



May 23, 2014

Jack McCarthy, Board Chair
AppleTree Early Learning PCS – Southwest
330 21st Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Mr. McCarthy:

The Public Charter School Board (PCSB) conducts Qualitative Site Reviews (QSR) 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 QSR during the 2013-14 school year for the following reason:

- School is eligible for a 10-year Charter Review during the 2014-15 school year

Qualitative Site Review Report

A QSR team conducted on-site review visits of AppleTree Early Learning Public Charter School – Southwest (AppleTree PCS-Southwest) between March 31, 2014 – April 11, 2014. 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. Members of the QSR team conducted 30 to 45 minute observations in classrooms. The QSR team scored each observation based on the critical attributes outlined in the *Framework for Teaching*. The team also visited a board meeting in order to observe the school's governance as it relates to fulfilling its mission, and charter goals.

The QSR team's report is attached. You will find that the Qualitative Site Review Report focuses primarily on the following areas: charter mission and goals, classroom environments, and instructional delivery. The QSR results for the school were exceptionally strong. Congratulations!

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

Sincerely,


Naomi DeVeaux
Deputy Director

Enclosures
cc: School Leader

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AppleTree Early Learning Public Charter School - Southwest (AppleTree PCS - Southwest) serves 74 students in pre-kindergarten-3 (PK3) through pre-kindergarten-4 (PK4) and is part of a five campus pre-kindergarten network serving over 600 students. Both facilities contain PK3 and PK4 classrooms. The mission of AppleTree PCS is to provide young children with the social, emotional and cognitive foundations that will enable them to succeed in school. DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB) conducted a Qualitative Site Review (QSR) because AppleTree PCS is eligible for a 10-year Charter Review during the 2014-15 school year.

The QSR team conducted observations over the course of a two-week window, from March 31 through April 11, 2014. A team of one PCSB staff member and one consultant conducted observations of all four classrooms. In each of the classrooms, there was a lead teacher, teaching assistant and teaching fellow. For the purpose of this report, an adult delivering instruction to students will be referred to as a “teacher.” All of the observations are based on the student-teacher interactions among all of the teaching staff in the classroom. The spirit of the QSR process is to observe the educational experience for all students, inclusive of students with disabilities, at a particular school. The results of this QSR reflect what the QSR team observed in all learning environments within your school. The QSR team used Charlotte Danielson’s *Framework for Teaching* Rubric throughout the observations and observed classrooms in mornings and afternoons. In addition to this two-week window, a member of the QSR team also attended a Board of Trustees meeting in order to observe the school’s governance as it relates to fulfilling its mission and charter goals.

The QSR team scored 100% of the observations as proficient or exemplary for the Classroom Environment domain. The students and teaching staff were extremely kind and respectful to one another. The students were focused on their learning and the teachers maintained high expectations for behavior and work completion. The students understood the routines and procedures well and helped facilitate them in the classrooms. The QSR team rated two of the observations as exemplary in the Managing Classroom Procedures component. Throughout all of the observations, every minute of instruction was maximized with opportunities for extending learning material. As the students lined up for their mid-morning snack, the teacher asked students math questions and reading comprehension questions about stories they had previously read. There were very few instances of student misbehavior. The teachers dealt with student misbehavior in a fair manner and maintained the students’ dignity. The classrooms were colorful and print-rich with numerous samples of student work displayed.

The QSR team scored 100% of the observations as proficient for the Instructional Delivery domain. In each of the classrooms, there was a common instructional theme observed as well as a similar classroom schedule for centers, small group instruction, and whole group activities. The communication with students by all of the teaching staff was thorough and clear. In many instances it was unclear who the lead teacher, teaching assistant, and teaching fellow were in the classrooms. The teachers asked open-ended questions inviting students to think and offer multiple possible answers. The students also had some choice in how learning tasks were completed during whole group instruction and while they were in learning centers.

CHARTER MISSION, GOALS, ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT EXPECTATIONS, AND BOARD GOVERNANCE

This table summarizes AppleTree’s 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 Review Visit.

Mission and Goals	Evidence
<p>The mission of AppleTree PCS is to provide young children with the social, emotional and cognitive foundations that will enable them to succeed in school.</p>	<p>There was evidence of the school implementing its mission to provide young children with the social, emotional, and cognitive foundations that will enable them to succeed in school.</p> <p><i>Social and emotional foundations:</i> Students managed their feelings and behaviors and also worked cooperatively in their small groups. The students had healthy interactions with their classmates and were not observed having many behavioral issues. The teaching staff modeled the appropriate behavior that they wanted to see from students and redirected students’ misbehavior in a positive manner. Teachers used a “Sit and Watch” chair for students who were having trouble following directions. A student would sit and learn from other students who were on task and behaving appropriately. Some of the students hugged the teaching staff when they entered the classrooms.</p> <p><i>Cognitive foundation:</i> The students had classroom jobs and actively participated in all components of the lesson. The students were excited about what they were learning and completed a variety of instructional activities cooperatively and independently during the observations. The students practiced emergent reading and writing skills in all of the classrooms observed.</p>

