DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD

November 10, 2014

Debra Graham, Board Chair
Bridges PCS
1250 Taylor Street, NW
Washington, DC 20011

Dear Ms. Graham:

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:

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

Qualitative Site Review Report
A Qualitative Site Review team conducted on-site reviews of Bridges Public Charter School (Bridges PCS) between September 8 and September 26, 2014. The purpose of the site review is for PCSB to gauge the extent to which the school's mission, goals and student academic achievement expectations were evident in the everyday operations of the public charter school. To ascertain this, PCSB staff and consultants evaluated your classroom teaching by using an abridged version of the Charlotte Danielson *Framework for Teaching* observation rubric. We also visited a board meeting.

Enclosed is the team's report. You will find that the Qualitative Site Review report 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 Bridges PCS.

Sincerely,

Naomi DeVeaux
Deputy Director

Enclosures
cc: School Leader

Bridges Public Charter School (Bridges PCS) was originally founded in 2005 to serve prekindergarten-aged students in an exemplary, educational program that includes all students. The school's mission promises that its developmentally appropriate, student and family-centered educational approach nurtures students to expand their developmental skills, in order to build a foundation for life-long learning. In 2012, the school was approved to add a grade each year until Bridges PCS reaches 5th grade in 2016-17. Bridges PCS currently serves approximately 270 students in prekindergarten (PK3) through grade two in Ward 1. DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB) conducted a Qualitative Site Review (QSR) at the campus in September 2014 because Bridges PCS is eligible for 10-year Charter Review in 2014-15.

Over the course of a two-week window, from September 8 through September 26, 2014, a team of two PCSB staff members, including PCSB's Special Education Senior Specialist and one consultant, conducted observations of 19 classrooms. A PCSB staff member also attended a Board of Trustees meeting on September 23, 2014.

The QSR team used Charlotte Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* Rubric throughout the observations and observed classrooms in mornings and afternoons. In some instances, the QSR team may have observed a teacher twice.

The QSR team scored 76% of the observations as distinguished or proficient in the Classroom Environment domain. Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport and Managing Student Behavior were the highest rated components with teachers referring to students as "friends" and consistently implementing behavior expectations. Managing Classroom Procedures was the lowest rated component with only 60% of teachers scoring distinguished or proficient. Transitions were uneven in some classrooms causing instructional time to be lost because students did not understand the directions or materials for the next task were not ready for the students.

The QSR team scored 68% of the observations as distinguished or proficient in the Instruction domain. Communicating with Students and Engaging Students in Learning were the highest rated components with 74% of teachers scoring distinguished or proficient. Most teachers clearly stated the purpose of the lesson and kept students engaged in learning. Using Questioning/Prompts and Discussion Techniques was the lowest rated component with only 58% of teacher scoring distinguished or proficient. While many teachers extended the discussion based on student comments, not all teachers used this technique. Some teachers also struggled with asking higher order thinking questions.

CHARTER MISSION, GOALS, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT EXPECTATIONS

This table summarizes Bridges PCS'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 Visit.

Mission and Goals	Evidence
Mission: The Mission of Bridges PCS is to provide an exemplary, educational program that includes all students. Our developmentally appropriate, student and family-centered educational approach nurtures students to expand their developmental skills, in order to build a foundation for life-long learning.	Bridges PCS focuses on serving students with all needs, and indeed has a student body comprised of 28% of students with individualized education plans, among the highest in the city. To support this part of the mission, the school has three to four staff members in most classrooms comprising of 15-20 students. In addition to the lead teacher and assistant teacher, QSR reviewers observed one-on-one aids working with specific students. Non-categorical classrooms had a minimum of four staff members in each room and 5-10 students. The school has five non-categorical classrooms for students with disabilities, who require more attention for their specific needs. This low student-to-teacher ratio allows students to receive more individualized attention from staff. All general education classrooms have a mixture of general education students and students with disabilities and at least two adults. The QSR team observed the curriculum for each grade level to be developmentally appropriate for the pre-kindergarten classrooms. There was a concern from the QSR team that the kindergarten through grade two curriculum may not be rigorous enough to meet the demands of the Common Core State Standards. While students in these classrooms were engaged in reading, writing, math, and developing their social emotional skills, the lessons were not appropriately challenging to all students.

