



INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP CHARTER SCHOOL

"Be the change you wish to see in the world." – Gandhi

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To: Jeannemarie Hendershot

From: Dr. Elaine Ruiz Lopez 

CC: Garth Harries
Board of Trustees
Michael Duffy
Roberta Cummings
Dirk Tillotson
James Merriman

Date: 10/26/07

Re: Response to Monitoring Report

We have attached our response to comments that were generated during the official visit that your office conducted on Friday October 5, 2007. On behalf of the ILCS staff and community, we thank you for your comments and reflections. We will use the comments found in the report as an opportunity to continue thriving towards, excellence and the development of an exceptional charter school.

Response to Monitoring Report

10/26/07

What the School Does Well

- The school has created a safe and stable environment where disruptions are minimal and expectations for student behavior are high.
- The school has clearly communicated behavioral expectations and consequences to students and families in a way that all parties understand clearly.
- Most students in the school feel that attending ILCS is a much better alternative to their zoned high schools. Further, most students expressed that there is at least one adult in the building who they can talk to about academic, personal, or social issues that may be troubling them.
- Classes are small and there are many adults in the building to provide additional support to students within each classroom.
- The Director of Instruction and new teachers have been successful in shifting the school culture to help students 'look forward' and move past the school's challenges from its first year.
- Teachers say that they feel supported by the Director of Instruction and appreciate the weekly Professional Development sessions that are organized each Wednesday.

What the School Needs to Improve

- Assessment data is not widely used to track student performance and inform instruction. ILCS should work to devise a school-wide data system that will help all staff analyze student performance across subgroups so that instruction can be more strategic and targeted to student needs.

Standard 1: High Academic Attainment and Improvement

Renewal Expectation: Students' academic performance meets or exceeds local, state, and federal standards.

ILCS Response #1

The aforementioned statement does not accurately reflect the educational program at the International Leadership Charter School in the area of utilizing school-wide data to track student performance and inform instruction. As stated in our school's charter, the IOWA Tests of Educational Development (ITED) will be administered to all students at the beginning of the academic year, during the spring, and at the end of the academic year. The IOWA (ITED) is a norm-referenced test administered primarily for the purpose of informing and supporting instruction, as so stated in our school's charter.

In addition, during the month of August we held a series of professional development one in which was given by Susanne Milton an assessment consultant from Riverside Publishing. Mrs. Milton conducted a three hour workshop on the baseline results of the IOWA (ITED) Iowa Test of Educational Development for our 9th grade students from the 2006-2007 school year. In addition, the workshop focused on how those results would then inform the instruction and support provided to our youngsters for the 2007-2008 school year.

Lastly, during the week on October 1st-4th, we administered the IOWA's to our incoming 9th grade student population as well as our 10th grade students. The results for the 9th grade will serve as a baseline, whereas the 10th grade results from this year and last year will be used to identify areas in which our youngsters are deficient and require additional instructional support as well as to identify areas of strength so that we can provide students with targeted academic enrichment

OCS Comment

- More informal and formal interim assessments should be utilized to give teachers and school leadership snapshots of student progress that will allow staff to effectively revise lesson plans, curricula and differentiate instruction.

ILCS Response #2

The aforementioned statement does not accurately reflect the educational program at the International Leadership Charter School and does not accurately reflect what we are doing in the area of informal and formal interim assessments.

As stated before, the IOWA Test of Educational Development (ITED) is used by the school as a formal interim assessment. Results from the 2006-2007 Living Environment and Math A Regents was shared with all stakeholders specifically teachers in order to effectively differentiate instruction.

Informal assessments such as student quizzes, unit tests, midterms, student portfolios, research projects, reflective writing samples are also utilized by teachers as a means of tracking student progress and modifying unit plans and curricula.

During our exit conference the school's leadership stated that it was reasonable to expect that a monitoring visit conducted three weeks into the academic school year would not accurately reflect the various mechanisms used to assess and track student progress formally as well as informally.

