Minutes of the North Carolina Charter Schools Review Board

State Board Room 755, Department of Public Instruction

October 6, 2025

9 AM

Attendance – CSRB Members	
Jeremy Wall- (nonvoting) Dr. Rita Haire Dr. John Eldridge Eric Guckian Hilda Parlér Dr. Shelly Shope	Eric Sanchez - Absent Bruce Friend Lindalyn Kakadelis Todd Godbey Gerald McNair - Remote Stephen Gay - Remote
Attendance – Other	
Office of Charter Schools Ashley Baquero, Director Joseph Letterio, Consultant - Remote Melanie Rackley, Consultant Jenna Cook, Consultant - Remote Dr. Natasha Norins, Consultant Dr. Brandi Gill, Consultant Nicky Niewinski, Asst. Director Megan Carter, Consultant Julie Whetzel, Consultant	*CSRB Attorney* Steven Walker - Remote *SBE Attorney* Allison Schafer - Absent *Teacher/Principal of Year* Dr. Jake Wilson – POY Lindsay Phillips – TOY - Absent

Recording of October CSRB Meeting: [Day 1 - October NC Charter School Review Board - Oct. 6, 2025]

Call To Order

Pledge of Allegiance & NC Flag Salute: Mr. Bruce Friend

Mission and Ethics Statement:

- Mission and Ethics Statement, Mr. Bruce Friend, Board Chair

Approval of the Agenda and Minutes

Motion: Ms. Hilda Parlér motioned to approve agenda for October Meeting
Second: Ms. Lindalyn Kakadelis

Vote: Unanimous

☒Passed ☐Failed

Motion: Mr. Gerald McNair motioned to approve September 2025 minutes.
Second: Dr. Rita Haire

Vote: Unanimous

☒Passed ☐Failed

October 6 Charter Schools Review Board Meeting

Amendment: Ms. Julie Whetzel, OCS Consultant

- Pine Lake Preparatory – Mission Statement

Ms. Whetzel shared information included in the Executive Summary.

Request: Change mission statement from "preparing students for college and a purposeful life" to "preparing students for college, career, and a purposeful life"

Background: School operates in Iredell County since 2007, serving approximately 1,900 students K-12. Change reflects strategic planning processes to include career preparation.

Motion: Ms. Lindalyn Kakadelis motioned to approve Pine Lake Preparatory's amended Mission Statement
Second: Dr. Rita Haire

Vote: Unanimous

☒Passed ☐Failed

Wayne Prep – National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

Ms. Whetzel shared information included in the Executive Summary.

Request: Participate in National School Lunch Program

Background: School in Wayne County, operational since 2014, serving approximately 850 students K-12. Board approved participation in April to better meet student and family needs.

Motion: Mr. Todd Godbey motioned to approve Wayne Preps's request for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)
Second: Mr. Stephen Gay

Vote: Unanimous

☒Passed ☐Failed

Fall 2025 New School Enrollment Update: Dr. Natasha Norins, OCS Consultant

Enrollment data presented for 2025 RTO (Ready to Open) schools as of October 1, 2025. Most schools showed growth since opening but have not met initial projections.

Triad International Studies Academy Enrollment Presentation:

School representatives presented information regarding TISA's under-enrollment.

Issue: Enrollment below 80-student state requirement (45 students enrolled, with some attrition bringing total to approximately 42)

Key Points Presented:

- Renovation delays caused loss of approximately half of registered students (from 104-109 initially)
- School opened on time (August 13) despite challenges
- Significant EC student population (over one-third of enrollment)
- Financial sustainability claimed with landlord rental deferral support
- Request for enrollment cap waiver or additional time

Student Demographics (45 students):

- Kindergarten: 24-25 students
- First Grade: 12-13 students
- Second Grade: 8 students
- 25 students on free lunch, 4 on reduced lunch
- 12 identified EC students (with 3 more in MTSS process)
- 22 ESL students
- Racial demographics: approximately 40-50% African American, 30% Hispanic, remainder White and multi-racial, 3 Asian

CSRB Discussion:

Major concerns raised:

- Break-even number stated as 50-60 students vs. actual enrollment of 42-45
- Budget inconsistencies and unclear financial details
- High percentage of EC students (approximately 31-33%) requiring significant support
- Lack of advance notice about inability to meet 80-student minimum

Motion: Mr. Brue Friend made a motion to revoke the charter of Triad International Studies Academy, effective December 30, 2025, based on failure to meet statutory enrollment requirements of 80 students
Second: Mr. Eric Guckian

Vote: Unanimous

☒Passed ☐Failed

2024-2025 Academic Presentation: Dr. Brandi Gill, OCS Consultant

Comprehensive academic data for 2024-25 school year presented for 206 charter schools (excluding alternative schools and those with insufficient data).

