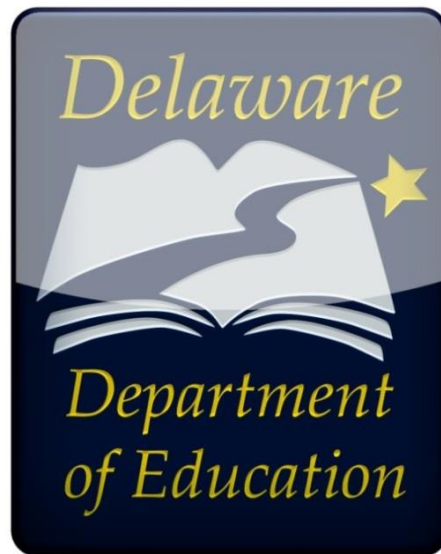


# CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**Newark Charter School**

**RENEWAL APPLICATION  
INITIAL REPORT**

CSAC Initial Meeting: October 25, 2018  
CSAC Initial Report Published: November 1, 2018

By September 30, 2018, Great Oaks Charter School 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, 2018:

**Voting Committee Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee**

- Chuck Longfellow, Chairperson of the Charter School Accountability Committee, Associate Secretary, Operations Support, DDOE
- Christine Alois, Deputy Secretary/Performance Support, DDOE
- Tracy Neugebauer, Education Associate, Exceptional Children Resources, DDOE
- Amy Baker-Sheridan, Education Associate, Academic Support, DDOE
- Michael Saylor, Education Associate, Educator Supports-School Leadership, DDOE
- Chandra Pitts, CEO, One Village Alliance, Community Member
- Chuck Taylor, Retired Head of School, Community Member

**Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)**

- Catherine Hickey, Deputy Attorney General, Delaware Department of Justice, Counsel to the Committee
- John Carwell, Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Finance Office, DDOE
- Sheila Kay-Lawrence, Administrative Secretary, Charter School Office DDOE
- Wafa Hozien, Education Specialist, Charter School Office, DDOE

**Ex-Officio Members (Non-voting)**

- Audrey Noble, Vice President, Delaware State Board of Education
- Kendall Massett, Executive Director, Delaware Charter School Network

**Representatives of Charter School**

- Franklin Newton, Board Chair
- Maura Duke, Vice Board Chair
- Gregory Meece, School Director
- Lisa Ueltzhoffer, Jr./Sr. High School Principal
- Jessica Browne, Dean of Instruction, K-6
- Jill Scannell, Director of Learning Support
- Chris Kohan, Assistant Principal, Jr./Sr. High School
- Jeff Lang, Board Member, Parent Representative
- Evelyn Zerenner, Board Treasurer
- Kelly Boulden, Board Member
- Daphne Brannon, Outreach Committee

## Discussion

Mr. Meece provided a summary of the school's charter renewal application. He stated that Newark Charter School (NCS) is proud to be a part of the Delaware public education landscape for the past 18 years. He noted that this charter renewal is the school's fourth. He recognized the hard work and dedication of the school's students, parents, teachers and staff since the school opened as a middle school in rented trailers. Since then, he added, NCS has grown to a three building school with over 2,380 students in grades K-12. Similar to other charter schools, he added, Newark Charter School demonstrates what can be accomplished when autonomy, accountability and choice combine with inspiration, innovation and commitment to meet the needs of the community the school serves.

Mr. Meece noted that during the school's prior three renewals, the school has accomplished its goals and its track record has been consistent and strong. The school's past success, he added, suggests a bright and promising future for the next renewal period, which would hopefully be for 10 years.

Mr. Meece noted that the school's finances are strong and the school has operated in the black every year. The school's financial projections, he added, show a positive financial balance during each year of the renewal period. He stated that annual external audits reveal no audit findings. He added that Standard and Poor's has given the school its highest bond rating for charter school finance and management which places the school among the top 5 charter schools in the nation. Mr. Meece also noted that the school has met all standards of the Department's financial performance framework every year.

Mr. Meece stated that the school's market demand is strong, achieving capacity enrollment with a waiting list every year since the school opened in 2001. The school's waiting list, he added, is typically more than 3,000 students. He also noted that student attrition is less than 1%. Mr. Meece noted that customer satisfaction is high and annual survey data shows that the rate of parent satisfaction in the school is consistently between 98-100%.

Mr. Meece stated that teachers and staff are satisfied and several times the News Journal has named Newark Charter School "A Top Workplace Award Winner" based on employee reported satisfaction. Teacher turnover, he added, is extremely low.

