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Dear CSAC committee,

Thank you for your service on this committee. Your duty is one of great importance to the children of Delaware charter schools. This letter is written with your duty in mind and with the hope that you will see the details, not as a complaint but rather an account of the actions of the board currently in place. Below I have listed items this committee should review prior to renewal of the Gateway Lab School Charter agreement.

Please let me be clear in saying, I feel this school is important to the students it serves and the students it serves need a school that can support their diverse needs. Having said that I have developed a list of concerns you should know about and consider prior to renewal of this charter application. These students, especially these students, should not have to endure the playing out of the board and administrative posturing at the expense of quality education for the students it serves.

Who am I? I am the former Executive Director and longest-tenured administrator of the school's history. I submitted my resignation with desolate sadness because the Board became so overwhelming in its efforts to deconstruct everything that was rebuilt after the first renewal and because of the nasty and humiliating actions towards me in public meetings and in my daily work at the school. On 2/20/19, I submitted my letter of resignation with the option to not resign if the problems were addressed (BOD Minutes 2/20/19). I did this with the hopes of getting the board to address their unprofessional actions of the prior months. As I expected, the board took no action to my concerns of several schools and state policy violations or to even gain perspective to why their school leader was resigning. Instead they rather quickly, the night the letter was submitted, by board vote, accepted my resignation and choose to move on without dealing with the issues. As indicated by the charter school office leader at the time, I gave them the easy way out by resigning.

Below are my major concerns with the current board continuing as the governing body of this charter school. The information in this letter detailing my concerns is either information I can recount or are public records.

List of Concerns

School Mission: While I understand the mission is heartwarming you must look beyond the compassionate pleas and empty promises about how they are going to improve and develop this beautiful dream of a school like the Lab School of Washington. You must realize this mission from The Lab School of Washington DC is the mission of a private school. The problem with running a private school model in the public-school realm was evident in the first renewal for Gateway and is still very clear now. Gateway has a much greater need with complex and intense classifications rising. The school just can't meet the basic needs of all students. They are in crisis mode every year with what to do. The reason for that is the lack of planning on the board's behalf.

To make a comparison between the two schools that share a similar mission. The Lab School of Washington DC is a private school that does not have to do the following and Gateway absolutely must do all the following:

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- Meet a state standard (i.e. Performance Framework)
- Does not have to comply with IDEA (i.e. does not accept federal funding)
- Does not have to take every student for enrollment (i.e. Can turn kids away with classifications other ADHD)
- Has endless funding through tuition and well suited and high functioning fundraising. (i.e. David Letterman was the MC of their fundraiser)

Gateway, states in its mission and renewal application that they are following this model and are getting back to their original mission. The board lacks in vision to evolve what was thought to be possible to what is actually possible in the public school realm.

The current board presents in its minutes and renewal application a vision of going back to the old system that was under review in the first renewal process. The students of Gateway need and deserve a plan that works and not a repeat of mistakes from the past.

In addition to reliving past mistakes, they also continue to fail to plan ahead. I have listed below, statistics obtained from the Gateway Lab School website that speak for themselves. To run any school you must plan ahead. Below, you will see very clear evidence that this board is failing in this area and for that reason, this board should not continue to fail these students.

Board Meeting and Committee Attendance

Gateway bylaws indicate that a **minimum of 75%** attendance is required to remain on the board. Below is the attendance of the board for the past 16 meetings over 17 months (Feb 2019 meeting not posted on web site even after request through an FOIA request on 10/3/19) the percentage of each person and the overall percentage of these board members attended.

- Salter, **Community Director, and GLS insurance agent** – attended 10 / 16 meetings – **63%**
- Horagan – attended 13 / 16 meetings – 81%
- Hack, **Treasurer** – attended 13 / 16 meetings – 81%
- Rathmell – attended 13 / 16 meetings – 81%
- Austin – attended 13 / 16 meetings – 81%
- Heredia – attended 9 / 11 meetings – 82%

*Overall these board members attend **78%** of the meetings held*

Operational & Sustainability Committee – See committee description from the website below

- 19/20 school year 4 of 5 meetings held or 80% of meetings held
- 18/19 school year 7 of 11 meetings held or 64% of meetings held
- 17/18 minutes not available on the website.
- 16/17 school year 7 of 12 meetings held or 58% of meetings held
- 15/16 school year no minutes available
- 14 /15 school year 1 of 6 meetings held or 17% of meetings held

*Overall, with the available data, these meetings are held **55%** of the time.*

Community Outreach Committee – See committee description from website see below

With the school's current enrollment (19-20 SY) barely holding on at 177 or 81% of the 216 approved enrollment and ending last year (18-19SY) at 164 (July 2019 BOD Minutes) meaning 8 students left the school during the school. This resulted in the school enrollment is 76% of its approved enrollment, one would think this committee would meet often and with a certain level of urgency given its purpose.

