



**Department of
Education**

Dennis M. Walcott, Chancellor

**Charter School Annual Site Visit Report
Charter Schools Office
2011-2012**

**CULTURAL ARTS ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL AT SPRING CREEK
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT**

APRIL 2012

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

Cultural Arts Academy Charter School at Spring Creek (CAACS) is an elementary school serving approximately 169 students from kindergarten through second grade in the 2011-2012 school year.¹ The school opened in 2010 with grades K-1. The school is in its' first chartering term and is projected to reach its full grade span, K-5, during its current term, which expires February 8th, 2015.² The school is currently housed in a private facility at 1400 Linden Boulevard, Brooklyn in District 18.³

There were 316 students on the waitlist after the Spring 2011 lottery.⁴ The student body includes 33.1% Free and Reduced Lunch students, compared to 72.5% in the district; 7.7% students with disabilities, compared to 14.2% in the district; and 0% English language learners, compared to 5.1% in the district.⁵ The average attendance rate for the 2011-2012 school year to date was 95. 2%.⁶ The school scored Well Above Average on the Academic Expectations, Communication, and Engagement sections of the NYC DOE School Survey in 2010-2011, and Above Average on the Safety & Respect section; 58% of the school's parents responded to the survey, and 79% of the school's teachers.⁷

The school has outperformed its Community School District and the city averages in ELA and Math for each of the past three years.⁸ The school is in good standing with state and federal accountability.⁹

Annual Review Process Overview:

The NYC DOE Charter School 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 the representatives of the New York City Department of Education Charters Schools Office and last the duration of one school day. The annual site visit begins with a meeting with the principal and the 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 17th, 2012:

¹ Self-reported by school on Annual Site Visit Data Collection Form dated April 2012

² NYC DOE ATS system and charter agreement

³ NYC DOE Location Code Generating System database

⁴ Self-reported by school on Annual Site Visit Data Collection Form dated April 2012

⁵ NYC DOE ATS system as of 4/3/2012

⁶ Self-reported by school on Annual Site Visit Data Collection Form dated April 2012

⁷ NYC DOE School Survey – <http://schools.nyc.gov/survey>

⁸ NYC DOE website – <http://schools.nyc.gov/> (search: test results); District and city averages are for the grade levels corresponding to the school's testing grades in specified years

⁹ New York State Education Department - www.nysed.gov

- Sonya Hooks, NYC DOE CSO
- Laurie Pendleton, NYC DOE CSO Consultant

Areas of Strength:

- CAACS has established a strong focus on academic rigor, and quality instruction, with a focus on the arts and character education.
 - Teachers at the Cultural Arts Academy Charter School specialize in the core subject areas allowing them to develop true expertise in their subject area. To further this concept, teachers are called Professors and classrooms are named after prominent colleges and universities.
 - The science classes observed on the day of the visit were particularly exciting. Students were very engaged and the professors were pushing them by asking high level questions and challenging them to use content-specific vocabulary.
 - Classroom word walls were reflective of the content being taught and contained high levels of vocabulary.
 - On the day of the visits, professors were observed intentionally checking for understanding and adjusting the lesson to meet the needs of the learners.
 - Professors were observed using such routines as “one-two-three, eyes on me”, “turn and talk”, and silent signals and students readily participated, making instruction more effective and efficient.
 - On the day of the visit, students appeared to be consistently on-task and engaged in high-quality work.
 - The school provides Character Education daily and uses the Project Wisdom curriculum and the schedule provides time for Spanish, music, art, and Physical Education. Professors interviewed reported that their students are exposed to the arts and science and that the culture sets them apart.

