

# THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

## Opportunity Network

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

**Provider:** One Bright Ray/IECI  
**Contract Term:** FY 2016-2017  
**Program capacity:** 135

**Site Visit Date:** Thursday, April 6, 2017- 10:50 a.m.  
**IEP Compliance:** 100%  
**Average Daily Attendance:** 70%

### Site Visit Review Team:

Majeedah Scott, Director, Multiple Pathways  
Cameo Posey, EOP Program Manager  
Nefertiti White, Special Education Director  
Crystal Cabbage, Executive Director, New  
Schools Initiative  
Mignon Verdell, Project Manager, E3 Initiative

### Program Staff:

Marcus Delgado, CEO, One Bright Ray, Inc.  
Joycet Velasquez, Chief Academic Officer  
Kara Fisher, Director, Curriculum and Instruction  
Marta Lasiy, Principal  
Jennifer Suarez, Curriculum and Instruction Coach

### 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 Elmwood leadership discussed and presented reading and mathematics growth data from last school year, which was the program's first year open. In mathematics, 7% of students made no growth, 17% of students made less than one year worth of growth, 17% of students made one year worth of growth, and 66% of students made two or more years worth of growth. In reading, 19% of students made no growth, 24% of student made less than one year worth of growth, 24% of students made one year worth of growth, and 33% of students made two or more years worth of growth. Program leadership discussed the strategies they use that have led to the amount of growth that students made in reading in mathematics. Teachers examine TABE score results with administration and target their instruction to improve specific areas of skill deficiency. For example, teachers found that a large group of students were incorrectly placing decimal points and dollar signs when writing numbers and currency. Teachers then delivered mini lessons to teach those particular skills, and assessed the effectiveness of the intervention using pre- and post- tests. In addition, staff have individual meetings with students to discuss their TABE results. Staff explain what the grade levels mean, and help students to set goals for improvement. At

times, students are upset to learn that they are performing at low levels. OBR leadership has found that students' upset actually motivates them to strive toward improvement.

OBR Elmwood leadership discussed and presented the program's retention data from last school year; 78% of students either graduated or remained enrolled through the next year. This retention rate is higher than the network average and OBR Elmwood 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 Elmwood is a very small program with only five Teachers on staff. Leadership noted that having so few Teachers allows them to be more flexible in the kinds of supports that they can provide to Teachers. Leaders conduct as many informal observations as possible, and convene one-on-one meetings with Teachers during prep periods to provide constructive feedback and support. Teachers must submit their storyboards for review, and then individual meetings are convened with leadership to review storyboards and provide feedback. OBR's Curriculum Coach provides intensive supports to Teachers. Supports are targeted and account for the individual needs of each Teacher. For example, new Teachers receive more frequent check-ins than veteran Teachers.

OBR Elmwood leadership discussed bridging the gap between students' low skill levels and their actual developmental age. For example, *Of Mice and Men*, is currently being taught in English and is written on a fifth grade level but deals with some mature concepts that will keep students engaged. Teachers work to ensure that content is appropriate and engaging for older students but remains accessible to them based on their skill levels. The program also focuses on connecting learning to the real world examples. In mathematics, students are creating manuals for travel planning using formulas to determine travel options based on a certain budget.

Program administrators communicate with parents and guardians frequently about their children's progress. They make phone calls home regarding both behavior and academic progress. Letters, interim reports, and report cards are mailed home, and parents and students have real-time access to grades via the program's PowerSchool system. OBR Elmwood Teachers do not interact much with parents. Leadership explained the rationale behind this as a way to ensure that Teachers can focus on instruction.

OBR Elmwood leadership 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 and driving questions to guide the lesson. In addition, positive interactions between students and teachers should be evident during classroom observations.

### **Classroom Observations**

Review team members observed an Algebra I class for approximately ten minutes and 17 students were present in class during the observation. The class was already in progress when the observation began. Classroom walls displayed recent student work, classroom procedures, and instructional resources. The lesson plan and class agenda were observed. All students were on-task during the observation. The focus of the lesson was for students to create a training manual for travel agents. The project required students to apply standard rates to variable rate situations and to determine how they apply to their final products. Students worked independently on their projects, and the Teacher circulated the room to check for progress and to provide support to individual students. The travel manual project will culminate in a 20-slide PowerPoint that students will present to the class. The depth of engagement observed challenged students to analyze and apply information, as well as synthesize and evaluate rates.

