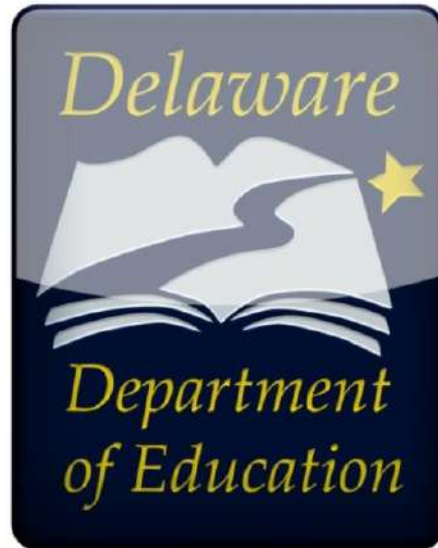


CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



MOT Charter School

**RENEWAL APPLICATION
INITIAL REPORT**

CSAC Initial Meeting: October 28, 2020
CSAC Initial Report Published: November 4, 2020

By September 30, 2020, MOT Charter School (MOT) submitted an application to renew its charter. Consideration of this application is in accordance with the applicable provisions of 14 *Del. C.* § 514A and 14 DE Admin. Code § 275. Written renewal application guidance is provided by the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) on its website. The renewal application template developed by DDOE is aligned to measures and targets within the Performance Framework, which outlines the academic, organizational and fiscal standards by which all Delaware charter schools are evaluated. The evaluation of the school's performance as measured by the Framework is a major component of the decision on the renewal application. The decision on the renewal application is based on a comprehensive review, guided, in part, by the following three questions:

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

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

The following were in attendance at the Initial Meeting of the CSAC on October 28, 2020:

Voting Committee Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee

- Kim Klein, Chairperson of the Charter School Accountability Committee and Associate Secretary of Education, DDOE
- Michael Saylor, Education Associate, Educator Support, DDOE
- Tiffany Green, Education Associate, Educator Support, DDOE
- Gregory Fulkerson, Education Associate, Academic Support, DDOE
- Catherine Oravez, Education Associate, Operations Support, DDOE
- James Pennewell, Education Associate, Operations Support, DDOE
- Susan Veenema, Education Associate, Exceptional Children Resources, DDOE
- Brian Moore, Education Associate, Student Support, DDOE
- Charles Taylor, Community Member and Former Charter School Leader
- Ted Molin, Community Member

Ex-Officio Members (Non-voting)

- Kendall Massett, Executive Director, Delaware Charter School Network
- Vince Lofink, Delaware State Board of Education

Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)

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

Representatives of MOT Charter School:

- Ned Southworth, Head of School
- Jen Taylor, Chairperson, Board of directors
- Shana Noll, K-8 Director of Curriculum and Instruction
- Mitch Weiss, Director of Student Services
- John Scali, Principal, STEM Academy
- Jenna Camponelli, Director of Special Education
- Terry Howarth, Principal, K-8 Academy
- Meryl Hewitt, Business Manager
- Faye Schilling, Principal, Arts Academy

Discussion

Ms. Klein reminded everyone that On March 12, 2020, Governor Carney issued a declaration of a state of emergency for the state of Delaware due to a public health threat. The State of Emergency allows all public meetings of executive branch public bodies, including the CSAC, to be conducted electronically, either by means of telephone conference call or video-conference call. This CSAC Meeting was open to the public electronically only. This was reflected on the State's Public Meeting Calendar.

Section 1: Overview

Ms. Klein asked the school to provide an overview. Mr. Southworth gave a brief overview and history of MOT Charter School. He explained that MOT opened its doors in 1999 with 500 students in kindergarten through sixth grade. In 2014 they added ninth grade, and opened the high school campus in 2015. MOT now serves 1,400 students across its two campuses in grades kindergarten through twelve. This is MOT's fourth renewal having been through three previous renewals in 2005, 2010 and 2015. The school has a 100% college acceptance rate.

