

# THE SUNY CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE

*FIRST YEAR SCHOOL EVALUATION REPORT  
URBAN ASSEMBLY CHARTER SCHOOL  
FOR COMPUTER SCIENCE*

*VISIT DATE: MAY 16, 2019*

*REPORT DATE: JULY 15, 2019*

*SUNY Charter Schools Institute*

*SUNY Plaza*

*353 Broadway*

*Albany, NY 12246*

*518.445.4250*

*[www.newyorkcharters.org](http://www.newyorkcharters.org)*



**Charter Schools Institute**  
The State University of New York



# CONTENTS

**2**

Introduction & School Background

**4**

Benchmark Analysis

**13**

School Overview

# INTRODUCTION & SCHOOL BACKGROUND

## INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the SUNY Charter Schools Institute’s (the “Institute’s”) observations and findings from its May 16, 2019 first year school evaluation visit to the Urban Assembly Charter School for Computer Science (“Comp Sci High”).

## REPORT FORMAT

As with all SUNY authorized charter schools, on a periodic basis throughout the term of the school’s charter the Institute conducts a number of formal site visits. The Institute reports in writing to the school on data gathered during these visits. Cumulatively, the information in reports such as this and those issued in later years, forms the foundation of qualitative data on the school’s effectiveness. At the conclusion of the school’s charter term, the Institute provides the State University of New York Board of Trustees (the “SUNY Trustees”) an analysis of the school’s performance over the term of its charter that includes this qualitative information. The Institute makes a renewal recommendation for the school based on two components: the school’s attainment of its Accountability Plan goals and evidence of the quality of the school’s educational program collected during school evaluation visits.

At renewal, the Institute evaluates the academic, organizational, legal, and fiscal aspects of the school’s program using the State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks (the “SUNY Renewal Benchmarks”; see attachment). For formal first year school evaluation visits conducted prior to renewal, the Institute focuses on specific qualitative benchmarks that provide a fixed standard for determining the quality of the academic program as the school progresses toward renewal.

Although the information provided in this report is not prescriptive, the Institute would expect school leadership to review thoroughly the issues highlighted below and, to the extent helpful, use them to assist in guiding the school’s academic program or other aspects of the school. In this regard, please be aware that although the Institute takes very seriously the conclusions provided, staff members are cognizant of the fact that a one-day site visit may not yield information on all facets of a school’s program.

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SUNY Plaza  
353 Broadway  
Albany, NY 12246

# INTRODUCTION & SCHOOL BACKGROUND

## SCHOOL BACKGROUND

The SUNY Trustees approved the original charter for Comp Sci High on April 13, 2016. The school opened its doors in the fall of 2018, and was chartered to serve 105 students in 9<sup>th</sup> grade during the 2018-19 school year. The school operates in space at 1300 Boynton Avenue, Bronx, New York within New York City Community School District (“CSD”) 12 where it is co-located with several district schools. At scale, Comp Sci High is chartered to serve 420 students in 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

Comp Sci High contracts with the Urban Assembly, Inc. (“Urban Assembly” or the “network”), a New York-based not-for-profit youth development organization that also contracts with multiple district schools in New York City with the goal of providing families with small schools of choice. Urban Assembly provides Comp Sci High with support in the areas of curriculum, leadership development, and data management.

The mission of Comp Sci High states:



*Comp Sci High equips students to be upwardly mobile in technology careers regardless of industry, providing the cognitive skills, direct training, and life preparation they need to succeed in any chosen computer science profession and in the pursuit of higher education. Our goal is to provide a dynamic and connected four-year experience in computer science training, academic education, and social-emotional development, culminating in a high school diploma, an industry credential, and a concrete post-secondary plan for education or work. Our students’ success and our enduring involvement with their communities will reverberate as a middle class opportunity for families and neighbors. Our graduates will be highly tech-literate, emotionally intelligent, and broadly skilled lovers of challenge and adapters to diverse contexts of learning, living, and working.*

Pursuant to the Institute’s inspection of Comp Sci High at the above address on August 8, 2018, (and documentation provided to or inspected by the Institute at that visit and prior/post thereto), the Institute determined that the school had completed substantially all of the Prior Actions required of it as defined in the Charter Agreement between the education corporation and the SUNY Trustees (the “Charter Agreement”) for the operation of the school. Therefore, per Section 3.1 of the Charter Agreement, the Institute permitted the education corporation to provide instruction at the school to students in accordance with the plan provided in the Charter Agreement.

