

Minutes of the North Carolina Charter School Advisory Board
Virtual Meeting, Department of Public Instruction
April 8, 2024
9 AM

Attendance – CSRБ Members	
Alex Granados (nonvoting) Dr. Rita Haire Dr. John Eldridge Alex Quigley Hilda Parlér Dr. Shelly Shope- Absent	Eric Sanchez Bruce Friend Dave Machado- Absent Todd Godbey Dr. Bartley Danielsen Stephen Gay
Attendance – Other	
<i>Office of Charter Schools</i> Ashley Baquero, Director Joseph Letterio, Consultant- Absent Melanie Rackley, Consultant Jenna Cook, Consultant Dr. Brandi Gill, Consultant Dr. Natasha Norins, Consultant Nicky Niewinski, Consultant Megan Carter, Consultant Julie Whetzel, Consultant Dr. Barbara O’Neal, NC ACCESS- Absent	<i>Attorney</i> Steven Walker <i>SBE Attorney</i> Allison Schafer- Absent <i>Teacher/Principal of Year</i> William Storrs- Absent Maria Mills TJ Worrell- Absent Ryan Henderson- Absent

Call To Order

Pledge of Allegiance: Mr. Bruce Friend

Mission and Ethics Statement:

- Mission and Ethics Statement read by Mr. Bruce Friend

Approval of the Agenda and Minutes

Motion: Ms. Hilda Parlér moved to approve agenda for the April Meeting.
Second: Dr. Bart Danielsen

Vote: Unanimous

Passed Failed

Motion: Ms. Hilda Parlér moved to approve March 2024 minutes

Second: Dr. Bart Danielsen

Vote: Unanimous

Passed

Failed

April Charter Schools Review Board Meeting

2023 Annual Report: Ms. Ashley Baquero, OCS Director

- Ms. Ashley Baquero gave an overview of the report that is required annually. This included information related to legislation and academic performance, as well as enrollment and best practices.
 - Ms. Baquero shared the number of schools and students in charter schools across NC including the number on waitlists.
 - Reviewed the history of charter schools in NC going back to 1998 and the rules creating the CSRБ and guiding its decision-making process.
- Ms. Baquero discussed legislative updates that the office thought was substantial/worth noting.
 - CSAB → CSRБ
 - No Impact statement consideration allowed.
 - Subgroup Performance
 - Enrollment Max removed for non-low performing schools – LP Schools can request.
 - Parent’s Bill of Rights
 - Remote Charter Academies
 - Application windows for ’23 and ’24.
- Ms. Baquero discussed the role and structure of the Office of Charter Schools and noted that an Assistant Director will be hired soon. She then discussed how charters are held accountable and went through the closure/termination process.
 - This included a brief conversation on the performance framework outlined in NC SBE policy and how schools were doing when compared with that framework.
- Ms. Baquero shared charter growth data noting the large increase in growth after the cap was lifted in 2011.
 - She also noted that OCS is the main authorizing staff for charter schools after the CSRБ approves a school’s charter.
- Ms. Baquero moved into data on charter student demographics and compared that data with those in a traditional LEA.
- Next, Ms. Baquero touched on Charter School Access.
 - She went through a timeline of Federal grants awarded to North Carolina and noted that over 70 charter schools have been approved to use a weighted lottery. She also shared new legislation creating a pilot program for a Durham charter school.
 - Reviewed the transportation plans for all schools and compared who provided what service to the students.
- Review of academic performance

- Ms. Baquero shared the breakdown in growth and performance data, noting the large number of schools with a C and at least meeting growth. She then went over definitions for low-performing and CLP schools.
- She also discussed comparison data for the '21-'22 year and '22-'23 year.
- Ms. Baquero outlined how charter schools receive funding, noting that state funds are based on ADM and Federal funds are targeted to special populations. She also noted other additional information in the report.

