

School Name: Las Américas ASPIRA Academy

Date of Submission: September 10, 2015

Minor Modification

Section A Core Questions

1. What modifications does the school's Board of Directors want to make to the term(s) of the charter? Identify the page number(s) on which the term(s) is/are stated in the currently approved charter. If the term(s) of the charter the school wants to modify is/are conditions placed on the charter by the Secretary of Education and members of the State Board of Education, state the condition(s) and the date(s) on which the condition(s) was/were placed on the school's charter.

Our charter school's Board of Directors wish to modify portions of the educator evaluation process. Specifically, we wish to modify our original charter application submitted on December 31, 2008 as it pertains to the use of the Delaware Performance Appraisal System (DPAS II). The Academic Excellence Subcommittee of the ADCO Board has reviewed the new Educator Effectiveness Framework approved by DDOE and supports its implementation.

2. What is the effective date of this modification?

The effective date for this modification is September 18, 2015.

3. The authorizer will review your most recent Performance Review Reports as part of your application. Discuss the school's academic performance, compliance with the terms of its charter, and financial viability as measured by the Performance Framework.

Narrative from the LAAA Charter Renewal Application (December 2014)

Academic

During the first three years, LAAA made significant gains in our academic achievement results. Our overall rating improved from Does Not Meet Standard in Year 1 to Meets Standard in Year 2 and Year 3. LAAA accomplished consistent growth in ELA with scores exceeding State average in all grade levels. The biggest opportunity

for improvement exists with Math scores. In response to this need, we are supplementing our math program with targeted instruction for students performing below grade level. The Delaware Academic Performance Framework reveals the following achievements:

Achievements

- We exceeded the state average in all grades for Reading.
 - 88% vs 71% (Class of 2019)
 - 78% vs 73% (Class of 2020)
 - 84% vs 76% (Class of 2021)
 - 78% vs 73% (Class of 2022)
 - 73% vs 70% (Class of 2023)
- The Reading proficiency for the Class of 2020 improved from 62% in Year 1 to 78% in Year 3.
- The Reading proficiency for the Class of 2021 improved from 65% in Year 1 to 84% in Year 3.
- The Reading proficiency for the Class of 2022 improved from 65% in Year 1 to 78% in Year 3.
- We exceeded the state average in three out of five grades for Math.
 - 72% vs 66% (Class of 2019)
 - 74% vs 71% (Class of 2021)
 - 78% vs 75% (Class of 2022)

The mission of *Las Américas ASPIRA Academy* is to provide a world-class education that prepares students through a dual language project-based learning curriculum, to become healthy productive community members and leaders, with an **expectation** that **every** child, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic level, is college bound.

We are accomplishing this mission through the full implementation of a dual language, project-based learning curriculum. Dual language instruction is being delivered through an immersion model, which was introduced in K-1st grades in Year 1. The immersion program continues to grow each year as students are promoted to the next grade. Grades K-4th are currently included in the immersion program with full school-wide implementation to be completed in the 2018-2019 school year. Our curriculum also includes character education to address the needs of the whole child. Character traits are highlighted every day by various methods such as morning announcements, morning homeroom meetings, lesson modules and recognition programs. In the middle school (grades 6-8), we have also implemented Character Growth measurements to provide students with feedback on their character strengths and areas for improvement. Based on the Delaware Academic Performance Framework, LAAA is meeting its mission relative to student achievement and growth for both general and subgroup student populations. Its overall rating is "Meets Standard".

Organizational

The school achieved an overall rating of “Meets Standards. Out of 13 measures that make up the overall rating, the school received 12 ratings of “Meets” and one rating of “Does not Meets Standard,” specifically for measure 4c., staff credentialing requirements. Significant progress was made last year, as the Highly Qualified Rate (HQT) increased from 77% in FY13 to 93.6% in FY14. We fully expect to achieve a 100% HQT rate this year. Las Américas ASPIRA Academy has had compliance visits from DDOE which showed the school has been compliant with all components of the DPAS II evaluation system, Title I programs, IDEA and the National School Lunch program. Our school website is in compliance as well, which is publicized in the Charter School Office’s monthly monitoring reports. The school also meets all State Department of Health guidelines, which is evident by passing our annual health inspections (1/30/13 and 1/14/14), along with meeting the regulations set forth in the Delaware Food Code.

Additionally, evidence of the school’s compliance with operational expectations can be found in compliance monitoring reports issued by DDOE over the last three years, which is the duration of our school’s existence. The most recent reports (2013) state that Las Américas ASPIRA Academy is in compliance with all monitored regulations, including but not limited to: McKinney-Vento Homeless Act, Child Abuse Reporting Training, immunization audit and policy regarding the release of students to persons other than parent/guardian.

