

In The Matter Of:
Department of Education
Las Americas Aspira Academy

Hearing
February 25, 2019

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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-- PUBLIC HEARING --

IN THE MATTER OF:)
)
Las Americas Aspira Academy)

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DNREC Richardson & Robbins Building
89 Kings Highway
Dover, Delaware 19901

Monday, February 25, 2019
5:00 p.m.

..

BEFORE: Leroy Travers, Lead Education Associate
Charter Office, Department of Education

Jenna Ahner, Executive Director
State Board of Education

ATTORNEY: Laura Makransky, DAG
Attorney for Department of Education

Interpreter: Sara Nehra
Back to Basics

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-- Transcript of Proceedings --

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1 MR. TRAVERS: Good evening, everyone.
2 I declare this public hearing to be open. My name
3 is Leroy Travers. I'm the Lead Education Associate
4 for the Charter School Office of the Delaware
5 Department of Education. And I have been appointed
6 by the Secretary of Education to conduct this public
7 hearing.

8 At this time I ask the other people
9 with me to introduce themselves for the record.

10 MS. AHNER: Hi. I'm Jenna Ahner,
11 Executive Director of the State Board of Education.

12 MS. MAKRANSKY: Hi. I'm Laura
13 Makransky. I'm the Deputy Attorney General assigned
14 to represent the Department of Education.

15 MS. NEHRA: I'm Sara Nehra. I'm a
16 Spanish translator, if anybody needs one.

17 MR. TRAVERS: The Las Americas Aspira
18 Academy has filed an application for a major
19 modification to their charter.

20 As is required by law, the matter was
21 referred to the Charter School Accountability
22 Committee for investigation and report.

23 This joint public hearing is being
24 held by the Delaware Department of Education and the



1 State Board of Education to receive public comments
2 on the application.

3 I would like the record to reflect
4 that the notice of the time, date, and place of
5 today's public hearing, as well as subsequent
6 reschedules, were published in the News Journal and
7 in the Delaware State News.

8 In addition, notice was posted at the
9 Charter School Accountability Committee's official
10 place of business, on the Department of Education's
11 official website, and on the State Public Meeting
12 Calendar on the State's official website on
13 January 7, 2019.

14 Further, the applicant was personally
15 notified of the time, date, and place of the public
16 hearing on January 17, 2019.

17 The applicant was notified of all
18 reschedules within 24 hours.

19 A court reporter is present so that a
20 recording of this hearing can be made.

21 It will be necessary for each speaker
22 to clearly identify his or herself before continuing
23 to speak so that the court reporter will be able to
24 note who you are.



1 The record of this hearing will be
2 provided to the Secretary of Education and the
3 members of the State Board of Education, together
4 with any written or electronic comments received
5 during the course of the modification application
6 process.

7 To date, no comments on this
8 application have been received.

9 We will proceed in the following
10 manner: First, we will hear from any
11 representatives of the charter school who wish to
12 comment on the modification application. Then we
13 will take comments from anyone else who desires to
14 speak.

15 There are sign-up sheets in the back
16 of the room. If you desire to speak, make sure that
17 you have checked the box that says that you wish to
18 speak. If you haven't done so, please do so now.

19 First, however, could I see a show of
20 hands for all that desire to make comments so I can
21 determine whether it is necessary to impose a time
22 limit on comments? So hands of those that would
23 like to speak? One, two, three, four, five, six,
24 seven.



1 We ask that you keep your comments to
2 five minutes or less. And I will signal you when
3 you get to one minute. Okay?

4 I reserve the right to limit comment
5 if it is purely repetitive or cumulative.

6 At this point I will accept comments
7 from any representative of the school.

8 MS. WAITE: Where do I make a
9 comment? At the podium or?

10 MR. TRAVERS: You can come -- yes,
11 please. This is a different venue than we are used
12 to.

13 MS. WAITE: Is this on or --
14 (Referring to microphone, which is not on.)

15 MR. TRAVERS: Just make sure you
16 speak loud enough for everyone to hear.

17 MS. WAITE: Good evening. On behalf
18 of the Aspira community, I want to thank you for
19 this opportunity to share our thoughts about the
20 pending modification request to expand to twelfth
21 grade.

22 I get the opportunity to address CSAC
23 during the review process, so I really want to give
24 this time to our families, the members of our school



1 community that have traveled here to make their
2 public comments.

3 I do have about 40 letters to submit
4 written by members of our school community,
5 including a letter of support from Senator Secola.

6 And, in closing, I just want to say
7 that, you know, in our first CSAC meeting a comment
8 was made about whether we have too many high schools
9 in our county. And I will say that, unlike other
10 schools in our county, we did not have to resort to
11 forced busing in order to create a diverse
12 multicultural school community. That happened
13 organically, naturally, and voluntarily, which is
14 the way it should happen. And we are very proud of
15 that.

