



**Department of  
Education**

*Dennis M. Walcott, Chancellor*

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

**INWOOD ACADEMY FOR LEADERSHIP CHARTER SCHOOL  
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT**

MAY 2011

# Part 1: Executive Summary

## **School Overview and History:**

Inwood Academy for Leadership Charter School is a secondary currently school serving approximately 110 students in grade five in the 2010-2011 school year.<sup>1</sup> The school opened in 2010 with grade five. It has plans to grow to serve students grades five through twelve.<sup>2</sup> It is currently housed in DOE space in District 6.<sup>3</sup>

The school population comprises 14.3% Black, 82.1% Hispanic, 2.7% White, and 0% Asian students. 83.0% of students are designated as receiving free/reduced price lunch, compared to 83.5% in the district.<sup>4</sup> The student body includes 28.6% English language learners compared to 36.2% in the district and 16.1% special education students compared to 13.8% in the district<sup>5</sup>.

The school is in its first year and thus has not yet earned a Progress Report grade or state/federal accountability designation.<sup>6</sup> The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 95%<sup>7</sup>.

## **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 May 19, 2011:

- Richard Larios, Senior Director, NYC DOE CSO
- Gabrielle Mosquera, Director of Oversight, NYC DOE CSO

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<sup>1</sup> NYC DOE ATS system

<sup>2</sup> NYC DOE ATS system and charter agreement

<sup>3</sup> NYC DOE Location Code Generating System database

<sup>4</sup> Demographic Data drawn from NYC DOE ATS System

<sup>5</sup> NYC DOE ATS system; data pulled on June 30, 2011

<sup>6</sup> New York State Education Department - [www.nysed.gov](http://www.nysed.gov)

<sup>7</sup> Self-reported by school

## Part 2: Findings

### Areas of Strength

- Meeting and interviews on the day of the visit indicated that school leadership and instructional staff share a strong commitment to the school's mission and have high academic and behavioral expectations for students.
  - The school aims for 1.5 years of student progress per academic year and has developed six-week interim assessments and also uses NWEA assessments to monitor student academic progress and additional resources, including Lexia, Renaissance Math, and Study Island, to accelerate student learning.
  - Students sign a Student Character Contract with self-identified goals for behavior throughout the year, and the school's discipline code includes specific consequences for particular infractions
  - Many teachers interviewed cited "high expectations for learning." For example, various teachers interviewed stated their appreciation of the school's expectations: "I was tired of low expectations [at previous schools]"; "I've had to shift to respond to the high level of accountability"; and "We're very driven and really believe in our mission".
- The school manifests a strong culture of professional collaboration with frequent opportunities for formal and informal teamwork.
  - All instructional staff meet once a month to plan common themes (e.g., honesty, keeping the peace) to incorporate across subjects and grade levels.
  - Each instructor teaches five classes per day, has three prep periods per day, and has three collaboration hours per week. These collaboration hour groups are based on teaching specialties as well as shared students.
  - Several instructors interviewed on the day of the site visit expressed having all of the supports and resources they needed to perform their jobs well and praised collaboration opportunities ("I feel we collaborate every day"; "collaboration occurs more often than the three collaboration hours," "we do a lot of sharing and open discussions"; and "I feel trusted as a teacher").
  - Although the school experienced the turnover of one full-time instructor (following a performance plan for classroom management) and two part-time instructors (both of whom left voluntarily) this year, at the time of the site visit school leadership reported that all current instructional staff had indicated they would be returning for school year 2011-12.
  - School is focused on creating a positive workplace culture where satisfaction and employee happiness is important and attended to. In teacher interviews on the day of the visit, several teachers referred to the school environment as a "family" or a place where "everyone feels at home."
- In the classrooms observed visitors saw a consistent level of instruction that effectively kept students focused, on-task, and engaged in their academic work.
  - School leadership utilizes techniques from *Teach Like a Champion* during professional development sessions to improve instruction and to obtain consistency in instructional practices.
  - Classes observed on the day of the site visit consistently used Do Nows, Exit Tickets, and similar checks for comprehension. Pace of instruction was similarly consistent and lively.
  - Classes observed on the day of the visit evidenced a consistently large number of students volunteering to answer questions as well as a high degree of student collaboration, both prompted and unprompted.

- The school displays a positive, safe, and productive learning environment with strong attention paid to character education and leadership development among students.
  - The school has a dedicated Dean of Culture who focuses on quickly aligning students to the school’s culture in order to maximize the time spent on instruction.
  - The school uses “Inwood Money” as a reward for positive student behavior, and this can be used at the monthly “school store.” Once students have displayed enough positive behaviors over the course of several months, they are given school jobs (such as office assistant or librarian) to further incentivize them. The DOE team observed one student performing his school job (classroom cleanup) before morning instruction.
  - On the day of the site visit, classroom ambassadors in several classes greeted the DOE team enthusiastically upon their entry and explained the lesson being taught.
  - The school’s attendance rate is high (95 percent)<sup>8</sup>.
  - One week of the school’s three-week Summer Academy is dedicated to introducing school culture to incoming students, with an emphasis on student leadership development.
  
