



February 18, 2020

Gregory Adams, Board Chair
Richard Wright Public Charter School for Journalism and Media Arts
770 M Street SE
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Mr. Adams:

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. Richard Wright Public Charter School for Journalism and Media Art (Richard Wright PCS) was selected to undergo a QSR during the 2019-20 school year for the following reason(s):

- School eligible for 10-year Charter Review during 2020-21 school year

Qualitative Site Review Report

A QSR team conducted on-site reviews of Richard Wright PCS between December 2, 2019 and December 13, 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 Richard Wright PCS.

Sincerely,

Rashida Young
Chief School Performance Officer

Enclosures
cc: School Leader

Qualitative Site Review Report

Date: February 18, 2020

Campus Information

Campus Name: Richard Wright Public Charter School for Journalism and Media Arts (Richard Wright PCS)

Ward: 6

Grade levels: Eighth through twelfth

Qualitative Site Review Information

Reason for Visit: School eligible for 10-year Charter Review during 2020-21 school year

Two-week Window: December 2 – December 13, 2019

QSR Team Members: Two DC PCSB staff including a special education (SPED) specialist and one consultant

Number of Observations: 9

Total Enrollment: 296

Students with Disabilities Enrollment: 72

English Learners Enrollment: 0

In-seat Attendance on Observation Days:

Visit 1: December 5, 2019 – 96.0%

Visit 2: December 11, 2019 – 92.6%

Visit 3: December 13, 2019 – 76.8%

Visit 4:

Visit 5:

Visit 6:

Visit 7:

Summary

The mission of Richard Wright PCS is “to transform students in grades 8-12 into well-versed media contributors by providing a student-centered environment that connects them to the classics and modern languages and a curriculum focused on strong writing skills and vocabulary.”

The Qualitative Site Review (QSR) team observed some evidence that Richard Wright PCS is achieving its mission. In most observations teachers and students interacted respectfully, and teachers showed a genuine interest in students’ lives beyond the classroom. Observers noted very few instances of student misbehavior, and when incidents occurred, they were swiftly and respectfully corrected by the teaching staff. Learning activities often incorporated a media arts component as students created advertisements, photographed their projects, and wrote articles

based on their experiences. The QSR team observed one journalism class, in which students worked on an assignment using computers. Thus, the review team was unable to conduct a full assessment of the school's journalism program during the two-week observation window. Notably, there were no unsatisfactory observations in the entire report.

Of some concern was that, throughout all observations, observers noted many assignments engaged students in content that did not require them to think critically or engage in content-related discussions. Examples include, math tasks that required students to exclusively copy and paste and reading comprehension assignments based solely on closed-ended questions.

During the QSR two-week window, the team used the Charlotte Danielson *Framework for Teaching* to examine classroom environment and instruction (see Appendix I and II). The QSR team scored 74% of observations as distinguished or proficient in the Classroom Environment domain. The highest rated component was *Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport* (2a) with 89% of observations scored as proficient or distinguished. Teachers and students showed respect for each other in most observations. Students worked collaboratively with their peers, complimented each other for sharing their ideas, and asked teachers politely when they needed additional support. The QSR team observed friendly student-to-student interactions in most classrooms and throughout the building. Teachers used subtle methods like the use of proximity and non-verbal hand signals to redirect minor instances of student misbehavior.

The QSR team scored just 40% of observations as distinguished or proficient in the Instruction domain. The highest rated component was *Communicating with Students* (3a) with 56% of observations scored as proficient or distinguished in this component. The review team found that teachers in a little over half of the observations clearly communicated the purpose of the lesson to students and ensured that they understood how tasks connected to the broader learning goal. However, in some observations, the teachers' explanation of the content was unclear and led to some confusion among students.

