



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

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July 8, 2015

VIA ELECTRONIC AND FIRST CLASS MAIL

Cary Davis, Board Chair
Boys Preparatory Charter School of New York
1695 Seward Avenue
Bronx, NY 10473

Re: First Year School Evaluation Visit

Dear Mr. Davis:

This letter outlines the SUNY Charter Schools Institute's (the "Institute's") observations and findings from its May 27, 2015 first year school evaluation visit to the Boys Preparatory Charter School of New York ("Boys Prep"). The visit team consisted of Heather Wendling, Director for New Charters; Sinnjinn Bucknell, Performance and Systems Analyst; and Jenn David Lang, an external consultant. Allow me to place this letter and the conclusions set forth below into context.

As with all SUNY authorized charter schools, on a periodic basis throughout the term of the school's charter the Institute conducts a number of formal site visits. The Institute reports in writing to the school on data gathered during these visits. Cumulatively, the information in letters such as this, as well as reports provided in later years, forms the foundation of qualitative data on the school's effectiveness. At the conclusion of the school's charter term, the Institute provides the State University of New York Board of Trustees (the "SUNY Trustees") an analysis of the school's performance over the term of its charter that includes this qualitative information. The Institute makes a renewal recommendation for the school based on two components: the school's attainment of its Accountability Plan goals and evidence of the quality of the school's educational program collected during school evaluation visits.

At renewal, the Institute evaluates the academic, organizational, legal and fiscal aspects of the school's program using the *State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks* (the "SUNY Renewal Benchmarks"; see attachment). For formal school evaluation visits conducted prior to renewal, the Institute focuses on specific qualitative benchmarks that provide a fixed standard for determining the quality of the academic program as the school progresses toward renewal.

To Learn
To Search
To Serve



For this first year visit, the Institute narrows the expectation for each benchmark in recognition of the school program's limited development. The center of attention is on the quality of instruction and related benchmarks, which heavily affect the progress that a school is able to demonstrate in meeting its Accountability Plan goals during the charter term. The Institute expects a school to have moved from the beginning of implementation and the promise of future growth to full and effective implementation of a quality program by the time the school comes to renewal.

Although the information provided in this letter is not prescriptive, the Institute would expect the board to review thoroughly the issues highlighted below and, to the extent helpful, use them to assist in guiding the school's leadership team to further develop the school's academic program or other aspects of the school. In this regard, please be aware that although the Institute takes very seriously the conclusions provided, we are cognizant of the fact that a one-day site visit may not yield information on all facets of a school's program.

Please find the team's findings from the first year visit below.

Instructional Leadership

Boys Prep is developing strong instructional leadership, but leaders have yet to establish clear standards for teacher performance or student achievement by which the school holds teachers accountable.

- Boys Prep's instructional leadership team, comprised of the founding principal, two intervention specialists and a dean of student services, cultivates an environment of high expectations for both teacher and student performance. However, leaders and teachers do not clearly articulate measurable student achievement goals, school wide instructional priorities or specific standards of quality instruction.
- Boys Prep's instructional leadership team supports the development of its small teaching staff with regular observations and feedback meetings. The principal, specialists and dean provide sustained coaching and supervision for all teachers at Boys Prep. The principal observes each teacher at least once every two weeks and provides oral and written feedback during regularly scheduled debriefing meetings with each teacher. The school's intervention specialists also coach teachers, both in classrooms and during weekly planning meetings; specialists focus specifically on building teachers' capacities to differentiate content for all learners. With the assistance of grade level lead teachers, the principal also provides lesson planning guidance and reviews all plans before implementation. To maintain capacity to provide coaching for teachers at the current frequency, the school plans to add a dean of curriculum and assessment to its instructional leadership team as it expands to serve 2nd grade students in the next school year.
- The instructional leadership team relies on classroom observations and school wide trends, such as levels of student engagement in classrooms, to determine teachers' professional

development needs. The majority of professional development activities in the school's first year of operation focus on effective classroom management techniques, in response to perceived ongoing need in this area.

