

Alabama Public Charter School Commission
August 2, 2022 10:00 A.M.
Via Zoom

MINUTES

The Alabama Public Charter School Commission (APCSC) met on August 2, 2022, at 10:00 A.M. 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

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

David Marshall	Paul Morin
Dick Brewbaker	Anthony Overton
Marla Green	Sydney Raine (entered late)
Julie Ann McCulley (absent)	Steve Siple (absent)
Ty Moody	Lakeshia Wheeler

Chairman asked for a motion to approve today's agenda and the minutes from the July 19, 2022, meeting. Commissioner Raine made a motion to approve today's agenda and the minutes. Commissioner Brewbaker seconded. The vote was unanimous. Minutes and agenda were approved. (See final notes at bottom)

Update from Legacy Prep

Chairman Marshall invited Legacy Prep leadership to make an announcement to the Commission. Ms. Rugayyah Abdullah stated that she wanted to introduce the new Head of School to the commissioners and the charter school community, Dr. Reneta Johnson. Ms. Abdullah acknowledged the help of AASB and a charter school consulting group in the selection process of finding the best candidate to lead Legacy Prep. Ms. Abdullah shared Dr. Johnson's background. She shared that Dr. Johnson's 20 plus years in education have included instructional coach, assistant principal, principal, international school leader and most recently Alabama Reading Initiative's Regional Literacy Leadership Specialist. Ms. Abdullah asked Dr. Johnson to address the commission. Dr. Johnson thanked the commission, and the Legacy Prep Board of Directors for allowing her to be part of the charter movement in the State of Alabama. Dr. Johnson stated that she is here to serve and support their school so our students can be successful. Chairman Marshall thanked Dr. Johnson for her remarks and welcomed her to the charter community. Chairman Marshall also thanked Ms. Abdullah for not only today's update but, all the previous updates on Legacy Prep's progress.

Presentation from Barnabas School of Leadership

Chairman Marshall moved on to the consideration of Barnabas School of Leadership's application. He shared how the process would proceed. He stated the commission would keep to a tight timeline. Chairman Marshall asked Mrs. Logan Searcy to keep time and hold everyone to their allotted time. The timeline would be as follows. First a 15 minute presentation from Barnabas School of Leadership. Next, Dothan City School Superintendent will have 5 minutes to address the application. Then Barnabas School of Leadership will have 5 minutes to respond to Dothan City School's remarks. Chairman Marshall reminded anyone making remarks to keep their remarks to the application and not to introduce any

new information. After the presentation, statement by superintendent, and response from the school the process would resume as usual giving each commissioner time to ask questions or make comment. Chairman Marshall turned the meeting over to the representatives from Barnabas School of Leadership for their presentation. Mrs. Trimeishia Cross, school principal, shared why they deserve to open Barnabas School of Leadership. The school will address the widening academic gap that exists in the Dothan City school system. The school will provide a better educational option for students. All students deserve an opportunity for another option for a better education. Mrs. Cross shared that Barnabas School of Leadership already has the following indicators for success in place and are ready for startup: Mission clarity and Alignment, identified school leader, Quality curriculum chosen, Established PreK – 5 program to funnel into elementary school, Community of committed supporters, Adequate facilities, Board of Governance with deep roots in the community. She continued with their mission and vision- Students will develop leaders of themselves, enter into an active partnership with teachers, administrators, parents, and fellow students. We will support, motivate, and elevate students. Mrs. Cross shared the school's enrollment plan. The school will initially serve K- 5th grade, serving up to 350 students in year one. Then adding a grade level each year until reaching 12th grade. Students of all races, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status are welcome. Mrs. Cross stated that Dothan City Schools is not giving students what they need and deserve, especially the black and brown subgroups. Mrs. Cross shared Dothan City student population data from 2017-2018 to 2021 school years illustrating the 4% increase in the minority populations and the 3% decline in the nonminority population. She also shared Dothan City testing data for 2020-2021 school year illustrating that the minority populations are falling further and further behind non-minority subgroups across all subject areas and all grade levels. Mrs. Cross stated that the data shows that the students are being underserved in Dothan. The students need something different. The same old methods are simply not working. What makes Barnabas School of Leadership different? Mrs. Cross continued that primary instruction will include high quality Tier 1 core instruction grounded in research passed vetted curriculum across subject areas, Tier 2 instruction will provide small group instruction in the classroom to help students with skills they need to review or need additional practice. Tier 3 instruction will be provided by intervention teachers who specialize in targeted support. Tier 3 students will be identified using Alabama's multi-tiered system of support and ensuring that the students in most need receive the support. Students chosen for interventions will be intentional using performance data. There will be a set daily schedule and interventions will be delivered with fidelity. Mrs. Cross also stated they will provide leadership development will allow students to take charge and be invested in their own learning. Core curriculum resources that will be used are The Leader in Me, Amplify CKLA, and enVision. These provide alternative instructional strategies that are different than in Dothan City Schools. They will develop a school culture that is rooted in instilling a sense of belonging in the students from the moment they walk in until they leave at the end of the day. They will be greeted and repeat the mantra daily. A Gallery of Achievers will be visible. Which is a collection of people of color that have overcome trials to become successful. Students will be referred to as achievers and be called by their last names to convey mutual respect and students will wear uniforms to communicate a sense of common purpose and focus. Mrs. Cross turned the meeting over to Cyla Fleming Harrell a current board for Barnabas School of Leadership to address the support of the community for the school. Ms. Fleming Harrell shared that there were 66 people that attended the two community meetings held and over 250 people attended the public hearing that was held. She also shared that they had given an interest survey and 110 people have completed the survey showing support for the school and 21 families have said that they are interested in having their students attend

