

SUBJECT

Wings Charter Middle School Annual Update

APPLICABLE STATUTE, RULE, OR POLICY

N/A

BACKGROUND

Wings Charter Middle School (Wings) is a public charter school originally authorized by the Public Charter School Commission (PCSC) under the name Southern Idaho Learning Center Lab School. Wings serves a primarily at-risk population of middle school students in Twin Falls, and just finished its fourth year of operation.

DISCUSSION

Wings will provide an update on the status of the school. Meeting materials were submitted after the deadline and have, therefore, been excluded from these materials.

Wings did not meet [AYP](#) in 2011-2012, because proficiency in math, reading, and language arts for all students was below state targets. Wings received a [2012 Star Rating](#) of 1 out of 5. The school's [2013 Star Rating](#) is again of 1 out of 5. Though the school's 2013 Star Rating results are concerning, it is notable that the overall points received increased from 23 in 2012 to 32 in 2013. Wings' overall 2013 Star Rating points place them as the eleventh lowest performing school in the state (out of 647 schools); seven (7) of the schools that received fewer points than Wings are SDE designated alternative schools.

Wings had similar Achievement category results in 2012 and 2013, with 2013 proficiency rates of 35.8% in math, 64.2% in reading, and 27.6% in language arts. Wings made slight gains with student growth rates; the school's points received in the Growth to Achievement and Growth to Achievement Subgroups categories increased from 20% of available points in these categories in 2012 to 33% of points in both categories in 2013. Though Wings' student population includes a high percentage of at-risk and special needs students, the 2013 Growth to Achievement results continue to reveal that the general student population at Wings is not growing at a rate that will allow them to achieve proficiency within three years, and the Student Growth Percentiles of 42 in math, 31 in reading, and 38 in language arts demonstrate that the growth rate of Wings' general student population is lower than that of their academic peers.

Enrollment has decreased steadily over the past two years. Wings ended the 2011-2012 year with 189 students, ended 2012-2013 with 123 students, and currently projects beginning the 2013-2014 school year with 80 students. At this time, only sixth grade students are confirmed for enrollment. This downward trend has had a negative impact on the school's finances.

The Wings budget shows an anticipated FY13 carryover of just \$682, as well as an FY14 projected balanced budget with no carryover at the end of the year. However, further communication with the school's Business Manager has revealed that the budget document was completed incorrectly. Rather than reflecting the school's overall carryover, the \$682 amount is the school's anticipated single-year increase in the carryover, as it is equal to total revenues minus total expenditures. Wings' actual carryover was just under \$300,000 at the end of FY12, and this has been maintained through FY13. Additionally, Wings recently received a grant that will result in over \$700,000 of additional revenue over the next three years (approximately \$260,000 for FY14). The grant is not reflected in the attached budget.

IMPACT

Information item only.

STAFF COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff has no comments or recommendations.

COMMISSION ACTION

Any action would be at the discretion of the PCSC.

**Idaho Public Charter School Commission
Site Visit Report**

School	Wings Public Charter School (WPCS)
Address	771 North College Road, Twin Falls, ID 83301
Date of Site Visit	April 24, 2013
PCSC Staff Present	Alison Henken, Charter Schools Program Manager
Board Member(s) Interviewed	Tony Adkins, Secretary / Treasurer Dianna Cullinan, Member
Administrator(s) Interviewed	Letha Blick, Administrator
Business Manager / Clerk Interviewed	Marci Stimpson, Business Manager
Other Stakeholder(s) Interviewed	Teachers (3)

Board Member(s) Interview

Tony Adkins, Secretary / Treasurer, and Dianna Cullinan, Member, participated in the interview. Tony has been on the board for three and a half years and has been the Secretary / Treasurer for one year. Dianna is a new board member, having joined in February 2013. During the interview, the board members stated that the Wings board has a new Chair. Kay Jones, the previous Chair, became a Capacity Builder (and is the Capacity Builder for Wings), so since there was a conflict of interest, she resigned her position on the board. In February 2013, Pat Walker accepted the Board Chair position on an interim basis. Though Pat was initially going to be a part of the interview, there were communication gaps that led board members to believe their interview was at a different time than Ms. Blick had it on the schedule for, and as a result, Ms. Walker arrived after the interview was completed.

