

Minutes of the North Carolina Charter School Review Board
State Board Room 755, Department of Public Instruction
March 9, 2026
9 AM

Attendance – CSRБ Members	
Jeremy Wall- (nonvoting) Dr. Rita Haire - left @ 11:55 Dr. John Eldridge Eric Guckian Hilda Parlér - Arrive @ 10:45 Dr. Shelly Shope - Remote	Eric Sanchez Bruce Friend Lindalyn Kakadelis Todd Godbey Gerald McNair - Remote Stephen Gay
Attendance – Other	
<i>Office of Charter Schools</i> Ashley Logue, Director Joseph Letterio, Consultant - Remote Melanie Rackley, Consultant Jenna Cook, Consultant - Remote Dr. Natasha Norins, Consultant Dr. Brandi Gill, Consultant Nicky Niewinski, Asst. Director Julie Whetzel, Consultant Megan Carter, Consultant	<i>CSRБ Attorney</i> Steven Walker - Remote <i>Teacher/Principal of Year</i> Lindsay Phillips – TOY - Absent Jake Wilson – POY - Absent

Recording of March. 9 CSRБ Meeting: [Day 1 - March NC Charter School Review Board - March. 9, 2026](#)

Call To Order

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

Mission and Ethics Statement:

- Mission and Ethics Statement, Bruce Friend, Board Chair

Approval of the Agenda and Minutes

Motion: Dr. John Eldridge moved to approve agenda for March 2026 Meeting

Second: Todd Godbey

Vote: Unanimous

Passed

Failed

January & February 2026 Meeting Minutes:

Motion: Lindalyn Kakadelis moved to approve the January and February 2026 meeting minutes

Second: Eric Sanchez

Vote: Unanimous

Passed Failed

Revised 2026 Meeting Calendar:

Dialogue/Discussion Summary

- Ashley Logue provided an overview of the proposed calendar changes, explaining that spring meetings — originally scheduled for two days as a precaution — would be reduced to one-day meetings for February, March, April, and May.
- A board member raised a question regarding when schools in the Ready-to-Open (RTO) process would receive final approval to open their doors, and Ms. Logue clarified that May would include any schools with readiness concerns, with June being the standard month for final RTO votes.
- A board member expressed concern based on prior years in which schools assured the board they would meet requirements by May/June but ultimately failed to do so — particularly regarding attendance requirements — raising the possibility that emergency or special meetings might be needed.
- Ashley Logue confirmed that summer special meetings can and have been called outside the regular July–August hiatus when circumstances require it.

Motion: Dr. John Eldridge moved to approve the revised 2026 meeting calendar

Second: Eric Guckian

Vote: Unanimous

Passed Failed

March Charter Schools Review Board Meeting

Charter Application Amendments: Julie Whetzel, OCS Consultant

Sallie B Howard: Mission Statement

Dialogue/Discussion Summary

- **Julie Whetzel** presented the request from Sally B. Howard, a public charter school in Wilson County operating since 1997 and serving over 1,200 students in grades K–12. She

explained that while the school's mission itself had not changed, the language was refined to be more concise.

- The revised mission statement was read into the record: *"Our mission is to provide every child with a world-class education that nurtures their gifts, talents, and intelligences so they become more than they ever thought they could be."*
- A board member offered an enthusiastic endorsement of the school, encouraging others to visit, calling it "an amazing school."
- No substantive opposition or concerns were raised.

Motion: Eric Sanchez moved to approve Sallie B Howard’s amended mission statement

Second: Todd Godbey

Vote: Unanimous

- Passed Failed

Ryze Academy (RTO): Relocation over 10 miles/admin unit

Dialogue/Discussion Summary

- Julie Whetzel presented Ryze Academy's request to relocate its instructional site from Forsyth County to Guilford County — approximately 4.4 miles from the originally approved location — as part of the RTO process. The school was approved as an accelerated application to serve 250 students in grades K–4, with future expansion to K–8.
- The school explained that the original site became untenable after a fire marshal's subsequent inspection added significant, cost-prohibitive requirements beyond what was initially communicated. Ryze Academy subsequently identified a space within Liberty Charter Academy's facility (135,000+ sq. ft.), which holds an existing ECO, offers utilities-inclusive leasing, and provides a 20% rent reduction if ADM falls below 201.
- Multiple board members — notably Todd Godbey and Eric Sanchez — expressed serious concern about the precedent of approving relocation for an accelerated applicant that had represented a locked-down facility at the time of application. Mr. Godbey noted that a similar approval had been granted previously for IDYL Wake but warned the board was being placed in a position where denial effectively closes the school. Mr. Sanchez raised concerns about process consistency and the risk of setting a standard where applicants submit accelerated applications with only a "Plan A" and rely on the board's flexibility after the fact.
- Several board members acknowledged the enrollment shortfall as the greater concern: Ryze Academy's March enrollment stood at approximately 137–140 students against a

