

Independent School Evaluation Visit Reports

Attached is a school evaluation report based on a school visit conducted by an external vendor on behalf of the Charter Schools Institute. School evaluation visits are a key component of the Institute's comprehensive oversight and evaluation system. They provide an assessment of the school's academic program and, to a more limited degree, its organizational and governance capacity. The objectives of the school evaluation visit are to:

1. Collect and document evidence of the school's progress toward meeting the academic and organizational standards found in the Institute's Renewal Benchmarks; and
2. Provide the school with feedback on its current achievement of the Renewal Benchmarks that may be helpful to the school as it determines how best to improve its program in anticipation of renewal.

The Institute engages external vendors to conduct an independent school evaluation visit and write an evaluation report at least once during a school's first charter term, and occasionally in subsequent charter terms. These evaluations provide the Institute with additional information about a school's program from an objective external perspective and serve to inform, corroborate or challenge conclusions drawn from the Institute's ongoing evaluation and oversight.

The vendors are selected through a competitive bidding process, and must demonstrate the capacity to conduct rigorous and reliable qualitative evaluation of a school's academic program and organizational capacity. The vendors are contracted to specifically collect and analyze evidence pertaining to the following SUNY renewal benchmarks¹:

Academic Success	Organizational Effectiveness and Viability
1B. Use of Assessment Data 1C. Curriculum 1D. Pedagogy 1E. Instructional Leadership 1F. At-Risk Students 1G. Student Order & Discipline 1H. Professional Development	2A. Mission & Key Design Elements 2B. Parents & Students 2C. Organizational Capacity 2D. Board Oversight 2E. Governance

While specific evaluation methodology is left to the discretion of the vendor, the school evaluation visits typically include classroom observation, interviews with teachers, parents, school leaders and board members, and review of relevant documents. The attached report was written by a vendor based on evidence collected during a school evaluation visit, with the school description section provided by the Institute. The school had an opportunity to review a draft of this report and provide factual corrections and comments prior to the finalization of the report.

Other evaluation reports for this or other schools can be found on the Institute's website at www.newyorkcharter.org. For questions or concerns about this report or the Institute's school evaluation procedures, please contact Simeon Stolzberg, Director of School Evaluation, at simeon.stolzberg@suny.edu or 212-221-6332.

¹ These reference version 4.0 of the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks; the latest version can be found on the Institute's website at: <http://newyorkcharters.org/documents/renewalBenchmarks.doc>

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

GREEN TECH CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Visit Date
May 25-26, 2010



CONDUCTED BY CLASS MEASURES
ON BEHALF OF THE SUNY CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE



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EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

GREEN TECH CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Green Tech Charter High School (Green Tech) was visited by an external school inspection team from Class Measures on behalf of the SUNY Charter Schools Institute (the Institute) on May 25 and 26, 2010. The school opened in 2008 and at the time of the visit served 146 students in grades 9 and 10.

The school administers a comprehensive set of formative and summative assessments in core academic areas that are aligned to the school's curriculum and the state standards. The staff meets approximately every six weeks to collaboratively analyze data, modify instruction and the curriculum based on the data analysis, identify students for intervention services, and select weak instructional areas for additional professional development for teachers.

Assessment data is reviewed and analyzed during half day professional development sessions that take place approximately every six weeks. Data is used to collaboratively design instruction for whole class, small groups, and individual students through the instructional support team (IST) which meets weekly and consists of all teaching and student support staff.


Green Tech has a well documented curriculum in place for each core academic subject that is aligned to state standards. Lesson plans aligned to the curriculum and state standards are submitted to the principal for review and comment; however, lesson plans do not follow a single format.

Instruction at Green Tech was provided by teachers with adequate subject knowledge and grade-level competency. All teachers were certified. Instruction, however, was not found to be rigorous in some classrooms. Although staff stated that they held high expectations for student behavior and academic performance, in some classrooms teachers did not challenge students to achieve a rigorous level of understanding of the subject material. Differentiated instruction was observed to be in place in classrooms. Students were observed to be well behaved, generally participated well in lesson activities, and were attentive and responsive to teacher questioning.

Instructional leadership is provided at Green Tech by the principal who is universally respected by the staff, teachers, and students. He holds high expectations for student and staff performance and has developed and maintains strong communications with staff through the use of daily surveys. Teachers are regularly evaluated through a formal observation and evaluation process that included pre- and post-conferences and a self assessment by teachers. The principal monitors student data to identify strengths in instruction and weaknesses that need attention.

Services for at-risk students were effectively planned by the school's IST and delivered through a tiered intervention program and the special education department. Lab classes in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics, which provide an additional 50 minutes of instruction, are available for students requiring additional assistance. A tutoring program is also available for students who need extra help. Students are evaluated for intervention services by the IST, which analyzes student assessment data to determine if students should receive interventions.

Green Tech has a well documented code of conduct in place that is consistently enforced school wide. The school has students participate in an innovative competition with other students for best behavior



that results in students being awarded merits and demerits and receiving awards. All stakeholders reported that the school is safe.

Professional development is focused on improving instruction. There is a substantial amount of time allotted for professional development, including time prior to the school year, both full and half day sessions throughout the year, and two weekly sessions. Half day professional development sessions are held approximately every six weeks for teachers to collaborate and review student assessment data. Professional development topics are guided by daily teacher input through a survey tool.

The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented most of the key design elements included in its charter. Stakeholders were familiar with the mission.

Parents participating in focus groups stated that they were happy with the academic and behavioral programs at Green Tech. Parents stated that the school was responsive to concerns and they were happy with communications between home and school. The school is not fully enrolled and does not need a lottery or maintain a waiting list.

The school has sufficient organizational capacity to manage the school efficiently and receives financial support and advice from the Brighter Choice Foundation. The Brighter Choice Foundation provides start-up grants, school facilities, a revolving loan fund, and technical assistance to charter schools in New York. The Foundation financed the construction of the school's building and leases it to the school's board of trustees.

