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Attachments:	Quest.audit.10.2016.pdf

see attached. thanks!

Quest Preparatory Academy
Performance Audit

Submitted October 20, 2016

Prepared by

TenSquare

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I.   Executive Summary

Background

Quest Preparatory Academy first opened its doors in 2008, with a mission to "provide quality instruction and effective tools for learning for students in the Las Vegas Valley." Quest grew rapidly—from a single campus serving a few hundred students in grades K-5 in 2008, to four campuses serving almost 1300 students in grades K-12 in the 2015-16 school year.

In 2015, however, a financial investigation revealed that Quest had serious financial and operational weaknesses, and that the school had more than $2M in outstanding obligations. As a result, the Nevada State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) placed the school into receivership on October 26, 2015. The SPCSA then appointed Joshua Kern, a nationally-respected charter leader and manager, as Receiver for the school.

Over the past year, the Receiver has worked to assess Quest's financial and operational viability, implement fiscal controls, stabilize the school, and "educate its students while addressing the significant, outstanding financial issues as quickly as possible," as he noted in a preliminary report prepared for the SPCSA on February 22, 2016.

Since the Receivership began, the school has implemented a new financial management plan, contested unlawful agreements and leases, rightsized the school's staff, campus, appointed new administrators, and made strategic cuts to other expenses to ensure that the school is on a fiscally viable path. In consultation with parents, community leaders and staff, and after the City Council's decision not to renew the school's Special Use Permit, the Receiver also made the difficult decision to close the Roberson campus, Quest's high school campus. To ensure that parents, family members, and students were supported through this very challenging transition, the school conducted extensive outreach, and the Receiver appointed a trusted Quest staff member as parent and family liaison. As a result of all these actions, Quest was able to open this school year on three campuses with a far more financially secure operation.

As it enters into the 2016-17 school year, Quest now has three campuses, serving 743 students from grades K-8. The Alexander campus serves students in Kindergarten. The Bridger campus serves students in K-5, and the Torrey Pines campus serves students in K-8. The former Director of Curriculum and Assessment for Quest has been appointed as Principal. She leads two of the three campuses (Torrey Pines and Alexander), and the third campus (Bridger) is led by a Site Administrator.

Now that many of the fiscal and operational crises are being addressed, the Receiver initiated a School Performance Audit to look deeply at Quest's academic program—to identify strengths, challenges, and opportunities in the areas of school performance and student achievement; leadership; school culture; and curriculum, instruction, integration of technology, teacher coaching, and professional development.

TenSquare School Performance Audit

TenSquare's school improvement practice works with schools, local education agencies, and their leadership teams to conduct in-depth performance audits; develop data-driven, actionable recommendations and strategic operational roadmaps; and provide targeted hands-on assistance to improve organizational effectiveness and student achievement—all of which lead to significant gains in school and organizational performance.

TenSquare School Performance Audits are rigorous reviews of school performance. They include detailed analyses of student achievement, student growth, and overall school performance; leadership capacity; school culture—determining the extent to which there is a culture of achievement for students and a culture of accountability and high performance for adults; and academic programming—assessing a school's instructional program, curriculum, integration and use of technology, teacher coaching, and professional development. They serve as a tool to pinpoint critical challenges and identify a roadmap for improvement. While they highlight school strengths, they apply an expert and critical eye to help even the best-performing schools continue to improve their practice—and outcomes for students. The standard used for judging schools is nothing short of excellence. TenSquare has worked with scores of schools around the country to conduct these audits, and then develop and implement targeted plans for change, leading to dramatic school improvement.

To assess Quest's strengths and challenges, TenSquare team members conducted a School Performance Audit from September 15 through October 17, 2016. The TenSquare audit team completed extensive data analysis, conducted on-site interviews and structured classroom observations, and reviewed documents and other materials in the areas of student performance, school culture, leadership, and academics. This report shares findings and recommendations to inform a targeted school improvement action plan for Quest.

Key Findings

Strengths

- Despite tremendous transition and change over the past school year, Quest's school culture appears to be relatively stable and positive. Students are engaged and eager to learn, and there is a sense of hopefulness about the future of Quest.

- Quest staff members are devoted and genuinely interested in positive outcomes for students. The current school leadership team is committed to Quest's improvement and ultimate success. Teachers are open to receiving additional professional development and feedback to improve instruction and student outcomes.

- Teachers have noted a positive change in culture this year under the school leaders. Teachers and staff report that the school is running much more smoothly. It is clear that this leadership team is working diligently to shift the culture of uncertainty and mistrust that was once a fixture at Quest in prior years.

Challenges

- Quest students are underperforming, compared to their peers, on state tests. Quest performance data indicates that more than 50% of Quest students are not meeting grade-level benchmarks for college and career readiness. Moreover, Quest's student proficiency rates on the state test generally *decrease* as grade levels increase, indicating that *students are becoming more off track as they progress through grade levels at Quest*.

- Though academic leaders have potential and a willingness to lead, they do yet not have a clear plan to support school improvement and academic growth.

- Instructional practice and teacher professional development are inadequate. There does not appear to be a shared vision for what excellent instruction—and student learning— should look like at Quest. There is an insufficient professional development plan, and there is no consistent instructional coaching process in place to improve teacher practice.

- The majority (66%) of Quest teachers observed in the audit were providing instruction at a *basic level*. This level of instruction does not support improving student academic performance.

- Many curriculum resources and materials (e.g. the middle school English language arts and K-8 math materials, for example) are outdated, not Common Core aligned, and lack sufficient rigor to prepare students for success on the annual state exam.

- Quest also lacks crucial data management systems present in high-performing schools. There is no comprehensive system to track, manage, and use data to improve teaching and learning, and to ensure that Quest is compliant with federal, state, and local reporting requirements.

- Though the student and adult culture appears to be strong at Quest, teachers and staff did raise concerns about the layout and configuration of the Torrey Pines campus. Improvements have been made to address parents' safety concerns, but there still appear to be some lingering concerns about the appropriateness of the campus for student learning.

Recommendations

Now that many of the most immediate fiscal and operational crises are being addressed at Quest, the Receiver should concentrate on providing rapid and targeted support for the school's academic leaders. We recommend that the Receiver:

- Engage outside academic expertise to develop a comprehensive school improvement plan and implement an aligned, goals-driven process for school performance management

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- Assess the skills of the current leadership team to determine best fit to goals and priorities, and to build on leaders' strengths; provide training for instructional leaders on school improvement strategies

- Work with the leadership team to outline clear student learning and achievement priorities, and align curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development to meet those priorities

- Provide in-depth training and support for all academic leaders on best practices to improve instruction; use teacher coaching and clear, consistent feedback to increase the urgency and quality of instruction; and institute a targeted coaching program for teachers on high-impact SBAC strategies

- Work with leaders to design professional development to ensure effective implementation of the Core Knowledge curriculum, and provide regular coaching and feedback to teachers

- Assess the use of a scripted curriculum, and identify a new math curriculum for the 17-18 school year; in the short term, supplement GoMath with SBAC and Common Core aligned problem-solving instruction

- Rapidly procure data oversight and management expertise; ensure that someone is responsible for accurately managing student performance data and meeting all federal and state compliance requirements in a timely manner. Provide training to school leaders so that they can manage and use student data to improve school performance.

II.   Audit Methodology

TenSquare conducted a School Performance Audit of Quest Charter School that consisted of extensive document review and on-site interviews and observations. The on-site observations and interviews took place from September 19-22, 2016. The team observed in classrooms, hallways and common areas; interviewed school leaders and teachers; and reviewed key programmatic and academic documents.

Auditors conducted a total of 39 classroom observations across grades K-8, totaling more than 737 minutes. An additional 120 minutes were spent observing common spaces such as hallways, the cafeteria, arrival, and dismissal. Observation data were normed across three TenSquare team members—former leaders and teachers and who have conducted performance audits of multiple K-8 schools across the country.

