

Utah State Charter School Board Meeting
Minutes
October 13, 2005
North & South Board Rooms
Utah State Office of Education

APPROVED

Members present: Brian Allen, David Moss, Scott Smith, Sonia Zisumbo; Members excused: Barbara Killpack, Anne Peterson, Eric Smith

Staff present: John Broberg, Lisa Putman, Gary Belliston, Jo Schmitt

Others present: Steve Kroes, Kim Frank, Nyman Brooks, Julie Adamic, Sonia Woodbury, Carolyn Sharette, Steve Winitzky, representatives from South Ridge Academy, George Washington Academy and Tuacahn High School of the Performing Arts

Members of the media present: Tiffany Erickson

Call to Order

Chair David Moss called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

Approval of Minutes

Motion was made by Member Sonia Zisumbo and seconded by Member Brian Allen to approve the minutes from the September 15, 2005 State Charter School Board Meeting. The motion was carried unanimously.

Utah Foundation Report

Director John Broberg stated in November 2004, the Charter School Board sanctioned the Utah Foundation to do a study of financial concerns of charter schools in the State of Utah.

Steve Kroes, Executive Director of Utah Foundation presented the research report "Challenges Facing Utah Charter Schools" and the "Appendix: Responses to Charter School Directors' Survey" completed by Utah Foundation.

Highlights of report:

Utah charter schools have not achieved funding parity with district schools when comparable, ongoing funds are examined. In 2004, charter schools received \$801 per pupil less than district schools;

A significant portion of the funding difference is caused by differing student populations. Charter schools do not enroll as many disadvantaged students who qualify a school for certain types of federal aid;

Another, even larger, portion of the difference is the exclusion of several revenue sources from the "local replacement funding" formula for charter schools. These include debt service revenues and state funds that supplement local property taxes;

A significant proportion of charter school funding is dependent of competitively awarded federal grants, carrying the risk of losing funds in the future if Utah does not succeed in renewing the grants;

A federal grant for charter school facilities was meant to aid the state in creating a new facilities funding program, but such a program has not been created;

Because of limited capital-raising capacity and questions about their borrowing ability, most charter schools must lease their facilities;

State funding for administrative costs has fallen dramatically as the charter school population has grown;

Charter schools are paying much lower salaries and benefits than districts, which may be a sign of fiscal difficulty or simply the result of a younger teaching staff.

The full report can be found on Utah Foundation's website at www.utahfoundation.org.

Member Brian Allen questioned why some funding the districts receive were not included in the report. Mr. Kroes informed the State Charter School Board the report excludes funds that were used for adult education, community programs, things that are not related to the actual business of educating children. Utah Foundation wanted to focus this report on the costs and revenue associated with educating the children in charter schools. The report excluded food preparation funds because charter schools are generally not providing those services. Also, another fund called Other Governmental and Enterprise funds were excluded because those funds are not comparable between districts and charter schools. Mr. Kroes feels if the report had included that money, the gap between charter schools and districts would have been larger. Utah Foundation did not want to overstate the gap, wanting to be realistic with the data.

Motion was made by Vice Chair Scott Smith and seconded by Member Brian Allen to approve the Utah Foundation Research Report. The motion was carried unanimously.

Charter School Association Presentation

Kim Frank with Utah Association of Public Charter Schools, Nyman Brooks, Director of Odyssey Charter School, Julie Adamic, Director of John Hancock Charter School, Carolyn Sharette, Director of American Preparatory Academy and Sonia Woodbury, Director of City Academy presented information given to the Education Appropriations Committee. Ms. Frank stated the goal in their presentation was to show the Education Appropriations Committee the Charter School Association, the State Charter School Board and the Office of Education were going into the legislative session with one voice, all on the same page. Their presentation also showed the 'experiment' called charter schools is working, through growth, diversity, academic progress, and innovations. An annual report prepared by the Utah Association of Public Charter Schools was distributed to the State Charter School Board members.

Member Brian Allen asked if the lack of transportation funding may have an impact on the number of economically disadvantaged students that are tracked. Because both parents work out of the home and have their children walk themselves to the local school, Mr. Allen questioned if there were any sense or feeling in the association if transportation was a problem with any of those economically disadvantaged families. Ms. Adamic stated she would predict there would be some discrepancy in the annual report, but she has found the district has a parent population that is willing to sacrifice and make sure their students get to a school where their needs are being met. Ms. Frank stated she requested from the Utah State Office of Education their numbers and statistics, and there were several charter schools with zeros; she felt that didn't make sense. Ms. Frank stated in her experience at John Hancock Charter School there is no "zero" in any one area, anywhere. She informed the State Charter School Board she contacted each of the charter schools and obtained their statistics. Ms. Frank stated USOE's numbers are different than the association's numbers. The numbers on the chart are the end of last year's reports from each of the charter schools. Even the schools that did report, show a different number than the Utah State Office of Education. Ms. Frank also stated in the future the Utah Association of Public Charter Schools would be doing their own reports to make ensure they had accurate numbers.

