

April | 2013

BETTER LEARNING COMMUNITIES ACADEMY

ANNUAL SITE REPORT
2012-2013 ACADEMIC YEAR

**Charter School Operations
College of Education**



University of Missouri



University of Missouri
Office of Charter School Operations – MU College of Education
Better Learning Communities Academy
Annual Site Report 2012-2013

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.

PERSONNEL

Dr. Deborah Carr – Director
carrd@missouri.edu

Mrs. Judy Forrester – MU Liaison
forresterje@missouri.edu

Mrs. Suzanne Love – MU Liaison
lovesg@missouri.edu

Ms. Lisa Weaver – Business Administrator
weaverli@missouri.edu

CONTACT INFORMATION

Columbia

MU Charter School Operations
316 Hill Hall
College of Education
University of Missouri
Columbia, Missouri 65211

Phone: 573-882-5738
Fax: 573-884-3006
Email: musponsorship@missouri.edu

Kansas City

Mizzou Center
1600 NE Coronado Drive
Blue Springs, MO 64014

Phone: 816-655-6260
Fax: 816-655-6716

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
MU Office of Charter School Operations Information	1
Table of Contents	2
Introduction	3
MU Charter School Operations	3
School Background	5
Focus Area I: Governance Compliance and Operations	8
Focus Area II: School Culture	12
Focus Area III: Teaching and Learning	15
Focus Area IV: Finances	18
Conclusions	20
Appendix A: Focus Area with Subcomponents	21
Appendix B: Teacher Survey Results	25
Appendix B: Board Survey Results	28

MU OFFICE OF CHARTER SCHOOL OPERATIONS

The MU Office of Charter School Operations, housed in the MU College of Education, provides monitoring and feedback to all charter schools within our portfolio. Our sponsorship role includes:

- Providing oversight on behalf of the State of Missouri;
- Ensuring that the Board of Directors and the school are in compliance with all state and federal laws;
- Identifying strengths and concerns to the Charter School Board of Directors; and
- Determining school status: to continue operations, to place on probation, to renew a charter of an existing school or to close a school for non-compliance of state and federal laws and/or not meeting the performance guidelines as specified within the school's charter.

Annual Evaluation Components

MU provides evaluations for its charter schools on an annual basis. The comprehensive evaluation has four components:

1. The first component of the evaluation process is an MU Annual Site Report comprised of four focus areas. MU provides an on-site evaluation and interviews with key stakeholders, usually in the second semester of the school year. Evidence for the compilation of this report includes:
 - Monthly visits (school and/or Board meetings).
 - Attendance at Board meetings/review of Board meeting documents.
 - Beginning-of-the-Year Checklist.
 - Classroom observations.
 - Teacher and staff surveys.
 - Teacher and staff interviews.
 - Communications with DESE.
 - Communications with Board Chair.
 - Communications with School Leaders.
 - Review of annual audit.
 - Review of ASBR.
2. The second component is a School Annual Report submitted by the school on or before July 1, based on (a) the criteria established in the charter (including any data collected internally), (b) response and/or action plans developed based on the MU site report and (c) performance goals for the upcoming school year, including goals from the school's Title I Plan.

3. MSIP 5 Performance Standards data provided by the State of Missouri is reviewed at the beginning of August by the school and by MU. Performance goals are re-assessed and adjusted (if needed) based on Performance Standards outcomes.
4. Based on the MU Annual report, the School Annual Report and the MSIP 5 data, a letter regarding school status is submitted to the school prior to the start of the school year.

Annual Site Report

MU reviews schools within Four Focus areas (Appendix A). These areas were established by reviewing protocols from other states and were generated and refined by the MU Charter Office personnel during our first year of sponsorship, and have been revised and refined based on internal review and feedback from schools. These four Focus Areas are identified as:

- Focus Area I: Governance, Compliance and Operations**
- Focus Area II: School Culture**
- Focus Area III: Teaching and Learning: Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment and Student Performance**
- Focus Area IV: Finances**

BLCA's 2013 Annual Report is organized into the four areas outlined above. Each Focus Area is comprised of several components. The MU Charter School Office personnel collected data via monthly visits to the school and/or meetings of the Board of Directors, meetings with school administrators, review of documents provided by the administration, board minutes, classroom observations and survey data provided by the Board of Directors, faculty and staff.

