



Charter Schools Institute

The State University of New York

2013-14 School Evaluation Report

Academy of the City Charter School

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INTRODUCTION

This School Evaluation Report presents the school’s 2013-14 Performance Review and Summaries, which provide an analysis of the attainment of the key academic goals in the school’s Accountability Plan. Following these achievement results, the report offers an analysis of evidence collected during the school visit on May 7, 2014. While the Institute conducts a comprehensive review of evidence related to all the State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks (the “SUNY Renewal Benchmarks”) near the end of a charter term, most mid-cycle school evaluation visits focus on a subset of these benchmarks called the Qualitative Education Benchmarks. These Qualitative Education Benchmarks address the academic success of the school and the effectiveness and viability of the school organization. They provide a framework for examining the quality of the educational program, focusing on teaching and learning (i.e., curriculum, instruction, and assessment), as well as leadership, organizational capacity and board oversight. The SUNY Charter Schools Institute (the “Institute”) uses the established criteria on a regular basis to provide schools with a consistent set of expectations leading up to renewal.

The appendix to the report contains a School Overview with descriptive information about the school, including enrollment and demographic data, as well as historical information regarding the life of the school. It also provides background information on the conduct of the visit, including information about the evaluation team and puts the visit in the context of the school’s current charter cycle. Finally, the appendix provides the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks.

The report below provides benchmark evidence to support these conclusions in order to highlight areas of concern. The Institute intends this selection of information to be an exception report. As such, limited detail and evidence about positive elements of the educational program are not an indication that the Institute does not fully recognize evidence of program effectiveness. This report does not contain an overall rating or comprehensive indicator that would specify at a glance the school’s prospects for renewal; however, it does summarize the various strengths of the school and notes areas in need of improvement based on the Qualitative Education Benchmarks.

SCHOOL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Opening Information

Date Initial Charter Approved by SUNY Trustees	December 14, 2010
School Opening Date	September 2011

Location and 2013-14 Enrollment

Address	District	Facility	Enrollment	Grades
31-29 60 th Street, Queens, NY 11377	NYC CSD 30	Private	277	K-3

2013-14 School Performance Review

Performance Summary

During 2013-14, the school's third year of operation and the first year during which achievement data were available, Academy of the City Charter School ("Academy of the City") did not meet its key academic Accountability Plan goals of English language arts ("ELA") and mathematics. The science goal is not yet applicable because Academy of the City did not enroll students in the 4th grade, the earliest grade in which the state administers a science assessment. The school met its No Child Left Behind ("NCLB") goal.

Note: This year, the Institute is not using absolute measure #1 under the ELA and math goals when evaluating goal attainment. Because of the high standards in the new state testing program only a handful of schools statewide met the absolute proficiency target. The Institute will resume the use of this measure during 2014-15. This year, the Institute is resuming the use of absolute measure #2 because the state has recalibrated the absolute Annual Measurable Objective.

ELA

Based on the one absolute measure and two comparative measures applicable under the goal, Academy of the City did not meet its ELA goal during the first year for which results are available. Academy of the City performed lower than expected in comparison to schools throughout the state enrolling students who are similarly economically situated. Academy of the City's ELA performance fell below that of Community School District 30 (the "district"). The school's Performance Level Index ("PLI") was lower than the state's Annual Measurable Objective ("AMO"). The ELA growth measure is not yet applicable because Academy of the City did not enroll 4th grade students during 2013-14.

Math

During 2013-14, based on the one absolute measure and two comparative measures available under the goal, Academy of the City fell short of meeting its mathematics goal during 2013-14. In comparison to demographically similar schools throughout the state, Academy of the City performed lower than expected and the school's percentage of 3rd graders at or above proficiency was nearly 16 points lower than the district's. Academy of the City posted a PLI that was lower than the state's AMO. The mathematics growth measure is not yet applicable because Academy of the City did not enroll 4th grade students during 2013-14.

Science

The science goal is not yet applicable to Academy of the City because the school did not enroll 4th grade students during 2013-14.

