

# Christopher Columbus Charter High School

## Prospectus

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## I. Executive Summary

The mission of Christopher Columbus Charter High School is to graduate well-educated and socially responsible young adults prepared for success in college, life, and the global community. It will provide New York City Community School District 11 with a quality school where all students are welcomed, given expanded educational opportunities and the support necessary to attain these objectives.

Christopher Columbus High School first opened its doors in 1932, and has served generations of residents from the Pelham Parkway section of the Bronx ever since. Always a school for all students, Columbus has prided itself in providing advanced placement, fine art and music (currently including 5 bands), CTE technology and culinary arts programs, a complete sequence of courses for ELLs and a full range of services to address the individual educational plans of those with special needs. Beyond the school day Columbus also provides a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities, including 26 PSAL teams.

So, why become a charter school? Over the past 8 years the structure of Bronx high schools has gone through substantial changes that have stripped Columbus of much of its former diversity. The school has been transformed from a thriving neighborhood school with a population reflecting all abilities and needs, to having the second most academically challenged high school population in New York City<sup>1</sup>. A series of events has contributed to this change in fortunes.

First, small schools came to the Bronx. New York City opened 172 new small schools between 2001 and 2006, many of which were in the Bronx. Over the same time period, 8 large Bronx High Schools were closed<sup>2</sup>. New small schools were granted 2-year grace periods in which they were not required to enroll any English Language Learners or students with special needs. This left the remaining larger schools with burgeoning special needs populations. Columbus went from 6.8% special needs to 24% special needs in its graduation cohorts during this time period.

As a campus earmarked for small schools, Columbus' own premier programs were targeted for conversion to small schools. The math and science honors program became the Columbus (later Collegiate) Institute for Math and Science, College Now became Pelham Preparatory Academy, a group from the social studies department formed Astor Academy and another team broke away to become New World High School, serving the more academically inclined English Language Learners. While strong and talented Columbus staff joined each of these new schools, many others made the decision to stay and support the increasingly challenged remaining population of the larger school.

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<sup>1</sup> Using the peer index of the NY Department of Education School Progress Reports, of those schools receiving reports in the Fall of 2009 Columbus had the second lowest peer index. The index is created using a formula to reflect the academic challenge level of the school population.

<sup>2</sup> Monroe, Taft, Roosevelt, Morris, South Bronx, Walton, Evander Childs, and Stevenson

As a charter school, Columbus will continue its long and proud tradition of serving the surrounding areas, providing an array of opportunities and services that most existing schools lack the size and thus capacity to provide. As a zoned school (one of only 4 remaining in the Bronx) Columbus has taken the students that other schools have not wanted – accounting for the burgeoning special needs and ELL populations. All but a handful fail to meet standards in reading and math at entry. As a charter school, with a lottery open to all students, we anticipate receiving a population more representative of CSD 11.

Christopher Columbus Charter High School will make a unique conversion school. Currently no high school in New York City has converted to charter (Renaissance is a secondary school, presenting a different dynamic). Through the carefully planned conversion, Columbus will re-emerge as a vibrant 21<sup>st</sup> Century high school. In order to accomplish this we must respond to current school and system issues.

We recently learned of the discouraging outcomes of students at Bronx public colleges. The most recent graduation statistics (for 2009-10) show that Bronx Community College is graduating a mere 6.8% of its students with an associate's degree in 3 years and Lehman College graduates only 30.8% of its students with a bachelor's degree in 6 years.<sup>3</sup> Columbus has had a longstanding and successful relationship with the University of Vermont, where typically a dozen Columbus graduates attend on full scholarship annually. We are now working to develop expanded relationships with our local colleges to address more comprehensively the challenges high school graduates face in college education. These partnerships will include a needs assessment during this planning year, provide ongoing opportunities for students to experience local colleges beginning in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and invite faculty representatives from local colleges to work closely with the Columbus faculty so that we may better prepare our students for the college experience.

While Columbus will retain and strengthen its small learning communities, proposed changes include transforming the school schedule to block programming – lengthening periods from 45 to 75 minutes, taking one afternoon a week for professional development and collaboration while students participate in either arts, community service or internships, depending on grade. Use of School Improvement Grant funding will also strengthen the availability and use of state of the art technology in classrooms throughout the school, which lack of funding has limited in the recent past. The school will also utilize an extended day schedule and will introduce a dress code.

