DC
PUBLIC
CHARTER
SCHOOL
BOARD

July 18, 2017

Judson Starr, Board Chair
Somerset Preparatory Public Charter School
3301 Wheeler Rd SE
Washington, DC 20032

Dear Mr. Starr:

The DC Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB) conducts Qualitative Site Reviews to gather and document evidence to support school oversight. According to the School Reform Act § 38-1802.11, DC 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 2016-17 school year for the following reason:

o   School eligible for 5-year Charter Review during 2017-18 school year

Qualitative Site Review Report
A Qualitative Site Review team conducted on-site reviews of Somerset Prep PCS between May 15, 2017 – May 26, 2017. 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, 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 Somerset Prep PCS.

Sincerely,

Naomi DeVeaux
Deputy Director

Enclosures
cc: Lauren Catalano, Executive Director

Qualitative Site Review Report

Date: July 18, 2017
Campus Name: Somerset Prep PCS
Ward: 8
Grade levels: 6-11
Reason for visit: School eligible for 5-year Charter Review during 2017-18 school year
Two-week window: May 15, 2017 - May 26, 2017
QSR team members: 3 DC PCSB staff including one special education specialist, 1 consultant
Number of observations: 24
Total enrollment: 324
Students with Disabilities enrollment: 71
In-seat attendance[1] during the two-week window:
Visit 1: May 15, 2017 – 86.3%
Visit 2: May 23, 2017 – 87.6%
Visit 3: May 24, 2017 – 85.3%
Visit 4: May 25, 2017 – 77.1%

Summary

Somerset Preparatory Public Charter School's (Somerset Prep PCS) mission is to prepare students to be successful in college; equip students with intellectual, emotional, social and ethical skills to maximize their unique individual potential; and form confident, self-directed, and responsible life-long learners who take an active role in improving the local and global community.

During the two-week window, the QSR team used the Charlotte Danielson *Framework for Teaching* to examine classroom environments and instructional delivery (see Appendix I). The QSR team scored 76% of observations as proficient in the Classroom Environment domain. In these observations teachers effectively managed student behaviors, maximized instructional time with clear transitions and procedures, and fostered an environment where students were held to high expectations. The highest rated component in this domain was *Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport* with 88% of observations scored as distinguished or proficient. Teachers and students in these observations displayed genuine warmth and positive regard for one another, resulting in a highly functional learning environment.

The QSR team scored just 57% of observations as distinguished or proficient in the Instruction domain. In these observations teachers created opportunities to engage students with higher order thinking, and students asked questions and received targeted feedback and assessment. The highest rated component in this domain was *Communicating with Students* with 62% of observations rated as proficient. In these observations teachers provided clear communication about learning objectives and checked for student comprehension.

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[1] This data has not been validated by the school. DC PCSB pulled the data in June 2017.

In-School Suspension
A QSR team member observed the In-School Suspension (ISS) Room and the Alternative Learning Center (ALC) on June 1, 2017. There were five students in the ISS room and ten additional students in the ALC working on assignments or reading books. Students in both rooms were on-task throughout the observation. According to school staff the ISS room also serves as the "late court" so students who enter school late are not disruptive to their first or second period classes. Two students left the ISS room during the observation and returned to their third period class.

Governance
A PCSB staff member observed Somerset Prep PCS' board meeting on May 17, 2017. There was a quorum present with three board members participating via phone. The board approved the minutes from the previous board meeting and introduced the new assistant principal for the high school. The principal began the meeting with a report on major school events including a National Honor Society induction ceremony and a film and arts festival. The principal also updated the board on the progress of staff recruitment for the upcoming school year. The board discussed the school's financials and scheduled a follow-up meeting to continue discussing the school's financials before completing the final budget. The academic committee reviewed the results of a mock QSR conducted by the school's management company, Academica.

Specialized Instruction for Students with Disabilities
Prior to the two-week window, Somerset Prep PCS completed a questionnaire about how it serves its students with disabilities (SWD). The special education specialist on the QSR team looked for evidence of the school's articulated program. Overall the school program effectively supports SWD in the general education classroom, but unevenly applies strategies for differentiation and checks for student understanding.

- The school stated that general education teachers have prior knowledge of SWD' Individualized Education Programs (IEP), and use baseline data and co-planning with exceptional student educators (ESE) to design and deliver instruction based on the unique needs of students. The observer saw examples of the ESEs working with a small group to reinforce the lesson through direct instruction and/or through providing support to students individually.

