

FOUR RIVERS COMMUNITY SCHOOL

2014 SITE VISIT



255 CAPITOL STREET NE
SALEM OREGON 97310

It is the policy of the State Board of Education and a priority of the Oregon Department of Education that there will be no discrimination or harassment on the grounds of race, color, sex, marital status, religion, national origin, age or disability in any educational programs, activities, or employment. Persons having questions about equal opportunity and nondiscrimination should contact the State Superintendent of Public Instruction at the Oregon Department of Education.

This document was produced by the Charter School Program staff
Office of Educational Improvement and Innovation
Oregon Department of Education

Please share this document with your colleagues.
All or any part of it may be photocopied for educational purposes
without permission from the Oregon Department of Education.

SITE VISIT REPORT: FOUR RIVERS COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Introduction

Site visits to the State Sponsored Charter Schools are a regular and systemic examination of a charter school's administration and implementation of the charter agreement. They are one of the essential function of the Oregon Department of Education, Office of Learning, as delegated by the State Board of Education (SBE), with ORS 338.095 (2) which states, "The sponsor or sponsor's designee at least annually shall visit the public charter school site and review the public charter school's compliance with the terms and provisions of the charter."

The mission of the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) is to "...foster excellence for every learner through innovation, collaboration, leadership and service to our education partners." With the mission and statute in mind, a Site Visit Protocol was developed to establish a framework and focus for the annual site visit to State Sponsored Charter Schools.

The purpose of the annual site visit is to gather and document evidence about the school's performance, implementation of the education and organizational program outlined in its charter, and compliance with law and regulations. The documents and observations gathered assist in assessing the extent to which the State Sponsored Charter School is faithful to the terms of its charter, educationally, and fiscally sound and organizationally viable.

Data Collection Process and Methodology

Acting as a representative of the SBE, the ODE conducted the 2013-2014 site visits to SBE sponsored charter schools. The site visit team at Four Rivers Community School included two members of the State Board of Education, two ODE specialists, a contracted retired educator, and a principal from another SBE sponsored charter school. In conducting the site visit, the team:

- Reviewed key background documents provided by the ODE, including the current charter agreement and the 2012-13 annual report.
- Researched other available information about the state sponsored charter schools, including relevant statutes, report and evaluations, newspaper articles and other data.
- Reviewed documentation provided by the state sponsored charter school prior to the visit.
- Arranged the site visit in coordination with State Sponsored Charter School, including identifying participants for the focus groups.
- Collected evidence of the school's compliance or performance with respect to its charter contract during the site visit.

The site visit occurred April 30, 2014 at Four Rivers Community School in Ontario, Oregon. The school campus has two buildings: one two-story building which houses grades K-5, with 7 classrooms, a reading room which serves as a library, a dance studio, an arts and science lab (that any teacher can use), a support services room, administrative offices, and a multi-purpose room; the other building houses grades 6-8

SITE VISIT REPORT: FOUR RIVERS COMMUNITY SCHOOL

(referred to as “prep”) students with three classrooms and a central area where students have tables and lockers. In addition, there is an athletic field with an amphitheater.

There is now the Family Education Center, which was in the planning stage at the last site visit, and is almost completed. It is behind the other buildings and includes a gymnasium/multipurpose space, a stage, changing room, adult learning classroom, nonprofit office and a concession area. The Center was developed out of a strategic plan in collaboration with local nonprofits and will be ready for occupancy this summer, 2014. The school leadership was very proud of this new space and the opportunities it will give the school and community.

The Review Team visited the entire campus. In addition to touring the facility, visiting classes, and observing students during and between classes, the Review Team devoted six hours to interviews with representatives of The Four Rivers Community School parents, staff, students, school leaders, and a charter board member. At the conclusion of the site visit, the team members met with the leadership team and staff members to share the team’s initial observations, follow-up questions and reviewed the site visit reporting process.

This report contains a summary of the data and information gathered prior to and during the site visit to the school. It also provides the Review Team’s observations about Four River’s compliance and performance as a State Sponsored Charter School. A part titled *Comment* at the end of each section is for consideration and possible action.

