

**In The Matter Of:**  
*Department of Education*  
*In Re: Family Foundations Academy*

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*Hearing*  
*December 9, 2014*

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*Wilcox & Fetzer, Ltd.*  
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THE STATE OF DELAWARE  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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-- PUBLIC HEARING --

IN THE MATTER OF: )  
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Family Foundations Academy )

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State Office Building  
Auditorium  
820 North French Street  
Wilmington, Delaware 19801

Tuesday, December 9, 2014  
5:00 p.m.

.. . . .

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

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

.. . . .

-- Transcript of Proceedings --

WILCOX & FETZER  
1330 King Street  
Wilmington, DE 19801  
(302) 655.0477  
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1 MS. NAGOURNEY: Good evening. I  
2 declare this public hearing to be open.

3 My name is Jennifer Nagourney.  
4 I am the Executive Director of the Charter  
5 School Office at the Delaware Department of  
6 Education, and I have been appointed by the  
7 Secretary of Education to conduct this public  
8 hearing.

9 The charter of Family  
10 Foundations Academy has submitted an  
11 application for the renewal of its charter.  
12 The Charter School Accountability Committee's  
13 recommendation was renewal with conditions.

14 At this point, I would like to  
15 introduce the other individual with me.

16 MS. HICKEY: My name is  
17 Catherine Hickey. I'm the deputy attorney  
18 general with the Delaware Department of  
19 Justice, and I am serving as counsel to the  
20 hearing officer this evening.

21 MS. NAGOURNEY: And we are also  
22 expecting Donna Johnson, the executive  
23 director for the State Board of Education.  
24 She is on her way, and will hopefully join us



1 very, very soon.

2 This joint public hearing is  
3 being held by the Department of Education and  
4 the State Board of Education to assist in the  
5 decision of whether the charter should be  
6 renewed. This hearing provides the school and  
7 the public with an opportunity to provide  
8 comments for the record.

9 I would like the record to  
10 reflect that the notice of the time, date and  
11 place of today's public hearing was published  
12 in The News Journal and the Delaware State  
13 News. In addition, notice was posted at the  
14 Charter School Accountability Committee's  
15 official place of business, on the Department  
16 of Education's official Website, and on the  
17 State Public Meeting Calendar, and on the  
18 State's official Website.

19 A court reporter is present so  
20 that a record of this hearing can be made. It  
21 will be necessary for each speaker to clearly  
22 identify himself or herself before beginning  
23 to speak so that the court reporter will be  
24 able to note who you are. The record of this



1 hearing will be provided to the Secretary of  
2 Education and members of the State Board of  
3 Education, together with any written or  
4 electronic comments received at or before this  
5 hearing.

6 We will proceed in the following  
7 manner: First, we will hear from any  
8 representatives of the school who wish to  
9 comment. Then we will take comments from  
10 anyone else who desires to speak. At this  
11 point, we will accept comments from  
12 representatives of the school.

13 Monique -- I'm sorry. I'm  
14 having trouble reading the last name.

15 MS. DOLCY: Dolcy.

16 MS. NAGOURNEY: Dolcy. Can you  
17 spell that?

18 MS. DOLCY: D-O-L-C-Y.

19 MS. NAGOURNEY: Great. Thank  
20 you.

21 MS. DOLCY: Good evening. I am  
22 honored to be here representing Family  
23 Foundations Academy. This is my fifth year  
24 with Family Foundations Academy, and I



1 currently hold the position of school climate  
2 director and national junior honor society  
3 advisor. My key role is to promote school  
4 spirit, staff morale and enforce the student  
5 code of conduct.

6 I'm excited to share the things  
7 that we've accomplished at FFA. We have  
8 adopted a new education framework entitled  
9 Character Counts, which focuses on the six  
10 pillars of character. It is our belief that  
11 building progression is best promoted through  
12 character education. This year, we've  
13 introduced our students to a normalizing  
14 process, through which time the students and  
15 teachers spend time understanding school-wide  
16 norms and the student code of conduct.

17 We've created a school climate  
18 team made up of students and recommend -- that  
19 recommend changes in school culture and  
20 community events. This trimester we are  
21 offering a learning annex, in which students  
22 will allow -- be allowed to elect many life  
23 courses to assist them in their educational  
24 journey. Adopting these positive resources



1 has contributed to a significant decrease in  
2 the number of suspensions and detentions  
3 issued.

4 It is certainly a place where  
5 staff and students are free to be creative in  
6 their educational journeys and achieve  
7 educational success. It is my expectation  
8 that the State Accountability Board will  
9 support our charter renewal. Thank you.

