



**Department of Education
Charter School Accountability Meeting**

**March 11, 2013
Modification Application
Initial/Preliminary Meeting**

Academy of Dover Charter School

Ms. McLaughlin called the meeting to order. For the purpose of the record introductions were made:

Attending Committee Members

Mary Kate McLaughlin, Chairperson, Chief of Staff
Deb Hansen, Education Associate, Visual and Performing Arts, Charter Curriculum Review
April McCrae, Education Associate, Education Associate, Science Assessment and STEM
Paul Harrell, Director, Public & Private Partnerships
Karen Field Rogers, Financial Reform & Resource Management

Support to the Committee

John Carwell, Director, Charter School Office
Catherine Hickey, Deputy Attorney General, Counsel to the Committee
Patricia Bigelow, Education Associate, Charter School Office
Chantel Janiszewski, Education Associate, Charter School Office

Other

Donna R. Johnson, Executive Director, State Board of Education
Kendall Massett, Executive Director, Delaware Charter School Network

Representatives of Charter School

Noel Rodriguez, Principal
Cheri Marshall, Curriculum Director
Kimeu Boynton, Board President

Ms. McLaughlin stated the purpose of today's meeting is for the Accountability Committee to review the modification application submitted by Academy of Dover which has proposed to add grade 5 to its current K-4 grade configuration. She said the Committee will make a preliminary recommendation to approve or deny the application and the school will have an opportunity to respond to the Committee's preliminary report.

Ms. McLaughlin stated that the Committee will streamline the process of the Initial and Preliminary meetings for today. She said during the first part of this meeting the Committee will ask representatives of the school clarifying questions; and the second part of the meeting, the Committee will discuss each of the relevant approval criteria.

Ms. McLaughlin stated that at the end of the meeting, John Carwell will provide the next steps. She named the following criterion that will be discussed after the question and answer review, during that time she requested that the applicant refrain from answering or participating in the discussion with the Committee.

- *Criterion 3 – Mission, Goals and Educational Objectives*
- *Criterion 4 – Goals for Student Performance*

- *Criterion 5 – Evaluating Student Performance*
- *Criterion 6 – Educational Program*
- *Criterion 7 – Student with Special Needs*
- *Criterion 8 – Economical Viability*

Criterion 6 – Educational Program. Ms. McLaughlin said in the application under Curriculum it seems that it was incomplete specifically in Visual Arts, Health and Physical Education. She said it shows that the school is a member of the Science and Social Studies Coalitions recommended curriculum; however the school didn't provide any evidence of how they intended to modify or tailor their units.

Ms. McLaughlin asked how the school intends to supplement the recommended curriculum under social studies.

Ms. Hansen said Mr. Rodriguez just handed her a notebook with their curriculum to review but she would need time to review it.

Ms. McLaughlin stated that she has a few questions that are pertaining to the curriculum and asked the Committee should she continue with the questions to confirm even though they might be in the curriculum notebook that was just submitted.

Ms. Hansen said that she thought it was important for the record to continue with the questions.

Ms. McLaughlin asked the school who is responsible for ensuring that the teachers attend the Coalitions trainings.

Mr. Rodriguez said the Curriculum Director is responsible for setting up the training and to make sure that the teachers are trained. He said when they have a change in personnel they make sure that the qualified teachers from other classrooms that are trained to do the instruction until the teachers get trained.

Ms. McLaughlin asked if there was a professional development plan available.

Mr. Rodriguez said yes and it varies depending upon funding. He said the school's primary focus in the past year has been mathematics. He said when the school did the charter renewal that was the weakest area that they needed to focus on including special education.

Criterion 8 – Economical Viability. Ms. McLaughlin said the student retention that was proposed for the fifth grade class was significantly smaller than the previous grades. She said the enrollment projection showed that half of the current fourth grade class will be leaving. She asked how would the school account for what appears to be a low retention rate for fourth grade and other grades; and if the bases are growth how do you account for the retention issues that the Committee see in the application.

