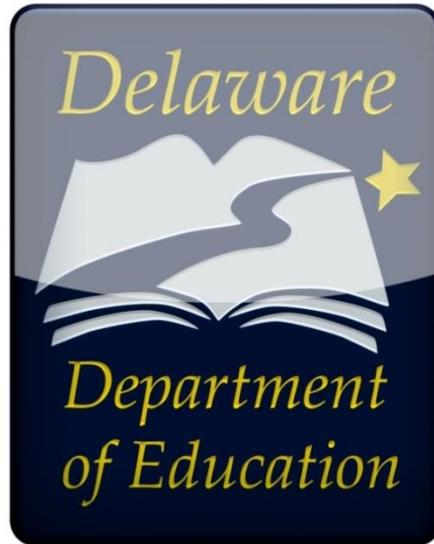


CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Sussex Montessori School

Application to Open a Charter School FINAL REPORT

CSAC Final Meeting: March 26, 2018
CSAC Final Report Published: March 29, 2018

Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee (“CSAC” or “Committee”) met with representatives from Sussex Montessori School (“SMS”) on March 26, 2018 for the CSAC Final Meeting to address the approval criteria set forth in 14 Del. Code § 512.

The following were in attendance at the Final Meeting of the Charter School Accountability Committee (CSAC) on March 26, 2018:

Voting Committee Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee

- Karen Field Rogers, Chairperson of the Charter School Accountability Committee, Deputy Secretary, DDOE
- Deb Hansen, Education Associate, Academic Supports, DDOE
- Tracy Neugebauer, Education Associate, Exceptional Children Resources, DDOE
- Charles Taylor, Head of School, Providence Creek Academy
- Chandra Pitts, CEO, One Village Alliance, Community Member
- Brian Moore, Education Associate, School Climate and Discipline, DDOE
- Maria Stecker, Education Associate, Educator Evaluation, Educator Effectiveness & Talent Management Workgroup, DDOE

Non-voting Committee Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee

- Donna Johnson, Executive Director, Delaware State Board of Education

Staff to the Committee

- Catherine T. Hickey, Deputy Attorney General, Counsel to the Committee
- Denise Stouffer, Lead Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Financial Reform and Resource Management
- John Carwell, Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Wafa Hozien, Education Specialist, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Sheila K. Lawrence, Administrative Secretary, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Jen Roussell, Administrative Secretary, Operations Support, DDOE

Representatives of Sussex Montessori School

- Linda Zankowsky, Ed.D., Board President
- Sean Steward, Board Member
- Jessica Crampton-Bradley, Board Member
- Christine Carrino Gorowara, Board Member
- Trish Hermance, Board Member (via teleconference)
- Brett Taylor, Consultant

Discussion

Karen Field Rogers, Deputy Secretary, Delaware Dept. of Education, and Chair of the Committee asked the Committee to approve the minutes for Sussex Montessori School's initial meeting held on January 24, 2018. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes as presented with no changes.

Ms. Field Rogers stated the purpose of the meeting which was for the CSAC to continue its review of the New Charter School Application, probe any areas of concern through a discussion with the applicant, and to issue its recommendation on the application. She noted that at its initial meeting, the CSAC identified areas of concern that required a response from the school. Those areas were listed and discussed in the CSAC's initial report. Additional items requested from the applicant were also listed in the initial report. Ms. Field Rogers asked the CSAC members if there were any questions or concerns regarding the application or the applicant's response to the initial report that required further discussion.

Section 1.3 – Education Plan

Curriculum and Instructional Design

Ms. Hansen thanked the applicant for addressing the curriculum concerns and questions outlined in the CSAC initial report. She stated that the applicant worked with the Education Associate for Science, Tonyea Mead. Ms. Hansen also stated that she worked with the applicant to revise the visual and performing arts curriculum. She noted that the science, visual and performing arts, and health curricula are approved.

Ms. Johnson noted that SMS' proposed K-6 grade configuration is inconsistent with the grade configurations of surrounding schools and asked if it would be better to start with grades K-5 and wait to explore expansion to grades 6-8 if there is sufficient demand. Dr. Zankowsky shared that the research shows that 12 year olds thrive in elementary settings because they have an opportunity to lead in an elementary setting versus middle school settings. She added that the board has decided to focus on grades K-6 and explore expansion to grades 7-8 after the school is established, similar to First State Montessori Academy.

Special Populations and At-Risk Students

Ms. Neugebauer referenced pages 4-5 of the applicant's response to the CSAC initial report regarding 12-month services. She stated that the applicant's response did not demonstrate a full understanding of the requirements. She explained that the 12-month program is an entitlement program that is based on five classifications, not a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals and progress. Ms. Neugebauer also noted that extended school year (ESY) services are usually provided during the summer but it is not considered summer school and it is not an entitlement program. She noted that the applicant's response only referenced federal ESY, not State ESY. Ms. Neugebauer explained that State ESY is reading-

based. She explained that the applicant should consider 12-month services, federal ESY and State ESY services for every student, separate from the IEP process.

