



March 25, 2024

Dr. Lisa Long
Executive Director
NYSED Charter School Office
Room 5N EB Mezzanine
89 Washington Ave
Albany, NY 12234

Dear Dr. Long:

Thank you for providing the opportunity to respond to American Dream Charter School's 2023-24 Renewal Site Visit Report. American Dream Charter School (American Dream or ADS) is a highly successful, community-based South Bronx charter school that delivers exemplary teaching and comprehensive opportunities for all students to achieve mastery of a standards-based curriculum in grades six through twelve. As a dual language school, American Dream excels at supporting students as they develop literacy and fluency in both English and Spanish, a truly necessary and somewhat unique offering. The educational model has been carefully calibrated to balance challenging academic instruction with comprehensive social and emotional supports to ensure students' well-being and educational success. This approach is critical for American Dream, which is located in the South Bronx and serves families from the country's poorest congressional district. American Dream's core principles and strong systems are essential to maintaining academic achievement while also responding to the needs of students and the community in new and evolving ways. These principles include mission-aligned hiring, instructional leadership developed through a variety of methods, planning and prep for teachers, collaboration, ongoing curriculum integration, and project- and experiential-based learning.

The 2023-24 Renewal Report highlights many of the strengths of the ADS program and designates a "meets" rating to eight out of ten renewal benchmarks. There are two benchmarks, however, which have been designated as "approaches" – these are benchmarks one and nine. American Dream believes the following information is relevant and should be considered for a comprehensive understanding of the School's performance and efforts.

BENCHMARK 1

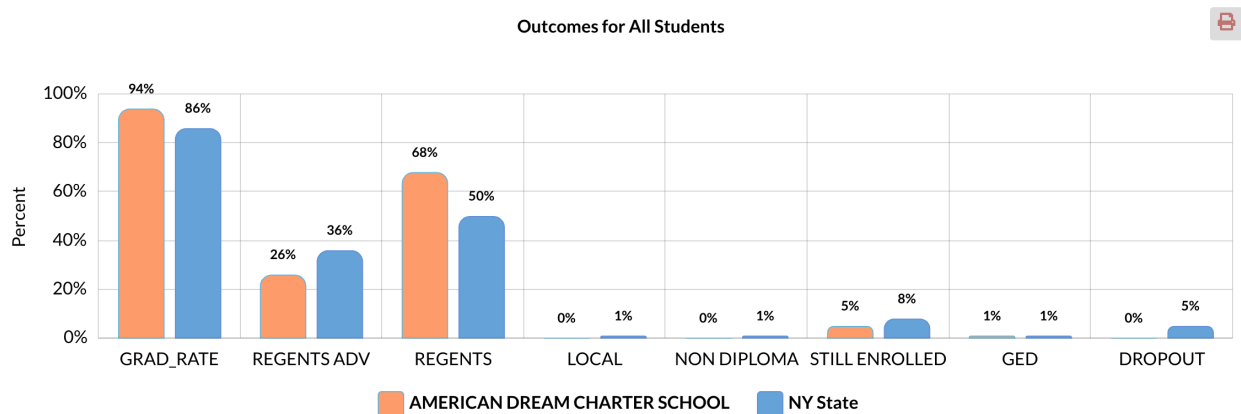
The ADS team disagrees with the Charter School Office's (CSO) tendency to lower a school's rating based upon a set of metrics that reflect more information about students' previous schools than their current placement. In this case, the CSO uses state test scores for grades six through eight to justify the lowered rating, even though sixth grade is the first year students enroll at ADS.

The Renewal Report awarded the "approaches" designation based on the following justification: "due to the school's consistent underperformance when compared to the NYS overall proficiency rates on the NYSTP 3-8 Assessments." American Dream serves students in grades six through twelve and reducing the rating from "meets" to "approaches" based on the data from just the three middle school grades – a period of time during which the deficits accumulated during scholars' time spent in district schools are generally being mitigated – unfairly distorts American Dream's rating on this benchmark.

Incoming students generally have pervasive academic deficits that must be bridged by the American Dream program, which understandably takes some time to achieve. It is important to note that there are many data available to support a “meets” rating.

The American Dream School enrolls students beginning in sixth grade and they subsequently matriculate through middle and high school and graduate from American Dream at rates that significantly surpass those at traditional high schools in Bronx CSD 7. This illustrates the fact that ADS does ultimately remediate the deficits that scholars may have when they first enter the school. As the 2023 graduation rate data below show, ADS also surpasses the New York State average for total graduation rate as well as percentage of students earning a Regents diploma.