16 So, with that said, I will hand it
17 over to the community. Thank you.

18 THE REPORTER: Can I just ask you to
19 state your name, please?

20 MS. WAITE: Margie Lopez Waite, Head
21 of School.

22 THE REPORTER: Thank you.

23 MR. TRAVERS: Next we have Isabela
24 Chevres. I apologize for the name mispronunciation.



1 MRS. CHEVRES: That's okay.

2 MR. TRAVERS: Isabela, make sure you
3 state your name for the court reporter.

4 ISABELLA CHEVRES: Hi. My name is
5 Isabela Chevres. This is my seventh year at Aspira.
6 This bilingual school gives an opportunity that
7 other schools don't.

8 Since Aspira is one of the only
9 schools that is bilingual, it is very important to
10 the local community. It gives us a chance.

11 I feel safe with this community,
12 because we've grown together, and we are all held at
13 a much higher standard than most.

14 Aspira is a diverse school accepting
15 all people regardless of ethnicity, religion, or
16 belief.

17 The mutual respect we all have has
18 been taught to us by our amazing teachers. Our
19 teachers have always been supportive role models.
20 They never give up on us, and their can-do attitudes
21 help us reach our full potential. They push us to
22 do our best, even when we think we can't. Would we
23 be able to depend on other schools for the same
24 support?



1 I have seen the school evolve every
2 year since I started there, and every year it gets
3 better.

4 Personally, I believe the K-12th
5 grade opportunity and would be the best option for
6 us. Thank you for your time.

7 (Applause)

8 MR. TRAVERS: Margie Rivera.

9 MS. RIVERA: Good evening. And I
10 will repeat my name. Margie Rivera.

11 I happen to be an Aspira board member
12 of Delaware. The Aspira board actually founded the
13 charter school. And I am also a founding member of
14 the charter school.

15 So I personally will say that I have
16 big, vested interest, because we had a vision of
17 individuals coming together, regardless of who you
18 are and where we meet you, to a dual language
19 bi-literacy community where we appreciate the
20 values, the identity of all students, staff, and
21 families.

22 And with that being said, when you
23 think about what we are trying to achieve in this
24 world, we are really trying to achieve a common



1 ground, a common ground where every single child has
2 an opportunity to exceed, excel, and also be
3 supported by the community.

4 So we are just not a school; we are a
5 school of community partners, both within the school
6 system and outside of the school system.

7 So I have had the opportunity
8 recently to be involved a little bit more than I'm a
9 retiree professional from Astra Zeneca. And so, if
10 I thought that my life was over then, it's just
11 beginning now.

12 People ask me every single day and
13 every time what's so special about this school.

14 The school has a culture of support.
15 It has a culture of belief. It really is preparing
16 global citizens. And I really mean that.

17 Every single day when I interact with
18 either children, staff, or families, when they are
19 given the opportunity to be involved and have a
20 voice, and a voice that's heard and listened to, I'm
21 amazed.

22 So I do work part time as the Family
23 Resource Center Manager, bringing families
24 consistently to the school, providing them with the



1 services and support that they need, as well as the
2 support and services that our children need.

3 I think I may be selfish a little bit
4 in saying that this school is awesome. The feeling
5 when visitors come to this school and knowing what
6 we are trying to achieve every single day, we are
7 not enough to be K-8. If I had my druthers, it
8 would be from cradle to college. But that's a
9 different story.

10 The most important story is that we
11 are trying to put our best foot forward. And guess
12 what? Everyone, no one, has it 100 percent. But I
13 think we have it 90 percent. And the 10 percent
14 would be like the icing on the cake to have a high
15 school that continues the education that we have
16 just started, that continues to be able to build
17 global citizens.

18 We have heard too much lately.
19 Border walls. Are we a global country? We are the
20 only country in this world that believes in
21 monolingualism. Why? Because we don't have enough
22 borders? Well, there is Canada next to us. There
23 is southern countries next to us. And, yet, we have
24 not had that opportunity.



1 I stress again -- I will keep it
2 short -- this is a passion of ours, the passion of
3 the founding members of this school, the staff, to
4 be able to grow and continue to grow, but having
5 first and foremost our children's lives and
6 wellbeing in our hands. And I don't take that
7 lightly, and I'm sure this community doesn't take it
8 lightly. Thank you so much.

9 (Applause)

10 MR. TRAVERS: L. Henshaw?

11 MS. HENSHAW: I was just signing in.
12 Sorry. (Laughter).

13 MR. TRAVERS: You are committed now.
14 (Laughter) Geisa Padilla?

15 MS. PADILLA: Hi. Good evening. I'm
16 Geisa Padilla. My family and I came from Puerto
17 Rico in the summer of 2017.

18 I work as a math fourth grade teacher
19 in Las Americas Aspira since August 2017. However,
20 tonight I will share with you my experience in
21 Aspira as the mother of a special education student.

