



**Department of
Education**

Dennis M. Walcott, Chancellor

**Charter School Annual Site Visit Report
Charter Schools Office
2010-2011**

**FUTURE LEADERS INSTITUTE CHARTER SCHOOL
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT**

MAY 2011

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

The Future Leaders Institute Charter School (FLI) is an elementary/middle school serving approximately 365 students from kindergarten through grade eight in the 2010-2011 school year.¹ The school opened as a charter school conversion from a preexisting DOE public school in 2005 with grades kindergarten through 8.² It is currently housed in a public school building in District 3, at 134 West 122nd Street in Harlem.³

The school population comprises 92 % Black, 7 % Hispanic and 1 % multiracial students. 73% of students are designated eligible for free or reduced lunch.⁴ The student body includes approximately 3% English language learners and 11% special education students.⁵

The school earned a D on its progress report in 2010, a B in 2009, a C in 2008 and a B in 2007. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 – 2011 was reported by the school as 96.4 %, as of May 11, 2011.⁶ The school is in good standing with state and federal accountability.⁷

Annual Review Process Overview:

The NYC DOE Charter Schools Office conducts an annual site visit of New York City Department of Education authorized charter schools in order to assess three primary questions: is the school an academic success; is the school a viable organization; and is the school in compliance with applicable laws and regulations. The visits are conducted by representatives of the New York City Department of Education Charter Schools Office and last the duration of one school day. The annual site visit begins with a meeting with the principal and school leadership team. Subsequently, the reviewers visit classrooms and hold brief meetings with available administrators, teachers, and students. Areas of evaluation include, but are not limited to: academic goals and mission; curriculum and instruction; school culture and learning environment; assessment utilization; parent engagement; government structures and organizational design; community support; special populations; and safety and security.

The following experts participated in the review of this school May 19, 2011:

- Sonia Park, NYC DOE CSO Senior Director
- Karen Drezner, Consultant

Notice of Concern:

As a result of the review, the NYC DOE, as the charter authorizer for the Future Leaders Institute Charter School, has issued a Notice of Concern on Sept 1, 2011 which is effective through the end of August 2012. The conditions that will need to be redressed beginning immediately are listed among the Areas of Improvement included in this report.

¹ NYC DOE ATS system

² NYC DOE ATS system and charter agreement

³ NYC DOE Location Code Generating System database

⁴ Demographic data drawn from NYC DOE ATS enrollment database as of 1/11/10.

⁵ FLI CS self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (5/19/11)

⁶ Ibid

⁷ New York State Education Department - www.nysed.gov

Areas of Strength

- Classrooms were observed to be resource and reference-rich.
 - In each classroom visited (at least one classroom per grade was observed) there were robust classroom libraries, a range of manipulatives, word walls with evidence of growth, and general technology use by teachers. Multiple examples/High Quality student work were posted, along with agendas, schedules, and reference charts.
- Teachers were seen to employ a variety of instructional strategies.
 - In visited classrooms, there was teacher-directed instruction, pair shares between students, student turn and talks, small group instruction, and full class shared reading.
 - Most observed students, particularly in the lower grades, were seen engaged in learning activities.
- FLI utilizes a range of measurements to assess student achievement.
 - In addition to state mandated assessments, the school administers Fountas & Pinnell leveled reading, running records, mock NYS assessments (administered three times a year), and Children's Progress Assessments for grades K-2 (administered three times a year).
 - Teacher created assessments aligned to the Common Core are also used.
 - Teachers received training on running records and Fountas & Pinnell. School-wide professional development is offered at least once a month.
- Interviewed special education staff spoke in positive terms of the school's push-in model and its flexibility, lending to frequent teacher collaboration.
 - Teachers described monthly special education meetings, student support team meetings, and weekly content meetings (which are every other week in middle school grades).
- FLI is self-reflective in terms of its operations management. The school has a conservative budgeting approach that is supplemented by fundraising.
 - The school anticipates a budget surplus for 2010-11 of over \$100,000. Over \$300,000 of revenue is derived from philanthropic and fundraising activities.

What the school needs to improve: this section is divided into three parts, one that identifies areas where we recommend that the school continues to focus on improvement; a second part that identifies the areas that the school needs to remedy; and a third section that outlines required elements for a Corrective Action Plan.

Areas of Continued Improvement

- FLI should clarify modes and schedule of communications between leadership, staff and parents. FLI is encouraged to define a strategic, overarching plan and align communications and actions to these priorities. FLI should continue to actively reach out to parents and encourage its parent organization (PIC) to meet regularly and consistently.
 - During the visit, FLI was in the midst of leadership transition, which has posed challenges and contributed to communication deficits for parents and staff. Teachers expressed a lack of transparency with decisions made by the Board of Trustees and leadership of the school.

