

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

*ITMO: Pike Creek Charter Middle School
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 NEW APPLICATION)
OF PIKE CREEK CHARTER)
MIDDLE SCHOOL)

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

Tuesday, June 4, 2013
6:20 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 I declare this public hearing to be open. My
3 name is John Carwell, Jr., and I'm the Director
4 of the Charter School Office at the Department of
5 Education. I've been appointed by the Secretary
6 of Education to conduct this public hearing.

7 The Pike Creek Charter Middle School
8 has filed an application for a new charter, and
9 as is required by law, the matter was referred to
10 the Charter School Accountability Committee for
11 investigation and report.

12 This joint public hearing is being
13 held by the Department of Education and the State
14 Board of Education to give the school an
15 opportunity -- to give the applicant an
16 opportunity to respond to the final report of the
17 Accountability Committee which recommended that
18 the application for a charter not be approved,
19 and also to receive public comments.

20 I would like the record to reflect
21 that the notice of the time, date, and place of
22 today's public hearing was published in the News
23 Journal and the Delaware State News on May 20,
24 2013. In addition, notice was posted at the



1 Charter School Accountability Committee's place
2 of business, and on the Department of Education's
3 official Web site, and on the State's Public
4 Meeting Calendar on the State's official Web site
5 on May 20, 2013.

6 Further, the applicant was personally
7 notified of the time, date, and place of today's
8 public hearing on May 20, 2013.

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

15 A record of this hearing will be
16 provided to the Secretary of Education and
17 members of the State Board of Education, together
18 with any written or electronic documents, which
19 in this case includes two electronic submissions.
20 Actually, I'm sorry, three electronic
21 submissions.

22 We will proceed in the following
23 manner: First, we will hear from any
24 representatives of the applicant group who wish



1 to comment on the Committee's final report. Then
2 we will take comments from anyone else who
3 desires to speak. And if you desire to speak and
4 have not signed in, please take this moment to do
5 so.

6 So I intend to be as liberal with
7 time as possible. However, I do reserve the
8 right to limit comment just in the interest of
9 everyone getting an opportunity to speak. So at
10 this point I will accept comments from the
11 representatives of the school. We do have on the
12 list -- it looks like four representatives of the
13 school. Is there another person?

14 MS. SOOKHOO: I will speak as well.

15 MR. SMITH: Melissa Whitehead will be
16 starting off.

17 MS. WHITEHEAD: "Good evening. First
18 and foremost, I want to thank you for allowing us
19 to speak tonight on behalf of Pike Creek Charter
20 Middle School. We have submitted our responses
21 to the final report and received confirmation of
22 receipt on June 4th, 2013. Our Board has
23 provided responses to the final report in all
24 areas that were needed. As a Board, we feel that



1 we have succeeded in addressing all areas and
2 feel confident in our charter school proposal.

3 "Growing up as a student athlete,
4 receiving a full scholarship for lacrosse at the
5 University of Delaware, I truly understand the
6 impact physical activity and fitness has on
7 student achievement. In addition to student
8 achievement, physical activity plays a
9 significant role in the short- and long-term
10 health of individuals. Currently, the nation is
11 raising a generation of kids that will live
12 shorter and sicker lives than their parents with
13 31.8 percent being overweight or obese.
14 Specifically in Delaware, 40 percent of children
15 ages 2 to 17 are overweight or obese. Research
16 has shown that students who participate in
17 physical activity on a daily basis have better
18 test scores, attendance, and few behavior
19 referrals.

20 "Pike Creek Charter Middle School
21 plans to address these issues by incorporating 60
22 minutes of physical activity daily. In addition
23 to physical activity, students will be actively
24 engaged in their classroom with the inclusion of



1 kinesthetics in every lesson.

2 "As an educator, I value the
3 collaboration and involvement of the community in
4 schools. In order to gain community support, the
5 Board has held two town hall meetings to educate
6 the community and ease any concerns with the
7 potential opening of the school. In addition to
8 the town hall meetings, we have presented in
9 front of the Pike Creek Civic Association and
10 answered any questions the community has asked.
11 We have used social media, such as our Web site
12 and Facebook page to update the community on our
13 progress and to make ourselves available to the
14 community.

