



Office of School Design and Charter Partnerships
2013-2014

**BROOKLYN ASCEND CHARTER SCHOOL
ANNUAL COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW REPORT**

2013 – 2014 SCHOOL YEAR

Part 1: School Overview

School Information for the 2013-2014 School Year

Name of Charter School	Brooklyn Ascend Charter School
Board Chair(s)	Theodore J. Coburn
School Leader(s)	Janna Genzlinger (K-4), Zelda Washington (interim, 5-7)
Management Company (if applicable)	Ascend Learning
Other Partner(s)	N/A
District(s) of Location	NYC Community School Districts 17 (5-7) and 18 (K-4)
Physical Address(es)	205 Rockaway Parkway, Brooklyn 11212 (K-4)
	123 East 98 th Street, Brooklyn 11212 (5-7)
Facility Owner(s)	Private

School Profile

- Brooklyn Ascend Charter School (Brooklyn Ascend) is an elementary and middle school which served 861 students¹ in grades K-7 during the 2013-2014 school year. It opened in 2008-2009, and is under the terms of its second charter. The school's authorized full grade span is K-11 which it expects to reach in the 2017-2018 school year. The school is located in two privately-operated facilities in Brooklyn within Community School Districts (CSDs) 17 and 18.²
- Brooklyn Ascend enrolls new students in kindergarten, but backfills empty seats in all grades. There were 3,084 students on the waitlist after the Spring 2013 lottery.³ The average attendance rate for the 2013-2014 school year to date as reported in February 2014 was 95.9%.⁴
- Brooklyn Ascend was renewed during the 2012-2013 school year for a full term (five years), and is consistent with the terms of its renewal application.
- The school's Lower School Director, Janna Genzlinger, was promoted to the position in July 2013. The previous School Director, Brandon Sorlie, who had served from February 2011, was promoted to Chief Academic Officer at Ascend Learning. The founding Middle School Director, Eunice Chao, stepped down in June 2013. Samantha Pugh was promoted to the position from Dean for grades 1 and 2. However, Ms. Pugh stepped down in January 2014. Zelda Washington, former Director of Cultural Development for Ascend Learning, took over the position on an interim basis for the remainder of the school year.
- Brooklyn Ascend is part of Ascend Learning, a Charter Management Organization (CMO). The CMO provides schools in the network the following services and supports: design and support of school program, selection and management of school director, financial management and support, and facilities support. The school pays a fee of 9% of per pupil revenues to the CMO for these services.
- Brooklyn Ascend had a student to teacher ratio of 13.9 to 1 in the 2013-2014 school year, and served 31 sections across all grades, with an average class size of 28.2.⁵
- The lottery preferences for Brooklyn Ascend's 2013-2014 school year included the New York State Charter Schools Act required preferences of returning students, students residing in the community school district of the school's location and siblings of students already enrolled in the charter school.⁶

¹ Enrollment reflects ATS data from 10/31/13.

² NYC DOE Location Code Generation and Management System database.

³ Self-reported information from school-submitted data collection form on 2/14/14.

⁴ Self-reported information from school-submitted data collection form on 2/14/14.

⁵ Self-reported information given on 9/19/14.

⁶ Brooklyn Ascend Charter School's 2013-2014 application.

Part 2: Summary of Findings

Essential Question 1: Is the school an academic success?

Overview of School-Specific Data through 2012-2013

ES/MS Students scoring at or above Level 3 on NYS assessments, compared to CSD, NYC, and State averages

% Proficient in English Language Arts				
	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013
Brooklyn Ascend Charter School	49.1%	53.4%	69.1%	21.9%
CSD 18	43.6%	46.1%	48.2%	20.3%
Difference from CSD 18	5.5	7.3	20.9	1.6
CSD 17	-	-	-	17.1%
Difference from CSD 17	-	-	-	4.8
NYC	46.5%	49.5%	51.2%	26.8%
Difference from NYC	2.6	3.9	17.9	-4.9
New York State	53.2%	52.8%	55.1%	31.1%
Difference from New York State	-4.1	0.6	14.0	-9.2

% Proficient in Math				
	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013
Brooklyn Ascend Charter School	43.4%	58.3%	83.9%	23.3%
CSD 18	48.8%	51.9%	55.1%	20.6%
Difference from CSD 18	-5.4	6.4	28.8	2.7
CSD 17	-	-	-	20.2%
Difference from CSD 17	-	-	-	3.1
NYC	54.3%	58.5%	62.6%	31.7%
Difference from NYC	-10.9	-0.2	21.3	-8.4
New York State	61.0%	63.3%	64.8%	31.1%
Difference from New York State	-17.6	-5.0	19.1	-7.8

* All comparisons to either the CSD or NYC take into account only grades the school itself served.

