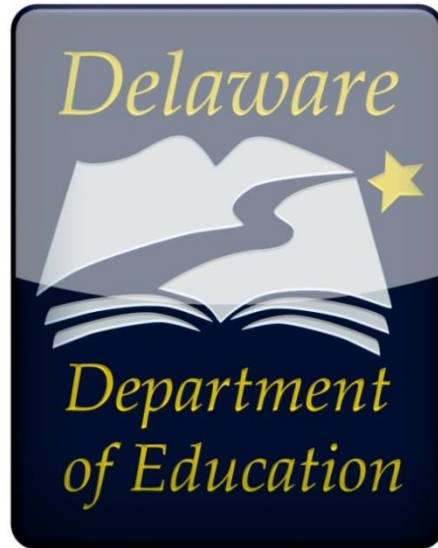


# CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



## Delaware Design-Lab High School

**FORMAL REVIEW  
INITIAL REPORT**

CSAC Initial Meeting: May 13, 2015  
CSAC Initial Report Published: May 18, 2015

The following were in attendance at the Initial Meeting of the CSAC on May 13, 2015:

**Voting Committee Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee**

- David Blowman, Chairperson of the Charter School Accountability Committee and Deputy Secretary of Education, DDOE
- Karen Field Rogers, Associate Secretary for Adult Education and School Supports, DDOE
- April McCrae, Education Associate, Science Assessment and STEM, DDOE
- Mary Ann Mieczkowski, Director, Exceptional Children Resources, DDOE
- Charles Taylor, Community Member and Retired Head of School
- Tasha Cannon, Deputy Officer Talent Recruitment, Selection and Strategy, Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Unit (TLEU), DDOE

**Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)**

- Ilona Kirshon, Deputy Attorney General, Counsel to the Committee
- Jennifer Nagourney, Executive Director, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Financial Reform and Resource Management, DDOE
- John Carwell, Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Michelle Whalen, Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE

**Representatives of Design-Lab Charter School**

- Cristina Alvarez, Ed.D., Chief Executive Officer, Delaware Design-Lab High School
- Dr. Martin Rayala, Ph.D., Chief Academic Officer, Delaware Design-Lab High School
- Karen Thorp, Innovative Schools
- Rebecca Girten, Board Member, Delaware Design-Lab High School

**Additional Attendees Noted**

- Elizabeth Lewis, Office of Management and Budget

## Discussion

Mr. Blowman stated that he was looking forward to an open dialog with the meeting. He stated that the purpose of the meeting was to have a free and open discussion, and not to issue a recommendation.

Mr. Blowman noted that the grounds for the formal review are outlined in a letter to the Delaware Design-Lab High School (“Design-Lab”) Board, dated April 23 2015, which include the following potential violations of the law and charter:

- Financial Viability
- Leadership Capacity
- Ability to Implement the Approved Charter with Fidelity

Mr. Blowman noted that that Design-Lab had submitted a set of documents to the Department of Education in advance of the meeting, which had been added to the record. These documents included a revised budget and organizational chart based on the May 1 enrollment count.

### Financial Viability

Mr. Blowman noted that Design-Lab had not met the requirement that it reach 80% of their total approved enrollment (300 students) by the April 1 deadline. He noted that the low enrollment number raised concerns about the school’s financial viability at that level. He reviewed the history of Design-Lab’s enrolled student data:

Date	# Enrolled Students	Approved Total	% of Approved Total
April 1	137	300	46%
May 1	202	300	67%
Revised Budget Submitted May 5	240	300	80%
May 13	205	300	68%

Mr. Blowman noted that Design-Lab’s enrollment is now closer to the 80% mark, but is currently at approximately 68%. He requested information about recruitment practices. Dr. Alvarez described a number of ongoing efforts, including a dedicated outreach team, billboards in high-traffic areas, radio spots that are updated weekly, family “open house” events on the school campus, student-to-student social marketing, and outreach to local community groups. She also stated that the school continues to receive applications through Data Service Center and she is confident it will reach the 80% mark.

Ms. Field Rogers noted that the submission did not include revenue sheets or a narrative. She further noted that the outcome of the Christina School District's referendum may affect the amounts sent to charters and suggested that the leadership team budget conservatively for any local funds from that district.

