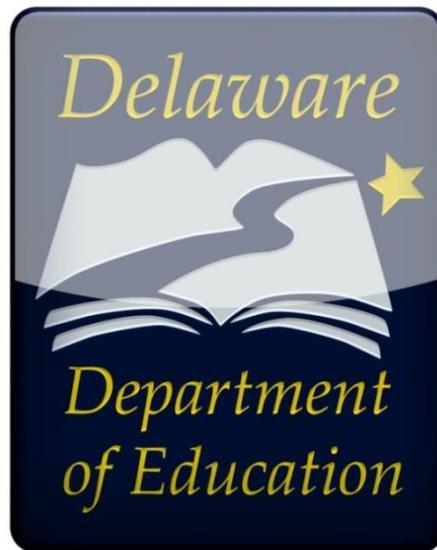


CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Academy of Dover

MAJOR MODIFICATION APPLICATION FINAL REPORT

CSAC Final Meeting: February 27, 2020
CSAC Final Report Published: March 5, 2020

On December 31, 2019, Academy of Dover (AOD) submitted an application for a major modification of its charter.

The following were in attendance at the Final Meeting of the CSAC on February 27, 2020:

Voting Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee

- Chuck Longfellow, Ed.D., Chairperson of the Charter School Accountability Committee, and Associate Secretary, Operations Support, DDOE
- Susan Veenema, Education Associate, Exceptional Children Resources, DDOE
- Brian Moore, Education Associate, School Climate and Discipline, DDOE
- Gregory Fulkerson, Ph.D., Education Associate, Language Acquisition, DDOE
- April McCrae, Ed.D., Education Associate, CTE / STEM initiatives, DDOE
- James Pennewell, Education Associate, Capital Project Management, DDOE
- Cathy Wolfe, Education Associate, Federal Funds / LEA Indirect Costs, DDOE
- Charles Taylor, Community Member, Retired Head of School

Ex-Officio Members (Non-voting)

- Audrey Noble, Ph.D., Vice President, Delaware State Board of Education

Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)

- Darryl Parson, Deputy Attorney General, Counsel to the Committee, Delaware Department of Justice
- Leroy Travers, Lead Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- John Carwell, Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Finance Office, DDOE
- Jennifer Roussell, Administrative Secretary, Operations Support, DDOE

Representatives of Academy of Dover

- Candace Holmes, Board Member
- Michele Marinucci, Ed.D., Head of School
- Debbie Postles, Curriculum and Instruction
- Marianne Longo, Office Manager

Dr. Longfellow stated this was the Final Meeting of the CSAC relative to the Major Modification Application submitted by the Academy of Dover. AOD applied for a modification to its charter to expand vertically by adding grade 6. This would include increasing their enrollment by 30 students, giving them an authorized enrollment of 330 students.

The CSAC initial report was issued on January 31, 2020 and the school submitted a timely response. An initial public hearing was also held on February 10, 2020. Dr. Longfellow stated that the purpose of the meeting was for the CSAC to discuss the Major Modification Application with the applicant, ask questions, and to probe any areas of concern based on the CSAC's initial review of the written application and feedback from the initial report, and to issue its recommendation on the application. Dr. Longfellow announced that the Department would issue the final report no later than March 5, 2020.

Discussion

Dr. Longfellow stated that, in its initial report, the CSAC requested the following information from the school:

1. Documentation explaining exactly how many applicants the Academy of Dover has received (to date) for the 2020-21 year for all grade levels including the proposed 6th grade.
2. An outline of a contingency plan if enrollment projections are not reached.
3. A description of how the recruitment plan has or will be improved to meet these enrollment projections.
4. Provide a detailed accounting of what changes were made in your budget to make the change in the contingency reserve.
5. Provide a Net Position statement for June 2019 that reflects Total Net Deficit and explanation that includes current status of Mosaica settlement.
6. Provide a description of efforts to ensure that your student body reflects the demographics of the community that you serve.
7. Provide a description of activities that you have utilized to share successful practices with other Delaware schools.
8. A description of what you might attribute the significant decline in student proficiency in ELA and Math from 2018 - 2019?
9. A plan for professional learning to support the implementation of new curricular resources.
10. Evidence of a written Social Studies curriculum aligned to the Delaware Social Studies Standards for grade 6.
11. A Minor Modification application to increase enrollment.

