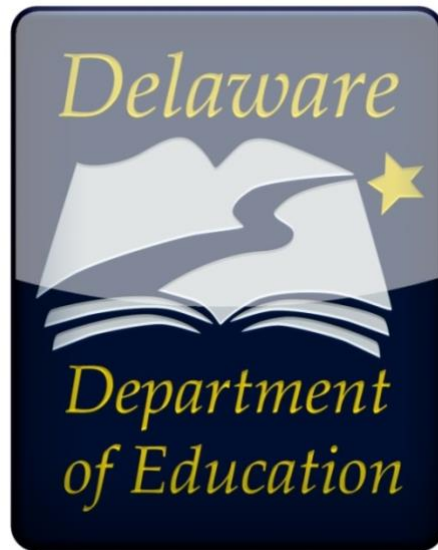


CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



GATWAY LAB SCHOOL

MAJOR MODIFICATION APPLICATION INITIAL REPORT

CSAC Initial Meeting: February 3, 2021
CSAC Report Published: February 9, 2021

On December 18, 2020, Gateway Lab School (GLS) submitted an application for a major modification of its charter. The following individuals comprise the Charter School Accountability Committee (CSAC):

Voting 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
- Michael Saylor, Ph.D., Education Associate, School Leadership, DDOE
- Brian Moore, Education Associate, School Climate and Discipline, DDOE
- Catherine Oravez, Education Associate, Federal Funds / LEA Indirect Costs, Federal Fund and Cost Recovery, DDOE
- James Pennewell, Education Associate, Capital Project Management, DDOE
- Tiffany Green, Education Associate, Mentoring and Induction, DDOE
- Joyce Leatherbury, Education Associate, General Supervision IDEA, DDOE
- Caitlin Gleason, Education Associate, Office of Early Learning, DDOE
- Tierra Fair, Community Member, Director, Community Engagement, United Way of Delaware
- Ted Molin, Community Member, Vice President, Wilmington Trust Investment Advisors, Inc.

Ex-Officio Members (Non-voting)

- Vince Lofink, Member, Delaware State Board of Education
- Kendall Massett, Executive Director, Delaware Charter Schools Network

Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)

- Leroy Travers, Lead Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- John Carwell, Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Finance Office, DDOE
- Alicia Balcerak, Administrative Secretary, Charter School Office, DDOE

Members of the Gateway Lab School (GLS)

- Catherine Dolan, Head of School
- Joyce Henderson, Board Chair
- Marlin White, Principal
- Pamela Draper, Business Manager, Lead Founder
- Dorcell Spence, Financial Consultant
- Marsha Rogers, Community Member
- Devie Smith, Member, Board of Directors

Ms. Klein shared that this was the Initial Meeting of the CSAC, relative to the Major Modification Application submitted by GLS. GLS applied for a modification to its charter to add grades kindergarten through two, increase approved enrollment by a total of 48 students (22.2%), change the name of their school to Gateway Charter School, and to relocate. The proposed modifications would begin in November of 2021 with enrollment and grade configuration changes to begin during the 2022/2023 school year.

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.

Ms. Dolan explained that GLS has determined that, historically, GLS's Enrollment does not follow a natural progression. The majority of their students enroll in middle school with lower enrollment numbers in the elementary grades. GLS has a waiting list for their middle school grades. The addition of grades kindergarten through two will allow for a natural progression and positively affect their total enrollment numbers as parents are less likely to transfer their child to a charter school in grade three. Ms. Dolan stated that GLS originally started at third grade because students were not being identified for special education services until grade three. They stated in their original charter that, after year two they would add additional grades, but did not do so. Currently there is a broader awareness of special needs students.

Ms. Dolan stated that GLS seeks to find a facility that costs less than the rent that they are currently paying. Ms. Dolan noted the advantages of owning its own facility as opposed to renting. Those advantages include:

- *Achieving a comparable salary schedule to a local district within 5% by 2023.*
- *Achieving their targeted annual teacher retention rates.*
- *Becoming a "best place" school by building or renovating a facility that can accommodate and enhance our educational model.*

Ms. Dolan stated that a thorough search for a new facility is under way.