15 "Finally, I am here to present you
16 with our Community Support Binder which includes
17 51 support letters from a variety of
18 stakeholders, our town hall attendee list, and
19 our ipetition of 270 signatures.

20 "As an educator, student, athlete and
21 Board member, I urge you to recommend Pike Creek
22 Charter Middle School for approval. Thank you."

23 MS. HICKEY: Exhibit A, Pike Creek
24 Charter Middle School Final Report Responses and



1 Documents.

2 Exhibit B, Pike Creek Charter Middle
3 School Letters of Support Presented on June 4,
4 2013.

5 Mr. Carwell will hold on to the
6 exhibits.

7 (Exhibits A and B were marked for
8 identification.)

9 MR. SMITH: My name is Michael Smith,
10 and I want to take the opportunity to thank you
11 all this evening for giving us a chance to speak
12 before the Board.

13 As a founding board, we started on
14 this journey a little over two years ago and here
15 we are today meeting with you all urging you to
16 approve Pike Creek Charter Middle School for
17 opening in 2014.

18 Our founding board is comprised of
19 many community members that are highly invested
20 in our community, and the impact this school will
21 have on the current state of public education in
22 Delaware, and the impact on our community in Pike
23 Creek as a whole.

24 As you've read in our proposal and in



1 our responses, schools in our community are
2 overcrowded. With the creation of another
3 elementary school in the area coming soon, more
4 elementary schools will continue to feed into
5 fewer middle schools.

6 Our mission is model driven and
7 necessary for educational growth in the State of
8 Delaware. Through numerous studies, it has been
9 proven that middle school students are at a
10 vulnerable age to learn behavior patterns, set
11 routines, and learn positive habits. We're
12 proposing a revolutionary school for middle
13 school students that will set them up for success
14 in high school, college, and beyond. The core of
15 our vision is to promote healthy lifestyles and
16 empower children to become lifelong learners.
17 The Delaware Department of Education commissioned
18 a study that proves that there is a direct
19 correlation between physical fitness, positive
20 behavior patterns, and positive test scores.
21 PCCMS emphasizes this correlation as a pillar of
22 the school culture.

23 I urge you to recommend approval for
24 Pike Creek Charter Middle School. My profession



1 personally gives me the opportunity to meet with
2 business leaders on a daily basis. They are
3 fearful to move their businesses to Delaware.
4 The number one obstacle that always comes up on
5 why they won't move their business here is the
6 state of our education in Delaware. They don't
7 read our publications; they don't tour our
8 schools; they look at our data. And currently
9 our data shows that our current system is
10 failing.

11 If they do end up moving here, the
12 majority of those business leaders move to
13 Pennsylvania to be a part of their public school
14 system. We don't want that and I know you don't
15 want that. Education is the domino effect that
16 promotes job growth, economic viability, and tax
17 rateables for our State.

18 Our proposal can be a launching point
19 for our State. We would like to team with you
20 all, the Department of Education, to give our
21 community a new choice for public education.
22 It's a school that can be replicated throughout
23 the public education system in Delaware. Once
24 you see it work in our community, expand it to



1 other communities around the State. It can be a
2 game changer for all of us.

3 Our responses to the Final Report as
4 you've identified have been included for public
5 record. Receipt of those documents
6 electronically was given to Mr. Carwell today at
7 10:23 a.m. We've hit every milestone throughout
8 this process, and today we're here to hit another
9 milestone to show how serious we are as a
10 founding board, as a community, and serious about
11 our application.

12 So to end, I want to thank you for
13 giving us this evening the time to speak before
14 you, and I want to commend and thank those of you
15 that were able to pick up the phone, answer
16 e-mails, and help us with any clarifications
17 along the line. So thank you.

18 MS. SOOKHOO: Good evening. My name
19 is Kate Sookhoo. I'm a founding board member. I
20 live in the Pike Creek area. I'm a mother of
21 three and I'm an attorney at Fox Rothschild.

