

September 2015

BETTER LEARNING COMMUNITIES ACADEMY

ANNUAL SPONSOR REPORT
2014-2015 ACADEMIC YEAR

**Charter School Operations
College of Education**



University of Missouri



Office of Charter School Operations General Information

Vision

Challenging all learners to reach their full potential.

Mission

Improve the quality and performance of charter schools in Missouri by collaborating with stakeholders to achieve exceptional educational outcomes for all students.

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Office of Charter School Operations
Better Learning Communities Academy Annual Report
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Better Learning Communities Academy Annual Report**

Executive Summary

The 2015-2016 school year is the renewal year in an original five-year charter period for BLCA. The board is currently in a period of serious strategic planning and organizational change. At the end of the 2014-2015 school year, the OCSO finds BLCA in a state of flux in many areas that will need to be addressed in the renewal application. Specific areas of potential improvement include:

- The board generally functions well, but there is concern about the ability of the board to maintain stable, quality school leadership in all areas—administrative and academic. There is sometimes confusion, both within the school and externally, regarding who holds authority and the level of involvement of other stakeholders.
- The school has been financially stable, with sound reporting. However, administrative leadership is provided by a board member and a contractor which contributes to the confusion and inefficiency introduced above. There are significant facility issues that need to be addressed in the short term.
- The school will always face the challenge of being a transient neighborhood school, but leadership should review curriculum, and continue to seek greater student achievement. Additionally, maintaining solid data tracking performance for returning students compared to the total MSIP population will be helpful to document future performance.

These findings are described in more detail below and additional evidence can be found in the staff and teacher survey results in the Appendix.



GOVERNANCE	Inadequate	Approaching	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Board Operations				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The board has been stable and holds regular meetings with regular attendance. • Currently undergoing a complete review of bylaws and policies in preparation for renewal. 			
Board Development				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The board does not regularly seek new membership. • The board does not have a training plan. 			
Board Planning				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The board is currently undergoing a strategic planning process, but has not engaged in ongoing strategic planning or a continuous improvement process. 			
School Oversight				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School leaders regularly attend and report at board meetings, but the board and school leadership has not been able to maintain employees that can deliver on both academic and administrative leadership and deliver high academic outcomes. 			



FINANCES & OPERATIONS	Inadequate	Approaching	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Health & Stability				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school is financially stable, but must seek a new facility to grow, or continue to struggle as a small school. Additionally, the board continues to employ consulting services for administrative management which may be a workable plan. However, the renewal application needs to show a clear plan for efficient long-term leadership with accountability in all areas. It is best if the board leads and does not manage the school. 			
Reporting & Compliance				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school maintains reliable data collection and reporting functions through a contractor. 			
General Operations				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school operates well, though inefficiently. Lack of a school leader, or a team of an academic and administrative leader hinders fully efficient and effective operation. There are often breaks in communication and both the sponsor and the state departments are often confused about who to contact and who has decision-making authority and control. 			
Fundraising and Grants				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school has started to seek external funding, and monitors progress at board meetings. 			



CULTURE & ENVIRONMENT	Inadequate	Approaching	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Leadership				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school has not had consistent leadership and depends on the board and a contractor. This is not ideal in the long term. • There is often confusion over roles and responsibilities of non-staff members. 			
Physical Environment				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current facility is too small for the current population and the outdoor environment is not ideal. 			
Culture				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The culture has improved, but there is still only weak adherence to a schoolwide behavior plan and staff and teachers see that as a problem. 			
Outreach				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents and the community are engaged in the school, but the school and board do not have a plan for how to utilize or leverage that engagement. 			



ACADEMIC OUTCOMES	Inadequate	Approaching	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Assessments				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2015 MAP scores provide significant room for improvement. • BLCA should continue to independently track performance of returning students compared to the full MSIP population. Transiency will always be a significant data problem. 			
Teacher Quality & Effectiveness				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers have been mentored, but not fully evaluated. Academic outcomes indicate room for improvement. 			
Curriculum				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BLCA has planned a curriculum review. 			
Special Populations				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students who are not making adequate progress, whether eligible for special education, or not, need to have some form of learning plan and additional help and tutoring to help them advance. 			



