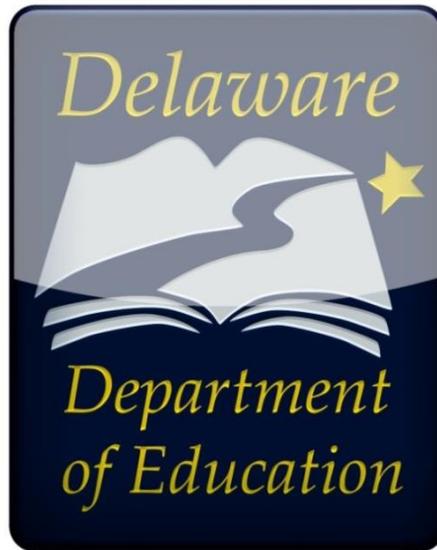


CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Early College High School at Delaware State University

**RENEWAL APPLICATION
INITIAL REPORT**

CSAC Initial Meeting: October 25, 2017
CSAC Initial Report Published: October 31, 2017

By September 30, 2017, Early College High School at Delaware State University (ECHS) submitted an application to renew its charter. Consideration of this application is in accordance with the applicable provisions of 14 *Del. C. Ch. 5*, including § 514A, and 14 DE Admin. Code § 275. Written renewal application guidance is provided by the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) on its website. The renewal application template developed by DDOE is aligned to measures and targets within the Performance Framework, which outlines the academic, organizational and fiscal standards by which all Delaware charter schools are evaluated. The evaluation of the school's performance as measured by the Framework is a major component of the decision on the renewal application. The decision on the renewal application is based on a comprehensive review, guided, in part, by the following three questions:

1. Is the academic program a success?
2. Is the school financially viable?
3. Is the school organizationally sound?

This report serves as a summary of the strengths, areas of follow-up, and/or concerns identified by members of the Charter School Accountability Committee (CSAC) during their individual reviews of the charter applicant's renewal application, Performance Review Reports, Annual Reports and Performance Agreements and during the CSAC meetings.

The following were in attendance at the Initial Meeting of the CSAC on October 25, 2017:

Voting Committee Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee

- David Blowman, Chairperson of the Charter School Accountability Committee and Associate Secretary, Financial Management and Operations, DDOE
- Karen Field Rogers, Deputy Secretary, DDOE
- Amy Baker-Sheridan, Education Associate, Academic Supports
- Mary Ann Mieczkowski, Director, Exceptional Children Resources, DDOE
- Seher Ahmad, Data Fellow, Performance Supports

Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)

- Catherine Hickey, Deputy Attorney General, Delaware Department of Justice, Counsel to the Committee
- Denise Stouffer, Lead Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- John Carwell, Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Financial Reform and Resource Management, DDOE

Ex-Officio Members (Non-voting)

- Donna Johnson, Executive Director, Delaware State Board of Education

Representatives of Charter School

- Dr. Marshá T. Horton, Board President
- Denese Lindsey, Board Treasurer
- Charles McDowell, Board Member
- Dr. Evelyn Edney, Principal
- Nyia McCants, Assistant Principal
- Timothy Yancy, Operations Manager
- Tom Forbers, Early College High School Coach, KnowledgeWorks Foundation
- Dorcell Spence, Financial Consultant
- Enid Wallace-Simms, Delmarva Power, External Affairs

Discussion

Section 1: Overview

Dr. Edney introduced a brief video about Early College High School at Delaware State University (ECHS). Following the video, Dr. Edney noted the following:

- ECHS went from having no State data to receiving its first Delaware School Success Framework report for school year 2016-17.
- ECHS students have earned 3,500 college credits to date. This school year students are slated to earn approximately 2,000 additional college credits.
- ECHS has developed a College Readiness Rubric, a tool which helps determine students' readiness for college-level work. ECHS partnered with the Department of Education to utilize its PerformancePlus system which has automated the process.
- Organizationally, the founding Board has transitioned to a sustaining Board.
- Financially, ECHS is unique relative to transportation costs. The school transports students from across the entire State which has prompted the school to conduct a forensic review of its finances to maximize resources.

Mr. Blowman stated that the school draws students from 14 of the 19 school districts which is unique. He also noted the large size of the current 9th grade class (184) in contrast to prior years and asked the school to discuss its projected enrollment. Dr. Edney stated that the school does not plan to continue bringing in a cohort of that size going forward but rather hopes to maintain a total enrollment of 425. She explained that the size of this year's 9th grade cohort was based on the uniqueness of the Early College High School model, taking into account that some attrition is normal due to the rigor of the educational model. She also noted that ECHS cannot backfill students in grades 11 and 12 because students need significant preparation to be successful in college courses. Since the school's first year, she added, supports have been put in place to help students be more successful and curtail some of the attrition.

