



Charter School Renewal Recommendation	
Charter School	Milwaukee Environmental Sciences Academy (MESA)
Date of Site Visit	November 14, 2019

The renewal recommendation is based on a thorough review and analysis of information and data from the following:

- Charter School Performance Summary
- Application for Renewal
- School Site Visit

Charter School Performance Summary		
Rating:	Met the Standard	Did Not Meet the Standard
Educational Performance		X
Financial Performance	X	
Organizational Performance	X	
Summary Comments:		
<p>Milwaukee Environmental Sciences Academy (MESA) is to provide a solid, intensive program of academic study aligned with the Wisconsin Common Core State Standards that is dedicated to the intellectual, physical, and emotional growth of all students within a safe and orderly environment.</p> <p>Educational Performance: For the past two years, MESA has not met most of the academic performance standards. MESA is showing slight gains from the 2017-18 school year to the 2018-19 school year; however, it is still well below the district. Attendance and mobility rates are two areas that have shown consistency and are outperforming the district. From the last renewal, MESA has taken steps to adopt and implement the Expeditionary Learning (EL) curriculum. In addition, it has adopted a new math curriculum and increased the minutes students receive science instruction.</p> <p>Although MESA did not meet the educational performance standards, it did make progress towards its goals, surpassing the district's rate of growth in many areas, though not at a rate that will surpass the district's proficiency rate. MESA has grown on its state report card which illustrates that it is exceeding expectations. The leadership team has focused on increasing proficiency in English Language Arts (ELA) and math and dedicated resources to align with the proficiency benchmarks.</p> <p>Financial Performance: MESA has met its financial performance standards. It continues to have a balanced budget and a clean audit.</p> <p>Organizational Performance: MESA has continuously met its organizational performance standards. MESA has restructured its administrative team to increase relationships among students and families by having an administrator that works with grade bands. It has chosen to partner with the Families and Students Together (FAST) organization this last year to increase resources and strategies aimed at providing supportive assistance to families outside of school. It has a Dean of Family Engagement to support students and</p>		

families and facilitate opportunities to increase parental involvement. MESA has partnered with Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) to increase its family and community involvement that will impact students.

Application for Renewal

Met the Standard	Did Not Meet the Standard
<p>The Application for Renewal provides <i>clear, concise and compelling information</i> in the areas of Educational, Financial and Organizational Performance. The school has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Included ample evidence of increased student achievement or shown continuous improvement; <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Provided credible examples and documented evidence of its financial performance; and <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Illustrated sufficiently and convincingly that it is organizationally sound. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The school's plans for continued success are clearly and effectively outlined with full details, descriptions, and explanations. 	<p>The Application for Renewal <i>does not provide clear, concise and compelling information</i> in the areas of Educational, Financial and Organizational Performance. The school did not satisfactorily address application components. Responses lack details. Descriptions and/or examples are underdeveloped. The school provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient evidence of increased student achievement or continuous improvement; <input type="checkbox"/> Unclear examples and evidence of its financial performance; and <input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate evidence that it is organizationally sound. <input type="checkbox"/> The school's plans for continued success are unclear and not fully described or developed.
X	

Summary Comments:

The application for renewal provided a solid base of information regarding educational, financial and organizational performance. MESA's application for renewal provided clear, concise, and compelling information in the areas of educational, financial and organizational performance. The school has included ample evidence to show a continuous improvement in academics. MESA provided credible examples of documented evidence of its financial performance and illustrated that its organizationally sound.

MESA's application for renewal presented strong evidence relating to growth while acknowledging and accepting responsibilities for deficiencies relating to the Wisconsin Student Assessment System WSAS. MESA's attendance rate has consistently been above the district rate and its mobility rate is lower than the district rate for corresponding grades. MESA has demonstrated growth in all four areas of the WSAS in math, reading, science and social studies. Although MESA did not meet or beat the district in these areas, it is demonstrating growth. The staff professional development days were increased to focus on implementing the EL curriculum and new math curriculum.

