



Charter School Annual Site Visit Report
Charter Schools Office
2010-2011

WILLIAMSBURG CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT

MAY 26, 2011

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

Williamsburg Charter High School (WCHS) is a high school serving approximately 944 students from grade nine through grade twelve in the 2010-2011 school year.¹ The school opened in 2004 with grade nine. It is currently functioning at scale.² It is currently in leased private space at 198 Varet Street, Brooklyn in District 14.³

WCHS population comprises 28.8% Black, 66.3% Hispanic, 3.9% White, and .3% Asian students; 75.2% of students are designated as Title I.⁴ The student body includes 3.9% English language learners and 14.0% special education students.

The school earned a D on its progress report in 2009-2010, a C in 2008-2009 and a B in 2007-2008. The average attendance rate for the school year 2009–2010 was 91.1%.⁵ The school is in good standing with state and federal accountability.⁶

WCHS is part of the Believe High School Network (Network), a charter management organization. WCHS states that the relationship was approved by the Board of Trustees of WCHS in August 2009; the arrangement was ultimately denied approval by the NYC DOE Charter Schools Office.⁷ The Network was retained to provide academic programming, budgeting and financial reporting, back office support, student and teacher recruitment, and school policies (e.g. HR) among other support services. WCHS, working with and through the Network, manages student information via ATS, orders supplies, and maintains its private facilities arrangements. The fee structure was based on an initial 20% of per pupil revenues and Excess Cost Funding with an annual reduction of 1%.⁸

Annual Review Process Overview:

The NYC DOE Charter Schools Office 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:

- Sonia Park, Senior Director, CSO
- Bertram Wyman, Analyst, CSO
- Kathryn Lattimer, Chief Operating Officer, Office of Operations and Support
- Simeon Stolzberg, Consultant

¹ NYC DOE ATS system

² NYC DOE ATS system and charter agreement

³ NYC DOE Location Code Generating System database

⁴ Demographic Data drawn from NYC DOE ATS System; Title I percentage from 2008 NY State Report Cards

⁵ NYC DOE School Progress Report. This document is posted on the NYC DOE website at <http://www.schools.nyc.gov> and is also included in Part 7 of this report.

⁶ New York State Education Department - www.nysed.gov

⁷ The nature of the relationship as viewed by the CSO is disputed by WCHS.

⁸ As delineated in the executed management agreement between CMO and School. Excess Cost Funds are defined by the agreement as ‘ all public entitlement funding other than Per Pupil Operating Expenses, that is not subject to restrictions from any Regulatory Authority with respect to how such public entitlement funding is distributed’

Part 2: Findings

Areas of Strength

- WCHS fosters a safe and comfortable learning environment which encourages both academic success and teacher professional development.
 - On the day of the visit students were well-behaved and respectful in classrooms and public spaces.
 - Classrooms were observed to be spacious, clean, and orderly.
 - The school has two professional development early release days each month. Professional development sessions include network and whole-school trainings as well as grade- or subject-specific work.
 - Staff holds regular meetings in grade teams and departments with network-based directors in each core subject area.
- The school has an established curriculum, which it continues to refine based on student needs.
 - Teachers reported having scope and sequences that they modify each year. They plan units and lessons throughout the year.
 - The school has a sequenced Latin program adapted by the publisher to be aligned to New York standards. School leaders reported a 90 percent pass rate for their Latin requirement.
 - Advanced Placement courses are offered in a range of subjects and will reportedly be expanded next year.
 - Instructional leaders described processes for reviewing and revising curriculum with teacher input and some had already begun planning for adoption of the Common Core standards.
 - The school revised its 9th grade literacy and math programs to ensure students have foundational skills.
- The school administers a range of assessments and collects and analyzes the results.
 - A literacy diagnostic assessment is administered to all incoming students.
 - Literacy assessments developed by WestEd and teacher-created assessments in other subjects are administered monthly to track student progress.
 - WCHS uses mid-terms and finals as summative exams.
 - Teachers described using a variety of resources to develop assessments with items aligned to standards. For example, a math teacher described using Scantron to identify common mistakes and re-teach and spiral those topics.
 - A teacher noted the practice of grading student writing using a standardized rubric with teachers across the grade.
 - The school introduced this year a practice ACT test to replace the ITBS as a more accurate Regents aligned assessment.
- The school has developed robust student support services.
 - The school reports having 19 collaborative team teaching (CTT) classes, 7 achievement centers (SETTS), and 11 self-contained classes. WCHS also has two ESL classes.
 - The school has a number of guidance counselors, social-emotional counselors and social workers who work with students on a range of issues.
 - Guidance counselors track student credits and Regents pass rates and meet regularly with students to keep them on track for graduation and college.
 - Two speech teachers are on staff. A “Regents boot camp” provides targeted instruction to students who still need to pass Regents exams.
 - WCHS provides tutoring to students during the lunch period.

Areas of Growth

- The school should continue to establish a culture of high student engagement, strong academic rigor and consistency across the school.

