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**Initial Memorandum To  
DeKalb Preparatory Academy  
November 3, 2023**

The DeKalb County School District's Initial Memo provides the petitioner with feedback from the DCSD Charter Petition Review Committee. The Initial Memo includes identified strengths, clarifying questions, and requests for additional information or documentation.

Directions:

1. Review the Initial Memo.
2. Respond in writing to each item. Written responses should be submitted with the revised petition. Below is an example.

**Feedback:** Describe the process for collecting data on stakeholder satisfaction. It is unclear as written.

**Petitioner's Response:** *Process revised in petition. See pages 2-3. Copy of survey included. See exhibit #32.*

3. Revise the original petition and save the revised document in Microsoft Word. All changes made to the original petition should be made using the "track changes" feature in MS Word. **No additional changes to the petition will be accepted unless requested by the DeKalb Board of Education.**



## **How to Submit the Final Revised Petition and Response to the Initial Memo**

By November 10, 2023 (12:00 PM), deliver to the School Innovation/Governance Department via DropBox at [charterschools@dekalbschoolsga.org](mailto:charterschools@dekalbschoolsga.org) the revised petition (including exhibits) and the Response to the Initial Memo. Use electronic folders for sections, exhibits, and appendices.

Your Application Package must include the following:

1. Microsoft Word version of your Application Cover Page (page 14)
2. REDLINED Microsoft Word version of your Application and Exhibits
3. PDF version of your Complete Application Packet in the following order: Cover Sheet, Application, signed Assurances Form(s), Affidavit, and Exhibits
4. PDF version of your Locally-Approved Charter School Partners Roles and Responsibilities Chart
5. Excel version of your completed Budget Templates
6. Microsoft Word version of the Response to the Initial Memo

Faxed or emailed copies will not be accepted. Only complete applications that comply with these guidelines will be evaluated.



## **SUMMARY**

On October 17, 2023, DeKalb Preparatory Academy submitted a DCSD charter renewal application seeking the DeKalb Board of Education's approval for a five-year contract term. In evaluating the petition, the Charter Petition Review Committee identified aspects of the petition, which would affect students attending the charter school.

### **Commendations from the Petition Review Committee:**

- The Head of School and Governing Board collaborate to analyze the root causes of persistent deficiencies in programming.
- DeKalb Preparatory Academy has demonstrated a strong financial performance and has a substantial fund balance.
- The recent change in leadership has fostered communication between the Governing Board and the school.

### **Process:**

Items requiring a response are listed below. If applicable, questions correlate to the page number in the Microsoft Word version of the petition. Additional areas of concern may be raised by DeKalb Board of Education members during their review of the petition or by GADOE during its review process.

### **Community Support**



Item	Committee's Feedback	Petitioner's Response
1	Question #2 asks the petitioner to describe why the academic program is innovative in the school district. Please clarify. – p. 12	See update on pages 12-13 of the redlined petition.
2	How did the governing board identify “enrollment fluctuations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic” as the cause of the decrease in DPA’s waitlist? – p. 14	See update on pages 14-15 of the redlined petition.

### School Governance

Item	Committee's Feedback	Petitioner's Response
3	What professional expertise does each member bring to the Governing Board? How many terms has each member served? - Exhibit 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Suzette Arnold- <i>Expertise</i> - Federal grant management, organizational management, <b>Terms Served</b>- 2+ (8 years)</li> <li>2. Janelle Wilhite - <i>Expertise</i> - Accounting and finance, <b>Terms Served</b> - 2+ (8 years)</li> <li>3. Wanda McKay - <i>Expertise</i> - Community involvement and parent advocacy, <b>Terms Served</b> - Currently serving 2nd term (5 years)</li> <li>4. Roberta Walker - <i>Expertise</i> - Academic and educational leadership, <b>Terms Served</b> - 2+ (7 years)</li> <li>5. Bridget Robinson - <i>Expertise</i> - Academic and educational leadership, <b>Terms Served</b> - 1st term (started in July 2023)</li> <li>6. Kathy Ann Young - <i>Expertise</i> - Community involvement and DPA parent, <b>Terms Served</b> - 1st term (started in August 2023)</li> </ol>
4	Board members shall serve a term of three (3) years from the date of their appointments or until their successors are seated. A Director may serve up to two (2) consecutive terms. What has been the rationale of the DPA GB to (seemingly) waive this term	Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, board member recruitment slowed down making it difficult to replace board members with longer terms. Additionally, with the leadership transitions that occurred during the contract extension, more veteran board members remained in place



