



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

**GROWING UP GREEN CHARTER SCHOOL**  
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT

MAY 2011

# Part 1: Executive Summary

## **School Overview and History:**

Growing Up Green Charter School (GUGCS) is an elementary school serving approximately 245 students from grade kindergarten through grade two in the 2010-2011 school year.<sup>1</sup> The school opened in 2009 with grades kindergarten through one. It has plans to grow to serve students grades kindergarten through five.<sup>2</sup> It is currently housed in private leased space at 3937 28<sup>th</sup> Street, Long Island City, in District 30.<sup>3</sup>

The school population comprises 17.9% Black, 30.7% Hispanic, 27.1% White, and 16.3% Asian students. 59.4% of students are designated as Title I.<sup>4</sup> The student body includes 13.0% English language learners and 10.6% special education students.<sup>5</sup>

The school is in its second year and has not yet earned a Progress Report grade or state/federal accountability designation.<sup>6</sup> The average attendance rate for the school year 2009-2010 was 85%.<sup>7</sup>

## **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:

- Sonia Park, NYC DOE CSO, Senior Director
- Consultant: Simeon Stolzberg

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<sup>1</sup> NYC DOE ATS system

<sup>2</sup> NYC DOE ATS system and charter agreement

<sup>3</sup> NYC DOE Location Code Generating System database

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

<sup>5</sup> GUGCS self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (5/4/11)

<sup>6</sup> New York State Education Department - [www.nysed.gov](http://www.nysed.gov)

<sup>7</sup> NYC DOE School Progress Report. This document is posted on the NYC DOE website at <http://www.schools.nyc.gov> and is also included in Part 7 of this report.

## Part 2: Findings

### Areas of Strength

- Growing Up Green has begun to establish a strong and distinctive school culture.
  - On the day of the visit the school was orderly and focused on learning. Observed students were generally well-behaved and respectful in classrooms and public spaces.
  - Expectations have been explicitly taught and reinforced through the use of videos and illustration of positive behaviors and celebration of success. Posters listing procedures and routines were observed in classrooms throughout the school.
  - Most students appeared to have internalized classroom procedures and routines designed to support learning. For example, students used hand signals to indicate agreement or having a question, and teachers effectively gained students' attention through clap or call and response routines.
  - The use of Responsive Classroom techniques was evident in observed classrooms. For example, teachers reinforced positive behaviors and provided consequences for misbehavior. Student choice was exemplified in one classroom where students nominated and voted on the title of a book they were creating.
  - The emphasis on student talk was observed. For example, students were asked to rephrase other students' answers and encouraged to use complete sentences in their response to questions.
- GUGCS has an organized curriculum framework and is modifying instructional materials to meet its needs.
  - School leaders with input from teachers developed pacing calendars and unit plans during the previous summer.
  - Interviewed teachers were appreciative of the structured curriculum and felt it provided clear guidance and consistency in what to teach and when to teach it while still allowing them creativity in the design of their lessons.
  - The school continues to use the LitLife program for English language arts. In mathematics the school has switched its primary curriculum program from Everyday Math to TERC Investigations.
  - The school has introduced Smartboards this year with a focus on mathematics and technology instruction, and plans to expand their use into literacy.
- The school has developed a systematic approach to administering assessments, analyzing data and using results to inform instruction.
  - The school is developing Looking Forward, Looking Back assessments that are administered every six weeks. Teachers also administer running records and end of unit tests.
  - The NWEA was introduced this year and will be administered three times. NWEA which replaces Scantron, is seen to be better aligned to NY State Standards. School leaders are reviewing the results to determine its alignment to curriculum and instruction.
  - Teachers use half-days to analyze the data and described it as a "reflective process." Assessment items are linked to standards and teaching points, which allows for item analysis.
  - Teachers use results to identify topics for re-teaching, reorganize small group instruction, and target interventions to individual students.
- GUGCS has instructional leadership that provides sustained support and supervision for teachers.
  - Instructional leaders conduct bimonthly informal classroom observations and three formal evaluations per year.

