

Snapshot Observations & Recommendations

<School Name>

Observed January 25, 2007

Introduction

The mission of the New York City Charter Center for Charter School Excellence is to stimulate the supply of high quality charter schools and support ongoing student excellence in all New York City charter schools, impacting the effectiveness of public education. As an independent nonprofit, the Charter Center is an advocate, bridge and catalyst for the achievement of academic and operational success, and sustainability in all New York City charter schools for each young person.

This school review report process is part of the Center's mission to help support and advise New York City charter schools. The report uses data, observations, and interviews to provide a report for the school on its strengths, areas in need of improvement, and next steps to achieve that improvement. It is our hope that these reports will help charter schools improve the quality of instruction, and move from Good to Great.

On Thursday, January 25, 2007, three NYCCCSE staff and one observer visited <School Name> (<School Name>), partnered with school leaders, and gathered information through observation and interviews. We met with administrators, observed approximately 2.5 hours of class time, interviewed eight teachers, and debriefed on our findings. During our time at <School Name>, we used data-gathering observation tools, scripted interview questions, and a three-section rubric to quantify what we were observing.

This report documents <School Name>' growth since our last visit in September 2006, and sets a baseline for <School Name>'s growth and improvement for the next several months. The Charter Center team will return in May 2007 for a follow-up review visit and with <School Name>' leadership team we will assess the progress the school has made. This is just one of the services offered by the New York City Center for Charter School Excellence. Along with this report, we hope to continue a relationship that allows for more frequent, informal help.

In our analysis of <School Name>, we focused on three framework areas that we believe must be strong to ensure student achievement: School Culture, Leadership, and Teaching and Assessment. In fall 2006, we selected the indicators to measure in each of these areas in partnership with the <School Name> leadership team. For this review, we revisited those indicators that had not yet been mastered as of the last review, or that the leadership team indicated that they would like to look at again. The majority of these indicators are what we consider *Level One* indicators—those upon which the ability to build a truly great and high-achieving school hinge on. This report shows which indicators <School Name> has mastered since our last visit, identifies priority areas for the <School Name> team to address, and provides recommendations on best practices which were generated in the post-observation debrief.

SCHOOL CULTURE

Strengths

1. Climate of Constant Learning

During the two and a half hours spent observing in classrooms, there were only two external disruptions that interrupted learning.

2. Routines and Systems

<School Name> has several consistently implemented school-wide routines and systems that help maintain a demand for constant learning. Five out of six observed hallway transitions were noted as orderly and timely. Also noted positively were the marks on walls and lines on the floor to indicate expected behaviors for hallway travel. Areas where routines and systems might be addressed were: student requests for bathroom use in a first-grade classroom and a student's mis-use of the hall pass.

3. Expectations for Achievement

It was agreed in the post-observation debrief that effort is an expectation (a "given") and results are the measure at <School Name>. The leadership team agreed, though, that they would like to explore this indicator again during the follow-up revisit in May 2007.

4. Behavioral Expectations

The behavioral expectations at <School Name> are clearly outlined in a set of published non-negotiables that nearly all staff use and support. A few exceptions were noted and had already been identified by school leaders.

Areas in Need of Improvement

1. Student Accountability

Evidence

This indicator was scored as being very close to mastery (1.5 on the scale of 0-2). Accountability systems are in place with clear consequences and rewards in about 75% of classrooms at <School Name>. The majority of the 113 behavior issues noted in the 150 minutes of observed class time were minor misbehaviors. 59% of all misbehaviors observed were checked by teachers, almost entirely with a verbal redirect rather than the administration of a consequence. Several teachers were noted for outstanding classroom management while a few others were identified as struggling. The school leadership team was aware of which teachers are struggling, and is working with them accordingly.

Recommendations

In the post-observation debrief it was agreed that students at <School Name> are generally very well-behaved. Leaders should continue to support those teachers who are struggling; it is likely that if teachers administer more consequences for misbehaviors there will be fewer misbehaviors.

2. Academic Rigor

Evidence

Some teachers at <School Name> are presenting lessons and materials that are not academically rigorous and developmentally appropriate. Of eight lessons observed with a focus on academic rigor, 2 were deemed “high rigor” and 6 were identified as “low rigor.” Observers shared concern that teachers are either too slow in their pacing or are not giving their students developmentally appropriate work.

