

**Commonwealth of Pennsylvania**  
**Department of Education**  
**Cyber Charter School**  
**2011 Renewal Application**



## Application Fact Sheet

This Application Fact Sheet is intended for administrative processing of the Cyber Charter Renewal Application. The information furnished below must be an accurate representation of the complete Renewal Application.

Cyber Charter School Name:

PA Distance Learning Charter School

School Address: 2200 Georgetowne Drive, Suite 300  
Sewickley, PA 15143

County: Allegheny Intermediate Unit: #3

Charter Start Date 03/16/2004 Date current Charter Expires 06/30/2012

Federal Employer Identification Number 20-1331146 AUN# 115220003

Vendor Identification Number: 0000197884

CEO: First: James Middle: P Last: Hoover

Address: 2200 Georgetowne Drive, Suite 300, Sewickley State: PA Zip Code: 15143

Telephone: 888-997-3352 Fax Number: 866-977-3527 Email: james.hoover@padistance.org

Grades Served by Cyber Charter School	Current & Projected 5 Year Student Enrollment	Current & Projected 5 Year Teaching Staff
Elementary: K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, & 6	2011-2012 350	2011-2012 25
Middle: 7 & 8	2012-2013 400	2012-2013 27
Secondary: 9, 10, 11, & 12	2013-2014 475	2013-2014 30
	2014-2015 550	2014-2015 32
Circle All Appropriate Grades K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 (ALL SERVED)	2015-2016 700	2015-2016 40
	Is increase due to addition of grade levels? <b>NO</b>	Does the cyber charter school have an existing retirement system? <b>YES</b>

*Leases, Deeds and Office Location Information*

PDLCS offices are located at 2200 Georgetowne Drive, Suite 300, Waterfront Corporate Park in Wexford, PA, 15143. White Hat Management leases the school's office space as part of the management agreement with the PDLCS Board of Trustees. PDLCS has had no reportable instances in the PA Safe Schools online reporting system.

The School's lease information is contained in Item \_Section 0.1 PDLCS Lease Renewal6-1-11  
Lumen Sewickley - signed

September 26, 2011

Charter School Office  
Pennsylvania Department of Education  
333 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

Students choose to enroll in a virtual school for a variety of reasons. Many students are motivated by the need for flexibility. Maybe they are working, raising a child, medically challenged, bullied, in a violent school or involved in an artistic or athletic pursuit. Notwithstanding, all students are looking for a school where they can experience academic success. Many Pennsylvania students are not finding academic success in their local public school and are desperate to find a viable educational option.

For our students, academic success is our priority. We let our students know that we are here to help them succeed. Our mantra is connect, engage and succeed, because we have found that if a student regularly connects to the school and engages in the instructional program he or she will experience academic success.

As the school's CEO, I have hosted the commencement ceremony of the Pennsylvania Distance Learning Charter School for last five (5) years. However, I am continually amazed at the depth of the personal interaction between the staff and students. Although many of our students are meeting their teachers face-to-face for the first time, you would think that they had known each other all their lives based on the conversations.

Our PSSA scores reflect the academic struggles that are endemic to our students. In 2006, PDLCS students met only three (3) of eleven (11) AYP targets. In 2007, students met all AYP targets with the exception of graduation rate and mathematics achievement in one (1) subgroup. In 2008, the school met all the participation and performance benchmarks with the exception of graduation rate. Although the school has not met AYP, we have been encouraged by the above normal growth rates achieved by PDLCS students as measured by the Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System (PVAAS) and our standardized performance assessment. Over the past three (3) years, the school's PVAAS data has shown significant academic growth. In 2010, PDLCS had higher academic growth rates than any other cyber charter school in the state as well as a substantial number of traditional public schools. Many of our students come to our school with significant academic deficits and our students are quite mobile; therefore, we focus on ensuring our students achieve academic growth over the course of an academic year or while they're enrolled in our program. In terms of growth, our PVAAS data as well as the results of our standardized achievement test indicate that the students are, in many cases, exceeding the academic growth expectations.

Our students experience a variety of successes that are not reflected in the AYP numbers. For example, although our school did not make AYP again in 2011, there is good news to share in the area of academics. Ten re-enrolling 8<sup>th</sup> graders will be taking the high school Algebra I

course this fall. These ten mathematicians scored high proficient or advanced on their 7<sup>th</sup> grade PSSA Mathematics test.

The average student score on the AP English Literature Composition Exam was a 3 with one of the three students earning a 4 and our only AP Chemistry student scored a 5 on his exam!

The school administration and Board recognize the importance of ongoing training for the instructional staff. At the beginning of each school year, all teachers attend a week of full time training in preparation for the start of each new school year. Our instructional staff is trained to provide instruction to each student that both challenges and supports student mastery of skills and standards. Teachers provide daily support for the students who are assigned to them. All teachers are trained to promote inquiry-based learning strategies when the students experience difficulty with assignments. Also, there are many assignments in all aspects of the curriculum that promote both in-depth learning using the Thinking Skills Model and Inquiry Based Learning Strategies. Teachers are provided opportunities to attend outside workshops and seminars. Staff members also attend trainings offered by the Intermediate Unit and PATTAN. Eleven (11) teachers are trained to become teachers of reading and writing. Teachers are encouraged to collectively prepare students for the PSSA reading and math assessments at the different grade levels. Also, science and math teachers are responsible for supporting acquisition of math standards that are assessed by the PSSA.

In 2008-09, the school implemented the *writing across the curriculum approach* in order to enhance our student proficiency in written communication. In 2009-10, the school began using a web based writing assessment program that integrates the Pennsylvania Writing rubric and allows students to have their responses to writing prompts scored similarly to the way they would be scored for the PSSA writing assessment. The instructional software's effectiveness has been corroborated by a large volume of research related to its validity and reliability. In 2009-10 all teachers were trained in using the eMetrics and PVAAS data in their classrooms. The summative data of PSSA, along with benchmark data of Scantron and classroom assessments are used in Response to Intervention and Instruction decisions, as well as in how the teacher will differentiate within their online classroom.

The school has invested in ensuring that the curriculum is aligned with the Pennsylvania academic standards. The Tri-State Study Council at the University of Pittsburgh was retained to conduct an objective audit of the school's curriculum. Based on the Tri-State audit finding, the Board of Trustees retained the services of an experienced curriculum consultant to guide and train the staff in curriculum mapping. The consultant managed the process of ensuring that the school curriculum is aligned with the Pennsylvania academic standards. The consultant also led the process to remedy issues cited in the Tri-State audit findings. The curriculum mapping process began in the fall of 2009 and was completed in December, 2010 using a web-based curriculum mapping tool. Work within the curriculum mapping software is a continual process to address items such as material changes, transition to Common Core Standards and new course offerings. With the completion of the curriculum mapping, teachers are now held accountable for ensuring that the delivered curriculum is consistent with the curriculum maps. The mapping consultant provided extensive training to our staff regarding the curriculum mapping process and consulted with individual staff members throughout the mapping process.

PDLCS has an exemplary compliance record. We are committed to serving our families and endeavor to accommodate any reasonable request. Our family oriented approach has created an environment where complaints to either the Board of Trustees or the Department of Education are non-existent. PDE has only received one special education complaint filed against the school in the past five (5) years alleging the school denied a special education student a free and appropriate public education. An investigation by the PDE found that the school acted appropriately and ruled in the school's favor.

Our annual financial audits consistently produce no findings and recommendations are implemented in a timely fashion. Similarly, our recent PASCCR audit, conducted in November, 2010, yielded no findings or recommendations.

The majority of our staff is made up of a core of highly qualified full-time teachers. We believe that student success is tied to developing consistent and productive relationships with their teachers. As with any organization, people come and go for a variety of reasons. Many of the teachers that left our school accepted positions in traditional brick and mortar schools. Some left due to spousal geographic transfers. One left to pursue a life-long dream of becoming a federal law enforcement agent. However, our teachers are held to a high standard of performance and accountability. Regrettably, some of our teachers did not have their contract renewed due to performance issues.

PDLCS uses the Scantron Performance Series and Children's Progress Achievement Assessment as the school's local assessments to identify students performing below expectation and prescribe instructional interventions to remedy academic deficiencies. All students in grades 3 through 12 are tested in the fall and spring in the areas of reading, mathematics, science, and language arts using Scantron. Students in grades K-2 are assessed in the areas of mathematics and reading three times per year using the Children's Progress Achievement Assessment. Both tests use computer adaptive technology and are delivered online to students. Test results are available immediately after the student completes the exams. Students that have been identified as requiring interventions are also assessed with greater frequency throughout the year to closely monitor their response to interventions. The results are compared to determine academic growth in each of the four core areas.

In the 2010-11 school year, PDLCS students achieved statistically significant academic growth in all four (4) core academic areas including reading, mathematics, science, and language arts. This is the fifth consecutive year that PDLCS students exceeded the academic growth in all four (4) core academic areas. In the 2006-07 school year, PDLCS students achieved significant growth in all academic areas with the exception of reading.

In 2006, PDLCS students met only three (3) of eleven (11) AYP targets. In 2007, students met all AYP targets with the exception of graduation rate and mathematics achievement in one (1) subgroup. In 2008, the school met all the participation and performance benchmarks with the exception of graduation rate. Although the school has not met AYP, we have been encouraged by the above normal growth rates achieved by PDLCS students as measured by the Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System (PVAAS) and the Scantron Performance Series. Over the past

three (3) years, the school's PVAAS data has shown significant academic growth. In 2010, PDLCS had higher academic growth rates than any other cyber charter school in the state as well as a substantial number of traditional public schools.

When I became the CEO of the Pennsylvania Distance Learning Charter School, I expressed a continuing commitment to ensure the school had exceptional teachers, competent curriculum and state-of-the-art delivery system to create a virtual school with academic credibility and integrity. As a school, we have focused on academic growth. We have found that students that regularly access and engage in our academic program will find academic success.

Sincerely,

James P. Hoover, Ed.D, CEO

## I. Student Achievement

### A. Progress toward Initial Goals and Objectives:

- *Describe how the cyber charter school has met or made reasonable progress toward initially established goals defined in the current charter application. If goals were revised, discuss why and how the new goals provide a better fit with the overall mission of the cyber charter school. Provide a concise explanation and use data whenever possible*

**Enrollment.** PDLCS has invested significant resources to ensure that parents and students of Pennsylvania are thoroughly informed about our expectations and the commitment required for success in our program prior to making the decision to enroll. At the same time, we have worked diligently to identify and remove any obstacles that may obstruct a dedicated and motivated parent and student from enrolling in our program.

Our marketing efforts have not borne the fruit desired in terms of enrollment numbers, despite very positive comments from parents and students and a very low complaint rate. In 2009, we rebuilt our web site and revised our marketing program to include several mass media methodologies, but the results were not satisfactory in meeting enrollment goals.

In 2010, we hired a new sales and marketing director and we developed over 2,300 interested students. However, follow up on interested students was insufficient and again enrollment numbers were not as expected.

In 2011, we again revised the marketing program, this time focusing on pay per click campaigns. While gaining some enrollment, our numbers have fallen short of goals. We are planning a combination of these efforts for the future, as we realize that enrollment growth is not going to be an instantaneous. We believe strongly in our program, as it is differentiated from the parent participation and pacing concept offered by other PA cyber schools and we are continually reviewing our marketing efforts, enrollment processes and procedures to improve this part of our program.

Our goal has been to create a brand identity of academic credibility, excellence and integrity. We have expended relatively considerable resources to promote our programs throughout the state; however, we recognize that we have yet to discover the optimal combination of promotion channels. We are also cognizant that we are competing with other cyber schools with substantially more resources to dedicate to marketing and promotion. The competitive field has also changed with the introduction of virtual programs delivered by Intermediate Units and school districts. However, at no time is our dedication to compliance with Pennsylvania laws and regulations compromised.

**Retention.** We believe that retention is directly connected to student and parent engagement with the School. While we have added the interactive class as a means to promote engagement, we

believe that there are additional tools and resources that will assist the parent and student become more “connected” to the School. Interconnectivity between parents, teachers, staff, administration, other parents, and peer students will enhance the learning experience and promote a stronger feeling of engagement. Various existing resources, such as the Family Network Community Group which provides a venue for families to connect with one another, availability for parents to view student grades, assignments, e-mail correspondence to and from staff members provide a transparency to the school, and our after-school tutoring program which is free to families for homework assistance or support in a particular content area. We are continuously developing resources that will be used to help us meet this goal. We have found that students who enroll and actively participate in our program are inclined to re-enroll. Our re-enrollment rate has exceeded 80% in the past several years.

