

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION CHARTER SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT

CHARTER SCHOOL INFORMATION

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NOVEMBER 30, 2014
Date

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Date

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Board President

NOVEMBER 30, 2014
Date

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: December 1st (September 30th 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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History

Sussex Academy currently operates as a charter school authorized by the Delaware Department of Education. Opened in 2000 the Sussex Academy of Arts & Sciences began as a 225-pupil middle school located in a newly constructed facility at 21777 Sussex Pines Road in Georgetown, Delaware. Within three years of opening, Sussex Academy made two minor modifications to first expand to 300 and then 325 students. The school renewed its charter for 2003-2008 and then again for 2008-2013 with only minor changes in structures and expectations. A major modification was approved in 2012 so as to begin adding a high school in 2013. Then Sussex Academy was approved for another five-year renewal (2013-2018). In order to meet facility demands needed for adding high school grades, the Sussex Academy Foundation executed an agreement with a nearby independent school, Delmarva Christian High School, to exchange buildings. This entailed a major capital campaign by the Sussex Academy Foundation to raise \$15.1 million so that Sussex Academy occupied its new facility at 21150 Airport Road in June 2013. A second phase for facility expansion is planned for the next two school years. When the decision was made to move to a new facility and an expanded program, the Executive Board shortened the school's name to Sussex Academy and endorsed a new tagline, school colors and mascot beginning in school year 2013-2014.

Mission

To foster academic achievement and social responsibility in a small school environment where students participate in an accelerated college preparatory program that prepares them for the technological and global challenges of the 21st century and that fosters ethical conduct and service to others in their day to day lives.

Vision

To cultivate students of distinction by providing them with the knowledge, skills, and values to become successful productive citizens.

Targeted Population

The target population is any student in grades 6 – 9 who resides in Delaware. Most students who apply reside in one of the six school districts in Sussex County (936 square mile area). In school year 2013-2014 the school population was comprised of 412 students in grades 6 – 9 with 40% male and 60% female; 81% white, 7% Hispanic, .2% Hawaiian, 3.6% Asian, 1.9% American Indian, 2.9% African American; 18.2% poverty. Interestingly, the demographics for Sussex County posted by the U.S. Census Bureau for 2013-14 are the following: 49% male, 51% female; 82% white, 9% Hispanic, <1% Hawaiian, 1% Asian, <1% American Indian, 12% African American. 12.9% below poverty level.

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.

Summary and Overall Rating 2013-2014: Exceeds Standard

Outcomes

During the past 14 years Sussex Academy's academic achievement as measured by the state assessment (DCAS and DSTP) have been excellent.

The Performance Framework analysis completed by DDOE in October 2014 for school year 2013-2014 indicates that Sussex Academy's overall school rating is "Exceeds Standard." The data indicate that 59.4% of the students met growth targets in math and 67.5% of the students met their growth targets in reading. It is unclear to what extent these numbers reflect a lack of significant academic progress by our students, as the data may likely be skewed by the impact of "ceiling effects" due to the high proficiency scores of our students a whole. Ceiling effects are noted to be problematic when assessing growth outcomes in high achievement students. (See *Mathematica Policy Research Paper: How Do Test Scores at the Floor and Ceiling Affect Value-Added Estimates?*) This occurs when advanced students score so highly on the initial measure (Fall testing), that standardized tests are not sensitive enough to measure their progress in the Spring. As Sussex Academy has received 96.1% proficiency rate in math and a 97.1% proficiency rate in reading, it appears that the failure to adequately meet growth targets can largely be explained in this context. When discussing growth measures with members of the Delaware Department of Education recently, a department representative provided this information: "In 2013-14, the Delaware Department of Education made a few changes to the statistical model used to determine expected growth targets that have implications for the final distribution of ratings discussed for Sussex Academy in this report. One of these changes involved giving expected growth targets to **all students**—including students whose fall DCAS scores placed them at the highest proficiency Performance Level (PL-4). During the 2012-13 school year, students who scored at PL-4 in the fall had to score at PL-4 in the Spring to be considered as having met their growth target. Without an actual predicted growth target, among students scoring PL-4 in the fall in DCAS Math, 100% of Sussex Academy students met their target compared to 98% for the state. In contrast, in 2013-14 51 percent of PL-4 students met their growth target (comparable to the results of other performance levels) across the state and 52 percent of Sussex Academy PL-4 students met their growth targets in Math. Overall, 60 percent of Sussex Academy students met their growth targets in Math and 68 percent in English Language Arts compared to 57 percent across the state in Math and 55 percent in English Language Arts. "

The administration and teachers need to learn more about growth target outcomes for other similar schools and how to move students further along the continuum of growth targets should the current targets be valid and reliable measures of student performance.

