



**Department of
Education**

Dennis M. Walcott, Chancellor

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

**THE EQUITY PROJECT CHARTER SCHOOL
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT**

JUNE 2011

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

The Equity Project Charter School is a middle school serving 247 students from grade five through grade six in the 2010-2011 school year.¹ The school opened in 2009 with grade five. It has plans to grow to serve students grades five through eight.² It is currently housed in DOE space in District 6.³

The school population comprises 8.5% Black, 90.3% Hispanic, 0.4% White, and 0.4% Asian students.⁴ 81.4% of students are designated as Title I, compared to the district average of 83.5%.⁵ The student body includes 26.3% English language learners (ELL) and 19.0% special education (SPED) students, compared to the district averages of 36.2% ELL and 13.8% SPED.⁶

The school is in its second year and has not yet earned a Progress Report grade or state/federal accountability designation.⁷ The average attendance rate for the school year 2009 - 2010 was 96.5%.⁸

Annual Review Process Overview:

The NYC DOE Charter Schools Office (CSO) 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.

The following experts participated in the review of this school on June 7, 2011:

- Jessica Fredston-Hermann, Analyst, NYC DOE CSO
- 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

⁵ NYC DOE ATS system; data pulled on June 30, 2011

⁶ NYC DOE ATS system; data pulled on June 30, 2011

⁷ New York State Education Department - www.nysed.gov

⁸ NYC DOE School Progress Report

Part 2: Findings

Areas of Strength

- Teachers have developed organized, outcome-driven curricula for each subject. Reviewers noted clear evidence of comprehensive unit and lesson planning.
 - Teachers stated that they use the six-week summer institute to develop curriculum maps with clear objectives for every subject, including physical education and music. Some objectives are assigned to teachers in other subjects to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration; for example, the mathematics objective related to measurement is addressed by the science curriculum and non-fictional text is addressed in social studies and science.
 - Teachers also develop Student Achievement Reports (SARs) that identify key outcomes for each subject.
 - Teachers have substantial autonomy in selecting instructional materials and many develop their own. Teachers interviewed indicated they have adequate resources.
 - On the day of the visit, observed lessons were organized and purposeful.
 - The school has expanded reading and math instruction this year through the addition of a daily Morning Block that includes questions from past state assessments and is intended to foster sustained practice over the course of the week.

- The school administers a range of assessments and uses data to drive instruction and decision-making.
 - The school administers the Rigby Reads test, NWEA MAP computer adaptive tests, pre- and post-unit tests, six-week mini-assessments based on past state exams, writing portfolios, and other teacher-developed formative assessments. Reviewed SARs indicated the use of summative projects as well.
 - The SARs contain mastery and/or growth measures for evaluating student performance in each subject. Data spreadsheets are used to track these measures throughout the year. This year state tests are included as a measure in the SARs.
 - Each grade has a teacher designated as the grade level assessment coordinator who supports administration of assessments and collection and analysis of data.
 - Teachers described using grade and department meetings to evaluate student work together and review assessment results.

- The school provides numerous supports for at-risk students.
 - The school provides a collaborative team teaching (CTT) class in each grade and co-teachers reported planning together and modifying lessons to meet their students' needs.
 - Students also receive pull-out services akin to SETTS during the morning block.
 - The school has a relatively high percentage of Special Education students (SPED). At the time of the visit 46 out of 247 students (18.6%) received SPED services, which is higher than the district average of 13.8%.⁹
 - The school uses a structured immersion approach for English language learners with targeted assistance provided during the Latin period.
 - Low-performing students also receive supplemental reading instruction during the period other students study Latin. The school is using Intervention by Design and Earobics programs for literacy intervention.
 - The Morning Block period also provides opportunities for co-teachers to target instruction to small groups of students.