Brian Allen stated that if there is a discrepancy with the numbers that were actually submitted, the appropriate step would be to find out why there is a discrepancy and correct that discrepancy.

Ms. Frank feels that in John Hancock's case, the state office has put in previous years data and the school had grown. She also stated that more staff at USOE and working together would answer the question of differences in numbers, but the association wanted to make sure the numbers they had were accurate for the presentation, so she personally called the schools, and the numbers as of last year are accurate.

Ms. Frank pointed out to the State Charter School Board in the report they had received there was a map showing where the charter schools in Utah are located, each senate district and the number of charter schools located in that district and district's representative, also a blurb from each of the existing charter schools.

Ms. Frank informed the State Charter School Board that the Core Knowledge Foundation President would be in Utah on October 26 and 27, 2005 to present John Hancock Charter School (chosen as the model school) and Timpanogos Academy certification plaques. Ms. Frank informed the State Charter School Board Governor Huntsman would be in attendance at the John Hancock Charter School presentation October 26 and invited the State Charter School Board and other interested parties to attend the presentation at John Hancock Charter School and Timpanogos Academy.

Charter Policy Change

Chair Davis Moss stated there is a need for a policy change because of challenges in the procedure of receiving communication from new charter school applicants. He feels there needs to be a time line established as to when the board members would accept changes to the original application. Mr. Moss stated changes are most often made because of responses received from readers' comments.

Motion was made by Member Brian Allen and seconded by Vice Chair Scott Smith for the State Charter School Board to submit a request to the State Board of Education to adopt a rule requiring a mandatory training for anyone wishing to submit a charter school application. The motion was carried unanimously.

After further discussion, additions to the motion were each new charter school applicant would be required to attend a mandatory training meeting, review and consider readers' comments and submit a revised application to Director John Broberg and the State Charter School staff. When the applicants have addressed the concerns and the application is complete and ready for presentation it will be given to the State Charter School Board for their comments and recommendation to the State Board of Education. All documents and revisions will be given to the State Charter School Board no later than two weeks prior to their hearing of the application at their scheduled monthly meeting. Applications will be heard every other month, six times per calendar year.

Sharing of Student Names Discussion

Chair David Moss informed the State Charter School Board that he, Vice Chair Scott Smith and Director John Broberg had been invited to attend a rules committee meeting at the state capitol concerning FERPA and confidentiality issues pertaining the sharing of student names and personal information between traditional schools and charter schools. Mr. Moss opened the meeting for discussion and requested the State Charter School Board's opinion and feeling regarding these concerns. Member Brian Allen stated he felt he or the State Charter School Board does not have enough information or knowledge to formulate an opinion. Other members of the State Charter School Board agreed with Mr. Allen's feelings.

Federal Programs Update

Education Specialist Lisa Putman informed the State Charter School Board for FY06 there is just over \$2.3 million in the Federal Facilities Grant. Ms. Putman stated if student enrollment is what was projected in May, 2005 of 1224 students; each school would receive \$184 for each student. She reminded the State Charter School Board the Facilities Grant is a per pupil grant. Ms. Putman informed the State Charter School Board once the State Office of Education has the final October 1 count, the office will be able to generate an award letter informing each school of their Facilities Grant Award amount.

Ms. Putman stated the Public Charter School Program Federal grant for \$4 million will be highly competitive. Applications for the funds will be sent to all eligible schools and can be downloaded from the Utah State Charter School website before November 2005. The applications will be due to the State Office of Education, Charter School Section Monday, November 14, 2005, before 5:00 p.m.

Ms. Putman informed the State Charter School Board prior to awarding the funds under the new grant, the state is required to obligate the funds that are remaining from the former grant. She stated the most expeditious way to accomplish that obligation is to award supplemental grants to those eligible schools that were operating in the FY04-05 school year. The amounts of the supplemental funds would be based on the school's original request; the amount the schools have received in the past, based on federal recommendations schools receive \$450,000 in total start-up; and implementation funds under this program.

Vice Chair Scott Smith inquired to the amount that is remaining in the former grant. Ms. Putman informed the State Charter School Board there is \$1.5 million in the grant and the amount available to schools is \$1.2 million.

South Ridge Academy Name Change

Chair David Moss referred the State Charter School Board to the letter that was received requesting the name change of South Ridge Academy. He stated the school initially had two separate boards that have combined and have had a chance to work together and formulate the school's direction. The name change South Ridge Academy's governing board is requesting for approval is Channing Hall which they feel gives a better sense of the tradition and international respect of the International Baccalaureate program they are implementing.

