



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

DEMOCRACY PREP HARLEM CHARTER SCHOOL
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT

APRIL 2011

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

Democracy Prep Harlem Charter School is a middle school serving approximately 109 students in grade 6 in the 2010-2011 school year.¹ This is the school's first year of operation. It has plans to grow to serve students grades 6 through 8.² It is currently housed in DOE space in District 5.³ There are three other schools (two district, one charter) within MS 481.

The school population comprises 73.4% Black, 23.9% Hispanic, .9% White, and .9% Asian students. 79.8% of students are designated as Title I.⁴ The student body includes 5.5% English language learners and 22.0% special education students.

The school is in its first year and has not yet earned a Progress Report grade or state/federal accountability designation.⁵ The average attendance rate for the school year 2010-11 was 95.60%.⁶ As of the date of the annual site visit (April 5, 2011), the school reported 6 in-school suspension and 53 out-of-school suspensions out of a student population of 109 enrolled.

Democracy Prep Harlem Charter School (DPH) is part of the Democracy Prep Public Schools network, a charter management organization. The CMO provides an overarching Superintendent, back office support, institutional goals aligned to network goals; student assessment data gathering, and school policies (e.g. HR) among other support services. DPH, working with and through the network, manages student information via ATS, orders supplies, and compiles its quarterly financial reports (in conjunction with the DPH's Board of Trustees Finance Committee). The fee structure is based on an initial 15% of public non-competitive revenues with an annual reduction of ½%.

Annual Review Process Overview:

The York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) Charter Schools Office conducts an annual site visit of NYC DOE 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 NYC DOE 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 in some cases 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 April 28, 2011:

- Sonia C. Park, NYC DOE CSO, Senior Director
- Bert Wyman, NYC DOE CSO, Analyst
- 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; Title I percentage from 2008 NY State Report Cards

⁵ New York State Education Department - www.nysed.gov

⁶ Democracy Prep Harlem Charter School self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (4/5/2011)

Part 2: Findings

Areas of Strength

- The School in its first year of operation has established a culture that is mission-driven and solidified, both among the school leadership and across the staff. The school benefits from high levels of engagement, trust, and “buy-in” from all stakeholders.
 - On the day of the visit, the school was safe, well maintained and orderly with a firm enforcement of discipline that has student and teacher support.
 - Consistent approach, language and systems between staff and students were observed in classrooms and during hallway transitions.
 - For example, Track “name,” thumbs up thumbs down, and count downs, were seen used in most classes.
- The Principal, Emmanuel George, has recruited an experienced teaching staff (an average of 7 years teaching experience). Teachers observed and interviewed expressed a collegial, collaborative, communicative relationship among peers and school leadership.
 - During the visit, Mr. George was observed with his laptop providing instant feedback via emails sent to teachers during classroom observations. One interviewed teacher stated that “she never felt criticized” and feedback she received included areas to improve upon as well as praise of exemplary performance.
 - Interviewed teachers reported strong leadership involvement. It was stated that the Principal frequently observes, evaluates and provides feedback to teachers through informal evaluations, weekly reviews of lesson plans and triennial formal evaluations.
 - The Teaching and Learning form (a network generated self-evaluation) is completed every trimester by teachers and by Mr. George.
 - The School has created a library of teacher video clips for internal profession development.
 - DPH has promoted staff from within, providing a path for teachers to take on additional responsibilities and leadership roles as the school continues to grow.
- During the visit, overall, teachers displayed strong instructional control. Students followed teacher directions and no significant behavioral problems were observed.
 - In over ten observed classes, most students were engaged in the lesson.
 - Teachers varied which students they called on/questioned, often targeting disengaged students.
- The School’s curriculum puts emphasis on frequent writing practice and instruction as well as data-driven differentiation of instruction.
 - On the day of the visit, writing was incorporated in non-ELA classes such as Math and Social Studies.
 - DPH employs data-driven differentiation as was evidenced by the student composition of Small Group Instruction and specific pull out classes. Data is processed by the network and analyzed at the school level.
 - SGI of 7 to 10 students are reconfigured every 2 weeks based on updated assessment data. Approximately 35-45% of students participate in SGI daily for two-week cycles. SGI meetings were observed during the visit.
 - Differentiation was also seen in specific pull out classes for all core subjects: ELA, Math, Science and Social Studies.
- School reported a budget surplus which the school leadership used to establish a tutoring program to further support students.

- Operational support for DPH is provided by the network. The school based operations person reported a clear and supportive relationship with the network as evidenced by professional development provided for administrative office personnel by the network.

Area of Growth

- DPH should enact corrective measures in order to be in full compliance with the 2010 amended Charter School Act, areas of non-compliance concern the Parent Organization, English Language Learners (ELL), and Teacher Certification.
 - DPH should continue to strengthen parent participation and engagement via the establishment of a Parent Organization which is formally organized and meets regularly.
 - The school should document outreach to ELL students in order to be comparable to the district, CSD 5. DPH's population includes 7.3%⁷ ELLs, which is lower than CSD 5's 12.3%⁸; and
 - DPH should continue to employ experienced, certified staff in order to meet the Act's requirement of non-certified teaching staff being only 5 or 30% of teaching staff, whichever is less. The school reported that 4 out of 11 teachers were not certified, i.e. 36%.
- DPH should continue to focus on ways to sustain and strengthen its culture as the school continues to grow over time.
 - In several observed classes, the level of energy and enthusiasm displayed by staff and students was inconsistent.
- DPH should continue to focus on ways to strengthen consistency among teachers, refine its definition of rigorous work, and emphasize developing student ownership of learning.
 - It was observed that student tracking directions were not consistently enforced by teachers and that teachers did not consistently push students to provide answers requiring critical thinking.
 - In several observed classes, the level of student engagement was inconsistent. The school is encouraged to utilize professional development to improve classroom management and re-engagement strategies.
 - Several lessons observed lacked checks for comprehension before students proceeded to independent work or the next lesson. The school should consider incorporating strategies that can be consistently used by teachers to verify student understanding before transitions to other activities or instruction.

⁷ DPH self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (April 5, 2011)

⁸ ATS data, (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