break-even of 150 and an approved ADM of 250. Board members warned the school directly that enrollment numbers must significantly improve before any RTO exit vote.

- The Office of Charter Schools confirmed that no site visit to the Liberty Charter facility had yet been conducted. A representative from Liberty Charter Academy's EMO appeared in support of the arrangement, noting that Liberty's board had formally approved the co-location at their February board meeting and that Liberty's own enrollment shortfall made the shared arrangement financially advantageous.
- A board member articulated that his opposition was based on precedent and the view that Ryze might be better served requesting a delay rather than proceeding to a second facility change within the same planning year.

Motion: Dr. John Eldridge moved to approve Ryze Academy’s relocation request

Second: Dr. Rita Haire

Vote: 7:3

Yes: Stephen Gay, Bruce Friend, Dr. Rita Haire, Eric Sanchez, Dr. Shelly Shope, Dr. John Eldridge, Lindalyn Kakadelis

Nay: Todd Godbey, Eric Guckian, Gerald McNair

- Passed Failed

2026 Ready to Open Updates: Dr. Natasha Norins, OCS Consultant

Dialogue/Discussion Summary

- **Dr. Norins**, RTO Lead Consultant with the Office of Charter Schools, presented the March 2026 RTO status update for seven cohort schools: BH2 Stream Academy, Carolina Collegiate High School, Focus Academy, IDYL Wake, Ryze Academy, Connections Academy, and Warren YES.
- Dr. Norins outlined the three-phase RTO structure and noted that the board's June meeting is the standard venue for final approval votes, while the May meeting will feature a detailed readiness report flagging any schools deemed at risk of successfully opening.
- Board members requested clarification on the difference between "accelerated" and "fasttrack" school designations. Dr. Norins and staff explained that FastTrack applies specifically to replication schools (i.e., a school already operating elsewhere that is opening a new campus), while Accelerated refers to brand-new boards on a compressed timeline.
- **A board member** noted that the RTO criteria language appeared to give schools the choice of requesting a delay versus withdrawal and pressed that the board itself may need

to make those determinations unilaterally. The Chair confirmed the board holds that authority at any time.

- **Bruce Friend** identified three schools warranting close enrollment monitoring based on March data: **Focus Academy**, **Ryze Academy**, and **IDYL Wake**, all of which show lagging indicators relative to their break-even enrollment thresholds.

Cape View Leadership Academy Appeal Remand: Bruce Friend, CSRБ Chair

Dialogue/Discussion Summary

- Board Chair of Cape View Leadership Academy, opened by noting a recent board composition change (one member resigned; new member Heather Allen joined) and explained the rationale for engaging EMO ACCEL: to provide educational expertise, operational infrastructure, and compliance support during the startup phase.
- Executive Vice President at ACCEL, addressed the key findings from the December hearing: (1) ACCEL's CTE program now operates across 22 brick-and-mortar and 12 online schools, serving approximately 2,500 students in career pathways with 1,100 credentials awarded across the country; (2) facility and management agreements will be freestanding so that termination of one does not affect the other; (3) equipment purchasing language in the draft contract will be amended to a "may" rather than a "shall," permitting the school to seek better pricing; (4) the AMP fee was clarified to cover LMS, SIS, and communication systems; and (5) ACCEL's Ohio performance record was contextualized — the state had required ACCEL to take over underperforming schools, and current data shows ACCEL's schools achieving approximately 4.9-point improvement versus 2.1 for comparable charter schools in Ohio.
- **Dr. Rita Haire** raised the most substantive financial concerns during the hearing. She identified that the budget's "other funds" line item — described as ACCEL startup/scaling investment — appeared in every year through Year 5 (not just Years 1–2 as represented), totaling over \$1 million in later years. She further noted that ACCEL's 15% management fee was apparently being charged against these contributed/loaned funds, resulting in fees of approximately \$78,000 in Year 1 and \$165,000 by Year 5 on money that may constitute a gift or loan. **ACCEL representatives** acknowledged this should not be classified as "qualified revenue" under Section 4.1(A) of the contract and that it should be corrected.
- **Todd Godbey** and **Eric Sanchez** both stated they would vote no, citing too many unresolved questions, budget holes, and the view that the school was not yet ready for prime time. It was noted that there seems to be a pattern of recent decisions where board members felt they lacked a real choice.
- **Several other board members** indicated support, citing the school's 2027 opening timeline, the draft status of the contract (allowing time for corrections), and the first