Barnabas School of Leadership. Ms. Fleming Harrell said parents in our area are demanding a different educational option for their children and they are confident that the Barnabas School of Leadership will be able to provide the quality education the children deserve. Mrs. Cross shared that each classroom will consist of student grouping, student centered/led instruction, technology driven instructional approach, small student /teacher ratios, highly qualified and paraeducators, and rigorous, culturally relevant, standards-based instruction. Students will also have opportunities for art, music, physical education classes and tutoring throughout the school year and summer learning. Pastor Roberts shared pictures of the school facilities inside and out. He stated that the building has been a school before and that the facilities are adequate and up to par. They can handle the needs of the students. Pastor Roberts also shared the background of several board members highlighting their connection to education. Chairman Marshall thanked them for their presentation.

Statement from Dothan City Schools Superintendent

Chairman Marshall introduced Dr. Dennis Coe Superintendent of Dothan City Schools. He gave him five minutes to give the perspective of the school system. Superintendent Coe thanked the commission for the opportunity to speak. Superintendent Coe stated that they Dothan City School system was caught off guard by the announcement of a proposed charter school within their district. Dr Coe said until the public hearing neither he nor the majority of the board knew the reasons behind the proposal. Now that the application has been made public and they have heard the presentation Dothan City can address appropriately the issues raised. Dr. Coe shared, for the record, that from the beginning of his tenure as Dothan superintendent the district has identified as major points of emphasis closing the achievement gaps that exist between the different subgroups of students. Addressing the inequities and providing additional layers of support for social and emotional health . the Dothan City Schools has established a model for the state in its implementation of mental health strategies and establishing an equity plan throughout the district. The district at the request of the state have presented the equity plan at both the MEGA and CLASS conferences this summer. Dothan City Schools, contrary to what has been presented share most of the same goals as the proposed school and fundamentally support any strategy, initiative or school that can provide students with a better opportunity than they are currently receiving. After looking at the application 3 areas are glaringly apparent as problematic and create a step backwards for students. **1.** Dr. Coe stated that by their own admission in their presentation the sole purpose of this school would be to address the perceived inequities in the education of children of color. To infer that an achievement gap between white and black students is unique to Dothan City School is a stretch. The data used in the application contained 2 different sets of assessment and spanned 2 unprecedented school years of COVID where learning loss was evident across all areas of education. An apples to apples comparison of assessments would show that Dothan City actually made great strides in closing the achievement gap in the last 2 years. In addition, in their own presentation they are attempting to create a public school made exclusively for African American students. The application seems to be directed only at African American Students. Even their Gallery of Achievers only includes African American role models. **2.** Dr. continued regards to finances, the creation of a 350 student school would force Dothan City Schools to close an elementary school. The students remaining, which the majority of are African American students, would be forced to vacate a community school and be bused to another school within the district. The school system's entire elementary structure would need to be rezoned resulting in increased bus route times, larger class sizes and fewer resources as a result of lost funding due to the charter school. The applicant is basing their financial stability on a

grant that hasn't yet been approved. They are projecting revenues from other churches in the area for monthly donations. Yet several local African American pastors have expressed their lack of support for this proposal. Considering the church's past financial woes and the fact they are struggling to find a local bank that would secure a loan for them it is difficult to believe that they will have the financial resources needed to sustain a school at the level or exceeds what the students are currently receiving in Dothan.

3. The Code of Alabama prohibits the creation of any public charter school that has a parochial or religious theme. Barnabas was an early disciple of Jesus and was closely associated with Paul and his ministry. In addition, the majority of member of the board are either pastors or licensed ministers with degrees in biblical studies. The name, location, board members and stated activities lend itself to a religious institution thus should be grounds for a vote of no approval. Dr. Coe said in closing we as a district echo many of the concerns identified by the applicant however, as a district we have already embraced these concerns and made them a priority moving forward. Dothan City Schools is committed to aligning resources to close the achievement gap. He stated he strongly opposes the application as submitted and hopes we can partner with concerned individuals moving forward.