AMERICAN DREAM CHARTER SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE DATA 4 YEAR OUTCOME AS OF AUGUST 2023*

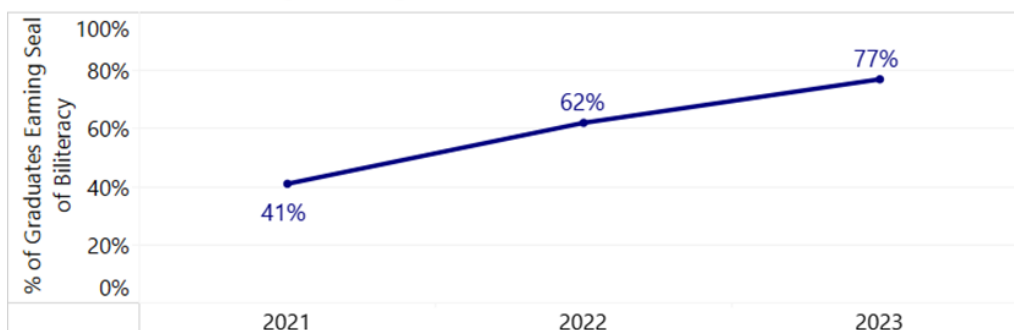


*Source: www.data.nysed.gov

American Dream also successfully keeps students enrolled and attending school, engaging them in their education and ensuring they are prepared for life beyond high school. In 2023, 77% of American Dream’s graduates earned the Seal of Biliteracy and 100% of graduates earned the Seal of Civic Readiness. The Seal of Biliteracy is an important metric for American Dream’s overall accountability. This is particularly relevant as ADS is a dual language school offering a middle and high school program.

Percent of American Dream Graduates Earning the Seal of Biliteracy

American Dream's first graduating class was in 2021



Dual language instruction at American Dream is informed by research-based strategies to engage students in high-quality, rigorous instruction using a 50-50 model. Students receive English and Spanish language arts instruction daily. American Dream works to help students overcome learning losses associated with the disruptions due to the pandemic, with high-quality academic and social-emotional support so all students develop dual language academic fluency.

At American Dream, students also consistently have access to rigorous courses and pathways for graduation. This access to advanced coursework aligns with the American Dream mission and is consistent with the School’s Advanced Placement offerings. ADS routinely provides students with access to multiple Advanced Placement (AP) courses, such as: Calculus, Pre-Calculus, Spanish Language and Culture, Spanish Literature and Culture, English Language and Composition, Biology, Chemistry, and US History.

Additionally, and as noted in the Renewal Report, American Dream is proud to have been recognized by the College Board for the 2022-23 AP (Advanced Placement) Honor Roll. This designation was created to recognize schools that have done outstanding work to welcome more students into AP courses and support them on the path to college success. The College Board’s metrics to grant Honor Roll status include an examination of College Culture, College Credit, and College Optimization.

AP School Honor Roll Progress Report - 2023


American Dream Charter School (330047)

Data Updated: July 12, 2023
Report Run: October 2, 2023


Honor Roll Criteria

Congratulations! American Dream Charter School has earned Silver recognition on the 2023 AP School Honor Roll.

Class of 2023

AP School Honor Roll Metrics	Bronze Criteria	Silver Criteria	Gold Criteria	Platinum Criteria	Your School	
					 SILVER Your school achieved all Silver criteria!	
College Culture	40%	50%	65%	80%	76% (59/78)	Gold
College Credit	25%	30%	35%	50%	59% (46/78)	Platinum
College Optimization	2%	5%	10%	15%	8% (6/78)	Silver

In addition to being placed on the Honor Roll, American Dream also was granted the Access Award.



AP Access Award

The 2023 AP School Honor Roll also recognizes American Dream Charter School as providing all students the chance to participate in AP, including students of underrepresented populations.

The recognition letter from the College Board states:

“Your school is being further recognized with the AP Access Award, which honors schools that encourage more low-income and underrepresented minority students to take AP courses. The percentage of students in at least one of these categories who took at least one AP Exam before graduation is proportional to or above your school's student population, demonstrating a clear and effective commitment to equitable access to advanced coursework.”

The College Board states that even if students do not earn college credit at the end of an AP course, there is immense value in having participated in the advanced coursework, which provides early exposure to college-level work and contributes to a college-going school culture. This is supported by American Dream's college acceptance and matriculation rates, which clearly demonstrate graduates are provided what they need, both academically and socially, to pursue opportunities in higher education.

