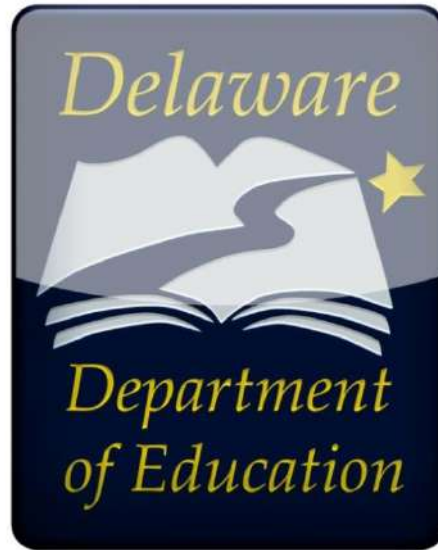


CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Delaware Design-Lab High School

MAJOR MODIFICATION APPLICATION INITIAL REPORT

CSAC Initial Meeting: January 26, 2016
CSAC Initial Report Published: January 29, 2016

On December 30, 2015, Delaware Design-Lab High School submitted an application for a major modification of its charter.

The following were in attendance at the Initial Meeting of the CSAC on January 26, 2016:

Voting Committee Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee

- David Blowman, Chairperson of the Charter School Accountability Committee and Associate Secretary, Financial Management and Operations, DDOE
- Karen Field Rogers, Deputy Secretary, DDOE
- April McCrae, Education Associate, Science Assessment and STEM, DDOE
- Barbara Mazza, Education Associate, Exceptional Children Resources, DDOE
- Chuck Taylor, Head of School, Providence Creek Academy

Non-voting Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee

- Donna Johnson, Executive Director, Delaware State Board of Education
- Kendall Massett, Executive Director, Delaware Charter School Network

Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)

- Catherine Hickey, Deputy Attorney General, Counsel to the Committee
- Jennifer Nagourney, Executive Director, Charter School Office, DDOE
- John Carwell, Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Michelle Whalen, Education Associate, Charter School Office
- Barbara Clendaniel, Acting Executive Assistant, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Financial Reform and Resource Management

Representatives of Delaware Design-Lab High School

- Cristina Alvarez, Ed.D., Chief Executive Officer
- Martin Rayala, Ph.D., Chief Academic Officer
- Joseph Mock, M. Ed., Principal
- Martin Rayala, Ph.D., Chief Academic Officer
- Riccardo Stoeckicht, Chief Operating Officer, Innovative Schools
- Teresa Gerchman, Chief Schools Officer, Innovative Schools
- Karen Thorpe, Financial Services, Innovative Schools

Additional Attendees

- Casey Guerke, Innovative Schools

Discussion

The following was discussed:

- A summary of the request – Delaware Design-Lab High School (“Design-Lab”) has applied for a modification to decrease the school’s authorized enrolment by more than 15%. In school year 2016-17, the authorized enrollment would decrease from 475 to 350 students (26%). The school explained that the Delaware market presented unique recruitment challenges than other Design-Lab locations. Thus, the requested enrollment modification reflects a more gradual enrollment trajectory that is based on the current market. Additionally, the board determined that a lower enrollment would have a significant positive impact on the school’s culture and learning environment.
- Projected retention of current students – 115 of 137 current 9th graders will continue to 10th grade and 85 of 96 current 10th graders will continue to 11th grade. Total projected enrollment for 2016-17 would be 350 (9th grade-150, 10th grade-115, 11th grade-85). The CSAC raised a concern about the school’s anticipated retention rates for current students moving up to 10th grade (83%) and students moving up to 11th grade (88%).
- Plans for student retention – The school aims to retain all students. Currently, there are 27 student ambassadors nominated by their peers who are excited about sharing their experiences at Design-Lab. The enrollment projections in the modification application are conservative. The school has implemented strategies to build a positive climate and culture. Mr. Mock was appointed as principal in early November and his goal was to create a dynamic, cohesive learning environment for all students. He and his team developed a student leadership and excellence program. Classroom behavioral data is tracked by a tool called “ClassDojo”. Every staff member mentors a group of 10-15 students to foster a positive culture. Additionally, the school uses restorative practices on a daily basis and the school has monthly assemblies to celebrate positive behavior.
- Will 10th grade enrollment be capped at 115 – Enrollment could fluctuate up to 105% as permitted by State law. A lottery may be necessary. The budget was developed based on an assumption of 10% attrition with conservative revenue assumptions.
- Applicants for the 2016-17 school year – As of January 25, 152 new applications for 2016-17 have been submitted (9th grade-114, 10th grade-22, 11th grade-16).
- Current fidelity to educational program as outlined in approved charter – The school has adopted the design thinking model which designers use at the university level and throughout their professional careers. Design-Lab uses design thinking and project-based learning as the main method of teaching for all subjects. In addition, all students take a design studio course. In 9th grade the design studio course is called “Technology Education” where students learn about the foundations of design. In 10th grade the design studio course is called “Media Design” where students learn about media literacy, animation, etc. All teachers, including core content teachers receive professional development in design thinking teaching methods.
- Who designed the computer lab – It was a group project involving a vendor (Omni Maven), a school team and students using design thinking methods. Monitors were

