



March 31, 2016

Robert Weinberg, Board Chair  
DC Scholars PCS  
5601 E. Capitol St. SE  
Washington, DC 20019

Dear Mr. Weinberg,

The 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, 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 2015-16 school year for the following reason:

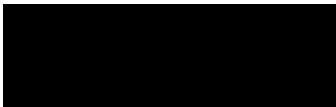
- School eligible for 5-year Charter Review during 2016 -17 school year

**Qualitative Site Review Report**

A Qualitative Site Review team conducted on-site reviews of DC Scholars Public Charter School between February 1 – 12, 2016. 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 instruction.

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

Sincerely,



Naomi DeVeaux  
Deputy Director

Enclosures  
cc: Carlie Fisherow

DC PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD

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## Qualitative Site Review Report

**Date:** March 31, 2016

**Campus Name:** DC Scholars Public Charter School

**Ward:** 7

**Grade levels:** PK - 6

**Enrollment:** 446

**Reason for visit:** School eligible for 5-year Charter Review

**Two-week window:** February 1 – 12, 2016

**Number of observations:** 26

### Summary

DC Scholars PCS was designed to sustain strong academic achievement. The school describes its program as one that delivers rigorous instruction and embeds the expectation that scholars can achieve academic success. The mission of DC Scholars Public Charter School (DC Scholars PCS) is as follows: DC Scholars PCS prepares students to attend and succeed academically in high school and college and provides them with a foundation of life skills required to become productive members of their communities. Throughout the observations there was evidence of an academic focus and an emphasis on becoming college ready. There were college banners throughout the hallways and in each classroom. Teachers referred to the students as scholars and referenced unique college mascots when addressing the class and through motivational chants during the observations.

The Qualitative Site Review (QSR) team used the Charlotte Danielson *Framework for Teaching* to score observations in two domains: Classroom Environment and Instruction. The QSR team scored 81% of the observations as distinguished or proficient in the Classroom Environment domain. The strongest areas of performance in this domain were Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport and Managing Classroom Procedures. Students and teachers were kind and respectful to one another and it was clear that routines were established and adhered to by the students. The QSR team scored 75% of the observations as distinguished or proficient in the Instruction domain, including 89% of observations as proficient or distinguished in the Communicating with Students component. Teachers clearly explained to students what they would be learning, effectively modeled learning activities for students, and made no content errors while delivering instruction.

### Specialized Instruction for Students with Disabilities

Prior to the two-week window, DC Scholars PCS provided answers to specific questions posted by DC PCSB regarding the provision of instruction to students with disabilities in the Special Education Questionnaire. The Special Education Consultant who served on the team observed services being provided using various models including inclusion classrooms, a self-contained classroom, and pull out session. In the inclusive classrooms both a general education and special education teacher collaborated to provide instruction and academic supports to students with and without disabilities. In these observations the station-teaching model was utilized where teachers were teaching different content to two different groups. The special education teachers did not limit their support and services to

students receiving special education services, rather they were observed providing instruction, feedback, and support to all of the students in their class. In the co-taught classrooms instruction and support took the form of one-on-one, small group, and whole group activities. In the self-contained classroom and pull out sessions, students seemed at ease with their teachers and were eager to learn and participate.

Instruction for English Language Learners

The school does not currently have any English Language Learners in its student body.

**CHARTER MISSION, GOALS, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT EXPECTATIONS**

This table summarizes DC Scholars 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.

<b>Mission and Goals</b>	<b>Evidence</b>
<p>The mission of DC Scholars Public Charter School is as follows: DC Scholars PCS prepares students to attend and succeed academically in high school and college and provides them with a foundation of life skills required to become productive members of their communities.</p>	<p>The QSR team saw evidence that DC Scholars PCS is meeting its mission. Teachers delivered content in whole group, small group, and one-on-one environments. During class discussions teachers encouraged students to express if they agreed, disagreed, or had a question about what other students were saying. If students disagreed they were asked to explain why. Teachers offered support and facilitated small group work when needed. There were frequent references to being ready for college. Teachers discussed career opportunities with students and college memorabilia filled the classrooms and hallways. Students were encouraged to use “complete college sentences” when answering questions and were placed in small groups named “Reading for College.”</p> <p>Students were kind to one another and in most cases respectful to the teacher. Students earned character points for good behavior and were asked to track the teacher and their classmates when they were speaking. There were “PETSYS” posters throughout the building which represented using please, excuse me, thank you, sorry and you’re welcome.</p>
<p>Goals:</p>	
<p>PMF Goal #1: Student Progress – Academic Improvement over time</p> <p>Effective instruction supporting student academic progress and achievement in reading and math.</p>	<p>Students in reading classes were often invited to explain their thinking and find evidence from the model text. The teachers used small group instruction in the reading and math classes to focus on emphasizing key skills and reinforce learning. Most classrooms also utilized stations where students used computer programs such as iReady to further develop their skills. Some classrooms had visible goal trackers marking individual student goals and progress.</p>