charter-school-in-Pender-County significance. A strong recommendation was made to the Cape View board to understand the contract in its entirety before proceeding.

Motion: Lindalyn Kakadelis moved to approve Cape View Leadership Academy’s charter application and move to the Ready to Open process

Second: Dr. John Eldridge

Vote: 7:3

Yes: Stephen Gay, Bruce Friend, Dr. Rita Haire, Dr. Shelly Shope, Dr. John Eldridge, Lindalyn Kakadelis, Gerald McNair

Nay: Todd Godbey, Eric Sanchez, Eric Guckian

Récuse: Hilda Parlér

- Passed Failed

2026 Low Performing Schools Presentations: Dr. Brandi Gill, OCS Consultant

Dialogue/Discussion Summary

- **Dr. Brandy Gill**, OCS consultant, provided an overview of the current cohort: approximately 28% of all North Carolina charter schools carry LP (Low-Performing) or CLP (Continually Low-Performing) designations. She also outlined the presentation expectations given to the 4 schools presenting. Each school was allotted 15 minutes to present their School Improvement Plan, followed by board Q&A. Presentations were largely informational; no motions were proposed.
- **Global Scholars Academy** reported a school performance score of 47, with growth exceeding 89% and recognition in the top 20% statewide for growth. Current enrollment of 161 is below the break-even of 190, attributed to a disruptive facility relocation in Spring 2025. Board members praised the growth trajectory, particularly eighth-grade reading progress, and encouraged outreach to preschools for enrollment pipeline development.
- **Lakeside Charter Academy** reported a dramatic turnaround from an F to a C in the 2024–25 school year as reported by interim principal Lisa Upper, who joined four weeks prior to the presentation. The school is projected to have a surplus and was recently removed from financial disciplinary status after engaging Goodall Consulting. Board members raised questions about staff continuity given significant teacher turnover and a recent principal departure.
- **Uwharrie Charter Academy** presented as the only charter school in Randolph County, serving 2,264 students. The school reported 158 days of cash on hand and documented improvement from a growth index of -14 to near-meeting-growth in recent years, though **Eric Sanchez** noted the school has not met growth in over a decade according to state

metrics, calling it a meaningful data concern. Board member Dr. **John Eldridge** encouraged the school to reach out to peer schools with similar demographics that have already achieved the growth targets Uwharrie is pursuing.

- **Wilmington Preparatory Academy** reported consistent improvement in school performance score (37% → 45% → 46%) and met or exceeded expected growth in all three reported years, including exceeding growth in 2024–25. A board member flagged that the school's FY2025 audit was still pending, which **Kevin Johnson** (principal) attributed to a difficult transition to ADP for payroll processing. Board members directed the school to expedite audit completion and report on remediation steps.

2026 Remote Charter Academy Interviews: Julie Whetzel, OCS Consultant

- Julie Whetzel presented information regarding the remote charter academy process.