- The school had a literacy staff developer last year and hired a math staff developer this summer to support teachers' planning and instruction. They model lessons and observe teachers and provide feedback.
  - Teachers submit lessons plans weekly and receive regular feedback from instructional leadership.
  - Teachers described a collaborative work environment and felt the administration was accessible and supportive.
  - The Director of Curriculum provides staff with a detailed weekly newsletter regarding curriculum and instructional issues.
  - This year the school has full-time science coordinator. The school reported that next year a curriculum coordinator and dean of school culture will be added to the staff.
  - School leaders reported identifying teachers with significant weaknesses and providing clear goals for improvement.
- The school has a comprehensive professional development program.
    - Three weeks in the previous summer were devoted to planning and training. Teachers meet every other Tuesday after school for professional development with additional half-days scheduled throughout the year.
    - School leaders indicated that the professional development is based on a combination of needs identified through observation and data analysis and teacher input and requests.
    - Enrichments teachers who push-in during the morning literacy block were all provided with targeted training on guided reading.
    - While observation and feedback is provided to all teachers, it is especially focused on more novice teachers. Professional development is also differentiated by allowing teachers to choose workshops to attend both on and off site.
    - The school's social worker provided workshops for teachers at the beginning of the year.
    - Smartboards were introduced mid-year along with immediate training in their use.
- GUGCS has organized programs to meet the needs of at-risk students.
    - The school uses a Response to Intervention (RTI) model to address the needs of struggling students.
    - The school's Successful Student Committee (SSC) meets to discuss students of concern, identify strengths and interests, and develop strategies and interventions. The SSC utilizes a progress monitoring tool every three to four weeks and uses the results to adjust the type and intensity of interventions.
    - Grade team meetings are also used to identify students of concern and develop strategies for meeting their needs. For example, all teachers participate in morning literacy instruction to provide low teacher to student ratios and allow for small group instruction.
    - The school had certified push-in teachers to provide additional support through small group and individual instruction.
    - The school employs a part-time ELL specialist who works with students and creates weekly plans to guide classroom teachers. The school has been using the Award Reading program and introduced the Reading Rods program mid-year.
- The school uses a range of practices to involve parents.
    - Parents are encouraged to participate in the school by attending morning meetings and school events.
    - The school's Parent Association (PA) meets bimonthly, the PA president attends board meetings and a parent is on the board (non-voting member).
    - Parents are included in the school leadership team.
    - The SSC informs parents about its plans for addressing at-risk students and "lets them know their rights" regarding referral for special education evaluation.

- GUGCS is self-reflective in terms of its operations management. The school has a conservative budgeting approach supported by active fundraising. The Director of Operations, hired this year, has a fund-raising background that buttresses the school's capital campaign efforts.
  - The school has a 10-year lease with the Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens, with the option to renew. Leasing costs increase from \$35,000 for 2010-11; \$55,000 for 2011-12; and \$57,000 for 2012-13 and all remaining years on the lease.
  - GUGCS is actively pursuing grant funding (public and private).
  - The school anticipates a budget surplus for 2010-11 of approximately \$200,000 and projects a surplus of \$150,000 for the 2011-12 school year.
  - The Director of Operations speaks to the Finance Committee of the Board of Trustees at least on a quarterly basis regarding the budget; more frequently and regularly for other issues.

### Areas of Growth

- GUGCS 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 English Language Learners (ELL) and Special Education 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. GUGCS has a population of 13%<sup>8</sup> ELLs (32 out of 245), which is lower than CSD 30's ELL rate of 23%<sup>9</sup>.
  - GUGCS should continue to refine and document its outreach strategies for recruitment and retention of Special Education students in order to be comparable to CSD 30. The school has a population 10.6%<sup>10</sup> SpEd students (27 out of 245) which is marginally lower than CSD 30's rate of 12.6%<sup>11</sup>.
- GUGCS should continue to develop and strengthen its Board of Trustees and should enact corrective measures in order to be in full compliance with its Charter Agreement. Areas of concern regard Board Trustee notification.
  - In accordance with Section 2.12 (a) Governance of the Agreement and subsection C of the Monitoring Plan, the GUGCS Board of Trustees must submit within 5 business days any additions or removal of board trustees. The name of any proposed member of the Board must be submitted with background information. This Section was not consistently adhered to.
- GUGCS should continue to develop consistent student engagement across classrooms.
  - Student engagement varied in observed classrooms. In some classes teaches effectively kept most students engaged by creative lessons, appropriate pacing, and effective re-direction. Students were observed to be eager to participate and volunteer answers. In other observed classes not all students were focused on the lesson or effectively re-directed. For example, during some whole class instruction students were not paying attention, putting their heads down and talking to others without consequence or effective re-direction.
  - During observed independent work, some students did not appear to understand the objective or learning task and were not adequately prepared to practice the targeted skill on their own.

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<sup>8</sup> GUGCS self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (5/4/11)

<sup>9</sup> ATS data, (June 30, 2011)

<sup>10</sup> GUGCS self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (5/4/11)

<sup>11</sup> ATS data, (June 30, 2011)

- In some observed lessons students completed the assigned task and then had little to do while others finished the assignment.
  - Teachers were seen made extensive use of “time outs” for minor infractions by sending individual students to the back of the room or to another teacher’s room. These students were often appeared to be disengaged from the lesson during time out, effectively missing out on instruction and learning.
- The GUGCS Board of Trustees is encouraged to develop a formalized evaluation approach for school leadership.
  - The Board should consider aligning the leadership formal evaluation with that of the teacher evaluations.

## 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