



Charter Schools Evaluation:
Breakthrough Academy

Alabama Public Charter Schools Commission

August, 2023

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Section I. Executive Summary

Evidence was provided for the re-evaluation of Breakthrough Academy, including the initial application, evidence, artifacts, and a follow-up interview with the head of schools. Breakthrough Academy used the Cognia eProve and Kelvin SEL platforms to garner stakeholder feedback.

This evidence was all considered when reviewing the charter school application for Breakthrough Academy. Four areas were evaluated: Educational Programming, Operations Plan, Financial Plan, and the Overall Alignment and Viability of the existing charter plan. Using The Alabama Charter School Commission Rubric, each area was carefully evaluated, and follow-up questions were asked for clarification.

This evaluation includes powerful policies embedded into each category and improvement opportunities. In addition, ACIP (Alabama Continuous Improvement Plan) goals are listed with self-assessments and evidence in each identified goal. There are also recommendations for the evaluation found to strengthen the potential operation of the school.

Powerful Practices

Breakthrough Academy's Project-Based Learning Model is seen through artifact evidence and carried throughout themes of the school, including projects in science, civics, ELA, and mathematics. The culture/climate of Breakthrough is a notable strength. The diversity and the commitment to continue the strong relationships with students, staff, and stakeholders are evident. Bringing stakeholders and families into the school and exposing students to businesses, arts, cultures, and cultures outside the school is a strength and a common practice. The ability to be flexible, adjust and meet the needs of students as situations change is a strength. Family and community engagement is apparent in the daily operations and processes at Breakthrough Academy. ACAP (Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program) initial year report card was a 73 overall. This score was higher than neighboring districts with similar demographics. Science scores are far surpassing state proficiency averages (Alabama- 37.31 % and Breakthrough- 57.89%). There have been outside services sought out for the needs of special needs students as well as allowances made for the greater number than expected enrollments to the school.

Improvement Opportunities

ACAP scores indicate that math scores are less than Alabama's state average: Proficiency scores- (AL- 27.2% and Breakthrough Academy- 17.38%). A process for assessing needs in instruction (especially in mathematics) would potentially increase math scores. Breakthrough Academy only has students through 9th grade, and as a result, a curriculum has not been added to meet the needs of high school curricular requirements. Enrollment trend data suggest that the student numbers will continue to grow. A plan to address this growth in the next 3-5 years would be beneficial. Targeted professional development and PLC schedules to address any instructional gaps and root causes and ELEOT tools to observe patterns could be beneficial.

Breakthrough Academy has earned a total of 199 points. The maximum number of points earned using the Alabama Public Charter Schools Commission (APCSC) Application Rubric is 211. The school has earned 94.3% of the maximum points earned. The quantitative



results of the evaluation of each category in alignment with the Alabama Public Charter Schools Commission Application Rubric are provided.

Section II. Educational Program

Powerful Practices

Curriculums that have been chosen for Breakthrough Academy's instruction are highly ranked in Edreports (eVision math, civics, and science), Stemsopes (science), EL Curriculum (ELA). The progress monitoring tools that are being used (enFocus, MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) growth data, and MClass (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills and Text Reading Comprehensions) to adjust instruction as needed. Reading scores on ACAP are almost equal to the state averages (State ELA proficiency- 47.28%; Breakthrough Academy ELA proficiency- 48.57%). Science instruction surpasses the state ACAP averages (State Science Proficiency- 38.31% and Breakthrough Science Proficiency- 57.89%).

Enrollment numbers have been larger than expected, and leadership had to go back to the Alabama Charter Commission and get approval to add more students as enrollment this year increased by over 100 more than projected. Breakthrough Academy serves students from six different counties, although it originally planned only to serve Perry County. Breakthrough administration has shown flexibility with enrollment and made necessary decisions and actions to allow for these additional students.

Breakthrough Academy has provided narrative evidence and artifacts highlighting instructional strategies that were described in the original charter application (examples: including Project Based Learning, small groups, service learning, scaffolding, and hands-on projects).

Forty-One families completed the culture and climate parent survey through Cognia. Kelvin Culture/Climate Pulse Survey was completed by 100 percent of faculty members. Eighty-Three percent of parents found the faculty and staff helpful, respectful, comfortable, supportive, or trusting when discussing the faculty and staff. One Hundred percent of parents agreed that teachers asked their students questions that supported student learning and development.

In the Kelvin survey, ninety percent of faculty felt their work environment was positive and felt confident the school would continue to grow positively as time progresses. One hundred percent of teachers stated that they feel trusted by the administration to teach well in their content areas. In addition, seventy-three percent of students feel they can adopt a growth mindset at Breakthrough, and 71% believe they operate with a strong sense of perseverance at Breakthrough Charter School.