**Program Design.** We are continually reviewing our instructional model to continuously improve and modernize the educational experience of our students and parents. Going to school should be neither complicated nor frustrating. We have identified specific areas where parents and students are frustrated, and created solutions to improve the ease and reliability of access to our program so that teachers, parents and students can focus on educational success.

**Curriculum.** We have continued to review our curriculum to identify content areas where we underemphasize and overemphasize. The school retained the Tri State Study Council at the University of Pittsburgh to audit our curriculum in January, 2008. The Tier I portion of the audit of all PDLCS courses was completed in January, 2009. The audit team from Tri State made a recommendation to improve the efficacy of our curricular offerings and ensure that our courses are consistent with Pennsylvania Academic Standards. Tri-State completed their audit in 2010.

The school also retained the services of a curriculum consultant to lead the staff in a curriculum mapping project that was completed in December, 2010. The electronic curriculum maps have enabled the administration to uncover instructional gaps and create interdisciplinary instructional links. In addition, administrators are able to hold teachers accountable for ensuring that instruction is consistent with the mapped curriculum.

Daily online lessons are supplemented with an array of curricula that are tailored to the unique needs of online learners at all grade levels and ability levels. All curriculum offerings allow for evaluation and feedback through assignments and progress monitoring efforts that align with the Pennsylvania Department of Education content area standards and anchors.

Teachers further supplement their classroom core curriculum with multi-sensory tools such as educational websites, interactive tutorials, virtual labs, articles, case studies, and videos as well. We have a unique ability to utilize the educational technology offerings of the Internet to our advantage to create a virtual classroom that goes beyond just the typical textbook or lecture format.

Grade level and course overviews:

Kindergarten: Please refer to Item \_Section 1.0 Kindergarten Overview

First Grade: Please refer to Item \_Section 1.1 First Grade Overview

Second Grade: Please refer to Item \_Section 1.2 Second Grade Overview

Third Grade: Please refer to Item \_Section 1.3 Third Grade Overview

Fourth Grade: Please refer to Item \_Section 1.4 Fourth Grade Overview

Fifth Grade: Please refer to Item \_Section 1.5 Fifth Grade Overview

Sixth Grade: Please refer to Item \_Section 1.6 Sixth Grade Overview

Seventh Grade: Please refer to Item \_Section 1.7 Seventh Grade Overview

Eighth Grade: Please refer to Item \_Section 1.8 Eighth Grade Overview

High School: Please refer to Item \_Section 1.9 High School Overview

Calvert Elementary Option Grades K-6: Please refer to Item \_Section 1.10 Calvert Elementary Option Grades K-6

- *Provide any other relevant information about progress toward academic goals. If reference has been made to test scores or other testing outcomes, include the name of the test and the dates administered. Include a rationale for using that particular test.*

The Pennsylvania Distance Learning Charter School utilizes the Scantron Performance Series and Children’s Progress Achievement Assessment as the school’s local assessments to identify students performing below expectation and prescribe instructional interventions to remedy academic deficiencies. The Scantron Assessment is particularly suitable for virtual school settings. All students in grades 3 through 12 are assessed in the fall and spring in the areas of reading, mathematics, science and language arts utilizing Scantron. However, more frequent testing is possible to measure academic growth as long as the time between tests is more than 12 weeks. Students in grades K-2 are assessed three times a year in early September, mid-January and late May in the areas of reading and mathematics. Both tests use computer adaptive technology and are delivered online to students. Unlike the administration of the PSSA assessments, we are able to assess students in the comfort of their own homes without the stress of having to travel to a test site to have an assessment administered in a strange and unfamiliar setting. Test results are available immediately after the student completes the exams.

Students that have been identified as requiring interventions are also assessed with greater frequency throughout the year to closely monitor their response to interventions. The results are compared to determine academic growth in each of the core areas. In order to prevent cheating, forensic analysis is performed on most exams. If the test metrics are not within the normal ranges, the exam is either “spoiled” automatically or may be spoiled by a test administrator. Students are generally asked to take the exam again. If a student’s scores continue to show

anomalies, he/she may be asked to come to the school office to have their exams proctored by a PDLCS staff member.

The Scantron Performance Series and Children's Progress Achievement Assessment provide data-rich reports with drill-down capabilities. The instructional staff has been thoroughly trained to access and analyze student assessment results, and use those results to tailor instruction to support their students. The teachers are trained to promote inquiry-based learning strategies when the students experience difficulty with assignments. Also, there are many assignments in all aspects of the curriculum that promote both in-depth learning using the Thinking Skills Model and Inquiry Based Learning Strategies.

Children's Progress Achievement Assessment (CPAA) increases the level of expectation for the student's performance with each testing period. Overall, K-2 students enrolled in our school are at or above expectations in all academic areas. CPAA assesses kindergarten students in the areas of Listening, Phonics/Writing, Phonemic Awareness, Reading, Measurement, Numeracy, Operations and Patterns/Functions. Students performed at expectations in all areas with the exception of Measure, in which they performed above expectations. First and second grade students were assessed in the areas of Phonics, Phonemic Awareness, Reading, Measurement, Numeracy, Operations and Patterns and Functions. Students in first grade performed at expectations in all areas with Reading and Patterns/Functions being areas in which they performed above expectations. Students in second grade performed at expectations in all areas. K-2 students enrolled in our school demonstrate the foundation skills to move on to the next grade level.

### Children's Progress Achievement Results 2010-11

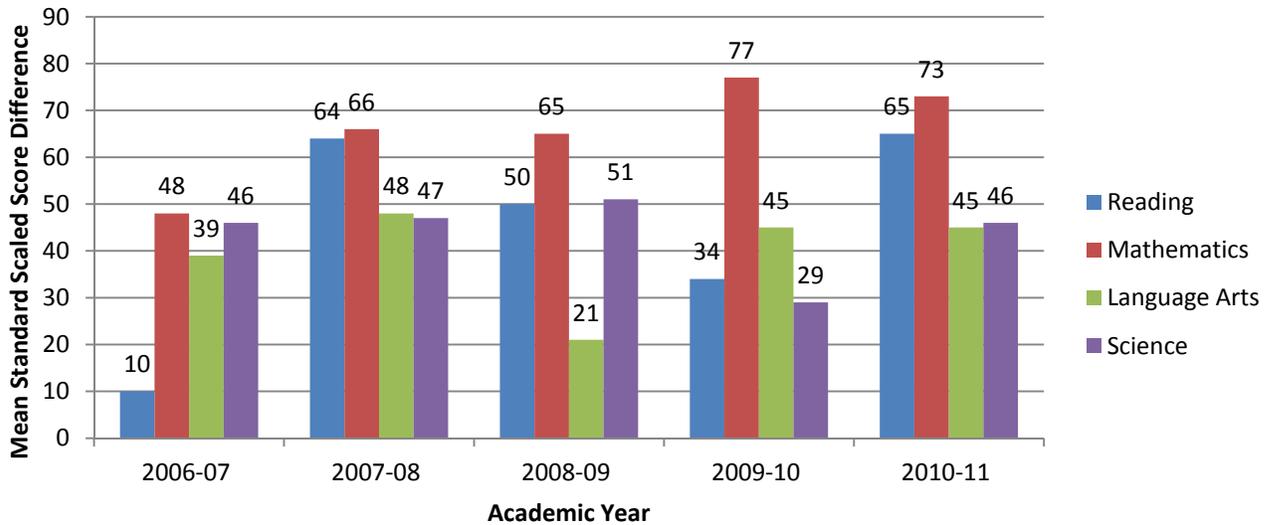
Please refer to Item \_Section 1.11 CPAA Grade One Data 2010-11

Please refer to Item \_Section 1.12 CPAA Grade Two Data 2010-11

Please refer to Item \_Section 1.13 CPAA Kdg Data 2010 - 2011

In the 2010-11 school year, PDLCS students achieved statistically significant academic growth in all four (4) core academic areas including reading, mathematics, science and language arts. This is the fifth consecutive year that PDLCS students exceeded the academic growth expectations in all four (4) core academic areas. The illustration below shows the comparison of academic gains achieved by PDLCS students over the past five (5) school years.

## 5 Year Aggregate Growth Comparison in Core Subjects



In the 2006-07 school year, PDLCS students achieved significant growth in all academic areas with the exception of reading. The growth measures from the results of the Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System confirm that our students are experiencing above normal academic growth. In 2010, the growth scores for our grades 3–8 exceeded the growth scores of all virtual charter schools.

Please refer to Item \_Section 1.14 PVAAS Cyber School 3 yr. Comparison

The table below shows the performance distribution of PDLCS students on the most recent Scantron Assessment.

Subject	Above Avg	Count	High Avg	Count	Low Avg	Count	Below Avg	Count	Total Count	Mean Score
Reading	36%	67	21%	39	18%	34	25%	46	186	2890
Mathematics	24%	45	19%	36	22%	40	35%	65	186	2657
Science	39%	43	19%	21	23%	25	20%	22	111	2651
Lang Arts	30%	34	23%	26	18%	20	28%	33	113	2579

- *Has the cyber charter school made Adequate Yearly Progress (“AYP”) for each of the last five years? If not, discuss why and what steps are in place to remedy the situation. Reference information from the cyber charter school’s School Improvement Plan where applicable.*

In 2005-06, the school met only 3 of 11 benchmarks for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The following year, the school met 13 of 15 benchmarks. The school did not meet the benchmark for

graduation rate and did not meet the achievement target for the "white" student subgroup in mathematics. Since 2007, PDLCS did, however, meet all the participation and performance benchmarks. Although the school did not meet AYP due to the lack of growth in the graduation rate; the school filed an appeal with Department of Education due to inaccurate reporting by the school's management company. However, our appeal was denied by the PDE and the school was placed on Corrective Action II.

In 2009, the school met all the participation targets and also met the graduation rate benchmark as well. Although the school did not meet all the academic targets, the school's students experienced positive academic growth as they have in each of the past four (4) years, as confirmed by our standardized test results and the Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System (PVAAS). Since the school did not meet AYP, PDLCS was required to develop an improvement plan and to formally adopt that plan for implementation by December, 2009. The goals were identified and the plan was implemented in the summer of 2009. The Board approved all of the policies discussed throughout this document and is very aware of the areas in need of improvement. The Board formally approved the plan at its December meeting. In 2010, our school improvement plan was modified to address the discrepancies in the school graduation rate.

The school recognizes that many of our students come to the school with academic deficits and many students come to our school from schools that are in school improvement. In addition, many students decide to stay with our program for one year or less for a variety of reasons which is true of virtual schools in general.

Our curriculum is organized in a manner that links assessment and instruction as part of the on-going instructional process. Consequently, students are placed in the curriculum that supports student learning and growth, and curriculum material is provided at their academic and developmental level. Assessment data are electronically stored and reviewed routinely to determine student growth and understanding. The student is provided instructional support from their academic team, which includes their parent/guardian, teachers and academic advisor. Students with special needs are assigned to a special education teacher who is responsible for developing the child's IEP and monitoring student progress. Students are also assigned to Title I Reading and Math instructors if they experience either reading or math difficulties and qualify for these services.

Students are assessed and placed in the curriculum at a developmental level that promotes success (differentiated instruction). Academic advisors work closely with the education staff to review assessment data and determine the appropriate academic level for student entry. Students are placed at an academic level and pace that supports growth and retention. If students continue to struggle, teachers are required to make a referral to the Response to Instruction and Intervention Program. Students who continue to struggle are discussed at a formal staff meeting chaired by a certified school psychologist with general education and special education staff present. Intervention strategies are followed throughout the RtII process for 60 days prior to a formal referral to special education, unless an evaluation is requested by the parent/guardian, in which case, the RtII and evaluation processes are followed simultaneously.

