

SchoolWorks

School Quality Review Report



LEAD Academy

May 12-13, 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, into 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 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 & 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?

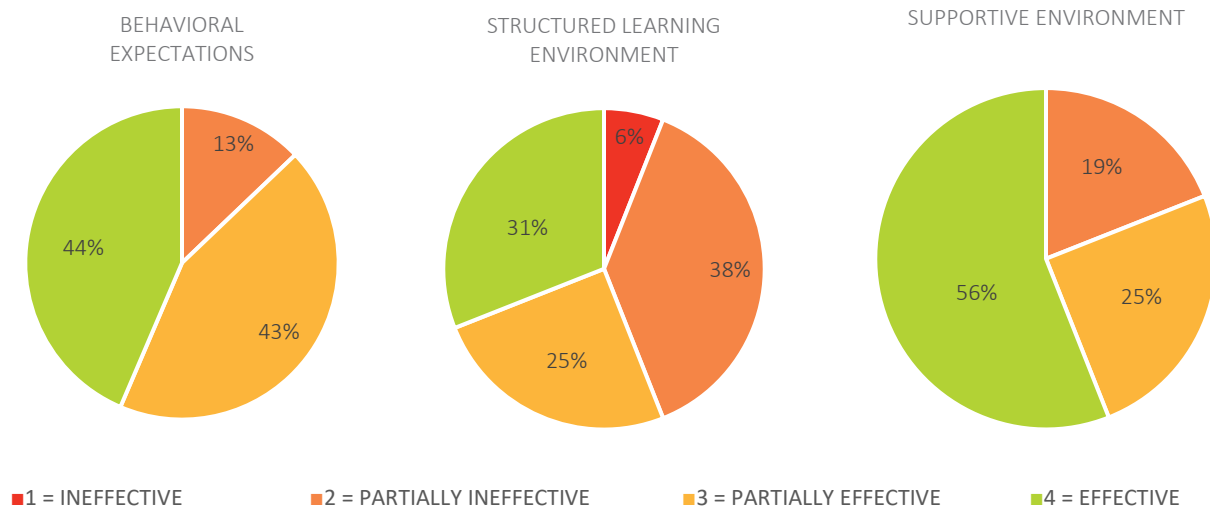
The school is working to provide students with opportunities to demonstrate growth through external assessments. Leaders and Board members stated that before SY2020-21, there were no assessments to track student growth data, both due to the pandemic and lack of State testing, and also because previous leadership did not implement criterion-referenced assessments. Leaders noted that the school purchased the Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP) for this school year and have administered the test three times (Fall, Winter, and currently administering Spring testing at the time of the site visit). Teachers and leaders explained that initial MAP Fall diagnostic testing was delayed, so teachers did not begin engaging with data until the year was well underway. When asked, teachers were not able to share specific goals (specific growth or achievement goals for reading/ELA or math), but they did discuss the collective goal of student growth generally. According to the school's 20-21 mission-specific goal progress report, LEAD Academy's instructional goals for SY20-21 are: 1) a minimum of 40% of students will show a minimum of one year's growth according to MAP Testing; and 2) 40-45% of students will score in Quartile 3 and Quartile 4. According to leadership and outlined in the school's progress report, 100% of tested students were within the expected achievement and Rasch Unit (RIT) scores as compared to national norms in the Fall, and 80% were within the expected range in the Winter. Additionally, 45.6% of students are in Quartiles 3 of 4 in Winter MAP Reading assessment, meeting their outlined academic goal. Corresponding Quartile math data was not included in the progress report update. It is also unclear how many students were tested, given that the report states that all traditional students completed the second round of testing, and does not clarify how many virtual students were not assessed. School leadership reported they did not yet have the results from the Spring MAP testing to determine if they were on track to meet end-of-year goals.

