



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD

April 14, 2015

Dr. Rhonda Wells-Wilbon, Board Chair  
Richard Wright Public Charter School for Journalism and Media Arts  
770 M Street SE  
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Dr. Wells-Wilbon:

The Public Charter School Board (PCSB) conducts Strategies Visits to gather and document evidence to support school oversight. According to the 2014 Memorandum of Understanding that PCSB has with the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) around implementation of the 2012 Waiver to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, PCSB must “Ensure that public charter schools identified as Focus or Priority are providing interventions and supports to students and their teachers consistent with that school’s Intervention and Support Plan” (p.5). Your school was selected to undergo a Strategies Visit during the 2014-15 school year for the following reason:

School is designated as Focus by OSSE.

Please see the following link for information about the requirements for exiting Focus status: <http://1.usa.gov/1K9dy5W>

PCSB conducted a Strategies Visit, which included on scheduled day on March 11, 2015 and two unscheduled visits between March 2 and March 13, 2015 to observe how the school’s Focus intervention strategies are being implemented in classrooms.

The Strategies Visit report is attached. We appreciate the assistance and hospitality that you and your staff gave the monitoring team. Thank you for your continued cooperation as PCSB makes every effort to ensure that Richard Wright Public Charter School for Journalism and Media Arts is in compliance with its charter.

Sincerely,



Naomi DeVeaux  
Deputy Director

Enclosures  
cc: School Leader

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Richard Wright Public Charter School for Journalism and Media Arts (Richard Wright PCS) serves 292 students in grades 8 through 12 in Ward 6. The DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB) conducted a Strategies Visit in March 2015 because Richard Wright PCS was designated as Focus by Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) in school year 2013-14. Richard Wright PCS was designated Focus for the underperformance of its African American and Economically Disadvantaged subgroups on the 2013 DC CAS assessment. It should be noted that these subgroups make up the vast majority of the school population. The school showed progress between 2013 and 2014, according to OSSE's ESEA growth tool. The school needs two consecutive years of improvement to exit status. Given the new assessment, OSSE will not be calculating progress in 2015. The school will have the next opportunity to exit status in 2016.

PCSB conducted a Strategies Visit for monitoring requirements under the 2012 Waiver to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). A Strategies Visit contains one scheduled day, set by the school, and one or two days of unannounced classroom observations. The Spring Strategies Visit included ten observations total, within a two-week window between March 2 and March 13, 2015. PCSB collected evidence related to the school's Focus strategies, including: differentiation, the use of assessments to drive instruction, Team Teaching, the use of technology, a focus on the development of literacy skills across subject areas, improving student engagement, and enhancing the home-school connection.

The majority of evidence collected during the scheduled day and the unscheduled observation window centered on the school's effective implementation of strategies to use assessment data to drive instruction, the development of literacy skills across the curriculum, improvement the home-school connection, and engaging students. The QSR team observed a robust system for tracking assessment data and observed how school leadership used data with individual students. The team also observed strong implementation of strategies to improve literacy skills, including individualized intervention programs in the Learning Lab, and an intentional focus on vocabulary development in classes beyond English. The school has various strategies in place to keep parents informed as to their students' progress. The school demonstrated its responsiveness to student needs and wants as they created a Spanish language course based on student demand, and worked to engage students in the college-planning process by connecting students to college and university representatives, either at the school or on site at the college or university.

The QSR team saw mixed implementation of strategies for differentiation; many classes included whole group instruction with students completing the same task and with no differences in the learning process. However the team noticed frequent checks for understanding throughout observations.

## SCHOOL INTERVENTION AND SUPPORT STRATEGIES

The following table summarizes Richard Wright PCS’ strategies and evidence collected by PCSB for the purposes of the 2012 ESEA Flexibility Waiver. PCSB observed the school implementing those strategies during both the scheduled day on March 11, 2015 and the observation window from March 2 to March 13, 2015.