There was evidence of special education service delivery in the contract signed and outsourced (Helping Hands, Inc.) to provide additional services beyond the scope of expertise with special education teachers on staff (for example, Occupational Therapy). Special needs students are included in activities with their non-disabled peers, as evidenced by pictures of field trips and school activities on social media and in the photos provided. The school also participated in Bibb County's Special Olympics.

Student Discipline has been maintained, and policies outlined in the manual have been followed. Additional programs have been added to increase school behavior, including "Stride for 25," where positive behaviors are rewarded for students with reward incentives and incentives for attendance with students and parents. Consequences for behavior have also been implemented (for example, "After



school clean up”). Initiatives to keep kids in school and allow them to have consequences and not lose instructional time have been considered, and strategies implemented.

There also existed evidence of diversity in the student population. Based on survey data, 53% of families surveyed identified as white, and 45% identified as black. This was important to the original vision of the charter application. As mentioned in the application, the public schools in the Perry County area were diverse and adequately represented the students in the area.

A proactive approach to address the needs of the community has also been met, including raising numbers for student enrollment, application for PreK First Class Grant, and a growth plan moving forward have all been included. Plans have begun with a consulting firm in Birmingham to address the need for a larger facility.

Improvement Opportunities

Breakthrough leadership should continue seeking opportunities to meet high school requirements as these numbers grow. The Head of School discussed in his interview many ideas for this (including ACCESS and hiring additional teachers). Still, a firm plan with course requirements aligned with approaches is needed.

Continue to add additional supplemental programs, including athletics and arts. While there are varied opportunities for students, continued growth in fine arts and participation in AHSAA or other athletic associations could further strengthen overall school opportunities.

Walkthroughs that address instruction and coaching cycles for teachers based on findings from walkthroughs would be beneficial. Additional small groups and remediation with emphasis on targeted groups for movement (especially in mathematics) may be helpful. Additionally, there can be more emphasis on acceleration to increase levels 3 and 4 on ACAP in mathematics and implementing strategic methods to move students to meet proficiency levels.

While PBL (Project Based Learning) shows evidence of success in some subject areas (science), there may need to be more of a focus on pacing in math and other strategies to target students that are not proficient/on grade level in mathematics. A strong emphasis on professional learning in mathematics for learners below grade level should be considered as a focus moving forward.

Section III. Operations

Powerful Practices

The Operations section of the application highlights a comprehensive governing structure as well as the strengths of the board. Governing Boards and organizational charts are well explained, and a vast amount of experience is apparent in the leadership. There also exists the mandatory representation of the board by parents.

Evidence of partnerships is seen throughout the evidence provided in surveys, on the school website, and through interviews. Students have been exposed to different areas in the community, and members brought into the school. In addition, evidence exists of partnerships (Helping Hands, OTResolutions

(Occupational Therapy Resolutions) in planning and/or implementation phases with outside agencies for needs moving forward with a larger facility.

Time has been built for teachers' professional development, including the early dismissal for students on Wednesdays, so teachers can have common planning time and opportunities for professional growth.

The Performance Management Goals and additional goals are stated and measurable so that these goals can be assessed appropriately and in the timetables outlined.

Highly qualified educators have been hired, and flexibility in hiring as new challenges have been discovered (for example, the need for a math interventionist).

Improvement Opportunities

Although time is allotted and given for professional learning, a more targeted approach to the unique challenges of Breakthrough Academy based on instructional data may be helpful. The area of Professional Development was listed as a goal in the ACIP and self-assessed as a need that is still being worked on at this time. A strategic professional development plan and a PLC plan to address needs for the first semester of 2023 will potentially help with the discrepancy in math gains compared with ELA and Science.

Breakthrough Academy should continue to look at growth plans to expand student numbers as trend data suggest student populations are continuing to grow. Considering the maximum number of students Breakthrough Academy will potentially be able to enroll, as well as larger school facilities and financial considerations (for example, teaching units, support staff, transportation), additional services will be beneficial. While the initial vision of growth has been acknowledged and plans are underway to begin planning for said growth, specific plans should be set in motion and definite plans laid out (for topics including facilities, personal and other needs for unforeseen growth. Considerations should also be given to how large the school leaders will allow the school to grow in student population and if there will eventually be an enrollment cap.

Looking forward to school needs including all areas (PreK, electives, needed high school credits, additional intervention teachers, STEAM teachers, foreign languages, and fine arts), and a growth plan for this would potentially be beneficial, especially if growth continues as quickly as has occurred in the 2022-2023 school year.

Section IV. Finance

Powerful Practices

Breakthrough Academy has been very transparent with fiscal reports. These reports have been published monthly for stakeholders.

In addition, during the first year, even with unforeseen growth, the school maintained an excess amount of money and stayed within its budget.

