



To: Lynda Spann, Board President, Beacon Academy of Nevada
Andrea Damore, Executive Director of Academics, Beacon Academy of Nevada
Tambre Tondryk, Executive Director of Operations, Beacon Academy of Nevada
From: Mark Modrcin, Director of Authorizing, State Public Charter School Authority
CC: Jason Guinasso, Chair, State Public Charter School Authority
Date: March 12, 2019
Re: Site Evaluation Report for Beacon Academy of Nevada

SITE EVALUATION REPORT

Beacon Academy of Nevada

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

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

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

Attached is the Site Evaluation Report for Beacon Academy of Nevada, which was conducted by myself and Mike Dang on January 29, 2019. The school is currently in its 5th year of its 2nd charter term, which expires on June 30, 2020.

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

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SITE EVALUATION REPORT

Beacon Academy of Nevada

Campus Name: Beacon Academy of Nevada

Grade Levels: 9 – 12

School Leaders: Andrea Damore & Tambre Tondryk

Purpose of Site Evaluation: Year 5, second charter term

Date of Re-Authorization: July 2014

Evaluation Date: Tuesday, January 29, 2019

Conducted By: Mark Modrcin & Mike Dang

SUMMARY OF SITE EVALUATION

The mission of Beacon Academy of Nevada is: to offer at-risk high school students the choice of an innovative and relevant education, which provides flexibility and support to graduate from high school with concrete plans for their future.

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

- Students are greeted each day by staff personnel, indicative of a warm and welcoming environment for all students.
- The beginning of lessons started with each student completing a STEP card so as to ground their work in the goals of the day. The STEP card is a critical element in helping all students and teachers understand what lessons are to be accomplished during the day, and how students are progressing. This demonstrates that all students are expected to follow plans that can lead them to academic success.
- Teachers, facilitators and tutors consistently were providing direct instruction in small groups or one-on-one instruction for students needing additional support. This additional support is critical for at-risk students.
- Teachers, facilitators and tutors were very aware of the current academic levels of each student in their classroom. Student progress data is provided to all staff twice each day so as to inform instruction and to ensure that students are making progress towards their goal. This individualized instruction helps ensure that students can make progress each day.

Site Evaluation team members observed instruction in all core subject areas: math, science, world history, personal finance and government. The flexible classroom structure allowed staff to observe students in grades 9 – 12, although most students at the school are either 11th or 12th graders. On average, each classroom evaluation was approximately 15 minutes. Evaluators were able to observe lessons both at the beginning and middle of class periods.

Observers noted consistency of school wide expectations, procedures and practices throughout the school day. Specifically, students in almost every instance were using their STEP cards at the beginning of each lesson and throughout as may be necessary. Students were also aware of the expectations in each classroom as almost all students were engaged in their lessons, either virtually, in a small group, or one-on-one with an instructor or tutor, and knew the procedure to leave their seat or ask for help. When necessary, teachers reminded students of these expectations and/or noted exceptions for their particular classroom. For example, cell phones were not allowed in one classroom that was observed, and the teacher reminded students of this prior to the start of instruction. Daily objectives were posted in almost every classroom that were easy to read and understand by the evaluators.

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I. CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Classroom Environment	Evidence Observed	School-wide Rating
<i>Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport</i>	All observed classrooms featured at least two teachers that were actively engaged with students in a respectful manner, offering support and clarification on lessons when necessary. When needed, teachers and tutors offered friendly reminders of school and classroom expectations. Teachers always engaged with students with an appropriate tone.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory
<i>Establishing a Culture of Learning</i>	Teachers, tutors and students embrace a culture of high expectations and were observed to be committed to a high-level of student achievement. Within each classroom, students were proactively asking questions so as to better understand the material. There were few, if any, instances where students appeared off-task or disengaged. This is likely due, in part, to the unique staffing structure at Beacon and the plethora of teacher support available to students during each period.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory
<i>Managing Classroom Procedures</i>	The procedures in each classroom were consistent and uniform throughout the school which resulted in smooth classroom procedures with almost all students recognizing and following expectations. Observers noted two instances where teachers did not address a small number of students that were not on-task.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory
<i>Managing Student Behavior</i>	Teachers in classrooms observed at the beginning of a lesson reiterated expectations and appropriate student behavior during the first few minutes. Adults in each classroom used multiple techniques such as positive encouragement and proximity to manage behavior to maintain a positive classroom environment.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory

II. INSTRUCTIONAL OBSERVATION

Instructional Observation	Evidence Observed	School-wide Rating
<i>Communicating with Students</i>	Teacher communication with students is appropriate and occurs in small group, individualized and push/support instruction as may be necessary. Teacher's explanations are appropriate and meet the student at the appropriate as evidenced through STEP cards and the available data.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory
<i>Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques</i>	Students were participating actively throughout lessons in multiple formats. The blended format provided teachers with opportunities to use different questioning techniques to promote participation by all. In some cases, questioning techniques could be more rigorous to challenge students beyond a basic understanding, but this	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory

	can be a difficult balance with credit-deficient students.	
<i>Engaging Students in Learning</i>	Students were engaged in lessons through all of the observed classrooms. Individuals needing extra support, or those that had less than satisfactory data within the daily tracker were supported by one or more adults during class while those students on pace to complete modules were progressing at their own pace throughout lessons. Classroom activities appeared appropriate and material to the learning objectives within each subject matter.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory
<i>Using Assessment in Instruction</i>	Students appeared aware of the criteria and performance standards by which they would be evaluated. Teachers, interventionists and tutors would provide students with support and feedback throughout lessons to monitor work quality and preparedness to complete lessons successfully.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory

III. OPERATIONS

Instructional Observation	Evidence Observed	School-wide Rating
<i>Mission-driven Operations</i>	Use of the STEP Card, reliance on timely data, multiple adults stationed in each classroom and the use of a blended learning model are qualities tied to the mission of the school. These routines are developed and embraced by both students and adults.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory
<i>Managing Schoolwide Procedures</i>	In all observed classrooms, as well as during transition periods, students show a clear understanding of procedures, operations and expectations. Teachers clearly uphold procedures and high expectations, and this is evidenced by the same routines being implemented by students in each classroom that are not prompted by teachers.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory
<i>Maintaining a Safe Environment</i>	Procedures are strong, and student and staff seem to understand that these maintain a safe and secure environment. Beacon also has a security guard on site to ensure that the environment is safe for all students and adults.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory

IV. FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

Group	Number of Participants	Duration
Governing Board Members	3 of 7 board members	30 minutes
Parents / Families	2 parents, 1 grandparent	45 minutes
Students	12 students	30 minutes
EL, SPED, RTI Facilitators	3 staff members	30 minutes
School Staff (w/teachers)	20 staff members	45 minutes

Site Evaluation team members conducted five Focus Groups, one each with the following groups: Governing Board, Parents/Families, Students, Intervention Facilitators, and all Staff. Participants were asked a series of questions, including common questions across all Focus Groups, with a range of 5 to 15 questions, depending on the group. All staff were present for the focus group except for

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the three facilitators who participated in their own focus group since this is an alternative school serving at-risk students.

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

Governing Board

- Board members are aligned on the mission of the school and understand the population they intend to serve. Additionally, the members of the governing body understand their role of providing oversight while allowing the school leadership team to manage the day-to-day operations of the school.
- Board members were all duly pleased with the school and its progress since being under a Notice of Intent to Revoke just a few short years ago. This is evident in their embrace of the new school model and classification as an alternative school. Moreover, Board members feel very apprised about the academic progress of students and agree on the key measures of student success: graduation rates, lower student turnover and a developing waitlist.
- Board members did express the need for more governance training. Of the three Board members participating in the listening sessions, all indicated that it had been at least 1.5 or 2 years since their last Board retreat. All recognized the value of prior retreats and training and firmly believe that ongoing training is an important tool that promotes effective governance.
- The Board reiterated that a key factor in the success of the school is the strong leadership team and collaborative environment that has been established between the administration and the staff. It is clear that they have a dedicated team and the Board is impressed by the lengths to which staff go to keep students in school.
- To evaluate the leadership team, one Board member leads this process and presents results to the whole board in a public meeting for review, comments and final approval. This process has worked well and allows the Board to rely on the educational work experience of a former administrator to provide feedback.