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

## QUALITATIVE BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

The SUNY Renewal Benchmarks, grounded in the body of research from the Center for Urban Studies at Harvard University,<sup>1</sup> describe the elements in place at schools that are highly effective at providing students from low-income backgrounds the instruction, content, knowledge, and skills necessary to produce strong academic performance. The SUNY Renewal Benchmarks describe the elements an effective school must have in place at the time of renewal.<sup>2</sup>

For first year visits, the Institute focuses on academic program benchmarks to establish a baseline measure of the quality of the school's systems and procedures which heavily affect the progress that a school is able to demonstrate in meeting its Accountability Plan goals during the charter term. The Institute expects a school to have moved from the beginning of implementation and the promise of future growth to full and effective implementation of a quality program by the time the school comes to renewal.

## DOES COMP SCI HIGH HAVE AN ASSESSMENT SYSTEM THAT IMPROVES INSTRUCTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND STUDENT LEARNING?

Comp Sci High regularly administers standardized and curriculum-based assessments and has clear systems for sharing updates on student academic progress with parents and students. While individual teachers consistently use assessment data to adjust instruction, school leaders recognize a need to do this more systematically as the school grows.

- Comp Sci High regularly administers standardized and other assessments. Students take the NWEA Measures of Academic Progress ("MAP") assessment three times per year to evaluate academic growth over time according to a standardized norm. The school prioritizes the Algebra I Regents exam for 9<sup>th</sup> grade students and administered several mock Regents exams over the course of the school year to monitor student mastery of algebra content. Curriculum-based assessments vary across content areas, with teachers in most subjects developing the formative and summative assessments for their courses by drawing on a variety of resources such as past Regents exams in English language arts ("ELA") and mathematics. Teachers initially develop assessments at the beginning of each trimester and adjust assessments as needed according to how students respond to instruction during each unit. Teachers utilize multiple assessment

1. An extensive body of research identifying and confirming the correlates of effective schools exists dating back four decades. Selected sources include: <https://www.gao.gov/assets/80/77488.pdf>; and [http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/dobbie\\_fryer\\_revision\\_final.pdf](http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/dobbie_fryer_revision_final.pdf).

2. Additional details regarding the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks are available at: [www.newyorkcharters.org/suny-renewal-benchmarks/](http://www.newyorkcharters.org/suny-renewal-benchmarks/).

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

formats, which facilitates student engagement by allowing students to demonstrate their mastery of content in a variety of ways. For example, at the time of the Institute's visit, students in ELA classes created a written narrative, infographic, or op-ed as an end of unit assessment.

- Individual teachers at Comp Sci High use assessment data to adjust instruction within content areas; however, school leaders acknowledge a need to develop a more systematized approach to tracking student performance across subjects in a more comprehensive, schoolwide way. Although individual teachers have developed their own spreadsheets and databases for tracking student assessment results and other academic data, the school does not currently have a system to accomplish this across classrooms and subject areas. The school intends to add a director of curriculum and instruction to the leadership team for the upcoming school year in order to increase its capacity in this regard. Within subject areas, teachers analyze student assessment results as part of the collaborative planning process. In addition, teachers bring student work to professional development sessions that take place weekly in order to discuss collectively how to meet students' needs based on assessment data. The school also provides professional development on using assessment data to adjust instruction. After each administration of the mock Algebra I Regents exam, mathematics teachers analyze student results and then reteach material or make instructional changes as necessary.
- Comp Sci High makes assessment results and information about student performance accessible to relevant stakeholders through a variety of means. The school's robust advisory system is the primary means through which parents receive information about students; all students have an advisor who meets with them regularly and retains primary responsibility for overseeing advisees' academic performance and overall well-being. Advisors send a weekly email to parents that includes a homework calendar for the week. Teachers update assessment results and grades frequently, which parents can access via an online platform. Teachers also consistently share information such as lesson plans and homework with students and parents using Google Classroom, which students can access outside of class. Parents routinely receive calls and text messages from teachers with updates about students' performance, and some teachers take photos of excellent student work to share with parents via text message.

