

In The Matter Of:
Department of Education
Charter School of New Castle

Public Hearing-
November 13, 2019

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THE STATE OF DELAWARE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
and
BOARD OF EDUCATION

In re:)
)
CHARTER SCHOOL OF NEW CASTLE)

TRANSCRIPT OF PUBLIC HEARING

New Castle Public Library
424 Delaware Street
New Castle, Delaware
November 13, 2019
5:00 p.m.

HEARD BEFORE: LEROY TRAVERS
WALI RUSHDAN

APPEARANCES:

DARRYL PARSON, Deputy Attorney General
for the Department of Education

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1 MR. TRAVERS: Good evening,
2 everyone. I declare this public hearing to
3 be open. My name is Leroy Travers, and I'm
4 the education associate with the Charter
5 School Office, and I have been appointed by
6 the Secretary of Education to conduct this
7 public hearing. We'll start tonight with
8 the Charter School of New Castle.

9 The Charter School of New
10 Castle has filed an application to renew
11 its charter for a term of five years. As
12 is required by law, the matter was referred
13 to the Charter School Accountability
14 Committee for investigation and report.

15 This joint public hearing is
16 being held by the Department of Education
17 and the State Board of Education.

18 I'll now ask the others to
19 introduce themselves.

20 MR. PARSON: Darryl Parson,
21 department of Justice, counsel to the
22 Department of Education.

23 MR. RUSHDAN: Wali Rushdan,
24 State Board of Education.



1 MR. TRAVERS: I would like the
2 record to reflect that notice of the time,
3 date, and place of today's public hearing
4 was published in The News Journal and the
5 Delaware State News on October 10, 2019.

6 In addition, notice was posted
7 at the Charter School Accountability
8 Office's official place of the business, on
9 the Department of Education's official
10 website, and the state public meeting
11 calendar on the State's official website.

12 Further, the Charter School of
13 New Castle was personally notified of the
14 time, date, and place of today's public
15 hearing on June 19, 2019 and notified of
16 the change in location on September 5,
17 2019.

18 A court reporter is present so
19 that a record of this hearing can be made.
20 It will be necessary for each speaker to
21 clearly identify his or herself before
22 beginning to speak so the court reporter
23 will be able to note who you are.

24 The record of this hearing will



1 be provided to the Secretary of Education
2 and members of the State Board of Education
3 together with any written or electronic
4 comments received during the course of the
5 renewal decision process.

6 To date comments received on
7 this renewal application are posted on the
8 Charter School Office's website.

9 We will proceed in the
10 following manner: First we will hear from
11 any representatives of the charter school
12 who wish to comment on the renewal
13 application. Then we will take comments
14 from anyone else who desires to speak.

15 There are sign-up sheets at the
16 back of the room. If you desire to speak
17 and have not signed up, please do so now.
18 Those who have not signed up will not be
19 permitted to speak and instead will be
20 asked to submit written comment. We will
21 now pause for a moment to ensure that
22 everyone who wishes to sign up can do so.

23 (A discussion was held off the
24 record.)



1 MR. TRAVERS: I reserve the
2 right to limit comment if it is purely
3 repetitive or cumulative. This hearing's
4 purpose is strictly to collect public
5 comment. Questions of the Department of
6 Education and State Board of Education are
7 not permitted and will not be acknowledged.

8 At this point I will accept
9 comments from any representatives of the
10 school.

11 DR. ODUMOSU: Hello, everyone.
12 My name is Dr. LaRetha Odumosu, and I'm the
13 executive director for Charter School of
14 New Castle Middle School.

15 We actually just wanted to
16 invite the public into some of the initial
17 comments that we shared during our CSAC
18 committee, so I'm going to turn it over to
19 Ms. Novosel, Ms. Valentin, and then anyone
20 else who's already signed up.

21 MS. NOVOSEL: So I am Amy
22 Novosel. Good evening, everyone. So I
23 have been a staff member slash parent of
24 Family Foundations Academy/Charter School



1 of New Castle since 2006. The staff always
2 wanted to create a strong instructional
3 experience for our children.

4 Family Foundations was a school
5 that struggled with students running down
6 the hallways, students disrupting
7 instruction, and financial mismanagement,
8 as well as an unhealthy staff culture.
9 Charter School had a record at the time
10 with DOE. We had the most parent
11 complaints per year to the DOE.

12 Our leaders and staff didn't
13 have the tools or knowledge of best
14 practices to create a strong, consistent
15 academic learning experience for our
16 students.

