CENTRAL BROOKLYN ASCEND MIDDLE SCHOOL

CENTRAL BROOKLYN ASCEND LOWER SCHOOL

Central Brooklyn Ascend Charter School

2020-21 ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

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2020-21 ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

Jonathan Masci, Manager of Strategic Initiatives for Ascend Learning, prepared this 2020-21 Accountability Progress Report on behalf of the school's board of trustees:

Trustee's Name	Board Position	
	Office	Committees
Stephanie Mauterstock	Chair	Nominating, Academic, Executive
Shelly Cleary	Treasurer	Finance, Executive
Glenn Hopps	Treasurer	Finance, Executive
Oral Walcott	Trustee	Nominating, Hiring
Kwaku Andoh	Trustee	Finance, Academic
Amanda Craft	Trustee	Academic, Hiring
Nadine Sylvester	Parent Representative	Nominating, Academic
Tracy Dunbar	Trustee	Academic, Hiring
Emmanuel Fordjour	Trustee	Academic, Hiring
Stanley Taylor	Trustee	Nominating, Hiring

Katherine Capella has served as lower school principal since July 2021.

Leyde St. Leger has served as middle school principal since July 2020.

SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Central Brooklyn Ascend Charter School (Central Brooklyn Ascend) opened in 2014 with the goal of equipping students with the knowledge, confidence, and character to succeed in college and beyond. Central Brooklyn Ascend offers a rich, rigorous inquiry-based education in a warm and supportive environment. In school year 2020-21 (SY21), Central Brooklyn Ascend served students in grades K through 7. It comprises Central Brooklyn Ascend Lower School (CBACS), serving grades K-4, and Central Brooklyn Ascend Middle School (CBAMS), serving grades 5-7. Students may attend Brooklyn Ascend High School (BAHS) for grades 9-12. As of BEDS Day in SY21, Central Brooklyn Ascend enrolled 735 students.

Central Brooklyn Ascend is located in New York City Community School District 22 (CSD 22). In SY21, 68 percent of Central Brooklyn Ascend students were eligible for free and reduced-priced lunch, 95.7 percent were black or Latino, 13.2 percent were special education students, and 8.5 percent were English language learners.

Central Brooklyn Ascend operated primarily in a remote learning modality in SY21. To serve student needs in this environment, Ascend built out opportunities for differentiated instruction and reduced whole-class time to reduce students' screen exposure. The Ascend network opened learning pods in all school buildings in January 2021. In April 2021, Central Brooklyn Ascend resumed in-person learning with a subset of students. In SY22, Central Brooklyn Ascend plans to offer full in-person instruction.

Ascend has provided comprehensive support to students and families during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since summer 2020, Ascend has provided each student with an individual device to access remote learning content. In response to heightened student need, the network increased socio-emotional supports by expanding staff capacity through training and development. The network maintained a food pantry, supplied clothing to students, and made microgrants to families experiencing homelessness or living in temporary housing.

ENROLLMENT SUMMARY

School Enrollment by Grade Level and School Year

School Year	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
2016-17	87	79	77	82										325
2017-18	89	91	90	80	77									427
2018-19	83	93	97	95	94	83								545
2019-20	84	90	82	83	81	85	87							592
2020-21	89	88	95	94	93	93	90	93						735

GOAL 1: ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Goal 1: English Language Arts

Central Brooklyn Ascend Charter School students will meet grade-level expectations in English.

BACKGROUND

Central Brooklyn Ascend implements the Ascend Common Core curriculum, which includes the following English Language Arts components.

Fundations, a program for phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, is used in grades K-2. The program is based on the Wilson Reading System principles, which is supported by multiple studies, including one by Massachusetts's Lynn Public Schools, of which the student population is composed of 66 percent black or Latino students. The study found that the system expedites grade-level reading improvement among elementary school students who previously struggled to achieve appropriate reading level growth.

Ascend has developed a unique writing program based loosely on the work of Lucy Calkins and The Reading and Writing Project at Columbia University's Teacher's College. Ascend's writing curriculum is genre-based and rooted in the belief that students need to write frequently. Grammar is strategically embedded in the units of study so that students learn grammar skills explicitly and then apply them immediately to the writing they do in class. The program requires teachers to provide frequent feedback to small groups of students in writing conferences while other students work independently. Ascend's writing program teaches students that writing is powerful, fun, beautiful, and purposeful.

Interactive Read Aloud sessions with students in grades K-2 occur five times per week. The class gathers on a rug while the teacher reads a carefully selected high-quality text and provides a model of fluent, expressive reading, which helps children recognize the value of reading for pleasure. Read Aloud promotes vocabulary acquisition, models the habits of a skilled reader, and supports deep discussion of texts through "turn and talks." Beginning in SY21, new Read Aloud texts were selected to provide more culturally diverse content, as well as content that pertains to social justice.