The team reviewed a variety of documents, including board meeting minutes and bylaws. An interview was also conducted with eight of the board members, including the board chair who is also the executive director of the Brighter Choice Foundation. The board was found to be in compliance with New York State Public Meeting Laws. Board members receive and review student performance data and financial information at all board meetings. The principal has been evaluated formally by the board and the board also conducts evaluations of the school and itself. The board is currently recruiting for a parent member.

SCHOOL DESCRIPTION¹

Opening Information

Date Initial Charter Approved by SUNY Trustees	February 1, 2006
Date Initial Charter Approved by: Operation of Law	July 31, 2006
School Opening Date	September, 2008

Location

School Year(s)	Location(s)	Grades At Location	District
2008-09 through present	321 Northern Boulevard Albany, NY	All	City School District of Albany

Partner Organizations

	Partner Name	Partner Type	Dates of Service
Current Partner	Brighter Choice Foundation	Nonprofit	2006 - present

Current Mission Statement

The mission of the Green Tech High Charter School is to prepare young men to complete high school with a Regents diploma so they will have the opportunity to succeed in college. Green Tech High will accomplish this mission by providing a complete high school curriculum that ensures every student will attain the skills and coursework necessary for a Regents diploma, including the use of basic computer technology with an added knowledge and understanding of the environment.

Current Key Design Elements

• Small school setting with a student-teacher ratio of approximately 12-1;
• Extended school day and year;
• College-preparatory focus;
• Two hours of comprehensive instruction in English composition and literature daily, 90 minutes of math instruction daily, and daily periods allocated for tutoring and other instructional assistance;
• Safe, highly-disciplined school culture that focuses on personal responsibility and high expectations;
• All-male learning environment;
• Commitment to equipping students with the technological expertise they will need to succeed in college, including providing all seniors with free laptop computers;
• Environmental curriculum that incorporates the natural resources of the region;
• Data-driven instructional approach; and
• Performance-based compensation for teachers.

¹ The information in this section was provided by the SUNY Charters Schools Institute.

School Characteristics

School Year	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Charter Enrollment	Actual Enrollment ²	Original Chartered Grades	Actual Grades	Days of Instruction
2008-09	175	75	80	9-10	9	200
2009-10	275	175	157	9-11	9-10	200

Student Demographics

	2008-09 ³		2009-10	
	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of Albany CSD Enrollment	Percent of School Enrollment ⁴	Percent of Albany CSD Enrollment ⁵
Race/Ethnicity				
American Indian or Alaska Native	0%	0%	0%	NA
Black or African American	86%	62%	76%	NA
Hispanic	4%	11%	14%	
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	0%	5%	1%	NA
White	4%	20%	4%	NA
Multiracial	0%	1%	5%	NA
Special Populations				
Students with Disabilities ⁶	15%		10%	NA
Limited English Proficient	1%	5%	1%	NA
Free/Reduced Lunch				
Eligible for Free Lunch	59%	59%	76%	NA
Eligible for Reduced-Price Lunch	16%	10%	13%	NA

² Source: SUNY Charter School Institute's Official Enrollment Binder. (Figures may differ slightly from New York State Report Cards, depending on date of data collection.)

³ Source: 2008-09 School Report Cards, New York State Education Department.

⁴ Source: 2009-10 Demographics and Limited English Proficient Percentages calculated from BEDS reports submitted at the beginning of the school year. This information is unverified by the schools BEDS reports not include Free/Reduced Lunch status; statistics shown are provided by the school.

⁵ Aggregated District data not yet available for 2009-10 school year.

⁶ New York State Education Department does not report special education data. Statistics given were provided by the school.

Current Board of Trustees⁷

Board Member Name	Term	Position/Committees
Chris Bender	3	Chair
Jennifer DelGreco	3	Trustee
Lillian Garland	3	Trustee
John Haller	3	Trustee
Christopher Hawver	3	Vice-Chair
Joseph Abdu Jarvis	3	Secretary
Chris Kennedy	3	Treasurer
David Shaffer	3	Trustee
Peter Stoll	3	Trustee

School Leader(s)

School Year	School Leader(s) Name and Title
2008-09	John Taylor, Principal
2009-10	John Taylor, Principal

School Visit History

School Year	Visit Type	Evaluator (Institute/External)	Date
2008-09	First Year Visit	Institute	March 12, 2009

⁷ Source: Institute Board Records.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?

Benchmark 1B: Use of Assessment Data

The school regularly administers standardized and other assessments that are aligned to the school's curriculum frameworks and state standards. Assessments administered include: Scantron Performance Series, administered in the fall, winter and spring; teacher developed end of week assessments for core subject areas; core subject end of unit assessments designed by leadership that are aligned to the curriculum and consist of released Regents exam items; the Terra Nova examination administered in the spring and fall; midterm and final exams; the preliminary scholastic aptitude test (PSAT) for grade 10 students; and the Regents exams in all core subjects plus a foreign language.

The school makes all data accessible to teachers, leaders, and board members. Teachers have access to the Scantron data online and through Scantron reports. Teachers meet during half day professional development sessions to discuss data and plan instructional and curriculum modifications following the receipt of Scantron data. Leaders have ongoing access to all data online. Teachers use worksheets generated by Scantron to target group and individual intervention activities towards specific student weaknesses. The principal works collaboratively with teachers in modifying instruction based on assessment data. Professional development topics are selected through teacher feedback and professional development needs are identified through the analysis of student data.

The principal monitors assessments and reviews weekly assessments to ensure they align with the Regents-based end of unit assessments. Teachers collaborate on instruction and assessment design and review all assessment data collaboratively and in detail following the assessments. The principal monitors progress towards Accountability Plan goals through assessments aligned to the Regents exams. The principal reported that all assessment data is provided to parents through newsletters, meetings, open houses and the parent teacher organization (PTO). Board members receive both financial and student data at every board meeting.

