

Minutes of the North Carolina Charter Schools Review Board

State Board Room 755, Department of Public Instruction

September 8, 2025

9 AM

Attendance – CSRБ Members	
Jeremy Wall- (nonvoting) - Absent Dr. Rita Haire Dr. John Eldridge Eric Guckian Hilda Parlér Dr. Shelly Shope - Remote	Eric Sanchez Bruce Friend Lindalyn Kakadelis Todd Godbey Gerald McNair Stephen Gay
Attendance – Other	
<i>Office of Charter Schools</i> 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	<i>CSRБ Attorney</i> Steven Walker <i>SBE Attorney</i> Allison Schafer - Absent <i>Teacher/Principal of Year</i> Dr. Jake Wilson – POY Lindsay Phillips – TOY

Recording of September CSRБ Meeting: [September NC Charter Schools Review Board, Day One - September 8, 2025](#)

Call To Order

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

Mission and Ethics Statement:

- Mission and Ethics Statement, Mr. Bruce Friend, Board Chair
- Ms. Kakadelis recused from Iredell Charter Academy of Arts and Sciences

Approval of the Agenda and Minutes

Motion: Ms. Hilda Parlér motioned to approve agenda for September Meeting

Second: Dr. Rita Haire

Vote: Unanimous

☒ **Passed**

☐ Failed

Motion: Dr. John Eldridge motioned to approve June 2025 Regular and Special Called meeting minutes.

Second: Dr. Rita Haire

Vote: Unanimous

☒ **Passed** ☐ Failed

Approval of CSRБ 2026 Meeting Calendar

Motion: Ms. Lindalyn Kakadelis motioned to approve the CSRБ 2026 Meeting Calendar

Second: Mr. Eric Sanchez

Vote: Unanimous

☒ **Passed** ☐ Failed

Approval of CSRБ Chair

Motion: Dr. Rita Haire motioned to approve Mr. Bruce Friend as CSRБ Chair

Second: Ms. Lindalyn Kakadelis

Vote: Unanimous

☒ **Passed** ☐ Failed

Approval of CSRБ Vice-Chair

Motion: Ms. Lindalyn Kakadelis motioned to approve Dr. John Eldridge as CSRБ Vice-Chair

Second: Mr. Eric Sanchez

Vote: Unanimous

☒ **Passed** ☐ Failed

Approval of CSRБ Legal Counsel

Motion: Mr. Bruce Friend motioned to approve Mr. Steven Walker as CSRБ Legal Counsel

Second: Dr. John Eldridge

Vote: Unanimous

☒ **Passed** ☐ Failed

Introduction of New CSRБ Members

- Eric Guckian
- Gerald McNair

September 8 Charter Schools Review Board Meeting

Introduction of TOY and POY – Board Advisors: Dr. Natasha Norins, OCS Consultant

Dr. Norins introduced the principal of the year and teacher of the year for charter schools in NC.

- POY - Dr. Jake Wilson; Mountain Island Charter School
- TOY - Lindsay Phillips; Mountain Island Charter School

Amendments: Ms. Julie Whetzel, OCS Consultant

- Iredell Charter Academy of Arts and Science – Mission Statement

Ms. Whetzel shared information included in the Executive Summary.

Motion: Dr. Rita Haire motioned to approve Iredell Charter Academy of Arts and Science's amended Mission Statement

Second: Mr. Eric Guckian

Vote: Unanimous - Ms. Kakadelis recused.

☒ **Passed** ☐ Failed

- Institute for the Development of Young Leaders (IDYL) – Mission Statement

Ms. Whetzel shared information included in the Executive Summary.

Motion: Dr. John Eldridge motioned to approve Institute for the Development of Young Leaders amended Mission Statement

Second: Ms. Hilda Parlér

Vote: Unanimous

☒ **Passed** ☐ Failed

- New Dimensions School - Mission Statement

Ms. Whetzel shared information included in the Executive Summary.

Motion: Ms. Lindalyn Kakadelis motioned to approve New Dimensions School's amended Mission Statement

Second: Mr. Todd Godbey

Vote: Unanimous

☒ **Passed** ☐ Failed

- Faith Academy - Mission Statement

Ms. Whetzel shared information included in the Executive Summary.

