



**Department of
Education**

Dennis M. Walcott, Chancellor

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

**BRONX ACADEMY OF PROMISE CHARTER SCHOOL
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT**

MAY 2011

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

The Bronx Promise Academy Charter School is an elementary school serving approximately 312 students from kindergarten through grade four in the 2010-2011 school year.¹ It has plans to grow to serve students kindergarten through grade 5.² It is currently housed in privately leased space at 1166 River Avenue in the South Bronx.³

The school population comprises 85% Black, 12% Hispanic, 0% White, 1% American Indian/Alaska native and 3% Asian students. 93.3% of students are designated as receiving free/reduced price lunch, compared to 85% in the district.⁴ The student body at Bronx Academy of Promise includes 26.1% English language learners compared to 26.6% in the district and 11.7 % special education students compared to 17.5% in the district⁵.

The school earned a B on its progress report in 2009-10⁶. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 – 2011 was 95.1%⁷.

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 20, 2011:

- Rick Larios, Senior Director, NYC DOE CSO
- Gabrielle Mosquera, Director of Oversight, NYC DOE CSO
- Karen Drezner, Consultant, NYC DOE CSO

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

⁷ Self-reported by school

Part 2: Findings

Areas of Strength

The school operational and instructional staff members have displayed resilience in managing a number of significant changes since the school opened in 2008, including several principal changes and separation from the school's original charter management organization.

- School leadership and teaching staff interviewed during the visit expressed a strong sense of commitment to students and their success, as well as to each other and the school.
- Prior to the March 2011 appointment of Catherine Jackvony as the school's new principal, a poor professional climate dominated; teachers reportedly lacked guidance and support and operated in a "vacuum." According to interviews with teachers and other staff, Jackvony was "very refreshing, very open, and very helpful." Another staff member reported that employees are "very comfortable talking with her" and noted that she instills confidence in them.
- On the day of the visit, the Board of Trustees chair expressed full confidence in Catherine Jackvony, the school's new principal, and the job she's done in a few short months.
- Although school leadership turnover has been high, the school has retained most of its K-2 teachers from its founding year. Current school leadership credited these and other instructional staff members with maintaining student morale and engagement amid the changes.
- The school's business director has worked with the school since before it opened, providing stable leadership to school finances and business operations.

The general school environment appeared positive, safe, and calm on the day of the visit.

- Classes observed were orderly, with students responsive to teacher directions and usually on task, including during transitions.
- Student work (particularly art) was prominently displayed in classrooms and hallways, some of it with rubrics included.
- The school appears to have substantial literacy resources. A wide array of printed references and learning resources are available to teachers, comprehensive book collections were evident in observed classrooms, and observed classrooms also made frequent use of word walls.

The school's principal and leadership team are focused on improving instruction and school culture.

- Teachers interviewed stated that soon after joining the school staff, the current principal responded to their requests for guidance by sending several staff members to conferences focused on reading, writing, and Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Those teachers then "turn-keyed" their conference knowledge to the rest of the staff.
- Initial areas of focus for the new principal include literacy instruction and morale. Teachers reported during interviews that the principal "is really visible" and supportive, coming into classes to model instruction and to "provide helpful feedback."
- Teachers have one 45-minute collaborative planning period a day, a weekly Friday Professional Development period for which the principal provides the focus, and a monthly half-day of PD.
- Both school leadership and teachers interviewed commented that respectful student behavior increased once the current principal began operating, noting that she is a strong presence throughout the school and all the students know her.
- ELL and Special Education staff reported that formal and informal check-ins with general education instructors are "constant," and that informal cross-planning with the school's homework tutors is very common.
- Teachers and administrators use data from the Saxon Math Assessments and from the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), which is administered three times a year, for

grouping decisions and to target specific skills. The second grade team reported using team-created monthly focus assessments in ELA and Math to monitor progress and target instruction.

The school reports strong and consistent levels of parent support and engagement.

- The school has a Parent Community Organization (PCO) with approximately 30 to 40 members, and 4 executive members. The PCO holds monthly meetings, flexibly scheduled to encourage attendance, and executive members meet with the principal on a monthly basis as well.
- A parent representative serves on the school's Board.
- The school staff includes a parent coordinator to assist leadership with parent engagement.
- Attendance at parent-teacher conferences, which is tracked via a sign-in process, is estimated to be 80 percent.

Areas of Growth

The school needs greater stability and consistent leadership and is encouraged to establish stronger school-wide systems, particularly related to student discipline, teacher evaluation, professional development, lesson planning, and use of data.

