



August 19, 2014

*Via email attachment and U.S. Mail*

Secretary Mark T. Murphy  
Delaware Secretary of Education  
401 Federal Street Suite 2  
Dover, Delaware 19901-3639

Dear Secretary Murphy,

This letter acknowledges receipt of your missive regarding Maurice J. Moyer Academic Institute being placed on Formal Review, pursuant to 14 Delaware Code 515 (b). The MJM Academic Institute Board understands and shares the concern about student progress, and knows the State has heard before charter holders who make promises and ask for unlimited time to turn things around. As a fledging charter with only two years' of experience, we believe we should have the opportunity to implement the initiatives already underway and demonstrate their success during the remainder of the 2014-2015 school year. The State has our further commitment, and we will make it binding in whatever fashion the State desires, that should we not make significant improvements in special education documentation and reporting during this school year and show measureable growth in student achievement during that same time, the MJM Academic Institute Board will not seek renewal at the end of its charter term.

After reviewing your reported information, we offer the following response:

#### **Academic Performance**

- 75% of this current population are new students
- While we clearly understand that proficiency on DCAS is extremely important, we ask you to acknowledge the fact that we are serving a population that comes to us severely underprivileged, underserved and underprepared. Using Lexile scores, we submit that on average our students come to us reading below grade level:
  - 6<sup>th</sup> grade is reading on average at a 5<sup>th</sup> grade level
  - 7<sup>th</sup> grade is reading on average at a 4<sup>th</sup> grade level
  - 8<sup>th</sup> grade is reading on average at a 4<sup>th</sup> grade level
  - 9<sup>th</sup> grade is reading on average at a 6<sup>th</sup> grade level
  - 10<sup>th</sup> grade is reading on average at a 7<sup>th</sup> grade level

These numbers reflect 85% of our population with special education reading much lower; closer to 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

- Of our 228 students, 32% of our population was identified special education and out of that 10 % were complex needs, 10% were intense and 80% were basic. This was an indication that personalized education was needed and provided.

Our ability to retain and attract proficient students is negatively affected due to being under "Corrective Action" and the instability created from the threat of closing the school on numerous occasions.

- Nonetheless, Out of 16 Seniors, 14 Graduated which is 88%
- Out of that 14 who graduated 9 of them are enrolled in college, which is 56%
- According to DCAS data
  - In the fall 97% tested in Reading with 12% proficient in the spring 23% (Same children & year)
  - In the fall 96% tested in Math with 4% proficient, in spring 10% proficient (Same children & year)
  - While we are saddened that the children arrive so far behind, there was/is growth
  - Our majority population is the minority for most schools' population. Nevertheless, we are committed to moving each child forward with the hopes of 100% proficiency; but it will certainly take more than one year

*Path-forward* ~ All MJM Academic Institute students will use "I-Ready" which is an adaptive online assessment including a diagnostic and benchmarks. (\*\*see attached\*\*) The diagnostic, which is aligned to CCSS and Delaware State Standards, will be administered to our students during the week of August 25 during their ELA and Math classes. This test will produce an individualized report outlining areas of deficiency in reading and math and help teachers to create specific sub skills and data driven lessons which will improve individual student outcomes. In addition to giving the diagnostic, we have created a student profile sheet for both middle school and high school students (\*\*see attached\*\*) which will assist us in tracking our students progress from last year through the upcoming year. The information will be used in determining student placement in their regular classes and their RTI tiers. It will also assist in their RTI movement.

The test will be taken four times per year. We will use this information to ensure our students are in the correct class settings and to place them in their correct Tier for RTI and to determine what interventions are necessary for improvement on the Smarter Balance Assessment. We have created an RTI team that will assist in the correct tiering of students, running benchmarks, and making adjustments as students improve their scoring.

### **Appropriate Strategies to Accommodate the Needs of At-Risk Students and Those Needing Special Education Services:**

MJM Academic Institute has been working collectively with Mary Ann Mieczkowski, Barbara Mazza and Dale Matusевич from the Exceptional Children Resource Office at the Delaware Department of Education since January's special education file audit. MJM Academic Institute has embraced all trainings and supports provided by the department and has worked diligently to correct the special education findings. In fact, DOE understood the dedication of MJM Academic Institutes Special Education staff and proactively provided the school with the extensions.

In regards to special education compliance, it should be noted that special education concerns have not been historical at MJM Academic Institute, rather isolated to the first semester of the 2013-2014 academic year, due to an influx of special education students. Since the noncompliance was identified, MJM Academic Institute has taken drastic measures in replacing the previous staff with a new team; beginning with the hiring of a full time Special Education Director in February, 2014.

