



**Department of
Education**

Dennis M. Walcott, Chancellor

Charter School Annual Site Visit Report
Charter Schools Office
2011-2012

**ROCHDALE EARLY ADVANTAGE CHARTER SCHOOL
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT**

APRIL 2012

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

Rochdale Early Advantage Charter School (REACS) is an elementary school serving approximately 108 students from kindergarten through grade two in the 2011-2012 school year.¹ The school opened in 2010 with grades kindergarten through one. It has plans to grow to serve students in grades kindergarten through five.² It is currently housed in private facilities in District 28.³

The school population comprises of 94.4% Black, 2.8% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 1.9% Hispanic, less than 1% White, and 0% Asian students. The student body includes 0% English Language Learners (ELLs), 9.3% Students with Disabilities (SWD), and 76.9% Free and Reduced Lunch students (FRL).⁴

The school is in its second year and has not yet earned a Progress Report grade or state/federal accountability designation.⁵

Annual Review Process Overview:

The New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) Charter Schools Office (CSO) conducts an annual site visit of charter schools authorized by the NYC DOE. The site visit is designed to address three primary questions: is the school an academic success; is the school a fiscally sound, viable organization; and is the school in compliance with its charter and all applicable laws and regulations? To ascertain matters of sustainability and strategic planning, we also ask about the school's plans for its next charter term. The visits are conducted by representatives of the CSO and last the duration of one school day. The annual site visit begins with a meeting with the school leadership team. Afterward, the reviewers visit classrooms and hold brief meetings with available administrators and teachers. 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 site visit is intended to be a snapshot of the academic year and reflects what was observed at the time of the visit.

The following experts participated in the review of this school on April 17, 2012:

- Keisha Womack, NYC DOE CSO
- Laurie Pendleton, NYC DOE CSO Consultant

¹ NYC DOE ATS system, April 2012

² NYC DOE ATS system and charter agreement

³ NYC DOE Location Code Generating System database, April 2012

⁴ Demographic Data drawn from NYC DOE ATS System, April 2012

⁵ New York State Education Department - www.nysed.gov

Part 2: Findings

Areas of Strength:

- REACS maintains curriculum programs aligned to its instructional model.
 - The school has created pacing calendars for literacy and math based on Common Core standards.
 - The school uses a Balanced Literacy approach to English Language Arts which includes instruction in phonics and guided reading.
 - Student work on display in the classrooms showed evidence of hands-on science and literature-based social studies.
 - Teachers reported collaborative planning across grade levels. Classes observed on the day of the visit were engaged in common lessons. Evidence of prior learning posted in the classrooms also showed collaboration between the teachers at each grade level.
 - In the majority of classrooms observed, the lesson objective was posted and, in classrooms observed at the start of the lessons, the teacher reviewed the objective with the students.
 - In alignment with their charter, the school is incorporating technology and career education into the curriculum through the use of a specialty teacher. A student was overheard saying that he wanted to be a “policeman and a scientist”. Another student said he plans to become a teacher.
 - In the majority of classrooms visited, students were engaged in “Accountable Talk”, which is an area of focus for the school. Students were heard saying, “I agree with you and would like to add...” and “I connect this to...” Teachers were actively encouraging student use of Accountable Talk and posters of Accountable Talk stems were seen in each classroom.

- REACS has an assessment system in place and uses the results to inform instruction and identify students in need of support.
 - The school assesses student progress in reading throughout the year using Rigby curriculum assessments, DIBELS, and Fountas & Pinnell Running Records. Below benchmark students are regularly monitored using DIBELS Progress Monitoring.
 - The school uses unit assessments from the Go-Math Curriculum to assess student progress in math.
 - Teachers use electronic methods for collecting the results of the DIBELS assessments and report the individual instructional recommendations are very helpful.
 - Teachers interviewed reported reviewing data collaboratively in weekly meetings and using the results to inform grouping and instruction.

- REACS shows evidence of meeting the needs of all students.
 - Each classroom uses the assessment results to identify students in need of intensive support in reading. These students received instruction provided by a literacy specialist and the makeup of these groups is reassessed every six weeks based on data.
 - Students who are reading above grade level are also provided small group enrichment instruction.
 - On the day of the visit, students were observed working in small groups with teachers and volunteers and independently.
 - During the interviews, the teachers shared they collaborate regularly with the Resource Room teacher to ensure continuity of instruction and goals.

- REACS is in compliance with the 2010 amended Charter Schools Act regarding attracting and retaining Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) students.
 - The percentage of FRL students served (76.9%) is more than CSD 28, which has a rate of 63.82%.⁶

- The school has established an orderly culture focused on learning.
 - The classrooms and hallways had a positive print environment showcasing quality student work and celebrations of student learning.
 - On the day of the visit, there were very few behavioral disruptions to teaching and learning. Each classroom observed used the same “Stop Light” behavior tracking strategy and classroom rules were posted in each room. The entire school used “Give Me Five” in the classroom, lunchroom, and hallways to gain student attention and students readily responded.
 - A few students in each classroom were observed using behavior charts to monitor their behavior. The school leadership explained how these charts are used to increase communication with parents.
 - On the day of the visit, all students were in the required uniform.
 - The school exhibits a warm, welcoming environment for parents, volunteers, visitors, and students.

