Providence Creek Academy Charter School

State of the School

October 2015

Providence Creek Academy Charter School is in good form today. The fiscal, organizational, and academic areas of the school have undergone change since the school opened and can be described as moving in a positive direction. The school has been in existence since 2002 and the student enrollment has grown from 425 students in grades K through 5 to 690 students in grades K through 8 for the FY2015 school year. The school, which was first housed on rented property, is now located on a site which includes three main classroom buildings, an equipment storage building, and athletic fields on approximately forty-five acres of property owned by the school. Throughout this period of development at the school, there have been many changes. Currently PCA is seeking a charter renewal for the next five years while also exploring the possibility of joining the International Baccalaureate Programme for a continuum of international education and searching for a new Head of School. These necessary changes will provide the forward positive momentum that will keep the school at its best for its students.

The renewal application for Providence Creek Academy Charter School was submitted on

September 28, 2015. School officials met with the Charter School Accountability Committee on October 13, 2015. The Committee asked various questions concerning the operation of the school. The Committee issued its initial report on October 16, 2015, Attachment 1. The responses required for the Committee will be sent to the Department of Education no later than November 4, 2015, Attachment 2. The final meeting with the renewal committee is scheduled for November 10, 2015. The Administrative Team is pleased with the progress at this time.

Enrollment: PCA enrollment information was completed for this school year using the Data Service Center. Electronic applications were completed by parents. The lottery was conducted, and invitations for enrollment were also electronic. There were a total of four hundred thirty-seven School Choice Applications. One hundred fifty-eight students were accepted through the lottery. The September 30 Unit Count Submission was for 690 students, equaling 40.23 teaching units. The Waitlist contained one hundred sixty-eight students as of September 30th. The school enrollment is at 103% of its approved enrollment.

Athletics:

The Athletic Department is moving forward with the Fall Sports Program which includes football, girls’ volleyball, boys’ and girls’ cross country, and cheerleading. The football team is undefeated and is supported by the cheerleading squad. The members of the cross country team are striving to achieve their “personal best.” The volleyball team has three wins and six losses. All of the teams are working to raise funds for the school athletic progam.The football team has raised over $3,000.00 through the sale of coupon books and apparel. The volleyball team has earned over $700.00 so far, while the cross country team has raised $200.00, and the cheerleaders have raised $37.50. The process has begun for planning the location of a soccer field and a well to provide irrigation for the athletic fields. Overall the student population in the athletic program is increasing. Winter Sports include boys’ and girls’ basketball, cheer, and competition cheer. Spring Sports include boys’ baseball and girls’ softball. All of the teams have a quality coach, and students are improving in their chosen sport. All PCA students participate in Physical Education classes.

The Arts:

Ballet:

One hundred twenty students are currently enrolled in the ballet program. This is a twenty per cent increase in student participation from last year. A Parent Observation Week was held October 19 through October 23. “Nutcracker” rehearsals are well underway. Performances are scheduled for December 5 and 6 with a school performance on December 4. Ethan Raysor from First State Ballet Theater will be performing as our Cavalier and offering the Company dancers their first experience with a Pas de deux. The annual Silent Auction will be held in conjunction with the “Nutcracker”performances. This is the largest fundraiser for the year.

An increase use of on-line portals is being included with performances. Tickets will be sold

on-line this year through Eventbrite and Volunteerspot will be available for people to sign up to help. The Ballet Director expects a smooth transition using these on-line tools. The Ballet program continues to grow through participation of parents and volunteers. Plans are underway to add a tumbling class and an adult dance class in January. In addition, award-winning choreographer, Victoria Silva, will be coming in January to set an original work on the Company dancers.

Band:

There are currently ninety-nine students participating in the band program. Sixty-three of those are beginners; the remainder of the band students are in the intermediate and advanced band. When students who had expressed interest in band did not join this year, the band director spoke with parents to verify that it was not an issue of obtaining an instrument. Parents preferring that their students wait another year and parents with concerns about academics were the two main reasons for the change in expected student participation for this year.

Beginners are in their third week of lessons, and the students are doing well. They are preparing for a demonstration concert on Tuesday, November 10th. After that performance, they will begin preparing for the Winter Concert on December 21st.  The Intermediate and Advanced students are currently preparing for the Winter Concert. Two PCA students are preparing for All-State Junior Band auditions in January of 2016. They are Jaclyn Ivry in 7th grade and Brianne Perry in 8th grade.

