

QUALITATIVE SITE REVIEW

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KIPP DC – AIM Academy Public Charter School (KIPP DC – AIM PCS) is part of the KIPP DC PCS network. This campus opened in school year 2005-06. It is part of the Douglass facility, which also includes an early childhood campus, Discover Academy, and an elementary school, Heights Academy. KIPP DC – AIM PCS serves 319 students in grades 5-8 in Ward 8. The DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB) conducted a Qualitative Site Review (QSR) in January 2015 because KIPP DC PCS is eligible to petition for 15-year Charter Renewal during the 2015-16 school year.

The QSR team conducted observations over the course of a two-week window, from January 12 through January 23, 2015. A team of two PCSB staff members (including PCSB's Special Education Specialist) and one consultant conducted 15 observations. A PCSB staff member also attended a Board of Trustees meeting. The QSR team used Charlotte Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* Rubric throughout the observations and observed classrooms in mornings and afternoons. In some instances a QSR team member observed a classroom twice. The QSR team also collected evidence regarding the school's stated mission and goals.

The QSR team scored 87% of the observations as distinguished or proficient in the Classroom Environment domain. This is a very high overall rating. The highest rated element within this domain was Managing Classroom Procedure, with 93% of observations rated as proficient. Transitions were smooth and routines were well established throughout observations. Classroom environments were warm and friendly and there was a focus on maximizing instructional time and time on task throughout observations.

The QSR team scored 65% of the observations as distinguished or proficient in the Instruction domain. The highest rated element within this domain was Communicating with Students, with 80% of observations rated as proficient or distinguished. Learning objectives were clear throughout observations and students engaged productively with learning tasks. Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques and Using Assessment in Instruction were rated significantly lower, with 47% and 65% (respectively) of observations rated as proficient or distinguished in these elements.

As stated in KIPP DC – AIM Academy PCS's special education questionnaire, KIPP DC believes in a holistic approach when providing case management and special education services for students with disabilities. This was evident during PCSB's Special Education Specialist's observations, as she observed various models (i.e., individualized instruction, small groups, resource room, etc.) of special education services being implemented for students depending on their individual needs. Within many of the classrooms designated for special education services, some students were working in small groups while others worked independently using a laptop. Additionally according to the school's questionnaire, students with disabilities had access to related services such as speech, occupational therapy, etc. The Special Education Specialist observed quality instruction for students with disabilities.

CHARTER MISSION, GOALS, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT EXPECTATIONS

This table summarizes KIPP DC – AIM PCS’s goals and academic achievement expectations as detailed in its charter and subsequent Accountability Plans, and the evidence that the Qualitative Site Review (QSR) team observed of the school meeting those goals during the Qualitative Site Visit.

Mission and Goals	Evidence
<p>Mission:</p> <p>KIPP DC’s mission is to create and sustain the highest quality school system for the most underserved communities in Washington, DC. KIPP DC students will develop the knowledge, skills, and character necessary to become thoughtful, influential, and successful citizens in the competitive world.</p>	<p>The evidence gathered during this QSR shows that KIPP DC – AIM Academy PCS is working to meet the KIPP DC mission.</p> <p><i>Create and sustain the highest quality school system</i> The quality of the campus is demonstrated by its high ratings on the <i>Framework for Teaching rubric</i>. The QSR team rated 87% of observations as proficient or distinguished in the <i>Classroom Environment</i> domain. This domain deals with the creation of an environment of respect, the learning culture, and the management of classroom procedures and student behavior. Students throughout observations demonstrated their common understanding of KIPP DC expectations by following school rules and helping facilitate effective procedures and routines. The school’s ratings in the <i>Instructional Delivery</i> domain are relatively lower, with 65% of observations rated as proficient or distinguished.</p> <p><i>Develop knowledge, skills, and character</i> Teachers throughout observations fostered the development of knowledge, skills, and character in students. Classrooms included teacher-created signs reminding students to persevere despite life’s challenges. Bulletin boards throughout hallways highlighted individual students for demonstrating grit, integrity and a sense of community. Teachers rewarded students with points through a “paycheck” system that students took from class to class, and KIPP DC- AIM PCS celebrated these students at the end of each Advisory</p>

