

MINUTES OF THE
MISSISSIPPI CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZER BOARD
Regular Monthly Meeting
Wednesday, April 9, 2014

The regular monthly meeting of the Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board was held at 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday, April 9, 2014, at the office of the Board of Trustees of the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning, located at 3825 Ridgewood Road, Jackson, Mississippi. In attendance were:

Tommie Cardin, Chairman
Chris Wilson, Vice Chairman
Dr. Carey Wright
Krystal Cormack
Johnny Franklin
Dr. Karen Elam

Board member Dr. Bonita Coleman-Potter participated by teleconference.

Board Chairman Tommie Cardin called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

Chairman Cardin recognized special guest in the audience, State Representative Charles Busby. NACSA representatives Beth Selig and William Haft were also participating in today's meeting.

ITEM I. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

A. Adoption of Agenda

The Agenda was previously circulated to all Board members. Dr. Elam requested that the following three items be added under New Business: (1) discussion of the Board's role in decision making in the application evaluation process; (2) planning for the management and logistics of the public hearings to be held during stage three; and (3) begin discussion of the second cycle of applications.

Chairman Cardin requested a motion to add these three actions items under New Business and to adopt the agenda as amended.

MOTION: Mr. Franklin

SECOND: Dr. Wright

There being no discussion and following a vote in favor by all members, the motion carried.

ITEM II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

A. Approval of Minutes

The Minutes of the March 17, 2014 meeting were previously distributed to the Board members for review. Two minor corrections were suggested.

Chairman Cardin requested a motion for approval of the Minutes of the March 17, 2014 meeting, as amended.

MOTION: Dr. Elam

SECOND: Mrs. Cormack

There being no further discussion and following a vote in favor by all members, the motion carried.

ITEM III. CHAIR REPORT

A. Administrative Matters

Kathryn Stewart reported that the Board's funding appropriation in the amount of \$250,000 had been passed by the Legislature. The funds will be made available as soon as the bill is signed by the Governor, which is expected to take place on or before April 21st. Travel forms have been provided to Board members who live outside the Jackson metro area for reimbursement of mileage.

Ms. Stewart also passed out a screenshot of the first draft of the home page for the website that is being developed for the Board. She stated that revisions are being made and a link will be provided to the Board members for their review and approval before the website goes live.

The three applications being ratified today have been redacted and prepared for publication once they are approved at today's meeting.

B. Legislative Update

Chairman Cardin reported that the legislation to remove the law degree requirement from the executive director position did pass and that requirement is no longer in place for that position. He stated that the Board will discuss revision of that job description in light of that change under New Business.

ITEM IV. COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. RFP and Application Committee

Krystal Cormack reported that the committees are meeting weekly with the NACSA team to prepare and evaluate proposals. Of the 12 applications received, 3 were considered both eligible and complete and the Committee will be making a recommendation that those three be moved forward to stage three evaluations. Further, she reported that the Committee would like to discuss with the Board the process that the committee will take when evaluating applications and Beth Selig will discuss that.

Mrs. Cormack further reported that concern has arisen related to the publication of the RFP for the next application cycle. The deadline for that publication is September 1st but the Committee will be working throughout the Spring and Summer and plans to publish the RFP no later than July 15th. As some school ratings will likely change between the time the RFP is published and when it is actually due, it will be necessary to determine which school ratings will be used when considering applications in the next cycle – the rating at the time of the publication of the RFP or the rating at the time the RFP is due on September 1st. Chairman Cardin stated that the Board will likely need to request an Attorney General’s opinion on the issue or, at the very least, seek the advice of the Attorney General’s office.

Mrs. Cormack reported that the Board has been given the opportunity to participate in a fellowship program with Teach for America through a partnership with Mississippi First. An application and resume has been received and circulated to the Board members for review and consideration today. This intern would assist, among other things, with the task of drafting contracts and revising and editing the RFP and application.