Domain 2: Instruction

KEY QUESTION 2

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

Classroom Climate



Behavioral expectations are clear and understood by most students. Leaders and teachers noted that they were in the initial stages of training staff using the Responsive Classroom model and are planning for schoolwide implementation of a positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) system in the upcoming year. Some teachers stated that inconsistency of expectations across classrooms is a problem, specifically in hallways and common areas. In 44% of classrooms (n=16), behavioral expectations were effectively established. In these classes, all students consistently behaved according to expectations throughout the lesson. Rules and expectations were posted, and teachers utilized a variety of classroom systems to reward positive behavior and administer consequences for negative behavior (e.g., clip charts, Class Dojo points). Students followed directions immediately, moved according to routines, and demonstrated internalized behavioral expectations. Additionally, when minor misbehaviors occurred, teachers successfully and quickly redirected and spent more time narrating positive behaviors (e.g., “I love how x and x are working together using a whisper.”) rather than addressing negative ones. In 44% of classrooms, the establishment of behavioral expectations were partially effective. In these classes, most students followed expectations most of the time, but some minor misbehaviors interfered with learning during points in the lesson. In other classes, a few students were sometimes off task with behaviors that were not disruptive but did not meet expectations (e.g., sleeping, head down), and teachers did not consistently redirect this behavior. In 13% of classrooms, behavioral expectations were partially

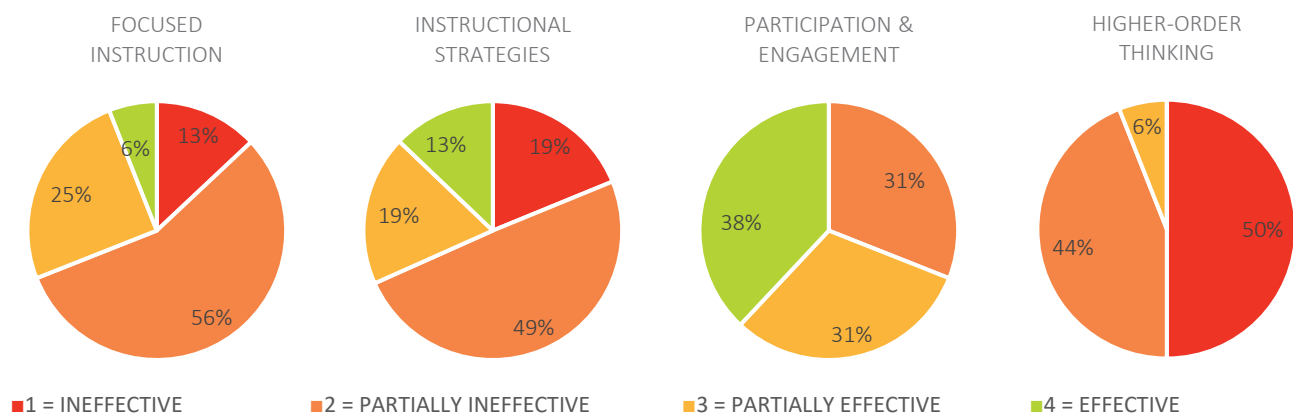
ineffective. In these classrooms, some students behaved throughout the lesson, but minor misbehaviors by several students (e.g., side conversations, calling out) led to disruptions in the lesson.

Most classroom interactions are respectful and responsive. In 56% of classrooms, supportive learning environments were effectively established. In these classrooms, teachers and students were respectful, caring, and supportive of each other. Teachers used positive, calm language (i.e., “Excellent work.” “You got this.” “Everyone – listen to x share a great answer.”). Similarly, students were respectful to teachers (e.g., “Yes, ma’am.” “Thank you.”) and with each other, often supporting or helping each other during independent or partner work. In these classrooms, teachers were also responsive to students’ non-academic needs. For example, in one classroom, a student was sleeping, so the teacher gently conferenced with them at their desk, and suggested they walk around the room while listening and participating in instruction. In 25% of classrooms, the partially effective establishment of supportive learning environments were observed. These classrooms were mostly caring; however, there were a few instances in which students were disrespectful with their peers (e.g., light teasing; talking over each other). In addition, while teachers noticed when students’ non-academic needs were not being met, their attempts to address these needs were not always effective. For example, in one class, a teacher continuously checked in with a student who was disengaged but did not provide interventions that effectively re-engaged the student. In 19% of classrooms, the establishment of a supportive learning environment was partially ineffective. In these classrooms, some interactions between students and teachers were not respectful in tone or content (e.g., students telling each other to shut up; calling each other names; shouting out). In some of these classrooms, teachers sat behind their desk for large parts of the lesson, and rarely noticed students who were off-task or were struggling with non-academic needs.