PCSB leaves it to the discretion of school leadership to determine the best use of time during the scheduled day of observations for the purposes of Focus intervention strategies. Therefore it may not be possible to observe certain strategies chosen by the school. In cases where PCSB did not have the opportunity to observe the strategy, we will use the following statement: “While this strategy may be in place, PCSB neither looked for nor observed any evidence related to this strategy.” Different language is used to indicate poor implementation of a given strategy.

Strategy Described In Intervention Plan	School’s Description of Strategy on the Ground	Evidence
<p>Increasing professional development around teacher collaboration</p>	<p>PCSB should see some similar branding across classrooms. For example, all classes have a focus on REACH. This is an engagement strategy into the lesson that leads into each lesson. This is built around teacher collaboration. Ex. If we’re doing English and the class is working on interpretations, PCSB may see the strategy in other classes. You should see collaboration across strategies.</p> <p>Professional development (PD) has also focused on Team Teaching: Math, ex. PCSB will see the general math teacher and another math teacher that would be in the classroom to help small groups, or</p>	<p>During both the scheduled day and the unscheduled observation window, the QSR team saw consistent evidence of REACH activities used to engage students within classrooms and common strategies used across classrooms. For example in an English class observation, the teacher asked students to name the two real-life places in the author’s novel, leading to a discussion of these places and their roles in the novel. In two separate observations, reviewers saw students take short assessments on the materials they covered the day before starting the new lesson. In both cases, these were done as quizzes.</p>

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	<p>provide an extra explanation around content. If students are doing equations, a different teacher may be working with a group that needs remediation. Team teaching occurs mainly in ELA and math.</p>	<p>During both the scheduled day and the unscheduled observation window, the QSR team saw some evidence of <b>Team Teaching</b>, though implementation was limited. In most observations of Team Teaching, the model was “one teach, one assist,” with one teacher presenting a lesson and the other teacher primarily focused on redirecting students with heads down or off task during the lesson. With the exception of one observation in which both teachers led small group work, reviewers saw that there was no evidence of both teachers actually leading instruction.</p> <p>The QSR team had the opportunity to observe an individual <b>professional development</b> session between the school's instructional coach and a teacher. This was a post-observation conference, after the instructional coach had observed the teacher's lesson the day before. The instructional coach started by asking the teacher to go through the structure of the lesson. The coach then praised the teacher around the positive class environment where, “students were willing to take risks and engage,” and students were</p>

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		<p>collaborating with one another. The instructional coach asked the teacher to describe the lesson in the larger context of the unit and what the follow-up would be. The teacher noted that some students needed to improve in verb usage and sophistication of vocabulary. The instructional coach and the teacher then discussed how to build on the lesson with students in the teacher's follow up conference.</p>
<p>Increased differentiation in classrooms</p>	<p>Team teaching involves multiple adults in the classroom, checking in and providing feedback to individual students. For the Spring 2015 visit, school leadership explained that this may be different. The school reconfigured the classes based on knowledge gaps in preparation for PARCC.</p> <p>Teachers differentiate instruction by creating action plans based on data to reteach where necessary. Action plans are done with ANet, focusing on math and reading. PCSB should see customized instruction.</p>	<p>Please see Strategy #1 for evidence related to <b>Team Teaching</b>.</p> <p>While the QSR team did not observe Team Teaching consistently across observation, the team saw <b>frequent checks for understanding across</b> subject areas and saw teachers providing feedback to students. The QSR team saw small class sizes with teachers walking around to groups of students asking them to verbalize the next steps in multi-step problems, checking in with individual students to scaffold the next steps in solving, and encouraging students to help each other, explaining next steps. In other</p>

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		<p>classes, team teachers checked in with individual students to ensure they understood directions and to facilitate discussion in small groups, and walked around asking small groups of students questions about their informational text to gauge student understanding and scaffold where necessary.</p> <p>Overall evidence of <b>differentiation</b> was mixed. In most observations assignments were whole group with every student working on the same task. One observation of science class used stations where students worked on different tasks, but they were not differentiated. The QSR team observed instances of differentiation all with online reading intervention programs. Students worked on different lessons within the program, and when they finished, they worked one-on-one with the teacher or reading specialist. The QSR team also saw differentiation in work products in English observations where students wrote narratives modelled after a novel.</p>