Because Green Tech is only in its second year, many of the goals contained in the School Accountability Plan are not yet able to be measured. Reasons for this include lack of consecutive years of test data and a lack of students in grade levels where high school graduation and college admission can be measured. The following absolute measures related to the goals can be partially assessed.

Benchmark 1C: Curriculum

The team reviewed written curriculum documents in the core subject areas. Curriculum maps showed well-defined frameworks for each grade, and core subject area binders contained lesson plans, pacing charts, maps, and assessments.

The principal stated that five areas are not yet aligned to state standards: physical education, technology, Spanish, Physics, and Trigonometry. Mapping and alignment of the last two subject areas where fewer than 4 students were currently enrolled will be finalized before the next school year.

The principal stated that the school's curriculum was a work in progress. Teachers said that they played an active role in refining the curriculum using Scantron and Regents assessment results to identify gaps.

The principal and teachers reported that teachers plan together and decide on the “curriculum delivery system.” Few use textbooks, and all teacher decisions about curriculum resources are outcome driven. The teacher teams also identified areas of deficiency based on analysis of the Regents assessment items and made curriculum adjustments to address these in the instructional program. Curriculum documents, provided by the school revealed that they supported the school’s stated mission of preparing all students for successful completion of the Regents program through a rigorous academic program aligned to the Regents subject areas.

There is no formal environmental curriculum. However, the family intervention specialist, who designs and delivers a rich extra-curricular program, focuses on activities which raise student awareness of the environment. For example, he has a fly fishing group, and other nature-based activities to help encourage “green thinking.” Neither teachers nor parents mentioned the connection to the environment as part of the school’s mission. However, the activities engaged in by the students definitely reflect the school’s mission related to the environment, and the family intervention specialist’s background and training and program planning reflect this commitment.

The team reviewed the current year’s collection of lesson plans in ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies. Lesson plans are submitted weekly to the principal and teachers reported that the principal provides written feedback to teachers. Currently there is no common lesson plan format. For example, while many teachers use the Understanding by Design format in building their lessons, mathematics lesson plans followed the sequence of Glencoe textbook units.

The curriculum as implemented is organized, cohesive, and aligned vertically. Teachers reported that weekly grade level and department meetings enable them to keep the curriculum cohesive and aligned. Teachers new to the school this year described the current documents as accessible and helpful in orienting them to the school’s program. All teachers interviewed valued the school’s collaborative climate in making curriculum decisions and monitoring curriculum effectiveness.

A multi-topic extra-curricular program is provided by the family intervention specialist who tailors small-group activities to the interests of the students. Many of the activities provided through this program support the school’s interest in environmental awareness and sustainability. The guidance counselor provides extensive information in preparation for college, while also tracking the academic and behavioral performance of students.

The team found that although the curriculum supports the mission by using the Regents standards for lesson planning, it does not yet have sufficient rigor or consistent high quality across all subject areas. According to the principal, students receive two hours of ELA and 90 minutes of mathematics instruction only if they participate in the additional 50 minute lab classes designed for academic support or remediation. All 9th grade students are given a diagnostic assessment and must score above a specific cut score in mathematics and ELA in order to avoid placement in a reading or mathematics lab.

Benchmark 1D: Pedagogy

Teachers demonstrated mixed subject matter competency during lessons observed by the team. Many lessons were focused on Regents examination preparation. Mathematics lessons in particular were instructionally weak, with a major teaching strategy consisting of having students plug multiple choice answers into the problems, “plug and chug,” frequently without attempting to solve the problem or reduce the number of viable answers using a standard mathematical approach. This method was used even in cases when the problems were relatively straightforward to solve. The team noted that all teachers were certified.

Teachers made learning objectives available to students in most classes. All lessons began with Do Nows and lessons were aligned to standards upon team review of lesson plans. Rigor was not, however, evident in many classrooms. Mathematics lessons were focused on test taking skills and in one ELA class, students had recently finished reading *Scorpions*, which is a young adult reader inappropriate for this age group. There were also pockets of more rigorous instruction identified by the team. In one US History honors class, students were engaged in document based questioning, which utilized well structured scaffolding questions to enable essay development.

Lesson plans were found to be aligned with the standards. The team noted that the teachers had grown in the quality of the lesson plans they had developed with substantial improvement from the beginning of the year, indicating teachers are implementing what they have been learning about lesson plans.

Differentiation was identified during many lesson observations. In one ELA lesson, differentiation was observed while students were engaged in researching and writing research papers. In one mathematics classroom, a student was noted to be using a laptop. The principal stated that differentiation is provided through leveled classes and through the RTI program. All staff meet weekly as members of the school wide IST and devise plans for instruction. Differentiation for students is implemented in general classes first through a “wraparound student support model.” Most classes observed were small, facilitating personalized teacher attention for students.

Green Tech teachers were focused on keeping students engaged in learning activities. Pacing for most classes was appropriate for the lesson. Learning time was maximized in lessons observed by the team. Most students were attentive and participated in lesson activities and students were comfortable and asking and answering questions. In a few lessons, students had their heads down but were not disruptive. Engagement dropped in some lessons at the end of class.

The team did not find evidence of teachers challenging students with questions and assignments that promote academic rigor, depth of understanding, and development of higher-order thinking and problem solving skills. Teachers in interviews stated that they have the expectation that students will meet goals, however, the in class performance did not support this statement. Levels of rigor varied dramatically and most classes did not challenge students to engage in higher level thinking.

Benchmark 1E: Instructional Leadership

The leadership team at Green Tech consists of a business manager and a principal. Instructional leadership at Green Tech is provided by the principal. All stakeholders interviewed by the team respect and admire the principal and his active in-class leadership style.

Parents interviewed by the team said that he has done a fabulous job in establishing a strong school culture and fostering high expectations for their sons. Students interviewed said that the principal knew who they were and was aware of what each of their issues were both academically and behaviorally. They stated that he transforms kids. Teachers interviewed told the team that they valued the principal because he was a hands on collaborator in the classroom and kept them reflecting on their practice so that they could continue to grow.

