

# **HEBREW LANGUAGE ACADEMY**

## ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT

JUNE 2011

## Part 1: Executive Summary

### **School Overview and History:**

The Hebrew Language Academy Charter School (HLA) is a public elementary school located in Brooklyn, New York. The school emphasizes dual language instruction in English and Modern Hebrew in addition to providing instruction in traditional subjects including math, science, social studies, art, music, technology, and physical education.<sup>1</sup> The school opened in 2009 serving 159 students in grades kindergarten through one.<sup>2</sup> The school serves 231 students in grades kindergarten through two. It has plans to grow to serve students in grades kindergarten through five.<sup>3</sup> It is currently housed in private space at 3340 Kings Highway in District 22.<sup>4</sup>

The school population comprises approximately 35% Black, 6% Hispanic, 55% White, 0% Asian, and 4% other students. Approximately 66.5% of students are designated as receiving free/reduced price lunch, compared to 53.4% for the district.<sup>5</sup> The student body includes 6.3% English language learners (ELL) and 14.0% special education students (SPED), compared to 10.5% ELL and 12.7% SPED for the district.<sup>6</sup> The average attendance rate for the 2010-2011 year was 95%.<sup>7</sup>

After its first year in operation, the school received a designation of “Good Standing” according to state and federal guidelines.

Hebrew Language Academy Charter School is affiliated with the Hebrew Charter School Center (HCSC), a nonprofit organization, supporting and developing schools throughout the United States. HCSC provides in-kind professional development services to HLA in many curricular areas. Friends of Hebrew Language Academy Charter Schools, a NYC based nonprofit organization, supports the school by providing school facilities at no cost to the school. HLA will be self-sustaining in Year 6 of operation.

### **Annual Review Process Overview:**

The New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) Charter Schools Office (CSO) conducts an annual site visit of charter schools authorized by the NYC DOE. The site visit is designed to address 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. Afterward, 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 June 3, 2011:

- Sonia Park, Senior Director, NYC DOE CSO
- Simeon Stolzberg, Consultant

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrew Language Academy Charter School website

<sup>2</sup> New York State Accountability and Oversight Report, 2009-2010

<sup>3</sup> NYC DOE ATS system, data pulled on June 30, 2011; charter agreement

<sup>4</sup> NYC DOE Location Code Generating System database

<sup>5</sup> Demographic Data drawn from NYC DOE ATS System; data pulled on June 30, 2011

<sup>6</sup> NYC DOE ATS system, data pulled on June 30, 2011

<sup>7</sup> HLA self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (5/19/11)

## Part 2: Findings

### Areas of Strength

- The school has established a warm and orderly culture in which teachers, students, and families embrace the school's mission and approach.
  - Community meetings were conducted on the morning of the visit. These meetings included music, singing and the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.
  - Students were generally well-behaved and respectful on the day of the visit.
  - Throughout the school teachers were observed using praise and positive reinforcement.
  
- HLA has an organized curriculum that supports co-teaching and collaborative learning.
  - Teachers are provided with curriculum maps in all subjects with which to guide their instructional planning. The school is using the Teachers College Reading and Writing Workshop developed by Lucy Caulkins for reading and writing and topics and genres are laid out for the year.
  - The school reported that a math consultant has been retained to help teachers adapt the EnVisions scope and sequence.
  - Students receive chess instruction once per week.
  - School leaders reported that they are starting the planning process to implement the Common Core standards.
  
- The school has implemented a robust Hebrew language immersion program.
  - The school uses a co-teaching model. In most core subjects an English speaking teacher and a Hebrew-only speaking teacher collaborate on instruction. Two Hebrew-only speaking teachers co-teach the daily Hebrew language class and two English teachers co-teach the English literacy program.
  - Hebrew speaking teachers were observed effectively instructing students in non-language classes such as mathematics.
  - Differentiation was observed in classroom instruction. Small, leveled groups were used in guided reading and Hebrew instruction. Differentiated materials and pacing were observed in use on the day of the visit.
  - English and Hebrew vocabulary was in evidence on classroom walls and students were observed using and responding to both languages throughout the day, including in physical education, music and dance classes.
  - The school reported investing heavily in professional development to support the immersion model, including providing training on co-teaching and the language proficiency model.
  - Newly enrolled students are provided with supplemental language instruction to catch them up to their peers.
  