22 My son, Raziell, has autism. And he
23 is in Aspira, like me, since August 2017.

24 Some facts about Raziell: Before



1 Aspira, he had a lot of trouble controlling his
2 emotion. He was easily upset and frustrated, and he
3 did not socialize well with his peers. His reading
4 level was C.

5 As you may know, he is a third grade
6 reading level. His math level was a mere second
7 grade level, and his writing was illegible.

8 As soon as I involved my son in
9 Aspira, they assigned a professional to Raziel to
10 provide him all the accommodations he needs to be a
11 successful student.

12 He grows academically and emotionally
13 in Aspira. And he is in fifth grade, and his
14 reading level is H. That is a fourth grade level.
15 He needs to work on that, but it's a huge progress
16 just in a year and a half.

17 He is working in a sixth grade level
18 in math. Wow. Another huge progress.

19 He did not write a lot, but he, at
20 least, what he writes is legible. In the EBI
21 meeting, we decided to use a tried system to help
22 Raziel control his emotions. Now he can control and
23 express better his emotions. He has episodes, but
24 shorter and less frequently than before. Now he has



1 friends.

2 A special education student as Raziel
3 needs a lot of accommodation. Aspira provides what
4 he needs and much more.

5 He has a speech, occupational therapy
6 in the school. He also has support in ELA and math
7 each day with an enrichment teacher.

8 He learns in a dual language program,
9 English and Spanish.

10 He also uses crumbles and a
11 personalized learning program which he learns in his
12 own pace.

13 He participates in art, dance team,
14 health, and music, as a part of his academic
15 program, make more holistic his learning.

16 The reality is that a student on the
17 autism spectrum are bullied more often than the
18 student with disabilities, in fact, of the students
19 who are both 62 percent and on the autism spectrum.
20 Bullying is my biggest concern, because Raziel is
21 very naive.

22 Aspira administration and all the
23 staff make sure that Raziel can learn in a safe and
24 a bullying free environment. That give me a peace



1 of mind. Aspira has a daycare program that takes
2 care of Raziel during teacher professional allotment
3 days. He loves Aspira, and Aspira loves him. What
4 else a mother could ask?

5 Having Aspira high school will
6 provide Raziel with a safe and bullying freeing
7 environment, loving and caring, and an
8 administration and staff working together to bring
9 all of his potential.

10 I'm sure that Aspira will continue to
11 provide a creative and an active curriculum where
12 Raziel will feel comfortable and grow at his own
13 pace, becoming a good and a caring citizen.

14 Aspira is not just another school.
15 I'm glad to be a part of Aspira not only as a
16 special education mother, but also as a teacher.

17 Aspira is nowhere, no matter where
18 you came from, how you look like, whatever you
19 believe. You will be accepted, loved, and cared.
20 Aspira is family. Thank you.

21 (Applause)

22 MR. TRAVERS: Lillian Rojas?

23 MS. ROJAS: Okay. I'm going to speak
24 on behalf of I guess what helped me the most with



1 Aspira, is the Spanish speaking language.

2 I'm a grandmother. I recently got
3 custody of two children that came straight from
4 Puerto Rico, one a four-year-old and one a
5 seven-year-old.

6 I was raising two other children when
7 I went to get them in August. I was able to get
8 them into Aspira school, which I didn't think I
9 would have a chance, but I did. I was able to get
10 them in there.

11 And, basically, the reason why I was
12 so afraid about it was I took them to a school that
13 my children go to Christian schools. And his name
14 is Jacob. When I took Jacob to be tested to attend
15 the second grade, because he was so afraid. He had
16 not lived here or, you know, learned -- Puerto Rico
17 doesn't teach you English. You know, it's a second
18 language, but not as a first language.

19 And when he went to -- the school
20 went to test him, he hid under the table.

21 And about half an hour later, they
22 came and they got me. And they said that, you know,
23 they were not able to test him.

24 So I thank God that I was able to get



1 him into Aspira. To my surprise, the other day we
2 were reading. And he was able to read -- and what
3 is it? Five months -- and he is reading English and
4 Spanish.

5 One of the things that impressed me
6 the most about Aspira, of course, is the atmosphere.
7 They are friendly and make you feel like family.
8 But when I go in -- the other day I was invited to
9 attend a little book writing. The little kids all
10 wrote a book about an animal.

11 And I was able to go, because I
12 retired to take care of the children. And I come
13 from -- I worked with dysfunctional families for 40
14 years. I worked for social services, so I know what
15 it is, you know, when people come in and they are
16 not able to speak the language and we need to
17 interpret for them. So I lived with that for the
18 past 40 years.

19 But, anyway, I was so impressed to
20 see non-English-speaking children alone with the
21 English-speaking children. And I saw this young,
22 this little girl that got up, and she is African
23 American, and she was able to read her little story
24 in Spanish. So I was utterly impressed.



