

CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Early College School at Delaware State University

Charter Renewal

Initial Report

November 1, 2022

On September 30, 2022 Early College School at Delaware State University (ECS@DSU) submitted an application to renew its charter for a term of five years. The purpose of the initial meeting is for the Charter School Accountability Committee (CSAC) to review the renewal application in light of the relevant statutory criteria for renewal.

The following individuals were in attendance at the initial meeting of CSAC on October 25, 2022:

Voting Committee Members

- Kim Klein, Associate Secretary of Operations Support
- Aimee Beam, Education Associate, School Support
- Gregory Fulkerson, Education Associate, Academic Support
- Tiffany Green, Education Associate, Workforce Support
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Operations Support
- Joyce Leatherbury, Education Associate, Academic Support
- April McCrae, Education Associate, Academic Support
- DeAnne Wimbish, Education Associate, Office of Equity, and Innovation
- Ted Molin, Community Member
- Charles Taylor, Community Member

Ex-Officio Members (Non-voting)

- Kendall Massett, Executive Director, Delaware Charter School Network
- Vince Lofink, Delaware State Board of Education

Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)

- Leroy Travers, Director, Charter School Office
- Alicia Balcerak, Administrative Secretary, Charter School Office
- Faye Schilling, Education Specialist, Charter School Office

Representatives of ECS@DSU

- Marsha Horton, Board President
- Evelyn Edney, Head of School
- Nyia McCants, Principal
- Dara Savage, Associate Principal
- Dorcell Spence, Business Manager
- Joell Whitley, Math Teacher
- Michelle Golding, Student

ECS@DSU was given time to provide an overview of the school. The school shared a presentation that depicted the school's leadership staff and students. Ms. Horton gave an overview of the early college school model and its mission to provide students with two years of college credits by the time they graduate high school. ECS@DSU is the only high school in Delaware that utilizes this model. The ECS@DSU leadership team shared the impact that the school has had on students and Ms. Golding shared the positive impact that the school has had on her life.

Finances, Budget, and Financial Framework

1. Explain how the school will address the significant risks identified by the school's audit firm (Maillie - page two of Appendix 11 – Summary of Findings from Independent Audits). Specifically, address how the school will ensure that internal controls cannot be overridden by management.

A - Since the inception of the school, ECS@DSU has never had findings in an audit. This was the first single audit, and there was one finding regarding internal controls for federal grant awards. ECS@DSU has a board policy on internal controls for federal grant awards. A corrective action plan was submitted with the audit and reads as follows: Early College School@ Delaware State University (The School) will develop a policy in Section 300 of the Board Policy Manual for Business and Finance. It will be labeled Section 14: Controls Over Federal Funds Awarded. The policy will include:

- *Cash management*
- *Allowability of costs*
- *Property Management*
- *Travel Reimbursement*

Once Board Policy 300-14 written, it will be presented to the Board Directors, who will follow Board Procedures for adopting new procedures which include:

- *Three Readings*
- *Posting for Public Comment*
- *Adoption of the Policy by a Board Vote of a Quorum of its members at a General Board Meeting*

Once the Policy has been approved by the Board of Directors, the following, the School Leader will be responsible for the corrective action. The anticipated date the corrections will be completed are:

- *Board readings and posing for Public Comment by December 31, 2022*
- *The voting for approval of the policy will take place at the February 23, 2023 Board of Directors Meeting*

2. According to the fiscal year (FY) 2023 preliminary budget, transportation expenses account for 17.1% of the school's operating budget. The final FY22 budget showed that transportation expenses accounted for 13.1% of the operating budget. Is the increase in FY23 due to the school's expansion?

A – Enrollment for FY22 was 342 and for FY23 was 520 for an increase of 178 students. The increase in the school's enrollment due to the addition of grades seven and eight contributed to the increase in transportation expenses. Of the current student body, 405 students ride the bus to and from school; while 20 students ride the DART bus. Ninety-five students are car riders. In addition to the increase in the number of students riding the bus, transportation companies raised their prices due to an increase in the cost of fuel.

The increase from the companies is for this year only. The fuel rate will be adjusted after the 2022-23 school year.

a. Are there steps that are being taken to find savings in this area?

