

DREAM CHARTER SCHOOL

ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT

MAY 2011

School Overview and History:

DREAM Charter School is an elementary school serving approximately 196 students from grades kindergarten through grade three in the 2010 – 2011 school year.¹ The school opened in 2008 with grades kindergarten through one. It has plans to grow to serve students grades kindergarten through eight.² It is currently housed in a New York City Department of Education (DOE) facility, located at 232 East 103rd Street, Manhattan in District 4.³

The school population comprises 59.4% Hispanic, 35.0% Black, 3.6% other, 1.5% Asian, and .5% White students. 83.3% of students are designated as Title I.⁴ The student body includes 8% English language learners (ELLs) and 18% special education students (SPED).⁵

The school has not yet received a progress report grade due to the need for students in testing grades. The average attendance rate for the school year 2009 – 2010 was 90.5%.⁶ The school is in good standing with state and federal accountability.⁷

DREAM has a partner relationship with Harlem RBI, a local nonprofit organization. Harlem RBI provides back-office support, programmatic support through afterschool and summer school programs, and student supportive services via a social worker sponsored by the organization.

Annual Review Process Overview:

The NYC DOE Charter Schools Office (NYC DOE CSO or CSO) 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 NYC DOE CSO 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 May 23, 2011:

- Sonia Park, Senior Director, NYC DOE CSO
- Simeon Stolzberg, 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 DREAM self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (5/23/11)

⁶ 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.

⁷ New York State Education Department - www.nysed.gov

Areas of Strength

- DREAM appears to have strong instructional leadership.
 - The school has changed its organizational structure and this year has a principal and two new assistant principal positions, one focused on instruction and the other on school culture.
 - School leaders have established and communicated clear expectations that staff appear to support.
 - Based on interviews with both school leaders and faculty, school culture and data-driven instruction are clear priorities. Professional development reportedly focused on school climate at the beginning of the school year and shifted in January to improving the academic culture.
 - School leaders described differentiated support for teachers based on expertise. For example, they co-wrote lessons with some teachers at the beginning of the year. Teachers noted goal setting and follow-up with school leadership.
 - Teachers indicated that they are observed regularly and receive helpful feedback. They also noted demo lessons, feedback on lesson plans and guidance in planning.
 - The school hired a Student Achievement Specialist to provide targeted support to the 3rd grade team. She reportedly assists with planning instruction and increasing the rigor of questioning and student work.
 - Common planning time is provided for grade level teams and attended by school leaders.

- DREAM is developing a culture focused on learning.
 - School leaders reported that summer training focused on school values and how to realize them through systems and procedures.
 - Common routines and procedures have been established or re-set. For example, during the visit color coded behavior charts were observed across classrooms. School leaders reported that students have been accepting of the changes with ongoing reinforcement.
 - The school has developed ways to recognize students for achievement and good behavior, such as weekly awards at the school's community meeting.
 - School leaders reported a decline in teacher turnover, which has helped to increase consistency.

- DREAM has begun to implement interim assessments and use data to drive instruction.
 - School leaders described a new assessment calendar with a push for more varied types of assessment. Teachers described a range of assessments, including the use of running records to determine reading levels, tests associated with commercial curriculum programs such as TERC, and exit tickets.
 - The school piloted the use of interim assessments this year. The development of the 3rd grade assessments was contracted out; the tests for lower grades were developed in-house.
 - Assessments were administered over four cycles, which included "data days" for analyzing results and creating action plans to address identified deficiencies. Teachers also spoke highly of EdVista, an online system that helped with data analysis.
 - School leaders reported trainings and protocols to help teachers analyze and use assessment data effectively.

- DREAM provides a range of programs to meet the needs of at-risk students.
 - The school was observed using flexible grouping to target instruction, primarily for literacy instruction, with some grouping across classes and grades.
 - The school uses curriculum programs such as Foundations and Stern to help struggling students.

