

BROOKLYN SCHOLARS CHARTER SCHOOL

ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT

AUGUST 2011

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

Brooklyn Scholars Charter School (BSCS) is an elementary school serving approximately 248 students. In the 2010-2011 academic year the school served students in grades kindergarten through five.¹ The school plans to grow to serve students in grades kindergarten through eight.² It is currently housed in privately leased space at 2635 Linden Boulevard in Community School District (CSD) 19.³

The school population comprises 79% Black, 14% Hispanic, 1% White, 1% American Indian/Alaska native and 4% Asian students. Approximately 84% of students are designated as receiving free/reduced price lunch.⁴ According to school data the student body includes approximately .08% English language learners (ELL) and 5.8% special education students (SPED).⁵

The school is in its second year and has not yet earned a Progress Report or state/federal accountability designation.⁶ The school reported average attendance for the 2010-2011 at 95.2%, as of May 13, 2011.

Brooklyn Scholars Charter School (BSCS) is part of the National Heritage Academies (NHA) network, an education management organization. NHA is responsible and accountable to the Board of Trustees for the administration, operation, and management of BSCS. This includes the school's instructional program, professional development training for staff, instructional materials and supplies, and all business and accounting administration. The fee structure is based on NHA retaining all excess revenues after all expenses and services for the school have been paid.

Annual Review Process Overview:

The New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) Charter Schools Office (CSO) conducts an annual site visit of NYCDOE-authorized charter schools in order to assess three primary questions: is the school an academic success, is the school a viable organization, and is the school in compliance with applicable laws and regulations? The visits are conducted by representatives of the New York City Department of Education Charter Schools Office and last the duration of one school day. The annual site visit begins with a meeting with the principal and school leadership team. Subsequently, the reviewers visit classrooms and hold brief meetings with available administrators, teachers, and students. Areas of evaluation include, but are not limited to: academic goals and mission, curriculum and instruction, school culture and learning environment, assessment utilization, parent engagement, government structures and organizational design, community support, special populations, and safety and security.

The following experts participated in the review of this school:

- Sonia Park, Senior Director, NYC DOE, Charter Schools Office
- Karen Drezner, Consultant

¹ NYC DOE ATS system; data pulled on June 30, 2011

² NYC DOE ATS system and charter agreement; data pulled on June 30, 2011

³ NYC DOE Location Code Generating System database

⁴ Demographic Data drawn from NYC DOE ATS System; data pulled on June 30, 2011

⁵ BSCS self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (5/13/11)

⁶ New York State Education Department : www.nysed.gov

Part 2: Findings

Areas of Strength

- BSCS has established a culture that is strong, calm and overall consistent.
 - There was evidence that instruction in morals and character is integrated throughout daily activities and permeates the community.
 - Reviewers observed accountable, positive language used across the school community and teachers reported feeling like a cohesive team.
 - On the day of the evaluation there was a morning assembly that contained affirmations, presentations of books, and was open to parents.
- The Dean of Instruction employed a structured approach for teacher observation and feedback.
 - The Dean of Instruction uses National Heritage Academies (NHA)-guided systems to conduct teacher observation and deliver feedback. The Dean reported that the system allows for differentiated delivery to accommodate the range of teaching experience among staff.
 - The Dean of Instruction recognized strengths in instructional practice and also identified areas of growth. On the day of observation she demonstrated a sense of urgency and ably assessed alignment of posted “I can” objective statements to implementation of lessons, including wrap-ups.
 - The Dean reported meeting weekly with teachers for “one-on-ones” and with each grade level team for instructional coaching.
 - Teachers reported feeling routinely encouraged to develop their skills and being supported in their pursuit for professional growth. There is a sense of collaboration, conversation, and collegiality among teachers.
 - Professional Development was described as supporting what is happening in the classroom. There is also daily common planning time and grade level planning for staff.
- There is a high priority placed on collecting and analyzing student performance data.
 - BSCS administers the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) assessments in the fall, winter and spring and use data collected to track student performance.
 - During the visit, NWEA scores were observed on pocket charts in classrooms. Some teachers placed references to scores and goals on students’ desks.
 - The Dean of Instruction also has pocket charts in her office, displaying all students’ winter scores in reading, language and math.
 - BSCS also reported using Web-based assessments to monitor student progress and mock state assessments approximately 4 times a year.
- School leadership reported having a strong relationship with NHA.
 - The school leadership reported receiving considerable back office support from NHA.
 - A two-week orientation and welcome session is offered to all new teachers. One week of orientation is conducted at the NHA headquarters and one week of orientation is offered onsite.