NCLB

Under the state’s NCLB accountability system, Academy of the City was not identified as a focus or priority school and thus met its NCLB goal.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY: English Language Arts
Academy of the City Charter School



	2011-12 Grades Served: K-1			MET	2012-13 Grades Served: K-2			MET	2013-14 Grades Served: K-3			MET			
	Grades	All Students	2+ Years Students		Grades	All Students	2+ Years Students		Grades	All Students	2+ Years Students				
		% (N)	% (N)			% (N)	% (N)			% (N)					
ABSOLUTE MEASURES 1. Each year 75 percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at proficiency on the New York State exam.	3	(0)	(0)		3	(0)	(0)		3	23.2 (56)	28.9 (38)				
	4	(0)	(0)		4	(0)	(0)		4	(0)	(0)				
	5	(0)	(0)		5	(0)	(0)		5	(0)	(0)				
	6	(0)	(0)		6	(0)	(0)		6	(0)	(0)				
	7	(0)	(0)		7	(0)	(0)		7	(0)	(0)				
	8	(0)	(0)		8	(0)	(0)		8	(0)	(0)				
	All	(0)	(0)		All	(0)	(0)		All	23.2 (56)	28.9 (38)	NA			
2. Each year the school's aggregate Performance Level Index on the State exam will meet the Annual Measurable Objective set forth in the State's NCLB accountability system.	Grades	PI	AMO		Grades	PLI	AMO		Grades	PLI	AMO				
									3	75	89	NO			
COMPARATIVE MEASURES 3. Each year the percent of students enrolled in at least their second year and performing at proficiency will be greater than that of students in the same grades in the local district.	Comparison:				Comparison:				Comparison: Queens District 30						
	Grades	School	District		Grades	School	District		Grades	School	District				
									3	28.9	34.0	NO			
4. Each year the school will exceed its predicted percent of students at proficiency on the state exam by at least a small Effect Size (at least 0.3) based on its percentage of Economically Disadvantaged students.	% FL	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size		% ED	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size		% ED	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size	
											77.2	23.2	24.3	-0.09	NO
GROWTH MEASURE 5. Each year, the school's unadjusted mean growth percentile will meet or exceed the state's unadjusted median growth percentile.	Grades	School	State		Grades	School	State		Grades	School	State				
	4				4				4						
	5				5				5						
	6				6				6						
	7				7				7						
	8				8				8						
	All				All				All						

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY: Mathematics

Academy of the City Charter School



	2011-12 Grades Served: K-1			MET	2012-13 Grades Served: K-2			MET	2013-14 Grades Served: K-3			MET	
	Grades	All Students	2+ Years Students		Grades	All Students	2+ Years Students		Grades	All Students	2+ Years Students		
		% (N)	% (N)			% (N)	% (N)			% (N)			
ABSOLUTE MEASURES													
1. Each year 75 percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at proficiency on the New York State exam.	3	()	()		3	()	()		3	26.8 (56)	34.2 (38)		
	4	()	()		4	()	()		4	()	()		
	5	()	()		5	()	()		5	()	()		
	6	()	()		6	()	()		6	()	()		
	7	()	()		7	()	()		7	()	()		
	8	()	()		8	()	()		8	()	()		
	All	()	()		All	()	()		All	26.8 (56)	34.2 (38)	NA	
2. Each year the school's aggregate Performance Level Index on the State exam will meet the Annual Measurable Objective set forth in the State's NCLB accountability system.	Grades	PI	AMO		Grades	PLI	AMO		Grades	PLI	AMO		
									3	80	86	NO	
COMPARATIVE MEASURES													
3. Each year the percent of students enrolled in at least their second year and performing at proficiency will be greater than that of students in the same grades in the local district.	Comparison:				Comparison:				Comparison: Queens District 30				
	Grades	School	District		Grades	School	District		Grades	School	District		
									3	34.2	42.0	NO	
4. Each year the school will exceed its predicted percent of students at proficiency on the State exam by at least a small Effect Size (at least 0.3) based on its percentage of Economically Disadvantaged students.	% FL	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size	% ED	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size	% ED	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size	
									77.2	26.8	33.8	-0.37	NO
GROWTH MEASURE													
5. Each year, the school's unadjusted mean growth percentile will meet or exceed the state's unadjusted median growth percentile.	Grades	School	State		Grades	School	State		Grades	School	State		
	4				4				4				
	5				5				5				
	6				6				6				
	7				7				7				
	8				8				8				
	All				All				All				

Benchmark Conclusions and Evidence

Instructional Leadership. Academy of the City’s instructional leadership team did not provide adequate support for teacher development at the time of the school evaluation visit. With no clear expectations for absolute performance or growth, leaders did not hold teachers accountable for student achievement.

