

November 25, 2019

Rachel Torres, Board Chair Washington Leadership Academy Public Charter School 3015 4th Street Northeast Washington, DC 20017

Dear Ms. Torres:

The DC Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB) conducts Qualitative Site Reviews (QSR) to gather and document evidence to support school oversight. According to the School Reform Act § 38-1802.11, DC PCSB shall monitor the progress of each school in meeting the goals and student academic achievement expectations specified in the school's charter. Washington Leadership Academy Public Charter School (Washington Leadership Academy PCS) was selected to undergo a QSR during the 2019-20 school year for the following reason(s):

School eligible for 5-year Charter Review during 2020-21 school year

Qualitative Site Review Report

A QSR team conducted on-site reviews of Washington Leadership Academy PCS between September 23 and October 4, 2019. Enclosed is the team's report. You will find that the QSR report focuses primarily on the following areas: classroom environment and instruction.

We appreciate the assistance and hospitality that you and your staff gave the monitoring team in conducting the QSR at Washington Leadership PCS.

Sincerely,

Rashida Young
Chief School Performance Officer

Enclosures

cc: Stacy Kane, Executive Director

Qualitative Site Review Report

Date: November 25, 2019

Campus Information

Campus Name: Washington Leadership Academy Public Charter School

(Washington Leadership Academy PCS)

Ward: 5

Grade levels: Ninth through twelfth

Qualitative Site Review Information

Reason for Visit: School eligible for 5-year Charter Review during 2020-21

school year

Two-week Window: September 23, 2019 – October 4, 2019

QSR Team Members: Two DC PCSB staff including a special education (SPED) specialist and three consultants including an English Learner (EL) specialist

Number of Observations: 24

Total Enrollment: 397

Students with Disabilities Enrollment: 97 English Language Learners Enrollment: 18 In-seat Attendance on Observation Days:

Visit 1: September 26 – 91.9%

Visit 2: September 30 – 93.4%

Visit 3: October 1 – 94.1%

Visit 4: October 2 – 91.3%

Visit 5: October 3 – 82.4%

Summary

Washington Leadership Academy PCS's mission is "to prepare Washington, D.C. scholars with the knowledge, skills and habits required for success in college and lives of public leadership." Washington Leadership Academy PCS is one of ten XQ Schools¹ in the nation. Students enrolled at Washington Leadership Academy PCS take four years of computer science courses. However, the Qualitative Site Review (QSR) team does not observe elective courses.

The QSR team observed some evidence that Washington Leadership Academy PCS is meeting its mission. Teachers encouraged the development of skills necessary for success in college and beyond, like citing textual evidence for claims, listening attentively while others spoke, and collaborating with peers. Teachers awarded

¹ https://xqsuperschool.org/xq-schools

tickets and "hustle points" to encourage positive habits. At times, some classroom environments reflected disrespectful behavior among students. Observers noted that a few teachers used sarcasm and harsh language when redirecting student behavior, and often ignored students' use of profanity.

During the QSR two-week window, the team used the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching to examine classroom environment and instruction (see Appendix I and II). The QSR team scored 61% of observations as distinguished or proficient in the Classroom Environment domain. The highest-rated component was Managing Classroom Procedure (2c), with 75% of observations scored as proficient. Students were productive during independent and small group work, even when not working with teachers. Teachers used various tools to signal transitions like verbal reminders and countdowns. They provided clear expectations for routines, verbally and in writing. The QSR team scored 59% of observations as distinguished or proficient in the Instruction domain. The highest-rated component was Communicating with Students (3a) with 74% of observations scored as proficient or distinguished. Teachers presented content clearly by using rich vocabulary and modeling learning tasks. Students showed they understood the presentation by engaging with the content.

Governance

Rachel Torres chairs the Washington Leadership Academy PCS Board of Trustees. The School Reform Act requires all DC public charter schools to have a majority of DC residents and two parents, which the school has been compliant with for the past three years.