- *Describe the strategies that are in place to ensure that students with special needs, those at risk of failure and those not making reasonable progress are meeting – or are being given the opportunities and reasonable accommodations to meet – the academic goals. Provide clear evidence and use data to document how those strategies are proving effective for students in terms of improved academic performance.*

At the beginning of the 2009–2010 school year, PDLCS developed and implemented the research-based 3-tier Response to Intervention (RtII) model as a portal through which all students' academic, behavioral, emotional, etc., needs are acknowledged and addressed. RtII is supported by the Pennsylvania Department of Education/PDE as a process by which student need(s) are recognized, monitored and addressed in ascending tiers. PDLCS' RtII process is continually reviewed to streamline the steps involved in monitoring student progress, referring students to the next level or tier, and gathering information used in making the determination whether to consider a student for Special Education referral. In Tier One, students function successfully within the research-based general education curriculum with accommodations such as Differentiated Instruction. PDLCS also successfully completed Curriculum Mapping its general education curriculum during the summer of 2010 through the 2010 – 2011 school year. Students and parent(s) receive orientation training and support from their academic advisors and teachers designed to provide information necessary to navigate and communicate within the virtual online school environment. A rigorous teacher and academic advisor Progress Monitoring Process (see attachment) is used to monitor student attendance, activity and participation, and completion of work. Student assessment methods include grades, monitoring of amount and quality of work the student turns in, state (PSSA, PSSA-M) and local assessments (i.e., Scantron and the Children's Progress Achievement Assessment/CPPA), as well as, e-metrics and PVAAS, etc., data.

Students who do not respond to strategies explained in Tier One are referred to Tier Two for additional and/or alternative intervention(s). A copy of the PDLCS Student Referral Form is attached for your review. Students continue to receive all Tier One accommodations that bring success as documented by the teacher progress monitoring process information, and may receive additional intervention(s) and accommodation(s) such as:

- Title One Reading or Title One Math
- Small Group Instruction
- SES, informal (i.e., before or after live learning sessions), or after-school tutoring by PDLCS teachers
- Assistance from the Academic Advisor (i.e., retraining, time management skills, etc.), teacher (i.e., special calendars, guided notes, study guides, etc.)

The RtII team meeting is scheduled by the academic advisor, and the team considers the student's academic and/or behavioral difficulties, as well as, need for referral to another school team such as the Student Assistance Program (SAP) to address emotional/behavioral issues affecting academic learning. Within Tier Two, students carrying a medical and/or mental health diagnosis are considered for a Section 504 Agreement, formal tutoring, and other intervention(s) such a Positive Behavior Support Plan (PBSP). The RtII team determines whether the student may benefit from a PBSP, which within a virtual school environment depends upon not only

teacher participation but also parent(s) participation within the home environment. If the student demonstrates 10% success within a 60 calendar day period, the student is not referred for Special Education; rather, the student continues to receive support within the regular education environment via RtII accommodation(s)/intervention(s).

**Tier Three:** If the student fails to demonstrate a minimum of 10% success over 60 calendar days, the RtII team meets to determine the appropriateness of a student referral for Special Education.

**Special Education Referral:** If the RtII team determines that the student may benefit from a Special Education (SPED) referral, PDLCS follows PDE rules/procedures to determine whether the student meets both need and eligibility criteria for SPED programming.

Based upon available data, a review of PDLCS' RtII process suggests success in the training and application of the documentation process by staff, teachers, and administration. The need for improvement in student and parent participation as well as authenticating student work is noted.

Please refer to Item \_Section 1.15 PDLCS Progress Monitoring Process August 2011

Please refer to Item \_Section 1.16 PDLCS Student Referral Form August 2011

Please refer to Item \_Section 1.17 PDLCS Basic Flow Chart Revised 6-30-10

Please refer to Item \_Section 1.18 One Page RtII PM Form

Please refer to Item \_Section 1.19 RtII\_Roles\_6.30.10

Please refer to Item \_Section 1.20 Pre Team Meeting Form

Please refer to Item \_Section 1.21 RtII\_Goal\_Template

Please refer to Item \_Section 1.22 RtII\_Family\_email\_6.30.10

Please refer to Item \_Section 1.23 Student\_Academic\_Self-Assessment\_6.3

Please refer to Item \_Section 1.24 Parent\_Academic\_Concerns\_Survey\_6.30

Please refer to Item \_Section 1.25 RtII\_1\_Meeting\_Form\_6.3.10

Please refer to Item \_Section 1.26 RtII\_2\_Meeting\_Form\_6.30

PDLCS receives Title I and Title IIA funds throughout the PDE Federal Programs e-grants system. The Title programs support a targeted assistance program providing supplemental services in Math and Reading serving students who are most at risk to fail the rigorous academic content standards. The school serves students in grades K-6 by providing intervention software, one-on-one and small group intervention classes using research based practices and materials. The school employs one full time highly qualified teacher that extends the school day and delivers the intervention activities. Continuous progress monitoring is achieved through the use of the Children's Progress Assessment, Scantron and Informal Reading Inventories. In addition to the school provided intervention activities PDLCS students participate in Supplemental Education Services. The school employs a Parent Involvement Specialist to ensure that parents receive support in community involvement opportunities, such as field trips, Open House, events in their local areas, and parent lead social gatherings. Title IIA funds are used to provide high quality professional development that is aligned to the continuous improvement plan. All grant expenditures are reviewed to ensure that they are allowable, allocable and appropriate according to EDGAR and USDE Regulations. Supplement not supplant rules are strictly adhered to. Title I School Improvement dollars are also allocated to the school that are used in accordance with the Getting Results Document which is attached to this application.

The school also receives IDEA B pass through dollars from the Allegheny Intermediate Unit to support the needs of our students who require Special Education services. The school has met the maintenance of effort requirements using the allocation to provide intervention and related services to students with special needs.

Please refer to the following Items for Title 1 information.

1. \_Section 1.27 Phone Call to Parents about Title 1 – 10.11
2. \_Section 1.28 Parent Letter
3. \_Section 1.29 Academy Parent Letter
4. \_Section 1.30 Title I Intro Survey Letter
5. \_Section 1.31 Title I Pamphlet PA 10.11
6. \_Section 1.32 Federal Programs PDLCS

The Student Assistance Program provides support for students and families who are experiencing barriers to their education outside of the classroom.

Please refer to Item \_Section 1.33 SAP Refresher Training 8.16.11

- *Using the chart on the following page, report the school's PSSA scores for each of the preceding years. Report out for subgroups, including, at a minimum, students with IEPs, students who are limited English proficient (LEP), race/ethnicity and economically disadvantaged. Explain how the scores correspond to the goals identified in the current charter. Discuss how the scores correspond to AYP as established in the Pennsylvania Accountability System.*
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Please refer to PSSA Testing Charts Folder.

## B. Educational Programs

- *Provide a detailed description of the curriculum offered and how it meets the requirements of 22P code Ch.4 (relating to academic standards and assessment). Also, provide a random sampling of lesson plans from different grade levels and academic disciplines.*

We continuously review our curriculum identifying content areas with over emphasis and under representation. To aid in our commitment, the school retained the services of an experienced curriculum consultant to lead the staff in a curriculum mapping project that was completed in December, 2010.

### a. See Content Area Curriculum Maps:

1. Arts & Humanities
2. Career & Work
3. Civics & Government
4. Economics & Ecology
5. Family & Consumer Science
6. Geography
7. Language Arts

8. Mathematics
9. Physical Education & Health
10. Science
11. Psychology
12. Technology
13. World Language

Review of our curriculum mapping project enabled the administration to uncover instructional gaps and create interdisciplinary instructional links. Highly qualified teachers were hired during the summer of 2011 to address gaps in the areas of Arts & Humanities, and World Language. Experienced teachers were supported in obtaining certifications in Family and Consumer Science and Technology. Throughout the summer of 2011, teachers created new classes and revised class lesson plans within our course delivery system to address areas of need in our curriculum map. In addition, each teacher has two hours per week set aside in his/her teaching schedule for curriculum mapping revisions. We are confident the revisions will yield a comprehensive map aligned with Pennsylvania State Standards.

Please refer to the Curriculum Maps Folder.

Daily online lessons are supplemented with an array of curricula easily tailored to meet the unique needs of online learners at all grade and ability levels. All curriculum offerings allow for evaluation and feedback through assignments and progress monitoring efforts that align with the Pennsylvania Department of Education content area standards and anchors.

b. Core Course Materials

1. Holt
2. Harcourt Mifflin
3. Think Central
4. Headsprouts
5. Starfall
6. Madcap Logic
7. Tritone Music
8. APEX Learning
9. Keys2Work
10. Glencoe

Teachers further supplement their classroom core curriculum with multi-sensory tools such as educational websites, interactive tutorials, virtual labs, articles, case studies, and videos as well. We have the unique ability to utilize the educational technology offerings of the Internet to our advantage in order to create a virtual classroom that goes beyond the typical textbook or lecture format.

c. Supplemental Materials

1. Discovery Video

2. World Book Library
3. Ebrary
4. Bridges
5. Education City
6. Skills Tutor
7. EdOptions
8. Brain Pop/Brain Pop Jr./Brain Pop Spanish
9. KET Labs
10. EduLabs

Please refer to the Sample Lessons Folder

- *Describe the curriculum delivery method. Provide specific information pertaining to the house of instruction, availability of teachers for direct assistance, method of instructional delivery, etc.*

Curriculum is delivered both synchronously and asynchronously. Daily lessons and materials are housed within our course delivery system, Angel Learning. The daily asynchronous lessons outline the objectives of the lesson; provide opportunities for instruction via our online programs and textbooks; guided and independent practice and assessment. All courses follow a course consistency layout developed with the Tri-State Study Council of the University of Pittsburgh.

Please refer to Item \_Section 1.35 Angel Course Consistency Instruction

Synchronous instruction occurs through our live learning classroom, Wimba. Students are required to attend live lessons, which provide students with the opportunity to interact with peers and receive highly qualified instruction. Elementary students meet daily with their core teachers and in a weekly resource room with elective teachers. Secondary students have live learning class schedules based on their individual schedules with each class meeting at a minimum once a week. All lessons are recorded to allow the student to refer to the lessons independently for reinforcement.

Teachers are available from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. by phone, email or during the live lessons on scheduled school days. With direct telephone access to teachers, students have less lag time when they have questions. Many teachers answer emails during the evening and on non-school days. It is important to note that our course teachers write their own daily lessons, provide the live learning instruction and grade all course assignments. Ensuring there are no barriers between the student and the highly qualified teacher is a priority in our school. In addition, the school offers an after-school homework assistance program Monday-Thursday from 4:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., which is serviced by our teaching staff.

Students needing more extensive assistance can participate in our Supplemental Education Services tutoring program, Title 1, and special education. Supplemental tutoring is offered through outside agencies. Calvert, Title 1 and special education students receive instruction with our highly qualified teachers. Families who choose Calvert, an asynchronous curriculum, usually have experience with home schooling their children. The Calvert teacher offers a daily live learning resource room for students. Assignments and assessments are collected through the online course delivery system to ensure students are on pace with expected learning objectives throughout the school year. Students and parents may contact the Calvert teacher by telephone, email or during the live lessons 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on scheduled school days. Title 1 students meet twice weekly with their teacher in a live learning classroom. Title students also participate in an asynchronous online mathematics and reading program. Special education teachers offer live learning resource rooms, as well as individualized and small group instruction for students. Title and special education teachers are available by telephone and email as well 7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. on scheduled school days. As is the case with our regular education teachers, these teachers also often respond to inquiries outside of their scheduled work hours.

Support staff and school administrators are also available to assist students with questions throughout the school day by telephone and email. Training for support staff on materials used in each class and navigating courses for academic success provides an extra layer of support for students needing assistance.

- *Describe how students are evaluated and how that evaluation is used to improve student achievement and attain learning objectives.*

PSSA, Scantron and Children's Progress Achievement Assessment data, as well as the course pre-assessment and start of school learning styles and interest surveys are analyzed by the teacher to discern when response to intervention and instruction for an individual or small groups of students is appropriate. As students are about to experience a unit or lesson in which their testing data indicates high levels of prior knowledge or areas of need the teacher can go into the online course delivery system and team the students accordingly. Those students needing a more challenging lesson, the students on pace with the lesson objectives and those in need of remediation will often experience a different lesson, type of assignment or receive leveled reading materials.

Students are evaluated without the fear of failure through formative assessment opportunities during their live learning sessions and with guided practice assignments. Both provide a time for the teacher to redirect, review and reinforce the key knowledge and skills the student is expected to master. Elementary teachers also provide time for students to read aloud in class and one-on-one with the teacher to assess for fluency and age appropriate word recognition. Teachers also provide study guides and self-check opportunities within the multi-sensory online curriculum that provides instant feedback to the students.