KEY QUESTION 3

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

Purposeful Teaching



Teachers do not consistently provide students with clear learning goals and focused, purposeful instruction. While leaders and teachers both stated that it is the expectation to have learning objectives for every lesson, leaders noted that creating specific, measurable objectives is still a major area of

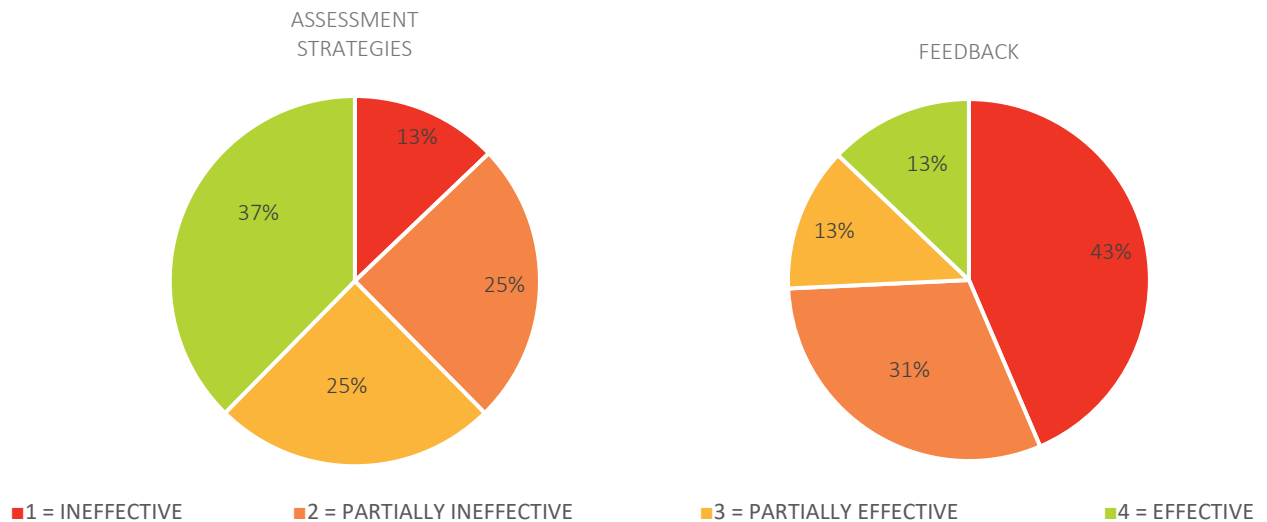
development for the school. In 25% of classrooms, the provision of focused instruction was partially effective. In these classrooms, the learning objective was either clearly posted or discussed. However, learning objectives lacked specificity around what students will know or be able to do. For example, one posted objective included the content standard and skill, but did not indicate a measurable, specific outcome. Additionally, in these classrooms, teachers generally communicated academic content with depth, clarity, and accuracy, as well as held high expectations for most, but not all, students. In 56% of classrooms, the delivery of focused instruction was partially ineffective. In these classrooms, posted or discussed learning objectives drove some, but not all, lesson activities. For example, in one classroom, students spent 12 minutes participating in an activity to reinforce basic skills but spent only a small part of the lesson engaged in content aligned to the learning objective. In other classrooms, the content delivered was not accurate at all times (e.g., completing a whole-group problem incorrectly). While teachers in these classrooms held some students to high expectations (e.g., circulating to groups, some cold-calling, having students complete work at the board), they allowed other students to opt out (e.g., heads down, not participating in academic content). In 13% of classrooms, focused instruction was ineffectively provided. In these classrooms, there was no evidence of a learning objective (e.g., not posted or discussed), with little-to-no academic content communicated to students, and students were not held to high expectations.

