



Nevada State Public Charter School Authority

Site Evaluation Report

Explore Academy

Evaluation Date: 11/17/2020

Report Date: 12/22/2020

State Public Charter School Authority
775-687-9174
1749 North Stewart Street Suite 40
Carson City, Nevada 89706
2080 East Flamingo Road, Suite 230
Las Vegas, NV 89119

Contents

Introduction and School Background	3
Academic Performance	4
Focus Group Summaries	7
Classroom Observation Totals.....	13
Organizational Performance	18
Site Evaluation Findings	21

Appendices

A: Nevada State Performance Framework

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

B: SPCSA Academic Framework

<http://charterschools.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/CharterSchoolsnvgov/content/News/2019/19062-8-Academic-Performance-Framework-Guidance-Document.pdf>

C: SPCSA Organizational Framework

<http://charterschools.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/CharterSchoolsnvgov/content/News/2019/19062-8-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 11/17/2020 at Explore Academy. The State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) conducts a comprehensive review of evidence related to all charters within the portfolio during the 1st, 3rd, and 5th year of operation. This comprehensive analysis addresses the academic success of the school and the effectiveness and viability of the school organization.

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 take-aways recorded using a checklist and observing all aspects of the school's operational components as outlined in the SPCSA operational 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

Explore Academy is located in Las Vegas, Nevada in a facility at 4660 N. Rancho Drive. The school serves 136 students (as of the most recent Validation Day in October 2020). The mission of Explore is: "Explore Academy will provide each student with a personalized educational experience through the power of student choice, allowing each student to create a unique educational pathway in preparation for a college future."

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Explore Academy Nevada School Performance Framework 2019

Explore Academy serves 136 students in grades 6th- 9th grade. As Explore Academy opened in SY 20-21 no academic performance data can be displayed.

Explore Academy
Math and ELA Results
Nevada School Performance Framework
2019

N/A

SPCSA Academic Performance Framework
Geographic Comparison Report
N/A

SPCSA Academic Performance Framework
Diversity Comparison
N/A

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARIES

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

Group	Number of Participants	Duration of Focus Group
Governing Board ¹	2	30 minutes
Parents/Families	5	30 minutes
Students	3	30 minutes
School Leadership	1	30 minutes
Staff	5	30 minutes

Governing Board:

- The board said they meet monthly, and sometimes more, in the event action is needed. When asked about training for members, participants said that they have connected with other board members from other schools. The board members said they have experienced board members who have helped others on this board with regard to Open Meeting Law and other legal requirements. When board members were asked if there is a process in place to onboard and train new members, the board said they are still working on that process and would be interested in receiving resources to help develop that process. Board members spoke about the freedom of choice that is offered through Explore Academy that allows students to create and manage their own educational experience.
- When asked what types of information the board receives regarding the academic performance of the school, they said they receive updates from the school leader every other meeting. The information relates to testing results and social and emotional learning. Board members said specific data the board receives is focused on math, reading, writing and how that data lines up with the state. Board members said they received an in-depth presentation from the school leader in September. Board members were asked about the data in the presentation and if it was Nevada standards based. The board members said they would need to revisit the presentation as the contents were more high-level. Board members said they received percentages regarding the pass rate of students. A board member shared they thought it was a good idea for them to go back to the data being presented and ensure that the school is teaching to the standards that the students will be measured by. Board members indicated that they would be exploring that in more detail at future meetings.
- Board members were asked about the plan for evaluating the school leaders. Board members said they would like to connect with Justin Baiardo, founder, to better understand what the evaluation process will look like. The board said they had not flushed out the details of the evaluation yet. This is also something they plan to discuss at a future meeting. Board members were asked about their role in updating, and approving, policy and procedures. SPCSA staff had found that the school did not have a fully developed Special Education and English Language Learner policy and procedure manual and board members were asked if they were aware of that. Board members said they were aware that

¹ Two members of the 5-member board participated. Quorum was not met, and Open Meeting Law was not violated

the information contained in previous procedures was not in-depth enough and would be focusing on that in upcoming meetings. Another board member said the policy and procedures were a challenge for the school and this has been discussed with the school leader. They said they are in a process of bringing on new staff, such as a SPED coordinator, to help assist the school to ensure they are serving the rights of the students properly.

- The board was asked if they had consulted with the schools in New Mexico with regard to development and implementation of the policy and procedures. The board members said they had not consulted with New Mexico regarding this matter. Board members expressed appreciation to the SPCSA staff for bringing attention to this critical matter. A board member said this would be the first agenda item at their next meeting. Board members were then asked about the budget and finance of the school and what types of information they receive at meetings. Board members said they receive information regarding the budget and finances of the school at almost every meeting. Additionally, board members indicated that they review budget spreadsheets to see how enrollment aligns with the budget and ensure the school remains financially viable. The board members said they felt they were doing really well regarding budgeting at the school. The board members said that, while they are experiencing some growing pains, the school leader, along with staff, are putting in the work to keep getting better. The board remains engaged with the operation and performance of the school and will continue to do so.

