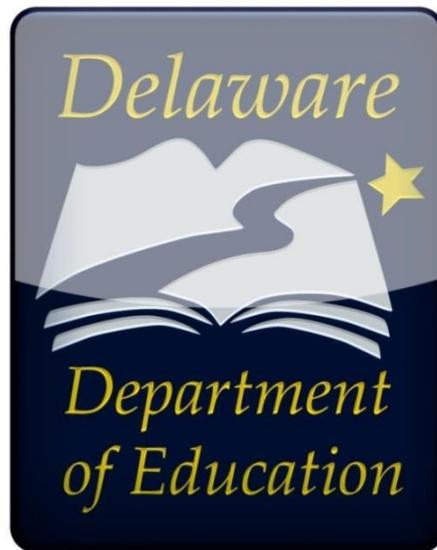


CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Sussex Academy Charter School

**RENEWAL APPLICATION
INITIAL REPORT**

CSAC Initial Meeting: October 24, 2017
CSAC Initial Report Published: October 30, 2017

By September 30, 2017, Sussex Academy Charter School (SACS) 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 the 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, Performance Agreements, and discussion during the CSAC meetings.

The following were in attendance at the Initial Meeting of the CSAC on October 24, 2017:

Voting Committee Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee

- David Blowman, Chairperson of the Charter School Accountability Committee and Associate Secretary, Operations Support, DDOE
- Karen Field Rogers, Deputy Secretary, DDOE
- Deb Hansen, Education Associate, Academic Supports
- Tracey Neugebauer, Education Associate, Exceptional Children Resources, DDOE
- Seher Ahmad, Data Fellow, Performance Supports
- Charles Taylor, Head of School, Providence Creek Academy

Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)

- Catherine Hickey, Deputy Attorney General, Delaware Department of Justice, Counsel to the Committee
- Denise Stouffer, Lead Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- John Carwell, Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Finance Office, 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

- Patricia Oliphant, Director, Sussex Academy Charter School
- Allen Stafford, Director, Sussex Academy Charter School
- Janet Owens, Director, Sussex Academy Charter School
- Jennifer Leonard, IB Co-Coordinator, Sussex Academy Charter School
- Grace Scott, Student, Sussex Academy Charter School
- Theresa Desmond, Social Studies Teacher, Sussex Academy Charter School
- McKinsey Zepp, Student, Sussex Academy Charter School
- Ellyes Baghoulo, Student, Sussex Academy Charter School
- Reagan Allen, Student, Sussex Academy Charter School
- Jack Faust, Student, Sussex Academy Charter School
- Jen Scott, Vice President, Board of Directors, Sussex Academy Charter School
- Joe Schell, Board Member, Sussex Academy Charter School
- Susan Mitchell, President, Board of Directors, Sussex Academy

Discussion

Section 1: Overview

David Blowman pointed out that Sussex Academy was applying for a ten year charter and requested that the Charter School Office define the parameters for this type of application for this year.

Denise Stouffer shared to be eligible for a 10-year charter, the school must be entering at least its fourth renewal term and have earned overall ratings of Meets or Exceeds every year in all performance frameworks.

Dr. Oliphant opened the introduction of the school by having several students present a power point of the school's performance and programming. Grace Scott, McKinsey Zepp, Ellyes Baghoulo, Reagan Allen, and Jack Faust presented the changes in the school over the last five years and discussed school demographics, the improvements in athletics, a new aquatic center, cross-curricular units, performing arts, as well as community involvement including service. The students presented a video that was written, and produced by students in their school.

Dr. Oliphant shared her recollection of the prior renewal process. She noted that five years ago the school only had a plan for a program, whereas now, the school is able to share how these goals were accomplished. Dr. Oliphant noted that while the school has increased the diversity of their school population, they continue to explore methods to attract diverse students. She reviewed the Sussex Academy academic data noting that the school has consistently outperformed the state by as much as 30% percent. Dr. Oliphant reviewed SAT, graduation, and International Baccalaureate data including students that earned their IB Diplomas.

Dr. Oliphant explained that the reason for the school's success has to do with the school's strong emphasis on literacy. She highlighted that all schools are required to take a writing course, independent of other subject areas as well as requiring writing to be taught across the curricula. Dr. Oliphant shared that approximately 20% of middle school students are required to take two math classes per semester. She also highlighted the school's full-inclusion model, the special education program, and screening processes for EL students. Dr. Oliphant shared that the IB learner profile is a part of the school's renewal application and provided information about how this tool is able to assist students to meet standards.

Dr. Oliphant provided information about the school's shared leadership approach. She described the instructional leadership team as well as the teacher led PLC teams that drive the instructional decisions that have led to the school's success. Dr. Oliphant shared that the school has strong data-driven instructional practices. She explained that the school will continue to use this system to drive instruction to make

enhancements to math instruction. She also explained that the school is in the process of implementing a grant for training in the MYP Program that focuses on IB programs at the grades 6 - 10. Dr. Oliphant emphasized the number of talented teachers employed by the school and acknowledged that it was through this talent that the school has been so successful.

Mr. Blowman asked the school to describe their recruitment efforts highlighting strategies the school was taking to attract diverse students.

Ms. Mitchell discussed how the school was providing recruitment materials in Spanish and English to remove barriers from students applying. She also shared that their Board has taken steps to ensure that the Board members are diverse, as well. It is the hope of the Board that their diversity will assist them in enhancing their outreach programs.

Mr. Blowman asked if the school has received any feedback from their diverse students and families about how they can enhance their enrollment outreach or if they are aware as to why more diverse students do not apply to the school.

