

LAS AMÉRICAS ASPIRA ACADEMY

ANNUAL REPORT

2018-2019



326 Ruthar Drive
Newark, DE 19711
Phone: (302)292-1463

I. Charter School Program

School Mission: The mission of Las Américas ASPIRA Academy (LAAA) is to educate and empower each student to realize their full potential and positively impact their communities.

School Vision: A fellowship of learners building culturally-inclusive communities.

Key Components of the Education Model:

Innovative Features of the School:

- **Dual Language:** LAAA aims to fulfill its mission by implementing a bilingual programmatic focus called dual language education. Dual language education is an instructional approach that develops language proficiency and literacy in English and a partner language. Immersion is one type of dual language education which begins in elementary school, and in which native English speakers and native speakers of another language learn academic content through English half of the time and a partner language the other half of the time. This immersion model was the first of its kind in Delaware, commencing in 2011 and seeking to educate and empower all language learners.
- **Academic:** The partner language at LAAA is Spanish; therefore, LAAA has an A/B day rotation in K-5 in which students alternate learning all core content (language arts, math, science, and social studies) in Spanish and English as they rotate each day. In grades 6-8 the continuation model includes English instruction in all core content areas (language arts, math, science, and social studies) and Spanish instruction in language arts and social studies known as humanities. Upon graduating 8th grade, students take the Assessment of Performance Toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL) which will allow them to apply for continued language courses in the 9th grade with the ultimate goal of applying for the Certificate of Multiliteracy at the end of high school graduation.
- **Project-Based Learning (K-8):** Project based learning (PBL) is a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging and complex question, problem, or challenge. LAAA is committed to providing PBL experiences for our students in which students can use their experiences in the classroom to benefit the wider community.
 - One of our largest PBL experiences is where second and third grade students team up to raise money for childhood cancer research by hosting our annual Alex’s Lemonade Stand. Second grade students practice their mathematical skills such as measuring volume and counting money while third grade students focus on studying economics such as the production and distribution of yellow goods and services. In 2019, LAAA made a charitable donation to the ALS Foundation of \$7,500.
 - In addition, our first grade team partners with Heifer International during their non-fiction writing unit. Students research and write books about animals in specific regions, at the same time students are introduced to Heifer International, which is a charity organization working to end hunger and poverty around the world by providing livestock and training to struggling communities. This makes a real world connection for the students to the people and animals living in different regions around the world. Homeroom classes agree on which animals to purchase which will help sustain food and an income for families over a long period of time. For example, after sharing their research and stories, last year the students chose to buy \$400 worth of beehives. The families can eat and sell the honey

from the hives.

- A school-wide PBL experience is the Outdoor Learning Environment (OLE) at ASPIRA, a National Wildlife Certified habitat, which serves as an extension to our classroom curricula. Our students at all grade levels benefit from hands-on, experiential learning in various facets of environmental education. ASPIRA’s youngest learners have the opportunity to plant and maintain our edibles garden annually. Through a partnership with a local zoo, the crops are donated for animal enrichment. Students not only learn about the life cycle of plants, but also how plants and animals are interconnected. Our upper-elementary students take advantage of the storm water retention pond on our campus to learn about ecosystems and habitats of native wildlife. Learners conduct field observations, collect data, and research the animals that make their home in the Outdoor Learning Environment. As part of the Delaware Pathways to Green Schools program, middle school students at ASPIRA have researched the effects of climate change on local and global levels. With this information they created and implemented an action plan to reduce ASPIRA’s carbon footprint by deeming our campus a ‘no idling zone’. The entire student body and team members at ASPIRA enjoy the benefits of the Outdoor Learning Environment on a regular basis by engaging with nature on a personal level. These experiences have led to our students becoming environmental stewards at school, at home and around our community.
- **Mastery Learning and Assessment (K-5):** Focus on implementation of Common Core, NGSS and DE Content Standards in a competency-based learning model. Implementation of Progress Book to provide real-time information to teachers and parents regarding students’ mastery of concepts and skills.
- **Blended Learning and Personalized Learning:** LAAA offers 1:1 Chromebooks in Grades K-8; Implementation of Schoology (grades 3-5), Seesaw (grades K-2), Google Apps for Education (grades K-8), and STEMscopes (K-8). Blended learning models incorporated in our core curriculum and instructional approaches include flipped classroom, playlists, and station rotation, personalizing learning by tailoring instruction towards students’ individualized learning goals. In addition, an innovation lab was created including activities often found in a makerspace incorporating all areas of STREAM (Science, Technology, Reading, Engineering, Art, & Mathematics).
- **MTSS:** LAAA signed an MOU with DDOE to participate in these state-wide efforts, collaborating with coaches from the American Institute for Research (AIR) which will take a look at academic, behavior, and social emotional supports under the Multi-Tiered System of Support Model (MTSS). During the 2018-2019 school year we formed an MTSS team including a variety of stakeholders. The MTSS team participated in a comprehensive needs assessment to identify specific areas of improvement. An action plan was developed to address the need for a behavior screener and we have begun to pilot the screener in targeted grades (3 and 8) based on both academic and behavior data.
- **Social Curriculum:** A school-wide implementation of the Responsive Classroom Approach, which embraces a fostering of community, based upon teaching socially-responsible behaviors.
- **Character Education:** ASPIRA’s Character Education provides students the social and emotional foundation and skills necessary to work in a rich and diverse learning environment. It focuses on teaching Accountability, Social and Emotional Intelligence, Positive Mindset, Inquiry, Resilience, and Appreciation mostly through two components already embedded in our instructional practices: Morning Meetings and Community Circles. By having a character growth focus, we launch our students into a successful future. We teach one character trait per month of the year. We do this by incorporating conversations, quotes, readings, discussions, games, and other