**Office of Charter School Operations
BLCA Annual Report
Appendix: Survey Results**

Every year, OCSO performs a survey of all board members, teachers and staff. Other surveys may be performed as needed, or requested.

This year, four board members responded to the survey. Ten teachers and seven of staff members responded to their surveys. Results of all surveys are included.

Each survey item will show the median response, the range and the standard deviation. Each report is highlighted in green to show positive or above average responses, and in orange to show less desirable responses. There is no science to this display. In general, the highest and most consistent scores were noted as positive and the lowest, and most variable scores were highlighted for possible attention.



Better Learning Communities Academy 2015 Board Survey Results

Based on complete responses from four board members.

BOARD FUNCTIONS

Charter boards fulfill a number of roles for the schools they support. Please rate your board on the following key responsibilities by circling one of the ratings on the scale.

Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent
1	2	3	4	5

Question	Range	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Clarifying the school's mission and vision	3-5	4.25	.957
2. Strategic planning and goal setting for the school	3-5	3.75	.957
3. Resolving key strategic or policy issues	3-5	4	.500
4. Developing the financial resources needed to support student performance and school success	4-5	4.25	.500
5. Overseeing financial performance and ensuring financial solvency	4-5	4.75	.500
6. Understanding charter school law	3-4	3.75	.500
7. Ensuring legal and ethical integrity	5-5	5	0
8. Tracking and assessing academic performance of the school based on the mission, vision, and charter goals n= 4	3-4	3.25	.500
9. Developing the school's Executive Director/CEO n=3	0-4	2.5	1.732
10. Evaluating the school's Executive Director/CEO n=3	0-4	2.5	1.915
11. Developing the Head of School/Academic leader/Principal	3-4	3.25	.500
12. Evaluating the Head of School/Academic Leader/Principal	2-4	3.5	1.000



BOARD PROCESSES

Effective charter boards have processes that maximize their operations, thus optimizing the effectiveness of the school community. Please rate the processes of your board by circling one of the ratings on the scale.

Poor **Below Average** **Average** **Above Average** **Excellent**
1 **2** **3** **4** **5**

Question	Range	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Identifying, cultivating, and integrating new board members based on the needs of the school (background, diversity, expertise, etc.)	0-4	2.5	1.732
2. Providing charter school orientation and training for new board members	3-4	3.25	.500
3. Utilizing board committees effectively and efficiently (committees fulfilling their identified roles and responsibilities)	0-5	3.25	2.217
4. Reviewing board meeting agendas and related materials in a timely manner in preparation for meetings	4-5	4.75	.500
5. Running board and committee meetings well (e.g., start/end on time, give members a chance to engage in issues, and ensure all voices are heard)	5-5	5	0
6. Selecting, developing and evaluating the board chair n = 2	3-5	4.25	.957
7. Selecting, developing and evaluating school leaders	2-5	3.75	1.258
8. Utilizing data to make strategic and operational decisions for the school	3-5	3.75	.957
9. Monitoring fiscal operations, including developing and approving a budget monitoring expenses, and optimizing cash flow for all funding and expense streams,	4-5	4.75	.500
10. Ensuring the board and school are in compliance with all required laws and policies (conflict of interest, background checks, whistleblower, non-discrimination, records, insurance, etc.)	4-5	4.5	.577



SHORT-TERM PRIORITIES

Part III of this survey is designed to help boards identify where they may require future support, training, or guidance. Please indicate for each of the following potential goals whether you consider them low, medium or high priority.

Low Priority
1

Medium Priority
2

High Priority
3

Question	Range	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Clarifying the organization's mission, vision and strategic goals	1-3	2.25	.957
2. Evaluating board performance to ensure continuous improvement	2-3	2.25	.500
3. Developing, adding or replacing board members	1-3	2.25	.957
4. Developing, adding or replacing school leaders	1-3	2.25	.957
5. Developing financial resources to support the school	2-3	2.75	.500
6. Improving financial stability	2-3	2.25	.500
7. Assessing and improving academic performance	3-3	3	0
8. Developing strategies for recruiting and retaining high quality teachers and staff	2-3	2.75	.500
9. Meeting all legal and policy requirements (specify needs below, if desired)	2-3	2.75	.500
10. Planning for facilities	2-3	2.5	.577
11. Considering expansion or replicator schools	1-3	1.75	.957
12. Preparing for renewal of the charter	3-3	3	0



COMMENTS ORGANIZED BY MAJOR THEMES

The board has taken several actions to improve the school this year.

