



2018-2019 Evaluation of City Garden Montessori School

Saint Louis University has sponsored City Garden Montessori Charter School since City Garden's inception in 2008; SLU has committed to a long-term partnership as City Garden's sponsor. Fundamental to SLU's sponsorship responsibilities are multiple oversight, compliance, accountability, and support activities undertaken by SLU's Office of Charter School Sponsorship to oversee and enhance the quality of the school.

More specifically, SLU's sponsorship of City Garden includes (but is not limited to):

- Establishing – in consultation with the Board Chair and Executive Director – a Performance Contract and related performance standards for student academic achievement, operations, Board governance, and financial performance.
- Monitoring of school achievement of Performance Contract
- Mandating specific actions or plan development when Performance Contract goals are not achieved
- Offering support and guidance for any required or recommended intervention, if appropriate
- Monitoring fidelity to the SLU-City Garden “general” contract
- Attendance at and participation in (as appropriate) all full Board meetings and selected sub-committee meetings
- Monitoring of Board compliance with Sunshine laws and other state regulations
- Classroom observation
- Solicitation of input from/discussion with teachers, staff, parents, students, and other stakeholders
- Monitoring of compliance with state and federal regulations (including special education, title programs, food service, services for homeless students, services for ELL students, etc.)
- Monitoring of admission policies and processes
- Establishing and monitoring achievement of criteria (academic, financial, etc.) for school expansion/growth
- Reporting to DESE on City Garden activities and achievement
- Financial support of City Garden teacher development, academic assessment, and Board development initiatives
- In-kind support of SLU faculty, staff, students, and facilities in support of City Garden's educational mission

Via these and related activities, SLU meets the Standards for Charter School Sponsorship established by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

What follows is SLU's evaluation of City Garden's performance for the 2018-2019 academic year. The evaluation is based on data and related analysis from the sponsorship activities identified above.



2018-2019 Sponsor Evaluation: City Garden Montessori School

1. Academic Achievement

Note: The MAP achievement goals below were revised from those in the original Performance Contract for 2018-19 based on the new exam administered by DESE starting in 2018.

#	Standard	Status/Comments
1.1	School-wide, at least 65% of all students will score at either the “Proficient” or “Advanced” level on the MO MAP ELA assessment.	61% scored at the Proficient/Advanced levels.
1.2	School-wide, at least 50% of all students will score at either the “Proficient” or “Advanced” level on the MO MAP MATH assessment.	48% scored at the Proficient/Advanced levels.
1.3	School-wide, at least 45% of all black students will score at either the “Proficient” or “Advanced” level on the MO MAP ELA assessment.	39% scored at the Proficient/Advanced levels.
1.4	School-wide, at least 35% of all black students will score at either the “Proficient” or “Advanced” level on the MO MAP ELA assessment.	30% scored at the Proficient/Advanced levels.
1.5	School-wide, at least 60% of students met their individual learning goals per a school-developed assessment.	The school has not finalized what school-developed assessment it will use for this standard. This is being rectified for 2019-20.

Academic achievement – and, particularly, the achievement gap between students of color and white students – remains City Garden’s greatest challenge. The SLU-City Garden Performance Contract for 2019-2028 – to be finalized in Fall 2019 – will contain increasingly higher goals for student achievement in each year of that contract – and will specifically reflect the school’s aim to eliminate all achievement gaps across race/ethnicity/economic status. For 2019-20 and beyond, City Garden’s Board has made significant investments in a) new academic leadership and b) expansion plans to generate increased financial support earmarked for greater – and more equitable – student educational achievement.

2. Curriculum & Instruction

Note: The external consultant's review referenced several times in this and other sections of this evaluation included a two-day visit of classrooms; discussions with teachers, staff, and parents; and reviews of academic performance and other institutional data. It was based on a "snapshot" of institutional performance and culture. It is recognized that a sustained, multi-month or yearlong study would likely produce findings that differed in various ways.

