



Oakland Unified School District

Charter School Renewal Site Visit Report

Oakland Charter Academy

**3001 International Boulevard
Oakland, CA 94601**

Principal: Jorge Lopez

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Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Oakland Charter Academy (OCA) is a small charter middle school that serves 150 students in grades 6-8. OCA describes itself as a “no nonsense,” “back-to-basics” educational program, emphasizing “honor through hard work.” The school is in its fourteenth year of operations and is undergoing its third renewal.

OCA’s current enrollment consists of 93% Latino, 3% African American, and 4% Asian and Pacific Islander and 1% White students. Ninety-eight (98%) percent of the students are known to be eligible for the free and reduced lunch program. Approximately 3% of the students have been identified with special needs and 22% have been identified as English Learners (EL).

The school performs extremely well on state-mandated assessments, demonstrating consistent and significant growth each year. Over the past four years OCA’s Academic Performance Index (API) growth has ranged between +40 and +113 growth points per year. In 2006, the OCA had an API base score of 856, ranking the school 9 statewide and 10 among similar schools. OCA’s API 2007 growth score is 896, the second highest middle school API growth score in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD).

Part 2: Overview

School Strengths:

- The school consistently out-performs other middle schools both locally and statewide on state standardized tests.
- The school is lead by a dynamic and effective school director who focuses on results and continuous improvement.
- The school's standards-based, direct instruction delivery model is consistently implemented to good effect in all classrooms.
- All stakeholders sustain the school's mission and high expectations which are embedded in daily practice.
- Student support systems, which include daily after-school tutoring, Saturday school and a mandatory three-week summer school, have made a positive impact upon individual student achievement.
- The school's board of director is well-informed and committed to supporting the school in achieving its mission.
- The staff, administration and teachers make Oakland Charter Academy a safe, caring and nurturing place that is very supportive of students' personal and academic success.

School Challenges:

- The school would like to have a gym to accommodate additional sports and recreational activities.

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation:

This is an excellent school overall.

Is the School An Academic Success?

Oakland Charter Academy is unequivocally an academic success. Over the past four years, the school has moved out of Program Improvement (PI) status to become a top performing middle school. OCA's 2006 API base score was 856, ranking the school ninth statewide and tenth among similar schools. The school has demonstrated consistent and impressive growth on its API each year for the past four years, with growth points ranging between +40 and +113. OCA's API 2007 growth score is 896, the second highest growth API among middle schools in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD).

OCA implements a comprehensive and rigorous, standards-based curriculum anchored by state-adopted textbooks. Instruction is primarily teacher-directed, yet there are good opportunities for students to reflect, think and ask critical questions. Very good support structures, which include daily afterschool tutoring, Saturday school and mandatory summer school are in place to prepare and help students become successful in the OCA environment. The school also provides art, physical education and Mandarin (as a foreign language) in addition to the core academic subjects.

OCA's culture is marked by a strong commitment to succeed. The school has a 98% attendance rate which is very high compared to other schools. Students are well-behaved, attentive, self-directed and engage in healthy competitions between classes for high attendance and grades. A close network of caring staff, teachers and administrators create an environment that fosters students' personal and academic successes.

Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?

Oakland Charter Academy is an effective, viable organization. In 2004 the school underwent a dramatic change in leadership and, as a result, a big shift in the learning culture of the school. A more rigorous curriculum and stricter behavioral standards were put in place. In addition, accountability for student achievement by all stakeholders, including parents, teachers, administrators and board members as well as students, was infused into the school. This has effectively increased student attainment at the school. A number of members have transitioned from the OCA board since that time, so that most of the current board members are only in their first, second or third year of service. The school is well organized and operates effectively. Policies relating to fiscal and programmatic operations are transparent and consistently followed through.

Has the School Remained Faithful to the Terms of Its Charter?

Oakland Charter Academy has met the terms of its charter in all areas related to student achievement, governance and fiscal accountability. The school is achieving its mission to provide a small, middle school learning environment that meets the social, emotional and academic needs of inner-city Oakland students. This is clearly evidenced by its student achievement data, school documents and information collected through the renewal site visit. Over the past four years, OCA has initiated changes related to academic accountability that were necessary to accomplish this mission. This means that the program outlined in the recent renewal charter is most consistent with OCA's current practice and operations.

