

SchoolWorks

School Quality Review Report



Acceleration Day and Evening Academy (ACCEL)

April 27-28, 2021



About the SchoolWorks School Quality Review

The SchoolWorks School Quality Review (SQR) is a process that educators can use to understand and explain how well schools are working to educate students. The SQR places a team of experienced educators from SchoolWorks and, in some cases, team members from the Commission in a school to collect and analyze data about school performance. The length of the SQR is two days. The SQR is based on a transparent, research-based set of standards – the SchoolWorks Quality Criteria (SQC) – that serve as the framework to understand the effectiveness of school practices. The SQC are used to promote understanding and dialogue between the school and the site visit team through both verbal and written feedback.

Purpose

SchoolWorks has partnered with the Alabama Public Charter School Commission (APCSC) to lead the Spring site visits. The purpose of the SQR is for regular monitoring of the charter school contract. The results from the SQR are used as one of the multiple pieces of evidence used in the eventual renewal decision. As outlined in the APCSC Comprehensive Performance Framework (p. 4), “Qualitative measures, most often inputs like observations of classroom instruction, may provide context for the outcomes that authorizers analyze; however, inputs do not measure the academic performance of the students in the school and so are not included in the Academic Performance Framework.”

Process

The SQR process places a team of reviewers from SchoolWorks and, in some cases, team members from the Commission, in a school to collect and analyze data about school programs and practices. The SQR utilizes multiple sources of evidence to understand how well a school is working. It extends beyond standardized measures of student achievement to collect evidence in relation to the protocol’s criteria and indicators. Evidence collection begins with the review of the key documents that describe the school and its students. Key documents reviewed by the site visit team prior to arrival on site include curricula and related teaching documents, professional

development (PD) records, and student assessment results. This provides the team with initial information about the school’s programs and the students it serves. While on site, evidence collection continues through additional document reviews, classroom visits, and interviews with key school stakeholders. After collecting evidence, the team meets daily to confirm, refute, and modify its hypotheses about school performance, and then communicates its progress to the school’s leadership. The team listens to the school’s responses and makes every effort to follow up on evidence that the school indicates the team should collect.

The site visit team uses evidence collected through these events to develop findings in relation to the protocol’s criteria and indicators. The team identifies trends that emerge from the evidence base; therefore, only criteria with strong evidence corroborated by multiple sources will be identified in the SQR report. These findings identify strengths and areas for growth. At the end of the visit, the team provides a brief oral report to school leadership about its findings. This verbal feedback is followed by a written report, detailing the evidence that led the team to reach its findings. The length and depth of both verbal feedback and written report depend on the type of review being conducted.

The SQR places a high value on engaging the school in understanding its own performance. The process may be described as an open, frank, professional dialog between the school and the site visit team. The professionalism of the school and team is essential in the process. Both the school and the team have clear roles and responsibilities that are designed to promote good rapport and clear communication. All team members are governed by a code of conduct. Honesty, integrity, objectivity, and a focus on the best interests of students and staff are essential to the success and positive impact of the site visit process.

Domains and Key Questions

DOMAIN 1: STUDENT ATTAINMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

1. Does the school show a record of academic achievement and do students demonstrate growth over time?

DOMAIN 2: INSTRUCTION

2. Do classroom interactions and organization ensure a classroom climate conducive to learning for all students?
3. Is instruction intentional, engaging, and challenging for all students?
4. Do teachers regularly assess students' progress toward mastery of key skills and concepts and utilize assessment data to provide feedback to students during the lesson?

DOMAIN 3: STUDENTS' OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN

5. Does the school identify and support its diverse learners?
6. Does the school foster a strong culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion and ensure a safe, supportive environment for all students?

DOMAIN 4: EDUCATORS' OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN

7. Does the school design professional development and collaborative structures to sustain focus on instructional improvement?
8. Does the school's culture indicate high levels of collective responsibility, trust, and efficacy?

DOMAIN 5: LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

9. Do school leaders guide and participate with instructional staff in the improvement of teaching and learning?
10. Do school leaders guide facilitate intentional, strategic efforts to ensure the effectiveness of the school's program and the sustainability of the organization?
11. Does the Board provide competent stewardship and oversight of the school?

Domain 1: Student Attainment and Development

KEY QUESTION 1

Does the school show a record of academic achievement and do students demonstrate growth over time?

