May 10, 2021

Dr. Valaida Wise, Board Chair
Creative Minds International Public Charter School
3700 North Capitol Street NW
Washington, DC 20011

Dear Dr. Wise:

The DC Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB) conducts Qualitative Site Reviews (QSR) to gather and document evidence to support school oversight. According to the School Reform Act § 38-1802.11, DC PCSB shall monitor the progress of each school in meeting the goals and student academic achievement expectations specified in the school's charter. Your school was selected to undergo a QSR because it is eligible for its 10-year charter review during school year (SY) 2021 – 22.

**Qualitative Site Review Report**
A QSR team conducted a virtual site review of Creative Minds International Public Charter School from March 15 – 26, 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in all DC public charter schools physically closing. As a result, the observations in this report took place remotely. The disruption in traditional school programming due to COVID-19 has had an untold impact on classroom environment and instruction, the primary areas of focus in this report. Observers considered these factors while visiting classrooms. Enclosed is the team's report.

Sincerely,

Rashida Young
Chief School Performance Officer

# Qualitative Site Review Report

**Date:** May 10, 2021

<u>**Campus Information**</u>
**Campus Name:** Creative Minds International Public Charter School (Creative Minds PCS)
**Ward:** 5
**Grade levels:** Pre–kindergarten 3 through Eighth

<u>**Qualitative Site Review Information**</u>
**Reason for Visit:** School eligible for its 10-year charter review during SY 2021 – 22
**Two-week Window:** March 15 – 26, 2021
**QSR Team Members:** One DC PCSB staff member and three consultants, including an English learner (EL) specialist and a special education (SPED) specialist
**Number of Observations:** 24 unscored observations
**Total Enrollment:** 540
**Students with Disabilities Enrollment:** 117
**English Learners Enrollment:** 67
**In-seat Attendance on Observation Days:**[1]
**Visit 1:** March 15, 2021 – 92.1%
**Visit 2:** March 16, 2021 – 91.9%
**Visit 3:** March 18, 2021 – 90.6%
**Visit 4:** March 19, 2021 – 86.5%
**Visit 5:** March 23, 2021 – 90.1%
**Visit 6:** March 25, 2021 – 86.5%

**Summary**
According to the school mission,

> Creative Minds PCS offers early childhood, elementary, and middle school DC public school students a highly engaging, rigorous, international, and inclusive education plan that provides them with the knowledge and skills required for successful participation in a global society through a project- and arts-based international curriculum that fosters creativity, self-motivation, social/emotional development, and academic excellence.

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[1] During SY 2020 – 21, educational services are being provided both in-person and via distance learning. While during normal operations there is a consistent city-wide definition of what constitutes "present" (a student must be physically present for at least 80% of the instructional day), there is significantly more variation in what constitutes "present" during distance learning. In-seat attendance as presented here represents all students receiving educational services, whether in-person or remote. This rate is fundamentally different than in-seat attendance during a typical year.

The QSR team observed strong evidence that the school is achieving its mission. Teachers provided engaging and rigorous instruction. In most classes, teachers designed questions to challenge student thinking, facilitate peer-to-peer discussions, and nudge students toward self-correction. Creativity was evident in the curious nature and exploratory feel of the lessons. Most students enthusiastically engaged in learning, and teachers allowed students' questions and interests to drive lessons. Teachers provided inclusive instruction by allowing students to demonstrate learning through writing, drawing, and answering in the chat rather than aloud. Teachers explained academic skills using authentic content, including map-reading, comparing and contrasting daily routines of children around the world, and discussing creatures of the sea. Some lessons included social-emotional check-ins and involved naming the traits of a successful student.

During the two-week observation window, the team used a modified version of Charlotte Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* to examine classroom environment and instruction (see Appendices I and II). After careful consideration regarding the uniqueness of virtual instruction, DC PCSB elected to summarize the overall findings from the observations using specific examples that apply to each indicator of the rubric, rather than assess individual scores and percentages for each domain. Therefore, the review team did not score any of the observations.