17 In 2015 Dr. Lamont Browne
18 agreed to be the CEO of Family Foundations
19 Academy. He knew that FFA needed leaders
20 who were experienced with financial
21 management, components of strong academic
22 instruction, creating a student culture
23 that's conducive to learning, as well as
24 the principles of creating an environment



1 which every staff member was valued and
2 coached.

3 Dr. Browne was a member of the
4 Leverage Leadership Institute as well as a
5 partner of the Delaware Leadership Project.
6 He knew that these organizations recruit
7 top leaders.

8 Dr. Browne researched all the
9 fellows and selected Rachel Valentin from
10 the Delaware Leadership Project. He valued
11 her years of experience at Uncommon Schools
12 and her work as a top performer in the DLP.
13 Her financial background at JP Morgan was
14 another skill set that he valued.

15 He interacted with thousands of
16 fellows from the National Principal Academy
17 and personally selected Dr. LaRetha
18 Odumosu. He was familiar with her doctoral
19 work in urban studies and her strong
20 academic results that she garnered at
21 Mastery Charter Schools in Philadelphia.

22 These a two leaders have been
23 instrumental in transforming CSNC to a
24 school where students and educators thrive.



1 The immense turnaround was
2 observed by Mr. Dusty Shockley. He came to
3 our middle school under our previous
4 leadership, and I will never forget the
5 look of horror on his face when he observed
6 a transition in our middle school. I
7 wanted to immediately fix the chaos but
8 didn't have the knowledge or best practices
9 to do so.

10 Mr. Shockley visited our CSNC
11 campus for a DeSSA site visit last May, and
12 he observed the quiet hallways and the
13 classrooms where everyone was on task and
14 engaged in the testing process. Receiving
15 the positive feedback from Mr. Shockley
16 affirmed all the tremendous work that our
17 staff has done during the last five years.

18 Our classrooms are conducive to
19 learning. Our staff members receive
20 consistent instructional coaching to
21 improve their daily instruction. Our staff
22 members are evaluated fairly and most
23 importantly are treated fairly.

24 Lastly, our parental



1 satisfaction is at an all-time high due to
2 the partnerships these leaders have forged
3 personally with our parents to invest in
4 every child's success.

5 I am also a CSNC parent and
6 experience that great partnership. My
7 daughter Emily is a senior taking physics.
8 And when most of her peers are struggling
9 daily, Emily is excelling. And when I
10 asked her why, what the difference was, she
11 contributed her success to the instruction
12 she received from Mrs. Moody at CSNC.

13 It is my sincere desire that
14 CSNC will have that kind of lasting impact
15 for thousands more children in the years to
16 come.

17 DR. ODUMOSU: So Ms. Novosel --
18 Hi, everyone. I'm Dr. LaRetha Odumosu.
19 Ms. Novosel mentioned one of our teachers,
20 Ms. Moody, who had a lasting impact on
21 Emily. And at CSNC we have been so blessed
22 to have so many similar stories of how a
23 teacher impacts our students.

24 If I could just take a minute



1 and have every CSNC representative just
2 either stand up or wave your hand so folks
3 can know who you are as far as CSNC
4 employees.

5 Every day our teachers and
6 support staff come ready to do whatever it
7 takes to ensure that our students are
8 getting the skills they need to be
9 successful.

10 Whether it means staying late
11 to provide students a different experience
12 after school, taking time during their prep
13 to get to know a student and build a
14 meaningful relationship, or spending extra
15 time at home reaching out to parents, our
16 teachers and our staff are always willing
17 to go that extra mile, and it is that
18 dedication that has made and continues to
19 make CSNC the place to be.

20 While Ms. Valentin and I
21 entered different school buildings five
22 years ago and as a result encountered a
23 variety of challenges from one school to
24 the next, one thing that we agree on is



1 that over these past five years we have had
2 the privilege of working with some of the
3 best educators that we have ever
4 encountered.

5 When asked our staff has shared
6 how CSNC differs from previous school
7 experiences, and that is due to one key
8 trend. CSNC is not just a job, it's a
9 family. And as a family, we stand on the
10 most important factor that draws us all in
11 to continue doing this work day in and day
12 out, our commitment to and our investment
13 in the ones that matter the most, our
14 students and our families.

15 MS. VALENTIN: Good evening,
16 everyone. My name is Rachel Valentin. I'm
17 the executive director of the elementary
18 school, so I would like to close out.

19 Ultimately this entire process
20 comes back to the most important audience,
21 a stakeholder above all stakeholders, our
22 students and their families. At CSNC we
23 have some of the best students in the state
24 of Delaware -- we have some here -- who



1 embody the true definition of perseverance,
2 passion, and love of learning.