Not all students are consistently engaged in learning. In 38% of classrooms, the site visit team observed effective participation and engagement. In these classrooms, all students were engaged and participating actively, doing the heavy lifting rather than the teacher. For instance, , students were active participants during mini-lessons and spent time engaged in solving, discussing, or writing during independent or partner work time. Teachers employed an array of strategies that promoted student engagement throughout the lesson (e.g., name sticks, cold-calling, choral response, show with fingers, wait time). In 31% of classrooms, partially effective participation and engagement was evident. In these classes, most, but not all, students were engaged (e.g., a few students not engaging in choral response or partner work). Additionally, in these classrooms, while teachers employed strategies to allow most students to participate in the majority of the lesson, there were times when they did not result in student engagement (e.g., checking for whole class understanding, but not requiring all students to participate). In 31% of classrooms, the site visit team noted that participation and engagement was partially ineffective. In these classrooms, students were inconsistently engaged in lessons. For example, in one classroom, most students finished the assignment, but did not have anything else to work on for the majority of observed time. In other classrooms, engagement strategies did not result in increased participation. For example, in one classroom, while the teacher used sticks to draw names of students to participate, they allowed students to opt out or other students to shout out answers. Leaders and teachers both named student engagement as a priority and pointed to the shift in using a mini-lesson structure as a strategy to increase participation but also named this was still new for many teachers. The site visit team observed mini-lessons in a few classes but noted that implementation was not uniform across classes.

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 inconsistently reveal students' thinking about learning goals. In 37% of classrooms, in-class assessment strategies were effective in revealing students' thinking about learning goals. In these classrooms, all students were assessed multiple times throughout the lessons (e.g., purposeful circulation with checks for understanding; monitoring student work via technology platforms). In addition, these assessments were aligned to the key content of the lesson. In several instances, teachers asked follow-up questions to probe or build on students thinking (e.g., "Can anyone else explain a different way to solve this problem?"). In 25% of classrooms, the use of in-class assessment strategies was partially effective. In these classrooms, most, but not all, students were assessed on their understanding of academic content. For example, teachers circulated to most, but not all, students to check for understanding. In some instances, while the teacher used group formative assessment strategies (e.g., choral responses, hand signals), a few students were allowed not to participate. In 25% of classrooms, in-class assessment strategies were partially ineffective at measuring student understanding. In these classrooms, only some students were assessed. For example, some teachers did not circulate to students, only calling on some students to answer whole-class questions. In other classrooms, teachers circulated only to some students to check for understanding. In 13% of classrooms, the ineffective use of assessment strategies was evident. In these classrooms, no assessment strategies were observed. For example, in one class, the teacher assessed understanding of behavioral or directional guidance, rather than lesson content.

Timely, frequent, specific feedback is not yet provided throughout the learning process to inform improvement efforts. In 13% of classrooms observed, timely specific feedback was effectively provided throughout the learning process to inform improvement efforts. In these classrooms, at least half of

students received actionable feedback on academic content at least one or more times. For example, teachers circulated to every student to look at student work, and most students receiving clear feedback or a sustained conversation about their work (e.g., “Why did you select that to focus on?” “Can you compare your answer with x and figure out where you made a mistake?”). In 31% of classrooms observed, the provision of feedback was partially ineffective. In these classrooms, teachers gave feedback to only a few students (e.g., while circulating around the classroom, student working at the board). In some cases, feedback did not fully clarify misunderstandings or provide specific guidance. For example, in one class, a teacher was able to identify a common misunderstanding, and stopped to reteach a skill to the class, but did not circulate to check student work afterwards – instead, focusing a conversation on one group until transitioning to a new activity. In 44% of classrooms, feedback was ineffectively provided. In these classrooms, students did not receive clear, specific, actionable feedback. Feedback was largely focused on the completion of work (e.g., “Good work.” “Nice job.”) or on directions (e.g., “You should be done and moving on to the next activity.”). Additionally, the site visit team observed some teachers not leaving their desk to check on student work or provide academic feedback.

Domain 3: Students' Opportunities to Learn

KEY QUESTION 5

Does the school identify and support its diverse learners?