Governance

Gregory Adams chairs the Richard Wright 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 Students with Disabilities

Prior to the two-week window, Richard Wright PCS completed a questionnaire about how it serves its students with disabilities (SWD). Reviewers looked for

evidence of the school's articulated program. The SPED primarily observed the school's self-contained and resource room settings, the most restrictive environments for SWD. Overall, the school succeeded at providing SWD access to accommodations and positive classroom environments outside of the general education setting. However, instruction in these more restrictive classrooms did not consistently support students' intellectual engagement. Key trends from the SPED observations are summarized below.

- The school stated in its SPED questionnaire that it aims to support SWD with “qualified teachers who are nurturing and who deliver high-quality education to students with adequate modifications and accommodations.” Across all special education observations, teacher-student interactions were friendly. In one observation, classroom interactions among teachers and students reflected genuine caring about students' lives beyond the classroom. One student shared personal details about why their parents and teachers are leaders in their life, as the student spoke, the teacher smiled and listened attentively. In other observations, teachers frequently gave students access to accommodations such as dictionaries, graphic organizers, and speech-to-text software to help meet students' individual needs. Despite the fact that students readily engaged with the accommodations they were provided, there was little evidence of rigor and age-appropriate content to indicate whether the lesson's objectives would adequately prepare students to meet high school expectations.
- According to the school's SPED questionnaire, “Resource teacher(s) help with the modification of instruction and seek to develop aligned supplementary material needed to support the general education standards and expectations.” In an observation of a resource classroom, the instructional materials and tasks did not appear age-appropriate for the grade level. For example, some of the tasks that these high school students were assigned included rote tasks, like answering low-level comprehension questions or writing a simple five-paragraph outline. In this observation, students had few opportunities to engage with challenging or engaging content. Although students were mostly on task in these observations, it was unclear how the instructional lessons observed fit within the broader high school curriculum to promote high expectations for learning.

THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT¹

This table summarizes the school's performance on the Classroom Environment 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 74% 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 89% of the observations as distinguished or proficient in this component. In the distinguished observations teachers demonstrated knowledge and caring about individual students' lives beyond the classroom and school building. In one observation, a student shared personal stories about the heroes in their life. After the student shared, the teacher smiled and replied, "Thank you for sharing that."</p>	Distinguished	11%
	<p>In the proficient observations teachers made general connections with students. In one observation, during a classroom discussion, the teacher mentioned that a student was a boxer and connected that information to the subject matter. In another observation, when one student had their head on the desk, the teacher gently touched their shoulder and asked if they felt okay. Teachers in these observations used terms like, "ma'am" and "sir" before addressing students by name.</p>	Proficient	78%
	<p>The QSR team scored 11% of the observations as basic in this component. In the basic observations the quality of interactions between teachers and students, or among students, was uneven, with occasional disrespect or insensitivity. During one observation, a student volunteered to model</p>	Basic	11%

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.

	<p>completing a problem on the board. As the student worked on the problem, some students laughed and teased them. The student responded by saying, "Why don't y'all come up here and do it then?" The teacher did not reprimand the students for the teasing.</p>		
<p>Establishing a Culture for Learning</p>	<p>The QSR team scored none of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.</p>	<p>Unsatisfactory</p>	<p>0%</p>
	<p>The QSR team scored 43% of the observations as proficient and none as distinguished in this component. In the proficient observations students expended good effort to complete high quality work. In one observation, students built model houses, adding lights and other materials to customize their homes. In one observation, students worked collaboratively with their partners to create drawings, use precise measurements, and incorporate electricity by using light bulbs. When students had questions, they freely and openly questioned the teacher and asked for support when necessary. In another observation, before students began independent work, the teacher reminded them, "You can talk to each other, not to give answers but to give help." Students in this observation worked together to describe how the word problems they solved relate to their everyday lives.</p>	<p>Distinguished</p>	<p>0%</p>
	<p>The QSR team scored 57% of the observations as basic in this component. In the basic observations teachers conveyed high expectations for only some students. In one observation, the teacher called two students to the board to complete a math problem for their classmates. Students not working directly with the teacher engaged in off-topic conversations and at times mocked their peers. Teachers in these observations focused primarily on task completion. For example, one teacher told two students to "pick something that would be easy to make," when choosing a human organ to form into a 3D model for a project.</p>	<p>Proficient</p>	<p>43%</p>
	<p>The QSR team scored none of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.</p>	<p>Basic</p>	<p>57%</p>
	<p>The QSR team scored none of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.</p>	<p>Unsatisfactory</p>	<p>0%</p>

