

2015-2016 DDOE Charter School Annual Report

Charter School Name: SUSSEX ACADEMY

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PATRICIA S. OLIPHANT
Head of School

December 1, 2016
Date

ALLEN STAFFORD
Head of School

December 1, 2016
Date

Denise Westbrook
Board President

December 1, 2016
Date

I. Charter School Program

Our History

Sussex Academy currently operates as a charter school authorized by the Delaware Department of Education. Opened in 2000 the Sussex Academy of Arts & Sciences began as a 225-pupil middle school located in a newly constructed facility at 21777 Sussex Pines Road in Georgetown, Delaware. Within three years of opening, Sussex Academy made two minor modifications to first expand to 300 and then 325 students. The school renewed its charter for 2003-2008 and then again for 2008-2013 with only minor changes in structures and expectations. A major modification was approved in 2012 to begin adding high school grades in 2013. Then Sussex Academy was approved for another five-year renewal (2013-2018). In order to meet facility demands needed for adding high school grades, the Sussex Academy Foundation executed an agreement with a nearby independent school, Delmarva Christian High School, to exchange buildings. Over a four-year period the Foundation completed the build-out of the interior structure, the outdoor athletic fields and facilities, and a new 33,000 sq. foot middle school wing. This development has entailed a major capital campaign by the Sussex Academy Foundation to raise \$34 million. Further, the construction of a swimming pool gifted by Schell Brothers at \$2.3 million will be completed in December 2016. When the Executive Board decided to move to a new facility and expand the program to include grades 6-12, they shortened the school's name to Sussex Academy and endorsed a new tagline, school colors and mascot beginning with school year 2013-2014.

Mission

To foster academic achievement and social responsibility in a small school environment where students participate in an accelerated college preparatory program that prepares them for the technological and global challenges of the 21st century and that fosters ethical conduct and service to others in their day to day lives.

Vision

To cultivate students of distinction by providing them with the knowledge, skills, and values to become successful productive citizens.

Educational Program

At the founding of Sussex Academy, the original Executive Board adopted the Expeditionary Learning Program as the philosophical and structural focus for the school. Over the last sixteen years, Sussex Academy has grounded itself in the practices and principles of expeditionary learning with a more project-based, hands-on approach to learning. As Common Core standards, next generation science standards, and expeditionary learning have evolved, Sussex Academy has now created its own unique instructional framework. Literacy and research are embedded in all content areas for students with teachers using school-wide best practices. In addition, the school fosters a culture of respect and responsibility - one built around character development. Within this framework students are required to complete community service, interdisciplinary study, and reflective portfolios.

When considering the addition of high school, school leaders and the Executive Board determined that the International Baccalaureate Program merged philosophically and methodologically with the middle school program already in place. Sussex Academy applied for candidacy and gained approval as an IB World School in the Diploma Program in 2014. Therefore, ninth and tenth grade courses prepare students for IB coursework that takes place in grades 11 and 12. The coursework is very rigorous and meshes with international academic standards. Within the school's framework, IB students must take both internal and external assessments including the "Extended Essay." The external assessments are juried outside of the school. In addition to the coursework, IB students must participate in a "CAS" (Creativity, Action, Service) project while all others must complete 25 or more hours of community service. Further, all high school students must take a course called "Theory of Knowledge." Sussex Academy will have its first graduating class in June 2017. Ultimately, Sussex Academy's aim is to develop the attributes of IB Learner Profile in each student who attends. This is the underpinning of our instructional framework.

One of the unique features of the school is that for thirteen years, the school operated as a middle school (grades 6-8) with no individual feeder school, but rather from numerous elementary schools. Subsequently, sixth grade students entered with varied

academic background and performance expectations. This dynamic coupled with the school's philosophy created the impetus for our heavy emphasis on literacy such that all middle school students have 90 minutes of language arts per day and literacy infusion into the other core courses of social studies, science, and mathematics. Now that we have implemented our high school program, we require that high school students take a writing course in addition to their regular English class. Another unique aspect of our high school program is that all students take the "Theory of Knowledge" course that focuses on philosophical positions on why we as man "know what we know."

