

MINUTES OF THE
MISSISSIPPI CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZER BOARD

Regular Meeting
Monday, December 7, 2015

The regular monthly meeting of the Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board was held at 10:00 a.m. on Monday, December 7, 2015, 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
Krystal Cormack, Vice-Chair
Dr. Bonita Coleman-Potter
Johnny Franklin
Chris Wilson
Dr. Carey Wright

Dr. Karen Elam participated by conference call. Executive Director Marian Schutte was also present at the meeting. Board Chairman Tommie Cardin called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

ITEM I. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

A. Adoption of Agenda

The Agenda was previously circulated to all Board members for review. There was a request to move the time for public comments and the announcement of the next meeting up the agenda so that they are addressed before the Board goes into Executive Session.

Chairman Cardin requested a motion to adopt the agenda, as amended.

MOTION: Mrs. Cormack

SECOND: Mr. Wilson

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

ITEM II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

A. Approval of Minutes

The Minutes of the October 5, 2015 meeting were previously circulated to the Board members for review.

Chairman Cardin requested a motion to adopt the Minutes of the October 5, 2015 meeting, as presented.

MOTION: Dr. Wright

SECOND: Mr. Franklin

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

ITEM III. CHAIR REPORT

Chairman Cardin announced that a retreat is being planned for the month of January to possibly be held on the coast, and a specific date for that will be discussed later in the meeting.

He announced further that the Executive Director's evaluation will be discussed during today's meeting in Executive Session.

ITEM IV. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Ms. Schutte announced that Midtown Public Charter School was featured on WJTV for their coding work and their participation with Kids Code Mississippi. She is excited to see each of the two schools that are currently in operation being recognized for the programs they are offering to the students here in Jackson.

She stated that during the month of October she had the opportunity to represent the Board at two conferences, first during the National Association of Charter School Authorizers Conference, where she was a presenter on the topic of the role of third party evaluators, and next at the Foundation for Excellence in Education Conference along with Dr. Wright. She had the opportunity to connect with other charter school advocates at these events including the heads of the charter school associations in the southeast.

As a further update, Ms. Schutte announced that on Friday she will be traveling to Baton Rouge to work with the Louisiana Association of Charter Schools who is hosting a technical support forum for applicants entitled "Apply Yourself" where she will have the opportunity to observe and provide feedback. The forum is also open to any Mississippi charter school applicants interested in attending. One focus of the forum will be on how applicants can better create a mission and vision for their school, as well as ensuring that their application has a theory of action to address whatever the specific problem is that they are trying to solve with the creation of their school.

Ms. Schutte further announced that the US Congress is currently working to pass revisions to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) or the "No Child Left Behind Act", as it is better known, and it contains revisions to the charter school program grants that would allow authorizer boards such as ours to apply directly to the federal government for grant funds. The bill was passed by the House of Representatives last week and it is now being sent to the Senate for consideration. The bill also contains increased funding for the charter school program grant, something for which the Board has expressed support through a letter to Senator Cochran.

Lastly, Ms. Schutte reported that she has been working with Ty Carr at Mississippi Interactive to revise the Board's website focusing specifically on making it more user friendly and more interactive for our charter schools.

ITEM V. COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Applications Committee

Mrs. Cormack reported that the committee has met multiple times via teleconference and today they will present for consideration the 2016 RFP, a copy of which has been circulated to the Board members. In creating the current RFP, the committee reviewed what was previously effective and what needed to be improved upon to make it more efficient. She stated that there were some redundancies found in the previous cycles and, as a committee, they have attempted to remove those and to tweak the process to make it as streamline and accessible as possible while maintaining the expectation of quality and rigor of previous cycles. She pointed out one major modification on page 4 involving the timeline, which was modified to provide applicants a longer window from the time the RFP is released to the application due date. She stated that the committee's goal is to launch the RFP on January 15th followed by some orientation and applicant support sessions and have the final completed proposals due in May and evaluations completed by September 12th. Today they will present the RFP for release for public comment with a goal of a final release at the January meeting.

B. Performance and Accountability Committee

Ms. Schutte reported that the committee has met via teleconference and has discussed the school selected indicators portion of the Performance Framework. A copy of two schools' proposed selected indicators and an excerpt from the Performance Framework where those indicators fit in was circulated to the Board members. Ms. Schutte stated that the charter school law requires that the Board incorporate school selected indicators into the Performance Framework but grants the Board the authority to review and approve those. These school selected indicators do not supplant the state accountability but will be used in addition to the state system of assessments and gives the schools the opportunity to point out additional standards they are setting for themselves.

