May 23, 2014

Jack McCarthy, Board Chair
AppleTree Early Learning Public Charter School-Columbia Heights
2750 14th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009

Dear Mr. McCarthy:

The Public Charter School Board (PCSB) conducts Qualitative Site Reviews (QSR) to gather and document evidence to support school oversight. According to the School Reform Act § 38-1802.11, PCSB shall monitor the progress of each school in meeting the goals and student academic achievement expectations specified in the school's charter. Your school was selected to undergo a QSR during the 2013-14 school year for the following reason:

- School eligible for a 10-year Charter Review during 2014-15 school year

Qualitative Site Review Report

A QSR team conducted on-site review visits of the Columbia Heights campus of AppleTree Early Learning Public Charter School-Columbia Heights (AppleTree PCS-Columbia Heights) between March 31 and April 11. The purpose of the site review is for PCSB to gauge the extent to which the school's goals and student academic achievement expectations were evident in the everyday operations of the public charter school. To ascertain this PCSB staff and consultants evaluated your classroom teaching by using an abridged version of the Charlotte Danielson *Framework for Teaching* observation rubric. Members of the QSR team conducted 30 to 45 minute observations in classrooms. The QSR team scored each observation based on the critical attributes outlined in the *Framework for Teaching*. The team also visited a board meeting in order to observe the school's governance as it relates to fulfilling its mission, and charter goals.

The QSR team's report is attached. You will find that the Qualitative Site Review Report focuses primarily on the following areas: charter mission and goals, classroom environments, and instructional delivery. The QSR results for the school were exceptionally strong. Congratulations!

We appreciate the assistance and hospitality that you and your staff gave the monitoring team in conducting the Qualitative Site Review at AppleTree PCS-Columbia Heights. Thank you for your continued cooperation as PCSB makes every effort to ensure that Apple Tree PCS-Columbia Heights is in compliance with its charter.

Sincerely,

Naomi DeVeaux
Deputy Director

Enclosures
cc: School Leader

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AppleTree Early Learning Public Charter School–Columbia Heights (AppleTree PCS–Columbia Heights) serves approximately 150 students in pre-kindergarten-3 (PK3) through pre-kindergarten-4 (PK4) and is part of a five campus pre-kindergarten network serving over 600 students. DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB) conducted a Qualitative Site Review (QSR) at all campuses in April 2014 because AppleTree PCS is eligible for a 10-year Charter Review during the 2014-15 school year.

The QSR team conducted observations over the course of a two-week window from March 31 through April 11, 2014. A team of two PCSB staff members including PCSB's Special Education Specialist and one consultant conducted 13 observations. In each of the classrooms at AppleTree PCS–Columbia Heights, there was a lead teacher, teaching assistant, and teaching fellow. For the purpose of this report, an adult delivering instruction to students will be referred to as a "teacher." All of the observations were based on the student-teacher interactions among all of the teaching staff in the classroom. The spirit of the QSR process is to identify the educational experience for all students, inclusive of students with disabilities, at a particular school. The results of this QSR are thus reflective of what the QSR team observed in all learning environments within your school where students with disabilities are being serviced, including the one Special Education teacher observed in the inclusion setting. In some instances the review team may have observed a teacher twice. The QSR team used Charlotte Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* Rubric throughout the observations and observed classrooms in mornings and afternoons. In addition to this two-week window, a member of the QSR team also attended a Board of Trustees meeting in order to observe the school's governance as it relates to fulfilling its mission and charter goals.

The QSR team scored 87.5% of the observations as proficient or exemplary for the Classroom Environment domain. The highest rated component within the Classroom Environment domain was Managing Student Behavior with 100% of observations rated as proficient or exemplary. The teachers and staff exhibited patience and skilled management of students' individual behavior. Teachers also encouraged sharing and respect between students. The lowest rated component in this domain was Establishing a Culture for Learning, where 67% of observations were proficient or exemplary. In a few isolated observations, teachers were not engaged with the students during center time and exhibited a low level of energy for the work.

The QSR team scored 85% of the observations as proficient or exemplary for the Instructional Delivery domain. The highest rated component within this domain was Communicating with Students, with 92% of observations scoring proficient or exemplary. Teachers clearly communicated expectations for learning, directions, and procedures to the students through oral and written communication. The lowest scoring components in this domain were Using Discussion and Questioning Techniques, Engaging Students in Learning, and Using Assessment in Instruction with 83% of observations scoring proficient or exemplary in all three components. In a small number of observations, teachers did not pace the lessons well or adjust the lessons based on the student responses or participation level.

