

**In The Matter Of:**  
*Department of Education  
and Board of Education*

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*ITMO: Kuumba Academy  
June 4, 2013*

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
and  
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

PUBLIC HEARINGS ON CHARTER SCHOOL DECISIONS

IN THE MATTER OF )  
THE FINAL MEETING OF )  
KUUMBA ACADEMY MODIFICATION )  
APPLICATION )

Townsend Building  
401 Federal Street  
Cabinet Room, 2nd Floor  
Dover, Delaware 19901

Tuesday, June 4, 2013  
5:00 p.m.

BEFORE:

JOHN CARWELL, JR.,  
Director of the Charter School Office at  
the Department of Education

ALSO PRESENT:

CATHERINE T. HICKEY, ESQ.,  
Deputy Attorney General for the  
State Board of Education

DONNA JOHNSON,  
Executive Director for the State  
Board of Education

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1 MR. CARWELL: Good evening, everyone.  
2 We're going to proceed in the following order.  
3 We're going to have Kuumba Academy go first; MOT  
4 second; and Pike Creek third.

5 I declare this public hearing to be  
6 open. My name is John Carwell, Jr. I'm the  
7 Director of the Charter School Office at the  
8 Department of Education, and I have been  
9 appointed by the Secretary of Education to  
10 conduct this public hearing.

11 The Kuumba Academy Charter School has  
12 filed an application to modify its charter. As  
13 is required by law, the matter was referred to  
14 the Charter School Accountability Committee for  
15 investigation and report.

16 This joint public hearing is being  
17 held by the Department of Education and the State  
18 Board of Education to give the school an  
19 opportunity to respond to the final report of the  
20 Accountability Committee which recommended that  
21 the school's modification application be  
22 approved, and also to receive public comments.

23 I would like the record to reflect  
24 that the notice of the time, date, and place of



1 today's public hearing was published in the News  
2 Journal and the Delaware State News on May 20,  
3 2013. In addition, notice was posted at the  
4 Charter School Accountability Committee's place  
5 of business, and on the Department of Education's  
6 official Web site, and on the State's Public  
7 Meeting Calendar on the State's official Web site  
8 on May 20, 2013.

9 Further, the school was personally  
10 notified of the date, time, and place of today's  
11 public hearing on May 20th, 2013.

12 A court reporter is present so that a  
13 record of this hearing can be made. It will be  
14 necessary for each speaker to speak clearly and  
15 identify his or herself before beginning to speak  
16 so that the court reporter will be able to note  
17 who you are.

18 A record of this hearing will be  
19 provided to the Secretary and members of the  
20 State Board of Education, together with any  
21 written or electronic comments received at or  
22 before this hearing, which in this case  
23 includes -- there was an electronic communication  
24 received -- we received two electronic comments



1 on behalf of Kuumba Academy.

2 And we will proceed in following  
3 manner: First, we will hear from any  
4 representatives of the charter school who wish to  
5 comment on the Committee's final report. Then we  
6 will take comments from anyone else who desires  
7 to speak. And I will now pause, if there are any  
8 other speakers who desire to sign up.

9 So I intend to be as liberal with  
10 time as possible. I may have to invoke a time  
11 limit, if necessary, but at this point I will  
12 accept comments from anyone who desires to speak  
13 starting with the school representatives. I'll  
14 go by the list of the sign-in sheet.

15 So first I would like to hear from  
16 Lynne Howard.

17 MS. HOWARD: If you don't mind, I  
18 would like Ms. Maldonado to go first.

19 MS. MALDONADO: My name is Sally  
20 Maldonado. I'm the Head of School for Kuumba.

21 I want to thank you for the  
22 opportunity to be here this evening on behalf of  
23 the Board of Directors, faculty, staff, and  
24 students of Kuumba Academy.



1 I would like to thank the Department  
2 for the opportunity to expand our high quality  
3 elementary program into middle school.

4 As we know, there is a significant  
5 need in the City of Wilmington for high quality  
6 middle school programs, and we are focused on  
7 continuing to serve our community by providing  
8 access to high quality teachers and a rigorous  
9 engaging academic program for Wilmington's  
10 children.

11 I would also like the record to  
12 reflect our gratitude to the Department of  
13 Education for their support throughout this  
14 rigorous application process, and I would like to  
15 invite David Carr, a fifth grade student, to read  
16 his comments.

17 DAVID CARR: Good evening. Thank you  
18 for allowing me the opportunity to speak tonight  
19 on behalf of my school and fellow classmates. My  
20 name is David Carr. I am a ten-year-old fifth  
21 grade student at Kuumba Academy Charter School.  
22 I have been attending Kuumba since I was in  
23 kindergarten. Up until now, Kuumba has only gone  
24 up to the fifth grade. I should know because all



1 of my sisters have graduated from the fifth grade  
2 as well. As a current fifth grader, myself and  
3 all of my classmates are so excited about the  
4 possibility of Kuumba's expansion through the  
5 eighth grade. We are glad to have the  
6 opportunity to stay at Kuumba, a place that we  
7 have called home since kindergarten.

