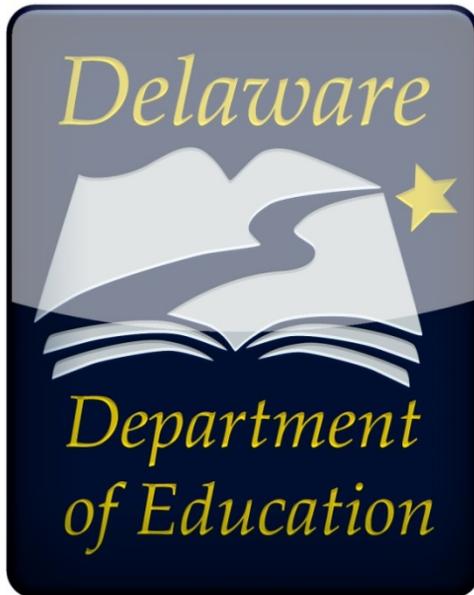


CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



REACH ACADEMY FOR GIRLS

PRELIMINARY REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

APPLICATION TO MODIFY AN EXISTING CHARTER

Opening Date: August 2010

Grades: K – 3 and 5 - 8

Location: New Castle County

30 September 2012 Unit Count: 390

Date of Report: 14 June 2013

Background

Name Reach Academy for Girls

Current Enrollment 390

Projected Enrollment	Year	Students	Grade Levels
	Year 1	252	K - 1 and 5 - 6
	Year 2	338	K – 2 and 5 - 7
	Year 3	432	K – 3 and 5 - 8
	Year 4	475	K - 8

Mission Reach Academy for Girls is a school that will provide a rigorous core curriculum based on research-validated strategies. Our goal is to help students, in collaboration with the family and community, reach their highest potential and become leaders in their school, family, and community.

Vision To invest each student in her own personal growth and development; to teach students how to plan and map out strategies with milestones to help each student achieve her goals; and to do so in creative ways.

Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee (Committee) convened on 30 May 2013 for the Initial/Preliminary Meeting.

At the Initial Meeting, the Committee engaged the Applicant in discussion about the proposed change in the location of the school. During the Preliminary Meeting, the Committee considered the modification application relative to the following approval criteria listed in 14 Del. Code § 512:

- Criterion Eight: Economic Viability
- Criterion Nine: Administrative and Financial Operations
- Criterion Ten: Insurance
- Criterion Twelve: Health and Safety

Initial Meeting

At the Initial Meeting, the Committee asked the Reach Academy representatives to give an overview of the application as well as to provide clarification upon several points. The following is a summary of the discussion.

- Reverend Casson noted how far the school has come since its opening year and the relocation opportunity will make the school even better.
- Ms. Allen told the Committee that soon the school will be at maximum capacity, even with the addition of modular classrooms. Additionally, the enrollment is growing and the school has one more grade to add to complete its final configuration of grades K – 8.

- Mr. Werb observed that the opportunity presented by the availability of the Pencader site would solve the school's space issues and seemed to be the best option for the school. Although there had been discussion about building a new school, the move to the Pencader site was the better option. The move is feasible and would maintain the economic viability and academics of the school.
- Additionally, a clear majority of parents (over 80%) favor the move and are willing to send their daughters to the new location. Based on a survey, parents, representing 273 students, would send their daughters to the new location. Furthermore, parents of approximately 95 new students are supportive of the move.
- The Reach Academy Board has received a formal letter of intent from the landlord.
- School representatives stated that the move will enable Reach Academy to draw from the entirety of New Castle County, with the New Castle area being the largest base.
- Committee members expressed concern about the cost of the lease; however, Ms. Spence noted that the enrollment will increase next year and that the lease is still under negotiation. Also, the rent and utilities are the responsibility of Reach Academy whereas maintenance is covered in the lease. The original Pencader building is fourteen years old and the second building is four years old; thus, the facilities are of much more recent construction than the current site.
- The Committee cautioned the school representatives based on the financial history of Pencader which had the highest facilities costs of any charter school in Delaware
- Ms. Allen indicated that the school currently has a waiting list for some grades and would be able to accept more students at the new site. Additionally, at the current site, the school is now at capacity and would not be able to accept more students next year.
- Mr. Werb noted that the capacity of the two Pencader buildings is for 1040 students. The site would accommodate more students than is currently possible at the current site and would allow the Board and administration to consider expanding to a high school at some point.
- Reverend Casson said that "due diligence" is the word of the Board and if the school is not capable of handling the move, the Board would not approve moving forward with the relocation plans.

Preliminary Meeting

Criterion Eight: Economic Viability

The Committee discussed the response to the Economic Viability criterion and noted the following.

- The applicant provided balanced budgets for projected enrollment as well as a balanced contingency budget based on 80% of approved enrollment. The budget worksheets were accompanied by detailed narratives that supported the revenue and expenditure figures in the worksheets.

- A site visit will be required to perform new calculations for the allocation of custodial units. The applicant's budget reflects eight custodial units, which may be slightly more than the school will be entitled to if approved for the new location.
- Even though the budget would be impacted by this potential revision, the current budgets show surpluses in excess of the difference. The potential change would not create a deficit.

The Committee concluded that Criterion Eight was met.

Criterion Nine: Administrative and Financial Operations

The Committee discussed the response to this criterion and noted the following.

- *Plan to Recruit Students.* The application includes a list of staff identified for the Student Recruitment Committee and has teacher, parent, and staff representation. The plan includes a timeline and activities. The current enrollment is 390 (82% of authorized enrollment). Based on a parent survey, 97% of parents supported the relocation. The survey had an 85% response rate. The school has budgeted conservatively and the FY 14 budget is based on 80% enrollment. New transportation routes could have an impact on student retention. Board minutes provide evidence of parent engagement.
- *Administrative Tasks before the Opening of School.* The application includes best-case and worst-case scenarios for projected administrative tasks and timelines. The budget is detailed.

