



**Department of Education
Charter School Accountability Meeting**

**October 15, 2014
Renewal Application Process
Initial Meeting - Minutes**

Odyssey Charter School

Mr. Blowman called the meeting to order. For the purpose of the record, introductions were made:

Voting Committee Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee

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

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, DDOE

Ex-Officio Members (Non-voting)

- Kendall Massett, Executive Director, Delaware Charter School Network

Representatives of Odyssey Charter School

- George Chambers, Board President
- Nick Manolakos, Headmaster
- Denise Parks, Assistant Headmaster
- Patrick Rossi, Business Manager

Representative of the Public

- Lindsey Lewis, Office of Management and Budget

Meeting purpose: To review the relevant statutory criteria for renewal and issue preliminary findings relative to the school's renewal application.

Meeting between the CSAC and Odyssey Charter School:

Section 1: Overview

Mr. Chambers detailed the history of the school from its inception with the Red Clay School District in 2006 through the present. He stated that he is asking for the DDOE to support the school's performance, to acknowledge and provide guidance during the high school expansion years, and to support the school's move to the consolidated campus at the Barley Mill Plaza.

Section 2: Academic Framework

Dr. Manolakos provided a general overview of the school. He stated that Table 1 (Longitudinal DCAS Statewide Rankings) of the Renewal Application provides a data chart of how the school has improved over the past three years and that the proficiency levels in 2013-14 speak volumes.

Ms. Mazza asked the school to identify the root cause of the performance drop of students with disabilities from 2012-13 to 2013-14 in English Language Arts (ELA) and math proficiency, and to explain the strategies put into place to target this issue. Dr. Manolakos noted that the school has a small population of students with special needs. He stated that the school has hired Paraprofessionals and extra reading specialists, added special education services, and hired a middle and elementary level Educational Diagnostician to focus on the needs of each child. He added the school adopted an enrichment block of 27 minutes each day and a new ELA text. Ms. Mazza asked that the school monitor its numbers.

Ms. Mazza asked if the school has an Instructional Support Team in place. Ms. Parks stated that the school has a Child Study Team (CST) and is structuring processes every month based on team needs.

Mr. Blowman asked the school identify the greatest area of challenge as the school expands. Dr. Manolakos stated that Reading is not reaching the same level of excellence as math and, as a result, the school wants to sustain the same excellence in ELA while maintaining the momentum in math. He also explained that the biggest challenge is allowing for the development of the Greek instructional model and curriculum.

Ms. McCrae noted that the school has a unique challenge because, although students have a proficiency level of 80% in Science and 95% in Social Studies, the growth target has dropped. Ms. Parks stated this has been a conversation at Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and a school-wide discussion. She stated that the school wants to see growth in all students and growth targets were a challenge. She stated that it is a top priority for all students and that the school is working with the Common Ground.

Ms. Massett asked if the school uses Measures of Academic Progress (MAP). Ms. Parks stated the school is using MAP and STAR. However, she stated that she has some concerns with MAP's alignment to the Common Core and has found that STAR is serving needs with data and is reliable. Ms. Massett asked if students are showing growth through that measure. Ms. Parks stated that the students met targets.

Mr. Blowman asked Mr. Chambers if he wished to add information regarding the school's mission. Mr. Chambers stated that the idea of having children be world citizens, perform excellently, and have a thirst for knowledge is being achieved, and that the school is going to continue to strive.

Mr. Taylor asked how the school's Gifted and Talented Program is run. Mr. Chambers stated that it is a pull out method. Dr. Manolakos added that the focus is on math and ELA for these programs.

Section 3: Organizational Framework

Mr. Blowman commended the school on measure 4c of the Organizational Framework Report and asked the school to speak generally about its Organizational Framework Report. Mr. Chambers stated that the school has been growing and is a work in progress. He added that the Board created a strategic plan and evaluates progress on a semi-annual basis, which helps communication.

Mr. Blowman asked how the organizational structure is managed with two sites. Mr. Chambers responded that efficiencies are not gained from being on the same campus. Dr. Manolakos stated that school creates school-wide activities to bring the community together and that both Assistant Headmasters communicate frequently with one another.

Ms. Nagourney asked about the Board's approach to oversight. Mr. Chambers explained that the Executive Committee has fiduciary responsibilities and can engage in contracts on behalf of Board.

Ms. Nagourney questioned how many members are on the Board, how many are on the Executive Committee, and if there are parent and teacher representatives. Mr. Chambers replied that there are eight members on the board with a teacher and two parent representatives. He said that the Executive Committee has four members, which include the elected President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer.

Ms. Nagourney asked if the Executive Committee has the ability to overrule the Board and how the Executive Committee functions. Mr. Chambers stated "no" and explained that the Executive Committee has the ability to execute and negotiate contracts with the approved budget from the Board without needing the Board to reconvene.