While the Common Core Standards undergird the curriculum, we continually infuse IB required elements into the curriculum. Teachers have a great deal of flexibility in selection of instructional materials and texts (digital or paper) so long as the standards, key school-wide practices, and literacy and research are at the center of the instruction. School practices include modeling, higher order questioning, frequent researching, writing, and presenting. Thus, classrooms at Sussex Academy are not clones of one another, but reflect the teacher's and the team's collective wisdom about teaching and learning. Additionally, teachers use technology through Smart boards, laptops, and iPads with 1:2 computer access at the middle school and 1:1 use at the high school.

This past year, we enjoyed a significant expansion of our arts programs in choral, instrumental, visual art, and performing arts. Also, we increased STEM offerings through a design engineering sequence. In addition, our athletic facilities have added significantly to the school community life where performance and collaboration are integral to the school culture.

Performance Reflection

Academic Performance

Every student, faculty member, staff member, administrator, and board member subscribe to the school's tagline: Explore, Experience, Excel. All are expected to meet high expectations. Sussex Academy was nominated as a National Blue Ribbon School and received the award in November 2016 from the United States Department of Education. In addition, the Delaware Department of Education named Sussex Academy as the Top Performing School. The educational research site, Smart Class named Sussex Academy as the best middle school in Delaware while another research

site, Niche, named Sussex Academy as the number 1 middle school out of 38 schools in the state.

Performance data on standardized assessments in 2016 illustrate that Sussex Academy students perform at a high academic level.

- **Data Chart 1 - Smarter Balanced – Reading and Math - % Meet or Exceed the Standard**

2016 Smarter Balanced Results				
Grade	SA Reading	State Reading	SA Math	State Math
6	95	52	67	37
7	98	53	90	40
8	94	54	88	38

Chart 1 illustrates that across all demographic groups on the 2016 Smarter Balanced assessment Sussex Academy had more than 95% of its grades 6-8 students scoring at the overall proficient level and was the top middle school in reading in the state. Further, Sussex Academy had 81% of its middle school students scoring at the overall proficiency in math in the state. It was second in the state, yet 8 points away from the highest performing middle school.

- **Chart 2 - Delaware Comprehensive Assessment (DCAS) – Social Studies and Science - % Meet or Exceed the Standard**

2015 DCAS Results				
Grade	SA Social Studies	State Social Studies	SA Science	State Science
7	96	57		
8			94	49
10			84	43

Chart 2 shows that Sussex Academy students scored very well in both the social studies and sciences as measured by the Delaware Comprehensive Assessment System. Our seventh grade social studies tied with one other charter school in having more than 95% of the students proficient giving them first place status. Our eighth grade science showed 94 proficiency rating with a first place ranking. Our tenth grade science students were second to all other students in the state with 84% proficiency rate.

- **Chart 3 – SAT – Reading, Writing, and Math**

2016 School Day SAT Summary			
	Score	% Meet Standard	%Below Standard
Reading/Writing	587	89.74	10.26
Math	572	66.67	33.33

Chart 3 shows data for the first year that Sussex Academy students participated in the SAT test. Our students demonstrated a 90% proficiency rating in reading and a 67% in mathematics.

Students and Culture

The original founders intended to open the school to all students in Sussex County. Most students who apply reside in one of the six school districts in Sussex County with a few students coming from Kent County. In school year 2015-2016 the school population was comprised of 594 students in grades 6 – 11 with 42% male and 58% female; 77.6% Caucasian, 8.6% Hispanic, .5% Hawaiian, 3.4% Asian, .1% American Indian, 5.2% African American, and 3.5% Multi-racial. Interestingly, the demographics for Sussex County posted by the U.S. Census Bureau for 2015 are the following: 48.5% male and 51.5% female; 82.5% Caucasian, 9.5% Hispanic, .1% Hawaiian, 1.3% Asian, 1.2% American Indian, 12.8% African American, and 2.1% Multi-racial..

