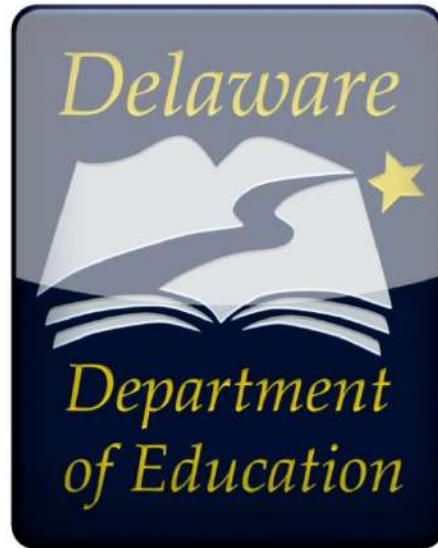


CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Gateway Lab School

**RENEWAL APPLICATION
INITIAL REPORT**

CSAC Initial Meeting: October 29, 2019
CSAC Initial Report Published: November 7, 2019

By September 30, 2019, Gateway Lab School (GLS) submitted an application to renew its charter. Consideration of this application is in accordance with the applicable provisions of 14 *Del. C.* § 514A and 14 DE Admin. Code § 275. Written renewal application guidance is provided by the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) on its website. The renewal application template developed by DDOE is aligned to measures and targets within the Performance Framework, which outlines the academic, organizational and fiscal standards by which all Delaware charter schools are evaluated. The evaluation of the school's performance as measured by the Framework is a major component of the decision on the renewal application. The decision on the renewal application is based on a comprehensive review, guided, in part, by the following three questions:

1. Is the academic program a success?
2. Is the school financially viable?
3. Is the school organizationally sound?

This report serves as a summary of the strengths, areas of follow-up, and/or concerns identified by members of the Charter School Accountability Committee (CSAC) during their individual reviews of the charter applicant's renewal application, Performance Review Reports, Annual Reports and Performance Agreements and during the CSAC meetings.

The following were in attendance at the Initial Meeting of the CSAC on October 28, 2019:

Voting Committee Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee

- Chuck Longfellow, Chairperson of the Charter School Accountability Committee and Associate Secretary of Education, DDOE
- April McCrae, Education Associate, Academic Support, DDOE
- Tiffany Green, Education Associate, Educator Support, DDOE
- Gregory Fulkerson, Education Associate, Academic Support, DDOE
- Catherine Oravez, Education Associate, Operations Support, DDOE
- James Pennewell, Education Associate, Operations Support, DDOE
- Susan Veenema, Education Associate, Academic Support, DDOE
- Susan Haberstroh, Education Associate, Student Support, DDOE
- Charles Taylor, Retired Head of School, Community Member

Ex-Officio Members (Non-voting)

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

Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)

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

Representatives of Gateway Lab School

- Joyce Henderson, Board President
- Catherine Dolan, Head of School
- Pam Draper, Business Manager
- Dorcell Spence, Financial Consultant
- Marlin White, Principal
- Joseph Menna, Math Instructional Specialist
- Laurie Gremminger, Special Education Coordinator
- Dolores Allen-McIntyre, Academic Dean
- Doreen Rathmell, Teacher and Board Member

Discussion

Section 1: Overview

Dr. Longfellow asked the school to provide an overview. Gateway Lab School (GLS) showed a short video. Using a PowerPoint, Ms. Dolan provided an overview of the school. She stated that Gateway Lab School is unique because 60% of the student population is categorized as special education and come to the school to find a place where they can learn. At GLS, the students arrive with major holes in their learning. These students are often struggling in the traditional school setting Ms. Dolan emphasized that GLS is not an alternative school and not a school for behavior. It is a model that works, it is a team that is powerful, it is a Board that is focused and it is a story worth hearing. Ms. Dolan shared data including the following:

- In 2018, 10% of GLS students were proficient in ELA, in 2019, 11% were proficient
- In 2018, 2.8% of students with disabilities were proficient in Math, in 2019, 4% were proficient.
- From 2018 to 2019, the academic progress in ELA has grown from 42.8% to 60% and the academic progress of students with disabilities has grown from 48.52% to 62.1%.
- From 2018 to 2019, the academic progress in Math has grown from 36.9% to 59.8% and the academic progress of students with disabilities has grown from 36.7% to 58.5%.
- In 2018 no students met growth targets on Smarter Balance. In 2019, 41.9% met growth targets in ELA and 38.8 in Math. Students with disabilities met growth targets at 45.3% in ELA and 35.3% in Math.
- MAP testing in Math and ELA showed that students met their growth targets with greater frequency in every grade level with the exception of 8th grade Reading.
- MAP data shows that the bottom third of academic performers met growth targets with greater frequency in ELA and Math in all grade levels including an overall increase of 40% in Reading and 25% in Math.
- 11% more students met growth targets on the Wilson Reading Assessment in 2019 than in 2018.