#	Standard	Status/Comments
2.1	Curricula are well-aligned with all applicable Montessori learning standards/outcomes and those established/adopted by DESE.	As a result of an external consultant's review in Fall 2019, alignment of Montessori, DESE, and City Garden's ABAR learning outcomes was prioritized and is in process. Additionally, math curricula and pedagogies are being revised per student achievement data.
2.2	Curricula are implemented with fidelity, and modified as needed to meet student needs.	Teacher fidelity to Montessori methods and lessons across all grade levels (as appropriate by grade level) is a continuing concern.
2.3	The school is compliant with the State of Missouri's and U.S. Department of Education's requirements for "Highly Qualified" teachers.	Developing a pipeline of well-qualified teachers is a primary goal of the Montessori Training Institute, a key element of City Garden's Strategic Plan.
2.4	City Garden's teacher evaluation standards and processes are compliant with DESE regulations.	The teacher evaluation standards and processes are compliant with DESE regulations; however, consistency and rigor of implementation needs to be increased.
2.5	All teachers develop supervisor-approved individual professional development plans that address specific short and long term performance goals.	Frequent, high-quality instructional training for lead guides was identified as major need and priority stemming from the Fall 2019 consultants review. Lead guide teacher retention into Fall 2019 was 100%.
2.6	The school has complete sets of adequate educational resources, materials, and equipment in each classroom.	Availability of materials/resources is adequate. Per consultant's review, use of available materials, and use with fidelity to Montessori lessons, should be addressed.
2.7	Student assessment data (from internal and external assessments) is regularly used to inform necessary changes to curriculum, pedagogy, -- including individual student lessons.	The persistent challenge of closing significant achievement gaps across student populations (race/FRL eligibility/etc.) confirms that more needs to be done.
Mission-driven and rigorous curriculum design, sound pedagogy, and school-wide fidelity in implementing both – these are what drive student learning, and what are at the heart of the most significant changes City Garden is making for 2019-20 and beyond.		

3. Climate/Culture

#	Standard	Status/Comments
3.1	At least one parent/guardian for each student participates in a parent-teacher conference.	98% of parents participated in parent-teacher conferences in 2018-19.
3.2	Complaint policies and procedures for students/parents/guardians are clear and regularly shared; they provide students/parents/guardians meaningful voice and appropriate appeal options while respecting educators' professional judgment.	Family Handbook details complaint policies and procedures and is made available to all parents and guardians. City Garden takes a "high touch" approach with students and families, providing regular and multiple opportunities for feedback and to engage in the school's activities.
3.3	Anti-bias education is integrated into all aspects of the curriculum, extra-curricular activities/events, and school operations/management.	Though there is and will always be more room for growth in this area, City Garden works to apply an anti-bias, antiracism (ABAR) in all curricular, instructional, hiring, and operational decisions and programs.
3.4	Anti-bias principles and commitments demonstrably guide the policies, planning, and decisions in school operations and governance.	City Garden's board and leadership go through significant ABAR training and have developed procedures to embed an ABAR lens in policy development and decision-making. Evidence of implementation includes attention to ABAR concerns in a) reviews of responses to RFPs for vendor selection and b) board annual self-evaluation.

City Garden's ABAR commitments are impressive, as is the evidence that board members, senior leaders, faculty, staff, and students are striving to fulfill those commitments regularly. When those commitments manifest in equitable academic achievement for all students, City Garden will be living its mission in full.

4. Operations & Compliance

#	Standard	Status/Comments
4.1	The school complies with all applicable state/federal laws, including those related to special education, title programs, homeless students, English Language Learners, etc.	City Garden has consistently met its state and federal compliance and reporting obligations.
4.2	All state- and federally-required reports/data are submitted by established deadlines.	
4.2	The school participates in the statewide system of assessments.	
4.4	The school makes available data from DESE's annual report card.	