1 I'm also impressed about not only
2 that they are bilingual, but they are also by
3 bicultural. And there are different cultures. And
4 children in the world that we live today where
5 everybody is, you know, fighting over this, that, or
6 the other, it is so, to me, very -- I was impressive
7 that here is the children growing, learning each
8 other's culture, and learning to grow up together.

9 I would like to see -- to me, a high
10 school is important because of the continuity of the
11 same program.

12 I recently also -- and I have lived
13 this many, many times -- went to a hospital. And
14 the patient -- I took my husband. And the patient
15 next door to my husband, believe it or not, in this
16 day and age they needed an interpreter and did not
17 have one.

18 I think it would be so wonderful that
19 in the future, if we had this high school, with the
20 continuity that we could have young people, not only
21 from Hispanic backgrounds, but regular-speaking
22 American people, young people that have more doors
23 would be open to them because they would be not only
24 bilingual but bicultural.



1 I would love to maybe in the future
2 go to that same hospital and see an Aspira high
3 school student be a nurse or a doctor who is able to
4 speak the language because they had an opportunity
5 to be in a school that was not only bilingual but
6 bicultural. I'm done.

7 (Applause)

8 MR. TRAVERS: Baltazar Villicana?

9 MR. VILICANA: My name is Baltazar
10 Villicana. I am the proud father of having three
11 kids in Aspira. The one in kindergarten, his name
12 is Juan. Maria is a fifth grade. And Laurie in
13 seventh grade.

14 For me, like in the beginning, Aspira
15 was like a challenging, because it was a new school
16 with new program versus like a public school.

17 And I'm so proud to say that we
18 making the right decision sending our kids there.
19 And now my daughter is in seventh grade, so pretty
20 soon we going to be like high school time.

21 So the idea for making high school is
22 really like something good to keep that program.
23 And especially because in my house the first primary
24 language is Spanish.



1 But there is a personal experience
2 about this program and school which I have.

3 We travel every day -- I'm sorry --
4 every year back in summer for vacations to my
5 country in Mexico.

6 And when we get to customs, my
7 daughter was reading everything like they belongs to
8 Mexico. And they say, "You guys living here, or
9 where are you guys coming from?" We say, "We come
10 from Delaware." They said, "You guys are speaking
11 really well Spanish. How do you guys do it?"

12 And we were so proud to say, you
13 know, they entered Aspira, they have this program
14 which in the beginning was like oh, maybe it's going
15 to work, maybe it's not going to work.

16 All the staff in Aspira has been so
17 great to us. They helping them in everything. They
18 helping in Spanish and English, so it's really good.

19 And I like the idea of Aspira having
20 a high school, and the whole community they can have
21 continued the program. That's all.

22 (Applause)

23 MR. TRAVERS: Ernesto DeJesus?

24 MR. DEJESUS: Good evening, all. So



1 I am currently a cadet at DMA, Delaware Military
2 Academy, and I am an alumni from Aspira Academy.

3 And I want to start off by saying I
4 cannot express how proud I am to be a part of the
5 Aspira family, because everybody talking, like just,
6 I don't know, just makes me happy.

7 But anyway, here is what I have got:

8 Aspira is a school that provides
9 academics for success. Aspira, being a multilingual
10 charter school, it teaches you skills that others
11 don't have the privilege to learn.

12 Aspira gave me the capability to do
13 things I do today and exceed expectations. In my
14 current high school career, it has not been required
15 for me to take a Spanish final due to my B average
16 and over an A in the class.

17 And I also average a 3.5 in my grade
18 point scale.

19 And to clarify, not to brag on my
20 accomplishments, I set out to prove what Aspira has
21 done for me and many other alumni.

22 Me and other alumni wouldn't have
23 been able to succeed without the help and support
24 that Aspira provides an individual. Aspira has



1 provided me the instructions and lessons needed to
2 be successful in high school and early adulthood.

3 Education is more than just a
4 curriculum. It's the people who surround you, the
5 experience you obtain, and the life lessons you
6 earn.

7 The education Aspira provides a child
8 is unmatched. I speak for me and many other
9 alumni when I feel confident saying Aspira is the
10 best middle school in Delaware.

11 The experience I had at Aspira is
12 something I will never forget. Not only did I learn
13 immensely; I also established relationships to last
14 a lifetime with both peers and teachers.

15 Education is the foundation of all
16 humans. And when someone has the privilege to
17 experience an education at the level Aspira
18 provides, they are destined for nothing but
19 blessings and success in the future.

20 And Aspira will do nothing but add
21 positivity and opportunities into our community.
22 This won't be an easy task, but I believe that if
23 there is any head of school and staff that is
24 capable, it's Ms. Margie and the Aspira staff.



1 Aspira is way more than a school.
2 It's a family, a family that's worth extending into
3 a high school.

4 Now, what you see here today -- and
5 this is all of you -- this is just a part of what we
6 call the Aspira family.

7 And I would like to say thank you on
8 behalf of the alumni and other students, just
9 because nothing that Aspira does would be possible
10 without any of you.

