



June 12, 2020

Jolene Slotter, Board Chair
Rocketship Public Charter School – Rise Academy
2335 Raynolds Pl SE
Washington, DC 20020

Dear Ms. Slotter,

The DC Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB) conducts Qualitative Site Reviews to gather and document evidence to support school oversight. According to the School Reform Act § 38-1802.11, DC PCSB shall monitor the progress of each school in meeting the goals and student academic achievement expectations specified in the school's charter. Rocketship Public Charter School - Rise Academy (Rocketship Rise PCS) was selected to undergo a Qualitative Site Review during the 2019-20 school year for the following reason(s):

- School eligible for 5-year Charter Review during 2020-21 school year

Qualitative Site Review Report

A Qualitative Site Review team conducted on-site reviews of Rocketship Rise PCS between March 2 –13, 2020. The team's report is enclosed. You will find that the Qualitative Site Review Report focuses primarily on the following areas: classroom environment and instruction.

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

Sincerely,

Rashida Young
Chief School Performance Officer

Enclosures
cc: School Leader

Qualitative Site Review Report

Date: June 12, 2020

Campus Information

Campus Name: Rocketship Rise PCS

Ward: 8

Grade levels: Pre-kindergarten 3 – Fifth

Qualitative Site Review (QSR) Information

Reason for Visit: School eligible for 5-year Charter Review during the 2020-21 school year

Two-week Window: March 2 – 13, 2020

QSR Team Members: One DC PCSB staff member and two consultants, including one who served as the special education (SPED) specialist

Number of Observations: 15

Total Enrollment: 710

Students with Disabilities Enrollment: 89

English Learners Enrollment: 7

In-seat Attendance on Observation Days:

Visit 1: March 2, 2020 – 92.8%

Visit 2: March 3, 2020 – 94.7%

Visit 3: March 4, 2020 – 94.5%

Visit 4: March 10, 2020 – 88.4%

Summary

Rocketship Education DC PCS's mission is “to eliminate the achievement gap by graduating our students at or above grade level in Language Arts and Math.”

The QSR team observed some evidence that Rocketship Rise PCS is meeting its mission. Throughout several observations, teachers had established strong relationships with students and showed interest in students' lives outside of school. Across most classrooms, students engaged in learning tasks through a variety of methods, including the use of laptops and small group “station instruction.” In several classes, however, teachers primarily asked closed-ended questions during classroom discussions and to check for student understanding, leading some students to disengage. In many observations, it was unclear if students understood the content.

During the QSR two-week window, the team used the Charlotte Danielson *Framework for Teaching* to examine classroom environment and instruction (see Appendices I and II). The QSR team scored 70% of observations as distinguished or proficient in the Classroom Environment domain. The highest-rated component in

this domain was *Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport*, with 87% of observations scored as distinguished or proficient. In these observations, interactions between teachers and students and among students reflected genuine warmth and caring. Teachers kindly greeted students as they entered the classroom and were observed asking students about their birthdays and family members.

The QSR team scored 67% of observations as distinguished or proficient in the Instruction domain. The highest-rated component in this domain was *Engaging Students in Learning (3c)*, with 93% of observations scored as distinguished or proficient. In these observations, most students engaged with learning tasks using a variety of materials. Teachers effectively used a variety of instructional groupings to maintain student engagement. Students worked independently, in whole groups, and in small group lessons with the teacher or independently at learning stations.

Governance

Jolene Slotter chairs the Rocketship Education DC PCS Board of Trustees. The School Reform Act requires each DC public charter school to have a majority of DC residents and two parents on its board, which the school has been compliant with for the past four years.

Specialized Instruction for Students with Disabilities

Before the two-week window, Rocketship Rise PCS completed a questionnaire about how it serves its students with disabilities (SWD). Reviewers looked for evidence of the school's articulated SPED program. Overall, DC PCSB observed three special education classroom environments including inclusion, push-in, and pullout instruction. Key trends from the SPED observations are summarized below.

- In supporting students with disabilities, Rocketship Rise wrote that they utilize co-planning through alternative and station teaching as well as other indicators of "meaningful inclusion," such as thoughtful planning around student's differing skill deficits. In each of the inclusion settings, the observer saw evidence of the general education teacher and the special education teacher supporting all students to access the same objectives through differentiated instruction.
- In one observation, after returning from a pullout group, SWD seamlessly transitioned back into the general education classroom. Students knew where to sit, which computers to use and followed instructions from both the special education and general education teacher.
- To provide accommodations for students with disabilities, the school said that DC PCSB might see a variety of resources being used. In both the push-in and pullout observations, the observer saw the following accommodations for SWD: preferential seating, graphic organizers, frequent breaks, e-books, and incentive charts.
- To provide modifications according to the IEPs of SWD, the school wrote observers may see modified work, simplified language, and alternate

assignments. The observer was able to see the following: modified amounts of work, simplified language, and tasks broken into smaller parts in all three SPED environments.

THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT¹

This table summarizes the school’s performance on the Classroom Environment domain of the rubric during the unannounced visits. The ratings for classroom observations—“distinguished,” “proficient,” “basic,” and “unsatisfactory”—come from the Danielson framework. The QSR team scored 70% of classrooms as “distinguished” or “proficient” for the Classroom Environment domain. Please see Appendix III for a breakdown of each subdomain score.

The Classroom Environment	Evidence	School Wide Rating ²	
Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport	<p>The QSR team scored 87% of observations as distinguished or proficient in this component. In the distinguished observation, the teacher demonstrated knowledge and caring about individual students’ lives outside of school. During the observation, a student said they felt tired, and the teacher walked over to them and said, “We’re going to talk to your mom today, maybe you’ll have to start going to bed earlier.” Throughout the observation, the teacher respected and encouraged student effort. For example, after one student answered a problem incorrectly, the teacher responded by saying, “That’s ok, you can always try again.”</p>	Distinguished	7%
	<p>In the proficient observations, talk between teachers and students was uniformly respectful. In one observation, teachers praised students with comments such as, “Awesome – thank you for sharing that with us.” In another observation, when a student accidentally knocked over a cup of pencils, the teacher responded by saying, “Can you please pick up the pencils you knocked over? Thank you.”</p>	Proficient	80%

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

² DC PCSB does not report out qualitative evidence if less than 10% of observations in any given component earned a “basic” or “unsatisfactory” level of performance.

The Classroom Environment	Evidence	School Wide Rating²	
	The QSR team scored less than 10% of the observations as basic in this component.	Basic	7%
	The QSR team scored less than 10% of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.	Unsatisfactory	7%
Establishing a Culture for Learning	The QSR team scored 59% of observations as proficient and none as distinguished in this component. In the proficient observations, teachers communicated the importance of the content. In one observation, the teacher walked around the room as students worked, saying things like, "I see Student X jotting down their ideas to become a good reader." In these observations, students expended good effort to complete high-quality work. In one observation, a student initially responded incorrectly, but after prompting from the teacher and their peers, they persisted and completed the problem correctly.	Distinguished	0%
	The QSR team scored 35% of observations as basic in this component. In the basic observations, teachers' primary concern was task completion. In one observation, the teacher told students their brainstorming notes didn't matter and would simply be thrown away. Teachers in these observations often held high expectations only for some students. In one observation, the teacher encouraged some students to complete their assessments while other students' off-task behavior and off-topic conversations went unaddressed.	Basic	35%
	The QSR team scored less than 10% of observations as unsatisfactory in this component.	Unsatisfactory	6%

Managing Classroom Procedures	The QSR team scored 59% of the observations as proficient and none as distinguished in this component. In the proficient observations, classroom routines functioned smoothly. In one observation, the teacher used a counter to transition students from whole group to small groups in thirty seconds. In another observation, students used a non-verbal hand signal to indicate to their peers that they needed them to speak louder, allowing the conversation to continue seamlessly. Teachers in these observations used a mixture of call and response prompts, chants, timers, and non-verbal gestures to quickly and efficiently transition students between groups resulting in no loss of instruction time.	Distinguished	0%
		Proficient	59%
	The QSR team scored 35% of observations as basic in this component. In the basic observations, classroom routines functioned unevenly. In one observation, materials for stations were not readily available to students, which resulted in some students sitting idle while others wandered the room in search of the appropriate materials. In another observation, significant instructional time was lost during small groups as the teacher had to stop instruction multiple times to redirect students working at stations. In these observations, uneven classroom routines, like the procedure for lining up, had to be repeated several times which, resulted in loss of instructional time.	Basic	35%
	The QSR team scored less than 10% of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.	Unsatisfactory	6%

Managing Student Behavior	<p>The QSR team scored 77% of observations as proficient or distinguished in this component. In the distinguished observations, student behavior was almost entirely appropriate. In one observation, the teacher consistently monitored student behavior and moved students to the “All-Star” and “MVP” zones for exhibiting positive behaviors. In another observation, the teacher used proactive methods to monitor student behavior like narrating positive student actions and using proximity to prevent any instances of student misbehavior.</p>	Distinguished	12%
	<p>In the proficient observations, teachers responded successfully to instances of student misbehavior. In one observation, the teacher asked a student if they needed to take a “mindful moment” after they engaged in off-task behavior. The student immediately went to a designated area and calmed down before returning to the group. Teachers in these observations used shared language related to behavior like, “clip up” and “clip down,” and constantly reminded students to “track” as they spoke.</p>	Proficient	65%
	<p>The QSR team scored 12% of observations as basic in this component. In the basic observations, teachers attempted to maintain order in the classroom but with uneven success. In one observation, students engaged in off-task, and sometimes unsafe, behavior (like kicking peers underneath the table and sitting unsafely on chairs) that went unaddressed by the teacher. In another observation, the teacher stopped the lesson several times to remind students to lower their voices. While some students briefly complied, many continued to talk loudly, before the teacher eventually ignored the misbehavior.</p>	Basic	12%