OCS Comments

- The academic rigor could be greatly improved among the classes. Observations of several classrooms revealed low-level questioning techniques and little evidence that talented students were being challenged or that instruction was being differentiated for students of varied abilities. There was minimal student engagement in many classrooms. Parents and students also noted that homework rarely lasted longer than one hour each night.

ILCS Response #3

The aforementioned statement does not accurately reflect the educational program at the International Leadership Charter School and the collective efforts that the school's leadership and staff are consistently and diligently working on in the area of academic rigor.

Director of Instruction was asked to sit in on the student interviews by the board and in doing so the DI was able to capture the student responses which were very positive. One of the many questions asked by students during the focus group interviews that were conducted by NYCDOE staff included the following question:

What do you find challenging about this school? Several of the students in the focus group responded that they found the work that teachers assigned to be very challenging. This was a view expressed by students across all ability levels.

When students were asked: What is better about this year? All the 10th graders responded that we have better teachers, more work, and that the teachers expected more of them. It is evident that this speaks to the academic rigor of the school.

The school's leadership in collaboration with our academic coaches and partners will continue to work with all of our teachers throughout the academic year to ensure that we maintain a high level of academic rigor across all subject areas for all of our students.

OCS Comments

- Short-term and long-term goals should be communicated more clearly to staff so that there is a sense of ownership and accountability for meeting these goals, and curriculum maps for each content area should reflect these as well.

ILCS Response #4

The aforementioned statement does not accurately reflect the educational program at the International Leadership Charter School and the activities that our school is carrying out in the area of communicating the short-term and long term performance goals at ILCS to our teachers and staff. As previously noted, a series of professional development sessions were held during the month of August to familiarize teachers with the mission, vision and goals of the school.

All teachers received and read a copy of the school's charter so that they have a clearer understanding of the goals and what is expected of them as educators of ILCS in order for the school to meet the goals as per our charter.

Communicating the school's achievement goals is continuous and is emphasized in every PD session and weekly meetings with the teaching staff. Teachers are required to continually emphasize the goals of the schools to our students. Students are also able to communicate the goals of the school as evidenced by the question asked in the focus group during student interviews "Do you know what the goals of the school are? Several students stated "90% graduation rate, perform better on the regents than neighboring high schools and 90% of students with a daily attendance of 85% or better."

OCS Comments

- The Director of Instruction has little experience with high school curriculum or data-driven instruction. As the school and board seek a new school leader, they should identify candidates that have strength in these two very important areas.

ILCS Response #5

The aforementioned statement does not accurately reflect the educational program at the International Leadership Charter School and does not accurately reflect the instructional and administrative experience of the Director of Instruction. The current DI, Ms. Roberta Cummings was a highly successful principal of a parochial elementary and middle school for 3 years. She has a Master in School Administration and holds a SBL license. She will continue to participate in ongoing leadership and professional development to become more proficient with the high school curriculum and all other areas as it pertains to instruction. The Head of School, Dr. Lopez has high school experience and has provided leadership and mentoring to Ms. Cummings in all areas that pertain to assessment, instruction, NYS standards and the alignment of the curriculum with instruction. Ms. Cummings is also receiving ongoing feedback in the Regents and high school graduation requirements.

OCS Comments

- Many teachers are new and inexperienced, and could benefit from more targeted support, observations, and professional development as they work to hone their craft.

ILCS Response #6

The aforementioned statement does not accurately reflect the educational program at the International Leadership Charter School. The school has contracted coaches in the areas of Mathematics, Science, English Language Arts, and Global Studies that work with the teachers in the classrooms on Wednesdays as well as additional days each month. At the time of site visit, we had 9 teachers on faculty. Only three of these teachers are "new and inexperienced" i.e. first year teachers. Nonetheless, all coaches provide one-on-one coaching as well as inter-disciplinary coaching to all experience and non experienced teaching staff.

The Director of Instruction conducts daily informal classroom observations and provides teachers with immediate feedback about lessons and classroom instruction.