Specialized Instruction for Students with Disabilities

Prior to the two-week window, Washington Leadership Academy PCS completed a questionnaire about how it serves its students with disabilities (SWD). Reviewers looked for evidence of the school's articulated program. DC PCSB staff scored 56% of special education observations scored proficient or distinguished in the <u>Classroom Environment</u> domain of the Danielson rubric, whereas 63% of SPED observations scored as proficient or distinguished in <u>Instruction</u> domain. Overall, the school succeeded at meeting the needs of students in its self-contained program; however, the effectiveness of co-teaching in inclusive settings varied across classrooms.

For students that enter at or below third-grade level, Washington Leadership Academy PCS provides some self-contained settings called a "School Within A School." The SPED observer visited one self-contained classroom and five co-taught inclusion classrooms. In the self-contained classroom, the teacher incorporated visual aids and videos, allowed ample time for independent practice, and made standards of high-quality work clear to students. During a typing exercise, the teacher provided students with feedback that corresponded with the posted positive typing behaviors. Most students worked diligently to meet the criteria.

To support SWD in a general education setting with their nondisabled peers, the school has invested heavily in co-teaching practices and primarily uses an inclusion model.

- Across all grade levels and multiple subject areas, DC PCSB observers saw
 many examples of co-teaching models, including team teaching, station
 teaching, and One Teach, One Assist. In many co-taught observations, the coteaching partnerships were rooted in parity; each teacher shared
 responsibility for delivering content, providing feedback, and helping to
 manage behavior. In one classroom, one teacher led a discussion, while the
 other supported students. The teachers later switched roles, which allowed
 both teachers to work with all students in the classroom.
- While many co-teachers shared classroom responsibilities, these partnerships inconsistently held all students to high expectations. In many observations, students not working directly with a teacher engaged in off-topic conversations instead of working independently. Some teachers attempted to keep track of student behavior by assigning "growth" and "hustle" points, but these systems functioned unevenly across classrooms. In one observation, neither co-teacher seemed aware that some students had thrown pencils across the room or had completed only a few problems on the assignment.

Specialized Instruction for English Learners

According to the school's EL Questionnaire, the school uses the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) to "develop English, proficiency, content knowledge, and academic language skills." Students acquire language through word walls and other vocabulary-building activities. The EL specialist observed strong implementation of SIOP features in one out of four lessons, some implementation in two lessons, and limited implementation in one lesson. None of the lessons observed included a specific language objective, though "One of the most important aspects of SIOP is the inclusion of both content and language objectives for each lesson."²

In the observation with strong implementation, the EL specialist observed several SIOP features. Teachers used effective pacing, periodically stopping to paraphrase the text or asking students to do so, and giving students time to write responses before responding verbally. As students paraphrased, teachers wrote their responses on the board. Teachers emphasized key vocabulary using a word wall, explained words verbally, used body motions, and wrote examples on the board. Additional language supports on walls included an anchor chart with parts of speech and directions for reading tasks. Teachers used graphic organizers as instructional scaffolds, helping students follow along and make meaning of the text. Teachers gave students sentence starters to complete written responses. They asked students

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² Echevarria, J., Vogt, M., Short, D. (2017) *Making Content Comprehensible for English Learners - The SIOP Model.* pxiii.

a variety of questions to promote higher order thinking, like what a character's motivations may be. The lesson provided frequent opportunities for interaction and discussion among teachers and students.

The EL specialist observed mixed implementation of SIOP in two math observations. Teachers clarified academic tasks by explaining them verbally and writing them on the board. Teachers provided regular feedback to students, walked around the classroom to examine their work and explained concepts as necessary. Students engaged in learning tasks for most of the class period, completing math problems at their own pace or as a class. Teachers used anchor charts and modeled the task to make concepts clear.

The EL specialist observed few SIOP features in one observation. Students responded to questions related to a text and film in written form before discussing them verbally. They spent the next twenty minutes watching a film adaptation of their book with a couple of interruptions by the teacher to quiet students down and to clarify who the character was addressing.

THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT³

This table summarizes the school's performance on the Classroom Environment domain of the rubric during the unannounced visits. The label definitions for classroom observations of "distinguished," "proficient," "basic," and "unsatisfactory" are those from the Danielson framework. The QSR team scored 61% of classrooms as "distinguished" or "proficient" for the <u>Classroom Environment</u> domain.

The Classroom Environment	Evidence School Wide Ra		
Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport	The QSR team scored 63% of the observations as proficient and none as distinguished in this component. In the proficient observations, talk between teachers and students was uniformly respectful. Teachers greeted students by name, asked them about a recent field trip experience, and thanked them for following instructions. Teachers asked students, "Are you ok?" and "Do you need water?" and said "Bless you" when they sneezed. In one observation, a teacher	Distinguished	0%
	they sneezed. In one observation, a teacher quietly supported a student who came in late to catch them up. In these observations students demonstrated respect for teachers by raising their hands, participating enthusiastically in whole-group discussions and listening attentively to instruction. Students cheered and high-fived peers who improved their performance, apologized for using inappropriate language, and let each other speak without interruption.		63%

³ Teachers may be observed more than once by different review team members.

⁴ DC PCSB does not report out qualitative evidence if less than 10% of observations in any given component earned a "basic" or "unsatisfactory" level of performance.

The Classroom Environment	Evidence	School Wide Ra	nting ⁴
	The QSR team scored 25% of the observations as basic in this component. In the basic observations teachers attempted to address disrespectful behavior among students with uneven results. Despite attempts at redirection, some students used their phones, watched unrelated content on computers, or socialized. In some observations, teachers addressed students with occasional disrespect. One teacher told students, "I'm sick of you," and "I'm done with [you] today." Many teachers ignored students who used profanity and did not intervene when students teased each other.	Basic	25%
	The QSR team scored 13% of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component. In one observation the teacher consistently ignored disrespectful behavior among students as they argued, insulted, and shoved one another. In another observation the teacher physically removed headphones from students who did not comply with their directions to take them out. In the same observation, the teacher physically moved a student who ignored his/her directions to move. The teacher said, "Don't play with me, boy," when the student talked back. In these observations teachers redirected students using sarcasm and harsh language.	Unsatisfactory	13%
Establishing a Culture for Learning	as proficient and none as distinguished in this component. In the proficient observations teachers communicated the importance of learning. One teacher told students, "This doesn't just affect our grade, it affects our learning," and "You have got to use your own brain!" One teacher projected the definition of tenacity and told students "You'll need to show tenacity and work through if you aren't 100%		0%
	sure." Students stayed on task and asked the teacher to check their work before continuing. Teachers praised students' effort saying, "I love the hustle!" and "I love what you were able to pull out"	Proficient	50%

The Classroom Environment	Evidence	School Wide Ra	ating ⁴
	The QSR team scored 50% of the observations as basic in this component. In the basic observations teachers conveyed high expectations for only some students. In one observation the teacher sat at the back of the room while some students had side conversations and engaged in off-task behavior. Students socialized, walked around the room, copied work from peers and played on their phones. Teachers attempted to intervene but with uneven success. At times students responded to redirection from teachers, and at other times they ignored them. In these observations teachers focused more on task completion than learning. One teacher told students, "I just need you to copy the problem down," and "Hurry up and get finished." In another observation a student asked why they were doing a task and the teacher responded, "Because it is math."	Basic	50%
	The QSR team rated none of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.		0%
Managing Classroom Procedures	proficient and none as distinguished in this component. In the proficient observations classroom routines functioned smoothly. Teachers used timers, countdowns, and verbal reminders to warn students about transitions. Most students remained productive during		0%
	small group or independent work even when not working directly with the teacher. Students transitioned quickly to the next activity when timers went off and helped distribute materials efficiently. Teachers in several observations displayed behavior expectations around cell phone use and voice level. Late students began working immediately when they arrived in classrooms.	Proficient	75%

