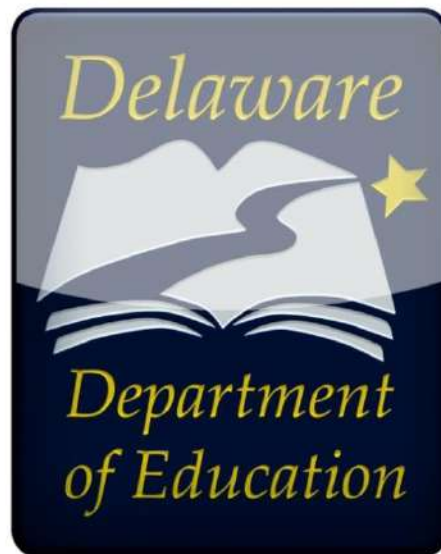


# CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



## Odyssey Charter School

**RENEWAL APPLICATION  
INITIAL REPORT**

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

By September 30, 2019, Odyssey Charter School submitted an application to renew its charter. Consideration of this application is in accordance with the applicable provisions of 14 **Del. C. Ch. 5**, including § 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 29, 2019:

**Voting Committee Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee**

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

**Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)**

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

**Ex-Officio Members (Non-voting)**

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

**Representatives of Charter School**

- Josiah Wolcott, Board Chair, Odyssey Charter School
- Denise Parks, Head of School, Odyssey Charter School
- Riccardo Stoeckicht Campus Operations Officer, Odyssey Charter School
- Karen Thorpe, Financial Consultant, Odyssey Charter School
- Renee Ickes, Special Education Coordinator, Odyssey Charter School
- Ashley Lipson, High School Dean, Odyssey Charter School
- Marina Mattheoudakis, Greek Program Dean, Odyssey Charter School

## Discussion

### Section 1: Overview

Mr. Wolcott introduced a brief video about Odyssey Charter School (OCS). Following the video, utilizing a PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Wolcott noted the following:

- OCS is a highly diverse K-12 Charter School.
- The 2019/2020 school year is their first year with a senior class.
- OCS focuses on a life-long love of learning with a specific focus on world citizenship and culture.
- The school is the nation's only K-12 Greek charter school and contains a group of students that are learning Greek for half of the day.
- OCS has nearly doubled in size during the last five years.
- OCS has made great strides in communication within and outside of the school community.
- OCS has established a compliance committee that has met to address conditions placed upon the school as part of the formal review process.
- OCS has been recognized for environmental stewardship and has been awarded a "Green Flag" by the National Wildlife Federation.

Following Mr. Wolcott's introduction, Denise Parks then shared the following information from the PowerPoint presentation:

- The school community operates as a family and they are committed to maintaining a family atmosphere.
- Forty-six percent of incoming kindergarten students are siblings of elder OCS students.
- OCS has met standard in academic achievement for every year of their charter term.
- This year's enrollment is at 1,916 students. They have an active waitlist of 1,973 across grades K-12.
- Students in grades 3-8 performed eleven to eighteen percent better than the state average on 2019 Smarter Testing in English/Language Arts (ELA) and eight to seventeen percent better in Math.
- OCS meets students where they are, academically, and advances them.
- 33% of students in grades 3-8 scored at a PL4 on Smarter ELA and 30% scored at a PL4 in Math.
- 67% of OCS's senior class has completed one or more college level classes.
- AP Human Geography and AP Human Language students outscored the state in Global Mean Score in both areas.
- All students are eligible to take AP classes.
- 22 students took the Ellinomatheia exam this year, 77% were successful.
- The school has developed a multi-pronged, intensive school improvement plan

designed to be enacted over several years.

- OCS was recognized as the best public school in Delaware in 2018 by the News Journal's Reader's choice awards. Niche.com ranked them #1 in many areas, as well.

