

***Illinois State Charter School Commission***  
**Schools Committee Minutes**  
**January 10, 2014**

A meeting of the Illinois State Charter School Commission's Schools Committee took place at 12:00 pm on January 10, 2014 at the James R. Thompson Center. The following attended the meeting in person: Commissioner Jaime Guzman, Commissioner Kathy Robbins, and Commission staff Jeanne Nowaczewski and Karen Washington. The following attended by phone: Commissioner Milton Wharton, Attorney Brian Dougherty, and consultant Lyria Boast. Commissioner Bill Farmer was absent.

- No member of the public attended, and the Committee received no requests from the public to address it.
- Commissioner Guzman called the meeting to order at 12:05 pm.

***Commissioner Renewal Refresher***

- Commissioner Guzman explained that there are generally accepted principles for addressing renewals of charter schools. The Commission has taken these principles into account and developed as well as accepted by vote an accountability system for examining schools' academic, financial, and operational performance.

***Update on the Prairie Crossing Charter School Renewal***

Overview: The Commission is in the process of evaluating PCCS for its upcoming renewal. Dr. Washington reviewed the Commission's work on the renewal so far.

- In July, Commission staff developed a timeline for the renewal process.
- In September, Commission staff held a workshop for PCCS administrators to go over the process to apply for charter renewal.
- In November, PCCS submitted the application for charter renewal.
- On December 4, the Commission did an evaluation during the site visit of PCCS. Outside evaluators for the renewal included Aisha Strong, Katie Hytros, and Matt Shaw.
  - That evening, Commissioners Farmer and Williams led the PCCS community forum. Some community members spoke in favor, and some against.
    - Dr. Washington said that most speakers supported PCCS and the renewal.
    - The School Board President from the Woodland School District and the superintendent of the Fremont School District spoke in opposition to PCCS due to the financial strain on the district.
    - A few parents raised concerns about PCCS dismissing parent complaints. They did not state that they opposed renewal, but wanted to raise concerns about PCCS. Accordingly, the Commission asked PCCS to provide documentation of its policy for handling parent complaints.
- In December, Commission staff and the evaluators held interviews with PCCS staff, and asked for supporting documents to address concerns and questions.

### Context:

- Ms. Nowaczewski explained that there are some authorizers who would simply renew the charter based on PCCS's excellent academic results. These authorizers believe that charter schools should operate autonomously, with little oversight.
  - The Commission did not take this approach and instead conducted observations and interviews. The Commission even hired IFF to review PCCS facilities for ADA compliance.
  - Commissioner Guzman stated that the Commission wanted to make sure that it required a high-quality renewal process.

### Concerns and Questions about PCCS Renewal:

- Commissioner Wharton raised a concern about PCCS student demographics. PCCS does not have as many minority and economically disadvantaged students as the feeder districts have.
  - Commissioner Guzman stated that this has been noted in the past. As part of the renewal process, the Commission is checking that PCCS follows the law with regard to serving ELL students and economically disadvantaged students; and with regard to a fair lottery system.
  - Dr. Washington stated that this concern prompted the Commission to ask PCCS to provide documentation of its outreach efforts.
- Commissioner Wharton asked about the effect PCCS is having on the community. For example, does the community know about PCCS's academic success? This kind of success should be publicized.
  - Commissioner Guzman stated that the Commission should explore this issue in the future, perhaps as part of its next biennial report.

Staff Recommendation: Dr. Washington directed the committee's attention to the draft *Report of Findings and Staff Recommendation*. Based on the findings from the analysis of PCCS academics, operations, and finances, the staff is tentatively recommending renewal, with two conditions and seeking committee input.

- Commissioner Guzman stated that the report should begin with a cover page that summarizes the findings and the recommendation.
  - The cover page should include a headline for each of the three domains (academic, operational, and financial), and list the major concerns or successes in each domain.
- Commissioner Guzman also suggested that Commission staff bring the binder with all of the findings and supplemental information to the next Commission meeting.
  - During the School Committee Chair's report, Commissioner Guzman can explain what has been done so far and what information has been collected.
  - Then, Commissioners can look through this information if they wish. They can raise any questions or point out missing information.
- Commissioner Robbins asked what information would be made public. Ms. Nowaczewski explained that the findings and report are confidential for now.

- If the Commission votes to renew the charter, a lawyer will prepare an order to renew the charter. Then the Commission staff and PCCS will work together to develop a contract. Finally, ISBE will certify the contract.
- The conversation turned to the two conditions of approval. Ms. Nowaczewski explained that these conditions will be incorporated into the contract.

### ***Accountability Revisions***

History: In June 2012, the Commission adopted an Accountability System. The Accountability System includes three domains: academic, operational, and financial.

- In June 2013, the state had not yet released information related to its Growth Model, so the Commission decided that this would be added to the academic domain at a later time.
- In October 2013, the state released the Illinois Growth Model and results for all schools, though the data is not yet disaggregated by subgroup.
- Accordingly, the Commission staff proposes adding the following to the Accountability System:
  - Measure 2.a: What percentage of students are making expected growth according to the Illinois Growth Model?
  - Measure 3.b: What percentage of students in subgroups are making expected growth in reading and math according to the Illinois Growth Model?
- Also, Commission staff proposes adding the following *for informational purposes only* until the next 2-3 years of data have been collected:
  - Measure 2.b: Are students meeting or exceeding student growth at the traditional schools that students would otherwise attend (using an assigned school composite)?
  - Measure 2.c: How does the school's growth compare to schools serving similar student populations?

### Staff Recommendations:

- Commissioner Guzman explained that the Commission wanted to adopt the measures above so that charter schools' performance will be measured by three data points.
  - First, how does the school compare to the state average?
  - Second, how does the school compare to the district schools the students would have otherwise attended?
  - Third, how does the school compare to similar schools?
- Commissioner Guzman stated that, for these measures, the "meets standard" benchmark will require charter schools to be a few points above the comparison group.
- Commissioner Guzman also recommended setting a specific "meets standard" benchmark, i.e. "school average growth meets or exceeds the comparison group by 5 points." As currently written, measures 2.b and 2.c require meeting or exceeding the comparison group by "x points."
  - Ms. Boast explained that it is difficult to set a specific number because the state has only released one year of data. Once the state has released two or three years of data, it will be easier to compare growth from year to year and determine the appropriate benchmarks.

- Also, the state is still holding schools accountable to AYP, and the state doesn't know yet when or how it will begin using the Illinois Growth Model. It would be unfair to hold charter schools accountable to a standard not required for other state schools.
- Ms. Nowaczewski explained that measures 2.b and 2.c will only be provided for informational purposes, and the exact benchmark numbers will be set after the Commission has collected 2-3 years of data.
  - Commissioner Guzman agreed.
- Ms. Nozaczewski stated that the measures will be presented to Commissioners for a first reading at the January meeting.

### ***Conclusion***

- The meeting was adjourned at 2:11 pm.
- Next committee meeting: The week of February 3rd, in the afternoon, probably after 3 p.m.