- FLI should continue to establish consistent, clear and transparent school-wide classroom management, discipline code, and protocols that reflect a shared understanding and common language of expectations for students, staff and families.
 - A range of classroom management techniques were employed by teachers (echo-clapping, 1 minute warnings, tambourine, heads down, if you can hear my voice, hands on heads/shoulders, etc.) but teachers rarely expected or received 100 % compliance. Students were permitted to remain off-task in assigned seats or in “time-out” chairs in several rooms. Although small groups were often initially engaged in learning, extension activities were not available if they completed the assignment.
 - Responsive Classroom training is currently arranged for 1 or 2 teachers off site. FLI should consider school-wide training.

- FLI should continue to focus on academic rigor and consistency across classrooms, especially in the middle school grades.
 - In some observed classes the pacing was slow, leading to disengagement as students waited for the teacher to write on the board or discuss an answer with a another student. The school is encouraged to utilize its professional development to improve classroom management.
 - FLI should continue the implementation of a school model with a focus on developing higher order skills. During classroom observations, questions were basic or leading and inadequate wait time was provided for students to come up with a nuanced answer.

- FLI is encouraged to continue to develop and use data to assess student performance and track growth.
 - At the time of the visit the school did not have fully developed, detailed rubrics that reflect high expectations and specific concepts/skills taught. A school-wide protocol to collect, review, plan and differentiate instruction with data needs was not evident though the Renewal Report in January 2010 noted that an interim assessment and data tracking system did exist (the “FLI Interim Assessment Model” and the enhanced system called “FLI Snapshot.”) It is not clear if implementation of the FLI Snapshot was delayed, revised or terminated.

- FLI should further refine its systems for teacher support and professional development (PD).
 - Teacher turnover is relatively high – 5 teachers left during the 2010-11 school year, and 2 were let go. Eleven teachers from the prior year either did not return or were not asked to return for the current school year.
 - The school should continue to refine its internal protocol for individual observations and provision of feedback, based on best practices and school-wide, grade level and individual learning priorities.
 - FLI should also assess the impact of current consultants and draft comprehensive plan for teachers to receive on-site and off-site PD opportunities to learn and turn-key information to peers.

Areas of Violation of Charter Law or Charter Agreement

- The Board of Trustees should enact corrective measures in order to be in full compliance with its bylaws. The Board of Trustees should meet bi-monthly as specified and approved by the CSO during the school’s renewal in January 2010.
 - In reviewing the submitted minutes of Board meetings, the Board did not consistently meet on a bi-monthly basis. Submitted minutes only included Sept. 16, 2010; Oct, 21, 2010; and March 22, 2011.

- FLI should enact corrective measures in order to be in full compliance with its Charter Agreement and School Monitoring Plan.

- In accordance with Section 2.12 (a) Governance of the Agreement and subsection C of the Monitoring Plan, the FLI Board of Trustees must submit within 5 business days any additions or removal of board trustees. The name of any proposed member of the Board must be submitted with background information to the CSO office for approval. The Board did not consistently provide this required information for board changes that have taken place during the 2010-11 academic year. On the March 2011 submitted roster, 12 trustees are listed (not counting two ex-officio members). On the revised May 2011 roster, there are 8 trustees listed.
- FLI should enact corrective measures in order to be in full compliance with the 2010 amended Charter School Act. Areas of non-compliance regard meeting target rates for enrollment and retention of Special Education students, English Language Learners, and hiring Certified Teachers.
 - The school should document outreach to Special Education students in order to be comparable to the district, CSD 3. The school used a combination of methods, including word-of-mouth and holding parent sessions. None of these efforts were specifically targeted toward Special Education students. FLI's population includes 11%⁸ Special Education students, which is lower than CSD 3's 14.3%⁹.
 - The school should document outreach to ELL students in order to be comparable to the district, CSD 3. FLI's population includes 3.2%¹⁰ ELLs, which is lower than CSD 5's 8.4%¹¹; and
 - FLI should continue to employ experienced, certified staff in order to meet the Act's requirement of non-certified teaching staff being only 5 or 30% of teaching staff, whichever is less. At the time of the CSO visit, the school reported that 6 teachers were either uncertified or reciprocity of certification was unclear.

Corrective Action Plan Requirements:

1. The Board revises its meeting schedule to comply with its bylaws.
2. The Board should verify its current Trustee roster and board background information with the CSO.
3. FLI should enact corrective measures in order to be in full compliance with the School Act in regard to teacher certification. As of the data provided on May 19, 2011, 6 of FLI's teachers were not certified. FLI should submit an updated staff roster, indicating certified and non-certified staff to the CSO.
4. FLI should develop an outreach plan that includes specific outreach to special education students and English Language Learners.