Background

Four Rivers Community School began its process of becoming a charter school when an application was submitted to Ontario School District in 2002. The Ontario School District denied the proposal. Four Rivers Community School appealed to the State Board of Education for sponsorship. The appeal was granted and Four Rivers Community School became the second charter school sponsored by the State Board of Education.

Four Rivers Community School opened its doors in the fall of 2003 with 25 half-day kindergarteners and 25 full-day first graders. There were two teachers and one instructional assistant in a cinderblock warehouse leased as a school. The two teachers served as the co-administrators. The initial contract allowed the school to grow one grade each year until it was a K-5 grade school. In 2007, Four Rivers requested, through a proposal, to add grades 6-8. The State Board approved the expansion and in the summer of 2007, FRCS secured funding and purchased two buildings, which were completely renovated, with 26,000 square feet on 4.5 acres. By 2010, Four Rivers Community School was a K-8 school with 244 students.

Currently, FRCS, in its eleventh year, serves 255 students in grades K-8. It is a Title I School-wide Program with 79% of the students qualifying for free and reduced lunches. The school has 26 employees (including 12 teaching staff and five paraprofessionals) that reflect the student population: 64% of the employees are Hispanic, 36% are

SITE VISIT REPORT: FOUR RIVERS COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Caucasian. In addition, 84% of the employees are female and 16% male with a very low staff turn-over reported.

Mission and Vision

The Four Rivers Community School has the following mission and vision as stated in its 2012-2013 Annual Report:

Mission

Four Rivers Community School is dedicated to providing progressive dual-language instruction and whole family education. Our students and staff demonstrate Pride, Purpose and Performance through everyday classroom activities and community involvement. We embrace diversity and cultural appreciation through instruction and practice.

Vision

To build generations of bi-literate and culturally engaged learners who envision a future of possibilities.

The vision of a dual language immersion program is clearly in place. The staff strives to recruit and serve underserved populations in the Ontario, Oregon area. The school promotes a culture of bi-literacy and builds partnerships with parents. Students demonstrated pride and respect as they talked about their school during the focus group.

The mission and vision of the school is also apparent in one of the major goals of the school: getting students to college. FRCS has a partnership with Eastern Oregon University located on the FRCS campus which provides opportunities for students and teachers in higher education. The school is proud that between fourth and eighth grade, the students have visited eight institutions of higher learning and have a strong sense that the school expects them to go to college. Twelve to 24 college credits through College Level Examination Program (CLEP) have been afforded approximately 85% of the 8th grade graduating students. In FRCS information, it states that college credits also allow their students to receive high school credit and provides them with an opportunity to take other courses in preparation for college, including a certificate of admission from EOU that provides “a fast-track to EOU after high school graduation.”

Comment

Four Rivers Community School has matured into a leader and model school. The Review Team encourages the FRCS board and charter school executive director to seek opportunities for dissemination of effective practices.

Enrollment and Attendance

Ethnicity and Race

Four Rivers Community School ethnicity and race enrollment data as of February 2013. The source is the ODE's Student Enrollment Reports for 2012-13 at <http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?=3225>. For the purposes of this report, Four

SITE VISIT REPORT: FOUR RIVERS COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Rivers' enrollment data are compared to Ontario School District because Four Rivers is located in that district.

GROUP	Four Rivers	Ontario SD
Female	47%	49%
Male	53%	51%
American Indian/Alaskan N	0%	1%
Asian	0%	1%
Pacific Islander	0%	0%
Black/African American	1%	1%
Hispanic/Latino	78%	61%
White	20%	35%
Multiracial	0%	2%

English Language Learners

Four Rivers Community Schools' 2012-2013 State Report Card shows its Percentage of Students in English as a Second Language Programs enrollment at 44%. Teachers "strongly agreed," in the June 2013 Staff Survey, that they "work effectively with English learners and ethnically racially diverse students."

Comment

The Ontario School District has approximately 14.8% of its students enrolled in English as a Second Language Programs. Four Rivers Community School has an opportunity to share best practices with the district and other schools serving high populations of English Language Learners.

Special Education

The Four Rivers administrators cited 10% of Four Rivers' students were eligible for special education. Ontario District Report Card shows its special education enrollment at approximately 12.1%.

