



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

CHALLENGE PREPARATORY CHARTER SCHOOL
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT

MAY 2011

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

Challenge Preparatory Charter School is an elementary/ middle school serving approximately 144 students from grade kindergarten through grade one in the 2010-2011 school year.¹ The school opened in 2010 with grades kindergarten through one. It has plans to grow to serve students grades kindergarten through eight.² It is currently housed in DOE space in District 27.³

The school population comprises 78.3% Black, 11.2% Hispanic, 2.1% White, and 0% Asian students. 76.9% of students are designated as Title I, compared to 70.1% in the district.⁴ The student body includes 3.5% English language learners (ELL) and 14.0% special education students (SPED), compared to district averages of 10.1% designated as ELL and 13.7% receiving SPED services.⁵

The school is in its first year and has not yet earned a Progress Report grade or state/federal accountability designation.⁶ The average attendance rate for the 2010 – 2011 school year was 95.0%.⁷

Annual Review Process Overview:

The NYC DOE Charter Schools Office 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 4, 2011:

- Rick Larios, Senior Director, NYC DOE CSO
- Jessica Fredston-Hermann, Analyst, 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 on June 30, 2011

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

⁶ New York State Education Department - www.nysed.gov

⁷ Self-reported by school.

Part 2: Findings

Areas of Strength

- The school's culture is mission-driven and results-focused, both among the school leadership and across the whole staff. The school benefits from high levels of engagement, trust, and "buy-in" from all levels of the community, and strong communication between different constituents.
 - Teachers and parents are in daily communication through Parent Communication notebooks, which are sent home every night with students and signed by parents. These notebooks include comments from the teacher about the students' academic and behavioral performance. Parents are invited to respond and engage in an ongoing dialogue with teachers.
 - Parents are also frequently invited to the school through assemblies, workshops, and special events such as Parent Involvement Day. Each class has a representative Class Parent, who meets with the school principal once a month.
 - The school has an actively engaged Parent Association, and a parent representative sits on the school's Board. All parents are given the cell phone numbers of their students' teachers as well as those of the school principal and the Board chair.
 - Teachers uniformly praised the school leader as "always available," even on weekends. One interviewed teacher stated that "the support of the administration here is huge."
 - Staff members support each other and frequently observe each other's classrooms. Interviewed teachers uniformly praised each other as supportive and open to collaboration and feedback.
 - Teachers and school leaders interviewed spoke about their commitment to raising student achievement, meeting the needs of every learner, and striving for constant self-improvement.
- The school leadership is self-reflective and sets ambitious goals for improvement among all constituents.
 - Teachers set goals and help evaluate their own performance. Teachers complete a self-assessment that is revisited throughout the year as part of their Annual Teacher Performance Plans.
 - All students have Individual Achievement Plans (IAPs) which track their goals and which are revisited three times yearly. Goals are differentiated for individual students. Parents are invited to join the process of goal-setting by reviewing and signing their children's IAPs at parent-teacher conferences.
 - The school has set ambitious schoolwide goals around differentiation, homework completion, use of assessment, and moving their scholars to meeting benchmark goals for achievement.
 - The school has sought partnerships and collaborations for self-improvement that include the Partnership for Innovation in Compensation for Charter Schools (PICCS), the Center for Educational Innovation-Public Education Association (CEI-PEA), and the NYU Metro Learning Center.
- The school is focused on the effective use of data to inform instruction, and uses data to drive differentiation and small-group support.
 - Teachers use data binders both for individual students and to track whole-class performance and growth. Data is also analyzed by subgroup.

- Teachers use a variety of assessments including DIBELS, running records, and Pearson enVision. They plan to introduce the Terra Nova and ECLAS-2 assessments next fall.
 - Small group compositions are determined based on DIBELS and other assessment results.
 - The school has obtained a PICCS grant to fund a variety of data tracking systems which include Performance Tracker, Assessment Builder, and Curriculum Connector. The school plans to train all of their teachers in the usage of these systems so that they can more easily develop, score, and analyze assessments; develop and share curricular resources; and analyze assessment results by school, class, teacher, race, gender, FRL status, etc.
 - Reviewers observed examples of teachers differentiating lessons, products, and processes. Reviewers noted multiple examples of differentiated small-group instruction as students worked with the additional adults in the room.
 - Students benefit from additional support in classrooms, both push-in support from specialty teachers (music, Health, and art), as well as targeted support from assistant teachers.
- There is evidence of a consistent approach to instruction and planning throughout the school.
 - Classrooms are safe, orderly, and print-rich, with multiple examples of recently graded student work displayed, often with specific feedback included from teachers.
 - Teachers use a consistent rubric where all student work is graded on a scale of 1-4. One PD session was devoted to comparing examples of student work at each level on the scale and developing norms around rigorous expectations.
 - Teachers use a common lesson planning format and common language around instruction. There is clear evidence of co-planning and of collaboration.
- The school has built a strong culture of professional growth, and the levels of respect and support for teachers are high.
 - One hour of professional development and/or planning time is built into the daily schedule, led by Kindergarten and Grade 1 Lead Teachers. These meetings may include time to look at student work, create assessments, or plan for the following week's lessons. The school principal and operations director sit in on at least one PD meeting per week.
 - Teachers receive three formal observations from the principal per year as well as many informal observations and feedback.
 - The school principal has empowered and encouraged teachers to take on leadership roles; two lead teachers have taken on additional roles within the school as Curriculum Liaison and Data Liaison, and one Kindergarten teacher has taken on the role of Reports Coordinator.
 - Teachers noted that the administration is supportive of their attending outside trainings and turnkeying the information to staff; one teacher said that "everyone should learn how to facilitate PDs."

Areas of Growth

- The school's culture is uniquely strong, especially for a school in its first year, and the school should continue to focus on ways to sustain and strengthen its culture as the school grows over time.
- The school should continue to develop and refine its focus on data.

- The school should consider engaging all teachers in the online data management program.
- The school should consider further engaging its student population in data reflection and individual goal-setting.
- As the school grows, it should continue to move toward using longitudinal data to inform goal-setting and strategic decisions.
- The school is encouraged to continue working with its instructional staff to develop strategies for ensuring that all students are actively engaged in the learning process.
 - Several lessons observed lacked checks for understanding before students were instructed to move on to group or independent work. The school should consider incorporating techniques that can be consistently used by teachers to verify student understanding before transitions to other activities or lessons.
 - In a number of classes observed, reviewers noted that teachers did not follow up with students who answered questions incorrectly to ascertain that they understood the correct answers. The school should consider ways to enhance discussion as well as questioning strategies to clarify misunderstandings and to ensure that 100% of students understand the question and are able to answer correctly.
 - In several classrooms observed, some students who finished early did not have any additional activities to complete, and were observed putting their heads down on their desks while awaiting further instruction. The school is encouraged to identify strategies for additional learning activities for students who complete their work early (e.g. work checks, independent reading, extension, or student choice activities).
- 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 percentages with its CSD.
 - The school's student population currently includes 3.5% ELL students, which is lower than the district average of 10.1%. However, the school's population of SPED students (13.7%) does more closely reflect the district average (14.0%).⁸

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