MESA illustrated the Habits of Scholarship through the use of *Crew*, a social-emotional curriculum.

The school provided sufficient documentation as to its financial performance and systems. However, it would have been beneficial to provide additional documentation and information to further support its plans to maintain and/or improve financial stability and performance moving forward. It should be noted that the school does have financial systems in place, regularly meets all measures relating to financial performance, and has an active board of directors that supports the program. The school has continuously met its target of a balanced budget and a clean financial audit. The school close oversight by the Milwaukee Teacher Education Center (MTEC) board of directors as well as the director of finance.

MESA provided compelling evidence relating to its organizational performance, particularly as it relates to its board and administrators. The application demonstrates an effective governance structure and collaboration with MTEC. The MTEC board of directors is diverse in professional backgrounds which

contributes to the ongoing success of the school. MESA has reported a balanced budget and consistently clean audits.

Though there have been some changes to the parental involvement channels, MESA offers a parent program called ATP and the application detailed a few community organizations it has partnered with. Both parental involvement strategies and community partnerships seem to be evolving. The monthly ATP meetings include topics such as Acts Housing, Vroom program, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Nursing, and Faithfully Investing in the Financial Perspective (FIIT Perspective). The application reports that 87 percent of 135 parents surveyed indicated that they believe the staff is committed to providing the best possible education for their children.

Finally, MESA did provide evidence of a plan for moving forward in all areas; educational, organizational and financial performance; particularly with regard to increasing students' fluency and comprehension in reading through the EL curriculum.

School Site Visit

Met the Standard	Did Not Meet the Standard
<p>Charter school site visit provided excellent further evidence that the school is meeting performance standards.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> School presentations clearly and effectively communicated information from its Application for Renewal. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> School sufficiently addressed any issues/concerns raised by the MPS Charter School Contract Review Team members. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> School (if appropriate) provided sufficient supplementary information to further clarify performance results and ratings. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Samples of student work and classroom visits reflect strongly and positively the school's teaching and learning practices. 	<p>Charter school site visit did not provide compelling evidence that the school is meeting performance standards.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> School presentations insufficiently communicated information from its Application for Renewal. <input type="checkbox"/> School did not adequately address issues/concerns raised by the MPS Charter School Contract Review Team members. <input type="checkbox"/> School did not provide ample supplementary information to clarify performance results and ratings. <input type="checkbox"/> Samples of student work and classroom visits did not necessarily positively reflect the school's teaching and learning practices.
X	

Summary Comments:

MESA provided a clear description of how the school was developed and evolved over the past seven years. The staff spoke about the school's greater focus on improving outcomes in ELA and math while being committed to the EL curriculum. They effectively answered questions and were candid about the areas for improvement and greater focus.

The school visit consisted of testimonies from of two parents, administrators, board members, community partners, and student focus groups. Classroom observations and the school presentation provided compelling evidence of the school's organizational and financial successes and stability. MESA has a strong, committed and diverse board. The school is taking steps to restructure administration to ensure continued growth as well as provide additional support to students, families and staff. The staff spoke highly of the school's partnership with MPS and provided evidence that it has taken increased advantage of this partnership for professional development and to address concerns relating to data and growth. MESA did acknowledge a desire to work with MTEC to offer increased professional support and development to its staff.

The special education coordinator provided evidence of systems that are in place to have quality supports for students aligned to three goals: 1) increasing parent involvement; 2) increasing collaboration between regular education and special education teachers; and 3) increasing the

confidence of all staff members who work with students with disabilities.

The classroom visits provided ample evidence of the incorporation of the EL model and commitment to the Habits of Scholarship. Lesson objectives were clearly posted in every classroom. The students were able to articulate what they were learning. The Habits of Scholarship were posted throughout and were also incorporated in lessons and during conversations.

