



**Department of Education
Charter School Accountability Meeting**

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

Reach Academy for Girls

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 Charter School

- Tara Allen, School Leader
- Denise Luce, Instructional Coach
- Maria Banks, Instructional Coach
- Kevin McDonald, Board Member
- Maureen Thomas, Business Manager
- Blase Maitland, Assistant Principal
- Rev. Canon Lloyd S. Casson, Board President
- Danny N. Schweers, Board Member
- Elvira Berry, Board Member
- Dorcell Spence, Financial Contractor
- Martha Beull, Board member
- Duane Werb, Legal Consultant
- Charlie Brown, Legal Consultant

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 Reach Academy for Girls:

Section 1: Overview

At the start of the meeting, Mr. Blowman indicated for the record that, for a brief period of time, while he was employed by the Brandywine School District, he served on the financial review committee of Reach Academy for Girls. He stated that he had spoken to the school's legal consultants, Mr. Werb and Mr. Brown, about whether there were any concerns that he should recuse himself or step down and invited anyone present to voice their concerns. There was no objection to Mr. Blowman continuing to serve as the CSAC Chairperson for this application.

Ms. Allen gave an overview of the school, stating that the school is the first and only all-girls public charter school in Delaware. She stated that the school just completed its first year at its new location on Lukens Drive in New Castle, Delaware. She reported that the school seeks to inspire and empower young women for success, identify their talents and interest, and prepare them for their future academic and professional pursuits. She said that last school year placed the school on the path to eventually become one of the strongest schools in Delaware, citing the school's double-digit gains in proficiency rates and growth targets in math and English Language Arts (ELA), its increased attendance rates, and its decreased discipline and suspension rates. She also noted that the school met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the first time. She noted that the school has not lost sight of the fact that it has more work to do.

Ms. Allen reported that, after the 2012 test scores, she sought advice about the school's next steps. She stated that a former DDOE official, Dr. Lilian Lowery, put the school into contact with Claremont Consulting Group, which is a national firm headed by John Tarvin. She said that the school received a sweeping assessment of the school that allowed the school to have a comprehensive and brutally honest action plan for the school. She stated that Mr. Tarvin's Assistant provided her with one-on-one leadership coaching. She noted that the school has also partnered with School Turnaround, an organization out of Albany NY, which provides the school with an intensive intervention of leadership development. She stated that the school engages frequently with specialists through that group. She reported that the school feels positive about the changes made thus far and she can see a difference among staff and in the building. She stated that the school recently became a member of the National Coalition of the Girls School to partner with other girls' schools to share best practices and professional development, networking, and advocating for the all-girl population.

Ms. Allen highlighted a few things from the school's previous year, including meeting AYP, showing academic progression in nearly every area, meeting its attendance goal, and decreasing suspension rates to below the State average. She attributed the rise in test scores to the decreased suspension rate. She stated that the school has acquired year-long professional training for Smarter Balanced training from Bonnie Albertson from the University of Delaware and have hired Denise Luce. Finally, she stated that the school is a member of the Delaware Common Ground for Common Core 2.0 with an approved plan for transition.

Ms. Allen noted that the school asked for extra time and, with that time, has shown progress and is on its way to take the steps necessary to get where it wants to be.

Mr. Taylor asked for more information about the report from Claremont. Ms. Allen offered the report as part of the record and it was provided to the CSAC members. She stated that, among other things, the report was about making sure the school had someone who could analyze the data and put an organizational chart together so that everyone knew who was responsible for what. She stated that it was brutally honest and eye-opening, but necessary. She stated that the school still had recommendations to go through, including programming.

Mr. Taylor asked whether the report included a status on where the school is today. Ms. Allen stated that the report gives a timeline. She provided an example, including that staff must acquire PD360 by October 30th. Mr. Taylor asked whether there was a School Turnaround report included. Ms. Allen said that there is information in the Claremont report about school turnaround and data analysis, but not a report from School Turnaround. She identified a weekend-long training and strategies that were learned and put into place. Mr. Taylor requested the school to provide the plan that resulted from the weekend-long training. Ms. Field Rogers asked if Claremont has come back since the report in March. Ms. Allen stated that they have not, but that the school has been in communication with them since. Ms. Massett asked whether information regarding what has been done as a result of the Claremont recommendations could be provided, stating that it would be very helpful for the CSAC.