INTRODUCTION

Background Information

Better Learning Communities Academy (BLCA) is in the second year of a five-year charter and is sponsored by the University of Missouri. BLCA has the following mission and vision, as set forth in the charter:

MISSION

The mission of Better Learning Communities Academy is to provide each student with a quality education in a safe, supportive and loving environment, which equips them for entrance into the middle school, high school and college of their choice. Better Learning Communities Academy is founded on the premise that by providing every family the option of a quality education for their children, a community of "lifelong learners" and "servant leaders" will be created in the Hyde Park neighborhood.

VISION

Beginning in 2012 every student will be actively engaged in age-appropriate activities that assist and help others in their family, school, neighborhood and community, to cultivate the student into their role of a "servant leader".

By 2015 BLCA will begin its transition from a K-5 school to include a middle school program.

By 2018 BLCA will include a fully accredited, high-functioning middle school.

By 2018 the graduates of BLCA will be academically prepared to attend any college preparatory high school in the St. Louis region.

By 2018 BLCA graduates will model the "lifelong learners" philosophy by creating a "Post High School Education Plan" outlining steps to achieve their future educational goals.

By 2020 BLCA will be the highest performing public charter school in the city of St. Louis with 95% of students who have been at BLCA for at least two years performing at "Proficient" or "Advanced" on the MAP test.

Goals in the BLCA Charter

The following specific goals are identified in the original charter:

1. Average a minimum of 1.5 years growth in communication arts and mathematics.
2. In the 2012-13 academic year, 60% of students will perform above the AYP targets in communication arts and math on the MAP test.
3. In the 2013-2014 academic year, 70% of students will perform above the AYP targets in communication arts and math on the MAP test.
4. In the 2014-2015 academic year, 80% of students will perform above the AYP targets in communication arts and math on the MAP test.
5. In the 2015-2016 academic year, 90% of students will perform above the AYP targets in communication arts and math on the MAP test.
6. An attendance rate of 90% or higher in the first year, growing to 95% within 5 years.
7. 70% of parents/guardians will participate in a minimum of three Beyond Classroom Learning Experiences each year (1 will be in a Servant Leadership activity).

Demographic Data

School data is provided in the table below:

Student Enrollment (CORE DATA) N= 100		
Demographics	Number of Students	Percent of Students
Gender		
Male	50	50%
Female	50	50%
Race		
Asian	0	0%
Black	98	98%
Hispanic	0	0%
Indian	0	0%
White	0	0%
Pacific Islander	0	0%
MultiRacial	2	2%
Other		
Free/Reduced Lunch	98	98%
SPED	16	16%
ELL	0	0%
Homeless	0	0%

Table 1. Demographic Data 2012-2013, retrieved from Missouri Comprehensive Data Submission, October 2012

AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE	
August	92%
September	92%
October	92%
November	90%
December	87%
January	90%
February	91%

Table 2. Average Daily Attendance 2012-2013, retrieved from March 26, 2013 Board Minutes

FOCUS AREA FINDINGS

FOCUS AREA I: GOVERNANCE, COMPLIANCE AND OPERATIONS

Governance, Compliance and Operations comprise one of the most challenging areas for charter schools. The federal and state regulations and laws are complex, and the knowledge needed to successfully navigate a K-12 environment within such regulatory environments is challenging. Moreover, the research suggests that governance and operations continue to be crucial areas in the overall success of charter schools, although the policy and empirical questions affiliated with not-for-profit boards still require continued analysis. Essentially, the mixture of sound business practice, a highly regulated industry and the human dynamics encompassed in the enterprise of human learning combine and contribute to an environment that is dynamic, fluid and difficult to navigate (Appendix A).

Strengths:

I.A The Board of Directors is effective in its governance and oversight of the school.

- Board and administration are utilizing a data dashboard to promote communication.
- Board members are diverse in background and expertise.

I.E

- Student records are well maintained.

Concerns:

I.A The Board of Directors is effective in its governance and oversight of the school.

- Academic progress is not reported to the Board on a regular basis.
- A process for adding new Board members is not evident.
- *Request for Information Form* for prospective Board members must be submitted to MU to keep Board information current.
- There is no ethnic diversity on the current Board.

I.B School administration is well structured and effective.

- There is no formal evaluation system for teachers.
- Utilization of staff is not efficient in supporting the needs of the school.
- The ability to have uninterrupted blocks of instructional time is impacted by the lack of substitute teachers and the lack of art and music classes.
- The school lacks a strong instructional leader.
 - Teachers receive limited instructional feedback.
 - There is no structured professional development plan.
 - There is no formal evaluation process for staff members.

I.C School administration ensures compliance with all DESE and MU reporting requirements.

