

Illinois State Board of Education Independent Charter School Authorizer Task Force

October 28, 2009

At 8:15 a.m. the second meeting of the Independent Charter Authorizer Task Force was called to order by Darren Reisberg of the Illinois State Board of Education.

After welcoming the task force members, Mr. Reisberg introduced Sheila Rodriguez from Learning Point Associates who conducted a roll call. All of the members were present by phone or in person. A list of the task force members appears on the final page of this document. In addition, Bettie Bergeron from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville was in attendance to represent Illinois institutions of higher education. Eight guests also attended the meeting, five of whom spoke during the public participation section.

Michael Bartlett made a motion to approve the minutes from the September meeting which was seconded by Senator Heather Steans. The minutes were approved by the task force.

Mr. Reisberg then introduced Jaime Guzman from the Office of New Schools at Chicago Public Schools (CPS) who presented about the CPS charter school authorization process. CPS charters were first approved in 1997 and the school district has led the authorization process since that time. Mr. Guzman noted that the following six areas of autonomy have worked well for charter schools: curriculum, staffing, use of time, budget, student discipline, and governance.

Greg Richmond, from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, also joined Mr. Guzman during this presentation. As he previously led the Office of New Schools at CPS, he added to the discussion of the history of charter schools in Chicago. Mr. Richmond stated that charter schools were started in Chicago to provide students and their parents with additional options for high quality schools. The initial cap set by the state of Illinois was 15 charters in Chicago. During the first year, 4 or 5 schools were opened. The school district focused on the quality of the schools and improving and expanding educational opportunities for CPS students.

Co-chair Steans asked what criteria or process CPS used to authorize these charter schools. Mr. Richmond responded that CPS worked closely with the Illinois Facilities Fund (IFF) in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the governance and finance plans of the proposed charters because IFF had strong expertise in this area. Mr. Guzman noted that CPS continues to engage external partners to support the district authorization process including IFF, a panel of experts, and the Renaissance School Fund. CPS staff work closely with the external partners to evaluate the proposed charters for the strengths and weaknesses of their plans for governance, finance, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and community involvement. In the end, the CEO of CPS makes a recommendation to the Board to approve the charter and the Board makes the final decision.

Mr. Guzman continued his presentation with a discussion of Renaissance 2010, a larger CPS initiative to expand the number of high-quality schools available in Chicago. The goal is to open 100 schools by the year 2010. Under this initiative there are 3 types of schools being developed: charter schools, performance schools and contract schools. To date, 92 schools have opened - 46

of which are charter schools. In response to a question about the lessons learned from authorizing, Mr. Guzman stated that authorizing high-quality charters requires appropriate levels of critical resources, including time and staff. His staff has recently been reduced because of district-wide budget cuts, but his office is focused on running a rigorous RFP process and holding charter schools accountable.

Co-chair Steans asked if any charters at CPS had been revoked. Mr. Guzman responded that CPS has only closed 4 charter schools since 1997. The most recent closing was this past summer. Charter schools can struggle with financial planning. As a result, most of the charter schools in Chicago were closed for financial or operational reasons.

Sharon Teefey complimented Mr. Guzman on the rigorous approval process in CPS and asked for further details about that process. Mr. Guzman responded that the approval process takes place over six months, which begins with the annual publication of the RFP in April. The RFP ensures that the process and the criteria for the applications are transparent. The applications are evaluated by CPS staff and their external partners. There are also public hearings to provide the community with an opportunity to learn more about the proposals. After receiving input from the community, CPS leaders, and external partners, the CPS Board makes a final decision in October. In response to a question about the staffing for this process, Mr. Guzman responded that a significant amount of staff time is required to complete the authorization process. Currently, they have 51 design framework proposals and 14 full proposals that they are still considering. All of the applications are handled by a staff of 8 people, with 8 full days being required solely for the application process.

Representative William Burns requested additional information about Chicago Board of Education policies. Mr. Guzman responded that CPS follows Article 27A and that the Board gives some additional guidance to charter schools.

