



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

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April 13, 2015

VIA ELECTRONIC AND FIRST CLASS MAIL

Mr. Samuel Cole, Board Chair
Success Academy Charter School-Crown Heights
330 Crown Street, 5th Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11225

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 3, 2014 first year school evaluation visit to the Success Academy Charter School-Crown Heights ("Success Crown Heights"). The visit team consisted of Institute Senior Analysts Heather Wendling and Aaron Campbell. 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 for determining the quality of the academic program as the school progresses toward renewal.

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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 Crown Heights 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 Crown Heights had strong instructional leadership in place at the time of the first year visit.

- The Success Crown Heights principal frequently encouraged students and teachers to achieve at high levels and to exceed the school's high expectations for all community members. The school's hallways and bulletin boards displayed numerous references to Success Crown Heights' "royal" theme, which paid homage to the school's name.
- With support from the school's not-for-profit charter management organization, Success Academy Charter Schools, Inc. (the "Success network"), the Success Crown Heights principal effectively supported the development of the teaching staff.
- The principal delivered sustained and systematic coaching using a network-wide rubric. The principal conducted weekly observations of teachers followed by one-on-one feedback meetings. With struggling teachers, the principal set small, concrete goals for improving pedagogical competence and tracked teachers' progress toward meeting each goal during observation cycles.
- Comprehensive professional development activities at both the school and network level built teachers' instructional skills and assisted teachers in meeting student needs. These activities interrelated with classroom practice; the principal monitored implementation of strategies discussed in professional development during classroom observations.
- The principal and network staff analyzed assessment data to determine specific teacher support needs. For example, the principal's analysis of math assessment results led to

devoting more time to developing teacher competencies in teaching fractions.

- The instructional leader uses a network-wide rubric as the basis for the school's evaluation process, which holds teachers accountable for high performance and student achievement.

Use of Assessment Data

Success Crown Heights gathered a variety of assessment and evaluation data and used it to improve student learning.

- Success Crown Heights 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 student assessment manager analyzed assessment results at the individual, class, grade and school level. Additionally, Success Crown Heights 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 Crown Heights made assessment results widely available to school stakeholders. The principal created a detailed school performance report prior to all board meetings.

Curriculum

In its first year of operation, Success Crown Heights' curriculum supported teachers in the planning and delivery of instruction.

- The school had a detailed curriculum framework that includes clear student performance expectations at each grade level. The Success network provided teachers with scope and sequence documents, unit plans and specific lesson objectives, thereby creating a bridge between the framework and daily lessons in most subject areas. In addition to the specific lesson objectives, the network provided scripted daily lessons that teachers then adapted to meet student needs. 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 accessed abundant curriculum materials such as math manipulatives and storybooks to meet the educational needs of all students.

Pedagogy

High quality instruction was evident throughout Success Crown Heights.

- Teachers delivered purposeful lessons with clear objectives that aligned to the school's curriculum. Lessons built on students' previous skills and knowledge.
- Teachers regularly and effectively used cold-calling, one-on-one conferencing and whole group questioning techniques to check for student understanding. Teachers used these checks to assess students' grasp of lesson material and to make ad-hoc instructional adjustments to support student learning more effectively. For example, after recognizing students' misunderstanding of rhyming words in a poem, a classroom the teacher added a whole group practice to a writer's workshop rather than release students to do independent practice as planned.
- Teachers included opportunities in their lessons to challenge students with questions and activities that developed depth of understanding and higher-order thinking skills. Classrooms throughout the school focused on the "how" and "why" of problem solving.
- Teachers established and maintained classroom environments with consistent focus on academic achievement. Timers shown on classroom SMART boards during lesson activities helped classes move at an appropriate pace and helped teachers minimize transition time. Students had a clear understanding of behavioral expectations. For example, when timers signaled the end of an activity, students automatically put their hands on their heads and faced the teacher.

At-Risk Students

At the time of the first year visit, Success Crown Heights 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 school staff shared a common understanding of available interventions.
- Success Crown Heights 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 teachers had or were working toward special education certification.
- Success Crown Heights served the four ELL students enrolled at the time of the first year visit in its 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 Crown Heights effectively delivered its educational program.

- Success Crown Heights had in place an administrative structure with staff, operational systems and procedures that allowed it to carry out the academic program. Success Crown Heights' business manager handled all operational issues at the school, freeing the principal, with network support, to focus on teaching and learning.
- In collaboration with the network, Success Crown Heights established a safe and orderly environment for students and staff.
- Success Crown Heights 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.
- With supports from the network, the school had begun to create the systems and protocols necessary to ensure a well functioning school 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.

The Institute looks forward to its next visit to Success Crown Heights 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

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