Central Wake High School (93L):

Dialogue/Discussion Summary

- Vice Chair and Executive Principal presented Central Wake High School's request to open a regional remote charter academy serving grades 9–12, starting with 100 students in Year 1 and expanding to 200 in Years 2–3.
- The school's student population averages two or more years behind their graduation cohort; approximately 70% are pregnant, parenting, or serving as caregivers; and about 50% work part-time or full-time. The remote academy would provide an additional pathway for students who cannot physically attend due to transportation barriers, geographic distance, or life responsibilities.
- The proposed model requires students to attend at least four sessions per week and physically come to the school at least one day per week for proctored assessments, wraparound services, and intervention. Instruction is largely asynchronous using the Edmentum platform, which the school already licenses.
- Board members engaged in an extended philosophical discussion about virtual learning generally. **Eric Sanchez** expressed concern about the societal impact of expanded asynchronous learning, citing research on learning loss and the challenges for underserved populations. **Bruce Friend** acknowledged the debate but noted that for Central Wake's specific population — students who would otherwise lose access entirely — the model is precisely appropriate, drawing a parallel to his experience.
- Several board members noted uncertainty about whether the board should even be approving such requests given that the school already operates a flexible learning environment, questioning whether the legislative framework for "remote charter academies" adds meaningful oversight value.

Motion: Lindalyn Kakadelis moved to grant Central Wake High School's amendment request for a remote charter academy.

Second: Hilda Parlér

Vote: 8:1

Yes: Stephen Gay, Bruce Friend, Hilda Parlér, Todd Godbey, Shelly Shope, Lindalyn Kakadelis, Eric Guckian, Gerald McNair

Nay: Eric Sanchez

- Passed Failed

Triangle Math and Science Academy (TMSA 92T):

Dialogue/Discussion Summary

- TMSA Superintendent and TMSA Director of Innovation presented TMSA's request to open a regional remote charter academy for grades 7–12, starting with 170 students in Year 1 (grades 8–10) and expanding to 250 students through grade 12 by Year 5.
- The model is anchored in TMSA's existing academic reputation. Teachers will be physically based at the Mcleansville facility, where students will participate in periodic in-person events (approximately once per month for face-to-face touch points), while receiving primarily remote instruction with both synchronous and asynchronous components. A dedicated "success coach" model is central to the design.
- The Director of Innovation outlined a measured, thoughtful approach to scaling, emphasizing "go slow" implementation and the importance of building authentic human relationships even in a virtual setting. He cited 35 states and nine countries of experience in virtual learning, including his role as a leader at NC Virtual (the second-largest state virtual school in the country).
- Board members debated the broader policy question of approving remote academies, with **Eric Sanchez** raising ongoing concerns about asynchronous learning outcomes in underserved populations and the risk of setting precedents that lead to budget-driven proliferation. **Todd Godbey** said he was personally skeptical of remote schools generally but found TMSA's plan compelling enough to support. **Lindalyn Kakadelis** expressed support, citing personal experience with virtual learning through a grandchild and the importance of staying current with educational innovation.
- The board noted TMSA has a 5,000-student waitlist across campuses, providing substantial evidence of demand.

Motion: Dr. John Eldridge moved to grant TMSA's amendment request for a remote charter academy.

Second: Lindalyn Kakadelis

Vote: 9:1

Yes: Stephen Gay, Bruce Friend, Hilda Parlér, Todd Godbey, Shelly Shope, John Eldridge, Lindalyn Kakadelis, Eric Guckian, Gerald McNair

Nay: Eric Sanchez

- Passed Failed

Jackson Day School (61X):

Dialogue/Discussion Summary

- The founder and academic leader presented Jackson Day School's request to open a face-virtual (hybrid) regional remote academy, proposing a model where students attend school in-person two days per week and participate virtually three days per week, taught by Jackson Day's own staff using Jackson Day's own curriculum.
- A key clarification emerged during the hearing: Jackson Day had applied requesting the remote academy operate as a separate Public School Unit (PSU/charter), based on a misunderstanding of the legislation. The Chair and staff clarified that a remote academy with more than 250 students may request separate charter status, but is not required to do so from the outset. Jackson Day revised its request on the spot to operate under its existing charter.
- **Eric Sanchez** raised Jackson Day's academic performance data, noting the school has met growth only once in five years, and suggested that improving internal outcomes should precede external expansion. School representatives acknowledged the data, described steps underway (hiring additional interventionists, bi-weekly PLCs, NC check-in trending improvements), and confirmed the academy would initially serve existing enrolled students rather than drawing from outside the school.
- Board members expressed support for the hybrid/face-virtual model as distinct from fully asynchronous models, citing the synchronous component and parental engagement as structural differentiators.
- The board noted that the remote academy will receive its own school accountability grade/number even under the existing charter.

Motion: Dr. John Eldridge moved to grant Jackson Day School's amendment request for a remote charter academy.