- The school is committed to co-teaching and has devoted professional development to training teachers how to effectively use various co-teaching models to meet students' needs.
- Teaching assistants provide targeted small group and one-on-one instruction and an external speech service provider is on-site four days per week.
- Tutoring was reported to be provided by teachers before and after school; in addition Saturday school is provided for 3rd grade students.
- A summer program is provided for all students and targets students performing below grade level. DREAM provides small group instruction to those students who need targeted intervention and Harlem RBI provides enrichment and recreation to all DREAM students over a 6-week period.
- DREAM serves a relatively high percentage of students with disabilities (18%) and English Language Learners (8%).
 - At the time of the visit 36 out of 196 students (18%) had individualized education programs (IEPs) and school leaders indicated a number of other students were currently in the evaluation process. In addition, 13 students had 504 plans. The percentage of SWD the school serves is on par with Community School District (CSD) 4, which has a rate of 20.5%.⁸ The school has decertified some of its students who have made substantial progress.
 - The percentage of ELL students served (8%) is less than CSD 4, which has a rate of 13.5%.⁹
- The school appears to have strong parent engagement.
 - The DREAM Family Action Council meets monthly. It has a secretary and treasurer and operates with a committee structure.
 - The school has a weekly school community meeting, which parents are welcome to attend. On the day of the visit a number of parents were present for the community meeting.
 - The school has a full-time Family Engagement Coordinator and a dedicated room for families.
- DREAM has a strong relationship with its organizational partner.
 - The school works closely with Harlem RBI and benefits from, among other things, back-office support and strategic planning.
 - Harlem RBI continues to provide wrap-around services, including summer and after-school programs and additional counseling.
 - Harlem RBI and the school are working on a facility plan with the intention of having newly constructed private space for both organizations within three years.
 - Instructional leaders at the school collaborate with RBI staff to build consistency across programs. For instance, the school's dean has been training after-school coaches in some of the school's routines and procedures.
- DREAM is self-reflective in terms of its operations management and has a conservative budgeting approach that is supplemented by fundraising.
 - The school anticipates a budget surplus for 2010-11 of approximately \$46,000.
 - The school has received contributions and foundation grants to supplement the per pupil and federally funded revenue it receives.

⁸ ATS data, (June 30, 2011)

⁹ Ibid.

Areas for Growth

- DREAM is encouraged to focus on instructional rigor and student engagement consistency across classrooms.
 - In some observed classes students were expected to use full sentences, asked to expand on their answers using practical strategies, and develop meta-cognitive skills. Teachers provided clear instructions, modeled for students, and referenced resources such as word walls and instructional posters. Students were cognitively engaged in learning activities.
 - In other classes students were less engaged with poor pacing and unclear instructions. Students were allowed to disengage from learning activities without notice or consequences. For instance, when individual students were sharing with the whole class others stopped paying attention.
 - Instructional time was not always maximized and procedures were not always efficient; for example, students lost focus as a teacher took excessive time to hand out materials. In addition, transitions between activities were not always smooth and did not always reflect practiced routines.

- DREAM should continue to develop fully and align its curriculum and assessment systems.
 - Teachers reported that the curriculum calendar they were given at the beginning of the year was inadequate and they have had to revise the scope and sequence and units as they go to meet new expectations for rigor.
 - Teachers also noted some deficiencies in the availability of instructional materials.
 - School leaders reported that gaps exist in the interim assessments as a result of not adequately benchmarking state standards. Moreover, they noted that in their pilot year the rigor of interim assessments was not consistent over time.
 - Interviewed teachers corroborated and noted having to supplement their curriculum programs in order to address topics covered in the interim assessments. They also did not have prior access to the interim assessments in order to plan instruction and were frustrated by testing their students on skills that had not yet been taught.
 - Teachers understand conceptually how to use assessment data but felt the schedule did not provide adequate time for re-teaching. Teachers noted that the administration is aware of the issues.
 - School leaders also described moving to a more systematic Response to Intervention (RTI) model next year to identify, support and monitor struggling students.

- DREAM should continue to develop a consistent approach to teacher supervision and evaluation.
 - Teachers value the goal setting process but indicated follow-up has been inconsistent with some meeting time devoted to administrative topics rather than their professional growth.
 - Teachers also noted that feedback is sometimes sporadic or not specific to their needs.
 - While a formal evaluation system was in place in the previous year, at the time of the visit it was just being implemented for the current year and teachers were unclear about the process.

- DREAM should continue to effectively implement school culture.
 - School leaders noted that while they have made significant progress on improving the school climate, they are not as far along in developing the academic culture of the school. The school has gone through leadership change and at the beginning of its third year of operation had re-prioritizing and re-set school culture.

- Teachers noted the need for more planning time in order to develop the school culture to meet their high expectations.
- DREAM should continue to be self-reflective in terms of its operations management. Though the school has a conservative budgeting approach, it is undertaking a large capital campaign with Harlem RBI to develop its facilities.
 - Harlem RBI is assuming the lead for the facilities development and is relying on external fundraising as a resource.

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