Response from Barnabas School of Leadership

Pastor Darryl Roberts founder of Barnabas School of leadership spoke in response to Dothan City School's superintendent's comments regarding Barnabas School of Leadership's application. Pastor Roberts thanked Dr. Coe for his interesting comments. Pastor Roberts said he wants to make it perfectly clear that the church is not starting a school. Greater Beulah Church is not starting a charter school. Barnabas School of Leadership is starting a charter school. It has its own entity. It has its own 501C3. Nor does Greater Beulah Baptist Church have any recourse of trying to start or manage Barnabas School of Leadership. Greater Beulah Baptist Church supports the efforts of Barnabas School of Leadership and is leasing its property to the school so the school can be successful. He continued it was mentioned that the school is driven toward African American children. We are open to all children not just African American children, all children. He shared if you look at the statistics, the statistics clearly show there is something morally wrong with Dothan City Schools when the majority of the students are failing. At least 60% of our 3rd graders are reading below grade level. Out of 59% of the population only 7% are proficient in math. You want to offer that we are targeting only African American children. No, we are targeting all children. This charter will be open to all the counties in Alabama not just Dothan. To say you would have to close a school because we're trying to bring something to our community to help our children is farfetched. It is overwhelming and compelling that at least 250 people attended our public hearing. People want change. We have over 100 letters of interest on our web site showing that we have community approval for this school. This is a tremendous interest in the reality of the Barnabas School of Leadership in the City of Dothan. We are called to take matters our own hands to give these students a fighting chance at a better life. They should not be destined to a life without all opportunities enjoyed by others. They should not be captive to a system that is not adequately preparing them for a life beyond school. They should have a viable option for a better future. If Barnabas School of Leadership is approved, we can look in those bright young faces and tell them and their parents that now you have a chance to become a full fledged citizen making positive contributions to society. They can up and support a family and fit into a world demanding more of its citizens. Pastor Roberts continued if our application is not approved, we must tell these students no you will not be allowed to take control of your learning, to create your own future and you have no options but to remain where you are and simply accept your fate in life. Pastor Roberts concluded with Barnabas School of Leadership wants to sit down with Dennis Coe and his leadership team to determine how we can collaborate with each other

and work together toward our shared goals to improve students learning. Chairman Marshall thanked Pastor Roberts for his remarks.

Consideration of the Application from the Barnabas School of Leadership

Chairman Marshall asked Mrs. Searcy to call roll and give each commissioner an opportunity to ask questions of the applicant or to make comments. Commissioner Brewbaker stated that he has a lot of questions and doesn't want to appear combative. He is just trying to get information. He asked Pastor Roberts to answer as frankly as possible. Commissioner Brewbaker said his biggest question is regarding the budget plans. He said after reading the documents it appears that your budget assumes there will be fewer teachers as your student numbers grow. Is that an error in the document or am I misunderstanding? Pastor Roberts: No sir that was an error in the document. As our student population grows our teacher ratio will grow. Mr. Brewbaker: It appears you are applying for a grant. What is your plan if you don't get it? Pastor Roberts: If we don't receive funding from New Schools in Alabama, we are in the process of applying in ed.gov for additional grants and searching for additional grants. We also have a website where donors can contribute. We are aggressively seeking other donors. We are also seeking a line of credit. Commissioner Brewbaker: In your budget I didn't see where budgeted any income for your planning year for where you have to get the school up to code. Has anyone brought that to your attention? Pastor Roberts: No, they haven't but we are planning for that project. It's another error in the paperwork. Commissioner Brewbaker: There are concerns that the Barnabas School of Leadership is very tightly tied to the church. The question people have is: Is this a publicly funded school that is mainly going to benefit the children of church members? Would you object as part of your charter contract if the commission put a requirement that a third party conduct your student lottery? Pastor Roberts Yes. Principal Cross: we would be open to a third party. Mrs. Cross also stated that we are not specifically for the church and not everyone connected to the school in connected to the church. She said what you are asking we are willing to do. Commissioner Green made a statement. This is what I'm hearing. Dothan City Schools aren't working, and the community has decided to try to do better for their student. To me race doesn't matter because legally to open a charter school you will have to accept everybody. Even though Dothan says they are doing better the community is saying to little t o late and we're moving forward. Commissioner Green: I don't have a problem with the school being in the church. The church is in the community and they're stepping up to help. The pastor has said the school is not part of the church and I think legally that takes care of that. Commissioner Green stated that her only concern would be if you have the money to open and that you're able to find teachers and quality leadership. She said she commends everyone for stepping up. Mrs. Cross asked to respond to the comments. Mrs. Cross stated that they are in a favorable position to receive the grants they've applied for, and she reminded the commission that in charter law it states that the budgets can be based on assumptions. Commissioner Morin made a statement. He stated that he listened to a lot of rhetoric on both sides, and he's seen on faces a lot of animosity. Commissioner Morin shared some of his personal history on working with children in different countries and different cultures. Commissioner Morin said that just on face value based on the application itself and the scoring rubric that this application has one single purpose and that's segregation by choice. Commissioner Morin said that is what he sees in the application. Commissioner Morin said the superintendent has a lot of work to do and saying that this is going to take money away from your system is not the way to win an argument or build an alliance. Commissioner Morin also addressed others if you want change in your system go to the school board

