



November 16th, 2018

Design Thinking Academy's Response to Initial CSAC Report

The Following Information was Requested:

Organizational Performance:

Curriculum:

- 1. Educational Program: A summary of the school's process and findings from the audit which Mrs. Silverman conducted when she arrived at the school.**

Response Supplied by Stephanie Silverman, Principal & Interim Head of School at DTA: Upon arrival at Design Thinking Academy in July 3rd 2018, I requested all documents relating to curriculum, course descriptions, graduation requirements, and typical course progression. As I conducted a thorough audit of our academic program, there were many information gaps and inconsistencies across all departments. At the time of my review in July and August, there was not a coherent or well-articulated course progression for both the core subject areas as well as the 5 Creative Pathways. In early August, I asked all Department Chairs to work collaboratively on a Course Catalog so that we could ensure that each course at Design Thinking Academy had a similarly formatted description, pre-requisites noted, and that our 5 Pathways were also represented in the Course Catalog. There were several new courses running for the first time this fall, so it was even more imperative to articulate the academic program. In addition, I wanted to set up the school for success as we entered our 5-year Charter Renewal Application with the Delaware Department of Education.

I asked all Department Chairs to meet with their respective departments to document their department's curricular scope and sequence. I created a standardized template, which incorporated fields for State Standards and also for XQ Learner Goals and XQ Design Principles, which we are expected to incorporate and adhere to as part of our XQ Superschool Status. After course descriptions were completed and all of the curricula was mapped, I was then in a better position to evaluate the academic rigor, strengths, and shortcomings of the entire Design Thinking Academy academic program. Though major alterations to the academic program need to be thoughtful and sequenced carefully, my long term goal is to strategically build in academic rigor and thoughtful scaffolding, including more Advanced Placement and Honors courses. In the future, I am hoping we can add an Audio Engineering Pathway to our career Pathway offerings.

Overall, the goal moving forward will be to increase rigor, maintain an ongoing reflection, revision and refinement of our existing curricula. Several action steps have been taken to ensure that ongoing revision and evaluation of our curriculum will become part of the professional expectations for teaching at Design Thinking Academy.

We have formalized plans in place, several of which include the support of XQ (beyond the annual grant award) towards our institutional goals of coherent academic curriculum aligned with the state standards and the XQ Design Principles and XQ Learner Goals. We will continue our work towards Design Thinking Academy's internal capacity building and commitment to academic excellence and professional development through formalized partnerships with Cooper Hewitt (the Design Museum Affiliate of the Smithsonian), StartSOLOE (to support teachers in the co-creation of Self Organized Learning Environments), and an emerging formalized partnership (created by XQ) with Inquiry Schools and Science Leadership Academy in Philadelphia, which will foster the conditions necessary to help advance the excellence of our school and overall educational program.

In addition, as part of the ongoing review, revision and refinement of our curriculum, I have developed an in-house Curriculum Specialist position for one of our Teachers (Susan Clough), whose expertise in design-thinking based, standards aligned curriculum is unparalleled. Our Curriculum Specialist will provide support to individual teachers and departments in the process of mapping, creating, revising, and developing original design-thinking curriculum at Design Thinking Academy. The Curriculum Specialist will function primarily to cultivate a cohesive and calibrated curriculum document and initiate the ongoing revision and development of DTA's curriculum over time. She will work with individual teachers and departments to assist in the development of a rigorous, standards-aligned, discipline specific curriculum infused with PBL and design thinking, develop assessment tools for evaluating curriculum and creating interdisciplinary/cross-curricular connections for added relevance and value. IN collaboration with the Community Partnerships Program Manager, our Curriculum Specialist will craft signature curricula and lesson plans to address the six XQ Design Principles and all XQ Learner Goals. Most importantly, the Curriculum Specialist will advance school-wide understanding and appreciation for curriculum writing as an ongoing constructive process requiring periodic and annual evaluation, revision, refinement.

2. Educational Program: See Appendix 1 for review notes from DOE's Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Development Workgroup.

All of our Completed and revised Scope & Sequence files for each Academic Department along with our 5 Creative Career Pathways can be accessed using this [link](#). The folder includes several subfolders, including: completed revised curriculum for our 5 Creative Pathways, English Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, and World Languages.

