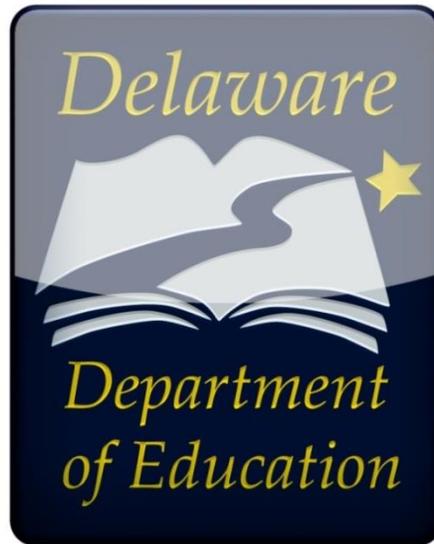


CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Freire Charter School

**MAJOR MODIFICATION APPLICATION
INITIAL REPORT**

CSAC Initial Meeting: January 28, 2015
CSAC Initial Report Published: February 2, 2015

The following were in attendance at the Initial Meeting of the CSAC on January 28, 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, Financial Reform and Resource Management, DDOE
- April McCrae, Education Associate, Science Assessment and STEM, DDOE
- Barbara Mazza, Education Associate, Exceptional Children Resources, DDOE
- Tasha Cannon, Deputy Officer Talent Recruitment, Selection and Strategy, Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Unit (TLEU), DDOE
- Charles Taylor, Community Member and Former Charter School Leader

Ex-Officio Members (Non-voting)

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

Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)

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

Representatives of Freire Charter School

- William Porter, Head of School
- Kelly Davenport, CEO, Build the Future
- Tammy Khieu, Head of Administration
- Scott Johnson, McConnell Johnson Real Estate

Additional Attendees Noted

- Kathleen Geiszler, Deputy Attorney General

Discussion

The following issues were discussed:

- The summary of the requests and their bases – The school explained that the requests are to remove its specific interest preference for students signing a pledge and to exclude student enrollment for 10th grade in Year 1 (2015-16), instead beginning with 8th and 9th grades. The school explained that the special interest preference is not in alignment with federal policy and would render the school ineligible for federal start-up funding. In addition, the school has received only nine 10th grade applications.
- The specifics of the federal guidance – The school stated that federal guidance deemed the specific interest pledge to constitute a weighted lottery. The CSAC requested a copy of the federal guidance that the school received.
- The number of applications received to date – The school responded that 125 applications have been received, with approximately 70% being for 9th grade.
- Whether 8th grade recruitment has been as much of a challenge as 10th grade – The school responded that students entering 8th grade are more willing to leave what they perceive to be a less safe environment.
- The effective date of the modification, if approved – The school explained that the specific interest preference was not used for the school's incoming class.
- The absence of funding for enrollment recruitment in the school's budget – The school responded that recruitment costs are being covered by grants from the Longwood Foundation and the federal Charter School Program (CSP) funds, which is \$189,000 for Year 1. Ms. Khieu noted that those funds are reflected in the "Other Funds" budget at line 53. The CSAC noted that the budget notes do not reflect that and asked that the school provide clarification in its response to the CSAC Initial Report.
- Changes to the budget based on the student enrollment decrease of approximately one-third – The school responded that FTE's were scaled back, such that the school will have 18 FTE's in Year 1 and 49 FTE's at full enrollment in Year 5. The school stated that administrative positions were scaled back, but the teacher-to-student ratio would remain the same.
- Substitute, custodial, cafeteria, and nursing – The school responded that custodial services will not be in-house, but will be contracted out (line 37 of the state and local funds). Substitutes are also contracted out (line 31 of the state and local). Cafeteria expenses are reflected on the "Other Funds" budget worksheet page (lines 5 and 22), and the school anticipates funds from the federal food program. Any upfront costs are funded by grants and donations, including the Longwood Foundation and the federal CSP. The CSAC requested a breakdown of the allocation for each grant. Finally, nursing services will be contracted and a full-time nurse will not be needed until Year 4. It was clarified that, in Delaware, every school must have a full-time nurse on site, even without full funding.