The school does not yet have a clear process for identifying students who are struggling and at risk nor systematically monitors student progress. The leadership team described the Response to Intervention (RtI) process for students who are academically struggling. They described using MAP assessment data as a universal screener to determine students below grade level combined with teacher recommendations, followed by teachers collecting data (e.g., student work samples, assessment data), and monthly meetings of the RtI team to progress monitor students, and determine needs for Tier III services or referral to further evaluation for special education services. However, when asked, teachers stated that there is currently no clear process for identifying students who are struggling or at risk. Additionally, most teachers stated that they are unclear who the RtI team includes or if the RtI team regularly meets. While leaders and some teachers identified RtI team members: the assistant principal, school counselor, mental health coordinator, special education team, and ARI (Alabama Reading Initiative) coach, they stated that the team does not meet regularly to review risk-indicator data to identify students in need of targeted academic supports or to plan interventions. Teachers noted that they received minimal training on the RtI process at the beginning of the year, and that they largely identify students who are struggling on their own through their in-class assessments. Teachers expressed concern that after they try an intervention (most noted small group instruction), LEAD Academy does not have clear next steps if a student continues to struggle academically (e.g., student intervention tracking, a process for movement through Tiers). Some teachers said they turn to the support team (special education team, counselors) for assistance, but noted that these are informal, quick conversations during planning time or in the hallways. Leaders and teachers outlined a five-step process for referring students needing targeted behavioral supports, which includes in-class warnings, conferencing, parent conferencing, and referral to either leadership, the mental health coordinator, or school counselor for further interventions. However, teachers stated that this identification process is inconsistently implemented and not transparent or fully understood, and there is no system to track behavior interventions.

The school does not yet implement appropriate supports for students who are struggling and at risk. Some teachers described the individual strategies they implement in their classrooms for students who are struggling academically (e.g., buddying students up, small-group instruction). Leaders and teachers also noted that they have begun Responsive Classroom training to provide schoolwide basic in-class preventions and supports to encourage positive behavior. However, teachers said that beyond limited in-class interventions, students do not receive additional academic supports (e.g., tutoring, pull-out, small-group intervention blocks). Teachers noted that they talk to colleagues about instructional strategies informally, but do not have devoted time for students to remediate skills. Several noted that the RtI staff have constantly shifted roles, and the process is unclear for students who continue to struggle after in-class interventions. Many teachers expressed frustration at having many students below grade level, yet not having clear interventions (e.g., research-based programming designed to remediate gaps) or support from other staff members. Parents additionally noted that they miss having the option of after-school

tutoring for their students if they needed extra help and would like to see this provided again post-pandemic. For students struggling with behavior, leaders, teachers, and staff stated that teachers refer students to either the mental health coordinator or school counselor who can provide additional behavioral supports. Teachers and leaders described how the mental health coordinator and school counselor work collaboratively, splitting their caseloads across lower and upper grades.

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 not yet engaged, supported, and involved in a strong culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Leaders and teachers noted that the staff is racially diverse and reflective of the community. When asked about LEAD Academy's approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion, leaders and teachers stated that there were some initial conversations and one training in September, but they indicated that the training has not been revisited in further schoolwide professional development (PD). Several teachers noted that the counseling team has sent out resources around DEI throughout the year via email (e.g., articles on systematic racism, toolkits for instruction); however, staff stated they can choose to use or not use materials, and there was no shared follow-up discussion. Leaders and teachers noted that some teachers actively incorporate student diversity and celebrate differences in their classrooms (e.g., learning about cultural traditions of students, choosing culturally relevant literature). Some teachers discussed how they worked to build inclusive communities in their classroom, but when asked about lessons about power, privilege, or bias, they were unable to share any examples. Leaders noted that this has not been a primary area of focus for them this year; however, the leadership team also stated that developing a shared understanding of how LEAD can enact practices that support and value DEI is important, especially given the history of school segregation in Montgomery.

Students are beginning to encounter and be involved in a strong culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Students all expressed a sense of belonging in the school community and described excitement at the return of clubs and activities next year, especially the construction of a gym. They also expressed a desire for more after-school and extracurricular activities. Students additionally indicated that they have the opportunity to learn Korean and noted that the school celebrates Black History Month (e.g., play, awards) and Cinco de Mayo. Some teachers added they have celebrated individual student cultures in their classrooms throughout the year and have asked students to share information about their religion and backgrounds. The site visit team also noted that pictures and descriptions of strong African American leaders line the hallway. However, when asked, students stated that the school does not currently teach them about topics related to DEI. Further, when asked, leaders and teachers did not speak about schoolwide initiatives to involve students in a culture of DEI. Finally, when asked, students noted that the discipline practices across the school are inconsistent, with some teachers struggling to manage their classes, while other teachers who have developed strong relationships with students have minimal behavioral referrals.