Recommendations

<School Name>’ leaders agreed that they need to facilitate a school-wide conversation around academic rigor. There should be an agreed definition within and across grades as to what rigor looks like in both lesson plans and in practice.

**Total number of behavior issues recorded in 150 minutes of observed class time:
113**

Note: This includes behavior not noticed, AND behavior noticed, yet unchecked.

**Total number of behavior issues checked by classroom teachers:
42**

**Total number of observed consequences administered:
4**

**Percentage of recorded behavioral issues that were addressed:
59%**

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Strengths

1. Clear roles and responsibilities

There is a clear delineation of the roles and responsibilities of school leaders that is transparent to all staff members. When interviewed, teachers were able to identify their supervisors and stated that they feel that the chain of support is clear.

Areas in Need of Improvement

1. Curriculum Alignment

Evidence

This indicator was scored as being very close to mastery (1.5 on the scale of 0-2). The school’s curriculum is mostly aligned with the New York state standards, and all teachers know and understand this. School leaders shared, however, that they are in a prolonged process to re-adjust the curriculum to align it with the state testing calendar.

Recommendations

School leaders should proceed as planned to adjust the curriculum to account for the fact that certain grades and subjects are tested relatively early in the school year. This will necessitate the commencement of teaching certain academic skills in the spring of the previous grade for which they are written (e.g. certain fourth grade math skills should be taught in the spring of third grade).

2. Staff Support

Evidence

This is another indicator that was scored as being very close to mastery (1.5 on the scale of 0-2). <School Name> began implementing a new, tiered professional development system this school year which has been well-received by staff and is off to a great start. Staff members whose practice is in need of improvement are identified, but so far are only receiving some of the needed supports. School leaders expressed frustration at the sense that there is not enough time in a day or week to fit in all needed meetings and observations.

Recommendations

<School Name>’ school leaders should continue to be proactive in refining their professional development system and identifying time to fit in needed meetings. It was agreed that we will revisit this indicator when we return in May.

3. Measurement of Teacher Effectiveness

Evidence

Teacher effectiveness at <School Name> is constantly being considered informally through pop-in observations, a formal observation (one more will occur later this year), and monthly one-on-one meetings between teachers and their supervisors. Teachers also complete self-evaluations, and their planning binders are reviewed by their supervisors. In

interviews, all teachers expressed a sense that they are well-supported by school leaders. Currently, teachers understand the tiered professional development system and have a vague sense of the indicators which will benchmark their progress. School leaders expressed a need for help in determining specific goals for teacher growth plans.

Recommendations

School leaders should continue to have structured, explicit conversations around needed areas for improvement based on individual teacher's weaknesses. Staff from the Center can be of assistance in determining progress indicators for teachers—<School Name> staff should make sure they get this support. It was agreed that we will revisit this indicator in May.

4. Collaboration and Integration

Evidence

Teachers have regular and supported time built into their schedules where some collaboration on planning and discussion of best practices is taking place. The level of collaboration and integration varies by grade-level team, as does the amount of structure and documentation of meeting topics. School leaders agreed that they would like for there to more structure to teacher collaboration sessions, and greater consistency across grade levels.

Recommendations

School leaders should identify those teams that are using their collaboration and integration sessions effectively, and strive to implement similar systems in other grade-levels. While it will not be possible to have every session be exactly the same (given that individual teachers have unique needs and working styles), it is possible to better structure and archive work. Some ideas that came up in the shared debrief session included a set calendar of meetings so that school leaders are able to be there, and a loose protocol so that certain topic areas are consistently addressed.

5. Data-driven Instructional Program

Evidence

This is another indicator that was scored at near-mastery (a 1.5 on the 0-2 scale). <School Name> has been working quite diligently to develop a school-wide, data-focused process for determining what needs re-teaching. Several staff development sessions have been dedicated to this topic, there is a common language around the topic, and teachers appreciate the support they are receiving. Teachers shared the use of assessments, observations, and classwork to identify what needs re-teaching.