The Columbus team of local elected officials, concerned parents, experienced educators and administrators have community support and will partner closely with the University of Vermont and local colleges to enhance college preparatory experiences for students, while the UFT will lend their experienced staff to the CMO role of providing back office services for the school. The willingness of the UFT to partner with Columbus is also testimony to the close collaboration that has historically existed as the faculty and administration have worked together to serve their community through ever increasing challenges.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://eservices.nysed.gov/orisre/mainservlet>

## II STUDENT POPULATION

### A. Student Enrollment

#### Anticipated Enrollment Projections

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
9 <sup>th</sup> grade	250	250	250	250	250
10 <sup>th</sup> grade	250	250	250	250	250
11 <sup>th</sup> grade	300	250	250	250	250
12 <sup>th</sup> grade	300	300	250	250	250
Ungraded	10	10	10	10	10
Total	1110	1060	1010	1010	1010

## B. TARGET POPULATIONS

### The School District

The demographic data provided by SED lists New York City Community School District 11 as 10.6% ELL K-12, no parallel information was available for students with IEPs. The percentage of students with IEPs for New York City as a whole was 12.5% for the 2008-9 school year<sup>4</sup>. The poverty rate for Community School District 11 on the demographic data sheet provided is 77.95%.

### Current School Population

Currently Columbus serves 263 students (over 24%) with IEPs<sup>5</sup>, with more than half requiring smaller classes based on their IEPs, and 197 students (over 18%) who are English language learners, over a quarter of whom also have IEPs.

Additionally, Christopher Columbus High School is currently one of 17 high schools located in District 11. Last year we looked at the graduation cohorts of the 17 high schools in Community School District 11. Of the 223 students with disabilities in the graduation cohort across the 17 schools, 105 (47%) were Columbus students. The most recent CEP

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/irts/reportcard/2009/supplement/300000010000.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://schools.nyc.gov/SchoolPortals/11/X415/AboutUs/Statistics/register.htm>

(Comprehensive Education Plan) for Columbus<sup>6</sup> identified the poverty rate for the school in the 2009-10 school year as 69.2%, with 81 students in temporary housing the previous year (figures for 2009-10 were unavailable). It is generally accepted that poverty rates at the high school level are underreported, and thus a comparison with K-12 district-wide may be inappropriate. Additionally, the population is 57% male to 43% female while 45% of students are Hispanic, 37% black, 10% white and 6% Asian<sup>7</sup>.

These statistics, coupled with the overwhelming percentage of students scoring at level 1 and low level 2 on the State 8<sup>th</sup> grade tests in ELA and math, have presented a powerful challenge when trying to reach absolute statistics such as a 60% graduation rate. Yet we have good reason to be optimistic.

### **The Impact of Conversion on Current and Future Students At-Risk**

As a charter school, Columbus will continue to make it known to surrounding schools serving middle grades that students with IEPs and ELLs are not only welcome but are well served here. We anticipate that, at opening, the charter school population will be similar to the one the school has now, with the average eighth grade score on reading being 2.5 – averaging basic, while a significant percentage will be at level 1 – below basic (last year 178 students -19.2% of those with 8<sup>th</sup> grade scores). It should be noted that 34% of the schools' population in 2008-9 had no 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading score – a further indication that this is an extremely at-risk group and reflects the surrounding community. With time we anticipate that percentages will come closer to the district norms, as students admitted to the conversion charter form a greater percentage of the school as a whole.

Although our statistics for 2010 are not yet finalized (since this document will be submitted prior to administration of August Regents exams) we believe that Columbus will reach or come close to a 55% 4-year graduation rate this year. Although with each year the standards for graduation are becoming more challenging, there are a number of factors that will enable us to raise our achievement level if we convert to charter status.

Charter status will free Columbus not only from the challenges of zoned status in the application process, but from the current New York City Department of Education practice of sending students 'over-the-counter.' During the 2008-9 school year we received 359 students under continuous enrollment into all grades throughout the year – students who were moving, immigrating, receiving safety transfers, or released from juvenile detention centers. This volume of mobility in the population is a significantly destabilizing factor, and impacts both classrooms and school-wide outcomes negatively.

