



Nevada State Public Charter School Authority

To: Renee Fairless, Mater Academy Mt. Vista Principal
Richard Jasso, Mater Academy Mt Vista, Board Chair
From: Sandra Kinne, Education Programs Professional
CC: Jason Guinasso, SPCSA Board Chair
Date: Monday, March 11, 2019
Re: Site Evaluation Report for Mater Academy – Mt. Vista

SITE EVALUATION REPORT MATER ACADEMY – MT. VISTA

Site Evaluations are a critical accountability component to the oversight of schools by the Nevada State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) and are fundamental to charter schools' autonomy. As approved by the Legislature [NRS-388A.150] the Authority is to *“provide oversight to the charter schools that it sponsors to ensure that those charter schools maintain high educational and operational standards, preserve autonomy and safeguard the interests of pupils and the community.”*

Site Evaluations allow the SPCSA to assess schools' student achievement, progress to goals, and fulfillment of their mission, vision, and educational program outlined in their charter. Improving the learning of pupils, and, by extension, the public education system; increased opportunities for learning and access to quality education; and a more thorough and efficient system of accountability for student achievement in Nevada are all foundational elements of the SPCSA's mission, the legislative intent of charter schools and are central elements of the Authority's on-going evaluation of charter schools.

The SPCSA conducts multiple visits and evaluations throughout schools' charter terms. The cumulative evidence through multi-year oversight measures become part of the record that help inform recommendations put forth by SPCSA staff, specifically renewal recommendations to the Authority Board. The Board of the Nevada State Public Charter School Authority makes all final charter renewal decisions. Site Evaluations are just one criterion considered for renewal; student achievement, financial prudence, and fulfillment of the program outlined in the approved charter are also evaluated by the Authority when making renewal decisions.

Attached is the Site Evaluation Report for Mater Academy – Mt. Vista, which was conducted by SPCSA team members, Sandra Kinne and Selcuk Ozdemir on Tuesday, January 22, 2019 at Mater Academy – Mt. Vista, 3445 Mountain Vista St., Las Vegas, NV 89121. The optional school response is also included. The school is current in its 5th year of its 1st charter authorization term, which expires June 2020. The school leader is Renee Fairless and the board chair is Richard Jasso.

Please contact the Team Lead for this Site Evaluation, Sandra Kinne, with any questions.

SITE EVALUATION REPORT

MATER ACADEMY – MT. VISTA

Campus Name: Mater Academy – Mt. Vista
Grade Levels: K-8
School Leader: Renee Fairless, Principal
Purpose of Site Evaluation: 5th year of charter contract
Date of Authorization: July 2013
Conducted Date: Tuesday, Jan 22, 2019
Conducted By: Sandra Kinne and Selcuk Ozdemir

SUMMARY OF SITE EVALUATION

The mission of Mater Academy of Nevada is to provide an innovative, challenging, multi-cultural education, preparing students to be global citizens and have a competitive edge in the 21st century workforce.

The work toward fulfilling this mission was noted in several observations by the team, including:

- Considerable technology in all classrooms. (21st century skills)
- College focus in environmental elements (posters about “college bound behaviors”, e.g.)
- Pi posted to the 16th number (higher-level thinking)
- Critical thinking through questions
- Clear evidence of CHAMPs (This was consistent in elementary classes.)
- Strategies posters from Spring Board
- Relevant questions in teacher-created questions (i.e., teaching relevancy to cultural events)
- Students generate their Science Fair plan (critical thinking)
- Small group discussion on carpet (collaboration)

The team conducted 13 classroom observations across all grade levels at Mater-Mt. Vista. Team members observed in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8. On average, the observation time in each classroom was just under 11 minutes. Observations ranged through the full cycle of observations, with some conducted in each the beginning, middle, and end of the lesson.

Observers noted consistency of posted schoolwide expectations, procedures, and practices throughout the school; similar CHAMPs posters, mission statements, and culture elements of the school were posted regularly in classrooms, hallways, and common areas.

Common trends from stakeholders were noted in focus groups, as well, including the sense of safety of students; the camaraderie and “family” feel that was mentioned by staff, students, and parents; the professional support and development; and the emphasis on academic achievement. All stakeholders spoke positively of Mater Academy-Mt. Vista, and there is a sense of pride in being a student, staff member, parent, and partner in and of the work the school is doing.

While the team identified some opportunities for growth, overall, Mater Academy-Mt. Vista has a strong culture and sense of community, an emphasis on academic achievement, and a commitment to fulfilling their mission for all their students.

I. CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Classroom Environment	Evidence Observed	School-wide Rating
Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport	Teachers were positive and respectful in their interactions with students, as were students with one another. While an increase in student-led discourse is needed (see recommendations to consider), the conversations that took place were respectful and age/grade level appropriate in tone, content, and behaviors.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory
Establishing a Culture for Learning	As noted in the team's summary of the Site Evaluation, there were clear components evident through classroom and schoolwide operations that spoke to a culture of learning. Students also spoke of activities (i.e., Leadership class, afterschool tutoring), and families spoke of monthly cultural events, that are aligned with the mission and create a positive culture of learning.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory
Managing Classroom Procedures	Teachers consistently demonstrate alignment to class and school procedures, and in most cases, there is no loss of instructional time due to misbehaviors or disruptions (and few misbehaviors or disruptions, if any, were observed by the team).	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory
Managing Student Behavior	Teachers consistently demonstrate proficiency with management of student behavior. There was a little evidence of positive reinforcement or praise of students, but there was also limited evidence of corrective or negative reinforcement.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory

II. INSTRUCTIONAL OBSERVATION

Instructional Observation	Evidence Observed	School-wide Rating
Communicating with Students	Teachers were generally purposeful in their instructional delivery and the explanation of content. However, a wide-range of instructional strategies was not observed, nor was higher-level questioning (as noted in recommendation to consider). Communication by teachers was positive, though stronger connections and application for students is encouraged in teachers' communication of content.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory
Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques	Teachers generally led questions and answers, rather than facilitate discussions among students. Many of the questions observed by both teammates were low-level, basic questions, for example, asking students to respond chorally, "Is this correct?" or respond with 'yes/no' answers.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory
Engaging Students in Learning	In lower grade levels, there was consistent proficient engagement by students. Students actively participated by raising hands, staying on topic/on-task, and demonstrating interest in the topic. In upper grades, however, most students during observations were visibly and audibly disengaged – not participating in either whole group or small group discussion. One teacher visibly struggled with getting responses from students, and another teacher had to remind students multiple times to engage and participate.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory

Using Assessment in Instruction	There was little observation of teachers using assessment in instruction. When it was noted, it was lower-level question (DOK Level 1, Bloom’s levels 1 and 2). There were few demonstrative pieces of evidence of teachers assessing mastery of the objective throughout the lesson or in a concluding factor, such as an exit slip. Teachers, in focus groups, named exit slips as one such strategy for determining student achievement, and it may very well be that this was simply not observed in the context of the team’s observations and timing of observations.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory
--	---	--

III. OPERATIONS

Observations	Evidence Observed	School-wide Rating
Mission driven operations	From the morning arrival gathering, to lunch and other schoolwide procedures, there is a clear focus on maximizing student learning, instructional time, and building community, all with the mission in mind.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed
Managing Schoolwide Procedures	There were clear classroom and schoolwide procedures, including CHAMPS, evident throughout all grade levels. During schoolwide transitions and transitions specific to middle school, there were clear, consistent practices apparent.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed
Maintaining a Safe Environment	Students and staff demonstrated safety, and, at least in the team’s observations, there was an absence of any security or procedural concerns.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed

IV. FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

Group	No. of Participants	Duration
Governing Board	3	45 minutes
Parents/Families	12	60 minutes
Students	13	45 minutes
Staff	12	60 minutes

Site Evaluation team members conducted four Focus Groups, one each with the following groups: Governing Board,¹ Parents/Families, Students, Staff. Participants were asked a series of questions, including common questions across all Focus Groups. All grade levels were represented for the Parents/Families except for 3rd grade and 8th grade; grades 3rd – 8th were represented for the Student Focus Group; and a mix of elementary and middle school grade levels, as well as instructional and support staff were represented on the Staff Focus Group.

¹ Of the full Governing Board of seven members, three members – the Chair, the Secretary, and a board member – participated, so quorum was not met, and Open Meeting Law was not violated.

In general, the common theme threaded throughout all Focus Groups was the sense of community and ‘family feel’ of Mater Academy – Mt. Vista. All stakeholders, particularly families, students, and staff, commented on the sense of community and how it is a compelling feature for retaining them at the school. Additionally, the following themes developed from each of the following Focus Groups:

Governing Board

- The principal is very transparent about the academic progress and success of the schools; she keeps the Board informed of student level academic performance, and they feel assured that the admin team working to improve education.
- Board members recognize the need to retain strong talent and do so by providing small bonuses, supporting teachers. Board members stated the need to replace ineffective teachers with stronger ones.
- The Board is not aware of any unresolved or mitigating parent concerns; members understand parents to be quite satisfied with their choice of Mater Academy – Mt. Vista.