Ms. Klein asked members of the CSAC whether there are any questions, comments, or feedback related to the requested modifications to the charter.

Dr. Saylor asked why the school would not start their expansion with a larger cohort of students. Their application states that their first cohort of kindergarten students will be sixteen students.

Ms. Dolan stated that they are starting conservatively with the intentions of building a foundation. The school wishes to take a practical look at their growth and ensure that they are being reasonable. She understands that more substantial growth at GLS can take place in the future. Mr. White stated that, when reviewing the data trends, GLS tends to receive more students in sixth grade.

Dr. Saylor asked what attributed to the jump in enrollment between grades three and four.

Mr. White stated that students often did not get identified for special services until grade three. Ms. Draper explained that parents often begin to realize that their child may have a learning disability in third grade and seek out GLS for their child's education. By grade six, parents are actively seeking special needs supports for their children and worry about them attending a large middle school.

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 stated that the modification indicates that most GLS students are either low income students, special education students, or English-language (EL) learners. He asked how the school plans to provide EL students the opportunity to learn in a culturally and linguistically responsive manner in the earlier grades. Ms. Dolan stated that the school has a staff member, Doreen Rathmell, that is certified in Wilson Reading. In addition, Ms. Rathmell has gotten additional degrees that certifies her to teach EL Learners with the understanding that this population continues to grow at GLS. Ms. Rathmell has taught at GLS since the school's inception and shows great dedication to the school and its students.

Dr. Fulkerson stated that, for math, the scope and sequence does not demonstrate clear alignment to Delaware standards.

Mr. White stated that they the Math in Focus curriculum that they are using is an updated version that meets all of the State standards.

Dr. Fulkerson asked how much time will be allotted daily for science instruction in grades kindergarten through two.

Mr. White explained that social studies and science will be taught on a rotating basis every other week, for 45 minutes per day.

Dr. Fulkerson stated that a scope and sequence document will need to be submitted for the Visual and Performing Arts curriculum.

Dr. McCrae asked if the Wilson-certified teacher offers professional development to other teachers at the school and whether GLS intends to have other teachers become Wilson-certified. Mr. White explained that the school holds morning meetings three days per week in which they study different content areas. During this time, Ms. Rathmell provides strategies for EL learners and for reading instruction. Ms. Dolan stated that the school starts their day with professional development each day. This occurs with either the full faculty or in small groups, based on content areas.

Dr. McCrae remarked that Wilson certification is very specific to dyslexia, which is a learning disability. Dr. McCrae stated that it is important that the learning strategies included with Wilson

be sustainable if the Wilson-certified teacher were to leave the school. Building capacity among staff members to incorporate dyslexia-centered approaches into their differentiated instruction is a novel approach.

Ms. Gleason asked why the school switched from using Engage New York to using Singapore Math.

Mr. White stated that they felt that teachers were having a difficult time grasping the concepts within Engage New York. The school formed a committee and researched math curricula. The committee felt that Singapore Math, in combination with Math in Focus, was a better choice for their teachers and students.

Ms. Gleason asked how the school will integrate curricula across subject areas.

Mr. White stated that the school does this, already, at certain times. For example, during Black History Month, the school utilizes the theme throughout the curriculum. The school works with someone from the University of Delaware that gives teachers ideas on integrating concepts cross-curricular. Ms. Gleason explained that utilizing inter-disciplinary connections are important to the contextual learning of young students. The school should focus on professional development that targets the ways in which younger children learn. Mr. White stated that the school is considering all aspects of their expansion as a team.

