

CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Great Oaks Charter School - Wilmington

Formal Review

Initial Report

October 25, 2022

On September 27, 2022, the Delaware Department of Education (DOE) placed the charter of Great Oaks Charter School – Wilmington (GOCS) on formal review, pursuant to 14 Del. Code § 515(b), to determine whether the school is violating the terms of its charter and, if so, whether to order remedial measures.

The following individuals were in attendance at the initial meeting of the Charter School Accountability Committee (CSAC) on October 18, 2022:

Voting Committee Members

- Kim Klein, Associate Secretary of Operations Support and CSAC Chairperson
- Aimee Beam, Education Associate, School Support
- Gregory Fulkerson, Education Associate, Academic Support
- Tiffany Green, Education Associate, Workforce Support
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Operations Support
- Joyce Leatherbury, Education Associate, Academic Support
- April McCrae, Education Associate, Academic Support
- DeAnne Wimbish, Education Associate, Office of Equity and Innovation
- Tierra Fair, Community Member
- Ted Molin, Community Member
- Charles Taylor, Community Member

Ex-Officio Members (Non-voting)

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

Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)

- Leroy Travers, Director, Charter School Office
- Alicia Balcerak, Administrative Secretary, Charter School Office
- John Carwell Jr., Education Associate, Charter School Office
- Faye Schilling, Education Specialist, Charter School Office
- Carla Jarosz, Deputy Attorney General

Representatives of GOCS

- David Blowman, Chief Financial Officer, Community Education Building
- Stacey Clark, Board Member
- Edward Emmett, Advisor
- Kelly Firment, Board Member
- Cathy Holloway, Board Member
- Michelle Lambert, Contracted Fiscal Consultant
- Jim Mazarakis, Board Chair
- Laretha Odumosu, Advisor
- Angela Parana, Director, Student Support Services
- Angela Perry, Board Member
- Tamara Price, Assistant Head of School

- Joe Ross, Teacher Board Member
- Antionette Thomas, Parent Board Member

Ms. Klein explained that the purpose of the meeting was to review the relevant statutory criteria as to whether the charter holder is violating the terms of its charter and, if so, whether remedial measures are warranted.

GOCS was given time to provide an overview of their school. Mr. Mazarakis shared that the school has spent the last several years strategically stabilizing the infrastructure of GOCS. They have secured the physical environment and have been articulating a new culture. The GOCS team looks forward to sharing evidence as to why they should have the chance to educate their current students and many students in the future. The GOCS Board has made a number of difficult personnel decisions and are prepared to introduce new leadership and look forward to a bright future.

The school was provided with questions prior to the meeting. Those questions are below with the school's responses notated in blue.

Finance and Budget

1. Two-thirds of GOCS' federal entitlement revenue is time-limited funding. All Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) and American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds need to be obligated by 2024. What plans have been made to replace these federal funds in the future?
A – Federal funds were intended to be supplemental funds to address the impact of COVID-19, they were not intended for long-term use. When the revenues from the federal funds are eliminated, the expenses that they were utilized for will also be eliminated. The school looks to right-size the budget around a smaller enrollment of 220 students. GOCS has created an updated budget, that does not include federal funds, around an enrollment of 217 students.
2. Salaries and benefits account for the highest percentage of expenses in the budget, which is typical of public schools. Another significant expense is rent, which has been \$5.7 million since the school opened. Has GOCS ever considered moving the school to a less costly location in Wilmington?
A – GOCS feels that the Community Education Building (CEB) is the best location for the school. The lease amount paid to CEB includes not only space rental, but also includes building maintenance, security, food service, a fully staffed library, and family services. The services from CEB also include tutors and fellows, which were once a significant expense within the school's budget.
 - a. If this has been considered, explain why it did not happen.
A – For the reasons listed above, this has not been considered.
3. Is GOCS pursuing any outside funding opportunities to supplement the budget?
A – Additional funding would be welcomed however, as the budget stands, GOCS is fully viable with an enrollment of 217 students, without the need for outside funding. CEB has an \$800,000 grant from the Longwood Foundation to support student advocates for both schools within CEB, including GOCS. Part of being a school within CEB allows

schools to benefit from CEB fundraising activities. This includes student advocacy, family services, and the Wellness Center. The Wellness Center was recently recognized by the Lieutenant Governor with a Delaware Health Leader Award. CEB does family crisis work which benefits GOCS. CEB recently received a United States Department of Justice grant for one million dollars over three years. This grant primarily supports GOCS through student advocacy, parent life-coaching support, and a safe school program which utilizes community ambassadors to work with students. CEB recently applied for a full-service community school grant which would provide direct funding for schools in the building.

