
ILLINOIS STATE CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CHICAGO IL May 31, 2019 – Until today, Illinois was one of 27 states that recognized the importance of charter school appeals. Since 2011, the Illinois State Charter School Commission (SCSC) has served as the only independent charter school authorizer in the state with jurisdiction to approve charter schools on appeal. The SCSC has been championed by many and opposed by others, over the last eight years, and while its independence may be foregone, its integrity and impact are undeniable.

“We are extremely disappointed in the actions of the Illinois General Assembly and their vote today to abolish the Illinois State Charter School Commission,” states Shenita Johnson, Executive Director, Illinois State Charter School Commission, “with this vote, the General Assembly is making it more difficult for countless other families to access unique and quality educational options.”

Today more than 4,000 students attend schools authorized by the Commission because their families decided it was the *right fit* for their children. SCSC schools enroll, retain and serve at-risk children, and each performs higher than the school these students would otherwise be assigned to attend. “Students have access to and experience college-prep and career-tech educational programs, culturally-relevant pedagogy, STEM and project-based learning models,” said Johnson.

Unlike other states across the country, the only way to start a charter school in Illinois is via an application to the local school district. Prior to the Commission, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) reviewed charter appeals and in two cases granted appeals to open two of the highest performing charter schools in the state: Southland College Prep (Richton Park) and Prairie Crossing (Grayslake) Charter Schools. Senate Bill 1226, however, does not return the right to appeal to ISBE; instead it requires charter applicants to file a lawsuit in a court of law, which is a far less prudent use of public resources.

In eight years, the Commission received 58 appeals and granted nine –15 were submitted for decision. Only once in the Commission’s history was there a unanimous decision to grant appeals. And, **all** Commission decisions legally challenged by local school districts were upheld and affirmed by Illinois courts.

By law, the SCSC was mandated to conduct *de novo* reviews of charter school appeals and withhold any deference to a local district or charter applicant. And, for eight years it has done just that - amidst perennial legislative actions, vitriolic statements by union representatives, school board members, and skeptics. The SCSC has carried out the original intent of legislators with fidelity and integrity – in compliance with the law **and** in the best interests of all students.

“Our hope is that Governor Pritzker understands the importance of SCSC to the at-risk children in the state and vetoes Senate Bill 1226,” said Johnson.

ABOUT ILLINOIS STATE CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION

Illinois State Charter School Commission (ISCS) was established in 2011 as an independent body to authorize and oversee high quality public charter schools throughout Illinois. Lawmakers passed Senate Bill 1226, which abolishes the Commission, as of July 1, 2020, and transfers school oversight and monitoring authority of existing schools to ISBE. The bill awaits final approval by Governor Pritzker.