- CAACS has instituted strong routines for the ongoing collection and analysis of student achievement data.
 - The school is using a variety of assessments including Fountas and Pinnell and Scantron assessments in addition to curriculum-based programs to measure student performance.
 - The students in grades one and two use Achieve 3000, a web-based differentiated literacy program that provides nonfiction passages and activities that are matched to student’s individual reading levels. The program assesses each student through the Lexile assessment tool and the school monitors these results.
 - Professors align individual assessment questions to standards taught and provide feedback to parents and students on the mastery of those standards.
 - Professors have “big goals” that are prominently displayed in their classrooms along with progress towards those goals.
 - Students have achievement goals and track their own progress.
 - The lesson plans professors prepare include a reflection portion entitled, “Daily qualitative Data” where professors reflect on the percent of students who mastered the lesson’s objective and to discuss adjusts that might be necessary to ensure 90% mastery.
 - Professors prepare a presentation of their data for their colleagues, providing an opportunity for team conversations focused on student achievement.
 - The school has a designated data coordinator who collects and organizes data for professors and teams to analyze. This position is also responsible for the completion of a school “Data Dashboard” that provides information on student demographics, staff, instructional time, student achievement, and attendance.

- CAACS has established a strong collegial environment amongst staff.
 - The professors prepare lesson plans and share with a designated colleague who provides feedback. The Director of Content and Curriculum also provides feedback on a random basis. The school uses the Atlas Curriculum Mapping tool and assessments are kept in a common folder, allowing professors to have access to all lesson plans and resources.
 - Professors are required to observe a peer at least once a week for at least 20 minutes and provide feedback on an observation template.

- CAACS employs various strategies that provide meaningful opportunities for parent engagement.
 - The school has an active parent association board that has created by-laws and includes participation from all classrooms.
 - The school hosts a variety of events for parents focused on both curriculum and building community.
 - There is a resource center where parents can access information on how to better assist their students. This center is staffed by a Parent Resource Coordinator who proactively reaches out to parents when concerns about student growth arise.

Areas of Growth:

- The staff at CAACS has many professors who are new to the profession and additional new professors will join the faculty as the school grows. The school is encouraged to continue to provide extensive professional development to ensure the continuation of a high-quality instructional program.
- CAACS is encouraged to think about how best to manage the effects and limitations the physical environment has on the school.
 - The shared classroom space could lead to challenges in ensuring the print environment is reflective of all subjects taught. On the day of the visit, the Spanish class was taught in a math classroom. Although there were many examples of math on the walls, there were no print supports for students.
 - Although students were very well-based during transitions through the halls on the day of the visit, the tight quarters could make it more challenging as the school grows and the students get larger.
 - The small physical space in many of the classrooms could limit the types of teaching activities teachers choose to implement.
- CAACS should continue to refine its outreach strategies for recruitment of ELL, students with disabilities, and Free and Reduced Lunch students and document the effectiveness of these efforts.
 - The school should continue to document outreach to ELL students in order to be comparable to the district, CSD 18. The school reported using a variety of recruitment strategies and making the application available in several languages. The school's population includes less than 0 ELLs, which is lower than CSD 18's 6.3%.
 - The school should continue to document outreach to Special Education students in order to be comparable to the district, CSD 18. The school's population includes 8.3% Special Education students, which is lower than CSD 18's 14.1%.
 - CAACS should continue to document outreach to students eligible for FRL in order to be comparable to the district, CSD 18. The school's population includes 28.1%, which is lower than CSD 18's 73%.

Part 3: Essential Questions and Accountability Framework

The CSO Accountability Framework

To help NYC DOE authorized charter schools better understand what we mean by success for charter schools, the NYC DOE's Charter Schools Office (CSO) has developed an Accountability Framework build around four essential questions for charter school renewal:

1. Is the school an academic success?

2. Is the school a fiscally sound, viable organization?
3. Is the school compliant with its charter and all applicable law and regulations?
4. What are the school's plans for its next charter term?

1. Is the School an Academic Success?

1a. High Academic Attainment and Improvement

Schools that are academic successes have many of the characteristics below:

- Meet absolute performance goals
- Meet student progress goals
- Are closing the achievement gap for at risk students, including special needs and ELL students
- Are surpassing performance of DOE identified peer-schools
- Are surpassing performance district and city proficiency or better averages
- Are meeting other rigorous academic and non-academic goals as stated in school's charter

Evidence for success might include, but not be limited to, the following depending on school configurations:

- Grades 3-8 NYS ELA Results (absolute performance, individual student progress, comparative performance to similar schools, home district or city averages, progress for at-risk populations)
- Grades 3-8 NYS Math Results (absolute performance, individual student progress, comparative performance to similar schools, home district or city averages, progress for at-risk populations)
- Grades 4 and 8 NYS Science Results (absolute performance, individual student progress, comparative performance to similar schools, home district or city averages, progress for at-risk populations)
- Grades 8-12 NYS Regent Exam Results
- When applicable, NYSAA or other approved alternate assessments results
- HS 4- and 6-Year Graduation Rates (absolute and progress, overall, for at-risk student populations)
- Grades 8-12 College Readiness Credit Accumulation
- Percentage of Students Applying to and Being Admitted to College
- Percentage of Students Taking AP Courses and/or Percentage of Students Passing AP Courses
- Results on state accountability measures
- Charter School Academic and Non-Academic Goals
- NYC Progress Reports

1b. Mission and Academic Goals

Schools with successful missions and goals have many of the characteristics below:

- Have an animating mission statement that staff, students and community embrace
- Set ambitious academic and non-academic goals that entire school community knows and embraces
- Have processes for regular monitoring and reporting on progress toward school goals
- Have processes for adjusting strategies in support of goals as appropriate in response to monitoring data

Evidence for successful missions and goals might include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Mission statement, charter, external documents (parent and family handbooks, school website, etc.)
- Annual reports, school improvement plans, leadership board reports
- Board agendas and minutes
- Parent, student, and teacher satisfaction surveys
- Participation at parent-teacher conferences, school advocacy events, participation in academic goal related programs

1c. Responsive Education Program

Schools with successful education programs have many of the characteristics below:

- Are self-reflective and examine practice based on outcomes against goals
- Have well-thought out curricular programs that are aligned with NYS learning outcomes as described by state standards and the new Common Core Curriculum.
- Use instructional models and resources consistent with school mission and that are flexible in addressing the needs of all learners
- Have defined strategies that they can measure and monitor for closing the achievement gap
- Offer defined opportunities for remediation and acceleration
- Implement a coherent and effective interim assessment system (e.g., use of formative, interim, and summative assessment data) for monitoring progress, predicting performance, and adjusting instruction
- Have an effective process for supporting improved classroom instruction, including frequent observation and feedback
- Have effective strategies and quality instructional programs for addressing students with special needs and ELLs
- Use a defined process for evaluating curricular tasks, programs and resources for effectiveness and fit with school mission and goals

Evidence for successful education programs, in addition to positive results, may include, but not be limited to, many of the following:

- Instructional planning documents (alignments, scope and sequences, curriculum maps, unit and lesson plans, etc)
- Student/teacher schedules
- Classroom observations
- Student Intervention / Response to Intervention program description and resources
- Interim assessment results
- Student and teacher portfolios
- Data findings; adjusted lesson plans
- Self-assessment documentation
- Professional development plans and resources

1d. Learning Environment

Schools with successful learning environments have many of the characteristics below:

- Have a strong culture that connects high academic and behavioral expectations in a way that motivates students to give their best effort academically and socially
- Use a comprehensive approach to student management, including positive behavioral expectations and a clear discipline policy to build and sustain a safe, orderly, and supportive classroom environment
- Provide for safe, respectful, efficient transitions, hallways, cafeteria, yard, etc.
- Have classrooms where academic risk-taking and student participation is encouraged and supported
- Provide opportunities for students to actively engage in their own learning and in the life of the school
- Have a formal or informal character education, social development, or citizenship program that provides opportunities to develop as individuals and citizens

Evidence for successful learning environments may include, but not be limited to, many of the following:

- School mission and articulated values
- Student management plan (code of conduct, school values, discipline policy, positive incentive system, etc.)
- Student attendance and retention rates
- Student discipline data
- DOE School Survey student results
- DOE School Survey parent and teacher safety and respect results
- Self-administered satisfaction survey results
- Leadership, staff, and, if appropriate, student interviews
- Classroom observations
- Scheduled student engagement opportunities (e.g., student advisory, internships, student government, student led conferences, peer tutoring, peer mediation, etc.)

