

CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Freire Charter School Wilmington

Charter Renewal

Initial Report

November 6, 2023

As is required, Freire Charter School (Freire) 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 were in attendance at the initial meeting of CSAC on October 30, 2023:

Voting Committee Members

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

Ex-Officio Members (Non-voting)

- Kendall Massett, Executive Director, Delaware Charter School Network
- Wali Rushdan, Delaware State Board of Education

Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)

- Leroy Travers, Director, Charter School Office
- Alicia Balcerak, Administrative Secretary, Charter School Office
- John Carwell, Education Associate, Charter School Office
- Faye Schilling, Education Specialist, Charter School Office
- Carla Jarosz, Deputy Attorney General

Representatives of Freire Charter School

- Clint Walker, Board President
- Madeline Weckel, Head of School
- Leigh Botwinik, Managing Director
- Kelly Davenport, CEO, Freire Schools Network Founder
- Sean Hamilton, Assistant Head of Academics
- Jan'nyah Johnson-White, Paraprofessional
- Paul Ramirez, Chief Leadership Officer (virtual)
- Lilian Wehbe, Director of Performance Management
- Tyrone Williams, Marketing & Recruitment Manager
- Nathan Yufer, Controller

Freire was given time to provide an overview of the school.

Ms. Weckel introduced a brief video. After the video, she highlighted Freire's mission, which is to provide a college-preparatory learning education in the heart of Wilmington. Freire's vision is for students to build the future, theirs and ours. In the current charter term, students have come to Freire less and less proficient, year over year, with unprecedented rates of chronic absenteeism. While Freire is incredibly proud of the ways in which they've been able to adapt and respond to these unique circumstances, there is a need for urgent improvement in order to ensure that students are leaving Freire equipped to graduate and be successful in college and beyond. Over the last year Freire, with the support and collaboration of the Freire Schools Network, has poured over data and analyzed trends. This has informed the urgent strategies outlined in the renewal application and the actions being taken right now to close gaps and improve where the school has fallen short. Freire students have truly limitless potential, and a dedicated staff and network team to ensure that the school is putting students on the path to college and truly build the future.

Mr. Walker stated that he chose to get involved with Freire because it was addressing an unmet need in Wilmington, providing a rigorous college preparatory education and putting students on a path to college. There are no admissions criteria. The average eighth grade student arrives two to three years below grade level. Last year, 85% of the graduating class applied to and was accepted to college. The prior year was 92%. Additionally, the persistence rate (students who return for their sophomore year) is 72%, well above the national average. The culture at Freire is strong. Students describe Freire as a family and it's a place where they thrive.

Ms. Johnson-White is a graduate of Freire and is currently a senior pursuing a Bachelor's of Business Administration at the University of Delaware. She currently works at Freire as a paraprofessional. She described how Freire helped set her up for success in college by maintaining high expectations, learning to develop relationships with her professors, seeking support when needed, and advocating for herself. Lastly, Freire supported her college search and application process and helped her earn a full scholarship.

Initial CSAC Questions and Feedback:

Finance

1. Question three asks for the school's current enrollment. The school responded, "445 enrolled with a unit count of 410." Is Freire indicating that they have 35 students attending their school that are not counted in the unit count? Why would these students not be counted for funding purposes?
A – Freire's final unit count was 411. Three students returned to school after unit count ended.
2. On the five-year projected enrollment chart the school has included a note stating, "we are requesting a minor modification to our charter to lower the school's enrollment cap from 500 to 430." However, the projected enrollment chart has varying total enrollments over the next charter term (ranging from 423 to 430). The five-year projected enrollment chart will become

the school's authorized enrollment for the new charter term. If Freire's intended enrollment is 430 for each year over the next five years, submit a revised five- year projected enrollment chart to reflect total enrollment of 430. Otherwise, authorized enrollment will be what is reflected on the original chart.

A – The intended enrollment is 430. The school will submit a revised enrollment chart.

