



## MPS Charter School Contract Review Team Comments and Renewal Recommendation

Name of Charter School: **Milwaukee Environmental Sciences Academy (MESA)**  
Date: **November 20, 2017**

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

- Charter School Performance Summary – Educational, Financial and Organizational Performance Standards
- Application for Renewal
- School Site Visit

### Charter School Performance Summary

#### Educational Performance Rating:

Met the Standard	Did Not Meet the Standard
	X

#### Financial Performance Rating:

Met the Standard	Did Not Meet the Standard
X	

#### Organizational Performance Rating:

Met the Standard	Did Not Meet the Standard
X	

### Summary Comments on Performance Ratings:

MESA was established fall of 2013 as a non-instrumentality charter school and is a year-round school. In the first year of the contract, they served grades K4-5 and grew a grade level each year. For the first three years of the contract term, a new Wisconsin State Assessment (WSAS) was implemented per the state.

#### Educational Performance

For the past two academic years (2015-16 and 2016-17), MESA has decreased the percentage of measures that they have met for their contract. In the areas of mathematics, science, and social studies, when comparing 2015-16 to 2016-17, MESA has had a decline in the percentage of students performing at proficiency on the Wisconsin State Assessment System (WSAS). Whereas, in English Language Arts (ELA), MESA showed an increase in the percentage of students performing at proficiency when comparing 2015-16 to 2016-17. MESA is implementing a

number of steps for improving the overall academic performance, which are outlined in the performance summary. As a school that is focusing on science through the expeditionary learning process, they have not been able to meet the WSAS proficiency over the past two years. However, during the schools' expeditions, students are able to articulate their projects, which show evidence that the students speaking and listening skills have developed through their experiences with expeditions.

MESA has been able to maintain an attendance rate above 90% over the term of the contract, however, they dropped below 90% in the 2016-17 school year and currently the attendance rate is at 94%. MESA has a low mobility rate and was able to meet this measure for three out of the four years of the contract term.

**Financial Performance**

MESA has continued to be in good financial standing. The financial audits have been unmodified each contract year and the budgets have indicated that there are no budget deficits or concerns.

**Organizational Performance**

MESA has met the organizational performance measures over the contract term, with the exceptions of meeting immunization requirements each year. The school works with families to ensure students have the proper immunizations.

MESA has undergone a number of changes moving into the current school year, including changes to their ELA curriculum, re-establishing their school culture program, onboarding a large percentage of new staff, and changing the school leadership. As such, this year has been a year to reset the educational program and implement new strategies and next steps.

MESA has a diverse governing body that is active in the decision making process and works collaboratively with the school administration to develop and implement a quality program. The school recognizes the academic challenges and has developed a plan to improve the educational program.

MESA has created opportunities for families to understand and participate in their child's social and academic development through the National Center for Families Learning, a three-year grant through Toyota Family Learning. The school worked to empower families in the support of their children through special classes that families could attend through a variety of topics and interest of the parents. These classes were held after school where attendance of the event expanded each year of the grant.

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### 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"> <li>- Included ample evidence of increased student achievement or shown continuous improvement;</li> <li>- Provided credible examples and documented evidence of its financial performance; and</li> <li>- Illustrated sufficiently and convincingly that it is organizationally sound.</li> <li>- The school's plans for continued success are clearly and effectively outlined with full details, descriptions, and explanations.</li> </ul>	<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.</p> <p>The school provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Insufficient evidence of increased student achievement or continuous improvement;</li> <li>- Unclear examples and evidence of its financial performance; and</li> <li>- Inadequate evidence that it is organizationally sound.</li> <li>- The school's plans for continued success are unclear and not fully described or developed.</li> </ul>

Met the Standard	Did Not Meet the Standard
X	

### Summary Comments on the Application for Renewal:

*(Instructions: Provide examples of strengths and weaknesses in the application for renewal.)*

The application for renewal provides clear information in the areas of educational, financial, and organizational performance. MESA provided credible examples and documented evidence of its financial performance and illustrated sufficiently that it is organizationally sound. MESA provided insufficient evidence of increased student achievement, however they did provide details of continuous educational improvement.

