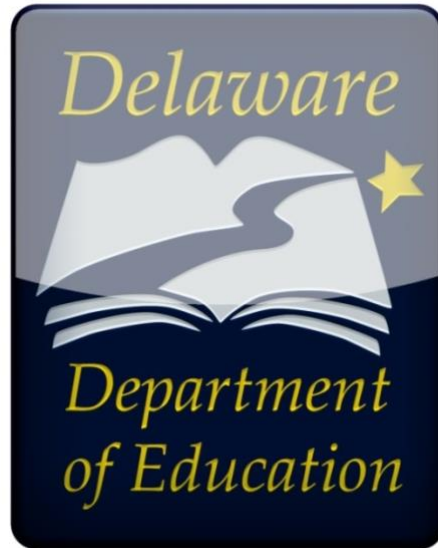


# CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



## **Early College High School at DSU MAJOR MODIFICATION APPLICATION INITIAL REPORT**

CSAC Initial Meeting: February 2, 2021  
CSAC Initial Report Published: February 8, 2021

By December 31, 2020, Early College High School (ECHS) 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 Early College High School at Delaware State University**

- Tony Allen, Ph.D. President, Delaware State University
- Marsha Horton, Board President
- Evelyn Edney, Ed.D, Principal
- Nya McCants, Ed.D, Assistant Principal
- Dara Savage, Teacher Representative, Board of Directors
- Dorcell Spence, Financial Consultant
- Dayna Cobb, Board Member
- Mahogany George, Student Representative to the Board of Directors



## Discussion

Ms. Klein shared that this was the Initial Meeting of the CSAC relative to the Major Modification Application submitted by ECHS. ECHS applied for a modification to its charter to expand its grade configuration to add grades seven and eight and increase its enrollment by a total of 200 students (an increase of 47%). Additionally, the school would change locations to occupy a space on the Wesley College Campus which was recently acquired by Delaware State University. The school would also alter their name to add “Early College Middle School” to their seventh and eighth grade program and name the school system “Early College at Delaware State University.” The proposed modifications would be effective July 1, 2022.

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. Horton began by explaining that the early college model is a nationwide initiative that allows students to receive a high school diploma and up to two years of college credits by taking a combination of high school and college classes during their high school years. According to a study conducted by the American Institute for Research, students in an early college program are more likely to graduate from high school, enroll in college, and obtain college degrees. ECHS is the only early college high school model in Delaware. Since its launch, ECHS has had three graduating classes with each class earning over 1,700 college credits. Graduates are granted acceptance at Delaware State University (DSU), but have been accepted to numerous other prestigious colleges across the country. The graduating classes have earned over 22.8 million dollars in scholarships. Students are involved in a number of extra-curricular activities. The school wishes to extend its offer of hopes and dreams to seventh and eighth grade students.

Dr. Edney stated that, at its inception, the core philosophy of ECHS was to provide access to a rigorous academic environment to low-income, under-represented, first generation college-going students. This model provides these students with the skills and tools necessary to be successful in college and career endeavors. The early college model is a powerful motivator of students. Dr. Edney was inspired by visits to two early college high schools and two early college middle schools and saw the readiness exhibited by middle school students when entering the high school model.

Dr. Edney stated that ECHS obtained a Charter School Program expansion grant for \$750,000, pending approval of their modification application. The school has worked with financial consultant, Dorcell Spence, to ensure their financial viability and with DSU to ensure the best placement for their school. This modification would allow middle school students in Delaware to have an earlier exposure to high rigor and an opportunity to create critical thinking skills earlier. This would prepare those students to begin college classes as high school juniors. Current students are excited to take courses on the campus of DSU.

Dr. McCants stated that she has been a part of ECHS for four and a half years. The school’s motto is “Dream Big Dreams.” Each year, ECHS’s graduation rates have surpassed that of the State’s

average. Disaggregated graduation data for sub-populations is also higher than that of the State's average. Collectively, ECHS students have earned 7,950 college credits. The school's first three graduating classes have earned an average of 30 Delaware State University credits, per student. For the class of 2018, sixty-one percent of ECHS graduates enrolled at DSU with very high retention rates over two years. Three of those students have already graduated from DSU. Sixty-four percent of 2019 graduates have enrolled at DSU with a one-year retention rate of 76.7%. The Early College model was developed specifically to increase college attendance among traditionally underserved populations.

Dr. McCants stated that ECHS will be adopting the College Board SpringBoard curriculum for English / Language Arts and Math for all grades, seven through twelve. The school uses Positive School Climate supports and believe that they are a major contributor to the success of the students at ECHS. ECHS's utilizes a college readiness rubric that aligns to David Conley's four keys to college and career readiness, Think, Know, Act, and Go. The rubric assesses the student's academics, attendance, behavior, teacher recommendations as well as proficiency and growth. Students are assessed eight times per year. The rubric is used to determine a student's readiness to take and remain in college courses. A similar measure will be used to assess a middle school student's readiness to take high school courses.

