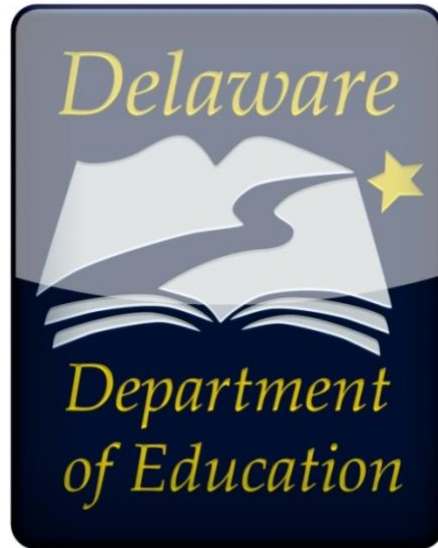


# CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



## Providence Creek Academy

**RENEWAL APPLICATION  
INITIAL REPORT**

CSAC Initial Meeting: October 27, 2020  
CSAC Initial Report Published: November 4, 2020

By September 30, 2020, Providence Creek Academy (PCA) submitted an application to renew its charter. Consideration of this application is in accordance with the applicable provisions of 14 *Del. C.* § 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 27, 2020:

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

- Kim Klein, Chairperson of the Charter School Accountability Committee and Associate Secretary of Education, DDOE
- April McCrae, Education Associate, Science Assessment, DDOE
- Tiffany Green, Education Associate, Educator Support, DDOE
- Gregory Fulkerson, Education Associate, Academic Support, DDOE
- Catherine Oravez, Education Associate, Operations Support, DDOE
- James Pennewell, Education Associate, Operations Support, DDOE
- Susan Veenema, Education Associate, Exceptional Children Resources, DDOE
- Brian Moore, Education Associate, Student Support, DDOE
- Michael Saylor, Education Associate, Educator Support, DDOE
- Charles Taylor, Community Member
- Chandra Pitts, Community Member
- Ted Molin, 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)**

- Darryl Parson, Deputy Attorney General, Counsel to the Committee
- Leroy Travers, Lead, Charter School Office, DDOE
- John Carwell, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Finance Office, DDOE
- Alicia Balcerak, Charter School Office, DDOE

**Representatives of Providence Creek Academy**

- Melissa Rhoades, Chairman of the Board
- Lisa Moore, Vice President of the Board
- Chuck Mosier, Board Treasurer
- Christine Chaney, Board Secretary, Teacher Member
- Danielle Gordy, Board Member
- Elizabeth Columbo-Kooch, Board Member
- Amanda Russell, Board Member
- Denise Stouffer, Head of School
- Amanda Silcox, Dean of Academics
- Patty Scheers, Director of Special Education
- Lisa English, Math Specialist

- Amy Santos, Reading Specialist
- Renee Stubbs, Dean of Students
- Sharvelle Feddiman, Technology Coach / Math Teacher
- Tracey Hennessy, Teacher
- Courtney Dowell, Human Resources Director
- Brandon Paris, Business Coordinator
- Bill Bentz, Business Consultant
- Rachael Straightiff, Human Resources and Business Assistant

## Discussion

Ms. Klein reminded everyone that On March 12, 2020, Governor Carney issued a declaration of a state of emergency for the state of Delaware due to a public health threat. The State of Emergency allows all public meetings of executive branch public bodies, including the CSAC, to be conducted electronically, either by means of telephone conference call or video-conference call. This CSAC Meeting was open to the public electronically only. This was reflected on the State's Public Meeting Calendar.