Unlike most charters in the state, Sussex Academy draws its students from a large geographic area. The founders envisioned that students would come from every Sussex County community encompassing 1,196 square miles. As the school has evolved, this is the case with most students coming from six Sussex County school districts involving 11 middle schools and roughly 16 elementary schools along with a few Independent and home schools. One of the ways that Sussex Academy builds school culture is through a school-wide expedition held for middle school students annually. The focus of the expedition is known as SAAS (Superior Academics, Awesome Students). During the expedition, we focus on relationship building and “standing up” for what is right – not being a bystander for what may be hurtful. The expedition is revisited throughout the year. At the high school level, students engage in crew, fieldwork, college visitations, and service projects to build and sustain school culture and community.

We believe that our faculty’s overt modeling and teaching of social expectations builds and sustains a respectful, responsible environment in the school. Other positive influences upon our school culture include uniforms, community service, school structures, and a superb faculty and staff.

Student and School Service

All students in the school complete community service in two ways. First every student in the middle school must complete at least ten hours of personal service throughout the year. Students must document these hours with evidence and reflection on their service. Service ranges from planting beach grass to working in a nursing home to cleaning up a little league park. In addition, each of the teams completes various service projects. Examples in 2015-2016 include the Ghost Tours in Georgetown,” the “Giving Tree” where household items were donated by our families and distributed to those in need, planting beach grass, collecting toiletries for the military, town of Georgetown clean-up, and raising funds for breast cancer research.

At grades 11 and 12 students must complete a service project or CAS (Creativity, Activity, Service) project as part of the IB program. Each student must develop and carry out a yearlong project that demonstrates his/her initiative, perseverance, and self-determination.

School Structures

There are school structures in place that are fairly apparent to students, parents, and visitors. First, each grade level is organized into a team at the middle school as well as at the high school. Exploratory and elective teachers also constitute a team. Thus, the team becomes the unifying structure for the group of students. Each member of the team takes on a specific responsibility such as being the leader, or being the parent contact, or being the fieldwork coordinator and so on. The team structure allows the teachers who are responsible for the students a level of autonomy in making decisions relative to curriculum, instruction, student schedules, student grouping, discipline, and general well being of their team.

Another structure within the school relates to school governance and decision-making. The administration and team leaders meet monthly as does the Instructional Leadership Team. Both groups are charged with making decisions and leading the school relative to school operations, budget, curriculum, instruction, students, professional development, etc.

Sussex Academy enjoys the support of an organized Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) and a Sports Boosters group. These organizations continually work to provide additional funds and support help in all activities that are of a school-wide and/or team nature.

These structures allow for collaboration and collective decision-making in order to respond to the needs of the students. Decisions tend to be more inclusive and change can be made more quickly.

Strengths

Our academic performance in reading and writing is our strong suit. In addition, our strong faculty and staff along with a responsive Executive and Foundation Board are critical to the school's academic success. Our emphasis on a school culture of responsibility and respect helps students and staff to stay focused on academic work. Also, the school structures that are in place help us make better decisions about our work with and for students. Certainly the support of parents and their willingness to "stay the course" by keeping their child at Sussex Academy is important for the school's academic outcomes. Consistency, hard work, and high expectations are evidenced through excellent standardized test scores.

Challenges

Our current academic challenge is to move the needle upward in mathematics. While we believe we have a very clear handle on the change in these standards, our students did not perform to our expectation on the SBAC in 2016. While this was our high school student's first time taking the SAT, we believe that we can improve student performance on this assessment in reading/writing and math. During 2015-2016 we made the decision to change our middle school math program after reviewing multiple programs. Implementation of the new middle school math program began in August 2016. At the same time we have incorporated a double math class for middle school students who show evidence of substandard performance.

Another challenge is ensuring that the Next Generation Science Standards are understood as they are rolled out and to take corrective curricular/instructional action where needed. Keeping pace with technology is also very important. We need to

ensure that we have the technology, the expertise, and the academic course modifications in tow so that our students are college and career ready.

Opportunities for Growth

As we move toward having our first graduating class, we have the opportunity to review our grades 6-12 programs to ascertain if and where we may need or want to make curricular and/or structural changes in our delivery systems. This includes how the school will structure its leadership, administration, and curriculum as we begin our next charter renewal.

Organizational Framework Performance: 2015-- 2016

Overall Rating: MEETS STANDARD

Sussex Academy met the standards in each of the six areas of performance on the Organizational Framework Performance Report 2015-216: Educational Program, Financial Management and Oversight, Governance and Reporting, Students and Employees, School Environment, and Additional Obligations.