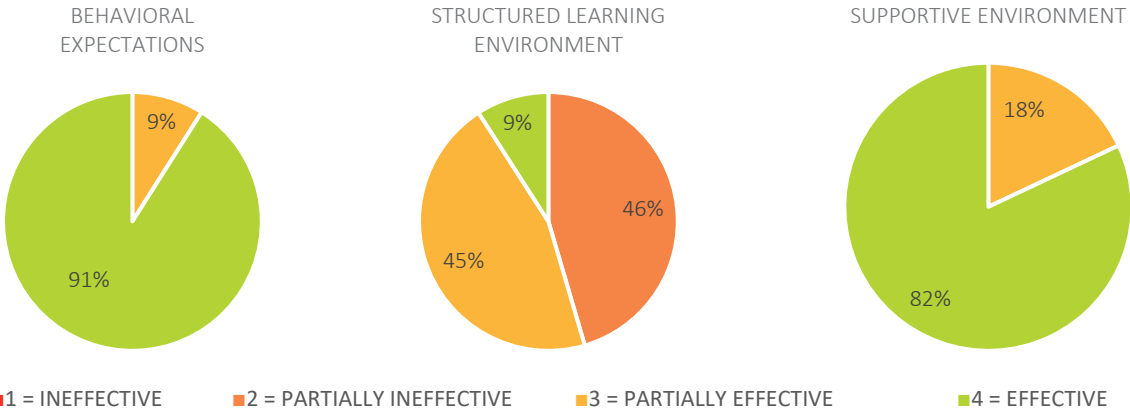
Students demonstrate growth on external assessments. Leaders and Board members stated that the school is focused on academic growth – specifically, Pre-American College Test (PreACT) to American College Test (ACT) growth, as well as Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP) growth, since most students enroll at ACCEL significantly under-credited or below grade level. This is further evidenced in their annual report that outlines their academic growth across the term of the charter. Leaders stated that from a growth standpoint, ACCEL outpaces demographically similar schools – high populations of students who are minorities and/or low-income – and their goal is to close achievement gaps and accelerate learning for students who have not experienced success in the past. Additionally, leaders stated that pre-pandemic students were showing tremendous growth on NWEA MAP assessments. A review of ACCEL’s 2019-20 Annual Report shows that according to the NWEA MAP assessment data, students grew at a pace of two years of growth in one year in mathematics and three years of growth in one year in reading/language arts. Further leaders stated that testing from the 2020 NWEA MAP Fall assessment did not see growth, but similarly, did not see much regression. According to their performance framework, ACCEL meets or exceeds standards for academic growth the last two school years it has been measured (SY17-18, and SY 19-20).

Domain 2: Instruction

KEY QUESTION 2

Do classroom interactions and organization ensure a classroom climate conducive to learning for all students?

Classroom Climate



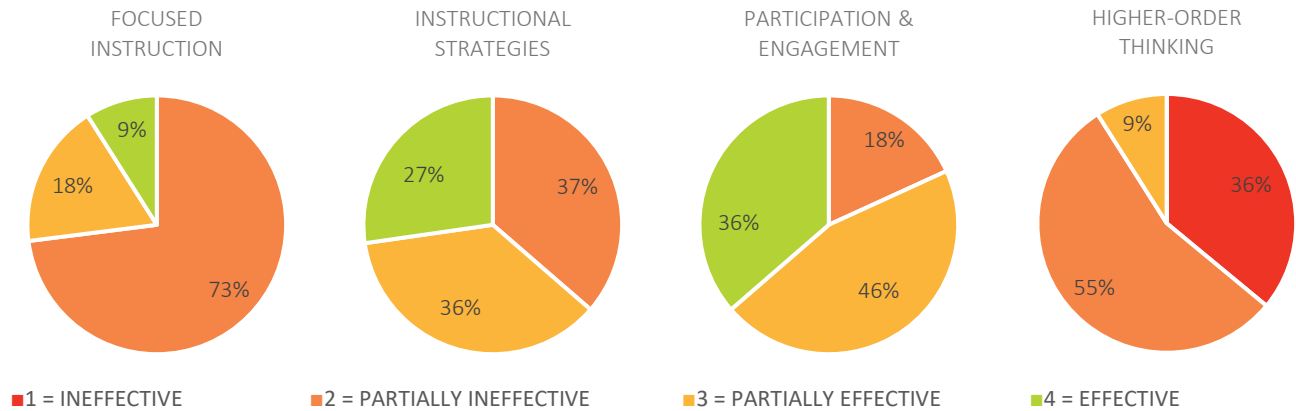
The learning environment is usually structured; however, learning time is not always maximized through effective planning and guidance. In 45% of classrooms (n=11), the partially effective provision of a structured learning environment was evident. In these classrooms, teachers were mostly prepared for their lessons with PowerPoint presentations, handouts, lab supplies, and materials readily available. Additionally, some teachers shared an agenda of the day's class activities. Additionally, in these classrooms, learning time was maximized for most, but not all, of the lesson. For example, bell ringer activities stretched beyond the time most students finished, so many students waited or sat quietly instead of being provided additional learning choices when tasks were completed. In 45% of classrooms, structured learning environments were partially ineffectively established. In these classrooms, most teachers were prepared, but learning time was maximized only some of the time. For instance, teachers lacked specificity and clarity in explaining tasks, resulting in teachers needing to circulate to every student to answer questions. Additionally, in these classrooms, the pacing of group activities – especially transition from direct instruction to partner work – was slow and timers or countdowns were not utilized.