4. Besides staffing, what other budgetary reductions have been implemented, or are anticipated, due to the reduced enrollment?
A – In addition to staff reduction, GOCS is looking into changing the floors they are using within CEB to cut cost. The school currently leases one and a half floors in CEB. Beginning in January GOCS will use one floor which will save the school \$167,000 for the balance of this school year and \$330,000 in next year’s budget. The school has also cut some contractual services. Additionally, there be operational reductions due to the elimination of the middle school grades.
 - a. Will these reductions impact GOCS’ ability to deliver services to students?
A – There will be no impact to student services.
 - b. Will these reductions threaten the fidelity of GOCS’ educational program?
A – This will not affect the fidelity of the school’s educational programs.
5. Does the school have any outstanding or pending educational settlements?
A – GOCS has no outstanding educational settlements.
 - a. If so, what is the total obligation, and what are the terms of the settlement(s)?
A – GOCS has no outstanding educational settlements.
6. Is GOCS’ Citizen’s Budget Oversight Committee (CBOC) active and holding meetings?
A – The CBOC is currently active and meeting at least one time per year pursuant to state legislative requirements.
 - a. If so, when was the last meeting held and what is the CBOC’s role in addressing the current budget concerns?
A – The last meeting was held in February of 2022. The membership of the CBOC will shift and meet again before February of 2023.
7. Provide additional details about the “EPER/Stipends/Summer/Saturday” line.
A – These funds are for the summer school and afterschool programs.
 - a. What do these amounts cover and how are they funded (state, local, federal)?
A – These funds are from the 21st Century grant.
 - b. Which staff are eligible to earn the additional payments?
A – The teachers of these programs earn the additional payments.
8. What are acceptable uses of closure reserve funds?
A – The funding will be used to cover summer salaries and the required audit.
 - a. Is there an estimate based on the current budget?
A – The estimated cost would be \$474,000. In the current budget, based on 217 students, there is \$474,000 set aside as a closure fund.
 - b. Have funds been set aside in the budget in the event of the school’s closure?
A - In the current budget, based on 217 students, there is \$474,000 set aside as a closure fund.

9. The revised budget includes a line for “Instructional Services” (55030) and notes that the funds are budgeted for “increase for alternative placement support.” Provide additional context for this line. In reviewing the Department of Education (DOE) approved alternative placements, it does not appear that any GOCS students have been approved for alternative placements through the Interagency Collaborative Team (ICT) process.
A – This funding is for the placement of students with significant behavioral needs. GOCS reserves spaces at Positive Change Academy for this purpose. This is intended to be a short-term placement and students that attend are reviewed quarterly to determine whether or not they are ready to return to the school. Students that would need long-term placement would go through the ICT process.
10. Is the cost of the fiscal year (FY) 2022 annual audit included in the revised budget?
A – The cost is included in the revised budget.
a. If so, which budget line includes funding for this expense.
A – This is included in account number 5505.
11. The revised budget includes a line for “Association Dues & Conference Fees” (55631) and notes that the funds are budgeted for “Delaware Charter Schools Network (DCSN) Fees.” The budgeted amount is only \$6,250; however, according to Data Service Center (DSC) reports, the school has already paid \$13,160 to DCSN in FY23. Are these amounts included elsewhere in the budget?
A - The 55631 line item is only funds budgeted for DCSN annual fees. The 55035 budget line includes fees paid to DCSN for additional administrative support being provided. There are also additional services being provided by DCSN that are not included in the first budget, but included in the revised budget. This will be an additional \$12,000.
12. GOCS has relied on prior year carry-over funding and multi-year federal grants to fill in the funding gaps created by the steadily declining enrollment. After FY23, this approach will no longer work, as most of the federal funds will have been expended. Given that the school is projecting a year-end fund balance of only \$162,298, explain the school’s long-term funding plan that will allow GOCS to remain financially viable in future fiscal years.
A – GOCS ensures that they budget down to their appropriation and budget federal funds separately to ensure that the school can operate with state and local funds and use federal funds as a supplement. The school is able to operate on state and local funds with an enrollment of 217 students and carry a surplus. GOCS staffing model and programmatic needs will be aligned with the budget.

CSAC Follow-up – Finance and Budget:

Brook Hughes: Why has the CBOC met only once this calendar year? This is not best practice for charter schools. Is it the school’s plan to hold more regular meetings?

A – The school met the requirement in statute. GOCS is working to intentionally build out its board and build out their committees. That work has taken some time. The school will hold more meetings in the future.

Kim Klein: The finances of GOCS has been a concern and monitored closely, yet has held only one CBOC meeting in the calendar year. This is very alarming and the school needs to fully understand that. GOCS has not been in an overly positive financial position and has met only

once with a group that provides financial oversight (CBOC). This sends the message that the school has not taken seriously the concerns around their financial viability. The expectation is that the CBOC will meet on a regular basis.

A – It is the school’s intention to meet more regularly and ensure full transparency around their finances moving forward.

Chuck Taylor: Does the budget include required reserves?

A – It does.

Chuck Taylor: What are the plans for staff reduction?

A – Most of the staff reduction will be administrative staff. These cuts are scheduled for the end of October.

Chuck Taylor: What is the current surplus?

A – Before reserves, the surplus is \$72,791. With reserves there is an ending fund balance of \$184,000.

Chuck Taylor: To reiterate, it is important that the CBOC meet regularly to ensure that there are external and internal financial controls.

A – The Board does meet monthly and they go through the budget in detail. It is very important to make budgetary decisions between the leaders and the Board. The school agrees that the additional oversight from the CBOC should be present, as well.

Tierra Fair: Would the school’s budget be viable if there was another decline in enrollment next year?

A – There are successful charter schools in the state with small enrollments, such as Positive Outcomes.

Kim Klein: As a reminder, the school is still well below the 80% enrollment threshold. GOCS has stated in the past that they expected the enrollment to be well above 80%. The school is currently at 67% of authorized enrollment.

