



June 11, 2013

Gilda Sherrod-Ali, Board Chair
Roots PCS
15 Kennedy Street, NW
Washington, DC 20011

Dear Ms. Sherrod-Ali,

The Public Charter School Board (PCSB) conducts Qualitative Site Reviews to gather and document evidence to support school oversight. According to the School Reform Act § 38-1802.11, PCSB shall monitor the progress of each school in meeting the goals and student academic achievement expectations specified in the school's charter. Your school was selected to undergo a Qualitative Site Review during the 2012-13 school year for the following reason(s):

- School eligible to petition for 15-year Charter Renewal during 2013-14 school year

Qualitative Site Review Report

A Qualitative Site Review team conducted on-site reviews of Roots Public Charter School between May 6 and May 17, 2013. The purpose of the site review is for PCSB to gauge the extent to which the school's goals and student academic achievement expectations were evident in the everyday operations of the public charter school. To ascertain this, PCSB staff and consultants evaluated your classroom teaching by using an abridged version of the Charlotte Danielson *Framework for Teaching* observation rubric. We also visited a board meeting.

Enclosed is the team's report. You will find that the Qualitative Site Review Report is focused primarily on the following areas: charter mission and goals, classroom environments, and instructional delivery.

We appreciate the assistance and hospitality that you and your staff gave the monitoring team in conducting the Qualitative Site Review at Roots PCS. Thank you for your continued cooperation as PCSB makes every effort to ensure that Roots Public Charter School is in compliance with its charter.

Sincerely,



Naomi DeVeaux
Deputy Director

Enclosures
cc: School Leader

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Roots Public Charter School (“PCS”) started as an Afro-centric charter school for students in the community and has maintained this focus throughout the 14 years the school has been open. Adults in the building are called “mama and baba”, rather than Ms. And Mr., and students are grouped into multi-aged classrooms with multiple teachers to reflect the African values of the village and family raising children together. All grades of the school are preparing for an end of the year recital to include African drumming and dancing. Review team members observed choreography and practice for the upcoming event and students in the Prekindergarten (PK) grades said that they were studying Malcolm X this month and the PK children recited a morning chant with references to African culture. However, the afro-centric focus was not observed in the instructional materials or classroom activities of the other classrooms, which focused on the Common Core State Standards.

The sense of community is a large part of the Afro-centric culture the school brings to the students. The school maintains a small student to teacher ratio and several teachers occupy a large room to teach students. In this way, students can be grouped differently depending on their needs and on the focus of the lesson. The review team observed students working in small groups, independently, and in larger groups with the teachers. During lessons with small groups, student groups rotated so the teacher could work with everyone. Some teachers utilized different groupings often while other teachers taught to the whole group during observations.

The primary focus of the mission and the goals of the school is to provide academic excellence to the students. Overall, the school does not appear to be meeting this goal. The review team observed 14 classrooms during the multi-day visit. Instruction observed in the Pre-kindergarten-3 through kindergarten (pre-primary) grades was much stronger than in grades 1-8. The pre-primary grades focused on questioning, targeted assessment and individualized work challenging each student. The review team saw whole group, small group, and individual instruction as well as students encouraged to work together to solve problems. Students thoroughly enjoyed morning circle time as they chanted, jumped, clapped, and sang through the Roots PCS daily opening message, said the alphabet, and counted to 100 by ones, twos and tens, etc. During all observations, the only culturally specific teaching observed was the Roots PCS daily opening “chant” the pre-primary students recited. The recitation included a cultural message of strength, unity, and family based on the African culture.

Instruction observed in Grades 1-8 limited student-to-student interaction. The review team observed teachers only using questions from the teacher’s manual in language arts and social studies. The questions were not linked to students’ lives or the mission of the school and students had trouble staying engaged at times. The observation team did not observe any direct math instruction, only students completing math worksheets with teachers helping students through math problems. When a student was struggling with a concept, the review team observed teachers repeating the instructions to the student directly or writing them out on the whiteboard. The teachers did not try to teach the concept in a different way, use manipulatives to demonstrate the concept, or look for other resources to assist students.

