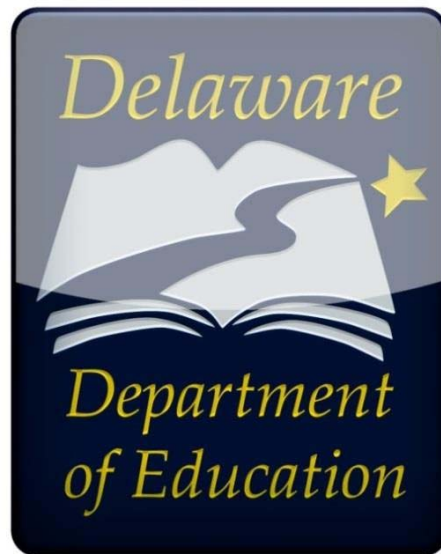


CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Academy of Dover

RENEWAL APPLICATION FINAL REPORT

CSAC Final Meeting: November 7, 2016
CSAC Final Report Published: November 17, 2016

By September 30, 2016, Academy of Dover (AOD) submitted an application to renew its charter. Consideration of this application is in accordance with the applicable provisions of 14 *Del. C. Ch. 5*, including § 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 November 7, 2016:

Voting Committee Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee

- David Blowman, Chairperson of the Charter School Accountability Committee and Associate Secretary, Financial Management and Operations, DDOE
- Karen Field Rogers, Deputy Secretary, DDOE
- Barbara Mazza, Education Associate, Exceptional Children Resources, DDOE
- April McCrae, Education Associate, Science Assessment and STEM, DDOE
- Eric Neibrzydowski, Deputy Officer, Special Projects, DDOE
- Charles Taylor, Head of School, Providence Creek Academy
- Deborah Wilson, Community Representative

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, Delaware Department of Justice, Counsel to the Committee
- Denise Stouffer, Lead Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- John Carwell, Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Financial Reform and Resource Management, DDOE
- Sheila K. Lawrence, Administrative Secretary, Charter School Office, DDOE

Representatives of Charter School

- Kimeu Boynton, Board President
- Charles Fletcher, Jr., Ph.D., Board Member
- Beverly Davis, Board Member
- Cheri Marshall, Head of School
- Gene Capers, Assistant Administrator
- Tracy McCarthy, Reading Specialist
- Bill Bentz, Finance

Other Attendees

- Tracey Neugebauer, Education Associate, Exceptional Children Resources, DDOE

Discussion

Mr. Blowman noted for the record that the CSAC Initial Report would be amended to include Charles Taylor as a voting member of the CSAC. There were no substantive changes to the report.

Mr. Blowman stated that an initial public hearing was held on October 3, 2016 and the CSAC Initial Meeting was held on October 11, 2016. He added that the CSAC Initial Report was issued on October 17, 2016. The school submitted a response to the CSAC Initial Report on November 2, 2016.

Mr. Blowman noted that in connection with the review process, the Department has prepared a draft copy of the Delaware Student Success Framework (DSSF) for the purpose of this renewal only. He also stated that the data included in the draft DSSF report is subject to change once the data has been validated. Should the data change, the updated report will be made a part of the record. A copy of this report was shared with AOD before the CSAC Final Meeting and will be added to the record. Mr. Blowman added that the final version of the DSSF report will be released on November 17, 2016.

Mr. Blowman stated that the purpose of the CSAC Final Meeting was for the CSAC to continue its review of the Renewal Application, probe any areas of concern through a discussion with the applicant, and to issue a recommendation on the renewal application to the Secretary of Education.

Section 1: Overview

Ms. Marshall stated that the response thoroughly addressed the concerns outlined in the CSAC Initial Report including the school's plans moving forward and highlighted past successes. Mr. Blowman asked the school if there were any student recruitment and retention strategies that could be highlighted for the CSAC. Dr. Fletcher noted that, in his role as a Board member, he has been involved with student recruitment planning efforts. He stated that in 2013, AOD began outreach to communities where daycare programs that AOD students attended are located. Dr. Fletcher also highlighted the school's outreach to local churches and that it has identified a contact person to interact with various congregations. He also stated that the school has participated in various community events. Dr. Fletcher noted that going forward the school will begin to utilize more online student recruitment strategies. In addition, the school plans to identify families with siblings who could attend AOD at some point. Mr. Taylor asked Dr. Fletcher if the partnerships he described are currently in place. Dr. Fletcher stated that the partnership are planned going forward.

