



Nevada State Public Charter School Authority

To: Kerry Roberts, Equipo Board Chair
Jason Guinasso, SPCSA Board Chair
Ben Salkowe, Equipo Academy principal
From: Sandra Kinne, SPCSA
Date: Monday, April 1, 2019
Re: Site Evaluation Report for Equipo Academy

SITE EVALUATION REPORT: Equipo Academy

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

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

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

Attached is the Site Evaluation Report for Equipo Academy, which was conducted by SPCSA staff members, Sandra Kinne and Mark Modrcin, on Tuesday, February 26, 2019 at Equipo Academy, 4131 E. Bonanza Road, Las Vegas, NV 89110. The optional school response is included. The school is currently in its 4th year of its first charter authorization term, which expires June 30, 2021. The school leader is Ben Salkowe, and the board chair is Kerry Roberts.

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

SITE EVALUATION REPORT

EQUIPO ACADEMY

Campus Name: Equipo Academy – East Las Vegas campus
Grade Levels: 6-12
School Leader: Ben Salkowe, Principal
Purpose of Site Evaluation: Year 4 of charter contract, first Site Evaluation
Date of Authorization: Jan. 26, 2015
Conducted Date: Tuesday, Feb. 26, 2019
Conducted By: Sandra Kinne, Mark Modrcin

SUMMARY OF SITE EVALUATION

The mission of Equipo Academy is to empower students to meet high expectations, excel to and through college, and become transformational leaders for East Las Vegas.

The work toward fulfilling this mission was noted by the team in instructional and operational observations through the following:

- Empowering students with tools and understanding of data
- Commitment to continuous improvement in areas of growth
- Students work with peers to give feedback
- Teacher reviews the previous day's Exit Slip to help students better understand the concepts
- High expectations throughout lessons/classes (grade checks, articulated expectations for work product, "Beast Mode")
- One observed classroom environment was decorated with quotes and photos by and of world/historical leaders, photos to inspire and exemplify leadership and empowerment
- College interview by one student of observer
- Clear student responsibility; scaffolded lesson; appropriate and rigorous questions.
- Use of technology and assumption of responsibility as appropriate.
- Push for rationalizing responses

The team conducted 12 classroom observations across all grade levels at Equipo in both the middle and high school classrooms. On average, the observation time in each classroom was 24 minutes. Observations ranged through the full cycle of observations, with some conducted in the beginning, middle, and end of each instructional lesson.

Observers noted high levels of respect and rapport between students and among students and teachers; student self- accountability and peer accountability to ensure expectations were met; and differentiated procedures for middle and high school, akin to the needs and capabilities of the age ranges.

Common trends from stakeholders noted in focus groups were: strong appreciation for the school's existence and a commitment to living out the mission for the sake of students; strong communication with families; and a push for stronger, more defined, specific roles for staff. As discussed in the focus group section, multiple staff members named the need for more support for students in Special Education, Counseling, and within Operations.

While the team identified some critical opportunities for growth, overall, the culture, commitment to the mission, and the collective drive to create equitable opportunities for high-quality education in the East Las Vegas community were strongly evident. The sense of pride in the school, passion of

staff to doing meaningful work, and the mission-driven focus are models for schools within the SPCSA portfolio.

I. CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Classroom Environment	Evidence Observed	School-wide Rating
Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport	Classroom interactions between students and between teacher and students were generally respectful and positive. In focus groups, students offered praised and positive commentary about their teachers, demonstrated a genuine respect for adults in the building. In most cases, learning time is maximized, with one or two exceptions noted in observations. In all, there is a proficient environment of respect and rapport with potential for the school to easily move to distinguished with consistency across the campus.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory
Establishing a Culture for Learning	Throughout the day, there was inconsistencies observed throughout the school with regards to emphasis on culture for learning's sake. While students in most classroom observations were engaged and on-task through the lessons, there were noted off-task behaviors and low expectations for behavior in some classes. For example, in one high school class, this criterion was observed to be basic, with students generally off-task and calling out, "Miss, what to do?" Students' volume and off-task behavior increased as the lesson went on. In another classroom, expectations for learning did not appear high, and there was noted talking across the room and engagement of off-task behaviors demonstrating, as the observer noted, falling "short of a commitment to high expectations." However, in at least 75% of observed classrooms, there was enough criteria observed to support the school being proficient in this area.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory
Managing Classroom Procedures	As in the area above, there were noted inconsistencies observed throughout the day, with some classrooms demonstrating evidence to be "distinguished," with other classrooms indicating "basic" evidence. Given the wide range, it was evident that at least, collectively, the school was proficient in this area. Noted one observer in a high school class, "Students all understand that they are responsible for following along the PPT, logging into the platform, and if they don't have technology, they assume responsibility for following along or working with others. There is no question about what the expectation is during the beginning of the lesson." In another class, this one in middle school, an observer noted, "Routines appear to be in place (most students are engaging in independent practice, but not all), but those students that are off task or not working on the exercise are not consistently reminded of loss of student work time. Some groups are, however, but there are a few off-task conversations that are not being addressed."	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory
Managing Student Behavior	In general, with a few exceptions, including as noted above, behavior expectations were clear and managed by	Distinguished Proficient

