

Illinois State Board of Education Independent Charter School Authorizer Task Force

November 10, 2009

At 8:10 a.m. the third meeting of the Independent Charter School 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 requested a roll call. Three members were represented by their designees and three members were absent. 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. Six guests also attended the meeting, none of whom spoke during the public participation section.

Senator Heather Steans made a motion to approve the minutes from the October meeting which was seconded by Collin Hitt. The minutes were unanimously approved by the task force.

Co-chair Reisberg then reviewed the timeline for the task force, reminding the members that the final report is due to the Governor and the General Assembly on or before January 1, 2010. He mentioned that Phyllis Lockett from the Renaissance Schools Fund will be presenting at today's meeting and that the second November meeting will feature presentations from: a representative from the State University of New York (SUNY), an example of an institution of higher education that serves as an authorizer; Alex Medler from the Colorado Charter Schools Institute - representing an independent state-level authorizer; Gary Miron of Western Michigan University; and task force members who will discuss district capacity to authorize charters in the state of Illinois. Co-chair Reisberg will work with Michael Bartlett, Paul Swanstrom, and Diane Rutledge of LUDA to develop this presentation about district capacity. At the request of Deanna Sullivan, co-chair Reisberg agreed to move the presentation about district capacity to December to allow adequate time for preparation.

Bette Bergeron noted that she was looking forward to receiving additional information about the roles and responsibilities of institutions of higher education that serve as authorizers at the next meeting. She is representing twelve deans from institutions of higher education in Illinois. Six of the twelve have responded to her request about their interest in serving as authorizers and all of those responses were positive. In response to a question from Dea Meyer, Dr. Bergeron clarified that the deans are reporting interest after engaging their presidents in the conversation. Thus, higher education has expressed an institutional interest in authorizing.

Co-chair Steans reviewed the four options for charter school authorization that she has heard expressed by the task force members during previous meetings. The first would be no change, or the status quo, with perhaps some strengthening to the appeals process. The second would be adding one or more institutions of higher education as authorizers. The third and fourth options would be related to the independent state-level authorizer model in which districts could either choose to be exclusive authorizers if they met certain criteria outlined by the state or choose not

to authorize, at which point the independent agency would serve as the authorizer for charter schools in that district.

In response to a question from co-chair Reisberg about states in which there are both institutions of higher education and an independent agency which authorize charters, Todd Ziebarth replied that most states have one or the other as an alternate to school district authorizers, but not both. He further noted that, in Colorado, for example, although districts have to apply to the independent agency in order to serve as authorizers, many choose not to apply. In response to a question from Collin Hitt about accountability for authorizers, Mr. Ziebarth replied that in the Colorado example, the state board of education is the final source of accountability for all charter school authorizers in the state. However, in Colorado there are 180 districts, in contrast with 871 in Illinois. Mr. Hitt emphasized the importance of developing standards for institutions that authorize charters and suggested that Illinois implement a chartering fee that could support an independent authorizer. In response, Sharon Teefey recommended that any new funding should be directed to ISBE, rather than to an independent agency, to help the state education agency increase their capacity to authorize charters at the state level if the applications are denied at the local level.

In response to a question about his ideal model from Dea Meyer, Mr. Ziebarth replied that conversations, much like the one in which the task force is currently engaged, have occurred in Idaho, Utah, Colorado, and Georgia – all states, like Illinois, with strong local control. He offered the Georgia model as a fifth option for the task force to consider. In Georgia, all applications for charter schools must go both to the school district and to the independent state agency. This ensures that all school districts have a seat at the table, but also allows charter school applicants the ability to by-pass a lengthy appeals process if their application is denied by the local school district.

Co-chair Reisberg then engaged the members with a question about why creating an independent agency would be necessary if there is already a process in place through which charter applicants that are denied by the local school district can appeal to the state board. Sharon Teefey and Deanna Sullivan remarked that many districts are currently not aware of the process that exists. Thus, there is a need to raise awareness and to educate school districts about the existing process. Dea Meyer argued that the central issue is how to authorize high-quality charters – a process that might not be supported by districts that are hostile to charters. Jaime Guzman pointed out that just as capacity at the state level is an issue, the capacity of smaller school districts to authorize charters is also limited. He urged the task force to be thoughtful about the authorization process that they recommend requiring in districts. Although the CPS model is successful, it may not work in other contexts. Moreover, the CPS process was dynamic, fluid and developed over time in response to their experience with authorizing. As a result, rigid requirements from the state outlining specific components of the authorization process might impede this type of flexible development over time. Co-chair Reisberg commented that CPS does a good job building on the foundation of the law, but other school districts do not follow such a high-quality authorization process. Consequently, there is a lack of accountability statewide for school districts that authorize charters. Todd Ziebarth reflected that most states are silent about the authorization process in their legislation, but this task force might choose to recommend that the legislature include roles and responsibilities for all authorizers in the charter school legislation. Dea Meyer recommended that the state education agency use regulations, not legislation, to provide

authorizers with both flexibility and high standards. Mr. Ziebarth emphasized that the commitment to high-quality authorizing is the key, but the question becomes, how should the state encourage high-quality authorizing statewide?

