

**School  
Organizational  
Solutions (SOS), LLC**

***Tindley Preparatory Academy***

***Second Year Site Visit***

***12/16/2013***

***Conducted by:***

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## Second Year Site Visit Report

Completed by Members of School Organizational Services (SOS), LLC

Name: Tindley Preparatory Academy

Date of Review: 12/16/2013

Year in the charter contract: Year Two

Site visit evaluation team members: Dr. Terrence Harewood, Marjorie Labelle, Cheryl McLaughlin, Dr. Sarah Ohmer

Sub-questions addressed in review:

- 4.1 Does the school have a high quality curriculum and supporting materials for each grade?
- 4.2 Are the teaching pedagogies consistent with the school's mission?
- 4.3 For secondary students, does the school provide guidance on and support and preparation for post secondary options?
- 4.4 Does the school effectively use learning standards and assessments to inform and improve instruction?
- 4.5 Has the school developed adequate human resource systems and deployed its staff effectively?
- 4.6 Is the school's mission clearly understood by all stakeholders?
- 4.7 Is the school climate conducive to student and staff success?
- 4.8 Is ongoing communication with students and parents clear and helpful?
- 4.9 Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations related to access and services to students with special needs?
- 4.10 Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations related access and services to students with limited English proficiency?

**Second Year Review:** The following report provides key findings from Tindley Preparatory Academy based upon the second year site review conducted by SOS, LLC. Team members Cheryl McLaughlin, Margie Labelle, Sarah Ohmer and Terrence Harewood, completed two days of classroom observations, special education file reviews, stakeholder interviews and document reviews in order to address the performance indicators of the Mayor's Charter School Performance Framework as outlined above. The process for this evaluation is iterative and the report, along with follow-up meetings, is designed to corroborate information provided to regulatory bodies and to provide useful feedback to the Mayor's office, school leaders and stakeholders.

The judgments in the report are based upon evidence collected during the process of the school visits. As stated in the Site Visit Protocols for Mayor-Sponsored Charter Schools: "Evidence comes from observations, interviews, and document reviews. The site visit evaluation team should build a base of evidence for each of its findings that would reasonably lead any set of

individuals to come to a similar judgment of the school's programs and practices.

## Introduction

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On December 16, 2013, four site visitors conducted the 2013 review of Tindley Preparatory Academy. Tindley Prep, an all-male middle school serving students from grades 6 through 8, is currently in its second year of operation. This report represents an evaluation about performance in each of the standards and indicators that are the responsibility of SOS, LLC. to evaluate. These indicators: 4.1, 4.2, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8, 4.9, and 4.10 are outlined in the Performance Framework.

The Site Team engaged in a number of evidence-collecting activities. The focus of this site visit was to gauge perceptions of key stakeholders at the school in relation to the areas of the performance framework that are part of the evaluation. The team conducted focus group discussions with students, staff, special education instructor(s), and parents, as well as interviews with the school administrators and board members.

Classroom observers also spent half-day observing students and teachers prior to the site visit. In the following report, standards and indicators are listed with relevant evidence given related to the performance criteria. Following the discussion of each indicator, a summary of strengths and areas for attention are provided for the core question.

### Summary Findings

**4.1 Does the school have a high quality curriculum and supporting materials for each grade?**

**Finding: Meets Standard**

**4.2 Are the teaching processes (pedagogies) consistent with the school's mission?**

**Finding: Meets Standard**

**4.3 For secondary students, does the school provide guidance on and support and preparation for post secondary options?**

**Finding: Not Applicable**

**4.4 Does the school effectively use learning standards and assessments to inform and improve instruction?**

**Finding: Meets Standard**

**4.5 Has the school developed adequate human resource systems and deployed its staff effectively?**

**Finding: Meets Standard**

**4.6 Is the school's mission clearly understood by all stakeholders?**

**Finding: Meets Standard**

**4.7 Is the school climate conducive to student and staff success?**

**Finding: Meets Standard**

**4.8 Is ongoing communication with students and parents clear and helpful?**

**Finding: Meets Standard**

**4.9 Do the school's special education files demonstrate that it is in legal compliance and is moving towards best practice?**

**Finding: Approaching Standard**

#### 4.10 Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations related to access and services to English as a Second Language (ESL) students?