### Section 1: Overview

Ms. Klein asked the school to provide an overview. Ms. Stouffer and the PCA team provided an overview of the school which included:

- The school's mission: *The mission of PCA is to provide a safe, nurturing, and diverse campus environment allowing our K-8 students to learn from experiences beyond the traditional classroom setting. Our students are empowered with opportunities to engage in a number of sports, visual and performing arts, creating connections with our community to provide deeper learning experiences.*
- PCA has met or exceeded standards since the implementation of new academic standards.
- The original charter stressed the "Three A's", Academics, Athletics, and the Arts.
- Students are at the center of everything they do.
- The math program is standards-focused and utilizes Eureka, Dreambox, and Reflex.
- The reading program is holistic and child-centered and utilizes a rich selection of diverse literature, comprehension clubs, guided reading, and teacher expertise.
- The team uses PLC's twice per week to study data and target instruction.
- They utilize a hands-on approach to Science and Social Studies and belong to both coalitions.
- The school offers a number of arts, including World Language, Dance, and other visual and performing Arts.
- PCA has athletic programs that include football, lacrosse, soccer, basketball, and volleyball.
- The school has multiple extended-day programs including Ballet, Learning Enrichment, tutoring, and after-care.
- PCA participates in the Reimagining Professional Learning Grant from the DDOE.
- The school has a monthly professional development session that is teacher driven.
- PCA is moving from "Response to Intervention" (RTI) to "Multi-tiered System of Supports" (MTSS) that will incorporate behavior supports in addition to academics.
- The school has implemented a systematic phonemic awareness program.
- They have piloted an "Able and Ambitious" program to challenge students in need of a greater challenge.
- Every child in every grade participates in service learning projects.
- PCA has a five-year strategic that encompasses the following highlights
  - o Partnerships

- A strong parent-teacher organization
- Stakeholder engagement
- Effective governance
- The Board has a standing oversight committee that looks over HR files, special education files, transportation, discipline, the re-opening of the school, etc.
- The school has met overall financial performance standards for the last two years.
- The Citizen Budget Oversight Committee is very involved.
- The school has added significant grant funding to help with expenses.
- PCA has increased enrollment by six percent.

## **Section 2: Academic Framework**

Ms. Klein stated that the school has received academic data, outlined in their Academic Framework, for the first four years of its current charter term. Due to the Governor’s mandated closure of all schools on March 12, 2020, there is no DSSF data available for the 2019/2020 school year. The school has been asked to reflect on their remote learning plan provided to the Department of Education.

Dr. Fulkerson commended the school for having contacted the DDOE in January to begin the ELA review process. PCA has been diligent and responsive to feedback provided.

The Education Associates in the Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Development Workgroup have reviewed the submitted curriculum documents and have determined that Providence Creek has met expectations in the following curriculum areas:

- ELA, K-8
- Math, K-8
- Science
- Social Studies
- Visual and Performing Arts

\*\* See attached curriculum document for a full review of the PCA curriculum.

Dr. Fulkerson stated that the documentation confirms that PCA uses the Eureka math materials, closely abiding by their intended design. From the documentation, “PCA uses Eureka as designed by the publisher with the following two exceptions: 7th grade teaches Module 3 at the beginning of the year (so students can refresh and build upon their understanding of rational numbers before using them, as required in Module 1) and Kindergarten teachers only use the last module as enrichment, as it is not a DE required standard.” The final module of Kindergarten, Module 6, addresses standards K.CC.4, K.G.5 and K..G.6, which are all required Delaware Standards. He asked how the school was ensuring that all Kindergarten students are fully engaging with these standards?

Ms. Silcox stated that the school incorporates those specific standards throughout Eureka and each standard is met throughout the curriculum. Ms. English emphasized that the modules and standards spiral throughout the school year.

Ms. Veenema commended the school on transitioning from RTI to MTSS before the regulation dictated that schools do so. Ms. Veenema asked the school to share how they determine interventions for students and how they incorporate these interventions to support students with disabilities.

Ms. Stouffer stated that the school determines their interventions on what is successful for students based on the data. Ms. Silcox stated that staff does all benchmarking using STAR Reading and STAR Math and that all decisions are made with teacher input. Ms. Santos stated that the school utilizes tier one to give everyone a solid foundation. During tier two, students receive an increased amount of small group time with their teacher. During tier three, PCA utilizes a much more targeted approach using the Reading Specialist. The team meets to discuss the effectiveness of each intervention. If students do not respond to the interventions, the special education team is consulted to decide on a path for the student. The school feels that their intervention program is successful because it utilizes a systematic, sequential, phonics-based progression for each student. Ms. Santos discussed the Barton and Wilson program that is based on many styles of learning to teach reading. It allows the team to identify all of the ways in which a child can learn to read. The program takes a great deal of hard-work and effort from teachers and students, but it allows them to find ways for each student to be successful.

