



March 3, 2015

Gilda Sherrod-Ali, Board Chair
Roots Public Charter School
15 Kennedy Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20011

Dear Ms. Sherrod-Ali:

The DC 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 2014-15 school year for the following reason:

- School had a Tier 3 rank on the Performance Management Framework during the 2013-14 school year

Qualitative Site Review Report

A Qualitative Site Review team conducted on-site reviews of Roots between January 12 and January 23, 2015. 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 on February 19, 2015.

Enclosed is the team's report. You will find that the Qualitative Site Review Report focuses primarily on the following areas: charter mission and goals, the classroom environment, and instruction.

We appreciate the assistance and hospitality that you and your staff gave the monitoring team in conducting the Qualitative Site Review at Roots PCS.

Sincerely,



Naomi DeVeaux
Deputy Director

Enclosures
cc: School Leader

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Roots PCS serves approximately 94 students in grades prekindergarten 3 (PK3) through grade 5 in Ward 4. The DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB) conducted a Qualitative Site Review (QSR) in January 2015 because Roots PCS had a Tier 3 rank with a score of 26.1% on the Performance Management Framework during the 2013-14 school year.

The QSR team conducted observations over the course of a two-week window, from January 12 through January 23, 2015. One PCSB staff member and one consultant conducted ten observations of five classrooms. A member of the QSR team also attended a Board of Trustees meeting on February 19, 2015.

The QSR team used Charlotte Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* Rubric throughout the observations and observed classrooms in mornings and afternoons. The QSR team observed multiple teachers more than once. The QSR team also collected evidence regarding the school's stated mission and goals.

The QSR team scored 68% of the observations as distinguished or proficient in the Classroom Environment domain. In the QSR conducted in May 2013 about 50% of the observations earned this rank. Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport was the highest rated component with 10% distinguished and 70% proficient. The majority of teacher interactions with students were respectful regarding both words and actions. Only 50% of the observations in the Establishing a Culture for Learning component were rated as proficient. Teachers in some of the observations explained the importance of the content and communicated their expectations for learning. In the other observations teachers did not connect with the students on the purpose or expected learning outcomes related to the material.

The QSR team scored just 28% of the observations as proficient and none as distinguished in the Instruction domain. In the May 2013 QSR report, 36% of the observation earned this rank. This is a very low overall score for this domain with the component of Using Questioning/Prompts and Discussion Techniques receiving a score of just 10% proficient. Observations showed students who did not appear to be engaged in the content. Observers noted a lack of high-level instruction, few opportunities for student discourse, and little use of precise content language across grade levels. Teachers introduced new material without first assessing student understanding of the previous lesson. There were also some content errors in one observation. The purpose of the content was not explained to the students and the communication of the material itself was not executed in an effective way.

CHARTER MISSION, GOALS, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT EXPECTATIONS

This table summarizes the goals and academic achievement expectations of Roots PCS 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: Promote and secure the connection of Mother Africa within our children; Prepare students to break the chains of psychological conditioning that attempt to keep them powerless in all phases of society; Provide students with a strong African-centered learning environment; Guide students toward academic excellence, exemplary character and social responsibility; Encourage success leading to self-reliance and economic, social/political contributions to society.</p> | <p>There was some evidence that Roots is working to meet its mission. However some observations suggested that instructional levels were not rigorous and not conducive to high academic standards.</p> <p>African-centered learning environment Each room had multiple representations of the African continent from a clock to a wooden map. Classrooms were decorated with pictures featuring Africans and African-Americans. The QSR team saw timelines of African-American history, an African-American heritage food pyramid and posters featuring African American writers. Students called their teachers “mama” and “baba,” which are Kiswahili words meaning “mother” and “father.” Some instructors wore traditional African clothing.</p> <p>Guide students toward academic excellence, exemplary character and social responsibility; Encourage success leading to self-reliance and economic, social/political contributions to society Teachers presented material but did not dig into topics when students had questions or misunderstandings. In a few observations teachers moved onto new material even though students expressed that they did not fully understand the previous topic.</p> <p>The school environment is safe and orderly. Students were universally compliant. However observers did not see students encouraged to expand their thinking or explore new ways of solving a problem.</p> |