- The board has provided Angela with an on-site mentor. The mentor is an experienced successful principal and available to Angela to help develop leadership skills. This was initiated in May and will continue into next year.
- The board has hired a consultant to review curriculum and instructional materials to ensure alignment with DESE. The charter renewal committee and board will review the recommendations.
- The board is committed to academic performance and recognizes the need to improve performance of the school.
- We are in the process of identifying new board members.

One other suggestion was provided.

- It is my contention that BLCA needs to expand to at least 8th grade and that means finding a new facility. As a parent, I would not want to enroll my child in a school that did not serve them until high school.



Better Learning Communities Academy 2015 Teacher Survey Results

Based on responses from 10 teachers with 1–47 years of teaching experience and 1-4 years at BLCA.

Part I: Please answer the following questions using the 5-point scale below:

5 **4** **3** **2** **1**
strongly agree **agree** **neutral** **disagree** **strongly disagree**

Question	Range	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. The school environment supports student learning.	4-5	4.6	.522
2. The school environment is safe and orderly.	2-5	4.0	.894
3. School facilities support student learning.	2-5	3.9	.831
4. Teachers at this school believe that all students can learn.	4-5	4.6	.505
5. The school's daily schedule supports student learning.	3-5	4.4	.674
6. Teachers at this school have high expectations for student learning.	3-5	4.6	.674
7. Teachers at this school have high expectations for student behavior.	3-5	4.6	.674
8. Teachers at this school collaborate to improve student learning.	2-5	4.0	.816
9. Teachers utilize effective instructional strategies in lesson delivery to promote student learning.	2-5	4.3	.905
10. Teachers utilize assessments to evaluate student progress and to guide instruction.	4-5	4.5	.522
11. The school has a clearly defined, high quality curriculum.	3-5	4.3	.647
12. Goals and objectives are clearly articulated	4-5	4.6	.522
13. The Title I plan is effective in supporting student needs.	2-5	3.6	.809
14. Staff follow a mandated process for identifying and supporting special education students.	3-5	4.0	.447
15. The delivery of special education services meet students' needs.	2-5	3.4	1.027
16. On-going professional development supports best practices and promotes student learning.	3-5	4.4	.674
17. Teachers at this school have necessary supplies (i.e. paper, markers) to support learning	2-5	4.0	1.054
18. Teachers at this school have necessary instructional materials (i.e. textbooks) to support learning.	4-5	4.7	.467
19. Teachers at this school have the necessary technology to support learning.	2-5	3.9	.831
20. Students are actively engaged in their learning.	3-5	4.0	.632
21. Policies/procedures for student behavior management are consistently communicated.	2-5	3.4	1.027



22. Policies/procedures for student behavior management are consistently implemented.	2-4	3.1	.944
23. Teachers at this school feel supported by school administration.	3-5	4.4	.674
24. School administrators effectively communicate teacher expectations.	3-5	4.3	.647
25. School administrators effectively communicate student expectations.	3-5	4.5	.688
26. Teachers at this school receive effective administrator feedback and guidance on instructional practice	2-5	4.2	.874
27. The administrative staff exhibits high standards of professional behavior.	3-5	4.5	.688
28. Administrators exhibit strong leadership skills.	4-5	4.6	.505
29. Good communication exists between all stakeholders.	3-5	4.3	.786
30. All stakeholders in the school treat each other with mutual respect.	3-5	4.4	.809

COMMENTS SUMMARIZED BY MAJOR THEMES

BLCA is a team united to educate its students.

