

**Damar Charter Academy  
SIXTH YEAR REVIEW**

Prepared For: Office of Education Innovation  
Office of the Mayor, City of Indianapolis

Site Visit Dates: October 31, 2023; November 2, 2023

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## **Part I: School Evaluation Overview and Methodology**

### **Process**

The school evaluation process involved three phases of data collection and synthesis – (1) pre-site visit with school leadership to preview site visit and discuss school’s evidence of Core Question 4 prior to site visit (2) document review of Damar Charter Academy’s (DCA) mission and vision statements, original charter proposal, Family Handbook, and parent survey results. This evaluation was for DCA only, not any other educational entity within the Damar organization. The remainder of the report will reference this school location as DCA.

In advance of the site visit, DCA had independently distributed a survey to students’ families. Since the school had already done this, the evaluation team did not ask for an additional survey.

The site visit consisted of the following components:

- Document analysis (e.g., mission and vision statements, original charter proposal, Family Handbook; scopes and sequences, student IEPs, and ILP Plans);
- Classroom observations of teachers and observation of shared spaces;
- Teacher focus group (mix of elementary and secondary)
- Student interviews: six different students were interviewed individually and in pairs, covering a sample of students across grade levels.
- Two family member focus groups (additionally, some parents spoke to evaluation team members on the phone if they were unable to attend the focus group).
- Administration focus group composed of school and network leaders.

## Part II: Damar Charter Academy Background Information

- DCA, is a tuition-free, open-enrollment, public charter school. DCA is authorized by Mayor Hogsett’s Office of Education Innovation. Their mission is to successfully prepare students with developmental, intellectual and behavioral challenges for a lifetime of learning. DCA serves grades K-12. All students at DCA have significant behavioral needs, and 97% of these students receive special education services through an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

### Student Demographics

- DCA began serving students in 2011 and has an enrollment of 180. Students are placed in different classrooms according to their individualized needs and their IEPs. Their age, diploma track, skill level, and degree of behavioral needs are considered when determining in which classroom to place a child. Each classroom has no more than 15 students, with one teacher, one instructional assistant, and often at least one additional Damar employee who is assigned to assist students who are in the Damar residential program.

Enrollment 2023/2024

**Free and Reduced Lunch:** According to the Indiana Department of Education GPS report 98.9% of the DCA student body pay receive free or reduced lunch.

**Ethnicity:** The racial and ethnic breakdown of the student population is as follows:

Ethnicity	Total Number of Students	% of Total Student Population
White	119	66%
Black	37	21%
Multi-Racial	12	7%

Hispanic	11	6%
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Reported from IDOE Compass (2017/2018)

Additionally, 3% of the student body are considered English Learners. All of these students have autism and are non-verbal. The students have Individualized Language Plans in place, but due to the small percentage of this population, the limited communication skills of these students due to their disabilities, and cases of international adoption (where the student was born in a non-English speaking home, but now lives in an English speaking home but has not passed WIDA exam due to disabilities), their language needs are not the primary focus for these students.

### **Student Performance**

DCA provided detailed standardized testing results for all of their students from 2021. Due to students' individualized needs and Case Conference Committee decisions in IEPs, 54.4% of students participate in regular statewide assessments, with 45.6% participating in alternate assessments. Those participating in the alternate assessments are not on a high school diploma track. In English/Language Arts, 10.8% of grades 3-8 students are approaching proficiency or higher. In mathematics, 5.4%% of grades 3-8 students are approaching proficiency or higher. For 3<sup>rd</sup> graders on IREAD, 0% of students demonstrated proficiency. The data from this year shows that 9.5% of students earned a high school diploma.

The median student growth percentile for students with disabilities (grades 5-8) participating in regular statewide assessments in English/Language Arts was 22.5% and the growth for this group in math was 15%.

Proficiency data for students taking alternate assessments (grades 3-8 and 11) show "Approaching Proficiency" or better for 69.44% of students in English/Language Arts and 60% in math.

### Part III: Core Question 4 Indicator Ratings

Core Question 4 of OEI’s performance framework consists of ten indicators and three possible ratings. The chart below summarizes the evaluation team’s assessment of DCA in a manner that is aligned to these indicators and ratings.

