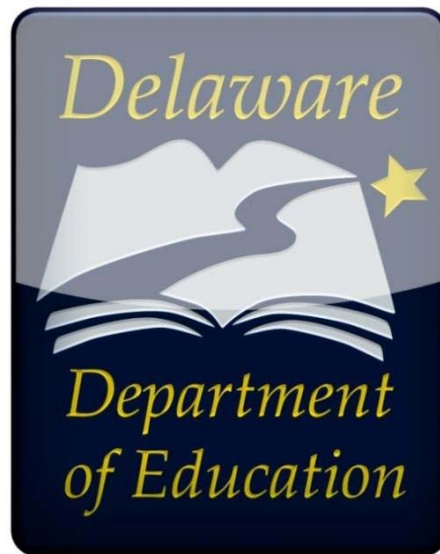


# CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**Academy of Dover**

**RENEWAL APPLICATION  
INITIAL REPORT**

CSAC Initial Meeting: October 11, 2016  
CSAC Initial Report Published: October 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 October 11, 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

**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

**Ex-Officio Members (Non-voting)**

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

**Representatives of Charter School**

- Kimeu Boynton, Board President
- Nancy Wagner, Board Vice President
- Beverly Williams, Board Member
- Cheri Marshall, Head of School
- Gene Capers, Administrator
- Bill Bentz, Finance
- Nicole Rains, Special Education Coordinator
- Marianne Longo, Administrative Assistant

## Discussion

### Section 1: Overview

Ms. Marshall stated that the renewal application highlights a number of the school's successes over the term of the charter as well as areas for improvement. She noted that in school year 2015-16, AOD students performed better on the State assessment than years past, as follows:

- English Language Arts (ELA) performance increased by 12 points in grades 3-5 with some grades exceeding State average performance.
- Mathematics performance increased by 28 points in grades 3-5. Additionally, students in grades 3 and 4 exceeded State average performance.
- Science performance increased by 15 points in grade 5.
- Social Studies performance increased by 14 points in grade 4 and exceeded State average performance.

Ms. Marshall stated that the school is requesting to change its current authorized number of school days from 200 days to 180 days. Additionally, she noted that the school is requesting to revise its existing mission statement to showcase the school's unique features.

Ms. Marshall stated that the school received an overall rating of meets standard on its 2015-16 Organizational Performance Framework Report. She added that all measures on the framework report were rated as meets standard. Ms. Marshall also noted that the school received an overall rating of meets standard on its 2015-16 Financial Performance Framework report but one measure (2.c. Cash Flow) received a rating of falls far below standard. Ms. Marshall noted that the school has not yet received its 2015-16 Delaware Student Success Framework (DSSF) report, but she anticipates that the school will meet standard based on the student gains previously mentioned.

Ms. Marshall stated that over the next five years the school will build on what is currently in place. Ms. Hickey asked the school to confirm that their intent is to clarify and better explain their mission statement, not change it. Ms. Marshall stated that is the intent. Ms. Hickey also clarified for the CSAC that school has requested a minor charter modification to change the school calendar from 200 days to 180 days.

Mr. Taylor asked the school to explain why they have requested to change the school calendar. He expressed concern about the loss of instructional time and wanted to know the school's plan to ensure that students needs continue to be met. Ms. Marshall stated that last year, the school implemented a Smarter Balanced Boot Camp that served 60 students after school from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. She added that teachers volunteered their time and focused on Smarter Balanced preparation and the Digital Library. She also noted that students were grouped based on their individual needs. Ms. Marshall stated that the boot camp contributed to the student gains in school year 2015-16. Going forward, she added, the boot camp will be expanded to serve more students and options are being explored to provide transportation since some students were not

able to participate because their families were unable to provide transportation. Ms. Marshall also noted that the calendar change will address the following challenges with the current schedule:

- Teachers have a shorter summer break and are paid less than surrounding districts. AOD teachers returned from summer break on August 4, 2016 and students started on August 10, 2016. A longer summer break will improve teacher retention.
- The 200-day calendar limits summer professional development opportunities due to the compressed summer schedule.
- AOD's first day of school is two weeks earlier than surrounding district schools and many parents choose to keep their children home with their older siblings until district schools begin their school year. Consequently, these students start school two weeks behind.
- The 200-day calendar only allows for 5-6 weeks of summer planning for the next school year. Additionally, the State financial system shuts down for part of July which limits the school's ability to purchase materials for programming and the upcoming school year.

