



January 10, 2020

Peggy O'Brien, Board Chair
St. Coletta Special Education Public Charter School
1901 Independence Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Ms. O'Brien:

The DC Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB) conducts Qualitative Site Reviews (QSR) 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. Your school was selected to undergo a QSR during the 2019-20 school year for the following reason(s):

- School eligible for 15-year Charter Renewal during 2020-21 school year

Qualitative Site Review Report

A QSR team conducted on-site reviews of St. Coletta Special Education Public Charter School (St. Coletta PCS) between October 21, 2019 and November 1, 2019. Enclosed is the team's report. You will find that the QSR Report focuses primarily on the following areas: classroom environment and instruction.

We appreciate the assistance and hospitality that you and your staff gave the monitoring team in conducting the QSR at St. Coletta PCS.

Sincerely,

Rashida Young
Chief School Performance Officer

Enclosures
cc: School Leader

Qualitative Site Review Report

Date: January 10, 2020

Campus Information

Campus Name: St. Coletta Special Education Public Charter School (St. Coletta PCS)

Ward: 7

Grade levels: Ungraded (rationale can be found in the summary)

Qualitative Site Review Information

Reason for Visit: School eligible for 15-year Charter Renewal during 2020-21 school year

Two-week Window: October 21 – November 1, 2019

QSR Team Members: Four special education (SPED) specialists, including three DC PCSB staff, one EL specialist, and one consultant

Number of Observations: 23 unscored observations

Total Enrollment: 250

Students with Disabilities Enrollment: 250

English Learners Enrollment: 27

In-seat Attendance on Observation Days:

Visit 1: October 23 – 90.0%

Visit 2: October 24 – 87.2%

Visit 3: October 25 – 87.6%

Visit 4: October 30 – 88.8%

Visit 5:

Visit 6:

Visit 7:

Summary

The mission of St. Coletta PCS is “to serve children and adults with intellectual disabilities and to support their families.” The Qualitative Site Review (QSR) team observed strong evidence that the school is achieving its mission. Most notably, the DC PCSB observation team saw clear evidence of warmth and positivity in the classroom environment, where teachers and staff often gave students positive praise for their efforts during various activities and encouraged students to persist when they seemed frustrated during a challenging exercise. Observers also noted the high level of respectful interactions between teachers and students, as well as between teachers and their colleagues. St. Coletta PCS uses a wide array of dedicated aides and classroom assistants, who were generally engaged with students in the classroom, to provide targeted support to meet their individual needs. The school consistently implements individualized instruction, as evidenced by its ample use of assistive technology and multi-modality devices to allow students to access classroom lessons more independently and increase their ability to

communicate with staff effectively. In many of the observations, there was apparent evidence of collaboration among teachers to effectively differentiate classroom activities and tend to students' individual needs in a supportive classroom environment where little instructional time was lost.

During the QSR two-week window, the team used a modified version of the Charlotte Danielson *Framework for Teaching* to examine classroom environment and instruction (see Appendix I and II). After careful consideration regarding the uniqueness of St. Coletta PCS's full-time SPED program and how to best apply the Charlotte Danielson Framework Rubric to this school's QSR, DC PCSB staff elected to summarize the overall findings from the observations using specific examples that apply to each indicator of the rubric, rather than assess individual scores and percentages for each domain. Therefore, the review team did not score any of the observations at St. Coletta PCS. Instead, observers used their expertise in SPED and the information provided in the school's questionnaire about how it serves its students with disabilities, to make determinations about how well St. Coletta PCS is implementing its SPED program with fidelity, based on specific examples of evidence that the team observed at the school.

Governance

Peggy O'Brien chairs the St. Coletta PCS Board of Trustees. The School Reform Act requires all DC public charter schools to have a majority of DC residents and two parents, which the school has been compliant with for the past five years.

Specialized Instruction for English Learners

St. Coletta PCS enrolls 27 English learner (EL) students, which represent 10.8% of the total school population. To provide ELs with language assistance, the school uses an adapted sheltered content model. Teachers provide explicit instruction on key vocabulary to support content development in functional literacy and numeracy, and they incorporate accommodations, adaptations, and resources such as visual aids, manipulatives, and translated materials. The reviewer found evidence of these elements in the school's sheltered content model. Key trends from the EL observations are summarized below.

- To emphasize key vocabulary and content, many classrooms featured adaptations to the environment and allowed for practice opportunities across modalities. In at least three classrooms observed, objects like the computer, television, recycling bin, and door were labeled in Spanish and English with an accompanying picture. In another observation, students participated in activities including a presentation, discussion, and modeling, that integrated the core content and vocabulary (in this example, "positive working relationships") with opportunities for reading, listening to, and speaking English.

- Language assistance accommodations, adaptations, and resources observed included: visual representations of directions, videos, number cards, maps, blocks, pegboards, and alternative and augmentative communication devices. Across all observations, teachers used a variety of prompting methods, including verbal, visual, physical, and gestures when communicating with EL students. Although the EL specialist did not observe any use of translated materials during the observation, an aide in one classroom gave directions to a student in Spanish.

THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT¹

This table summarizes evidence collected on the school’s performance in the Classroom Environment domain of the rubric during the unannounced visits. Please see Appendix I for a breakdown of each subdomain indicator.

