



October 30, 2015

Ms. Jennifer M. Nagourney, J.D.  
Executive Director  
Charter School Office  
Delaware Department of Education  
The Townsend Building  
401 Federal Street, Suite 2  
Dover, DE 19901-3639

Via email to: [infocso@doe.k12.de.us](mailto:infocso@doe.k12.de.us)

Dear Ms. Nagourney:

In June 2015, the Department of Education, with the assent of the State Board of Education, concluded its formal review of Freire Charter School Wilmington and placed the school on probation until December 31, 2015, subject to the following conditions:

1. The school shall submit a report on its transportation plan by June 30, 2015; with an update to be submitted by October 31, 2015;
2. All members of the school's board of directors shall participate in training offered by the Delaware Alliance for Nonprofit Advancement by October 1, 2015; and
3. The school shall submit a report by October 31, 2015 based upon the September 30 enrollment and unit count outlining the number of basic, intensive, and complex students by grade and what Freire is doing to implement all of the services outlined in the IEPs of those individual students.

With this letter and attached documentation, Freire Charter School Wilmington satisfies the conditions of its probation, and as such, we request that the school be removed from probation and permitted to continue providing a first class educational program to our students free from any conditions. Specifically, we have met the conditions of our probation as follows:

### **TRANSPORTATION REPORT UPDATE**

On June 29, 2015, Freire Charter School Wilmington submitted its transportation plan to the Department of Education. This letter constitutes an update to this report.

Presently, Freire Charter School Wilmington has 231 students enrolled from all over New Castle County as follows: Wilmington (approximately 40%), Newark (approximately 30%), New Castle (approximately 20%), and Bear (approximately 10%). 68% of our students live further than 2 miles from the school. August 31, 2015 was our first day of instruction and of paramount importance during our start-up operations was the development of a comprehensive transportation plan for this geographically diverse student body. Our plan was designed to both ensure the safety of our students and also minimize disruption to the neighborhood in which we are located.

At the time of our application, we had anticipated using DART First State as our primary mode of student transportation to and from our charter school. Based on the geographic diversity, parental feedback, and discussions with city agencies, we have revised our transportation plan into a three pronged approach:

1. **DART Public Transportation** – For many of our students, using DART buses remains the best transportation option. Freire Charter School Wilmington is committed to partnering with DART for several reasons. First, using public transportation at our Philadelphia charter school has been a successful experience for these students, offering them an opportunity to learn real-world commuting skills. We also use DART to allow students to stay after school to get academic help and stay as long as needed to master the material with their teacher by their side. In Wilmington, our campus is located in close proximity (within a 5-10 minute walk) to several major bus stops. Additionally, prior to implementing this model, we were in conversation with a Wilmington private school who has used DART effectively to transport students to and from school from all over New Castle County for over 20 years. So, while a novel approach to charter school transportation, it is a model that has been tested successfully in Wilmington. The model has proven safe and effective, with no behavior incidents or safety concerns being reported to Freire Wilmington. Freire Charter School Wilmington provides DART passes to students free of charge. Approximately, 30% of our students use DART as their main mode of transportation to and from school, with some using it just for transportation when participating in extracurricular activities after school.
2. **Commercial School Bus Transportation with Bus Hub Stops** – While many parents were really excited about the use of DART for student transportation, during the student recruitment process we quickly learned that others preferred a school bus option or simply did not live in close proximity to a DART stop. We wanted to accommodate parent needs and preferences, so we negotiated a commercial bus contract (after a public bid process) with Lehane’s Bus Service, Inc. that provides three routes of transportation primarily using hub stops (21 stops throughout Wilmington, Newark, New Castle, Elsmere, and Bear). It is also important to note that the drop off locations at Freire Charter School Wilmington are not directly in front of the school in response to neighborhood concerns about buses traversing the narrow streets of Midtown Brandywine. Rather, the buses drop off and pick up on 12<sup>th</sup> Street between King Street and Market. Our Head of Academic Supports, one of our two heads of school, is stationed at this location during arrival and dismissal each day along with one other staff member. Approximately 50% of our students ride the school bus to and from school.
3. **Personal Transportation** – We also have some families who prefer to transport their students to and from school in their personal vehicles or live quite close to the school and their students walk or bike to and from the building each day. To be responsive to this preference while also respecting the neighborhood’s expressed desire to avoid traffic congestion in the area immediately in front of the school, we are discouraging parents from dropping their students off directly in front of the school. Just as with the school buses, we have provided drop off locations outside of the neighborhood within a short walking distance to the school. The drop off location (which is marked with City signage) is located on Market Street between 14<sup>th</sup> Street and 15<sup>th</sup> Street, and is typically manned at arrival and dismissal by a Freire staff member. Approximately 20% of our students use personal transportation to and from Freire. Students are prohibited from driving themselves to school.