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 occasionally designed to address school priorities, improvement goals, and/or identified areas of need. Leaders identified the key school priorities: introducing a responsive classroom model, supporting the growth of teachers (through professional learning communities and mini-lesson implementation), and focusing on reading growth of students. Teachers and leaders described how the school year began with the establishment of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and stated that meetings covered such topics as responsive classroom, mini-lessons, and MAP data analysis. Most teachers noted that they appreciated this time to collaborate across grade and content areas. Leaders and teachers described how they created norms, introduced the practice and structure of PLCs, and began to meet monthly, also evidenced by mini-lesson training materials and posters displayed in the PLC workspace. Teachers and leaders stated that there was summer PD as well PD every third Friday of the month at the beginning of the year. However, teachers stated that due to testing and other scheduling issues, in-person PD has not happened since the Winter holiday, with most PD consisting of watching videotapes or completing individual assignments. Given that many of LEAD Academy's staff are either first-year teachers, many expressed wanting more support and follow-up from initial sessions in the Fall. Specifically, teachers noted areas of need including analyzing and using student data, differentiation strategies, RtI process and progress monitoring, implementation of reading curriculum, and virtual learning instructional strategies.

Educators informally collaborate; however, they do not consistently learn about effective instruction and students' progress. Leaders described that they meet weekly, mostly informally, but noted that the leadership team talks daily to problem-solve. Teachers stated that they meet weekly for grade level teams. While some teams stated that they have agendas, with leaders giving grade level leaders information to share with their teams, other grade level teams stated they meet more informally. Many teachers described how grade level teams share planning by subject, with each teacher sharing lesson plans with the rest of their team. Teachers noted that they do not have time to plan vertically with other grade level teams since PLCs have stopped meeting and expressed a desire to see PLCs return. Leaders outlined that since most teachers are just beginning to learn how to read and interpret student data, the assistant principal pulled MAP data and showed teachers how to do student data analysis. Teachers stated that beyond this training, they do not regularly meet to analyze data and make data-informed instructional decisions. Additionally, teachers and leaders stated that there is not currently a data protocol or structure to shape these conversations. Most teachers noted that they go other teachers in the building to talk about their own instructional practice. Some teachers noted that sharing knowledge and expertise among colleagues as essential, indicating that have taken the initiative to observe other teachers' classrooms during their preparation periods. However, leaders and teachers also noted there are a few teachers who do not want to meet, receive feedback, give feedback, or collaborate.

KEY QUESTION 8

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

Most educators' mindsets and beliefs reflect shared commitments to students' learning. Leaders stated that most teachers and staff believe that all students can learn and that most are at LEAD Academy for the right reasons. Most leaders and teachers described the importance of authentically knowing individual students and their families, as well as indicated that they understand that students' learning is their collective responsibility, regardless of students' home situations. For example, several teachers and staff noted that it is important to reach students where they are, especially given the challenges of virtual learning. Families described how most teachers and leaders went above-and-beyond to support their students. Additionally, students noted that they generally see most teachers as helpful and willing to provide extra support to achieve their goals. Parents stated that teachers provided additional supports to virtual learners and their families, often scheduling individual Zoom times to support students who are struggling. However, leaders noted, and teachers confirmed, that there is a small subset of teachers who do not believe that all students at LEAD can learn. When asked, leaders and teachers reported some teachers "were only here for the paycheck," or they believe that home situations of students impact their ability to learn effectively. Leaders noted that they had not renewed several of these teachers recently due, in part, because they did not hold a shared vision for how to educate all LEAD Academy students.