CHARTER MISSION, GOALS, ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT EXPECTATIONS, AND BOARD GOVERNANCE

This table summarizes AppleTree PCS–Columbia Heights's goals and academic achievement expectations as detailed in its charter and subsequent Accountability Plans, and the evidence that the Qualitative Site Review (QSR) team observed of the school meeting those goals during the Qualitative Site Review Visit.

Mission and Goals	Evidence
Mission: The mission of AppleTree Early Learning PCS is to provide young children with the social, emotional and cognitive foundations that will enable them to succeed in school.	The QSR team observed evidence that AppleTree–PCS Columbia Heights is carrying out its mission. Teachers and staff structure the classroom environment and instruction to support the students' social, emotional, cognitive, and motor development. *Social and emotional foundations:* Discussions between teachers and students and between students themselves encouraged social and language development. Students worked together in groups during center time, while teachers facilitated other students putting on puppet shows in one observation. Teachers used behavior charts and the "Sit and Watch" chair to help students learn how to regulate their own behavior. A few students sat in this chair for a short while if they had trouble participating or engaging in a class activity. After certain activities, the teacher put stickers on the behavior chart and highlighted appropriate behavior. One particular area of the classroom setting highlighted the school's focus on emotional development. Each classroom had a "calm down station." The calm down station contained a beanbag or comfortable chair. Charts posted on the wall listed various emotions: happy, sad, excited, angry, etc. Each label had an accompanying face expressing the emotion. The area also contained a mirror. Students could go to the center to calm down.

Qualitative Site Review Report   AppleTree PCS-Columbia Heights   May 23, 2014

2

Mission and Goals	Evidence
	The QSR team observed teachers helping students who were upset and needed extra attention. Teachers helped crying students calm down by encouraging the students to take deep breaths, leaving the room with them briefly to get water, and speaking softly to them. *Cognitive foundations* Teachers led reading, writing, and math instruction in whole and small groups. Teachers used language and math manipulatives to introduce concepts. Students engaged in hands-on learning in structured environments such as teacher-led small groups and less structured environments such as free play in the block center or sand table. Common centers among the classrooms included a writing center, art studio, investigation location, construction zone, exploration station, library, dramatic play/puppet theater, etc. Each center reflected the current academic thematic unit. During this two-week window, the thematic unit was dinosaurs and excavation.
PMF Goal # 1: Student Progress – Academic Improvement over time *Effective Instruction supporting student academic progress and achievement in reading and math*	Teachers worked with students in small groups to blend sounds, read sight words, and write in journals about the thematic unit. Students also read books about dinosaurs in the library center. Teachers read books aloud in a whole group setting, stopping to ask the students about the book and engage them in a discussion about the topic. Teachers introduced addition in a whole group setting. The teachers used small dinosaur toys to provide a visual representation of the numbers in the equation. Teachers also delivered math instruction in small groups using laminated placemats for counting and adding. Students used manipulatives to solve math problems.
PMF Goal #2: Student Achievement – Meeting or exceeding	Teachers worked with some students individually to support more

Mission and Goals	Evidence
academic standards *Moving students to advanced levels of proficiency in reading and math*	independent reading and writing. Teachers also modeled writing in a whole group setting while differentiating levels of what the students could do. Some students were encouraged to draw a picture and explain it while others were asked to label their drawings in their journals. Teachers also led small group math instruction and presented different levels of problems to different groups of students. Students also had opportunities to work independently.
PMF Goal #3: Gateway – Outcomes in key subjects that predict future educational success *Promotion of reading proficiency by third grade and math proficiency by eighth grade*	See evidence described in goals #1 and #2 above.
PMF Goal #4: Leading Indicators – Predictors of future student progress and achievement *Culture of learning and support in the classrooms*	Teachers prepared and delivered structured lessons while communicating the purpose and importance of the content. Teachers held high expectations for students and encouraged independence. Students were encouraged to write a number on the board before being dismissed from the rug to start center work. Students showed pride in their work by concentrating on completing a task and sharing the result with the class e.g., sharing journal writing from the author's chair.
Board Governance	Two overlapping governing boards that attend one joint meeting oversee AppleTree Institute and AppleTree Early Learning Public Charter School. A PCSB staff member observed the board meeting on January 28, 2014. Both boards carried out business for both entities at this meeting. It was not clear which board members were on which board. At the January 28th board meeting, seventeen board members were in attendance and they voted for Cal Leonard (consultant from the New Schools Venture Fund) to join the board. It was unclear which