The growth measures data revealed that 79.6% of the students in the lowest quartile met their growth targets in math and 77.2% of those same students met them in reading. According to this report 96.13% of the students are making annual growth in math and 84.6% in reading to maintain or achieve proficiency within 3 years. As a whole school the data revealed that there was a 96.1% proficiency rate in math and a 97.1% proficiency rate in reading. When further delineated, it was found for low socio-economic students that 88.4% exceeded in math proficiency while 93.0% exceeded in reading proficiency. Additionally, in math 90.3% of the Hispanic students exceeded the standards and 90.3% of those same students exceeded the standards in reading. The subgroup summary shows that in math and ELA students received “exceeds” the standard. For that achievement the DDOE and Lt. Governor cited Sussex Academy as a Rewards School for school year 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. Overall, when compared to similar schools in the state, Sussex Academy students scored approximately 12% points higher in math and reading than those similar schools.

During the Spring 2014 administration of DCAS the following percentage of students met or exceeded the standards in reading for grades 6, 7, 8, and 9 respectively: 98%, 96%, 97%, and 94%. The percentages of students in the highest level (PL4) in reading in grades 6, 7, 8, and 9 were 77%, 71%, 81%, and 78% respectively. In mathematics 93%, 97%, 98%, and 94% met or exceeded the standards in those same grades respectively. The percentages of students in the highest level (PL4) in grades 6, 7, 8, and 9 were 62%, 38%, 65%, and 55% respectively. In social studies 86% of the students met or exceeded the standards with 61% of the students in PL 4. In science 94% of the students met or exceeded with 64% scoring in PL 4.

The school regularly examines data to determine student performance. Sussex Academy faculty perform data analyses during their Professional Learning Communities. The teams disaggregate data to ascertain how particular subgroups are doing so as to provide interventions to the lowest performing students.

Strengths

Over the course of the school’s fourteen-year history, standards and assessments have changed as have some of the operational elements and personnel within the school. Yet, the school’s mission of providing an accelerated curriculum within a small school setting has remained in tact. The school’s commitment to providing rigor in curriculum that is project-based with authentic experiences taught by excellent teachers has been sustained and improved over time. The school’s value to the public educational landscape is verified through the students’ academic performance, their social conduct and

consciousness, and their parents' support of the school. Sussex Academy was one of the schools described in the Delaware Education Research and Development Center's Technical Report T2010.4 "Beating the Odds." Additionally, twice it has been deemed a Rewards School by the DDOE.

Challenges and Opportunities for Growth

Sussex Academy's expansion presents varying challenges, but also opportunities. We have four challenges. The first is ensuring that our school sustains the culture that has been the bulwark of our success. As the school expands, we need to remain mindful of "crew" as a concept that fosters collaboration, shared leadership, and reflection among our professional staff. We will continue with the middle school model of "Team" into the high school so as to sustain and build upon the culture. The second challenge is ensuring that we keep current with changing curriculum, assessments, technology, and best practice. This includes determining how the new testing system is implemented and an examination of how growth targets affect the measurement of high performing students. This examination needs to not only occur at the local charter school level, but at the Delaware Department of Education as well so as to ascertain whether these targets are valid measures of student performance. As the school expands, we need to promote and provide professional development opportunities for our staff that address these areas. For example, our faculty will continue with professional development through expeditionary learning, common core, and the International Baccalaureate. As school year 2014-15 evolves our focus will be on completing all requirements to become an authorized *IB World School*. Professional development in these areas is very costly, but finding and allocating funds for this is critical to our staff's staying current in best practice. At the same time, we are engaged in Common Ground for Common Core, a DDOE initiative relative to CCSS and assessment. The third challenge is ensuring that our at-risk students continue to perform academically and that they have the appropriate supports in place. With our expansion into high school, the potential exists that students will come with wider gaps in academic preparedness so we need to plan for how we will address these gaps. The fourth challenge revolves around our growth as well. Currently, portions of our facility are yet to be finished. Thus, we will need to collaborate with the Sussex Academy Foundation to solidify the next two phases for the building completion as they continue to raise revenue to fund the build-out. These plans must be consistent with Sussex Academy's academic and curricular direction so this planning and collaboration touches on all operations of the school.

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.

Summary and Overall Rating 2013-2014: Meets Standard

The Sussex Academy met the standard on all indicators included in the Financial Performance Framework for the 2013-2014 school year. Additionally, the FY14 audit and financial statements indicate that the school continues to be fiscally sound.