- The school leadership did not clearly communicate high expectations for teacher performance. For example, while school leaders stated they expected teachers to be able to recognize gaps in student assessment data, some teachers reported being unaware of where students should perform on an end-of-year reading assessment.
- The instructional leadership team, consisting of the principal and assistant principal, was of sufficient size to support the development of the school’s 19 lead and associate teachers. However, a lack of formal systems and procedures regarding coaching and feedback rendered the support provided to the teaching staff ineffective at the time of the evaluation visit.
- The school leadership observed teachers formally three times a year and provided written feedback following each. Outside of these observations, the leadership did not coach teachers in a systematic fashion to improve instructional effectiveness. According to teachers, leaders made themselves available when requested but did not initiate one-on-one meetings beyond those connected to formal observations.
- Leaders built opportunities into the school schedule that allowed for common planning time across grade levels. Each grade had daily common planning of 30 minutes, bi-weekly grade level meetings of about one hour and time set aside during monthly half-day professional development sessions. School leaders encouraged teacher collaboration in both professional learning communities (“PLCs”) and within grade levels.
- In its third year of operation, Academy of the City provided teachers with minimal professional development to support them in meeting students’ needs. The school’s professional development program as presented during the school visit consisted of a one-week pre-service training during the summer and one half-day professional development session each month. School leaders reported planning professional development topics connected to the needs of classroom teachers, but Institute visitors found no evidence of regular oversight, coaching and feedback systems to ensure the interrelation of professional development activities with classroom practice. Although able to take advantage of external professional development opportunities, some teachers stated that available options did not significantly foster the development of pedagogical competencies or improve instructional effectiveness.
- Despite conducting teacher evaluations with some clear criteria, school leaders did not specify clear quantitative expectations for student performance.

Curriculum. As of the date of the evaluation visit, Academy of the City’s curriculum did not support instructional planning adequate to prepare students to meet state performance standards.

- Academy of the City had a curriculum framework and supporting materials that provided a fixed underlying structure with performance expectations for each grade. These documents enabled teachers to know what to teach and when to teach it, but the instructional leadership had not audited the curriculum to ensure alignment with state standards as of the time of the school visit. Reviews of documents provided for the school visit indicated that the curriculum was not preparing students to demonstrate mastery on state tests.
- At the time of the visit, the school had no systematic process in place to develop and review the curriculum. School leaders encouraged teachers to reflect on the effectiveness of delivered units but provided no guidance on the process and did not hold teachers accountable for unit reflections.
- Teachers planned units collaboratively and submitted these plans to instructional leaders. According to teachers, instructional leaders gave minimal feedback on unit plans, which teachers used to create daily classroom lessons. Reviews of lesson plans on the day of the evaluation visit showed that teachers were inconsistent in writing strong lesson objectives and developing detailed activities that aligned with stated objectives.

Use of Assessment Data. Academy of the City did not systematically use assessment results to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning at the time of the Institute’s visit.

- The school regularly administered standardized assessments to gauge student performance. In addition to Fountas and Pinnell, Go Math and NWEA assessments, teachers created quizzes, projects and writing prompts to evaluate student learning. The reliability of teachers’ scores was unclear at the time of the visit. Teachers scored formal and informal assessments individually, and Academy of the City had no process in place to norm this scoring. Instructional leaders reported that the whole school used a common rubric for evaluating student writing, but teachers reported creating their own standards.
- Academy of the City had no school-wide approach to analyzing assessment results. Despite a lack of clear, school-wide expectations for how teachers should use assessment results to adjust instruction, some teachers provided examples of doing so: teachers used data to plan ability-based classroom reading groups, to determine which students were in need of additional services and to regroup entire grades for proficiency-based word study lessons. The utility of these efforts remained questionable as the school lacked mechanisms to consider assessment results beyond the individual student level. Additionally, Academy of the City did not act with urgency in making data-driven instructional decisions. For

example, one teacher reported using data from three months prior to the day of the Institute’s visit to plan student groups for an upcoming unit.