During the June 11, 2014 Prong I findings MJM Academic Institute was found not to be at 100% compliance although huge gains were made in all indicators. It was noted during the meeting with Mary Ann Mieczkowski and Barbara Mazza that Sylvia Simmons, the Special Education Director was proactive and cooperative. They applauded her dedication and desire to learn. Most findings during the second audit were limited to one item within a student's IEP compared to the original audit that contained a variety of areas for each student. Please see attached documentation of extreme growth in compliancy (refer to Jan. 2014 audit and June 2014 Prong I

findings), dramatic growth was made in all of the original areas indicated; procedural safeguards, eligibility determination, secondary transition and students being served in the least restrictive environment.

MJM Academic Institute started the 2013/2014 school year with 3 full time special education teachers and 4 paraprofessionals. Due to a variety of unforeseen circumstances those employees were no longer employed as of January, 2014, at which time MJM Academic Institute was actively seeking to replace all three special education positions. Sylvia Simmons was hired as the full time Special Education Director in February and due to the time of year; MJM Academic Institute was not successful in locating qualified special education teachers to fill the 3 posted positions. During this time state licensed substitutes and certified special education teachers who were outside contractors were used to provide direct support. Looking ahead, Ms. Simmons has been successful in hiring three additional special education teachers for the 2014/2015 school year, as well as four paraprofessionals.

MJM Academic Institute wants to see all students flourish and succeed and applaud the efforts of the Delaware DOE in supporting the growth of all stakeholders, as well as students. Because of the strong commitment of both MJM Academic Institute staff and the DDOE; the following plan has been agreed to and is being implemented:

*A. School Administrators:*

1. Complete 6 hours of professional development relating to IEP development, transition services, procedural safeguards for parents and children, and discipline procedures as outlined in the Delaware Administrative Code. Training will be provided by the DDOE on August 7, 2014 (9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.)
2. Develop a process to provide building level support to the educational diagnosticians when scheduling and coordinating IEP meetings.
3. Identify strategies to use when parents do not respond to school staff attempting to schedule IEP meetings, or when parents cannot or do not attend IEP meetings;
4. Establish scheduling practices to ensure participation of general education and CTE teachers at IEP meetings.
5. Use relevant administrative complaint decisions and administrative hearing officer decisions, which are available on the DDOE's website, in professional development trainings with staff.
6. Provide ongoing professional development for all staff relating to students with disabilities and achievement through PLCs.
7. Develop and implement a process to measure the effectiveness of the professional development and technical assistance activities and an effective way to measure implementation as described in this Agreement, which may include, but not be limited to, collecting an evaluation summary and feedback from the participants following the professional development.
8. Attend professional development provided through Special Education Leadership meetings on September 10, 2014, December 3, 2014, and March 11, 2015. School leadership is also strongly encouraged to attend all Teaching and Learning Cadre meetings provided by the DDOE.
9. Attend professional development provided through Charter School Special Education Director meetings on October, 27, 2014, February 2, 2015, and April 27, 2015.
10. Enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the DDOE to participate in Standards-Based IEP training including attendance of special education teachers, Director of Curriculum, and Educational Diagnostician at all scheduled professional development, participation in on-site coaching, and other as identified/needed.
11. Submit a written plan to the DDOE outlining a system of accountability to ensure compliance with IDEA, provision of special education services and procedural safeguards, along with a process to monitor student records and staff practices for regulatory compliance across the school. This written plan shall be due to the DDOE by September 30, 2014.

12. Submit a written report to the DDOE relating to special education units earned and a detailed description of how funds were allocated. This report shall be due to the DDOE by October, 30, 2014.

*B. Educational Diagnostician:*

1. Complete 6 hours of professional development relating to IEP development, transition services, procedural safeguards for parents and children, and discipline procedures as outlined in the Delaware Administrative Code. Training will be provided by the DDOE on August 7, 2014 (9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.)
2. Complete 15 hours of IEP Plus training. This training will be provided by the DDOE on August 14 – 15, 2014, and October 8, 2014 (9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.).
3. Attend 3 hours of professional development with school psychologists relating to the IEP process and eligibility determination. This training will be provided by the DDOE on August 19, 2014 (9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.)
4. Attend 5 hours of IEP Plus training with special education staff. This training will be provided by the DDOE on August 27, 2014 (9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.).