Ascend's Literature Circle program in grades 3 and 4, influenced by a similar program at Success Academy Charter Schools and Icahn Charter Schools, promotes student discussion as teachers help students mine the deepest meaning of fine children's literature and develop the habits of excellent readers, all while building skills in reading comprehension and seminar-style discussion. In Literature Circle, each student has a copy of the text, and students read sections of the text both together and independently. Students are also assigned written work as a component of this literacy block.

In the Shared Text component, implemented in grades 2-8 and modeled after a similar close reading program at Success Academy Charter Schools, the teacher leads students to understand and then write about the deeper meaning of a short, complex text. Students then answer Common Core-style comprehension questions. Texts fall into a range of genres including fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. Due to the difficulties of adapting this model to a remote environment, this component

was temporarily removed from the middle school curriculum during the pandemic; it will resume in SY22. Middle school students on or above grade level will receive Shared Text instruction for 30 minutes per day, four days per week during targeted intervention blocks; students below grade level will receive Guided Reading instruction (described below) during these blocks.

Guided Reading is taught in small groups of students who are on the same reading level, as determined by the Fountas and Pinnell (F&P) Benchmark Assessment System. Teachers serve as skilled facilitators, providing explicit teaching and support for reading increasingly challenging texts. These texts are at students' instructional reading level and students read the whole text. In Guided Reading, teaching is responsive to individual student strengths and needs. Each Guided Reading session addresses skill gaps identified through the previous session, whether in the area of decoding, fluency, or comprehension. Data collected from the F&P Benchmark Assessment is used to inform instruction for each Guided Reading lesson. In SY21, Guided Reading was expanded to grades 5 and 6; in SY22, Ascend will expand this component to all middle school grades.

Ascend's middle school reading program, which begins in grade five, is the natural successor to the lower school's Literature Circle program. Using a diverse selection of engaging texts, students practice applying their close reading skills with the goal of arriving at the deepest level of meaning of any text. In a departure from previous years' focus on solely mastering 'what happened' in each text, the re-envisioned program provides students with multiple opportunities to practice their reading skills in different contexts, moving them closer to reading proficiency. The course emphasizes the importance of critical thinking skills and students' abilities to apply them, rather than mere memorization of the plot of each core novel. In SY21, changes were made to the ELA reading lists to diversify characters and authors. In each grade, a social justice unit was added, focused on either a narrative, informational, or opinion text.

Ascend has created a powerful culture of response to instructional data (RTI) to support and enhance learning, and will continue to develop and employ a variety of assessments to measure progress towards mastering standards. In addition to New York State exams administered each spring, teachers use benchmark and mock assessments, unit tests, F&P assessments, and other measures of student performance during the course of the year. The Illuminate Data and Assessment (DnA) system allows staff to monitor progress and assess student comprehension, and supports data-driven teacher training and evaluation through access to instant feedback. Teachers and leaders consistently review student work and achievement data and trends, resulting in effective planning for upcoming lessons and timely and purposeful feedback to students.

All Ascend schools participate in Teacher Planning and Development (TPD), a network-wide program aimed at improving teaching and learning and creating a platform for teacher collaboration. Through unit studies, planning and assessment studies, lesson debriefs, teach-backs, and data meetings, TPD meetings represent a critical piece of a professional development program that also includes pre-service training, full professional development days, after-school sessions, and ongoing coaching and modeling.

Ascend schools operated primarily in a remote learning modality in SY21. To accommodate students in this environment, Ascend built out opportunities for differentiated instruction and reduced whole-class time to reduce students' screen exposure. The Ascend network opened learning pods in all school buildings in January 2021. In April 2021, Ascend schools resumed in-person learning with a subset of students. In SY22, Ascend plans to offer full in-person instruction at all schools.

METHOD

For several years, Ascend has administered internally-developed benchmark exams, modeled off of the NYS exams in ELA, to students in grades 3-8. Benchmark exam results are administered three times per year and meant to indicate the level of student proficiency and mastery. These exams begin with a "baseline" assessment early in the year. This testing structure allows teachers and school leaders to understand student progress throughout the year. Ascend can use scores from these benchmark exams to project, historically with high accuracy, students' level of success on the state ELA exam. In the absence of reliable state exam results in SY21, Ascend has used performance on these benchmarks and the resulting state test projections as primary measures of student achievement and growth.

Ascend also uses F&P Benchmark Assessments to assess student literacy achievement and growth in grades K-4. Our internal F&P goal is that at least 85% of kindergarten students will be at or above their target reading level by the end of the year; for grades 1-4, our goal is to increase the percentage of students at or above the target level by at least 10 percentage points from baseline to round 4.