| Mission and Goals | Evidence |
|---|--|
| | Across the classrooms teachers rarely communicated to students the purpose of the lesson or the expected outcomes. |
| Goals: | |
| <p>Roots PCS will continue to demonstrate a commitment to serving students (FAPE- free appropriate public education) with disabilities by completing the Public Charter School Board’s Quality Assurance Review (QAR) in the fall of 2014. RPCS will create a Special Education QAR Action Plan in collaboration with PCSB staff, and achieve “in place” for all indicators of the QAR by the end of the spring of 2016 and until its next five-year review school year 2018-2019 and beyond.</p> | As of March 3, 2015, Roots PCS had not completed a QAR report. |
| <p>For students in PK3 and PK4, at least 75 % of Pre-Kindergarten students will meet or exceed widely held expectations per the growth report from the Fall to the Spring administration of the <i>GOLD literacy assessment</i>.</p> | <p>PK3 and PK4 students participated in morning songs, chants, and dances. Teachers greeted students as they arrived and incorporated them into the ongoing morning program. Afterwards students broke into groups in the classroom and worked on literacy skills including: cutting out letters and writing.</p> |
| <p>At least 75% of students in kindergarten through second grade will increase by at least one reading level or maintain proficiency by the spring administration of the Scholastic Reading assessment (SRA) reading mastery test.</p> <p>At least 75% of first and second grade students will score proficient on the Scholastic Reading assessment (SRA) reading mastery test.</p> <p>The percent of students scoring proficient or advanced on the state reading assessment will meet or exceed the state average at each grade level 3-8 each year.</p> | <p>The QSR team observed teachers using nonfiction texts to teach science topics. One teacher discussed setting a purpose for reading by turning a heading into a question. Students engaged in a meaningful discussion about the topic and the vocabulary in the text.</p> <p>Other observations showed slow pacing which led to students disengaging from the lesson. In one observation incorrect answers were left unaddressed at the end of a lesson.</p> |

| Mission and Goals | Evidence |
|---|---|
| <p>At least 75 % of Pre-Kindergarten students will meet or exceed widely held expectations per the growth report from the Fall to the Spring administration of the <i>GOLD math assessment</i>.</p> | <p>All classrooms contained many types of math manipulatives and colorful charts showing counting, numbers, and shapes.</p> |
| <p>At least 75% of students in grades K through 2 will advance one level or maintain proficiency on the My Math assessment.</p> | <p>In the observation of My Math lessons, students worked with the teacher in a small group or independently on computer activities. The focus or intention of the computer activities was unclear. Other than allowing for differences in pacing/completion, assignments did not appear to be differentiated. One teacher used appropriate scaffolds to support student engagement, while others appeared to lack strategies needed to reach all students. All students completed the same worksheets.</p> |
| <p>The percent of students scoring proficient or advanced on the state math assessment will meet or exceed the state average at each grade level 3-8.</p> | <p>Please see the information for the previous math goal. In addition to this information, observers saw a math vocabulary lesson during which one student expressed misunderstanding and did not resolve the problem during the class period. During a later math game, students repeatedly gave incorrect answers. The teacher did not stop to work through any of the problems or provide explanations for how to solve them.</p> |
| <p>Governance:</p> | <p>A PCSB staff member attended the Roots PCS Board Meeting on February 19, 2015. A quorum was present. The attendees included members of the Roots PCS Board of Trustees, a representative from Education Compliance Associates (ECA) who will be working to increase school test scores, and a representative from Ghost Note who will be working on marketing for the school. The CEO, Dr. Bernida</p> |

| Mission and Goals | Evidence |
|--------------------------|---|
| | Thompson, provided an update on fundraising efforts. The Board then voted to approve a new member to their board – Dr. Otto. The remainder of the meeting included a report regarding student and faculty issues; a financial report; updates from the pre-primary; and the annual spring fling fundraiser. |

THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT¹

This table summarizes the school’s performance on the Classroom Environments domain of the rubric during the unannounced visits. The label definitions for classroom observations of "distinguished," "proficient," "basic," and "unsatisfactory" are those from the Danielson framework. The QSR team scored 68% of the observations as “distinguished” or “proficient” for the Classroom Environment domain.

| The Classroom Environment | Evidence Observed | School Wide Rating | |
|---|--|--------------------|-----|
| Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport | The QSR team scored 80% of the observations as distinguished or proficient in Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport. Teachers and students interacted in respectful ways. In most observations teachers used positive language and respectful tones with students. Teachers told students they were doing a good job and encouraged them to keep trying. Students engaged politely with one another, took turns, shared materials and listened respectful to peers. | Distinguished | 10% |
| | | Proficient | 70% |
| | The QSR team scored 20% of the observations as basic and none as unsatisfactory in this component. During one observation students were publically reprimanded frequently. In a few instances a teacher used a sarcastic tone to direct students or respond to student behavior. When one student told the teacher that she did not remember something the teacher responded, “I’m sure you don’t remember.” In another observation the teacher said, “Do you know what silent reading means?” in response to a student asking a question. | Basic | 20% |
| | | Unsatisfactory | 0% |
| Establishing a Culture for Learning | The QSR team scored 50% of the observations as proficient and none as distinguished in Establishing a Culture for Learning. Teachers acknowledged and praised on-task behaviors. One teacher actively engaged | Distinguished | 0% |