	<p>The QSR team scored 12% of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component. In the unsatisfactory observations, teachers did not monitor student behavior. In one observation, students engaged in unsafe behaviors like standing on top of or hiding underneath furniture. In another observation, a student hid in a corner of the room in an attempt to hide from the teacher. Eventually, the students had to be removed from the classroom by an administrator.</p>	Unsatisfactory	12%
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INSTRUCTION

This table summarizes the school’s performance on the Instruction domain of the rubric during the unannounced visits. The ratings for classroom observations—“distinguished,” “proficient,” “basic,” and “unsatisfactory”—come from the Danielson framework. The QSR team scored 67% of classrooms as “distinguished” or “proficient” for the Instruction domain. Please see Appendix III for a breakdown of each subdomain score.

Instruction	Evidence	School Wide Rating	
<p>Communicating with Students</p>	<p>The QSR team scored 74% of observations as proficient or distinguished in this component. In the distinguished observation, the teacher explained content clearly and imaginatively. In this observation, the teacher asked students to plan and design a village using a variety of materials. The teacher modeled the expectations for students and used rich vocabulary to link the assignment to a previously read text.</p>	Distinguished	7%
	<p>In the proficient observations, teachers stated clearly at some point what students would be learning. In one observation, the teacher said, “Today we will identify the problem in our text,” before leading students in a targeted review of the book. In another observation, the teacher used an anchor chart to display story elements and definitions and explained how the chart could be used as a resource. Students in these observations completed tasks quickly and did not require additional prompting or support from their teachers.</p>	Proficient	67%

Instruction	Evidence	School Wide Rating	
	<p>The QSR team scored 27% of observations as basic in this component. In the basic observations, teachers had to clarify the learning tasks so that students could complete them. In one observation, students asked the same questions repeatedly during independent work time. As a result, the teacher unsuccessfully attempted to reteach the lesson before simply giving students the correct answers. In these observations, teachers' explanation of the content was purely procedural. For example, after being asked a question, the teacher responded, "They just want you to label the clock," and did not provide any additional guidance although several students expressed similar misunderstandings.</p>	Basic	27%
	<p>The QSR team scored none of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.</p>	Unsatisfactory	0%
<p>Using Questioning/ Prompts and Discussion Techniques</p>	<p>The QSR team scored 38% of observations as proficient and none as distinguished in this component. In the proficient observations, teachers used a mix of open-ended questions that required students to think critically. In one observation, the teachers asked questions like, "What in the story tells you he might be angry?" and "How does that section in the text help us to understand the topic?" In another observation, the teacher used turn-and-talks and effective wait time to allow multiple students to engage in content-related discussions. In another observation, the teacher used "equity sticks" to ensure that all students participated in the discussion.</p>	Distinguished	0%
		Proficient	38%

Instruction	Evidence	School Wide Rating	
	<p>The QSR team scored 63% of observations as basic in this component. In the basic observations, teachers framed some questions to promote student thinking, but many had a single correct answer. In one observation, the teacher asked students to describe the characters in a text, but moved rapidly from one student to the next. The teacher did not provide enough wait time for students to elaborate on their answers or contribute to a broader content related discussion. In another observation, the teacher exclusively asked closed-ended questions like, “What number is this?” and “What do you skip by?”</p>	Basic	63%
	<p>The QSR team scored none of observations as unsatisfactory in this component.</p>	Unsatisfactory	0%

Engaging Students in Learning	The QSR team scored 93% of observations as proficient or distinguished in this component. In the distinguished observation, all students engaged in the learning task.	Distinguished	8%
	In the proficient observations, most students intellectually engaged in the lesson. In one observation, students read an informational text, and the teacher assigned them “thinking jobs.” The jobs required students to take notes as they read. As students finished their notes, the teacher provided prompting and scaffolding to help them develop their ideas. In these observations, teachers used a mix of instructional groupings to ensure ongoing student engagement. For example, one teacher used small group instruction to target individual students while other students engaged in learning stations.	Proficient	85%
	The QSR team scored none of the observations as basic in this component.	Basic	0%
	The QSR team scored less than 10% of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.	Unsatisfactory	8%