External auditors have conducted annual independent audits of the school finances of the Sussex Academy for the past 13 years with no findings during that period. It is anticipated that this performance will continue into the future.

The school's budget is reviewed and approved by the Executive Board of the Sussex Academy. The school's Citizen Budget Oversight Committee (CBOC) and the Executive Board review monthly financial reports. This report is posted on our website. The school typically operates with a financial surplus to ensure fiscal viability and sustainability. In FY14, however, reserves were needed to cover additional expenses related to moving into a new, larger facility. Consequently, the school has established, and continues to maintain, a sufficient reserve fund to cover unanticipated and/or emergent events.

The enrollment is projected to increase through the 2017 school year as high school grades are added. Accordingly, the school expects to benefit from economies of scale. That being said, the "growing" years may be more challenging than in the past as our 9th grade classes have been smaller than anticipated and there are on-going one-time, initial expenses related to renovating and relocating into a much larger facility.

Strengths

The school's financial future is secure. A long waiting list is maintained for all middle school grades in the event of any unexpected openings. Clearly, this is a sign of financial stability.

The financial decisions that the school makes are based on sound and planned reasoning. The Executive Committee of the Board and/or the CBOC is involved in financial decisions that were not included in the original approved budget. Policies are in place to ensure that adequate reserve funds are maintained to cover unexpected events.

Challenges

Funding for our school is a function of enrollment. Funds for student transportation and local funding are based on expenditures of the prior school year and thus are difficult to predict. Shifts in the number of students enrolled at our school from one school district or another can cause anticipated revenues to fluctuate, as can decreases in local expenditures.

In addition, the Sussex Academy has benefited greatly from the opportunity to swap buildings with Delmarva Christian High School as the new facility provides both finished and potential new spaces to accommodate the anticipated growth in our student population over the next few years. However, there will likely be unexpected building related expenses due to the age of the building and the unknown maintenance practices and history of the former tenant. In an effort to address this concern, the Sussex Academy maintains an account at PNC Bank and is currently depositing approximately \$1800 monthly to establish a maintenance reserve. It is anticipated that this amount will be increased as additional students are enrolled in the upper grades.

Opportunities for Growth

We are fortunate to have an active and successful foundation supporting our school. The Sussex Academy Foundation, Inc. has raised the funds to purchase and renovate portions of the building that the school is currently occupying. The Foundation has funds on hand to continue completing the unfinished portions of the new facility and will be aggressively soliciting funds to develop the property further in the coming years. This will include constructing additional classrooms, installing athletic fields, and finishing the stage, kitchen, library, and cafeteria. A Building and Grounds Committee has been established to work with the Foundation to ensure that the school's needs are addressed as we grow into an institution serving grades 6 through 12.

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.

Summary and Overall Rating 2013-2014: Meets Standard

During the 2012-13 school year Sussex Academy met the thirteen Organizational Performance Indicators. During previous monitoring and desk audits Sussex Academy has been found in compliance with implementing the terms of the charter, the legal requirements for special education, and the oversight and reporting of financial and auditing, as well as meeting credentialing and attendance goals, and employee rights. We have received in-compliance monitoring reports such as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Act, Child Abuse Reporting Training, Immunizations, Chemical Safety Storage, Title I, DPAS II R, HQT, National School Lunch Program.

Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities for Growth

Sussex Academy has implemented the current charter in compliance with applicable state and federal requirements inclusive of legal requirements for students with disabilities and English Learners. It is meeting the governance and reporting requirements as well as the accountability requirements for management, students, and employees. Thus, Sussex Academy has demonstrated its ability to meet organizational performance expectations. As the purposes for charter schools are considered, we note that charter schools were meant to be independent entrepreneurial organizations freed from most regulations. Yet over time, continuous adoption of rules and regulations tend to make them bureaucratic institutions where more people have to be hired simply to oversee regulatory compliance.

As independent organizations, charters have the capacity to respond to the marketplace and make changes quicker than larger bureaucratic organizations. Regulators need to consider the notion that an input model doesn't necessarily breed performance but an output model does measure performance. Regulators need to consider eliminating regulations that are inconsistent with the philosophic intent of charter schools and those that measure inputs instead of outputs. Certainly, the opportunity for growth at Sussex Academy lies within the staff and Executive Board to stay committed to a continuous improvement mindset where change and innovation are valued.

STATUS OF CONDITIONS PLACED UPON THE CHARTER:

Include:

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

The State Board of Education approved the Application to Renew the Charter of Sussex Academy and we were so notified on March 4, 2013. The conditions that were placed on Sussex Academy had to be met by the stated deadlines. The foregoing is a synopsis of those conditions and the status of those conditions.