Documents reviewed include:

- School calendar
- Assessment calendar
- School bell schedule
- Master schedule
- Daily schedules
- Special education teacher schedules
- RTI (Response to Intervention) plans
- Organizational chart
- Assessment performance data for 2015-2016
- Student and teacher demographic data
- Attendance data
- Floor plan of school buildings
- Enrollment data
- Staff, parent, and student handbooks
- Professional Development plans from 2015-16
- English language arts (ELA) and Math scope and sequence documents
- Curriculum materials
- Teacher and school leader observation and evaluation tools
- Pre-service schedules

TenSquare also interviewed a cross-section of school stakeholders through group and individual interviews, including:
- The Principal
- The Vice Principal
- The Bridger Site Administrator
- The Testing Coordinator
- The Special Education Director
- The Leadership Team (with above leaders as one group)
- Classroom teachers (17 total teachers, representing grades K-8)

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III.   Student Performance

Overview of Quest's Student Population

As noted earlier in the Audit, **Quest has experienced a significant enrollment drop this year**—in part due to the closure of the high school. Enrollment across Quest schools, however, has declined by almost 24%, and *50% of students enrolled in school year 2015-16 eligible to return in 2016-17 chose to leave Quest.*

Despite declines in enrollment, however, teachers and leaders expressed a sense of optimism and hope about Quest's future. Teachers also noted that they trusted school leaders, and that parents were appreciative of Quest's efforts to reach out to and engage them as the school year opened. While declines in enrollment are concerning, they are to be expected given the transition the school is currently undergoing.

Quest serves a diverse student population. As Table 1 illustrates, Quest has a higher percentage of African American students and English language learners, compared to Clark County and the state of Nevada.

Table 1: Quest Enrollment by Demographics, compared to County and State

	Asian	African American	Hispanic	White	Two + races	SPED	ELL	FRL
Nevada 2014-15	6%	10%	41%	35%	6%	12%	16%	53%
Clark County 2014-15	6%	13%	45%	28%	6%	12%	18%	58%
Alexander 2016-17	2%	**37%**	39%	*14%*	8%	*4%*	**43%**	*45%*
Bridger 2016-17	2%	**30%**	**50%**	*18%*	8%	10%	**37%**	*48%*
Torrey Pines 2016-17	5%	**28%**	*29%*	27%	8%	13%	**22%**	*26%*

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Analysis of Student Performance Data

To gain a better understanding of student performance overall, student performance was analyzed on the state standardized assessment, Smarter Balanced (SBAC), on the ACT ASPIRE, and the Renaissance Star 360. Analysis of the predictive benchmark tool, Acuity, was also conducted. This section provides an analysis of student achievement outcomes on those assessments, to the extent that the data were available.

Data limitations—The Smarter Balanced (SBAC—Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium) assessment is the state accountability tool currently used to evaluate Quest students' annual achievement. SBAC results for 2014-15 are not publicly available, and high level 2015-16 state SBAC results were just released on October 7, 2016, making comparisons challenging. Additionally, student growth percentile data, a cornerstone of the Nevada Performance Framework, were not available.

2013-14 Historical Test Results

To provide some historical context, data from the 2013-14 Nevada state assessment (**not** SBAC), which are the most recent comprehensive results publicly available, are summarized below.

2013-14 data show that there are large fluctuations between the number of Quest students scoring proficient across the grade levels, with proficiency rates varying from 40% to 79% in ELA, and from 7% to 87% in math. In grade 4, Quest students beat the state average in both ELA and math, while grade 8 student scores fell below the state average in both content areas. Data were not available at the campus level for the 2013-14 assessment.

Table 2: Percent of Students Proficient on the Nevada State test in ELA, 2013-14

	State	Clark County	Quest
Grade 3	61%	60%	**73%**
Grade 4	69%	68%	**79%**
Grade 5	68%	66%	71%
Grade 6	61%	58%	57%
Grade 7	62%	61%	**70%**
Grade 8	53%	52%	*40%*

Table 3: Percent of Students Proficient on the Nevada State Test in Math, 2013-14

	State	Clark County	Quest
Grade 3	65%	64%	69%
Grade 4	70%	69%	**87%**
Grade 5	67%	66%	67%
Grade 6	49%	46%	*38%*
Grade 7	54%	53%	49%
Grade 8	37%	37%	*7%*

2015-16 Smarter Balanced (SBAC) Test Results

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For the 2015-16 SBAC assessment, raw data for Quest schools was made available, along with roster data, which allows for comparison by campus. Students receiving a proficient score on the SBAC are considered on track for demonstrating the knowledge and skills necessary for college and career readiness.

Data show that, while there are exceptions in some grades, in general Quest proficiency rates are below the Nevada state average. While more granular SBAC comparisons between Quest and Clark County are not possible yet, we can look at state and Quest performance data within campuses, grades, and major demographic groups (see Tables 5-6 below).

Table 5: Percent of Students Scoring Proficient on SBAC in ELA by Grade Level

2015-16 SBAC	Nevada	Torrey Pines	Bridger	Roberson
All Grades	48%	*45%*	*33%*	
Grade 3	48%	*45%*	*8%*	
Grade 4	49%	*44%*	*36%*	
Grade 5	52%	**57%**		
Grade 6	43%	**46%**		
Grade 7	49%	*31%*		
Grade 8	49%			*12%*

Table 6: Percent of Students Scoring Proficient on SBAC in Math by Grade Level

2015-16 SBAC	Nevada	Torrey Pines	Bridger	Roberson
All Grades	34%	*31%*	*11%*	
Grade 3	47%	*40%*	*19%*	
Grade 4	40%	*38%*	*0%*	
Grade 5	34%	*33%*	*7%*	
Grade 6	32%	**33%**		
Grade 7	31%	*11%*		
Grade 8	19%			*6%*

Proficiency rates at the Torrey Pines campus are within ten percentage points of the state average, and often closer.

The rates for Bridger and Roberson are extremely low, however, compared to the state average. Quest may want to review these data with the state for accuracy. Proficiency rates at the Bridger campus are of extreme concern**.** In math, *zero* students in fourth grade scored proficient on the state assessment. Rates for the 8th grade students at Roberson are also alarmingly low.

Table 7: Percent of Students Scoring Proficient on SBAC by Demographic Group

Students by Demographic	Nevada		Quest	
	Math	**ELA**	**Math**	**ELA**
All Students	34%	48%	*28%*	*43%*
Asian	58%	72%	**71%**	**77%**
Black/African American	16%	31%	*10%*	*24%*
Caucasian/white	47%	61%	*30%*	*47%*
Hispanic	24%	38%	25%	36%
Two or More Races	41%	57%	*28%*	*47%*
Pacific Islander	34%	48%	**38%**	50%
Female	33%	54%	*26%*	*49%*
Male	35%	43%	*26%*	*33%*
SPED	12%	14%	11%	*9%*
ELL	15%	17%	*4%*	**21%**
Economically Disadvantaged	24%	37%	*15%*	*30%*

In looking at demographic breakdowns, we see that Asian students are the highest performing group at Quest, outperforming their peers in the state in both math and reading. Students identifying as Hispanic and Pacific Islander are performing similarly to their peers in the rest of the state.

Students identifying as white, African American, two or more races, and economically disadvantaged, however, are underperforming their peers in the state by a wide margin. Additionally, ELL students outperform their peers at the state on the ELA assessment, but underperform their peers in math; only 4% of ELL students at Quest are scoring proficient in math. Overall, special education students and ELL students have the lowest rates of proficiency, followed closely by African American and economically disadvantaged students.

Currently ELL students' services are solely provided in an afterschool voluntary program. There are no ELL teachers on staff. Families are notified that their child is eligible to stay afterschool to engage in a computer learning program designed for ELL students. Families can choose to opt out of the programming. Quest was unable to provide more data regarding this initiative. This program should be evaluated further to determine its effectiveness in serving ELL students' needs.

While there are areas of strength at Quest, it should be noted that across the board, more than half of Quest students are not demonstrating college and career readiness on state exams. Overall, performance appears stronger in ELA across all grades, campuses, and demographic groups. When the new Nevada accountability framework is finalized, however, Quest schools will be at risk of being identified as focus or priority schools, given that the Quest SBAC average is below the state, and SBAC results will likely be a cornerstone of the framework.

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Local Testing

ACT Aspire

The ACT Aspire is a norm-referenced assessment aligned to the Common Core State Standards and predictive of the ACT. The ACT Aspire test is administered at Quest to students in grades 3, 4, 6, and 7.

Quest provided aggregate level ACT Aspire data for all Quest campuses combined for school year 2015-16, so comparisons and deep analyses are limited. Table 16 below shows the percent of students scoring "Ready" on the ACT Aspire in 2015-16, along with the national average of students scoring "Ready" for each grade level.

Table 8: Percent of Students at Scoring Ready on ACT Aspire, 2015-16

Content	ELA		Math	
Grade	National	Quest	National	Quest
3	71%	*41%*	50%	51%
4	69%	*40%*	45%	**51%**
6	68%	*42%*	43%	**54%**
7	71%	*25%*	34%	*15%*

Quest is overall on track with national norms on the ACT Aspire in Math for grades 3, 4, and 6, but is underperforming the national average fairly significantly in grade 7.