similar practices to one of our Morning Meeting components: Greeting, Sharing, Activity, or Morning Message. Growth Mindset is a key trait taught throughout the school year. Students at ASPIRA track their progress towards demonstrating these 7 traits throughout the school year. We use Character Growth Cards to provide opportunities for student self-reflection toward demonstrating these traits. Our Character Growth Cards are provided to students every trimester. Via a mini-conference with their homeroom teachers, students discuss their progress and next steps (strategies). At the end of each trimester, celebrations of learning occur to reinforce our students' social and emotional practices and growth. Since the inception of our Character Growth Cards, we have had 100% completion rate in Middle School. At ASPIRA, our social and emotional growth is as important as our academic growth.

II. Performance Reflection

Tier 1 Narrative:

Academic Performance

What are the Successful Academic Practices At Your Charter School that Other Schools Can Replicate?

Core Curriculum & Instruction Overview

- For Literacy grades K-5, we use Columbia University's Teachers College Reading Units of Study, Writing Units of Study, and Phonics Units of Study. Teachers College Reading and Writing Project's Units of Study are high quality instructional resources with strong alignment to the Common Core State Standards. The Teachers College Reading and Writing Project's approach to literacy instruction includes best practices from a number of well-known researchers in the area of literacy. The units aim to prepare students to become life-long, confident readers and writers who display agency and independence. Reading and writing workshops are deliberately designed to offer a simple and predictable environment so that the teacher can focus on the complex work of observing students' progress and teaching into their needs. Each session begins with a mini-lesson. Students sit with a long-term partner while in the mini-lesson. The mini-lesson ends with the students practicing independently. As students work, the teacher confers with them and leads differentiated small groups.
- For Literacy 6-8, we use McGraw-Hill Networks to teach humanities. This course is taught through social studies topics while addressing social studies and English language arts standards. The humanities course build skills in writing and critical reading. The humanities course encourage students to think creatively and teaches students to reason about being human and to ask questions about their world. The humanities course is designed to support the development of informed and critical citizens.
- For math we are using the EngageNY curriculum, an EdReports highly rated resource. The curriculum focuses on conceptual understanding coupled with procedural fluency to build a strong foundation of mathematics for our students. We also introduced Number Talks as a way to elicit student thinking and build a community of safe sharing where multiple solution paths are valued.

Additional Curriculum & Instruction Resources

- Teachers in grades 3 - 8 will be administering Smarter Balanced Interim Assessment Blocks (IABs) in both ELA and Math. In addition, Grade 3 will continue to take the Interim Comprehensive

Assessment Block (ICA). Teachers will be using this IABs for both assessment as well as instructional purposes. Students will be assessed using a similar scoring rubric to that of the state assessment. Students will also be offered questions during these IABs that will prepare them for similar question types they will see on the state assessment.

- Test Readiness tools and resources from the Smarter Digital Library will be incorporated into small group instruction. An Instructional Technology Coach was hired and will support teacher implementation of the available Smarter tools.
- School-wide changes have been established and have begun to be implemented to support student growth in the SBAC claims. Since the Smarter Assessment is a summative measure and Smarter Interims are administered approximately 3 times per year in each subject, we continuously monitor student growth towards proficiency using the tools - ITracker and i-Ready. ITracker is a tool that houses data for state, curriculum, and progress monitoring assessments. i-Ready is used as our diagnostic assessment and creates individualized learning paths for students. The reports produced by this program provide alerts consistently and frequently to allow for possible, immediate intervention.
- In both ELA and math growth scores on the state assessment in grades 4 – 8 outperformed the state growth averages in every grade save fourth.