Mission and Goals	Evidence
	The school has an exceptional approach to teaching students with disabilities. The QSR team observed the entire spectrum of services for students including non-categorical classrooms and push-in. The teachers created an individualized plan and calendar for each student. For example, every student in the non-categorical classrooms had an individualized picture-schedule to help them focus throughout the day.

In the general education classrooms, it appeared that not every teacher had the skills to handle the diversity of student behavior and needs. Some teachers had a variety of skills to draw upon to help students while some teachers struggled with handling challenging student needs. In these rooms, students were off task and at times in danger of hurting themselves by wrestling or hurting others when hitting.

The QSR team observed a student- and family-centered environment. Parents were welcomed into the building with staff communicating to families in their native language, which included mostly Spanish. Some parents ate breakfast in the classrooms with their students and the leadership team welcomed families by name. This created a warm environment for the school community. |
| **PMF Goal #1: Student Progress – Academic improvement over time**
Effective instruction supporting student academic progress and achievement in reading and math. | The QSR team observed a range of literacy instruction across all grades. Students in pre-kindergarten read books, participated in read-alouds, and literacy centers. Observers saw students actively engaged in each approach. In kindergarten through second grades, students had similar experiences. The read-alouds observed were engaging with purposeful questions posed to students to allow for critical thinking. Students also had access to a variety of books in which they worked on answering questions and identifying key parts of the story. |

Mission and Goals	Evidence
	While these tasks were engaging in the classroom, teachers struggled with challenging students in all tasks. During independent work, many students were off task or confused by unclear directions. Special education teachers also focused on literacy activities in non-categorical rooms and pull-out sessions. Students participated in sight word games and were provided sentence starters to vocabulary and context cues.
	Teachers helped students work on literacy and math skills by assisting them in writing and typing math questions. One kindergarten math classroom worked on the math problem of the week where students independently were asked to add circles and squares together. While a few students struggled with this word problem, most kindergartners were finished in a minute and waited until the teacher pulled the group back together.
	In terms of academic progress for all students, the QSR team observed differentiated groups in pre-kindergarten and in the non-categorical classrooms. Pre-kindergarten students were engaged in different activities that pushed their learning in areas of math and literacy. In kindergarten through grade two general education classrooms, students infrequently worked in small groups. Most classrooms focused on whole group instruction or independent work time in which staff circulated to assist students. While students had choices in how to complete a task and in the products they produced, students were not always engaged or challenged. In one classroom working on the structure of a text, a few students struggled with writing about the beginning, middle, and end of the book. Most students had finished the task and were waiting for the teacher to move forward to the next assignment.

Mission and Goals	Evidence
PMF Goal #2: Student Achievement – Meeting or exceeding academic standards *Moving students to advanced levels of proficiency in reading and math*	The QSR team observed teachers emphasizing verbal and receptive language skills development in pre-kindergarten classrooms. During center activities, teachers frequently monitored student-to-student interactions and expanded on comments from students. Teachers also fostered development through imaginary play. During this time teachers integrated early literacy and numeracy skills development into the play. For example, one student was playing with cubes to make a number 4. The teacher took the opportunity to review and ask questions on counting and one-to-one correspondence. In kindergarten through 2nd grade, students worked on a number of reading and math skills through whole class activities and independent work. Even though student engagement was high for these activities, in most classrooms the level of rigor did not appear to challenge all students. While some students struggled with reading and math work, those that did not struggle did not receive work that was more challenging. These students sat and waited until the activity changed for the class.
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*	See evidence described in goals #1 and #2 above.
PMF Goal #4: Leading Indicators – Predictors of future student progress and achievement *Culture of learning and support in the classrooms*	The low teacher-to-student ratios demonstrated a culture of individualized learning and support, particularly for students with disabilities. Students had opportunities to engage directly with their teachers and then reinforce skills when working with an instructional assistant. In most classrooms students knew the expectations of the classroom from breakfast time to centers to independent activities.