In a research study performed with self-contained IEP students this spring and published on Gotham Schools<sup>8</sup> a strong relationship was identified between the length of student

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<sup>6</sup> [http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/oaosi/cepdata/2009-10/cepdata\\_X415.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/oaosi/cepdata/2009-10/cepdata_X415.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <http://schools.nyc.gov/SchoolPortals/11/X415/AboutUs/Statistics/register.htm>

<sup>8</sup> <http://gothamschools.org/2010/03/22/lengthy-commutes-and-academic-progress/>

commutes, attendance, and credit accumulation. Those most vulnerable IEP students living within 15 minutes of school had an 86% attendance rate and 69% earned 5+ credits in the fall semester, versus a 74% attendance rate and a mere 22% reaching 5+ credits among those students traveling 30+ minutes to school. We will share this information with surrounding schools. As we attract a higher percentage of students from our immediate neighborhood this research indicates that attendance will rise and thus academic progress will increase.

### **How Columbus Charter High School will Attract, Identify, Serve, and Retain Students with Special Needs**

With the closing of so many larger high schools in the Bronx, there has been a serious reduction in schools offering comprehensive services for students with IEPs. This has resulted in the remaining larger high schools serving increasing percentages of these students – particularly those with the highest levels of need. Local schools serving the middle grades have long recommended Columbus to students with IEPs, particularly those requiring smaller classes or who are NYSAA eligible because the school has a complete array of services, many highly qualified special educators and a principal who is a special educator herself in addition to being a parent of child with special needs. For these reasons we anticipate that even after conversion to charter, Columbus will continue to receive percentages of students with disabilities exceeding the district average.

Upon enrollment, all IEP's are reviewed and checked for compliance. Students are programmed so that all of their modifications and needs are met. Self-contained classes are created so that students are grouped by level in order that the appropriate remediation can be given.

Services for students with special needs include collaborative team teaching, smaller settings commonly referred to as 15-1, 12-1 and 12-1-1, related services for the hearing impaired, resource room and vocational programs. NYSAA eligible students, our most severely challenged population, benefit from an array of vocational programs including a fully equipped career center (the only such program in the Bronx) as well as work-study opportunities at on-site and off-site locations. Additionally, the school offers work-study at off-site locations such as the Hebrew Home for the Aged in Riverdale, where students gain valuable work experience and skills, and are sometimes hired full-time with benefits upon graduation. Participation in work-study programs is highly beneficial to a great many with special needs, and leads to significantly higher than average academic achievement<sup>9</sup>.

Individual Educational Plans are reviewed regularly and students are moved into less restrictive environments whenever they are ready. The Columbus staff has been focusing on infusing differentiated instruction into all classes for the past two years. Beginning this summer and continuing through the 2010-11 school year, the school is working to create

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<sup>9</sup> Rowland, C. (2010, March 8) A Different Commuter Crisis (Web log post). Retrieved from <http://gothamschools.org/2010/03/08/a-different-commuter-crisis/>

Understanding by Design unit plans that incorporate differentiated instruction as a part of a comprehensive effort to infuse the new common core standards and to increase cross-curricular planning.

### **How Columbus Charter High School will Attract, Serve, and Retain English Language Learners**

Columbus also has a long history of serving ELLs, and has a diverse student body speaking 13 languages other than English. The school offers a full program of ESL in compliance with state mandates, and has worked to strengthen the skills of general education teachers to support ELLs in content area classes. ELLs are typically able to receive sheltered instruction in their content area classes, since the school has sufficient numbers of ELLs to support these classes. Sheltered instruction allows ELLs to develop their academic English skills while learning core content<sup>10</sup>. Sheltered instruction classes are still differentiated to meet the varied levels of readiness, learning styles and interest.

For several years now, the content teachers of ELLs have met together twice weekly to collaborate in strengthen student performance. Together with Christine Rowland of the UFT Teacher Center, teachers have worked to improve learning outcomes for ELLs and have organized programs to help students with immigration issues and to negotiate the college application process. This team has presented its work on collaborative teaching and improving achievement for ELLs at several conferences around the State, including Channel 13's Celebration of Teaching and Learning in 2009. Students frequently joined with teachers in professional development to share how specific strategies impacted their learning, while graduates visit from college to inform and encourage current students at information sessions. The data resulting from this work are studied in an ongoing way to improve instruction, programming and services for ELLs.

