

# THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

## Opportunity Network

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### YES Philly Instructional Site Visit Summary May 31, 2017

**Provider:** YES Philly  
**Contract Term:** FY 2013-FY 2017  
**Program capacity:** 100

**Site Visit Date:** Tuesday, March 28, 2017- 9:00 a.m.  
**IEP Compliance:** 89%  
**Average Daily Attendance:** 69.9%

#### Walkthrough Review Team:

Christina Grant, Assistant Superintendent,  
Opportunity Network  
Majeedah Scott, Director, Multiple Pathways  
Cameo Posey, EOP Program Manager  
Darryl Johnson, Transition Liaison  
Jennifer Zahor, Director, Special Education  
Megan Reamer, Program Manager, Charter Schools

#### Program Staff:

Taylor Frome, Executive Director  
Kim Atias, Education Director  
Melvin Davis, Dean of Students

#### Overview of Instructional Site Visits:

Instructional site visits consisted of four main parts: **Academic Success Questions with Leadership**; **Academic Success Questions with Teachers**; **Academic Success Questions with Students**; and **Classroom Observations**. **Academic Success Questions with Leadership** was driven by standardized questions that focused on: data and academic outcomes; academic outcomes versus goals; and preparation for classroom observations. **Academic Success Questions with Teachers** was driven by standardized questions that focused on: the use of academic assessments; academic outcomes versus goals; and the school's overall academic performance. **Academic Success Questions with Students** was driven by standardized questions that focused on: student backgrounds and previous educational experiences; academic expectations set by Teachers; tests, grading procedures, and supports from Teachers; overall level of satisfaction with the program and recommendations for improvement; the program's mission; the program's Special Education services; and food and health services. **Classroom Observations** was guided by a standardized Classroom Observation Form that assessed elements of: the classroom environment; instruction; and assessments.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

### Academic Success Questions with Leadership

YES Philly leadership presented and discussed reading and mathematics growth from the previous school year. The program previously used TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education) to assess students' growth in reading and mathematics. Among students from last school year who pre- and post- tested in reading via the TABE, 46% made no growth in reading, and 54% made some growth. Among students who pre- and post- tested in mathematics via the TABE, 48% made no growth, and 52% made some growth. YES Philly leadership was unable to provide specific data to show the exact amount of growth that students made in reading and mathematics.

YES Philly began using the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) this school year in lieu of the TABE. The program moved away from the TABE because leadership thought that students were not taking the TABE seriously, and that students felt disconnected from the TABE. Leadership noted that it has been easier to get students to focus on the MAP. YES Philly administered the MAP in the beginning of this school year and again in February. Program leadership also described the MAP as a more effective teaching tool than TABE in that the

MAP has provided them with data regarding what students are ready to reinforce, what they are ready to explore further, and their zone of proximate development. Students receive their MAP scores immediately after finishing the test. Student score reports from the MPA include growth chart that show students whether they have improved their skills. Program leadership acknowledged that TABE scores were not provided to students in the same way as MAP scores (i.e., immediate feedback, score reports, etc.). As a result, students did not take ownership over their progress on the TABE. Conversely, program leadership acknowledged the MAP has spurred conversations between Teachers and students that have never been seen with the TABE. Overall, program leadership was adamant that the MAP has students taking standardized testing more seriously, and students have started to take ownership over their MAP scores and growth over time.

YES Philly leadership discussed the peer learning community for the MAP, which supports Teachers in understanding MAP scores and using score reports to inform instruction. The program demonstrated its analysis of midyear MAP scores displayed in color coded charts. The peer learning community for the MAP is run by YES Philly Teachers with guidance from Kim Attias, the program's Education Director. Teachers selected school-wide strategies as a result of studying MAP results. Strategies include: a literacy strategy focused on activating students' prior knowledge using visual imagery; and a numeracy strategy focused on analyzing data to determine the types of interventions that should be applied in class. Education Director Attias noted that implementation of the strategies are increasing student engagement.

YES Philly leadership discussed the program's acceptance into Summit Schools for next year, which will allow them to gain technical assistance for rolling out a new blended learning platform. The program also seeks to refine its curriculum in order to directly link the MAP assessment to learning. YES Philly leadership noted that next year the program should have a new curriculum in place and as a result, they expect to see skill growth for all students.

