



Charter School Renewal Report
Charter Schools Office
2011-2012

INWOOD ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT

MAY 2012

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

Inwood Academy for Leadership Charter School is a middle school serving approximately 220 students from fifth through sixth grade in the 2011-2012 school year.¹ The school opened in 2010 and plans to expand to grade eight during its current charter term (ending 2014) with eventual expansion plans to grade twelve by adding one grade per year, if approved for a second charter term.² Inwood Academy is currently housed in an annex of trailers located in Community School District 6 at 93 Nagle Avenue.³ The student body includes 18.6% English language learners, 16.3% special education students, and 87.3% free and reduced-price lunch students⁴.

As Inwood is only just completing its second year of operation, the school has not yet received a progress report grade but will at the end of the 2011-12 school year. During its first year (2010-2011), the school at one testing grade, grade 5, and 55.5% of its students scored at Level 3 or better on the NYS math exam, compared to 51.0% for CSD 6 at grade 5 and 62.9% citywide at grade 5. On the ELA state exam, 25.7% of Inwood's 5th graders scored at level 3 or better, compared to 38.4% of CSD 6 fifth graders and 49% of fifth graders citywide. The average attendance rate for the school year 2009 - 2010 was 94.8%⁵. The school is in good standing with state and federal accountability.⁶

Inwood Academy is an independent charter school not associated with a charter management organization (CMO) or other parent-organization. However, Inwood is a member of the Network of Independent Charter Schools (NICS). This partnership helped the school to recruit a largely veteran teaching staff that averages eight years of experience per teacher, and includes only three instructors with less than two years of experience.

Annual Review Process Overview:

The New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) Charter Schools Office (CSO) conducts an annual site visit of charter schools authorized by the NYC DOE. The site visit is designed to address three primary questions: is the school an academic success; is the school a fiscally sound, viable organization; and is the school in compliance with its charter and all applicable laws and regulations? To ascertain matters of sustainability and strategic planning, we also ask about the school's plans for its next charter term. The visits are conducted by representatives of the CSO and last the duration of one school day. The annual site visit begins with a meeting with the school leadership team. Afterward, the reviewers visit classrooms and hold brief meetings with available administrators and teachers. 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 site visit is intended to provide a snapshot of the school and reflects what was observed at the time of the visit.

The following experts participated in the review of this school on May 1, 2012:

- Scott Torres, Director of Operations, NYC DOE CSAS
- Simeon Stolzberg, Consultant to NYC DOE CSAS

¹ NYC DOE ATS system

² NYC DOE ATS system and charter agreement

³ NYC DOE Location Code Generating System database

⁴ NYC DOE ATS system, data pulled April 2012. The school's self-reported numbers from its April 23, 2012 ASV Data Collection Form were similar to the above ATS numbers: 88% FRL, 19.7% with IEPs or 504s, and 18.3% ELLs.

⁵ NYC DOE School Progress Report

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

Part 2: Findings

Areas of Strength:

- The school has established a safe and orderly culture that is conducive to learning.
 - On the day of the visit students were well-behaved and respectful in classrooms and public spaces. Student ambassadors approached guests and explained what was happening in the classroom. Transitions in hallways were quiet and efficient.
 - Observed teachers demonstrated effective classroom management, using clear procedures and protocols that students appeared to have internalized. For instance, teachers used a clapping technique to gain attention quickly and organized groups for quick transitions between activities.
 - On the day of the visit instruction was generally purposeful and productive across classrooms. Most students were focused on the learning activities and many were eager to volunteer answers to teachers' questions.
 - Teachers have participated in professional development activities, such as Ramapo for Children, to enhance classroom management skills. Many teachers observed used praise and positive reinforcement, a focus of these PD sessions.
 - The school uses a point-based incentive system to encourage appropriate behavior; paycheck deductions were posted in classrooms and most teachers reportedly use this system. In addition, students who violate the school code wear a white shirt for a week, attend silent lunch, and write an essay and read it to their class.
 - The school added a Dean who will transition into the Director of School Culture next year. (The current Director will become the Community and Family Engagement Specialist as the school expands its leadership team to correspond to the school's growth.)