Questions from the CSRБ

- Ms. Parlér asked if they can vote/make a motion after they get the data from the renewals. Ms. Baquero and CSRБ worked out when the motion will be made.
- Mr. Friend thanked Ashley and OCS for getting the data together and thanked them for the work they've done as well.
 - He also asked if it were possible to make another metric on the survey to have board minutes publicly available citing the lack of minutes from some schools. Ms. Baquero said that was being discussed and noted other items OCS is looking to add.
 - Mr. Friend noted that all board members, but Mr. Quigley have terms that end next year and he and Ms. Baquero noted they are looking to stagger that to avoid any potential confusion/chaos.
- Dr. Haire asked if it were possible to include the percentages on a particular table/graph. Ms. Baquero noted that it initially didn't come from her office, but she would reach out to see if that was attainable.
- Hilda Parlér thanked Ms. Baquero and OCS for the report.

Motion: Mr. Bruce Friend moved to adopt the annual report with the disclaimer that it would be updated after the renewals are voted on later today.

Second: Dr. John Eldridge

- Vote: Unanimous
- Passed Failed

RTO Cohort 2024 Update: Dr. Natasha Norins, OCS Consultant

- Dr. Norins gave an update on the 2024 Cohort.
 - She noted there were 12 schools initially and now there are 3. She went over the schools in delay and those with insufficient findings.
- Dr. Norins then gave an update on the delay year schools. She noted that Flat Rock Classical Academy has withdrawn their application and others are before the board today to request a delay.
 - She reviewed each school individually noting the number of student applications and facility update.
- Dr. Norins concluded that these schools were told they could be invited back in May.

Charter Amendments: Ms. Nicky Niewinski, OCS Consultant

GO BIG: 2nd Delay Request

- Ms. Niewinski went over the amendment request to get a 2nd delay. She noted that it was mainly due to facility and the location they found needed another year to get ready for educational use.

Questions from the CSRБ

- Mr. Friend asked what they have done with parent awareness/recruitment in between these delays. How do they prove interest.
 - Dr. Howe – a Rep from the school – forwarded to the board chair after mentioning everyone present today. Ms. White – Board Chair – outlined the steps they are taking to bolster recruitment and maintain interest from both students and staff.
- Mr. Friend asked what the bigger ticket items were to get the facilities ready for educational use.
 - Ms. White went into detail on all the things being done on both facilities – one a church and one a former school – and how they are going to get the funds to do those renovations.
- Ms. Parlér asked for specifics on the renovations to the former school.
 - Another board member mentioned they are very minor renovations and Ms. Parlér asked again for more specifics. Dr. Howe mentioned there are structural changes to make the facility ready for educational use and gave a few examples. She noted they had to work with the facility owner to make sure their vision was also implemented in the school.
 - Dr. Howe also added the needs for the former school.
 - Ms. Parlér asked again for more specifics and a board member went into detail on the former educational facility and the needs of that facility.
- Dr. Haire asked what changes have been made to the board and Dr. Howe explained the changes.
- Dr. Haire – noting the current economic conditions – said that the budget is a bit off since it is nearly 4 years old, and she is concerned about changes in costs over the years from older applications. She also asked what the plan is to get more interest.
 - Ms. White stated the biggest question asked by parents is where the facility is. She said there are conversations with parents, but they are hesitant to commit until a facility is finalized. She also added they are still going out and marketing to the community.
 - Dr. Haire asked what the most recent event was, and Dr. Howe stated one event had 5 families and that a STEM event in the future had 40 tickets requested on Eventbrite. She said they really are beginning to work on conversion as opposed to just numbers of applicants/enrollees.
 - The board also noted they are grateful for OCS help as well.
- Ms. Parlér asked about a potential relationship on the board. Ms. Howe said that she is the spouse of Dr. Howe and that she plans to roll off to avoid COI.
- Mr. Godbey commented they needed to be ready to report back on interest as that is important to the board.

Motion: Mr. Todd Godbey moved to approve GO BIG’s request for a 2nd delay.

Second: Mr. Stephen Gay

Vote: Unanimous

- Passed Failed

Nalanda: 2nd Delay Request

- Ms. Nicky Niewinski went over the history of the school, the proposed location for the school, and the reasoning for why they need a 2nd delay. She cited a facility issue as the main.