Formal assessments come in the form of quizzes, written assignments, projects, tests, and virtual labs within classrooms. Teachers vary classroom assessments in an effort to address learning styles. Gaining authentic assessment is essential in an online environment. Teachers have received training on how to use the online tools available to them through the course delivery system and online curriculum to aid in gaining authentic assessment. When discourse is evident between instructional goals and formal assessment achievement, the teacher will work with the student one-on-one to address any areas of concern. Interventions will be put into place by the teacher through differentiated instruction techniques and initiation of a student referral for a team meeting or Response to Intervention and Instruction may also occur.

- *Describe teaching methods used to enhance student learning. Describe professional development provided by the cyber charter school and how the professional development has been used to enhance the delivery of instruction.*

Professional development within the school primarily focuses on improving student achievement. Curriculum mapping, Standards Aligned System, Response to Intervention and Instruction, eMetrics, Pennsylvania System of School Assessment, Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System and School Improvement opportunities have occurred multiple times in the last three years.

Curriculum mapping training began in the fall of 2009 and continued through December 2010. Teachers were taught the importance of understanding the difference between what they intend to teach, what is actually taught in a lesson and what is learned by the student. The mapping software program continues to provide the teachers with a resource in determining when and where to effectively apply interventions techniques for students. Teachers learned how to write curriculum using backward design. The initial maps indicated that some teachers were assessing numerous key knowledge and skills by the end of a short learning segment. The lessons learned during the mapping training are evident in the daily lesson revisions teachers worked on during the summer of 2011, as well as in the teaming which occurs in the course delivery system.

Please refer to Item \_Section 1.34 Curriculum Mapping PowerPoint.

For the last two years a School Improvement Team made up of teachers from various grade levels and content areas have participated in training with the Intermediate Unit and Pennsylvania Department of Education staff on how to evaluate school district, building, grade level and individual school data. The team members are responsible for coming back to the school and training others. Participation in the trainings has brought greater understanding across the teachers in the connection and importance between our curriculum map, daily lessons, classroom assessments and what students learned according to standardized testing results.

Please refer to Item \_Section 1.35 School Improvement Team Teacher Training.

Teachers used their curriculum maps in the eMetrics, PVAAS and PSSA training sessions. They worked in content area and interdisciplinary teams across grade levels to determine how every content area can assist in improving student achievement. Teachers outside of mathematics and language arts now have the tools and resources to work with individual students on academic growth in reading and math.

Please refer to Items \_Section 1.36 and \_Section 1.37 for eMetrics and PSSA detailed information.

Multiple sessions on how teachers can use the Standards Aligned System for developing daily instruction and interventions within courses have occurred since 2009. Sessions included the information contained in each component and an overview of how to use the system. The primary use teachers have reported is in using the system to create standards-based lessons in their classroom, unpacking the anchors and ideas for interventions.

Please refer to Items \_Section 1.38 and \_Section 1.39.

Response to Intervention and Instruction training has resulted in increased use of differentiated instruction across grade levels and courses. Flexible grouping, learning contracts, tiered instruction, and increased choice opportunities for the students to utilize their learning preferences are evident in the courses. In addition, improvement in monitoring measurable interventions during phase one of RtII allows the academic team to make data driven decisions in RtII II meetings.

Please refer to Item \_Section 1.40 for the School calendar.

Please refer to Item \_Section 1.41 for the School Improvement Plan.

## II. School Operations and Management

### A. Teacher Evaluation and Professional Development

- *How are teachers and administrators evaluated? Describe the standards for teacher and staff performance.*

PDLCS follows the state mandated teacher evaluation format and procedures. The PDE appropriate teacher evaluation form (PDE 426, PDE 426A, PDE 427, PDE 427A, PDE 428 or PDE 428A) is used to document teacher effectiveness. The critical departure in the school's evaluation process involves a review of student performance and student growth metrics for all students assigned to a teacher. In essence, the success of our teachers is directly tied to student achievement.

Teachers possessing a temporary professional certificate are evaluated formally at least twice a year. Teachers with permanent certification are formally evaluated at least once a year. Both the CEO and the Principal conduct informal observations of classes throughout the year to monitor instruction and provide teachers with constructive feedback. Dr. James Hoover, CEO, and the K-12 Principal, Mrs. Patricia Rossetti, are solely responsible for teacher evaluation. Dr. Hoover possesses Pennsylvania Administrative certification as well as a District Superintendent Letter of Eligibility. Mrs. Rossetti possesses Pennsylvania administrative certification as a K-12 Principal.

The school's CEO annually reviews the performance indicators with the staff and provides each teacher with a pre-observation guide prior to a scheduled formal observation. In addition, growth in student achievement, as indicated by the school's standardized test and (PVAAS) emetrics data, is annually reviewed with individual members of the school's teaching staff. Dr. Hoover and Mrs. Rossetti attend professional development offered through the intermediate unit, PA Department of Education, PATTAN, National Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals, PA Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals, The International Association for K-12 Online Learning and the Pennsylvania Coalition of Charter Schools.

Dr. Hoover came to PDLCS with thirteen (13) years of experience as a building administrator in Pennsylvania public schools. Mrs. Rossetti has been with the school since its second year of operation. The school's principal and Director of Pupil Services are annually evaluated by Dr. Hoover using an instrument similar to the teacher evaluation template. Domains included in the instrument are based on the duties and responsibilities outline in the respective job descriptions.

The CEO is annually evaluated by the President of the Board of Trustees (the performance review is reviewed by the full Board of Trustees), based on mutually established goals related to the operational management of the school and the academic goals established by the Board of Trustees.

The PDLCS Observation Checklist follows:

## Observation / Evaluation Checklist PA Distance Learning CS

<b>Teacher:</b>	<b>Date Observed: 9/2/09</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Time:</b>
<b>Observer: Dr. James P. Hoover</b>	<b># of Students:</b>

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### Preparation

- \_\_\_\_\_ Adequate knowledge of content and pedagogy
- \_\_\_\_\_ Adequate knowledge of Pennsylvania Academic Standards
- \_\_\_\_\_ Adequate knowledge of students and how to use this knowledge to direct and guide instruction
- \_\_\_\_\_ Appropriate instructional goals that reflect content standards and high expectations for students
- \_\_\_\_\_ Reasonable awareness of resources, materials, or technology available through the school or district
- \_\_\_\_\_ Appropriate instructional design in which plans for various elements are aligned with the instructional goals
- \_\_\_\_\_ Appropriate reflection on teaching and learning and use of such in future instructional planning
- \_\_\_\_\_ Appropriate assessments of student learning completely aligned to the instructional goals

Notes:

### Classroom Environment

- \_\_\_\_\_ Clear and moderate expectations for student achievement
- \_\_\_\_\_ Challenging and dynamic learning environment
- \_\_\_\_\_ Moderate attention to equitable learning opportunities for students
- \_\_\_\_\_ Appropriate and highly respectful interactions between teacher and students and among students
- \_\_\_\_\_ Effective classroom routines and procedures resulting in effective use of instructional time
- \_\_\_\_\_ Clear standards of conduct and effective management of student behavior
- \_\_\_\_\_ Safe and adequate organization of physical space that provides accessibility to learning

Notes:

### Instructional Delivery

- \_\_\_\_\_ Adequate communication of procedures and high-quality explanations of the content
- \_\_\_\_\_ Adequate use of different levels of questioning and discussion strategies
- \_\_\_\_\_ Reasonable engagement of students in learning and appropriate pacing of instruction
- \_\_\_\_\_ Adequate feedback to students on their learning
- \_\_\_\_\_ Adequate use of formal and informal assessments to meet learning goals and monitor student learning
- \_\_\_\_\_ High degree of flexibility and responsiveness in meeting the learning needs of students

Notes:

### **Professionalism**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Adherence to school and district procedures and regulations related to attendance, punctuality, etc.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Knowledge of Professional of Conduct and full commitment to professional standards
- \_\_\_\_\_ Compliance with school requirements for maintaining accurate and complete records
- \_\_\_\_\_ Compliance with participating in school professional development events/opportunities
- \_\_\_\_\_ Applies new knowledge and skills in the classroom
- \_\_\_\_\_ Regularly communicates with families regarding student needs/improvement

Notes:

### **Virtual School Competencies (Teacher Documented)**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Provides clear guidelines for interaction with students
- \_\_\_\_\_ Develops well-designed discussion assignments facilitate meaningful cooperation among students
- \_\_\_\_\_ Provides opportunities to present course projects
- \_\_\_\_\_ Provides information feedback and acknowledgment feedback
- \_\_\_\_\_ Provides deadlines for online course
- \_\_\_\_\_ Promotes high expectations by providing challenging tasks, sample cases, and praise for quality work
- \_\_\_\_\_ Allows students to choose project topics incorporating diverse views into online courses

Notes:

### **Response to Intervention (Teacher Documented)**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Learner performance and progress is reviewed on a regular basis and in a systematic manner
- \_\_\_\_\_ Regularly identifies students that are making adequate progress,
- \_\_\_\_\_ Uses information that directly reflects student learning based on measurable learning criteria
- \_\_\_\_\_ Student progress is frequently assessed to identify adequate or inadequate growth trends
- \_\_\_\_\_ Priority is given to using actual student performance on the instructional curriculum to guide decisions
- \_\_\_\_\_ Modification of the core curriculum is arranged for students who are identified as non-responsive
- \_\_\_\_\_ Utilizes team-based structures and procedures
- \_\_\_\_\_ Adopts and implements of a full continuum of intervention practices

Notes:

### **Commendations**

### **Recommendations**

- *Discuss why that process was chosen and how it has evolved and been refined over the course of the charter.*

The PDE appropriate teacher evaluation form (PDE 426, PDE 426A, PDE 427, PDE 427A, PDE 428 or PDE 428A) was chosen to document teacher effectiveness because it is consistent with Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for teachers. The evaluation system also lends itself to a portfolio based evaluation structure. The process has been refined by adding additional domains specifically related to virtual education and student intervention requirements. For example, our teacher evaluation includes a “virtual school competencies” domain. Our teachers are evaluated on the following virtual school competencies in addition to the domains in Danielson’s Framework:

- Provides clear guidelines for interaction with students
  - Develops well-designed discussion assignments facilitate meaningful cooperation among students
  - Provides opportunities to present course projects
  - Provides information feedback and acknowledgment feedback
  - Provides deadlines of online course
  - Promotes high expectations by providing challenging tasks, sample cases, and praise for quality work
  - Allows students to choose project topics incorporates diverse views into online courses
- *Provide evidence and discuss the quality of teaching at the cyber charter school. Include outcomes of teacher evaluations and teacher surveys in the discussion.*

As the school has evolved, the skill level of our staff has also evolved.

The true indicator of teacher quality is the satisfaction level of the parents and students. Based on the anecdotal feedback and almost nonexistent complaints lodged by parents, our teacher quality is high and teachers are going the extra mile to meet the needs of our families. This trend is also evident through the formal and informal evaluations conducted by the administrators at the school.

The school administration is focused on academic growth and holds the staff accountable for achieving sustained academic growth for the students. The Board of Trustee’s has developed a systematic approach to reward staff for helping students achieve academic growth. The school administers the Scantron Performance Series assessment in four core subject areas in the fall and spring to gauge the academic growth of each student in grades 3 through 12. Children’s Progress Achievement Assessment is utilized in kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade three times a year in the areas of mathematics and reading.

- *Discuss staff turnover and retention patterns. Drawing upon exit interviews and surveys, explain why teachers choose to return or not to return to the school.*

Our exit interviews and surveys revealed similar influences for both staff and student turnover and retention. Just as cyber school education may not be the best fit for a student, the same can be said for a teacher or other staff member. Similarly, just as many parents enroll at a virtual school on a year-to-year review basis, staff and teachers may also do the same. For some teachers, experiencing a virtual school model adds a unique educational skill set to their instruction capabilities; for many, the benefits and support provided by PDLCS has been instrumental in their desire to further their careers with PDLCS.

Staffing in a charter school is largely dependent on enrollment. The primary reason that teachers choose to leave PDLCS is to gain experience in order to garner positions in the traditional brick and mortar public schools. Teachers believe that the traditional public schools offer a more stable and certain work environment. PDLCS provides extensive training and professional development for its staff members. As school districts begin to embark on developing their own in-house cyber programs, experience in virtual education is becoming a sought after skill. However, in some cases, teachers have not had their contracts renewed due to performance issues or poor academic achievement among students assigned to them.