School Performance Grades

- 71% of schools earned C or better
- Schools earning F grade lowest in 5 years (11 schools)
- 17 schools earned A rating (up from 7 in 2021-22)

Top 10 Schools by Performance Grade: Recognition given to highest-performing schools across diverse educational models and regions

Growth Data

- 44% of schools met growth (consistent with previous years)
- 29% exceeded growth (increase from 19% in 2021-22)
- 28% did not meet growth (lowest in several years)

Math Growth: 28% exceeded growth (4-point increase); 70% met or exceeded growth

Reading Growth: 20% exceeded growth (highest since 2021-22); 62% met growth

Top 10 Schools by Growth: Special recognition to IDYL for double-digit growth index and multiple schools serving high-need populations

Low-Performing Schools

- 48 schools on continuing low-performing (CLP) list for 2024-25 (3-year low)
- 20 schools removed from list compared to previous year
- 8 schools remain on CLP list despite not being low-performing in current year (due to 3-year cycle requirement)

Board Discussion:

- Request for disaggregated subgroup academic performance data comparing charter and traditional public schools
- Emphasis on need for growth metrics rather than solely achievement-based grading
- Request for analysis of continuing low-performing schools

Introduction to 2026 Charter Application Interviews: Ms. Melanie Rackley, OCS Consultant

- Ms. Rackley reviewed the application process, legislation, and timeframe for applicant interviews.

<u>Preparatory Leadership Academy</u> (Gaston County) - Standard

<u>Introduction</u>

- Ms. Melanie Rackley introduced the Board of Directors to the School; as well as their mission, number of students, and other details pertaining to their application. She also introduced the choices the CSRB had regarding this application.

Board Concerns and Questions:

Budget Issues:

- Significant discrepancies between narrative (250 students year 1) and budget spreadsheet (300 students year 1)
- Revenue calculations based on higher numbers while staffing based on lower numbers
- Insufficient staffing for proposed enrollment (11 teachers for 300 students)
- Year 1 surplus under $50,000
- No EC teacher budgeted despite 10% EC projection (28 students)
- EC Coordinator salary only $45,000
- Operations budget sparse with minimal allocations

Application Inconsistencies:

- Demographic projections don't match stated goals
- Limited data-driven assessment tools identified beyond MAP assessments
- Schedule concerns (lunch, recess, teaching time compressed into 1 hour 45 minutes)
- Community service requirements unclear for K-5 population

Community Support:

- Only 39 parent survey responses from April 2024 (data considered outdated)
- Lack of recent community engagement evidence
- Fear of overcrowding cited but limited supporting data

School Leadership/History:

- Dr. Doris Sanders served as assistant principal and in multiple roles at Ridgeview Charter (F-rated school that closed)
- One other board member previously taught at Ridgeview
- Questions about differentiation from previous failed school
- Limited demonstration of what would be different

Key Responses from Applicants:

- Budget errors acknowledged as working/planning document mistakes
- Commitment to adequate staffing despite budget discrepancies
- Plans to serve EC students according to IEPs with contracted services
- Emphasis on board governance lessons learned
- New facility secured (different from original Ridgeview location)

Motion: Ms. Lindalyn Kakadelis motioned to deny Preparatory Leadership Academy's charter application.

Second: Ms. Hilda Parlér

Discussion: Board members expressed concerns about budget viability, application inconsistencies, lack of community support evidence, and connections to previously failed school

Vote: Unanimous

- ☒Passed ☐Failed

Ms. Baquero reminded applicants of right to appeal decision to Appeals Committee of State Board of Education.

Encompass Montessori; CMO Epic Change Education - Standard

Introduction

- Ms. Melanie Rackley introduced the Board of Directors to the School; as well as their mission, number of students, and other details pertaining to their application including due diligence for the CMO. She also introduced the choices the CSRB had regarding this application.

BOARD QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

Governance and Organizational Structure:

Board members raised numerous questions about:

1. Supervision and Reporting:

- Principal would report to school board, not CMO
- ll employees report to principal
- School board of five members considered too small

2. Geographic and Community Concerns:

- Representatives from Tennessee (Candace), Vermont (Sarah), and Florida (Cherylyn)
- Limited local Wake County representation (Carol, Katie, Steve Griffin)
- Question: Why not plant school in Florida where CMO is based?
- Response: North Carolina provided best alignment of people, place, structures, and supportive organizations

3. Board Composition:

- Three founding board members have leadership roles at National Center for Montessori
- One would step down to become principal
- Concerns about conflicts of interest with contracting relationships
- Plan to expand board with local community members once location determined

CMO Structure and Services:

Services to be provided by CMO according to contract:

- Operations and accounting
- Educational aspects
- Recruiting and admissions
- Purchasing
- Professional development
- Technology (with school input)
- Curriculum procurement
- Food service (NSLP program)
- Hiring (school leader only; all other hiring by principal/board)

Clarifications made during meeting:

- Special education services managed directly by school (closest to students)
- Technology supported/advised by CMO but managed by school
- Aftercare, extracurricular, and co-curricular activities managed by school
- School and CMO both provide professional development

National Center for Montessori Relationship:

- CMO would contract with National Center for Montessori in Public Sector for training
- Training provided at or below cost (gold standard)
- No individual board members personally benefit financially
- School board not contracting directly with National Center; CMO makes those decisions

Financial and Budget Concerns:

Multiple discrepancies identified:

- Budget in Edlusion system showed errors and didn't match printed materials
- Year one revenue showing as $1,595,717 in one location, $1,623,000 in another
- Management agreement shows 15% fee but applicants stated graduated fees (8.7%, 7.4%, 10.5%, 12%)
- Signed management agreement shows 15%; budget shows different percentages
- Draft contracts not finalized but already signed by both parties
- Teacher assistant salary: $25,000/year (full-time)
- One elective teacher for 144 kids at $25,000/year
- Insurance line item: $1,495 per year for employees
- One custodian in year one
- Zero budget for marketing for all five years
- Students eating in classrooms

Facility and Lease Concerns:

- CMO would own building; school would lease
- Lease separate from management agreement
- Capital sources: Richard Mareno searching for financing
- Lease terms: 25-year lease, school could purchase for $1,000 at end of 25 years, payment increases as enrollment increases, net zero lease (school responsible for everything in building)
- Concerns about what happens to facility if CMO relationship terminates
- Response: Lease agreement would remain intact separate from management contract

Contract and Legal Issues:

- Management agreement signed but described as "draft"
- Attorney (Fish and Richards, Washington DC) provided pro bono review
- Not all changes incorporated into contracts after narrative changes
- Explanation: Didn't want to spend money having attorney revise contracts to match revised narrative
- Board confirmed attorney reviewed agreement
- Contract states CMO will oversee all aspects including personnel selection, instructional materials, equipment, technology, supplies, extracurricular activities
- Later clarifications contradicted some contract language

Community Support:

Major concern raised by multiple board members:

- No demonstration of community support, need, or demand
- Application submission showed only brief letter stating Montessori is great
- Minimal community interest documentation
- Only one board member lived in North Carolina for one year
- Website encompassmonasori.org launched recently with some responses but no social media presence yet
- Plans described for future outreach but not completed:
  -Mailers, newspaper ads, listening events, billboards
  -Library and park visits
  -Collaboration with local businesses and government leaders
  -YMCA, churches, preschools, local realtors
  -Farmers markets, Spring Fling, Latin American Festival
  -Parent Square platform for communication

Additional Concerns:

- Not offering transportation in non-urban setting with 60% economically disadvantaged students
- Area already has East Wake Academy and recently approved charter school
- Saturation concerns in target area (though area is growing rapidly)
- No Building Hope impact grant received ($250,000 not in budget)

Positive Comments:

- Multiple board members expressed appreciation for Montessori model
- Recognition of leadership expertise and experience
- Acknowledgment of national significance if successful
- Potential to address waiting lists for public Montessori schools
- Unprecedented CMO support specifically for Montessori network

Motion: Dr. John Eldridge motioned to deny Encompass Montessori's standard application.

Second: Mr. Eric Guckian

Discussion: Board members encouraged applicants to:

- Work with Office of Charter Schools on fast-track application
- Secure property/facility
- Demonstrate community support
- Finalize contracts with clear roles and responsibilities
- Correct budget discrepancies
- Ensure founding board demonstrates confidence and knowledge of application

Vote: Unanimous

- ☒Passed ☐Failed

Ms. Baquero reminded applicants of right to appeal decision to Appeals Committee of State Board of Education.

2026 Charter Application Discussion: Ms. Ashley Baquero, OCS Director

- Application converted from PDF format to streamline document organized by sections
- Overall reduction from 255 questions to 189 questions
- Document available on eBoard and sent via email
- Reminder: No applicant answers all questions (accelerated, conversion, replication sections only apply to specific applicants)

Applicant Contact and Student Enrollment Section

Changes:

- Consolidated all enrollment information into one section (previously scattered throughout application)
- Added definition of "charter support organization" (clarification needed after school this year claimed to be support organization but functioned as management company)
- Added clarification around enrollment projections and demographic projections
- Moved section to beginning of application for easier evaluation

Nonprofit Corporate Information

Changes:

- Moved bylaws and articles of incorporation to this section (previously in governance section)
- Better alignment with administrative information (federal ID, etc.)

Acceleration Section

Changes:

- Updated language to reflect CSRB (Charter School Review Board) instead of State Board
- Added new language: "Applicants must know and indicate their intended timeline for opening upon application. Accelerated applications seeking to change timelines following application submission may not be automatically granted approval."
- Intent: Make clear that timeline must be known at application; door still open for requests if circumstances change (as occurred last month), but not automatic

Conversion Section

Changes:

- Removed redundant question
- Small section for schools converting from public or private schools

Replication Section

Changes:

- Updated language to reflect CSRB
- Clarified eligibility criteria (from legislation, no wiggle room)
- Required presentation of evidence for qualifications (financial data, academic data)

Board Discussion:

What happens if replicated school decides during renewal period they're no longer replicating original model?

