



December 21, 2020

Anthony Lewis, Board Chair
KIPP DC AIM Academy Public Charter School
2600 Douglass Road SE
Washington, DC 20020

Dear Mr. Lewis:

The DC Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB) conducts Qualitative Site Review (QSR) visits 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 because its eligible for its 20-year charter review during school year (SY) 2020 – 21.

Qualitative Site Review Report

A QSR team conducted a virtual site review of KIPP DC AIM Academy Public Charter School from October 19 – 30, 2020.

DC PCSB intended to conduct the QSR in the spring of SY 2019 – 20. However, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in all DC public charter schools physically closing in March 2020 through the end of school year. As a result, the observations in this report were postponed to SY 2020 – 21 and took place remotely. The disruption in traditional school programming due to COVID-19 has had an untold impact on classroom environment and instruction, the primary areas of focus in this report. Observers considered these factors while visiting classrooms. Enclosed is the team's report.

Sincerely,

Rashida Young
Chief School Performance Officer

Qualitative Site Review Report

Date: December 21, 2020

Campus Information

Campus Name: KIPP DC AIM Academy Public Charter School (KIPP DC AIM Academy PCS)

Ward: 8

Grade Levels: Fifth through Eighth

Qualitative Site Review Information

Reason for Visit: School eligible for 20-year Charter Review during school year (SY) 2020-21

Two-week Window: October 19 – 30, 2020

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

Number of Observations: 16 unscored observations

Total Enrollment: 421¹

Students with Disabilities Enrollment: 88

English Learners Enrollment: 0

In-seat Attendance on Observation Days:²

Visit 1: October 19, 2020 – 96.0%

Visit 2: October 20, 2020 – 96.9%

Visit 3: October 23, 2020 – 95.7%

Visit 4: October 27, 2020 – 96.2%

Visit 5: October 29, 2020 – 94.8%

Summary

According to the school's mission,

KIPP DC is a non-profit network of high-performing, college-preparatory public charter schools in Washington, D.C. All KIPP DC schools are tuition-free,

¹ This enrollment figure is based on preliminary, unvalidated data as of November 5, 2020.

² During SY 2020 – 21, educational services are being provided both in-person and via distance learning. While during normal operations there is a consistent city-wide definition of what constitutes "present" (a student must be physically present for at least 80.0% of the instructional day), there is significantly more variation in what constitutes "present" during distance learning. In-seat attendance as presented here represents all students receiving educational services, whether in-person or remote. This rate is fundamentally different than in-seat attendance during a typical year, and caution should be taken when comparing schools to each other or to historic rates.

open enrollment schools, and actively recruit and serve students in the city's most educationally underserved communities. At KIPP DC, there are no shortcuts. Highly skilled teachers and leaders, more time in school, a rigorous college preparatory-curriculum, and a strong culture of high expectations and support help our students make significant academic gains and continue to excel in high school and college.

The Qualitative Site Review (QSR) team observed some evidence that the school is achieving its mission. Across all classrooms, teachers encouraged student participation, and at times they invited students to help one another. Observers noted high expectations for student behavior, yet low levels of intellectual rigor in many classrooms. Teachers asked low-level questions, gave minimal wait time, focused largely on procedural tasks, and moved quickly between lessons.

During the two-week observation window, the team used a modified version of Charlotte Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* to examine classroom environment and instruction (see Appendices I and II). After careful consideration regarding the uniqueness of virtual instruction, DC PCSB 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. Instead, observers used Charlotte Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* tool to make determinations about how well KIPP DC AIM Academy PCS is meeting its mission, based on specific examples of evidence the team observed during remote visits.

In the Classroom Environment domain, observers noted that teachers consistently encouraged students and affirmed their abilities. In one observation, students were learning how to identify whether a graph represented a proportional relationship. The teacher reassured students by saying, "I promise every single one of you will figure out how to when we come away from today's lesson." Teachers consistently held high expectations for student behavior in nearly all observations. In the Instruction domain, observers noted significant variation in assigned tasks between classrooms; some tasks required students to complete high level tasks, such as solving real-world math problems and evaluating literary characters. Other assignments spurred low intellectual engagement, such as copying and pasting definitions for academic vocabulary in small groups.

Governance

Anthony Lewis chairs the KIPP 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 five years.