In the Classroom Environment domain, observers noted joyful and respectful interactions between teachers and students. Teachers greeted students by name, joked with them, and praised them for their responses. Teachers also modeled joy and wonder in learning and encouraged students to express their ideas without judgment. Students participated freely and persisted in assigned tasks.  In the Instruction domain, observers noted teachers' explanation of content was clear and invited student participation and thinking. Students intellectually engaged in work by making connections across texts, choosing among multiple strategies to complete tasks, asking clarifying questions, and critiquing work products before creating their exemplars.

Governance
Dr. Valaida Wise chairs the Creative Minds PCS Board of Trustees. The School Reform Act requires each DC public charter school to have a majority of DC residents and two parents on its board, which the school has been compliant with for the past five years.

Specialized Instruction for Students with Disabilities
Prior to the two-week observation window, Creative Minds PCS completed a questionnaire about how it serves its students with disabilities. Reviewers looked for evidence of the school's articulated program. According to the school, its program

consists of highly structured and engaging 1:1 or small group instruction tailored to meet individual student needs and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). DC PCSB observed six SPED classrooms and three different settings: two co-taught classes, three small group/1:1 sessions, and one resource room session. Overall, DC PCSB found that the school implements its stated SPED program with fidelity. Key trends from the SPED observations are summarized below.

- **One to one, small group individualized instruction**: In all observations, students actively engaged and participated in lessons. In the three small group sessions, DC PCSB observed warm and caring interactions between the teachers and students. Students appeared happy to see their teachers and vice-versa. Teachers tailored instruction to students' needs as the school stated, and students successfully worked on individual goals, work completion, or specialized instruction. In one observation, students practiced reading, spelling, and identifying sight words. In another observation, students applied strategies for approaching word problems: "read the problem, picture the problem, draw it, figure it out." DC PCSB observed high levels of enthusiasm and engagement in small group instruction. In one observation, the teacher and student worked together to plan a unit to teach to the student's peers. At the end of each lesson, teachers reviewed their goals for the session and emphasized the students' success in reaching those goals.

- **Scaffolded instruction**: DC PCSB observed that both general education and SPED teachers used scaffolded instruction to support student comprehension. Teachers used graphic organizers, created visual representations of word problems, underlined and highlighted key text, re-read written content, and re-directed students as they worked. In one observation, while students solved a mathematics word problem, the teacher narrated their thoughts and drew a visual representation of the distributive property at work in the equation. In another observation, students read a passage from a novel together. As the students read, the teacher underlined and highlighted key passages that related to their discussion topic.

- **Co-teaching**: The school stated that its co-teacher models consist of one teach/one assist, station teaching, and alternative teaching. Overall, DC PCSB observed one teach/one assist and station teaching in the push-in/co-taught classes. Each teacher in both observations responded to students in the chat and added their thoughts and ideas to the whole class discussion, "Student X in the chat says…" and "Student Y says, 'yes,' he agrees." In one co-taught class, the teacher moved one student into a breakout room and worked with them to complete a task.

Specialized Instruction for English Learners
Prior to the two-week observation window, Creative Minds PCS completed a questionnaire about how it serves its EL students. The QSR team looked for evidence of the school's articulated program. According to the questionnaire, the school's EL program uses push-in supports and pull-out sessions to "provide extra support, increase their engagement and tailor instruction." The school also indicated that the EL teacher uses "small group time to target…goals, increase access to grade-level texts, and support the acquisition of academic language and grade-appropriate literacy skills." DC PCSB observed two push-in and two small group pull-out sessions observed. Overall, DC PCSB found that the school implemented its stated EL program with fidelity.

- **Push-in support**: Both general education and EL teachers supported the development of academic language and grade-appropriate literacy skills. Teachers gave students ample wait time, individual feedback, and displayed the correct answers on screen. In one observation, the teacher used sentence stems to support students' rationale, projecting on the screen, "I chose X because Y." In another observation, the teacher clarified directions for students after noticing misunderstandings. Students practiced restating and answering questions based on short pieces of text and identified correct thesis statements for particular arguments.

