

December 9, 2019

MINUTES OF THE
UTAH STATE CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD: CAPSTONE CLASSICAL ACADEMY
INFORMAL HEARING

Thursday, December 9, 2019
Utah State Board of Education—Basement West

DRAFT

Members Present:

Chair Kristin Elinkowski (*refrains from voting, unless otherwise noted)
Vice Chair DeLaina Tonks
Member Cynthia Phillips
Member Jim Moss
Member Krystle Bassett
Member Michelle Smith (via telephone)
Member Bryan Bowles

Staff Present:

Jennifer Lambert
Assistant Attorney General David Jones
Michael Clark
Amber Hellstrom
Brett Campbell
Stewart Okobia
Greg Connell
Marie Steffensen
James Madsen
Jenna Magnetti

Others Present:

Chair Mark Huntsman (USBE), Brittini Donelson (Capstone Classical Academy, CCA) Susan Goers (CCA) Tom Ruiz (CCA) Tami Ross (CCA) Rob Fontenot (CCA), Brenden Pierce (CCA), Bart Norman (CCA), David Strait (CCA), Christine Ruiz (CCA), Kelsey Hargrove (Highmark), Brittney Bennett (CCA), Steven Leaf (Red Apple), Spencer Adams (Red Apple).

Call to Order

Chair Elinkowski called the meeting to order at 9:03 AM.

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Pledge of Allegiance

A flag was not present, so no Pledge of Allegiance was made.

Public Comment

Mr. Steve Hess discussed moving child to a school where they experienced bullying, then transferring student to a private Montessori school that was too expensive, and then finally transferring his student to Capstone Classical Academy (CCA) when it opened. Mr. Hess expressed a belief that it would be a tremendous loss to lose CCA and urged the state to support schools rather than looking to close them.

Hearing

Capstone Classical Academy (CCA)

Representatives of CCA responded to merits of the SCSB motion proposing termination, discussing: positive cash-flow, adding 15 new students in two months, having 186 students enrolled, confidence in school growth, landlord willing to sponsor bussing program, overcrowding in Weber High School, ability to raise more than \$150,000 in three months, restructuring rent payments but not having executed documents, and the option of co-tenancy, achievements of scholars in various prestigious competitions and awards received by staff members, violence and parental displeasure in local district, noting that a Standard Examiner article helped increase enrollment, plans to host the Chamber of Commerce in April, marketing efforts, educating parents that students can participate in boundary sports and attend CCCA, carpool app, parent bussing system, working with Highmark for bussing, petitioning UTA for a stop in front of building, formulating in schedule for home-schoolers, using Market 321 to facilitate social media and having developed a plan/schedule for those platforms, Google Adwords, the school's model being copyrighted and unique, going to neighboring elementary schools to raise awareness, positive retention surveys, consistently scheduled open houses with a conversion rate of 85%, and "Bring a Friend Day" events.

Ms. Brittney Bennett offered the story of her student's experience at CCA versus local district school. Effectiveness of organic marketing compared to the wasted resources on billboards/magazine ads and the formation of a marketing committee.

Mr. Brenden Pierce told his story of teaching at CCA, moving his family to Utah from Colorado, belief in CCA's ability to produce principled leaders, being impressed with unification of humanities curriculum, the teaching of Latin, and not shying away from teaching religion in a historical context.

Mr. David Strait commented on reading SCSB mission and vision and believing they (SCSB) are not the 'boogie man,' having participated on the Charter School Task Force committee and understanding how much is expected of the SCSB with limited resources/authority. Mr. Strait extolled the achievements of CCA students and why CCA is such a boom to the arts community.

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Leveraging resources and musical instrument donations, incorporating world history into music instruction, music history course being aligned with humanities course, offering a music-tech curriculum to offer students practical skills, feeling the power struggle and concerns over public sentiment, the AISU closure and damaged trust between charter schools and oversight bodies, the SCSB advocating for highly successful charter schools and providing supportive oversight, and inviting SCSB to visit CCA was also discussed.

