



December 21, 2020

Anthony Lewis, Board Chair
KIPP DC Heights 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 Heights 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 Heights Academy Public Charter School (KIPP DC Heights Academy PCS)

Ward: 8

Grade Levels: First through Fourth

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: 12 unscored observations

Total Enrollment: 465¹

Students with Disabilities Enrollment: 83

English Learners Enrollment: 1

In-seat Attendance on Observation Days:²

Visit 1: October 23, 2020 – 90.1%

Visit 2: October 27, 2020 – 96.8%

Visit 3: October 29, 2020 – 95.9%

Visit 4: October 30, 2020 – 95.3%

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, open enrollment schools, and actively recruit and serve students in the

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% 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.

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. Teachers set high expectations for student behavior and classroom participation. In some classrooms, the pacing was rushed, resulting in little opportunity for students to discuss ideas among peers. Observers noted university-themed classroom names as evidence of the school's focus on college preparation. Overall, teachers demonstrated supportive relationships with students.

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 Heights 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 relationships between teachers and students were respectful and encouraging. Teachers praised student effort and demonstrated a high regard for students' abilities. One teacher said, "You did such a great job and I saw how hard you worked." Across most observations, teachers maximized instructional time with smooth transitions, attention-grabbing chants, and active contributions from all teachers. In the Instruction domain, observers noted strong evidence of *Using Assessment in Instruction*, with teachers giving students multiple opportunities to receive real time feedback and correct their work. In some classrooms, however, teachers asked rapid fire questions and accepted all contributions without asking students to explain their reasoning.

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 DC Heights 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. Additionally, the general education teachers co-plan to provide modifications and adaptations of 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." Overall, the school implemented its stated special education program with fidelity as evidenced by teachers co-planning, a workshop style instructional program that focuses on targeted Individual Education Programs (IEP), and specific strategies that support accommodations. Key trends from the SPED observations are summarized below.

- To demonstrate that teachers collaborate and co-teach, the school explained that "special educators and general educators [work] together to best meet the needs of students with disabilities." During observations, teachers used the co-teaching models One Teach, One Observe, and Alternative. Teachers communicated clearly and often during their respective parts of the lessons to support individual students. Lessons flowed without any hiccups transitioning from teacher to teacher or from one lesson part to the next.
- To demonstrate that the school provides a continuum of special education services, the school said, "students will be educated in the least restrictive environment that meets their unique academic and social/emotional needs." All observations took place in the general educational setting (inclusion) or a pull-out setting. Teachers used an online learning platform and literacy systems to support student independence, access to the curriculum, independent and leveled practice, and assess students.
- To demonstrate that teachers provide accommodations according to students' IEP, the school indicated that the QSR team would observe "changes in how a student accesses information and demonstrates learning" in the following ways: student response format and procedures, environment, equipment, graphic organizers and scaffold notes, and visuals. Teachers created alternative learning spaces with virtual teaching supports to aid student learning. Teachers used visuals and verbal directions and provided multiple opportunities for students to practice the expected task or strategy. Students responded in various formats, including speaking, writing in the chat box, and writing responses in their work. Some students wore noise-canceling headphones.

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	<p>In all observations, teacher and student interactions were respectful and caring. In one classroom, the teacher’s screen froze; a student commented, “[Teacher X], your screen’s frozen.” The teacher responded, “Oops, I’m sorry. Is that better?” In some classrooms, teachers acknowledged students’ lives outside of the classroom and encouraged them to share their home lives. Overall, students participated without hesitation and teachers encouraged their efforts.</p>
Establishing a Culture for Learning	<p>In all observations, teachers set high expectations for student participation during lessons. Across classrooms, teachers insisted that students answer questions when randomly selected, recite chants and songs, and complete all tasks. In one observation, the teacher praised a student for using precise language, stating, “I have to give a shout out to [Student X]. They were able to go back and refine their answer.” In most classrooms, teachers displayed a high regard for student abilities, though they focused on completing tasks and their energy for the content was neutral. One teacher stated, “I can’t wait to see who joins us for our 100% party because they’re focused the whole time.”</p>
Managing Classroom Procedures	<p>In all observations, classroom routines function smoothly. Students followed classroom routines independently navigating Zoom and Nearpod features with minimal prompting and guidance.⁴ Teachers used timing devices, attention signals, and advanced organizers to move between activities. One teacher stated, “You did a great job coming back to the screen when you saw the video playing.” Overall, observers noted smooth transitions, resulting in little to no loss of instructional time.</p>
Managing Student Behavior	<p>In most observations, teachers frequently monitored student behavior and rewarded students who followed classroom norms. In one observation, a teacher respectfully redirected a student stating, “[Student X], I can’t celebrate the wonderful things you’re doing if your camera is off. Turn your camera on, please.” Overall, student behavior was generally appropriate.</p>

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

⁴ Nearpod is an interactive lesson platform featuring real-time formative assessments. See more info: <https://nearpod.com/>.

