



April 13, 2015

**VIA ELECTRONIC AND FIRST CLASS MAIL**

Mr. Samuel Cole, Board Chair  
Success Academy Charter School-Fort Greene  
101 Park Avenue  
Brooklyn, NY 11205

Re: First Year School Evaluation Visit

Dear Mr. Cole:

This letter outlines the SUNY Charter Schools Institute's ("the Institute's") observations and findings from its June 2, 2014 first year school evaluation visit to the Success Academy Charter School-Fort Greene ("Success Fort Greene"). The visit team consisted of Institute Senior Analysts Aaron Campbell and Heather Wendling. First, please accept my most sincere apologies for the extended delay in sending this letter to you. I understand that certain details of the school's program have likely changed in the current school year, but I do hope that you find this record of information shared during the visit team's debrief with school leaders helpful. 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 your 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 educational program. At the conclusion of the school's charter term, the Institute provides the State University of New York's Board of Trustees (the "SUNY Trustees") an analysis of your school's performance. The Institute makes a renewal recommendation for your school based largely on two key components: the school's attainment of its academic 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

To Learn  
To Search  
To Serve

for determining the quality of the academic program as the school progresses toward renewal.

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. Because Success Fort Greene is a replication of an established high-performing school model and in keeping with its ongoing oversight of replicated programs, the Institute presents an abbreviated first-year evaluation of the school.

Although the information provided in this letter is not prescriptive, the Institute would expect you to review thoroughly the issues highlighted below and, to the extent you find them helpful, use them to assist in guiding the school's leadership team to develop further 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 brief 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**

*Success Fort Greene was developing strong instructional leadership at the time of the first year visit.*

- After a change in school leadership early in the school year, Success Fort Greene promoted a culture of learning and high expectations for teacher and student performance. Walls and bulletin boards displayed a variety of personal achievement awards, student work samples and references to the mission and guiding values of the school's not-for-profit charter management organization, Success Academy Charter Schools, Inc. ("the Success network"): "agency, curiosity, try and try, integrity, others and no-shortcuts."
- With support from the network, the principal and education coordinator focused on developing the pedagogical strengths of a largely inexperienced teaching staff.
- The school principal maintained a frequent presence in classrooms, with daily walk-through visits and weekly formal observations of all teachers. The principal followed up on observations, providing specific and actionable feedback in one-one-one meetings to improve instructional effectiveness. Members of the network learning team also visited the school regularly and provided coaching support to address identified shortcomings in teachers' pedagogical practices.
- Success Fort Greene implemented the network's comprehensive professional development program. Professional development activities at both the school and network levels



interrelated with classroom practice and prepared teachers to meet the needs of all students.

- Success Fort Greene's principal used data from observations and coaching, as well as school-wide student performance trends, to determine additional professional development needs for teachers.
- The school held teachers accountable for high performance and student achievement in mid- and end-of-year evaluations with clear criteria that teachers understood. Additionally, the principal used formal improvement plans to hold teachers not meeting expectations accountable.

### **Use of Assessment Data**

*Success Fort Greene gathered a variety of assessment and evaluation data and used it to improve student learning.*

- Success Fort Greene regularly administered standardized tests and network-created interim assessments across grade levels to monitor student progress. The principal required that teachers create and administer exit tickets and weekly quizzes in math and reading.
- The principal and education coordinator analyzed assessment results at the individual, class, grade and school level. Additionally, Success Fort Greene compared its student achievement results to those of other schools within the network to identify areas for teacher development and to evaluate program effectiveness.
- Teachers regularly made instructional decisions based on assessment data. Adjustments made to meet students' needs included differentiating lesson activities, grouping students by ability level within classrooms and referring students for intervention services.
- With an online student management system, Success Fort Greene made assessment results widely available to school stakeholders. The principal created a detailed school performance report prior to all board meetings.

### **Curriculum**

*Success Fort Greene has a curriculum that supports teachers in the planning and delivery of instruction.*

- The Success network provided the school with a curriculum framework, scope and sequence documents, unit plans, lesson objectives and daily lesson plans for teachers to use in most subjects areas. Teachers created their own lesson plans for shared text and read-aloud classroom periods, which the principal reviewed.
- Using these documents, teachers knew what to teach and when to teach it.
- Teachers used ample curriculum materials, such as math manipulatives and storybooks, to support them in meet the educational needs of students.

