



**DeKalb PATH Academy Response to Initial Memorandum**  
**November 8, 2024**

DeKalb PATH Academy appreciates the opportunity to provide additional information and clarification regarding aspects of our academic, financial and operational activities. Please see the information below and related attachments.

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

By November 8, 2024 (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 guidelines will be evaluated.

complete applications that comply with these

## **SUMMARY**

On October 17, 2024, DeKalb PATH 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:**

- It is evident that the DeKalb PATH stakeholders have a compelling case for why the school fills an unmet need in the DeKalb County School District.
- The Governance Board demonstrates cultural competency specific to the community with whom it works.
- Despite a history of Governance Board weaknesses, the new Governing Board presents as high-functioning, knowledgeable, and collaborative.
- The financial plan is developed and aligned with the school's mission, vision, and education program.

### **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	The charter petition mentions 40-50% of students are accepted into competitive schools. (p. 11). What is PATH's definition of competitive schools?	PATH defines "competitive schools" as educational institutions that may maintain selective admission standards or require students to enter through a lottery process. These schools typically attract a high number of applicants, and some may use merit-based criteria to determine which students are accepted. The competitive nature of these schools often reflects their commitment to maintaining high academic standards, rigorous curricula, and well-rounded educational opportunities that challenge and inspire students.
2	Are DeKalb PATH Academy students eligible for merit-based and/or needs-based scholarships to attend private schools? If so, how does DeKalb PATH Academy support parents in identifying scholarship/funding sources? (p. 11)	All PATH students accepted to private schools receive need-based financial aid, which reduces tuition to near zero in most cases or to manageable cost levels. Dekalb PATH staff are integral in helping parents understand and complete the admissions applications and where applicable, financial aid applications.

### School Governance

Item	Committee's Feedback	Petitioner's Response
3	Open Records/Open Meetings compliance has been an ongoing concern for DeKalb PATH Academy. What are the steps that you have taken and will take to be in compliance and remain in compliance? (question 4)	To ensure compliance with Open Records and Open Meetings requirements, the PATH Governing Board has completed a training course on the Open Meetings & Records Acts. We've worked diligently to correct previous errors and are collaborating with our Webmaster to keep the school website current and user-friendly for consistent



		<p>updates. Our Board Chair is reorganizing previous documents into shared folders accessible to key team members, including the Secretary and Chair, who will work together to post items promptly and verify their accuracy. At the next meeting, the Governing Board will set the calendar for the year to maintain consistency, and each meeting's agenda will be set during the prior meeting and posted with the Summary of Action.</p>
4	<p>What contributed to the turnover of board members? What criteria will be used to recruit new board members to promote sustainability? (question 4)</p>	<p>PATH experienced significant Board member turnover early in the charter term which was driven by a grievance brought by a staff member directly to a board member. The issue was addressed in a way that lacked transparency with the rest of the board. This disagreement led to the resignation of three members. Following this, a Grievance Policy was established to clearly outline the process for handling such issues among the board and involved parties.</p> <p>In recruiting new board members, PATH will prioritize candidates with a strong commitment to school's mission and vision, relevant expertise to support this mission, and a genuine desire to serve. Our process includes background review, interviews, and a school visit with the CEO. Additionally, we seek individuals who reflect our community's diversity to ensure broad representation and sustainability.</p>

### Academic Plan

Item	Committee's Feedback	Petitioner's Response
5	<p>Do you have intensive English students? If so, how are you servicing your intensive English students? (question 6)</p>	<p>PATH does not currently service students who qualify for intensive English.</p>