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

| The Classroom Environment | Evidence Observed | School Wide Rating | |
|--------------------------------------|---|--------------------|-----|
| | <p>a student who was despondent. She demonstrated her high expectations for his participation by scaffolding his language, using wait time to allow him to process, and using his name throughout instruction. Teachers in these observations encouraged students and recognized strong student effort.</p> | Proficient | 50% |
| | <p>The QSR team scored 50% of the observations as basic and none as unsatisfactory in this component. Some teachers had low energy and only conveyed high expectations for some students. In one observation a few students were not addressed or engaged by the teacher during 20 minutes of the observation. When the teacher directly spoke with the students, the comments were not positive and did not support the students in completing the task successfully.</p> | Basic | 50% |
| | | Unsatisfactory | 0% |
| Managing Classroom Procedures | <p>The QSR team scored 70% of the observations as proficient and none as distinguished in Managing Classroom Procedures. There were few interruptions to instruction. In some observations students followed routines and functioned independently. Some teachers had points and stars systems to support classroom routines. In one observation the teacher offered “points” to any student who would volunteer to give a sheet of paper to another student. In these observations students responded appropriately to cueing for transitions.</p> | Distinguished | 0% |
| | | Proficient | 70% |
| | <p>The QSR team scored 30% of the observations as basic and none as unsatisfactory in this component. Teachers seemed to have routines in place but had trouble enforcing them. Often students did not have things to do when they finished an assignment or an assessment. Some transitions led to</p> | Basic | 30% |

| The Classroom Environment | Evidence Observed | School Wide Rating | |
|---------------------------|---|--------------------|-----|
| | lost instruction time because the teacher kept changing the directions. Students were asked to sit one place and then moved again to computers. In one observation transitioning took over 15 minutes. Most students waited sitting at their desks. In another observation a teacher used a timer that went off long before the transition was complete. | Unsatisfactory | 0% |
| Managing Student Behavior | The QSR team score 70% of the observations as proficient and none as distinguished in Managing Student Behavior. Classroom rules were posted in most classrooms. Teachers acknowledged on-task behaviors with praise, stars, and points. There was almost no student misbehavior during the majority of observations and when a student misbehaved, she or he would respond favorably the first time the teacher addressed inappropriate behavior (e.g., “stop talking”). | Distinguished | 0% |
| | | Proficient | 70% |
| | The QSR team scored 30% of the observations as basic and none as unsatisfactory in this component. Teachers were inconsistent in their response to the few behavior issues that were observed. In one observation students were play fighting with scissors for a quite a while without the teacher noticing. During this time the students were supposed to be cutting information out of a workbook and pasting it into a folder. The students did not start the task during the allotted time. | Basic | 30% |
| | | Unsatisfactory | 0% |

INSTRUCTION

This table summarizes the school’s performance on the Instruction domain of the rubric during the unannounced visits. The label definitions for classroom observations of “distinguished,” “proficient,” “basic,” and “unsatisfactory” are those from the Danielson framework. The QSR team scored 28% of the observations as “proficient” for the Instruction domain, with none earning the rank of distinguished. For a school in its 16th year of operation, this is extremely low.

| Instruction | Evidence Observed | School Wide Rating | |
|---|--|----------------------|------------|
| <p>Communicating with Students</p> | <p>The QSR team scored only 20% of the observations as proficient and none as distinguished in Communication with Students. In a science lesson a teacher explained the lesson topic. The teacher also reminded students of previous lessons they had on the topic and asked them to recall some of the things they learned. As the lesson continued students discussed vocabulary from the reading and described its meaning in the context of the text.</p> | <p>Distinguished</p> | <p>0%</p> |
| | | <p>Proficient</p> | <p>20%</p> |
| | <p>The QSR team scored 80% of the observations as basic and none as unsatisfactory in this component. Teachers neither explained the purpose of lessons nor the student expectations for completing the assignment. In a few observations teachers moved from topic to topic without establishing a clear progression. Some teachers were trying to make connections between the lesson and other ideas but often the ideas did not clearly relate to what the students were learning. One teacher</p> | <p>Basic</p> | <p>80%</p> |