All teachers have a minimum of 3 formal observations which includes a pre-conference and post-conference. The DI coaches will continue to work with all teaching staff in perfecting their craft.

Standard 2: Responsive Educational Program and Environment

Renewal Expectation: A quality educational program enables all students to achieve academically and socially.

OCS Comments:

The school's instruction is aligned to State standards with the goal of accelerating Regents participation. The quality of instruction during the visit varied greatly, with some teacher's appropriately incorporating interdisciplinary teaching and using engaging instructional techniques, and others not using engaging techniques or sophisticated, rigorous questioning. While each classroom had standards posted and a uniform blackboard configuration with an Aim and a Do Now, the actual teaching and learning was inconsistent, with no clear picture of what quality classroom instruction should look like.

Response

We appreciate the acknowledgement that our instruction is aligned with the State standards. The "monitoring" took place on a Friday October 5, 2007 after the completion of 4 days of interim assessments conducted to determine a baseline of skill levels and abilities for all students. Our school's standards and expectations for quality of instruction are very high. During the debrief the ILCS Head of School and staff noted that at 3 and a half weeks of instruction the focus was on building the school's culture and expectations for discipline and achievement. It was also noted that ongoing training is being provided in order to incorporate technology into the lessons.

OCS Comments

Teachers meet every Wednesday to plan across subjects and grade levels, and receive external professional development. The school should work to define expectations for quality teaching at ILCS, and create opportunities for staff to observe one another so that best practices can be shared across classrooms.

We appreciate this observation and comment. Inter-visitations to classrooms have been planned and expectations have been defined during the school's pre-opening. In addition, visits to high performing charter schools have been scheduled. All of the core content area teachers received a rigorous professional development seminar for 3 weeks in all areas of our school's charter, the curriculum, New York State Standards, the Regents, academic rigor, what quality instruction looks like, school culture. The mastery of these areas are part of a process that requires ongoing professional development. ILCS is committed to this as demonstrated by the partnerships that have been developed with NYU and Fordham University for professional development and coaching of our teachers in various areas of the curriculum.

OCS Comments

The school's charter calls for instruction in a Language Other Than English (LOTE), but we did not see this instruction happening during the visit. The school should clarify whether this will be provided for students, and if not, submit an amendment to the charter.

Response

The aforementioned statement does not accurately reflect the educational program and the services that are provided to students at the International Leadership Charter School. At the time of visit we had two certified ESL teachers on staff. The pull-out services for our ELL students were not scheduled to begin until the LAB was administered and completed. The date for the administration of the LAB was slated for October 5, 2007. This was the date that the NYCDOE scheduled a site visit.

OCS Comments

At the time of the visit, a special education paraprofessional was providing push-in services to a number of students. The school must ensure that these students are receiving services from a certified special education teacher as per their individualized education plans.

The aforementioned statement does not accurately reflect the educational program at the International Leadership Charter School. Special Education services are provided during our Instructional Support Services Block. These classes were indeed taking place on the day of visit. There was not a request from the visitors to see this class. We had a certified Special education teacher, and two teacher assistants. There is one TA who is a retired engineer and a bilingual math specialist and another TA who is a former bilingual special education teacher who provides support to our linguistically diverse special needs students as well as all of our 12 special needs students. These services are provided consistently per their IEP over the course of one hour 4 days per week..

OCS Comments

Finally, provision for physical education has been limited and needs to be further enhanced.

Response

We appreciate this comment and understand the concern. This has been a challenge due to not having a gymnasium. The need to develop a plan for PE has been addressed by our school's leadership and staff. We will begin an athletic program by Nov 5th that includes dance, soccer track and field athletic program for our kids.

OCS Comments

The School has documented discipline policies and procedures that are consistently applied and lead to an environment conducive to learning. All students understood and could articulate the behavioral expectations that have been established. They and their parents had a solid understanding of the clear consequences that result from violating the school's community covenant, which parents and students are asked to read and sign.

