



# Brighter Choice Charter Middle School for Girls

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## 2012-13 School Evaluation Report

**Visit Date: March 14-15, 2013**

**Report Issued: March 4, 2014**

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## INTRODUCTION

This School Evaluation Report includes four components. The first section, titled School Overview, provides descriptive information about the school, including enrollment and demographic data, as well as historical information regarding the life of the school. The second section provides background information on the conduct of the evaluation visit, including the date of the visit and information about the evaluation team and puts the visit in the context of the school's current charter cycle. The third section provides the school's 2012-13 Performance Review and Summaries, which gives an analysis of the attainment of the key academic goals in the school's Accountability Plan. Finally, a fourth section entitled School Evaluation Visit presents overall benchmark conclusions (in italics) and an analysis of evidence collected for each of the respective benchmarks. Following these sections, the report includes an appendix containing the Qualitative Education Benchmarks (a component of the Renewal Benchmarks) used during the visit

The Qualitative Education Benchmarks address the academic success of the school, focusing on teaching and learning (i.e., curriculum, instruction, and assessment), and the effectiveness and viability of the school organization, including board oversight and organizational capacity. The Institute uses the established criteria on a regular and ongoing basis to provide schools with a consistent set of expectations leading up to renewal.

**The report below provides more detailed conclusions, and evidence to support these conclusions, for some benchmarks in order to highlight areas of concern and provide additional feedback. In contrast to the format of reports issued in previous years and in an effort to issue reports in a timelier manner, the Institute now approaches the presentation as an exception report and deliberately emphasizes areas of concern. As such, limited detail and evidence about positive aspects of the program are not an indication that the Institute does not fully recognize evidence of program effectiveness.**

Because of the inherent complexity of a school organization, this School Evaluation Report does not contain a single rating or comprehensive indicator that would specify at a glance the school's prospects for renewal. It does, however, summarize the various strengths of the school and note areas in need of improvement based on the Qualitative Education Benchmarks.

## SCHOOL OVERVIEW

### Opening Information

Date Initial Charter Approved by SUNY Trustees	September 15, 2009
Date Initial Charter Approved by: Board of Regents	January 12, 2010
School Opening Date	September 7, 2010

### Location

School Year(s)	Location(s)	Grades	District
2010-11	250 Central Avenue, Albany, NY	5	Albany
2011-12 to Present	395 Elk Street, Albany, NY	5-7	Albany

### Partner Organizations

	Partner Name	Partner Type	Dates of Service
Current Partner	Brighter Choice Foundation	Nonprofit Foundation <sup>1</sup>	2010-11 to Present

### Mission Statement

The mission of the Brighter Choice Charter Middle School for Girls is to prepare girls for high school and college success while attending to the unique developmental needs of middle school scholars.

### Key Design Elements

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Differentiating instruction to meet the wide ranging learning needs of its entire scholar body.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offering single-gender instruction in flexible learning spaces.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilizing data from all aspects of its operation to inform decision making and improve scholar performance.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Committing to technology use and integration into the school's academic program and culture.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing staff advisors and group seminars to support the positive social and emotional growth of adolescents.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offering individualized counseling and guidance throughout the high school placement process.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Brighter Choice Foundation provides the school with assistance in curriculum and instruction, facility design, construction and financing, as well as advocacy and other support. Though the foundation is not a charter management organization, it does collect a per-pupil fee for service.

## Student Demographics<sup>2</sup>

	2010-11		2011-12		2012-13 <sup>3</sup>
	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of School District Enrollment	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of School District Enrollment	Percent of School Enrollment
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>					
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0	0	0	0
Black or African American	88	59	79	55	80
Hispanic	12	12	19	14	15
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	0	7	0	7	0
White	0	21	3	21	5
Multiracial	0	1	0	2	0
<b>Special Populations</b>					
Students with Disabilities <sup>4</sup>	N/A	N/A	9	15	5
English Language Learners	2	6	5	7	3.5
<b>Free/Reduced Lunch</b>					
Eligible for Free Lunch	74	52	78	60	77
Eligible for Reduced-Price Lunch	17	8	9	7	10

<sup>2</sup> Source: 2010-11 and 2011-12 School Report Cards, New York State Education Department.

<sup>3</sup> The Institute derived the 2012-13 statistics from the school's October 2012 student enrollment report to SED (2012-13 BEDS Report). District data are not yet available.

