



**Department of Education
Charter School Accountability Committee Meeting**

**April 25, 2014
Modification Application Process
Initial Meeting - Minutes**

Gateway Lab School

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. For the purpose of the record, introductions were made:

Voting Committee Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee

- David Blowman, Deputy Secretary, DDOE (Chair to the Committee)
- Tasha Cannon, Deputy Officer Talent Recruitment, Selection and Strategy, Teacher & Leader Effectiveness Unit (TLEU), DDOE
- Rich Heffron, Senior Vice President of Government Affairs, Delaware State Chamber of Commerce
- April McCrae, Education Associate, Science Assessment and STEM, DDOE
- Michelle Whalen, Education Associate, Exceptional Children Resources Workgroup, DDOE
- Kim Wheatley, Director, Financial Reform Resources, DDOE

Ex-officio Members (Non-voting)

- Donna Johnson, Executive Director, Delaware State Board of Education
- Kendall Massett, Executive Director, Delaware Charter Schools Network

Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)

- Catherine Hickey, Deputy Attorney General, DOJ
- Jennifer Carlson, Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Financial Reform Resources, DDOE
- Chantel Janiszewski, Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Jennifer Nagourney, Executive Director, Charter School Office, DDOE

Representatives of the Charter School

- Catherine Dolan, Head of School
- Pamela Draper, Treasurer, Board of Directors

Meeting purpose: To review and discuss the Gateway Lab School application for a major charter modification.

Meeting between the CSAC and Gateway Lab School: To review and discuss Gateway Lab School's application for a major charter modification, to take such further action thereon as

the CSAC deems appropriate including, without limitation, the drafting of a report on the application, to provide the applicant an opportunity for an interview in support of the application, and to give the applicant the opportunity to present additional evidence beyond the data contained in the application, supporting its demonstration of alignment to the approval criteria set forth in Title 14 Del. Code §512.

Meeting between the CSAC and Gateway School: Mr. Blowman introduced each major section of the application, identified below, and invited CSAC voting members to raise concerns and ask clarifying questions directly of the applicant for each of those sections. Various issues were explored, including those listed under applicable section headings. All comments and questions discussed in the meeting are documented in the Initial Report.

Conclusion of the meeting: Mr. Blowman gave the reviewers the opportunity to restate any questions or concerns about any sections of the application that did not meet the criteria for a “Meets Standard” rating and to clarify the additional information requested. The concerns and questions will be detailed in the initial report of the CSAC.

Section A: Core Questions

The CSAC asked the school to explain why they did not request the at-risk designation in the initial charter application. Ms. Draper explained that DOE officials, who are no longer with the DOE, advised them that the initial application would not be approved if it included the at-risk designation.

The CSAC asked the school to explain any differences in the student population since the school launched three years ago. Ms. Draper explained that there are differences between the initial target population and the current population. Ms. Dolan noted that 62% of Gateway’s students have Individual Education Plans (IEPs). An additional 12% of students have 504 plans (over and above the 62% of students with IEPs).

The school was asked to clarify that they were seeking an enrollment preference for students at-risk of academic failure, not an interest preference. The school confirmed that they are only seeking a preference for students at-risk of academic failure.

The school was asked to clarify the school’s Response-to-Intervention (RTI) process. Ms. Dolan explained that the RTI process is a data-driven, integrated and community-based process.

The CSAC determined that there were no questions or concerns about Section A of the application that would prevent the school from meeting the approval criteria.

Section D: Mission (At-Risk Designation) Questions

The CSAC asked the school to explain how social skills and “grit” are evaluated. Ms. Dolan explained that a tremendous amount of professional development time is spent on the “responsive classroom” philosophy. Ms. Dolan credited the “responsive classroom” program methods with the school’s success in mitigating fear and anxiety associated with past academic failure. She also noted that assemblies were added this year to build student identity around several key themes – honorable, loyal and true. At the assemblies students are recognized for demonstrating grit and perseverance. Ms. Draper also noted that the Board of Directors is looking for formal assessments to measure grit and social skills.

The CSAC asked the school to describe their outreach to Gateway parents and community and their feedback regarding the proposed modification. Ms. Dolan explained that she met with parent focus groups and the feedback was positive. The term “at-risk” was initially seen as a stumbling block, but parents appreciated Gateway’s compassionate approach.

The CSAC asked the school to explain the Board’s approval process of the proposed Performance Agreement. Ms. Draper explained that the proposed Performance Agreement will be reviewed at Gateway’s May 20th Board meeting.

The following concerns were noted:

- The applicant is requested to provide a copy of the Board-approved proposed Performance Agreement reflecting all of the proposed modifications. The date the Agreement is entered into should be changed from October 14, 2013, as it was written on the version that was originally submitted, to the May date of the Board of Directors meeting when the Performance Agreement is approved.
- The applicant is requested to provide either: an assurance that the Performance Agreement was presented and voted upon at a public board meeting with the date of that meeting, or a copy of the minutes from the board meeting where the Performance Agreement was voted upon.

Conclusion:

Mr. Blowman gave the reviewers the opportunity to restate any concerns about the application information and to clarify the additional information requested.

Mr. Blowman articulated the next steps in the modification application process as follows:

- The applicant’s first public hearing would be held on May 7, 2014 at 5:30 p.m. in the 2nd Floor Auditorium in the Carvel Building located at 820 French Street, Wilmington, DE.
- The CSAC Initial Report will be issued to the applicant following the end of the first public hearing.

- The applicant will have the opportunity to submit a written response to the CSAC Initial Report. The response is due on May 22, 2014 no later than 11:59 p.m.
- The final meeting of the CSAC will be held on May 27, 2014 at 1:00 p.m.
- The CSAC Final Report will be issued to the applicant on June 4, 2014.
- A final public hearing will be held on June 10, 2014 at 5:00 p.m. in the 2nd Floor Cabinet Room of the Townsend Building in Dover.
- The process would conclude with the State Board of Education meeting on Thursday, June 19, 2014 where the Secretary of the Department of Education, Mark Murphy, will present his decision on the application.

The meeting concluded at 1:40 p.m.