The classroom environment is respectful and responsive. In 82% of classrooms observed, supportive learning environments were effectively established. In these classrooms, interactions were respectful and responsive. For example, teachers used calm, positive language, and interactions between students were positive and collaborative. Teachers warmly greeted students at the door and welcomed them into class, as outlined in ACCEL's Culture Playbook. Most students remained engaged in classroom activities and demonstrated internalized behavioral expectations for the entirety of the observation. In focus groups, leaders, teachers, staff, and students all pointed to relationships between students and teachers as one of the school's greatest strengths. Teachers and leaders also described how when students misbehave, teachers check in with them and ask how they can help them in the moment. Students stated that they feel interactions between teachers and students are respectful, even when a teacher is correcting behavior. For example, in one classroom, when a student cursed, the teacher quickly and quietly assigned a demerit in a calm tone and checked in with the student privately afterwards. Leaders and teachers emphasized, as outlined in ACCEL's Culture Playbook, that the school's focus is on restorative, not punitive, discipline. In these classrooms, students collaboratively focused on learning during turn-and-talks and group work. In focus groups, students noted that they enjoy being paired with different students on group work and described the importance of working on a team as an important life and career skills.

KEY QUESTION 3

Is instruction intentional, engaging, and challenging for all students?

Purposeful Teaching



Teachers are beginning to provide students with learning goals; however, these goals are not always clear, and instruction is not always focused and purposeful. In 18% of classrooms, the partially effective provision of focused instruction was observed. In these classes, clear learning objectives that aligned to standards were provided. Additionally, learning objectives drove lesson activities. Content also was delivered accurately and clearly. However, in these classrooms, teachers did not consistently hold all students to high expectations. For example, in some classrooms, teachers only called on students who raised their hands, allowing a few students to opt out. In 73% of classrooms, the delivery of focused instruction was partially ineffective. In these classrooms, objectives were posted. However, some objectives were activity-based (e.g., complete X project). In other classrooms, student activities and assessments did not align to the objective. For example, one learning objective stated that students would analyze but, instead, students copied definitions from the board. Teachers and leaders explained that creating quality objectives and ensuring they drive all lesson activities continues to be an area of focus. Review of the Spring PD calendar confirmed significant time spent on providing training around creating clear learning objectives. Additionally, in these classrooms, academic content was not consistently communicated with accuracy. Finally, in these classrooms, while there were high expectations for some students, teachers at other times accepted partially correct answers or allowed other students to opt out. When asked about high expectations for students, some teachers only shared behavioral expectations for students, such as being prepared with materials or indicated basic academic expectations, such as writing in complete sentences. Overall, leaders and teachers noted that they are implementing higher-order thinking questions and discussion into lessons to guide focused instruction; however, most classrooms did not display alignment of focused and purposeful instruction with stated objectives.

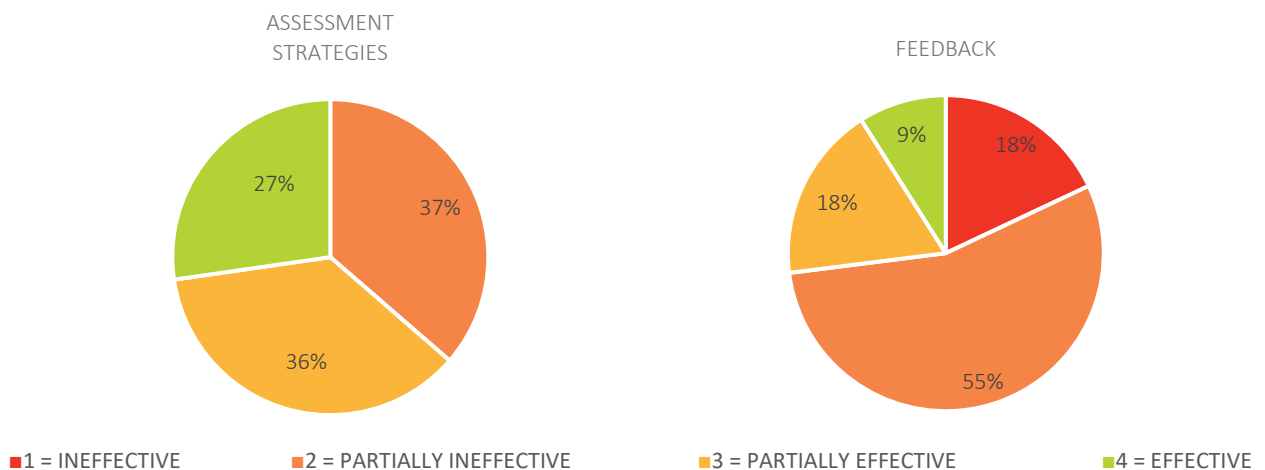
Instruction does not yet consistently require all students to use and develop higher-order thinking skills.