11 Oh, yeah. So just thank you on
12 behalf of me and all other alumni. That's all I
13 have got.

14 (Applause)

15 MR. TRAVERS: Puill Penix-Tadson?

16 MR. PENIX-TADSON: That's me. It's
17 Phill.

18 MR. TRAVERS: Sorry.

19 (Laughter)

20 MR. PENIX-TADSON: Hi. I'm Phill
21 Penix-Tadson. I'm an Aspira parent. I have got
22 children in sixth grade and third grade in Aspira.

23 I'm also -- I work as a professor of
24 Spanish and Latin American studies at University of



1 Delaware. So I come to this as a parent of Aspira
2 students and also as a language and cultural
3 educator myself to express my support for Ms. Lopez
4 Waite and Aspira to expand their charter to the
5 twelfth grade.

6 Since my older child is in sixth
7 grade, I have been here since the second year that
8 Aspira was around. I've seen the school really be
9 built into what it is today.

10 And I think that Ms. Margie has
11 brought together an incredible, professional,
12 specialized team that has given us all confidence
13 and the education that our children are getting at
14 Aspira.

15 I think that this team has shown
16 regional leadership and bilingual and bicultural
17 emergent education. I think that their model is in
18 high demand and is indeed now much imitated, but
19 that they are the pioneering team and the most --
20 the team with the most expertise in this field in
21 the state and the region, and that they deserve
22 recognition for that and deserve to expand and
23 extend their operations and give those opportunities
24 to more students at a higher level.



1 Students, of course, lose linguistic
2 proficiency when they spend time without using the
3 language when they are taught in multiple languages.
4 So expanding the base that they have built through
5 the seventh and eighth grade up through the high
6 school level really expands opportunities for
7 students who are coming out of such a solid
8 foundation from their primary education at Aspira
9 that they really could expand that and build upon
10 those proficiencies if they are able to continue
11 with bilingual education.

12 And I also wanted to say that
13 bilingual and bicultural education is the foundation
14 of the educational model at Aspira. But, in a way,
15 it's also just the beginning of what Aspira does.
16 And there are so many specialized programs, arts
17 programs, accelerated programs, programs for
18 students with individuals needs, special needs, and
19 things like this.

20 And I think that it's important to
21 understand that, that it is a leading bilingual,
22 bicultural emerging school. But, beyond that, it's
23 also incredible with, you know, preparing kids for
24 college preparation, for being part of society for



1 their civic duties and things such as this.

2 So I think it's really important to
3 recognize that they are successful on so many levels
4 and not just on bilingual emergent, which, of
5 course, is essential and extremely important.

6 So, in closing, I just wanted to say
7 that I have the utmost confidence that this is a
8 team that can bring bilingual and bicultural
9 emergent education to the high school level.

10 I have seen the benefits of this
11 already in students coming up to University of
12 Delaware who have been through bilingual and
13 bicultural programs, the first students starting to
14 come up now for Aspira in the early years.

15 And I can say that it's a fantastic
16 foundation that can only be built upon and expanded
17 and strengthened if we were to approve the expansion
18 of this charter to the twelfth grade. Thank you.

19 (Applause)

20 MR. TRAVERS: Erika Gutierrez?

21 MS. GUTIERREZ: Hello everybody. I'm
22 really honored to be here as a mother of Aspira
23 kids, as a friend of many of those parents over
24 there, and also as an advocate for the Latino



1 community.

2 First of all, I would like to mention
3 that Aspira Academy, regardless of being a charter
4 school, is a school that the Latino community has
5 been waiting for decades.

6 We have needed this model of
7 education for many years. There is no place where
8 our kids can develop in a safer space, learn the
9 cultural values, feel like a person, feel like they
10 belong, than in this model.

11 I feel personally, as an advocate and
12 as a mother, that our Latino families need a school
13 like this in every corner of the state. We need
14 this more than we can say.

15 We have so much to learn from this
16 model to apply to our public schools. There is no
17 fighting here. This school is not about charter
18 performance.

19 This is about what the Latino
20 community needs and what our American community is
21 benefiting, as well.

22 My kids, as many kids that come to
23 this school, they don't have identity problems.
24 They don't see themselves as different. They don't



1 bully other kids. They work together and in Spanish
2 and English.

3 It is an amazing education and an
4 amazing reality that mothers like me feel so proud
5 about. I don't have to explain to my kids why they
6 have to act different, they have to behave
7 different. I am proud to say I am happy for you
8 that all the kids are acting together.

9 When my kids have birthday parties,
10 everybody comes. And everybody is a family. It
11 doesn't matter if they speak Spanish, they speak
12 English. And they don't see each other different.

13 This is what we need for our state.
14 We have got so many problems. We don't need that.

15 We have an example that can work for
16 the whole state. And I ask you all to decide in
17 favor of a greater good, support this project,
18 support it because we need it.

