

**In The Matter Of:**  
*Department of Education*  
*In Re: Las Americas*

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*Hearing*  
*December 9, 2014*

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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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Las Américas ASPIRA Academy )

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

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

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

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

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-- Transcript of Proceedings --

WILCOX & FETZER  
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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. I have been appointed by the  
7 Secretary of Education to conduct this public  
8 hearing. The charter of Las Américas ASPIRA  
9 Academy has submitted an application for the  
10 renewal of its charter. The CSAC has  
11 recommended that the charter be renewed.

12 At this point, I would like to  
13 introduce the other individuals with me.

14 MS. HICKEY: I'm Catherine  
15 Hickey. I'm the deputy attorney general, and  
16 I'm serving now as counsel to the hearing  
17 officer for this evening.

18 MS. NAGOURNEY: Can you hear us?

19 THE COURT REPORTER: No.

20 MS. NAGOURNEY: Do we need to  
21 repeat something?

22 THE COURT REPORTER: No.

23 MS. NAGOURNEY: Okay. This  
24 joint public hearing --



1 Better?

2 This joint public hearing --  
3 also, Donna Johnson is expected to join us  
4 momentarily. She was delayed on a trip from  
5 Dover. This joint public hearing is being  
6 held by the Department of Education and the  
7 State Board of Education to assist in the  
8 decision of whether the charter should be  
9 renewed. This hearing provides the school and  
10 the public with an opportunity to provide  
11 public comments for the record.

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

21 A court reporter is present so  
22 that a record of this hearing can be made. It  
23 will be necessary for each speaker to clearly  
24 identify himself or herself before beginning



1 to speak, so the court reporter will be able  
2 to note who you are. The record of this  
3 hearing will be provided to the Secretary of  
4 Education and members of the State Board of  
5 Education, together with any written or  
6 electronic comment received at or before this  
7 hearing.

8 We will proceed in the following  
9 manner: First, we will hear from any  
10 representatives of the schools who wish to  
11 comment. Then we will take comments from the  
12 public. There are sign-up sheets in the front  
13 of the room. If you desire to speak, and you  
14 have not yet signed in, please sign up now. I  
15 will now pause for a moment to get the sign-in  
16 sheet.

17 If you desire to speak for Las  
18 Américas ASPIRA Academy, please raise your  
19 hand.

20 Okay. I intend to try to be as  
21 liberal as time and reason allow. However, if  
22 we go over the time limit, I do reserve the  
23 right to limit public comment.

24 MS. LOPEZ WAITE: All right.



1 Thank you for the opportunity to speak this  
2 evening. My name is Margie Lopez Waite, and  
3 it is my privilege and honor to serve as Head  
4 of School and one of the co-founders of Las  
5 Américas ASPIRA Academy. I want to thank the  
6 Charter School Accountability Committee for  
7 their recommendation for renewal.

8           The ASPIRA Team has been working  
9 hard over the past three years to build a  
10 school that not only meets the educational  
11 needs of our students, but also strengthens  
12 the community we serve. We appreciate the  
13 Charter School Accountability Committee's  
14 thorough review of our academic, financial and  
15 organizational achievements. In addition to  
16 these achievements, I would like to take this  
17 opportunity to highlight other ways that we  
18 are having a positive impact on our community.

19           Under -- in regards to the food  
20 and nutritional programs are the adult -- the  
21 Child and Adult Care Food Program, the CACFP  
22 recently approved the ASPIRA Academy to serve  
23 free after-school meals and snacks to  
24 students. We're the first charter school in



1 Delaware to be approved for this program. In  
2 addition to that, we partner with the Food  
3 Bank of Delaware with a Backpack Program and  
4 we provide free meals to students based on  
5 staff referrals. We currently distribute  
6 about 70 backpacks every Friday, with  
7 nutritious non-perishable food items for the  
8 weekend. These students would most likely not  
9 have nutritious meals over the weekend without  
10 the help of this program.

11 In addition, we provide support  
12 to our parents and our families. For example,  
13 this evening we are hosting an informational  
14 seminar back at our school to help parents and  
15 families understand the impact of President  
16 Obama's recent legislation regarding  
17 undocumented immigrants. We have invited a  
18 bilingual immigration attorney to speak to the  
19 attendees on how they can benefit from this  
20 development.

