

# DELAWARE CHARTER SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT

## CHARTER SCHOOL INFORMATION

Charter School Name: Las Américas ASPIRA Academy

Mailing Address: 326 Ruthar Drive  
City/State/Zip: Newark, Delaware 19711

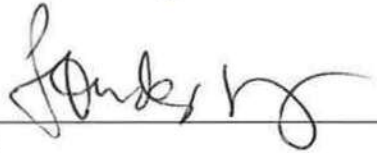
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Margie López Waite  
Head of School



September 25, 2014  
Date

Lourdes Puig  
Board President



September 25, 2014  
Date

**SUBMISSION DEADLINE: December 1<sup>st</sup> (September 30<sup>th</sup> for renewing charter schools)**

All schools submit one (1) signed copy (PDF via email preferred) to the DDOE Charter School Office

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## ABSTRACT

### Our History

**Las Américas ASPIRA Academy (LAAA)** began as a vision among a group of advocates in the Hispanic community committed to providing an educational alternative within the public school system. In 2009, the Delaware Department of Education with the assent of the State Board of Education approved the school's charter application. The opening of our school was delayed one year due to challenges in securing a long-term facility for the school. In August 2011, LAAA celebrated their grand opening with an enrollment of 303 students (101% of goal) in its current location in Newark (326 Ruthar Drive). In our second year of operation (2012-2013), we achieved 105% of our enrollment goal with 338 students. Our enrollment was determined by lottery for Year 2 (2012-2013), Year 3 (2013-2014) and Year 4 (2014-2015) with a waiting list that continues to increase each year. LAAA's targeted population is students residing in Delaware.

LAAA is the direct outgrowth of the mission of ASPIRA of Delaware, Inc., an associate office of the national ASPIRA Association. ASPIRA, since its start with ASPIRA New York, has had over fifty years of experience creating and implementing formal and informal education programs that build up youth self-esteem, cultural awareness, and leadership abilities. ASPIRA associate offices successfully operate eleven charter schools in 3 cities: Philadelphia, Miami and Chicago. Originally founded as a Puerto-Rican organization, ASPIRA Associate Offices in the 7 states of Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Florida, Massachusetts and Illinois and the commonwealth of Puerto Rico now serve a diverse population of youth, with the specific mission to empower the Puerto Rican and Latino community through advocacy and the education and leadership development of its youth.

### Mission

The mission of the **Las Américas ASPIRA Academy (LAAA)** is to provide a world-class education that prepares students through a dual language project-based learning curriculum, to become healthy productive community members and leaders, with an **expectation** that **every** child, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic level, is college bound.

### Philosophy

The philosophy Las Américas ASPIRA Academy (LAAA) is that students learn best through doing (project-based learning) and that students can become fully bi-literate in English and Spanish, if students are taught early on through a dual-language approach. And because research shows that students who are healthy and active perform better in the classroom, Las Américas ASPIRA Academy (LAAA) will integrate physical fitness and good nutrition as core components of its rigorous project-based learning curriculum.

**The academic, physical, social, and emotional development of our students rests on:**

- ASPIRA Principles of Awareness, Analysis and Action
- Setting high expectations for each student, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity or socio-economic level, where **every** student is college-bound
- Building on the first language of English Language Learners to increase their academic performance

- Enriching the education of English speaking children by having them achieve literacy and fluency in a second language
- Making real-world connections for all learning
- Creating a healthy personalized school environment that is positive and student centered, focused on cross-cultural understanding
- Facilitating learning through investigations, interactions, and dual language instruction that is intellectually challenging and developmentally appropriate
- Providing ongoing professional development to teachers and staff in order to keep them abreast with the best research-based teaching practices
- Using systematic qualitative and quantitative student assessment to drive and strengthen instruction
- Creating a strong partnership between parents, community, private sectors, teachers and staff to increase overall educational achievement and attainment

**ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE:**

WHAT ARE THE SCHOOL'S ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES THAT WILL DEMONSTRATE STUDENT GROWTH, PROFICIENCY, AND COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS LEVELS AS MEASURED BY THE PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK? PROVIDE AN ANALYSIS OF STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH IN THESE AREAS.

**Academic Performance Review Rating:**

**2013-2014 Summary and Overall Rating: MEETS STANDARD**

**2012-2013 Summary and Overall Rating: MEETS STANDARD**

**2011-2012 Summary and Overall Rating: DOES NOT MEET STANDARD**

During the past three years, LAAA has made significant gains in our academic achievement results. Our overall rating improved from Does Not Meet Standard in Year 1 to Meets Standard in Year 2 and Year 3. LAAA accomplished consistent growth in ELA with scores exceeding State average in all grade levels. The biggest opportunity for improvement exists with Math scores. In response to this need, we are supplementing our math program with targeted instruction for students performing below grade level.

The Delaware Academic Performance Framework reveals the following achievements and opportunities for growth:

**Achievements**

- We exceeded the state average in all grades for Reading.
  - 88% vs 71% (Class of 2019)
  - 78% vs 73% (Class of 2020)
  - 84% vs 76% (Class of 2021)
  - 78% vs 73% (Class of 2022)
  - 73% vs 70% (Class of 2023)
- The Reading proficiency for the Class of 2020 improved from 62% in Year 1 to 78% in Year 3.
- The Reading proficiency for the Class of 2021 improved from 65% in Year 1 to 84% in Year 3.
- The Reading proficiency for the Class of 2022 improved from 65% in Year 1 to 78% in Year 3.
- We exceeded the state average in three out of five grades for Math.
  - 72% vs 66% (Class of 2019)
  - 74% vs 71% (Class of 2021)
  - 78% vs 75% (Class of 2022)
- We exceeded the state average for Science (58% vs 49% for 5<sup>th</sup> grade).
- We exceeded the state average for Social Studies (80% vs 65% for 4<sup>th</sup> grade; 76% vs 59% for 7<sup>th</sup> grade).