<b>Does Not Meet Standard</b>	Ratings across all sub-indicators were scored at 65% or less of the total overall points possible.
<b>Approaching Standard</b>	Ratings across all sub-indicators were scored between 79% and 66% for the total overall points possible.
<b>Meets Standard</b>	Ratings across all sub-indicators were scored between 80% and 89% of the total points possible.
<b>Exceeds Standard</b>	Ratings across all sub-indicators were scored at or above 90% of the total overall points possible.
Sub-Indicator Point Values	
Planning	1 point
Emerging	2 points
Implementing	3 points
Sustaining	4 points

Core Question 4 Indicator	Rating
4.1: Curriculum and Supporting Materials	<u>Exceeds Standard</u>
4.2: Pedagogy	<u>Exceeds Standard</u>
4.3: Post-Secondary Guidance	<u>Meets Standard</u>
4.4: Assessment	<u>Exceeds Standard</u>
4.5: Talent	<u>Exceeds Standard</u>
4.6: Mission	<u>Exceeds Standard</u>
4.7: Climate	<u>Exceeds Standard</u>
4.8: Communication	<u>Exceeds Standard</u>
4.9: Exceptional Learners	<u>Exceeds Standard</u>
4.10: English Learners	<u>Exceeds Standard</u>

## Part IV: Findings

<b>Indicator 4.1: Does the school have a high-quality curriculum and supporting materials for each grade?</b>	<u>Exceeds Standard</u>
Element	Evaluation
<i>a) The curriculum used across all academic areas is rigorous, evidence-based and aligned with state standards.</i>	<u>Sustaining</u>
<p><b>Findings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DCA has comprehensive curriculum maps for its entire curriculum for each grade level and content area, all aligned to state standards.</li> <li>• Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH) Reading</li> <li>• Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH) Math</li> <li>• Edgenuity - High School Online Courses</li> <li>• Life Centered Education (Vocational)</li> <li>• Unique Learning Systems (Life Skills)</li> <li>• Work Bin (Life Skills)</li> <li>• 3 Tracks (ages 5-22) - K-12 Academic – Diploma, 9-12 Vocational - Certificate of Completion, and Essential Life Skills</li> <li>• Curriculum mapping is designed to focus on Indiana State Standards, provide teaching timing, and highlight key indicators in order to achieve mastery. Selected curriculums are evidence based and provide the necessary individualized level of rigor for each student.</li> <li>• Students are given an assessment to establish academic strengths and challenges. Based on the assessments, classroom teachers use the established curriculum to meet the students where they are. This includes ability grouping and targeted small group instruction using the curriculum and the resources provided. This may also require slight modification of the assignments. Friday is set aside to provide intervention support. HMH is also embedded in student morning work.</li> <li>• Students receiving Life Centered Education are also exposed to a curriculum that allows the classroom teacher to adjust and assign assignments that are tailored to the needs of the students and mastery of Indiana State Standards.</li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was clear evidence of the use of these various curriculums throughout the different classrooms.</li> <li>• Teachers reported confidence in using the curriculum through PD, collaboration with colleagues.</li> <li>• OEI representative reported to team that many other schools are moving away from Edgenuity to get students more attention from licensed teachers using programs like Indiana Online. Admin team will look into this option, and has used Indiana Online in case by case situations.</li> </ul>

Element	Evaluation
<i>b) Systematic reviews of curricula are conducted by administrators and school staff to identify gaps based on student performance across and within subgroups.</i>	<b><u>Implementing</u></b>

<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher led assessment schedules to determine progress and identify any additional support needs.</li> <li>• Teachers meet routinely to discuss student progress among the content areas, performance gaps, and social and behavioral impacts.</li> <li>• Due to the ability grouping within each classroom and the changing of classes based on content instruction, teachers are actively assessing and determining student needs and possible performance gaps. Based on these decisions small group placement and instructional skill targets are adjusted.</li> <li>• Classroom teachers meet bi-weekly to discuss and assess student progress and performance. Discussions include but are not limited to academic standing, classroom assessment of skills, social relationship, student conflict, student challenges and student successes. The classroom teacher for the vocational program also meets with each student’s therapist daily to ensure that not only the academic needs of his students are met, but also the emotional and mental needs.</li> </ul>	