**Finding: Meets Standard**

#### Key Interpretations

#### 4.1 Does the school have a high quality curriculum and supporting materials for each grade?

**Finding: Meets Standard**

#### Summary and Specific Commendations

During the site visit, the SOS, LLC site team found evidence of an up-to-date curriculum map that shows alignment of both Common Core and Indiana state standards. The school has systematized and institutionalized its curriculum development process by utilizing the Atlas Curriculum Mapping program. The program houses standards-based unit plans, lesson plans and pacing guides. Teachers have the option of modifying or utilizing these exact lessons or tweaking them based on the developmental readiness of their students. Regardless, teachers are required to post their own unit plans and learning ladders (lesson plans) to the Atlas software, which are reviewed locally by the administration, and at the district level by the curriculum team. Teachers described a comprehensive, continuous improvement process where lessons are designed based on analysis of student assessment data.

#### Other Areas of Strength:

- Site team found evidence that Tindley Prep uses backward design to build curriculum around common core and state standards and assessments.
- Teachers report and the site team saw evidence that teachers modify or prioritize curriculum according to test data. Data walls were prevalent in many classrooms and provide good use of flexibility in adjusting curriculum to student achievement.
- Teachers described and students produced sample learning ladders during the focus group interviews. These learning ladders clearly articulate exactly what students need to know and do on a daily basis.
- Teachers, students and leaders report that the curriculum is supplemented with high quality resources.

**Recommendations:** None

#### 4.2 Are the teaching processes (pedagogies) consistent with the school's mission?

**Finding: Meets Standard**

#### Summary and Specific Commendations

To assess this standard, the site team relied heavily upon data gathered during classroom observations. Classroom observers spent 3.82 hours (229 minutes) observing 10 classrooms, 140 students, and 10 teachers. On average, each observation lasted 22.90 minutes and the observed student to teacher ratio was 14:1. Such detailed analysis produced significant evidence regarding pedagogical practices at Tindley Prep that led to a judgment that the school meets this standard. The school leader explained that the teaching processes are grounded in research regarding best practices for educating males such as drawing upon and positively channeling testosterone. Classroom observers saw overwhelming evidence of a gender-based approach such as the use of widespread competition, chants, and other male-ego building activities.

Classroom observations and teacher focus groups also supported the fact that curriculum is being implemented in classrooms according to its design. Instruction is focused on core learning objectives. For the vast majority of the classrooms (80%) instructors adequately maximized instructional time. A full 90% (9/10) of the classrooms observed had challenging content, although, only 20% of the classrooms observed exhibited differentiation. The most frequent instructional activities included “teacher-led Q and A,” “direct instruction” and “drill and practice.”

#### **Areas of Strength:**

- Classroom observations revealed high levels of rigor, challenge and support in the majority of classrooms.
- There were a variety of whole group, small group, one-on-one, and teacher-led strategies to support students’ diverse learning needs.
- Site team observed meta-cognitive lessons where students were reflecting on their own learning.
- Students were very supportive of each other and teachers often facilitated this process by encouraging the students to provide “shout outs” to students who had performed a particular task well.
- Most students and parents reported they found the curriculum challenging.

#### **Recommendations**

- Some high performing students expressed concern that they are not challenged. Site team wondered what process is in place for high ability students? (School should consider using the 7th period from 3:00-5:00 p.m. to enhance high performing students: debate club where students can do research, oratorical contests)
- Site team did not see evidence of differentiation in assessment and learning. While uniformity is important to the schools model, it is also important to recognize that one size does not fit all. The school should consider PD in differentiated instruction and assessment.

#### **4.3. For secondary students, does the school provide sufficient guidance on and support preparation for post-secondary options?**

This standard is not applicable for Tindley Prep since the school only serves students from grades six through eight.

#### **4.4. Does the school effectively use learning standards and assessments to inform and improve instruction?**

### **Finding: Exceeds Standard**

#### **Summary and Specific Commendations**

Tindley Preparatory Academy is exemplary in its use of data to guide and support instruction. It is impossible to visit the school and not notice the school's data driven focus. In classrooms and hallways throughout the building, signs such as the following are clearly illuminated:

Every scholar will pass ISTEP—That's 100%

Every Scholar will earn at least mastery of all objectives in Humanities A and B.