- There have been several missed deadlines for compliance with state and federal regulations.
- The Title I program needs space to comply with FERPA (currently using hallway space).
- Attendance rates are below the new MSIP 5 regulations, which require a 94% attendance rate to meet state standards.

I.D School facilities meet health, fire and safety regulations.

- Restroom needs must be addressed as the school increases enrollment.
- Space utilization needs to be addressed.
 - The sharing of space between the school and the after-school program needs to be addressed.
 - Organization of materials and supplies is not evident.
- A process and plan for expansion of the facility is not evident (e.g., remodeling, bathroom issues on the second floor, shared space).

I.E School files are well maintained.

- There is no documentation system for dispensing medications, treating injuries or noting illnesses.
- A formal systematic process for record retention is not evident.

I.F School staff/Board meet expectations set forth in state and federal guidelines.

- Confirmation of completion/screening/clearance of all background checks for Board members has not been received by MU.

2012 Recommendations and Outcomes

<i>Recommendation from 2012</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Provide targeted Professional Development for the Board and Administration in the area of effective communication between the Board and the Administration.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Development of Data Dashboard in December 2012 for use at Board meetings.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Clarify roles and expectations for the Board and Administration.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Progress in developing administrator evaluation tools and greater Board understanding and involvement in oversight.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Provide mentoring for the Principal in her role as instructional leader.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provided late in the school year.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilize a consultant to study the budget and provide recommendations on balancing the budget and locating additional funding sources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board has utilized a consultant to assist with financial issues. The Board has engaged in the development of a plan for locating additional funding.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a long-range funding plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A long-range funding plan has been developed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a strategic plan to engage the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A strategic plan to engage the community is not evident.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement an evaluation plan for the Principal and Business Manager. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Principal and the Business Manager were evaluated, spring 2012.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the job description of the Business Manager to determine if additional support/training is needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The job description of the Business Manager has been revised.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide Board Meeting documents one week prior to the meeting date to allow ample time for document review. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In need of improvement.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and provide training for the Board and Business Manager in the area of school finance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An outside consultant has been utilized to support both the Board and the Business Manager.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and discuss Record Retention Document to establish appropriate procedures for records. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No evidence of procedures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop systems of documentation for health, discipline and attendance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No evidence of system development.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a recommendation for increasing the size of the Board. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A recommendation for increasing the size of the Board was developed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a completed self-report to MU at the end of each school year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report was submitted late and was incomplete for 2012.

Table 3. Governance, Compliance and Operations Recommendations and Outcomes from 2012 Annual Report

ANNUAL REPORT CONCLUSIONS – Governance, Compliance and Operations

BLCA demonstrated some growth in the second year in terms of governance, compliance and operations. The board is diverse in terms of background and experience, Board and administration are utilizing a data dashboard to promote communication and student records are well maintained. The current Board Chair and Treasurer have substantially increased both involvement and oversight that has strengthened the operational component of the school. The Board has seriously engaged in discussions and long-range planning for fundraising.

Several concerns were noted. The effectiveness of the administrative team (I.B) is a serious area of concern. Academic progress has not been reported to the Board on a regular basis, and no documentation of progress toward charter goals is available. There is no formal evaluation system for teachers, and the current utilization of staff (e.g. para-professionals) is not efficient in supporting the needs of the school. There have been several areas of non-compliance with state and federal regulations and delay in responding to requests from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. There is no documentation system for dispensing medications, treating injuries or noting illnesses. Written confirmation of completion of background checks for the Board, as required by state law, has not been received by MU. Teacher Survey Results (Appendix C) support the interviews and observations. Lower ratings were found for *“teachers at this school receive effective administrative feedback and guidance on instructional practice.”*

The Board Survey Results (Appendix B) indicated that the Board Functions of *“clarifying the school’s mission and vision”* and *“ensuring legal and ethical integrity”* received the highest ratings. Areas that were considered below average included *“tracking and assessing academic performance of the school based on the mission, vision and charter goals,”* *“developing the school’s Executive Director/CEO”* and *“developing the Head of School/Academic Leader/Principal.”* It is important to note the wide variability in the response range of the Board. This may need further discussion during strategic planning for the future.

Board Processes that received high ratings included *“running board and committee meetings well”* and *“selecting, developing and evaluating the board chair.”* Areas that received below average ratings included *“providing charter school orientation and training for new board members,”* *“selecting, developing and evaluating school leaders”* and *“utilizing data to make strategic and operational decisions for the school.”* It will be helpful for the board to focus on developing and/or refining the areas that were perceived as below average.

