



**Department of
Education**

Dennis M. Walcott, Chancellor

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

**JOHN W. LAVELLE PREPARATORY CHARTER SCHOOL
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT**

APRIL 2011

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

John W. Lavelle Preparatory Charter School is a middle school serving approximately 139 students from grade 6 through grade 7 in the 2010-2011 school year.¹ The school opened in 2009 with grade 6. It has plans to grow to serve students grades 6 through 12.² It is currently housed in DOE space in District 31.³

The school population comprises 46.2% Black, 22.0% Hispanic, 25.8% White, and 5.3% Asian students. 71.9% of students are designated as receiving free/reduced price lunch, compared to 51% in the district.⁴ The student body includes 4.6% English language learners, compared to 5.9% in the district; and it includes 40.2% special education students, compared to the district's average of 18.9%.⁵

The school is in its second year and has not yet earned a Progress Report grade or state/federal accountability designation.⁶ The average attendance rate for the school year 2009 - 2010 was 92.9%.⁷

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 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. This particular visit included additional conversations with school leadership and the Board of Trustees chair, as well as attending an August Board of Trustees meeting in response to concerns raised on the site visit and concerns raised by some parents with the CSO and other agencies.

The following experts participated in the review of this school:

- Richard Larios, Senior Director, NYC DOE CSO
- Jessica Fredston-Hermann, Analyst, NYC DOE CSO
- John Mulligan, Deputy Executive Director for Committees of Special Education, NYC DOE

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 NYC DOE ATS system; data pulled June 30, 2011.

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

⁷ NYC DOE School Progress Report. This document is posted on the NYC DOE website at <http://www.schools.nyc.gov>.

Part 2: Findings

Areas of Strength

- The school reports a strong, collaborative professional learning community and provides teachers with a variety of professional development supports.
 - School has an informal school leadership team as well as a formal instructional leadership team, both of which include teacher leaders of grade level teams. School principal stated that she meets informally every morning with 6th and 7th grade leaders.
 - Teachers in the core subjects conduct peer observations and meet every other week, alternating weeks math and science team with humanities team. Teachers stated that there has been “more effort to increase instructional support this year,” including weekly observations from a consultant who provides targeted feedback as well as less frequent, more formal observations from the school principal.
 - All teachers participate in an annual two-week summer institute, designed and delivered by school’s instructional leadership team (which includes principal, grade-level teacher leaders, and consultant coaches). In addition, new hires have the opportunity to participate in pre-hiring training.
 - School leadership and teachers in their respective interviews described the professional climate positively—“strongly collaborative,” “teamwork is common,” “we have vertical and horizontal teams,” staff is “all very friendly,” no one “feels intimidated,” and “we’re a happy, cohesive group.”
 - In addition to teacher leader roles, there are opportunities for professional growth at all levels: for example, a number of full-time teachers interviewed had begun working at the school as substitutes.
 - The school has early release for students for a monthly half-day staff development with a focus that varies by need, although topics usually focus on improving instruction.
- School staff has developed a productive learning environment, supportive of school’s mission and educational goals.
 - All classes observed on the day of the visit had small class sizes (15 on average), typically with two adults in the room.
 - Classrooms on the day of the visit were observed to be orderly and students were generally on-task.
 - The school is implementing a Positive Reinforcement System to support its student management program, with a points system that rewards good behavior.
 - Students begin the day with a whole school assembly, where students are honored for successes and recite the Optimist’s Creed.
 - Classrooms observed were well-resourced, including SmartBoards, with rich print environments and a variety of student work displayed.
 - All classrooms include a student “Tool Box” to provide learning/study skill support with subject/unit specific definitions, explanations, and examples.
- Instructional approach is well-thought out and supported by consistent structures, including planning, resources, and instructional practices.
 - School has developed curriculum maps that are revisited each year and added to as the school expands its grade levels. Teachers referred to the maps in their interviews on the day of the visit as useful frameworks for planning.
 - Teachers submit lesson plans for review and sharing, which share certain common elements (aim, do now, skill of the week, etc.) although the format is flexible.

- School has developed a Wellness Curriculum that is taught three times a week with units focused on goal-setting, self-identification, bullying, and life skills, among its main topics.
- School has launched a school-wide effort to increase writing across the curriculum, which includes using the same rubrics and graphic organizers in different disciplines.
- School has a strong beginning level focus on data use to improve academic results and school performance.
 - The school administers a quarterly Interim Assessment (IA) based on the NYS assessments, the results of which are analyzed by Log On To Learning, leading to the identification of focus Skills of the Week, which are school-wide and across the curriculum. The IAs are also used to group students as green, yellow, and red, with students who score at the red level receiving afterschool and tutoring help.
 - The school also gives the Northwest Evaluation Association's MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) assessment annually to track learning progress from year-to-year.
- School welcomes and has supportive programs in place for a high percentage of special needs students.
 - School special needs percentage of enrollment is over 40% of the total student enrollment.
 - Most classes are taught by two adults, typically a certified or dual-certified teacher and a paraprofessional, who travels with the students. Some, particularly those where the teacher is not dually certified, have special education certified push-in support.
 - School uses flexible grouping to help address the needs of all learners. The school also provides access to educational software like IXL and Achieve 3000 to support skill development in math and ELA.
 - Students who do not complete homework are asked to attend the lunch break Homework Club, where they work with teachers in small groups of 5-8 students. Regular after school enrichment help is also available to students who need extra tutoring.
- The school reported strong parent support.
 - Lavelle Prep reported a small but active core leadership team for its Family-School Association (FSA), with 69.7% attendance at parent-teacher conferences. Parents must come in to receive report cards so even if they don't make it to scheduled parent-teacher conferences, they do have at least an informal meeting when they visit to claim their child's report card.
 - FSA meets monthly and a handful of parents attend Board of Trustees meetings, including officers of the FSA.
 - Parent participation in the 2009-10 DOE School Survey was 74% (25 points higher than the citywide averages) with parent scores in three of the four elements earning well above average (dark green) and the fourth element above average (light green).
 - Interviewed teachers stated that parents are "involved" and that teachers try to listen to parents' feedback, such as by posting students' homework and announcements online each week in response to parents' requests.
- As noted, the school serves a higher than CSD average of SPED students (40.2% compared to the district's 18.9%) and a close, but slightly lower, percent of ELL students (4.5% to 5.9%).⁸