Students with Disabilities receive services from Ontario School District every day. The teachers "agreed," in the June 2013 Staff Survey, that they "work effectively with special education students."

Curriculum and Instruction

Background

Four Rivers Community School is a dual language immersion Spanish/English program with a 50/50 week at-a-time model. It uses GLAD and SIOP as models for sheltered instruction. The dual language model, as described in the 2012-2013 Annual Report, is based on work on Virginia Collier and Wayne Thomas of George Mason University.

SITE VISIT REPORT: FOUR RIVERS COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Teachers use running records and quarterly pre/post-tests as part of using formative and summative assessments to help guide lessons. Teachers have a great deal of instructional materials, including supplemental materials the school has created. Instruction is often influenced by student interest in conjunction with integrating state standards and using the Common Course standards as the main guide. The school adopted Reading and Writing Workshop materials by Lucy Calkins which has helped structure language arts curriculum. Professional development for these workshops increased this year (see below).

In K-3 for one-hour, twice a week, teachers supplement instruction with *REACH* (National Geographic School Publishers), language games, and experiential learning. For all students in grades 4-8, teachers use Inside (National Geographic School Publishers) curriculum with laptops for each ELL students. At the same time, native English speakers are divided into Spanish language proficiency groups for 40 minutes, four times per week and have second language instruction using Hampton Brown's *Bien Dicho!*

The first grade program has two plans in place: "Academic Track" and "Progressive Track." It was apparent to staff that if students were not progressing during kindergarten, and again in first grade, that an intervention was needed. The process includes staff beginning to talk with the parents of kindergarten children and then throughout first grade. It was determined that at FRCS about 30% of first graders needed an extra year to really be prepared for second grade. Those students are then put in the "Progressive Track" and given an additional year at first-grade. It was noted that this year's fifth graders are the first "class" that had the Progressive Track in place when they were first graders. Since parents are involved in the discussions since kindergarten, the school has family support, and it been a very successful program.

This year a "Top 20" student identification program was implemented. Teachers collaborate to discuss the needs of students (e.g., assessment data, classroom work, family situation, siblings) who require additional support. These students all receive a home visit and a specific program of support is determined. Teachers noted that the "Top 20" is a 'fluid' list as students improve, and are off the list, other students/families can receive help. One of the often used phrases at Four Rivers is: "Educating parents/families---not just children."

The K-5 Academic Academy is also an integral program of student support. Teachers invite students to a Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday after school tutoring opportunity. The focus of the week is specific for the child and the following week other students, depending on need, will be invited. This allows staff to meet the needs of students on a regular and timely schedule.

Students noted that they feel the instruction is "just the right amount of challenge." Teachers provide tools to help students accomplish the work. Students reported they can get help during after school study hall or by just asking a teacher. High school students, who completed the education at FRCS, often come back to visit and help other students. Friday morning is a project-based learning time when students can

SITE VISIT REPORT: FOUR RIVERS COMMUNITY SCHOOL

choose different subjects of interest (i.e., swimming lessons, golf, engineering, first aid, sign language) and the afternoon students work on topics such as community organization or cultural mythology. Students reported that teachers “move beyond the outlined curriculum” and are encouraged to “be independent learners.”

Parents made the following comments as to why they wanted their child to attend FRCS:

- “Parents of children already here love the school.”
- “It was a small school with a caring staff and teachers communicate with children and families.”
- “Heard only positive things about the school.”
- “I wanted my child to have a bilingual education. We speak English [one parent is Latino] at home so wanted them to have a bilingual background.”
- “Student had an issue at a bigger school so I appreciate the small welcoming school. Also the staff has good bilingual communication.”

Students made the following comments as to why they like FRCS:

- “I am being prepared for high school and the future.”
- “Teachers push me and give me a sense of responsibility.”
- “I can trust teachers.”
- “Other school had a lot of bullying. This school has a sense of community.”
- “People respect one another.”
- “The PRIDE points help me and other students understand how to behave.”
- “Everyone cares about you and help so you don't fall behind.”
- “I feel safe and welcomed. It has formed a strong family feeling in the school.”
- “At my old school parents were not welcome unless it was a conference. Here, parents are very welcome.”