ECHS is available to all residents of Delaware. Almost half of their students come from the Caesar Rodney or Capital School District. If the expansion into middle school reflects current enrollment trends from the high school, ECHS's expansion will have little to no effect on the enrollment of the surrounding districts. The expansions will, however, provide parents in the surrounding area another educational option.

Ms. Savage stated that ECHS's model will increase engagement, build rigor and give middle school students a framework to build success skills. The model will prepare students for college sooner, rather than later.

Ms. Cobb stated that her child is a sixth grader and feels that ECHS's middle school would allow middle school students an easier transition into high school and give them an advantage in obtaining college credits.

Ms. George feels that ECHS has allowed her to achieve things that should would not have achieved if she did not attend. Ms. George took college classes during her sophomore year and will have sixty college credits upon graduation in May or 2021.

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

Ms. Oravez asked if there would be cost associated with the physical move of the school to the Wesley College campus.

Dr. Allen stated that the positioning of ECHS in downtown Dover would be of significant benefit. Delaware State will provide furniture and space necessary for the students of ECHS.

Mr. Moore congratulated the school on reducing their suspension numbers through the use of Restorative Practices. He reminded the school that they will need to adopt middle school

curriculum programs for consent education and for teen dating violence. Mr. Moore offered his assistance with those.

Mr. Moore reminded Dr. Edney that The Academy of Dover Charter School is also looking to expand into seventh and eighth grade and encouraged her to reach out to Head of School Dr. Michele Marinucci to coordinate efforts and collaborate. Dr. Edney responded that they will be having a conversation about this.

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.

In response to Dr. Fulkerson's review, Dr. Edney stated that the school is a project-based learning school and items are being developed for that purpose. The school has a nationally certified project-based learning trainer on staff that works with teachers.

Dr. McCants stated that the school currently has an English-Language Learner population of two and works with Back-to-Basics, contractually, to provide ELL support and services. The school will continue to use them as their population grows. ECHS will continue to utilize technology and train teachers to work with ELL students.

Dr. Fulkerson asked if ECHS was an active member of the Social Studies coalition. Dr. Edney replied that they are an active member. Dr. Fulkerson asked Dr. Edney to provide a signed agreement.

Dr. Fulkerson asked what the school's plan was to offer professional learning to seventh and eighth grade science teachers.

Dr. Edney responded that she would reach out to the Department of Education for ideas and ensure that teachers were properly trained in middle school science.

Dr. McCrae asked how middle school students would be prepared to meet middle school standards and demonstrate that they have met those standards while also incorporating high school standards for students that are ready.

Dr. Edney responded that their rubric would determine when students are ready to take high school courses in addition to middle school classes. The rubric assessment is viewed as a pattern and not a one-time assessment. If students exhibit readiness during their seventh-grade year, they will be permitted to take high school courses during their eighth-grade year.

Dr. McCrae stated that, unlike high school students, middle school students are still assessed using Smarter Balance and specific standardized tests for science and social studies, aligned to very specific grade-based standards. Her concern is that students would not be provided the opportunity to learn those specific middle school standards if they are taking high-school courses. Dr. McCrae encouraged the school to work closely with the Department of Education to ensure that the curriculum allows students to master grade-level standards.

Ms. Leatherbury asked what the school is planning to do help teachers meet the needs of their new seventh and eighth grade students with disabilities and increase the achievement and graduation rates of those students.

Dr. McCants stated that special education graduation rates at ECHS are very high. The school will hire additional special education teachers and para-educators to provide in-class support. The school contracts for psychology services, speech therapy, and occupational therapy. They will continue to do so unless their needs change. The school trains staff on how to support students with special needs in the classroom as well as students' social and emotional needs. Special education staff attends specific training on students with special needs.

Ms. Leatherbury asked if their students with special needs typically attend college.

Dr. McCants stated that some have while others pursue work or attend a trade school. The school works with students to develop a post-secondary plan. Students that transition to DSU do so seamlessly.

Dr. Saylor asked what process they followed to show that there is a need or interest is seventh and eighth grade at ECHS.

Dr. Edney responded that, anecdotally, she gets questioned often when they plan to have a middle school. The school worked with their parent-teacher association to survey and gauge whether there would be an interest in a middle school. Current families with middle school and elementary students have also expressed interest.

Ms. Fair asked how the school plans to retain students from middle school to high school.

Dr. Edney responded that the school plans to retain all of their middle school students.

Mr. Lofink asked if having a seventh and eighth grade would help the school retain more tenth grade students.

Dr. Edney responded that it would. She stated that there is a large attrition rate among early college high schools throughout the country. Having a middle school would help students establish a mindset earlier that will carry over into their high school careers.

Ms. Greene asked if the school's mentoring program for teachers would be divided into two programs, one for middle school teachers and one for high school teachers.

Dr. Edney stated that they haven't discussed mentoring, yet, but would work with their planning committee to determine the best way to provide mentoring. Ms. Greene stated that she would follow-up with the school.

