

**Campus Community Charter School  
Observation and Interview Report  
May 15, 2014**

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with your staff and administrative team. Your school was quite welcoming and willing to express their concerns and observations openly with this consultant as well as sharing ideas for ways that the school performance may be improved. Through these interviews and observations, three main themes were present: **Communication**, **Roles and Responsibilities**, and **Accountability**. Your staff is dedicated to their students as well as reflective on their own performance. In my professional opinion, there are three categories that you may wish to explore in order to address these themes. The following topics are areas of concern and include suggestions for activities and development to assist your school in improving academic performance overall as well as supporting students of diverse needs.

***Compliance***

There were several concerns about compliance with federal regulations involving special education students. Many teachers feel that the needs of these students are not able to be addressed in the current consultative/ collaborative model. In addition, concerns with the Response to Intervention process as well as the School-wide Behavior Management System were voiced by all staff. These areas may fall as top priorities for the team to address because of the state and federal mandates addressing these systems.

**1. RTI and Special Education Identification**

The RTI process at Campus Community is developed and in place. There are forms for the documentation of student areas of need and goals as well as strategies to be put into place. However, most staff members are not familiar with how to fill out these forms or what kinds of strategies can be used to address the particular needs identified by the data. There is no systematic way to collect the data for these strategies, and the teachers seem to see this as a special education initiative and therefore within the realm only of the special education teachers. It has been reported that in some cases the teachers have told the parents to request an evaluation in order to bypass the RTI process. In Delaware, a Learning Disabled classification is now determined by the student's response to intensive instruction in the area of need. A full psycho-educational evaluation is used only to determine a more severe intellectual disability. Therefore, the staff should recognize that if they believe a student has a specific learning disability, this process must be followed. The data collected through the RTI process is reviewed by the Instructional Support Team in collaboration with the parent and school psychologist in order to determine if the student indeed has a learning disability. As mentioned earlier, RTI includes directed and intensive instruction in specific areas of need. Some RTI groups (including the most intensive groups) are taught by paraprofessionals who are given little to no guidance in how to address these needs. It is recommended that this process be reviewed and shared with the entire staff on an ongoing basis to ensure that the needs of the students are being met as well as helping to better identify those students in need of special education identification. In addition, specific guidelines and strategies for teaching these groups should be shared. Finally, all RTI paperwork should be kept in a centralized location at the end of each year to ensure that students are not overlooked from year to year and the receiving teacher is aware of previous interventions and strategies that have been implemented in order to address student needs.

**2. Behavior Management**

The staff reported that student behavior is a concern. There is little consistency reported as to what is handled in the classroom versus what should be sent to the office. There is no clear idea as to what the behavior matrix is to address behaviors or what occurs when a student is sent to the office for a behavioral concern. For example, it was reported that a student may be sent out for a behavioral concern and return with candy. In particular, the behavioral reports of special education students do not seem to be communicated to the necessary teachers. At times, these students have been suspended or placed on

homebound instruction which may be a violation of FAPE as this constitutes a break in service as well as a possible change in placement. Special education staff members have reported that they were told the reason is “confidential”, however a break in services of this type requires an IEP team meeting to be convened to determine the necessity for this change and revise the IEP to reflect this need. In addition, special education students with repeated behavioral concerns should have this listed as a need on the IEP and accommodations and/ or goals should be included to address these areas. Therefore, communication about the behaviors of these and all students should be communicated in a systematic way. It is recommended that the school develop a school-wide behavior support system which includes expectations, major versus minor behaviors, acknowledgements for students who follow the expectations, lesson plans for teachers to share these expectations, and a system for documenting suspensions that is accessible to special education teachers as well as other necessary staff members including the behavior coach. In this way consistency can be developed throughout the staff and the behavioral needs of all students can be addressed in a more systematic way.

### **3. Functional Behavior Assessments/ Behavior Support Plans**

The special education team reported that behavior support plans were being developed for special education students without the knowledge of the teacher. These functional behavior assessments and support plans do not need to be developed by the special education teacher and may also be developed for general education students with significant or recurring behavioral concerns. However, a behavior support plan should be built on data collected and goals set for specific behaviors as well as specific instruction in the area of behavioral need and therefore if developed for a student with special education status should be added to the IEP during a meeting convened with the entire team including teachers, parents, and an administrator/ designee. Your school has trained a team in developing these plans, and so it is recommended that lines of communication are developed in order to inform the teacher of the need to address these behaviors through the revision of the IEP. In addition, it is recommended that these plans be shared with all teachers involved and a data collection system is developed as well as a timeline to review the plan and check for fidelity of implementation and level of impact. In this way the behavioral supports can be monitored and addressed and the team members are aware of their role in implementing the plan.

