



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

CULTURAL ARTS ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL AT SPRING CREEK
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT

MAY 2011

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

Cultural Arts Academy Charter School (CAACS) at Spring Creek is an Elementary school serving approximately 120 students from grade kindergarten through grade one in the 2010-2011 school year.¹ The school opened in 2010 with grades kindergarten through one. It has plans to grow to serve students grades kindergarten through twelve.² It is currently housed in private space at 1400 Linden Boulevard, Brooklyn in District 18.³

The school population comprises 90.8% Black, 3.3% Hispanic, 1.6% White, and 0% Asian students. Twenty five point eight percent students are designated as Title I.⁴ The student body includes less than 1% of English language learners and 11.7% special education students.⁵

The school is in its first year and has not yet earned a Progress Report grade or state/federal accountability designation. The average attendance rate for the 2010-11 school year was self-reported as 94.3%.⁶

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 NYC DOE 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 6, 2011:

- Sonia Park, Senior Director, NYC DOE CSO
- Sylvia Rabiner, 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 CAACS self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (4/29/11)

⁶ Ibid.

Part 2: Findings

Areas of Strength

- CAACS has developed a strong culture that encourages academic performance and allows all students to interact in a supportive learning community.
 - The school has a set of shared expectations, routines and procedures that was observed in classrooms. There is a school-wide discipline policy, the Olympic Record, which encourages respectful and courteous student behavior by clearly defining expectations and consequences.
 - Students are encouraged to resolve conflicts by using respectful language and tone, through individual guidance and positive role modeling. In an observed first grade math class, the teacher helped a group of students to resolve a conflict by asking them to tell her what had happened, reminding them to communicate with “kind words” and asking them to apologize to one another.
 - Students are additionally supported by individual Mentors (who meet daily with students in the morning), a Guidance Counselor, Dean of Students and a Parent Resource Coordinator.
 - On the day of the visit, teachers routinely use language such as “ I like the way Jordan is putting her books away”, or “One, Two, Three, Eyes On Me” and “Track The Teacher” in viewed classrooms to encourage student participation and attention to the lesson.
 - Classrooms are well-appointed and attractive with tools, charts and visual aids posted to keep students focused and on track. Among these were word walls, Steps for Solving Problems, 8 Habits of the Heart, Big Goal charts tracking student progress, RACE To Win guidelines for respectful behavior. Each classroom prominently displayed the Big Goals.
 - Celebration of student work is evident in classrooms and public spaces. For example, science projects created for a science fair were displayed in the school lobby. Exemplary student work was posted on Champion Scholars bulletin boards. The school reported holding monthly celebrations for scholars.

- The school has developed a cohesive arts-infused instructional framework and professional development program.
 - CAACS has a commitment to provide a standards-based academic and arts education program. The arts are infused through an interdisciplinary curriculum. In first grade, Dance and Mathematics class is aligned with the math class and drama is infused in social studies. There is a Spotlight on Music Program from McMillan-McGraw Hill. All the students are learning to play the recorder this year.
 - Teachers plan units using the Understanding by Design model across all classrooms.
 - Teachers have 45 minutes of daily planning and meeting time in addition to full staff development days distributed throughout the school year, summer months and Saturdays. Professional development is teacher led to share best practices, develop interdisciplinary projects, reflect on peer observations and plan units and lessons.
 - Teachers are formally evaluated three times a year with informal evaluations occurring almost daily with immediate feedback provided.
 - Teachers use data to inform instruction. Formal and informal teacher-developed assessments are utilized to track student progress continually. This year teachers engaged in an inquiry data project during which they tracked student data in all subject areas, analyzed the data and made presentations to their colleagues.
 - Professional development encompasses both instruction and social and emotional child development. Teachers have read “Teach Like A Champion, have received training in the UBD model, training in differentiated instruction, and attended a five week course about bullying developed by Arts Horizon.