In 18% of classrooms observed, the partially effectively establishment of higher-order thinking was evident. In these classrooms, most, but not all, students used higher-order thinking skills during most of the lesson. For example, small groups of students or individual students were engaged in rigorous thought with the teacher and a back-and-forth conversation between most, but not all, students occurred. In 55% of classrooms observed, instruction was partially ineffective in requiring students to use and develop higher-order thinking skills. In these classrooms, rigor was evident only some of the time and for some students. For example, some student activities were not rigorous or challenging tasks (e.g., analysis, interpretation, application) but, instead, were low-rigor activities such as copying, summarizing, or recalling information. In other classes, students were actively engaged in activities or projects that did not assess the rigor of the stated standard (e.g., activities that demonstrated an idea but were overly simplistic without rigorous tasks). Other observed classrooms had higher-level objectives, but student work was not always aligned to these objectives. Some students were asked to explain, but not write or synthesize their thinking and understandings using evidence. In 36% of observed classrooms, the establishment of higher-order thinking was ineffective. In these classrooms, rigor was not evident. For instance, students were not asked to answer in complete sentences, use academic vocabulary, cite text to support their answers, and/or explain or defend their answers. Students were not asked to apply new knowledge or skills to investigate open-ended problems.

KEY QUESTION 4

Do teachers regularly assess students' progress toward mastery of key skills and concepts and utilize assessment data to provide feedback to students during the lesson?

In-Class Assessment & Feedback



In-class assessment strategies do not yet consistently reveal students' thinking about learning goals. In 27% of classrooms, in-class assessment strategies were employed effectively. In these classrooms, all students' understanding of academic knowledge was assessed, and assessments aligned to the key lesson content and objectives. For instance, in one classroom, the teacher circulated to every student to check on their work and gauge students' levels of understanding, as well as monitored assignment completion and accuracy through technology. In several instances, students were asked to explain their thinking or follow-up on an answer through the use of text-based evidence or explaining their computational strategies. In 36% of classrooms observed, in-class assessment strategies were partially effective at revealing students' thinking. In these classrooms, most, but not all, students' understanding of academic content was assessed during the lesson. For example, teachers used a variety of assessment strategies including checks for understanding on technology (Google classroom), circulating to check on student work, cold-calling students, asking for volunteers to answer questions, and giving exit tickets. In 36% of classrooms observed, in-class assessment strategies were partially ineffective at revealing students' thinking. In these classrooms, only some students' understanding around academic concepts was assessed. For example, while teachers asked open-ended questions, they were often answered by a handful of students consistently.

Timely, frequent, specific feedback is not yet provided throughout the learning process to inform improvement efforts. In 18% of classrooms, the delivery of feedback was partially effective. In these classrooms, teachers provided feedback to some students, including feedback on technology platforms, such as Kahn Academy. In one class, students were asked to explain their thinking, and then the teacher clarified a conceptual understanding; several students used that feedback to guide their group discussion. In 55% of observations, the provision of feedback was partially ineffective. In these classes, teachers provided clear, specific actionable feedback to only a few students. For example, in one class, only a few students received actionable academic feedback on the revision of work. In these classes, most feedback was mostly procedural (e.g., "You need to do this next; You can go onto the next section."), or not actionable, specific guidance regarding improvement (e.g., "Good job; I like that answer."). In 18% of classrooms, the provision of feedback was ineffective. In these classrooms, no academic-related feedback was observed.

Domain 3: Students' Opportunities to Learn

KEY QUESTION 5

Does the school identify and support its diverse learners?