A – There has been a realization that this school needs to be small as the needs of these particular students would benefit from a small school environment. The budget will be reset around a much smaller enrollment. The right size of the school is around 220 students.

Kim Klein: This is the first time CSAC has heard that the enrollment of the school should be small (220 students). It is CSAC’s responsibility to react to the past requests and applications of the school.

A – The school is still trying to figure out what might work best. GOCS has learned lessons and looks to act on those lessons.

Audrey Noble: To reiterate, there is great concern around the lack of CBOC meetings. The State Board of Education brought this to the school’s attention in February of 2022. The CBOC plays a critical role in the governance of the school.

A – There was no response to this statement.

Audrey Noble: The challenges of running a high school program are costlier than that of running a middle school, specifically having career pathway programs. How will GOCS address the challenges of sustaining and growing those programs?

A – The school currently operates as a high school and has career pathways as part of the budget. GOCS is exploring ways to grow those programs and ways to incorporate the growth into the budget. GOCS will work with Ed Emmitt from Positive Outcomes on ways to streamline their current programming and explore non-traditional pathways.

Kim Klein: Does the school have any additional food service costs beyond what is paid in the lease to CEB?

A – The school has no additional costs.

Kim Klein: Are the administrative positions that will be eliminated currently filled or vacant?

A – There are four positions that will be eliminated. One of those positions is vacant and three are currently filled.

Kim Klein: Is the \$72,000 surplus that the school has before or after summer pay has been accounted for?

A – The surplus is after summer pay has been backed out.

Facilities

13. Given the reduced enrollment this year, is the school able to further reduce its footprint in the Community Education Building and/or potentially renegotiate the lease terms to reduce the rent cost?

A - The school currently leases one and a half floors in CEB. Beginning in January GOCS will use one floor which will save the school \$167,000 for the balance of this school year and \$330,000 in next year's budget. GOCS will utilize the entirety of the sixth floor.

Staffing

14. According to the FY23 budget, GOCS' staffing budget includes the following administrative positions: middle school assistant dean of students, principal, middle school principal, and assistant principal in addition to an executive director and head of school. Given the decreased enrollment, justify the number of administrative positions and any overlapping responsibilities.

A – Several of the positions noted in this questions are no longer in operation. The current staffing plan, including administrative positions, will be analyzed and adjusted in accordance with the budget. GOCS does not feel that unnecessary disruptions to the staff would benefit the school's high-need population.

15. Provide a full staffing chart including all current teachers, administrators, and support staff (counselors, nurses, psychologists, social workers, etc.) For each individual, provide information regarding their current Delaware certification. For classroom teachers, also provide their instructional assignments.

A – Twelve of fifteen teachers are certified.

- a. Include the number of teachers on initial license and the number on continuing license.
A – There are six teachers and one counselor on an initial license.
 - b. Include the number of staff members who are participating in an Alternative Routes to Certification (ARTC) program.
A – One fellow, through the Relay Program, is participating in ARTC. This individual is not a teacher of record.
16. What changes to the staffing plan for FY23 have been implemented, or are anticipated, given the decrease in students?
- a. How will updates to the staffing plan impact the FY23 budget?
A – The current budget will be reviewed and the staffing plan will be adjusted accordingly.
17. According to the FY23 staff budget submitted, GOCS employs the following special education staff:
- a. Special education teacher (2),
 - b. Special education supervisor,
 - c. Director of special education,
 - d. Special education coordinator.
 - Provide a brief description of each position’s primary responsibilities.
A – The school currently serves 64 special education students. Ms. Parana has been with the school since August. She is the director of student services and responsible for the oversight of the special education program, specifically compliance issues and other support services. Ms. Parana is working on building processes for students with behavioral needs. There is a special education coordinator that handles day-to-day operations of the special education program including team meetings, professional development, and individual student behavioral needs. There are three special education teachers that cover all five grades. The teachers handle data collection and are the first point of contact for parents. They have caseloads of 19, 19, and 26. There are two special education paraprofessionals. There is an additional adult support care for one student. The school has a full-time school psychologist that carries out all evaluations and provides therapeutic supports. There are contracted services for speech therapy, occupational therapy and physical therapy.
 - Identify any other staff members that have special education responsibilities.
A – All staff members are responsible for the education of special education students. Staff understands all accommodations and provides services in the classroom. The entire special education team is new, but GOCS has pulled together the best of the best.
 - What are the responsibilities of the special education staff when addressing the special education issues identified by DOE?
A – Special education teachers corrected and updated student plans. The school psychologist conducted evaluations and corrected errors. The coordinator ensured that all appropriate stakeholders are attending meetings and that all meeting documents were uploaded. Ms. Parana

completed and turned in the compliance workbook that was required. All binders and digital uploads have been reviewed to ensure compliance. Many documents were not sent by originating districts so the team is working with those districts to receive the correct documentation. Students with emotional disabilities are being given functional behavioral analysis and support plans. The team is ensuring that each student plan is reflective of their individual needs.

18. Does the school nurse attend Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and 504 plan meetings?

A – There are currently 14 students identified as “Other Health Impaired” and the nurse attends each of their eligibility meetings and provides input at all meetings.

19. Will GOCS continue to depend on Kuumba Academy Charter School (Kuumba) for nursing services?

A – GOCS does not depend on the Kuumba nursing for services. The Kuumba nurse serves as the supervisor for GOCS nurse, who is full-time. The benefits of having a shared building is the ability to share services. The school feels that this collaboration serves them well and intends to continue the partnership.