- Changes to the anticipated number of staff – The school responded that it did not intend to reduce the FTE and would compare its original application to its new projections.
- After-school programming in Year 1 – The school responded that, absent additional funding on the side, the school would most likely not offer after-school programming. However, teachers will hold office hours for working with students. Athletics will be based upon student interest.
- Funding for cafeteria services – The school responded that the school anticipates raising \$300,000 per year as it has at other campuses. The school noted that the Longwood Foundation grant was a matching grant, such that it would not be released until the school raised \$300,000, which it was able to do.
- Deferred expenses – The school responded that a lot of the building expenses are being defrayed.
- The status of the budget with respect to fundraising and whether the commitment letter for \$1.1 million is included – The school responded that the commitment letter was for an \$800,000 loan. The school has asked for a \$1.1 million loan and will provide the letter once received.
- Funding for special education – The school responded that it used state-provided spreadsheets for its projections and also anticipates IDEA funding.
- Changes to eRate Program reflected in the budget – The school responded that it has a meeting on February 2, 2015 with the Delaware Department of Technology and Information and hopes to learn more then.
- Costs associated with the use of ten-passenger vans – The school responded that, as of right now, the school does not anticipate needing the vans.
- Special transportation and other services for students with IEPs – The school responded that it will cross that bridge once a student has been identified, but will comply with all special education laws.
- Discussions with DART – The school responded that it has been working with David Dooley and that DART continues to express its support.
- Capacity to implement and monitor special education services – The school responded that its Director of Student Services will ensure that the school is in compliance with IDEA.
- School Psychologist and other specialists' knowledge of Delaware law – The school responded that it has employed a full-time School Psychologist and has also contracted for the service in the past.
- The intention to use two special education teachers to serve an anticipated 33 special education students despite funding for almost four teacher positions – The school responded that its Director of Student Services will carry a special education caseload.
- New projections on which districts students would come from – The school responded that its new projections are based on actual applications received to date.
- Information being communicated to the local neighbourhood association regarding ten-passenger vans not reflected in the budget – The school responded that the communication with the neighbourhood association regarding ten-passenger vans is a

contingency that the school does not anticipate. The school responded that it has met with the neighbourhood association's leaders three times, and two other times along with the City of Wilmington.

- Freire's pending application to operate a new charter school in Philadelphia and how it will impact capacity – The school responded that it will learn in the next 60 days whether that application will be approved and that, if approved, will lead to more revenue and increased capacity.
- Feedback regarding the school's low application numbers – The school responded that it is an uphill battle for a college preparatory school to attract students that wish to attend technical schools with shops. The school anticipates more applications once students learn that they have not been accepted elsewhere.
- Feedback from parents regarding the transportation plan – The school responded that just one mother has stated that she is not comfortable with DART as an option.

Conclusion

Mr. Blowman asked voting members of CSAC whether there was any additional information that it required to inform its decision-making.

The following information was requested:

- A copy of federal guidance that the school received regarding enrollment preferences;
- A copy of the school's brochure (which can be provided in hard copy);
- Clarification regarding recruitment funding;
- Clarification regarding donations and grants;
- Clarification regarding the specific allocation of the Longwood Foundation and federal CSP grants;
- Clarification regarding budgeting for nursing and custodial services;
- An updated budget sheet for federal and/or private grant money and updated narrative to be consistent with budget sheets
- Copy of loan commitment letter as mentioned in budget narrative
- An updated budget with respect to FTEs;
- Clarification regarding access to the cafeteria;
- Clarification regarding the current status of the school's transportation plan;
- The most current transportation plan provided to the neighbourhood association and the implications on the budget for this plan;
- A set of budget sheets that include an alternate transportation plan to include the use of school buses; and
- Clarification regarding how the changes to the eRate Program impact the school's budget. Remove eRate consultant from the budget document.

Next Steps:

- The CSAC will provide the school with an Initial Report no later than February 2, 2015.

- An initial public hearing will be held on February 3, 2015, in the 2nd floor Cabinet Room of the Townsend Building at 401 Federal Street, Dover DE.
- The applicant's written response to the CSAC Initial Report is due on or before February 18, 2015.
- The final meeting of the CSAC will be held on February 24, 2015, in the 2nd floor Cabinet Room of the Townsend Building at 401 Federal Street, Dover DE.
- CSAC's Final Report will be issued no later than February 27, 2015.
- A second and final public hearing will be held on March 9, 2015, in the 2nd floor auditorium of the Carvel State Office Building, located at 820 North French Street, Wilmington DE.
- The public comment period ends on March 13, 2015.
- The State Board of Education will hold a meeting on March 19, 2015, in the 2nd floor Cabinet Room of the Townsend Building at 401 Federal Street, Dover DE, at which time the Secretary will announce his decision on the application and, if required, the State Board will act on that decision.