Ms. Schutte reported that Midtown Public Charter School set forth a goal that targets their students who begin the year scoring basic or below basic on the Star assessment. Their goal is for 100% of the students who are scoring at those levels to demonstrate 1 ½ years of growth in reading and math during the course of the year. Reimagine Prep has set a goal of 100% of its student who start the year reading below grade level, based on the scholastic reading inventory, to grow 1 ½ grade levels over the course of the year

ITEM VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. Performance Framework: School Selected Indicators

Ms. Schutte presented in her report the two school selected indicators being presented today for consideration. She further clarified that these indicators fall within Measure No. 2 of the Performance Framework, School Specific Academic Goals. She explained that the schools were given an assessment period of one half of the school year in order to determine the needs of their students and develop these goals before being required to submit their indicators. This time frame will continue with future schools being required to present their school selected indicators in December of their first year of operation.

Chairman Cardin requested a motion to adopt the School Selected Indicators proposed by Midtown Public Charter School and Reimagine Prep Middle School.

MOTION: Mr. Wilson

SECOND: Mrs. Cormack

There being no further discussion and following a vote of 6 in favor and 1 opposed, the motion carried.

B. Joel E. Smilow Collegiate: Defer Opening to 2017-18 School Year

Ravi Gupta, CEO and co-founder of Republic Schools, and Kate Cooper, Regional Director of Republic Schools, presented their request. Mr. Gupta gave a brief update on the opening of Reimagine Prep Middle School and where they stand with Smilow Prep and Smilow Collegiate schools. Their request is that they be allowed to defer the opening of Smilow Collegiate until the 2017-18 school year in order to have more time to concentrate on the development of its individual curriculum and ensure the quality level that is expected upon opening. Smilow Prep will open for the 2016-17 school year as previously approved.

Chairman Cardin requested a motion to approve the request to delay the opening of Joel E. Smilow Collegiate Charter School until the 2017-18 school year.

MOTION: Mrs. Cormack

SECOND: Dr. Wright

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

C. Charter School Contracts

i. Joel E. Smilow Prep

The charter contract for Joel E. Smilow Prep has previously been circulated to the Board.

Chairman Cardin requested a motion to approve the Joel E. Smilow Prep Charter School Contract.

MOTION: Mr. Franklin

SECOND: Dr. Elam

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

D. 2016 Request for Proposals: Release for Public Comment

Mrs. Cormack presented the 2016 RFP during her committee report. The Committee recommends that the Board release the 2016 RFP for public comment for 30 days to receive comments and recommendations for revisions.

Chairman Cardin requested a motion to approve the release of the 2016 Request for Proposals for public comment.

MOTION: Mrs. Cormack

SECOND: Mr. Franklin

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

E. Approval of Invoices

Ms. Schutte presented travel invoices, as well as Cornerstone invoices for the months of September and October.

Chairman Cardin requested a motion to approve the invoices as presented.

MOTION: Dr. Wright

SECOND: Dr. Coleman-Potter

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

ITEM VII. PUBLIC COMMENT

Rachael Canter, Executive Director of Mississippi First, addressed the Board. She stated that Mississippi First has recently published the second in a series of four issue briefs on various charter school issues. The current issue is about ways to grow independent charter schools in Mississippi. The brief was written to address the challenges they have observed in attracting CMOs to Mississippi and the advice they have been given by national charter organizations to "grow their own" CMO. They have been told repeatedly that they must encourage local educators to make local models for the students they know. The brief contains findings on what people said were the barriers to opening independent schools and some recommendations to overcome those barriers. Of all of the recommendations contained in the brief, she first emphasized the one option that is *not* found in the brief and that is lower its standards for approving schools. She stated the firm belief of Mississippi First that proposed schools must be required to meet the stringent standards development by the authorizer board or they are not an option.

She next discussed some of the barriers that prospective independent schools are facing. First is the lack of a network of resources and support that CMOs have. Securing facilities and quality staffing is harder without an established network of financial resources and support. Next is the fear of reprisals from community leaders many experience when they voice an interest in opening an independent school in their community. Often the political structure in an area is more supportive of the traditional school system and a veteran educator interested in exploring the possibility of opening an independent school will not voice his or her interest for fear of losing his/her job. Startup costs are another significant barrier because of the lack of the national fundraising networks. And finally is the barrier faced by those who want to open independent schools in smaller school districts where they are competing for a smaller group of children and funding.