**Challenges/Opportunities for Growth**

- The following opportunities for improvement are being addressed with specific targeted instruction during the summer and school year:

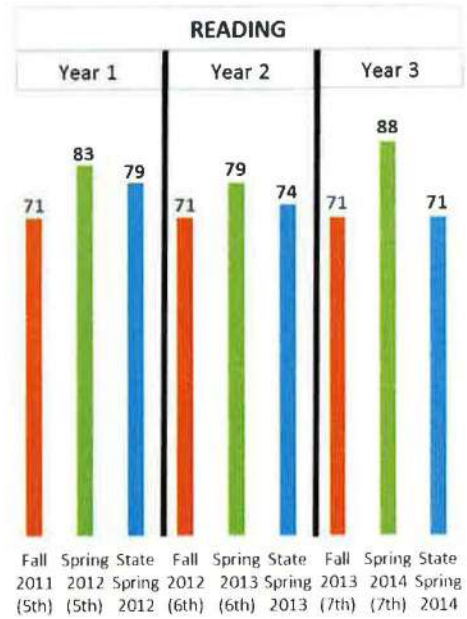
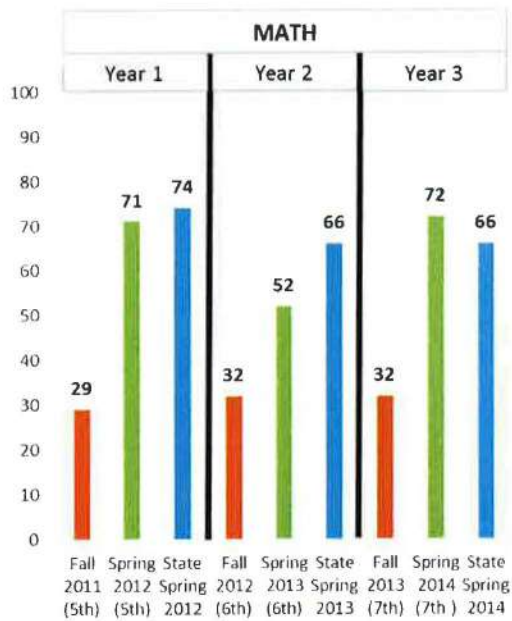


- Math achievement for Class of 2020 (current 7<sup>th</sup> graders) is lower than state average (51% vs 66%); however, the gap has decreased to 15 compared to 22 the previous year.
- Math achievement for Class of 2023 (current 4<sup>th</sup> graders) is lower than state average (61% vs 72%).
- Based on the DCAS results, we are taking the following action to address our achievement gaps:
  - Hired a Math Interventionist to provide targeted instructional support to students.
  - Identified supplemental materials to support math instruction (i.e., Khan Academy, IXL Math, etc.).
  - Providing free summer math tutoring with free transportation to targeted students needing additional support.
  - Dividing rising 7<sup>th</sup> graders (Class of 2020) into two smaller Math classes for more targeted small group instruction with the support of Special Education teachers.
  - Revising class schedule to create additional instructional time in the school day for targeted support in Math and/or Reading.
  - Working to expand extracurricular programs to include academic enrichment clubs such as Odyssey of the Mind, Science Olympiad and Math Olympiad.

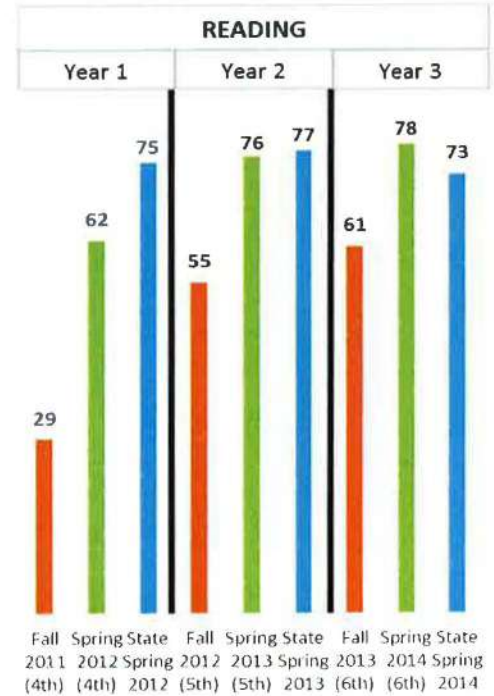
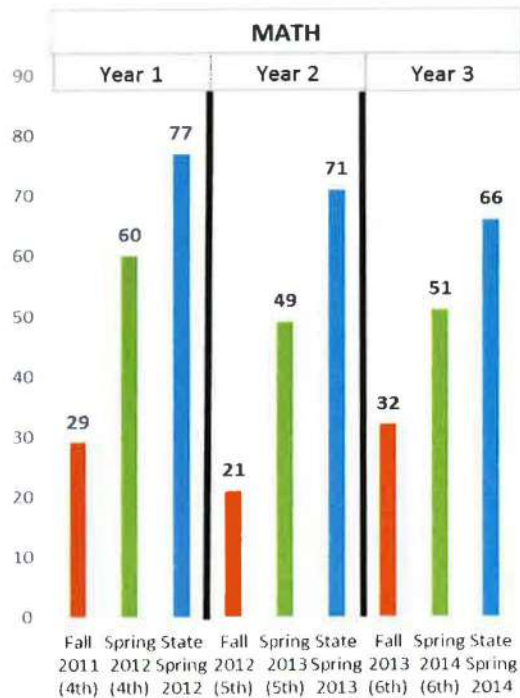
We are confident that our results for Spring 2015 will reflect the positive impact of these actions. The implementation of Smarter Balance will result in new benchmark data; therefore, we will need to re-evaluate our growth targets for subsequent years due to the lack of correlation between DCAS and Smarter Balance data points. This will be part of the transition throughout the state since all schools/districts will need to re-establish their academic goals.