All scholars will achieve two years of reading growth.

The school collects a wide variety of assessment data including NWEA, which is administered twice a year, Acuity (three times a year), ISTEP, ECA, Unit and Interim tests. Teachers reported that they regularly review data in order to guide their learning ladders. Classroom observers also saw data walls with individual students divided into one of three groups: keep pushing, on target, and over the top. Teachers and administration also described a process they termed "data dives," which occurs following each major assessment. Data dives are used to analyze and determining possible changes in the curriculum to meet students' learning needs. Midcourse corrections are made based on students' performances on these assessments. Students were also very aware of their own data and could clearly articulate the focus goals for their "house" and the school.

#### **Areas of Strength:**

- School uses data from a variety of standardized and teacher created assessments, including Acuity, NWEA, ECA, ISTEP, and unit tests to guide instruction.
- Network utilizes data director to disseminate data to all network schools (and "houses"). School uses this disaggregated data to organize school day for students. For instance, if a student scores below 75%, they are required to attend 7th period (from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m.) Conversely, students scoring above 75% have the option of an early release from school, or could elect to participate in one of the enriching activities. As the school leader described, "Students can earn the right to be released early."
- Teachers use a "data dive" following each assessment, to modify curriculum and create "mini lessons" or reteach unit.

#### **Recommendation**

- The site team struggled to find ample evidence and pondered the following question: Are assessments differentiated for exceptional students? Although, the school leader explained that teachers are expected to have an adapted test posted on Atlas and that there is also a resource room for adapted assessments, the site team did not witness explicit evidence to support this claim.

#### **4.5 Has the school developed adequate human resource systems and deployed its staff effectively?**

### **Finding: Meets Standard**

#### **Summary and Specific Commendations**

Tindley Preparatory Academy is part of a network of schools under the auspices of EdPower. As such, the school benefits from a high level of support including the facilitation and utilization of a shared Human Resource system. Though hiring decisions are made on the local level, the network undertakes the responsibility for the recruitment and initial vetting of personnel for Tindley Prep. The EdPower network also organizes shared orientation and professional development opportunities for its staff and new hires, designed to orient them into the “Tindley model.” The school leader reported that all teachers are licensed and deployed in areas where they are certified. The school leader also noted that the school is fully staffed, with the exception of one teacher (English). Teachers stated that they were very happy working at Tindley Prep. They mentioned the overwhelming support they received from the school leader. The school leader also noted that there is a professional development calendar generated at the beginning of the school year which is designed to support teachers as they face new realities throughout the school year. He noted that modifications to the PD calendar are frequently made in response to classroom observation and other data. Students are released half-day on Fridays and teachers use this time for PD. It was apparent that most PD decisions are made at the school leadership (local or network) level. The school also has a well-articulated teacher evaluation system as well as various systems to support and nurture teachers. This evidence supports a meets standard.

#### **Areas of Strength:**

- School has hiring process in place designed to recruit and orient teachers into the Tindley model, including a three-week Teacher institute during the summer.
- Teachers are given high level of challenge and support through weekly classroom walk-throughs and feedback
- The school has an extensive rubric based evaluation system in place, including a teacher-developed professional growth plan (PGP) at beginning of year, and a Principal evaluation of teachers and a post PPG at the end of the year.

- School leader described PD calendar that is generated at the beginning of school year but modified based on data collected drawing classroom walk-throughs and feedback

#### **Recommendations**

- Teachers expressed some lack of clarity about how PD decisions are made. The school leader might consider soliciting input from the staff regarding their professional development needs.
- Teachers want more time for collaboration and curriculum development. Some teachers recommended that Friday PD sessions could at times be used for collaboration since some days PD appears to be more of a “venting session.”
- School needs to be sensitive to the fact that some teachers are experiencing burnout and put systems in place to avoid high attrition due to teachers feeling overwhelmed.

#### **4.6. Is the school's mission clearly understood by all stakeholders?**

#### **Finding: Meets Standard**

#### **Summary and Specific Commendations**

The school leader stated that the mission of Tindley Preparatory Academy is to “empower male students to become successful scholars who graduate with the capacity for rigorous high school and college opportunities.” The College readiness objective is ingrained into the social fiber and the culture of the school. The school is divided into five different “houses,” which is named after Ivy League colleges: Columbia, Princeton, Harvard, Yale, and Stanford. Students are placed in one of the houses and the school has various inter-house competitions to promote school culture such as academic competitions and a recent stock market challenge. Furthermore, the school’s college-preparatory focus is highlighted into its’ slogan, “college or die.”