Questions from the CSRБ

- A Nalanda board member introduced himself and the other members on the call.
- Dr. Haire asked if there have been any changes to the board. A board member responded that the board is the same. She and Dr. Haire went through the details of the application and Ms. Niewinski added more information as well.
 - Dr. Haire asked if they couldn't put as much interest before the board due to the lack of a facility. A board member noted that there is increased interest – of about 50 students – they are seeing the lack of facility as a difficulty.
- Mr. Friend asked if there is an area the school is really trying to hone in on.
 - A board member mentioned they initially looked in Northwest Raleigh but once they found a proposed facility in Raleigh they were seeing interest from all over Wake County. Another board member followed up by saying what the board has been doing to explain the situation to parents and possible students.
 - Mr. Friend reiterated his point that it was a very big net.
 - The Business Coordinator added that she went to preschools to recruit but there are requests to see the building from prospective parents and their hands are tied due to not having one.
- Ms. Parlér stated they need to do a lot to get the number of interested students higher.
 - The Business Coordinator stated they are working on it and currently in a marketing campaign to increase what they already have.
- Dr. Haire asked what the breakeven number was, and a board member said 147. Ms. Niewinski added the enrollment numbers were approved in February when they were before the board for an amendment request.

Motion: Mr. Bruce Friend moved to approve Nalanda's request for a 2nd delay.

Second: Dr. John Eldridge

Discussion:

- Mr. Friend stated they have their work cut out for them. Other members agreed.

Vote: Unanimous

- Passed Failed

Quality Education Academy: Mission Statement

- Ms. Nicky Niewinski went over the new mission statement and gave the history of the school. She stated they are doing this to help simplify the statement and make it able to be tracked/quantified. She then read the old and new statements and noted the extensiveness of the process to get to this point.

Discussion from the CSRБ

- Dr. Haire asked who is online and Dr. Turner introduced herself and the other board members.
 - She also asked why a certain part of the statement is being added into / as the mission. Dr. Turner mentioned it is part of their future and also a part of their innovation over the years.
- Mr. Friend asked if their plan was to be financially comparable to the district when they should be focusing on the academic parts of their work. He says it doesn't read like that, but it could.
 - Dr. Turner explained the way it was worded and compared it to other statements in their charter as well.
- Ms. Parlér asked if the mission statement was still required to be 35 words or less and Ms. Baquero said they normally don't monitor the word count but would have to see if it's on the new application or not.

Motion: Dr. Rita Haire moved to approve Quality Education Academy's mission statement request.

Second: Dr. John Eldridge

Vote: Unanimous

- Passed Failed

Millennium Charter Academy: Mission Statement

- Ms. Nicky Niewinski went over the new mission statement and gave the history of the school. She then read the old and new statements and noted the goal was to help clean up the statement and help it be perceived as organized and clean. She also noted the process used to review this change within the school and the community.

Discussion from the CSRБ

- Ms Parlér noted that their statement wasn't very clear on some parts. Ms. Niewinski reiterated that she did ask representatives from the school to be available for today knowing there would be questions posed by the board. School has not responded to notifications of requirement to attend.
- Mr. Godbey stated he wouldn't support without discussion. Ms. Niewinski and Mr. Friend suggested they should move this to May so there is representation from the school.

Discussion Tabled to the May Meeting

Valor Prep: CLP Enrollment Increase

- Ms. Niewinski introduced the request for expansion and noted that due CLP status and requesting an increase in enrollment of 30% or more they needed to gain approval of the CSRБ.
- Ms. Parlér recused herself from the discussion.

Discussion from the CSRБ

- Mr. Friend asked why they are CLP.
 - Ms. Porter introduced herself and the other members of her board that were on the call. Ms. Roman noted the past performance and added they have made partnerships to turn

around the school. She also added they have seen positive change in growth and performance.

- Mr. Friend asked if there was demand present and Ms. Roman said yes and gave specific numbers.
- Dr. Haire asked if it was a K-12 and Ms. Roman said yes.
 - Dr. Haire asked if she had academic growth data and Ms. Roman said no but noted that the lower school exceeded growth.
 - Dr. Haire asked if the increased enrollment was spread across levels, and Ms. Roman said it was spread across all levels but focused on the lower school.

Motion: Dr. Rita Haire moved to approve Valor Prep’s CLP enrollment increase request.

Second: Dr. John Eldridge

Discussion:

- Dr. Haire noted that the partnerships they have are good and they do have the demand so long-term this would be a good move. Mr. Friend agreed.