Mr. Blowman noted that the school's enrollment trends show that the school is becoming slightly less diverse with a higher proportion of female students and African American students. He asked the school to describe its recruitment plans and its projected demographics long-term. Dr. Horton noted that the school's proportion of female students is similar to national college going enrollment trends. She added that female students appear to be far more aggressive about pursuing the opportunities provided at ECHS. She added that when the school opened, the gender composition was more equal but many students enrolled based on significant influence from their parents. Dr. Edney stated that exit interviews have indicated that students have withdrawn due to long bus rides and limited sports programs. Based on this data, she added, additional programs were added and recruitment strategies were modified,

targeting middle schools and utilizing staff, parents and students in the process.

Ms. Neugebauer noted that special education enrollment has decreased and asked the school to discuss the attributing factors. Ms. McCants noted that the proportion of students with disabilities is down but the absolute number of students with disabilities has increased.

Ms. Field-Rogers asked the school to discuss any challenges related to providing after school transportation. Dr. Edney explained that the school provides an activities bus for after school programming and students are transported to hub stops. She added that the school day schedule was adjusted to start earlier so that students had more time for after school activities. Dr. Edney also noted that a minimum G.P.A of 2.5 is required for athletics participation.

Section 2: Academic Framework

Mr. Blowman commended the school for including PSAT 8/9 and PSAT 9/10 data to supplement the one year of available State assessment data. He also commended the school for its transparency and strategic focus on both its strengths and challenges. Dr. Horton stated that the school's focus on college readiness encompasses multiple factors including G.P.A. as well as dispositions, teacher recommendations, attendance and discipline data. She added that the college readiness evaluations are conducted eight times per year. Dr. Horton cited math performance as an area for growth. In response, she added, the school provides students with the opportunity to double up on math to prepare them for college-level math courses. Dr. Edney stated that the school had limited data points when it first opened. She noted that she did not want students' first test experience to be the SAT so the PSAT was administered to understand each student's strengths and weaknesses. She also stated that 9th grade students take Algebra I and 10th grade students take Geometry. Additionally, students receive support in math through Khan Academy. Dr. Edney distributed copies of the college readiness rubric. She stated the students have college readiness meetings every 4-6 weeks to track their progress against the rubric during their advisory classes.

Ms. Field-Rogers asked the school to discuss any enhancements to the college readiness rubric over time. Dr. Edney stated that the assessments have changed over time. She added that various assessments have been adopted at different grade levels such as SAT practice tests. Dr. Edney stated that all of the assessments used to be scored manually but have been moved to the PerformancePlus platform which provides a more robust set of analytic tools. This data, she added, is very useful when speaking with students and parents. She commented that transforming 14 year olds into college students by 10th grade is very challenging. Ms. McCants noted that ECHS students are provided a unique opportunity to analyze their own data and develop an individual development plan in the 9th grade whereas many students do not begin this process until they reach college.

Ms. Baker-Sheridan asked the school describe its plans to diagnose deficits in math and

provide targeted intervention. Ms. McCants stated that as part of the school's Rtl structure, students take benchmark assessments throughout the year and the data is used to determine math course placements. She also noted two interventions – Rtl Support and the Rtl Class. Rtl Class is a 90-minute daily class for students who need significant intervention with a special education teacher. Rtl Support is offered three days per week and is designed for students on the Tier II level and students who make significant progress may be transitioned out after a marking period. Ms. McCants also stated that the Rtl program is provided during the advisory period which is offered two days per week and activity period which is offered three days per week. Students who require intervention are pulled from their advisory and/or activity periods. She noted that the Rtl program has focused primarily on math during the most recent marking period. Ms. McCants stated that 15 upper-class students and 14 freshman students are currently receiving additional math support. Ms. McCants also stated that remediation is also built into regular instructional time. She added that students who are taking college courses can access the university's resources for additional support.

Ms. Baker-Sheridan asked the school to describe its benchmark assessments. Ms. McCants stated that Study Island is used for benchmarking and it is aligned with Common Core. Ms. Baker-Sheridan noted the importance of aligning the coursework to the assessments. She suggested that the school review the current math scope and sequence since students are expected to cover all of the Common Core by 10th grade. Ms. Baker-Sheridan provided the following feedback on the school's curriculum submission. This feedback included:

Math

1. Recommended that ECHS remove Pre-Algebra from high school course offerings, as this is not a high school course.
2. Provide documentation as to how students taking Pre-Algebra are able to complete the full continuum of high school math courses when they begin with Pre-Algebra.
3. Recommend offering SAT Prep as a mathematics elective course, not a mathematics credit course. SAT prep does not serve as an appropriate senior level coursework.
4. Ensure that students are exposed to ALL high school standards regardless of the four-year progression they select. The high school statistics standards were not addressed in any of the course syllabi submitted. All students are expected to receive instruction aligned to all of the high school standards, regardless of their four-year high school sequence, including accessing the statistics standards. For example, if students take Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, and then College Algebra, the school needs to ensure the statistics standards are provided as a part of this pathway. The school is not meeting the State requirement for teaching the content standards if statistics standards are not embedded.

