

In The Matter Of:
Department of Education
Major Modification Application - Academy of Dover

Hearing
February 10, 2020

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STATE OF DELAWARE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
CHARTER SCHOOL OFFICE

IN RE: MAJOR MODIFICATION APPLICATION
ACADEMY OF DOVER

Delaware Department of Education
Charter School Office
Townsend Building
401 Federal Street
Dover, Delaware

Monday, February 10, 2020
5:00 p.m.

BEFORE: LEROY TRAVERS,
Lead Education Associate,
Charter School Office

ALSO PRESENT: CANDICE FIFER,
Delaware State
Board of Education

DARYL A. PARSON, ESQ.,
Deputy Attorney General for
the State Board of Education

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1 MR. TRAVERS: Good evening,
2 everyone. I declare this public hearing to
3 be open. My name is Leroy Travers. I'm
4 the lead education associate with the
5 Charter School Office and I've been
6 appointed by the Secretary of Education to
7 conduct this public hearing.

8 The Academy of Dover Charter
9 School has filed an application to modify
10 its charter to include a sixth grade. As
11 is required by law, the matter was referred
12 to the Charter School Accountability
13 Committee for investigation and report.
14 This joint public hearing is being held by
15 the Department of Education and the State
16 Board of Education.

17 With me this evening, I have
18 Darryl Parson, a deputy attorney general,
19 and Candice Fifer from the Delaware State
20 Board of Education.

21 I would like the record to
22 reflect that the notice of time, date and
23 place of today's public hearing was
24 published at the Charter School



1 Accountability Committee's official place
2 of business, on the Department of
3 Education's official website, and on the
4 State Public Meeting Calendar on the
5 State's official website.

6 A court reporter is present so
7 that a record of this hearing can be made.
8 It will be necessary for each speaker to
9 speak clearly and identify him- or herself
10 before beginning to speak so that the court
11 reporter will be able to note who you are.
12 We also ask that if you wish to speak
13 please have a seat at one of the seats at
14 the end of this table so that he can hear
15 you. Also, if you have prepared notes to
16 speak from, if possible, please submit
17 those to the court reporter as well.

18 The recording of this hearing
19 will be provided to the Secretary of
20 Education and members of the State Board of
21 Education, together with any written or
22 electronic comments received during the
23 renewal process. To date, comments
24 received on this renewal application are



1 posted on the Charter School Office's
2 website.

3 We will proceed in the
4 following manner. First we will hear from
5 representatives of the charter school who
6 wish to comment on the renewal application.
7 Unless otherwise waived by the presiding
8 officer, charter school representatives
9 shall be limited to 15 minutes in total.

10 Next we will take comments from
11 the public. There are sign-up sheets at
12 the back of the room on the table near the
13 door. If you desire to speak and have not
14 signed up, please do so now. Those who
15 have not signed up will not be permitted to
16 speak and instead be asked to submit
17 written comment. All public speakers shall
18 be limited to three minutes.

19 We will now pause for a moment
20 to ensure that anyone that wishes to sign
21 up can do so.

22 We'll go off the record.

23 (A brief recess was taken.)

24 - - - - -



1 MR. TRAVERS: All right. I
2 reserve the right to impose reasonable
3 time, place and manner restrictions if the
4 speakers prevent the hearing from
5 accomplishing its goals in a reasonable
6 manner. The hearing's purpose is strictly
7 to collect public comment. Questions of
8 the Department of Education or the State
9 Board of Education are not permitted and
10 will not be acknowledged.

11 At this point we will accept
12 comments from any school representatives.

13 MR. BOYNTON: Thank you,
14 Mr. Travers.

15 I'm going to give the court
16 reporter my card. My name is going to be a
17 little hard to spell.

18 My name is Kimeu Boynton. I'm
19 the board president for the Academy of
20 Dover Charter School. And just for quick
21 information, my fellow board member,
22 Dr. Charles Fletcher, will be speaking on
23 behalf of the school. And then we'll turn
24 it over to Dr. Marinucci, our head of



1 school.

