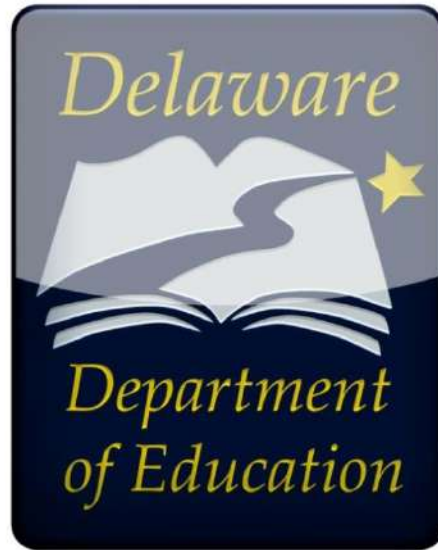


CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Academy of Dover

**MAJOR MODIFICATION APPLICATION
INITIAL REPORT**

CSAC Report Published: January 31, 2020

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

The following individuals comprise the Charter School Accountability Committee (CSAC):

Voting Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee

- Chuck Longfellow, 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, Education Associate, Language Acquisition, DDOE
- April McCrae, Education Associate, CTE / STEM initiatives, DDOE
- Raushann Austin, Education Associate, Educator Effectiveness, 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
- Chandra Pitts, Community Member, CEO, One Village Alliance

Non-voting Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee

- Audrey Noble, Vice President, Delaware State Board of Education
- Kendall Massett, Executive Director, Delaware Charter Schools Network

Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)

- Darryl Parsons, Deputy Attorney General, Department of Justice, Counsel to the Committee
- Leroy Travers, Lead Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- John Carwell, Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Finance Office, DDOE

Please find the following attachments submitted by members of the CSAC Committee:

- Attachment 1 – Comments, questions, concerns and follow-ups from the Delaware State Board of Education.
- Attachment 2 – Comments, questions, concerns and follow-ups from the Academic Support Team, DOE.
- Attachment 3 – Statements regarding the financial health of the school.

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.

The CSAC requested that AOD provide the following information to the Charter School Office on or before February 17, 2020:

- 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.

In addition, in accordance with 14 *Del. C.* § 511(k), AOD has until February 17, 2020 to submit any written comments on this report to the Charter School Office.

Next Steps:

- The applicant will have the opportunity to submit a written response to the CSAC Initial Report, which is due by close of business on February 17, 2020.

- The final meeting of the CSAC will be held on February 27, 2020; 2nd Floor Cabinet Room, Townsend Building, Dover.
- A public hearing will be held on February 10, 2020; 2nd Floor Cabinet Room, Townsend Building, Dover.
- A second public hearing will be held on March 11, 2020; 2nd Floor Cabinet Room, Townsend Building, Dover.
- The Secretary of Education will announce her decision at the March 19, 2020 State Board of Education meeting and seek the assent of the State Board.

CSAC Major Modification Questions

Source: DE State Board of Education

January 30, 2020

Academy of Dover

Projected Enrollment

Our greatest concern is your ability to meet your enrollment targets as projected on pages 5 and 6 of your application. Your k-5 enrollment this year is 266 students; during the last 5 years, not once have you reached your approved charter enrollment figure of 300.

You propose adding a 6th grade this fall which will increase your enrollment by 24%, from 266 to 330. Even though you have surveyed your parents and only a small number have indicated that their children will not be returning, your actual re-enrollment rates for 2016-27 and 2017-18 were around 70%. In 2017 you created a recruitment committee expecting an increase in enrollment in 2017-18. However, that didn't happen.

Question: How do you plan to reach your enrollment goals, which are central to the success of adding this additional grade level?

Question: What is your plan if you are unable to enroll the 50 students to fill your 6th grade?

Follow-up requests:

- 1) Indicate 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) Outline a contingency plan if enrollment projections are not reached
- 3) Describe how the recruitment plan has or will be improved to meet these enrollment projections

Financial Viability

Contingency Reserve: On page 3 you refer to a significant increase in your contingency reserve budget from ~\$67K to ~\$258K between July and October 2019.

