



June 11, 2013

Christopher Siddall, Board Chair
Meridian Public Charter School
2120 13th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009

Dear Mr. Siddall:

The 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 2012-13 school year for the following reason(s):

- School eligible to petition for 15-year Charter Renewal during 2013-14 school year

Qualitative Site Review Report

A Qualitative Site Review team conducted on-site reviews of Meridian Public Charter School "Meridian PCS" between May 6 and May 17, 2013. 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.

Enclosed is the team's report. You will find that the Qualitative Site Review Report is focused 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 Meridian PCS. Thank you for your continued cooperation as PCSB makes every effort to ensure that Meridian PCS is in compliance with its charter.

Sincerely,



Naomi DeVeaux
Deputy Director

Enclosures
cc: School Leader

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The first striking observation of Meridian Public Charter School (“Meridian PCS”) is the building in which the school is located. The building itself is beautiful and inside is organized to maximize opportunities for its students. Specifically, the school has a parent center, library, computer lab, instrumental music room, gymnasium, and many small instructional rooms for English language learners (“ELLs”) and special education classes. The reviewers observed staff using all of the rooms as they worked with the student body. The school has prioritized communication with parents with two full time staff who manage the parent center. Each member of the review team was welcomed by the reception team at the front table and the parent center has programs in place to make sure every parent understands what is happening at the school, especially for parents where English is not their native language. Students were also observed to be very courteous and respectful to school staff, parents and review team members.

The school maintains a full-time instructional assistant in every classroom from Prekindergarten-3 (“PK-3”) through sixth grades. However, reviewers did not see the instructional assistants fully utilized during observations. A few times, the second staff member in the room was observed working with a smaller group of students but they were not observed differentiating the instruction; instead they were using the same materials and strategies as the teacher. In most classrooms, the reviewers observed that the instructional assistant monitoring behavior during whole-group instructional lessons.

The reviewers observed twenty-two classrooms over a two-week window. A few teachers may have been observed twice by different reviewers. Overall, during the classroom observations, the classroom environment was strong but teachers scored lowest in discussion and questioning during instructional delivery. Reviewers observed teachers teaching to the whole group and directed mostly low-level questions to the students. Additionally, discussion was teacher led. The review team did not observe most teachers challenging students or asking students to justify their answers and reviewers observed minimal critical thinking from students. In the PK-3 and -4 classrooms students were observed completing worksheets during instruction.

The school has strategies in place to work with students with disabilities and ELLs. Reviewers observed teachers pulling these students out of classrooms and working with them individually and in small groups. Many of the teachers seemed to have skills and techniques to help all students in the classrooms behaviorally. The review team observed solid behavior management techniques employed to help students maintain focus and not get off-task.

During the two-week observation window for the Qualitative Site Review “QSR”, the school had Stanford 10 testing scheduled during the second week for kindergarten through eighth grades. The Dean of Academics informed PCSB that academic instruction would occur during the afternoons of this second week. The QSR observations continued through week two in the afternoons. However, there was a disconnect between the Dean of Academics and the Test Coordinator and teachers. The Test Coordinator suggested to a review team member that she not come at all the second week because no academics would be taught in the afternoons. When a review team member did visit in the afternoon of the second

week, students were coloring workbook pages and playing games. Pre-kindergarten classes were also not following their normal schedule and were “taking some time off of learning,” as one teacher stated. When a class was taking an academic assessment, the teachers were chatting off to the side and eating, until the observer came into the room, at which point the staff members stood up and started to walk around the room observing students.

Due to a change in the school’s board meeting schedule, a PCSB team member was unable to attend a board meeting. Instead, a PCSB staff member reviewed the board minutes from the 2012-13 academic year. Board members met quarterly and maintained a quorum for each meeting. At each meeting, the board of trustees heard and discussed a report of academics from the Head of School and Dean of Academics. The leadership and board members analyzed the PCSB PMF and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education’s Elementary and Secondary Education Act Accountability Report to further understand the academic progress on which the school can focus. The board also discussed finances at each meeting. In November 2012, Meridian PCS honored the school’s long tenured chairman as he resigned and welcomed new board chair, Chris Siddall.