YES Philly leadership discussed and presented the program's average daily attendance. Attendance was trending significantly lower this school year for the months of September through November, compared to last school year. However, attendance significantly improved during the months of December, January and February. Program leadership noted that they have probably given students too many chances to remain enrolled despite poor attendance, and that overall the program has to determine ways to better support students with attendance challenges. The uptick in attendance for December through February may be attributed to the Dean ensuring that the program has more contact with parents and home visits.

YES Philly presented its graduation data for the last three years. The program's graduation rate has continuously decreased year over year, and was ten percentage points lower for 2016 than it was in 2014. However, the program's calculation of annual or event graduation rates did not align with conventional definitions. YES Philly defined graduation rate based on students who enrolled in the program during its first year of operation, and whether those students eventually graduated. The conventional definition of event or annual graduation rate is the percentage of students eligible to graduate in the beginning of the school who meet all requirements for graduation during the same school year. YES Philly's retention rate, however, saw a significant increase in 2016 with a retention rate of 72%, compared to 32% and 46% in 2014 and 2015, respectively.

In preparation for classroom observations, YES Philly leadership informed the review team of what we should expect to see in classrooms. Leadership noted that we should see "awesomeness, teaching and learning, and great conversations." We should also see that classes are set up similarly with the same expectations in every classroom. The review team was also told that we would see rigor in classrooms, lesson agendas, Do Now's, and use of technology in many classrooms. The site visit was held during the last two weeks of the program's learning cycle, and a result, we might also see classes engaging towards the completion of final projects.

## **Classroom Observations**

Review team members observed an English class for 12 minutes that was already in progress. The number of students present in class was 16. The Teacher was collecting Do Now's from students, and noted for students that Do Now's will be used to determine if the lesson topic should be re-taught or if students are ready to move forward. Students seemed confused about completing the Do Now, which led to the Teacher's explanation as to why it is used. The next activity observed was a group activity entitled "Speed Dating". The activity was designed to have students discuss and record their opinions regarding several different topics in preparation for writing persuasive essays. The objective posted on the board was for students to be able to differentiate between logos, ethos, and pathos arguments. Review team members did not observe any student writing posted in the English class. Review team members observed students practicing persuasive and counter arguments in groups. The Teacher had to repeat the instructions for group activity several times over students talking. The assessment method observed was questioning and the depth of engagement observed was demonstration of understanding.

Review team members observed a Social Studies class for approximately ten minutes; the class was already in progress. The number of students present in class was 15. The objective posted on the board aimed for students to use their prior knowledge to research and create an initial list of key Philadelphia locations for their final projects. Student work posted in the classroom included a mapping project that required students to draw the map of a country and label important cities and physical features of the land using a legend. Review team members observed question and answer between the Teacher and students regarding the reasons why they would visit certain Philadelphia locations or venues. One student recorded responses on the board. We observed the class developing reasons for visiting the Philadelphia Zoo and the Art Museum, and their responses were recorded on the board. The method of assessment observed was questioning, and the depth of engagement observed was demonstration of understanding.

Review team members observed a Media class for thirteen minutes that was already in progress. The number of students present in class was ten. No recent student work was posted in the classroom, other than Post-it notes that students had written on. The Do Now that was posted asked students to write down their favorite recent movie, show, game or music album, and to explain how they heard about their favorite. The Teacher shared the class agenda for the day, which would involve students in creating a marketing strategy or their final project by identifying target audience and four marketing strategies for their target audience. Review team members observed students discussing answers to a worksheet as a class, with the Teacher using questioning methods in order to get students to answer. Some students were observed to be disengaged from the class activity, and not all students were involved in the discussion. Students and the Teacher talked a great deal about celebrities and the products that they endorse. The review team did not observe a deep engagement of students or any connections being made between the lesson and prior learning. Overall, the depths of engagement observed were basic recall and demonstration of understanding.

Review team members observed a mathematics class for ten minutes that was already in progress. The number of students present in class was 18. The lesson agenda was posted and the Do Now was posted. The Do Now asked students to identify three things that they remembered about the Law of Reflection. All students were engaged in the lesson, which focused on getting students to represent data in alternative ways. Assessment methods observed were questioning and observing. The depth of engagement observed challenged students to analyze and apply, as well as synthesize and evaluate information.