City Garden's performance in this context is a testament to the quality of its administrative staff.

5. Budget & Finance

#	Standard	Status/Comments
5.1	All required Final Expenditure Reports and the Annual Secretary of the Board Report (ASBR) are submitted to DESE by established deadlines.	Met
5.2	Annual independent audit is conducted and submitted to all required parties on time, with no material findings.	Met
5.3	The Board approves an annual budget by June 30 of the prior fiscal year.	Met
5.4	The monthly check register is reviewed and approved by the Board as required by 5 CSR 20-100.260 and Board policy.	Met
5.5	The Board publicly reviews financial statements monthly against the approved budget, and makes quarterly budget amendments as required.	Met
5.6	Procurement, financing, construction and remodeling of facilities (current and future) is planned and implemented to ensure no undue burden on staffing or educational and school operations.	Plans for expansion/growth are regularly measured against potential impacts on current operations (financially, operationally, and culturally). Wide-ranging variables of future plans limit the accuracy or predictability of impact on current operations.
5.7	Budget priorities are informed by strategic planning and stakeholder input.	The Board is aware of and accounts for input from parents/families, staff, teachers, etc. The need for additional funding derived via economies of scale is one reason for expansion/growth.
5.8	The school's financial status allows for adequate staffing (teachers, administrators, support staff, etc.).	Per consultant's review, student-teacher ratios, instructional support, and administrative support remain concerns. Anticipated growth heightens some of those concerns, but also provides certain economies of scale that could produce resources to address them.
5.9	The Board adheres to the adopted fiscal policies and procedures.	Met
5.10	The school is continuously in good financial standing with all vendors and contractors; financial obligations are met on time	Met
5.11	The school maintains a minimum 8% annual fund balance, calculated per DESE standards.	City Garden consistently outperforms this minimum without inappropriately reserving funds that could be used for annual operations.
<p>City Garden's overall organizational maturation is reflected in, and is a reflection of, its financial stability and the quality of its financial planning and operations. Additional resources are necessary to fund instructional support efforts to advance academic achievement, which is a driving rationale for expansion.</p>		

6. Governance

#	Standard	Status/Comments
6.1	The Board has adopted a written statement of board responsibilities and expectations that is consistent with by-laws; by-laws are subject to regular review.	Met
6.2	There is a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities between the school leader and Board chair.	Both the CEO and the Board Chair have clearly articulated roles that are understood and observed.
6.3	Communication between Board chair and school leader is open, honest and regular.	They meet weekly to review and discuss governance and operational matters, to review strategic plan progress and to plan for board meetings and activities.
6.4	Board has a comprehensive evaluation process in place for the school leader.	A new evaluation process was put in place for the CEO in 2018-19, and a comprehensive evaluation was completed by June 2019. The CEO sets annual goals that are aligned with board goals; the CEO and board chair discuss progress toward meeting those goals throughout the year.
6.5	The Board reviews standardized test results and uses them to inform decisions.	This certainly happens, but the lack of a Board member with significant expertise in this area, and the lack of an Academic Excellence (or similar) Board committee, has limited the Board's understanding and use of data in decision-making in recent years – not to a detrimental extent, but enough to note the concern. The addition of a new Board member in 2019-20 with such expertise, and the reconstitution of the Academic Excellence committee, should help significantly. SLU expects the Board to engage in rigorous review of achievement data as it deliberates greenlighting expansion/growth plans.
6.6	The Board has a strategic planning process and the Board uses the strategic plan as a tool for board discussion and planning.	City Garden's strategic planning process has been deliberate and comprehensive. The approved strategic plan is regularly referenced and continually guides discussion and planning. Research underlying certain Strategic Plan goals remains to be completed, however.
6.7	The Board appropriately seeks appropriate and sufficient input from stakeholders when making decisions.	Regarding the development of new City Garden schools, research on community needs, wants, and expectations has not been completed; this must be completed before growth beyond the flagship campus may proceed.

