



**Nevada State Public  
Charter School  
Authority**

**To:** Josh Kern, Receiver, Quest Preparatory Academy  
Janelle Veith, Principal, Quest Preparatory Academy  
**From:** Mark Modrcin, Director of Authorizing, State Public Charter School Authority  
**CC:** Jason Guinasso, Chair, State Public Charter School Authority  
**Date:** April 5, 2019  
**Re:** Site Evaluation Report for Quest Preparatory Academy

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**SITE EVALUATION REPORT  
Quest Preparatory Academy**

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 criteria 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 Quest Preparatory Academy, which was conducted by Mark Modrcin and Selcuk Ozdemir on February 21, 2019. The school is currently in its 5<sup>th</sup> year of its 2<sup>nd</sup> charter term, which expires on June 30, 2020.

Please contact the Team Lead for this Site Evaluation, Mark Modrcin, with any questions.

# SITE EVALUATION REPORT

Quest Preparatory Academy

**Campus Name:** Northwest Campus

**Date of Authorization:** July 2008

**Grade Levels:** K – 8

**Evaluation Date:** Thursday, February 21, 2019

**School Leaders:** Janelle Veith

**Conducted By:** Mark Modrcin & Selcuk Ozdemir

**Purpose of Site Evaluation:** Year 5, second charter term. School operating under receivership.

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## SUMMARY OF SITE EVALUATION

The mission of Quest Preparatory Academy is “to foster students’ personal and intellectual growth so that they are prepared to be positively productive and engaged citizens of their communities. We pride ourselves on our familial environment, and caring and committed teaching, leadership, and support staff.”

During our Site Evaluation, the team observed this mission being lived out on campus through the following:

- Almost all school staff members reiterated how the school community is truly a family. Staff works hard to get to know all parents, and frequently they know parents outside of those that have children in their classroom.
- Teachers demonstrated a commitment to data-driven instruction, and since the Receivership began, staff has noted a shift in how teachers are developed so as to improve instruction. Administrators are in classrooms more often, lesson plans are reviewed weekly, and feedback to teachers focuses on improvement. This reinforces the school’s emphasis on committed teachers and school leaders.
- The school has established systems in place to review classroom and school level data in addition to teacher observation data. These systems are integral to the recent academic successes occurring at the school and speak to the school’s shift towards continuous development and improvement.

Site Evaluation team members observed instruction in both elementary and middle school classrooms, and core subject areas in both grade configurations: math, English/ELA, world history and science. Additionally, SPCSA staff observed instruction in one special education/resource room. On average, each classroom was observed for approximately 24 minutes. Evaluators were able to observe lessons at the beginning, middle and end of class periods.

Observers noted consistency in the posting of daily objectives in all classes. These were easy to read and current. SPCSA staff also noted the use of the “knights up” phrase/chant in order to get the attention of students or bring everyone back together for further instruction (in classrooms) or additional direction (in common areas) in the elementary grades. Lastly, SPCSA staff noted that staff handled any behavior issues in a calm and warm manner. Classrooms were generally free of any behavior management issues, but when they did arise, staff demonstrated the necessary skills and relationships to refocus students on the task at hand in almost every case.

## I. CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Classroom Environment	Evidence Observed	School-wide Rating
<i>Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport</i>	Teachers were positive and respectful in their interactions with students, as were students with one another and they always engaged with students with an appropriate tone. While an increase in student-led discourse is needed, the conversations that took place were respectful and exhibited general warmth.	Distinguished <b>Proficient</b> Basic Unsatisfactory
<i>Establishing a Culture of Learning</i>	Observers noted that during the classroom observations there were few, if any, behavior concerns. Teachers were actively working to create a positive culture of learning. There were few, if any, instances where students appeared off-task or disengaged. If this occurred, teachers were quick to address the situation in a positive manner to redirect the student back to the task at hand.	Distinguished <b>Proficient</b> Basic Unsatisfactory
<i>Managing Classroom Procedures</i>	For the most part, general education teachers had strong, consistent classroom procedures that were followed by students throughout the school. Less consistency in classroom procedures was seen in resource rooms.	Distinguished <b>Proficient</b> Basic Unsatisfactory
<i>Managing Student Behavior</i>	Teachers consistently demonstrate proficiency with management of student behavior. In general teachers used positive encouragement to maintain an environment conducive to learning and are aware of students that may need to be redirected.	Distinguished <b>Proficient</b> Basic Unsatisfactory