Criterion 1: Improving Student Achievement

A charter school promotes student learning through a clear vision and high expectations. It achieves clear, measurable program goals and student learning objectives, including meeting its stated performance standards, state and federal performance standards, and closing achievement gaps of students.

This area of the school's work is excellent.

Oakland Charter Academy's motto, "Honor Hard Work," serves as the cornerstone from which the school operates and emphasizes its high expectations for student attainment. This approach, coupled with the creation of a small, academically rigorous learning environment, is yielding strong success as demonstrated through the school's API results. Over the past four years the school has moved out of Program Improvement (PI) status to become a top performing middle school. OCA's 2006 API base score was 856, ranking the school ninth statewide and tenth among similar schools. The school has demonstrated consistent and impressive growth on its API each year for the past four years with growth points ranging between +40 and +113. OCA's API 2007 growth score is 896, the second highest growth API among middle schools in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD).

Achieving proficiency on state academic standards underpins learning objectives as well as the school's overarching program goals. Interim targets are created and are based upon the percent of standards covered and achieved by students throughout a school year. Progress towards these targets is tracked through results on textbooks exams throughout the year and annual standardized measurements such as the Standardized California and Reporting (STAR) and measures of proficiency under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The school's complete focus on covering and learning state standards has resulted in very high test scores.

The school's academic program is rigorous and, although the experience of teaching staff varies between one and six years, instruction is consistently good throughout the school. While instruction is whole-class for the most part, there are some good opportunities for students to reflect, think and respond within lessons. Most learning activities are based on textbook exercises but teachers take advantage of opportunities to make connections which provide context and relevance when discussing or introducing a topic. Questioning by teachers ask not just "what" of students, but also "why." Students, in turn, respond well are attentive in their lessons. However, little differentiation of instructional strategies was observed in the classrooms which means that opportunities are missed for students to explore answers from different approaches or for individuals or groups to review missed concepts.

Now that the school has established a strong, skills-based curriculum, it is beginning to explore more varied ways for students to learn. For example, OCA re-designed its English/Language Arts program last year to take a more thematic and literary approach to the subject and have begun to incorporate more student-generated learning activities such as journaling and role-play in this area.

The school has very good structures in place to motivate, challenge and support its students. The school director promotes healthy competitions between classes and among the students to achieve higher attendance rate, grades and test scores. Students interviewed expressed a very strong desire to achieve and felt that the school pushes them to strive for higher goals. At the same time, the school also provides strong support to help them. Teachers are in regular communication with parents through progress reports every three weeks and through parent phone calls. Students and parents interviewed confirmed that it would students do not "fall through the cracks." Consequences for missed homework (detention) or support for areas of academic deficiency (tutoring/Saturday school) are clear and immediate. Rewards for doing well are also given to students who accomplish attendance goals, test scores and grades in the way of fieldtrips and small cash rewards.

To ensure the success of students, OCA provides a range of opportunities for additional support, many of which are mandatory. This includes a mandatory three-week summer school for all students, despite

their GPA or test scores, thereby extending the academic school year. During the school year, tutors are hired specifically to work with students in after-school tutoring where there is a much greater degree of differentiation based upon students' skill levels and needs. Saturday school is held once a month to provide more opportunities for work with students who are lagging behind academically. Students and parents report that the tutoring and Saturday schools have been successful in helping students catch up.

OCA works with the John Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth (CTY), which allows for academically high-achieving students to take college courses throughout the summer and at different times during the school year. Students interviewed spoke of the program enthusiastically as an opportunity to experience college. Because so many students are motivated to achieve, approximately 37% (15% seventh graders and 22% eighth graders) of the students in the school are participating in additional after-school tutoring in the hopes of passing the test that would allow them entry into CTY.

The OCA school culture is structured and disciplined and marked by a strong commitment to succeed. Students come to school, go to class and work. As the classrooms are self-contained, there is no need for transition time between classes, and transitions between activities within the classrooms are smooth and immediate with little "social" time. This provides for more learning time. The facilities are safe and clean and the classrooms are well-resourced. Additionally, within this very structured and disciplined environment, students feel accepted and cared for. Students interviewed feel that the adults on the campus are there to support and "help them get better." Parents interviewed state that though there are strict consequences for not doing homework, their children's primary motivator for completing homework was not wanting to disappoint their teachers or the school administrators.