- BLCA is an environment where all students are expected and encouraged to learn and thrive. There are many caring staff prepared to help how they can
- The culture of the school is squarely focused on student learning and good character. The teachers and staff work hard to help students learn. Our students are happy. We will continue to work on moving our school along the continuum of excellence.
- The teachers and students work together to try and implement a positive environment.
- The culture of the school is friendly, supportive, caring and professional. The staff at BLCA sets high expectations so that all students can achieve.
- The culture of our school is family oriented.
- Even though BLCA has not officially been trained in the Correlates of Effective Schools, several of them are in place. They are; on-going assessment, high expectations, strong instructional leadership (consultants from Houghton Mifflin provide workshops in classroom observations with feedback), safe and orderly environment. The school climate is focused on academics.



Meeting needs of challenging students and consistency in behavioral expectations could be improved.

- All students are given high expectations for learning. Behavior management is an ongoing concern and negative / disruptive behaviors seem to overrun the school.
- Consistency with expectations and consequences for behavior is still an issue, though the PBS-SW program for 2015-2016 year holds promise.
- I believe we are moving in the right direction to improve overall school culture. Example; PBS program RIT etc. At present there are some hurdles we still need to jump.
- Resources for out of class help is also a need.
- The culture of the school has variations on a week to week basis. At times the day can flow with discipline, learning and support. At other times their seems to be a undefined understanding of discipline issues, number of students in a class, parents walking in and out through the day without appointments from 8am - 3pm for example.



Better Learning Communities Academy 2015 Staff Survey Results

Based on responses from 7 staff members with 1-28 years doing their current or similar jobs, and 1-4 years at BLCA.

Part I: Please answer the following questions using the 5-point scale below:

5 **4** **3** **2** **1**
strongly agree **agree** **neutral** **disagree** **strongly disagree**

Question	Range	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. The school environment supports student learning.	2-5	4.0	1.195
2. The school environment is safe and orderly.	2-5	3.6	.976
3. School facilities support student learning.	2-5	3.9	.991
4. Staff at this school believe that all students can learn.	3-5	4.3	.707
5. The school's daily schedule supports student learning.	3-5	4.0	.756
6. Staff at this school have high expectations for student learning.	3-5	4.1	.835
7. Staff at this school have high expectations for student behavior.	3-5	4.0	.926
8. Staff at this school have necessary supplies (i.e. paper, markers) to support learning.	3-5	4.0	.756
9. Staff at this school have the necessary technology to support learning.	2-5	3.4	1.061
10. Students are actively engaged in their learning.	2-5	3.5	.926
11. Policies/procedures for student behavior management are consistently communicated.	1-5	3.1	1.356
12. Policies/procedures for student behavior management are consistently implemented.	1-5	3.1	1.458
13. Staff at this school feel supported by school administration.	2-5	3.8	1.389
14. School administrators effectively communicate staff expectations.	2-5	3.8	1.165
15. School administrators effectively communicate student expectations.	3-5	4.0	.926
16. Staff at this school receive effective administrator feedback on job performance.	2-5	4.0	1.069
17. The administrative staff exhibits high standards of professional behavior.	2-5	4.0	1.069
18. Administrators exhibit strong leadership skills.	3-5	4.3	.886
19. Good communication exists between all stakeholders.	2-5	3.4	1.061
20. All stakeholders in the school treat each other with mutual respect.	3-5	3.9	.835



COMMENTS ORGANIZED BY MAJOR THEMES

Culture is positive and supportive, but learning environment is inconsistent.

- The culture of BLCA is supposed to exemplify a standard of excellence. Some classrooms are able to maintain this standard while others cannot. As a collective whole, discipline standards have plummeted with suspensions being reduced and ISS being a joy for students to attend. Thus, the expectation of student behavior has been a constant battle while trying to educate them as well.
- Our school is family oriented. Supportive of children inside and outside of school settings. Practice leadership and excellence for staff and students. We are all excited the learning environment and dedication, hardworking as a team. Together we stand firm and knowing that love conquers all.
- BLCA is a community based charter school with high expectations of achievement. We are fortunate to have an extremely experienced staff of educators who understand the educational and socioeconomic needs of the students. Standards promoting academic achievement. Most of the educators are displaying high expectations. At least one has mediocre expectations and very little teacher student instruction--just papers passed out for students to complete no actual teaching, therefore no actual learning.

Only one additional suggestion presented.

- Some learning should be done electronically. Learning programs are needed on computers.