



Charter School Annual Site Visit Report
Charter Schools Office
2010-2011

VOICE CHARTER SCHOOL
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT

JUNE 2011

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

VOICE Charter School is an elementary school serving approximately 210 students from kindergarten through grade four in the 2010-2011 school year.¹ It has plans to grow to serve students kindergarten through grade 8.² It is currently housed in NYC DOE school facilities at 37-15 13th Street in Long Island City, Queens.³ This school is geographically located in Community School District 30 in New York City.

The school population comprises 12 % Black, 49 % Hispanic, 18 % White, less than 1 % American Indian/Alaska native, less than 1% Native Hawaiian, 15 % Asian students, and 2% Multi-racial. Eighty-four percent of students are designated as Title I.⁴ District 30's student population, for the 2010-2011 school year, comprises of 8 % Black, 53% Hispanic, 16% White, less than 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native and 22% Asian students.⁵ The student body, as reported on the school data collection form completed by the school, includes 14 % English language learners and 13.8 % special education students⁶. For the 2010-2011 school year, 8.2% of the students in District 30 were classified as special education students and 23% of the students are classified as English Language Learners.⁷

The school is in its first year and has not yet earned a Progress Report grade or state/federal accountability designation.⁸ The average attendance rate, for the school year 2010 – 2011, was reported by the school as 95.2 %, as of June 9, 2011. As of December 31, 2010, the average attendance rate for District 30 schools was 92.79%.

Annual Review Process Overview:

The NYC DOE Charter Schools Office conducts an annual site visit of New York City Department of Education 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 on June 9, 2011:

- Sonia Park, Senior Director, NYC DOE CSO
- Keisha Womack, Director of Operations, NYC DOE CSO
- Karen Drezner, Consultant

¹ NYC DOE ATS system

² NYC DOE ATS system and charter agreement

³ NYC DOE Location Code Generating System database

⁴ Demographic Data drawn from NYC DOE ATS System; Title I percentage from 2008 NY State Report Cards

⁵ NYC DOE Statistical Summaries <http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/Data>

⁶ VOICE CS self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (5/17/11)

⁷ NYC DOE 2010-11 Demographics of New York City's English Language Learners Spring 2011 Report

⁸ New York State Education Department - www.nysed.gov

Part 2: Findings

Areas of Strength

- VOICE Charter School's culture is child-centered, warm and focused on learning.
 - Music is a significant and celebrated aspect of learning. It appeared to be well integrated into and enriching the culture, rather than overwhelming or crowding out other core content area learning. Teachers used developmentally appropriate and common language, verbally and in writing.
 - Students were observed on the day of the visit as being overall highly engaged in rigorous work. Plentiful visual cues were plentiful in observed classrooms. Reference charts included reading goals, procedural reminders, evidence of learned concepts and skills, and large, extended word walls.
 - All adults are being trained and supported to implement the social/emotional management and growth approach to discipline, based in large part on the work of Barbara Coloroso, author of *The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander*. Teachers reported feeling appreciative of their collective, proactive response to discipline issues, and noted the connection to Restorative Justice approach.
 - Additional student support was arranged through Partnership for Children to work on the social work structure and schedule. Fifty students were reported to have received support this year.

- VOICE Charter School's leadership is self-reflective and the professional atmosphere is communicative, collegial and collaborative.
 - During the visit, a strong sense of team was evident. The principal is mission-driven and demonstrated thoughtfulness of action. He described being "deliberate about what we put on teachers," and meets face to face with each staff member for approximately 20 minutes every 6 weeks.
 - Coaching and feedback is frequently provided. A literacy consultant supports teachers in the implementation of the workshop model, across all content areas (including music), 3 days a week. Another coach who is focused on classroom management was available twice a week at the school through the fall months. A music coach comes to the school once or twice a week. Teacher reported that school Leaders are active, available resources for teachers.
 - Teachers have 3 periods daily for prep periods.
 - Teachers interviewed reported being engaged in problem-solving on a variety of levels to address school-wide issues, as evidenced by the school-wide response to an incident of bullying and collaborative planning for the split-siting of the school in 2011-12.

- VOICE is self-reflective in terms of its operations management and has a conservative budgeting approach.
 - The school anticipates a budget surplus for 2010-11 of approximately \$200,000.
 - VOICE will add an additional site in the 2011-2012 school year for their upper grade levels. VOICE was in the process of signing a 20 year lease for their new site. Overall, the school has demonstrated a clear understanding of their expansion and goals.
 - The school has been proactive and has taken steps to account for any additional expenses that may arise due to the opening of the additional site. The school has applied for an additional line of credit to account for any unforeseen issues (such as window and boiler replacements, electrical service upgrade) that may arise when the new site is opened. The school is also actively pursuing grant funding, i.e. State Stimulus Fund to support the additional site.

- The School is focused on the effective use of data to inform instruction, and uses data to drive differentiation and small group instruction. Strategic interventions occur across several tiers, driven by performance data.
 - Approximately 25 % of students have been reviewed at IS meetings. Skill-focused and guided reading groups are being implemented in classrooms. CTT classes are established in Kindergarten and Second Grade, which certified teachers pushing into other grades and classes as needed.
 - Five intervention teachers utilize their own assessments to design targeted instruction and there are two Reading Recovery teachers are on staff.
 - Foundations materials are used to teach phonics skills.
 - Additional supports are made available through other organizations. This is evidenced by the School's partnership with LaGuardia Community College which offers two 10-week programs on Saturdays (approx. 80 students were reported to participated).
- The school uses a range of practices to involve and communicate with parents.
 - Teachers described "extraordinarily strong relationships" with families. Class parents meet often and are supportive to teachers. Teachers interact with parents in daily homework folders, through emails and phone calls. School-wide events, such as a music performance and a carnival, have been well-attended.
 - The school's formalized Parent Association (PA) meets regularly and has established bylaws and elected officers.
- VOICE is a diverse community, closely reflecting the surrounding neighborhood. Students with special needs and English language learners both represent approximately 14% of the school's population.

Areas of Growth

- VOICE should enact corrective measures in order to be in full compliance with the 2010 amended Charter School Act. Areas of concern regard meeting target rates for enrollment and retention for ELL students.
 - The school should continue to refine and document its outreach strategies for recruitment and retention of ELLs in order to be comparable to the district, CSD 30. The school reported using Vanguard and a variety of recruitment strategies. VOICE has a population of 14%⁹ ELLs, which is lower than CSD 30's ELL rate of 23%¹⁰.
- VOICE should continue to develop consistent student engagement and discipline across classrooms. The School is encouraged to learn more about effective discipline practices, particularly related to upper elementary and middle school grades.
 - Small distractions and minor off-task behaviors were observed in classrooms. Though teachers were seen using common language, consistent application across classrooms was not always evident.
 - Several teachers observed appeared to have solid, consistent management systems in place and were implementing well-designed instructional lessons. However, classroom management and pacing was variable across classrooms. Some teachers were observed struggling to maintain 100% engagement.
- The school is encouraged to continue to differentiate teacher growth opportunities.
 - Leadership is encouraged to help teachers continue to evolve their practice to facilitate deeper intellectual work by students and expand higher-order thinking and questioning.

⁹ VOICE CS self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (5/17/11)

¹⁰ ATS data, (June 30, 2011)

- VOICE leaders appear to know where the pressure points are in regards to planning their split site, and an expeditor has been hired. In addition, a Board of Trustees committee named “The Future” is actively involved in this aspect of the school’s evolution. VOICE leadership is encouraged to further develop clearly defined plans for instruction, operations and maintaining community culture.

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