<sup>4</sup> District-level students with disabilities enrollment data are not available for 2010-11. SED released these district data for the first time in spring 2012 as the State's Empirical Analysis of Enrollment Targets.

**Board of Trustees<sup>5</sup>**

<b>Board Member Name</b>	<b>Position/Committees</b>
Chris Bender	Chair
Lucia Fisher	Vice Chair
Joanne McElroy-Moore	Trustee
Martha J. Snyder	Secretary
Nilsa Vellessa	Trustee

**School Leader(s)**

<b>School Year</b>	<b>School Leader(s) Name and Title</b>
2010-11 to 2011-12	Vanessa Threatte, Principal
2012-13 to Present	Darryl Williams, Director of Schools Kim Arrington, Principal

**School Visit History**

<b>School Year</b>	<b>Visit Type</b>	<b>Evaluator (Institute/External)</b>	<b>Date</b>
2010-11	First-Year Visit	Institute	April 6, 2011
2012-13	Evaluation Visit	Institute	March 14-15, 2013

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<sup>5</sup> Source: Institute board records.

## CONDUCT OF THE SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT

### Specifications

Date(s) of Visit	Evaluation Team Members	Title
March 14-15, 2013	Sean Fitzsimons	Director of School Applications
	Jeff Wasbes	Director of Performance and Systems Analysis
	Joe Nicolella	Consultant

### Context of the Visit

Charter Cycle	
Charter Term	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year of the First Charter Term
Accountability Period <sup>6</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year of the Current Four Year Accountability Period
Anticipated Renewal Visit	Fall 2014

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<sup>6</sup> Because the SUNY Trustees make a renewal decision in the last year of a charter term, the Accountability Period ends in the next to last year of the charter term. For initial renewals, the Accountability Period is the first four years of the Charter Term. For subsequent renewals, the Accountability Period includes the last year of the previous charter term through the next to last year of the current charter term.

## 2012-13 School Performance Review

At the beginning of the charter term, the school developed and adopted an Accountability Plan that set academic goals in the key subjects of English Language Arts (“ELA”) and math. The Accountability Plan also includes science and No Child Left Behind Act (“NCLB”) goals. For each goal in the Accountability Plan, specific outcome measures define the level of performance necessary to meet that goal.

Note: This year the Institute is not taking into account the two absolute ELA and math measures when evaluating schools’ goal attainment. Because of the high standards in the new state testing program only a handful of schools statewide met the absolute proficiency target and the state has not yet recalibrated the absolute Annual Measurable Objective. Further, the results for the growth measure are not yet available.

### ***Performance Evaluation***

**In 2012-13, the second year that both comparative measures in ELA and math were applicable to Brighter Choice Middle School for Girls’ (“BC Girls”) and the third year of its four-year Accountability Period, the school is meeting neither its ELA nor its math goal. Given the school’s failure to meet its key academic Accountability Plan goals, BC Girls’ prospects for renewal are in jeopardy**

The school is meeting its No Child Left Behind (“NCLB”) goal and does not yet have results in science.

### ***ELA***

Through the first three years of the Accountability Period, BC Girls has not met any of the ELA measures that constitute the goal. It has underperformed the Albany City School District by about ten percentage points in each of the last two years. In comparison to demographically similar schools, BC Girls has performed worse than expected each year and much lower than expected in the last two years.

### ***Math***

Through the first two years of the Accountability Period, BC Girls did not meet any of the math measures that constitute the goal. In 2012-13, it has met one measure, the mean growth percentile. It has underperformed the Albany City School District in each of the last two years. In comparison to demographically similar schools, BC Girls has performed worse than expected each year.

### ***NCLB***

BC Girls has met its NCLB goal in the first two years of its charter.

### ***Science***

In 2012-13, the school did not enroll students in grades in which the state administers its science exam.

**SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY: English Language Arts**  
**Brighter Choice Charter Middle School for Girls**



	2010-11			MET	2011-12			MET	2012-13			MET			
	Grades Served: 5				Grades Served: 5-6				Grades Served: 5-7						
	Grades	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)		Grades	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)		Grades	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)				
<b>ABSOLUTE MEASURES</b>															
1. Each year 75 percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at proficiency on the New York State exam.	3	(0)	(0)		3	(0)	(0)		3	(0)	(0)				
	4	(0)	(0)		4	(0)	(0)		4	(0)	(0)				
	5	34.9 (43)	(0)		5	20.3 (59)	0.0 (3)		5	8.9 (56)	0.0 (1)				
	6	(0)	(0)		6	29.2 (48)	33.3 (33)		6	5.3 (57)	4.4 (45)				
	7	(0)	(0)		7	(0)	(0)		7	7.1 (42)	8.3 (36)				
	8	(0)	(0)		8	(0)	(0)		8	(0)	(0)				
	All	34.9 (43)	(0)		All	24.3 (107)	30.6 (36)	NO	All	7.1 (155)	6.1 (82)	NO			
2. Each year the school's aggregate Performance Level Index on the State exam will meet the Annual Measurable Objective set forth in the State's NCLB accountability system.	Grades	PI	AMO		Grades	PI	AMO		Grades	PI	AMO				
	5	119	122	NO	5-6	107	135	NO	5-7	59					
<b>COMPARATIVE MEASURES</b>															
3. Each year the percent of students enrolled in at least their second year and performing at proficiency will be greater than that of students in the same grades in the local district.	Comparison: Albany City Schools				Comparison: Albany City Schools				Comparison: Albany City Schools						
	Grades	School	District		Grades	School	District		Grades	School	District				
	NA			NA	6	30.6	40.1	NO	6-7	6.1	18.8	NO			
4. Each year the school will exceed its predicted percent of students at proficiency on the state exam by at least a small Effect Size (at least 0.3) based on its percentage of Economically Disadvantaged students.	% FL	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size		% FL	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size		% ED	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size	
	73.8	34.9	40.6	-0.29	NO	79.6	24.3	38.6	-0.88	NO	89.7	7.1	15.3	-0.72	NO
<b>GROWTH MEASURE</b>															
5. Each year, the school's unadjusted mean growth percentile will meet or exceed the state's unadjusted median growth percentile.	Grades	School	State		Grades	School	State		Grades	School	State				
	4				4				4	0.0					
	5				5				5	34.6					
	6				6				6	47.3					
	7				7				7	42.6					
	8				8				8	0.0					
	All	36.5	50.0	NO	All	35.0	50.0	NO	All	41.6	50.0				NO

**SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY: Mathematics**  
**Brighter Choice Charter Middle School for Girls**



	2010-11 Grades Served: 5			MET	2011-12 Grades Served: 5-6			MET	2012-13 Grades Served: 5-7			MET			
	Grades	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)		Grades	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)		Grades	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)				
		3	(0)			( )	3			(0)	(0)		3	(0)	(0)
<b><u>ABSOLUTE MEASURES</u></b>															
1. Each year 75 percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at proficiency on the New York State exam.	4	(0)	( )		4	(0)	(0)		4	(0)	(0)				
	5	41.9 (43)	( )		5	11.9 (59)	0.0 (3)		5	7.1 (56)	0.0 (1)				
	6	(0)	( )		6	29.2 (48)	36.4 (33)		6	10.5 (57)	11.1 (45)				
	7	(0)	( )		7	(0)	(0)		7	4.8 (42)	5.6 (36)				
	8	(0)	( )		8	(0)	(0)		8	(0)	(0)				
	All	41.9 (43)	( )		All	19.6 (107)	33.3 (36)	NO	All	7.7 (155)	8.5 (82)	NO			
2. Each year the school's aggregate Performance Index on the State exam will meet the Annual Measurable Objective set forth in the State's NCLB accountability system.	Grades	PI	AMO		Grades	PI	AMO		Grades	PI	AMO				
	5	128	137	NO	5-6	98	148	NO	5-7	60					
<b><u>COMPARATIVE MEASURES</u></b>	Comparison: Albany City Schools				Comparison: Albany City Schools				Comparison: Albany City Schools						
3. Each year the percent of students enrolled in at least their second year and performing at proficiency will be greater than that of students in the same grades in the local district.	Grades	School	District		Grades	School	District		Grades	School	District				
	NA			NA	6	33.3	50.7	NO	6-7	8.5	11.2	NO			
4. Each year the school will exceed its predicted level of students at proficiency on the State exam by at least a small Effect Size (at least 0.3) based on its percentage of Economically Disadvantaged students.	% FL	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size		% FL	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size		% ED	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size	
	73.8	41.9	54.0	-0.62	NO	79.6	19.6	51.3	-1.52	NO	89.7	7.7	16.0	-0.53	NO
<b><u>GROWTH MEASURE</u></b>	Grades	School	State		Grades	School	State		Grades	School	State				
5. Each year, the school's unadjusted mean growth percentile will meet or exceed the state's unadjusted median growth percentile.	4				4				4	0.0					
	5				5				5	58.2					
	6				6				6	60.7					
	7				7				7	60.3					
	8				8				8	0.0					
	All	15.5	50.0	NO	All	21.3	50.0	NO	All	59.7	50.0	YES			

## SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT

### **Benchmark Conclusions and Evidence**

#### **Use of Assessment Data**

***While BC Girls made changes to its assessment system, the school has not improved its instructional effectiveness.***

- BC Girls administers Terra Nova assessments, STAR reading and math assessments, thrice yearly interim assessments (“IAs”) and the New York state exams to all students. Instructional leaders use the results of the Terra Nova exams to group students and to monitor student growth over the course of the school year.
- The network’s director of school quality, an instructional leadership position oversees the assessment program at Brighter Choice Charter Elementary Schools for Girls and Boys and the Brighter Choice Middle Schools for Girls and Boys (the “network”). A consultant designs the interim assessments and the network assessment coordinator reportedly ensures that IAs align with state performance standards and with the school’s curriculum.
- Teachers engage in a reliable process for scoring exams. Writing teachers and instructional leaders use the Common Core writing rubric and exchange students’ exam papers in an effort to ensure inter-rater reliability.
- Instructional leaders hold IA data analysis sessions with teachers to identify topics for re-teaching and to select students for small group instruction. They also use the analysis to adjust classroom instruction and to adjust the curriculum scope and sequence; however, given state test results, these responses are inadequate for improving student achievement.

#### **Curriculum**

***BC Girls’ curriculum supports teachers in their instructional planning.***

- The school uses the Common Core State Standards to provide a fixed, underlying structure for curriculum development and to ensure alignment across grades.
- Instructional leaders and teachers from BC Girls work with staff from its brother school, Brighter Choice Middle School for Boys (“BC Boys”), to develop common scope and sequence documents that provide pacing, instructional topics, texts and skill foci. Teachers regularly refer to these documents to inform lesson plan development.
- At the time of the visit, leaders had informally started to discuss curricular options for the school’s expansion to include 8<sup>th</sup> grade but had not taken any formal steps toward developing curriculum.

#### **Pedagogy**

***Adequate, teacher-centered instruction is generally evident throughout the school; however, students have few opportunities to develop the higher-order thinking skills necessary to demonstrate proficiency on state exams.***

- Together with teachers from BC Boys, teachers plan purposeful lessons as subject area teams thus ensuring vertical alignment. Lesson plans include purposeful classroom

activities aligned with clearly communicated learning objectives.

- The teacher-centered instruction at BC Girls limits students' independent processing and application of information. Teachers miss opportunities to build students' higher-order thinking skills. For example, while many teachers use Venn diagrams to encourage students to compare and contrast information they walk the students through the activity without challenging them to explain their answers or evaluate their peers' responses.
- As evidenced in teachers' plans, lessons follow a standardized, school-wide "I-we-you" instructional framework meant to gradually release responsibility for learning from the teacher to students. Many teachers spend significant time on the teacher modeling ("I") or whole group ("we") portions of the lesson but do not move to the independent practice ("you") section of the lessons, which limits opportunities for independent student application of knowledge
- Most teachers regularly check for student understanding by circulating around the room to check work, as well as questioning students during lessons and requiring exit tickets after lessons. The frequency of teacher checks notwithstanding, most questions do little more than require students to recall factual information.
- Teachers effectively implement common classroom management techniques to keep students on task. For example, teachers have a set vocabulary to re-direct students and use cold-calling to make sure that all students participate in the lesson.

