

**BRONX COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL  
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT**

MAY 2011

# Part 1: Executive Summary

## **School Overview and History:**

Bronx Community Charter School is an elementary school serving approximately 176 students from grade kindergarten through grade 3 in the 2010-2011 school year.<sup>1</sup> The school opened in 2008 with grades kindergarten through 1. It has plans to grow to serve students in grades kindergarten through 5.<sup>2</sup> It is currently housed in private space in District 10.<sup>3</sup>

The school population comprises 36.4% Black, 58.9% Hispanic, 1.7% White, 1.2% American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 0.57% Multiracial. 80.1% of students receive free/reduced price lunch, compared to 79.0% for the district.<sup>4</sup> The student body includes 13.1% English language learners (ELL) and 10.2% special education (SPED) students, compared to 22.8% ELL and 17.3% SPED for the district.<sup>5</sup>

The school has not yet received a Progress Report grade. The average attendance rate for the school year 2009 - 2010 was 94.0%.<sup>6</sup> The school is in good standing with state and federal accountability.<sup>7</sup>

## **Annual Review Process Overview:**

The NYC DOE Charter Schools Office (CSO) conducts an annual site visit of New York City Department of Education authorized charter schools in order to assess three primary questions: is the school an academic success; is the school a viable organization; and is the school in compliance with applicable laws and regulations. The visits are conducted by representatives of the New York City Department of Education Charter Schools Office and last the duration of one school day. The annual site visit begins with a meeting with the principal and school leadership team. Subsequently, the reviewers visit classrooms and hold brief meetings with available administrators, teachers, and students. Areas of evaluation include, but are not limited to: academic goals and mission; curriculum and instruction; school culture and learning environment; assessment utilization; parent engagement; government structures and organizational design; community support; special populations; and safety and security.

The following experts participated in the review of this school on May 26, 2011:

- Rick Larios, Senior Director, NYC DOE CSO
- Jessica Fredston-Hermann, Analyst, NYC DOE CSO
- Sylvia Rabiner, Consultant

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<sup>1</sup> NYC DOE ATS system

<sup>2</sup> NYC DOE ATS system and charter agreement

<sup>3</sup> NYC DOE Location Code Generating System database

<sup>4</sup> Demographic Data drawn from NYC DOE ATS System

<sup>5</sup> NYC DOE ATS system; data pulled on June 30, 2011

<sup>6</sup> NYC DOE School Progress Report

<sup>7</sup> New York State Education Department - [www.nysed.gov](http://www.nysed.gov)

## Part 2: Findings

### Areas of Strength

- The school has developed a strong, student-centered learning environment that utilizes a project-based, hands-on instructional model.
  - The school's environment is clean and print-rich, with multiple examples of student work and artwork displayed in classrooms and hallways. Abundant teaching tools include word walls and reading and writing strategies.
  - The school has a dynamic, hands-on project-based inquiry approach to instruction consistent with its belief that children learn best as active participants. Students are engaged in and excited about their work. Among the school's current projects are the Kindergarten Family Study, First Grade Neighborhood Study, and Second Grade Food Study. The research question the Second Grade students explored was "Where Do We Get Our Food?" Their research included visiting a Whole Foods store, Arthur Avenue markets, and Chinatown. Third Graders visited the Transportation Museum and Queens Museum as part of a project on studying New York City one hundred years ago.
  - There is emphasis on reading and writing in all grades. In the kindergarten class students were observed writing and illustrating stories about personal experiences they would "publish"; first graders were observed creating a table of contents for stories they were writing; and in a second grade classroom a group of students was observed sharing stories with a teacher who was helping them develop their ideas.
  - There are clear and consistent norms and expectations for cooperative student behavior posted in all classrooms, among these the motto "We are first graders. We work together. We play together. We learn together." Clear guidelines for collaborative student communication are posted in classrooms, such as "I agree with you because..." and "I disagree with you because." In a third grade classroom, a group of students was observed deciding which artifacts to put in their classroom museum. One girl told another "I disagree with you because I think we can say if someone touches a light bulb they can get a shock."
  - Time is set aside for Work Choice electives in all grades during which students play a role in the selection of activities which include sewing, model building, woodworking, art, cooking, and examining how appliances work. In kindergarten, students participate in a number of different activities; by the time they reach second and third grade, they are asked to begin specializing according to their interests.
  - The school provides a range of supports for at-risk students, including two CTT classrooms and support of a special education provider who works with students with mandated services two days a week. School leadership reports a good relationship with the local CSE.
- There is a strong professional learning community ethos with high levels of trust and collaboration between administration and staff, and among staff.
  - Teachers are provided with time every Monday from 4-5 pm and Friday from 2-4 pm for professional development as well as 45-50 minutes within the school day for grade team meetings once a week. This time is used for planning, reviewing and revising curriculum, reflecting on daily lessons, developing strategies for co-teaching, and working with the literacy and math specialists. Teachers meet for two weeks in August prior to the opening of school to do additional curriculum planning.

