

In The Matter Of:
Department of Education
The Design Thinking Academy

Public Hearing
December 10, 2018

Wilcox & Fetzer, Ltd.
1330 King Street
Wilmington, DE 19801
email: depos@wilfet.com, web: www.wilfet.com
phone: 302-655-0477, fax: 302-655-0497



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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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-- PUBLIC HEARING --

IN THE MATTER OF:)
)
The Design Thinking Academy)

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

Monday, December 10, 2018
5:00 p.m.

.. . . .

BEFORE: Leroy Travers, Lead Education Associate
Charter Office, Department of Education

Candice Fifer, Board Member
State Board of Education

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

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-- Transcript of Proceedings --

WILCOX & FETZER
1330 King Street
Wilmington, DE 19801
(302) 655-0477
www.wilfet.com



1 MR. TRAVERS: Greetings. Good
2 evening, everyone. I declare this public hearing to
3 be open.

4 My name is Leroy Travers. I'm the
5 Lead Education Associate, and I have been appointed
6 by the Secretary of Education to conduct this public
7 hearing.

8 The Design Thinking Academy Charter
9 School has filed an application to renew its charter
10 for a term of five years.

11 As is required by law, the matter was
12 referred to the Charter School 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.

17 I will now ask the others at the
18 table to please introduce themselves?

19 MS. HICKEY: Good evening. My name
20 is Catherine Hickey. I'm a Deputy Attorney General
21 with the Delaware Department of Justice, and I am
22 here as counsel to the hearing officer this evening.

23 MS. FIFER: I'm Candice Fifer. I'm
24 with the State Board of Education.



1 MR. TRAVERS: I would like the record
2 to reflect that the notice of the time, date, and
3 place of today's public hearing was published in the
4 News Journal and the Delaware State News on
5 September 20, 2018.

6 In addition, notice was posted at the
7 Charter School Accountability Committee's official
8 place of business, on the Department of Education's
9 official website, and on the State Public Meeting
10 Calendar on the State's official website.

11 Further, the Design Thinking Academy
12 Charter School was personally notified of the time,
13 date, and place of today's public hearing on
14 September 10, 2018.

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

20 The record of this hearing will be
21 provided to the Secretary of Education and the
22 members of the State Board of Education, together
23 with any written or electronic comments received
24 during the course of the renewal decision process.



1 Any comments received to date of this
2 renewal application are posted on the Charter School
3 Office's website.

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

9 There are sign-up sheets at the back
10 of the room on the table. If you desire to speak,
11 please sign up now. I will now pause for a moment
12 to permit anyone who so desires to sign up to speak.

13 MS. HICKEY: I have the Design
14 Academy sign-up sheet here, but I think everybody
15 that's here and is going to speak is signed up.
16 Correct?

17 MS. SILVERMAN: Yes.

18 MR. TRAVERS: Could I have a show of
19 hands if anyone would desire to speak or make
20 comments? (Two hands raised)

21 I reserve the right to limit comment
22 if it is purely repetitive or cumulative.

23 At this point I will accept comments
24 from any representative of the school.



1 MS. SILVERMAN: We have one of our
2 star teachers here, so we will wait until she gets
3 signed up.

4 Are you ready for us?

5 MR. TALMO: May we begin?

6 MS. SILVERMAN: Good evening. My
7 name is Stephanie Silverman. I am the principal and
8 head of school at Design Thinking Academy.

9 And first I want to thank you for
10 consideration of our five-year charter renewal
11 application.

12 The Design Thinking Academy's
13 innovative instructional model is centered on design
14 thinking as our primary pedagogy and curricular
15 model for which we are going to be preparing
16 students for jobs that haven't even been imagined
17 yet.

18 Our curriculum is standards aligned,
19 and it's also meant to leverage the creative and
20 critical capacity of our students.

21 And we believe we offer something
22 very distinctive in the landscape of Delaware public
23 education, and we are closer than ever to realizing
24 our mission and vision. And to have another five



1 years to further our vision and mission delivery
2 would be most appreciated.

3 So thank you for your consideration
4 of our application. And I am now going to turn it
5 over to Nancy Marvel.

6 MS. MARVEL: Good afternoon. My name
7 is Nancy Marvel, and I am one the original teachers
8 from what was Design Lab. It is now Design Thinking
9 Academy.

10 I am the Social Studies department
11 chair and the Entrepreneurship teacher.

12 So we live in a world where the R's
13 of education go beyond reading, writing, and
14 arithmetic, but now include rigor, relationships,
15 relevance and results.

