

Illinois State Board of Education Independent Charter School Authorizer Task Force

February 22, 2010

At 9:10 a.m. the seventh meeting of the Independent Charter School Authorizer Task Force was called to order by Co-chair Heather Steans.

After welcoming the task force members, Senator Steans requested a roll call. All members were present. A list of the task force members in attendance appears on the final page of this document. In addition to the appointed task force members, Bette Bergeron from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville was in attendance to represent Illinois institutions of higher education. Four guests attended the meeting.

Senator Steans opened the meeting by directing the attention of the task force members to the draft recommendations. She commented that the draft report attempted to capture the consensus that was reached at the last task force meeting. She encouraged the members to voice any major or minor concerns with the report.

Sharon Teefey commented that the report did not capture the charge from the legislature to conduct an assessment of the capacity of school districts in Illinois to authorize charter schools. She asked for additional information about the survey that was discussed at one point to gather input from school districts. Co-chair Reisberg remarked that the survey was not conducted because two members of the task force, Paul Swanstrom and Michael Bartlett, asked a sample of their colleagues to provide input on the question of capacity. Along with Diane Rutledge, they delivered a presentation to the task force about district capacity. Paul Swanstrom agreed with Ms. Teefey that a statement about the capacity of school districts to authorize charters was not clearly evident in the report. He would like to see a stronger affirmation in the report of the capacity of school districts to review and evaluate charters. He also expressed concern about the list of denials in the appendix because it might appear to an uninformed reader that school districts routinely deny charters and this could signal a hostile environment to charters in the state. He requested that the chart be modified to include all of the charters that have been approved to present a more balanced portrayal. Traci Cobb-Evans agreed and asked that the list include both the number of charters and the number of campuses per charter to ensure that the total number of charter schools is accurately depicted. Laurie Preece noted that the degree to which districts deny charters does not necessarily signal the quality of their authorization process. Collin Hitt remarked that is also important to look at the rate of applications, particularly outside of Chicago, to determine how likely it is for charter school applicants to submit applications in districts throughout the state.

Todd Ziebarth observed that the task force's consensus decision to recommend the Idaho model was an affirmation of the capacity of school districts and the group's respect for local control because the task force is recommending that all charter school applicants must first go to the local school district. He further commented that the report explicitly mentioned that Illinois is committed to the quality of the authorization process and will strive to avoid situations that are created, in states like Ohio, in which the emphasis is on the quantity of authorizers, but not on

the quality of the process. He noted that consensus around the Idaho model was a compromise position because several task force members did express a preference for a model in which charter school applicants could go directly to the statewide authorizer. Greg Richmond and Dea Meyer requested that the task force report reflect that the Colorado model was preferred by some task force members, and local control by others, but the Idaho model was a compromise that all members agreed would help Illinois significantly strengthen the current appeals process for charter school applicants.

Collin Hitt agreed and commented that the task force members do not want to take control away from districts, but do want to mitigate situations in which districts might be hostile authorizers. Dea Meyer supported this argument and noted that she prefers the Colorado model because it has increased the spread of high-quality authorizing throughout the state. She recommended that the new Illinois commission develop expertise in authorizing and be independent of ISBE.

Sharon Teefey asked about the viability of the task force's proposed solution if the legislature provides appropriate funding. Co-chair Reisberg responded that the task force's recommendation is viable if appropriate resources are provided and if the appeals process is conducted by a quasi-independent state commission, like the state teacher certification board, that has a close connection to ISBE. This commission should develop expertise in charter school authorization and lead the appeals process to ensure that issues related to charter school denials do not dominate the agenda of the State Board. However, ISBE is ultimately accountable for all public schools in the state, charter or otherwise, and will certify all charter schools that are authorized by both school districts and the quasi-independent state commission. Senator Steans agreed that the commission should be somewhat separate from ISBE because the mission of the commission will focus exclusively on the quality of the authorization, a much narrower mission than that of ISBE.