Mission and Goals	Evidence
<p>PMF Goal # 1: Student Progress – Academic Improvement over time <i>Effective Instruction supporting student academic progress and achievement in reading and math.</i></p>	<p>AppleTree students explored literacy and math using whole group instruction, small group instruction, and learning centers. During all of the classroom observations, nearly all of the instruction was aligned to the theme of dinosaurs. Most of the reading passages and instruction were focused on stories or poems about dinosaurs. Students learned how to break down phonemes and identified sight words during small group instruction.</p> <p>Students could choose between several learning centers. Students were able to participate in activities they were interested in completing such as building an excavation site, designing a dinosaur museum, or reading books about dinosaurs in the library. During one of the small groups, students learned emergent writing skills as they practiced writing letters to their dinosaur pen pals. Students also worked on identifying letters and practicing writing their name.</p> <p>Although explicit math instruction was not observed, students in one of the centers worked on identifying and writing two and three digit numbers on their whiteboards. Students also used counter blocks to count the number of sounds within a word.</p>
<p>PMF Goal #2: Student Achievement – Meeting or exceeding academic standards <i>Moving students to advanced levels of proficiency in reading and math.</i></p>	<p>There were several examples of the teachers differentiating reading instruction to move students to advanced levels of proficiency. The teachers varied the level of questioning and support of students during small group rotations.</p> <p>During one of the observations, all of the students learned sight words beginning with the letter F. The teacher differentiated the level of support to students by having one group engage in extra practice identifying sight words. The teachers were able to individually assess student learning through questioning and observation. During two classroom observations students were assessed individually using the</p>

Mission and Goals	Evidence
	Every Child Readiness Curriculum (ECR). Teachers also assessed students using pictures of “rare words.” Students were expected to tell the name of each picture.
<p>PMF Goal #3: Gateway – Outcomes in key subjects that predict future educational success</p> <p><i>Promotion of reading proficiency by third grade and math proficiency by eighth grade</i></p>	See evidence described in goals #1 and #2 above.
<p>PMF Goal #4: Leading Indicators – Predictors of future student progress and achievement</p> <p><i>Culture of learning and support in the classrooms</i></p>	<p>There are three teaching staff members in each classroom responsible for student learning. Each adult played an integral role in the classroom instruction. The teachers worked hard to ensure that students were on task throughout the observation and that students moved through transitions quickly. The schedule for the day was posted in each class with student pictures and times prominently labeled to indicate each activity.</p> <p>The students appeared to enjoy learning in the classrooms. The students willingly participated in activities and were often heard laughing while working with their peers or during a read-aloud about dinosaurs. The teachers frequently communicated learning and behavior expectations to students. The students often responded positively to their requests.</p>
Board Governance	Two overlapping governing boards that attend one joint meeting oversee AppleTree Institute and AppleTree Early Learning Public Charter School. A PCSB staff member observed the board meeting on January 28, 2014. Both boards carried out business for both entities at

Mission and Goals	Evidence
	<p>this meeting. It was not clear which board members were on which board. At the January 28th board meeting, seventeen board members were in attendance and they voted for Cal Leonard (consultant from the New Schools Venture Fund) to join the board. It was unclear which board he joined, but all 17 members voted, which leads PCSB to believe he is part of the Institute's board but not the charter school's. On May 2, 2014, AppleTree clarified that the eleven members of the AppleTree Early Learning PCS Board are also on the AppleTree Institute board with other members. While on paper there is a distinction, in practice, there still appears to be a conflict of interest. Additionally while not in conflict with the School Reform Act, the board chair of the school is also the President and CEO of AppleTree Early Learning PCS, which is not a best practice.</p> <p>AppleTree Institute provides services to other DC public charter schools, including CLASS observation evaluations and has proposed to PCSB to conduct the CLASS observations for the AppleTree Early Learning PCS campuses. While the board meeting is divided into two sections and the board chair stopped a vote on charter school finances during the AppleTree Institute portion of the meeting, acknowledging the PCSB observer, this division of the Board's business is not enough to provide sufficient independence between the two entities to allow for AppleTree Institute to evaluate AppleTree Early Learning PCS.</p> <p>During the public charter school portion of the meeting, Anne Malone, Chief of Schools, reported on attendance goals and MySchoolDC applications. Ms. Malone also spoke on teacher retention and school culture. The board approved an amended budget and discussed the upcoming charter 10-year review.</p>

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT¹

This table summarizes the school’s performance on the Classroom Environment domain of the rubric during the unannounced visits. PCSB considers any rating below "proficient" to be under the standard of quality expected of DC charter schools. The QSR team scored 100% of the observations as “proficient” or “exemplary” for the Classroom Environment domain.