## **Academic Success Questions with Teachers**

Mr. Moore (Media), Ms. Hickson (Math), and Mr. Mitchell (ELA/Math support) participated in the Academic Success Questions with Teachers. All Teachers discussed their satisfaction with teaching at YES Philly, and they noted that their students are amazing despite the gaps in learning that come with to the program. Teachers discussed the open and comfortable school environment at YES, and they enjoy being able to know all of their

students and the challenges that their students face. Teachers noted that it is imperative for them to build a rapport with their students in order to get the students to trust them and engage fully in learning.

Teachers discussed assessments that the program administers and how results are used to drive learning. Teachers discussed the MAP and how students are buying into the MAP more so than the TABE. Teachers discussed their peer learning community, and their focus on the MAP during those meetings. Teachers were in the process of mapping out student levels, and planned to use those levels to develop learning groups in the classes. Teachers discussed the use of Do Now's and other formative classroom assessments to determine if re-teaching of certain concepts is necessary. Teachers provided examples of how they have used MAP results in class. One Teacher talked about using the results to ensure that relevant texts are being read in class that meet the needs of students. Another Teacher discussed using the results to differentiate a lesson on angle measurements.

Teachers discussed YES Philly's program-wide goals and initiatives, such as Wednesday squads and literacy and numeracy strategies. Wednesday squads allow students to set goals for attendance and academics. The squads are an opportunity for students to also measure their progress, and to determine any steps for improvement. The program's literacy and numeracy strategies including analyzing data to inform instruction, and using imagery to help students access prior knowledge.

Overall, Teachers that the program is doing well academically, but also expressed areas for growth and challenge areas. Teachers acknowledged that they sometimes do not have enough time to cover all necessary material within a nine-week cycle. Teachers also acknowledged that it is challenging to ensure that all students are accessing content when students' skill levels vary so greatly. As a result, one area for improvement that they identified was to have students grouped according to skill level.

### **Academic Success Questions with Students**

YES Philly Leadership selected eight students to participate in the Academic Success Questions with Students. The students were: Dominique (age 18), Ramadeen (age 19), Donna (age 20), Shaquan, (age 19), Rakim (age 18) Alyssa (age 17), Dayquan (age 18), and Chyna (age 17). When asked if their Teachers at YES Philly expected a lot from them, they all stated "not really". Students explained that Teachers do not try to force them, and that they move at their own pace. Students talked about knowing how well they are doing in school by checking their grades in PowerSchool. Students also talked about the weekly awards on Wednesdays, at which students are acknowledged for doing well. All students reported that they check PowerSchool almost daily to see how they are doing in their classes.

Students were able to articulate reasons why they take the MAP, and that they understand their score reports because Teachers have explained the reports to them. One student acknowledged the MAP as helping her to understand her full potential. Students were not certain as to how MAP scores are used in classes by Teachers.

Students discussed their postsecondary plans with review team members. Half of the group stated that college matters to them, and the other half stated that college does not matter to them. One student is currently enrolled in a dual enrollment program at Community College of Philadelphia. Students talked about postsecondary planning that they do at YES Philly. The program uses squads to support students with planning for life after high school. Seniors have a checklist of activities that they must complete, including the FAFSA, college applications, job applications, and resumes. Students also talked about going on college tours with the school.

When asked what they liked best about YES Philly, students talked about feeling respected and supported by program staff. They thought that the school was a good idea because of the fact that they can focus on learning, in comparison to their previous schools where they often felt distracted and unsupported. Students also noted that they like the final projects that they produce at YES Philly because the projects allow them to be original.

Students talked about enjoying some of YES Philly's extra-curricular activities, such as the cooking class, the Aspen Challenge, and Media Club.

When asked what advice they would give to alternative education programs, students thought that the opportunity to enroll in an alternative education program should be available to any student who needs it. They thought that the programs needed more funding to ensure that Teachers can purchase what they need for their classes, such as enough books for all students. Students talked about wanting to take more educational trips at YES Philly, and they wanted the program to get its own building. All students stated that they would refer a friend or family member to YES Philly.

### **Recommendations**

The review team recommends that YES Philly increase academic rigor throughout the program. Classroom observations revealed that what students are asked to do is more often than not rooted in a low level of student engagement (i.e., basic recall and restating). There was little evidence to suggest that class lessons are grounded in high school level work, and the Academic Success Questions with Teachers showed that they are not clear about what it means to deliver high quality instruction.