Ms. Mitchell shared that the new recruitment materials address some of the key questions that diverse families have shared. Ms. Scott stated that the Board has increased its enrollment strategies to ensure families know where the school is located. Ms. Scott mentioned that some students have shared that Sussex Academy has a reputation of being academically rigorous. She went on to say that many students, no matter their background, have shared that they were worried about the rigor of the program. She also shared that the school has been attending cultural events to share information about the school and supports the school has available to assist all learners. The school's connection with the local boys and girls club has allowed the school to promote their program as well as the school supports. It was noted by Mr. Schell that not having a football team has prevented some students from coming to the school. Dr. Oliphant shared that the school's connections with the community have allowed them to form relationships with the greater Sussex County.

Section 2: Academic Framework

Mr. Blowman shared that the school has consistently received five stars across all academic areas of the DSSF.

Tracy Neugebauer mentioned that the growth scores of the students with disabilities was impressive. She also mentioned that the inclusion model was impressive. She recommended that the school continue to focus on this model and accommodations as they continue to grow.

Dr. Oliphant shared that they will continue to grow and support the inclusion model and have

added paraprofessionals to classrooms to support student's individual needs.

Mr. Blowman asked when the school planned to implement the MYP Program.

Dr. Oliphant shared that the school is still evaluating the MYP. The school is hopeful that the Board will be able to make a decision in the spring. The school is currently sending teachers to training to gain more information.

Section 3: Organizational Framework

Mr. Blowman pointed out that Sussex Academy has met overall standards in the Organizational Performance Framework for the last four years. He shared that there was one area where the school has an approaching standard as a part of one measure.

The school clarified that this one approaching standard was due to one member of the board that had missed the financial training deadline but has since been trained.

Mr. Blowman asked the school to describe the school and board's approach to leadership of the school.

Allen Stafford stated that the school has a shared leadership model that places the teachers at the center of the instructional decision making process. The school utilizes an on-going data driven continuous improvement model in all aspects of the school.

Ms. Mitchell shared that the school continually recruits new members with diverse backgrounds culturally as well as within each individual's areas expertise. She shared that the school board members include a lawyer, a doctor, business people, and other experts of a variety of fields. She noted the diverse ethnic backgrounds of the Board. She shared how the Board stays within compliance by Open Meeting Law and utilizes subcommittees to accomplish projects and expand the capacity of the Board. Ms. Mitchell shared that the Board is highly active in the school. The Board participates in training both locally and also through attendance at national conferences. The Board also includes training and literature as part of their board meetings. The Sussex Academy Board of Directors evaluates themselves on their Performance Framework Reports. The Board believes that the performance framework reports and their strategic planning is a demonstration of their success.

Tracy Neugebauer posed the question about the number of students with disabilities attending the school. She stated that she sees the high performance of students with disabilities as information that could be shared to encourage students with disabilities to apply.

Dr. Oliphant shared that Sussex Academy continues to promote that all students can succeed at the school. Ms. Scott pointed out that the lottery is a blind draw.

Ms. Stouffer asked the school to describe its transition plan for school leadership as well as for

the board members.

Ms. Mitchell shared that the Board's Executive Committee has been planning for the succession of Dr. Oliphant for over a year. The school brought Ms. Owens in to support the administrative team through this transition. In addition the Board voted to hire a national consultant to find a new director.

Ms. Scott noted that the school has been diligent in building systems to support the future of the school.

Ms. Scott described the succession planning of the board for a three year term with one year built in for transitions including term limits of six years.

Ms. Johnson asked how the school was utilizing pathways to promote college and career readiness for their students.

Dr. Oliphant shared that the school has two pathways. Mr. Stafford shared that Sussex Academy provides course work in STEM, Communications and Computer Pathways, AP Courses, Project Lead the Way; and provided information about the general course work that has lead to their students being college ready.

Deb Hansen provided accolades on several areas of the curricula. Science and Social Studies curricula met every standard. The Performing Arts curricula was also aligned with the artistic standards. She asked about a few of the ELA Units that did not contain a state standard. She also asked the school to describe the math units that did not have a standard.

Dr. Oliphant explained that there are some units that are written at a collegiate level and therefore were above standard.

Section 4: Financial Framework

Mr. Blowman reviewed the school's financial performance by sharing the school has consistently met all standards and then stated that he is aware that the one measure where the school was approaching standard was due to roll out of the enrollment.

There were no specific questions on finances.

Section 5: Five-Year Planning

Mr. Schell presented information about the foundation's plans to continue the expansion of the school by making improvements to athletic fields and the buildings, as needed. Mr. Shell highlighted that the school has demonstrated that it has been able to accomplish their goals and they wish to maintain and enhance those goals over the next ten years. He shared that Sussex Academy is preparing students for college.

The school leadership explained that the renewal application contains the school's plans for enhancing the programs through programs such as MYP that clarify and refine their mission for every student to go to college.

Conclusion

No other documents were requested by the committee.

Next Steps:

- The CSAC will provide the school with an Initial Report no later than October 30, 2017.
- 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 14, 2017.
- The final meeting of the CSAC will be held on November 28, 2017; 2nd Floor, Cabinet Room, Townsend Building, Dover.
- A second public hearing will be held on December 5; J.W. Collette Building, Conference Rooms A&B, 35 Commerce Way, Dover.
- The public comment period ends on December 8, 2017.
- The Secretary of Education will announce her decision at the December 21, 2017 State Board of Education meeting.