

Denver Public Schools



**The District School Improvement And
Accountability Council (SIAC)
Comments and Recommendations
to the Board of Education
On
Charter School Renewal Applications**

November 2010

Background

For many years, the District School Improvement and Accountability Committee (District SIAC) has reviewed applications for new charter schools and provided the Board of Education with its recommendations on whether to grant the requested charters, thereby establishing a new DPS school. A school created by this process is established for a set term, usually three years, and at the end of such term may continue in existence only if its charter is renewed by the Board. District SIAC has taken on the additional responsibility of reviewing and making recommendations as to whether the Board should renew the charters of those schools whose contractual term is expiring at the end of the present school year.

Process

To complete our review in a timely fashion, District SIAC formed a committee from its membership that included:

Michelle Moss, DPS Parent, Former DPS Board Member, Chair of the Subcommittee

Paula Ortlieb, DPS Parent, DPS Employee, Chair of District SIAC

Jesse Sutherland, Community Person

Rita Montero, Community Person, Former DPS Board Member

Jacqui Shumway, DPS Parent

The New Schools Office provided the committee with the applications and the evaluation of the applicant's CSAP scores for the past three years. The School Performance Framework (SPF) was also used as a tool for evaluating each of the charter schools. The committee met on three occasions to consider each school and reach consensus on our recommendations.

Criteria for Renewal

As in the past, the primary focus of District SIAC's evaluation of these applications for charter renewal is student achievement. This year we relied extensively on the School Performance Framework rating developed by the District, including not only the "stoplight" charts but also some of the underlying data and quadrant maps. To the extent possible, we took into account the school's response to the elements of the SPF rating. We also referenced the Colorado Growth Model ratings developed by the State Board of Education that in many respects closely resembles the SPF rating.

Specifically, we examined the percentage of students scoring proficient or above for reading, writing, and math for the years 2008, 2009 and 2010. We focused on any trends that the data reveal for students in a specific age cohort. We also compared the school's CSAP and SPF ratings with schools of similar size and demographics in terms of poverty levels (as measured by eligibility for free and reduced lunch).

Odyssey Charter School

2010 SPF Rating – Meets Expectation

2009 SPF Rating – Meets Expectation

2008 SPF Rating – Meets Expectation

District SIAC Recommendation – Renew Charter – 3 year Term

Rational for Recommendation:

The SPF data for Odyssey shows a school that is struggling in the elementary grades, but is doing well in the middle school. Over the past three years in the elementary school, Odyssey has not shown significant progress in meeting the District's expectations in reading, writing or math. Their growth ratings in all subject areas are "approaching expectations". In addition, over the past three years their achievement gaps in reading and math have grown dramatically. In their application, Odyssey explains that, "The growth gains have been stronger in Odyssey's middle school years than the elementary years, giving us a clear opportunity to focus our efforts in the lower grades." (Page 1 Executive Summary) District SIAC notes however that the problems in the elementary school have persisted at least over the three years we examined. The gaps have gotten significantly greater over those three years in both math and reading.

The middle school has done significantly better than the elementary grades. They are consistently meeting or exceeding the district's expectations in all subject areas. While their gaps in achievement are significantly lower than the elementary school, gaps remain in both reading and math.

District SIAC commends Odyssey for their exceptionally high enrollment demand. We recognize that the school is only able to accept approximately 10% of the students who would like to enroll in Odyssey. We would however caution the board to continue to monitor the progress of the elementary grades before deciding to allow Odyssey to double their current enrollment.

Wyatt Edison Charter

2010 SPF Rating – Meets Expectations

2009 SPF Rating – Meets Expectations

2008 SPF Rating – Meets Expectations

District SIAC Recommendation – Renew Charter – 2 year Term

Rational for Recommendation:

District SIAC applauds Wyatt Edison for being a Colorado Department of Education Center for Excellence.

Wyatt Edison shows strong results in their middle school and weaker results in the elementary grades. The middle school is meeting or exceeding the district's growth expectations in all subject areas. They met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in both reading and math in 2010. The SPF does show that gaps persist in all subject areas in the middle school.