19 We need our kids to learn what is
20 this about, what cultural embracement is, what it
21 means to be united for real.

22 It's not about going to a festival.
23 It's not about eating tacos. It's about
24 understanding each other, respecting each other, and



1 having a place to discuss, to talk, to create, to do
2 science projects, to do civic engagement together.

3 It is just a magnificent place to
4 grow as a state.

5 In our public schools, we need this.
6 We don't have the grade one charter school, maybe,
7 but this school is vital for our community.

8 And the Latino community, you know,
9 we have more than 40 letters or more than 40
10 letters, more than 40 families that wanted to be
11 here. But they couldn't come.

12 We were waiting for that meeting at
13 the Newark Public Library. And then not everybody
14 could make it here. So we want also to establish
15 that we need accessibility.

16 If you want to hear from us, please
17 come close to us. Please make it easy for us to
18 communicate, because we don't want disembodiment.
19 We want to be able to say let's work together, let's
20 let us agree on something or disagree on something
21 respectfully and hear our arguments.

22 This is the school we need. Our
23 heart is here. All the parents are happy here. We
24 have a waiting list of I don't know how many



1 hundreds. There is a reason for that.

2 So let us keep growing. Allow the
3 high school to develop and place benefit, because
4 it's a benefit for the whole state.

5 And that's my case. Thank you so
6 much.

7 (Applause)

8 MR. TRAVERS: Yessenia Tolentino?

9 At this point we will accept comments
10 from anyone else who desires to speak. Please
11 remember to identify yourself before you begin your
12 comments.

13 MR. TORRIJOS: Thank you for allowing
14 me to speak. My name is Javier Torrijos. And I'm
15 speaking here as a private citizen today, but I am
16 involved very heavily with the Latino community
17 through Delaware Hispanic Commission and also the
18 Governor's Advisory Council on English Language
19 Schools.

20 And having gone through a lot of the
21 work in the efforts that the Delaware Hispanic
22 Commission is focused on education for our Latino
23 families, our children, it's been the forefront of
24 our priorities.



1 And I can tell you that Las Americas
2 Aspira Academy has been a shining light in this
3 area. Really, as you have heard all the testimonies
4 of the many individuals that came here from New
5 Castle County -- and I applaud you for coming from
6 New Castle County all the way down here to Dover --
7 to really make your voices heard, because this is a
8 shining example of what really works in the State of
9 Delaware.

10 And I would like to kindly submit to
11 you today a letter on behalf of myself. And I would
12 like to say the following words:

13 I would kindly ask that you strongly
14 consider Las Americas Aspira Academy (LAAA) to
15 expand their education level to the high school.

16 LAAA offers excellent student success
17 in their student curriculum and will be offering a
18 bi-literacy pathway that is crucial to today's
19 emerging business markets.

20 LAAA junior/senior high school
21 students will have the opportunity to earn the
22 Delaware Certificate of Multi-literacy. This is a
23 win-win situation for not only the student that
24 him/her competitive for college and future career



1 job opportunities but positions Delaware to have a
2 highly multi-literate workforce that can open up
3 global markets for Delaware businesses.

4 According to Child Trends Hispanic
5 Institute report dated September 24, 2014, of the
6 74 million children in the U.S. today, 17.5 million
7 are Hispanic. They are the largest racial/ethnic
8 minority group of children, and also the fastest
9 growing.

10 By 2050, it will be one in two
11 children will be Hispanic. These children represent
12 tomorrow's workforce, our future. It is extremely
13 important that our educational institutions start
14 developing programs that focus on bi-literacy and
15 multi-literacy.

16 Extending LAAA's grade configuration
17 to include grades nine through twelve would ensure
18 students are better able to take advantage of career
19 opportunities.

20 HR Magazine published an article in
21 May of 2013 that stated that Hispanics are projected
22 to make up 30 percent of the U.S. labor workforce in
23 2050.

24 This report goes on to say that a



1 more highly educated society is better able to
2 compete internationally.

3 I submit to you today that LAAA is
4 laying the groundwork for the highly educated
5 workforce that will allow Delaware to compete in the
6 global stage through its core educational values of
7 excellence.

8 It is also important to keep in mind
9 that expanding the grade level to twelfth grade
10 creates an educational continuity structure for
11 students to learn in a school system that they are
12 most familiar and comfortable. And you heard that
13 today.

14 It helps reduce the students' anxiety
15 and stress levels and allows them to focus within
16 the existing education structural system where they
17 are accustomed to.

18 As most of you know, changing schools
19 is stressful. And students that experience anxiety
20 when they transition from one school to another can
21 face challenges that may lead to poor academic
22 achievements. By allowing the LAAA to modify its
23 grade levels, it allows the educators to build a
24 strong relationship with the students and families.