	limitation? - Exhibit 2	to provide organizational stability.
5	Figure 3 in the petition indicates that DPA met the governance performance goal regarding GA Open Meetings Compliance. During SY22-23, DCSD cited DPA for violation of State Board Rule 160-4-9-.06, and the Georgia Open Records Act, O.C.G.A. §50-18-70. – p. 18	See update on page 18 of the redlined petition.

### Academic Plan

Item	Committee's Feedback	Petitioner's Response
6	Describe how the needs of students with disabilities are met through DPA's Saturday School Program. - p. 59	See update on page 60 of the redlined petition.
7	<p>During the contract extension, three Letters of Concerns were issued for Special Education non-compliance. Several of the recommendations have not been addressed or continue to be concerns. How does DPA ensure that compliance issues raised to the school are addressed as new teachers transition into their positions?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Special Education Teachers are required to distribute accommodations to staff members. Documentation of signatures of review and distribution must be uploaded into Infinite Campus.</li> <li>b. DPA will meet regularly with the LTSE to review schedules and IEPs to ensure adequate services are delivered to Students with Disabilities.</li> <li>c. DPA's Instructional Lead Team will conduct daily spot checks to ensure all PEC students are following the designated schedule throughout the school day.</li> <li>d. Special Education staff will receive staff development as follows: March- IEP Writing Course and Accommodations in Testing; April- Co-Teaching Models; May- Progress</li> </ol>	See updates on pages 61-62.



	<p>Monitoring; July- FAPE and Dyslexia; August- Behavior Problems.</p> <p>e. Teachers are collecting Progress Monitoring Data every 4.5 weeks and providing parents with updates on student progress.</p> <p>Provide responses to all outstanding letters of concern related to state- and federally- mandated services to students with disabilities no later than November 10, 2023. – p. 59</p>	
<b>8</b>	<p>The petitioner states that predictive tools have increased DPA’s educators’ ability to predict student performance on state-mandated assessments. Please provide examples of how this increased ability to predict student performance on state-mandated assessments has led to increased student performance on state-mandated assessments. – p. 43</p>	See update on page 44 of the redlined petition.
<b>9</b>	<p>In the past two years you were cited in a Georgia DOE complaint and an OCR complaint related to providing FAPE. How does DPA monitor Exceptional Education Students' progress in the General Education Setting to ensure that FAPE is provided? - p. 59</p>	See update on page 63 of the redlined petition.
<b>10</b>	<p>DPA's charter renewal is based on whether specific goals were met on the extended contract. One of the goals (Goal 7) on your extended contract was to have implemented all essential features as defined in Section 5 of the charter contract in all material respects. The petitioner reports that with respect to PBL, with an emphasis on AVC Technology, DPA met its goal in the last three years of the charter and extension. What data is used to assess project-based learning at DPA? What has been the impact of project-based learning on student outcomes? P. 20</p>	See update on page 20 of the redlined petition.
<b>11</b>	<p>The petitioner included a sociodemographic comparison in its analysis of students’ GMAS performance. Please clarify how</p>	See update on page 31 of the redlined petition.