- The school employs parent engagement strategies that integrate and mobilize parents within the school community as conduits for student success.
 - CAACS has an active, informal parent association that meets approximately every other week and there is a parent representative on the Board of Trustees (voting member).
 - The school employs “I Care” online system which enables the parent coordinator to track parent participation in school events and meetings.
 - The school hosts many events for parents, among these are Orientation Day, Tour Day, Curriculum Night, Thanksgiving Family Dinner and a Winter Concert. There are monthly parent engagement meetings.
 - The school has programs for parents like Fit for Life which encourages healthy living.
 - There is a resource center where parents can learn how to better assist their children with homework as well as discuss social and emotional issues with the Parent Resource Coordinator.
 - The school provides parents with an informative Parent Handbook.

- CAACS is self-reflective in terms of its operations management. The school has a conservative budgeting approach supported by fundraising which is coordinated by the Board Chair and School Principal.
 - The school is in a 5-year lease with the 1st year’s rent waived. In year 2, rent will be approximately \$240,000 and will increase gradually over the remaining years of the lease.
 - The Board Chair is spearheading the capital campaign for a new facility that will be built for the school.

Areas of Growth

- CAACS should enact corrective measures in order to be in full compliance with the 2010 amended Charter School Act. Areas of concern regard the Parent Organization and meeting target rates for enrollment and retention of English Language Learners (ELL), Special Education Students, and Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) students.
 - CAACS should continue to strengthen parent participation and engagement via the establishment of a parent organization which is formally organized.
 - The school should continue to document outreach to ELL students in order to be comparable to the district, CSD 18. The school reported using a variety of recruitment strategies and making the application available in several languages. The school’s population includes less than 1%⁷ ELLs, which is lower than CSD 18’s 6.3%⁸.
 - The school should continue to document outreach to Special Education students in order to be comparable to the district, CSD 18. The school’s population includes 11.7%⁹ Special Education students, which is lower than CSD 18’s 14.1%¹⁰.
 - CAACS should continue to document outreach to students eligible for FRL in order to be comparable to the district, CSD 18. The school’s population includes 28.1%¹¹, which is lower than CSD 18’s 73%¹².

⁷ CAACS self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (4/29/11)

⁸ ATS data, (June 30, 2011)

⁹ CAACS self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (4/29/11)

¹⁰ ATS data, (June 30, 2011)

¹¹ Demographic Data drawn from NYC DOE ATS System; Title I percentage from 2008 NY State Report Cards

¹² ATS data, (June 30, 2011)

- There are eight first year teachers currently teaching at CAACS and additional new teachers will join the faculty as the school adds grades. The school is encouraged to continue to provide extensive professional development and support to build teacher capacity.
 - The school should continue its professional development to deepen teacher understanding of interdisciplinary curriculum, differentiated instruction, questioning and assessment to expand strategies for their implementation and to ensure consistency across classrooms.
 - Teachers are expected to develop projects in the core subjects. The school is encouraged to provide professional development for teachers in the preparation and implementation of effective projects.
 - During the site visit, some classes were taught by two or more teachers while other classes had only one teacher. The school should examine its resources so that maximum resources are allocated to the classroom consistently.
 - The school should continue to develop a plan for how it will provide instructional leadership to articulate curriculum planning, cross grade conversations and professional development to meet the needs of the additional grades it will serve.
- The present school schedule entails many transitions between classes as well as within class lessons. Classroom management of the transitions was observed to be variable from class to class.
 - CAACS should continue to work with teachers to develop a consistent approach to transitions and class management. The school should examine its present method of departmentalization to determine whether moving students between several classrooms should be modified to increase time on instruction.
- CAACS is supported by the Christian Cultural Center via a gift in year 1 of \$42,000 and the waived rent for the facility, which is owned by CCC. The school is encouraged to be fiscally conservative and seek additional public funds that are available. For example, federally available Title 1 funds were not applied for and the school does not currently participate in the Federal School Lunch Program.

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