22 I've served on the committee in my
23 legal capacity, and I've worked on the 501c3
24 application.



1 I'm here to report to you that that
2 is pending. It's in the process of being
3 approved by the IRS, and we hope to have that
4 approval shortly.

5 With that being filed, we are able to
6 accept money and we are working with individuals
7 and corporations to receive grants under the
8 501c3. But without approval from you all, we are
9 not able to collect from foundations and
10 nonprofit grants, which would substantially, you
11 know, enable our abilities to be financially
12 viable. And just for your information, we've
13 consulted extensively -- there's a finance
14 committee that has consulted extensively with
15 other charter schools' financial officers to
16 insure that Pike Creek Charter Middle School is a
17 viable entity.

18 I really appreciate the time that
19 you've given to us and our application and your
20 consideration. Thank you, and I urge you to
21 approve our application.

22 MR. CARWELL: Thank you for your
23 comments.

24 MS. SHEEHAN: My name is Robyn



1 Sheehan. I stand before you now not as a
2 founding board member of Pike Creek Charter
3 Middle School, but to give voice to the writers
4 of the support letters who couldn't be with us
5 today, the ones who support our mission and our
6 vision.

7 There's not nearly enough time to
8 read each one of these letters in their entirety.
9 So I'm just going to give you a small sampling of
10 the letters that we have received.

11 Pike Creek Charter Middle School and
12 I quote, "is bringing a proactive choice for our
13 education system in Delaware.

14 "Is a school model that has the
15 ability to foster intellectual and emotional
16 growth like no other.

17 "Pike Creek Charter Middle School
18 would be an asset to my community.

19 "Is able to provide the benchmark for
20 our schools across the nation and create the
21 programs that many can follow in our future.

22 "Pike Creek Charter Middle School
23 provides a strong incentive for administrators
24 and teachers to make PCCMS stand out and excel.



1 "Pike Creek Charter Middle School has
2 uncovered an innovative mission and vision to
3 drive positive change and choice in their
4 community.

5 "I want my community and neighbors to
6 be able to benefit from such a great program."

7 Delaware Barbell Club and Fitness
8 says they're willing to help in any way to make
9 this school a success, and hope to share their
10 knowledge and passion for fitness with Pike Creek
11 Charter Middle School students.

12 "I pledge my continued support and
13 mentorship in the area of finance upon the
14 approval of their charter.

15 "Delaware PTA is excited to be able
16 to create and foster parent engagement at Pike
17 Creek Charter Middle School.

18 "We at Pike Creek Valley Running Club
19 strongly support the mission of PCCMS. We
20 believe it covers an unmet need in our community.
21 Many of our current club members are parents and
22 know the proven mental and physical benefits of
23 regular exercise."

24 And last but not least, "My hope is



1 that the vision of this Board, which is supported
2 by extensive research across a multitude of
3 disciplines, will be carried out. Please grant
4 approval for the charter of Pike Creek Charter
5 Middle School." Thank you for your
6 consideration.

7 MR. CARWELL: Thank you. Would you
8 like to submit that as part of the record?

9 MS. SHEEHAN: Yes.

10 MR. CARWELL: Any other
11 representatives from the school?

12 MR. SMITH: No.

13 MR. CARWELL: Next we would like to
14 hear from Morgan Balan.

15 MORGAN BALAN: Hi, I'm Morgan Balan.
16 So we are here to talk about the new school.
17 This would be a good school because there are
18 many opportunities to stay active. There is a
19 swimming pool, which is a great form of exercise
20 and normally not found in a middle school and
21 every day there is gym. It's sometimes hard to
22 sit still in school all day long, but here we
23 wouldn't have to. We can stay active in the
24 classroom too. As a soon to be middle schooler,



1 I love technology. Sometimes I may stay on the
2 computer or ipod for too long instead of going
3 outside to play. And I know my sister and
4 friends do the same. But PCC will guide us as we
5 learn about ways to stay healthy and keep active
6 and give us the opportunity to keep moving all
7 day long and use technology during our classes.
8 It's the best of both worlds. My parents told us
9 we can do anything we put our minds to. Please
10 give us a chance to make PCC work. We can do it
11 as a community. I promise.