MOT has met all internal and external benchmarks and serves a diverse parent body. their kindergarten through eighth grade demographics are similar to their surrounding community. The high school has a higher diversity demographic. MOT is committed to providing a challenging curriculum in a safe environment where all students can flourish, participate, understand and enjoy learning, and reach his or her own academic potential. MOT is committed to meeting the needs of every student, regardless of where they are on the learning continuum. Curriculum is designed around problem solving to allow creative and intuitive thinkers. MOT is a one-to-one technology school beginning in middle school and MOT provides its younger students with technological devices in their classrooms. Their kindergarten through eighth grade academy is a strong visual arts academy where students have exposure to robotics at the kindergarten level. MOT's high school curriculum allows students to pursue their passions, intellectual curiosity, and critical thinking. Their students achieve true growth, developing the skills needed to succeed in college and beyond.

Section 2: Academic Framework

Ms. Klein stated that the school has received academic data, outlined in their Academic Framework, for the first four years of its current charter term. Due to the Governor's mandated closure of all schools on March 12, 2020, there is no DSSF data available for the 2019/2020 school year. The school has been asked to reflect on their remote learning plan provided to the Department of Education.

Dr. Fulkerson commended the school for submitting documents as a part of an early review window and for their responsiveness to requests for additional information.

The Education Associates in the Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development Workgroup have reviewed the submitted curriculum documents and have determined that MOT has met expectations in the following curriculum areas:

- ELA, K-5
- Math, K-8
- Science
- Social Studies
- World Languages—High School Levels 1-5

**See attached curriculum document for a full review of the MOT curriculum.

The documents submitted for ELA, grades 6-12; math, grades 9-12 and Visual and Performing Arts were found to partially meet expectations. The following expectations for alignment were cited:

ELA:

- (Grades 6) No evidence of the integration of reading, writing, speaking and listening so that students apply and synthesize advancing literacy skills. The first three units of grade 6 separate the standards into the different strands. Evidence of integration would be either a revised scope and sequence that demonstrates the integration of the strands or unit plans for the first three units that demonstrate how the strands are intended to be interwoven together in practice
- (Grades 9-12) Sample learning experience/assessment were not provided. Evidence is needed of text dependent/text-specific questions for the chosen grade-level text under study to demonstrate attention to the Non-Negotiable 2 of the IMET tool.

Math:

The high school resource, IMP, partially meets expectations for alignment to Delaware’s state standards in area of focus and coherence. The materials partially attend to the full intent of the standards and do not spend a majority of course time on the major clusters of the grade. Additionally, materials partially meet expectations for spending a majority of time on the standards applicable as prerequisites. A list of the high school math standards that are either not addressed or not fully addressed can be found in the math section below.

Visual and Performing Arts:

- Documentation did not include sample assessments for each content areas of art, music, theater and dance.
- The Dance Curriculum documentation is also missing a scope and sequence showing standards targeted and major topics for each grade/course in the school.

MOT has identified that students who receive EL services present a particular challenge. The school has stated that their focus is to revise the high school program to better meet the needs of high school students and for teachers to better understand how to incorporate EL techniques into their everyday teaching.

Dr. Fulkerson asked if this goal was to improve EL programming or high school curriculum in general? He also asked what that revision looks like?

Mr. Weiss said that their comment was specific to the EL students, which is a relatively new population for MOT, particularly at the high school. As they have worked to meet the students' needs they have come at it with a two-pronged approach. One facet is to work directly with the students in the EL program. They are also supporting the teachers in their math and ELA classes in meeting the needs of EL students. Supports provided to teachers include:

- Identifying what an EL student struggling in vocabulary looks like and how to help them better understand the academic vocabulary that is present in their particular content area.
- Identifying some of the struggles that EL students face in writing and how that translates to writing and other academic areas.

Mr. Weiss stated that, because it is a new population for them, they cannot assume that their staff knows how to handle the needs of those students. They wanted to help them meet the needs of those students with their own professional development.

Dr. Fulkerson stated that the school described a very rich and robust professional learning system. He asked how the professional learning needed for EL is embedded into this rich structure that they have created?

Mr. Weiss stated that they provided this on an as needed basis by offering assistance through his expertise or the assistance of their two EL staff members. There is also a broader initiative to teach all teachers about the needs of all EL students. It is just one of the topics that they deal with through in-person training and also through providing materials to those staff members.