Mr. Meece commented that the school's operations are excellent. He noted that the school's attendance rate is high and its discipline rate is low. He also stated that on the Department's organizational performance framework, the measuring tool used to evaluate charter school operation and compliance issues, Newark Charter School has met standard in every category every year. In school year 2017-18, he noted, the school scored 100 points out of a possible 100 points.

Mr. Meece commented that stable enrollments, satisfied customers, financials that are strong, and sound operations would mean little without student success. He reported that NCS was named a National Blue Ribbon School twice and the Department of Education cited the school as a Superior School, a Reward School, a Recognition School, a School of Continued Excellence and a National Distinguished Title I School. He added that based on school year 2017-18 Smarter Balanced test results for English Language Arts and Math, NCS ranked first, second or third for every grade level. Mr. Meece also noted that the school's 11<sup>th</sup> grade students achieved the second highest SAT scores in the state. Over the last two years, he added, 100% of NCS graduates were accepted into colleges and universities across the nation.

Mr. Meece stated that when the school's academic performance data is disaggregated by student subgroups such as race, low income, English learners, and special education, student performance tends to be higher than the state average. He added that NCS is a public school that welcomes students regardless of their backgrounds or abilities and students are admitted only through a lottery as intended by Delaware law. Mr. Meece noted that the school currently has nearly 200 students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 150 with 504 accommodation plans. The number of students with intensive and complex disabilities, he added, have grown steadily year after year. He noted that the National Association of Special Education Teachers has named Newark Charter School an exceptional charter school in special education for the past two years. He noted that the school's percentage of minority students has increased every year for the past 18 consecutive years and the school's diversity closely mirrors the diversity in New Castle County, Delaware.

Mr. Meece stated that what distinguishes NCS is evident to anyone who has visited the school, a community that shares a common vision of what excellence looks like for every student. The NCS community, he added, pulls together in the same direction every day to achieve its vision. He commented that NCS has never strayed from its mission and core values, which are as vital now as when the school was first conceived in the year 2000. Mr. Meece thanked the Department and the State Board of Education for having faith in NCS from the start and for being an essential part of the school's growth and success. Working together, he added, the lives of thousands of young people have been changed.

Following Mr. Meece's summary, Mr. Longfellow noted the following regarding the school's Delaware School Success Framework (DSSF):

- On September 18, 2018, the Charter School Office provided draft DSSF results to the renewing charter schools so they could complete their renewal applications. The correspondence noted that the data was still draft and schools would be notified if there were any corrections.
- Four of the renewing schools, including Newark Charter School, had corrections to their DSSF data. While Newark's overall rating did not change, the rating descriptor

associated with the school's points earned for Academic Progress changed from "Meets Expectations" to "Exceeds Expectations" because of the accountability methodology applied to school year 2017-18 DSSF data.

- For school year 2017-18, the ratings were based on the continuous improvement rating scale which is used for all public school accountability ratings. The draft DSSF data schools received on September 18<sup>th</sup> was based on the static ratings model which was the old accountability methodology used for school year 2016-17. The final DSSF data provided to the renewing charter schools reflects the continuous improvement rating scale.

### **Section 1: Overview**

Mr. Longfellow asked the CSAC if they had any questions or concerns regarding the Overview section of the school's renewal application.

Mr. Saylor asked Mr. Meece to clarify whether the school's demographics match the demographics of school-aged children in New Castle County or all residents of New Castle County. Mr. Meece stated that the demographic information he provided was based on census data for New Castle County but it was not differentiated by age.

Ms. Neugebauer noted that the school's percentage of students with disabilities is half of the state average and asked the school to describe possible attributing factors. Mr. Meece stated that the school's enrollment is attributed to the lottery. Ms. Scannell stated that parents in the community are aware that students with disabilities are served well at NCS. She added that this year's incoming kindergarten class had a significant increase in students with special and very complex needs who were selected through the lottery.

### **Section 2: Academic Performance**

Mr. Longfellow asked the CSAC if they had any questions or concerns regarding the academic performance section of the school's renewal application. Ms. Baker-Sheridan asked the school to describe how its academic programming has evolved since the charter was last renewed. Ms. Browne stated that the school has worked over the years to adopt the Common Core Standards and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). The school has curriculum alignment committees, she added, that meet over the summer and throughout the school year to review the standards, determine how they will be implemented in the classroom, and identify the materials to support implementation. She also noted that the school's Core Knowledge curriculum was realigned to the new state standards. Ms. Browne also explained how the school uses Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) data and Smarter Balanced data to identify any areas where students are lacking to inform adjustments to the curricula and deepen instruction on specific standards.

