



Nevada State Public Charter School Authority

Site Evaluation Report: Strong Start Academy

Evaluation Date: 11/16/2022

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Appendices

A: Nevada School Performance Framework

<http://www.doe.nv.gov/Accountability/NSPF/>

B: SPCSA Academic Framework

<http://charterschools.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/CharterSchoolsnvgov/content/News/2019/190628-Academic-Performance-Framework-Guidance-Document.pdf>

C: SPCSA Organizational Framework

<http://charterschools.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/CharterSchoolsnvgov/content/News/2019/190628-OPF-Att-1-Ratings-Scorecard.pdf>

INTRODUCTION AND SCHOOL BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

This Site Evaluation Report offers an analysis of evidence collected during the school evaluation that took place on 11/16/2022 at Strong Start Academy (SSA). The State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) conducts a comprehensive review of evidence related to all charters within the portfolio during the first, third, and fifth year of operation. This comprehensive analysis addresses the academic success of the school and the effectiveness and viability of the school organization. Schools identified as having a rating of a two-star or below, and those schools with a Notice of Concern, Notice of Breach, or Notice of Termination, will have a differentiated procedure for their site evaluation. SSA is in year one of their charter contract thus meeting the criteria for a comprehensive site evaluation.

An analysis of the school's academic and operational success is undertaken by reviewing the most current versions of the Nevada State Performance Framework (Appendix A) and the State Public Charter School Authority Academic Framework (Appendix B) as well as the Organizational Framework (Appendix C).

In addition, the Site Evaluation Team conducts classroom observations within the areas of classroom environment and instruction. The purpose of these observations is to collect evidence using a rubric which has been normed by our team. All classroom rating outcomes will be displayed within this report so that school leaders have an overall idea of what is happening in general, at any time, in any classroom. The overall numbers will provide information about the school outcomes on this one day.

SPCSA staff will track "best practices", using a checklist and a summary of best practices observed and will be contained within the report. Using information from focus groups of students, parents, staff, school leaders, and the school's board, the SPCSA team will conduct focus groups and summarize results for schools within the report. The operational portion of the evaluation will be observed and takeaways recorded using a checklist and observing all aspects of the school's operational components as outlined in the SPCSA Organizational Framework.

This evaluation has been designed to focus on teaching and learning (e.g. curriculum, instruction, assessment, and services for at-risk students) as well as leadership, organizational capacity, and board oversight. The SPCSA uses the established criteria on a regular basis to provide schools with a consistent set of expectations leading up to renewal.

SCHOOL BACKGROUND

Strong Start Academy (SSA) is located in Las Vegas, Nevada in a facility at 310 S. 9th St. The school serves 80 students (as of the most recent Validation Day) in kindergarten through second grade. The mission of SSA is: "We design and deliver inclusive, anti-bias, and rigorous approaches to eliminate the gaps between young children's inherent potential and their achievement in school and life. With our partners, we accelerate child and family outcomes that honor the aspirations and cultures of the communities we serve."

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Nevada School Performance Framework¹ 2022

This information is provided to assist in understanding the data sets impacted by the pandemic.

Elementary School

N/A

¹ SSA is in year one of their charter contract therefore there is no prior academic performance data.

Math and ELA Results
Nevada School Performance Framework
2022

This information is provided to assist in understanding the data sets impacted by the pandemic.