They described the school's mission and vision to provide an academic transition for struggling and at-risk students by providing them with smaller class sizes and focused work on their individual learning challenges so they can be prepared for high school and life.

The board members feel they have a good relationship with the administrator, Letha Blick. They feel that Ms. Blick is open and up front with them and gives the board the information they request and need to make decisions. Though the board and administrator have sometimes had differences of opinion, they have talked these situations through and found common ground.

In addition to evaluating the administrator, the board conducts a self-evaluation at least once per year. The members complete a questionnaire and later they have a group discussion about their capacity and how they can improve as a board. The board members conceded that board training is an area where they can improve. In the past, individual board members have individually attended conferences and seminars, but there is no established board training plan. As a new board member, Dianna described her training as informal. She is learning from the other board members and speaks with the administrator frequently.

The board members said that their most significant concern at this time is hiring a new administrator, since Letha Blick has resigned her position effective at the end of the school year. When asked to describe what traits they will be looking for in a new administrator, they responded that they will look for someone who is similar to Letha and really cares about the student; someone who is capable of managing the varied roles of a charter administrator and has strong leadership, administration, and time management skills. Additionally, the board members expressed concern about teacher turnover, since they have two teachers leaving at the end of the year, and turnover has a significant impact on the population of students they serve.

Enrollment is another area of concern for the board members, since they know that enrollment has to stay up so that school's finances can remain stable. The board members stated that academics are always a concern for them, since Wings serves a diverse, at-risk population, and often enrolls students who have IEPs or behavioral issues who have not succeeded at other schools. They have discussed alternate ways to measure student growth and success (such as increases in attendance, etc.) that go beyond standardized test performance. On the other hand, they are proud that students like to come to school and show up, and that they have the opportunity to see struggling students finish middle school.

Administrator(s) Interview

Letha Blick, Administrator, participated in the interview. Ms. Blick has been the school's administrator since Wings opened in 2009. Ms. Blick has resigned her position at Wings; she will be completing this school year.

Ms. Blick feels she has an excellent relationship with the board. She tries to keep them informed and while the board members are helpful and supportive, she said they also question her in the decision making process. She demonstrated an understanding of the appropriate division of roles between the board (oversight, finances, and strategic planning) and the administrator (day-to-day management of staff, curriculum and school and enforcing board policies). She feels that the board and administrator at Wings are close to this ideal and that the board is conscientious about not micromanaging.

Ms. Blick measures success at Wings based on the growth of individual students, particularly in regards to progress on benchmark tests (AIMS web) and decreases in referrals for behavior. She also considers teachers' professional growth. She feels that Wings is "further than most" in their preparations for implementing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), since they purchased their textbooks with CCSS in mind and have already adopted a revised lesson plan template. At this point, Wings is working on revising their assessments to ensure they include some of the types of questions that students will have to answer when Idaho transitions to using the Smarter Balanced Assessment for standardized testing.

When asked about concerns she has about the school's operations, academics or finances, she responded that she feels the operations are too much for one administrator, particularly since approximately 40% of the school's students have IEPs or 504 plans and addressing behavior issues takes a considerable part of the administrator's time. She believes this will be addressed with her resignation, as the board is considering shifting funds so that the school can have 1.5 administrators. She also has concerns about the need to get Wings' parents more involved in the school and the children's education, and stated that this is a challenge. Additionally, she noted that the school has difficulty retaining teachers, since Wings is not able to pay as much as surrounding districts.