Ms. Ueltzhoffer stated that when she arrived at NCS six years ago, the Jr./Sr. high school only had grades 7-9. She added that the core curriculum for grades K-8 was very set, but the high school curriculum was built based on the richness of the K-8 Core Knowledge curricula. She stated that the evolution of the high school provided a rare opportunity for vertical articulation. Ms. Ueltzhoffer noted that the math curriculum, for example, was an area where students entered high school more advanced and their unique needs informed the school's adoption of Advanced Placement (AP) coursework. Two years after launching the high school, she added, the school is in the process of shifting the entire high school science curriculum to better align with the NGSS. For example, Ms. Ueltzhoffer stated that biology was shifted to freshman year for honors students, followed by chemistry and physics to provide more access for students who wanted a deeper exposure to science.

Ms. Ueltzhoffer noted NCS is the first school in the state to implement the Advanced Placement (AP) Capstone Program, which includes 25 AP courses. Many of the high school teachers, she added, have attended AP trainings which provides them with a larger network of individuals who deliver the same curricula. She stated that the school's success on the AP assessments have been above the national average. Ms. Browne noted the school day schedule was adjusted in the intermediate school, grades 4-6. In response to the Common Core Standards, she added, math instruction went from 43 minutes of math every day to 86 minutes of math every other day.

Ms. Neugebauer asked the school to describe the school's Response to Intervention (RtI) processes to meet the needs of diverse learners. Ms. Scannell stated that students are served by multi-tiered systems of support to identify the specific needs that might inhibit success in the regular education classroom such as socio-emotional, academics, attendance, and executive functioning. She explained that as the specific needs are identified, interventions are designed to address the targeted areas. Ms. Scannell noted that in grades K-6, reading and math specialists work with students to address their academic needs. In the Jr./Sr. high school, she added, the teachers are empowered to work with subgroups with academic needs and provide mentoring to students with socio-emotional needs. Ms. Baker-Sheridan asked if the academic supports are a tutoring model. Ms. Ueltzhoffer explained that some students have a scheduled academic support class and if they have an IEP, they also receive small group support in a full-inclusion, co-taught setting. She added that students in the Jr./Sr. high school have an activity period in which they are provided extra help and students who qualify are pulled for RtI groups. Ms. Scannell also noted that students receive support for executive functioning skills to mitigate disorganization as a factor for students to successfully access the curricula. She added that student data is reviewed by a team of educators and professionals on a 6-week cycle to determine the appropriate interventions, as needed.

Dr. Noble noted that the school's renewal application references an ad hoc committee established to support the socio-emotional needs of students, teachers and parents and asked the school to provide additional information. Ms. Scannell stated that the school has seen an increase in the number of students with a wide range of socio-emotional needs that range from anxiety, coping skills, attention, body awareness, self-regulation, and adverse childhood

experiences. She noted that some students as young as five years old require intervention. The committee, she added, identifies potential resources to support the students and explores ways to extend supports to the home environment to support parents as well. Ms. Scannell stated that the committee also explores socio-emotional supports for teachers to empower them in their effectiveness. She added that the committee is in its initial stages and its current objectives are to inventory existing resources and explore new strategies. Dr. Noble asked if the committee has any community partners that support this work. Ms. Scannell stated that the school works with behavioral health consultants, experts and other schools. Mr. Meece stated that, unfortunately, there are many schools experiencing the same issues without clear reasons, but it's clear that socio-emotional needs impact the classroom.

Ms. Baker-Sheridan asked the school to describe how they design and organize professional learning to improve the quality and effectiveness of core content teachers. Ms. Browne stated that several years ago NCS partnered with the University of Delaware's Professional Development Center for Educators to support the school's implementation of the Next Generation Science Standards. She added that Dr. Amy Trauth was brought in to provide professional development on implementing the NGSS. Dr. Trauth, she added, worked very closely with the K-6 grade staff to breakdown the standards, develop units and assist with classroom observations. Ms. Browne also noted that NCS has had success with developing science kits and does not use the state's Science Coalition kits.