3 In the end the reason for all
4 of our hard work, as you can see from our
5 entire family that's present here, the late
6 hours, the early mornings, is to make an
7 impact. Every member of the CSNC community
8 wants to ensure that we're providing the
9 best learning experience for all of our
10 students.

11 And with that level of
12 commitment, it's incredible to share that
13 over the last five years our students have
14 grown more confident and can compete
15 academically with the best of them.

16 With chips already stacked
17 against some of our students due to
18 childhood traumas or just the challenges of
19 life, we remind them daily that their race,
20 their class, or creed will not ever hold
21 them back for striving for their best
22 within the four walls of our school, and
23 whatever they dream of will become a
24 reality.



1 So they count on us daily to be
2 the determining factor in changing the life
3 trajectory, and it always starts with these
4 simple words, "Welcome to CSNC. We are
5 glad that you are here."

6 MR. MCDOWELL: I'm Charles
7 McDowell. I'm president of the board of
8 Charter School of New Castle, and I would
9 just like to say from the board's
10 perspective that the charter renewal is
11 based largely on the experience during the
12 last four years of the charter.

13 And during that four-year
14 period what was formerly Family Foundations
15 Academy has been rebranded as Charter
16 School of New Castle. Its enrollment has
17 increased. The academic performance of its
18 students has steadily improved. It's met
19 standards in DOE's organizational
20 frameworks.

21 It has received a clean
22 financial audit with no findings, and it is
23 financially stable with expectations of
24 ending this year with more than \$1 million



1 in the bank.

2 Perhaps more importantly, the
3 percentage of students meeting their
4 individual growth targets in the last two
5 years has exceeded state averages. This
6 academic progress has been accomplished
7 because of the skill and stable leadership
8 of Ms. Valentin and Dr. Odumosu.

9 The Charter School of New
10 Castle board is extremely optimistic about
11 the future of CSNC. Thank you.

12 MS. CONNOR: Hello. I'm
13 Kathleen Connor. I am a former assistant
14 principal and currently first retiree of
15 Charter School of New Castle. Yay.

16 Back in the old days when CSNC
17 was known as FFA, I was hired to teach ELA
18 the first year that the middle school
19 opened. At that time we were located in
20 the former St. Matthew's School building
21 the Newport, where we remained for four
22 years, and almost the last year of FFA's
23 existence for it was in that year that
24 during the charter renewal process it was



1 discovered that the school leaders had
2 misappropriated funds.

3 During their deliberations
4 state board members expressed concern about
5 the ability of the school to remain open;
6 however, they recognized the academic
7 progress students were making and instead
8 of voting to close the school, organized an
9 alliance with EastSide Charter School.

10 That alliance, although no
11 longer in existence, led to the hiring to
12 two exceptional school leaders, both of
13 whom remain to this day, Mrs. Rachel
14 Valentin and Dr. LaRetha Odumosu. It has
15 been through the leadership of Principals
16 Valentin and Odumosu that the school
17 experienced a rebirth.

18 Change of name aside, the
19 Charter School of New Castle began a
20 relentless drive to become a
21 high-performing charter school by
22 incorporating best practices utilized by
23 already high-performing charter schools.
24 They brought on board leadership teams who



1 share their vision.

2 They provide professional
3 development focusing on understanding and
4 utilizing data, are transparent in their
5 expectations for their staff, provide
6 avenues for teacher growth, celebrate a
7 cadre of teaches who have been with them
8 for the entire journey, and along the way
9 built and are sustaining a school
10 environment that focuses on the individual
11 student while putting in place the academic
12 structures that enable and ensure
13 continuous academic growth.

14 There is no question in my mind
15 that the carter renewal of Charter School
16 of New Castle is guaranteed.

17 MR. TRAVERS: Are there other
18 representatives from the school that would
19 like to speak at this time?

20 MS. OSEGBU: Hello, everybody.
21 My name is Chiamaka Osegbu. I am currently
22 a second grade teacher at the Charter
23 School of New Castle as well as the teacher
24 rep on the board. And I just wanted to



1 speak as far as, like, my experience and
2 how Charter School of New Castle has
3 developed me not only as a teacher, as a
4 mother, as a leader.

5 And I'm just so thankful
6 because while I was an undergrad I had the
7 opportunity to be a school sub and -- in
8 the middle school and the elementary
9 school. And I thank Dr. O as well as
10 Principal Valentin for giving me the
11 opportunity to grow as an educator.