Recommendations

In the shared debrief, it was agreed that <School Name> should continue to hone their teachers' skills in using evidence to determine what needs re-teaching. School leaders agreed that although great progress has been made, they would like for this to be a continued focus.

6. Structure to Support Arts Infusion

Evidence

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The majority of teachers at <School Name> feel supported in planning to integrate the arts into their lessons, and there were a few examples of arts infusion observed in classrooms. When interviewed in September teachers shared the leadership support structure for integrating arts into their planning and expressed excitement around the artist-in-residence program. In the paired debrief, school leaders agreed that the actual amount of arts infusion occurring in classrooms is not up to the standards set forth in the school’s mission.

Recommendations

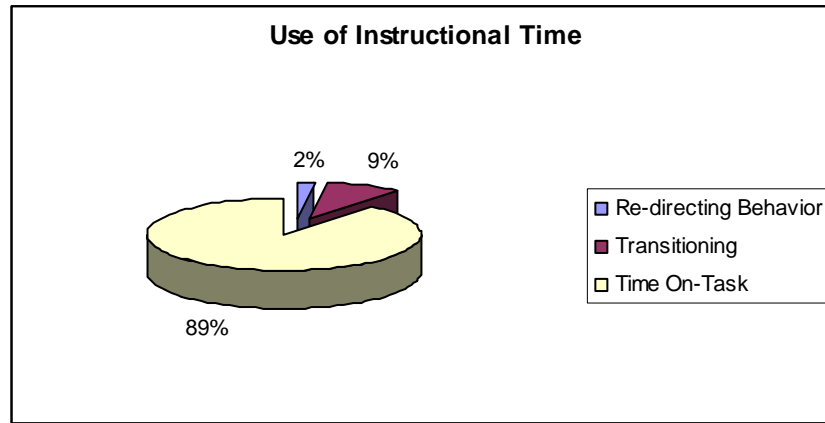
<School Name>’ school leaders agreed that they will push themselves and their staff to define arts integration and agree upon what an “arts-infused” classroom should look like and sound like.

TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

Strengths

1. Time-on-Task

Educational time in <School Name> is generally an average of 89% of time instruction. Of the total 273 using the time-on-task 9% of time was spent on in- and 2% of time was spent on directs. It was agreed that needs to focus on to take advantage of this of time that is spent on



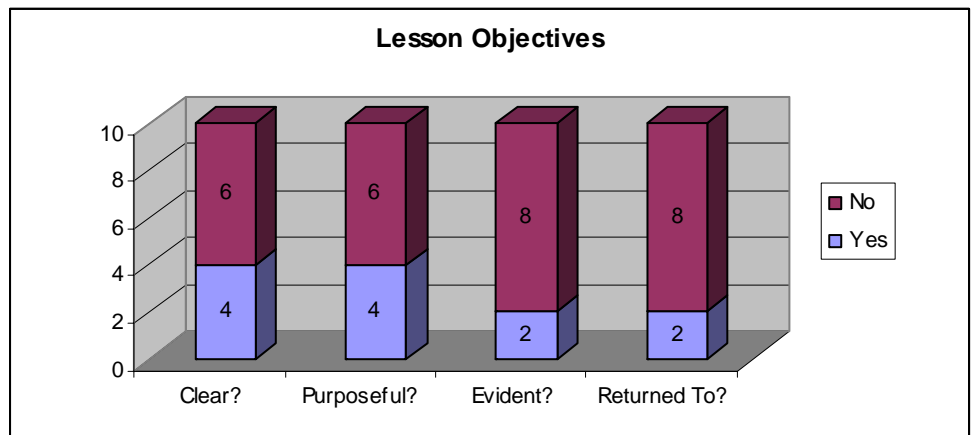
classrooms at maximized with spent on minutes recorded observation tool, class transitions behavior re- <School Name> maximizing rigor large percentage learning.

Areas in Need of Improvement

1. Clear Objectives

Evidence

In many classrooms lessons reflected planning to achieve clear objectives or aims and were purposeful and evident throughout. In most cases, observers were able to determine a lesson’s objective, but few objectives were explicitly stated or written. What was identified as a needed area for improvement was the returning to an objective at lesson’s end or prior to each transition. Teachers often ended lessons with instructions for a transition without connecting the lesson’s activities with prior work, the previously identified objective, or future learning.



