

FINAL



Oakland Unified School District

Charter School Site Visit Report

Conservatory of Instrumental/ Vocal Arts (COVA)

**171 12th Street
Oakland, CA 94607**

Director: Dr. Valerie Abad

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Reviewer: David Montes de Oca

OUSD Office of Charter Schools

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Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Conservatory of Instrumental/Vocal Arts (COVA) is a small charter school in its second year of operation. The school currently serves approximately 140 kindergarten through eighth grade students and is located in a former parochial private school facility in East Oakland. COVA provides an educational program with a unique emphasis in music and performing arts curriculum. The school was granted its charter in January, 2007 subsequent to four denial decisions by the District.

The **MISSION** of the Conservatory of Instrumental/Vocal Arts is:

COVA's mission is to create a K-8 school serving inner city Oakland students with musical interests through the integration of musical arts into each subject area; enable students to participate passionately in music and performance; provide the highest standard of academic instruction; and help students become self-motivated, competent, life-long learners who are able to read, write, speak, and calculate with clarity and precision.

VISION:

By immersing students in the musical arts in the early grades, COVA students will be prepared to further their music education at the high school and college level, ultimately, demonstrating the ideals of citizenship by contributing to the life enrichment of the community through public musical performance and collaboration. COVA students will graduate from COVA at or above grade level, and ready to continue their achievement of 21st Century learning skills through high school and college graduation and a wide variety of life/career paths that are available due to the strong music and state standards foundation provided at COVA.

In 2008, COVA achieved an Academic Performance Index (API) of 837. The school opened in 2007 serving grade 3 - 7, under the leadership of Dr. Valerie Abad, former Director of Oakland Military Institute and veteran special education teacher with OUSD. The school seeks to grow to serve up to 350 students, but will maintain an enrollment of approx. 200 at their current facility.

Part 2: Overview

School Strengths:

- COVA achieved an API score of 837 in its first year of operation.
- COVA leadership is clear about the strengths and shortcoming of the teaching staff and has established plans for support and intervention.
- High quality instructors in the performing arts have been hired, including professional musicians and artists.
- Students were observed preparing for both ensemble and solo performance competitions held off-site in which students' participation is sponsored by the school.
- Rigor of performing arts classes was evidently high with balanced levels of encouragement and critique.
- COVA leadership confidently provides feedback on to students on their performance and is comfortable reigning in the delivery of a lesson to model effective teaching, both to the benefit of students and their teachers.
- COVA leadership was observed modeling effective teaching practices.
- Students are provided with four "rotation" options during a given year. These rotations options include:
 1. Jazz band
 2. Voice
 3. Dance (Tap)
 4. Violin
 5. Yoga
 6. Percussion
 7. Drumline
 8. Ballet
 9. Sports
 10. Gymnastics
 11. Winds
 12. Rock Band
 13. Handbells
 14. Art
 15. Stage Band
 16. Guitar
 17. Afro/Latin Drumming
 18. Keyboard
 19. Musical Theatre
- *Consistent with the terms of the approved charter:*
 1. School provides instruction in all state music and art standards, as well as advanced instruction in music.
 2. Students participate in community performances.
 3. All students receive training in one or more selected musical instruments, as well as music theory. More advanced students receive instruction in advanced musical composition and performance.
- The facility offers ample performance and practice space.
- Observed interactions between students and adults were positive, appropriate and students were encouraged in a rigorous manner to improve their musical and dance performance skills.

- All staff is hired with an emphasis in the added performing arts expertise each staff member can contribute to the over-all program offerings in the school. For example, these include observed art instruction provided to kindergarten students by the school's administrative assistant.

School Challenges:

- The school is currently located in a facility that is limited to a year to year lease option. The school is secure for the coming year, 2009-2010, however the school will likely need to consider relocation if a long term opportunity does not emerge at the current site.
- COVA had originally proposed to open with 180 students in its first year, but instead opened with just over 40 students. Due to low enrolment in their first year, COVA is underfunded for the current year. As the current year apportionment is based on an enrolment of approx. 50 students for 2007-08, COVA has received equivalent funding for 2008-09, though the school now serves 140 students. As a result, the school has had difficulty meeting all of its competing financial demands and has been forced to acquire a loan where-in their upcoming apportionment of approx. \$250,000.00 will be “purchased” and an “advance” is then provided for a fee of approx. \$20,000.00.
- COVA has observed that, while the enthusiasm and initiative of parents was high at the start of the school’s opening year, maintaining parent participation and volunteerism has been difficult. The need for the school to fundraise and benefit from the added value of parent skills and expertise has increased, however parents have become less and less available and strategies to increase parent engagement have not been effective thus far.
- The school is likely to suffer over-time from the effects of a strong founding leader who has yet to develop the systems necessary to sustain the school’s program over the long haul. Due to wearing many hats, the school’s leader is limited in her capacity to apply the necessary energy and resources to create the procedures and processes necessary to ensure timely reporting, maintaining a well-organized records, or to operate the school efficiently. This is evidenced by the absence of internally developed forms, clear complaint resolution procedures for parents, and the absence of timely R30 reporting required of the school.
- The school’s governing board is weaning in its efficacy to effectively oversee the school. The board which established the school is not the board likely to bring the school’s vision to full fruition. The COVA leadership is aware that it must recruit, in short order, a broad range of skilled stakeholders and invested community members to take up the governing board responsibilities.
- Aligned to the challenges of sustainability noted above, succession planning is an urgent need the school has, in order to avoid the likely catastrophic effect on the school of a sudden loss of the current leader.