3. In the response to question 23, the school notes that they acquired their school building and an adjacent school building. Did the school submit minor modifications for these changes? Both actions required a minor modification according to 14 DE Admin. Code 275.

A – Freire will work with the charter school office to submit a minor modification, after the fact. Freire did its due diligence to ensure that this was in the best interest of the school. There will be a minor impact on the school's budget. The new facilities costs will be almost equivalent to the cost of the rent.

4. The school submitted two fiscal year (FY) 2024 budgets based on an enrollment of 475 students and 420 students. The school's actual unit count on September 30 was 411 students (82% of authorized enrollment). Submit an updated FY24 budget based on the actual enrollment of 411 students. If any staffing changes were made as compared to the original budget, clearly identify those changes.

A- Freire has resubmitted the budget. Non-programmatic positions were removed from the budget and the school did not replace the positions of those who resigned.

CSAC follow-up for Finance

Kim Klein – It is extremely important for schools to be aware of their responsibilities as it pertains to Delaware code. Having charter schools submitting minor modifications after the fact does not put the Delaware Department of Education (DOE) in a good position.

Brook Hughes – What recruitment efforts has the school put into place for next school year to ensure that Freire is meeting enrollment targets?

A – Last year, Freire worked with a consultant to audit recruitment and retention strategies. The school also contracted with a marketing firm to increase enrollment. Advertising has been expanded in the digital space. Additionally, Freire added a gym to the campus, which was a long-time request of students.

April McCrae – What staffing changes have been made?

A – The following positions were eliminated: college counselor, building substitute, administrative assistant (resigned and not replaced). The school psychologist role changed to contracted services.

Kendall Massett – Has the new registration process hindered access to enrollment or added any barriers to the school choice process for families?

A – The choice process can be cumbersome for families to begin with. Consequently, Freire provides whole family support on that process. The new registration process certainly provided an added barrier to entry.

Wali Rushdan – Provide any information regarding the reasons why students did not reenroll.

A – Freire noticed increased in chronic absenteeism following the pandemic. Several students who had patterns of truancy in the previous year did not show up. There were no records requests to indicate that students had enrolled elsewhere. Despite many efforts to contact the students and their families, they did not show up during unit count period. However, as a result of the school’s outreach efforts three or four students did show up after the unit count period ended but many remain truant.

Wali Rushdan - Regarding chronic absenteeism, the application calls out the multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) coordinator as one of the strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism. Describe the specific work of this position and any other strategies to address this issue.

A – A multipart strategic plan has been developed to address chronic absenteeism. The new assistant head of school is the MTSS coordinator and is supporting those efforts. An important piece is ensuring that the state attendance policy is being implemented with fidelity. Prior to the pandemic Freire did not see these issues with chronic absenteeism. It has become increasingly important that the state policy is followed with extreme fidelity and acting urgently in contacting families when there are any patterns of absences. The attendance plan is very proactive and includes providing regular updates to students and families about their attendance and building a culture of attendance.

Staff / Licensure and Certification / Evaluations

5. Has goal setting for administrators been completed for the 2023/2024 school year?

a. If so, when was it completed? If not, what is the plan for completion?

A – This year, one administrator, Mr. Hamilton, is required to complete this and he has submitted his goals for the year.

6. Freire’s current professional growth plan completion rates are as follows (the recommended time for completion is October 15th):

- professional growth goals – 0%
- student improvement goals –0%

A – In the past, this process was completed using paper forms instead of the Data Service Center (DSC). This year, Freire is utilizing DSC for this process, and it will be completed by November 13.

a. Share the school’s experience with completing professional growth and student improvement goals. Have there been any particular challenges in completing either?

A – The first round of benchmarking with Star Math and Star Reading was completed in September and teachers are using the data to craft and inform their goals. Additionally, Freire uses its own approved alternative evaluation tool, the Deeper Learning Rubric. Observations with this tool are conducted in mid-November, Mid-January, mid-May and this data will be entered into DSC.

b. Describe Freire’s plan for completing professional growth and student improvement goals.