Ms. Neugebauer referenced page 8 of the applicant's response to the CSAC initial report regarding providing a continuum of services for students. She said the school may enroll students who span the continuum of education services: students who require an A-setting (in the general education classroom 100%), B-setting (in the general education classroom 40-79%) or C-setting (in the general education classroom less than 40%). She stated that the applicant's response equated these settings to needs-based funding but they are separate and distinct from each other. She explained that while more students with complex needs are placed in B- or C-settings, some students with complex needs are placed in A-settings. Ms. Neugebauer also stated that teacher-student ratio is only one factor in considering needs-based funding. Mr. C. Taylor asked the applicant to describe how B- and C-setting accommodations factor into their facilities search. Dr. Zankowsky said that the board has been mindful of these considerations in their facilities search. Ms. Neugebauer stated that B- and C-settings must be provided separately from the general education classroom.

Ms. Neugebauer referenced the proposed budget which reflects an increase from one to two special education teachers. She also noted that the budget also includes the following positions: speech therapist, occupational therapist, school psychologist and educational diagnostician but the budget only allocates \$51,000 which is inadequate to fund these positions, based on the 31-39 students with disabilities the school projects to serve. Ms. Neugebauer referenced First State Montessori School, which currently serves 61 students with disabilities and has one full-time educational diagnostician and a part-time school psychologist who regularly works two days a week, and works more as needed. She said that the Sussex Montessori School should have an educational diagnostician for at least 18 hours per week and a school psychologist that works one or more days based upon the projected number of students with disabilities. She recommended that SMS revise its budget accordingly and plan to have the educational diagnostician and school psychologist hired when the school opens to oversee the myriad processes for students with disabilities. Mr. C. Taylor stated that the budget must be flexible because the actual numbers of students with disabilities might exceed or be less than the enrollment projections.

Section 1.5 – Staffing

Ms. Stecker referenced the applicant's plan for teachers to receive Montessori training through the University of Delaware which would require each teacher to pay \$10,000 over time. She noted that First State Montessori Academy uses this model with their assistant teachers who aspire to be teachers. She stated that salaries for charter school teachers are typically lower than district teacher salaries and commented that \$10,000 is very expensive for new teachers. She asked SMS to describe the return on investment (i.e. transferability, additional compensation, etc.) for the training costs and how they would not pose a disincentive to teacher recruitment. Ms. Stecker asked if teachers leave SMS whether there are surrounding schools that would recognize the Montessori training certification. Dr. Zankowsky shared that

SMS has sought a start-up grant from the Longwood Foundation to supplement the training costs. She added that SMS will also explore the non-State Education Agency (SEA) grant funding from the U.S. Department of Education. Dr. Zankowsky also shared that whether the training is provided by the University of Delaware or the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector, the certification would be transferable to other Montessori programs. She added that traditional school principals also see value in teachers with Montessori training.

Dr. Zankowsky acknowledged that there is a pay discrepancy between charter school and district teacher salaries. She added that independent Montessori schools typically pay 75% of district teacher salaries but she successfully recruited committed teachers who were attracted to a different environment and paid the training costs despite the salary discrepancies. She shared that the greater challenge is finding a local Montessori training provider and hopes that the University of Delaware and Montessori Works can develop some local training opportunities. She added that First State Montessori Academy is also looking for local training opportunities. Dr. Zankowsky stated that some of the districts who are interested in Montessori education might also be interested in local training opportunities.

Ms. Field Rogers asked the applicant if the Montessori training at the University of Delaware would only be offered in Newark and if teachers would be expected to travel from Sussex County. Dr. Zankowsky shared that the current plan is for the training to be offered in Newark but the location might be flexible. She distributed a handout (“University of Delaware Montessori Teacher Residency”). She shared that the initial plan was to launch the program with a cohort of 10 teachers in summer 2018 but it may be delayed to the following summer based on enrollment. She added that SMS would partner with a charter school in Baltimore, MD and include their teachers. Dr. Zankowsky explained that SMS teachers would be required to attend the training for 5 weeks during the summer and SMS would be assigned a school-based coach to support teachers.

Ms. Stouffer asked SMS if they had explored other Montessori training providers since several SMS board members are affiliated with the University of Delaware, which might pose a conflict of interest. Dr. Zankowsky stated that she does not believe there is a conflict of interest with the University of Delaware. She explained that she views the partnership as an opportunity that enhances the credibility of the program. Dr. Zankowsky stated that it is not a lucrative opportunity for the organizations involved.

