Department of Education
Dennis M. Walcott, Chancellor

ST. HOPE LEADERSHIP ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT

APRIL 2011

CHARTER SCHOOLS OFFICE
52 Chambers Street, New York, NY 10007

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

St. Hope Academy Charter School is a middle school serving approximately 275 students from grade 5 through grade 8 in the 2010-2011 school year.[1] The school opened in 2008 with grades 5 through 7. Initially the school was affiliated with a California-based CMO that developed the model upon which the school is designed. During the first year of operation, the school separated from its CMO and now operates independently. It is currently functioning at scale with grades 5 through 8.[2] It is currently housed in DOE space in District 5.[3]

The school population comprises 75.4% Black, 22.7% Hispanic, 1.9% White, and 0% Asian students. 77.7% of students receive free/reduced price lunch, compared to 79.7% in the district.[4] The student body includes 7.6% English language learners, compared to 12.3% in the district and 19.3% special education students, compared to 17.1% in the district[5].

The school earned a B on its progress report in 2009-2010. The average attendance rate for the school year 2009-2010 was 95.7%[6]. The school is in good standing per state and federal accountability measures.[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 April 26, 2011:

- Richard Larios, Senior Director, NYC DOE CSO
- Jessica Fredston-Hermann, Analyst, NYC DOE CSO
- Gabrielle Mosquera, Director of Oversight, 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 June 30, 2011.
[6] NYC DOE School Progress Report
[7] New York State Education Department - www.nysed.gov

Part 2: Findings

Areas of Strength

- The school has a stable, mission-driven leadership team and school support staff.
    - During interviews on the day of the site visit leadership and support staff were open, reflective and direct in sharing school's strengths and areas of improvement.
    - Principal and Director of Curriculum and Instruction have started receiving leadership development support from Cambridge Associates this year. Leadership stated that the Cambridge consultants also visit classrooms and provide feedback with the intention of trying to norm a common vision of high-quality instruction.
    - School took ownership of low 2009-10 Math and ELA results, describing a process of data review, goal-setting, and instructional changes as "reality therapy."

- In self-evaluation, interviews, and professional development planning school evidenced a strong commitment to data use and a data-driven instructional focus.
    - School began year in August with diagnostic assessments and followed them up with interim assessments (IAs) administered every 6-7 weeks. Each administration of the IAs is followed by a full-day Data Day when teachers analyze results and create re-teaching plans.
    - Diagnostic and interim assessments are based on released state assessment items. The school uses Edusoft to scan and input responses and analyze test results, and plans to contract with Achievement Network, a non-profit that helps schools organize, analyze and respond to data, for the 2011-12 year.
    - School administered a "dress rehearsal" assessment in February for ELA and Math with somewhat reassuring results in ELA (less so in Math), which helped with spring test prep work.
    - Teachers discuss grades and academic performance with students during the Advisory period on Accountability Tuesdays. After each testing cycle, students complete individual reflection sheets that include detailed test results and standards for each question so that students can identify areas of strength and areas of growth.
    - The school's focus on data is reflected in its hallways, where students are publicly celebrated for their academic performance and growth on assessments. Names are listed for "high flyers" (81%+ in Math, 73%+ in ELA), "rising stars" (100%+ growth between IAs), honor roll, high honor roll, and honorable mentions.

- In response to low 2009-10 ELA results, school identified a number of actions to improve literacy instruction at the school.
    - The school joined Columbia University's Teachers College Readers and Writers Project (TCRWP), receiving curriculum resources, professional development, and support in implementing the TCRWP model, including 20 site support visits from a TC literacy coach.
    - The school's emphasis on literacy was evident—in lesson aims, questioning, class activities, and the rich print environment observed on the day of the visit. The school's cross-curricular focus on reading, writing and math across the curriculum was also noted by reviewers on the day of the visit.

- On the day of the visit, the school learning environment appeared safe, orderly, and supportive of learning.

- In the majority of classrooms observed on the day of the visit students were on task and focused in completing assignments.
- School values (HARLEM in Action; created by the school's culture committee) were posted in rooms and hallways and are part of a citizenship rubric in its first year of launch.
- Student Advisory occurs daily to help students and adults form relationships, develop positive expectations, good habits of learning, and address issues such as bullying as appropriate or necessary.
- School administration and student support staff share a flexible approach to academic and behavioral interventions that is consistent with the school's mission and values.