Strengths

The school meets all performance expectations of the Organizational Framework. The school strives to be in compliance with all rules and regulations. During the last school year there was progress was made by the Delaware Department of Education to more clearly define and refine a rubric for the Organizational Framework so as to improve charter schools' understanding and adherence to required measures. While the revised framework will be implemented in 2016-2017, the conversation and scrutiny around the framework will be helpful to the Department and the charter schools in meeting the required measures.

Challenges

The challenges inherent in any organization's ability to meet expectations often lie in the number of expectations and the stability of those rules and regulations from year to year. For example, there are approximately 55 compliance areas that must be met. Since charter schools are very flat organizations (few administrative heads with more

resources in the classroom), it is challenging to “keep up” with changes in rules, regulations, and monitoring of those rules.

Opportunities for Growth

As Sussex Academy expanded the student population into a 6-12 configuration, it had the opportunity to weigh how it will operate organizationally with both a middle school and a high school. Growth impacts all aspects of the organization including curriculum/instruction, students, staff, facilities, and finance. In moving forward, Sussex Academy is analyzing which administrative structures should be implemented to ensure that the middle school (grades 6-8) and high school (grades 9-12) are unique – that is that each has the ability to identify itself while at the same time cultivating a “single school identity” as it meets the standards of the Organizational Framework.

Financial Framework Performance: 2015-2016 Overall Rating: MEETS STANDARD

Sussex Academy met the standard on all indicators included in the Financial Performance Framework for the 2015-2016 school year with the exception of one. Additionally, the FY16 audit and financial statements indicate that the school continues to be fiscally sound.

External auditors have conducted annual independent audits of the school finances of the Sussex Academy for the past 16 years with no findings during that period. It is anticipated that this performance will continue into the future.

The school’s budget is reviewed and approved by the Executive Board of the Sussex Academy. The school’s Citizen Budget Oversight Committee (CBOC) and the Executive Board review monthly financial reports. A current financial report is posted on our website on a monthly basis. The school typically operates with an annual financial surplus to ensure fiscal viability and sustainability, as was the case in FY16. Consequently, the school has established, and continues to maintain, a sufficient reserve fund to cover unanticipated and/or emergent events.

Enrollment is projected to increase through the 2019 school year current 11th and 12th grade classes graduate, smaller classes than anticipated when the charter modification

was approved, and the 9th grade enrollment increases. This was the one area where Sussex Academy did not meet the benchmark as the total student population in grades 6 through 11 for school year 2016 was only at 94% of the approved total enrollment.

Accordingly, the school expects to benefit from economies of scale as the enrollment increases. That being said, the “growing” years were more challenging than in the past due to on-going, one-time, initial expenses related to continual renovations, construction, and maintenance of a much larger facility than we occupied prior to SY14.

Strengths

The school’s financial future is secure. A long waiting list is maintained for all middle school grades in the event of any unexpected openings. Clearly, this is a sign of financial stability. The financial decisions that the school makes are based on sound and planned reasoning. The Executive Committee of the Board and/or the CBOC is involved in financial decisions that were not included in the original approved budget. Policies are in place to ensure that adequate reserve funds are maintained to cover unexpected and/or emergent events.

Challenges

Funding for our school is a function of enrollment. Funds for student transportation and local funding are based on expenditures of the prior school year and thus are difficult to predict. Shifts in the number of students enrolled at our school from one school district or another can cause anticipated revenues to fluctuate, as can decreases in local expenditures in the prior year.

In addition, the Sussex Academy has benefited greatly from the opportunity to swap buildings with Delmarva Christian High School as the new facility provided both finished and potential new spaces to accommodate the growth in our student population. During the 2016 school year, fifteen additional classrooms were added to further accommodate our growth. However, there have been and, most likely, will continue to be unexpected building related expenses due to the age of the building and the unknown maintenance practices and history of the former tenant. In an effort to address this concern, the Sussex Academy maintains an account at PNC Bank and is currently depositing approximately \$2000 monthly to establish additional maintenance reserves. It is

anticipated that this amount will be increased as additional students are enrolled in the upper grades.