21 In addition to that, we host  
22 student success nights each fall to help  
23 parents understand how their student's  
24 beginning-of-year assessments and spring goals



1 will measure their child's success. We also  
2 provide them with tips on how they can support  
3 their child's learning at home.

4 This year, we implemented the  
5 Giving Tree program to help students -- to  
6 help families in need during the holiday  
7 season. A tree is displayed in our main lobby  
8 and each paw on the tree represents an item on  
9 the child's wish list which can be donated by  
10 an ASPIRA team and family member.

11 Another program that we are  
12 proud of is the Habitat for Humanity  
13 Partnership. We have partnered with them to  
14 provide families with more information about  
15 potential home ownership. In addition, we are  
16 dedicating 10 percent of our ticket sales from  
17 our annual fund-raising event this spring to  
18 support Habitat for Humanity.

19 We've also hosted a high school  
20 night this fall to help our students and their  
21 parents learn about options for high schools  
22 after they graduate from the ASPIRA Academy  
23 this year.

24 We also provide on-site before





1 and after school care programs for the  
2 convenience of our families. These programs  
3 include homework help and free programs such  
4 as Boy and Girl Scouts.

5 We also provide a summer  
6 enrichment program for students where they  
7 receive instructional support in reading, math  
8 and Spanish over the summer. In addition, we  
9 provide them with field trips and recreational  
10 activities. We accept Purchase of Care to  
11 offset the expense of these programs and make  
12 them available to more families.

13 In addition, we offer  
14 educational programs such as our ELL Literacy  
15 Program. Over the past year, we have hosted  
16 informational sessions to introduce families  
17 to the services provided at their local public  
18 libraries. We hold these sessions at the  
19 library and we have the attendees receive --  
20 go through the library card process and have  
21 their library cards at the end of the event.

22 We also have partnered with the  
23 national office of ASPIRA out of Washington,  
24 D.C., to introduce a new program this year to



1 increase Hispanic families' involvement in  
2 their local science museums and programs.  
3 It's known as CHISPA. The program is funded  
4 by the Miami Museum of Science and provides  
5 the participating schools with funding to  
6 deliver an after school science program, as  
7 well as an annual visit to the Philadelphia  
8 Museum of Science.

9                   We also partnered with the  
10 University of Delaware to expose our first  
11 graduating class of 8th graders to college.  
12 The students spent the day on campus attending  
13 college courses, interacting with college  
14 students and participating in a Q&A about  
15 college.

16                   And, lastly, we host cultural  
17 events. Two of them are the Hispanic Heritage  
18 event. This event has become a fall tradition  
19 at our school since year one. It is a  
20 community event held in the evening on school  
21 grounds in a street festival style. The event  
22 includes food, music, dance and student  
23 performances, and it's open to the entire  
24 community at no fee.



1           We also, in the spring, host the  
2           PBS Carnival, which is also in the evening,  
3           and it's open to all family members.

4           These are just some examples of  
5           how our school is addressing the needs of the  
6           whole child. We not only see our role as an  
7           educational institution, but also as a  
8           community institution. We strongly believe  
9           that to address the needs of the student, you  
10          must also address the needs of the family as a  
11          whole. The stronger the family unit, the more  
12          successful a child will be in school.

13          Thank you for your time this  
14          evening and allowing me to share this  
15          additional information with the committee. We  
16          feel that the impact of a school should not be  
17          limited to the academic, financial and  
18          organizational framework, but also take into  
19          account the -- also take into consideration  
20          the impact it has on the community as a whole.  
21          We are proud of our accomplishments thus far  
22          and we look forward to building on our  
23          successes in the future. Thank you again for  
24          your time and attention.



1 MS. NAGOURNEY: Is there anyone  
2 else who desires to speak? If not, we will  
3 declare this hearing closed.

4 I want to thank everyone for  
5 being here, thank everyone for participating.  
6 The secretary will consider your comments as  
7 part of the decision-making process, and your  
8 comments will also be available for the State  
9 Board to consider. Thank you.

10 (Concluded at 5:14 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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