B. Executive Director/Consultant Search Committee

Mr. Wilson reported that the committee met to discuss the actions of the legislature in providing the requested funding, as well as removing the law license requirement for the executive director position. The question of the education requirement for the position of executive director was discussed, and the committee will recommend that the language of the job description be amended to require a bachelor’s degree with an advanced degree preferred but not required so that the broadest range of applicants can be reached.

ITEM V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Ratification of Applications

Concerning the incomplete and ineligible applications, Beth Selig with NACSA discussed the findings of the stage one review which included an eligibility determination by the Board and a completeness determination by NACSA. The Board received 12 applications in total. Following the withdrawal of one application, eleven proceeded through the eligibility and completeness evaluations. All eleven were asked to address deficiencies in their applications and four of those did not resubmit. Seven remained “live” and were again reviewed for eligibility and completeness. Three were determined to be qualified to proceed to the next stage of evaluation. Those three are (1) Reimagine Prep (5-8): Jackson Public Schools; (2) Phoenix Early College Charter School (9-12): Natchez-Adams County Schools; and (3) Inspire Charter School STEM & ARTS Scholars Academy (K-6, 9): Columbus Municipal Public Schools.

The four applications determined to be incomplete and ineligible in this application cycle are: (1) PALS Charter School Amite County (K-12): Amite County Schools; (2) Sojourner Truth Academy of Science, Arts and Technology School (K-8): Leake County Schools; (3) Jackson Developmental Academy for Pregnant & Parenting Teens (6-12): Jackson Public Schools; and

(4) New Destiny Preparatory Academy (K-5): Meridian Public Schools. The four applicants that did not resubmit their applications are: (1) Emerge Community STEAM Charter School (K-8): Tunica County Public Schools; (2) Excellence Academy (K-5): North Panola Schools; (3) Greater Refuge Preparatory Academy (K-8): Canton Public Schools; and (4) Greater Refuge Preparatory Academy (K-8): Jackson Public Schools. While these applicants did not successfully complete this evaluation cycle, they will be allowed and are encouraged to submit applications in future cycles.

Chairman Cardin requested a motion to ratify the findings of the Committee and NACSA regarding the ineligible and incomplete applications.

MOTION: Dr. Wright

SECOND: Mr. Franklin

There being no further discussion and following a vote in favor by all members, the motion carried.

Chairman Cardin requested a motion to ratify the findings of the Committee and NACSA with regard to the applications determined to be eligible to advance to the third stage of the evaluation process.

MOTION: Dr. Elam

SECOND: Mrs. Cormack

There being no further discussion and following a vote in favor by all members, the motion carried.

B. Approval of Evaluation Guidance Form

Two documents prepared by NACSA in partnership with the RFP and Application Committee have been circulated to the Board for review. These are tools to be used by the evaluation team in the third stage of the evaluation process. The first is an evaluation form drafted with information drawn from the rubric created by the Board. The second is a guidance form. This form contains information that will assist evaluators, particularly those from out of state, with district-specific information and guiding questions that follow the RFP.

Chairman Cardin requested a motion to approve the guidance forms for use by the evaluation teams.

MOTION: Mrs. Cormack

SECOND: Dr. Elam

Following some discussion and a vote in favor by all members, the motion carried.

C. Adopt Education Qualifications for Executive Director Position

Mr. Wilson stated that Executive Director Search Committee has reviewed the job description in light of the removal of the law degree requirement and would request that the job description be amended to reflect the education requirement of a Bachelor's degree with an advanced degree preferred but not required.

Chairman Cardin requested a motion to amend the job description to reflect the education requirement of a Bachelor's degree with an advanced degree preferred but not required.