A - ECS@DSU is taking steps toward savings in transportation in the following ways:

- Board committee meetings are reviewing, researching, and determining potential steps to find savings for a state-wide student pick-up process;
- ECS@DSU is promoting the use of DART bus passes, especially for juniors and seniors taking Delaware State University (DSU) courses;
- The school has reached out to the Delaware Department of Education (DOE) Transportation Department regarding the possibility of doing a hazard zone review of Price Hall on the DSU campus (the new and permanent site of the high school and eventually, the middle school);
- Hub stops are being reviewed by the ECS@DSU administrative team and transportation companies to determine if they can be streamlined.

CSAC Follow-up - Finance, Budget and Financial Framework

Kendall Massett- Commended the school for utilizing the annual student bus pass. This provides students with access to many opportunities.

Kim Klein- A request for a hazard review from DOE is typically a request to be placed on the list of unique hazards which will increase transportation services in that area. Is ECS@DSU asking to be removed from this list?

A - The request was to look at the property around DSU and the pathways from student homes to see if there are existing hazards. There are pathways around DSU, which is a change from the original location in the Living and Learning Commons. There are not secure sidewalks at DSU except those along Route 13.

Staffing

3. What is the average staff to student ratio?

A - The average ECS@DSU staff to student ratio is one staff member to 25 students and the average ECS@DSU teacher ratio is one teacher to 22 students. Most DSU courses have a ratio one teacher to 20 students.

a. How does this ratio provide for optimal student learning?

A - Smaller class sizes are optimal for student learning because teachers can give more individualized attention to students. Lessons can be tailored to students in the class. With smaller classes, participation increases and distractions decrease. Teachers can create collaborative spaces so that students can be a part of facilitating their own learning.

4. How is ECS@DSU maximizing the talents of the staff who are not needed full-time for instruction, support, etc.?

A - There are only three staff members who are not full-time employees. The first two are administrative assistants. One of them works from 7:15 A.M. – 12:30 P.M. while the other works from 12:30 P.M. - 5:30 P.M. daily. They both work in the main office and tend to the needs of students, staff, and parents. The afternoon assistant stays until the end

of the after school program to ensure that someone is answering phones after school hours should parents need assistance. The final part-time employee is a nutrition worker for the middle school. She works through the breakfast and lunch mealtimes. During her work hours, she is responsible for delivering meals to the students, cleaning the cafeteria, and decorating for special occasions.

5. How do you reward staff members who are considered high performers?

A - High performers are rewarded with recognition at bi-monthly staff meetings through messages from other staff members and the leadership team. They are also recognized at the ECS@DSU Hornet Awards at the end of the school year. At that event the teacher of the year and staff member of the year are recognized. High performers are asked to present at staff meetings and other professional development events as a way to showcase and share best practices. ECS@DSU is a collaborative school and sharing with other staff members is something they value.

6. How many staff members are licensed and certified within the area in which they teach?

- a. How many staff members are not certified?

A – Three staff members are uncertified, however, all three have submitted the information needed to DOE’s Licensure & Certification office and are awaiting responses.

- b. How many staff members are on initial licenses?

A – Two staff members are on initial licenses.

- c. How many staff members are on continuing licenses?

A – Nineteen staff members are on continuing licenses.

- d. How many staff members are participating in an Alternative Routes to Certification (ARTC) program?

A – One staff member is participating in the ARTC program.

7. Does ECS@DSU consider their mentoring support program to be effective? Why or why not?

A - ECS@DSU’s mentoring support program is effective due to its hands-on approach. All new staff members are given a mentor within the building. This is usually someone who is in a similar or the same role. That person is there for day-to-day questions, comments, or concerns. In addition, teachers work with their lead mentor to complete all DOE requirements for mentoring. The ECS@DSU administration runs a New Staff Academy (NSA) each month to acclimate new staff members to the ECS@DSU way. In the NSA everything is differentiated depending on staff needs. Teachers work with the administrative team on topics such as classroom management, Schoology, e-School, integrating technology into instruction, lesson planning, and other topics. Teachers and support staff also have individualized workshops. In addition to teaching information, logistics and calendar items are discussed to provide any clarification or explanation for traditions, events, and the ECS@DSU way. These efforts are led by the administrative team, teacher leaders, and other staff members with expertise in any given area. There are celebrations, group therapy, idea exchanging, etc.

8. Does the school have an effective and sustainable instructional coaching staff?

A - The ECS@DSU instructional coach became an administrator this year, solidifying the instructionally-focused administrative team. All three administrators can be seen leading staff professional development and curriculum writing sessions and working on the leadership development of teacher leaders. With the staff reaching 50 members

department liaisons have been established. These leaders assist with curriculum items for the teaching staff. They also lead professional development sessions. The liaisons conduct peer walkthroughs to assist with lesson planning, classroom management, and instruction.