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<p>More time spent focusing on developing literacy skills</p>	<p>Richard Wright PCS has hired two additional reading teachers in order to teach a reading fundamentals class for 8<sup>th</sup> graders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ School leadership has focused on teaching reading skills across the curriculum, beyond just ELA. Explicit reading skills should be taught in both Science and Social Studies.</li> <li>▪ Richard Wright PCS uses the program Testourkids.com. PCSB should see students in the lab in the library. Some of the students are brought out of reading. Some of the students are brought out of English. This determination is made by the reading coordinator. All of the 8<sup>th</sup> graders do Reading Fundamentals and Testourkids.com. A portion of the tenth graders are brought out of the English to do testourkids.com.</li> </ul>	<p>The QSR team observed a focus on literacy skills across subject areas during the scheduled day and observation window.</p> <p>In history observations students or teachers read sections of informational text aloud. In one observation the students answered questions in small groups. In another observation the students defined age-appropriate vocabulary words (e.g., “coerce”) and used them in sentences before continuing with the lesson.</p> <p>Students developed writing skills in English by examining the style of a novel and modeling the narrative in their original writing piece.</p> <p>In Latin class observations the teacher made frequent connections between Latin words and English words with similar roots.</p> <p>The QSR team also observed students working on a remedial reading program in the Learning Lab. Students read various texts based on their reading levels and answered questions related to the text.</p>

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		<p>Some students were reading informational text while others read from fiction texts. The text highlighted specific words as students read along. Two adults were present in the room, looking over the students' shoulders to ensure they understood directions and were completing the learning tasks. In another Learning Lab session during the unscheduled observation window, the QSR team observed all students working actively on the reading program. Students read a passage (or had a passage read to them), answered questions about the passage, and played vocabulary games. The questions and activities were different for each student. Two students finished with the computer program and worked one-on-one with the teacher or reading specialist.</p>
<p>Frequent use of assessment to continually check student progress and to continue targeting instruction.</p>	<p>Richard Wright uses a wide range of assessments to benchmark students throughout the year. These include ANet (four before DC CAS) and Discovery Ed. As a result, instruction should be highly differentiated.</p>	<p>For information related to <b>frequent checks for understanding and differentiation</b>, please see evidence listed under Strategy #2.</p> <p>During the scheduled day, the QSR team observed a conference between a member</p>



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		<p>of the leadership team and individual students to review their ANET results. A school academic specialist told the QSR team that she meets with all students taking ANet assessments after the interim to review student results. A different student came into the room about every fifteen minutes. The school academic specialist asked each student to look at his or her previous two interims, record them along with the proficiency levels associated with their scores, and observe the trajectory. The specialist and student discussed why the student may have experienced an increase or a decrease in scores. The sessions ended with a brief discussion of next steps, and how the student could either maintain the upward trajectory or improve on past scores.</p>
Co-teaching in math	Co-teaching in math provides the opportunity for students to receive more differentiated support and feedback from teachers.	PCSB did not see evidence of co-teaching in math classes.
Increases in instructional time with the use of technology	Students have the opportunity for more instructional time using online programs.	Please refer to the evidence listed under Strategy #2, differentiation, and Strategy

