



BROOKLYN COLLABORATIVE

A NYC Outward Bound School

January 28, 2019

Dear Families and Supporters of Brooklyn Collaborative,

Last week, we received a letter from the New York State Education Department (NYSED), explaining that our school, Brooklyn Collaborative Studies, has been designated a Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) school. This means that according to State criteria, our school has not performed as well as other schools in New York State on the MS state examinations in ELA and Math.

As a reminder, we will be holding a meeting on Fri 2/1 from 8:15am-9am in Rm 411 to answer any questions you might have. There will also be a representative from our Superintendent's Office available to answer your questions. Our Superintendent Kathy Rehfield-Pelles and her team have been extremely supportive of our school over many years, and we appreciate their allyship.

In this letter, we want to make sure that you have basic information about the state designation and that you hear directly from us as school leaders about our action steps and the other measures of success we monitor at Brooklyn Collaborative.

Why is BCS on the list?

The list was compiled by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) based on the performance of the "All Students" subgroup for the MS state examinations in ELA, Math and Science, in terms of Composite Performance Index and Growth, placing us in the "Bottom 10%" in the state. An additional factor that NYSED looked at was Chronic Absenteeism (students who have less than 90% attendance for the year).

Why did our students not perform proficiently on the state exams?

The MS state examinations in ELA and Math assess proficiency on grade level standards. As an intentionally diverse school, BCS is committed to serving all types of learners at all levels. We serve 36% students with special needs, much higher than the city average. Our incoming students have, on average, lower 5th grade Math and Reading levels than the city as well. Our internal data shows that all students make progress every year at our school, even if they are not yet at grade level standards.

Is BCS "anti-test"?

We believe that students should show mastery on a range of assessments. That's why in the BCS grading policy, every learning target must be assessed by at least three summative assessments each semester with one of them being an on-demand assessment. Tests, roundtables, Socratic seminars, in-class writing, debates are all examples of on-demand assessments students experience frequently at BCS. We believe in our rich progressive curriculum, not test-prep.

How did parent choice to opt-out of MS state exams factor in?

It is not entirely clear. This year, for the first time, New York State used a formula for calculating proficiency on the state tests where students who did not take the exam counted at the lowest level for schoolwide

accountability to generate a Composite Performance Index. At BCS last year, 24% of students in Grades 6-8 took the state exams; 76% of parents opted their children out of the MS exams.

How does NYSED address participation rate?

BCS had a participation rate in the state exams of below 95% (because of our opt-out rate). According to one of the many documents we've been given to read since this designation was issued, "under the new accountability system and beginning in 2019-20, schools that have a participation rate below 95% for the same subgroup and measure for two years in a row are required to develop a participation rate improvement plan. Meeting the 95% participation will be required for making progress if identified as a CSI school." We are still seeking to learn what that specifically will mean for our school. *Rest assured, as always, we will continue to respect parent choice in whether their child takes the exam or opts out.*

What happens now that we're on the list?

Because of this designation, we have received some additional money this year, called Title IV Well Rounded ESSA money. We have also been contacted by our Superintendent team and the NYCDOE Borough Support Office to help us with an improvement plan. This plan provides math support/coaching for our teachers, help in analysis of our test data, and supports for using interim assessments (in Math and ELA) to regularly report progress to students and families on grade level standards. The CSI list was only made public on 1/17/2019. As we hear more information from the state/city about steps we are required to take, we will share them with you.

Many parents have reached out to us and said, "I'm so surprised that BCS is on this list." What are our other measures of success as a school?

- Our latest [School Quality Report](#) shows that we earned the highest rating, Well Developed, in four out of five total areas.
- Our students complete performance-based assessment tasks (PBATs) and roundtables in every core subject, every year in all grades 6-12. The PBATs are tracked internally every year to record individual progress and schoolwide patterns. (Note: just last year, [two NYS Regents \(Judith Johnson and Kathleen Cashin\) visited our school](#) and participated in PBATs so they could experience alternative assessment models to standardized testing!)
- Our students in Grades 6-8 have ELA and Math interim assessments three times a year, which track progress on grade level standards.
- Nearly 70% of our students stay with us from Grades 6-12, making our high school and college outcomes strong indicators of our persistent success with students. This 7-year arc also respects the learning process over time for different learners, instead of overemphasizing growth in one year.
- We boast some of the strongest high school graduation and college data in the city with an average 90+% graduation rate. Our students typically exceed the College Readiness Index of our comparison group and city average every year.
- In the past six years, BCS has had fourteen Posse Scholars (more than any other school in NYC our size). The Posse Foundation awards full-tuition scholarships for students with extraordinary leadership potential.