12 MR. CARWELL: Leanne Gandolfo.

13 MS. GANDOLFO: I came here tonight.
14 I live in Hockessin. I'm a mother of two. I'm
15 also a full-time lab manager. And I learned
16 about the school from a friend. I attended one
17 of the first town hall meetings, and right from
18 the get-go I became passionate about a school
19 like this. I grew up as a competitive figure
20 skater, and I also went to school full time. And
21 I know that from my activity with the skating, I
22 learned a lot of discipline that helped me in
23 school. So I went to the University of Delaware
24 and I went to college full time and also skated



1 and graduated with honors there.

2 I know that a school like this
3 combining education along with health and
4 community involvement, I think would be an
5 excellent opportunity for my son who would be --
6 my son is actually ten years old and he's in
7 fourth grade. So he would be attending the
8 school the first year it's open. And I know that
9 the community of Hockessin is a very active
10 community. I belong to the Hockessin Athletic
11 Club and I see how those families there, they're
12 all getting their children involved. And also,
13 my children attend North Star Elementary
14 currently, and I know that the parents there -- I
15 hear from teachers all the time, and I'm there at
16 the school a lot, that they're very involved.
17 And I know that they would be in a school like
18 this. I've talked to several families that
19 couldn't be here night because end of school
20 year, there's baseball play-offs, and dance
21 recitals. But they would have if they could and
22 they would be very excited about a school like
23 this. So I hope that the approval is made for
24 the school.



1 MR. CARWELL: Thank you.

2 Next is Hayley McDaniel.

3 MS. McDANIEL: I'm a fourth grade
4 teacher at a private school in Pike Creek that is
5 closing, and I'm just here to say that I have
6 several parents as well as students that are very
7 interested in the school because they're all very
8 active students, and they have shown great
9 interest towards Mr. Smith's wife. Thank you.

10 MR. CARWELL: Next we have -- that's
11 all who have indicated they would like to speak.
12 Anyone else?

13 MS. JOHNSON: My name is Yvonne
14 Johnson. So you know me as the Delaware PTA
15 President, but today I'm here as Yvonne Johnson
16 as a parent advocate for the community that I've
17 been involved in for the last 20 years. And
18 about two years ago, I met Michael and he told me
19 about this school and I started to talk to -- as
20 you know, I know so many people, about the school
21 and they were so excited about the concept of the
22 school, the mission of the school, having a
23 school in their community.

24 I'm talking about people across the



1 entire districts from the city to Bear are really
2 interested in this school.

3 One of the things that I can speak to
4 is that the middle schools that we currently have
5 in the Red Clay area are very overcrowded. Both
6 my children went to school in Red Clay in middle
7 school, and they had over 30 kids in every single
8 one of their classes. And some children can do
9 fine and some children can't. My daughter did
10 okay; my son did not. It's just some students
11 cannot work in classroom sizes of 35. And I see
12 a huge need for this school, and the people
13 around the community are really rooting for this
14 school to be opened.

15 One of the things that I hear from
16 the community also is that it's the weak link.
17 Middle school is the weak link in the area. They
18 don't feel like they have enough choices.
19 Charters are public schools, as you know.
20 They're not traditional schools. And I believe
21 in choice and I think that by having a school
22 that parents can choose to send their child to
23 other than the traditional school should be
24 there.



1 We have things like Cab Calloway and
2 Conrad, and these schools have 600 plus kids on
3 their waiting list. It's because they just don't
4 have enough room for all these middle school
5 students. And I think somebody mentioned earlier
6 about the new school opening which will bring
7 even more students. I just don't know where
8 we're going house all these middle school
9 students. And this will give an opportunity for
10 us to lessen the class sizes and have room for
11 all these middle school students.

12 I just also want to comment on the
13 fact that I talked to so many people that are in
14 favor of this school and they really wanted to be
15 here tonight.