Short-Term Priorities that were most highly prioritized included *“assessing and improving academic performance,”* *“planning for facilities,”* *“developing, adding or replacing school leaders,”* *“developing financial resources to support the school”* and *“improving financial stability.”* These are the areas deemed most critical at the present time and should be developed through strategic planning, goal setting and action plans.

FOCUS AREA II: SCHOOL CULTURE

School culture has been defined in numerous ways, broad and narrow, and has more recently been the focus of intense study, with the development of instruments to “measure” this construct. Regardless of how this term is defined, what is clear for charter schools is that all embrace a specific mission and vision that is based on a set of values, assumptions and “ways of operating” that become part of the collective fabric of the organization. As this is unique and important to the overall success of the school in meeting the original goals set forth in the charter, this area is included in the overall review process.

Strengths:

II.A The school environment supports student learning.

- The staff is focused on the success of all students and committed to their overall well-being and learning.
- The staff has built relationships with parents and the neighborhood community.
- Class size has remained relatively small.
- The school has the feel of a small community.

Areas of Concern:

II.A The school environment supports student learning.

- The school is lacking a school-wide behavior management plan.
 - As the school increases enrollment, this will become an even greater issue impacting student learning and student safety.
 - Individual classrooms have behavior plans, but there is no consistent building-wide plan.
 - There needs to be consistency with behavior consequences.
 - To be effective, all staff need initial training about plan implementation followed by support throughout the school year.
 - All staff members would benefit from restraint training.
- Behavioral expectations between the after-school program and the school program differ and create confusion during the school day.
- Lack of effective communication was evident.
 - Teachers expressed frustration with the minimal communication between the Board, administrators and staff.
 - Teacher collaboration is minimal.
 - Teachers noted they received very little instructional feedback.

II.B Teachers feel supported by the administration.

- The morale of the staff is relatively low.
 - Teachers expressed frustration with the cut in pay and the loss of plan time due to cuts in student services (i.e. music and art).
 - There were many staff concerns about the stability and future of the school.

- The lack of substitute teachers creates conflicts with daily schedules and disrupts daily learning.
- Para-professionals lack clearly defined expectations for their roles and responsibilities.

II.D All stakeholders in the school treat each other with mutual respect.

- Teachers referenced tension between staff members.

2012 Recommendations and Outcomes

<i>Recommendation from 2012</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
● <i>Design and implement a school-wide behavior management plan.</i>	● Not evident.
● <i>Develop a structure for formal staff collaboration, including paras.</i>	● Not evident. Paras are included in the weekly PD, but PD is reported as unproductive.
● <i>Develop a plan to strengthen the home/school connection.</i>	● Improvement in this area is noted and needs continued focus.
● <i>Provide specific training outlining paraeducator roles, responsibilities and expectations.</i>	● Not evident.

Table 4. School Culture Recommendations and Outcomes from 2012 Annual Report.

ANNUAL REPORT CONCLUSIONS – School Culture

The staff continues to keep their focus on students. It is evident they care and are concerned for all students and their well-being. However, the increase in student enrollment has created changes in the overall school environment that have provided new challenges for staff and administration. The sense of unity and the commitment to the mission and purpose of the school, strong in the first year of operations, is not as evident in the second year. Though not unusual when a new organization experiences growth, it is important to note that a strong focus on the mission and vision is central to the success of the school and key in long-range planning.

Focused professional development was not as evident in the second year, an effective school-wide behavior management plan has not been implemented, and the lack of both will limit future academic success. With the low staff morale, there are concerns about teacher retention and stability. Improved communication across all stakeholder groups will assist in establishing a positive school culture and set the climate for overall school success.

The Teacher Survey Results (Appendix C) supported the interviews and observations. Highest scores from the teaching staff included, *“teachers at this school believe all students can learn,” “teachers at this school have high expectations for student learning”* and *“teachers at this school have high expectations for student behavior.”* Teacher ratings were low for *“policies/procedures for student behavior management are consistently communicated,” “policies/procedures for student behavior management are consistently implemented,” “the school environment is safe and orderly,” “school administrators effectively communicate teacher expectations,” “school administrators effectively communicate student expectations,”* and *“good communication exists between all stakeholders.”*

FOCUS AREA III: TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching and learning are the core components of a successful school. With continued emphasis on accountability at both national and state levels and the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, it is imperative that schools invest in a clearly defined, high quality curriculum, engage in individualized plans for each learner, consistently utilize assessment tools that are reliable and valid, engage all members of the teaching team in the use of assessment data to maximize student success, and effectively meet the needs of learners with special needs.