The school has a variety of programs to assess the students and challenge them individually using technology. The review team observed older students (grades 4-8) working independently on the computers. The principal stated that students are assessed through Plato Learning and

Discovery Benchmark. The school also utilizes Tutor in a Backpack and other technology programs for one-on-one support and differentiated instruction.

The school is very small with grades 1-8 in two big rooms and pre-primary grades in another building with one big room. Both buildings have an additional multi-purpose room for large group activities. The school does not appear to have a universal, consistent behavior management plan in place. A few of the teachers observed struggled to implement a consistent and fair behavior management system. Since the school is relatively small with approximately 60 students in grades 1-8, the few behavior issues observed were small but some teachers still struggled with how to redirect the students. The pre-primary room established more consistent behavior management and classroom procedures to smoothly transition and work with the approximately 40 students in the youngest grades.

The school has one special education teacher to work with the four students requiring special education services. The special education teacher was administering a test on the days the observers were present at the school. This teacher also coordinates services for these students. The school does not currently have any English language learners.

A PCSB consultant attended the Roots PCS board meeting on May 16, 2013. The board had six voting members present to constitute a quorum. In addition to discussing personnel and school events, the board reviewed the current 2012-13 budget and the proposed 2013-14 budget. The board is looking at cutting staff development slightly for next year. In the administrative report, the principal proposed to the board to phase out grades 6 - 8 by 2014-15. The board will not vote on this issue until August 2013 but the principal is proposing to start phasing out 7th and 8th grade students for the 13-14 school year.

CHARTER MISSION, GOALS, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT EXPECTATIONS

This table summarizes Roots PCS’ goals and academic achievement expectations as detailed in its charter and subsequent Accountability Plans, and the evidence that the Qualitative Site Review (“QSR”) team observed of the school meeting those goals during the Qualitative Site Visit.

Mission and Goals	Evidence
<p>Mission: The mission is to provide the motivation within students to strive towards academic excellence, exemplary character, and social responsibility.</p>	<p>The review team observed students who were generally well-behaved. Students were held responsible for not having their homework complete, giving answers to another student, or copying from another’s paper. Other character traits were not directly observed. Reviewers observed a few teachers who gave students choices to be more responsible. For example, one teacher gave a student the choice to have the day’s homework completed on time by the next day or to work on it during free time. Other teachers talked to students about being responsible and focusing on their work. The lectures observed on responsibility did not seem to make a great impact on the students. Students were more motivated in tasks that involved active participation. The review team observed many instructional strategies that did not motivate the students to strive towards academic excellence. The review team observed “Round Robin Reading” which limited student discussion about the text. This activity was followed by worksheet or workbook pages, which did not appear to motivate students, particularly in grades 1-8.</p>
<p>Provide Washington, DC students with the option to select a culturally relevant school. The Roots Public Charter School will seek to empower youth by exposing them to their great heritage and instilling in them African centered values and beliefs that support exemplary character and social responsibility.</p>	<p>Students addressed adults as “Mama” and “Baba” to reflect the African values of the village and family raising children together. The review team observed the pre-primary grades (PreK-3 through K) begin the mornings with the “Circle of Love” where they sing songs, chant, and focus for the day. This time allowed the children to focus on the morning message while actively participating through movement. All students participated in cultural dance and drumming. The review team observed students preparing for an upcoming end-of-the-year recital where all grades would participate. The entrance area and hallway had</p>