MESA is dedicated to the intellectual, physical, social and emotional growth of all students. An emphasis is placed on engaging students in thinking, problem solving, and decision-making, allowing students to function in a global society. MESA uses the expeditionary learning model as a way for students to learn through self-discovery. The expeditionary learning model is based on the understanding that high quality learning is active, challenging, meaningful, public and collaborative. MESA works with teachers to ensure that students are deeply engaged in learning and support them to reach high levels, academically and socially. The goal is for students to gain the necessary skills to be ready for college and career through a rigorous curriculum that strives to develop strong literacy and math skills, as well as, the ability to think critically, problem solve, collaborate, and become active citizens within their community. The educational program is the integration of environmental sciences throughout the core content. Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) is a part of the strong foundation for an interdisciplinary program.

Expeditionary learning is based upon ten design principles of self-discovery, having wonderful ideas, responsibility of learning, empathy and caring, success and failure, collaboration and competition, diversity and inclusion, the natural world, and service and compassion. MESA fosters the social and emotional growth through the components of expeditionary learning as well as crew and celebrations of learning at the end of each learning expedition. Crew is a meeting that is done every day in the student's classroom that focuses on character traits. In addition, there are whole school and grade level specific meetings.

MESA has provided insufficient evidence of increased student achievement or continuous improvement in the application. The school has referenced the state report card for the 2016-17 school year of exceeding expectations, however, there is improvement needed in meeting the contract measures as outlined.

MESA has ongoing parental involvement and communication through a variety of means, such as; National Centers for Families Learning, Action Team for Partnership, weekly newsletters, parent text alerts, and Class Dojo. MESA has a school advisory council that consists of parents and students voice and commitment to increase academic outcomes.

Overall, MESA's application contains many principles for implementing expeditionary learning which they are continuing to refine. The application indicates plans to continue the educational program as outlined and provides clear goals and measurable objectives and priorities for continuous improvement.

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

Met the Standard	Did Not Meet the Standard
<b>X</b>	

**Summary Comments on School Site Visit:**

*(Instructions: Provide comments regarding the school site visit.)*

During the visit, MESA presented to the Team all of the information that was noted in their application, specifically the expeditionary learning, crew, Class Dojo, project based learning, and parental involvement. crew is aligned to each habit of scholars and their ability to discuss real world issues. Students are greeted every morning and in home base, the teacher shares a quote and students articulate how to overcome an obstacle based on that quote by providing personal examples, when appropriate. The goal is to build culture and community within the school.

Student work samples from the expeditions were displayed throughout most of the school, which included rubrics and standards. During classroom visits, it was noted that most of the instruction was teacher led, however the educational program is developed around student centered activities. There was evidence of a safe and respectful environment throughout the school.

The visit to MESA indicated that they have a stronger elementary program than middle school program. The elementary classrooms had detailed anchor charts that were student centered and there was evidence of student voice. The classrooms were well managed with smooth transitions within the classroom. The hallways displayed student work samples and artifacts of expeditionary learning. Each elementary classroom displayed student data walls to monitor academic progress in both reading and mathematics.

A concern, which was a common thread throughout the middle school grades, as evidenced by the teaching and learning and differentiation to meet students' needs as well as observation and student work samples. Details regarding expeditionary learning were shared by the presenters, however there was limited evidence of it in the classroom. The school is in the process of adopting a new expeditionary learning ELA curriculum which has not been fully implemented. The school indicated that this new curriculum will allow teachers to plan for cross-curricular activities that infuses the expeditionary learning throughout all content areas.

It was noted that the middle school program had more areas that needed growth compared to the elementary program. Students needed more redirection in the middle school and the tasks did not provide opportunities for

engagement or higher level thinking. Expeditionary learning was not observed in the middle school classroom or hallways. There were inconsistencies in the level of expectations observed in the classrooms.

During the debrief, MESA referred to this year as being a “refresh” year due to new administration, several new staff members and the new expeditionary learning ELA curriculum. The school indicated that the change in curriculum was based on data to strengthen the expeditionary learning component of their program. It is clear that during the final year of the contract term, the school is working to make improvements. MESA’s governing board is engaged in the priorities for improvement, which proves positive in terms of the direction they have the potential to achieve after this transitional year.

