

Minutes of the North Carolina Charter Schools Review Board

State Board Room 755, Department of Public Instruction

October 14, 2024

9 AM

| Attendance – CSRБ Members | |
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| Alex Granados- (nonvoting) Dr. Rita Haire Dr. John Eldridge - Absent Alex Quigley Hilda Parlér - Absent Dr. Shelly Shope (Remote) | Eric Sanchez - Absent Bruce Friend Dave Machado Todd Godbey Dr. Bartley Danielsen – Arrive 9:40 Stephen Gay (Remote) |
| Attendance – Other | |
| <i>Office of Charter Schools</i> Ashley Baquero, Director Nicky Niewinski, Asst. Director Joseph Letterio, Consultant- Remote Melanie Rackley, Consultant Jenna Cook, Consultant- Remote Dr. Natasha Norins, Consultant Dr. Brandi Gill, Consultant 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> Sarena Fuller – POY - Absent Lee Haywood – TOY - Absent |

Recording of October CSRБ Meeting: [NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings](#) – YouTube

Call To Order

Pledge of Allegiance/North Carolina Flag Salute: Mr. Bruce Friend

Mission and Ethics Statement:

- Mission and Ethics Statement, Mr. Bruce Friend, Board Chair
 - No recusals
 - Mr. Friend shared that the western part of the state is in the thoughts and prayers of the CSRБ and reminded people to keep them in mind while doing the work of the board today.

Approval of the Agenda and Minutes

Motion: Mr. Dave Machado motioned to approve agenda for October Meeting

Second: Mr. Todd Godbey

Vote: Unanimous

☒ Passed

☐ Failed

Motion: Dr. Rita Haire motioned to approve September 2024 minutes.

Second: Mr. Stephen Gay

Vote: Unanimous

☒ Passed

☐ Failed

Amendments: Ms. Julie Whetzel, OCS Consultant

Southern Wake Academy – Mission Statement

- Ms. Whetzel introduced the amendment and gave a brief overview and history of the school. She read the old mission statement and gave an overview of the school. She then went over changes to the mission statement and discussed the various groups that gave input on the change.

Motion: Mr. Stephen Gay motioned to approve Southern Wake Academy’s amended Mission Statement

Second: Mr. Todd Godbey

Discussion:

- Mr. Friend stated it was a much more concise mission statement.

Vote: Unanimous

☒ Passed

☐ Failed

Durham Charter School – Mission Statement

- Ms. Whetzel introduced the amendment and a history of the school. She read the old mission statement and gave an overview of the school. She read the old mission statement and gave an overview of the school. She then went over changes to the mission statement and discussed the various groups that provided input on the statement.
- Mr. Quigley noted the new mission statement is simpler, and a name change was also approved recently.

Motion: Mr. Stephen Gay motioned to approve Durham Charter School’s amended Mission Statement

Second: Dr. Shelly Shope

Vote: Unanimous

☒ Passed

☐ Failed

2023-2024 Academic Data Presentation: Ms. Ashley Baquero, OCS Director

- Ms. Baquero gave a presentation overviewing the 2023-2024 Accountability data.
 - She began by outlining the schools that exceeded, met, and didn't meet growth; and the trends for schools across a 5-year period. She noted that there are positive trends post pandemic and they hope to continue that moving forward.
 - She then went over the top performers in the state (by school performance grades) noting some higher performers being in a 'turnaround' phase. She then continued to highlight trends in both letter grades and scores.
 - Ms. Baquero stated that 25% of currently open charter schools are identified as low-performing and presented more specific data on this point. Then stated that 26% of currently open charter schools are identified as continually low-performing and presented more specific data on this point.
 - She concluded her presentation by saying that the in-depth and final report will be done by the beginning of the new year.

Introduction to 2024 Charter Application Interviews: Ms. Melanie Rackley, OCS Consultant

- Ms. Rackley introduced the two standard applications that are before the board and gave a schedule of the interviews taking place today. She also gave a quick overview of the statutes affecting the board's decisions and the rules surrounding the application summary feedback done by OCS staff.
 - Dr. Shope asked at what point in the timeline are the schools provided feedback and if they can make any changes. Ms. Rackley said they are provided with feedback but are not allowed to make any changes and went over the timeline for applications in this cycle.
- Ms. Rackley then went over data for the LEAs in which the interviewees are hoping to open a school.