meetings, get involved. Be part of the answer but don't withdraw from it. The answer is not to segregate and separate yourselves the answer is to work together. Commissioner Overton: Had no comments or questions. Commissioner Raine apologized for being late to the meeting and stated that all the questions he has have been answered. Commissioner Wheeler had no comments and her questions have been answered. Chairman Marshall thanked the applicant again for their presentation. He said he had a lot of questions, some of them have been asked and answered and some have been answered through the presentation. Chairman Marshall stated that there are a couple of questions regarding the facility. What are the terms of the lease agreement for the facility? Pastor Roberts: The terms of agreement between Barnabas School of Leadership and Beulah Baptist Church are that they would lease the building for free the first three years and after the third year the school would pay rent to the church for renting the property. Chairman Marshall: Have you determined what that rent is? Pastor Roberts: Yes, fifteen thousand a month for the lease of the property. Mr. Marshall made comments regarding some of the concerns voiced. He stated that Alabama charter law is such that the charter has to take all that apply and if you have more applicants that slots then you are to engage in a lottery. Chairman Marshall said he appreciates the willingness of the applicant to allow a third party to conduct that lottery. That adds a layer of protection for you. Chairman Marshall said that there has been concern that this school would be exclusively for one population or another but having a lottery eliminates some of that. The law also takes care of that. Chairman Marshall said that his biggest concern is the budget. When he read the application it leans heavily on the charter school funding. It sounds like you have a number of other lines for funding out there. How much money do you have on hand? Pastor Roberts: As of now we don't have any, we have donation promised upon approval. Chairman Marshall: What would be that total? Pastor Roberts: Between ten and twenty thousand dollars. We are also in touch with our bank and upon approval we will go back and talk about what they can do for the school. Chairman Marshall: That is all of may questions and concerns. Are there any additional questions or comments from the commissioners? Commissioner Green asked what had been said about staff? How many teachers do you have in place? Pastor Roberts: We didn't say anything about how many teachers on staff? The question was once the population grows what would we do. That wasn't in our application. We do have a vetting group and the applicants will be vetted similarly to educators in the school system. Commissioner Brewbaker: Chairman Marshall I have a question as a point of order. They have expressed their willingness to use a third party for their lottery. Can we assume when we vote that will be part of the charter agreement? Chairman Marshall: We can certainly make that part of the motion. Chairman Brewbaker: Commissioner then if that is appropriate that is the motion I make. Chairman Marshall: Is there a second? Commissioner Wheeler seconded. The motion is to accept the application of Barnabas School of Leadership charter application with the added provision that they will have a third party conduct their student lottery. The vote was 5 yes, 2 no. The motion carries. The application was accepted. The vote was as follows:

David Marshall - Yes
Dick Brewbaker - Yes
Marla Green - Yes
Lakeshia Wheeler - Yes

Paul Morin - No
Anthony Overton - Yes
Sydney Raine - No

Commissioners Julie Ann McCulley, Ty Moody and Steve Siple were absent.

Chairman congratulated Barnabas School of leadership on their charter application being accepted. He stated that the commission would meet in the next few weeks to consider the resolution to memorialize today's vote.

Chairman Marshal said there was one final thing that needs to be done because he forgot to do it earlier and that is to vote to approve the minutes from the previous meeting. Lane Knight reminded him that today's agenda should also be included in the vote. In case anyone would like to add an item to the agenda. Chairman Marshall asked if there was any discussion of the minutes or agenda or a motion to accept the agenda and minutes. Commissioner Raine made a motion to accept the minutes and agenda. Commissioner Brewbaker seconded. The vote was unanimous. The minutes and agenda were accepted. (Item also included at the top of the agenda)

Adjourn

Chairman Marshall thanked everyone for their participation in today's meeting. He said he appreciated the spirited discussions and questions and interest in public education here in Alabama. Especially charter schools which is our focus. Again, congratulations to the leadership of Barnabas School of leadership. Pastor Roberts: Asked for just one minute to address everyone. He thanked the commission for their time and all of the effort that has gone into this. Chairman Marshall: We are prepared to adjourn. Is there a motion to adjourn? Commissioner Brewbaker made the motion to adjourn, Commissioner Overton seconded. All in favor with a voice vote. Meeting was adjourned.