Mr. Rodriguez said he didn't understand where the retention issue is coming from by the question. He said the school is losing a lot of fourth graders because of two changes the parents do not want to subject their children to moving them into the fifth grade to a middle school like Caesar Rodney that the parents would need to change schools at the end of the sixth grade. He said normally the students have one or more siblings already in the school and this is based on the transition of the fourth grade the school's population. He said letters were sent out to the fourth grade parents and 90% of the responses

were that if the grades were approved they would send their children back. He said if that becomes the norm it would stabilize, less kindergarten, and their numbers would remain the same. He said this is why it wouldn't affect them financially. He said two years ago when they had a modification they changed their enrollment number to 300 and they didn't take any special education students into account. He said that was the number of students they would need to maintain the staff they have. He said basically, they wouldn't be able to maintain more students for that reason. He said the fourth graders and the sibling in the lower grades.

Mr. Carwell said as a follow up question in the modification application the grade level enrollment goes from Kindergarten 68, first grade 66, second grade 53, third grade 53, fourth grade 53 and fifth grade 20. He said 90% of the 40 would be closer to 30 or maybe 35% how did you come up with 90% if the fourth grade only has 40 students and there are only 20 in the fifth grade.

Mr. Rodriguez said at the time he submitted the modification application he hadn't received the results back from the parents. He said their target number is 20 and that covers the financial component. He said because it is new it will take time for the community to get used to having a fifth grade, but right now the numbers look good and enough to generate a unit plus.

Ms. Johnson asked coming from Caesar Rodney and Capital School Districts what was his percentage of enrollment right now.

Mr. Rodriguez said Capital School District is about 85%.

Ms. Johnson said 85% of your students have a K-4 configuration that is in their feeder pattern school and then transfer into your fifth grade only to do a sixth grade at another school. She said so 15% of your students come from a K-5 environment.

Mr. Rodriguez said the current feelings of the families and the community are they are not keen in transitioning their children to Capital School District. He said so if they could buy off another year to send their children to high schools that would give them more time to do so. He said a lot of the feedback from the parents are they are content to have another year in the charter school. He said it is one of those situations that once you get there you will deal with it and it would give them more time to get into Providence Creek or another school.

Ms. Johnson said you mentioned that you would be reducing the size of your kindergarten in order to have a fifth grade. She asked would that be beneficial to the overall growth of the school.

Mr. Rodriguez said the initial number of 300 is their target number. He said the numbers change from different grade levels each year. He said right now if this application is approved, those were the numbers they are looking at. He said they are not going to discourage enrollment to the kindergarten and he's hoping that they get to the point that when fifth grade is added then he would ask for a waiver for that variance of 15%. He said they needed a place to start with in focusing on that 300 which is their target number. He said they do have a plan a, b, and c, if they do go over that number of what their focus is. He said it is never fruitful to discourage kindergarten and he doesn't think in the future that it would happen because they would start leveling out the grade level.

Ms. Johnson asked if the size of their building has the capacity to hold a fifth grade that would be similar in size as K-4 that he currently have.

Mr. Rodriguez said it would be identical as the other classrooms are set up.

Ms. Johnson asked if he had the ability in the building to expand through a fifth grade without reducing the size of the other grades.

Mr. Rodriguez said of course.

Mr. Harrell said he needed to understand the enrollment numbers a little better. He said as he is looking at these numbers are the numbers projected or actual.

Mr. Rodriguez said based on current numbers. He said each year the numbers will move and what they are doing is balancing them to make sure they do not exceed 300.

Mr. Harrell said let's get back to the sixth grade in looking at the capacity level. He asked if the kindergarten number is usually large like it is.

Mr. Rodriguez said no the number usually average around 75.

Mr. Harrell said why that number wouldn't stay up so that the other grades would expand. He said if you amend your charter for a fifth grade you would think those numbers would expand in all grades.