Focus Charter Academy – Standard, 2026

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 Focus Charter Academy Board

- Dr. Grubbs introduced herself and gave her credentials. She then yielded to all board members to introduce themselves and give their credentials.
 - Ms. Bateman (treasurer) went first and touched on why she is qualified to be in this role.
 - Mr. DuBois went after and gave why he is excited to join the board of this school.
 - Mr. Grubbs introduced himself and gave his credentials. He also mentioned that the experience he had raising a son with an IEP gave him the desire to give parents and students all opportunities available to them.
- Dr. Grubbs stated that as they work on the application, they consistently remind themselves that this project is bigger than them.

Questions/Deliberations from CSRБ

- Mr. Friend asked who exactly was on the board and Dr. Grubbs gave an updated list. She also noted that some members left for personal reasons and confirmed the final list.
- Mr. Friend asked what her plans were when the school opened, and Dr. Grubbs said that her plans are to become the principal and step down from the board. She stated that wasn't her plan initially.
 - Mr. Godbey asked if any other board members would transition as well, and Dr. Grubbs said no.
- Mr. Friend asked if there was a relationship between her and Mr. Grubbs
- The Treasurer came up and spoke on behalf of the Grubbs and stated they are consistently being professional and not letting personal things get in the way / come up during voting.
- Dr. Haire asked about the integration of the arts and where it is in the budget.
 - The treasurer and other board members stated it was in the PD section and went over some of the ways that students and teachers are utilized to help implement Professional Development.
 - Dr. Haire stated that in the budget it didn't seem to list any specific curriculum. A board member came up and mentioned the curriculum they plan to use and said they would integrate the arts into those.
- Mr. Friend – referencing the budget – asked if what he is referencing is what was submitted. Ms. Baquero said the one on EBoard is revised. Mr. Friend asked more budget/application specific questions and Ms. Baquero stated that some of the application questions had – for example – the demographics of Garner as opposed to what they were proposing to serve in this particular school.
- Mr. Friend asked what work they have done to demonstrate community interest/need and cited some of the work they have done previously.
 - A member of the board came up and outlined all the events they have done in the community such as attending fall festivals and other events across Southeastern Wake County/Garner. She also mentioned future plans to hold events across the community and an interest meeting.
- Dr. Haire asked some budget-specific questions – about items such as computers and curriculum. She stated it doesn't seem workable and asked the board to address that. A member of the board came up and stated there is a large level of fluidity and over the course of this process they realize there are a few things they need to change/break down further in their initial application. She also went into detail on some of the curriculum items and touched on how they would integrate the arts within the classroom.
- Dr. Haire stated they should've known some of the up-front costs initially and put that in their budget presented today. She then asked a question about the bus section of the budget.
 - Mr. Friend and Mr. Godbey went over the budget further and noted that they did discuss a partnership with a local church for bus. Dr. Haire again reiterated her point that some of these costs should be in their initial budget even if it is an estimate and even though first year budgets tend to be flexible.
 - A member of the board said again they noticed the need to go back and revise the budget again and focus more on certain areas.
- Mr. Friend cited a few of his concerns in the budget such as professional development, counseling and more. A member of the board came up and again noted that was an area they need to revisit. She stated they followed Wake County's guideline for what needs to be in a classroom and that would change if/should they be approved. Mr. Friend thanked them for that and said the board can only evaluate what is in front of them.

- Mr. Friend added that with the population they hope to serve they are going to have a hard time attracting the necessary experienced teachers at the \$42,000 mark. A board member also stated again they know they need to make adjustments, and noted that she believes she put in a line item for counseling.
 - Dr. Haire stated they would need additional staffers to fulfill areas of their mission they said was important.
- A board member reiterated where they got the initial projections / needs for teachers and went more into detail on the ratios required. Mr. Quigley stated he doesn't know any schools except one that follows those ratios and that's why districts spend so much money.
 - Mr. Quigley also noted that it does seem like they are overstaffed.
- Dr. Haire asked another budget specific question and asked where the source of the funding is coming from. A board member stated they are looking for partnerships and hope to establish a sort of recurring donation platform. Dr. Haire asked if there are any commitments yet and the board said no. Dr. Haire – citing the need to make adjustments – said that they are very dependent on that funding.
- Mr. Machado – looking at the organizational chart – asked a question about who would serve as the Executive Director and the principal and if those were two separate positions. A board member said that Dr. Grubbs will serve as the principal and ED. She clarified that the principal is the only salaried position, and they are a non-voting board member after Mr. Machado asked if they would be getting two salaries. Another board member clarified they would only receive the principal salary.
- Mr. Machado asked if they are looking at possibilities that something happens with the husband and wife who are both on the board now. A board member stated he plans to step down after the school begins operation and explained how they recruit board members and some of the other changes they've had within the board.
- Mr. Machado asked how many busses the church has committed to providing. The board member said 2 full size and 2 that are not full size. He asked if the name of the church would be on the side of the bus when they picked students up and the board member said she believes so.
- Mr. Machado also asked about the proposed homeless population in the application served and if that was accurate to how many they planned to accept. Ms. Baquero and other CSRБ members clarified that those were the demographics of the Garner area and not the demographics of the proposed school.
- Mr. Friend asked if the school bus drivers were provided by the church and the board member said no. Mr. Friend asked if there's an item in the budget for those salaries. Dr. Haire confirmed this was in the budget.
- Dr. Haire asked if the school plans to hire the husband back on due to his extensive experience. A board member said no they do not.