## II. INSTRUCTIONAL OBSERVATION

Instructional Observation	Evidence Observed	School-wide Rating
<i>Communicating with Students</i>	Teachers proficiently communicated with students and students spoke appropriately with each other. This was seen through multiple examples, including the opening of lessons and as teachers explained the content that was covered.	Distinguished <b>Proficient</b> Basic Unsatisfactory
<i>Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques</i>	Teachers generally led questions and answers, rather than facilitate discussions among students. The questions asked of students were often basic and low level, requiring follow-ups by the teacher to determine mastery and understanding. Few teachers implemented higher Depth of Knowledge (DOK) questions.	Distinguished Proficient <b>Basic</b> Unsatisfactory
<i>Engaging Students in Learning</i>	Throughout all classrooms, students appeared at least somewhat engaged as evidence by their participation. While a few classrooms had strong pacing and structure to their lessons, the majority of classrooms appeared to have pacing and/or activities that did not lead to high levels of engagement. As previously mentioned, questioning techniques could be more rigorous to challenge and engage students beyond a low-level, basic understanding.	Distinguished Proficient <b>Basic</b> Unsatisfactory

<i>Using Assessment in Instruction</i>	In most classrooms, students seem aware of the performance and criteria that they will be evaluated on as a result of the lesson. In a few cases, teachers did an excellent job of tying the assessment back to the daily objective so that students are able to see the importance of success and understanding of a specific topic. Teachers and interventionists provide student with support throughout lessons so as to be successful within a lesson.	Distinguished <b>Proficient</b> Basic Unsatisfactory
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### III. OPERATIONS

<b>Instructional Observation</b>	<b>Evidence Observed</b>	<b>School-wide Rating</b>
<i>Mission-driven Operations</i>	Use of the walk-through tracker, student data monitoring and analyzing academic data via online tools are qualities tied to the mission of the school. Other elements of the school, such as transitions between classes, indicate that students and teachers operate with a sense of urgency.	Distinguished <b>Proficient</b> Basic Unsatisfactory
<i>Managing Schoolwide Procedures</i>	In general, observed classrooms, as well as during transition periods, students show a clear understanding of procedures, operations and expectations.	Distinguished <b>Proficient</b> Basic Unsatisfactory
<i>Maintaining a Safe Environment</i>	The team noted student and staff demonstrated a concern for maintaining a safe student environment. Staff understands the unique structure of the campus and the need to escort students between buildings given they are separate and unattached. Observers do feel, however, that Quest Academy could take more proactive measures to ensure that student transitions are seamless and safer for students.	Distinguished <b>Proficient</b> Basic Unsatisfactory

### IV. FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

<b>Group</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>Duration</b>
Governing Board Members	1 (Receiver)	45 minutes
Parents / Families	6	55 minutes
Students	10	50 minutes
School Leadership	6 (principal, assistant principal, instr. coaches)	45 minutes
School Staff	12	45 minutes

In general, the following themes developed from each of the following Focus Groups:

#### **Governing Board (Receiver)**

- The school has worked tirelessly to improve in two areas – data-driven instruction and professional development – to expedite the turnaround efforts at Quest Academy. From a governance perspective, this has been largely successful to date but has required frequent leadership meetings, stronger data tools and support for teachers to foster their development.

- The Receiver continues to prioritize the hiring, development and retention of effective staff. This has been largely successful as evidenced by the school's results but has required increased pay for teachers and a strategic, coordinated advertising campaign so that there is a deep pool of applicants from which to choose.
- The Receiver recognizes that the turnaround efforts at Quest will continue to be a challenge, especially given some of the past and current financial problems at the school. The two priorities moving forward are the continued, positive academic trajectory of the school and to resolve the remaining financials issues to as to put the school on a path to success.

### Parents / Families

- Members of this focus group were especially thankful that the school provides individual attention to their students. The school setting has been very caring, and teachers are very accessible for all of their students. Said one parent, *"I have three kids. Teachers pay attention to kids. If there are any concern teachers communicate with me right away."*
- The members of the group commented that they feel very welcome in their child's school. One parent explained that she feels part of a family at Quest. Even when she calls the office to ask something she can feel from their voice they are very warm and caring. Said one parent, *"My daughter feels like part of a family here. They always treat us like a family."*
- All participants in this focus group said the school and staff are responsive to student and family needs. They mentioned that the school often sends fliers and emails to communicate them. A couple of members also expressed thanks for the phone app in as it is easy to use and is always handy. Said one parent, *"In addition to email or phone application, teachers also call us to communicate. I am not good with technology, so I really like when they call me"*
- The members of the group commented they like when the school asks them to be involved (such as International Night, Chili Cook-off, Coffee with the Principal, Pack meeting). A few members commented that school posts the board meeting notices to the windows, but they also prefer to receive it as an email/flier so that they can remain fully informed of current issues at the school.