Motion was made by Vice Chair Scott Smith and seconded by Member Sonia Zisumbo to approve the name change of South Ridge Academy to Channing Hall. The motion was carried unanimously.

George Washington Academy Amendment

Chair David Moss informed the State Charter School Board initially George Washington Academy's application for first year of operation had a student population of 350 students, grades K-6; second year 400 students, grades K-7 and third year 450 students, grade K-8. Mr. Moss stated as the school further developed their budget, the money allocated as Local Replacement Dollars was not sufficient to pay the lease on a facility unless the school was at full student capacity. Mr. Moss informed the State Charter School Board the school is asking for an amendment to their charter to operate the first year with a student population at 450 students, grades K-8 rather than the original request of 350 students, grades K-6.

Mark Ward, representing George Washington Academy informed the State Charter School Board because of the rising cost of land as well as the cost of construction in St. George the governing board of George Washington Academy is concerned if they don't plan ahead now, they will not be able to later on. To build an oversized facility that would accommodate more students than they have funding for would not be sensible. Mr. Ward stated Washington School District is in support of George Washington Academy because the district is having a difficult time accommodating the high growth rate in St. George.

Vice Chair Scott Smith inquired if George Washington Academy's governing board feels they could accommodate 450 students and being comfortable with the middle school curriculum issues for 7th and 8th grade. Mr. Ward informed the State Charter School Board that George Washington Academy's governing board originally considered increasing the student numbers to 475 simply because of the high growth rate in the area, but have opted not to increase to 475 and request 450 students in order to maintain the small school feel and to give the individual attention they hope to provide. Mr. Ward also informed the State Charter School Board the governing board for George Washington Academy has fully investigated the secondary curriculum and have implemented those things in the school's curriculum.

Motion was made by Vice Chair Scott Smith and seconded by David Moss to approve the amendment of George Washington Academy's charter to accommodate 450 students, grades K-8. The motion was carried unanimously.

Tuacahn High School Conversion

Chair David Moss informed the State Charter School Board Tuacahn High School is requesting a conversion to transfer authority from the State Board of Education to State Charter School Board.

Member Brian Allen opened the discussion with concerns he has with the school regarding parental involvement in management decisions at the school level. Mr. Allen stated in the school's conversion document it states they have a parent advisory board that provides input and advice on very specific things including the schools curriculum. He is questioning how that input is provided to the governing board and what influence that input has. Mr. Allen stated the law "...to provide opportunity for greater parental involvement in management decisions at the school level." He doesn't feel there are specifics as to what and where the parents are involved in the decisions of the school.

Chair David Moss quoted Assurance T from the Utah State Charter School Board Charter School Application, "The charter school will maintain an active parent/guardian involvement process including some formal mechanism for meaningful involvement in site-based decision making." Mr. Moss agrees there needs to be a clearer definition of what constitutes parental involvement at Tuacahn High School.

Vice Chair Scott Smith stated he has children that attends Tuacahn High School and receives mailings each month containing information concerning board meetings. He attended those meetings, but never had an opportunity to vote concerning issues of the school. Parents were given information, but never had an input on the way the school was being run. Mr. Smith also stated if the State Charter School Board is to understand the desire of state law and assurances concerning Utah Charter Schools, there needs to be additional parental involvement in the school. He also feels the governing board of Tuacahn High School must to decide how additional parental involvement needs to be implemented, with documentation.

Mike Duckworth, Principal of Tuacahn High School stated he feels Tuachan High School has a very powerful governing board and has a forum and a current structure that allows word to get through when significant changes need to take place. He feels there is parental involvement in the school.

The PTO President of Tuacahn High School stated she is a member of the parent advisory board and feels her concerns have and are being heard by Tuacahn High School's governing board. She also stated she feels she has had a voice and has had opportunities to give meaningful input into Tuacahn High School's decision making.

Motion was made by Member Brian Allen and seconded by Vice Chair Scott Smith for Tuacahn High School to clarify how the parent/teacher organization, parent advisory committee and the governing board interact and to have that information to the State Charter School Board before their next scheduled meeting, November 17, 2005 in order for the board to take action on Tuachan High School's conversion request.

A substitute motion was made by Chair David Moss and seconded by Member Brian Allen to approve the conversion document for Tuacahn High School with the provision the school's governing board will supply clarification and documentation to the State Charter School Board, before their November 17, 2005 meeting, of their governance plan reflecting parental involvement at the school.

The motion passed with positive votes from Vice Chair Scott Smith, Chair David Moss and Member Brian Allen, with an opposing vote by Sonia Zisumbo.

Adjourn

Motion was made by Vice Chair Scott Smith to adjourn the meeting at 12:45 p.m. The motion was carried unanimously.