

In The Matter Of:
Department of Education
In re: Academy of Dover Charter School

Hearing
October 5, 2016

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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-- PUBLIC HEARING --

IN THE MATTER OF:)
)
Academy of Dover Charter School)

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Department of Education
The Townsend Building
2nd Floor Cabinet Room
401 Federal Street
Dover, Delaware 19901

Monday, October 5, 2016
5:00 p.m.

..

BEFORE: Denise Stouffer, Lead Education Associate

ATTORNEY: Catherine T. Hickey, DAG
Attorney for Department of Education

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-- Transcript of Proceedings --

WILCOX & FETZER
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1 MS. STOUFFER: Good evening,
2 everyone.

3 MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE: Good evening.

4 MS. STOUFFER: I declare this public
5 meeting to be open. My name is Denise Stouffer. I
6 am the Lead Education Associate, and I have been
7 appointed by the Secretary of Education to conduct
8 this public hearing.

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

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

17 I would like the record to reflect
18 that the notice of the time, date, and place of
19 today's public hearing was published in the News
20 Journal and the Delaware State News on September 19,
21 2016.

22 In addition, notice was posted at the
23 Charter School Accountability Committee's official
24 place of business, on the Department of Education's



1 official website, and on the State Public Meeting
2 Calendar on the State's official website.

3 Further, the Academy of Dover Charter
4 School was personally notified of the time, date,
5 and place of today's public hearing on September 19,
6 2016.

7 A court reporter is present so that a
8 record of this hearing can be made. It will be
9 necessary for each speaker to clearly identify his
10 or herself before beginning to speak so that the
11 court reporter will be able to note who you are.

12 The record of this hearing will be
13 provided to the Secretary of Education and the
14 members of the State Board of Education, together
15 with any written or electronic comments received
16 during the course of the renewal decision. To date,
17 no comments have been received on the renewal
18 application.

19 We will proceed in the following
20 manner: First, we will hear from any
21 representatives from the charter school who wish to
22 comment on the renewal application. Then we will
23 take comments from anyone else who desires to speak.
24 There is a sign-up sheet at the table located at the



1 door. If you desire to speak, please sign in now.

2 I will now pause for a moment to
3 permit anyone else who desires to sign up to speak
4 to do so. First, however, I would like a show of
5 hands of all those who desire to make comments so
6 that I can determine whether it may be necessary to
7 impose time limits. Let's go off the record.

8 (off-the-record.)

9 MS. STOUFFER: Let's go back on the
10 record. Perfect. I intend to try to be as liberal
11 with time as possible and allow comments as
12 necessary. However, I do reserve the right to limit
13 comments if they are purely repetitive. At this
14 point in time I will accept comments from any
15 representatives of the school. So if someone would
16 like to start?

17 MS. MARSHALL: I will start.

18 MS. STOUFFER: Please feel free.
19 Will you come forward? You can sit at the table, or
20 you may stand at the podium, whichever you feel
21 comfortable with.

22 MS. MARSHALL: Good evening. I'm
23 Cheri Marshall, Principal at the Academy of Dover
24 Charter School. I just want to, first of all, thank



1 you for having us here tonight.

2 I have been at the school since 2003
3 when it opened. And during those 13 years I have
4 seen the school overcome so many obstacles. And
5 each time we have grown stronger and bounced back
6 from every obstacle. And I have no doubt in my mind
7 that we will continue to grow and strengthen every
8 year.

9 Our school is made up of 247
10 wonderful students in grades kindergarten through
11 fifth grade. We have 35 staff. We have a very
12 supportive board and many wonderful parents. And I
13 want to thank everyone for coming out to show your
14 support for the Academy of Dover.

15 I don't want to cry -- (Laughter in
16 audience) -- but I really have invested a lot in the
17 school. So, with that being said, I just really
18 look forward to the renewal process. It's my first
19 time going through it. I'm really excited about it.
20 And I know that the school has a lot of good things
21 that we are going to do over the next five years,
22 and I look forward to working with you. And thank
23 you to the Committee for believing in us for the
24 last 13 years and getting us to where we are. Thank



1 you.

2 (Applause)

3 MR. BOYNTON: Good afternoon, members
4 of the Committee. My name is Kimeu Boynton. I
5 spell that for the court reporter. It's K-I-M-E-U,
6 last name is B-O-Y-N-T-O-N. I'm the board president
7 for the Academy of Dover.

8 I don't want to repeat anything that
9 our head of school, Cheri Marshall, just said. I
10 just want to take this time to thank the Committee
11 for taking a very well-reasoned look at our renewal
12 packet. And we look forward to working with you
13 guys as we go through this renewal.

