

# THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

## Opportunity Network

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### Ombudsman Northwest Instructional Site Visit Summary May 31, 2017

**Provider:** Ombudsman Educational Services, Ltd.  
**Contract Term:** FY 2013-FY 2017  
**Program capacity:** 90

**Site Visit Date:** Tuesday, April 25, 2017- 9:00 a.m.  
**IEP Compliance:** 100%  
**Average Daily Attendance:** 90%

#### Walkthrough Review Team:

Majeedah Scott, Director, Multiple Pathways  
Darryl Johnson, Transition Liaison  
Fateama Fulmore, Executive Director, High Schools  
Lori Shorr, Professor, Temple University  
Mignon Verdell, Project Manager, E3 Initiative, Philadelphia Youth Network

#### Program Staff:

Julita Byrd, Regional Director, Philadelphia, Ombudsman Educational Services

#### Overview of Instructional Site Visits:

Instructional site visits consisted of four main parts: **Academic Success Questions with Leadership**; **Academic Success Questions with Teachers**; **Academic Success Questions with Students**; and **Classroom Observations**. **Academic Success Questions with Leadership** was driven by standardized questions that focused on: data and academic outcomes; academic outcomes versus goals; and preparation for classroom observations. **Academic Success Questions with Teachers** was driven by standardized questions that focused on: the use of academic assessments; academic outcomes versus goals; and the school's overall academic performance. **Academic Success Questions with Students** was driven by standardized questions that focused on: student backgrounds and previous educational experiences; academic expectations set by Teachers; tests, grading procedures, and supports from Teachers; overall level of satisfaction with the program and recommendations for improvement; the program's mission; the program's Special Education services; and food and health services. **Classroom Observations** was guided by a standardized Classroom Observation Form that assessed elements of: the classroom environment; instruction; and assessments.

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

#### Academic Success Questions with Leadership

Ms. Lita Byrd, Ombudsman Northwest Site Director and Regional Director for Ombudsman, presented and discussed the program's reading and mathematics growth data from the previous school year. The program uses the STAR assessment to measure reading and mathematics growth. In reading, 26% of students made at least one year worth of growth. In mathematics, 5% of students made at least one year worth of growth. Ombudsman Northwest uses the Reading Plus program as its main reading intervention for low level readers. Students are assigned to Reading Plus based on their skill levels and they are required to work on the program daily before beginning their core coursework. Reading Plus allows students to see their improvement in reading because the program highlights their progression from one level to the next. When students reach level 8, which is the highest level, Ombudsman Northwest celebrates them with incentives and completion certificates. Review team members noted the small percentage of students who grew one or more grade levels in reading and mathematics from the previous school and asked Ms. Byrd about other ways that the program measures students' progress. Ms. Byrd

considered credit accumulation to be another strong indicator of whether students are making adequate progress in the program.

Students enrolled at Ombudsman Northwest receive the bulk of their core coursework via the A+ Learning System, which is a computer-based learning platform. Program staff conduct daily checks of student progress in the A+ system to ensure that students are completing an adequate number of lessons to stay on track toward course completion. Students are required to complete all components of a course in order to earn a credit. Students are also required to keep notes in their notebooks and to show their notes in order to earn credit for a given course.

Ms. Byrd discussed the types of assessments that Ombudsman Northwest uses. Teachers use verbal assessments that require students to talk through their understanding of concepts. Teachers also use written assessments that include multiple choice questions and computer-based questions. In addition, each course in A+ Learning includes quizzes and a final exam. Review team members asked about the number of attempts that a student can make to pass an exam in the A+ system, and how the program ensures that students are really proficient in their computer-based courses. As previously mentioned, Teachers monitor students' progress in A+, which includes the number of attempts made to pass exams, as well as the marks that students earn on exams. Students with more than three attempts on an exam are provided with additional Teacher support. Teacher's talk with those students and examine concern areas based on exam results. This information is then used to develop a learning plan for students or, on occasion, an alternate assessment mode for students to demonstrate proficiency. Students who are struggling in certain courses receive individual and small-group instruction. Teachers create seminar-like courses for students who require extra help.

Review team members asked Ms. Byrd about the types of writing assignments that students complete at Ombudsman Northwest. Ms. Byrd recognized that students in the program need more opportunities to practice writing and to develop different types of writing. Ms. Byrd asked for assistance from review team members in gaining outside services to better support students with writing.

Ms. Byrd presented and discussed the program's retention rate and average daily attendance. The program's retention rate for the previous school year was 97% and the average daily attendance for the current school year was 90%. These rates are significantly higher than the Network average and correspond to the program's high level of parent participation. For example, more than half of Ombudsman Northwest's parents attended report card conferences this school year. Ms. Byrd attributes these performance levels to the program's frequent and consistent outreach to parents, and also to the expectations that are set for parents during orientation. Ms. Byrd and her staff make contact with all parents on almost a daily basis, and parents tend to feel welcomed and valued by program staff.