Parents/Families:

- Parents were asked what they have liked about Explore in its first year of operation, and parents and families reported that they appreciated the small class sizes and they feel like the school focuses on learning. One parent said that their child had seen huge improvements in their grades, especially math, and that has been great. Another parent said they had come from a different charter school, and the “flavor” choices ²Explore Academy offers has been important to their child. Parents were asked what wasn’t working at Explore regarding the distance education and they spoke about the difficulties at the beginning of the year. But family members added that Explore Academy has been trying to engage students more as everyone becomes more accustomed to the virtual format. Another parent spoke about their ELL child, and how the remote learning actually helped their child. Explore found a program that translates for their child which has helped their child better understand the lessons. One parent said that their child has had a hard time in the virtual environment, but the school has done a lot to engage their child. The parent also said they are looking forward to going back to in-person instruction.

² Explore Knowledge Academy is a project-based school which means that the students learn through hands on, self-directed research. The Nevada Academic Content Standards guide the curriculum, but it is the student’s interests and curiosity that determine the method and the type of project the students create to show they have met the standards- this is referred to as “Flavors”.

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY continued

- Parents were asked if the school held any meetings before the year started to assist students and families with instruction in a virtual environment. Parents said the school has been communicating with them on developments with in-person versus virtual learning and the parents complemented the school leader on their communication with them throughout the pandemic. Parents said the school had communicated with them that they should have the cameras on during virtual lessons. Parents said the school has reached out to them if their child had not been following directions regarding their camera. Again, the parents voiced their appreciation with communication from the school that has allowed them to help at home with the distance learning. Parents were asked if they felt their children were learning at Explore in the virtual model. One parent said that their child is flourishing, and teachers have talked with them about how well their child is doing in school. Another parent said the school has been great with testing their children to see if they can move up in their lessons which has motivated their children to continue to excel. Another parent said they are home while their children are in school and they have seen the engagement the teachers are having with the children. They said their other child is attending a different school virtually and that school has not been nearly as engaged with their child as Explore has been.
- Parents were then asked about the type of testing that is occurring at Explore and what their understanding of the measures of learning are via those tests. A parent said that teachers are testing the students which guide the students on the next course they will take. Teachers send out progress reports to keep parents informed on the progress their children are making. If a child is not making the proper progress, they meet with the teacher for additional assistance. A parent also spoke positively about the office hours teachers provide to students. Parents said that sometimes office hours are just between one student and the teacher and other times there is more than one student present. One parent complimented a math teacher for the help that is being given during their office hours. Another parent said they have used the virtual environment to pop in and see what is going on and they haven't been told they are not allowed to do that. The parent went on to say that they saw teachers trying to include every child in the lessons.
- Parents were asked if there was anything that they felt the school could improve upon. Parents said the school has been very responsive to both theirs and their children's needs and couldn't think of anything that needed to be improved at the school.

Students:

- Students were asked if there was anything they liked about the distance learning through COVID-19. One student said they have enjoyed being able to communicate with their teachers and it has been easier virtually. Students were then asked what they don't like about the online learning environment and responded by saying there were a lot of challenges. One student said they do not like the online school at all, but they do it so they can keep their grades up. The online environment has caused some students to feel depressed because they haven't been able to interact with their classmates at school. Students were asked if they still feel like they are learning and they responded that they were still learning. One student spoke about learning about the World Wars in their history class. Another student said they appreciate having their parents and siblings at home because they can learn other things that their siblings are learning. A third student said they feel like they have been learning and the school has helped with their grades. Students shared that attending the school has taught them about nobility and enthusiasm, and that the school encourages students to show enthusiasm through "Shout Out Forms."

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY continued

- Students were asked what motivates them to come to school every day and they responded that they enjoy learning new things. One student said the classes feel different than what other schools are offering. A student said they really like the clubs including the sign language club, a movie critics club, and a music club where you can learn how to create music. Students also mentioned leadership, the Rubik's cube club, and the medical mystery clubs as options they have enjoyed. Students said they filled out forms at the beginning of the year about things that interested them and that was one way they chose the clubs to participate in. Another student said they really liked learning about history and said that they are motivated to have good grades, so they participate in their Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) club.
- Students were then asked about their feeling of belonging at the school and the respect they receive. Students said they feel respected because they don't get questions about their appearance. They feel like they have their own privacy, and no one messes with [them] about the way you look. Another student said they like that students don't make fun of one another. One student said they hadn't really gotten to know their classmates because they haven't met in person yet, indicating that they are sort of going through the motions to get the grades they need.
- Students were asked if they have any suggestions for the school to improve their learning experiences. Students said they would like to see some additional club offerings. They would like to see students given the opportunity to think of different clubs to have at the school. Another student said they would like to see an ROTC program at the school, which would help bring more meaning to some of the students and would give students a chance to see if they might like joining the military. One student said they would like to see the learning be made more fun. They would like to see some new techniques that may bring more enjoyment to lessons. Finally, students were asked to share anything else that may have been on their mind regarding the school. One student said they really like having the assemblies that include all of the students at the school. They also said they really like the movie nights the school has offered. The student also said that their classes have unique topics like the *Simpsons*, *Star Trek*, and other topics that they have really enjoyed.