6	Describe gifted services at DeKalb PATH Academy, include delivery models, the student population, the gifted identification process, and number of gifted certified teachers. (question 2)	PATH's gifted students are served in the advanced content model, an educational approach that provides them with challenging and stimulating content. There are currently 3 gifted certified teachers serving 25 students. PATH uses the DCSD process for Gifted Eligibility, which begins with Fall MAP testing and then uses CoGAT, ITBS, the Renzuli, NNAT3, the Torrance, and for 5th grade GES and 6th-8th GPAs. This cycle will begin again after Winter MAP testing in November.
7	How do you serve students with disabilities who transfer or move into your school with services in a small group setting? (p. 49- 58)	When students transfer into our school, PATH is intentional about ensuring their needs are covered. Our DeKalb LTSE reviews the IEP to ensure PATH covers all periods listed in the Big Picture. We have a teacher who serves our students in the small group setting. Our small group teacher can provide students with appropriate instruction regardless of the grade level or content.
8	What type of support is offered to Special Needs students during the Saturday sessions? How is the Saturday school/extended day being utilized to help close the gaps for students with disabilities? What tools are being used and how is data tracked? What adjustments are being made during the extended day since growth is low to increase growth? (p. 16 - 17)	<p>At PATH, it's essential to note that among our 28 SWD, 24 are ESOL students. It's crucial to ensure that the strategies used cater to both needs.</p> <p>During Extended Day, students are placed in classes with two teachers. This allows students to benefit from instruction from both teachers, similar to co-teaching. PATH employs Instructional Conversations, a model developed by The Center for Latino Achievement and Success in Education (CLASE) at The University of Georgia. The instructional Conversation (IC) System is a 'way of teaching' that positively impacts student language development, opens the space for formative assessment and differentiation, and encourages collaboration. The instructional conversation model allows students to work on a joint productive activity and be grouped with those who either need a similar level of support or with students with a more excellent grasp of the academic vocabulary and content.</p>



		<p>While we began using this program three years ago, we have been training teachers in small groups due to the expense of training. This year, 70% of the teachers have been trained in the model, which will lead to increased growth in academic language based on MAP assessments. Importantly, this will also allow students to interact with the content more personally, making their learning experience more engaging and leading to improved scores on the GMAS.</p>
<p>9</p>	<p>How do smaller class sizes and flexible grouping foster an environment conducive to special education students' growth? How does PATH address gaps in services or interventions for students who continue to struggle despite being in the special education program? (p. 52 - 53)</p>	<p>Smaller class sizes and flexible grouping allow students to have deeper relationships with their teachers; teachers can group students according to lesson goals. PATH is committed to making sure that we have enough paraprofessionals to provide additional support in co-taught classrooms so that groupings can be data-informed and intentional. When students continue to struggle in the special education classroom, we work with our LTSE to determine if their placements are correct or if the students have appropriate accommodations. PATH has made it a point to ensure minimal student service gaps, ensuring that Special Education positions are staffed before the beginning of the school year.</p>
<p>10</p>	<p>Discuss cultural affirming learning experiences and flexible grouping that is data driven for all students. (p. 17)</p>	<p>At PATH, cultural affirmation begins when students walk through the door. 35% of our staff are Spanish speakers, and staff members also speak Amaraich. This helps students to understand that their family's home language is valued and essential. Students can talk in their home language in areas that drive instruction. We make sure to center students' culture at the center of instruction, celebrations, and everyday interactions. In developing flexible grouping, our teachers use MAP data as a constant measure of the way groups can be shaped and changed. This is especially true during extended-day</p>