### **Pedagogy**

*Adequate instruction was evident throughout Success Fort Greene at the time of the first year visit.*

- Most teachers delivered purposeful lessons with clear objectives that aligned to the school's curriculum using clear, age appropriate terms. Teachers regularly referenced past lessons to reinforce and build upon previously taught skills.
- Teachers generally used a variety of techniques such as cold calling, hand signals and individual conferencing to check for student understanding. Teachers circulated around classrooms to monitor student responses and ask probing questions. For example, during writer's workshop, teachers met with each student briefly and asked clarifying questions to guide students in the writing process.
- Some teachers included opportunities in their lessons to challenge students with questions and activities that developed depth of understanding and higher-order thinking skills. In several classrooms, teachers pushed students to defend their answers and conjectures. Illustrating the school's high expectations for students, students in 1<sup>st</sup> grade completed a writing assignment on preparing resumes that outlined their qualifications for a career of their choice. Teachers required students to explain what relevant academic strengths and interests they possess that would help them succeed in a career as an airline pilot, doctor, fashion designer or train conductor.
- Some teachers established and maintained classroom environments with a consistent focus on academic achievement. Most teachers had materials readily available, but the frequency and severity of student misbehavior limited the effective use of these materials and disrupted the delivery of instruction in some classrooms. Some teachers applied classroom rules and consequences inconsistently and/or ineffectively, often redirecting students using severe or negative language and removing students from the classroom for minor infractions.

### **At-Risk Students**

*Success Fort Greene adequately addressed the needs of at-risk students.*

- The school had clearly defined procedures for identifying students struggling academically, students with disabilities and English language learners ("ELLs"). All Success Fort Greene staff shared a common understanding of available interventions.
- Success Fort Greene provided small group push-in and pull-out special education teacher support services ("SETSS") to students at risk of academic failure as well as to those with Individualized Education Programs ("IEPs") mandating academic interventions. Most Success Fort Greene teachers had or were working toward special education certification.
- Success Fort Greene served the eight ELLs enrolled at the school in its core, general education English language arts program, which was print rich, writing focused and emphasized student-to-student interaction.

- The special education team met weekly to discuss the progress of struggling students. During these weekly meetings, instructional staff reviewed student data on interim assessments and discussed teachers' classroom observations.

### **Organizational Capacity**

*Success Fort Greene delivered its educational program effectively at the time of the first year visit.*

- In its first year of operation, Success Fort Greene put in place an administrative structure with staff, operational systems and procedures to carry out the academic program with network support. Success Fort Greene's business manager was responsible for all operational coordination at the school.
- Success Fort Greene's staffing structure allowed the principal to focus on teaching and learning. The school added a dean of students in January to attend to school culture issues, attendance and significant student discipline problems as well as to build better relationships with families and the community.
- In collaboration with the Success network, Success Fort Greene established a safe and orderly environment for students and staff.
- Success Fort Greene allocated an abundance of resources to support student achievement. Teachers used technology such as SMART boards and iPads in classrooms to facilitate lesson activities, to increase student independence and to reach students with multiple learning styles.
- The Success network worked closely with school leadership to put in place systems and protocols such as procedures to identify at-risk students to ensure the school develops as a well-functioning organization.

These conclusions constitute the beginning of your 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.

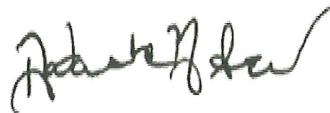
The number of school evaluation visits the Institute will conduct before renewal depends on a variety of factors. Concerns raised in the conclusions of previous visits, the school's progress toward meeting its Accountability Plan goals and emergent legal and compliance issues may affect the frequency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



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The Institute looks forward to its next visit to Success Fort Greene 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Natasha M. Howard".

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

Enclosure

c: Candido Brown, Principal (*via email*)  
Eva Moskowitz, CEO, Success Academy Charter Schools, Inc. (*via email*)