### ***Staff and Training***

The staff at Campus Community Charter School is dedicated to student success. They seem eager to improve student performance and willing to attempt strategies which may help them better address the needs of most students in the school. However, there seems to be much separation between the regular education staff and the special education staff. Comments such as “when they stopped being our paras and started being special ed paras” and “the low functioning kids take up all of my time” suggest that there is a clear division in what students are “ours” versus “theirs”. Special education teachers report feeling “inadequate” and “ineffective” and used as an extra body when asked to push in to a general education class. A lack of communication is evident and teachers are not given much time to plan and collaborate together which seems to impact the success of the consultative model of inclusion. In addition, most of the paraprofessionals seem to lack training and guidance as to what their role should be while in the general education classroom. Finally, classroom teachers reported a lack of scope and sequence as to what is to be taught in what order to ensure that all areas of reading are addressed throughout the elementary grades.

### **1. Roles and Responsibilities**

Staff members expressed confusion as to their roles and responsibilities on a daily basis. The regular education teachers seem to hold the belief that students with IEPs, 504 plans, or who are in Tier 3 for RTI are the special education teachers’ responsibility. Although the paraprofessionals apparently are placed in classrooms to assist with special education students, no one seems to know whose direction to follow. Consultation time is spent discussing data or specific student needs rather than planning for accommodations

or modifications to curriculum. There seems to be a disconnect about these modifications, and little time is dedicated to allowing special education teachers access to collaborative planning time or information about classroom activities. The behavior coach seems to be encumbered by addressing crisis needs each day, and when approached with student concerns has cited her job description as a reason to exclude herself from involvement. Teachers are unsure of what they are to teach and when. It is also unclear who is to handle minor but recurring behavioral concerns. Teachers do not seem clear as to what to do for assistance. There is a general lack of communication between administration, special education, regular education, and paraprofessionals. It is suggested that a system of communication is put into place in order to address the needs of all staff members. A representative group could meet monthly to share information and bring concerns of staff. Teacher orientation may include who would handle such things as behavior concerns, academic concerns, and parent concerns. Concerns with identified special education students should be conveyed to the corresponding special education case manager in order to ensure compliance, and so this list should be shared with related teachers. The instructional staff may feel more supported by the administrative team if open lines of communication were established and each staff member was clear on what the roles and responsibilities of each position would be.

## **2. Instructional Strategies and Differentiation**

The staff shared concerns in the ability to address a wide range of student needs in the classroom. Some teachers are reported to teach only to the “middle”, and many expressed concerns with the ability to modify the curriculum. An inconsistency with reading instruction was shared as well, and the need for a specific scope and sequence for reading was identified. Although teachers may be clear on the specific needs of a student, they are unsure how to address those needs within the realm of general classroom instruction. Many teachers shared that there was a lack of support for the special education and 504 students, and that although the special education teachers were assigned to support, there was not time to plan, collaborate, or consult with them to gain their expertise as they were often pulling out students (both general and special education) for more intensive instructional groups. Quick sessions at monthly meetings to share and/ or model research based instructional strategies and modifications, adjusting the schedule of the special education teachers to allow for more collaborative planning time, and a clarified scope and sequence of the reading curriculum including the dimensions of reading are suggested in order to improve this area.

## **3. Small Group Instruction**

All staff members shared that small group instruction does occur, but the effectiveness of these groups was questionable. Paraprofessionals are teaching groups without guidance, or teachers may work with one small group while the rest of the class is monitored by a paraprofessional or another teacher. When not working with the teacher, some students are reportedly asked to silently read for 30-40 minutes at a time. This lack of directed instruction for the majority of the classroom may contribute to behavioral issues as well as academic frustration. In addition, some of these small groups are developed around RTI concerns, and therefore should have specific academic areas which they are designed to address. For many of these groups the staff member is not familiar with the subject she is assigned to teach and lacks resources as well. Consider training in monitoring small groups while engaging all students as well as guidelines for paraprofessionals who may be teaching these groups. You may also include types of strategies that can be used to address the RTI area of concern including materials or other resources which would streamline the scope and sequence of the directed intervention groups.