Mission and Goals	Evidence
	<p>Period. In multiple observations teachers enabled students to keep track of their knowledge and skills by discussing progress reports so that students knew how they were doing before the end of the Advisory Period. Teachers encouraged positive character traits by challenging students to remain calm and positive in both classrooms and hallways. In the majority of observations, there was very little loss of instructional time and students always had something productive to do after finishing the learning task, such as completing their exit slip, starting homework, or reading quietly.</p> <p><i>Students become thoughtful, influential, and successful in the competitive world</i></p> <p>KIPP DC- AIM PCS develops students who are thoughtful, influential and successful in a number of ways. The QSR team observed students exiting one of their monthly leadership meetings, similar to student government, whereby students plan school-wide functions. A staff member told the QSR team that students were awarded “citizen of the week” for demonstrating community. Messaging throughout the school included signs such as, “Community: I am responsible for my community being 100% successful. 100% does not exist without me.” Teachers encouraged students to think about social issues as in one classroom where the learning task included a free verse poem based on an injustice in the world.</p>
Goals:	
<p>Students will demonstrate academic proficiency at a performance level that makes students competitive for outstanding public or private secondary schools of their choice.</p>	<p>While PCSB does not look for evidence of individual student performance levels, the QSR team noted that students participated in a variety of learning tasks that would make them competitive for outstanding secondary schools of their choice. Across content areas teachers focused on writing skills. In many observations students worked on writing persuasively and supporting claims with evidence.</p>

Mission and Goals	Evidence
	<p>Other learning tasks in English language arts classes included writing free verse poetry based on a societal injustice and creating a podcast on a social issue In math class observations teachers provided students with multiple strategies to solve math problems and helped students remember math vocabulary by using examples relevant to students’ lives.</p> <p>The school prepares students to be competitive in the schools of their choice through high engagement and by differentiating instruction. As described in further detail later in this report, 74% of observations were rated as proficient or distinguished in Engaging Students in Learning, which includes how teachers engage students intellectually and how teachers use instructional grouping and differentiation.</p>
<p>Students promoted from KIPP DC elementary schools are prepared to succeed in KIPP DC middle and high schools, as well as other competitive schools of their choice.</p>	<p>Throughout observations KIPP DC – AIM PCS prepared students to succeed in high school by providing a nurturing learning environment and by engaging students in learning. Eighty percent of observations rated as proficient or distinguished in Establishing a Culture for Learning, which included teachers conveying importance of content, demonstrating high regard for student ability, and encouraging students to do their best. The QSR team scored 74% of observations as proficient or distinguished in Engaging Students in Learning.</p> <p>KIPP DC- AIM PCS focused its middle school students on high school by messaging as with a large bulletin board in the hallway titled: “High School Match Matters” with information about different schools and guides to help students determine how to make the right choice.</p>
	<p>Most classrooms had very few empty seats.</p>

Mission and Goals	Evidence
Students will have high attendance rates (the school will maintain daily attendance of 93% or greater).	
Students will benefit from enrichment activities.	The QSR team noted posters and notices throughout hallways about participating in a spring musical, a soccer/poetry club (DC Scores) and opportunities for seventh and eighth grade students to tutor younger students.
Principals will create an educational program and foster a school environment that facilitates student academic and social improvement.	<p>KIPP DC – AIM PCS facilitated academic improvement through clear communication of content with students, with 80% of observations rated as proficient or distinguished in Communicating with Students. The school facilitated academic improvement through high student engagement, with 74% of observations rated as proficient or distinguished. However observations were rated relatively lower in the other two elements of the <i>Instructional Delivery</i> domain, with only 47% of observations rated as proficient or distinguished in Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques, and 60% of observations rated as proficient or distinguished in Using Assessment in Instruction.</p> <p>KIPP DC – AIM PCS developed social improvement in students through a paycheck system of student recognition, a focus on being productive in class, and by recognizing students who demonstrate positive character traits like grit. Teachers encouraged hard work on the part of students and recognized student effort, with 80% of observations rated as proficient or distinguished in Establishing a Culture for Learning.</p>

Mission and Goals	Evidence
The Principal will ensure the fiscal and physical sustainability of the school.	The QSR team neither looked for nor observed any evidence related to this goal.
The Board will provide sufficient and effective support to school leaders.	The QSR team neither looked for nor observed any evidence related to this goal.
The school leader will create a culture among staff that facilitates professional growth.	The QSR team neither looked for nor observed any evidence related to this goal.
The school will create an environment in which parents will support and participate in their child’s education.	The QSR team observed a chart tracking the most “valuable” parent volunteers and a sign advertising a parent support center. One observer noted a weekly parent memo with shout-outs, reminders, and announcements hanging outside of a few classrooms in the hallways of KIPP DC – AIM PCS.
The school will create a safe environment in which to learn.	The QSR team noted that the school appeared to be safe and conducive to learning. Classroom observations were rated highly in the <i>Classroom Environment</i> domain, with 87% of observations rated as proficient or distinguished. The QSR team observed security personnel at each entrance and who required identification to enter the building. A staff member accompanied all visitors as they moved through the building increasing the feeling of safety. Students in the hall walked quietly and moved quickly from class to class. There were very few students in the hallways during instructional time and an adult accompanied those who were in the hall. The hallways were clean with colorful bulletin boards and inspiring quotes appropriate for the grade-level of the students.