Ms. Oravez asked the school to explain their recruitment efforts to increase enrollment. Ms. Dolan explained that the school has hired a Parent Engagement Coordinator, understanding that their most effective advertisement is through word of mouth. This is verified through parental surveys that ask parents how they found the school. The Parent Engagement Coordinator has contacted each parent, individually, to ask how they found the school and what they are looking for in a school, among other items. She also encourages parents to reach out to others to talk about their experiences at GLS.

Ms. Draper stated that the school has utilized a number very diverse methods for recruiting. These include newspaper ads, billboards, movie theater ads, mall ads, etc. The school has found that referrals from others is the school's most effective recruitment tactic. They have found social media to be very successful for recruiting, as well. GLS is working with someone to continue and improve their social media recruitment. GLS does a full video about the school that they use in a variety of ways. This year they have begun a community education series in which they invite experts within the community (social workers, psychologists, etc.) to speak in webinars. These webinars are accessed by GLS parents as well as other members of the community. This outreach into the community will help GLS obtain more referrals. The school also interviews their alumni to have them share their stories of success in high school and college. The school feels that these personal stories will be a very powerful recruiting tool.

Ms. Henderson stated that the school is developing a marketing and communications committee that will work with the University of Delaware to improve their social media and other marketing.

The University of Delaware will audit the school's social media marketing and work with them to improve it. Additionally, GLS will be marketing their upcoming tenth anniversary with the assistance of the University of Delaware.

Ms. Oravez asked the school to provide additional information on the cost of relocation, not including the purchase of a facility, such as furniture, supplies, etc.

Ms. Dolan stated that the school received a Longwood Grant to purchase multi-sensory furniture that they have used to upgrade classrooms. This furniture, along with the school's technology, will travel with them to their new location. Ms. Spence explained that GLS is in the process of setting aside funds to ensure financial viability related to the Financial Framework. GLS currently has a contingency fund of \$1.3 million, of which one million is free of obligations. The school will have to determine how much they will put down on a facility, in addition to the costs needed for furniture and supplies. Additionally, the school was recently approved for a \$750,000 Charter School Program Expansion Grant, pending approval of this modification.

Mr. Pennewell asked if the school has a plan in place for financing using either traditional or alternative methods. Ms. Dolan explained that GLS has met with representatives from WSFS Bank to discuss traditional financing. The school has also worked with two other institutions about the possibility of bond financing. The school discovered that bond financing can be done for as low as one million dollars. GLS has also spoken to Greg Meece, former Head of School at Newark Charter, and he will work with the school as a guide while they explore facilities. GLS has discussed USDA financing, as well, but that option is dependent upon the location of the school. The school has explored the possibility of renovating existing buildings, purchasing land, and the potential of constructing a new building. GLS hopes to find something centrally located in New Castle County. The school has formed an expansion task force to explore all possibilities.

Ms. Dolan discussed her journey at GLS and the drift away from the mission that occurred when she had to step away from the school. She thanked everyone for their help and assistance whenever it is needed.

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. Submit evidence of addressing gaps in ELA by addressing the following:
 - a. Anchor texts are high quality and worthy of careful reading
 - b. Independent texts are high quality and consider a range of independent reading level
 - c. CCSS shifts through regular practice with complex text and the academic language; reading, writing and speaking grounded in evidence from the texts; and building knowledge through content.

- d. Resources and some recommendations on how to help with this are provided below.
2. Scope and sequence documents aligned to the CCSS for mathematics, including the content and math practice standards and the instructional shifts for mathematics.
3. Rationale for the adoption of “Math in Focus”.
4. Evidence of Membership in SSCD or Social Studies Scope and Sequences Documents and Units of Instruction
5. Visual and Performing Arts Scope and Sequence Documents

Next Steps:

- The first of two public hearings will be held on February 17, 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 24, 2021.
- A second and Final Meeting of CSAC will be held on March 25, 2021, at 11:00 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 7, 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.