During 2020-21, the school(s) primarily used the following exam to assess student growth and achievement in ELA: Internally developed

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

2020-21 Ascend State Test Projections

Measure	Subgroup	Target	Tested	Results	Met?
Absolute Measure: 75 percent of all tested students who are enrolled in at least their second year will be projected to perform at or above proficiency on the state's English language arts exam for grades 3-8.	Students in at least their second year	75%	399	47%	No
Growth Measure: The average student-level change between SY19 state English language arts exam score and SY21 projected score will be positive.	All students	>0 pp	199	-1.5 pp	No
Gap Closing Measure 1: Among students whose state English language arts exam score in SY19 was in the bottom quartile of projected scores, median change between SY19 score and SY21 projected score will be positive.	Low initial achievers	>0 pp	119	-2.7 pp	No

Gap Closing Measure 2: The median change between SY19 state English language arts exam score and SY21 projected score for students with IEPs will be greater than the same median change among students without IEPs.	Students with IEPs	>-1.2 pp	48	+0.3 pp	Yes
Gap Closing Measure 3: The median change between SY19 state English language arts exam score and SY21 projected score for ELL students will be greater than the same median change among non-ELL students.	ELL students	>-1.1 pp	10	-0.2 pp	Yes

Absolute: *percentage of all tested students enrolled in at least their second year projected to perform at or above proficiency*

Overall	3	4	5	6	7
47%	67%	49%	35%	49%	37%

Growth: *average student-level change between SY19 state exam score and SY21 projected score (percentage points)*

Overall	5	6	7
-1.5 pp	-5.7 pp	+0.4 pp	+1.2 pp

Gap Closing

Median change from SY19 state exam score to SY21 projected score among students who scored in the bottom quartile in SY19 (percentage points)

Overall	5	6	7
-2.7 pp	-8.3 pp	-0.6 pp	+2.4 pp

Median change between SY19 state exam score and SY21 projected score among students with IEPs, compared to students without IEPs (percentage points)

	Overall	5	6	7
Students with IEPs	+0.3 pp	-7.5 pp	+1.3 pp	+9.3 pp
Students without IEPs	-1.2 pp	-5.5 pp	+0.2 pp	+0.5 pp

Median change between SY19 state exam score and SY21 projected score among ELL students, compared to non-ELL students (percentage points)

	Overall	5	6
ELL students	-0.2 pp	-3.1 pp	-0.2 pp
Non-ELL students	-1.1 pp	-5.6 pp	+0.2 pp

While Central Brooklyn Ascend fell short of its ELA goal in SY21 while students engaged in remote learning, with students overall demonstrating lower proficiency in SY21 than they did in SY19, we can see indications of achievement and growth. Students with IEPs showed positive growth in literacy, narrowing the gap with general education students. Similarly, ELL students narrowed the gap with non-ELL students. A recent analysis of national iReady assessment data found that students in SY21 performed roughly nine points lower in literacy than matched students from previous years; Central Brooklyn Ascend's negative change of 1.5 points from SY19 to SY21 reflects this national trend.

Though Central Brooklyn Ascend's overall achievement and growth fell short, the school's successes in closing gaps indicate that our strategic adaptations to minimize unfinished learning have supported student learning in SY21. Before and during the year, Ascend was proactive in meeting the needs of our students and families, distributing devices on a 1:1 basis and adapting our curriculum and instruction to the remote environment. Ascend is committed to reversing the effects of unfinished learning, and we have developed a comprehensive strategy for SY22 that we are confident will build on our curricular innovations in SY21 to ensure our educational program meets the needs of students and families as they recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Resuming in-person instruction for all students, as well as providing additional small-group instruction, implementing tutoring, and focusing on differentiation will aid students in

recovering academically and socio-emotionally. This strategy is described in detail in the "Action Plan" section below.

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT AND EVIDENCE

The internal benchmark assessments have a long history of validity as a measure of achievement. While the testing modality changed in spring 2020 and SY21, we believe our faithful implementation of the assessment format through a remote learning platform retains much of that validity. Staff administered ELA assessments through Google Classroom in grades 3 and 4, and Illuminate Online in grades 5-8. To support students' psychological safety during the pandemic and to maintain community trust, Ascend did not engage in browser locking or eye tracking.

After Ascend's second benchmark assessment, staff saw indications in some exam responses that students had used answers found online. This happened most frequently in grades 8-12 and was more common on ELA than on math assessments; math assessments relied heavily on Constructed Response questions and used the Desmos platform, both of which require more work to be shown via the testing platform than do multiple choice questions. Staff determined this had a low risk of recurring, as Ascend administered the state exam in place of our third internal benchmark, with Ascend staff digitizing the exams and administered them remotely to students who had not yet returned to in-person learning.

In addition to benchmark assessments, Ascend also uses F&P assessments to understand student performance and growth in literacy in grades K-4.

Percentage of students at or above target F&P instructional level

Assessment Round	K	1	2	3	4
Baseline	100%[1]	32%	39%	25%	36%
2	46%	33%	49%	20%	35%
3	54%	34%	51%	0%	
4	61%	29%	45%	18%	36%

These results exemplify the unfinished learning students face due to the pandemic and the remote learning environment. Ascend is confident that through our action plan for SY22, our students will recover academically and socio-emotionally, and assessment results will reflect that recovery.