Motion: Mr. Gerald McNair motioned to approve Faith Academy's amended Mission Statement

Second: Ms. Lindalyn Kakadelis

Vote: Unanimous

☒ **Passed** ☐ Failed

- Clover Garden - Mission Statement

Ms. Whetzel shared information included in the Executive Summary.

Motion: Dr. John Eldridge motioned to approve Clover Garden’s amended Mission Statement

Second: Mr. Stephen Gay

Vote: Unanimous

☒ Passed

☐ Failed

- Carolina Cyber Academy - Mission Statement

Ms. Whetzel shared information included in the Executive Summary.

Motion: Dr. Rita Haire motioned to approve Carolina Cyber Academy’s amended Mission Statement

Second: Mr. Eric Guckian

Vote: Unanimous

☒ Passed

☐ Failed

- The Experiential School of Greensboro – National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

Ms. Whetzel shared information included in the Executive Summary.

Motion: Dr. John Eldridge motioned to approve The Experiential School of Greensboro’s request to implement the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

Second: Mr. Todd Godbey

Vote: Unanimous

☒ Passed

☐ Failed

- Voyager Academy – National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

Ms. Whetzel shared information included in the Executive Summary.

Motion: Mr. Todd Godbey motioned to approve Voyager Academy’s request to implement the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

Second: Dr. John Eldridge

Vote: Unanimous

☒ Passed

☐ Failed

- West Triangle HS (RTO) – Relocation over 10-miles or out of the LEA

Ms. Whetzel shared information included in the Executive Summary.

Background: School faced zoning issues in Orange County and had lease terminated by landlord. The new location is a 65,000 sq. ft. building which crosses county lines, requiring board approval under new legislation.

School Representative Present – Remote: Joey Webb, Executive Director

Key Discussion Points:

- Zoning challenges in Orange County requiring move eastward to Durham
- New building is a former commercial office space requiring renovation
- Demographic changes expected and the use of a weighted lottery may increase demand
- Articulation agreements in place

Motion: Dr. John Eldridge motioned to approve West Triangle HS’s request to relocate over 10 miles and out of the LEA

Second: Mr. Stephen Gay

Vote: Unanimous

☒ Passed ☐ Failed

TMSA Durham – Sub Campus over 10-miles or in new LEA

Ms. Whetzel shared information included in the Executive Summary.

- TMSA leadership team provided a comprehensive presentation.
- Key Presentation Points
 - TMSA operates 4 North Carolina campuses (Charlotte, Apex, Cary, Greensboro) serving over 6,000 students
 - Strong financial metrics including debt coverage ratio over 1.15 and goal of 100 days cash on hand
 - Excellent academic performance – both Triangle and Apex campuses showing strong growth scores
 - Durham campus would serve as a K-8 feeder to TMSA Triangle High School
 - Location chosen based on current student commute patterns and wait lists
 - Received \$8.3 million federal grant for school expansions
 - Pursuing Charter School Growth Fund support of approximately \$1,000 per student.

Board Discussion

- Extensive discussion about precedent of a “sub campus” designation vs. traditional replication process.
- Dr. Eldridge raised concerns about precedent and whether this should be handled as a replication vs. sub campus to avoid bypassing the application process.
- Dr. Haire supported the sub campus approach for high-performing schools with 18-year track record, noting 250+ question application process as potential barrier for a school to apply for replication.
- Mr. Sanchez expressed concerns about process integrity and loophole potential despite support for TMSA’s quality.
- Mr. Gay questioned precedent and the need for a regulatory process even for high-performing schools.

- Mr. Walker, Board Attorney, recommended CSRБ develop clear criteria for future sub campus requests.

Motion: Ms. Lindalyn Kakadelis motioned to approve TMSA Durham’s request for a Sub-Campus over 10 miles from the main campus.

Second: Mr. Bruce Friend

Discussion:

- Board debated precedent implications and need for future sub campus criteria.

Vote: 6:5 **Yay** – Mr. Stephen Gay, Ms. Lindalyn Kakadelis, Mr. Bruce Friend, Dr. Rita Haire, Ms. Hilda Parlér, Dr. Shelley Shope and **Nay** – Mr. Todd Godbey, Mr. Eric Sanchez, Dr. John Eldridge, Mr. Eric Guckian, Mr. Gerald McNair

☒ **Passed** ☐ Failed

Follow-Up:

Mr. Friend announced the formation of a subcommittee to develop sub-campus criteria led by Dr. Eldridge.