*Use the following table to report professional staff turnover/retention data for each year of the past charter.*

	<b>2007-08</b>	<b>2008-09</b>	<b>2009-10</b>	<b>2010-11</b>	<b>2011-12</b>
Total number of professional staff	21	27	24	24	28
Number of professional staff employed in September who returned from previous year	17	19	22	21	24
Number of professional staff employed in June who were also employed by the school the previous September	17	23	26	23	

- *Complete the table below for all professional staff members.*  
Please refer to Item \_Section 2.0a PDLCS Professional Staff Table.
- *If not currently meeting the requirement that 75% of its professional staff hold appropriate certification, how will the school meet this requirement? Discuss how the cyber charter school meets the requirements for “Highly Qualified” teachers.*

The PDLCS staff is 100% highly qualified.

- *Submit documentation and discuss evidence that teachers and other staff have the training and resources they need to perform effectively. Describe the professional development that is in place to support teachers so that more students are meeting the standards. Describe why this professional development was selected and how it relates to the overall cyber charter school mission and student outcomes.*

PDLCS realizes that the operation of a cyber-charter school requires a different approach to both the selection and training of staff. We have undertaken a study to determine the best possible interview questions for educational staff at the PDLCS. We know the importance of quality staff and utilize our best efforts throughout the hiring process to ensure our best candidates are selected and trained in order to be truly effective in their positions.

PDLCS administrator uses the PA.educator.net system to search, screen, and select highly qualified candidates for instructional vacancies at the school. Each employee is annually required to sign a statement affirming that they have not engaged in criminal activities during the previous year.

A comprehensive Professional Education Plan was submitted in a timely manner and approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education on 4/21/11. A copy of the plan is included as Appendix B in the 2011 PDLCS Annual Report. Professional Development for all staff members is encouraged and supported at PDLCS through a variety of delivery systems including local staff development, attendance at seminars and conferences, higher education course work and any responsible provider of training.

Please refer to Item \_Section 2.0b Professional Education Plan.

A Teacher Induction Plan was also submitted in a timely manner and approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education on 10/16/07. The 2011 PDLCS Annual Report is under review at the Pennsylvania Department of Education therefore the 2010 approval letter is included.

Please refer to Item \_Section 2.1 for the Teacher Induction Plan.

Please refer to Item \_Section 2.2 Annual Report Approval Letter.

Please refer to Item \_Section 2.2.1 Annual Report

Additionally, we utilize a comprehensive teacher and staff orientation program. This program assigns each new staff member to a mentor teacher, who assists the new staff member in learning their job over an eight-week time period.

Another substantial investment that PDLCS makes into its staff is in the area of resources and equipment. PDLCS is one of the few cyber schools in Pennsylvania that requires most of its staff to work from school offices. While this means that PDLCS must provide workspace for its staff at a substantial additional cost, we believe that this investment pays dividends in providing staff with the best training possible, as well as empowering our teachers, through daily face-to-face

communication, to be the best possible distance learning teachers for their students and families.

Finally, PDLCS recognizes the importance of its students to master the ability to write using organized, analytical and structured skills. PDLCS is committed to providing a program which will teach these skills to our students and will provide Professional Development to our educational staff to assist with these skills to our students. We are excited about this opportunity, as it is critical to our students' academic development, as well as providing a new opportunity in cyber school education to the students of Pennsylvania.

- *Does the cyber charter school have any union contracts with professional employees? If so, please attach.*

No

#### A. Financial Solvency

- *How frequently are the school budget and financial records reviewed by the Board of Trustees?*

The Board of Trustees reviews and approves the treasurer's report at each quarterly meeting. The Board of Trustees reviews and approves the school's budget prior to submission to the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The Board also reviews all audits performed at the school.

- *Who is responsible to review contracts, invoices and receivables, and who is responsible to sign checks? Has there been an independent audit performed each year of the charter? For each audit, if not previously submitted to the Department, attach with the Renewal Application.*

The Pennsylvania Distance Learning Charter School has entered into a management agreement with White Hat Distance Learning (WHDL) to perform all "back office" functions necessary to operate the school on a daily basis with the exception of employment. White Hat Distance Learning oversees and manages the financial operations of the school. Checks drafted against the Board account are signed by the WHDL accounting manager and the school's CEO. Independent audits are performed annually by Malin, Berquist & Company, LLP. Date of Last Audit: FYE June 30, 2010.

According to the current management agreement, the subcontractors are subject to written approval by the Board of Trustees. The management agreement states:

“The company (White Hat Management) reserves the right to subcontract any and all aspects of services it agrees to provide to the school, but may only do so upon the prior written approval of the School Board”.

- *Discuss the school's financial controls and procedures for the management of financial resources.*

The Board of Trustees has several financial controls surrounding the accounting cycles of budgeting, receipts, disbursements, and payroll:

The Board of Trustees passes an annual budget in which estimated resources are appropriated for the upcoming fiscal year. Regular reviews of the budget are conducted to ensure that no significant variances from the budget have occurred that would require an amendment. If such changes are necessary, the budget is amended only through resolution by the Board of Trustees.

Receipts of funding from various Districts are deposited in one of two ways. Districts making payments to the School can send payments to a lockbox at the School's bank. This helps to ensure that all funds collected by this method are accurately deposited and recorded in the School's bank account. For funds coming from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) that have been withheld from non-paying Districts, a periodic deposit is made by PDE directly into the School's bank account, again helping to ensure that funds are accurately deposited and recorded.

All checks written by the School are signed by the business manager, employed by the management contractor, and the school's CEO after determining that the expense is supported by appropriate documentation and the School is properly liable for the cost. All other disbursements are conducted via wire transfer after receiving written Board approval.

The School's payroll is processed by a third party contractor specializing in payroll processing. The payroll processing contractor completes all aspects of the payroll function including processing of semi-monthly payroll, payment of taxes, completion of tax returns and printing of employee W2s. Only contractors that have a sound internal control system that allows them to deliver their product with a high rate of accuracy are contracted to process the school's payroll. Payroll costs for the School are recorded based upon reports received from the payroll contractor. Currently, the school contracts with ADP for its payroll processing.

Finally, the School undergoes an annual financial and compliance audit by an independent accountant. Last year's audit report for the School (6/30/10) rendered a clean audit opinion and indicated no material weaknesses or instances of non-compliance. It is expected that the School will have its audit for 6/30/11 completed by December 2011.

Regarding how financial information is communicated to the Board of Trustees, each Board Trustee receives at each of the scheduled Board meetings a complete financial package which includes a balance sheet, income statement, check register,

bank reconciliation, budget vs. actual statement, plus any other significant information that the Board needs to be aware of. The Board reviews the financial reports along with the Board's Treasurer and then such is also reported at the Board meeting. Then, after all items are addressed, the Board approves each financial report through formal resolution.

- *Following are Items relating to copies of the most recent financial statement and the audits for the past five (5) years.*

Please refer to the financial reports, please refer to the following Items:

1. \_Section 2.3 PDLCS Financials June
2. \_Section 2.4 FY2005 Audit
3. \_Section 2.5 FY2006 Audit
4. \_Section 2.6 FY2007 Audit
5. \_Section 2.7 FY 2008 Audit
6. \_Section 2.8 FY 2009 Audit
7. \_Section 2.9 FY 2010 Audit

- *How many bank accounts exist for the cyber charter school? Provide bank locations, type of accounts and account numbers.*

The School banking information is as follows:

One (1) checking account  
Citizens National Bank  
525 William Penn Place  
Pittsburgh, PA  
Acct # 620195-693-3

- *If applicable, discuss and provide documentation regarding how any findings from any auditor general's report were addressed and resolved.*

Not Applicable

- *Explain how the cyber charter school commits resources in ways that ensure it achieves its mission.*

PDLCS has formed extremely positive relationships with community organizations, museums, zoos, and other organizations through our student gatherings. Our school outreach coordinator arranges gatherings for the students at various locations throughout the Commonwealth. At least one gathering is held during the fall semester and one during the spring semester, all of which shall be held in different regions of the State of Pennsylvania, so that every student/parent will have the opportunity to attend at least one gathering each year. These gatherings are designed to foster a sense of community between parents, students and School staff. These student gatherings at local libraries, museums, symphonies, theaters and other educational/developmental sites of interest are organized and scheduled so

that students may better appreciate the wonderful resources that Pennsylvania has to offer. In turn, these organizations have demonstrated their appreciation by referring students to PDLCS.

Each year, the school sponsors a “Start of School” picnic. This year, this event was held at North Park in Western Pennsylvania. All families enrolled in the school or considering enrollment were invited to attend. We had over 90 families attend this event. Several families travel across the state to attend. This event provided an informal setting for our families and teachers to make a personal connection. We also hold an annual “open house” event where families can visit our Pittsburgh offices and meet the teachers and staff.

No specific agreements have been entered into with the local school districts regarding participation of the cyber charter school students in extracurricular activities within the school district. PDLCS has enjoyed very positive relationships with the Pennsylvania local school districts and a number of our students participate in their extracurricular activities. For these students, we provide the school district with a Progress Report, as requested, to ensure that students follow the same participation guidelines as students enrolled in the local school district.

Upon request, PDLCS provides the following documentation to our student’s school district of residence, in written form:

- A copy of the charter
- A copy of the cyber charter school application
- A copy of all annual reports prepared by the cyber charter school

As required by Pennsylvania law, in the manner prescribed by the law, PDLCS provides each residential school district of our enrolled students, a list of all students from that school district enrolled in PDLCS.

PDLCS has complied with the Cyber Charter School Law provision that within five (5) days of the enrollment of a student in the cyber charter school, the parent or guardian and the cyber charter school shall notify the student’s school district of residence of the enrollment through the use of the notification form developed by the Department of Education. PDLCS faxes the PDE Notification Form to the school district.

PDLCS has complied with the Cyber Charter School Law provision that the cyber charter school and the parent or guardian shall provide written notification to the school district of residence within 5 days following the withdrawal of a student from the cyber charter school. PDLCS faxes a signed Withdrawal Form to the school district.

Please refer to Item Section 2.10 Withdraw Form.

- *What is the fund reserve balance as of the date of renewal application submission?*  
The fund reserve is \$683,792 as of 8/31/2011.
- *Cut and paste (or recreate) the table below into your report in order to show how the charter has made investments over the last five years in staff and professional development, books, technology, and other supplies and in ways that are consistent with the cyber charter school's priorities as stated in the current charter agreement.*

Investment Area:	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Professional Development	\$ 14,721.25	\$ 13,016.76	\$ 6,311.08	\$ 25,791.86	\$ 9,132.00
Textbook	\$ 262,368.82	\$ 209,314.28	\$ 134,568.86	\$ 114,540.70	\$ 86,593.68
Technology	\$ 45,083.33	\$ 334,112.79	\$ 260,315.68	\$ 161,175.57	\$ 205,551.65
Other Supplies					
Technology Supplies	\$ 158,758.25	\$ 46,971.43	\$ 1,113.10	\$ 10,837.56	\$ 8,196.07
Teaching Supplies	\$ 7,473.05	\$ 1,040.82	\$ 185.16	\$ 382.86	\$ 3,122.54
Student Supplies	\$ -	\$ 30,225.00	\$ 17,437.50	\$ 27,861.81	\$ 12,303.38
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 533,488.03</b>	<b>\$ 968,793.87</b>	<b>\$ 680,247.06</b>	<b>\$ 501,765.93</b>	<b>\$ 530,450.97</b>

- *Provide any other information or data that describes how resources have been used and/or leveraged to further the school's mission and support the school's unique design.*

PDLCS receives Title I and Title IIA funds throughout the PDE Federal Programs e-grants system. The Title programs support a targeted assistance program providing supplemental services in Math and Reading serving students who are most at risk to fail the rigorous academic content standards. The school serves students in grades K-6 by providing intervention software, one-on-one and small group intervention classes using research based practices and materials. The school employs one full time highly qualified teacher that extends the school day and delivers the intervention activities. Continuous progress monitoring is achieved through the use of the Children's Progress Assessment, Scantron and Informal Reading Inventories. In addition to the school provided intervention activities, PDLCS students participate in Supplemental Education Services. The school also employees a Parent Involvement Specialist, who ensures that parents and students are supported through facilitating field trips and other social activities. Title IIA funds are used to provide high quality professional development aligned to the continuous improvement plan. All grant expenditures are reviewed to ensure that they are allowable, allocable and appropriate according to the EDGAR and USDE Regulations. Supplement not supplant rules are strictly adhered to. Title I School Improvement dollars are also allocated to the school that are used in accordance with the Getting Results Document, which is included with this application.