### Detailed Data by Class

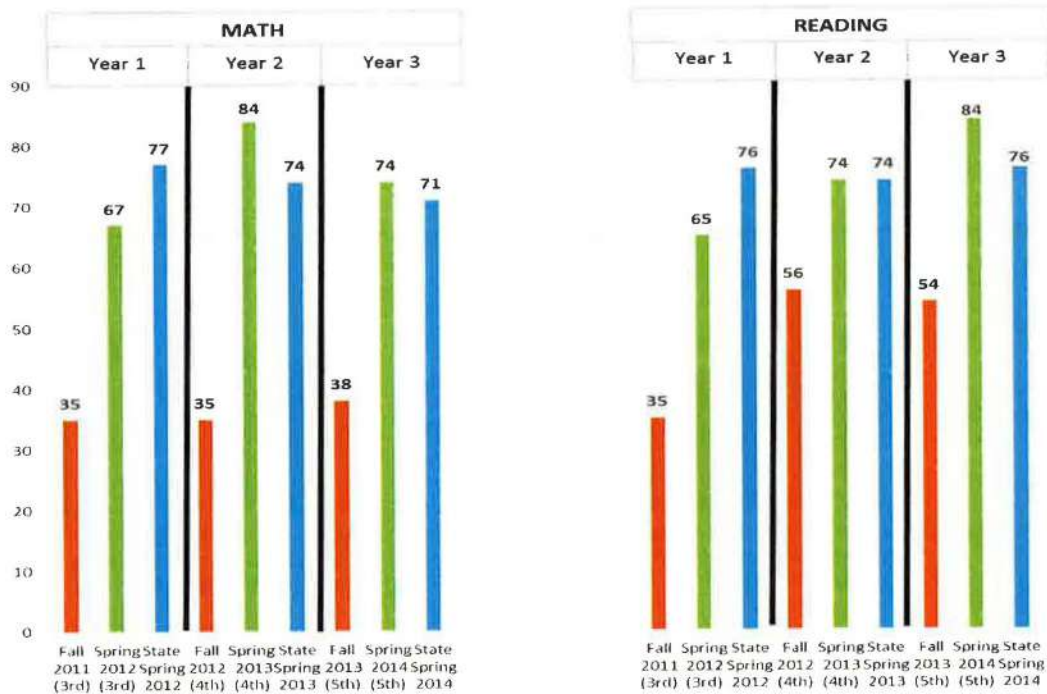
#### ▪ **Class of 2019: Percentage of Students Meeting/Exceeding Standard**



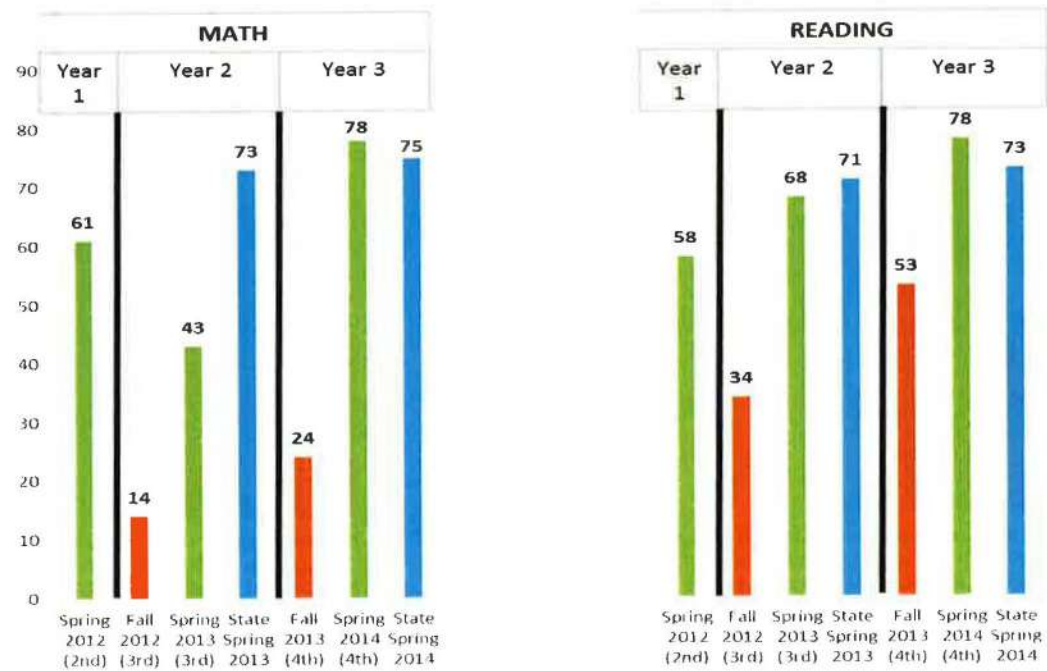
#### ▪ **Class of 2020: Percentage of Students Meeting/Exceeding Standard**