The second presentation of the morning was delivered by Sharon Teefey of the Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT). She presented the union perspective of the charter school authorization process. She began by highlighting some of the research that has been conducted related to the quality of charter schools. For example, she mentioned a June 2009 Stanford University study that found that student achievement in charter schools varied widely by state, with students in more than one-third of the charter schools in the study performing worse than students in traditional public schools. The IFT recommendation is that Illinois proceed with caution and focus on authorizing only the highest quality charter schools. She mentioned Ohio as an example of a state that has multiple authorizers, with 75 public/private entities authorizing charters. They chartered more schools during their first year than any other state. However, they emphasized the quantity of authorizers over the quality of the authorization process. In contrast, students in CPS charter schools are performing better, on average, than their counterparts in traditional public schools – a testament to the quality of the CPS authorization process.

Ms. Teefey also stressed the importance of local control. Under current Illinois law, there is an existing provision for applicants who have been denied by the local school board to appeal to the state board and to the voters of their community to have their charter school application approved. Ms. Teefey further recommended that the state look at funding streams to ensure that funds that might be spent for an independent authorizer are not diverted from funding for public

schools. The union recommends that Illinois should continue to use the existing process that focuses on local control. Finally, Ms. Teefey recommended that the task force invite Gary Miron from the Western Michigan University and Chris Lubienski from the University of Illinois/Champaign to present the findings from their research on charter schools.

Mr. Richmond noted that the quality of authorization varies widely by state. For example, Ohio has over 300 charter schools with 75 authorizers, but the charter schools are not high-performing on average. However, overall, charters in Illinois are performing well. Another consideration is the appeal process if a charter proposal is denied by the local school district. Missouri, for example, doesn't have an appeal process. Illinois does have an appeal process and this is desirable. Representative Burns commented that the state should outline model criteria on which all charter proposals would be evaluated. In addition, school districts should be able to choose whether or not they authorize charter schools. For those districts that choose not to serve as authorizers, ISBE or an independent authorizer could serve as an authorizer for charters in that school district.

The third presentation of the day about the capacity of the state board to serve as an authorizer was delivered by co-chair Reisberg. He referred to a copy of the Illinois Charter Annual Report that was distributed to all of the task force members. He reviewed the demographic information in the report and highlighted disparities in the percentages of low-income students and students from various racial/ethnic groups enrolled in charter schools as compared to the overall enrollment of the school district. Traci Cobb-Evans commented that many of the charter schools in Chicago do not enroll large numbers of students from the neighborhood in which the school is located. Co-chair Reisberg concluded his presentation by noting that any continued involvement by ISBE in the chartering process would be problematic given resource issues. Mr. Reisberg noted that having a separate state body to address either initial charter proposals or charter appeals could alleviate some of ISBE's burden, information from other states shows that the start-up costs for such a separate state agency would need to be around \$250,000 and that a separate state agency would need to continue to be appropriately resourced over time. Currently, ISBE is engaged in internal discussions about their role with charter schools and the best way to provide charter schools with the resources they need.

The fourth presentation was delivered by Greg Richmond from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers. He opened his presentation with a map that displayed the states throughout the country in which his organization has provided consulting services. States deal with authorizing charter schools in a variety of ways. Ohio's choice to use multiple authorizers has not resulted in a system of high quality charter schools. Another model exists in Colorado where a school district can apply and be approved to have exclusive chartering authority but otherwise an independent state commission has the power to authorize charters. In other states, universities or independent boards have the power to authorize charter schools. Based on his experience with authorizers across the country, Mr. Richmond has developed a model of high-quality authorizing which has 3 components: maintain high standards, protect student and public interests, and preserve school autonomy. It is important to protect student and public interests because there have been cases where charter schools have misused money. As a result, authorizers should have systems in place to protect against a misuse of public funds. With regard to students, authorizers should also ensure that charter schools do not discriminate, treat

all students fairly, and provide appropriate services for students with disabilities and English Language Learners.