#### **Strengths**

- All stakeholders could verbalize school mission. Students, in particular, unanimously recited the schools mission.
- All stakeholders fully embrace the school’s mission. Teachers reported that the school’s mission is what draws them. Parents also note that the school’s strong focus on preparing their students for college is the primary reason why they chose the school.

#### **Recommendations**

- Despite the fact the school’s website states the phrase college or die, “was never meant to be interpreted literally,” the school should be sensitive to some students’ concern and their “literal” interpretation of “college or die.” Many students reported feeling a sense of disrespect toward their parents who might not have attended college.

#### 4.7. Is the school climate conducive to student and staff success?

### Finding: Meets Standard

#### Summary and Specific Commendations

Generally speaking, Tindley Preparatory Academy has developed a strong culture and climate that promotes and is conducive to both student and staff success within its two years of operation. The school has a very strong and rigorous behavioral management system, which is designed to reinforce and support the school’s culture. During classroom observations, the rules could be seen posted in all of the classrooms. The rules were also posted in the hallways throughout the school. The student’s handbook also clearly articulates the strict code of conduct. Parents are also taught the behavioral expectations and the strict consequences for students’ misbehavior during an initial orientation to the school. The school is intentional about cultivating a scholar identity amongst the students and this notion of students as scholars and “sons of excellence” is reinforced on a daily basis. For example, students enthusiastically recite and chant the scholar’s creed every day, which reads:

I am a Tindley Prep Scholar.  
I will bring honor to my family, country, and school  
by excelling academically.  
I will exhibit the timeless qualities  
of a genius and a gentleman.  
I do not lie cheat or steal  
and I am always accountable for my actions.  
I will seek the mantle of leadership  
and be prepared to uphold excellence at The Prep.  
May I always believe in myself  
and always follow this creed.

Because we are... Sons of Excellence!

The site team also recorded 8 (80%) classrooms using proactive discipline. Care and respect for the students and teachers was also reported in all of the classrooms.

#### Strengths

- School has a well-articulated behavior management system that is clearly understood by students and posted in each room.
- Students believe the system of discipline is meted out fairly to each student.
- Developing an environment of success is clearly enculturated into the core fiber of the school.
- School has developed and implemented best practices based on research in educating all male students.

### **Recommendations**

- Teachers reported that internal communication among and between teachers and the administrators at Tindley Prep was good but expressed concerns about communication and relationships with the external network.
- Students reported concern with level of consequence for petty offenses (not having a pencil, etc.)
- Site team also expressed serious concern about the high numbers of suspensions (20%) and office referrals in a one-week period. While the site team recognizes the need to enforce a strict code of behavior, the school should consider a different model for disciplining students beyond the out of school suspensions. Perhaps the school should consider thinking about a creative way to support an in-school-suspension program such as a network-based model.

## **4.8 Is ongoing communication with students and parents clear and helpful?**

### **Finding: Meets Standard**

#### **Summary and Specific Commendations**

The school leaders discussed a wide variety of ways the school outreaches to parents including: weekly and interim reports, teacher newsletters, and parent-teacher conferences. Parents stated that they appreciate the assessment information and the information regarding how their children were doing at the school. Parents also have access to the school's web-based student information system, PowerSchool, and can access a variety of reports and information about the school or their students.

Tindley Prep also disseminates a regular newsletter to parents and school families, which includes pertinent information about school initiatives, student achievement and upcoming events. Teachers also send home weekly newsletters. Student achievement progress is also communicated regularly via weekly progress reports sent home to parents, formal progress reports sent home quarterly, and parent teacher conferences. Students are given learning ladders on a regular basis which amount to a minor syllabus illustrating what is expected for each class, and how and when it will be assessed.