14 I believe this is my second one on
15 top of a modification and some other issues that we
16 have had to work out. The school, itself, has been
17 through quite a bit in the last, I would say, three
18 to four years. I have been a board member since
19 2007, so we have weathered many, many storms. But I
20 think it's testament if you look around the room to
21 the number of staff and parents that we have with us
22 today.

23 And I would have to say any
24 organization that I have ever been a part of, I



1 don't think I have seen a more dedicated group of
2 faculty and staff members than we have at the
3 Academy of Dover. So I would like to, you know,
4 give my thanks to them.

5 The board, we are there very
6 sporadically. So the people that are in the
7 building every day are there for those children
8 every single day. Thank you.

9 (Applause)

10 DR. FLETCHER: Good evening. My name
11 is Dr. Charles D Fletcher. I am a member of the
12 board. I have been on the board since 2014.

13 The school started in 2003 with
14 several well-minded people from this community who
15 have a purpose and a desire to do something about
16 education for young people.

17 And had it not been for one person
18 who is also a colleague of mine from Delaware State
19 University where I was Associate Provost for
20 Technology for a number of years, Mr. Jeffrey
21 Williams, I probably would not be here today. It is
22 often said that that which does not kill you makes
23 you stronger. So it's obvious that the school must
24 be just teflon tough (laughter in audience) with the



1 amount of things that we have gone through for just
2 a small, little school, just a small, little school
3 in a rented building; not a building that was given
4 to them by the State, as they do for the Capital
5 School District and other districts, but a school, a
6 school not unlike other charters where someone
7 donated the building. It's a building that we
8 actually pay a very princely sum of rent to continue
9 to educate young people in this community.

10 We are going to go through this
11 process, and through this process we are going to
12 learn something. But you also have to go through a
13 very thorough review of our activities. And we are
14 happy that you are going to do that, because you are
15 going to point out some things that perhaps even our
16 eyes could not see.

17 And we are going to look forward to a
18 process that, at the end, because we have gone
19 through this before and before and before, I know in
20 advance how it should come out. And we are hopeful
21 that we will be able to articulate some of the
22 things that you might be able to continue to do for
23 us. I know what we are trying to do for the
24 children in this community, but we need to have some



1 attributes on the other side. In your review you
2 will say we could have done something better for
3 them. So I certainly want to thank you for this
4 evening's time.

5 (Applause)

6 MS. STOUFFER: Are there any other
7 representatives from the school who would like to
8 speak? At this point I would like to accept -- I'm
9 sorry. Go ahead --

10 MS. STEWART: Good evening, ladies
11 and gentlemen. My name is Chavonne Stewart. I am
12 the current Behavioral Intervention/Transportation
13 Supervisor at the Academy of Dover.

14 I, too, have been there since the
15 very beginning groundbreaking. I started off as a
16 para, and I have manifested into the wonderful
17 Behavioral Interventionist that you see before you.

18 (Laughter in audience)

19 It wasn't until -- I limit myself for
20 how often I go out in Dover. Because every time I
21 go out in Dover, I run into a parent or run into a
22 student that I interacted with in some way during
23 the last 13 years that I have been at the Academy.
24 But it was not until that my two children, who are



1 now five and six, about to be six and seven, who
2 currently goes to the Academy of Dover, as well, I
3 didn't realize the impact that we truly had until
4 they were there.

5 We are a small setting, which
6 everyone has previously expressed. Everyone knows
7 my oldest child, Nyara. And she is the mayor. She
8 loves everybody. She loves everybody. She is just
9 a very friendly, interactive person. I could not
10 see her in any other setting. Not just because I'm
11 there, but just because of the type of personality
12 that she has.

13 With the way the world is nowadays
14 with the bullying and all the harshness that we see
15 on TV and all the harshness that our children face,
16 whether it be at the bus stop or in the school
17 cafeteria or whatever, I can proudly say that,
18 though we may have a few issues, our issues are
19 minimal compared to what I see and deal with on a
20 daily basis.

21 And I'm proud that I have my
22 five-year-old and my six-year-old there. And I hope
23 that we can continue so that they can -- and add a
24 sixth, seventh, and eighth grade just so I don't



1 have to make that transition. (Laughter in
2 audience)

3 But I just want to say thank you.
4 And anything that we need to do to try to move
5 forward to make us even more successful than we
6 already have in the last 13 years, please just let
7 us know. And we will collaboratively come together,
8 just as we have done for the last 13 years, and do
9 the best we can to be successful. Thank you for
10 your time. Have a good evening.