20. How is driver education being provided to tenth grade students? The FY23 staff budget notes that the driver education teacher is part-time. Are students participating in driver education during the regular school day, or is this course being provided during evenings/weekends/summer?

A - GOCS does not have a student population large enough to justify a full-time position. Students participate during the school day.

21. In the past, GOCS has been cited for a number of issues in regards to staffing such as, having teachers provide services beyond their scope of certification, gaps in student schedules, and staff leaving and not being replaced. What has been done to improve these issues?

A – The leadership shift will improve these issues.

22. GOCS’ evaluation data for SY21-22 is as follows:

- Measure Selection – 90% completed
- Measure Target- 85% completed
- Measure Rating – 35% completed
- Summative evaluations – 30% completed
- Formative evaluations – 46% completed
- Of the 13 novice teachers:
 - 5 had 3 formative observations
 - 1 had 2 formative observations
 - 1 had 1 formative observation
 - 7 had 0 formative observations

Why was the evaluation process not completed for SY21-22? Why have staff assignments for measure selections not been completed for this school year?

A – The former leadership struggled in a number of different areas and the evaluation system has been changed to address this area. The new school leadership will ensure that all necessary requirements are met.

23. What is the average staff to student ratio?

A – The average ratio is one staff member to seven students.

- a. Does this ratio provide for optimal student learning?

A – Because the school provides trauma-informed care, the small ratio is better for their culture and climate.

24. How are you maximizing the talents of the staff who are not needed full-time for instruction, support, etc.?

A – These staff members respond to student needs.

25. What is the staff retention rate?

A – The school does not experience significant unplanned turnover.

a. Is there an exit interview when staff leaves? If so, is the data being used to improve retention?

A - This has not been conducted in the past as most staff turnover is due to lack of full-time position availability. When a staff member leaves for other reasons a formal meeting takes place with their human resources contractor.

b. Is GOCS tracking the number of staff members that leave mid-year?

A – for the current school year, no staff member has left. Because the staff is small, tracking is not an issue.

26. Are new staff members participating in mentoring?

A – All new staff members are participating in mentoring.

27. Is there a person assigned to the induction and mentoring support of teachers?

A – Mr. Ross is the site coordinator, lead mentor, and a teacher mentor.

CSAC Follow-up – Staffing

Gregory Fulkerson – What is the average class size?

A – The average class size varies. They may range from 15 to 25 students per class. There are approximately 12 teachers to every student.

Tiffany Green – Are all teachers, besides the six on initial license, on a continuing license.

A – All other teachers are on a continuing license.

Tiffany Green – Have the measures selection been completed for this year?

A – They have not been completed but they are in the process of being completed.

Tiffany Green – Will there be a plan in place in case the lead mentor changes?

A – The school will put this plan together.

April McCrae – How are special education teachers placed in the classroom?

A – There is a special education teacher in every math and English/Language Arts classroom. When available, staff members are in other classes and meeting with other teachers to ensure that accommodations are embedded in each lesson. There is a fellow in each classroom that consults with special education teachers. The fellow program helps keep the staff to student ratio low and helps provide trauma-informed instruction. The school has a para-educator to provide extra support when special education teachers cannot.

Tierra Fair – How does the diversity of the staff compare to the population of students?

A – The staff makeup matches that of the student population. National data shows that drop-out rates are cut in half for black male students when they are taught by teachers that look like them.

Chuck Taylor – Asked for more information around the leadership shift.

A – The school has had to make some difficult decisions around leadership. The school had a transitional leadership team to lead them through some extremely difficult times. They are now looking to put leadership in place to take them to the next level. There are changes being made to the Board, as well. There will be formal leadership decisions made at their next Board meeting. The school needs a leader with experience with staff development and one that can help develop the Board.

Audrey Noble – How many students are being taught virtually? Are these students full-time? What is the reasoning for having a virtual option for such a small school? Are there special education students in the program?

A – There are about twenty students currently in the virtual program. The program is a way to meet the needs of the students that are not able to come to the building due to anxiety, work, and other reasons. The virtual program is full-time for students and utilizes thje Edmentum online instructional platform supplemented and supported by the school’s teachers who check-in with the students. There are a few special education students in the program.

Kendall Massett – What is the background of Ms. Parana?

A – Ms. Parana was a special education teacher in Seaford, a special education coordinator in Woodbridge and an educational diagnostician in the Appoquinimink district. Ms. Parana received a Doctoral Degree and is currently an adjunct professor at Wilmington University.

Kim Klein – What do the leadership changes include? What will Ms. Odumosu’s role be? What will Mr. Emmitt’s role be?

A – GOCS needs to be cautious in regards to leadership members that have not been notified of changes. Additionally, there are students that have trusted adults in current leadership positions and those students need to be prepared for changes. There is a pending contract with Charter School of New Castle to allow Ms. Odumosu to lead GOCS. There is a pending vote to add Mr. Emmitt to the Board. Sally Maldonado from Kuumba will provide leadership mentoring. Building level leadership will be evaluated by Ms. Odumosu.

Kim Klein – Is this leadership plan long-term or transitional.

A – The plan will be both. Ms. Odumosu will provide contracted support this year and look to move into a more permanent structure next year.