Mr. Rodriguez said then those numbers would make them go into a lottery. He said they do have a plan if their school does have to go into a lottery.

Mr. Harrell said if it is approved then your demand would only be 300 students.

Mr. Rodriguez said yes and then they would have to go into a lottery situation.

Ms. Johnson asked why you wouldn't ask to increase your enrollment then. She said your enrollment is approved for 300 and as you are expanding this would attract more parents and solve the problem of the parents' concerns in transitioning their children to another school for one grade level year after year. She said it would seem that your enrollment would expand and not diminish. She asked why he wouldn't include in the modification a request to expand your charter enrollment of 300.

Mr. Rodriguez said three reasons; 1) they just had the enrollment numbers reduced to 300 two years ago; 2) he is not sure if they could accommodate any more than 350 students comfortable in the building so that it would be equitable in every classroom; 3) they need to see how it will work out.

Mr. Carwell said so there is a possibility that after you see how it will work that you will come back for another modification to increase your enrollment.

Mr. Rodriguez said yes if it blossom and give them an opportunity for financial growth, and then it will give them the ability to expand. He said they are treading lightly without overstepping their boundaries.

Ms. McLaughlin said she had one more question about the Budget worksheet that was not included. She mentioned that Karen Field Rogers will probably follow up on this as well. She said the new charter school estimated state and local fund calculation spreadsheets was included but the budget worksheet

was not. She asked have they completed the worksheets and specifically they are looking for the revenue expenses.

Mr. Rodriguez said no because he asked for technical assistance and they were not able and he forward an email to Mr. Carwell for assistance and no one got back to him.

Ms. McLaughlin asked if that was before Brook came. Mr. Carwell said yes.

Mr. Rodriguez said overall when you look at the financial component nothing changed because the total number isn't changing, the expenses will not change as much. He said it is only a matter of providing a key expenditure of the additional unit.

Ms. McLaughlin said for the completion of the application they would need the financial component and they will provide him with the technical assistance.

Ms. McLaughlin said that was the last of her questions/comments and asked the committee if they had anything else that they wanted to raise.

Mr. Carwell said he had a follow up question in terms of the enrollment. He asked does they see the enrollment over the next four years, increasing slightly.

Mr. Rodriguez said absolutely; based on the previous five years, exception of one year, they have consistently increased. He said the time of decrease was when there were economy changes and that reflects on the community. He said how the school is demographic, most of the students come from urban area and when the economics get tough in Delaware they tend to hit the urban areas where public assistance is easier to maneuver. He said normally when they leave they take two or three students with them. He said it is not like other families that have one or two students; they mostly have two to three. He said overall their enrollment has been consistently increasing.

Ms. Janiszewski said she had a question based on a statement made in the application "that not having a fifth grade has hampered your students' progress in middle school". She asked what was his evidence that showed how it hampered their progress.

Mr. Rodriguez said feedback from the families when the students leave the fourth grade. He said they have established a method of learning and the parents are very displeased in what they have to commit their children too and they are not happy with the progress of the feeder schools. He said the feedback is that their children were learning at a better and higher pace at their school. He said this is why the parents wish the students were with them longer to be prepared to go into a middle school environment.

Ms. McLaughlin said that was the last of her questions/comments and asked the committee if they had anything else that they wanted to raise. She said seeing none, they will be moving into the 2nd half of the meeting which is the preliminary meeting which gives the Committee an opportunity to discuss the application and ask if the school would refrain from speaking as they did in the first half, but if there is something that the school could clarify real quick she would ask for them to jump in.

Criterion 3 – Mission, Goals and Educational Objectives. Mr. Carwell said the school's mission statement is well articulated, convincing and coherent. He said in addition, the mission reflects a strong

commitment to high expectations and clearly serves the students of the school in measurable ways. He said however, the modification application did not include clearly defined and measurable goals and objectives for grade five that align to the school's mission.