Vote: Unanimous

- Passed Failed

Lakeside Charter Academy: CLP Enrollment Increase

- Ms. Niewinski went over the history of the school as well as some of the data. She noted the reasons why the school is requesting the enrollment expansion and the reasons why CSRБ needs to approve the change.

Discussion from the CSRБ

- Ms. Sipe introduced herself and the other board members on the call.
- Mr. Friend asked if they already have the student applications in and Ms. Sipe stated they do have the demand and it’s based off their most recent lottery.
- Dr. Haire asked for an explanation of why they were CLP and what they’re doing to change that.
 - Ms. Sipe noted the history of being a LP school. She said that most of it was in the middle school and they have hired more certified teachers and other staff to make sure there are no gaps in classrooms. She said that projections are showing them meeting or exceeding growth and that their grades will be either a C or B.
 - Dr. Haire asked when she has been the interim school leader and Ms. Sipe gave when she started.
 - Dr. Haire asked when they are planning to make the position permanent, and Ms. Sipe deferred to the board chair. She explained the flow of how she got into the role and that they are currently interviewing candidates for the permanent position.
 - The Board chair noted they are looking to start the new permanent head of school in the next school year.
- Dr. Haire asked if the expansion would occur across certain levels or across the K-8 spectrum. Ms. Sipe said that it would be primarily in the lower grades but overall would be across the K-8 spectrum.

- Dr. Haire expressed concern that they are CLP with no head of school. She and Ms. Sipe went over the current student populations and the board chair stated that many parents left as a result of the principal's departure. She added that Ms. Sipe has helped to stabilize the school.
- Dr. Danielsen asked what the cap would be if they vote to approve vs. not to approve.
 - Ms. Niewinski and others went over those numbers. Ms. Sipe stated they want to include all those students next year. Several board members and Ms. Niewinski again confirmed the numbers of students able to enroll in both scenarios.
- Mr. Gay asked how the new legislation affects this request. Ms. Baquero said that it now allows CLP to request expansion above 20%.
- Discussion ensued on what enrollment numbers they would use and Ms. Baquero explained the system they used.
- Mr. Friend asked the school what number they're trying to get to next year and Ms. Sipe said 363.
 - Dr. Danielsen broke down the request again with those new numbers. Mr. Friend agreed and reiterated that they would need to approve this since it's over 20%.
 - Dr. Haire asked for more information on the current lottery taken in February and Ms. Sipe gave details from that lottery.
 - Dr. Danielsen and others went over some of the numbers if they approve/don't approve.

Motion: Mr. Bruce Friend moved to approve Lakeside Charter Academy's CLP enrollment increase request.

Second: Dr. Rita Haire

Vote: 6 nay, 3 approved

- Passed Failed

- Dr. Danielsen and Dr. Haire explained what they thought would benefit the school in the future.

Renewals 2024 Vote: Mrs. Jenna Cook, OCS Consultant

- Ms. Jenna Cook explained the voting procedure and rules pertaining to the voting procedure.

Movement Eastland:

- Ms. Cook introduced the school and noted the comparability data between them and the LEA. She added they were unaware of non-compliance issues and noted financial non-compliance issues as well as performance data.
 - She added that prior to the financial non-compliance status they were placed in a 5-year renewal but moved to a 3-year after the financial issues.
- Mr. Hurley introduced himself and his team present today. He said that his focus was going to be primarily on the financial side of things as they were initially placed in a 5-year renewal.
 - He went over the letter they received from DPI and noted how there was some concerns over when the school was notified. He explained the concerns that were in the letter and how they have addressed/rectified the concerns.

- Ms. McFadden noted that they were looking at ‘Movement’ as a whole and not at Eastland individually.
- Mr. Hurley noted that the operating deficit was expected but that they’ve been going to every meeting and have strong overall compliance and reporting. Additionally, he stated they have strong financial support. He expressed concern over the lack of communication and asked that the board remove Movement Eastland from noncompliance entirely or to a ‘cautionary’ status.
- Ms. McFadden noted that the ADM change has been addressed. She also noted they were going to be on some sort of financial noncompliance due to a negative fund balance. She added that if she were to receive the evidence then they may be able to put them on a probationary status. She also apologized for the lack of communication as well.
- Mr. Friend noted that the CSRБ cannot remove them from that status.