### ***Processes***

There are significant gaps in understanding the processes to be used in several areas. Although the RTI process has been established, there is no clear expectation for how to collect data, interpret that data, and make decisions using that data. The teachers state that they are working in a consultative model but little consultation and collaboration

seem to be occurring. Scheduling for special education teachers may change according to what teachers deem as their needs, and the flexibility with those scheduled is limited because of the wide range of students who are served by each teacher. Therefore, regular education teachers feel unsupported by these special education teachers as they are unable to take time to implement a consultative and collaborative model to co-plan and assist with lesson modifications and adaptations.

### **1. Data Collection**

Although collecting data is an imperative part of the RTI process and an important decision making tool for both academic and behavioral support, there does not appear to be a way for teachers to easily collect and utilize data. In addition, this type of documentation is viewed as “jumping through hoops” rather than as an informative process. The lack of data collection impacts the ability for the RTI system to be successful, the suspensions of special education students to be accurately monitored, and the ability of all teachers to focus both academic and behavioral supports in a consistent manner. It is recommended that teachers be introduced to ways of collecting data that are simple and relatively quick, and then instructed on how the data can inform what they address in the classroom during RTI, small groups, Reader’s and Writer’s Workshop, and Morning Meetings. In addition, the data collected should be accessible to teachers on an ongoing basis from previous years. The development of a spreadsheet, documentation form, or other tracking tool may be useful in assisting teachers and administrations with identifying needs of students for instruction, behavior supports, and individualized education program planning.

### **2. Consultative/ Collaborative Model**

The school reports to practicing a consultative/ collaborative model of special education instructional support. However, there is little time in the school day for teachers to actually consult and collaborate. Special education teachers reported being informed weeks later of missing projects or failing grades, and little can be done to support students when communication is not present. Teachers are not able to collaborate to modify curriculum and instruction to better meet student needs because of lack of time and lack of willingness or ability for the general education teachers to share lessons in advance. It is a challenge for one person to support students through several grade levels in several academic areas while still providing support for the neediest students in a separate classroom for part of the day. If this model is to be successful, additional time should be given for team planning and collaboration as well as ways of communication developed so that general education teachers are aware of what modifications should be in place and special education teachers are able to support those modifications as well as time to share these supports with paraprofessionals to better utilize these staff members in the classroom.

### **3. Scheduling of Student and Teachers**

The consultative model also requires creative scheduling to be in place for both students and teachers. Currently, classes seem to be triaged and the special education teachers try to address each grade level and class need separately. With the current staff this is a definite challenge and may require some creative planning. Consider grouping students by need rather than grade level throughout multiple grades (for example, developing a K-2 phonics group, a 6-7-8 study skills group) that would enable the special education teacher to address the needs of the students in a small group setting but also allow for time inside the general education classroom for support as well as more consultative time with the general education teacher. The teachers also seem to have tremendous impact on the schedule as far as which students are placed where, and so it is suggested that these groups be developed based on overall student need rather than teacher preference. Additionally, this may require paraprofessionals to be more directed as where they are assigned as required by the needs of the students as determined by the IEP team.

**Summary**

Campus Community Charter School has a dedicated staff and there are several processes in place to support the academic needs of students in the general education curriculum. However, there are significant issues with communication between both staff and administration and special education and regular education teachers as well as with paraprofessionals. There are many questions as to who should be doing what in order to support students both academically and behaviorally and this has led to a high level of frustration among staff members. Consider taking steps to develop clear processes as well as providing professional development in order to support these processes at times throughout the year. Information about the legal requirements for IEPs, RTI, and 504 plans should be shared with all staff in order to help eliminate the general consensus that these plans and processes are not a concern of the regular education staff. Guidance for paraprofessional staff and behavior support staff should be provided as well in order to comply with state and federal regulations as far as the provision of supports and education within the least restrictive environment to the maximum extent possible. Clearly defining these processes as well as those roles of staff members in each area will help to enhance a collaborative environment and better enable all staff member to meet the needs of your diverse student population.

Thank you for the opportunity to assist your school. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns or for additional resources by phone at 302.236.5653 or by e-mail at [mebling@udel.edu](mailto:mebling@udel.edu) or [just.the.la@gmail.com](mailto:just.the.la@gmail.com).

**Respectfully Submitted By:**

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**5.15.14**