Criterion 2: Strong Leadership

The leaders of a charter school are stewards of the charter's mission and vision and carry out their duties in a professional, responsible and ethical manner. Charter school leaders use their influence and authority for the primary purpose of achieving student success.

This area of the school's work is excellent.

The school director and site coordinator are experienced educators who effectively ensure that OCA's mission, goals, pedagogical approach and educational model are aligned and clearly communicated to all stakeholders in the school. Over the past three years, the OCA's director has taken a strong "no nonsense" approach to establishing a culture focused on results. Structure, discipline and orderliness are prevalent throughout the school. This year, the director's duties have expanded to include the management of Oakland Charter High School, so a school site coordinator has been established to manage and oversee the daily operations of the OCA. The site coordinator has been received well and has made good impact through working with teachers, parents and students at the school.

School policies and expectations are clearly outlined in parent orientations and in the school's parent/student handbooks and are implemented consistently. Students adhere to the school's uniform policy and strict behavioral and academic expectations are maintained schoolwide and reinforced by the teachers and the school administration. Parents and students interviewed report that they appreciate that the rules are very strict and that there are very high expectations at the school. At the same time, they also feel the staff to be very responsive to, and supportive of, students, especially those who need assistance academically.

The school leadership closely monitors the program and is visible throughout the school. Teacher lesson plans are reviewed weekly, and administrators frequently "drop-in" on classrooms and provide feedback to teachers. Yearly goals for the academic progress of students (i.e. API targets) are posted throughout the school and discussed with students. Students, teachers and parents interviewed all state that they clearly understand what is expected of them by the school. While school leaders are strict in their expectations, they are also reflective and think about ways to improve the school program. For example, based on the desire to develop a more "thinking" curriculum, the director initiated the re-design of the school's English/Language Arts program to take a more thematic and literary approach to

the subject. The result is a curriculum that better prepares students for AP English courses at the high school level.

With small classes and a “looping” system where teachers move through the grade levels with their students, all teachers have a good grasp of student needs. Assessment of student progress throughout the school year is done through regular textbook assessments in all subject areas and close monitoring of how teachers and students are moving through the textbook curriculum. Student performance as a whole, therefore, is monitored through progress and achievement of standards covered in the textbooks. All students not meeting standards, including EL and students with special needs, are provided with differentiated support and tutoring after school.

During the summer, OCA teachers are provided with in-service training on the “OCA way” of high expectations and on classroom management. This means that classroom norms are consistent throughout the school. Professional development based upon specific subject matter is encouraged and whole-school in-service training sessions have been provided in previous years. Teachers report that they have opportunities for informal collaboration and that more structured collaboration time, although desirable, may not be sustainable due to their busy schedules in working with students after school. Most seem to feel that this informal collaboration is currently sufficient, though more structured time could be utilized to support newer teachers and build further cohesion among the staff.

The school's academic performance is clearly publicized throughout the school, and OCA's students, teachers and board directors are actively engaged in monitoring the schools annual API growth as a means to challenge and encourage continuous growth. OCA also maintains a School Accountability Report Card (SARC) as required by law.

All OCA policies are clearly communicated and consistently followed. Conflicts of interest policies are in place. The parent/student handbook references opportunities for individuals to address the OCA Board of Trustees, but does not include the school's internal dispute policies. The school leadership is careful to define the nature of valuable and appropriate parental and community engagement in the school. For instance, rather than fundraising or chaperoning student events, parents are asked to be involved in the school through supporting and working with their children on homework. They are also welcome to attend or observe classes. The school has formed a parent advisory council which meets at various times throughout the year to provide feedback to the school administration on school policies. Community partnerships, though not varied, are solid. In addition to partnering with John Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth (CTY), OCA students participate in rowing with the Jack London Aquatic Center and rugby with the Baracus Youth Rugby Club, which provides enrichment activities in addition to the school's academic program.

