



---

Charter Schools Office

*Clara B. Ford Academy*



Reauthorization Review

December 6-7, 2016

**Report:** Reauthorization Review Visitation  
**Academy:** Clara B. Ford Academy  
**Visitation Dates:** December 6-7, 2016

The visitation occurred at the Clara B. Ford Academy (CBFA) Campus with three members of the Ferris State University Charter Schools Office (FSU-CSO) visitation team. The team had the opportunity to meet with and interview the school leadership team, three school board members, a representative from CS Partners (the management company), and the School Improvement Team (SIT).

The visitation team toured several of the academic and residential facilities to get a broad view of where students live and where they learn. Classroom visits allowed the team to observe teaching and learning, and to assess how technology and audiovisual aids were used to illuminate lessons and special units.

The team appreciated the open communication and transparency that was apparent among and between the various stakeholders and daily collaborations with Vista Maria's court-ordered services for adjudicated youth.

## Visitation Findings –

### School Systems and School Improvement Plan (SIP) Review

The team had several opportunities to review in depth the documents with school leaders and instructional staff.

#### **SIP Review with the SIT**

The team observed and documented many coordinated strategies being used by teams of teachers, paraprofessionals, and teacher aides to help students develop the stamina to remain focused and engaged in the learning process:

- The staff is working to implement classroom management and de-escalation strategies in their classroom. The purpose and need is to work to keep students engaged for longer periods of time.
- The staff is working to differentiate curriculum content and instructional strategies to better meet each student's needs.
- The staff has been well trained in Trauma Informed Education. They regularly communicate with one another, across disciplines, to ensure that students are provided support and

consistency in blending their academic, social and coping skills within the structured school setting.

- The staff is fully aware of the need to treat, heal and then educate. They understand that each student has unique needs and varied backgrounds that impact their ability to adjust and thrive in a highly structured classroom setting.
- Staff work individually and collectively to help ALL students learn and apply “soft skills” to promote and celebrate academic achievement.
- A team effort is evident as staff cooperatively identify and prioritize overarching academic skills to reinforce in all content areas. Teachers consistently instruct and compare results of how well students perform the following skills in each class: Writing across the curriculum; problem-solving and higher level thinking skills; reading for understanding; evaluating information; verbally communicating information skills. It is evident that the entire staff supports one another to ensure the integration of these skills into each subject area.
- The staff is also very much engaged in developing behavior skills necessary for success in careers and further education. This is done by teaching students to regulate their emotions, establish healthy relationships, learn delayed gratification, word filtering, and self-monitoring.
- Staff have invested great effort in structuring inviting, stimulating and creatively arranged learning stations in each classroom. Students are encouraged to collaborate, communicate, use critical thinking, and express their creativity. When students need a “break” from the structure, protocols are seamlessly implemented to transition the student to another venue without any disruption to the learning environment. This involves a team effort among staff to staff, staff to students, and CBFA staff to Vista Maria staff.
- “Student Success Plans” have been adopted as a means of helping students be proactive in planning and implementing positive goals for improving their daily lives. The message that is desired to be communicated is “You are struggling; we are here to help you. How can we do that? How can you help yourself?”
- Continuous communication and problem-solving between CBFA staff and Vista Maria staff are accomplished through phone calls, emails, text messages and face-to-face meetings.
- The SIT leader developed a condensed overview that lists the key SIP components of the plan supported by relevant strategies and timelines. This provided a very helpful guide for the visitation team to walk through the plan.

#### **EdYes! School Systems Review**

- The team’s review of the EdYes! Report did not find any major discrepancies. The evidence and documentation provided are consistent with what was observed during conversations with school leaders, staff, board members, and classroom observations.

#### **Opportunities for Growth**

In regards to the SIP we make the following suggestions:

- Continue to collaborate with your partners to develop assessments for academic achievement and behavioral “soft skills” that will be helpful for making continued improvement.
- Be intentional in your efforts to analyze your goals and strategies for improvement. You are willing and able to make changes when necessary.

In regards to the EdYes! Report we make the following suggestions:

- Continue your efforts to have all teachers use “Curriculum Crafter” and “Understanding by Design” to develop lesson plans that follow a common format, that follow the State curriculum, and help to provide effective lessons for student achievement. While flexibility is helpful to promote teachers’ creativity, consistency and common metrics and reference points will facilitate smooth transitions as CBFA is joined by the new staff.
- CBFA may need to continue the search for or self-create an adaptable curriculum that will work for your unique population; one that is readily available to new teachers.
- Regarding student progress reports, it may be helpful to move towards the development of proficiency scales for the essential content (standards-based reporting), rather than letter grades/points. Your leadership team expressed a desire to move in this direction as a means of encouraging student input/accountability.
- You seem to have a strong mentor/mentee program in place to help newcomers adapt to the culture and expectations of CBFA. You might want to extend this a bit to create system-wide protocols and publication guides to quickly access in the event of staff turnover. Examples might include a new teacher training/mentee program, introduction to Trauma Education practices, intervention strategies/practices, a substitute teacher “survival” guide, etc.
- Continue your efforts to find the right tool to measure academic growth. You were using “AIMS” and now are using “ACCUCESS.”

## Facilities Review

A tour of your facilities and classroom visits reveal that you have conscientiously worked to maintain an environment that is well kept, safe and conducive to learning. The newly painted walls and special decorations and inspirational posters have brightened the appeal and cheerfulness of the building. The installation of classroom smart boards and new projection systems provide added opportunities for engaging students. The Academy has a less cluttered appearance and has cleared the way for much needed space.

## Opportunities for Growth

- None at this time.

