

**In The Matter Of:**  
*Department of Education*  
*In Re: Odyssey Charter School*

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*Hearing*  
*October 8, 2014*

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*Wilcox & Fetzer, Ltd.*  
*1330 King Street*  
*Wilmington, DE 19801*  
*email: [depos@wilfet.com](mailto:depos@wilfet.com), web: [www.wilfet.com](http://www.wilfet.com)*  
*phone: 302-655-0477, fax: 302-655-0497*



THE STATE OF DELAWARE  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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-- PUBLIC HEARING --

IN THE MATTER OF: )  
Odyssey Charter School )

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Department of Education  
The Townsend Building  
2nd Floor Cabinet Room  
401 Federal Street  
Dover, Delaware 19901

Wednesday, October 8, 2014  
7:00 p.m.

.. . . . .

BEFORE: Jennifer Nagourney, Executive Director  
Charter Office, Department of Education

Donna Johnson, Executive Director  
State Board of Education

ATTORNEY: Catherine T. Hickey, DAG  
Attorney for Department of Education

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-- Transcript of Proceedings --

WILCOX & FETZER  
1330 King Street  
Wilmington, DE 19801  
(302) 655-0477  
www.wilfet.com



1 MS. NAGOURNEY: Good evening. I  
2 declare this public hearing to be open. My name is  
3 Jennifer Nagourney. I am the Executive Director of  
4 the Charter School Office at the Delaware Department  
5 of Education, and I have been appointed by the  
6 Secretary of Education to conduct this public  
7 hearing. The charter of Odyssey Charter School has  
8 submitted an application for renewal of its charter.

9 At this point I would like to  
10 introduce the other individuals with me today.

11 MS. JOHNSON: I'm Donna Johnson,  
12 the Executive Director of the State Board of  
13 Education.

14 MS. HICKEY: I'm Catherine Hickey.  
15 I'm a Deputy Attorney General, and I'm serving as  
16 counsel to the hearing officer this evening.

17 MS. NAGOURNEY: This joint public  
18 hearing is being held by the Department of Education  
19 and the State Board of Education to assist in the  
20 decision of whether the charter should be renewed.  
21 This hearing provides the school and the public with  
22 an opportunity to provide comments for the public  
23 record.

24 I would like the record to reflect



1 the notice of the time, date, and place of today's  
2 public hearing was published in the News Journal and  
3 the Delaware State News on August 18, 2014.

4 In addition, notice was posted in  
5 the Charter School Accountability Committee's  
6 official place of business, on the Department of  
7 Education's official website, and on the State  
8 Public Meeting Calendar on the State's Official  
9 Website on August 18, 2014.

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

15 A record of this hearing will be  
16 provided to the Secretary of Education and members  
17 of the State Board of Education together with any  
18 written or electronic comments received at or before  
19 this public hearing.

20 We will proceed in the following  
21 manner: First, we will hear from any  
22 representatives of the charter who wish to comment.  
23 Then we will take comments from anybody else who  
24 desires to speak. There were sign-up sheets



1 outside, which I have here with me now. If there is  
2 anyone else who would like to speak, you will have  
3 the opportunity to do so.

4 I intend to be as liberal as time  
5 and reason allow in accepting comments. However, I  
6 do reserve the right to limit comments if they are  
7 purely repetitive or cumulative.

8 At this point we will be happy to  
9 accept comments from any representatives of the  
10 school?

11 MR. MANOLAKOS: I sort of jumped  
12 the gun, but thank you. My name is Nick Manolakas.  
13 I am the headmaster at Odyssey School. And I don't  
14 think there is anyone else that was here tonight to  
15 hear the comments about Odyssey, but I would be  
16 happy to share some comments for the record, if we  
17 can.

18 Thank you for the invite to come.  
19 And it is a pleasure to be here tonight. The story  
20 that I have to tell you about our school is  
21 extremely exciting and very compelling in many, many  
22 ways.

23 The school is entering its ninth  
24 year, and we have a student population of



1 approximately 940 students, and we have a staff of  
2 approximately 80. We operate out of two locations,  
3 one in the city on Bayard Street behind the Delaware  
4 Association of Police off of Lancaster Pike. We  
5 operate our grades five through seven operation  
6 there. And our K through four is in Barley Mill  
7 Plaza, Building Number 23, which we just started  
8 occupying this past year.

9 The school has been on a continual  
10 ascent in terms of academic improvement and academic  
11 records. The past three years it has -- I have been  
12 associated with the school three years. This is my  
13 third year. And in that three years we have  
14 compiled a very impressive -- what we think is a  
15 continuation of an impressive academic record and  
16 the ability to engage our parents and get them to be  
17 interested in wanting to attend our school.

18 I brought some information, if I  
19 could share a couple pieces with the committee and  
20 with any interested parties in the audience. There  
21 is --

22 MS. HICKEY: Just one moment. Let  
23 me get this marked in. The court reporter can only  
24 do one thing. She is very good.



1 MR. MANOLAKOS: That's fine.

2 That's fine.

3 (The reporter marked Odyssey Exhibit  
4 1, one page, two-sided.)