		programming, where student groups are centered around RIT scores on MAP.
11	How does PATH support professional development for teachers in meeting the evolving needs of SPED students, especially those with dual needs (SPED and ESOL)? Describe trainings that have taken place and any planned trainings. (question 6)	All teachers at PATH can choose PD opportunities that fit students' and teachers' needs. Teachers submit a proposal for training they are interested in, and the administration determines if the training is feasible. In the past, teachers have attended DCSD training, AVID and DBT Training, and the school-wide Instructional Conversations Training. Last year, the entire staff participated in Curriculum MAP training given by Amy Heineke, one of the authors of Using Understanding by Design in the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Classroom. The curriculum maps are in their first year at PATH and have been specifically created for our student population.
12	Are there specific challenges that dual-certified teachers face in balancing the demands of both SPED and ESOL responsibilities? How are these challenges addressed? (p. 48)	While many of PATH teachers are dual-certified, it's important to note that they are not required to handle the documentation processes for both roles. Our ESOL department chair is responsible for all ESOL documentation and paperwork, with the ESOL-certified teachers providing valuable assistance. Similarly, PATH has four dedicated teachers who serve as case managers for our SPED population, handling the progress monitoring and IEPs for the SPED Students. This clear division of responsibilities ensures that everyone is informed and can focus on their specific roles.
13	How does the DeKalb PATH Academy team determine when an IEP needs to be revised more frequently than the annual review? What triggers such revisions? (p. 53)	The Dekalb PATH Academy team never makes unilateral decisions. All decisions regarding revisions to the IEP include meetings with the grade level team, consideration of progress monitoring data, and the input of our DeKalb LTSE. Revisions are triggered by students either exceeding their IEP goals or failing to progress on the goals.
14	Please address the drastic decrease in 2023 Social Studies scores. (pg. 24, Fig. 5)	PATH considered a myriad of factors to explain the decrease and transparently, the answer remains somewhat unclear. We looked at the teacher specifically – both in experience with the content as well as data yielded through consistent observation. We looked at the



		<p>students themselves and any characteristics unique to that group that could be contributing factors. Finally we considered the data set itself – meaning this represents a single grade level as opposed to the three grade levels for Math and ELA. Regarding the teacher – this was their first year teaching Georgia studies. PATH worked with them to adjust instructional practice, which yielded positive results. This has been confirmed by the 2024 CCRPI scores for Social Studies that show that during last school year, our students met their improvement targets in all subgroups. PATH remains committed to ensuring that all subjects are taught with fidelity and that are students are showing mastery and progress.</p>
<p>15</p>	<p>Describe what happens in the extended summer program for students in grades 6-8? (p. 17)</p>	<p>During our charter term, PATH replaced the summer program for grades 6-8 with an extended day program for all students during the school year. However, 5th graders continue to attend a summer program, which introduces them to PATH culture and helps ensure appropriate class placement for the upcoming school year.</p>
<p>16</p>	<p>Clarify the statement that the curriculum is extended over a longer period of time. Are Saturdays and the Summer program required for all students? (p. 16 – 17)</p>	<p>The last mandatory Saturday and Summer School for all students, with some exceptions (e.g., attendance at competitive programs like Reach for Excellence, C5, etc.), was held in Summer 2019.</p> <p>During the pandemic, PATH adjusted the program to address two main challenges: 1) the need for more immediate intervention to close learning gaps and 2) the difficulty in staffing the summer program with our top teachers.</p> <p>To ensure that students learn from our best educators, PATH launched an extended day program in the 2021-22 school year. This approach has been effective, as we redistributed the instructional hours from summer and Saturday school across the school year. Currently, we</p>



		provide one additional hour of instruction Monday through Thursday during the extended day season.
17	With the new interventions put in place this current year to improve ACCESS scores, how are the interventions being progress monitored and how often? (question 6)	<p>In addition to fully implementing the Instructional Conversation System as described above, PATH also piloted Mentor Sentences last year. Mentor Sentences provide ESL students with structure, grammar, and author craft. Mentor Sentences are now a standardized practice across the ELA department.</p> <p>The Winter MAP Assessment, a crucial tool, will be used to gauge the effectiveness of our new interventions. It is important to give the interventions enough time to become routine and to determine the best course of action moving forward. In the meantime, the ESOL department is using the can-do descriptors provided by WIDA to determine the movement of students to new language proficiency levels. The ESOL department meets regularly to discuss what is working and adjustments that need to be made.</p>
18	How many segments of ESOL do students receive? How many minutes are in each segment? When are ESOL segments scheduled? (p. 60)	Every ESOL student receives 1 segment during Morning Group, 67 students receive 2 segments during the day based on the availability in our schedule and if the student is also identified as SWD. Each segment is 1 hour.
19	Regarding Home Language Surveys, what are the languages provided for parents? (p. 59)	Home Language Surveys are provided in English and Spanish.
20	Do you screen potential English Learners at your school site? (question 6)	Most students entering PATH are existing DCSD students, meaning they've already undergone screening by DCSD. If a student enters PATH and is new to DCSD, PATH will work with DCSD to administer the WIDA Screener in alignment with DCSD guidelines.
21	How are you supporting ELs who did not make positive band-to-band movement? The District is concerned with the EL progress. A high percentage of ELs did not make positive band to band movement. (question 6)	Before this school year, PATH was not given access to Illuminate, the platform that can extrapolate data as described, and we received very little support from the EL department. However, we are pleased about the changes made this school year.



