



**Department of  
Education**

*Dennis M. Walcott, Chancellor*

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

**HEBREW LANGUAGE ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL  
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT**

**MAY 2012**

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## Part 1: Executive Summary

### School Overview and History:

The Hebrew Language Academy Charter School (HLACS) 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. The school opened in 2009 serving 159 students in grades kindergarten through one. The school serves 305 students in grades kindergarten through three.<sup>1</sup> It has plans to grow to serve students in grades kindergarten through five. During the 2011-2012 school year, the school was housed in private space at 3340 Kings Highway in District 22.

The school population comprises approximately 35% Black, 6% Hispanic, 55% White, 0% Asian, and 4% other students. Approximately 61.5% of students are designated as receiving free/reduced price lunch, compared to 58.08% for the district.<sup>2</sup> The student body includes 5.3% English Language Learners (ELL) and 16.1% Students with Disabilities (SWD), compared to 10.01% ELL and 12.98% SWD for the district.<sup>3</sup> The average attendance rate for the 2010-2011 year was 95%. At the time of the visit, the average daily attendance rate was 93% for the 2011-2012 school year.<sup>4</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 Accountability and Support (CSAS) 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 fiscally sound, viable organization; and is the school in compliance with its charter and all applicable laws and regulations? To ascertain matters of sustainability and strategic planning, we also ask about the school's plans for its next charter term. The visits are conducted by representatives of the CSO and last the duration of one school day. The annual site visit begins with a meeting with the school leadership team. Afterward, the reviewers visit classrooms and hold brief meetings with available administrators and teachers. 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 site visit is intended to be a snapshot of the academic year and reflects what was observed at the time of the visit.

The following experts participated in the review of this school on May 3, 2012:

- Sonya Hooks, Senior Director, NYC DOE CSAS
- Keisha Womack, Director of Operations, NYC DOE CSAS
- Lynnette Aqueron, Special Education Consultant, NYC DO

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<sup>1</sup> NYC DOE ATS system, April 2012

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> HLACS self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (4/20/12)

## Part 2: Findings

### Areas of Strength:

- HLACS is in compliance with the 2010 amended Charter Schools Act regarding attracting and retaining target rates for enrollment and retention of students with disabilities and Free and Reduced Lunch students.
  - 16.1% of students have individualized education programs (IEPs) and/or 504 plans. The percentage of SWD the school serves is above with Community School District (CSD) 22, which has a rate of 12.98%.<sup>5</sup>
  - The percentage of FRL students served (61.5%) is more than CSD 22, which has a rate of 58.08%.<sup>6</sup>
- The HLACS Board agenda and prior Board minutes are made available to the public through the school's website, in compliance with the Open Meetings Law (OML) (New York Public Officers Law, Article 7).<sup>7</sup>
- HLACS has a warm, friendly student-centered environment.
  - Teachers and students were respectful to one another.
  - Teachers were observed providing positive feedback to students.
  - Classrooms were print rich with leveled libraries.
  - The school reports facilitating several extracurricular activities for including chess, dance as well as cultural shows and festivals.
- The school is expanding their efforts toward establishing a data-driven instructional model.
  - Grade teams meet regularly to discuss student performance data.
  - Teachers are able to site a range of assessments that are intended to measure students' academic progress, and are used throughout the school year. Fountas and Pinnel running records are administered four times per year. E-CLAS assessments are administered twice a year to students in grades 1-3 and three times a year to kindergarten students.
  - Systems and routines have been implemented to track student progress. Teachers maintain their own anecdotal data.
- HLACS has established processes to create a safe environment for the entire school community.
  - Faculty and staff have all been trained to be proficient in AED and CPR technique.
  - Fire drills are regularly conducted and a roster system is used to account for students present in each classroom during these drills.
  - A security guard is present at the front desk immediately upon entering the school building.
  - School leaders have developed a safety plan that is regularly reviewed and updated.
  - The school utilizes an intercom system to clearly communicate with staff and students.
  - The school leadership reports in their School Self-Evaluation Form (SSEF) that they are developing a discipline policy that will provide a consistent approach to behavior management and gives teachers and parents a clear set of behavioral expectations.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Effective February 2, 2012, OML includes a new provision, subparagraph (e) of Section 103(2), calling for release of materials discussed at board meetings.

- HLACS has a range of support services for special needs students and students in enrichment groups.
  - Individual Education Programs (IEPs) are being successfully implemented.
  - Second-grade students were observed receiving instruction in accordance with the Singapore math curriculum.
  - Individualized instruction and support was evident in observed classrooms, which combined with differentiated instruction, has enabled the school to declassify 5 ELL students.
  - Required programs and services for Students with Disabilities (SWDs) are available and in line with IEPs.
  - HLACS general education teachers and special education teachers were observed working collaboratively to implement individual accommodations in the IEP.
  - HLACS utilizes a Child Study Team that assesses and tracks student progress to determine whether an increase in services is needed.
- HLACS successfully utilizes language immersion and diverse models for language acquisition.
  - During classroom observations, students demonstrated the ability to read and write in Hebrew, clearly demonstrating successful language acquisition.
  - End of unit assessments in Hebrew are administered quarterly in all four language skills: speaking, reading, listening and writing.
  - Hebrew and English vocabulary was evident in classroom work. During the visit, students and teachers were observed using and responding in Hebrew and English.