Riccardo Stoeckicht then discussed the operations of the school noting the following:

- Operations at OCS includes two additional area's that may not be typical with most schools, one being co-location aspects (most of their complex is a Pettinaro Construction development) and their campus/tenant relationships (the school is a landlord).
- A major focus of 2018 was campus safety and security.
- The school implemented the use of the Rave security alert system and implemented its use at with their tenant, Academia Antonia Alonso (AAA), as part of their commitment to safety for the entire campus.
- OCS opened a second emergency exit that leads out to the street. This is near the back of the campus.
- The school has enhanced the number of external cameras to increase safety.
- Most of the safety upgrades were completed with the state's Safety and Security grant funds.
- The school plans to implement the school pass badge system utilizing the same funds.
- OCS has developed a multi-year fit-out plan to address future facilities expansion, to include a gymnasium, auditorium, and additional high school classrooms.
- OCS has enhanced its services to its tenant, AAA.
- The school wants to work proactively with Pettinaro Construction to leverage potential shared services.

Following the school's introduction, Dr. Longfellow noted the following regarding the school's Delaware School Success Framework (DSSF):

- On September 20, 2019, the Charter School Office provided draft DSSF results to the renewing charter schools so that they could complete their renewal applications. The correspondence noted that the data was still draft and schools would be notified if there were any corrections.

Dr. Longfellow asked the CSAC if they had any questions or concerns regarding the Overview section of the school's renewal application. There were none.

## **Section 2: Academic Framework**

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

Ms. Veenema stated that the school's LEA determination for special education was rated as "needs intervention" due to student performance in ELA and Math. She asked what the school had in place to improve student outcomes for students with disabilities. Ms. Parks stated that the school's special education population has grown and the staff has been cognizant of how students are identified for special education services. She stated that the school has worked to ensure that students are identified properly, and early. They have strengthened their Response to Intervention (RTI) process to ensure that students are receiving interventions before being identified for special services. Ms. Ickes stated that the school's special education academic struggles are mostly in the middle school population. The school has taken part in professional development around inclusive practices and what they should look like in middle school. Younger classrooms are moving towards a Team Approach to Mastery (TAM) model. Ms. Veenema asked about their behavior model and how it was blended with academic special services utilizing a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). Ms. Parks stated that the school utilizes Responsive Classroom at the K-5 level and interweaves it with Positive Behavior Supports (PBS). In grades 6-12, OCS utilizes Restorative Practices for culture and climate purposes and for interventions. They are training all 6-12 faculty in Restorative Practices. Ms. Ickles stated that OCS is reviewing their Tier 2 supports using their child study team to develop strategies. OCS has a Family Crisis Therapist, a child psychologist and counselors that make up their child study team. Ms. Veenema commended the school on their increase in the number of in-house school psychologists.

Dr. McCrae noted that the school uses a number of assessment tools to monitor progress. She encouraged them to ensure that the measures that they are using align to the goals that they have set for their students as well as their academic and instructional goals. All of their monitoring tools do not appear to be aligned. Dr. McCrae noted that some of what was being done at the middle and high school level was not aligned to standards, as it is provided to them from the vendor. She asked them to think about what they are doing to ensure that the materials are aligned to the standards. Dr. McCrae stated that no Social Studies materials were received.

Dr. McCrae noted that the school has hired 50 new staff members in the past two years and asked the school to discuss their onboarding process, professional development and any assistance in ensuring stability within the school. Ms. Parks stated that, beyond the comprehensive induction program conducted at the state level, OCS has an in-house mentoring program that includes items that are specific to OCS. Areas such as curriculum, instruction, and assessment are covered in Professional Learning Communities (PLC's). Ms. Parks stated that the school conducts walk-throughs, primarily with administrators. Next week, however, teachers will begin conducting instructional walk-throughs to provide peer feedback. OCS has engaged outside resources to take part in professional development offerings that include science coalition, Design Thinking, and curriculum vendors.

Dr. Noble pointed out that enrollment at the high-school level has dipped since 2016/2017 and last year, grades 9-11 were forty-five percent lower than the approved enrollment. At grades K-8, enrollment was eighteen percent higher than approved enrollment. Dr. Noble asked what the school planned to do to increase high school enrollment and whether they would lower K-

8 enrollment if high school enrollment goals are met. Ms. Parks stated that the school made an educated best guess regarding high school enrollment. They found that when they first opened the high school attrition rates were at roughly fifty percent, which is not unusual across the Delaware charter landscape. The school has activities in place to help address this, including a high school open house and a “Roll out the Blue Carpet” event for eighth grade students. Ms. Parks stated that building a quality program helps, as well as high schools take a while to mature and take hold. She explained that the retention rate for students entering middle school has increased each year and that this year it was over ninety-one percent.