Observations

The Review Team noted that even with an open floor plan (classrooms without full walls), the noise level is low; teachers feel very comfortable being able to share with one another and hear what other teachers are doing. Although, in another building, the prep building teachers, feel totally a part of the whole school/staff as they go between buildings and have built relationships with other teachers. The Executive Director has encouraged grade-level teams by giving them a common lunch every day which fosters an environment of constant collaboration, curriculum planning and co-teaching.

The Review Team members observed a variety of classrooms during the visit. Students and staff were actively engaged in Spanish speaking with very little (or no) English being spoken in classrooms. It was explained that to be fully dual-language immersion, classrooms have one-week English only and one-week Spanish only. Reviewers reported seeing use of Smart Boards, iTouch devices, computers, books and materials. Students were working independently, others encouraged to share with one another, some were brainstorming ideas together or were taking notes. In some classrooms,

SITE VISIT REPORT: FOUR RIVERS COMMUNITY SCHOOL

teachers and paraprofessionals were moving around the room to help different students and in others, the teachers were directing the discussion. Classrooms were organized with literacy-rich walls, materials in Spanish and English, and helpful reminder posters (especially in the upper grades).

Professional Development

ODE Site Visits are Not for Teacher or Administrator Evaluations

The site visit and report are not intended to be and should not be interpreted to be evaluations of individual teachers or their instruction or an evaluation of the school administrator. Those are the responsibilities of the Four Rivers Community School's administrator and board.

Four Rivers Community School's Processes for Teacher and Administrator Evaluations

The teachers reported their evaluations this year have continued to be focused on their goals, but that the process has changed. Teachers are observed by the Executive Director using four areas: Report Cards/Grading; Common Core/Smarter Balanced; Data-driven decision making; Organization. Each area is analyzed by five (SMART) criteria: Strategic and Specific; Measurable; Attainable; Results-based or Research-based; Time-Bound. The Executive Director has also developed a teacher evaluation checklist which includes: Teaching Techniques; Effective Planning; Student/Teacher Relationships; Classroom Environment; Assessment; Personal Relationships. The director rates a series of statements for each area by Non-observed, Unsatisfactory, Developing, Strong and Commendable.

The teachers reported that they believe the evaluation process is more accountable, and they receive feedback more frequently. Teachers are more involved in observations since their goals are being checked quarterly. They believe they are getting positive support, having weaknesses addressed and help with setting goals. Teachers also said that the evaluation process is also helping to determine the professional development needed the next year.

The Charter Board also has a process for an annual review of the Executive Director. She determines her goals for the year and updates the board throughout the year on her progress. At the end of the year, the board will evaluate how she has accomplished her goals. The board clarified that as the needs of the school changes her goals will be adjusted. The Charter Board is not using Administrator Standards and stated that the Executive Director is more of a CEO than a school administrator.

Comment

The charter board is encouraged to continue to conduct an annual performance review for the Executive Director and consider aligning the tool to educational leadership standards. Based on performance reviews, it would be beneficial for the board to

SITE VISIT REPORT: FOUR RIVERS COMMUNITY SCHOOL

consider providing professional development opportunities to the ED to support continued growth.

Federal Law, Highly Qualified to Teach

The 2012-13 Four Rivers' School 2012-2013 State School Report Card shows 100% of its teachers were highly qualified, assignments consistent with state and federal standards, for their teaching.

Staff Licensure and Years of Experience

Teachers interviewed, reported having one to more than six years of experience. Four Rivers' School's 2012-13 Report Card shows 30% of the school's teachers hold a Master's Degree or higher and none of the staff had an Emergency or Provisional Credential. The average years of experience for teachers was reported in the Report Card as 4.7.

Professional Development (PD) and Other Supports

The partnership with Eastern Oregon University is the cornerstone of the school's professional development. EOU provides opportunities for pre-service teachers, FRCS faculty, EOU research faculty and students to work with the Center for Teacher and Learning located on the FRCS campus. Teachers reported they are receiving extensive professional development from Heinemann on Writers' and Readers' Workshop strategies. This has included an on-site trainer (several times this year) working with staff in and out of class, meeting with teams and the staff as a whole. Throughout the year, this has included on-going support that staff believes has been very beneficial.