- The school has established a reflective professional culture focused on individual improvement and student achievement.
 - Teachers participate in goal-setting exercises that inform their ongoing professional development and evaluation. School-wide goals were established by October 2011 and classroom objectives established by November 2011. School leaders report that this year's goal-setting process was more collaborative than last year's, and that feedback solicited from teachers stated that the process was "fair and objective."
 - Teachers receive regular observation and feedback from instructional leaders and consultants. The school is using the Danielson framework to inform observation and evaluation. Struggling teachers are placed on an improvement plan with specific actions and timeline; those who do not make adequate improvement based on the terms of their plans do not have their contracts renewed.
 - Teachers are provided with regular opportunities for professional development, including in-house training by school staff and consultants and participation in external training across the country that they are expected to turnkey upon their return. Faculty meet every other Friday and students are released early once per month to accommodate additional professional development. Consultants have supported the school's revisions to its reading program, cooperative learning, curriculum development, classroom management, and special education topics.
 - Teacher collaboration is supported by time in the schedule devoted to common planning by departments and "houses" or grades.
 - Teachers participate in monthly inter-visitations to observe and provide each other with critical feedback. They also videotape themselves teaching and analyze the tapes with instructional leaders. School staffers also visit and observe other schools to learn about effective practices and strategies.

- The school devotes significant resources to meeting the needs of at-risk students.

- The school has coordinated ELL and special education programs with an emphasis on team teaching. Creative scheduling allows students to learn in the least restrictive environment while getting the support they need whatever the setting. Co-teachers plan lessons and analyze data together.
 - Inwood Academy offers self-contained special education classes in addition to collaborative team teaching (CTT) classes. School leadership reports that all of its 5th and 6th grade classes are moving toward the CTT model.
 - The school emphasizes small group instruction and collaborative learning based on performance data. Differentiated tasks and materials were evident in observed classrooms.
 - The school provides a number of remedial programs offered after school, on Saturdays and during the summer.
 - School leaders reported a variety of supplemental curriculum for at-risk students, including Great Leaps and Wilson, and said they plan to implement Read 180 next year.
- The school has a systematic approach to using data to drive decision-making.
 - The school restructured its ELA program based on NYS exam results from the previous year, adding the 100 Book Challenge from American Reading Company program and generally focusing on literacy across the curriculum. For example, writing is emphasized in all subjects, including art and physical education, and literacy skills are being specifically emphasized in social studies. Teachers interviewed echoed this focus in statements such as, “We’re all reading teachers” and “All teachers are social studies teachers.”
 - The school administers a range of useful assessments, including the NWEA MAP test three times per year, school developed interim assessments four times per year, and bimonthly conferencing with students to determine reading levels.
 - Department leaders revised last year’s interim assessments to better align them with state tests and increase their rigor.
 - The school continues to develop systems for collecting and analyzing assessment results. Color-coded spreadsheets demonstrate nuanced analysis of assessments and binders contain ongoing tracking of exit tickets. The school is monitoring the performance of subgroups, such as student with disabilities and English language learners. A data wall in the teachers’ lounge tracks the progress of low performing students.
 - Teachers use assessment results to inform curriculum development, select topics for re-teaching, modify instruction, and identify students for remediation. While the mathematics department was described as strong with data, the English language arts department is growing as a result of a new reading program that provides more actionable data.
 - Teachers meet regularly to create “battle plans” based on recent assessment results. Protocols are used to identify standards for whole-class review and small group instruction, as well as specific students of concern.
 - The school is in the process of adopting Performance Plus, specifically the assessment module, which will allow them to combine data from multiple assessments, conduct analysis and generate reports to drive instruction. At the time of the visit, the system had been populated with all of the school’s state assessment, NWEA, and interim assessment results but had not yet been rolled out to faculty.
 - The school serves a proportion of at-risk students that is largely comparable to District 6. Students with disabilities comprise 16.3% of Inwood’s students, which is higher than the 13.8% District 6 average of students with disabilities. Similarly, the school serves a higher percentage of students eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (87.3%) compared to District 6 (80.2%). The school’s ELL population is 18.6%, compared to 33.4% in the district.⁷
 - The school should continue to enact measures and monitor their success to maintain its compliance with the 2010 amended Charter Schools Act as it relates to recruitment and

⁷ NYC DOE ATS system, April 2012

retention of Special Education students and students eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch, and to reach full compliance with its ELL students.

