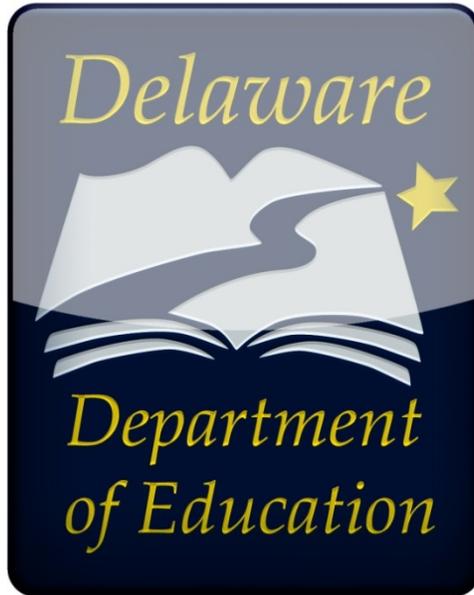


# CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**Gateway Lab School**

**MAJOR MODIFICATION APPLICATION**

**INITIAL REPORT**

CSAC Meeting: April 25, 2014  
Initial Report Published: May 7, 2014

In July 2013, Governor Jack Markell signed House Bill 165 into law, bringing sweeping changes to Delaware's existing charter school laws. This legislation included a number of provisions to strengthen the application process for charter school modifications.

Per 14 Del. C. §511(e), the first Charter School Accountability Committee (CSAC) meeting provided the applicant an opportunity in for an interview in support of the application, and provided the members of the Charter School Accountability Committee and the Delaware Department of Education with an opportunity to assess applicant capacity, allow the applicant to clarify information provided in the application, and gather additional information. The applicant was provided with an Initial Report that detailed areas of follow-up, and/or concerns identified by members of the CSAC during the Initial Meeting. The applicant then submitted a response to the Initial Report, which is considered part of the application.

After reviewing the response to the Initial Report, CSAC holds a Final Meeting to issue a recommendation on whether the application should be approved. This Final Report details CSAC's recommendation and any outstanding concerns about the application.

The following were in attendance at the Initial Meeting of the CSAC on April 25, 2014:

#### **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

### **Section A: Core Questions**

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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**

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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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Cabinet Room of the Townsend Building in Dover.
- The process will 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.