Other professional development has included science (the teacher has been on a content plan committee for the state and has brought back strategies to his classroom), Professional Learning Teams, common core material, collaboration skills, and attending conferences such as the Bilingual Educator Conference. Teachers also reported that professional development is "evenly distributed across all content areas, not just English and math." When asked what professional development support is still needed, the following were suggestions: more classroom support; more collaboration time in order to implement what they have learned; more support to new teachers; more technology training in order to keep up with technology changes.

Student Performance Data

Participation in State Assessments

Four Rivers' School Report Card shows a 100% of its students participated in the 2012-2013 Oregon Assessments of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS) compared to the state participation target of 94.5%.

SITE VISIT REPORT: FOUR RIVERS COMMUNITY SCHOOL

State School Report Card – 2012/2013

Four Rivers Community School's 2012-2013 OAKS testing results and the Oregon Report Card, revealed a Level 4 rating.

Four Rivers is located in the Ontario School District, but the Ontario School District does not sponsor Four Rivers Community School.

School Improvement/Organization

In Four Rivers Community School's 2012-2013 Annual Report, the School Improvement plan included the following Core Values:

- foster positive collaborative and reflection amongst small, integral stakeholder groups;
- promote educational opportunities for parents to become integral members of the educational team;
- honor students' native language and knowledge while assisting them in acquiring a second language;
- develop bi-lingual, bi-literate, bi-cultural individuals who can build community bridges;
- provide innovative, engaging, relevant and multi-disciplinary coursework;
- integrate Pride, Purpose, and Performance as supporting pillars of personal character;
- provide access to advanced educational opportunities that assist students in envisioning their potential future;
- technology;
- integrity—hold a strong commitment to personally furthering the mission/vision of Four Rivers.

As a dual-language school, the core values listed above address the various aspects and needs of staff, students and parents. The Review Team saw examples of how students' language is honored, parents are included in the process of a student's education, and teachers reflect on data.

The Charter Board member shared that the board has community support, especially with the new facility opening. The board itself is grounded with a stable financial basis. The board believes the buy-in from parents has been extremely important. The "One Hour a Week" campaign (parents were asked to volunteer at least one hour a week) has also resulted in increased parent involvement. The board has been careful to explain to parents the difference between a charter school vs. a district school with statements such as "We are a team raising the child."

Staff academic priorities include meeting state standards, aligning curriculum with standards, and making sure students are progressing. Staff noted that they are always

SITE VISIT REPORT: FOUR RIVERS COMMUNITY SCHOOL

pushing to improve language development with high expectations for both English and Spanish.

One of the ways staff engages with students and their families is through the Home Visits. Not only do all kindergarten children receive a home visit, but they also receive three home-visit conferences throughout the year. At the other grades, home visits occur, often during spring conference time. The teachers believe the home visits have become part of the school culture. A team of two teachers make home visits, have an intentional and explicit agenda and write a summary to document the visit. The agenda and summary documents were improved this year after staff discussed that a change was needed to enhance the visits. Teachers reported that home visits help track students over time but also gave teachers a chance to celebrate successes with the child and family in person. Teachers are also hoping to help parents understand the importance and value of home visits as a recent survey suggested parents did not fully understand the purpose of the visits. During the parent focus group, there were positive comments about the home visits, especially helping the family and child feel more comfortable at the school. Parents believe the open communication and the child's academic progress discussion were strengths of the home visit and the school in general.

School Effectiveness

The school leadership believes that one strength of the school is that the children are getting “more than a standard education.” Another strength are the pre-kindergarten meetings held once a month (once children are identified) are also helping parents and their children to become prepared for the upcoming school year. The teachers believe the strengths of the school are its advocating for Latino families, a strong teaching staff, and the home-school connections. The teachers “love their kids” and feel dedicated to the families and children. Challenges include finding bilingual teachers (strong in English and Spanish) and fundraising in the poorest county in Oregon. The leadership noted that the school is receiving good publicity in the local newspaper. Always striving to improve, both the leadership and the teachers discuss often “What would make this a better school for students?”