The Classroom Environment	Evidence
<p>Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport</p>	<p>In all classrooms observed, the QSR team observed warm interactions between teachers and students, in which teachers and staff demonstrated a high regard for students’ needs and well-being. For example, teachers were observed offering high-praise for students’ efforts, saying things like, <i>“C’mon, Mama, let’s go!”</i> or <i>“Good job, Student X!”</i> In one observation the teacher made individual connections with students by asking them about their family members and home life.</p>
<p>Establishing a Culture for Learning</p>	<p>In all classrooms observed, observers noted there was strong evidence of differentiated instruction and the use of manipulatives and multi-modality devices to ensure all students had an opportunity to engage in classroom activities and demonstrate their efforts. For example, in one observation, students were variously asked to look at or touch pictures, name the thing represented in the picture or use their device (or respond to a staff member’s use of the device) to indicate understanding. In several observations, the team observed teachers using a reward system to convey high expectations for student effort and to praise students for their successes.</p>
<p>Managing Classroom Procedures</p>	<p>Overall, teachers and classroom staff made sure that students had the appropriate materials or equipment needed to complete various classroom activities. In most observations, the team observed dedicated aides and classroom assistants offering ample support to students and teachers to ensure that little instructional time was lost during the various lessons that DC PCSB observed. Teachers quickly accessed student support devices before lessons and made sure that all students could participate seamlessly without any loss of instructional time. In one observation, the teacher checked in frequently with the paraprofessionals to monitor student progress and to give directions regarding the next steps once students completed the activity. Additionally, in most of the classrooms, there were numerous methods employed for sharing the schedule with students. Teachers used charts with pictures for the components of the schedule and went through the schedule picture-by-</p>

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

	<p>picture, ensuring each student could see or touch the picture for each part of the schedule.</p>
<p>Managing Student Behavior</p>	<p>In general, student behavior was mostly appropriate, and when necessary, teachers, aides, and paraprofessionals used positive redirection to support student engagement and manage behaviors. When minor instances of student misbehavior occurred in one observation, the teachers corrected students respectfully. One teacher said, “When you are ready, you can come over and join us,” to encourage a student that was hiding underneath a desk. In two observations, staff members had to block students from eloping. However, in both instances, the teachers successfully blocked the door and redirected the students back to their respective activities.</p>

INSTRUCTION

This table summarizes the school's performance on the Instruction domain of the rubric during the unannounced visits. Please see Appendix II for a breakdown of each subdomain indicator.

Instruction	Evidence
Communicating with Students	In most observations, the DC PCSB team saw evidence of school staff using verbal communication, communication devices, and gestures to communicate with students. In many instances, staff members honored communication attempts, even those that were slightly off-topic. Teachers introduced the instructional purpose of the lesson to students and used manipulatives and other materials to support their explanation of the activity. In one observation, the teachers used several visual supports and manipulatives in a grocery shopping lesson, including a pretend cash register and dollars/cents to calculate a grocery list that students compiled together. In another observation, the teacher clearly explained, "So the purpose of this lesson is to share 'news to you' and talk about things happening at this time." In one classroom where evidence was limited, the teacher noticed that a student did not have their communication device and asked a paraprofessional if they could find it. As the student waited, they did not have a means of participating in the lesson.
Using Questioning/ Prompts and Discussion Techniques	DC PCSB staff observed that teachers used mostly open-ended questions and choice options to engage students in discussion. The team also found that St. Coletta PCS staff engaged with students individually and generally at students' appropriate levels. In one classroom, a teacher facilitating a lesson on shapes asked one student to name the shape (rectangle), and name what the shape would be used for in the art project (a door), but in an effort to differentiate with another student, the teacher asked the student to repeat the word "rectangle." In another observation, during a review of the food pyramid, the teacher asked questions like, "What was your reasoning for saying something was dairy?" "Is a tomato a fruit, vegetable, or grain?" The teacher called on several students to respond, and students responded using a variety of methods such including gesturing, typing out a response, or using an audio device.

<p>Engaging Students in Learning</p>	<p>Overall, students were generally intellectually engaged in learning tasks, and teachers made sure to differentiate activities to adapt them to students' individual needs. However, the level of student engagement was mixed in at least one observation where students were sitting and doing nothing for the duration of observation. Notably, this observation was an outlier regarding engagement compared to DC PCSB staff's other classroom observations. Observers saw multiple classroom aides, dedicated aides, and related service providers (e.g., Occupational Therapists, Speech, Physical Therapists) in classrooms supporting students with accessing instructional content. Teachers used a variety of adaptive technology to engage students of varying abilities, and highly scaffolded instruction through the use of visuals aids and one-on-one support. Student in these observations engaged with the activities and assignments. For example, during a whole-group lesson, the teacher asked a student to read out the PowerPoint slides. The student did so by clicking through the presentation, and successfully engaging their classmates in discussion questions by calling on them directly. In the observation with mixed results for student engagement, staff members worked with individual students on an art activity or counting, but one staff member was observed doing all of the art project while the student lay on the floor, and two other students did not participate at all.</p>
<p>Using Assessment in Instruction</p>	<p>Teachers frequently asked students direct questions to check for understanding, and teachers frequently gave immediate and direct feedback to students. In one observation, during a whole-group question/discussion lesson on literacy, the teacher checked the response from all students (one student provided the response on their speech device, one student provided their response orally, and others pointed to images with support from their dedicated aides). In another observation, one teacher was observed taking notes while working individually with a student. Students used a variety of methods to show if they agreed or disagreed with the teacher's questions, and throughout the lesson teachers weaved in multiple opportunities for students to show that they understood the content.</p>

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.