### **Classroom Observations**

Review team members observed 42 students present in the main classroom area. All students were on-task during the observation. The classroom walls displayed recent student work, school rules, and instructional resources. Students worked independently on a variety of subjects via the computer-based A+ Learning System. Students raised their hands to indicate the need for help. Ombudsman Northwest's Teachers circulated the main classroom and assisted students as needed. Students took notes from their computer-based lessons. Review team members randomly asked students what they were working on. All students were able to articulate their work and the reasons why they were taking a particular computer-based class. The program's credit accumulation wall was updated to reflect the number of credits that students had earned since the beginning of the school year.

### **Academic Success Questions with Teachers**

Ms. Byrd selected Mr. O'Neil to participate in the Academic Success Questions with Teachers. Mr. O'Neil is certified in Social Studies and has been with Ombudsman Northwest for a little over two years. Review team members asked Mr. O'Neil why he thought that STAR results (i.e., student reading and math growth) do not correlate to A+ Learning progress. Mr. O'Neil thought that students do not take the STAR seriously and therefore do not try their hardest to demonstrate improvement. He recommended that perhaps the program should include performance on the STAR exam as part of students' final course marks.

Mr. O'Neil talked about the assessments that he uses to monitor student learning. He uses checks for understanding as a major informal assessment. Mr. O'Neil talked about the STAR exam, A+ exams, and developing his own assessments as another progress monitoring tool instead of students always taking exams on the computer.

Review team members asked Mr. O'Neil if he thought that students at Ombudsman Northwest were actually learning their course material. He thought that about half of students were actually learning and that the other half was not necessarily mastering concepts that were taught on the computer. Mr. O'Neil recommended that students be required to write essays using prompts that are at the end of every lesson in A+ Learning. This would help Teachers to have a stronger measure of how well students have mastered concepts.

Review team members asked Mr. O'Neil about the kinds of supports that students receive with postsecondary planning. The program hosts speaker events in which professionals and college representatives speak to students about opportunities in a certain field or at a certain college. Students ask Teachers for help with college and financial aid applications. The program's School Counselor visits Ombudsman Northwest about once per month to work with students.

### **Academic Success Questions with Students**

Ombudsman Northwest selected three students to participate in the Academic Success Questions with Students. Two students were graduating seniors and one student was in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. The students all attended traditional public high schools before they enrolled at Ombudsman Northwest.

Students talked about their opinions of computer-based learning at Ombudsman Northwest. They felt that they were learning a lot more at the program than at their previous schools. They regarded themselves as independent learners and stated that they liked to work mostly by themselves and at their own pace. Students stated that they know they are learning when they can pass a practice test without using their notes. Students noted that they are allowed to use their notes for all tests taken in the A+ system. If they fail a test three times, then the test locks and a Teacher has to unlock it for them. After that, students noted that they may have to do a review of the class with a Teacher, or they may use their notes to study again. Students reported that they can get help from their Teachers whenever they need it and they enjoyed getting one-on-one support.

Students talked about their plans after high school. None of the graduating seniors had applied to colleges yet although all had ambitions of matriculating to college. Students identified Ms. Byrd and Ms. Branch as staff members that they can go to in order to receive help with planning for college. They noted that the program's School Counselor visits the school once a week, but they were not aware of her name and none had ever met with her. Students also stated that they could get help from their homeroom Teacher with planning for college, but that there were no regular meetings to develop plans for after high school.

When asked what they would change about the school, students initially stated that they would not change anything. Later they noted that they would like to have gym class. Overall, students reported being very satisfied with their experiences at Ombudsman Northwest. They felt that the program was one big family and that their

Teachers were supportive and really cared about their success. Their previous experiences were discouraging for them, but they reported finding a newfound confidence in their ability as students as result of their positive experiences at Ombudsman Northwest.

### **Recommendations**

The review team recommends that Ombudsman Northwest hire a full-time Social Worker, Counselor, or similar case management professional. Ombudsman's contract with the School District requires that the program have a 1 to 50 ratio of case management staff to students. It is imperative that students have regular opportunities to develop and access postsecondary pathways. This could take the form of ongoing counseling sessions with the School Counselor in which students explore viable postsecondary options and careers, and apply for colleges, jobs and financial aid. The review team also recommends that Ombudsman Northwest provide more opportunities for students to practice writing in preparation for postsecondary education and careers, and also to provide alternative ways to assess mastery of course content. Students can be assigned essays that are in the A+ Learning System. Students can also be assigned to pull-out classes that focus on writing. There are organizations and colleges in the area that can assist the program with implementing a writing program. The Opportunity Network and review team members offered their assistance with finding partnerships to increase writing opportunities for students.