6.8	The Board has a scorecard or dashboard used to track data and inform decisions.	A data dashboard is regularly updated and shared as part of each Board meeting; however, a more comprehensive dashboard with key academic progress data is still under development.
6.9	The Board engages annually in a self-evaluation to assess performance based on established goals.	The Board engaged in a meaningful self-evaluation activity during its June 2019 meeting. Candid appraisals of accomplishments and challenges were communicated openly and respectfully. The implementation of the Board On Track software has greatly facilitated this and related Board work.
6.10	Reporting to SLU, auditors, DESE and all other state, federal and private agencies/entities is comprehensive, accurate and timely.	On the rare occasions when SLU is informed about outstanding reporting obligations to DESE, the Board and related staff are very responsive and resolve issues quickly.
6.11	The Board communicates in a timely manner with SLU's sponsorship liaison about significant policy, personnel, school performance or legal issues.	The Board chair and Executive Director are both proactive and very responsive in their communications with SLU. Open dialogue and trust among all parties has been key to a solid working relationship.
6.12	The Board has an adopted profile of expertise and perspectives needed on the Board which sets current and future recruitment needs.	The Board has adopted such a profile, but it could/should be revised to reflect the Board's shared concern for greater and more targeted expertise in certain governance domains.
6.13	Expertise in key fields is currently present on the Board.	The lack of a Board member with significant expertise in K-12 educational accountability has limited the Board's use of achievement data in its governance role. Such a Board member has just been added for 2019-20, which bodes very well for the future.
6.14	Board has diversity relevant to the community and the school population.	Despite comparatively strong minority and gender diversity currently, the Board has self-identified this as a continuing concern that the Governance Committee will use to guide future work.
6.15	Defined Board member terms and election processes are open and transparent.	Met
6.16	The Board has a defined orientation process for members.	Met
6.17	The Board has identified key skills and areas of need for both individuals and the board as a whole and developed a plan for board training and development to meet those needs.	The design of the Board's retreat in August 2019 was informed by the Board's end-of-year self-evaluation in June 2019 and other, ongoing evaluations of Board needs.
6.18	The Board has an agreed upon yearly schedule of meetings that includes at least 10 regular meetings and maintains a quorum at each meeting.	Met
6.19	All Board and committee meetings adhere to the provisions of the MO open meetings/Sunshine laws.	Met

6.20	Board materials are easily accessible; agendas and related documents are provided at least 5 days in advance of meeting.	Implementing the “Board On Track” software has prompted welcome process changes, including the timeliness of materials distribution.
6.21	Board committee structure is focused on key issues relevant to the school's needs.	The lack of an active Board committee on Academic Achievement has limited the Board’s use of achievement data in its governance role. That committee has been reconstituted for 2019-20, and will be led by an experienced K-12 school accountability professional, which bodes very well for the future.
6.22	Staff responsibilities in relation to each Board committee are clearly defined and adhered to.	Members of City Garden’s executive leadership team serve as liaisons to the board committees and work well with committee chairs to support the goals and activities of the committees.
6.23	All Board members have undergone criminal background and FCSR checks as required in section 160.400.14, RSMo.	Met
6.24	All Board members submit ethics commission paperwork annually as outlined in 105.483 and 105.492 RSMo.	Met

City Garden’s board is strong, and well-led. It welcomes and makes solid use of data provided by key administrative and academic leadership staff. The need for greater attention to student academic achievement, and plans for strengthening achievement, is well understood. Three new board members joining in Fall 2019 each bring substantial expertise in the areas of academic achievement, Montessori education, and fundraising. The board operates with integrity and honesty, and is clearly committed to City Garden’s ABAR and Montessori identities. The board’s greatest challenge in 2019-20 will be holding itself to established expansion/growth greenlighting criteria (and appropriately amending those criteria and related plans as necessary).