## Academy Culture

- It appears that all stakeholders recognize the unique needs of your student population. You are “all in” to develop and learn how to effectively apply “Trauma Informed Teaching” strategies.
- You are living your mission each day as you provide a safe learning environment to help your students become self-fulfilled, contributing adults.
- You are an open and collaborative staff. You care about each other and are concerned about the self-care of each staff member.
- You have established a partnership with Wayne State University to help you develop a “cutting edge” process to understand trauma. You have made it a priority to track data to

provide an informed evaluation of practices that maximize learning for students who have experienced trauma in their lives.

- You have explained your emerging future to have in place a “perfect assessment for soft skills,” more partnerships, more life skills training, and you are committed to helping other schools use “best practices” that you have found to be useful and effective.
- The team observed a mutual respect and admiration between all levels of CBFA Board members, the leadership team, instructional and support staff, and Vista Maria personnel.
- It was especially refreshing to see “shared leadership” in action. The school leader has empowered staff members at all levels to become “experts” who feel confident in sharing their knowledge and skills via team meetings, demonstrations, professional development sessions, and serving as consultants and presenters at state and national conferences for those who serve similar populations.

### Opportunities for Growth

- None at this time.

### Mission Accomplishment

When asked “How do you ensure your mission, vision, and core values are embedded in what you do?” the responses included:

- Our mission is what we do.
- This is our mindset.
- We have a passion for helping our students.
- Our school Board reviews these at every meeting. They make a point to recognize areas where they see the mission or vision or core values taking place.

### Opportunities for Growth

- None at this time.

### Website

A review of your website showed that you are providing essential information. Each teacher has a website that is accessible through the school’s website that provides a class syllabus and other essential information. It may be helpful to publicize this more so that interested parties can more easily locate the specific sites for further review.

### Opportunities for Growth

- None at this time.

## Academy Internal Review

### Student Outcomes

- Your responses support what the team observed and heard. You are aware of your achievement data and trends.
- The development of the Monarch Room is essential for the success of your students. You have used data from your Monarch Room to adjust programming, as needed.
- You are aware of deficiencies in your ability to collect the right data for some of your FSU contract goals. You are proposing a change in your goals that will provide a better system of data collection and program improvement.

### Governance and Leadership

- The visitation team supports the examples you provided to show that the following practices have been internalized:
  - Your Board operates effectively and works collaboratively with your management company, CS Partners.
  - Your management company provides the process to ensure that your policies and procedures are in accordance with the law and best practices.
  - The Board has a workable number of members and meets regularly to conduct academy business.
  - The Board allows the school leadership and staff to manage day-to-day operations.
  - The Board works to allow for staff collaboration.
  - The Board supports the many efforts used to help all stakeholders to be engaged.
  - The Board is fully aware of the needs of your students and supportive of efforts to reach goals.
  - The Board works collaboratively with your management company and school leader to develop a budget that will meet current and future needs.
  - The Board maintains a strategic plan that aligns well with the mission, vision, core values and the educational planning of the Academy.

### Resources and Support Systems

- The team agrees with your responses indicating that the following are in place:
  - Quality staff are in place.
  - The Academy is always working to make the most of its available resources.
  - Facilities are well kept.
  - A wide range of media and informational resources support your educational programs.
  - The Academy's technology infrastructure supports the teaching and learning needs of the students.
  - The Academy provides support services to meet the physical, emotional, and social needs of the students.
  - The management company works to take a lot of things off the school leader's plate so that she can focus on student and staff needs.
  - The management company provides a sounding board for the school leader.

- The management company provides expertise in school finance, human resources, compliance and school leadership support.
- The management company works to do what is best for the Academy.

### Opportunities for Growth

- Continue your efforts to maximize communication and collaboration with Vista Maria. An effective partnership with Vista Maria will help to make your students' success a reality.
- Continue your efforts to sustain quality staffing.

### Special Thanks

Ferris State University's Charter Schools Office Visitation Team appreciates the time and hospitality shown to us during the December 6-7, 2016, review. Everyone was welcoming and willing to share their ideas – including the students.

We also appreciate your efforts to prepare and assemble notebooks and artifacts which provided ample documentation of how CBFA operates. The materials were well organized, which made it convenient and useful for us to refer to them as questions arose.

Again, your cooperation and participation were appreciated.

# CSO Review of Overall Performance for Clara B. Ford Academy

## Contract Performance Report Review

### CSO Points of Pride for **CBFA**

- Eligible students complete the SAT assessment.
- CBFA had a 100% compliance rate for 2015-16.
- Average Board of Directors' attendance was 94% for last year.
- CBFA spent 68% of expended funds on instruction, the highest level in FSU-CSO portfolio.

### CSO Area of Concern for **CBFA**

- **None at this time**

## School Support Team (SST) Updates

### CSO Points of Pride for **CBFA**

- CBFA currently has a "Green" designation based on overall academic procedures, compliance, and governance performance.
- FSU-CSO is working with CBFA to develop updated process-driven goals and measures.

### CSO Area of Concern for **CBFA**

- **None at this time**

## Opportunities for Growth

- Complete and implement with fidelity the new goals and measures.

## CSO Expectations in Consideration for Recommendation of Reauthorization

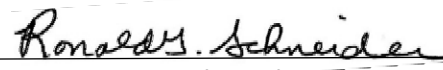
### At this time:

- **Continue to follow current charter contract language.**
- **The CSO has no additional expectations at this time.**

Signed

  
CSO Visitation Chair

Signed

  
CSO Associate Director

Date: December 20, 2016

Date: December 20, 2016