A challenge for Columbus Charter may be retaining an ELL population of current proportions. English Language Learners in the Bronx are highly mobile, and Columbus currently receives many of its ELL students as new immigrants in the tenth, eleventh and even twelfth grade. Many new arrivals have had interrupted formal education, leading to serious issues with their native language literacy that impact on their acquisition of academic English.

The fact that the vast majority of ELLs will now be arriving at the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade will change the dynamic of the program, and while it should make possible a significant rise the graduation rate over time for this subgroup (and thus the school as a whole) the overall numbers of students will probably decline, bringing the percentage of ELLs in the charter school into closer to the District 11 K-12 average of 10.6%. An internal study of our 2009

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<sup>10</sup> Echevarria, J, Powers, K & Short, D (2006) School Reform and Standards-Based Education: A Model for English-Language Learners. *The Journal of Educational Research* 99(4) 195-210. Retrieved from <http://wikiedresearch.wdfiles.com/local--files/bilingual-education/SIOP.pdf>

cohort ELLs showed that, of those students who did not also have IEPs, 71%<sup>11</sup> of students who entered Columbus in September of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade graduated in 4 years, as opposed to 45% of the general education ELLs overall.

### **English Language Learner Identification and Placement**

Newcomers are administered the LAB-R by the ESL Coordinator if they have never taken it before. Based on the results of this assessment, students are placed in the appropriate level of ESL - beginner, intermediate, advanced or proficient. If students receive a proficient score, they are no longer considered ELLs and therefore are not entitled to ESL services. Every spring, all ELLs regardless of level take the NYSESLAT in order to determine their English acquisition. Any student who tests out and leaves the country for more than 1 year is entitled to re- take the LAB-R upon their return if desired.

### **How Columbus Charter High School will Attract, Serve, and Retain Students from Households who are Eligible for the Federal Free- and Reduced-Priced Lunch Program**

Poverty is an issue for the majority of the Columbus population, and it impacts on students in many ways. Students who are homeless have no place to rest when they are sick, since shelters are closed during the day. Most students have no dedicated space to study at home. There is also a high mobility rate among those living in poverty that inhibits educational progress and we work with many children in foster care. Columbus has a strong program of outreach to families and conducts frequent home visits to support families in getting their children to school and with other support services they may need. Academically speaking, Columbus has many programs to help these students – creating opportunities as the need for them arises. We currently have 3 special programs: Renaissance (a successful project-based learning program from 2:30-7:30), Boys to Men (a highly structured program for our boys in need of closer supervision) and Women’s Empowerment (the girl’s equivalent).

### **Local Appeal**

Columbus has consistently been viewed positively by the community – with 1641 students applying for admission in September 2009, and 1411 for September 2010. Our challenge has been that as one of only 4 remaining zoned schools in the Bronx, that other schools were able to select or indicate a preference for specific students at various points in the selection process, while as a zoned school Columbus was not afforded this opportunity and merely received those students who had requested the school and were passed over by all other non-zoned schools to which they applied.

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<sup>11</sup> This number excludes ‘good’ discharges, e.g. students who returned to their countries of origin.



*Several Columbus Renaissance students celebrate graduation, June 2010*

## **Outreach**

As a charter school we will focus our admissions outreach on our school neighborhood and Community School District 11 by maintaining our relationships with the counseling staffs of surrounding middle and junior high schools. We will produce an informative brochure for parents in addition to letters inviting families to apply. We will also hold our own outreach programs for high school applicants, giving them an opportunity to visit the school and meet faculty, see some of the opportunities their sons and daughters would have, and to learn about planned changes, addressing their questions and concerns and giving them an opportunity to complete an application.

Outreach for these events will be conducted by our parent coordinator who is a fluent speaker of Spanish. All materials will be translated into Spanish. We also have counselors who speak Spanish and Albanian, helping us to reach both groups.

Admission to Christopher Columbus Charter High School will be through the New York City Common Charter Application, with a lottery held as necessary.

