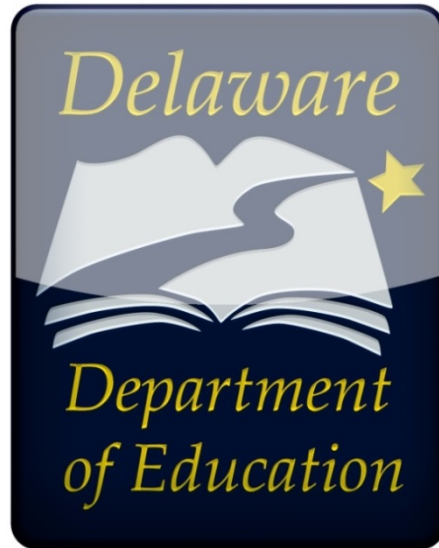


CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



ACADEMY OF DOVER RENEWAL APPLICATION INITIAL REPORT

CSAC Initial Meeting: October 19, 2021
CSAC Initial Report Published: October 25, 2021

By September 30, 2021, Academy of Dover Charter School (AOD) 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.

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 review of the charter applicant's renewal application, Performance Review Reports, Annual Reports and Performance Agreements and during CSAC meetings.

Under 29 Del. C. § 10006A(e) CSAC is permitted to hold a fully virtual meeting without an anchor location during a state of emergency. On July 13, 2021, the Governor of the State of Delaware issued a Declaration of a Public Health Emergency for the entire state. Governor Carney extended the Public Health Emergency on October 7, 2021.

The following individuals attended the Initial Meeting of CSAC on October 19, 2021:

Voting Committee Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee

- Kim Klein, Chairperson of CSAC and Associate Secretary of Operations Support, DDOE
- Gregory Fulkerson, Ph.D., Education Associate, Academic Support, DDOE
- Joyce Leatherbury, Education Associate, Academic Support, DDOE
- April McCrae, Ed.D., Education Associate, Academic Support, DDOE
- Tiffany Green, Education Associate, Educator Support, DDOE
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Operations Support, DDOE
- Brian Moore, Education Associate, School Support, DDOE
- Charles Taylor, Community Member
- Tierra Fair, Community Member
- Ted Molin, Community Member

Ex-Officio Members (Non-voting)

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

Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)

- Darryl Parson, Deputy Attorney General
- Leroy Travers, Lead Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- John H. Carwell Jr., Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE

Representatives of Academy of Dover

- Kimeu Boynton, Board President
- Candace Holmes, Esq., Board Member
- Ashley Murphy, Board Member
- Esosa Irowen, Ph.D., Board Parent Representative
- Ms. Lauren Comegys, Board Teacher Representative
- Michele Marinucci, Ed.D. Head of School
- David Hudson, Assistant Head of School
- Debra Gerald, Deputy Assistant Principal
- Jennifer Bartsch, Financial Secretary

Overview

Ms. Klein stated that in accordance with 14 Del. C. § 514A, charter renewal decisions are to be based on the evidence of the school’s performance over the term of the charter. A charter school’s performance is assessed by the Department using the approved performance framework. The renewal application is aligned with the measures and targets within the performance framework. The decision as to whether an applicant’s charter will be renewed is based on a review which is guided, in part, by the following three questions:

- Is the academic program a success?
- Is the school financially viable?
- Is the school organizationally sound?

Ms. Klein stated that through a thorough examination of the record in those areas and the school's responses to those items, CSAC would base its recommendation at the final meeting. Ms. Klein asked the school to summarize its charter renewal application.

Dr. Marinucci presented a PowerPoint (see [here](#)). Below is a summary of her remarks:

- AOD strives to teach, love, inspire, lead, and motivate.
- AOD focuses on teaching the whole child.
- In addition to teaching core content areas, AOD provides music, chorus, band, theatre arts, world cultures, graphic design, technology, and health.
- AOD offers a therapeutic program. In addition to the school counselor, contracted therapists come to the school to work with students and their families. The therapeutic program also includes a social worker.
- AOD has student leadership programs for girls (Blue Ribbon Girls) and boys (Bowtie Boys).
- AOD's enrollment has grown significantly from 247 (2016) to 375 (current).
- AOD's contingency reserve has increased from <\$40k in 2017 to \$1.4M at present.
- The New Teacher Project national survey of staff satisfaction showed that AOD ranked above the national average on every domain (e.g. professional development, career progression, leadership, workload, etc.)
- AOD's academic performance in ELA and mathematics tracks closely with the State average performance.