- 100% of students in the Class of 2018 were admitted to multiple colleges, with 70% of graduates matriculating at 4 year institutions. (See Page 2 of our [school profile](#) for our college matriculation data)
- [US News & World Report cited Brooklyn Collaborative in their 2018 Best High Schools rankings](#). We were among the elite schools that scored high enough to earn a Bronze Best High Schools badge.
- This year, we did very well during admissions season, reflecting that we're an in-demand option for many families who want to join BCS. 1084 students in D15 elementary schools have applied for our incoming Grade 6 (class size of 90 seats). Every student (88) in our current Grade 8 applied to our Grade 9. 862 new students from other middle schools applied. That means a total of 950 applicants ranked us for our incoming Grade 9 (class size of 102 seats).

How does it feel to be on the list?

At times, it feels like we're being publicly shamed. It is demoralizing for our staff and students to work so hard and to be recognized in so many other ways for our good work, only to have NYSED label us as a "failing school" on one assessment measure. It also feels worrisome. More accountability usually means more scrutiny, which may mean less freedom. It may mean more paperwork, more data that we have to report to the state, more visits. Most times, we're trying to stay positive - ever the underdog who believes the cup is half full. This designation will not change the core heart of Brooklyn Collaborative.

What do we hope will change for public education?

Our mission says that we prepare students for "full participation in civic life." Courageousness is one of our BCS core values so we feel a sense of responsibility for all schools on the list. We need to stand together and speak up in solidarity! Instead of asking schools what we will do to get off the list, let's ask the city, state, and lawmakers how they will help all public schools better serve all students? Let's ask why we don't get 100% Fair Student Funding? Let's ask why we are basing large impactful evaluations on single standardized assessment measures that have historically been biased against students of color? Let's ask why school leaders, teachers, and students are feeling the pressure to raise test scores instead of asking why this narrow evaluation system exists in the first place? Let's ask what it looks like to respectfully support students with disabilities or English Language Learners instead of pointing out how they are not proficient on grade level standards? Let's ask why some schools serve so many more high-needs students than others? Just this Wednesday 1/23, our NYS state legislature passed a law to [drop state exams](#) from teacher evaluations. That means test scores cannot be used to evaluate teachers, yet here we are, with the same measures being used to label whole schools. Let's ask how labeling a school as "failing" supports learning and progress for all?

What can we do now?

Parents and students:

- Write and call the policymakers who determine how schools are evaluated and challenge the formula that NYSED uses to evaluate schools that is based on test scores (this year the formula was changed to factor in participation rate and opt out - why?)
 - Listen to [6th grade BCS parent Columbia call into Brian Lehrer \(at 26:41\)](#) to ask Mayor DeBlasio about the CSI list
 - Read [7th/8th grade BCS parent Tish's op-ed in the Daily News "Our Schools Are Failing? Really??"](#)
- Rally for more schools to have access to performance-based assessment as an alternative measure, like we do with our NYS Board of Regents-approved Regents waiver in collaboration with the New York Performance Standards Consortium (no such waiver exists for the MS exams - why not?)

- Stay tuned for updates from our School Leadership Team (slt@bcs448.org) and the BNS/BCS parent-led Political Action Committee
- Ask your child's teachers about the state tests
- Attend the Fri 2/1 @ 8:15AM meeting if you have more questions

SOME PEOPLE OF INFLUENCE TO REACH OUT TO

- Governor Andrew Cuomo (<https://www.governor.ny.gov/content/governor-contact-form>, 518-474-8390)
- Assemblymember JoAnne Simon (simonj@nyassembly.gov, 718-246-4889)
- Chancellor of Board of Regents Betty Rosa (Regent.Rosa@nysed.gov, 518-474-5889)
- Regent Kathleen Cashin (Regent.Cashin@nysed.gov, 518-474-5889)
- Regent Judith Chin (Regent.Chin@nysed.gov, 518-474-5889)
- Regent Judith Johnson (Regent.Johnson@nysed.gov, 518-474-5889)
- Regent Nan Eileen Mead (Regent.Mead@nysed.gov, 212-643-3039)
- Regent Luis Reyes (Regent.Reyes@nysed.gov, 518-474-5889)
- Regent Lester Young (Regent.Young@nysed.gov, 718-722-2796)
- State Senator Shelley Mayer - Chair of the State Senate Education Committee (smayer@nysenate.gov, 914-934-5250)
- Any other city or state officials you know who can speak up about what's good for our students and our school!

We are committed and inspired to be school leaders at our incredible school. In Crew, we ride the highs together, we weather the lows together, and we persistently problem solve to row the boat forward together. As Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor." Despite our recent CSI designation by NYSED, we promise you that what you love best about Brooklyn Collaborative will not change and we will continue to forge ahead with our good work (good for the soul and good for the world) on behalf of all students and families. Onward!

In solidarity,
Scill, Amanda, Imani