Mission and Goals	Evidence
	posters with poems, depictions of African heritage, and biographical information of historic African Americans posted. The review team observed the color scheme of black, red, green, and yellow throughout the school. The multi-purpose room also has plaques hung up with pictures of individuals who have influenced the school directly and indirectly. This demonstrated the rich history of African culture and values. A large student-made quilt also hangs in this room with African symbols of love and family woven together. The review team did not observe African centered values and beliefs that support exemplary character and social responsibility being taught or reinforced during instructional time.
Provide academic excellence in language arts, math, social studies, science, music, art and physical education.	The teacher roster does not include teachers with a specific focus on art, music or physical education. The review team observed Round Robin reading in language arts and social studies classes as well as students completing workbook pages or answering questions at the end of the section. There was little discussion observed, active engagement, or authentic product production noted in grades 1-8. Teachers focused questioning on the questions provided by the teachers' manual, which did not connect to students' lives or the mission of the school, but was aligned to the Common Core State Standards. The review team did not observe teachers demonstrating ways to focus on the reading or what to look for when reading long passages out of textbooks. The review team did not observe student-to-student dialogue or class discussions.
The foreign languages taught on an exposure level will be Spanish, French, and Kiswahili.	The review team did not observe teachers exposing students to Spanish French or Kiswahili.
The academic focus for the primary and middle school divisions will be one of acquiring a strong grasp of the basic academic skills.	The review team observed basic instruction for the primary and middle school divisions. In the pre-primary room, the review team observed students actively engaged in circle time, reading, and math. Teachers appeared to be challenging students in every subject area by increasing the rigor of instruction on an individual basis. Teachers gave students a higher-level book to read aloud or a more advanced math worksheet to

Mission and Goals	Evidence
	work on. In the higher grades, teachers focused on reading passages and questions from textbooks in language arts and social studies. During math instruction, the review team observed students learning the concepts in math through worksheets with some demonstrations on a white board.
Prepare students to attend quality high schools of their choice.	A poster displayed in the hall of the school noted one student who was accepted to the charter high school of his choice. The review team did not observe other information that focused on high school admissions.
Students will demonstrate positive social behaviors and responsibility.	Overall, the students were well-behaved and respectful. The pre-primary grades were welcoming to the reviewers; every child gave a PCSB staff member a hug, high five or fist bump (with the okay from the teacher). Teachers held students responsible for having their work completed on time and being ready to work with the correct supplies. During all observations, teachers reminded students about responsibility, to complete their work, have materials ready, and be prepared to work on tasks.
Students will attend school regularly.	Although the review team did not analyze the current attendance records, most students appeared to be in class on the days of the visits. The pre-primary classroom was very busy with about 40 children at school learning each morning. In grades 1-8, class sizes ranged from 10-17 and students occupied most desks.
Staff will express satisfaction with Roots PCS.	The QSR team neither looked for nor observed any evidence related to this goal.
Parents will express satisfaction with Roots PCS and its culturally relevant school model/design.	A PCSB staff member attended the Afternoon of Fitness and Nutrition at the school. This event was the first event this year put on by the school's Wellness Council. A small group of parents (seven) joined the principal and a few teachers in a Zumba exercise class and other wellness activities. During the afternoon, the PCSB staff member had a chance to talk with a few of the parents at the event. Many of the parents already had a child or two graduate from the school. The parents said they liked the African heritage focus of the school and the multi-age learning environments.

Mission and Goals	Evidence
	In addition, the review team saw a few different parents volunteering their time to help students with various activities. One foster parent was tutoring small groups of children in reading during all visits and another parent was helping the kindergartners prepare for kindergarten promotion.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS¹

This rubric summarizes the school's performance on the Classroom Environments elements of the rubric during the unannounced visits.

Class Environment	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport	Of the teachers observed, many teachers exhibited warm, respectful, helpful interactions with students. The pre-primary teachers were especially warm and respectful in their interactions with students and helped create respectful interactions among the students. In grades 1-8, many of the teachers observed lacked warmth and caring tones and did not respect student integrity in redirection of behavior. At times, teachers sounded harsh when interacting with students.	Limited	0%
		Satisfactory	43%
		Proficient	57%
		Exemplary	0%
Establishing a Culture for Learning	Through all grades observed, most students showed belief in the value of their work and were persistent in their effort to be successful in all grade levels observed. In the pre-primary grades, teachers exhibited high expectations for students, supported through verbal and non-verbal behaviors. Teachers encouraged students to do their best and expected all students to participate in the lessons. In the higher grades, even though students valued their work, about half of the teachers observed were not encouraging and did not adequately support struggling students. Teachers also conveyed high expectations to certain students.	Limited	0%
		Satisfactory	50%
		Proficient	50%
		Exemplary	0%
Managing Classroom Procedures	Most transitions observed were smooth with little loss of instructional time. For the most part, transitions occurred between small groups of 3-4 students, and students started on the independent activity quickly after the teachers gave instructions. Overall, the pre-primary classrooms handled transitions smoothly but this was not consistent for all observations in these grades. In the higher grades, only a few teachers took the opportunity to utilize a variety of instructional materials and supplies, so there were few transitions to observe. During a few observations, the teacher was not ready for the next group of students. Students became off-task waiting for the teacher to begin.	Limited	7%
		Satisfactory	43%
		Proficient	50%
		Exemplary	0%
Managing Student Behavior	The review team did not observe clear standards for student conduct posted or	Limited	0%

¹ Teachers may be observed more than once by different review team members.

