

CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Academia Antonia Alonso

Charter Renewal

Initial Report

November 1, 2022

On September 30, 2022, Academia Antonia Alonso submitted an application to renew its charter for a term of five years. The purpose of the initial meeting is for the Charter School Accountability Committee (CSAC) to review the renewal application in light of the relevant statutory criteria for renewal.

The following were in attendance at the initial meeting of CSAC on October 24, 2022:

Voting Committee Members

- Kim Klein, Associate Secretary of Operations Support
- Aimee Beam, Education Associate, School Support
- Gregory Fulkerson, Education Associate, Academic Support
- Tiffany Green, Education Associate, Workforce Support
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Operations Support
- Joyce Leatherbury, Education Associate, Academic Support
- April McCrae, Education Associate, Academic Support
- DeAnne Wimbish, Education Associate, Office of Equity and Innovation
- Ted Molin, Community Member
- Charles Taylor, Community Member

Ex-Officio Members (Non-voting)

- Kendall Massett, Executive Director, Delaware Charter School Network
- Vince Lofink, Delaware State Board of Education

Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)

- Leroy Travers, Director, Charter School Office
- Alicia Balcerak, Administrative Secretary, Charter School Office
- Faye Schilling, Education Specialist, Charter School Office

Representatives of La Academia

- Wilma Almonte Rosario, Dean of Curriculum and Instruction
- Maria Alonso, Board President
- Mercedes Alonso, Executive Director
- Mandy Balanetsky, Math Coach
- Mayara Costa, Director of Admissions, Communications, and Marketing
- Michelle Hastie, Business Manager
- Deborah Roadenouser, Project Manager
- Amanda Walters, Human Resources

Academia was given time to provide an overview of the school. The school shared a video that depicted staff and students, and their move to the new building. Maria Alonso shared a history of the school. Ms. Alonso shared that the school is constantly reaching towards its vision. Ms. Alonso discussed some of the obstacles they have overcome, such as losing transportation and high leadership turnover in the early days of the school.

Finances, Budget, and Financial Framework

1. The school has worked diligently to build cash reserves over the past five years. La Academia used a portion of the cash reserves to cover expenses related to the new building. The school also noted that they will need to increase cash reserves due to the increased expenses associated with the school's expansion. Does La Academia have a plan to ensure that cash reserves are increased sufficiently?
 - a. Are there specific goals or benchmarks the school has in regard to the increased reserves?

A - La Academia understands the importance of reserves. This is monitored monthly. The goal is to have a minimum of 75 days cash on hand, but they aim to reach for more. Budgeting is done using a zero-based approach with a 2% contingency as part of the overall budget picture. The school has fixed expenses and a sustainable lease. La Academia looks at spending and determines each year how to justify costs, reviewing exactly how money is being spent and assess future needs. Their goal is to minimize non-instructional expenses to focus on instructional costs necessary to maintain compliance, safety, and provide the greatest instructional support. In terms of benchmarks, the school analyzes data to determine how they are performing against similar schools. Benchmarks are being developed for the school nutrition program (this is the first time the school is preparing and serving food) and transportation to function from an optimal financial and operational standpoint.

CSAC Follow-up - Finance, Budget, and Financial Framework

Vince Lofink- What is the cost of the facility lease?

A - The lease agreement is a fixed cost and the full impact of the lease will not be seen until school year (SY) 2024. The school budgets very conservatively. Upon submission of their recent modification the lease was taken into account and there is still a positive cash flow with a 2% contingency. There are no anticipated problems with the cost of the lease. The school will be financially sound and continue to provide excellent academics.

Kendall Masset- Michelle Hastie works with five other charter schools. Her conservative approach is appreciated.

Staffing

2. The school has improved teacher certification and plans to continue to work with Relay Delaware to develop highly effective teachers while also working with the Delaware Department of Education to host teachers through the Visiting International Teacher program for Spanish immersion teachers. All of this is commendable. What is the

school's plan to retain teachers who are or who will become certified to minimize turnover and increase consistency over time?

A – Teachers often leave for monetary reasons. Teachers are lost to districts that pay more. There is an ongoing commitment from the board to look at the salary scale to see how salaries can be increased. There is also a commitment to getting teacher feedback to improve the school climate. School climate accounts for about 30% of organizational performance. The school utilizes the Group Management Questionnaire (GMQ), which gives quantitative data across eight areas of the organizational climate. Categories include how well people understand goals, mission and values, communication, conflict, leadership, and performance management. This data is collected every six months and analyzed by leadership to improve school climate. This has proven to be a powerful tool.