*C. School Psychologist:*

1. Complete 3 hours of professional development relating to evaluation, evaluation procedures, and eligibility determination as outlined in the Delaware Administrative Code. Training to be provided by the DDOE on August 19, 2014 (9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.)

*D. Special Education Teachers:*

1. Complete 6 hours of professional development relating to the IEP Process and transition services. This training will be provided by the DDOE beginning on August 7, 2014 (1:00 – 4:00 p.m.) to be completed in its entirety by June 1, 2015.  
Complete 5 hours of IEP Plus training. This training will be provided by the DDOE on August 27, 2014 (9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.).

*E. Regular Education Teachers:*

1. Complete 6 hours of professional development relating to the IEP Process, provision of special education services, and procedural safeguards. This training will be provided by the DDOE by June 1, 2015.

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a continued area of focus for MJM Academic Institute. There is an evident systematic need for support and MJM Academic Institute will not tread lightly in this mission. Working proactively with the DDOE, MJM Academic Institute has whole heartedly agreed to participate in both administrative and whole group training in this area as specifically noted within the agreement above. It is the sincerest intention of MJM Academic Institute and all stakeholders to fully support and implement a school wide RTI plan focusing on high academic achievement for all students during the 2014/2015 academic year. Additionally strict attention will be to develop the RTI program based on the DDOE requirements, meeting the educational needs of all students through professional accountability to ensure: delivery of scientific, research based core curriculum and instruction, ongoing monitoring of student data to assess the effectiveness of instruction, determination and delivery of targeted and intensive individualized student supports and shared responsibility – all staff (general education teachers, special education teachers, Title I, administration and Instructional strategist).

## **Educational Programs**

Beginning June of 2012, K12 & DOE worked together to complete a fully aligned curriculum. It was determined in December of 2013 that K12 could not deliver a curriculum that aligns with Delaware Standards or Common Core State Standards, so in May 2014 the Board decided to purchase a curriculum (SpringBoard) and invest enormous resources in full training and coaching for our staff to ensure a successful delivery for our students. We have put a plethora of resources to fill the gaps and appropriately train our staff.

*Path Forward*~ In addition we have solicited the help of Generation Ready, a national provider of leader and teacher professional learning services that uniquely combines deep instructional job embedded expertise, innovative technology tools, and a targeted digital content library that ensure sustained professional growth and improved student learning. (\*see attached\*)

### **School Discipline and Attendance Procedures**

Previously we were cited for non-reporting of disciplinary infractions and having an unsafe school. When it was determined that was the case, we took strong measures and a zero tolerance approach, which resulted in a spike in our out of school suspensions. Therefore, while acknowledging the issue, we overcorrected which in turn has made us a safer learning environment. Even with the alleged nine unsafe incidences cited, because our staff took quick action; no students were ever in danger. Out of our 228 students, 13 represent over half of the reported 61% suspension rate. According to the attendance trends report in 2012-2013 we were at 79% attendance. This year we grew to 90% partly due to outside resources and also putting in appropriate systems given to us via training from the Department of Education. While it is not the 95% desired, we have increased our rate significantly.

*Path-Forward* ~ All staff received professional development in De-escalating Strategies, Crisis Intervention and Managing School Culture and Climate Student Discipline. This training took place on August 15th and was facilitated by Dr. Doug DiRaddo, School Psychologist from the Brandywine School District. The school leadership team is devoted to and will enforce the Student Code of Conduct in order to quickly and fairly address any negative student behaviors that disrupt the orderly education process and impede the learning of other students. As part of the Compliance Agreement, a memorandum will also be entered into for MJM Academic Institute to participate in the Positive Behavior Support Project. This will include training for the school-based team and on-site coaching. In order to provide students, staff, and parents with an additional feeling of safety and security within the building, MJM Academic Institute has submitted a request to Sgt. Anthony Bowers and the Wilmington City Council for a School Resource Officer, in order to provide a safe visual presence on the school campus.

In an effort to continue to strengthen our student attendance, MJM Academic Institute has employed a visiting teacher whose responsibility would include, but would not be limited to: performing home visits, reporting truancy issues, providing student and family counseling, and acting as a liaison between the school and alternative placements and other outside agencies

### **Student Assessment**

We clearly acknowledge our participation rates for the testing scenarios; however we had several students placed in outside agencies throughout the course of the year which could skew the numbers (**See Attached**)

*Path-forward* ~Dates for the testing windows have been placed on our 2014-2015 Academic Calendar under Key Dates (\*see attached\*). There is a team, which works in conjunction with our RTI team that has created a testing schedule for all of our students. The testing cycles include open windows of practice, participation and make-up windows. The students will be testing in their ELA classes. Any students that are absent from original testing, will be part of the make-up cycle. The team will check in with each other at the open of business and again at the close of business each day to ensure that all students are counted and tested.

