

# THE SUNY CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE

*SCHOOL EVALUATION REPORT*  
**BUFFALO UNITED  
CHARTER SCHOOL**

*VISIT DATE: MAY 15-16, 2019*  
*REPORT DATE: JUNE 18, 2019*

*SUNY Charter Schools Institute*

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



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# INTRODUCTION & SCHOOL BACKGROUND

## INTRODUCTION

This School Evaluation Report offers an analysis of evidence collected during the school visit on May 15-16, 2019 to Buffalo United Charter School (“Buffalo United”). While the SUNY Charter Schools Institute (the “Institute”) conducts a comprehensive review of evidence related to all the State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks (the “SUNY Renewal Benchmarks”) near the end of a charter term, most mid-cycle school evaluation visits focus on a subset of these benchmarks. This subset, the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, addresses the academic success of the school and the effectiveness and viability of the school organization. It provides a framework for examining the quality of the educational program, focusing on teaching and learning (e.g., curriculum, instruction, assessment, and services for at-risk students), as well as leadership, organizational capacity, and board oversight. The Institute uses the established criteria on a regular basis to provide schools with a consistent set of expectations leading up to renewal.

Appendix A to the report contains a School Overview with descriptive information about the school, including enrollment and demographic data, as well as historical information regarding the life of the school. It also provides background information on the conduct of the visit, including information about the evaluation team, and puts the visit in the context of the school’s current charter cycle. Appendix B displays the performance summary that contains the school’s performance on the required measures under its English language arts (“ELA”) and mathematics goals. Appendix C displays the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks.

This report does not contain an overall rating or comprehensive indicator that would specify at a glance the school’s prospects for renewal. Rather, it serves as a summary of the school’s program based on the Qualitative Education Benchmarks. The Institute intends this selection of information to be an exception report in order to highlight areas of concern. As such, limited detail about positive elements of the educational program is not an indication that the Institute does not recognize other indicators of program effectiveness.

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# INTRODUCTION & SCHOOL BACKGROUND

## SCHOOL BACKGROUND

The SUNY Trustees approved the original charter for Buffalo United on September 13, 2002. The school opened its doors in the fall of 2003, initially serving 240 students in Kindergarten – 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Buffalo United is in its third year of its fourth charter term currently chartered to serve 760 students in Kindergarten – 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The school is located in the Buffalo City School District at 325 Manhattan Avenue, Buffalo, NY.

Buffalo United’s mission states:



*Buffalo United Charter School will offer families and students a public charter school, which focuses on high academic achievement and instills a sense of family, community, and leadership within all of our students.*

Buffalo United partners with National Heritage Academies, Inc. (“NHA” or the “network”), a Michigan for-profit educational charter management organization. NHA provides the school with back office services such as human resources, purchasing, budget management, and financial oversight. The network also provides academic service support through leadership coaching, assessment and curriculum development, and professional development design. NHA partners with three SUNY authorized charter schools, which are separate education corporations and have distinct boards, and with three other charter schools in New York State: one authorized by the Board of Regents; and, two authorized by the New York City Schools Chancellor.

In its fourth charter term, Buffalo United has not established an academic program that is strong and effective. NHA’s regional support staff and other resources do not effectively develop the school leaders’ abilities to grow teacher skills, and the board does not urgently hold NHA and school leaders accountable for improved academic outcomes.

In an attempt to target instruction based on student need, during this charter term and previous charter terms, the school has separated students into three ability-based cohorts in every grade level. At the time of the Institute’s visit, the school shared that after seeing little growth with the lowest performing groups of students, it will shift the cohort model for the 2019-20 school year to have two heterogeneous sections and continue with one advanced level section in each grade.

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# INTRODUCTION & SCHOOL BACKGROUND

Despite this year's changes to the school's collection and use of data, and the anticipated changes in student cohort groupings, the school lacks systems to evaluate the quality of the implementation of curricula, data analysis, professional development, and coaching supports. As such, the school does not have evidence to demonstrate how the academic program will result in all students, including its lowest performing, meeting or coming close to meeting grade level standards and leaving Buffalo United fully prepared for high school.



# ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

## 2017-18 SCHOOL PERFORMANCE REVIEW

At the beginning of the Accountability Period,<sup>1</sup> the school developed and adopted an Accountability Plan that set academic goals in the key subjects of ELA and mathematics. For each goal in the Accountability Plan, specific outcome measures define the level of performance necessary to meet that goal. Throughout the charter term, the Institute examines results for five required Accountability Plan measures on an annual basis and provides an Accountability Dossier to each school detailing the school's progress toward meeting its Accountability Plan goals. Because the Act requires charters be held "accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results"<sup>2</sup> and states the educational programs at a charter school must "meet or exceed the student performance standards adopted by the board of regents"<sup>3</sup> for other public schools, SUNY's required accountability measures rest on performance as measured by statewide assessments. More information about the required Accountability Plan measures can be found on the Institute's website at [www.newyorkcharters.org/accountability/](http://www.newyorkcharters.org/accountability/).

During 2017-18, the third year of the school's five year Accountability Period, Buffalo United did not meet its key academic Accountability Plan goals in ELA or mathematics, after not meeting the goals in 2016-17 and coming close to meeting the goals in 2015-16. The school came close to meeting its science goal and met its No Child Left Behind ("NCLB") goal. Based on this record of academic performance, Buffalo United's prospects for earning a renewal are currently in jeopardy.

1. Because the SUNY Trustees make a renewal decision before student achievement results for the final year of a charter term become available, the Accountability Period ends with the school year prior to the final year of the charter term. For a school in a subsequent charter term, the Accountability Period covers the final year of the previous charter term and ends with the school year prior to the final year of the current charter term.

2. Education Law § 2850(2)(f).

3. Education Law § 2854(1)(d).

### ELA

In 2017-18, Buffalo United did not meet its ELA goal. With 29% of the school's students enrolled in at least their second year scoring at or above proficiency, Buffalo United's performance fell 46 percentage points below the absolute target of 75%. As it had in 2016-17, the school slightly outperformed the district by six percentage points but posted a comparative effect size below the target of 0.3, which means that in comparison to schools across the state enrolling similar percentages of economically disadvantaged students, Buffalo United performed lower than expected. The school posted a mean growth percentile that exceeded the target of 50 by two points. Given the school's low absolute proficiency, this level of average growth is not sufficient to improve the performance of all students such that they meet or exceed proficiency standards before matriculating out of the school after 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

# ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

## MATHEMATICS

Buffalo United failed to meet its mathematics goal in 2017-18 and in 2016-17. With 26% of the school's students enrolled in at least their second year scoring at or above proficiency, the school's performance fell far below the absolute target. While the district's performance increased by four percentage points from 2016-17, Buffalo United's performance remained essentially the same and the gap between the school and the district narrowed to only five percentage points. The school failed to meet its comparative effect size target of 0.3 for the third consecutive year and performed lower than expected in comparison to demographically similar schools across the state. Buffalo United also did not meet its growth target posting a mean growth percentile slightly below the target of 50.