Sharon Teefey agreed that high quality authorizing should be the focus of this commission and noted that high quality authorizing at the front end of the process was a critical area of consensus for the task force. She observed that it would be helpful for the commission to create guidebooks for school districts to provide them with technical assistance with the authorization process, guidance, and models of documents like RFPs for charter school applicants. She also asked the task force to confirm that if the district chooses to send an individual charter school applicant to the quasi-independent state commission that they are opting out only for that application and not forever. The task force confirmed this interpretation. Finally, she asked that the report make clear that members of the commission should not be biased or advocates for charter schools, but instead should be committed to the mission of high-quality authorizing.

Paul Swanstrom asked the task force if they thought the Chicago process could be replicated in other districts. Jaime Guzman responded that Chicago is currently reimagining their process, so it is dynamic and not static. However, there are some core elements of their process that other districts could certainly scale up. Mr. Swanstrom agreed, but noted that the size of the district will be important because the authorizing process may look quite different in smaller districts. Dea Meyer commented that there should be some standards for all districts, but there should also be flexibility in the process to allow for differing local contexts. Greg Richmond agreed and remarked that the task force should not present Chicago as the model for the state. Instead, the quasi-independent state commission should develop standards and criteria for high-quality

authorizing processes. As in Colorado, the commission should then use these standards and criteria to help districts develop model practices and improve the quality of authorizing statewide.

The task force then discussed accountability for the quasi-independent authorizer. Todd Ziebarth noted that in Ohio and Minnesota, for example, they have multiple authorizers, but have only recently begun putting accountability mechanisms in place. In Ohio, low-performing charter schools that were threatened with closure by one authorizer could simply switch authorizers. In order to avoid this situation, he recommended that Illinois utilize an outcome-based accountability process in which the primary measure of authorizer quality is student achievement in charter schools. If district authorizers close low-performing charter schools, the schools should have the right to appeal to the quasi-independent state commission, but the commission will have to justify their action, with sufficient evidence, if they choose to overturn the district's decision to close the school. Sharon Teefey agreed that Illinois wants to avoid the Ohio problem and ensure that the authorizing process is solid on the front end. Collin Hitt and co-chair Reisberg recommended that the legislation to create the commission should include an emergency provision that would allow ISBE to remove authorizing power from any authorizer in the state that allows low-performing charter schools to continue to function without intervening.

Nicole Gales requested more clarification on the connection between ISBE and the commission. Co-chair Reisberg responded that the commission would be the entity that reviews appeals and applications that districts deferred to the commission. They will make the determination about which charters should be approved and which should be denied. If the schools are approved, the quasi-independent state commission would serve as the authorizer. The commission would be staffed by state employees who would be directly accountable to the executive director of the commission. Because the State Board is the overall authority for all public schools in the state, the executive director of the commission might, for example, be required to report to ISBE on a quarterly basis. Todd Ziebarth recommended that all authorizers in the state, both districts and the quasi-independent state commission, submit annual reports to ISBE. This would create an annual opportunity for a policy conversation at the State Board level about the quality of charter schools and authorizers in Illinois.

Co-chair Reisberg then asked the task force members for final thoughts about the report. Greg Richmond observed that the report does not currently reflect the comprehensive, day-to-day work of authorizers, but only focuses on the application process. He will send some language to include in the report to address his concern. Sharon Teefey also recommended that the report describe the consensus decision, but also include the other options that the task force discussed before arriving at that decision.

Co-chair Reisberg affirmed that this would be the last meeting of the task force and thanked all of the members for their participation. He asked for comments on the draft report to be sent to the co-chairs and Peggie Garcia by March 1, 2010. If any task force member would like to write a minority report, they also need to inform the co-chairs by March 1st. Corrections will be incorporated into the report by March 8th and the recommendations will be filed with the Governor and the General Assembly by March 12th. The meeting was adjourned by co-chair Reisberg at 11:10 a.m.

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

Name	Organization	2/22/2010
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