



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

NEW YORK FRENCH AMERICAN CHARTER SCHOOL
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT

MAY 2011

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

New York French American Charter School (NYFACS) is an elementary school serving approximately 149 students from grade kindergarten through grade two in the 2010-2011 school year.¹ The school opened in 2010 with grades kindergarten through two. It has plans to grow to serve students in grades kindergarten through twelve.² It is currently housed in privately leased space at 311 West 120th Street in District 3.³

The school population comprises 45.1% Black, 52.8% Hispanic, .7% White, and 1.4% Asian students. 84.5% of students are designated as receiving free/reduced price lunch, compared to 49.0% in the district.⁴ The student body, as reported on the school data collection form completed by the school, includes 9.4 % English language learners (ELL) and 2.7 % 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.⁶ The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 – 2011 was reported by the school as 96.8 %.

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 (CSO) 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 11, 2011:

- Sonia Park, Senior Director, NYC DOE CSO
- Jessica Fredston-Hermann, Analyst, NYC DOE CSO
- Karen Drezner, Consultant

Notice of Concern:

As a result of the review, the NYC DOE, as the charter authorizer for the New York French American Charter School, has issued a Notice of Concern on August 12, 2011 which is effective through the end of August 2012. The conditions that will need to be redressed beginning immediately are listed among the Areas of Improvement included in this report.

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

⁵ NYFACS self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (4/27/11)

⁶ New York State Education Department - www.nysed.gov

Part 2: Findings

Areas of Strength

- NYFACS, in its first year of operation, has begun to create a unique school culture with an emphasis on diversity.
 - There is a high value placed on French language acquisition and the philosophy that it supports growth in foundational English language skills.
 - Teaching staff reflected the diverse population of Harlem and the children being served.
 - NYFACS is in compliance regarding attracting and retaining its ELL student population at 9.4%, which is higher than CSD 3's 8.4%.⁷
- Parents and teachers are engaged in the school and invested in its mission.
 - An established, formalized Parent Association meets twice a month. School leadership reported that parents also volunteer at the school regularly.
 - There are up to two seats reserved on the Board for non-voting parent representatives as well as a non-voting teacher representative.
 - Teachers expressed having a vested interest in the mission of the school and reported being collaborative and feeling a sense of collegiality. Teachers interviewed expressed enthusiasm about the benefits of teaching French and English to their student population.
- Staff and school leadership meet regularly.
 - Weekly staff meetings are planned in response to current and ongoing concerns (e.g. safety, discipline).

What the school needs to improve: this section is divided into three parts, one that identifies areas where we recommend that the school continues to focus on improvement; a second part that identifies the areas that the school needs to remedy; and a third section that outlines required elements for a Corrective Action Plan.

Areas of Continued Improvement

- The school should consider increasing urgency around academic rigor and focus on consistency of rigor across classrooms.
 - NYFACS is encouraged to prioritize its focus on its charter accountability goals for achievement in ELA and math.
 - In conversations with teachers and school leadership, collected objective data (e.g. DIBELS) was not used to guide instructional planning and differentiation according to academic needs and aligned to appropriate, NYSED standard-based, grade-level learning expectations. DIBELS was administered but the school could not provide information/data on student performance either individually or as an aggregate.
- NYFACS is encouraged to develop and use data to assess student performance and track growth.
 - At the time of the visit the school did not have available detailed rubrics that reflect high expectations and specific concepts/skills taught. A school-wide protocol to collect, review, plan and differentiate instruction with data needs was not evident.

⁷ ATS data, (June 30, 2011)

- The school should continue to develop a common language for classroom management.
 - During the visit, inconsistent behavior norms and classroom management were significant. A wide variation of teaching methods and behavioral expectations were observed, particularly between French and English classes. Teachers spoke about weekly meetings focusing on discipline, school safety, bullying and other school culture issues, yet classroom management and norms varied greatly.
- NYFACS should further refine its systems for teacher support and professional development (PD).
 - It was observed that the instructional leadership prioritized instructional support on the acquisition of French language. Other PD for teachers was centered on classroom management and discipline. Professional development that focused on backwards-design, the IB philosophy, and the co-teaching model had occurred once during summer PD and was not provided again.
- NYFACS should continue to be self-reflective in terms of its operations management. Though the school has a conservative budgeting approach, it must also be supported by active fundraising.
 - The school has a 5-year lease which is automatically renewable. Leasing costs (rent and utilities) was budgeted at over \$438,000 for 2010-11 with expectations that costs will increase annually. It was anticipated at the time of the visit that the Board would have to raise approximately \$100,000 more for additional renovations costs.
- NYFACS should re-evaluate its prioritizing regarding operational expenses.
 - Teachers expressed frustration with the lack of teaching and classroom supplies. Classrooms were observed with few books for students.
 - Due to facilities costs, the planned staffing model had to be readjusted and reduced. At the time of the visit, hiring for the 2011-12 year was halted while the Board worked to resolve salary and benefits items within budget.

