

Sussex Academy Major Modification Request CSAC Response - February 14, 2020

- 1. A statement clarifying why the decision was made to create a new elementary program as opposed to responding to the already expressed demand of the community.**

The mission of Sussex Academy is to foster academic achievement and social responsibility in a small school environment. The enrollment of our middle and high schools are 377 and 481 students, respectively. The Sussex Academy Board of Directors decided to expand enrollment through the addition of elementary school grade levels and not at the middle or high school levels to stay true to our mission and the school's approved charter. The elementary expansion at a second location will provide elementary-aged students the opportunity to also experience a highly rigorous academic program in a small school setting. At maximum capacity, enrollment will be 240 students, or approximately forty (40) students per grade level.

Additionally, Sussex Academy currently enrolls students from ten (10) different neighboring districts as well as students from private schools and home-schools. These students arrive with varying levels of academic abilities. To better ensure that students enter our middle school with similar academic backgrounds, the Sussex Academy Elementary school will have a strong, academically-rich program consistent with the rigors of our middle and high school grades. Students from Sussex Academy Elementary entering Sussex Academy Middle School would then experience a smoother transition, with fewer academic gaps than we currently see with incoming sixth graders.

- 2. Clarification of procedures that will be utilized to ensure that qualified teachers will be in place in time to offer the proposed elementary school program within the proposed time frame.**

This spring, school leaders will be attending local and regional career fairs to recruit staff not only for expected middle/high school vacancies, but also for the proposed Sussex Academy Elementary School. This is a practice that has not been done in the past by the school. We have identified colleges and universities with proven teacher

preparation programs and have strategically signed up for upcoming job fairs generally attended by students from these institutions. Additionally, word-of-mouth recruiting by current middle and high school teachers has generated interest from many teachers in neighboring districts. The opportunity to become part of a new school and to establish a school's identity does not come along often in a teacher's career. For the first time Sussex Academy is planning for elementary grades, and area elementary teachers interested in becoming part of a successful school are currently reaching out to administrators and staff about joining our team. School leaders have already compiled a list of interested veteran elementary teachers that is longer than the projected staffing needs.

In feedback received in the initial CSAC report, the State Board of Education stated that our time frame *"appears to be at best challenging, but more likely, unrealistic,"* adding that *"The State Board of Education has concerns that opening an elementary school, on a separate site, requiring additional staffing and curriculum, cannot be done well in such a short period of time."* The Board comments cited the process being followed by Sussex Montessori whose *"Founders applied in January 2018 and are opening a school 2 and one-half years later based on a well-established instructional model."* While additional time may be seen as an advantage, finding staff who are trained in the Montessori instructional model, while a well-established model, appears to be difficult for the school. A recent local newspaper advertisement for a recruitment event on February 8, 2020, just six months from their expected opening, would indicate that the school is not fully staffed despite two-and-a-half years of planning. Sussex Academy Elementary School will follow a more traditional instructional model, and therefore, will not need as long of a timeframe. Because of its non-traditional teaching model, the Montessori School has needed additional time to locate, hire, and train staff. It is unfair to compare the two schools' staffing processes when the two schools have vastly different instructional models.

As already stated, Sussex Academy school leaders have already compiled a list of interested, and proven, local veteran elementary teachers that includes more teachers than the projected staffing needs to open the school. New teacher recruitment efforts will yield additional candidates for that list. We are confident that we will be able to staff the school with a well-trained team of teachers. Upon approval of our modification request, we will identify, recruit, hire, and train a

high-quality elementary staff. Our goal would be to make all offers for employment before the end of June.

Additionally, an analysis of current staff schedules and areas of certifications will allow for cross-school teaching assignments. This will allow us to become more fiscally responsible with the use of State and local funds while strengthening our K-12 academic programs through vertical curriculum alignment. Staff working in both buildings will ensure fidelity to our academic programs across all grade levels.

3. A detailed recruitment plan that will illustrate your commitment to serve a wider range of students in your community, specifically in the newly added grades.

Just six years ago eighty-one percent (81%) of the students who attended Sussex Academy were White or Caucasian. This year, we received 455 middle/high school student applications for the 2020-21 school year, of which thirty-six percent (36%) were from non-White applicants. Additionally, during the 2014-2015 school year, 0.04% of the students who attended Sussex academy were Hispanic or Latino. This school year, 14.45% of our student population identifies as Hispanic or Latino.

In an effort to increase the diversity of the student body, the Board of Directors established an Outreach Committee to actively recruit students to complete the application process. The efforts of this committee are evident in the increased diversity that the school has experienced over the past few years. To serve a wider range of students specifically in the newly added grades, the Committee has developed an Outreach Plan to recruit students for the elementary grades.