16 And I would like to address how DTA
17 engages our students in each of these.

18 THE REPORTER: Excuse me. Can you
19 slow down.

20 MS. MARVEL: Sorry. Our focus in
21 education is on applying the design thinking process
22 to solve issues. Our goal is to create a rigorous
23 project-based learning college preparatory
24 curriculum that sets high expectations for all of



1 our students. This year we have formalized our
2 curriculum that does set those high expectations.
3 We have added a curriculum specialist, and we are
4 evaluating our curriculum in an ongoing effort to
5 ensure the rigor, the development of skills, and
6 engagement of our students.

7 This past summer, members of the DTA
8 teaching staff spent weeks attending summer
9 institutes to sharpen and strengthen their knowledge
10 and toolkit to increase the rigor and strengthen the
11 quality of the projects to be used in the classroom.

12 Currently, we offer five pathways.
13 And through the use of design thinking, our faculty
14 creates engaging, relevant curriculum that
15 incorporates the personal backgrounds of students
16 and current events.

17 The focus is on content and
18 developing needed skills to be successful as they
19 move into the next chapter of their lives.

20 As a relatively new school, we are
21 still gathering evidence of our success. Our state
22 test scores are not where we want them to be yet.

23 We must meet our students where they
24 come to us. We are identifying the areas of needed



1 remediation and have programs in place to help
2 students gain those missing skills while still
3 participating fully in the curriculum.

4 And the students in our pathways are
5 finding success. In my pathway, Entrepreneurship,
6 my students have grown significantly in the past two
7 years.

8 Students, often shy, who once feared
9 speaking in public, will now pass you their business
10 card and pitch their ideas.

11 Our students have won the World
12 Series of Innovation, a national competition, and in
13 the regional business plan competition this past
14 spring placing first, second, and third and having
15 their businesses funded.

16 Two of our young ladies participated
17 in Harvard University's Young Women's Business
18 Leadership Conference just two months ago.

19 And I want to tell you about a young
20 man who for a year floundered, but months ago he
21 found out his passion was in truly helping other
22 young people learn about gaming and coding and
23 design.

24 And realizing he didn't yet have the



1 skills he needed to do that, he did his research and
2 due diligence on how he could learn those things,
3 and now he submitted a proposal to Ms. Silverman to
4 add a gaming design pathway.

5 This young man has worked out the
6 particulars of the courses that will need to be
7 taken and the skills the students would need so that
8 they would be employable in the field upon
9 graduation.

10 So this young man also has moved
11 forward in his participating dual school. And when
12 his parents came in for an open house just two weeks
13 ago, they raved about the transformation. His
14 brother was also checking us out, and I hear he will
15 be joining us as a freshman next fall.

16 Our seniors have applied to college.
17 Many have already received early admission to
18 multiple universities and historically black
19 colleges.

20 And this week we have students who
21 are awaiting decisions from the Ivy League and MIT.

22 And I want to tell you about a
23 student who actually believed he wasn't college
24 material. It took me weeks to get this young man to



1 apply to Del Tech. And the excitement on his face
2 when he received his acceptance letter brought my
3 entire classroom joy.

4 What was evening better was because
5 of that letter and a little bit of pushing, he, I
6 got this young man to apply to two more colleges,
7 four-year schools, and he was accepted into both.

8 And while all of that is important to
9 the success of our students and our school, it is
10 the relationships that truly define our school.

11 Our principal, Ms. Silverman, leads
12 by example. She brings talent, a design background,
13 and an understanding of the challenges that teachers
14 face in a desire to provide the best educational
15 experience for our children in the safest place we
16 can create.

17 Students and adults are held
18 accountable to make good decisions and, if not,
19 there are consequences.

20 With feedback, we learn from our
21 mistakes and failures, and we come up with new,
22 different, and better solutions.

23 There is also a new level of
24 transparency, clarity, and communication which,



1 until this year, has been problematic.

2 Each week, students, staff, families,
3 and stakeholders receive a weekly update. More than
4 just a newsletter, this communique highlights the
5 work and achievements of our amazing students and
6 staff.

7 It is wonderful to come in on a
8 Monday to have students share how proud they were to
9 be recognized. And there are those students who
10 will not say much, but if you mention it to them
11 that you saw them, they will give you that sly
12 smile.

13 Our Vice Principal Durrell Harris has
14 created a climate and culture in which students have
15 an active voice to participate and hold each other
16 accountable for behaviors. There is accountability
17 now on every level.

18 But, most importantly, all of our
19 students feel safe, and they know they are cared
20 for. Students have at least one trusted adult they
21 can turn to when needed.