A – In addition to the response above, Freire uses its own approved alternative evaluation tool, the Deeper Learning Rubric. Observations with this tool are conducted in mid-Nov, Mid-Jan, mid-May and this data will be entered into DSC.

- c. Have the three Delaware Teacher Growth and Support System (DTGSS) observations been scheduled to ensure that each observation is completed in a timely manner? The recommendation is to complete round one before December 1st, round two before March 1st, and round three before May 15th. Explain the schedule or plan for scheduling and completion.

A – See the response to question 6b.

7. According to information in the mentoring center there are four educators in year one of the comprehensive induction program, one educator in year two, two educators in year three, and three educators in year four.

- a. When will year one and year two mentees be assigned a mentor for the 2023-2024 school year in the mentoring center?

A- All of the mentoring pairs have formally been added to the mentoring center.

- b. Has mentoring begun for them? The recommendation is that all mentees are assigned within 30 days of employment and that they are all assigned in the mentoring center by October.

A – Mentoring pairs were assigned over the summer and mentoring began during summer professional development in August.

8. Has the lead mentor conducted any trainings for mentors this year?

- a. If so, how many?

A –The new assistant head of academics, Mr. Hamilton, meets with all coaches and mentees for an hour on a weekly basis. Informal meetings happen as well.

9. Does Freire have year-long teacher residences? a. If so, how many?

A – Currently, Freire does not have any teacher residents but did participate previously in the year-long teacher residency grant program in partnership with Relay. Freire currently has a teacher on staff from that program.

10. Does Freire have a para-educator to teacher program or pipeline?

- a. If so, have any participants been hired?

A – Freire currently does not have a para-educator to teacher pipeline.

11. What is the school's staff to student ratio?

A – Freire currently has 49 full-time equivalent employees with 411 students enrolled for a staff to student ratio of 1:8.

12. When was the staff recruitment plan last revisited?

A –The most recent staff recruitment plan was created in November 2022 and is reviewed monthly. The strategies are revisited every six months.

13. How many current vacancies does the school have?

A – Freire currently has one special education teacher vacancy.

14. Submit a full staff listing with each staff member's current assignment and current licensure and certification status (including initial or continuing license).

A – The school will send this via email.

15. Submit Freire's salary schedule / table.

A – The school will send this via email.

CSAC Follow-up for Staff / Licensure and Certification / Evaluations

Tierra Fair – Describe any staff recruitment efforts that ensure staff diversity.

A – Since the majority of Freire students identify as students of color, recruitment efforts are in place to recruit candidates who reflect the student body. One specific strategy is maintaining contact with Freire's alumni base as they matriculate through college and recruit them for paraprofessional and teaching positions. Last year, Freire participated in The New Teacher Project's (TNTP) Black teacher recruitment fellowship which explicitly trained a cohort of directors of recruitment on strategies and marketing to increase the number of Black teachers.

Gregory Fulkerson – What is Freire's average class size?

A – Class sizes are generally 20-30 students.

Tiffany Green – Are there any teachers not showing up in the mentoring center who should be receiving mentoring in their first year?

A – There are not.

Tiffany Green – In the past year there have not been any requests for mentoring stipends. Are there mentors who do not receive pay?

A – There are staff who serve as instructional coaches and they already receive stipends or have modified schedules. Prior to last year, Freire received the comprehensive induction program grant and have found ways to make it sustainable.

Kendall Massett – Stated that charter schools are not required to have a salary schedule.

Wali Rushdan – Is the teacher to student ratio by design?

A – In general, Freire is a small school model (500 students maximum) to ensure close relationships with students. Additionally, the model has an intensive system of student supports that allow teachers to be instructionally focused. Another feature of the Freire model is to have co-teachers in most classrooms.

