DC PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD

July 12, 2021

Lori Kaplan, Board Chair
LAYC Career Academy Public Charter School
1419 Columbia Rd NW
Washington, DC 20009

Dear Ms. Kaplan:

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 because it is eligible for its 10-year charter review during school year (SY) 2021 – 22.

Qualitative Site Review Report
A QSR team conducted a virtual site review of LAYC Career Academy Public Charter School from May 17 – 28, 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in all DC public charter schools physically closing. As a result, the observations in this report 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

<h1 style="text-align:center">Qualitative Site Review Report</h1>

Date: July 12, 2021

<u>**Campus Information**</u>
Campus Name: LAYC Career Academy Public Charter School (LAYC PCS)
Ward: 1
Grade levels: Adult

<u>**Qualitative Site Review Information**</u>
Reason for Visit: School eligible for 10-year charter review during SY 2021 – 22.
Two-week Window: May 17 – 28, 2021
QSR Team Members: One DC PCSB staff member and four consultants, including one special education (SPED) specialist and one English learner (EL) specialist
Number of Observations: 15 unscored observations
Total Enrollment: 92
Students with Disabilities Enrollment: 6
English Learners Enrollment: 8
In-seat Attendance on Observation Days:[1]
Visit 1: May 24, 2021 – 64.8%
Visit 2: May 25, 2021 – 62.5%
Visit 3: May 26, 2021 – 70.5%
Visit 4: May 27, 2021 – 67.7%

Summary
According to its mission, LAYC PCS "engages and empowers young people between the ages of 16–24 by providing a college preparatory education, career training in high growth occupations, and college-credit classes."

The Qualitative Site Review (QSR) team observed strong evidence that the school is achieving its mission. DC PCSB observers saw evidence of the school's career training curriculum across classrooms. Teachers frequently referenced certification exams and made the connection between in-class assignments and career. Teachers often encouraged students to persist in answering questions and to engage in classroom discussions. DC PCSB observers noted friendly and respectful greetings, and pleasant social exchanges.

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[1] 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.

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 LAYC PCS is meeting its mission, based on specific examples of evidence the team observed during remote visits.

In the Classroom Environment domain, observers noted positive and respectful interactions between teachers and students. Teachers made connections to students' lives outside of school and referenced student mental health on multiple occasions. Teachers frequently encouraged students to persist and complimented their efforts. In the Instruction domain, observers noted that teachers clearly stated lesson objectives and modeled academic expectations for students. Across classrooms, student engagement was mixed and at times limited to only a few students.

Governance
Lori Kaplan chairs the LAYC PCS Board of Trustees. The School Reform Act requires each DC public charter school to have a majority of DC residents and two parents[2] 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 window, LAYC PCS completed a questionnaire about how it serves its students with disabilities (SWD). Reviewers looked for evidence of the school's articulated program. According to the school, every student receives personalized learning and specialized instruction in person and via distance learning. The school stated that it maintains collaboration with all adult students, parents, and related service providers to ensure students are learning the skills they lack. Overall, DC PCSB found the school implements its stated SPED program with fidelity. Key trends from the SPED observations are summarized below.[3]

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[2] Adult schools may use alumnae or adult students to satisfy the parent requirement.

[3] The school provided DC PCSB with an outdated copy of the SPED schedule, leading to challenges with observing the SPED program. The data here is limited.

Small group instruction: In this observation, students completed lessons both individually and collaboratively in small group breakout rooms. Breakout rooms provided an environment with fewer visual and auditory distractions and a smaller staff-to-student ratio. The SPED teacher read directions to students and asked clarifying questions to ensure students understood the learning tasks. The teacher also provided students with guided notes to help them organize the content, making it more accessible.

Co-teaching: In both observations, SPED paraprofessionals and general education teachers worked collaboratively to provide support in and out of the classroom. Paraprofessionals pushed into lessons to support students with varying needs. Paraprofessionals were observed providing graphic organizers, supporting with task management, and providing individual coaching to students.

Scaffolded instruction: DC PCSB observed that both SPED and general education teachers used scaffolded instruction to support student understanding. When introducing new content, teachers identified key words and definitions, used color coded visuals, provided a variety of methods for students to respond to prompts, and incorporated different learning modalities throughout their instruction using video and audio.

Specialized Instruction for English Learners
Prior to the two-week observation window, LAYC PCS completed a questionnaire about how it serves its English learners (ELs). The QSR team looked for evidence of the school's articulated program. According to the questionnaire, the school's EL program groups students in English courses based on assessment data. The program provides "necessary basic interpersonal communication" skills and "cognitive academic language." The EL program uses cognitive, metacognitive, and language learning strategies and provides small group instructional, individual intervention, differentiation within the classroom, and grouping by ability. Overall, DC PCSB found the school implemented the following aspects of its EL program with fidelity in the four EL sessions observed.
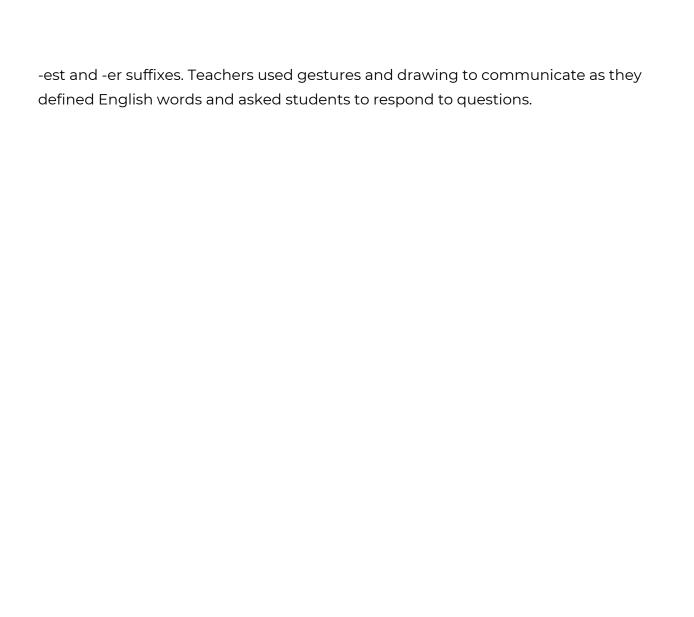
Basic interpersonal communication: Instruction supported students' development of basic interpersonal communication as teachers greeted students warmly as they entered classrooms and asked about their weekends. Teachers encouraged students to speak freely as they answered questions about content, including questions related to academic and personal goals.

