

CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**Thomas A. Edison Charter School
Charter Renewal
Initial Report
November 2, 2022**

On September 30, 2022 Thomas A. Edison Charter School (Edison) submitted an application to renew its charter for a term of five years. The purpose of the initial meeting is for the Charter School Accountability Committee (CSAC) to review the renewal application in light of the relevant statutory criteria for renewal.

The following individuals were in attendance at the initial meeting of CSAC on October 26, 2022:

Voting Committee Members

- Kim Klein, Associate Secretary of Operations Support
- Aimee Beam, Education Associate, School Support
- Gregory Fulkerson, Education Associate, Academic Support
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Operations Support
- Joyce Leatherbury, Education Associate, Academic Support
- April McCrae, Education Associate, Academic Support
- Tierra Fair, Community Member
- Ted Molin, Community Member
- Charles Taylor, Community Member

Ex-Officio Members (Non-voting)

- Vince Lofink, Delaware State Board of Education

Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)

- Leroy Travers, Director, Charter School Office
- Alicia Balcerak, Administrative Secretary, Charter School Office
- Faye Schilling, Education Specialist, Charter School Office

Representatives of Edison

- Megan Brown, Director of Special Education
- Mikkell Christie, Board President
- Wayne Cooper, Board Treasurer
- John Shelton, Assistant Principal
- Salome Thomas-El, Principal
- Patricia Winder, Chief Financial Officer
- Elizabeth Yates, Assistant Principal

Edison was given time to provide an overview of the school. The school shared a presentation that depicted the school's leadership, staff, and students. Mr. Thomas-El and Ms. Yates shared some of the school's success stories, including that of a former student currently playing professional basketball and the school's multiple national chess championships.

Finance and Budget

1. The preliminary budget is based on an enrollment of 700 students. Provide an updated budget based on the actual September 30, 2022 enrollment of 632 students.
A - The budget has been updated to reflect 632 students. The changes that have been made are now based on the current unit count formula and local billing numbers have been added. These reductions have not affected instruction or class size. As enrollment increases, positions may be added.
2. What changes to the staffing plan for fiscal year (FY) 2023 have been implemented, or are anticipated, given the decrease in student enrollment?
A - To offset the decreased revenues, which were approximately \$400,000 less than what was budgeted, the school has reduced staffing by four teachers (two specialist teachers and two classroom teachers) and two paraprofessionals.
 - a. How will updates to the staffing plan impact the FY23 budget?
A - As a result of these staffing adjustments, the budget is now balanced. Any deficit in revenue has been accounted for.
3. Besides staffing, what other budgetary reductions have been implemented, or are anticipated, due to the reduced enrollment?
A - There were no other reductions.

Staffing

4. What is the average staff to student ratio?
A - The staff to student ratio is one staff member to eight students. The teacher to student ratio is one teacher to 18 students. The average class size is 20 students per class.
 - a. How does this ratio provide for optimal student learning?
A - Smaller class sizes allow teachers to have more individualized groups and personalized learning. Smaller class sizes allow teachers to build relationships with students and reduce classroom disruptions and behavior incidents allowing more time to be spent on academics. This also provides opportunities for moral support and the effective implementation of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). Small classes help build a sense of community while also contributing to teacher recruitment and retention. The power of relationships cannot be understated. In addition to being optimum for learning, small class sizes are important for mitigating health concerns.
5. How is Edison maximizing the talents of the staff who are not needed full-time for instruction, support, etc.?
A - Every person that is not directly teaching is responsible for other items such as supporting, coaching, and mentoring. Supporting students is everyone's job. The goal is to teach and work from "bell to bell" and maximize instructional time using the personnel and support available.
6. How are staff members who are considered high performers rewarded?

A - With the support of the school's board, Edison has become highly creative in supporting and acknowledging staff members. Staff members may be rewarded with bonuses. Lead teachers, mentors, and other extra activities are given stipends. Edison also tries to provide experiences for teachers and staff. For example, during the statewide professional development day, an omelet truck prepared breakfast for staff. A "Magic Squad" of staff members initiates monthly "pick-me-ups" to celebrate and recognize teachers. Some experienced teachers have "model classrooms" which serve as exemplary educational settings used to model successful and effective educational practices and techniques for new or inexperienced staff and teachers. It is considered a reward to be recognized as a model classroom. Shout-outs in the weekly newsletter boost morale and recognize the amazing work teachers are doing. Teachers also enjoy being selected to go out and recruit for the school. This excites them and gives them a sense of fulfillment. Joy and learning can exist in a school, they are not mutually exclusive components.