- Instructional leaders conduct mid-year and end-of-year evaluations for all teachers based on a clear rubric developed by the school's charter management organization, Public Prep ("the network") that measures each teacher's progress on a variety of competencies, as well as identifies personal goals for each teacher to work toward in subsequent coaching cycles. However, leaders have not yet set student achievement goals or other means to define acceptable teacher performance.

Use of Assessment Data

In its first year of operation, Boys Prep regularly gathers assessment data, but the school has not yet developed a system to use the data to improve student learning.

- Boys Prep regularly administers a range of standardized and informal assessments. The school administers standardized reading assessments and network-created writing and mathematics benchmark exams twice a year and guided reading assessments at least four times per year. Teachers administer unit tests and other formative assessments on an on-going basis.
- Some teachers examine data collaboratively. For example, one teacher brought examples of "low," "medium" and "high" level student work to a team meeting for group discussion. However, norming activities are not a school-wide practice. Much of the data collection and compilation occurs at the network level. During school and network-wide professional development sessions, teachers are beginning to learn how to record and analyze data for trends.
- Teachers report using assessment results primarily to adjust guided reading groups. The visit team found no evidence that teachers use assessment results to adjust pedagogy, curricular documents or other aspects of instruction.

Curriculum

Borrowing heavily from the network and several other high-performing charter schools, Boys Prep is in the process of creating a curriculum to support instructional planning.

- For the first part of the year, Boys Prep provided teachers with scope and sequence documents from the network for English language arts ("ELA"), social studies and science. Mid-way through the year, leaders identified a need for more rigorous ELA curriculum and decided to pilot reading and writing units from another high-performing charter school; the school also adopted the iRead program to support struggling students. The school relies on commercial curriculum for teaching mathematics.
- Teachers know what to teach and when to teach it based on these documents.

- Teachers at Boys Prep collaboratively plan weekly lesson plans, with one teacher planning all of the lessons for one subject and sharing those lessons with their grade team. Teachers have had diminished supports in the development of the curriculum over the course of the year because of staffing turnover within the network's curriculum development team, resulting in additional responsibilities for both leaders and teachers to both craft and review lesson material.

Pedagogy

In observations during the visit, high quality instruction, sufficient to support all students in achieving the success in meeting state standards is not yet evident throughout the school.

- Most teachers at Boys Prep deliver purposeful lessons aligned to the school's curriculum (8 of 12 classrooms observed) though lesson activities do not consistently communicate the stated objective. In some classrooms, slow pacing prevents teachers from covering sufficient content to enable students to meet posted objectives. For example, a math mini-lesson on addition lasted three times longer than scheduled, leaving no time for students to work with counting blocks to practice the skill.
- A minority of teachers effectively check for student understanding (3 of 12 classrooms observed). Most teachers rely on calling on individual student volunteers to answer recall questions and do not gauge all students' understanding before proceeding with lessons. Teachers rarely make spontaneous adjustments to instruction based on student responses, even when students clearly do not grasp concepts. For instance, a teacher asked students to identify basic plot elements of a story; students were unable to give correct responses, but the teacher did not attend to common misunderstandings or review terminology before continuing with the lesson as planned.
- Few teachers require students to engage in higher-order thinking and problem solving (4 of 12 classrooms observed). Teachers rarely challenge students to elaborate on their responses to drive deeper understanding. Teachers do not adequately scaffold lessons or provide temporary supports so that all students can access the material and/or complete challenging tasks and activities.
- Half of the teachers at Boys Prep maintain classroom environments with a focus on academic achievement (6 of 12 classrooms observed). Teachers use a number of school-wide classroom management techniques and classroom rituals to varying degrees of effectiveness. Extended transitions result in numerous students being off task. Most teachers do not use instructional time effectively. In many lessons, teachers spend a significant portion of learning time attending to student discipline. The school does not leverage the co-teaching model to effectively manage behavior to enable lead teachers to focus on lesson delivery and maintain student engagement. Notably, instruction by both lead and associate teachers within small guided reading groups tends to be of better quality,

with more robust questioning and teachers holding students accountable for explaining their responses.