Academic Performance and Framework

16. Science proficiency in 2022 was approximately 9% (school level) and in 2023 was approximately 6% (school level). Social Studies in 2022 was approximately 10% and in 2023

approximately 13% (school level). We recognize the role of the pandemic in all academic areas, and the school's focus on college application, entrance, and improvements in English / Language Arts and Mathematics is noted. What efforts are put forth in non-primary instructional content (Science and Social Studies) to ensure growth in those subject areas?

A – High quality instructional materials make a difference. Historically, teachers have been using Inquiry Hub. This year, Freire will pilot the OpeSciEd curriculum along with Inquiry Hub to see which curriculum suits students better. To ensure high quality science instruction, a dedicated science coach (Biology teacher) will support the entire science team. Additionally, professional development will be based on the Solidify: Science Leadership Development Workbook to help understand any of the shifts required by Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS).

This past summer, a professional development series kicked off with a science launch day where all science teachers from across the network gathered in Philadelphia to become more familiar with NGSS and to the new curricula being piloted this year. This was led by instructional coaches and mentors.

Throughout the year, science teachers have biweekly professional learning communities (PLCs) which are led by the science mentor and coach. Additionally, PLCs and coaching continue to build the capacity of science teachers. This year, the science team is focused on the Delaware System of Student Assessments (DeSSA) for eighth and tenth grade students and teachers are developing strategies to help students be better prepared for the exams.

During the summer, science teachers designed a vertically aligned lab from grades eight through twelve. All students will complete ten labs per month with hands on lab work. Freire, receive a \$30,000 grant for lab revitalization and equipment. In the spring, Freire will pilot an instructional partner science classroom observation tool to evaluate how science teachers are doing with NGSS and phenomena-based education.

For social studies, one of Freire's major focus areas is to narrow down one standard per unit that students can master. Freire now has two social studies coaches that are guiding the department and leading biweekly PLCs. Additionally, they are provided with several resources like Stanford History Education Group and others so they can embed literacy practices. There is also an intentional focus on DeSSA and preparing students for success on the exams. Literacy instruction is a priority for social studies teachers - pushing into Common Core standards and equipping teachers with the resources to effectively teach literacy skills. Recently, social studies analyzed Star Reading data.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development

17. Describe, in detail, the enhancements that have been made to the school's MTSS process.

A – Freire has made several enhancements for MTSS program which include the adoption of specialized software (e.g., Branching Minds, Schoolzilla, Data tracking, and Renaissance Star benchmarking). Freire hired an assistant head of school who is currently serving as Freire's MTSS coordinator. At the tier 1 level the most significant enhancement has been the

adoption of high quality instructional materials in both math and reading, with the adoption of Illustrative Math and Engage NY, respectively. At the tier 2 level the most significant enhancement has been in actually adjusting the school day schedule that includes built in time for intervention blocks focused on both math and reading. At the tier 3 level the most significant advancement is occurring this year with the use of iXL for individualized student support.

a. How do students move from tier 1 to tier 2 and from tier 2 to tier 3?

A – Student movement through tiers is informed by Star assessment data in both reading and math to identify students for tiered supports. After each round of benchmarks, the data and MTSS teams come together to review the data. Students who score at intervention levels receive tier 2 supports and students who score at urgent intervention level receive tier 3 supports. Students identified for tiers 2 and 3 receive interventions primarily within daily intervention blocks in math and reading built into the schedule.

18. What resources and interventions are used to support students in tier 2 and tier 3?

A – Resources include Corrective Math, explicit reading strategies from Lexia Reading, and iXL.

19. What professional learning is provided to staff to ensure that the policies and procedures outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) are followed for students with disabilities?

A – Freire’s special education director and new coordinator attend the required special education training provided by DOE. The director of special education leads staff through training to ensure compliance with IDEA and the procedural rights and safeguards for students with disabilities. Professional development is provided at the start of the school year and annually around how to read an individualized education plan (IEP), the transition program, understanding different classifications, how to provide input for IEP's and how to provide accommodations, and effective co-teaching models and practices.