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	<p>Richard Wright PCS has a library where students can access online programs, going through various modules in Learning Lab. Students have additional instructional time during Saturday school. Saturday school is mandatory for 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders. Ninth graders are filtered in according to need. There is also additional instructional time after school, when teachers coach class and study groups.</p>	<p>#3 related to the development of literacy skills for a description of the Learning Lab observation.</p>
<p>Increase home-school connection</p>	<p>Through <b>an emphasis on homework and accountability for completing homework</b>, teachers are constantly giving students feedback to make the connection between what they do in school and what they do at home. Because students have to turn in their homework at the beginning of the day, school leadership is able to connect with parents in situations where students are not completing homework.</p> <p>RWPCS also communicates frequently with parents about academic programming. This year, senior students are participating in an <b>in-depth research project</b> where they will survey literature in the topic area around the media, gather</p>	<p>The QSR team saw a strong <b>emphasis by teachers on homework and accountability, though student completion of homework</b> was inconsistent at times. In a math observation, the teacher asked some students why they had not turned in their homework that morning, encouraging them to do better and describing the importance of doing homework to continue advancing in course content, telling students, “If you’re not doing homework, you’re shooting yourself in the foot!” In another math observation the teacher checked for homework completion at the beginning of the period.</p>

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	<p>and analyze related data, and finally write a research paper. RWPCS staff gave parents the opportunity to attend a Senior Parent Meeting to discuss this project further on March 5, 2015.</p>	<p>The QSR team also looked at documentation around <b>the senior project</b> as a strategy to engage parents and the community. School leadership sent information home about an in-depth research project. The project will culminate in a panel presentation to outside observers later in the spring. School leadership gave parents the opportunity to attend a Senior Parent Meeting to discuss this project further on March 5, 2015.</p> <p>While the QSR team did not observe school staff communicating with parents, a PCSB staff member had the opportunity to speak with the school counselor about the different strategies to connect with parents and families. The school counselor described speaking with parents of seniors as they prepared for college or their next step.</p>
<p>Increase Student Engagement</p>	<p>RWPCS has implemented a number of strategies to increase student engagement in academic content. Responding to the requests of students, RWPCS now offers</p>	<p>During the scheduled day, the QSR team observed <b>Advanced Academy Spanish Class</b>. There were five students present in the class taking place before regular</p>

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	<p>an <b>Advanced Academy Spanish Class</b> beyond the regular student course-load. This class is open to all students, but is currently a pilot program. It happens every day before school hours, and is a way for RWPCS to engage high performing students in subject areas that interest them.</p>	<p>school hours. Students listened to Spanish music as they learned about parts of the body in Spanish, matching the vocabulary word to the correct body part. The teacher frequently checked for understanding, asking students to talk through the process of going to the doctor in English, and then they spoke as a class about how to answer questions from the doctor in Spanish. Students moved on to independent work, filling out a registration form in Spanish, and then presented their health problem to the class. The teacher (dressed as a doctor) used props like bandages and aspirin to address the students' (fake) health problems. Students enthusiastically answered the teacher's questions about Spanish vocabulary and productively completed learning tasks.</p> <p>Student engagement was generally high. In an AP History observation, the teacher facilitated a lively class discussion related to the challenges of empire –building. Students listened attentively as classmates identified challenges and volunteered enthusiastically to answer the teacher's questions. In an English class observation, students broke into small groups and</p>

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		<p>played the role of panelist and press corps. As small groups, students discussed a text to answer a list of questions and had to come up with a list of questions to ask other panelists. The atmosphere was lighthearted as students joked around, though continued to focus on the answers to the question and evidence from the text. In a Latin class observation, the teacher presented information about Roman armies and used a video game to engage students, showing them different formations of battle and asking students to identify the formation. Students demonstrated high engagement by extending the discussion about which formations were more beneficial. As described further in Strategy #3 related to developing literacy skills, students were highly engaged as they worked at their own pace during literacy lab observations. However in a few classes, engagement was mixed, with only a few students answering the teacher's questions and engaging in the learning task, and other students socializing.</p> <p>The QSR team did not observe the college visits or the guidance counselor speaking</p>

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		<p>with students about college. However the school counselor discussed strategies to engage students in the college process during the scheduled day. Throughout students' senior year, the school counselor brought in representatives from different colleges to discuss college options, and organized trips to various local schools. She described connecting students with "student ambassadors" at the different universities. These ambassadors were often college students with similar backgrounds who could speak to the school population about what it is like to be a student at a particular school.</p>