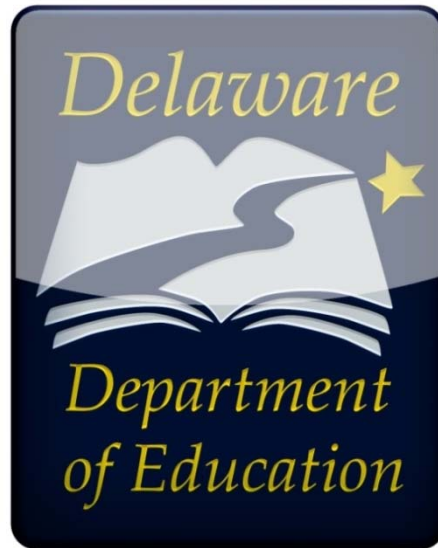


CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Las Américas ASPIRA Academy

**RENEWAL APPLICATION
INITIAL REPORT**

CSAC Initial Meeting: October 13, 2014
CSAC Initial Report Published: October 22, 2014

By September 30, 2014, Las Américas ASPIRA Academy submitted an application to renew its charter. Consideration of this application is in accordance with the applicable provisions of 14 *Del. C.* § 514A and 14 DE Admin. Code § 275. Written renewal application guidance is provided by the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) on its website. The renewal application template developed by DDOE is aligned to measures and targets within the Performance Framework, which outlines the academic, organizational and fiscal standards by which all Delaware charter schools are evaluated. The evaluation of the school's performance as measured by the Framework is a major component of the decision on the renewal application. The decision on the renewal application is based on a comprehensive review, guided, in part, by the following three questions:

1. Is the academic program a success?
2. Is the school financially viable?
3. Is the school organizationally sound?

This report serves as a summary of the strengths, areas of follow-up, and/or concerns identified by members of the Charter School Accountability Committee (CSAC) during their individual reviews of the charter applicant's renewal application, Performance Review Reports, Annual Reports and Performance Agreements and during the CSAC meetings.

The following were in attendance at the Initial Meeting of the CSAC on October 13, 2014:

Voting Committee Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee

- David Blowman, Chairperson of the Charter School Accountability Committee and Deputy Secretary of Education, DDOE
- Karen Field Rogers, Associate Secretary, Financial Reform and Resource Management, DDOE
- April McCrae, Education Associate, Science Assessment and STEM, DDOE
- Barbara Mazza, Education Associate, Exceptional Children Resources, DDOE
- Atnre Alleyne, Director of Talent Management, Leadership and Educator Effectiveness, Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Unit (TLEU), DDOE
- Charles Taylor, Community Member and Former Charter School Leader

Ex-Officio Members (Non-voting)

- Kendall Massett, Executive Director, Delaware Charter School Network
- Donna Johnson, Executive Director, Delaware State Board of Education

Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)

- Catherine Hickey, Deputy Attorney General, Counsel to the Committee
- Jennifer Nagourney, Executive Director, Charter School Office, DDOE
- John Carwell, Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Jennifer Carlson, Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Michelle Whalen, Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Financial Reform and Resource Management

Representatives of Las Américas ASPIRA Academy

- Lourdes Puig, Chairman of the Board
- Margie Lopez-Waite, Head of School
- Greg Panchisin, Business Manager
- Beth Anne Gluck, Dean of Instruction

Performance Framework Ratings Summary

Ratings Scales

Academic	Financial	Organizational
E = Exceeds Standard (89-100)	M = Meets Standard	M = Meets Standard
M = Meets Standard (63-88)	D = Does Not Meet Standard	
D = Does Not Meet Standard (39-62)	F = Falls Far Below	DNM = Does Not Meet Standard
F = Falls Far Below Standard (Below 39)		