Parents / Families

- Members of this focus group were especially thankful that such a school existed for their students. The alternative setting has been incredibly helpful for all of their students as it has given them a chance to be successful and enjoy school, something that was previously not possible. Said one parent, "My student would be failing without the small environment, three and a half workday, and high-level of support offered at this school. I know he needs this type of school to be successful."
- The members of the group held common beliefs about the school's mission and support how well it is being pursued. All firmly believe in the mission of the school and believe that their children are experiencing success due in large part to the school's success in reaching their students. One parent explained that her son had severe health problems and had fallen behind. At Beacon, however, he was able to make great strides with his illness now in remission.
- All participants in this focus group commended the school and staff for how responsive they can be to student and family needs. When describing the staff at Beacon, parents mentioned words such as "superior" and "proactive", indicating that they are made aware of problems when they arise on campus.

Students

- The students were noticeably enthusiastic about the school and had many positive thoughts to share about their experiences at Beacon. Of the 12 students participating in the focus

group, all but three mentioned that the flexibility and individualized support were key contributors to their success. Each was thankful that there was a school like Beacon that could accommodate their individualized needs.

- A majority of the students offered high praise of their teachers and the administration, especially when it came to supporting students. One student said, “whenever I have a facial expression or am acting moody, my teacher knows my triggers and helps me work through that situation. It’s hard—sometimes teachers never know what is going on outside of school, but she makes sure to have a good vibe and seeks to understand my situation first.”
- Many spoke about how grateful they were for the flexibility the school offered them. Many students work and are benefit from a class schedule requiring them to attend classes twice per week, normally either Monday and Wednesday or Tuesday and Thursday.
- Lastly, one student commented on how much the teachers sincerely try to help them make progress despite the challenges they may have faced in other school environments. This reiterates much of what was shared during the Governance and Parent focus groups as the impact of staff is felt throughout the school community, not just in classrooms.

EL, SPED, RTI Facilitators

- The three staff members that comprised this focus group were passionate and enthusiastic about serving the high-needs students at Beacon Academy. This was evident by their passion to serve a challenging workload of at least 50-60 individual weekly check-ins, updating data for WiDA and IEP goals at least weekly and meeting as an interventionist team at least once a week. It is clear that this work is critical to the overall success of the school.
- Interventionists communicated that the full staff and leadership team listen to feedback and try to address all opportunities to improve. Said one interventionist: “I have been at Beacon Academy for over five years and I’ve witnessed tremendous growth and reflection over that time. Our leadership has promoted honest conversations that have fostered this growth and allowed us to implement some new suggestions.”

School Staff

- From the onset, it was clear that the staff, like others throughout the day, was very enthusiastic and dedicated to the school’s mission. The pervasive tone in the room indicated that they most concerned with the future success of students. This was evident in how they approach their work daily, share ideas with others including the administration, and work together to address individual students and their needs.
- Staff resoundingly applauded the administration and their consistent efforts to gather feedback and input from staff to improve the school. Staff indicated that surveys for teachers make them feel valued, and that often times responses from within surveys are implemented soon thereafter. An example provided was around a request for more support in serving ELL populations, to which more PD is now provided. This demonstrates the administration’s commitment to staff and their willingness to adapt to improve the learning environment.
- It was clear that the established data systems used by the school are critical to each day of instruction. Student databases are updated twice daily allowing teachers to group students accordingly. This strengthens the instructional delivery model as there are 2-3 adults in each classroom facilitating small group work, interventions and individual work simultaneously.
- Staff reiterated that because the schools is fairly small, it truly is a family. They talked about how this is important when providing the flexibility students need as those students manage their work schedules as well as their sometimes chaotic lives. Staff also emphasized that

they are all on the same page and level for students, and that there is no hierarchy, including the administration. This positive morale could be felt by the evaluators throughout the day.