Since January 4th, 2016 the committee has scheduled 17 meeting dates and met **ZERO** times. How can that happen? There is no excuse for this kind of neglect. The students of GLS depend on this board which in turn, according to the boards' description of the committee, depends on this committee to keep their school going with enrollment and community outreach. Excuses for why and relying on "Hope" as stated several times in the August 2019 board minutes by the founding board member, is just not enough. Schools are not built on Hope, they are built on hard work and commitment to the students and the community they live in. They are built on people rolling up their sleeves and making it work. Not meeting even once out of 17 scheduled meetings is just gross negligence.

*Overall, with the available data, these meetings are held **0%** of the time since Jan 4th, 2016.*

Finance Committee – No description available but I think we can assume the purpose from the name.

19/20 school year 4 meeting held of 6 meetings scheduled or 67% of the scheduled meeting held

18/19 school 4 meetings held of 6 meetings scheduled or 67% of the scheduled meetings held

Previous years are not posted on the website.

*Overall, with the available data, these meetings are held **67%** of the time.*

Report card on time spent on governing the school

Board Meetings	78%
Operational Sustainability	55%
Community Outreach	0%
Finance	67
Average time spent on board governance	50%

Staff Retention: As indicated on the Sept. 17th, 2019 board minutes, the enrollment for the school is struggling to stay at minimal compliance and they are in year 10 of the charter. The enrollment problem is a direct result of the inability of the school to effectively keep staff.

- SY 18-19 to SY 19-20 there is a 43% turnover. When you look at previous school years you will see upwards to 50% or more in turnover. This was highlighted in the CSR done by DASL following the first renewal process.

In the renewal application, you will hear as a reason for the turnover being the salary scale difference between districts and charters. While this is a reasonable and very true response, I want you to take a minute and focus on what you won't see in the renewal application. All this information is from the Board Minutes over the past 16 months. Just this past year, (March 2019 BOD minutes) you will notice 3 teachers resigned at the same time. Also, in the same BOD meeting, in executive session the board settled an employee matter. We can make assumptions about why but the fact that three resigned at the same time is a concern. Another clear sign of why GLS struggles to keep staff is in the Sept 2019 BOD minutes, the founding board member announces an investment in technology of cameras in the classroom. This is a clear sign of distress, not to mention, a prison-like mentality towards dealing with behavior or a really bad way to monitor their teachers. Another example would be the public comment during Dec. 2018 BOD meeting minutes by a GLS teacher stating Parents are complaining about student readiness, students need to own their actions, and be held accountable. Lastly, April 2019 BOD meeting minutes show that only 40% of staff returned their letters of intent. One might conclude that teachers are very frustrated with the system they work in and with DPAS formatives not being completed until late April (April BOD minutes) the teachers feel like they are unsupported. When teachers do not return it has a major effect on students, it affects the building culture in a negative way, and you lose your ability claim to be an expert in the field of special education because you have no consistency in your staffing model to build that credibility or long term successes.

In addition, the school has struggled to maintain leadership. I can only give my personal experience of dealing with the board during my tenure in the then Executive Director position, as being intolerable, humiliating and demeaning to say the least. I can say that in my conversations with past administrators the same sentiments emerged in those conversations as well.

Strategic Plan: The original strategic plan ended in 17-18 SY. There has not been a plan since that time until September 2019.

Please be cautious of the Big Words and the timing of those words. Example: 7/16/19 BOD meeting the HOS indicated a “Visionary Piece” to the Technology plan. The only thing following that announcement was the issuing of 4-year-old chrome books. Sending home 4-year-old chrome books is hardly visionary, it should be the norm. Another less than a visionary approach to the school model is the addition of video cameras in the classroom. This really just serves the purpose of protecting themselves from a lawsuit. We will wait to see what the technology plan is when it is actually shared with the school and community but let’s just hope the plan comes out soon enough for the CSAC committee to evaluate before renewal.