Recruitment and Enrollment

28. GOCS had success during the initial years in the recruitment of middle school students. The enrollment began to decline when high school grades were added. From 2018-2020 GOCS applied for several modifications to reduce authorized enrollment. In 2020 middle school grades, which GOCS had the most success recruiting, were eliminated. Since then, enrollment figures have steadily declined. Explain the rationale behind the elimination of the middle school.

A- GOCS exists to serve a highly specific population within the city of Wilmington. It is the responsibility of a strategic and thoughtful leader to innovate outside of the existing infrastructure. To align with the needs of the community and after a landscape

scan, which indicated a saturated middle school market, it was only fitting to target those needs. Specifically, since Wilmington residents have been requesting access to high quality high schools for years. The school is grateful that CSAC has approved the modification requests. As they build toward the quality expected at GOCS, they have encountered anticipated challenges, such as decreased enrollment in the first year of the modification due to elimination of middle grades, lagging enrollment into secondary grades, time for the community to calibrate and become brand aware, and staff transition to support grade specific needs. Moving forward, GOCS anticipates increased brand awareness.

29. Has GOCS collected any data regarding the reason(s) students are leaving the school?

A - They have, however, since January 2022 GOCS has maintained 87% of its current student body.

a. Besides the lack of career and technical education courses offered, what are the other main factors identified by exiting students and what is the school doing to address those factors?

b. How did GOCS track students that left for vocational / technical (VOTECH) schools?

A - Students withdrawing from GOCS are tracked using E-School.

30. Provide any additional information about recent or upcoming recruitment efforts, including information on when and how the most recent recruitment plan was updated.

A - The start of the school year focused on attempts to reengage students who, prior to COVID-19, were already resistant to attend school. Through phone calls, home visits, and neighborhood drives GOCS attempted to locate students through mid-September, with a goal of getting students back into the building. Many attempts were unsuccessful; however, they were able to locate two homeless families and re-enroll those students. Like most choice programs in the state, families choose schools that work best for them. The school has found that families selecting GOCS are those specifically seeking an intimate high school environment, which is small enough to provide a personal touch. GOCS will continue to reach out to families seeking that type of environment and experience. In addition, they will encourage current families to recommend this type of school to others seeking the same type of community and setting. GOCS will streamline response systems and utilize Data Service Center to assist in proactively connecting with families that have expressed an interest in attending and have ongoing communication with those families.

31. On Thursday (9/29), Unit Count reflected 235 students enrolled. However, when Unit Count was locked down on 9/30, enrollment dropped to 217 students. Did GOCS wait until 9/30 to remove 18 students from the official roster?

a. If not, what explains the sudden drop in enrollment?

A- GOCS holds, as a core value, the need to operate with dignity, transparency, and in service to the students and families to which they have committed. In alignment with those values, the recruitment and enrollment team worked tirelessly to ensure that every single student in the city that was eligible had an opportunity to learn about and apply to the school. Those efforts recorded some of the highest recruitment engagement experienced in the school's history. They were unwilling to give up on those 18 existing students given their commitment to the community. The school staff spent those final days flooding students with phone calls and making daily visits to the families and

guardians that could be found, in an effort to reengage those existing students who had not enrolled elsewhere. Due to those efforts, four students have returned to GOCS since September 30th.

CSAC Follow-up – Recruitment and Enrollment

Brook Hughes: As the school choice window approaches, what is the primary plan to attract students to GOCS for next year?

A-Moving forward, the new leadership team will have full agency over that work. GOCS will be taking advantage of the school choice window. There are students every year that say they wish to attend GOCS, however, if families apply and there is no follow-up conversation with them, they will go elsewhere. Therefore, they will have a clear message about where the school is going. GOCS will follow up with students and take advantage of connecting with families that have already expressed an interest in the school.

Tierra Fair: How is GOCS using social media and other digital marketing for recruitment efforts?

A-GOCS has a social media class where student-generated Tik-Toks have been created to establish a social media presence. GOCS students can effectively reach other students better than the adults. The school is also using parent testimonials on the website to share why their student selected GOCS.

Audrey Noble: We have heard in the past that GOCS students would benefit significantly from the opportunities in a VOTECH system. Over time, that story has changed. The concern is that the constant changes and modifications are a response to the ongoing change of leadership in this school and the changing mission and vision you have for your students. GOCS is in a constant state of flux. It is understood what the school is trying to do at this point, but it was also understood what GOCS was trying to do at many other points every time a modification was discussed. Instability in leadership and vision has contributed to a lot of the ups and downs this school has experienced.

A- It is understood that leadership changes do create a level of instability, but that is just one factor. The story is changing, on the ground, in the city of Wilmington and the state of Delaware as it pertains to lessons learned collectively around what students need and what suits them in their environments. GOCS is excited about the opportunity to reach the landscape where it is, one which is crying out for opportunities that are VOTECH based and otherwise. There is a groundswell of educational changes happening across the state.

Kendall Massett: GOCS has worked with CEB on a communication plan around student voice related to recruitment and enrollment. Is this something that is being worked on and incorporated?

A - Community outreach includes students that have been helping with recruitment. CEB adds powerful assistance in communication. Partnerships and student advocates have built and established very deep connections with families. The Student Advocacy Program is an evidence-based, advocacy-based tool which has increased attendance, time on task, and community engagement.