Response:

- Renewal process includes self-study of original application
- Schools review mission, curriculum, etc.
- If changes identified, must go through amendment process before renewal
- Board receives most up-to-date information at renewal
- Amendment must be approved before proceeding to renewal

Alternative School Section

Changes:

- Added narrative requirement to explain how applicant meets alternative school requirements
- Response to confusion about alternative schools (very few meet specific legal requirements)
- Now must explain how they meet requirements, not just claim alternative status

EMO and CMO Section

Changes:

- Section begins with definition of EMO/CMO (from administrative code)
- Revised language based on last month's meeting discussions

Specific Questions Added:

- Question 78: How will nonprofit board evaluate and hold management company accountable?
- Specify relationships between management company and school employees
- Disclose any conflict of interest relationships
- How can board terminate contract and what are consequences?
- Who will own the facility?
- Summarize management company's financial compliance history

Financial Compliance History:

- Great variance in what companies submit
- New focus on compliance history, especially for schools outside North Carolina
- Must provide evidence of good financial standing:
    - Audited financial statements
    - IRS Form 990s
    - Letter of good standing from CPA or banking institute
- Specific question about non-compliance as red flag

Additional Question: Has independent counsel for the board reviewed the contract?

Board Discussion:

Conflict of interest question - is that new?

Response: The way it's asked is new.

Additional Comment: Reminder that OCS provides extensive training to applicants:

- Resources available
- Open office hours
- Webinars
- Goal: Prevent "first draft" applications

Remote Academy Section

Changes: None

- Standard section
- Could not be extracted from system for review document

Mission, Vision, Purposes and Goals

Changes:

- Clarified language about what constitutes mission vs. vision
- Recommended 35 words or less (recommendation, not requirement)
- **Major addition:** Enhanced clarity around demand assessment.

Required Data Elements (at minimum):

- Type of contact
- Date of contact
- Number of attendees
- Indication of demand

Rationale:

- Response to insufficient demonstrations this year ("people are really excited at our events")
- Tough enrollment market requires specific evidence
- Aligned with other authorizers nationally moving toward "hard contact" vs. "soft contact" distinctions
- Need to know: Who are you interacting with? Will their children actually attend?
- Example: Fifth grader's parent irrelevant if school won't open until child ages out

Board Discussion:

Can we provide exemplar applications that "blew it out of the water" to show what this means?

Response:

- Have done this when specific requests made
- All applications online for public access
- Can direct applicants to strong examples
- Good idea to consider for harder sections where issues arise

Additional Context:

- Attended NACSA (National Association of Charter School Authorizers) conference last year
- This type of specific demand question in line with what other authorizers implementing
- All facing similar enrollment and marketing challenges

Educational Plan

Major Changes - Significantly Reduced Questions

Philosophy:

- Created broader questions that better illustrate educational plan
- Improved clarity
- Removed repetitive elements handled in RTO (Ready to Open) process

Questions Retained:

- Describe typical day for students at different grade levels
- How core subjects integrated
- What instructional methods teachers will use
- How curriculum addresses diverse learning needs
- Questions ensuring understanding of how educational program and curriculum align with mission and educational philosophy

Questions Removed:

- No need to upload curriculum outlines (300-page PDFs showing specific programs)
- Board needs to see they understand *why* they chose curriculum and how it aligns with mission, not just that they chose it

Board Discussion:

School leaders ask teachers "what do you do when they're not learning?" Need to see:

- What happens when plan doesn't work?
- What data used to determine if working?
- What will they do before EOG tests show problems?
- This is why schools end up low-performing

Response:

- Addressed in Student Performance Standards section which covers remediation and reaching at-risk students

High School Section

Changes:

- Remains very similar
- Explains high school education model
- How graduation requirements met
- What systems/structures in place for students at risk of dropping out or not meeting requirements
- Aligned with addressing struggling students

Student Performance Standards

Changes: None

School Culture and Discipline

Changes:

- Added question regarding exclusion or expulsion
- Must specify if school will use exclusion/expulsion and how
- Must understand requirement to abide by due process
- Response to legal cases in last year

Governance and Capacity

Major Changes - Greatly Reduced Section

Philosophy:

- Removed items handled during RTO
- Retained basics

Questions Retained:

- Governance structure
- Governing board's functions, roles, duties
- Ensure understanding of what governing board does
- Size and powers
- How board members recruited and selected
- Board's knowledge of target community (always comes up in interviews)
- Strategic calendar for board
- How board ensures grievances and concerns heard (without requiring specific policy details drafted during RTO)

Board Discussion:

Should bylaws be moved earlier in application, perhaps right after nonprofit information?