20. Freire’s response to question 28 of the renewal applications states, "With the support of our special education teachers, we are able to accommodate most students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) with minimal or no pull-out support (served in the regular classroom 80% or more of the day)." Explain the discrepancy between the school’s response and the data from Freire’s Fy21 Local Education Agency (LEA) Determination for Students with disabilities (Indicator 5: Least Restrictive Environments).

A – Freire is working with DOE’s Exception Childrens Resources workgroup on an improvement plan.

21. During the last charter term, the number of students with disabilities being served in the general education setting for 80% or more of the school day (setting A), did not meet the state's target. What actions will be taken to increase the number of students being served in setting A?

A – Of the students who arrived at Freire with an IEP, 55% were in setting A, 45% arrived with a setting B or C indicated as their least restrictive environment. Many families who

transition to Freire prefer to have their children stay in setting B or C. If data shows that student could transition to setting A, recommendations are made to families with assurance of appropriate accommodations.

22. What professional learning has been provided to general education teachers to ensure that students with disabilities are learning in the least restrictive environment?

A – As noted in the school’s response to question 19, all teachers receive annual training. Additionally, all teachers have instructional coaches and mentors. Student services teachers create IEPs at a glance summaries to support general education teachers with implementing IEPs.

23. Freire met standards for curriculum in all content areas and no follow-up is required.

CSAC Follow-up for Academic Performance and Framework and Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Development:

Gregory Fulkerson – It is recommended that Freire join the Social Studies Coalition.

A – Freire has contacted Michael Feldman and joined the Schoology group. Based on the fee to join the Social Studies Coalition, the leadership team will review based on the school’s budget and other priorities.

Gregory Fulkerson – Freire is to be commended for meeting all curriculum requirements.

Joyce Leatherbury – How often does team meet to discuss student MTSS and Star data? Does the school use any other data?

A – The MTSS team meets every eight to ten weeks to review data. In addition to Star, Freire uses iXL data.

April McCrae – When attending professional development in Philadelphia be mindful of differences that may be present in their local standards and Delaware’s standards. Regarding IEP meetings and parents who request B and C settings, they may not have the comfort level to request an A setting.

A – Freire makes sure to know the student well before making a recommendation about that student’s setting.

Kendall Massett – Asked Freire if there was any additional information they wanted to share that was not already discussed.

A – Freire launched with 320 students and has worked its way up. Any staffing changes were intended to align with the original intent of how the school was staffed to serve 400 students. There’s a local and national trend that is shaping a new paradigm regarding what good teaching and learning looks like and how to make those changes in an uncertain world. The Freire Schools Network leadership team is committed to doing everything it can for Freire students.

Wali Rushdan – Regarding academic performance, there is a clear commitment to the standard and success but different dynamics and realities make the intended goals a formidable obstacle. What does success for Freire students look like?

A – Early success looks like growth, joy, and peace. Early success looks like growth which may not meet the standards initially. Additionally, success is implementing the plan with fidelity and incrementally showing improvement. Joy is important because the work is hard and students may have difficult lives. A joyful environment is a pretext to growth. Creating a peaceful environment is part of Freire’s mission. Early success is implementing the plan and ruthlessly look at the data and make adjustments, as necessary. Nothing is sacrosanct. Additionally, Freire’s high achieving staff continues to remain in the community and families feel like they’re part of Freire’s family.

The follow items were requested as follow-ups to this meeting:

1. Provide a revised enrollment chart.
2. Provide the school’s staff chart and salary schedule.
3. Provide a budget based on the actual enrollment.
4. Continue to work with the CIPD workgroup to ensure that all curricular areas meet standard.

Next Steps:

- An initial report will be issued on or before November 6th.
- An initial public hearing will take place on October 30th at 6:00 p.m. (3rd Floor Conference Room, DDOE, 401 Federal Street, Dover, DE 19901)
- The applicant will have the opportunity to submit a written response to the CSAC initial report, which is due by close of business November 21st.
- A second and final meeting of CSAC will be held on November 27th.
- On or before December 4th, CSAC will issue its final report including its recommendation on the renewal.