



Office of School Design and Charter Partnerships
2013-2014

**EXPLORE 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	Explore Charter School
Board Chair(s)	Graeme Daykin
School Leader(s)	Sheryl Ackerman (K-2), Michal-Anne Fox (3-5), Christina Froeb (6-8)
Management Company (if applicable)	Explore Schools Inc.
Other Partner(s)	N/A
District(s) of Location	NYC Community School District 17
Physical Address(es)	655 Parkside Avenue, Brooklyn 11226
Facility Owner(s)	DOE

School Profile

- Explore Charter School (Explore) is an elementary and middle school, which served 524 students¹ in grades K-8 during the 2013-2014 school year and is fully at scale. It opened in 2002-2003 and is under the terms of its third charter. The school is located in publicly-operated facilities in Brooklyn within Community School District (CSD) 17.²
- Explore Charter School enrolls new students in kindergarten, but backfills empty seats in all grades. There were 3,320 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 92.7%.⁴
- Explore Charter School was renewed during the 2010-2011 school year for a full term (five years), and is consistent with the terms of its renewal application.
- The school leadership includes three Academic Directors and a Director of Operations. Christina Froeb, the Upper School Academic Director, has been with the school for four years. Michal-Anne Fox, previously at Explore Schools Inc., joined the school at the start of the 2013-2014 school year as Intermediate School Academic Director. Sheryl Ackerman was promoted to Lower School Academic Director at the start of 2013-2014 school year. Ryan Smith, Director of Operations, has been with the school for more than three years.
- Explore Charter School is part of Explore Schools Inc., a Charter Management Organization (CMO). The CMO provides schools in the network with talent management and human resource support, academic leadership, finance support and planning, management and operational support, technology support, advocacy and external relations, and public grant and external fundraising support services. The school pays a fee of 11.5% of general education per pupil revenues to the CMO for these services.
- Explore had a student to teacher ratio of 11:1 in the 2013-2014 school year, and served 21 sections across all grades, with an average class size of 30 in grades K-5 and 20 in grades 6-8.⁵
- The lottery preferences for Explore Charter School'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, as well as English Language Learner students.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 2/11/14.

⁴ Self-reported information from school-submitted data collection form on 2/11/14.

⁵ Self-reported information given on 9/29/14.

⁶ Explore 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
Explore Charter School	43.1%	40.8%	53.0%	22.0%
CSD 17	33.7%	37.0%	38.7%	17.1%
Difference from CSD 17	9.4	3.8	14.3	4.9
NYC	42.4%	43.9%	46.9%	26.4%
Difference from NYC	0.7	-3.1	6.1	-4.4
New York State	53.2%	52.8%	55.1%	31.1%
Difference from New York State	-10.1	-12.0	-2.1	-9.1

% Proficient in Math				
	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013
Explore Charter School	66.7%	66.9%	85.8%	44.0%
CSD 17	42.7%	47.1%	50.5%	17.5%
Difference from CSD 17	24.0	19.8	35.3	26.5
NYC	54.0%	57.3%	60.0%	29.6%
Difference from NYC	12.7	9.6	25.8	14.4
New York State	61.0%	63.3%	64.8%	31.1%
Difference from New York State	5.7	3.6	21.0	12.9

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

Performance on the NYC Progress Report

Progress Report Grade	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013
Overall Grade	B	C	A	C
Student Progress	B	D	A	C
Student Performance	C	C	A	C
School Environment	A	A	B	C
Closing the Achievement Gap Points	1.8	0.5	3.8	3.0

Progress Towards Attainment of Academic Goals

- Explore Charter School, according to its 2012-2013 Annual Report to the New York State Education Department (NYSED), partially met three of six of its academic performance goals identified in its charter. The school did not meet the other three goals.