- Criterion Two: Form of Organization
- "That on or before the Public Hearing to be held in this matter, the school submit, revised bylaws in a form satisfactory to the Secretary of Education . . ."
- **The school met all the conditions for Criterion 2 as noted in the 3/6/13 attachment revision from DDOE.**
- Criterion Eight: Economic Viability
- (1) "On or before 15 December 2012, the school shall identify a site and provide a detailed construction or renovation plan, as appropriate in the circumstances, that contains specific dates to ensure that a Certificate of Occupancy shall be obtained on or before 15 June 2013."
- **The school met the condition as noted in the 3/6/13 attachment revision from DDOE. The Certificate of Occupancy was submitted on January 4, 2013.**
- (2) "Provide a plan with dates and action items to be completed to make certain that the school is on track with renovations and to obtain certificates and other required approvals."
- **The school met the condition as noted in the 3/6/13 attachment revision from DDOE.**
- (3) "The school shall provide quarterly updates about progress on the facility pursuant to the school's approved modification to expand to grades nine to twelve."
- **The school submitted the quarterly update before March 28, 2013. Renovations for the current phase were completed with occupancy on**

July 29, 2013. Meetings with the Sussex Foundation are held during the Fall 2013 to plan for the second phase of renovations to begin prior to the Spring 2013. When these phase-in plans are complete, an update will be submitted by December 31, 2013.

- **Criterion Nine: Administrative and Financial Operations**
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- **(1) On or before 31 January 2013, Sussex Academy shall develop a new Performance Agreement that is aligned with the requirements in 14 DE Admin Code 275 and shall submit the agreement to the DDOE for its review.**
- **The school met the condition on September 11, 2013 as per directed by the DDOE.**
- **(2) On or before 30 April 2013 Sussex Academy shall submit a report to the DDOE that summarizes the outcomes of the school’s outreach efforts to under represented populations.”**
- **The school met the condition and submitted this report prior to April 30, 2013. Outreach efforts have continued. The Outreach Committee meets routinely. Their activities include one-to-one contacts, small group gatherings, paid advertisements, press releases, mailings, and web-based communications. The chart below illustrates a comparison in student population between 2012-13, 2013-14, and 2014-15.**

- **The number of students by Under-Represented Populations**

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
African American	6	11	16
American Indian	4	10	7
Asian American	9	15	20
Hawaiian	1	1	2
Hispanic	16	29	48
White	295	334	384
Multi-Racial	9	12	16
Low-Income	58	72	76
Special Education	14	19	17

STUDENT RETENTION GOALS AND TARGETS:

Include:

- The percentage of students who have re-enrolled from the prior year according to ESEA demographic categories,
- 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,
- A summary of why students chose to leave,
- The percentage of students who did not pass from one grade to the next,
- Your plan to improve student retention and average daily attendance if less than your stated targets.

STUDENT RETENTION

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

Students re-enrolled by Demographic Categories

Ethnicity	Number Re-enrolled
African American	4
American Indian	7
Asian American	8
Hawaiian	1
Hispanic	9
White	200
Multi-Racial	7

The percentage of students who re-enroll in the middle school program from the prior year is approximately 95-98% for middle school.

In the past eighth grade students had to make a choice as to where they would attend high school. For school year 2013-14 they continued to have that option but also they could choose to stay at Sussex Academy for grade 9. Of the eighth grade class approximately 25% chose to enroll in Sussex Academy's high school freshman class. The other 2013-14 freshmen were new to the school.

The number of students who have left the school before the year is over or before the end of the charter school's grade configuration according to demographic category.

The number of students who left by Demographic Categories

Ethnicity	2012-13
African American	0
American Indian	0
Asian American	0
Hawaiian	0
Hispanic	1
White	28
Multi-Racial	0

The percentage of students who left during the school year was 7% in 2013-14.

Summary of Why Students Chose to Leave

In general, Sussex Academy has enjoyed a fairly stable student population with roughly 95-98% of the enrollees staying for the duration of the middle school program. Based on middle school Entry/Withdrawal Data, 25 students returned to their home school districts and three students transferred to an independent school during the school year. According to feedback, middle school students have tended to leave because the family moved or because of the academic workload.

Data for the first year of the high school is different than the middle school for the 2013-2014 school year. As noted about 25% or 25 students chose to stay at Sussex Academy from the previous grade 8 class. From that same grade 8 class 59 students transferred to Sussex Technical High School; 8 transferred to Cape Henlopen; 1 to Indian River; 1 to Seaford; and 9 to independent or out of state schools. Survey results from those grade 8 students revealed that they sought another high school option because they wanted “the full high school experience,” “full athletic programs,” “different technical options,” or “to be with their friends.”