As we reviewed the feedback for our curriculum in the Initial CSAC Report, it appears as though the curriculum reviewed in our Initial CSAC Report was the same version we submitted for our initial review. After receiving the feedback for our initial submissions from the September optional feedback opportunity, our departments worked very hard to incorporate all of the recommendations and expectations to meet the standards outlined. I submitted all of the revised curriculum for each department by the deadline.

We would like to note that we submitted all of our curriculum for the preliminary DOE Review on 8/17. Our Academic team was confused upon receiving the Initial CSAC Report on 11/1, because all of the recommendations and expectations outlined in the Initial Report were identical to the results from the preliminary curriculum review we received from John via email on 9/17, where all of our curriculum was given a "Does not Meet Standard" rating. We now understand that the feedback listed in the Initial Report may in fact have been the feedback offered for our Early Submission Curriculum Review. We worked very hard to incorporate all expectations and as many of the recommendations as we possibly could to meet the 12-day tight turnaround of revised curriculum submissions by the 10/1 Charter Renewal Application Deadline, understanding the 10/1 date as the deadline for curriculum revisions.

The folder also includes a PDF of our 2018-19 Course Catalog, which includes our Typical Course Progression, 5 Creative Career Pathways Course Progression, and course descriptions for each course offered at Design Thinking Academy.

3. School Climate & Discipline: Provide a Plan for compliance with the Non-Academic Mandatory Training requirements for staff (e.g. suicide prevention, bullying preventiuon, gang awareness, etc.)

Response supplied by Christina Hembree, Director of Internal Operations

The Director of Internal Operations has implemented a system to track all required non-academic trainings and their completion. Employees are first made aware of the requirement in the Employee Handbook given out at the beginning of each School Year, listing course number, descriptions and a completion date of 8/15. Employees are emailed after the completion date if they are still missing any of the required courses and advised to complete them during a Professional Development Day. Any staff member still missing completion of any of the required courses will be mandated to report to the school on January 2, 2019 to complete the training instead of having the day for independent Professional Development. Staff has been made aware that the DOE tracks the completion of these courses and it is a professional obligation to the school and the state to complete these mandated trainings.

4. Enrollment: A plan to increase enrollment

Response Supplied by Loretta Harper Brown, Recruitment & Admissions

Design Thinking Academy Retention Plan 2018 - 2019

This section represents the goals and strategies Design Thinking Academy will implement during the school year to maximize the number of students who successfully complete all course requirements, and to prevent students from transferring to other schools. The table below also provides additional narrative on the implementation status and any proposed changes to the retention plan.

Overall Student Retention Goal	
Annual goal for student retention (percentage):	Implementation Status & Proposed Changes
We aim to achieve 95% student retention for students in grades 9 th , 10 th , and 11 th . June 2019 there is an average graduating class of about 130 students.	<i>Will continue with the goal of an attrition rate of 5% or less.</i>

Retention Plan: Implementation

Retention Plan Goals and Strategies -- List goals and strategies for retention activities.		
Goals & Strategies	Description	Implementation Status & Proposed Changes
Retention Action	Provide clear information to incoming parents through conducting multiple orientation sessions and written documentation of our policies and philosophies. We believe that this will help ensure that parents who enroll in our school are clear about our school program and aligned with our mission.	Completed during the enrollment period, tours, and shadow dates.
Retention Action	Continue to improve our educational course selections to provide additional rigor. The goal is to assist our students to outperform other students locally and nationally.	In progress will continue
Retention Action	Ensure that special education students are achieving at a level that is significantly higher than special education students across the state. Ensure that in addition to IEP specifications, special education students are receiving adequate academic supports from teachers, tutors, counselors, etc.	In progress will continue
Retention Action	Ensure that students/parents will have an opportunity to share in a town hall fashion. Have staff, administration, and consultants present to answer any questions and or concerns. This process will take place quarterly.	In progress
Retention Action	We will ensure that we minimize required parent fees (i.e. field trip fees and activity fees) and/or make fees “pay as you can”.	In progress
Retention Action	Increase communication with parents of struggling students so they are receiving frequent progress updates. Continue to recognize students with honors and distinguish honors.	In progress