Dr. Longfellow asked each member if they had any questions or comments regarding the items submitted by the school in their response.

Dr. McCrae stated that the Capital School District plans to modify its schools' grade configurations from buildings that serve grades 5/6 and grades 7/8 to buildings that serve grades K-5 and grades 6-8. She also stated that AOD's proposed expansion from grades K-5 to grades K-6 was selected, in part, to align with Capital School District's current school grade configuration. She asked the school to explain what impact, if any, Capital School District's proposed grade configurations might have on AOD. Dr. Marinucci stated that Capital School District's plan will not be implemented for several years. Therefore, she added, if the modification is approved, AOD's grade configuration would remain out of alignment with Capital School District. She added that 75% of parents attended a recent school event and the vast majority indicated that they plan to reenroll their children. Dr. Marinucci also noted that parents have reported that they chose AOD for its small academy environment, small class sizes, village mentality, and the energy they feel at the school. She also mentioned that several parents who reside in the Caesar Rodney School District, which also has a different grade configuration, have children currently enrolled at AOD. Dr. Marinucci stated that parents have also requested that AOD eventually expand to include grades 7 and 8. However, she noted, the current facility does not have the capacity more grades beyond grade six.

Dr. McCrae noted the national research findings AOD cited in its response regarding better sixth graders performance in K-6 schools as opposed to 6-8 schools. She noted that research findings on Delaware's sixth graders showed more negative behaviors in K-6 settings versus 6-8 settings. For example, she added, the research showed that female sixth graders in K-6 settings reported having more suicidal ideation than their peers in grades 6-8 settings. Dr. McCrae asked the school to describe how it would ensure the social-emotional well being of its sixth grade students. Dr. Marinucci stated that she has been in education for 22 years with a focus on special education. The Governor, she added, appointed her as a behavioral health advocate and spokesperson, representing all educators in the State of Delaware. Dr. Marinucci stated that she does this work because of her passion for the behavioral health needs of her students. She also noted that as a special education director for over 12 years at the district level she observed how severe mental health issues have evolved from being mostly concentrated at the secondary grade levels to much lower grade levels including kindergarten. She commented that it's a national epidemic.

Dr. Marinucci stated that her employment at AOD started in August 2019. She noted that AOD is located in Capital School District which has an 85% poverty rate and the gaps associated with poverty are significant. To address these gaps, she added, one of the first steps should took was to hire a school social worker. Dr. Marinucci also emphasized the importance of working with students' families. She added that she is trained as an asset builder and noted that a student leadership program was implemented this year.

Dr. Noble noted that AOD has had a 73% reenrollment rate over the past three years. She asked

the school if they anticipated any negative enrollment consequences based on Capital School District's plans to open new schools. Dr. Marinucci stated that she anticipates the reenrollment rate to increase based on parental feedback. Dr. Noble asked the school to explain why 25% of students do not reenroll annually. Dr. Marinucci distributed a handout to CSAC that showed 76 new choice applications to date compared with 17 new choice applications at this time last year. The school, she added, has employed a variety of recruitment strategies including social media and families have responded. Referencing the handout, Dr. Marinucci noted that 183 parents to date have submitted reenrollment forms. Dr. Noble asked the school to provide its projected reenrollment rate for school year 2020-21. Dr. Marinucci stated that thus far 183 out of 265 students (69%) are projected to reenroll next year. (Note: If the school excludes the 21 rising sixth graders, the retention rate is based on 183 out of 244 students (76%). Based on AOD's projected reenrollment and new students, she added, the total projected enrollment for next year is 325 students or 98% of the school's authorized enrollment (330), if the modification is approved. Dr. Marinucci noted that school year 2020-21 enrollment is on well on-track to meet the April 1 eighty percent (80%) enrollment target.