Strengths:

III.D The school has an effective special education (SPED) program.

- Services are provided for special needs students.

Concerns:

III.A The school has a clearly defined, high quality curriculum.

- Teachers report they do not have a strong curriculum.
 - The reading program is limited in scope. A comprehensive reading program should include phonemic awareness/phonics, grade level text, instructional level text, vocabulary development, and spiraling comprehension skills. Certain components are being implemented, but there is no overall comprehensive program.
 - Saxon Math is being utilized, but this will need to be reviewed with the implementation of the new Common Core Math Standards.
 - There are limited resources for social studies and science.
 - There are no grade level curriculum maps, which impacts teacher accountability.

III.B Instructional practices meet the needs of all learners.

- Professional development (PD) time is not used productively to improve student learning.
 - PD is not targeted and on going.
 - Staff meetings are not targeted professional development.
 - Suggested topics for PD include: writing, the SPED referral process, lesson design, questioning strategies, implementation of common core standards, vertical collaboration.
- Title I services have not been consistently provided throughout the school year.
- Shared space limits teacher ability to prepare for daily classroom instruction.

III.C Assessment is used effectively to support student learning.

- Teachers do not use student data to drive instruction.
 - The only form of assessment referenced during interviews was running records completed by the reading consultant.

- The NWEA test was not administered as planned.
- Teachers were provided no NWEA data for analysis.
- There is no formal assessment data to track student growth.

III.D The school has an effective special education (SPED) program.

- There is no CARE Team/Student Services Team to discuss and plan for student needs.

2012 Recommendations and Outcomes

<i>Recommendation from 2012</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
● <i>Utilize the NWEA at least twice yearly, preferably three times, to track student growth and drive teacher instruction.</i>	● Not evident.
● <i>Give math, social studies and science equal focus with literacy.</i>	● Not evident.
● <i>Provide Professional Development for teachers in the area of MAP preparation – i.e., types of questions, writing.</i>	● Not evident.
● <i>Provide focused training for paras.</i>	● Not evident.
● <i>Hire a full-time reading teacher for the 2012-2013 school year.</i>	● Not evident.
● <i>Provide adequate funding for literacy materials, library materials and materials for math, social studies and science.</i>	● Limited evidence.
● <i>Establish a pool of substitute teachers.</i>	● Not evident.
● <i>Establish a system for teachers to track the teaching of GLE's (curriculum mapping).</i>	● Not evident.
● <i>Continue to contract with Belle Center.</i>	● The Belle Center has continued to provide services for SPED students.
● <i>Begin preparation now for Common Core Standards.</i>	● Not evident.
● <i>Develop procedures for submission of a comprehensive self-report at the end of each academic year.</i>	● Not evident.

Table 5. Teaching and Learning Recommendations and Outcomes from 2012 Annual Report

ANNUAL REPORT CONCLUSION – Teaching and Learning

There are numerous concerns in the area of teaching and learning. The lack of addressing the 2012 recommendations, along with the anticipated increase in enrollment for next year, makes this area critical. Coupled with this are the increasing state expectations/accountability systems and the movement to the new common core state standards. The Teacher Survey Results (Appendix C) support the interviews and observations. Teachers ranked the following items low:

- *“The school has a clearly defined, high quality curriculum.”*
- *“The Title I plan is effective in supporting student needs.”*
- *“The deliver of special education services meet students’ needs.”*
- *“On-going professional development supports best practices and promotes student learning.”*
- *“Teachers at this school have the necessary instructional materials (i.e., textbooks) to support learning.”*
- *“Teachers at this school have the necessary supplies (i.e., paper, markers) to support learning.”*

In order for BLCA to meet their charter goals and be a viable school of choice, it is imperative that these concerns be addressed. Currently, the goals set forth in the charter are not being realized.

FOCUS AREA IV: FINANCES

Financial stability is critical and is one of the key factors that prevent a school from achieving its mission and vision. Due to the need for start-up funding, building needs, and the high costs associated with a new business venture, the early years of a charter school, especially for schools growing by one grade level annually, can be very challenging. Oversight of finances is crucial, is a primary focus for the Governing Board and is monitored carefully and publically at both federal and state levels.

Strengths:

IV.A The school budget supports student learning.

- The Annual Secretary of the Board Report (ASBR) unrestricted ending fund balance for FY12 was 8.42%.

Concerns:

IV.A The school budget supports student learning.

- Personnel received cuts in salary.
- Cash flow issues prevent BLCA from meeting criteria established in the charter (e.g. para in every classroom, art/music).
- Teachers report lack of instructional materials and supplies (Appendix B).