Buffalo United groups students in each grade level into three ability-based groupings. In 8<sup>th</sup> grade, typically two of the three cohorts take the state mathematics exam and the highest performing students take the Regents Algebra I exam. The school administered the Regents Algebra I exam to 23 of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. Although not included in its Accountability Plan, for this group of students the school posted commendable achievement, with 83% of those tested students passing with a score of 65 or higher. However, in 2018, for the second consecutive year, none of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students who took the state's mathematics exam scored at or above proficiency.

## SCIENCE

Buffalo United came close to meeting its science goal in 2017-18 after also coming close to meeting it in the first two years of its Accountability Period. However, only 38% of the school's 8<sup>th</sup> grade students scored at or above proficiency, falling far below the absolute target of 75%. Ninety percent of the school's 4<sup>th</sup> grade students enrolled in at least their second year scored at or above proficiency.

## NCLB

The school met its NCLB goal in 2017-18 as the state's accountability system did not identify Buffalo United as a focus charter or needing improvement.

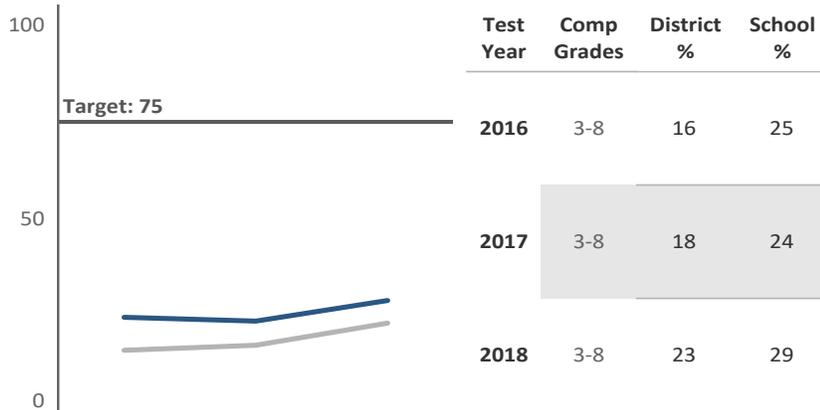
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# ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

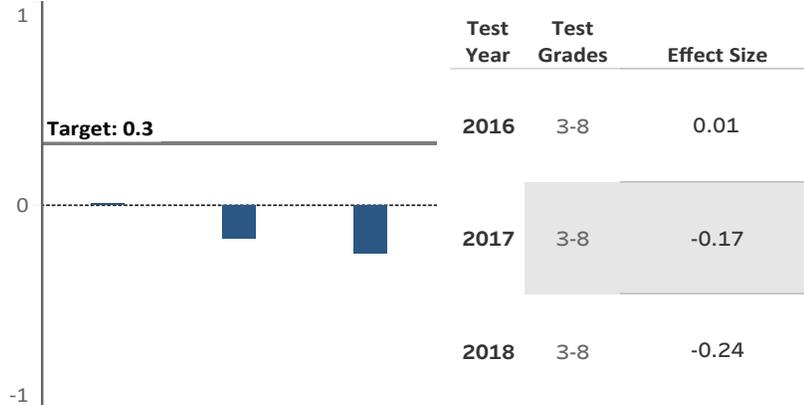
## BUFFALO UNITED CHARTER SCHOOL

### ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GOAL

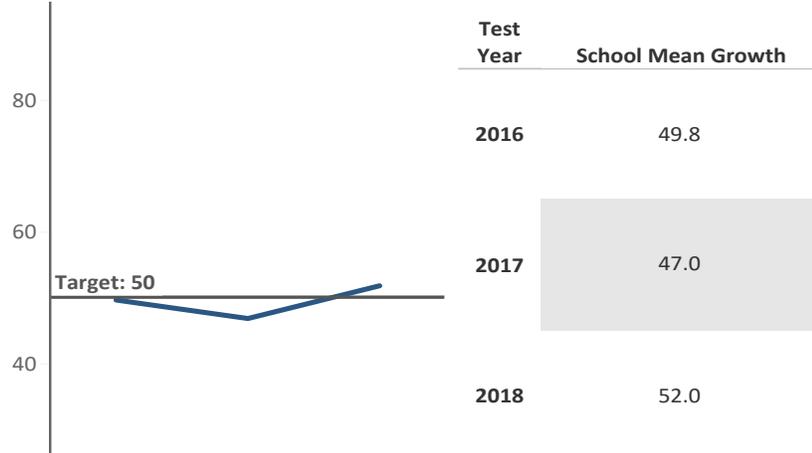
**Comparative Measure: District Comparison.** Each year, the percentage of students at **the school** in at least their second year performing at or above proficiency in ELA will be greater than that of students in the same tested grades in the **district**.



**Comparative Measure: Effect Size.** Each year, the school will exceed its predicted level of performance by an effect size of 0.3 or above in **ELA** according to a regression analysis controlling for economically disadvantaged students among all public schools in New York State.



**Comparative Growth Measure: Mean Growth Percentile.** Each year, the school's unadjusted mean growth percentile for all students in grades 4-8 will be above the state's unadjusted median growth percentile in **ELA**.