8 Kuumba is a school of the arts. We  
9 have classes that focus on the arts like drama  
10 and dance, but we also learn through the arts in  
11 our regular classes. This makes learning fun for  
12 me and my friends. Our instructional focus is on  
13 math. The math that we learn is not the kind  
14 that all students are used to. We learn  
15 Singapore Math. Singapore Math was challenging  
16 at first, but now that I have the hang of it, I  
17 am really very good at math. This year I learned  
18 algebra and I cannot wait to see what I get to  
19 learn in middle school. This, among many other  
20 things, is what makes Kuumba special to me. At  
21 Kuumba I know that my teachers care about me,  
22 that my classmates care about me, and that I am  
23 in a safe place to learn. We look out for  
24 bullies and we look out for each other.



1 I have learned new skills, made great  
2 friends, and have had a great elementary school  
3 experience at Kuumba. Kuumba's expansion gives  
4 our students another three years to experience  
5 arts integration and other unique Kuumba ways.

6 Thank you again for this opportunity  
7 to speak to you this evening. I look forward to  
8 an awesome Kuumba Middle School experience.

9 MR. CARWELL: Thank you, Mr. Carr.

10 MS. MOLDONADO: This first letter is  
11 from the Vision Network from Louis Hobbs, the  
12 Interim Executive Director.

13 "To the Delaware Department of  
14 Education, and Delaware State Board of Education.

15 "Kuumba Academy Charter School has  
16 year after year shown that it is a school that  
17 takes the academic growth of each of its students  
18 very seriously, and has consistently helped those  
19 students to achieve at remarkable levels. They  
20 have developed a leadership and culture of high  
21 expectations and continuous growth within their  
22 school. These qualities will allow them to reach  
23 even higher levels of success if they are allowed  
24 to expand to serve additional students at the





1 elementary and middle school levels.

2 "We have had the pleasure of working  
3 with Kuumba Academy leaders and teachers over the  
4 last six years as they participated in the Vision  
5 Network. We have seen firsthand the drive and  
6 focus that they bring to achieve academic success  
7 for all of their students. Over these years, we  
8 have seen Kuumba take on significant challenges  
9 in their pursuit of world-class education for all  
10 of their students. This has included  
11 implementing challenging curriculum such as  
12 Singapore Math, committing to data-informed  
13 instruction by implementing the NWEA MAP  
14 assessment, posting their achievement data  
15 throughout the building, and focusing deeply on  
16 the development of their teaching staff through a  
17 process of effective instructional feedback.

18 "We are excited to see Kuumba succeed  
19 and are more excited by the opportunity for more  
20 Delaware students to have access to this model  
21 school. This is even more powerful when we  
22 consider the families and students that Kuumba  
23 seeks to serve. It is our hope that Kuumba  
24 Academy will be granted its request for a Charter



1 Modification, and will be allowed to bring its  
2 high quality academic program to more Delaware  
3 students. Thank you, Lisa Hobbs."

4 I have an additional letter from  
5 Delaware Math and Science Foundation.

6 "The Delaware Foundation for Science  
7 and Mathematics Education is pleased to support  
8 the request to the Delaware Department of  
9 Education by Kuumba Academy to expand its charter  
10 school from K-5 to K-8. We believe its  
11 demonstration of student achievement, the  
12 dedication and teaching excellence of its staff,  
13 and the outstanding leadership of its  
14 administration point to the success in their new  
15 endeavor.

16 "Our belief is supported by personal  
17 observations as DFSME assisted the school to  
18 implement, over three years, a world-class math  
19 curriculum.

20 "DFSME offered to either provide the  
21 necessary materials for the new course or pay  
22 teachers for their time in training. The  
23 teachers agreed to use their personal time to  
24 attend one week's training in the summer and four



1 four-hour Saturday sessions during the following  
2 year. This was a major cost savings for the  
3 school.

4 "The teachers outwardly expressed  
5 their fear and dislike of math, yet they worked  
6 diligently to learn the new pedagogy. They  
7 deepened their personal understanding of the  
8 principals of math and began to confidently  
9 transfer this knowledge to students. Their  
10 personal growth was evident to DFSME through  
11 observations and willing incorporation of  
12 suggested improvements during coaching sessions.  
13 Two teachers have used their own time to help  
14 train teachers in the Brandywine School District  
15 and are participating in the development of  
16 curriculum for the State of New York to meet  
17 common core math standards.