16 Like Leanne mentioned, people have
17 dance recitals and St. John's carnival, and
18 family night, and people are already on vacation.
19 Everyone was so busy because of the time of year,
20 but if they could, they would have been here.
21 And I hope that you'll approve the school for
22 fall 2014. Thank you.

23 MR. CARWELL: Thank you.

24 Is there anyone else who desires to



1 speak? Please come forward and identify
2 yourself.

3 DR. TANKERSLEY: Good evening. I'm
4 Dr. Julie Tankersley.

5 I'm here tonight to give support to
6 Pike Creek Charter. I am presently a public
7 school teacher who has had administrative
8 responsibilities, district responsibilities, and
9 I see firsthand what kind of problems middle
10 school students have today. I am presently
11 placed in a middle school. I see the problems
12 that come in from the diversity of our
13 population. The economics play a big part. I
14 see that right now public schools are 90 minute
15 blocks without much get up and go around the
16 classroom. So consequently students fall asleep,
17 students are bored, and students do not learn the
18 material.

19 Part of Pike Creek Charter is to have
20 kinesthetic awareness going on in the classroom.
21 There are many programs out there such as the JAM
22 program, Daily Fit program, Let's Move program.
23 They all incorporate academics with physical
24 activity.



1 I also would like to speak briefly
2 about life skills that are not taught in the
3 public schools at this point. And through the
4 program at Pike Creek Charter, they are gearing
5 towards teaching these youngsters life skills,
6 lifelong learning, how to get along with people,
7 and teamwork, cooperation, how to deal with
8 conflict resolution, mediate problems, to reduce
9 behavior problems that do occur, and behavior
10 problems do hinder the education of all the
11 students. So it's possible to have two or three
12 kids in a public school setting in a middle
13 school that prevents the other students from
14 learning the material that is necessary.

15 So with the learning of these
16 lifelong skills, hopefully these youngsters will
17 develop healthy lifestyles to continue on, and we
18 just start a brand new generation, and it just
19 keeps carrying on and carrying on; much different
20 than what we see right now in middle schools.
21 Thank you.

22 MR. CARWELL: Thank you for your
23 comments.

24 Is there anyone else who desires to



1 speak?

2 MR. RAMONE: My name is Michael
3 Ramone.

4 I just want to address from a
5 different standpoint. I'm not really here to
6 address as a state representative, although I am.
7 And I'm not really here to address as a supporter
8 of Pike Creek Charter, although I am. I'm really
9 here to address what I think are the needs of the
10 children in this area as a citizen.

11 I grew up in this area; I raised my
12 children in this area, and there are a lot of
13 things that are prevalent today that weren't
14 prevalent a while ago.

15 The middle schools are crowded,
16 that's true, but our elementary schools are so
17 overcrowded, they're building a new one. I have
18 Linden Hill right next to my fitness center with
19 800 some children in it. We're trying to build a
20 new elementary school in that district to be able
21 to digest all these children. By the time it's
22 built, we've lost four to five years of children
23 in overcrowded schools because we weren't
24 proactive.



1 Now, does Red Clay have a vision to
2 maybe put in another middle school? I don't
3 know. What I do know is, you have a charter in
4 front of you that I think have a plan that is
5 strong, have a fiscal level of responsibility
6 that's very unique, and I've watched a lot of
7 charter schools over the years, and I think have
8 an element of timing that's extremely interesting
9 right now. They're bringing in a concept of
10 physical fitness into education.

11 Most of you know I'm a little biased.
12 I ran swim schools all my life with children from
13 six months until they get in college. I think
14 physical education helps stimulate the brain. I
15 think there's a lot of literature out there that
16 says that. But you have another environment
17 going on where our traditional public school
18 system is getting so strong and so attracting,
19 and the economy has become so challenging that we
20 have an influx of children coming into our
21 traditional public schools that exponentially is
22 exceeding our ability to digest these children in
23 our public school system and not detract from the
24 quality of education of all those other children.



