



**Department of Education  
Charter School Accountability Committee Meeting**

**May 22, 2014  
Formal Review Process  
Final Meeting - Minutes**

**ACADEMIA ANTONIA ALONSO CHARTER SCHOOL**

The meeting was called to order at 1:02 p.m. For the purpose of the record, introductions were made:

**Voting Members of the Committee**

- David Blowman, Chairperson of the Charter School Accountability Committee and Deputy Secretary, DDOE
- Karen Field Rogers, Associate Secretary, Financial Reform and Resource Management, DDOE
- Tasha Cannon, Deputy Officer Talent Recruitment, Selection and Strategy, Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Unit (TLEU), DDOE
- Barbara Mazza, Education Associate, Exceptional Children Resources, DDOE
- April McCrea, Education Associate, Science Assessment and STEM, DDOE

**Ex-officio Members (Non-voting)**

- Donna R. Johnson, Executive Director, State Board of Education
- Kendall Massett, Executive Director, Delaware Charter Schools Network

**Staff to Committee**

- Catherine Hickey, Deputy Attorney General, Counsel to the Committee
- Jennifer Nagourney, Executive Director, Charter School Office, DDOE
- John Carwell, Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Jennifer Carlson, Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Chantel Janiszewski, Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Financial Reform Resources, DDOE

**Representatives from Academia Antonia Alonso Charter School**

- Maria Matos, Board Chair
- Maria Alonso, Board Vice Chair
- Nora Gonzalez Castellanos, Board Treasurer
- Melissa Browne, Board Member
- William J. Hutchinson, Board Member
- Kathleen Laskowski, Board Member
- Jesús Urdiales, School Leader

**Representatives from Innovative Schools**

- Matt Swanson, Executive Board Chairman
- Deborah L. Doordan, Executive Director

- Caitlin Dennis
- Teresa Gerchman

#### **Additional Attendees**

- Virginia Esteban
- Jose Somato

#### **Meeting Purpose**

On April 17, 2014, La Academia was placed on Formal Review by the Secretary of Education with the assent of the State Board of Education due to the missed enrollment target to determine whether the school was violating the terms of its charter. On April 30, 2014, the Charter School Accountability Committee (CSAC) met with representatives of La Academia for the Initial Meeting to review the relevant statutory criteria of 14 Del. C. § 506(c)(1) and §§512 (1) and (7) through (9) and made an initial determination that the school was violating the terms of its charter. On May 20, 2014 La Academia submitted a comprehensive response to the CSAC Initial Report requirements. On May 22, 2014 the CSAC committee met to discuss the concerns about each of the non-compliance areas to make a final determination as to whether the charter was in compliance and if remedial measures were necessary.

#### **Discussion**

##### **April 1<sup>st</sup> Enrollment Requirement**

David Blowman stated that the current enrollment as of May 22<sup>nd</sup> was 263. He then requested that La Academia provide a highlight of the charter's response to the initial report. Kathleen Laskowski of La Academia explained that the school relied on traditional methods of recruitment including: printed material, website, social media, paid advertisement, community outreach, and follow-up with interested families until December. In December, the charter began home visits and employed a student recruitment consultant working with Latino community. Later another consultant was added to target certain communities. The charter needed a lot of resources and broader approach with staff that have a proven track record. Mr. Blowman explained that he was concerned that parents may not have a clear understanding of what they have agreed to, given the quick increase in enrollment. Ms. Laskowski explained that La Academia is in contact with parents and is taking the initiative to build relationships. Melissa Browne stated that once the grand opening occurs it will keep contact growing amongst students and parents and the charter will soon release a newsletter. Donna Johnson asked for a breakdown of students by grade. Mr. Blowman stated that La Academia has enrolled 175 kindergarteners and 88 first graders.

*The Committee concluded that the April 1<sup>st</sup> enrollment requirement is not met, however, the school has now reached compliance with the current enrollment figure.*

##### **Economic Viability**

Nora Gonzalez Castellanos described changes in order to compare the original budget to the new budget which is based on the May 1, 2014 count. La Academia was awarded a grant totaling \$525,000 from the USDOE for three years. Ms. Gonzalez Castellanos explained that the technology expense figure was reduced because funding is not required for infrastructure since moving to the CEB location. The renovation budget was also no longer needed because of the move to Community Education Building (CEB). The Charter Management Organization (CMO) fees were changed due to reorganization. According to La Academia, the CMO fee adjustment was due to an agreement modification that simply changed support provided. The charter increased the professional development funding to allow for

more opportunities. Finally, funding was increased for special services provided by therapists, traveling and technology consultant. Karen Field Rogers stated that given the budget is comprised of averages; the school needs to be kept abreast of the budget as the number of students is finalized.