Ms. Nagourney asked about which items were brand new to the school and Ms. Allen stated that the report provided recommendations only. She stated that the school evaluated which recommendations were good for the School, including adding a data coach and full-time instructional staff. She stated that Ms. Banks is the instructional coach for middle school and Ms. Luce for elementary. Mr. Taylor requested information about the instructional coach's roles and typical days and weeks. Ms. Luce and Ms. Banks provided an overview of their schedules and roles, including common planning and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Ms. Banks described the school's assessment process and the movement of students. Mr. Maitland stated that, in addition, the school uses Scholastic Math Inventory (SMI) quarterly as a quarterly interim assessment. Ms. Banks then provided an overview of the school's Response to Intervention (RtI) process and protocol.

Section 2: Academic Framework

Mr. Blowman noted that the school had already segued into a discussion of the school's academics and asked whether the CSAC had any questions regarding the school's academic performance.

Ms. McCrae noted that there was "quite a bit of improvement" from last year to this year, but asked the school to explain the significant drop in special education proficiency in math and ELA. Ms. Allen responded that there was teacher turnover. She stated that the original teacher had established such a rapport with the students that, when the new teacher came in right at testing time, it was very difficult for the students to adjust. Mr. Blowman asked what strategies the school has put in place to help with the situation and Ms. Allen stated that the new teacher has since built trust with the students. She stated that the teacher also pushes into the classroom to give the students the confidence to be successful inside the classroom. Ms. Banks added that, one of the things that School Turnaround asked the school to do was to set goals early on for students and with teachers. She said that the students did that with the original teacher and felt bad that they couldn't reach them when the teacher left. She reported that the school reminded the new teacher to set goals and meet early with teachers. Ms. Allen

noted that she did have a copy of the report from School Turnaround and Mr. Taylor asked that she provide it to Ms. Nagourney. Ms. Mazza asked for clarification regarding when the teacher left and the new teacher arrived. Ms. Allen stated that the original teacher left around February 20th and the new teacher came in mid to late April. Ms. Mazza clarified that there was a long-term substitute in the interim. Ms. Allen stated that she believed the difference was mental for the students and Mr. Maitland added that the substitute did not provide the same type of instruction that the original teacher provided. Ms. Allen confirmed that the substitute was certified in special education. Ms. Massett expressed concern that the same thing may happen again if the girls are building trust with just one person. Ms. Allen stated that the school wants to implement “Girl Talk” outside of the classroom to help the students deal with bullying, peer pressure and hurdles/obstacles that occur outside of the classroom. Ms. Banks noted that the school’s Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) has taken on a new tone as well. She stated that, although everyone last year was familiar with the responsive technique of a responsive classroom, not everyone was implementing with fidelity.

Mr. Taylor stated that climate and culture is critical in any school and asked for a brief description of the guidance counselor’s role. Ms. Allen described the guidance counselor’s role. She stated that, in addition to the guidance counselor dealing with some behavior interventions, the school also has Ms. Murray (Family Crisis Therapist) and the school has partnered with a wellness group, Affinity, which provides two behavioral social interventionists for middle school behavior intervention. She reported that before the school partnered with Affinity, suspension and discipline was on the rise.

Ms. Mazza noted that last year, when the school met with the CSAC, there were several strategies that the school was putting into place, including an increased focus on student data and increased effectiveness of teachers and leaders, strategic intervention programs for all students, increased student engagement, and was also exploring a comprehensive school design. She asked how the school evaluated the effectiveness of those strategies. She also noted that the current application has a Fifth Grade Initiative, extended day learning, and enhanced professional development. She asked what data the school used to determine whether those strategies would produce positive results. Ms. Allen described the reasons for the Fifth Grade Initiative and the extended-day learning. Ms. Mazza asked whether the things put into place last year were no longer in place or continued in addition to the new strategies. Ms. Banks stated that the school is still doing all of those things and have added more. Ms. Banks stated that one thing the school likes a lot is being part of the Common Ground and described the strategies acquired from that participation.

Ms. Mazza asked whether the school has an Instructional Support Team (IST) that goes through a formal problem-solving process. Ms. Banks indicated that she, Ms. Luce, Mr. Maitfield, Ms. Allen, a special education teacher, a math intervention teacher, and another specialist are all part of the team and gave an example gave a teacher strategies.

