Department of Education
Dennis M. Walcott, Chancellor

Charter School Renewal Report
Charter Schools Office
2011-2012

SUMMIT ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT

MARCH 2012

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

Summit Academy Charter School is a middle school serving approximately 213 students from sixth through eighth grade in the 2011-2012 school year.[1] The school opened in 2009 with grade 6. The school is under the terms of its first charter and is projected to expand to grades 6-9 during its current term, which expires December 15, 2013. If approved for renewal, the school is projected to reach its full grade span, 6-12, during the 2015-2016 school year.[2] The school is currently housed in a DOE facility in District 15, and is co-located with P.S. 27.[3]

The school enrolls new students in grades 6-7. There were 35 students on the waitlist after the Spring 2011 lottery.[4] The student body includes 69.6% Free and Reduced Lunch students, compared to 54.2% in the district; 21.1% special education students, compared to 17.5% in the district; and 2.6% English language learners, compared to 16.5% in the district.[5] The average attendance rate for the school year 2011-2012 to date was 88.3%.[6] The school scored Above Average on the Academic Expectations, Engagement, and Safety & Respect sections of the NYC DOE School Survey in 2010-2011, and Well Above Average on the Communication section; 48% of the school's parents responded to the survey, 61% of the school's teachers, and 86% of the school's students.[7]

The school earned a C on its NYC DOE Progress Report in 2010-2011.[8] The school has underperformed both its Community School District the citywide averages in ELA and Math for each of the past two years.[9] The school is in good standing with state and federal accountability.[10]

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 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 provide a snapshot of the school and reflects what was observed at the time of the visit.

The following experts participated in the review of this school on March 21, 2012:

- Sonya Hooks, Senior Director, NYC DOE CSO
- Gretchen Tonnesen, Analyst, NYC DOE CSO
- Dr. Elihu Feldman, Senior Special Education Program Review Specialist, NYC DOE Division of Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners
- Angela Chubb, Consultant

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[1] Self-reported by school on Annual Site Visit Data Collection Form dated 3/13/2012
[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 3/13/2012
[5] NYC DOE ATS system as of 4/3/2012
[6] Self-reported by school on Annual Site Visit Data Collection Form dated 3/13/2012
[7] NYC DOE School Survey – http://schools.nyc.gov/survey
[8] NYC DOE Progress Report – http://schools.nyc.gov/progressreport
[9] 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
[10] New York State Education Department - www.nysed.gov

Part 2: Findings

Areas of Strength:

- The school is focused on the collection, implementation and use of data.
    - The school utilizes interim assessments created by Achievement Network, which are administered every 6 weeks. On the day of the visit, results from interim assessments were posted in the hallways.
    - The school established teams that meet every 6 weeks, after each interim assessment cycle, for "Data Days." Data teams review and discuss student data across each grade level and make plans for re-teaching, grouping and daily lesson planning.
    - In observed classrooms, there was evidence of re-teaching based on results of interim assessments and evidence of small groupings based on interim assessment data.
    - The school has implemented "Show What You Know" quizzes, given each Friday to all students. The school collects and analyzes this data.
    - Exit tickets are given after each lesson to assess student progress.
    - School leaders reported using data to create individual action plans for students and classrooms targeting skills and concepts to be re-taught.
    - The school uses data to identify the needs of struggling students. School leaders reported that students are referred for office hours, afternoon IMPACT period, and Saturday Academy based on achievement data.