Leadership:

- The leadership team was asked in what ways teachers at the school ensure that students are engaged and challenged. The leader said engagement with students has fallen off recently. At the beginning of the year, parents were very happy with the options that were being provided by Explore. The leader said things started to shift when they were told the school could not enforce a "camera on" rule. The school has taken steps to explain to students that having the cameras on will ultimately help them in their learning and engagement with teachers and classmates. The leader discussed looking at the teacher's standards documents to ensure teachers are addressing the standards they should be addressing. The leader also said she relies on assistance from the Explore network team to help check the rigorousness of the curriculum.

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY continued

- The leader was asked about Explore's alignment to the Nevada Academic Content Standards and whether someone in the Explore network cross referenced the standards from New Mexico with the Nevada standards. The leader said the network and school did cross reference to ensure the standards were aligned and they made a few minor adjustments prior to the start of the year. The leader was asked about how teachers foster learning. The leader shared the school focuses on student-led learning to help engage the students and foster a full understanding of the materials they are learning.
- The leader was asked how teachers provide clear, timely, feedback to students. The leaders said the feedback to students is still a process, that Explore staff continues to improve that feedback, and that the ultimate goal is for students to be able to fully explain and take ownership of the content they are learning. According to the school leader, Explore Academy would like students to fully grasp the standards and be able to describe those standards back to the teacher. The leader said they also signed up for the Achievement Network³ which will help inform how the leader will support the teachers.
- The leader was also asked how data was used to drive instruction. The leader said data collection has been made more difficult due to the ongoing pandemic, but the school is monitoring student attendance. By also looking at attendance by teacher to see if there are trends, the school can help teachers ensure students attend class. The school also collects data on social and emotional learning, both schoolwide by the leader and at the classroom level by the teachers. There are both monthly grade level Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and biweekly content PLCs. The leader was asked how the teachers use this data to inform their instruction. The leader said this has also been rough because the staff is so small. The leader said the school hopes this process will become better as the school expands in the coming years. The school leader shared that a priority is to make the data accessible to teachers without overwhelming them while also continuing to help teachers use the data to inform instruction. The school leader stated that there is a strong desire to help teachers understand what the data means. Additionally, the school leader shared that some of the teachers are new to this type of data-driven instruction and they have been working with new teachers to bring them along. Finally, the leader said they have a few math teachers who independently decided to tutor each other's students and that idea came out of the PLCs.

³ Achievement Network or A-Net is a nonprofit dedicated to an integrated system of tools and training to help schools and districts boost student learning using successful practices of educators around the country.

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY continued

Staff:

- Staff was asked what they thought their biggest barriers have been with distance education. One staff member said that one of the biggest issues has been students not having their cameras on. Staff added that at the beginning of the year there were technical issues, but as the year has gone along, more students have just stopped responding to requests to have their cameras on during virtual instruction. Another staff member said differentiation has been difficult in the virtual environment when you are working with students remotely. A third staff member said instruction is really difficult when you can't see the students. Teachers are unable to read cues like body language to see if students are really understanding the materials being taught. Staff was asked about their understanding of the camera requirements and how they have been implemented at the school. Staff said that some of the issues have come down to some students not being forthright with their parents and others having legitimate issues with their cameras. Staff spoke about the difficulties of ascertaining whether there is a real technology issue or if the student just doesn't want to be on the camera. It has been frustrating for the teaching staff because it makes it difficult to teach. Recently, the school has included camera operation as a part of the progress report to show parents when a student has, or does not have, their camera on during lessons. Teachers said they spend a lot of the instructional time reminding students to keep their cameras on which takes away from the lessons they are trying to teach.
- Staff was then asked about the instructional model at Explore Academy and their understanding of how it is implemented. Staff said that one of their favorite aspects of the model is the "flavors." Teachers can go and find what needs to be taught and implement techniques they think will be best. Teachers said they love the freedom of the model, but sometimes can feel rushed when trying to teach the subjects. One staff member said that overall, they have liked the online format, while another teacher said the online environment is very difficult. Teachers said that they provide math instruction but working with the flavor model has been difficult with regard to teaching the fundamentals of math. Teachers also said that since students are so far behind on math, they are just teaching the basics and they haven't been able to use their flavors. The teachers said they have had to pull out entire lessons because they had to go back and teach standards again. The staff was asked about the standards and whether they had concerns with students being able to do the fundamentals of the standards. One staff member said they are designing their assessments based on the content they are teaching, stating that they are using a backwards planning model to help map out what the curriculum will look like. Another staff said they, too, use a backwards planning model to be able to focus on the essential skills of the lessons they are teaching. Staff said that 22 instructional days isn't always enough time to complete the implementation of the curriculum. In addition, there are lost days for midterms and other assessments, is not a lot of time which can be difficult for staff.
- Staff was asked about the training they received for the current model. Staff said they all have a department chair that is in New Mexico, and that despite the distance, they are able to communicate with their department chairs and get assistance when needed. The department chairs assist teachers with their backwards planning and how to map out the semester so teachers are able to meet their standards.
- Finally, staff was asked if there was anything else they would like to explain about the school. They spoke about how great the leadership has been with staff. Staff indicated that while there are challenges with the student population they serve, they said it is no fault of Explore. Staff shared that they know it is a new school and they are all learning together and operating, as a distance education model has had its difficulties. Despite these challenges, staff praised leadership, stating that they have been there with support the whole time, always mindful of their wellbeing.