Class Environment	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
	communicated by teachers. During observations, most students adhered to general standards of conduct and many teachers were proactive in anticipation and remediation of problem areas. For example, some teachers changed students' seats before behavior problems started. Two teachers observed used harsh words and tone to redirect student behavior. The redirection did not maintain student dignity to improve behavior.	Satisfactory	43%
		Proficient	50%
		Exemplary	7%
Organizing Physical Space	In both buildings (pre-primary and grades 1-8) learning areas were safe and learning was accessible for all students. Bookcases and cubbies divided a larger room into smaller sections to create classroom areas. The pre-primary room was pleasantly inviting to the younger students, who loved the tree houses in the room with science, art, music and math stations. The walls in the rooms with grades 1-8 were bare, but items may have been taken down during DC-CAS testing. Each teacher had access to a SMART Board in the higher grades but the teachers did not use these consistently to enhance learning while the review team was present.	Limited	0%
		Satisfactory	36%
		Proficient	64%
		Exemplary	0%

INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY

This rubric summarizes the school's performance on the Instructional Delivery elements of the rubric during the unannounced visits.

Instructional Delivery	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
Communicating with Students	<p>In the pre-primary room, teachers used language rich lessons with vocabulary development appropriate to the students' age and development. Teachers gave clear directions, which helped students comprehend the content. However, in the upper grades, the review team did not see an indication of standards-based instruction. Students focused on textbook passages, workbooks, and worksheets. In a few cases, the teacher's attempt to explain the instructional purpose of the lesson was limited, leaving a few of the students in the small groups confused. Some teachers did not present lessons with clarity or a purpose.</p>	Limited	14%
		Satisfactory	50%
		Proficient	36%
		Exemplary	0%
Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques	<p>The pre-primary room involved all students in questioning. Circle time gave students a chance to stand up and answer questions related to the story they had just read. The teacher then allowed other students to respond to the first student's answer. The kids were involved and excited to discuss the story. This continued through most of the pre-primary instruction where teachers challenged students through questioning as well as student responses that were incorporated into the next set of questions.</p> <p>In grades 1-8, the review team observed that all questioning was convergent and from teacher to students. Most questions were lower-level questions when prompted by the teacher and there was a lack of choice or multiple approaches to answering questions. Question and answer sessions were mostly teacher-oriented and read directly out of the teachers' manual. The review team observed that this did not create an environment that promoted student thinking or exchange of ideas.</p> <p>One teacher observed received a "not applicable" for this section, as students were practicing for a music recital.</p>	Limited	43%
		Satisfactory	14%
		Proficient	36%
		Exemplary	0%

Instructional Delivery	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
Engaging Students in Learning	<p>The pre-primary students exhibited high focus, enthusiasm and motivation for their activities. Every student observed was active in reading, writing and playing. Many of the three and four year old students were reading independently.</p> <p>Lesson objectives or goals were not explicitly written, stated, or referred to in grades 1-8 and goals were not clear to observers. The goal in one lesson was how to complete the workbook page, rather than understanding the concept. The language arts and social studies classes observed in grades 1-8 consisted of Round Robin reading with the teacher not referring to any focus for the reading. Questions after the reading were teacher led which did not engage the students. During independent work, not all students were focused and on task. When not directly supervised, students tended to socialize and misbehave with other students.</p>	Limited	7%
		Satisfactory	43%
		Proficient	50%
		Exemplary	0%
Using Assessment in Instruction	<p>Teachers in the pre-primary room were more effective in using assessment in instruction. These teachers circulated around the small groups and discussed the activities students were doing. The teachers elicited individual evidence of understanding from each student. In the higher grades, teachers could assess learning through workbooks, worksheets and students responses to book questions. Teachers monitored understanding through these single methods and did not elicit evidence of understanding from all students. During some observations, teachers were not engaged in student work and missed opportunities to assess the instruction. With the small student-to-teacher ratio, teachers stayed in one place while interacting with students. Oftentimes, teachers did not circulate to monitor student learning or offer feedback even when sitting so close.</p>	Limited	21%
		Satisfactory	50%
		Proficient	21%
		Exemplary	7%
Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness	<p>Less than half of the teachers observed demonstrated flexibility and responsiveness during their instruction. In the pre-primary grades, teachers had a better handle on being persistent to support student learning.</p>	Limited	14%
		Satisfactory	50%
		Proficient	36%