Areas of Growth

- BSCS should continue to enact measures to be in full compliance with the 2010 amended Charter School Act and Education Law Sections 2590-h(15)(a) and 414(1)(c). Areas of concern regard meeting target rates for enrollment and retention for English Language Learners (ELL) and special education students (SPED) and the establishment of a formal Parent Organization.
 - The school should continue to refine and document its outreach strategies for recruitment and retention of ELLs in order to be comparable to district CSD 19. The school reported using a variety of recruitment strategies such as having the flyers

- and application available in several languages, and hosting parent information meetings. BSCS has a population of less than 1%⁷ ELLs (2 out of 248 students), which is substantially lower than CSD 19's ELL rate of 12.8%⁸.
- In order to be considered comparable to CSD 19, BSCS should continue to refine and document its outreach strategies for recruitment and retention of Special Education students. The school has a population of 4.8%⁹ SPED students (12 out of 248) which is lower than CSD 19's rate of 14.4%¹⁰.
 - Education Law Sections 2590-h(15)(a) and 414(1)(c) require all NYC charters in to establish Parent Associations and that meetings of the parent association are, among, other things, open to the general public. At the time of the visit, BSCS had active parent participation and engagement. The school should continue to strengthen this via the establishment of a Parent Organization which is formally organized and meets regularly.
- The school should enact corrective measures to notify the CSO for any and all material and non-material changes to its charter. All changes must be submitted to the CSO office per the Charter Revision Technical Assistance Memo.¹¹
 - As noted in the submitted Board minutes dated February 15, 2011, the Board approved "An addition to the Admission and Enrollment Policy". There is no indication of what the addition was and if it constituted a significant change to the CSO-approved Admission and Enrollment policy.
 - BSCS is encouraged to review its Charter Agreement and School Monitoring Plan in order to be in full compliance.
 - In the February 15, 2011 Board minutes, a revised Code of Ethics was approved by the Board but was not forwarded to the CSO. Per the Monitoring Plan, Section B:

The Charter School shall provide written notice to [CSO] thirty (30) days prior to the occurrence of any of the following:

 1. *a significant change in the Charter School's curriculum or instructional approach;*
 2. *a change in the Charter School's by-laws; and*
 3. *a change in the Charter School's code of ethics.*
 - The school should continue to refine its consistency of instruction, behavior norms, and classroom management between classes.
 - BSCS is encouraged to continue to develop higher order questioning/thinking and a variety of teaching strategies in its instructional approach.
 - The school should continue to promote tight management of classroom behavior and the rigor of content and instruction.
 - Teachers also expressed the need for more time to plan their activities. The school is encouraged to assist teachers better utilize the three common planning sessions a week for more effective planning.
 - BSCS should refine the use of objective data to assess student performance, track growth, and drive instructional planning.
 - Teachers and the Dean of Instruction are encouraged to standardize the ways in which NWEA performance and test data is used to drive decision-making and making adjustments to school operations and instruction. For instance, 42.3% of students met standards on the spring 2010 English Language Arts (ELA) test. It wasn't evident during the visit how these results drove the setting of instructional goals and plans for the 2010-11 school year.

⁷ BSCS self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (5/13/11)

⁸ ATS data, (June 30, 2011)

BSCS self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (5/13/11)

¹⁰ ATS data, (June 30, 2011)

¹¹ For more information, please see the SED Technical Advisory on Charter Revisions (9/20/10):

<http://p1232.nysed.gov/psc/documents/charterrevisionTA21.09.10.seb.PDF>.

- The school should continue to utilize NWEA scores, create leveled groups and provide push-in support.
 - BSCS is encouraged to conduct more comparative evaluations of NWEA results. It was observed that current summaries of performance described the percentage of students achieving “typical” growth for reading and language use with no reference to where students started in the fall and to what extent the same students demonstrated progress towards expected grade level performance by the winter.
 - According to the data provided by BSCS, the school should continue to promote progress in reading for 2nd and 3rd graders as NWEA winter results revealed that many students in these grades were not reading on grade level.
 - The school should consider establishing school-wide protocols to collect, review, plan, and differentiate instruction.
 - The school is encouraged to develop rubrics that reflect high expectations and specific concepts and skills taught.
- The Board of BSCS is encouraged to actively provide oversight and monitor the school’s financials as delineated in its management agreement with NHA.
 - NHA is supposed to provide the Board with projected annual Budgets, detailed statements of all Revenues received, and detailed statements of all direct expenditures for services and or expenses rendered or incurred by or on behalf of the School, whether incurred on-site or off-site. Reports on School operations, finances, and student performance should be provided approximately four (4) times per year. It was unclear based on the submitted board minutes when the last reports were submitted to the Board.

