



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-Hell's Kitchen
439 West 49th Street
New York, NY 10019

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 5, 2014 first year school evaluation visit to the Success Academy Charter School-Hell's Kitchen ("Success Hell's Kitchen"). 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 effectiveness. 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 over the term of its charter that includes this qualitative information. 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

To Learn
To Search
To Serve



“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.

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 Hell’s Kitchen 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 Hell’s Kitchen had strong instructional leadership in place at the time of the first year visit.

- Success Hell’s Kitchen promoted a culture of learning and scholarship through what the principal referred to as “big rocks:” a culture of daily mastery, a love for learning and teamwork.
- The principal delivered sustained and systematic coaching to teachers using a rubric developed by Success Academy Charter Schools, Inc. (the “Success network”), the school’s charter management organization. The principal conducted informal observations of classrooms daily and gave real-time feedback to teachers. The school leader provided more intensive support for struggling teachers with increased observation and feedback cycles as well as assistance with lesson plan development. Upon the leader’s request, members of the network learning team also visited the school and provided support to teachers.
- Success Hell’s Kitchen 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.

- The principal used data from the coaching and feedback system, as well as school-wide student performance trends, to determine the additional professional development needs of Success Hell's Kitchen teachers.
- The school provided formal time for teacher collaboration and planning with weekly grade level meetings.
- The principal held teachers accountable for high performance and student achievement with formal mid- and end-of-year evaluations.

Use of Assessment Data

Success Hell's Kitchen gathered assessment and evaluation data and used it to improve student learning.

- Success Hell's Kitchen regularly administered standardized tests and network-created interim assessments across grade levels to monitor student progress. The principal required that teachers create and administer "mini-interim" assessments in order to predict how students will perform on formal assessments.
- With an online student management system, the school made assessment results widely available to stakeholders. The principal and education coordinator analyzed assessment results at the individual, class, grade and school level; additionally, Success Hell's Kitchen compared its student achievement results to those of other schools within the network in order to improve student learning and to evaluate program effectiveness.
- Success Hell's Kitchen teachers regularly made instructional adjustments such as regrouping students by ability level based on assessment data. Teachers and instructional leaders also used assessment results to identify students for academic intervention services.

Curriculum

The Success Hell's Kitchen curriculum supported teachers in the planning and delivery of instruction in the school's first year of operation.

- Success Hell's Kitchen used network-created materials to support instruction. The Success network provided the curriculum framework, scope and sequence documents, unit plans, lesson objectives and daily lesson plans for teachers to use in most subject areas. Teachers created their own lesson plans for shared text and read aloud blocks, which the principal reviewed. School leaders reported that curriculum materials aligned both vertically and horizontally and prepared students to meet state performance standards.
- Using these documents, teachers knew what to teach and when to teach it.
- Teachers used a plethora of curriculum materials including well-stocked leveled reading libraries that supported them in meeting the educational needs of all students.

Pedagogy

High quality instruction was evident throughout Success Hell's Kitchen classrooms.

- Teachers delivered purposeful lessons with clear objectives aligned to the school's curriculum. Lessons built on students' previous skill and knowledge. In one class, a student was able to explain to visitors that he and his classmates continued to work on contractions by separating or combining words on an activity sheet before placing each contraction in the appropriate blank in sentences on the worksheet.
- Teachers regularly used cold-calling and one-on-one conferencing to check for student understanding. Teachers effectively monitored student performance by circulating and questioning in both whole and small group settings, adjusting instruction throughout the lesson to fit student needs.
- Teachers included opportunities in their lessons to challenge students with questions and activities that developed depth of understanding and higher-order thinking skills. Classroom lessons pushed students to understand the "how" and the "why" of a problem. Teachers required students to defend their answers, but in first grade classrooms, this emphasis came largely from peers, with students regularly asking other students to explain their answers or to describe the process they went through to solve problems without teacher input.
- Teachers established and maintained classroom environments with consistent focus on academic achievement. Teachers had lesson materials readily available to maximize learning time. Timers, hand signals and activity closures such as "hands on top, that means stop" allowed for appropriate pacing and effective transitions.

At-Risk Students

Success Hell's Kitchen addressed the needs of at-risk students at the time of the first year visit.

- The school had clearly defined procedures for identifying students who were struggling academically, students with disabilities and English language learners ("ELLs"). All teaching staff members shared a common understanding of available interventions.
- Success Hell's Kitchen provides 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. All Success Hell's Kitchen teachers had or were working toward special education certification.
- As is the case in other network schools, Success Hell's Kitchen served ELL students 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 all struggling students. During these weekly meetings, instructional staff reviewed student data on interim assessments and discussed teachers' classroom observations of students to monitor progress.

Organizational Capacity

Success Hell's Kitchen effectively delivered its educational program.

- Success Hell's Kitchen had in place an administrative structure with staff, operational systems and procedures to carry out the academic program. Success Hell's Kitchen separated instructional and operational responsibilities. The principal and an education coordinator managed the academic program while the school's business manager handled the day-to-day school operations. The Success network provided both instructional and operational supports.
- The Success network had a robust hiring process through which the Success Hell's Kitchen principal selected new teachers including some from other network schools. The network also partnered with Touro College for the hiring of assistant teachers.
- In collaboration with the Success network, the school established a safe and orderly environment for students and staff.
- The school 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.

The Institute looks forward to its next visit to Success Hell's Kitchen 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', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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

Enclosure

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