Element	Evaluation
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<i>c) The school regularly reviews instructional curriculum maps to ensure presentation of content is aligned with learning objectives.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
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**Findings**

- Staff are required to participate in data meetings with the Instruction and Accountability Director.
- Curriculum mapping is submitted and reviewed for each grade level/classroom.
- Classroom teachers create the curriculum map and align it to the standards covered in the identified curriculum. Rarely are adjustments made due to the range of academic ability and pacing of progress of each student. Maintaining the curriculum map as designed increases the probability of addressing the various learning gaps of the students.

<b>Element</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
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<i>d) The school has a well-designed horizontal and vertical alignment within and across grade levels and content areas that is prioritized and focuses on core learning objectives.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
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**Findings**

- Curriculum mapping provides a content and behavioral alignment with each class connected to an Indiana State Standard.
- Population served and classroom grouping does not support a clean cut alignment within and across grade levels, yet administration and teachers work together to analyze the curriculum and how to implement it to meet students' needs.
- Each classroom has a range of grade levels represented. The grouping is as follows: K-2, 3-5, 5-8, High School behavioral life skills (ages 17-22). Due to this grade level and ability grouping, a clean vertical and horizontal alignment is not present nor appropriate. The alignment is instead focused on the individual needs and performance of each student versus the assigned grade level.
- Focus standards were prioritized based on the program curriculums.

<b>Element</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
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<i>e) Instructional staff have access to provided materials to deliver the curriculum effectively.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HMH Reading &amp; HMH Math are accessible to all instructional staff both in book hardcopies and digital programming and resources.</li> <li>• Unique Learning Systems is a digital platform that all instructional staff can access and print needed resources.</li> <li>• Life Centered Education is a digital platform that all instructional staff can access and print needed resources.</li> </ul>	
<b>Element</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<i>f) Instructional staff understand and uniformly use curriculum documents and related program materials to effectively deliver instruction.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All instructional staff use the curriculum documents and related program materials to effectively deliver instruction.</li> <li>• In addition, classroom teachers and instructional assistants collaborate in determining the lesson focus based on the curriculum and Indiana Standards, resources to support the lesson, and any adaptations that may need to be made based on student needs.</li> <li>• In interviews with teachers and with instructional assistants, it is clear that there is a high level of collaboration between teachers and all instructional staff to best utilize the curricular materials and appropriate strategies to maximize student learning.</li> </ul>	

<b>Indicator 4.2: Are the teaching processes (pedagogies) consistent with the school's mission?</b>	<b><u>Exceeds Standard</u></b>
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<b>Element</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<i>a) The curriculum is implemented in all classrooms with fidelity</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The evaluation team observed consistent alignment to state standards and use of curricular resources and programs in all classrooms during the site visit.</li> </ul>	

- The evaluation team noted that curricular materials were clearly informing the instruction.
- Teachers indicated a high degree of comfort in using the curriculum.

Element	Evaluation
<i>b) A clearly documented lesson internalization process is used to explicitly target core learning objectives across all academic areas</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>

<b>Findings</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on the school’s Comprehensive Needs Assessment, there was an identified need for teacher professional development in the area of curriculum in 2021. As a result, the school has placed greater emphasis on professional development around its curriculum and allowing teachers the opportunity to identify their own professional development needs based on their individual students’ needs.</li> <li>• Instruction and Accountability Director regularly observes and provides feedback to teachers, including on their lesson planning process.</li> </ul>

Element	Evaluation
<i>c) A clearly documented lesson internalization process is used to explicitly identify a wide range of instructional strategies that target core learning objectives across all academic areas.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>

<b>Findings</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a clear expectation of regular lesson internalization for all teachers where they engage in this process, submit to the Instruction and Accountability Director and receive feedback.</li> <li>• Teachers are empowered by administration to take ownership of their own professional development and identify opportunities for development to help them meet their students’ needs.</li> </ul>