Ms. McCrae expressed concerns regarding the school’s low Science and Social Studies proficiency rates. She noted that the school is a member of the Science Coalition and asked whether middle school teachers attend training. Ms. Allen stated that there is a new middle school teacher coming from a high school and is signed up for training. She stated that the previous teacher had attended training. However, she stated that it is a lot when you’re doing sixth, seventh, and eighth grade training because it’s more time away from the classroom. Ms. McCrae expressed concern that the school made the choice to be a member of the Science Coalition and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) as opposed to supplying a curriculum. She explained that the MOU provides assurances that teachers will attend trainings. She stated that the biggest concern is that students have access to Science instruction

and the scores evidence that it is not happening. Ms. McCrae noted that the school's Social Studies scores are in the teens as well. She stated that she wished to make sure students were not just getting math and ELA. She stated that the MOU provides that the school will attend training, such that the school should provide some evidence of implementation of the standards if teachers cannot attend the trainings. Ms. Allen stated that the school is meeting the training needs. Ms. Allen stated that the school supplies the teacher with the kits and materials so that the lessons can still be provided even while the teacher is waiting for the next training. As far as Social Studies, Ms. Allen stated that the school joined the Social Studies Coalition. Ms. Luce noted that a Board member will be helping the school with Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) instruction this year. Ms. McCrae stated that she would like to see some kind of plan to ensure that the students have access to quality rigorous Science and Social Studies in the classroom. Mr. Taylor noted the difficulty in locating a substitute with a Science background and asked what the school's strategy is to employ such a substitute. Ms. McCrae made clear that she is not recommending that the teacher attend all four trainings for sixth, seventh, and eighth grades this year. Ms. Banks noted that the school has PD360 at its disposal to supplement training and coaching. Ms. Thomas stated that the school did try to hire someone with a Science background but has not been successful in getting its substitute service to provide someone with that background. She stated that the school attempted to hire a long-term substitute for this year, to no avail. Ms. Massett asked whether the school's use of SMI and Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) provide the opportunity to measure growth and, if so, whether the school can provide data to demonstrate growth. Mr. Maitland said that they can provide that for previous years.

Mr. Blowman stated that the school clearly has had some growth this year, but still has a long, long way to go. He stated that the school's academic rating was "Does Not Meet Standard," missing "Falls Far Below Standard" by one-half point. He reviewed the down, up, down, up trend and noted the difficulty in getting assurances that last year was the beginning of an upward trend and not just another up-down data point. He stated that the more information the school can provide of an upward trend, the better.

Section 3: Organizational Framework

Ms. Nagourney noted that the school was one of the first schools to submit its final audit and that its Organizational Framework report was completed well-in advance of the meeting. She noted that the overall rating was "Meets Standard."

Mr. Blowman asked the school to speak about credentialing, noting that it was a fairly common issue not unique to the school. Ms. Allen stated that the school currently has three returning teachers that are not certified. She stated that they each have been required to develop an action plan for becoming certified by the end of this school year and that the school does not plan to hire any additional non-certified teachers unless absolutely necessary. She stated that the current Science teacher is an Alternative Routes to Certification (ARTC) candidate. She reported that the school is also a member of the Delaware Talent Co-Op, which is where the school found its current science teacher. She stated that the school's recruiting strategies do not include accepting non-certified teachers. Mr. Taylor later asked what happens if the non-certified teachers don't succeed in their action plan and Ms. Allen stated that in that case they would be terminated. Ms. Cannon later noted that the school is able to sign up for the statewide recruitment portal, JoinDelawareSchools.

Ms. Field Rogers asked what happened this year regarding the financial aspect and posting standards. Ms. Allen stated that it was simple confusion. She cited the seven days posting of agenda and listing the Citizens Budget Oversight Committee (CBOC) and Board meeting dates, locations, and times as

examples. She stated that since clarifying via emails with the DDOE, the school is now compliant and completely confident about what needs to go on the website and when.

Mr. Blowman asked the school to speak to the stability of the student population, specifically as it relates to attrition and transients. Ms. Allen replied that, up until this year, attrition rate has been pretty minimal. She reported that, this past year, the school lost a good number of students due to the uncertainty regarding the school's future. She stated that even during re-enrollment time, a lot of parents noted that they were "not sure you're going to be open" and things like that. Ms. Field Rogers asked whether the school specifically received feedback regarding parents' uncertainty about the school remaining open and Ms. Allen confirmed that the school got the feedback on its re-enrollment form.

Mr. Blowman asked about the current relationship between Board and the school leadership. Ms. Allen responded that the Board recently expanded with six new members and is very supportive and plays a vital part in the school's program. She stated that a Board member, Carol Roth, is currently chairing the Reading Olympics. She noted that Cheresse Winstead, the Chairman of the Chemistry Department at Delaware State University, is providing Science Technology Engineering Arts and Math (STEAM) activities. She reported that Dr. Martha Beull, who is the Chairman for the Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood, is also a member of the Board.