The school is beginning to reflect a safe, trustworthy, and growth-oriented professional climate. All stakeholders described how the school climate has greatly improved under the new leadership team. Leaders described how the transition was an adjustment since many teachers were not accustomed to receiving constructive feedback or being held accountable for their instructional practices. Leaders described how most teachers, especially newer teachers, were eager to seek and accept feedback, and were hungry to learn new instructional strategies. However, leaders also described another subset of staff who blame leadership and others for challenging problems, consistently do not carry out basic duties, and are unreliable team members. Most teachers stated that adult relationships were mostly strong, with teachers always being willing to help out or support each other. Additionally, most teachers described leaders as approachable, with an open-door policy, and highly visible during the school day. Teachers and staff did express a desire to have more opportunities to discuss their own instructional practice with teachers across grade levels, noting that they particularly enjoyed this aspect of PLCs.

Domain 5: Leadership & Governance

KEY QUESTION 9

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

School leaders do not yet ensure that teachers deliver high-quality instruction. Leaders described (and teachers confirmed) how they conduct formal teacher evaluations every semester. According to leaders and teachers, this includes a lesson plan review, a classroom observation, and feedback session, usually within 48 hours of the observation. Using the evaluation results, leaders stated that the next step is to build one-to-two professional objectives to work on with teachers. However, a review of samples of evaluations showed limited actionable feedback around improving their instructional practice. For example, one observation noted, “Classroom was very disorganized, and students were not aware of what they were to accomplish.” Another formal evaluation noted as an instructional goal/ next step: “Have an activity for... special holidays for students.” Beyond formal observations, leaders stated that they are constantly in classrooms, explaining that they conduct periodic walkthroughs using the walkthrough checklist. While some teachers agreed that leaders frequently conduct walkthroughs, other teachers indicated that leaders only pop into their classrooms to check in on them. Additionally, leaders indicated that they provide feedback after walkthroughs; however, when asked, teachers provided varied responses about receiving feedback. Some teachers indicated that they are provided with feedback after some walkthroughs, while others stated that they do not receive informal feedback on their instruction. Some teachers also reported receiving feedback on their lesson plans if they ask for it and stated that the feedback is useful. Other teachers reported that they receive no feedback on lesson plans. Some teachers further noted that the quality of feedback depended on individual leaders. Additionally, when asked, teachers were not able to explain how leaders hold teachers accountable for applying feedback to their practice and did not describe how they were working on individual goals for their professional growth.

School leaders are beginning to provide conditions that support a schoolwide data culture. As noted, leaders stated that prior to this year, there was not a regular cycle of interim assessments to gather data on student performance. Leaders described how they purchased NWEA MAP assessment at the beginning of this school year. Leaders stated that part of initial teacher PD was teaching how to administer the assessments. Following the first cycle of assessments, given the lack of teacher experience in synthesizing student data, leaders reported that they broke down data for teachers to analyze. Leaders explained that the next step is for teachers to analyze their own MAP data. Teachers noted that they looked at MAP student data with their grade-level teams. However, while some teachers noted that they use IXL data to inform small student groups, as well as noted looking at exit tickets to identify trends, teachers indicated that, overall, they do not look at data consistently. Some teachers further expressed concern that they did not have varied or current instructional data beyond MAP assessments to identify students in need of remediation or programs that can provide appropriate supports to students. Overall, teachers would like more support in analyzing student data, with 47% of surveyed staff members (n=17) stating that they need more professional learning in using assessment results.

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 do not yet ensure effective communication and inclusive, transparent decision making across the organization. Leaders and teachers described the ways that leaders communicate information to staff via weekly email, newsletters, and weekly Monday faculty meetings ranging in length from 15 minutes to one hour. A review of staff meeting agendas showed mostly logistical items (e.g., submitting grades, grading virtual work, preparing for Thanksgiving break). Teachers consistently described communication as an area of growth. Several teachers noted that communication about important issues (e.g., schedule changes, events) are often last-minute. Collectively, timeliness of communicating information was seen by teachers and staff as a major growth area for leaders. Most teachers stated that they do not have opportunities to provide input in planning and implementation of school policies. Teachers pointed to the PLCs as setting the structure for teacher voice and leadership; however, they noted that PLCs have been inconsistent and dropped off over the course of the year. While many teachers stated that leaders are approachable and open to conversations, they also noted that teachers and staff do not have opportunities to provide input on important decisions. Some teachers described decision making as being top-down and indicated that are unsure of the accessibility of the Superintendent or Board.