- **Pull-out sessions**: Teachers used various modalities to engage students including, songs, body movements, and visual representations.  During one lesson, the teacher activated background knowledge, modeled a new skill, and allowed students to practice the skill. Teachers ensured all students participated and offered frequent praise and validation for responses. Students practiced conversation skills as the teacher provided visual supports. In these sessions, teachers also provided students extra support in completing their homework and feedback to ensure students' work was clear and concise.

**THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT[2]**

This table summarizes the evidence collected on the Classroom Environment domain of the rubric during the unannounced virtual observations. Please see Appendix I for a breakdown of each subdomain.

| The Classroom Environment | Evidence |
|---|---|
| **Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport** | In most observations, students and teachers consistently interacted in a warm and friendly manner. Teachers greeted students by name, played upbeat welcome songs, and lovingly wished students farewell at the end of the lesson. In one observation, teacher interactions reflected genuine warmth and sensitivity to students as individuals. One teacher read about siblings and invited students to connect to the text by asking about their siblings by name. In another observation, the teacher successfully calmed a frustrated student by gently and respectfully leading them through a breathing exercise. In all observations, teachers encouraged students through specific praise and words of affirmation. |
| **Establishing a Culture for Learning** | In most observations, the classroom culture was cognitively busy. Students engaged in discussions about natural disasters, debated scenarios related to war powers, used tape diagrams to demonstrate division, and began tasks as soon as they were assigned. Teachers communicated the importance of the content and the conviction that all students could master the material with hard work. In one observation, the teacher said, "I know this hard, but you are smarter than the problem. You will win." In another observation, a student suggested the class should only write one to two sentences. The teacher responded, "We are in X grade, so we need to do more; how about two paragraphs?" In some observations, teachers demonstrated passion for the subjects saying things like, "Isn't that cool?" and "Are you guys ready for my favorite chapter?" |
| **Managing Classroom Procedures** | In most observations, classroom routines and procedures functioned smoothly, leading to no loss in instructional time. Teachers shared content on screen, used verbal warnings and countdowns, and checked in with students to ensure they had enough time to complete academic tasks. In one observation, a student initiated and led the class through an emotional check-in at the start of the lesson. Students knew the procedure for asking and answering questions, independently muting and unmuting their audio without teachers' prompting. |

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[2] Teachers may be observed more than once by different review team members.

| The Classroom Environment | Evidence |
|---|---|
| **Managing Student Behavior** | In all observations, student behavior was generally appropriate. Students remained on task, followed directions, and participated when prompted. In one observation, a student restated a class rule and all students complied. In few observations, teachers intervened in off-task behavior gently with uneven success. |

**INSTRUCTION**

This table summarizes the evidence collected on the Instruction domain of the rubric during the unannounced virtual observations. Please see Appendix II for a breakdown of each subdomain.

| Instruction | Evidence |
|---|---|
| **Communicating with Students** | In all observations, teachers clearly stated what students would be learning. Teachers explained content clearly, invited student thinking, and used vocabulary to extend student understanding. In one observation, the teacher described how zombies feel movement as force by using an analogy of how students feel movement in a car. In another observation, the teacher used practical examples and hands-on activities to help students see an equal sign as "the same." Teachers began each lesson by appropriately modeling expectations for students. In some observations, teachers anticipated misunderstandings, highlighting common errors and reminding students before starting independent tasks. Students used academic vocabulary and engaged with learning tasks with few clarifying questions, indicating they understood what to do. |
| **Using Questioning/ Prompts and Discussion Techniques** | In all observations, teachers used questions and discussions to promote student thinking and understanding. In some observations, teachers asked open-ended, high-level questions, inviting students to offer multiple answers. Teachers asked, "What makes the equator so important?" and "How are these similar or different than other graphs we've made?" In some observations, teachers asked low-level questions, like "How many pufferfish do we see on this slide?" and "Did anyone hear any rhyming words there?" In some observations, teachers facilitated discussions between students. At other times, teachers prompted students to respond to their peers' line of thinking, "I want you to think about what S1 just said. They said, 'If you subtract zero, you get what you started with.' Is that true? What is your brain thinking about that?" Across all observations, most students engaged in the discussions. |