Mr. Boynton provided the following remarks:

- The board is very pleased with the school's growth since the last charter renewal in 2016.
- AOD has seen significant growth in nearly every area and continues to trend positively.
- AOD has strong staff and leadership.
- Years ago enrollment was an ongoing challenge. Parent engagement, recruitment, staff engagement with the students, communication with the greater Dover and Kent County community have greatly increased enrollment. Currently, AOD has waitlists for various grades. Remarkably, the spike in enrollment occurred during COVID-19. AOD also maintained a strong in-person educational program during the pandemic.
- Finance – AOD's increased contingency reserve speaks to the school's sound accounting and fiscal management policies and practices.
- Staffing – Staff morale is high. The board instituted a tuition remission benefit for staff. The TNTTP survey results are evidence of AOD's recruitment and retention efforts.

- Parent Engagement – AOD parents are pleased that AOD was approved for a charter modification to expand its grade configuration from grades K-6 to grades K-8. Building construction is underway and parents are looking forward to their children continuing their education at AOD.

Discussion

Ms. Klein stated that the school has received academic data, outlined in their Academic Framework, for four of the five years of its current charter term. Due to the Governor’s mandated closure of all schools on March 12, 2020, there is no Delaware School Success Framework (DSSF) data available for the 2019/2020 school year. CSAC reviewed the school’s application and sent initial questions and concerns to the school prior to this meeting. Ms. Klein asked the school to address the initial questions and concerns that the CSAC provided (see Attachment A).

Dr. Marinucci provided the following remarks:

- Board Training – The Board has completed the required board governance and financial responsibility training.
- Assessment – The documents requested from DDOE’s Assessment workgroup have been submitted. Last year, AOD’s test coordinator resigned but an administrator took over that responsibility. Last school year, 80% of students attended school in-person as opposed to remotely which resulted in higher than average test participation rate.
- Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) – MTSS continues to be a major area of focus. The leadership team meets weekly to review academic and screening data and identify any instructional changes needed to improve student learning. AOD teachers are expected to seek evidence that students are learning the standards. In addition to academics, the weekly leadership team reviews the social and emotional needs of students. Additionally, student voice is sought and validated in school decisions.
- Curriculum and Instruction – AOD took advantage of the Curriculum workgroup’s early submission window. AOD uses 5-Star, highly-rated curricula and programs.
- English Learners – AOD has hired native-Creole and native-Spanish speakers to compliment the school’s English learners program.

Conclusion

Mr. Travers asked each CSAC voting member and non-voting member to identify, if applicable, any follow-up or clarifying information/documentation necessary to properly evaluate the renewal application. The CSAC did not request any further information.

Next Steps:

- An initial public hearing will take place, virtually, on November 1, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.
- 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 9, 2021.
- The final meeting of the CSAC will be held on November 23, 2021. That meeting will take place virtually.
- If necessary, a second public hearing will be held virtually on December 6, 2021.
- The public comment period closes on December 8, 2021
- The Secretary of Education will announce her decision at the December 16, 2021 State Board of Education meeting and ask for the assent of the State Board.

Questions for the school to address:

1. Has the Academy of Dover identified someone to take on the responsibility of District Test Coordinator?
 - a. If so, who is this person? [Debra Gerardi](#)
 - b. If not, who will be attending all DTC meetings, responding to DDOE Assessment queries, and ensuring that AOD is following procedures, and deadlines related to state assessment expectations? [n/a Debra Gerardi is in the role](#)
2. Has the LEA submitted its test security plan for 2021-22? [Yes. It was submitted through the Help Desk and attached to an email sent to the Office of Assessment](#)
3. Has the LEA created, and is it prepared to submit its testing schedule for 2021-22? [Yes. It was submitted through the Help Desk and attached to an email sent to the Office of Assessment](#)
4. Has the LEA prepared a test security training protocol for 2021-22? [Yes. The Academy is tracking the security training for all staff members.](#)
5. Has the Head of School completed financial training? [Yes, the certificate was submitted with the initial application.](#)
6. Have all Board Members completed all trainings as required to date? [Yes. All board members have completed the financial and board governance training as required.](#)

Curriculum Review for Initial CSAC Meeting

The Academy of Dover is to be commended for having taken advantage of the Early Submission Window in August to receive feedback on their curriculum documents prior to submitting their renewal application on September 30.