2 I just wanted to make a short
3 comment and wanted to thank the members of
4 the Committee for reviewing our
5 application. The addition of a sixth grade
6 is very important to our school. It would
7 make us more competitive in the community.
8 Every year we have parents that are pleased
9 with the educational outcomes of their
10 students when they get to fifth grade. And
11 the one sole wish is "I wish I could keep
12 them at AOD for one more year before they
13 start middle school." So that's very
14 important to us. And that's due in large
15 part to why we are submitting our
16 application for the modification of our
17 charter to add a sixth grade.

18 I'll keep my comments brief.
19 And I'll now turn it over to Dr. Charles
20 Fletcher.

21 DR. FLETCHER: Thank you.

22 Good afternoon, Mr. Travers,
23 and the other members here for the hearing.

24 I too am a member of the



1 Academy Board. And my name is
2 Dr. Fletcher. I've been a member for a
3 good number of years. My wife was a
4 teacher at the school. So that's sort of
5 how my connection grew with the program.

6 But I've always been concerned
7 about our lack of a competitive edge with
8 some of the other schools. The way the
9 middle school is structured in the Capital
10 District places us at a disadvantage.

11 Now, we have to admit it was
12 our choice not to continue with sixth
13 grade, because I can remember years when we
14 did have one. But with the trickle of
15 students -- but now it is the parents that
16 are a part of the program. And we listen
17 to them a little more keenly. And it is
18 their efforts that desire us to go toward
19 sixth grade. They are very happy with what
20 we are doing with the school, the academic
21 performance of their youngsters. And we're
22 very happy with the role that we're playing
23 in the community. So we're grateful that
24 you are considering this proposal and we



1 know that you will give it a very thorough
2 review and consideration.

3 DR. MARINUCCI: Hi. Thank you
4 for having us.

5 I'm Michele Marinucci. I'm the
6 head of school for the Academy of Dover.

7 I came on in August, literally
8 one day before the staff started. So I
9 have been running hard with an amazing,
10 amazing staff. And we have been just doing
11 some really incredible things with and for
12 our students and their families. And so
13 through this is how we came to be here at
14 this table today.

15 One of the common themes in
16 talking to our families about our
17 enrollment and our history of enrollment
18 difficulties and retention difficulties is
19 a common theme. And that common theme from
20 our families is they want their children to
21 stay in a small school where the school
22 knows their children, where they're not
23 just part of a body of a thousand
24 students -- they're part of a much smaller



1 group of students -- which led us to,
2 through much discussion -- to submit the
3 major modification application to expand
4 our enrollment to 330 students and add
5 sixth grade for this coming school year.

6 I will tell you that I love our
7 fifth graders. They are amazing, amazing
8 children. And we have just -- just in the
9 few months that I have been there watching
10 them thrive, watching them grow, watching
11 them turn around and be so proud and
12 develop the leadership skills that we want
13 our children to develop. I don't want to
14 lose them next year as sixth graders. And
15 that seems to be the common theme with our
16 families too. They have -- they too have
17 seen the change in their children.

18 We have the small class sizes
19 where we can create that culture of caring
20 and almost the village mentality that our
21 culture seeks right now. We need that
22 village where we come together and we work
23 with our families, with our community, with
24 our students.



1 We listen to our students. We
2 have developed the Blue Ribbon Girls and
3 the Bowtie Boys. And these students are
4 students that develop -- they demonstrate
5 leadership capabilities. It started with
6 our fifth graders. It's trickled down. We
7 now have kindergartners wearing little blue
8 satin bowties. And you're actually going
9 to hear from one of our students that's
10 wearing a bowtie today.

11 But these students are so
12 proud. They take an oath to do great
13 things for our Academy and for our
14 community. And we've seen our
15 fifth graders take on being leaders in our
16 Academy. And to watch them grow and
17 develop into leaders where they actually
18 have given up their recess -- and for a
19 fifth grader to say -- to voluntarily say,
20 "I will give up my recess. Can I please
21 tutor a younger child?" The amount of
22 growth that comes for them and to others
23 with doing that is just incredible. And
24 that culture, it just permeates throughout



1 our building to where we have been able to
2 secure so many more families in enrolling.