mounted on the walls to maximize workspace in the classroom. A large part of the school model is based on including student voice. Student proposals and suggestions are highly encouraged. Students successfully implemented the concept for the computer lab and are currently in the process of fine-tuning the layout. Students in 9th grade also requested more accelerated mathematics and submitted a proposal to add Khan Academy courses. Design-Lab's vision is to create innovators, entrepreneurs and college graduates.

- Will the decreased enrollment provide sufficient resources in the long-term to implement the approved instructional model with fidelity – The school stated that the modified enrollment would provide sufficient resources.
- Are substitutes included in the budget – The school responded that substitutes are budgeted under “Contracted Services”.
- How are the positive impacts on students with special needs (cited on page 5) possible based on reduced enrollment – The change in enrollment would still provide sufficient resources to hire special education teachers, paraprofessionals and counselors to meet the needs of students with special needs.
- What is the current percentage of students with special needs – 21% (Basic-36, Intense-12, Complex-0)
- The CSAC cautioned the school to anticipate lower per pupil funding from Christina School District next year based on lower projected spending by the district.
- Does Design-Lab's current facility have the capacity to serve 350 students – The current building has the capacity to serve 280 students. Enrollment above 280 would require the addition of modular units. The school is currently exploring modular options and plans to submit a subsequent minor modification request. Currently, the school has a lease for 5 years at the current site which includes flexibility for an “early-out” in two years if the board decides to find another location. Design-Lab's board is exploring various long-term options, including the current site which is surrounded by 11 acres. Another option would be to maintain the current site and open a satellite campus. The decreased enrollment projection would provide a growth curve that aligns better with the capacity of the current site.
- What was the rationale for excluding a modification request for modular units from the current modification request since they are related – The board decided to separate the requests because negotiations are underway for modular units and they did not want to submit a request before a clearly defined solution was identified.
- Ms. Nagourney noted that a compendium of parent complaints will be added to the record. The school responded that a “Frequently Asked Questions” guide was developed to address the parent complaints and requested that it be included as part of the record.

Conclusion

Mr. Blowman asked whether there were any components of the application that any members felt did not meet the standard for a positive final recommendation. The following specific information was requested by the CSAC to inform its decision-making:

- A clearer articulation of the relationship between projected student enrollment that includes new students and the retention of current students.
- Student retention strategy. What are the plans and goals for student retention?
- Budget based on 80% projected enrollment

Next Steps:

- The CSAC Initial Report will be issued no later than January 29, 2016.
- The first of two public hearings will take place on February 1, 2016, in the 2nd Floor Auditorium of the Carvel State Office Building, which is located at 820 N. French St., Wilmington, Delaware, beginning at 5:00 p.m.
- The school's response to the Initial CSAC Report, if the school chooses to submit a response, is due by 5:00 p.m. on February 16, 2016.
- The Final CSAC Meeting will be held on February 22, 2016, in the 2nd Floor Cabinet Room of the Townsend Building, which is located at 401 Federal St., Dover, Delaware, beginning at 1:00 p.m.
- A Final CSAC Report will be issued no later than March 1, 2016, and will include the CSAC's recommendation on the application.
- A second and final public hearing will take place on March 7, 2016, in the 2nd Floor Auditorium of the Carvel State Office Building, which is located at 820 N. French St., Wilmington, Delaware, beginning at 5:00 p.m.
- The public comment period will close on March 11, 2016.
- The Secretary of Education will announce his decision at the regular meeting of the State Board of Education on March 17, 2016.