## **III. SCHOOL DESIGN**

The founding team in the charter conversion brings a wealth of experience to the table. The principal of the school, Lisa Fuentes, is not only a Columbus graduate herself but was a special education teacher for 12 years, before becoming an assistant principal supervision for special education at Columbus, then an assistant principal of organization before becoming principal in September 2003. James Vacca, New York City Council Member for the 13<sup>th</sup> District is also a Columbus alumnus, and he has maintained a strong relationship

with his alma mater including helping to raise substantial funds to renovate the library into the campus media center, upgraded the auditorium and modernized the cafeteria to reflect a college campus environment. John Fratta, a member of Community Board 11, will also help keep Columbus and the community in which it is situated linked closely. Patricia Williams, parent of Columbus graduates and for many years parent advocate extraordinaire, will also bring family and community voice to our decision making team. Dr. Leo Casey, United Federation of Teachers Vice-President for Academic High Schools, will also serve as a board member for the school, lending his considerable experience and expertise with charters to support Columbus in making this transition. This is a group of knowledgeable, committed and community-based individuals who will work together to help Christopher Columbus Charter High School become an educational pillar of the Pelham Parkway community.

The staff of Columbus is a committed group of educators. As a faculty, we have developed strong skills in working with a very high need population, responding to an ever changing group of students and their needs. Teachers are proud to teach in the school that has arguably the highest needs population of any high school in the city. Known for their skills with at-risk students, many have turned down offers from other schools that would represent significantly easier professional situations in order to continue their vital work here.

### **School Size**

Fundamental to the issue of design is the question of school size. While some believe that small is better, we believe that better is better. Columbus has been downsized dramatically since 2003, when the school population was around 4500. The Columbus team is of the belief that maintaining a medium-sized school of around 1000 will allow for the maintenance of a strong and varied curriculum including the arts and sports, while not creating space issues with the small schools currently housed in the building. Lane (2008) cites researchers Lee and Smith (1997) who, in a seminal paper, looked into the impact of school size, examining data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS:88). They concluded that medium-sized schools with 600–900 students and those with 900–1,200 students showed greater gains in reading and math than either smaller or larger high schools. Schools that were smaller in size frequently suffered from an inability to provide a broad curriculum. Larger schools (over 1200) did slightly better in terms of achievement across 4 subjects, but experienced higher dropout and transfer rates. Thus we conclude that a medium-sized school is the best fit for Columbus and consistent with the academic literature on the subject.

### **Small Learning Communities**

Columbus will retain the academy structure that was put in place in September 2005 to increase personalization for students. Columbus has 4 non-themed academies 9-12 which serve equal populations. In Lane's study<sup>12</sup> of smaller learning communities she notes:

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<sup>12</sup> Lane, J.L. (2008). Small Learning Communities. *Educational Leadership* 65(8) pp 84-85

The Chicago High School Redesign Initiative, begun in 2001, launched the conversion of five large high schools into small autonomous schools. Evaluators found a more personal and supportive climate for both students and teachers in the small learning communities, but no evidence that this climate produced changes in instruction or in student achievement test scores. The researchers did find some evidence of reduced dropout rates (Kahne, Sporte, & de la Tóree, 2006). Quint (2006) synthesized findings across a series of studies of three high school redesign efforts and reached the same conclusion: Although such reforms may improve school climate, the change in climate is not reflected in achievement gains.

This research would align with our experience, finding benefits that have been reflected in the constantly improving Learning Environment Survey scores and rising attendance rates. We also note that the affective changes did not necessarily impact on test scores, while they did receive some credit for reducing the dropout rate (Lane, 2008).

Lane's conclusions on the benefits and issues surrounding small learning communities are also echoed by the Columbus experience:

The planning and birth of small learning communities ask teachers to take on many new roles, which can leave them less time for professional learning. Moreover, fewer colleagues who teach the same courses are now part of their immediate community. Without a focus and investment in teaching and learning, structural changes can actually inhibit teachers' motivation and ability to improve their instruction.

### **Block Scheduling and Increasing Class Length**

Having noted how applicable Lane's findings are to our experience, we have carefully considered how we can maintain the benefits of the smaller learning communities to school climate while making that focused investment in teaching and learning that will bring about stronger outcomes. In order to address this we are proposing two fundamental changes in the educational program. The first will be to move away from a traditional academic high school schedule and to block program 75-minute periods. Each academy will take one afternoon a week when 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students study the arts (either fine art or music), juniors perform community service, and seniors work in internships. This schedule will build in time for academy faculty to engage in collaboration around student achievement, including professional development, inquiry and case conferencing. It is understood that the extended periods with block programming will require significant professional development to assist teachers in making this important transition and yet to increase student achievement and collaboration with our partners in higher education to the degree where we can make a significant difference, this commitment will be essential.

