



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD

Charter Actions Requiring a Vote	Non-Voting Board Items
<input type="checkbox"/> Approve a Charter Application (15 yrs)	<input type="checkbox"/> Public Hearing Item
<input type="checkbox"/> Approve a Charter Renewal (15 yrs)	<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion Item
<input type="checkbox"/> Approve Charter Continuance (5 or 10 yrs)	<input type="checkbox"/> Read into Record
<input type="checkbox"/> Approve a Charter Amendment Request	
<input type="checkbox"/> Give a Charter Notice of Concern	
<input type="checkbox"/> Lift the Charter Notice of Concern	
<input type="checkbox"/> Commence Charter Revocation Proceedings	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revoke a Charter	
<input type="checkbox"/> Board Action, Other _____	
Policies	
<input type="checkbox"/> Open a New Policy or Changes to a Policy for Public Comment	
<input type="checkbox"/> Approve a New Policy	
<input type="checkbox"/> Approve an Amendment to an Existing Policy	

SUBJECT: Revocation Of the Charter of Potomac Preparatory Public Charter School

DATE: February 13, 2016

On December 14, 2015, the District of Columbia Public Charter School Board (“DC PCSB” or “the Board”) voted to initiate revocation of the charter of Potomac Preparatory Public Charter School (“Potomac Prep PCS”). At the request of the school, the Board held an informal hearing on the proposed revocation on January 14, 2016. On February 10, 2016, DC PCSB voted unanimously to revoke the charter of Potomac Prep PCS, effective at the end of the school year. This memorandum provides the reasons for the Board’s decision.

Background

The School Reform Act grants DC PCSB discretion to revoke the charter of a public charter school that fails to meet its student goals and academic achievement expectations as set forth in its charter. *D.C. Code § 38-1802.13(a)*.

In 2014, Potomac Prep PCS underwent a 10-year review, during which DC PCSB found that the school had not met 17 of the 20 goals and academic achievement expectations set forth in its charter. As a result, on November 17, 2014, DC PCSB voted to initiate charter revocation proceedings against Potomac Prep PCS. However, the school maintained that a significant turn-around was underway and, on December 15, 2014, DC PCSB voted not to revoke the charter, and to approve charter continuance, conditioned on the school meeting

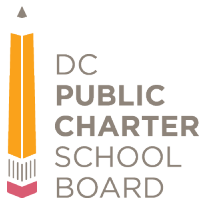


certain targets for the 2014-15 school year and beyond. Potomac Prep PCS amended its charter with DC PCSB in December 2014 (the “Amendment”), agreeing to meet those targets or relinquish its charter.

For the 2014-15 school year, the Amendment required Potomac Prep PCS to meet all of the specified targets or relinquish its charter by the end of the 2015-16 school year. The table below shows each of these targets, along with DC PCSB’s determination as to whether the target was met.

Target	Met?
The school will be within at least one percentage point of or exceed the in-seat attendance rate for the charter sector for each of the three grade-level bands for 2014-15.	No
<p>The school’s average proficiency rate on PARCC in reading and math will be at least within one standard deviation of the 50th percentile of all DC charter elementary and middle schools for 2014-15.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>70% of all 3-8th grade students will score at or above the 40th percentile of NWEA MAP national average and/or meet/exceed their spring typical growth target in math and reading.</p>	No
<p>At least 75% of PK3 and PK4 students will meet or exceed their average growth goals on the Every Child Ready assessment or Potomac Prep PCS will score within 0.1 point of the 2014-15 DC charter average in each of the three CLASS domains.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Potomac Prep PCS will score within 0.1 point of the 2014-15 DC charter average in each of the three CLASS domains.</p>	Yes
50% of kindergarten through second grade students will meet or exceed typical growth in reading and math on the NWEA-MAP assessment.	No

Because Potomac Prep PCS did not meet all of its targets for the 2014-15 school year, pursuant to the Amendment, the Potomac Prep PCS board should have taken steps to relinquish its charter by the end of the 2015-16 school year. In November 2015, DC PCSB staff submitted a letter to Potomac Prep PCS requesting that the school submit a letter of relinquishment by December 9, 2015, prior to the DC EdFest, which occurred on December 12, 2015.



DC PCSB did not receive the requested letter of relinquishment from Potomac Prep PCS, and instead received a letter summarizing why the school should remain open despite not achieving its goals. As a result, DC PCSB staff recommended that DC PCSB initiate the revocation process at the Board’s December 14, 2015 meeting.

On January 14, 2016, DC PCSB held an informal public hearing at Potomac Prep PCS, during which DC PCSB staff presented its analysis of the school’s data and its recommendation for revocation. School representatives and more than 50 stakeholders (including students, parents, teachers, community stakeholders, and an ANC representative) testified, sharing their concerns and opinions regarding the proposed revocation of Potomac Prep PCS.

On January 25, 2016, Potomac Prep raised a concern that DC PCSB staff acted in an unprofessional manner during the proposed revocation process, resulting in a possible violation of the school’s due process rights under the School Reform Act. While DC PCSB did not agree that a violation of the school’s due process rights occurred, nevertheless, the Board and DC PCSB staff requested that the Office of the State Superintendent for Education (“OSSE”) conduct an independent analysis of the school’s data that formed the foundation for DC PCSB staff’s initial recommendation to initiate revocation proceedings. The results of OSSE’s independent data analysis confirmed that Potomac Prep PCS missed all but one of its targets for the 2014-2015 school year.