Sharon Teefey then opened a discussion about the difficulty of revoking charters. In response to a question from Ms. Teefey about the process of revoking charters if the authorizer is an independent agency as opposed to a school district, Todd Ziebarth and Katie Kelly concurred that the process is difficult, regardless of the authorizer, as independent agencies are under the same pressure that local school districts face to close low-performing schools. Mr. Ziebarth remarked that independent authorizing agencies have both revoked and not renewed charters. He argued that it is better for an independent agency to begin with a rigorous authorization process and to authorize only the highest quality charter schools. He identified Colorado as a state that is a model in this regard. In response to a question from co-chair Reisberg about the development of objective measures for revoking charters, Mr. Ziebarth commented that high quality data, on a variety of metrics, is critical. He described how he and Greg Richmond worked together with legislators in Ohio to develop automatic closure criteria for charter schools that were chronically low-performing over several years. Jaime Guzman mentioned that CPS has developed metrics related to the language in the charter school legislation about “failing to make reasonable progress.” He is currently working with other district leaders to develop a transparent set of district wide metrics that will hold all schools, both charter and traditional, to the same standards. Currently, if CPS charter schools are low-performing, they must develop a school improvement plan and face potential consequences, including school closure, if they do not improve.

Phyllis Lockett and Connie McHugh from the Renaissance Schools Fund then delivered a presentation about their organization’s support for the CPS district authorization process. The goal of Renaissance 2010 is to create 100 new high quality schools in Chicago. To date, 96 schools have opened, 65 of which have been financially supported by the Renaissance Schools Fund (RSF). All of these are new schools, but only some of them are charter schools. RSF partners with CPS to evaluate the strength of applications for new schools on a variety of rigorous selection criteria and then monitors the quality of new schools that they support for three years. RSF staff partner with CPS staff, national experts, and representatives from school-based Transition Advisory Councils to evaluate the strength of concept papers, to provide feedback to design teams, and to evaluate the full proposals for new schools. CPS staff members make recommendations to their board about which schools should be opened and RSF staff members make a recommendation to the RSF Board about which of the new schools RSF should financially support. There is also an invitational process for charter school organizations, which are running more than one school, which focuses more explicitly on the strength of the organization’s business plan. Historically, CPS opens approximately 25 percent of the schools that were proposed at the beginning of the annual RFP cycle or an average of 10 schools annually. This rigorous evaluation process costs approximately \$800,000 annually, with the bulk of the funding from CPS, but with RSF contributing approximately \$250,000. Paul Swanstrom followed up with a question about ongoing monitoring after the schools have been approved. Jaime Guzman responded that monitoring is the responsibility of CPS. The district works hard to develop clear, transparent, rigorous metrics in order to hold charter school accountable. They have closed four charters to date. His office also engages a partner organization that assists with school visits, document review, interviews, and assessments of services for students with

disabilities and ELLs. Paul Swanstrom noted that transparency of this process at the local level is critical. Co-chair Reisberg further commented that under the current law, ISBE cannot close a charter school; only the district has that authority.

In the follow-up conversation, Phyllis Lockett remarked that an additional authorizer from higher education in Illinois might be a good option. She stressed that the goal should be quality, not quantity, so no authorizer should have an incentive to open schools. Dr. Bergeron argued that institutions of higher education have the potential to be high quality authorizers because they have infrastructure in place, house expertise in many areas, and are geographically spread throughout the state. Furthermore, the deans whom she represents are energized about working with their P-12 partners to make sure that high quality schools are available for families throughout the state. Connie McHugh emphasized the importance of involving practitioners in the authorization process who have developed and launched new schools – stakeholders who might not typically be represented in higher education. In response to a question about proximity of the authorizer to the charter school raised by co-chair Reisberg, Katie Kelly contended that the capacity of the authorizer is the issue, not proximity. Finally, in response to a question from Sharon Teefey, Phyllis Lockett responded that RSF would consider authorizing schools outside of Chicago.

Before concluding the meeting, co-chair Steans reviewed the agenda for the next meeting and announced the dates of the next two meetings which will occur on November 17, 2009 and December 14, 2009. The November 17th meeting will be held in Chicago at 50 E. Washington Street. The December meeting will also be held in Chicago. The agenda will be distributed to the task force members in advance of both meetings. She then asked Todd Ziebarth to develop a draft discussing the components involved in authorization for the task force members to review at the next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned by co-chair Reisberg at 10:12 a.m.

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

Name	Organization	11/10
Michael Bartlett	Illinois Association of School Boards	Represented by Deanna Sullivan
Clarice Berry	Chicago Principals and Administrators Association	Absent
Representative William Burns	Illinois General Assembly	Absent
Traci Cobb-Evans	Chicago Teachers Union	Represented by Sharon Teefey
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	Absent
<i>Co-Chair</i> Darren Reisberg	Illinois State Board of Education	Present
Greg Richmond	National Association of Charter School Authorizers	Represented by Katie Kelly
<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