[1] All kindergarten students start at an F&P baseline of at or above target.

SUMMARY OF THE ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS GOAL

Though Central Brooklyn Ascend did not meet its overall ELA goal in SY21, results indicate Ascend's proactive adaptations to minimize unfinished learning during the COVID-19 pandemic have supported student learning. Looking forward to SY22, Ascend will implement a network-wide strategy to meet our students' academic and socio-emotional needs as our communities recover from the pandemic and the period of remote instruction.

ACTION PLAN

The Ascend network's plans to address unfinished learning will provide our students with the support they need to excel in ELA. In SY22, one of the Ascend network's four strategic imperatives is to hone our student learning model to close the academic and social learning gap created by COVID-19 and integrate technology into our instructional model. To close the academic gaps we have seen in ELA, Ascend will implement three evidence-based strategies, which it will continue to adapt throughout the coming year.

1. *Increasing small-group instructional time.* Ascend has added more opportunities for small-group instruction across lower and middle school grades. The middle school schedule has been adjusted to provide four one-hour intervention blocks per week, which will be divided between ELA and math and provide additional academic support. Ascend will also hire additional special education teachers across the network; school leaders can utilize these staff members to create more small-group instruction opportunities for students in special education.
2. *Establishing a tutoring program.* A new tutoring program will serve 10-15% of each school's enrollment. This program will supplement existing Ascend small-group instruction, and the network will determine whether to continue the tutoring program in SY23 and beyond based on the program's effectiveness in SY22. Ascend is designing this program around evidence-based principles, with frequent instruction (three sessions per week), limited group sizes, and regular assessment and data analysis. School leadership will have discretion over scheduling and location to most effectively operationalize the program at their schools.
3. *Repacing the curriculum.* The curriculum pacing and sequencing has been adjusted to ensure students receive targeted instruction on prerequisite content immediately before it's needed for grade-level content, and to embed more opportunities for differentiation.

The network is also prioritizing students' mental health and wellbeing. Ascend has hired two to three additional clinicians to serve as "floaters," supporting schools that exhibit an increase in mental health needs. Each school will have an additional culture associate, who will support student culture, community, behavior, and socio-emotional needs in both proactive and reactive ways. Ascend is also investing in the DESSA tool, a screener for schools to identify social emotional learning supports for all students.

In SY22, Ascend plans for full in-person instruction. Schools will ensure consistency in data reporting by administering benchmark and curricular assessments comparable to those administered in SY21 and previous years. In the event that schools must return to remote instruction, Ascend staff will

leverage their experience with remote instruction in SY21 and the above strategies to address unfinished learning to ensure students are engaging consistently in remote assessments.

GOAL 2: MATHEMATICS

ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE MATHEMATICS

Goal 2: Mathematics

Central Brooklyn Ascend Charter School students will meet grade-level expectations in math.

BACKGROUND

Central Brooklyn Ascend implements the Ascend Common Core curriculum. The curriculum includes the following mathematics components, which feature Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI).

In grades K-4, our math program is built on the Launch, Explore, Discuss (LED) model, an inquiry-driven lesson structure that leads students to learn by questioning and discovering. In this approach, students build enduring conceptual understanding and problem-solving skills by progressing through three stages of learning: concrete (using manipulatives), pictorial (using visual representations and models), and abstract (using equations).

In Number Stories, also deployed in grades K-4 and founded on the tenets of CGI, students spend an entire period studying a single, Common Core-style story-problem that they might encounter in the real world. Students construct their own solutions, defend their thinking, and compare their approaches. The routines that open each Number Stories lesson (approximately 10 minutes per day) also reinforce fluency; students practice math routines to build automaticity in computation.

In middle school, one 60-minute daily math period draws from the EngageNY curriculum and a variety of Common Core-aligned resources in order to execute the LED model. The block encompasses a balanced math program; the first five to seven minutes provide practice with fluency and reasoning skills, in addition to targeted reteaches of previously taught, unmastered content. During the Explore portion of the class, students work collaboratively on authentic, rigorous tasks and drive towards a common learning conjecture, or “STAMP.” Students also have the opportunity to apply the STAMP to solve new problems and apply their learning to new contexts during independent practice. The math block ends with a daily exit ticket that assesses that day’s objective and is typically incorporated into the next day’s Opening Procedures.

In SY22, Ascend will introduce a Guided Math component for all middle school grade levels, implemented during intervention blocks for 30 minutes per day, four days per week. Guided Math will be analogous to the Guided Reading component; in a small-group setting, teachers will use data to target concepts to the group’s instructional level. Ascend staff will monitor math performance data in SY22 and future years to determine the effectiveness of the Guided Math approach.