V. OVERALL STRENGTHS OF PROGRAM

a. Mission and data-driven, blended instruction

- i. In each classroom that was observed, teachers were operating with a strong sense of urgency that demonstrated their understanding and desire to follow the mission of the school. Evaluators also observed students and staff relying on course data to inform instruction and guidance through lessons. There was ample evidence of this throughout classrooms: students completing STEP cards, teachers directing students to work in small groups or one-on-one for interventions, and/checking in with students about questions that they have. Teachers also provided a significant level of support to many students throughout the day, aligning with the mission of Beacon Academy of Nevada. Finally, because each student has a mentor teacher assigned to them, regular check-ins help the school live its mission on a daily basis.

b. Positive school culture

- i. Casual interactions with all staff members as well as the multiple focus group for all staff and interventionists revealed a very positive school culture. There is a strong sense of family prevalent at the school which is likely critical to the success of the school given the population it serves, the size of the student body and the rather small facility that is unlike a traditional school building. Teachers embrace their strengths. Additionally, teachers are open and appeared eager to identify their weaknesses and problem-solve collaboratively for the betterment of students and the school. This positive culture is a tremendous asset to the school.

c. Schoolwide procedures are evident throughout the building

- i. Evaluators noticed that schoolwide procedures, from the time students enter classrooms, during instructional periods, to transition time between periods, students were always acting in accordance with established routines and procedures. Students seemed to understand their responsibilities as learners and consistently implemented these no matter the setting on campus. It was clear that the teachers hold students to high expectations and this is likely a key reason behind the positive school culture and mission-driven instruction.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS/ACTION ITEMS

a. Develop and/or revise board member orientation and annual training regimen

While it was clear that the Board understands the mission and strengths/weaknesses of the school, the Board expressed a sincere desire for more training on strong governance practices as well as an annual retreat. The execution of the training ultimately resides with the governing body, but school staff and leadership should work closely with the Board to ensure that the training is occurring on a regular basis and is high-quality. Moreover, the school may wish to refer to

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and/or update their bylaws so as to strengthen this important process as described in [NRS388A.246](#). SPCSA staff did not observe any significant deficiencies at the board level but believes that a stronger orientation and annual training can only benefit the school as the composition of the Board changes. It also provides the school a safety net during times of unexpected transition.

b. Ensure that school administration is evaluated by the full Board

The Board reported during the focus group that one individual of the Board completes a draft of the evaluation for site administrators before it is shared with the full Board in a closed meeting. While it is certainly permissible to evaluate administrators in this manner, we recommend the school consider an alternative process that involves multiple board members in the early evaluation stages. Increasing the participation of Board members during the early stages of an evaluation process will promote board involvement in the school, provide different perspectives that could be gaps in the current process, and ensure that the final evaluation is more transparent and balanced among all governing body members. SPCSA staff has no reservations about current leadership at Beacon Academy but believes that this could be a positive step forward and allow the school to continuously reflect and improve.

c. Continue to be vigilant about high-quality curriculum that is rigorous

Staff consistently found the instruction at Beacon Academy to be high-quality and engaging for students. Beacon Academy is often described as the last resort for many students who have been unsuccessful in prior educational experiences. Staff members and the Board spoke of the quality curriculum and how it is developed in a thoughtful manner so as to remain effective and engaging for students given the flexible environment and schedule. SPCSA staff strongly encourages that Beacon Academy staff, leadership and Board continue to refine the curriculum used at the school so that it remains effective and rigorous. SPCSA staff recognizes that balancing rigor and an appropriate level of scaffolded instruction is difficult with an at-risk population and recommends that this practice continue moving forward.

Note

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

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