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

## SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1C

### DOES COMP SCI HIGH'S CURRICULUM SUPPORT TEACHERS IN THEIR INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING?

Comp Sci High has a curricular framework that supports teachers in planning and delivery of instruction. Instructional staff members develop course curricula based on essential questions using a variety of high quality resources and materials.

- Teachers at Comp Sci High utilize internally developed unit plans and scope and sequence documents to support the development of daily lesson plans, and teachers know what to teach and when to teach it based on these documents. ELA teachers spent time before the school year creating curricular guiding documents and have revised them as needed over time in response to student needs. Teachers in ELA classes utilize an inquiry-based unit plan template centered around essential questions, such as “Will technology lead to humankind’s success or destruction?” ELA classes also incorporate class novels, literature circles, and independent reading. Mathematics teachers develop algebra units using a scope and sequence the principal developed based on open source materials from high-performing charter high schools that are available online. Physics, computer science, and social studies teachers implement internally developed curricula based on a variety of open source and commercial resources. Teachers develop daily lesson plans one to two weeks prior to implementing them and frequently make adjustments to these plans based on students’ needs and performance in class and on assessments.
- Teachers at Comp Sci High have access to ample curricular materials that support them in meeting the needs of all students. Teachers utilize a variety of materials and resources both inside and outside the classroom to enhance instruction and student engagement, such as Google Classroom, which enables teachers to communicate useful information to students and parents. Students have regular access to classroom technology such as laptops and robotics, which aligns with the school’s focus on preparing students for careers in technology.

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

## SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1D

### IS HIGH QUALITY INSTRUCTION EVIDENT THROUGHOUT COMP SCI HIGH?

High quality instruction is emerging at Comp Sci High. Students demonstrate a high level of engagement, and a majority of teachers use effective techniques to check for understanding and challenge students to apply higher order thinking skills. However, lesson activities frequently do not align with a discernible objective. As shown in the chart below, during the first year visit, Institute team members conducted 5 classroom observations following a defined protocol used in all school evaluation visits.

GRADE	
9 <sup>th</sup>	
CONTENT AREA	
ELA	1
Math	1
Specials	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>

- Few teachers at Comp Sci High deliver lessons with clear objectives (1 out of 5 lessons observed). While lessons are generally focused and purposeful and students engage in thoughtful academic work, teachers do not consistently communicate explicit learning objectives. Teachers miss opportunities to identify what students should know and be able to do by the end of the lesson and reinforce it throughout the class. While some teachers build on students' previous skills and knowledge, most do not explicitly tie prior learning to a clear objective for the current lesson.
- Some teachers regularly and effectively use techniques to check for student understanding (3 out of 5 lessons observed). In classrooms with regular checks for understanding, teachers consistently circulate to monitor student work and address misconceptions either one on one or as a whole group. Some teachers also utilize techniques such as cold calling students to read out their answers or share what a partner said during a discussion. In classrooms where checks for understanding are not effective, teachers circulate but do not actively monitor student work or adjust instruction according to student performance. Teachers in these classrooms also miss opportunities to gauge the understanding of the class as a whole, instead checking in with only one or two students to evaluate their work and offer feedback.

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- Some teachers include opportunities in their lessons to challenge students with questions and activities that develop depth of understanding and higher order thinking and problem solving skills (3 out of 5 lessons observed). Teachers in classrooms where students consistently engage in higher order thinking employ effective questioning techniques that challenge students to defend and elaborate on their and others' answers. Students in these classrooms also have opportunities to interact with peers and apply their learning to real life situations, such as in an ELA class in which students edited drafts of an op-ed as part of a unit assessment. In classrooms where teachers miss opportunities to challenge students to apply higher order thinking skills, most questioning requires students to recall basic facts rather than analyze and interpret information, and students do not interact with peers consistently.
- Most teachers at Comp Sci High have effective classroom management techniques and routines that create a consistent focus on academic achievement and strong classroom culture (4 out of 5 lessons observed). Students are consistently on task and engaged in academic work. Teachers maintain lesson pacing by minimizing transition time and communicating a sense of urgency. Teachers also routinely provide clear directions so that students know what is expected of them.