Areas of Growth:

- The school should continue to improve its instructional rigor, its level of classroom engagement in small group activities, and its overall academic performance.
 - Inwood's first 5th grade cohort reached a 55.5% proficiency level (Level 3 or higher) on the NYS Math exam, a higher level of proficiency than its district of location, but below the citywide average of 62.9% proficiency for grade 5. In ELA, only 25.7% of Inwood's students reached Level 3 or better, compared to 38.4% of CSD 6's 5th graders and 49% of 5th graders citywide. Based on the school's interim assessments, Inwood staffers anticipate improved levels of proficiency in both subjects.
 - The school is clearly emphasizing cooperative learning with small group activities noted in many classes. It was not evident, however, that this approach was being maximized, as instructions to small groups were not consistently clear and not all students involved in small group work on the day of the visit participated equally in group activities.
 - Teachers generally used effective questioning techniques, though in some observed classes teachers directed students to the answer they sought rather than guiding students to find it themselves. Some teachers required their students to use and explain subject-specific vocabulary while others were less consistent in insisting or reinforcing use of technical vocabulary. Some observed teachers focused on basic recall rather than challenging students to develop critical thinking skills.

- The school should continue to develop and refine its curricula to better serve the needs of its students and to fully align to Common Core and NYS standards, as well as insuring alignment of expectations from grade to grade.
 - The school has developed an instructional scope and sequence and is using backwards design methods to develop detailed unit plans based on Common Core standards. Teachers submit unit and lesson plans for review, but the school has yet to develop a systematic approach to organizing and archiving curriculum.
 - The school is using Core Knowledge as planned, but based on the low performance level of incoming students through the first two years it is adjusting its program to accelerate the development of foundational skills and knowledge first.
 - The school is revising its course offerings to meet students' needs. Science is offered twice per week while social studies is offered daily; next year the two subjects will alternate days. Due to difficulty finding adequate teachers, the school is planning to offer Spanish instead of Latin.

- The school, as it continues to expand under its current charter, should continue to pursue solutions to meet the its near-term and long-term facility needs.
 - The school is making due with limited space and has a short-term remedy for immediate growth. However, space in the current trailers housing 5th and 6th grade is limited; some teachers do not have their own classrooms and there is no gym or cafeteria.
 - The school has signed a lease that will accommodate its 7th and 8th grades in a separate site; it is in the process of coordinating renovations that should be complete by September 2012.
 - The school is investigating long-term solutions, including purchase and renovation of private space. School leadership should continue to be proactive regarding facilities planning, monitoring time lines and developing contingency plans as needed.

Part 3: Essential Questions and Accountability Framework

The CSO Accountability Framework

To help NYC DOE authorized charter schools better understand what we mean by success for charter schools, the NYC DOE's Charter Schools Office (CSO) has developed an Accountability Framework build around four essential questions for charter school renewal:

1. Is the school an academic success?
2. Is the school a fiscally sound, viable organization?
3. Is the school compliant with its charter and all applicable law and regulations?
4. What are the school's plans for its next charter term?

1. Is the School an Academic Success?

1a. High Academic Attainment and Improvement

Schools that are academic successes have many of the characteristics below:

- Meet absolute performance goals
- Meet student progress goals
- Are closing the achievement gap for at risk students, including special needs and ELL students
- Are surpassing performance of DOE identified peer-schools
- Are surpassing performance district and city proficiency or better averages
- Are meeting other rigorous academic and non-academic goals as stated in school's charter

Evidence for success might include, but not be limited to, the following depending on school configurations:

- Grades 3-8 NYS ELA Results (absolute performance, individual student progress, comparative performance to similar schools, home district or city averages, progress for at-risk populations)
- Grades 3-8 NYS Math Results (absolute performance, individual student progress, comparative performance to similar schools, home district or city averages, progress for at-risk populations)
- Grades 4 and 8 NYS Science Results (absolute performance, individual student progress, comparative performance to similar schools, home district or city averages, progress for at-risk populations)
- Grades 8-12 NYS Regent Exam Results
- When applicable, NYSAA or other approved alternate assessments results
- HS 4- and 6-Year Graduation Rates (absolute and progress, overall, for at-risk student populations)
- Grades 8-12 College Readiness Credit Accumulation
- Percentage of Students Applying to and Being Admitted to College
- Percentage of Students Taking AP Courses and/or Percentage of Students Passing AP Courses
- Results on state accountability measures
- Charter School Academic and Non-Academic Goals
- NYC Progress Reports

1b. Mission and Academic Goals

Schools with successful missions and goals have many of the characteristics below:

- Have an animating mission statement that staff, students and community embrace
- Set ambitious academic and non-academic goals that entire school community knows and embraces
- Have processes for regular monitoring and reporting on progress toward school goals
- Have processes for adjusting strategies in support of goals as appropriate in response to monitoring data

Evidence for successful missions and goals might include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Mission statement, charter, external documents (parent and family handbooks, school website, etc.)
- Annual reports, school improvement plans, leadership board reports
- Board agendas and minutes
- Parent, student, and teacher satisfaction surveys
- Participation at parent-teacher conferences, school advocacy events, participation in academic goal related programs

1c. Responsive Education Program

Schools with successful education programs have many of the characteristics below:

- Are self-reflective and examine practice based on outcomes against goals
- Have well-thought out curricular programs that are aligned with NYS learning outcomes as described by state standards and the new Common Core Curriculum.
- Use instructional models and resources consistent with school mission and that are flexible in addressing the needs of all learners
- Have defined strategies that they can measure and monitor for closing the achievement gap
- Offer defined opportunities for remediation and acceleration
- Implement a coherent and effective interim assessment system (e.g., use of formative, interim, and summative assessment data) for monitoring progress, predicting performance, and adjusting instruction
- Have an effective process for supporting improved classroom instruction, including frequent observation and feedback
- Have effective strategies and quality instructional programs for addressing students with special needs and ELLs
- Use a defined process for evaluating curricular tasks, programs and resources for effectiveness and fit with school mission and goals

Evidence for successful education programs, in addition to positive results, may include, but not be limited to, many of the following:

- Instructional planning documents (alignments, scope and sequences, curriculum maps, unit and lesson plans, etc)
- Student/teacher schedules
- Classroom observations
- Student Intervention / Response to Intervention program description and resources
- Interim assessment results
- Student and teacher portfolios
- Data findings; adjusted lesson plans
- Self-assessment documentation
- Professional development plans and resources

1d. Learning Environment

Schools with successful learning environments have many of the characteristics below:

- Have a strong culture that connects high academic and behavioral expectations in a way that motivates students to give their best effort academically and socially
- Use a comprehensive approach to student management, including positive behavioral expectations and a clear discipline policy to build and sustain a safe, orderly, and supportive classroom environment
- Provide for safe, respectful, efficient transitions, hallways, cafeteria, yard, etc.
- Have classrooms where academic risk-taking and student participation is encouraged and supported
- Provide opportunities for students to actively engage in their own learning and in the life of the school

- Have a formal or informal character education, social development, or citizenship program that provides opportunities to develop as individuals and citizens

Evidence for successful learning environments may include, but not be limited to, many of the following:

- School mission and articulated values
- Student management plan (code of conduct, school values, discipline policy, positive incentive system, etc.)
- Student attendance and retention rates
- Student discipline data
- DOE School Survey student results
- DOE School Survey parent and teacher safety and respect results
- Self-administered satisfaction survey results
- Leadership, staff, and, if appropriate, student interviews
- Classroom observations
- Scheduled student engagement opportunities (e.g., student advisory, internships, student government, student led conferences, peer tutoring, peer mediation, etc.)