⁹ NYC DOE ATS system; data pulled on June 30, 2011

- The school provides support and enrichment classes in the afternoon two days per week.
- The school has hired a social worker for each grade who loops with students each year. The social worker also coordinates special education administration with the Committee on Special Education (CSE).
- The school has established a professional work environment and provides ongoing support and evaluation to teachers.
 - Teachers establish professional goals and are expected to provide deliverables such as video clips or observation forms that demonstrate growth.
 - Quarterly-rotating peer partnerships are used to focus peer observation and interdisciplinary work. Partners are expected to observe (and sometimes film) each other twice per week, and document and share their observations. Post-partnership reflections are included in teacher portfolios that are used as part of formal evaluations. Interviewed teachers stated that it was “really nice” to have time built into the schedule for targeted peer observations and that they appreciated the feedback.
 - The school has developed a rigorous formal evaluation system that includes SAR data, teacher growth (particularly pertaining to the peer partnerships), and school-wide leadership roles (all teachers are responsible for taking on a role outside the classroom, such as Deans or Assessment Coordinators). In addition, the principal evaluates teacher performance in a range of domains, including professionalism, classroom management, assessment, instruction and parent engagement.
 - In interviews, teachers described setting their own growth goals and receiving very specific and useful feedback regarding their teaching practice from school leadership as well as their peers.
 - School leadership is self-reflective and responsive to teachers’ requests and concerns. For example, the school Principal decided to bring in outside substitute teachers in the second semester in response to a request to reduce teacher workload. Teachers stated during interviews that they feel comfortable giving the school Principal feedback and making suggestions to improve the school.
- The school has established a culture focused on learning in which teachers and school leadership maintain high expectations for student behavior.
 - On the day of the visit students were orderly and respectful in classrooms and public spaces. The school has implemented silent transitions between trailers and almost all observed students complied with this expectation.
 - In observed classrooms most students were engaged in learning activities and appeared to have internalized routines and procedures.
 - The school is intentional about its discipline practices: school leadership stated that they do not believe in out-of-school suspensions and for most infractions prefer to keep students at school to sustain learning. For minor infractions, students are assigned to “practice” during extended learning block.
 - The school implemented TIGER values this year and references to these values were observed on classroom posters.
 - A class challenge chart travels with each class throughout the day and provides incentives for positive behavior.
 - The school newsletter described the creation of a student anti-bullying leadership council.
 - Teachers described a collaborative process for reviewing and revising school policies and procedures, such as dismissal and recess.
- The school communicates regularly with families to increase parent engagement.
 - The school has an active parent association with officers that meets on a semi-monthly basis. The school plans to pay for training to enhance the organization.
 - The school hosts monthly breakfasts or lemonades for staff to meet with parents.

- Parent-teacher conferences are held twice per year, and report cards are provided to parents each quarter.
- According to school leaders, a number of parents volunteer to assist with events, enrollment outreach, and mailings.
- The school publishes a regular newsletter in English and Spanish to connect with Spanish-speaking families.

Areas of Growth

- The school should continue to focus on developing curricular coherence across subjects and grades.
 - Teachers have substantial autonomy in developing their own curriculum. Efforts to vertically integrate the curriculum across grades were described by teachers as informal. The school is encouraged to formalize these efforts to increase vertical coherence across grade levels.
 - School leaders indicated that the school had implemented the morning block this year to increase coherence across subjects. The school should continue to evaluate this program's impact and make any necessary adjustments based on student results.
 - The school has begun to emphasize reading and writing across the curriculum; teachers have reportedly developed common rubrics and begun to examine work together to norm expectations. The school should monitor its progress in achieving inter-rater reliability and make adjustments as needed.

- The school should continue to expand opportunities for meeting the needs of all students.
 - Missed opportunities wherein more advanced students could have been provided with more challenging work were observed in some classes and noted by school leaders. Teachers noted during interviews that there are robust supports in place for at-risk students but that there is currently less focus on the needs of more advanced students. School should identify strategies to improve its instructional differentiation to better meet the needs of all learners.

- The school should continue to focus on recruiting and retaining teachers in an effort to reduce teacher attrition.
 - The departure of some teachers mid-year has required unexpected changes to the instructional program, such as replacing Latin with a second period of Math for sixth-graders. Teachers and administrators initially covered empty positions until the school decided to hire full-time substitutes to lighten the load. Next year the school intends to overstaff to ensure adequate support in all subjects. The school has also developed apprenticeship positions for the upcoming school year which will provide more leeway in recruiting hard-to-fill positions such as middle school Latin. The school should continue to monitor these solutions and budget appropriately to ensure sustainability of practices.

- The school should continue to refine its outreach strategies for recruitment of ELL students and document its efforts for ongoing monitoring of effectiveness in reaching comparable percentages with its CSD.
 - The school's student population currently includes 25.9% ELL students (64 out of 247), which is lower than the district average of 36.2%.¹⁰

¹⁰ NYC DOE ATS system; data pulled on June 30, 2011

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