Improvement Opportunities



As numbers grow and additional units are added and facilities upgraded and increased, careful financial plans are encouraged, and financial planning with experts is encouraged to ensure this happens successfully.

Section V. Alabama Continuous Improvement Plan

2022-23 ACIP

The following goals were identified in the 2022-23 ACIP. Each goal was ranked in the portal by school leadership. Evidence in each area listed in the ACIP is indicated below:

- Hire a math interventionist- Documented by the school as Complete
 - Currently working with targeted students.
- Hire high-quality certified instructors – Documented by the school as a growth area.
 - Although many teachers were hired and the school was well-staffed this year, moving forward, there is a need to have qualified staff to meet individual student needs.
- Purchase materials to increase math and reading scores- Documented by the school as a growth area and necessary steps have begun for this goal.
 - Materials, including manipulatives and workbooks, have been purchased to aid in math instruction. STEM activities with materials to aid in instruction have also been purchased.
- Allocate time and resources for PD with teachers- Documented by the school as “lagging”). *This area was identified in this report's Opportunities for Growth section (more targeted PD to observe root causes of math deficits).*
- Create partnerships with families and stakeholders-strength- Evidence of continuous family engagement and community participation has been provided. Students are brought out into the community to participate in activities, and individuals from local and state agencies have been an ongoing part of the daily operations at the school. Partnerships with community members and families are evident through evidence of artifacts and social media (examples: Grandparents Day, Alabama State Department of Education, Marion Military Institute, Marion Public Library, James Spann, and Marion Fire and Rescue to name a few).

Recommendations

- 1) Create a walkthrough structure to look for ways to increase math instruction, including standard fidelity, equity of learner engagement, rigor, checks for understanding, etc. Possibly use an observation tool to see what trends are in instruction.
- 2) Develop a growth plan for moving forward (facilities, finance) as numbers increase.
- 3) As more students enter high school grades, a curriculum should be sought out to meet the needs for each of the required credits and a written plan for this.
- 4) Gauge information related to workforce development in Perry County and surrounding areas for interning opportunities and to retain students in the local area (as stated as a goal by Mr. Ramalho).
- 5) Continue to provide opportunities and be innovative for additional math instruction and remediation.



Section VI. Evaluation Results

Conflicts of Interest	Yes/No
The description of the board’s ethical standards and procedures for identifying and addressing conflicts of interest does not exist or is lacking sufficient detail: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Code of Ethics Policy • Conflict of Interest Policy 	NO
The applicant has provided a signed, conflict of interest statement for every: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant team member • Identified board member 	Yes

Requirement	Points Awarded	Possible Points	Requirement	Points Awarded	Possible Points
EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM			OPERATIONAL PLAN		
Educational Program Overview	4	4	Organization Structure & Partnerships	7	7
Curriculum & Instructional Design	17	20	Governing Board	15	15
Student Performance Standards	4	4	Staffing Plans	3	4
HS Graduation Requirements (HS Only)	3	4	Professional Development	5	7
School Calendar and Schedule	4	4	Performance Management	7	7
School Culture	19	20	Facilities	9	10
Supplemental Programming	4	4	Startup & Ongoing Operations	15	15
Special Populations and At-Risk Students	15	15	Operations Capacity	4	4
Student Recruitment & Enrollment	4	4	OPEARATIONAL PLAN TOTAL RATING POINTS	65	69
Student Discipline Policy & Plan	4	4			
Family & Community Involvement	4	4			
Educational Program Capacity	19	20			
EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM TOTAL RATING POINTS	101	107			



Requirement	Points Awarded	Possible Points	Requirement	Points Awarded	Possible Points
FINANCIAL PLAN			OVERALL ALIGNMENT & VIABILITY		
Financial Plan & Financial Management Capacity	19	20	Overall Alignment & Viability	14	15
			Experienced Operators if Applicable	N/A	N/A
FINANCIAL PLAN TOTAL RATING POINTS	19	20	OVERALL ALIGNMENT & VIABILITY TOTAL RATING POINTS	14	15

Section	Points Awarded	Points Possible	Percent
Educational Program	101	107	94.4%
Operations Plan	65	69	94.2%
Financial Plan	19	20	95%
Overall Alignment and Viability	14	15	93.3%
SECTIONS TOTALS	199	211	94.3%

Section VII. Evaluation Organization

Cognia is a global organization with 128 years of education and continuous improvement expertise. We are the world’s largest improvement network, with approximately 30,000 members in the United States of America and 90 other countries. Our overarching goals are to support schools in their improvement efforts through organizational effectiveness, emphasizing improving outcomes for all learners. We continue to expand our support and partnering with schools, districts, and states across the globe beyond just the traditional approaches to education.