Element	Evaluation
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<i>d) Instruction is differentiated based on ongoing formative assessment of student learning needs, identified student interests, and preferred learning styles.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is the basis of all instruction. Each student is placed in a classroom based more on their skills and long-term goals than grade. Teachers are constantly monitoring student progress, adjusting instruction, all aligned to IEP goals for both immediate and long-term goals in academics, behavior, social skills, employment and independent living.</li> </ul>	

<b>Element</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<i>e) Instructional strategies used are designed to promote authentic learning to impact levels of student engagement.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The individualized nature of the instruction and learning helps to create more authentic experiences, resulting in higher levels of engagement.</li> <li>• The secondary vocational program affords students the opportunity to work in and shop at the school store. Also, the wood shop program is highly authentic and trains students in job skills, personal accountability, safety, and engages students on a level that this team has rarely seen.</li> </ul>	

<b>Element</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<i>f) Instructional practices are intentionally designed to validate and affirm the cultures of students.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The individualized nature of the instruction in the school allows for a great deal of flexibility to validate and affirm students' cultures.</li> <li>• There is consistent evidence of curricular materials in all classrooms that reflect the students' cultures.</li> <li>• There is intentional incorporation of events that celebrate and honor cultures represented in the school.</li> </ul>	

- In a school with high levels of behavioral needs, there is not a “one size fits all” approach, with the goal to work with the students, keep them in school, and to use behavioral challenges as an opportunity to learn and grow. This is in contrast to policies that have a history of disproportionate disciplinary practices.

Element	Evaluation
<i>g) Staff receive explicit feedback on instructional practices on an ongoing basis.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff indicated that it is very common for administration to be in their classrooms for the purpose of observation and feedback. This happens at least weekly, if not multiple times per week.</li> <li>• There are bi-weekly data meets where teachers collaborate with administration to review student data and make instructional decisions to meet their needs.</li> <li>• The formal evaluation occurs annually, but feedback is so regular that this is not a stressful event for teachers as they know where they stand and have opportunity to address any shortcomings in their practice.</li> </ul>	

<b>Indicator 4.3: For secondary students, does the school provide sufficient guidance on and support preparation for postsecondary options?</b>	<b><u>Meets Standard</u></b>
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Element	Evaluation
<i>a) The school provides access to rigorous coursework and career planning experiences to prepare students for post-secondary opportunities aligned to their interests.</i>	<b><u>Implementing</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virtually all students have an IEP, resulting in transition to life after K-12 education being a major focus of the Case Conference Committee, including transition assessments, services and goals.</li> <li>• Students have opportunities to pursue different tracks based on their transition goals (vocational, academic, life skills). The vocational program provides students with</li> </ul>	

rigorous job training opportunities in Mr. Trueblood's wood shop. It is our recommendation look for similar skill sets / industries to train students.

Element	Evaluation
<i>b) A system is in place to ensure school staff provide students with the supports they need to be effectively prepared for post-secondary opportunities.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DCA utilizes a report card for its students that is titled, "Vocational Employability Inventory". The inventory is disaggregated into employability categories such as "pre-employment work habits" and "interaction with supervisors" which are filled out for students every quarter of the school year. The inventory also documents the grades in coursework, but the focus of the inventory is employability skills.</li> </ul>	

Element	Evaluation
<i>c) The school provides opportunities for extracurricular engagement and activities connected to student interests to increase post-secondary options.</i>	<b><u>Implementing</u></b>
<b>Findings</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students can receive vocational training with Mr. Trueblood in his wood shop program. Students learn skills related to working with hand-held power tools and other wood-working tools.</li> <li>Transition activities are identified in IEPs that are aligned to student interests and long-term goals.</li> </ul>	

Element	Evaluation
<i>d) The school offers a range of pathways that allow all students to meet or exceed Indiana Core 40 graduation requirements.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	

- DCA offers coursework that is aligned to the multiple pathways of state requirements that allows students to meet and exceed the Core 40 requirements, as well as vocational and life skills tracks to meet students' individual needs.

