

M E M O R A N D U M

to: Members of the Charter School Review Committee, Jarett Fields
cc: David Chief, Janice Ereth, Colleen Kerwin
from: Sue Gramling, NCCD Children's Research Center
subject: Analysis and recommendation regarding Milwaukee Math and Science Academy's probationary status
date: February 9, 2016

On September 10, 2015, the Charter School Review Committee (CSRC) received and accepted the Milwaukee Math and Science Academy's (MMSA) 2014–15 Programmatic Profile and Educational Performance Report. At that time, the CSRC was concerned that the progress made during the 2014–15 academic year might not be sustained over the 2015–16 academic year. The CSRC extended the school's probationary status and asked MMSA to provide a report at the middle of the 2015–16 school year, with the possibility of lifting the school's probationary status at that time. A letter outlining the required content for the midyear information and data submission was sent to the school on October 30, 2015.

MMSA submitted all of the required information in a very timely fashion to the chair of the CSRC, CSRC staff, and staff of the Children's Research Center (CRC). Following is CRC's analysis of the information submitted by the school at midyear, which included the following areas:

1. The steps the school has taken toward the recommendations for school improvement;
2. An explanation of the specific measures taken during the first half of the 2015–16 academic year to reduce the number of out-of-school suspensions, including professional development activities regarding appropriate behavioral consequences;
3. A list of the school's administrative leadership and a list of the board of directors at the end of the first semester;
4. Data regarding the engagement indicators: attendance, student reenrollment (return rate), student retention, instructional staff return rate, and instructional staff retention rate for the first semester.

1. Steps Taken Toward School Improvement Recommendations

MMSA submitted a detailed letter with an explanation of the specific steps taken to address the school improvement recommendations included in its 2014–15 Programmatic Profile and Educational Performance Report. Please see pages 1–18 of MMSA’s January 29, 2016, letter to the CSRC chair, Kevin Ingram.

CRC staff have reviewed MMSA’s efforts as explained in the letter and find the efforts to be both specific and responsive to the recommendations.

2. Specific Measures Taken to Reduce Out-of-School Suspensions

In the same letter to the CSRC chair, on pages 19–23, the school explained the specific measures it has taken to reduce the number of out-of-school and in-school suspensions, including professional development activities regarding appropriate behavior consequences.

CRC staff have reviewed these measures and found them to be specific and responsive to the problem.

CRC also examined the data submitted by the school regarding in-school and out-of-school suspensions, specifically the amount of time students spent, on average, in suspension (either in-school or out-of-school). Throughout the first semester of the 2015–16 school year, 116 students from K4 through eighth grade were suspended at least once.

Of those students, 98 spent, on average, 2.7 days out of school on suspension, and 41 students spent an average of 1.2 days in school and on suspension. Note that 23 students were given both in-school and out-of-school suspensions during the year.

During the entire 2014–15 school year, 154 students were given out-of-school suspensions, with an average length of 4.1 days. During the first semester of the 2015–16 school year, 98 students had out-of-school suspensions, with an average length of 2.7 days.

The first-semester data indicate that the school is on track for decreased average length of out-of-school suspensions. It is difficult to estimate the actual number of students who may be suspended for the first time during the second semester.

Additionally, during the first semester this year, 41 students spent an average of 1.2 days in school and on suspension. Last year, 55 students spent an average of 1.6 days on suspension in school. These data indicate the school is on track for decreasing the average time spent on suspension in school. It is difficult to estimate the actual number of students who may receive in-school suspensions for the first time during the second semester.

3. Board and Administrative Leadership Stability

The officers of MMSA's board of directors (the board president and vice president/treasurer) have served on the board since fall 2013. There are three other board members. Of these, one has been serving on the board since May 2015, and two have been serving since September 2015.

Regarding the administrative leadership of the school, the principal/director, the instructional coordinator, and one of the two deans of students have been in their positions since last school year. One dean of students, who left at the end of the 2014–15 school year, was replaced in August 2015.

4. Engagement Data Analysis

a. *Attendance:*

CRC examined student attendance in two ways. The first reflects the average time students attended school, and the second includes excused absences. Both measures include all students enrolled at any time during the first semester. The school considered a student present if he/she arrived at school no later than 10:00 a.m. and remained in class for the rest of the school day or arrived at school by 8:00 a.m. and remained in class until at least 1:00 p.m.

Attendance data were available for 365 students enrolled during the first semester. On average, students attended 91.7% of the time. When excused absences were included, the attendance rate rose to 92.2%.

The full-year attendance rate for 2014–15 was 89.7%, with excused absences raising the rate to 90.5%. If the school maintains its first-semester attendance rate during the second semester, it will improve upon the prior year's attendance rate.

b. *Student Reenrollment (Return Rate)*

On the last day of the 2014–15 academic year, 277 MMSA students were eligible for continued enrollment in the 2015–16 academic year. Of those, 187 were enrolled on the third Friday in September 2015, representing a return rate of 67.5%. This is a slight decline from last year (68.3%) and indicates that MMSA needs to explore ways to increase the number of students who remain with the school for their entire elementary career.

- c. *Student Retention Rate*
At the beginning of the year, 336 students were enrolled at MMSA.¹ An additional 29 students enrolled after the school year started, and 32 students withdrew from the school prior to the end of the first semester. Of the 336 students who started the year at the school, 307 remained enrolled at the end of the first semester, representing a 91.4% retention rate. The retention rate for the first semester of the 2014–15 school year was 90.1%. If the school maintains this retention rate throughout the school year, the school is on track for at least maintaining the 2014–15 student retention rate.
- d. *Teacher Retention Rate:*²
Analysis of the school's midyear teacher/instructional staff roster indicates that 27 instructional staff began the year on the first day of school. Of these, two were asked to leave and one passed away. Of the 24 remaining staff, all remained at the school throughout the first semester, for a retention rate of 100%. The retention rate for the entire 2014–15 school year was 88.9%. The first-semester data indicate the school is on track to exceed its annual teacher retention rate.
- e. *Teacher Return Rate:*
Analysis of the school's fall teacher/instructional staff roster indicates that a total of 19 instructional staff who were at the school at the end of the 2014–15 school year were eligible to return in the fall of 2015. Of the 19 staff members, 15 returned, for a staff return rate of 79% compared to 82.3% the prior fall. Two of the four who did not return were classroom teachers, one was the physical education teacher, and the fourth was a music teacher. This decline is problematic and deserves continued efforts by MMSA leadership to keep qualified staff, as explained in the related school improvement recommendation.

Conclusion

CRC has found all of the information submitted by MMSA to be specifically responsive to the CSRC's midyear informational requirements. In addition, overall, the school is on track to meet or exceed its 2014–15 scorecard results, which would again place MMSA in the "good/promising" category or better. Therefore, CRC recommends lifting the school's probationary status at this time.

¹ As of September 18, 2015.

² It is the CSRC's policy to include only eligible staff for retention and return rates.