State Charter Schools Commission of Georgia

Staff Recommendation
for the 2017 Petition Cycle
May 24, 2017

School:	**International Academy of Smyrna**
Attendance Zone:	Cobb County
Grade Levels:	K-6
Staff Recommendation:	SCSC staff recommends that the petition for International Academy of Smyrna be **approved** by authorizing the SCSC Chair to execute a charter contract for the operation of a state charter school.

Rationale:

International Academy of Smyrna (IAS) is a locally-approved start-up charter school operating under the authorization of the Cobb County Board of Education (CCBOE) and the State Board of Education (SBOE). On April 20, 2017, the Cobb County Board of Education voted to deny a renewal of IAS's charter contract citing academic and financial deficiencies.

Following the district's denial of this renewal request, IAS requested consideration by SBOE for authorization as a State Chartered Special School. The SBOE and GaDOE investigated the conditions under which IAS had been operating as a locally approved charter school and determined that the school's appeal warranted further review. The SBOE also determined, however, that the SCSC was the most appropriate authorizer to review IAS's petition application. As a result, the school submitted an application for renewal to the SCSC pursuant to the expedited petition process for existing schools. In response to the school's request, SCSC staff evaluated the school's petition to the SCSC and performance on the Comprehensive Performance Framework (CPF).

<u>Evaluation of IAS's Petition</u>

Review of IAS's petition indicated a strong commitment to improve academic, operational and governance practices. The petition did not indicate a strong understanding of the roles and obligations the school will have as an LEA. However, during the school's capacity interview, governing board members and school officials were able to provide additional information and evidence that the school is prepared to operate as its own LEA.

<u>Evaluation of IAS's Performance on the CPF</u>

When reviewing renewal applications, the SCSC uses its primary accountability tool—the Comprehensive Performance Framework (CPF)—to assess a school's performance in the areas of academic achievement, financial viability, and operational compliance. When evaluated with CPF measures and metrics, IAS failed to meet academic standards as outlined in the SCSC's comprehensive Performance Framework (CPF) in 3 out of the last 4 years (including the most recent year for which data is available). Specifically, IAS has not consistently outperformed its comparison district (Cobb County) in achievement, growth, or value-added impact. Additionally, after reviewing the school's past financial audits, the SCSC determined that the school failed to meet SCSC financial standards for 3 out of the last 4 years (including the most recent year for which data is available). With regard to the school's operations,

SCSC staff was unable to determine the school's ability to comply with LEA requirements since the school operated under the authorization of a local school district (and thus, was not required to fulfill LEA obligations).

Evaluation of Dynamic External Events

Under typical circumstances, the school's performance track record would not warrant SCSC authorization. However, the school cites (and provides evidence of) dynamic external events outside the school's control as an explanation for poor performance. Upon special request from the SBOE in this very unusual circumstance, the SCSC has given additional consideration to the following issues:

1. The school experienced significant and documented funding discrepancies. For the last 3 years, the school received an average of $1,853 per pupil less than the average brick-and-mortar state charter school. The school alleges that this funding differential contributed to the loss of experienced teachers as well as the school's inability to fund and implement a comprehensive remediation program to curtail declining student performance.
2. The school's local authorizer failed to abide by the National Association of Charter School Authorizer's (NACSA) identified Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing. The importance of authorizer integrity gained attention during the 2017 legislative session when the Georgia General Assembly passed and Governor Deal signed HB 430 which requires the creation of a code of principles to establish high-quality authorizing practices for all Georgia authorizers, including local districts. The implementation and application of such principles will help to prevent any future instances of inequitable treatment of charters by their authorizers. Unfortunately, the provisions of HB 430 do not apply retroactively, and IAS did not receive annual evaluations and/or written documentation of deficiencies until well after the time for remediation had passed. This left the school without the opportunity to demonstrate the capacity for the timely correction of identified issues.

SCSC staff determined that the lack of access to quality authorizing practices coupled with the level at which funding was allocated to IAS by its authorizer represents a dynamic event outside the school's control since the school has no ability to access funds directly from the state. As this event provides a reasonable and proximate cause for the school's inability to meet SCSC standards, SCSC staff believe the school should have the opportunity to be evaluated under fair and equitable circumstances through a framework with transparent and clearly delineated measures and metrics. Thus, SCSC staff recommends that IAS receive charter contract for a 3-year probationary charter term as a state charter school.

Link to Petition and Related Materials: Click here for information on the International Academy of Smyrna