



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

VOICE  
CHARTER SCHOOL  
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT

MAY 2010

# Part 1: Executive Summary

## **School Overview and History:**

VOICE Charter School is an elementary/middle school serving approximately 150 students from kindergarten through grade 2 in the 2009-2010 school year.<sup>1</sup> The school opened in 2008 with grades K-1 and plans to grow to serve students in K-8.<sup>2</sup> It is currently housed in a DOE facility in District 30.<sup>3</sup>

The school population comprises 16% Black, 47% Hispanic, 21% White, and 15% Asian students. 66% of students are designated at Title I.<sup>4</sup> The student body includes 13% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 39% of the students enrolled and girls account for 61%.<sup>5</sup>

The school is in its second year of operation and has not yet received a Progress Report. It is in good standing with state/federal accountability.

## **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:

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

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<sup>1</sup> NYC DOE ATS system

<sup>2</sup> NYC DOE ATS system and charter agreement

<sup>3</sup> NYC DOE Location Code Generating System database

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

<sup>5</sup> 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 has developed a healthy learning environment that nurtures, motivates and challenges students to achieve the highest level of academic excellence.
  - Rigorous and standards-driven curricula are utilized to meet the individual needs of students.
  - A concept of efficacy rests at the core of the school's academic culture – the school follows the belief that all human beings are born capable of advanced study in all subject areas. This philosophy is evident as one walks throughout the school, viewing print-rich classrooms and hallways that display individual and group achievement on all grade levels.
  - Classroom teaching and planning are differentiated and child-centered. Strategy charts are displayed in classrooms with tips on good reading, good writing, how to find the main idea, and how to write a story.
  - Guided reading and independent reading activities enable students to focus on comprehension, building vocabulary and participating in clarifying questioning sessions.
  - Mathematics teachers use visual aides and manipulative tools to address the needs of different types of learners.
  - A daily morning sing-a-long has been instituted to develop a learning community based upon respect, excellence and academic performance; practice, focused learning and listening skills are all developed through these community activities.
  - Performance-based instruction in choral singing guides students to develop creative and higher order thinking skills that apply to academic subject areas.
- Benchmark assessments are used to evaluate student progress and assist with teacher planning and delivery of instruction.
  - Differentiated instructional strategies are used to focus on individual student assessments: coaches analyze test results with teachers and plan re-teaching strategies, group modifications, and targeted assistance.
  - The school employs a variety of assessments including Fountas & Pinnell, Dibbels, Foundations, Kodaly, and Rubrics.
- Professional development supports teacher excellence and high student performance.
  - Teachers receive training on implementing NYS Standards.
  - Teachers plan and work collaboratively to incorporate best practices on all levels.
  - Teachers demonstrate student learning by meeting lesson objectives, planning together, and reviewing assessments, rubrics, tests, work samples and projects.
- Parent and community connections support the mission and vision of the school
  - Parents demonstrate a high interest in the school and curricula by attending parent conferences in large numbers and volunteering during the day to assist with school projects.
  - Parents understand and endorse the Parent Involvement Policy.
  - Parents assist with student attendance and homework completion, and participate in decisions relating to the education of their children.
  - The school has established outside professional contacts with Elmezzi Foundation, Public Allies, PAAP and the Noguchi Museum.
  - Special programs such as Usdan, Public Library Summer Reading Program and several music concerts all serve to enhance the school's mission and vision.
- The school is in good financial condition and maintains appropriate internal controls.

- As of May 31, 2010, the school possessed \$1,052,603 in current assets and \$875,718 in current liabilities. Therefore, for each outstanding dollar in current liability, the school possesses \$1.20 in current assets to meet its obligations.
- The school's long-term financial outlook appears good based on the total assets of \$1,090,065 and total liabilities of \$875,718. Therefore, for each dollar in long-term liability, the school possesses \$1.24 in long-term assets to meet its obligations.
- The school exercises appropriate internal controls on its financial systems.
- The school board is providing adequate and balanced oversight.
  - The board reviews reporting from the management, Terra Nova test scores, income statement and balance sheet, and attendance and suspension figures, among other data.
  - The board plans to continue improving the music program and engaging parents further in the school community.

### **What the school needs to improve**

- The school should continue to encourage teachers' collaborative work in supporting the school's mission.
  - Currently there is no space for teachers to plan and prepare lesson plans without distraction – the school should consider setting aside professional space for teachers to “call their own.”
- The school should continue developing purposeful structures a K-8 program at scale.
  - The school staff should begin to plan for higher level learning.
  - To sustain the focus on voice and the arts, the school should begin to look at and develop middle school curricula on instrumental practices.
  - The school should begin to plan for extending the elementary model through grade 8 or incorporating a middle school model for grades 6-8.
- The school should consider outreach efforts to diversify its student body.
  - In order to close the gender gap (39% males to 61% females), the school should develop a comprehensive plan to recruit and retain males.
  - Early parent outreach to the community coupled with an intensive program to expose the high quality instructional program with a choral component may encourage a wider participation in the application process.

## 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