In math in grades K-8, semi-weekly quizzes assess current content as well as a pre-selected, previously explored (spiraled) standard to constantly appraise knowledge gaps on major cluster

standards. Teacher teams study these data points weekly and use them to plan for Response to Data (RTD) instructional periods.

Ascend has created a powerful culture of response to instructional data (RTI) to support and enhance learning, and will continue to develop and employ a variety of assessments to measure progress towards mastering standards. In addition to New York State exams administered each spring, teachers use benchmark and mock assessments, unit tests, F&P assessments, and other measures of student performance during the course of the year. The Illuminate Data and Assessment (DnA) system allows staff to monitor progress and assess student comprehension, and supports data-driven teacher training and evaluation through access to instant feedback. Teachers and leaders consistently review student work and achievement data and trends, resulting in effective planning for upcoming lessons and timely and purposeful feedback to students.

All Ascend schools participate in Teacher Planning and Development (TPD), a network-wide program aimed at improving teaching and learning and creating a platform for teacher collaboration. Through unit studies, planning and assessment studies, lesson debriefs, teach-backs, and data meetings, TPD meetings represent a critical piece of a professional development program that also includes pre-service training, full professional development days, after-school sessions, and ongoing coaching and modeling.

Ascend schools operated primarily in a remote learning modality in SY21. To accommodate students in this environment, Ascend built out opportunities for differentiated instruction and reduced whole-class time to reduce students' screen exposure. The Ascend network opened learning pods in all school buildings in January 2021. In April 2021, Ascend schools resumed in-person learning with a subset of students. In SY22, Ascend plans to offer full in-person instruction at all schools.

METHOD

For several years, Ascend has administered internally-developed benchmark exams, modeled off of the NYS exams in math, to students in grades 3-8. Benchmark exam results are administered three times per year and meant to indicate the level of student proficiency and mastery. These exams begin with a "baseline" assessment early in the year. This testing structure allows teachers and school leaders to understand student progress throughout the year. Ascend can use scores from these benchmark exams to project, historically with high accuracy, students' level of success on the state math exam. In the absence of reliable state exam results in SY21, Ascend has used performance on these benchmarks and the resulting state test projections as primary measures of student achievement and growth.

During 2020-21, the school(s) primarily used the following exam to assess student growth and achievement in mathematics: Internally developed

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

2020-21 Ascend State Test Projections

Measure	Subgroup	Target	Tested	Results	Met?
Absolute Measure: 75 percent of all tested students who are enrolled in at least their second year will be projected to perform at or above proficiency on the state's mathematics exam for grades 3-8.	Students in at least their second year	75%	366	59%	No
Growth Measure: The average student-level change between SY19 state mathematics exam score and SY21 projected score will be positive.	All students	>0 pp	173	-0.4 pp	No
Gap Closing Measure 1: Among students whose state mathematics exam score in SY19 was in the bottom quartile of projected scores, median change between SY19 score and SY21 projected score will be positive.	Low initial achievers	>0 pp	82	-3.7 pp	No
Gap Closing Measure 2: The median change between SY19 state mathematics exam score and SY21 projected score for students with IEPs will be greater than the same median change among students without IEPs.	Students with IEPs	>-0.6 pp	41	+0.5 pp	Yes
Gap Closing Measure 3: The median change between SY19 state mathematics exam score and SY21 projected score for ELL students will be greater than the same median change among non-ELL students.	ELL students	>+1.5 pp	5	-3.6 pp	No

Absolute: *percentage of all tested students enrolled in at least their second year projected to perform at or above proficiency*

Overall	3	4	5	6	7
59%	74%	49%	54%	55%	63%

Growth: *average student-level change between SY19 state exam score and SY21 projected score (percentage points)*

Overall	5	6	7
-0.4 pp	-4.7 pp	+0.9 pp	+2.6 pp

Gap Closing

Median change from SY19 state exam score to SY21 projected score among students who scored in the bottom quartile in SY19 (percentage points)

Overall	5	6	7
-3.7 pp	-5.3 pp	-3.6 pp	+1.3 pp

Median change between SY19 state exam score and SY21 projected score among students with IEPs, compared to students without IEPs (percentage points)

	Overall	5	6	7
Students with IEPs	+0.5 pp	-4.7 pp	-1.2 pp	+3.8 pp
Students without IEPs	-0.6 pp	-3.9 pp	+2.0 pp	+2.3 pp

While Central Brooklyn Ascend fell short of its math goal in SY21 while students engaged in remote learning, with students overall demonstrating lower proficiency in SY21 than they did in SY19, we can see indications of gap closing. Students with IEPs demonstrated more growth in math than did general education students. A recent analysis of national iReady assessment data found that students in SY21 performed roughly ten points lower in math than matched students from previous years; Central Brooklyn Ascend's negative change of 0.4 points from SY19 to SY21 reflects this national trend. Ascend is committed to reversing the effects of this unfinished learning, and we have developed a comprehensive strategy for SY22 that will ensure our educational program meets the needs of students and families as they recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Resuming in-person instruction for all students, as well as providing additional small-group instruction, implementing tutoring, and focusing on differentiation will aid students in recovering academically and socio-emotionally. This strategy is described in detail in the "Action Plan" section below.