9. Does ECS@DSU partner with any Educator Preparation Programs?

A - ECS@DSU partners with DSU and their middle school preparation program for all core areas. In addition, secondary health and physical education and music education majors have been assigned to ECS@DSU teachers. DSU and Delaware Technical and Community College has partnered with ECS@DSU for school nursing. ECS@DSU has partnered with Wilmington University, Seton Hall University, and the University of Connecticut for school counseling preparation. Finally, ECS@DSU has partnered with DSU, Wilmington University, and the University of Delaware in both the ARTC program and principal preparation programs.

10. What is the staff retention rate?

A - The school's staff retention rate for the 2020-2021 school year was 69.2% and has risen to 83% this school year.

a. What are the school's goals related to the retention of current staff?

A - To monitor and minimize teacher attrition rates ECS@DSU will provide an NSA class to be held each Tuesday, after school. This time will allow for more time for professional development, explanation of school procedures, discussions about upcoming events, and teacher evaluation. This will be a time for new teachers to address concerns, issues, or questions they may have with the school leader. There will also be small rewards for new staff members to celebrate their accomplishments as new ECS@DSU teachers. Whenever possible, ECS@DSU provides a two to three percent retention bonus each year.

11. When did ECS@DSU last update or revisit their staff recruitment plan?

A - ECS@DSU revisits the staff recruitment plan each year. Money is typically an obstacle, so the school looks at ways to provide supplemental income such as:

- After school extra help;
- Summer school;
- Coaching and advising.

ECS@DSU arranged an opportunity with the DSU president to pay for the tuition of any ECS@DSU staff member pursuing a degree to further their education.

12. How does ECS@DSU provide staff with stretch or long-term opportunities while not causing burnout?

A - ECS@DSU has a very collaborative spirit. Whenever something new comes along, it is presented to the staff for input, and a plan is agreed upon to ensure that it is streamlined with existing initiatives. The staff meets in departments to discuss and work out a plan that is agreeable to all. Staff members remain positive, however, they speak up if they feel that the stretch or long-term opportunities would be too much for them to handle.

13. How does the school gather feedback from staff? How often does this occur?

A - Staff members take part in meetings on Mondays. During the school day there are check-in meetings with the guidance team, special education team, athletics staff, nutrition staff, facilities department, business department, human resources department, school nurses, afterschool staff, student activities staff, and department liaisons. There are check-ins at new staff meetings and at whole staff meetings. The administrative team

divides the meetings to be present while staff members facilitate. Staff members provide feedback in all aspects of the school and all voices are heard.

Recruitment and Enrollment

14. The projected enrollment table is missing. Submit your completed 5-year projected enrollment chart.

A - This was completed by Ms. Spence and was thought to be uploaded at the time the report was submitted. It is now attached.

15. When did ECS@DSU last revisit its recruitment plan for students?

A - ECS@DSU revisits the recruitment plan each September to discuss the next year's recruitment season. A calendar of events is listed and staff members sign up for two or more events in the fall and two or more in the spring. These events include open houses, high school nights, and festivals all over the state.

- a. Have any new strategies been adopted?

A - At recruitment tables there are school-labeled tablecloths, brochures, and gifts for table visitors. ECS@DSU provides tours for the eighth grade students that attend other charter schools and there are shadowing experiences for students.

16. How is the school utilizing its budgetary and time resources for enrollment?

A - In the past year ECS@DSU has utilized Charter School Program (CSP) grant funding to assist with student recruitment efforts. The most effective strategy has been the mailing of postcards to students in grades six through nine in the greater Kent County area and Middletown. Families are invited to come to one of ECS@DSU's ten open houses from October through January. In addition to CSP grant funding, ECS@DSU sets aside money in the budget for marketing. ECS@DSU is fortunate to work with the DSU Marketing Department on strategies to better market the school. DSU is currently working on an updated marketing video for ECS@DSU.

17. Have new stakeholders been engaged to increase student enrollment?

A - All stakeholders have been engaged to increase student enrollment. Parents, teachers, staff members, and students are present at every open house to assist prospective students and their families. During ECS@DSU open houses, current students give testimony about their experiences and take the prospective students on tours and into classrooms to participate in ice breakers and answer questions. Parents do the same, it is a family effort.

Recruitment and Enrollment Follow-up Questions

Chuck Taylor- Why is there a drop in student enrollment in 11th grade?