11 (Applause)

12 MS. WAGNER: My name is Nancy Wagner,
13 and I'm the Vice President of the Board. I didn't
14 sign up. I apologize.

15 But I was in the Legislature when we
16 passed charter legislation. And we struggled with
17 that, because we weren't really sure that people,
18 regular folk, could come together and could put
19 together a school. They may or may not have
20 educational background. And so some of the
21 parameters we put in, such as provide your own
22 building, if you are capable of getting a building
23 or getting someone, that tells us you have some
24 ability to put things together.



1 Now, I also spent 25 years of my life
2 as a public schoolteacher, not that charters are not
3 public, but they are different. I never envisioned
4 that the work that a charter board would do was as
5 all encompassing in the actual running of the school
6 or that they would have to work as hard as they do
7 to solve problems and to come think out of the box
8 to be able to figure out how to make this work.

9 We all know the, quote, regular
10 public schools is this and this and this and this
11 and this, and that's just the way it works. In
12 charter schools, it's not like that.

13 I have never seen a set of teachers
14 and staff as dedicated as this, as this. You are
15 not going to get this in a, quote, regular school.
16 I can attest to that. In a, quote, regular school,
17 this is my job description, this is what I do, this
18 is what I get the apple for, this is this, and
19 that's kind of my parameters.

20 In this little charter school, they
21 do everything. I mean, it doesn't matter if we work
22 for less money, if we stay extra hours, if we have a
23 longer school year. It's for the kids. I have
24 never seen that.



1 I can honestly say when charter was
2 voted on, I supported it, but I was a little iffy.
3 I wasn't quite sure how it was going to work out. I
4 never envisioned that it would be something as
5 dynamic and as much vitality as this is. It's an
6 amazing experiment, and we need to be able to really
7 take some of this stuff and move it into the, quote,
8 regular schools, which was the intent, which we
9 haven't done so much yet.

10 I know now there is a kind of a
11 feeling that we are not sure -- I mean in the
12 Legislature -- about some of us charters are more in
13 favor, some of us are more not in favor. But you
14 just look at this, and it is amazing.

15 So I'm really glad I had the
16 opportunity not only just to be there in the
17 beginning, but to work with these people and see how
18 it really works. That is a great example of people
19 wanting to make schools terrific, their children's
20 lives terrific. And they will do anything in this
21 little school to make that happen.

22 So I wasn't going to say anything,
23 but I thought I would add that. Thank you.

24 (Applause)



1 MS. STOUFFER: At this point I will
2 accept comments from anyone else who desires to
3 speak. Please remember to identify yourself before
4 you give your comments. Is there anyone else who
5 desires to speak?

6 MS. NEMECEK: I do. I will. I'm
7 Dana Nemecek, and I'm a paraprofessional at the
8 Academy of Dover now. But at the last renewal, I
9 was a parent, and so I spoke on behalf of the
10 school.

11 My feeling about the school has not
12 changed. I brought them a very challenging case in
13 my son -- a lovely human being, blessed to have him,
14 but he was a whole, whole set issues that the
15 Academy of Dover really went above and beyond to
16 help me parent him but also to educate him the way
17 that I wanted him to be educated.

18 And I think that's what we bring to
19 the community is that we are willing to listen to
20 what parents have to say and to really hear what
21 they are saying. We don't -- we are not thinking of
22 a response; we are listening to what you are saying,
23 and we are really trying to then help you raise your
24 child. We are educators, but we feel like we have a



1 buy-in to your child and the whole of your child.

2 And like I said, I saw that. Like I
3 say, he is 20 years old. He graduated from high
4 school. He is working now. Thank you, Jesus.

5 (Laughter)

6 But I just really wanted to -- and,
7 like I said, I'm still there. I was only going to
8 stay until he got out, and then I was like, okay,
9 it's going to be time for me to go.

10 And I'm still there now. Because,
11 like I said, we really are a village, and we do
12 believe it takes all of us to raise -- help you
13 raise your child, not just educate them. And that's
14 all I wanted to say.

15 (Applause)

16 MS. STOUFFER: Is there anyone else
17 who desires to speak? If not, I want to thank all
18 of you for participating today. The Secretary will
19 consider your comments in deciding, at the
20 conclusion of the renewal process, what decision to
21 submit to the State Board for consent, if needed.
22 This hearing is now closed.

23 (Adjourned at 5:19 p.m.)

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CERTIFICATE

I, Lorena J. Hartnett, a Notary Public and Registered Professional Reporter, do hereby certify that the foregoing is an accurate and complete transcription of the proceeding held at the time and place stated herein, and that the said proceeding was recorded by me and then reduced to typewriting under my direction, and constitutes a true record of the testimony given by said witnesses.

I further certify that I am not a relative, employee, or attorney of any of the parties or a relative or employee of either counsel, and that I am in no way interested directly or indirectly in this action.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my seal of office on this 5th day of October 2016.



Lorena J. Hartnett
Registered Professional Reporter

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