Ms. Stecker asked SMS if the Montessori 5-week summer training schedule is full- or part-time. Dr. Zankowsky stated that the training is full-time over the 5 weeks. Ms. Stecker commented that the potential for teacher burnout is a reality based on the rigorous training requirements and no additional compensation. She shared that she was encouraged that SMS is seeking grant funding to offset teacher-training costs but she expressed concern that without grant funding it could be a challenge for teacher recruitment.

Ms. Stecker asked SMS to describe its contingency plan if teachers are hired later than expected and are not Montessori trained, since many charter schools and districts hire into September.

Additionally, she asked if SMS had considered a tiered compensation structure that provides higher pay for Montessori trained teachers versus non-Montessori trained teachers. Dr. Zankowsky stated that the Board had not considered a tiered compensation structure but would consider it based on the CSAC's feedback. Regarding teacher recruitment, Dr. Zankowsky shared that there is an opportunity to attract Montessori certified teachers from other states. She added that any teachers who are hired after the 5-week training would receive coaching and wraparound support available at the school.

Ms. Stecker asked SMS to describe its plan for school leader evaluation and how the Montessori rubric described in the charter application would be used in relationship to the State's Delaware Performance Appraisal System II (DPAS II) requirements. Dr. Zankowsky shared that the Montessori school leader evaluation rubric has not been reviewed against the DPAS II evaluation requirements but she would be interested in working with DDOE to determine the best approach. Ms. Stecker noted that SMS could apply for a waiver to use an alternative school leader evaluation system.

Ms. Stecker asked SMS to explain why the professional development cost projections on the 80% budget (line 28, Other Funds) are substantially more than the 100% budget. Mr. B. Taylor explained that the school will have less teachers based on the 80% enrollment scenario and the salary savings are reallocated to professional development. Ms. Stecker asked SMS if the budget is sufficient to cover other types of professional development beyond Montessori training. Dr. Zankowsky shared that SMS' professional development model includes three focus areas: Montessori education, Responsive Classroom, and Literacy. Ms. Stecker commented that the professional development budget should be flexible enough to address any unidentified teacher needs that may come up. Mr. B. Taylor shared that the professional development budget is flexible.

Ms. Stecker asked if SMS assistant teachers will be required to obtain the State's paraeducator permit. Dr. Zankowsky stated that the school would prefer to hire assistant teachers with the State's paraeducator permit. Dr. Gorowara shared that any references to uncertified staff in the charter application pertains to Montessori certification. Ms. Stecker recommended that the professional development calendar include some flexibility to cover any unforeseen topics that might come up during the school year. Ms. Johnson recommended that SMS review the different tiers of the paraeducator permit outlined in 14 DE Admin. Code 1517.

Section 1.6 – Governance and Management

Ms. Stouffer asked SMS to describe how many days per week the SMS board would spend in Sussex County during the startup year. Dr. Zankowsky explained that the first priority would be to hire the head of school who will establish a presence in Sussex County. She added that the specific number of days per week have not yet been determined but the board will be involved with marketing, building the board, and the facility acquisition process. Dr. Zankowsky also noted that if the charter is approved, SMS would receive startup funding from the Longwood Foundation to fund staff in the startup year.

Ms. Hickey stated that the school's plan to have dual authorization and a cap for discretionary expenditures is not reflected in the board's bylaws and asked if the bylaws will be updated to include these provisions. Mr. B. Taylor stated that the bylaws will be revised to include these provisions. Dr. Zankowsky shared that the board has had preliminary discussions with Neely and Spence Financial Consulting Services, LLC regarding the financial supports they provide to charter schools as well any recommendations for checks and balances. Ms. Hickey recommended that the checks and balances be established before SMS spend funds from any source.

Mr. Moore noted that the submitted fiscal procedures appeared to have a single approver with no cap on expenditures and asked the applicant whether they had considered a dual approval process. Mr. B. Taylor stated that the school's standard operating procedure would be to have dual signers to include the head of school (or his/her designee) and a board member, with a cap determined by the board. Mr. Moore also noted that he did not see any reference to the provisions the General Assembly approved last year in 14 DE. Admin Code § 4162 relative to informing students about personal body safety, child abuse and child safety.

Ms. Hickey noted that the sample insurance policy provided as part of SMS' response to the CSAC Initial Report was comprehensive and covers key areas that can be problematic for charter schools, particularly in the area of special education and the provision of free and appropriate public education. She cautioned SMS to review the declarations page of the policy to ensure that it covers the key areas that could be problematic for charter schools.