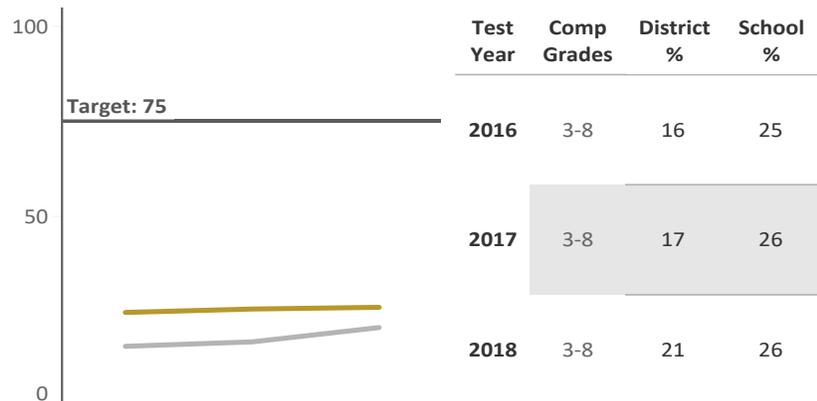


# ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

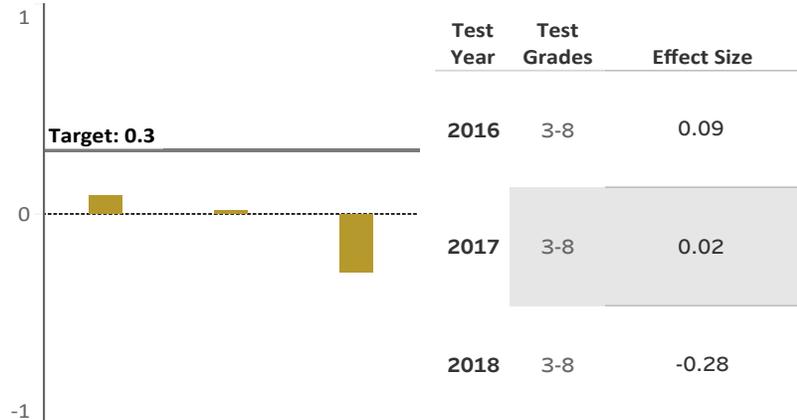
## BUFFALO UNITED CHARTER SCHOOL

### MATHEMATICS ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GOAL

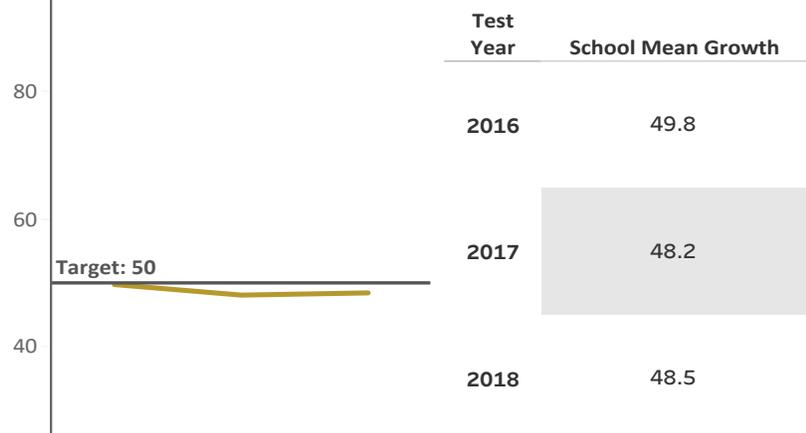
**Comparative Measure: District Comparison.** Each year, the percentage of students at **the school** in at least their second year performing at or above proficiency in Mathematics will be greater than that of students in the same tested grades in **the district**.



**Comparative Measure: Effect Size.** Each year, the school will exceed its predicted level of performance by an effect size of 0.3 or above in **mathematics** according to a regression analysis controlling for economically disadvantaged students among all public schools in New York State.



**Comparative Growth Measure: Mean Growth Percentile.** Each year, the school's unadjusted mean growth percentile for all students in grades 4-8 will be above the state's unadjusted median growth percentile in **mathematics**.

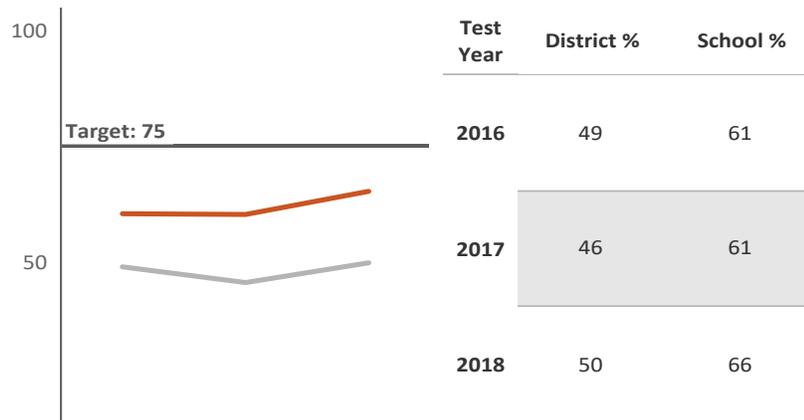


# ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

## BUFFALO UNITED CHARTER SCHOOL

### SCIENCE ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GOAL

**Science: Comparative Measure.** Each year, the percentage of students at the school in at least their second year performing at or above proficiency in **science** will exceed that of students in the same tested grades in the district.



### SPECIAL POPULATIONS PERFORMANCE

	2016	2017	2018
<b>Enrollment Receiving Mandated Academic Services</b>	52	65	72
<b>Tested on State Exam</b>	32	42	54
<b>School Percent Proficient on ELA Exam</b>	6.3	0.0	3.7
<b>District Percent Proficient</b>	3.0	3.7	8.5
	2016	2017	2018
<b>ELL Enrollment</b>	1	4	11
<b>Tested on NYSESLAT Exam</b>	1	3	10
<b>School Percent 'Commanding' or Making Progress on NYSESLAT</b>	s	s	30.0

The academic outcome data about the performance of students receiving special education services and ELLs above is not tied to separate goals in the school's formal Accountability Plan.

The NYSESLAT, the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test, is a standardized state exam.

"Making Progress" is defined as moving up at least one level of proficiency. Student scores fall into five categories/proficiency levels: Entering; Emerging; Transitioning; Expanding; and, Commanding.

In order to comply with Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act regulations on reporting education outcome data, the Institute does not report assessment results for groups containing five or fewer students and indicates this with an "s."

# 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>4</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>5</sup>

## SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1B

### DOES BUFFALO UNITED HAVE AN ASSESSMENT SYSTEM THAT IMPROVES INSTRUCTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND STUDENT LEARNING?

Despite collecting a robust set of data, Buffalo United lacks quality systems to leverage this information to improve instructional effectiveness. NHA has not built leaders' capacity to use student achievement data to evaluate components of the academic program or make changes to supports for teachers that result in sustained achievement for all students. Leaders do not provide the data analysis support to assist teachers in making in-the-moment adjustments to instruction.

- Although the school regularly administers assessments aligned to the school's curriculum and state standards, Buffalo United does not have a process to ensure teacher created assessments are valid and reliable. Teachers create and administer formative assessments and exit tickets in most lessons. The school lacks explicit norming procedures for teachers to ensure that scoring of those assessments and student writing is reliable. Although teachers use rubrics for scoring, the rubrics vary in quality with only some rubrics identifying specific criteria for success on the task.
- Buffalo United does not use its assessment system to effectively adjust instruction to meet student needs. At the time of the visit, Buffalo United continued to use assessment results to group students by ability in three class sections within grade levels without delivering meaningfully differentiated instruction necessary for lower performing groups to catch up to grade level expectations. Within each class section, leaders expect teachers to form strategic student groupings and modify lessons based on the information in data binders, a collection of all formative and summative student assessment data. However, while academic deans and teachers have robust data to use during weekly coaching meetings, meetings do not produce specific action steps with instructional strategies based on gaps in student learning. As a result, it is difficult for leaders to measurably track the quality of teachers' plans and adjusted instruction and its impact on student achievement.

4. 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).