- The school reported that differentiating lessons in the inclusive setting includes grouping students by ability levels. The school stated that students have choice in the level of complexity "of certain targeted questions." Some students may work on i-Ready, a web-based reading and math programs tailored to their individual performance levels while others work in a small group with an instructor. Of these described methods of differentiation, the observer saw flexible grouping with an ESE working with a small group of students and an ESE pulling-out two students for remediation. The observer did not see the use of student choice or web-based instructional programs.

- The school stated that teachers gauge student understanding using periodic tests (I-Ready, I-XL, ANET, teacher made tests), but did not state the strategies teachers use to determine whether SWDs understands the lesson. In three out of six observations, the ESE effectively gauged student understanding through circulating and providing feedback on specific students' progress or working with a small group of students to answer questions. However, in the other three classrooms the teachers only used universal checks for understanding (thumbs up/down) or checked in with some students, but not others.

CHARTER MISSION, GOALS, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT EXPECTATIONS

This table summarizes qualitative evidence related to the goals and academic achievement expectations as detailed in the school's charter and subsequent charter amendments. Some charter goals can only be measured quantitatively. The Qualitative Site Review (QSR) team recorded evidence of what the school is doing on the ground to meet these quantitative goals. During the charter review or charter renewal process, DC PCSB staff will use quantitative data to assess whether the school met those goals.

Mission and Goals	Evidence
Mission: To prepare students to be successful in college; equip students with intellectual, emotional, social and ethical skills to maximize their unique individual potential; and form confident, self-directed, and responsible life-long learners who take an active role in improving the local and global community.	The QSR team saw mixed evidence that the school is meeting its mission. Students are developing intellectual, emotional, social and ethical skills as evidenced by data collected in the *Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport* section of the Danielson Framework, in which 88% scored proficient or distinguished. In these observations students respectfully followed directions, acted in a self-directed manner when given a task, and regularly met the behavior expectations established by their teachers.

Students demonstrated enthusiasm to learn and engage in higher-level concepts regarding local and global issues. The school promotes a positive character trait of the month. During the two-week window the trait was respect. Student-generated examples of this trait such as "don't pressure someone to do something he or she does not want to do" and "value other people's opinions even if they are different from your own" were displayed in the hallways.

The school promoted college attendance through the presence of college banners, college-named classrooms and career-related learning topics.

The QSR team saw weaker evidence regarding academics. In some observations the assignments lacked rigor and/or |

	students did not actively engage in academic content.
PMF Goal #1: Student Progress – Academic Improvement over time in math PMF Foal #2: Student Achievement – Meeting or exceeding academic standards in math	Overall the QSR team observed mixed levels of instruction in math classes. Strong observations were marked by high levels of engagement and student ownership. In one observation students applied math concepts as they built robots. In another observation students encouraged each other to re-do incorrect equations, saying, "We have to figure that one out! Let's re-do it." Teachers posed questions designed to promote student thinking and understanding. In one observation the teacher activated the students' prior knowledge of multiples to teach sequences. In other math observations students had to be reminded to stay on-task multiple times. In one observation the stated objective was related to geometry, but the teacher asked students to research the salaries of interesting jobs. Many students did not follow the directions and began off-topic Internet searches.
PMF Goal #1: Student Progress – Academic Improvement over time in reading PMF Foal #2: Student Achievement – Meeting or exceeding academic standards in reading	The QSR team observed strong instruction in some, but not all, English Language Arts (ELA) observations. In two observations students read and discussed grade-appropriate text. Students read aloud, and the teacher frequently asked comprehension questions. The teacher encouraged students to go back and look for specific details in the text to teach characterization. Almost all students asked questions and shared ways that they personally related to the novel. In another ELA class students read an article and discussed it in pairs. Students were 100% on task reading and annotating. The teacher asked a series of questions

	which required students to draw conclusions or make inferences. In the weaker observations students were off-task on their computers when they were asked to work on i-Ready lessons, and the teachers did not successfully re-direct all students.
PMF Goal # 3: Gateway – Outcomes in key subjects that predict future educational success *Promotion of reading proficiency by third grade and math proficiency by eighth grade*	The QSR team saw high student engagement in most middle school math classes. Students in these observations enthusiastically worked to add/subtract/multiply/divide fractions, find square roots, and solve algebraic equations. In one observation the teacher asked students to explain the concept of integers using real-world scenarios. In another observation the teacher explained a mathematical concept using multiple approaches and engaged students with questions such as, "Why is absolute value always positive?" and "What is an independent variable?"
PMF Goal #4: School Environment – Predictors of future student progress and achievement	DC PCSB measures attendance to evaluate the climate of a school. DC PCSB believes that if students are not in school, they lose opportunities for learning. On one day of observations, the school did not have an attendance rate above 82%, which is the floor of the Performance Management Framework. **In-seat attendance during the two-week window:** **Visit 1:** May 15, 2017 – 86.3% **Visit 2:** May 23, 2017 – 87.6% **Visit 3:** May 24, 2017 – 85.3% **Visit 4:** May 25, 2017 – 77.1%

THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT[2]

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 76% of classrooms as "distinguished" or "proficient" for the Classroom Environment domain.

