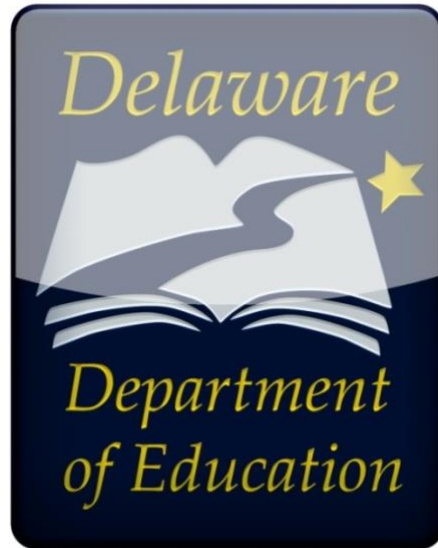


CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Academy of Dover MAJOR MODIFICATION APPLICATION INITIAL REPORT

CSAC Initial Meeting: February 3, 2021
CSAC Initial Report Published: February 8, 2021

By December 31, 2020, Academy of Dover (AOD) submitted an application for a major modification of its charter. The following individuals attended the Initial Meeting of the CSAC on February 2, 2021:

Voting Committee Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee

- Kimberly Klein, Chairperson of the Charter School Accountability Committee and Associate Secretary of Education, DDOE
- Gregory Fulkerson, Ph.D., Education Associate, World Languages and International Education, DDOE
- April McCrae, Ed.D., Education Associate, Science Assessment, DDOE
- Tiffany Green, Education Associate, Mentoring and Induction, DDOE
- Michael Saylor, Ph.D., Education Associate, School Leadership, DDOE
- Brian Moore, Education Associate, School Climate and Discipline, DDOE
- Joyce Leatherbury, Education Associate, General Supervision IDEA, DDOE
- Catherine Oravez, Education Associate, Federal Funds / LEA Indirect Costs, Federal Funds and Cost Recovery, DDOE
- James Pennewell, Education Associate, Capital Project Management, DDOE
- Tierra Fair, Community Member, Director, Community Engagement, United Way of Delaware
- Ted Molin, Community Member, Vice President, Wilmington Trust Investment Advisors, Inc.
- Charles Taylor, Community Member and Former Charter School Leader

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)

- Leroy Travers, Lead Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Financial Reform and Resource Management, DDOE
- John H. Carwell Jr., Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Alicia Balcerak, Administrative Secretary, Charter School Office, DDOE

Representatives of Academy of Dover

- Kimeu Boyton, Board President
- Michele Marinucci, Head of School
- Lauren Comegys, Teacher Representatives, Board of Directors
- Bishop W. James Thomas, Board Treasurer

Discussion

Ms. Klein shared that this was the Initial Meeting of the CSAC, relative to the Major Modification Application submitted by AOD. AOD applied for a modification to its charter to expand vertically by adding grades seven and eight and increase its enrollment by a total of 80 students (an increase of 24.2%) over two academic years. The proposed modifications would be effective next school year (2021-2022) with the addition of grade seven. Grade eight would be added in school year 2022-2023. In accordance with 14 Del. Code § 511(b) (3), in addition to meeting the approval criteria established in § 512 of this title, when the department considers a modification in which the increased enrollment will occur less than 18 months from the date of application (an “expansion”), it shall also consider the potential positive and negative impact of the expansion on the schools and the community from which the charter school’s new students will likely be drawn. In reviewing the impact, the department shall consider all information furnished to it during the application process and may exercise its reasonable discretion in determining whether the proposed expansion is contrary to the best interests of the community to be served, including both those students likely to attend the charter school and those students likely to attend traditional public schools in the community.

Ms. Klein stated that the purpose of the meeting is for the CSAC to discuss the Major Modification Application with the applicant, ask any questions the committee may have, and to probe areas of concern based on the CSAC’s preliminary review of the application. The meeting also serves as the applicant’s opportunity to provide verbal remarks supporting the application.

Ms. Klein asked the school to summarize their application.

Dr. Marinucci explained that the school’s motto is to teach, love, inspire, lead, motivate. AOD feels that they have successfully navigated the changes brought about by COVID-19. Families continually ask her if AOD will add grade levels. Last year, AOD added a sixth grade, adding thirty seats to their approved enrollment. If approved for this modification, they would like to add a total of eighty seats in grades seven and eight. The school is currently at or near capacity for enrollment and they have a waitlist. AOD has had to be creative with space given their growth. They will expand their building to add what will become a sixth, seventh, and eight grade wing.

Dr. Marinucci shared they have implemented a highly rated English/Language Arts and Math curriculum at all grade levels. They plan to keep that curriculum as they grow. They have found it to be effective and user friendly as well as challenging for students. The school has adopted a computer-adaptive program called Edmentum that they are very happy with. Students have shown growth in assessment scores as well as skills attained.

AOD has focused on data to assess academic and emotional growth. The school has weekly Professional Learning Communities (PLC’s) and regular staff meetings in which they review academic data, as well as other student data. The staff is fully engaged and on-board.

