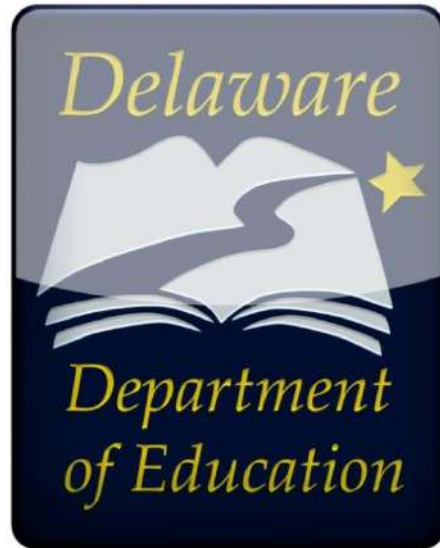


CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Prestige Academy

MAJOR MODIFICATION APPLICATION INITIAL REPORT

CSAC Initial Meeting: January 26, 2016
CSAC Initial Report Published: January 29, 2016

On December 31, Prestige Academy submitted an application for a major modification of its charter.

The following were in attendance at the Initial Meeting of the CSAC on January 26, 2016:

Voting Committee Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee

- David Blowman, Chairperson of the Charter School Accountability Committee and Associate Secretary, Financial Management and Operations, DDOE
- Karen Field Rogers, Deputy Secretary, DDOE
- April McCrae, Education Associate, Science Assessment and STEM, DDOE
- Barbara Mazza, Education Associate, Exceptional Children Resources, DDOE
- Chuck Taylor, Head of School, Providence Creek Academy

Non-voting Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee

- Donna Johnson, Executive Director, Delaware State Board of Education
- Kendall Massett, Executive Director, Delaware Charter School Network

Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)

- Catherine Hickey, Deputy Attorney General, Counsel to the Committee
- Jennifer Nagourney, Executive Director, Charter School Office, DDOE
- John Carwell, Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Barbara Clendaniel, Acting Executive Assistant, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Financial Reform and Resource Management, DDOE

Representatives of Delaware Academy of Public Safety and Security

- Don Mell, Chairman of the Board
- Cordie Greenlea, Executive Director
- Michelle Lambert, Accountant

Additional Attendees

- Casey Guerke, Innovative Schools

Discussion

The following was discussed:

- Summary of request – Prestige Academy has applied for a modification to change its grade configuration, change the number of approved students, and the number of instructional days in the school calendar.
- Rationale for the request – The school indicated that, together, the three requested modifications are part of a strategic plan to improve Prestige Academy’s academic performance and recruitment and retention for both students and staff. The school indicated that it requested to change the grade configuration from 5-8 to 6-8 to improve student recruitment and, ultimately, enrollment. Since the 3rd year of school operations, the school says it has found that 5th students were reluctant to leave their elementary schools to enroll at Prestige, and that recruitment for 5th grade required disproportionate effort. The school stated its expectation that the modified grade configuration would be more appealing to prospective students. The school indicated that requested change to grade configurations is driving the requested change to enrollment, and that it will be able to be fully enrolled at the lower enrollment level. Finally, the school indicated that the decreased number of instructional days will be accomplished without decreasing the number of instructional hours by restructuring the student schedule, which currently includes a half-day of school for students every week to accommodate professional development sessions for teachers. The school indicated that there are questions about whether the increased number of school days is translating into increased student achievement, and there are questions about whether those days would be better used for a summer bridge program. The school also stated that the school schedule is an issue for parents, who may have students enrolled in other schools with different calendars.
- How change will impact professional development – School said it wants to be strategic in all of its plans, including those for professional development. For example, this year, the school is planning professional development sessions focusing on de-escalation [of potentially dangerous situations?], working with students who have experienced trauma, and creating a “family environment” where students can connect with teachers and learning.
- How the change would impact the school’s financial viability – The school indicated that it believes it will be financially viable at the proposed grade configuration and student enrollment levels, noting that 5th grade staffing cuts would create savings while increasing enrollment for the remaining grades. The school said that the staffing plan submitted with the modification applications details the impact that the changes would have on staffing levels for specific subjects and grade levels.
- Enrollment projections – The school anticipates that it will be fully enrolled with 240 students for the 2016-17 school year, with applications for new students and 40 current fifth graders who they expect will remain enrolled. The school indicated that there was “significant” student and staff attrition at the end of last school year because of the departure of former Executive Director Jack Perry and related changes to culture and

expectations. The school stated that it is working hard to create a new culture of improved academic achievement, and believes that new culture will attract more new students.

- Services for exceptional students - The CSAC noted that, as a result of on-site monitoring conducted at the school last year, the school had developed a corrective action plan for the provision of services for exceptional students that had been approved by the DOE and was being implemented at the school level.
- Academic Performance – The CSAC noted that Prestige has shown a consistent decline in student performance over the last 5 years, and that both growth and proficiency remain a significant concern. The CSAC also noted that the submitted modification application states that Prestige has out-performed state averages, and noted that this is incorrect. The CSAC requested additional information regarding current student performance levels taken to drive improvement. The school indicated that the students would shortly begin testing using school-level data systems, and were developing plans to work with struggling students over the summer vacation. The school indicated that it was also working to support students' academic performance with services aimed at promoting social and emotional well-being, noting that some students may be suffering from trauma due to the effects of community violence on their families. The school indicated that it is also running a Saturday academy for students.

Conclusion:

Mr. Blowman asked whether there were any components of the application that any members felt did not meet the standard for a positive final recommendation. The following were noted:

- Student enrollment
- Academic performance

The following specific information was requested by the CSAC to inform its decision-making:

- Data demonstrating student growth
- Professional development plans

Next Steps:

- The first of two public hearings will take place on February 1, 2016, in the 2nd Floor Auditorium of the Carvel State Office Building, which is located at 820 N. French St., Wilmington, Delaware, beginning at 5:00 p.m.
- The school's response to the Initial CSAC Report, if the school chooses to submit a response, is due by 5:00 p.m. on February 15, 2016.
- The Final CSAC Meeting will be held on February 23, 2016, in the 2nd Floor Cabinet Room of the Townsend Building, which is located at 401 Federal St., Dover, Delaware, beginning at 9:00 a.m.
- A Final CSAC Report will be issued no later than March 1, 2016.
- A second and final public hearing will take place on March 7, 2016, in the 3rd Floor Conference Room in the Carvel State Office Building, which is located at 820 N. French St., Wilmington, Delaware, beginning at 5:00 p.m.
- The public comment period will close on March 11, 2016.
- The Secretary of Education will announce his decision at the regular meeting of the State Board of Education on March 17, 2016.