Proficiency Rates

Elementary School

N/A

SPCSA Academic Performance Framework
Geographic Comparison Report

N/A

SPCSA Academic Performance Framework
Diversity Comparison Results

N/A

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARIES

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

Group	Number of Participants	Duration of Focus Group
Governing Board	2	30 minutes
Parents/Families	7	30 minutes
Students	10	30 minutes
School Leadership	2	30 minutes
Staff	5	30 minutes

Governing Board²:

- One governing board member shared, “We’ve had a fast transition into the building. We have supported the school in obtaining legal counsel, hiring for staffing, and getting ready for opening day. There were numerous negotiations with the city to logistically ensure we could open, order items, and get things ready.” Another board member said, “There is strong board support for school leadership. The board is very involved with legal agreements, leases, attorneys, licenses, etcetera.”
- Governing board participants shared ways they are kept up to date by school leaders. Board members explained, “We have monthly reports from the principal including student enrollment. We hired a marketing person right away to ensure we can recruit and market to grow our student enrollment numbers. We increased our budget with marketing to increase advertising for next year.” One governing board member stated, “We conducted phone call surveys to families who chose to go elsewhere to find out why they didn’t select SSA as their school of choice. We are hiring a part-time person to attend local events and recruit.”
- Board members demonstrated a sound understanding of the education program being offered at SSA. One governing board member said, “We want to hit the 50/50 mark with 50 percent native Spanish speakers and 50 percent English native speakers. We are creating a marketing plan that explains who we are and why we are here.” Another board member reported, “We want to focus on the retention of families, so they can grow with the school as we grow our classes from 3rd grade during the 2022-24 school year, then 4th grade during the 2024-25 school year, and finally 5th grade during the 2025-26 school year.”

Parents/Families:

- Families shared how they learned about SSA. One parent said, “I heard about the school through a newscast in Spanish.” Another parent said, “I saw a newscast in English.” A third parent reported she was looking for a preschool for her child and heard about the elementary school. Several parents said they heard about SSA on Facebook. A different parent said she came across SSA from a computer search.

² Two members of the nine member board participated. Quorum was not met, and Open Meeting Law was not violated.

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARIES

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY continued

- Families reported several reasons why SSA was a good fit for their child. One parent explained, “Class sizes are very important to parents. There are no public schools that have small class sizes anywhere nearby.” Another parent said, “I drove the area and was very concerned about safety. I spoke with the school and visited the school prior to accepting a seat here.” One parent said, “I am happy that the facility is upgraded and nice.”
- Several parents reported that the bi-lingual program played a huge role in their decision to send their children to SSA. Most parents reported they commute from long distances. Families reported that their child is excited to come to school every day. Several parents said their children do not like to miss school.

Students:

- Students shared how they learned about Strong Start Academy. One student said, “My mom was looking for a school for me and my big sister and she found SSA online.” Another student shared, “My mom saw the school on TV and signed me up.”
- Students in the focus group reported that SSA provided an orientation and helped students feel a part of the SSA family. One student shared, “Our teachers taught us the expectations for the different locations of the school at the beginning of the year.” A few students reported they were nervous on the first day, but SSA staff made them feel at home.
- Students reported they feel comfortable asking for help in class. One student said, “Usually the teacher asks the students to repeat what she said or asks if the students have any questions. Another student shared, “The teachers help if we don’t understand by working with us one on one or in a small group.”

Leadership:

- Members of leadership discussed how the opening of the school has been for SSA. One leadership member stated, “The lateness in obtaining occupancy for our building impacted our enrollment numbers. We had 140 students confirmed to attend, but when we didn’t have our building by the end of June 2022, we lost many families.”
- Leadership shared plans for future recruitment and enrollment, given that Strong Start is under the projected enrollment numbers. One leadership member explained, “We have a marketing report that reported how many people clicked on the website and coordinated that with how many people reached out with interest and/or applied. Transportation is an issue for a few families who live further away. The commute is challenging even with bus passes offered.”
- Leadership communicated SSA’s onboarding process for students and families. One leadership member shared, “We have a meet and greet and open house at the

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARIES

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY continued

beginning of the year. We hold parent-teacher conferences as well.” Another member of leadership explained, “The principal records a presentation with detailed expectations, rules, etcetera. It is broadcasted in all classes.” Members of leadership elaborated, “There is a weekly newsletter that goes out to families, the website is updated, and links are provided. This is distributed in English and Spanish. We also hold monthly meetings for families. We have offered bus passes to families in need, but some have declined.”