Some additional details of our transportation plan include:

- We are in frequent communication with DART officials to discuss logistics, including purchasing DART pass cards in large quantities (which we are doing successfully).
- Bus drop off/pick up locations have been coordinated with the Public Works Department of the City of Wilmington, with final approval by the Wilmington Police Department. These locations are outside the residential neighborhood to alleviate some neighborhood concerns. Signage was also coordinated with the City.
- We have reached out to the Wilmington Police Department to identify places where crossing guards may be beneficial, and we are on the waiting list for crossing guard(s).

- We worked with an experienced traffic engineer who has coordinated city, neighborhood association leadership, and school leadership with the aim of minimizing extra traffic within the neighborhood and identifying safe and close locations for both bus and parent drop off outside the residential neighborhood.
- Some students due to special education related services needs or disability may require specialized transportation. These situations will be handled on a case-by-case basis. For example, we have met the needs of two students who require specialized transportation according to what is mandated in their IEP or 504 plan.
- During the first two weeks of school a cadre of volunteers (parent and community members) and Freire staff mobilized to provide a presence at most intersections along the routes surrounding the school (e.g. DART bus stops, intersections between the parent drop-off and the school, intersections between the school bus drop-off and the school, and intersections within the residential neighborhood). The purpose of this was to acclimate our students to their short walking routes and ensure that residential traffic was minimized.
- As the weather is getting colder, we are again assembling a team of volunteers to mobilize around the school to ensure that students are dropped off at the appropriate locations and not directly in front of the school.
- To continue our outreach to the Midtown Brandywine community, we published a newsletter that included a section on transportation, and we will continue to do so as necessary.
- During our monthly parent meeting, parents are able to address any concerns they have with transportation. We also included a session on transportation during parent orientation during the first week of school.
- After submitting our transportation report to your office last June, DDOE concerns were raised regarding statutory responsibilities of charter school heads of school, specifically related to providing for “close and continuous supervision of the unloading and loading zones on or near the school plant grounds, and during emergency drills (3.1.4)” and providing for “supervision for those pupils whose bus schedules require them to arrive at school before classes begin and remain after classes terminate (3.1.5).” The main concern expressed was that students would be dropped off at locations away from the school and have to walk to the school. However, we have run this scenario by legal counsel, and by stationing one of our heads of school at the loading and unloading zone (along with one other staff member), we ensure the close and continuous supervision. As for before or after school activities, on most days, our school is open and staffed from 7 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. to provide for supervision of students who travel outside the normal school day window. Also, we do not presently provide school bus service for after school activities. Students use either personal transportation or DART.

We believe we have addressed the transportation matter in a manner that is both convenient and safe for our students and respectful to neighborhood resident concerns. We will continue to monitor our transportation routinely with an eye towards providing the safest, most efficient means of getting to and from school for each child.

### **GOVERNANCE TRAINING**

Freire Charter School Wilmington’s Board of Directors is composed of the following individuals:

- John Pierson, President
- Hal Real, Treasurer
- Clint Walker, Secretary
- Christian Willauer, Assistant Secretary
- Mike Cattermole (parent representative, pending vote)
- Mia Davenport-Chaney (parent representative)
- Julia Li (teacher representative)
- Henry Smith

On September 22, 2015 all of the members above, except Henry Smith, participated in the Delaware Alliance for Nonprofit Advancement’s “Foundation for Board Excellence Training for Charter Schools.” The certificates of completion attesting to this fact are appended to this letter. One of our co-heads of school, Head of Academics Paul Ramirez, also

participated in the training as did two members of the school’s charter support organization Build the Future Education Collaborative (Kelly Davenport and Melanie Reiser).

As we brought to the Department of Education’s attention in a September 21, 2015 email to David Blowman and Jennifer Nagourney, Henry Smith has been battling a prolonged illness that has temporarily made him unable to participate on the Board and made him unavailable to participate on the September 22, 2015 training. As we mentioned, Henry has been a Board member of Freire Charter School Wilmington since its inception, and he is a servant of the State of Delaware in his job as undersecretary in the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services. We know that he fully intends to honor his commitments as soon as he is well enough to do so, and, as such, we wish to retain him as a Board member for Freire Charter School Wilmington.

In the September 21, 2015 email we inquired if we would need to remove Henry Smith as a Board member to be fully compliant with our probation conditions. On September 22, 2015, Jennifer Nagourney indicated that Henry Smith could complete the training at another time when he is not going through medical issues. This remains our plan for Henry upon his return to the Board. As such, we believe we are compliant with this condition of our probation.

**SPECIAL EDUCATION REPORT**

On June 1, 2015, Freire Charter School Wilmington submitted its detailed special education plans to the Charter School Accountability Committee as part of our formal review process. Now, two months into school operation we have been able to implement a special education program – called Student Services at Freire – with fidelity to IDEA and the required regulations of Delaware’s Education Code.

As of our September 30 enrollment and unit count, we service 15 special education students (6.4%) – 9 Basic, 4 Intensive, and 2 Complex. These are all students who entered Freire with IEPs and whose IEP paperwork and audit files were all reviewed by our Student Support team and either adopted as is or adopted with addenda. We also continue to grow our Student Services population as new students enroll and as we identify potential students through our RTI process.