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION TOTALS

A total of 13 observations were conducted for approximately 20 minutes on the day of the evaluation.

I. CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT					
<p>Areas 1 & 2</p> <p>Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport</p> <p>Establishing a Culture for Learning</p>	Distinguished	Proficient	Basic	Unsatisfactory	Not Observed
	Classroom interactions are highly respectful and the teacher demonstrates a passionate commitment to the subject.	Classroom interactions reflect general warmth and caring and a genuine culture for learning.	Classroom interactions are generally appropriate and free from conflict with a minimal culture for learning.	Classroom interactions between the teacher and students are negative and do not represent a culture for learning.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
	Total: 1	Total: 10	Total: 2	Total:	Total:
	Students ensure maintenance of high levels of civility among classmates and assume much of the responsibility for establishing a culture for learning.	Interactions reflect cultural and developmental differences of students. Teacher and students are committed to the subject.	Interactions may be characterized by occasional displays of insensitivity and inconsistent expectations for student achievement.	Interactions are characterized by sarcasm, put-downs, and/or conflict. There is a low teacher commitment to the subject and few instances of students taking pride in their work.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
	Total: 2	Total: 10	Total:	Total:	Total: 1
<p>Areas 3 & 4</p> <p>Managing Classroom Procedures</p> <p>Managing Student Behavior</p>	Distinguished	Proficient	Basic	Unsatisfactory	Not Observed
	Classroom routines and procedures appear seamless and student behavior is entirely appropriate.	Classroom routines and procedures have been established and the teacher ensures smooth functioning with little loss of instruction time.	Classroom routines and procedures have been established but function inconsistently, with some loss of instruction time.	Classroom routines and procedures are nonexistent or inefficient, resulting in the loss of much instruction time.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
	Total: 1	Total: 10	Total: 2	Total:	Total:
	There appears to be no misbehavior during the observation. The teacher monitoring of student behavior is subtle and/or preventative.	Teacher responds to student misbehavior in ways that are appropriate and respectful of the students.	Teacher tries to establish standards of conduct for students and monitor behavior. These efforts are not always successful.	Teacher is unsuccessful in monitoring student behavior.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
	Total: 4	Total: 6	Total: 2	Total:	Total:

II. CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

Area 5					Not
	Distinguished	Proficient	Basic	Unsatisfactory	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 real- 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 explanations are done skillfully, but other portions are difficult to follow.	The purpose for the lesson learning activity is unclear. Teacher's explanation of the content is unclear, confusing or uses inappropriate language.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
	Total: 2	Total: 10	Total:	Total:	Total:
Area 6	Distinguished	Proficient	Basic	Unsatisfactory	Not Observed
Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques	A 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:	Total: 9	Total:	Total: 1	Total: 3
	B Students assume responsibility for the participation of most students in the discussion.	Teachers assumes responsibility for the discussion which includes most students.	There is some attempt by the teacher to initiate student discussion and student participation.	There is little to no student discussion even though the opportunity is there.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
Total	Total: 11	Total:	Total: 1	Total: 1	

II. CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION (continued)

		Distinguished	Proficient	Basic	Unsatisfactory	Not Observed
Area 7 Engaging Students in Learning	A	Students are highly engaged throughout the lesson. The pacing and structure of the lesson 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 suitable for this group of students.	Students are partially engaged throughout the lesson.	Students are not at all intellectually engaged in significant learning.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
		Total:	Total: 11	Total: 2	Total:	Total:
	B	Students make contributions to the representation of content.	There are appropriate activities and materials and instructive representations of content.	The representation of content or structure/pacing is uneven.	There are inappropriate activities or materials, poor representations of content or lack of lesson structure/pacing.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
		Total: 2	Total: 9	Total: 2	Total:	Total:
		Distinguished	Proficient	Basic	Unsatisfactory	Not Observed
Area 8 Using Formative Assessment in Instruction	A	Students are aware of the learning goals/targets for themselves during this instructional timeframe.	Most of the students are aware of the learning goals/targets for themselves during this instructional timeframe.	Some of the students are aware of the learning goals/targets for themselves during this instructional timeframe.	Students are not aware of the learning goals/learning target during this instructional time frame.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
		Total:	Total: 13	Total:	Total:	Total:
	B	The teacher purposefully and consistently provides clear, descriptive feedback in regard to student's demonstration/understanding of the learning goal/target. The feedback is timely and is in a reasonable amount.	Much of the time, the teacher, provides clear, descriptive feedback regarding student's understanding/ demonstration of learning goal/target. The feedback is timely and is in a reasonable amount.	At times, the teacher provides clear, descriptive feedback but not in a consistent manner regarding learning goal/target. Observing where the work was meeting and where it was not. The feedback is timely and is in a reasonable amount.	The teacher does not provide clear, descriptive feedback regarding learning goal/target and does not observing where the work is and where it is not meeting. The feedback is not timely and is not in a reasonable amount.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
		Total:	Total: 13	Total:	Total:	Total:

The purpose of this portion of the report is to provide a numerical value to the total number of best practices seen during the classroom observational portion as a whole. This number is indicated at the end of each best practice descriptor/line.

Evidence of adapted materials/assessments: Area # 1

- Lessons are designed to encourage student curiosity and learning beyond classroom time: 3
- The explanation of the content is imaginative: 1

Evidence of questioning and discussion techniques: Area # 2

- Questions are planned ahead of time and tied to learning target(s): 1
- Teacher questions are open ended: 3
- Teacher allows time for students to answer – 3 seconds or more: 3
- Teacher extends the thinking and discussion by encouraging students to say more, restate or summarize: 3 (chat-rewrite)
- Teacher purposefully signals to entire group of students to wait/think before volunteering a response: 2
- Teacher provides the opportunity for all students to answer the question (think, pair, share, written response): 3

Evidence of engaging students in learning area: Area # 3

- Active learning is taking place (rather than just listening or viewing): 3
- Students are using reasoning and critical thinking: 3
- The lesson is rigorous and includes cognitively complex tasks:
- Students engage in several types of activities during the lesson including:
 - Speaking Writing Reading Listening Discussing Creating Problem Solving
- Cooperative groups:
- Student-led classroom: 1
- Technology is integrated into learning/outcomes: 5
- Project-based learning: 1

Evidence of Formative Assessment During Instruction: Area # 4

- Teachers provide the students feedback about their learning referring to examples taking anecdotal notes: 2
- Students incorporate the feedback by revising their work: 3
- Students receive frequent and meaningful feedback regarding their work: 3
- A wide range of instructional practices that are likely to motivate and engage most students are used during the lesson: 2

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 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.

Measure	Description	Evidence Collected Through	Takeaways
1a	The school implements material terms of the education program.	School Presentation Classroom Observations	Explore Academy is a newly opened school. School leaders and staff make a point of upholding the mission statement. The school's academic plan allows for the NVACS to be taught and classes conducted in a seminar-style of teaching with students making choices based on individualized student interest. The levels of achievement towards the NVACS are routinely measured.
1b	The school complies with applicable education requirements.	School Presentation Classroom Observations	Staff and school leaders are evaluated on a yearly basis.
1c	The school protects the rights of students with disabilities.	School Presentation Classroom Observations	The school leaders and school board are working to update and detail the policy and procedure manual for this area.
1d	The school protects the rights of ELL students.	School Presentation Classroom Observations	The school leaders and school board are working to update and detail the policy and procedure manual for this area.

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Measure	Description	Evidence Collected Through	Takeaways
3a	The school complies with governance requirements.	School Presentation Classroom Observations	Explore Academy schools and its Board serve in the best interest of all students. The Board ensures that teachers, staff, parents/guardians, and other stakeholders interested in an investment of education in Nevada have an opportunity to improve the learning of students within the state.
3b	The school holds management accountable.	School Presentation	All school leaders are evaluated on a yearly basis.
4a	The school protects the rights of all students.	School Presentation Classroom Observations	Explore Academy has implemented culturally responsive practices and works to protect the rights of all students.
5b	The school complies with health and safety requirements.	School Presentation Classroom Observations	The school has an Emergency Response Plan as well as a COVID-19 Mitigation plan in place.

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 Evidence are found within the body of the report and summarized here.