Art:

The entire PCA student population is involved with art.  A group of students are working with the Art Teacher after-school to prepare portfolios for Cab Calloway and MOT’s Fine Arts High School Program.  The Charter Art Show will be in January, and the Art Teacher has been collecting art from PCA students for this exhibit. After current units are completed, some students will begin working with clay to create coil pots.  An increasing number of grade levels have been able to work with clay through the years. Prepping the clay, cutting the clay, storing the clay, and firing the clay to bisque and to glaze demands a lot of time and space, so classes/grade levels working with it must be spaced out.

The Art Teacher envisions that the PCA Art Program will continue to be supported and developed to include focus on a variety of disciplines. Visual communications and technologically-based art should be included in the program. These areas may require additional funding for modification of classroom space or hiring of additional arts instructors.   
  
Chorus:

There are approximately seventy-two students in the Concert Choir, sixty-six students in the Elementary Choir, and forty-five students in the Women’s Choir. Eight PCA students will be auditioning for the Jr. All State Choir. PCA students will attend the ACDA Children’s Honor Choir in the Spring as well as the ACDA “Men Only Aloud” concert event. The Chorus program continues to expand with each year, but the growth is impacted by class size and time. In the Spring of 2016, PCA plans to have additional performance groups, such as a Select Choir and Men’s Choir.

PCA is hosting the Kent County Jr. Choral festival on March 14th. The school is taking bids to provide additional seating in the auditorium for this event. The stage piano needs to be replaced. Due to its age and condition, it cannot be fixed properly for performances.

Percussion Ensemble: The Percussion Ensemble of PCA continues to perform and has become well-known in and out of the school since its beginning.

Buildings and Grounds:

The Building and Grounds Department has made tremendous improvements from repairing the safety equipment to restoring the grounds that will offer an appeal to our students and families. This work includes the installation of drains in the walking paths, replanting flowers, planting trees and shrubs, painting classrooms and hallways, repairing street lighting, repairing existing and installation of new security cameras, and application of asphalt patch in the roadways. The old playground mulch was replaced with new rubber mulch and provides a much safer play area. Work for the improvement of the buildings and grounds continues at the time of this report.

The school is soliciting bids for additional balcony seating in the auditorium and is outlining a potential soccer field. The upgrade and maintenance of the PCA facility has been accomplished through the work of a dedicated staff.

Technology:

The technology for the school has been improved since last year. The WIFI access points have been increased along with the installation of updates on all machines. The school’s server has been updated, a security fence now encloses the server/storage room, new printers have been purchased for the staff, and new copiers have been leased. The school is in the process of leasing three new computer carts and replacing deteriorating Smart Boards with Dell Interactive Boards. These new boards cost less and are larger. The school has not received vendor support from the previous vendor and has registered a complaint with the State Purchasing Agent. The school’s technology is increasing, and the Administration is very satisfied with outsourcing the maintenance of the technology.

Tech Lab: Mrs. Sieanna Bucy began the school year approximately three weeks into the year. She has worked diligently to acclimate herself to the school and has begun to implement “Keyboarding without Tears” and “Typing Training” into the technology program along with iSafe, which is mandated by the state.

Transportation:

The Transportation Department has fourteen buses that operate on a daily basis and two spare buses that are used when needed. The last bus of the fleet was purchased this year with the acquisition of the last four older buses. Two buses will need to be replaced in 2021. The normal life of PCA buses is fourteen years. The PCA fleet is up-to-date. There are eighteen available drivers for the fleet. A Bus Evacuation drill was held last week as part of the Safety Program. The drivers will undergo medical training on October 29, 2015 as part of their Emergency Medical Training.

Food Service:

The Dining Hall serves breakfast to approximately one hundred twenty students and lunch to approximately three hundred fifty students per day. Two hundred sixty-three students participate in the reduced /free lunch program. The school does receive income from the Federal Government to supplement the Dining Hall. PCA is in the process of using more “farm to school food.” Fruits and vegetables are purchased from local markets versus big vendors. The Food Service Department participates in the Back-pack Program through the Food Bank of Delaware to assist in supplying food for one hundred seventy PCA disadvantaged students.

Parent Involvement: Parents continue to be involved in the school, volunteering in and out of the classroom. They participate in the PTO and help at school dances and after-school student activities. The time and effort of all parents in support of PCA is appreciated as it positively impacts student success.