2012 Recommendations and Outcomes

<i>Recommendation from 2012</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Work with an expert in the field of educational finance to balance this year's budget (with adequate reserves) and plan next year's budget.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The BLCA Board of Directors has worked with a financial expert to prepare and balance the FY13 budget.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Analyze teacher and administrator salaries.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The BLCA Board of Directors has reviewed administrator and teacher salaries to use in strategic planning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Develop a long-range plan for facilities' funding.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not evident.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Review enrollment, income and staff utilization.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The BLCA Board of Directors has been diligent in preparing budget scenarios based on varying enrollment scenarios.

Table 6. Finance Recommendations and Outcomes from 2012 Annual Report

ANNUAL REPORT CONCLUSIONS – Finances

Financial concerns continued in the second year of operations due to cash flow issues, primarily associated with the Special Education portion of the budget. The Board was proactive in seeking support and expertise in budget alignment and demonstrated the ability to make difficult decisions necessary to keep the school financially sound. The Board has addressed fiscal monitoring and is presently adhering to a balanced budget. The recently revised method for reviewing monthly financial statements provides the Board with a more effective measure of accountability. The continued work in garnering external funding will assist the school until enrollment goals are met. The audit was submitted on time, and was promptly re-submitted as requested by DESE.

ANNUAL SITE REPORT CONCLUSIONS

Better Learning Communities Academy had significant challenges during the second year of operations. Increase in enrollment, staff turn-over, cash flow issues and the lack of a high quality curriculum with on-going academic assessment were areas that had to be addressed in the second year of operations. Through the utilization of consultants in the area of finance and strong intervention by the Board Chair and Treasurer, financial difficulties were addressed and new processes are now in place to ensure fiscal awareness and accountability.

BLCA has a dedicated Board of Directors who displays a strong commitment to the school. The school continues to demonstrate a commitment to students and families and the Board is in the process of stabilizing finances through long-range fundraising plans.

As the school enters the third year of its five-year charter, a review of the mission and vision, strategic planning for the future, and a stronger emphasis on academics will be imperative for the future success of the school. Other areas of focus should include strengthening connections with the surrounding community, focusing on space needs and utilizing a strong performance evaluation system for administrators and staff to ensure that professional development needs, across all focus areas, are addressed.

The implementation of MSIP 5 will greatly impact all LEAs in the State of Missouri. Focused strategic planning by the Board of Directors, Administration and staff will be necessary for BLCA to achieve its mission. The MU Office of Charter School Operations looks forward to continuing our work with BLCA to achieve the stated mission of offering a high quality school in the Hyde Park neighborhood.

APPENDIX A

FOCUS AREAS WITH SUBCOMPONENTS

FOCUS AREA I: GOVERNANCE, COMPLIANCE AND OPERATIONS

I.A The Board of Directors is effective in its governance and oversight of the school. (GOVERNANCE)

- I.A.1: Board is accountable for operations and academics.
- I.A.2: Board is knowledgeable regarding the school budget.
- I.A.3: Board holds non-profit status.

I.B School administration is well structured and effective. (OPERATIONS)

- I.B.1: Administrators are certified.
- I.B.2: Administrators demonstrate good leadership skills.
- I.B.3: Administrators are good instructional leaders.
- I.B.4: Administrators are engaged in targeted professional development.
- I.B.5: The school's daily schedule supports student learning.

I.C School administration ensures compliance with all DESE and MU reporting requirements. (COMPLIANCE)

- I.C.1: Student attendance rates promote student learning.
- I.C.2: Required reports and data submissions are submitted on time, are complete and error-free.

**I.D School facilities meet health, fire, and safety regulations. (COMPLIANCE) **

- I.D.1: Annual Fire Inspection.
- I.D.2: Annual Health Inspection.
- I.D.3: Adequate restroom facilities.
- I.D.4: Safety and emergency procedures are clearly displayed in all classrooms and public areas (e.g. hallways, cafeterias, gymnasium, office).
- I.D.5: Documentation of regular safety drills.

I.E School files are well maintained. (COMPLIANCE)

- I.E.1: Personnel files.
- I.E.2: Student files.
- I.E.3: Health records.
- I.E.4: Attendance records.

I.F School staff/board meet expectations set forth in state and federal guidelines. (COMPLIANCE)

- I.F.1: 100% of instructional staff is highly qualified.
- I.F.2: Complete background checks, including fingerprinting by the MO Highway Patrol and a Family Care Safety Registry Check, are documented for all board members and staff.