3. What is the staff retention rate?

a. What are the school's goals for the retention of current staff?

A - La Academia has retained 82% of teachers, which is a 20% increase over the course of three years. Last year seven teachers left, but of those seven only two left to go to other districts for more money. Three teachers moved out of state, one stayed home with a child, one teacher was not renewed due to deficient performance, and one teacher left to pursue her doctorate degree. All positions for SY 22/23 were filled by June.

4. What is the average staff to student ratio?

A – Kindergarten through second grade averages 20 students to one teacher. Grades three through five average 24 students to one teacher and grade six averages 16 students to one teacher.

a. Does this ratio provide for optimal student learning?

A – Paraprofessionals are utilized based on areas of need. The school would like to have paraprofessionals in all rooms, however, the budget does not allow for that. Therefore, data is used to ensure that paraprofessionals are placed correctly.

5. How is La Academia maximizing the talents of the staff who are not needed full-time for instruction, support, etc.?

A - All staff are fully needed and used for support. Part-time, non-instructional staff are not used in other areas. Those staff members are used fully in the areas in which they were hired.

6. How are staff members who are considered high performers being rewarded?

A - The school provides leadership opportunities for staff to become team leaders and mentors. Additionally, there are opportunities for internal promotions. The leadership team is intentional in determining which educators should be utilized to assist in decision making.

7. How many staff members are licensed and certified within the area in which they teach?

A - There are 45 teachers at La Academia. Of those teachers, 31 are certified in the area in which they teach. Three teachers are teaching outside of their certification area. Two teachers are on an Emergency Certificate.

a. How many staff members are not certified?

A - Ten staff members are not certified.

b. How many are on initial licenses?

- A – Twenty-two staff members are on initial license.
- c. How many continuing licenses?
A – Thirteen staff members are on a continuing license.
- d. How many staff members are participating in an Alternative Routes to Certification (ARTC) program?
A - Four teachers are in ARTC with one additional teacher joining in January.
8. Does La Academia consider their mentoring support program to be effective? Why or why not?
A - The school has a comprehensive teacher induction program. The school is also working with Tiffany Green on a new pilot mentoring program.
9. Does the school have an effective and sustainable instructional coaching staff?
A - The school has an effective instructional coaching staff. The school’s instructional support team consists of two deans of curriculum and instruction; a dean of special education; a math coach; a test coordinator; an English as a second language (ESL) teacher; and a curriculum consultant.
10. Does La Academia partner with any Educator Preparation Programs?
A - The school partners with Relay Delaware. In addition, La Academia works with ARTC programs. The charter school teacher of the year is from La Academia and is a graduate of the ARTC program.
11. When did the school last update or revisit its staff recruitment plan?
A - La Academia reviews this annually. Last school year this process started in February and, as a result, the school was fully staffed for the current year by June.
12. How does La Academia provide staff with stretch or long-term opportunities while not causing burnout?
A - The school provides professional growth and planning opportunities daily. Staff can receive extra pay when developing pacing guides. Stipends are given to lead and mentor teachers. Staff have the opportunity to lead professional development. Acknowledgements are given at all staff meetings, honoring the work and accomplishments of staff. There is also a Sunshine Club to boost staff morale.
13. How does the school gather feedback from staff?
A - Staff feedback is gathered daily.
- a. How often does this occur?
A - Leadership is present and visible in the hallways, classrooms, and cafeteria and is constantly engaged with staff. The school values using people’s time wisely while also involving them in problem solving. Additionally, GMQ’s are used every six months to gain additional data.

CSAC Follow-up - Staffing

Joyce Leatherbury- How many special education teachers are on staff? How many special education students are in the school? How does La Academia provide a continuum of support and structure for special education?

A - Currently, there are 55 students receiving special education services. The structure of the special education department is as follows: one dean of special education; three special education teachers; three special education paraprofessionals; and a special education consultant. Paraprofessionals “push-in” to the classrooms that have the greatest need. Special education

teachers are assigned to specific grade levels. Regular education and special education teachers plan together and work collaboratively together in professional learning communities (PLCs). The school utilizes a “push-in” model however, students are pulled-out when a need is presented.

Leroy Travers- Are paraprofessionals full-time or part-time?

A - Paraprofessionals serve in both full-time and part-time roles.

Leroy Travers - Who is responsible for observing and evaluating teachers?

A - The dean of special education and the deans of curriculum and instruction are responsible for observing and evaluating staff.

Recruitment and Enrollment

14. The projected enrollment table is blank. Submit the completed 5-year projected enrollment chart.

A - The enrollment chart is attached.