2. Is the School a Fiscally Sound, Viable Organization?

2a. Governance Structure and Organizational Design

Schools with successful governance and organizational design structures have many of the characteristics below:

- Operate with a clearly articulated governance structure, compliant with its charter and all applicable laws and regulations
- Have a capable Board of Trustees with appropriate blend of skills and experiences to provide oversight and strategic direction to fulfill the mission and goals of its charter
- Have a Board that is fully compliant with all applicable laws and regulations, particularly but not limited to open-meeting laws and conflict of interest regulations
- Have developed a succession plan for board and school leadership, consistent with the charter and Board by-laws, to ensure continuity of direction and leadership over time and despite circumstance
- Implements a school leadership structure that is aligned with charter and that is sufficient to fulfill school's mission and achieve its accountability goals; it also has clear lines of accountability for leadership roles, accountability to Board, and, if applicable, relationship with a charter management organization
- Have timely and appropriate access to legal counsel
- Implemented a process for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the school's organization and leadership structure
- Have instructional leadership staffing and support structures that holds staff accountable for student learning outcomes and provide regular feedback on instruction to teachers

Evidence for school governance and organizational design may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- School charter
- Board by-laws, roster, trustee resumes, meeting agenda and minutes
- Annual conflict of interest forms
- Staff roster, job descriptions, staff handbook, operations manual
- School calendar, professional development plan

2b. School Climate and Community Engagement

Schools with a sustaining school climate and engaged parent and community support have many of the characteristics below:

- A healthy professional school climate that is collaborative, student centered, and open to parents and community support
- An effective process for recruiting, hiring, supporting, and evaluating leadership and staff
- A flexible, data-driven approach to professional development for all staff
- An effective way of measuring and monitoring core constituency satisfaction (parent, staff, and, when age appropriate, student), including the DOE School Survey
- Effective home-school communication practices to ensure meaningful parent involvement in the learning of their children
- Strong community-based partnerships and advocacy for the school

Evidence for school climate and community engagement may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- DOE School Survey satisfaction parent, teacher, and, if appropriate student results
- Student retention and wait list data
- Staff retention data
- Leadership, staff, parent, student interviews
- Student and staff attendance rates
- Parent attendance at parent-teacher conferences
- Parent association meeting calendar and minutes
- Community partnerships and sponsored programs

2c. Financial and Operational Health

Schools that are responsible stewards of public funds and effective, sustaining organizations have many of the characteristics below:

- Consistently meet its student enrollment and retention targets
- Annual budgets that meets all short- and long-term financial responsibilities with available revenues
- School leadership and Board that oversee financial and operational responsibilities in a manner that keeps the school's mission and academic goals central to decision-making
- Boards and school leadership that maintain effective internal controls of finances to ensure integrity of financial management and a proactive approach to mitigating risk
- Consistently clean financial audits
- If applicable, strong, accountable partnerships with management organizations and other partners and significant vendors to support delivery of chartered school design and academic program
- A safe, clean and appropriately resourced educational facility with all appropriate services specified in charter and mandated by appropriate law and regulations

Evidence for a financially sound, viable organization may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- School budget, P&Ls, and monthly/quarterly cash-flow reports
- Appropriate insurance documents
- Required facility documents (lease, certificate of occupancy, fire and safety inspections, etc.)
- Financial audits
- Financial leader(s) resume and accountability documents
- Operational policies and procedures
- Operational org chart
- Secure storage areas for student and staff records
- Policies/protocols for maintaining secure records
- School safety plan

3. Is the School in Compliance with its Charter and All Applicable Law and Regulations?

3a. Approved Charter and Agreement

Schools in substantial compliance with their charter and agreement have:

- Implemented the key features of their charter as described in the original charter and as modified in approved revisions to their charter, including but not limited to mission, academic program, school organization, grade configuration, enrollment, goals, etc.
- Ensure that update-to-date charter is publicly available to staff, parents, and school community
- Implemented comprehensive academic, behavioral, oversight, management, and operational policies and procedures that are substantially aligned with the charter and the school's stated mission and vision

Evidence for a school's compliance with the terms of its charter and charter agreement may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Authorized charter and signed agreement
- Charter revision request approval and documentation
- School mission
- School policies and procedures
- Site visits
- Board meetings, agendas and minutes
- Leadership/board interviews