- The school is committed to strengthening its co-teaching model to provide more individual targeted student support. Consultants from Goldmansour and Rutherford provided a summer workshop and follow-up visits to support teachers in the most effective use of two teachers to a classroom. Observed lesson plans included directives for both teachers in the room, and co-teachers were observed providing targeted small-group support as well as working with students one-on-one.
  - One important aspect of professional development is the system of intensive three week cycles aligned to school-wide initiatives during which math and literacy specialists work closely with teachers to plan, conduct targeted observations, and provide feedback both to individual teachers and to teacher teams. A key aspect of each cycle is the lab site structure during which a grade team plans and participates in teaching, observing and debriefing a lesson. On the day of the visit, reviewers observed a second grade lab site, during which two teachers conducted a mini lesson on spelling patterns while other teachers observed to determine which aspects of the lessons were concise and which repetitive. One teacher interviewed commented that “Lab site is a great opportunity to work on what the teacher needs to focus on and get specific feedback.”
  - There is committed, capable school leadership monitoring the school mission and providing effective guidance to staff and students. School leadership and teachers are self-reflective and open to feedback with the goal of improving the school. Teacher evaluations are collaborative, engaging teachers in determining the areas in which they need to further develop their instructional practice around the question “What Makes a Good Teacher”. School leaders provide extensive written feedback following classroom observations.
  - The school is committed to developing teacher talent through intentional support. The school has worked with student teachers from Bank Street, LIU, Sarah Lawrence, and City College, and has hired a number of student teachers to work at the school at the end of their placements.
- The school is developing a culture of data-driven decision making and employs tools to monitor student performance and inform teaching and learning.
    - The school employs the Terra Nova, the DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment), a Spelling Inventory, a Narrative Writing assessment and Word Study (for Kindergarten and first grade). Math assessments are given at the conclusion of each math unit. The school is currently exploring more effective math assessments in conjunction with other charter schools.
    - Teachers use formal and teacher-designed assessments to guide the placement of students in flexible reading and math groups, as well as to identify students in need of further academic intervention.
    - The school is launching a flexible online program – Rediker System- which is customized and consistent with the school’s instructional goals to support nuanced and long-term data collection including individual student portfolios, narrative and work samples.
  - The school maintains a consistent connection to parents and mobilizes parents within the school community as conduits for student success.
    - There are many activities designed to engage parents: a family parade and orientation for the opening of school, an arts festival, classroom tours, and monthly workshops on topics of interest to parents.
    - Parents are informally engaged in school decision making, such as the architectural design of the new school building. A parent representative sits on the Board of Trustees, and parents have formed a Community Council. School leadership stated that parents on the Community Council have worked hard this

- year to coordinate a number of fundraisers for the school, and added that parent involvement in general at the school is “terrific.”
  - Parents receive a biweekly newsletter from teachers and a monthly newsletter from the school directors.
  - The school provides narrative reports for parents in November, March and June. The teachers use a range of data to write extensive reports detailing the strengths, interests, social development, work habits, and goals for each student. Twice a year teachers meet with parents for conferences to set goals for students and review their progress.
  - The importance of families to the school community is visually represented in the school through the “Meet the Bronx Community Families” posters in the hallway, and discussions and displays from the Kindergarten Family Study Project in which kindergarteners bring their families in to class to be interviewed.
- There is careful stewardship of public funds to create and sustain a quality school of choice option in the community.
  - The school reports a conservative forecasting approach with seven-year budget projections and sound oversight by its board finance committee to give school confidence in its expansion plans.

### **Areas of Growth**

- The school should continue to refine its outreach strategies for recruitment of ELL/SPED students and document its efforts for ongoing monitoring of effectiveness in reaching comparable percentages with its CSD.
  - The student body includes 13.1% English language learners (ELL) and 10.2% special education (SPED) students, both of which are lower than the district averages of 22.8% ELL and 17.3% SPED.<sup>8</sup>
- As the school continues to grow and expand, it should continue to focus on sustainability, both of structural supports and school culture.
  - The school is encouraged to consider a plan for distributed leadership to maintain its strong school culture.
- The school is encouraged to continue its current work to advance instruction to improve student learning and improve student achievement results.
  - At the time of the visit, the school stated that it was looking into purchasing a Student Information System for the 2011-12 school year. The school should continue to develop systems for tracking student data, viewing longitudinal progress, and comparing subgroup performance. The school is also encouraged to focus on how the data collected is used by teachers in the classroom for targeted differentiated instruction and small-group support.
  - The school is encouraged to continue refining its instructional approach to ensure that instruction reliably results in learning that both improves students’ state assessment results and secures the higher-level learning that comes with project-based instruction and authentic assessments, both of which are critical to the school’s mission. School efforts in content development, aligning student work against expectations contained in the Common Core, and more effective use of technology to meet the needs of all learners, particularly in addressing skills-based deficiencies, are all promising initiatives and should be continued and monitored for success.