FOCUS AREA II: SCHOOL CULTURE

II.A The school environment supports student learning.

- II.A.1: The learning environment is safe and orderly.
- II.A.2: Teachers believe that all students can learn.
- II.A.3: All staff have high expectations for student learning and behavior.
- II.A.4: Staff collaborates and works together to meet students' needs and to support student learning.
- II.A.5: Instructional materials are displayed to facilitate student learning.
- II.A.6: Policies and procedures for school structure and student management are consistently communicated and implemented.
- II.A.7: Good communication is evident between all stakeholders.
- II.A.8: The staff has built strong relationships with parents and the local community.

II.B Teachers feel supported by the administration.

- II.B.1: All staff have a clear understanding of their job responsibilities and expectations.
- II.B.2: Teachers receive effective feedback and guidance on instructional practice.
- II.B.3: Beginning teachers are supported through a Mentoring Plan.

II.C High standards of professional behavior are exhibited by all staff.

- II.C.1 There is evidence of collaboration.
- II.C.2 Teachers and staff fulfill clearly assigned responsibilities

II.D All stakeholders in the school treat each other with mutual respect.

- II.D.1 There is evidence of collaboration.
- II.D.2 Leaders at the school are recognized for their expertise.
- II.D.3 Teachers and staff can easily identify the instructional leader(s).

FOCUS AREA III: TEACHING AND LEARNING

III.A The school has a clearly defined, high quality curriculum.

III.A.1: Curriculum is aligned to state standards.

III.A.2: Curriculum aligns with the theme described in the school charter.

III.A.3: High quality instructional materials are available to support the curriculum.

III.A.4: Goals and objectives are clearly articulated.

III.B Instructional practices meet the needs of all learners.

III.B.1: Teachers utilize good instructional strategies in lesson delivery.

III.B.2: The Title I Plan is effective in supporting students' needs.

III.B.3: Ongoing professional development supports "best practices" and student learning.

III.B.4: Technology use is evident, of high quality, and supports student learning.

III.C Assessment is used effectively to support student learning.

III.C.1: Data is used to guide instruction.

III.C.2: Classroom assessments are effective in assessing learning and students' needs.

III.D The school has an effective special education program (SPED).

III.D.1: The SPED program is compliant with state and federal laws.

III.D.2: Staff follows a mandated process for identifying and supporting SPED students.

III.D.3: Delivery of SPED services meets students' needs.

FOCUS AREA IV: FINANCES

IV.A The school budget supports student learning.

IV.A.1: The school has sufficient resources to support operations.

IV.A.2: The school adheres to a balanced budget.

IV.A.3: The Annual Secretary of the Board Report (ASBR) shows an unrestricted ending fund balance that exceeds state minimums.

IV.B Financial records are efficiently maintained.

IV.B.1: Monthly financial statements are an effective accountability measure and align with the approved budget.

IV.B.2: Monthly financial statements are clearly presented to and reviewed by the Board of Directors.

IV.B.3: The Board of Directors has established a system of checks and balances to ensure that all fiscal issues are carefully monitored.

IV.C Annual Audit

IV.C.1: The annual audit, with documented Board approval, is submitted on or before December 31 per state regulations.

IV.C.2: The annual audit meets regulatory requirements as established by DESE.

IV.C.3: The findings of the audit are published within 30 days following receipt of the audit, as per regulatory requirements.

22. Policies/procedures for student behavior management are consistently implemented.	2.2	1-3	.8
23. Teachers at this school feel supported by school administration.	3.0	1-5	1.5
24. School administrators effectively communicate teacher expectations.	2.4	1-4	1.0
25. School administrators effectively communicate student expectations.	2.4	1-4	1.0
26. Teachers at this school receive effective administrator feedback and guidance on instructional practice	2.0	1-4	1.1
27. The administrative staff exhibits high standards of professional behavior.	3.7	1-5	1.5
28. Administrators exhibit strong leadership skills.	2.8	1-5	1.5
29. All stakeholders in the school treat each other with mutual respect.	3.2	1-5	1.8
30. Good communication exists between all stakeholders.	2.4	1-5	1.7

Part II: Describe the culture of your school – MAJOR THEMES

Positive Comments:

- Cooperation of staff members is good; a family oriented culture with a friendly and supportive staff.
- The principal is very caring and tries very hard to support the staff.

Areas of Concern:

- BLCA students need more attention and help through instruction.
- Parental involvement is an area of concern.
- There is a lack of support for the staff.
- A harmonious culture for staff and students needs to be developed; tension exists between some teachers/aides/kitchen staff/after-school staff.
- Consistency will help with student behavior.
- The building is not clean; there should be a separate restroom for the staff.
- There seems to be an ethnic divide for some issues that has not been resolved.