Ms. Dolan discussed the 7 Gateway highlights:

1. Mission and Vision (The Creep)
2. Change in Leadership
3. Curriculum (Wonders, Math in Focus)
4. Responsive Classroom (Culture and Climate)
5. Academic Rigor (Dean and Expectations)
6. Teacher Retention
7. Collaboration (Arts Integration and Community Involvement)

Section 2: Academic Framework

Dr. Longfellow stated that on September 20, 2019, the Charter School Office provided draft DSSF results to the renewing charter schools so they could complete their renewal applications. Dr. Longfellow asked if there are any questions on the Overview and Academic Framework.

Dr. McCrae noted that there was a significant drop in enrollment from 2015 to 2016. During that time GLS lost 40 students. At 3rd grade, there was a drop from 38 to 9 students on the September 30th count for 2018-19. Ms. Dolan, explained that she left in the Spring of 2015 and this was concerning to parents and impacted enrollment. About 2018-19, she felt that many parents felt that GLS was a behavioral alternative school, when it is actually an academic school for who learn differently and who have challenges. Dr. McCrae noted that the ratio of male to female is 70/30, which seems like a large male ratio. Ms. Dolan explained with ADHD there are more males diagnosed.

Dr. McCrae reminded the school to ensure that the measures that they are using to collect data align with the goals that they have set for their organization and their students. Many of their growth measures align to the MAPP assessment, which does not assess the students' success towards the standards. The use of standards-based assessments may be a better predictor of how students will perform on State accountability tests. Ms. Dolan stated that the MAPP assessment allows them to target deficiencies. Dr. McCrae advised the school to ensure that they are utilizing tracking tools accurately and offered assistance in the utilization of those tools.

Dr. Noble stated that there is learning loss during summer months. She asked how predictive the MAPP scoring is to Smarter scoring and how accurate the data from year end to year end may be due to summer learning loss. This is particularly true for students that are at-risk, academically.

Ms. Dolan explained that GLS does provides for six weeks of Extended School Year (ESY) services during the summer. Ms. Dolan acknowledged that GLS needs to do more during the summer. Eventually, GLS wants to offer camps that are fun but keeps students engaged in learning.

Dr. McCrae asked what type of process is in place to ensure that vendor created materials are standards based and to ensure proper professional development on the use of the materials. She asked if the pacing of the materials is customized for their school.

Mr. White stated that at GLS the administration regularly meets with teachers to discuss scope and sequence. . During the summer, a representative from "Math in Focus" provided professional development to staff. He stated that administration visits classrooms twice a week to observe teachers and provide feedback.

Mr. White added that they make sure that instructional time is built in.. Mr. White stated that they added Response to Intervention (RTI) block from 9:30 to 10:15 in which every student receives RTI instruction. The students with the highest needs are with the most experienced teachers. Every adult in the building has small group instruction during this time. Mr. White

stated that during the summer all students have access to the online learning databases and programs.

Ms. Dolan explained that GLS has professional development in the morning each day due to a delayed bus schedule. The teachers arrive at 7:45am and take part in professional development from 8:00 am until 8:30 every day.

Ms. Veenema asked what type of professional development topics they take part in specific to the needs of special education students. Ms. Gremminger explained that teachers are learning about data collection. They discuss the needs of at-risk students and strategies to meet their needs. They utilize this time to learn strategies for identifying students for additional interventions, as well. Some teachers meet to discuss students that take the alternative assessment. Mr. White stated that GLS has experienced master teachers and they share information with one another.

Ms. Veenema asked, what evidence based strategies they employed to assist special education students? Mr. White stated that GLS uses small group instruction and differentiated instruction by having students go to different centers. They work with novice teachers how to do this effectively. Novice teachers are also observing other teachers. Mr. Meena explained that this year, professional development has focused on the eight practices for teachers. Teachers have begun to discuss common goals. They are now taking a look at procedure regarding math versus actual practices in complex analysis. Teachers are analyzing their instruction. The teachers are taking one lesson and applying strategy to it.

Ms. Veenema Asked how GLS ties academics and behavior together using RTI and Responsive Classroom. Ms. Dolan explained that they tie in academics with who the students are. Students are constantly asked “What does it mean to be a Gateway Gladiator?” Responsive Classroom focuses on relationships and community building. The students are buying in to the Gateway Gladiator system.

Ms. Veenema asked the school to explain their inclusion model. Ms. Dolan stated that they have small classrooms, with one teacher and a para in every classroom. Their maximum class size is 18 students, however, they have no classrooms that large.