In ELA, Quest underperformed the national average across the board by at least 25 percentage points. Again in grade 7, Quest student scores fell significantly below the national average. Achievement of students in grade 7 is of great concern, especially given the large difference in achievement between grades 6 and 7.

Demographic breakdowns were provided for grades 3 and 4, and are included in Table 17. Demographic breakdowns for grades 6 and 7 were not available.

Table 9: Quest students scoring ready on ACT Aspire by demographic group, 2015-16

	Female	Male	Asian	Black/African American	Hispanic	White
Reading	44%	38%	78%	23%	31%	48%
Math	53%	50%	89%	37%	40%	60%
n size	116	125	18	57	71	92

In grades 3 and 4, female students outperformed male students. Asian students were the highest performing, though it should be noted that they comprise a much smaller percent of the total test taking population. Black/African-American students performed the lowest.

Renaissance STAR 360

Quest administers the STAR 360 assessment as a performance monitoring assessment for all students in grades K-8 with increased frequency for ELL students and students in RTI. This targeting for increased frequency is determined by Quest and was not clear to auditors. While

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student level data were provided, given the small number of students taking the assessment, inferences cannot be made to the larger Quest population.

For students participating in the assessment, students at Torrey Pines seem to be making growth at all grade levels. Students in higher grade levels at the Bridger campus, however, were not making adequate growth in school year 2015-16. A half-year of growth is .5. See table 18 below.

Table 18: Growth on the STAR Assessment (in years), 2015-16

Grade	Bridger		Torrey Pines	
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math
K	0.5	**0.7**	0.6	0.6
1	**1**	**1.1**	**1.0**	**1.2**
2	**0.8**	**1.1**	**0.8**	**1.0**
3	0.6	**0.7**	**0.7**	**0.9**
4	0.5	0.5	**1.4**	**1.3**
5	0.6	0.6	**0.8**	**1.1**
6	n/a	n/a	0.6	**1.1**

The majority of participating students at Torrey Pines appear to be meeting growth targets (that have been set by Quest of one grade level), while participating students at Bridger are growing, but not meeting all targets.

Given that participating students are identified by the school for progress monitoring based on need, Quest would first need to confirm that both campuses are identifying eligible students and implementing practices in the same way prior to being able to make accurate comparisons between the campuses on STAR growth.

It is concerning that that students are meeting growth targets on STAR, and math norms on ACT Aspire, but overall achievement and especially LEP achievement on the SBAC are extremely low. There also appears to be a disconnect between the ELA and Math performance on SBAC and the ACT Aspire. This may indicate that the ACT Aspire and STAR assessments aren't administered with fidelity by Quest, or that the ACT Aspire and STAR are not aligned to the rigor of SBAC.

Summary Findings

- On state tests in 2013-14 and 2015-16, Quest student performance was inconsistent across grade levels, and 8th grade results were especially low.
- Within Quest, proficiency rates generally decrease as grade level increases, indicating that students are becoming more off track as they progress through grade levels at Quest.
- Within Quest, proficiency rates for Black/African American, special education, ELL and economically disadvantaged students are significantly below the Quest average, and below peer performance at the state.
- The Renaissance STAR 360 is only used with a targeted group of ELL students, but students appear to generally be meeting growth targets.
- ACT Aspire and STAR performance data conflict with SBAC performance data and can therefore lead to the false conclusion that students are adequately prepared for success in high school and in college and careers.

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Summary Recommendations

- Implement immediate instructional improvements; ensure that instruction is Common Core aligned—designed to increase rigor and improve students' readiness for success on annual state exams.
- Implement targeted RTI (Response to Intervention) program and other instructional support strategies designed to meet the needs of struggling students. Ensure that instruction and intervention and support programs are differentiated to meet the needs of English language learners, students with disabilities, and students who are identified as economically disadvantaged. Ensure that strategies are also designed to close achievement gaps between different racial groups as well.
- Once comprehensive SBAC data are available, review them to determine student, classroom, grade-level, and campus-based trends, strengths, and challenges to address student learning needs and improve student achievement.
- Determine the purpose of administering ACT Aspire and STAR assessments. Review alignment of interim assessments to Common Core/SBAC content and rigor. Ensure interim assessments are aligned, intentional, and provide data for instruction that are incorporated into professional development.
- Monitor and evaluate the afterschool ELL program for effectiveness and compliance.

IV. School Culture

Overview

It is clear from interviews and observations that Quest has worked diligently to establish a safe learning environment for all of its students. There is mutual respect among the staff and student body, school leaders care deeply for Quest, and the new leadership team has stabilized the school.

Given the turmoil surrounding transitions and the uncertain fate of the school, this transformation was no easy task. The strong positive culture sets a great foundation for the instructional work that must follow.

All campuses effectively utilize policies and procedures to create a safe and inviting learning environment. TenSquare observed students and teachers interacting in a respectful manner at all three campuses. More than 85% of students observed in classrooms were on-task and engaged in the lesson. Students completed instructional tasks and volunteered responses in class appropriately. Each campus reported that there were fewer than 17 suspensions across all three campuses last year. We did observe one middle school classroom where student behavior seemed to be an outlier. In this classroom, the teacher's directions were completely ignored by students, and as a result, very little learning occurred.

Student transitions, with a few exceptions, were generally orderly and efficient. Additional adults came out into the halls or onto walkways and assisted teachers. Students followed all directions and accepted re-directions/corrections as needed. Adults respectfully provided clear directions and praised students when they met the expectations. Students were smiling and eager to participate in activities.

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Despite a high level of student and staff turnover, K-2 classrooms at all campuses have a warm and inviting culture. The audit team observed a strong school culture in the majority of K-2 classrooms. During classroom observations, students were engaged and eager to participate. Classrooms were colorful and robustly decorated. As students transitioned between arrival and dismissal, they were eager to begin their school day and were well-behaved. Students listened to teacher directions, did not call out of turn, stayed seated and were focused on their classwork. During teacher interviews, many teachers who have returned for 2015-2016 year noted that they made their decision based on the high levels of parent and family engagement. They expressed that parents are invested and involved in the school community. This was particularly true of Alexander campus teachers. They noted that they love teaching at Quest and the Quest community because "it feels like a family" and a "bubble" they do not want to burst.

Teachers have noted a positive change in culture this year under the school leaders. In TenSquare's interviews, teachers acknowledged a positive change in culture since the school has been under the new principal's leadership. In Quest's previous history, there were a myriad of transitions and relocations, most of which were not transparently communicated to faculty, staff, and families, creating a culture of instability and uncertainty. Teachers had concerns that they were not being supported, that they might get fired without warning, or that the school would close abruptly, leaving them without a job.

This year, in contrast, TenSquare noted ubiquitous remarks from teachers and staff that the school is running much more smoothly. One teacher stated that "this year seems more organized; we have more of a direction," crediting the new principal and vice principal as the motivators behind this positive cultural change. Another teacher stated that despite the extensive turnover and loss of great families. "I stay because of the principal." Every Bridger campus teacher interviewed expressed how thankful they are for the Site Administrator's leadership. They believe she is very good at communicating with families and building a sense of community at Bridger. It is clear that this leadership team is working diligently to shift the culture of uncertainty and mistrust that was once a fixture at Quest in prior years.

Though all the campuses appear to have a warm and welcoming school culture, Quest lacks a culture of accountability and high-performance for adults. The teachers at Quest unanimously lauded the amount of autonomy that they feel they have teaching at a charter school versus teaching at a Clark County school. During interviews, teachers stated, "we have so much freedom in lesson planning, curriculum, and classroom culture" compared to the Clark County School District public schools. Teachers referred to these schools as "regimented" and rife with paperwork and micromanagement.

Charter schools, and their teachers, are given more freedom and flexibility by definition; however, this freedom and flexibility *must* be tied directly to student learning and outcomes, or students may fail to learn.

Teaching in charter schools does not mean that teachers are completely free of instructional expectations, deliverables, tracking, or paperwork. It was evident in discussions with Quest teachers and leaders, however, that *instructional and organizational freedom are the main focal*

point, and draw, of its charter school. To build a culture of achievement for students and high performance for adults, accountability practices must be established and enforced through systems of specialized professional development; data-driven instruction; and regular, helpful instructional feedback from leadership.