At the secondary level, Ms. Ueltzhoffer noted that NCS has consulted with Dr. Peg Dawson to provide professional development on executive skill function. She also noted that the school partners with the Delaware Charter School Network. Other partnerships, she noted, include the state math cadre, and the Science and Social Studies Coalitions. Ms. Ueltzhoffer stated that the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> teams have common planning time to collaborate and coordinate their efforts since the Core Knowledge is interdisciplinary. She added that the department chairs are expected to provide curriculum leadership. Ms. Browne noted that professional development needs are typically based on teacher feedback and classroom observations. This year, she added, new professional development offerings have focused on staff wellness such as book clubs and "pop up" professional development. She also noted the NCS collaborates with and visits other schools to share best practices.

### **Section 3: Organizational Performance**

Mr. Longfellow asked the CSAC if they had any questions or concerns regarding the organizational performance section of the school's renewal application.

Ms. Massett noted that NCS developed a model anti-bullying policy and practices before state law made them a requirement. Mr. Moore reminded the school to list the Ombudsman's phone number on the school's homepage. Mr. Meece stated that the school's anti-bullying policy was established in 2002-03.

Mr. Saylor asked the school to describe its plans for professional development for



administrators. Mr. Meece stated that many of the school's administrators came to NCS with administrative experience and are well-connected in the administrative community. He added that his administrative team are members of the state association for administrators. Ms. Ueltzhoffer noted that Mr. Meece sent the administrative team to the National Alliance of Public Charter Schools' annual conference. She also noted that she and Mr. Meece attended the International Baccalaureate conference to explore what it could offer.

Ms. Browne noted that she was a teacher at NCS for 13 years before she transitioned into an administrative role. She added that her administrative network has been invaluable. Mr. Meece stated that for three years he served as a mentor for Las Americas ASPIRA Academy's head of school, Margie Waite Lopez. He also noted that ASPIRA's educational program was modeled after NCS. Mr. Meece added that ASPIRA adopted the Core Knowledge curriculum and NCS teachers helped ASPIRA with staff recruitment. Mr. Meece also noted that NCS has a history of disseminating effective practices. Ms. Scannell stated that she coordinates monthly special education professional learning community (PLC) meetings.

Ms. Neugebauer noted that NCS has consistently demonstrated compliance with special education requirements and provides an effective continuum of services for students with disabilities. She commended Ms. Scannell for coordinating the special education PLC.

Dr. Noble asked the school to describe its merit pay system. Mr. Meece stated that the school's merit pay system is for all staff and last year a total of \$450,000 was provided in merit pay. He added that the criteria and rubrics were developed in collaboration with the staff and they reflect the school's values. He noted that the system is not based on test scores but observations, involvement in school activities, and customer feedback and 95% of staff have received the full bonus.

#### **Section 4: Financial Performance**

Mr. Longfellow noted that the school has met standard on every measure each year since the Financial Performance Framework's inception. He added that the school continues to show strong financial performance.

Mr. Longfellow asked the CSAC if they had any other comments or questions regarding the financial performance section of the school's renewal application. There were none.

#### **Section 5: Five-Year Planning**

Mr. Longfellow asked the CSAC if they had any comments or questions regarding the Five-Year Planning section of the school's renewal application.

Dr. Noble stated that the school's five-year plan shows stable enrollment projections with

increases of less than 5% each year. The renewal application, she added, describes the school's efforts to be market-driven and responsive to the community. She asked the school how they reconcile the projected 5% growth with the school's waiting list of 3,000 students. Mr. Meece stated that NCS started off with 400 students and is currently the largest public school in Delaware, expanding via several major charter modifications over the years to keep pace with market demand. Currently, he added, the school does not have the capacity to serve an additional 3,000 students but it might be considered in the future.

Dr. Noble asked if the board had considered any future expansion to address market demand. Dr. Newton stated that the school has had waiting lists since it started. He noted that the 3,000 students on the waiting list are not spread evenly across grade levels but has a higher proportion at the earlier grades. Over the years, he added, additional seats have been added to classrooms to address the demand. Currently, he noted, there are 190 students per grade in grades K-9.

Ms. Pitts commended Mr. Meece for his opening summary and the insights he provided. She added that NCS has a great reputation in the community regarding its academic success. She noted, however, that the school's demographics have been a concern in the community, particularly the percentage of low income students which is at 7%. Ms. Pitts asked the school to describe how it operationalizes its commitment to enrollment diversity and confirm whether its current diversity is simply a product of the lottery. Mr. Meece noted that the school has established an outreach committee to address diversity and he introduced a member of the committee, Daphne Brannon. Ms. Brannon stated that she is a NCS parent and for several years the outreach committee has reached out to area preschool programs and participated in community events to raise awareness. She noted that there were a lot of misconceptions about the school. She added that she currently has three children enrolled at NCS and one has an IEP. Ms. Brannon stated that she is able to speak from experience when she participates in the school's outreach activities. She noted that she has helped with the lottery process and confirmed the fairness of the process. She added that the outreach committee currently has 10 members and they work to address any misconceptions about the school so that all parents are encouraged to apply.