Section 3: Organizational Framework

Dr. Longfellow asked the CSAC if they had any questions or concerns regarding the organizational performance section of the school’s renewal application

Dr. Haberstroh asked why the school revised the mission to become much shorter and remove specific populations that the school is targeting. She also asked if this should be a major modification. Ms. Dolan stated that a good mission statement is one that you could memorize. GLS honed it as a more concise statement for more ownership. She stated that the mission of the school, itself, has not changed only the wording of the statement.

Ms. Draper, emphasized that this mission statement is the original one from the charter application.

Dr. Haberstroh asked if the decline in student absentee rate was due to the number of students in the hospital and homeless students. Mr. White commented that attendance was not done with fidelity prior to him taking on the principal position. It is now being done correctly and with fidelity and all proper follow-up is taking place.

Ms. Green asked if they were currently on-track to evaluate the Head of School and other administrators at the school. Ms. Henderson stated that they have evaluated the Head of School using a 360 tool and it has been sent to the DDOE.

Ms. Green, asked how many teachers are in year one or year two of the mentoring program. There are six. She asked if the school is finding it difficult to find mentors for those teachers. Mr. White explained that just finding the time is the challenge. Experienced teachers are observing the novice teachers. In the mornings GLS added the mentor/mentee component, where they are going over specific needs, courses, and opportunities that are offered to them and discussing the things novice educators are having difficulties with.

Dr. McCrae asked what GLS is doing in terms of capacity building and ensuring sustainability should there be a change in leadership. Ms. Dolan verified that she has assembled a team to build capacity and the leadership team can be self-sufficient, if necessary. Dr. Longfellow advised the school to rehearse scenarios in which the school leader is out for an extended period of time.

Dr. Noble expressed concern about their potential modification to add kindergarten through 2nd grade students and plans to purchase a building at the same time. Ms. Draper stated that GLS started at 3rd grade because students were not being identified for special education services until third grade at the time of their original charter. It stated in our original charter that after the second year they would add additional grades. Now, there is a broader awareness of special needs students. If the school starts at kindergarten, they will have a natural progression. Parents are less likely to transfer to a charter school at grade three. The school has a waiting list starting in 6th and 7th grade. Ms. Dolan stated that purchasing a building would cut GLS's rent in half. A potential modification would not take place until 2022

Mr. Taylor, community member, asked if the current facility provides GLS the room to increase enrollment? Ms. Dolan stated that GLS has empty classrooms, so the answer is yes.

Mr. Pennewell asked if GLS has the mechanism to purchase the facility. Ms. Spence stated that a USDA loan is an option. The school would look to make a purchase without putting the school at risk. Mr. Pennewell then encouraged the school to reach out to division of small business because they offer tax exempt bond financing.

Ms. Oravez asked how long GLS's current lease is. Ms. Dolan stated that the lease is through summer of 2021 with an option to extend it.

Section 4: Financial Framework

Next Dr. Longfellow addressed the finance reports.

- FY19 Audit results showed no findings, a clean audit opinion, no related party transactions were identified, there is no long-term debt, no outside bank accounts.
- The school clearly documented estimated summer pay obligations and demonstrated that they have sufficient funding set aside to cover those obligations.
- The five-year planning projected enrollment chart (p. 85) aligns with the 100% budget.
- The school's financial performance has improved over the term of the charter. This year, they met standard on all measures of the Financial Framework report, except enrollment.
- The school remains financially viable, even at the lower enrollment numbers.
- Both the 100% and 80% budgets are balanced and show adequate carryover amounts from year to year. The assumptions were clearly defined in the narrative.

Section 5: Five-Year Plans

No questions or concerns were voiced on the school's five year plans.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of the meeting, Dr. Longfellow asked the voting members of the CSAC if there was any additional information they required in order to inform their decision-making.

The following information was requested:

1. Educational Program: See Appendix 1 for review notes from DOE's Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Development workgroup.
2. A plan on how to recruit students and teachers as they expand the grade levels.
3. Explain how the mission was developed and any processes in place to ensure that "mission creep" does not happen in the future.
4. A major modification application for a mission change, if the mission is changing.

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 November 22, 2019.
- The final meeting of the CSAC will be held on December 2, 2019, 2nd Floor Cabinet Room, Townsend Building, Dover.
- A public hearing will be held on November 13, 2019, New Castle County Public Library, 424 Delaware Street, New Castle, DE.
- If necessary, a second public hearing will be held on December 10, 2019, Cabinet Room, Townsend Building, Dover, DE.

The Secretary of Education will announce her decision at the December 19, 2019, State Board of Education meeting, and ask for the ascent of the State Board, if necessary.