<b>Mission and Goals</b>	<b>Evidence</b>
<p>PMF Goal #2: Student Achievement – Meeting or exceeding academic standards</p> <p>Moving students to advanced levels of proficiency in reading and math</p>	<p>During the writing blocks students had extension opportunities if they completed their classwork. Teachers invited students in the reading classes to debate their responses to demonstrate their comprehension. In several math observations students were encouraged to explain their answers and their mathematical thinking to their peers or to the teacher. Several teachers used discussion prompts to respond directly to their peers and build off of students answers. In several observations the teachers used high level questioning to push student thinking. There were posters in some of the classrooms charting students’ progress on the ANet and NWEA MAP assessments.</p>
<p>PMF Goal # 3: Gateway – Outcomes in key subjects that predict future educational success</p> <p>Promotion of reading proficiency by third grade and math proficiency by eighth grade</p>	<p>The QSR team noted several examples of student writing. Students worked on analytic essays based on literary text. There was also evidence of student writing posted in the hallway based on an informational text passage on Abraham Lincoln. Teachers read aloud to students during many of the literacy lessons and facilitated rich discussions about what students were reading. Teachers posted displays in the classrooms and the hallways monitoring students’ growth in reading and math. The teachers used a variety of instructional groupings in the reading and math class to support student learning. Students regularly used computer programs to assist with their learning in reading and math. In the multiple math observations, the teachers modeled content using math manipulatives and real-world examples. DC PCSB will evaluate quantitative data to assess if the school met this goal during the review process.</p>
<p>PMF Goal #4: Leading Indicators – Predictors of future student progress and achievement</p> <p>Culture of learning and support in the classrooms</p>	<p>There were many school-wide systems in place to support student achievement and the culture of learning and support in the classrooms. The classrooms observed were generally full. Students were asked to sit in the STAR position – “Sit up straight; Track the speaker; Ask questions; Raise your hands.” There were class pledges and student generated classroom rules posted throughout the classrooms. One of the pledges stated, “I am intelligent, I am hardworking, I am a scholar today, I pledge to be a leader. Tomorrow I will make history.” Some students had “PARCC All-Star” sweatshirts, several others had t-shirts with a “Principal All-Star” logo. There were several attendance boards celebrating individual</p>

Mission and Goals	Evidence
	<p>students with perfect attendance and class averages for the past two weeks. During the observations teachers encouraged students to speak directly to one another to solve problems and gave students choice when selecting their learning activities. DC PCSB will evaluate quantitative data to assess if the school met this goal during the review process.</p>
<p>Governance:</p>	<p>A DC PCSB staff member joined the DC Scholars Board of Trustees meeting via conference call on February 3, 2016. A quorum was present. Several members of the Board were present in person and via phone. The focus of the meeting was talent strategy and strategic planning (with a focus on planning future Board meetings and helping make them more efficient). A stated goal is to help Board meetings be more strategic, so they are planning to send video presentations to the Board prior to the meetings going forward so that they can digest data ahead of the meeting and then use the meeting for more discussion. The Board reviewed the Regional Dashboard of school performance including academics, culture, talent, finance and enrollment. The school discussed its understanding of the PMF and plans for improving its score. They spent the remainder of the meeting discussing talent retention and strategy going forward.</p>

## THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT<sup>1</sup>

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 81% of the observations as “distinguished” or “proficient” for the Classroom Environment domain.