Mission and Goals	Evidence
	board he joined, but all 17 members voted, which leads PCSB to believe he is part of the Institute's board but not the charter school's. On May 2, 2014, AppleTree clarified that the eleven members of the AppleTree Early Learning PCS Board are also on the AppleTree Institute board with other members. While on paper there is a distinction, in practice, there still appears to be a conflict of interest. Additionally while not in conflict with the School Reform Act, the board chair of the school is also the President and CEO of AppleTree Early Learning PCS, which is not a best practice. AppleTree Institute provides services to other DC public charter schools, including CLASS observation evaluations and has proposed to PCSB to conduct the CLASS observations for the AppleTree Early Learning PCS campuses. While the board meeting is divided into two sections and the board chair stopped a vote on charter school finances during the AppleTree Institute portion of the meeting, acknowledging the PCSB observer, this division of the Board's business is not enough to provide sufficient independence between the two entities to allow for AppleTree Institute to evaluate AppleTree Early Learning PCS. During the public charter school portion of the meeting, Anne Malone, Chief of Schools, reported on attendance goals and MySchoolDC applications. Ms. Malone also spoke on teacher retention and school culture. The board approved an amended budget and discussed the upcoming charter 10-year review.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT[1]

This table summarizes the school's performance on the Classroom Environment domain of the rubric during the unannounced visits. PCSB considers any rating below "proficient" to be under the standard of quality expected of DC charter schools. The QSR team scored 87.5% of the observations as "proficient" or "exemplary" for the Classroom Environment domain.

Classroom Environment	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport	The QSR team scored 92% of the observations as exemplary or proficient in Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport. Teacher and student interactions were warm and respectful. Teachers encouraged sharing and helped students cooperate as needed.	Exemplary	8%
	One exemplary observation involved a teacher pulling a child aside to talk about some things happening outside of school. This exchange was discreet and carried out calmly in a caring manner.	Proficient	83%
	The QSR team scored fewer than 10% of the observations as below proficient.	Satisfactory	8%
		Limited	0%
Establishing a Culture for Learning	The QSR team scored 83% of the observations as proficient in Establishing a Culture for Learning. Students exhibited a determination to stick with tasks and obtain correct answers in small groups. Teachers maintained high expectations for students and encouraged them to keep trying. Students who were having trouble blending some sounds continued to practice and were rewarded with praise after accomplishing the task.	Exemplary	0%
		Proficient	83%
	The QSR team scored 17% of the observations below proficient in Establishing a Culture for Learning. In a few isolated observations, staff members were not	Satisfactory	17%

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[1] Teachers may be observed more than once by different review team members.

Classroom Environment	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
	engaged in the work with students and missed opportunities to facilitate exploration and learning. In a small number of observations, the teachers' energy and observed commitment to the work was relatively low.	Limited	0%
Managing Classroom Procedures	The QSR team scored 83% of the observations as proficient in Managing Classroom Procedures. Teachers used management techniques to gain students' attention, give instructions, highlight appropriate behavior, and transition students throughout the day. Examples include turning the lights off and on, using special calling voices, and positive reinforcement.	Exemplary	0%
	Students used wooden sticks with their names on them to move from center to center. In order to join a new center, students looked to see if there was an open space indicated by a free Velcro piece outside of the center. Each student would stick his or her stick on that Velcro piece and participate in the center. The students took their sticks with them as they freely moved around the room. Students understood the expectations and managed their movement without teacher redirection.	Proficient	83%
	The QSR team scored fewer than 10% of the observations as below proficient.	Satisfactory	8%
		Limited	0%
Managing Student Behavior	The QSR team scored 100% of the observations as exemplary or proficient in Managing Student Behavior. Teachers managed student behavior with patience and understanding. They used behavior charts and the "Sit and Watch" chair when appropriate. Teachers placed stickers on the behavior charts to highlight appropriate behavior and talked about each student's behavior as they placed the	Exemplary	8%

Classroom Environment	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
	stickers next to the names. The "Sit and Watch" chair was used sparingly. The few students who sat in it were there for a brief time before they reentered the class activity. Teachers handled crying students in a calm manner with soft voices. Some were briefly removed from the room to get a drink. Teachers encouraged students to take deep breaths and explain why they were upset.	Proficient	92%
		Satisfactory	0%
	The QSR team did not score any of the observations as below proficient.	Limited	0%

INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY

This table summarizes the school's performance on the Instructional Delivery elements of the rubric during the unannounced visits. PCSB considers any rating below "proficient" to be under the standard of quality expected of DC charter schools. The QSR team scored 85% of the observations as "proficient" or "exemplary" for the Instructional Delivery domain.