Classroom management varied from room to room, with some teachers having trouble implementing consequences for minor disruptions. However, on the whole, the orderly environment provides a strong backbone for the school to begin implementing a more rigorous curriculum. Articulation between the YLA teacher and content area teachers should continue, as this appears to be an effective way of maintaining school culture and strong discipline.

Response

Thank you for this comment and reflection in this area. We agree that our school has developed an orderly environment that is conducive to learning. In the areas of classroom management and communication of expectations for conduct among our student body will provide ongoing professional development and a frequent review of our student consequences matrix with the entire school community. The development of school's culture and expectations is a process. The school's leadership and ILCS Board is working diligently to ensure consistency in the application of consequences for minor as well as serious disruptions. We will continue providing all teachers with feedback and support in order to ensure positive student outcomes in an environment that supports academic rigor which embodies our school's mission and vision.

Standard 3: Responsible School Leadership and Management

Renewal Expectation: Leadership furthers the school's mission, program and goals and is strategic to ensure adequacy, alignment and coherence of actions.

OCS Comments:

While the school has created a designated professional development day each week, there does not appear to be a great deal of collaboration between teachers. However, since the staff is mostly new, building this spirit of collaboration will take some time. The leadership should establish ways for teachers to get targeted, individualized professional development to help them each meet their needs. In addition, peer observations should be implemented to help create cohesion among the staff and create a forum for sharing best practices.

Response

We agree that building a spirit of collaboration will take time as this is part of community building that's part of a long term process. We have scheduled visits with high performing charter high schools for inter-visitations and observations as part of our PD. We have also incorporated inter-class visitations at ILCS as part of ongoing individual PD. Please note that at the time of this visit by OCS were 3 weeks into our school year and our focus was on the development of our school's culture and setting high expectations.

OCS Comments:

At the time of the visit, staff had not yet received a formal evaluation. However, interviews with the Director of Instruction revealed that there would be a process for yearly evaluations and that teachers would be informed about this shortly.

Response

This appears to be an unreasonable and impractical expectation. Per our charter and consistent with most schools we ask the Office of Charter Schools to provide examples of schools that have conducted annual formal evaluations within the first three weeks of school. Consistent with our charter, The Director of Instruction conducts daily informal classroom observations and provides teachers with immediate feedback about lessons and classroom instruction. All teachers have a minimum of 3 formal observations which includes a pre-conference and post-conference. The first formal observations will not take place before December 2007.

What structures does the school have in place for developing staff professionally?

OCS Comments:

- The school utilizes Wednesday afternoons for professional development, in addition to a three-week pre-opening training for all teachers. This time has been used so far to train teachers to look at data from the IOWA exam, to use the Smart Board system, and to implement the Youth Leadership curriculum. ILCS should continue to use this time to meet teachers' needs, and consider implementing individual growth plans for each teacher so that the Wednesday time slot is used most effectively. The school should consider partnering with management or support organizations, other charter high schools, or even NYCDOE small schools, to create opportunities for teacher observations, sharing of resources, and professional development.

Response

Thank you for this comment. The recommendation for Individual Growth Plans is well taken. We use the Qualities of the Effective Teacher to guide us through a number of processes to meet individual teacher needs. We have purchased and distributed the Qualities of Effective Teachers for our staff and this is part of our ongoing PD. We will utilize most of the protocols that are found in this text. We have scheduled visits with high performing charter high schools for inter-visitations and observations as part of our PD. Please note that at the time of this visit by OCS were 3 weeks into our school year and our focus was on the development of our school's culture and setting high expectations.

Standard 5: Strong Culture and Supportive Relationships

Renewal Expectation: There is high social trust within the school community and a culture of excellence.

Interim Expectation: School has mechanism (s) for incorporating parents and other community partners in the school

Interim Indicators:

What structure does the school have in place for incorporating parents and other community partners in the school?

