



**Department of Education
Charter School Accountability Meeting**

**October 13, 2015
Renewal Application Process
Initial Meeting - Minutes**

MOT Charter School

Mr. Blowman called the meeting to order. For the purpose of the record, introductions were made:

Voting Committee Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee

- David Blowman, Chairperson of the Charter School Accountability Committee and Deputy Secretary, DDOE
- Karen Field Rogers, Associate Secretary for Adult Education and School Supports, DDOE
- Barbara Mazza, Education Associate, Exceptional Children Resources, DDOE
- April McCrae, Education Associate, Science Assessment and STEM, DDOE
- Deborah Wilson, Community Member

Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)

- Catherine Hickey, Deputy Attorney General, Counsel to the Committee
- Jennifer Nagourney, Executive Director, Charter School Office, DDOE
- John Carwell, Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Michelle Whalen, Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Financial Reform and Resource Management, DDOE

Ex-Officio Members (Non-voting)

- Kendall Massett, Executive Director, Delaware Charter School Network
- Donna Johnson, Executive Director, Delaware State Board of Education

Representatives of Charter School

- Linda Jennings, Head of School
- Jennifer Taylor, Vice Chairperson, Board of Directors

Discussion

Section 1: Overview

Ms. Jennings stated that the current renewal is MOT's fourth renewal. She stated that MOT has demonstrated that it is academically successful, financially stable and a school that is in high demand. Ms. Jennings stated that MOT is an extraordinary school that provides a rigorous academic program and a warm and friendly school environment. She added that the current school is the culmination of the work of many caring people who have devoted their lives to providing a quality education.

Ms. Jennings stated that since MOT opened in 2002, it has seen a steady increase in the number of applicants and reached an all-time high waiting list this year. In 2012, MOT expanded its K-8 facility with substantial support from parents to build a gymnasium, a library, two classrooms and a Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) room.

Ms. Jennings noted that, last year, MOT launched its high school, which is located on a separate campus. She stated that the building design is student- and pedagogically-driven. Ms. Jennings added that MOT families and staff members are highly invested in the school. She noted that at the end of the 2014-15 school year, 65% of MOT employees had been with the school for at least five years and more than a one-third over 10 years.

Ms. Jennings stated that MOT's low student attrition is evidence of the school's success. She added that, year after year student surveys report teachers care about learning and care about students as learners. She also noted that MOT is relentlessly focused on areas in which it does not excel. Ms. Jennings also commented that MOT has a strong foundation from which to grow.

Section 2: Academic Framework

Ms. Jennings stated that MOT is purposeful about cultivating thinkers and doers instead of repeaters. She stated that MOT's 2014-15 Smarter Balanced results demonstrated that the school provided a strong foundation for students.

Mr. Blowman asked the school to describe its ongoing areas of challenge. Ms. Jennings stated that Common Core will continue to be a challenge in grades K-8 and vertical alignment with the high school, in particular. Teachers have immersed themselves in the Common Core Standards and are working on assessments but the key is understanding vertical alignment from grades K-12. She also noted that serving struggling students and students with disabilities are ongoing areas of challenge.

Ms. McCrae asked the school to describe its plans for serving students with disabilities. Ms. Jennings stated that MOT's self-assessment found that the academic goals for students with disabilities are not rigorous enough. Another challenge is finding a tool to determine the optimal level of stress to inspire the students. She noted that students under too much stress shut down and students under too little stress do not perform. Therefore, by the end of October, the school's goal is to identify a relevant tool and develop some baselines.

Ms. Taylor noted that MOT is a 100% inclusion school where students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are taught with their regular education peers. He stated that MOT parents want their children with disabilities to be part of the community and provided the same level of instruction as regular education students as long as they are provided accommodations and supports.

Ms. Mazza noted that MOT was monitored on-site in January 2015. She stated that the school had corrective actions to complete and is on track. She also noted that the school has been very responsive to DDOE's requests. Ms. Mazza noted that MOT recently received its annual determination, which included a rating of "Needs Assistance," and the school recently submitted a Corrective Action Plan. She asked the school to describe how instruction changes for students with disabilities. Ms. Jennings explained

that each classroom has a high level of scaffolding. When a student's specific area of need is identified, additional support is provided by the special education teacher in collaboration with the classroom teacher. All special education teachers have the same planning period as the regular education teachers to facilitate collaboration.

Ms. Mazza asked the school to clarify whether students with disabilities receive Tier 2 and Tier 3 Response to Intervention (RtI) services in addition to special education services, rather than as part of their special education services. Ms. Jennings affirmed that students receive Tier 2 and Tier 3 services in addition to special education services. Ms. Mazza suggested that the school look into the ACCESS Project at the University of Delaware and the Universal Design for Learning training, in particular.

Ms. Johnson asked the school to describe its implementation strategies for the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Ms. Jennings stated that MOT has been involved in the NGSS leadership project. MOT's science teacher attends the collaboration meetings for science and English Language Arts (ELA) teachers. Ms. Jennings stated that the teacher brings back that information and shares it during MOT's professional development meetings. For example, she has demonstrated how a number of science kits would be different under the NGSS. Ms. Jennings noted that the high school is already using the NGSS.