Mission and Goals	Evidence
Governance:	<p>A PCSB staff member attended the KIPP DC Board of Trustees meeting on September 17, 2014. A quorum was present. The attendees included members of the KIPP DC Board of Trustees and a representative from Bain Consulting, who would be working with the school on strategic planning. KIPP representatives gave presentations on various aspects of the school’s performance. The presentations focused on a discipline report, a finance committee report, a management report, a school performance report, and a real estate update.</p>

THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT¹

This table summarizes the school’s performance on the Classroom Environments 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 87% of the observations as “distinguished” or “proficient” for the Classroom Environment domain.

The Classroom Environment	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
<p>Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport</p>	<p>The QSR team rated 87% of the observations as distinguished or proficient in Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport. Teachers demonstrated caring for students by respectfully intervening when students did not have the necessary materials to start the lesson, using please and thank you with students, and by putting a student at ease through a playful joke when he or she got an answer wrong because the student was not paying attention.</p>	Distinguished	7%
	<p>Teachers and students communicated respectfully with each other throughout observations. Students demonstrated respect in most observations by complying immediately with directions. Teachers made individual connections to students saying things such as, “You had a really good day yesterday. I want to see it again!”</p>	Proficient	80%
	<p>The QSR team rated 13% of the observations as basic and none as unsatisfactory. In an isolated observation students showed disrespect to each other by making fun of one another with no intervention from the teacher. In another observation students demonstrated disrespect for the teacher by continuing to talk after the teacher asked them to focus on the learning task.</p>	Basic	13%
		Unsatisfactory	0%

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

The Classroom Environment	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
Establishing a Culture for Learning	<p>The QSR team rated 80% of the observations as distinguished or proficient in Establishing a Culture for Learning. Teachers demonstrated high expectations for students as they asked students to take out completed homework at the beginning of class so they could check it. Teachers encouraged and praised students for their grit and persistence, saying “You’re working really hard!” and “I’m seeing a lot of great ideas. Keep going!”</p>	Distinguished	13%
	<p>Students eagerly shared work they had created with one another, praising each other’s work. Students put forth good effort to complete work of high quality, copying notes in cases where someone else answered a question and by taking time to think about their answers before responding to a question. Teachers encouraged persistence by giving students ample wait time to answer a question and by politely insisting that a student try to answer a question with which the student struggled.</p>	Proficient	67%
	<p>The QSR team rated 20% of the observations as basic and none of the observations as unsatisfactory. In a small number of observations, teachers seemed complacent about learning by not intervening when students demonstrated off task behavior like continuing to socialize and not complete the learning task or putting their heads on their desks during a class discussion. In an isolated observation the teacher seemed to be more focused on task completion rather than content, emphasizing procedure and student behavior rather than the quality of their work product (a writing exercise).</p>	Basic	20%
		Unsatisfactory	0%
Managing Classroom Procedures	<p>The QSR team rated 93% of the observations as proficient and none as distinguished in Managing Classroom Procedures. Teachers used timers on the board and subtle cues and chants to keep students on track and to alert them of transitions. In many observations teachers maximized time on task through the smooth operation of entrance procedures, taking attendance while</p>	Distinguished	0%

The Classroom Environment	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
	students came into the class and worked on their warm-up activity. Students worked productively in small groups even when not working directly with the teacher. There were clear procedures in place for the distribution of materials and for students asking to go to the bathroom or getting water, with students politely raising their hands.	Proficient	93%
	The QSR team rated less than 10% of the observations as basic and none of the observations as unsatisfactory.	Basic	7%
		Unsatisfactory	0%
Managing Student Behavior	The QSR team rated 86% of the observations as distinguished or proficient in Managing Student Behavior. Student behavior was generally appropriate throughout observations with students complying easily with the teachers' requests to refocus. In most observations teachers effectively used subtle cues like quick glances, proximity, and simply saying the student's name to redirect off-task student behavior. The QSR team observed "Problem Solving Binders" to redirect behavior in many observations, and observed one student reading from the binder after the teacher asked the student to take a break. Teachers consistently used a paycheck system to reward positive behavior across observations.	Distinguished	33%
		Proficient	53%
	The QSR team rated 13% of the observations as basic and none of the observations as unsatisfactory. In a small number of observations, students continued to socialize after teachers asked them to stay silent.	Basic	13%
		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 65% of the observations as “distinguished” or “proficient” for the Instruction domain.