### **Instructional Leadership**

***Despite significant staffing changes following poor student achievement results on state tests, BC Girls' instructional leaders have not instilled high expectations for teacher performance or student achievement.***

- The BC Girls board replaced the school's founding principal following the 2011-12 school year and added new positions to support teachers' development. In contrast to previous years, the school's instructional leadership includes a school-level director of instructional quality and a network-level director of schools in addition to the principal.
- The school's instructional leaders conduct frequent teacher observations using shared frameworks to standardize feedback and expectations. Instructional leaders track individual teacher progress with brief summaries of teacher observations as well as assessments of each teacher's progress in meeting instructional goals and growth targets.
- Teachers have regular opportunities to plan curriculum and instruction in grade teams and content area departments. BC Girls teachers have daily grade level common planning and meet with their counterparts from BC Boys on a weekly basis for additional shared instructional planning and professional development activities.
- Teachers participate in an extensive two-week summer pre-service training; the school also conducts weekly half-day professional development activities where school leaders facilitate sessions on specific topics. School leaders report planning and implementing professional development activities based on state assessment results from the previous year, network-level IAs and teacher observations.
- School leaders conduct mid- and end- of-year teacher evaluations using a network-wide rubric, which leaders report places a large emphasis on quality instruction; however, poor achievement results, as well as continued deficits in instructional quality observed during the school visit, suggest that instructional leaders do not hold teachers accountable for student outcomes.

### **At-Risk Students**

***BC Girls uses clear procedures to identify at-risk students and provides a range of services to meet their educational needs, but state assessment results provide evidence that the services are ineffective in supporting students to meet proficiency standards.***

- The school uses standardized assessments such as STAR reading and math exams to identify students at-risk for academic failure. BC Girls' Academic Intervention Services (AIS) team provides small group instruction for students who are struggling academically. The AIS team tracks the achievement of all students receiving academic intervention services, and reviews this information to monitor students' progress.
- Three special education teachers support the school's seven students with Individualized Education Programs ("IEPs") mandating academic intervention with resource room and push-in services in addition to supporting students at-risk of academic failure. Special education staff provides teachers with information about students' IEPs and accommodations at the beginning of the year. At-risk staff participates in Friday professional development and also join general education teachers during common planning time to discuss strategies for supporting at-risk students in general education classrooms and to help modify materials to meet students' individual needs.
- BC Girls uses the home language survey and the Language Assessment Battery-Revised to identify English language learners ("ELLs"). A certified English as a second language teacher provides tutoring during the school day for the school's six ELLs. The school administers the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test ("NYSESSLAT"), but classroom teachers are not aware of students' progress toward English proficiency.

### **Organizational Capacity**

***The changes to the BC Girls' organizational structure have not brought about positive results in supporting the effective delivery of the educational program.***

- The school's partner organization supports a coalition of four Brighter Choice schools, including the Brighter Choice Charter Schools for Boys and Girls and BC Boys and Girls middle schools, and has put in place a number of senior leaders tasked with assisting principals in accomplishing the schools' mission. . This consolidation of leadership responsibilities has not resulted in improvements in student achievement.
- With a director of finance and operations overseeing business operations for the school, BC Girls has an organizational structure that limits instructional leaders' administrative duties, presumably allowing singular focus on teaching and learning; however, this separation of responsibilities has not resulted in significantly improved pedagogy.
- The school provides ample curriculum resources, materials and instructional technology.
- BC Girls has implemented a well-defined school-wide discipline policy. Displays throughout the school track students' performance on its school-wide behavior management system.
- BC Girls has experienced relatively little teacher turnover. While the stability of a teaching team is often cited as a positive indicator of a school's future success, BC Girls' leaders' decision to rehire all teachers following poor results on state exams suggests a lack of accountability for student achievement and low expectations for teacher performance.

### **Board Oversight**

***Although its members possess the skills and expertise needed for effective governance and the BC Girls board has taken a number of steps to improve student performance, these initiatives have not enabled the school to meet its academic goals.***

- Board members have expertise in the areas of law, business, education and child welfare, as well as charter school policy, practice and governance. While board members have sufficient knowledge necessary to monitor the school's finances, the board is actively seeking to add a member with stronger financial skills.
- The board holds monthly meetings, with the board's one permanent committee, the budget and governance committee, meeting more frequently to address any concerns that may arise.
- Board members monitor the health of the school through a dashboard presented by the director of schools that contains information about the school's academic performance on standardized tests, attendance, suspension rates, personnel issues, and school finances. Through this dashboard, the board is aware of BC Girls' challenges in successfully implementing its programs.
- The board has taken actions to address deficiencies. Based on low performance on state assessments and other concerns identified through the board's monitoring, in the second year of the charter term, the board brought in an independent group of consultants to evaluate the school and make suggestions for how to improve it. At the end of the second year, the board chose to replace the school's leadership to improve the school's outcomes. While the board set realistic expectations for student achievement, the school has performed far below those expectations.