At-Risk Students

Boys Prep is addressing the educational needs of some at-risk students, but does not have a program in place to meet the needs of English language learners (“ELLs”).

- Boys Prep uses appropriate procedures for identifying at-risk students including students with disabilities, ELLs and those struggling academically. Teachers use standardized reading fluency tests and informal assessments to identify students in need of extra supports. Boys Prep uses the Home Language Identification Survey and the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners to identify students as ELLs.
- The school employs several resources and processes to meet the needs of students at-risk of academic failure and students with disabilities. Based on oral reading fluency assessment results, the school creates intervention groups in which some students receive intensive pull out support to remediate skill deficits in reading. Leveraging the co-teaching model, teachers organize at-risk students in small, leveled groups in mathematics and writing within general education classrooms to provide targeted supports.
- Boys Prep does not deploy resources to meet the specific language acquisition needs of its 10 identified ELLs. This is an area for improvement the school has identified upon which to focus in its second year of operation.
- Boys Prep provides sufficient time and support for on-going coordination between general education and at-risk teachers with weekly scheduled planning blocks. Teachers report using this time to review data, discuss student progress, share instructional strategies and plan lessons with input from the intervention specialists. Teachers are generally aware of their students’ disabilities and academic needs.

Organizational Capacity

Boys Prep’s organizational structure supports the delivery of the school’s academic program.

- Boys Prep has in place an administrative structure with staff, operational systems and procedures that allow it to carry out the academic program. With the school’s director of operations managing the day-to-day business of the school, the founding principal focuses on strengthening teachers’ pedagogical skills.
- While Boys Prep generally maintains a safe and orderly environment throughout the school, low-level misbehavior is present in most classrooms. Inconsistent implementation of the school-wide disciplinary system inhibits its effectiveness.
- Boys Prep allocates sufficient resources to achieve its goals. Classrooms are well resourced with leveled libraries, abundant mathematics manipulatives and instructional technology that teachers use to meet student needs. The school invests significant funds into teachers’

professional development, allotting each teacher \$1500 per year to pursue external development opportunities.

- The school is beginning to implement network-directed systems and protocols, adapting them to meet the school's needs. The school's founding principal completed a leadership residency program with the network prior to founding Boys Prep; the network also provides staff recruitment support as well as professional development for staff prior to school opening.
- Although Boys Prep is generally compliant in meeting the requirements of its charter contract, one area for remedy is the submission of all board meeting minutes to the Institute on an ongoing basis. The education corporation has provided no board minutes since June 2014.

These conclusions constitute the beginning of the school's record of progress toward meeting the standards detailed in the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks. The Institute conducts formal evaluation visits at various times during each school's initial charter term and generally at least once during subsequent charter terms. The cumulative evidence collected during these school evaluation and renewal visits, as well as the school's record of success at meeting Accountability Plan goals becomes part of the record that informs the Institute's renewal recommendation to the SUNY Trustees.

The number of school evaluation visits the Institute will conduct before renewal depends on a variety of factors. Concerns raised in the conclusions of previous visits, the school's progress toward meeting its Accountability Plan goals and emergent legal and compliance issues may affect the frequency and timing of the visits.

The Institute looks forward to its next visit to Boys Prep and is available at any time to discuss the results of the first year visit, future visits or other concerns you may have as the school moves through its charter term and toward renewal.

Sincerely,



Natasha M. Howard, Ph.D.
Managing Director of Program

Enclosure

cc: Peter Herzberg, Principal *(via email)*

Carl Watson, Director of Operations *(via email)*

Ian Rowe, CEO, Public Prep Network, Inc. *(via email)*