## Staff Credentials

*Path-forward* ~Of the 11 teachers we started with in August, 2013, 8 were HQ and all 11 were state certified. With the rumors of the school closing, we continued to lose great teachers with our consistent attempt to replace them with like credentials. In previous years, it has been difficult for MJM Academic Institute to maintain dedicated and quality instructors due to the created fear of job stability. This year, we will provide needed professional development to equip our staff with the tools necessary to be highly effective and confident educators. We will also take a systemic approach to valuing and building up our current team. In an effort to do so, we have improved communications and buy-in between the leadership team and the school faculty and staff, by creating new team led committees such as PLC's, an Instructional Support Team, a Leadership Support Team, and a School Climate Committee. Also, in the event of possible vacated positions, we will continue to actively recruit a pool of "Highly Qualified" candidates who will be prepared to step into any possible vacated positions, in order to provide continuous quality education to our students.

## Financial and Administrative Operations

Since September of 2013, our website was up and fully operational. It wasn't until April of 2014, when DOE started sending out compliance reports that we recognized there were two links not working and therefore moved expeditiously to correct them. Since May of 2014, we have been in full compliance based on the compliancy reports from DOE.

In conclusion, an enormous amount of time, effort and energy to ensure that the elements of the "Corrective Action Plan" of July 26, 2013 were satisfied. We recognize that the school faced a plethora of challenges even before our board assumed responsibility. For instance:

- Our inherited management company (K12) did not provide a Delaware Standards and Common Core State Standards aligned curriculum
- K12 appointed six different heads of school within two years.
- K12 also entered into a burdensome \$56,000 a month lease agreement with an investment group.

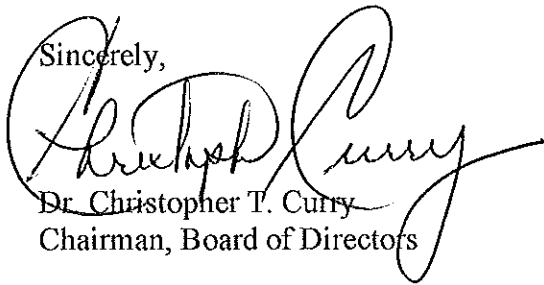
### Since then,

- The board has acquired the property and is only paying a mortgage of \$16,000.
- While we have not reached our 95% attendance rate we are much closer than we have ever been (90%).
- The board initiated and concluded a process to hire an additional dean. This additional staff person greatly assists in our ensuring that the school climate is conducive to the learning process.
- Our disciplinary actions have led our school to be safer and a more favorable educational environment.
- The board initiated, designed, and implemented a process that concluded with the hiring of a highly qualified, Delaware-grown, administrative team that includes the Head of School and Director of Curriculum.
- The board has contracted with Generation Ready, experts in coaching and training teaching staffs to build capacity and fill knowledge gaps.
- MJM Academic Institute (MJMAI) has hired dually certified, highly qualified teaching staff. To date, 15 out of 16 teaching positions are secured with signed contracts, all of which meet the above criteria.
- In consultation with knowledgeable entities, the Board has identified SpringBoard as the curriculum that will empower MJMAI to effectively educate its students in alignment with Delaware Standards and Common Core State Standards. We are confident that our collaboration with Generation Ready will ensure the ability of our teaching staff to implement this rigorous curriculum.
- K12, our CMO, has provided Lorna Bryant, Ed.D., who has extensive experience with special student populations (at both ends of the academic spectrum).

The Board was aware that we needed to secure the facilities, increase our attendance, report disciplinary actions appropriately and secure a curriculum aligned with Delaware State Standards and Common Core State Standards. We believed that since we were satisfying all of the corrective actions, we would be in a position to provide a quality education to our children without all of the external pressures of closing the school.

MJM Academic Institute has, and is implementing, a satisfactory corrective action plan to ensure that both student academic and overall institutional performance meet and exceed acceptable standards. As a result, it is our firm belief that upon completion of your due diligence you will find that MJM Academic Institute is in a position, with the additional assistance we have contracted (Generation Ready, etc.), to meet and exceed expectations. While challenges remain, the Board believes none are insurmountable. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the Delaware Department of Education, and moving to meet the educational goals outlined in our charter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Christopher Curry". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Dr. Christopher T. Curry  
Chairman, Board of Directors