** In 2012-2013 students in grades kindergarten through four were served in District 18; students in grades five and six were served in District 17. The 2012-2013 district-level proficiency rates presented above reflect all grades served by Brooklyn Ascend Charter School in 2012-2013, regardless of the grades served in the district.

Performance on the NYC Progress Report

Progress Report Grade	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013
Overall Grade	B	C	A	D
Student Progress	B	C	A	F
Student Performance	B	C	A	C
School Environment	A	B	B	B
Closing the Achievement Gap Points	2.3	0.0	1.8	0.7

Progress Towards Attainment of Academic Goals

- Brooklyn Ascend, according to its 2012-2013 Annual Report to the New York State Education Department (NYSED), did not meet four of 10 of its applicable academic performance goals identified in its charter. The remaining six goals were not determined because the data was not available by time of submission.

Responsive Education Program & Learning Environment⁷

- As a response to the 2013 Common Core test scores, Ascend network's (Ascend) academic and curricular teams examined and evaluated the strength of the curriculum. Based on that work, Ascend began revising the Ascend school design model. One of the changes Ascend is making to all of its schools is having departmentalized teaching in all subjects for grades 3-5.
- Another major change in the Ascend model across the network was the shift from K-4 lower and 5-8 middle schools to K-5 lower and 6-8 middle schools. Since the school spanned grades K-7 in the 2013-2014 school year, the change had an impact on the school design, including the lower school facility that subsequently would include an additional grade.
- A major initiative that was implemented during the 2013-14 school year was the full implementation of the Responsive Classroom model, begun in 2011-2012, to cultivate students' cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, and empathy as well as strengthen the Ascend student culture.
- In January 2014, Brooklyn Ascend added a "student life" period with an array of new activities from outside providers, including chess, theater, Global Scholars, and jazz. These new activities supplement the previously established activities of choir, step dance, fencing, drumming, and martial arts. Future activities may include team sports (soccer, basketball, and track), debate team (Model UN and Model Congress), robotics club, and school government.
- The middle school implemented the Origins Developmental Designs (DD) approach for student management which integrates social and academic learning.
- Ascend worked closely with SABIS curriculum writers, who license the materials to the network, in order to better align the rigor and content of the assessments to address the needs of the Common Core Learning Standards.
- The school also sought to improve its alignment between the SABIS curriculum and the expectations of the Common Core, and to have a stronger fidelity to the SABIS system of instruction in the classroom. This includes clear communication of lesson points, a short and explicit "teach" section, fully participatory guided practice, independent practice, a check for understanding utilizing a student prefect for each group, and any necessary re-teaching.
- The school maintains its primary academic goal to have student scores average 85% and higher on all SABIS assessments.
- Brooklyn Ascend provides SETSS for students with IEPs (Individualized Education Programs), which typically includes specially designed and/or supplemental instruction provided by a special education teacher to help the child succeed in the general education classroom.
- The school also offers an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) classroom support model to ensure that students with IEPs are given an opportunity to access mainstream curriculum while their individual needs are closely monitored and addressed.
- The school provides related services, including counseling, speech and language services, occupational therapy, physical therapy, hearing services, and paraprofessionals, via a DOE contract agency through the CSE.
- The school offers Freestanding English as a Second Language for students who are designated as English Language Learners (ELL).
- Brooklyn Ascend utilizes Response to Intervention (RtI) for students who are in need of extra support and remediation. The RtI team is comprised of school leadership, a special education

⁷ Self-reported information from school-submitted ACR self-evaluation form on 2/18/14.

coordinator, special education teachers, social workers, intensives teachers and classroom teachers.

- The school has expanded its after-school Intervention program. The intervention program focuses exclusively on the Ready curriculum for New York Common Core Learning Standards and the more complex problem-solving required under the Common Core.
- The school holds professional development sessions focused on data-driven instruction, including regular data meetings to discuss goals, methods for teaching and strategizing ways to improve using Renaissance Learning STAR Reading reports, exit tickets, and periodic and end-of-term data.
- Teachers have regular weekly meetings with their instructional leaders and Grade Level Teams to analyze the class data.
- Brooklyn Ascend leaders observe teachers every week and consistently document their observations. Each leader makes recommendations that are actionable and measurable such that teachers employ the right levers for driving scholar achievement.