Criterion 3: A Focus on Continuous Improvement

A charter school engages in a process of continuous self-improvement in order to increase the effectiveness of its educational program. The school regularly assesses and evaluates student learning based on stated goals.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Oakland Charter Academy uses student test scores and the school's API to measure its success. Therefore, school wide goals for improvement are primarily focused on raising these scores. Student performance as a whole is monitored by progress through, and achievement of, content standards covered in the textbooks. Tests embedded in the textbook curriculum are regularly used to evaluate student progress. The results of these tests are used for re-teaching, if necessary, and for one-on-one interventions during tutoring and Saturday schools. Beyond this, the school does not use formal systems for collecting, monitoring and analyzing performance trends as whole; however, current methods of assessing students and targeting interventions have seem to have been proven successful based on the school's growth in test scores.

Families are kept well-informed of both individual student and schoolwide academic progress through STAR results, class tests results and progress reports every three weeks. The school's greatest

concern related to assessing and evaluating students' progress is the significant delay in receiving cumulative records from previous schools they have attended. This hinders the individualized planning and goal-setting process OCA outlines with each student at the beginning of every school year. The more expedient transfer of student cumulative records is an area that the school would like to work more closely with OUSD. The school is also researching other normative assessment programs that may streamline evaluations of students' content skills within the school year to assist in collecting and disaggregating data more quickly and immediately.

Criterion 4: Criterion 4: Responsible Governance

A charter school board and administration establish and implement policies that are transparent and focused on student achievement. Charter school board members and administrators have a cogent understanding of and comply with the laws that govern charter schools.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Oakland Charter Academy Board of Directors is responsible for monitoring the overall academic and fiscal operations of the school. In 2004 the school underwent a dramatic change in leadership and, as a result, a big shift in the learning culture of the school. A more rigorous curriculum and stricter behavioral standards were put in place; and accountability for student achievement by all stakeholders, including parents, teachers, administrators and board members as well as students, was infused into the school. Since 2004, a number of board members have transitioned from the board, so that most of the current board members of OCA are in their first, second or third year of service. Parent, community representatives serve on the board, and current members are well-qualified with varied experience in business and education and with community organizations in Oakland.

All new board members are provided with a full binder of information on OCA and oriented to his/her duties by the director. The board has a full set of bylaws and adheres to detailed conflicts of interest policies. Meeting agendas and interviews demonstrate that the board is well-informed about the school's academic performance and appropriately oversees the school budget. Though small, various members of the board participate in subcommittees which include personnel, education, finance/development, nominating, discipline and parent and facilities. The parent/student handbook provides information on board meetings and instructions on how to address the board.

The OCA director keeps abreast of current laws and charter school issues by participating in OUSD charter office meetings, the Oakland charter school consortium meetings and in various statewide workshops related to charter schools.

All required reports to the district have been submitted in accordance with timelines established.

Criterion 5: Fiscal Accountability

A charter school fulfills its fiduciary responsibility for public funds and maintains publicly accessible fiscal records. The school conducts an annual financial audit which is made public.

This area of the school's work is excellent.

The OCA director and the board treasurer work closely to develop, oversee and monitor its annual budget through a process that adheres to required timelines. The school follows full set of fiscal policies that provide checks and balances on major expenditures and protect against conflicts of interest.

OCA is a locally-funded charter school and has met all fiscal reporting requirements. The school adheres to the audit requirements in law for charter schools, and audits are performed in accordance with generally accepted standards. Audit reports for the past two fiscal years are comprehensive and show no exceptions or deficiencies. Thus far the school has focused most of its expenditure upon textbooks and instructional materials, the hiring of quality teachers and staff, and in the maintenance of its campus. School facilities are clean, attractive and well-maintained and provide enough space for

classrooms, a small library and a hardtop for its PE program. Short and long-term budget projections are made with considerations for contingencies. Most recently, the school leadership and board have begun to work on a fiscal plan to acquire a gymnasium so that the school can expand its sports program and offer more extracurricular activities. OCA has managed its budget well, prioritizing appropriate instructional materials, staffing, and facilities to support its students while maintaining a solid reserve