Mr. Taylor expressed concern that student gains will not be sustained if instructional time is decreased. He also stated that student no shows during the first two weeks of school could be addressed by truancy proceedings. Mr. Taylor commended the school for the boot camp but emphasized his concern about reduced instructional time. Mr. Capers clarified that the calendar change will provide more time for professional development opportunities during the summer. He noted the importance of providing professional development to help meet the school's goals and sustain the gains from school year 2015-16. Mr. Capers also noted that the summer is an ideal time to bring staff together to build their skills. Mr. Taylor stated that he wanted to see an academic plan that would mitigate any potential negative effects of reduced instructional time. Mr. Blowman stated that the student gains in school year 2015-16 were likely related to the current amount of instructional time. Thus, a significant decrease to instructional time poses a risk to sustaining the gains from last year. Mr. Boynton noted that the correlation does not apply to students who are absent for the first two weeks of school. Mr. Blowman asked the school for an estimate of the number of students who are absent for the first two weeks of school. Ms. Marshall stated that approximately 15% are absent. Ms. Marshall added that absences also occur at the end of the school year when district schools close and AOD is still in session. She added that parents have expressed concerns about the current 200-day school year and anticipates that the calendar change will improve student retention.

Ms. Mazza asked the school if a longer school day had ever been considered. Ms. Marshall stated that the current daily schedule is already quite long – 7:45 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Ms. Johnson stated that the charter renewal application did not include a draft hourly attendance survey based on the proposed calendar change to demonstrate that the new schedule would meet the required hours of instruction and how professional learning time would meet State requirements. She asked that the school to provide an hourly attendance survey based on the proposed calendar change.

Mr. Blowman noted that the school's enrollment has declined steadily over the years, from 308 students in school year 2013-14 to 247 students this school year. He added the school's enrollment trend has had a significant negative impact on revenue and economic viability. He asked the school to explain the factors behind the enrollment decline and plans to address it. Ms. Marshall stated that families are asked to complete an exit survey when they withdraw their children from the school and most families have indicated that they wanted a K-8 charter. She added that parents have indicated that they do not want their children to attend districts schools for grades 6-8 and seek other charter schools that serve these grades. Mr. Blowman asked the school to describe its plan to address this challenge. Ms. Marshall stated that a recruitment committee has been established to get out into the community and share highlights of the school. She noted that the school is working to overcome negative history. Ms. Marshall stated that every year the school hosts an open house for local Head Start programs which provides mini-lessons to prospective kindergarten students and their parents. However, parent participation has decreased recently so the recruitment committee began presenting at the Head Start programs where the parents are more likely to attend. Ms. Marshall also noted that the recruitment committee reached out to local daycare centers, churches and community based organizations. She also noted that the spring open house has been moved up to November to align with the School Choice application period. Ms. Marshall stated that marketing efforts have increased (e.g. brochures, mailings, etc.). She noted that the school has a newly active Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) with 35 parents that will help with recruitment efforts.

Mr. Capers stated that parent involvement is a major focus of the school. He added that last August, parents were surveyed and provided information about school's goals and expectations. Mr. Capers also noted that the school is starting a task force that will include a member of a local church who will act as a liaison to other area churches to help boost enrollment.