Part 3: Additional Findings

Classroom observations on 3/3/09:

Ms. Irwin – Dance

Ms. Davidson – Instrumental Music

Mr. Barone – Drumming

Instructor – Rock Band

Administrative Assistant – Art (Kinder)

Systems

COVA leadership has reflected a great deal on the start up challenges of a new school. The absence of existing systems to support the operation of the school has had a notable impact on the school. The leadership acknowledges the difficulty of fully assessing in advance what one must know in starting a new school. The leadership notes the difference between the recruitment strategies necessary when the school had not yet opened, and the benefits now of having an existing program to recruit new students.

The leadership has found, however that the initial bumps in aligning the mission and vision of the school with the assumptions and goals of parents that caused a few riffs in relationships the first year, have settled significantly in the second year, with many more families having enrolled with a clearer sense of the program goal and the school over-all approach and design. That, said, the school still faces challenges in ensuring parents are fully aware of their rights and the processes under which the school is likely to operate.

Professional Development

The leadership has described staff development as one hour a week of collaboration and one hour a week of faculty meetings. The following professional development goals have **yet to be realized**;

“...ongoing professional development topics will include: Implementation of State Content Standards and Frameworks; Student Assessment and Evaluation; Training in Integration of Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences; Integrating Music into the Core Curriculum (LTRTA); Strategies for Academic Improvement Across the Curriculum; Training in Specific Methods and Materials for the State adopted reading and math series (Open Court, Math Series); Providing for Differentiated Instruction for Special Education, EL, At-Risk and GATE students; Classroom Organization and Management, the Student Study Team process; and Using Technology to Enhance Learning. All staff will participate in regular training sessions, subject matter cohorts, and new staff will be assigned a “mentor” teacher to assist in the development of successful teaching techniques.”

Given the diverse needs of faculty, many of whom are new to the school, and as the school’s continues to grow, much of the staff development time has focused on the more operational aspects of the school; such as: emergency planning, STAR Test training, attendance accounting, etc. While the school has benefited from its small size insomuch as the sense of community among staff is strong, the purposeful development of a professional learning community among adults, as envisioned in the school charter; is still at a beginning stage.

Music Progression

Students who enroll in COVA in the early grades are introduced to music through their K-3 classes using a *Do-Ra-Mi-Fa-So* approach. In addition, a variety of dance and movement instruction is offered to students in the primary grades. As students enter grade four they are introduced to a musical instrument and begin formal instruction reading music. As students progress, they begin to be grouped by skill level which allows for greater differentiation of musical instruction. This flexibility in grouping allows for students entering in the upper-grades to effectively integrate into the music program component.

Part 4: Follow-up

Future site visitations

1. OUSD staff will follow-up in future site visits to observe evidence of:
 1. *“All students will be assessed to create an individual intelligences profile, and age appropriate students will complete a Multiple Intelligences self-assessment”* as outlined in the school’s charter.
 2. *“COVA’s mathematics program will integrate rhythm, meter, and tempo within the math curriculum”* as outlined in the school’s charter.
 3. Foreign Language program component as outlined in the school’s charter:

*Foreign Language: All students beginning in Kindergarten will participate in foreign language instruction. In grades K-5 students will have an opportunity to learn songs, poems, and riddles in French, Spanish, and Italian (**tied with the music curriculum**). Beginning in grade 6 students will receive instruction to enhance vocabulary in Latin roots and phrases to enhance English vocabulary development. Students in grade 7 and 8 will participate in a foreign language elective (Spanish or French). English Learners will receive supplementary instruction in English instead of taking another foreign language course until re-designated as English proficient.”*
2. OUSD staff will follow-up in future site visits to interview teachers regarding the extent and effectiveness *professional development associated with “Training in Integration of Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences” and “Providing for Differentiated Instruction for Special Education, EL, At-Risk and GATE students”* as outlined in the approved charter.