- The school has introduced a number of significant changes this year; the implementation of some programs and procedures was not always systematic or consistent and their impact was not yet clear.
 - In several classrooms students were observed with their heads on their desks and were allowed to disengage from instruction without consequences. Questions and activities did not effectively challenge or engage all students.
 - WCHS has an advisory program, which is 10 minutes every morning plus an hour on Wednesdays. Teachers reported that students were often tardy to morning advisory and their opinion of the value of advisory varied.
 - Teachers also reported inconsistent expectations for the assignment and weighting of homework.
 - In January the school decided to stop using out-of-school suspensions (40 for 2010-11) for most infractions and now has significantly more in-school suspensions, growing from 3 in 2009-10 to 101 in 2010-11⁹. WCHS should continue to work with the Deans to establish a consistent approach to discipline.
 - The number of Deans has decreased from four at the beginning of the year to two. Some teachers questioned the consistency of discipline enforcement and were frustrated by the process for assigning students to detention.
 - Some teachers and staff stated parent engagement is an area for improvement.
- WCHS has entered into a management arrangement with the Believe Network for academic, financial, and back office supportive services that has not been approved or recognized by the CSO¹⁰. In any event, the school should define the roles of key staff members and the school's relationship with the network office.
 - The nature and delineation of responsibilities between school and network staff was unclear. For example, school staff was unable to clearly articulate the state of the school's financial and budgetary status.
 - With significant changes in leadership and the organization chart, some teachers said clarity of roles is an issue.
 - One person is both the network superintendent and interim principal for the Williamsburg Charter High School. Next year the superintendent role will be eliminated and she will just focus her attention on the role of school principal.
 - Some teachers were not clear about the role and responsibilities of the network staff, even though they were based in the same building.
- The school is encouraged to improve communication between school leaders and staff.
 - Several staff members interviewed expressed that directives from school leadership were often unclear.
 - Two staff members interviewed were unable to articulate the roles and responsibilities of key members of the school leadership team.
 - Two teachers interviewed stated they received negligible feedback for submitted lesson plans.
 - One teacher stated that the process of evaluating teachers was unclear and there was a lack of common academic expectations.
- The Board of Trustees should meet bi-monthly, as specified in the school's bylaws.
 - The Board met, with quorum, only 4 times from June 23, 2010 to March 16, 2011. The Annual Meeting, held on March 1, 2011, did not make quorum with only three board members present.
 - The Board is encouraged to further develop, diversify and grow its board beyond the trustees currently serving.

⁹ WCHS self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (5/17/11)

¹⁰ The nature of the relationship as viewed by the CSO is disputed by WCHS.

- The Board of Trustees should enact corrective measures in order to be in full compliance with the 2010 amended Charter School Act regarding conflicts of interest. .
- WCHS should enact corrective measures in order to be in full compliance with the amended Charter School Act and Education Law Sections 2590-h(15)(a) and 414(1)(c). Areas of concern regard meeting target rates for enrollment and retention English Language Learners (ELL) and Special Education and the establishment of a formal the Parent Organization.
 - Under the revised Charter Schools Act, charter schools are to meet a set of target rates for the enrollment and retention of students who are English Language Learners and students with disabilities. The school should continue to refine and document its outreach strategies for recruitment and retention of ELLs in order to be comparable to the district, CSD 14. WCHS reported using a variety of recruitment strategies and translating materials into Spanish and Polish. The school has a population of 3.9%¹¹ ELLs, which is lower than CSD 14's 12.9%¹².
 - WCHS should continue to refine and document its outreach strategies for recruitment and retention of Special Education students in order to be comparable to CSD 14. The school has a population (127 out of 865) 14.7%¹³, which is marginally lower than CSD 14's 17.3%¹⁴.
 - Education Law Sections 2590-h(15)(a) and 414(1)(c) require all NYC charters in to establish Parent Associations and that meetings of the parent association are, among, other things, open to the general public. WCHS should continue to strengthen parent participation and engagement via the establishment of a Parent Organization which is formally organized and meets regularly.
- WCHS should enact corrective measures in order to be in full compliance with its Second Renewal Charter Agreement and School Monitoring Plan (2009). Areas of concern regard Governance, Management, and Finance.
 - In accordance with Section 2.12 (a) Governance of the Agreement and subsection C of the Monitoring Plan, the WCHS Board of Trustees must submit within 5 business days any additions or removal of board trustees. The name of any proposed member of the Board must be submitted with background information to the CSO office for approval. The WCHS Board has not provided this required information for board changes that have taken place from 2009-10 academic year to 2010-11.
 - In accordance with Section 2.12 (c) Governance of the Agreement, each Trustee that has served on the board shall annually file a Disclosure of Financial Interest report with the State Education Department (SED). The WCHS Board had submitted a Disclosure of Financial Interest report for only one Board member to SED for the 2009-10 academic year.
 - In accordance with Section 2.13 Management, WCHS must have CSO approval prior to entering into a contractual relationship with a management organization (Believe High School Network). The school sought CSO approval *after* such relationship was established and has continued the contractual relationship though the CSO has denied the relationship, in violation of Section 2.13 of WCHS's Charter.¹⁵
 - In accordance with Section 5.8 Collateral for Debt, WHCS may not pledge or assign per pupil funds in connection with the purchase, construction, acquisition, reconstruction, rehabilitation or improvement of a school facility. Based on the NYCDOE's current understanding of the agreements, WHCS has violated this clause in its term and line of credit agreements with the Nonprofit Finance Fund.

¹¹ WCHS self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (5/17/11)

¹² ATS data, (June 30, 2011)

¹³ WCHS self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (5/17/11)

¹⁴ ATS data, (June 30, 2011)

¹⁵ The nature of the relationship as viewed by the CSO is disputed by WCHS.

- WCHS is being audited by the NY State Office of Audit Services and under investigation by the NY State Office of the Attorney General concerning its relationship with the Believe Network, corporate governance, and financial practices.

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 or 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