Section 3: Organizational Framework

Mr. Blowman stated that the school's Organizational Performance Framework results are a fairly typical pattern for a new charter school with some strengths and areas of challenge. He added that over time the school is trending more positive. Mr. Blowman asked the school to

discuss the governance relationship between the Board, school leadership and Delaware State University (DSU) and how the organizational challenges have been addressed. Dr. Horton stated that the relationships between the Board, school leadership and the university are very close. She also stated that the Board is still transitioning from a founding Board to a sustaining Board. The Board, she added, is very much “hands on” and involved but keeping sufficient distance to allow the school administration to carry out its roles and responsibilities. Dr. Horton noted that the ECHS Board and DSU Board have members in common. She stated that, as Board President, she relies on Charles McDowell who sits on both Boards. Dr. Horton stated that the ECHS Board provides a variety of supports and resources to the school and communication with the school is ongoing. She referred to Ms. Lindsey who is the Chair of the Finance Committee for the ECHS Board. She is also the Interim Vice President for Finance at DSU.

Ms. Field-Rogers asked the school to discuss how Board members who serve in dual roles maintain clear boundaries when the entities are intertwined. Dr. Horton stated that in her role as Dean of DSU’s College of Education, Health and Public Policy she has to be very thoughtful about how she engages on different issues. In addition to her role as ECHS Board President, she is also the parent of an ECHS student. Mr. McDowell stated the ECHS operates like a department of the University. He added that ECHS reinforces the University’s current initiatives and aligns with its legacy. Mr. McDowell also stated that DSU’s Board of Trustees views ECHS as a natural feeder into the University. He added that if the University can attract 70% of ECHS’ graduates, the University will gain a cohort of students who are much better prepared for college than the average incoming college student. Mr. McDowell touted the unique benefits that ECHS enjoys from having the University’s support such as University personnel. He noted that he became interested in the ECHS Board because of his involvement on the University’s Board of Trustees. Mr. McDowell stated that Dr. Lois Hobbs, the former Superintendent of Indian River School District, also sits on both the ECHS Board and the University’s Board. He added that the University provides significant financial support (e.g. free facility, free tuition), access to University facilities and other student resources.

Mr. Blowman acknowledged that there are clear benefits from ECHS’ partnership with the University but underscored the importance of a strong Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that clearly lays out the respective roles and responsibilities of all parties. He asked the school to speak to the status of the revised MOU. Dr. Horton stated that the revised MOU has been approved by the University’s Board of Trustees. Ms. Stouffer requested that the school provide a copy of the revised MOU.

Mr. Blowman asked to the school to speak to the “Approaching Standard” rating for measure 1c. (Students with Disabilities) on the 2016-17 Organizational Performance Framework Report. Ms. McCants stated that the Department completed a special education audit and since that time she has worked closely with the Department’s Barbara Mazza to address the findings from the audit. She stated that she appreciated the Department’s feedback which has help improve processes and procedures and informed professional development. Ms. McCants also stated that the school is on track to address the audit findings by next month. Ms. Mieczkowski noted

that the school will close out Prong I and transition to Prong II which includes an on-site review of student records. She also noted that the process must be closed out by February.

Ms. Stouffer asked the school to address how the Board avoids any potential conflicts of interest. Mr. McDowell stated that he did not see any conflicts of interest. He stated that Delaware State University owns ECHS. The University, he added, is the single member of a non-profit corporation. He explained that it is like a corporation that owns a subsidiary. Mr. McDowell noted that there are commonality interests but the funding is kept separate. He stated that there are not situations where something that is in the interest of ECHS that is not in the interest of the University. Ms. Hickey asked the school to confirm the number of University Board members who sit on the ECHS Board. Mr. McDowell stated that there are two members who sit on both Boards, Mr. McDowell and Dr. Lois Hobbs. Ms. Hickey asked the school to confirm the total number of ECHS Board members and describe how a quorum is defined in its bylaws. Mr. McDowell stated that there are eleven (11) members on the Board and the bylaws define a quorum as a majority of the directors.