The school has a process for identifying students who are struggling and at risk and systematically monitors student progress and program effectiveness. Teachers and leaders explained how they use the NWEA MAP assessment as a universal screener at enrollment to identify students needing support in math and reading. Leaders and teachers indicated that identified students are then enrolled in newly-created math intervention and reading fundamentals classes, which are created to better support students. In addition, leaders and staff described how the student support team conducts intake interviews with each student and family to ask questions (e.g., “What brings you to ACCEL based on the last three school years?”) to identify necessary behavioral or social-emotional supports. In addition, leaders and teachers described, and document review confirmed, that there is an established Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) system outlined in ACCEL’s 20-21 MTSS playbook that includes vision and goals (e.g., 100% of students who exhibit behaviors or achievement levels that “trigger” an MTSS response have an established plan within two weeks), roles and responsibilities of each MTSS team member, an annual meeting calendar, and specific triggers to target Tier II and Tier III behavior or academic interventions (e.g., more than two detentions in one quarter, below 20th percentile in NWEA). Leaders and teachers stated the MTSS team includes, but is not limited to, the MTSS Coordinator, advocacy counselors, interventionist, school nurse, behavior specialist, and members of the administrative team. The MTSS team meets weekly to collaborate, collect, and review academic, behavioral, and attendance data, as evidenced by MTSS trackers, meeting minutes, and kickboard reports; it also uses multiple data points to progress monitor students including NWEA, unit tests, work samples, Freckle reports, grades, attendance, discipline reports (tracked through kickboard) through a defined problem-solving process. Teachers and leaders noted how the MTSS tracker is updated weekly by the MTSS Coordinator to synthesize these data points and is shared with staff. Leaders, teachers, and staff all clearly described the processes that have been established and codified to support the schools most struggling students and, as well, all described a collective responsibility to be case managers. Moreover, teachers stated they appreciate how the MTSS process allows them to collaborate and identify strategies that are working for an individual student within a particular class or with a staff member.

The school implements appropriate supports for students who are struggling and at risk. Since many students come to ACCEL because they are struggling or at risk, leaders, teachers, and staff reported, and students confirmed, that students learn foundational habits of success (e.g., on-task behavior, goal-setting) in advisory classes. Students described how they use this time to check grades, meet with advisors, check school emails, and organize plans to make up missing assignments. Leaders, teachers, and staff all described the many supports for students who continue to struggle academically, including providing remedial classes (reading fundamentals, math intervention), after-school personalized academic learning support (called PALs), office hours on Friday afternoons, and Twilight – a targeted after-

school program for students nearing graduation who need credit recovery. Leaders described how Expedition Fridays allowed for students to explore post-secondary options (e.g., workplaces, internships, colleges). However, with restrictions during the pandemic, the school quickly pivoted to hosting Friday teacher office hours that allows for more personalized instruction for virtual students. For students who are struggling with behavior or attendance, leaders, teachers, students, and families reported that ACCEL has established several structures, including home visits, check-in/check-out protocols at the beginning and end of each day with interventionist or advocacy counselors, Wellness Wednesday sessions, and onsite counseling partners. Leaders, teachers, and staff noted that if students need more intensive support, functional behavioral assessments and behavior plans are implemented by the student support team.

KEY QUESTION 6

Does the school foster a strong culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion and ensure a safe, supportive environment for all students?

The school’s leadership and staff are beginning to be engaged, supported, and involved in a strong culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Leaders and teachers reported that given the events related to systemic racism that unfolded over the summer of 2020, on the first day of Summer PD, they kicked off the academic year by offering a training entitled, “The Moment in Which We Find Ourselves and Our Commitment – DEI and Social Justice.” Leaders reported, and teachers confirmed, that ACCEL has begun to implement restorative practices through their Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) system and conflict resolution program, also reflected in their annual PD plan. Additionally, according to leaders, teachers, and staff, the school is starting to disaggregate discipline data and using it to drive decisions. For example, leaders and staff stated that an analysis of discipline data showed that African-American females were being suspended at a disproportionate rate and for a longer period of time than their peers for behavior perceived to be aggressive. Using sub-group data, they were able to identify and address this inequity. Students, teachers, and staff reported that during months like Black History Month and Hispanic Heritage Month, there have been some celebrations in the form of artistic displays and opportunities for students to share their own cultural identities. While leaders and teachers stated that DEI is at the heart of what they do, sustained PD or multiple professional learning opportunities focused on culturally responsible pedagogy is not yet evident.

Most students encounter, and are involved in, a strong culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion. All students share a sense of belonging and pride in the school community. They spoke about how leaders, teachers, and staff have created a safe, inclusive environment where they feel welcome, known, and heard. Students stated that staff members treat students equally with respect. In turn, they have created a community in which students feel comfortable to trust adults and resolve conflicts with support. Students also described how they have learned to disagree appropriately, and how they appreciate having diversity in the school, such as among their peers who have disabilities or who are immigrants. They pointed to the development of advisory classes as a way to build habits of success and get to know one another and their advisor more deeply. Additionally, students remarked that when Expeditions were

happening, they were able to select activities based on their passions. In particular, they spoke about two affinity groups – “Girls with Pearls” and a young men’s group. However, when asked if they had opportunities to think critically about power and privilege, bias, or cultural responsiveness in the classroom, they were unable to provide any examples of how.