7. How many staff members are licensed and certified within the area in which they teach?

A - There are currently 14 staff members who are not certified, however, 11 are eligible to be certified and awaiting paperwork to be processed in the Delaware Educator Data System (DEEDS). Therefore, three is a more accurate number reflective of those not certified. Two of those three teachers are working to get into Alternative Routes to Certification (ARTC).

- a. How many staff members are not certified?

A – Fourteen staff members are uncertified (see note above).

- b. How many staff members are on initial licenses?

A - Thirteen staff members are on initial licenses (two or three are still waiting to be processed).

- c. How many staff members have continuing licenses?

A – Fifteen staff members are on continuing licenses.

- d. How many staff members are participating in an ARTC?

A - Two staff members are currently in ARTC and two are pending acceptance into the program.

8. Does Edison consider their mentoring support program to be effective? Why or why not?

A - The Delaware Department of Education (DOE) mentoring program is not enough to meet Edison's needs, so additional support is provided. In addition to mentoring, there is a "coaching corner" for first- and second-year teachers which meets bi-weekly with a specific focus, as well as specific observations and debriefs. As an inner-city school with a high number of new teachers, additional mentoring is needed.

9. Does the school have an effective and sustainable instructional coaching staff?

A - Edison has a reading, math, and academic coach. Ms. Brown, Mr. Shelton, and Ms. Yates are also in place to provide support. The instructional staff at the school has been in place for a long period of time.

10. Does Edison partner with any educator preparation programs?

A - Edison partners with the Relay Delaware and enrolls some paraprofessionals in the program so that they may become certified. Edison has also worked with Delaware Technical and Community College, the University of Delaware, and Wilmington University. Edison is also partnering with historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) such as Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, Lincoln University, and Delaware State University.

11. What is the staff retention rate?

A – Last year the retention rate was 76%, however, in previous years the rate was much higher (80%, 89%, and 84%). Last year several factors contributed to the decrease such as burnout, seeking other jobs outside of education, or moving away.

a. What are the school’s goals related to the retention of current staff?

A – The goal is to hire staff that want to teach in the inner city. Additionally, Edison wants to retain committed teachers dedicated to improving outcomes for students. The profession is suffering a shortage. Universities and colleges are closing their teacher and administrator preparation programs due to lack of interest and enrollment. Therefore, it is imperative to retain teachers. Edison wants to create an environment where teachers feel supported and can be creative. They should make connections with students. Teachers are valued and trusted as professionals. Additionally, Edison surpasses the national rate (2%) of black male teachers in the school. Young African-American males struggle more than any other student, but if they can see themselves in some of their teachers, they will understand that the profession is more diverse, which encourages greater opportunities for those students. The entire school staff is diverse and exposes students to people that look like them. Not only is there an achievement gap, but there is also an exposure gap for city students.

12. When did Edison last update or revisit their staff recruitment plan?

A - During and after COVID-19 the plan was revisited. As a result of COVID-19 adjustments were made that included conducting open houses and interviews virtually. This year, Edison worked with a staffing agency to select from a greater pool of candidates. Edison will be participating in the Delaware ConnectED event on December 10th. Prior to COVID-19, the “Street Team” was utilized to go door to door within the community and visit childcare centers. The plan is to begin using this team again. Edison will also be using billboards to advertise the accomplishments of their graduates.

13. How does Edison provide staff with stretch or long-term opportunities while not causing burnout?

A - There is a fine line between asking a lot from teachers while also recognizing their mental health and personal needs. There are various school programs throughout the year, and teachers are encouraged to select and participate in cycles instead of trying to do everything. To prevent burnout, Edison uses outside agencies to run after-school, Saturday, and summer programs, so that teachers do not feel obligated to be in school constantly. Edison values staff members’ time. Utilizing asynchronous professional development has been a great resource to honor staff time. Edison has increased personnel with the addition of another counselor and a nurse to attempt to lighten the load of the teachers so they are not alone in supporting the social/emotional and health needs of students.

14. How does the school gather feedback from staff?

a. How often does this occur?

A - Edison sends out staff surveys two times per year and reviews this feedback. Data and feedback is gathered through bi-weekly leadership team meetings and weekly professional learning community (PLC) meetings.