Ms. Thorp stated that the changes in enrollment resulted in a number of changes to the budget, including staffing levels and related expenses (such as benefits) and property maintenance costs that were added to the lease. Most of the other costs were fixed costs, and not affected by the change in enrollment. She said that the school had based the cash flow projection on a payment for 202 students at the beginning of the year, with subsequent payments based on a September 30 count of 240 students. Ms. Nagourney noted that, since enrollment can go up or down, and may not reach 240 students by September 30, it would be helpful to see a cash flow projection based on 202 students throughout the year.

Ms. Field Rogers asked if the budget assumed the use of a line of credit. Ms. Thorp responded “absolutely not.”

#### Ability to Implement the Approved Charter with Fidelity

Mr. Blowman said he had questions about whether the approved charter could be implemented with fidelity at a lower enrollment level. He noted that a high school of any size had to provide a full breadth of courses, and asked if that could be done with 202 students. Dr. Rayala said that the new budget included a complete academic program, and the only changes made involved staffing levels in some areas.

Mr. Taylor inquired about contracted student support services, and Ms. Thorp said the school planned to contract for services with counselors. Mr. Taylor asked how many special education students were currently enrolled, and was told there are 32, nine of whom are termed “complex” for the purposes of the state funding formula. Mr. Taylor asked how many special education teachers the school planned to hire. Dr. Alvarez said Design-Lab planned to hire one dual-certified special education teacher who would co-teach with a classroom teacher and manage all compliance issues. Ms. Mieczkowski, Mr. Taylor, and Mr. Blowman expressed concern that the workload might be too much for a single teacher to manage, and asked for additional information about the plan to provide services for special education. Mr. Blowman also noted that Design-Lab’s special education students were generating units that were being used in the budget to serve the overall student population.

Ms. Nagourney asked if the school had a plan in case it could not identify a qualified candidate for this role. Dr. Alvarez noted that Design-Lab had received many applications for staff positions and was confident that it would be able to find the right person. Dr. Alvarez noted that if for some reason the position could not be filled, she would be able to draw on resources and personnel from other schools in the Design-Lab network.

Ms. McCrae noted that the budget for professional development seemed low for the training that would be required for project-based learning, and requested additional information about the programs planned.

Mr. Taylor asked for a plan for how Design-Lab would meet the needs of intensive and complex students under Delaware law, and noted that these plans are very important for the budget.

### Leadership Capacity

Mr. Blowman asked Dr. Alvarez for clarification on her capacity with respect to her role at Design-Lab and her role with another school in Philadelphia. Dr. Alvarez stated that she had disclosed to the Design-Lab board that she has a contract with a charter school in Philadelphia, and would be overseeing both schools in a function similar to that of an Executive Director. She stated that she would be travelling between the two schools. Design-Lab is in the final stages of hiring a school leader, who would oversee all activities. Dr. Rayala noted that he would also work full-time at the Design-Lab Delaware location. Mr. Taylor requested information about the hiring process and the selected candidate once that process was completed.

### **Conclusion**

Mr. Blowman asked the CSAC whether there were any additional questions. No questions were raised.

Mr. Blowman noted that Design-Lab was not in compliance with the enrollment requirement April 1 and has not yet met it, and financial viability concerns remain. He stated that based on the discussion at this meeting, he was not aware of any specific concerns about leadership capacity, but there was a need for additional information:

- Budget narrative
- Budget revenue sheets
- Updated cash flow projection based on September 30 enrollment at 202 students
- Details about the education plan as it relates to:
  - Special education staffing and
  - Services to the general school population
- Narrative describing the professional development program
- Narrative describing the school leader hiring process & qualifications
- Narrative describing the recruitment process for the dual-certified special education teacher.

### **Next Steps:**

- The first public hearing is scheduled for May 18th at 5:00 p.m. in the 2nd Floor Auditorium in the Carvel Building in Wilmington.
- The charter will have the opportunity to submit a written response to the CSAC Initial Report; the response is due by close of business on June 1.

- The final meeting of the CSAC will be held on June 3, at 1:00 p.m., in the 2nd Floor Cabinet Room in the Townsend building.
- If, after the final meeting, CSAC recommends probation or revocation of the charter, a second public hearing will be held on June 9th at 5:00 p.m. in the 2nd Floor Auditorium in the Carvel Building in Wilmington.
- The public comment period is open, and will close on June 12th.
- The Secretary of Education will announce his decision at the June 18th State Board of Education meeting.