10 MS. NAGOURNEY: Amy Novosel.

11 MS. NOVOSEL: I am Amy Novosel.  
12 I've been with Family Foundations since it  
13 opened in 2006. I am currently the  
14 school-wide director of curriculum and  
15 instruction working with both the elementary  
16 school and middle school.

17 So FFA stands for Families  
18 Focused on Achievement. We are dedicated to  
19 increasing student achievement for all of our  
20 students, even though the school community has  
21 grown since 2006, when I first started --  
22 started as a 1st through 3rd grade school. We  
23 strive to bring -- maintain that family  
24 atmosphere. We strive to be a school where



1 every student is known and greeted by name.  
2 We strive to propel every student to  
3 greatness.

4 We are working towards being a  
5 data-driven school where students are actively  
6 tracking their own data. This has already  
7 increased student achievement as evidenced by  
8 our honor roll assembly where hundreds of  
9 students were recognized today. As evidenced  
10 by our academic framework, we are making  
11 strides in the right direction. We are a  
12 passionate group of educators, who are  
13 committed to ensure every child in our school  
14 receive a world class education. Our goal  
15 every year is to receive an exceeds rating.

16 We are hopeful that our charter  
17 will be renewed so that our goal can be  
18 realized for our students and staff. And as  
19 they say, sometimes, in commercials, I'm not  
20 only a staff member, I'm a parent. I've had  
21 three -- four children go through Family  
22 Foundations Academy, and all of them have been  
23 very well prepared as they go to high school.

24 So it's my honor to recommend to



1 you that the charter be renewed for Family  
2 Foundations Academy.

3 MS. NAGOURNEY: Thank you.

4 Robert Morrell.

5 MR. MORRELL: Can you hear me?

6 Good evening Charter School  
7 Renewal Committee. Thank you for allowing me  
8 to speak on behalf of my school, Family  
9 Foundations Academy. My name is Robert  
10 Morrell, and I've been a part of the FFA  
11 family for six years now. I am currently the  
12 school data coach, and I was previously a  
13 teacher for five years.

14 During my time at Family  
15 Foundations, I've seen our school grow from  
16 1st through 5th, and then K to 5th, and now  
17 we're actually a K through 8th school, with  
18 elementary in the middle. Our enrollment  
19 numbers have increased each year because of  
20 the mission of Family Foundations Academy. We  
21 have a strong emphasis on family. And I know  
22 that from working it firsthand. We look out  
23 for one another, and we want nothing for the  
24 -- but the best for our families, our students



1 and our staff.

2 From being on the data team  
3 since its inception at Family Foundations, and  
4 now a full-time data coach, I've seen how much  
5 we've grown academically each year. Our data  
6 shows that students who remain at FFA continue  
7 to improve on a year-by-year basis. The data  
8 also shows the students who join us from other  
9 public and/or charter schools meld with our  
10 population and improve in their academics, as  
11 well.

12 By renewing Family Foundations  
13 Academy's charter, you allow us to continue  
14 improving on all of our students academically  
15 each and every year. Thank you.

16 MS. NAGOURNEY: Thank you.

17 Patricia Brooks.

18 MS. BROOKS: Good evening. My  
19 name is Patricia Brooks, and I really  
20 appreciate the opportunity to be here today to  
21 speak about Family Foundations Academy. I  
22 have been in employment and training for over  
23 30 years and had the good fortune to work with  
24 Family Foundations over the last couple of



1 years. And I have to tell you, I have never  
2 seen a group of more dedicated individuals to  
3 training and supporting our students and  
4 supporting the school.

5 I've had the good fortune to  
6 work with many of the staff members here in a  
7 training capacity, because I do handle some of  
8 the professional development training. Each  
9 staff member/teacher is always looking to  
10 grow, and Family Foundations affords them that  
11 opportunity. As you can see by what our  
12 students have accomplished, the students are  
13 learning and they are continuing to achieve  
14 academically.

15 The management of the school is  
16 always looking for process improvement, and we  
17 have made great strides. We have connected  
18 them with the community and parents through an  
19 ongoing newsletter that keeps parents informed  
20 as to some of the great things that are  
21 happening at the school. We've opened an  
22 avenue where parents -- my official title is  
23 satisfaction officer, and I work with parents  
24 to make certain that if they have a concern,



1 that it is resolved.

2 We have a great team of  
3 educators and staff who works with them, but  
4 to ensure that parents are satisfied, we still  
5 follow up even beyond that point. And I know  
6 that there was -- may have been concern in the  
7 past, but we can show you many e-mails that we  
8 get all the time from parents who say thank  
9 you for taking the time, you know, to reach  
10 out and ensuring that our concerns are  
11 addressed.

12 You know, I don't know what else  
13 I can tell you about the school. It's a great  
14 school, and I highly recommend that the  
15 charter be renewed. Thank you.