5. 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

- Buffalo United does not use its assessment system to effectively evaluate teachers and provide targeted coaching or professional development. NHA's regional staff have not provided professional development that builds the interim principal's and deans' capacity to facilitate meaningful data team meetings and help teachers implement instructional plans that result in all students meeting grade level expectations. While leaders and teachers review assessment data and student work during weekly meetings, these meetings fail to result in individual professional development plans or broader instructional strategies aligned to the school's priorities for instruction.
- Although Buffalo United made changes in 2018-19 to make data available to key stakeholders, the new practices still do not enable school leaders, NHA, and the board to reflect on the program quality and make decisions. The principal and NHA continue to provide the board with data, but these reports fail to provide accessible information on performance trends, subgroup comparisons, or other notable snapshots of information that would allow the board to monitor specific areas of concern in the academic program.

## DOES BUFFALO UNITED'S CURRICULUM SUPPORT TEACHERS IN THEIR INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING?

Buffalo United's curriculum provides teachers with some of the necessary components to plan instruction. However, the school does not provide oversight to ensure effective implementation or that the existing curricula meet student needs. The school does not have quality systems to support teachers in supplementing and modifying the curriculum.

- Buffalo United has a curricular framework aligned to state standards that provides a foundation for lesson planning. The school uses a variety of commercial curricula, NHA-developed material, and teacher created materials. NHA provides a playbook, a comprehensive curricular planning tool that includes scope and sequence documents, weekly assessments, and other supporting tools. Now in its first full year of implementation, teachers work to better align the playbook with New York State standards as the previous version aligned more closely to Michigan standards. Despite the fact that NHA delivers this playbook to other schools in New York State, this is the first year the school has ensured the framework aligns to New York State standards.
- NHA does not develop instructional leaders' capacity to provide teachers with curricular planning support that leads to high quality lessons. While teachers have a framework and some supporting tools, leaders do not provide the necessary coaching and oversight of lesson planning to meet students' needs. For example, academic deans do not

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# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

consistently provide lesson plan feedback that is specific and actionable. Teachers rely on basic strategies for differentiation and higher order thinking that are not tailored to individual lessons. The school does not provide the necessary time and support for teachers to do the intellectual preparation and lesson internalization such that they effectively deliver lesson activities. As evidenced by classroom observations, teachers struggle to make adjustments in the moment based on student questions and level of understanding of the material.

- Buffalo United has not established a process to identify strengths and gaps in curricula based on student achievement despite being in its 16<sup>th</sup> year of operation. Although teachers and leaders have the opportunity to adapt the curricular materials, the school lacks strong practices to use assessment data or classroom observation data to evaluate teacher effectiveness and the efficacy of curricula schoolwide.

## IS HIGH QUALITY INSTRUCTION EVIDENT THROUGHOUT BUFFALO UNITED?

- Buffalo United’s instruction demonstrates little improvement from the Institute’s 2018 evaluation visit. Although structural systems are in place, NHA regional staff’s supports do not enable leaders to fully develop teacher pedagogical skills and help teachers demonstrate deep content knowledge. Teachers primarily deliver the curricular programs as stated in teacher manuals with little to no adjustments based on student responses, proficiency, or mastery of lesson materials. As shown in the chart below, during the evaluation visit, Institute team members conducted 24 classroom observations following a defined protocol used in all school evaluation visits.

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1D

		GRADE									
		K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
CONTENT AREA	ELA	1		1	2	3	1	2	1	1	12
	Math		1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	10
	Soc Stu								1		1
	Science					1					1
	Total	1	1	2	3	5	3	4	3	2	24

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- Though 16 out of 24 lessons demonstrate clear objectives aligned to the school's curriculum, the quality of objectives and lesson delivery vary across grade levels and subject areas. Some teachers post success criteria while others simply post a broad and general statement of the lesson outcome. Teachers do not plan instruction purposefully to drive student needs. For example, in one classroom a student asked a general and higher order thinking question about the topic, but the teacher responded that the student was jumping ahead in the material and went back to the script in the lesson plan.
- Teachers do not consistently use effective techniques to check for student understanding (9 out of 24 lessons observed). During whole group lessons, teachers lack strong pedagogical practices to gain a complete understanding of what students know or do not know during lessons. Some teachers attempt cursory checks such as asking students to put a thumbs up or down if they understand the material, but do not hold all students accountable for responding. These checks do not support teachers in knowing how to adjust instruction based on the objective. In some classrooms, the small group nature of lessons supports teachers in gathering in-the-moment data to make adjustments. Although the school systematically collects exit tickets to gauge mastery at the end of lessons, teachers do not consistently utilize formative assessments during lessons to adjust student learning and address student misconceptions during lessons.
- Teachers do not use instructional skills that intellectually challenge students or help students deepen understanding of concepts (5 out of 24 lessons observed). Most lessons focus on tasks and questions that require basic recall. Instructional leaders' observation feedback notes indicate that leaders primarily provide general or vague feedback on the implementation of programs and not on content expertise to drive student learning. Teachers implement consistent, but basic, strategies directly from the curricular programs and miss opportunities to utilize higher level habits of learning such as annotating texts or engaging in deep, meaningful discussions.
- After focusing on the school's culture over the past two years, many teachers utilize effective management strategies to create a consistent focus on academic achievement and engaged students (16 out of 24 lessons observed), but this is similar to the Institute's 2018 visit. Though the Institute observed few disruptions in classrooms, and teachers utilize a variety of strategies to redirect student misbehaviors, some teachers do not instill a sense of urgency to improve student learning. In these classrooms teachers give students too much time on tasks such that they become disengaged or students work and complete transitions slowly. For example, in one classroom it took 10 minutes for the teacher to ensure all students had a worksheet, and 12 minutes into the independent work time, less than half of students were working on the task.

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

## SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1E

### DOES BUFFALO UNITED HAVE STRONG INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP?

Buffalo United continues to lack instructional leadership capacity. NHA regional staff member support for Buffalo United does not meet the specific needs to ensure leaders build teacher skills. The board does not hold NHA accountable for improving its supports. Leaders do not clearly articulate the instructional strategies that will enable teachers to intellectually prepare for a lesson and deliver it with fidelity.