- The school’s operational practices appear sound, and its operations team displays a cohesive and focused approach toward maximizing funding for instruction.
  - Both school leadership and operational staffers expressed a focus on limiting the school’s administrative expenses. This was evidenced in their decision to lower administrative expenses from 19 percent of salary costs in the 2010-11 budget to 14 percent of salary costs in the 2011-12 budget, enabling instructional salary costs to rise from 25 percent in 2010-11 to 29 percent in 2011-12.
  - The school’s Director of Operations developed an independent merit pay structure that incorporates school-wide academic performance objectives, classroom improvement plan objectives, and individual performance objectives in nearly equal proportions.
  - The school reported that its lottery process was fair and effectively carried out with appropriate safeguards, for example, the lottery was videotaped in addition to being witnessed by three independent observers.
  - The school’s Board meets 10 times per year and has at least four standing committees (Academic, Board Development, Facilities, and Finance). School leadership and operations staffers reported that each meeting involves a school leader report in addition to at least one other report (such as finance or student culture).
  - During day of the visit interviews the operations staff reported that roles and responsibilities were clear and that while everyone works together to get things done accountability was well-defined.
  
- The school reports positive and open relationships with parents.
  - The school’s leadership reported a high participation rate for parent-teacher conferences and student performance events.
  - The school became a neighborhood Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) pickup site to better connect with parents as they pick up produce.
  - School leadership reported that it started frank conversations around retention in March 2010 and that most parents of the approximately 10 percent of students to be retained this year supported the decision.
  - The school conducts informal parent surveys throughout the school year.
  
- The school provides students at all academic levels with opportunities for growth.
  - Teachers interviewed reported that student groupings, including groupings with SpEd students, are fluid and adjusted based on performance and need.

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<sup>8</sup> Self-reported by school

- All classrooms are inclusive and serve General Education students, Special Education students, and English Language Learners.
- The instructor re-teaching days built into the school's interim assessment schedule also include peer teaching intended to benefit both the struggling student and the student who has mastered the material.
- The school reported launching a tutoring program that served about 50% of Inwood's students with once a week academic support targeted to needs identified on student assessments. It also provides an after school program and enrichment program for students.

### **Areas of Growth**

- The school should continue its plan to improve the level and quality of parent engagement with the school.
  - School leadership reported a need to re-launch its parent association with a more formalized structure, meeting protocols, and more consistent involvement with the Board of Trustees and school leadership team.
  - The school should follow up on its intent to fill the parent seat on the Board, as is outlined in its charter.
  - The school is encouraged to continue its outreach to Democracy Builders, the NYC Charter School Center, and the Center for Educational Innovation, Public Education Association (CEI PEA) for advice and training support of this re-launch of the Parent Association.
  - The school should develop and monitor strategies to improve parent participation in the NYC DOE School Survey and to use survey data as a resource for further improvements in parent engagement.
  - The school reported that a number of Parent Workshops had disappointing attendance and should review topics, communication, scheduling and any participant feedback to identify ways to improve attendance through better alignment with parent needs and interests.
  
- The school should continue developing effective processes and procedures for several academic and operational areas in need.
  - In their first year, the school leaders have identified a number of areas where they would like to make revisions to existing academic or operational policies, processes or procedures based on its first year experience of implementation.
  - School leadership stated that they want to solidify its interim assessment process, including improving the timing and quality of administration of the interim assessments and improving the make-up of these assessments. In addition, it should review effectiveness of these assessments and their use and other assessments used by the school based on the school's actual results, making any adjustments necessary to improve outcomes.
  - The school should follow through on its intention to revise the contents of its handbooks for parents/students and for employees, as well as to revise certain identified policies and procedures, including its Promotion and Retention Policy to refine effectiveness and clarity.
  - Additionally, as the school grows, the school should continue to formalize procedures for teacher support, teacher evaluations, and expectations for lesson planning. The school plans for its 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers to loop up to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade with their students; the execution of this plan, as well as its revised procedures for training and evaluation, should be documented and monitored for effectiveness.
  
- The school should continue to communicate its progress in securing private space for the 2014 school year.

- Several teachers interviewed on the day of the visit expressed worry regarding the space limitation of the school's current facility and its potential impact on sustaining school culture.
- The school intends to stay in the Nagle Avenue site through the 2013-14 school year and should continue to keep the DOE and its community informed of its progress in fundraising, financing, and private facility negotiations.
- The school should continue to focus on improving instructional quality through staff support, data use, and more sophisticated levels of differentiation.
  - Interviewed teachers reported frequent classroom observations ("principal is in classrooms three or four times a week") and between two and three formal classroom observations. As the school grows while trying to lower administration versus classroom expenditures, it should continue to look at ways to sustain the levels of support classroom teachers receive as well as the informal support they provide one another.
  - School leadership should monitor the impact of planned strategies (partnering novice and veteran teachers, use of thrice weekly collaboration periods, efforts to free up specialists for one class a day, and providing structures to facilitate peer observations) on its support plan and academic achievement
  - As the school's internal data grows more robust and as it refines its assessment program, the school should increase the sophistication of its use of data to inform instruction, to group and re-group students within and across classes, and to customize instruction to meet the needs of its students.
  - During the visit, observed examples of differentiated instruction in classrooms were most commonly examples of students being placed in small groups to receive more individual teacher support. The school should continue to improve its approach to differentiation to include differentiation of content and product, as well as continue to differentiate by process.
- The school should continue to refine its outreach strategies for recruitment of ELL/SpEd students and document its efforts for ongoing monitoring of effectiveness in reaching (ELL) or sustaining (SpEd) comparable percentages with its CSD.
  - The student body includes 28.6% English language learners (ELL) and 16.1% special education (SpEd) students, compared to the district averages of 36.2% ELL and 13.8% SpEd.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> 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