18 "The school leaders, school heads and  
19 deans, often accompanied DFSME personnel on  
20 observations to learn what constituted excellence  
21 and to show their support. Lack of this kind of  
22 participatory leadership was recently cited by  
23 the Math and Science Coalitions as one of the  
24 barriers to excellent math and science teaching



1 elsewhere across Delaware.

2 "Noting growing math competency, the  
3 school dean successfully replicated DFSME's  
4 implementation strategy -- multiple training  
5 sessions and ongoing coaching -- with our reading  
6 curriculum. This demonstrates top leadership's  
7 commitment to its own continual learning.

8 "We hope these personal observations  
9 help one to understand why extraordinary results  
10 shown by student data have been achieved. We  
11 expect that allowing the school students to  
12 continue association with this culture of  
13 excellence through grade eight will lead to their  
14 continued success.

15 "One would also hope that Kuumba's  
16 example, as it approaches incorporating grade  
17 eight, will inspire public schools across the  
18 State to match or surpass its successes.  
19 Sincerely, Dr. Ross Ambrecht, Executive  
20 Director."

21 MS. AVERY: My name is Raye Jones  
22 Avery. I also would like to read letters to be  
23 submitted for the record.

24 The first letter I will be reading is



1 from the University of Delaware, College of  
2 Education and Human Development, Delaware Center  
3 For Teacher Education.

4 "It is with great enthusiasm that I  
5 write in support of Kuumba Academy Charter  
6 School's modification request. Since the summer  
7 of 2010, I have worked with Kuumba Academy's  
8 administrators and faculty to implement reading  
9 comprehension strategies and writing skills, and  
10 strategies in teachers' classrooms. As part of a  
11 university partnership, Kuumba's teachers have  
12 participated in workshops, book studies, and  
13 classroom coaching with a goal to improve the  
14 reading and writing of students at all grade  
15 levels: Kindergarten through fifth grade. In  
16 addition, teachers embraced the Learning-Focused  
17 strategies in order to ensure a consistent  
18 pedagogy among the grade levels.

19 "Since Delaware's adoption of the  
20 Common Core State's Standards in 2010, Kuumba  
21 Academy's staff has been committed to aligning  
22 their reading and writing curricula with the CCSS  
23 and implementing evidence-based practice in  
24 literacy. Teachers have diligently and



1 enthusiastically worked in collaborative groups  
2 to improve their practice, learn new content,  
3 curricula, and strategies that would positively  
4 impact academic outcomes for their students.

5 "Kuumba Academy's teachers and staff  
6 are among some of the most dedicated  
7 practitioners for whom I have had the privilege  
8 to provide professional development. I highly  
9 recommend and support their efforts in the  
10 charter application process.

11 "Sincerely, Christine M. Evans,  
12 Ed.D., Delaware Center for Teacher Education."

13 The next letter of support comes from  
14 Teach For America.

15 "On behalf of Kuumba Academy Charter  
16 School, I write a letter in support of their  
17 vision and expansion in Wilmington.

18 "Although only starting as the  
19 Executive Director of Teach For America -  
20 Delaware nine months ago, I have been part of the  
21 emerging charter school market in our city as a  
22 board member of the East Side Charter School  
23 since 2004. Throughout that time, our board  
24 looked to Kuumba as a model for high quality



1 education shown through academic results,  
2 happiness and stability of staff, and deep  
3 connection and creative engagement with  
4 parents.

5 "Kuumba's results are functions of  
6 effective leadership. Leadership is everything.  
7 It derives from a cultivation and development of  
8 talent and culture over time. This is what  
9 Kuumba has proven in our State with no national  
10 charter models. We know from the highest  
11 performing schools in the country that ideas of  
12 expansion are ideas only; vision is vision only.  
13 Without leadership in place, schools who know  
14 better will not risk opening.

15 "In my current role, I have had the  
16 chance to meet people and visit schools all over  
17 the State. I often wonder why the extraordinary  
18 work Kuumba does with children is not a salient  
19 part of every conversation about success, proving  
20 what is possible for children. I know from Teach  
21 For America teachers who work at Kuumba that the  
22 attention to details that matter to achievement,  
23 and the obsession with development and  
24 instructional approach of teachers is paramount.



1 The chance to allow the school to grow and  
2 realize a cradle to college vision is allowing  
3 the opportunity for children in our city to  
4 experience life-changing opportunity that  
5 currently does not exist.

6 "With 18 percent college ready in our  
7 State, and areas of Wilmington with 50 percent  
8 high school dropout rates, we need to do whatever  
9 we can to honor and promote what has proven to  
10 work with as much urgency as the children who are  
11 being educated every day deserve.

12 "Thank you for the opportunity to  
13 write on Kuumba's behalf, but really on behalf of  
14 children and the health of our community.  
15 Warmly, Laurisa Schutt."