15. When did La Academia last revisit their recruitment plan?

A - The school revisits its recruitment plan yearly, beginning in February.

a. Have different strategies been adopted?

A – This year the school has reviewed and revised job descriptions. The team has also revised offer letters. More positions have been added to the Facebook page to encourage people to apply. La Academia has discussed partnerships with local colleges, as well. The school also partnered with colleagues from DOE to incorporate the Spanish Immersion program.

The recruitment strategies for students is ever evolving. Faculty, staff, and current parents promote the school. Social media is used to highlight the school. La Academia’s annual Hispanic heritage celebrations assist in promoting the school during the school choice window. Former families and community members attend these celebrations. Buses go to childcare facilities to transport parents and students to the school for tours. Virtual tours of the school are also provided. New initiatives include a partnership with Maximo Radio, who covers the school’s events and broadcasts live testimonials from students. Buses with the school’s name on them are a great source of advertising, resulting in many families calling to learn more.

16. How is the school utilizing budgetary and time resources to market for enrollment?

A - The school does not spend a lot of money on marketing. Most marketing is done internally through parents, staff, and faculty. The school utilizes videos, social media, information sessions about school choice, family outreach, and visitations to early childhood centers as methods to market the school. The majority of the current marketing budget has been used to update marketing materials with their new address.

17. Have new stakeholders have been engaged to increase enrollment?

A - To increase enrollment, La Academia continues to engage with medical community partners, such as the University of Delaware. Last year, nursing residents worked on a video for the health and wellness program. Also, the University of Delaware partnership allows them to work with students who minor in Spanish. These students assist with

translation. The school has expanded the visitations to early childhood centers. La Academia has hired a grant writer with the goal of improving the academic program.

Academic Performance and Framework

18. The school has consistent assessment participation of over 95% on all required assessments. Proficiency is variable, but the school reports accurate performance in its application. Mathematics is an area of concern regarding the overall population as well as subpopulations for the school. What plans does La Academia have for providing teacher-focused support for strengthening mathematics instruction for all students and subpopulations (professional development, coaching, content support, etc.)?

A - The math coach, deans of curriculum and instruction, and special education dean provide structured support. The math coach works with teachers to create resources, provide guidance and support with instructional techniques, and strategically embed manipulatives. Teachers and deans take part in PLC's to conduct a deep dive into the curriculum and review materials for alignment. Faculty attends statewide professional development and collaborate with DOE math associates to ensure correct alignment that works with tier I instruction. Professional development includes Kagan Structures for cooperative learning and Be Glad Strategies for language acquisition. Starting in kindergarten, end of unit common assessments have been developed.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development

19. What professional learning opportunities are provided throughout the year to support teachers' skillful implementation of the Wonders 2020 curriculum?

A - There are components in the Wonders Curriculum that are compatible with other needs across all content areas. Deep dives are conducted to align and pull resources to embed into the pacing guides. Additional online training from McGraw-Hill is utilized to ensure that the curriculum and all its resources are being used effectively and with fidelity.

20. What professional learning opportunities are provided to teachers to support the implementation of curriculum across all content areas?

A - Professional development is critical to maximize the use of resources and promotes collaboration and modeling. Observations are conducted to assess teacher needs. Time is given to learn, practice, and ask questions. Deep dives are conducted to review resources, materials, and program alignment. Goals and standards are planned collaboratively. Pacing guides have been created for each content area, which have been developed collaboratively by teachers from all content areas. Expressive arts teachers work jointly with core teachers to integrate math standards into their instructional practices, helping students discover math in new and diverse ways. Members of the school participate in state-provided professional development and participate in math, science, and social studies coalition meetings. Specific professional development is aligned to the curriculum and are provided in Imagine Math, My Math connected platforms, and My Math research.

21. What professional learning opportunities are provided to teachers to support tiered instruction?

A - Leadership encourages professional learning and participation in the various coalitions at the state level. In addition, instructional support is given from the math

coach, along with data analysis, to identify the greatest needs of students. As a result, appropriate resources are provided to enhance instruction. There is a shift in culture and teachers see leadership as partners and feedback, coaching, and support are used to address the needs of all learners.

22. On question 21, the school shared that they strengthened the tier I toolbox, prioritizing foundational skills, ensuring standards-based planning, and learning for grades kindergarten through five and providing a strong social-emotional learning curriculum that focuses on students' fundamental need for motivation, social connectedness, and self-regulation as prerequisites for learning. What are some of the primary tier I academic supports available to all students?

A - The school is extremely focused on strengthening tier I supports. Teachers need to understand the process and the role they play in that process. Professional learning and discussions occur to support teachers and instruction. Resources and tools, such as the Wonders Curriculum, Study Sync, and My Math are utilized. Differentiation occurs at all levels through flexible grouping and the use of manipulatives.

