



Charter School Renewal Report
Charter Schools Office
2011-2012

BROOKLYN SCHOLARS CHARTER SCHOOL ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT

MARCH 2012

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

Brooklyn Scholars Charter School is an elementary/middle school serving approximately 392 students from kindergarten through sixth grade in the 2011-2012 school year.¹ The school opened in 2009-2010 enrolling students in kindergarten through grade 4. The school is under the terms of its first charter and is projected to expand to its full grade span, K-8, during its current term, which expires February 9th, 2014.² The school is currently housed in a private facility in District 19.³

There were 1,507 students on the waitlist after the Spring 2011 lottery.⁴ The student body includes 90.3% Free and Reduced Lunch students, compared to 78.8% in the district; 6.6% special education students, compared to 14.8% in the district; and 0.8% English language learners (ELL), compared to 11.8% in the district.⁵ The average attendance rate for the school year 2011-2012 to date was 95.8%.⁶ The school scored Above Average on the Academic Expectations, Communication, Engagement, and Safety & Respect sections of the NYC DOE School Survey in 2010-2011; 14% of the school's parents and 46% of the school's teachers responded to the survey.⁷

The school earned a 'B' grade on the Elementary School NYC DOE Progress Report in 2010-11. The school received a C in the Student Performance and Student Progress sections and an A in the School Environment section.⁸

Annual Review Process Overview:

The New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) Charter Schools Accountability and Support (CSAS) 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 CSAS 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 March 14, 2012:

- Bertram Wyman, Analyst, NYC DOE CSAS
- Simeon Stolzberg, Consultant

¹ Self-reported by school on Annual Site Visit Data Collection Form dated 2/15/2012

² NYC DOE ATS system and charter agreement

³ NYC DOE Location Code Generating System database

⁴ Self-reported by school on Annual Site Visit Data Collection Form dated 2/15/2012

⁵ NYC DOE ATS system as of 4/3/2012

⁶ Self-reported by school on Annual Site Visit Data Collection Form dated 2/15/2012

⁷ NYC DOE School Survey – <http://schools.nyc.gov/survey>

⁸ NYC DOE website – <http://schools.nyc.gov/> (search: progress reports)

Part 2: Findings

Areas of Strength:

- Brooklyn Scholars has a systematic approach to administering assessments and using results to inform instructional decision-making.
 - The school regularly administers computer-based NWEA assessments and “dress rehearsal” state exams to identify students’ strengths and areas for improvement.
 - The school uses common “scoring scales” to evaluate student work, which provide explicit expectations for student work. The use of these scales was observed on posted student work in many classrooms. School leaders acknowledged that norming expectations is an ongoing struggle and have devoted staff development time to collaboratively examining anchor papers to build consistency.
 - The NHA Descartes system provides tools for analyzing data through disaggregation and item analysis.
 - School leaders and faculty noted professional development on assessment and use of data to inform instructional planning. Time is devoted to collaboratively examining student work and performance data.
 - Staff reported using results for a variety of purposes, including assignment of students to flexible groups for targeted support, identification of specific skills for re-teaching, and evaluation of curriculum and pacing. For example, recent assessments indicated students are struggling with comprehension, stamina, “most likely” questions and inference questions.
- Brooklyn Scholars has created a professional culture and provides robust support to develop teachers’ skills.
 - School leaders have set high expectations for student behavior and academic performance as well as teacher performance. The school has a Teacher Evaluation Handbook that articulates clear, detailed expectations for teacher practice. Consistent practices were observed across all classrooms, including posted objectives, daily agendas, word walls.
 - The principal and two deans are a frequent presence in classrooms. Protocols are in place to coordinate weekly “O3” (one-on-one) meetings with all teachers to discuss their lesson planning and instructional practices.
 - School leaders have made rigor, engagement and differentiation priorities for staff development. The schedule supports a variety of regular meetings, including grade teams as well as weekly staff meeting on Monday afternoons, to address the needs of teachers.
 - Teachers described differentiated support based on their individual needs and opportunities to set personal goals. They noted receiving concrete suggestions and articles, modeling by coaches, and feedback on lesson plans. An online learning series provides modules in a range of areas that individual teachers can choose or be assigned, which they then observe in practice in the school. Mentoring is also provided to novice teachers, including assistance with lesson planning and instruction.
 - Through its educational management organization, National Heritage Academies, the school also has resources dedicated to supporting the principal and deans, including regular on-site coaching and off-site trainings.
- Brooklyn Scholars has established strong school culture that is conducive to learning.
 - On the day of the evaluation visit, the school was calm and orderly in both classrooms and public spaces. Students were consistently well-behaved and respectful and transitions between classes and activities were generally smooth. In many classrooms an assigned student “greeter” shook hands, introduced him or herself and welcomed guests to the classroom.
 - Clear expectations for student behavior and protocols for redirecting misbehavior were posted throughout the school. A color-coded “moral yardstick” is used to identify student behavior levels and it was seen in use by teachers. Teachers used common language to address behavior and use explicit procedures to manage their classrooms, such as signals and protocols for re-gaining

attention. Some teachers were very effective at using non-intrusive techniques such as proximity or a private conversation to keep the whole class on task. There is also a 4-step questioning process for addressing misbehavior with escalating consequences.

