

James Island Charter High School

2008 Charter Renewal Report

Charter Renewal External Team Visit

May 4-8, 2008

Robert Bohnstengel, Head of School

**External Review Team
TEC Dowling, Chairperson
Cheryl Allred
William Jenkins**

INTRODUCTION

An External Review Team consisting of three members of the Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (CASI), Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), visited the James Island Charter High School in Charleston, South Carolina on May 7, 2008. Hosting an onsite review team was a part of the school's extensive efforts in seeking approval of their Charter Renewal with the Charleston County School District.

During the visit, the school was asked to provide evidence to the review team that it:

1. meets the *Terms of Agreement* with the Charleston County School District;
2. engages in a continuous process of improvement; and,
3. implements strategies and activities that ensure it fulfills its mission and reaches its goals.

During the visit, the team was responsible for:

1. determining the school's status relative to the *Terms of Agreement* in their original charter school application to the Charleston County School District;
2. assessing the efficacy and impact of the school's improvement process;
3. assessing the effectiveness of the school's methods for quality assurance;
4. identifying positive aspects of the school's operations.

The review team fulfilled its responsibilities by:

1. identifying relevant points of inquiry;
2. reviewing documentation provided by the school;
3. establishing and following a schedule of activities and interactions that provided for significant stakeholder involvement;
4. conducting interviews of a representative set of stakeholders; and
5. engaging in professional deliberations as a team to reach consensus on the school's status regarding each of the requirements for accreditation

In fulfillment of the quality review process, school personnel provided documented evidence for the *Terms of Agreement* and identified the methods and strategies it implements to ensure that it fulfills its mission and reaches its goals. In addition to the summary of documentation the school provided the External Review Team, it gave the members ready access to all other information pertinent to the review, e.g., the improvement plan, student achievement data, policies and procedures, and financial data.

During the accreditation team visit, members of the External Review Team interviewed the principal, four other members of the administrative team, four parents, three board members and one member of the Discipline Committee. Through interviews, observations, reviews of documents and other sources of information, the External Review Team:

- gained a school-wide perspective;
- gathered evidence corroborated by multiple sources;
- examined the context and capacity of the school in relation to its vision, mission, and beliefs; and
- applied the *Terms of Agreement*.

TERMS OF AGREEMENT

The primary requirement for renewal of the charter is that the James Island Charter High School provides evidence that it meets the Terms of Agreement for their charter. The findings of the External Review Team regarding the compliance are summarized on the following pages.

The Leadership Team and school administration coordinated and facilitated the school's compilation and consideration of evidence related to each of the *Terms of Agreement*. School personnel and other key stakeholders were involved in the compilation and consideration of the documentation for each of the *Terms of Agreement*.

VISION, MISSION and BELIEFS

The school has in place a well developed vision and mission and has adopted goals in the form of a school improvement plan which focuses the efforts of the school and community on achieving the goals resulting from the vision. Performance measures reveal that significant progress has been realized since the school became a Charter School. This progress identifies that the Terms of Agreement in the original charter application are definitely being met by the school. Goals to achieve the mission, a system to monitor student progress, and a focus on quality teaching and learning are aligned throughout the school. Whereas everyone interviewed was not completely familiar with the mission, vision and beliefs, it was evident from the results of school efforts that these are being supported and intertwined with a program of continuous improvement.

GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP.

The stakeholders at James Island Charter High School maintain a focus on student learning that supports their efforts to improve student performance. The charter governing board is known as the Board of Directors and it manages the business affairs of the school. The Board consists of nine directors that are elected by a plurality of the cast votes. Nominations are open to parents and community members with teachers holding two of the board positions as ex-officio members.

The Board ensures compliance with all requirements for a charter school as provided by South Carolina Charter School Law, but the job and methodology of teaching is left to the control and decision-making of the professional educators.

The principal of JICHS has created a functioning chain of command among the stakeholders. He delegates appropriate responsibilities to the leadership team and other teacher leaders within the school. This commitment to the democratic processes empowers teachers to make meaningful decisions that positively impact the teaching and learning process.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

All curricula at James Island Charter High School are aligned with state and national standards. The school utilizes a 4x4 period day/semester schedule for most courses. This modified 4x4 block schedule was designed with student success in mind. Comparison of pre-charter and post-charter student performance data reflects that many of the student performance objectives have been surpassed. SAT, ACT, and HSAP scores have improved since James Island was converted to a charter school. Numbers of students taking IB exams have increased, and the school averages on those tests have exceeded national averages. Graduation rates have increased, and the percentage of African-Americans graduating on time has increased. In addition, the school drop-out rate has decreased.