CHARTER MISSION, GOALS, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT EXPECTATIONS

This table summarizes Meridian 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
<p>Mission: The mission of Meridian Public Charter School is to develop a graduate with strong academic skills, well-developed character and a life-long ambition to achieve.</p>	<p>While the school has a strong focus on behavior management, values and academics, the lack of discussion and questioning techniques in classrooms are not challenging students to critically think. Overall, the review team did not observe teachers asking higher order thinking questions and classroom discussions were teacher led. In the middle school classrooms, the review team observed teachers preparing students with strong academic skills. Teachers helped students take notes on text reading and led students through higher-order questioning and discussion in science and social studies as well as problem analysis in math and presentation skills in language arts. This was not observed in the elementary grades where students focused primarily on worksheets during observations. To assist with strong academic skills, the school has hired full-time instructional assistants for each classroom through sixth grade. Observers did not see the instructional assistant providing much instruction,, usually s/he monitored behavior. Even with the second instructional staff member in the classrooms, reviewers did not see differentiated content, products or processes.</p> <p>Elementary classrooms had character traits posted on the walls and teachers were observed referring to the character traits when appropriate during instruction. Students were observed to be well behaved and courteous to each other and visitors.</p>
<p>All students in grades K-8 will increase achievement.</p>	<p>The school has a full-time instructional assistant in each classroom through sixth grade. While observers did not see teachers using the instructional aides to fully differentiate instruction, instructional aides</p>

Mission and Goals	Evidence
	do assist with leading small groups and classroom management. Students were well behaved and focused and were mostly on-task during learning time. The school focuses on whole group instruction and scored lowest overall with questioning and discussion techniques. While a few teachers were proficient and one was exemplary in the area of Questioning, most teachers were not asking higher-order questioning to create an environment of inquiry and critical thinking.
Parents and teachers will indicate high levels of satisfaction with the school's program.	The QSR team neither looked for nor observed any evidence related to this goal.
The school will involve parents and the community as active partners in support of student education.	<p>The school tries to be parent-centered, with two full-time, bilingual staff members in the front office. The two staff members work with room parents to communicate school events and needs and translate parent meetings and school information for parents who do not speak English. The Spanish-speaking bilingual staff and parent volunteers have meetings in place to help communicate important information to parents whose native language is not English.</p> <p>The parent center offers monthly meetings to help educate parents on different essential topics. In the last two months, parent workshops have centered on Common Core and DC CAS testing. Additionally, parent bulletin boards with useful school related information were posted outside most of the classrooms observed.</p>
Students will regularly attend school.	The review team did not review the attendance data of the school but during classroom observations, the review team saw very few empty desks throughout the days observed. Most students appeared to be present and were on time for school.
Create a team-oriented environment where everyone is committed to a unified vision for the school.	The current school schedule allows grade level team members to plan together daily during specials time and afterschool. In kindergarten through sixth grades, every classroom has a full-time instructional assistant. To further support the sense of community, adults were in halls supporting students during transitions and additional adults helped to walk the younger students to the park for recess.
Achieve enrollment projections.	The QSR team neither looked for nor observed any evidence related to