Mr. Blowman asked the school if the decline in enrollment is attributable to smaller incoming kindergarten classes or withdrawals after a couple of years. Ms. Marshall stated that in the past, students who enrolled in kindergarten have typically stayed through grade 5 but this year the number of incoming kindergarten students went down. The school has typically had 3-4 kindergarten classrooms in the past but this year there are only two kindergarten classrooms. This year, the school has seen increased enrollment in grades 2-4. Ms. Massett stated that the current challenge is a potential opportunity to partner with schools in Capital School District. Ms. Marshall stated that Capital School District has been in contact with her to discuss the school's gains in 2015-16.

Ms. Johnson noted that student retention as noted on page 11 of the renewal application was only 56% when looking at the current number of students in grade five (33) versus the 2013-14 incoming kindergarten class (60). She added that this negative trend is consistent from year to year and asked the school to describe its efforts to reverse this trend which is especially problematic with a lower than average incoming kindergarten class this year. Mr. Blowman added that the school will need large kindergarten cohorts going forward to make up for this year's smaller cohort. He emphasized that the school's enrollment is critical to CSAC's renewal recommendation to the Secretary and the CSAC will need to see a strong plan to turnaround a

consistent downward trend in enrollment, especially at the kindergarten level, and a steady decline in year-to-year retention. Mr. Blowman noted that enrollment would likely decrease to under 200 students if current trends persist and the school would not be economically viable. Ms. Johnson stated that if the current 2016-17 enrollment is projected out based on the trends to date, the school would be at 46% enrollment in four years, well below the required 80%. She added that this trend is occurring at every grade level versus one particular cohort. She reiterated that the school must provide a strong plan to mitigate this year's reduced kindergarten enrollment and the low year-to-year retention rates.

Ms. Mazza noted that the number of students with identified disabilities is low compared to the total population. She asked if the school had any specific plans or strategies to recruit students with disabilities and English learners. Ms. Marshall stated that the school's current outreach efforts are more general but this year, there was a slight increase in the school's English Learner population which is attributed to word of mouth referrals. She also noted that she conducts weekly school tours for interested parents on Tuesdays.

## **Section 2: Academic Framework**

Ms. Marshall stated that AOD's science teachers are active participants in the Science Coalition. She noted that student performance in science improved from 21% proficient in 2014-15 to 36% proficient in 2015-16 but still under the State average (47%). Last year, AOD received professional development in science from the Southern Delaware Professional Development Center's Rhonda Banks. All of the teachers and paraprofessionals received training on the Next Generation Science standards. Ms. Marshall also noted that the training will be offered again this year to train the nine new staff members who joined AOD this year. Ms. Marshall also stated that AOD contracted a former Newark Charter School administrator to provide curriculum mapping training for all content areas. She noted, as an example, that this training helped teachers determine where the science kits were not aligned to the Next Generation Science Standards and fill in the gaps. Ms. Marshall stated that walkthroughs were implemented last year during science instruction and will continue this year. She added that Ms. Banks will be contracted again this year to provide training and meet with teachers. Ms. Marshall stated that a goal for this year is to establish a common science vocabulary across classrooms and eventually across all content areas.

Ms. Marshall stated that student performance in social studies improved from 49% proficient in 2014-15 to 63% proficient in 2015-16, outperforming the State average (60.3%). She attributed the improvement to training the Department provided to teachers. Prior to the training, she noted, a lot of teachers had questions about the Delaware Recommended Curriculum and how it looks in the classroom.

Ms. Marshall stated that 3<sup>rd</sup> grade performance in English Language Arts (ELA) improved by 9% from 2014-15 to 2015-16, but missed the State average by 4%. She added that African American students exceeded the State average in ELA by 4%. Ms. Marshall also noted that students with

disabilities improved by 13% from 2014-15 to 2015-16, but missed the State average by 10%. Ms. Marshall stated the school is pleased by last year's upward trend but realizes that there is room for more improvement. She also noted that 4<sup>th</sup> grade performance in ELA improved by 8% from 2014-15 to 2015-16, but missed the State average by 10%. She added that 5<sup>th</sup> grade performance in ELA improved by 27% from 2014-15 to 2015-16, but missed the State average. However, she added, 5<sup>th</sup> grade African American students and students with disabilities exceeded the State average.