School leaders evaluate teachers and dismiss those who do not meet professional standards and expectations. Leaders explained that the previous administration hired many first-year and non-licensed teachers, and turnover following the leadership transition was high, with more than half of teachers and staff leaving LEAD Academy. Leaders described implementing a formal evaluation system, and they indicated that they have used this evaluation process to identify and address persistently low-performing staff members. Leaders stated, and a review of documentation confirmed, that PD plans were created for low-performing staff members. Additional documentation shows documentation of professionalism issues (tardiness to work, grade management). Leaders stated that four teachers recently received non-renewal notices due to lack of progress on PD plans, while also pointing to several newer teachers who had implemented their plans with fidelity and are returning. Leaders and Board members stated that filling all teaching roles with certified, qualified teachers was a primary goal for the upcoming school year. Additionally, leaders described how they have recently made significant changes to their organizational chart by moving some positions around to leverage strengths of the team.

KEY QUESTION 11

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

The Board provides financial oversight. Board members and leaders stated how the Board maintains and monitors complete and accurate financial records. Board members discussed that the first year at LEAD Academy (SY19-20) had multiple school principals, as well as a Charter Management Organization, which did not have structures to provide proper financial oversight, so the Board was overly involved in the day-to-day financial operations of the school. Board members described how the previous Chief School

Financial Officer (CSFO) got them to a place of financial stability, including a having recent audit with no findings. According to Board members, prior to each meeting, the CSFO and superintendent meet with the Board Chair to review financials line-by-line. Board members added that they are able to ask specific questions about the budget and receive detailed answers from the superintendent or the CSFO. Board members stated, and document review confirmed, that FY201 Budget Reports, monthly financial statements, and the school's audit are posted on the school's website. Board members and leaders described how the budget process is currently in place for the upcoming year, to ensure that there are two Board meetings before budget submission in September. The Board stated that they feel confident in the recent hiring of a new CSFO who has a robust knowledge of charter funding. When asked, leaders shared that the Board spends a lot of time and effort on finances to ensure they are in order.

The Board maintains effective governance practices to ensure organizational viability, including the systematic selection and oversight of the chief executive. Leaders and the Board noted that the Board membership composition possesses the necessary set of professional skills and expertise (legal, finance, policy, health, school board experience, information technology [IT]) to ensure organizational viability. Board members and leaders described, and review of meeting agendas confirmed, that the Board meets monthly (2nd Monday each month) to review academic, financial, and operational practices. Board members recounted how over the summer, they identified the need to hire a competent chief executive (Superintendent), even though it the position was not budgeted for the upcoming year. Board members described the transition from being a Board that was overly involved in the day-to-day operations of the school, to hiring the Superintendent to assume the vacuum that had been left by a lack of effective school leadership. The Board stated that they have a flexible system of ad-hoc committees (including Finance, Personnel, IT) that have been able to expand as needed. For example, the IT committee was very active during Chromebook purchasing and distribution. Similarly, according to Board members, the Personnel committee was very engaged during the Superintendent search, and will ramp back up when a principal search begins. While the Board has not currently evaluated the Superintendent, they are planning on conducting an evaluation beginning in July using a modified evaluation from the Alabama Association of School Boards, as well as a survey of teachers and analysis of student achievement data. Additionally, the Board is engaging with the superintendent to strategically plan for the upcoming year (e.g., building expansion, expansion of grades, academic goal setting), and conducted a 6-hour leadership retreat led by New Schools for Alabama (NSFA) in Fall 2020.

Appendix A

Site Visit Team Members

The site visit to LEAD Academy in Montgomery, AL took place on May 12-13, 2021. The following Team Members conducted the visit.

- Jacob Schmitz, Team Leader, SchoolWorks
- Olivia Lahann, Team Writer, SchoolWorks
- David Marshall, Observer, APCSC
- Logan Searcy, Observer, APCSC
- Peggy Haveard, Observer, APCSC

Appendix B

Summary of Classroom Observation Data

During the site visit, the team conducted 16 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