Essential Question 2: Is the school a fiscally sound, viable organization?

Governance Structure & Organizational Design

After reviewing information and documentation concerning Board turnover, Board minutes, reporting structure, organizational chart, annual accountability reporting documents, Board agendas, and the school's website, the NYC DOE notes the following:

- The Board has seven board members, all voting. The Board Chair, Ted Coburn, has been on the Board since January 2008.
- As evidenced from a review of Board rosters, the Board did not have any turnover in Board members during the 2013-14 school year.
- As recorded in the Board's minutes, there is a clear reporting structure with school leadership providing regular updates on academic performance to the Board and its committees. School leadership attends some board meetings; much of the school reporting on the academic, financial, and operational performance comes from the school's CMO, Ascend Learning.

School Climate & Community Engagement

After reviewing information and documentation concerning leadership turnover, staff turnover, attendance rate, student turnover, NYC School Survey results and response rates, and PTO meetings, the NYC DOE notes the following:

- The school has experienced leadership turnover in both the Lower and Middle Schools. The Lower School had a new Director who was promoted to the position in July 2013. The founding Middle School Director stepped down in June 2013. The Middle School Director who started out the 2013-2014 school year, resigned in January 2014. The former Director of Cultural Development for Ascend Learning took over the position on an interim basis for the remainder of the school year.
- Instructional staff turnover was 35% with 16 out of 60 instructional staff choosing not to return for the 2013-14 school year from the prior year, and five instructional staff who were asked not to return. As of February 2014, during the 2013-14 school year, eleven teachers had left the school, including nine from the middle school and two from the lower school.⁸
- As of February 2014, average daily attendance for students during that school year was at 95.9%, which is higher than the school's charter goal of at least 95%.⁹
- Student turnover was 7.5% of students from the prior school year who did not return at the start of the 2013-2014 school year, and 3.8% of the students left the school between the start of the school year and February 2014.¹⁰
- Both the lower and middle schools of Brooklyn Ascend Charter School have active parent organizations called the Brooklyn Ascend Charter School Family Association and the BAMS Family Association, as evidenced on the school's calendar.

2012-2013 NYC School Survey Results¹¹

Categories	Result	Community	Response Rate	Citywide Rate
Academic Expectations	Well Below Average	Parents	40%	54%
Communication	Well Below Average	Teachers	90%	83%
Engagement	Well Below Average	Students	100%	83%
Safety & Respect	Well Below Average			

⁸ Self-reported information from school-submitted data collection form on 2/14/14.

⁹ Self-reported information from school-submitted data collection form on 2/14/14.

¹⁰ Self-reported information from school-submitted data collection form on 2/14/14.

¹¹ Results are particular to the school type as identified in the 2013 School Survey.

Financial Health

Near-term financial obligations:

- Based on the FY13 financial audit, the school's current ratio indicated a risk that the school may be unable to meet its current liabilities.
- Based on the FY13 financial audit, the school's unrestricted cash availability indicated a risk that the school may be unable to cover at least one month of its operating expenses without an infusion of cash.
- A comparison of the enrollment projections for the 2013-2014 budget to the actual enrollment as of the last day for the 2013-2014 school year revealed that the school had met its enrollment target, supporting its projected revenue.
- As of the FY13 financial audit, the school had met its debt obligations.

Financial sustainability based on current practices:

- Based on the financial audits from FY11 to FY13, the school operated at an aggregate deficit over the past three fiscal years.
- Based on the FY13 financial audit and follow up, the school's debt-to-asset ratio indicated that the school still has more total liabilities than it had total assets.
- Based on the financial audits from FY11 to FY13 and follow up, the school had overall negative cash flow from FY11 to FY13.

Annual Independent Financial Audit

- An independent audit performed for FY13 showed no material findings.

Essential Question 3: Compliance with charter and all applicable laws and regulations?

After a review of documentation submitted for the NYC DOE annual accountability reporting requirements for the 2013-2014 school year, the NYC DOE finds the following:

Board Compliance

The Board is in compliance with:

- The Board's membership size of seven members meets the requirement of no fewer than five, and retaining an odd number of trustees, as outlined in the school's charter and in the Board's bylaws.
- Currently, officer positions outlined in the Board's bylaws are filled.
- The Board has held the minimum number of monthly Board meetings of at least six times each year, as outlined in its bylaws. Based on submitted Board minutes, the Board held 10 meetings for the 2013-2014 school year in which quorum was reached.