1. The teaching staff at Explore Academy has many caring teachers. SPCSA staff noticed that the teaching staff uses kind words such as please and thank you whenever possible. Student's names were used often. Teaching staff expressed excitement to the students and used open ended questions. It was clear that the staff is reaching out and trying to develop relationships with students despite the inherent challenges of distance learning for a brick-and-mortar school.
2. There appear to be some highly experienced and qualified teachers at Explore Academy, and there was evidence of some best practices taking place at the school. These included teachers using good teaching techniques such as re-stating what students say and maintaining positivity. In some cases, the teachers appeared to have in-depth knowledge of the teaching content.
3. School staff and family members spoke highly of the unique cultivation to an active-learning environment. Classes average about 16 students per teacher and instruction is conducted in seminar-style with two-way discourse between teachers and students, which eliminates the teacher as the sole source of information. Every seminar at Explore Academy is offered to students through multiple versions or "flavors". It is through this diversity that students come to possess the freedom to choose their version of each class which interests them most. Teachers create themed instruction based on their passions, and students to choose which flavors in which they're most interested, every student's combination of choices becomes unique and independently driven. This approach to instruction and learning is highly appreciated and the autonomy and choice this provides learners is exclusive to Explore Academy.
4. The family and student focus groups were highly positive in their remarks about Explore Academy. Parents are happy with the leaders, teachers, communications, and school policies. The students are thankful for the wide range of clubs which have been provided, even during this time of virtual learning. Students described the school as providing choice and respect and said they felt able to be themselves and don't face judgements at the school.
5. The support of the Department Heads in New Mexico network is a strength. The network helped teachers get off to a good start and provided them resources and examples of backwards planning. Each instructional teacher has been paired with a Department Head from the network who is there to answer questions, provide reassurance, and work as teammates to overcome obstacles.

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.

1. Due to the current learning environment and to the newly opened school, there are some instances of the content or lessons plans with the “flavors”, which may pose challenges. The primary challenge is that, according to instructional staff, there may not always be time to get all of the content taught before it is time to move on. One example given was within the content area of Math and Social Studies. Some instructors are realizing that they are not able to cover the curriculum in full and are concerned about this situation.
2. As indicated in focus groups and within the school presentation, this campus must develop and implement a more cohesive plan to meet the needs of students with special needs.
3. It is imperative that the school team work to motivate and empower each other to implement additional best practices in teaching in both the virtual setting and the in-person learning setting. This will require students, teachers, and family members to have a more data based understanding of the mastery of a Nevada Academic Content Standard as it relates to student learning and Nevada State expectations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

The SPCSA strongly encourages Explore Academy to implement the following five recommendations within a short time frame of no later than (60 days (April 5, 2021)). Each recommendation is highly important to the ongoing success of the school. The SPCSA will conduct a check for completion of all recommended items after April 5, 2021.

1. SPCSA staff strongly recommends that the Explore Academy School Board work closely with the Explore school leader to develop and vet well-defined and detailed and comprehensive procedures and policies for Special Education and Second Language Learning. Special education presents one of the major challenges facing school leaders. Schools must provide students with disabilities appropriate access to the general curriculum and effective instructional support. . Student progress must be monitored closely and demonstrated through participation in assessment efforts. Research suggests that the principal’s role is pivotal in the special education process; The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (USDOE, 1997) specified that students with disabilities must have access to the general education curriculum and participate in assessments. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (USDOE, 2002), a sweeping reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) creates additional provisions to ensure that no children—especially those with the greatest learning needs—are neglected in standards-driven learning environments. NCLB redefines the federal role in K-12 education with the goal of closing the achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students and their peers.
2. The Explore Academy School Board is strongly encouraged to provide for formal training of each board member in critical areas including open meeting law (quorum, electronic communications). In addition, it is crucial that each board member understand their role in school governance, finance, human resources and student learning. Because the attributes of a highly effective governance team are highly important for newly elected and first term members, the SPCSA recommends a written training and implementation plan of action for current and future members of the board.
3. Because school boards are charged with governing education by overseeing the implementation of state and federal mandates and ensuring academic excellence for all students, it is important to establish clarity in regard to the role of school board members and the school leader/superintendent. It is imperative that a well-designed performance evaluation tool for the school leader is implemented. The evaluation should include formal guidelines to provide both guidance and standards throughout the superintendent/school leader performance school year and evaluation process. School goals should drive the evaluation of the leader. Other benefits include the goal setting and monitoring of improvements in areas such as communication, school improvement, budgeting, planning, and board relations.
4. One of Explore Academy’s strengths is their unique seminar approach to instruction which creates and cultivates an active-learning environment. Another strength is the availability of department heads and curriculum experts from New Mexico, who have been successful in the backward planning and implementation of the versions of classes, also known as “flavors”. The SPCSA celebrates this approach and at the same time recommends that the newly opened Nevada School stay in constant communication with their counterpart in New Mexico with an on-going and elevated target to make sure all Nevada Academic Content Standards are both taught and learned as measured by reliable and valid measures of student achievement. This may require the school to work to fine-tune a way to implement baseline and mid-year testing, such as interim tests, common

formative assessments, daily formative assessments, and diagnostic assessments so as to create a more data-driven environment. A strong and robust plan to create a testing environment for diagnostic testing will provide essential information to the staff about current levels of student achievement and provide feedback regarding the measure of learning up to a certain point in the year. It is critical that teachers know the impact of their instruction in terms of their ability to recognize if and when a student has mastered a standard and when they have not.