- The school has an established culture of collaboration and respect amongst students and adults, and the learning environment is safe, orderly and respectful.
    - Teachers were observed used positive and encouraging language throughout the lessons and providing supportive feedback to students.
    - On the day of the visit, students appeared engaged and ready to learn. Lessons had little to no student disruptions. Transitions were quiet and orderly.
    - In observed classrooms, student behavior contracts were posted and signed by students.
    - Interviewed teachers reported that they regularly engage in peer review and provide feedback after peer observations.
    - In interviews, teachers reported that they had established the "Eagle's Nest" teacher council, which meets to discuss solutions to problems that occur on all levels at the school, then brings these ideas to the school leadership for discussion and implementation. School leaders reported that the Eagle's Nest has increased teachers' investment in the school's success, allowing teachers to have a direct impact on instituting change in the school.
    - Interviewed teachers reported a "high level of trust" between staff and administration.
    - Teacher interviews highlighted a focus on academic success for all students and a commitment to college prep.

- The school's leadership and staff have a common voice and understanding around professional growth and feedback expectations.
    - Interviewed teachers reported that they receive "multiple snapshot observations with instant feedback" and commented that they find it extremely helpful to have the opportunity to do peer reviews where they can get ideas to take back to their classrooms.
    - Interviewed teachers reported that they participate in formal reviews 3 times per year using the Mitchell rubric and all observations have a focus. Goals are set based on individual feedback.

- The school has a rich staffing environment with structures that support student learning.
    - The school has expanded its leadership team to include an Assistant Principal and a Dean of Scholar Life, both hired from within the school's existing teachers.
    - The school added team leads this year, including content leads and grade level leads.
    - The school has a robust Learning Supports Team that leads the instructional differentiation at Summit. School leaders report that the Learning Strategists and Related Service providers collaborate with content area teachers to plan differentiated lessons

based on modifying the content, process and product to meet the needs of all students. The school added a full-time Director of Learning Supports this year.

Areas of Growth:

- The school should continue to work to make sure all Special Education students are receiving designated services and every student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is current.
    - Upon review of the IEP files, correspondence with the school, and interviews with the Director of Learning Supports, the visiting team noted that current copies of IEP documents for 12 students were unavailable on the day of the visit. The school reported that it has a list of names and mandated services for these students but not the original IEPs. The school should increase efforts to obtain current IEPs from the Committee on Special Education (CSE) and maintain a written log of efforts to obtain documentation.
    - Although the school reports Related Services Agreements have been issued to the parents, five students are not receiving occupational therapy.
    - For students whose IEPs for indicated self-contained classes, which Summit does not provide, due process letters indicating that the students' parents have been informed and are in agreement with the programs and services being provided were not available at the time of the visit.

- The school should work to ensure that its teachers are appropriately certified and licensed.
    - On the day of the visit, copies of the licenses and certification of instructional and related services staff were unavailable for review. In addition, documentation for teachers in the process of acquiring certification was unavailable.

- The school should continue to focus on improving instructional practice and effectiveness for all staff.
    - In observed classrooms, lessons lacked rigor and pacing was slow. There was little evidence of higher-order thinking or extension questioning.
    - In observed classrooms, all instruction was delivered lecture-style with little attention paid to small groups or differentiation for learning styles or individual skill weaknesses. It appeared to observers that all students were working on the same lesson, mostly driven by worksheets.
    - Observers noted that lessons were "flat" and significant instructional time was wasted on wait time by the classroom teacher.
    - The school is encouraged to explore additional strategies to improve student achievement and progress. One of the school's charter goals is to achieve a 'B' on the Student Progress section of the NYC DOE Progress Report. In 2010-2011, the school received a 'C' on the Student Progress section and thus did not meet this goal.

- The school should work to increase teachers' urgency around, and comfort with, using data.
    - Interviewed teachers did not appear to trust that the interim assessment accurately measured their students' ability relative to the appropriate standards.
    - Interviewed teachers could not clearly articulate how they used data to set goals or improve their instruction.

- The school is encouraged to continue to build a culture of continuous improvement, with a clear focus on student learning
    - There were very few student work samples or exemplars posted in observed classrooms, and rubrics did not accompany the few samples that were posted.
    - The school utilizes a "home-grown" curriculum for both ELA and Math. The school should continue to adjust the curriculum, if necessary, to align to standards.

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 were 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