(See Appendix A - Sussex Academy Elementary Initial Outreach Plan)

4. A description of activities that you have utilized to share successful practices with other Delaware schools

Under new leadership in place since the 2018-2019 school year, Sussex Academy has collaborated within the charter community to share best practices. Several teachers presented at the first annual Delaware Charter School conference in October 2019 to share successful practices that have been implemented at Sussex Academy:



- One teacher presented on the middle school coding program which is unique to Sussex Academy. The program is an introduction to computer science, designed to demystify "code", to show that anybody can learn the basics, and to broaden participation in the field of computer science.
- Teacher leaders and the Head of School presented a session on how Sussex Academy has expanded building leadership capacity through the development of teacher leaders.
- Sussex Academy has a growing Environmental Science Program, and through an already existing relationship with the Jefferson School, Sussex Academy was able to connect Newark Charter School with members of the Jefferson School community to be able to use their outdoor facilities and collaborate on environmental science projects. This partnership will only continue to grow stronger as Sussex Academy expands and enrolls elementary students at the Jefferson School Campus.
- With two new Charter Schools in the midst of opening doors in Sussex County, building leadership and staff have served as an ongoing resource to leadership for Sussex Montessorri and The Bryan Allen Stevenson School. Sussex Academy leaders have helped the new schools in their planning and preparation phases, sharing best practices and connecting them with members of the state-wide charter community.

5. **The application outlines a purchase of the 43-acre Jefferson school but does not describe a plan for explanation for inclusion of teachers and staff or administration of the new facility. Please provide a staffing plan to include the answers to the following questions:**
- a. **Will the existing Jefferson School staff be included in the SA staffing plan?**
 - b. **Will the existing staff be implementing new state curricula, and will they receive appropriate training in all elementary curricular standards and instruction expectations before opening next year?**

Our annual enrollment lottery took place in January, and we are currently confirming the intent-to-return of current students. Upon approval of our modification request, we will begin accepting enrollment applications from elementary students at the end of March. Initial enrollment numbers will help the school to determine our projected student enrollment prior to the State's May 1 Unit Count. These projections will help school leaders determine available funds to meet staffing priorities. Once these are determined, then teacher recruits and applicants will be reviewed and interviewed for available vacancies. Our goal would be to make all offers for employment before the end of June.

The current school leader of the Jefferson School will join the Sussex Academy administrative team as the Dean of Elementary. All other staff members at the Jefferson School interested in working at Sussex Academy Elementary School will be required to submit employment applications and will receive consideration through our hiring process.

All staff hired to work at the SA Elementary School will receive training on the school's adopted curriculum as well as on the schools standard operating procedures. Sussex Academy will become a K-12 school, with all staff onboarded and trained according to the standards by which current staff and new hires are held. A summer orientation will be planned for all new staff. The Dean of Elementary will be provided additional time to focus on team-building for the new elementary school staff to prepare for a smooth opening in the fall of 2020.

6. Clarification as to whether Spanish-speaking English – Language Learners (ELs) will be a special focus for recruitment for the new elementary program

As addressed previously, our Board of Directors Outreach Committee has worked to increase the diversity of our student population. As the percentage of students who identify as Hispanic or Latino has increased, we have also experienced an increase in the number of Spanish-speaking English Language Learners (ELs) who attend Sussex Academy. While our elementary Spanish program will help in allowing enrolled Spanish-speaking EL students to maintain their native language as they develop stronger English Language Arts skills, the purpose of the program is to provide all interested families an alternative to other district elementary World-language Immersion programs. The program will be highlighted as an appealing option for EL support during the recruitment process, but it will not be the lone driving factor behind recruitment efforts for ELs.

7. An explanation of how the Spanish literacy program will be structured to promote bilingualism and biliteracy, specifically for ELs? Explain how this will be different than the two-way immersion programs currently in Seaford, Indian River, Milford and Cape Henlopen? Explain other structures that are being considering such as Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) and Guided Language Acquisition Instruction (GLAD) that would provide a school-wide approach to meeting the needs of ELs?

Ideally, every ELA teacher would be supported by a Spanish teacher using the GLAD model. Staff would be provided with professional development in this area to enable the ELA teachers to incorporate the Spanish literacy program with more confidence. The goal will be to provide each class with integrated Spanish instruction by the Spanish teacher on specific days and to have the regular Language Arts teacher incorporate Spanish literacy into their program on a regular basis. The staff members will support one another in the classroom in a team-approach during this time. We believe that this will be the best system for the chosen ELA curriculum which has a built-in Spanish literacy program that focuses on building students' language and literacy skills in conjunction with building academic content knowledge in the ELA program.



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This is different from Spanish Immersion programs in the area, first because every student would be part of the program in all grades K- 5, not just select classes as is the case in our neighboring districts. English and Spanish would be taught in tandem (in ELA classes and hopefully beyond), allowing both English-speaking students and Spanish-speaking students to learn important foundational content in a language with which they are familiar.