



Charter School ASV Report
Charter Schools Office
2011-2012

FAHARI ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT

MARCH 2012

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

Fahari Academy Charter School is a middle school serving approximately 225 students from fifth through eighth grade in the 2011-2012 school year¹. The school opened in 2009, serving 90 students in the fifth grade. The school is authorized to serve grades five through twelve and will grow by one grade each year to reach full scale². During this charter term, which ends December 15, 2013, the school is chartered to serve grades five through nine. The school is currently housed in a DOE facility at 72 Veronica Place, Brooklyn, New York, 11226 in District 17, co-located with MS 246 Walt Whitman.³ The student body includes 4% English language learners and 14.2% special education students.⁴

The school has experienced high student attrition with 24% turnover in 2010-2011 and 26% turnover as of March 2011. There are currently 27 students on the waitlist.⁵

The school earned a C on its progress report in 2011-2012, and a D in 2010-2011.⁶ The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 96.7%⁷. The school is in good standing with state and federal accountability.⁸

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 provide a snapshot of the school and reflects what was observed at the time of the visit.

The following experts participated in the review of this school on March 29, 2010:

- Recy Benjamin Dunn, Executive Director, NYC DOE Charter Schools Office
- Daree Lewis, Director of Oversight, NYC DOE Charter Schools Office
- Laurie Price, Director of Operations, NYC DOE Charter Schools Office
- Simeon Stolzberg, Consultant

¹ Self-reported by Fahari Academy Charter School on School Visit Data Collection Sheet submitted March 2012

² NYC DOE ATS system and charter agreement

³ NYC DOE Location Code Generating System database

⁴ Self-reported by Fahari Academy Charter School on School Visit Data Collection Sheet submitted March 2012

⁵ Self-reported by Fahari Academy Charter School on School Visit Data Collection Sheet submitted March 2012

⁶ NYC DOE School Progress Report

⁷ Self-reported by Fahari Academy Charter School on School Visit Data Collection Sheet submitted March 2012

⁸ New York State Education Department - www.nysed.gov

Part 2: Findings

Overview:

Fahari Academy Charter School was issued a Notice of Deficiency in August 2011 after last year's annual site visit raised concerns about Fahari Academy's ability to:

- Hire and retain quality staff
- Maintain student enrollment
- Maintain an appropriate behavior management system
- Effectively serve its students

As part of the school's response to the Notice, several changes have been instituted such as: restructuring the school's organizational structure with an Executive Director that focuses on external relations and operations, and an academic leader that manages the instructional staff; the addition of a English language arts staff and curriculum developer; and retaining of a search firm to hire key staff.

Areas of Strength:

- *Fahari has established an orderly environment that is conducive to learning.*
 - On the day of the visit, students were generally respectful and attentive in classrooms. Transitions between classes were mostly smooth and efficient.
 - Teachers described an effective advisory program that is part of the students' schedule that allows them to build meaningful relationships with students and their families.
- *The school has devoted significant resources to support teaching and learning.*
 - The school has employed a large number of consultants to meet its needs. For example, consultants have been used to develop curriculum frameworks, units and even lessons for English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. Consultants also assist with teacher observation and coaching as well as evaluation of student writing. In addition, a consultant was hired to assist with staff recruitment.
 - Technology was evident throughout the school, including SMART boards and computers. The school has recently implemented Revolutions Prep, a computer-based program that allows students to work at school and at home at their own individual pace.
 - The school has built time into its schedule for staff development, including a summer session and early release for students on Wednesdays to accommodate staff meetings.
 - Fahari has changed its staffing plan to enhance instructional leadership. An academic leadership position, currently filled on an interim basis, was created to supervise and support instructional staff. There is also now a part-time director of English language arts.
 - The school has a robust learning support team, including a social worker, learning supports coordinator, special education teachers and reading intervention person.
- *The school administers regular assessments and collects and analyzes data to inform instruction and programmatic decisions.*
 - Fahari administers a range of assessments, including regular interim assessments and mock state tests.
 - Results from these assessments are used to identify students for remediation, group students in leveled classes, and distinguish skills that students have not yet mastered.