The Torrey Pines campus is not ideally suited to meet the needs of the student body. The Quest Torrey Pines campus is divided across grade levels: K-2 students are in an enclosed building connected to a playground and parking lot; 3-8 grade students' classes are divided among two trailers (referred to as "portables") and another free-standing building that has entry points into classrooms only from the outside. While faculty, staff, and leaders use the space very efficiently for pickup and drop-off car lines, the setup of the campus is not conducive to a culture of community. Students (and staff) are dispersed across large swaths of parking lots, grassless fields, and an amalgamation of structures housing their classrooms.

During teacher interviews, teachers shared that some parents did not deem the campus to be safe and therefore did not re-enroll. Three weeks into the 2015-2016 school year, the area around the Torrey Pines campus was ungated. This was a major cause of concern from parents who believed the level of safety at the Torrey Pines campus would not match the level at the Alexander campus. This was primarily due to the proximity of a major roadway and an open campus. This resulted in families exiting Quest after completing Kindergarten at the Alexander campus.

TenSquare observed 3-8 grade physical education classes at Torrey Pines being held outside on the pavement, in dusty courtyards, or across empty parking lots in elevated temperatures. In interviews with Torrey Pines K-2 teachers, teachers noted that the Torrey Pines K-2 playground facility was not conducive to healthy, clean play for its younger students. Woodchips on the playground were unsanitary, and rife with cigarette butts and other debris—they kick up dust and dirt while young students are playing during recess. There are no outdoor water fountains in place, creating a managerial predicament for teachers as they are responsible for watching students on the playground while attempting to ensure students are comfortable, clean, and hydrated in elevated temperatures.

Summary Findings

- There are many examples of positive behavior in the school. Students are respectful of teachers and one another. K-2 classrooms, in particular, have a warm and inviting culture.
- Teachers have noted a positive change in culture this year under the leadership of the new principal and vice principal.
- Despite the creation of a warm and inviting culture for students and a more positive culture for adults, Quest lacks a culture of achievement for students and high performance for adults. Adults are focused on individual freedom, not overall accountability for student learning, the cornerstone of high-performing charter schools.
- The perceived lack of safety and security and adequate facilities at the Torrey Pines campus poses deeper challenges for Quest and has implications for future enrollment growth.

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Summary Recommendations

- To build a culture of achievement for students and high performance for adults, accountability practices must be established and enforced through systems of specialized professional development, data-driven instruction, and instructional feedback. Leaders must work to build a Quest culture that is BOTH 1) warm and engaging for students, staff, and families, and 2) also permeated with high expectations for student learning and achievement, and high performance from adults. This means focusing everyone's work—teachers, staff, counselors and school leaders—on improving student learning. Leaders must shift everyone's thinking, so that every staff member is focused on their "responsibility" to work together to improve student outcomes.
- The leadership team should continue working diligently to shift the culture of uncertainty and mistrust that was once a fixture at Quest.
- To address families' concerns, all Quest campuses should communicate safety and security as a priority to families, so they are able to retain students as they move up to new grade levels (and new campuses). Quest should also continue to conduct outreach to and build partnerships with families and the community, to stem enrollment losses and build future enrollment growth.

V.   Leadership

Overview

The findings and observations below are based on interviews with individuals, a focus group conversation with the Quest leadership team, a review of school- and school-system level data and documents, and both classroom and school wide observations and interviews with teachers and staff at each campus.

Currently, Quest is managed by a team of three academic leaders: the principal, who is responsible for the Alexander and Torrey Pines campuses; the vice principal, who also supports those campuses and reports to the principal; and the Bridger Site Administrator, who is responsible for the Bridger campus. Though the site administrator technically reports to the principal, she appears to operate the Bridger campus fairly autonomously. Since this leadership configuration is rather new—and was frankly created to address an immediate need for school leadership—the roles and responsibilities of each administrator have not yet been fully defined.

It's important to emphasize that many of the problems facing Quest have undoubtedly been with the school for some time and it would be terribly unfair to assign blame for the issues raised in this section to the new administration that has been at the job for only a few months and under difficult circumstances. In fact many of these issues are to be expected given the school's history. Now that the Board and former administrators have been replaced and the school has uncovered the areas of neglect, the school can begin to "heal" and rebuild with a new, much stronger, foundation.

Leaders have not yet identified and communicated school-wide learning goals. It appears that the leaders have devoted most of their time and energy to ensuring that the schools are up and running this year, and that the transition from the old leadership to the new builds trust with parents and families. The Leadership team was unable to articulate clear, measurable goals for the school this year, or identify the specific practices in place that would achieve those goals. It became clear in interviews that Quest leadership team members have not yet identified a clear set of school-wide goals that can be used to guide performance during the school year.

The principal stated that the goals for the school year were "growth," "to have "80-90% of kids' on grade level," and to get K-3 students "reading proficiently." When each leadership team member was asked about their own goals, however, they could not express a connection back to school-wide goals. For example, the special education director shared that she wanted the school to be "fully inclusive," and the Bridger Site Administrator expressed that she wanted to see increased test scores and an increased "home and school connection." While admirable and important, these goals were not tied to a clear set of overall school improvement goals.

At a school like Quest, where more than half of the students are not adequately prepared for college and career readiness, the entire team must shift their focus to measurable indicators such as SBAC scores, performance on baseline and interim assessments, and increasing the quality of instructional practices.

Leaders currently lack clear job descriptions and an evaluation system for measuring success. When asked to explain how the leadership team members would measure their growth and success this year, some team members responded that they lacked clear job descriptions, measures of success, or an evaluation system to evaluate leaders' success. None of the Quest leadership team members could clearly explain the vision or process for how they would be supervised and managed in their roles during the 2016-2017 school year.

A high-functioning school leadership team is characterized by clear structures for performance management, linked to organization-wide, measurable goals to ensure that all team members are supporting the school's top priorities and can receive ongoing feedback on their efforts. Each leadership team member should have a clear job description, clear evaluation rubric, and short term and long term goals with measures of success for his/her position.

Now that Quest has made it through the critical beginning of year transition, it must develop and implement a comprehensive leadership evaluation system, ensure that leaders have clear job descriptions, and that each leader's individual goals are tied to overall school performance. This is one concrete way to set expectations and goals, and monitor progress. Accountability and success cannot be attained if such systems are not in place.

Academic leaders are unable to best use their time to meaningfully impact instruction and student achievement. Currently, the principal's daily schedule is largely focused on non-instructional matters. The principal spends much of her days in meetings with parents and PTO members, on traffic duty, in activity meetings, dealing with substitute teachers, dealing with before and after care issues, meeting with the counselor three days a week, and in grade level team

meetings to aid teams that are not working well together.

The site administrator at the Bridger campus appears to be able to devote more of her time to supporting instructional staff. Teachers report seeing her regularly in classrooms, working with students and providing feedback and support for teachers. Auditors witnessed her working with several students during intervention block. In her interview, she spoke about meeting with teachers and providing feedback on a weekly basis, and currently, the Bridger campus appears to be the only Quest campus where teachers have regularly scheduled meetings to receive feedback.

While it is evident that the site administrator sees the value of providing clear expectations and following up with teachers, when asked to elaborate on the type of feedback she provide, however, she was unable to articulate what components and levers for change drive her feedback. In order to enhance the effectiveness of these meetings, the administrator must strategically plan and implement an agenda with clear goals and outcomes for these meetings.

The principal must also shift her schedule, to allow time to observe instruction, conduct regular classroom walkthroughs, and provide focused instructional feedback to staff.

Academic leaders' assessments of teachers' performance do not align with classroom observations. Academic leaders were asked to share insights about their teaching staff. Each academic leader listed struggling and top teachers. Auditors then compared the academic leaders' assessments with the auditors' observations. In some instances the "top teachers," however, were seen as some of the more struggling teachers during observations. Several teachers that the auditors listed as struggling were not listed by the academic leaders as such.

This discrepancy was particularly evident at the Torrey Pines campus. Auditors consistently observed that "top teachers" provided poor direct instruction and their classrooms displayed low levels of student engagement.

This points to a clear disconnect between academic leaders' perceptions and the observed reality of their "top teachers'" teaching skills. This misalignment can stem from a number of sources. One issue may be that academic leaders are not in classrooms with enough frequency to gauge teacher performance. Another issue may be that academic leaders do not know how to best observe, assess, and improve teaching skills.