ADS has an impressive track record of supporting students as they enter the next phase of their lives beyond high school, as demonstrated through college acceptance and matriculation rates.

College Acceptances by Class

- **Class of 2021:** 63 students (100% Received College Acceptances)
- **Class of 2022:** 82 students (100% Received College Acceptances)
- **Class of 2023:** 78 students (99% Received College Acceptances)

College Matriculation by Class

** The data below represents the students who committed and enrolled in their respective colleges as of June 2021, 2022, and 2023. **

- **Class of 2021:** 59 students (94% Went to College)
- **Class of 2022:** 78 students (95% Went to College)
- **Class of 2023:** 74 students (95% Went to College)

Use of Data to Drive Instruction

ADS continues to use data to drive effective instruction. For example:

- After Interim Assessment week, teachers meet on Data Day to discuss data from the perspective of the whole school, department, and individual classes. In all sections, teachers are identifying what students had to do in order to show mastery and what teacher actions led to the results they received. This allows teachers to identify strategies and methods already in place when considering how to assist student remediation.
- Once students have completed their Interim Assessment, teachers meet as a department during Data Day to analyze students' performance to identify the standards that students experience difficulty with. Once the standards have been isolated, teachers then shift their lens to analyze data to identify students that require targeted support and small groups are generated.
- A comprehensive approach is used to implement Student Study Teams and provide Response to Intervention.
- The Kid Talk Protocol was designed to support teachers with gathering holistic data pertaining to students' socioemotional well-being, academic standing, and their overall attendance. The purpose of this is to understand the whole child, so that pedagogues and service providers can

reflect on the efficacy of the interventions that are underway to support students. Based on the reflections, members of the team may choose to pivot and launch additional interventions

BENCHMARK 9

In 2020, ADS requested permission to use an enrollment preference for students with disabilities (SWD), and the CSO denied this request.

The “approaches” rating in Benchmark 9 is solely based on the School’s SWD enrollment, despite ADS meeting many of the metrics associated with this benchmark and being recognized as a school structured in a way that provides highly effective instruction to support all subgroups. In addition to meeting many metrics under benchmark nine, ADS believes extensive good faith efforts are evident, have been documented throughout the charter term, and are worthy of consideration.

The CSO states the “approaches” designation is “due to under-enrollment of SWD.” However, American Dream:

- Meets targets for overall enrollment and is at 100 percent of chartered enrollment.
- Enrolls both English language learner (ELL) and economically disadvantaged (ED) students at greater rates than NYC CSD 7, the district where it’s located. ADS is currently +12 and +4 percentage points above CSD 7 respectively, for ELL and ED rates.
- Has implemented strategies in good faith to support the recruitment of at-risk students, including SWDs – including the use of a weighted lottery.
- Provides highly effective instruction and support to students regardless of their background or risk factors, including each at-risk subgroup, which supports retention.
- Exceeds NYC CSD 7 for retention of students in each at-risk subgroup and has higher overall retention compared to the district as well.

While ADS will continue to operate in good faith and strives to increase the number of students with disabilities enrolled, charter schools face real challenges to record huge increases from year to year. For example, during the application period for the upcoming school year (SY2324), ADS received a substantial number of applications—206 students—qualifying for the SWD Weighted Preference. Out of these applicants, only 27 were admitted to ADS, leaving 98 students on the waitlist. The other 81 applicants either declined, rescinded, canceled, or withdrew their applications. Unfortunately, the weighted approach in the lottery has not seemed to make much of a difference in achieving this goal. However, our liaison has subsequently offered a suggestion of requesting a weight increase for applications of students with disabilities to improve their chance of receiving a seat. ADS was unaware that this was an option. We will also continue to discuss implementing a full enrollment preference with the CSO.

In 2023, ADS again increased outreach to partner organizations and in 2024 will continue to take advantage of every opportunity to attend community events and showcase the ADS approach to ICT, Speech, and counseling services. ADS resumed attendance as an exhibitor at the IncludeNYC fair in 2024. We’ve established new CBO relationships with intent to more effectively reach families that may have students with disabilities. Some of these CBOs are ADAPT Community Network, Advocates for Children of New York, ARISE Coalition, Bronx Developmental Disabilities Council, and Rising Ground, to name a few. These efforts complement those that have been in place throughout the term, such as communicating with DOE guidance counselors and parent liaisons, attending community events, running impactful media and social media campaigns, distributing carefully designed materials through Vanguard, and maintaining impactful partnerships with others throughout the CSD 7 community.