Mr. Bart Norman commented on his son's experience at the school, noting that local schools were not equipped to support advanced education, so his son was homeschooled before transferring to CCA. Socratic seminars, the school's role in shaping habits of excellence, and the belief that society needs schools who are willing to work for more than a passing grade was also discussed.

Ms. Christine Ruiz commented on being an unwilling education activist, the joy of finding CCA, appreciation of challenge CCA offers and the support of parents' rights, intangible results such as service and joy of learning, wanting to preserve daughter's rights to pursue an education that meets her unique needs, and stakeholder contracts detailing expectations. Ms. Ruiz invited SCSB members to visit the school and offered her home as lodging for those that would need to stay overnight.

Mr. Tom Ruiz asked clarification on receiving Notice of Concern in June and not being notified that they were not meeting the terms until the motion in October's meeting. Mr. Ruiz expressed not understanding the logical path in jumping from a Notice of Concern to a proposed termination.

SCSB Staff Response

Executive Director Lambert responded noting that enrollment from 1st-2nd year did not have enough of an increase and making up the difference in finances is easy in the short term but much harder to address long term. The "Exhibit B" concerning distance learning that the SCSB approved was further discussed, as well as resources following goals and the discrepancy between amounts budgeted for marketing versus the amount budgeted for student activities. Director Lambert addressed Mr. Ruiz' questions and read statute referenced in the Notice of Concern which supports the SCSB's October motion to propose termination, noting that steps in the Oversight Model are not sequential and are determined by need.

Not disagreeing with value of classical education, quality of education at CCA, impressive accomplishments, amazing mentors and teachers and students, having a really good director, being a great school was discussed alongside the hard reality that insufficient funds and low enrollment exist.

Staff's analysis of enrollment and funding was displayed. SY19 audited financial statements, insufficient funds to pay teachers if closed at the end of the year, fundraising efforts and unverifiable documentation, scenarios based on month of closure, concessions from landlord, enrollment projections, comparisons to other charter high schools and the typical increases experienced in second year that CCA did not experience was discussed.

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Ms. Kelsey Hargrove (Highmark *landlord*) discussed base-rent payment until October 2020, deferments to allow school to operate, outstanding balance of promissory note, and the assumption of co-tenancy.

Mr. Steven Leaf and Spencer Adams (Red Apple) discussed allotments, delaying a month before adding funds, and the amount of shortfall if school remains open and has to pay contracts through August 10, 2019.

Capstone Classical Academy Closing Statements

Dr. Susan Goers commented that in SY19 CCA had an \$800,000 shortfall and were able to overcome it while this year CCA had a \$4000,000 shortfall in October and believes they will be able to overcome that as well. Dr. Goers sked the board to consider growth and fundraising efforts past two months.

SCSB members reiterated that the hearing is not a referendum on Dr. Goers or her program, band clarified that it is about funding and enrollment and asked where large donations could come from.

Dr. Goers mentioned donors in Florida wanting CCA there, selling popcorn, matched dollars, Chick-Fil-A, a real estate investor, qualifying for a USDA loan and trying to get investors to buy building.

SCSB Members expressed appreciation for the heart and effort of CCA representatives, students and community.

SCSB Discussion

Options, closing school at end of year rather than in middle, and not wanting to send CCA away without a decision was discussed.

Capstone Classical Academy—Action on Proposed Termination

Motion

Member Bowles moved, and Member Bassett seconded, “to close Capstone at the end of this school year (FY2020).” The motion carried unanimously by those members present.

Amendment to the Motion

Member Phillips moved to “have Capstone Classical Academy at the January SCSB meeting to come before our board and provide us a report or update to consider in either affirming or overturning such decision.” The amended motion was not accepted by Member Bowles.

Discussion

The possibility of making future motions or rescinding the carried motion was discussed.

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Adjourn

Motion

Member Phillips moved to adjourn. The motion carried unanimously.