Recommendations

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In the collaborative debrief, we discussed the need for teachers to better plan each lesson’s closing to ensure that each lesson is neatly “tied up” in a student’s brain. A KWL-plus chart is an example of a good tool for ensuring that a lesson’s objectives are revisited. Additionally, it was agreed that teachers should be encouraged to explicitly write their objectives out for students and observers to see. Finally, school leaders suggested that they will start questioning students on what they are learning when conducting classroom walk-throughs.

2. Data-Driven Intervention

Evidence

Instruction at <School Name> includes re-teaching that is driven by both data analysis and teacher instinct. School leaders shared a number of instruments that teachers should be utilizing to identify areas for re-teach, including DRAs, math assessments, running records, and writing records. When interviewed, teachers stated that they are using assessment results, rubrics, observation notes, and classwork to determine what needs re-teaching.

Recommendations

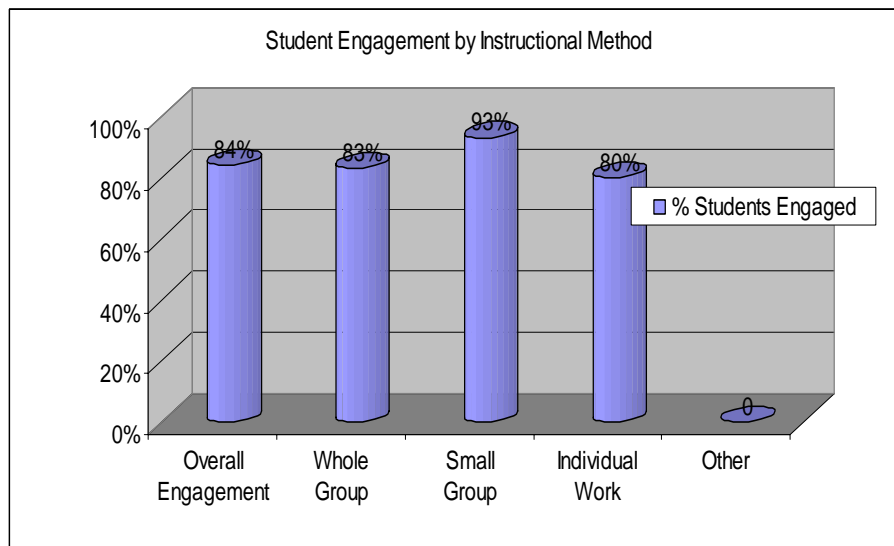
In the shared debrief it was agreed that <School Name> has made tremendous progress towards mastering this indicator since our September visit. School leaders should continue to support and challenge teachers in using data to drive instructional interventions.

3. Level of Engagement

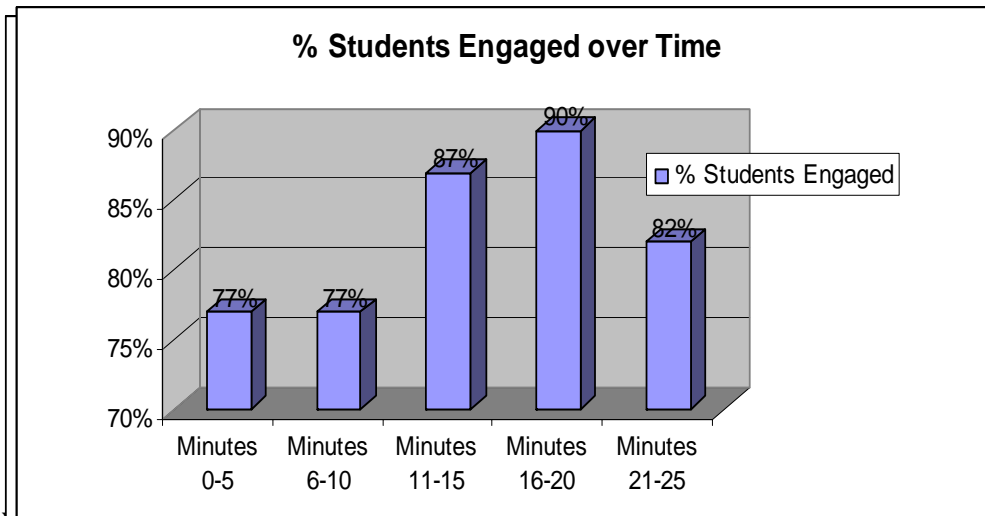
Evidence

Overall student <School Name> Quite interestingly, more often engaged in minute of a lesson than While the percentage it was agreed that being challenged at their developmental levels. were observed doing activities out of seeming