Leaders lack training in how to use classroom observation feedback to improve instruction. A review of observation forms illustrates a lack of training in the area of providing actionable feedback that will significantly impact student performance. One observation form, for example, listed an employee's only short term goal as "plan and execute one team outing within three months to build staff cohesiveness." Staff cohesiveness is not an appropriate short term goal for a teacher; it lacks any direct impact on student achievement.

Another employee's observation form stated, "Great job! You had students recall information" as evidence of higher order thinking. Recall is actually the lowest level on Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Domains and does not address the critical skill of higher order thinking.

Although leaders are clearly committed to providing feedback and support, it is not clear that the feedback and support provided is laser focused on the highest leverage action steps for teachers.

Walkthroughs by instructional leaders do not appear to be strategic, nor do they focus on appropriate teaching skills. Structured classroom walkthroughs are a highly effective practice for providing teachers with brief, helpful feedback on a regular basis. To achieve maximum impact, walkthroughs must be consistent and laser focused on strategies that will meaningfully impact student achievement. From observations and interviews, it is clear that leaders would benefit from additional training in this area.

One leader shared that she walks through the classrooms whenever she is able to do so, but doesn't have a schedule or a set rotation. When asked what she looks for, she stated that she checks to make sure teachers are "doing okay and have everything they need." Another leader noted that she walks around every day, but does not typically provide regular feedback based on her walkthroughs of the classrooms.

Teachers confirmed that leaders visit their class for a minute, but leaders often focus on whether teachers have adequate supplies or just check to see how things are going. Teachers report that they do not typically receive clear and focused feedback on instruction.

Summary Findings

- Leaders have been focused on school transition and building school community; they have not yet identified and communicated a clear set of school-wide student learning and achievement goals.
- Leaders currently lack a leadership evaluation system, clear job descriptions, and goals tied to overall school performance.
- Academic leaders are unclear on how to best use their time to meaningfully impact instruction and student achievement
- Leadership team members lack training on how best to use classroom observation and feedback to improve student learning and teacher practice.

Summary Recommendations:

- Now that the school year is underway—and Quest leaders have built a solid foundation for the year—Quest must shift its attention articulating clear goals for student achievement and leaders must develop and communicate a focused set of priorities that will make immediate and sustained impacts on student achievement.
- Quest should implement an evaluation system that enables leaders to be evaluated against a set of clear and measurable goals that are tied to their job descriptions and school- and campus-level outcomes.
- Academic leaders should delegate and restructure daily schedules to allow the maximum amount of time to be spent in classrooms and working with teachers (and other school leaders) to improve instruction.
- School leaders should receive training on teacher observation best practices, including

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what to look for and appropriate frequency, how to provide feedback, and how to use structured classroom observations to improve student learning and achievement.

VI.   Academic Program

Overview

The academic program is comprised of the curriculum, instructional delivery, access to and integration of technology, and teacher coaching and professional development. Findings and recommendations are based on an in-depth review of policy and practice documents, curriculum and instructional resources, interviews with teachers and leaders, and classroom observation data.

Curriculum

With the level of rigor and preparation demanded by the Common Core, it is crucial to provide teachers with high-quality, standards-aligned materials to set them up for success. High performing schools have spent the past three years updating their curricula in anticipation of Common Core adoption.

Quest uses the following curriculum supports and resources:
Core Knowledge Language Arts (2014), for grades K-5
Core Knowledge Social Studies and Science (2014), for grades K-8
Go Math (2014), for grades K-8
Various novels and Holt's Elements of Literature (2009), for grades 6-8

Although the Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) is a Common Core-aligned curriculum, teachers lack resources to implement it effectively. CKLA is a heavily-scripted curriculum requiring teachers to "stick to the script," meaning they generally follow the pacing calendar and recommended activities.

The audit team found, however, that Quest teachers have misconceptions about the curriculum due to lack of training. A Kindergarten teacher specifically noted that the last time CKLA came to Quest for a training was during the 2014-2015 school year. This is problematic for a variety of reasons. As questions regarding the curriculum arise and teachers are forced to make instructional decisions based on the needs of their class, they do not have an expert explaining the rationale for the scope and sequence or pedagogy. Consequently, teachers change pacing or veer off script to incorporate teacher-produced materials that are not vetted for alignment to the Common Core.

Additionally, some teachers noted that the curriculum is too rigorous for their students and does not incorporate enough grammar. For example, Kindergarten teachers are expected to teach three-four letters per week and the "ch and "sh" sound together. Some teachers find this to be "confusing" and too rigorous, so they slow their pace—which is not a CKLA recommendation.

Since there is no continuous coaching or professional development around the implementation of CKLA, teachers do not fully understand the scope and sequence and the need to maintain a rigorous pace. As a result, they do not appear to be implementing the curriculum with fidelity.

Go Math does not meet the criteria for rigor and standards of mathematical practice in grades K-8, and therefore provides students with inadequate preparation for SBAC assessments. In interviews, teachers expressed very positive feedback regarding the Go Math curriculum, exclaiming that they "love it" and that it is easy to supplement and differentiate. Observations of math classes at the Torrey Pines campus concluded that 100% of teachers were integrating the curriculum into their instruction but with little to no observable differentiation, scaffolding, or remediation strategies.

The team concluded that teachers like Go Math for three main reasons: first, the entire curriculum is guided for students. Rather than solving problems and writing about their solutions, as required on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) summative end-of-year statewide exam in Nevada, students work out of workbooks and fill in missing blanks with numbers and vocabulary words as they follow along with the teacher's instruction. Without the burden of performance-task problem-solving, instruction is more straightforward and undoubtedly leads to easier comprehension.

Second, in following the Go Math curriculum, teachers are not required to plan rigorously, or challenge students with higher-order questioning. Quest teachers rely heavily on the "Enrichment" and "Re-Teach" packets, available in easy tear-out form for each lesson, to give to students with varying levels of skill, depending on whether the teacher feels the student is ahead of the class (and in need of "Enrichment"), or behind (and in need of a "Re-Teach").

Finally, it was commonly observed that teachers use GoMath instructional videos in place of direct instruction, which does not provide an appropriate amount of engagement for students to understand, interact with new concepts, and develop the rigorous mathematical thinking and reasoning skills they will need to be successful on the SBAC.

The middle school literacy curriculum resources are outdated and not aligned to the Nevada state standards. For middle school English language arts (ELA), Quest uses a 2009 version Holt's *Elements of Literature*. Although *Elements of Literature* is a well-known basal curriculum, this outdated version is not Common Core-aligned and therefore does not provide students with appropriate levels of rigor that will help them reach the levels of critical thinking required for success.

The newer versions of *Elements of Literature* identify the appropriate Lexile level for each reading selection, as well as provide a quantitative and a qualitative analysis of the text. The versions in use at middle school level do not include this analysis. Texts with identified Lexile levels help teachers make their questions "text-dependent." Common Core updated materials also ensure that 50% of reading selections are nonfiction. In addition, newer curriculum materials prompt students to use examples from the text to justify their answers, use close reading, include source analysis, and use a rich vocabulary to build students' background knowledge—all essential 21st Century communication skills.

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Because middle school teachers lack up to date texts, teachers are left to use outdated materials or supplement with materials they have found on their own. In a school with relatively high teacher turnover, like Quest, the lack of proven curriculum resources is a significant risk to teacher effectiveness and student achievement.

Without clear guidance, teachers are incorrectly using remediation programming. Teachers' current use of MobyMax for both enrichment and differentiation should be reexamined. MobyMax, a supplemental computer curriculum used in K-8 classrooms at Quest, is an adaptive program that recognizes patterns of mistakes that students make and adjusts itself to target areas where students are struggling, and to support student mastery. MobyMax is known for "finding and fixing learning gaps" and as such, is a powerful tool to use for student remediation.

At Quest, though, teachers are using this program without differentiation. Students in need of enrichment and remediation are using the program. While MobyMax has proven to be effective for remediating skill deficits, it has not been proven to be effective for advanced students in need of enrichment. It would be much more productive for math teachers to separate their classes based on skill level (using STAR test results or classroom assessment data), and only assign MobyMax to those students exhibiting gaps in understanding in a certain skill area.

A program like MobyMax can be an effective tracking tool for teachers to assess student progress and mastery. Through TenSquare's observations and interviews with teachers, it was not evident that teachers were using this tool to track student growth. Tracking students will allow teachers to adjust their instruction based on class need, reassess comprehension, and determine Nevada state test readiness.

Instruction

TenSquare visited 39 classrooms at each of the three campuses over the course of four days. Three auditors observed classes for 15-20 minutes at a time. Due to a schedule change, all but one core academic classroom teacher was observed over the course of the observation period.