2. Is the School a Fiscally Sound, Viable Organization?

2a. Governance Structure and Organizational Design

Schools with successful governance and organizational design structures have many of the characteristics below:

- Operate with a clearly articulated governance structure, compliant with its charter and all applicable laws and regulations
- Have a capable Board of Trustees with appropriate blend of skills and experiences to provide oversight and strategic direction to fulfill the mission and goals of its charter
- Have a Board that is fully compliant with all applicable laws and regulations, particularly but not limited to open-meeting laws and conflict of interest regulations
- Have developed a succession plan for board and school leadership, consistent with the charter and Board by-laws, to ensure continuity of direction and leadership over time and despite circumstance
- Implements a school leadership structure that is aligned with charter and that is sufficient to fulfill school's mission and achieve its accountability goals; it also has clear lines of accountability for leadership roles, accountability to Board, and, if applicable, relationship with a charter management organization
- Have timely and appropriate access to legal counsel
- Implemented a process for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the school's organization and leadership structure
- Have instructional leadership staffing and support structures that holds staff accountable for student learning outcomes and provide regular feedback on instruction to teachers

Evidence for school governance and organizational design may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- School charter
- Board by-laws, roster, trustee resumes, meeting agenda and minutes
- Annual conflict of interest forms
- Staff roster, job descriptions, staff handbook, operations manual
- School calendar, professional development plan

2b. School Climate and Community Engagement

Schools with a sustaining school climate and engaged parent and community support have many of the characteristics below:

- A healthy professional school climate that is collaborative, student centered, and open to parents and community support
- An effective process for recruiting, hiring, supporting, and evaluating leadership and staff
- A flexible, data-driven approach to professional development for all staff
- An effective way of measuring and monitoring core constituency satisfaction (parent, staff, and, when age appropriate, student), including the DOE School Survey
- Effective home-school communication practices to ensure meaningful parent involvement in the learning of their children
- Strong community-based partnerships and advocacy for the school

Evidence for school climate and community engagement may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- DOE School Survey satisfaction parent, teacher, and, if appropriate student results
- Student retention and wait list data
- Staff retention data
- Leadership, staff, parent, student interviews
- Student and staff attendance rates
- Parent attendance at parent-teacher conferences
- Parent association meeting calendar and minutes
- Community partnerships and sponsored programs

2c. Financial and Operational Health

Schools that are responsible stewards of public funds and effective, sustaining organizations have many of the characteristics below:

- Consistently meet its student enrollment and retention targets
- Annual budgets that meets all short- and long-term financial responsibilities with available revenues
- School leadership and Board that oversee financial and operational responsibilities in a manner that keeps the school's mission and academic goals central to decision-making
- Boards and school leadership that maintain effective internal controls of finances to ensure integrity of financial management and a proactive approach to mitigating risk
- Consistently clean financial audits
- If applicable, strong, accountable partnerships with management organizations and other partners and significant vendors to support delivery of chartered school design and academic program
- A safe, clean and appropriately resourced educational facility with all appropriate services specified in charter and mandated by appropriate law and regulations

Evidence for a financially sound, viable organization may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- School budget, P&Ls, and monthly/quarterly cash-flow reports
- Appropriate insurance documents
- Required facility documents (lease, certificate of occupancy, fire and safety inspections, etc.)
- Financial audits
- Financial leader(s) resume and accountability documents
- Operational policies and procedures
- Operational org chart
- Secure storage areas for student and staff records
- Policies/protocols for maintaining secure records
- School safety plan

3. Is the School in Compliance with its Charter and All Applicable Law and Regulations?

3a. Approved Charter and Agreement

Schools in substantial compliance with their charter and agreement have:

- Implemented the key features of their charter as described in the original charter and as modified in approved revisions to their charter, including but not limited to mission, academic program, school organization, grade configuration, enrollment, goals, etc.
- Ensure that update-to-date charter is publicly available to staff, parents, and school community
- Implemented comprehensive academic, behavioral, oversight, management, and operational policies and procedures that are substantially aligned with the charter and the school's stated mission and vision

Evidence for a school's compliance with the terms of its charter and charter agreement may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Authorized charter and signed agreement
- Charter revision request approval and documentation
- School mission
- School policies and procedures
- Site visits
- Board meetings, agendas and minutes
- Leadership/board interviews