Section 4: Financial Framework

Mr. Blowman stated that the school's Financial Performance Framework shows some early challenges but gradual improvement over time. He added that the school is projecting a current year surplus and a small, but growing, year end balance. Ms. Field-Rogers stated that rent is currently provided in-kind by the University but at some point ECHS will be expected to pay and asked the school to specify the timing. Mr. McDowell stated that rent payments depend largely on fundraising. He added that the University has, as part of its master plan, included an ECHS facility on its main campus and it is currently envisioned as a dual use facility that would be shared by ECHS and a University department (e.g. School of Education). He noted that fundraising will drive the process.

Mr. Blowman asked the school to discuss its current line of credit and indicate when they expect to operate without it. Mr. McDowell stated that based on the school's five year plan and full enrollment, the line of credit will be paid off by the fourth year.

Mr. Blowman noted the school's significant investments in transportation and asked the school about their current contractors. Dr. Horton stated that ECHS has experienced some of the same challenges that other schools and districts have faced across the State such as the limited number of bus contractors to make rates more competitive. Mr. Yancy stated that ECHS currently contracts with three transportation companies. Ms. Spence stated that another challenge is that State transportation funding decreased while vendor contracts increased. She added that the Board is very good about requesting out-year scenarios to budget accordingly.

Mr. Blowman asked the school to describe its ideal long-term maximum enrollment. Dr. Edney stated that due to this year's large incoming freshmen class, there was insufficient space to serve all grades. She also noted that the University permitted ECHS to place the sophomores

on campus. She added that the junior and seniors are already taking college courses on campus. Dr. Edney also noted that ECHS could potentially serve up to 525 students. Dr. Horton stated that 425 is the ideal enrollment for the school at this time. She added that any potential increase in enrollment is tied to the facilities plan which is tied to fundraising.

Mr. Blowman asked the school if they had considered satellite campuses at the University's other locations. Dr. Edney stated that there have been preliminary conversations but the school's primary focus is on the current location.

Ms. Field-Rogers asked the school to discuss the Board's transition from a founding Board to a sustaining Board. Dr. Horton stated that the Board is systematically taking steps back in various areas such as marketing and recruitment. However, she added, there are areas where the Board continues to be very involved such as finance and fundraising. Dr. Edney stated that the school has developed systems for various processes so that the Board is not required to be as involved as they were initially.

Section 5: Five-Year Planning

Dr. Horton stated that in five years ECHS will have had four graduating classes of students who have earned credits equivalent to an Associate degree. She added that the school looks forward to having established patterns for bus transportation. Dr. Horton also noted that the school will have data showing the percentage of graduates who are choosing to matriculate at the University or attend other institutions. Mr. McDowell stated that ECHS will have a facility on the main campus of the University.

Ms. Stouffer asked the school to speak to the major modification that they have included with their charter renewal application. Dr. Edney stated that the school is removing its charter management organization, Innovative Schools. She also noted that in February, the Department approved ECHS for a minor modification to scale back some of the services provided by Innovative Schools. Dr. Horton stated that the intent from the beginning was to phase out the charter management services over time. Ms. Johnson asked the school to specify the end date of their current contract with Innovative School. Dr. Edney stated that the contract ends on June 30, 2018. Ms. Hickey asked the school if the contract contained any language regarding automatic renewal. Dr. Edney stated that the contract does not contain any language regarding automatic renewal. Ms. Hickey noted that page 53 of the modification application listed the operations manager's start date as November 2017. Dr. Edney stated that the date was an error and should have been listed as November 2016.

Conclusion

Mr. Blowman asked voting members of CSAC whether there was any additional information that it required to inform its decision-making.

The following information was requested:

1. Curriculum (Math)
 - a. Provide documentation of how Delaware statistics standards are addressed within the ECHS core mathematics curriculum.
 - b. Provide documentation of the pathway students take that ensures they complete all high school mathematics course requirements when they begin high school with pre-algebra.
2. Copy of the revised Memorandum of Understanding with Delaware State University.

Next Steps:

- The CSAC will provide the school with an Initial Report no later than October 30, 2017.
- The applicant will have the opportunity to submit a written response to the CSAC Initial Report, which is due by close of business on November 14, 2017.
- The final meeting of the CSAC will be held on November 28, 2017; 2nd Floor Cabinet Room, Townsend Building, Dover.
- A second public hearing will be held on December 5; J.W. Collette Building, Conference Rooms A&B, 35 Commerce Way, Dover.
- The public comment period ends on December 8, 2017.
- The Secretary of Education will announce her decision at the December 21, 2017 State Board of Education meeting.