This appears more robust in mathematics than English language arts. For example, the school reports in its Self Evaluation that “We disaggregated data for the mathematics by standard with each skill being tagged with one of the following strategies: Spiral Review, Small Group Instruction, One-on-One tutoring, or Whole Class Re-teach.”

- The school used external graders to evaluate student writing and calibrate its writing program with expectations on state exams. There was some evidence of use of writing rubrics along with posted student work; although, in some cases students received the highest rating for work that clearly indicated it deserved a lower rating.
- In a number of classrooms individual whiteboards were being used by teachers to check for understanding.

Areas for Growth:

- *Continue developing curriculum that is rigorous, vertically aligned from grade to grade and prepares students for future success.*
 - The school has made use of external consultants to develop scope and sequences, units and even lessons. Given that many instructional leaders and teachers are new to the school, it is apparent that that staff turnover limits deep understanding and ownership of the curriculum and that internal capacity for curriculum development is an area for growth.
 - The curriculum continues to change and evolve. For example, an integrated math and science class was change mid-year to provide students with a distinct and more robust science class. Students do not study social studies in 5th and 6th grade, though school leaders report that non-fiction is studied in the Communications classes.
 - Teachers raised concerns about limited opportunities this year for collaborative planning.
- *Focus on improving the consistency of instruction across all classes.*
 - The level of rigor varied across classrooms. Granted that at the time of the visit the school was heavily focused on preparation for upcoming state exams, still the rigor of questions and academic tasks was inconsistent. Some teachers challenged students to explain their answers, develop alternatives and provide details. Others provided limited opportunities for students to explore content or concepts. In one class students were asked to recall and define a test-taking strategy, rather than apply it. Most observed that instruction was teacher centered and did not provide opportunities for very many students to participate in discussion.
 - Students were not consistently engaged in learning activities. In some classes poor classroom management techniques limited instruction. For example, in some classes an inordinate amount of time was spent getting students organized to learn. In other classes, students were observed finishing a task and then sitting with nothing to do while they waited for others to catch up. And in other classes individual students were off task without notice and re-direction by the teacher. In one case, a circulating teacher checked in with an off-task student but did not effectively re-direct his attention to the learning activity. Pacing also varied across classrooms, with a sense of urgency in some and in others evidence of students looking bored or alternatively not providing adequate time for writing or exploration of ideas.
 - It was not evident that the use of multiple adults in classrooms is being maximized. In most classes with multiple adults the instruction was whole group and often utilized the “lead and assist” model of co-teaching, yet it was apparent that individual students were still not engaged. Some concerns were also raised by teachers about unclear roles and responsibilities for teaching assistants.
 - On the day of the visit there was limited evidence of differentiated instruction. The primary difference between leveled classes appears to be pacing and number of adults in the room. The school is in the process of introducing a “flipped” lesson model to provide students with more independent work time and presumably allow teachers to work more

with individual students. The introduction of Revolution Prep is also designed to provide opportunities for students to work at their own pace.

- *School leadership has clear expectations for teacher and student performance, but they have not yet been instilled in the faculty.*
 - The instructional leadership team is new, the Academic Leader position is currently filled by an interim person, and the Director of English language arts is a part-time position. It was apparent through interviews and observation of classroom instruction that the school's instructional leadership has high expectations and clear beliefs about effective pedagogy. For example, they are clearly focused on raising the level of student achievement and aware of current performance relative to their accountability plan goals. Nevertheless, these expectations were not yet evident in classroom practice, and observations and interviews with faculty suggest a common framework for thinking and talking about instruction was not yet in place, which makes holding them accountable for student performance challenging. Given that the leadership structure is new, it was also not surprising that roles and responsibilities are not yet completely clear to staff.
 - A clear definition of rigor was not evident. As noted, the level of questioning and academic tasks varied across classrooms. The school has done some work to norm expectations for student work, such as using external graders to evaluate student writing and provide objective comparison to state standards.
 - When teachers were asked how they know if they are doing a good job, most focused on classroom management and student engagement, with limited discussion of measurable student learning. They indicated that inconsistent conversations about staff accountability.