Teachers have clearly defined expectations for student learning across subject areas. Utilization of disaggregated test data has helped teachers establish rigorous school wide efforts to remediate targeted students. Reform initiatives that reflect the school's overarching mission to provide superior opportunities for all students to succeed include the "We Matter Summer Camp", "We Care Alternative School", "College Insights", an additional counselor for at-risk students, and "Project Lead the Way".

JICHS is a fully accredited school through SACS. "High Schools That Work" has been adopted as the instructional design framework as the school operates on the modified block schedule and accommodates the inclusion of a Freshmen Academy. A differentiated curriculum is offered that includes college preparatory, honors courses, Advanced Placement (AP)/International Baccalaureate (IB), dual credit courses, and a wide range of Career and Technology Education (CATE) courses

James Island Charter High School recognizes that the students benefit from having a variety of learning experiences, and the staff has worked diligently to provide opportunities for all learners to excel.

RESOURCES

James Island Charter High School has the necessary resources to support its mission and goals. All professional staff members are certified. Over 70% of these hold advanced degrees and 22 teachers have national board certification. During interviews, it was revealed that the school would not encounter any problems in filling vacancies when they arise. Many experienced, qualified teachers are interested in becoming a part of this school team.

The administrative team consists of a principal and five assistant principals. There are nine certified counselors in the guidance department. This permits a counselor and an assistant principal to be assigned to the same group of students for their entire high school career, providing consistency and support to the individual student.

The school maintains a strong, sound financial position that permits many of the needs of the school to be met without delays. An example is the recent addition of two new programs this school year, drivers' education simulators to further facilitate that program and the addition of a course in Industrial Technology. There remain some needs that were identified to committee members. These are additional computer labs for instructional support as well as more "state of the art" technology. These improvements will be limited due to the age of the buildings and necessary infrastructure.

During the interviews it was stated that additional physical facilities are needed to accommodate fine arts, athletics and to replace the portable classrooms. This will require some creative solutions due to the restrictions created by the current campus and buildings locations.

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR STUDENT LEARNING

JICHS provides a wide variety of support services designed to meet the needs of all students. The school recognizes that a continuum of support services is integral to reducing barriers to student learning. Accordingly, the services are aligned with their mission statement.

Quality student services are provided to ensure that all students are ready for learning when they enter the classroom. Numerous counseling positions are provided as each grade level has a counselor. There are at-risk counselors, career specialists, testing coordinators, special education coordinators, and other student services specialists. Two nurses are available to meet the health related student needs.

The Disciplinary Review Committee consists of five (5) elected members who are qualified parents. They are empowered to examine facts, hear appeals, and render a decision pertaining to suspension and expulsions brought on appeal of administrative decisions. The school has established the "We Care Alternative School" as an option to removing students from the school setting.

Parents feel welcome in the school and are provided numerous opportunities to participate in their child's school. A "Community Liaison" person has been hired to coordinate public relations with the community, meet with local ministers to keep the faith-based community informed of the charter school activities, and serve as the school's hospitality coordinator. There was no evidence of an active PTO organization, but the active Booster Club was addressed during parent interviews.

There are policies on student attendance and behavior. Teacher attendance is emphasized, and perfect attendance by staff is rewarded with a financial incentive. James Island

Charter High School is to be commended on the multitude of services that support the development and well-being of all students.

CLOSING SUMMARY

The External Review Team found the James Island Charter High School to be a high quality school that is effectively meeting all requirements of the Terms of Agreement with the Charleston County School District. The school serves as a shining demonstration of the positive outcomes that are the focus and goal of charter status. The school is led by a skilled and talented professional staff, a knowledgeable and dedicated governing board, educated and involved parents, and a supportive community that collectively encourages and support student success. It is evident throughout the school that the school's improvement plan is the driving force behind the high quality student experiences that are available and that the improvements in student achievement are worthy of commendation. Success for each and every individual student is a defining goal of the school.

The school has some needs, particularly in the area of additional facilities that would enable them to better serve a growing population. This is being careful consideration by the leadership and governing body of the school.

The External Review Team submits this report to the Charleston County School District to document the school's ability to meet the requirements of the Terms of Agreement in their charter application. Based of the findings of the external review team, we highly recommend that the charter be renewed.

The External Review Team expresses appreciation to the administrative head of the school, members of the professional staff, parents and other community representatives for their hospitality throughout the visit. The team urges the staff to study the team's report and to act on those areas they believe will improve or enhance the quality and capacity of the school to improve student learning. The team wishes the school and its students much success in pursuit of student achievement through the charter school process and the process of school improvement.