The parent testimony indicated that MESA is a safe school with systems in place for communicating with parents regarding their child’s behavior, both positive and negative. In addition, parents noted that they have seen gains in their child’s academics, as well as, behavior while attending MESA. The parents noted that there are positive relationships between teachers and students, teachers and parents, and that teachers have high expectations. The sentiment from the parents is that MESA is like a second home for their children and that they trust the staff to educate their children. The parents confirmed the multiple forms of communication and opportunities to become involved in the school. A few of the parents discussed the National Centers for Families Learning, which has led to more opportunities for parents at a national level. The National Centers for Families was a three year grant through a Toyota Family Learning partnership where parents learned about financial literacy, health care, and promoting family time. Since the grant has ended, the school has continued implementing the program to actively engage parents. MESA parents participate in the financial literacy class, math and science curriculum night, canned food drives and parent programs. The parents are the best advocates as they are recruiting more parents to participate in this opportunity.

During the student focus group, the Team was able to hear from a variety of students’ experiences at MESA. The students ranged in grades from second through eighth and the focus group had one to five years of attending MESA. When students were asked to describe the best features of the school, they expressed that the teachers are supportive and encouraging. In addition, students indicated that math and science were their favorite classes to attend. Students had a varying degree of answers when asked if they felt safe. Some students indicated that the discipline could be stronger while others indicated that they felt the school was safe. Students would improve the school by providing more opportunities for girls in after school programs, their peers’ attitudes towards others and teachers, the uniform policy, and more science equipment. Students were able to articulate the crew program and how it has been beneficial in building community. Students who had been at MESA the longest were able to describe some of their experiences and provide a few examples of expeditionary learning.

# MPS Charter School Contract Review Team Comments and Renewal Recommendation

## Renewal Recommendation by MPS Charter School Contract Review Team

The renewal recommendation for Milwaukee Environmental Sciences Academy (MESA) School is:

\_\_\_\_\_ Full-term Renewal – Term of Five Years

X

\_\_\_\_\_ Short-term Renewal – Term of Three Years

\_\_\_\_\_ *Non-Renewal / Revocation*

### Renewal Recommendation Rationale:

#### Summary Comments:

*(Instructions: Provide summary comments and rationale for the renewal recommendation. Provide examples to support the recommendation.)*

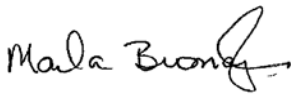
The goal of the Milwaukee Teacher Education Center (MTEC) is to maintain a high performing charter school with a focus on environmental sciences using the expeditionary learning model. Milwaukee Environmental Sciences Academy (MESA) is non-instrumentality charter school governed by MTEC. The school's educational program focuses on the primacy of self-discovery through the manner in which students learn through planned expeditions. The instructional design of MESA is for students to grapple with challenging expedition ideas that include well thought out guided questions that are related to the classroom and community. Students participate in two expeditions per year, which are planned in advance to ensure that students are meeting their grade level standards, while having hands-on learning experiences. The teaching and learning process is documented through a documentation panel and students present to family members and the community at a *celebration of learning*. All of the learning expeditions have a service learning connection to the community at large.

The Charter School Review Team has reviewed the educational program along with the charter school renewal application, performance summary and additional data, and conducted a full day site visit where the school team provided additional information as well as testimony from both students and parents. Based on the information that was submitted, the Team recommended a short term renewal. The decision was based on the decline of academic performance and fidelity of implementing the educational program. The Team recognized that this year was a transformational year with new administration and staff. The new expeditionary learning ELA curriculum is emerging. The Team recognized the transition, however there was limited evidence that expeditionary learning was being implemented based on what was observed and some of the student testimony. Although the hallways displayed the documentation panels in the elementary grades, there was limited evidence in the middle school.

The Team indicated that the educational program and application needs to better align with the current practices of the school. It was recommended that the school modify the educational program to better align to what they do well. MESA and their governing body have a commitment to ensure that all students are successful, as they focus on the needs of the whole child. The expeditionary learning component needs to be strengthened to include authentic projects that connect to the community. MESA has provided unique opportunities to engage parents through the National Centers for Families Learning and are continuing to provide similar opportunities since the grant has ended. MESA continues to use data as part of their decision making process and recognizes that improvements need to be made to ensure students are successful.

**MPS Charter School Review Team Members: (List names and affiliation of all members)**

Nuntiata Buck	MPS Curriculum and Instruction
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Terry Falk	MPS Board of Directors
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**Signature:**  \_\_\_\_\_  
**Marla Bronaugh, Director, Contracted School Services**

**Date:** November 20, 2017