



**Department of
Education**

Dennis M. Walcott, Chancellor

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

**OPPORTUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT**

MAY 2011

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

Opportunity Charter School (OCS) is a middle/high school serving approximately 420 students from grade six through grade twelve in the 2010-2011 school year.¹ The school opened in 2004 with grades six through seven. It is currently functioning at scale.² It is currently housed DOE space in District 3 at 240 W. 113th Street.³ There are two other schools (one district, one charter) within P.S. 241.

The school population comprises 77.9% Black, 18.5% Hispanic, 1.4% White, and 1.2% Asian students. 76.8% of students are designated as Title I.⁴ The student body includes 4.7% English language learners and 50.0% special education students.

The school earned a C on its progress report in 2009-2010, an A in 2008-2009 and a C in 2007-2008. The average attendance rate for the school year 2009 - 2010 was 93% for the middle school and 84% for the high school⁵. The school is in good standing with state and federal accountability.⁶

Annual Review Process Overview:

The York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) Charter Schools Office conducts an annual site visit of NYC DOE 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 NYC DOE 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 in some cases 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 17, 2011:

- Sonia Park, Senior Director, CSO
- Bertram Wyman, Analyst, CSO
- Lynnette Aqueron, Senior School Improvement Specialist, Div. of Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners
- Simeon Stolzberg, Consultant

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 Opportunity CS self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (5/12/11).

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

Part 2: Findings

Areas of Strength

- The school has established a warm and orderly environment.
 - Students were generally well-behaved in classrooms and off-task students responded positively when teachers re-directed them.
 - The school has trained its staff in Therapeutic Crisis Intervention.
- The school has implemented systems and programs to develop consistency across classrooms.
 - The school has adopted the Framework for Effective Instruction (FEI) model. Utilization of FEI was consistent across classrooms observed. Teachers interviewed stated support of the model. Training was provided in the summer to new teachers and an FEI consultant works with the staff during the school year.
 - OCS uses a wide range of academic interventions to support learners in the classroom such as Wilson Reading System, and Schools Attuned (All Kinds of Minds).
 - Common language and lesson structure as well as posted agendas were evident in observed classrooms.
 - Grade teams and content teams meet weekly; each team has an administrative liaison who attends meetings.
- The school serves a notably high percentage of students with disabilities (SWD) and provides a range of appropriate services.
 - At the time of the visit about half of the student population had an individualized education program (IEP).
 - The school has implemented programs and hired staff to accommodate students in the least restrictive environment. The special education program and services were provided by appropriately certified/licensed individuals as per students' IEP.
 - Programs and services for students with disabilities are implemented within required timelines and in accordance with the students' IEPs. This was evidenced by OCS's Projected Register Report which tracks frequency, duration, and group size. Related Service providers and teachers frequently communicate and collaborate on lesson planning.
 - Students with disabilities are educated to the maximum extent appropriate with students who are non-disabled. OCS uses the full flexibility of the Continuum of Services based on students' needs, SWD's are serviced with a variety of service deliveries including 15:1/ ICT/ SETSS.
 - The school has maximized its budget to provide a low student-teacher ratio, including special education teachers, learning specialists, teacher assistants and counselors.
 - The interviewed special education teachers stated that they work collaboratively in developing the Long Term goals for Transition Services for SWDs.
 - Students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum.
- OCS employs a rigorous assessment system to monitor student progress.
 - The school has developed interim assessments that are administered every eight to nine weeks. Scantron Performance Series assessments are also administered twice per year.
 - For students with disabilities, detailed descriptions of their progress are maintained.
 - The school has provided professional development related to data analysis and lesson planning.
 - Each grade team has an assigned "data manager."

- The school is developing a database to track student behavioral referrals as part of its student information and accountability system.
- OCS has established a range of partnerships and programs and provides students with myriad extracurricular opportunities.
 - The school has partnered with the Children's Aid Society's Carrera Program, which provides staff and programs for students in 6th through 9th grade, expanding to 10th grade for the 2011-2012 school year.
 - The school is coordinating internships for students to gain career awareness.
 - The school started a service learning program this year and will expand it to all students next year.
- OCS reports strong communication with students and active parent engagement.
 - Follow up for SWDs' Transition Activities as per their IEPs is frequently discussed with students. Students also participate frequently at their IEP meeting.
 - The school's Office of Student and Family Service conducts workshops and connects with partner organizations.
 - School leaders reported an active and formally organized PTA.
 - The school hosts Honors Assemblies to which it invites parents to recognize student achievement.
 - The school utilizes an online system called TeacherEase which provides academic and behavioral updates for parents.
 - OCS has an extensive guidance department that maintains contact with many students after they leave the school.
- OCS's operations management is self-reflective. The school has a conservative budgeting approach supplemented by active fundraising.
 - The school anticipates a budget surplus for 2010-11 of approximately \$95,000.

Areas of Growth

- In observed classrooms, instructional rigor and engagement was inconsistent.
 - In a number of observed classrooms students were allowed to disengage from instruction, in some cases without notice or consequences. For example, some students had their heads on their desks and were not involved in the learning activity. In some classes the pacing was slow, leading to disengagement as students waited for the teacher to write on the board or discuss an answer with a another student. The school is encouraged to utilize its professional development to improve classroom management.
 - OCS should continue the implementation of a school model with a focus on developing higher order skills. During classroom observations, questions were often basic or leading and inadequate wait time was provided for students to come up with a nuanced answer.
 - The school offers some high level college prep classes, such as trigonometry, but it was not clear that students had mastered foundational skills as they struggled with higher level problems. Teachers interviewed noted the tension between depth and coverage in implementing the curriculum. The school is encouraged to utilize their assessment data to ensure students are prepared for higher level coursework.
 - Behavioral expectations related to learning were consistently posted throughout the school, yet teachers were not observed referring or holding students accountable to them. The school is encouraged to continue its commitment to established behavioral standards and consider making more consistent use of them as reference when handling behavior issues or reminding students of expectations.

- The school's teacher evaluation protocol provides a range of components with detailed sub-categories that could target specific issues of rigor and engagement, but reviewed samples showed only ratings for overall components, not the sub-categories, and the narratives were not specific. The school should continue to develop its usage of teacher evaluations to provide comprehensive feedback to staff.
 - School leaders reported that the rigor of interim assessments was not consistently aligned with Regents level work. The school is encouraged to develop assessments in line with state tests.
- Student performance data was not being used consistently to improve instruction.
 - School leaders noted that they are continuing to develop teachers' use of data, particularly with respect to the interim assessments. The school is encouraged to fulfill its self-assessment plans for "fuller student-level reporting, additional item difficulty metrics, and further integration of interim testing results into ongoing teacher meetings."
 - While teachers reported having data with which to target instruction, they more often noted grouping students based on behavior issues than learning needs. The school should continue to advance data use to target the academic needs of sub-groups and individuals as well.
- Teacher retention and development is a concern.
 - In the provided self-reported 2009-10 data, of the 46 teachers that were working at OCS, 30% left or were let go (14). The school is encouraged to foster a stronger relationship with staff to decrease teacher attrition. At the time of the site visit, teaching staff were in the process of voting for union representation. .

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