	<p>staff/teachers. In one observation, a student with a visible phone out was discreetly corrected by the teacher, with the interaction being unnoticeable by other students, thus providing an opportunity for students to continue working uninterrupted.¹ Teachers are sensitive to student needs and progress and respectfully redirects students when necessary through monitoring. Additionally, students can be heard reminding each other of expectations and owning this responsibility for strong expectations.</p>	<p>Basic Unsatisfactory</p>
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II. INSTRUCTIONAL OBSERVATION

Instructional Observation	Evidence Observed	School-wide Rating
<p>Communicating with Students</p>	<p>Teachers were generally purposeful in their instructional delivery and the explanation of content. Communication by teachers was positive, and in one middle school classroom, the teacher demonstrated a strong capacity to make the content engaging and entertaining, while also incredibly informative.</p>	<p>Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory</p>
<p>Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques</p>	<p>While there were some examples of teachers attempting high-level questions, there was more evidence of low-level Depth of Knowledge (DOK) questions grounded in factual/recall questions. When higher-level questions were attempted, they indicated basic questioning techniques with an absence of scaffolding. Across observations, there is some discussion, but it is generally teacher-driven and directed rather than student-facilitated.</p>	<p>Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory</p>
<p>Engaging Students in Learning</p>	<p>In several classrooms, topics were generally relevant and relatable for students. Students were often engaged with topics and applicability of the lesson, when the application was evident and discussed. Across grade levels, students raised hands but were also cold-called to ensure engagement and full participation. Given the size of the classes, the teacher especially did a solid job of ensuring equity of voice and hearing from multiple students, not just one or two individuals repeatedly.</p>	<p>Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory</p>
<p>Using Assessment in Instruction</p>	<p>Students were generally aware of the criteria and expectations for their academic performance, as the expectations were often noted by teachers in the context of instructional delivery. In one middle school classroom, the teacher reviewed the previous day's Exit Slip, noting errors and making connection to the SBAC, which demonstratively helped students understand the work and expectations for mastery. In another classroom, the teacher reminds students of a project's rubric, which is how the student's work will be evaluated.</p>	<p>Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory</p>

¹ The observer noted the exchange because the observer was sitting next to the student who was redirected. It is unlikely it would have been observed, otherwise, given the teacher's discretion.

III. OPERATIONS

Observations	Evidence Observed	School-wide Rating
Mission driven operations	Throughout the day, there were clear procedures that contributed to a sense of urgency within in the school. This included a push by teacher for students to move more quickly; students began transitioning to Advisory more than 5 minutes before its start; and students moved in an orderly way that demonstrated an established practice.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory
Managing Schoolwide Procedures	There were clear schoolwide procedures in place, with some appropriate delineation between the middle school and high school procedures. Classes start on time with students moving through the campus using the silent, digital clocks to countdown time and ensure prompt arrival to class. Students know how to exit and enter class. Late comers are not a distraction, come in silently and get to work immediately, indicating they understand procedures and routines. Students assume this responsibility without direction of the teacher. The major discrepancy observers noted was with technology. It seemed that students understood the expectations related to cellphones and headsets, but those expectations were not always consistently met by students nor consistently enforced by staff. This was evident both across the grade levels and within both the middle and high school.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory
Maintaining a Safe Environment	Staff ensured a safe campus with a strong presence during the passing period and throughout the common times (i.e., arrival, dismissal, lunch). Teachers engage with students, calling them by name and asking how they are and remind them of class. Students who are 'benched' are monitored in a safe environment. Students in the focus group reported feeling safe in their school.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory

IV. FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

Group	No. of Participants	Duration of Focus Group
Governing Board ²	2	1 hour
Parents/Families	9	45 minutes
Students	12	45 minutes
Staff	10	45 minutes

Site Evaluation team members conducted four Focus Groups, one each with the following groups: Governing Board, Parents/Families, Students, and Staff. The Authority team also conducted a round table with the school's Leadership Team. All grade levels were represented by students in their roundtable, and except for parents of 6th graders, all grade levels were represented in the Parent/Family Focus Group, with the majority of participants having been with the school since its first year. For the Staff Focus Group, there was a balance of high school and middle teachers, as well

² Two members of the seven-member board participated, including the Board Chair. Quorum was not met, and Open Meeting Law was not violated. One member participated in person, the other by phone.

as instructional and operational support staff, with a majority of participants having been with the school since it opened.

In general, the themes threaded throughout the Focus Groups were: strong sense of community and belonging at the school; commitment to and focus on the mission of the school; and the need to clarify and streamline staff's roles and responsibilities.

Governing Board

- Board members are committed to the mission and understand the need to have all students college-prep ready. They commented that teachers have high expectations for all students, and one board member said that as a parent, this is “really important.” Board members recognize getting to and through college is the school’s ultimate goal for students and named this as an area for growth for the school, as 79% of its graduating class last year enrolled in college. Board members took pride in graduating 100% of its seniors, recognizing the challenge and accomplishment that it was, and praising the staff for their support to meet this goal.
- Board members expressed comfort with meeting four times a year³, citing the work commitments of most of the Board, as well as the communication between board meetings by the school leader as sufficient. The Board also has Special Meetings when necessary and longer meetings this year, in lieu of monthly meetings. Board members feel informed and connected to the community through the communication.
- Board members echoed the concerns raised by staff in their focus group, and as discussed below in ‘Recommendations/Action Items’, that the school leader struggles to delegate, which leads him to become, to paraphrase a board member’s comments, appear to be over-burdened and struggling to meet the demands of his role.

Parents/Families

- Parents overwhelmingly expressed appreciation for the focus on and attention provided to their students. They cited the ‘family feel’ of the school, the commitment of the staff to support their students, and the preparation for university the school has provided.
- Communication from the school by teachers, staff, and school leadership was cited as an important element of the school and that it was, overall, “excellent.” Said one parent, *“Communication is everything.”* Said another, *“Teachers are willing to communicate via text, email face to face. ... At any event, there is always time for the parents to meet at events as well. (They are) always on top of parents to make sure that they are informed.”*
- With consensus, parents and family members spoke of the high expectations and challenging learning that happens at the school. Students are not taught to “just get by,” said one parent, and the focus on college prep and leadership were a strong attraction for many. Several parents said there is a need for more schools like Equipo, and that an Equipo elementary school is necessary. *“If there are more schools like this, this side of town can be more successful. We need more opportunities. There should be more schools like this,”* said one parent.

Students

- Multiple students cited the support from teachers and their commitment to helping them succeed as their favorite part of school. *“Teachers want you to succeed and want to do anything with you to help you succeed,”* said one student. Students expressed appreciation for the teachers and staff, and how much above and beyond they go to help students. Said one student,

³ Board members named meeting four times a year. The school’s publicly posted calendar reflects five meetings. Retrieved April 4, 2019:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53ac605ee4b0e00285f5e309/t/5b311614562fa7a69e0363cf/1529943573236/equipo.board.2018.2019.meetings.pdf>

“Our teachers, the teachers here are not lazy. They stay after school pretty late. They come early and sit on the balcony to provide extra help. They take the time out of their day to try to help you; they don’t have to do that.” Another student said, *“The teachers here, they don’t just take time out of their day, they also grow close bonds with you. Not all schools do that; a lot of teachers don’t have that kindness that teachers here do.”* Students overwhelmingly named a handful of teachers that help them feel more confident, comfortable, and challenged at school and for whom they all had praise. Another student said there’s nowhere else s/he would want to go, and in response, all students raised their hand to agree with that statement. There is a strong interest in and commitment to the school by students. Said one student, *“I feel like we can all say Equipo Academy is an amazing school, and we all feel fortunate to be here.”*

- Conversely, multiple students cited the long day, especially for juniors and seniors with jobs, as their least favorite thing about the school. While they appreciate the opportunity to attend a school like Equipo, they collectively expressed concern about being able to work in the evenings given the length of the school day. (The length of the school day was a shared concern by staff, too, as discussed below.)
- Collectively, students said they seldom felt disrespected in classes or at the school (a noticeably different response than from other schools with similar grades within the portfolio). Said one student, *“It’s very rare when we feel disrespected in our classes. We have morals around respect here and most people honor that.”* This sentiment was echoed by other student participants.