Part 3: Framing Questions

FRAMING QUESTIONS:

Throughout the Renewal Process and the life of each school's charter, the NYCDOE Charter Schools Office uses the following framing questions to monitor Charter School success:

1. Has the School Been an Academic Success?
2. Has the School Been a Viable Organization?
3. Has the School Been in Compliance with All Applicable Laws and Regulations?

Annual Site Visit Rubric:

1. Has the School Been an Academic Success?
- Academic Goals and Mission
 - School components and curriculum align together and holistically support the mission
 - School has high academic expectations and employs strategies for the full range of students served by the school, including those at risk and those with special needs
 - Curriculum and Instruction
 - The educational plan is flexible and is adjusted to meet the performance levels and learning needs of all enrolled students
 - School implements programming to address the needs of students with disabilities and ELLs
 - Teachers demonstrate the use of differentiated instructional techniques to support the varying ways by which students learn
 - School has implemented programming for students who need remediation or acceleration
 - School Culture
 - The culture is strong, intentional, supportive and sustainable and promotes student learning
 - The school motivates all students and respects the diversity of learners and cultures in the community
 - School offers programs, activities or support services beyond academics to address students' social and emotional needs
 - School calendar and day are set to provide extra supports to ensure that students are able to meet and exceed academic goals
 - Schedule for communication to parents/students is timely and allows for due process, includes strategies to prepare students for transitions and strategies for those students who are not on schedule, presents a clear and fair system that complies with students' due process rights
 - Structures that foster the development of authentic, sustained, caring, respectful relationships among all stakeholders within school
 - Behavioral expectations and social supports that reflect the school's mission and comply with all applicable laws and regulations
 - Assessment
 - Establishes a culture of continuous improvement and accountability for student learning
 - Develops assessments that shape and inform instruction on an ongoing basis and develop data that's used to gauge student, teacher and school progress through formative and summative assessment
 - Student learning measured with multiple forms of assessments/metrics
 - Develops educational goals and performance metrics that are SMART – Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Reflect the Mission and Time-Specific
 - Develops assessments that are appropriately aligned with curriculum, instruction, and adopted standards
 - Provides evidence of how data will influence instruction, professional development and curricular adjustments
 - Parent Engagement

- Parent engagement strategies that integrate and mobilize parents within the school community as conduits for student success
 - Capacity to communicate effectively with parents and families
 - Parent engagement strategies that integrate and mobilize parents within the school community as conduits for student success
2. Is the School a Viable Organization
- Governance Structures and Organizational Design
 - School has articulated appropriate roles, responsibilities, and decision-making structure for school community members (including Board of Trustees and school leadership)
 - An accountability structure that provides effective oversight of the educational program and fiscal components of the school is in place and utilized
 - Board regularly reviews a data dashboard of student achievement and fiscal management that forms the basis for Board discussions and decisions
 - Board has diverse skill set that lends itself to strong educational / operational oversight
 - Board has an articulated process for ongoing policy development, Board member development and self-evaluation
 - Organizational charts are aligned with mission; roles and responsibilities are clearly defined
 - Board has developed essential strategic partnerships with organizations that support the mission of the school
 - Community Support
 - School Leadership demonstrated responsiveness to the unique needs and interests of the community to be served
 - School has established a presence in the community and has buy in from community members
3. Is the School in Compliance with Applicable Laws and Regulations
- Special Populations
 - Well-defined plan and sufficient capacity to service the learning needs of Special Education students, English Language Learners
 - School adequately addresses the academic and non academic needs of students in need of remediation, students with disabilities, students with interrupted formal education, and gifted students
 - There is a coherent plan for meeting the non-academic needs of students with disabilities, students with interrupted formal education, and other populations
 - School employs a process to identify students at risk of not meeting expectations and creates intervention plans and follow up
 - School demonstrates a comprehensive recruitment, enrollment and retention approach that is sensitive to the diverse needs of students
 - School admission policy and lottery preferences serve to create a student body that reflects community demographics and give a preference to community school district residents
 - Safety and Security
 - School is well maintained
 - Transitions and student gatherings are orderly and well supervised
 - Expectations for student behavior are well known and are enforced fairly
 - School is current with all safety recruitments and drills.
 - AED machines are in operation and school staff is trained in CPR