The Classroom Environment	Evidence	School Wide Rating	
Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport	The QSR team scored 88% of the observations as distinguished or proficient in this component. In these observations classroom interactions were highly respectful and reflected genuine care towards individuals. Students routinely received verbal praise for their participation and communicated using polite language. Teachers displayed a sense of humor and authenticity in their interactions with students. They shared candidly about their lives, gave high-fives, hugs, and used nicknames such as "buddy."	Distinguished	0%
		Proficient	88%
	The QSR team scored 12% of the observations as basic in this component. In these observations interactions between the teacher and students and among students were generally appropriate but contained occasional inconsistencies. In a few observations students ignored redirections from the teacher. In one observation a student repeatedly attempted to get the teacher's attention. The teacher thanked the student for being patient but never addressed the student's question. In another observation a student walked in late and said to the teacher, "Don't touch it. I'm not in the mood today."	Basic	12%

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[2] Teachers may be observed more than once by different review team members.

	The QSR team scored none of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.	Unsatisfactory	0%
Establishing a Culture for Learning	The QSR team scored 71% of the observations as proficient and none as distinguished in this component. Teachers demonstrated high expectations and showed belief in their students. In one observation a teacher had a "Wall of Fame" for student work. Teachers encouraged students to be open-minded and positive about their future academic pursuits. In one observation a student was upset about not having his assignment and wanted to leave school. The teacher worked with him individually and encouraged him to finish the school day.	Distinguished	0%
	In several observations the students put forth their best effort and asked for help when needed. In one observation, the teacher asked students to write journal entries. One student asked, "Can you help me by giving me a few ideas of how I can start this off?"	Proficient	71%
	The QSR team scored 29% of the observations as basic in this component. In these observations some students did not participate in lessons or only the same few students engaged in the lesson. Some students actively showed disinterest by engaging in off-task behaviors such as putting their heads down or opening video games on their phones. In another observation it was okay for students to say that they didn't want to participate. Only two or three students engaged in the classroom discussion. Teachers did not challenge students who were unwilling to participate. In another classroom some groups had a high commitment to their work while other students laughed, talked, played with toys and didn't complete the assigned project. The teacher focused on the groups that were doing the work.	Basic	29%

	The QSR team scored none of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.	Unsatisfactory	0%
Managing Classroom Procedures	The QSR team scored 71% of the observations as proficient and none as distinguished in this component. In these classrooms there was little to no loss of instructional time, and students helped teachers with classroom procedures such as passing out papers and sharing supplies. In several observations teachers used verbal, audio, and kinesthetic cues for transitions.	Distinguished	0%
	Students in these observations efficiently completed classroom tasks without disruption. In multiple classes students retrieved computers without teacher prompts. In another observation students quickly helped their peers who arrived late to class catch up and retrieve the necessary materials. Teachers showed patience and flexibility in managing time based on student need.	Proficient	71%
	The QSR team scored 29% of the observations as basic in this component. In a few observations teachers did not anticipate the bell and students had to stay after class to collect their materials. In one classroom the students took over 20 minutes to log into the i-Ready computer program because they didn't know their passwords, resulting in a significant loss of instructional time for several students. In one classroom most of the classroom routines functioned smoothly, but some of the small groups were not engaged when the teacher was not working with them.	Basic	29%
	The QSR team scored none of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.	Unsatisfactory	0%

Managing Student Behavior	The QSR team scored 75% of the observations as proficient and none as distinguished in this component. In most observations there were very few instances of misbehavior. The teachers addressed them quickly and moved on with the lesson. One teacher effectively re-directed a student by suggesting the student take a quick water break to redirect himself and re-join the classroom after he calmed down. In another observation students self-evaluated their behavior in an exit ticket on "FALE" which stands for Focus, All materials, Language, Effort. In multiple observations, teachers referenced positive behavior intervention system (PBIS) points to reward positive behaviors in the classroom.	Distinguished	0%
		Proficient	75%
	The QSR team scored 25% of the observations as basic in this component. In some observations teachers attempted to address misbehavior with mixed results and were ineffective at capturing student attention. In other classrooms there were no systems in place for tracking student behavior, and teachers did not effectively address off-task behaviors for all students. In other observations students disengaged by putting their heads down on their desks without redirection.	Basic	25%
	The QSR team scored none of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.	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 57% of classrooms as "distinguished" or "proficient" for the Instruction domain.