The Committee concluded that Criterion Nine was met.

Criterion Ten: Insurance

The Committee discussed the response to the insurance criterion and noted the following.

- The Applicant provided a quote for insurance from Turtley Insurance Agency, Inc. with revised premiums.

The Committee concluded that Criterion Ten was met.

Criterion Twelve: Health and Safety

The Committee discussed the response to the Health and Safety Criterion and noted the following.

- *Staff to Ensure a Safe and Healthy Environment.* Plans are appropriate and the reviewer commended the school nurse on staff.

- *Location of the School; Compliance with Building Codes, Maintenance Practices, Location and Facilities for Physical Education; Safety Concerns.* The head of school, Ms. Allen, has provided the requested new floor plan for the re-evaluation of the custodial count. Additionally, Ms. Allen expressed interest to DOE for a site visit to determine if any safety fences need to be placed around the building.
- *School Transportation.* The modification request does not account for two impacts to school transportation: (1) changes in school transportation eligibility based upon the location of the residences around the school and (2) changes in the level of service to be provided. The reviewer provided additional information and requested that the Applicant clarify its response relative to DOE regulation 1105. Appendix B contains the additional information.
- *Providing Meals to Students and Compliance with the Free/Reduced Lunch Program.* The reviewer indicated that the response from the Applicant did not show an entirely accurate understanding of the operations of the Free/Reduced Lunch Program. Additional information is in Appendix C.

The Committee concluded that Criterion Twelve was partially met.

Summary and Recommendations

Criterion	Charter School Accountability Committee's Recommendations
(8) Economic Viability	Met
(9) Administrative and Financial Operations	Met
(10) Insurance	Met
(12) Health and Safety	Partially Met

The Charter School Accountability Committee recommended that the charter school modification application for Reach Academy for Girls ***be approved with clarification/follow-up information from the school staff.***

Appendix A

List of Attendees

Final Meeting of the Charter School Accountability Committee

30 May 2013

Application to Modify an Existing Charter

Members of the Committee

- Mary Kate McLaughlin, Chief of Staff; Committee Chair
- Karen Field Rogers, Associate Secretary, Financial Reform and Resource Management
- Debora Hansen, Education Associate, Visual and Performing Arts, Charter Curriculum Review
- Paul Harrell, Director of Public and Private Partnerships
- Barbara Mazza, Education Associate, Exceptional Children Resources
- April McCrae, Education Associate, Education Associate, Science Assessment and STEM
- Kendall Massett, Executive Director, Delaware Charter School Network (non-voting)

Staff to the Committee

- Catherine T. Hickey, Deputy Attorney General, Counsel to the Committee
- John Carwell, Director, Charter School Office
- Patricia Bigelow, Education Associate, Charter School Office
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Charter School Finance
- Chantel Janiszewski, Education Associate, Charter School Office
- Sheila Kay-Lawrence, Administrative Secretary

Representatives from Reach Academy for Girls

- Reverend Canon Lloyd Casson, Board President
- Tara Allen, Head of School
- Judith Gregory, Board Treasurer
- Maureen Thomas, Business Manager
- Duane D. Werb, Esq., Attorney for Reach Academy
- Trisha L. Neely, Neely and Spence Financial Consulting Services, LLC
- Dorcell S. Spence, Neely and Spence Financial Consulting Services, LLC

Appendix B

Additional Information: Transportation

- DOE Regulation 1105 provides transportation eligibility requirements. The present school is located in an area where apparently 26 students are not eligible for transportation. The new school will be located in an area where this number will likely change. The school should evaluate the area and could also check with the local school district transportation staff for assistance in how they have defined eligibility zones in that same area. Any change in students eligible for transportation would impact the transportation funding available for the school.
- DOE Regulation 1105 states that students residing in the same district as the school will receive the same level of transportation service that would be provided by that school district. Hub points may be established for those outside of the district where the school is located. The change in location from within the Brandywine School District (S.D.) to the Colonial School District could impact transportation operations. For example, students living in the Brandywine S.D. previously were to be provided the same service that the Brandywine S.D. provides. The school could set up hub stops in that area, if desired. On the other hand, where hub stop service was provided for students residing in the Colonial S.D., the service would need to be modified.

Appendix C

Additional Information: Plan for Providing Meals to Students and Compliance with the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch Program

- In SY 13-14, Reach Academy will be establishing its base year to become a Provision 2 school. This means that in SY 13-14, the school will still need to collect Meal Benefit Forms and other methods of establishing individual student eligibility for free, reduced, or paid price meals.
- The school will need to serve all the meals free to the students (breakfast and lunch) and not collect any money. The school will be claiming the meals per child based on the student's eligibility.
- At the end of SY 13 - 14, DOE will conduct a Provision 2 base year review. DOE will then verify all of the eligibility documentation and establish set claiming percentages of free, reduced, and paid meals.
- Beginning in SY 14 - 15, Reach Academy will no longer need to collect eligibility information. The school will feed all students for free and will be reimbursed according to the claiming percentages established by DOE.
- Having the designation of a Provision 2 school means that the school is able to offer the meals for free to all students, but it does **not** ensure that the participation rate will increase (as stated in the original paragraph).
- Reach Academy has entered into a vended meals contract that charges the school \$1.45 per breakfast and \$2.98 per lunch. In the application, the school stated the combined total of these two charges which is not accurate because the numbers of breakfast and lunch meals are not always the same.
- Questions/concerns can be directed to Aimee Beam, Education Associate School Nutrition Programs, at 302-735-4060.