FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

State Charter School Commission Hires First Executive Director

Dateline: June 5, 2012 (Chicago): The Illinois State Charter School Commission is pleased to announce that it has hired Jeanne L. Nowaczewski, of Chicago, Illinois, as the Commission’s first Executive Director. The State Charter School Commission is a new independent commission established by the Illinois legislature effective November 2011 with the power to approve charter school proposals that are denied by local school boards throughout Illinois.

“There are many good public schools in Illinois,” said Greg Richmond, Chairman of the Commission, “but we still have a long way to go before all of our students are graduating from high school with the skills they need to succeed. New charter schools can help us better educate more students.”

Commissioner Dr. Michael Jacoby, who is also the Executive Director of the Illinois Association of School Business Officials, added, “The Commission is comprised of nine talented and dedicated Illinois citizens who represent a wealth of experiences in public education. We were all impressed by Ms. Nowaczewski’s strong skill set and her commitment to improving public education opportunities for children.”

Nowaczewski, Director of the Chicago Public Schools’ Charter School Recruitment Office during Secretary of Education Arne Duncan’s administration; founding board member of the Young Women’s Leadership Charter School of Chicago, the first single gender charter school created in Chicago; and a former litigation partner at Chicago’s Schiff, Hardin & Waite, brings a veteran’s seasoned understanding of the national charter school landscape to the new Commission.

In addition to processing appeals of charter school denials, the Commission will also serve as authorizer for Prairie Crossing Charter Elementary School in Grayslake, and Southland College Prep Charter High School in Richton Park as of July 1, 2012. “The Commission’s schools will benefit greatly from Jeanne’s hands-on experience starting a charter school, and advising and reviewing so many charter applications in her six years at CPS: she’s tough but fair, and insists on quality,” said Commissioner Jaime Guzman, Chair of the Commission’s Schools Committee, and Chief Advisor to the Board of Trustees, City Colleges of Chicago.

The Commission’s nine members were nominated by Governor Quinn and appointed by the Illinois State Board of Education. In addition to Richmond, Jacoby and Guzman, other members of the Commission include: Glen Barton, former Chairman and CEO of Caterpillar, Peoria; Bill Farmer, Science Teacher and Local Education Association President, Evanston High School, Evanston; Angela Rudolph, Educational Consultant, Chicago; Dr. Paul Swanstrom, retired Superintendent, Joliet Township High Schools, Crete; Patricia Van Pelt-Watkins, Executive Director, TARGET Area Development Corp., Chicago; and Rudy Valdez, General Manager—Asia Programs, Hamilton-Sunstrand Corp., Rockford. The Commission’s offices are located at the Michael A. Bilandic Building, 160 North LaSalle Street, Suite S-601, Chicago, IL 60601, and its website, including postings of upcoming meetings and events is http://www.isbe.net/scsc/default.htm
A charter school is a public school that is funded by tax dollars but is not operated by a local school district. Charter schools have greater levels of flexibility than traditional public schools and greater levels of accountability for student results. Charter schools do not charge tuition, are open to all students in a community and cannot administer admissions tests. Under the Illinois Charter Law, educators, parents, community organizations and others may form a non-profit board to apply to start a charter school. If approved, the non-profit receives a 5-year contract, or “charter,” to operate the school. At the end of the five years, the school’s academic performance is evaluated to determine if the results are strong enough to continue to operate. Charter schools currently serve nearly 50,000 students throughout Illinois in 123 campuses, representing 2.4% of all Illinois public school students and 11% of CPS students. Nationally, 1.8 million students attend approximately 5300 charter schools.

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