Ms. Veenema commended the special education department at MOT. She has enjoyed being their liaison. She asked how they tailor their robust professional development program to meet the needs of students with disabilities?

Ms. Camponelli stated that they look for statewide professional development opportunities, participate in autism workshops through the University of Delaware, and take advantage of the professional development that the DDOE offers. They have a parent committee for dealing with COVID-19 and how they are going to address students' needs during the pandemic. There are various opportunities with parents and with outside resources that they bring to their staff and families and help integrate their experience.

Mr. Lofink asked the school to explain why they have a significantly lower percent of students with disabilities compared to their surrounding school district and lower than the state average.

Mr. Southworth stated that, for admission, they operate a blind lottery. They do not have a screening process and do not use testing data. The only criteria that students have to meet is a completed application. Once a student is enrolled they determine what the student's needs are. Some students bring a special education diagnosis with them or they conduct a review to determine what needs they may have. There is no procedural "speedbump" that they put in the way. They use the same application process that school districts and other charters use.

Mr. Southworth is unaware of what the discrepancy is regarding the surrounding district and does not have an explanation for it. Mr. Weiss stated that it may have to do with the robust special education process that the school has, particularly at the kindergarten through eighth grade building. Students needs are identified at younger grades, and their process aims to meet students' needs up front before the special education process begins. This gets the students the help that they need, right away. As the school leadership stated, they are responsive to students' needs. If there is a need, they find out what the need is and respond to it. It is not specifically tied to special education, it has to do with meeting the students' needs.

Section 3: Organizational Framework

Mr. Moore commended the school on what they have done with discipline practices. He stated that he has noticed a significant reduction in out-of-school suspensions. When reviewing their bullying data, Mr. Moore noticed that during the 2018 school year they had 14 allegations of bullying and 12 substantiated incidents. During the following year there were no substantiated bullying complaints and their allegations reduced to seven. Last year they had none. Mr. Moore asked how they would explain the reduction.

Ms. Howarth said that they spend a lot of time working in the early stages when they receive an allegation. When they had a large number of allegations, they asked themselves what was causing it and what they can do about it. They work with the students proactively to address these behaviors that become bullying situations. Some of their allegations were focused on a couple of students. It was not a widespread problem but a couple of students who were struggling in their relationships with other students. They took a more proactive approach to working with some counseling for the students, setting up expectations, and doing check ins. They did a lot of work to make sure that students understood what bullying looked like and how these behaviors were impacting others. They implemented mindfulness strategies, as well. The school identifies these behaviors before they become something that impacts other students and results in bullying behavior.

Mr. Moore stated that the Department of Justice's bullying hotline number should be on the homepage of the school's website or the homepage should contain a link for it. Currently it is under their regulatory compliance and he had to search for it. The law states that it has to be within two clicks of the homepage. Mr. Moore stated that the students should have access to an anonymous reporting mechanism.

Mr. Saylor commended the school's commitment to the evaluation system within their application. He visited their school and met with their administrative team to do calibration walks, see the instruction, and hear the conversation about instruction. They are commended for having their Assistant Principal complete all of her induction requirements, and is committed to her second year induction. This is not required, but is best practice for leaders that are looking to develop their skills. The Educator Effectiveness Workgroup has seen good things and he has enjoyed the partnership with the school.

Section 4: Financial Framework

In reviewing the school's Financial Reports, Mr. Moore noticed that there was a \$360,000.00 increase in their expenses for administrative services. He asked if they had a contract change or an unforeseen change in that line?

Ms. Hewitt explained that it was due to the change in coding structure that they implemented because of the way that the DDOE wants to see their reporting. They were supposed to have a hired position that they ended up contracting for administrative services.

Mr. Molin commended the school on their financial practices. Mr. Molin asked if the school had any large capital projects that it will need to finance in the coming years?

Mr. Southworth stated that they were thinking about how to best configure their middle school. If they decide to make changes, it would involve another couple of years of research. They could potentially envision a reconstruction of their middle school wing, because they need to accommodate many different learning spaces.. The goal is for the students to feel good and see improvements in performance, increased attendance, and decreased disciplinary issues. This would be a number of years down the road.