The Team observed several very effective teachers in classrooms as evidenced by a high level of participation with engaged students asking questions and contributing to ideas. The Team observed a science class in which there was a lively discussion as well as opportunities for students to build their reading and presentation skills. The Team observed several math lessons in which students were working collectively to solve problems and learn a variety of approaches. There was effective use of technology for learning and appropriate support in the classrooms.

It was clear that there was a heavy focus on the Habits of Scholarship as anchor charts were visible throughout all classrooms and students referenced them on numerous occasions. Each classroom had learning intentions posted for each of the core subjects. The EL curriculum was used in each of the classrooms during the literacy block. Data boards were posted outside of each classroom that related to attendance, uniform, and homework completion. In addition, data boards related to the benchmark assessments were posted inside each of the classrooms.

There were samples of student work throughout the school that demonstrated the school's approach to learning and student achievement. Students and families voiced appreciation for the school and teachers. The students also liked the classes, especially science, and enjoyed the projects and field trips. The students liked that the administration was visible and active in the school.

The student focus groups provided further evidence of academic growth as well as the use of Habits of Scholarship. Students indicated that they would like to have opportunities for music instruction as well as more space for collaboration among students. When asked what students liked best about MESA, they stated the following:

"Learning activities in the most fun way possible and the teachers are very nice."

"The educators and how they treat us. They do things, but you have to work for it. They have scholarships and they give us chances to excel and to be better in our class."

The family representatives (two parents) also expressed general satisfaction with the school; however, they also expressed concerns about opportunities to become more involved with the school and that their voice might not be heard as much as they would like. The school acknowledged these concerns and did point out changes in administrative structure and new partnerships that they hoped would remedy these concerns. It would have been beneficial to hear from other parents to confirm if this was a larger issue.

While concerns remain regarding not meeting the academic performance measures and commitment to environmental sciences, as opposed to/or in conjunction with EL curriculum, the Team believes that MESA has demonstrated growth as evidenced in WSAS scores and the state report card. The school has a strong commitment to continued improvement and implementation of the EL curriculum.

Charter School Review Team Renewal Recommendation

Full-Term
Term of 5 Years

To be eligible, schools must be in the last year of the contract term and have achieved the following:
There is a strong and compelling record of evidence that the school met or exceeded the performance standards in the areas of Educational Performance, Financial Performance, and Organizational Performance.

		<p><u>Guidelines for Recommending Five-Year Renewal:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Team determines that a school primarily merits <i>Met the Standard</i> ratings in the performance areas. A school that receives mixed ratings may be recommended for a full five-year renewal term if sufficient additional evidence obtained from the school's Application for Renewal and School Site Visit make this a credible recommendation.
X	Short-Term Term of 3 Years	<p>To be eligible, schools must be in the last year of the contract term and have achieved the following: <i>There is a strong and compelling record of evidence that the school met or exceeded a considerable number of the performance standards in the areas of Educational Performance, Financial Performance, and Organizational Performance and/or shows continuous, meaningful improvement toward meeting the performance standards.</i></p> <p><u>Guidelines for Recommending Three-Year Renewal:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Team determines that a school primarily merits <i>Met the Standard</i> ratings or demonstrates continuous and meaningful improvement in the performance areas. A school that receives mixed ratings may be recommended for a three-year renewal term if evidence obtained from the school's Application for Renewal and School Site Visit make this a credible recommendation.
	Non-Renewal/Revocation	<p><i>The school does not apply for renewal or the school's educational, financial, and/or organizational performance results do not meet defined standards and are deemed unsatisfactory. This would result in a recommendation for non-renewal/revocation.</i></p> <p><u>Guidelines for Recommending Non-Renewal/Revocation:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school receives a <i>Did Not Meet the Standard</i> in all three areas of performance. A school that receives mixed ratings may be recommended for non-renewal/revocation if evidence obtained from the school's Performance Summary, Application for Renewal, and School Site Visit make this a credible recommendation.