Instruction	Evidence	School Wide Rating	
Communicating with Students	The QSR team scored 62% of the observations as proficient and none as distinguished in this component. Teachers clearly explained lesson directions and procedures in these observations. All teachers used essential questions and daily objectives that were referenced throughout the lesson. In some observations teachers modeled academic tasks for students prior to having students work independently.	Distinguished	0%
	Teachers also used multisensory methods of communicating information to students to ensure comprehension. One teacher both wrote and stated learning objectives aloud and explained content thoroughly. In another observation a teacher creatively introduced the topic of conflict using a video and still images.	Proficient	62%
	The QSR team scored 38% of observations as basic in this component. In some observations teachers did not successfully communicate learning objectives to students, resulting in the need to continue clarifying and answering questions for students. In some observations the objective on the board did not match the assignment. In one observation the teacher's explanation of content consisted of a monologue. Students were not invited to participate intellectually. In another observation students needed multiple	Basic	38%

	prompts to understand the content.		
	The QSR team scored none of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.	Unsatisfactory	0%
Using Questioning/ Prompts and Discussion Techniques	The QSR team scored 57% of the observations as proficient and none as distinguished in this component. In many observations teachers responded to student questions by posing questions that helped students answer their own queries. Teachers appropriately challenged students by asking complex, open-ended questions and challenging students to justify their answers. The balance of low and high-level questions in these observations encouraged participation from all students. Some teachers prompted involvement by calling on quiet students.	Distinguished	0%
		Proficient	57%
	The QSR team scored 35% of observations as basic in this component. Some teachers asked mostly low-level questions with one possible correct response. In one observation there were few opportunities for students to contribute to the dialogue even though it was a high-interest topic. In another observation only a select group of students responded to teacher questions while the rest of the students remained quiet.	Basic	35%
	The QSR team scored less than 10% of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.	Unsatisfactory	8%

Engaging Students in Learning	The QSR team scored 50% of the observations as proficient and none as distinguished in this component. Teachers worked to promote intellectual engagement of all students throughout lessons both independently and in guided small groups. In these observations students appeared enthusiastic about the learning process. In two observations students were engaged in multi-day projects. These students came prepared with materials and worked in pairs for the entire observation with very little off-task conversation. Teachers maintained intellectual engagement through appropriate activities and pacing. Teachers used multiple modalities to deliver information and solicit student participation, such as technology and small groups.	Distinguished	0%
		Proficient	50%
	The QSR team scored 46% of observations as basic in this component. In several observations students were either given too much time to remain engaged in the activity, or the preparation for the activity was too time-consuming and engagement lapsed. Some instruction did not effectively engage students, such as lessons which were focused on note-taking and did not allow space for student processing. In other observations students worked independently despite being assigned to small groups, and only some were intellectually engaged with the work.	Basic	46%
	The QSR team scored less than 10% of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.	Unsatisfactory	4%

Using Assessment in Instruction	The QSR team scored 61% of the observations as proficient and none as distinguished in this component. Teachers monitored student progress and effectively used a variety of methods to check for understanding, such as thumbs up/down, walking around the classroom, and questioning students. Teachers encouraged students to share what they learned. Teachers also encouraged students to give feedback about how well they comprehended the information.	Distinguished	0%
	Students in these observations actively engaged in self-assessment. One student realized that she had done her work incorrectly and worked to fix it. Teachers used a variety of assessment strategies, including daily quizzes, summarizations of learning, "Know It" lists, and rubrics to establish criteria and performance standards for students prior to being assessed.	Proficient	61%
	The QSR team scored 30% of observations as basic in this component. In some observations teachers did not assess learning during activities, and there was little evidence that formative assessments helped teachers make instructional choices. In one observation a teacher only questioned a single student following each presentation and moved on to the next without assessing any other student's knowledge or comprehension. Teachers used global checks for understanding, such as "Does everyone understand?" without providing opportunities for students to respond. Some teachers checked only for task completion and not for learning or performance. In one observation a teacher corrected students reading aloud for mispronouncing words but did not check	Basic	30%

	for comprehension. Teachers occasionally did not provide a solid framework for assessment or were unclear in their expectations regarding both formal and informal assessment.		
	The QSR team scored less than 10% of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.	Unsatisfactory	9%

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.
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 situation 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 may 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.
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.