Ms. Marshall stated that math performance improved across the board with the exception of 5<sup>th</sup> grade. She noted that 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students improved from 33% proficient in 2014-15 to 72% proficient in 2015-16, outperforming the State by 17%. Ms. Marshall also noted that African American students outperformed the State average by 35% and students with disabilities outperformed the State average by 21%. Ms. Marshall stated that 4<sup>th</sup> grade performance improved by 21% and met the State average. She also noted that African American students outperformed the State average by 15% and students with disabilities outperformed the State average by 21%. Ms. Marshall stated that 5<sup>th</sup> grade performance in math improved by 22%, but missed the State average by 10%. She also noted that African American students outperformed the State average by 7% and students with disabilities outperformed the State average by 21%.

Ms. McCrae stated that the school's ELA unit submission did not meet approval. She noted that a copy of the Department's review will be provided to the school. Ms. McCrae commended the school for working with curriculum maps and noted that those tools should be helpful in addressing the curriculum deficiencies. Ms. McCrae stated that the Department also identified deficiencies in the math unit submission. Ms. McCrae asked the school to describe the goals and expectations of the Smarter Balanced Boot Camp. Ms. Marshall stated that one of the primary goals of the boot camp was to help students with test taking strategies and have students work on performance tasks from the Smarter Balanced Digital Library. She added that performance tasks were tied into the regular classroom instruction. Ms. Marshall also noted that students in the boot camp worked on the IXL program for mathematics. Mr. Capers explained that Ms. Marshall tasked him with building a culture around data analysis to set up teachers for success. He also noted that he joined AOD in December 2015.

Ms. McCrae asked Mr. Capers to explain how his work relates to the boot camp. Mr. Capers stated that the boot camp provides teachers with what students need to know to be successful on the Smarter Balanced assessment. He added that teachers adjusted classroom instruction based on what they learned about students in the boot camp. Ms. McCrae asked the school to confirm that the boot camp is essentially extra Response to Intervention (RtI) time. Mr. Capers agreed. Ms. McCrae noted that her initial concern was that the boot camp was limited to test preparation. She commented that students who are not understanding concepts could be an indicator that there may be something missing in curriculum and instruction that the boot camp would not necessarily address. Ms. McCrae also expressed concern about the large number of students who attend the boot camp and whether there should be some focus on curriculum and instruction.



Ms. Johnson concurred that the initial description of the boot camp as test preparation was not fully accurate. She added that it is clearly more than helping students understand the technology components of test taking but can be more accurately described as a program that helps students demonstrate mastery of content standards. She added that the boot camp helps students with areas of deficiency. Ms. Johnson commented that in addition to the boot camp, teachers should be provided with wraparound services to review deficiencies in the curriculum. She also suggested that the school revisit communications about boot camp so that the Board, parents, teachers and the community have a more accurate understanding of how the boot camp connects to classroom instruction.

Ms. McCrae asked the school to clarify how the various assessments identified in the renewal application are being utilized to assist teachers. Mr. Capers stated that these strategies have been rolled out in the last 10 weeks. He added that the focus on data analysis was critical for helping teachers, especially for new teachers who joined AOD this year. Mr. Capers explained that students were grouped after he helped the teachers review the data. He added that teachers received DIBELS data at the beginning of the year and discussed and identified strategies through their PLCs. Ms. McCrae stated that it would be helpful to include with revised curricular units a description of how they are using interim assessments to monitor student growth and make adjustments to curricula throughout the year.