Mission and Goals	Evidence
<p>Meridian will significantly reduce the number of student referrals to the principal's office and suspensions.</p>	<p>this goal.</p> <p>The school has implemented a consistent, school-wide behavior management plan. Reviewers observed variations of "Green Team" posters in every classroom, sixth grade and lower. Teachers utilized various methods to monitor student behavior with the color chart through clothespins to artistic displays. The review team saw classroom rules and values posted in each classroom and behavior management was consistent throughout the school. The review team did not observe any misbehavior in the diverse student population. Teachers observed seemed to have a wealth of strategies to help them maintain student focus.</p>
<p>Students in grades Pre-K-6 will demonstrate strong character.</p>	<p>In all classrooms observed from PreK-3 through sixth grades, instructors had the core values posted. In approximately one-third of the rooms observed, teachers wove one or more of the values into the lesson or discussion. This seemed appropriate and not prescriptive.</p> <p>The review team observed students who were courteous and respectful. Students opened doors for the review team members and politely explained what they were doing or learning. During the observations, values seem to be part of the culture, not just posters on the walls.</p>

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS¹

This rubric summarizes the school's performance on the Classroom Environments elements of the rubric during the unannounced visits.

Class Environment	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport	Interactions observed between teachers and students and among students were positive and respectful. Teachers used soft voices and positive body language to redirect behavior and support student learning. Students were courteous when interacting with review team members. Staff and teachers used teachable moments to talk about how to be respectful to others when appropriate.	Limited	0%
		Satisfactory	0%
		Proficient	91%
		Exemplary	9%
Establishing a Culture for Learning	Teachers in all grades encouraged students to do their best and keep trying. Most of the teachers observed were highly engaged in student learning. Teachers focused on learning objectives in lessons and held students to high expectations on assigned tasks. High quality instruction did not continue through testing week and observers did not see lesson objectives posted in every classroom.	Limited	0%
		Satisfactory	14%
		Proficient	72%
		Exemplary	14%
Managing Classroom Procedures	Most of the teachers observed had established strong classroom procedures so activities, centers, and transitions were smooth. Students were accustomed to nonverbal and verbal cues such as dimming the lights, counting backwards and using soft voices. In the youngest classrooms, teachers have procedures in place for students to rotate through classroom activities. Students knew how to put their names at a center, push in chairs, and wash hands between centers. Established routines continued through all grades where there was little loss of instructional time observed during classroom transitions and hallways stayed quiet and orderly during class transitions.	Limited	0%
		Satisfactory	14%
		Proficient	82%
		Exemplary	4%

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

Class Environment	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
Managing Student Behavior	The review team did not observed misbehavior of any kind during observations. Teachers effectively managed student behavior by setting expectations and using proactive behavior management strategies like Green Team, a color system to reinforce positive behavior. A few teachers maintained exceptional behavior management techniques throughout observations. These teachers anticipated behavior issues and monitored without speaking out, just by moving around then asking questions to students to refocus them on their work.	Limited	0%
		Satisfactory	9%
		Proficient	73%
		Exemplary	18%
Organizing Physical Space	<p>The classrooms and building were bright, spacious and adequately equipped for learning. Many classrooms were stocked with adequate books, manipulatives and supplies for learning. The school also had a well-stocked library, computer lab and instrumental music room.</p> <p>Classrooms had limited technology in each room. Even though every room had a SmartBoard, the review team rarely observed the technology in use and did not observe the SmartBoard used as more than an overhead to show an assignment. Classrooms appeared to have older computers and classroom libraries were not consistently well stocked from room to room.</p> <p>Most of the elementary classrooms did not have a place to store backpacks and coats.</p>	Limited	0%
		Satisfactory	9%
		Proficient	91%
		Exemplary	0%

INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY

This rubric summarizes the school's performance on the Instructional Delivery elements of the rubric during the unannounced visits.