Academic

Year	1.a. Growth		1.b. Bottom 25%		1.c. Growth to Prof		2.a. Prof		2.b. Overall Subgroup		2.c. District		2.d. Similar Schools		3.a. AYP	4.a. SAT	4.b. Grad Rate	5.a. Mission Specific	OVERALL RATING/SCORE	
	Math	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	ELA						
10-11	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
11-12	F	D	F	F	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	F	D	D	N/A	N/A	N/A	D	43.4
12-13	F	M	D	D	M	M	D	M	D	M	D	M	D	M	M	N/A	N/A	N/A	M	62.5
13-14	D	D	D	D	M	M	D	M	D	M	M	M	M	M	M	N/A	N/A	M	M	65.0

Financial

Year	1.a.	1.b.	1.c.	1.d.	2.a.	2.b.	2.c.	2.d.	OVERALL RATING
11-12	M	M	M	M	NR	M	NR	M	M
12-13	M	D	M	M	NR	M	NR	M	M
13-14	F	D	M	M	M	M	F	M	M

Organizational

Year	1.a.	1.b.	2	3.a.	3.b.	3.c.	4.a.	4.b.	4.c.	4.d.	5.a.	5.b.	6	OVERALL RATING
11-12	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	N/A	M	M	M	M	Meets
12-13	M	M	DNM	M	M	M	M	M	DNM	M	M	DNM	M	Does not Meet
13-14	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	DNM	M	M	M	M	Meets

Discussion

Section 1: Overview

Mr. Blowman asked the school to provide an overview. Ms. Lopez-Waite described the school's history and highlighted that there have been three strong years of academic results and increases every year.

Section 2: Academic Framework

Ms. Lopez-Waite provided an overview of the academic achievement of the school. She stated that the school has exceeded the State average in all grades for English Language Arts (ELA) and three grades for math, as well as Science and Social Studies. She stated that the school identified gaps in learning and brought additional resources and restructured the school schedule.

Ms. McCrae asked the school to describe its philosophy on problem-based learning. Ms. Gluck described innovative practices to close gap while using cross-curricular methods.

Ms. McCrae asked the school to explain why the ELA growth targets went down and to describe the school's plan moving forward. Ms. Lopez-Waite explained that late entry students impacted the results and the school has considered offering a summer school refresher or Saturday Academy.

Mr. Taylor asked what assessments are used and how often. Ms. Gluck stated that the AIMSweb is used for Rtl assessment every six weeks.

Ms. Johnson asked about the mission-specific goals target, what information was learned, and if the school will pursue new goals. Ms. Gluck stated that the mission of being academically proficient in both languages was exceeded and the school may look to make changes but needs more time. Ms. Lopez-Waite added that the school is confident with the goals.

Ms. Johnson asked why the original approval was 980. Ms. Lopez-Waite explained that the enrollment was right based upon the school's construction plan and that the school is capping at 780.

Ms. Massett asked if the original idea was to have more Spanish-dominant students. Ms. Lopez-Waite stated that the school wanted a 50/50 mix, but would need two lotteries in order to achieve that, which was not approved.

Section 3: Organizational Framework

Ms. Lopez-Waite detailed the school's organizational performance by stating the school is a great steward of funding, especially without having capital resources. She added that the school has passed audits for special education, English Language Learner (ELL) and the meal program.

Mr. Blowman asked the school to speak to the teacher credential metric. Ms. Lopez-Waite stated that Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) rating was 94% and the goal this year is to be at 100%.

Mr. Taylor asked why the emergency plan compliance was delayed and when it was completed. Ms. Lopez-Waite stated it was not intentional and there was a miscommunication that was experienced by many Charter schools, as confirmed by Ms. Nagourney.

Mr. Taylor asked about the process for Board policies. Ms. Lopez-Waite explained that processes have been developed.

Ms. Mazza asked the school to explain why the math scores for students with disabilities have decreased and how the gaps are identified. Ms. Lopez-Waite stated that the school works with special education to address gaps with supports and that a small number of students can skew the numbers

Ms. Mazza asked for a description of the school's continuum of services. Ms. Lopez-Waite explained the process for identifying issues. Ms. Mazza then asked if the special education teacher is involved in professional development for Common Core. Ms. Gluck stated that all teachers have been involved in Common Core training.