1 And should you wish to contact me,
2 I've provided you my phone number. So thank you for
3 this opportunity.

4 (Appause)

5 MR. TRAVERS: Are there others that
6 would like to speak at this time? Sir?

7 RAZIEL PADILLA: In Aspira Academy,
8 it's okay if you are from a different country. You
9 will learn on a learning environment that it will be
10 just right for you. And then K to 12 sounds like a
11 good idea because then we can learn much further
12 ahead.

13 (Appause)

14 MR. TRAVERS: Can you give your name?

15 RAZIEL PADILLA: My name is Raziel
16 Padilla.

17 (Appause)

18 MR. TRAVERS: I want to thank you all
19 for participating today -- I'm sorry.

20 GREGORY CRUZ: Hi. My name is
21 Gregory Cruz. I came here to tell you that I
22 started at Aspira since it first opened its doors.

23 I am in seventh grade now and proud
24 to say that I am fluent in English and Spanish.



1 I have seen the school grown so much
2 since the first day, and I look forward to
3 continuing my education in Aspira High School.

4 I love Aspira. And I want to thank
5 all the teachers and staff for giving us a healthy
6 learning environment and all their support to every
7 student to be successful in life. Thank you.

8 (Applause)

9 MR. TRAVERS: Any others that would
10 like to speak at this time?

11 MS. ALICEA: My name is Rosa Alicea.
12 I am speaking on behalf of my son, who attends
13 Aspira Academy, but also as a teacher.

14 I began working at Aspira two and a
15 half years ago, three years ago, entered the fifth
16 grade.

17 And it was a change for me, but I
18 have been so blessed to be a part of a family,
19 because we are truly a family.

20 We are all united, and the students
21 see that. We greet each other with hugs, with
22 kisses. That's who we are. And we share that with
23 our students. And it's something that they have
24 learned as students at our school.



1 My son also came with me when I came
2 to Aspira, so he has been there two and a half
3 years. And it's amazing to see the growth that he
4 has done in the language just in these two and a
5 half years.

6 So it has been a pleasure being a
7 part of the staff, but more so seeing the growth
8 that my son has made.

9 And I look forward to my son entering
10 middle school next year. And, hopefully, fingers
11 crossed, we move on to the high school, and he can
12 continue his learning through the high school.
13 Because I think we can do it.

14 And I know under her leadership and
15 the leadership of the rest of us, it is a
16 possibility, and it's a positive growth for all of
17 our students.

18 So, hopefully, it's something we can
19 continue. Thank you.

20 THE REPORTER: Can you say your name
21 again?

22 MS. ALICEA: Rosa Alicea.

23 MS. GLOCK: Good evening. My name is
24 Beth Young Glock. I'm Head of School.



1 I work directly with our middle
2 school students and families. And some of them are
3 here tonight and have shared their appreciation for
4 our program, our guidance, the academic program that
5 we have put together. But I would like to just
6 share a little bit for those that weren't able to
7 come.

8 So the past few weeks as we have
9 talked about our high school application with
10 students, particularly with our seventh graders,
11 because they would be potentially the first ninth
12 graders in the high school.

13 So, as I sit down at lunch with some
14 of the seventh graders and talk with them or visit
15 their classes, they are really excited about this
16 potential opportunity.

17 Many of them have come through Aspira
18 since kindergarten. Others have joined at different
19 points in their elementary and middle school career.

20 But they all spoke to the fact that
21 they truly want to continue in an Aspira community
22 that has such a high regard for high academics, for
23 acceptance, for inclusivity.

24 And I have been involved with the



1 school since the first year of its operation. And I
2 have to tell you, under Margie Lopez Waite's
3 leadership, we have evolved in so many ways. And
4 the opportunity for high school is just really an
5 exciting opportunity.

6 So I hope that the voices that you
7 have heard tonight from our students, from our
8 families, will help to make the dream of our high
9 school a reality. Thank you.

10 (Applause)

11 MS. TOLENTINO: Hi. Good evening.
12 I'm a little nervous when I speak in front of
13 people. So, um, my name is Yessenia Tolentino.

14 I actually was originally an Aspira
15 from the Saturday academy when I was in high school.
16 I am actually -- I actually graduated from William
17 Penn High School. And that's how I met Aspira.

18 And through that program, that was
19 actually the first time that my mom felt included in
20 my college (crying) application process. It was
21 very emotional for me. And she was empowered. She
22 was also educated. She was able to ask questions,
23 because somebody was able to speak Spanish with her
24 and empower her, make her feel included.



1 And that was very important to me,
2 because I was very much into the education process
3 for myself. As well as, of course, elementary and
4 middle school, my parents needed to face the
5 language barrier, and I had to help them as I grew
6 up to understand things that were going on, along
7 with my three other sisters.

8 Um, so I have always done things with
9 them as a motivation, and as well as the importance
10 of a community, helping each other and just being
11 involved.

12 I had a lot of leaders who helped
13 lead me as I grew up. And Aspira Saturday Academy
14 program actually helped to guide me, as well, and
15 empowered me as a student, as an individual, as a
16 woman, on so many different levels.

