

In The Matter Of:
Department of Education
Las Americas Aspira Academy

Public Hearing
November 13, 2019

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THE STATE OF DELAWARE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
and
BOARD OF EDUCATION

In re:)
)
LAS AMERICAS ASPIRA ACADEMY)

TRANSCRIPT OF PUBLIC HEARING

New Castle Public Library
424 Delaware Street
New Castle, Delaware
November 13, 2019
6:30 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. I'm
4 the educational associate with the Charter
5 School Office, and I have been appointed by
6 the Secretary of Education to conduct this
7 public hearing.

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

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

17 I'll ask the others with me to
18 introduce themselves.

19 MR. RUSHDAN: Wali Rushdan,
20 State Board of Education.

21 MR. PARSON: Darryl Parson,
22 Department of Justice.

23 MR. TRAVERS: I would like the
24 record to reflect that the notice of the



1 time, date, and place of today's public
2 hearing was published in The News Journal
3 and the Delaware State News on October 10,
4 2019.

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

11 Further, Las Americas ASPIRA
12 Academy was notified of the time, date, and
13 place of today's public hearing on June 19,
14 2019 and notified of the change in location
15 on September 5, 2019.

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

22 The record of this hearing will
23 be provided to the Secretary of Education
24 and members of the State Board of Education



1 together with any written or electronic
2 comments received during the course of the
3 renewal decision process.

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

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

13 There are sign-up sheets at the
14 back of the room. If you desire to speak
15 and have not signed up, please do so now.
16 Those who have not signed up will not be
17 permitted to speak and instead will be
18 asked to submit written comment.

19 We will now pause for a moment
20 to ensure that anyone who wishes to sign up
21 can do so.

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

24 MR. TRAVERS: I reserve the



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

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

11 MS. WAITE: Margie Lopez Waite.
12 I'm the head of school. L-o-p-e-z
13 W-a-i-t-e.

14 I just want to say that I am
15 proud to be in such good company. I know
16 the rest of the schools have left, but to
17 be among other charter leaders that had a
18 vision and really wanted to serve the needs
19 of students that were being underserved,
20 especially with Gateway.

21 We opened our doors the same
22 year as Gateway. And just like they were
23 looking to serve the needs of a special
24 group of students, we were also looking to



1 serve the needs of English learners, which
2 we felt were not necessarily being
3 supported in traditional educational
4 settings because the focus was always on
5 just learning English and not really
6 nurturing a second language.

7 And so now we have -- Now we
8 have -- This is our ninth year, and we are
9 proud that our school has really blossomed
10 to really be welcoming to people from all
11 different backgrounds and races and
12 socioeconomic backgrounds.

13 And what they value is that
14 they see that their child being bilingual
15 and biliterate is something valuable,
16 regardless of what career they pursue in
17 life.

18 But what's most important to us
19 is that the language may have been the
20 carrot that attracted people to our school,
21 but what keeps them there, and I'll let
22 them speak for themselves, is really the
23 environment that we have built of
24 bringing -- building a stronger community



1 by bringing people together and forming
2 relationships and friendships.

3 And that's what's most
4 important to us, is the impact that we're
5 having on the community as a whole. That's
6 all I have to say.

7 Do we have a translator?
8 Because we do have a parent that's going to
9 make her comments in Spanish. So I just --
10 Did we bring a translator?

11 MR. TRAVERS: We did not.

12 MS. WAITE: So Lourdes.

13 MR. TRAVERS: I apologize.

14 MS. WAITE: That's all right.
15 Our board chair will translate.

16 MS. CHAVEZ: Good afternoon.
17 My name Erica Chavez. There's a lot of
18 things I like about ASPIRA, but she's going
19 to focus on a few things.

20 The first thing that she likes
21 about ASPIRA is security. With everything
22 that is going on on television and the
23 media, the schools are not necessarily a
24 safe place as they used to be any longer



1 necessarily.

2 On the contrary, sending her
3 daughter at ASPIRA she feels very
4 comfortable because of the environment that
5 the school provides, so she doesn't have to
6 worry about -- worry while her daughter is
7 at school because it is a safe environment.

8 The second thing that she
9 really likes about ASPIRA is the family,
10 that is a family. It's a family
11 environment. Her daughter started in
12 kindergarten is now a second grader. And
13 all the staff and teachers that her
14 daughter has connected with or that have
15 been teachers of her daughter have treated
16 her as family, as their own daughter.

17 So it's not only the staff, but
18 also the children. Her daughter has been
19 able to make very, very strong friendships,
20 and it really is continuity of that family
21 environment.

22 The third point that she likes
23 about ASPIRA is the fact that it's a
24 bilingual school. The fact that the school



1 is bilingual allows the fact that her
2 daughter can remain the skill on the
3 Spanish language which would allow to
4 communicate with her grandparents. So it's
5 something that she will not lose from her
6 heritage.