- Brooklyn Scholars has a well-developed curriculum that is vertically aligned from grade to grade and to state standards.
 - Teachers reported general satisfaction with the curriculum and felt they had adequate resources and opportunities to make adjustments based on student need. One teacher reported that she fills gaps with materials she creates or has the ability to request the purchase of additional materials as necessary.
 - Regularly scheduled meetings provide opportunities for teachers across grades to discuss and align topics, objectives and projects. Some teachers also noted looking at the grades above and below what they teach to determine the appropriate level of challenge for their grade.
 - The school has not yet aligned its curriculum to the Common Core, though teachers reported beginning to emphasize non-fictional text.
 - Evidence of the school's moral focus curriculum was evident throughout the school, including poster and presentations at school meetings to address monthly values.

Areas of Growth:

- Brooklyn Scholars is encouraged to continue to enhance the level of instructional rigor and increase student engagement across all classrooms.
 - In observed classes students were typically attentive and for the most part cognitively engaged in learning activities. The school has clearly focused training on "100%" techniques for engaging all students, but the efficacy of implementation varied. Some teachers quickly noted off-task students and effectively re-directed them, while in other classes observed, individual students were disengaged and seating arrangements sometimes marginalized students far from the teacher. Some teachers reviewed procedures and held students accountable for them, while others were inconsistent. In some rooms the teacher repeatedly requested attention and then immediately went on with the lesson regardless of whether students were engaged. Many teachers displayed a sense of urgency and implemented well-paced lessons; in a few instances considerable time was used for handing out materials or setting up activities that took away from learning. The school should continue to use professional development and individual coaching to provide teachers with support in classroom management and strategies to increase student engagement.
 - The level of rigor varied across classrooms. In some classes observed, teachers asked students higher order questions, challenging them to explain their answers, elucidate or make connections. In others the question was basic and missed opportunities to further conceptual understanding. School leaders have identified rigor as a priority and are devoting staff development time to focus on areas such as higher order questioning skills and consideration of Bloom's Taxonomy in lesson planning.
 - When asked how the school uses data, both school leaders and teachers primarily focused on identification of students for leveled grouping and specific skills for re-teaching. They did not, however, describe specific processes for meeting the needs of individual students through ongoing monitoring, instructional changes and interventions.
 - The school has just implemented a new workshop model that focuses on differentiated centers reportedly based on student performance on NWEA assessments; teachers are continuing to develop their skills in using this new approach and the results remain to be seen. While only a few workshop lessons were observed on the day of the visit, they appeared to be organized and purposeful. However, in one class students at one center did not understand the assignment, could not read the instructions, and sat there doing nothing until the teacher was able to join them.

- Brooklyn Scholars is encouraged to work to limit staff turnover, which presents a challenge for developing instructional consistency.
 - The school lost three teachers and a dean during this school year. It appears to have ably handled this situation with long-term substitute teachers, new hires and borrowing an interim dean temporarily from another NHA school. The school's robust supervision and support systems, i.e., frequent observations and feedback, mentoring, and training, have minimized disruptions from the student perspective, but turnover does limit the impact of ongoing staff development. The school should continue to focus on implementing hiring practices and a professional work environment that enhance staff stability.
- Brooklyn Scholars has clear systems in place to meet the needs of at-risk students; the school is encouraged to enhance coordination between interventions and the general education classroom.
 - Regular meetings, online systems such as Descartes and the NHA curriculum all provide opportunities for coordination of services. Some teachers also mentioned that intervention staff supported classroom learning by pre-viewing and reinforcing concepts they were teaching. Nevertheless, communication between intervention staff and classroom teachers was reportedly informal, and some interviewed teachers did not recognize a need for coordination.
- While the percentage of students with disabilities is similar to the district, the percentage of English language learners is below that of the district. The school is encouraged to enhance its recruitment practices in an effort to enroll more English language learners.
 - 6.6% of students at Brooklyn Scholars have disabilities, compared to 14.8% of students in the district.
 - 0.8% of students at Brooklyn Scholars are English language learners, compared to 11.8% of students in the district.
- While parents are actively involved in the school as volunteers and at events, Brooklyn Scholars does not have a parent association.
 - NYC DOE requires charter schools authorized by the Chancellor and/or located in a DOE building to have a parent association. At the time of the evaluation visit Brooklyn Scholars did not have an active parent association and is encouraged to work with parents to implement one.
 - School leaders reported, however, high levels of family attendance at school events and parent volunteers come to the school on Fridays to read to students.

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