*The Committee concluded that the economic viability requirement is met.*

### **Facilities**

Mr. Blowman stated that given the enrollment figures, the CEB relationship issues have been addressed. Ms. Gonzalez Castellanos stated that La Academia will receive their Certificate of Occupancy by June 15, 2014. She also clarified that CEB will partner with health providers to provide services.

*The Committee concluded that the facility requirement is met.*

### **Fidelity to Approved Charter**

Mr. Blowman stated that the potential impact on instruction for special education is less of an issue given the enrollment figures but requested La Academia to provide an explanation of how to manage the kindergarten and first grade. Jesús Urdiales stated that their budget includes three Special Education teachers as well as specialists. Melissa Browne explained that the kindergarten bubble was always planned and they will enroll 100 students each year. Barbara Mazza asked for the number of enrolled students that would require special education. Mr. Urdiales stated that at this point only one student enrolled has an IEP, but they know of several students with 504 plans. Mr. Blowman advised La Academia to have all their Individual Education Programs (IEP) in place by September 30, 2014 to ensure funding. Ms. Mazza also encouraged that the school adhere to the regulations around Child Find and if the school faced more complex needs they need to reach out to Access at University of Delaware.

*The Committee concluded that the fidelity to approved charter requirement is met.*

### **Capacity of Leadership Team**

Deborah Doordan stated that the CMO shares responsibility with school and they could have provided a stronger signal around the April 1st deadline. Ms. Gonzalez Castellanos stated that the committee has dug deeper into the CMO and the Board is building capacity to succeed. She also stated that the CMO has made a mistake and needs to be accountable. Ms. Gonzalez Castellanos stated that the CMO has not acknowledged their mistake. Matt Swanson stated that he is completely committed and fully responsible for the entire process and will take responsibility for the outcomes. Mr. Blowman stated that there is a need for absolute clarity and ultimately the Board is responsible. Ms. Johnson questioned if termination of the CMO contract would jeopardize the \$525,000 grant. La Academia's Board did not know that answer because the grant was submitted by the CMO on behalf of the school. Maria Matos stated that the Board is committed to an oversight committee that is not lax and they will be good stewards of public money. According to Ms. Matos, if the CMO does not step up then they will have to part terms. Jennifer Nagourney stated that the Department of Education has put a lot of effort put into the technical assistance sessions and supporting the charters preparing to open and the April 1<sup>st</sup> requirement was made very clear. She explained that the organizational, financial and academics are intertwined and all are required to operate efficiently to be successful. Ms. Matos stated that the Board is under new management and has a greater sense of responsibility and accountability.

*The Committee concluded that the capacity of leadership team requirement is met.*

## Summary and Recommendations

- April 1 Requirement – Out of compliance but achieved compliance. There is still a concern about stability of 1st year agreements.
- Economic Viability – Submitted a budget that is viable and addressed most of the concerns.
- Facilities – Addressed and clarified with timing of reports.
- Fidelity to Approved Charter – Issues of special needs have been addressed.
- Capacity of Leadership Team – The grant status requires clarity. The Board has verbalized commits.

## Conclusion

A motion was made and seconded that the charter for Academia Antonia Alonso to be placed on probation with the following conditions:

1. By June 30, 2014 La Academia shall provide the Department with a plan that describes the oversight effort the Board of Directors will employ over the CMO. The plan shall include measurable goals that will be reported to the CSO monthly for the first year along with a report of issues discovered and corrective action taken. If after six months the CSO determines the intervention efforts to be sufficient, the CSO may suspend future reporting on this condition.
2. By October 30, 2014 La Academia shall provide the Department with final budget as of the September 30<sup>th</sup> unit count which shall include proper documentation of funding sources. Upon submission of the budget, any adjustments to funding categories must be communicated to the CSO with the proper documentation to support the need to adjust the budget.
3. By the 1<sup>st</sup> of each month, La Academia shall provide the Department with a summary of its monthly enrollment changes, and the response to any drops in enrollment until the September 30, 2014 unit count.

The motion was unanimously carried.

Mr. Blowman stated the next steps in the new application process as follows:

- The Final Report will be issued no later than May 28, 2014
- A final public hearing will be held on June 12, 2014, at 5:00 p.m. in the 2nd Floor Cabinet Room in the Townsend Building in Dover
- The Secretary of Education will announce his decision at the June 19, 2014 State Board of Education meeting

The meeting concluded at 1:50 p.m.