Special Education Legal Action against the school – to what extent you are permitted to look at this please do. You will notice a great deal of money going out the door. Little issues lead to big numbers of in-laws suits. Little issues happen when things are not being monitored.

Renewal Application:

The phrases you will consistently see in the renewal application are:

- “Unforeseen Circumstances”,
- “Drifting away from the mission”
- “Re-alignment of Mission & Vision”
- “Beginning to respond positively” with regards to enrollment.

The unforeseen_circumstances were not unforeseen, they were created by the board and they had a chance to deal with the circumstances but choose to brush them under the rug by accepting my resignation as stated earlier.

The mission has been changed by the board several times since the school opened. Is the thought, every time there is a struggle, change the mission?

The Re-alignment they are referring to means moving away from the 5 Stars shown in the academic growth section of the Alternative Academic Framework. Maybe they should work towards the successes and not back towards the failures.

The current enrollment is at 177 after dropping two students in September 2019. Maybe they should have worked with the parents of those two more to preserve their enrollment. (9/17/19 BOD Minutes, pg. 4) In the minutes it sounds like the school gave up on the family.

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Why am I writing this letter to you? I loved this school and worked tirelessly to make it work and we were moving in the right direction.

- We had comprehensive fundraising and grant funding plan that has since been thrown out by the board and subsequently they have not received a grant since then and are currently “exploring idea’s” (BOD MIN Dec, Jan 17)
- We had an expansion plan that had the potential to achieve the GLS goal of serving the greater community and opening a space better suited to the student’s needs. They are starting over on this as well.
- The culture was blossoming and did not need cameras in the classroom (BOD Minute 9/17/19) which presents a prison mentality, to say the least.
- We did a comprehensive review of the budget found dozens of the mismanaged items like Unit count, Cafeteria expenses, overpaid positions (Full-time building engineer, the landlord did this job as well, double paying in rent and FTE), line by line for every dollar spent. The treasurer at the time blow all this up into misleading facts about the school was going broke (You would have to review the board minutes (BOD, MTG Minutes, Dec. 2017) and audio to get the full grasp of this)

We were making it work, developing a solid plan with more than words and evolving the mission so that the idea of the school could live and breathe in a public school environment. The current board is forgoing all of that work and starting over which will lead to them repeating a history of failure. If you approve this charter it will be your responsibility as the CSAC committee to develop a comprehensive monitoring plan for this board to ensure the big words and statements about all they are going to do actually happen and it does not just become lip service to please your ears during the renewal process.

Sincerely,

Timothy W. Griffiths

Committee descriptions

Operational & Sustainability Committee description

Board structure, development/recruitment, training and ensuring sustainability, Community Outreach – relationship with DOE, DE Politicians, other key influencers, Policy development and review, Strategic Planning (comprehensive), Establish sound policies and procedures for complying with regulatory standards and meeting fiduciary responsibilities, Establishing policies and procedures and assuming oversight of adherence with record-keeping, public reporting, publicity and press releases, Liaison with GLS counsel, Oversight of contracting process and review of contracts with vendors and outsourced service providers, Oversight responsibility for adherence with GLS By-Laws and other documents related to the operations of GLS, particularly Conflicts of Interest, Recommendations with regard to and oversight of vendors and outsourced solutions providers, Educate Board of Directors and other members of the GLS community with regard to best practices in Charter School and Special Education leadership and governance, Educate Board of Directors and other members of the GLS community with regard to regulatory, legal and policy changes to Delaware Charter School and Special Education legislation and administration. This all sounds pretty important stuff. Canceling meetings seems to be the trend with this committee.

Community Outreach Committee description

Establish sound policies and procedures for Board activities relating to fostering strong relationships with the greater GLS community and communication, Oversight responsibility for GLS and GFF policies and procedures relating to communication and fostering relationships with the greater GLS community with particular attention as to whether they are in alignment with GLS' mission and values and foster GLS' reputation and sustainability, Liaison between Board and Gateway Friends and Family (GFF), Ensure effective measurement and reporting of Student and Parent satisfaction with GLS, Strategic planning with regard to community outreach and communication, Educate Board of Directors regarding to best practices in communication and relationship building