	subgroup data analysis informs decisions related to instruction and student support at DPA. – pp. 26-33	
<b>12</b>	What has DPA identified as the root cause(s) of challenges with MTSS progress monitoring during the current charter term? – p. 68	See update on page 69 of the redlined petition.
<b>13</b>	The petitioner states that its new leadership structure is “more streamlined than the previous ‘top heavy’ structure thus allowing more resources to be allocated at the classroom level; both in instructional resources, and increased compensation for instructional staff.” Please clarify how the addition of administrative staff in the new structure is more streamlined than the previous “top heavy” structure. – p. 80	See update on page 80 of the redlined petition.
<b>14</b>	The petition mentions that DPA can provide more extensive offerings than traditional public schools given the flexibility afforded charter schools. What extensive offerings are provided at DPA that are not provided at other DeKalb County School District locations? p. 13	See update on page 13 of the redlined petition.
<b>15</b>	Does DPA still implement EnVision Math? What metrics were used to measure the impact of implementation of EnVision Math on students’ performance? - p. 20	See update on page 20 of the redlined petition.
<b>16</b>	Page 28 -30 of the petition shows that DPA consistently did not outperform their peers at the state and district level. What was determined to be the root cause of this difference? P. 28-30	See update on page 29 of the redlined petition.
<b>17</b>	What other academic performance data does the Governing Board monitor to drive decision making? - Governing Board Capacity Interview	The governing board uses MAP, GMAS, pre/post tests, iReady and common formative assessment data to monitor program quality and drive decision making.



<p><b>18</b></p>	<p>What screener do you use to determine eligibility for ESOL services and what curriculum is used for ESOL classes? How does DPA provide translation and interpretation services for families whose primary home language is other than English (PHLOTE)? What are your criteria for exiting students from the ESOL program? - p. 69</p>	<p>See updates on the following pages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Page 70 - screener</li> <li>● Page 70 - translation of materials and interpretation</li> <li>● Page 71 - ESOL curriculum</li> <li>● Page 72 - exit criteria (this information is not redlined because it was already included in the petition.</li> </ul>
<p><b>19</b></p>	<p>No CCRPI scores were included in the School Accountability report. The school entered an N/A for school years 2018-2019 and 2021-2022, which is inaccurate. - Exhibit 5</p>	<p>See updated Exhibit 5.</p>

**Financial Plan**

Item	Committee’s Feedback	Petitioner’s Response
<p><b>20</b></p>	<p>During the Superintendent’s site visit to DPA, the Head of School asserted that DPA cannot offer salaries comparable to the district. Describe the Governing Board’s process for prioritizing areas of need and allocating resources to provide FAPE for students. - Exhibit 23</p>	<p>Based on the root cause analysis conducted in spring 2023, the DPA board has prioritized allocating additional resources and plans to update the salary scale, which is critical to increasing academic performance and organizational effectiveness.</p>
<p><b>21</b></p>	<p>DPA’s five-year budget forecast under facilities allots \$100,000 to building improvement for FY2024, but none for FY2025 through FY2029. Which building upgrades are scheduled for FY2024, totaling \$100,000? Does DPA anticipate having any building improvements after FY2024? If not, explain why not. - Exhibit 23</p>	<p>See the revised budget in Exhibit 23.</p>
<p><b>22</b></p>	<p>During your Governing Board Capacity Interview on Tuesday, October 31, the board was asked the following question. Please confirm that DPA has six full-time certified special education teachers, each responsible for a caseload of between 9-10 students. (Section Academic   Performance Plan) The board responded that DPA has six (6) full time special education teachers.</p> <p>DPA has forecasted a five-year budget prediction of \$65,000 for staff classified as special education teachers for FY2024 – FY2029. Is this</p>	<p>See the revised budget in Exhibit 23.</p>



	the total budgeted amount for the six (6) full-time special education instructors listed in the five-year budget projection? If not, then where? - Exhibit 23	
<b>23</b>	For the DeKalb Preparatory Academy, the exhibit is the Premium Finance Agreement, Statement of Values, Certificate of Completion and Commercial Insurance Application. A Certificate of Insurance is needed; Exhibit 16	See proof of insurance in Exhibit 16.
<b>24</b>	Provide a copy of the facilities management plan and policy referenced by the Governing Board Chair during the Governing Board Capacity Interview.	The facility plan is located in Exhibit 30. The policy is in development, but has not been ratified as of yet.