Most Quest teachers are delivering instruction at a "basic" level. Of the teachers observed in 39 classrooms, only 10% of teachers are delivering instruction at a high level, 66% are delivering instruction at a basic level and need coaching, and 23% of teachers need intensive coaching and development.

Since there are no clear expectations or a shared vision for what excellent instruction should look like at Quest, instruction lacks focus, consistency and intentionality. Typically, school leadership is responsible for communicating a vision for instructional excellence and implementing a framework to support best practice. In high-performing schools, this vision is evident throughout the school—leaders and teachers can clearly articulate the vision and we see it in practice throughout classrooms.

During observations at Quest, however, it became clear that instruction lacks focus and intentionality. The primary indicators that were used to make this determination included:

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inconsistency across objective boards; the lack of a posted and detailed agenda; and a lack of grade-level appropriate opportunities for teachers to check student progress (checks for understanding) and data-driven instruction.

Across campuses, standards and objectives were not posted or written consistently across grade levels. The daily agenda (including time allotments and content taught) was not posted across grade levels and/or was not adhered to with fidelity. Following a daily schedule will ensure that class time is used productively and that there is ample opportunity within class time to differentiate instruction.

Instruction is also inconsistent across grade levels and campuses. At Torrey Pines, for example, one Kindergarten teacher we observed was introducing students to one letter sound, while another Kindergarten teacher at the Alexander campus was introducing other letters in the alphabet, indicating that teachers are not all following the scripted curriculum.

In addition, teachers were not using differentiated techniques to teach content. For example, some 1st grade classes at Torrey Pines used manipulatives to teach their math content while others were simply relied on direct instruction throughout the lesson, with no small group, individualized, or other evidence of differentiated instruction. Lastly, we observed very little student work on the walls. The work that was displayed was not exemplary (rife with spelling and content errors) and lacked evidence that it was designed to exemplify a particular learning standard or process.

Teachers use benchmark testing with fidelity across campuses, but there is no school wide process for using interim assessment data to improve student progress and achievement. Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) benchmarks are administered throughout the year to assess student progress and instructional efficacy. It was clear that students participate in the STAR benchmark testing during the appropriate window, and that teachers receive limited training on how to aggregate and interpret class scores.

Only a few teachers, however, referenced benchmark data and how they use data to improve instruction—through practices like differentiation, grouping, and pacing. Observations indicate that interim assessment data are not being used universally to support differentiated instruction or remediation in the classroom. One teacher noted that early September STAR data are not even considered in her Kindergarten classroom until the end of December, during which time "everyone catches up" in learning the letters of the alphabet, and she is then able group and differentiate students. By the time the baseline data are used, they are not applicable—a third of the school year has passed, and outdated student results are no longer relevant.

To launch a "data-driven instruction" initiative at Quest, teachers will need to obtain proper training on how to interpret data, how to create and implement any necessary re-teaching plans based on test results, and how to design effective small-group instruction to meet students' individual needs. Quest will also need to implement an accountability system to monitor how well teachers are using data to inform their instruction, and to provide feedback on their data-driven instruction. Teachers should be guided through data meetings that include analysis of teacher-, student- and grade-level data. This intentional, continuous cycle of data collection and analysis, through SBAC aligned practice tests, exit tickets and benchmark assessments, will promote

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strategically informed instruction.

The lack of differentiated instruction will prevent all students from making academic gains.
Differentiated instruction is based on the understanding that differences in how students learn have
a significant impact on their achievement. Principles of differentiated instruction include the
following:

- learning begins from a student's point of readiness
- a safe, non-threatening and respectful learning environment is vital to student achievement
- high expectations of success by all are matched by tasks that provide a high degree of
  challenge for the individual
- essential concepts can be effectively presented in a variety of forms.[1]

Across K-8 classrooms, the audit team found that differentiated instruction was inconsistent and
often completely lacking. Teachers spent a disproportionate amount of time on whole group
instruction. There was some evidence of small group work, but this was inconsistent across grade
levels. Though K-2 teachers incorporated some variety of instructional techniques, for example,
we saw no evidence of varied instructional techniques in grades 3-8 (e.g., use of learning
manipulatives) to appeal to different types of learners. Observed classrooms relied heavily on
teacher-led, whole-group instruction. Furthermore, there was little differentiation between the
instructional strategies and materials used to teach accelerated and non-accelerated classes.
Teachers noted that the same curriculum is being used across classes, with slight pacing
adjustments.

We also found no evidence of RTI (Response to Intervention—a proven method for addressing
students' varied learning and socio-emotional needs through tiered supports and interventions)
implementation; nor a structure or accountability framework in place for leaders to provide
support to and hold teachers accountable for differentiating instruction.

The majority of K-8 classroom instruction lacked appropriate grade-level rigor. While the
majority of elementary classrooms demonstrated engaging, appropriate instructional strategies, the
level of rigor was often low. This was also the case in middle school classrooms.

In most classrooms, the vast majority of students showed high levels of engagement, demonstrated
by 90-100% participation, tracking of the teacher, and appropriate behavior during call and
response activities. Students followed teacher directions, adhered to routines and procedures
enabling swift transitions, and were eager to participate when invited to provide a response during
classroom discussions.

While engagement was high and instructional strategies were appropriately implemented,
however, students were not given an opportunity to engage in rigorous levels of instruction.
Throughout the course of the observations, teachers did not 1) give students adequate time to work
independently on an assigned task that was not teacher led; 2) ask higher-order thinking questions

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[1]

http://www.edugains.ca/resourcesDI/Brochures/DIBrochureOct08.pdf

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that would push students to think outside of the scripted curriculum; 3) give students opportunities to express their mathematical reasoning in either written or oral form.

Although the curriculum used in elementary classrooms aligns with Common Core standards, the lack of rigor observed in the classrooms poses deeper challenges in terms of preparing students for success on the Smarter Balanced assessment. The current SBAC exams include writing at every grade level, more open-ended questions instead of multiple choice questions, and questions where students must demonstrate real research, writing, and problem-solving skills. In grades 3-5, 40-50% of the exam requires students to think beyond recalling concepts and procedures. For this portion of the exam, students are expected to independently problem-solve, model and analyze data, and communicate reasoning. Given the demands of the SBAC and the lack of rigor currently observed in K-8 classrooms, it is clear that students are not being appropriately prepared for the high stakes end-of-year assessment.

Quest's use of highly-scripted curriculum materials is problematic. The current Quest curriculum is tightly scripted and requires teachers to provide direct instruction. In many mathematics classrooms we observed, however, teachers are using videos in place of the traditional, direct-instruction portion of a mathematics lesson. Videos alone cannot adequately prepare students with enough conceptual understanding to work out problems independently.

Moreover, a downside of having a scripted curriculum is that teachers do not have an opportunity to internalize student misconceptions prior to delivering a lesson, and they do not necessarily embed opportunities for checks for understanding, or moments within their lesson to gauge student comprehension. In observations, a universal absence of the instructional practice "checking for understanding" was prevalent across grade levels and disciplines. Check for understanding questions or tasks are used to determine valuable information about student comprehension. Not only do regular check for understanding questions pinpoint what students know or don't know, but they can also expose any foundational misconceptions that are hindering student comprehension, or can identify connections students are making from background knowledge to the new concept being taught. The practice of frequent, habitual "check for understanding" questions interspersed into instructional delivery is paramount. They allow teachers to assess what students know and don't know, and make real-time modifications to lesson content and delivery, allowing for more effective and relevant instruction.

Exclusively teacher-led, teacher-driven instruction does not develop students' metacognitive skills. Student-centered learning is a common practice implemented by highly-effective teachers for a number of reasons: it allows students to take ownership of their learning; student involvement makes lessons more meaningful; and it provides the opportunity for teachers to model to students what a "learner" looks like, using self-evaluative and metacognitive, or higher-order thinking skills.

In observations of classroom instruction at Torrey Pines and Bridger, however, we saw very little student-centered learning. Most teachers used lecture-driven direct instruction. Questions were asked and answered largely by the instructors, without giving students the appropriate space and opportunity to arrive at their own conclusions and engage in a discussion justifying their opinions. The ability to substantiate conclusions is a paramount higher-order skill, tested on the Smarter

Balanced summative statewide assessment, and utilized in most middle and secondary school courses across discipline areas.