Opportunities for Growth

We are fortunate to have an active and successful foundation supporting our school. The Sussex Academy Foundation, Inc. has raised the funds to purchase, renovate, and construct new portions of the building that we are currently occupying. The Foundation has funds on hand to continue improvements to our building to accommodate the anticipated increase in enrollment and program changes and will continue to aggressively solicit funds to develop the property further in the coming years. A local construction company has donated an indoor pool that will be opening in December 2016. A Building and Grounds Committee has been established to work with the Foundation to ensure that the school's needs are addressed as we continue to grow as an institution.

II. Performance Reflection

In school year 2015-2016 Sussex Academy was a Tier 1 school. When reflecting about practices that drive the school, numerous structures that are part of the success can be replicated as identified here.

Academic Practices that Can Be Replicated

- Engage in a Project-based learning through mindset where student is worker and where high expectations are held. We recommend investigation in current program and practices as www.elschools.org.
- Engage in a rigorous academic program such as the International Baccalaureate Program. We recommend investigation in current programs and practices as www.ibo.org.
- Establish and live a school-wide instructional focus. At Sussex Academy literacy is the instructional focus along with research and inquiry. We use school-wide practices such as 6+1 Writing Traits, CSET, cross-curricular expeditions and curriculum integration.
- Enact practices that position the school to know their students better. At Sussex Academy we have practiced “Looping,” where a set of students stays with the same

set of teachers for two years. Sussex Academy has utilized this practice for grades 6 and 7 since its founding.

- Enact a strong team approach with all teachers having a set of responsibilities around a set of students. This includes collective decision-making by the faculty.
- Work at fostering a strong culture and community in the school. The larger the organization is, the harder it is. Yet, schools can engage in practices that will work if they have patience and perseverance.

Organizational Practices that Can be Replicated

- While not defined by the Organizational Framework, but imperative for a well functioning, high performing charter school is an outstanding Executive Board who understands and lives their role and responsibilities. Finding members who have diverse backgrounds and live in different communities has brought strength to the school.
- Sussex Academy has been very fortunate in finding and keeping outstanding faculty who are student-centered, well educated, and prepared to teach. All administrators, faculty, and staff understand that they are here by invitation.

Financial Practices that Can be Replicated

- Under our Director of Finance and Operations we have developed excellent financial management and oversight structures and practices.
- We have a Foundation Board that is clearly connected to the school's growth and development. Whether this can be replicated is not clear; however, the current Foundation Board is extraordinary and Sussex Academy's growth has occurred because of the commitment and leadership on the Sussex Academy Foundation Board.

Attachment 1

School Administrators:

Dr. Patricia S. Oliphant, Director of Curriculum and Instruction

patricia.oliphant@saas.k12.de.us

Mr. Allen Stafford, Director of Finances and Operations

allen.stafford@saas.k12.de.us

2015-2016 Faculty/Staff:

Administrators	2
Teachers	40
Student Service Coordinator	1
Academic Counselor	1
Special Education Coordinator	1
Paraprofessionals	4
Librarian/Technology	1
Business/Secretary/Communications	4
Custodians	8
Nurse	1

Education Performance:

2016 Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) Overall Mean Score Comparison

Delaware DOE SAT Testing, 2016

Subject	State	Sussex Academy
Reading/Writing	490	587
Math	482	553

2016 Delaware Comprehensive Assessment System (DCAS) Overall Percent Score Comparison*Delaware DOE DCAS Testing, 2016*

Grade	Subject	State	Sussex Academy
10	Science	52%	84%

2016 Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC)-Overall Percent Score Comparison (% that met or exceeded standards)*Delaware DOE Smarter Balanced Testing, 2016*

Grade	Subject	State	Sussex Academy
6	Reading	52%	95%
6	Math	37%	67%

Grade	Subject	State	Sussex Academy
7	Reading	53%	98%
7	Math	40%	90%
7	Social Studies	57%	96%

Grade	Subject	State	Sussex Academy
8	Reading	54%	97%
8	Math	38%	88%
8	Science	49%	94%

Student Statistics:**Enrollment Sussex Academy 2016-2017** *(based on September 30, 2016 count)*