Review team members observed an African American History class for approximately eight minutes and 20 students were present in class during the observation. Classroom walls displayed recent student work, class procedures, and instructional resources. All students were on-task during the observation. Students were completing graphic organizers on racial and ethnic disparity in the United States criminal justice system. The

lesson objective was for students to read, infer, and create meaning from various data sources. Main ideas were posted using an LCD projector, and the class was engaged in a discussion led by the Teacher. The classroom Teacher called on different students to answer questions, even those who did not raise their hands. The depth of engagement observed challenged students to analyze and apply data, and well as synthesize and evaluate information from various sources.

Review team members observed an English 3 class for approximately six minutes and 18 students were present in class during the observation. Classroom walls displayed recent student work, class procedures, and instructional resources. All students were on-task during the observation. The lesson objective was for students to support their claims with evidence from a text. A black and white image was posted using an LCD projector and students worked as a whole class to record their first impressions of the image without text. The lesson plan and class agenda were observed. Later in the lesson, the Teacher planned to have students read a text related to the image and write their observations using the text as evidence. The depth of engagement observed challenged students to analyze and apply data, and well as synthesize and evaluate information from various sources.

Review team members observed a Chemistry class for approximately seven minutes and 14 students were present in class during the observation. Classroom walls displayed recent student work, class procedures, and instructional resources. All students were on-task during the observation. The objective of the lesson was for students to follow multiple steps of an experiment and use content specific vocabulary in their analysis of the experiment's results. During the observation, the class was engaging in a discussion regarding their experiments and the chemical changes that they observed during their experiments. The lesson plan and class agenda were observed. The depth of engagement observed challenged students to analyze and apply data, and well as synthesize and evaluate information using prior knowledge.

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

OBR Elmwood leadership selected three students to participate in the Academic Success Questions with Students. Two of the students were in grade eleven and one student was in grade twelve. Students discussed the supports that they receive from their Teachers at OBR Elmwood. They felt that they have many opportunities to get help when they need it and they felt comfortable asking for help. They liked the fact that the program allows them to recover failed credits, and that they have the ability to make up any that they may have missed when they are absent from school. Students felt that their Teachers challenged them and guided them appropriately.

Students discussed their process for preparing for exams. They share notes and form study groups to help each other review material. Students discussed the TABE and how staff prepares them for the exam and also talks to them about their results so that they can understand how well they did. Some of the students remarked that test taking can be overwhelming, but the reassurance and encouragement that they receive from Teachers helps them to perform with little anxiety.

Overall, students were excited and satisfied with their experiences at OBR Elmwood. When compared to their previous traditional school settings, students found that OBR Elmwood allowed them to focus on their work and form good relationships with their peers and Teachers. They particularly liked the ability to earn credits faster at the program, which they were not able to do in their former traditional schools. All looked forward to graduating and pursuing postsecondary education and employment after high school, but they did not have a strong sense of what their exact postsecondary pathways would be.

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

Ms. Marker, Social Studies Teacher, participated in the Academic Success Questions with Teachers. She has been employed with OBR since 2013. Ms. Marker had a brief hiatus from OBR when she went to work at a charter high school. She returned to OBR after her brief tenure at the charter school.

Ms. Marker discussed the assessments that she uses to monitor student learning. She credited the TABE as one of the tools that she uses to measure student progress. She uses the data to determine students' reading and math abilities, and takes into account their levels and skill deficiencies when creating her storyboards and driving questions. Ms. Marker gives her students two written assessments every four weeks, and she enjoys the freedom that she has to create the written assessments. Students must respond to written assessment with at least three paragraphs. She talked about it being important that assessment align to what is actually being covered in class in a given timeframe.

When planning her lessons/storyboards, Ms. Marker modifies and chunks text at times to make the content more accessible for students. She uses gradual release daily, which allows students to receive a model and to also engage in independent practice. She ensures consistency in the structure and flow of her daily lessons, minds pacing to ensure that she is staying on track with the curriculum. Marker discussed the program's goal of improving students' skill levels every year. She thought that it was essential for students to make more than one year worth of gains because the program is accelerated and students have less time to make improvements before they graduate.

Ms. Marker talked about the academic data that is shared with parents and guardians. Teachers are required to update grades in PowerSchool weekly, and parents have real-time access to grades via PowerSchool. Ms. Marker noted that Teachers do not communicate directly with parents, and that the program administration typically communicates with parents on the behalf of Teachers. Teachers provide a written account of progress or an incident to administrators, who in turn relay the information to parents and guardians.

### **Recommendations**

The review team recommends that OBR Elmwood provide students with opportunities to produce longer written assignments in preparation for college matriculation. The review team also recommends that the program make stronger connections for students to postsecondary options. OBR leadership noted that they have added three positions to their budget for Postsecondary Counselors. This investment should help to provide students with better support with the development of their postsecondary pathways.