CSAC Follow-up - Finance and Budget and Staffing

Joyce Leatherbury- How many special education teachers does Edison have and how are they utilized to provide services?

A - There are five special education teachers assigned to specific grade bands. Dependent upon the grade band, they typically will have a caseload between seven and 14 students. The model that is used is a combination of “push-in” and “pull-out” services, with the goal of keeping students in the classroom for most of their support. Services are provided through small groups in the classroom, but also in the resource room when needed. Edison believes that special education students are everyone’s students. Edison is inclusive and sets high expectations, but also provides the support to meet students where they are. Every teacher is an English – Language Arts (ELA) teacher. Helping students learn to read is everyone’s responsibility- Literacy is a civil right. ELA and math are important, but there is also a focus on providing instructional support in other academic areas such as social studies and science.

April McCrae- Have you contacted Tiffany Green from DOE to discuss the extra mentoring being provided so that teachers credited and to ensure that there is no overlap?

A - The school does work with Ms Green to identify areas that overlap and activities that could be counted for credit within the DOE mentoring program.

Leroy Travers- What is the structure of support related to social/emotional, mental health, and counseling services?

A – A counselor has been added in addition to the family crisis therapist and behavioral health coordinator on staff. The school has partnered with Delaware Guidance to provide in-school therapy. Edison is a “Leader in Me” School, focusing on character and leadership for students. Edison utilizes “Second Step” and the student intervention team to work through MTSS for behavioral interventions.

Recruitment and Enrollment

15. When did Edison last revisit its recruitment plan for students?

A - This is ongoing but was particularly studied during the COVID-19 pandemic.

a. Have any new strategies been adopted?

Kindergarten enrollments are down throughout the country. Edison went into the community to conduct family outreach and visited local childcare centers to provide information to families. Parents and alumni are great advocates of the school and assist in spreading the word about the things happening at the school. The school will start up its “Street Team” again now that the pandemic has subsided. Edison wants to highlight the academic accomplishments of graduates and acquire testimonials from their parents as to why they chose the school.

16. How is the school utilizing its budgetary and time resources for enrollment?

A - Edison is investing in human resources and advertising in magazines and at recruitment fairs.

17. Have new stakeholders been engaged to increase student enrollment?

A - As mentioned above, Edison is working with community stakeholders, organizations, childcare facilities, parents, and alumni to spread the word about the school.

18. Confirm that the school understands the 5-year projected enrollment chart becomes the authorized enrollment for the next charter term. The current approved enrollment is 745; the projected enrollment chart changes this to 710.

A – This is understood and Edison feels that this number enables them to provide a safer space considering class size, formulating small groups, working in MTSS, and monitoring health needs. The additional space allows for appropriate interventions for students in tier II and tier III and, with the addition of more mental health support, enables the school to have the required office space for those professionals.

19. Besides the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, what other factors led to the decrease in the school's enrollment for the 2022-23 school year? Edison's enrollment dropped by 68 students from last school year.

A - There is a transportation issue. Since the pandemic Advance Transportation has been experiencing a staffing shortage. As a result, many students were arriving home from school very late. Some parents decide to remove their students because there is not a powerful middle school sports program. Lastly, weekly COVID-19 testing and mask requirements also caused some families to leave the school.

20. Does Edison have an updated student recruitment plan to ensure next year's enrollment is more in line with the school's authorized enrollment?

A – Edison will be utilizing billboards and advertisements along with outreach to childcare centers, recruitment fairs, partnerships with local universities and HBCUs and alumni and parents spreading the word within the community. Edison will also be using the recruitment team which consists of the leadership team, teachers, and the board of directors.