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 clearly stated what students would be learning. Teachers explanation of content was accurate and encouraged student participation. Across classrooms, teachers focused on strategies such as the use of a word bank with key vocabulary from the text, a thinking job protocol to guide students through independent work, and sentence starters for student discussions. In some observations, teachers modeled and described specific strategies students might use, inviting students to interpret them in the context of what they're learning. For example, a teacher offered two strategies for finding the missing addend and emphasized, "Everybody should be pressing and counting. The big thing is to circle the sign and label your number sentence." In another observation, the teacher pointed out possible areas for misunderstanding by saying, "I'm going to go over this again, because I see a lot of us making the same mistake." The teacher reviewed the steps again, however some students remained confused about the learning task.
Using Questioning/ Prompts and Discussion Techniques	In some observations, teachers used open-ended questions that invited students to think. Teachers asked questions like, "What makes someone a good friend?" and "Using what we know about the character, does that sound like a thing the character would do?" Observers noted that teachers also asked low-level questions that elicited quick student responses and focused on a single correct answer. In most observations, teachers facilitated discussions, and called on students who volunteered and those who did not. However, teachers remained at the center of discussions and students often did not have the opportunity to speak directly to their peers.
Engaging Students in Learning	In most observations, students remained intellectually engaged. Learning tasks required a mix of thinking and recall. Students discussed a book and debated character traits, completed math problems using an interactive application, indicated rhyming words with thumbs-up, and read independently with cameras on and microphones off. In one classroom, the teacher invited students to explain their thinking in order to complete tasks. In most classes, the pacing of the lessons provided students the time needed to be intellectually engaged. Across observations, teachers used timers and advanced organizers to support the structure and pacing of the lesson.

Instruction	Evidence
Using Assessment in Instruction	In most observations, teachers made standards of high-quality work clear. One teacher reviewed the steps to complete the task, modeled the task, and highlighted exemplar work samples. Teachers used specifically formulated questions to elicit evidence of student understanding. In most classrooms, teachers provided specific and timely feedback and students could make improvements to their work. One teacher encouraged a student to self-assess and then check back with an updated answer. Another teacher told the class, “We’re moving too fast and circling our sign, but forgetting the rule.” In one observation, the teacher paused the lesson to offer suggestions and address student misunderstanding stating, “I’m going to private message you which one you need to check, okay.” The student said okay and proceeded to look down at the screen and started typing.

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 Heights 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.⁵ Each work sample was reviewed in the areas of content, practice, and relevance.⁶ The review tools are based on The New Teacher Project’s report: *The Opportunity Myth*.⁷

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.⁸

⁵See here for more information on the shifts in the college and career ready standards here:

<https://achievethecore.org/category/419/the-shifts>

⁶ Reviewers used this tool for ELA work samples: <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/SsIFfy9Ab7>. Reviewers used this tool for Math work samples: <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/Ca2F7INXld>.

⁷ See here for more information: <https://opportunitymyth.tntp.org/>

⁸ 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, one assignment received an overall rating of sufficient. On this work sample, students were required to integrate multiple standards and use what they learned from a high-quality grade appropriate text to answer prompts. Four assignments received an overall rating of minimal. On these work samples, students had minimal opportunity to use what they learned from a text to complete tasks. Some evidence is captured below:

- Third grade students read a grade-appropriate text and wrote an ending to the story. This assignment exposed students to multiple grade level standards and contained questions that reached the depth of the standards. The assignment allowed students to apply what they learned from the text and use their voice to complete the tasks.
- Second grade students stretched their small moment idea into a story to practice narrative writing. While this assignment included an opportunity to relate to real-world experiences, it did not require students to use details to describe their actions, thoughts, and feelings or use temporal words to signal event order.

Of the five Math samples submitted, one assignment received an overall rating of sufficient. On this work sample, students answered problems that reached the depth of the targeted grade-level standards. Two assignments received an overall rating of minimal. On these work samples, students had minimal opportunity to connect academic content to real world experiences. Two assignments received an overall rating of no opportunity. On these work samples, students had no

opportunity to engage in critical mathematical practices while working on grade-level content. Some evidence is captured below:

- First grade students solved addition problems and used the relationship between addition and subtraction to answer related questions. Students had multiple opportunities to practice grade-appropriate operations and construct viable arguments and critique others' reasoning. However, the problems did not allow students to apply math concepts to the real world.
- Fourth grade students solved multi-digit addition and subtraction problems using the standard algorithm, focusing on regrouping. This assignment includes an opportunity to engage with the standard and mathematical practice at the appropriate depth. However, it does not connect academic content to real-world experiences.

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.