### Students

- The majority of students participating in the focus group indicated that they feel challenged by their teachers on a daily basis. Students cited that teachers use exit tickets, additional work at the end of class, or scaffolded assignments to push their thinking to ensure mastery.
- Students shared that they see their teachers working together and collaborating so that students are served effectively. Students indicated that teachers meet regularly, and that they seem to get along.
- Students indicated that they feel safe on campus. One student said, *"Yes, I feel safe on campus and can't walk anywhere without an adult present."* Another student also mentioned that there are many safety drills conducted frequently which helps them feel secure. Both comments are encouraging given the logistical challenges at the Northwest campus with multiple buildings that are not connected.
- The 'knight up' chant/routine helps students understand teacher expectations throughout the campus. All students in the focus group indicated that this stresses the importance of being responsible, respectful and safe. However, students communicated that a failure to follow the 'Knight-up' expectations were loosely enforced, and reprimands could vary from class to class.

## Leadership

- It was clear that the data systems (walk through tracker, student data monitoring, Google sheets) used by the school are critical to each day of instruction. This strengthens the instructional delivery for teachers and students.
- All participants in this focus group said more professional development is provided under current leadership than the previous administration and governing board. The professional development sessions are based on the needs uncovered in available data. Instructional coaches mentioned they are in the classroom frequently to support teachers and give them feedback on their lesson plans so as to foster changes and improvement. There are also 2 interventionist work with small group in the classroom. This demonstrates the administration's commitment to staff and their willingness to adapt to improve the learning environment.
- All participants in the focus group spoke favorably about the emphasis on developing and maintaining a positive culture at Quest Academy, and the sense of community cultivated by the school's leadership and staff and. Participants in the focus group spoke highly of the school's mission and were able to identify multiple ways they work toward fulfilling it for all students. This positive morale could also be felt by the observers throughout the day.
- The leadership team consistently cited and spoke highly of using data (MAP testing, student growth, progress monitoring) to inform instruction. The pervasive tone in the room indicated that they always evaluate the data and data binders as well as a demonstration of the systems were provided to the evaluation team. It is clear that the school updates data frequently (at least once a week) and that results are shared with teachers as well as during professional development. Said one parent, *"Nothing happens by chance. We strategically use formative data to inform instruction"*

## Teachers

- Teachers participating in the focus group overwhelmingly indicated that the school has a renewed focus on data, which is used to promote student growth, teacher planning and professional development. One teacher commented, *"Data is being used in all aspects of my class, especially the MAP test. The results from this test are so important because they allow me to make sure all students are making progress."*
- Teachers provided positive comments related to the teacher evaluation process. Prior to the Receivership, teachers were observed once a year and the feedback was mostly negative, focused on what areas the teacher needed to work. Now, teachers are provided with areas of strength and areas that need some improvement. Additionally, teachers are provided with coaching and mentoring to further their development.
- The Quest staff indicated that there are high expectations for lesson planning, and that feedback and support is provided to them when necessary. One teacher said, *"We have to provide our lesson plans four days in advance of the following week, and I receive feedback within 24 hours of submission. Having a different lens review this information is helpful, and I know that coaches and the leadership team are willing to help me."* This confirms that the school takes teacher development and support seriously.
- There is a sense of pride among teachers about working together to support one another, and many commented that they feel Quest feels like a family. Teachers indicated that they appreciate the opportunity to determine the best way to solve problems. Examples of this include defining the "knights-up" expectations at the beginning of the year and each other's willingness to help others when students may misbehave. This can include talking about management strategies to trading students when there is a need for a supervised time-out.

## OVERALL STRENGTHS OF PROGRAM

### a. Progress monitoring and data-driven instruction

An emphasis on data-driven instruction was evident to observers throughout the school as well as in roundtables with the Receiver, school leadership and teachers. Teachers feel comfortable using the data and assessments available to them, and this was made clear during their focus group. Quest administration provided SPCSA staff with a thorough overview of their data practices, data trackers, and how the tool is used to identify students that may need additional support. The school has clearly shifted in this direction under the Receiver, and it is likely that this has been an underlying factor in the academic gains at Quest. To further build on this emerging strength, the school should work with students so that they are aware of their individual data and take ownership of their opportunities for growth over time.