## DOES COMP SCI HIGH HAVE STRONG INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP?

Comp Sci High is developing strong instructional leadership to support the development of instructional staff members. The school identifies a need to further develop systems for coaching and evaluation and intends to add an additional leadership team member in the school's second year to address these areas.

- Comp Sci High's leadership team promotes a culture of learning and scholarship for teachers and students, and the school's instructional leadership team effectively supports the development of the teaching staff. Staff members consistently describe school culture as a strength, which the leadership team has intentionally prioritized in the school's first year. The instructional leadership team consists of the principal and director of intervention, both of whom have coaching and supervision responsibilities. The school intends to add a director of curriculum and instruction to the instructional leadership team for the school's second year to further develop the team's capacity to provide robust instructional support to the teaching staff.

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- Instructional leaders support the development of the teaching staff through sustained and systematic coaching. Each instructional leader is responsible for coaching a group of teachers. Leaders observe teachers weekly or bi-weekly followed by a one on one check-in. The frequency of observations is dependent on teacher need, with teachers requiring additional development receiving more frequent observations and check-in meetings. Leaders also pair teachers with one another for peer observations during which partners observe one another weekly and provide feedback via email.
- The school provides regular professional development that supports teachers to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of students. Teachers participate in schoolwide professional development sessions every Wednesday. The leadership team determines the topics for these sessions based on trends in classroom observations and student assessment data. There are also two full day sessions per term during which teachers analyze upcoming unit plans and conduct data analysis to inform their curricular planning.
- Comp Sci High is developing a process to evaluate teachers based on clear criteria. In its first year, the school has adopted an evaluation rubric based on Marzano's teacher evaluation model. The principal uses this rubric to conduct informal mid-year conversations with each staff member and at the time of the Institute's visit intended to conduct similar meetings before the end of the school year. However, the evaluation process is not yet formalized, and not all teachers have a clear understanding of how the school intends to evaluate their performance.

## DOES COMP SCI HIGH MEET THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF AT-RISK STUDENTS?

Comp Sci High is developing systems to support the educational needs of at-risk students. In its founding year, the school's at-risk program team has established effective procedures to identify students struggling academically. The school is beginning to establish interventions for each at-risk sub-group and systems to communicate student progress across multiple stakeholders.

- The school allocates appropriate resources to support the needs of at-risk students including students with disabilities, English language learners ("ELLs"), and students struggling academically. The director of intervention coordinates supports for at-risk students, which at-risk program providers implement. At-risk program providers include a reading specialist and two special educators. Students with disabilities receive push in and pull out support based on the mandated services in their Individualized Education

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

Plans (“IEPs”). Students struggling academically and ELLs receive small group literacy instruction. As an additional layer of academic support, students participate in daily study hall and lab periods. Study hall and lab provide structured time for at-risk students to receive additional one on one support from content teachers.

- Comp Sci High has clear procedures to identify at-risk students. The school is developing systems to ensure at-risk students receive appropriate interventions and all staff members are aware of these interventions. The director of intervention uses various data at the beginning of the year such as MAP and New York state assessments to identify students in need of academic intervention. Using additional data from classroom assessments, progress reports, and trimester exams, the at-risk program team monitors the progress of these students on a regular basis. Based on these data, at-risk program providers determine appropriate interventions and adjust the interventions when necessary. The school is still developing a system to ensure all teachers, including at-risk program providers and general education teachers, are aware of the types of academic support each at-risk student receives to ensure there is effective coordination of these supports.
- The school provides time for at-risk staff members and general education teachers to coordinate on a weekly basis during the school day or during schoolwide weekly professional development sessions. In a more formal way, the at-risk program team presents reading growth progress to the entire teaching staff every three weeks, and the school sets time aside to discuss students that are failing a course once every trimester.

## DOES THE SCHOOL ORGANIZATION EFFECTIVELY SUPPORT THE DELIVERY OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM?

Comp Sci High is establishing an organizational structure that will enable the school to deliver the educational program effectively.