The Classroom Environment	Evidence	School Wide Ra	ating ⁴
	The QSR team scored 25% of the observations as basic in this component. In the basic observations, students not working directly with teachers were off task. In one observation, the teacher told students to access their "Do Now" online. While most students opened their computers and located the assignment, many continued socializing rather than working. One teacher lost instructional time as s/he tried to collect cell phones at the beginning of class. Many students failed to comply and needed significant prompting. In these observations, teachers had unclear expectations for group work. For example, students asked to work together and the teacher replied "I mean you can work together, but I feel like when you work together you don't get it done. Just know it's due at the end of class." Many students remained off-task throughout the observation.		25%
	The QSR team rated none of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.	Unsatisfactory	0%
Managing Student Behavior	Student as distinguished or proficient in this component.		8%
			50%

The Classroom Environment	Evidence School Wide I		nting ⁴
	The QSR team scored 33% of the observations as basic in this component. In these observations, teachers attempted to maintain order in the classroom but with uneven success. Teachers threatened to give "growth points" or deduct points from assignments for off-task behavior, but some students still did not comply. In these observations teachers implemented standards of conduct inconsistently. One teacher told some students to put their phones away but ignored other students who used phones throughout the class period. Disrespectful behavior and profanity usage was not addressed by several teachers. Students placed in the hallway for disruptive behavior continued to disrupt the classroom once they returned.	Basic	33%
	The QSR team rated less than 10% of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.	Unsatisfactory	8%

INSTRUCTION

This table summarizes the school's performance on the Instruction domain of the rubric during the unannounced visits. The label definitions for classroom observations of "distinguished," "proficient," "basic," and "unsatisfactory" are those from the Danielson framework. The QSR team scored 59% of classrooms as "distinguished" or "proficient" for the Instruction domain.

Instruction	Evidence	School Wide R	ating
Communicating with Students	The QSR team scored 74% of the observations as distinguished or proficient in this component. In distinguished observations teachers explained content clearly and imaginatively. In one observation teachers brought content to life by asking students to imagine themselves in the place of someone on a quest. Another teacher used rich and relevant comparisons to help students understand the main character in August Wilson's Fences. In the proficient observations, teachers used vocabulary like "archetype," "superficial," and "self-knowledge." Teachers modeled how to see and graph reflections in math, provided sentence frames for thesis statements, showed examples of text annotation, and related	Distinguished	9%
	examples of text annotation, and related vocabulary words to well-known stories. Teachers used vocabulary like "obscure" and provided verbal and visual explanations, and used gestures to show meaning. In these observations, teachers anticipated trouble areas and taught students what to do if they encountered it. For example, in one observation the teacher explained, "When you don't have a plotted image and you don't have a graph to go on, this is what you can do." Students engaged with the learning task by identifying evidence from the text to support their conclusions. In one observation, students asked teachers to examine their math work and offered alternative ways to approach a problem.	Proficient	65%

Instruction	Evidence	School Wide R	ating
	The QSR team scored 26% of the observations as basic in this component. In the basic observations teachers had to clarify learning tasks several times. In one observation a student asked, "What am I supposed to be doing?" and stated "You're confusing me. I don't get it." In another observation, so many students required clarification that only about half of them engaged in the learning task. Teachers' explanation of content was purely procedural. For example, as one teacher walked students through the steps to solve math problems, they focused solely on the correct answers and not the process. Similarly, the teacher in another observation stated the procedure for task completion. The teacher simply told students to read and answer questions, without telling them the objective for the assignment.		26%
	The QSR team rated none of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.		0%
Using Questioning/ Prompts and Discussion Techniques	The QSR team scored 32% of the observations as proficient and none as distinguished in this component. In the proficient observations, teachers asked high-level questions designed to promote student thinking and understanding. Teachers asked students to identify examples of the quest archetype in popular culture and	Distinguished	0%
	the quest archetype in popular culture and justify how a character sees herself. In other observations, discussions enabled students to talk to one another as they provided feedback on each other's approach to a math problem, agreed or disagreed about a primary vs. secondary source, and drew conclusions about a character's feelings using textual evidence. In these observations teachers called on most students, even those who had not initially volunteered. For example, the teacher said, "I'd like to hear from X now."		32%