Closing Remarks from the School Board

- A board member came up and thanked the CSRБ for the opportunity and for the questions that taught them some of the things they might need to address afterwards. He stated they are very hopeful and committed to this and hopeful to get the resources they need to make this work. He then touched on his credentials and explained his passion to teach and bring choice to an area that doesn't have it. He concluded his statement by reflecting on some of the concerns/questions board members had but also expressed confidence in the board.
- Another board member came up and said that two of her strengths – found through the strength-finder test – are important to leading a school and building a community in an area that has a strong need for choice in this area.

- Another board member came up and said that although they didn't do well on the budget, the violence he has seen (such as murders and stabbings of kids) warrant the need for the CSRБ to help the board out a little bit.
- One other board member came up and said that this whole thing is bigger than them. She stated one of the things she loves about her board is how resilient they are and how they always get back up when they realize things weren't going right. She stated she is passionate about this citing her experience seeing students in her classroom turnaround academically. She also said that she was the educator that would go above and beyond for her kids. She said she would do things such as buying shoes for kids without them and help braid other girl's hair. She said this is the type of educator she hopes to bring to Focus.

Deliberation from the CSRБ

- Dr. Haire thanked the board for their passion and stated they would need to address what will happen with the board when the Grubbs leave the board. She stated as a start-up school they would need to outline and really demonstrate how to build their board out.
- Mr. Machado agreed with Dr. Haire. He also clarified that he wasn't slighting Mr. Grubbs in any way with his line of questioning. He expressed concerns with the application and stated he isn't confident they are ready to open. He stated there are certain things that a board needs to have done prior to coming before the board and getting CSRБ's comments. He stated he doesn't think they're ready to move forward just yet and this isn't an opportunity to get feedback.
- Mr. Friend echoed Mr. Machado's comments but stated there is a need to put a school here. He applauded them for doing this on their own and cited their desire to partner with outside organizations. He listed certain things in the budget that need to be tightened up and recommended working with someone who has put together a budget. Mr. Friend also reiterated the concerns Dr. Haire brought up and noted there was a lot of new faces on the board.
- Mr. Quigley stated he loves the board's passion and agrees with the need for a charter school in the area. He said overall passion is overrated and that this process – although starting with passion – is very difficult work that is incredibly detail-oriented. He added that outside of the application itself the board needs to look very closely at the schools around them since competition is very steep. He stated they need to be careful when assessing demand due to declining number of students in more urban areas.
- Dr. Danielson stated part of the emphasis on the budget is because some of the most grueling sessions the CSRБ sits through are schools that fail due to financial issues. He stated it is not uncommon for one family to dominate the board in those schools that are struggling financially. He stated this might seem harsh and doesn't believe that's what is happening here, but they do need to look at that as well.
 - Dr. Danielson noted that Durham and Garner are very different, and that he believes most of the Review Board would be supportive of a charter in Garner. However, there is a new type of competition now that vouchers have been introduced.

Motion: Mr. Dave Machado motioned to deny Focus Charter Academy's charter application.

Second: Dr. Rita Haire

Discussion:

- Mr. Godbey repeated what Mr. Friend mentioned and encouraged the board to keep going and come back.
- Dr. Haire concurred with what Mr. Godbey said. She also said that she sees Ms. Grubbs is strategically picking each member of the board to serve a specific purpose.

- Dr. Shope agreed with what was said but wished they got more into the curriculum side of the application. She did agree however that the board wasn't ready due to the budget.

Vote: Unanimous (Stephen Gay Abstaining due to difficulties hearing the discussion)

- ☒ Passed ☐ Failed

Mr. Machado mentioned a charter school in Halifax County that had to come back three times but is now one of the best schools in the state. He said to keep their passion alive.