Before opening for the school year, Dr. Marinucci stated that they were in constant communication with staff, gathering input and working to ensure that they could open in a safe and effective manner. The entire staff is dedicated to doing what is best for students.

Dr. Marinucci acknowledged that the school has had a difficult financial history. She stated that when she became the Head of School, less than two years ago, AOD had less than fifty thousand dollars in their contingency fund. They currently have nearly eight-hundred thousand dollars in their contingency fund. Their operating budget has gone up significantly over that time, and has made the school more financially healthy and viable. AOD's most recent Financial Framework showed an overall rating of "meets standard", demonstrating a remarkable improvement since 2015. The school's focus is to attract students and keep them. They feel that they offer superior customer service and show families that their children's academic and social/emotional needs will be met. The school's enrollment has grown greatly over the last eighteen months, and this year marks their highest enrollment, ever. The school's needs-based units and special services units have grown significantly, causing the school to be more financially viable. Going forward, the school will continue staff development and continue to build their team. The school has utilized a variety of advertising methods to attract students.

AOD has purchased Chromebooks to allow each student to have a computer. This initiative will allow them to add language-learning for every student next year. Students will have a designated fifteen minutes, each day, to learn a language of their choice. The school has also developed a print-shop that uses a sublimation printer to make shirts, mugs, etc. Students learn about sublimation, marketing, design and other real-world skills. Additionally, they have added a financial literacy component to their classrooms.

AOD feels that they have built a strong culture of caring. They have developed an Academy of Leaders that allow students to pledge to be leaders. This allows students to wear blue ribbons or bow ties. The school has focused on building staff and culture and now look to maintain. Dr. Marinucci added that student retention is very high and 97% of students have stated that they will return next year.

Ms. Klein asked if there were any further comments or questions from the CSAC regarding the modification application.

Dr. Saylor asked what the school's current waitlist is for grade six. Dr. Marinucci stated that there are roughly five or so students on their waitlist. The school currently has forty-nine sixth grade students.

Dr. Saylor asked if they could target a survey to their sixth graders to determine if they will return for seventh grade. Dr. Marinucci responded that they have enough students that have applied at AOD that they will meet the forty-student growth target for next year, if they keep current sixth grade students. The school did ask for a commitment from students and each sixth-grade family that has responded has stated that they would remain at AOD.

Dr. Saylor asked how many additional staff members they would need if granted this modification. Dr. Marinucci responded that they will need two additional staff members. They will continue to be decompartmentalized. They would then add two more in grade eight the following year.

Ms. Leatherbury asked how they would address growth in the number of special education students in regards to staffing. Dr. Marinucci responded that she served as a special education coordinator before transitioning to AOD and special education is very important to her. Currently,

they have a special education lead teacher supported by an additional staff member. A majority of their staff is dual-certified. The school also employs a reading and math specialist, a counselor and a behavioral interventionist. The school may add another staff member to support special education students if the added units support that.

Mr. Moore stated that Early College High School (ECHS) is also looking to add grades seven and eight and may be moving closer to AOD. Mr. Moore asked if AOD has had any conversations with ECHS about recruiting. Dr. Marinucci responded that they have not yet had a conversation, however, they will in the future. Dr. Marinucci stated that their intent is to keep the students that are already enrolled into seventh and eighth grade and feel that ECHS's growth will have little effect on them.

Mr. Moore stated that they he will be reaching out regarding "consent education", as that will be required next year. The school will also have to add "teen dating violence" to their non-academic mandatory training.

Dr. McCrae referenced the application regarding science and social studies. The application states that they will have forty-five minute learning blocks every other day. Dr. Marinucci stated that it will look different in the middle school. They currently have an hour block for science and social studies and students take one course for half of a marking period and the other course during the other half (an elementary model). Once students switch to upper grades (middle school), they will have science and social studies on a regular basis.

Dr. Fulkerson provided an overview of the curriculum team's curriculum review. The full review, with commendations / recommendations / and expectations is attached as appendix A.

Dr. Fulkerson asked how the school plans to provide supports to English-Language Learners (ELL) in their new grades. Dr. Marinucci responded that they will continue their current supports. These include native-language textbooks, Chromebooks (with translation), and providing pull-out ELL supports.

Dr. Fulkerson asked what the school planned to do to address Eureka Math's usability issues for grades seven and eight. Dr. Marinucci stated that they have piloted the program and have decided that the program's content was very rich and they can work to overcome usability issues. Their math specialist also supports teachers with the program. The school has had training from Eureka and have purchased all of the resources that come with the program.

Dr. Fulkerson asked how the school plans to provide professional development for middle school science teachers. Dr. Marinucci stated that this will be dependent upon that staff that is hired for those positions. AOD will also work with other leaders around the state and seek other resources.

Dr. Fulkerson stated that having dedicated time for a foreign language could be very powerful. He asked if they have thought about the supports that would be needed to help students maximize their learning during that time. Dr. marinucci stated that she would reach out to Dr. Fulkerson to discuss.

Ms. Oravez asked for follow-up information showing projected revenue from 2022-2025.