Classroom Environment	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport	The QSR team scored 100% of the observations as proficient. The teachers and students had positive, respectful interactions with one another. The teachers’ words and actions set the tone for the classroom and conveyed that they cared about the students. The students spoke positively to one another and used first names. When students danced or celebrated, the teachers gleefully clapped along. The teachers encouraged students to actively listen to one another and were warm and caring when communicating expectations to students.	Exemplary	0%
		Proficient	100%
	The QSR team did not rate any observations as below proficient.	Satisfactory	0%
		Limited	0%
Establishing a Culture for Learning	The QSR team scored 100% of the observations as proficient. The teachers had high expectations for all students. In all of the classrooms, the teacher reviewed the schedule for the day along with all of the learning tasks. The teacher explained all activities and expectations for all centers and stations. One of the teachers reminded students to do their best in the writing center. The students in self-guided centers worked independently. The teacher used a calendar and symbols to help students generate appropriate responses for questions posed and action statements given.	Exemplary	0%
		Proficient	100%
	The QSR team did not rate any observations as below proficient.	Satisfactory	0%

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

Classroom Environment	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
		Limited	0%
Managing Classroom Procedures	The QSR teamed rated 100% of the observations as proficient. The teachers had established procedures and routines that ensured a smoothly running classroom and allowed for the efficient use of time. The transitions in student classrooms were seamless and required relatively no teacher involvement. Some of the teachers used a Smart TV to call small groups of students to the table for instruction and intervention. Other teachers circulated the classroom and assisted students as needed in various centers. The students were able to transition without direction or intervention from the teachers. Students also retrieved materials and resources as needed (e.g., markers, crayons, and books).	Exemplary	50%
		Proficient	50%
	The QSR team did not rate any observations as below proficient.	Satisfactory	0%
		Limited	0%
Managing Student Behavior	The QSR team rated 100% of the observations as proficient. The teachers effectively monitored and responded to student behavior. The classrooms had a “time out” / “time to myself” chair for students to sit in while they reflected on their actions. The teachers and students used community language to encourage students to be in control of their actions and behaviors and to manage their feelings saying things like - “It’s a little deal,” “We can handle this,” and “Remember, be kind to others.” While there were very few instances of student misbehavior – some students only became upset when centers were full or resources were taken. The teachers quickly redirected these students and reintegrated them into the lesson.	Exemplary	0%
		Proficient	100%
	The QSR team did not rate any observations as below proficient.	Satisfactory	0%
		Limited	0%

INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY

This table summarizes the school’s performance on the Instructional Delivery elements of the rubric during the unannounced visits. PCSB considers any rating below “proficient” to be under the standard of quality expected of DC charter schools. The QSR team scored 100% of the observations as “proficient” for the Instructional Delivery domain.

Instructional Delivery	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
Communicating with Students	The QSR team rated 100% of the observations as proficient. The teachers effectively communicated the lesson and expectations for learning to students. The teachers often shared the lesson purpose as well as the scope and sequence of the daily activities. The teachers often shared the purpose of the story or any assessments prior to the start of the activity. The teachers used accurate syntax and a rich vocabulary for students. During story time the teachers used imaginative language to pique the students’ interest. There were strong expectations for learning. The classrooms were joyful, and students moved throughout a variety of activities with high levels of engagement.	Exemplary	0%
		Proficient	100%
	The QSR team did not rate any observations as below proficient.	Satisfactory	0%
		Limited	0%
Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques	The QSR team scored 100% of the observations as proficient. Teachers used questioning and discussion techniques to deepen student understanding. The teachers asked a variety of questions to students with various levels of difficulty. Questions were posed to students during story time, centers, and while assessments were taking place. Nearly all students were given opportunities to participate in class conversations. The questions were engaging and charged students with recalling details, connecting ideas, and making predictions. When students were asked to share what they knew about some of the story themes, they often made text-to-self connections.	Exemplary	0%
		Proficient	100%

Instructional Delivery	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
	The QSR team did not rate any observations as below proficient.	Satisfactory	0%
		Limited	0%
Engaging Students in Learning	<p>The QSR team scored 100% of the observations as proficient. Students were intellectually engaged in assignments. Teachers provided learning tasks that required high levels of student thinking. All of the students participated in each learning center. The small group instruction was well paced and afforded appropriate time for deep learning and synthesis of content.</p> <p>The learning centers and small group instruction were comprised of activities and learning opportunities that allowed students to experiment with manipulatives and develop basic reading and writing skills. The teachers used a variety of materials and resources when working with small and whole groups of students. The teachers also used timers to measure time on task and time spent completing tasks and assessments.</p>	Exemplary	0%
	The QSR team did not rate any observations as below proficient.	Proficient	100%
		Satisfactory	0%
	Limited	0%	
Using Assessment in Instruction	The QSR team scored 100% of the observations as proficient. Teachers effectively used assessment to monitor student learning. See goal #2 for evidence of assessment and differentiation during observations.	Exemplary	0%
		Proficient	100%
	The QSR team did not rate any observations as below proficient.	Satisfactory	0%
		Limited	0%

APPENDIX I: CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT OBSERVATION RUBRIC

Classroom Environment	Limited	Below Proficient	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.

Classroom Environment	Limited	Below Proficient	Proficient	Exemplary
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: INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY OBSERVATION RUBRIC

Instructional Delivery	Limited	Below Proficient	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	Below Proficient	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.