Section 3: Organizational Framework

Mr. Blowman asked the school whether there were any areas that the school wished to highlight. Ms. Jennings noted that MOT pays attention to its state and federal obligations. Ms. Johnson asked the school to describe its Board evaluation and training processes. Ms. Jennings stated that MOT's Business Manager, Meryl Hewitt, provides financial training for the Board. She also noted that her close connections with attorneys helps with Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) training. Last year, the school conducted a Board evaluation, which was prompted by the launch of the high school. Ms. Jennings stated that the Board looked at the National Association of Independent Schools and Board on Track, which specializes in charter schools. The evaluation identified areas in need of improvement (e.g. a new CEO evaluation tool, benchmarking and board goal-setting). Ms. Taylor noted that the Board is working to balance a very established K-8 program with a very new high school on two different campuses.

Ms. Johnson asked the school to describe its efforts to address the slight increase in student attrition rates from last year. Ms. Jennings stated that MOT conducts an exit interview when students decide to withdraw, which provides valuable information about these decisions. In addition, she stated that the school will work harder on messaging. Ms. Jennings noted that some of the decisions to withdraw were related to the 1:1 program and what that experience is like. She also noted that the school will increase its focus on freshmen onboarding. There are four or five events for freshmen, but students could miss important information if they miss any of the events. For example, MOT uses a lot of flipped classroom strategies, which makes homework critical to students' success. The school has found that this has caught many students and parents by surprise and creates a sense that they may not be successful at MOT. Additionally, the school is working to build connections between the K-8 program and the high school program.

Mr. Blowman asked the school to describe the shifts the school has made to manage two sites. Ms. Jennings underscored the importance of good leadership at both buildings. Last year was a practice year when the high school was located in a modular on the K-8 campus. New systems have been developed

which include communications, attendance, reporting, financial procedures, professional development. Ms. Taylor noted that the high school administrator was the former administrator at the K-8 campus. She also noted that last year's incoming freshmen represented 36 different high schools who brought different expectations and levels of preparation.

Section 4: Financial Framework

Ms. Nagourney asked the school to describe its financial modeling process when planning for the high school. Ms. Taylor stated that the Board looked at various scenarios based on the Board's vision for new school. Initial plans were for a 600-student high school, but financial projections determined that 750 students would be viable. Ms. Jennings noted that the expansion would not be possible without initial investment funding.

Ms. McCrae asked the school to describe its succession plan. Ms. Jennings stated that she was MOT's Board Chair before she became the Head of School. When she became Head of School, she realized how important Ms. Hewett was to the school and decided that it was important to document all key processes. The whole school is very systems oriented. Ms. Jennings also noted that Board and faculty longevity is an advantage.

Ms. Field Rogers asked the school to describe its staffing plan for the high school and how culture is bridged across the two schools. Ms. Taylor noted that the vetting process for the new staff was very rigorous. Ms. Jennings stated that MOT uses a shared leadership model. At the K-8 building there are two principals – one focuses on curriculum and instruction and the other focuses on students and families. Similarly, the high school will have two principals – one to lead the science academy and the other to lead the arts academy. Ms. Taylor noted that the school is working very hard to ensure that the faculties at both schools do not feel segregated.

Ms. Wilson asked the school to describe how it engages new parents to acclimate them to MOT's unique culture. Ms. Jennings stated that the first touch begins with a parent orientation in the spring. Also, when students participate in summer activities, programs are provided for parents. Ms. Taylor noted that MOT has a strong tradition of utilizing parent advisors for various programs such as Science Olympiad and Odyssey of the Mind. This tradition is being continued at the high school.

Ms. Johnson noted that MOT has been a high performing school academically for several years. She suggested that the school push themselves by adopting goals at the high school relative to college and career metrics.

Section 5: Five-Year Planning

Mr. Blowman asked the school to summarize its five-year plan. Ms. Jennings noted that the school sets annual goals. She stated that college and career readiness is very important. For example, MOT has established a partnership for its high school students to take college-level courses.

Conclusion

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

- None stated.

Mr. Blowman asked CSAC whether there were any sections that they determined currently warrant a “Does Not Meet Standard” rating based upon information currently provided. The result was a unanimous “no.”

Next Steps:

- The CSAC will provide the school with an Initial Report no later than October 20, 2015.
- 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 4, 2015.
- The final meeting of the CSAC will be held on November 10, 2015, at 1:00 p.m., in the 2nd floor Cabinet Room of the Townsend Building at 401 Federal Street, Dover DE.
- CSAC’s Final Report will be issued no later than November 17, 2015.
- A second public hearing will be held on December 8, 2015, at 5:00 p.m. in the 2nd floor Cabinet Room of the Townsend Building at 401 Federal Street, Dover DE.
- The public comment period ends on December 11, 2015.
- The State Board of Education will hold a meeting on December 17, 2015, in the 2nd floor Cabinet Room of the Townsend Building at 401 Federal Street, Dover DE, at which time the Secretary will announce his decision on the renewal application and, if required, the State Board will act on that decision.

The meeting was adjourned.