- *Programs and strategies for meeting the needs of all students are limited.*
 - The school has a robust learning support team. Some compliance issues were evident, but at the time of the visit the learning support staff appeared to be in the process of addressing most of them.
 - There was limited evidence of strategies to meet the needs of individual students within the general education classroom. Though collaborative team teaching (CTT) was in place, it was not clear that the use of multiple adults in the classroom was being maximized. Though teachers circulated and assisted individual students, instruction was not targeted to specific needs of small groups or individuals. Given the large amount of data collected this seems like a missed opportunity.
 - The school does not have a clear program in place to meet the needs of English language learners.
 - Small group instruction (SGI) is conducted for all students at the end of the day with leveled classes based on state test performance. Some targeted intervention for struggling students has also been implemented. In January tutors were hired to support the lowest performing 6th grade students in Saturday classes.

- *The school should continue to develop staff supervision and support into a coherent professional development program.*
 - The school is devoting substantial resources to staff development, including new instructional leadership positions as well as employment of numerous consultants for, among other things, coaching. Teachers report that observation and feedback has been increased and enhanced; some teachers felt the feedback has become more concrete and actionable. Said one teacher, "I'm finally getting what I need."
 - Teacher turnover limits the efficacy of staff development. School leaders appropriately focus on the needs of novice teachers and staff new to the building, but this limits opportunities for more veteran teachers. One teacher complained that staff development has been covering the same issues each year and focuses predominantly on school culture. Consistent turnover also limits the returns on investment in teachers and long term growth as well as development of school-wide practices.

- The school does use a framework for evaluation, but it does not appear to be closely tied to ongoing formative observation and feedback.
- *The school should focus on recruitment efforts to ensure its population of at-risk students is comparable to district schools.*
 - 11.7% of Fahari students have disabilities requiring services, compared to 13.6% of the district.
 - 4% of Fahari students are English language learners, compared to 9.6% of the district.

Part 3: Essential Questions and Accountability Framework

The CSO Accountability Framework

To help NYC DOE authorized charter schools better understand what we mean by success for charter schools, the NYC DOE's Charter Schools Office (CSO) has developed an Accountability Framework build around four essential questions for charter school renewal:

1. Is the school an academic success?
2. Is the school a fiscally sound, viable organization?
3. Is the school compliant with its charter and all applicable law and regulations?
4. What are the school's plans for its next charter term?

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
- Meet student progress goals
- 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
- Participation at parent-teacher conferences, school advocacy events, participation in academic goal related programs

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
- Have defined strategies that they can measure and monitor for closing the achievement gap
- Offer defined opportunities for remediation and acceleration
- 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
- Have effective strategies and quality instructional programs for addressing students with special needs and ELLs
- Use a defined process for evaluating curricular tasks, programs and resources for effectiveness and fit with school mission and 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
- Interim assessment results
- Student and teacher portfolios
- Data findings; adjusted lesson plans
- Self-assessment documentation
- Professional development plans and resources

1d. Learning Environment

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

- Have a strong culture that connects high academic and behavioral expectations in a way that motivates students to give their best effort academically and socially
- 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 formal or informal character education, social development, or citizenship program that provides opportunities to develop as individuals and citizens

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

- School mission and articulated values
- Student management plan (code of conduct, school values, discipline policy, positive incentive system, etc.)
- Student attendance and retention rates
- Student discipline data
- DOE School Survey student results
- DOE School Survey parent and teacher safety and respect results
- Self-administered 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.)