Cognitive academic language: Instruction supported students' development of cognitive academic language. In EL Math, the teacher used appropriate terms as he described parts of a circle, writing definitions on the board along with visuals to ensure understanding. The teacher used academic language appropriate for students' level in the Beginner EL class as she helped students understand comparative adjectives, telling students that to compare means, "to look at two or more things and determine how they are the same and how they are different." In the Advanced EL class, the teacher encouraged a student to be more precise with their language as they described their future goals.

Intentional grouping: Teachers used grouping like small groups, individual intervention, grouping by ability, and differentiation within the classroom as appropriate for the lesson. Teachers instructed small groups as classes included six or fewer students, allowing teachers to check in individually with students and answer questions as needed. In two classes, the teacher mentioned another student working directly with an aide for individual intervention. Teachers also mentioned availability later during the day in case students required individual support. Three of four classes observed were grouped by ability: beginner, intermediate and advanced English. The teacher in one class asked the aide to work with a group of students on reviewing the previous lesson, demonstrating evidence of differentiation within the classroom.

Cognitive learning strategies: Instruction included several cognitive learning strategies. Teachers clearly stated learning objectives at the beginning of the class as students learned about circles, comparative adjectives, and discussed personal and academic goals. Teachers emphasized key vocabulary as they said the word, wrote it on the board with a definition, and used visuals and examples to explain. A graphic organizer about goal setting helped students plan their academic and personal goals, outlining necessary steps for achievement. Teachers also encouraged students to take notes as they wrote key ideas and definitions on the board.

Language learning strategies: Instruction included several language learning strategies. In Beginner English, students learned about grammar conventions of comparative adjectives and broke down words to learn the difference between the

-est and -er suffixes. Teachers used gestures and drawing to communicate as they defined English words and asked students to respond to questions.

THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT[3]

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, interactions between teachers and students demonstrated care and respect. Teachers greeted students by name as they entered the classroom. As one student entered the classroom, the teacher said, "Hello sir, how are you?" In another observation, the teacher mispronounced a student's last name. The student corrected the teacher to which they apologized, and the student replied, "That's OK." In several observations, teachers made connections with individual students beyond the classroom. In one observation, as students entered the classroom, the teacher reminded them to take care of themselves by saying, "Remember your mental health matters."
Establishing a Culture for Learning	In all observations, teachers demonstrated a high regard for student abilities. In one observation, the teacher said, "If you had any problems, please let me know. I have no problem going back and giving you the support you need." In these observations, teachers communicated the importance of the content. In one observation, the teacher reminded students about an upcoming certification exam and affirmed their ability by saying, "It is going to be a lot, but you can handle it."
Managing Classroom Procedures	In all observations, classroom routines and procedures functioned smoothly. Students entered virtual classrooms on time and teachers had lesson prompts available immediately. In one observation, classroom attendance was optional, and no students joined the session. The teacher maximized instructional time by teaching and recording the lesson for students to review later. Across all observations students muted and unmuted themselves to participate in classroom discussions without incident or loss of instructional time.
Managing Student Behavior	In all observations, student behavior was appropriate. Standards of conduct appear to have been established and were implemented successfully. Students listened respectfully to teachers and peers. There were no instances of student misbehavior.

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[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 all observations, teachers stated clearly what students would be learning. In one observation, the teacher said, "We are going to look at the quotes that we analyzed last week." In many observations, teachers modeled problem solving for students. In another observation, the teacher modeled reading a passage and identifying sources. After reading, the teacher asked students to independently identify sources and place them into the chat. Across classrooms, teachers made no content errors and used vocabulary that was appropriate and suited to the lesson.
Using Questioning/ Prompts and Discussion Techniques	In most observations, teachers used open-ended questions, inviting students to think and/or offer multiple possible answers. In one observation, the teacher worked with students to solve math problems asking, "What can we do here?" and "How can we solve this?" In some observations, while teachers posed questions to the entire class, few students volunteered to respond either aloud or in the chat. In some observations, a small group of students answered multiple questions while other students' participation was limited.
Engaging Students in Learning	In most observations, some students intellectually engaged with the learning tasks. Teachers used a variety of methods such as: cold calling, naming individual students, and offering polls with mixed success. In one observation, multiple students freely offered to read a small portion of a passage aloud. In another observation, the teacher asked for student volunteers to enter their responses in the chat. Most students attempted to answer. In a few observations, students only passively engaged with the learning tasks. In one observation, students watched training videos and were not required to actively engage with the lesson.
Using Assessment in Instruction	In most observations, teachers monitored student understanding through a single method. In one observation, the teacher's questions focus solely on task completion asking, "How is everything with the practice?" However, in other observations, teachers elicited evidence of student understanding through a variety of methods. In one observation, the teacher asked, "What is the formula?" When student responded incorrectly, the teacher modeled solving the problem for them and invited other students to offer feedback.

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 situation 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 may 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.