Mr. Taylor asked the school to provide its staff retention rate for the 2015-16 school year. Ms. Marshall stated that 9 out of 33 teacher are new this year. Mr. Taylor asked the school to provide the average years of teaching experience. Ms. Marshall stated that most of this year's incoming teachers are new to the profession and the other teachers have 5-10 years of teaching experience. She added that the reading specialist has 20+ years of experience. Ms. Johnson asked for the grades levels being taught by new teachers. Ms. Marshall stated the following: kindergarten: 1; 1<sup>st</sup> grade: 1; 2<sup>nd</sup> grade: 1; 4<sup>th</sup> grade: 1; special education: 2. Mr. Taylor asked for the current number of classes per grade. Ms. Marshall stated that the school has typically had the following number of classes per grade: kindergarten: 3; 1<sup>st</sup> grade: 3; 2<sup>nd</sup> grade: 2; 3<sup>rd</sup> grade: 2; 4<sup>th</sup> grade: 2; and 5<sup>th</sup> grade: 2. However, this year, she added, kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade have two classes and 5<sup>th</sup> grade was reduced to one class.

Mr. Neibrzydowski asked the school to explain the reasoning behind its transition from DIBELS to the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) and whether the intent is to move away from DIBELS altogether. Ms. Marshall stated that this is the first year that the school moved away from Moby math and Math XL to the Scholastic Math Inventory (SMI) and expects to adopt SRI. However, she added, SRI was not implemented to prevent overwhelming the teachers with too many changes but it is being evaluated for potential use in the future. Ms. Mazza referenced page 9 of the renewal application which lists a number of disability categories including "multiple disabilities" and clarified that this is not a recognized disability category. She also clarified that page 1 of Appendix P referenced a 60-day timeline for evaluations which is a federal requirement but the State requirement is 45-days.

Ms. Mazza referenced the school's Rtl data in reading and noted that the Tier I percentages are low and asked the school if they have evaluated their interventions for Tiers II and III since the percentages in Tier III are relatively high. Ms. Marshall stated that the reading and math specialists work with teachers and have provided training on DIBELS Next and SMI. Through this process, she added, one teacher was identified for extra support. Ms. Mazza asked the school about the evaluation process and how they determine if interventions are not working. Ms. Rains stated that the Instructional Support Team reviews cases in which students are not progressing and determines if students should be referred for evaluation. Ms. Mazza noted that the high Tier III percentages could be attributed to issues with classroom instruction versus individual student issues. She asked the school to describe its feedback process to ensure that corrective actions are made. Mr. Capers stated that they focus on student engagement, small group instruction, use of extended activities in the classroom and use of classroom technology. He added that teachers are provided with feedback from walkthroughs. Ms. Rains added that weekly and/or bi-weekly progress monitoring provides data on upward or downward trends that are referred to the math specialist or reading specialist. She explained that students may be regrouped based on the data. Ms. Mazza asked if the math and reading specialists attend the Department's Reading Cadre and Math Cadre meetings. Mr. Capers stated that the reading specialist attends the Reading Cadre meetings. Mr. Capers also noted that the new assessments have enabled more group assessments and have informed adjustments, as needed.

Ms. Mazza asked the school if there is a process to evaluate the new reading curriculum along the way. Mr. Capers stated that currently there is not a formal evaluation process in place but the school is planning to bring back a consultant to help with this. Ms. Mazza suggested that the consultant focus on skill gaps in the new reading curriculum.

Ms. Mazza noted that the school has had four educational diagnosticians in four years and asked what processes the school has in place to improve retention for this position. Ms. Marshall stated that the pay gap between what AOD can afford and district pay is a challenge.

Mr. Taylor asked the school to describe its daily schedule. Ms. Marshall stated that ELA is a 90-minute block, math is a 60-minute block, and social studies is a 45-minute block.

Ms. Field Rogers asked how last year's 27% staff attrition compares with previous years. Ms. Marshall stated that the school lost more staff last year than in previous years. She added that the school typically loses 3-4 teachers to district positions but the school hired more new teachers this year than in years past. Ms. Field Rogers asked the school to explain what the lower retention is attributed to. Ms. Marshall stated that higher salary is the primary reason that teachers leave the school. However, she added, many of these teachers have reported that they enjoy working in a small school and one former teacher returned to AOD for the environment. Mr. Blowman asked if the 200-day school calendar has been a factor in staff retention. Ms. Marshall agreed.

