

**March 15, 2022**

## **RESPONSE TO INITIAL CSAC REPORT dated March 1, 2022**

La Academia would like to thank the voting members of the Charter School Accountability Committee, the non-voting Ex-Officio members, and Staff to the Committee for their feedback, recommendations, and suggestions regarding the Major Modification application submitted on behalf of our school. Our team remains committed to further engaging the support of DDOE to assist with our ability to advance the academic growth and achievement for each of our students as we continue our work to close the wide achievement gaps among underserved student populations.

To that end, we remain committed to supporting our students as they continue to show improvement in state assessments and would like to respond further to the comment offered by April McCrea.

### **April McCrae's Comment, P. 11:**

**Academia students are performing lower than students in the surrounding area, including comparisons to matched sets of students. How does the school plan to address that, especially when moving to the middle school level?**

### **La Academia's Response:**

In response to this comment, we want to first note that La Academia is a young and emerging / developing school.

- It is challenging to compare an individual school with aggregated data from a school district/the entire State of Delaware. The demographics are significantly different.
- We recognize that the school districts are well established, and over a longer period of time have been able to establish and distribute resources to improve student achievement.
- Unlike La Academia's student population, students who are English language learners in school districts are typically a minority population that is surrounded by a majority population of native English speakers. In these settings, children from lower income families have the benefit of learning next to native English speakers who are more well-resourced peers.
- We also note that despite these advantages, school districts (e.g., Red Clay School District), along with many schools in the State of Delaware, are also struggling with lower percentages of students in subgroups (mirroring La Academia) meeting standards.
- A more appropriate comparison for La Academia would be with other individual schools (within a school district) whose student demographics are similar to La Academia's (e.g., other schools with a 100% free and reduced lunch population/Title 1 schools).

Our school's history also informs our experience with these assessments, so we want to highlight a few events:

- While we had a rocky start and several early changes in leadership since SY2015 when the school opened, La Academia has stabilized with the leadership of our current Executive Director. We have made strides, are getting back on track (despite the pandemic), and are focused on our priorities- including SBAC.
- Also, it is important to note La Academia has had limited years of experience with taking SBAC.

- In the school's eight years of existence, La Academia has had only 2 years of comparative data against which to measure its performance against other schools in the State of Delaware.
- SY2015 N/A - school only served K-1
- SY2016 N/A - school only served K-2
- SY2017 N/A - 3rd Grade Only (Baseline Year)
- SY2018 3rd Grade (Baseline Year) and 4<sup>th</sup> grade only
- SY2019 3rd Grade (Baseline Year), 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades
- SY2020 N/A Accountability waiver due to COVID
- SY2021 N/A Results inconclusive due to COVID (with a 57% participation rate (most of whom were Sp. Ed and ELs))
- In 2019-2020 SY before COVID-19, usage of the IAB and FIAB database to prepare students for SBAC yielded highly favorable results. In 5<sup>th</sup> grade, general education students, including students with learning and language needs, we're seeing nearly universal growth after using the IAB as a training tool for the Smarter Balanced assessment.
  - Pre- and post-assessment results reflected this growth in 5th grade students. This data was collected with an eye on ensuring that students with learning and language needs were being instructed in a manner that enabled them to access the curriculum, as well as promote their achievement on state assessments.
  - In 2018-2019, 5<sup>th</sup> grade students met state standard expectations at nearly 50% of the student population in the English assessment (we believe the exact percentage was 48.7%; state standard is 55%+). Some might say this was a one-off reflection of that particular group of students, but it could be countered that those students were a 'test run' with using the IAB practice tests. The practice of using the IABs was standardized the following year in 2019-2020. Student achievement had increased nearly 18% in that student group from their 4<sup>th</sup> grade to 5<sup>th</sup> grade and that increase can and should be attributed to the usage of the IABs as an instructional tool. If viewing as a trend, we would say that the usage of the IABs was indicating a positive trend in student achievement in the upper grade levels as measured by state assessments.

#### Then COVID...

- Since Covid hit (in March 2020), we don't really have a good baseline for our kids as we have very few years of kids taking SBAC (See above).
- Since the time our current Executive Director started (during the SY2018-19), our school exhibits consistent indicators of positive changes, including curricular changes, teacher professional development, teacher retention, wellness initiatives, student growth etc.
- Lastly, language development (and math proficiency) is long-term, and we do not have sufficient longitudinal data to show how La Academia children are progressing toward our goals for them. Additionally, the data we do have is significantly affected by the learning loss caused by the disruptions of the COVID pandemic.

*In terms of the research, most experts agree that it takes children with strong language and literacy skills in their first language (which does characterize most of our population) 7-10 years or longer (especially for children with disabilities) to achieve proficiency in a second language. The time needed to develop proficiency in different aspects of language varies, with many students requiring longer to acquire proficiency.*

- We see the SBAC assessment data as an issue of equity for our students for this reason. One cannot assess students' content knowledge if the students do not understand the language in which the test is administered. Our students do not understand the test and the test questions, making it impossible to truly assess our student's content knowledge. So at La Academia, our goal is to try to level the playing field in order to address this inequitable experience for our students.

### **La Academia's Plan Now and Moving Forward into Middle School**

La Academia recognizes achievement on state standardized tests like SBAC is the result of a concerted effort by students, faculty, parents and administrators. Our plan to collectively address the gaps include, but are not limited to:

- Continue teacher training on interpreting interim scores to identify areas of strength and growth for students, and inform instruction (reteach, provide more practice or skill-based instruction)
- Engage students in practice tests throughout the year to help students understand the kind of thinking the questions are asking for, engage/model strategies that develop this thinking and give them opportunity to practice the technology skills they need to be successful on the test
- Facilitate family workshops to stress the importance of the test, inform parents/guardians about what the test measures, how it reflects student achievement on grade-level material, and how families can best support their students.
- Emphasize teacher/student conferences to discuss areas of strength/growth on interim assessments. Ownership is a big part of student success and one of our values. During conferences teachers and students discuss the scores and set realistic goal(s) to improve skills and performance that they omit to achieving through actionable steps.
- Continue to teach teachers how to develop performance tasks and how to scaffold these tasks with their students.
- Continue to build social emotional strategies to helps students lower levels of testing anxiety.
- Use the data from interim assessments to help teachers develop cognitive labs in which the instructional lessons will focus on how to approach and how to solve problems. This will also give students the opportunity to work in small groups and strengthen their collaboration, listening, and communication skills to reinforce material as well as maximize opportunities to explain how and why they are learning.
- Support our Deans of Curriculum & Instruction to regularly meet with Education Associates from the Department of Education to ensure that the assessments and data are aligned to the goals and an assessment to the other.
- Schedule professional learning opportunities for teachers and administrators specific to assessment and instruction in different content areas.