The principal stated in an interview with the team that he sets high expectations for students by holding them accountable on a daily basis. He holds them accountable academically through weekly assessments that provide clear data about where they are and where they need to go next. He holds them accountable to a strong and clear code of conduct that is built into daily activity at the school. There is also an advisory system in place that acts as a support system for students and a communication system for parents. Teachers interviewed stated that they have high expectations for students and they believe that

every one of their students will graduate with a Regents diploma and go to college. They further stated they will do what it takes to accomplish that goal.

The principal sets high expectations for teachers by holding them accountable in a number of ways. He expects them to prepare well and so he reviews and gives feedback on daily lesson plans that teachers email him each week. He also expects teachers to have a hard copy of those lesson plans available for him as he observes classes and does evaluations. There are unit assessments based on released Regents assessment items generated by the principal that serves as a check on the rigor of individual teacher assessments. The principal indicated gaps sometimes existed between teacher assessments and the Regents exam unit assessments he generated. There are also consistent expectations for classroom practice such as expectation for common lesson components such as Do Nows and instruction that is aligned to the state standards.

There is an evaluation system in place for teachers. The principal stated that it is a clinical model with a pre and post conference and a formal evaluation. He said he is in classes every day and gives informal feedback to teachers verbally or in written note form. Teachers evaluate themselves using the document entitled the instructional quality survey. The document has twenty-two questions about classroom practice that ask about such things as use of data, engagement, differentiation, time on task and high expectations. The self evaluation is used for a conversation between the teacher and the principal. The team reviewed sample formative evaluations conducted by the principal and self-evaluations done by teachers. Of the five sample observations reviewed, thereof the five were making progress on lesson rigor, but had not yet met the standard. The principal is aware of and working on rigor in the classroom. For example, one comment on an evaluation noted the teacher was spending too much time on Do Nows.

Because the teaching staff is young and relatively inexperienced, there is a mentor/ mentee structure in place. Every teacher in the school is either a mentor or a mentee. According to the principal, the mentors have been trained and their role is designed to be a supportive one. Teachers interviewed stated that the mentor/mentee relationship it is a partnership and that they learn from each other through peer observations and weekly meetings.

Both teachers and the principal reported that there is a daily check out procedure where teachers respond to questions at the end of each day on Survey Monkey. The principal uses the information gathered to set the agenda for weekly meetings and sometimes as a needs assessment for professional development. Teachers said this gives them a strong voice in decisions made at the school. They said they are helping shape every aspect of the school.

The principal stated that he monitors all student progress through data analysis and that students with disabilities are monitored for performance and growth through this process. He stated that the data analysis is used to monitor the academic program as well.

Benchmark 1F: At-Risk Students

The school deploys numerous resources to provide support and academic interventions to address students' needs within the general and special education programs. Support may be provided to students by the guidance counselor, the dean of students, the school psychologist, two special educators, a family intervention specialist, and/or by classroom teachers during daily advisory sessions. Additional academic support is provided by classroom teachers during twice a week tutorials after school. Volunteer tutors also provide tutorial services. Green Tech also provides before and after school Regents review sessions that are available to all students. A summer school program is available and is required

for students who have failed a course. This combination of support programs provides a strong safety net for students who have academic or behavioral difficulties. Students and parents highly valued the school's outreach and support for all students.

The IST is made up of the entire staff and meets weekly to identify students who may be at risk. Organized by the school psychologist/director of student services, the group reviews student performance and behaviors and formulates a support plan, which is then communicated school wide by email. Teachers reported that this was an effective process and they indicated that it was efficient and effective in meeting the academic and behavioral needs of students.

The school follows a Response to Intervention (RTI) model. Teachers provide Level 1 support and reported receiving training in differentiation to help them meet this need. Students who need more intense academic support (as identified by Scantron results) are placed in "lab" mathematics and ELA programs, which provide an additional 50 minutes of instruction per day. If these interventions are not effective, a student is referred for possible Tier 3 special education interventions.

The school psychologist, who also holds the title of director of student services, reported that 16 students are currently on individual educational programs (IEPs), four are on 504 plans, and one student is an English Language Learner (ELL). Students on IEPs are serviced primarily in the classrooms by two special educators. The one student with language needs is supported through use of a specialized language software program (Rosetta Stone). The director of student services insures that teachers are provided with IEP goals and monitors student performance. On-going coordination among all support providers occurs at weekly all-staff meetings.

Teachers, students, and parents reported that the advisory system is particularly helpful in supporting all students. Daily sessions are 25 minutes, and on Fridays extend to 50 minutes when outside speakers participate. Some of the advisory goals noted by the students include: learning what good students do, habits of students and scholars, learning what it takes to be successful, setting goals for the day, and "etiquette." With a ratio of 10 students per advisor, parents and students highly valued the individualized attention and support they received. Both parents and students specifically mentioned the sense of community and connectedness that this and other programs at Green Tech provided.

Benchmark 1G: Student Order and Discipline

The Student Handbook and Code of Conduct includes a clear discipline policy with stated consequences for each infraction. The handbook lists ten non-negotiables of student behavior: attend school daily; respect all members of the Green Tech community; focus on learning; arrive on time to each class; follow every aspect of the student code of conduct; come to school prepared to learn each day; complete all assigned homework to the best of the student's ability and to the expectation of instructor; respect the building and all community property; turn off and put away all electronic devices before entering school and maximize the effective use of time each day.

The code of conduct also identifies ten character virtues that serve as a blueprint for living and learning at Green Tech. The code of conduct along with the character virtues are two steps in the process of creating an environment in which all students can learn. The virtues are broken into two categories: ones that build performance character and those that build moral character. Virtues that build performance character are: responsibility; perseverance; self-discipline and courage. The virtues that build moral character are: respect; kindness; trustworthiness; citizenship; fairness and caring and true friendship.