Ms. Pitts commended the outreach committee's efforts to increase the diversity of the applicant pool. She asked if the school applies any additional filters after the families apply. Mr. Meece confirmed that the school is legally prohibited from basing enrollment decisions on student grades or discipline records but the lottery determines admission. Ms. Neugebauer asked the schools to describe its enrollment preferences. Mr. Meece stated that, similar to other charter schools, the school has enrollment preferences for siblings and children of staff.

Mr. Longfellow offered the Charter School Office's assistance in providing the demographics of school-aged children in New Castle County to assist the school with its efforts to increase diversity.

Ms. Pitts asked the school how it values diversity in leadership and governance roles. Mr. Meece stated that NCS values diversity at all levels and noted that the board currently has two African

American board members and one Hispanic board member. He acknowledged that the faculty could be more diverse but noted that the applicant pool is not very large. Mr. Meece also noted that it is difficult to retain diverse talent because they are recruited for opportunities elsewhere. He stated that one of the first administrators he hired was an African American male and he took another position and is currently a superintendent. Dr. Newton noted that several years ago the board prioritized the school's recruitment of a diversity counseling staff to reflect the needs of the school. Mr. Meece noted that last year, he served on the Secretary of Education's Anti-discrimination Committee in Education to write policy that impacts all schools.

Ms. Pitts commended the school for its academic performance and pointed to the need for more quality public school seats. Mr. Meece stated that NCS was started as a grassroots effort by parents who wanted better educational options for their children. He commented that the school's last charter modification to expand was not publicly supported. Dr. Newton stated that the NCS board supports excellent education in Delaware. He noted that he was a NCS parent during the last expansion process and witnessed firsthand some of the public pushback to the expansion.

Mr. Carwell asked if the school's waiting list might grow exponentially if the school's geographic preference for families that live within a 5-mile radius was removed. Mr. Meece stated that 50% of applicants on the waiting list live within the 5-mile radius. He added that a 100 siblings of current students are also on the waiting list. He commented that it is difficult for NCS to meet the market demand of families living within the 5-mile radius.

## Conclusion

Mr. Longfellow 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. 10-Year Charter: Provide a narrative on the school's justification for 10-year versus a 5-year charter renewal.
2. Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Development: The work group requests a response to the Next Steps listed below by November 16 in advance of the final meeting of the Charter School Accountability Committee meeting.
  - a. All Content Areas: Please submit a plan describing the school's process for reviewing and revising curriculum to ensure instruction is aligned to the adopted state adopted standards for the next ten years.

## Next Steps:

- The CSAC will provide the school with an Initial Report no later than November 1, 2018.
- 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 16, 2018.
- The final meeting of the CSAC will be held on November 27, 2018; 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Cabinet Room, Townsend Building, Dover.

- A second public hearing will be held on December 10, 2018; 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Cabinet Room, Townsend Building, Dover.
- The public comment period ends on December 14, 2018.
- The Secretary of Education will announce her decision at the December 20, 2018 State Board of Education meeting and seek the assent of the State Board as necessary.



# CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

## RENEWALS 2018

NEWARK CHARTER SCHOOL				
Grades	ELA	Math	Science	SS/Hist.
K-12	None submitted	None submitted	None submitted	None submitted

This document reflects the results of the Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Learning work group’s review of submitted curriculum material in preparation for the initial meeting of the Charter School Accountability Committee on October 25. We invite you to review the set of Commendations, Recommendations, Expectations to inform future work. While it may appear that there are no changes in curricula during a five-year renewal cycle, there may indeed have been changes that occurred at the national and/or state level. Feedback from the Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Learning workgroup is to ensure that there is a plan for aligning curriculum to the adopted state standards.

The work group requests a response to the Next Steps listed below by November 16 in advance of the final meeting of the Charter School Accountability Committee meeting.

All Content Areas: Please submit a plan describing the school’s process for reviewing and revising curriculum to ensure instruction is aligned to the adopted state standards for the next ten years.

Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Development Workgroup (302)735-4180

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