Staff

- Staff said they are supported and coached, and generally satisfied with opportunities to grow. They have standing appointments to meet with their coaches weekly, get observed by their instructional coaches regularly, and have the opportunity to observe and learn from each other. There is a commitment to the growth mindset; it’s part of the culture, staff said. Said one staff member, compared to the district – where *“they would just come in briefly and say they had bigger fires and just give me credit for kids being on task”*, the feedback at Equipo is interactive, supportive, and honed-in on specific ways to help teachers.
- The morale of staff has improved over time, and that having more like-minded staff members who fit the mission and model of the school has helped. Families help boost morale, too, they said, by cooking for staff. Said one staff member, *“Leadership recognizes things that diminish morale – late deadlines, communication, family events. ... They’ve reflected on what is truly important; we’re headed in the right direction.”*
- Teachers and staff members identified a range of opportunities for growing the school, including revisiting the courses students are taking in high school to ensure more purposeful scheduling such as eliminating some of the elective options and creating more Honors and/or IB courses. One staff member said there was a need to be more purposeful with the extended day, stating, *“How much do middle schoolers need a second elective?”* Staff members also said there needed to be more streamlined, delineated tasks, including a school counselor and a Special Education facilitator. Staff members overwhelmingly echoed the need for more streamlined roles. Said one person, *“From the ops side, we wear so many hats and do so many things, this year was the first year when I felt I couldn’t give one hundred percent. ... We have so much on our plate, it would be nice to be able to have another person.”* Said another, *“We need more specifically delineated tasks. So the principal is the principal, and we have a counselor to help with specific student issues, and the dean of students is the dean of students. Have more specified roles so people aren’t over-tasked.”* Teachers and staff also said the absence policy needs to be re-evaluated; they named having only two days as not sustainable or helpful for staff’s mental health. As one participant put it, *“The absence policy doesn’t work for us.”*

V. OVERALL STRENGTHS OF PROGRAM

1. Positive school culture

While staff offered feedback on changes to strengthen staff morale and instructional and operation practices at the school, they also offered high praise and commitment to the school. Staff and teachers actively expressed pride in the school and its mission, as well as a shared dedication to the work being done by and on behalf of students. Students, staff, and families spoke of the team culture that is present throughout the school, the high level of engagement by families, and the relationships that are built within the campus. *"People are in it because they have the same heart,"* was said by one staff member and could be attributable to any stakeholder of the school or applicable to any school leader, staff member, teacher, parent, or student based on the numerous comments and feedback Authority staff received. There is a clear investment of and by staff members who want to work with the student population and recognize their role in preparing first generation college students and there is an evident drive by students to fulfill the school's mission, which they have internalized and personalized because of their commitment to it.

2. School wide procedures

In general, there are school-wide procedures that are evident, internalized, and well-embraced by students. They are also differentiated by age/grade level with noticeable, appropriate changes from middle school to high school. This creates a sense of pride in the grade levels, and students feel treated like adults or professionals, with high expectations being met. Students demonstrate a sense of ownership and accountability in the procedures.

3. Board feels informed

The Board feels very informed and included in the school's operation. They have a good pulse on the school through informal and formal communication and are welcomed at school events. The Board Chair said she regularly communicates with the school leader and feels kept in the loop on governance-related issues, such as an expulsion recommendations or behavior matters that get brought to the Board.

4. Warm, welcoming, receptive students

SPCSA staff noted being asked about their about college experiences by students, which was welcomed first. There is a clear emphasis on high expectations and being college bound that is evident in students' communication, goals, and engagement. Students reflect the professionalism expected of collegiate scholars and help create a warm, welcoming community on the campus. This was palpable throughout the day.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS/ACTION ITEMS

1. The Board needs to participate in formal governance training by June 30

There were numerous concerns raised through the conversation with Board members, as well as those noted by the Board. These included a lack of pipeline development for new board members, struggles for board members to fulfill their commitments given schedules, and the nonstandard evaluation process for the executive of a public charter school. Through the Focus Group comments by Board Members, there appears to be a misunderstanding of their roles, responsibilities, and legal obligations as board members of a public charter school.