12 They took me under their wing.
13 They molded me. They showed me not only
14 how to be a good teacher but how to be
15 effective and how to ultimately change
16 lives. They showed me how to -- how to not
17 only care for my students academically, but
18 care for their whole being, their
19 character, to speak life into them.

20 And I'm thankful to work in a
21 place where that is our staple every single
22 day. It's not only just academics, but we
23 teach the whole child. We cultivate their
24 character. We give them confidence. We



1 allow them to find things within themselves
2 and make them great, and they believe it.

3 And they have opportunities to
4 not only grow in those talents that we help
5 them see, but in other things that we may
6 not have even noticed. So I'm just
7 thankful for the opportunity to work for a
8 place that takes this job of molding minds
9 because that is what we do very, very
10 seriously.

11 And we care for our students,
12 for our families, for each other, and I'm
13 thankful to be a part of that.

14 MR. MORRELL: Good evening,
15 everyone. My name is Rob Morrell. I'm the
16 director of operations for Charter School
17 of New Castle, formerly Family Foundations
18 Academy.

19 I've been a member of the
20 FFA/CSNC family for over ten years now, so
21 I was here this time five years ago when we
22 went down to DOE, myself, Ms. Connor,
23 Ms. Novosel, and we pled our case for the
24 opportunity. We knew what we were facing



1 due to the choices made by our previous
2 leadership.

3 But the strength of our
4 teachers and the team that we had in place,
5 DOE recognized that and kept our doors
6 open, renewed our charter for the five
7 years. At that time Dr. Browne came in and
8 instilled new leadership throughout the
9 building, and we got everything turned
10 around.

11 Under Dr. Browne we were able
12 to bring in Dr. Odumosu and Ms. Valentin,
13 and all we've done since is continued to
14 lead our students in the right path. And
15 with this renewal that I'm sure will
16 definitely go through, it's just amazing to
17 see just how far we've come over these
18 years and how we continue to expand.

19 And it's been an honor for
20 myself to be in these students' lives and
21 see them in high school. They come back.
22 They see us. They thank us. And it really
23 does, it really means a lot, and that's why
24 as an educator you get into this field.



1 You don't get into this field
2 get rich. You get into this field to
3 change lives and make a difference. And I
4 can't -- just, again, I just can't get over
5 how far we've come under the new leadership
6 and since we've become Charter School of
7 New Castle.

8 And, again, it's an honor and
9 privilege that I've been here for ten
10 years, and I hope to have the opportunity
11 to retire with the Charter School of New
12 Castle as well. Thank you.

13 MR. TRAVERS: Are there other
14 representatives of Charter School of New
15 Castle that would like to speak at this
16 time?

17 At this point we will accept
18 comment from any member of the public that
19 would like to speak regarding Charter
20 School of New Castle.

21 MS. TURNER: My name is Sharon
22 Turner, and I'm a parent, grandparent of a
23 student who started FFA when he was in
24 kindergarten. He is in the seventh grade



1 now. He has blossomed, you know, excelled
2 in school so well.

3 Not only, you know, I'm not
4 just saying their teachers, they
5 communicate with the parents each and every
6 day. I know things about him before he
7 even gets home from school, and which is
8 really good. And they keep you up to date
9 of what your child is doing, whether it's
10 good or bad.

11 So there's no need for you to
12 wonder when the report card comes, oh, I
13 didn't know that, because you knew it way
14 ahead of time. So this school here has
15 been one of the best things for my
16 grandson.

17 And they have been a family to
18 him. During the time he started he lost
19 his parents, and they rallied around him,
20 and it is just excellent. And I've
21 grown -- have gotten to know a lot of them,
22 and we have formed good relationships, and
23 I'm 100 percent behind them.

24 MR. TRAVERS: Is there anyone



1 else that would like to speak regarding
2 Charter School of New Castle?

3 I would like to thank you all
4 for participating today. The secretary
5 will consider your comments in deciding at
6 the conclusion of the renewal process what
7 decision to submit to the State Board for
8 assent if needed. The hearing for Charter
9 School of New Castle is now closed.

10 (Hearing concluded at 5:21
11 p.m.)

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1 REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

2
3 I, SUSAN ARNOLD YODER, Registered
4 Professional Reporter and Notary Public, do
5 hereby certify that the foregoing record,
6 pages 1 through 22 inclusive, is a true and
7 accurate transcript of my stenographic notes
8 taken on November 13, 2019, in the
9 above-captioned matter.

10 IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set
11 my hand and seal this 19th day of November,
12 2019, at Wilmington.

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18 SUSAN ARNOLD YODER, RPR
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