



# Department of Education

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Date: March 19, 2026

To: Members, State Board of Education

From: Cynthia Marten, Secretary of Education

**RE: 2025-26 Formal Review of the Bryan Allen Stevenson School of Excellence (BASSE)**

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## **Background**

Pursuant to § 515(a) of [Delaware's Charter School Law](#), the Delaware Department of Education (Department) with the assent of the State Board of Education is the approving authority for BASSE and is therefore responsible for its oversight.

On December 18, 2025, following the assent of the State Board of Education on December 11, 2025, I placed BASSE under formal review due to potential violations of its charter involving enrollment, financial, and organizational concerns that have persisted at the school despite earlier interventions by the Department including allowing the school to delay its planned opening, offering programmatic flexibilities, and providing on-site technical assistance.<sup>1</sup> My decision initiated a nearly three-month review by the Department's Charter School Accountability Committee (CSAC), which is comprised of Department staff, community members, and representatives from the State Board of Education and the Delaware Charter Schools Network.

On February 17, 2026, CSAC voted unanimously to recommend that BASSE's charter be revoked.<sup>2</sup> CSAC then:

- Finalized a formal, public record of its proceedings including more than five hours of recorded meetings with BASSE leadership, two public reports covering more than 15 topics, verbal and written public comment, and the school's fiscal year (FY) 2025 financial audit; and
- Ensured that this record was timely posted to the Department's website.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A: Formal Review Notification

<sup>2</sup> [Final CSAC Report](#), p. 11

<sup>3</sup> [2025-26 Formal Review: Bryan Allen Stevenson School of Excellence \(BASSE\)](#)

The formal record closed on Thursday, March 12, 2026, as reflected in the timeline posted on the Department’s website.<sup>4</sup> Today’s State Board of Education meeting will include discussion of my decision in accordance with 14 *Del. C.* § 515(d) on whether the criteria for revocation of BASSE’s charter have been satisfied and a request for the State Board’s assent on my decision. An approved charter may be revoked “after the exercise of due diligence and good faith” for “fail[ure] to comply with its charter or to satisfy, in its operation of the school, the criteria set forth in § 512 of [the Charter School Law].” BASSE has failed to satisfy the following criteria from § 512(8) of the Charter School Law:

- Enrollment requirements
- Economic and operational viability

Given the significance of this decision, I am providing supporting evidence for each of my conclusions.

Before addressing the statutory criteria, I wish to speak to public feedback gathered during the formal review. While public comment does not determine charter viability, it does provide contextual insight into school operations and stakeholder experience. Public comment is considered as supplementary evidence and is not dispositive in my decision.

I have reviewed or listened to the public comments gathered during the CSAC process and note that a majority of the roughly 50 unique commenters argue that BASSE should remain open. Notably, commenters who identified as parents or guardians of current or former BASSE students represented fewer than half of all comments received. While most parents offered positive testimony (including by citing the school’s small size as a defining characteristic), roughly 20 percent of comments from parents—and both comments received from students—expressed negative views regarding BASSE including relating to student and staff turnover.<sup>5</sup>

I want to thank every member of the BASSE community who took time to make their voices and perspectives heard during this process.

## **Enrollment**

Historical, current, and projected enrollment data is central to assessing whether it is financially and organizationally viable for the long-term. Just as we expect students to meet established standards, charter schools should be accountable for fulfilling the enrollment

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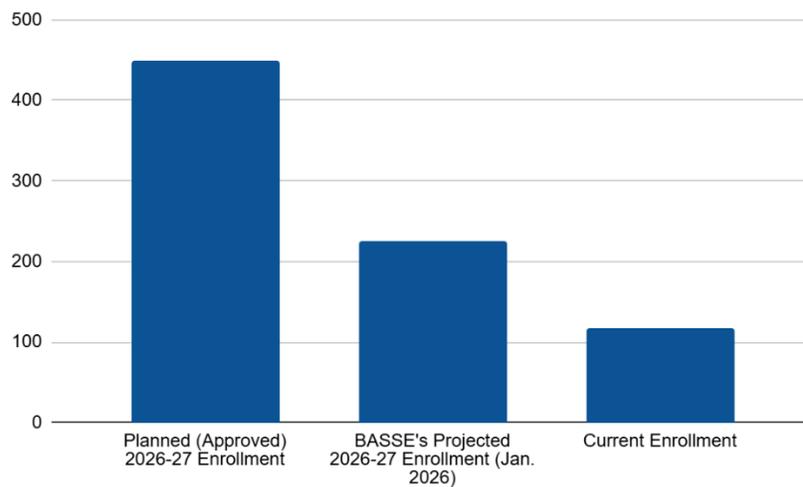
<sup>4</sup> [Formal Review Timeline](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Initial](#) and [Final](#) Public Hearings and [Written Public Comment](#)

targets they have set and must, in all cases, demonstrate that enrollment levels are sufficient to prevent a sudden, mid-year closure of the school.