Ms. Nagourney asked who has the authority of employment contracts and how is authority exercised over the charter term. Mr. Chambers stated that only the Board President has authority. He then explained that the authority has been pushed down to administration over the past two years.

Ms. Nagourney asked how people are appointed to the Board by the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA). Mr. Chambers explained that five members are appointed by AHEPA for a three-year term.

Ms. Nagourney stated that the group of individuals cannot be founders and that she is concerned about the ongoing connection between the group and a public charter school that uses public funds to operate. Mr. Chambers explained that it was a deliberate decision of the founding association because it shares the mission of excellence of education. He stated it is the school's mission to bring Hellenic culture to the general public. Mr. Chambers explained that the reason the bylaws were tied to the organization was for sustainability, as charter schools have a difficult time maintaining a mission and financial foundation. He added that tying the charter to AHEPA in the bylaws brings a level of continuity and support.

Ms. Nagourney questioned whether it's the Board or organization controlling the school. She further elaborated that it creates an incentive for those appointed by the organization to put the organization's

interests ahead of the students. Mr. Chambers replied that the Board operates with the students in mind, that the missions are consistent, and that there is a link through the school's bylaws. Ms. Nagourney stated that the bylaws do not put the concerns to rest and there are ways to cultivate partnerships with organizations and leverage millions without an organization managing the Board.

Ms. Massett asked if any members that started with the Board's Executive Committee have changed. Mr. Chambers responded that there has been one change. He also explained the parent member is appointed by the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) and that there is also a teacher representative and parent community member. He stated that there has not been a lot of change because of the desire for continuity.

Mr. Taylor asked if the Board has received governance training and Mr. Chambers stated that it is scheduled.

Mr. Blowman asked about student attrition rates and Mr. Chambers stated that the attrition rates are low at the elementary level.

Mr. Blowman if there were sufficient funds for summer payroll. Ms. Field Rogers questioned how quickly the replenishment will happen. Mr. Chambers stated that, in December, \$800,000 will be paid back to the contingency and estimated that it will take two to three years to build back the funds.

Section 4: Financial Framework

Ms. Nagourney stated that the Financial Report is in draft form pending the final audit.

Ms. Field Rogers noted that the findings in the draft audit were missing. Mr. Chambers explained that the comments that speak to the tables were provided and that the Board made a number of decisions that impacted the financials. Mr. Blowman noted that this was not a unique circumstance with this framework. Mr. Chambers stated that the school gave teachers an increase to align with neighboring districts and this decreased margin to bet on futures.

Ms. Field Rogers requested the budget worksheet with Full-Time Equivalent (FTEs) and revenue sheets. She then asked the reason for the audit finding. Mr. Chambers stated that money in Quickbooks was transferred to First State Financials (FSF) incorrectly.

Section 5: Five-Year Planning

Mr. Blowman asked the school to discuss its future plans. Mr. Chambers stated that the school expects to operate at a high school level at a consolidated campus. He stated that the school believes that it will be able to mature its Greek program so that it is aligned seamlessly to the Common Core State Standards. He stated that the school wants a single integrated program through curriculum development and leveraging the teachers' work, in math, the Greek language, ELA, and the sciences.

Mr. Blowman noted that a modification was approved last year. Mr. Chambers clarified that the school is in Building 20 and that it will expand to Buildings 21 and 23. He stated that he wanted to verify that the differentiation was approved. Mr. Blowman stated the DDOE will verify that another approval is not required.

Ms. Cannon questioned why the student goals seem low. Ms. Parks explained that with transition to Smarter Balanced, it was challenging to determine rates, but with unknown factors they felt comfortable with these goals.

Ms. Nagourney stated that the school's curriculum submissions for both ELA and math met standard.

Conclusion of the meeting:

Mr. Blowman asked the voting members of the CSAC if there was any additional information that they required in order to inform their decision-making. The following information was requested:

- Final audit.
- Budget worksheets with FTEs and revenue sheets that tie out to Budget.

Mr. Blowman then asked the voting members of the CSAC if there were any sections of the application that they felt currently warrant a "Does Not Meet Standard" rating based upon information currently provided. The result was a unanimous "no."

Renewal Application Process Timeline:

Mr. Blowman discussed the renewal application process timeline as follows:

- 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 recommended that the school 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 10, 2014, at 1:45 p.m., in the 2nd floor Cabinet Room of the Townsend Building at 401 Federal Street, Dover DE.
- The CSAC's Final Report will be issued no later than November 20, 2014.
- A second public hearing will be held on December 10, 2014, in the 2nd floor auditorium of the Carvel State Office Building, located at 820 North French Street, Wilmington DE, and will begin at 6:00 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.

The meeting was adjourned.