Kim Klein: There are particular concerns about the four students that returned to school after the September 30 count. DOE had similar conversations last year with leadership about students

returning after unit count. It is commendable to receive students back into the school from the perspective of the student and public education, however, it is not ideal for a school to educate four students for which they do not receive state or local funding. It is critical to the viability of this school that students are on the roster for the September 30 unit count. DOE has been pressing the school since the spring to build the enrollment and be at 80% of authorized enrollment. There were many students on the double count list. The Charter School Office contacted district schools to confirm the attendance of those students in their schools. The effort to bring students in was made was too late. This cannot be repeated.

A - The school agrees that this situation is not ideal, at all. However, it is also important to acknowledge larger systemic issues that are keeping students away. Why are students deciding to return to school after September 30? The school has decided to serve and educate those students. As a point of clarification, those 18 students were students that the school could not find. The process of finding those students was ongoing. The school's population is very transient and difficult to find. The school did everything possible up until the last minute to find those students. When the school could not find those students as of September 30, they were dropped from enrollment. District schools often get students back in October.

Kim Klein: Large school districts getting students after September 30 cannot be compared to a school that only has 217 students. School districts have a much larger margin to financially and academically account for students than a school that is only staffed to educate 217 students. This is not a practice that is financially feasible or viable for this school

Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development

32. Students are being lost to VOTECH schools. What is GOCS plan (immediate and long-term) to add VOTECH programing to the curriculum?

a. Is there a timeline?

A – Programming will be added this year and continue into the next school year.

b. Will this increase enrollment?

A - Increased enrollment is an outcome of many factors, not only VOTECH programing. It is GOCS aim to maintain the current enrollment and provide the best environment for students.

c. GOCS plans to apply for approval for vocational tracks related to culinary, computer science and technology, hospitality management, and engineering and solar sciences. Describe how these programs would be funded and staffed.

- Would they be offered by the school directly or in conjunction with existing vocational programs offered by other providers?
- What is the estimated potential enrollment for each of these programs?

A - The previous administration has shared great intent to increase the number of offerings, however, after recent discussion, the current leadership team, along with the board, has determined that there is interest in pursuing different options. GOCS has no intentions to become a VOTECH school. GOCS is a smaller high school and the offerings must meet the staffing and financial model. In restructuring, the school will ensure that the needs of the community are being responded to while making sure students have the appropriate career pathway credits and establish other partnerships.

33. GOCS is part of 21st Century Community Learning Center's (CCLC) Cohort 16, meaning the school is in the fifth and final year of the program. How has GOCS aligned this programming with current in-school programming?

A - Currently, GOCS is in the final year of the CCLC grant. The school has aligned programs directly with CCLC goals to increase attendance and academic achievement. Every program must include participation in mentoring and homework help. If students attend after school clubs, program session leaders must check-in with students to ensure they are academically sound. GOCS goal to make sure that every student is connected with an adult. Another goal is to increase the students' connectedness with teachers and fellows. Teachers are the coaches and conduct the activities, allowing them to spend more time with the students and build relationships. It is also a goal to increase the capacity of students to become productive adults. Students help in developing programs. This year students have helped develop the following clubs: yearbook, culinary, kickboxing, DJing, gaming, cosmetology, and financial literacy.

a. What are plans for CCLC or similar programming in the future?

A - Future plans would include applying for the next round of CCLS grants that become available. GOCS is also partnering with CEB, Student Advocacy Program, Network Connect and others willing to offer special opportunities for students. The plan is to build a sustainable model.

34. The number of students identified as homeless in SY22 was ten and in SY23 is seven. Is it possible that students are being misidentified or not identified, at all?

A - Nathalia Joshua is the school's homeless liaison. She has shared that the current number of students experiencing homelessness is ten, which matches last year's number. GOCS collaborates with the Family Resource Center through CEB to assist in securing housing for homeless families. A needs assessment is sent to all families after September 30. This allows families to self-identify regarding homelessness. This assessment is also sent out several times throughout the year. Data from the assessment is used to direct families to any support they may need. Staff is also directed to let leadership know if they notice anything with students related to their environment or basic needs. Additionally, families call the school directly to ask for resources and support, such as the availability of the food pantry.

a. Are all families being connected with essential resources?

A - The Family Resource Center does an amazing job in supporting families. They provide support such as student meals, food deliveries to families, internet access, housing, employment and career services, access to health services, and other basic necessities. The partnership with CEB allows GOCS to do great things for families.

CSAC Follow-up - Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development

Gregory Fulkerson: What current career pathway programs exist and how robust are those programs?

A - GOCS has an Allied Health Pathway and a Teacher Development Pathway. The Allied Health Pathway requires three years of courses within the program. GOCS will reevaluate both programs moving forward.

Academic Performance

ELA Performance 2022

Grade Level	Assessment	Participation	Proficiency
7 th	ELA	84%	28.6%
8 th	ELA	86%	35.3%

Grade Level	Assessment	Participation	Proficiency
High school	SAT School Day/ELA	47.7%	10%

Math Performance 2022

Grade Level	Assessment	Participation	Proficiency
7 th	Math	84%	0%
8 th	Math	86%	4.17%

Grade Level	Assessment	Participation	Proficiency
High school	SAT School Day/Math	47.7%	0%

Science Performance 2022

Grade Level	Assessment	Participation	Proficiency
8 th	Science	80%	2.2%
High school	Science	65%	8.3%

Social Studies Performance 2022

Grade Level	Assessment	Participation	Proficiency
7 th	Social Studies	84%	19%
High school	Social Studies	60%	7.4%

35. While proficiency is a concern, GOCS did not meet participation targets for any state assessment in 2022. What is the plan for meeting assessment participation requirements moving forward?