- REACS has a commitment to parent participation.
 - The school has established many opportunities for parental involvement. There are a variety of activities focused on both academics and community building, available to families. The school has held literacy and math Parent Workshops led by the principal and the teachers.
 - The school has established a Parent Association consisting of a class parent from each classroom. The association has created by-laws and the fund raising committee has held a number of activities.
 - Teachers report attendance at parent conferences consistently reaches 100%.

- The school provides support for their teachers.
 - Teachers report both the formal and informal observations and resulting feedback are informative and helpful to their improvement as instructors.
 - Teachers interviewed report positive relationships with the school leadership and feel the Principal has an “open-door” policy making it easy to address concerns.
 - There are clear procedures and routines in place for requesting classroom supplies and teachers report their needs are met in a timely fashion.

- The school has a robust Professional Development Program.
 - The classroom schedule and school calendar provide ample time for individual, team, and whole school professional development.
 - The teachers reported that the PD provided is targeted to their needs as well as areas of focus for the school. Professional Development plans are created through collaboration between the Literacy and Math consultants, the Principal, and the teachers.
 - Teachers receive Professional Development through a combination of modeling, observation, feedback, and direct instruction. They also reported the Principal provides professional readings based on both individual and school needs.
 - The school has purchased the services of both Math and ELA consultants who are available on a consistent basis.
 - Professional Development funds are also available to all staff including the Business and Operations Manger.

⁶ NYC DOE ATS system (April 3, 2012)

- The school has participated in outreach to other educational institutions.
 - The school has invited two New York DOE district schools to participate in their International Day celebration. This type of collaboration helps to establish relationships with schools outside of the charter school community.

- REACS's operations team has procedures in place to ensure the safety of the school community.
 - The school's physical plant is well-maintained.
 - Six staff members are trained in AED use and CPR which meets the New York City DOE recommendations.
 - The school conducts fire drills according to recommendations and has documentation of the drills conducted.
 - The school safety plan is written and members of the school community are aware of the procedures outlined in the plan.
 - A security officer is present in the school and all visitors are required to show identification and sign in.
 - The school has a safety committee which meets once per month to discuss any safety issues concerning the school community.
 - The student records are secure and are kept in an orderly fashion.

- The school is fiscally sound and fiscally conservative.
 - The school has established an orderly system for maintaining invoices and receipts. All purchases must be pre-approved by the principal.
 - The school has cash readily available for unforeseen costs.
 - The Operations/Business Manager meets with the principal weekly to discuss the school's finances.
 - The Operations and Business Manager makes reports to the REACS Board on the school's financial state.
 - The school is in the process of evaluating facilities for the planned expansion. The REACS Board and operations team have made several connections with the community members and elected officials with regard to the expansion. Currently, the Board is exploring several options for expansion.

- The school's leadership is knowledgeable about the instruction, the budget, and school operations.

Areas of Growth:

- REACS should enact corrective measures in order to be in full compliance with the 2010 amended Charter School Act. Areas of concern regard meeting target rates for enrollment and retention of English Language Learners (ELLs) and Students with Disabilities (SWD).
 - The school should continue to document outreach to ELL students in order to be comparable to the district, CSD 28. The school reported using a variety of recruitment strategies and making the application available in several languages. The school's population includes 0% ELLs⁷, which is lower than CSD 28's 10.87%⁸.
 - The school should continue to document outreach to Students with Disabilities (SWD) in order to be comparable to CSD 28. The school's population includes 9.3%⁹ Students with Disabilities (SWD) students, which is lower than CSD 28's 13%¹⁰.

⁷ REACS self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (April 2012)

⁸ NYC DOE ATS system (April 3, 2012)

⁹ REACS Self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (April 2012)

¹⁰ NYC DOE ATS system (April 3, 2012)

- REACS should continue to strengthen the use of data to allow for school-wide and longitudinal analysis.
 - The school currently uses unit assessments in math to assess student progress. Teachers reported the need for additional assessments to monitor student achievement in math.
 - Currently, assessment results are kept in a variety of ways making school-wide analysis challenging. The school may want to systematize the way it collects data.

- As it grows, the school should continue refining its strategy for instilling key components of its culture in new staff members and students.
 - Teachers reported the “small school” feel was important to the school’s mission and partially responsible for their early success. They shared concerns about how the school will maintain this culture as it continues to grow.

- The school should continue its plans for bringing on a Guidance Counselor.
 - The school should consider a crisis management strategy for severe behavior. Currently, the teachers report that the procedure for dealing with students who are having a particularly difficult time is to call on the principal or a volunteer to remove the student to allow them to cool down. The school should continue to evaluate its plan to support students who may need additional social and emotional support.

- The school should continue to manage the school’s budget as the building needs grow.
 - The school should continue to look into additional fundraising streams to help offset growing costs due to expansion.

