Nevada State Public Charter School Authority

To: Valerie Blake, LAN Board Chair
Bryon Richardson, LAN
Jason Guinasso, SPCSA Board Chair
From: Sandra Kinne
Date: Monday, March 11, 2019
Re: Site Evaluation Report for Leadership Academy of Nevada

SITE EVALUATION REPORT
LEADERSHIP ACADEMY OF NEVADA

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 fulfilment 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 LEADERSHIP ACADEMY of NEVADA, which was conducted by SPCSA Sandra Kinne and Mike Dang on Tuesday, February 5 at the school's central offices 7495 W Azure Dr #120, Las Vegas, NV 89130. The school is current in its 5th year of its first charter authorization term, which expires June 2020.

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

SITE EVALUATION REPORT
LEADERSHIP ACADEMY of NEVADA

Campus Name: Leadership Academy of Nevada
Grade Levels: 6-12
School Leader: Byron Richardson
Purpose of Site Evaluation: 5th year Site Evaluation
Date of Authorization: January 2013
Conducted Date: Tuesday, February 5, 2019
Conducted By: Sandra Kinne and Mike Dang

SUMMARY OF SITE EVALUATION

The mission of Leadership Academy of Nevada is *"to provide highly motivated and self-directed students in Nevada with a classical education so that they can become principled leaders."*

The most common trends and evidence related to the school living out its mission came through multiple examples in multiple classrooms of connecting the subject/topic to real life. The application of what was being discussed and/or read about helped students to better understand the content. Additionally, in multiple focus groups, there were common trends related the leadership emphasis of the school, including opportunities for students to serve in leadership capacity, read and discuss leadership traits and habits, and the leadership skills students are developing through this school's philosophy and approach.

While students identified some shared concerns around "cliques" and fitting in, they, as well as parents in the family focus group, generally felt the school was a good fit for their needs, learning styles, and interests, and all participants were glad to have this school as an option. There was collective, demonstrated pride by staff, students, and parents of being members of this learning community and school.

As has been a trend for the Authority in Site Evaluations, an over-arching observation at Leadership Academy was the limited rigor and engaging questioning within classes and class discussions. We noted off-task questions and comments by students in chat boxes during observations, and, in their focus groups, students collectively said they felt challenged but not engaged in their coursework.

I.   CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Classroom Environment	Evidence Observed	School-wide Rating
Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport	Teachers generally offer praise for students, particularly when they participate, as well as maximize learning time through school-wide close out processes. While students were often off-task in the chat boxes, their conversations were respectful of one another and that was modeled in verbal communication by teachers.	Distinguished <mark>Proficient</mark> Basic Unsatisfactory
Establishing a Culture for Learning	While the observations noted that classroom interactions are warm and friendly, and teachers model respect for students, the number of students	Distinguished Proficient <mark>Basic</mark>

		Unsatisfactory
	who offered comment on the culture at the school and their limited engagement led to a 'basic' rating. As discussed in recommendations below, there is room for the school's leaders to reassess culture, including the influence of the school's culture on learning and its impact on student achievement.	
Managing Classroom Procedures	Consistently, teachers have a proficient approach to ensuring learning time is maximized. There were common practices observed in multiple classes, including the closure process and keeping all students in the class until it was officially over.	Distinguished <mark>Proficient</mark> Basic Unsatisfactory
Managing Student Behavior	There were limited, observable instances of student behavior concerns. In some cases, when students were off-task in the class chat box, teachers would verbally remind students of the topic and/or reiterate the question/comment to ensure students were following. Teachers' approach was always respectful of students.	Distinguished <mark>Proficient</mark> Basic Unsatisfactory