5 MR. MANOLAKOS: So what I have  
6 shared with you is some information. There is two  
7 sides to the paper, and the one side has our  
8 demographic information.

9 For those of you who aren't  
10 familiar with our school, I do wish to mention that  
11 we are a dual-language school. We teach -- our  
12 school is based on the foundation that children's  
13 academic achievement is enhanced through the early  
14 acquisition of a foreign language. And we teach our  
15 children Greek from kindergarten through with a  
16 progressive foreign language elementary school  
17 program that is proven to be quite attractive and  
18 interesting to our children.

19 The school was founded nine years  
20 ago by a gentleman associated with the AHEPA  
21 Organization of Wilmington, Delaware, and that is  
22 from -- it's affiliated with Holy Trinity Greek  
23 Orthodox Church in Wilmington, but it is not limited  
24 to membership in the church to preclude you from



1 becoming a member of what's called AHEPA. And AHEPA  
2 is a philanthropic association. It stands for  
3 American Hellenic Educational Progressive  
4 Association, and it was formed in the early 1940's.

5 And this is one of seven schools  
6 that have similar foundational groups as AHEPA.

7 So if you look at this document  
8 that I have provided you, it gives you basically --  
9 I will spare the specifics, but what it boils down  
10 to is, of a population of 940 students, 35 students,  
11 we are approximately 30 percent ethnic diversity.  
12 We have students in grades -- 132 students per grade  
13 for grades K through seven, with some variation in  
14 those grades. We have an approximately 30 percent  
15 low socioeconomic status and 30 percent ethnic  
16 diversity.

17 The story of how we have been able  
18 to navigate this success with academic achievement,  
19 which I think is one of the most compelling  
20 arguments for the school, in the last three years,  
21 if you look at the statistics, we have gone from  
22 being ranked 26 in mathematics to second in, for  
23 instance, in grade three. We have gone from, in  
24 grade four, we have gone from seventeenth to first



1 in mathematics. In reading in grade four, we have  
2 gone from twenty-third to third in the state.

3 And, basically, there is very  
4 similar statistics where we have moved in the last  
5 couple of years, the last three years, to being in  
6 the top 11 out of 58 middle and 108, approximately,  
7 or 106 elementary. I'm guessing that's what the  
8 total is in the State of Delaware now.

9 So that record is something we are  
10 extremely proud of, and we think that it speaks  
11 volumes about why we have an extensive wait list for  
12 our school. We have wait lists throughout all of  
13 our grades, particularly in the kindergarten and  
14 first grade.

15 And before I go any further, are  
16 there any questions with any of the information that  
17 I have presented? I didn't hear the other format,  
18 so I'm not sure how you generally operate.

19 MS. NAGOURNEY: Traditionally,  
20 it's not much conversation. You are welcome to say  
21 whatever you want to say and for us to listen and  
22 record.

23 MR. MANOLAKOS: Okay. Very good.  
24 Well, I will continue. I have a couple of minutes,



1 if you will indulge me, and then I will be happy to  
2 open it up to any conversations.

3 One of the things that we think  
4 has helped propel the success of our school is that  
5 we have adopted what's called a breaking ranks model  
6 for school reform.

7 And breaking ranks is a K through  
8 12 school reform model that was generated by the  
9 National Association of Secondary School principles.  
10 And we have combined that and meshed that with the  
11 Delaware standards, the creation of a completely new  
12 curriculum for Greek as a foreign language in the  
13 State of Delaware with this model.

14 And this model has three main  
15 areas of focus. One is making children feel  
16 connected to the school that they attend. And we  
17 call that personalizing the school environment,  
18 where the children get to know -- and we have  
19 advisory periods -- the children get to know their  
20 teachers. They feel like they're safe. There is  
21 someone in the building that they can communicate  
22 with, and they feel connected in many, many ways  
23 through this school.

24 The other main focus is the CIA,



1 but not the agency. It's Curriculum Instruction and  
2 Assessment. And we take a very close look at  
3 identifying what it is that needs to be taught and  
4 how we do that and how we assess it.

5 And the last part is collaborative  
6 leadership, which, when I came to the school three  
7 years ago, they had had a tragic loss of the  
8 school's leader. And it was a time of great  
9 difficulty at the school. And the school went  
10 approximately a year, a little more than a year,  
11 without a leader. So when I came in, this model was  
12 introduced, and it was very well received by the  
13 staff.

14 Since I have been in the school,  
15 it has more than doubled, and we began to embark on  
16 the expansion in the middle levels.

17 So one of the things that I also  
18 want to mention is that we have, in the data I  
19 shared with you, we have shown a remarkable ability  
20 to perform at exceptionally high levels in  
21 mathematics. And we think that part of that is due  
22 to the fact that we have a traditional block class  
23 of mathematics. Our school is structured on nine  
24 42-minute periods a day, and there is a 42 minutes



1 of mathematics, but we also then combine it with a  
2 42 minutes of mathematics in Greek language.