Discussion from the CSRБ

- Dr. Haire apologized that they had to go through the media coverage for those mistakes that weren’t mistakes. She noted the clean financial performance and asked DPI to remove them from financial noncompliance.
- Dr. Danielsen echoed what Dr. Haire said and asked if there’s anything for the board to do in this situation.
 - Ms. Baquero stated today they would need to vote on a charter term and that it would be up to them to pick what term the school would be renewed at.

Motion: Dr. John Eldridge moved that the Charter Schools Review Board renew the charter for Movement Eastland for 5 years beginning July 1, 2024.

Second: Ms. Hilda Parlér

Vote: Unanimous

- **Passed** **Failed**

Children’s Village Academy

- Ms. Jenna Cook explained the voting procedure and rules pertaining to the voting procedure.
- Ms. Cook also went over the performance and growth data for the school and noted there were federal programs and school business reports previously for financial noncompliance. She also added a timeline for renewal recommendations and stated that they are currently listed for non-renewal.
- Ms. Cook yielded to Ms. Brigman from Federal Programs
- Ms. Brigman introduced herself and gave an update on what’s happened with Children’s Village.
 - She stated the February 5th letter yielded an inability to produce sign-in/sign-out sheets as well as background checks for all staff. She mentioned CVA was given a sheet of recommendations/requirements, and they were subject to unannounced verification.
 - She stated that on March 14th CVA submitted written policies for background checks and sign-in/sign-out and that they were considered closed.
- Ms. Brigman added that the Fiscal Desk Review had a settlement reached. She went over the settlement and the requirements within it.

Questions from the CSRБ

- Mr. Gay asked if they have received the funds and Ms. Brigman said no, they have 30 business days from the 26th of March.

School Business Update

- Ms. McFadden noted the school did update the audits and added updated information regarding the loan from the board member. She added they are running at a deficit and gave some of the numbers noting they have very little cash on-hand. She also stated they had a drop in ADM to 141 students.

Questions / Discussion from the CSRБ

- Mr. Friend asked if the settlement agreement took care of everything that needed to be taken care of.
 - Ms. McFadden stated they are still looking for implementation of the procedures but did receive how they planned to move forward. Ms. Brigman added they are looking for repayment and that it was paramount those came from local funds.
 - Ms. Brigman said she would get the final date and confirmed the total amount owed.
- Ms. Parlér asked about the internal controls and the specifics. Ms. Baquero noted that they were unable to be present today and did provide a letter for the board. Ms. Cook stated they had opportunities in the past to present to the board.
- Mr. Friend asked if they have changed up the leadership of the board. Ms. Cook shared there has been no change in leadership but they have employed outside help for financials and added a new board secretary.
- Mr. Friend asked what their enrollment is this year and Ms. McFadden said 141. Ms. Parlér noted some of their past mistakes and said they really needed to clean up their minutes and approval of the agendas.
- Mr. Friend asked if the settlement agreement closed the concerns of purchasing homes/furniture outside of the school campus. Ms. McFadden explained that DPI chose not to pursue that but instead wanted to focus on the misuse of 21st century funds.
- Dr. Eldridge asked what the odds are of getting that paid off when they have a loan to a board member and to DPI.
 - Dr. Haire asked if their previous conversation where the loan to the board member was forgiven was correct and Ms. McFadden said she hasn't seen anything in the financial statements to verify that. Ms. McFadden and Dr. Haire went over the details of that loan and noted that she is interested in the additional items such as the properties.
 - Dr. Haire and Ms. McFadden discussed upkeep in their monthly budgets to the property owners for those facilities. Ms. McFadden stated they haven't seen any updated contracts and their auditor said it'd be better to lump things into the monthly charge.
- Mr. Friend – citing the letter they received from the school in February – noted that the remaining balance on the loan from the board member was ~\$31,000 and that there were repayment terms listed within. Ms. McFadden noted that this was the 2nd loan, and that no agreement was made for that Sept. 2022 loan.
- Ms. Parlér asked what the interest rate was on the loans and Ms. Baquero said 9% on a 5-year term.
- Mr. Godbey asked if they've provided any indication of where that money would come from based on their financials showing they most likely don't have that money. Ms. McFadden said she didn't want to speculate. Ms. Brigman noted they haven't had any additional federal funds and have been cut off. She added that she doesn't know how they are paying the bill if they don't have any access.

