

Meeting Minutes
Virginia Board of Education
Charter School Committee

Wednesday, September 22, 2010

Mrs. Isis Castro, chair of the Charter School Committee, called the committee meeting to order at approximately 3:00 p.m. Also present were Virginia Board of Education (Board) members: Mrs. Elizabeth Beamer (also on the Committee), Mrs. Eleanor Saslaw, Dr. Virginia McLaughlin, Mr. David Foster, Dr. Ella Ward, and Mr. David Johnson, as well as Dr. Patricia Wright, Superintendent of Public Instruction. Mr. Rob Krupicka (also on the Committee) and Dr. Billy Cannaday arrived after the meeting began.

The committee received comments about the charter school application process from the following individuals representing various organizations:

- Mr. Patrick Lacy, Counsel - Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA)
- Dr. Phi Worell, President – Virginia Association of School Superintendents (VASS)
- Dr. Kitty Boitnott, President, Virginian Education Association (VEA)
- Ms. Susan Bridges, President, Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals (VAESP)
- Dr. Randy Barrack, Executive Director, Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals (VASSP)
- Ms. Debi Abadie, President, Virginia Parent-Teacher Association (VPTA)
- Ms. Marcia Obenshain, President, Virginia Counselors Association (VCA)

The panelists made general comments about public charter schools and the importance of examining local needs in the application process, funding, management committee expertise, benchmarks for student achievement, and the role of parental involvement.

Mrs. Castro asked the panelists what would make a community support a charter school. Ms. Abadie replied that the educational program offered at a public charter school should not be greater than what is offered at a regular school. Dr. Boitnott indicated that the community needs to make the decision to approve and that the focus of improving schools should not be taken away from regular schools. Dr. Worell indicated that a community might support a public charter school if it provides a program that a traditional school cannot provide and is innovative.

Mr. Lacy agreed with Dr. Worell. Mr. Lacy indicated that public charter schools should be innovative and avoid being elitist.

Mrs. Beamer asked if the panelists could provide examples of questions that might be appropriate for one public charter school application with a particular focus but not for other types of applications. Mr. Lacy indicated that localities have different issues so there may be particular needs that must be addressed (services to English language learners is one example). Dr. Boitnoitt indicated that diversity may dictate the need for differences in the information sought. Dr. Worrell indicated that a general application process is a two-step process and school boards should have the opportunity to generate local applications that are unique to local needs.

Mr. Krupicka asked about community support and how this could be demonstrated in an application. Ms. Abadie indicated that a petition process is helpful as well as public interest from parents in an open forum.

Mr. Lacy also commented that a process of assessing progress continuously is important. Dr. Worrell indicated that Virginia already has good standards and that school divisions need support from the state regarding the monitoring of public charter schools.

Dr. Cannaday asked how the Board could better express local needs through its annual report to the General Assembly. The VASS indicated that the Board needs to remain aware of its direction and public charter school application should address this direction.

Mr. Foster asked about admission policies and how an open admissions process can address demographics. The VASS indicated that enrollment needs to be open but may not include everyone depending on the mission of the school.

Mr. Krupicka asked if principals had the level of autonomy that is needed to operate a public charter school. Ms. Bridges replied that the level of autonomy varies across the state. Dr. Barrack agreed that the level of autonomy varies statewide.

Dr. McLaughlin asked what kind of flexibility from regulations is needed. Most of the panelists indicated that flexibility would be helpful.

Dr. Ward asked if any of the panelists had experience working with charter schools. All of them responded that they had not.

Dr. Cannaday asked what flexibility would a principal need to make a difference. Ms. Bridges responded that additional instructional time would be helpful.

Mrs. Stella Edwards, a parent, also made public comment at this meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:45 p.m.