Response: Good point; can easily move that up.

Background Checks and Board Member Forms

Changes: None

Staffing

Changes:

- Condensed two sections so all staffing information together

Elements Included:

- Staffing chart outlining projections
- Recruitment plans
- How licensure identified and ensured (meeting 50% licensure requirement)
- Professional development plan (narrowed down from repetitive questions; worked out with school leader during RTO)

Student Recruitment

Changes:

- Builds on enrollment section at top of application
- Focuses on marketing plan
- How will people know and be informed about school?
- How plan to recruit throughout planning year?
- Removed redundant questions
- Three straightforward questions

Parental and Community Involvement

Changes:

- Similar to previous version
- Three straightforward questions:
    - How communicate with parents?
    - How engage parents?
- Cut redundancy of multiple questions asking same thing

Admissions, Operations, Facility

Changes: None

Financial Plan

Changes:

- Removed two questions already asked at top of application:
    - How are student numbers projected?
    - Why do you think there's demand?
- Rest remains same (certifying application created/drafted, etc.)

BOARD MEMBER SIGNATURE DISCUSSION

Proposal: Each board member should sign application with integrity in mind.

Rationale:

- During interviews, often evident board members haven't read own application (especially when working with CMO/EMO)
- Charter belongs to board
- All board members should sign

Current Process:

- Board chair or president signs signature page
- All board members submit board member information form and resume

Alternative Suggestion: On information sheet, board members could sign that they have read and understand application.

GENERAL BOARD COMMENTS

Mr. Bruce Friend: "I've been wanting to see this for eight years. Amazing work."

Dr. John Eldridge: "You guys have done a ton of work. Amazing. This stuff looks really good."

Ms. Lindalyn Kakadelis: "You all have gotten a lot of feedback from a lot of people, wanted or unwanted, and you've really tried to take into thought the various types of feedback. It's reflective in this work. Thank you very much."

Response: "Thank you to the whole team. It was a joint effort."

RTO Process and Enrollment Verification: Ms. Ashley Baquero, OCS Director

Evidence of Problem:

- Two school closures in last 3-4 years due to not hitting enrollment targets
- Schools barely hitting break-even numbers
- Need ability to advise schools like TISA: "You're not going to hit your number. You might want to consider delaying."
- If schools choose not to delay, that's on them
- Need better way to determine if school will hit enrollment numbers

Current situation:

- Will bring RTO schools earlier (instead of just June and May)
- Minimum guidelines exist but aren't set in stone
- Schools mostly transparent about numbers but not realistic about typical drop-off between application and day one
- Despite repeated warnings about losing kids between application and opening, "it doesn't click"

Potential Solutions Discussed:

1. **Board Authority:**

- This board could make decision when seeing numbers
- Very hard after working with schools for so long to say "you're not making it"
- But preferable to current situation

2. **Key Distinction:**

- Before opening: Can tell schools to delay (not stop permanently)
- After opening: Have to close school
- Delaying not same as denying charter

3. **Setting Standards:**

   - Need to hold current crop of schools accountable to whatever standard developed.

   Questions posed:

   - Create a number and stick to it?
   - Must be at 75% by specific date?
   - Create standard for intent to enroll forms?
   - Multiply intent forms by 75% (or other percentage) to project actual attendance?
   - Show benchmark to RTO schools quickly

4. **75% Guideline Discussion:**

   Current situation:

   - 75% guideline existed "for a long time" (origin unknown)
   - It's a guideline, not strictly enforced
   - Ms. Jenna Cook sent data showing last couple years' patterns
   - Need to analyze data to determine adequate percentage indicating day-one success
   - Looking at May or June numbers

   Key Point: "We hear a lot from schools that 'it's June, we still have the summer,' but reality is most parents know where they want to be by June. As a parent myself, you want to know by June where your kids are going in the fall."

Board Response:

- General agreement that changes needed
- Support for earlier intervention
- Support for clearer, enforced standards
- Preference for requiring delays before opening rather than closing schools after opening

Motion to Adjourn: Mr. Todd Godbey

Second: Mr. Eric Guckian

2:50 pm

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October 7, 2025

9 AM

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Office of Charter Schools Ashley Baquero, Director Joseph Letterio, Consultant - Remote Melanie Rackley, Consultant Jenna Cook, Consultant - Remote Dr. Natasha Norins, Consultant Dr. Brandi Gill, Consultant Megan Carter, Consultant Nicky Niewinski, Asst. Director Julie Whetzel, Consultant	*CSRB Attorney* Steven Walker *SBE Attorney* Allison Schafer - Absent *Teacher/Principal of Year* Dr. Jake Wilson– POY Lindsay Phillips – TOY - Absent

CSRB October Meeting Recording: [Day 2, October NC Charter School Review Board - Oct. 7, 2025]

