
REFERENCE: APPROVED MINUTES – December 22, 2008 Public Charter School Commission Special Meeting

**PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING
MONDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2008
650 W. STATE STREET, BOISE, IDAHO
SUITE 307**

A special meeting of the Idaho Public Charter School Commission was held on Monday, December 22, 2008 at 650 W. State Street, Boise, Idaho. Chairman William Goesling presided. The following members were in attendance by telephone:

Alan Reed Esther Van Wart Brad Corkill Gayle O'Donahue

Gayann DeMordaunt

Commissioner Joe deVera attended the meeting in person.

Chairman Goesling called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

1. Commission Discussion: Charter School Caps

Chairman Goesling invited the Commission to discuss concerns and possible solutions regarding raising the cap on new public charter schools in Idaho.

Commissioner Van Wart said her primary concern is not whether the Commission will continue to authorize quality schools, but that inadequate resources must be available for proper oversight of an increased number of schools.

Commissioner Corkill agreed with Commissioner Van Wart.

Commissioner Van Wart suggested that district authorizers be provided with resources to encourage authorization, and that districts be required to consider petitions thoroughly before referring them to the Commission.

The Commission discussed possible means by which district authorizers could obtain funding for their time and effort.

Commissioner DeMordaunt suggested that districts be encouraged to accept the transfer of successful Commission schools to district authorization after three to five years of operations.

Chairman Goesling recommended that the Commission first decide upon a new cap, then progress to discussion of how the resulting increase in authorizer workload could be funded.

Commissioner Van Wart asked staff for an explanation of how the cap affects Idaho's ability to obtain federal charter school grants.

Tamara Baysinger, Commission staff, said one of the factors considered in the application process for the federal start-up grant is whether a state has a cap on the number of charter schools that may open in a particular year. She said the presence of a cap is detrimental to a state's likelihood of being awarded grant dollars.

Commissioner O'Donahue added that Idaho charter schools would be eligible for additional, private grants if the cap were eliminated.

Chairman Goesling inquired whether the cap could be removed and growth rates limited by the Commission based on the state's ability to fund additional schools.

Ms. Baysinger said that would not be possible without significant statutory changes to the petitioning process because the Commission is obliged to consider petitions within a prescribed timeline. She said a petition could be denied on the basis of the state's inability to fund another charter school, but such a decision could be appealed like any other denial.

Commissioner DeMordaunt said that her own discussions with Shirley Rau of the State Department of Education indicate that, for purposes of continued eligibility for the federal charter grant, an upward shift in the cap would be beneficial even if the cap were not removed entirely.

Chairman Goesling said he would prefer to see a controlled expansion of the cap, allowing time for the legislature to commit additional resources to support the growth of charter schools and their authorizers.

Commissioner Corkill said he would prefer elimination of the cap, noting that it may help force long-needed change in Idaho's public school funding formula.

Commissioner O'Donahue said she doesn't like to see good options for children postponed and agreed that changes in the funding formula may be necessary.

Commissioner Corkill and Chairman Goesling said they believed the legislature would be more receptive to gradual lifting of the cap.

Commissioner DeMordaunt asked for additional information regarding the dissemination portion of the federal charter grant.

Commissioner deVera said Idaho charter schools may apply for grant funds to be used for sharing their successful practices with other charter or traditional schools.

Commissioner deVera said there seems to be agreement that the cap should be raised,

but the question of how this should be accomplished is more complicated and requires further research. He said educating districts about how to approve charters may help take some burden off the Commission.

Commissioner Van Wart said that while she would like to see the cap eliminated, there is merit to a gradual lifting of the cap. She suggested using the intervening years to help districts understand charter schools and the petitioning process.

Commissioner DeMordaunt noted that the education of districts would be more appropriately directed by the State Department of Education than by the Commission.

Commissioner deVera asked whether Commission is interested in drafting proposed legislation and finding a legislator to sponsor it in 2009.

Commissioner Reed expressed concern that it would be unwise for the Commission to propose a change without full understanding of its financial implications.

Commissioner O'Donahue noted that proposed legislation must be submitted with a fiscal impact statement.

Commissioner Corkill suggested that the Commissioners talk with legislators to get a general sense of their opinions on the subject of raising the cap.

The Commissioners generally agreed to support a graduated increase in the cap in the short term, with an eye toward eventual elimination of the cap.

Commissioner DeMordaunt noted that the current cap also limits growth to no more than one new charter per district, per year.

Commissioner deVera said it appears that the Commission is unprepared, in terms of research, to make a proposal for the 2009 legislative session.

The Commissioners agreed to raise the caps discussion among legislators with a goal of gathering information that will help direct a decision on what kind of proposal might be made with regard to charter school caps.

Chairman Goesling adjourned the meeting at 10:15 a.m.