Specialized Instruction for Students with Disabilities

Prior to the two-week observation window, KIPP PCS AIM Academy PCS completed a questionnaire about how it serves its students with disabilities. The QSR team looked for evidence of the school's articulated program. According to the school, it has created a robust system of supports across the network including a broad continuum of placements designed to support each student's individual needs. The school stated that the general education teachers co-plan with special education teachers, and special education teachers modify and adapt general education content to ensure student access. The school notes that it "uses research-based intervention to promote data-driven instruction, to individualize learning experiences, and to effectively integrate resources which would positively impact students' educational programs." The school also said observers should see co-teaching models including alternative, team, parallel, and station support. The SPED specialist observed all of these methods with the exception of station teaching. Overall, the school implemented its stated program with fidelity, as evidenced by the implementation of specific strategies that support accommodations. Key trends from the SPED observations are summarized below.

- To demonstrate that the school offers a robust system of supports enabling individual needs within the least restrictive environment (LRE), classrooms used clear and explicit instructions for virtual learning norms as well as multiple learning systems to support student access, practice, and assessment. Teachers rewarded students for exhibiting desired behaviors and provided accommodations like noise cancelling headphones, the use of multiple modalities, and visual supports to encourage intellectual engagement.

THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT³

This table summarizes the evidence collected on the Classroom Environment domain of the rubric during the unannounced virtual observations. Please see Appendix III for a breakdown of each subdomain.

The Classroom Environment	Evidence
Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport	In all observations, talk between students and teachers was uniformly respectful. Teachers consistently greeted students by name as they entered the class and made general connections with the group. For example, when one teacher praised students who received high scores on the midterm assessment, some told their classmates “Great job!” and “Wow!” in the chat.
Establishing a Culture for Learning	In most observations, teachers held high standards for student work and conveyed a belief in their abilities. For example, one teacher cold called students who had not participated to ensure active participation from all students. In another observation, the teacher made sure a student checked their work by saying, “Go back and make sure that you are answering both parts. Go back and finish.” In another observation, the teacher said, “I promise every single one of you today. We will figure out how to do this when we come away from today’s lesson.”
Managing Classroom Procedures	In all observations, teachers used technology platforms efficiently so that they enhanced, not distracted from, the learning experience. Students followed along, staying on pace as teachers used learning applications, such as Nearpod, Google Classroom, and Zoom to teach and engage students. Routines and procedures functioned smoothly, and most students intellectually engaged in both small and whole group instruction. In one observation, when the teacher had a technology issue, students helped the teacher to get back on track to minimize loss of instruction. In two observations, students not directly working with the teacher only partially engaged with the learning tasks.
Managing Student Behavior	In most observations, standards of conduct had been implemented, and student behavior was generally appropriate. In these observations, any off-task behavior was minor and respectfully redirected. In some observations, teachers attempted to redirect instances of student misbehavior, but not all students complied. In one observation, the teacher reminded all students to turn their cameras on, one third of students did not comply, and the teacher did not redirect the non-compliant students.

³ Teachers may be observed more than once by different review team members.

INSTRUCTION

This table summarizes the evidence collected on the Instruction domain of the rubric during the unannounced virtual observations. Please see Appendix III for a breakdown of each subdomain.

Instruction	Evidence
Communicating with Students	In most observations, teachers communicated clearly what students would be learning. In these observations, teachers also explained content, strategies, and instructions effectively and without error. In some observations, students participated in the explanation of the content. For example, as one teacher led instruction, students defined academic vocabulary, explained what happened in the previous lab, hypothesized about that lab's results, and made predictions about an upcoming experiment. Throughout most observations, students completed assignments as directed, indicating they understood the expectations.
Using Questioning/ Prompts and Discussion Techniques	In all observations, teachers posed a mix of open-ended and recall questions. For example, teachers asked, "What is the character revealing about her relationship with Dre?" and "Now think about if you plotted (1, y). If your x was 1, what would your y value be, and what does that mean?" Teachers provided varied amounts of wait time, appropriate at times but rushed at others leading to limited engagement with the learning tasks. In most observations, teachers led most of the discussions and students had minimal opportunities to respond directly to their peers. Teachers across all observations encouraged all students to participate often asking for, "New hands."
Engaging Students in Learning	In most observations, most students intellectually engaged with the learning tasks. The cognitive demand of the work, however, varied across classrooms. In one observation, the teacher asked students to apply new strategies to interpret a challenging real-world math problem. However, in another observation, students simply copied and pasted definitions into a PowerPoint template. When appropriate, teachers in some observations scaffolded content effectively. In one observation, the teacher said, "Okay, I am going to go back to the text. Let's go to page 60. Some of her cousins called her ugly. What do you think is going on here?" Several students provided responses.