Parents/Families

- Parents and family members overwhelming spoke of the strong culture and welcoming community at Mater Academy – Mt. Vista. Said one parent, *“My son feels like a family here. The way treated us like a family.”*
- There was general appreciation for the focus on academics and student achievement. Said one parent, *“Charter system has so much better teachers and principal. My son had problems previous school (district school) but here the school gives him what he needs and motivates him.”*
- Parents and family members said they feel included, involved, and communicated regularly with by school staff. *“We are treated as staff,”* said one parent. *“We are at home,”* said another.
- Parents also expressed appreciation for the emphasis on student achievement and academic success for all children. *“They care about our kids... my kid is in kindergarten and now we are talking about college. This is great. all kids treated the same. ... They are equal. ...,”* said one parent.

Staff

- Staff echoed the viewpoints of other stakeholders, with the positive emphasis on culture at Mater Academy – Mt. Vista. All staff members in the focus group spoke favorably of the sense of community cultivated by the school’s leadership. Several shared specific stories of students, staff, and family that emulated this. (Some stories were very specific and not captured in notes so as to protect those identified, but a number of stories were shared during the focus group conversation.) Said one staff member of the importance of the school’s community to her, *“If I quit Mater, I wouldn’t stay here. ... Mater is the only reason I’m staying in Nevada.”*
- Staff was generally positive about the opportunities for growth and professional development, citing the attention to curriculum data binders, how teachers ask students questions, and the level of support, including lesson plan and instructional feedback. Staff members also named several ways they appreciated being developed, including the strong partnership with their Florida sister school, professional development workshops like Kagan trainings and “ThinkLaw” (both of which several spoke highly), and the multiple conference options they’ve had. *“If there’s something that hasn’t been offered, (we) ask for it and come back to teach it to peers; Renee is very good at finding the money and letting us go.”*
- At least one staff member expressed concern about diminished opportunities and the role of instructional coaches being split with the Bonanza campus, and there was consensus in follow up commentary to that person’s initial comment. A considerable majority of staff focus

group participants expressed gratitude for the opportunities for growth and development. (No one expressed displeasure or discontentment.) Said one staff member, *"They're going to push you to the next level. Whether you want to go there or not."*

- Staff consistently cited and spoke highly of the school's mission and was able to identify multiple ways they work toward fulfilling it for all students. This included Springboard, multicultural nights, student empowerment, and that all students know their graduation date and speak of going to college. Staff d the pride students have because they know they'll be the first ones in their family to graduate high school and college. *"Students are prideful b/c they know they'll be the first one to graduate HS, graduate college. ... Students build each other up so much,"* said one staff member. *"They believe in us, as much as we believe in them."*

Students

- Students echoed many of the common comments from other stakeholders, including the sense of community in the school and the support that allows them to feel comfortable in their learning environment. *"We're very family orientated. Everyone knows everyone. We're all very close. You can go to anyone,"* said one student. Said another, *"It feels different here than all other schools. You have this positive vibe here. They give you the attention and the help you need."* Said another, *"I like the embrace of diversity. It feels like a family. It feels like everyone fits in."*
- Overwhelmingly, students expressed satisfaction with and spoke favorably of the academics; opportunities for extra learning – including the afterschool and leadership program; and the support they get at the school. There was consensus, however, in one area of improvement – the Specials classes of Art, Music, and Spanish. Multiple students spoke of being bored in these courses, and this was the sole area where there was general less-than-positive consensus. (They all spoke positively of PE and the PE instructional team.)
- Students generally feel challenged in their classes and know they're being prepared for long-term opportunities. *"Mater Academy is a great stepping stone to get into high school, and it prepares you."* Some students, particularly in higher grade levels, expressed boredom in core classes, like Math and English. Students were able to identify and distinguish between being challenged and being engaged and recognized that they were not synonymous. They expressed interest in and appreciation for being challenged but did want to be pushed to be more engaged, especially those students in middle school.
- Students felt safe, supported, and generally respected, though two students noted feeling disrespected when their peers talk over them in class and when their teachers don't curb the extraneous talking. Students named that they are pushed to grow while being supported in doing so, and that the strong, safe, supportive culture is one they like. Said one student, *"This school encourages you to break out of your shell. And make new friends. ... The principal gives a voice to the voiceless."*

V. OVERALL STRENGTHS OF PROGRAM

1. The overwhelming mention of positive culture and community from all stakeholders.

All stakeholders – parents, staff, students – spoke highly and passionately of the school’s culture and community, and while the Board did not speak directly to that, they spoke of the lack of parent concerns raised to their level and the high rates of retention among staff – all indicators of strong culture within a school. Students spoke with pride at being Mater Academy students, and the focus on college preparation and student achievement was emphasized by all stakeholders, especially students, who were able to identify their long-term, professional plans and how Mater Academy was helping them reach those goals. Staff identified the strong culture for reasons for their continued retention, and parents praised the ‘family feel’ of the school and their continued, welcomed presence on the campus.