Question: What changes were made in your budget to accomplish this? Where was the greatest effect felt?

Statement of Net Position: Your June 2018 audit (page 4) shows total net deficits in 2017 and 2018 of more than \$6.2 million.

Question: What is your net position as of June 30, 2019?

Follow-up requests:

- 1) Provide a detailed accounting of what changes were made in your budget to make the change in the contingency reserve
- 2) Provide a Net Position statement for June 2019 that reflects Total Net Deficit and explanation that includes current status of Mosaica settlement

Student Diversity

What is Academy of Dover leadership doing to expand diversity of its enrollment, including students from low-income families? How will you focus on this as you expand?

Follow-up request: Description of efforts to ensure that your student body reflects the demographics of the community that you serve.

Shared Practice

Question: How do you proactively share what's working in your model to other Delaware public schools, both traditional and charter?

Follow-up request: Description of activities that you have utilized to share successful practices with other Delaware schools

CSAC Major Modification Questions

Source: Academic Support Workgroup, Delaware Department of Education

January 30, 2020

Academy of Dover

Questions/Comments:

1. On page 1 the school cites ELA proficiency as 49.6% and Math as 39.2%. These are 2018 proficiency scores. 2019 Proficiency percentages for ELA is 39% and math is 28.54%
 - a. Could you speak to what you might attribute this significant decline in student proficiency in one year?
2. On page 4 of the application the school cites that 78% of the population is drawn from the Capital School District, and that having to return to a district for “Just 6th grade” would be an “unnatural condition.”
 - a. Is the school aware that Capital School District is working to re-configure their grade structure to a K-5/6-8 program as of 2023? If granted the modification, this new setting of K-6 would have students entering or returning to a district explicitly “out of alignment” with the district’s organization—which is the exact issue you are claiming to try to rectify. Could you discuss this a bit for us?
3. Your application cites research from 2007 that states that students in schools where 6th grade is the terminal year of elementary school do better on tests than those in 6-8 configurations. However, the feeder district from which your school draws much of its student population currently has a configuration where grade 6 is a terminal year in a 5-6 school and students in this setting are not faring better than any other students in the state of Delaware. What makes you think they will be more likely to succeed in your school setting under a K-6 configuration?
4. Before focusing so heavily on the research taken from the 2007 study, please reference the 2010 study from the Journal of Early Adolescence that was completed here in the state of Delaware. The research indicates that while 6-8 schools were more likely to report delinquent behavior of students, self-reporting data from students indicated that students in terminal 6th grades reported higher rates of drug abuse, physical altercations and other delinquent behaviors with lower rates of school interventions. According to this research, the differences in outcomes had to do with data reporting at the school levels more-so than actual student behaviors.
 - a. Of greater concern is that 2x the number of females in terminal 6th grades (elementary schools) reported having suicidal thoughts or having acted upon suicidal feelings.

Note: School and district comparative proficiency data is provided, as well as the 2010 research paper.

CSAC Major Modification Questions

Source: Operations Support Workgroup, Delaware Department of Education

January 30, 2020

Academy of Dover

Questions/Comments:

- It is recommended that the school create a new projected 5-year budget plan (80% and 100%).
- AOD's finances have not been stable in recent years; however, there has been improvement this year. Their projected ending balance continues to improve each month (on the monthly charter projections) their school leader seems to have a good understanding of their finances and what needs to be done to improve their financial position.
- Overall, this request seems to be a good idea for the school. It will likely help with increasing their enrollment and it just makes sense since many of AOD's students come from Capital SD and ending after sixth grade would align with Capital's grade configuration (Wm. Henry is 5-6; Central Middle is 7-8). This allows AOD students to avoid going to three different schools in three years (AOD for 5th, Wm. Henry for 6th, Central Middle for 7th).
- Increased enrollment will likely have a positive impact on the school's finances since they will not need to increase operational/administrative expenses. They will need to hire additional teachers, but their existing space and administrative staffing levels will not change.