#### **Areas of Growth:**

- HLACS should continue to enact measures to be in full compliance with the 2010 amended Charter Schools Act. The primary area of concern regards 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 district CSD 22. The school reported using a variety of recruitment strategies such as developing multi-language marketing materials to reach out to families of English Language Learners.
  - HLACS has a total population of 5.3% ELLs, which is lower than CSD 22's ELL rate of 10.01%<sup>8</sup>.
- HLACS is encouraged to increase and differentiate their professional development for teachers to allow for a more effective learning environment.
  - School faculty could benefit from greater collaboration, particularly across subject areas, and further alignment between Hebrew language and general education instructors.
  - Better utilization of student data could allow teachers to make more impactful instructional decisions and to implement more relevant teaching techniques.
  - Classroom management techniques were inconsistent throughout the school. The school is encouraged to have teachers share best classroom management practices.
  - The school is encouraged to support teachers in better structuring lessons so that objectives are clearly defined.

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<sup>8</sup> NYC DOE ATS system, April 2012

- HLACS is encouraged to improve its recordkeeping as it relates to the Special Education population in the school.
  - The appropriate staff should be identified and notified of their responsibility to attend IEP reviews, coordinate compliance and ensure that IEPs are complete and finalized.
  - The school should work to maintain updated IEPs for students, and to submit them to their local CSE in a timely manner.
  - School administrators should also evaluate their case management system for Special Education students to develop best practices for balancing case load.

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# 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 established in school charter
- Meet student progress goals established in school charter
- 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
- Parent association meeting agendas and minutes
- Participation at parent-teacher conferences, school advocacy events, participation in academic goal

related programs

- Stakeholder (board, parents, staff, students, etc.) interviews

### **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
- Offer defined opportunities for remediation and acceleration
- Have effective strategies and quality instructional programs for addressing students with special needs and ELLs
- Have defined strategies that they can measure and monitor for closing the achievement gap
- 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
- Use a defined process for evaluating curricular tasks, programs and resources for effectiveness and fit with school mission and goals
- Have school calendars and day schedules that provide the time necessary to deliver on the school's mission and academic 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
- Special Education/ELL progress monitoring documentation
- Interim assessment results
- Student and teacher portfolios
- Data findings; adjusted lesson plans
- Self-assessment documentation
- Professional development plans and resources
- School calendar and daily schedules
- DOE School Surveys and internal school satisfaction surveys
- Instructional leader and staff interviews

### **1d. Learning Environment**

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

- Have a strong academic culture that creates high academic and behavioral expectations in a way that motivates students to consistently give their best efforts
- 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 plan with formal or informal structures or programs in place that provide students opportunities to develop as individuals and citizens (for example: a character education, citizenship, or community involvement or service program)

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

- School mission and articulated values
- School calendar and class schedules
- Student management plan (code of conduct, school values, discipline policy, positive incentive system, etc.)
- Student attendance and retention rates
- Student discipline data (referral, suspension, expulsion)
- DOE School Survey student results
- DOE School Survey parent and teacher safety and respect results
- Parent complaint/concern information
- Internal 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:

- Have a clearly articulated governance structure, compliant with its charter and all applicable laws and regulations, with clear lines of accountability for the Board, school leadership and all staff
- Have a capable Board of Trustees with appropriate officers, committees, and a purposeful 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, and is fully compliant with its Board approved by-laws (number of meetings, quorum, posting of calendar, agenda and minutes)

- Have a defined process for Board reflection on effectiveness, assessing developing needs, and plan for professional growth
- 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 and, if and when necessary, makes timely adjustments to that structure with proper notice to and approval by its authorizer
- If applicable, school relationship with a charter management organization is identified in charter and supported by a management agreement that spells out services, responsibilities, accountability reporting, performance expectations, and fees
- Have timely and appropriate access to legal counsel
- Implements a process for recruiting, hiring, compensating, monitoring, and evaluating the effectiveness of the school's staff that is clearly defined in staff handbook
- Have instructional leadership staffing and support structures that holds staff accountable for student learning outcomes and provide regular feedback on instruction to teachers, including both formal and informal observations

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

- School charter
- Board by-laws, roster, trustee resumes, calendar of meetings, meeting agenda and minutes
- Annual conflict of interest forms
- Board resources for evaluating school leadership and staff, including rubric/performance metrics
- Board resources for self-reflection and professional growth
- Board development plan
- Board interviews
- Staff roster, job descriptions, staff handbook, operations manual
- School calendar
- Professional development plan for leadership staff
- School leadership and staff interviews

