



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

DREAM  
CHARTER SCHOOL  
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT

JUNE 2010

# Part 1: Executive Summary

## **School Overview and History:**

DREAM Charter School is an elementary and 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 will grow to serve students K-8.<sup>2</sup> It is currently housed in a DOE facility in District 4.<sup>3</sup>

The school population comprises 30% Black, 52% Hispanic, 3% White, and 0% Asian students. 83% of students are designated as Title I.<sup>4</sup> The student body includes 6% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%.<sup>5</sup>

The school has not yet received a Progress Report or a state/federal accountability designation. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 89%.<sup>6</sup>

## **Annual Review Process Overview:**

The NYC DOE Charter School 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 School 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, Charter School 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

## Part 2: Findings

### What the school does well

- The school implements differentiated instruction and an integrated curriculum to promote content proficiency and engage students.
  - In all content areas students are actively engaged in whole class lessons, small group lessons, independent reading, and working in station groups with teachers or on independent work.
  - The co-teaching model (at least two teachers plus additional staff in each classroom) supports differentiated instruction. Parallel teaching, small group instruction, teacher pairs, and team teaching are evident in all classrooms.
  - Students who needed extra support receive instruction in small groups or individually. There is CTT support, flexible grouping and, continuous meeting of teachers to reflect on and create/revise strategies for specific students.
  - Classes use reading and writing workshop approaches to encourage individual work in a variety of learning styles, and celebrate student work on the room walls and in the hallways.
  - 18% of students are special needs students, although others may qualify, school is working hard to address needs without formal classification.
  - Classrooms are co-taught across the school; administrative personnel are often in classrooms to work with students as well.
  - There are guided reading groups for specific reading support; mixed groups for independent reading and different experiences.
- The school employs a rigorous assessment system and strong data tracking tools to monitor student performance and inform teaching and learning.
  - The Fountas Pinnell track the reading and writing progress of each student in each grade, their levels and improvements are accessible to staff as they regularly examine and review student achievement.
  - Teachers know each student well and have multiple forms of student work and demonstration of learning for each child, evidenced through the folders each student has to organize student work in each subject and the regular weekly grade meetings where staff look at student work and determine strategies to support the learning needs.
  - The co-teaching model practiced by the staff allows implementation of ways to address varying learning styles; staff knows the students strengths and challenges.
- 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 clear in the way staff and students interact/help/speak with each other.
  - Guidelines for positive focus on learning are posted in student friendly language.
  - “Fill your Bucket” rewards acts of support and cooperation with the student name and effort on that are displayed in the hallways, reinforcing positive collaboration in students.
  - Personalization is implemented, not only in the classroom, but in the hallways where student work is displayed, and student pictures accompany their work in celebration.
  - School focus on helping students is “caring, safe, respectful and work smart” by incorporating strategies to help them deepen their skills.
- The school has created a strong culture that encourages academic excellence and allows all students to interact in the supportive learning community.
  - Each morning begins with breakfast in the cafeteria where parents, students and staff are together for the routine sharing of a meal.

- Students are guided to resolve conflicts and concerns by sentence starters and reminders in each room and from staff.
- The routines are clear and implemented in each of the classrooms allowing for consistency of expectations throughout the school.
- Classrooms have word walls, agendas, schedules, content area student work, and guidelines re content specific which support the academic focus and the learning community throughout the school.
- Students are encouraged to be responsible with their learning and their work with others. Opportunities for critical thinking skills are present as teachers and materials ask “why” to help students understand evidence and connections to other topics and personal lives are highlighted.
- There are at least 10 school wide events each year, two family meetings a month, many trips including Green Meadow Farm, Central Park, America Museum of Natural History, the Bronx Zoo, the Aquarium, etc.
- The Family Wellness Program, with a Director on site works to deepen family involvement by bringing support to social and emotional issues.
- The school has a strong professional development program that helps teachers support academic achievement through teaching strategies and understanding of the whole child.
  - Teaching strategies focus on best practices with particular attention to Literacy, Team Teaching, and Culture Building.
  - Weekly grade level meetings where staff look at work, develop tools (like rubrics) review data, etc.
  - Weekly whole school staff development time with consultants, co-teacher meetings, small groups on specific topics, individual support, subject area planning, social and emotional issues, school wide concerns and goals, and business, etc.
  - Teachers report a strong collaborative community exists where all feel supported as they work on teaching practice to improve student achievement from a variety of entry points. They feel that they are part of the decision making process of the school, that they see progress in the students and deepening of the learning community, and that the professional development supports them in many ways.
- The school is in good financial condition and maintains appropriate internal controls
  - As of 3/2010, the school possessed \$1,355,716 in current assets and \$58,888 in current liabilities. Therefore, for each outstanding dollar in current liability, the school possessed \$23.02 in current assets to meet its obligations
  - The school’s long-term financial outlook appears good based on the total assets of \$1,486,374 and total liabilities of \$58,888. Therefore, for each dollar in long-term liability, the school possessed \$25.24 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.
  - Board gets reporting from the principal, school dashboard, facilities update, income statement and balance sheet, attendance and suspension figures besides other statistics
  - Board plans to conduct self assessment before the new school year.

## What the school needs to improve

- Continuing to develop ways to communicate to others (the community, the incoming students and staff, orientation for families, etc.) what the DREAM school is about.
  - Documentation and other ways to communicate “What is the DREAM way?”
- As literacy, reading, writing and math have been an important focus so far, staff efforts to build curriculum and cohesiveness in social studies and incorporation of the social and emotional areas may be helpful next steps in creating curriculum for clarity of goals.
  - The school should continue its collaborative work in curriculum planning and cross grade conversations to articulate the content of the additional grades they will serve.
  - Examining the ways in which caring, safety, respect and smart work (i.e. “choices” students make) are embedded in the daily life.
- The school should continue its work on community issues already identified like Health (asthma, diabetes, and chronic illnesses), housing, etc. to support the goals so that the school may address community needs.
  - Continue positive links with RBI to insure continued attention to student, family and community issues as the school continues to address the larger community needs.
  - Within the school, deepening the Health and Wellness component of the program, Family Involvement support.
  - Consider ways to bring these areas in to the curriculum planning as the school grows.
  - The school should continue to deepen its partnerships and relationships with community agencies, resources and institutions to encourage opportunities for and participation in the external experiences available.

## Part 3: Framing Questions

### FRAMING QUESTIONS:

Throughout the Renewal Process and the life of each school’s charter, the NYCDOE Charter School 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 follows 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.