Ms. Johnson noted that the school's opening remarks were more descriptive than the information contained in the renewal application. She added that the application did not reference the school's science or social studies data. Ms. Marshall noted that in working on the

renewal application and annual report simultaneously she realized after submission that she only included the science and social studies data in the annual report.

Ms. Johnson asked the school to describe its data analysis relative to areas where the school has not performed well and, more specifically, in the area of single year growth. She added that under the previous Academic Performance Framework, AOD struggled in single year growth but growth to proficiency was improving. Ms. Johnson noted that growth and growth to proficiency accounts for 60% for elementary and middle schools under the DSSF. She added that in school year 2014-15, only 10.2% of students showed growth to proficiency in ELA and 1.6% in math. Ms. Johnson asked the school to describe its process for tracking growth and growth to proficiency. She noted that AOD outperformed the State for some cohorts of students but the renewal application does not provide an analysis that demonstrates an understanding of the data and whether this information is being incorporated into professional development opportunities. Mr. Capers claimed responsibility for this information not being presented in the renewal application and agreed that her suggestions would be important to look at going forward. Ms. Johnson commented that the school has a lot to build on and celebrate but it is important to provide evidence that the school has taken an introspective look and has planned forward based on the data. Mr. Blowman applauded the school for its improvements but noted that the CSAC wants to know that the school understands why the improvements occurred and be able to articulate it to provide confidence to CSAC that the improvements are sustainable. He added that the school does not currently have a trend, but rather one year of solid performance. He reiterated that the CSAC is interested in how the school will sustain success going forward. Ms. Stouffer suggested that the school's response include information and data to support its decisions such as adopting a new ELA curriculum and also address the questions posed by Ms. Mazza and Ms. McCrae.

Ms. Johnson suggested that the school revisit the academic goals outlined on page 16 of the renewal application and determine if these goals are truly reflective of the school's 2015-16 performance. She noted that since the DSSF places significantly higher weight on growth and growth to proficiency it would be helpful to include goals relative to growth. Ms. Johnson also noted that it is important to consider the school's areas for improvement as well as the key areas of accountability from the authorizer's perspective when revising the goals.

### **Section 3: Organizational Framework**

Ms. Marshall stated that the school met standard across the board on its 2015-16 Organizational Performance Framework report. She added that the school made a concerted effort to clean up the compliance issues identified in its 2014-15 report. Ms. Marshall also noted that the school is currently meeting all of its special education requirements and has been working closely with Ms. Mazza who has been very helpful. Currently, she added, the school is on a corrective action plan with requirements due to the Department on October 14, 2016.

Ms. Marshall referenced the school's attrition rates which were listed on page 12 of the renewal application. She noted that student recruitment is a priority for the school. She also noted that the State closure requirements are addressed in the renewal application. Mr. Taylor asked for information about the Board Oversight Committee and the frequency of its meetings. Ms. Marshall stated that the committee meets every other month and includes two Board members and herself. Mr. Taylor asked if the committee keeps meeting minutes. Ms. Marshall stated that she records the committee minutes but they are not posted to the school's website. Mr. Taylor requested a copy of the minutes.

Mr. Blowman commended the school its progress in meeting compliance requirements. Ms. Johnson asked the Board to describe how they achieved significant progress on meeting compliance requirements over the past year. Mr. Boynton attributed the improvements to the dedication of the Board. He added that some of the school's past financial issues were related to Board oversight so the Board made it a priority to become intimately involved in the decision making of the school. Mr. Boynton also cited the importance of the school's Citizen Budget Oversight Committee and the help the Board has received from the Department. Mr. Blowman asked Mr. Boynton if systems have been put in place to sustain the positive changes. Mr. Boynton agreed. Mr. Taylor asked the school for additional detail. Mr. Boynton stated that the Board has streamlined a number of policies to simplify processes. As an example, he explained that the Board cancelled the school's PCard and eliminated unnecessary expenditures. Mr. Boynton also noted that the Board has participated in governance training. He added that systems have been put in place to ensure that every Board member receives the same information so that every member is equipped to answer questions. Mr. Boynton also noted that Ms. Marshall consults the Board regularly for feedback on critical decisions.