5. To better meet the needs of all students, the SPCSA recommends the school leader develop a robust plan based on the detailed policy and procedure in item 1 of this report. These policies and procedures must be implemented within the next 60 days (April 5, 2021). Using the newly detail oriented Special Education procedures, implement these by providing clear expectations for all teaching staff, and administrators at the school. Include professional development where needed which may include discipline of students in Special Education, IEP Components, and guidelines for working with paraprofessionals, aides, or assistant teachers. States/schools must establish standards and test every student's progress using tests designed for the standards. Progress must be measured for all. This should likely include the collaborative efforts of the school leader, school board, and CMO as well as review with legal counsel to ensure all requirements are met. Studies of effective schools have identified five instructional leadership priorities of effective principals: (a) defining and communicating the school's educational mission, (b) managing curriculum and instruction, (c) supporting and supervising teaching, (d) monitoring student progress, and (e) promoting a learning climate (Bateman & Bateman, 2001; Blasé, J. J., 1987; Blasé, J. J., Blasé, J., Anderson, & Dungan, 1995; Blasé, J., & Kirby, 1992).

These priorities keep effective administrators focused on student learning and professional development. As a result, effective leaders are familiar with current research, find necessary resources, make well- reasoned judgments regarding students' programs, mentor new teachers, provide professional opportunities for all staff members, and evaluate teacher performance.

DEFICIENCIES

There were no deficiencies identified for Explore Academy during this site evaluation.

RESPONSE TO SITE EVALUATION REPORT

EXPLORE ACADEMY - LAS VEGAS

EXPLORE ACADEMY - LAS VEGAS



Explore Academy - Las Vegas (EA-LVS) has received the draft report for its 2020-2021 site evaluation. The following response pertains to the recommendations listed on pages 24-25 of the draft document provided to the school's administrative team.

1. *SPCSA staff strongly recommends that the Explore Academy School Board develop and ratify well-defined procedures and policies for Special Education and Second Language Learning.*

This should likely include the collaborative efforts of the school leader, school board, and CMO as well as review with legal counsel to ensure all requirements are met.

EA-LVS has worked with its legal counsel to review its handbooks for both special education and English language learners. The completed documents are scheduled to be approved by the Board during their February meeting. The handbooks are also scheduled to be reviewed in their entirety by staff who work with those populations as well as the entire administrative team by February 12, 2021. This will be followed by a staff training in March or April using the Board-approved handbooks.

- 2. The Explore Academy School Board is strongly encouraged to provide for formal training of each board member in critical areas including open meeting law (quorum, electronic communications). In addition, it is crucial that each board member understand their role in school governance, finance, human resources and student learning. Because the attributes of a highly effective governance team are highly important for newly elected and first term members, the SPCSA recommends a written training and implementation plan of action for current and future members of the board.*

The school is arranging Board training this year in several areas to assist the Board in its governance duties. This includes OML, procedures, annual school leader evaluation, public notices, etc. EA-LVS has worked with its legal counsel to ensure that the Board and school are updating procedures to comply with all federal and state rules and regulations. The administrative team has compiled a handbook to assist the Board and school leadership with the governance duties and responsibilities.

- 3. Because school boards are charged with governing education by overseeing the implementation of state and federal mandates and ensuring academic excellence for*

all students, it is important to establish clarity in regard to the role of school board members and the school leader/superintendent. It is imperative that a well-designed performance evaluation tool for the school leader is implemented. The evaluation should include formal guidelines to provide both guidance and standards throughout the superintendent/school leader performance school year and evaluation process. School goals should drive the evaluation of the leader. Other benefits include the goal setting and monitoring of improvements in areas such as communication, school improvement, budgeting, planning, and board relations.

The school board understands its role in governing the charter school, including the importance of hiring a strong school leader and holding that leader accountable. To ensure the same, the board will be provided with a comprehensive school leader evaluation reports each term. These reports include goals for improvement and areas of strength as well as performance in relation to school goals and school performance data. At the completion of the academic year, the board will evaluate the school leader's performance based on the reports from each term as well as their own interaction with and observation of the school leader. This evaluation will be outlined in a report and will be shared with and reviewed by the Board and school leader.

- 4. One of Explore Academy's strengths is their unique seminar approach to instruction which creates and cultivates an active-learning environment. Another strength is the availability of department heads and curriculum experts from New Mexico, who have been successful in the backward planning and implementation of the versions of classes, also known as "flavors". The SPCSA celebrates this approach and at the same time recommends that the newly opened Nevada School stay in constant communication with their counterpart in New Mexico with an on-going and elevated target to make sure all*

Nevada Academic Content Standards are both taught and learned as measured by reliable and valid measures of student achievement. This may require the school to work to fine-tune a way to implement baseline and mid-year testing, such as interim tests, common formative assessments, daily formative assessments, and diagnostic assessments so as to create a more data-driven environment. A strong and robust plan to create a testing environment for diagnostic testing will provide essential information to the staff about current levels of student achievement and provide feedback regarding the measure of learning up to a certain point in the year. It is critical that teachers know the impact of their instruction in terms of their ability to recognize if and when a student has mastered a standard and when they have not.