Instructional Delivery	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
Communicating with Students	The QSR team scored 92% of the observations proficient in Communicating with Students. Teachers clearly stated the purpose of the lessons and repeated the purpose throughout the lesson as needed. Teachers communicated directions to students and modeled instructional tasks. Teachers embedded ways to gauge student understanding of the material such as asking students to give a thumbs up if they understood or agreed with another student's answer.	Exemplary	0%
		Proficient	92%
	The QSR team scored fewer than 10% of the observations as below proficient.	Satisfactory	8%
		Limited	0%
Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques	The QSR team scored 83% of the observations as proficient in Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques. Students participated in discussions in whole group and small group settings during all of the observations. Teachers paused during read alouds to ask higher-level questions, encourage students to predict the next part of the book, and engage in discussions. During a whole group math lesson, the teacher called on different students to participate in solving an equation. Students arranged small dinosaurs to fit the equation and took turns writing answers to the equations on the board.	Exemplary	0%
		Proficient	83%
	The QSR team scored 17% of the observations as below proficient in Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques. In a small number of observations,	Satisfactory	17%

Instructional Delivery	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
	teachers were not encouraging students to respond to the material.	Limited	0%
Engaging Students in Learning	The QSR team scored 83% of the observations as exemplary or proficient in Engaging Students in Learning. Instructional lessons were aligned to learning expectations. Students were highly engaged in classroom activities. Teachers encouraged participation in whole group by having students act out some dinosaur actions such as pouncing. Students participated in the "dino-pokey," which was a variation of the hokey pokey but with dinosaur body parts such as a tail.	Exemplary	8%
		Proficient	75%
	The QSR team scored 17% of the observations as below proficient in Engaging Students in Learning. The pacing of the lessons was not appropriately aligned to abilities of the students. In one observation the lesson moved too quickly for a few students. The teacher repeatedly moved on to the question when a student was not able to answer correctly instead of helping the students work out the solution.	Satisfactory	17%
		Limited	0%
Using Assessment in Instruction	The QSR team scored 83% of the observations as exemplary or proficient in Using Assessment in Instruction. The team observed ongoing assessment and feedback. Teachers posed numerous questions to elicit student responses during whole and small group instruction. Teachers repeated aspects of the lesson such as putting sounds together to form a word when a student did not arrive at the correct answer. Teachers also moved to more challenging tasks depending on student responses. When students finished a set of addition problems during small group work, the teacher moved on to more difficult equations with bigger numbers.	Exemplary	8%
		Proficient	75%

Instructional Delivery	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
	The QSR team scored 17% of the observations below proficient. Teachers did not always adjust instruction based on the needs of the students. During one observation of small group math instruction, the teacher focused more on finishing the addition activity than making sure students had complete understanding. The teacher did not adjust the task by breaking the problem down for the students who were getting wrong answers.	Satisfactory	17%
		Limited	0%

APPENDIX I: CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT OBSERVATION RUBRIC

Classroom Environment	Limited	Below Proficient	Proficient	Exemplary
Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport	Classroom interactions, both between the teacher and students and among students, are negative or inappropriate and characterized by sarcasm, putdowns, or conflict	Classroom interactions are generally appropriate and free from conflict but may be characterized by occasional displays of insensitivity.	Classroom interactions reflect general warmth and caring, and are respectful of the cultural and developmental differences among groups of students.	Classroom interactions are highly respectful, reflecting genuine warmth and caring toward individuals. Students themselves ensure maintenance of high levels of civility among member of the class.
Establishing a Culture for Learning	The classroom does not represent a culture for learning and is characterized by low teacher commitment to the subject, low expectations for student achievement, and little student pride in work.	The classroom environment reflects only a minimal culture for learning, with only modest or inconsistent expectations for student achievement, little teacher commitment to the subject, and little student pride in work. Both teacher and students are performing at the minimal level to "get by."	The classroom environment represents a genuine culture for learning, with commitment to the subject on the part of both teacher and students, high expectations for student achievement, and student pride in work.	Students assumes much of the responsibility for establishing a culture for learning in the classroom by taking pride in their work, initiating improvements to their products, and holding the work to the highest standard. Teacher demonstrates as passionate commitment to the subject.
Managing Classroom Procedures	Classroom routines and procedures are either nonexistent or inefficient, resulting in the loss of much instruction time.	Classroom routines and procedures have been established but function unevenly or inconsistently, with some loss of instruction time.	Classroom routines and procedures have been established and function smoothly for the most part, with little loss of instruction time.	Classroom routines and procedures are seamless in their operation, and students assume considerable responsibility for their smooth functioning.