		<p>Since gaining access to that platform, PATH has been very intentional about our plan to address band-to-band movement. We began by restructuring the morning group period and placing students by composite scores. This has allowed teachers to provide them with activities that meet their needs determined by their proficiency level. Teachers work with students on their can-do descriptors to see how to scaffold instruction best and assess the students' learning continually. This continuous assessment provides us with a clear picture of our students' progress, reassuring us that they are on the right track for positive band-to-band movement this school year, with an exit from the program being the goal.</p>
<p>22</p>	<p>The petition lists the WIDA ACCESS Placement tool (WAPT) as a screening tool. GADOE no longer uses this as a screening tool. See "EL Screening Procedures" on the GADOE ESOL site. This information needs to be revised in the petition. (p. 59)</p>	<p>(p. 59) The petition was revised to reference "WIDA Screener"</p>
<p>23</p>	<p>The description for re-testing ELs does not follow GADOE protocol. (p. 60) This information needs to be revised in the petition.</p>	<p>(p. 59) PATH administers the ACCESS for ELLs test annually to ESOL students within the district's designated testing window to measure progress. Students who achieve the necessary passing score on the ACCESS assessment, as determined yearly by DCSD, become listed as EL-Monitored, ready to exit ESOL language program services. Following exit from the program, students are monitored for at least 2 years to ensure they receive ongoing support as they continue to work toward grade-level academic language performance and adapt academically, socially, and psychologically in the regular classroom. ELL students continue to receive support for their learning through flexible grouping that explicitly addresses their learning needs. They are monitored by their core subject teachers and the ESOL team to ensure sustained growth.</p>



24	<p>The reclassification process is described. However, the clear exit process is not described. Reclassification criteria not explicitly stated. (p. 59)</p>	<p>(p. 60) Although PATH utilizes the DSCD yearly determined ACCESS score as the exit criteria for ESOL, there is also the opportunity for students to be re-classified as EL-Monitored using DSCD's additional criteria for exit. This criteria involves considering all students who meet all the following reclassification criteria: Overall Composite Proficiency Level of 4.3 to 4.9; Literacy Score of 4.3 or above; and Comprehension Score of 4.3 or above.</p> <p>The ESOL department chair and classroom teachers meet to determine whether students in this category should be exited from the ESOL Program. This process includes examination of ACCESS Scores, which measure English language proficiency, MAP scores, which assess academic growth, and GMAS Scores, which evaluate academic achievement. Parents are also included in this process to make sure that they understand the committee's recommendation and that they are comfortable with the decision.</p>
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### Financial Plan

Item	Committee's Feedback	Petitioner's Response
25	<p>Create a 5-year contingency budget considering other options for building space/locations. (Exhibit 23) What measures is the Governing Board reviewing considering the new lease term agreement from your leaser? (Exhibit 20)</p>	<p>(p. 718) A 5-year contingency budget has been provided as "Exhibit 23 Addendum". Although a change in facility may cause PATH to run a slight deficit in Years 3 and 4, the reserve is enough to cover the difference while still retaining substantial savings.</p> <p>For the upcoming charter term, PATH may need to secure a new facility starting in Year 3. Our longtime partner, Oglethorpe University, has offered a two-year lease renewal instead of the usual five years. PATH's strong reserves provide flexibility to consider options like purchasing and renovating an existing building, leasing, or building a brand new facility. We also plan to explore available unused facilities</p>