- The school has an administrative structure with instructional and operational expertise that allows it to deliver the academic program. In addition to instructional leaders, the school’s leadership team includes a director of culture and operations who oversees the effective implementation of operational systems at the school. The school also employs a director of external partnerships to support out of school opportunities for students such as internships and summer activities.

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- Comp Sci High has established a safe and orderly school environment in which teachers and students focus on academic achievement. Student attendance and discipline data reflect the safe and orderly environment teachers and leaders have developed. Daily attendance averages 95%, and student retention has been strong with the school losing only two students during the 2018-19 school year as the result of geographic relocation.
- The school allocates sufficient resources to implement the academic program. Teachers have access to curricular materials that support high quality instruction, and they know the process for requesting additional resources. The school employs an appropriate number of staff with no vacancies at the time of the Institute’s visit. Through the work of the director of external partnerships, the school has developed strong relationships with various community partners and intends to place 93% of its students in summer jobs.

Comp Sci High was authorized to serve 105 students during the 2018-19 school year; its enrollment at the time of the Institute’s visit was 110 students, placing it within the Institute’s enrollment collar. Specific strategies the school uses to maintain enrollment and retention include:

- posting information about the school lottery in print and online media in order to reach a wide audience of prospective families;
- hosting events such as an open house for prospective families; and,
- maintaining an updated website and regular presence on social media.

## DOES THE SCHOOL BOARD WORK EFFECTIVELY TO ACHIEVE THE SCHOOL’S ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GOALS?

Comp Sci High’s board members actively engage with the school, and the board has effective structures in place to provide effective oversight of the school’s academic program as well as its organizational and fiscal status.

- The Comp Sci High board has adequate skills, structures, and procedures with which to govern the school. Board members possess a variety of skills and experiences in areas relevant to supporting the school, such as education, finance, and technology. Board members acknowledge the need to add additional expertise in real estate management as the school grows and seek to identify new members who can build its capacity in that respect. The board operates with a committee structure that includes an accountability,

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

finance, governance, and development committee. Board members identify developing community partnerships as critical to the school's success as it builds out its career and technical education ("CTE") program over time and have prioritized building relationships with potential partner organizations including Google and local business owners.

- The board receives sufficient information from the principal to provide rigorous oversight. The principal provides board members with an updated dashboard at monthly meetings that includes information about the school's academic, organizational, and fiscal health. The principal and board chair also have a standing weekly phone call during which they discuss issues relevant to the school. Some board members engage with the school as volunteers and work with students as tutors, which enables board members to see the school in action and speak directly to students. Additionally, the school conducts surveys of parents and students to determine their satisfaction with the school and reports on the outcomes of these surveys to the board.
- The Comp Sci High board has developed clear criteria for evaluating the head of school that include academic, operational, and fiscal management. The board conducts an annual formal evaluation of the principal through a qualitative process that assesses the principal's performance according to these criteria, which include specific student achievement outcomes.

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# SCHOOL OVERVIEW

## URBAN ASSEMBLY CHARTER SCHOOL FOR COMPUTER SCIENCE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

### CHAIR

Angel Morales

### VICE CHAIR

Marielys Divanne

### TREASURER

Pravin Sathe

### SECRETARY

Kristin Kearns-Jordan

### TRUSTEES

Ivonne Fleitas

Kwadwo Nyarko

Marianna Ofosu

Lindsey Dixon

Bethany Crystal

## SCHOOL LEADERS

*David Noah, Principal (2018 - Present)*

## SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

SCHOOL YEAR	CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL AS A PERCENTAGE OF CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	PROPOSED GRADES	ACTUAL GRADES
2018-19	105	110	105%	9	9

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# SCHOOL OVERVIEW

## CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

DATE(S) OF VISIT	EVALUATION TEAM MEMBERS	TITLE
May 16, 2019	Hannah Hansen Maureen Foley	School Evaluation Analyst Director for New Charters

## KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS:

ELEMENT	EVIDENT?
Standards-aligned and mastery driven instruction	+
A holistic and supportive school culture	+
A career and technical education framework for computer science education	+
Post-secondary awareness, advisement, and planning structures	+
Robust and flexible scheduling	+
Embedded weekly, monthly, and yearly professional development	+
Cycles of continuous improvement	+

