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May 8, 2017

Denise Stouffer
Charter School Office
Delaware Department of Education

Dear Ms. Stouffer,

Thank you for the La Academia Antonia Alonso Charter School Renewal Report sent on April 26, 2017 and for this opportunity to respond. Our goal is to provide additional data points in support of our Charter's renewal.

Overview

Since the School opened in 2014-15, our organization has continually exhibited a pro-active approach to maximizing the impact we have on our students' academic, social, and emotional growth. We have established a unique academic program both as a Dual Language and an Expeditionary Learning (EL) School. We have built a strong school community focused on culture, character, achievement, and high quality work that is attracting new students every year. As noted on the DOE Renewal Report, over our first three years of operation we have shown consistent enrollment growth by adding a grade level each year within 2% of our authorized enrollment levels. At our May 1st, 2017 e-school enrollment target date, the school reached 93.3% of approved enrollment of 525 students.

In 2016 the School underwent a major modification, moving to our own building in Barley Mill Plaza. As a result the move has allowed the school to increase instructional time, minimize logistical challenges, and utilize the green space around campus in alignment with our EL model.

The DDOE is recognizing the role that trauma plays in the lives of children and how it impacts the learning experience of a child. Given Academia's student demographics, as a school we are present to the challenges that our children are faced with day to day in relation to trauma. Through supports provided by the DOE, our school has partnered with the Office of the Child Advocate and Children & Families First to provide professional development to our staff around trauma and its impact on the brain and learning. We have created a mindfulness room that serves to support our students with self-regulation difficulties in order to help them establish greater psycho-social-emotional balance.

These initiatives are being integrated into the School's program and Code of Conduct and complement our current use of restorative practices such as Responsive Classroom and EL-related initiatives. We feel that the School's pro-active commitment to seeking student-centered solutions will continue to improve what we are able to offer our students, teachers, and families. As stated in our mission and vision, we believe we are inspiring children to become joyful, confident, creative, bilingual learners, by providing them with a strong biliterate academic and cultural foundation. We





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believe they are also developing a passion for life-long learning and becoming multicultural stewards and leaders in the communities they touch.

Academic Performance

As noted in the Renewal Report, this year will be the School's first year with third graders taking the Smarter Balanced assessment. In alignment with our goal of preparing and equipping students with what they will need to be successful, we elected to have students take the [optional] interim Smarter Balanced assessments as an instructional tool. The goal was to help students learn about the technology interface of the SBAC assessments, as well as to familiarize them with the types of questions and answers they will be asked to provide.

This year, the School piloted EL Education's language arts curriculum. After much discussion and analysis, the staff felt the EL Language Arts curriculum was not ideal for a dual-language school. In light of this, the School's leadership team met with a number of publishers to explore established bilingual language arts curriculums for SY 2017-18. The selection and implementation of an established bilingual language arts curriculum in SY 2017-18 will provide significant support to the School's program as more layers of dual-language instructional practices are inherently built into this type of curriculum. The School continues to work with DDOE's Office of Language Acquisition in regards to supports for next year, including an amended curriculum 'rider' they have prepared that would support one of the bilingual curricula being explored.

As an Expeditionary Learning school, the case studies and learning expeditions created by the teachers are built around themes to create a deeper dive into student learning. In reviewing the School's original charter, it was noted that the School was to be using the science kits provided by the State. Upon learning of this commitment, the School ordered the science kits and provided training for the staff on how to use the kits. Teachers began creating their case studies and learning expeditions with the science kits as a resource and are excited about some of the components involved that help bring learning to life.

We expect our academic growth outcomes to continue to increase as we have made a number of instructional adjustments through the last three years that are all geared toward moving students forward in reading, writing, listening, and speaking in both languages.

Organizational Performance

As noted in the overview, the School has made great strides since its opening year in 2014-15. The School went from a Tier III rating in 2014-15 to a Tier I rating the following year, SY 2015-16, on the DOE's Charter School Performance Framework. Every year, new structures, policies, initiatives, interventions, and supports have been implemented to further enhance the organizational performance of the School. This year, in alignment with our ongoing goal of improvement, we conducted an organizational assessment of the School using a group of organizational consultants





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from the Alchemy Project. The goal was to identify the strengths of the School, as well as opportunities for growth.

Measure 2 - Meeting financial reporting requirements.

In SY 2014-15 and SY 2015-16, the Renewal Report noted that documents relating to financial oversight were not posted as required at multiple points during the reporting period. Through a series of calendar reminders and new mutually shared responsibility, the Board has been successful in meeting this material requirement for SY 2016-17, as of May 7, 2017. Monthly financial reporting, including a month-by-month cash flow analysis, continues to be reviewed by School leadership, the Board and the Citizen Budget Oversight Committee. This reporting allows constant monitoring of the budget and cash flow position and to respond quickly should any issues arise.

Measure 3b - How the school holds management accountable for school performance.

As noted in the Renewal Report, the School met standard for this in 2015-16. The School has continued using the Teaching Excellence Framework with teachers receiving frequent observations, coaching sessions, and mid-year conferences. The School leadership has continued working with Hendy Avenue Consultants by attending professional training to develop norms for observations, coaching, and other aspects of the framework. Innovative Schools has provided updates to the Board on observation progress. The School is also now using Ed Reflect, an online system that houses observation data.

Measure 4b - Success in meeting school attendance goals.

To address attendance, we established protocols in this area of need. We utilized the Data Service Center Student Truancy Tracking during 2015-16 and 2016-17 to help ensure we were working with our families to improve attendance. For the 2016-17 school year, we took action to provide a staff member to support our families with attendance issues. Interventions included but were not limited to letters regularly sent home, meetings with parents, signed attendance contracts and affidavits of probable cause submitted to Truancy Court. An additional intervention that we are implementing is an automated message system called School Messenger that notifies parents when their child is not present in school. This automated system will continue through SY 2017-18.

Measure 4c - Evaluation of staff credentialing.

As noted in the Renewal Report, the School met standard for staff credentialing in SY 2015-16. The School expects to meet standard again for SY 2016-17.

Financial Performance

Over our three years of operation, La Academia Antonia Alonso has shown a continued commitment to maintaining strong financial management practices. The high level of fiscal responsibility has allowed for the School to invest in and fund the capital fit-out of our new building in Barley Mill





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Plaza at costs over \$1.3 million. There will be a second, less expensive phase of construction taking place this summer estimated to cost between \$400,000 and \$500,000. This work will include the addition of 6 classrooms and a multi-purpose space. In the summer of 2018, a final phase of construction will be completed with the remaining classrooms added to accommodate the School's full K-5 enrollment of 625 students.

Our current projections and preliminary budget for 2018 are showing minimal to no need to draw on our line of credit to continue growing and strengthening the organization and its performance. The School's current financial stability and growth create the possibility of freeing up capital funding, which can then be placed into the staff, programming and facility improvements.

Thank you again for this opportunity to provide additional information. We look forward to our continued work with you and all of the staff at the Charter School Office through the Renewal Process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'M. T. Alonso'.

Maria Alonso, President
Board of Directors