- Although staff articulate a need to meet 75% proficiency on state assessments as outlined in the school's Accountability Plan, the school does not hold all students to high expectations. Teachers cannot articulate appropriate benchmark targets that enable all students to reach grade level mastery. Teachers and leaders accept growth as a goal without evaluating whether it is enough for all students to leave the school prepared for high school particularly students grouped in the lowest performing class section. School leaders hold at-risk teachers accountable for students meeting individualized education program ("IEP") or English language acquisition goals, but lack clear measures for ensuring at-risk students grow enough to master grade level standards.
- After the school's nearly 16 years in operation, NHA has not established systems to develop instructional leaders such that they have the skill to support the development of the teaching staff. An NHA director of school quality and NHA curricular coach provides coaching and resources to the interim principal and the school for data analysis and leadership development. The school's instructional leadership team consists of the interim principal, who at the time of the visit was transitioning back into the role of academic dean; two additional academic deans; and dean of special education and intervention. However, although Buffalo United had the lowest absolute proficiency on the 2018 ELA and mathematics state assessments out of the six schools in NHA's New York State portfolio, NHA regional staff cannot articulate how it provides support targeted to meet the needs of Buffalo United's students and staff. While the school showed improvements in interim assessment scores over last year's data, the Institute did not find evidence that NHA has supported instructional leaders in effectively executing the data analysis and coaching practices that ensure sustained student growth and achievement.
- Although Buffalo United has structures in place to provide coaching to all teachers, the school lacks evidence to show how progress in teachers' pedagogical skills produces sustained student improvement. Deans meet weekly with teachers to review a variety of assessment data and identify student groups based on the data. Deans conduct regular walkthroughs as well as informal and formal observations. At the start of the current

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

school year, leaders prioritized working with teachers to design lesson activities with strong objectives aligned to state standards that engage students in higher order thinking activities. Despite this focus, classroom observation feedback does not result in improved instructional strategies in these areas. Leaders do not systematically track teacher progress toward the stated priorities. Leaders also do not connect observation feedback to student achievement and curricular adjustments.

- Buffalo United lacks a comprehensive professional development program that consistently develops all teachers' competencies. Instructional leaders hold some schoolwide professional development sessions and focus on weekly coaching sessions as the primary means for professional development. Leaders have not clearly identified their expectations for teaching and learning at Buffalo United nor articulated them to staff. As such, coaching and professional development does not consistently develop teachers toward meeting quality indicators for effective pedagogy.
- Instructional leaders do not consistently hold teachers accountable for quality instruction and student achievement. Buffalo United uses the NHA teacher evaluation rubric to conduct formal evaluations two times per year. The school has placed teachers on improvement plans or provided more intensive coaching for teachers who leaders observe are not yet effective based on the NHA teaching framework. However, at the end of the 2017-18 school year, leaders rated nearly all teachers as effective or exemplary, despite less than 30% of Buffalo United students scoring at or above proficiency on the ELA and mathematics state assessments in 2018. The board lacks clear targets for student achievement and, as such, lacks a system for evaluating whether students show enough growth and for holding school leaders and NHA accountable.

## DOES BUFFALO UNITED MEET THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF AT-RISK STUDENTS?

Buffalo United lacks urgency to ensure all students meet grade level standards. Although the school attempts to differentiate instruction through small group instruction and intervention teacher push in and pull out, school leaders' inability to provide high quality professional development makes it difficult for Buffalo United to significantly raise and sustain high achievement among its struggling learners. The school lacks specific state standard mastery goals for each ability-based cohort and does not disaggregate achievement data to identify different student subgroup progress toward meeting standards.

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- Buffalo United does not consistently identify students at risk of academic failure. Although members of the Response to Intervention (“RTI”) team are clear on referral processes and interventions for students struggling academically, some staff members are unclear about the protocols and benchmarks used to guide identification and progress monitoring for the RTI process. As such, the school does not consistently identify students with disabilities and students in need of more intensive academic interventions. After inconsistent identification practices in the past, Buffalo United is beginning to put a process in place to accurately identify incoming students who may need English language learner (“ELL”) services. The school administers a home language survey and interviews students and their families, as required. The school then administers the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners (“NYSITELL”), when appropriate.
- The school’s intervention programs do not meet the needs of students struggling academically. One general education teacher and one intervention teacher co-teach the lowest performing class section in each grade with the goal of providing more differentiated instruction to students. Intervention teachers also support struggling students in the other class sections. Buffalo United continues to use the Reading Mastery and Corrective Reading programs to provide intervention support to struggling readers, and AIMSweb to assess student oral reading fluency. Despite these structures, poor instructional practices continue to limit the school’s ability to raise student achievement. Teachers rely primarily on the implementation of commercial programs rather than adapting the content based on student needs. This year teachers use daily and weekly data to create groupings of students within each class and provide differentiated activities. However, the school lacks data to show how each set of differentiated work will enable all students to meet grade level standards.
- Buffalo United’s intervention program for students with disabilities and ELLs does not meet all students’ needs. The school provides push in and pull out services for students with disabilities and has not made significant changes to the programming from last year. Given that 4% and 8% of the school’s students with disabilities met proficiency on the 2018 ELA and mathematics state assessments, respectively, the supports for students with disabilities do not meet students’ needs. For ELLs, the ELL teacher provides push in and pull out services. While the ELL programming is compliant, general education teachers at Buffalo United fail to incorporate appropriate language objectives, such as objectives that explicitly articulate the reading, writing, listening, speaking, and thinking skills that students should be developing throughout the lesson, in their lesson and unit plans to support ELL academic language development.

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- Although teachers participate in some professional development for reading intervention, the school has not provided professional development or coaching on using effective instructional practices to supplement the reading intervention programs utilized across the school. In professional development sessions, general education and intervention teachers learn the basics for how to execute the Reading Mastery and Corrective Reading programs. However, the school has not provided significant coaching on pedagogical practices for reading such as showing students how to use annotations to facilitate their close reading of a text; consistently using anchor charts to guide reading comprehension; or, having students summarize in their own words what they have read. Consequently, the Institute's classroom observations demonstrated that struggling students are dependent on teachers for answers and do not demonstrate that students monitor and correct their work independently.
- Leaders and teachers have not set clear and measurable goals for at-risk student academic achievement. In the absence of these goals, the school has also not prioritized a system to monitor student progress. Staff members cite a desire to see growth but do not have measurable targets for student mastery of grade level standards. In the absence of measurable growth and achievement goals, the school cannot evaluate whether students are making sufficient progress. The school does not have specific English language acquisition goals for ELLs. The performance evaluation criteria for special education and ELL teachers does not hold teachers accountable for student mastery of state standards.

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

## SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 20

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

Although in its fourth charter term, Buffalo United's organization does not work effectively to deliver the educational program. Although the school is the lowest performing of all NHA schools in New York State, it is not evident that NHA's support enables the school to demonstrate significantly improved results for student learning that are sustained over time. NHA's regional staff have not made the necessary improvements to the leadership team's capacity and teacher practice, and the board has not held NHA accountable for doing so.