Curriculum Review for Initial CSAC Meeting 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:

- Submit evidence of addressing gaps in ELA by addressing the following:
 - Anchor texts are high quality and worthy of careful reading
 - Independent texts are high quality and consider a range of independent reading level
 - CCSS shifts through regular practice with complex text and the academic language; reading, writing and speaking grounded in evidence from the texts; and building knowledge through content.
 - Resources and some recommendations on how to help with this are provided below.
- Scope and sequence documents aligned to the CCSS for mathematics, including the content and math practice standards and the instructional shifts for mathematics.
- Rationale for the adoption of Math In Focus.
- Evidence of Membership in SSCD or Social Studies Scope and Sequences Documents and Units of Instruction
- Visual and Performing Arts Scope and Sequence Documents

Content-Specific Comments, Commendations and Recommendations

ELA

Commendations:

- The scope and sequence addresses all ELA/Literacy standards.
- The scope and sequence provides opportunities to complete the types of writing defined by CCSS ELA/Literacy standards.
- Scope and Sequence, activities and tasks address grade-level CCSS for foundational skills
- The unit targets grade-level CCSS ELA/Literacy standards in reading, writing, speaking/listening and language.
- Writing tasks include respond to reading through writing.
- Writing tasks include a mix of on-demand and process writing.

Recommendations:

- Ensure the integration of reading, writing, speaking and listening activities throughout each unit.
- Ensure all students have regular access to complex text through close reading and close read-aloud (K-2) and provide opportunities for rich evidence-based discussion and writing about the text.
- Build and evaluate text-dependent questions. Find opportunities to ask questions that require students to make connections across texts. The following link is a resource that is useful for creating and evaluating text-dependent questions: <https://achievethecore.org/category/1158/ela-literacy-text-dependent-questions>

Expectations:

Submit evidence of full alignment by addressing the following:

- Anchor texts are high quality and worthy of careful reading
- Independent texts are high quality and consider a range of independent reading level
- CCSS shifts are addressed through regular practice with complex text and the academic language; reading, writing and speaking grounded in evidence from the texts; and building knowledge through content.
- If using Wonders 2014, refer to the Wonders Materials Adaptation Project to support full alignment of the materials <https://achievethecore.org/page/3131/wonders-materials-adaptation-project>.

Math:

Math curriculum documents that were submitted include the following:

- Forty-four page vendor provided scope and sequence for K-5. This document is organized by math topic but does not demonstrate clear alignment with the Delaware Content Standards for mathematics and does not show pacing information. This document does not indicate the copyright year of the materials.
- Additional scope and sequence document for grade K. This document shows alignment to content standards but not to math practice standards. This document does not show pacing information.
- Unit plan for Chapter 1 of Kindergarten. This document does list the alignment to standards (both content and practice standards) and indicates pacing. Some items in this plan show a copyright year of 2012. This document does give an assessment example with scoring rubric.
- The school is using Math in Focus curriculum materials but the copyright year for these materials is not provided.

Commendations:

- Unit plans include alignment to content ad practice standards and include pacing

Recommendations:

- Revisit the professional development plan to assist teachers in getting started in using the curricular materials and receiving on-going training and coaching support to implement the materials skillfully.

Expectations:

- Scope and sequence documents need to be updated to demonstrate the clear alignment to the adopted Delaware standards for mathematics (CCSS math content and practice standards). The current vendor provided document is organized by math topic but does not show alignment to standards or intended pacing; alignment and pacing information needs to be added to the documents.
- The rationale for the curricular choice of Math in Focus was not provided. The research and evidence of the effectiveness of the materials was not supplied. It is not clear what the copywrite year of Math in Focus will be used. **The modification application asks for this description to be provided.** The 2015 version of Math in Focus was scored poorly by EdReports and the newest versions have not been reviewed by EdReports. So, verifying that the materials are of high quality is the school's responsibility and must include something more compelling than statements, case studies or other research provided by the publisher.

Social Studies:

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

Expectation:

- Evidence of Membership in SSDC or Social Studies 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.

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