BASSE’s enrollment data show an unmistakable downward trend. Under its current approved charter, BASSE should be preparing to serve 450 students in 2026-27 including 50 students in a new 10<sup>th</sup> grade cohort.<sup>6</sup> Instead, during the January 12, 2026, CSAC meeting, the school indicated that its goal is to serve half that number—or 225 students.<sup>7</sup> As of March 12, 2026, BASSE’s enrollment stood at 117 students; at this level, BASSE is operating at one-third of its current, authorized enrollment.<sup>8</sup> See Figure 1, below.

Figure 1. BASSE Enrollment Summary



Of particular concern, BASSE’s own survey of parents and families of current students revealed that half of survey respondents (14/28) were either not returning to BASSE in 2026-27 or undecided on enrollment plans for next year.<sup>9</sup>

There is nothing wrong with a small school; however, since its founding, BASSE has failed to meet enrollment projections by wide margins and the school has provided no information—involving any combination of student retention, application, or enrollment data—to substantiate a credible pathway to reaching even the 125 students that it identified as an absolute break-even point.<sup>10</sup> And since enrollment and budgeting go hand-in-hand, there is no assurance that BASSE (which currently generates the lowest Unit Count of any Delaware charter school) can reach sustainability thresholds.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> [Modification Application](#), p. 7

<sup>7</sup> [Initial Report](#), pp. 16-18; [Initial Meeting Recording](#), starting 1:14

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix B: March 12, 2026, Infinite Campus Enrollment Snapshot

<sup>9</sup> [2026 Formal Review Follow-Up Responses](#), p. 1

<sup>10</sup> [Final Meeting Recording](#), starting 2:25:25

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix C: September 30, 2026, Unit Count Report

## **Economic and Operational Viability**

My concerns about BASSE's viability for the 2026-27 school year are exacerbated by a range of financial indicators exhibited by the school. On this count, it is critical to note that a charter school is a formal government subdivision of the State of Delaware, with a responsibility to use taxpayer funds in a transparent manner, and to ensure that all elements of the school's finances can be verified through an annual, independent audit.

The results here are alarming. BASSE's FY 2025 financial audit, which was delivered to the Department more than four months behind schedule, includes a Disclaimer of Opinion.<sup>12</sup> A Disclaimer of Opinion is the most deficient possible result from an independent audit, indicating that auditors cannot arrive at any meaningful conclusion about an entity's financial health because the underlying financial records are too deficient to analyze.<sup>13</sup> Specifically, BASSE's auditors note the following:

- *“The School did not maintain and/or provide adequate accounting records and supporting documentation necessary for us to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence regarding significant financial statement amounts and disclosures.”*
- *“Supporting documentation was not provided for certain receipts and disbursements, and the School did not provide documentation necessary to substantiate various account balances and transactions, including, but not limited to, receivables, payables, payroll, accrued liabilities, revenues, capital assets, and expenses.”*
- *“We did not obtain written representations from management regarding their responsibilities for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial statements, as well as other information necessary for the audit.”*

While BASSE's March 12, 2026, communication in response to the audit attributes findings to “BASSE's first year of operations, following the school's opening in September 2024,” three current (non-staff representative) board members have served continually since at least 2023, with an average tenure of six years.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> [Fiscal Year 2025 Financial Audit](#)

<sup>13</sup> AICPA, AU-C Sections 700-799 – Audit Conclusions and Reporting, AU-C Section 705, “Modifications to the Opinion in the Independent Auditor's Report,” paragraphs .09-.10 and .A1 (table), pp. 194-195 and 199

<sup>14</sup> [Final Meeting Recording](#), starting 1:15:30

As discussed during the formal review process and noted above, BASSE operates with the lowest Unit Count of any Delaware charter school, leaving no room for error in budgeting and spending decisions. Indeed, throughout the formal review process, questioning by CSAC members underscored the school's thin financial margins and substantial delays in paying invoices.<sup>15</sup> In the absence of reliable, audited financial records, the Department cannot verify solvency, payroll obligations, or appropriate use of funds, and is therefore faced with two options: hope for the best or work quickly to mitigate possible adverse impacts for BASSE's students, staff, and contractors. The latter is the only prudent course.

### **Decision**

This is the first case of a charter revocation reaching the State Board of Education since 2016, a fact that underscores the generally strong performance of Delaware's public charter schools and the Department's reluctance to deploy this authorizing tool in all but the most serious cases. Each of the findings above raises such concerns; taken together, they demonstrate a pattern of material, ongoing deficiencies that compromise BASSE's ability to operate as a viable public school through the 2026-27 school year and create an unacceptable level of risk for students, families, and staff. As noted in my introduction, these concerns persist despite significant, prior interventions including extensive technical assistance and an earlier formal review.

**Accordingly, I will request that the State Board of Education assent to revoke BASSE's charter, which results in school closure, effective the end of the 2025-26 school year.**

### **Next Steps**

With the State Board's assent, the Department's Charter School Office will initiate its Charter School Closure Protocol to support the school in achieving an orderly winddown. Efforts would include ensuring parent and family awareness of this action to allow maximum time for students to transition to another local education agency, providing support for BASSE employees in exploring their next professional steps, collecting and organizing students records, and ensuring that BASSE has adequate financial resources to complete the 2025-26 school year including meeting its obligations to its employees and contractors.

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<sup>15</sup> Formal Review [Initial Report](#), pp. 3-4, 13; [Final Report](#), p. 11