Call To Order

Pledge of Allegiance & NC Flag Salute: Mr. Bruce Friend, Board Chair

Mission and Ethics Statement:

- Mission and Ethics Statement, Mr. Bruce Friend, Board Chair

Mr. Bruce Friend (Chair): Before beginning agenda item, took moment to thank Office of Charter Schools, Ms. Baquero and entire staff for their work:

- Not just work during meetings but extensive preparation
- Working with applicants and renewals
- Monthly presentations to State Board
- Expressed appreciation on behalf of board

<u>2026 Charter Application Discussion and Vote:</u> Ms. Ashley Baquero, OCS Director

Background

- Ongoing conversation since March 2024
- Previous day's discussion reviewed "clean copy" of all questions
- Ready for final vote to send to developers

Changes from Previous Day's Discussion

One modification identified:

- Move nonprofit section and governance capacity section together toward top of application
- Will communicate this change to developers

Resolution of signature discussion:

- Multiple places in application where board members must certify understanding
- **Determination:** Current certification requirements deemed sufficient

Board Questions and Discussion

Lease Agreement:

- Getting lease agreements or draft copies
- Not always possible to have lease finalized before board interview
- Particularly relevant for EMO/CMO situations
- Question 84 addresses buyout agreement, but what about lease agreement itself (two separate documents)?

Response:

- New question added this year: "Who will own the facility?" (cut and dry)
- If buyout agreement exists, must provide it
- Facility section asks for lease or draft lease if available

For CMO/EMO situations, did board add question about whether board has had attorney review draft agreement?

Response:

- Yes, added
- Question 77: "Has independent counsel for the applicant board reviewed the draft agreement?"

Questions 77 and 83 appear to say almost the same thing, with only difference being "out of state" reference in 83.

Response:

Question 77:

- Applies to schools managed in-state
- Three different checkbox options
- Must provide and discuss:
    - Student performance
    - Governance performance
    - Financial data from schools managed (in-state or out-of-state)
- Purpose: Demonstrate how organization is good fit for targeted student population

Question 83:

- Specifically targets whether there have been non-compliance findings outside North Carolina
- Board would know about North Carolina non-compliance
- Wouldn't necessarily know about issues in other states (Nevada, etc.)

Does Question 77 need to specify it pertains to North Carolina?

Response:

- Question 77 could pertain to outside North Carolina as well
- Question 77 focuses on financial data in general
- Question 83 focuses on specific compliance issues

Regarding immediate families on board or having conflicts of interest - can family members sit on board?

Response:

- Yes, can sit on board
- Must disclose the conflict
- Disclosure is requirement, not prohibitive

Question 80 specifically addresses:

- Purpose: Identify conflicts to ensure compliance with state conflict of interest laws
- Not limiting board membership, just requiring disclosure

When schools submit budgets, should they use standard template?

Response:

- For application: Always use standard budget
- Also do this for RTO (Ready to Open) using standard form
- Acknowledged that when schools use Prestige or other consultants, format might vary but typically better quality
- **Confirmed:** For application, always use template

Motion: Dr. John Eldridge motioned to approve the 2026 charter application with discussed amendments.

Second: Ms. Hilda Parlér

Discussion:

Contract Law:

- Looking at contracts; contract law is very specific
- Glad attorney present because may need contract law information
- Hopes board won't look further into contracts beyond EMO/CMO situations

Burden on Applicants:

- While understanding application necessity, concerned it's becoming so burdensome that there will be fewer and fewer applications

Response:

- Application itself prepares applicants for interview
- Appreciates effort and work that went into creating application

Key Points:

1. **High Standards Justified:**
    - "It's a high bar and it should be"
    - "It's not easy"
    - Application asks appropriate questions
    - Takes time to answer questions adequately - "It should, right?"

2. **Reference to Recent Examples:**

    Example 1 (Encompass Montessori):

    - Really good idea
    - **But:** Board couldn't explain it. Couldn't answer questions without turning around and looking to second party for guidance ("How should I answer this question?")

    Example 2 (TISA):

    - "Really stellar application"
    - Board approved it
    - **But:** "Couldn't execute on it appropriately"
    - CSRB voted to close the school in December

Questions:

1. Does OCS look to other national best practices?
2. How does interaction with National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) work?

Response:

- OCS has attended NACSA and national authorizer conferences
- **Challenge:** Don't typically have much budget for conferences; would love to make that a possibility
- Ms. Baquero attended convening of authorizers from across country working on new applications
- Authorizers dealing with same concerns across country

North Carolina's Unique Position:

- One of only two single-authorizing states
- Most authorizers are funded by applicants (schools pay fees to authorizing office)
- North Carolina doesn't have that funding model

National Trends:

- Many authorizers moving toward more intensive interviews and less paper
- **Challenge for NC:** Don't have capacity for that approach
- Other offices typically have more staffing
- Other offices usually have lower numbers of applicants

How does this process in North Carolina compare to what traditional public schools go through?

