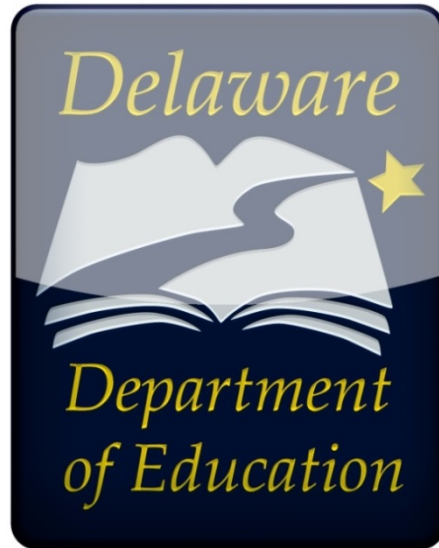


CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Las Américas ASPIRA Academy

**RENEWAL APPLICATION
INITIAL REPORT**

CSAC Initial Meeting: October 28, 2019
CSAC Initial Report Published: November 7, 2019

By September 30, 2019, Las Américas ASPIRA Academy (LAAA) submitted an application to renew its charter. Consideration of this application is in accordance with the applicable provisions of 14 *Del. C.* § 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 28, 2019:

Voting Committee Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee

- Chuck Longfellow, Chairperson of the Charter School Accountability Committee and Associate Secretary of Education, DDOE
- April McCrae, Education Associate, Academic Support, DDOE
- Tiffany Green, Education Associate, Educator Support Team, DDOE
- Gregory Fulkerson, Education Associate, Academic Support Team, DDOE
- Catherine Ortiz, Education Associate, Federal Funds and Cost Recovery, DDOE
- James Pennewell, Education Associate, Capital Projects Management, DDOE
- Susan Veenema, Education Associate, Exceptional Children Resources, DDOE
- Susan Keene Haberstroh, Education Associate, School Support Services, DDOE
- Charles Taylor, Community Member and Former Charter School Leader

Ex-Officio Members (Non-voting)

- Kendall Massett, Executive Director, Delaware Charter School Network
- Wali Rushdan, Delaware State Board of Education

Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)

- Darryl Parson, Deputy Attorney General, Counsel to the Committee, Delaware Department of Justice
- Leroy Travers, Lead Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Sheila Kay Lawrence, Administrative Secretary, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Financial Reform and Resource Management, DDOE

Representatives of Las Américas LAAA Academy

- Lourdes Puig, Chairman of the Board
- Margie Lopez-Waite, Head of School
- Greg Panchisin, Business Manager
- Emily Edmonds-Eveland, Director of Curriculum and Instruction
- Deborah Panchisin, Academic Support

Discussion

Section 1: Overview

Mr. Longfellow asked the school to provide a school overview. Ms. Lopez-Waite explained that this is the school's second charter renewal. She described the school's history and highlighted that these have been strong years of academic results for its 946 students. In addition, the enrollment waitlist increases every year. LAAA is excited about their upcoming expansion for next Fall in which they will be adding a ninth grade. This will allow them to have a pathway for bi-literacy and for college and career readiness. The school feels that they are good stewards of their school finances. Ms. Lopez-Waite provided an overview of the academic achievement of the school. As of Spring, 2019, 50% of students achieved proficiency in English Language Arts and 40% in Math on the Smarter Balance assessment. 62% of their students achieved their growth targets in ELA and 58% in Math. LAAA students are outperforming their peers within the neighboring school districts of Christina, Colonial and Red Clay in ELA and Math, this includes the African-American and Hispanic students subgroups. All data can be found in the appendix of the school's renewal application.

Following the school's introduction, Dr. Longfellow noted the following regarding the school's Delaware School Success Framework (DSSF):

- On September 20, 2019, the Charter School Office provided draft DSSF results to the renewing charter schools so that they could complete their renewal applications. The correspondence noted that the data was still draft and schools would be notified if there were any corrections.

Dr. Longfellow asked the CSAC if they had any questions or concerns regarding the Overview section of the school's renewal application. There were none.

Section 2: Academic Framework

Dr. McCrae stated that the school is to be commended for its focus on goal setting. This illustrates that the school is using data to set professional development goals. Dr. McCrae asked, why the school chose to pivot away from performance tasks. Ms. Lopez-Waite explained that LAAA noticed that the performance tasks were too much for students at the time and they needed more focus on Claim One. Ms. Lopez-Waite stated that they are integrating the performance tasks into the every-day curriculum. She explained that it does take stamina to work through the larger performance tasks.

After the first Smarter Balance results, Ms. Lopez-Waite noticed which schools were outperforming them and met with those curriculum supervisors to research what these schools were doing differently. Ms. Lopez-Waite stated that LAAA hired a math supervisor to coach teachers

to become stronger content experts. Dr. McCrae explained that she wanted to ensure that they are still using the performance tasks, but continuing to scaffold students towards them.