## Strengths

- All stakeholders reported and praised the strong one-on-one communication with teachers, administrators and students.
- The school leader is very well liked by students, who describe him as “Strict but playful.” The parents describe him as approachable (cell phone number provided to all parents) and caring.
- Tindley Prep uses PowerSchool which is accessible to all stakeholders
- The students are provided regular updates on their progress through the weekly report cards
- The school disseminates weekly newsletters
- Students use daily learning ladders which keep parents informed of their daily learning

## Recommendations

- Parents expressed a need to have more consistent and reliable communication
- The school must ensure it has a more up to date Web site to communicate more accurate information to stakeholders.

### **4.9 Do the school’s special education files demonstrate that it is in legal compliance and is moving towards best practice?**

#### **Finding: Approaching Standard**

#### **Summary and Specific Commendations**

Prior to the site visit, SOS, LLC conducted a comprehensive review of 30 out of 43 (randomly selected) special education files at Tindely Prep. The extensive review provided critical information regarding general trends in the documentation and delivery of special education services at the school. Tindley Prep was found to have instituted many systems in compliance with state and federal mandates regarding special education. The school has an individual file in place for each student receiving special education services at Tindley Prep. Most files contained the required and pertinent information. The school participates in and utilizes the Indiana IEP electronic program. The site team also found evidence that the school uses a multistep Response to Intervention (RTI) program. The school benefits from having the support of the EdPower network regarding the services for students with special needs.

While, generally speaking, the school was found to have a fairly sophisticated system, there were some particular areas of concern for the site team. The delivery of special education services is a highly sensitive aspect of a school and one that can be potentially litigious and costly to a school. Consequently, schools are encouraged to be proactive in ensuring that the appropriate documentation is made and available upon request. The site team found several areas of incomplete or missing information, which led to a judgment of approaching this standard. For example, several important documents were missing requisite signatures. Also, no apparent system was in place to verify participants at case conferences.

## Strengths

- The school utilizes the state electronic IEP system so that all legally required topics are included.
- The school has a multistep RTI program which includes participation of both general education and special education staff.
- The files of the special education students are kept in a secure location with a system in place for signing them out if reviewed by staff members.
- The special education files are well organized.
- The special education coordinator was present and available to answer questions and clarify procedural questions.

## Recommendations

- Notices of case conferences are not signed by the parent in most of the files. Therefore, there was no proof of the parent receiving adequate notice of the upcoming conference or of the topics to be addressed. There was one file in which it was included in the IEP that a parent stated “ it was the first time she had ever been included in the case conference”, though her son had been identified as a special education student at Tindley in previous years. There were also unsigned notices of case conferences that had been developed after the case conference had occurred. The notices need to be sent to parents before the case conference. If a conference is held and the parent had not returned the agreed upon notice with a signature then they should sign at that time and make note that they had received it earlier.
- IEP participants did not sign in that they were actually at the conference so there was no documented system in place to verify who was actually at the case conference. Tindley Accelerated has addressed this issue and could be contacted on their system.
- “Child Find” information needs to be included in parent/student handbook. When staff were asked how a parent is informed that they could request a special education evaluation, they were not able to share how a parent would know how to pursue this. This could be addressed with a section added to the handbook and PD for the staff on how to inform the parents that this is available at Tindley Prep.
- FBA/BIP data was minimally documented. Several files had missing information even though behavior issues were stated in the IEP. One file had 7 out of 11 pages of the IEP including this information so there is knowledge of the Article 7 requirements.
- There was no apparent process for teacher communication and collaboration of individual education plans. Classroom accommodations were minimal though there were extensive accommodations listed for state testing. The specifically designed education for students with IEP’s was not identified for the majority of

students other than the opportunity to access the resource room when testing support was needed. There were four self-contained students with emotional disabilities that this issue was not relevant as a concern.

- The site team also found several cases where the report and/or notice developed beyond legal timelines as defined by Article 7. Timelines are very specific in the regulations and a system needs to be put in place to guarantee that they are met.

#### **4.10 Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations to access and services to students with limited English?**

### **Finding: Meets Standard**

#### **Summary and Specific Commendations**

At the time of the site visit, Tindley Preparatory Academy did not enroll any students with limited English proficiency. To assess this standard, the site team examined evidence of a process in place that would easily facilitate services to such students in a timely and legal way. The site team found such a process is outlined in the student handbook. Moreover, the school leader described and the site team confirmed a Network process that would be applied in the event an ESL student enrolls at the school. Though the school has yet to apply this process, the system is aligned and could easily be implemented based on the design.