factor this is the heavy group instruction shown in the pie of instructional spent in whole 16% of time was groups and 20% work. No classes with students trios or inquiry- Student working in small <School Name> Re



engagement at averaged 84%. students were the twentieth in the first five. alone seems solid, students are not appropriate Several students non-instructional boredom. A likely



contributing to use of whole by teachers. As chart at right, 64% time observed was group, while only spent in small on individual were observed working in pairs/ based learning. engagement while groups was 93%, a

full ten percentage points greater than when working in whole group, and thirteen more than when working individually.

Recommendations

In our partnered debrief, we agreed that in order to challenge students at their appropriate developmental levels there needs to be a school-wide push towards academic rigor. As previously mentioned, students at <School Name> are well-behaved; the observed time-wasting activities underscore the fact that students are hungry for more challenging material. Based on the statistics given in the previous section, school leaders might also encourage staff to diversify the instructional methods they use.

4. Informal Assessment

Evidence

Teachers at <School Name> often, but not always, assess student understanding in the course of their lessons in order to inform next steps in instruction. In six out of the eight lessons recorded using this observation tool, teachers informally assessed student understanding prior to moving on. Teachers used a mix of strategies: call and response, individual responses, sample responses, and other methods were all seen.

Recommendations

It was agreed that <School Name>' teachers should not wait until after class, school, or a formal assessment to identify whether or not students are learning a concept. Teachers should use more informal assessments to identify areas for re-teach the next day rather than the next week. Additionally, consistent routines for informal assessment can be a nice way to conclude a lesson and return to the day's learning objective (as discussed in the section on Learning Objectives). School leaders agreed that this is an area where they can continue to push their teachers.

5. Consistency

Evidence

Set or stated consequences and rewards are followed through and consistent among most kids in most classes. As shown in the section on Student Accountability, teachers are often checking student misbehaviors with verbal redirects that are effective. It was agreed that problems with consistency are isolated to a few classrooms where teachers are struggling with management.

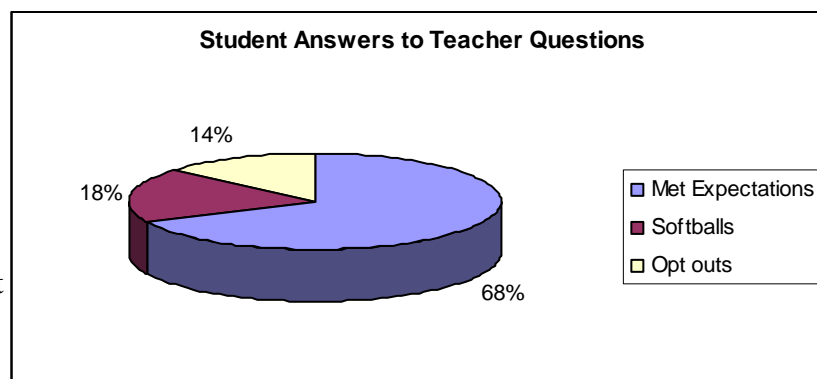
Recommendations

In the shared debrief, we focused on the need for supervisors to continue to support those teachers who are struggling. Those teachers will likely benefit from the consistent use of their behavior card system to reinforce classroom rules and consequences.

6. High Academic

Evidence

Teachers at <School Name> all students in their classes to expectations. The pie chart at <School Name> Review Report



Expectations

often do not hold high academic right shows that

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teachers allowed students to “opt out” or gave them a “softball” in response to 32% of student answers to questions. 68% of student responses to teachers’ questions met teachers’ expectations. Unfortunately, many of the questions were considered unchallenging, thus facilitating student ease in answering.