Using Assessment in Instruction	The QSR team scored 73% of observations as proficient and none as distinguished in this component. In the proficient observations, teachers checked for student understanding using a variety of methods. In one observation, a student incorrectly pronounced a letter sound and the teacher responded by saying, "Oh no, let's try that again." The teacher later modeled the sound for the student and used a hand motion to help redirect the student. In another observation, the teacher allowed students the opportunity to refine their answers after a brief classroom discussion. The teacher said, "I will give you 30 seconds to adjust any part of your statement." Students reflected on their work and made changes accordingly.	Distinguished	0%
		Proficient	73%
	The QSR team scored 18% of the observations as basic in this component. In the basic observations, teachers monitored student understanding through a single method, without checking for evidence of student understanding. In one observation, the teacher moved quickly through the content and gave only global feedback such as, "Good job" and "Got it?"	Basic	18%
	The QSR team scored less than 10% of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.	Unsatisfactory	9%

APPENDIX I: THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT OBSERVATION RUBRIC

The Classroom Environment	Unsatisfactory	Basic	Proficient	Distinguished
Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport	Classroom interactions, both between the teacher and students and among students, are negative or inappropriate and characterized by sarcasm, putdowns, or conflict.	Classroom interactions are generally appropriate and free from conflict but may be characterized by occasional displays of insensitivity.	Classroom interactions reflect general warmth and caring, and are respectful of the cultural and developmental differences among groups of students.	Classroom interactions are highly respectful, reflecting genuine warmth and caring toward individuals. Students themselves ensure maintenance of high levels of civility among member of the class.
Establishing a Culture for Learning	The classroom does not represent a culture for learning and is characterized by low teacher commitment to the subject, low expectations for student achievement, and little student pride in work.	The classroom environment reflects only a minimal culture for learning, with only modest or inconsistent expectations for student achievement, little teacher commitment to the subject, and little student pride in work. Both teacher and students are performing at the minimal level to "get by."	The classroom environment represents a genuine culture for learning, with commitment to the subject on the part of both teacher and students, high expectations for student achievement, and student pride in work.	Students assumes much of the responsibility for establishing a culture for learning in the classroom by taking pride in their work, initiating improvements to their products, and holding the work to the highest standard. Teacher demonstrates as passionate commitment to the subject.
Managing Classroom Procedures	Classroom routines and procedures are either nonexistent or inefficient, resulting in the loss of much instruction time.	Classroom routines and procedures have been established but function unevenly or inconsistently, with some loss of instruction time.	Classroom routines and procedures have been established and function smoothly for the most part, with little loss of instruction time.	Classroom routines and procedures are seamless in their operation, and students assume considerable responsibility for their smooth functioning.
Managing Student Behavior	Student behavior is poor, with no clear expectations, no monitoring of student behavior, and inappropriate response to student misbehavior.	Teacher makes an effort to establish standards of conduct for students, monitor student behavior, and respond to student misbehavior, but these efforts are not always successful.	Teacher is aware of student behavior, has established clear standards of conduct, and responds to student misbehavior in ways that are appropriate and respectful of the students.	Student behavior is entirely appropriate, with evidence of student participation in setting expectations and monitoring behavior. Teacher's monitoring of student behavior is subtle and preventive, and teachers' response to student misbehavior is sensitive to individual student needs.

APPENDIX II: INSTRUCTION OBSERVATION RUBRIC

Instruction	Unsatisfactory	Basic	Proficient	Distinguished
Communicating with Students	Teacher's oral and written communication contains errors or is unclear or inappropriate to students. Teacher's purpose in a lesson or unit is unclear to students. Teacher's explanation of the content is unclear or confusing or uses inappropriate language.	Teacher's oral and written communication contains no errors, but may not be completely appropriate or may require further explanations to avoid confusion. Teacher attempts to explain the instructional purpose, with limited success. Teacher's explanation of the content is uneven; some is done skillfully, but other portions are difficult to follow.	Teacher communicates clearly and accurately to students both orally and in writing. Teacher's purpose for the lesson or unit is clear, including where it is 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.
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.

APPENDIX III: DOMAIN AVERAGES BY COMPONENT

Percent of	2a	2b	2c	2d	3a	3b	3c	3d
Unsatisfactory	7%	6%	6%	12%	0%	0%	8%	9%
Basic	7%	35%	35%	12%	27%	63%	0%	18%
Proficient	80%	59%	59%	65%	67%	38%	85%	73%
Distinguished	7%	0%	0%	12%	7%	0%	8%	0%
Subdomain Average	2.87	2.53	2.53	2.76	2.80	2.38	2.92	2.64

	Domain 2	Domain 3
% of Proficient or above	70%	67%
Domain Averages	2.67	2.68