Next she addressed some of the recommendations for ways to combat these barriers, some actions that may be taken by the authorizer board, some by the legislature and some by other independent charter school organizations to support others. First is the language of the law addressing conversion schools and the possible prohibition of the conversion school to at least lease the building previously occupied by the traditional school. Mississippi First suggests that the law be clarified to say that conversion charter schools be allowed to lease or purchase their building. Another recommendation is the development of an organization in Mississippi that would specialize in the type of applicant support that the authorizer board is not able to provide. Finally, she suggested that the authorizer board play an advocacy role in developing a leadership pipeline or in identifying an existing national pipeline from which Mississippi can draw quality school leaders or send local individuals for the type training that is required to lead an independent charter school. Copies of the issue brief and Mississippi First's annual report were provided to the Board members.

Chairman Cardin thanked Ms. Canter for her work and that of Mississippi First in bringing these issues to the forefront and stated that the authorizer board has met with the University of Mississippi's education department and discussed the specialized qualities needed by a charter school leader, and he plans for the Board to meet at Mississippi State in February and hopefully other universities throughout the year to further address this issue.

Dr. Coleman-Potter also expressed her thanks for the work being done by Mississippi First on this topic and emphasized the importance of having this information in the hands of the legislators as they begin their next session and begin considering re-opening the law for possible revision. She also stated her opinion that compensation structure for staffing is another area that must be addressed in order to attract and maintain quality teachers and leaders. Mrs. Canter stated that though compensation structure is not addressed specifically in this report as charters are allowed to set their own compensation structure and this report focus more on sourcing, she believes also that that is a conversation that needs to be had state wide in both traditional and charter schools. She further stated that Mississippi First is currently working with legislative leadership on tweaks to the charter school bill and will continue to do so throughout the session. The information contained in this brief will be provided to all of the legislative leadership.

Mr. Franklin asked if Mrs. Canter was familiar with a training module for turnaround schools developed by Mississippi State's School of Business, based on a program at the Virginia School of Business, and asked if that could possibly be a model for creating a leadership training pipeline. Mrs. Canter stated that she is familiar with that program but expressed her opinion that what is needed is a more "ground up" approach to training people rather than an add-on to an existing program.

Mrs. Cormack addressed the information contained in the brief regarding the cost for the National Principals Academy and the cost for Building Excellent Schools (BES) and asked specifically if it is Mississippi First's suggestion that there be a legislative recommendation for funds to send people to these programs. She asked further if Mississippi First had information on the cost of the Relay program as they have plans to expand into the Memphis area and if there is a possibility of partnering with them for leadership training for Mississippi. Mrs. Canter stated that Relay is a much more cost effective option than BES and they will be in conversations with the New Orleans director to either partner with them for training or to attempt to find someone to replicate the program for Mississippi.

Next Mike Sayer with Southern Echo asked when the RFP would be published for public comment, and Ms. Schutte stated that it would be posted tomorrow. He asked further if the next meeting will be set prior to executive session, and Ms. Schutte stated that it would be set as that change in the agenda had been earlier approved.

ITEM VIII. NEXT MEETING

Following some discussion, it was announced that the next meeting will be held on Wednesday January 27th with a Board Retreat to be held on the afternoon of the previous day on Tuesday, January 26th in Ocean Springs. The specific times and location are to be determined.

ITEM IX. EXECUTIVE SESSION

Chairman Cardin requested a motion for a closed determination to consider going into executive session for the purpose of discussing a personnel matter.

MOTION: Mrs. Cormack

SECOND: Mr. Franklin

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

Chairman Cardin requested a motion to go into Executive Session for purpose of discussing a personnel matter.

MOTION: Mr. Wilson

SECOND: Dr. Wright

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

During executive session, the Board discussed the annual performance evaluation of the Executive Director.

There was a motion made by Mr. Chris Wilson and seconded by Dr. Carey Wright that based on the overall satisfactory job performance of the Executive Director, her annual salary for 2016 should be increased by \$5,000.00, effective January 1, 2016, resulting in a total annual salary of \$100,000.00 for 2016.

MOTION: Mr. Wilson

SECOND: Dr. Wright

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

Chairman Cardin requested a motion to come out of executive session.

MOTION: Mr. Wilson

SECOND: Mrs. Cormack

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

Chairman Cardin announced upon the return to open session that the Board voted during executive session to approve a \$5,000.00 increase in the Executive Director's salary based on satisfactory overall job performance, effective January 1, 2016, resulting in a total annual salary of \$100,000.00 for 2016.

ITEM X. ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Cardin requested a motion to adjourn.

MOTION: Dr. Wright

SECOND: Mr. Franklin

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

The meeting adjourned at 12:45 p.m.

ADOPTED, this the 5th day of January, 2016.



TOMMIE S. CARDIN, Chairman