### **Block Scheduling – A Rationale**

There are three primary reasons for adopting block scheduling:

1. Giving students many short periods a day can lead to fragmented instruction. Lengthening periods gives more opportunity to support new learning with application and more time to assess the degree to which students have understood

- the skills, material and/or concepts taught and are ready to move on.
2. Moving from shorter to longer periods will reduce the amount of time wasted in 'passing' and will thus support a more orderly environment.
  3. Maximizing instructional time by lengthening periods will allow teachers to accomplish more within a period, whilst reducing the loss of time around entering and leaving classrooms.

While there appears to be little very recent quantitative research on the impact of block scheduling on students achievement, Carroll (1994) claimed that the approach benefits student learning, successful course completion and has been credited with reducing dropout rates. Caution is also advised by researchers though, with a recommendation to allow plenty of time for professional development both prior to and during introduction.

### **Block Scheduling and Professional Development**

Block scheduling will also allow for the afternoons devoted to professional activities. This will benefit the academic strength of the school by creating time for teachers to collaborate around student performance and achievement. Professional development will address topics such as making the transition to the longer class periods – maximizing the effective use of time, upgrading skills to work with expanded classroom technology, such as the broader use of SMART Boards. Teachers will continue the work of the planning year to design, examine and revise Understanding by Design units with a focus on specific elements of the Common Core State Standards as a lens for examining student work and progress towards college readiness. The UFT Teacher Center will provide both onsite and on-going professional development while lending the boarder organization's support to any additional professional needs the school may require in expanding faculty skill and experience with SMART Board interactive whiteboards, and other educational technological advances.

### **Block Scheduling with the Arts, Community Service and Internships**

These afternoons will also afford students the opportunity to expand *their* horizons as freshmen and sophomores through arts and music programs, as juniors through community service – forming and developing closer bonds with our surrounding community, and culminating with work internships for our senior students.

The relationship with our local community is a key element in the school's design – promoting social responsibility and community awareness we hope that experiences our students have here will help create a habit of giving back that will extend far beyond their high school years and ultimately far beyond this Bronx community. We have the connections to establish the community and business partnerships necessary to create these programs, but will need to establish a position (coordinator of community life) for someone to perform the tasks necessary to ensure that each student is matched with an appropriate community placement, and to interface with our community partners to establish, operate and refine the program.

## **Extended Day**

Serving significant numbers of students who arrive with skill levels far below the standards for their grade makes it extremely difficult to succeed within the traditional limits of the school day. These students will need specialized interventions in reading and math as indicated by their eighth grade scores. In order to provide the time for these supports we intend to extend the school day for the students needing these services. In addition to providing extra support in reading and math, we will also make a study hall available with teachers available for tutoring and homework help – recognizing that a majority of our students lack space or anyone able to assist them with homework at home. We will accomplish this without incurring additional costs by staggering the staff schedule so that those working the extended day will not be teaching the first period.

### **a. Increase student achievement and decrease student achievement gaps in reading/language arts and mathematics;**

We believe that multiple factors will contribute to increased student achievement including block programming, extended day, Understanding by Design unit planning and the partnering performance assessments, increased opportunities for faculty to examine student performance collaboratively in order to make adjustments and differentiate instruction more effectively, stronger college partnerships, etc.

In terms of the achievement gap, it is interesting to note that on the school's most recent Accountability and Overview report, black students had the highest performance in English Language Arts, followed by Hispanic students, with white students as lowest performing. To understand this data it is important to look more closely at the students we serve. Although the school is (according to the demographics page in the report) 10% white, those students are almost entirely Albanian, the majority of whom are ELLs – many arriving in high school as newcomers. A significant percentage of our Hispanic students are also ELLs, with special education status cutting across all ethnic groups.

In mathematics, while students and, interestingly, English Language Learners, outperformed other subgroups the greatest weakness by far was in special education. Removing special education from the calculations would leave the school making its annual yearly progress target. Since our research has indicated that proximity to the school is a major factor in attendance and thus academic progress for special needs students<sup>13</sup>, we anticipate that this structural change will lead, over

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<sup>13</sup> Rowland, C. (2010, March 23). Lengthy Commutes and Academic Progress. (Web log post). Retrieved from <http://gothamschools.org/2010/03/22/lengthy-commutes-and-academic-progress/>

time, to improved outcomes as the local population as a percentage of the total special needs population rises.