Parent Teacher Organization:

The PTO of 2015-2016 has purchased mats for the Lower School playground, part of the rubber mulch, and playground equipment (Dome). The PTO also gave staff/teachers $75.00 to start-off the school year. The PTO held a Fall Festival, a School Family Dance for grades K through 5, and a school-wide Book Fair.  The PTO will sponsor “Duct Tape the Teacher” and “Silly String the Teacher” events on November 10th. The PTO will also hold a Food Drive for the entire school for the month of November. In December the PTO will have a Gathering for all grades after-school and “Breakfast with Santa”. The Annual Quarter Auction will be held in March. The PTO hopes to raise enough money to purchase two laptop carts for the school.

Finance: The Finance Department was reorganized in the Spring of 2015. Some policies have been revised and other policies have been introduced in order to have a more efficient Finance Department. These changes allow for a better checks and balance system and fewer mistakes. The staff members in the Finance Department have completed all training requirements as of the date of this report. Each month the Citizens Oversight Budget Committee meets to review the budget and ensures that the school’s financial goals are met. The Financial Framework Report was received by PCA on October 21, 2015 from the Department of Education. The overall rating was “Meets Standard.” The only area that did not meet was the Debt to Asset Ratio; this fact is due to the debt for the school buildings. The building debt is larger than the school income and listed assets. These figures will change after the debt is reduced through future years. Attachment 3 is the Financial Framework Report.

Administrative Team: The Board of Directors restructured the Administrative Team to include a Head of School, Principal, and Director of Curriculum. All are twelve-month employees.

Office Staff: The current Office Staff consists of the PCA Office Manager and an Assistant. A co-op student also works part-time in the office. The office does an excellent job of interacting with PCA students, parents, school staff, and community members.

Teaching Staff: At the beginning of the school year, PCA was fully staffed. Since then there has been one new hire and currently there is one open position, Reading Specialist. The following postings are published: Art Teacher, Tutors, Reading Specialist, and Long-term Substitute. PCA has thirty-eight teachers scheduled for four hundred thirty-one classes. Of the thirty-eight teachers, two have certification pending, and one is a long-term substitute. PCA has a full-time Speech Therapist who is a full-time school employee and no longer a contractor. The school has two contractors, a School Psychologist and an Occupational Therapist. There are one behavioral and four instructional para-professionals. Additional support staff members include a Special Education Service Coordinator, a 504/DPAS II Service Coordinator, two Nurses, and an Interventionist.

Mentoring: All novice teachers have begun the mentoring requirements for the school year. Each of the two teachers in Year One of the mentoring program (Joseph Lightcap and Phillip Vaughn) has a mentor for this school year (Elaine Lambert and Kelly Hanson). Six teachers are in Year Two of the program (Grace Danks, Stephanie Taillon, Guy Cooper, Michelle Gazzerro, William Simpson, and David Wessell). These teachers are participating in a book study on Classroom Assessment for Learning. Five teachers are in Year Three of the mentoring program (Kristen Roberts, Laurie Poore, Nathan Ferster, Tracy Pawlikowski, and Emily Pizzi). These teachers are working on professional development plans for their continuing licenses. Gaffel Hippolyte is also in the program as a “New to the State” teacher. He is completing the Year Three requirements.

Student Services: Changes have been implemented in the area of student services. A department has been created to include Special Education, RtI/ELL, and 504/DPASII. Each area has a service coordinator to address student needs and provide teacher support. The Principal meets weekly with the team in order to stay informed on each area. Currently there are thirty-six students with IEPs: nineteen in K-5 and seventeen in grades 6-8. Of those, seven receive speech services. There are two students in the evaluation process. Eleven students receive occupational therapy and twenty-five who receive speech-only services. There are five students in the speech evaluation process. Twenty-four students have a 504 Plan.

Tutoring: A new tutoring coordinator has been selected. Mrs. Nicole Lewis will be in charge of the program. The plan this school year is to run the tutoring program similar to the PCA Spring Break Academy of last year. The program will target students who are on the border of meeting proficiency. Teachers will also be able to recommend students for tutoring. The school has advertised for instructors from outside of the school in case there are not enough teachers at PCA who would like to tutor.