Mr. Richmond distributed a booklet on the principles and standards for quality charter school authorizing to the task force members as well as a handout entitled, "Quality, Diversity and Choice: The Value of Multiple Charter Authorizing Options." He noted that there are over 800 authorizing agencies in the country. The authorizers that serve more schools are more likely to have protocols related to monitoring compliance and are more likely to look at growth data. Having only one authorizer is risky because undesirable and unchecked behaviors may accumulate over time. Therefore, having more than one authorizer provides a system of checks and balances. He emphasized that the quality of authorizing is more important than the quantity of authorizing agencies. In response to a question from co-chair Steans about a model that would fit the needs of Illinois, Mr. Richmond responded that whatever option is selected should be run professionally. He would lean toward the public university model because universities already have an infrastructure in place and house the expertise to authorize high-quality charter schools. If that is not feasible, another option would be to create a state-level independent chartering agency. He also noted that funding for independent authorizers varies. For example, in Washington D.C. the authorizer is funded through appropriations, while other states use a percentage of their revenue.

The final presentation was delivered by Todd Ziebarth from the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. His presentation focused on lessons learned from successful examples of authorizers as well as a discussion of model legislation. He opened by mentioning that currently 30 states allow non-district entities to serve as authorizers. States provide a variety of options to ensure that applicants should have a choice in authorizers. Mr. Ziebarth's experience with both high-quality and low-quality authorizers has led him to the conclusion that authorizers should meet certain criteria, such as political insulation and adequate infrastructure. Authorizers often lack fiscal resources and state laws need to be clear on how authorizers will be held accountable. Next, Mr. Ziebarth encouraged the task force to review the model legislation that was developed by his organization and provided to the task force members. He noted that authorizers should communicate clearly to schools about their role and how they are using public funds. For authorizer funding, it is important that state law establish a funding formula to ensure that authorizers have adequate resources.

Mr. Ziebarth concluded his presentation with a review of his recommendations for the task force: there should be a state charter board that should have an odd number of members (7-9 members), it should be bi-partisan, appointments should be in staggered terms and the members should be diverse in their experience and expertise. If Illinois creates a state charter agency, then the board should require that all authorizers report annually. The state should also tackle how to fund the start-up and operational costs of the state charter agency. As for school funding, it is critical that funding is equitable. The Colorado model makes the most sense because there is no movement of local property tax dollars, only the state funding (in an amount equivalent to the state and local dollars per-pupil in the student's resident district) moves with the student.

Mr. Ziebarth ended his presentation and allowed a group from the Waukegan district to present for the remainder of his time. Two adults and one middle school student spoke to the task force about their support for an independent charter school authorizer in Illinois because last year the Waukegan Board denied their charter application. They argued that their children are not receiving an adequate education in the public schools in Waukegan. As a result, they advocate for an independent charter school authorizer as an option to help increase the opportunities for high-quality schools for students in their school district.

Before concluding the meeting, co-chair Reisberg asked for questions or comments. Dr. Bergeron stated that she is representing twelve deans from institutions of higher education in Illinois. They meet regularly and are interested in pursuing the idea of becoming an authorizer, but need additional information about the role of authorizers.

Co-chair Steans announced the dates of the next two meetings which will occur on November 10, 2009 and November 17, 2009. The November 10th meeting will be held in Chicago at 50 E. Washington Street. The agenda will be distributed to the task force members in advance of both meetings.

The meeting was adjourned by co-chair Reisberg at 11:35 a.m.

**Illinois State Board of Education
Independent Charter School Authorizer Task Force**

Name	Organization	10/28
Michael Bartlett	Illinois Association of School Boards	present
Clarice Berry	Chicago Principals and Administrators Association	present
Representative William Burns	Illinois General Assembly	present
Traci Cobb-Evans	Chicago Teachers Union	present
Sean Denney	Illinois Education Association	present
Nicole Gales	Springfield Ball Charter School	present
Jaime Guzman	Office of New Schools - Chicago Public Schools	present
Collin Hitt	Illinois Policy Institute	present
Dea Meyer	Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago	present
Laurie Preece	Rockford Charter Schools Initiative	present
<i>Co-Chair</i> Darren Reisberg	Illinois State Board of Education	present
Greg Richmond	National Association of Charter School Authorizers	present
<i>Co-Chair</i> Senator Heather Steans	Illinois General Assembly	present
Paul Swanstrom	Superintendent, Joliet Township High School District 204	present
Sharon Teefey	Illinois Federation of Teachers	present
Todd Ziebarth	National Alliance for Public Charter Schools	present