



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

BROOKLYN ASCEND
CHARTER SCHOOL
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT

JUNE 2010

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

Brooklyn Ascend Charter School is an elementary/middle/high school serving approximately 250 students from kindergarten through grade 3 in the 2009-2010 school year.¹ The school opened in 2008 with students in kindergarten through grade 2, and will grow to serve students in kindergarten through grade 12.² It is currently housed in a private facility in District 18.³

The school population comprises 93% Black, 4% Hispanic, 0% White, and 0% Asian students. 83% of students are designated as Title I.⁴ The student body includes 1% English language learners and 9% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%.⁵

The school earned a B on its 2009-2010 Progress Report. The average attendance rate for the school year 2009 - 2010 was 95.8%.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 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.

⁶ NYC DOE School Progress Report. This document is posted on the NYC DOE website at <http://www.schools.nyc.gov>.

Part 2: Findings

What the school does well

- The school has developed a cohesive, strength-based instructional and professional development program.
 - Teachers work towards academic achievement through the SABIS approach that promises “to prepare all students for college, equip them with the ability and desire for lifelong learning, and strengthen their civic, ethical and moral values.”
 - Teaching strategies focus on best practices, using direct instruction with particular attention to specified pacing charts and frequent testing of point and perfect classroom practice.
 - Staff members look at data to inform instruction and planning during weekly grade-level meetings.
 - Three-week Summer Institute Planning forms the basis for professional development all year. Teachers meet weekly with the Director of Instruction and develop specific goals for two-week periods for review and support. PD includes work with lesson plan templates, whole school systems, social and emotional issues, schoolwide concerns and goals, etc.
 - The Director of Instruction maintains contact with and support of each teacher by visiting the classrooms each week, working on review of lesson plans and teacher practice, holding individual conferences, and articulating strategies that push towards academic and whole school development
 - The Dean of Students and Director of Special Education are in all classrooms frequently to support students and staff working on specific learning and behavioral concerns. The Director and Director of Instruction are presences as well, so that all are working together on overseeing implementation of the direct instruction model and progress toward the specific goals of the school.
 - Currently the school teaches grades K-3, and while the classrooms reflect grade level differences in content, there are consistent teaching strategies and school routines throughout.

- The school employs a rigorous assessment system and strong data tracking tools to monitor student performance and inform teaching and learning.
 - The SABIS instructional program guides instruction, documents progress of each student in each grade through three week and semester cycles, and provides posters and other materials. Student levels and improvement are accessible to staff as they regularly examine and review student achievement.
 - The STAR program includes computer-administered individual reading tests every six weeks.
 - The Terra Nova assessment is administered at the beginning and end of each year.
 - Classroom assessments include writing tests, i.e. letter writing.
 - Students’ progress is communicated to parents on a weekly basis and during report card meeting family appointments.

- The school fosters a safe learning environment that encourages student learning and ensures the security of students and faculty.
 - The respectful and collaborative culture in each classroom is evident in the respectful tones that staff and students when interacting with each other.
 - Clear and consistent routines and expectations are evident in the classrooms, the cafeteria, and the hallway transitions; behavior guidelines

- are posted in classroom signs such as “HALLS” (Hands at your sides, Attention forward, Lines are straight, Silence); hand signals are clear, other clapping and finger snapping and gestures are used for appreciation of responses and reminding of focus, etc.
 - Motivational, Study and Behavior Guidelines are posted in each room; students repeat “I am hungry for knowledge to go to college” and “Show what I know” to deepen focus and increase effort.
 - Student work is displayed on classroom walls and on the hallway bulletin boards, reinforcing academic goals and celebrating student achievement.
- The school has developed a strong culture that encourages academic excellence and allows all students to interact in a supportive learning community.
 - The morning meeting/breakfast is used to help students focus on the learning goals for the day: students enter quietly and have breakfast in their class groups; the teacher then leads homework review and inspirational call and response phrases; finally, students help clean up to share in the care of the school community. Students responded easily and quickly when asked to pick up items that had fallen on the classroom floors.
 - Students are guided to resolve conflicts and concerns by using respectful language and tone, both through individual guidance and through the positive role modeling of the adults in the learning community.
 - Routines are implemented clearly in all classrooms, allowing for consistency of expectations throughout the school.
 - Present in all classrooms are posters with agendas and schedules, steps for the writing process, literature titles, number lines, alphabets, vocabulary words, signs for hand signals, word walls, a “bank of knowledge,” days of the year and weekdays, hallway behavior guidelines, and Text Talk materials, which support the academic focus and the learning community throughout the school. The rooms also each contain one or two computers.
 - Celebration of student work is evident in hallways through bulletin boards that reflect units of study as in Literature by Faith Ringgold, Prepositions, Organisms, etc. The school’s Core Values are also prominently displayed on banners in the hallway.

What the school needs to improve

- The school should continue to develop additional ways for the students to demonstrate their mastery in different subject areas.
 - The testing program is strong and implemented soundly; consideration may be given to cross-curriculum projects which would help students expand their ways of learning through providing additional ways to deepen critical learning skills.
 - The school should consider moving from informal oral experiences that students lead in classroom subject activities to more formal presentations, in order to support practice in sharing mastery of subject matter, defending using evidence, responding to questions, and “on-the-spot” thinking.
- The school should continue to analyze student work as an indicator of mastery.
 - The school should further develop the process of analyzing sample student work during staff meetings, and using students’ work as additional data that can inform ideas for lesson planning.
 - The school should continue displaying more student work in classrooms, and in the hallways to celebrate effort and the value the school places on the energy and effort students demonstrate with their studies.

- The school should continue to work on ways to sustain their consistent expectations and routines through next year's growth.
 - The school should consider developing activities and events that orient students and families to the routines and roles all play in achieving the goals of the school.
 - The school should continue deepening the focus on incorporating new staff into the emerging culture, supporting the learning curve that is natural to new staff becoming a part of a learning community.

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