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

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

Institute for the Development of Young Leaders (IDYL) - Fast Track Replication

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 CSRБ had regarding this application.

Opening Statement from the School Board

- Representatives Present: Dr. Christopher Edwards, Dr. Yvette Monroe and the full board of directors for IDYL
- Dr. Edwards spoke about 12 years of experience serving disenfranchised students based on Maslow’s Hierarchy principles.
- Dr. Monroe emphasized serving historically underserved children and community demand for the new school as evidenced by over 1400 student expressions of interest.

Questions/Deliberations from CSRБ

- Leadership Structure: Same CEO will lead both campuses; shared administrators initially; centralized training for culture replication.
- Facility: Purchasing former charter school building; inspection shows minimal needs; negotiated price down through dual agency relationship.
- Board Composition: Same board initially; plans to add Wake County representation; extensive advisory board structure.
- Academic History: School was CLP until recent turnaround; has exceeded growth about 8 consecutive years while serving students 2-3 grades behind when entering.

- Why K-8 vs. High School: Deliberate decision to replicate proven model rather than expand to unproven high school model.
- Community Engagement: Extensive door to door outreach; no negative feedback about previous school's closure at the location.
- Mr. Sanchez praised growth results but questioned reading proficiency lag behind math; expressed concern about fragility of success when dividing resources and leadership.
- CSRБ members who visited the current location reported positive culture and student engagement.
- Concerns noted were questions about evidence of demand and maintaining culture across two locations.

Motion: Dr. John Eldridge motioned to approve the Institute for the Development of Young Leaders (IDYL) charter application and move them to the RTO Process as a fast-track replication.

Second: Ms. Hilda Parlér

Vote: Unanimous

- ☒ Passed ☐ Failed

Focus Academy Charter Academy - Accelerated

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 CSRБ had regarding this application.

Opening Statement from the School Board

- Representatives Present: Dr. Grubbs and the full five-member board.
- Passion driven mission and arts integration model, noting they returned after previous year's feedback with stronger preparation, secured facility, community support (302 survey responses), and refined budget.

Questions/Deliberations from CSRБ

Primary Board Concerns:

- Operational support contract with American Traditional Academy: \$220,000 annually (10% of revenue) for operational support services.
- Board extensively questioned whether this constituted EMO/CMO services.
- Three-year contract with ATA providing contractors for various services
- Board members expressed concern about cost-effectiveness compared to direct contracting

Key Exchange on ATA Services:

- Mr. Friend: Questioned ongoing value after initial connections made
- Mr. Sanchez: Compared ATA fee to his school's \$54,000 annual back-office costs
- Dr. Shope: Requested specific articulation of services for \$200,000 - \$400,000 cost
- Applicant Response: Defended need for support as "rookies" but struggled to articulate ongoing value proposition.

Facility Questions:

- Leasing former Word of God Christian Academy building
- 21,773 sq ft main building plus modular units

Board Governance:

- Dr. Grubbs plans to step down as board chair to serve as principal
- Currently recruiting additional board members to expand from 5 to 7 members
- No 501(c)(3) yet

Evidence of Demand:

- 302 survey responses but only 62% had school-age children
- Concerns raised about actual enrollment projections
- Community engagement through 15 events and door-to-door outreach

Closing Remarks from the School Board

- Dr. Grubbs emphasized focus should be on serving children through arts integration rather than operational concerns, highlighted community support and team's persistence in addressing previous feedback.

CSRБ Discussion

- Primary Concern: Whether ATA arrangement constitutes EMO/CMO services despite classification as operational support.
- Educational Focus: CSRБ spent limited time on actual school model and curriculum due to operational questions.
- Accelerated Status: CSRБ questioned whether application met criteria for accelerated review.
- Budget Concerns: Fiduciary responsibility regarding 10% of budget allocation.

Motion: Mr. Bruce Friend motioned to bring Focus Charter Academy back for a second interview in October.