Responsive Education Program & Learning Environment⁷

- To build on the changes Explore made to its literacy curriculum in the 2012-2013 school year, during 2013-2014, the school split ELA into two separate classes taught by two separate teachers: Reading and Writing. Having two separate classes enables students to focus their skills, and helps teachers to go deeper in one content area rather than stretching across two content areas.
- Explore also revised daily schedules to include more time for reading, writing, guided reading, and word study, as well as to provide six to eight week Guided Reading Study Groups for teachers to support planning for below level readers. Explore adopted the Teachers College Units of Study Writing curriculum, for grades K-5. The school contracted with LitLife to provide the 6th grade Reading and Writing curriculum.
- For its math curriculum, the school continued to refine the Investigations and Impact curriculums, with a scope and sequence aligned to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS).
- The school continued to utilize a co-teaching model in grades K-5 to ensure differentiated instruction throughout the school day.
- Explore continues its use of Achievement Network for ELA interim assessments, aligned to CCLS, to monitor progress and adjust instruction.
- The school's math interim assessments (IPTs) are created at the network level.
- Teaching teams, supervisors, and curriculum coordinators use the data from the IPTs to determine student trends, areas of strength, and re-teaching needs.
- In an effort to increase support for students with special needs, Explore restructured the role of Support Services Coordinator to include two full-time staff members. One coordinator supervises the team of learning specialists, as well as conducts observations and provides support to classroom teachers. The second staff member is a learning specialist who manages all aspects of the compliance process, including IEP (Individualized Education Program) annual reviews and 504 plans.
- The school created Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) classrooms in Kindergarten, 1st and 4th grade.
- The school also provided small group tutoring for struggling students, twice weekly for a total of 24 sessions.
- In order to support the roll out of the new Writing curriculum, 10 staff members attended Teachers College Writing Professional Development sessions.
- The school repositioned Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as a lever for professional development, in terms of content area. The sessions are facilitated by academic leadership and trained lead teachers.
- Explore added a third Academic Director and a Leadership and Professional Development Manager to provide more focused coaching, teacher development, and accountability.
- School-wide professional development focused on how to facilitate students' independent practice, aligned to the CCLS.
- The Explore Network provides collaboration between schools for unit plan writing through professional development sessions for grades 2, 3, and 4, as well as sharing lesson plans across the network for all grades.

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

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 eight board members, all voting, including the school's founder and CEO of the school's CMO, Explore Schools Network. The Board Chair, Graeme Daykin, has been on the Board since September 2013. Explore Charter School's Board is comprised of the same members as Explore Empower Charter School's Board.
- As evidenced from a review of Board rosters, the Board did not experience any turnover in the 2013-2014 school year.
- As recorded in the Board's minutes, there is a clear reporting structure with the school's CMO providing regular updates on academic, financial, and operational performance to the Board and its committees. However, it is not clear in the Board minutes how or if the school leadership reports into the Board and CMO.
- Board minutes and agenda items for half of the 2013-2014 school year's Board meetings have been provided via the school's website for inspection by the public.

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. The Principal who was new to the school in the 2012-2013 school year left after one year. The school was led by three Academic Directors for the 2013-2014 school year, along with a Director of Operations. The Upper School Academic Director and the Director of Operations were in those roles in the previous school year. The Intermediate School Academic Director was previously at Explore Schools Inc., joining the school at the start of the 2013-2014 school year. The Lower School Academic Director was promoted to the role at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year.
- Instructional staff turnover was 17.3% with eight out of 46 instructional staff choosing not to return for the 2013-14 school year from the prior year. As of February 2014, during the 2013-14 school year, four teachers had left the school.⁸
- As of February 2014, average daily attendance for students during that school year was at 92.7% which is lower than the school's charter goal of 95%.⁹
- Student turnover was 3.6% of students from the prior school year who did not return at the start of the 2013-2014 school year; 2.7% of the students left the school between the start of the school year and February 2014.¹⁰
- The school reported having a parent organization called the Parent Partnership Group.¹¹

⁸ Self-reported information from school-submitted data collection form on 2/11/14.