Recommendations

It was agreed in the shared debrief that this indicator is largely related to the issue of academic rigor. As mentioned previously, the school should agree upon a definition for academic rigor at <School Name> and enforce it through peer and supervisor observations.

7. Classroom Environment

Evidence

About two-thirds of <School Name> classrooms are meeting the school-wide expectations for general space, wall use, and furniture organization. The table at right shows the number of classrooms observed to have each of the expected elements. Of note are the two lowest numbers: only three classrooms were observed to have a clearly identifiable reflection space and only four classrooms had an observable job chart or list. It is also worth noting that some of the required elements may not be applicable to a given classroom (e.g. math materials need not be in the dance classroom).

General Space		Walls		Furniture	
Meeting area	8	Word wall	7	Book bins labeled	6.5
Reflection space	3	Calendar Math	7	Math materials	5
Conference area	6	Schedule	8.5	Material bins	6
Traffic flow	7.5	Jobs	4	Student storage	9
Total classrooms observed using this tool: 10		Bath/hall passes	7	Teacher resource storage	8
		Incentive charts	7		

Recommendations

In our shared debrief, it was agreed that teachers likely need a mid-year reminder of what a room should look like and some time to straighten up. Certain teachers are struggling with organization more than others. School leaders discussed once again setting up a model classroom.

CONCLUSION

<School Name> has made great progress since our last visit in September. School leaders, teachers, and staff should be proud of their hard work, and use this momentum to fuel their continued efforts. With a relentless focus on defining and demanding rigor, structuring collaboration and integration sessions, and deepening teachers’ lesson plans, we feel that the school will be further improved upon our next review visit. The appended rubrics of measured indicators highlight in red <School Name>’s needed areas of improvement in each of the three areas we explored, first for the most recent visit and then for the September visit. Please note that a few of the indicators measured in September were re-worded prior to the January visit, making them more rigorous and robust. The final page includes a data dashboard summarizing findings from our observation tools.

Summary of Priority Areas in Need of Improvement (a.k.a. “The Big Rocks”)

Culture	Leadership	Teaching and Learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Academic Rigor</i> – Define and monitor academic rigor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Collaboration and Integration</i> – Increase support and structure of teacher collaboration sessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Lesson Objectives</i> – Deepen lesson plans and make lesson objectives explicit in teaching • <i>Level of Engagement</i> – Challenge students at their

		appropriate developmental levels • <i>High Academic Expectations</i> - Pair this with the focus on rigor
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About the School Review Team

The visit to <School Name> was conducted on January 25, 2007 by three staff members of the New York City Center for Charter School Excellence.

Glenn Liebeck, Director of School Leadership Development

Jessica Nauiokas, Director of School Development

Cate Swinburn, Consultant and Project Manager

<School Name> Second Review

Data Dashboard 1/25/07

Culture	
Fraction of classrooms observed with behavioral expectations posted	10 of 12
Fraction of hallway transitions observed as orderly	5 of 6
Number of behavior redirects observed that had a positive outcome	39
Number of card changes observed	4
Number of external disruptions observed in 150 minutes	2
Percent of acceptable answers given from total questions asked	68%
Fraction of lessons deemed rigorous	2/8

Teaching and assessment				
Lesson Engagement	Level of Engagement at 5-Minute Intervals			
	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20
Avg. % of students engaged →	77%	77%	87%	90%
Percent instructional time spent as whole group	64%			
Average student engagement using specific instructional method	Whole group	Small group	Individual work	Other
	83%	93%	80%	N/A
Ratio of instances of misbehavior checked to unchecked.	42 to 71			
Ratio of unchecked misbehavior noticed to un-noticed.	44 to 27			
Avg. time spent re-directing behavior.	12 seconds			
% class time spent re-directing behavior	2%			
Avg. length of transition	57 seconds			
% class time spent transitioning	9%			
% time learning [<i>obs. length – (transitions +</i>	89%			
Fraction of lessons with clear, purposeful, and evident learning objectives	2 of 8			
# lessons observed where learning was consistently assessed before transitions	6 of 8			