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

ELA, K-8
 Science
 Social Studies
 Visual and Performing Arts

The documents submitted for math were found to **partially meet expectations** due to an alignment issue in kindergarten. In the early submission in August, the following expectation was noted, but it is not reflected in the updated renewal application: “Revise the scope and sequence for Kindergarten to include the content of the final module (Module 6) which addresses K.CC.4d, K.G.5, K.G.6 (Page 7 currently indicates there is no plan to include this module or these standards in the K curriculum for all students.)”

Additional questions regarding the school’s MTSS plan are also included below.

Expectation for Alignment in Mathematics

Revise the scope and sequence for Kindergarten to include the content of the final module (Module 6) which addresses K.CC.4d, K.G.5, K.G.6 (Page 7 currently indicates there is no plan to include this module or these standards in the K curriculum for all students.)

There was an error on our chart. We do include this module at the end of the year and have fixed the chart to match what we do.

Follow-Up Clarification Questions

ELA

According to the application document, Academy of Dover students were assessed as 38.28% proficient with the ELA standards on the last state assessment. What is your plan to accelerate the learning of the majority of incoming 7th and 8th grade students not fully prepared for grade-level work?

Our plan to accelerate the learning of the majority of incoming 7th and 8th grade students that are not prepared for grade-level work includes whole group review of skills of the previous year that may be needed at the beginning of units based on pre-assessments. Support will also include tutoring, small group instruction, regularly scheduled intervention blocks of focused learning, and the use of data to determine the level of remediation needed for each situation. For all grades and all core subjects, as our teachers deliver instruction, they remain focused on the standards to be taught/met. After each series of lessons is taught, the teachers review the learning both individually, by classroom, and by grade to identify how well the students learned the standard. Should there be a gap area, this is a focus that is addressed either by reteaching, small group pull out support, RTI focused instruction, or other similar means. Each week, during the PLC discussion, a portion of time is spent discussing the data around the students meeting standards and how any struggling or excelling students are being supported. We are focused on remediating the learning needs, and also on expanding the learning abilities of all of our students through both reteaching and extension instructional opportunities.

English Learners

In AOD's application, it states that "The Academy will continue to work towards meeting [increased outcomes for Progress toward English Language Proficiency]. If our numbers continue to increase, we may need to look into adding an additional staff member to provide support to those ELL students." How has AOD addressed this expectation? Has additional staffing or support been provided after two year of review?

We have quite a few students who are learning English—some who just arrived to our country and who have a large amount of language learning needs. This year, due to the increasing needs of our English learners, we have added additional staff members who speak Spanish, German, and Haitian Creole to assist in translation as well as push-in/ pull out services for classwork and RTI. We have also continued to provide the contracted EL services that were provided in prior years. We have also been working to create a small group of students, supported by our staff who also experience coming to our country as English Learners, to facilitate conversation and team-building experiences. In addition, we have added a new course to our Academy called World Cultures. We have a focused instructional period where all students learn about the different cultures around the world, and have an opportunity to participate in a cultural celebration every few weeks regarding that culture. Our first celebration was last week and focused on Hispanic Heritage. We had family members who shared the attire and food with us, while our students put on a musical celebration for all of us to enjoy.

Math

How many minutes of instructional time are available for Tier 1 mathematics instruction per day? Is this in alignment with the instructional time recommended by Eureka, which is 60 minutes per lesson? There are 60 minutes of math instruction each day at the Academy of Dover, which is what is recommended by Eureka. In addition, there is a 30-minute Math-focused RTI period daily to further enhance the math instruction.

A major revision of the MTSS plan took place between the early application and the revised application, most notably a major change in materials for both assessment and intervention. How was this need determined and what process was used to select new materials and resources? What is the school's response to the questions posed in the early review, which are shown below for convenience:

- What intervention supports (Curriculum (Eureka)-embedded) are being provided to students within the Tier 1 instruction and what Eureka-specific professional learning has been or will be provided to teachers so that teachers can skillfully provide these supports within Tier 1 instruction?
 - Instructional modifications are made on an as needed-basis to meet the needs of students—both individually and in groups of students. Teachers use frequent checks for understanding and review as needed for their students. Exit tickets, quick checks for understanding, as well as evaluating classwork and assessment results are all regularly used as instructional tools. Teachers have been provided individual access to Eureka training and instructional videos and online materials for Professional Development. In addition, teachers collaborate within grade-level and curriculum focused bands to ensure all are supported internally.
- How are curriculum-based measures from Eureka being used as part of screening and progress monitoring?
 - Regular and ongoing checking for understanding and re-teaching takes place daily in our classrooms. In addition, students that are thriving are pushed further with additional projects and extended RTI activities. During the weekly PLC meetings, teachers bring data and discuss as well as show evidence of how their students are meeting the standards. This then leads to additional conversation about how well students are acquiring the curriculum and to modifications being made to ensure all are learning as intended.
- What other measures besides STAR testing are being used to determine which students need Tier 2 intervention?
 - We use Edmentum, not STAR. The measures that are used include: teacher-based referral, curriculum-based assessment results (from mid and end of unit assessments), ongoing evidence gleaned from classwork and assessments as well as Edmentum benchmark testing results (four times throughout the year).
- How are Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions being used in such a way that there is a clear connection to providing access and greater success with the Tier 1 content with which the student is currently engaged?
 - Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions are being used based on student needs that the teacher recognizes during Tier 1 instruction. The skills in which the students need support are addressed during the daily RTI sessions for Tier 2 and Tier 3 students.

Content-Specific Comments, Commendations and Recommendations

ELA, K-8:

Overall Evaluation:

- Meets Expectation

Commendations:

- EL Education K-5 (2017) & 6-8 (2019) meets the expectations for alignment in Gateway 1 – Text Quality, Gateway 2 – Building Knowledge, and Gateway 3 – Usability as evaluated by Ed Reports. The report indicates that the instruction materials include texts that are worthy of students’ time and attention, support advancement in reading and provide opportunities for rigorous evidence-based discussion and writing about the text to build literacy skills.
- The master schedule includes a weekly PLC devoted to examining student data and collaborative planning.

Recommendations:

- Use the publisher or other professional learning vendor to provide professional learning for teachers and leaders to strengthen the implementation of the EL materials. The [DE PLPG](#) is a useful resource for identifying potential PL providers.
- (Grades 6-8) Use Mid-Unit and End-of-Unit data in addition to EdMentum data to plan for Tier 1 and Tier 2 intervention supports to apply to the complex texts of the Tier 1 classroom.
- (Grades 6-8) Find more frequent opportunities for regular, explicit instruction of the grammar and usage standards as practiced in the Language Dives to impact both sentence level construction and sentence comprehension.

Math:

Overall Evaluation:

- Partially Meets Expectations

Commendations:

- The master schedule provides time for weekly PLC work that is focused on data and the cycle of inquiry. The school calendar provides an unspecified number of additional PL days.

Recommendations:

- Consider utilizing the publisher or other professional learning vendor to provide professional learning for teachers and leaders to strengthen the implementation of the Eureka materials. This may be especially helpful in addressing the usability weaknesses of the materials for grade 6-8. The [DE PLPG](#) is a useful resource for identifying potential PL providers. (The revised math curriculum document does recognize the need to address this curriculum weakness and states that PL will be provided (page 2) but does not provide a detailed plan for the PL.)
- The changes made to the MTSS process description from the early renewal application to the current renewal application were substantial and perhaps unneeded. In the early renewal feedback the school was only asked to provide extra detail for a few questions.

It is recommended that the school continue to learn more about MTSS and review its previous processes with a special focus on Tier 1 instruction in planning for 2022-23. The DE MTSS Tier 1 Planning Guide will be helpful along with other resources found on the DE MTSS webpage and upcoming MTSS book studies (Leading Equity-Based MTSS for All Students, and/or Integrating MTSS: Blending RTI and PPBIS). The following contains the questions that were asked in the early feedback.

- A prioritized academic area of focus for 2021-22, as schools are making revisions to build a stronger MTSS system, is the skillful use of curriculum-embedded (Eureka-embedded) supports within Tier 1 instructions. This is why the early application review asked, “What intervention supports are being provided to students within the Tier 1 instruction and what Eureka-specific professional learning has been or will be provided to teachers so that teachers can skillfully provide these supports within Tier 1 instruction?”
- How are curriculum-based measures from Eureka being used as part of screening and progress monitoring?
- What other measures besides STAR testing are being used to determine which students need Tier 2 intervention?
- How are Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions being used in such a way that there is a clear connection to providing access and greater success with the Tier 1 content with which the student is currently engaged?

Expectations:

- Revise the scope and sequence for Kindergarten to include the content of the final module (Module 6) which addresses K.CC.4d, K.G.5, K.G.6 (Page 7 currently indicates there is no plan to include this module or these standards in the K curriculum for all students.)
- Response to Clarification Questions

Social Studies:

Overall Evaluation:

- Meets Expectations

Commendations:

Standards are addressed in the scope and sequence. Schedule allocates 45-60 minutes daily for social studies instruction.