▪ **Class of 2021: Percentage of Students Meeting/Exceeding Standard**

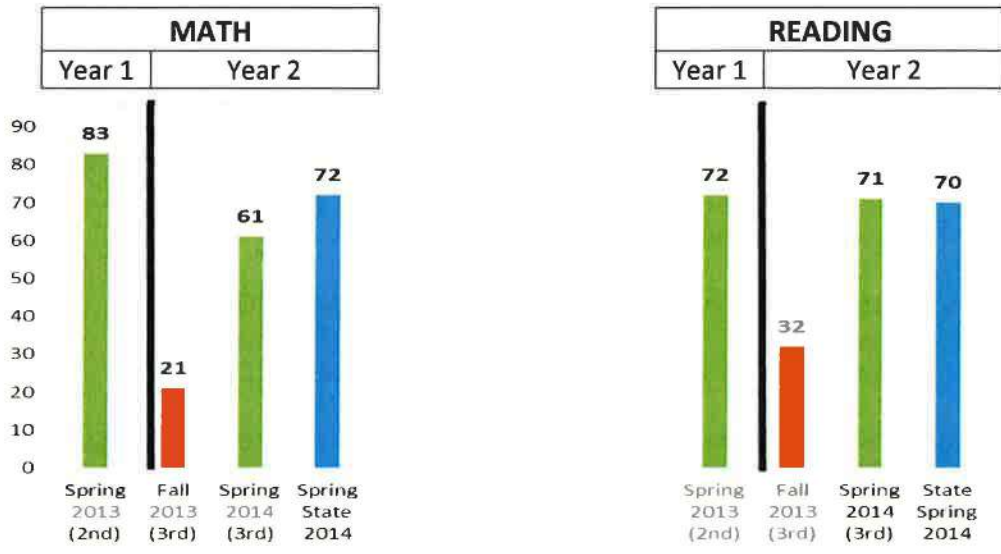


▪ **Class of 2022: Percentage of Students Meeting/Exceeding Standard**

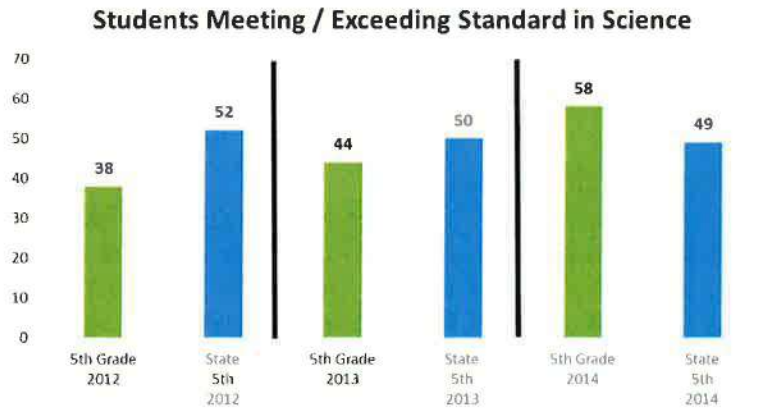




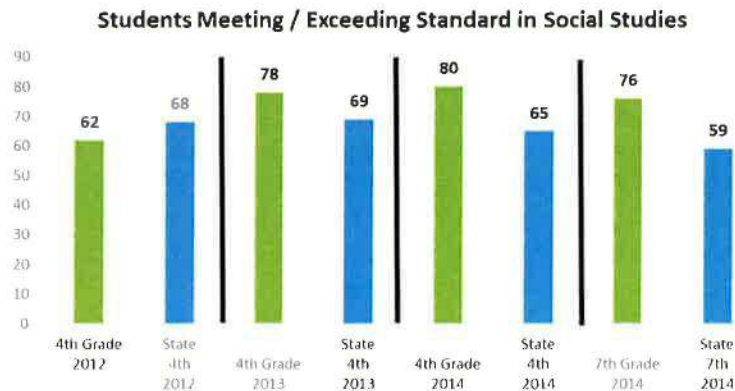
▪ **Class of 2022:** Percentage of Students Meeting/Exceeding Standard



▪ **Science:** Percentage of Students Meeting/Exceeding Standard



▪ **Social Studies:** Percentage of Students Meeting/Exceeding Standard



## **FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE:**

WHAT ARE THE SCHOOL'S FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS THAT WILL DEMONSTRATE VIABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY AS MEASURED BY THE PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK? PROVIDE AN ANALYSIS OF STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH IN THESE AREAS.

### **Financial Performance Review Rating:**

**2013-2014 Summary and Overall Rating: MEETS STANDARD**

**2012-2013 Summary and Overall Rating: MEETS STANDARD**

**2011-2012 Summary and Overall Rating: MEETS STANDARD**

Las Américas ASPIRA Academy ended with a surplus for its third straight year. Our overall performance was solid, thus represented by our cash carryover of \$502,748; however, we were forced to use operational funds to finance a portion of the Phase II construction (13 classrooms) and purchase of new classroom furniture. This plan was noted in last year's Annual Report and the FY14 preliminary and final operating budgets. Results show a \$58,000 reduction of our cash surplus from FY13 to FY14; however, if not for funding a portion of the Phase II construction project, our surplus would have increased for the 3<sup>rd</sup> straight year. That said, by adding back the \$225,732 FY14 construction and \$148,000 FY14 furniture (capital) expenditures into the school's operating funds, our surplus for the year would have grown to \$876,000, thus a net increase of \$315,000 from FY13.