Retention Plan Goals and Strategies -- List goals and strategies for retention activities.		
Goals & Strategies	Description	Implementation Status & Proposed Changes
Retention Action	Thank-you— parents that continue to retain enrollment with DTA, will receive a personalized, handwritten note. This correspondence will be from the head of school, principal and admissions director.	
Retention Action	Establish a goal of meeting with every family during the school year. This is a high touch approach with high gains. The goal is to ask 4 questions listed below. 1. Overall satisfaction level at the school 2. Strengths and weaknesses of the school 3. Plans for continuing next year 4. Issues that might affect their continued enrollment	

Financial Performance

Submitted by Michelle Lambert, Please see attachments. Files can also be accessed using this [link](#).

1. Documentaton of the internal controls of the school’s procedures for expenditures and purchasing
2. Re-submit the revised 100% Budget with any changes or additons
3. Revised 80% budget proections: DTA submitted an 80% budget, but only Year 0 reflected 80% enrollment. Resubmit with 80% reflected in Years 0-4. (Note: For both the 100% and 80% Budget: reflecting inflationary factors, enrollment projections,increasing cost for rent/lease, and substitute funding whern the XQ grant runs out should be reflected in the budget.

Design Thinking Academy Recruitment Work Plan 2018-19

“Design Thinking Academy’s mission is to empower all students to be tomorrow’s innovators and lifelong learners who question, imagine, create, and share every day.”

Consultant: Loretta Harper-Brown
Prepared by: Loretta Harper-Brown

Goal: Attract and Retain Students for DTA

OBJECTIVES/STRATEGIES	MEASURABLE CRITERIA	TIMETABLE				PROGRESS
		Q1 7/1 – 9/30	Q2 10/1 – 12/31	Q3 1/1 – 3/31	Q4 4/1 – 6/30	
Develop a recruitment committee /monthly meeting	Committee formed	X				
	Develop 1-year work plan for recruitment	X				
	Develop engagement and communication strategy plan.					
	Develop case for support.					
	Director of Development job description completed.					
	Presentation provided to the Board of Directors.		X			
Hire a Director of Development to implement the plan.	Position posted on recruitment websites.		X			
	Interviews, references, and background checks conducted.			X		
	Offer accepted by finalist.			X		
Raise 2018-19 funds and implement the engagement strategies per the plan.	X number of donors solicited.			X	X	

OBJECTIVES/STRATEGIES	MEASURABLE CRITERIA	TIMETABLE				PROGRESS
		Q1 7/1 – 9/30	Q2 10/1 – 12/31	Q3 1/1 – 3/31	Q4 4/1 – 6/30	
	X dollars raised.				X	
	X number of potential donors engaged.				X	
	X dollars awarded through grant submissions.				X	

5. Financial Performance Submitted by Michelle Lambert, Please see attachments. Files can also be accessed using this [link](#).

1. Documentaton of the internal controls of the school’s procedures for expenditures and purchasing
2. Re-submit the revised 100% Budget with any changes or additons
3. Revised 80% budget proections: DTA submitted an 80% budget, but only Year 0 reflected 80% enrollment. Resubmit with 80% reflected in Years 0-4. (Note: For both the 100% and 80% Budget: reflecting inflationary factors, enrollment projections,increasing cost for rent/lease, and substitute funding whern the XQ grant runs out should be reflected in the budget.

Please see attached Revisions to the 10/23/2018 Discussion Section of Initial Report. These suggested revisions to the Discussion were also shared with John Carwell and Wafa Hozien on Thursday, 11/8/2018 via email by Stephanie Silverman. **We also want to be sure that the Delaware Department of Education has referenced our Final Renewal Documents found [here](#).**

Thank You in Advance for your consideration of our response to the Initial Charter School Accountability Committee’s Report.



Stephanie Silverman, NBCT
Principal & Interim Head of School
Design Thinking Academy

Design Thinking Academy
179 Stanton Christiana Road
Newark, DE 19702
Ph.: 302-292-5450