⁸ FLI CS self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (5/19/11)

⁹ ATS data, (June 30, 2011)

¹⁰ FLI CS self reported School Evaluation Visit Data Collection Form (5/19/11)

¹¹ ATS data, (June 30, 2011)

Part 3: Framing Questions

FRAMING QUESTIONS:

Throughout the Renewal Process and the life of each school's charter, the NYCDOE Charter Schools Office uses the following framing questions to monitor Charter School success:

1. Has the School Been an Academic Success?
2. Has the School Been a Viable Organization?
3. Has the School Been in Compliance with All Applicable Laws and Regulations?

Annual Site Visit Rubric:

1. Has the School Been an Academic Success?
 - Academic Goals and Mission
 - School components and curriculum align together and holistically support the mission
 - School has high academic expectations and employs strategies for the full range of students served by the school, including those at risk and those with special needs
 - Curriculum and Instruction
 - The educational plan is flexible and is adjusted to meet the performance levels and learning needs of all enrolled students
 - School implements programming to address the needs of students with disabilities and ELLs
 - Teachers demonstrate the use of differentiated instructional techniques to support the varying ways by which students learn
 - School has implemented programming for students who need remediation or acceleration
 - School Culture
 - The culture is strong, intentional, supportive and sustainable and promotes student learning
 - The school motivates all students and respects the diversity of learners and cultures in the community
 - School offers programs, activities or support services beyond academics to address students' social and emotional needs
 - School calendar and day are set to provide extra supports to ensure that students are able to meet and exceed academic goals
 - Schedule for communication to parents/students is timely and allows for due process, includes strategies to prepare students for transitions and strategies for those students who are not on schedule, presents a clear and fair system that complies with students' due process rights
 - Structures that foster the development of authentic, sustained, caring, respectful relationships among all stakeholders within school
 - Behavioral expectations and social supports that reflect the school's mission and comply with all applicable laws and regulations
 - Assessment
 - Establishes a culture of continuous improvement and accountability for student learning
 - Develops assessments that shape and inform instruction on an ongoing basis and develop data that's used to gauge student, teacher and school progress through formative and summative assessment
 - Student learning measured with multiple forms of assessments/metrics
 - Develops educational goals and performance metrics that are SMART – Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Reflect the Mission and Time-Specific
 - Develops assessments that are appropriately aligned with curriculum, instruction, and adopted standards

- Provides evidence of how data will influence instruction, professional development and curricular adjustments
 - Parent Engagement
 - Parent engagement strategies that integrate and mobilize parents within the school community as conduits for student success
 - Capacity to communicate effectively with parents and families
 - Parent engagement strategies that integrate and mobilize parents within the school community as conduits for student success
2. Is the School a Viable Organization
- Governance Structures and Organizational Design
 - School has articulated appropriate roles, responsibilities, and decision-making structure for school community members (including Board of Trustees and school leadership)
 - An accountability structure that provides effective oversight of the educational program and fiscal components of the school is in place and utilized
 - Board regularly reviews a data dashboard of student achievement and fiscal management that forms the basis for Board discussions and decisions
 - Board has diverse skill set that lends itself to strong educational / operational oversight
 - Board has an articulated process for ongoing policy development, Board member development and self-evaluation
 - Organizational charts are aligned with mission; roles and responsibilities are clearly defined
 - Board has developed essential strategic partnerships with organizations that support the mission of the school
 - Community Support
 - School Leadership demonstrated responsiveness to the unique needs and interests of the community to be served
 - School has established a presence in the community and has buy in from community members
3. Is the School in Compliance with Applicable Laws and Regulations
- Special Populations
 - Well-defined plan and sufficient capacity to service the learning needs of Special Education students, English Language Learners
 - School adequately addresses the academic and non academic needs of students in need of remediation, students with disabilities, students with interrupted formal education, and gifted students
 - There is a coherent plan for meeting the non-academic needs of students with disabilities, students with interrupted formal education, and other populations
 - School employs a process to identify students at risk of not meeting expectations and creates intervention plans and follow up
 - School demonstrates a comprehensive recruitment, enrollment and retention approach that is sensitive to the diverse needs of students
 - School admission policy and lottery preferences serve to create a student body that reflects community demographics and give a preference to community school district residents
 - Safety and Security
 - School is well maintained
 - Transitions and student gatherings are orderly and well supervised
 - Expectations for student behavior are well known and are enforced fairly
 - School is current with all safety recruitments and drills.
 - AED machines are in operation and school staff is trained in CPR