#### **Section 4: Financial Framework**

Mr. Bentz noted the importance of enrollment to the financial viability of the school. He also noted the impact of the Mosaica judgement which heavily impacted the school's finances. Mr. Bentz stated that in addition to legal expenses, the school has made the following payments toward the settlement: \$350,000 (June 2015), \$150,000 (July 2015), and \$50,000 (July 2016). Two additional payments of \$50,000 each are due in July 2017 and July 2018. He added that the payments to date have come out of the school's reserves. Mr. Bentz stated that problems with the previous head of school also impacted the school's financial position. He referenced the school's FY17 audited financial statements which confirms that all prior year findings have been resolved and there are no current year findings. Mr. Bentz noted that efforts have been made to reduce expenses and the Board successfully negotiated a \$90,000 reduction in this year's rent from \$553,887 to \$479,856. He reiterated the importance of increasing the school's enrollment.

Mr. Blowman noted that the school does not currently have adequate reserves on hand should the charter not be renewed and asked the school to describe its plan to build up its reserves. Mr. Bentz stated that the only way to build up reserves is to increase enrollment. He added that the school was able to build reserves when enrollment was at 310 students.

Mr. Blowman asked the school to describe the revisions to the budget based on 247 students and 15 units. Mr. Bentz stated that the Board reviewed the budget line by line and looked at staffing and decided to use reserves to minimize impacts to the educational program. Mr. Blowman asked the school if there were any significant changes to the budget beyond the rent reduction. Mr. Bentz noted that that legal expenses went down after the Mosaica judgement was settled. He added that the school was able to purchase new curricula. Ms. Field Rogers asked if there was any reduction in staff due to the reduced enrollment. Ms. Marshall stated that the school had two teachers in 5<sup>th</sup> grade but one of the teachers accepted another position. She added that 5<sup>th</sup> grade enrollment decreased to 33 students and the Board decided to combine the two classes instead of hiring another 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher to meet the budget.

Ms. Field Rogers noted a possible discrepancy between what the school reports as the remaining balance due to Mosaica and what is reported on page 16 of the FY17 audit. She noted that the audit shows a payment in 2019 but the school reported a final payment in 2018. Mr. Bentz stated that the audit is incorrect and confirmed that the school's final payment is due in July 2018.

Mr. Blowman noted that while the school received an overall rating of meets standard on its 2015-16 Financial Performance Framework report its financial position remains fragile based on its cash flow and low enrollment.

### **Section 5: Five-Year Planning**

Ms. Marshall stated that the goal is to increase enrollment by 40 students in the 2017-18 school year and stabilize at 298 students. Mr. Blowman noted that the school's enrollment projections assume an increase in kindergarten enrollments while reducing grade-to-grade attrition. Ms. Wilson requested additional clarification regarding the rent reduction. Mr. Bentz stated that the \$90,000 reduction is based on a monthly cut of \$7,500 per month starting in October and carries through part of next year.

Ms. Marshall stated that the school is in the process of evaluating various options but may transition to from DIBELS to SRI. She added that teachers will continue to receive training on science kits and extra professional development on the Next Generation Science Standards. Ms. Marshall stated that over the next five years the school will gradually upgrade its laptops which are 5 years old. She also noted that the school currently utilizes the Department's ParTech services. Mr. Blowman asked if the laptop costs are reflected in the budget. Ms. Marshall stated that the school IT contractor refurbishes computers.