Grade	Enrollment
6	130
7	134
8	130
9	111

10	91
11	57
12	39
TOTAL	692

Enrollment From Districts Sussex Academy 2016-2017

District	Number of Students
Caesar Rodney	3
Cape Henlopen	241
Delmar	1
Indian River	215
Lake Forest	2
Laurel	45
Milford	48
Seaford	122
Woodbridge	15

District Fall Enrollment Sussex County Schools

Delaware DOE School Profiles

District	Grades	2014-2015	2015-2016
Cape Henlopen	Pre K-12	5075	5170
Delmar	Pre K-12	1367	1347
Indian River	Pre-K-12	9842	10,171
Laurel	Pre K-12	2177	2221
Milford	Pre K-12	4197	4119
Seaford	Pre K-12	3509	3473
Sussex Tech	9-12	1545	1444
Woodbridge	Pre K-12	2384	2466

Sussex Academy	6-10	498
	6-11	594

Ethnicity Enrollment Sussex Academy 2016-17

Ethnicity	MS Female	MS Male	HS Female	HS Male	Total
American Indian	1	0	3	2	6
African American	8	9	7	3	27
Asian	11	3	7	6	27
Native Hawaiian/Pac Islander	1	1	1	0	3
Hispanic/Latino	24	13	27	23	87
Caucasian	179	136	124	81	520
Multi Race	5	4	7	6	22

% Ethnicity Comparison by Specified Districts 2016-2017

Delaware DOE School Profiles

Ethnicity	Cape Henlopen	Delmar	Indian River	Laurel	Milford	Seaford	Sussex Tech	Woodbridge	Sussex Academy
African American	13.7%	14.2%	13.3%	30.1%	24.3%	35.8%	13.9%	27%	5.2%
American Indian	0.5%	0.7%	0.7%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.8%	0.2%	1.2%
Asian	1.4%	3.2%	1.3%	0.9%	0.9%	1.3%	1.9%	0.8%	3.4%
Hawaiian	0.0%	0%	0.1%	0.3%	0.1%	0.3%	0.1%	0%	0.3%
Hispanic/Latino	14.3%	5.9%	30.4%	11.5%	19%	17.1%	11.8%	20.8%	8.6%
Caucasian	66.4%	70.8%	50.9%	52.0%	50.8%	40.5%	68.4%	47.9%	77.6%
Multi Race	3.7%	5.2%	3.3%	4.9%	4.7%	4.7%	3.2%	3.3%	3.7%

% Ethnicity for Sussex County-2015 Total Population 215,622

quickfacts.census.gov

Ethnicity	Percentage
African American	12.8%
American Indian	1.2%
Asian	1.3%
Hispanic/Latino	9.5%
Multi Race	2.1%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0.1%
Caucasian	82.5%

% Other Student Information by District 2015-2016

Delaware DOE School Profiles

District	Low Income	Special Education
Cape Henlopen	32.8%	16.9%
Delmar	16.9%	9.7%
Indian River	42.1%	16.2%
Laurel	54.2%	15.4%
Milford	45%	13.9%
Seaford	54.5%	16.9%
Sussex Tech	19%	6.9%
Woodbridge	49.6%	12.2%
Sussex Academy	10.4%	4.9%

Sussex Academy Low Income Information

	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
Enrollment	498	594	692
Free and Reduced	73	124	120

Census	40	40	57
Other	48	73	86
Total Low Income	161	237	263

District Financials 2014-2015

Delaware DOE School Profiles/District Reports

District	Expenditure per Pupil	Revenue per Pupil
Cape Henlopen	\$15,254	\$18,158
Delmar	\$10,269	\$10,130
Indian River	\$12,687	\$12,709
Laurel	\$11,257	\$12,542
Milford	\$11,237	\$11,605
Seaford	\$13,441	\$13,587
Sussex Tech	\$14,845	\$17,589
Woodbridge	\$13,877	\$13,820
Sussex Academy	\$10,388	\$10,402

Sussex Academy Financials

Year	Expenditures	Revenues/Other Sources	Balance
2015-2016	\$6,494,003	\$6,495,221	\$1,218
2014-2015	\$5,558,029	\$5,593,174	\$35,145
2013-2014	\$4,581,692	\$4,351,789	(\$229,903)

Contingency

+/- \$1,700,000