- Having had three school leaders in less than three years has proven disruptive to the school's climate and educational direction. Primary grade teacher retention remained stable, but all of the third grade teachers left or were let go before the start of the 2010-11 school year, leaving the school with teachers new to the school in all of the grade three and four classrooms. Moving into the next academic year, the Board and school leadership are encouraged to build on the improvements of the spring and to implement proposed strategies that will support stability and clarity of direction, including but not limited to launching a proposed mentoring program, hiring Reading and Math intervention specialists, and providing leadership opportunities for proven staff.
- The Board and school leadership are negotiating a contract with the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) with representatives of the school's instructional staff. As of the time of the school visit, the contract had not been finalized and the principal was unable to conduct formal teacher evaluations. It is important to begin the 2011-12 school year with clarity about performance expectations, supervision and evaluation, and processes and protocols for teacher support and accountability. School leadership should continue its efforts to reach required agreements that will result in quality teaching and learning for its students.
- Teachers interviewed on the day of the site visit stated that discipline had been inconsistently enforced over the course of the year due to a lack of formal policy and support structures. Additionally, the school's Family Handbook, submitted to the CSO as part of the requested site visit documentation, did not include an articulated school discipline policy. The school is encouraged to ensure that it begins the 2011-12 school year with a board-approved discipline policy that is effectively communicated to all stakeholders (staff, students, and parents), and is supported with appropriate professional development and clear routines and processes for students, teachers, and administrators to consistently manage and enforce.

The school should continue to focus on quality teaching and learning, considering ways to improve the overall quality and consistency of instruction in all classrooms.

- Observed classrooms were organized, orderly, and with students generally on task, but quality of instruction varied and there was little observed evidence of rigor in instructional expectations or student work. The school should continue its work with Common Core Standards and develop strategies to increase use of higher-level thinking and discussion strategies, and more effective use of differentiation through strategic grouping and targeted instruction.

- Classroom instruction for writing was consistently focused on the writing process but quality of displayed student written work varied and much of it appeared below grade level. The school should work in grade-level and cross-grade-level teams to evaluate its expectations and resources (prompts, rubrics, grading reliability) and make sure they are aligned with state expectations.
- The school is switching from Saxon Math to Envision Math because teachers and administrators determined it was better aligned with the Common Core, and is encouraged to support the transition from Saxon to Envision with appropriate professional development, monitoring of implementation, and effective feedback so that the change results in improved teaching and learning.
- The grade-level teams worked together in developing curriculum maps aligned to the Common Core Standards. It is important for the school to continue to review and develop these maps to improve goal setting, lesson planning, and instructional delivery in ways that add urgency and focus to classroom practice and improve results for students.
- The school lacked a substantive academic intervention program during the school day. The school is encouraged to continue to identify resources and strategies (including but not limited to its plan to hire reading and math intervention specialists) to help develop an effective Response to Intervention program that will provide students with the regular opportunities necessary to overcome learning deficits and accelerate learning.

The school, although finishing its third year, is at a beginning level of effective assessment data use.

- The school's assessment program is not fully defined and is in transition. The TerraNova (TN) is administered but leadership and teacher interviews confirmed that the data from the TN is not analyzed and used instructionally. The school is uncertain what role TN will play in its assessment program going forward. Saxon Math assessments will be replaced by Envision Math assessments. Teacher teams are developing their own interim assessments. The school is encouraged to formalize the assessment data to be collected; to systematize how data is organized, tracked, reviewed and used; and to ensure assessments are aligned with appropriate grade level expectations.
- The school reported that DRA results to date had demonstrated some progress, but also exposed some pockets of concern broadly across 1st grade and particular gaps in 3rd grade. The school is encouraged to examine DRA results against state assessment results for its students in grades three and four when they become available and incorporate findings into curriculum map work and unit and lesson planning in the new school year.
- The school's principal attended Doug Reeves's "Leadership and Learning" conference, which provided guidance about setting Specific Measurable Attainable Relevant and Timebound (SMART) ELA and Math goals for the school and students. Trainings are scheduled for August to focus teacher work on creating formative assessments and supporting data teams. The school is encouraged to follow up that work with effective monitoring support to the data team and any additional staff development appropriate to accelerate effective use of the new teacher assessments in focusing instruction on school, grade, class and individual student needs.

The school should consider strategies for strengthening its Board capacity and ensuring that the Board has the right mix of skills and professional backgrounds to provide effective oversight and leadership to support the school's most pressing educational and operational needs, as well as to provide the strategic direction for the school's long-term prosperity.

- The Board currently has only required minimum of 5 members, 3 of whom are original founders and 2 of whom are new. The Board currently does not have any functioning committees.
- The Board should consider evaluating its capacity against the short and long-term needs/goals of the school to determine the best strategy for ensuring that Board capacity evolves in support of the school, including considering board expansion, board training, and developing effective committees.

The school should continue its focus on solutions for its upcoming facility needs.

- The school is currently at capacity in its current location and leadership reported looking at another nearby facility. Splitting sites or relocating the entire school are both being considered for upcoming school years. The school is encouraged to work with its Board to develop a firm financial and operational plan for this location switch and to develop a contingency plan in the event that its initial plans encounter delays or reversals.
- The school's student population currently includes 11.7% SPED students, which is lower than the district average of 17.5%. However, the school's population of ELL students (26.1%) does more closely reflect the district average (26.6%).⁸ 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 comparable SPED percentages with its CSD and maintaining its comparable ELL averages.

⁸ 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