Mr. Neibrzydowski asked the school to describe its plans to establish an Early Childhood Assistance Program (ECAP). Mr. Capers stated that the school is embarking upon an aggressive student recruitment initiative that would be in place by the spring. One aspect, he added, is exploring the feasibility of an ECAP four-year old program. Mr. Capers referenced his experience

in Capital School District which had both morning and afternoon pre-school programs. He added that the school's recruitment task force which is scheduled to meet on November 9th will begin to attach timelines to the various student recruitment initiatives to increase enrollment between November 1st and April 1st. Mr. Capers added that the school is also looking at upgrading its website and participating in various upcoming Kent County and City of Dover events to market the school. Capers noted, as an example, that on November 12th, the school will have a table at Sam's Club. These activities, he added, will include students, parents and teachers. Mr. Capers also noted that the school will provide three events between November 1 and April 1 for parents of rising kindergartners to visit the school and attend a brief orientation on expectations for kindergarten.

Mr. Blowman clarified that ECAP only funds a finite number of slots per year through providers in each of the three counties. He added that unless the State adds additional slots or a provider drops out in the school's target area, ECAP may not be a viable option but suggested that the school seek clarification from the State. Mr. Taylor asked the school if any applications had been submitted to date. Ms. Marshall stated that the school choice window just opened.

Ms. Johnson asked the school to clarify whether the response is indicative of the Board's intent to establish a pre-kindergarten program or is it something that requires further exploration. Mr. Boynton stated that the Board is exploring the possibility. He added that the school will identify parents of incoming kindergartners with younger siblings and track them for potential enrollment. Ms. Johnson suggested that the school reach out to charter schools which have already established pre-school programs. Mr. Boynton added that the school is the beginning stages of its explorations process.

Mr. Blowman asked the school if there were any portions from its response that they wanted to highlight regarding staff recruitment and retention. Mr. Boynton noted that the school's financial position impacts staff recruitment and retention because surrounding schools and districts are able to offer higher salaries and teachers naturally gravitate toward opportunities which offer higher compensation. He stated that the Board has worked to counter this by offering performance bonuses and continues to explore other incentives to retain teachers. He also noted that the school has very dedicated teachers who have been with the school for over 12 years. Ms. Marshall stated that the starting salary for AOD teachers' is approximately \$10,000 less than surrounding districts, making it difficult to compete with surrounding districts and neighboring schools. She added that AOD provides about 15% on top of the State salary scale in comparison to districts which provide about 30% on top of the State scale. As a result, AOD typically attracts new teachers. Mr. Boynton also noted that the school has had teachers who started with the school in August and left a few weeks later because of higher paying opportunities at other schools.

Mr. Blowman asked the school to describe how to make AOD the preferred employment destination and any non-compensation based strategies that create an attractive culture to increase staff recruitment and retention. Mr. Boynton noted that staff morale has greatly improved since the previous challenges with former leadership. He added that many of the

school's more dedicated staff have remained with the school because morale has improved. Mr. Boynton noted that many teachers enjoy the smaller school environment that AOD offers in comparison to district schools. As an example, he stated that staff have direct contact with the Board and see Board members in the school on a regular basis.

Ms. McCarthy, the teacher representative on the Board, stated that this year is the first time in a many years that teachers have not brought any problems to her. She added that she hears a lot of positive feedback about the school such as the smaller classrooms and the school's efforts to be more data driven. Ms. McCarthy also noted that teachers enjoy seeing the impact that they have on their students. Mr. Blowman stated that it is important for the school to raise awareness about student achievement.

Mr. Blowman asked the school if there were any portions from its response that they wanted to highlight regarding the Smarter Balanced Boot Camp. Ms. Marshall stated that the program provides much more than test preparation; it also provides opportunities for students and parents to take advantage of extra supports. She added that teachers work collaboratively to determine the specific support needs at each grade level. Ms. McCrae suggested that the name of the program be changed to more accurately capture what the program is about. She added that the current name makes the program sound like test prep. Dr. Fletcher noted that he was impressed with how students and families improved their understanding of mathematical concepts as a result of the program. He added that the program became so popular that there were more students interested than available slots. Ms. Johnson applauded the program for enriching students' knowledge in reading, writing and math and, as a result, the school has seen gains on the State assessments. She added that the program goes well beyond test preparation but increases students' knowledge and mastery of State content standards which prepares them for the next level. Ms. Johnson also noted that this message will resonate more strongly with parents than test preparation and represents a culture shift. Ms. Wilson suggested that the school consider how its communications might shift to attract funding as part of its fund development strategy.

Section 2: Academic Framework

Ms. Marshall noted that the English Language Arts and math units required revisions. She commended that Department's curriculum and instruction team for the technical assistance they provided. Ms. Marshall also noted that the response includes strategies for sustaining student performance with the 180-calender versus the 200-day calendar such as continuing to refine the PLCs. Ms. McCrae commended the school for its PLC calendar and suggested that there be some flexibility in the calendar to incorporate ideas from teacher leaders. Mr. Capers agreed with Ms. McCrae and noted that adjustments to the PLC calendar are expected and the school has already incorporated adjustments to its new reading series based on teacher feedback.