Instructional Delivery	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
	<p>Teachers would rephrase a question or present alternative questions to help students understand. Teachers also incorporated students' interests into the lessons to help students understand the topic. In grades 1-8, there were times observed when teachers missed an opportunity to demonstrate flexibility and responsiveness, especially to incorporate student discussion. Teachers followed the questions from the book more closely and did not allow students to expand on answers. The teachers also did not use the Smart Boards to enhance learning; they used them as overhead projectors. Additionally, teachers were not prepared with additional materials or manipulatives to support learning and to enhance lessons or to make an adjustment when students were visibly confused.</p>	Exemplary	0%

APPENDIX I: CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT OBSERVATION RUBRIC

Class Environment	Limited	Satisfactory	Proficient	Exemplary
Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport	Classroom interactions, both between the teacher and students and among students, are negative or inappropriate and characterized by sarcasm, putdowns, or conflict	Classroom interactions are generally appropriate and free from conflict but may be characterized by occasional displays of insensitivity.	Classroom interactions reflect general warmth and caring, and are respectful of the cultural and developmental differences among groups of students.	Classroom interactions are highly respectful, reflecting genuine warmth and caring toward individuals. Students themselves ensure maintenance of high levels of civility among member of the class.
Establishing a Culture for Learning	The classroom does not represent a culture for learning and is characterized by low teacher commitment to the subject, low expectations for student achievement, and little student pride in work.	The classroom environment reflects only a minimal culture for learning, with only modest or inconsistent expectations for student achievement, little teacher commitment to the subject, and little student pride in work. Both teacher and students are performing at the minimal level to “get by.”	The classroom environment represents a genuine culture for learning, with commitment to the subject on the part of both teacher and students, high expectations for student achievement, and student pride in work.	Students assumes much of the responsibility for establishing a culture for learning in the classroom by taking pride in their work, initiating improvements to their products, and holding the work to the highest standard. Teacher demonstrates as passionate commitment to the subject.
Managing Classroom Procedures	Classroom routines and procedures are either nonexistent or inefficient, resulting in the loss of much instruction time.	Classroom routines and procedures have been established but function unevenly or inconsistently, with some loss of instruction time.	Classroom routines and procedures have been established and function smoothly for the most part, with little loss of instruction time.	Classroom routines and procedures are seamless in their operation, and students assume considerable responsibility for their smooth functioning.
Managing Student Behavior	Student behavior is poor, with no clear expectations, no monitoring of student behavior, and inappropriate response to student misbehavior.	Teacher makes an effort to establish standards of conduct for students, monitor student behavior, and respond to student misbehavior, but these efforts are not always successful.	Teacher is aware of student behavior, has established clear standards of conduct, and responds to student misbehavior in ways that are appropriate and respectful of the students.	Student behavior is entirely appropriate, with evidence of student participation in setting expectations and monitoring behavior. Teacher’s monitoring of student behavior is subtle and preventive, and teachers’ response to student misbehavior is sensitive to individual student needs.
Organizing Physical Space	Teacher makes poor use of the physical environment, resulting in unsafe or inaccessible conditions for some students or a serious mismatch between the furniture arrangement and the lesson activities.	Teacher’s classroom is safe, and essential learning is accessible to all students, but the furniture arrangement only partially supports the learning activities.	Teacher’s classroom is safe, and learning is accessible to all students; teacher uses physical resources well and ensures that the arrangement of furniture supports the learning activities.	Teacher’s classroom is safe, and students contribute to ensuring that the physical environment supports the learning of all students.