**Organizational Plan**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Committee's Feedback</b>	<b>Petitioner's Response</b>
<b>25</b>	Describe the organizational challenges that DPA has faced during the current term with special attention to challenges that directly impacted school climate and culture. – Superintendent Site Visit	During the current charter term, DPA faced organizational challenges that directly impacted the climate and culture of the school. Changes in leadership (top executive) and staff turnover have been two of the most impactful challenges as it is very difficult to increase organizational effectiveness with a high percentage of staff attrition.
<b>26</b>	Provide an update on DPA's 2023-2024 staff retention results and initiatives. What supports has DPA put in place for staff members in the aftermath of the pandemic? – Superintendent Site Visit	DPA does not have a retention rate for the current (2023-2024) school year as of yet. The governing board and head of school have put various incentives and supports in place. DPA is offering signing bonuses, as well as retention and longevity incentives to increase retention dramatically in the next charter term. A significant pay scale increase has already been implemented across the school for all certificated positions. The DPA board has also added ADP Total Source for their staff, which provides mental health support, legal advice and a host of other employee services.



<p><b>27</b></p>	<p>Describe the Governing Board’s process for allocating resources to maintain the facility. Does DPA have a facility master plan? If so, please provide a copy. – Operations Site Visit</p>	<p>During the budget planning process, the governing board seeks input from the Head of School to determine facility needs and budget resources accordingly.</p> <p>The facility plan is located in Exhibit 30.</p>
<p><b>28</b></p>	<p>Clarify how DPA’s leveraging of the broad flexibility waiver in the area of teacher certification led to better outcomes for students. - p. 13</p>	<p>See update on page 13 of the redlined petition.</p>
<p><b>29</b></p>	<p>Provide examples of the professional development and training opportunities into which DPA has invested in response to compliance-related concerns related to instruction and special education services. – p. 21</p>	<p>Response provided on page 22 of the redlined petition.</p>
<p><b>30</b></p>	<p>The petition states that “for the past three years, DPA has lost 53% of its staff each year.” What “strategic steps” is DPA taking to address this trend? Specifically, what steps is DPA taking to address high turnover and training/development of special education staff? – p. 39</p>	<p>See update on page 40 of the redlined petition.</p>
<p><b>31</b></p>	<p>The petition states that DPA also has a fully certified Special Education Lead Teacher that provides oversight for the program by monitoring the identification/evaluation process...etc. How does the person in this role support the newly hired special education teachers? – p. 67</p>	<p>See update on page 67 of the redlined petition.</p>
<p><b>32</b></p>	<p>DPA did not submit an update on the percentage of certified staff by September 30, 2023, as required by its conditional contract extension. Provide data on the percentage of certified teachers for SY22-23 and SY23-24. – p. 40</p>	<p>See update on page 40 of the redlined petition.</p>
<p><b>33</b></p>	<p>The petitioner states “Teacher retention at DPA has been an ongoing challenge. This is due to several factors; 1) teacher salaries are not sufficiently competitive, 2) teachers leave after</p>	<p>See update on page 77 of the redlined petition.</p>



	they obtain certification, and 3) burnout from the extended day and year model.” How has DPA addressed factors 2 and 3? – p. 77	
<b>34</b>	The following statement in the petition is incomplete: “DPA is anticipating a retention rate of % for the 2023-2024 school year.” Please complete this statement. – p. 78	See update on page 80 of the redlined petition.
<b>35</b>	The petitioner states that “during the extended contract period, DPA continued to experience higher than acceptable staff turnover. Organizational shifts of this magnitude do not allow for the rapid improvement the school needed to demonstrate during the two-year window.” What evidence supports that DPA has the “organizational capacity and board oversight to provide an innovative and high-quality student experience in the next charter term?” - pp. 81-82	See update on page 83 of the redlined petition.
<b>36</b>	<p>In your renewal petition, you submitted the DCSD Code of Conduct, along with your own schoolwide discipline plan. Is it DPA’s plan to implement both for discipline and safety procedures?</p> <p>Has DPA reviewed both documents to determine if there are any procedural conflicts or concerns?</p> <p>If you do not plan to utilize the DCSD Code of Student Conduct, how do you plan to handle legally mandated procedures like hearings, appeals (local, state, and Superior Court), violations with state-mandated penalties, etc.? Do you have a school police contact? If yes, have you discussed procedures for handling threats, weapons, bomb threats, evacuations, etc.? Has DPA attended the training sessions on student discipline conducted by the Department of Student Relations? - Exhibit 12 and 13</p>	The DPA discipline plan addresses the day-to-day protocols, while the DCSD Code of Conduct is used to guide DPA and ensure that due process is provided for all students in all discipline matters.