- Dr. Eldridge asked if there is a forecast on where they would finish this year and Ms. McFadden said they don't have that forecast. Dr. Eldridge noted they would have to add more students because cutting staff might not get them enough. Dr. Haire stated they also have academic concerns they need to address.
 - Dr. Eldridge and Ms. Parlér added they are surprised no one is here on the call to answer questions.
 - Dr. Danielsen noted that the surrounding county also has poor performance data but expressed concern over the financial side of things. He asked if it was correct they were unable to verify implementation of financial changes. Ms. McFadden confirmed this. Dr. Danielsen expressed concern this could happen again. Ms. McFadden said they've presented new procedures but couldn't verify implementation.
- Dr. Danielsen asked what would happen if they granted a 3-year renewal but then in a few weeks couldn't repay the money to DPI.
 - Ms. Baquero said they could make them come before the board. Ms. Baquero noted the removal of governance noncompliance but reiterated they are not changing their recommendation of non-renewal due to the extensiveness of the fiscal concerns.
 - Ms. McFadden noted that the letter did mention the first loan being forgiven. She and Dr. Haire confirmed when that letter was received.
 - Dr. Haire asked if in the April 3rd letter the actions have been taken. Ms. McFadden said they would go out soon and investigate this. Ms. Brigman confirmed they were planning to go out soon and look at the sign-in/sign-out and background checks as well.
- Mr. Friend asked why they weren't here today.
 - Ms. Cook went over the details of their notification of the renewal vote. She said that after conversing with Ashley, they determined they weren't required since they've had the opportunity to address the concerns listed in the two business reports.
- Mr. Gay asked if the recommendation is still non-renewal and Ms. Baquero said yes.
 - Other board members mentioned COI concerns and the fact that there were repayment concerns.
- Dr. Haire asked what the 30-day requirement was and Ms. Brigman said May 8th based on the fact it was 30 business days.
 - Dr. Haire asked when their charter expired and several said June 30th.
- Mr. Friend asked if they should push this back a month.
 - Dr. Haire and Dr. Danielsen agreed and added this could spurn them into getting the payment in sooner.
 - Mr. Friend said that he thinks it's real close between 3 year and non-renewal. Ms. Baquero stated the timeline for appeals if they chose non-renewal would be difficult but that they could make it work.
 - Mr. Friend added they need solid reasons for non-renewal and that the reasons they present if they voted today may be rectified in 30 days.
 - Dr. Eldridge agreed but said their track record is very poor and that he really doesn't know how they're going to end financially.
 - Mr. Sanchez said he sees both sides but added that this decision – to close a school – is the most important decision that requires all the information possible.
 - Ms. Parlér asked if they could even get all that info seeing the lack of details in their minutes.
 - Dr. Danielsen said that if they keep deferring then in essence they are voting for a non-renewal since their charter is going to expire. He said he could push the vote back but that if the loan isn't repaid, he doesn't see how he can vote for any renewal.

- Mr. Friend reiterated his concerns over the loans and financial concerns and wants to hear from the CVA board. Said he would give them time to address those concerns.
- Ms. Brigman said that her team would go out and do an unannounced visit and update on whether they've received the funding.
 - Dr. Haire agreed and stated they should be required to attend in May to answer questions.
 - Mr. Godbey noted there are questions surrounding COI and other things that they don't seem to have a grasp on. Ms. McFadden agreed and said they will follow up on those things.
 - Dr. Eldridge noted that he too is shocked that this school doesn't have these things in place already seeing how long the school's been open.
 - Dr. Haire and others noted they opened in 1997.
- Mr. Gay asked where the money that gets repaid comes from as they can't take out any new loans.
 - Ms. McFadden said she'd follow-up on that as well.

Renewal Vote Moved to May

Director's Updates: Ms. Ashley Baquero, Director, Office of Charter Schools

- Ms. Baquero gave her update including when the new cohort application closes, SBE appeals, new requirements for renewal recommendations, and more.
- Mr. Walker went over the legal implications of that recommendation change and said that he'd have more info on it in the future.

Motion to Adjourn: Ms. Hilda Parlér

Second: Mr. Bruce Friend

Unanimous

12:50 pm.