Summary Comments:

MESA has made some positive improvements that support the growth of students both in academics and social-emotional well-being. The school has made adjustments to its leadership team to ensure that there is a direct contact with students, teachers and families. They have added art to their programming by hiring a full-time art teacher. The addition of the special education coordinator was added to ensure that students with disabilities are receiving an equitable learning experience. The adoption and implementation of the EL curriculum is showing a positive impact on students. MESA is the first urban school to implement the EL curriculum and is working towards becoming an accredited EL school.

MESA acknowledged shortfalls on academic performance measures. More importantly, the school did provide testimony and evidence of growth and improvement that outpaced the district. Furthermore, the school demonstrated growth on the state report card. MESA has demonstrated that it has taken a variety of steps to promote continued growth, including, but not limited to professional development, analyzing and addressing data in collaboration with the district, restructuring administration and a strong commitment to the EL model which brings additional accountability on the school. While this growth and the state report card are commendable, there is still reservation from the Team because the gap between the performance of the school and the district is rather significant. Further, while the EL model is unique and the related Habits of Scholarships focused on building character, there was limited evidence of the environmental science focus of the school.

The EL curriculum focus offers many opportunities for students. In addition to the support that teachers receive from school leadership, there is other supplemental curriculum that is fundamental to the success and the intentional way to increase student achievement. Students articulated how they enjoy the Celebration of Learning expositions that occur at the end of each of the EL units. These expositions support teachers in designing learning projects that are authentic and combine academic rigor and character development. MESA is a great choice for MPS families who seek a year-round program focused on Expeditionary Learning (EL) experiences.

It is evident that MESA promotes commitment from all school community members, which attests to the school's different approaches to student achievement. The culture of the school is safe, nurturing to students' needs and supportive of its unique approach to learning. MESA listed a number of community partners; however, the Team did note that there was even greater opportunity for exploration of partnerships in light of the school's unique programming and location.

As indicated in the Charter School Performance Summary and the evidence provided by the school, MESA has not met the majority of its educational performance measures as outlined under the contract. MESA did meet attendance and mobility rates. Despite this fact, the school did accept responsibility and fully acknowledge that they were not yet where they wanted to be at this time. However, the documentation provided by the school in its performance summary, application and site visit has indicated that MESA has demonstrated growth in these areas and its growth often exceeded that growth of the district. MESA also proudly boasted improvement on the state report card. MESA provided clear and convincing evidence that it has been implementing a rigorous curriculum (with additional accountability) through the EL model along with various other interventions that the school believe will lead to continued growth. Additionally, MESA adequately addressed concerns relating to its stability rate, which dropped. By restructuring the administrative team, it is the school's hope that they will form meaningful relationships with students, families and staff to increase the stability rate.

MESA has improved to meet 100% of the financial measures during the term of the contract. They have regularly had unmodified audits with no material findings or significant weaknesses reported. Furthermore, the strong financial support over time from its governing board demonstrates their commitment to the future success of MESA.

MESA has consistently met 90% of the organizational performance measures under the contract with the exception of immunization requirements, which have recently shown improvement. The school has a strong and committed board of directors with diverse employment backgrounds. The school has restructured its administrative team in hopes of continuing improved performance and to improve support staff in the program. MESA provided evidence of a reformed parental organization. However, it should be noted that the parents who provided evidence did not share the same feelings as to the success of the program and desired more options for involvement and participation as well as a strong desire to have their voice heard. The school did accept these concerns and hoped that the new structure would continue to create improvements and new opportunities.

Based on the evidence provided in the Charter School Application for Renewal; Performance Summary; Site Visit (which included classroom visits, testimony from students, staff and parents); along with additional data and artifacts, the Charter School Review Team recommends a short-term renewal to provide an opportunity to show greater growth with the systems that have been put in place.

MPS Charter School Review Team Members

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Signature: Bridget Schock Date: November 14, 2019
 Bridget Schock, Contracted School Services