We foresee that the structural changes we are making in terms of block scheduling, lengthening class times, increasing opportunities for professional development and collaboration implementing Understanding by Design planning along with strengthening our post-secondary relationships will lead to positive trends in achievement data across the curriculum, but particularly in English and mathematics.

**b. Increase high school graduation rates and focus on serving at-risk high school student populations (including re-enrolled drop-outs and those below grade level);**

Columbus has a long history of strong long-term graduation rates, in part because staff and administration never give up on students. There is high mobility in the population, and it is common for some students to leave for periods of time to work or take care of family members, then return to complete their education as they are able. Our most recent 7-year graduation rates are 81.5%<sup>14</sup>, 79.6%<sup>15</sup> and 77.4%<sup>16</sup>. These percentages exceed district and city averages for each year, and represent major increases over the Columbus 4-year rates. Long-term dropout rates are also substantially lower than both district and city averages.

We attribute the strength of these figures to the fact that we have taken so many students with extreme academic challenges – arriving in the United States late in their high school careers with no English, with special needs, over-age for grade and well behind in skills at entry. We help them gain the skills they need, providing tutoring, extra help and patience, until they can meet the requirements for graduation. Our academies and counselors help students who are struggling without experiencing significant long-term progress by helping students explore their options within Columbus, rather than counseling them out.

It is Columbus' 4-year NCLB achievement outcomes that have resulted in its current position on the State's Persistently Lowest Achieving School's list. ELA and math

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[http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/Reports/Data/Graduation/Class\\_of\\_2004\\_Final\\_Longitudinal\\_Report\\_shortversion.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/Reports/Data/Graduation/Class_of_2004_Final_Longitudinal_Report_shortversion.pdf) p.58

<sup>15</sup> [http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/Reports/Data/Graduation/Class\\_of\\_2005\\_Final\\_Longitudinal\\_Report.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/Reports/Data/Graduation/Class_of_2005_Final_Longitudinal_Report.pdf) p.58

<sup>16</sup> [http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/Reports/Data/Graduation/Class\\_of\\_2006\\_Final\\_Longitudinal\\_Report.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/Reports/Data/Graduation/Class_of_2006_Final_Longitudinal_Report.pdf) p.58

outcomes for this group were for a cohort of students who entered Columbus in 2005 with only 5.9% proficient in ELA and 14% proficient in math based on 8<sup>th</sup> grade test scores. These students took longer to succeed in school – they needed more time to master fundamental skills in order to prepare them for college. We believe that conversion to charter is the only one of the four potential reform models that will result in Columbus meeting all of its obligations under NCLB based on a combination of an admissions procedure that will bring greater balance and stability, and the time to institute the design reforms identified in this proposal.

**c. Focus on academic achievement of middle school student populations and preparation for transition to high school (if applicable);**

Not applicable.

**d. Utilize a variety of high-quality assessments to measure understanding and critical application of concepts;**

Columbus utilizes a wide range of assessments including but not limited to Regents examinations, Acuity Periodic Assessments, teacher made tests, essays, reports, projects, portfolios etc. This year, as we begin the creation of Understanding by Design units, teachers will be integrating performance assessments that will be carefully constructed to encourage students to grapple with their understanding of concepts, overarching understandings and essential questions within the unit. Task-specific rubrics will help students understand and participate in the evaluation process and should help students understand not only the degree to which they met the objectives laid out for them, but also areas for growth and development. In this way we will strive to make the assessments part of the learning experience and a contributing factor in increasing the ‘stickiness’ of core concepts.

**e. Increase implementation of local instructional improvement systems to assess and inform instructional practice, decision-making, and effectiveness;**

Implementation of the half-day professional development and collaboration sessions will provide significant extra time to consider student performance in assignments and various types of assessment and will allow for greater consideration of how student performance will inform instruction, planning and overall success.

Since we are committed to improving college outcomes for our students, we intend to put a premium on examining student work (hopefully with representatives of higher education) through the lens of the Common Core State Standards. This practice will shed a light on very specific needs that we must address in our students’ performances, along with ways of assessing their progress over time.

We will also use lesson study to examine in greater depth how specific classroom practices impact on student learning. This will involve teams of teachers planning

lessons together, observing one another teaching those lessons in a focused way, examining evidence of learning among all students in the room and reconsidering the lesson as it was taught in the light of these findings.

**f. Partner with low-performing, local public schools to share best practices;**

The Columbus team is committed to working collaboratively with local public schools to share in best practices. We believe that these relationships benefit all involved.

