



**Department of
Education**

Dennis M. Walcott, Chancellor

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

**METROPOLITAN LIGHTHOUSE CHARTER SCHOOL
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT**

MAY 2011

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

Metropolitan Lighthouse Charter School is an elementary school serving approximately 138 students from grade kindergarten through grade two in the 2010-2011 school year.¹ The school opened in 2010 with grades kindergarten through two. It has plans to grow to serve students grades kindergarten through five.² It is currently housed in DOE space in District 8.³

The school population comprises 45.1% Black, 52.8% Hispanic, .7% White, and 1.4% Asian students. 84.5% of students are designated as receiving Free/Reduced Price lunch, compared to 71.7% in the district.⁴ The student body includes 14.1% English language learners, compared to 12.5% in the district, and 10% special education students⁵, compared to 19.6% in the district⁶.

The school is in its first year and has not yet earned a Progress Report grade or state/federal accountability designation.⁷ The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 – 2011, as of May 2, 2011, is 97 %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 May 2, 2011:

- Rick Larios, Senior Director, NYC DOE CSO
- Gabrielle Mosquera, Director of Oversight, NYC DOE CSO
- Karen Drezner, 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 Self-reported by school

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

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

⁸ Self-reported by school

Part 2: Findings

Areas of Strength

- A strong, positive relationship between school leaders and the Charter Management Organization (CMO) (Lighthouse Academies), including a shared focus and mission, was evident on the day of the visit and throughout interviews and meetings.
 - The daily, onsite presence of CMO staff provides current support, as well as future opportunities for instructional leaders to learn and grow their capacity.
 - The CMO provides board governance support including significant training, dashboard reviews, and support of financial oversight.
 - This relationship enables Cambridge Consulting to provide professional development support for school leadership.
- The school's leadership and CMO have established critical support structures and protocols for academic and operational support.
 - Strong operational tracking systems are in place for purchasing, enrollment, facilities management, parent involvement, and discipline.
 - Leaders maintain close oversight by reviewing lesson plans, observing classrooms, and addressing student needs through RTI (Response to Intervention) framework.
 - Through the CMO network and school model, leadership and staff have significant Professional Development opportunities: 20 days during the summer and throughout the school year
 - School leadership team participates in monthly "cluster meetings" that work across all network schools.
 - Teachers have weekly grade level meetings with a set agenda from the Director of Instruction.
 - Teachers receive formal evaluations three times a year using a set rubric from Lighthouse Academies, plus informal observations.
- A strong focus on reviewing and learning from both academic and operational data in order to improve performance was evident among school leadership team and CMO team.
 - The school administers the NWEA assessment three times a year and uses DIBELS as well as other third-party and self-created assessments to generate data to monitor instructional progress.
 - The school's NWEA Kindergarten and 1st grade fall-to-winter scores demonstrated the most significant growth in reading and solid progress in math. Its 2nd grade results varied.
 - The school is participating in the CMO network's writing assessment pilot program and the development of interim assessments
- The school and classroom environment is safe and generally orderly, with students often on task.
 - In most of the classes observed on the day of the visit students were on task in response to specific assignments.
 - Morning meetings reflected Responsive Classroom strategies with structured activities (greeting, sharing, student-led Q&A) that provide a foundation for a potentially strong social curriculum.
 - Lighthouse Academies' focus on core values of SHINE (Self-discipline, Humility, Intelligence, Nobility, Excellence) provides structure for supporting social curriculum and connecting learning to behavior expectations.
 - Observed classrooms were print-rich and had ample instructional resources.

- The school reports strong parent support and engagement.
 - The school has a full-time parent coordinator who has established parent engagement opportunities such as monthly parent nights that provide support to parents on how to help their children succeed at school and other topics, as well as coordinated parent support for Advocacy Day in Albany.
 - The school has a Parent Association that meets monthly, both in executive and general sessions.
 - Parent attendance at parent/teacher conferences has been strong (Q1: 86 %, Q2: 93 %, Q3: 91 %).
 - The Principal and/or parent coordinator meet regularly with Parent Association leadership.