A - Natural attrition typically occurs during 11th grade in early college programs. Initially parents and students believe that an early college program is right for them, but over time learn that it is not.

Kendall Massett- Has ECS@DSU registered for DE ConnectED event in New Castle County on December 10th?

A – ECS@DSU is registered and will attend.

Academic Performance and Framework

18. Questions 22-27 are intended, broadly, to get at how the school, organizationally or systemically will prepare a balanced assessment system or group of assessment systems

that will inform the educational programming of the school to drive ongoing and constant improvement. While questions may also be answered with organizational matters (such as teacher effectiveness, teacher retention, and teacher training etc.) many are focused toward expected outcomes and intentional measures focused on specific educational goals, identification of root causes for data outcomes, and steps toward future goals. The data provided by ECS@DSU was focused only on the SAT, which does not indicate monitoring of other academic areas such as social studies or science. Root causes and/or next steps beyond COVID-19 interruptions were absent and measures focused on monitoring and adjusting courses based on student performance were built on generalized terms such as “pre-post test, student work, common assessments, and so forth.” What specific assessment and monitoring plans does the school have for ensuring coherence and student success across all/each academic education system within the school?

A – The Exact Path software is used to identify, diagnose, and build skills with students not yet proficient in grade-level math and reading. These are monitored on a four and a half week cycle. During professional learning communities (PLCs) the content-area teams monitor success based on classroom-level assessments. ECS@DSU utilizes the Delaware System of Student Assessment (DeSSA) testing, PSAT 8/9, and other assessments to build a full and complete analysis of student success and focus areas for the instructional staff.

19. Social studies assessment participation was only 91% last year. Science just came in at 94.74%. SAT was 97% across the board. What plans does the school have to ensure 95% participation in all required assessments moving forward?

A - ECS@DSU will improve communication efforts with stakeholders to inform them about the importance of assessments. Administrators will provide talking points to staff about the purpose of assessments and the expectation for staff members is to model a positive attitude about assessments. Administrators will provide ongoing and advanced communication to students and families about annual assessments, to include upcoming assessments and student results. Instructional and support staff will communicate with students and families about annual assessments, model a positive attitude, encourage students to do their best, and explain the purpose of the test, why it is important, and how test results are used.

CSAC Follow-up Academic Performance and Framework

Joyce Leatherbury- Are special education staff included in professional development opportunities along with core content teachers?

A - There is no differentiation in professional development for special education teachers. Special education and general education teachers participate in the same professional development. Instructional support staff are also included.

Joyce Leatherbury - What steps do teachers take to ensure that all students have access to general education and advanced classes?

A - Special education teachers and other staff members work together collaboratively. The special education department works with the Student Accessibility Services Department at DSU. All stakeholders are at the table to support special education students.

Joyce Leatherbury - What challenges have you faced with the implementation of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)?

Initial MTSS professional development occurs at the start of each year. Throughout the year, additional training, resources, and academic supports are provided, in addition to social and emotional supports. The goal is not to classify students, but to identify students and align appropriate plans to their needs. Other steps include reaching out to the DSU tutoring center and working with parents to review each individual student plan. Plans are not cookie-cutter and each one looks different based upon a student's need.

April McCrae- Exact Path is a diagnostic and norming tool. This gauges how students are doing in comparison to one another, but not how they are performing according to the standards. It's important to consider how assessments are being used to make strategic choices. Other assessments would be valuable to the educational program and will provide data related to the root causes or determine patterns that help in moving the program forward. It would be beneficial to create a coherent and balanced assessment plan, which is criterion referenced. A plan can be outlined for the entire year and DOE can assist with this.

Chuck Taylor- Commended the school on addressing the needs of the whole child.

Gregory Fulkerson- Commended the school on taking advantage of the early submission window for curriculum.

The following items were requested as follow-up to this meeting.

1. Provide a staffing chart that includes the following:
 - a. Each teacher's license and certification status, to include whether they are on an initial or continuing license;
 - b. Each teacher's instructional assignment.
2. Provide an outline of all core assessments.

Next Steps:

- An initial report will be issued on or before November 1st.
- An initial public hearing will take place on November 1st at 5:00 p.m.
- The applicant will have the opportunity to submit a written response to the CSAC initial report, which is due by close of business November 16th.
- A second and final meeting of CSAC will be held on November 30th.
- On or before December 5th CSAC will issue its final report which will include its recommendation on the formal review.