When the PCSC staff member followed up with Ms. Blick about the school's academics and Star Rating, she stated that she feels Wings is on an upward trend. They eliminated some electives from the school in order to provide two reading and/or math classes for students struggling in those subjects. However, she still has concerns about the school's ability to get students to proficient. On the other hand, she does feel that they can and should get student growth rates up so that students (and Wings) will meet adequate growth.

Business Manager / Clerk Interview

Marci Stimpson, Business Manager, participated in the interview. Ms. Stimpson began as the full-time Business Manager at Wings in September 2012. She previously worked in finance for a

school district. When asked about how she feels the school is doing financially, Ms. Stimpson responded that she feels that finances are looking good this year, with expenses tracking closely to what was anticipated. Ms. Stimpson intends to build the FY14 budget based on previous years' actuals. She feels the board is fairly involved in monitoring the school's finances; they check the financial statements and outgoing checks. Besides approving financial statements at board meetings, the board tends to have discussions about finances as they relate to potential or ongoing projects. The Board Chair and Treasurer also meet with the administrator as needed.

Teacher Meeting

The PCSC staff member had the opportunity to meet with three (3) teachers who teach a variety of grades and subjects, including special education. Below are the questions presented to the teachers and their summarized responses:

How can Wings improve? What can the school do better?

- We need to build a more positive school climate and a stronger sense of school identity
- We could have more consistency in behavior management and discipline
- Collaboration and training for teachers could be stronger and more frequent
- We could have more ongoing training for general education teachers regarding working with special education and at-risk students
- Student recruitment could improve, which would help the school be more fiscally stable

Earlier this year, I spoke with your administrator and board members about the school's Star Rating and how it could be improved. Please describe what interventions you've put in place and how they are going.

- We have improved core instruction
- We are using more data and targeting our interventions based on benchmark results and the reasons that teachers feel students have struggled
- We're trying to incorporate more student buy-in when we set academic goals
- We now have a set time for teacher collaboration, which has helped, though it could still improve
- In general, we feel it's heading in the right direction but there is still room to improve on all of these things. For instance, while we've increased student involvement in setting goals, we want them to be able to track their own progress so they feel more ownership over their academic growth.

If you could make the decisions, what would you do next year to continue to move the school's academic performance forward?

- We'd like to see more accountability for academic interventions – we need to have our interventions be quicker and more effective. We could use more structure, including clear entry and exit scores for certain types of interventions.
- Overall, our intervention instruction could be more systematic and improved, especially for students whose performance is in the middle – work for the lowest and highest performers is currently more organized than those in the middle.

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How prepared do you feel Wings is for the implementation of the Common Core State Standard (CCSS) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment?

- We're pretty comfortable – most of the staff are trained and are using it already when they can
- We still need to work and prepare for the assessments, both in terms of how the assessment and question types and in preparing technology and technology instruction

How effective is the professional development you receive? How strong is the application of what you learn?

- At the beginning of the year before instruction started, we had great professional development and ideas, but because there wasn't an accountability structure in place for implementation, some of it got left behind
- We struggle with the balance between learning and working on many things through professional development and doing them all minimally or doing a few things well – we think it would help if professional development was more focused and connected to high priority aspects of instruction / practice that we want to get in place
- We would like professional development to be more organized and structured – it's helped a lot to have a time set aside for collaboration, but we think we could use that time more effectively
- It would be good if professional development could be based on needs that teachers help to identify and then if we could have an established and ongoing process for collaboration, implementation, and accountability

What do you like about working at this school? What's going well?