2. Emphasis on student achievement and college preparation.

In multiple classrooms, through instruction, in focus groups, the emphasis on preparing students to get to and through college was apparent. In classrooms, posters and visual reminders related to critical thinking and college pathways were apparent. In focus groups, different stakeholders spoke of the emphasis on getting all students ready for college and career. This was especially noteworthy for parents and staff who were grateful for the college preparatory focus in a community of majority-minority students who also come from a low-income background. All students in the focus group were able to identify a specific career option they have for themselves, and, when asked, students were able to make connections to how they’re preparing now for their long-term plans. Students took pride in being in school that challenges them and provides them with opportunities - through their instructional program, extra curriculars like sports and leadership, and afterschool support and tutoring – to do their best.

3. Opportunities for staff and abundance of professional development.

Often schools will rest on laurels or accept mediocre performance for their students and staff. This is not at all the case at Mater Academy – Mt. Vista, as demonstrated through the staff’s comments in the focus group and the discussion with school leadership. There is an evident and conscious effort for continuous learning and constant growth, and this was expressed and appreciated by staff. Staff repeatedly praised the school’s leader for finding and creating opportunities for their growth and development. There was identified disappointment for the sharing of instructional coaching staff with the other Mater Academy campus, which demonstrates the value add of this role at the Mt. Vista campus. The on-going efforts to learn, the continual development of adults of the building, and the shared drive to be better not only indicate a desire to be a stronger, more informed instructional team, but it also sets a clear example of life-long learning and continued growth for students.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS/ACTION ITEMS

1. Increase rigor and higher-level questioning

In multiple observations, particularly in middle school grades (6th-8th), students were generally disengaged and non-participatory. Students in focus groups from the upper grades discussed being less challenged and less engaged than peers in lower grades. In multiple observations, the team observed low-level DOK and Bloom's questioning, focused more on recall and skills/concepts rather than analysis, application, or extending thinking. In most classrooms the team observed, the teacher led the questioning of students rather than facilitating a discussion between students, and it did not appear that the teacher had pre-drafted or selected questions as part of the lesson planning; rather, they relied on determining the questions in the moment instead of crafting them as related to assessing mastery of the objective or pushing for extended thinking of students. Teachers seems reluctant to turn over the discussion to students and, as observed widely, tend to contribute more 'teacher talk' as a result. A shift in who is engaging in the conversations will shift the 'lift' to students and allow for more student-centered learning.

Action Item

Collectively review the DOK levels and/or Blooms' Taxonomy to push for higher-level, more rigorous questioning throughout all grade levels. Encourage teachers to craft questions, related to the instructional delivery and mastery of objective, as part of the lesson planning process so that teachers may be intentional in their questioning of students to informally assess understanding. Coach and develop teachers to 'let go' of leading the questioning and discussions, and rather work with them to feel comfortable with allowing students to facilitate their own, grade-level appropriate conversations that speak to and provide engagement with the lesson's content.

2. Increase the consistency of objective communication to students.

There were inconsistencies throughout all grade levels as to the placement of the objective for lessons, in part due to a lack of uniformity of the board presentation, including bell work, homework, and essential question. Further, in some classes, the objective was posted and/or stated by the teacher, while in some classes, it was neither posted nor communicated to students at the start of the lesson (or at other observed points in the lesson). While seemingly small, the inconsistency demonstrates a gap in execution of schoolwide plans, but it can also diminish the purpose of the lesson, which can create a lack of urgency or intention for students during the instructional delivery. The absence of purpose for students can lead to an absence of engagement, mastery, and/or application for students, who want to know 'why' they need to know something and how to apply it.

Action Item

Ensure consistency with both placement of the objective on the school-wide uniformed board and ensure teachers name/share the objective with students to help them better understand why what they're learning matters and what they are expected to be able to do as a result of the lesson. Students should be able to explain not only what they are learning by why they are learning in (in a non-generic, not "because we have to" manner) and how it is applicable and leads to students being able to differentiate, analyze, and/or create. School leaders might also consider reviewing with staff how to make state standards and objectives more student-friendly and in language appropriate for the grade level/age of students.

Note

SPCSA School Support Team members will follow up on each of these recommendations during their next site visit, unless otherwise noted.