The SPF shows that the elementary grades continue to show low performance in all subject areas. CSAP results for 2010 do show some positive change, but in all subject areas, at least 50% of the students are not scoring proficient or advanced. Wyatt Edison's application argues that the achievement gap in reading among, "Black Students, Hispanic Students and Students qualifying for Free & Reduced lunch (FRL) has essentially closed." (Page 5) They also report that, "The Reading achievement gap between Limited English Proficient students and All students has been reduced from approximately 30 percentage points in 2008, to approximately nine (9) percentage points in 2010." (Page 5) Yet, the 2010 SPF rating for Gaps in Reading, Math and Writing are all "Does Not Meet". The SPF rating for Colorado English Language Assessment (CELA) is "Approaching".

District SIAC recommends a two year renewal based on the low performance of the elementary school and the persistent gaps in the middle school.

Finally, we agree with Wyatt Edison's application that the diversity of the Charter Board is a concern. We recommend that the Board more closely represent the population of the school.

Pioneer Charter School

2010 SPF Rating – Meets Expectation

2009 SPF Rating – Accredited on Watch

2008 SPF Rating – Accredited on Watch

District SIAC Recommendation – Renew Charter – 2 year Term

Rational for Recommendation:

District SIAC commends Pioneer for voluntarily undergoing turnaround strategies to increase the academic achievement of their students. We also believe the decision to wait to add grades 7 and 8 was appropriate.

Pioneer is meeting expectations in growth for each of the tested subjects. They are also meeting expectations in AYP for 2010. In CSAP Proficient/Advanced, they fell to “Does Not Meet” on the SPF in reading, writing and science. They also continue to score “Does Not Meet” in the gap measurements for all subject areas. While their CSAP scores have gone up over the last three years, Pioneer students continue to test far below the state average in all grades and subjects except third grade math.

District SIAC recommends that the District continues to monitor Pioneer’s progress. This is the first year for a new principal and a new curriculum.

Finally, there is a math error on page 10 of the application. On question 2.5 in the chart, Pioneer shows their Reading English Language Learners (ELL) gap percentages from 2008 to 2010. They show a 20.14 reduction in the gap for this cohort. The reduction for this group is actually 11.61.

Additional Concerns

As the members of this committee looked at the SPF ratings for each of the schools we evaluated and looked at their CSAP scores, we noted that we were uncomfortable with the SPF ratings. The schools in the “Meets Expectations” category show a wide spectrum of student achievement. Of the schools we examined, Odyssey had a score of 72% while Wyatt Edison had a score of 56%. The achievement levels of the students in these two schools show a wide gap in scores.

School	2008 % at or Above Prof				2009 % at or Above Prof				2010 % at or Above Prof			
	Reading	Math	Writing	Science	Reading	Math	Writing	Science	Reading	Math	Writing	Science
Odyssey	86	64	64	47	84	77	66	55	78	74	62	58
Wyatt	43	34	33	8	48	42	35	14	50	43	32	13

It is difficult for this committee to consider a school with fewer than 50% of the students scoring proficient or advanced as a school that meets the District’s expectations. We believe that this sets too low a bar for any of the schools in DPS (see Appendix A). It also makes the evaluation of these schools difficult. Schools at the bottom end of the SPF category can argue that they are meeting expectations when in fact; their students are not meeting the expectations of the State or the District.

A second concern is one that Odyssey expressed in their application. This concern has to do with funding. There is a level of uncertainty regarding the per pupil funding that will be allocated from the state legislature. Schools that serve small populations will have a more difficult time absorbing funding decreases. If the state reduces per pupil expenditures, charters may find that they have significant financial shortfalls. The District needs to consider this as they approve charters with small enrollments and should ask how schools would compensate for decreases in Per Pupil Operating Revenue (PPOR).

Appendix A – CSAP Scores for Highest and Lowest Elementary Schools in “Meets Expectations” Rating on the SPF

University Park Elementary School and Castro Elementary School both “Meet Expectations” on the School Performance Framework. The difference in percentage of students scoring proficient and advanced on CSAP in all subject matters is significant.

School	Math % Proficient & Advanced	Reading % Proficient & Advanced	Writing % Proficient & Advanced	Science % Proficient & Advanced
UNIVERSITY PARK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	80	80	64	49
CASTRO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	37	34	18	31