- Buffalo United's administrative structure is clear, and NHA has many mechanisms in place to allow instructional leaders to focus on developing and improving the academic program. NHA's home office and operational teams focus on actions like recruitment, finances, and other back office activities. However, the current expertise and deployment of NHA resources does not result in the improvement of teacher pedagogical skills or understanding of content knowledge.
- Similar to previous school years, Buffalo United continues to struggle with retaining high quality staff members. For the second year the school maintains a teacher in residence ("TIR") program in which a pool of teachers in training at the school can become classroom teachers if a teacher vacancy occurs. However as of the May 2019 visit, only two teachers remained in the TIR program from the 19 who started the school year because they filled vacant positions due to high teacher attrition. Teachers continue to leave mid-year hindering the school's ability to establish strong, consistent instruction schoolwide. To attempt to confront this, the school continues to survey and interview teachers. At the start of the school year members of NHA's human resources department came to the school to conduct focus groups, and the board is working with NHA to increase benefits like the school retirement plan and medical benefits. Notwithstanding these efforts, the school has not had a meaningful increase in teacher retention over last year.
- Buffalo United continues to see a decrease in student enrollment, especially as the year progresses. Since the beginning of this school year, 118 students left the school. The school currently is below the acceptable limits of its chartered enrollment of 760 students with only 602 students enrolled at the time of the school's third quarter unaudited financial report. The school organization does not work with urgency to increase enrollment and meet its targets for students with disabilities and ELLs. The school recognizes a need to provide bussing to students, and the interim principal worked to establish a plan to provide bussing. However, the school delayed initiating the plan until 2020-21 as the school did not discuss the plans for bussing with families.

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- NHA, the board, and school leaders lack structures to regularly monitor and evaluate the school's programs to make necessary changes. NHA has not supported leaders in establishing clear systems to reflect on the effectiveness of elements within programming and curricular resources. Despite demonstrating some improved scores with interim assessments, the school is unable to pinpoint exact program elements, aside from using data binders, that contribute to the increases. The school cannot clearly articulate which elements of the curricular programs are the most effective for student achievement.
- Buffalo United's discipline system lacks alignment across grades and classrooms. The deans oversee discipline at the school with a restorative justice approach in Kindergarten – 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and a color behavior chart system in 3<sup>rd</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Although teachers have the ability to manage minor misbehaviors and disruptions in classrooms, during the Institute's visit, school staff did not articulate how the two discipline systems work in tandem and meet students' developmental needs.

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

### SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 2D

In its 16<sup>th</sup> year of operation, the Buffalo United board has still not built its capacity to provide effective oversight and hold NHA accountable for student success. The board recognizes it does not have systems for evaluating the network and is making some efforts to improve, but continues to lack information needed to monitor the program as a whole.

- The board established an education committee at the start of the current school year in an effort to provide meaningful oversight of the academic program. Both the principal and NHA provide members of the education committee with a variety of student performance data throughout the year. While the seven board members bring a variety of skills and expertise to the board, the board lacks members with a deep understanding of Kindergarten – 8<sup>th</sup> grade programming and continuous improvement planning. By not having this critical skill set on the board, the members are unable to provide the type of targeted oversight of the school and its general operations that they desire.
- The board requests information about the academic program from the interim principal and NHA, but does not clearly identify specific priorities for which to request information. As such, the board reviews information about professional development and the academic program at a high level of detail that does not allow them to evaluate the school as a whole. Further, similar to the Institute's visit in 2018, the board does not take clear action to improve the school program based on the available information and data.

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- After nearly 16 years, the board has only engaged with an external consultant to create a strategic plan, but has not established long-term goals for the school. Although the strategic plan identifies key areas for growth, the goals and objectives stated in the plan are not measurable and are not explicitly aligned to the school's Accountability Plan. As such, it is not clear how execution aligned to these stated goals and objectives will help the school fulfill the terms of its charter.
- The board has plans to evaluate the newly hired principal and NHA, but lacks a regular process to do so. The board completed a performance evaluation of the principal last year but is working with an external consultant to develop a new evaluation tool for the new principal and NHA. It is unclear how the board has held NHA accountable for providing the necessary supports to the principal and interim principal during the current and previous school year.
- The board has identified staff retention as a priority but has not yet made improvements to increase teacher retention. In an effort to address keeping teachers in a more targeted manner, the board recruited a new member with marketing experience to help them craft a plan for recruiting and retaining the talent they need. The board also is in conversation with NHA about effective practices for getting the staff members and teachers to make a long-term commitment to the school. These strategies include providing the staff with performance bonuses and more competitive medical and retirement benefits. The board hired a new principal whom they have tasked with building teacher effectiveness and creating the professional environment that retains staff. Because the board is just starting to make these changes to the school's policies, the board does not have data that they can use to monitor the efficacy of these schoolwide initiatives. At the time of the Institute's visit, 13 teachers left the school during the 2018-19 school year.

Buffalo United

# Ax

APPENDICES

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# APPENDIX A: School Overview

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES<sup>1</sup>

### CHAIR

Andrew Freedman

### VICE CHAIR

Kim DeJesus

### TREASURER

Ted Purvis

### SECRETARY

Kathy Wood

## SCHOOL LEADERS

### PRINCIPAL

*Teresa Gerchman, Principal (May 2019 to Present)*

*Patty Zika, Interim Principal (August 2018 to May 2019)*

*Tammy Messmer, Principal (2008-09 to 2017-18)*

*John Metz, Principal (2006-07 to 2007-08)*

*Gary Bell, Principal (2005-06)*

*David Bouie, Principal (2003-04 to 2004-05)*

## SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

SCHOOL YEAR	CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT <sup>2</sup>	ACTUAL AS A PERCENTAGE OF CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	PROPOSED GRADES	ACTUAL GRADES
2003-04	240	240	100%	K-4	K-4
2004-05	405	396	98%	K-5	K-5
2005-06	480	430	90%	K-6	K-6
2006-07	555	484	87%	K-7	K-7
2007-08	650	573	88%	K-8	K-8
2008-09	630	600	95%	K-8	K-8
2009-10	650	640	98%	K-8	K-8
2010-11	650	617	95%	K-8	K-8
2011-12	680	630	93%	K-8	K-8
2012-13	680	629	93%	K-8	K-8
2013-14	680	676	99%	K-8	K-8
2014-15	680	693	102%	K-8	K-8
2015-16	680	699	103%	K-8	K-8
2016-17	760	644	85%	K-8	K-8
2017-18	760	632	83%	K-8	K-8
2018-19	760	602	79%	K-8	K-8

1. Source: The Institute's board records at the time of the visit.

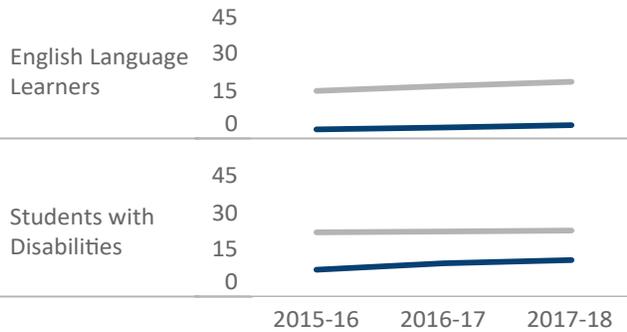
2. Source: Institute's Official Enrollment Binder. (Figures may differ slightly from New York State Report Cards, depending on date of data collection.)