<b>Indicator 4.4: Does the school effectively use learning standards and assessments to inform and improve instruction?</b>	<b><u>Exceeds Standard</u></b>
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<b>Element</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<i>a) Assessments utilized are well aligned to learning standards</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers indicated in the interview session that they place an emphasis on matching their curriculum materials with the Indiana academic standards. The curriculum maps also contained documentation of standards-assessment alignment.</li> </ul>	

<b>Element</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<i>b) Assessments utilized are varied in order to support a wide range of student learning styles and abilities</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DCA utilizes a wide variety of assessments for determining progress towards mastery for each student. Students are administered NWEA testing as a benchmarking system leading up to ILEARN in the Spring, but teachers also utilize formative assessments such as in-class work, exit tickets, spelling tests, MobyMax, comprehension questions at the end of a lesson, etc. to guide their instruction. Teachers indicated that they tailor the assessment for each student's needs because some of the students are able to communicate more effectively in a written assessment while others are better suited for an oral assessment.</li> </ul>	

<b>Element</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<i>c) Assessments utilized provide student level data focused on growth and proficiency</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	

- The formative and summative assessments administered to students at DCA generate data that can be used to inform both growth and proficiency. The teachers indicated that since their students typically are unable to demonstrate proficiency levels on par with students in traditional settings, the school places a heavy emphasis on analyzing the academic growth of each student on the assessments.

Element	Evaluation
<i>d) Assessments are administered with sufficient frequency and results are provided in a timely manner</i>	<b><u>Implementing</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are multiple assessments that are given at an ongoing frequency to track proficiency and growth.</li> <li>• The results are analyzed frequently in collaborative environments with administration and colleagues.</li> </ul>	

Element	Evaluation
<i>e) A system is in place to ensure that assessment data is analyzed across and within subgroups and used to guide decision-making related to instruction and curriculum.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All the assessments used to benchmark student progress (i.e., NWEA, MobyMax, assessment of independent learning through Indiana University’s vocational website) immediately returns the results of the assessment. Was not able to find artifacts that supported the results of these benchmarking assessments being shared with families in a timely manner.</li> </ul>	

<b>Indicator 4.5: Has the school developed adequate human resource systems and deployed its staff effectively?</b>	<b><u>Exceeds Standard</u></b>
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Element	Evaluation
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<p>a) <i>A standard recruitment/hiring policy and procedure is in place and is designed to ensure human resources are leveraged to reflect the needs of the school population.</i></p>	<p><b><u>Sustaining</u></b></p>
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<p><b>Findings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administration benefits from low turnover (resulting from a variety of factors reflective of healthy culture &amp; generative leadership practices). That allows Damar to systematically recruit from Damar home office / direct service associates. New hires begin with a two-week training program &amp; ongoing training specifically designed for the developmental needs of the teacher / teacher assistant relative to the students being served.</li> <li>• Administration has identified specific character traits to identify cultural fits for the school, specifically grit and resiliency.</li> </ul>	
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<p><b>Element</b></p>	<p><b>Evaluation</b></p>
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<p>b) <i>Hiring processes are well organized and used to support the success of new staff members.</i></p>	<p><b><u>Sustaining</u></b></p>
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<p><b>Findings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administration benefits from low turnover (resulting from a variety of factors reflective of healthy culture &amp; generative leadership practices). That allows Damar to systematically recruit from Damar home office / direct service associates. New hires begin with a two-week training program &amp; ongoing training specifically designed for the developmental needs of the teacher / teacher assistant relative to the students being served.</li> </ul>	
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<p><b>Element</b></p>	<p><b>Evaluation</b></p>
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<p>c) <i>Staff levels adequately allow staff to maximize their instructional time and capacity.</i></p>	<p><b><u>Sustaining</u></b></p>
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<p><b>Findings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All rooms are adequately staffed: at a minimum one teacher &amp; one TA. Most times, there are additional staff (primarily from Damar Services) who provide support for students who need additional attention, including 1:1 attention.</li> <li>• At the time of the evaluation, there was only one vacancy at the school, which was a staff, non-instructional position (school safety officer).</li> </ul>	
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Element	Evaluation
<i>d) Faculty and staff are appropriately certified/sufficiently trained in areas to which they are assigned and possess the instructional proficiencies needed for the school population served.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DCA teachers are certified in the area in which they are teaching.</li> <li>• There is ongoing professional development to further teacher development to meet the needs of the population they serve.</li> </ul>	