APPENDIX II: INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY OBSERVATION RUBRIC

Instructional Delivery	Limited	Satisfactory	Proficient	Exemplary
Communicating with Students	Teacher’s oral and written communication contains errors or is unclear or inappropriate to students. Teacher’s purpose in a lesson or unit is unclear to students. Teacher’s explanation of the content is unclear or confusing or uses inappropriate language.	Teacher’s oral and written communication contains no errors, but may not be completely appropriate or may require further explanations to avoid confusion. Teacher attempts to explain the instructional purpose, with limited success. Teacher’s explanation of the content is uneven; some is done skillfully, but other portions are difficult to follow.	Teacher communicates clearly and accurately to students both orally and in writing. Teacher’s purpose for the lesson or unit is clear, including where it is situated within broader learning. Teacher’s explanation of content is appropriate and connects with students’ knowledge and experience.	Teacher’s oral and written communication is clear and expressive, anticipating possible student misconceptions. Makes the purpose of the lesson or unit clear, including where it is situated within broader learning, linking purpose to student interests. Explanation of content is imaginative, and connects with students’ knowledge and experience. Students contribute to explaining concepts to their peers.
Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques	Teacher makes poor use of questioning and discussion techniques, with low-level questions, limited student participation, and little true discussion.	Teacher’s use of questioning and discussion techniques is uneven with some high-level question; attempts at true discussion; moderate student participation.	Teacher’s use of questioning and discussion techniques reflects high-level questions, true discussion, and full participation by all students.	Students formulate many of the high-level questions and assume responsibility for the participation of all students in the discussion.
Engaging Students in Learning	Students are not at all intellectually engaged in significant learning, as a result of inappropriate activities or materials, poor representations of content, or lack of lesson structure.	Students are intellectually engaged only partially, resulting from activities or materials or uneven quality, inconsistent representation of content or uneven structure of pacing.	Students are intellectually engaged throughout the lesson, with appropriate activities and materials, instructive representations of content, and suitable structure and pacing of the lesson.	Students are highly engaged throughout the lesson and make material contribution to the representation of content, the activities, and the materials. The structure and pacing of the lesson allow for student reflection and closure.

Instructional Delivery	Limited	Satisfactory	Proficient	Exemplary
Using Assessment in Instruction	Students are unaware of criteria and performance standards by which their work will be evaluated, and do not engage in self-assessment or monitoring. Teacher does not monitor student learning in the curriculum, and feedback to students is of poor quality and in an untimely manner.	Students know some of the criteria and performance standards by which their work will be evaluated, and occasionally assess the quality of their own work against the assessment criteria and performance standards. Teacher monitors the progress of the class as a whole but elicits no diagnostic information; feedback to students is uneven and inconsistent in its timeliness.	Students are fully aware of the criteria and performance standards by which their work will be evaluated, and frequently assess and monitor the quality of their own work against the assessment criteria and performance standards. Teacher monitors the progress of groups of students in the curriculum, making limited use of diagnostic prompts to elicit information; feedback is timely, consistent, and of high quality.	Students are fully aware of the criteria and standards by which their work will be evaluated, have contributed to the development of the criteria, frequently assess and monitor the quality of their own work against the assessment criteria and performance standards, and make active use of that information in their learning. Teacher actively and systematically elicits diagnostic information from individual students regarding understanding and monitors progress of individual students; feedback is timely, high quality, and students use feedback in their learning.
Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness	Teacher adheres to the instruction plan in spite of evidence of poor student understanding or of students' lack of interest, and fails to respond to students' questions; teacher assumes no responsibility for students' failure.	Teacher demonstrates moderate flexibility and responsiveness to students' needs and interests, and seeks to ensure success of all students.	Teacher seeks ways to ensure successful learning for all students, making adjustments as needed to instruction plans and responding to student interest and questions.	Teacher is highly responsive to students' interests and questions, making major lesson adjustments if necessary, and persists in ensuring the success of all students.