- During the school visit, leaders indicated that they used assessment results to make instructional decisions such as replacing a previously used TERC math program with Go Math. Instructional leaders also decided to increase the amount of leveled readers in classrooms after reviewing students’ Fountas and Pinnell reading scores. Nonetheless, Academy of the City did not use assessment results to evaluate teacher effectiveness.

Pedagogy. The quality of instruction observed during the school visit was insufficient to prepare students to meet grade level standards, though ELA lessons were generally stronger than those in math. Poor pacing and ineffective checks for understanding were detrimental to lesson effectiveness. As shown in the chart below, during the visit, Institute team members conducted 11 classroom observations following a defined protocol used in all school evaluation visits.

Number of Observations

		GRADE				Total
		K	1	2	3	
CONTENT AREA	ELA		1	4		5
	Math			2	1	3
	Writing		1		1	2
	Science			1		1
	Total		1	4	6	11

- Teachers delivered purposeful lessons with clear objectives aligned to the school’s curriculum in a slight majority of classrooms (6 out of 11 classrooms observed). Lesson objectives were at times unclear and/or focused on task completion rather than student learning. For example, the stated objective of an ELA lesson was simply “Students will finish their poems.” Additionally, lead and associate teachers’ roles in supporting students lacked clarity. School leaders pointed to inefficient use of associate teachers when discussing areas of instructional weakness during the evaluation visit.
- Although most teachers attempted some checks for student understanding, these efforts were rarely effective (4 out of 11 classrooms observed). Some teachers called only on volunteers when questioning; others circulated to monitor students’ written work but commented only on progress toward completion of the assignment without regard to the quality of the product. During the school visit, observers found no evidence that teachers adjusted instruction after gauging knowledge and understanding across classrooms.
- Few teachers challenged students with questions or activities that developed depth of understanding and higher order thinking skills (4 out of 11 classrooms observed). Teachers

also did not communicate the expectation that students challenge themselves. Students selected texts for independent reading that were below their ability level without teacher objections.

- A minority of classroom environments observed at the time of the visit maintained consistent focus on academic achievement (5 out of 11 classrooms observed). Most teachers did not communicate a sense of urgency for learning, and extended transitions significantly reduced learning time. For example, one in-class transition extended to seven minutes while students engaged in off-task conversations and the teacher repeatedly stated, “I’ll just wait.”

Organizational Capacity. At the time of the evaluation visit at the end of the school’s third year of operation, the school organization did not effectively support the implementation of Academy of the City’s educational program.

- Weak operational systems, policies and procedures did not support the school in meeting its academic goals at the time of the school visit. The school employed a director of operations to manage the day-to-day running of the school in order to enable instructional leaders to focus their time on student achievement and teacher development. Nonetheless, the principal, the primary instructional leader, played a key role in many operational aspects of the school, including the transition into a new facility.
- Lines of accountability were unclear to members of the visit team. Academy of the City’s principal served as the head of instruction and the assistant principal also worked in an instructional capacity, in addition to overseeing discipline and developing teachers’ classroom management abilities. While leaders reported individually supervising two grade levels each, teachers reported that both leaders conducted evaluations of each grade level, making it hard to distinguish supervisory roles across the school.
- At the time of the visit, Academy of the City used Responsive Classroom as the foundation for its student discipline and classroom management system but offered little professional development to support teachers in its implementation. Although some teachers attended external training sessions, the implementation was inconsistent across Academy of the City classrooms.
- Teacher turnover was significant at the time of the visit. More than 25 percent of 2012-13 teachers did not return to Academy of the City for the 2013-14 school year.
- The school maintained adequate enrollment with 277 registered students at the time of the visit and a reported waitlist of 662 prospective students. Notably, the school retained the majority of the students enrolled while Academy of the City was in its former facility despite moving three miles from its original site.