Managing Classroom Procedures	<p>The QSR team scored 67% of the observations as proficient and none as distinguished in this component. In the proficient observations classroom routines and procedures functioned smoothly. In one observation, after working quietly on laptops, students quickly put them away and transitioned out of the classroom without any prompting from the teacher. In another observation, to facilitate the exchange of papers for a review, the teacher counted down from 10. At the end of the countdown students sat in their seats and indicated they were ready to begin. In these observations, the distribution of materials was smooth, as students often willingly assisted with handing out papers or putting away laptops.</p>	Distinguished	0%
		Proficient	67%
	<p>The QSR team scored 33% of the observations as basic in this component. In the basic observations classroom routines functioned unevenly. In one observation, the teacher had unclear procedures for how materials would be distributed. At times, the teacher told students to remain seated and that they would pass the materials out. At other times, the teacher told students they could move freely around the room to gather their materials. As many students stood after being told that they could, the teacher then instructed them to return to their seats. Several minutes of instructional time were lost as students either gathered the materials they needed, or the teacher passed them out to individual groups of students. While the teacher passed out materials, they also attempted to give instructions that were unheard or misunderstood due to the constant movement of students gathering materials. In another observation, significant instructional time was lost as teachers had to help students retrieve their computer passwords before they could begin working on an assignment.</p>	Basic	33%
	<p>The QSR team scored none of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.</p>	Unsatisfactory	0%

Managing Student Behavior	<p>The QSR team scored 89% of the observations as distinguished or proficient in this component. In the distinguished observations student behavior was almost entirely appropriate. In one observation, a student corrected another student who struggled to pronounce a word. The teacher replied, "Let [Student X] do it first." The student respectfully replied, "Okay."</p>	Distinguished	22%
	<p>In the proficient observations teachers effectively responded to instances of student misbehavior. In one observation, students worked quietly on laptops to complete an assignment. When students required additional support, they walked over to the teacher to ask or silently raised their hands and waited for a response from the teacher. In another observation, students worked collaboratively in groups to complete their science projects. At times, students' voices got loud with excitement as they discussed how they could add more details to make their projects better. As a result, the teacher walked over to them and subtly tapped on the table or asked them to quiet down. All students complied immediately.</p>	Proficient	67%
	<p>The QSR team scored 11% of the observations as basic in this component. In the basic observation the teacher's response to student misbehavior was inconsistent. During this observation, students engaged in an off-topic conversation about body types. The teacher walked over to them and asked, "Why are you talking?" The group of students did not respond and continued to engage in off-topic conversations off and on throughout the block.</p>	Basic	11%
	<p>The QSR team scored none of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.</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 40% 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 56% of the observations as proficient and none as distinguished in this component. In the proficient observations teachers stated clearly at some point what students would be learning. In one observation, the teacher told students they would be looking for the square root of a number. The teacher provided additional resources such as charts, calculators, and peer-to-peer support to help students solve the problems. Following small group work time, students had the opportunity to explain their answers on the board to their peers. In another observation, the teacher gave students a deadline to complete their assignment and instructed them to photograph their pictures so that they would be prepared to create an advertisement for the houses they built.</p>	Distinguished	0%
		Proficient	56%
	<p>The QSR team scored 44% of the observations as basic in this component. In the basic observations teachers provided little elaboration or explanation about what students would be learning. In one observation, the teacher projected an electronic copy of a textbook on the board and students copied down notes. The teacher attempted to ask students questions while they took notes, but it was unclear how they related to the learning tasks. Many students asked follow-up questions that indicated confusion about the content. In another observation, the teacher instructed students to make 3D models of a body part. After the explanation provided by the teacher, students asked questions like, “How do I do that?” and “Do I have to change this?”</p>	Basic	44%