Literacy Proficiency

- During the 2018-2019 school year, our ELA scores produced positive outcomes due to our school wide focus to give all students access to grade level complex texts by enhancing our core reading curriculum, Lucy Calkins Reading Workshop Units of Study. The W.O.L.V.E.S Reading Program was created in partnership with the University of Delaware (UD) in which our lead trainer, Dr. Steve Amendum, provided coaching support and professional learning during the past two school years. LAAA educators created the modules following a Before, During, and After (BDA) Framework. The modules were then enhanced to include specific speaking and listening scaffolds.
- LAAA partnered with the Dual Language Education of New Mexico to provide professional development during the 2018-2019 school year on Literacy Squared techniques and strategies that support all language learners. Select educators attended La Cosecha Dual Language Conference in New Mexico in November 2018. Educators received Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) training, and professional development in Thinking Maps, Biliteracy Instructional Strategies, and Language Development, in order to design and create the modules. Additional coaching was provided by the University of Delaware professor Dr. Steve Amendum and walkthroughs/feedback sessions by LAAA Instructional Coaches. This all positively contributed to the effective design and implementation of the W.O.L.V.E.S Reading Program, during the during the 2017-19 school years. When looking at our reading claim proficiency, there was an upward trend 10% proficiency (2017) to 58% proficiency (2018). When looking at our speaking and listening claim this year, 35% proficiency (2018) to 56% proficiency (2019).

Math Proficiency

- In math, we had our first year with access to a Common Core aligned curriculum (K-5 - EngageNY). Our achievement scores remained relatively flat with 5th grade countering a previous trend and showing significant gains and fourth grade showing a dip. This is the second year that our teachers will be teaching from EngageNY, which will allow them to teach more effectively from a known curriculum.
- In math, we will continue to focus on conceptual understanding which will support the Procedures and Concepts claim. Last year we asked teachers to focus on eliciting student thinking. This year we are asking that teachers continue to elicit thinking but have added that

they now build on that elicited student thinking. We will continue to leverage Number Talks and Number Strings as a way to both elicit student thinking as well as build on student thinking while targeting specific conceptual learning goals.

- In addition to our current Elementary and Middle School Literacy coaches, a math supervisor was hired and will support our teachers with coaching as well as leading the math professional development for our school.

Organizational Performance

What are the Successful Organizational Practices At Your Charter School that Other Schools Can Replicate?

ASPIRA Team

- Our team represents diverse backgrounds from race/ethnicity to skill sets. Since our first year of operations, we have been intentional in developing the talents of our team members and investing in their professional development. For the most part, our leadership team began with LAAA in the first year in different roles. Making an investment in our internal talent pool has resulted in strong leadership capacity across each area of instruction and operations. This approach has also heightened our teams' interest in the success of the school. It also helps that a large percentage of our team members are also parents of LAAA students.

Roles & Responsibilities

- One of our practices is to ensure each person has a specific role and set of responsibilities. This includes having job descriptions with a hire and onboarding process that provides new team members with the information needed to be successful in their position. The onboarding process includes ASPIRA 101, which is facilitated by the school leadership team.

Single Points of Failure

- One of our team philosophies is “not to have a single point of failure”, which means each person has a back-up or two to ensure the school operations do not suffer in the absence of one person. This requires an intentional approach to cross-training people on different tasks and functions.

Financial Performance

What are the Successful Financial Practices At Your Charter School that Other Schools Can Replicate?

Leadership

- The best practice for successful financial practices is to hire the right person for the oversight of the school finances. Fortunately, we have the best in Greg Panchisin. His attention to detail and high level of commitment is critical in his role. His knowledge of school finances has allowed him to develop the skills of his team and create a support system that works efficiently.

Collaboration

- LAAA has always taken a collaborative approach of sharing best practices. In year 1, we established a relationship with Newark Charter through a charter leader mentor program implemented by the Delaware Charter Schools Network. This mentorship between our school leader and the NCS school leader led to many collaborative efforts, including one between our business managers. One key element was the adoption of their a budget model, which we

continue to use today. This model allows us to conform to the state unit formula and estimate local and state revenue, which helps us to determine our allowable expenditures.

Conservative

- Another important practice has been our approach to budget management. Greg has always followed his principles of remaining conservative when building the budget, which means “not counting your eggs before they hatch” and not overestimating projected growth in revenue. This philosophy has allowed us to remain within and under budget consistently. It has also resulted in our ability to secure traditional financing to purchase our school property after only four years of operation, then secure bond financing the following year.

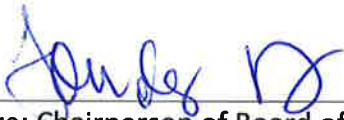
Oversight

- Aside from our COO’s role, we also have a strong Financial Oversight Committee that is chaired by our school board treasurer. This committee meets on a regular basis throughout the year to review the school financial reports and P-card usage. They take a deeper dive into the financials with the COO to ensure LAAA remains good stewards of their funding.
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III. ANNUAL REPORT CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

Name of School:	Las Américas ASPIRA Academy
Location:	326 Ruthar Drive, Newark, DE 19711

I hereby certify that the information submitted in this annual of a charter school is true to the best of my knowledge and belief; that this application has been approved by the school's Board of Directors.



Signature: Chairperson of Board of Directors (or designated signatory authority)

9/30/19
Date

Print/Type Name:	Lourdes Puig
Title (if designated):	Chairperson of the Board of Directors
Date of approval by board of directors:	September 26, 2019