According to the handbook, even slight misbehavior has consequences. All student misbehavior falls into one of four categories: culture violation; academic violation; cheating violation and safety violation.

All but severe misbehavior leads to demerits. The team observed teachers giving students demerits in a consistent manner during classroom observations. The school also has a merit system entitled “score it” that is designed to help students develop good habits. It is focused on helping the students do the right thing over and over until it becomes a habit. Students score themselves daily in each class on a variety of focus areas such as being prepared and being respectful. Teachers score them as well. They accumulate points that lead to a monthly cash prize and designation as student of the month.

The school has added a dean of students this year. Teachers interviewed stated that discipline is time consuming and that this position has improved discipline and maximized instructional time.

All stakeholders stated that Green Tech is a safe school. There are cameras in hallways and outside. Doors are locked and visitors need to be buzzed in by the front office. Teachers are posted in the hallways during duty periods and some teachers have after school duty to walk students to bus stops. Students interviewed said that the school is safe because it is small and they are known. Parents stated that safety is a top priority at the school. The school did have an incidence of gang activity off campus at the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year and, consistent with the school’s commitment to a safe learning environment, all involved students were expelled. During the visit the team observed a safe and orderly environment that promoted a culture of learning.

Benchmark 1H: Professional Development

The professional development program at Green Tech is designed to instruct teachers in pedagogical techniques and to help them develop an understanding of their student population. Prior to the school year, the school provides two weeks of professional development for new teachers and one week for returning teachers. There are two additional full days of professional development provided during the year and half day sessions occurring about every six weeks that are used for data analysis. Also, each week teachers meet after school on Mondays for an hour and before school on Thursdays for a half hour of meeting time, which is a combination of school business and professional development activities.

All professional development, according to the principal, is in place to develop the teaching skills of the staff so that they can meet the school mission of a Regent’s diploma for each graduate. Teachers interviewed said that they feel well supported by the professional development opportunities offered to them.

The new teacher induction begins in August and is focused on the instructional processes at the school such as the use of data, culture, grading and teacher expectations. There has also been training in differentiation. New teachers told the team that they have to learn the student handbook and then create Power Point presentations on different sections so that they can teach the handbook requirements to the entering ninth grade students. In reviewing the professional development calendar and in interviews with teachers and the principal, the team found there was an emphasis on teaching the urban student as well as training in providing instruction targeted at the male brain. Special education teachers also conduct special education training for their colleagues.

The principal stated that there is no formal needs assessment conducted; however, the daily teacher check-ins, classroom observations and his knowledge of the individual strengths and weaknesses of his staff help inform professional development decisions. Teachers set informal goals in conversation with the principal. Although the principal stated that he does evaluations for individual professional development sessions provided by vendors, there is no systematic evaluation to determine the effectiveness of the program.

Renewal Question 2 Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?

Benchmark 2A: Mission and Key Design Elements

The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented most of the key design elements included in its charter. The mission “to prepare young men to complete high school with a Regents diploma so they will have the opportunity to succeed in college” is supported through a standards aligned curriculum and a focus on providing students with computer skills. In addition, Green Tech provides students with the “Keys to Success” program that builds student work ethics and social skills that will allow them to be successful in life. All stakeholders interviewed were able to describe the major points of the mission.

The school was found to have implemented most of its key design elements designed to support the mission. This included:

- With 146 students and 14 teachers, Green Tech had a student to teacher ratio under 11:1. The school maintains a small school setting with an average class size of 13 students in the 14 classes observed by the team.
- According to the Green Tech High Student Handbook and Code of Conduct, students are in attendance at Green Tech from early August through the end of June for a total of 208 days, 200 of which are days of instruction. The additional days when instruction is not provided include a four day mandatory student initiation in August and half days for parent teacher conferences and teacher professional development. Students have an extended school day, beginning at 8:20 a.m. in their homeroom class and finishing the school day at 4:45 p.m.
- Green Tech maintains a strong focus on preparing students for college. A focus on core academics provides students with an extended core academic program. The emphasis on building performance and moral character is designed to instill strong work habits and social skills to help students succeed in college and beyond. In addition, the school’s fraternity model, which includes interactions with local college fraternities, provides students with exposure to the college environment. The guidance counselor is active in providing students with information on college and in helping students plan for their educational future.
- Although the school has identified as a key design element the provision of two hours of comprehensive instruction in English composition and literature and 90 minutes of instruction in mathematics, only students who participate in the 50 minute academic support sessions receive this amount of instruction in these subject areas. Green Tech does not meet this key design element. Tutoring and other instructional assistance is available.
- The school has a well developed set of guidelines for student conduct and students were found by the team to be respectful and well behaved. Students are held accountable for their behavior including minor infractions.
- The student body at Green Tech is all male.
- Green Tech is committed to providing students with technological expertise with all students attending computer programming courses. Currently, there is no grade 12 at Green Tech, so the portion of the key design element related to provision of a laptop to every senior is not yet accessible.

- The environmental focus of the school is primarily transmitted to students through the Biology and Environmental Studies course and through extracurricular programs that focus on the environment. Documents also show that Green Tech plans to offer an Advanced Placement Environmental Science course in the future for grade 12 students. One member of the board of trustees has a background in environmental science. A Biology class with a lesson on acid rain was observed by the team.
- Green Tech is a strongly data driven school with a number of formative and summative assessments in place to provide comprehensive information on student progress to staff. The entire staff meets collaboratively to review data and modify instruction for whole class, group, and individual instruction every six weeks. Data is provided to all stakeholders.
- Based on an interview with the principal, the team learned that Green Tech does partially base teacher compensation on performance. Currently the school has a bonus program that may reward teachers with bonuses up to five percent of their salary, and plans exist for this compensation to be increased in the future to as much as 12 percent of teacher salary for very high performance. Awards are based fifty percent on teacher professionalism and fifty percent on performance. Because the school was in its first year in 2008-2009 and limited assessment data was available, all teachers received a bonus.

