



**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-Prospect Heights  
760 Prospect Place, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Brooklyn, NY 11216

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-Prospect Heights ("Success Prospect 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 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 "SUNY Renewal Benchmarks"; see attachment). For formal school evaluation visits conducted prior

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

- The Success Prospect Heights principal frequently encouraged students and teachers to "go beyond the z" in order to promote a culture of high expectations. The school also communicated the expectation that all students will graduate from college, naming homerooms after teachers' alma maters and displaying multiple references to the year that each class will graduate.
- With support from the Success Academy Charter Schools, Inc. (the "Success network"), the school's charter management organization, the school principal effectively supported the development of the teaching staff. The principal also supported teachers in their lesson planning during regular grade team meetings.
- The principal provided sustained and systematic coaching for teachers using a network-wide rubric to prioritize focus areas. The school principal conducted informal observations at least once a week and provided feedback during biweekly one-on-one meetings. Members of the network learning team visited the school and occasionally provided in-the-moment coaching support to teachers, usually at the request of the principal.



- Success Prospect Heights 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 held teachers accountable for applying skills learned during professional development sessions and gauged the effectiveness of the program by monitoring implementation during classroom observations.
- The principal and network analyzed assessment data to determine teacher support needs. For example, after comparing the school's results with those of other network schools, Success Prospect Heights began devoting additional time to scoring student work samples to increase teachers' competency in reliably grading math assignments.
- The school leader used a network-wide rubric as the basis for evaluating teacher performance.

#### **Use of Assessment Data**

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

- Success Prospect Heights regularly administered standardized tests and network-created interim assessments across grade levels to monitor student progress. With an online student management system, the school made assessment results widely available to school stakeholders. The principal and education coordinator analyzed assessment results at the individual, class, grade and school level; additionally, Success Prospect Heights 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 Prospect Heights 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**

*Success Prospect Heights had in place a curriculum that supported teachers in the planning and delivery of instruction.*

- The Success network provided the school with a curriculum framework, scope and sequences, unit plans, lesson objectives and daily lesson plans for teachers to use in most subjects. Teachers created their own lesson plans for shared text and read aloud blocks, which the principal reviewed. Leaders reported that curriculum materials aligned vertically and horizontally and these materials prepared students to meet state performance standards.



- Using these documents, teachers knew what to teach and when to teach it throughout the first year of operation.
- Teachers used ample curriculum materials, such as math manipulatives and storybooks, to support them in meeting the educational needs of students.

### **Pedagogy**

*High quality instruction was evident throughout Success Prospect Heights.*

- Teachers delivered purposeful lessons with clear objectives that aligned to the school's curriculum. Success Prospect Heights emphasized interdisciplinary learning such as a "supermarket" unit during which students calculated food prices in math and compared the roles of supermarket workers during writer's workshop.
- Teachers regularly and effectively used techniques such as cold-calling, whole class non-verbal signals and one-on-one conferencing to check for student understanding. Teachers also used formative assessment to guide students in the completion of high quality work products. In a hands-on lesson on how bees pollinate flowers for example, the teacher assisted students through their investigations with challenging questions, ensuring that students did the cognitive heavy lifting throughout the lesson.
- Teachers included opportunities in their lessons to challenge students with questions and activities that developed depth of understanding and higher-order thinking skills. Some lessons allowed students to take on sophisticated leadership roles as illustrated by a Kindergarten student teaching her peers about the literal and deeper meaning of a poem while supporting her conjectures with text evidence. Across the school, teachers consistently required students to explain the process behind their answers and to utilize multiple strategies to solve problems.
- With efficient transition routines and fast-paced lessons, teachers maximized learning time and communicated a sense of urgency. Teachers effectively anticipated and redirected occasional low-level misbehavior immediately, thereby maintaining classroom environments that focused on academic achievement.

### **At-Risk Students**

*At the time of the first year visit, Success Prospect 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 Success Prospect Heights staff shared a common understanding of available interventions.
- Success Prospect Heights provided small group push-in and pull-out special education teacher support services ("SETSS") to students at-risk for academic failure as well as to the nine students with Individualized Education Programs ("IEPs") mandating academic



interventions. All Success Prospect Heights teachers had or were working toward special education certification.

- As is the case in other network schools, Success Prospect Heights served its four enrolled ELLs 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**

*The Success Prospect Heights organization effectively delivered its educational program in the school's first year.*

- Success Prospect Heights had in place an administrative structure with staff, operational systems and procedures that allowed it to carry out the academic program. Success Prospect Heights' business manager handled all operational issues at the school, freeing the instructional leadership, with network support, to focus on teaching and learning.
- Success Prospect 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 in the future. For example, the principal monitored the effectiveness of the professional development program with follow up observation in order to ensure continued development of teachers' pedagogical skills.

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 Prospect 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,

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: Monica Komery, Principal (*via email*)  
Eva Moskowitz, CEO, Success Academy Charter Schools, Inc. (*via email*)