Recruitment and Enrollment Follow-up Questions

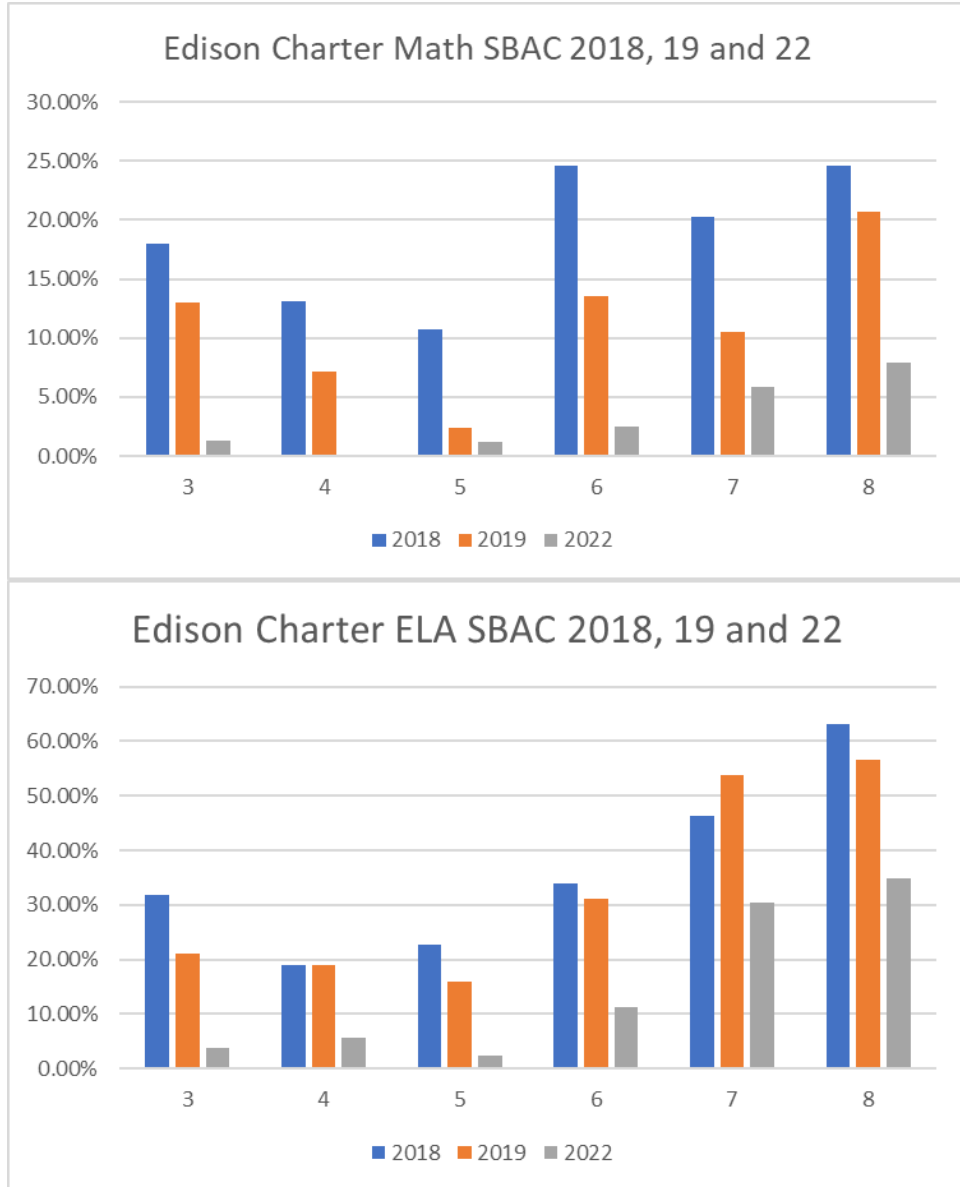
Tierra Fair: Has the school explored using social media to assist with recruitment?

A – Edison has not used social media consistently but feels that they need to start advertising on various platforms. Social media has been used to show what is happening in the school but should be utilized more directly for recruitment.

Academic Performance and Framework

21. According to question 21 “While Edison did not earn a “meets standard” rating on the Academic Performance Framework, we had—prior to the pandemic—demonstrated consistent growth in our performance and in ensuring strong outcomes for students.” Data provided (below) indicates that the school was not illustrating growth prior to the pandemic but was, in fact, illustrating significant losses except for English-Language Arts in grades six, seven and eight. Describe what organizational or instructional changes may have occurred between 2018 and 2019 that will help identify root causes for these academic challenges (unrelated to the pandemic)

- a. What is the school's plan to reduce the effects or likelihood of recurring pre-pandemic challenges while also incorporating post-pandemic strategies?