## **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. Revised embedded assessment prompts for grades 7 and 8 in ELA. Examples of what these prompts could look like will be included in the full report below.

2. Revised Scope and sequence documents addressing gaps in Springboard to demonstrate alignment to the CCSS for mathematics, including the content and math practice standards and the instructional shifts for mathematics.
3. Confirmation of Membership in SSCD or Social Studies Curriculum Alignment Documents, Scope and Sequences Documents and Units of Instruction
4. Visual and Performing Arts Scope and Sequence Documents
5. A description of how high school standards will be aligned within middle school and how they will vertically articulate to the high school program and onward to the college course availability.
6. Provide data related to the interest in a middle school program at ECHS.
7. A structure of what the mentoring program will look like, including a description of how new teachers will be paired.

### **Next Steps:**

- The first of two public hearings will be held on February 16, 2021, beginning at 6:00 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 22, 2021.
- A second and Final Meeting of CSAC will be held on March 25, 2021, at 10:00 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 6:00 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—Early College @ DSU 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

8. Revised embedded assessment prompts for grades 7 and 8 in ELA. Examples of what these prompts could look like will be included in the full report below.
9. Revised Scope and sequence documents addressing gaps in Springboard to demonstrate alignment to the CCSS for mathematics, including the content and math practice standards and the instructional shifts for mathematics.
10. Confirmation of Membership in SSCD or Social Studies Curriculum Alignment Documents, Scope and Sequences Documents and Units of Instruction
11. Visual and Performing Arts Scope and Sequence Documents

### Content-Specific Comments, Commendations and Recommendations

#### ELA

##### Commendations:

- ECHS has chosen ELA curricular *materials* (Springboard 2018) that meet the expectations for text quality and complexity and alignment to the standards.
- The grade 8 curriculum maps included the highly effective mentor sentence strategy for supplemental language work.
- Over the past two years, ninth grade cohorts of students enrolled in ECHS have demonstrated steady increases in meeting the Evidence Based Reading and Writing benchmarks. The SAT suite of assessments do not measure proficiency in meeting the state standards, but rather the acquisition of literacy skills over the course a students' career. While not conclusive, this high-level data suggests that the overall literacy instruction at ECHS (ELA, Social Studies, and Science/Technical subjects) may be addressing unfinished learning from earlier in certain students' schooling.

##### Recommendations:

- Update curricular materials to the most recent version as soon as possible. Springboard 2021 are high quality instructional materials that meet all three gateway criteria - including providing teachers with strategies for meeting the needs of a range of learner

so the content is accessible to all learners and supports them in meeting or exceeding the grade-level standards. Further, they specifically provide SAT and AP connections for all students in their teacher guidance for planning the unit. These additions would support ECHS's mission to provide appropriate advanced instruction to as many students as possible.

- Prioritize volume of reading and the building of knowledge of topics over practice with state assessments and reading strategy instruction. The grade 8 curriculum maps make teacher suggestions for both in the District Expectations and Opportunities for Additional Instruction. As instructional time is both precious and limited, building knowledge around more topics has a much more significant research base behind it supporting increase in reading comprehension. And while counterintuitive, the approach is more aligned with standards-based instruction.

### **Expectations:**

- Revise culminating tasks/embedded assessments to promote the building of students' knowledge of the theme/topic. The ELA curricular materials ask students to engage in skills-integrated culminating tasks; however, the focus is consistently on the task itself, rather than building knowledge or thinking deeply about the texts students read during the course of the unit in service of transferring critical thinking skills to other texts and concepts. For example:
  - Grade 7, Unit 2, Embedded Assessment 1: *Write an Informational Essay and Participate in a Collaborative Discussion* Possible Revision: *Write an Informational Essay that explains the role of advertising in the lives of youth and then exchange ideas in a collaborative discussion.*
  - Grade 8, Unit 3, Embedded Assessment 1: *Present a panel discussion in front of your peers in which you explain how the theme or central idea of "finding light in the darkness" is developed in a narrative you have read.* Possible Revision: *Present a panel discussion that includes an oral reading of a significant passage from the texts read by your group. Your discussion should explain how the theme or central idea of 'finding hope in times of despair' is developed in each text.*

### **Math:**

#### **Recommendations:**

- The instructional materials do not meet the expectations for focus of the standards. The resources devote an insufficient amount of time to the major work of the grade. SpringBoard does not meet the expectations for coherence because they do not make sufficient connections between the standards within a grade and across grades.

### **Expectations:**

- Complete a comprehensive review of the Springboard Mathematics, taking into account the EdReports review information, to ensure that the materials are aligned to the CCSS, including the content and math practice standards and the instructional shifts for mathematics. Supply needed additions or revisions to address all alignment issues.
- Align all assessment items to the standard(s) which are being addressed and provide rubrics to support the scoring of all extended items.

**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.

Expectation:

12. 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](http://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:

13. Visual and Performing Arts Scope and Sequence Documents

**World Languages:**

N/A