The Charter Board has developed a strategic plan. It also spent last year reviewing policies and procedures. It has not developed a formal evaluation of themselves as a board and believes this is a good time to create such a process.

Parents, in the focus group, commented on their approval of school uniforms, appreciation of staff with behavior issues and follow-up, the children learning in both languages especially if only one language spoken at home, and the support of the child to not feel “boxed in.” Parents also complimented the staff on the many ways they communicate with them: texting, positive postcards, phone, email, calendar/newsletter, notes in folder, quarterly progress reports and every 2 to 3 weeks reports to parents of prep school students. Parent said they, themselves, receive help from the school, such as becoming a citizen, completing job application/medical insurance assistance forms,

SITE VISIT REPORT: FOUR RIVERS COMMUNITY SCHOOL

and providing them with community resources. Finally, the parents believe the school “bridges the culture with families, even those who speak English at home but want to maintain a Spanish culture.” They know the school is about the whole family and not just their children.

From the June 2013 Staff Survey, the statements that teachers “strongly agreed” with included: effective parent involvement can increase student achievement; I believe every student can learn; quality work is expected of all students; quality work is expected of me; quality work is expected of all the adults working at this school; it is important to communicate often with parents; and I love to teach. Parents, responding to the June 2013 Parent Survey, “strongly agreed” with the following statements, for example: I feel welcome at my child's school; the school expects quality work of its students; I respect the school's teachers; I support my child's learning at home. Students, responding to the June 2013 Student Survey, “strongly agreed” with the following statements, for example: my family wants me to do well in school; my teacher is a good teacher; my teacher believes I can learn; my principal cares about me.

Summary

The Review Team saw evidence of successful students and an engaged and collaborative staff. The staff has shown it is involved in a continuous improvement cycle in areas such as curriculum, professional development and policy development. Teachers see themselves as learners with professional development as a focus and priority for all staff. Teachers also believe there is strong leadership at all levels and they, themselves, have a strong “buy in” to programs, curriculum, operations and commitment to the school. There is an innovative, problem solving and responsive approach by all staff when faced with challenges. Students feel safe and are encouraged in a number of ways to think about college and a career. Students are also held accountable for their academic performance and behavior. Latino families have support and strong ties to the school. The culture of the school is welcoming to everyone. The staff intentionally builds home-school connections in many ways. The community partnerships and empowerment has also been a driving force to see the Family Education Center open this summer. The facilities, overall, are impressive but the new addition of the center is remarkable.

During focus group discussions, there were a few challenges. Students wish they had sports more readily available on campus and the option of taking advanced classes at the high school. Students realize the uniforms are important and appreciate the fact that no one gets bullied because of clothes, but students still think uniforms limit their self-expression. While they feel prepared to go on to high school, they do worry about topics such as knowing how to use a lock on a locker. Parents feel one challenge is helping students learn two languages and to write each one correctly. The teachers believe a challenge can be with communication across the school so feelings don't get hurt if not everyone gets the information. The board feels its greatest challenge is

SITE VISIT REPORT: FOUR RIVERS COMMUNITY SCHOOL

recruiting teachers; Nyssa is preparing to become a dual-language school which will add to the area's need for bilingual teachers. The school leadership would like to strengthen the non-profit fundraising efforts. This would help FRCS in “growing our own teachers” thus providing the resources (i.e., helping students afford college) and enhancing relationships to achieve this goal. Finally, the school leadership believes an important challenge is making sure FRCS has enough people to complete its mission.

The Review Team did find areas that would benefit the school and recommend they be discussed by the Charter Board:

- Teacher recruitment for qualified certified bilingual K-8 must be a priority. This may include more partnership work with EOU.
- Use the strategic plan to track the progress of the Charter Board.
- Review the Executive Director's evaluation process to be sure to use teacher input on her evaluation. Teachers were asked some questions on a recent survey about the administration; this information should be included with more questions developed to give the board appropriate data.
- Administration support needs to be addressed in order to avoid burnout by the Executive Director and support professional development.
- Fundraising is a challenge, especially in Ontario and Malheur County. It would be good to determine strategies that will work, as well as who is responsible for fundraising.
- Professional development of in-class instructional support needs to be on-going for all teachers.