Providence Creek Academy Charter School

State of the School

October 2016

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 700 students in grades K through 8 for the FY2016-2017 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. PCA’s charter was renewed for the next five years in January of 2016. The Board of Directors is searching for a new Head of School. The search is anticipated to end in November of 2016.

The Board of Directors is in the process of establishing a Non-profit 501 (C) 3 Educational Foundation to assist with the expansion of the Facilities as well as refinancing the school’s current debt structure. The Board of Directors, Head of School, and Finance Department are working with several financial organizations to establish the best course of action to ensure that cash flow is positive and school debt is the lowest possible. This process is expected to end no later than February of 2017. The current Swap agreement is scheduled to end on May 1, 2017.

The Board of Directors has hired a new Director of Curriculum who comes to PCA with a wealth of knowledge in curriculum and instruction, Delaware Department of Education experience, Independent School experience, and private business experience. The Board of Directors have filled teacher vacancies with new teachers and experienced teachers; some have five years or less experience and others have fifteen-plus years. The Board of Directors welcomes all the new staff members and wishes them well.

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 forty-one School Choice Applications. One hundred fifty-five students were accepted through the lottery. The September 30 Unit Count Submission was for 700 students, equaling 40.33 teaching units. The Waitlist contained one hundred forty-seven students as of September 30th. The school enrollment is at 105% 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 currently 1-1 and is supported by the cheerleading squad. The members of the cross country team are striving to achieve their “personal best.” The volleyball team is currently 1-3 but has made dramatic improvements since last season due to the new hiring of Coach Scott Nichols. All of the teams are working to raise funds for the school athletic program. The Fall Sports have just completed their discount card fundraiser (with discount cards still on sale and valid until March 2017) and their apparel sales. The next fundraiser will be the "Kidnap a Teacher" fundraiser for the football team. 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. A Parent Observation Week was held October 17 through October 22. “Nutcracker” rehearsals are well underway. Performances are scheduled for December 10 and 11 with a school performance on December 9. The annual Silent Auction will be held in conjunction with the “Nutcracker” performances. This is the largest Ballet fundraiser for the year.

PCBT was evaluated and was accepted into Regional Dance America/Northeast. Advanced, Apprentice, and Company members have been invited to attend the National Festival in May 2017 in Phoenix, AZ along with ninety other studios from around the country. In addition to attending the Delaware Dance Festival for the sixth consecutive year, PCBT will also be taking classes and performing at the Philadelphia Youth Dance Fest.

PCBT now offers Tumbling year-round and Adult Dance in the Spring. The Summer Performance, which involves all levels, will be on June 17th and 18th. Two nationally recognized choreographers will be coming to set original works on PCBT dancers.

 Band:

There are currently ninety-five students participating in the band program. Thirty-nine of those are Beginners; the remainder of the band students are in the Elementary Advanced and Middle School Bands.  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 remain the two main reasons for changes in expected student participation for the year. Beginners are in their fifth week of lessons, and the students are doing well. All students are preparing for the Winter Concert on December 20th.

In September, PCA purchased the following new instruments for the band students to use:

two Bass Clarinets, one Tenor Saxophone, one Baritone Saxophone, three French Horns, two Euphoniums, two Tubas, one Marimba, and one set of Orchestral Bells. These instruments were purchased from the Conn-Selmer Corporation through their Division of Education.  Having these instruments gives the band students the opportunity to enhance and round out the overall tone of the bands. The Bass Clarinets, Saxophones, Horns, Euphoniums, and Tubas are allowing for more of a low woodwind/low brass presence within the band, making it easier for students to achieve proper balance and blend as an ensemble. The Marimba and Bells are both mallet keyboard instruments that round out the overall sound of the band's percussion section. These instruments will also provide students the opportunity to play a wider variety of music literature, as there are many band arrangements that require having the additional instruments. Mr. Hicks and the band students are extremely grateful to Mrs. Hanson and the entire PCA Administrative Team for providing these instruments and for their continued support of our band program.