### **Strengths, Challenges and Opportunities for Growth**

The school, though only in its 4<sup>th</sup> year of operation, has shown the ability to favorably manage its finances while completing a school start-up and its second phase of construction. For the past two years, and this year again, we will be at enrollment capacity (105%) with a current enrollment of 541 K-8<sup>th</sup> grade students. Our significant waiting list of students gives us the ability to manage our enrollment to ensure we reach capacity (as shown the last three years), thus ensuring our funding is at a maximum level each year.

We realize the revenue benefits of a continued increase in student enrollment; however, because of the increased debt due to the Phase II construction, and now the pending school building purchase and Phase III construction (additional classrooms), we will be managing our school finances very tightly. The school will continue to do everything it can to supplement revenue through fundraising and deploying its newly hired Development Manager to lead the school's capital campaign. One successful fundraiser to build on from last year is the Viva ASPIRA Dinner/Silent Auction, now an annual event that last year netted the school a \$10,000 profit. We will continue to grow, promote and build on our schools overall success resulting from its first three years of operation.

**ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE:**

WHAT ARE THE SCHOOL'S PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS IN MEETING ITS ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, ADMINISTRATIVE OPERATIONS, REPORTING, AND LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES AS MEASURED BY THE PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK? PROVIDE AN ANALYSIS OF STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH IN THESE AREAS.

**Organizational Performance Review Rating:**

**2013-2014 Summary and Overall Rating: MEETS STANDARD**

**2012-2013 Summary and Overall Rating: DOES NOT MEETS STANDARD**

**2011-2012 Summary and Overall Rating: MEETS STANDARD**

The school achieved an overall rating of "Meets Standards. Out of 13 measures that make up the overall rating, the school received 12 ratings of "Meets" and one rating of "Does not Meets Standard," specifically for measure 4c., staff credentialing requirements. Significant progress was made last year, as the Highly Qualified Rate (HQT) increased from 77% in FY13 to 93.6% in FY14. We fully expect to achieve a 100% HQT rate this year. Las Américas ASPIRA Academy has had compliance visits from DDOE which showed the school has been compliant with all components of the DPAS II evaluation system, Title I programs, IDEA and the National School Lunch program. Our school website is in compliance as well, which is publicized in the Charter School Office's monthly monitoring reports. The school also meets all State Department of Health guidelines, which is evident by passing our annual health inspections (1/30/13 and 1/14/14), along with meeting the regulations set forth in the Delaware Food Code. Additionally, evidence of the school's compliance with operational expectations can be found in compliance monitoring reports issued by DDOE over the last three years, which is the duration of our school's existence. The most recent reports (2013) state that Las Américas ASPIRA Academy is in compliance with all monitored regulations, including but not limited to: McKinney-Vento Homeless Act, Child Abuse Reporting Training, immunization audit and policy regarding the release of students to persons other than parent/guardian.

**Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities for Growth**

The school will continue to strengthen its internal capacity for maintaining/meeting organizational performance expectations. We are now in our fourth year of operations, and it has proven to be a difficult task to keep up with the many (and changing) regulations. For the first three years, the school purposely used its funds and resources to primarily support the classrooms in building a world class educational environment, thus keeping administrative and support staff hiring at a minimum. This strategy, though taxing on the few administrators employed at the school, has shown to produce solid and growing results in the academic and financial performance of the school for its first three years. Additionally, staff and student retention rates are very high thus aiding to our success. We continue to evaluate our staffing model and now have staffing projections, which correlate to projected enrollment numbers, classrooms and instructional needs through FY20. This year marks the first year where we have all business functions in house, thus eliminating the need to hire an outside source to perform back office work (HR, Payroll and IT support). The additional staff in these respective areas will provide the necessary leverage for the school to have total control of all functions which is critical to the success of the overall business and organizational performance.

## STATUS OF CONDITIONS PLACED UPON THE CHARTER:

Include:

- A status update of any conditions imposed upon the school's charter,
- Your plan to meet any conditions that are currently "not met".

On June 17, 2010 the State Board of Education approved LAAA's request to delay opening the school until August 2011. When our charter was originally approved there were 30 conditions imposed by the State Board. At the time of delay some of those conditions had been met; therefore, the new list of conditions contained 21 conditions.

The following conditions are ongoing conditions without a defined due date and have been met each year of operation:

- ☒ 1. The Board of Directors of the school, its employees, agents and contractors, shall comply with all obligations imposed upon them by law, shall comply with the provisions of the corporate charter, by-laws and resolutions, and shall further comply with any applicable rule or regulation, all of which are imposed as conditions to approval of this charter.
- ☒ 2. No part of the school's corporate charter or by-laws shall be amended, altered, repealed, restated or otherwise modified without the prior written consent of the Department of Education, except that the number of directors may be increased or decreased without the Department's consent, provided that any such change shall be limited to the number of directors only and not the qualifications thereof; and further provided that any such change shall otherwise be consistent with any applicable law, rule or regulation.
- ☒ 3. The Board of Directors shall ensure that school is and remains in compliance with any student, educator, and school achievement performance requirements now and hereafter in effect in Delaware Code or Regulation.
- ☒ 4. The Board of Directors shall not charge or collect any fee not permitted to be assessed by a school district. These include but are not limited to fees to any students applying for admission and fees for the use of instructional materials.
- ☒ 5. Each month the charter school financial reports shall be posted monthly on the charter school website and shall be provided in writing upon request pursuant to 14 Del. C. § 122(11).
- ☒ 6. The Board of Directors shall have adequate liability insurance in force prior to hiring any school employee. The board of directors shall submit evidence of adequate liability insurance to the Department upon hiring the first employee.
- ☒ 7. The Board of Directors shall ensure that the school is in full compliance at all times with the requirements for background checks as stated in 11 Delaware Code, Chapter 85, and Subchapter VI.
- ☒ 8. Prior to the school opening for instruction, the Board of Directors shall submit written verification to the Department that it has hired a Delaware Registered Nurse and verification that the nurse has attended the summer school nurse orientation



program provided by the Department and that the nurse will be part of any IEP team as necessary.