Potomac Prep Arguments and DC PCSB Responses

Potomac Prep PCS did not dispute that the school missed three of the four targets outlined in the Amendment. Instead, the school made several arguments as to why it should be allowed to retain its charter. Each of these arguments is addressed below:

1. *Potomac Prep PCS experienced an unexpected increase in its special education population, which made the targets both more difficult to achieve and unrealistic.*

Based on data confirmed by OSSE, in September 2014, 50 students at Potomac Prep PCS received special education services. By June 2015, the school had newly identified 20 students, bringing the total students receiving special education services to 70. The percentage of students with disabilities at Potomac Prep PCS grew from 13% to 16% during the 2014-2015 school year—a 3 percentage point increase (or 40% increase). The average special education population percentage for public charter schools in the District is 13%. We find a 16% population of students with special education needs is well within the normal range for charter schools.

Further, a review of Potomac Prep PCS student records revealed that the majority of the students whose service hours were at the highest level of need (both newly identified students and students already identified) were given support for behavior management, not an increase in instructional hours. The primary method of support for students in need of



behavior management is to provide dedicated aides not instructional aides or increased specialized instruction hours with a certified special education teacher.

We find the school’s responses regarding the increase in its special education population unpersuasive. Despite its claim that Potomac Prep saw a 300% increase in its special education population, the number of students the school reported to OSSE shows a much smaller increase, and a population within the normal range for D.C. charter schools. We further find Potomac Prep PCS’s suggestion that its results would look better if we exempt this population from the results runs counter to the Amendment’s goal—and DC PCSB’s mandate—of ensuring all students at Potomac PCS receive a quality education.

2. *Charter revocation is unwarranted because Potomac Prep PCS partially met the targets outlined in the Amendment.*

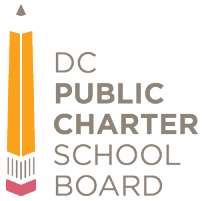
DC PCSB and the school designed the targets to ensure that the school continued to implement its turnaround plan. The targets were intentionally designed as realistic thresholds for Potomac Prep PCS to exceed; they were not aspirational goals. The school missed three of its four targets in almost every subgroup. The DC PCSB finds that failure to meet the targets has shown that the school’s turnaround efforts have not been sufficient to meet the student goals and academic achievement expectations for the school.

3. The quality of Potomac Prep has increased as shown by many measures, including a drop in suspensions, the rise in the school’s attendance rate, school partnerships, school activities, and improved administrative quality.

DC PCSB commends the Potomac Prep PCS Board and staff for the improvements in the school’s climate. However, the Board notes that the attendance data cited by the school and the school’s re-enrollment rate are below charter school averages. The primary focus of DC PCSB’s accountability is on the academic quality of the school and, in this area, DC PCSB finds that the school neither met its targets nor is at the level of quality of the vast majority of D.C. public charter schools.

4. It is unfair to judge the Potomac Prep PCS performance based on one year’s worth of results.

The Board considered revoking Potomac Prep PCS’s charter in 2014 at the school’s 10-year review based on its failure to achieve 17 of its 20 academic achievement goals. A key reason for this Board’s decision not to revoke the charter at that time was the school’s assertion that a school turnaround—academic and cultural—was already well underway. Potomac Prep provided a “2014-15 Turn Around Plan” to DC PCSB for consideration, and this plan contemplated academic performance improvement within one school year. The Amendment was designed to measure the school’s success in achieving this “Turn Around.”



Potomac Prep PCS now argues that its leadership did not understand the targets agreed to in the Amendment. But, as mentioned above, the targets were intentionally designed as realistic thresholds for Potomac Prep PCS to exceed and were measured by standard educational data. In fact, the school leadership consistently emphasized its commitment and adherence to “data-driven instruction.”

DC PCSB finds the school’s argument unpersuasive. Potomac Prep PCS drafted a one-year turnaround plan and agreed to be bound by realistic targets measured by standard educational data.

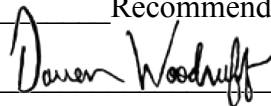
5. The closure of the school will be disruptive and in many cases harmful to the students attending the school.

DC PCSB is revoking the charter of Potomac Prep PCS because the school did not meet its goals and academic achievement expectations as agreed to in the Amendment. DC PCSB finds that, under the leadership of Dr. White-Hood, Potomac Prep PCS’s culture has improved. DC PCSB has a great deal of respect for the work done by the teachers, students, families, and administrators at Potomac Prep PCS over the last two years. However, this cultural improvement has not translated into measurable academic improvements, and this Board is charged with revoking the charters of schools when it finds, in its expert opinion, that a school fails to meet its goals and academic achievement expectations. The Board finds that Potomac Prep has failed to meet its goals and academic achievement expectations.

Conclusion

After consideration of the full record in this matter and pursuant to its authority under §38-1802.13(a)(2) of the D.C. Code, DC PCSB revokes the charter of Potomac Prep PCS effective at the end of the 2015-2016 school year for failure to meet the goals and academic achievement expectations in its charter, as amended.

Revocation decisions are not easy and DC PCSB’s focus throughout this process has been on the families and children of Potomac Prep PCS. DC PCSB will engage enrollment specialists who will meet one on one with each family to review school options and help with placements, as it has done in the past, including facilitating students’ participation in the My School DC common lottery.

Date: February 13, 2016
PCSB Action: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Decision <input type="checkbox"/> Recommendation
DC PCSB Board Chair Signature: <u></u>