| Instruction | Evidence |
|---|---|
| **Engaging Students in Learning** | In all observations, learning tasks and activities were age-appropriate and aligned with instructional outcomes. Teachers challenged students to make observations about the landscape in different parts of the globe, read graphs featuring sea animals, and describe the strengths and weaknesses of a pamphlet. In one observation, the teacher and students explored the "$x + 0 = x$" rule and discussed why the rule works. All lessons had a clear structure and included elements of scaffolding, exploration, and inquiry. In some observations, student contributions led to the exploration of content in a new way. In one observation, the teacher showcased an unexpected but exemplar student response, and began asking the class questions related to the student's response. The teacher extended the invitation for other students to lead by asking, "What's another way we could show part to whole?" Students suggested things from finger-counting to ten-squares to story problems, and the teacher enthusiastically agreed that these were all strong ideas. The class then tried them with full participation. In most observations, pacing was appropriate, providing most students the time needed to be intellectually engaged. |
| **Using Assessment in Instruction** | In most observations, teachers monitored student learning as a whole group. Teachers asked questions throughout the lessons to assess student understanding. Teachers asked, "Why might someone have to run to higher ground during a tsunami?" and "What makes a statement a fact?" In one observation, the teacher feigned ignorance and made a mistake, "I'm drawing it like this because six is greater than seven, right friends?" Many students immediately unmuted and called out, "No, no!" In some observations, teachers adjusted the lesson and provided specific feedback to clarify processes, explain errors in students' rationale, and give students more opportunities to practice a skill. In one observation, the standard for high-quality work was clear as students revised their work using a pre-defined rubric. |

Work Sample Review

As an added oversight measure to account for the limits of virtual observations, during SY 2020 – 21, DC PCSB reviewed ten student work samples in addition to classroom observations. Creative Minds PCS submitted five English language arts (ELA) samples and five math samples covering a range of grade levels and assignment types. The QSR team evaluated the work samples based on grade-level alignment to college and career ready standards, including Common Core.[3] The team reviewed each work sample in the areas of content, practice, and relevance.[4]

The goal of the review is to answer three essential questions:
1. Does this assignment align with the expectations defined by grade-level standards, including a high-quality text and text-based questions?
2. Does the assignment provide meaningful practice opportunities for this content area and grade-level?
3. Overall, does the assignment give students an authentic opportunity to connect academic standards to real-world issues and/or context?

DC PCSB used the criteria below to assign an overall rating to each ELA assignment.[5]

| | Content | Practice | Relevance |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sufficient | The assignment is based on a high-quality, grade-appropriate text and contains questions that reach the depth of the grade-level standards. | The assignment both integrates standards and requires students to use what they learned from the text. | The assignment builds grade-appropriate knowledge, gives students a chance to use their voice and/or connects to real-world issues. |
| Minimal | The assignment is based on a high-quality, grade-appropriate text but does not contain questions that reach the depth of the standard. | Either the assignment does not integrate standards, or it does not require students to use what they learn from the text. | The assignment builds grade-appropriate knowledge but does not give students a chance to use their voice and does not connect to real-world issues. |
| No Opportunity | The assignment is not based on a high-quality, grade-appropriate text. | The assignment does not integrate standards and does not require students to use what they learn from the text. | The assignment does not build grade-appropriate knowledge, does not give students a chance to use their voice and does not connect to real-world issues. |

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[3] See here for more information on the shifts in the college and career ready standards: https://achievethecore.org/category/419/the-shifts.

[4] Reviewers used this tool for ELA work samples: https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/Ss1Ffy9Ab7. Reviewers used this tool for Math work samples: https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/Ca2F7INXld. The review tools are based on The New Teacher Project's report: *The Opportunity Myth, available here:* https://opportunitymyth.tntp.org/.

[5] The overall assignment rating scale can be found here: https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/bzuOyBrYzK.