1. Is the School an Academic Success?

1a. High Academic Attainment and Improvement

Schools that are academic successes have many of the characteristics below:

- Meet absolute performance goals established in school charter
- Meet student progress goals established in school charter
- Are closing the achievement gap for at risk students, including special needs and ELL students
- Are surpassing performance of DOE identified peer-schools
- Are surpassing performance district and city proficiency or better averages
- Are meeting other rigorous academic and non-academic goals as stated in school's charter

Evidence for success might include, but not be limited to, the following depending on school configurations:

- Grades 3-8 NYS ELA Results (absolute performance, individual student progress, comparative performance to similar schools, home district or city averages, progress for at-risk populations)
- Grades 3-8 NYS Math Results (absolute performance, individual student progress, comparative performance to similar schools, home district or city averages, progress for at-risk populations)
- Grades 4 and 8 NYS Science Results (absolute performance, individual student progress, comparative performance to similar schools, home district or city averages, progress for at-risk populations)
- Grades 8-12 NYS Regent Exam Results
- When applicable, NYSAA or other approved alternate assessments results
- HS 4- and 6-Year Graduation Rates (absolute and progress, overall, for at-risk student populations)
- Grades 8-12 College Readiness Credit Accumulation
- Percentage of Students Applying to and Being Admitted to College
- Percentage of Students Taking AP Courses and/or Percentage of Students Passing AP Courses
- Results on state accountability measures
- Charter School Academic and Non-Academic Goals
- NYC Progress Reports

1b. Mission and Academic Goals

Schools with successful missions and goals have many of the characteristics below:

- Have an animating mission statement that staff, students and community embrace
- Set ambitious academic and non-academic goals that entire school community knows and embraces
- Have processes for regular monitoring and reporting on progress toward school goals
- Have processes for adjusting strategies in support of goals as appropriate in response to monitoring data

Evidence for successful missions and goals might include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Mission statement, charter, external documents (parent and family handbooks, school website, etc.)
- Annual reports, school improvement plans, leadership board reports
- Board agendas and minutes
- Parent, student, and teacher satisfaction surveys
- Parent association meeting agendas and minutes
- Participation at parent-teacher conferences, school advocacy events, participation in academic goal related programs
- Stakeholder (board, parents, staff, students, etc.) interviews

1c. Responsive Education Program

Schools with successful education programs have many of the characteristics below:

- Are self-reflective and examine practice based on outcomes against goals
- Have well-thought out curricular programs that are aligned with NYS learning outcomes as described by state standards and the new Common Core Curriculum.
- Use instructional models and resources consistent with school mission and that are flexible in addressing the needs of all learners
- Offer defined opportunities for remediation and acceleration
- Have effective strategies and quality instructional programs for addressing students with special needs and ELLs
- Have defined strategies that they can measure and monitor for closing the achievement gap
- Implement a coherent and effective interim assessment system (e.g., use of formative, interim, and summative assessment data) for monitoring progress, predicting performance, and adjusting instruction
- Have an effective process for supporting improved classroom instruction, including frequent observation and feedback
- Use a defined process for evaluating curricular tasks, programs and resources for effectiveness and fit with school mission and goals
- Have school calendars and day schedules that provide the time necessary to deliver on the school's mission and academic goals

Evidence for successful education programs, in addition to positive results, may include, but not be limited to, many of the following:

- Instructional planning documents (alignments, scope and sequences, curriculum maps, unit and lesson plans, etc)
- Student/teacher schedules
- Classroom observations
- Student Intervention / Response to Intervention program description and resources
- Special Education/ELL progress monitoring documentation
- Interim assessment results
- Student and teacher portfolios
- Data findings; adjusted lesson plans
- Self-assessment documentation
- Professional development plans and resources
- School calendar and daily schedules

- DOE School Surveys and internal school satisfaction surveys
- Instructional leader and staff interviews

1d. Learning Environment

Schools with successful learning environments have many of the characteristics below:

- Have a strong academic culture that creates high academic and behavioral expectations in a way that motivates students to consistently give their best efforts
- Use a comprehensive approach to student management, including positive behavioral expectations and a clear discipline policy to build and sustain a safe, orderly, and supportive classroom environment
- Provide for safe, respectful, efficient transitions, hallways, cafeteria, yard, etc.
- Have classrooms where academic risk-taking and student participation is encouraged and supported
- Provide opportunities for students to actively engage in their own learning and in the life of the school
- Have a plan with formal or informal structures or programs in place that provide students opportunities to develop as individuals and citizens (for example: a character education, citizenship, or community involvement or service program)

Evidence for successful learning environments may include, but not be limited to, many of the following:

- School mission and articulated values
- School calendar and class schedules
- Student management plan (code of conduct, school values, discipline policy, positive incentive system, etc.)
- Student attendance and retention rates
- Student discipline data (referral, suspension, expulsion)
- DOE School Survey student results
- DOE School Survey parent and teacher safety and respect results
- Parent complaint/concern information
- Internal satisfaction survey results
- Leadership, staff, and, if appropriate, student interviews
- Classroom observations
- Scheduled student engagement opportunities (e.g., student advisory, internships, student government, student led conferences, peer tutoring, peer mediation, etc.)