- School is well supported by parents and families, and families are engaged in the life of the school.
  - Parent participation in 2009-2010 NYC DOE School Survey was well above city average (95% compared to about 50% in 2009-10), with above-average satisfaction scores by parents (91% satisfied or very satisfied with the education their child is receiving).
  - School has active parent association called the Parent Council with five officers and two co-chairs.
  - Parent Council meets monthly with school principal and publishes a monthly newsletter for parents.

Areas of Growth

- The school should continue to refine its outreach strategies for recruitment of ELL students and document its efforts for ongoing monitoring of effectiveness in reaching comparable ELL percentages with its CSD, as well as continue to monitor SPED student recruitment to ensure the school sustains its comparable enrollment average for SPED.
  - The school's student population currently includes 7.5% ELL students, which is lower than the district average of 12.3%. Its current population of SPED students (19.3%) is higher than the district average of 17.1%.[8]

- The school should continue to work on improving its culture and learning environment, particularly as it relates to its approach to student behavior.
  - School survey results and teacher interviews during the day of the annual site visit indicated a disconnect between teachers and the school's leadership and support staff's approach to student discipline. Teachers see inconsistency where leadership sees flexibility. Interviewed teachers cited teacher turnover, a "lack of consistency in responsiveness," failure of suspensions to be a deterrent, a lack of administrator follow-through, and adding new students after the start of the school year as reasons why the problem hasn't been solved yet.
  - In addition to seeking to continue to improve Student Advisory and the use of St. Hope's citizenship rubric and HARLEM in Action values, the school may consider engaging staff in re-committing to the school's mission and vision and reviewing its approach to student behavioral expectations and discipline policy to ensure administrators and all staff are working effectively together for a safe and productive learning environment.

- The school should continue to develop its data-driven culture to improve effectiveness of using data to inform instruction and to improve school achievement results.
  - Observed instruction on the day of the visit was responsive to school-wide data findings linked to the school's IAs and "dress rehearsal" assessments but there was little observed differentiation of instruction within classes (sub-groups, individuals).

[8] NYC DOE ATS system; data pulled on June 30, 2011

    - Structures are in place to facilitate more sophisticated and efficient use of data to target instruction and school instructional leadership should consider strategies and activities to increase teacher and student ownership of academic data.

- The school should continue to work on improving consistency and quality in instructional practices.
    - Pacing and rigor in observed classrooms on the day of the visit was inconsistent, as was the use of instructional strategies that engaged students more actively in their learning. In several classes observed, expectations for what students should be doing were not made clear and/or the goal/outcome of the lesson was not clearly articulated. The school is encouraged to focus efforts on raising and clarifying expectations for students and on refining its definition of rigorous instruction so that all students are challenged at appropriate levels.
    - Discussion strategies also varied in effectiveness and engagement, with some teachers using higher level questions and others only using fact recall questions; some teachers consistently performed checks for understanding after a concept was taught or before an activity was begun, while others did not.
    - School has advanced its efforts to arrive at a common instructional structure and language and should align professional development, teacher collaboration, and teacher evaluation expectations around a common understanding of what effective instruction is.

- To better advance the school's improvement efforts, school leadership should consider ways to add structure, focus, and consistency in the school's professional development program and teacher evaluation process.
    - In interviews during the school visit, teachers described the school's approach to professional development as "sporadic," "self-driven," and "inconsistent," ,and said "newer teachers don't know what to request".
    - Teachers also reported inconsistency of frequency and duration in informal and evaluative classroom observations and some said the latter lacked structured expectations and objectivity.
    - While school leadership has intentionally sought to encourage teachers to plan for their own professional growth and identify workshops to meet their individual needs, survey results, interviews, and academic performance and school improvement efforts suggest a more structured approach to professional development and teacher evaluation would be beneficial. The school's instructional leadership should consider ways to work with teachers to identify and prioritize professional development needs linked to school and teacher performance and organize those priorities into a cohesive professional development plan linked to measurable outcomes.

- The school should continue its efforts to strengthen parent engagement and further leverage parental satisfaction.
    - Staff reported that parent attendance at school events varies and could be better.
    - The board is considering adding a parent representative to the Board of Trustees in 2011-12.
    - According to leadership team, school staff help to coordinate efforts and effectiveness of Parent Council. School leadership should consider working with Parent Council co-chairs to identify strategies for improving independence of PC and for using the PC to mobilize parents to more effectively support the school and its mission.

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. <u>Has the School Been an Academic Success?</u>

- 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 or 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