###



MATER ACADEMY
of Nevada

Mater Academy of Nevada

3445 Mountain Vista St.

Las Vegas, NV 89121

Tel: (702) 485-2400 • Fax (702) 485-3322

Materacademynv.org

Renee Fairless, Principal

To: SPCSA Board

From: Renee Fairless, Lead Principal Mater Academy

Regarding: Mater Academy Mt. Vista Site Visit January 2019

In response to our site visit on January 22, 2019. I am concerned that the Site Evaluation Handbook clearly states that the Academic Performance and Data Analysis will be utilized in site evaluations in order to determine the effectiveness of instructional programs, however, it is evident that the evaluators at Mater Academy Mountain Vista did not follow their own clearly outlined process.

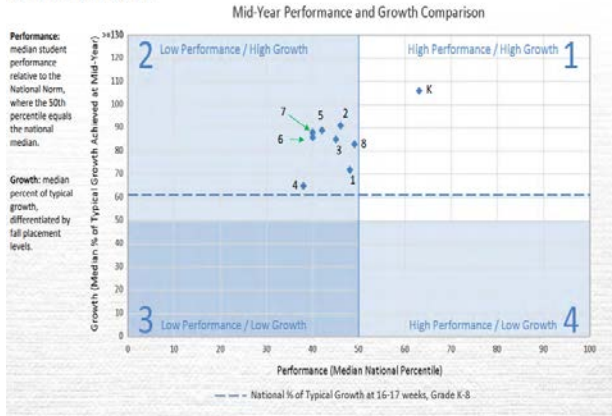
Mater Academy Mt. Vista's Middle School is rated a strong 4 star with 79.5 on the NSPF. The elementary school is rated a 3 star. Our current data is trending in a similar trajectory as determined by iReady assessments. As you can see in the graph's below our 7th and 8th grade data shows exemplary high performance and growth. This is obviously a testament to rigor and student engagement.

MATHEMATICS

READING

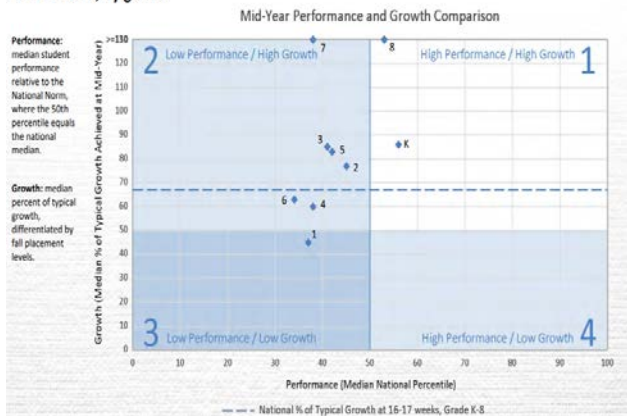
Performance and Growth by Grade

Comparison of median student performance and median percent of typical growth at 16-17 weeks, by grade.



Performance and Growth by Grade

Comparison of median student performance and median percent of typical growth at 16-17 weeks, by grade.



From the SPCSA Site Evaluation Handbook it clearly states that the SPCSA will assess schools' student achievement, progress towards goals, and fulfillment of their mission, vision, and educational program outlined in their charter. It states that data collection and analysis and



MATER ACADEMY
of Nevada

Mater Academy of Nevada

3445 Mountain Vista St.

Las Vegas, NV 89121

Tel: (702) 485-2400 • Fax (702) 485-3322

Materacademynv.org

Renee Fairless, Principal

document review will be used as evidence which will be examined and considered through the Academic Framework. Unfortunately, as I review the school-wide rating from the site review evidence observed I have to dispute the “basic” rating for engaging students in learning. The reviewer stated “In lower grade levels, there was consistent proficient engagement by students. In upper grades, however, most students during observations were visibly and audibly disengaged – not participating in either whole group or small group discussion.” However, it is clear that if the SPCSA Site Evaluators had focused on the academic performance or detailed data analysis of student achievement, Mater Academy would have received a Proficient or even a Distinguished rating.

The Site Evaluation Report states that the Mission, Vision and Values of Mater Academy Mt. Vista is evident, “from the morning arrival gathering, to lunch and other school wide procedures, there is a clear focus on maximizing student learning, instructional time, and building community all with the mission in mind.” This description supports evidence for a Distinguished school, however we received a Proficient rating. The rubric does not clearly identify what would differentiate Mater Academy from a Proficient to a Distinguished rating.

We would like to be provided a rubric with detailed descriptors for each performance indicator in each category that is evaluated. This would provide clear guidelines on why we received ratings in each indicator.

Sincerely,

Renee Fairless

Lead Principal

Mater Academy of Nevada

702-379-2736