A - Proficiency and participation rates were directly impacted by COVID-19. Using school year 2021-22 data as a baseline, the leadership team will identify and implement best practices, such as making sure that students and families are aware of testing windows and emphasizing to students the importance and value of testing.

36. What improvement efforts are in place to address the exceptionally low student proficiency rates that were identified in the recent assessment cycle?

A- The leadership team recognizes that proficiency rates are consistent with statewide trends in student performance. Going forward the reconfigured leadership team has vast experience in implementing best practices to maximize instructional time. These practices have been effectively implemented in multiple states and other schools to close academic gaps. Strategies to improve student achievement include providing teacher training on using objective assessments, understanding the data analysis and response cycle, targeted instruction and prioritization, addressing learning gaps, and maximizing student supports (e.g. Tutor Corps, Student Advocates).

Additionally, the instructional leadership team is currently working with the Achievement Network to analyze student assessment data and use it to teach and/or reteach content. CEB's advocacy support has also assisted in supporting this work.

CSAC Follow-up: Academic Performance

Joyce Leatherbury: How has the school implemented Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and what has been its impact on achievement?

A - The leadership team is working to develop and revamp the MTSS process to ensure that the academic and social-emotional learning components are fully realized.

April McCrae – The participation rates for SAT's represent far more than accountability and compliance, but represent equitable access to college entrance exams. Some students may have barriers to taking college entrance exams outside of school. Additionally, given the school's number of special education students, Ms. McCrae recommended the Smarter Balanced Interim Assessment Blocks (IABs) as a resource for ongoing instructional feedback throughout the year.

A - The school will incorporate this feedback.

Kim Klein - Asked for participation rates for other charter schools and districts. Additionally, Ms. Klein recommended that the school look closely at its strategies to ensure that participation rates are met going forward.

A – Ms. Odumosu requested that Ms. McCrae's analysis of participation rates include a breakdown of racial subgroups.

School Climate and Culture

37. Provide a comprehensive plan for improving school climate and how that plan will increase enrollment.

A – Current school data demonstrates improvements in school climate. The out-of-school suspension rate has dropped significantly year over year. This data is tracked through the school's report card. The school's comprehensive plan will establish a structure to assess student behavior and adult response through regular observations, identify clear on-track metrics, and establish schoolwide indicators. This structure has been effective in multiple schools and states. The engagement and investment by the student body has been integral to these improvements in school climate.

38. What services do community partners provide for students and families?

A - GOCS has a myriad of community partners that provide students with holistic supports in academics, life skills, housing, food banks, college and career services, and cultural enrichments. Zip Code Wilmington provides coding classes during the school day. Born for Brothers is a community-based partner that came through CEB and provides targeted academic supports for adjudicated students. Network Connect provides numerous supports which included a summer programming that focused on health, mental wellness, job training, and academic enrichment. During the school year Network Connect provides programming focused on job readiness. Personal Wellness provides two school social workers focused on trauma-informed counseling. Strive Leadership provided summer enrichment classes that focused on leadership and character development. Wilmington University provides an early college program for students to complete college credits while completing high school. YMCA Camp of the Pines in New Jersey provided a week-long summer enrichment program that included hiking the Appalachian trails.

Additionally, GOCS has partnered with DOE to launch the Parent Camp program. Several local churches and community-based organizations have provided donations. Urban Promise's Street Leader program provides job training, college counseling, and academic enrichment, which included college tours at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) during spring break. GOCS students attend various community events, such as the recent HBCU Week at the Chase Center. The Teen Warehouse provides job training programs. Two college access programs, Teen SHARP and Delaware College Scholars, serve a number of GOCS students.

School climate and culture has been greatly impacted by students participating in the various after school enrichment clubs provided by the CCLC grant (e.g. kickboxing, culinary, personal finance, gaming, anime). Staff members host these clubs from 4:00 – 5:30 p.m. and provide academic support. CEB provides dinner and GOCS provides transportation. GOCS has an athletic program that includes an indoor track team.

GOCS has a Student Government Association (SGA) that interacts with the school's Board. Students are currently planning for the homecoming dance. The student planning committee is provided autonomy and a budget to plan for this event. Student participation is a testament to how invested GOCS students are in their school community. The clubs are student-driven. Teenagers will often vote with their feet so their engagement is noteworthy.

39. How has student and family input been incorporated into the school's improvement planning?

A – Student and family input has been incorporated through programs such as Parent Camp, school improvement meetings, and the Board's parent representative. These are essential feedback channels.

40. Has GOCS applied for grants to assist with climate and culture?

- a. Is there a plan to apply for such grants?

A - CEB is a vital partner, applying for various grants that bolster and complement the school's efforts. In addition to the grants highlighted previously, a grant from Highmark Delaware provides mental health counseling. A grant from Albertson's supports the food bank. A federal grant and a grant from the Longwood Foundation support climate and culture strategies. Additionally, a five-year grant from DOE is supporting the development of a full-service community school. CEB has a full-time director of development who is dedicated to finding funding opportunities to support students.