3 And if you know a little bit about  
4 Greek, you realize that much of the scientific and  
5 derivatives of words and meanings come -- have a  
6 root in Greek language. And also, if you happen to  
7 be a fan of Michelle Ray, who is a very well-known  
8 leader of school reform in Washington, D.C., she did  
9 her research on the affects of early acquisition of  
10 a foreign language. And, while 30 or 40 years ago  
11 it was perceived perhaps to confuse children to  
12 learn a second language at a young age, it has now  
13 been, in fact, shown to be something an additive,  
14 something extra.

15 And the research is showing that  
16 it's been able to activate this filtering mechanism  
17 in the brain that has a direct impact on the  
18 executive functions of the brain which allow  
19 children to make good decisions and help improve  
20 with academic achievement.

21 So, all of that heavy duty  
22 research aside, we think that we are showing that  
23 this is working, because it's working with -- our  
24 achievement gap results are significantly lower --



1 we have a 30 percent ethnic diverse population --  
2 but our achievement gap differential is almost to  
3 single digits. We are right at the 9 and 10 percent  
4 level with low SES children, which we have  
5 30 percent, and with our Asian and children of  
6 color. And the statistics I handed to you.

7 So we think that's quite -- quite  
8 a -- after nine years that we are going in the right  
9 direction.

10 The emphasis that I want to make  
11 to the committee or to the folks gathered is that we  
12 have a truly open lottery. There is no pre-testing.  
13 We are in the city. We would like to encourage more  
14 people that live in the community. It's one of my  
15 challenges to branch out within the city and  
16 increase enrollment. But the fact of the matter is  
17 that every name of the children that apply goes into  
18 a drum and, with DOE present, we pull the names each  
19 year for the children that get a seat in our school.

20 So we are proud of the fact that  
21 we do not "cream" as some people are critical of  
22 charters, and we do not preselect. We admit. Which  
23 we also have a special education population, and all  
24 the statistics will show.



1                   So, to cut to the chase, I think  
2 we have identified the five goals that our school  
3 would like to focus on this year for this  
4 breakthrough ranks model: One is to sustain the  
5 momentum that we have in mathematics, education.  
6 Two is to narrow the gap between -- which is not  
7 significant -- but to try to narrow the gap between  
8 our reading and ELA scores with those of our  
9 mathematic scores. The third goal is to continue to  
10 build the curriculum around our brief model.

11                   The fourth is a little bit of a  
12 challenge, but it's one of the things that we are  
13 working very hard, to improve our communications  
14 within the school and out of the school in our  
15 community and try to be more open, where we have had  
16 a reputation as being very close and very small, as  
17 a small elementary, and now that's changing as we  
18 expand.

19                   And, finally, the last goal that  
20 we wanted to achieve this year is to maintain our  
21 culture of excellence where we celebrate the things  
22 that we feel we do best, which is operating a very  
23 lean administrative staff and support staff so that  
24 our money from the school -- from the taxpayers gets



1 into the classrooms for the children where it  
2 belongs, and I think our record supports the fact  
3 that we are doing that.

4 So one last comment is we are in  
5 the process of negotiating, and we are in a very  
6 delicate stage in the negotiations for a highly  
7 controversial property in Wilmington known as the  
8 Stoltz Property. We have a signed sales agreement,  
9 but we are still in the final stages where we are  
10 seeking to purchase 36 acres of land and six  
11 existing buildings. And there is extensive  
12 discussions that we can talk about at another time  
13 regarding all of that. But those discussions should  
14 be coming to a conclusion rather rapidly.

15 We have had extensive  
16 conversations with local city and county and  
17 state-elected officials and members of the civic  
18 associations that represent those communities.

19 So there will be more to follow.  
20 We have conducted a series of open houses and  
21 community meetings to initiate that.

22 So, with that, I will conclude my  
23 lengthy statement. And thank you for your  
24 attention.



1 (The reporter asked for spelling of  
2 last name. Dr. Nick Manolakos)

3 MR. MANOLAKOS: And I brought also  
4 some information that talk about our school and its  
5 mission.

6 MS. HICKEY: Okay. So we will  
7 make this exhibit number two.

8 (The reporter marked Odyssey Exhibit  
9 2, a brochure.)

10 MS. NAGOURNEY: Is there anyone  
11 else who would like to speak on behalf of Odyssey  
12 Charter School? If not, the hearing is now closed.

13 I would like to thank you all for  
14 participating today. The Secretary will consider  
15 your comments as part of the decision-making  
16 process. Your comments will also be available for  
17 the State Board to consider. Thank you.

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CERTIFICATE

I, Lorena J. Hartnett, a Notary Public and Registered Professional Reporter, do hereby certify that the foregoing is an accurate and complete transcription of the proceeding held at the time and place stated herein, and that the said proceeding was recorded by me and then reduced to typewriting under my direction, and constitutes a true record of the testimony given by said witnesses.

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

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my seal of office on this 9th day of October 2014.

/s/ Lorena J. Hartnett



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Lorena J. Hartnett  
Registered Professional Reporter

<b>A</b>	11:1,6 12:23 15:3,16	<b>Bayard (1) 5:3</b> <b>becoming (1) 7:1</b>	<b>challenges (1)</b> 12:15	<b>communications (1)</b> 13:13
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