



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Mark T. Murphy
Secretary of Education
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April 23, 2015

Via email attachment

Don C. Mell III
Board President
c/o Prestige Academy
1121 Thatcher Street
Wilmington, DE 19802

Dear Mr. Mell:

Please be advised that, for the reasons set forth below and with the assent of the State Board of Education, the Department of Education has placed the charter of Prestige Academy on Formal Review, pursuant to Title 14, Delaware Code, Section 515(b), to determine whether the school is violating the terms of its charter and, if so, whether to order remedial measures.

The school was approved to operate grades 5 to 8 with an enrollment of 252 students. However, unit count information submitted April 1, 2015 showed a total enrollment of 186 students, or 59% of the total authorized enrollment. Title 14, Delaware Code, Section 506(c)(1) requires that on or before April 1 of each school year, a charter school shall have enrolled, at a minimum, 80% of its total authorized number of students. This requirement was also imposed as a condition upon the approval of the charter. The Board of Directors signed an assurance document, ensuring that "by April 1 each year the school [would have] enrolled at least 80% of the total authorized number of students and that it [would have] notified each school district of information about enrolled students."

A student enrollment number so far below the total authorized enrollment and 80% minimum raises concerns about whether the school will be financially viable. It also raises concerns about whether many areas of the approved charter application can be implemented with fidelity – these include, but are not limited to: plans for curriculum and education delivery, plans to serve students with special needs, plans to maintain economic viability and plans for administrative and financial operations.

There are also concerns about Prestige Academy's academic performance. Over the last three years, Prestige Academy's Academic Framework Reports have shown significant regression. In the 2010-11 school year, Prestige Academy earned an overall rating of Meets Standard with an overall score of 63.4%. In the 2013-14 school year, Prestige Academy earned an overall rating of Does Not Meet Standard with an overall score of 39.1% - just 0.2% above the cutoff for an overall rating of Falls Far Below Standard. Additionally, the 2013-14 overall score was nearly 17% below the prior year's overall score of 55.9%.

This matter will be referred to the Charter School Accountability Committee (CSAC) for review and recommendations. Enclosed, please find a timeline for this process, including dates of CSAC meetings and public hearings. Please note that there is a May 5 deadline for a revised budget and organizational chart, which should be developed based on the final May 1 enrollment count. Additionally, the Department requests an example of a math unit and an ELA unit that were implemented at the school during the 2014-15 school year, along with artifacts demonstrating student performance. These documents, and any other materials you wish the CSAC to review, should be submitted by the Charter School Office to infocso@doe.k12.de.us.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (302) 735-4020 or Jennifer.Nagourney@doe.k12.de.us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jennifer Nagourney". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Jennifer Nagourney
Executive Director, Charter School Office

cc: Dr. Jack Perry, Head of School, Prestige Academy
Mark Murphy, Secretary of Education
David Blowman, Deputy Secretary of Education