LUNCH

Bettis Academy – Standard, 2026

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 and other information about the region they plan to have the school.

Opening Statement from the School Board

- Ms. Brown – Board Chair – introduced the board and explained the reasons why she wanted to start this school. She cited the large waitlist at the only charter school near Zebulon and gave reasons why their school is better. She stated performance grades were also very low in this area and their school provided transportation and food while the other charter didn't. She also cited a few concerns other teachers/administrators/people in the public have expressed as well.
 - She demonstrated the work they've been doing in the community such as going door-to-door talking to people and sharing their idea. She gave other examples of community events and stated they've received over 120 surveys. She also said they have been mentored by Dr. Eldridge and other charter school leaders in North Carolina.
 - Ms. Brown continued by going into the curriculum and some extracurricular activities that would set them apart in their area of Wake County.

Questions/Deliberations from CSRБ

- Mr. Friend thanked the board for demonstrating the need and for noting they've spoken with prospective parents.
- Dr. Haire asked them to describe the multilingual section she has seen throughout the application. Ms. Brown said that based on the demographics of the area, they will need to be prepared to serve students with a variety of language needs. Dr. Haire asked for more detail on the language program and Ms. Brown shared possible languages the school may offer.
- Dr. Haire asked about the Project-Based Learning and other things she mentioned in the opening statement. Ms. Brown stated they have budgeted for a world-language teacher that is going to work with the younger kids in a rotation with extracurriculars like art, music, and PE.
- Dr. Haire asked for more numbers regarding the interest/demand in the area.
 - Ms. Brown reiterated that people liked to talk as opposed to fill out surveys. Stated she didn't create a summary of those conversations, but they did exist.
- Dr. Haire asked when the last interest meeting was.

- Ms. Hines gave her story of how she joined as a board member and how she found out about the school. She also gave more information as to why she wanted the school citing her children and the areas need for another charter school.
- Mr. Godbey asked about social media and the 130 responses to the surveys.
 - Ms. Brown explained how they gathered the poll recipients on Facebook and how it was a lot better for members of the community.
- Mr. Machado asked if Zebulon was able to support another charter school and why they picked Zebulon.
 - Another board member – citing her experience teaching in that area – stated there is a need since parents are looking for an option that has transportation and food (something the other school doesn't have). She said that people were getting discouraged when trying to look for a better school. She also gave a few reasons why their school is different.
- Mr. Friend – citing the budget – asked how they envision Teacher Assistant's being utilized. Ms. Brown explained how the Teachers Assistants would be assigned to classrooms. Mr. Friend commented they may need to look at the number of EC teachers with a large number of students with disabilities. He also expressed some concern about the part-time nurse and other staff listed in the budget.
- Mr. Friend asked if they've outsourced or plan to outsource this work. Ms. Brown stated they've partnered with Acadia-Northstar for some of this and after feedback from OCS they are going to re-evaluate certain staff positions.
- Mr. Friend asked where they are with facilities.
 - Ms. Brown mentioned a partnership with several groups that are helping them, and they are waiting to get approval before acquiring anything. She stated Zebulon doesn't have a lot of free-standing buildings that are able to be renovated as well. Stated they do have a backup plan as well in case all else fails such as partnering with a local company that can provide modular classrooms.
- Mr. Godbey asked how many board members would become staff at the school.
 - Ms. Brown said that she is most likely going to become a staffer.
 - Mr. Godbey stated CSRБ gives the charter to the board not the principal and they really want to have that experience on the board. Ms. Brown agreed.
- Mr. Godbey stated they'll need more nutrition staff for the proposed population. He also asked for more about the community college partnerships / transfer pathways.
 - Ms. Brown stated they want to have options for students regardless of what their future plans are. She mentioned the new Wake Tech campus being built and listed pathways that her school will be working with Wake Tech to get students ready for very needed careers in NC.
 - Ms. Brown also noted they are working to create logistical avenues for parents of students who may be taking classes at times that the school might not be able to transport.
- Mr. Quigley asked what the target number of students is that participate in the community college aspect of this.
 - Ms. Brown said the ideal goal is 100%, citing the extensive work and preparation they will be giving these kids in kindergarten. She stated they really need to work with the kids that come through their doors.
 - Mr. Quigley asked how many are participating at the other school she has worked with, and Ms. Brown said 95% (all but 2) are participating. She also went more into detail on the data, specifically about the high school seniors participating in the program.
- Mr. Quigley noted some of the feedback mentioned on the application surrounding the curriculum and the instructional model and asked for clarification.
 - Ms. Brown stated the project-based learning model is what they will be using, and this allows them to create a model that is student-centered. She said the benefit of this is that