	The QSR team scored none of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.	Unsatisfactory	0%
Using Questioning/ Prompts and Discussion Techniques	The QSR team scored just 33% of the observations as proficient and none as distinguished in this component. In the proficient observations teachers used open-ended questions, inviting students to think or offer multiple possible answers. In one observation, multiple students shared detailed stories related to the writing prompt, "Who are the leaders in your life and why?" Teachers in these observations allowed multiple students to engage in back-and-forth exchanges their peers and with the teachers.	Distinguished	0%
		Proficient	33%
	The QSR team scored 67% of the 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 questions like, "What is the square root of X?" During this observation, one student consistently answered all of the questions. At times, the teacher asked questions, and no one responded, and the teacher defaulted to that same student. In another observation, the teacher asked procedural questions like, "Who needs glue?" and "How many lights do you need?" Students posed similar questions to teachers such as, "Can I have a glue stick?" and "Can we have some glue?"	Basic	67%
	The QSR team scored none of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.	Unsatisfactory	0%

Engaging Students in Learning	The QSR team scored 38% of the observations as proficient and none as distinguished in this component. In the proficient observations most students intellectually engaged in the learning task. In one observation, students conversed with their peers about which details they would add to their projects and which role each partner would take in completing the task. Students eagerly added lights, windows, stairs, and other architectural details to the model houses they built. Students in the proficient observations intellectually engaged in work that involved solving multi-step problems or using higher-level thinking skills, such as comparing and contrasting linear equations in standard form and linear equations in slope intercept form, as well as providing sample equations of each. Throughout these observations, pacing and grouping kept students engaged with a mixture of whole-class instruction and small-group work that supported the learning goals.	Distinguished	0%
		Proficient	38%
	The QSR team scored 63% of the observations as basic in this component. In the basic observations only, a few students engaged with the learning tasks. In one observation, two students volunteered to model the steps for answering questions for their peers, while other students sat idle and at times engaged in off-topic conversations. Throughout this observation, student engagement with the task was inconsistent. At times, students responded to questions by the teacher, however for much of the observation the same few students disengaged from the activity. In another observation, the teacher asked a mix of recall and open-ended questions such as, "What do these photos reveal about FDR's ideas about the conservation of natural resources," but only a few students raised their hands to participate while most sat idly.	Basic	63%
	The QSR team scored none of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.	Unsatisfactory	0%

Using Assessment in Instruction	The QSR team scored 33% of the observations as proficient and none as distinguished in this component. In the proficient observations, feedback included specific and timely guidance to students. In one observation, the teacher asked questions to make sure that students understood each part of their essay. The teacher asked, "What does the introduction do?" The student responded by saying, "My introduction should pique interest." While the student talked through their thoughts for the body paragraph, the teacher gave specific feedback. For example, the teacher said, "That's a run-on sentence with many ideas. Let's separate them out."	Distinguished	0%
		Proficient	33%
	The QSR team scored 67% of the observations as basic in this component. In the basic observations feedback was not specific or oriented towards future improvement. Teachers in these observations gave global feedback like, "Underline like terms," but did not engage students further. In most observations, there was little evidence to indicate that students understood how their work would be evaluated. One student showed the teacher an idea they had for a biology project, asking, "Would that pass?" The teacher laughed and replied, "Yes, that would pass." The teacher then turned to another student's idea and said, "I like the color," but did not provide any additional feedback.	Basic	67%
	The QSR team scored none of the observations as unsatisfactory in this component.	Unsatisfactory	0%

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	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Basic	11%	57%	33%	11%	44%	67%	63%	67%
Proficient	78%	43%	67%	67%	56%	33%	38%	33%
Distinguished	11%	0%	0%	22%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Subdomain Average	3.00	2.43	2.67	3.11	2.56	2.33	2.38	2.33

	Domain 2	Domain 3
% of Proficient or above	74%	40%
Domain Averages	2.80	2.40