Board members unwittingly raised concerns for the Authority about their capacity and skillset to be governance board members, stating *"My first time on the Board – it can be a little scary at times."* One board member said s/he asks to be cc'd on items by the school leader, which could be an

interpretation of micro-managing and overstepping the boundaries of the governance body – or simply a failure to understand their role as a board member and the oversight body of the school not the manager of the school’s leader. Board members recognized the need to grow the board and to have a strong board, but a board member’s comment – “*We need an effective Board to be able to run the school effectively.*” – is slightly misplaced. The Board’s role isn’t to run the school effectively; the Board’s role is to ensure the school leader is held accountable to run the school effectively.

Additionally, a board member said s/he is “*always thinking how can I support*” the school leader. The job of the Board is not to ‘support’ the school leader; it’s is the Board’s responsibility to hold the school leader accountable. The Board oversees the execution of the authorized charter, comply with state and federal statutes, and ensure the school is financially viable. The board members’ focus on data, support of the school leader for the sake of support, and non-governance matters was alarming.

It is the responsibility of the Board to communicate to and with Leadership on matters of fiscal and legal responsibilities. The school leader should help drive the ship, but the ship’s chartered course and the ownership and responsibility of the charter authorization are the Board’s, not the school leader’s. The citation of board member’s “busy schedules” and that standing committees do not exist because they weren’t “working out with schedules” is problematic to the Authority, as was the comment in the focus group that “*we never had enough board members to make the committees effective.*” The responsibility of being a board member is to the school, absent of external factors, including jobs and personal obligations, and these multiple comments related to board members’ busy-ness and inability to commit to standard operation practices of charter school boards, signaled a misunderstanding of the Board’s fiduciary and legal obligations and a potential for dereliction of duty as the accountable parties and holders of the charter.

Additionally, the Authority encourages the Board and school leadership to be mindful of Open Meeting Laws, and that email and text discussions, as cited by the Board Members in the Focus Group, can easily become violation of Open Meeting Laws if topics are being discussed in group texts, emails, or social media apps and/or if decisions are being made electronically. That’s not to say that this is happening, but it is a note of caution for the sake of compliance with and adherence to state law as a public entity.

SPCSA staff is also concerned about the evaluation process for the school leader. Given Board Members’ comments in the focus group, it appears he is only evaluated by two board members on the basis of a self-evaluation he completes. Further, one of the board members tasked with “discussing” his self-evaluation, as the board members phrased it, is the school leader’s former manager from his previous role. This becomes concerning when considering the formats by which boards typically evaluate the executive of an entity, particularly a public charter school, as well as when considering the lack of input and perspective from *all* board members, including those with whom the school leader does not have a prior professional relationship.

ACTION ITEM

Given the concerns raised as a result of the discussion in the Governance Focus Group, including the admission by board members that they have not had any recent training and had not deemed it necessary, in conjunction with the noted concerns related to board members understanding their legal and fiscal roles as members of a governing board of a public charter school, we strongly advise the Board to engage in a formal governance training by the start of the 2019-2020 fiscal year with an established charter school board resource organizations, such as Charter School Boards, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, or the National Charter School Resource Center and led by an external (that is, not the school leader) resource. This is critical to understanding the roles and

responsibilities of the governance team of a public charter school, as well as being able to execute on standard operating practices of public charter schools, including committees, school leader evaluation, prospective board member recruitment and identification, and the cadence of board meetings. SPCSA staff is willing and happy to work with the Board to identify specific ways to support its governance team, as well as help develop their training.

Additionally, the evaluation of the school leader needs to be re-examined regularly and a more formal process must be established to ensure transparency and purposefulness. We recommend the inclusion of a full 360-evaluation including feedback and the completion of the evaluative process by the full board not simply by the school leader's former principal/manager. Governance training by established charter school organizations will help the Board better understand their responsibilities and obligations related to oversight of and accountability from the school leader. This will also help the Board further develop the school leader and grow the current school leader's capacity to strengthen the school and student outcomes.