Domain 4: Educators’ Opportunities to Learn

KEY QUESTION 7

Does the school design professional development and collaborative structures to sustain focus on instructional improvement?

Professional development (PD) is designed to address school priorities, improvement goals, and/or identified areas of need. Leaders and teachers explained that PD generally comes in three formats: summer intensive development; weekly Friday PD; and weekly one-on-one teacher coaching. A review of the summer intensive development calendar revealed three weeks of staff development that covered a variety of topics, including (but not limited to): instructional methods; lesson and unit planning; PBIS; culture role-plays; trauma-informed practice; and blended and virtual learning. During this time, teachers and leaders reported that teachers had significant work time to plan lessons and collaborate. Ongoing throughout the year, leaders, teachers, and staff described how students are dismissed on Fridays to work at home, while teachers meet for weekly PD. Teachers and leaders stated that weekly PD is typically led by the instructional coach, with a focus on teachers planning for, and practicing, a skill or remediation lesson for the upcoming week. Leaders stated that they use instructional walkthroughs to check non-negotiables, identify common trends or areas of schoolwide improvement, and use that observational data to drive PD series. Leaders noted that certain PD sessions are led by teacher leaders. According to teachers, and confirmed by agendas, weekly PD largely follows a consistent structure with big picture announcements, shout-outs and appreciations, skill development, and time for collaboration, data analysis and updating MTSS trackers, as well as making calls to students and families. Finally, a key component of teacher development is weekly coaching with the school’s instructional coach. According to leaders and teachers, based on weekly observations, the coach and teacher will meet to debrief the observed teacher and student actions, reflect on student outcomes as seen in classwork/assessments, and craft personalized weekly goals to improve student outcomes in the following week. A review of Spring weekly PD planning shows instructional strategies building from week-to-week (e.g., posting objectives and success criteria, and developing discrete objectives that can be actively observed/measured). Additionally, teachers described how they establish goals for each week with the instructional coach during their weekly coaching sessions; they conveyed that school leaders are knowledgeable, supportive, and helpful.

Educators collaborate regularly to learn about effective instruction and students’ progress. In addition to meeting formally for PD on Fridays, teachers, leaders, and staff discussed how they engage in weekly MTSS meetings (classroom teachers, as needed) to continuously focus on improving student learning,

achievement, and behavior. In addition, teachers described approaching each other informally throughout the week to ask for help and share best practices. Teachers described how leaders have built time in their schedules to conduct peer-to-peer observations, both inside and across content areas. Teachers stated they regularly bring student work to one-on-one coaching meetings. Leaders and teachers described protocols around meeting structures and teacher expectations to develop reflective dialogue around data and instruction (outlined in ACCEL’s MTSS playbook and evidenced in meeting notes). Leaders described how they have adjusted content meetings over the course of the year to be more focused and targeted to increase accountability with specific deliverables (e.g., writing higher order thinking questions, creating rubrics for projects) to ensure that teachers have the framework to utilize time well.

KEY QUESTION 8

Does the school’s culture indicate high levels of collective responsibility, trust, and efficacy?

Educators’ mindsets and beliefs reflect shared commitments to students’ learning. Teachers, leaders, and staff conveyed a shared vision and value for ACCEL’s commitment to serve all students – from students who are ready to engage in Advanced Placement (AP) and dual-enrollment courses upon enrollment, to students who are academically or behaviorally struggling. Additionally, while teachers and staff were able to identify the many challenges their student population faces (e.g., having to work to support families, histories of trauma) consistently, school members relayed a collective belief in their students’ ability to excel. All leaders, teachers, and staff conveyed a belief that students’ learning is their collective responsibility, especially given the fact that many students who come to ACCEL have had negative or unsuccessful experiences with school. During both student focus groups, students described their close, trusting relationships with the adults in the building. Students powerfully conveyed that they had never seen a teacher or staff member at ACCEL ever give up on a student, even if they appear they do not want to learn. Students described how they felt ignored or disconnected at previous schools, but ACCEL felt “like a big family.” Students and parents stated that leaders, teachers, and staff conduct home visits and call regularly to check in and provide updates and encouragement. Teachers described how thorough the MTSS process, shared collaborative planning, and peer observations, they are able to hold each other accountable for the success of all students and work together to develop wraparound supports and connections for every student.