17 And just I am actually speaking on
18 behalf a former Aspira student. Also, I'm a team
19 member. I work at Aspira Academy. I have been
20 there for almost four years -- I have been there for
21 almost four years, and I -- it was after I graduated
22 from -- sorry -- it was after I graduated -- a
23 little after I graduated from the University of
24 Delaware, in which, of course, the program helped me



1 choose.

2 And so I work at the front desk. And
3 every day I work hard in order to always make sure I
4 have a smile on my face, because that was one of the
5 biggest influences that affected me when I had to
6 search for information for things that I was
7 interested in pursuing and all that in order to
8 explain that to my parents.

9 So just working with the team that I
10 work with, everyone empowers each other. They are
11 so student censored. And I'm very proud to be
12 working alongside these teachers, these team
13 members. Because we call each other team members,
14 because we are part of a team in order to make a big
15 difference, the biggest difference that we are able
16 to make for these students.

17 So I think that it would be amazing
18 to be able to continue on and provide those
19 opportunities and to continue to empower and support
20 our families as we do and what we offer at Aspira
21 Academy.

22 So thank you.

23 (Appause)

24 MS. ARENSON: I wasn't going to



1 speak, but you have inspired me. My name is Rebecca
2 Arenson. And I have two students at Aspira. One is
3 in third grade, and the other one fifth grade. Both
4 started in kindergarten.

5 And it has been an amazing experience
6 for us, because we are bilingual. Their father is
7 from Argentina.

8 And just to have my children be able
9 to grow up in an environment where Spanish is
10 normal, it's not just something to you with your
11 father or, you know, friends that we have that are
12 here, but it's part of their everyday life. It's
13 part of them understanding a culture that I really
14 can't give to them.

15 And to be able to learn to read and
16 write and express themselves in the most eloquent of
17 ways as they grow up is just -- it's been amazing to
18 me to see their process.

19 And also that, you know, speaking to
20 the ability that their father can go and have a full
21 understanding of their education. And that has been
22 just a huge thing for our family for him to really
23 be a part of their education in a very deep way.

24 So I really hope that this can



1 continue to grow and there be a program through high
2 school so that, you know, it doesn't just kind of
3 stop at eighth grade, that they are able to, you
4 know, continue this more and learn both languages.

5 I really appreciate it. Thank you.

6 (Applause)

7 MR. TRAVERS: I want to thank you all
8 for participating today. The Secretary will
9 consider your comments in making her decision at the
10 conclusion of the modification application process.

11 (Someone is raising their hand.)

12 Just so I don't cut anyone else off, is
13 there a show of hands of anyone else that would like
14 to speak after her? Thank you.

15 MS. EDMONDS-EVELAND: Thank you for
16 making time. My name is Emily Edmonds-Eveland. I'm
17 the Director of Instruction at Aspira. And I
18 started when they opened their doors in 2011 as a
19 second grade teacher, and then a third grade
20 teacher.

21 And I just wanted to speak on behalf
22 of their investment and their educators.

23 Um, Margie Lopez Waite has been
24 dedicated to the professional development of all



1 teachers. She drives us to Newark for free
2 workshops multiple times a year.

3 She saves money to send teachers
4 across the United States for conferences.

5 It doesn't matter how many years
6 experience the teacher has; she believes in
7 investing in them so that they can be the best
8 educators for our students.

9 And the expansion will not just
10 benefit us, but it would benefit all schools,
11 educators, and students in the state, because we are
12 committed to sharing our practices, specifically the
13 linguistic support and ELL access to complex tech.

14 We have participated in the Delaware
15 Academy for School Leaders Policy and Practice
16 Institute and presented there last summer.

17 We have also presented at La Cosecha,
18 a national dual-language conference, this past fall.
19 And we are eager to share more practices when we
20 expand to high school.

21 So thank you for your consideration.

22 (Applause)

23 MR. TRAVERS: I want to thank you all
24 for participating today. The Secretary will



1 consider your comments in making her decision at the
2 conclusion of the modification application process.

3 This hearing is now closed.

4 (Concluded at 6:00 p.m.)
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1 CERTIFICATE

2 I, Lorena J. Hartnett, a Notary Public and
3 Registered Professional Reporter, do hereby certify
4 that the foregoing is an accurate and complete
5 transcription of the proceeding held at the time and
6 place stated herein, and that the said proceeding
7 was recorded by me and then reduced to typewriting
8 under my direction, and constitutes a true record of
9 the testimony given by said witnesses.

10 I further certify that I am not a relative,
11 employee, or attorney of any of the parties or a
12 relative or employee of either counsel, and that I
13 am in no way interested directly or indirectly in
14 this action.

15 IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my
16 hand and affixed my seal of office on this 26th day
17 of February 2019.

18
19
20
21 

22 _____
23 Lorena J. Hartnett
24 Registered Professional Reporter



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