Ms. McCrae commended the school for its 2015-16 academic gains. She stated that it would have been helpful if the school's response to this section was in a strategic plan format. Ms. McCrae stated that CSAC's concern is that the school is at risk of financial collapse if enrollment and retention do not improve which can be tied to teacher retention. She added that teacher retention impacts school culture. Ms. McCrae also emphasized the importance of addressing

curriculum and instruction and using data analysis to guide decision making. She added that it is critical for the school to take the opportunity to reflect to be successful going forward. Mr. Capers stated that he used a model framework when he worked in Capital School District and asked Ms. McCrae if that format aligns to her suggestion. Ms. McCrae agreed. Ms. Massett stated that the school needs to develop a strategic plan now and the Board should be intimately involved in the process. She added that the plan should include a fundraising component. Mr. Taylor requested a comprehensive recruitment plan.

Ms. Johnson noted that the Board went through the Delaware Alliance for Nonprofit Advancement (DANA) training in 2015 (“Mapping Board Excellence”) and requested that the school’s response include an outline of the vision and goals the Board developed based on the DANA training. She added that this information will give the CSAC a better understanding of the Board’s governance perspective and how it relates to the instructional leadership perspective. Ms. Johnson also requested more information on the school’s plans for professional development around the use of technology to enhance instruction.

## **Conclusion**

Mr. Blowman asked voting members of CSAC whether there was any additional information that it required to inform its decision-making.

The following information was requested:

## **Overview**

1. Provide a list of activities AOD has historically used for student recruitment and retention. Provide a list of new activities and a calendar/timeline.
2. Provide a list of activities AOD has historically used for staff recruitment and retention. Provide a list of new activities and a calendar/timeline.
3. Provide an explanation of how the school is communicating the Smarter Balanced Boot Camp to the Board, parents, students and the community.

## **Academic Framework**

4. Revise ELA and math curricular units based on deficiencies identified within the rubrics (see attached) and describe interim assessments used to monitor student growth and make adjustments to curricula throughout the year.
5. Describe any changes to the educational program to ensure that student gains are sustained based on proposed shorter school year. Explain how professional learning schedule (PLCs, etc.) will be sustained based on proposed shorter school year.
6. Provide 2017-18 School Calendar and Attendance Survey based on 180 days to include weather contingencies/unforeseen closures.
7. Describe plan for evaluating new reading curriculum with a timeline.

8. Provide updated Rtl information to include fall screening results that show how students are distributed by tiers. Describe Tier II and Tier III interventions.
9. Provide PLC framework and plan (schedule, sample agendas, and minutes that include the data analysis cycle).
10. Describe the process of analysis of and conclusions drawn from science and social studies data. List identified areas of weakness and what is being done this school year to address these areas.
11. Describe the process of analysis of and conclusions drawn from growth and growth to proficiency data. List identified areas of weakness and what is being done this school year to address these areas.
12. Explain how Smarter Balanced Boot Camp enhances the general curriculum and supports the Rtl program.
13. Describe the process of analysis of and conclusions drawn from identified curricular gaps. List identified areas of weakness and what is being done this school year to address these areas.

### **Organizational Framework**

14. Provide Board Oversight Committee minutes.
15. Identify areas of strength and need based on the Board's self-evaluation and outline the vision, strategic plan and goals the Board developed based on the DANA training. The response should reflect how the Board's governance perspective relates to the instructional leadership's perspective.

### **Financial Framework**

16. Provide a calendar and describe the activities the Board plans to accomplish as part of its fund development plan.

### **Five-Year Planning**

17. Review academic goals on page 16 of the Renewal Application and revise as needed.

Mr. Blowman asked the school if they had any final questions or statements. Mr. Capers requested technical support for Ms. Marshall to address the CSAC's concerns. Mr. Blowman commended the school for its success in 2015-16. However, he added, student recruitment and retention are critical to the school's future success. Mr. Blowman also noted that minor shifts in the school's enrollment could have a more significant negative impact on the educational program because the school's margins are currently very thin.

### **Next Steps:**

- The CSAC will provide the school with an Initial Report no later than October 17, 2016.

- 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 2, 2016.
- The final meeting of the CSAC will be held on November 7, 2016, at 1:00 p.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 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.