Mr. Rodriguez said he does not understand.

Mr. Carwell said mission specific goals; they do have their curriculum in terms of aspirations for what they want to see in terms of outcomes for grade five.

Mr. Rodriguez said he now understands what he meant.

Mr. Carwell's recommendation is this criterion is not met.

Mr. Harrell asked based on the outcome. Mr. Carwell said based on the lack of outcome.

Criterion 4 – Goals for Student Performance. Ms. McCrae said the student performance was not included in the 5th grade. She said in the application there were no goals set for performance by grades and students. She said the school did not address any aspects of section four of the modification application. Since no information was presented in this section, it is considered "not met."

Mr. Rodriguez said as a charter school their goals for student performance is dictated to them. He said he does not understand that he has to change it. He said the school was just renewed last year and they gave their goals. He asked did he have to regurgitate what was in their charter renewal.

Mr. Carwell said for grade five they would need to see some target goals set for their unique student populations would be very helpful. He said if you have certain outcomes for your grade four that you would show growth.

Mr. Rodriguez said so it would be based on grade four since he doesn't have a grade five and it hasn't been one since he's been there.

Ms. McLaughlin said the information would be laid out in the preliminary report.

Criterion 5 – Evaluating Student Performance. Ms. McCrae said the school did not address any aspects of section five of the modification application. Since no information was presented in this section, it is considered "not met."

Mr. Carwell said to give further clarification on this obviously the charter performance framework would be the bases for the review of your school's performance. He said for an example if your school does not meet or exceed any one of the measures on the performance framework. He said as a Board, he is certain that they would want to know what the progress is needed to hit those particular benchmarks; and what is the plan to get there is. He said as the Board evaluates the school's performance they would want to know what the fifth grades, as well as all of the other grades approved; how they are evaluating his performance and the school's performance as a whole.

Mr. Rodriguez said he understands they would be projected because they currently do make it under the framework their goals, so it would be an extension of that. He said he now understands how to formulate it.

Criterion 6 – Educational Program. Ms. Hansen said the curriculum that was received by the school seemed good. She said in Mathematics the school has prioritized the amount of time spent on certain domains, cluster, and standards as set forth by the Common Core State Standards. She said the majority of the instructional time is spent in the number and fraction concepts. She said essential questions are included and are appropriate for the content being taught. She mentioned English Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies had additional comments which will be listed in the preliminary report. She also mentioned that Health and Physical Education, World Languages, Visual & Performing Arts there were no documentation was submitted. She said there was a comment provided by the Reviewers from the Delaware Center for Educational Technology (DCET) that reviewed the technology section that the school has been non-compliant with Federal eRATE requirements: Internet Safety Policy and internet Safety Curriculum for over a year.

Ms. Hansen’s recommendation is that this criterion is not met.

Mr. Rodriguez asked who he could contact in regards to eRATE.

Ms. Hansen said Wendy Modzelewski and she would be glad to give him assistance.

Criterion 7 – Special Needs. Mr. Carwell said this criterion was reviewed by Mary Ann Mieczkowski and it was considered met.

Criterion 8 – Economical Viability. Ms. Field Rogers said since they didn’t have any sheets provided by the revenue, they could not provide an evaluation of this criterion.

Ms. Field Rogers’ recommendation is that this criterion is not met.

Ms. McLaughlin asked if there were any more discussions on the floor before she made her recommendations.

Ms. McLaughlin said for purposes of the Preliminary Report her recommendation to the Committee is that the charter modification application for Academy of Dover Charter School be considered *Not Approved*. A vote was taken. All ayes; none opposed or abstained.

Ms. McLaughlin asked Mr. Carwell to share next steps. Mr. Carwell provided the next steps in the modification application process.

- Final Meeting – TBD
- Public Hearing – TBD

Meeting adjourned.