Mission and Goals	Evidence
	Staff members were involved in activities and sat with students during breakfast and snack time to engage in discussion. Even though the predominant culture is one of learning and support, a few general education classrooms across all grades struggled to consistently maintain this culture. Teachers across all grades struggled with discussion techniques, only 58% of teachers scored proficient. At times the extra staff members were not involved in the activity and did not prepare the materials for the next activity leaving the students waiting. Additionally, two teachers used harsh and impatient tones when speaking.
Governance:	A PCSB staff member observed the Bridges PCS Board of Trustee's meeting on September 23, 2014. A quorum was present with nine board members attended in addition to some school staff. School leadership presented information on the school's current enrollment and recruitment efforts. The board also heard presentations from the finance, government, development, and facilities committees.

THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT[1]

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 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 84% of the observations as proficient or distinguished in Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport. Teachers encouraged respectful talk between students and called students by name or "friend". Most of the teachers also used positive language, such as "Great Job", "High five" and "I love it". Even at times when students had trouble maintaining control of their behavior, the teachers remained composed and supported the student to reengage in the learning activity.	Distinguished	26%
		Proficient	58%
	Interactions were uneven between the teachers and students in approximately 15% of the observations. In a few classrooms, the tone of the teacher was harsh and negative towards students. For example, one teacher told multiple students their work was wrong and then erased the incorrect sentences for them. One student tried to respond and the teacher said, "I don't want to hear it."	Basic	11%
		Unsatisfactory	5%
Establishing a Culture for Learning	The QSR team scored 74% of the observations as proficient or distinguished in Establishing a Culture for Learning. Teachers communicated the importance of hard work to all students saying statements such as, "Today we are going to work really hard at our school work" and "Great job! You can do it!"	Distinguished	5%
		Proficient	69%

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

The Classroom Environment	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
	In approximately 25% of the observations, the classroom culture was characterized by little commitment to learning by the teacher. In one classroom, the teacher did the work for an off-task student. In a few classrooms, the students complied with the teacher's expectations for learning but did not indicate a commitment or initiative for their work. Students were talking to each other during independent work time and making up off-topic answers for the work.	Basic	26%
		Unsatisfactory	0%
Managing Classroom Procedures	The QSR team scored 63% of the observations as proficient or distinguished in Managing Classroom Procedures. There was little loss of instructional time in these classrooms as teachers had clearly established routines for transitions and distribution of materials. Many teachers used a bell or chime to help students transition to the next activity. In PK classrooms, students self-selected centers after the teacher explained the directions. Support staff in the rooms assisted with the collection and distribution of materials to minimize loss of instructional time.	Distinguished	5%
		Proficient	58%
	Procedures for transitions appeared to have been established but their implementation led to instructional time being lost in almost 40% of the classrooms. For example, in a few classrooms, the teacher gave the directions too quickly or materials were not ready causing the transition to independent practice to take longer than expected. In other rooms, teachers had not established protocols for students to use materials. The observer saw students flipping pencils in the air and trying to roll books across the room, causing instructional time to be lost to re-directing student behavior.	Basic	37%
		Unsatisfactory	0%

The Classroom Environment	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
Managing Student Behavior	The QSR team scored 86% of the observations as proficient or distinguished in Managing Student Behavior. In most classrooms, standards of conduct were established and frequently monitored by the staff in the room. In the event that a student needed redirection, students were able to refocus with the teacher's positive reinforcement and clear and consistent direction, for example, "I like how this table is sitting and ready to go!" and "If you need to get my attention, I'll come over when you raise your hands."	Distinguished	11%
		Proficient	75%
	In a small number of classrooms, teachers' attempts to monitor behavior were unsuccessful and student behavior posed a safety concerns. In one prekindergarten classroom, students were observed hitting, biting, and falling to the tile floor. In another classroom, the teacher could not see students wrestling behind a bookshelf.	Basic	16%
		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 68% of observations as "distinguished" or "proficient" for the Instruction domain.