Art:

Art is off to a great start this Trimester. “Scholastic Art” has been incorporated into the art history component for the students in fifth through eighth grades. They begin each art class with a warm up, "Caption This", in which the students examine a piece of art and write a caption or hash tag. PCA now has a classroom set of “Meet the Artist” books, and the Art teacher has brought in his personal art book collection for the classroom art library. The Square One Art fundraiser is under way. In the works are field trips to the Delaware Art Museum and the Biggs Museum. PCA is hosting the DE Charter School Art show in the spring, and everyone seems to be having fun! There are also collaborations going on with Mr. Vaughn for an election/campaign poster idea and with the nurse for the Sandy Hook Promise.

Percussion Ensemble: Percussion Ensemble: There are twenty-six students in the group this year, and their first performance was at the Charter School Network’s IDEA awards. PCA is looking forward to another great year of music-making and performances around the state.

 Chorus: Concert Choir: This year there are approximately seventy sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students enrolled in the Concert Choir. Junior All State Chorus auditions are approaching and PCA has sixteen students auditioning, the most PCA has ever had. Also, four young ladies will be participating in the first ever DE ACDA Women’s Choir event in November.

Elementary Choir: This choir began its first rehearsals a few weeks ago, and the students are preparing for the Winter Concert. There are approximately sixty students from third, fourth, and fifth grade participating.

Drama: Bernadette DeLong, the Art Teacher and Drama Director of MOT Charter School in Middletown, is directing the Broadway musical, “Cats,” here at Providence Creek Academy this fall. Thirty-eight PCA students will be in the show, featuring Michael Wiley as Rum Tum Tugger and Emma Van Orden as Grizabella. The PCA performances of “Cats” will be Friday, November 18th at 6 PM, Saturday, November 19th at 3 PM & 6 PM, and Sunday, November 20th at 3 PM.

Buildings and Grounds:

The dedicated staff of the Buildings and Grounds Department has continued to make improvements that include 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. Additional playground mulch has been added to ensure a safe play area for students. Work for the improvement of the buildings and grounds continues at the time of this report. PCA is soliciting Architectural Support for the addition of the following: building an addition onto the Upper School that will house four classrooms, two ballet studios, one STEM Lab; balcony seating for the auditorium; enlargement of the vocal and instrumental classrooms; tear down and replacement of existing storage building near the bus yard; build a new bus/storage building and re-asphalt the surrounding roadway. Buildings and grounds personnel will install split rail fencing in front of the overflow parking during the month of October. Installation of the Security film on all building doors and windows at height level was completed before school started this year. Other projects are envisioned to keep pace with the demands of supporting the students’ education.

 Technology:

The technology implementation at the school has been significantly improved over the previous year. The network infrastructure has been redesigned and implemented with increases in bandwidth and redundancies put in place to ensure stability. The Internet connection was also upgraded, increasing available Internet bandwidth ten-fold. Local Area WiFi has been improved, with Wireless Access Points now installed in every classroom and new management software deployed to control the wireless environment. The school’s servers were updated and optimized to minimize delays and increase reliability, and a security fence now encloses the server/storage room to provide an additional physical point of protection. New HP LaserJet printers have been purchased for the classrooms and office staff, and new copiers have been leased. The school is now leasing three new mobile computer carts in addition to the existing units, and is in the process of deploying additional student PCs to the Upper School classrooms. The school’s technology is increasing, and the Administrative Team is very satisfied with outsourcing the maintenance of the technology.

 Tech Lab: Ms. Andrea Grier is our new technology teacher. She has been following the PCA technology curriculum sequence and is using the i-SAFE curriculum in the technology program, 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. Bus evacuation is scheduled for October 11, 2013, with a rain date of October 13, 2016 and March 8, 2017, with a rain date of March 10, 2017. Materials for annual training will be purchased in the month of October 2016. The materials will be reviewed and a program will be set up to ensure all drivers are trained every year. The four-hour annual training for fiscal year 2017 will be scheduled in the month of January.