22 It is almost impossible for a student
23 to walk through our school without an adult saying
24 hello and checking in on them. We know our



1 students. We know when they are happy, when they
2 are upset, and when something is off.

3 I want to share a conversation that
4 took place in my room just last week. The younger
5 man I mentioned before who applied to college had a
6 very rough sophomore year.

7 He was sharing to classmates that he
8 couldn't believe he was actually here alive and he
9 was doing so well, he had just received another
10 college acceptance, he had been trained as a manager
11 in his shop, his mother was supportive, and he was
12 in a healthy relationship, because a teacher
13 listened and heard him when he was in pain.

14 But allow me to digress. After
15 struggling with his identity in his sophomore year,
16 he came to terms with his identity and sexuality,
17 one that he was afraid to share with his family for
18 fear of rejection and expulsion from his home.

19 On top of his family angst, this
20 young man became involved with someone who was
21 emotionally destructive to him.

22 The young man walked into the
23 teacher's room while she was on her planning period,
24 and he shared more of what was going on in his life



1 and how hopeless he felt and that he just couldn't
2 and didn't want to go on.

3 The teacher listened and talked with
4 the student and reached out, with the student's
5 consent, to the counselor. The young man received
6 the help he needed, and he returned to school.

7 This is just one example of one
8 interaction with one child in which our staff makes
9 a daily difference in the lives of a child.

10 The content we teach is important.
11 Helping our students develop the tools to deal with
12 the challenges they face is even more important.
13 Students feel safe in our school.

14 In fact, DTA is the safest, most
15 stable place for many of our students. Students who
16 have seen more than any child should, students who
17 are homeless, students who have part-time jobs who
18 help their families pay bills, and so much more.

19 At our school, these students are
20 seen, they are heard, they are accepted, they are
21 loved, and they are special.

22 The broken promises of the first two
23 years of our school is something now in the past.
24 Design Thinking Academy has finally become the



1 school students and staff were promised when they
2 originally signed on.

3 Yet, we are not stopping there. We
4 are committed to continuing to strengthen our
5 curriculum, building community relationships, and
6 developing meaningful experiences for our students.

7 We are creating a super school where
8 we rethink traditional education. But, first and
9 foremost, we are creating a school that creates a
10 super experience for our students.

11 Our students are now proud to be DTA
12 wolves, and some days you can hear the wolf howl in
13 the hallway. DTA has become more than just a
14 school. It is a tight-knit community.

15 DTA is making a difference in the
16 lives of our children who walk through our doors
17 each day.

18 And much like our children, our
19 school is a work in progress. And we will both
20 continue to grow, to learn, to become stronger and
21 ultimately to do good and be amazing. And that is
22 why I believe our charter should be renewed. Thank
23 you.

24 MR. TALMO: My name is Mark Talmo. I

1 am Design Thinking Academy's Director of Operations.

2 I have been an employee since July of
3 2016. When I started with Design Lab, and then
4 becoming Design Thinking Academy, the academic
5 programs lacked strength, and the enrollment was a
6 little bit weak. Where the enrollment was headed
7 was probably considerably weak.

8 And then in the six months, in the
9 time when I had started with the school, the school
10 showed considerable strength.

11 And I can tell you where we have
12 gained strength. It's in the academic programs.
13 It's in the athletic programs. It's in the
14 administration, which shows strength and stability.
15 The enrollment is continually growing. The tech
16 programs are engaging. Student behavior has
17 improved critically.

18 All the programs within the school,
19 be it dining services, be it transportation, be it
20 the structural issues within the school, have all
21 shown improvement in the last couple of years.

22 I think what's even more of interest
23 is that our parents are showing interest in what it
24 is that we are doing. The PTO program has grown in



1 numbers and is considerable.

2 So not only is the administration,
3 not only is the staff and the faculty thinking about
4 what's next for the school, but then so are our
5 parents.

6 So, on that end, I believe that the
7 charter should be renewed.

8 MR. TRAVERS: At this point I will
9 accept comments from anyone else who desires to
10 speak. Please remember to identify yourself of
11 before you give your comments.

12 So if anyone else would like to speak
13 on behalf of Design Thinking.

14 Thank you all for participating
15 today. The Secretary will consider your comments in
16 deciding at the conclusion of the renewal process
17 what decision to submit to the State Board for
18 assent, if needed.

19 This hearing is now closed.

20 (Concluded at 5:15 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 16th day of December 2018.



Lorena J. Hartnett
Registered Professional Reporter

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