Ms. Veenema noted the school's decline in academic proficiency in school year 2018-19 and asked the school to describe its data, Multi-Tiered System of Support and other strategies to improve student outcomes. Dr. Marinucci stated that 20 years ago she received training in the Baldrige Excellence Framework, a business model focused on data. She stated that students are taught to review their own data and set their own academic growth goals. Teachers, she added, look at students' strengths and weaknesses. Dr. Marinucci stated that data-driven meetings are held weekly with teachers in professional learning communities (PLCs). Teachers, she added, take the data from the PLCs and have student-level discussions. Dr. Marinucci also stated that some teachers facilitate student-led conversations during parent-teacher conferences. This year, she added, the school schedule was modified to eliminate overlapping Response to Intervention (RTI) periods for math and reading. Every class, she added, starts the day with writing. She noted that students have made marked improvement in writing. Dr. Marinucci stated that this year the school adopted new math and English Language Arts curricula and literature books were purchased to help drive the instruction.

Ms. Veenema asked the school to describe its special education supports for students with significant needs in the most inclusive way possible. Dr. Marinucci stated that she and Ms. Postles, who also has experience as a special education director, have worked together for 5 years. She added that they both have experience in meeting the needs of the whole child. Dr. Marinucci stated that AOD has a number of students with significant special needs and supports are in place to meet their social-emotional and physical needs. One student, she added, receives one-on-one support. Dr. Marinucci also noted that they have redirected resources to maximize support students. The school, she added, has hired a special education teacher who is fully dedicated to small group instruction in a pull-out resource room model. She also noted that all teachers have access to students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 plans. Dr. Marinucci added that staff discuss student support needs at weekly PLC meetings. Professional development, she added, has focused on supporting all students and trauma-informed care.

Dr. Fulkerson asked the school to describe the current capacity of school leadership to provide professional development on implementing the new math curriculum and ensure its successful rollout. Dr. Marinucci stated that the school has not yet launched the math curriculum. This year, she added, the school launched the new English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum and noticed gaps in capacity with the implementation. As a result, the school contracted an ELA expert to provide professional development to the staff. Dr. Marinucci also stated that the administration is currently in the process of identifying math expertise to assist with the implementation of the new math curriculum. She also noted that the school currently has ELA and math specialists who serve as resources for their respective disciplines but the school is in the process of identifying professional development opportunities to support them.

Conclusion

The criteria for approving a modification to a charter are set forth in 14 *Del. C.* § 512. The criteria include that the charter school's educational objectives are consistent with the legislative intent of and restrictions set forth in Title 14, Chapter 5 of the Delaware Code; the charter school's educational program has the potential to improve student performance; the plan for the charter school is economically viable; the charter school's financial and administrative operations meet or exceed the same standards, procedures, and requirements as a school district; and the charter school's procedures to assure students', employees', and guests' health and safety are adequate.

Dr. Longfellow asked if there was a motion to recommend approval of AOD's application to modify its charter. The motion was made and seconded to recommend approval without any conditions and was carried unanimously. Dr. Longfellow reminded the school that the CSAC's recommendation was just that: a recommendation to the Secretary of Education on the application to modify its charter.

Next Steps:

- On or before March 5, 2020, the CSAC will issue a Final Report, which will include its recommendation on the Renewal Application.
- A second and Final Public Hearing is scheduled for March 9, 2020 at 5:00 P.M. at the Townsend Building's 2nd Floor Cabinet Room located at 401 Federal Street, Dover, DE 19901.
- The public comment period closes on March 12, 2020.
- The Secretary of Education will announce her decision at the March 19, 2020, State Board of Education meeting.