II. INSTRUCTIONAL OBSERVATION

Instructional Observation	Evidence Observed	School-wide Rating
Communicating with Students	Teachers maintained a balance between verbal communication with students and engaging with them in the chat box. Two teachers, in particular, seemed to maintain conversations both through verbal discussion and typed comments in the class chat box. With one or two exceptions, particularly in classes of low-engagement and/or low rigor, teachers' explanation of content is appropriate and connects with students' knowledge and experience.	Distinguished <mark>Proficient</mark> Basic Unsatisfactory
Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques	As discussed in the recommendations (below), questions were generally low-level DOK/Bloom's focused more on recall questions. There were strong examples of application and connections to real life, but the majority of questions were limited in scope, including a number of DOK 1 "identify" and "recall" questions.	Distinguished Proficient <mark>Basic</mark> Unsatisfactory
Engaging Students in Learning	As noted by both the majority of student focus group participants, as well as the team through observations, students tended to be more disengaged than engaged. Off-topic conversations in the chat box, limited participation by all students with responses coming from the same few voices in each class, as well as students in the focus group identifying themselves as disengaged, though challenged, provides an uneven and inconsistent level of engagement.	Distinguished Proficient <mark>Basic</mark> Unsatisfactory

	During the observation, Site Evaluators did not observe this criterion significantly enough to evaluate. This criterion is not rated.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory ==Not Observed==
Using Assessment in Instruction		

III. OPERATIONS

Observations	Evidence Observed	School-wide Rating
Mission driven operations	The emphasis on leadership opportunities and learning, as emphasized by staff and students, supports mission-driven operations.	Distinguished ==Proficient== Basic Unsatisfactory
Managing Schoolwide Procedures	There was consistency in multiple classrooms around the close out process, including teachers providing a recap of the day's lesson and next steps, as well as ensuring students remained in the class through its official conclusion time.	Distinguished ==Proficient== Basic Unsatisfactory Not observed/Not applicable
Maintaining a Safe Environment	Given the online nature of the program and the current description for this criterion, the team did not evaluate this area in its observations.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory ==Not observed/Not applicable==

IV. FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

Group	No. of Participants
Governing Board	3
Parents/Families	4
Students	8
Staff	5

Site Evaluation team members conducted four Focus Groups, one each with the following groups: Governing Board,[1] Parents/Families, Students, Staff, plus a conversation with the school leadership team. Participants were asked a series of questions, including common questions across all Focus Groups. For the Parent/Family focus group, grades 6, 10, and 12 were represented, while for the Student Focus Group, students in all grades but 8th were represented.

---

[1] Of the full Governing Board of seven members, three members 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 flexibility of the online school, the focus on leadership and learning about leadership, and the positive changes since ending the relationship with the former EMO. Additionally, the following responses developed from each of the following Focus Groups:

Student Focus Group
- Students spoke of the ease and flexibility of the program and the accessibility of teachers. Multiple students identified being able to participate in other activities during the day as a positive feature of the school.
- Several students named not feeling "like we fit the mold" as a concern about the school, saying they don't feel like they fit in. Multiple students named the class presidencies as ineffective and contributing to class bullying, rather than preventing it. They said the cliques of the school are unexpected, and it can be awkward, especially when you're new.
- The majority of students said they are grateful for the school and its approach. Multiple students cited the openness of teachers and discussions in class. They said they felt welcomed to be open. *"Some things can be really hard, but I don't think I'll find a better place. This place is the best for me now,"* said one student.

Staff Focus Group
- Staff spoke of the positive leadership emphasis, for both students and staff; team activities like book clubs and yoga, and the learning opportunities for staff member; and the 1:1 meetings with supervisors to share concerns and continue their growth as positive aspects of their work. Two staff members specifically cited the external professional development opportunities in which leadership allows them to participate, and the opportunities that are aligned to staff members' individualized needs and skills. *"Your efforts feel valued,"* said one staff member.
- Staff members feel there are plenty of resources and resources are allocated appropriately. *"We have so many resources. … You just have to ask,"* said one staff member. This is a positive of the school; other staff members echoed the sentiment.

Governance Board Focus Group
- Board members cited the work around increasing student achievement and getting students where they need to be as the current focus of the school. Said one board member, *"We look at data and growth to ensure progress or to adjust; we're concerned with it all the time."*
- Board members said the biggest challenge they've faced was deciding whether to continue with their EMO, which they ultimately decided against. A board member said it was an 8-month, "very intense" process but ultimately it was made to better ensure student outcomes. They also said enrollment has been a challenge, citing they're growing slower than they hoped but are marketing the school for its fit for students.