Areas of Growth

- Instructional delivery and classroom management practices observed in classrooms during the visit varied in effectiveness.
 - Observed classrooms showed some examples of intentional differentiation but in most classes it was difficult to determine the purpose of the grouping or intentionality of the small group work. In one class, a small group worked with a teacher and several other groups were playing different games where they didn't seem to be able to describe the desired learning outcomes (counting syllables, identifying the missing sounds). In another observed class an excessive amount of time was taken for directions of a relatively simple activity that created opportunities for restlessness and delayed the start of student practice until there was virtually no time for the practice. The school, working with a young staff, is encouraged to continue its efforts to improve instruction through customized professional development, the support of the school's instructional leaders, and the use of educational consultants focused on improved differentiation, grouping, and more efficient routines.
 - Four of six classroom teachers are first-year teachers. The school is encouraged to follow up on its intention to recruit and hire more experienced teachers for next year, particularly in light of its expansion to 3rd grade, to add capacity to staff and support its efforts to create mentoring structures.
- The school is encouraged to align staff expectations around discipline with those of its leadership.
 - Teacher interviews conducted on the day of the visit suggest that there is a gap between teachers and administrators around behavioral expectations and responsibility for discipline. One teacher said, "I don't feel supported; I have to explain and document a lot when I just want to get them out of my classroom." Another said, "I have a 'good class' and I had a child hit me and another rip up posters." The school is encouraged to review its recruitment practices and pre-opening professional development to ensure that new teachers are committed to the school mission/model and prepared to work with challenging urban students; the school is also encouraged to review its support systems for discipline to ensure that teachers are provided with appropriate levels of support.
 - The school experienced a winter spike in suspensions that was linked to some staff turnover in January and February. In interviews, however, teachers complained about a lack of consistency by administration in enforcing discipline policies. One teacher observed, that the "bar is set too low" and that the zero-tolerance policy set forth in handbook with parents was not enforced. The school is encouraged to review its discipline policy, discipline data, and professional development on student management as well as monitor them for alignment of expectations, compliance in implementation, and consistency in execution.
- The school is expanding by one grade level per year for the immediate future and should remain mindful of creating a sustainable culture, developing additional capacity, and

refining administrative practice to ensure that effective practices are less dependent on exceptional effort from a few key staff.

- The school should continue to focus on creating opportunities and developing expectations for professional collaboration, such as its intention to provide new teachers with mentoring.
 - The school should use internal and external surveys (such as the DOE School Survey) to monitor staff satisfaction and analyze what is working and what needs attention.
 - The school should explore long-term sustainability of current teacher oversight efforts, including ways to evaluate effectiveness of supervision, evaluation, and staff development practice so that efforts can be prioritized by evidence of success.
- The school should continue to develop its use of interim and other assessment data to improve instruction and support improved differentiation of instruction through better targeting of group and individual learning needs.
 - The school leadership team provides much of data analysis and guidance on instructional use of data. The school is encouraged to pursue its intentions to use professional development, mentoring, and consultants to improve individual teacher ownership for analyzing data and customizing instruction in response to data analysis.
 - The school should continue to advance parent engagement to greater levels of involvement.
 - While a core group of parents provides leadership of the executive committee of the Parent Association, attendance at general sessions is weak. The school is encouraged to continue developing strategies to improve parent attendance at general sessions of the Parent Association.
 - The school should continue to leverage its Parent Coordinator to work with parents to improve the value of, and attendance at, Parent Night workshops.
 - Parent participation on DOE School Survey was reported to be 50%; the school should consider setting goals for increased participation and developing measurable strategies for reaching increased participation goals.
 - While the school's enrollment exceeds the district in its percentage of English Language Learners (14.1% compared to 12.5%), its population of Special Education students (10%⁹ compared to 19.6%¹⁰) is well below district averages.
 - The school is encouraged to continue documenting and monitoring its recruitment efforts to ensure it makes every effort to both reach Special Education enrollment percentages comparable to the district's and sustain its comparable numbers for English Language Learners, making any adjustments required in pursuit of this mandate.

⁹ Self-reported by school

¹⁰ NYC DOE ATS system; data pulled 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