3 So when I started, we did have
4 an enrollment challenge. And so, in
5 August, we -- between August and
6 September 30th, which, as you know, is a
7 very crucial deadline, we were able to
8 recruit 50 additional students to our
9 school. That was a significant number.
10 And, then, since September 30th, we've
11 continued to enroll students because we
12 want to support and serve our community and
13 to see students thrive and learn. So
14 between -- after September 30th, we
15 enrolled an additional nine students. And
16 what that has allowed us to do is keep our
17 enrollment consistent. So we had 266
18 students on September 30th. Today we have
19 264. And we have two more applications for
20 coming on this year pending. So we are
21 maintaining status quo on our enrollment,
22 which was one of our goals -- that we
23 didn't have a drop. Because kids move.
24 The lifestyle -- you know, there's life



1 changes that happen. And so there's a
2 natural decline in enrollment that happens
3 throughout the year.

4 But knowing that there was
5 an importance of that, we've sought
6 additional creative ways to fix for that.
7 So we've been accepting students after
8 September 30th. We've launched an
9 incredibly powerful Facebook campaign. And
10 that has driven in an incredible number of
11 applications and people.

12 Our electronic marquee in front
13 of our school does some really fancy things
14 that we figured out when we first came at
15 the start of the year. And a lot of our
16 families are coming in because of that.
17 But the majority of our families that come
18 in are coming in because they heard about
19 the amazing things happening within our
20 Academy for our students.

21 We absolutely love our
22 students. We love what we do. There is a
23 complete passion that isn't just my passion
24 but it's the passion of the entire staff



1 when you come in the building. Our parents
2 see it. Every tour we do for parents that
3 are interested in coming to the Academy
4 ends up with an enrollment application
5 filled out before they leave. So it's
6 really exciting to see the power happening
7 within our Academy.

8 And having the sixth grade
9 addition will just allow us to continue to
10 grow these fifth graders one year longer
11 and develop them further and also not have
12 them go to that awkward split where they
13 go -- the majority -- 86 percent of our
14 students come from the Capital School
15 District. So their awkward split is that
16 they go to William Henry for sixth grade
17 but not for fifth grade. And so they're in
18 that middle school year for one year where
19 they came from this real small class size
20 where everything is done in a very small
21 way where we all know the students to where
22 they're part of such a large student body
23 that they sometimes struggle. And we've
24 had that feedback from parents who have the



1 older students that have gone on.

2 So we've -- we ended up,
3 through polling our families -- it was an
4 overwhelming response by our families that
5 they wanted to continue. We held an
6 interest night. And we opened it up to
7 parents of fourth and fifth graders. We
8 even had parents of kindergartners show up
9 that were like -- they said, "Don't leave
10 us out. We want a say. We're interested
11 in this."

12 Our fourth and fifth graders
13 have told us what sports they want. They
14 have helped us to build the Academy into
15 what it should be. And we continue to
16 listen to all of their voices. And that is
17 where our application came from. So it
18 came with lots and lots of heart and love
19 and interest and exploration of our
20 families, which includes our community and
21 our students as well.

22 So -- and, then, the academic
23 rigor, obviously, is something really
24 important to us. And we are making sure



1 that we're preparing our students well for
2 academic success. So not only are we
3 focusing on the social and emotional side
4 of building up them to be leaders but we're
5 also focusing on the academics by taking a
6 look at our curriculum that was in place
7 and building in supplemental pieces for
8 that, as well as moving into a completely
9 new ELA curriculum, because the one we had
10 just wasn't cutting it.

11 So I thank you for your time.
12 And I'm sorry I said so much.

13 Thank you.

14 MR. TRAVERS: Are there any
15 other representatives of the school that
16 would like to speak at this time?

17 Okay. At this point we will
18 accept comments from anyone else who is
19 signed up to speak. I'll call your name.
20 Please remember to repeat your name and
21 have a seat at one of the chairs up front.

22 We have Jennifer Jurczak.

23 MS. JURCZAK: Yes.

24 Hi. I'm Jennifer Jurczak.



1 It's J-u-r-c, like in cat, Z, like in
2 zebra, a-k.

3 My son has gone to the school
4 from kindergarten. He is currently in
5 fourth grade. And we actually decided to
6 choice him outside of the Caesar Rodney
7 School District where we live. It's the
8 best choice that we have made.