Staff:

- Staff discussed the bilingual program offered at SSA. One staff member said, “Second graders at SSA take Spanish as enrichment for 50 minutes at the end of the day. Kindergarten and first-grade staff teach in Spanish and English. Kindergarten and first-grade students learn math, science, and social studies in Spanish. However, they learn English language arts (ELA), writing, and phonics in English.”
- Staff shared what motivated them to work at SSA. One teacher said, “She came out of retirement to teach at SSA.” Another teacher explained, “I’m working through my ARL program at SSA, and I couldn’t ask for a better situation to obtain my license.”
- Staff communicated systems in place to minimize learning interruptions. One staff reported, “We use social-emotional learning (SEL) strategies for 15 minutes every morning. At the beginning of the year, we went over the expectations (e.g., be responsible, be kind, and be safe). All expectations fall within these three categories. Teachers always refer back to those three categories if there are any misbehaviors.” Another staff said, “The SPED teacher has consulted with teachers on severe challenges and shared what works for her in SPED.” A staff member shared, “There are two learning strategists, and they will go into the classroom to provide tiered levels of support.”

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT AND INSTRUCTION OBSERVATION RUBRIC

A total of 23 classrooms were observed for approximately 15 minutes on the day of the evaluation.

Classroom Environment					
	Distinguished	Proficient	Basic	Unsatisfactory	Not Observed
Classroom Learning Environment is Conducive to Learning	Students create and maintain a learning environment where students feel free to share their ideas and take risks in learning. Students take ownership in explaining, modeling, and reinforcing classroom routines. Learning experiences guide students to identify their strengths, interests, and needs; problem-solve; ask for support when appropriate; maximizing learning time.	The teacher creates and maintains a learning environment where students feel free to share their ideas and take risks in learning. Teachers explain, model, and reinforce classroom routines. Learning experiences guide students to identify their strengths, interests, and needs; problem-solve; ask for support when appropriate; maximizing learning time.	The teacher attempts to create and maintain a learning environment where students feel free to share their ideas and take risks in learning. Teachers attempt to explain, model, and reinforce classroom routines. Learning experiences make an effort to guide students to identify their strengths, interests, and needs; problem-solve; ask for support when appropriate. Learning time is sometimes maximized.	The teacher does not create and maintain a learning environment where students feel free to share their ideas and take risks in learning. Teachers do not explain, model, and reinforce classroom routines. Learning experiences do not guide students to identify their strengths, interests, and needs; problem-solve; ask for support when appropriate. Learning time is seldom maximized.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
	Total: 11	Total: 11	Total: 0	Total: 0	Total: 1
Establishing a Culture for Learning	Students and teachers respond appropriately when conflicts arise and demonstrate respect for and affirm their own and others' differences related to background, identity, language, strengths, and challenges.	Teacher responds appropriately when conflicts arise and demonstrate respect for and affirm their own and others' differences related to background, identity, language, strengths, and challenges.	Teacher attempts to respond appropriately when conflicts arise and demonstrate respect for and affirm their own and others' differences related to background, identity, language, strengths, and challenges.	Teacher does not attempt to respond appropriately when conflicts arise and does not demonstrate respect for and affirm their own and others' differences related to background, identity, language, strengths, and challenges.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
	Total: 13	Total: 10	Total: 0	Total: 0	Total: 0