Please refer to Item \_Section 1.30 School Improvement Plan

The school also receives IDEA B pass through dollars from the Allegheny Intermediate Unit to support the needs of our Students who require Special Education services. The school has met the maintenance of effort requirements by using the allocation to provide intervention and related services to students with special needs.

- *Will the school's facilities meet the needs of the school for the next five years? Provide addresses of all facilities, the ownership of each facility and the purpose of which each facility is used. Will the cyber charter school's administrative office remain the current facility? If not, describe where the cyber charter school's administrative office will be located and why the new location has been selected (if applicable)? Include valid certificates of occupancy for all new sites, if applicable.*

Facilities acquisition is the responsibility of White Hat Management under our management agreement with them. The school and White Hat Management meet annually to assess the need for additional facilities based on staffing levels needed to meet enrollment and compliance requirements.

### C. School Governance

*Provide a list of board members who have served and the dates each has served since the cyber charter school's inception. Discuss leadership changes on the board and in the school administration and explain why those changes were effected.*

Please refer to Item \_Section 2.11 PDLCS Board Member List, terms, capacity.

Please refer to the following Items for the Board Members statements of financial interest:

1. \_Section 2.12 Marous, Statement of Financial Interest
2. \_Section 2.13 Donahue, Statement of Financial Interest
3. \_Section 2.14 DiBenedetto, Statement of Financial Interest
4. \_Section 2.15 Keys, Statement of Financial Interest

Please refer to the following Items for the Board Meeting Agendas:

1. \_Section 2.16 9.13.10 Board Meeting Agenda
2. \_Section 2.17 11.23.10 Board Meeting Agenda
3. \_Section 2.18 12.6.10 Board Meeting Agenda
4. \_Section 2.19 3.7.11 Board Meeting Agenda
5. \_Section 2.20 5.3.11 Board Meeting Agenda
6. \_Section 2.20a 6.27.11 Board Meeting Agenda

- *If the cyber charter school utilizes an external management organization, describe how that relationship has functioned over the course of the charter and provide any changes to the management agreement that were not previously provided to the Department.*

- *Describe and discuss how the board has held the external management organization accountable for measurable results.*

The School has established a “Who Does What” document to define responsibilities of the management company and of the School. Any responsibilities not satisfactorily implemented by the management company are then taken over by the school to ensure successful completion of the required function, with costs of the School’s additional responsibility being borne by the management company.

Please refer to Item \_Section 2.21 for the “Who Does What” document.

- *Include as appendices and discuss evaluations of the management organization conducted by the board and any relevant reports from the management organization to the board.*

Please refer to Item \_Section 2.22 for the Current Management Agreement

Please refer to Item \_Section 2.23 for the PDLCS EMO Evaluation Form.

- *Provide clear explanations and evidence of how the cyber charter school has complied with requirements and regulations in each of the following areas. Address any complaints and corrections made regarding compliance in each area.*

- *Special Education Students*

Please refer to the following Items regarding the School’s Special Education policies and procedures.

1. \_Section 2.24 Special Education Policies 2009 Final LEA Policies 10.29.09
2. \_Section 2.25 Special Education Policy & Procedures

- *English Language Learners*

Please refer to Item \_Section 2.26 regarding the School’s English Language Learners policies and procedures.

- *Administration of the PSSA*

Please refer to Item \_Section 2.27 regarding the School’s PSSA Testing Policy.

- *Health and Safety Requirements*

Please refer to Item \_Section 2.28 regarding the School’s Wellness Policy

- *Describe how the Sunshine Notices are provided for all public meetings and how parents are involved in board meetings.*

Please refer to the following Items.

1. \_Section 2.29 PDCS Public Notice 9.13.10
2. \_Section 2.30 PDLCS Public Notice 11.23.10
3. \_Section 2.31 PDLCS Public Notice 12.6.10
4. \_Section 2.32 PDLCS Public Notice 3.7.11
5. \_Section 2.33 PDLCS Public Notice 5.3.11
6. \_Section 2.34 PDLCS Public Notice 6.27.11

### **III. Overall School Design**

#### **A. Communications to Parents and Community**

- *How is the school accountable to parents and the community? Provide examples of communications, outreach, marketing of the cyber charter school, etc.*

The goal of our marketing outreach efforts is to provide sufficient information for parents and students to make an informed decision about enrolling in our program. We believe that the more that parents and students know about our program, the more likely they are to enroll. PDLCS has committed itself to providing a high quality education to its students and being responsive to the needs of our families. PDLCS has invested heavily into both its academic programs and support programs in order to create a viable and responsive alternative to tradition schooling. Additionally, in order to attain high retention rates and high re-enrollment rates, PDLCS has invested considerable time and effort in ensuring the parents and students are well served by the school.

The administrators at PDLCS require that all student and parent communication receive a response within 24 hours. Students and parents are able to contact teachers, staff or administrators at the school via phone or email. Conferences may be scheduled either online or in person at mutually convenient times. We strongly encourage our students to attend all their live learning session in order to be in touch with a live person from the school each day; however, our live learning sessions are recorded so that students may access the sessions at any time.

Training materials and live orientation sessions are presented in order to ensure that students and parents possess the necessary information to take full advantage of the school's resources and capabilities. Each year, students are encouraged to participate in a live orientation session in which they receive direct instruction on navigating the school's learning management system, course delivery system, online course materials, email and website. This orientation also outlines the school's requirements including attendance, academic pace, testing participation, submission of assignments and teacher contact.

Our school programs are extremely transparent. Parents are able to access everything related to their child's education including live learning session and materials. Due to this inherent transparency, our virtual school provides greater awareness to parents regarding their child's education.

Please refer to \_Section 3.0 for the 2009-2010 Family Satisfaction Survey Results.

Examples of marketing, communications, outreach, etc. are provided in the Items below.

1. \_Section 3.1 PA Distance Flyer
2. \_Section 3.2 Open House Letter 10
3. \_Section 3.3 R.S.V.P. Open House 2010
4. \_Section 3.4 PA Distance Back To School
5. \_Section 3.5 Carnegie Science Center email
6. \_Section 3.6 R.S.V.P. Carnegie Science Center 2011
7. \_Section 3.7 Carnegie Science Center Questions
8. \_Section 3.8 Field Trip Herra
9. \_Section 3.9 R.S.V.P. Herra 2010
10. \_Section 3.10 Herra Questions

- *Provide evidence that the Board of Trustees has been responsive and effective as a governing entity. Discuss how formal complaints have been investigated and resolved. Provide specific examples of governance issues and how they have been resolved.*

The Board of Trustees has been concerned with monitoring, response and resolution of parental complaints from the date of the School's inception. There have been several Board discussions on how to handle complaints, including what is appropriate and the necessity of timely resolution. The Board and the school's CEO created the School's Complaint Policy, utilizing a review process from the Board's counsel. The Administrator has been reporting any and all complaints to the Board of Trustees on a regular basis. The report is submitted to the Board President and is then reviewed by all Board Trustees at their regularly scheduled Board meetings. As an example, a complaint has been reviewed regarding computer backorders, and this complaint has been addressed by the EMO working with the School's Principal and the appropriate technology consultants as directed by the Board.

Refer to Item \_Section 3.11 Complaint Policy for the Parental Complaint Policy and Procedures.

The Board has been an effective governing entity, requesting detailed information at Board meetings and asking in-depth questions regarding School operation and student data. The Board has met regarding PSSA testing and graduation, reviewing Policies (such as the Parental Complaint Policy), staff hiring for positions (such as Special Education), and AYP. The Board drives the development of School Policy, such as the ESL Policy, and works to ensure the School is provided with the materials needed to succeed.

When issues arise regarding the role of the management company in school governance, the Board has stepped in to insure that the Board of Trustees and the school's CEO will ultimately determine the direction of the school and its academic programs.

- *Describe the composition of the cyber charter school's governance structure, specifying how it includes parents and the community. Be specific about how the board is accessible and accountable to parents. Include dates, times and agendas of important parent meetings or events and include copies of sign-in sheets for the session.*

The Pennsylvania Distance Learning Charter School is governed by a strong and capable Board of Trustees that is aware of the need for virtual educational options for Pennsylvania students.

The Trustees are active and involved in the School's operations while staying true to the role of board governance and oversight. The Board meets on a regular basis (usually 6 times per year), with the Board President meeting monthly with the CEO and communicating with other trustees and advisors to approve Policies and Bylaws and in-depth meeting minutes. The Board of Trustees has experienced very little change in its membership, the result being a consistent and active, well-informed governing Board. The Board President will also call special meetings should the immediate needs of the school require Board action. The strategic planning committees that determine the direction of profession development, technology, student services and teacher induction include at least one trustee.

- *Describe the relationship of the cyber charter School with the surrounding community. Describe any complaints that have been received and how they have been investigated and resolved.*

PDLCS has formed extremely positive relationships with community organizations, museums, zoos and other organizations through our student gatherings. Each teacher organizes student gatherings for the students in his/her assigned grade level. At least one gathering is held during the fall semester and one during the spring semester, all of which shall be held in different regions of the State of Pennsylvania, so that every student/parent will have the opportunity to attend at least one gathering each year. These gatherings are designed to foster a sense of community between parents, students, and School staff. Student gatherings at local libraries, museums, symphonies, theaters and other educational/developmental sites of interest are organized and scheduled so that students may better appreciate the wonderful resources that Pennsylvania has to offer. In turn, these organizations have demonstrated their appreciation by referring students to PDLCS.

No specific agreements have been entered into with the local school districts regarding participation of the cyber charter school students in extracurricular activities within the school district. PDLCS has enjoyed very positive relationships with the Pennsylvania local school districts and a number of our students participate in their extracurricular activities. For these students, we provide the school district with a Progress Report, as requested, to ensure that students follow the same participation guidelines as students enrolled in the local school district.

Upon request, PDLCS provides the following documentation to our student's school district of residence, in written form:

- A copy of the charter.
  - A copy of the cyber charter school application.
  - A copy of all annual reports prepared by the cyber charter school.
- *Describe the mechanisms in place to measure stakeholder satisfaction and solicit input. Include copies of surveys and questions and include a summary of responses.*

Throughout the year, the School conducts informal and periodic surveys with parents. Since 2007, PDLCS has conducted annual surveys to improve our communication with families in terms of feedback about our program, so that we can better solicit their input and adjust our program to meet their needs.

The 2009-10 Overall School Performance survey data indicate our staff members provide high levels of communication, support and respect to our families. Motivating students to reach their highest academic potential also ranked high with our families.

An area needing improvement was assistance with planning for the future. To address this need during the 2010-11 school year, the guidance office and academic advisors increased opportunities for post-secondary presentations with two-year and four-year colleges/universities, the Armed Forces and trade schools. In addition, online planning scheduling sessions were offered to every family to allow the parent and student to visually map out a course of study applicable to the goals of the student. The sessions were received with praise from our families. In 2011-12, we are building on this success by holding two sessions; one in the fall following first quarter progress reports and the second in the spring.

School administrators review the end of course survey results with the teacher to open up the lines of communication between intention on the part of the teacher and perception on the part of the parent and/or student. The teachers reflect on the survey results for his/her classes with the expectation they will incorporate professional goals for the next semester or school year. These surveys provide our teachers with a valuable resource for giving our families a voice in decisions involving improving instruction, communication and program expansion.

