

# THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

## Opportunity Network

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PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19130

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One Bright Ray Community High School- Simpson Campus  
Instructional Site Visit Summary  
May 31, 2017

**Provider:** One Bright Ray/IECI  
**Contract Term:** FY 2013-FY 2017  
**Program capacity:** 200

**Site Visit Date:** Monday, April 3, 2017- 10:45 a.m.  
**IEP Compliance:** 100%  
**Average Daily Attendance:** 64.2%

### Review Team:

Majeedah Scott, Director, Multiple Pathways  
Dr. Eric Beacots, Assistant Superintendent  
Allison Smith, District Performance Office  
Jennifer Zahor, Special Education Director  
Elvis Mucaj, Strategy Analyst

### Program Staff:

Marcus Delgado, CEO, One Bright Ray, Inc.  
Joycet Velasquez, Chief Academic Officer  
Derik Hrubosky, Principal  
Rachel Toransky, Dean of Academics

### 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

OBR Simpson Leadership presented and discussed growth data in reading and mathematics from the previous school year. In reading, 25% of students made no gains, 20% made less than one year of growth, 18% made one year of growth, and 37% of students made two or more years of growth. In mathematics, 31% of students made no gains, 20% of students made less than one year of growth, 20% of students made one year of growth, and 29% of students made two or more years of growth. Program leadership attributed the amount of skill growth for students to the program-wide focus on teaching specific deficient skills based on TABE results. Education Support Teachers push into classrooms to provide one-on-one and small group support for students. OBR Simpson's classes focus on real-world learning, which helps to keep students engaged in learning. Every eight weeks OBR Simpson focuses on introducing new writing and reading standards across the program. In addition, all teachers stay after school to provide students with extra help in skill areas that they are struggling to master. Teachers at OBR Simpson use a rounds model to observe their peers, which leads to the sharing of best practices.

OBR Simpson leadership presented and discussed retention and graduation data from the previous school year. Of all eligible seniors, 81% graduated last year, and the program had a retention rate of 72%. This retention rate is higher than the network average and OBR Fairhill leadership attributed the high rate to many students returning to the program after brief hiatuses. OBR conducts home visits, and it is through this outreach that they re-engage many students.

OBR Simpson leadership facilitated a discussion on the program's attendance data from last school year. Monthly attendance rates ranged from 75% to 58%, with the highest average daily attendance occurring in June. OBR runs a year round program for students, and the summer modules begin in June. Leadership explained that June is the highest month for attendance because students get more focused in the summer in anticipation of August graduation or starting off the next school year as promoted to the next grade level. The program has formed Action Plan Teams to focus on school engagement, which includes student attendance. The team is examining ways to increase engagement by providing more incentives, resources, and supports for students. Part of the current action plan is to survey students about why they were not present in school. The most common answer is that students report being tired. OBR Simpson attributes some of the month to month fluctuations in attendance to students realizing that they will not earn credits in a particular module as a result of poor attendance. Students realize that they can come back at the start of the next 8-week module to start fresh.

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OBR Simpson uses final product check points as one of their interim assessments to monitor student progress. In addition, two written assessments are required for every class each module. Teachers are required to input at least three grades into PowerSchool on a weekly basis. The program Principal checks PowerSchool to ensure that grades are being entered as expected.

The program conducts both formal and informal observations of Teachers. Evaluations are used to spur professional growth, and the program uses Domains 2 and 3 of the Danielson Framework to structure observations and feedback. The Dean of Academics observes specific areas when she enters the classroom and does so against the Teacher's goals and program-wide goals. Program leadership was adamant about ensuring that Teachers are continuously growing. They acknowledged that one Teacher's low performing practices could really negatively affect student progress, which is not acceptable in an accelerated learning environment.

OBR Simpson administrators discussed what the review team should expect to see during classroom observations. High levels of student participation and engagement should be evident. A standard board configuration should be observed in all classrooms. Each class should have a storyboard, lesson objectives and driving questions to guide the class. In addition, positive interactions between students and teachers should be evident during classroom observations.

### **Classroom Observations**

Review team members observed an English 2 class for approximately ten minutes and 16 students were present in class during the observation. The class period was wrapping up during the observation. Walls displayed recent student work, classroom procedures, instructional resources, lesson objectives, driving questions, and a

storyboard. The Teacher posted a graphic organizer using an LCD projector, and the class was taking notes together as a group. The Teacher asked the class various questions related to the book *Night* by Ellie Weisel, and student answers were used to fill in the graphic organizer. The lesson focused on having students make inferences from the text, and provide supportive evidence for how they know what is happening in the book based on the text. The depth of engagement observed challenged students to synthesize and evaluate information from a text.