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT AND EVIDENCE

The internal benchmark assessments have a long history of validity as a measure of achievement. While the testing modality changed in spring 2020 and SY21, we believe our faithful implementation of the assessment format through a remote learning platform retains much of that validity. Staff administered ELA assessments through Google Classroom in grades 3 and 4, and Illuminate Online in grades 5-8. To support students' psychological safety during the pandemic and to maintain community trust, Ascend did not engage in browser locking or eye tracking.

After Ascend's second benchmark assessment, staff saw indications in some exam responses that students had used answers found online. This happened most frequently in grades 8-12 and was more common on ELA than on math assessments; math assessments relied heavily on Constructed Response questions and used the Desmos platform, both of which require more work to be shown via the testing platform than do multiple choice questions. Staff determined this had a low risk of recurring, as Ascend administered the state exam in place of our third internal benchmark, with Ascend staff digitizing the exams and administered them remotely to students who had not yet returned to in-person learning.

Ascend also uses internal curricular assessments to understand student proficiency in math. The metric reported is the percentage of students receiving an average assessment score of 65 or greater. Achieving a score of 65 on the assessment does not necessarily equate to passing, since participation is also factored into the grading; however, this score cutoff is a primary indicator of academic achievement in math.

Change in percentage of students receiving average assessment scores of 65 or greater between SY19 and SY21 (change in percentage points)

	Overall	**K**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
2020-21	66%	92%	78%	63%	56%	59%
2018-19	70%	94%	85%	79%	64%	42%
Change	-4 pp	-2 pp	-7 pp	-16 pp	-8 pp	+17 pp

Central Brooklyn Ascend saw improved performance on math assessments in grade 4 between SY19 and SY21. Overall, these results exemplify the unfinished learning students face due to the pandemic and the remote learning environment. Ascend is confident that through our action plan for SY22, our students will recover academically and socio-emotionally, and assessment results will reflect that recovery.

SUMMARY OF THE ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE MATHEMATICS GOAL

Central Brooklyn Ascend did not meet its overall ELA goal in SY21. In SY22, Ascend will address this unfinished learning with a network-wide strategy that will ensure our educational program supports our students' academic and socio-emotional needs as our communities recover from the pandemic and the period of remote instruction.

ACTION PLAN

The Ascend network's plans to address unfinished learning in the coming school year will provide our students with the support they need to excel in math. In SY22, one of the Ascend network's four strategic imperatives is to hone our student learning model to close the academic and social learning gap created by COVID-19 and integrate technology into our instructional model. To close the academic gaps we have seen in math, Ascend will implement three evidence-based strategies, which it will continue to adapt throughout the coming year.

1. *Increasing small-group instructional time.* Ascend has added more opportunities for small-group instruction across lower and middle school grades. The middle school schedule has been adjusted to provide four one-hour intervention blocks per week, which will be divided between ELA and math and provide additional academic support. Ascend will also hire additional special education teachers across the network; school leaders can utilize these staff members to create more small-group instruction opportunities for students in special education.
2. *Establishing a tutoring program.* A new tutoring program will serve 10-15% of each school's enrollment. This program will supplement existing Ascend small-group instruction, and the network will determine whether to continue the tutoring program in SY23 and beyond based on the program's effectiveness in SY22. Ascend is designing this program around evidence-based principles, with frequent instruction (three sessions per week), limited group sizes, and regular assessment and data analysis. School leadership will have discretion over scheduling and location to most effectively operationalize the program at their schools.
3. *Repacing the curriculum.* The curriculum pacing and sequencing has been adjusted to ensure students receive targeted instruction on prerequisite content immediately before it's needed for grade-level content, and to embed more opportunities for differentiation.

The network is also prioritizing students' mental health and wellbeing. Ascend has hired two to three additional clinicians to serve as "floaters," supporting schools that exhibit an increase in mental health needs. Each school will have an additional culture associate, who will support student culture, community, behavior, and socio-emotional needs in both proactive and reactive ways. Ascend is also investing in the DESSA tool, a screener for schools to identify social emotional learning supports for all students.

In SY22, Ascend plans for full in-person instruction. Schools will ensure consistency in data reporting by administering benchmark and curricular assessments comparable to those administered in SY21 and previous years. In the event that schools must return to remote instruction, Ascend staff will leverage their experience with remote instruction in SY21 and the above strategies to address unfinished learning to ensure students are engaging consistently in remote assessments.

GOAL 3: SCIENCE

ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCIENCE

Goal 3: Science

Central Brooklyn Ascend Charter School students will meet grade level expectations in Science.

BACKGROUND

Central Brooklyn Ascend implements the Ascend Common Core curriculum, which includes the following science components.