Edison Charter Science and Soc Studies 2019 and 2022

Combined School Average	2019	2022
Science	8.15%	4.11%
Social Studies	11.97%	9.35%

A - In the past, middle school ELA students have been close to, if not meeting, the state average. Math scores did decrease pre- and post-pandemic. It is important to note that scores related to educating African-American students were always similar to, if not outperforming, many schools throughout the state. While not proud of the data, Edison understands they are servicing a population that requires a large amount of support to overcome barriers. To address this area of concern Edison has undergone some organizational, structural, and instructional changes. In 2018, the school hired a math coach. Staff retention and consistency is

also a major focus since there is a learning curve with adapting to new curriculum. Instructionally, math, literacy, and academic coaches are supporting teachers and leading small group instruction. Edison has adopted the Bridges math curriculum. Structurally, MTSS time for math and ELA has been built into the schedule, daily. Through MTSS, they are effectively benchmarking and progress monitoring to ensure the necessary support. Edison has observed that students were struggling with online testing. As a result, the school has adopted “Great Minds”, which has computer-based testing. This experience and exposure to computer-based testing is designed to get students comfortable and ready for state testing. Additionally, interim assessments are administered to provide students with more exposure to the testing experience. Edison is always looking for support to enhance the practices of teachers. Examples include a partnership with the University of Delaware in the implementation and usage of Bookworms; participation in the math and reading cadre and Engage Eureka; and piloting Delaware Teacher Growth and Support System (DTGSS) for assistance with observations and evaluations. The school is partnering with Research for Better Teaching to have four additional training days centered around the DTGSS rubric.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development

22. One of Edison commendations is that they have chosen to employ a grade and age appropriate reading screening tool for seventh and eighth grade students. Has the school discovered that these older students struggle with word attack skills?

A – Edison has found that older students in seventh and eighth grades struggle with comprehension across all content areas, while younger students struggle with word attack skills.

- a. What interventions outside of the tier 1 curriculum is Edison using to close these gaps in foundational learning?

A - Edison is using Achieve 3000, which provides informational text and articles aligned to individual student Lexile levels, as well as SpringBoard, which provides middle level ELA interventions and resources.

23. What is the school’s plan for refining the social studies scope and sequence documents to meet the realignment requirements of the Delaware Recommended Curriculum for Social Studies?

A - Social studies has been difficult to put together. Middle school social studies teachers are leading this work to get the scope and sequence ready.

24. How has Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) been implemented within your school’s systems?

A - This year the school has embedded math (30 minutes of Freckle) and ELA (45 minutes of Bookworms) MTSS into the schedule. They have added an additional school counselor, school-based therapist, and two behavioral support personnel.

- a. What challenges has the school faced and what steps will be taken to address those challenges?

A - Challenges include staffing, scheduling, the number of students qualifying for tier II and tier III interventions, along with the learning curve with staff adapting to the new curriculum. These challenges are addressed through professional

development and support from the University of Delaware and Eureka, along with creative schedule changes and data PLC meetings.

25. In what ways have you been successful in implementing the MTSS framework?

A - Edison has been successful through building MTSS time into the daily schedule to provide consistent support. Progress monitoring has been successful, as well.

CSAC Follow-up - Academic and Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development

Gregory Fulkerson- Commended the school for utilizing both curriculum submission windows and, as a result, everything is in alignment.

Gregory Fulkerson- What is the timeline for the implementation of the social studies curriculum?

A - New requirements are being implemented this year. It is anticipated that this curriculum will be clearly outlined by the end of the year.

April McCrae- The school should shift the way that it looks at assessment. It is important to look at assessment as an action research tool to guide professional development and curriculum. Use the data to identify trends or to pinpoint if there is something programmatically that can be adjusted. The Office of Assessment is available to assist with this.

Leroy Travers- Has the school given any thought to joining the Wilmington Learning Collaborative?

A – This has been discussed.

Kim Klein- Commended the school, on behalf of DOE, for consistent receptiveness to feedback. DOE appreciates the way that leadership receives feedback and takes it to heart. The school's challenges are understood and it is apparent that the goal is to serve students.

The following items were requested as follow-up to this meeting.

1. Provide a staffing chart that includes the following:
 - a. Each teacher's license and certification status, to include whether they are on an initial or continuing license;
 - b. Each teacher's instructional assignment.
2. Provide an email of the revised 632 student budget.
3. Provide a summary of the school's MTSS plan to include how students are moved and how programs are set-up.

Next Steps:

- An initial report will be issued on or before November 2nd.
- An initial public hearing will take place on November 15th at 6:00 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 November 17th.
- A second and final meeting of CSAC will be held on November 29th.

- On or before December 5th CSAC will issue its final report which will include its recommendation on the formal review.