Classroom Instruction					
	Distinguished	Proficient	Basic	Unsatisfactory	Not Observed
Purpose and Explanation of Content, Lesson, Unit or Classroom Activity	The purpose of the lesson or unit is clear and connects with student's life experiences. The explanation of content is imaginative, and students contribute to the lesson by participating and/or explaining concepts to their peers.	The purpose for the lesson or learning activity is clear. The teacher's explanation of content is appropriate, and connects with students.	The teacher attempts to explain the instructional purpose, with limited success. The explanation of the content is uneven; some is done skillfully, but other portions are difficult to follow.	The purpose of the lesson and learning activity is unclear. The teacher's explanation of the content is unclear, confusing, or uses inappropriate language.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
	Total: 10	Total: 13	Total: 0	Total: 0	Total: 0
Students' Cognitive Awareness of Learning Goals/Targets	Students can explain/demonstrate the goals/targets of the lesson, content, unit, or classroom activity during this instructional timeframe.	Most of the students can explain/demonstrate the goals/targets of the lesson, content, unit, or classroom activity during this instructional timeframe.	Some of the students can explain/demonstrate the goals/targets of the lesson, content, unit, or classroom activity during this instructional timeframe.	Students cannot explain/demonstrate the goals/targets of the lesson, content, unit, or classroom activity during this instructional time frame.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
	Total: 7	Total: 15	Total: 0	Total: 0	Total: 1
Quality and purpose of questions	Students formulate and ask high-level questions.	Teacher formulates and asks several high-level questions.	Teacher questioning and discussion techniques are uneven with some high-level questions.	Teacher makes poor use of questioning and discussion techniques, with low-level questions, limited student participation, and little true discussion.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
	Total: 1	Total: 17	Total: 0	Total: 0	Total: 5
Opportunities for student discourse and student use of academic language	Students use academic language while participating in discourse. Students demonstrate mastery through reasoning and higher-order thinking.	Teachers encourage the use of academic language and provide students opportunities for discourse. Students are encouraged to demonstrate knowledge through reasoning and higher-order thinking.	There is some attempt by the teacher to encourage the use of academic language. Students are provided limited opportunities for discourse. There is some attempt by the teacher to encourage students to demonstrate knowledge through reasoning and higher order thinking.	There is little to no opportunity for student discourse. There is little to no opportunity for students to demonstrate knowledge through reasoning and higher-order thinking.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
	Total: 5	Total: 13	Total: 0	Total: 0	Total: 5

Classroom Instruction (continued)

	Distinguished	Proficient	Basic	Unsatisfactory	Not Observed
Intellectual Engagement in Learning	Students are intellectually engaged throughout the lesson. The pacing and structure of the lesson is differentiated and allows high levels of student engagement.	Students appear to be intellectually engaged throughout most of the lesson. The pacing and structure of the lesson is differentiated and adequate.	Students are partially intellectually engaged throughout the lesson. The pacing and structure of the lesson is somewhat differentiated and inconsistent.	Students are not at all intellectually engaged in significant learning. The pacing and structure of the lesson is not differentiated and inadequate.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
	Total: 2	Total: 21	Total: 0	Total: 0	Total: 0
Using Formative Assessment in Instruction	The teacher purposefully and consistently provides clear, descriptive feedback in regard to student's understanding of the learning goals/targets. The feedback is timely and is in a reasonable amount.	Most of the time, the teacher, provides clear, descriptive feedback regarding student's understanding of the learning goals/targets. The feedback is timely and is in a reasonable amount.	The teacher provides clear, descriptive feedback inconsistently regarding student's understanding of the learning goals/targets. The feedback is seldom timely and is in a reasonable amount.	The teacher does not provide clear, descriptive feedback regarding student's understanding of the learning goals/targets. The feedback is not timely and is not in a reasonable amount.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
	Total: 4	Total: 19	Total: 0	Total: 0	Total: 0

Additional information about the classroom observations shared here when applicable

1. While observing an elementary classroom, the teacher read a text in English and recalled vocabulary words in Spanish. The teacher asked several questions about details from the text.
2. During an elementary classroom observation, students used context clues to identify the topic, the main idea, key details, and facts from textual evidence. The teacher modeled academic language in both Spanish and English leading the students through the reading. Students answered the question prompts by discussing textual evidence with a partner, using academic language. Students then reported to the class what their partner said in both Spanish and English.
3. In an elementary classroom, students participated in small group centers for 15 minutes each. Students rotated between small group reading with the teacher, i-Ready independent work, and independent reading.

ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

The SPCSA uses the Organizational Performance Framework to collect evidence of performance and evaluate schools, at least annually, to monitor schools throughout their charter terms, to report to schools and the public annually, to intervene in schools that do not meet expectations and to make high-stakes decisions, including: renewal, non-renewal, possible revocation, expansion, or replication. Most of this work is done through routine submissions by the school to the SPCSA.

A limited number of measures within the organizational performance framework may be at least partially evaluated during the site evaluation process. Measures are partially evaluated based upon evidence from school focus groups, school observations, documents reviewed, visual inspection and information from the school presentation portion of the evaluation. SPCSA staff will note the evidence provided by the school and also outline any questions or potential concerns.

Indicator	Measure Description	Evidence Collected
Indicator 1: Education Program	<p>Measures 1a and 1b: The school implements the material terms of the education program. Ex: SPCSA site evaluations will confirm that the school is staying true to its approved application and programming, as well as review curricular materials and their alignment to Nevada Academic Content Standards.</p> <p>Measures 1c and 1d: The school protects the rights of students with disabilities and EL students. Ex: For example, classroom observations include examples of students with an IEP or those learning English as a language. Student support is provided within small groups or teachers using interventions and supports to provide students with special needs and EL learners with meaningful access to grade-level content and standards.</p>	SSA specializes in bilingual education. SSA offers a two-way dual language 50/50 model, using English and Spanish for instruction. All teachers who work directly with special education students must acknowledge that they understand the IEP and their obligation to comply with the accommodations identified in the IEP. SSA uses Infinite Campus and WIDA digital systems online to monitor ELs' progress.
Indicator 3: Governance and Reporting	<p>Measure 3a: The school complies with governance requirements Ex: Board policies and oversight of Education Service Provider</p>	SSA's governing board meets monthly. The board has 100% board member participation in open meeting law and board governance training. The school is compliant with open meeting law requirements.
Indicator 4: Students and Employees	<p>Measure 4a: Student records under lock and key/stored appropriately</p> <p>Measure 4d: Personnel files are under lock and key/stored appropriately</p>	Student and faculty records are stored under lock and key in secured offices.
Indicator 5: School Environment	<p>Measure 5b:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evacuation plans for classrooms are posted • The school has fire extinguishers on all floors which are tagged • Active permit for food service (if applicable) • Nurse requirements are met through visual check of health office, disposal of sharps, cot, refrigeration 	The site evaluation team saw evacuation plans in classrooms, tagged fire extinguishers throughout the building and common areas, as well as an active food service and elevator permit. The site evaluation

		team visually checked and located two cots, a refrigerator, and a receptacle for disposing of sharp objects in the nurse's area.
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Measures of Progress from Previous Site Evaluations

The extent to which the school has been successful in maintaining areas of strength, removing challenges, and acting upon the recommended items made by the SPCSA during the school's previous evaluation.

Summary of recommendations from most recent site evaluation	This is not applicable to SSA for the 2022-2023 site evaluation as SSA is in year one of its charter.
School assessment of progress made against recommendations and evidence provided, or reasons the school believes additional time may be necessary to fully address past recommendations.	This is not applicable to SSA for the 2022-2023 site evaluation as SSA is in year one of its charter.
SPCSA staff assessment based upon findings during site evaluation.	This is not applicable to SSA for the 2022-2023 site evaluation as SSA is in year one of its charter.

SITE EVALUATION FINDINGS

STRENGTHS

A summary of strengths as observed through academic achievement indicators, classroom observations, focus group feedback and portions of the Organizational Performance Framework are described within the body of the report and summarized here.