- ☒ 9. The Board of Directors shall ensure that the schools submit data requested or required by the Department in any form, including electronically, in accordance with timelines in the Department's Data Acquisition Calendar.

The following conditions were met by the specific due date:

- ☒ 10. By August 1, 2010, the Board of Directors shall submit revised budget to the Department reflecting no federal start-up funds, if necessary.
- ☒ 11. By October 15, 2010, the Board of Directors shall have consulted with designated staff in the Department's Curriculum Workgroup and submitted to the Department for review and approval, a fully developed curriculum that is aligned with the Delaware content standards in all subject areas at each grade the school will offer during the initial four year charter term. Specifically, the Board of Directors will submit aligned curriculum, including three units of instruction, a course scope and sequence, summative unit assessments and scoring rubrics for the three submitted units in the content area, and a summary table showing the explicit links between the instructional program and the Delaware Academic Standards and grade level expectations (GLEs) for the following content area: Mathematics.
- ☒ 12. By December 15, 2010, the Board of Directors shall submit to the Department a copy of the signed lease or purchase agreement, description of the facilities, and description of the budget revisions required by the acquisition of the facilities and preparation of the facilities for school opening. Further, the Board of Directors shall submit to the Department for review and approval the construction/renovation plan for the school facilities. The plan shall provide satisfactory details on the tasks to be completed to prepare the completion and assignment of responsibilities. The school will be required to demonstrate satisfactory progress in completing projected construction/renovation tasks until the submission of the Certificate of Occupancy on or before June 15, 2011.
- ☒ 13. By February 15, 2011, the Board of Directors shall submit to the Department for approval proposed Performance Agreement specifying measurable objectives with annual targets that is acceptable to the Secretary. In the event that further revisions are needed, the Board of Directors shall make such revisions and resubmit the Performance Agreement within ten days of receiving notification of the needed revisions.
- ☒ 14. By February 15, 2011, the Board of Directors shall submit to the Department for review and approval the plan the school proposes to use for access to DFMS and PHRST beginning with the school's first year of operation. Prior to the school beginning operation, the point of access must be located at the school's primary facility of operation. The plan must meet the security requirements of both DFMS and PHRST.
- ☒ 15. By April 1, 2011, and each succeeding year thereafter, the Board of Directors shall submit enrollment rosters to the Department and to each affected school district in a form satisfactory to the Department that verify that the school has enrolled at least 80% of the total authorized number of students for the following school year.



- ☒ 16. By June 15, 2011, the Board of Directors shall submit a Certificate of Occupancy that verifies the premises to be occupied by staff and students.
- ☒ 17. By June 30, 2011, the Board of Directors shall have consulted with designated staff in the Department's Exceptional Child and Early Childhood Workgroup to procure training for special education teachers in assessment.
- ☒ 18. By August 1, 2011, the Board of Directors shall submit documentation that appropriate staff has been trained on data reporting.
- ☒ 19. By September 1, 2011, the Board of Directors shall submit to the Department in a form satisfactory to the Department a listing of its members including addresses and phone numbers, and indicating the names of members representing the teachers employed at the school and the parents of students enrolled at the school. Anytime a new director is elected to the school's Board of Directors, the board shall provide written notice to the Department within ten days of such election. The notice shall include name, address and telephone number of the new director. Within ten days of any change in the address or phone number of any existing member of the board, the board shall provide written notice of the same to the Department including the new address and/or phone number of such board member.
- ☒ 20. By September 1, 2011, and each September 1 thereafter the Board of Directors shall submit to the Department in a form satisfactory to the Department a list of the staff employed at the school and that is has employed a sufficient number of certified, highly qualified teachers to comply with the requirements of 14 Del. C. § 507(c). The Board of Directors shall ensure that the Department is notified in writing with 20 calendar days when changes occur in the staff list, including new hires, terminations in employment, and any changes in status and/or assignment.
- ☒ 21. Documents related to these conditions must be submitted through the Charter Schools Office at the Department of Education, which will be responsible for distribution within the Department.

## STUDENT RETENTION GOALS AND TARGETS:

**The percentage of students who have re-enrolled from the prior year according to ESEA demographic categories.**

94.8% of the students enrolled in FY14 returned in FY15. The schools' demographics for September 30, 2013 were as follows:

Demographic Group	Total	Attrition	% Re-Enrolled
Caucasian	113	13	88.5%
African American	55	4	92.7%
Asian	11	0	100.0%
Multi-Racial	4	0	100.0%
Hispanic	254	6	97.6%
Native American	1	0	100.0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>439</b>		<b>94.8%</b>
Low SES	220	9	95.9%
Special Education	20	3	85.0%

**The number of students who have left your school before the year is over or before the end of the charter school's grade configuration per ESEA demographic category.**

100% of the students who were enrolled on September 30, 2013 remained enrolled through the end of the school year.

**A summary of why students chose to leave.**

This past summer, LAAA had 23 students withdraw at the end of the school year. Two (2) of those students moved out of the state. Eight (8) of those students transferred to other charter or magnet schools (5 for Montessori; 2 for Family Foundations; 1 for Cab Calloway). Two (2) were pulled to be home schooled by their father. One (1) transferred to a private school (Caravel). The remaining ten (10) returned to their district feeder school.