Benchmark 2B: Parents and Students

Parents and students whom the team interviewed were highly satisfied with the school. Both groups described the ease and frequency of communication with the principal and teachers and said that concerns were seriously listened to and addressed. They described and valued the teachers and administrators high expectations for students and parents in meeting the school's standards. Currently no parent or family survey is administered to measure satisfaction with the school, according to interviewees. However, the family intervention specialist's job description is very specific about communication with parents and building involvement with the school. He serves as the "chief community liaison to build relationships with appropriate organizations and agencies that will provide services and resources to families with issues that impact student achievement and/or behavior."

Parents stated that they were aware of the policies in place allowing them to pursue grievances at the school board level. These policies are provided in the Green Tech High Student Handbook and Code of Conduct. A parent-teacher organization (PTO) was in place and served as a representative body for parents in bringing issues to the school's attention.

Both parents and students stated that more families/students would seek admission to the school if they were aware of the high quality of the programs and the strong supportive academic culture of the school. Students stated that they wished that more of their friends would choose Green Tech and described the difficulties that these friends were experiencing in other schools. Parents stated that they planned to send their other sons to Green Tech and encouraged friends and families to enroll their children. Many of the students described the school as a second home and a school where they felt certain that they would graduate with a Regents diploma.

Benchmark 2C: Organizational Capacity

Green Tech, located in Albany, New York, is an all-male grade 9 and 10 school with a current enrollment, according to the principal, of 146 students. According to school information provided to the team, for school year 2008-2009, the school had an initial charter enrollment limit of 175 and a revised

charter enrollment of 75. The school opened in September 2008 with 83 students and is only the second high school in Albany. For the 2009-2010 school year, the school had a charter enrollment limit of 275 and a revised charter enrollment of 175.

According to the principal, the description of the school in the original charter application described the operation of a middle school rather than a high school. The principal visited five successful charter high schools across the country to learn best practices. According to information on the school's website: "The success of these 'no excuses' type high schools has shown irrefutably that potentially negative demographic factors can be overcome by well-designed schools that combine innovative educational approaches, longer instructional time, high academic standards, and strong behavioral expectations." The Institute approved changes to the charter that reflect the present school mission and goals, according to the principal.

As noted, Green Tech opened in September 2008 and expanded to grade 9 in school year 2009-2010. The school will add grade 11 in school year 2010-2011. As a new all-male school that competes with Albany High School, meeting enrollment goals has been a challenge for Green Tech. After school year 2008-2009, the principal indicated 52 students returned from the original chartered cohort of 75. According to the principal's report to the board, dated August 27, 2009, the school had an enrollment of 155 students with 97 grade 9 students and 58 grade 10 students at the beginning of school year 2009-2010. Further enrollment information in the principal's report indicated the school had an enrollment goal in school year 2009-2010 of 175 students. In the early part of that school year, eight students were expelled because of a gang related off campus altercation. The principal attributed student attrition to several reasons, including the school being all-male, transportation issues, students' families moving, and students wanting to return to Albany High School. The principal indicated the school had a high "burn" rate the first few weeks of school as the students begin to understand what will be required of them, such as an extended school day, a longer school year (200 days of instruction), and high academic expectations.

Green Tech has recognized the need to stabilize and grow enrollment and has implemented an enrollment marketing plan that was presented to the board at the August 2009 board meeting. This enrollment marketing plan is the primary method of recruiting students as the school does not hold a lottery since it has never exceeded its chartered enrollment. The plan included the distribution of flyers at strategic locations, direct mailings, open house tours, newspaper inserts, parent information meetings, and radio ads. The school also reaches out to local community organizations to distribute school information. The school was also planning mailings to communities not previously marketed to, and incentives such as free uniforms. School leaders stated they are encouraged that the enrollment applications for the 2010-2011 school year are ahead of estimates. The principal indicated the school already had 96 applications for the incoming grade 9 cohort. The school has a goal of 135 grade 9 admissions, and is budgeting for a school enrollment of 250-260 for three grades.

A review of the 2009-2010 staff list showed the school has a principal, a business manager with experience in start up businesses, a school psychologist, a family intervention specialist, a guidance counselor, a dean of students, a two special teachers, two mathematics teachers, three ELA teachers, two social studies teachers, a physical education teacher, a biology teacher, a biology/chemistry teacher, a mathematics/physics teacher, a foreign language teacher, a .25 music teacher, a teaching assistant, a computer science teacher, an office manager, one individual responsible for data and assessment and one person responsible for office support. Fifteen of these staff are new and 11 are returning from last year. The school hired a dean of students this year to focus on grade 9 student discipline/cultural issues. This

hire freed up the principal to focus on those same issues in grade 10 as well as teaching and learning issues across the school.

According to the school description provided to the team, the current partner of Green Tech is the Brighter Choice Foundation, a non-profit organization. The foundation is not a charter management organization but according to information on its website, “The nonprofit Brighter Choice Foundation provides start-up grants, school facilities, a revolving loan fund, and technical assistance to eleven public charter schools in the City of Albany, New York’s state capital. The public charter schools established in Albany by the Brighter Choice Foundation are based upon some of the top urban schools in the United States, with a focus on replicating best practices and proven school models. The public charter schools assisted by the Brighter Choice Foundation each offer: small-school settings, longer school days and school years, high academic and behavioral expectations, extensive use of data to inform instruction, and school uniforms.”

The Executive Director of the Brighter Choice Foundation is also the chair of the school’s board of trustees. According to information provided to the team, the foundation provided the school with \$500,000-\$600,000 in startup funding and funded the construction of the building, which it leases to the board of trustees. According to interviewees, in school year 2008-2009, the foundation forgave the school all rent payments and this school year forgave half the rent payments. The lease with the foundation allows the school to purchase the school. One interviewee indicated the foundation has done a “phenomenal” job providing advice and support to the school; however, the school needs to strengthen its own fundraising capacity.