- students are driving their education, and it allows teachers to meet kids where they are in their education. She stated it may be a gradual implementation due to the steep learning curve that this puts on teachers but noted they will work to train teachers and other staff.
- Mr. Quigley asked if they have any type of curriculum identified as it may be difficult to implement this model for younger students.
 - A board member mentioned the standard course of study is what they most likely will use and – after clarifying with Mr. Quigley – agreed that teachers will create the curriculum.
 - Mr. Quigley asked about kindergarten and a board member said they would create the curriculum as well.
 - Mr. Machado asked if there was any discussion about replicating and why they decided not to go that route.
 - Ms. Brown stated there were discussions but that initially they didn't want to overstretch the school. She also said they had some other personal reasons that she didn't know if she could touch on.

Closing Remarks from the School Board

- Ms. Mayes – a Zebulon resident – gave a closing statement and said that Bettis gives kids in Zebulon things their parents generation never had access to (such as financial literacy, etc.)
- Ms. Hines – a board member – noted the tremendous growth in the region and that members of the community have told her at her HOA meeting that they need another charter school. She then asked members of the Zebulon community in attendance who support their mission and the idea of a new school to stand up.
- Another individual from the community came up and reiterated the need in the community citing data on the number of people moving in each day.

Deliberation from the CSRБ

- Dr. Haire asked if they have fulfilled the legislative requirement of 'innovation to the community' and Mr. Godbey said it doesn't necessarily fit the requirement since they do have something in the area already. Mr. Machado said it might not be new, but it is definitely based off of successful models and they're bringing that into the community.
- Dr. Haire stated she thinks the budget is thoughtfully prepared and noted a few minor concerns she had with it. She also noted that there were other pieces mentioned in their application that she wasn't sure tied into the overall curriculum.
- Mr. Quigley stated his concerns for the model. He stated the way they planned to do it is very difficult to implement in younger grades and is a bit concerned about that.
- Dr. Haire asked if anyone has anything to say about the board piece (and filling out the board). Mr. Godbey agreed and stated it was important to build that depth. He also agreed with Mr. Quigley and said that running a K-12 school is like running 3 different schools. He said that he thinks they are going in the right direction and that they will get there eventually.
- Mr. Friend agreed with everything previously said and reiterated he has confidence in this board to figure it out. He said that – compared to this morning – this group's budget is far more put together and isn't missing huge sections.
- Mr. Gay – citing his experience in Zebulon – reiterated the comments made by the board members and stressed that the area is growing and there is need. He stated the thing he is concerned about is really seeing if there is a curriculum to get the kids old enough to take those classes at Wake Tech.

- Mr. Quigley asked how Mr. Gay would vote citing what he said above. Mr. Gay mentioned the charter schools in the area and stated in his opinion they should come back and further refine their curriculum for the younger grades. He reaffirmed what Mr. Quigley said and they really will excel if they sell it well to the population.
 - Mr. Quigley asked if there's a large Hispanic and ESL population and Mr. Gay said it was growing in the area and that they are going to come if they see you'll take care of their kid.
 - Mr. Gay also reiterated some of the other things he was concerned with and wanted to hear more about.

Motion: Mr. Stephen Gay motioned to bring back Bettis Academy for a 2nd interview.

Second: Mr. Alex Quigley

Discussion:

- Mr. Friend and Dr. Haire asked what the stipulation / requirement of the school before they came back.
- Mr. Quigley agreed with Mr. Friend about the real estate concerns.
- Mr. Gay recommended finding people on the board from Wendell and/or Wake Tech.
- Dr. Danielson said that all those schools in the area have large waitlists. He stated the good thing about charter schools is they are not confined to the county line. He said that he is ready to approve based on his belief in the need but says it won't be harmful to bring them back a 2nd time.
- Ms. Baquero said that in December they would be back in front of the CSRБ. Mr. Friend then laid out the guidelines for getting 2nd interview questions to the board.

Vote: Unanimous

- ☒ Passed ☐ Failed

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

- Ms. Baquero gave details about Hurricane Helene and the amount of damage to charter schools. She also gave more details about the legislation recently passed by the GA.
- She then discussed the Charter Renewals for 2025 and noted those are going to begin in November and December. She then mentioned the schools in RTO for 2025 and 2026 and noted that Dogwood Classical would be withdrawing from RTO.

Motion to Adjourn: Mr. Friend

1:17 pm