**g. Demonstrate the ability to overcome start-up challenges to open a successful school through management and leadership techniques;**

Columbus has a leadership team that is well able to meet the challenges of charter conversion in terms of administration – from day-to-day school leadership to practical know-how with financial and accounting issues, and in terms of instruction.

As previously mentioned, Principal Lisa Fuentes is not only an experienced and well-respected leader in her school and community, but she has weathered numerous challenges in her 7 years as school principal. In her first year in the position, 2003-4, the expansion of small schools in the building left Columbus students on an ‘end-to-end’ schedule where juniors and seniors entered at 7:05 and left at 12:25 while freshmen and sophomores entered at 12:25 and left at 5:45. Added to this, the lack of classroom space for Columbus left up to 8 classes simultaneously being taught in the library. Was the experience difficult? Absolutely! But 81.5% of the senior cohort that year ultimately graduated (see footnote 14).

The freshman class received the greatest adverse effect of the chronic overcrowding, and the resulting 4-year graduation rate for that group has left Columbus where it is now – on the State’s lowest performing list.

Under her leadership the school moved from being an Impact school – cited for safety concerns (which occurred as a result of the overcrowding) to earning one of the best safety records in the city.

Partnership with the UFT as CMO will bring experience in the practical side of handling day-to-day operations in areas such as payroll and budget. UFT accounting personnel will assist with budget management and payroll, as they have for the UFT Charter School and for Greendot Charter School.

**h. Demonstrate the support of the school district and the intent to establish an ongoing relationship with such district;**

After undertaking initial discussions about charter conversion in the spring of 2010, Ms. Fuentes contacted Michael Duffy, Executive Director of Charter Schools for the New York City Department of Education, and made plans to work together to move forward with an application to convert Columbus. Personal schedules conflicted in July and made progress on meeting difficult, but we are confident that we will develop a strong working relationship with the Charter School Office.

**i. Provide access to viable education alternatives to students in regions where there are a lack of alternatives.**

As a medium-sized charter school with small learning communities and block scheduling, Columbus will provide many opportunities that are not otherwise available to neighborhood students. The school is able to provide a strong academic foundation with high degree of personalization through the academy structure, while still having enough students to be able to maintain advanced placement exams in several subjects, arts, music, CTE technology and culinary arts programs that have attracted to many families in the community, not to mention the extensive extra-curricular and sports options.



*Culinary arts students cater Café Day, 2010*

Columbus has 26 PSAL teams and in addition to being New York City Boys Lacrosse champions this year they were division champions for Boys Soccer, Boys Bowling, Girls Outdoor Track, Girls Basketball, and Boys Lacrosse. Local parents have expressed a desire that opportunities for their children go beyond the basic high school curriculum in the belief that these may be the hooks that excite their sons and daughters to come to school every day, even when they may have struggled in the past. These are aspects of the Columbus experience that work well for students, and we intend to retain them.



Research supports the notion that participation in fine arts and sports programs substantially reduces the likelihood that a student will dropout (McNeal, 1995). Furthermore, Alma et al (2004) also explored the relationship between extracurricular activities and success:

Preliminary results show that involvement in high school extracurricular activities leads to positive long term outcomes in individual lives. There is a generally positive impact on long term educational attainment measures, either in the form of enrollment beyond high school or even up to the Bachelor's degree level, even after controlling for family, school and student school achievement characteristics. In contrast, such participation at the high school level discourages negative family outcomes such as the incidence of early births or the incidence of single parent families in the long term.

All of these factors speak to the mission of Christopher Columbus Charter High School to graduate well-educated and socially responsible young citizens prepared for success in college, life, and the global community. We will provide the Pelham Parkway neighborhood with a quality school where all students are welcomed, given expanded educational opportunities and the support necessary that they may attain these objectives.

Columbus is a great school for its passionate commitment to helping all students succeed, and its long-term results attest to this. Sadly, Columbus as it stands today does not fit well within the systems that the City and State have created, not because Columbus is at fault, but because the system is flawed. Were it not flawed it would recognize our real, hard, measurable success and reward us for it – not sanction us. Columbus deserves to stay open, and a charter would allow us to do this. After all, this is what chartering is for – to serve at-risk students and to innovate.

We sincerely hope that you will grant us the opportunity to do so.

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