Element	Evaluation
<i>e) Professional learning opportunities are offered regularly in order to support the staff in delivering culturally relevant and differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all learners.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is regular professional development offered for staff to develop their instructional practices to meet students' needs.</li> <li>• Training opportunities are specifically tailored to meet the population of students the school serves, as well as allowing for teachers to take ownership of their own development.</li> </ul>	

Element	Evaluation
<i>f) Professional learning opportunities are determined through analyses of student outcomes data and clearly linked to strategic objectives and school improvement goals.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student data is regularly analyzed by teachers and administration in bi-weekly meetings, resulting in more targeted approaches to raise student outcomes.</li> </ul>	

- This emphasis on data and analysis from the curriculum was identified in the Comprehensive Needs Assessment of the school from 2021.

Element	Evaluation
<i>g) The teacher evaluation process is explicit and regularly implemented with a clear process and criteria.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers report they receive ongoing feedback, support and partnership from administration. Administration treats faculty /TA's as professionals, allowing significant autonomy, which plays a key role in the attraction and retention of quality faculty and staff. Annual review process.</li> </ul>	

<b>Indicator 4.6: Is the school's mission clearly understood by all stakeholders?</b>	<b><u>Exceeds Standard</u></b>
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Element	Evaluation
<i>a) Procedures are in place for assessing all stakeholder's perceptions, knowledge and commitment to the intentions of the school's mission.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DCA has engaged in regular survey distribution of stakeholders about their perceptions of the school and how it is performing.</li> <li>• There have been efforts to create and sustain a PTO, with mixed results as families have many obstacles (large percentage of students in foster care system, lack of transportation to and from school, many appointments and challenges of having children with severe disabilities).</li> </ul>	

Element	Evaluation
<i>b) Procedures are in place for establishing meaningful partnerships with all families and community stakeholders to support the school's mission</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	

- There have been efforts to create and sustain a PTO, with mixed results as families have many obstacles (large percentage of students in foster care system, lack of transportation to and from school, many appointments and challenges of having children with severe disabilities).
- When interviewing family members, there is a strong theme of partnership between the school and home. Many of these parents came to DCA after less than ideal experiences at other schools, and have such a high degree of loyalty and sense of belonging for themselves and their children at DCA. Parents were afraid our evaluation team was there to pull funding, and they did everything short of begging us not to do so.
- The Damar organization provides a lot of structure for additional services for students, and the DCA board is comprised of many community members who bring opportunities for further community engagement.
- Multiple parents shared anecdotes of contacting teachers or administration after hours and how responsive they all were and how well cared for they and their children are by the staff.

<b>Indicator 4.7: Is the school climate responsive to the needs of students, staff, and families?</b>	<b><u>Exceeds Standard</u></b>
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<b>Element</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<i>a) A multi-tiered framework designed to support the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs of students is implemented with fidelity.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>

<b>Findings</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students are eligible for one of three academic tracks at DCA: academic track (Core 40 diploma), vocational track (alternative diploma), or life skills track. All students have a behavioral plan that is developed to meet the needs of each student.</li> </ul>

<b>Element</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<i>b) Culturally responsive and evidence based interventions are explicitly identified and implemented throughout the school to support the needs of students.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>

<b>Findings</b>
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- Classroom observations indicated that interventions utilized by the teachers, teacher assistants, and support staff are implemented on a consistent basis. Parent interviews also indicated a strong adherence to interventions which support the needs of their children. One parent described DCA as “a safe and loving place where my child finally fits in.”