Mr. Pennewell asked if there were programs that OCS had planned to alleviate high school attrition. Ms. Parks responded that the school has hired excellent teachers. The school has developed multiple career paths. Ms. Lipson stated that initially there were only a few pathways, including Drama and Stage Crew, Advance Greek and an English Academic pathway. The school has since added a Computer Science pathway, a Business Information pathway and a Bio-medical pathway. These pathways were added due to student interest and the school has added over 20 courses based on what students were interested in and staff strengths and qualifications.

Ms. Green asked if there was a plan in place to help recruit and retain teachers. Ms. Parks stated that the school employs roughly 130 faculty members. She stated that the school does exit interviews with all teachers and they have not identified trends for exiting teachers. Ms. Parks feels that OCS is attractive for employment and the school is very popular at career fairs. The school wishes to ensure that the faculty is diverse and mirrors the student population at the school. This has proven to be challenging. They have hired an HR specialist to focus on this goal. Ms. Green then asked when the school anticipated loading school leader evaluations into the states online system, as this has not been completed. Ms. Parks responded that they are currently wrapping up evaluations and completing final conferences during the week. The school is focused on “goal getting” for the administrative team that includes personal goals, division goals, and individual goals. Division goals include student achievement, professional practice, and engagement.

Ms. Veenema asked how the school organized special education teachers within the regular education population and within the Greek program. Ms. Parks stated that special education services have grown significantly to match the growing special education needs of the school. The school has added multiple “C settings” within the school. Ms. Parks stated that special education within the Greek program has been a challenge. She stated that Greek teachers are difficult to find, in general, and it is unusual to find Greek teacher with special education certification. They have hired an inclusion coaching specialist to work with all teachers, including Greek teachers.

### **Section 3: Organizational Framework**

Dr. Longfellow reminded the CSAC that the school has conditions in place due to their current probationary status. He asked OCS to give an update on the conditions. Mr. Wolcott stated that

OCS created a compliance committee immediately after being placed on probation, in July. The committee is comprised of three board members as well as other members of the school community. This committee is designed to make recommendations to the OCS Board on the best way to comply with the conditions. The committee has created sub-committees to work on each condition category, including By-laws, Finance, and Communication. Mr. Wolcott stated that the committee and the sub-committees have had multiple meetings since July (meeting bi-weekly) and representatives from the Board have had multiple meetings with Dr. Longfellow and Mr. Travers, as well. OCS has engaged with the Delaware Association for Non-profit Advancement (DANA) to provide them with guidance around by-law amendments and best practices around conflicts of interest and other Board governance issues. The Board plans to look at potential by-law changes within the next week. The State Auditor's office plans to complete its investigatory audit by December 15, 2019. Mr. Stoeckicht stated that he and Ms. Thorpe are working to collect all relevant information for submission to the auditor's office by November 1, 2019. Mr. Stoeckicht stated that the Citizens Budget Oversight Committee (CBOC) has seen movement on the conditions and is currently enhancing practices by reviewing the school's check registry and P-card purchases. Mr. Wolcott feels that they are in a position to meet all deadlines laid out in their probation.

Dr. Longfellow stated that DANA sent a letter to DDOE outlining some recommended changes. These include increasing the size of the Board and striving to balance the gender equality on the Board. DANA has recommended that the Board President position transition each two years as opposed to every year, as laid out in the probation letter. Mr. Wolcott stated that the collaboration between the DDOE and OCS has been very good.

Mr. Taylor asked for clarification from Mr. Wolcott around the certainty of meeting the conditions. Mr. Wolcott stated that the Board will decide on everything within the given time frame.

Ms. Oravez asked if there are any conditions that have been met or completed. Mr. Wolcott replied that none have been fully satisfied, however, the compliance committee has had conversations around each. Mr. Pennewell asked if a source had been identified for the repayment of funds, as outlined in the conditions. Mr. Wolcott responded that one has not identified, due to Ithaka being dormant. Ithaka was the early learning program started by The American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association or AHEPA. This program was founded, partially, by utilizing funds from OCS. Mr. Wolcott explained that AHEPA does not have the funds to repay, but are looking to raise funds to do so. Mr. Wolcott stated that Ithaka is represented by DiMitri Dandalos.

