion could help the Charter Commission. Dr. Reynolds said that all board meetings are open. He said they have legislators come regularly and they would certainly be glad to accommodate the entire group. He said that the commission can come anytime they would like and during the boards' question session he would give the commission his mike to peak on anything they would like. Vice Chairman Ferrer said that was a great idea and asked the communication team to look at that. He turned to Mrs. Searcy to finish up with the agenda. She said that the commission has two applications in process and there is one denial appeal from Montgomery County School District it I Dream Big and another one from the Fairfield community and that public hearing is April 24th at Miles College. The decision on the denial appeals and the straightforward applications will be on May 9th. The Cognia Reports will be ready, and you can use them along with the applications to help you make your decision. There are also two renewals coming up Lead Academy and Legacy Prep. The renewal process will begin as soon as the Spring application process is completed on May 9th. There are timelines involved with the renewal process. Lane Knight and Mrs. Searcy will be collaborating with the schools going through the renewal process on the timelines. The decisions will be made in October on the renewals of Lead Academy and Legacy Prep. Vice Chairman Ferrer asked if there were any further questions or comments. Commissioner Morin asked if we move forward with the accountability meetings that New Schools for Alabama be allowed to be part of those meetings. They have great newsletters that include good things happening in our charter schools and would be an excellent resource for sharing the good things going on in charter schools. He also said he would like for New Schools in Alabama to be included in the federal program's regional meetings. Vice Chairman Ferrer asked the commissioners if they want to have a work session prior to the May 9th meeting to meet with the boards of the two schools up for renewal to ask them questions or voice concerns? Commissioner Kendall said that the commission should default to the process that has been followed in past renewals because that is what the two are expecting. Lane Knight advised the commissioners that

the process is ultimately dictated in the charter law. There is a process and we've followed it in the past. Mrs. Searcy reminded the commissioners that the Performance Framework is part of the charter contract. She suggested the commissioners review Performance Framework. Vice Chairman Ferrer asked for additional questions/comments. None were asked/made.

Adjourn

Vice Commissioner Ferrer thanked everyone for their time and asked for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Morin made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Kendall seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous to adjourn.