**The percentage of students who did not pass from one grade to the next.**

13 students were retained at the end of FY 14 – nine KN students, one 2<sup>nd</sup> grader and three 3<sup>rd</sup> graders. 69% were Hispanic (9 students), 15% were African American (2 students), 8% were Caucasian (1 student), and 8% were Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (1 student).

**Your plan to improve student retention and average daily attendance if less than your stated targets.**

Average daily attendance goals have been met each year and they have been consistently higher than the state average. Student retention goals have been met every year with average attrition being insignificant. Our waiting list was approximately 400 students. Our attrition does not seem to be linked to any demographic categories or to student achievement.

## INNOVATION:

Las Américas ASPIRA Academy (LAAA) is the direct outgrowth of the mission of ASPIRA of Delaware, Inc., an associate office of the national ASPIRA Association. ASPIRA, since its start with ASPIRA New York, has had over fifty years of experience creating and implementing formal and informal education programs that build up youth self-esteem, cultural awareness, and leadership abilities. ASPIRA associate offices successfully operate eleven charter schools in 3 cities: Philadelphia, Miami and Chicago. Originally founded as a Puerto-Rican organization, ASPIRA Associate Offices in the 6 states of Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Florida and Illinois and the commonwealth of Puerto Rico now serve a diverse population of youth, with the specific mission to empower the Puerto Rican and Latino community through advocacy and the education and leadership development of its youth.

The mission of the **Las Américas ASPIRA Academy (LAAA)** is to provide a world-class education that prepares students through a dual language project-based learning curriculum, to become healthy productive community members and leaders, with an **expectation** that **every** child, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic level, is college bound.

The features of the school that are considered innovative, unique or integral to fulfilling the school's mission and philosophy include the following:

### **Dual Language Instruction**

LAAA provides students dual language instruction through two separate programs. The Dual Language Immersion Program began in grades K-1<sup>st</sup> in Year 1 and grows each year as students advance to the next grade. This program provides students with daily alternating instruction in each language, so students learn the fundamentals of the language (i.e., English Language Arts and Spanish Language Arts) while also learning content in core subjects. A biliteracy framework has been developed, specific to the needs of our student population and school community, based upon the research of Karen Beeman, Cheryl Urow and Kathy Escamilla. Its focus is on the integration of language arts and content-area instruction, allowing students to learn and practice literacy skills within a highly comprehensible context and more effectively bridging between Spanish and English. All students will become bilingual, bi-literate and bicultural in the dual language immersion program, while gaining the academic, physical, social and emotional skills to succeed in school and in life. The students in the upper grades (2<sup>nd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> in Year 1; 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> in Year 3) are in the Spanish as a World Language Program, so they have Spanish class every day all year long similar to other core subjects.

### **Project-Based Learning**

LAAA provides students with a project-based learning curriculum. Developed by the Buck Institute for Education, it is described as follows:

*In Project Based Learning (PBL), students go through an extended process of inquiry in response to a complex question, problem, or challenge. While allowing for some degree of student "voice and choice," rigorous projects are carefully planned, managed, and assessed to help students learn key academic content, practice 21st Century Skills (such as collaboration, communication & critical thinking), and create high-quality, authentic products & presentations. Students*

*gain a deeper understanding of the concepts and standards at the heart of a project. Projects also build vital workplace skills and lifelong habits of learning. Projects can allow students to address community issues, explore careers, interact with adult mentors, use technology, and present their work to audiences beyond the classroom. PBL can motivate students who might otherwise find school boring or meaningless.*

### **School Climate and Culture**

LAAA has made it a priority to create an orderly, safe environment to allow teachers to teach and students to learn. Our Positive Behavior Support (PBS) Program recognizes students for doing the right thing and following the School Code of Conduct. The program incorporates Character Education to teach students the six pillars of character. The Student of the Month program recognizes students that demonstrate the Character Trait of the Month. In middle school, students receive Character Growth Reports along with their academic report cards. These reports provide students an opportunity to self-assess their own key character traits, while also providing them with ratings from their primary teachers. School uniforms have been in place from the beginning to promote discipline, respect, and a focus on learning. Strict absentee and tardiness policies teach students to value the importance of education. Academic Excellence Celebrations are held at the end of each trimester to recognize students achieving President's List and Honor Roll, as well as the Students of the Month.

### **QUEST Program**

The enrichment program targeted at gifted learners at Las Américas ASPIRA Academy is known as the QUEST program. This acronym stands for "Quality Utilization and Enrichment of Student Talents". Though Delaware law does not mandate the delivery of gifted services to students, LAAA recognizes that students who are academically accelerated and demonstrate elevated gifts and talents have unique needs. Since one characteristic of giftedness is the ability for students to acquire new languages quickly, we feel that promoting development of gifts and talents within an environment already structured for rich language learning could serve to enhance and challenge those individual students with the goal of helping all students to reach their full potential.

The program design is one that is able to evolve to meet the needs of learners and takes the approach that gifted education should not be a one-sized fits all model; LAAA believes that education should mold to fit the child, not the other way around. QUEST is project-based and driven by students' interests to the extent possible as the QUEST curriculum is primarily focused on developing students' critical, creative, and logical thinking skills as well as problem-solving abilities in a variety of ways.

