



Charter School Annual Site Visit Report
Charter Schools Office
2009-2010

ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP
CHARTER SCHOOL
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT

MAY 2010

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

Academic Leadership Charter School is an elementary school serving approximately 150 students from kindergarten through first grade in the 2009-2010 school year.¹ The school opened in 2009 with students in kindergarten and first grade, and it will grow to serve students in kindergarten through fifth grade.² It is currently housed in a DOE facility in District 7.³

The school population comprises 39% Black, 48% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. 89% of students are designated at Title I.⁴ The student body includes 10% English language learners and 8% special education students. Boys account for 44% of the students enrolled and girls account for 56%.⁵

The school is in its first year and has not yet received a Progress Report or a state/federal accountability designation.

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 Accountability Team 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:

- Marian Mogulescu, Education Consultant
- Aamir Raza, Director of Oversight and Policy, NYC DOE Charter Schools Office

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 Student Demographic data is inputted by school staff into the ATS enrollment database and summarized by NYC DOE staff.

Part 2: Findings

What the school does well

- The school utilizes differentiated instruction and an integrated curriculum to promote content proficiency and actively engage students.
 - Literacy is infused in all subject areas, evidenced by bulletin board displays in the hallways, student work on classroom walls, all content areas using writing and reading in lesson plans, and abundant vocabulary work. The balanced literacy approach is reflected through mini-lessons, workshop sessions, and texts that include a variety of subject area materials.
 - Students were actively engaged in whole group lessons, small group instruction, and independent reading as they work on teacher-made handouts. Students' artworks are related to content from social studies, reading, math and science.
 - Students who need extra support receive instruction in small groups or individually, in the classroom or outside for specific needs; teachers form groups of students for specific lessons, and vary the groups to avoid tracking while still addressing student learning needs.
 - There are two adults in each classroom plus special education support.
 - Literature, the idea of "the story," and real-life experiences drive the curriculum.

- The school employs a rigorous assessment system and strong data tracking tools to monitor student performance and inform teaching and learning.
 - The school uses Terra Nova and TERC Math assessments. Interim assessments are charted and reviewed by staff to track individual and whole-class progress.
 - Documentation of student work and evidence of learning is easily accessible, as teachers maintain folders for each student in each subject area that include journals, homework and class projects.
 - Process assessments determine and support individual work in the afterschool program.

- The school fosters a safe learning environment that encourages student expression and ensures the security of students and faculty.
 - The respectful and collaborative culture in each classroom is evident in the way staff and students interact/help/speak with each other.
 - Guidelines for positive focus on learning are collaboratively developed by staff and students, and posted in student-friendly language.
 - Student work is displayed in both the classroom and the hallways; student pictures accompany the work in celebration of students' accomplishments.

- The school has created a strong culture that encourages academic excellence and allows all students to interact in a supportive learning community.
 - School Shows evidence tremendous excitement and interest; all classes are able to sing and share books they have read.
 - The school's extended school day and year deepen the focus on learning.
 - Trips to museums, the Statue of Liberty, the Aquarium, Queens Meadow Farm, local stores, etc. facilitate student connections between course content and real-world experiences.
 - Daily agendas are consistent from classroom to classroom; routines are clear and implemented in each of the classrooms, allowing for consistency of expectations throughout the school.

- Students are encouraged to be responsible with their learning; they work collaboratively with their peers and, while adults support and guide the activities, students' voices, questions and understandings are paramount.

What the school needs to improve

- The school should continue to improve academic rigor, engagement and consistency of instruction.
 - Weekly Professional Development support informs Lesson and Unit planning; the school should continue to create more critical thinking opportunities where students respond to, discuss and interpret higher-level comprehension questions.
 - Teachers should work on helping students articulate questions that arise during their study in addition to the ones teachers pose.
- The staff uses many modalities in the classroom instruction; continuing to provide experiences and additional entry points for student learning, the school should continue its quest for Arts infusion, adding additional staff or partnering with agencies/institutions as the school grows and expands.
- The school's focus on Literacy is omnipresent; examining mathematics instruction and strategies is a stated goal for additional exploration.

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