Science:

Overall Evaluation:

- Meets Expectations

Recommendations: Continue to work with the DDOE Science Education Associates to align professional development and assessment work to three-dimensional learning/assessments. Continue to have your teachers take NGSX training through DDOE. Try to attend the DE Science Coalition meetings especially when budget and curriculum items are discussed so your charter school has a voice.

Visual & Performing Arts:

Overall Evaluation:

- Meets Expectations

Commendations:

Standards are addressed in the Scope and Sequence for both Art and Music.

Recommendations:

Continue to utilize the standards in unit planning and preparation. Much of what is included only uses the “Create” process component for music education, where the other three process components of Perform, Respond, and Connect could be well incorporated in each of the lessons.

Expectations:

It is the expectation that assessments and rubrics provided match the standards addressed. Rubrics should consider including language aligned directly to the standards. Examples can be located on the DE Arts Standards Website at www.deartsstandards.org.

World Languages:

N/A

Students with Disabilities

How does AOD support students with disabilities during Tier 1 Instruction? We individualize all support for our students. Our special education staff push in to the classrooms to provide support to the students based on needs. In addition, students are pulled out into a small group setting to work on their goals and/or other areas of need. Accommodations and modifications are provided to support our students based on their individual areas of need.

Who are the members of the problem-solving team? The problem-solving team is comprised of the Academy administration, teachers, parent(s), Special Education teacher, Dean of Students (if needed), School Counselor (if needed), School Psychologist, and, depending on the child's age, the child is frequently included either pre-, post-, or during the meeting.

What strategies are used prior to the student being recommended for a special education evaluation? The strategies used prior to a recommendation for a special education evaluation vary greatly depending on the reason for referral or noted concern. If the concern is academic in nature, the PLC team (comprised of the grade level teachers, administration, special education lead, counselor, and dean of students) discuss the area(s) of concern and provide suggestions of support. Additionally, when academic, the RTI time is then focused in on the areas of need/concern. If the concern is behavioral/social emotional, the PLC team (with the aforementioned members) discuss strategies and develop a plan of action to be implemented. The members of the academy team then monitor to ensure success or to take the next steps based on the results. Additional supports are typically put into place for our students including coaching, counseling, small group support, working with the therapy program, etc, depending

on the need identified. The classroom teachers regularly provide small group instruction during independent classwork time and daily small groups for RTI, which often results in the area of concern being addressed, or additional data to support the referral for an evaluation.

MTSS questions:

How are you doing with integrating the academic and nonacademic data when making decisions? The team looks at the students' academic progress in all areas as well as classroom and school behaviors. We operate using a holistic approach to our students. As a small Academy, we are very familiar with each of our students and much of what is going on both inside and outside of school. Each week, our leadership team meets, which includes our administration, nurse, counselor, head of special education, Dean of Students, Family Crisis Therapist. We discuss our student's needs and ensure we are all aware of any larger issues or concerns happening. We then develop a plan to assist our students and/or families. When reviewing data during our weekly PLCs, in our leadership team meetings, or in meetings with our educators, we look at how the student or students are doing academically in meeting the standards as well as social/emotionally.

How are you implementing a universal screening process for academic and nonacademic?

The Academy of Dover uses Edmentum as our universal screener for academics and we use Class DOJO to reward for good/positive behaviors. Students who struggle with behaviors are supported through multiple methods, including conversations with the administration, Behavior Interventionist, Dean of Students, School Counselor, Family Crisis Therapist, or, when necessary, through the contracted therapy providers within our Academy. These conversations and supports focus on how to make the situation better. We have seen a significant change in our students by using all of these approaches with our students. They are better able to deal with challenges individually, model with their peers the skills we have helped them develop, and have grown to be positive and impactful students.

What DOE PL opportunities related to MTSS have you participated in?

Our Head of School was one of the initial participants of the MTSS development and participated in meetings with DOE when this initiated in Delaware. In addition, for the past few years she has served as the Governor-appointed member on the Behavioral Health Consortium, representing educators across the state. The work on ensuring multi-tiered systems of supports begins with the leadership and is consistently employed through everyone working within the Academy—including the custodial and cafeteria staff. All staff have been through training as part of the initial Professional Development at the start of this school year to ensure all understand the importance of relationships and meeting the needs of the whole child. This MTSS development has been a multi-year initiative at the Academy. Staff participate in book studies, professional development, and regular supportive conversations on ensuring we do it well.