7 The mother feels very strongly
8 that by knowing a second language provides
9 advantages in terms of your future. You'll
10 be able to have more employment
11 opportunity, earn more money, be more
12 marketable. So because of that, we'll
13 provide stronger opportunities for the
14 future.

15 And she feels very strongly
16 that then ASPIRA should continue to be open
17 to offer this opportunity to the children.
18 So as a parent she feels very strongly
19 about what ASPIRA has provided so far but
20 would provide for a stronger future and be
21 successful. So she strongly recommends
22 ASPIRA to be renewed. Thank you.

23 MR. TRAVERS: Erika Gutierrez?

24 MS. GUTIERREZ: Hello again.



1 My name is Erika Gutierrez,
2 G-u-t-i-e-r-r-e-z, my last name. I am an
3 ASPIRA -- proud ASPIRA parent. My daughter
4 started kindergarten I think the second
5 year that ASPIRA started, and then my son,
6 he's in third grade now, as well enrolled
7 in ASPIRA.

8 What I can tell you about
9 ASPIRA and why I consider it to be
10 indefinitely renewed is because what I see,
11 not just my kids, but in every person that
12 comes to ASPIRA, first of all, we have a
13 teacher quality that is beautiful. You can
14 see how teachers engage with the kids, how
15 they care about their needs, how they
16 address parents, how they are provided the
17 resources they need.

18 Kids are thriving. They are
19 secure. They are -- They feel included in
20 everything. There is not separation of
21 race. It's like a global community, which
22 is something that I love. I wish this
23 culture in every school in Delaware. We
24 need that kind of leadership.



1 School quality is amazing.
2 It's transparent. It's comfortable. And I
3 really love that whenever I need to talk to
4 anybody about any issue, everybody is
5 hoping to do so in a very friendly and
6 respectful way. Leadership quality is
7 something that is also something that I
8 respect and feel proud of about ASPIRA.

9 Our principal is always trying
10 to improve, traveling anywhere where things
11 are getting better, where new models are
12 rising so our kids have the best
13 opportunities there are, and I think that
14 is amazing. That's something that should
15 be done in every single school in the state
16 as well.

17 Her vision about keeping the
18 mission of providing kids not just with
19 dual language and immersing communication,
20 it's beyond that. It's academics. It's
21 culture. It's leadership. It's
22 everything. And that is something that I
23 value highly.

24 Culture and climate taking



1 place and ASPIRA is amazing. There is
2 respect. There are different approaches
3 according to the children, to the parents.
4 There is always a place where things can be
5 resolved in a way that fits everybody,
6 which is not seen everywhere. It's a great
7 model.

8 Academics, our kids are happy.
9 They are learning. They feel comfortable
10 about what they learn. And if they are
11 stumbling, they feel confident about
12 telling us and reaching out to the
13 principal.

14 And I can speak for my
15 daughter. Every time that she feels that
16 something is hard, she's, like, I should
17 talk to my teacher, and she talks to her
18 teacher, and she gets the that she needs.
19 And that is beautiful. To me that speaks
20 about the school and the environment that
21 is brought into everyone.

22 Innovation, it's another thing
23 that I love, that everything possible
24 available in the school reach is met. And



1 I love it. Everybody is invited to come to
2 the school to see what happens, and that is
3 something that is admirable.

4 What else can I say? The
5 leadership development. I see ASPIRA kids
6 being leaders. They are not afraid to
7 create. They are not afraid to come up
8 with an idea for a club. They are not
9 afraid to design something for an art
10 project where they can do anything they
11 want, not feeling like they are less than.

12 And that is something very
13 appreciated because our kids are encouraged
14 to be who they are, and they are encouraged
15 to try. They have expectations. They have
16 high expectations, and they feel like they
17 are part of it.

18 Nobody looks at them and say
19 you're not going to do it, you're not going
20 to make it. It's like where do you want to
21 go? And they work hard. And there are
22 programs for them to develop their skills,
23 to be leaders. And they support each
24 other, and that is something that I wish I



1 had.

2 So I highly suggest that
3 ASPIRA's permit to continue the beautiful
4 job that they have done and delivering for
5 parents and students keeps going. And it's
6 not just about the language. It's about
7 the culture and the beautiful model to help
8 the state into innovating into the very
9 needed education that we need. Thank you.

10 MR. TRAVERS: Is there anyone
11 else that would like to speak regarding Las
12 Americas ASPIRA?

13 I want to thank you all for
14 participating today. The secretary will
15 consider your comments in deciding at the
16 conclusion of the renewal process what
17 decision to submit to the State Board for
18 assent if needed. This hearing for Las
19 Americas ASPIRA is now closed.

20 (Hearing concluded at 6:45
21 p.m.)

22
23
24



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 14 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.

13
14
15
16 *Susan A. Yoder*
17

SUSAN ARNOLD YODER, RPR

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22
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