Please refer to Items:

- \_Section 3.12 Survey Example 1 Overall School Performance Survey May 2010.docx
- \_Section 3.12.1 Survey Example 2 End of Course Survey 1st Grade.pdf
- \_Section 3.12.2 Survey Example 3 End of Course Survey World History.pdf
- \_Section 3.12.3 Survey Example 4 Student and Parent Summer School Survey.pdf
- \_Section 3.12.4 Survey Example 5 Parent Involvement Educational Series Survey.pdf

## **B. Student Enrollment**

- *Is the enrollment stable and/or near capacity? What is the average “churn rate” for the last five years?<sup>1</sup>*

PDLCS enrollment has been stable over the past five (5) years. Although enrollment grew by 438 from 2004-05 to 2005-06 (an increase of 48 percent), many of these students had to be mandatorily withdrawn when the new CEO was hired in April, 2006. PDLCS enrollment is driven by ensuring that as many students as possible are a good fit for the School’s cyber charter program. We want to provide sufficient information for parents and students to make an informed decision about enrolling in our program. The focus of our Information Sessions, marketing and family outreach efforts is to provide an in-depth review of our program and thoroughly answer questions from prospective parents and students. As you can see on our [www.padistance.org](http://www.padistance.org) public portal, in the Frequently Asked Questions area, we are very candid in asserting that PDLCS is not for every student. It is very important for us, and we believe for the educational future of Pennsylvania, for this program to be provided to students who can truly flourish in a distance learning setting. Going forward, the goal is still to grow the program annually with an increase in enrollment of students who fully understand the program and are a good fit for PDLCS. This dual-part goal is measurable through a comparison of enrollment numbers as well as retention.

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<sup>1</sup> Churn Rate is the Number of Enrollments divided by the Number of Withdrawals (# of Enrollments/# of Withdrawals).

2006: 80%
488 Enrolled
391 WD
28 DNR – carry over to 2007
2007: 70%
655 Enrolled
464 WD + 28 DNR from 2006
42 DNR – carry over to 2008
2008: 79%
282 Enrolled
182 WD + 42 DNR from 2007
70 DNR – carry over to 2009
2009: 93%
274 Enrolled
187 WD + 70DNR from 2008
87 DNR – carry over to 2010
2010: 94%
232 Enrolled
158 WD + 87 DNR from 2009
51 DNR – carry over to 2011
2011 as of today: .07%
355 Enrolled
25 WD + 51 DNR from 2010

- *Describe the system for maintaining accurate student enrollment and withdrawal information as required under Section 1748-A, Enrollment and Notification.*

As part of the enrollment process, parents must complete a PDLCS enrollment application and sign a Charter School Enrollment Notification form. The enrollment notification is sent to the student’s school district of residence within 5 days in compliance with Section 1748-A. In addition to the enrollment notification form, the PDLCS records manager also notifies the student’s school district of residence through an Authorization for the Release of Records form once the student has completed the enrollment process. The request for records is sent in addition to the enrollment notification. The records request is also sent to the student’s school district of residence within 5 days of enrollment. However, since the student’s

records are essential for course scheduling with secondary students, the records request is usually sent immediately upon the student's enrollment.

Please refer to Item \_Section 3.16 2011-2012 for the Application Sample.

Please refer to Item \_Section 3.17 for the Withdraw Form

Please refer to Item \_Section 3.18 for the Truancy Letter

- *Describe the marketing techniques used to advertise this cyber charter school opportunity and how the cyber charter school has made resources available equitably across the state.*

PDLCS uses a multi-faceted marketing approach to draw students to the school. Since we are an online school and many prospective students search for virtual schools online, we have invested some of our marketing resources to design and develop a professional and informative public website. In addition, the school has internal personnel that purchase space to establish an information booth at various public and commercial events throughout the state that would attract potential students. We have also contracted with various shopping malls throughout the state to establish kiosks that are both manned and unmanned to disseminate information to potential students about our school and programs. We also purchase ads in various regional magazines and radio ads at popular stations throughout the state. Because of our limited resources, we attempt to purchase advertising that will let us get our message out at a reasonable cost.

- *Using the following table, provide the history of student enrollment for each year and discuss trends in student turnover and retention data.*

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
<b>Total Student Enrollment at the end of the school year</b>	441	341	370	294
<b>Number of students enrolled in June who were also enrolled in September of the previous year</b>	396	302	204	161
<b>Number of students, excluding graduates, who were enrolled at the end of last year</b>	429	323	298	198
<b>Number of students, excluding graduates, who were enrolled at the beginning of the school year who were also enrolled at the close of the previous school year</b>	392	299	196	158

- *Provide waiting list data for each year, detailing how many students were on the waiting list at the beginning of the year, how many were extended opportunities to enroll and how many enrolled during the year.*

PDLCS has not placed any students on a waiting list.

- *If the school has been under- or over-enrolled, provide an explanation.*

As stated earlier, PDLCS has chosen to focus its marketing on informing students and parents about the program. We believe that we have developed a credible and academically rigorous program suited for academically accelerated students as well as those needing remediation. We are also committed to delivering a high level of family involvement and communication. We firmly believe, and the data confirms, that students who engage in our program experience academic growth and success; sometime for the first time in their lives. We have also integrated programs, processes and policies to ensure that students do not “fall through the cracks”. Inherent in this strategy is the insistence that students regularly attend school, participate in the program and maintain a reasonable academic pace. If a student falters, our staff is in immediate contact with the family to develop an inclusive plan to help students get back on track. We also make every effort to accommodate any special requirements for our students, such as schedules, activities or location.

Prior to enrolling in our program, we make every effort to ensure that students and parents understand and are willing to accept the built-in obligations for success in an online school environment. Unfortunately, some prospective students are unable or unwilling to accept the responsibilities necessary to effectively function in a virtual school.

Our school has a smaller student enrollment than several of the other cyber schools in the state. Unlike these other schools, their management partners have expended significant resources to promote and advertise the schools.

Many school districts have begun to offer online programs in their districts that directly compete for students that would otherwise enroll in our program.

- *Drawing upon exit interviews and other sources, explain why students choose to return or not to return to the school.*

Flexibility, involvement and family support are the primary reasons families choose to re-enroll in our school. High school students enjoy the flexibility of being able to work on their classes 24 hours a day, which for many students suits their learning style best. Many high school students are permitted to work at an accelerated pace in their classes to make up for past errors or possibly to graduate early. It is rarely possible in a traditional setting for a student to finish a course by mid-semester and

move onto another class. In our school we encourage students to make up for lost educational time. When their children are at home, parents feel a higher level of control and influence over their child's education as they are key member of the academic team. Our families praise the high level of communication and academic support they and their children receive each day from our teachers. Re-enrolling families experience high levels of involvement in the day-to-day education of their children as the students are permitted flexibility in learning and they receive academic support.

The majority of students who do not return to our school return to their home districts because they miss their peers, experience changes in the family dynamics or they recognize a lack in the skillset necessary to meet the expectations of online learning. In exit interviews, students often report they want to graduate with their peers or they miss the physical interactions with their peers. Parents most often report a change in the family situation, for instance divorce, moving or a parent who must enter the workforce due to the economic climate. A small percentage of students who do not re-enroll in PDLCS and move onto another cyber charter school, are primarily looking for a program that offers a larger variety of course offerings.

## **C. Policies and Procedures**

### **a. Technology and Support**

- *How is technology used to provide curriculum?*

Each student is issued either a laptop or desktop computer with a printer/scanner upon enrollment. Parents and students are encouraged to get a high speed internet connection from a local Internet Service. Students log on to Angel, the school's content management system, via the Internet to access their Provider (ISP). PDLCS reimburses parents quarterly for internet services. Besides Angel, PDLCS uses several on-line systems to deliver its curriculum including, Holt, Study Island, and Wimba.

- *Describe the teaching methods that are used to deliver instruction and to assess academic performance. How is the cyber charter school improving student learning through the effective use of technology?*

Classes are taught synchronously by highly qualified teachers through Wimba which is PDLCS's live classroom platform. Assignments are posted by teachers and submitted by students via Angel. As an assignment is submitted, it is automatically posted in the electronic grade book. Teachers use both the participation in live class and assignments to assess the student's academic performance. PDLCS's entire educational base is a technologically rich platform that utilizes the most cutting edge technology paired with best practices to improve student learning and achieve student success.

## **b. Truancy Policies**

- *How the “school day” is defined and how is the student’s attendance for the day monitored?*

The "school day" is defined as 450 hours of work per school year for kindergarten, 900 hours of work per school year for grades 1-5, or 950 hours per school year for grades 6-12 based on a Monday through Friday school week. The daily work schedule is a combination of live class time and individual work time planned between the student and parent. Attendance is monitored through the course delivery system, Angel Learning Attendance Pin component, as well as student participation in synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities, which are monitored using the Angel Learning Activity Report. The Truancy Elimination Plan is followed to ensure school and home communication regarding daily attendance occurs consistently. Students must submit excused absence forms for missed school days. Please refer to the following Items:

1. Section 3.19 Attendance Policy
2. Section 3.20 Truancy Elimination Plan Process

- *How does the cyber charter school verify the authenticity of a student’s work and how are exams proctored?*

Exams and homework are assigned and proctored in various ways to assess individual student performance. They are posted at the Angel site and related systems (e.g. Holt) for students to access through their individual password logins. Exams and assignments created in Angel can include "one-time only" access, and time limitations for students. Exams are immediately received by the teacher upon completion and submission and can be viewed to ensure authenticity.

Teachers are instructed on how to determine authentic student work by using the data available to them in eMetrics, Scantron, Children’s Progress Achievement Assessment, the course pre-test, work samples available in the student’s virtual file, as well as in their live classroom observations. There should be a correlation between daily work, course assessment, and standardized assessment. Any areas of discourse are evaluated to determine the best approach for the individual student to ensure the student, not someone else is completing their course work. Teachers will often proctor a student while they work on an assignment or assessment via the live classroom as part of the evaluation process.

- *Describe the system for maintaining school records and disseminating information as required under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).*

White Hat Distance Learning is responsible for the accuracy, integrity and confidentiality of the permanent records contained within electronic systems. Permissions are created for faculty and staff for electronic systems to ensure proper usage of student information. Students and parents can only access their own student records within the electronic systems. Teachers are not permitted to

give out information about a student to another student. E-mail accounts are also password protected to ensure confidentiality.

- *How is technical support provided to students and parents (i.e. during what times of the day, how is it provided, etc.)?*  
White Hat Distance Learning contractually obligated to provide technical support for our students and staff. Technical support assistance is available to families Monday-Thursday 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and Friday 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
- *Describe the hardware, software and Internet connections, and technical support provided.*  
White Hat Distance Learning is contractually responsible to provide the hardware, software, internet connections and technical support services.
- *If “spyware” is used on student computers describe the type of spyware used and explain the purpose of the use.*  
White Hat Distance Learning is contractually responsible to provide the hardware, software, internet connections, and technical support services.
- *Does the cyber charter school have a written policy on cyber bullying and how is the policy made known to parents and students?*  
The school has a cyber-bullying policy in place and the policy is included in the student handbook (p16). Each year, new and re-enrolling students and parents are required to sign a statement verifying that they have read the student handbook and understand the contents. A copy of the actual policy is included below.

## PENNSYLVANIA DISTANCE LEARNING CHARTER SCHOOL

### ANTI-BULLYING POLICY

Please refer to Item \_Section 3.21 Anti-Bullying Policy 10 10

### Truancy Policies

- *Describe the cyber charter school’s Policy on Truancy. What constitutes truancy (number of days not attending, number of days inactive?) When are parents contacted? How is contact made (phone call, email, home visit, etc.)? Attach copies of all forms used.*

The school truancy policy is outlined in the student handbook (p.9 thru p. 11). PDLCS’s academic advisors follow an 8 step truancy process.

**For the 1<sup>st</sup> absence**, an email is sent to parent/guardian (if this email has been sent 5 times for 5 non-consecutive absences, an RTI referral needs to be made).

**For the 2<sup>nd</sup> consecutive absence**, an email is sent to parent/guardian and phone call is made (when this email has been sent out for the second time to a parent/guardian, an RTI referral needs to be made).

**With the 3<sup>rd</sup> consecutive absence**, a 3-day truancy letter sent to parent/guardian and local home school district.

**After the 4<sup>th</sup> consecutive absence**, a phone call made to Children Services agency if child is **under the age of 13**.

**If the student is 17 and under, a Truancy Elimination Plan (TEP) is created.** This occurs through a school-family conference via telephone and is mailed to the parent/guardian and local home school district. A referral to RTI is also to be made.

If unable to reach parent/guardian to create the TEP between days 5-9, the TEP will be created by the academic advisor and guidance counselor without the student and family and then will be mailed to the parent/guardian with cover sheet via certified mail and regular mail. The TEP will also be mailed to the home school district with a cover letter.