| Instruction | Evidence Observed | School Wide Rating | |
|---|--|--------------------|-----|
| | <p>made some science content errors confusing weather patterns with the changing of day and night.</p> <p>During a math vocabulary lesson, one student expressed misunderstanding. The teacher did not address the issue but instead moved on to another task and never came back to the question. Students were later grouped into two teams and competed by solving math problems generated by an online program. Students repeatedly gave incorrect answers on the math game. The teacher did not stop to work through any of the problems or provide explanations for how to solve them.</p> | Unsatisfactory | 0% |
| Using Questioning/Prompts and Discussion Techniques | The QSR team scored 10% of the observations as proficient in Using Question/Prompts and Discussion Techniques. Observers saw discussion prompts used, discussions effectively building on student responses and the use of some open-ended questions. Students were engaged in their lesson and the class discussion. | Distinguished | 0% |
| | | Proficient | 10% |
| | The QSR team score 90% of the observations as basic or unsatisfactory in this component. Overall teachers did not ask open ended or higher order questions, with students generally occupying their time completing worksheets Observers did not see teachers giving an appropriate amount of wait time after posing a question and observed primarily recall-level questions. | Basic | 80% |

| Instruction | Evidence Observed | School Wide Rating | |
|--------------------------------------|---|--------------------|-----|
| | <p>In one observation a teacher looked at each finished assignment paper and said, “No,” to each student who had gotten the wrong answer without any probes or guidance for attaining the correct answer. In other observations teachers talked to students about the material but did not engage them in the discussion about the material.</p> | Unsatisfactory | 10% |
| Engaging Students in Learning | <p>The QSR team scored 30% of the observations as proficient in Engaging Students in Learning. PK students used different materials and worked in small groups to complete similar objectives. Teachers across grade levels encouraged students as they were working by saying, “Work together; put your heads together and figure it out; take the challenge when you see difficult words in the text.” Students eagerly raised their hands to answer questions and participate in the lessons in these observations.</p> | Distinguished | 0% |
| | | Proficient | 30% |
| | <p>The QSR team scored 70% of the observations as basic in this component. The majority of students observed were independently completing tasks on computers. Teachers did not revisit lesson objectives following time on computer activities.</p> <p>Other observations showed slow pacing which led to students disengaging from the lesson. In a few observations students spent parts of the class waiting for others to finish; during this time they started to disengage from the work and had trouble getting back into the lesson. There was little evidence of choice in completing the same task. In the majority of the observations the students all completed the same worksheets in the same manner.</p> | Basic | 70% |
| | | Unsatisfactory | 0% |

| Instruction | Evidence Observed | School Wide Rating | |
|---------------------------------|---|--------------------|-----|
| Using Assessment in Instruction | The QSR team scored 50% of the observations as proficient in Using Assessment in Instruction. In these observations teachers provided feedback to students on responses and classwork. Teachers also corrected student errors on assignments and provided guidance on how students could improve work. | Distinguished | 0% |
| | | Proficient | 50% |
| | The QSR team scored 50% of the observations as basic in this component. Teacher in these observations made minor attempts to engage students in assessing their work. Overall there was little evidence that students understood how their work would be evaluated. There were also limited attempts to model high-quality work. In one observation the teacher used a game show format to have teams of students solve problems. The students knew that they were getting all of the answers wrong but the teacher never adjusted the game/lesson to give feedback or work through the problems together. In another observation involving the reading of a nonfiction text, the teacher did not give feedback on written work related to the lesson. The teacher moved on to new material even after students had given incorrect answers on the written work. | Basic | 50% |
| | | Unsatisfactory | 0% |

APPENDIX I: THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT OBSERVATION RUBRIC

| The Classroom Environment | Unsatisfactory | Basic | Proficient | Distinguished |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| 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. |

| The Classroom Environment | Unsatisfactory | Basic | Proficient | Distinguished |
|----------------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| 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. |

APPENDIX II: INSTRUCTION OBSERVATION RUBRIC

| Instruction | Unsatisfactory | Basic | Proficient | Distinguished |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| 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. |

| Instruction | Unsatisfactory | Basic | Proficient | Distinguished |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <p>Using Assessment in Instruction</p> | <p>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.</p> | <p>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.</p> | <p>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.</p> | <p>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.</p> |