Lastly, while the Board is in compliance with state law related to its cadence of meetings, given the examples of special meetings and frequent board communication via texts and emails, as well as the comments by the board members that being on a board 'is a little scary at times,' we encourage the Board to reconsider the frequency of its meetings and hold at least six meetings a year, if not once a month during the school year. The increased number of board meetings will help board members better understand and execute their roles and responsibilities; strengthen the capacity of the team as a whole; and ensure the Board is fully engaged and responsible for that which they are legally responsible.

2. Increase rigor and higher-level questioning

While the school offers a wide range of topics of interest to students and aligned with state standards and graduation requirements, the level of instructional rigor is low, like many of the school's in our portfolio.

In multiple observations, there was low level engagement, and in some cases, off-task behavior, as noted above. Discussions were universally led by teachers, rather than by students, and there were notable examples of low-level DOK questions based in factual/recall. While teachers did a strong job of calling on individuals instead of relying on choral responses – which helps teachers better mastery of the content – there is still a need for teachers to make stronger connections to real-life application and ensure all students are receiving rigorous instruction and engaging in high-level discussions that provide evidence of understanding the material.

ACTION ITEM

At a professional development session, review the DOK levels and/or Blooms' Taxonomy to push for higher-level, more rigorous questioning throughout all grade levels. Encourage teachers to craft questions, related to the instructional delivery and mastery of objective, as part of the lesson planning process so that teachers may be intentional in their questioning of students to informally assess understanding. (We recognize lesson plans are not required to be submitted by all staff. This may be an area for isolation of a lesson planning component – submission of High-Level Questions (HLQs) or Essential questions.) Coaches can also work with teachers to help them develop HLQs or specifically look for it in their regular observations to better support staff with scaffolding and rigorous instruction.

3. Improve the school leader's development and develop capacity with staff

Just as a teacher would develop and grow students to be independent, autonomous, and efficient learners, so, too, does leadership need to develop and rely on staff's capacity.

Schools cannot be singularly focused or led. Given feedback from multiple stakeholders, including staff and governing board members, if the school leader unexpectedly became incapacitated, given the current lack of formalized delegation and role distribution, it is unlikely the school would be able to immediately properly function and continue sound operations for the sake of students and staff. There is real opportunity for delegation of responsibilities and growing the capacity and leadership skills of other staff members.

For example, board members cited the overburden impression as a result of the school leader repeatedly failing to delegate; staff members cited the “overly-tasked” individuals who are often responsible for student needs, including that three people are serving as a Special Education facilitator instead of one person being tasked full-time with that job, as well as the Operations team requesting more support; and from the Authority’s team’s first-hand experience, multiple documents related to the Site Evaluation were late and/or not provided.

While SPCSA staff is confident these documents exist and provide further evidence of the school’s overall competency/achievement, there is a pattern of late or incomplete tasks which is a concern to the Authority, as well as school stakeholders, as expressed in focus groups. In addition to the concerns expressed internally, from external educators’ perspective, there is a real need for the school to have a more balanced leadership and one that is not reliant on a single individual. The tendency for one person to ‘own’ all of the responsibilities of the school provides an appearance of leadership being overwhelmed by their responsibilities; under-resourced by human capital – which does not appear to be the case, given the current org chart and school structure; and frequently overburdened by new tasks and responsibilities, such as the Site Evaluation.

While we recognize this time of year was a busy one with WIDA testing, the reality of school leadership and the cadence of the school year is that there is always something that is ‘out of the norm’ for the schedule and pace of the school year. The expectation for all schools is to have materials and documents available for review, and this was not met during the Site Evaluation. Additionally, the school leader identified a need for an EL Coordinator, as did staff members in their focus group, so there a realization of the need to not stretch too thin and supplement roles that best support students and would allow school leadership to better meet the demands of their roles.

Action Item

Given teacher and staff feedback, as well as comments by the Board Chair in the Governance Focus Group, we strongly suggest that the school leadership team re-evaluate its structure to include full-time roles for a Special Education facilitator, EL Coordinator, and counselor, as well as survey the staff, students, and families to identify other roles that would better support student outcomes and work toward the mission.

While we recognize Leadership staff may have a strong connection to teaching and/or other interests in shared roles, the feedback in focus groups, as well as the Authority’s observed habits, indicate a need - and a vested interest by teachers – for stronger delineation of roles and responsibilities, full-time positions (rather than sliced roles spread out among staff) that better support student achievement, and more focused responsibilities that better ensure the sustainability of staff, the achievement of students, and the success of the academic program.

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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