Review team members observed an American History class for approximately ten minutes and 25 students were present in the class during the observation. Walls displayed recent student work, classroom procedures, instructional resources, lesson objectives, driving questions, and a storyboard. All students were on-task during the observation. The focus of the lesson was for students to make educated claims based on evidence from a historical text. Students were completing a graphic organizer that required them to list reasons why the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were justified or unjustified using facts from the primary source document entitled, "Atomic Age" by Howard Zinn. The depth of engagement observed challenged students to synthesize and evaluate information from an historical text.

Review team members observed a Biology class for approximately ten minutes and 14 students were present in class during the observation. Walls displayed recent student work, classroom procedures, instructional resources, lesson objectives, driving questions, and a storyboard. All students were on-task during the observation. The focus of the lesson was for students to determine the beneficial and harmful components to a neighborhood ecosystem. Students were drawing and coloring landscape maps of their neighborhoods. The landscapes were due at the end of the week, and the project also included a lab requirement in which students were to record observations of their neighborhoods. The depth of engagement observed required students to recall basic facts and demonstrate an understanding of ecosystem components.

### **Academic Success Questions with Teachers**

Three Teachers participated in the Academic Success Questions with Teachers: Ms. White (Arts and Humanities), Ms. Scott (World Language), and Mr. Moreno (English). Teachers talked about the assessments that they use to monitor student learning. They issue written assignments to students every two weeks and final product check points to ensure that students are on pace to complete their final projects. Teachers issue new project guidelines for students every four weeks, and there is a different project topic in every class. On a daily basis, students receive grades from class assignments and participation, and Teachers enter marks into PowerSchool on a weekly basis.

Teachers discussed the data that they review as a whole staff. These data include attendance and course marks analyses that are aggregated and broken down by teacher and subject area. TABE data is also reviewed during all staff meetings, and Teachers talked about targeting students for extra support whose TABE results show specific skill deficiencies. Students receive additional support in class and after school. Teachers talk with students about their TABE scores so that students can own areas for improvement and have a better understanding of what the test results mean. School-wide enrichment classes (SWE) serve as the main forum for preparing students for the TABE and for explaining TABE results.

Teachers noted that parents and students have access to grades in PowerSchool, and that progress reports are published every two weeks for students. The program uses a color coded system (green, red, orange, yellow, etc.), to highlight students' progress and then administrators makes phone calls home to inform the parents of struggling students about their children's progress. Teachers acknowledged that students know their colors at any given time, and that their progress matters to them.

Overall, Teachers felt that OBR Simpson is performing well academically. They noted an increase in students' college-going aspirations, which they felt was a sign that students are being challenged more academically in the program.

## **Academic Success Questions with Students**

OBR Simpson leadership selected six students to participate in the Academic Success Questions with Students. Students' ages ranged from 18 to 22 years old, and they previously attended both Charter and District traditional high schools. Students talked about the tests that they take at OBR Simpson, which include the SAT, TABE, Keystones, and class quizzes. They considered the SAT to be the hardest of all of the tests that they take. Students also talked about the final products that are required in all of their classes. They considered the final products to be helpful with learning academic material.

Students talked about their current experiences at OBR Simpson compared to their previous experiences at traditional high schools. They felt as if they are learning more now than they ever did at their previous schools. They liked OBR Simpson's 85ers Club, which acknowledges students with high attendance and good grades. Students who earn 85ers Club status benefit from incentives including fun trips and special award recognitions. Students noted that they are able to concentrate on learning more at OBR Simpson than ever did at their old schools. The program is so small that they cannot hide and get away with slacking off. For example, if they are absent one day, then the whole school knows and Teachers ask about their whereabouts because they care. They felt as if everyone in the program was a part of a big family. They recognized that discipline policies at OBR Simpson are fair, but more strict than in other schools that they have attended.

Students informed the review team that their Teachers consistently encourage them to pursue college after high school. The program supports them with postsecondary planning and decision making. All graduating seniors participate in Senior Seminar class, where they complete a portfolio aimed at postsecondary preparation and access. The portfolio work includes a resume, cover letters, job applications, college applications, career searches, FAFSA/financial aid applications, and scholarships. All of the students had very clear plans to pursue college after high school.

## **Recommendations**

The review team recommends that OBR Simpson provide students with opportunities to produce longer written assignments in preparation for college matriculation. The review team recommends that OBR Simpson increase the level of rigor and the depth of engagement throughout the program. OBR has all of the necessary structures in place (e.g., an administrator for curriculum support; feedback loops for teachers, etc.) to implement an academic campaign aimed at increasing rigor. Although students often enter the program with very low skills, it is important that learning even the most basic concepts goes deep and that students are pushed to connect, evaluate, and analyze content. The review team also recommends that OBR Simpson develop a campaign to address the program's low attendance rate. Low attendance may be connected to the program's grading system and module calendar. Examining monthly attendance and within module attendance may reveal trends that can be directly combated with targeted interventions.