MOTION: Dr. Elam

SECOND: Dr. Wright

Mrs. Cormack stated her preference that the Board maintain a minimum education requirement of a Master's degree so as to ensure the most highly qualified applicants are sought. Dr. Potter agreed stating that she strongly believes it was the Legislature's intent to ensure that the person tapped to lead this Board have a thorough understanding of and experience in education administration and management and at least be qualified to hold certifications in these areas. Dr. Wright commented that in light of the administrative qualifications that will be required for the job, she agrees that a minimum standard of a Master's degree should be required.

Mr. Wilson stated that the Committee had taken each of these points into consideration but also realized that the Board will be responsible for hiring and can look at each applicant's education and experience individually. He wants the Board to be able to draw from the largest pool of applicants possible and does not want to exclude someone who might be perfect for the job but fails to have that advanced degree.

After further discussion, it was the consensus of the Board that the minimum education requirement should be a Master's degree with an advanced degree preferred. Mr. Wilson amended the motion to change the words "Bachelor's degree" to "Master's degree." There being no further discussion and following a vote in favor by all members, the amended motion carried.

D. Statement of Salary Range in Executive Director Job Description

Mr. Franklin asked that the Board consider removing from the job description a specific numerical salary range and instead include verbage that states that the salary is based on qualifications and experience.

Chairman Cardin requested a motion that the numerical statement of a salary range be removed from the Executive Director job description and be substituted with language that states that compensation will be based upon education and experience.

MOTION: Mr. Franklin

SECOND: Mrs. Cormack

There being no further discussion and following a vote in favor by all members, the motion carried.

Dr. Elam asked for clarification of the requirement of experience with fundraising that is included in the job description. After some discussion, Dr. Elam suggested that that be expanded to not only require experience in fundraising to bring money into the authorizer board but also require the ability to review, analyze and understand grants and other funding sources and the compliance issues that go along with those.

Chairman Cardin requested a motion to authorize the Chair to make the suggested revisions and publish the job description on the websites of MDE, IHL, DFA, as well as any other additional website suggested by NACSA and the Department of Education.

MOTION: Mr. Wilson

SECOND: Mr. Fanklin

There being no further discussion and following a vote in favor by all members, the motion carried.

E. Summer Fellowship Program

As Mrs. Cormack reported earlier, the Board is being given the opportunity to enter into a contract with Teach for America for a summer intern to work with NACSA and the RFP Committee. She would assist with various tasks including the revision and editing of the RFP, application toolkit and any other materials to be used for the RFP release, as well as create applicant tools including webinars or podcasts and FAQ's to include on the website. The intern would work daily from the Mississippi First office in Jackson and would begin the 6 week internship around the first week in June. An application received from Amelia Huckins has been circulated to the Board members and is being recommended by the RFP Committee. This internship is being provided at no cost to the Board.

Chairman Cardin recognized a motion to authorize the Board to enter into a contract with Teach for America in order to bring Amelia Huckins on for a summer internship.

MOTION: Mrs. Cormack

SECOND: Mr. Wilson

There being no discussion and following a vote in favor by all members, the motion carried.

Dr. Elam extended the Board's appreciation to Rachael Canter with Mississippi First for making the arrangements with Teach for American giving the Board the opportunity to enter into this agreement.

F. Board's Role in Decision Making Process

Beth Seling outlined several options for the Board's participation in NACSA's review of the remaining three applications prior to the Board's final approval in June. It was the consensus of the Board that for this application cycle each committee member could be assigned one application to follow through the process and then lead the discussion when those applications are brought before the full Board for discussion.

Chairman Cardin requested a motion directing the Committee to proceed with the assignment of one application per committee member to follow through the evaluation process and for that member to be prepared to lead the discussion when those applications are being considered by the full Board.

MOTION: Mrs. Cormack

SECOND: Dr. Wright

There being no further discussion and following a vote in favor by all members, the motion carried.

G. Video or Audio Recording of Capacity Interviews

Beth Seling suggested that the capacity interviews be video or audio recorded for review by the full Board at a later date and prior to their final approval. Dr. Wright offered the services of the MDE videographer for this task.