Second: Ms. Lindalyn Kakadelis

Vote: 9:2 **Yay** – Mr. Bruce Friend, Ms. Lindalyn Kakadelis, Mr. Stephen Gay, Dr. Rita Haire, Ms. Hilda Parlér, Mr. Todd Godbey, Dr. Shelley Shope, Mr. Eric Guckian, Mr. Gerald McNair and **Nay** – Mr. Eric Sanchez, Dr. John Eldridge

- ☒ Passed ☐ Failed

Stipulation Schools (2026 Renewals) Updates; Ms. Jenna Cook, OCS Consultant

- Ms. Cook reviewed stipulation schools and their progress related to additional renewal requirements assigned by the SBE/CSAB/CSRБ.

NC Coalition for Charter Schools Annual Report; Mr. Dave Machado, Executive Director, NC Coalition for Charter Schools

- Mr. Machado shared the annual report for the Coalition and complimented CSRБ and Ms. Baquero for their hard work and dedication.

Motion to Adjourn: Ms. Hilda Parlér

Second: Dr. John Eldridge

2:40 pm

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Attendance – Other	
<i>Office of Charter Schools</i> 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	<i>CSRБ Attorney</i> Steven Walker <i>SBE Attorney</i> Allison Schafer - Absent <i>Teacher/Principal of Year</i> Dr. Jake Wilson– POY Lindsay Phillips – TOY - Absent

CSRБ September Meeting Recording: [September NC Charter School Review Board - Day 2 - Sept. 9, 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

Review of SB254 and Director’s Updates: Ms. Ashley Baquero, OCS Director

- Ms. Baquero presented a comprehensive review of Senate Bill 254 (Session Law 2025-80), which became law on July 29, 2025, amending charter school laws.
- Key changes to state board and CSRБ roles:
 - Enhanced CSRБ authority
 - Expanded CSRБ duties
 - New non-material revision regarding relocation

- Charter agreement terms now approved by CSRБ
- Class ranks no longer required on official charter school transcripts
- Teacher evaluation flexibility
- Low performing charter improvement plans
- CSRБ now notifies SBE of fiscal management issues of charter schools
- Remote charter academies with 150+ students may request a separate charter
- Director's Updates
 - Ms. Baquero shared enrollment data for 7 schools that opened in Fall 2025
 - Mr. Friend expressed concerns about schools potentially falling below the 80-student minimum. He recommended bringing struggling schools to the next board meeting.
 - Mr. Sanchez suggested an earlier board review in May and June rather than just June to identify problems sooner.
 - Dr. Haire recommended monthly enrollment reporting and earlier lottery deadlines.
 - Dr. Eldridge emphasized the need for realistic enrollment projections and backup plans.
 - Proposed Solutions: earlier final approval meetings, better demand validation in the application process, monthly enrollment monitoring, and pre-application education about realistic challenges.
 - Ms. Baquero shared current RTO schools opening Fall 2026

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

- Ms. Baquero led a detailed review of proposed changes to the 2026 charter application, scheduled to open the last Friday in January 2026.
- Section 1: Applicant and Student Enrollment Information
 - Proposed changes: expand zip code options from 1 to 3 (with ranking preference suggested); add state law minimum 80-student requirement; new question #15 regarding how projected enrollment numbers were determined, move demographic questions from other sections to front-load enrollment information.
- Section 7: EMO/CMO Selection
 - Proposed changes: add sentence to question 73 requesting a summary of what the board understands is being provided by the EMO/CMO and for what fee; simplify question 75; split question 76 into three separate questions for student performance, governance performance, financial data; remove question about highest and lowest performing schools; question 77 was simplified.
 - Mr. Sanchez raised concerns about conflicts of interest and nepotism in EMO relationships.
 - Mr. Gay emphasized board vs. EMO control questions.
 - Mr. Walker cautioned against creating appearance of preferred EMO/CMO endorsements.
 - Mr. McNair advocated for evaluation tools/processes to hold EMOs accountable.
 - Key consensus: board agreed to add clear definitions of EMO/CMO to application.

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

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

Ascent Classical Academy of Moore County (Replication) - Accelerated EMO

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 CSRБ had regarding this application.

Opening Statement from the School Board

- School representatives introduced themselves and shared information related to their application.
- Due to facility issues, the school is requesting a move from accelerated timeline to a standard timeline, opening in Fall of 2027.
- Original plan included temporary church partnership that became unavailable.
- Still have letter of intent on 16-acre property for permanent development.