⁹ Self-reported information from school-submitted data collection form on 2/11/14.

¹⁰ Self-reported information from school-submitted data collection form on 2/11/14.

¹¹ Self-reported information from school-submitted ACR self-evaluation form on 2/18/14.

2012-2013 NYC School Survey Results¹²

Categories	Result		Community	Response Rate	Citywide Rate
Academic Expectations	Below Average		Parents	80%	54%
Communication	Below Average		Teachers	96%	83%
Engagement	Below Average		Students	93%	83%
Safety & Respect	Below Average				

Financial Health

Near-term financial obligations:

- Based on the FY13 financial audit, the school's current ratio indicated a strong ability to meet its current liabilities.
- Based on the FY13 financial audit, the school had sufficient unrestricted cash to cover its operating expenses for at least two months without an infusion of cash.
- A comparison of the enrollment projections for the 2013-14 budget to the actual enrollment at the end of the school year indicated that the school had met its enrollment target, supporting its projected revenue.
- As of the FY13 financial audit, the school had no debt obligations

Financial sustainability based on current practices:

- Based on the financial audits from FY11 to FY13, the school generated an aggregate surplus over the three audited fiscal years, though the school operated at a deficit during FY12.
- Based on the FY13 financial audit, the school's debt-to-asset ratio indicated that the school had more total assets than it had liabilities.
- Based on the financial audits from FY11 to FY13, the school generated overall positive cash flow from FY11 to FY13, though the school had negative cash flow in FY12.

Annual Independent Financial Audit

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

¹² Results are particular to the school type as identified in the 2013 School Survey.

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 falls within the range of no fewer than five and no greater than 16 members, as outlined in the school's charter and in the Board's bylaws.

The Board is out of compliance with:

- The Board has not held the minimum number of Board meetings of at least 10 during the academic year, as outlined in its bylaws. Based on submitted Board minutes, the Board held seven meetings for the 2013-2014 school year in which quorum was reached.
- Currently, officer positions outlined in the Board's bylaws are filled, with the exception of the Secretary position.

School Compliance

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

- The school has submitted required documentation for teacher certification and is compliant with state requirements for teacher certification.
- The school has the required number of staff with AED/CPR certification.
- The school has submitted appropriate insurance documents to 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 10, 2014 adhering to charter law's requirement of accepting applications up to at least April 1.
- A 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 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:

- Explore Charter School is at its full authorized grade span of K-8. The Explore Schools Network that serves as Explore's CMO, however, plans to expand the network by replication, adding two new schools (authorized by the State University of New York – Trustees) for a total of six schools in Central Brooklyn by fall 2015-16.
- As part of the Explore Schools Network, the Board of Explore Charter School voted to merge all Explore schools under Explore Excel Charter School's 501(c)(3), such that Explore Excel would be the surviving education corporation. The school reported that they anticipate continuing in the merger process throughout the next school year.

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, Explore served a comparable percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced price lunch as the citywide average but a lower rate compared to the CSD 17 average. The school served a lower percentage of students with disabilities and English Language Learner students compared to both CSD 17 and citywide averages.

Special Populations

	Free and Reduced Price Lunch					Students with Disabilities					English Language Learners				
	2009 - 2010	2010 - 2011	2011 - 2012	2012 - 2013	2013 - 2014	2009 - 2010	2010 - 2011	2011 - 2012	2012 - 2013	2013 - 2014	2009 - 2010	2010 - 2011	2011 - 2012	2012 - 2013	2013 - 2014
	School	68.2%	74.6%	77.0%	78.3%	74.0%	15.8%	14.1%	14.9%	14.1%	14.9%	1.5%	1.7%	1.8%	1.7%
CSD 17	85.0%	82.8%	81.2%	80.0%	83.1%	14.2%	14.5%	14.0%	14.3%	15.8%	9.1%	9.6%	9.3%	9.1%	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-8	K-8	K-8	K-8	K-8
CSD(s)	17	17	17	17	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.