Element	Evaluation
<i>c) Explicit procedures for facilitating the development of strong, positive relationships between adults and students are clearly communicated to and implemented by all staff.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers at DCA are provided with various opportunities for continuing education. Some of the continuing education focuses on relationships between adults and students, including: Tier One Trauma Accommodating Framework, Therapeutic Crisis Intervention, and child abuse neglect reporting.</li> </ul>	

Element	Evaluation
<i>d) Procedures are in place for assessing staff, student, and family perspectives to ensure a sense of connectedness and engagement within the school</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The parent and family engagement policy meeting minutes referenced going over the results of a “Family Friendly School Survey” at the May 26 meeting.</li> </ul>	

<b>Indicator 4.8: Is ongoing communication with students and families clear and helpful?</b>	<b><u>Exceeds Standard</u></b>
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Element	Evaluation
<i>a) An active and ongoing system of communication between the school and family members is in place.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	

- Participants in the parent focus group noted that communication between the school and families was frequent and timely. DCA utilizes School Messenger for delivering important school information as well as a monthly school newsletter sent to all stakeholders. The monthly newsletter is created in Smore and contains items such as important dates, student spotlight, staff spotlight, policy reminders, etc. DCA administration noted that the newsletter generates an open rate of 80% or higher. A parent-teacher organization has been in place at DCA, but depending on the school year, the parent attendance at the meetings has been minimal.

Element	Evaluation
<i>b) Procedures for responding to concerns of families are clearly defined and implemented by all school staff and validated by families.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DCA has a parental involvement policy that outlines several different procedures for responding to family concerns. The policy notes that parents will have the opportunity to discuss their child’s progress at any time throughout the year. Parent-teacher conferences can also be held upon request to discuss academic achievement in the classroom.</li> </ul>	

Element	Evaluation
<i>c) Families are regularly informed in their native or home language of their students’ academic and behavioral strengths and areas of need.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The parental involvement policy notes, “The school will assist the parent with understanding these components, along with any associated reports, and will provide training and materials in English and the native language (when possible), so that the parent may better participate in making decisions regarding the education of the child.”</li> </ul>	

Element	Evaluation
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<i>d) The school's communication methods are designed to promote family-school partnerships in ways that meet the needs of a diverse set of families.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One of the parents in the parent focus group said, "There is no other school in the city that has the same level of professionalism as Damar." All parents noted that the relationship between families and school is not characterized as "us versus them"; rather, the families and school are in a partnership. The parent then went on to say that even though the families feel like a partner, the school administration is not afraid to have difficult conversations about student behaviors. DCA hosts a literacy night in the winter and a math night in the spring which serves as an opportunity for parents to strengthen the partnership with the administration and classroom teachers.</li> </ul>	

<b>Indicator 4.9: Do the school's special education files demonstrate that it is in legal compliance and is moving towards best practice?</b>	<b><u>Exceeds Standard</u></b>
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<b>Element</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<i>a) Services outlined in Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) adequately match the exceptional needs of the student.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The services in the IEPs are appropriate for the exceptional needs of the students.</li> </ul>	

<b>Element</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<i>b) IEPs include student specific goal and plan for ongoing assessment of student progress.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The goals are skill specific and include a plan for ongoing assessment of student progress.</li> <li>These goals are all connected to skill-specific data in the present levels of performance section where there is a deficit area for the student.</li> </ul>	

<b>Element</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<i>c) IEP goals are rigorous and based on state and national learning standards.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>

<b>Findings</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All goals demonstrate appropriate rigor, individualization and alignment to standards</li> </ul>

<b>Element</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<i>d) IEP goals are reviewed and revised annually as determined by present level of performance.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There was evidence of annual review and revision based on high quality present level of performance statements for all students.</li> </ul>	

<b>Element</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<i>e) IEPs explicitly identify requirements for specifically designed curriculum and instruction to align with student needs.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is a SDI identified for each goal that aligns with the students' needs.</li> </ul>	

<b>Indicator 4.10: Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations related to access and services to students with limited English proficiency?</b>	<b><u>Exceeds Standard</u></b>
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<b>Element</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<i>a) Staff have a clear understanding of legal obligations, current legislation, research, and effective practices relating to the provision of services for ELL students.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Although there are only a few English Learners in the school, there is a system in place to service these students and any other future students who would enroll.</li> </ul>	

- One administrator oversees the ELL process, ILPs, WIDA testing and works with the teachers who have these students in class to ensure that students' needs are met.