A lack of accountability for schedule adherence negatively impacts the distribution of time spent on core subjects. In K-3 classrooms observed at Quest, teachers did not consistently adhere to the posted daily schedule. During the course of one observation, a transition from reading to math should have occurred according to the schedule posted in the classroom; however, this transition did not occur and the reading lesson continued throughout the duration of the observation. Similarly, in a 3rd grade classroom we observed, a transition into mathematics should have occurred before the lunch break, but during the 20-minute observation of the period before lunch, it did not.

This is an indication that teachers are not held accountable for pacing and time allocation between disciplines. This is problematic because, within the course of a school-day, exceeding the allotted time for content-level instruction in one subject requires that other instruction be either shortened or entirely removed from the day's schedule. This poses even deeper implications when considering the preparation that is needed for statewide exams. Currently, it is unclear whether the appropriate amount of instructional time is being spent on relevant subjects that will be tested. Adherence to the daily agenda and strict accountability regarding pacing within particular content areas is an integral component of student academic success.

A lack of clear expectations for classroom instructional visual aids has led to a clear disparity between K-3 and 4-8 classrooms' impact on student learning. We found a stark contrast between the quantity and quality of visuals present in the K-3 classrooms we visited, and the 4-8 classrooms we saw. Observers noted that K-3 classroom walls at all campuses were effectively used to aid instruction. These classrooms had numerous posters and visual aids. These included posters on the writing process, number lines, calendars, behavior charts, classroom expectations, agendas, schedules, and various images/visuals related to the current unit of study.

One area of improvement would be to ensure that all student work posted is reflective of high quality and rigor. The Bridger campus walls were filled with student work; however, the majority of the student work was of low quality and filled with misspellings. Only student work of high quality should be posted.

By contrast, grades 4-8 classrooms were sparsely decorated, if at all. This was most evident at the Torrey Pines campus. The walls were generally bare, and the whiteboards blank in many of these classrooms. There was little student work or relevant curriculum materials (anchor charts, posters) posted. When school leaders were asked about classroom visual expectations, they stated that there were no expectations set forth for staff.

A text-rich and visually pleasing, organized classroom environment significantly contributes to students' academic experience. Word Walls, number lines, and other anchor charts provide students with reinforcement and visual cues to supplement the curriculum. High achieving schools set clear expectations for all grade levels on classroom visuals and board configuration. The addition of an agenda, daily objective and homework posting helps students plan for the day and create connections between daily objectives and their learning activities. Lastly, the absence of

class expectations, school-wide norms, and mission statements are a missed opportunity to create and reinforce a Quest identity.

Access to and Integration of Technology

Quest teachers do not incorporate enough relevant, standards-aligned technological exposure and practice for students. Since the 2014-2015 school year, the Nevada Department of Education has required that the statewide Smarter Balance test be administered online to all students, with the exception of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) that have accommodations that would necessitate a print-on-demand test form.[2]

National research shows testing online can have a negative effect on student scores if students are not adequately prepared for this format. Testing on the computer is a cognitively demanding exercise, which requires students to produce copious typed essay responses and also use features and functions that are new and unfamiliar to them. For this reason, during the past two years, high-performing charter schools have allocated significant resources to provide their students with more access to technology. These schools also explicitly teach students about the technology features and functions of the exam during classroom instruction.

Through interviews, teachers confirmed that Quest provides 1:1 laptops for its students. It was observed that some teachers had laptop carts as a fixture in their classrooms. Teachers noted that laptops are used by their classes, on average, anywhere from 2-4 times per week. Teachers employ websites such as "Kahoot," "Class Dojo," and their own created classroom websites that students and parents access as a reference for homework assignments, resources, and announcements.

None of the resources reported by teachers are directly aligned to the standards and skills necessary to be successful on the technology tools and content of the Smarter Balanced assessment, however. Additionally, through the auditors' observation findings across four full school days, we did not observe a single class where teachers integrated laptop use into instruction or student practice. In contrast, many high-performing schools, or schools committed to performance improvement, have created schedules during which students in tested grades receive at least 40 minutes of relevant, standards-based, and state-testing aligned computer preparation daily.

To prepare students for the summative SBAC statewide exam, teachers should integrate technology-based test-preparation via SBAC released digital library items, interim assessments, and other comparable assessment materials that are Common Core aligned. The most effective way for students to prepare for a summative statewide test like the SBAC exam is to practice with released test items from the SBAC, or work with comparative tests that mirror the content and level of rigor of the SBAC exam (PARCC or MCAS). For schools where this is a common practice, students are much better prepared for testing (and learning), because students are not only exposed to realistic test items, but have practiced the stamina, technology requirements, and testing strategies necessary for success.

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[2] "State Assessments & Testing." *Testing/State Assessments*. Nevada Department of Education, Apr. 2015. Web. 1 Oct. 2016.

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Auditors observed that there was not a test-preparation plan in place at Quest to enable relevant and rigorous practice, to allow students to familiarize themselves with the SBAC exam for which the quality of Quest as a school will be held accountable. In making test awareness and preparation a programmatic instructional requirement, Quest can maximize its potential for student success on this summative statewide test.

Teacher Coaching and Evaluation

Teacher coaching and evaluation must be at the center of every school improvement plan. A consistent, focused and intentional coaching and evaluation cycle is one of the most effective methods for improving student outcomes. Although the majority of teachers at Quest have more than three years of teaching experience, the average teacher has been with Quest for fewer than two years. This provides an excellent opportunity to reset expectations and accountability with all teachers through the creation of a substantive coaching and evaluation process.

The existing formal evaluation system does not give teachers enough feedback about their annual performance and has little to no impact on the quality of instructional delivery. Best practices across top-performing charter schools around the country promote a culture of excellent instruction, which includes frequent opportunities for instructional feedback. At Quest, teachers receive one-two evaluations per year, which are used to formally grade the teacher, rather than improve instructional delivery.

During 2015-2016, teachers at Quest noted that they were observed once or twice late in the year. There is evidence to suggest that not all of the instructional staff received an evaluation, but also evidence that the new administrators who had just been put in place understand the importance of observations. That said, the current culture at Quest does not appear to be rooted in continuous teacher development—teachers reported receiving neither constructive criticism nor praise, and it is assumed that a teacher is doing well if he/she does not receive feedback.

To foster best practice, annual performance evaluations should be conducted separately from coaching. Although informal observations could potentially inform some components of the annual teacher evaluation, the quality of instruction will only be improved through a continuous coaching and feedback cycle.

There is no mechanism to provide consistent coaching and feedback for teaching staff. Routine coaching and feedback through teacher observations is among the most impactful methods of teacher improvement. Informal observations provide a structured format for instructional leaders to provide regular, bite-sized, constructive feedback that improves a teacher's practice. They are central to the improvement of instructional practice.

Currently at Quest, there is no mechanism to provide consistent coaching and feedback for the teaching staff. Teachers note that administrators conduct informal "pop-ins" to check in on staff and will, from time to time, leave informal feedback regarding the observed instruction. However, this communication is inconsistent and not aligned to a systematic and formal observation, coaching and feedback loop. Leaders do not provide constructive feedback that pushes a teacher's practice. According to the teachers, many of the walkthroughs are check-ins

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on supply needs. No teacher described informal observations that focused on the delivery of content.

Observations and feedback must be intentionally planned by coaches/academic leaders and systematically tracked to note when teachers are observed and how they are progressing toward their coaching goal. Furthermore, through an intentional focus on clear goals throughout a coaching cycle, teachers will have an opportunity to hone their practice and can move forward with continuous development.

Professional Development

Leaders lack a streamlined, overarching plan for professional development. When asked by TenSquare to explain the professional development (PD) program, we were told that there was none in previous school years.

Initial PD planning this school year appears to be inadequate as well. 2016-17 pre-service professional development focused largely on HR protocols, instead collaborative planning and academic preparation for the upcoming year. New teachers spent two days (8 hours total) in curriculum-focused (Core Knowledge Training, Core Knowledge Language Arts and Go Math) professional development sessions. Returning teachers spent the majority of their pre-service time setting up classrooms and completing HR focused tasks. Returning teachers spent a total of 1.5 hours (out of 37.5 hours), or 4% of total pre-service time, on curriculum topics. Most notably, only a half-an-hour was allocated to curriculum maps and instructional expectations. High performing schools spend more than 75% of their allotted pre-service professional development time on instructional best practices and curriculum focused sessions.

This year, Quest will have four PD days throughout the year. Leaders mentioned that these would become data days, but they have not yet developed a clear plan for how these days will be used. PD sessions have clearly-focused topics, intentional agendas, and time for teachers to practice and work collaboratively to analyze data and plan instruction.