Dr. McCrae explained that the DSSF is an organizational growth measure, while DPAS II is an individual growth measure for teachers. These measures are set to a different scale with different goals so the school should consider this when presenting the data.

Ms. Veenema asked how LAAA designs professional development to support special education students and students that are struggling academically. Ms. Lopez-Waite replied that every grade level has a special education teacher assigned to it that pushes into the classrooms. The special education teachers meet every week as a team and discuss IEP goals. Ms. Edmonds-Eveland works with Ms. Kristen Egan, Director of Education Enrichment, to personalize professional learning. For example, if a teacher is requesting a specific topic or module, then that is built into the professional development schedule. LAAA customizes what is offered to teachers so as to meet their academic needs.

Ms. Edmonds-Eveland, further stated that LAAA partnered with the Delaware Math Coalition to facilitate professional development. As a result of this collaboration, LAAA was able to get multiple perspectives from math experts on how to differentiate instruction for students with disabilities.

Ms. Veenema asked how Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is supporting the academic focus for all students. Ms. Lopez-Waite explained that LAAA built a culture and climate team that looks at behavior, character development, being more proactive and helping students make better choices. In year two, LAAA became a responsive classroom school. MTSS has helped them continue to talk about the whole child, look at goals for each child, look at their behavior, and learn how to better support each student. LAAA is currently piloting this in the third and eighth grades. This has allowed the piloting teachers to advocate for its use school-wide by discussing the benefits of MTSS.

Mr. Fulkerson stated that just over 50% of the students are proficient in English Language Arts. Mr. Fulkerson asked them to describe the professional supports or structures that are being used to help teachers provide grade level, standards based instruction to ensure that more students reach proficiency, in particular EL students since the school has a 40% EL student population.

Ms. Edmonds-Eveland stated that LAAA attends and presents annually at a national dual-language conference on EL strategies. Twenty team members have attended this conference in the past with eight team members planning to attend this year. In February, the group of teachers that attend the conference will provide professional development to all teachers so every teacher in the building can benefit from the latest language acquisition strategies. LAAA utilizes a coaching model, with their math supervisor, reading specialist, bi-literacy coach, and instructional technology coach providing weekly observation and coaching to their teachers. They use the "Six Steps to Effective Feedback" model to observe, identify action steps, and provide feedback.

Next Dr. Longfellow asked why the lower grades have lower proficiency levels while proficiency levels rise as the students progress through grades. Ms. Lopez-Waite explained that they are building a dual-language school. The students experience a period of time in which the brain struggles to switch back and forth between the two languages. LAAA sees that, in third grade, this begins to improve. This is consistent with research done in the area of dual-language acquisition.

Section 3: Organizational Framework

Dr. Longfellow asked the CSAC if they had any questions or concerns regarding the organizational performance section of the school's renewal application.

Ms. Green, asked the school when they anticipate having all goal setting forms completed for the school leaders for the current school year. Ms. Lopez-Waite stated that they have already started the process. LAAA's goal is to be done by November 1st.

Section 4: Financial Framework

Dr. Longfellow provided the following feedback:

- The school has a clean audit opinion.
- The 5 year plan aligns with enrollment.
- 100% and 80% budgets are balanced.
- With a waiting list of over 1,000 students, the 80% budget is unlikely to be utilized. .
- The budget projections reflect an improved budget over five years.
- There is significant carry over from year to year.
- Assumptions are clearly defined.
- Enrollment trends are strong and will continue to grow.
- The school has red areas on the financial framework due to significant improvements to equipment and facilities funded with cash and the taking on of additional debt.
- This is also due to a grant received in fiscal year 2018, but spent in fiscal year 2019.

Section 5: Five-Year Plans

No questions or concerns were voiced on the school's five year plans.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of the meeting, Dr. Longfellow asked the voting members of the CSAC if there was any additional information they required in order to inform their decision-making. The following information was requested:

1. Science Curriculum: Revised K-5 scope and sequence to include the engineering design standards.
2. Follow up with Mr. Saylor is there is a delay in meeting the November 1, 2019 goal setting date.

Next Steps:

- The CSAC will provide the school with an Initial Report no later than November 7, 2019.
- 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 22, 2019.
- The final meeting of the CSAC will be held on December 2, 2019; 2nd Floor Cabinet Room, Townsend Building, Dover.
- A public hearing will be held on November 13, 2019; New Castle Public Library, 424 Delaware Street, New Castle, Delaware.
- If necessary, a second public hearing will be held on December 10, 2019, 2nd Floor Cabinet Room, Townsend Building, Dover.
- The Secretary of Education will announce her decision at the December 19, 2019 State Board of Education meeting and seek the assent of the State Board as necessary.