## **2b. School Climate and Community Engagement**

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

- Create and maintain a healthy professional school climate that is collaborative, student centered, and aligned with school mission and values
- Implement flexible, data-driven approach to professional development for all staff
- Encourage professional conversations about effective performance and quality instruction among staff, through, for example, such means as regular and periodic teaming (grade level teams, data days, etc.) and peer observations
- Have systems in place to evaluate professional development effectiveness and provide ongoing support for school-wide and individual initiatives
- Employ an effective means of measuring and monitoring core constituency satisfaction (parent, staff, and, when age appropriate, student), including, but not limited to, the DOE School Survey
- Have effective home-school communication practices and engagement strategies to ensure meaningful parent involvement in the learning of their children
- Engage parents actively in the life of the school, including advocacy, community engagement, and feedback on school policies and initiatives
- Develop strong community-based partnerships who support and advocate for the school

- Have a clear procedure for parents and staff to express concerns to school leadership and the Board, as appropriate, including a clearly articulated escalation path to authorizer

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
- Internal satisfaction surveys
- Staff handbook
- Student retention and wait list data
- Staff retention data
- School Professional Development Plan and staff feedback on professional development events
- Resources for evaluations and observations, scheduled opportunities for professional collaboration, staff feedback on professional development events
- Leadership, staff, parent, student interviews
- Student and staff attendance rates
- Parent/Student Handbook
- Parent attendance at parent-teacher conferences
- Parent association meeting calendar and minutes
- Community partnerships and sponsored programs
- Parent and community feedback via public hearings, renewal calls to parents, etc.
- Community outreach documents (newsletters, announcements, invitations, etc.)

## 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 student enrollment and retention targets
- Maintain annual budgets that meet all short- and long-term financial responsibilities with available revenues
- Provide rigorous oversight of financial and operational responsibilities, as school leadership and Board levels, in a manner that keeps the school's mission and academic goals central to short- and long-term decision-making
- Have clearly established policies and procedures for overall fiscal and operational health of the school (onboarding of all new staff, record-keeping, processing requests of HR services, application and enrollment calls, visitors, volunteers, etc.)
- Maintain effective internal controls of finances to ensure integrity of financial management and a

proactive approach to mitigating risk

- Receive consistently clean financial audits
- If applicable, have strong, accountable partnerships with management organizations and other partners and significant vendors to support delivery of charter school design and academic program
- Ensure a safe, clean and appropriately resourced educational facility with all appropriate services specified in charter and mandated by appropriate law and regulations
- Have appropriate insurance coverage

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
- Financial leader(s) job description, resume and accountability documents
- Financial and operational organizational chart
- Financial audits
- Contracts or Memos of Understanding (MOUs) for significant partnerships and vendor relationships
- Operational policies and procedures, including training resources
- Staff turnover and retention records
- Secure storage areas for student and staff records
- Policies/protocols for maintaining secure records
- Required facility documents (lease, certificate of occupancy, fire and safety inspections, etc.)
- School safety plan
- Appropriate insurance documents

### **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, if appropriate, 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 up-to-date charter is available on request 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
- Annual Site Visit reports
- Board meetings, agendas and minutes
- Leadership, Board, staff and community interviews

- Public hearings (renewal or material revision hearings)

### 3b. Applicable Federal and State Law

Schools in substantial compliance with federal and state law:

- Meet all legal requirements for Title I and IDEA regulations and reporting
- Meet or exceed enrollment and retention targets for FRL, ELL and Special Education students to those of their district of location<sup>9</sup> or are making documented good faith efforts to reach comparable percentages for enrollment and retention
- Implement 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
- Conduct an independently verified fair and open lottery and manage with integrity enrollment process and annual waiting lists
- Employ 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
- Family/Student handbook
- Student discipline records
- Parent complaint/grievance records
- Lottery policy, resources, and records; enrollment procedures and records
- Demographic data (school, district, and other as appropriate)
- 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 CSAS's requirements for reporting changes in board membership and securing approval for new board members.
- Informed NYC DOE CSAS, and where required, received CSAS approval for changes in significant partnerships, such as dropping/replacing a management organization
- Effectively engaged parent associations

<sup>9</sup> School-specific targets for enrollment and retention are to come from NY State Education Department

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 with Board, staff, parents, students or others, as appropriate

## 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:

- Renewal application narrative, including performance results and analyses of the current charter term
- Renewal application revised charter submission, including mission, program description, governance, organization, budget, etc. for new term
- Charter (replication) Application
- 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:

- Renewal application narrative, including performance results and analyses of the current charter term
- Renewal application revised charter submission, including mission, program description, governance, organization, budget, etc. for new term
- 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:

- Renewal application narrative, including performance results and analyses of the current charter term
- Renewal application revised charter submission, including mission, program description, governance, organization, budget, etc. for new term
- Leadership and board interviews
- Contracts or Memos of Understanding (MOUs) with partners or important vendors

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