The Classroom Environment	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
<b>Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport</b>	The QSR team scored 85% of the observations as distinguished or proficient. Teachers and students showed each other respect through listening, taking turns while talking, and responding to established hand signals with various meanings. Students respectfully disagreed with each other about the meanings of events in different stories. They articulated their points with the facilitation of the teacher. Teachers said, “Good job, nice work, way to go!” Teachers praised students for exemplary work and encouraged students through classroom chants and cheers.	Distinguished	12%
		Proficient	73%
	The QSR team rated 12% of the observations as basic. In a few observations students were unkind to one another with no response from the teacher. In another observation the teacher made disparaging comments to some students when they forgot a step when solving a problem. In one observation the teacher was respectful to most of the students but was not respectful towards the students who were disrupting the class.	Basic	12%
	The QSR team rated less than 10% of the observations as unsatisfactory.	Unsatisfactory	3%
<b>Establishing a Culture for Learning</b>	The QSR team rated 81% of the observations as distinguished or proficient. During these observations the teachers pushed students by	Distinguished	4%

<sup>1</sup> Teachers may be observed more than once by different review team members.

The Classroom Environment	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
	<p>saying, “I know my scholars can handle this” or “your answer is good, but not great. I know you can do better.” Teachers often waited for a majority of students to volunteer to answer before continuing with the lesson. Students worked diligently without prompting from the teacher in most of these observations. Students often used sign language to communicate that they agreed with someone’s answer. Students also praised their classmates when they got the answer correct.</p>	Proficient	77%
	<p>The QSR team rated 19% of the observations as basic. These observations included: teachers not holding all students to the same expectations, students refusing to cooperate with the teacher, students talking instead of learning, or students making excuses for why their work wasn’t done.</p>	Basic	19%
	<p>The QSR team rated none of the observations as unsatisfactory.</p>	Unsatisfactory	0%
<b>Managing Classroom Procedures</b>	<p>The QSR team rated 77% of the observations as distinguished or proficient. In the majority of observations, teachers used cheers to help students transition from the rug to centers and from centers to lining up. Students moved quickly through transitions with minimal time lost. In cases where students did not transition quickly, teachers gave warnings such as “You have one minute to log off” or had students repeat the transitions.</p>	Distinguished	0%
		Proficient	77%



The Classroom Environment	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
	<p>The QSR team rated 23% of the observations as basic. In one observation the teacher did not have a system for passing out materials and getting students on task resulting lost instruction time. In other observations some students who were not working directly with the teacher were off-task or needed reminders or consequences to get on task.</p>	Basic	23%
	<p>The QSR team rated none of the observations as unsatisfactory.</p>	Unsatisfactory	0%
Managing Student Behavior	<p>The QSR team rated 81% of the observations as distinguished or proficient. Some teachers gave class points for good behavior and used the online Class Dojo system to assign individual points to students who were on task. The teachers circulated the classroom and used proximity and other strategies to manage behavior. The teachers allowed students to do extra classroom chants if they behaved well. In some distinguished observations students corrected their peers when they were misbehaving.</p>	Distinguished	12%
		Proficient	69%
	<p>The QSR team rated 19% of the observations as basic. In one observation the teacher was unsuccessful at getting some students to pay attention and get back on track. Individual students did not comply with the teachers requests and disrupted the class in other observations.</p>	Basic	19%
	<p>The QSR team rated none of the observations as unsatisfactory.</p>	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 75% of the observations as “distinguished” or “proficient” for the Instruction domain.

Instruction	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
<p><b>Communicating with Students</b></p>	<p>The QSR team rated 89% of the observations as distinguished or proficient. In most observations teachers clearly presented material and instructions for the whole class as well as small group work in centers. Teachers asked students to repeat directions and content. In another observation the students shared with the teachers what they were going to learn in each center before moving to the centers. In another observation the teacher explained the importance of measurement and gave many real-world examples. Teachers also modeled tasks for the students to ensure they were clear about how to complete them.</p>	<p>Distinguished</p>	<p>8%</p>
		<p>Proficient</p>	<p>81%</p>
	<p>The QSR team rated 12% of the observations as basic. In one observation a teacher made a minor content error when explaining a project causing students to become confused. In another observation the teacher’s directions about a classroom activity were not clear and students needed additional clarification.</p>	<p>Basic</p>	<p>12%</p>
	<p>The QSR team rated none of the observations as unsatisfactory.</p>	<p>Unsatisfactory</p>	<p>0%</p>
<p><b>Using Questioning/Prompts</b></p>		<p>Distinguished</p>	<p>12%</p>