Areas of Violation of Charter Law or Charter Agreement

- The Board of Trustees should enact corrective measures in order to be in full compliance with the 2010 amended Charter School Act with regard to being subject to provisions of the General Municipal Law (GML) regarding conflicts of interest. In general, under the GML, school board members or employees are prohibited from having an interest in any contract with the school board or school from which they may benefit financially and over which they have authority as a result of their position. The school should adopt new conflict of interest policies and revise its bylaws to reflect the GML.
 - In reviewing the submitted minutes of Board meetings, an employee of the school, specifically the principal, is a voting trustee. This is regarded as a conflict of interest and should be immediately remedied.
- The Board of Trustees should enact corrective measures in order to be in full compliance with the 2010 amended Charter School Act with regard to board meetings. The Board of Trustees should meet monthly as specified and required by the amended Charter School Act.
 - In reviewing the submitted minutes of Board meetings, the Board met frequently but not always on a monthly basis. In some of the board meetings, it was not clear if quorum had been reached. Per the school's bylaws Section 8, in person attendance only shall count towards the majority for quorum. In several of the board minutes, Trustees participated via conference or web calls and appeared to count towards quorum.

- NYFACS should enact corrective measures in order to be in full compliance with its Charter Agreement and School Monitoring Plan.
 - In accordance with Section 2.12 (a) Governance of the Agreement and subsection C of the Monitoring Plan, the NYFACS Board of Trustees must submit within 5 business days any additions or removal of board trustees. The name of any proposed member of the Board must be submitted with background information to the CSO office for approval. The Board did not provide this required information for board changes that have taken place since the charter for NYFACS was originally approved in September 2009.

- NYFACS should enact corrective measures in order to be in full compliance with the 2010 amended Charter School Act. Areas of non-compliance regard meeting target rates for enrollment and retention for Special Education students and hiring Certified Teachers.
 - The school should document outreach to Special Education students in order to be comparable to the district, CSD 3. The school used a combination of methods, including word-of-mouth and holding parent sessions. None of these efforts were targeted toward Special Education students. NYFACS's population includes 2.7%⁸ Special Education students, which is lower than CSD 3's 14.3%⁹.
 - NYFACS should continue to employ experienced, certified staff in order to meet the Act's requirement of non-certified teaching staff being only 5 or 30% of teaching staff, whichever is less. At the time of the CSO visit, the school reported that only 5 of 12 teachers (41.6 %) were NYS certified.

- The school should enact corrective measures to perform a complete, comprehensive review of its academic program as proposed in its charter. The academic program of NYFACS, as described and delineated by its charter school application, differed from what was observed by the CSO visit. If the program has modified, material and non-material changes must be submitted to the CSO office per the Charter Revision Technical Assistance Memo.¹⁰
 - Examples of misalignment to the charter included:
 - Instructional methods and philosophy guided by the International Baccalaureate (IB) philosophy for Primary Years was not observed.
 - Math instruction was taught in French, not in English as indicated in the application.
 - The lack of teacher Annual Portfolios that include "the academic results of students in his/her charge and [relate] his/her professional practice to accomplishments" and are used by the principal to rate teacher performance.
 - Annual use of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills as a normed standardized test was mandated in the charter application, but not observed during the site visit. During the site visit, school leadership discussed implementing a different normed test beginning with the 3rd grade and was not planning on administering any normed test beyond DIBELS during the current academic year.
 - Adherence to the proposed discipline policy was not consistent.

Corrective Action Plan Requirements:

1. The NYFACS conflict of interest policy and bylaws should be revised to be compliant with the Charter School Act and the General Municipal Law.

2. . Board revises its meeting schedule to include 12 monthly meetings a year.

⁸ NYFACS self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (4/27/11)

⁹ ATS data, (June 30, 2011)

¹⁰ Fore more information, please see the SED Technical Advisory on Charter Revisions (9/20/10): <http://p1232.nysed.gov/psc/documents/charterrevisionTA21.09.10.seb.PDF>.

3. NYFACS should enact corrective measures in order to be in full compliance with the School Act in regard to teacher certification. As of June 28, 2011, 67% (8 out of 12) of NYFACS teachers were certified. However, this is countered by 3 certified teachers (out of 4) who are not returning to the school. *NYFACS should submit an updated staff roster, indicating certified and non-certified staff to the CSO prior to the start of the 2011-12 school year.*
4. NYFACS should perform a complete, comprehensive review of its academic program as proposed in its charter and notify the CSO of any revisions, material and non-material, that have to be made.

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