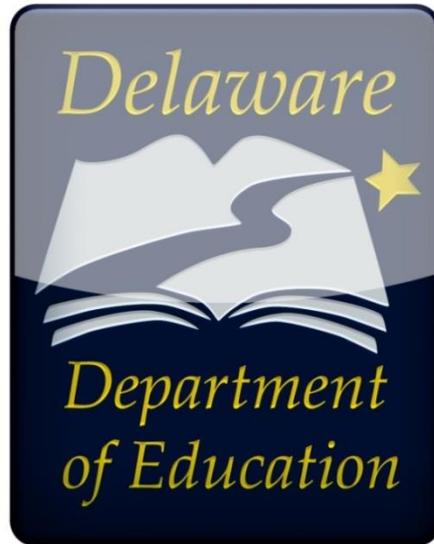


CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Freire Charter School Wilmington

**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 Freire Charter School Wilmington

- Kelly Davenport, CEO, Build the Future Education Collaborative, attending and participating by telephone
- Tammy Khieu, Head of Administration, Build the Future Education Collaborative, attending and participating by telephone
- Paul Ramirez, Head of Academics, Freire Charter School Wilmington
- Felicia Wenell, Head of Academic Supports, Freire Charter School Wilmington

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 Freire Charter School Wilmington (“Freire”) 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 Freire 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 Freire had not met the requirement that it reach 80% of its total approved enrollment (224 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 Freire’s enrolled student data:

Date	# Enrolled Students	Approved Total	% of Approved Total
April 1	78	224	46%
May 1	160	224	71%
Revised Budget Submitted May 5	160	224	71%
May 13	208	224	93%

He noted that Freire’s enrollment is now in compliance, but noted that if students were to withdraw, that would have a negative impact upon viability.

Dr. Davenport and Mr. Ramirez spoke about ongoing recruitment activities and plans to continue enrolling students up to the approved total and to establish a waiting list. Dr. Davenport spoke about the practice of enrolling students at an open house, when students have an opportunity to meet the staff, tour the facility, and learn about the programs, with the

hope that students would buy into the mission and have an incentive to stay enrolled. Mr. Ramirez noted that Freire has received over 100 applications from students who have not yet enrolled, indicating additional interest. Dr. Davenport stated that Freire planned to continue conversations with parents about enrollment throughout the summer and over the next year.

Ms. Field Rogers asked if many of the enrolled students were coming from the Christina School District. Ms. Wenell stated that approximately 54% of students currently enrolled came from Christina. Ms. Field Rogers noted that the outcome of Christina's referendum may affect the amounts sent to charters and suggested that Freire budget conservatively for any local funds from that district.

Ms. Field Rogers noted that the budget included a loan for school renovations and financing from its their landlord (McConnell Johnson), and asked if Freire also planned to use a line of credit. Dr. Davenport stated that Freire had secured a line of working capital from Barclay's for \$800,000, which can be tapped into during the first year if needed. Ms. Khieu stated that Freire had done careful cash flow projection on a lower enrollment number, and noted that if the school received funds from the state at the expected dates, then the line of working capital would not need to be used. With a higher enrollment now, Freire does not foresee a need to use the line of working capital.

Ability to Implement the Approved Charter with Fidelity

Mr. Blowman asked if there were any foreseeable problems with implementing the approved charter with fidelity at 208 students. Dr. Davenport stated that she did not foresee any problems, even though the school would need to operate in a way that was "leaner and meaner."

Mr. Taylor inquired about the number of special education students currently enrolled, the breakdown between basic, intensive, and complex designations, and whether there were sufficient funds in the revised budget to serve them as needed (Note - Numbers not included in this report pursuant to Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act requirements). Ms. Khieu stated that Freire had budgeted extra funds to serve those students and was confident that it could meet those needs. Dr. Davenport stated that the Freire team was looking into all possible opportunities to serve those students, and would be drawing ideas from their experience operating in Pennsylvania. Mr. Blowman noted that Delaware laws about serving special education students are very different and Dr. Davenport noted Freire's intent to implement plans that meet Delaware's legal requirements.

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

Ms. Mieczkowski asked for information regarding how the school would serve special education students, including the staffing levels, plans for providing special education services, plans for providing differentiated instruction, and also meeting all compliance requirements.

Leadership Capacity

Mr. Blowman noted that Bill Porter would no longer be the school leader and that those responsibilities would now be fulfilled by Mr. Ramirez and Ms. Wennell. He asked how that change would affect school operations. Dr. Davenport spoke about each person's experience working in Freire's Philadelphia schools. Dr. Davenport noted that they would lead operations at the school campus and she would be supporting them as a school leader from "behind the scenes."

Ms. Field Rogers noted that Mr. Porter had received a lot of training and asked how the new school leaders would get the training they needed to open and operate the school. Dr. Davenport noted that she had full confidence in Melanie Reiser, the Director of Operations and Compliance and her "right hand" at Build the Future Education Collaborative. Melanie had attended many of the trainings as well and had been working on the opening process. Dr. Davenport noted that Mr. Porter had not left the Freire organization and would also be available to help and answer questions as needed.

Conclusion

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

Mr. Blowman noted that Freire was not in compliance with the April 1 enrollment requirement but has since achieved at least 80% enrollment. Due to the increased student enrollment, he was not aware of any specific financial viability concerns. He noted that there was a need for additional information about how the school will serve special education students based on the projected enrollment of that population.

As discussed above, the following specific information was requested by the CSAC:

- A plan detailing how the Freire would meet the needs of the intense and complex special education students; and
- A plan detailing how Freire would serve all special education students, including the staffing levels, plans for providing special education services, plans for providing differentiated instruction, and also meeting all compliance requirements.

Next Steps:

- The first public hearing on this application 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; that 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 of at 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.