



Charter School Renewal Report
Charter Schools Office
2011-2012

IMAGINE ME LEADERSHIP CHARTER SCHOOL ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT

MARCH 2012

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

Imagine Me Leadership Charter School is an elementary school serving approximately 160 students from kindergarten through second grade in the 2011-2012 school year.¹ The school opened in 2010 with grades K-1. The school is under the terms of its first charter and is projected to reach its full grade span, K-5, during its current term, which expires January 11, 2015.² The school is currently housed in a private facility in District 19.³

The school enrolls new students in grades K-2. There were 137 students on the waitlist after the Spring 2011 lottery.⁴ The student body includes 82.1% Free and Reduced Lunch students, compared to 74.8% in the district; 13.5% special education students, compared to 14.8% in the district; and 1.9% English language learners, compared to 11.8% in the district.⁵ The average attendance rate for the 2011-2012 school year to date was 92.3%.⁶ The school scored Average on the Academic Expectations, Communication, Engagement, and Safety & Respect sections of the NYC DOE School Survey in 2010-2011; 47% of the school's parents responded to the survey, and 75% of the school's teachers.⁷

The school has not yet earned a grade on the NYC DOE Progress Report and has not yet had any grades eligible for the New York State test.

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 March 12, 2012:

- Daree Lewis, Director of Oversight, NYC DOE CSO
- Laurie Price, Director of Operations, NYC DOE CSO
- Debra Schwartzman, Senior Director, NYC DOE CSO

¹ Self-reported by school on Annual Site Visit Data Collection Form dated 2/29/2012

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 2/29/2012

⁵ NYC DOE ATS system as of 4/3/2012

⁶ Self-reported by school on Annual Site Visit Data Collection Form dated 2/29/2012

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

Part 2: Findings

Areas of Strength:

- The school has established a warm environment conducive to learning.
 - Classrooms were print rich with rubrics, rules and directives posted for students to use. Classrooms shared common themes; each with a math center, a social studies center and word wall.
 - Positive reinforcement and self-affirmation of students' culture is reflected in class projects and activities, with a focus on goal-setting and aspirations. On the day of the visit, many student works were posted including the kindergartener's "What do I want to be" passages.
 - Classrooms had a low student to adult ratio, with at least a lead teacher and educational assistant in every classroom, that allows the teachers to provide more differentiated and small group instruction.
 - Teachers were observed using praise and positive reinforcement to encourage appropriate behavior.

- The school fosters a supportive teaching environment that enables teachers to focus on instruction.
 - Grade team teachers are provided with two collaborative planning periods daily Monday through Thursday, and a two hour period on Friday, that gives teachers time to plan across the grade. Teachers reported strong grade team collaboration.
 - Educational assistants staffed in every classroom provide support with lessons and classroom management.
 - A new position was created and filled for a Director of Curriculum and Instruction, who aids in lesson planning and teacher coaching, by giving immediate and frequent feedback. The Director facilitates the Friday planning meetings to discuss data around literacy.
 - Every week a literacy consultant and a differentiation learning consultant come in to work with the teachers. A math consultant comes in three times a month.

- The school has begun to take measures to ensure a safe environment, in response to previous staff feedback.
 - A code of conduct and a revised discipline policy has been implemented in the school.
 - A new position was created and filled for a Dean of Students, who has been reported to have a positive impact on the teaching and administrative staff, focuses on Positive Behavior Facilitation (PBF). The Dean guides the discipline, but is not just punitive and includes celebrations for achievement, such as a pizza party for students who are showing improvement.
 - School leadership has reduced the amount that parents can "pop-in" to classrooms and other activities, in order to give more structure and prevent classroom distractions.
 - Cameras have been installed throughout the school to provide added security.

- The school utilizes rigorous assessments to monitor student progress.
 - School leadership demonstrates forward thinking on the types of assessments administered in their use of state practice tests as assessment tools to gauge where to target interventions and monitor strengths and mastery.
 - Teachers all rely on student records and assessments to determine guided reading groups and small-group instruction.
 - Benchmarks for reading and math are established at the beginning of the year. Teachers report that they focus on moving the students up level by level.

Areas of Growth:

- There appears to be a challenge in communication between administration and staff to ensure that the goals and vision for the school are consistent.
 - Teachers reported that they receive mixed messages from the administration around the prioritized goals of the school. They also discussed a lack of clarity around what the vision for the school is and that this impacts their day-to-day planning.
 - Although school leadership has taken steps to improve the safety of the school environment, staff reported continued inconsistencies and changes around the implementation of the revised code of conduct and the discipline consequences confuse staff and students. For example, teachers reported that there are no repercussions with their lateness policy. When the revised code of conduct was disseminated, the school leaders did not conduct a professional development on it for teachers to be trained in it.
 - Teachers reported inconsistent expectations around academics and teaching. The educational assistants reported that the curriculum changes and that they will start with one concept but may not finish it.
- Across classrooms, there appears to be challenges in classroom management and inconsistencies in student engagement.
 - Teachers in classrooms observed did not mitigate low-level behavior problems that could become larger problems. Teachers noted that consequences were enforced uneven.
 - During the observation, students were noted to have frequent time off task and were not held accountable for small group work. The group work was not well defined creating a loud classroom environment, where students were confused as to their task.
 - Teachers were observed not giving enough time for students to respond or extensions to the lesson, which led to time management issues and students not understanding the lesson.
- The school appears to experience challenges with parent engagement and accountability.
 - Although the school's parent association was reinstated in September 2012, the school does not have a parent representative on their board.
 - The school should continue to encourage parental involvement, as they have begun to through a parent newsletter, phone calls for student positive behavior and achievement, a parent log, and informal breakfasts with the principal.
 - Teachers reported little parent accountability in support of the school wide discipline policy and revised code of conduct.
- The school appears to need further improvement of teacher professional development and their employment of human capital.
 - Teachers interviewed discussed a need for more vertical alignment between all of the grades in the school. Although they described a strong collaboration within grades, the teachers reported wanting more vertical alignment not only of instruction, but of data sharing as well.
 - School leadership recognizes the need to more effectively use the educational assistants, and should continue to foster their development. The new executive director started an Educational Assistant Institute, where the educational assistant is mentored by the lead teacher for professional development, to learn best practices and how to create lesson plans.
 - The school should continue to expand the development of the educational assistants, in order to provide focused differentiated learning.
- The school appears to have challenges with retaining school leadership.

- According to the Board minutes, at the beginning of the school year, an Interim Acting Executive Director was hired. A month into the position, the Interim Acting Executive Director submitted her resignation.
 - Three months after the first Interim Acting Executive Director resigned, a new Interim Acting Executive Director was hired, but the position was only to be filled until the Board was able to hire a new Executive Director. At the time of the visit, it was unclear if the Board intended for the Interim to remain at the school and become the new Executive Director or if they were still in the process of recruiting.
- To be in compliance with state mandates that are being implemented, the school should continue documented outreach to ELL students in order to match district averages.
 - The school's population includes 1.9% ELL students, which is lower than the district average of 12%.

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