3b. Applicable Federal and State Law

Schools in substantial compliance with federal and state law have:

- Met all legal requirements for Title I and IDEA regulations and reporting
- Comparable enrollment of FRL, ELL and Special Education students to those of their district of location *or* are making documented good faith efforts to reach comparable percentages
- Implemented school policies related to student discipline and promotion and retention that are fully compliant with laws and regulations related to students with disabilities and due process regulations
- Conducted independently verified fair and open lottery and manage with integrity enrollment process and annual waiting lists
- Employed instructional staff with appropriate security clearances and certification requirements

Evidence for compliance with applicable federal and state law may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- School reporting documents
- School's Annual Report
- Student recruitment plan and resources
- Student management policies and promotion and retention policies
- Student discipline records
- Lottery policy, resources, and records; enrollment procedures and records
- Staff roster, fingerprint clearance for all staff, certification status of all instructional staff

3c. Applicable Regulations

Schools in substantial compliance with applicable regulations have:

- Safe and secure facilities with no significant compliance concerns with applicable regulations
- Consistently clean annual audits, up-to-date escrow accounts, and have completed all other financial reporting as required
- Boards that meet requirements for size, meeting frequency, public notice, applicable open-meeting and conflict of interest regulations, as well as complying with NYC DOE CSO's requirements for reporting changes in board membership and securing approval for new board members.
- Informed NYCDOE CSO, and where required, received CSO approval for changes in significant partnerships, such as dropping/replacing a management organization
- Effectively engaged parent associations

Evidence for compliance with applicable regulations may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- School or building safety plan; appropriate inspection documents
- Annual audits, escrow accounts, other financial reporting documents
- Board roster, calendar, agenda and minutes, conflict of interest documents, notification of changes/approval of new member request documents
- Charter revision requests, revised or new contracts
- Parent association calendar of meetings, identified officers, parent association agenda and minutes, parent satisfaction survey results
- Interviews

4. What Are the School's Plans for its Next Charter Term?

4a. School Expansion or Model Replication

In anticipation of a new charter term schools may be considering various growth options: replication, expansion to new grades or increased enrollment or altering their model in some significant way. Successful schools generally have processes for:

- Conducting needs/opportunity assessments
- Forming Board and leadership committees or subcommittees to investigate options, develop action plans, ensure capacity and resources are aligned, etc.
- Engaging school community in articulating charter revisions (or a new charter in cases of replication) to address the proposed growth plans
- Ensuring that the final proposal is ambitious but realistic in its plans
- Creating a well-reasoned and documented prospective for the school's new charter term and, if applicable, a new charter proposal (for replication)

Evidence for likely success in planning for school growth in a new charter term may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Application Part I: Retroactive Analysis, including performance results and analyses of the current charter term
- Application Part II: Prospective Analysis, including mission, program description, governance, organization, budget, etc. for new term
- Leadership and Board interviews

4b. Organizational Sustainability

Successful schools consistently perform despite change. While there is no single path for ensuring sustainability, successful schools often have the following features:

- School anticipates organizational opportunities/needs and plans for resource development (human resource policies for growing your own talent, for example, or fundraising or budget management to take care of anticipated capital needs and to mitigate risks for the unexpected, or board development to bring new talent or specific needs-based expertise to the school)

Evidence for organizational sustainability may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Board roster and resumes
- Board committees and minutes
- School organization chart
- Staff rosters
- Staff handbook
- Leadership and staff interviews
- Budget

4c. School or Model Improvements

Successful schools are thoughtful about the continued appropriateness of school design features and elements of their models. They:

- Review performance carefully and even if they don't make major changes through expansion or replication, they are careful to adjust elements to ensure continued and improved success.
- Develop plans to improve the school learning environment, including improving their facilities to expand program offerings and/or developing new partnerships to further the school's mission.

Evidence for successful improvements to a school's program or model may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Application Part I: Retroactive Analysis, including performance results and analyses of the current charter term
- Application Part II: Prospective Analysis, including mission, program description, governance, organization, budget, etc. for new term
- Leadership and board interviews
- MOUs or contracts with partners