Board Oversight. Academy of the City’s board provided oversight of the educational program at the time of the school evaluation visit but did not focus on the student achievement outcomes required for the school to meet its Accountability Plan goals.

- Academy of the City board members possessed a diverse range of skills relevant to school governance. The full board met regularly throughout the 2013-14 school year and subcommittees met as needed to focus on specific aspects of the education program.
- Although the board set priorities such as increasing teachers’ mathematics instructional competencies, it did not have clearly defined and measurable goals in place at the time of the evaluation visit. As an example, the board highlighted the need for student growth from year-to-year but did not have benchmarks to track progress in place.
- The board was successful in hiring and retaining key personnel, including the school’s founding principal, and provided generally sufficient resources. During the school visit, board members expressed their recognition of the need for additional operational staff and effective procedures to free instructional leaders to focus on teaching and learning.
- The board had a clear system for evaluating the school principal in place at the time of the school visit. Each board member completed an evaluation using a common rubric. Additionally, the board consulted with teachers and parents in addition to reviewing the leader’s self-evaluation prior to making a performance determination. The board’s evaluation of the principal’s performance did not include student achievement outcomes.

APPENDIX
SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Mission Statement

Our students will become independent thinkers, lifelong learners, and responsible members of their communities. We are committed to an educational philosophy rooted in social justice, inquiry, experiential and collaborative learning, and supported by continual professional development and reflective practice. Through a literacy-based, integrated curriculum that encourages community and honors diversity, our students receive the education they will need to meet the academic and social challenges of the best high schools, to be prepared for our best colleges and universities, and to thrive in today's world.

Student Demographics¹

	2011-12		2012-13		2013-14
	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of NYC CSD 30 Enrollment	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of NYC CSD 30 Enrollment	Percent of School Enrollment
Race/Ethnicity					
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0	0	0	0
Black or African American	28	8	27	7	19
Hispanic	47	54	51	54	50
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	12	23	12	23	19
White	13	15	9	15	10
Multiracial	0	0	1	0	2
Special Populations					
Students with Disabilities	7	13	17	13	13
English Language Learners	24	22	28	21	20
Free/ Reduced Lunch					
Eligible for Free Lunch	70	70	--	--	--
Eligible for Reduced-Price Lunch	6	9	--	--	--
Economically Disadvantaged	77	85	80	87	74

¹ Source: New York State Education Department School Report Cards.

School Characteristics

School Year	Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment	Original Chartered Grades	Actual Grades
2011-2012	104	100	K-1	K-1
2012-2013	156	156	K-2	K-2
2013-2014	270	276	K-3	K-3

Board of Trustees²

Board Member Name	Position
Dr. Richard Welles	President
Angela Howard	Vice President
Nancy Sills	Secretary
Steven Zimmerman	Treasurer
Harold Elish	Trustee
Jessica James	Trustee
James Traub	Trustee
Silvana Vasconcelos	Trustee

School Leader(s)

School Year(s)	School Leader(s) Name and Title(s)
2011-12 to Present	Richard Lee, Principal

School Visit History

School Year	Visit Type	Evaluator (Institute/External)	Date
2011-2012	First Year Visit	Institute	April 17, 2012
2013-14	Evaluation Visit	Institute	May 7, 2014

² Source: Institute records at the time of the visit.

CONDUCT OF THE SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT

Specifications

Date(s) of Visit	Evaluation Team Members	Title
May 7, 2014	Natasha Howard, Ph.D.	Director of School Evaluation
	Aaron Campbell	Senior Analyst
	Jenn David-Lang	External Consultant

Context of the Visit

Charter Cycle	
Charter Term	3 rd Year of Five-Year Charter Term
Accountability Period ³	3 rd Year of Four-Year Accountability Period
Anticipated Renewal Visit	Fall 2015

³ Because the SUNY Trustees make a renewal decision in the last year of a charter term, the Accountability Period ends in the next to last year of the charter term. For initial renewals, the Accountability Period is the first four years of the charter term. For subsequent renewals, the Accountability Period includes the last year of the previous charter term through the next to last year of the current charter term.