3b. Applicable Federal and State Law

Schools in substantial compliance with federal and state law have:

- Met all legal requirements for Title I and IDEA regulations and reporting
- Comparable enrollment of FRL, ELL and Special Education students to those of their district of location *or* are making documented good faith efforts to reach comparable percentages
- Implemented school policies related to student discipline and promotion and retention that are fully compliant with laws and regulations related to students with disabilities and due process regulations
- Conducted independently verified fair and open lottery and manage with integrity enrollment process and annual waiting lists
- Employed instructional staff with appropriate security clearances and certification requirements

Evidence for compliance with applicable federal and state law may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- School reporting documents
- School's Annual Report
- Student recruitment plan and resources
- Student management policies and promotion and retention policies
- Student discipline records
- Lottery policy, resources, and records; enrollment procedures and records
- Staff roster, fingerprint clearance for all staff, certification status of all instructional staff

3c. Applicable Regulations

Schools in substantial compliance with applicable regulations have:

- Safe and secure facilities with no significant compliance concerns with applicable regulations
- Consistently clean annual audits, up-to-date escrow accounts, and have completed all other financial reporting as required
- Boards that meet requirements for size, meeting frequency, public notice, applicable open-meeting and conflict of interest regulations, as well as complying with NYC DOE CSO's requirements for reporting changes in board membership and securing approval for new board members.
- Informed NYCDOE CSO, and where required, received CSO approval for changes in significant partnerships, such as dropping/replacing a management organization
- Effectively engaged parent associations

Evidence for compliance with applicable regulations may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- School or building safety plan; appropriate inspection documents
- Annual audits, escrow accounts, other financial reporting documents
- Board roster, calendar, agenda and minutes, conflict of interest documents, notification of changes/approval of new member request documents
- Charter revision requests, revised or new contracts
- Parent association calendar of meetings, identified officers, parent association agenda and minutes, parent satisfaction survey results
- Interviews

4. What Are the School's Plans for its Next Charter Term?

4a. School Expansion or Model Replication

In anticipation of a new charter term schools may be considering various growth options: replication, expansion to new grades or increased enrollment or altering their model in some significant way. Successful schools generally have processes for:

- Conducting needs/opportunity assessments
- Forming Board and leadership committees or subcommittees to investigate options, develop action plans, ensure capacity and resources are aligned, etc.
- Engaging school community in articulating charter revisions (or a new charter in cases of replication) to address the proposed growth plans
- Ensuring that the final proposal is ambitious but realistic in its plans
- Creating a well-reasoned and documented prospective for the school's new charter term and, if applicable, a new charter proposal (for replication)

Evidence for likely success in planning for school growth in a new charter term may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Application Part I: Retroactive Analysis, including performance results and analyses of the current charter term
- Application Part II: Prospective Analysis, including mission, program description, governance, organization, budget, etc. for new term
- Leadership and Board interviews

4b. Organizational Sustainability

Successful schools consistently perform despite change. While there is no single path for ensuring sustainability, successful schools often have the following features:

- School anticipates organizational opportunities/needs and plans for resource development (human resource policies for growing your own talent, for example, or fundraising or budget management to take care of anticipated capital needs and to mitigate risks for the unexpected, or board development to bring new talent or specific needs-based expertise to the school)

Evidence for organizational sustainability may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Board roster and resumes
- Board committees and minutes
- School organization chart
- Staff rosters
- Staff handbook
- Leadership and staff interviews
- Budget

4c. School or Model Improvements

Successful schools are thoughtful about the continued appropriateness of school design features and elements of their models. They:

- Review performance carefully and even if they don't make major changes through expansion or replication, they are careful to adjust elements to ensure continued and improved success.
- Develop plans to improve the school learning environment, including improving their facilities to expand program offerings and/or developing new partnerships to further the school's mission.

Evidence for successful improvements to a school's program or model may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Application Part I: Retroactive Analysis, including performance results and analyses of the current charter term
- Application Part II: Prospective Analysis, including mission, program description, governance, organization, budget, etc. for new term
- Leadership and board interviews
- MOUs or contracts with partners