**For absences after TEP has been created**, a letter is mailed to local home school district to inform them that the parent/guardian and student are not adhering to the TEP.

**With the 10<sup>th</sup> consecutive absence**, the student will be mandatorily withdrawn from PDLCS.

- *Explain in detail the process and procedures the cyber charter school uses to notify a student's school district of residence of a student's truancy. How often has the cyber charter school provided such notification to resident school districts in the previous school year? Attach copies of all forms used.*

Copies of all truancy letters are sent to the student's school district of residence. The student's school district also receives a copy of the students Truancy Elimination Plan and invited to participate in the TEP meeting.

- *Provide a copy of the cyber charter school's policies and procedures regarding attendance, truancy and withdrawal.*

Please refer to the following Items for the school truancy policy and the 8 step process:

1. \_Section 3.22 Truancy Elimination Plan Process
2. \_Section 3.23 D:CS Truancy Policy Change
3. \_Section 3.24 01. 8-Step Truancy Process
3. \_Section 3.25 02. First Absence Email
4. \_Section 3.26 03. Second Absence Email

5. \_Section 3.27 04. 3-Day Truancy Letter
6. \_Section 3.28 05. PA State Law Enclosure
7. \_Section 3.29 06. SAP Brochure
8. \_Section 3.30 07. TEP Template 2011-2012
9. \_Section 3.31 08. TEP Cover Letter Parents
10. \_Section 3.32 09. TEP Cover Letter School Districts
11. \_Section 3.33 2011-12 Student Handbook

**c. Extracurricular Activities**

- *Does the cyber charter school maintain any agreements with local school districts regarding participation of cyber charter school students in extracurricular activities? If so, please explain the agreement(s)?*

PDLCS does not have any external agreements with local school districts. If any PDLCS student participates in an extracurricular activity at the local school district, PDLCS will work with the district to ensure that our student is qualified to participate in the activity. For example, PDLCS will regularly inform the district of a student's grades or attendance in order to meet local qualification requirements.

- *Does the cyber charter school host any social events for enrolled students? If so, explain. Are they available to all students?*

As stated earlier, PDLCS hosts a number of social events throughout the state during the school year. Each year, both enrolled students and parents as well as perspective families are invited to the Start of School picnic. In October, an open house is held for our families. The open house event includes food and activities. Each year, PDLCS families are invited to the annual commencement at Penn State in State College, PA.

Our family outreach coordinator holds a variety of different events throughout the state. In addition, the school sponsors field trips at various locations throughout the state. For example, we may have a trip to the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh; visit the state capital in Harrisburg, or various historic sites in Philadelphia.

**d. School Safety**

Refer to Item \_Section 3.35 for the School Safety Report.

- *Describe the cyber charter school's student assistance programs (SAP). Include in the discussion information about agreements with county agencies to provide mental health and drug abuse counseling, when necessary.*

Refer to the Student Assistance Program folder.

- *Describe the cyber charter school's expectations for student behavior and discipline. Explain how the cyber charter school's discipline policy complies with*

*Chapter 12 of the Pennsylvania Education Regulations, Title 22, particularly with respect to due process for students.*

The PA Distance Learning Charter School has a code of conduct that outlines expectations of student behavior. The discipline code is published on our student/parent handbook and all parents are required to sign an agreement indicating that they have reviewed and understand the discipline code. The attached handbook outlines the general and specific guidelines of student expectations. Our code of conduct and student expectations of behavior comply with Chapters 12 including the due process procedures.

- *Provide a copy of the Student Handbook and/or other materials that are used to detail behavior and consequences for students.*  
Please refer to Item \_Section 3.33 to review the School's Student Handbook and school calendar.
- *Discuss the cyber charter school's suspension/expulsion history. Describe the interventions/processes put into place to reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions to affect this progress. If there are concerns regarding suspensions/expulsions, describe the steps/adjustments being made to address these concerns.*  
There have been no expulsions or suspensions in the history of the school.

- *What measurable outcomes will by cyber charter school achieve over the next five years?*
  - Use the chart below to respond to academic goals listed and the empty rows to insert your own academic and non-academic goals. Be sure to include goals for any new grades being proposed.

<b>Goals for Future Planning</b>						
	<b>Current Status</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Year 4</b>	<b>Year 5</b>
Scantron Performance Series Growth Scores	Significant Growth in all four core subject areas	Significant Growth in all four core subject areas	Significant Growth in all four core subject areas	Significant Growth in all four core subject areas	Significant Growth in all four core subject areas	Significant Growth in all four core subject areas
Students will reduce the number of non-proficient students in Mathematics by 10% each year as measures by the PSSA	36%	40%	44%	49%	54%	60%
<b>Continue focus on academic growth with to help students to meet AYP</b>	Significant growth in all core subjects	Significant growth in all core subjects	Significant growth in all core subjects	Significant growth in all core subjects	Significant growth in all core subjects	Significant growth in all core subjects
Continue Meeting PSSA Participation Rate Goals	98%	99%	100%	100%	100%	100%
PVAAS Growth Measures	Significant Evidence that school exceeded standard for Academic Growth	Significant Evidence that school exceeded standard for Academic Growth	Significant Evidence that school exceeded standard for Academic Growth	Significant Evidence that school exceeded standard for Academic Growth	Significant Evidence that school exceeded standard for Academic Growth	Significant Evidence that school exceeded standard for Academic Growth
Continue to refine the school's curriculum maps and convert to Common Core Standards	Provide time for teachers to review curriculum maps and make refinements.	Provide time for teachers to review curriculum maps and make refinements	Provide time for teachers to review curriculum maps and make refinements	Provide time for teachers to review curriculum maps and make refinements	Provide time for teachers to review curriculum maps and make refinements	Provide time for teachers to review curriculum maps and make refinements
Use student and parental feedback to improve access.	Pilot the use of SIS system	Expand data in Pilot SIS	Implement New SIS System	Add additional functionality to SIS	Add additional functionality to SIS	Add additional functionality to SIS

## IV. Plans for the Future

- *What is the proposed school design for the next five years, if the charter is renewed?*  
PDLCS will continue to build on its traditional track for students who wish to pursue a general academic curriculum in high school. The school administrators and staff will continue to revise and update curricula in the general academic area utilizing both the PA Standards Aligned System and the Understanding by Design frameworks. The school's administration and staff is continuously assessing the school's needs for support options for our classes. The decision to renew or purchase new subscriptions to online textbooks or to utilize emerging open source materials will be evaluated and decided upon in the next five years.

The school's contract with its management company ends at the end of 2012-13 school years. In the current management agreement, the company retains 97% of the school's revenue and assumes all financial risk. The School recognizes the need for transparency of costs and of appropriateness of cost management, and in light of this need, the School, with a successful charter renewal, will enter into an effort to revise the management agreement to support contracting for management services based on fees for specific services approximately as outlined below:

Marketing  
Enrollment  
Grant Administration  
Computer Supply  
Computer Technical Support  
Educational Material Supply  
Office and Overhead and IT Support  
Portal, LMS, Curriculum Offerings  
Educational Program Infrastructure and Support  
Testing  
Financial Administration and Reporting  
State and Compliance Reporting

The School will issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) for these services. A committee comprised of teachers, staff, administrators and board members will conduct a thorough examination of the respondents to the RFP based on quality of service, cost, and quality of support and administration of services. The committee will determine awardees of the various contracts for the services envisioned.

*Discuss whether the cyber charter school is proposing any curriculum changes, new academic emphases, etc. Articulate any grade and/or enrollment expansion requests. Provide additional curriculum content area descriptions and goals for the new grades, and discuss how the proposed expansion impacts the overall mission and educational design of the current charter.*

*How will the cyber charter school accommodate additional students?*

Over the past five (5) years, PDLCS has evolved to become a school that provides value to our families. We are an oasis for families desperate to find a school that works for their children

We strive to provide an education option for students seeking acceleration or remediation as well as a high level of parent communication. We recognize that some of our students are bored or unchallenged in the traditional school and looking for opportunities to accelerate their academic program and progress. Although we readily accommodate these students, we also recognize that many of our students choose the virtual option due to actual or perceived inability of their current school to provide them with an academic environment where they can achieve success. At PDLCS, our focus is on academic growth. We realize that many of our students arrive at our door with academic deficits. We strive to ensure that our students will be successful in our school.

PA Distance Learning Charter School will continue the process of continuous improvement of the academic value of its courses by utilizing a research based process specifically tailored to online instruction. In 2010, all of our courses were mapped. We are currently integrating a process to ensure that our teachers are actually teaching the skills and concepts outlined in our maps. We view our curriculum maps as a “work in progress” and will continue to use this tool to update and refine our curriculum. In addition, we are exploring partnerships with organizations that specialize in online learning to review and validate the efficacy of our online curricular offerings.

PDLCS is always open to exploring possible partnerships with businesses and higher education communities to provide relevant experience and insight into the process of designing and implementing more advanced courses to attract more academically capable students and the possible establishment of an online stem school. The expectations for these partnerships include providing instructors, field experiences, mentoring and expertise in the selection of appropriate curricula.

*Discuss and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the cyber charter school’s program over the previous three to four years and explain how that information will be used in future plans. Be specific about how those plans build on feedback and input from parents, teachers and students.*

The Pennsylvania Distance Learning Charter School has a solid curriculum, committed staff, and excellent technology. The administration of the school maintains a strong focus on student growth and academic achievement. We are encouraged by the operational improvements made to the school over the past five years. We are also encouraged by the academic growth experienced by our students as indicated by the Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System.

In 2006, the school met only 3 of 11 benchmarks for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The following year, the school met 13 of 15 benchmarks. The school did not

meet the benchmark for graduation rate and did not meet the achievement target for the "white" student subgroup in mathematics. PDLCS did however all the participation and performance benchmarks in 2007-08. Although the school did not meet AYP due to the lack of growth in the graduation rate; the school filed an appeal with Department of Education due to inaccurate reporting by the school's management company. . In 2009, the school met all the participation targets and also met the graduation rate benchmark as well. Although the school did not meet all the academic targets, the school's students experienced positive academic growth as they have in each of the past four (4) years, as illustrated by standardized test results and the Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System (PVAAS).

The school also has a strong Board of Trustees that is committed to the success of the school. Our trustees bring a diverse array of skills and business expertise.

Our main weakness has been our inability to substantially grow our enrollment. The Board is convinced that the school's program has not been adequately marketed. Over the past year, the school has assumed the main marketing responsibilities from the management company. However, due to limited resources, we spend substantially less than other cyber schools to attract students to the school. We are continually working to refine our message and highlight the school's positive results in the marketplace. We are also seeking the most cost effective marketing channels. This year, we promoted the school through various in-person events throughout the state and have seen positive results.

- *How will stakeholder involvement be enhanced in the next five years?*
  - *Discuss the plans for parent, student and teacher involvement. Be specific in describing how these plans are informed by experiences of the past three to four years.*

The school intends to create a school Outreach Advisory Panel that will increase stakeholder involvement and channel feedback. The steering committee will be composed of parents and members from the higher education, industry and the non-profit communities. The purpose of the steering committee will be to broaden our stakeholders group to include those that can guide and direct the school in relevant areas to make it more responsive to the needs of the community. This input will include (but is not limited to) the development of the general curricula including course content, course progressions, learning objects, textbooks, supplementary materials, instructor requirements, internship opportunities, revenue streams, and program evaluation.

The school will also continue to engage parents via designated parent nights, open houses, field trips and student activity days/evenings while building upon the success of those events in the past. The school has begun to employ and develop social media and other channels to engage parents. These tools will be used for both collective gatherings and individual meetings.

*Describe how stakeholder (parent, student and teacher) input and satisfaction will be measured in the future. Discuss how the cyber charter school leadership and administration will utilize input and feedback from the stakeholders for program involvement.*

Each stakeholder group (parents, students and teachers) will be provided opportunities to participate in internal LMS and web-based surveys to gauge their level of satisfaction. The survey responses of those electronic surveys will be comprehensively categorized at the conclusion of each school year. Those results will be used to provide input into the planning for the following year.

- *Report the cyber charter school’s student enrollment plans for the next five years using the following table. Include any requested grade/enrollment expansions:*

	<b>Current Year</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Year 4</b>	<b>Year 5</b>
Total Projected Enrollment	350	425	550	625	700	775
Grades to be Offered	K-12	K-12	K-12	K-12	K-12	K-12