2. Is the School a Fiscally Sound, Viable Organization?

2a. Governance Structure and Organizational Design

Schools with successful governance and organizational design structures have many of the characteristics below:

- Operate with a clearly articulated governance structure, compliant with its charter and all applicable laws and regulations
- Have a capable Board of Trustees with appropriate blend of skills and experiences to provide oversight and strategic direction to fulfill the mission and goals of its charter
- Have a Board that is fully compliant with all applicable laws and regulations, particularly but not limited to open-meeting laws and conflict of interest regulations
- Have developed a succession plan for board and school leadership, consistent with the charter and Board by-laws, to ensure continuity of direction and leadership over time and despite circumstance
- Implements a school leadership structure that is aligned with charter and that is sufficient to fulfill school's mission and achieve its accountability goals; it also has clear lines of accountability for leadership roles, accountability to Board, and, if applicable, relationship with a charter management organization
- Have timely and appropriate access to legal counsel
- Implemented a process for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the school's organization and leadership structure
- Have instructional leadership staffing and support structures that holds staff accountable for student learning outcomes and provide regular feedback on instruction to teachers

Evidence for school governance and organizational design may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- School charter
- Board by-laws, roster, trustee resumes, meeting agenda and minutes
- Annual conflict of interest forms
- Staff roster, job descriptions, staff handbook, operations manual
- School calendar, professional development plan

2b. School Climate and Community Engagement

Schools with a sustaining school climate and engaged parent and community support have many of the characteristics below:

- A healthy professional school climate that is collaborative, student centered, and open to parents and community support
- An effective process for recruiting, hiring, supporting, and evaluating leadership and staff
- A flexible, data-driven approach to professional development for all staff
- An effective way of measuring and monitoring core constituency satisfaction (parent, staff, and, when age appropriate, student), including the DOE School Survey
- Effective home-school communication practices to ensure meaningful parent involvement in the learning of their children
- Strong community-based partnerships and advocacy for the school

Evidence for school climate and community engagement may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- DOE School Survey satisfaction parent, teacher, and, if appropriate student results
- Student retention and wait list data
- Staff retention data
- Leadership, staff, parent, student interviews
- Student and staff attendance rates
- Parent attendance at parent-teacher conferences
- Parent association meeting calendar and minutes
- Community partnerships and sponsored programs

2c. Financial and Operational Health

Schools that are responsible stewards of public funds and effective, sustaining organizations have many of the characteristics below:

- Consistently meet its student enrollment and retention targets
- Annual budgets that meets all short- and long-term financial responsibilities with available revenues
- School leadership and Board that oversee financial and operational responsibilities in a manner that keeps the school's mission and academic goals central to decision-making
- Boards and school leadership that maintain effective internal controls of finances to ensure integrity of financial management and a proactive approach to mitigating risk
- Consistently clean financial audits
- If applicable, strong, accountable partnerships with management organizations and other partners and significant vendors to support delivery of chartered school design and academic program
- A safe, clean and appropriately resourced educational facility with all appropriate services specified in charter and mandated by appropriate law and regulations

Evidence for a financially sound, viable organization may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- School budget, P&Ls, and monthly/quarterly cash-flow reports
- Appropriate insurance documents
- Required facility documents (lease, certificate of occupancy, fire and safety inspections, etc.)
- Financial audits
- Financial leader(s) resume and accountability documents
- Operational policies and procedures
- Operational org chart
- Secure storage areas for student and staff records
- Policies/protocols for maintaining secure records
- School safety plan

3. Is the School in Compliance with its Charter and All Applicable Law and Regulations?

3a. Approved Charter and Agreement

Schools in substantial compliance with their charter and agreement have:

- Implemented the key features of their charter as described in the original charter and as modified in approved revisions to their charter, including but not limited to mission, academic program, school organization, grade configuration, enrollment, goals, etc.
- Ensure that update-to-date charter is publicly available to staff, parents, and school community
- Implemented comprehensive academic, behavioral, oversight, management, and operational policies and procedures that are substantially aligned with the charter and the school's stated mission and vision

Evidence for a school's compliance with the terms of its charter and charter agreement may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Authorized charter and signed agreement
- Charter revision request approval and documentation
- School mission
- School policies and procedures
- Site visits
- Board meetings, agendas and minutes
- Leadership/board interviews

3b. Applicable Federal and State Law

Schools in substantial compliance with federal and state law have:

- Met all legal requirements for Title I and IDEA regulations and reporting
- Comparable enrollment of FRL, ELL and Special Education students to those of their district of location *or* are making documented good faith efforts to reach comparable percentages
- Implemented school policies related to student discipline and promotion and retention that are fully compliant with laws and regulations related to students with disabilities and due process regulations
- Conducted independently verified fair and open lottery and manage with integrity enrollment process and annual waiting lists
- Employed instructional staff with appropriate security clearances and certification requirements

Evidence for compliance with applicable federal and state law may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- School reporting documents
- School's Annual Report
- Student recruitment plan and resources
- Student management policies and promotion and retention policies
- Student discipline records
- Lottery policy, resources, and records; enrollment procedures and records
- Staff roster, fingerprint clearance for all staff, certification status of all instructional staff

3c. Applicable Regulations

Schools in substantial compliance with applicable regulations have:

- Safe and secure facilities with no significant compliance concerns with applicable regulations
- Consistently clean annual audits, up-to-date escrow accounts, and have completed all other financial reporting as required
- Boards that meet requirements for size, meeting frequency, public notice, applicable open-meeting and conflict of interest regulations, as well as complying with NYC DOE CSO's requirements for reporting changes in board membership and securing approval for new board members.
- Informed NYCDOE CSO, and where required, received CSO approval for changes in significant partnerships, such as dropping/replacing a management organization
- Effectively engaged parent associations

Evidence for compliance with applicable regulations may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- School or building safety plan; appropriate inspection documents
- Annual audits, escrow accounts, other financial reporting documents
- Board roster, calendar, agenda and minutes, conflict of interest documents, notification of changes/approval of new member request documents
- Charter revision requests, revised or new contracts
- Parent association calendar of meetings, identified officers, parent association agenda and minutes, parent satisfaction survey results
- Interviews

4. What Are the School's Plans for its Next Charter Term?

4a. School Expansion or Model Replication

In anticipation of a new charter term schools may be considering various growth options: replication, expansion to new grades or increased enrollment or altering their model in some significant way. Successful schools generally have processes for:

- Conducting needs/opportunity assessments
- Forming Board and leadership committees or subcommittees to investigate options, develop action plans, ensure capacity and resources are aligned, etc.
- Engaging school community in articulating charter revisions (or a new charter in cases of replication) to address the proposed growth plans
- Ensuring that the final proposal is ambitious but realistic in its plans
- Creating a well-reasoned and documented prospective for the school's new charter term and, if applicable, a new charter proposal (for replication)

Evidence for likely success in planning for school growth in a new charter term may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Application Part I: Retroactive Analysis, including performance results and analyses of the current charter term
- Application Part II: Prospective Analysis, including mission, program description, governance, organization, budget, etc. for new term
- Leadership and Board interviews

4b. Organizational Sustainability

Successful schools consistently perform despite change. While there is no single path for ensuring sustainability, successful schools often have the following features:

- School anticipates organizational opportunities/needs and plans for resource development (human resource policies for growing your own talent, for example, or fundraising or budget management to take care of anticipated capital needs and to mitigate risks for the unexpected, or board development to bring new talent or specific needs-based expertise to the school)

Evidence for organizational sustainability may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Board roster and resumes
- Board committees and minutes
- School organization chart
- Staff rosters
- Staff handbook
- Leadership and staff interviews
- Budget

4c. School or Model Improvements

Successful schools are thoughtful about the continued appropriateness of school design features and elements of their models. They:

- Review performance carefully and even if they don't make major changes through expansion or replication, they are careful to adjust elements to ensure continued and improved success.
- Develop plans to improve the school learning environment, including improving their facilities to expand program offerings and/or developing new partnerships to further the school's mission.

Evidence for successful improvements to a school's program or model may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Application Part I: Retroactive Analysis, including performance results and analyses of the current charter term
- Application Part II: Prospective Analysis, including mission, program description, governance, organization, budget, etc. for new term
- Leadership and board interviews
- MOUs or contracts with partners