Financial

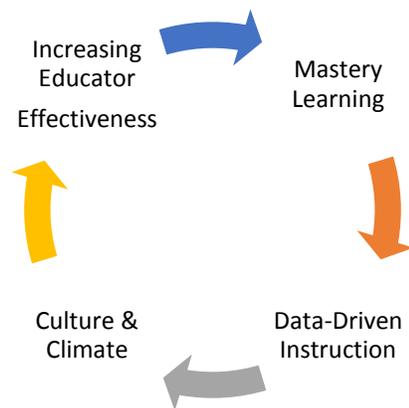
Las Américas ASPIRA Academy has achieved a MEETS rating per the Performance Framework for the past three years (FY12-14). We ended with a surplus for the third straight year. Our overall performance was solid, thus represented by our cash carryover of \$502,748; however, we were forced to use operational funds to finance a portion of the Phase II construction (13 classrooms) and purchase of new classroom furniture. This plan was noted in last year’s Annual Report and the FY14 preliminary and final operating budgets. Results show a \$58,000 reduction of our cash surplus from FY13 to FY14; however, if not for funding a portion of the Phase II construction project, our surplus would have increased for the 3rd straight year. That said, by adding back the \$225,732 FY14 construction and \$148,000 FY14 furniture (capital) expenditures into the school’s operating funds, our surplus for the year would have grown to \$876,000, thus a net increase of \$315,000 from FY13. The school, though only in its 4th year of operation, has shown the ability to favorably manage its finances while completing a school start-up and its second phase of construction. For the past two years, and this year again, we will be at enrollment capacity (105%) with a current enrollment of 541 K- 8th grade students. Our significant waiting list of students gives us the ability to manage our enrollment to ensure we reach capacity (as shown the last three years), thus ensuring our funding is at a maximum level each year.

4. Describe the rationale for the request(s). Discuss any relevant research base or evidence that supports this type of request. (Attachments may be provided)

According to Delaware Code, charter schools have the potential to “improve student learning; encourage the use of different and innovative or proven school environments and teaching and learning methods” to enhance student achievement. The Department of Education’s Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Unit (TLEU) presented an application to propose an alternative evaluation system that will allow schools to maximize opportunities for educator development. Our charter school requests to utilize a system that is tailored to our needs and is based on best

practices in educator evaluation. This system was developed for our school in the spirit of increasing educator effectiveness and accountability, and ultimately, student achievement in our school.

Las Américas ASPIRA Academy (LAAA) embarks upon its fifth year of operations during the 2015-16 academic year. After receiving its Charter Renewal with no conditions (December 2014), the LAAA leadership team met to refine its five-year strategic plan. The focus of the plan is to close the achievement gap of its students based upon a four pillar approach: Increasing Educator Effectiveness, Mastery Learning, Data-Driven Instruction, and Culture & Climate.



Each of the four pillars is integral to the achievement of our goal. However, a critical piece is increasing educator effectiveness; without significant gains in this area, the four pillars supporting the close of student achievement gaps will falter. As noted in research by Darling-Hammond (2000), "...the effects of well-prepared teachers on student achievement can be stronger than the influences of student background factors, such as poverty, language background, and minority status" (p.33). The State of Delaware took steps to put systems in place to support novice teachers with its Comprehensive Induction Program, as well as to evaluate teacher effectiveness through DPAS II; its goal was to combat *The Widget Effect*¹ featured in the research of Daniel Weisberg, et.al (2009), cited in a report issued by The New Teacher Project (p.4). As prescribed by the State, LAAA has used DPAS II, as well as the Comprehensive Induction Program, since its inception.

Research by Daly and Odden (2009) asserts that there are three main things an evaluation system should do: differentiate levels of performance, tightly align feedback with professional development, and demonstrate that teacher performance is validated by student performance.

We are implementing a new model that promotes the growth of educators as individual professionals centered on using their strengths to address opportunities for growth in a professional learning-based approach. The framework will provide constructive feed-forward information 6-8 times a year, as well as a pre-assessment (Fall Benchmark) at the beginning of the academic year and a post-assessment (Spring Benchmark) at the end. The model is a result of synthesizing information from a review of current research on teacher effectiveness

¹ The failure of evaluation systems to provide accurate and credible information about individual teachers' instructional performance.

programs, the Delaware Charter Collaborative's Teaching Excellence Framework, the InTASC Core Teaching Standards and Learning Progressions for Teachers, Danielson's framework, and the research of Moss & Brookhart on formative walkthroughs.

- 5. Describe how the proposed modification will impact the operation of the school. Include how student achievement, staffing, facilities, and financial viability of the school may be impacted in the current school year and for the remainder of the school's charter term.**

Our school is interested in utilizing our own evaluation system and process in the spirit of increasing educator accountability and, ultimately, student achievement. The Student Improvement Component of the current DPAS-II system will be utilized in order to assist in determining educator effectiveness. Staffing, facilities, and financial viability of the school will not be negatively impacted by the proposed minor modification. We expect the quality of staffing to improve based upon this framework. We do not anticipate any changes to facilities and any/all financial incentives will be determined based upon our financial viability.

- 6. Indicate the projected impact, if any, of the proposed modification on the school's present financial position, and its financial position going forward. If the modification promises to create financial challenges, indicate how those will be remedied.**

There is no projected impact of the proposed modification on our school's financial position. We do not anticipate any changes to facilities and any/all financial incentives will be determined based upon our financial viability.