### **Section 3: Organizational Framework**

Mr. Moore commended the school on their disciplinary reductions. He stated that two years ago there were seventy-nine out-of-school suspensions compared to just sixteen two years later. Mr. Moore stated that this is one of the greatest improvements that he has ever seen. The school has utilized conferencing and alternative consequences to achieve this. Mr. Moore asked what type of privilege restrictions the school utilizes.

Ms. Stouffer stated that students that achieve a blemish-free tri-mesters are able to participate in additional rewards, such as a movie or free-time on the playground. This is used for students utilizing good citizenship schools.

Mr. Moore asked the school to discuss their physical activity consequences.

Ms. Stouffer stated that physical activity is a part of everything they do and that students in grades kindergarten through grade eight participate in recess. They feel that middle school students need a time to exercise and get together. Ms. Stouffer stated that their MTSS system of behavior support is also responsible for the improvement of their behavior data. Students with behavioral challenges are given extra support. The students also take physical breaks throughout the day. Ms. Stouffer stated that the school does not deny recess, but may ask students to do a lap before playing at recess for a small infraction.

Mr. Moore stated that the physical activity consequence appears to be working as there is no recidivism when a physical activity consequence is applied. Mr. Moore asked for an updated copy of their student code of conduct. Mr. Moore had to dismiss himself after this comment for another meeting.

#### **Section 4: Financial Framework**

Mr. Lofink commended the school on their comprehensive financial support. Mr. Lofink asked for explanations for the school not meeting standard in total margin and cash flow from 2017-2019 (the school met standard in each area in 2019/2020).

Mr. Mosier stated that those ratings were driven by large capital expenditures in prior years, such as the purchase of buses, along with funding reductions from the State. Mr. Mosier stated that those issues have been rectified and the school is now meeting standard in both area and were able to contribute two-hundred thousand to other accounts at the end of the most recent fiscal year. Ms. Stouffer stated that the three-year trend impacted the school financially in prior years, but that the school is currently meeting standards in all areas. The school purchased a new fleet of buses over the course of school years 2015/2016, 2016/2017 and 2017/2018 that affected the framework negatively for three years. It was in the best interest of the school, financially, to purchase the buses outright instead of leasing them or buying them over time. The interest payments alone would have cost the school \$90,000.00 or more. The Division II cuts that took place in fiscal year 2018 also had a negative effect on the school's financially.

Ms. Oravez stated that the school is to be commended for their continued financial improvement. Ms. Oravez stated that the debt-to asset ratio is still rated as "approaching standard". She stated that the school has a strategic plan to improve that rating and asked if there was a time-frame for improving.

Ms. Stouffer stated that the school historically followed the State's policy to only capitalize items of \$50,000.00 or more. In 2017, the school determined that they were too small to continue doing so, Ms. Stouffer hopes to achieve that metric over the next two years. The school continues to look into what needs to be capitalized in order to achieve that standard.

Ms. Stouffer thanked the DDOE team for their support during this process.

#### **Conclusion**

At the conclusion of the meeting, Ms. Klein asked the members of the CSAC if there was any additional information they required in order to inform their decision-making.

The following information was requested:

1. A copy of an updated Student Code of Conduct.



**Next Steps:**

- 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 19, 2020.
- The final meeting of the CSAC will be held on December 2, 2020 in a virtual format.
- A public hearing will be held virtually on November 10, 2020.
- If necessary, a second public hearing will be held, virtually, on December 9, 2020.
- The Secretary of Education will announce her decision at the December 17, 2020 State Board of Education meeting and ask for the assent of the State Board of Education.