1 Now, I listened to the group before
2 this and I was in the hall listening to the group
3 before them, and I hear the same underlying
4 desire to create an environment that fosters a
5 loving, nurturing, positive influence for our
6 children. That can be done at a traditional
7 public school as well as a charter school. But
8 we can't build buildings fast enough and go
9 through the political process to digest the
10 children at the rate at which they're coming in.
11 And this school gives you that opportunity.

12 If the issue is when, and not if, I
13 understand this group of people have come a long
14 way from where they started their proposal to
15 where they've ended, and I've watched this team
16 grow exponentially faster than any other charter
17 school that I've watched and helped in my time.

18 I believe that means there's a need.
19 I believe it means that timing is important. I
20 believe it means people have trust in their
21 financial ability to run this business well. I
22 believe they believe this is a location that is
23 uncandidly beneficial to helping the rest of the
24 children in the community. Not just the children



1 that go to Pike Creek Charter, but the children
2 at the other schools in the community that are
3 overcrowded and constantly having to be victims
4 of us going back to the state legislature or the
5 school board and asking for waivers for class
6 size.

7 You have an opportunity to help, not
8 just the children that go to Pike Creek Charter
9 today, you have an opportunity to help a lot of
10 children in my district that I represent. And I
11 know the process, and I know what normally
12 happens, and I know that this school, if not
13 obtaining a charter this year, continues to work
14 next year will even be stronger and better and
15 more successful. But I don't think you're making
16 an error in enabling them to move forward
17 immediately with the adjustments they've made and
18 the progress they're making in trying to adjust
19 the needs. They've never said the needs aren't
20 valid; they constantly try to rectify their
21 environment to come to what you all need, and I'm
22 watching that happen at a very fast rate.

23 In conclusion, I guess what I'm
24 trying to say in a very simple form is, I would



1 like you all to approve this charter as soon as
2 possible because I believe the need is now. And
3 why are we going to deny a whole year of
4 children, not just Pike Creek Charter children,
5 but the rest of the children in my district the
6 ability to take advantage of the school? Because
7 please understand, this school is not just taking
8 children from other traditional public schools
9 moving in, there's a lot of private school
10 children that can't afford to go to those private
11 schools anymore that are looking for the
12 opportunity to also populate this school.

13 So just please take that into
14 consideration. Your respect of what you've done
15 so far to help the school be successful has been
16 noted and has been digested and we're very
17 grateful.

18 So, again, I didn't come here to
19 talk, but the more I heard, the more I thought I
20 would be remiss if I didn't bring it up. So
21 thank you.

22 MR. CARWELL: Thank you,
23 Representative.

24 Mr. Smith, unfortunately the



1 procedures don't allow for a second speaking.

2 I will take any other comments from
3 the audience. Is there anyone who desires to
4 speak?

5 If not, I want to thank everyone for
6 participating today. The Secretary will consider
7 your comments for a decision for the consent of
8 the State Board. And this hearing is now closed.
9 Thank you.

10 (Public hearing adjourned at 6:50
11 p.m.)

12 (Exhibits A and B were retained by
13 Mr. Carwell.)

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E X H I B I T S

NUMBER	DESCRIPTION	IDENTIFICATION
Exhibit A	Pike Creek Charter Middle School Final Report Responses and Documents	7
Exhibit B	Pike Creek Charter Middle School Letters of Support Presented on June 4, 2013	7



1 CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER

2 I, Vera T. Sitze, a Notary Public and Registered
3 Professional Reporter, do hereby certify that the
4 foregoing is an accurate and complete
5 transcription of the proceeding held at the time
6 and place stated herein, and that the said
7 proceeding was taken down by me in Stenotype
8 notes and thereafter transcribed by use of
9 computer-aided transcription under my direction.

10 I further certify that I am not a relative,
11 employee, or attorney of any of the parties or a
12 relative or employee of either counsel, and that
13 I am in no way interested directly or indirectly
14 in this action.

15
16
17 

18
19 Vera T. Sitze, RPR

20
21
22 My commission expires July 31, 2014
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