Chairman Cardin requested a motion to authorize the video recording of the capacity interviews.

MOTION: Mr. Franklin

SECOND: Dr. Elam

There being no further discussion and following a vote in favor by all members, the motion carried.

H. Planning for Public Hearings

The Board discussed the public hearing phase of the application review process and the need to schedule the hearings soon. The Board agreed that it would be best for the hearings to take place in each applicant's respective school district. The three school districts involved are Natchez/Adams County Schools, Jackson Public Schools and Columbus School District. For notice purposes, it was agreed that the hearings should take place the week of May 19th, concluding all three hearings within that week if possible. Once a location and time are set for each hearing, a notice will be posted.

Chairman Cardin requested a motion to direct the Board to set up public hearings for the applicants that have proceeded to stage three of the review process.

MOTION: Dr. Elam

SECOND: Mr. Franklin

There being no further discussion and following a vote in favor by all members, the motion carried.

I. Second Cycle of Applications

NACSA has requested that the Board move forward with scheduling the second cycle of applications. William Haft reported that NACSA has an additional \$20,000 remaining from another grant that it will be able to carry over for this work. He recommended that the RFP be revised as needed and available in draft for the Board to review in May with final approval in June as the release of the second cycle RFP is scheduled for July.

Mrs. Cormack discussed the benefit of having worked with NACSA on this first application cycle and requested that the Board continue that working relationship throughout the next cycle. It was agreed that the Board would review the scope of services in its existing agreement with NACSA and a revised agreement that would carry the working relationship through the next application cycle before the Board during the next meeting.

ITEM VI. PUBLIC COMMENT

Dr. Cynthia Gardner with Sojourner Truth Academy addressed the Board. She thanked the Board for taking the time to review their application and apologized for the technological problems they encountered. She stated that they do intend to reapply and asked if they would be able to sit in on the public hearings being conducted for this round of applications. She also asked with regard to the school grading (accountability) when they reapply, could that reach back to the timeframe from when they originally applied although the application did not pass in that stage.

Chairman Cardin stated that yes they could attend the public hearings that would be conducted in this round of applications. Regarding the question of the time frame for consideration of the school grading when their application is resubmitted, Chairman Cardin stated that he would seek the advice of the Attorney General's Office but believes they would not allow the Board to reach back to consider the grading at the time of the original application but would have to consider the school grading as it exists at the time of the resubmission of the application.

Dr. Gardner further asked if there would be a problem if they have a consultant working with them who has a for-profit organization as well as a not-for-profit organization. Chairman Cardin stated that it must be a non-profit that is the ESP and, if that is the case, the applicant should be fine.

Darren Leach with Inspire Charter School addressed the Board and stated that they are excited to be moved to next phase of the review process. He asked if the two evaluation tool documents discussed earlier would be made public to the applicants. Chairman Cardin stated that they would.

Mike Sayer with Southern Echo asked if all twelve of the original applications would be posted publicly or would it simply be the three that have moved to the next phase of evaluation. Chairman Cardin stated that only the remaining three would be posted after redaction of confidential information. Chairman Cardin stated further that anyone wishing to see any of the remaining applications can make a public records request for those documents.

Mr. Sayer asked how the evaluation documents would be made available to the public. Chairman Cardin stated that they would be posted to the website.

ITEM VII. NEXT MEETING

After some discussion it was agreed that the next meeting would be held on May 8th at 9:00 a.m. at the MS Department of Education prior to the capacity interviews being held that day.

The June meeting will be held on June 2, 2014, at 10:00 a.m. at IHL.

ITEM VIII. ADJOURN

Chairman Cardin requested a motion to adjourn.

MOTION: Dr. Elam

SECOND: Mr. Franklin

There being no discussion and following a vote in favor by all members, the motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 11:34.

ADOPTED, this the 8th day of May, 2014.



TOMMIE S. CARDIN, Chairman