School Compliance

The school is in compliance with (as reviewed during May 2014):

- The school has the required number of staff with AED/CPR certification.
- The school has submitted appropriate insurance documents to the NYC DOE.
- The school has submitted its required immunization documentation and is in compliance with Department of Health standards of 99% for immunization.
- The school had an application deadline of April 1, 2014 and lottery date of April 15, 2014 adhering to the charter law's requirement of accepting applications up to at least April 1.
- The school leader was trained in General Response Protocols/Fire Emergency Drill Conductor for NYC, as mandated by the NYC Fire Department.

The school is out of compliance with:

- All staff members do not have appropriate fingerprint clearance as of November 2013.
- The school has submitted required documentation for teacher certification and is not in compliance with state requirements for teacher certification with 17 uncertified staff out of 38.
- The school has not posted its 2012-2013 NYSED Annual Report and annual audit to its website, as specified in charter law, as of May 2014.

Essential Question 4: What are the school's plans for the next charter term?

As reported by the school's leadership, the following is noted:

- Brooklyn Ascend maintains its original growth plan of a K-12 school, growing one grade each year until it reaches its full grade span. The school is expected to reach its full grade span in the 2018-2019 school year, and will be comprised of a lower school, middle school, and high school. Since the school is currently authorized for grades K-11, it will have to submit and have approved, by its charter authorizer and the Board of Regents, a material charter revision to expand to the serve the 12th grade.
- As part of the Ascend network of schools, the Board of Brooklyn Ascend voted to merge all Ascend schools under Canarsie Ascend Charter School's 501(c)(3), such that Canarsie Ascend would be the surviving education corporation. The school reported that they anticipate continuing in the merger process throughout the next school year. The merger is contingent upon submission to and approval by the schools' charter authorizers and the Board of Regents.
- The school reported that they have shifted its model from a K-4 grades lower and 5-8 grades middle schools to K-5 grades lower and 6-8 grades middle schools, which will impact school design and facilities.

Enrollment and Retention Targets

As a reminder regarding accountability in the next charter term:

- Amendments to Article 56 of the New York State Consolidated Laws: Education, which relates to Charter Schools, call for charter schools, as a consideration of renewal, "to meet or exceed enrollment and retention targets" for students with disabilities, English language learners, and students who are eligible for the free and reduced price lunch program. The amendments further indicate "Repeated failure to comply with the requirement" as a cause for revocation or termination of the charter.
 - The law directs schools to demonstrate "that it has made extensive efforts to recruit and retain such students" in the event it has not yet met its targets.
 - The NYC DOE, as authorizer, will annually monitor the school's performance against these targets and the efforts it makes to meet this state requirement.
- In school year 2013-2014, Brooklyn Ascend served a higher percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced price lunch as compared to both CSDs in which it operates as well as the citywide average. However, the school served students with disabilities and English Language Learner students at a lower rate than that of both CSDs in which it operates as well as citywide averages.

Special Populations

	Free and Reduced Price Lunch					Students with Disabilities					English Language Learners				
	2009 -	2010 -	2011 -	2012 -	2013 -	2009 -	2010 -	2011 -	2012 -	2013 -	2009 -	2010 -	2011 -	2012 -	2013 -
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
School	82.3%	75.5%	77.8%	82.9%	84.6%	8.5%	7.7%	7.2%	8.6%	10.3%	0.4%	0.9%	0.4%	0.4%	0.8%
CSD 18	72.7%	70.6%	70.2%	74.3%	76.8%	13.3%	13.2%	12.8%	13.7%	14.9%	4.2%	5.0%	4.5%	4.1%	4.0%
CSD 17	-	-	-	-	83.1%	-	-	-	-	15.8%	-	-	-	-	8.8%
NYC	62.1%	65.3%	68.1%	69.8%	73.5%	15.9%	15.9%	15.7%	16.1%	17.1%	16.1%	16.1%	15.5%	15.0%	14.7%

Additional Enrollment Information					
	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
Grades Served	K-3	K-4	K-5	K-6	K-7
CSD(s)	18	18	18	18	18 & 17

Comparisons to both the CSD(s) and City are made against students in grades K-8, 9-12 or K-12 depending on the grades the school served in each school year. Special population figures are as of October 31 for each given school year, with the exception of the 2012-2013 school year, which is as of October 26, 2012.