		within DCSD. While we are hopeful the lease situation will be resolved, we are confident in our ability to secure a new space if necessary.
<b>26</b>	During your Governing Board interview, you highlighted that PATH has always had a building contingency account. Can you share with us the purpose of this account and how, or if, you plan to use it in this new charter term?	For the upcoming charter term, PATH may need to secure a new facility starting in Year 3. Our longtime partner, Oglethorpe University, has offered a two-year lease renewal instead of the usual five years. PATH's strong reserves provide flexibility to consider options like purchasing and renovating an existing building, leasing, or building a brand-new facility.
<b>27</b>	What contingency plan has PATH put in place to resolve transportation issues that may occur during the new charter term? (Exhibit 17)	Moving forward, PATH is open to partnering with DCSD to cover our bus routes and has also requested lease-to-purchase quotes to reduce costs. Additionally, PATH understands that our current contract, established to launch the bus service, may be renegotiated after three years to lower expenses, and plans to explore this option as well.
<b>28</b>	<p>The following items are missing from Exhibit 16, the Certificate of Insurance. These items are required by the Assurances:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There is no Workers' Compensation and Employers' Liability Insurance coverage. Statutory limits are needed for Workers' Compensation and a minimum of \$1,000,000 per accident for Employer's Liability Insurance. Once this is obtained, the waiver of subrogation box on the Certificate of Insurance should be checked in favor of the District;</li> <li>2. Educators' Legal Liability Insurance coverage is lacking. This coverage is needed with limits of not less than \$2,000,000 for each claim, and \$2,000,000 in the annual aggregate for all claims. An endorsement of this policy is needed which states that coverage shall include the district, its officers, employees, and students, that participate in any internship program.</li> <li>3. There is no Property Insurance coverage. This coverage is needed in sufficient amounts to cover the replacement cost of all structures and contents for</li> </ol>	<p>(p. 415) Please see "Exhibit 16 Addendum" for updated policies/coverage amounts. PATH is awaiting follow-up from our insurance company regarding the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educator Legal Liability – PATH currently carries a \$1M policy. The carrier is investigating whether a higher limit (\$2M) is possible, and if so, it will be done via endorsement.</li> </ul> <p>PATH will provide updates to DCSD regarding additional policy updates once they are received from the insurance company.</p>



	<p>property owned or leased by the charter school. An endorsement of this policy is needed to name the District as a Loss Payee. The deductible or retention amount shall not exceed \$100,000 per loss.</p> <p>4. The Umbrella Liability Insurance coverage expired on August 21, 2024, per the Certificate of Insurance. This coverage is needed with limits of liability not less than \$3,000,000 and in excess of the coverage provided by Employer's Liability Insurance, Commercial General Liability Insurance and Automobile Liability Insurance.</p> <p>5. The Commercial Employer's Liability, General Liability, Automobile Liability, and Umbrella Liability coverages should have the box checked for an endorsement making the District an additional insured. A copy of these endorsements should be provided to the District. Likewise, the box should be checked "yes" for waiver of subrogation in favor of the District; and</p> <p>6. A copy of the endorsement, or provision, stating that coverage afforded under the required insurance policies shall not expire, be canceled or altered without at least 45 days prior written notice to the District is needed.</p>	
<p><b>29</b></p>	<p>A copy of the Crime and Fidelity Bond, in the sum of not less than \$1,000,000 per occurrence, should be provided. The coverages required in the bond are for employee theft and dishonesty, forgery or alteration, theft of money and securities, robbery and burglary, computer fraud, funds transfer fraud and money orders, counterfeit currency and impersonation fraud. The bond should also cover liability to any third party. (Exhibit 16)</p>	<p>PATH is working with the carrier to obtain this coverage amount We will provide DCSD with updates as they become available.</p>



## Organizational Plan

Item	Committee's Feedback	Petitioner's Response
30	Executive Summary – The school does not plan for an increase or decrease in enrollment in the next charter term. Describe DeKalb PATH's process(es) for keeping enrollment steady at 368. (p. 10)	368 is consistent with the enrollment of our current charter. PATH maintains a waitlist of over 500 students which is utilized as needed to keep enrollment steady.