### **Education Enrichment Programs**

To address the needs of all students, we implemented an "Enrichment" block in every student's schedule and created the Education Enrichment Team to oversee and/or support targeted instructional programs. The Enrichment block provides every student with 30 minutes of instructional support every day for a total of 150 minutes a week. Students performing at and below grade level are provided targeted instruction as part of our Response To Intervention (RTI) program. The Education Enrichment team consists



of Special Education teachers, paraprofessionals, Math Interventionist, Reading Interventionist, ELL teacher and QUEST teacher. Aside from supporting students identified as needing Special Education or ELL services, the team also supports the RTI program by delivering small group instruction in collaboration with the grade level teachers. Students identified as being accelerated learners are supported through the QUEST Program (as described above). This approach to education enrichment allows us to optimize resources for the benefit of all of our students.

### **Performing Arts Program**

The Performing Arts Department of the Las Américas ASPIRA Academy is truly innovative. Students from kindergarten through eighth grade are provided with general music and dance instruction each week as part of their specials curriculum. Students who would like to continue their studies in either music or dance are given the opportunity to participate in a wide variety of performing ensembles throughout the school year. Our ensembles include beginning band, elementary band, middle school band, jazz band, elementary choir, middle school choir and the ASPIRA Dance Company. For the convenience of our families, our choir and band programs rehearse during the school day. All band students are given private lessons based on their instrument type and level of ability. Our lesson program is a pull-out program during the school day but is based on a rotating schedule so that students do not miss the same class week after week. The members of the ASPIRA Dance Company rehearse after school to improve upon their technique and choreography. Students are given instruction in ballet, jazz, modern and various other styles. Our Hispanic culture is infused throughout our performing arts department in a variety of ways. Latin music and Latin dance styles are incorporated in the general music and dance curriculum. Our choirs frequently perform songs in Spanish and students perform Latin dances annually at our Hispanic Heritage Night. Our ensembles also perform at our annual winter and spring concerts and community events such as Blue Rocks games, PTO fundraisers and award ceremonies. Our ASPIRA Middle School Choir and Latin Dancers were invited to perform at DelTech's Hispanic Heritage Recognition ceremony last school year and we have been invited to perform at the highly prestigious IDEA Awards this October. We are thrilled that our school community not only supports but is actively involved in our performing arts department and we look forward to providing quality music and dance instruction for years to come!

### **Middle School Electives**

This school year we implemented an exciting new initiative in middle school. The 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade students have been given the opportunity to participate in the Middle School Electives Program at ASPIRA Academy. During the first week of school, students were given an "Electives Handbook" listing the programs that are offered during the first trimester of the school year. This new program utilizes a holistic approach in order to enhance the education of our middle school students. The focus of this program is to foster growth in the social, emotional, and creative sides of our students. As students move through each middle school grade at ASPIRA Academy, it is the goal of the teachers to prepare the students for high school, college, careers and beyond. While some of these electives encourage the students to explore their internal interests, other electives foster the success of students' academic lives. The following are the electives being offered to our students during the first trimester: Student Success 101 (SS 101), Student Government, Reading Buddies, Debate Team, Fashion Illustration, School Newspaper, Middle School Choir, Middle School Band, Jazz Band, as well as a diverse range of sports to meet students' interests. For the following two trimesters of the school



year, students will be exposed to other electives, again, choosing those electives that capture their attention. At LAAA, we believe all of our students are college-bound, and with the addition of our elective program, students will graduate from our school with academic prosperity combined with social, emotional, and physical development.

### **DIAA Sports Program**

This year Las Américas ASPIRA Academy became a member of the Delaware Interscholastic Athletic Association (DIAA). The goal of LAAA Athletics is to establish a program that will develop students who are strong in character, academics, and athletics, in that order. To fulfill that goal, our coaches put emphasis on teaching our student-athletes lifelong skills such as teamwork, sportsmanship, responsibility, health/fitness, and a work-life balance. We place great emphasis on the fact that they are the positive role models for other students to follow and hold each one to the highest standards of scholarship and citizenship. The reward of this hard work will be the knowledge that LAAA Athletics is molding well-rounded individuals who will be successful in high school and beyond.

In our first year, we plan to offer the following sports for students in grades six through eight: basketball (boys and girls), cheerleading, field hockey, soccer (boys and girls), track, and volleyball. The LAAA Athletics Program has a booster club, whose purpose is to create and support an athletic community of families who will help to ensure the viability of the program for years to come. There will be end of season banquets which will celebrate the achievements of all student-athletes. We will also take time to thank those community partners, coaches, parents/guardians, and volunteers who do their part to make each season successful.

### **Standards Based Report Card**

Las Américas ASPIRA Academy is piloting a standards-based report card in grades K-2 during the 2014-2015 academic year. Using StandardsScore, a C2 Collaborative product, classroom assessments are aligned to Common Core and Delaware Content standards to evaluate student mastery of the delivered curriculum. Grading activity is transformed into real-time, actionable assessment data to drive differentiated instruction, tiered intervention, and more effective teaching practice. This tool will allow us to:

- Export result of student assessments to our standards-based grading, assessment and report card
- See how students are performing relative to standards
- Monitor accommodations and interventions in the classroom on a daily and individual student basis
- Support special education and primary teachers through learning target scoring
- Connect and involve family to heighten communication
- Provide a report card in multiple languages

In comparison to the report card generated from E-school, we will now be able to utilize best practices in standards-based assessment, grading and reporting based upon the work of Thomas R. Guskey, Jane M. Bailey, and Lee Ann Jung. The focus will shift from the earning of letter grades to the mastery of learning.

**iPad Learning and Technology Initiative**

A key component of the Common Core State Standards is the use of technology in preparing students to become successful 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. In collaboration with Digital Wish, we have secured the resources to implement a 1:1 iPad program in grades 1-5 starting in the 2014-2015 academic year.