

**EQUALITY
CHARTER SCHOOL
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT**

APRIL 2010

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

The Equality Charter School is a middle and high school serving approximately 133 students from grade 6 through grade 7 in the 2009-2010 school year.¹ The school opened in 2009 with grades 6 through 7. It has plans to grow to serve students grades 6 through 12.² It is currently housed in P.S. 160 in District 11.³

The school population comprises 70% Black, 16% Hispanic, 4% White, and 1.5% Asian students. 71% of students are designated at Title I.⁴ The student body includes 3% English language learners and 23% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%.⁵

The school is in its first year and has not yet received a Progress Report or state/federal accountability designation.

Annual Review Process Overview:

The NYC DOE Charter School 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 School Office Accountability Team 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 expert participated in the review of this school:

- Sylvia Rabiner – Education Consultant
- Tyler Whittenberg- Analyst, Charter School Office
- Aaron Listhaus- Chief Academic Officer, Charter School Office

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 Student Demographic data is inputted by school staff into the ATS enrollment database and summarized by NYC DOE staff.

Part 2: Findings

What the school does well

- The school has high academic expectations and employs strategies for the full range of students served, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners.
 - The school has an instructional framework aligned to State Standards for shared and coherent instructional expectations and practices which can be seen across all classrooms and to which all members of the school community are committed and accountable.
 - Learning objectives were clearly visible in every classroom and demonstrated an inquiry-based approach to instruction as stated in the school's mission.
 - An emphasis on critical thinking was observed in the Art, Social Studies, Read 180 and Basic Literacy classes where students were analyzing text, making conjectures, and stating their opinions based on evidence from text.

- The school utilizes differentiated instruction and an integrated curriculum to promote content proficiency and actively engage students.
 - Students were actively engaged in small group instruction, individual computer based instruction utilizing the Plato math program, and individualized use of audio books from the Reading 180.
 - Students in need of academic intervention in math are provided instruction in small pull-out groups with 8-10 students per teacher.
 - A wide variety of multilevel texts and materials are available in all classroom libraries.

- The school fosters a safe and comfortable learning environment which encourages both student academic progress and teacher professional development.
 - Teachers develop a Personal Professional Development plan as part of a formal evaluation process.
 - Teachers are scheduled for a daily one-hour meeting to collaboratively prepare, plan and implement curriculum utilizing a common template based on the State standards, content concepts, skills, big ideas/ enduring understandings, and essential questions.
 - School expectations are posted in every classroom.
 - Classrooms are clean and attractive; walls are posted with an abundance of teaching tools, charts, visual aids and data to keep students focused and on task.

- The school employs a rigorous assessment system and strong data-tracking tools to monitor student performance and behavior which informs teaching and learning.
 - The school employs the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports program ("PBIS") for a consistent approach to student discipline across all classrooms. Referrals and interventions are tracked and disaggregated. There is a clear guidance referral process.
 - The Scholastic Reading Inventory is used to assess student reading levels.
 - Assessment is used to identify students in need of academic intervention and necessary services are provided by placement in the Reading 180 and Basic Writing Skills programs.

- The school is in good financial condition and maintains appropriate internal controls.
 - The school possesses \$910,514 in current assets and \$491,328 in current liabilities at the time this review was conducted.
 - The school's long-term financial outlook appears good based on the current figures.

- The school exercises appropriate internal controls on its financial systems.
- The school board is providing adequate and balanced oversight.
 - Board gets adequate reporting and data to have meaningful dialogue at board meetings.
 - Board handled co-leadership turnover appropriately and did further strategic planning.

What the school needs to improve

- The college preparatory focus was not evident in all classrooms.
 - Reviewers noted an inconsistency in the application of the inquiry model; not all classes were observed providing students the opportunity to engage in authentic research or generate student-created products.
- Personalization of the student experience has not been fully developed.
 - Reviewers noted that the planned Advisory program is likely to significantly improve this area.
- The school and its Board have not yet developed significant partnerships within the surrounding community.

Part 3: Framing Questions

FRAMING QUESTIONS:

Throughout the Renewal Process and the life of each school's charter, the NYCDOE Charter School 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