- HLA is establishing a data-driven instructional model.
  - According to the school, teachers administer a range of assessments, including Early Childhood Literacy Assessment (ECLAS), Fountas and Pinnell, tests provided by commercial curriculum programs such as Scott Foresman and EnVisions Math, ITBS, and oral proficiency interviews for Hebrew language acquisition.
  - Teachers administer six-week assessments to monitor student progress and reportedly use portfolios and project-based assessments in science and social studies.
  - The school reported using the TeacherEase system to store and analyze data, while teachers maintain their own anecdotal data.
  - Grade teams meet three times per week and discuss student performance data.
  - Teachers reported using assessment results to modify instruction, place students in groups, identify topics for re-teaching, and determine which students are in need of interventions.

- There is evidence of a range of support services available for at-risk students.
  - The use of co-teaching observed on the day of evaluation provides opportunities for targeted instruction.
  - HLA also makes use of special education teachers and paraprofessionals to provide additional support including collaborative team teaching (CTT) and pull-out instruction.
  - The school recently hired a long-term substitute to provide one class with additional support.
  - The school's child study team (CST) meets weekly to discuss students of concern and has a full-time social worker.
  - Online curriculum programs provide supplemental instruction which students may access at school and at home.
  - HLA has a Special Education population comparable to the population of CSD 22. The school has a population 13.8%<sup>8</sup> SPED students (32 out of 231) which exceeds CSD 22's rate of 12.7%<sup>9</sup>
  
- Teachers are provided with ongoing support and supervision.
  - In addition to the principal, the school has two directors of curriculum and instruction, one for English and one for Hebrew.
  - HLA also uses external coaches and consultants to support teachers, including staff from Brandeis University, Hebrew at the Center and the Hebrew Charter School Center.
  - The school provides teachers with pre-service training in the summer and ongoing professional development throughout the year.
  - School leaders and external coaches provide teachers with regular observations and feedback. Formal evaluations are reportedly conducted three times per year. Goals are set at the first evaluation and are monitored at subsequent observations.
  - Teachers participate in structured peer reviews as part of the school's Partnership for Innovation in Compensation for Charter Schools (PICCS) grant.
  - The school provides opportunities for teachers to participate in external professional development activities. For instance, it sends teachers to Middlebury College's summer intensive language program and Responsive Classroom training.
  
- HLA reports effective parent engagement and participation.
  - The school has a formal parent organization that meets monthly.
  - The school reported having a shared decision-making committee that includes administration, staff and parents.
  - The school holds numerous events involving parents, including curriculum and movie nights, fundraisers and performances. Orientation meetings are held for new parents.
  - School leaders report parents regularly volunteering in the classrooms and at events.
  - A parent is a member of the school's Board of Trustees.
  - Teachers reported regular contact with parents; a weekly blast is sent home via e-mail and is placed in students' backpacks. A "back and forth" sheet is used to communicate with individual parents.
  - Progress reports and report cards are provided to parents four times per year.
  - The school's website includes a portal for parents to access information.

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<sup>8</sup> HLA self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (5/19/11)

<sup>9</sup> ATS data, (June 30, 2011)

## Areas of Growth

- HLA should continue to enact measures to be in full compliance with the 2010 amended Charter School Act. Areas of concern regard meeting target rates for enrollment and retention for English Language Learners (ELL).
  - The school should continue to refine and document its outreach strategies for recruitment and retention of ELLs in order to be comparable to the district, CSD 22. The school reported using Vanguard and a variety of recruitment strategies such as having the application available in several languages. HLA has a population of 6.3%<sup>10</sup> ELLs (14 out of 235 students), which is lower than CSD 22's ELL rate of 10.5%<sup>11</sup>.
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- The school is encouraged to focus on the consistency of classroom management and discipline across classrooms.
  - On the day of the visit, while most students were actively involved in instructional activities, in some of the classrooms observed several students were allowed to disengage (i.e. whispering to other students, not participating in the lesson's activities) without consequence or notice. The school is encouraged to consider strategies to increase student engagement and participation in lessons so that all students are being engaged and challenged at appropriate levels.
  - Concern was raised by teachers regarding consistent consequences for aggressive student behavior. The school is encouraged to consider refining its discipline system and ensuring that consequences are consistent across different classrooms.
  - The implementation of Responsive Classroom was reportedly challenging at first for teachers who were expected to speak only Hebrew with students. The school is encouraged to continue monitoring this program and making adjustments as needed.

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<sup>10</sup> HLA self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (5/19/11)

<sup>11</sup> 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