Mr. Molin asked if there could be other expenses in the future due to COVID-19. He asked if costs are currently manageable and, in event of an ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, if the school has budgeting contingencies for that?

Mr. Southworth stated that they are in a very good place, they are able to pay for the staffing that they need and buy the resources that they need. The short answer is that they can meet the needs of students and families. If they know that this will go beyond this academic year, they may need to make some shifts. They may need to direct some administrative resources to their remote learners. They will need to think of them as a unique cohort of students as opposed to simply viewing them as students who are not in the building. They have seen some families who have indicated that they prefer the online model and it is something that they need to think about moving forward. The school needs to be prepared to be creative and think about that. For now, Mr. Southworth stated, they have dedicated resources to remote learning and everyone is going above and beyond to make the program successful.

Ms. Taylor explained that the MOT Board spent a significant amount of time during their last two meetings discussing whether to go hybrid and what return to school plans would look like. Right now, the biggest obstacle that they have is having students return safely and social distancing in the buildings. Their kindergarten and first graders come back to school four days of the week for their hybrid model. Other students through eighth grade are back in school for four days.

Ms. Taylor explained that they are going to have to make sacrifices for their program because they are going to need to use the classrooms, libraries, multi-purpose rooms, etc. for classrooms. If this pandemic goes beyond June, they will need to talk about using some type of

modular space. The school will have more administrative and faculty costs if there is a long-term remote learning situation for students. There will be a budgetary impact and the Board is very aware of the situation.

Ms. Taylor further explained that, today, there are many mandates on schools that have little to do with academics and instead have to do with health and safety and mental health. Staff is worried about the students not in school and those that may miss meals at home.

Mr. Molin asked how they monitored that. Ms. Taylor explained that their cafeteria staff has gone above and beyond. They also work with Delaware Food Bank to be a food site and a pickup site for New Castle County. Some of their most vulnerable families are the ones that have decided to have their child learn remotely. The school feels that they are missing the live point of contact.

Ms. Howarth explained their most vulnerable students, academically, come from difficult home environments and have attendance problems or they are unable to get work from them. Traditionally, they would ask them to stay after school to work with them and give them additional supports. It becomes a struggle now that they have the option to be online. Ms. Howarth calls these families to encourage them to participate in a hybrid model, even if it for only for a couple of days a week, to give them some extra supports

Ms. Green asked if teachers that are participating in the mentoring program have been paired with their mentor. She stated that she did not see that information available in the mentoring center. Mr. Weiss responded that all teachers are paired and working with their mentors. It should be in the mentoring center and inputted.

Section 5: Ten-Year Plans

Mr. Travers wanted the school to be aware that the enrollment listed on their enrollment chart will become their authorized enrollment. He noted that this would not require a modification. Ms. Oravez asked the school to submit a predicted enrollment for the ten-year charter period that they have requested.

Conclusion

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

The following information was requested:

Curriculum:

- ELA Grade 6 evidence of integration which can be a revised scope and sequence that demonstrates integration for grade six.
- For grades 9-12 the sample learning experiences and assessments that were requested and are missing.
- Math: for HS Math Standards were not addressed or not fully addressed in the curriculum, if you can point out where in the curriculum they can be found.
- Visual and Performing Arts: sample assessments that were requested were not included and that the Dance Scope and Sequence was missing

Financial and Operations Support:

- A 10-year projection for enrolment

Organizational:

- Ensure that the Department of Justice's phone number is within two clicks of the homepage.

Mentoring Program:

- Ensure that all mentors are captured within the mentoring center.

Next Steps:

- The applicant will have the opportunity to submit a written response to the CSAC Initial Report, which is due by close of business on November 19, 2020.
- The final meeting of the CSAC will be held on December 2, 2020. That meeting will take place virtually.
- A public hearing will be held virtually on November 12, 2020.
- If necessary, a second public hearing will be held virtually on December 10, 2020.
- The Secretary of Education will announce her decision at the December 17, 2020 State Board of Education meeting and ask for the assent of the State Board.