### b. Positive school culture

Multiple focus groups – staff, families, students – reiterated that there is truly a positive culture present at Quest, and that all stakeholders view Quest as a community hub with a positive culture. Teachers indicated that they have strong, personal relationships with parents and families, often referring to them by their first name and having frequent conversations, either by phone or in-person. Parents substantiated this sentiment, stating that they feel welcome at all times. Students also felt cared for at the school and, for the vast majority, had strong relationships with teachers, especially those that have been at the school for some time. This strong culture should be celebrated, and the school should look at ways to build on this success.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

### a. Push for more rigorous, student-centered instruction tied to the daily objective

Evaluators noted that most classrooms provided direct instruction to students with few opportunities for student discourse and/or discussion among their peers. This was true in most classrooms no matter if the observers conducted an evaluation during the beginning, middle or end of a lesson. The school should continue to prioritize developing the instructional-capacity of teachers so that students assume more responsibility of their learning. In many classrooms, especially within the elementary school, evaluators also noted that instruction lacked rigor. Questions were low-level, and most of the time simply required students to respond with a simple yes/no answer without a justification or rationale for their response. On some occasions, teachers would indicate an answer was correct and provide the rationale for the students. While students did indicate that they feel challenged, the evaluation team's findings do not match this conclusion.

#### Action Item

Teachers should shift from questioning students to facilitating lessons and discussions so as to more accurately measure mastery of the objective(s). Teachers and school leadership should collectively review the Depth of Knowledge and/or Bloom's Taxonomy to push students towards higher level thinking. During lesson plans, teachers should be asked to insert questions throughout their lessons so as that this can be developed over time and delivered more consistently during lessons. Lesson planning should also include opportunities for students to lead the discourse and conversation so that mastery can be assessed. Evaluators noted a few examples of this, but they were almost exclusively within the middle school grades. New teachers or those that may need additional support in this area may find it useful to observe their peers implement this skill.

Lessons could be further enhanced by direct ties to the daily objective during the opening and closure of the lessons. SPCSA staff saw only one clear example of this during the site evaluation. A

conscientious effort to prioritize a restatement of the objective at the beginning and end of the lesson will help engage students as they will more clearly understand how the day's goals and how they are to be assessed.

**b. Ensure that school safety plans are up to date and implemented consistently**

While students indicated that they felt safe, and evaluators observed staff helping during student transitions, SPCSA staff remains apprehensive about the unique arrangement of the campus and how it may leave the school open to unique safety issues. Students are required to walk outdoors between buildings each day, sometimes on a sidewalk next to a drive used heavily by cars during drop-off and pick-up times. SPCSA staff did observe Quest staff members consistently escorting students to and from buildings, but this may not always be possible when students are called to the office or if there are extenuating circumstances. It should be noted that classrooms for younger students are housed in the main building, limiting the amount of transitions they experience outside.

**Action Item**

SPCSA staff requests that Quest leadership continue to provide ongoing training and reminders to current staff regarding school safety plans. SPCSA staff would like to take a more active role in the school safety planning process for the 2019 – 2020 school year. This may include reviewing final safety and drill plans and reviewing daily schedules for students so as to minimize transitions. SPCSA staff also asks that the school look into other measures (wraparound fencing, security guard) that may help increase the level of student safety. SPCSA staff recognizes the inherent costs associated with this recommendation but feels compelled to highlight this concern given it is related to student safety.

**c. Develop a transition plan from the Receivership to a full-fledged governing Board**

It is clear that Quest Academy has shown progress under its current receiver, who has been in place since October 26, 2015. This is most evident in the academic improvement of the school, which saw an increase of nearly 30 index points from the 2017 to the 2018 ratings. The court-ordered receivership, however, is not a permanent fix to the prior governance problems the school experienced.

**Action Item**

The receiver, in collaboration with SPCSA staff, should present a transition plan to the Authority no later than the May 31, 2019 meeting. This will allow the school to continue to implement its academic improvement plan under the guidance of the receiver during the final year of the current charter contract (2019 – 2020). Should the school be renewed by the Authority in the fall of 2019, this timeline would allow the school to start with a new, able governing board under a renewed contract taking effect on July 1, 2020. Moreover, this timeline would allow the receiver a significant runway to ensure that the integrity of the academic plan continues with fidelity under a new governing body.

**Note**

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

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