 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 and eleven 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

Dining Hall is also working on more “made from scratch cooking” as a way to improve quality and cost of food served to PCA students. The Food Service Department participates in the

Back-pack Program through the Food Bank of Delaware to assist in supplying food for one

hundred eighty-two 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, serve as chaperones on field trips, 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 has purchased computers for the Upper School, classroom supplies for the Lower School, and other items for PCA. The PTO held a Fall Festival, a School Family Dance for grades K through 5, and a school-wide Book Fair.  The PTO has sponsored “Duct Tape the Teacher” and “Silly String the Teacher” events. The PTO will also hold a Food Drive. In December the PTO will have activities after-school and “Breakfast with Santa”. The Annual Quarter Auction will be held later in the year.

 Finance: The Finance Department was reorganized in the Spring of 2015. Included in this department are the HR/Finance Manager and an Administrative Assistant. Working at PCA once or twice a month, Mr. William Bentz continues to provide oversight of the school’s finances to the Administrative Team, Board of Directors, HR/Finance Manager, and Administrative Assistant. Policies continue to be revised and other policies have been introduced in order to have a more efficient Finance Department. These changes allow for a better checks and balances 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 most recent Audit for FY 2015-2016 has been completed with no findings. The Audit Firm performed an in-depth look at the school’s operations and financial controls that are in place, and there were no recommendations presented. All recommendations from the previous year had been corrected. The only concern was the impact of GASB 75, which may be a concern as this relates to the employee pension plan.

The Administrative Team is in the process of establishing an Educational Foundation for the school. The purpose of the Foundation is to raise money for the school. As of this writing we are in the late stages of filing the application with the Unites States Department of Agriculture. The last 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. The school is waiting for the past year’s Financial Framework Report from the Department of Education.

 Administrative Team:

The Administrative Team currently consists of 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 interacting with PCA students, parents, school staff, and community members.

 Teaching Staff: At the beginning of the school year, PCA was fully staffed. Currently there is one open position, World Culture. This position became open with the resignation of the educator hired to teach

 eighth grade math. The 7/8 Social Studies teacher moved into the math position; then the World Cultures teacher moved into the 7/8 Social Studies position, leaving the World Culture position available. PCA has forty-one teachers scheduled for four hundred thirty-one classes. Of the forty-one teachers, all are certified. The school has three contractors: a Speech and Language Therapist, a School Psychologist, and an Occupational Therapist. There are two behavioral and four instructional para-professionals. Additional support staff members include a Reading Specialist, a Math Specialist, a Special Education Service Coordinator, a DPAS II Service Coordinator, two part-time Nurses, a part-time Interventionist, and a full-time Interventionist.

 Mentoring: All novice teachers will begin the mentoring requirements for the school year through a DDOE grant. The teachers will complete competency-based programs using a partnership with Bloom Board. The Bloom Board program provides teachers with support regardless of what cycle of mentoring support they are required to complete. Teachers on a continuing license have been paired with one or more novice teachers to act as lead mentors for the staff.

 Student Services: PCA continues to use the changes implemented in the area of student services during 2015-2016. A department was 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. There are IEPs for Special Education students in grades K through 8. Some of these students also receive speech services. An evaluation process is in place for other students recommended for speech services and occupational therapy. Some PCA students have 504 Plans. All of these services and plans are reviewed and modified in accordance with student needs.

 Student Health: Over the last few months, the Nurse’s Office has implemented the use of technology. The nurses began to use Google Voice as a means to communicate with parents when their child is in the office. While no confidential is exchanged, a text is sent asking for a phone call to the Nurse’s Office. Not many people answer the phone in this day and age. Everyone uses texting.

A Facebook page has also been created to allow the nurses to post important information from their office and offering another means of communication. They have been able to alert parents of upcoming screenings, letters coming home in folders, and important health topics specific to the school population.

 The PCA nurses and school have recently partnered with the Sandy Hook Promise. This foundation was created by the parents of victims from the Sandy Hook School shooting. An assembly on Thursday, October 27 for grades 4-6 will discuss bullying and its effects, as well as the warning signs of potential violent behaviors and how to report these warnings to adults. The nurses continue to address particular student needs, including such special cases as instructing students on the self-administration of insulin.