Instruction	Evidence	School Wide R	ating
The QSR team scored 64% of the observations as basic in this component. In the basic observations, teachers' questions led students along a single path of inquiry. Few students responded to teachers' attempts to start discussions and chose to work silently instead. Teachers attempted to encourage students to use their peers as resources but were unsuccessful. In these observations, teachers attempted to frame some questions to start a discussion but few students participated.		Basic	64%
	The QSR team rated less than 10% of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.	Unsatisfactory	5%
Engaging Students in Learning	The QSR team scored 63% of the observations as proficient and none as distinguished in this component. In the proficient observations most students intellectually engaged with the learning tasks. Students analyzed the impact of events on a character's life, described symbolism in a play, and wrote a thesis	Distinguished	0%
	statement about justice and injustice from Twelve Angry Men. Teachers scaffolded to support engagement as they modeled tasks, described expectations for responses, gave students sentence stems, and offered other approaches to problems, like graphing using paper instead of a computer. Students participated in discussions eagerly, by raising their hands and reacting to one another's responses. Materials and resources supported learning goals as teachers used graphic organizers to deepen understanding about a text and gave students extra graph paper and protractors to help them graph functions.	Proficient	63%

Instruction	Evidence	School Wide R	ating
	The QSR team scored 38% of the observations as basic in this component. In the basic observations few students engaged in the learning task. Some students engaged while others socialized, played non-academic games on their phones, or discussed non-academic topics with each other. Pacing was ineffective at times. One teacher did not allow enough time for students to copy a problem before working through it. Many students asked the teacher for additional time to copy the problem, but s/he declined. In another observation, few students handed in projects or completed math problems by the end of the lesson, despite the teacher's expectations that all students do so. Student engagement with content was largely passive as students focused on learning facts.	Basic	38%
	The QSR team rated none of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.	Unsatisfactory	0%
Using Assessment in Instruction	Assessment in component in these observations teachers		0%
			65%

Instruction	Evidence	School Wide R	ating
	The QSR team scored 35% of the observations as basic in this component. In the basic observations the teacher did not elicit evidence of understanding from all students. In several observations, teachers relied on students to volunteer evidence rather than ask questions to ensure all students understood the presentation. Teachers asked large groups of students if they had questions, but elicited no individual evidence of understanding. Feedback was general as teachers said "Yep," or "Good" when students answered questions or when teachers reviewed written work.	Basic	35%
	The QSR team rated none of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.	Unsatisfactory	0%

APPENDIX I: THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT OBSERVATION RUBRIC

The Classroom Environment	Unsatisfactory	Basic	Proficient	Distinguished
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.
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: INSTRUCTION OBSERVATION RUBRIC

Instruction	Unsatisfactory	Basic	Proficient	Distinguished
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 highlevel 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.
Using Assessment in Instruction	Students are unaware of criteria and performance standards by which their work will be evaluated, and do not engage in selfassessment 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.

APPENDIX III: SCORE BREAKDOWN BY COMPONENT

Percent of:	2a	2b	2c	2d	3a	3b	3с	3d
Unsatisfactory	13%	0%	0%	8%	0%	5%	0%	0%
Basic	25%	50%	25%	33%	26%	64%	38%	35%
Proficient	63%	50%	75%	50%	65%	32%	63%	65%
Distinguished	0%	0%	0%	8%	9%	0%	0%	0%
Subdomain Average	2.50	2.50	2.75	2.58	2.83	2.27	2.63	2.65

	Domain 2	Domain 3
% of Proficient or above	61%	59%
Domain Averages	2.58	2.59