Element	Evaluation
<i>b) Staff have a knowledge of the process of language acquisition and the skillsets needed to differentiate instructional strategies to meet the needs of ELL students.</i>	<b><u>Implementing</u></b>
<b>Findings</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff have knowledge of the language acquisition process and apply these best practices to all students. All instruction is differentiated at this school, regardless of their level of language skills.</li> </ul>	

Element	Evaluation
<i>c) Procedures are in place to ensure relationships with ELL students, parents, and external providers are well-managed and in compliance with Indiana law and regulations.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To ensure communication, there are efforts to provide translated communication when this need arises. Currently, it is not an issue.</li> </ul>	

Element	Evaluation
<i>d) ILPs include student specific goal and plan for ongoing assessment of student progress.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All ILPs include specific goals and plans for ongoing assessment.</li> </ul>	

Element	Evaluation
<i>e) ILPs explicitly identify needs for targeted instruction to align with student needs.</i>	<b><u>Sustaining</u></b>
<b>Findings</b>	

- The main needs for these students are addressed in their IEPs, but the ILPs also identify the need for targeted instruction to align with student needs.

## **Part V: Closing**

Overall, DCA is characterized as a school with a high degree of trust and collaboration between administration, faculty, staff and families. Our team was amazed at the longevity of service of the school employees had across the board. With long-term consistency in administration and in the classrooms, it is evident that this is a highly desirable place to work for teachers and instructional aids because they are trusted to be professionals and do their work. The administrators allow them to do their work, and tasks that they put on the instructional staff are collaborative and focused on how to best serve students and their individual needs. This school provides an immeasurably valuable service for their students, their families, and our city and broader community. Students come to DCA and often have had major challenges in school. At DCA, the common story is that students find a place to belong and grow. Many parents dread the day when their child with severe needs is too old to come to school at DCA. It is a lifeline for these families. The confidence that we observed in classrooms as students were eager to engage in the work and learning was exciting, and we did not want to leave. Programs like the wood shop deserve to be protected, invested in, and exploration for ways to expand this model and provide additional opportunities for students like that deserve attention and funding. Hearing the stories of how behavior in a traditional classroom approach was not working led to the eventual development of this program, seeing a dramatic

decrease in problem behavior and students wanting to come to school, and audibly groaning when it was not their turn to work in the shop was nothing short of inspiring.

Given the demographics of the school in terms of students with disabilities, the academic achievement data in terms of state testing is not great and it never will be. These metrics should not be totally ignored, but much greater weight should be placed on student growth, graduation outcomes, skill certificates earned, IEP goal attainment, etc. Development of an accountability measure that unique fits a school like this could be helpful, but our recommendation is to approach this with caution. Accountability can be incredibly helpful in improving practice and outcomes for students, but there should be a broad consideration of multiple outcomes for students to inform this.

Our team recommends continual evaluation of the curriculums that the school is using to best provide high quality instruction to students, as finding teachers with special education licenses and content areas (particularly for secondary teachers) is highly unlikely. The approach to identify potential hires based on a cultural fit to the building is what is happening and should continue. When students are ready to pursue content and earn credit in classes that there is not a licensed teacher, online curriculum options should be pursued like they are now.

Similar to the approach to individualizing needs in academic offerings, an expansion of the vocational program could provide great opportunity for even better outcomes for these students. Given the warehouse setting of the school and the high demand for workers in this area, equipping students with

opportunities to learn these skills and credentials could take a great program even further. For example, if students were able to learn how to operate a forklift and earn a certification in this, that would be highly valuable in terms of employability for students. Not all students may be interested in this kind of work, so there may be opportunity to connect students to opportunities to learn some IT skills, or have opportunities to practice customer interactions in the school store. These are just hypothetical examples and may not be applicable to all students, but may be some opportunities for the future.

The quality of the IEPs and ILPs was very high with clear processes in place for gathering data and writing these. Such practices should be continued. Although there are very few ELL students now, this can change quickly. So, further development and consideration of your systems if you were to increase enrollment is something to keep in mind.

It was a great privilege for our team to spend the time in this school and observe the outstanding work of all of these fine educators. If we controlled educational funding, we would have quickly acted contrary to the family members' fears that we were cutting funding and promptly increased it to further the impact that this school has for this population and their families.