The school reflects a safe, trustworthy, and growth-oriented professional climate. Leaders, teachers, and staff all reported that they work together to solve challenging instructional or cultural problems. For example, according to leaders and teachers, they identified a need for increased explicit teaching around ACCEL’s habits of success, so they launched an advisory period. Students reported they appreciate this time to connect, plan, and get additional support. Similarly, leaders supported teachers through intentional PD around leading advisory, as evidenced by the Spring PD plan. Leaders repeatedly acknowledged that teachers have had to wear a variety of hats, particularly during the pandemic, but working together, through a constant process of feedback and data analysis, they have made adjustments to PD and the school schedule (e.g., addition of office hours, shifts in virtual learning) to optimize support

for student learning. Leaders, teachers, and staff describe adult culture as warm, familial, supportive, competent, and open. Leaders and teachers described how teachers engage in peer observations and feel comfortable providing each other with instructional feedback and strategies. Similarly, teachers described how leaders are constantly in classrooms, providing welcome and useful feedback. Newer teachers remarked that they could turn to any colleague for support, with veteran staff members always being available to help.

Domain 5: Leadership and Governance

KEY QUESTION 9

Do school leaders guide and participate with instructional staff in the improvement of teaching and learning?

School leaders have created, but staff have not yet internalized, a college-preparatory career-ready academic vision and goals to meet the vision. Leaders, teachers, and staff all were able to present the school's academic vision of creating college-and-career-ready courses. Moreover, students and parents described how ACCEL is preparing students for college and were able to describe how (e.g., assistance with college applications, career coaching, building habits of success). Additionally, ACCEL's leadership team and staff have created several foundational documents outlining the school's instructional vision: 2021-22 Strategic Improvement Plan, which prioritizes rigorous instruction, college-and-career-ready graduates, and strong climate and culture with corresponding measures; an outline of effective instruction that prioritizes the right targets, personalized pathways, and thinking and doing (with corresponding definitions of each priority); and an overview of the academic and curriculum model. Moreover, the Spring 2021 PD plans outline goals connected to staff development, advisory roll-out, students enrolled in credentialing programs, MTSS implementation, and operational goals. However, when asked about the academic goals and priorities of the school for this year, responses from teachers and staff were varied and not clear (e.g., writing clear objectives, teachers as facilitators, building habits of success, increasing credential opportunities, expansion of middle school programming). Leaders discussed how this year has been challenging to continue building their college-and-career-readiness programming due to COVID, which led to cancelling Friday Expedition opportunities, as well as limiting dual-enrollment opportunities for students. Additionally, they described balancing the work and life demands of teachers with pushing goals around the instructional cycle and other planned initiatives without overwhelming or demotivating teachers.

School leaders are working to ensure that teachers deliver high-quality instruction. Leaders and teachers reported the teachers are observed weekly by the instructional coach, in addition to occasional informal observations by other administrators. Teachers and leaders outlined that teachers submit their weekly lesson plans every Friday, and are regularly given feedback that is useful, meaningful, and timely. Teachers and leaders described how Friday PD is connected to look-fors in the following week's observation. In this way, teachers are held accountable for applying feedback to their practice, while the leadership team is simultaneously conducting weekly instructional rounds to identify areas of support for upcoming PD sessions. A review of Spring PD planning artifacts showed instructional strategies building from week-to-week (e.g., posting objectives and success criteria, developing discrete objectives that can be actively observed/ measured). Additionally, teachers described how they establish goals for each week with the instructional coach during their weekly coaching sessions; they conveyed that school leaders are knowledgeable, supportive, and helpful. Leaders described how they have adjusted content meetings to be more focused and targeted to increase accountability with specific deliverables (e.g., writing higher order thinking questions, creating rubrics for projects).

KEY QUESTION 10

Do school leaders guide facilitate intentional, strategic efforts to ensure the effectiveness of the school's program and the sustainability of the organization?

School leaders ensure effective communication and inclusive, transparent decision making across the organization. Teachers and staff described communication from leaders as fluid, frequent, and open (e.g., hallway conversations, open door policy). Teachers and staff stated they feel comfortable approaching anyone on the leadership team with a question, concern, or suggestion. Teachers and leaders described major points of communication at weekly Friday staff meetings, through emails (including the weekly memorandum), and through shared documents and Google classroom platforms. Leaders described that they regularly meet on Mondays to identify schoolwide issues, collaborate using a problem-solving protocol, and make a communication plan for staff for the following Friday PD. For example, leaders described a decline in kickboard logging of merits and demerits – a key element of the schoolwide PBIS system – so they presented schoolwide data, had staff discuss in small groups to process, and asked for feedback. Leaders described providing weekly updates on progress toward meeting positivity ratios of merits to demerits and individually conferencing with staff members who needed additional support or context on the importance of the school system. Leaders and teachers indicated that the school has established committees (e.g., teaching and learning, advisory, senior, culture) to involve staff in planning and implementation of school policies. According to teachers and leaders, these committees provide input on important decisions and lead key initiatives.

