

RESPONSE OF REACH ACADEMY FOR GIRLS TO RENEWAL REPORT

May 14, 2014

Introduction

The Renewal Report for Reach Academy for Girls (“Reach”) evaluated Reach under 3 separate criteria: (1) Academic Performance; (2) Financial Performance; and (3) Organizational Performance. With the exception of the Academic Performance Framework, and upon further clarification of the Renewal Report that was issued on April 30, 2014, Reach understands that it did meet most of the standards set by the Department of Education. Specifically, Reach did meet the Financial Performance Standard as well as the Organizational Performance Standard. Reach will address the Financial Performance and Organizational Performance Standards first.

Financial Performance

The Renewal Report provided that Reach DID meet the Financial Performance standard. Notwithstanding the finding that Reach met its Financial Performance standard, the one area of concern that was identified in the Renewal Report regarding Financial Performance was the enrollment variance. After the threat of closure during the 2010-2011 school year and a drop in enrollment the following year, Reach has been increasing its enrollment each year. In the 2013-2014 school year, Reach increased its enrollment variance to 99%.

Organizational Performance

The initial Renewal Report reflected a Does Not Meet standard for 2012-2013. However, after further clarification from the Department of Education, Reach understands that it DID meet the Organizational Performance standard for 2012-2013. Regardless of the classification that Reach was assigned for this criteria, there were two areas of concern which the Department of

Education identified under Organizational Performance: (1) the daily attendance rate for students and (2) the percentage of certified teachers.

As to the attendance rate, the Renewal Report states that Reach fell a single percentage point below the statutory required attendance rate of 95% during the 2012-2013 school year. For the 2013-2014 school year, as of the date of this response, Reach's attendance rate was approximately 98%.

As to the teacher certification, there were a number of teachers who were enrolled in programs to obtain certification. The Delaware Charter School law allows for Charter Schools to operate with less than 100% teacher certifications. Reach has sought clarification as to how the 92% teacher certification figure was calculated. Regardless of that calculation, however, Reach can report that during the 2013-2014 school year all but four teachers were certified. Of the four teachers that were not certified, every one of those teachers was in a program working towards certification and had submitted a plan for obtaining certification.

Academic Performance Framework

With respect to Reach's Academic Performance Framework, the Renewal Report gave Reach a Far Below Standard for each year that Reach was evaluated. Of special concern in the Renewal Report regarding the Academic Performance Framework was a drop in the 2012-2013 test scores from the prior year.

As an important initial note, while the State DCAS testing is still ongoing, Reach has already seen an improvement in the 2013-2014 school year DCAS testing. Reach has also observed an increase in the SM1 and SR1 test scores that Reach students take between the DCAS tests. Reach also submits that there are a number of mitigating factors that help to explain low

DCAS test scores including: (1) shifting enrollment and a large influx of new students each year since it first opened with the 2013-2014 school year being the first year that Reach filled every grade from K-8; (2) Reach's initial grade configuration and the fact that it had started with both an upper school and a lower school with, significantly, the upper school starting in grade five; and (3) until the 2013-2014 school year Reach struggled with an obsolete facility that lacked air conditioning in many rooms and did not have sufficient space.

With respect to the shifting enrollment, as Reach was a new school during the 2010-2011 school year, 100% of its students were new students. During the 2011-2012 school year, Reach added two new grades and approximately 56% of its students were new to Reach. During the 2012-2013 school year, Reach added two more new grades and approximately 36% of its students were new Reach students. Even during the 2013-2014 school year, Reach was still adding grades, adding one more grade, and approximately 39% of the students being tested were new to Reach. All of Reach students, including its new students took a Fall DCAS test. Each Fall from 2010 to 2012 more new students scored a 1 on their assessment than any other score and for each year fewer new students scored a 4 than any other score.

With respect to the grade configuration, Reach has experienced significant challenges in starting new enrollment at its upper school at grade five. For most schools in Delaware, junior high school starts at the sixth grade. While students may switch schools for any number of reasons at any time, most students who are performing well at their lower school will not be considering changing schools until they matriculate out of the school where they are currently attending in much the same way that a high school twelfth grader will rarely be changing schools unless there are significant challenges that the student is facing at his or her current school. By

starting with a grade figuration for its upper school at grade 5, Reach received a large number of new fifth grade students who were experiencing significant challenges. Indeed, even when reviewing the retention and recruitment efforts for the 2014-2015 school year, after its very first year of having a complete K through 8 configuration, the one grade that has a significant number of new students is next year's sixth grade class or this year's matriculating fifth grade class, which, again, were all new to Reach this year.

With respect to the facility, the 2013-2014 school year was Reach's first year at the Lukens Drive location in New Castle, Delaware. This facility is a little more than ten years old and, significantly, is a completely air conditioned facility with enough room for its students. Reach's prior location on Philadelphia Pike in Claymont, Delaware was more than 60 years old, had limited air conditioning and had significant space constraints. During the 2012-2013 school year, Reach installed temporary trailers to address the space constraints. Unfortunately, there were construction delays in installing the temporary trailers and for more almost 2 months, Reach had to reconfigure its existing space including using the cafeteria as temporary classrooms to address the lack of space and the construction delays.

As noted earlier, Reach has observed significant improvement during the 2013-2014 DCAS testing over the DCAS testing from prior years. Reach attributes the increased DCAS test scores to a number of factors including the new facility providing a better testing environment, the remediation plan that Reach implemented and continues to fine tune as well as the fact that of the approximately 460 students enrolled at Reach for the 2013-2014 school year, approximately 280 were returning students.

Reach reserves the right to supplement its response to the Renewal Report.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tara Allen", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tara Allen
School Leader
Reach Academy for Girls