# APPENDIX A: School Overview

Buffalo United Charter School

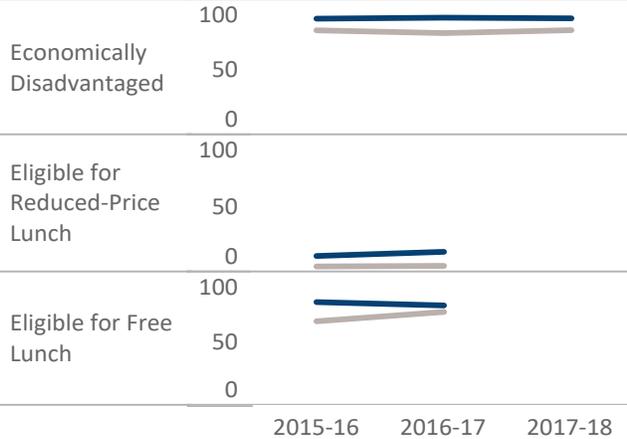
Buffalo

## Student Demographics: Special Populations



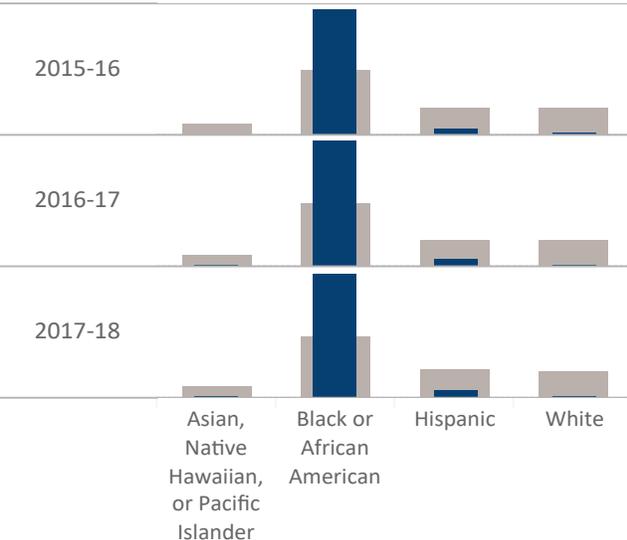
	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
District	15.4	17.4	19.0
School	0.0	0.8	1.7
District	22.4	22.7	23.1
School	7.2	9.8	11.1

## Student Demographics: Free/Reduced Lunch



	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
District	84.2	81.9	84.4
School	94.2	95.0	94.4
District	0.0	0.5	-
School	8.8	12.3	-
District	67.9	75.9	-
School	84.4	81.5	-

## Student Demographics: Race/Ethnicity



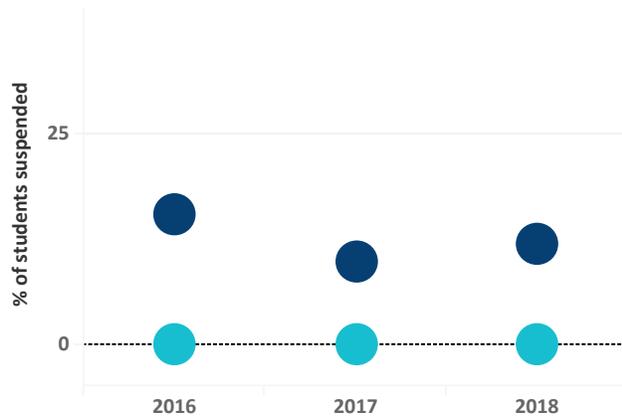
	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	
District	8.2	47.5	19.6	19.7
School	0.6	92.6	4.7	1.8
District	8.6	46.5	20.4	19.3
School	0.8	92.6	5.2	1.1
District	9.0	45.1	21.1	19.3
School	1.1	91.2	5.6	1.9

Data reported in these charts reflect BEDS day enrollment counts as reported by the New York State Education Department.

# APPENDIX A: School Overview

## Buffalo United Charter School

Buffalo



	School ISS Rate	School OSS Rate
2016	0.0	15.5
2017	0.0	9.7
2018	0.0	11.9

CSD data suitable for comparison are not available. The percentage rate shown here is calculated using the method employed by the New York City Department of Education ("NYCDOE"): the total number of students receiving an in school or out of school suspension at any time during the school year is divided by the total enrollment, then multiplied by 100.

**Persistence in Enrollment:** The percentage of students eligible to return from previous year who did return



**Expulsions:** The number of students expelled from the school each year

	2016	2017	2018
Expulsions	0	0	0

### Buffalo United Charter School's Enrollment and Retention Status: 2017-18

		District Target	School
<b>Enrollment</b>	economically disadvantaged	85.8	94.4
	English language learners	12.3	2.3
	students with disabilities	20.9	11.9
<b>Retention</b>	economically disadvantaged	95.3	80.1
	English language learners	95.5	75.0
	students with disabilities	95.4	86.8

Data reported in these charts reflect information reported by the school and validated by the Institute.

# APPENDIX A: School Overview

## SCHOOL VISIT HISTORY

SCHOOL YEAR	VISIT TYPE	DATE
2003-04	First Year Visit	May 14, 2004
2004-05	Evaluation Visit	April 5, 2005
2005-06	Evaluation Visit	April 25-26, 2006
2006-07	Evaluation Visit	March 27-28, 2007
2007-08	Initial Renewal Visit	October 16-18, 2007
2008-09	Evaluation Visit	March 19, 2009
2009-10	Evaluation Visit	October 13-14, 2009
2010-11	Sebsequent Renewal Visit	September 27-28, 2010
2014-15	Subsequent Renewal Visit	May 5-6, 2015
2017-18	Evaluation Visit	May 9-10, 2018
2018-19	Evaluation Visit	May 15-16, 2019

## CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

DATE(S) OF VISIT	EVALUATION TEAM MEMBERS	TITLE
May 15-16, 2019	Kerri Rizzolo	Senior Analyst
	Sinnjinn Bucknell	Director of Performance & Systems
	Andrew Kile	Director of School Evaluation
	Aretha Miller	External Consultant

## CHARTER CYCLE CONTEXT

CHARTER TERM	ACCOUNTABILITY PERIOD <sup>3</sup>	ANTICIPATED RENEWAL VISIT
Third Year of Fourth Subsequent Charter Term	Fourth year of five-year Accountability Period	Fall 2020

3. 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 that charter term. For schools in initial charter terms, the Accountability Period is the first four years that the school provides instruction. For schools in subsequent charter terms, the Accountability Period includes the last year of the previous charter term through the next to last year of the current charter term.