Classroom Environment	Limited	Below Proficient	Proficient	Exemplary
Managing Student Behavior	Student behavior is poor, with no clear expectations, no monitoring of student behavior, and inappropriate response to student misbehavior.	Teacher makes an effort to establish standards of conduct for students, monitor student behavior, and respond to student misbehavior, but these efforts are not always successful.	Teacher is aware of student behavior, has established clear standards of conduct, and responds to student misbehavior in ways that are appropriate and respectful of the students.	Student behavior is entirely appropriate, with evidence of student participation in setting expectations and monitoring behavior. Teacher's monitoring of student behavior is subtle and preventive, and teachers' response to student misbehavior is sensitive to individual student needs.

APPENDIX II: INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY OBSERVATION RUBRIC

Instructional Delivery	Limited	Below Proficient	Proficient	Exemplary
Communicating with Students	Teacher's oral and written communication contains errors or is unclear or inappropriate to students. Teacher's purpose in a lesson or unit is unclear to students. Teacher's explanation of the content is unclear or confusing or uses inappropriate language.	Teacher's oral and written communication contains no errors, but may not be completely appropriate or may require further explanations to avoid confusion. Teacher attempts to explain the instructional purpose, with limited success. Teacher's explanation of the content is uneven; some is done skillfully, but other portions are difficult to follow.	Teacher communicates clearly and accurately to students both orally and in writing. Teacher's purpose for the lesson or unit is clear, including where it is situation within broader learning. Teacher's explanation of content is appropriate and connects with students' knowledge and experience.	Teacher's oral and written communication is clear and expressive, anticipating possible student misconceptions. Makes the purpose of the lesson or unit clear, including where it is situated within broader learning, linking purpose to student interests. Explanation of content is imaginative, and connects with students' knowledge and experience. Students contribute to explaining concepts to their peers.
Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques	Teacher makes poor use of questioning and discussion techniques, with low-level questions, limited student participation, and little true discussion.	Teacher's use of questioning and discussion techniques is uneven with some high-level question; attempts at true discussion; moderate student participation.	Teacher's use of questioning and discussion techniques reflects high-level questions, true discussion, and full participation by all students.	Students formulate may of the high-level questions and assume responsibility for the participation of all students in the discussion.
Engaging Students in Learning	Students are not at all intellectually engaged in significant learning, as a result of inappropriate activities or materials, poor representations of content, or lack of lesson structure.	Students are intellectually engaged only partially, resulting from activities or materials or uneven quality, inconsistent representation of content or uneven structure of pacing.	Students are intellectually engaged throughout the lesson, with appropriate activities and materials, instructive representations of content, and suitable structure and pacing of the lesson.	Students are highly engaged throughout the lesson and make material contribution to the representation of content, the activities, and the materials. The structure and pacing of the lesson allow for student reflection and closure.

Instructional Delivery	Limited	Below Proficient	Proficient	Exemplary
Using Assessment in Instruction	Students are unaware of criteria and performance standards by which their work will be evaluated, and do not engage in self-assessment or monitoring. Teacher does not monitor student learning in the curriculum, and feedback to students is of poor quality and in an untimely manner.	Students know some of the criteria and performance standards by which their work will be evaluated, and occasionally assess the quality of their own work against the assessment criteria and performance standards. Teacher monitors the progress of the class as a whole but elicits no diagnostic information; feedback to students is uneven and inconsistent in its timeliness.	Students are fully aware of the criteria and performance standards by which their work will be evaluated, and frequently assess and monitor the quality of their own work against the assessment criteria and performance standards. Teacher monitors the progress of groups of students in the curriculum, making limited use of diagnostic prompts to elicit information; feedback is timely, consistent, and of high quality.	Students are fully aware of the criteria and standards by which their work will be evaluated, have contributed to the development of the criteria, frequently assess and monitor the quality of their own work against the assessment criteria and performance standards, and make active use of that information in their learning. Teacher actively and systematically elicits diagnostic information from individual students regarding understanding and monitors progress of individual students; feedback is timely, high quality, and students use feedback in their learning.