Ms. McCarthy addressed a concern in the CSAC Initial Report relative to the number of students in Tier III of the school's Rtl program. She stated that 73 new students enrolled last year and a

large proportion of them were incoming kindergarteners. Ms. McCarthy added that many of them were not exposed to pre-kindergarten and lacked foundational skills. She also noted that kindergarten students were not placed in Tier III until their growth was evaluated. However, she added, there were a number of older students who received RtI services in addition to EL and special education services. Ms. McCarthy also stated that the school continuously looks to provide whatever services students may be missing. Thus, the school's RtI program serves the unique needs of all students. Ms. Mazza commended the school for the RtI services provided to students with disabilities and English Language Learners.

Ms. Marshall stated that the science and social studies data was included in the annual report instead of the renewal application. She added that the school's response to the CSAC Initial Report included this data and a chart which shows that in school year 2015-16 students in grade 4 performed above the State average in social studies. Ms. Marshall attributed the improvement to supports provided by the Department and the University of Delaware's Fran O'Malley. Ms. Marshall stated that science continues to be an area in need of improvement although the school participates in the Science Coalition. Her science teachers have reported that the science kit trainings have not been particularly helpful. She explained that the trainers do not provide in-depth information on the science kits but simply read the manuals word for word. Ms. Marshall added that the school will continue to work with the Southern Delaware Professional Development Center's Rhonda Banks to provide professional development to new teachers.

Section 3: Organizational Framework

Mr. Boynton stated that the Board created a steering committee to develop a strategic plan. He also noted that several years ago, the Board started a strategic planning process with the help of Innovative Schools but the process was tabled. Mr. Boynton added that the Board was able to use that information as well as the survey results from the Delaware Alliance for Nonprofit Advancement (DANA). He stated that the strategic plan will include a Board evaluation, recruitment and succession processes. Mr. Boynton added that the Board has reviewed the strategic plans of other charter schools and anticipated that the AOD's strategic plan would be completed in 60 days.

Section 4: Financial Framework

Mr. Boynton stated that the Board has created a fund development committee. He added that the committee is tasked with identifying potential funding sources. Mr. Boynton also noted that the Board has expanded its understanding of potential revenue sources to include private sector funding. He added that the Board realizes the importance of marketing the school's successes and involving parents and other stakeholders in the process.

Section 5: Five-Year Planning

Ms. Marshall stated that the following goal was added to the five-year plan:

Goal #2: Students in grades 4 and 5 will meet or exceed their projected growth scores on the State Assessment for ELA and Math.

- Primary assessment tool: Smarter Balanced
- Rationale: According to the Projected Growth Targets set by the Department of Education, each student will be provided with the instructional support necessary to meet and attain their independent growth goal for the school year.

Ms. Marshall stated that this goal aligns to the Component V goal for teachers. Ms. Johnson noted that Goal #1 should reference the Delaware Student Success Framework (DSSF) not the referenced the old Academic Performance Framework guidelines. She also clarified that the Star ratings on the DSSF are not related to meeting or exceeding State average proficiency.

Conclusion

Mr. Blowman asked the CSAC whether there any questions or concerns regarding the application that require further discussion.

Mr. Taylor asked the school to describe its contingency plan if its recruitment goal are not met. Ms. Marshall stated that 73 students were added this year, but retention was lower than expected. She added that the school's goal is to meet its authorized enrollment by April 1, 2017 and, if necessary, continue enrollment beyond date. Ms. Marshall stated that the school has already began to target current AOD parents with other children who could attend AOD next year and well as outreach to new parent. Mr. Capers stated that the school is focused on spreading the word about the successes at AOD by leveraging the PTO and attending community events. Dr. Fletcher affirmed the importance of sharing AOD's story with the community.

Mr. Blowman noted the school's improvements in academic, organizational and financial performance. He noted that student recruitment remains an ongoing concern that should be closely monitored.

Mr. Taylor expressed concern regarding student recruitment. Ms. McCrae expressed concern about teacher retention as it relates to student retention. Mr. Neibrzydowski suggested that the school harness the success of the boot camp to build relationships between the Board, parents and staff to boost improve student recruitment and teacher retention.

Mr. Blowman requested a motion to recommend renewal of the charter of Academy of Dover. The motion was made to approve the recommendation and was carried unanimously.

Mr. Blowman reminded the applicant that the CSAC's recommendation was just that; a recommendation to the Secretary of Education on the renewal application.

Next Steps:

- CSAC's Final Report will be issued no later than November 17, 2016.
- A second public hearing will be held on December 5, 2016, at 5:00 p.m. in the 2nd floor Cabinet Room of the Townsend Building at 401 Federal Street, Dover DE.
- The public comment period ends on December 9, 2016.
- The State Board of Education will hold a meeting on December 15, 2016, 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.