Family Focus Group
- Parents generally say the school provides a great experience for their students, and the cite the flexibility, the small class size, and the support for students with special needs as highlights of their experience. They said the school isn't just about the "status quo," and they chose the school for their children because of the smaller classes, the more personalized approach teachers and staff take with their students, and because it's not like the other virtual schools that seem to have too many students in their class. "Students feel valued and their teachers know who they are," said one parent.

- Parents said their children are appropriately challenged in their classes, including through debate, group projects, and leadership opportunities. They also said the opportunity for their children to be more autonomous and accountable for their learning was a positive feature of the school.
- Parents cited the ease and convenience of being able to go into the parent portal to be able to check on their children's progress and academic achievement. Said one parent, *"We can go in at any time to see how Ss are doing. … Grades and curriculum are much more transparent than (traditional) schools."*

V.   OVERALL STRENGTHS OF PROGRAM

1.   Flexibility and approach to meet individual students'/families' needs
Multiple students and parents named the school's flexibility and online mission as a key feature of the school and their reason for being there. Parents spoke openly of being grateful for this type of model, and they specifically cited the small class sizes (as compared to other online options), the caring and kind teachers who know their students, and the ease of the school, in general, as their reasons for enrolling their children and keeping them enrolled. Students identified the openness and approachability of teachers, as well as their support as highlights of their experience at LAN.

2.   Transition to independence allows for flexibility and focus on mission
Multiple staff and board members cited the recent decision to severe ties with the EMO as a positive decision for the sake of the school. Both staff and governance team members said it allow the school to better address students' needs, implement curriculum that is more aligned to Nevada state standards, and

VI.   RECOMMENDATIONS/ACTION ITEMS

1. Increase rigor and higher-level questioning
In multiple observations, students were disengaged, non-participatory, and/or off-task in the discussion, be it in the chat box or verbally. In the focus groups, students said that while they feel challenged in their classes, they're not particularly engaged. This was in part due to perceived cliques and, what students identified as, an ineffective class president approach, as well as limited comfort within the class. In multiple observations, the team observed teachers making connections to real-life application, which is higher-level questioning, but for the most part, the questioning was low-level DOK and Bloom's with limited discussion and engagement – both verbal and in the chat box – and almost always teacher-driven discussions rather than student-driven. A shift in who is engaging in the conversations, as well as the substantial nature of the discussions, will shift the 'lift' to students and allow for more student-driven 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. Develop an approach – be it written in the chat box or verbal – that allows students to be more focused on the

discussion and content so that they are engaged and consider eliminating off-topic conversations and messaging in the chat box during guided instruction.

2. Reassess student culture

While one student said she disagreed with her peers' comments (but understood their perspective and was respectful in her contribution to the conversation), the consensus from students in the focus group was that while they love the school's approach to learning and its flexibility, they don't often feel like they fit in. Students in online schools, especially those in this focus group, often have very specific reasons for unenrolling in traditional, brick and mortar schools. They don't feel comfortable with their peers; they're in rural communities with limited access or burdensome travel times to school; and/or they have other factors (i.e., medical needs) for which online schooling is a better fit. As the students in this focus group discussed, they often feel like they don't fit in in traditional environments, and the majority of them said they often feel like they don't fit in with 'cliquey' peer groups in their current classes.

ACTION ITEM

Re-evaluate the 'mold' of the school as related to culture to ensure full inclusion for all students. Survey students specifically about the culture and climate within the school's model, and assess through multiple lens' – students, staff, and families – key components of the school's approach to cultures. The 'class presidencies' were specifically named by a majority of students as an ineffective feature of their classes. Given the school's emphasis on leadership, which was identified and appreciated by multiple stakeholders in focus group, this may be an opportunity for students to take lead and create a revised approach to cultural to ensure its strengthened.

NOTE

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

###