K-8 science units are designed based on the criteria set forth in the New York State P-12 Science Standards and according to the implementation timeline. The curriculum follows a multiyear sequence that helps students develop increasingly sophisticated practices and ideas across grades K-8 and beyond, with a focus on the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) Science and Engineering Practices (SEPs) and Crosscutting Concepts (CCs).

Designed to engage scholars in inquiry-based tasks that promote a deep conceptual understanding of grade-level standards, science instruction also follows the Launch, Explore, Discuss (LED) model. Data-driven planning enables teachers to tailor instruction to meet the individual needs of students. As students engage with scientific phenomena from kindergarten on, they develop agency as lifelong scientific thinkers.

To harness the power of students' curiosity about the world around them, Ascend's program provides students a range of relevant learning experiences as they engage with scientific phenomena. Examples include inquiry and investigation, evidence-based argument, and application of skills and knowledge in unit projects. Units may also include reading informational texts critically and leveraging scientific knowledge and skills to take action on issues of social justice.

In SY20, Ascend piloted a Living Environment Regents course in 8th grade at Brooklyn Ascend Middle School. In SY21, the program was expanded to 8th grade students at all of our middle schools. Earning a Regents credit in 8th grade empowers students to take more advanced science classes in high school, setting them up for success as they compete with peers across the state. This transition aligns with New York State's mission of preparing science students for college and career readiness in STEM fields.

Ascend has created a powerful culture of response to instructional data (RTI) to support and enhance learning, and will continue to develop and employ a variety of assessments to measure progress towards mastering standards. In addition to New York State exams administered each spring, teachers use benchmark and mock assessments, unit tests, and other measures of student performance during the course of the year. The Illuminate Data and Assessment (DnA) system allows staff to monitor progress and assess student comprehension, and supports data-driven teacher training and evaluation through access to instant feedback. Teachers and leaders consistently review student work and achievement data and trends, resulting in effective planning for upcoming lessons and timely and purposeful feedback to students.

All Ascend schools participate in Teacher Planning and Development (TPD), a network-wide program aimed at improving teaching and learning and creating a platform for teacher

collaboration. Through unit studies, planning and assessment studies, lesson debriefs, teach-backs, and data meetings, TPD meetings represent a critical piece of a professional development program that also includes pre-service training, full professional development days, after-school sessions, and ongoing coaching and modeling.

Ascend schools operated primarily in a remote learning modality in SY21. The Ascend network opened learning pods in all school buildings in January 2021. In April 2021, Ascend schools resumed in-person learning with a subset of students. In SY22, Ascend plans to offer full in-person instruction at all schools.

During periods of remote instruction, the SEPs were highlighted as a way to continue to engage students in authentic science thinking and practices. In SY22, we will follow the current research, which recommends keeping the focus on grade-level content and rigor. We will leverage the NGSS progression of Disciplinary Core Ideas to help address learning gaps as needed within the context of grade-level work. An increased focus on the Next Generation Science Standards will support the goal of developing students as scientific thinkers.

METHOD

To assess student achievement and growth in science, Ascend used the metric of course performance. Ascend science courses are aligned to New York State science standards, as well as the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), and employ rigorous instructional methods.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

2020-21 Ascend Science Course Grades

Measure	Subgroup	Target	Tested	Results	Met?
Absolute Measure: 75 percent of all students who are enrolled in at least their second year will achieve a passing science course grade in grades 3-8.	Students in at least their second year	75%	394	75%	Yes
Growth Measure: The change in percentage of students receiving a passing course grade in science between SY19 and SY21 will be positive.	All students	>0 pp	460	-12 pp	No
Gap Closing Measure 1: The change in percentage of students with IEPs receiving a passing science course grade in SY19 and in SY21 will exceed the change in percentage of students without IEPs receiving a passing science course grade over the same time period.	Students with IEPs	>-11 pp	85	-16 pp	No
Gap Closing Measure 2: The change in percentage of ELL students receiving a passing science course grade in SY19 and in SY21 will exceed the change in percentage of non-ELL students receiving a passing science course grade over the same time period.	ELL students	>-11 pp	21	-33 pp	No

Absolute: *percentage of students enrolled in at least their second year achieving a passing course grade*

Overall	3	4	5	6	7
75%	100%	70%	58%	74%	82%

Growth: *change in percentage of students receiving a passing course grade in science between SY19 and SY21 (percentage points)*

	Overall	3	4	5

2020-21 (all students)	74%	98%	71%	56%
2018-19	86%	83%	88%	87%
Change	-12 pp	+15 pp	-17 pp	-31 pp

Gap Closing

Change between SY19 and SY21 passing percentage among students with IEPs, compared to students without IEPs (percentage points)

	Overall	**3**	**4**	**5**
Students with IEPs	-16 pp	+27 pp	-19 pp	-35 pp
Students without IEPs	-11 pp	+13 pp	-15 pp	-30 pp