Mr. Taylor asked if the school has gone through governance training. Reverend Casson stated that they have and that more is contemplated. He stated that the Board went through two different sessions with Claremont, with and without the school leadership. Ms. Thomas stated that, with the exception of one who is injured, all of the new Board members are set up for training. Reverend Casson stated that there will be a retreat pending the outcome of the renewal process.

Mr. Blowman asked the school to speak to its closure protocol and the extent to which it has reserves on hand to meet summer payroll. Ms. Thomas stated that, right now, the school has a summer pay contingency in the amount of \$420,371 set aside. She stated that the school has more than that set aside, but that there is 100% coverage.

Section 4: Financial Framework

Ms. Field Rogers noted that she was in possession of the school's revenue sheets, which were submitted as part of the school's application. She stated that it all matches, but that the one area of concern is that enrollment is now below 80%. She asked what adjustments are being made to the budget to meet the financial needs. Ms. Thomas stated that the application contains a budget planning document for 377. Ms. Field Rogers stated that she can match the budget sheets with the revenue sheets. Ms. Thomas noted that there would be a balance at the end of the year.

Section 5: Five-Year Planning

Mr. Blowman asked for the school to speak about plans and goals for the next five years. Ms. Allen stated that the school plans to continue to be stable and grow academically. She said that as the school increases its enrollment, she would like to add experienced teachers to the middle school to possibly TAM teach. She stated that, as she noted earlier, the school would like to become STEAM focused, as research shows that girls sometimes do not perform as well in those areas. She said the school would like to increase its partnership with Prestige Academy. Ms. Allen stated that, with respect to the facility, given that it was a former high school, it has been outfitted for elementary and middle school, but there

is still not a playground. She reported that the school would like to add a playground. She also stated that given the proximity of the Delaware River, the school would like to add fencing. She reported that the school already has some former parents ready to send their children back to Reach. She stated that she is confident that it was the uncertainty that really drove them away. She said she does not anticipate an enrollment problem next year.

Mr. Blowman stated that the approved maximum is 475 and noted the school's plan to grow to 600. Mr. Blowman asked whether the school is, through this process, formally requesting an increased enrollment. Ms. Allen stated "no." Mr. Blowman stated that if there is a desire to include a major modification within the application process, the school must submit a formal request as soon as possible. Ms. Hickey indicated that it should be specific as to what the school is seeking. Mr. Blowman stated that it could be considered part of the application, but that they can certainly wait. Ms. Massett clarified that the school could seek a gradual expansion.

Mr. Blowman asked whether the school sees the current location as its permanent home. Ms. Allen responded that it was more than enough space and there is no plan to go anywhere else.

Mr. Taylor asked about the school's Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). Ms. Allen replied that the PTO is very active and that the PTO's parents are often in the building. She stated that the PTO parents run a lot of activities and volunteer in the teachers' classrooms. She stated that they also provide additional resources for the teachers. Ms. Massett asked whether, when parents do go to PTO meetings, there is an opportunity for teachers and parents to discuss strategies around academics and whether the parents utilize that opportunity. Ms. Allen stated that parents know that they can't be very specific, but that when there is a question about policy or procedure, the parents feel more comfortable when the teachers are there. Ms. Banks stated that there is always a final question whether the teachers have anything to add. Ms. Thomas noted that Ms. Allen requires administration to go to the meetings. Reverend Casson added that there are two parents on the Board; one parent who represents lower level and one who represents middle level. Ms. Allen added that there are also two teachers on the Board; one teacher who represents the lower level and one who represents the middle level.

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:

- Plan moving forward for students with disabilities, including what is going to be different for students with disabilities, how IEPs are aligned with Common Core State Standards, and how skill and learning gaps are addressed.
- Targeted plan for Science and Social Studies, outlining supports for teachers in improving student outcomes, including the school's current status in addressing the recommendations outlined in the Claremont report and the report from School Turnaround with current status.

Mr. Blowman then asked the voting members of the CSAC if there were any sections of the application that they felt warranted a "Does Not Meet Standard" rating at this time based on their review of the application and the discussions at the meeting:

- Academic Framework warranted a "Does Not Meet Standard" rating.

- Organizational Framework (math curriculum only) warranted a “Does Not Meet Standard” rating.

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 2:30 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.