Ms. Nagourney asked the Board to describe its approach to the oversight of school operations. Ms. Puig stated that Board is very involved, and that she as Board chair communicates directly with the School Leader on average once per week. Each Board meeting includes a report by the School Leader. Additionally, members of the Board are assigned to oversee specific areas of school operations.

Ms. Nagourney asked how the School Leader is evaluated. Ms. Lopez-Waite stated that the School Leader is evaluated using Delaware Performance Appraisal System (DPAS).

Ms. Nagourney stated that the school's curriculum submissions for both math and ELA had been reviewed and meet standard.

Ms. Field Rogers asked how many students move out of state. Ms. Lopez-Waite stated about one or two per year.

Mr. Taylor asked if the Board attends training and it was confirmed by Ms. Puig.

Section 4: Financial Framework

Ms. Panchisin stated that the cash accounting is positive and the school has managed funds well.

Ms. Nagourney stated that the Financial Framework Report is available with additional information submitted by the school.

Ms. Massett stated that the Charter schools have always have had an issue with current ratio metric. Ms. Lopez-Waite stated that she added the addendum to the financial report to explain that construction hurt the financial ratings.

Ms. Field Rogers requested the school's revenue sheets and Ms. Lopez-Waite replied that she would provide them.

Mr. Taylor asked if money is set aside for closure. Mr. Panchisin responded that the school has \$204,000 in contingency funds and explained the sources of funds to cover expenses.

Section 5: Five-Year Plans

Ms. Lopez-Waite described the plans for the future to include the continuation of excellence in academic, financial and organization performance. She said that the school's goal is to close the gap and be among the top school in the state. She added that, organizationally, the school is hoping to grow at its current facility and purchase the property. She stated that the school will also continue to strengthen dual language and adjust curriculum and supports to achieve.

Mr. Blowman asked the school to speak to its enrollment. Ms. Lopez-Waite explained the evolution of right sizing the school's enrollment.

Mr. Alleyne inquired about professional development. Ms. Gluck explained the methods of staff developments that are used including classroom walkthrough, feedback, etc.

Mr. Blowman asked about the teacher recruitment strategy. Ms. Lopez-Waite detailed the establishment of a network and referrals and stated that bilingual teacher search is challenging.

Ms. Johnson asked for clarification on the school's Common Core State Standards implementation. Ms. Lopez-Waite stated that Common Core has been implemented and the reference in the application was to Science curriculum and Smarter Balance Assessment.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of the meeting, Mr. Blowman asked the voting members of the CSAC if there was any additional information they required in order to inform their decision-making.

The following information was requested:

- Revenue Sheets.

Mr. Blowman then asked the voting members of the CSAC if there were any sections of the application that they felt currently warranted a “Does Not Meet Standard” based upon their review of the application and the discussions at the meeting. The result was a unanimous “no”.

Next Steps:

- The CSAC will provide the school with an Initial Report no later than October 22, 2014.
- The applicant will have the opportunity to submit a written response to the CSAC Initial Report, which is due by close of business on November 7, 2014. Mr. Blowman encouraged the school to not wait until the issuance of the Initial Report to begin preparing its response.
- The final meeting of the CSAC will be held on November 12, 2014, at 10:00 a.m., in the 2nd floor Cabinet Room of the Townsend Building at 401 Federal Street, Dover DE.
- CSAC’s Final Report will be issued no later than November 20, 2014.
- A second public hearing will be held on December 9, 2014, in the 2nd floor auditorium of the Carvel State Office Building, located at 820 North French Street, Wilmington DE, and will begin at 5:00 p.m.
- The public comment period ends on December 10, 2014.
- The State Board of Education will hold a meeting on December 18, 2014, in the 2nd floor Cabinet Room of the Townsend Building at 401 Federal Street, Dover DE, at which time the Secretary will announce his decision on the renewal application and, if required, the State Board will act on that decision.