Change between SY19 and SY21 passing percentage among ELL students, compared to non-ELL students (percentage points)

	Overall	**3**	**4**	**5**
ELL students	-33 pp	0 pp	-25 pp	-60 pp
Non-ELL students	-11 pp	16 pp	-16 pp	-31 pp

While Central Brooklyn Ascend fell short of its science goal in SY21 while students engaged in remote learning, with students overall demonstrating lower proficiency in SY21 than they did in SY19, we can see indications of achievement. Central Brooklyn Ascend met its absolute achievement measure, with 75% of students enrolled in at least their second year achieving a passing grade in science. Additionally, the school saw remarkable performance and growth among third graders, performing positively on all growth and gap closing measures. Though Central Brooklyn Ascend's overall growth fell short, the school's successes on these measures indicates that our strategic adaptations to minimize unfinished learning have supported student learning in SY21. Before and during the year, Ascend was proactive in meeting the needs of our students and families, distributing devices on a 1:1 basis and adapting our curriculum and instruction to the remote environment. Ascend is committed to reversing the effects of unfinished learning, and we have developed a comprehensive strategy for SY22 that we are confident will build on our curricular innovations in SY21 to ensure our educational program meets the needs of students and families as

they recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Resuming in-person instruction for all students, as well as providing additional small-group instruction, implementing tutoring, and focusing on differentiation will aid students in recovering academically and socio-emotionally. This strategy is described in detail in the "Action Plan" section below.

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT AND EVIDENCE

Ascend is confident in the consistent administration of assessments through its remote learning platforms in SY21. In SY22, Ascend's strategy to address unfinished learning and support our students in recovering from the pandemic (described in the "Action Plan" section below) will empower our students to achieve a high level of academic performance.

SUMMARY OF THE ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCIENCE GOAL

Though Central Brooklyn Ascend did not meet its overall science goal in SY21, results indicate Ascend's proactive adaptations to minimize unfinished learning during the COVID-19 pandemic have supported student learning. Looking forward to SY22, Ascend will implement a network-wide strategy that will build on these successes to support our students' academic and socio-emotional needs as our communities recover from the pandemic and the period of remote instruction.

ACTION PLAN

The Ascend network's plans to address unfinished learning in the coming school year will provide our students with the support they need to excel academically. In SY22, one of the Ascend network's four strategic imperatives is to hone our student learning model to close the academic and social learning gap created by COVID-19 and integrate technology into our instructional model. To close academic gaps, Ascend will implement several evidence-based strategies to support student achievement in science, which it will continue to adapt throughout the coming year. First, Ascend will hire additional special education teachers across the network. The curriculum pacing and sequencing have also been adjusted to ensure students receive targeted instruction on prerequisite content immediately before it's needed for grade-level content, and to embed more opportunities for differentiation. The network is also prioritizing students' mental health and wellbeing, which are inexorably linked to academic performance. Ascend has hired two to three additional clinicians to serve as "floaters," supporting schools that have exhibited an increase in mental health needs. Each school will have an additional culture associate, who will support student culture, community, behavior, and socio-emotional needs in both proactive and reactive ways. Ascend is also investing in the DESSA tool, a screener for schools to identify social emotional learning supports for all students.

In SY22, Ascend plans for full in-person instruction. Schools will ensure consistency in data reporting by administering benchmark and curricular assessments comparable to those administered in SY21 and previous years. In the event that schools must return to remote instruction, Ascend staff will leverage their experience with remote instruction in SY21 and the network's strategies to address unfinished learning to ensure students are engaging consistently in remote assessments.

GOAL 4: ESSA

Due to COVID-19 and the subsequent changes to the state's testing, accountability, and federal reporting requirements, the 2020-21 school accountability statuses are the same as those assigned for the 2019-20 school year. The 2019-20 accountability statuses were based on 2018-19 exam results. Assigned accountability designations and further context can be found here.

Goal 7: Absolute Measure

Under the state's ESSA accountability system, the school is in good standing: the state has not identified the school for comprehensive or targeted improvement.

METHOD

Because *all* students are expected to meet the state's performance standards, the federal statute stipulates that various sub-populations and demographic categories of students among all tested students must meet the state standard in and of themselves aside from the overall school results. As New York State, like all states, is required to establish a specific system for making these determinations for its public schools, charter schools do not have latitude in establishing their own performance levels or criteria of success for meeting the ESSA accountability requirements. Each year, the state issues School Report Cards that indicate a school's status under the state accountability system.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

Central Brooklyn Ascend is currently in "Good Standing" status, which it has maintained since the 2018-19 school year. The school thus meets this measure.

ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE

In 2018-19, Central Brooklyn Ascend earned the ESSA status of "Good Standing." It has thereafter maintained this status, receiving the "Good Standing" status in 2019-20 and 2020-21.

Accountability Status by Year

Year	Status
2018-19	Good Standing
2019-20	Good Standing
2020-21	Good Standing