16 MS. NAGOURNEY: Thank you.

17 Sean Moore.

18 MR. MOORE: Good evening. I'm  
19 Sean Moore. I'm the co-director and chief  
20 administrative officer at Family Foundations  
21 Academy. And what can I say that already  
22 hasn't been said? I'm proud to have been  
23 affiliated with FFA since its inception, the  
24 past six and a half years as a full-time staff



1 member of the school.

2 Family Foundations has grown  
3 exponentially, as we mentioned before. From  
4 the first year, we had 235 kids, to this year,  
5 we have over 800 students in grades  
6 kindergarten through the 8th grade. We've  
7 educated these students and we've served the  
8 community well. We started out in just the  
9 city of Old New Castle, and now we are serving  
10 the community of Wilmington, as well. And FFA  
11 actually attracts students from six different  
12 school districts within the State of Delaware.

13 I think that says a lot for the  
14 mission and guidance of Family Foundations  
15 Academy. And I would just like to request  
16 that the State Board and Secretary of  
17 Education, Mr. Murphy -- Secretary Murphy,  
18 agree with the Accountabilities --  
19 Accountability Committee's recommendation to  
20 renew the charter. Thank you.

21 MS. NAGOURNEY: Thank you.

22 Damien Ross.

23 MR. ROSS: Good evening. My  
24 name is Damien Ross, and I'm the parent of



1 Damien Ross, Jr., at Family Foundations  
2 Academy Charter. And I agree with everyone  
3 else who has spoken on behalf of Family  
4 Foundations Charter to renew -- have their  
5 charter renewed. My son, I have watched him  
6 grow. He's been there since kindergarten, and  
7 I've watched him grow socially, emotionally.  
8 His social and emotional development has been  
9 extraordinary, and I'm proud of him.

10 Right now, he's in Florida  
11 playing for the national championship in  
12 football. It's not his first one. He's  
13 actually playing for his third. And every  
14 time that he needed to do something or go  
15 somewhere, they've always been in support of  
16 him. They also have a cheerleading program  
17 that's nationally ranked and there's a lot --  
18 they produce winners. So it's been a good  
19 experience having my son there. I wouldn't  
20 have it any other way.

21 Academically, he's doing very  
22 well. You know, he's coming home -- my  
23 problem is that -- you know, helping him with  
24 his homework, because I don't know how to help



1 him with it. But as far as the school goes, I  
2 like the challenge that they present to him on  
3 a daily basis. And it's nothing -- I have  
4 nothing but accolades to say about Family  
5 Foundations Charter. Thank you.

6 MS. NAGOURNEY: Thank you.

7 Delilah -- I might get this  
8 wrong -- Starkey? Stuckey?

9 MS. STARCKS: Starcks.

10 MS. NAGOURNEY: Starcks. Can  
11 you spell that, please.

12 MS. STARCKS: Yes, Delilah  
13 Starcks. I'm PTA president for Family  
14 Foundations Academy.

15 MS. NAGOURNEY: Can you spell  
16 your last name, please.

17 THE WITNESS: I can. It's S-T,  
18 as in Tom, A-R-C-K-S.

19 MS. NAGOURNEY: Thank you.

20 MS. STARCKS: You're welcome.

21 I'm here just to report on that  
22 -- our current status, we have 92 PTA members.  
23 We are currently running a membership drive.  
24 And some of the activities that we are



1 currently doing is First Tee of Delaware. And  
2 the First Tee National School Program  
3 introduced the game of golf and the First Tee  
4 nine core values and nine healthy habits to  
5 the elementary school, which is through our  
6 physical education.

7 We also are working with  
8 bringing bank at school, through Delaware  
9 Financial Literacy Program, to provide our  
10 students with financial management. We are  
11 also working with helping -- we are going to  
12 be a part of the Odyssey of the Mind. So the  
13 PTA is going to rally around that and do some  
14 fundraisers for that.

15 And I also want to concur with  
16 everyone that we do get that renewal. Thank  
17 you.

18 MS. NAGOURNEY: Okay. Is there  
19 anyone else who wants to speak on behalf of  
20 Family Foundations Academy? If not, this  
21 hearing is now closed.

22 I want to thank you for  
23 participating today. The secretary will  
24 consider your comments as part of the



1 decision-making process, and your comments  
2 will also be available for the State Board to  
3 consider. Thank you.

4 (Concluded at 5:51 p.m.)  
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CERTIFICATE

I, Heather M. Chiaro, a Notary Public, Certified Shorthand Reporter 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 witness.

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 the 12th day of December 2014

*Heather M Chiaro*

Heather M. Chiaro  
Registered Professional Reporter



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