The Nevada content standards and student proficiency and performance are the driving force behind the entire curriculum in all grade levels and content areas. The

seminars are designed based solely on the standards that are assigned to each specific seminar. The flavor component of the model is the vehicle that carries the NV academic standards and rigorous class content. The academic systems embedded into the model are reliant on comprehensive data collection and reporting mechanisms, all of which having been carefully designed and customized to the school and its enrolled students. This includes standard-aligned metrics such as exit exams and annual state tests, formative classroom assessments, weekly progress checks for every student, placement tests to assist with proper class level placement (particularly in math), and academic referrals. The metrics are examined every month and the school staff use the reports from each term to drive the improvement efforts and initiatives as they move forward. This is similar to the way classroom teachers use formative assessment data daily to course correct and customize instruction daily to meet the needs of the students and their unique academic needs. The entire model, while focused on choice and individualization, is driven by and dependent on data to function.

One component, the exit exam, is vital in assessing student proficiency and progress related to the content standards and skills. These exams, which are peer-reviewed and designed using Bloom's Taxonomy for varied levels of questioning, are tied directly to the academic standards assigned to each seminar. This first year has been focused on training teachers and students in the school systems and characteristics of successful assessments and grading practices. The school relies very heavily on formative, individual student feedback, and it takes teachers time to adjust to the paradigm shift away from cumulative grades and relying on the average of dozens of standards over the course of a semester.

As the teachers are more experienced with the demands of more authentic assessment in class, they will move to the common exit exams starting in the fall. This means that all flavors of a given class (such as the MTH 110 flavors 111, 112, and 113) assess students using the exact same common assessment for part 1 of the exit exam (called the Core Assessment). This is designed using Bloom's levels 1-4 to assess comprehension and basic proficiency in every standard required for the seminar, individually. Each teacher then assesses students using a Flavor Assessment which is designed using Bloom's levels 3-6 and incorporates the class flavor while assessing proficiency in each of the seminar's assigned standards. These exams are submitted to the content team as well as to the Explore Learning team for review and approval, ensuring that the level of rigor is high and that teachers, regardless of flavor, are assessing students fairly using valid and reliable assessments tied directly to the NV content standards.

5. To better meet the needs of all students, the SPCSA recommends the school develop a robust plan and policy to follow with regard to Special Education students. Using

the newly detail oriented Special Education procedures, implement these by providing clear expectations for all teaching staff, and administrators at the school. Include professional development where needed which may include discipline of students in Special Education, IEP Components, and guidelines for working with paraprofessionals, aides, or assistant teachers.

The school has systems in place in regard to special education procedures and policies, including the handbook mentioned in recommendation 1. Additionally, the administrative team developed a shared calendar to track all special education events including IEPs, services, and conferences. The special education teacher has worked to keep all IEPs current and record progress toward goals in the school system and Infinite Campus. Ms. Larsen has worked tirelessly to find stable ancillary service providers and ensure that all service hours are being met, even when several providers have proven to be unreliable or not able to meet the needs of EA-LVS students. Currently, the special education teacher and Ms. Larsen are reviewing the comprehensive handbook in depth in order to better understand the various aspects of the special education process and requirements. The administrative team will work together this spring to make resources materials related to special education procedures such as timelines, graphic organizers, and checklists. This will also assist as we expand the student body over the next few school years.

Plan to collect evidence as of April 5th, 2021 per SPCSA

The SPCSA strongly encourages Explore Academy to implement the following five recommendations within a short time frame of no later than (60 days (April 5, 2021)). Each recommendation is highly important to the ongoing success of the school. The SPCSA will conduct a check for completion of all recommended items after April 5, 2021.

1. Send a full copy of the completed handbooks for both special education and English Language Learners. Indicate that the Explore Academy board has approved these handbooks.
Provide a copy of the agenda and signed attendance of staff at the training to take place in March or April
2. Provide the name of the training, date, time for the board trainings including the agendas for the following items:
 - Open Meeting Law
 - Annual school leader Evaluation documents
 - Use of public notices
 - Updating of procedures to comply with all federal and state rules and regulations
 - Copy of the handbook you have created to assist the Board and school leadership with the governance duties and responsibilities
3. Provide an outline of the comprehensive school leader evaluation reports you will receive each term
4. Provide an outline which shows how the following indicators are currently implemented at the school (The metrics are examined every month and the school staff use the reports from each term to drive the improvement efforts forward.)
(standard-aligned metrics such as exit exams and annual state tests, formative classroom assessments, weekly, progress checks for every student, placement tests to assist with proper class level placement (particularly in math), and academic referrals. improvement efforts and initiatives as they move forward.

5. Provide a copy of the tracking shared calendar you use to track all special education events including IEPs, services, and conferences.

Provide the outcome of MS. Larson reviewing the comprehensive handbook in depth and additional resources materials checklists that the school will assist with.