Of the five ELA samples submitted, two assignments received an overall rating of sufficient. On these work samples, the assignment was based on high-quality, grade-appropriate text, and students had an opportunity to use their voice and connect to real-world issues. Three assignments received an overall rating of minimal. On these work samples, the assignment was based on a high-quality, grade-appropriate text, but it did not contain questions that reach the depth of the standards. No assignments received an overall rating of no opportunity. Some evidence is captured below:

- Eighth grade students analyzed a high-quality text to identify a theme, choose relevant evidence from the text, and write an essay to justify their reasoning. This assignment gave students an opportunity to connect to real-world issues around freedom, slavery, and loyalty.

- Sixth grade students recorded themselves reading a monologue with expression and using gestures to convey meaning. Students also wrote a short paragraph explaining their choice of expression in reading the monologue. While this assignment refers to a high-quality text, it does not contain questions that reach the depth of the standards.

DC PCSB used the criteria below to assign an overall rating to each math assignment.

|  | **Content** | **Practice** | **Relevance** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sufficient | All the questions on the assignment reach the depth of the targeted grade-level standard(s). | The assignment includes an opportunity to engage with at least one mathematical practice at the appropriate level of depth. | The assignment connects academic content to real-world experiences and allows students to apply math to the real world in a meaningful way. It may also include novel problems. |
| Minimal | More than half (but not all) of the questions on the assignment reach the depth of the targeted grade-level standard(s). | The assignment includes an opportunity to engage with at least one critical math practice, but not at the level of depth required by the standard. | The assignment connects academic content to real-world experiences, but the problems do not allow students to apply math to the real world in a meaningful way. |
| No Opportunity | Less than half of the questions on the assignment reach the depth of the targeted grade-level standard. | The assignment provides no opportunity to engage with critical mathematical practices while working on grade-level content. | The assignment does not connect academic content to real-world experiences. |

Of the five math samples submitted, three assignments received an overall rating of sufficient. On these work samples, students had the opportunity to answer questions that reached the depth of the targeted grade-level standards and apply mathematical concepts to real-world experiences or solve the problems using multiple solution paths. Two assignments received an overall rating of minimal. On these work samples, students had the opportunity to engage with at least one mathematical practice while working on grade-level content, but not in a real-world context. No assignments received an overall rating of no opportunity. Some evidence is captured below:

- Third grade students used tape diagrams and written explanations to demonstrate their understanding of the quotient as the number of groups or size in a division word problem. This assignment required students to engage with multiple mathematical practices at the appropriate level of depth.

- Sixth grade students answered questions to demonstrate their understanding of the relationship between absolute value and order. This assignment met a grade-level standard and gave students practice with grade-appropriate operations; however, the problems did not include real-world experiences.

## APPENDIX I: THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT OBSERVATION RUBRIC

| The Classroom Environment | Unsatisfactory | Basic | Proficient | Distinguished |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport** | Classroom interactions, both between the teacher and students and among students, are negative or inappropriate and characterized by sarcasm, putdowns, or conflict. | Classroom interactions are generally appropriate and free from conflict but may be characterized by occasional displays of insensitivity. | Classroom interactions reflect general warmth and caring, and are respectful of the cultural and developmental differences among groups of students. | Classroom interactions are highly respectful, reflecting genuine warmth and caring toward individuals. Students themselves ensure maintenance of high levels of civility among member of the class. |
| **Establishing a Culture for Learning** | The classroom does not represent a culture for learning and is characterized by low teacher commitment to the subject, low expectations for student achievement, and little student pride in work. | The classroom environment reflects only a minimal culture for learning, with only modest or inconsistent expectations for student achievement, little teacher commitment to the subject, and little student pride in work. Both teacher and students are performing at the minimal level to "get by." | The classroom environment represents a genuine culture for learning, with commitment to the subject on the part of both teacher and students, high expectations for student achievement, and student pride in work. | Students assumes much of the responsibility for establishing a culture for learning in the classroom by taking pride in their work, initiating improvements to their products, and holding the work to the highest standard. Teacher demonstrates as passionate commitment to the subject. |
| **Managing Classroom Procedures** | Classroom routines and procedures are either nonexistent or inefficient, resulting in the loss of much instruction time. | Classroom routines and procedures have been established but function unevenly or inconsistently, with some loss of instruction time. | Classroom routines and procedures have been established and function smoothly for the most part, with little loss of instruction time. | Classroom routines and procedures are seamless in their operation, and students assume considerable responsibility for their smooth functioning. |
| **Managing Student Behavior** | Student behavior is poor, with no clear expectations, no monitoring of student behavior, and inappropriate response to student misbehavior. | Teacher makes an effort to establish standards of conduct for students, monitor student behavior, and respond to student misbehavior, but these efforts are not always successful. | Teacher is aware of student behavior, has established clear standards of conduct, and responds to student misbehavior in ways that are appropriate and respectful of the students. | Student behavior is entirely appropriate, with evidence of student participation in setting expectations and monitoring behavior. Teacher's monitoring of student behavior is subtle and preventive, and teachers' response to student misbehavior is sensitive to individual student needs. |