16 MS. HOWARD: Good afternoon. My name  
17 is Lynne Howard, and I'm the Director of  
18 Expansion at Kuumba Academy, and I'm going to  
19 wrap up with two letters also to be read into the  
20 record.

21 The first comes from Riccardo  
22 Stoeckicht, the President of the Community  
23 Education Building.

24 "On behalf of the Community Education





1 Building, I am writing this letter in support of  
2 Kuumba Academy Charter School.

3 "When it opens its doors in the fall  
4 of 2014, the Community Education Building, (CEB)  
5 will bring a world-class public education  
6 experience to some 2,400 students in the City of  
7 Wilmington. By bringing together some of the  
8 best pedagogical platforms being implemented in  
9 the United States with the infrastructure and  
10 student support resources not readily available  
11 to charter schools, the CEB seeks to create an  
12 environment of educational excellence that will  
13 serve our most needy city children.

14 "Kuumba Academy has a proven track  
15 record of educational excellence being rated as  
16 one of the highest performing charter schools in  
17 the State of Delaware, and the winner of the  
18 State's Academic Achievement Award for a second  
19 year. In addition, Kuumba has a rich history of  
20 fostering and maximizing community partnerships.  
21 Their contributions, once in the CEB, will be a  
22 vital ingredient to creating a high performing  
23 building culture for all schools and partners  
24 serving children in our facility.



1                    "We are excited to have Kuumba join  
2 us and look forward to building upon their  
3 experience and sharing it with our future tenant  
4 schools.

5                    "Sincerely, Riccardo Stoeckicht,  
6 President."

7                    And lastly, I have a letter from  
8 Dr. Paul Herdman, President and CEO of Rodel  
9 Foundation of Delaware.

10                   "It is with great excitement that I  
11 write this letter to support the expansion of  
12 Kuumba Academy Charter School.

13                   "Your team has proven that a clear  
14 strategy coupled with a big dose of love can make  
15 amazing things happen. Your board's willingness  
16 to expand to serve more children in the City of  
17 Wilmington is a worthy one, and has the potential  
18 to change the trajectory of thousands of  
19 children's lives over time.

20                   "In the State of Delaware, the gap in  
21 performance among low income children,  
22 particularly children of color, and their white  
23 peers is generally about 20 percentage points or  
24 more. Your school has completely closed, if not



1 reversed, that gap in both mathematics, and more  
2 recently, the English Language Arts. Your work  
3 to expand the number of high quality Kuumba seats  
4 into middle and high school could be a game  
5 changer.

6 "Public resources are precious, and  
7 the expansion of any school, charter or district,  
8 should be considered very carefully. However, I  
9 would argue that Kuumba is as ready as any school  
10 will be for such an expansion. It's had strong  
11 and steady leadership for close to a decade at  
12 the board and principal levels, is on sound  
13 financial footing, has demonstrated outstanding  
14 student results, has built a clear and feasible  
15 operational partnership with the Community  
16 Education Building, and has forged deep community  
17 partnerships.

18 "Moreover, Kuumba has demonstrated  
19 that it not only wants to benefit the children in  
20 its care, but it epitomizes a part of the intent  
21 of the charter statute that often gets lost, to  
22 serve as a catalyst for innovation statewide.  
23 Among many partnerships, it has been a strong  
24 collaborator with the Brandywine School District



1 in regard to deepening the implementation of  
2 Singapore Math and worked with the New Castle  
3 County Vocational Schools and many others through  
4 the Vision Network.

5 "That said, this expansion to middle  
6 school will not be easy. Clear communication and  
7 agreements about performance benchmarks should be  
8 expected from the State and embraced by Kuumba.  
9 However, given the school's track record of  
10 excellence, I have every confidence that while  
11 this will not be a straight path, Kuumba will  
12 navigate its expansion with the same level of  
13 exceptional quality and integrity it has  
14 demonstrated to this point.

15 "Sincerely, Dr. Paul Herdman,  
16 President and CEO."

17 That concludes our remarks, and thank  
18 you for the opportunity to speak.

19 MR. CARWELL: Thank you.

20 Is there anyone else who desires to  
21 speak that hasn't had an opportunity?

22 If not, I want to thank you all for  
23 participating today and the Secretary will  
24 consider your comments in deciding what



1 recommendation to propose for the consent of the  
2 State Board. This hearing is now closed. Thank  
3 you.

4 (Public hearing adjourned at 5:20  
5 p.m.)

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## 1 CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER

2 I, Vera T. Sitze, a Notary Public and Registered  
3 Professional Reporter, do hereby certify that the  
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14 in this action.

15  
16  
17 

18  
19 Vera T. Sitze, RPR

20  
21  
22 My commission expires July 31, 2014  
23  
24



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