Instructional Delivery	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
Communicating with Students	<p>Overall, teachers clearly communicated the instructional purpose of the lessons to students and the teachers' explanations were clear and accurate. Teachers used a developmentally appropriate wide vocabulary at all grades to explain content to students.</p> <p>In a few classrooms, teachers did not effectively communicate the expectations of the activities, which resulted in children wandering around the classroom, unclear about their role.</p>	Limited	0%
		Satisfactory	14%
		Proficient	77%
		Exemplary	9%
Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques	<p>In the classroom observations, teachers struggled overall using questioning and discussion techniques. Overall, teachers' questions led students through a single path of inquiry and questions were of low cognitive challenge. Teachers usually only called on students who raised their hands, resulting in students who were not engaged. Most questioning was directed by the teachers and teachers asked many yes/no questions. When students answered questions, teachers did not take opportunities to continue a discussion from the student response. Teachers led the conversations in the classrooms, which did not give students an opportunity for inquiry, or student-to-student discourse.</p> <p>The middle school teachers were observed asking questions that challenged students to think critically at times, but they still only called on students who raised their hands.</p>	Limited	36%
		Satisfactory	36%
		Proficient	23%
		Exemplary	5%
Engaging Students in Learning	<p>Overall, students were attentive and on-task. Students were working at a suitable pace and at appropriate levels of development. Most students appeared to be highly motivated and responsive to the learning tasks introduced. Most of the students observed were very eager to please their</p>	Limited	27%
		Satisfactory	18%
		Proficient	50%

Instructional Delivery	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
	<p>teachers and complete activities.</p> <p>Many classroom observations were dominated by whole group instruction. When an instructional aide did work with a small group, the content was the same across the classroom. The review team did not observe differentiated instruction in terms of content, process or product. The review team did not see all students engaged when teachers read aloud from texts. The learning tasks observed in the classrooms did not consistently require high levels of student thinking or present challenging concepts.</p>	Exemplary	5%
Using Assessment in Instruction	<p>Most of the teachers observed were actively monitoring student progress on assigned activities. Teachers were roaming between aisles to check for student understanding. At times, progress seemed to be checked for completion rather than understanding. In some classrooms, the number of desks limited teacher movement to all students to observe work. Some teachers relied on group responses therefore, they were unable to distinguish individualized responses. The review team rarely observed rubrics, the use of exit tickets or other forms of informal assessments.</p>	Limited	27%
		Satisfactory	27%
		Proficient	45%
		Exemplary	0%
Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness	<p>Overall, teachers took advantage of teachable moments and made adjustments in response to students' needs. Classrooms with the youngest students were filled with opportunities for flexibility, responding to students instead of keeping to a schedule, most of the PK and kindergarten teachers did this well to develop the whole child, even incorporating a vocabulary lesson into the lunch discussion. Some teachers were able to modify their questions depending on a student response.</p> <p>Nine classrooms received a "not applicable" in this area. Observers were unable to determine if the teacher demonstrated flexibility and responsiveness.</p>	Limited	0%
		Satisfactory	17%
		Proficient	75%
		Exemplary	8%

APPENDIX I: CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT OBSERVATION RUBRIC

Class Environment	Limited	Satisfactory	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.
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.
Organizing Physical Space	Teacher makes poor use of the physical environment, resulting in unsafe or inaccessible conditions for some students or a serious mismatch between the furniture arrangement and the lesson activities.	Teacher’s classroom is safe, and essential learning is accessible to all students, but the furniture arrangement only partially supports the learning activities.	Teacher’s classroom is safe, and learning is accessible to all students; teacher uses physical resources well and ensures that the arrangement of furniture supports the learning activities.	Teacher’s classroom is safe, and students contribute to ensuring that the physical environment supports the learning of all students.

APPENDIX II: INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY OBSERVATION RUBRIC

Instructional Delivery	Limited	Satisfactory	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	Satisfactory	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.
Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness	Teacher adheres to the instruction plan in spite of evidence of poor student understanding or of students' lack of interest, and fails to respond to students' questions; teacher assumes no responsibility for students' failure.	Teacher demonstrates moderate flexibility and responsiveness to students' needs and interests, and seeks to ensure success of all students.	Teacher seeks ways to ensure successful learning for all students, making adjustments as needed to instruction plans and responding to student interest and questions.	Teacher is highly responsive to students' interests and questions, making major lesson adjustments if necessary, and persists in ensuring the success of all students.