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<sup>8</sup> NYC DOE ATS system; data pulled on June 30, 2011

## Part 3: Framing Questions

### FRAMING QUESTIONS:

Throughout the Renewal Process and the life of each school's charter, the NYCDOE Charter Schools Office uses the following framing questions to monitor Charter School success:

1. Has the School Been an Academic Success?
2. Has the School Been a Viable Organization?
3. Has the School Been in Compliance with All Applicable Laws and Regulations?

### Annual Site Visit Rubric:

1. Has the School Been an Academic Success?
  - Academic Goals and Mission
    - School components and curriculum align together and holistically support the mission
    - School has high academic expectations and employs strategies for the full range of students served by the school, including those at risk and those with special needs
  - Curriculum and Instruction
    - The educational plan is flexible and is adjusted to meet the performance levels and learning needs of all enrolled students
    - School implements programming to address the needs of students with disabilities and ELLs
    - Teachers demonstrate the use of differentiated instructional techniques to support the varying ways by which students learn
    - School has implemented programming for students who need remediation or acceleration
  - School Culture
    - The culture is strong, intentional, supportive and sustainable and promotes student learning
    - The school motivates all students and respects the diversity of learners and cultures in the community
    - School offers programs, activities or support services beyond academics to address students' social and emotional needs
    - School calendar and day are set to provide extra supports to ensure that students are able to meet and exceed academic goals
    - Schedule for communication to parents/students is timely and allows for due process, includes strategies to prepare students for transitions and strategies for those students who are not on schedule, presents a clear and fair system that complies with students' due process rights
    - Structures that foster the development of authentic, sustained, caring, respectful relationships among all stakeholders within school
    - Behavioral expectations and social supports that reflect the school's mission and comply with all applicable laws and regulations
  - Assessment
    - Establishes a culture of continuous improvement and accountability for student learning
    - Develops assessments that shape and inform instruction on an ongoing basis and develop data that's used to gauge student, teacher and school progress through formative and summative assessment
    - Student learning measured with multiple forms of assessments/metrics
    - Develops educational goals and performance metrics that are SMART – Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Reflect the Mission and Time-Specific
    - Develops assessments that are appropriately aligned with curriculum, instruction, and adopted standards

- Provides evidence of how data will influence instruction, professional development and curricular adjustments
  - Parent Engagement
    - Parent engagement strategies that integrate and mobilize parents within the school community as conduits for student success
    - Capacity to communicate effectively with parents and families
    - Parent engagement strategies that integrate and mobilize parents within the school community as conduits for student success
2. Is the School a Viable Organization
- Governance Structures and Organizational Design
    - School has articulated appropriate roles, responsibilities, and decision-making structure for school community members (including Board of Trustees and school leadership)
    - An accountability structure that provides effective oversight of the educational program and fiscal components of the school is in place and utilized
    - Board regularly reviews a data dashboard of student achievement and fiscal management that forms the basis for Board discussions and decisions
    - Board has diverse skill set that lends itself to strong educational / operational oversight
    - Board has an articulated process for ongoing policy development, Board member development and self-evaluation
    - Organizational charts are aligned with mission; roles and responsibilities are clearly defined
    - Board has developed essential strategic partnerships with organizations that support the mission of the school
  - Community Support
    - School Leadership demonstrated responsiveness to the unique needs and interests of the community to be served
    - School has established a presence in the community and has buy in from community members
3. Is the School in Compliance with Applicable Laws and Regulations
- Special Populations
    - Well-defined plan and sufficient capacity to service the learning needs of Special Education students, English Language Learners
    - School adequately addresses the academic and non academic needs of students in need of remediation, students with disabilities, students with interrupted formal education, and gifted students
    - There is a coherent plan for meeting the non-academic needs of students with disabilities, students with interrupted formal education, and other populations
    - School employs a process to identify students at risk of not meeting expectations and creates intervention plans and follow up
    - School demonstrates a comprehensive recruitment, enrollment and retention approach that is sensitive to the diverse needs of students
    - School admission policy and lottery preferences serve to create a student body that reflects community demographics and give a preference to community school district residents
  - Safety and Security
    - School is well maintained
    - Transitions and student gatherings are orderly and well supervised
    - Expectations for student behavior are well known and are enforced fairly
    - School is current with all safety recruitments and drills.
    - AED machines are in operation and school staff is trained in CPR