Aftercare: Aftercare is operating well and has a solid enrollment. The hours of operation are from 3:30 P.M. until 6:00 P.M. each day school is in session. This year a cap was placed on the number of students who can participate in Aftercare due to the demand and the physical space that was available. There are approximately forty children attending Aftercare each day, and the program is very successful.

LEAP (Learning Enrichment After-School Program): Mrs. Elaine Lambert is the LEAP coordinator for this school year. She has worked to further develop the program and increase the number of offerings for students in all grades. This year two buses are being offered as transportation to encourage further student participation in the program.

School Climate and Safety: Additional video cameras were installed, exterior doors locks have been changed, and a controlled number of keys have been issued. Two security persons are employed to check identification and sign-in of persons entering the Core Building after hours. They monitor the other buildings with the use of the video system in the school as well as with two-way radio communication. Speed bumps have been installed to slow traffic. The School Safety Committee continues to meet on a quarterly basis this year. Monthly fire drills are held. The school has had an Intruder Lock-Down Drill, and at the end of that drill a newly-designed Evacuation Drill with the students and staff was held. The Clayton Police Department participated in the drill. Both drills were successful and required only a small number of improvements. The School Safety Committee was invited to observe the drill.

A part-time paraprofessional was hired for In-School Suspension three days per week-- Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. The purpose of the In-School Suspension Program is to provide a consequence for inappropriate behaviors. This is an alternative to out-of-school suspension. Prior to school starting, a professional development session was hosted by Michelle Nutter to provide the school staff with the most up-to-date information on the laws. She trained the staff by offering classroom management strategies. On October 1, 2015, Dr. Jay Banks hosted an assembly for the student body that was educational, fun, and interactive. He empowered the students with what they could do if they encounter problems in school or on the bus. A code of conduct has been developed specifically for infractions that occur on the bus. A service learning activity is also being developed to incorporate student learning with service to the PCA community. Throughout the year opportunities are provided for parents to join in a partnership with the school.

Assessment: In the Spring of 2015, progress of Providence Creek Academy students was assessed using the Smarter ELA/Literacy and Smarter Mathematics tests. The following information is based on the results published in September of 2015.

* 66% of PCA students scored proficient in ELA compared to the State Average of 51.9% and Smyrna School District Average of 56.5%
* 43.3% of PCA students scored proficient in Math compared to the State Average of 38.8% and Smyrna School District Average of 41.8%
* In ELA PCA averages were above the State Average in every grade level (3-8) and above Smyrna School District averages in grades 3, 6, 7 and 8. In grade four PCA students were 2.7% below grade four students in Smyrna and 0.5% below grade five students in Smyrna.
* In Math PCA averages were above the State Average in grades 3, 4, 6, and 7 and above Smyrna School District in grades 3 and 7.

Based on this data and in conjunction with other school level data, PCA has shifted focus on increased student achievement and success to Math and is working to implement changes that will help increase math scores. These changes include:

* Adding Ready Common Core Math to grades 2-5 in addition to grades 6-8 that was implemented in the last school year.
* Adding Pearson SuccessMaker which provides students with a customized learning path based on their individual needs.
* Implementing new benchmark tests (Scholastic Reading Inventory and Scholastic Math Inventory) to better align with the Smarter Balanced test. The new benchmark tests provide a more accurate picture of where students are (especially in Math). The SMI focuses on quantile levels for students, and teachers have learned how to use the quantile score to look for resources by standards that meet each student’s instructional quantile level.
* Aligning classroom assessments to the Common Core State Standards and incorporating more performance tasks into classroom assessments.
* Improving targeted Math resources for RTI

Smarter Balanced has added back an assessment in Writing; therefore, PCA has added additional Writing resources to the curriculum to provide students with targeted instruction that aligns to the Common Core State Standards and Smarter Balanced. Over the next five years, PCA would like to add further performance tasks to its assessments and instruction and move toward more project-based learning. When students are engaged in hands-on experiences, they are better able to apply the skills and knowledge that they have learned.

Conclusion: Overall, Providence Creek Academy has made and continues to make tremendous gains in the entire operation of the school. Student academic performance and parent involvement are increasing with each year. The instructional staff is solid, professional, and experienced. The PCA leadership team is caring and professional, and the support staff is well-versed and full of pride. Everyone involved at Providence Creek Academy Charter School can take pride in being part of the PCA TEAM.

Respectfully submitted, Charles E. Taylor Head of School