Check one (1)

School has multiple structures in place for incorporating parents and other community partners in the school

School has a structure in place for incorporating parents and other community partners in the school

School has no structures in place for incorporating parents and other community partners in the school (This one was checked off by OCS)

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OCS Comments:

- The school is beginning to make strides in this area, though no formal structures have been created yet. A small group of parents were volunteering at the school at the time of the visit. These parents were working together to create a Parent Organization and would be mailing out letters to all parents in the coming weeks to garner interest. It would be in the school leadership's best interest to assist in the creation of this organization and ensure that there are mechanisms in place that engage, unite and offer a forum for all parents within the school. Parents frequently attend board meetings, though the communication of these meetings to parents does not always appear consistent. The school does not have a seat on the board for a parent representative. There was evidence that inconsistent communication has resulted in some parents being uninformed about school meetings, policies, curriculum and upcoming events.

The school should provide more consistency and transparency to parents regarding meetings, policies, curriculum, and upcoming events so that all parents can be more fully involved in their children's education. We recommend that the Charter website creation be expedited as a forum for communication and transparency regarding Board meetings, updates, policies, guidelines and student life within ILCS. However, to the extent that not all families and stakeholders have Internet access, the existing methods of communicating to all families should continue (letters, phone calls).

Response

The recommendation for a charter website is well taken. The school's management has been working diligently to have a website operating by end of November 2007 in order to improve communication among the entire school community and to promote the ILCS mission and vision.

OCS Comment

"The school does not have a seat on the board for a parent representative".

Response

Thank you for your comment however this requires clarification. We are following our school's charter and as a charter school all of our mechanisms for participation and representation of our school must be rooted in excellence and accountability. We embrace parent activism and authentic involvement that is guided by preparation, training and respect for self and others. As such a seat on our board is not automatic. Consistent with the process for electing Board members, there is a criterion for parent leadership roles that is rooted in an observed dedication and a desire to represent all of our school's children in a positive and constructive fashion. Consistent with what is stated in our charter, we restate the following... "the Board of Trustees at the CEO requests, or at the request of parents, the PA will be asked to participate in, or comprise advisory committees to study or implement a specific policy or action of the ILCS. For example, committees may be formed to assist the Board with fundraising, student recruitment activities and desired school community events. In addition, we will encourage the selection of one parent representative per grade who will meet with the school's CEO for 45 minutes a month in order to gain input from a parent's perspective on activities or issues that should be addressed".

We have implemented a focused professional development mechanism for our parents who are genuinely interested in partnering with the school as parent leaders through the creation of a PAC that will engage in the development of a PA at the time that the PAC determines that there is readiness among the parent body to hold themselves and each other accountable. We have further developed our commitment to the development of our parents by hiring a Parent and Community Liaison. Since the October 5, 2007 visit from OCS parents formed a Parent Advisory Council to work in collaboration with the school's leadership and management to assist with building a community of trust and excellence.

OCS Comment

"There was evidence that inconsistent communication has resulted in some parents being uninformed about school meetings, policies, curriculum and upcoming events".

Response:

The aforementioned statement does not accurately reflect the opportunities that parents are provided with for participation at the International Leadership Charter School. Please provide us with the evidence that is being referred to in this aforementioned statement. This statement is unfounded. The school's leadership and management did raise its concerns with OCS with regard to the extreme disruptions that have been caused by an adult student representative, who is not a legal guardian of student and has challenged our protocols of conduct and school security while on school property. Our first priority is the safety of our staff and students. We reassert our right as a charter school to take action against any individual who violates our security protocols and disrupts our educational environment. Similar serious concerns were presented by numerous parents with regard to this individual to OCS staff during the Oct. 5, 2007 visit.

We promote transparency at every level of our school community. In that spirit, we note here for the record that there were several parents who are volunteers and who have a vested interest in the school's success and expressed feeling ignored and dismissed by the representatives of the Office of Charter Schools when their concerns were raised. During the site visit, there were several parents who waited the entire day and requested to be part of the exit meeting. The OCS agreed to allow only one parent representative into the room for the debrief.