- SPCSA site evaluators observed SSA's bilingual education to be a strength. In several classrooms, teachers taught lessons in English and Spanish. Students responded in both English and Spanish. For example, in one classroom, the teacher read a text in English and reviewed vocabulary words from the text in Spanish. All students were actively engaged and participated in both English and Spanish.
- SPCSA site evaluators observed SSA to have a strong teaching staff. SSA has high levels of experienced teachers who utilized several best practices. Teachers transitioned from whole group, small group, and independent instruction seamlessly. In several classrooms, teachers set the purpose of the lesson, provided opportunities for student's voice, and reviewed academic vocabulary in both English and Spanish.
- SPCSA site evaluators recognize SSA to have a strong teaching staff to support the needs of diverse student groups. According to the school, 75 percent of the core classroom teachers received certification in Project GLAD (Guided Language Acquisition Design) and 63 percent of the core classroom teachers are TESL or Bilingual endorsed. These skills support the school's mission and instructional model.
- SSA has well-established partnerships and support with the community it serves. For example, SSA has a partnership with the City of Las Vegas and Youth Center. Additionally, leadership reported that SSA has a strong presence at board meetings, an immense set of resources, and human capital support.
- SSA provides a positive learning environment to students and families. SPCSA site evaluators observed students following expectations in different locations of the school. Teachers redirected students and provided positive feedback to students who displayed the expected behaviors. Teachers created a safe and positive learning environment where students felt safe to participate in discussions with their peers.

CHALLENGES

A summary of challenges as observed through academic achievement indicators, classroom observations, focus group feedback and portions of the Organizational Performance Framework Evidence are described within the body of the report and summarized here.

- Low enrollment is a challenge for SSA. Leadership reported their enrollment cap is 180. According to the SPCSA's student enrollment data for the 2022-23 school year, SSA is under-enrolled with 80 students. At the SPCSA Board meeting on December 16, 2022, SSA was approved for a reduced enrollment cap of 85 for the remainder of the 2022 – 2023 year. Nevertheless, the lower than anticipated enrollment has resulted in adjustment being made to the school's budget as well as operations.
- There are several new programs being implemented at SSA. Staff reported that the implementation of multiple, new programs is challenging alongside everything else that must occur in the school's inaugural year. Staff members shared, "We are overwhelmed by the number of programs that we are expected to implement."

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended items are provided so charters may increase their school-wide ratings as well as their overall success. Authorizing Team members will follow up on each listed recommendation.

- SPCSA staff recommends that SSA pay close attention to the slow-growth model so as to ensure the school is not negatively impacted by a loss of revenues for a second consecutive year. SPCSA suggests that SSA consider adopting a formalized, strategic plan to ensure that enrollment targets are met for the 2023 - 24 school year and beyond. The SSA board should also closely monitor enrollment for the 2023 - 24 school year at each upcoming meeting and may wish to set monthly benchmarks to effectively monitor progress.
- Given the unique, bilingual instructional model being implemented at SSA, SPCSA staff recommends that the school take necessary steps to monitor its implementation for the remainder of the current academic year. It will be critical that staff continues to build their instructional capacity. Additionally, the school may need to consider adopting more remediation for students to mitigate against COVID learning losses felt by students as all students are relatively new to formal schooling in a brick-and-mortar setting.
- SPCSA evaluators recommend SSA continue to bolster family engagement. Participants from the board and family focus groups discussed the need for a Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). Consider communicating with families about adding grades and how that will roll out. Continue using the parent and family survey to inform decisions on events and potential training for families, such as access to Infinite Campus, school events, accessing grades, etcetera. SSA may want to offer these more than once and record sessions to accommodate family schedules.
- SPCSA evaluators recommend SSA's leadership and governing board familiarize themselves with various resources offered by the SPCSA, such as MTSS training, board training, funding opportunities, etcetera. Leadership reported they were unaware of some resources offered by the SPCSA. SPCSA staff can be available to provide support as needed.

STRONG RECOMMENDATIONS

There were no strong recommendations identified for SSA during this site evaluation.

DEFICIENCIES

There were no deficiencies identified for SSA during this site evaluation.