Instruction	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
<b>and Discussion Techniques</b>	<p>The QSR team rated 62% of the observations as distinguished or proficient. In the majority of observations, teachers asked open-ended questions, asked students to explain their answers, and facilitated discussions between students. Teachers encouraged students to discuss journal writing or ideas in turn and talk environments. Teachers also asked students to do this during small group work in centers. Students were reminded to answer questions in complete sentences.</p>	Proficient	50%
	<p>The QSR team rated 38% of the observations as basic. During some observations students worked independently with no opportunities for discussion or dialogue. In other observations teachers posed questions with one-word answers and did not provide opportunities for discussion.</p>	Basic	38%
	<p>The QSR team rated none of the observations as unsatisfactory.</p>	Unsatisfactory	0%
<b>Engaging Students in Learning</b>	<p>The QSR team rated 73% of the observations as distinguished or proficient. The students worked in small groups, independently on computers, and as whole groups. The lessons were well paced and students often had the opportunities to reflect on their learning orally and in writing. Students were engaged in activities in learning centers such as measuring objects, discussing text, creating illustrations or choosing a task that most interested them. The teachers used turn and talks to give students an opportunity to share what they learned with their classmates. Students had choices to engage in extra work if they finished the assigned tasks early.</p>	Distinguished	0%
		Proficient	73%

Instruction	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
	<p>The QSR team rated 27% of the observations as basic. In one observation, the students had no choice in their work and nothing to do after completing the assigned worksheet. Some classroom activities took longer than necessary to complete and some students had long periods of idle time.</p>	Basic	27%
	<p>The QSR team rated none of the observations as unsatisfactory.</p>	Unsatisfactory	0%
<p><b>Using Assessment in Instruction</b></p>	<p>The QSR team rated 77% of the observations as distinguished or proficient. In the majority of observations, teachers did constant checks for understanding: asking directly, having students repeat content, having students give hand signals if they agreed or disagreed, and allowing ample time for students to ask questions if needed. These teachers also individualized their feedback to help students with specific questions. One teacher had each student check in with her individually to make sure they got all of their problems right on a math sheet involving multiplying decimals. The teacher walked the student through the problems, asked them to explain their work, and helped them correct their work.</p>	Distinguished	4%
		Proficient	73%
	<p>The QSR team rated 23% of the observations as basic. In these observations the teachers asked questions but did not make adjustments when students were confused by the material. In one observation there were few attempts to assess student understanding and the feedback was not individualized.</p>	Basic	23%

Instruction	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
	The QSR team rated none of the observations as unsatisfactory.	Unsatisfactory	0%

**APPENDIX I: THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT OBSERVATION RUBRIC**

<b>The Classroom Environment</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Distinguished</b>
<b>Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport</b>	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.
<b>Establishing a Culture for Learning</b>	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.
<b>Managing Classroom Procedures</b>	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
<b>Managing Student Behavior</b>	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
<b>Communicating with Students</b>	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.
<b>Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques</b>	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.
<b>Engaging Students in Learning</b>	Students are not at all intellectually engaged in significant learning, as a result of inappropriate activities or materials, poor representations of content, or lack of lesson structure.	Students are intellectually engaged only partially, resulting from activities or materials or uneven quality, inconsistent representation of content or uneven structure of pacing.	Students are intellectually engaged throughout the lesson, with appropriate activities and materials, instructive representations of content, and suitable structure and pacing of the lesson.	Students are highly engaged throughout the lesson and make material contribution to the representation of content, the activities, and the materials. The structure and pacing of the lesson allow for student reflection and closure.



Instruction	Unsatisfactory	Basic	Proficient	Distinguished
<p><b>Using Assessment in Instruction</b></p>	<p>Students are unaware of criteria and performance standards by which their work will be evaluated, and do not engage in self-assessment or monitoring. Teacher does not monitor student learning in the curriculum, and feedback to students is of poor quality and in an untimely manner.</p>	<p>Students know some of the criteria and performance standards by which their work will be evaluated, and occasionally assess the quality of their own work against the assessment criteria and performance standards. Teacher monitors the progress of the class as a whole but elicits no diagnostic information; feedback to students is uneven and inconsistent in its timeliness.</p>	<p>Students are fully aware of the criteria and performance standards by which their work will be evaluated, and frequently assess and monitor the quality of their own work against the assessment criteria and performance standards. Teacher monitors the progress of groups of students in the curriculum, making limited use of diagnostic prompts to elicit information; feedback is timely, consistent, and of high quality.</p>	<p>Students are fully aware of the criteria and standards by which their work will be evaluated, have contributed to the development of the criteria, frequently assess and monitor the quality of their own work against the assessment criteria and performance standards, and make active use of that information in their learning. Teacher actively and systematically elicits diagnostic information from individual students regarding understanding and monitors progress of individual students; feedback is timely, high quality, and students use feedback in their learning.</p>