Questions/Deliberations from CSRБ

- Mr. Friend expressed concern about allowing mid-process changes.
- Ms. Kakadelis supported allowing change for legitimate circumstances beyond the applicant's control.
- Mr. Sanchez questioned authenticity of application if accelerated criteria are not met.
- Mr. Walker confirmed there are no legal barriers to changing to standard but recommended clear rationalization for the decision.
- Key questions: When did the church partnership end? Answer: Within the past month. Could modulars still make 2026 viable? Answer: Possibly, but uncertain. Does this set a precedent for future applications?

Motion: Mr. Eric Guckian motioned to approve Ascent Classical Academy of Moore County's charter application request to move from accelerated to a standard timeline.

Ms. Lindalyn Kakadelis motioned to amend Mr. Guckian's motion to allow the timeline change but interview the applicant in the standard cycle, not today.

Amended Motion Vote: 5:6 **Yay** – Mr. Stephen Gay, Dr. Rita Haire, Ms. Lindalyn Kakadelis, Mr. Eric Guckian, Mr. Gerald McNair **Nay** – Mr. Bruce Friend, Ms. Hilda Parlér, Mr. Todd Godbey, Mr. Eric Sanchez, Dr. Shelley Shope, Dr. John Eldridge

- Passed **x Failed**

Original Motion:

Vote: 4:7 **Yay** – Dr. Rita Haire, Ms. Lindalyn Kakadelis, Mr. Eric Guckian, Mr. Gerald McNair **Nay** – Mr. Bruce Friend, Mr. Stephen Gay, Ms. Hilda Parlér, Mr. Todd Godbey, Mr. Eric Sanchez, Dr. Shelley Shope, Dr. John Eldridge

- Passed **x Failed**

Final Motion: Mr. Bruce Friend motioned that Ascent Classical Academy of Moore County’s charter application does not meet the requirements of an accelerated application and does not move forward.

Second: Ms. Hilda Parlér

Vote: 9:2 **Yay** – Mr. Stephen Gay, Mr. Bruce Friend, Ms. Hilda Parlér, Mr. Todd Godbey, Mr. Eric Sanchez, Dr. Shelly Shope, Dr. John Eldridge, Mr. Eric Guckian, Mr. Gerald McNair **Nay** – Dr. Rita Haire, Ms. Lindalyn Kakadelis

- ☒ Passed ☐ Failed

BH2 STREAM Academy, Accelerated

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 CSRБ had regarding this application.

Opening Statement from the School Board

- School representatives present: Tammy Barrow, Christian Herring, Jeremy Herring, Dan Crocker, Carlton Bryand, and other board members attending virtually.
- Key points: Located in tier 1 county; no high-performing K-8 schools in the LEA; strong community support; partnership with Sallie B Howard leader; detailed STEAM integration plan with arts components; year-round calendar with intervention opportunities.
- CSRБ extensively questioned budget projections: concerns about flat-line costs, lack of legal counsel.

Questions/Deliberations from CSRБ

- Mr. Godbey praised the well-written application and accomplished board.
- Mr. Sanchez recommended partnership with USDA, Self-Help, Great Schools NC for funding expertise.
- Dr. Haire commended the homegrown, community-driven approach.
- Dr. Eldridge noted refreshing ability of applicants to answer questions knowledgeably.

Motion: Mr. Eric Sanchez motioned to approve BH2 STREAM Academy’s charter application and move them to the RTO Process.

Second: Mr. Bruce Friend

Vote: Unanimous

- ☒ Passed ☐ Failed

RYZE Academy; Accelerated

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 CSRБ had regarding this application.

Opening Statement from the School Board

- School representatives present: Ms. Mayo, Ms. Sabo, Mr. Whitaker, Mr. Robinson, Mr. Taylor.
- Key presentation points: Serves tri-county area; response to school consolidations and 4-day week implementation in the area; over 300 intent to enroll forms completed; strong community engagement and social media presence.

Questions/Deliberations from CSRБ

- Ms. Parlér asked about entrepreneurship class structure and food vendor.
- Mr. Godbey questioned board member backgrounds and organizational relationships.
- Mr. Sanchez asked about teacher training for entrepreneurship skills.
- Dr. Eldridge suggested connecting with High Point University.

Motion: Mr. Todd Godbey motioned to approve RYZE Academy’s charter application and move them to the RTO Process.

Second: Ms. Hilda Parlér

Vote: Unanimous

- ☒ Passed ☐ Failed

Adjourn:

3:30 pm