⁸ NYC DOE ATS system; data pulled on June 30, 2011

- The school should continue to monitor its outreach efforts for ELL students to attain and sustain comparable averages to its district, documenting its efforts to better adjust as necessary its recruitment efforts.

Areas of Growth

- Going into its third year, the school should review and clarify critical school policies, including its discipline and promotion and retention policies.
 - At the time of the visit, the school's discipline policy was still in draft form and at variance with the policy described in the charter. (The Board approved a revised discipline policy subsequent to the visit in April 2011.) A lack of clarity about the current policy and procedures, however, resulted in several complaints to the CSO (and to other agencies) about particular cases, and leaves the school vulnerable to procedural and due process challenges.
 - Subsequent to the visit, additional complaints were received regarding promotion and retention policies and timely and clear communication about student status as the school year ended. School leadership and the Board of Trustees promised improvements to communication protocols in the coming year.
- During the visit questions were raised regarding the special education program, as it is described in the school charter and as it is implemented.
 - School serves a population of students that includes over 40% with identified special needs and offers a unique variation on a traditional 8:1:1 special class model, designated on student IEPs as "8:1:1 integrated setting (Lavelle Prep)" but closer in look and feel to a Collaborative Team Teaching class. Classes in this model integrate regular education and special education students in a small class setting with a total of between 13 and 17 students, no more than 8 of whom are identified as special needs. Classes are taught either by a dual-certified teacher with a para or are co-taught by a subject-matter certified teacher with the collaboration of special education certified push-in teacher. In this model, all students benefit from certified Special Education instruction for 4.5 hours a day. However, there are questions related to coding of these students and whether the described model is consistently implemented. The school should continue to work with its CSE to ensure that its program is reflective of its charter and fully compliant with appropriate special education regulations and requirements.
 - During interviews on the day of the visit, school leadership described the circumstances that kept the school from securing the services of an in-school mental health clinic, which was described in the school's charter as being a resource to which the school would have access, as well as challenges in finding sufficient dually-certified secondary teachers. The school should continue its efforts to encourage and support teachers without dual certification to gain certification and continue to refine its recruitment efforts to help realize this critical staffing feature.
 - The school did submit a list of revisions to its original charter to align its charter with current program and practice. The CSO approved the non-material changes on October 26, 2011. The school is seeking community input on the need/demand for a school-sited mental health clinic before deciding whether to seek a material change to its charter and should complete this process and take the appropriate follow-up action promptly.
 - Subsequent to the site visit, three complaints were received regarding special education services by SED's Special Education Quality Assurance (SEQA) office, which is looking into the circumstances of the particular cases and conferring with the SED's special education office to get feedback on Lavelle Prep's program. Pending SEQA's response, the school may need to make adjustments to its program and/or follow-up on the individual cases reported to their office.

- Also subsequent to the visit, several parents attended the September Board of Trustees meeting to voice concerns about a variety of topics, including charter compliance, special education services, and communication. The school leadership and the Board committed to responding to these concerns, beyond the conversation at the event. Although the majority of parents appear to be very satisfied with the school, based on school feedback and supported by School Survey results, the school should continue to work to resolve issues identified this spring and summer.
- The school should continue its work to improve instructional practice to be more efficient and consistently effective, with more sophisticated use of differentiation to reach the needs of all learners, and greater student engagement and ownership of learning.
 - Several areas of instructional focus identified by school leadership were not witnessed in observed classrooms on the day of the visit, including the Arrow of Recitation strategy, differentiation by product, and consistently effective use of teaching assistants and paraprofessionals. The school's instructional leadership should work to clarify expectations around these areas of focus and provide necessary support and oversight to improve their implementation.
 - Other elements of sound instructional practice identified as features of school professional development were inconsistently observed during the classroom visits, including efficient transitions within lesson parts, regular checks for understanding, and lesson wrap-ups. The school should continue to focus on promoting school-wide use of Doug Lemov's instructional techniques to improve effectiveness and consistency across classrooms.
- School staff has benefit of both formal and informal support structures, particularly in terms of teacher collaboration and staff development. As the school grows, such structures as an informal school leadership team and unscheduled teacher collaboration time might need to be formalized to ensure the school continues to have a strong and collaborative professional environment.
 - Leadership reported that that the group that met with the CSO on the day of the visit was an informal leadership team, although it did represent the various leadership groups within the school (instructional, operational, etc.).
 - Teachers reported that they collaborated before school and during lunch and after school. The school is encouraged to consider introducing formalized times for teachers to meet and collaborate, particularly by grade team and by discipline.
- School is moving into private space in its third year, which will add additional one-time and annual costs to school's budget.
 - School will need to manage fiscal obligations carefully to sustain critical elements of its school model, including small class sizes and robust instructional staffing.

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