Second: Hilda Parlér

Vote: Unanimous

- Passed Failed

Phoenix Academy (41D):

Dialogue/Discussion Summary

- Phoenix Academy board members and representatives of National Heritage Academies (NHA) presented Phoenix Academy's request to open a statewide remote charter academy in partnership with NHA, which operates a virtual school of approximately 1,500 students in Michigan (Virtual Prepnet Academy). The academy would offer two instructional pathways: a Live Online (synchronous, bell-schedule-based) track and a Self-Paced (asynchronous with weekly pacing requirements) track, using NHA curriculum for reading and math and Flex Point (formerly Florida Virtual School Global) for the self-paced track.
- Four legislatively mandated staff positions for remote academies — instructional technology facilitator, school library media coordinator, data manager, and sufficient remote technical support — were not clearly outlined in the submitted budget per a CSRБ member. The applicants attempted to direct the board to an "instructional support" line showing three staff at \$22,000 each (\$66,000 total), which board members found insufficient in both clarity and compensation levels.
- Phoenix Academy Treasurer acknowledged that if the budget submission was in error, the school would resubmit and comply with all legislative requirements.
- **Bruce Friend** noted that this was different from positions the board might recommend as best practice — these are legislatively mandated, and the budget must clearly reflect them.
- **Lindalyn Kakadelis** proposed approving the request contingent upon the applicant providing verification that the legislatively mandated positions are accounted for in the budget without altering the submitted financial totals.
- A question was also raised regarding a \$645,500 marketing line item in the budget; NHA representatives explained this encompassed communication staff and NHA central office support roles.

Motion: Dr. John Eldridge moved to approve Phoenix Academy's remote charter academy request, contingent upon the applicant submitting verification that all legislatively mandated positions are reflected in the budget as presented.

Second: Hilda Parlér

Vote: Unanimous

- Passed Failed

NC Association of Public Charter Schools: Rhonda Dillingham, Director NCAPCS

Dialogue/Discussion Summary

- **Rhonda Dillingham**, Executive Director of the NC Association for Public Charter Schools, and newly appointed Project Director, presented the newly awarded NC GROW (Generating Results-Oriented Wins) federal Charter Schools Program (CSP) grant — a five-year, \$52.9 million award. This is the first time in North Carolina history the CSP has been awarded to a nonprofit organization and the largest federal grant to charter schools in North Carolina's 30-year history.
- The presentation noted that the federal government shutdown (approximately 40 days) delayed NCAPCS implementation timelines: the Request for Applications was pushed to April 2, 2026 (from December 2025), with letters of intent due April 16, full applications due May 21, and award notifications in June 2026.
- The grant's four objectives are: (1) increase the number of NC public charter schools by 28 over five years (42 total subgrants, prioritizing CTE/STEM/AI-focused schools); (2) support CSRБ and OCS with board governance training and a one-year finance fellowship; (3) develop a remote academy implementation guide and quality indicators rubric; and (4) support innovative CTE, STEM, and AI programming aligned with North Carolina's workforce needs (628,000 annual job openings; projected 2 million credentialed workers needed by 2030).
- Board members affirmed that the grant is open to all charter schools regardless of association membership. Subgrant eligibility for implementation-only or expansion grants requires a C or better performance grade and meeting/exceeding growth for all applicable data years.
- **Eric Sanchez** asked about the process for selecting high-quality contracted providers (e.g., for the finance fellowship), and they described an active RFP process with evaluation rubrics. **Mr. Sanchez** also raised questions about how schools that opened since the prior CSP grant (the "CSP gap" schools) would be treated for eligibility.
- **Dr. John Eldridge** raised the issue of the grant being a reimbursement grant, noting that new schools without cash reserves face a practical barrier to accessing funds. **Rhonda Dillingham** acknowledged this and noted an interest in exploring bridge-financing partnerships (citing a Colorado model in which a bank partnered with CSP grantees), as well as possible engagement with entities like Great Schools NC.
- **Dr. Shelly Shope** confirmed that non-subgrantee schools may access governance and finance fellowship training, though fees may apply. Board members expressed strong support for the incubator program concept — working with potential applicants before they reach the CSRБ — as a tool to improve application quality.

Adjourn:

Motion: Hilda Parlér

Second: Bruce Friend

4:15 pm