Teachers are eager to improve their instruction and expressed an overwhelming interest in professional development as a means to make academic gains. Through TenSquare's interviews with teachers, it became clear that there was a unanimous desire for teachers to receive professional development opportunities through Quest. A historical lack of focused professional development at Quest, however, has led teachers to seek and pay for professional development on their own. Teachers are eager to improve their skills, learn innovative approaches, advance their understanding and implementation of the curricula, and satisfy Nevada State Licensure renewal requirements for educators.

Providing relevant and frequent professional development opportunities will enhance teacher's and leaders' practice, improve student outcomes and prevent Quest from losing valuable teachers.

Quest could improve professional development by implementing meaningful, focused and consistent team meetings that drive instructional practice. Currently, there do not appear to be set team meetings, grade level meetings, or staff meetings held on a consistent basis at the Torrey Pines and Alexander campuses. On the Torrey Pines campus, the majority of meetings are labeled

"as needed" or "emergency staff meetings." Leadership meetings are held on a monthly basis, but do not appear to have a set agenda. Leadership expressed the opinion that many teachers choose to teach in charter schools because they do not want to deal with being "scripted" or having "lots of write ups" like they do in the county schools. Rather, teachers are looking for "independence."

Although the Bridger campus holds regular meetings with staff members, they do not appear to be focused on instructional priorities. Once a week, all teachers attend their grade-level meeting and have a staff meeting. A review of these meeting agendas revealed a highly organized approach—focused on policies, procedures and upcoming dates. Though there is a clear structure in place for all meetings, however, time does not appear to be dedicated to actually developing teachers' practice. A three-page list of classroom interventions was provided to teachers at the September 20th meeting, for example. While helpful, a three-page list of possible classroom interventions will not lead to improved delivery of intervention services. Teachers need to have the opportunity to digest material, collaboratively plan, and practice implementation before they are able to successfully use techniques or materials in their classrooms.

In order to meaningfully impact student achievement, teachers must be able to collaborate with one another on a regular basis. Grade- and content-area meetings serve as a means to share data, problem solve, create new solutions, and train on new materials and strategies. The four PD days scheduled for this calendar year are insufficient to meet teachers' professional development needs. Additional structured meetings with clear goals are needed.

Summary Findings:

Curriculum

- Quest currently uses Core Knowledge Language Arts as the primary ELA curriculum. Teachers, however, do not receive enough professional development around its implementation.
- Quest's 6-8 ELA curriculum is out of date and does not meet the requirements for Common Core success.
- Go Math does not meet the criteria for alignment to the Common Core in grades K-8 and is therefore inadequate to prepare students for success on the SBAC, a Common-Core aligned assessment.
- Teachers' current use of MobyMax for both enrichment as well as differentiation should be reexamined. Mobymax is known for "finding and fixing learning gaps," and as such, is a powerful tool to use for student remediation.

Instruction

- Quest lacks clear expectations, a data-driven process, and a shared vision for what excellent instruction should look like across Quest campuses.
- Quest classrooms across K-8 lack differentiation and appropriate grade level rigor.
- Quest's highly-scripted curriculum is problematic and mostly teacher-led. Teacher-led, teacher-driven instruction does not adequately develop students' metacognitive skills. The absence of higher-order thinking questioning in instruction does not give students the

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opportunity to be challenged and think critically.

- Quest teachers appear to rarely use check for understanding as a barometer of student comprehension, and hence teachers have a very limited grasp of students' mastery.
- Teachers use benchmark testing with fidelity across campuses, but they need professional development to analyze and use data to plan instruction that will meet the needs of students, e.g. through small group instruction and differentiation.

Access to and Integration of Technology

- Quest teachers do not incorporate enough relevant, standards-aligned technological exposure and practice for students.
- Teachers should integrate technology-based test-preparation via SBAC released digital library items, interim assessments, and other comparable assessment materials that are Common Core aligned.

Teaching Coaching and Evaluation

- Quest's current teacher evaluation system does not have a meaningful impact on increasing the quality of teacher's instructional delivery.
- Quest does not employ a consistent observation and feedback loop for teachers, and lacks an effective system for growing and improving teachers' instructional practice through coaching.

Professional Development

- Quest currently lacks a strategic plan for year-long professional development to enhance instruction.
- Teachers are willing and eager to engage in substantive PD that will improve their practice.
- PD at all three campuses is lacking intentionality and focus.

Summary Recommendations

Curriculum

- In the long-term, Quest should review its decision to use a highly-scripted curriculum.
- Should Quest decide to continue with CKLA, leadership should include CKLA training during pre-service for all teachers and should offer on-going professional coaching around effective implementation of the program.
- Go Math lacks rigor and sufficient integration of mathematical practices, compared to programs like Eureka Math (K-8), Bridges in Mathematics (K-5), and Core Connections (6-8). An upgraded curriculum that reflects the rigor of the SBAC summative exam would better position Quest students for success on the end of year state test.
- A new 6-8 ELA curriculum should be investigated and purchased to ensure that students are adequately prepared for the SBAC assessment.
- The use of MobyMax should be reexamined to ensure that the program is being used

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appropriately for student grouping and for students exhibiting gaps in understanding. Instruction.

- Quest must launch a "data driven" instructional framework that holds teachers accountable for incorporating grade-level rigor and standardized test preparation into their instruction.
- Quest should communicate expectations around classroom displays (both interior and exterior) and share best practices around differentiated instruction and accountability with regard to pacing through a scripted curriculum.
- Quest should provide opportunities for quarterly school-wide data review and professional development sessions to share best practices around instructional urgency in grades K-2 and prepare students for the end-of-year high stakes state exams in grades 3-8.
- Quest leadership should monitor grade level rigor by consistently reviewing weekly lesson plans and observing instruction, to ensure that it includes higher-level questioning. Teachers should also receive continuous professional development around SBAC test specifications and test preparation.
- Quest leaders should conduct frequent walkthroughs to ensure that learning objectives are clear and that classes include enough independent work time. Leaders should also review and analyze lesson plans to ensure that they include comprehensive question techniques outside of the scripted curriculum, check for understanding techniques, and appropriate pacing.
- Quest should devise a lesson planning template that includes sections dedicated to student-centered learning, in which teachers script out activities, discussions, or explorations led by students to foster their rationalization, metacognition, and self-evaluative skills.
- Quest should consider implementing a professional development session (as part of a larger, strategic professional development plan) exclusively devoted to how teachers can effectively use "check for understanding" questions to drive instruction. Teachers should be required to utilize "check for understanding" questions or tasks in their lesson planning templates, by scripting out 3-4 "check for understandings" per lesson. This session should also focus on the type of instructional decision-making that teachers will use in anticipation of a variety of student responses or outcomes.
- Teachers should be provided with high-impact training on how to interpret data, how to create and implement any necessary re-teaching plans based on test results, and how to design effective small-group instruction to meet students' individual needs.

Access to and Integration of Technology

- To prepare students to use technology effectively, Quest must create schedules that provide students in tested grades with at least 40 minutes of relevant, standards-based, and state testing-aligned computer preparation daily.
- The overarching professional development plan should include support for teachers to access high-impact technology resources; to integrate test preparation into their daily lessons (so that it is not just "test-prep" but learner-centered instruction designed to build students' technological and study skills); and to ensure that students develop the skills they need to be successful as 21st Century learners—and also be able to demonstrate those skills on annual state tests.

Teaching Coaching and Evaluation

- Leaders should review and update evaluation systems and tools, 1) so that the evaluation rubric is clear and transparent, and 2) so that each teacher receives a minimum of two formal observations with detailed feedback directly linked to the evaluation rubric.
- Quest leaders should create a yearlong coaching cycle for all teachers, to increase professionalism among the staff and to ensure that all teachers are meeting instructional expectations.

Professional Development

- Quest leadership should develop a year-long professional development plan in order to provide teachers with the training necessary to effectively implement the curriculum and increase instructional effectiveness.
- Leaders should work with teachers to develop relevant and frequent professional development opportunities. This will improve teaching and learning at Quest and prevent the school from losing valuable teachers. Furthermore, regular PD opportunities should be designed to positively impact the culture of teaching, learning, and leadership at Quest.
- Regular meeting times, with focused agendas, should be established so that teaching teams can review interim assessment data, plan instruction, and modify (or adapt) curriculum materials and instructional strategies to improve student learning and achievement.