School leaders create and implement systems to recruit and retain effective teachers and staff who can drive dramatic student gains. Leaders outlined a robust interview process to ensure that teachers and staff demonstrate commitment to, and competence in, working with the school's target population, as well as exhibit alignment with the school's mission. Specifically, leaders spoke about searching for candidates who were excited at the opportunity – versus the challenge – of working at a high-needs school. Leaders explained that they use their networks locally, since most charter school websites do not attract teachers looking to move to Mobile. Leaders and teachers described the hiring process that includes and initial phone screening, a one-hour interview, role plays, a data-driven performance task, and a demonstration lesson. Additionally, leaders described how they grow teachers through their teaching fellows program, providing them with constant feedback, mentorship, and support. Additionally, leaders stated that they are currently developing career pathways to keep effective teachers engaged and committed to their work from teaching fellow to classroom teacher to professional teacher (teacher with added leadership responsibilities) to master teacher. Leaders acknowledged that they were still building partnerships with teacher residency programs and higher educational institutions to identify candidates and noted this as one of the biggest challenges for the upcoming school year and potential growth of the school. Finally, teachers and staff stated that they are regularly acknowledged and celebrated by leaders through shout-outs, invitations to share best practices, and celebratory events like staff lunches.

KEY QUESTION 11

Does the Board provide competent stewardship and oversight of the school?

The Board is working to provide strong oversight of the effectiveness of the academic program. Board members describe their primary priority is to help under-credited, overage youth get to a place where they can contribute to society and improve their lives through college-and-career-readiness. Board members emphasized that being the Founding Board for the first charter school in Alabama has been a massive undertaking, and they have learned much along the way. Members stated, and meeting minutes reflected, that they monitor academic performance of students through monthly reports from the school leadership team at Board meetings. Additionally, both leaders and Board members reported that the academic excellence committee engages the leader as part of their annual improvement plan, including observing data meetings to get a first-hand look at how the Board can support and enhance academic performance of students. Board members stressed the importance of understanding the challenges that teachers and students are facing and continually adapt to meet those challenges. Board members added that they look at ACT scores, attendance data, state evaluation data. While the CEO takes the lead on setting goals, the Board stated that they provide oversight and support to the CEO. Board members noted that since they created key ACCEL's performance framework with the commission, they monitor those measures on a quarterly basis, but also described how they are continuing to engage on a more granular level (e.g., meeting students and families, tracking honor roll and AP participation). The Board did note that, while they have expertise in a wide range of fields, they currently do not have a member who possesses instructional expertise to provide oversight of the academic program. However, they noted this a deficit they were hoping to fill with the upcoming reconstitution of the Board.

The Board maintains effective governance practices to ensure organizational viability, including the systematic selection and oversight of the chief executive. School leaders and the Board reported (and review of Board meeting minutes confirmed) that the Board meets monthly. The Board stated that they worked over the summer to develop a five-year strategic plan. Priorities include completing preparations for a middle school opening, completing a five-year renewal of charter, developing and implementing a long-term financial plan, developing back house data management and support, enhancing college-and-career-ready options for students, and developing and executing a strategic human capital plan. Board members also noted that they spent considerable time researching and creating an evaluation tool for the school leader that includes four parts: key objectives; annual targets; a qualitative section; and quantitative measures from Alabama report card – specifically, academic growth. They feel confident that they have created a tool that is uniquely tailored to ACCEL. The Board emphasized that they want to continue to grow the school leader and pointed to hiring consultants to support him in his role. In addition to oversight and evaluation of the school leader, the Board described the diverse expertise of its team to oversee school policies; several Board members recently attended a six-hour training hosted by New Schools for Alabama (NSFA). Leaders at ACCEL indicated that they feel supported by the Board, considering them the “heart and soul” of the school.

Appendix A

Site Visit Team Members

The site visit to Acceleration Day and Evening Academy (ACCEL) in Mobile, Alabama took place on April 27-28, 2021. The following team members conducted the visit.

- Jacob Schmitz, Team Leader, SchoolWorks
- Olivia Lahann, Team Writer, SchoolWorks
- Kristen Sousa, Observer, APCSC
- David Marshall, Observer, APCSC

Appendix B

Summary of Classroom Observation Data

During the site visit, the team conducted 11 observations, representing a range of grade levels and subject areas. The following tables present the compiled data from those observations.

SUMMARY OF CLASSROOM OBSERVATION DATA
Total Number of Teachers Within Each Rating Category by Indicator