Green Tech has a process in place for hiring teachers and other staff. Examples of methods used by the school to recruit included advertising on web-based search engines and attending minority teacher recruitment fairs. After the school receives resumes, they compensate an outside third-party to conduct an initial telephone interview. The principal assembles a team to interview candidates subsequent to the initial telephone interview. Prospective candidates are required to deliver a demo lesson and students are asked to rate the lesson. Interviewees indicated it is anticipated five core content teachers, a physics teacher, and possibly a special education teacher would be hired for the 2010-2011 school year and that staffing and budgeting are correlated with the anticipated 2010-2011 enrollment targets. Teacher attrition is minimal at the school. The principal indicated one teacher did not return from last year and one teacher will not be returning next year due to performance issues. Teacher compensation is equal to compensation in the Albany school district.

School leaders and the board communicate regularly with parents, school staff, and students. The principal’s evaluation rubric includes a section on parent communications and feedback. The principal communicates with staff through electronic mail and staff meetings. He also requires that he be copied on intra-school emails so that he stays informed about school issues. The school publishes a parent newsletter and has a system in place to send electronic telephone calls to parents. The principal also communicates with parents via email and teachers hold parent conferences. The board primarily communicates through board meetings to which the public is invited. Board meeting minutes are also published and made available to the public.

Benchmark 2D: Board Oversight

Green Tech has a nine member board of trustees. According to the school’s by-laws provided to the team, the number of trustees shall be not less than five or more than 15. The powers of the board are described in the by-laws. Examples of specific powers include electing and removing trustees;

borrowing money and incurring debt; carrying out the business of the charter school; indemnifying and maintaining insurance; and acquiring real or personal property by purchase, exchange, lease, gift, devise, bequest, or otherwise.

Eight members of the board were available to be interviewed by the team; however, the board presently does not include a parent member, and they are now recruiting to fill this vacancy. Members described their backgrounds to team members, which indicated they had the experience to oversee the school. The school's website included the following information about board expertise and responsibilities:

“The qualifications for trustees on the Green Tech High Charter School board of trustees comprise the following:

- Experience and expertise in one or more of the following professional fields: education accountability, assessment and curriculum experience; real estate; law; fundraising; business; technology; accounting; military; government; environmental fields; administration or community and/or youth development.
- Preferred experience in governance including, but not limited to, training courses, responsibility for serving a board, and/or board membership in a non-profit organization, governmental body, or for-profit business.
- At least 18 years of age.

In addition to the aforementioned qualifications, each member of the board of trustees of Green Tech High commits to the following:

- Belief in and support of the mission and design of Green Tech High.
- Attendance at board and committee meetings, particularly in the early stages during the review and approval process, as well as during preparation for opening since meetings are anticipated to be more frequent than monthly.
- Willingness to volunteer for individual assignments on behalf of and by the board, including service on committees and fundraising endeavors.
- An expectation that all children can learn and can accomplish high academic achievement regardless of race, income, family background, religion, gender, or previous behavior.

The board of trustees ensures that the school adheres to the mission, goals and all other terms and conditions of the school's charter. The board supervises and holds accountable the performance of the school principal, who is responsible for the day to day operation of the school. Additionally, the Board approves the appointment of the school's business manager. The board of trustees is also responsible for the establishment and maintenance of all policies governing the operation of the school. They respond to complaints submitted to the board pursuant the school's complaints process, including matters of enforcement of the school's discipline code which govern long term suspensions and expulsion.” Board interviewees confirmed this information, which is also included in the 2009-2010 Green Tech High Student Handbook and Code of Conduct.

Board members interviewed articulated the mission and key design elements of the school, and indicated they received packets of student achievement data before each board meeting. Examples of the type of data received included Regents test statistics, promotion rates, attrition rates, and enrollment information. The board also receives financial reports from the business manager. A review of board minutes provided to the team showed that the board was provided information on the school's 2009

Regent exams results, student enrollment, an update on the student data system, and anti-bullying efforts. The business manager provided budget and auditor reports, including information relative to cash balances and budget carryover expenditures.

The board has not made any financial or organizational decisions that have impeded the school in meeting its mission; however, the board has taken action and conducted analysis to meet financial challenges. Board members interviewed stated the budget is discussed at every meeting, and they recognize that stabilizing and increasing student enrollment is a major challenge for the school and it is closely associated with financial self-sufficiency. At the December, 2009 board meeting, the business manager presented a report on the school year budget and indicated that, due to enrollment numbers, the budget is in danger of shortfall. His report predicted that the Brighter Choice Foundation will loan a substantial amount of money to Green Tech before the end of the fiscal year. According to board minutes, the Green Tech staff and the board have worked to make cuts and prepared a list of additional cuts if necessary.

The board members interviewed indicated they had evaluated the principal in writing and they are in the process of developing a self-evaluation rubric. The principal's evaluation rubric included sections on enrollment, attendance/discipline, budget, test scores, parental relations, personnel management, physical plant, board interaction, decision making, general leadership, and compliance reporting/authorizer relations.


Benchmark 2E: Governance

The board has developed and approved the mission and academic goals included in the school's Accountability Plan. Board members indicated that there is a system in place to assure that goals and priorities are met. They have also have focused on strategies to improve risk factors associated with the school population by implementing after school support and intervention systems. The board relies on the principal to implement and monitor systems to meet school goals and priorities, and have added additional staff this year to help the school to meet goals and priorities, including a dean of students, a family intervention specialist, and a guidance counselor.

The by-laws include articles which describe a process for election, eligibility, term of office, removal, resignation, vacancies, and compensation. The board members interviewed indicated the board meets each June to determine whose term is expiring and who will be staying on the board. Recruiting for new board members is based on the skills that they would bring to the board. A vacancy currently exists on the board for a parent representative.