Instruction	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
<p>Communicating with Students</p>	<p>The QSR team rated 80% of the observations as distinguished or proficient. In most observations teachers clearly stated what students were learning and learning tasks were aligned to the objective. Teachers clearly stated directions and most students engaged productively with the learning tasks. Teachers across content areas used rich vocabulary appropriate to the students’ age and lesson objective, including vocabulary related to environmental issues, parts of a cell, and podcasts.</p> <p>Teachers modeled the process for completing the learning task. Math teachers completed problems on the board before having students do so independently. Teachers also asked students to participate in the explanations of content as in other math classes where the teachers asked students to walk through their approach to solving problems for the rest of the class.</p>	<p>Distinguished</p>	<p>33%</p>
		<p>Proficient</p>	<p>47%</p>
	<p>The QSR team rated 20% of the observations as basic and none of the observations as unsatisfactory. In a couple of observations, teachers’ explanation of the content was monologue or procedural with no opportunity for participation on the part of students. In another observation the teacher’s explanation of content left students confused and unable to execute the learning task.</p>	<p>Basic</p>	<p>20%</p>
		<p>Unsatisfactory</p>	<p>0%</p>

Instruction	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
Using Questioning/Prompts and Discussion Techniques	<p>The QSR team rated 47% of the observations as distinguished or proficient in Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques. Teachers built on student responses asking other students to respond or explain further, as in math classes where teachers asked students to walk through problems step-by-step. Teachers asked open-ended questions such as, “Why is [the student] saying that;” “What are some mistakes we could have made to get this problem wrong;” and “What can we infer that [the author] is trying to do, based on what she is saying in the passage?” In some classes teachers called on most students randomly, even those not initially volunteering. Teachers used wait time effectively, giving students the opportunity to consider the question before responding.</p>	Distinguished	7%
		Proficient	40%
	<p>The QSR team rated 54% of the observations as basic or unsatisfactory. In most observations questioning was teacher directed along a single path of inquiry with pre-determined one-word answers. In some observations a few students dominated the discussion as the teacher called on the same students to participate throughout the lesson. Most discussion was between the teacher and students with few opportunities for students to speak to one another throughout observations.</p>	Basic	47%
		Unsatisfactory	7%
Engaging Students in Learning	<p>The QSR team rated 74% of the observations as distinguished or proficient in Engaging Students in Learning. Students throughout observations remained highly engaged in learning tasks like creating a slideshow in pairs on a laptop and making posters related to environmental issues, even when not working directly with the teacher. Teachers made content relevant to students. One teacher used a previous</p>	Distinguished	7%

Instruction	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
	<p>class debate to help students identify useful evidence to support claims. Teachers also connected vocabulary to examples in students' lives. Learning tasks allowed for choice in how students completed them, including creating comic strips based on a science concept, developing podcasts based on their interests, writing poetry based on a social injustice, and solving math problems using different strategies.</p>	Proficient	67%
	<p>The QSR team rated 27% of the observations as basic or unsatisfactory. Student engagement was inconsistent in some observations. Multiple students were socializing or putting their heads on their desks rather than engaging with the learning tasks with no redirection.</p>	Basic	20%
		Unsatisfactory	7%
Using Assessment in Instruction	<p>The QSR team rated 60% of the observations as distinguished or proficient. In some observations teachers cited students' low scores on work the previous week to explain their reasoning behind re-teaching, indicating that the teacher had reviewed student work and used it as a basis to tailor instruction. Teachers reviewed the criteria for high quality work, asking students to review a rubric that would be used to assess work and asking students to state the criteria for high quality work. Teachers gave students specific, individualized feedback, such as "You could really strengthen your essay by adding transitions. Teachers assessed student understanding in a variety of ways, calling on them randomly to answer math questions, asking students to correct other students' papers, and walking around to read student responses.</p>	Distinguished	7%
		Proficient	53%
	<p>The QSR team rated 40% of the observations as basic and none as unsatisfactory. In some observations checks for understanding were only global with little evidence of individual student understanding. Teachers</p>	Basic	40%

Instruction	Evidence Observed	School Wide Rating	
	in some observations made no attempt to adjust instruction despite student confusion. In a couple of observations there was no indication for students regarding criteria for high quality work.	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.

The Classroom Environment	Unsatisfactory	Basic	Proficient	Distinguished
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.

Instruction	Unsatisfactory	Basic	Proficient	Distinguished
<p>Using Assessment in Instruction</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>