- Staff collaboration – Even though we think it could be improved, we really value the fact that we have time set aside and everyone is very willing to work together
- The small class sizes work well for our population of students
- Since January (2013), we have been doing monthly assemblies with a student showcase and teacher-student challenge. These are helping to begin to build school spirit and identity.
- In January, we also started focusing on positive behavior recognition and doing more PBIS (positive behavioral interventions and supports), and we believe this is the right direction to go to improve behavior management
- Our ADA seems to be improving
- Even though the kids can be a challenging group, we really like working with them, because we're meeting a need and we get to see them grow
- The staff here all believe in the goals of the school – we're very mission-focused, so the successes with students are really rewarding

Documents Review

Finances

The 2011-2013 fiscal audit and 2012-2013 year-to-date finances were reviewed in person. Questions were answered by the Business Manager, Marci Stimpson and the Administrator, Letha Blick. At the end of FY12, the school had a carryover of approximately \$200,000, having increased the carryover by approximately \$100,000 from the previous year. Wings requested an advance payment at the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year, and Ms. Blick said the estimated support

units were close to actual. The submitted financial given to the PCSC did not include a comparison of actual expenditures to the established budget, but the Business Manager, Marci Stimpson, stated that the budget is tracking well and they estimate that finances will be close to balanced this year. There are no significant concerns about the school's finances at this time.

Special Education Files

Three (3) special education files were selected at random by the PCSC staff member for review. Kristy Oberg, Special Education Director, was available to answer questions. All of the reviewed files were complete and well organized, including up-to-date IEPs, clear accommodations current eligibility and LRE reports. All essential elements of the files were present, and there are no concerns about the files at this time.

The PCSC staff member also had the opportunity to speak briefly with Ms. Oberg about Wings' special education services. In regards to implementing IEPs, Ms. Oberg generally reviews the student's IEP and services from the previous school (most of Wings' special education students have IEPs when they enroll) and make amendments and adjustments as needed based on the available services and approach at Wings. Services primarily happen through inclusion, though pullouts are done as necessary. The school also contracts with specialists, including physical and occupational therapy, speech / language therapy, and a school psychologist. Ms. Oberg expressed that the most challenging part of her job is having only one person at Wings certified in special education despite the fairly high percentage of Wings' students who are in need of services. Though Wings has looked for additional special education staff, an area wide shortage makes recruitment challenging.

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations were generally positive, though somewhat mixed. In some classrooms, students were engaged in activities and minimal behavior issues were observed. In one such classroom, students were engaged in a discussion with the teacher and most students were actively participating. On the other hand, there were some classrooms where students did not appear to be as engaged; at times, students were not doing the assigned task and the teacher did not step in to get them back on track. In several classrooms, textbooks, worksheets, and lectures were the observed instructional / learning method, and in most of these classrooms, there were behavioral or engagement challenges. Pacing, transitions, and behavior management seemed to present challenges for some teachers. This varied depending on the classroom, and there were some classrooms that demonstrated strong instruction. However, it is that there is room for improvement.

Summary

Strengths

- The school's financial situation has improved and is now stable.
- The board and administrator report having a strong relationship.
- Teacher report having improved collaboration and are committed to improving the services the school provides and Wings' academic outcomes.

Challenges or Areas for Improvement

- Academics need improvement as reflected by the school received a 1 Star Rating

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- Based on teacher feedback and classroom observations, consistency in classroom engagement and behavior management could be improved

Concerns

- The school's 1 Star Rating and low points in the Student Growth sections is of concern.

Possible Charter Violations

- There are no apparent charter violations at this time.

Possible Charter Amendments

- There are no potential charter amendments at this time.

Recommendations

- PCSC staff recommends that the Wings Board of Directors be diligent in the hiring an onboarding of a strong administrator, as this will be critical for Wings to improve the school's academic outcomes and financial stability
- PCSC staff recommends that the board recommend that the new administrator work with the teachers to prioritize and re-structure professional development and collaboration in order to improve classroom management and student engagement (for students of all academic levels)
- PCSC staff recommends that the administrator, clerk, and board all remain diligent in monitoring their finances to give them the best possible chance of ending the year with an increased carryover

Materials or Follow-up Requested of the School

No follow-up was requested; the administrator and some board members participated in a meeting with the Charter Schools Program Manager regarding the school's star rating on November 28, 2012.