9 There was a time earlier when
10 he was in second, third grade we decided,
11 you know, we might put him into another
12 school. But the way that everything has
13 gone this year -- and it's so different.
14 Everything is just so amazing. We decided
15 that we definitely do not want to do that.

16 Sorry.

17 He was diagnosed with autism
18 this year. And this school was
19 instrumental in helping us, where we've
20 been trying to get that for many years to
21 try to get the extra help. Now he's in so
22 many different supports. We had taken him
23 to services through Caesar Rodney before he
24 started school, and we couldn't even get an



1 appointment to get in to talk with them
2 about different things. The school has
3 completely changed our lives.

4 He is now, like, going out
5 thinking about stuff beyond himself to do.
6 They had a teacher that had an unfortunate
7 situation where her home burnt down. And
8 he took every bit of the money that he had
9 been saving to give to her because he
10 wanted to help her -- something that he
11 never would have done before. But it was
12 because of what he was taught at the
13 school. So there's definitely life
14 changing things from the school.

15 So I just -- we'd love to keep
16 him in through sixth grade. If they could
17 even go through eighth grade, we could keep
18 him there. So I just wanted to say that.

19 Thank you.

20 Sorry for getting emotional.

21 MR. TRAVERS: Jeffrey Jurczak.

22 MR. JURCZAK: My name is
23 Jeffrey Jurczak. And I really like this
24 school so much, because being -- they have



1 a very nice staff, just like my teacher.

2 And I forget the rest.

3 MS. JURCZAK: Just speak from
4 your heart, honey. You don't have to --
5 there's no script or anything. You just
6 tell the truth.

7 MR. JURCZAK: And I love my
8 technology teacher and -- teacher, I mean.
9 And my art teacher. And my gym teacher.
10 They're so nice.

11 That's it. That's all I want
12 to say.

13 MR. TRAVERS: Thank you.

14 Ronda Bacu.

15 MS. BACU: Yes.

16 My name is Mrs. Bacu. I'm
17 actually the math specialist at Academy of
18 Dover Charter.

19 I want to add on to what
20 Jeffrey said. We are a small school, but
21 we have a big vision. And the teachers
22 generally care and are passionate about the
23 learning of their students. So our -- I'm
24 here to request that you consider to



1 approve the application to add sixth grade
2 to the Academy. I know it is what our
3 parents are seeking and I know it would
4 continue to support our students in
5 learning. And it would be what's best for
6 our Academy. So I request that you please
7 seriously consider approving the charter
8 modification for sixth grade.

9 Thank you.

10 MR. TRAVERS: Daniel Jones.

11 MR. JONES: Good afternoon.

12 My name is Daniel Jones. I'm
13 the behavior specialist at the Academy.

14 And a lot was said today about
15 different things. But one thing I want to
16 touch on is the leadership that
17 Dr. Marinucci and Mr. Postles has given us
18 at the Academy.

19 This is my first year of
20 teaching. And the training and the help
21 and the guidance that they gave was
22 tremendous. And the children -- the bonds
23 that us, as a staff, as a -- I'd say a
24 small community gathering with the



1 children. I request for the sixth grade
2 to -- for us to be extended to the sixth
3 grade. It would benefit the children
4 mostly for socially and academically.

5 MR. TRAVERS: Thank you.

6 Well, I want to thank everyone
7 from Academy of Dover for participating
8 today. The Secretary will consider your
9 comments in deciding, at the conclusion of
10 the renewal process, what decision to
11 submit to the State Board.

12 This hearing for Academy of
13 Dover is now closed.

14 (The hearing adjourned at
15 approximately 5:19 p.m. this same day.)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

STATE OF DELAWARE :
:
KENT COUNTY :

I, Robert Wayne Wilcox, Jr.,
Registered Professional Reporter and Notary
Public, do hereby certify that the
foregoing record, Pages 1 to 20 inclusive,
is a true and accurate transcript of my
stenographic notes taken on February 10,
2020, in the above-captioned matter.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto
set my hand and seal this 10th day of
February, 2020, at Wilmington, Delaware.



Robert Wayne Wilcox, Jr., RPR

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