Ms. Oravez asked why the school's transportation budget showed an increase this year, but decreased next year. Dr. Marinucci responded that, due to COVID-19, the school added additional bus-aides to the buses, that will be a one-year cost.

Ms. Oravez asked if transportation costs would increase due to the increased enrollment. Dr. Marinucci responded that the school gets charged based on the number of bus routes. The school has already added another bus and will not need to add additional. She also noted that a majority of students are self-transported.

Ms. Oravez asked if the increase in rent, due to expansion of the building, is an estimate or an exact number. Dr. Marinucci stated that it was an exact figure.

Ms. Oravez asked if the school planned to increase contingency funds, as it is not reflected in the budget projections. Dr. Marinucci explained that the plan is to increase the contingency fund, however, they budgeted conservatively.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of the meeting, Ms. Klein asked the voting members of the CSAC if there was any additional information they required in order to inform their decision-making. The CSAC requested the following information:

1. Confirmation of Membership in the SSCD or Social Studies Curriculum Alignment Documents, Scope and Sequences Documents and Units of Instruction.
2. Visual and Performing Arts Scope and Sequence Documents.
3. Projected revenue for 2022-2025.

Next Steps:

- The first of two public hearings will be held on February 15, 2021, beginning at 5:00 p.m. That meeting will take place virtually.
- The school will have an opportunity to comment on CSAC's draft Initial Report. The school's comments are due on or before February 23, 2021.
- A second and Final Meeting of CSAC will be held on March 25, 2021, at 9:00 A.M. That meeting will take place virtually.
- On or before, April 2, 2021, CSAC will issue a Final Report, which will include its recommendation on the Major Modification Application.
- A second and Final Public Hearing will be held on April 6, 2021 at 5:00 P.M. That meeting will take place virtually.
- The public comment period ends on April 9, 2021.
- The Secretary of Education will announce her decision at the April 22, 2021, State Board of Education meeting and ask for the assent of the State Board.

Charter School Modification—Academy of Dover Curriculum Review for Initial CSAC Report

The Education Associates in the Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Development Workgroup have reviewed the submitted curriculum documents in the following curriculum areas:

ELA
Math
Science
Social Studies

No documents were submitted for the Visual and Performing Arts.

Follow-up Expectations

- Confirmation of Membership in the SSCD or Social Studies Curriculum Alignment Documents, Scope and Sequences Documents and Units of Instruction
- Visual and Performing Arts Scope and Sequence Documents

Content-Specific Comments, Commendations and Recommendations

ELA, K-5:

Commendations:

- The Academy of Dover uses high quality instructional materials, specifically Expeditionary Learning, for their core ELA instruction.
- Edmentum’s Exact Path diagnostic assessment is an appropriate screening tool for comprehension difficulties.

Recommendations:

- Promote and support teacher’s use of the opportunities provided in Expeditionary Learning for students who read, write, speak, or listen below grade level, or in a language other than English. EL is rated highly as an instructional resources for the scaffolds it provides so that all students can access the complex texts and meet or exceed grade level standards. These resources should be maximized before supplemented.

Math:

Commendations:

- The school has recognized a need for rigorous and aligned math curricular materials at grades 7-8. Adopting an open education resource allows for the school to redirect funds that would otherwise be spent on materials toward professional learning support to assist teachers in skillful use of high-quality instructional material.

Recommendations:

- The Eureka Math (2015) materials that were submitted in the renewal application for grade 7-8 have been reviewed by EdReports, scoring green in Gateways 1 and 3. The area of usability did not score in the green category for grade 6-8. The school needs to review the EdReports reviews for grades 7-8. It will be found that there are concerns about the teacher supports and guidance available for planning and use of assessments as well as supporting a variety of learners and special populations of students. These weaknesses in the materials may require special attention during PLCs, co-planning and teacher professional learning.
- The following resources may provide assistance in implementing high quality instructional materials for long-term success: [https://curriculumsupport.org/DDOE Professional Learning Partner Guide](https://curriculumsupport.org/DDOE-Professional-Learning-Partner-Guide)

Social Studies:

No signed MOU for the Social Studies Coalition was provided in the application. SSCD records do not indicate that the Academy of Dover is a current member.

“By using EL Education, Social Studies is already fully integrated thematically within the literature.” From a Social Studies perspective, this is not an accurate statement of alignment with DE Social Studies Standards. CIPD does not recommend integration in such a way, particularly in middle school grades.

Expectation:

- Social Studies Curriculum Alignment Documents, Scope and Sequences Documents and Units of Instruction as outlined in the application for modification

Science:

Recommendations:

- Teachers should register for NGSX training when available.
- Administration should attend NGSX PLANS training when available.
- Use www.stemteachingtools.org for reference to help guide professional development and use supports for science classroom equity, three-dimensional learning, and assessments.
- Use the Safety-First Manual and Regulation 885 to meet the facility requirements for middle school science classrooms.

Visual & Performing Arts:

No curriculum documents were submitted for the Visual and Performing Arts.

Expectations:

- Visual and Performing Arts Scope and Sequence Documents

World Languages:

N/A