Section 1.7 – Parent and Community Involvement

Ms. Pitts noted that SMS's response to the CSAC Initial Report outlined recruitment plans to ensure student racial and socioeconomic diversity. She asked the school to describe its plans to ensure staff diversity that is reflective of the anticipated student body. Dr. Zankowsky stated that First State Montessori Academy has developed some successful staff recruitment practices that SMS will work to replicate. She added that SMS has begun to explore a program that identifies teachers in places like Puerto Rico who are interested in teaching opportunities in the U.S. She shared that SMS is committed to creating a very diverse school community of students and teachers. Ms. Pitts commented that SMS should also ensure diversity at the leadership and governance levels as well. Dr. Zankowsky stated that as the SMS board transitions from a founding board to a governing board, candidates will be identified who are reflective of the student body.

Ms. Pitts noted that SMS' response to the CSAC Initial Report addressed the CSAC's concerns around transportation challenges for underserved populations but she did not see any information regarding grassroots marketing strategies targeting underserved populations. She commented that generic approaches like billboards and electronic communications may not reach underserved populations. Mr. Steward shared that while SMS has established connections with the Creole and Hispanic community, they realized that they were only

touching first generation immigrants and additional work was needed to reach second and third generation families who could help SMS reach more first generation immigrants. Ms. Field Rogers asked if the two local board member candidates listed on the handout (“CSAC Sussex Community Engagement follow up-3-7-18”) would add diversity to the SMS board. Dr. Zankowsky stated that the candidates would not add diversity to the board so their outreach will be broadened to address diversity. She added that SMS will work with Leadership Delaware to identify additional candidates. Ms. Field Rogers noted that funding can vary based on the school’s location and where students are drawn from. She explained that if the school is located in Western Sussex, the school would attract less students from Cape Henlopen School District and earn less revenue.

Ms. Johnson asked SMS to describe any supports that would be provided to families as they explore school choice options for grades 7 and 8. Dr. Zankowsky stated that a guidance counselor would be on board by that time to assist families with this transition. She added that the head of school and teachers will also be working together to identify school choice options and working to build partnerships with prospective schools. Ms. Johnson asked SMS to describe how they would work with choice schools. Dr. Zankowsky stated that SMS would develop partnerships with Sussex Academy and Sussex County Technical School.

Section 1.8 – Start-Up and Operations/Section 1.9 – Facilities

Mr. C. Taylor asked the applicant if any of the identified prospective sites would provide better transportation options for families. Dr. Zankowsky provided a handout (“Sussex Montessori School Facility Updates – 3/6/18”) which listed several prospective sites identified since the CSAC initial meeting. She added that a total of 24 different properties have been identified which includes sites in the Georgetown corridor. She also stated that the search has stretched further into western Sussex County since the initial search, with viable options identified in Seaford, Bridgeville and Laurel based on the CSAC’s feedback at the initial meeting regarding family accessibility. Mr. B. Taylor stated that the search has also included properties in the Milford area, which might increase bus times for some families. He noted that SMS would review the bus hub system that Sussex Academy has established based on their location in Georgetown. Mr. B. Taylor stated that their transportation analysis, which was calculated at three times more than the average driving time for a passenger vehicle travel, was roughly an hour in duration with hubs placed in strategic locations.

Mr. C. Taylor asked if any of the prospective locations listed on the handout are more viable and/or readily available. Mr. Chura stated that the prospective properties include both raw land and properties with existing structures. He added that one of properties with an existing structure seems to be ready for use and meets the transportation requirements if the school is approved to open in fall 2019. He added that based on the facilities options explored to date, the school would be able to launch with a readapted structure or with a combination of a readapted structure and trailers.

Conclusion

Ms. Field Rogers asked voting members of the CSAC whether there was any additional information that it required to inform its decision-making. She stated that in order for the CSAC to issue a recommendation for approval, all approval criteria outlined in 14 Delaware Code § 512 must be met. She requested a motion. The motion was made and seconded to recommend Sussex Montessori School's application for a new charter be approved and this motion was carried unanimously with the following conditions:

Should the charter not:

1. Meet 80% enrollment by May 1, 2019, including all documentation required to be properly accounted for in the Unit Count;
2. Acquire a facility in accordance with 14 Del. Code § 511 (n);
3. Meet other deadlines specifically defined in statute or regulation,

the charter will be revoked.

Should the charter fail to meet other pre-opening conditions, not defined above, as outlined by the Charter School Office, the charter may be placed on formal review.

Next Steps:

- On or before March 30, 2018, the CSAC will issue a Final Report, which will include its recommendation on the Charter School New Application.
- A second and Final Public Hearing will be held on April 4, 2018 at 5:00 p.m., in the 2nd floor Cabinet Room of the Townsend Building in Dover.
- The public comment period ends on April 6, 2018.
- The Secretary of Education will announce her decision at the April 19, 2018 State Board of Education meeting.