Response:

Traditional Public School Process:

1. **School Opening Process:**

    - No process like charter application
    - Up to superintendent to do hiring
    - Never comes to local board of education

2. **Performance Area:**

    - When charter schools are low-performing or continually low-performing, they come before CSRB and present what they'll do differently
    - **In districts:** Local board never sees that
    - Some state board members have considered requiring continually low-performing districts to come before state board
    - Local districts don't close their low-performing schools

Vote: Unanimous

- ☒Passed ☐Failed

Renewals Preview: Ms. Jenna Cook, OCS Director

- Ms. Cook reviewed the renewal process, legislation, and timeframe for renewal schools.
- Outlined OCS proposed school renewal placements and interview schedule.

Key Takeaways:

1. **2026 Renewals:** Comprehensive program with significant board work ahead over coming months
2. **Comparability Discussion:** Ongoing conversation about moving from "arbitrary 5%" district comparison to more localized, accurate comparison methodology; follow-up with Bart's team needed
3. **Board Authority:** Ultimate renewal decisions rest with 11 board members; guidelines provide framework but not absolute requirements
4. **Renewal Process Rigor:**
    - Five-member OCS team
    - Full-day site visits (typically 9 AM - 2 PM)
    - Self-assessment requirement
    - Charter review and corrections
    - Website compliance review
    - Focus group interviews (45 minutes to 1 hour each)
    - School tours and classroom observations
    - Professional, cordial approach
    - Board accountability component
5. **Traditional Public School Comparison:** Unlike charter schools, traditional public schools not evaluated for continuation of operations

Introduction to 2025 Charter Application Interviews: Ms. Melanie Rackley, OCS Consultant

- Ms. Rackley reviewed the application process, legislation, and timeframe for applicant interviews.

Focus Charter Academy - Accelerated, Second Round

Introduction

- Ms. Melanie Rackley introduced the Board of Directors to the School; as well as their mission, number of students, and other details pertaining to their application. She also introduced the choices the CSRB had regarding this application.
- Focus Academy Charter School appeared for second interview following first interview concerns. Policy committee gathered 17 follow-up questions; all responses uploaded to eBoard for board review.

Opening Remarks - Dr. Grubbs

Key Themes:

1. **Response to Previous Feedback:**
    - Last year board encouraged them to come back
    - Gave suggestions
    - "We did everything that you asked us to do"
    - Put everything into place
    - Put boots on the ground
2. **Community Engagement:**
    - Met with parents
    - Engaged in community
    - Knocked on doors
    - Put flyers in doors
    - Sought help where needed
    - "Put the work in"
3. **Focus on Mission:**
    - Not about board members, but about children they want to serve
    - Parents they want to give another option in Garner community and surrounding area
    - Can tell about all community events participated in and events lined up
4. **Current Enrollment Interest:**
    - **31 students** with intent to enroll forms waiting to enroll
    - Previous meeting: 302 people completed survey with 186 parents with school-aged children
    - Current: **381 people** completed survey with **264 parents** with school-aged children
5. **Seeking Support:**
    - Didn't check CMO box but did seek support
    - Want strong foundation for Focus Academy
    - "Not just about passion...but there's a business aspect to it"
    - Want to ensure can stay open and continue to grow

Key Takeaways

1. **Dramatic Improvement:** Board unanimously noted stark difference between first and second interviews in terms of preparedness, confidence, and clarity

2. **ATA Services Clarified:**
    - Not a CMO relationship
    - Operational services only
    - Clear understanding of what receiving and not receiving
    - Extensive vetting process by board
    - Contract negotiated and reviewed by independent attorney

3. **Community Engagement Evidence:**
    - 381 survey responses (264 parents with school-aged children)
    - 31 intent to enroll forms
    - Active community presence at events

4. **Strong Support Network:**
    - Mentorship from Arts-Based School (Miss Hollis)
    - Dr. Woodard from Sally B. Howard
    - Dr. Grover Bridges (former director of charter schools)
    - Board member collaborations

5. **Facility Advantages:**
    - Signed five-year lease with Word of God Church
    - Facility furnished with existing equipment
    - Preschool on-site with pipeline of students
    - Temporary location while searching for permanent facility in Garner

6. **Budget Flexibility:**
    - Gifted three buses (eliminates $78,000 transportation contract)
    - Creates wiggle room for personnel adjustments
    - Budget looks acceptable including ATA fees

7. **Critical Board Guidance:**
    - Cannot take enrollment for granted
    - Must work tirelessly on recruitment
    - Need approximately 400 commitments to get 200 day-one students
    - Board will monitor enrollment progress during RTO process

Motion: Mr. Bruce Friend motioned to approve Focus Charter Academy's accelerated charter application and move to the RTO process.