Instruction	Evidence
Using Assessment in Instruction	In some observations, teachers frequently checked for student understanding, “taking the pulse” of the group. In other observations, there was little evidence as to how students’ work was evaluated. In one observation, teachers used Nearpod to effectively monitor understanding throughout the class, providing just enough feedback to nudge students towards the correct answer. The teacher said, “[Student X], try just plotting the one point with the information they gave us, and connect that one point to the origin.” In another observation, the teacher asked students to explain their answers saying, “What is your solving method?” when a student provided the answer to a math problem.

Work Sample Review

As an added accountability measure to account for the limits of virtual observations, during SY 2020 – 21, DC PCSB reviewed ten student work samples in addition to classroom observations. KIPP DC AIM Academy PCS submitted five English language arts (ELA) samples and five math samples covering a range of grade levels and assignment types. The QSR team evaluated the work samples based on grade-level alignment to college and career ready standards, including Common Core.⁴ Each work sample was reviewed in the areas of content, practice, and relevance.⁵ The review tools are based on The New Teacher Project’s report: *The Opportunity Myth*.⁶

The goal of the review is to answer three essential questions:

1. Does this assignment align with the expectations defined by grade-level standards, including a high-quality text and text-based questions?
2. Does the assignment provide meaningful practice opportunities for this content area and grade- level?
3. Overall, does the assignment give students an authentic opportunity to connect academic standards to real world issues and/or context?

DC PCSB used the criteria below to assign an overall rating to each assignment.⁷

⁴See here for more information on the shifts in the college and career ready standards here: <https://achievethecore.org/category/419/the-shifts>

⁵ Reviewers used this tool for ELA work samples: <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/Ss1Ffy9Ab7>. Reviewers used this tool for Math work samples: <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/Ca2F7INXld>.

⁶ See here for more information: <https://opportunitymyth.tntp.org/>

⁷ The overall assignment rating scale can be found here: <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/bzuOyBrYzK>

	Content	Practice	Relevance
Sufficient	The assignment is based on a high quality, grade appropriate text and contains questions that reach the depth of the grade level standards.	The assignment both integrates standards and requires students to use what they learned from the text.	The assignment builds grade appropriate knowledge, gives students a chance to use their voice and/or connects to real world issues.
Minimal	The assignment is based on a high quality, grade appropriate text but does not contain questions that reach the depth of the standard.	Either the assignment does not integrate standards, or it does not require students to use what they learn from the text.	The assignment builds grade appropriate knowledge but does not give students a chance to use their voice and does not connect to real world issues.
No Opportunity	The assignment is not based on a high quality, grade appropriate text.	The assignment does not integrate standards and does not require students to use what they learn from the text.	The assignment does not build grade appropriate knowledge, does not give students a chance to use their voice and does not connect to real world issues.

Of the five ELA samples submitted, three assignments received an overall rating of sufficient. On these work samples, students answered questions based on a high-quality grade appropriate text. Two assignments received an overall rating of minimal. On these work samples, students had minimal opportunity to use their voice to answer questions related to the text. Some evidence is captured below:

- Seventh grade students read a nonfiction text about the gender pay gap in professional soccer, then summarized and analyzed the article’s central ideas. The assignment exposed students to a grade-appropriate, topically relevant text, and asked them to answer standards-aligned multiple-choice questions and one open-ended question at an appropriate level of rigor.
- Eighth grade students read and answered questions about an authentic, grade-appropriate work of fiction. The assignment covered a variety of standards through multiple choice and open-ended questions.

Of the five Math samples submitted, four assignments received an overall rating of sufficient. On these work samples, students engaged in critical mathematical practices while working on grade-level content. One assignment received an overall rating of minimal. On this work sample, students had minimal opportunity to connect academic content to real world experiences. Some evidence is captured below:

- Fifth grade students solved problems on reading, writing, and comparing decimals to the thousandths. The assignment gave students multiple opportunities to practice and demonstrate the skill associated with the

standard, and to use mathematical modelling on grade level content. Even so, the assignment did not provide an opportunity to connect academic standards to real-world contexts.

- Eighth grade students analyzed and solved linear equations and pairs of simultaneous linear equations using the mathematical practice of attending to precision. Although the assignment addressed the standards at an appropriate level of depth, it afforded students minimal opportunity to link their learning to real-world contexts.

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.