



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

BROWNSVILLE ASCEND
CHARTER SCHOOL
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT

JUNE 2010

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

Brownsville Ascend Charter School is an elementary/middle/high school serving approximately 170 students in kindergarten and grade 1 in the 2009-2010 school year.¹ The school opened in 2009 will grow to serve students K-12.² It is currently housed in a private facility in District 18.³

The school population comprises 88% Black, 7.5% Hispanic, 1% White, and 0% Asian students. 79% of students are designated as Title I.⁴ The student body includes 2% English language learners and 9% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%.⁵

The school has not yet received a Progress Report or a state/federal accountability designation.⁶

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

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 New York State Education Department - www.nysed.gov

Part 2: Findings

What the school does well

- The school has a strong instructional and professional development program.
 - The school is clear on its mission of preparing students for college, and aiming for 85% mastery in all subjects.
 - 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 life long 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, point and perfect classroom practice.
 - Administration staff is in the classrooms often, working with teachers and students.
 - Three week Summer Institute Planning forms the basis for the Professional Development all year, review of goals and plan for support is provided for staff, whole school systems, whole school staff development time, school wide concerns and goals, and business, etc.
 - Currently the school has grades K-1, 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; three week and semester cycles document progress of each student in each grade and provides materials, posters, etc.; student levels and improvement are accessible to staff as they regularly examine and review student achievement.
 - The STAR program includes reading tests, computer administered, every six weeks,
 - For grade 11 the CAT is every 4-5 weeks, the STAR literacy assessment is every six weeks, and the TERRA NOVA is administered in the beginning of September and again in June.
 - The Kindergarten students’ learning is assessed with Running Records, STAR early literacy exams, and 1 on 1 math exams.
 - Student work is kept in folders that is accessible to families and staff and also while documents progress.
 - Parents are communicated with weekly, in report card meetings, and family appointments.

- The school fosters a safe learning environment that encourages student learning and ensures the security of students and faculty.
 - The orderly and collaborative culture in each classroom is clear in the way staff has helped students follow directions; activities in the classrooms are managed with routines which students demonstrate as they move from one lesson to the next.
 - Clear and consistent routines and expectations are evident in the classrooms, and the hallway transitions; students returning from lunch were in lines and walking silently; behavior guidelines are evident in classroom signs such as Hand Signals, other clapping and finger snapping and gestures used for appreciation of responses and reminding of focus, etc.
 - Student work hangs on classroom walls and on the hallway bulletin boards; the halls are attractive and celebrate the student work.

- The school has created a strong culture that encourages academic excellence and allows all students to interact in the supportive learning community.
 - The school had trips and events this year that had impact the way families are included in the school community: there was a Winter Festival; the trip to the Metropolitan Museum on a Saturday was very well attended by students and family members, and the Pot Luck dinner which was attended by 190 participants. The families also participated in a gallery walk to see the school space and learned about the work the students did that was displayed. Other trips included the Botanical Gardens and the Brooklyn Public Library.
 - The expectations are clear and implemented in each of the classrooms allowing for consistency throughout the school.
 - The school has a No Excuses culture, quiet halls, and signs to guide behavior in classrooms. The classrooms participate in group cheers and gestures to communicate appreciation for a correct answer. There are artistic bulletin boards in the hallways, even though this is not their permanent space, the art teacher was able to create very attractive boards, and each students has something displayed. Classrooms include singing, clapping, etc. that demonstrate students practice the routines of the school culture; additional bulletin boards show animal collages, chalk pastels, etc. for celebration of work.
 - Each strand/class is named for the college the teacher attended, and additional information about that college is communicated so the goals of going to college are evident in the conversations and the visuals

What the school needs to improve

- Developing additional ways for the students to demonstrate their mastery.
 - The testing program is strong and implemented; the school can develop additional ways students can demonstrate their learning by providing various exercises to deepen critical learning skills.
- Thinking of ways to focus on best practices now that SABIS is in place as a frame for instruction.
 - Through staff meetings that look together at sample student work as additional data and documentation of student progress and ideas for lesson planning.
 - Selecting a few specific strategies all will work with, practice, and become comfortable with those approaches to continue the consistency in teaching practice.
- Working on ways to ways to sustain the consistent expectations, culture, as the school grows.
 - By finding ways/activities that orient students and families to the routines and roles all play in achieving the goals of the school.
 - Helping students achieve academically; the school plans to hire a Dean with a focus on school culture.
 - By revising the schedule to allow for common planning time, weekly grade level meetings, absorbing new staff, supports deepening the adult culture.

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 are 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.