CSAC Follow-up: School Climate and Culture

Kendal Massett: Commended the school for its programming and community partnerships which have led to high levels of student engagement. Ms. Massett asked if all of the students are welcome for dinners held at the school.

A - Every student who participates in after school activities receives dinner. Additionally, students who participate in athletic programs are provided transportation back to the schools and are served dinner. The school intentionality provides meals equitably. This is what drives student participation. Transportation, dinner, and homework work together to support student success.

Closure Plan

41. The Closure Plan that was provided is a generic sample document. What is GOCS specific closure plan?

- a. When submitting the revised closure plan, identify the individuals responsible for each task.

A - The GOCS Board and leadership team have reviewed DOE's closure protocol and have the capacity to execute the tasks outlined in the protocol in the event of closure.

42. The breakdown of receiving schools indicates that GOCS receives the largest number of students (130) from the Christina School District (CSD). Is there an opportunity or plan to coordinate with CSD for a smooth transition among your current student population in the case of closure?

A - The GOCS Board and leadership team have created a multi-pronged plan and believe that they are uniquely positioned to serve its high-need population of students. Should it become necessary, the Board and leadership team are prepared to coordinate and collaborate with the appropriate districts, agencies, and partners to ensure a smooth transition.

Other

43. GOCS has often been cited for failing to respond to time-sensitive tasks and failing to develop and follow systems and processes. What plans are in place to improve these issues?

A - The GOCS team is comprised of professionals who students and families have come to know and trust. Current leadership has stepped up to teach classes as teachers of record. The Board acknowledges that the current leadership, while leading the school through post-pandemic healing, rebuilding school climate and culture, and reigniting joy

in the school community, resulted in some imbalance and myriad failures in responding to compliance requirements. The Board is excited to implement a multi-pronged plan that not only addresses these failures but takes GOCS to an entirely new phase of performance.

In the coming days, the Board will onboard a new, high-performing school leader, Dr. LaRetha Odumosu, who is known and respected in the Delaware education community, pending final signatures. Mr. Emmett, who continues to prove what is possible with some of the State's highest needs students will join the Board along with several other mission-aligned professionals who believe in the school's vision and purpose. Ms. Parana will continue to execute on the school's comprehensive special education plan.

GOCS' Board Parent Representative, Antoinette Capri, provided remarks. Her son enrolled at the school in 2017. She noted that her son thrives with male teachers and GOCS has a number of male teachers. GOCS has successfully met her son's unique learning style. The school's AmeriCorps tutors have also benefitted her son.

GOCS began to encounter challenges prior to the pandemic when some students encountered traumatic community issues that disrupted the learning process at the school. Staff members, such as Leland, Kent helped mitigate these experiences and provided stability and a safe haven from what was happening in the community. Her son is one of the highly engaged students mentioned previously. He is the captain of the track team and participates in Network Connect. He is at school from the early morning and returns home at 7:30 p.m. GOCS has transformed since the pandemic. School climate and culture have greatly improved. The school has recruited seasoned teachers. The educational program has improved. GOCS provides a unique educational niche that is not available at traditional schools.

CSAC Follow-up - Closure Plan and Other:

Kendall Massett asked Mr. Emmett, Dr. Odumosu, and Ms. Clark to explain why they have joined with GOCS.

A - Dr. Odumosu: She began her teaching career at a school in Trenton, NJ that was very similar to GOCS. Her experience with a charter turnaround management organization provided proof points that the school can be turned around. None of the issues that GOCS is currently facing are insurmountable. She has witnessed successful turnarounds with schools in larger cities and more pressing problems. Furthermore, schools like GOCS play a vitally important role in students' lives. If turnaround were not possible, she would not be onboard.

Mr. Emmett: He supports the school because the GOCS team is unequivocally student-centered.

Ms. Clark: She is not willing to give up on the 217 GOCS students. GOCS provides opportunities for students that are not available for them elsewhere. This school and these students matter.

The follow items were requested as follow-ups to this meeting:

1. A full staffing list that includes the following:
 - Each teachers' license and certification status;
 - Each teacher's instructional assignment;
 - Which teachers are on a continuing license and which are on an initial license;
 - A plan with a timeline for completing each staff member's evaluation for this school year.
2. A revised organizational chart.
3. A revised FY23 budget based on an enrollment of 217 students.
4. A revised student recruitment plan relative to the upcoming school choice window.
5. Provide detailed information regarding the Edmentum virtual program to demonstrate that the content is aligned to Delaware content standards.
6. Detailed information on how the Edmentum virtual program meets the needs of special education students.
7. A detailed plan to increase participation rates.
8. A detailed MTSS implementation plan. GOCS is encouraged to reach out to their Exceptional Children Resources liaison for support and resources.
9. Additional detail regarding how the 21st CCLC program aligns with the school day and future plans for the program.
10. A revised closure plan identifying individuals responsible for each task.

Next Steps:

- An initial report will be issued on or before October 25th.
- An initial public hearing will take place on October 27th at 5:00 p.m.
- The applicant will have the opportunity to submit a written response to the CSAC initial report, which is due by close of business November 9th.
- A second and final meeting of CSAC will be held on November 22nd.
- On or before November 29th CSAC will issue its final report which will include its recommendation on the formal review.
- A second public hearing will be held, if necessary, will take place November 28th.