Presently, our Student Services team is comprised of the following:

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>EDUCATION/TRAINING</b>	<b>EMPLOYED/ CONTRACTED</b>	<b>DUTIES</b>
Head of Academics	Certified Delaware Teacher	Employed Full-Time	Oversee the educational plans and assessments of all students with special needs, 504 plans, and manage RTI process.
Student Services Teachers (2)	Certified in Special Education in Delaware	Employed Full-Time	Provide special education push-in and pull-out services to students with IEPs, monitor progress, participate in IST. Manage transition services.
Student Services Support Paraprofessional	Trained in special education	Employed Full-Time	Provide small-group instructional, physical, and behavioral support to students with complex needs.

School Psychologist	Certified in Delaware	Contracted Part-Time	Evaluate student skills, achievement levels, and cognitive needs, and assess students' progress for IEP development.
Freire Charter School Philadelphia Consulting	Staff trained in special education implementation and compliance	Contracted Part-Time	Provide ongoing mentoring to full Student Services Team
School Nurse	R.N. completing DE School Nurse training	Employed Full-Time	Provide student healthcare and physical accommodations. IEP team participant to represent health needs of the child.
Speech Therapist	Certified in Delaware	Contracted Part-time	Provide speech therapy services per IEPs.

This Student Services Team has been successful in providing the services required by our special needs population, as follows:

Student	Service Level	Amount of time of Special education services	How Services are Provided
1	Basic	110 minutes weekly pull out	Student Supports Teacher A
2	Basic*	60 minutes weekly push in	Student Supports Teacher B
3	Basic	60 minutes weekly push in/190 minutes pull out	Student Supports Teacher B
4	Intensive	180 minutes weekly push in/490 minutes pull out	Student Supports Teacher B
5	Intensive	180 minutes weekly push in/490 minutes pull out	Student Supports Teacher B
6	Complex	490 minutes weekly pull out	Student Supports Teacher A
		Paraprofessional all day except for lunch	Paraprofessional
		Speech 3 times a month 45 minutes	Speech Therapist Contractor
7	Intensive	180 minutes weekly push in/490 minutes weekly pull out	Student Supports Teacher B
8	Complex	490 minutes weekly pull out	Student Supports Teacher A
		Paraprofessional all day except for lunch	Paraprofessional
9	Basic	60 minutes weekly pull out	Student Supports Teacher A
10	Basic	60 minutes weekly push in/120 minutes weekly pull out	Student Supports Teacher B
11	Basic	60 minutes weekly push in/120 minutes weekly pull out	Student Supports Teacher B
		Speech 2 times a month 45 minutes	Speech Therapist Contractor
12	Basic	60 minutes push in/60 minutes pull out	Student Supports Teacher A
13	Basic	60 minutes weekly push in/150 minutes weekly pull out	Student Supports Teacher B
14	Basic	60 minutes weekly push in/150 minutes weekly pull out	Student Supports Teacher B
15	Basic	60 minutes weekly push in/120 minutes weekly pull out	Student Supports Teacher B

\*Student 2 was reevaluated in October. While his September 30<sup>th</sup> designation was Intensive, his improved academic achievement led him to be reclassified as Basic.

Some additional details of our special education report include the following:

- We have added five additional Student Services students since September 30<sup>th</sup> (through new enrollment and child find through our RTI program) and are providing them with special education services despite receiving no additional funding for these students. This brings our Student Services population to 8.6%.
- Freire Charter School Wilmington is in communication with our DDOE contact Barbara Mazza as we strive to implement our program to the highest standards. Both administration and teachers have participated in DDOE special education training.
- Freire's two Complex students are in the same classes all day long, and, as such, share a paraprofessional who is funded through IDEA funding.
- Freire Charter School Wilmington contracts with Therapy Source for its certified school psychologist.
- All of our Student Services students take Intensive Reading and Intensive Math (their "double dose") which are taught at their ability levels. Skills Center teaches organization and transition services.
- For transition programming, Freire is implementing Delaware Compass and Keys to Work.
- Both Student Services teachers are in compliance with guidelines for caseload limits.
- Approximately 2% of our students will require services beyond the school year, either Extended School Year (ESY) or 12-month services. We will be providing these services in summer 2016.
- Less than 1% of our students require assistive technology, and this is provided throughout the day using a keyboard per the student's IEP.
- Speech therapy is currently the only related service required, which we contract out through Therapy Source.

Freire Charter School Wilmington's Student Supports team has worked diligently to ensure that we were able to immediately meet the needs of our special needs students, and we have demonstrated that we are doing what is necessary to implement all of the services outline in the IEPs of our individual students.

**CONCLUSION**

Freire Charter School Wilmington has found the position of being on probation to be a beneficial learning opportunity as it provided us with the structure to think strategically about real operational challenges before and during our initial implementation. We trust that this letter and the associated documentation satisfies the conditions of our probation, and we look forward to continuing to serve our students at the highest standards. If you have any questions about the information contained herein, please do not hesitate to reach out to us.

Sincerely,



Paul Ramirez  
Head of Academics

Sincerely,



Felicia K. Wenell  
Head of Academic Supports

Enclosure