Second: Dr. John Eldridge

Discussion:

Mr. Todd Godbey:

- Wants to come visit when they get open
- To anyone watching: "I hope you also took notes and paid attention to the difference in the two interviews"

Dr. Rita Haire:

- Can see evidence of growth and understanding

Vote: Unanimous

- ☒Passed ☐Failed

<u>Sub-Campus Committee Report:</u> Dr. John Eldridge, Committee Chair

Dr. Eldridge presented the Sub campus Committee's report and recommendations for establishing guidelines on how the board will handle future sub campus requests. Committee was formed following September meeting discussion on sub campus issues.

Background

Context from September Meeting:

- Board tackled issues of sub campuses
- Committee formed to have discussion and develop ideas
- Goal: Put parameters and thoughts around definition of sub campus
- Bring forward recommendations to full board

Critical Correction To Minutes

Location: Page 2, under "Required Review Process for Subcommittee"

Incorrect Statement in Minutes: "All schools interested in creating a sub campus regardless of performance should present to the review board."

Correction:

- NOT applicable for schools inside 10-mile radius
- By legislation, schools within 10 miles do not have to present to board

Clarification:

- Board would love schools to come in to tell about great things they're doing
- But not required if inside 10-mile radius

- Exception: If moving to different county AND inside 10-mile radius, still must come to board (because going to different county)

Questions and Discussion

Is it possible school could be CLP (Continually Low Performing) because they weren't low performing in current year, but still have carryover from previous years?

Response (Dr. Eldridge):

- Committee discussed that
- Correct interpretation
- **Standard:** Just cannot be low performing in the year that they're applying for sub campus

Important Clarification:

1. **Sub campus is NOT a New Charter:**
    - On heels of meeting last week, media reports said school "got to open up a new charter in Durham bypassing the process". This is incorrect.
    - They opened facility more than 10 miles away
    - Not a new charter
    - Not getting second, third, or fourth actual charter agreement
2. **Advantages of Sub campus Model:**
    - All schools under one number
    - Campus underneath one number
    - Better insurance rates for employees
    - Can pull everything together
    - Help campus grow with existing funds already have
3. **Main Campus Clarification:**

    Example using TMSA:

    - Home school is in Apex
    - Sub campus in Durham is the Apex expansion
    - Key Point: "You don't use the school in Durham to then jump off and do another school someplace else"
    - Home school will always be the Apex facility
    - Not like you go few counties away and that campus becomes new home school
    - Original school that's being replicated or expanded IS the home school and will always be.

Was there discussion in committee about geographic limits?

Response (Dr. John Eldridge):

Current Requirements:

- If sub campus going to different county: Must come to CSRB
- If more than 10 miles away (regardless of if different county): Come to CSRB

No Geographic Limits Otherwise:

- Nothing limiting if school wanted to open sub campus
- Example: School in Holly Springs opening sub campus in Boone
- This board would make determination whether approved or not

Committee Approach Explanation (Dr. Rita Haire)

Committee's Philosophy:

- Tried very hard to discuss options
- Leave it as open as possible
- **Goal:** Board gets to hear from schools who want sub campus
- Not tying board's hands to anything from get-go
- Only restriction: Can't be low performing
- Make decisions on one-by-one, individual basis
- Rather than "do you fit into this box"

Legal Perspective: Renewal Comparability (Mr. Walker)

Important Future Consideration:

Example: TMSA

- Home school is Wake County
- Charter is in Wake County
- When renewal comes up: Compare them for comparability purposes with Wake County

Potential Issue:

- If Durham campus is lower performing, that plays into it
- All testing information under one school number
- Durham campus and Apex campus numbers will be one set of numbers
- If Durham numbers lower than Wake numbers: Brings down overall number
- Will have to be explained in renewal process

Question for Board to Consider:

- If school has campus across three or four counties, how do you compare their performance for renewal purposes?

Alternative Data Presentation

- CSRB already allows schools to present alternative data beyond just comparing to local LEA
- Have charter schools based in one county but serve seven counties

Committee Recommendations:

Criteria for Good Standing (to request sub campus):

1. Not low-performing in year applying for sub campus
2. No significant non-compliance issues whatsoever (corrected from just financial)

Required Review by CSRB:

1. Different county: Must present to board regardless of distance
2. More than 10 miles away: Must present to board regardless of county
3. Inside 10-mile radius within same county**:** NOT required to present (by legislation)
    - Exception: Still welcome to present voluntarily
    - Schools must notify OCS to ensure submission of required documentation for DPI

Committee Philosophy:

- Keep guidelines open rather than restrictive
- Evaluate each request individually
- Let schools present their case
- Board makes determination based on merits

Status: Draft guidelines to be formalized and brought back to next meeting for full board approval.

Director's Updates: Ms. Ashley Baquero, OCS Director

- None

Adjourn: Mr. Bruce Friend

Second: Ms. Hilda Parlér

11:15 am