- a. What are some of the primary tier II (some students) and tier III (few students) academic supports and interventions available to students?

A – Ninety-five percent groups, Bookworms, Reading Assist, Read 180, System 44, My Math, and the Imagine Platform (Español and Math Facts, and Literacy) are all available to students for support and interventions.

- b. In what ways are the eight instructional assistants utilized to support tiered instruction?

A - Instructional assistants review data to determine the greatest needs. Instructional assistants also lead whole group and small group instruction, provide testing support, perform progress monitoring, and implement tier II and tier III instruction.

- c. How is the math coach being utilized to support math teachers and students?

A - The math coach provides professional development, models instructional strategies and techniques, and assists and supports in the implementation of curriculum to maximize the effectiveness of instructional resources. Additionally, the math coach supports teachers in planning, data analysis, designing common assessments, designing centers, co-teaching, and lesson feedback.

23. On page thirteen, question 27, more clearly articulate the need for and define the structure of the extended period of time for students in mathematics.

A - The math block was changed from 45 minutes to 60 minutes. The structure of the math block is as follows: routine math (five minutes); activating background knowledge (five minutes); math talk (five minutes); math lesson (20 minutes); centers and small group instruction (20 minutes); student reflections/exit tickets (five minutes). La Academia has created a math lab embedded into the expressive arts class in kindergarten through second grade. Students have one week, every six weeks, to receive focused support centered on constructing arguments and fluency with mathematical concepts. There has also been a restructuring of the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) block.

24. Share the support structure for special populations such as interventions, staffing, protocols, and programming.

A - Interventions are done through the tiered MTSS model. Progress monitoring is done in three cycles every six to eight weeks. Data is provided to teachers, not only in the content area in which they teach, but in all academic areas of their students. This data and information also aides the school in providing the appropriate professional development. The MTSS team is comprised of an ESL teacher, math coach, general education teachers, deans of curriculum and instruction, the dean of special education, the dean of equity, inclusion, and access, the counselor, and the dean of climate and culture. The special education department consists of the dean of special education, three special education teachers, three instructional assistants, one psychologist, one occupational therapist, and one physical therapist. The school uses scientifically research-based programs and evidence-based practices to support the needs of every student. The school also uses an extended school year program.

CSAC Follow-up - Academic Performance and Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development

Gregory Fulkerson - Thanked the school for taking advantage of the early submission window during the summer. La Academia was super responsive and highly organized. In the review, every content area met expectations, except for English, which partially met expectations.

Gregory Fulkerson – Are there dedicated professional learning days included in the calendar in addition to PLCs and, if so, how do they work in conjunction with one another?

A – There is one professional development day per month and prior to the year there are two weeks of new faculty development. Academic teams target the topics that will be covered on those professional development days. There is also flexibility with professional development days as issues may arise, such as testing windows. Teacher feedback based on data or other specific needs is also utilized to drive professional development.

April McCrae - During visits to the school students know every adult, which is a positive testimony to the team.

April McCrae - Regarding interventions, it is important to remember that instruction should be different from tier one instruction.

Charles Taylor - How is the math block organized if there are students that are struggling? Are there after-school opportunities?

A - In the classroom students receive extra instruction during small group time. The math lab enables leadership to work with the teachers to determine the greatest needs of students. During math lab time instruction and activities are differentiated. The team is trying to be creative and find time within the schedule. Lunch and learn opportunities will also be used for high achievers. There is an afterschool program that may be used for tutoring in the future.

The follow items were requested as follow-ups to this meeting:

1. Provide a staffing chart that includes the following:
 - a. Each teacher's license and certification status, to include whether they are on an initial or continuing license;
 - b. Each teacher's instructional assignment.
2. Provide a projected enrollment chart that includes SY 27-28.
3. Provide a rationale for diverging from the chosen highly aligned curriculum that occur in each grade.
 - a. For example, texts and tasks were modified in the scope and sequence documents for grade three. While these documents describe the unit topic and complexity level of the modified texts, the culminating writing tasks are divorced from the content under study.
4. Provide detailed, yearly information on the cost of the lease for the new building.

Next Steps:

- An initial report will be issued on or before October 31st.
- An initial public hearing will take place on November 14th at 5:00 p.m.
- The applicant will have the opportunity to submit a written response to the CSAC initial report, which is due by close of business November 15th.
- A second and final meeting of CSAC will be held on November 29th.
- On or before December 5th CSAC will issue its final report which will include its recommendation on the formal review.