# APPENDIX II: INSTRUCTION OBSERVATION RUBRIC

| Instruction | Unsatisfactory | Basic | Proficient | Distinguished |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Communicating with Students** | Teacher's oral and written communication contains errors or is unclear or inappropriate to students. Teacher's purpose in a lesson or unit is unclear to students. Teacher's explanation of the content is unclear or confusing or uses inappropriate language. | Teacher's oral and written communication contains no errors, but may not be completely appropriate or may require further explanations to avoid confusion. Teacher attempts to explain the instructional purpose, with limited success. Teacher's explanation of the content is uneven; some is done skillfully, but other portions are difficult to follow. | Teacher communicates clearly and accurately to students both orally and in writing. Teacher's purpose for the lesson or unit is clear, including where it is situation within broader learning. Teacher's explanation of content is appropriate and connects with students' knowledge and experience. | Teacher's oral and written communication is clear and expressive, anticipating possible student misconceptions. Makes the purpose of the lesson or unit clear, including where it is situated within broader learning, linking purpose to student interests. Explanation of content is imaginative, and connects with students' knowledge and experience. Students contribute to explaining concepts to their peers. |
| **Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques** | Teacher makes poor use of questioning and discussion techniques, with low-level questions, limited student participation, and little true discussion. | Teacher's use of questioning and discussion techniques is uneven with some high-level question; attempts at true discussion; moderate student participation. | Teacher's use of questioning and discussion techniques reflects high-level questions, true discussion, and full participation by all students. | Students formulate may of the high-level questions and assume responsibility for the participation of all students in the discussion. |
| **Engaging Students in Learning** | Students are not at all intellectually engaged in significant learning, as a result of inappropriate activities or materials, poor representations of content, or lack of lesson structure. | Students are intellectually engaged only partially, resulting from activities or materials or uneven quality, inconsistent representation of content or uneven structure of pacing. | Students are intellectually engaged throughout the lesson, with appropriate activities and materials, instructive representations of content, and suitable structure and pacing of the lesson. | Students are highly engaged throughout the lesson and make material contribution to the representation of content, the activities, and the materials. The structure and pacing of the lesson allow for student reflection and closure. |
| **Using Assessment in Instruction** | Students are unaware of criteria and performance standards by which their work will be evaluated, and do not engage in self-assessment or monitoring. Teacher does not monitor student learning in the curriculum, and feedback to students is of poor quality and in an untimely manner. | Students know some of the criteria and performance standards by which their work will be evaluated, and occasionally assess the quality of their own work against the assessment criteria and performance standards. Teacher monitors the progress of the class as a whole but elicits no diagnostic information; feedback to students is uneven and inconsistent in its timeliness. | Students are fully aware of the criteria and performance standards by which their work will be evaluated, and frequently assess and monitor the quality of their own work against the assessment criteria and performance standards. Teacher monitors the progress of groups of students in the curriculum, making limited use of diagnostic prompts to elicit information; feedback is timely, consistent, and of high quality. | Students are fully aware of the criteria and standards by which their work will be evaluated, have contributed to the development of the criteria, frequently assess and monitor the quality of their own work against the assessment criteria and performance standards, and make active use of that information in their learning. Teacher actively and systematically elicits diagnostic information from individual students regarding understanding and monitors progress of individual students; feedback is timely, high quality, and students use feedback in their learning. |