



## Las Américas ASPIRA Academy

### **RESPONSE TO SCHOOL RENEWAL REPORT**

*(submitted May 14, 2014)*

#### **Academic Performance Review Rating:**

- **2011-2012 Summary and Overall Rating: DOES NOT MEET STANDARD**
- **2012-2013 Summary and Overall Rating: MEETS STANDARD**

During the past two years, LAAA has made significant gains in our academic achievement results. Our overall rating improved from Does Not Meet Standard in Year 1 to Meets Standard in Year 2. LAAA accomplished consistent growth in ELA with scores exceeding State average in some categories. The biggest opportunity for improvement exists with Math scores. In response to this need, we are supplementing our math program with targeted instruction for students performing below grade level.

The Delaware Academic Performance Framework reveals the following achievements and opportunities for growth:

#### **Strengths**

- Students at LAAA are making enough annual growth to maintain or achieve proficiency status within 3 years or by 10<sup>th</sup> grade (69.7% for Math and 80.6% for ELA).
- LAAA's students are exceeding State average in ELA proficiency (72.9% for LAAA vs. 70.1% for State). LAAA's proficiency rates in ELA increased from 2012 to 2013 by 5 points (67.9% to 72.9%) while the State average decreased by 6 points (76.1% to 70.1%).
- LAAA's Low Socio-Economic students' 2013 proficiency rates in ELA are higher than the State average (64.6% for LAAA vs. 64.2% for State). LAAA's proficiency rates in ELA increased from 2012 to 2013 by 8 points (56.6% to 64.6%) while the State average decreased by 3.2 points (67.4% to 64.2%).
- LAAA's English Language Learners (ELLs) students' proficiency rates in Math and ELA exceeded the State average (41.9% vs. 38.3% in Math and 59.7% vs. 31.8% in ELA). LAAA's proficiency in ELA earned a rating of Meets Standard.
- LAAA's Hispanic students' 2013 proficiency rates in ELA are higher than the State average (66.3% for LAAA vs. 63.9% for State). LAAA's proficiency rates in ELA increased from 2012 to 2013 by 3.4 points (62.9% to 66.3%) while the State average decreased by 0.7 points (64.6% to 63.9%).
- LAAA's White students' 2013 proficiency rates in ELA are higher than the State average (81.8% for LAAA vs. 80.8% for State).

#### **Challenges/Opportunities for Growth**

- LAAA's students were not as proficient in Math compared to the state average (57.4% for LAAA vs. 68.0% for state).
- LAAA's Low Socio-Economic students' 2013 proficiency rates in Math were below the State average (47.6% for LAAA vs. 61.4% for State).

- Although LAAA's ELL students' proficiency in Math exceeded the State average, it was still considered Below Standard (41.9% for LAAA vs. 38.3% for State average) due to being below State's proficiency rate at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile (54.8%).
- LAAA's Hispanic and White students' 2013 proficiency rates in Math were below the State average (Hispanic: 48.9% for LAAA vs. 63.4% for State; White: 72.7% for LAAA vs. 79.7% for State).

#### **Financial Performance Review Rating:**

- **2011-2012 Summary and Overall Rating: MEETS STANDARD**
- **2012-2013 Summary and Overall Rating: MEETS STANDARD**

#### **Strengths, Challenges and Opportunities for Growth**

Las Américas ASPIRA Academy had another strong year, ending with a financial surplus for its second straight year. The school increased its cash carryover of \$514,000 for school year 2011-2012 to \$561,000 for year 2012-2013. We were faced with the difficult challenge of securing the necessary funding for Phase II construction, a \$1.3 million project to expand the school by 13 classrooms to accommodate the enrollment growth for the start of the 2013-2014 school year. Additionally, Las Américas ASPIRA Academy, made a strategic decision to pay down \$221,000 as part of a principal reduction to the original Building Hope loan that was used to finance the school's construction for its first two years of operations. Overall, Las Américas ASPIRA Academy had a \$514,000 debt principal reduction in 2012-2013; however, the school still increased its cash reserves.

The school, though only in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year of operation, has shown the ability to favorably manage its finances while completing a school start-up and its second phase of construction. For the past two years we have been at enrollment capacity (105%), thus putting our enrollment at 439 K-7<sup>th</sup> grade students this year. Our large waiting list of students gives us the ability to manage our enrollment to ensure we reach capacity (as shown the last two years), thus ensuring our funding is at a maximum level each year. To date, our enrollment applications for the 2014-2015 school year show we will once again hold a lottery and maintain a substantial waiting list.

We realize the revenue benefits of a continued increase in student enrollment; however, because of the increased debt due to the Phase II construction, this school year will be our most challenging year to date. The inability to acquire a significant loan to fund the entire construction project will force us to use carryover money from our cash surplus. This is shown in our FY14 preliminary budget and will also show in the final budget. That being said, the school will continue to do everything it can to supplement revenue through fundraising and deploying its newly formed Development Committee charged to spearhead the school's capital campaign. We will continue to grow, promote and build on our schools overall success resulting from its first two years of operation.

#### **Organizational Performance Review Rating:**

- **2011-2012 Summary and Overall Rating: MEETS STANDARD**
- **2012-2013 Summary and Overall Rating: DOES NOT MEETS STANDARD**

#### **Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities for Growth**

The school's overall organizational performance targets were not met. Out of 13 measures that make up the overall rating, the school received 10 ratings of "Meets" and three ratings of "Does not Meets Standard;" specifically for measures 2, 4.c. and 5.b. Las Américas ASPIRA Academy does not take these results lightly and corrective measures are now in place to correct the audit deficiencies (one

material finding) and staff credentialing deficiencies. Also, the school will ensure the health and safety annual reporting requirements are achieved through timely submissions. Las Américas ASPIRA Academy has had compliance visits from DDOE which showed the school has been compliant with all components of the DPAS II evaluation system, Title I programs, IDEA and the National School Lunch program. The school also meets all State Department of Health guidelines, which is evident by passing our first health inspection (1/30/13). Additionally, evidence of the school's compliance with operational expectations can be found in compliance monitoring reports issued by DDOE over the last two years, which is the duration of our school's existence. The most recent reports (2012) state that Las Américas ASPIRA Academy is in compliance with all monitored regulations, including but not limited to: McKinney-Vento Homeless Act, Child Abuse Reporting Training, immunization audit and policy regarding the release of students to persons other than parent/guardian.

The school will continue to strengthen its internal capacity for meeting organizational performance expectations. We are now in our third year of operations, and it has proven to be a difficult task to keep up with the many (and changing) regulations. The school has purposely used its funds and resources to primarily support the classrooms in building a world class educational environment, thus keeping administrative and support staff hiring at a minimum. This strategy, though taxing on the few administrators employed at the school, has shown to produce solid and growing results in the academic and financial performance of the school for its first two years. Additionally, staff and student retention rates are very high thus enabling to our success. The school is now in the process of evaluating its current staffing model, job responsibilities for the schools administrators, and its overall growth plan for the future. We realize the importance of having the required infrastructure to support all areas of the school's business (finance and human resources) to enable the school to have compliance in all operational areas. We fully expect to achieve an overall rating of "Meets Standard" in 2013-2014.