Students Who Did Not Pass

Two middle school students were retained at the end of school year 2013-14. One of those students was Hispanic; the other student was white.

In the high school eleven students did not earn enough credits to be promoted to grade 10. Eight of those students were white; two students were Hispanic; one student was African American.

Plans to Improve Student Retention and Average Daily Attendance

Average daily attendance goals are met and they are consistently higher than the state average. Students tend to stay at Sussex Academy. The waiting list for

each grade 6-8 is approximately 100 students. For school year 2013-14 we did not expect all students to continue with our program from the 8th to 9th grade. Approximately 25% of those students stayed for the freshman class. We expect less attrition from 8th to 9th grades as we continue to phase in the high school. We recognize that there are a number of options for area high school students, but we feel that if we continue to provide a program that is academically challenging and a small-school environment where students build confidence and character that we will retain students. We also believe that our expanded physical facilities, our expanded extra-curricular and athletic programs, and the International Baccalaureate program will draw students to remain and or enroll at the school.

INNOVATION:

Include:

- A discussion of innovation occurring at the school in areas including, but not limited to, curriculum development, instructional strategies, school culture and climate, community and parent engagement, professional development, operations and management practices, and extra-curricular programming.

School Year 2013-14 represented a continuing organizational change for Sussex Academy. As has been customary, 100+ new sixth graders entered the school for middle school. In addition, we began the phase in of the high school with the first ninth grade class in the school. While the size of the freshman class was about 50% of what we had wanted, the smaller size allowed the school to experiment with some high school curriculum. For example, we began a relationship with the Rehoboth Beach Film Society, the Rehoboth Beach Art League, and Lead Your Way Solutions to bring more authentic arts experiences to our students. Our high school teachers began the incorporation of International Baccalaureate protocols in their instruction and assessments at grade 9. Our freshmen class bonded through an over-night expedition to Cape Henlopen State Park, other fieldwork, crew meetings, and other school clubs and activities throughout the school year. Also, the Sussex Academy Foundation finished off six new classrooms, locker rooms and a student lounge. We hired four new teachers and began assembling our new Technology Education program to be implemented in the 2014-15 school year. Professional development included work in Expeditionary Learning, Common Core Standards, and the International Baccalaureate.

Our curricular work last year revolved around the Common Core Standards and Smarter Balanced. In addition, we constantly are creating new expeditions and revising old expeditions so as to integrate our curriculum across contents and bring authentic learning experiences to our students. Students are engaged in hands-on projects routinely. Since our instructional focus is literacy – reading, writing, speaking, and listening - all students have a minimum of ninety minutes per day in reading and writing. This is probably unique in that most middle schools teach English Language Arts where reading and writing are merged into one forty-five or fifty minute class per day. Reading and writing are integral to all contents taught in the school. This is highlighted through our Portfolio program where all students are required to maintain a portfolio that features artifacts and reflections about their learning during the school year. At the end of the year students must present those portfolios to their parents. We attribute much of our successful academic performance to attention to literacy across all contents. Further, our science and social studies programs are very strong with emphases on fieldwork, research, and experiential learning. All students in the school are required to complete a science fair project every year. As we phase in our high school, we believe this will serve our students well when tackling the International Baccalaureate Programme. In looking forward, we believe that we

must pay attention to students' writing performance and instruction in writing for all students.

One of the strengths of our school also lay in the school culture. We follow the 10 principles of Expeditionary Learning and overtly teach the concepts. We have long had a system in place to practice the 3R's – responsibility for property, responsibility for self, and respect for others. Thus, misbehavior in the school is minimal. We also enjoy the support of parents when our students must shoulder consequences when they misbehave. We believe that our practice of having looping in grades 6 and 7 undergird our instructional and behavioral expectations for students. Students and parents benefit from having the same set of teachers for two years as they begin middle school. Another common element in our school is that all students must complete and document individual community service in addition to any service projects done through the expeditions and grade level teams. Again, our emphasis on character development pervades the culture at Sussex Academy.

Our collaborative practices serve our school well. We have an active PTO, Sports Boosters, Outreach Committee, Executive Board, and a Foundation. In addition, we take a shared leadership approach through our Instructional Leadership Team and our Team Leaders. We find that the “collective intelligence” is far more powerful than the individual intelligence. We face the future with the full knowledge that adaptation and innovation are part and parcel of a thriving organization.