Instruction	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
Communicating with Students	The QSR team scored 74% of the observations as proficient or distinguished in Communicating with Students. In most classrooms, the teachers clearly communicated what the students were learning. Many teachers provided directions in both oral and written forms, modeled the task, and checked students' understanding of the directions before transitioning students to work independently. During independent work, interactions, teachers also used a rich vocabulary and provided struggling students with strategies, such as "tapping it out" when spelling words.	Distinguished	11%
		Proficient	63%
	In approximately one-quarter of the classrooms, the students did not fully understand the directions and the teacher was unable to provide clarity. In one classroom where students were not working, the teacher repeated the directions multiple times, and then in frustration gave the answers to the students.	Basic	26%
		Unsatisfactory	0%
Using Questioning/Prompts and Discussion Techniques	The QSR team scored just over half (58%) of the observations as proficient or distinguished in Using Questioning/Prompts and Discussion Techniques. In these classrooms, teachers used a variety of techniques to challenge students. Teachers created genuine discussions with the class by extending students' answers and asking open-ended questions to continue discussions. Teachers also effectively used wait time to allow students to think before responding.	Distinguished	0%
		Proficient	58%

Instruction	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
	In approximately 42% of the classrooms, the teachers either asked questions that required one-word or one-gesture responses (such as pointing) or only engaged a few students in the room. In one classroom, when a student did not understand the question, the teacher asked an easier question and showed the student where to point for the answer. When the student answered the simpler question, the teacher did not scaffold to a more difficult question to challenge the students but moved on to another topic. In another room, the teacher asked some open-ended questions but did not give students enough time to respond, causing the teacher to appear frustrated. The teacher then started asking yes/no questions to the group.	Basic	42%
		Unsatisfactory	0%
Engaging Students in Learning	The QSR team scored 74% of the observations as proficient or distinguished in Engaging Students in Learning. Students were eager to learn and enthusiastic to participate in classroom activities. In one classroom, students were so excited about the learning activity that they clapped and cheered for each other as students answered questions correctly. Students were actively engaged in pre-kindergarten learning centers, kindergarten math activities, and first and second grade writing projects. Older students worked on writing books they were eager to share with friends and family at the end of the week.	Distinguished	5%
		Proficient	69%
	In one-quarter of the classrooms, students not directly working with the teacher were off task, sometimes without a task assigned. In one classroom, the lead teacher left the room, and the assistant teachers struggled to maintain student engagement.	Basic	21%
		Unsatisfactory	5%

Instruction	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
Using Assessment in Instruction	The QSR team scored 68% of the observations as proficient or distinguished in Using Assessment in Instruction. In these classrooms, teachers consistently elicited evidence of student understanding while monitoring the classroom. The teachers asked clarifying questions or had the students explain what they were working on. When students chose a title for their written stories, the students had to explain to the teacher how the title connected with the content of the story. In rooms with less verbal students, the teacher provided pictures for the students to work with. Teachers used the pictures to assess student understanding by asking questions and having these students answer by pointing to the correct pictures.	Distinguished	0%
		Proficient	68%
	In 32% of the observations teachers assessed through universal checks for understanding, such as "Does anyone have a questions?" and "Good job." This was said even when some students were clearly confused by the task and unsure how to complete the assignment.	Basic	21%
		Unsatisfactory	11%

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 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.

Instruction	Unsatisfactory	Basic	Proficient	Distinguished
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.