Dr. Noble reiterated that it is concerning that none of the conditions have been satisfied. She stated that most of the conditions appear to be reliant upon the guidance of DANA. Mr. Wolcott stated that he expected the compliance committee to make recommendations to the Board that followed the basic ideas contained within DANA's feedback. Dr. Noble asked that, if available, the draft by-law changes be made available to CSAC before the next meeting of the committee.



Ms. Oravez also expressed concern that the school has not satisfied any of the conditions since July.

#### **Section 4: Financial Performance / Five-year planning**

Dr. Longfellow provided the following feedback:

- The school had a clean audit opinion for fiscal year 2019, however, two material concerns were identified. The first area was capital asset records. This was due to the school not recording the purchase of seven buses, school vans and various construction projects. The audit provided feedback on how to properly conduct this task in the future.
- Another concern was around construction project management. The recommendations were to further formalize the bidding procedure and have more board involvement in purchase orders and approvals.
- The school has an outstanding long-term debt of \$37,000,000 due to the acquisition of property.
- The school has demonstrated sufficient funding to cover summer pay obligations. Their five year planning enrollment chart aligns with the 100% budget. Both the 100% budget and the 80% budget are balanced and show adequate carryover from year to year. Given the schools large wait list, it is highly unlikely that the 80% will need to be used.
- The assumptions were clearly defined in the narrative. The school's financial position has improved over the course of the charter. OCS met standard on all measures except debt-to-asset ratio and financial oversight due to the school's probation.

Dr. Noble asked why the school has large amounts of money (roughly \$3,300,000) in unprotected accounts, according to their 2018 audit. Ms. Thorpe stated that she felt that this may be an error as a majority of OCS's funds are held within the state financial system with the exception of a minor WSFS bank account that is required for their debt service payments. Ms. Thorpe will look into this and provided clarification.

Ms. Oravez asked if a person had been identified to track capital expenditures, as recommended in the audit. Ms. Thorpe stated that she would be performing that duty June 30, 2020. The school is, however, in the process of searching for a business manager, who will be trained to perform that task. Mr. Stoekicht stated that the audit firm provided a template that they use to track expenditures. He stated that the school had tracked expenditures, however, had done so on a separate spread sheet. This information was provided to the auditors.

Dr. Longfellow asked the CSAC if they had any other comments or questions regarding the financial performance section or the five-year planning section of the school's renewal application.

### **Conclusion**

Dr. Longfellow asked voting members of CSAC whether there was any additional information that it required to inform its decision-making.

The following information was requested:

#### Academic Performance:

1. A timeline for completed goal-setting forms for the 2019-2020 school year.
2. Educational Program: See Appendix 1 for review notes from DOE's Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Development workgroup.

#### Organizational Performance:

1. A draft of the language, as of the response date, of the ten by-law related conditions imposed due to the school's probationary status.
2. Progress update on all additional conditions.

#### Financial Performance:

1. A plan for addressing processes identified as the two material weaknesses in the audit (capital asset records and construction project management).
2. An explanation of the \$3,300,000 that was identified in the 2018 audit as not being insured or collateralized.
3. A copy of the investigatory audit, if completed within the CSAC timeline. If not completed during the CSAC timeline, the results will be shared with the Secretary of Education and the State Board of Education before any decisions are made.

### **Next Steps:**

- The CSAC will provide the school with an Initial Report no later than November 7, 2019.
- The applicant will have the opportunity to submit a written response to the CSAC Initial Report, which is due by close of business on November 22, 2019.
- The final meeting of the CSAC will be held on December 2, 2019; 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Cabinet Room, Townsend Building, Dover.
- A public hearing will be held on November 13, 2019; New Castle Public Library, 424 Delaware Street, New Castle, Delaware.
- If necessary, a second public hearing will be held on December 10, 2019, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Cabinet Room, Townsend Building, Dover.
- The Secretary of Education will announce her decision at the December 19, 2019 State Board of Education meeting and seek the assent of the State Board as necessary.