School name: Oakland Charter Academy

School Quality Review	5	4	3	2	1
Overall evaluation score	X				

Criterion 1: Improving Student Achievement: A charter school promotes student learning through a clear vision and high expectations. It achieves clear, measurable program goals and student learning objectives, including meeting its stated performance standards, state and federal performance standards, and closing achievement gaps of students.		5	4	3	2	1
Criterion 1 overall score:		X				
1.1	Achieves clear, measurable program goals and student learning objectives, including meeting its stated performance standards, and state and federal standards	X				
1.2	Achieves comparably improved student learning outcomes relative to students in traditional public schools that students would have otherwise attended	X				
1.3	Demonstrates high expectations for student achievement	X				
1.4	Provides a challenging and coherent curriculum for each individual student	X				
1.5	Implements and directs learning experiences (consistent with the school's purpose and charter) that actively engage students		X			
1.6	Allocates appropriate resources in the way of instructional materials, staffing and facilities to promote high levels of student achievement	X				
1.7	Promotes academic risk taking by supporting students in a safe, healthy and nurturing environment characterized by trust, caring and professionalism	X				
1.8	Productively engages parental and community involvement as a part of the school's student support system		X			
1.9	Shares its vision among the school community and demonstrates its mission in daily action and practice	X				
1.10	Involves staff, students, parents and other stakeholders in its accountability for student learning and in the school's program evaluation process		X			

Criterion 2: Strong Leadership: The leaders of a charter school are stewards of the charter's mission and vision and carry out their duties in a professional, responsible and ethical manner. Charter school leaders use their influence and authority for the primary purpose of achieving student success.		5	4	3	2	1
Criterion 2 overall score:		X				
2.1	Effectively communicates and engages stakeholders in the vision mission of the school	X				
2.2	Consistently puts into practice the educational program outlined in its charter.	X				
2.3	Generates and sustains a school culture conducive to staff professional growth		X			
2.4	Actively monitors and evaluates the success of the school's program	X				
2.5	Provides regular, public reports on the school's progress towards achieving its goals to the school community and to the school's authorizer	X				
2.6	Treats all individuals with fairness, dignity and respect	X				
2.7	Has a cogent understanding of the laws that govern charter schools and monitors the trends, issues and potential changes in the environment in which charter schools operate	X				
2.8	Makes management decisions and uses his/her influence and authority for the primary purpose of achieving student success	X				
2.9	Abstains from any decision involving a potential or actual conflict of interests		X			
2.10	Respects diversity and implements practices that are inclusive of all types of learners consistent with the school charter		X			
2.11	Engages community involvement in the school		X			

Criterion 3: A Focus on Continuous Improvement: A charter school engages in a process of continuous self-improvement in order to increase the effectiveness of its educational program. The school regularly assesses and evaluates student learning based on stated goals.		5	4	3	2	1
Criterion 3 overall score:			X			
3.1	Uses information sources, data collection and data analysis strategies for self-examination and improvement.		X			
3.2	Establishes benchmarks and a variety of accountability tools for monitoring student progress and uses the results of these assessments to improve curriculum and instruction		X			
3.3	Establishes both long and short term goals and plans for accomplishing the school's mission as stated in its charter.		X			
3.4	Uses student assessment results to improve curriculum and instruction.		X			
3.5	Uses the results of evaluation and assessment as the basis for the allocation of resources for programmatic improvement.		X			

Criterion 4: Responsible Governance: A charter school board and administration establish and implement policies that are transparent and focused on student achievement. Charter school board members and administrators have a cogent understanding of and comply with the laws that govern charter schools.		5	4	3	2	1
Criterion 4 overall score:			X			
4.1	Ensure that policies are implemented in a fair and consistent manner.		X			
4.2	Monitor the trends, issues and potential changes in the environment in which charter schools operate.		X			
4.3	Seek input from impacted stakeholders.			X		
4.4	Enact policies that respect diversity and implements practices that are inclusive of all types of learners consistent with the school charter.		X			
4.5	Actively engage the school's authorizer in monitoring the school's educational program and its fiscal status.		X			

Criterion 5: Fiscal Accountability: A charter school fulfils its fiduciary responsibility for public funds and maintains publicly accessible fiscal records. The school conducts an annual financial audit which is made public.		5	4	3	2	1
Criterion 5 overall score:		X				
5.1	Creates and monitors immediate and long-range financial plans to effectively implement the school's educational program and ensure financial stability.	X				
5.2	Conducts an annual financial audit which is made public.		X			
5.3	Establishes clear fiscal policies to ensure that public funds are used appropriately and wisely.	X				
5.4	Ensures financial resources are directly related to the school's purpose: student achievement of learning goals.	X				