 Tutoring: Ms. Kristin Brewer will be in charge of the tutoring program this year. The plan for this school year is to run the tutoring program a little differently than in the past. There will be three different sessions which will allow specific targeted instruction to meet the students’ needs for each trimester. Classroom teachers will recommend struggling students to the program and will provide strengths and specific standards-based goals for each student. Tutors will keep a folder for each student to document student growth and what techniques and lessons are provided. There will also be a student-parent contract that clearly defines the expectations for students and parents participating in the tutoring program. The coordinator will supervise tutoring students from dismissal until tutoring begins at 3:45 PM, and will supervise student pick-up at the conclusion of tutoring. The coordinator will move between the different tutoring groups to provide support, ensure that everyone is on task, and deal with any negative behaviors that may arise. It is hoped that this new schedule and structure will encourage increased PCA teacher participation in the tutoring program.

 Aftercare: Aftercare is operating efficiently with a solid enrollment and has students on a waiting list. 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. The program includes five paraprofessionals every day (one lead and four aides) and an Aftercare Coordinator to oversee the program.

 LEAP (Learning Enrichment After-School Program): The LEAP program will be held this Fall from the week of October 17th through the week of December 12th. Each class is $40 and runs from 3:45 PM until 4:45 PM on the assigned days (Mondays and/or Thursdays). Classes offered are: Fun With Crafts, Full STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math) Ahead, Cake Fun, Innovators of the Future, and Kids’ Yoga and Meditation (2 classes). We are very excited to be able to offer such fun, educational, and unique classes to PCA students.

 School Climate and Safety: During the summer safety film was installed on all exterior doors and windows from the door height down. The purpose of the safety glass is to prevent the glass from shattering. This feature will delay the entry of intruders into the buildings.

A full-time Interventionist and a part-time Interventionist provide support for teachers and students to assist in handling student discipline behaviors and conflicts. The Code of Conduct is utilized to ensure students and teachers have a resource to determine what behaviors should be documented as a conduct referral and/or a classroom issue. As part of staff professional development prior to the start of the new school year, Dr. Celeste Bryson provided in-service training to the PCA staff with knowledge and strategies to assist them with managing student behavior and promoting a safe learning environment. After the start of the school year, Dr. Bryson presented further training for all staff as directed by the Department of Education on the topic of Bullying: how it impacts student behavior, learning, and social/emotional well-being. Dr. Bryson also conducted two educational sessions for grades four-five and grades seven-eight students to teach children how to work together and understand and accept each other’s differences. In addition, she hosted a session to discuss diversity and acceptance among students.

The Interventionists are in the process of scheduling two assemblies: “The Ned Show”, for grades kindergarten through six and “Choice Road” for the Upper School students. The nurse and the interventionists work as a team to support students who need assistance and who are referred by a staff member. Student needs may include school supplies, school uniforms, or emotional support.

The part-time Interventionist is responsible for the In-School Suspension Program three days per week. 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. The school continues to implement the Code of Conduct for infractions that occur on the bus. PCA also promotes “service learning” as a means 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 for “service learning”, field trips, and other student activities.

 Assessment: In the spring of 2016, the 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 2016: 

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 implementing changes that will help increase math scores. These changes include:

* Transitioning to Eureka Math as the core math curriculum in grades K-8 in addition to the Ready Common Core workbooks used last school year.
* Continuing to use Pearson SuccessMaker which provides students with a customized learning path based on their individual needs.
* Continued use of 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.
* Weekly professional learning communities have been established to meet with grade level teams to support mathematics instruction and student engagement throughout the curriculum.
* Aligning classroom assessments (Eureka Math) to the Common Core State Standards and incorporating more performance tasks into classroom assessments.
* Improving targeted Math resources for ROTI.

Smarter Balanced has added back an assessment in Writing; therefore, PCA has added 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