Part III: Additional comments – MAJOR THEMES

Positive Comments:

- BLCA is a good school and will get better over time.

Areas of Concern:

- Technology training is needed in all areas.
- Collaboration time is needed.
- A reading curriculum is needed.
- Supplies are limited.
- Center materials are needed.
- Stronger follow through on communication is needed.
- Observation and feedback for teachers is needed.

APPENDIX C
Better Learning Communities Academy
APRIL 2013 BOARD SURVEY RESULTS (n = 5)

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 1	Below Average 2	Average 3	Above Average 4	Excellent 5
Question					Standard Deviation
1. Clarifying the school's mission and vision					.84
2. Strategic planning and goal setting for the school					.55
3. Resolving key strategic or policy issues					.84
4. Developing the financial resources needed to support student performance and school success					1.00
5. Overseeing financial performance and ensuring financial solvency					1.41
6. Understanding charter school law					.89
7. Ensuring legal and ethical integrity					.55
8. Tracking and assessing academic performance of the school based on the mission, vision and charter goals					1.14
9. Developing the school's Executive Director/CEO					.97
10. Evaluating the school's Executive Director/CEO					1.50
11. Developing the Head of School/Academic leader/Principal					1.30
12. Evaluating the Head of School/Academic Leader/Principal					1.64

COMMENTS – MAJOR THEMES for BOARD FUNCTIONS

1. There are concerns about the strength of the leadership team.
2. Evaluation and action steps are done in a positive manner.
3. Plans for fundraising have been excellent.
4. Finances are back on track.
5. The Board engaged in careful monitoring of professional staff.

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 1	Below Average 2	Average 3	Above Average 4	Excellent 5
Question	Mean	Range	Standard Deviation		
1. Identifying, cultivating, and integrating new board members based on the needs of the school (background, diversity, expertise, etc.)	3.6	2-5	1.14		
2. Providing charter school orientation and training for new board members	2.8	2-4	.84		
3. Utilizing board committees effectively and efficiently (committees fulfilling their identified roles and responsibilities)	3.3	3-4	.50		
4. Reviewing board meeting agendas and related materials in a timely manner in preparation for meetings	4.4	4-5	.55		
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)	4.6	4-5	.55		
6. Selecting, developing and evaluating the board chair	4.5	3-5	1.00		
7. Selecting, developing and evaluating school leaders	2.6	1-4	1.38		
8. Utilizing data to make strategic and operational decisions for the school	2.6	1-4	1.34		
9. Monitoring fiscal operations, including developing and approving a budget monitoring expenses, and optimizing cash flow for all funding and expense streams.	4.4	3-5	.89		
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.)	4.0	3-5	.71		

COMMENTS – MAJOR THEMES for BOARD PROCESSES

1. There were concerns with monitoring cash flow until late in the year.
2. There are concerns regarding the amount of financial responsibility for the Board Treasurer.
3. New board members have brought in needed expertise.
4. Board members were invited to attend an MCPSA program (two did attend).
5. Committee work (finance and task force for evaluation of the leadership team) has been handled well.
6. The Board effectively identified areas of concern and developed plans to address those areas.

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	Mean	Range	Standard Deviation
1. Clarifying the organization's mission, vision and strategic goals	1.6	1-2	.55
2. Evaluating board performance to ensure continuous improvement	2.2	2-3	.45
3. Developing, adding or replacing board members	1.8	1-2	.45
4. Developing, adding or replacing school leaders	2.8	2-3	.45
5. Developing financial resources to support the school	2.8	2-3	.45
6. Improving financial stability	2.8	2-3	.45
7. Assessing and improving academic performance	3.0	3-3	.00
8. Developing strategies for recruiting and retaining high quality teachers and staff	2.6	2-3	.55
9. Meeting all legal and policy requirements (specify needs below, if desired)	1.6	1-2	.55
10. Planning for facilities	2.8	2-3	.45
11. Considering expansion or replicator schools	2.2	1-3	.84
12. Preparing for renewal of the charter	2.6	2-3	.55

COMMENTS – MAJOR THEMES for SHORT-TERM PRIORITIES

1. Financial issues now appear to be under control but there are concerns regarding the amount of oversight required by the Board Treasurer.
2. The Board understands it should not be as involved in administrative tasks.
3. Search for a new Principal will be a priority, looking for both administrative and leadership skills.