School and board policies are in place. School policies for students and parents are outlined in the Student Handbook and Code of Conduct 2009-2010; board policies are reflected in the by-laws. According to a review of the by-laws, the board holds bi-monthly meetings. The by-laws allow the meetings to be held at the corporation's principal office or at any other place designated by the board. Interviewees indicated board meetings were held at the school. The board adheres to the New York State public meeting laws and meeting times and dates are published on the school's website and in two other local publications, according to interviewees. The Brighter Choice Foundation also lists the dates and times of board meeting for its schools and includes a description of the state's open meeting law.

The chair of the board is also the executive director of the Brighter Choice Foundation, which provides financial and advisory support to the school. The chair indicated he recuses himself from board votes in matters that may be viewed as a conflict of interest. He indicated that if the school purchases the school building from the foundation, the negotiations would be handled by the chief financial officer of the



foundation and the treasurer of the board. The team was provided a conflict of interest policy that was included in the by-laws and included requirements for board members to abstain from conflicting votes.

Board members indicated a grievance process was in place at the school. A review of the Green Tech High Student Handbook and Code of Conduct 2009-2010 showed that it included a section entitled “Grievance Policy,” which detailed the procedures to follow if there was a concern about school policy or a complaint against the school for violating state law or the school’s charter. A review of these procedures showed that the board and all staff were accessible as part of the complaint process.

METHODOLOGY

The two-day renewal inspection site visit was conducted at Green Tech during the period from May 11 to 12, 2010. The renewal inspection team (the team) conducted interviews with the CDCI; the CDO, the dean of students, the Uncommon Schools managing director of collegiate charter schools, the Uncommon Schools chief operating officer, the special education coordinator, and a social worker. The team used a portion of the State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks to guide the evaluation process.

In addition, the team conducted the following focus groups of school community representatives:

- A board of trustees' interview with eight current members.
- A teacher focus group consisting of five teachers.
- A student focus group consisting of nine students representing grades 9-10.
- A parent focus group consisting of two parents.

The team conducted 14 classroom observations in grades 9 and 10. The observations ranged were 20 minutes in length. Three ELA lessons were observed, four mathematics lessons, two science lesson, two social studies lessons, one physical education class, one programming class, and one Spanish lesson were observed. Team members kept running records of their observations using a classroom observation evidence worksheet.

The documents and data reviewed by the team before, during, and after the site visit included the following:

- Organization chart
- School improvement or strategic plan
- List and calendar of formative and summative assessments
- Copies of data analyses and summaries
- Description of student support programs
- Student and family handbooks
- Faculty and staff handbooks
- Professional development program documents, schedules, and course lists
- Board minutes and by-laws
- Teacher planning time and meeting schedules
- Teacher evaluation tools
- Classroom observation tools
- Job descriptions of school leaders and instructional staff
- School classroom schedules and map
- Teacher roster and certification, including highly qualified status
- Parent surveys and newsletters
- School data to include waiting list, enrollment, student teacher and attrition data
- Sample lesson plans
- Sample student work
- Sample evaluations of teachers, school leaders, and management organizations
- Curriculum documents

The external school evaluation was conducted by an experienced team of educators from Class Measures. Their biographies follow:

Christine Brandt has been an educator for many years, serving as a classroom teacher, special educator, administrator, and principal. She began her career as a Middle School teacher of English, French, Moderate Special Needs, and Reading. She moved into the administrator ranks as a Special Education Director at the Middle School level. For 18 years she served as principal, first in Wellesley, then in Dover, Massachusetts. In addition, she worked with the Somerville Charter School as their Lower School Coordinator. Currently, she mentors and supervises aspiring school administrators in both regular and special education. She serves on the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Elementary School Principals Association and is their Federal Liaison and Legislative Chair. She earned her undergraduate degree from Regis College, and her graduate degrees from the University of Massachusetts at Lowell in Reading and Learning Disabilities and from Northeastern University in Education Administration.

Jeanne Simons, Director of Educational Development. She worked previously as a high school mathematics teacher and in mathematics reform in urban school districts as a Targeted Mathematics Specialist with the Massachusetts Department of Education. She is a content and pedagogical expert in mathematics. She has experience in the development of coaching programs, effective differentiation, assessment and the formative usage of data, and in developing and providing professional development for teachers and leaders across a variety of reform topics. In addition, she has been involved in the development of a variety of technology-based educational initiatives, most recently providing educational support in the development of one of the first online teacher licensure programs in the Middle East. She holds a Bachelor of Science Degree from the California Institute of Technology and a Masters of Education in Mind, Brain and Education from Harvard.

James Hearn is the Vice President of Professional Services for Class Measures. In that capacity, he manages the Class Measures school evaluation and inspection process and all school and district inspection/evaluation/review contracts, participates as a team member on site visits, and edits and writes reports. Jim has over twenty-five years of experience in state government policy and budget analysis, performance auditing, program evaluation, and University teaching. Jim served as a School District Examiner and Field Coordinator for the Massachusetts Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, completing over forty school and district reviews in Massachusetts. For almost a decade, Jim held the position of Senior Policy Analyst for the Senate Post Audit and Oversight Committee of the Massachusetts State Senate. In that capacity, he completed a number of performance audits and policy reviews, including a comprehensive review of the Massachusetts adult correctional education programs. Jim is a former member of the Executive Committee of the National Legislative Program Evaluation Society. From 1982 to 1996, he served as an Adjunct Lecturer in Health Management at University College at Northeastern University. Jim earned his Bachelors Degree in Business from Boston College and holds a Master's Degree in Business from Suffolk University.

Melanie Gallo has been an educator for 35 years. A member of the National School Reform faculty, she has been a teacher and a school director. She has been a founder of two schools: a school in New Hampshire and a charter school in Massachusetts. She has been recognized by the College Board for excellence in teaching AP English and is the author of Senior Project in Creating the Good High School by Mackin/Silva. She is a trained Critical Friends coach and has served on the Board of the Massachusetts Drama Guild. She is currently on the graduate school adjunct faculty at Fitchburg State College. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and a Master's degree in Education from Fitchburg State College. She is at present a Leadership Consultant for Class Measures.