# APPENDIX A: School Overview

## KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS:

ELEMENT	EVIDENT?
A high quality K-8 education as a critical foundation for student success in high school, college, and beyond	—
A commitment to fostering strong partnerships with parents	—
A leadership team and staff that take responsibility for student learning	—

# SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY: ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

## Buffalo United Charter School

		2015-16 Grades Served K-8				2016-17 Grades Served K-8				2017-18 Grades Served K-8								
		Grades	All % (N)	2+ Years % (N)	MET	Grades	All % (N)	2+ Years % (N)	MET	Grades	All % (N)	2+ Years % (N)	MET					
Absolute Measure	1. Each year 75 percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above proficiency on the New York State exam.	3	30.5 (95)	31.9 (72)		3	32.5 (77)	30.2 (63)		3	23.7 (76)	27.3 (55)						
		4	18.8 (69)	19.6 (56)		4	25.8 (89)	30.4 (69)		4	29.0 (69)	29.8 (57)						
		5	18.6 (70)	20.0 (60)		5	19.2 (73)	25.5 (55)		5	27.8 (72)	28.1 (64)						
		6	20.3 (69)	26.5 (49)		6	7.9 (63)	8.9 (45)		6	30.3 (66)	33.3 (48)						
		7	17.4 (69)	21.8 (55)		7	15.5 (71)	19.0 (58)		7	24.5 (49)	31.6 (38)						
		8	24.3 (70)	28.1 (57)		8	24.1 (54)	25.0 (44)		8	26.2 (61)	26.8 (56)						
		All	22.2 (442)	24.9 (349)		<b>NO</b>	All	21.3 (427)	24.0 (334)		<b>NO</b>	All	27.0 (393)	29.2 (318)		<b>NO</b>		
Absolute Measure	2. Each year the school's aggregate Performance Index on the State exam will meet the Measure of Interim Progress set forth in the State's ESSA accountability system.	Grades	PLI	AMO		Grades	PLI	AMO		Grades	PI	MIP						
		3-8	86	104		<b>NO</b>	3-8	82	111		<b>NO</b>	3-8	94	101		<b>NO</b>		
Comparative Measure	3. Each year the percent of students enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above proficiency will be greater than that of students in the same grades in the local district.	Comparison: Buffalo City School District				Comparison: Buffalo City School District				Comparison: Buffalo City School District								
		Grades	School	District		Grades	School	District		Grades	School	District						
		3-8	24.9	16.4		<b>YES</b>	3-8	24.0	17.8		<b>YES</b>	3-8	29.2	23.4		<b>YES</b>		
Comparative Measure	4. Each year the school will exceed its predicted performance on the state exam by an effect size of 0.3 or above based on a regression analysis controlling for economically disadvantaged students statewide.	Grade	% ED	Actual	Predicted	ES	Grade	% ED	Actual	Predicted	ES	Grade	% ED	Actual	Predicted	ES		
		3	90.1	30.5	28.1	0.16	3	96.3	32.1	26.3	0.33	3	97.5	23.7	34.9	-0.62		
		4	96.2	18.8	23.9	-0.27	4	92.7	25.8	25.7	0.01	4	91.4	29.0	35.1	-0.34		
		5	92.3	18.6	19.3	-0.02	5	93.4	19.2	19.9	-0.06	5	90.1	27.8	24.3	0.25		
		6	98.7	20.3	17.1	0.19	6	93.8	7.9	16.5	-0.72	6	95.0	30.3	32.4	-0.14		
		7	94.7	17.4	17.4	-0.03	7	100.0	15.5	22.2	-0.40	7	95.2	24.5	24.5	0.00		
		8	93.5	24.3	24.0	0.00	8	93.8	24.1	30.3	-0.35	8	93.1	26.2	35.1	-0.50		
All	94.0	22.2	22.0	0.01	<b>NO</b>	All	95.0	21.3	23.5	-0.17	<b>NO</b>	All	93.7	27.0	31.3	-0.24	<b>NO</b>	
Growth Measure	5. Each year, the school's unadjusted mean growth percentile will meet or exceed the target of 50.	Grades	School	State		Grades	School	State		Grades	School	State						
		4	42.7			4	44.0			4	46.7							
		5	47.7			5	53.2			5	50.1							
		6	53.8			6	51.6			6	61.6							
		7	51.6			7	39.6			7	53.0							
		8	53.0			8	48.5			8	49.3							
All	49.8		50.0		<b>NO</b>	All	47.0		50.0			<b>NO</b>	All	52.0		50.0		<b>YES</b>

# SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY: MATHEMATICS

## Buffalo United Charter School

		2015-16 Grades Served K-8				2016-17 Grades Served K-8				2017-18 Grades Served K-8							
		Grades	All % (N)	2+ Years % (N)	MET	Grades	All % (N)	2+ Years % (N)	MET	Grades	All % (N)	2+ Years % (N)	MET				
Absolute Measure	1. Each year 75 percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above proficiency on the New York State exam.	3	27.8 (97)	29.7 (74)		3	45.3 (75)	46.8 (62)		3	41.3 (75)	46.3 (54)					
		4	16.2 (68)	14.5 (55)		4	25.6 (90)	28.6 (70)		4	37.7 (69)	40.4 (57)					
		5	28.6 (70)	28.3 (60)		5	18.3 (71)	24.5 (53)		5	26.0 (73)	27.7 (65)					
		6	25.7 (70)	36.0 (50)		6	21.7 (60)	23.3 (43)		6	9.2 (65)	8.7 (46)					
		7	11.8 (68)	14.8 (54)		7	10.1 (69)	12.3 (57)		7	15.1 (53)	19.0 (42)					
		8	22.1 (68)	25.5 (55)		8	0.0 (27)	0.0 (20)		8	0.0 (34)	0.0 (32)					
		All	22.4 (441)	25.0 (348)	NO	All	23.0 (392)	25.9 (305)	NO	All	24.4 (369)	26.4 (296)	NO				
Absolute Measure	2. Each year the school's aggregate Performance Index on the State exam will meet the Measure of Interim Progress set forth in the State's ESSA accountability system.	Grades	PLI	AMO		Grades	PLI	AMO		Grades	PI	MIP					
		3-8	82	101	NO	3-8	76	109	NO	3-8	82	103	NO				
Comparative Measure	3. Each year the percent of students enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above proficiency will be greater than that of students in the same grades in the local district.	Comparison: Buffalo City School District				Comparison: Buffalo City School District				Comparison: Buffalo City School District							
		Grades	School	District		Grades	School	District		Grades	School	District					
		3-8	25.0	16.1	YES	3-8	25.9	17.2	YES	3-8	26.4	21.0	YES				
Comparative Measure	4. Each year the school will exceed its predicted performance on the state exam by an effect size of 0.3 or above based on a regression analysis controlling for economically disadvantaged students statewide.	Grade	% ED	Actual	Predicted	ES	Grade	% ED	Actual	Predicted	ES	Grade	% ED	Actual	Predicted	ES	
		3	90.1	27.8	30.5	-0.12	3	96.3	45.3	31.4	0.68	3	97.5	41.3	37.7	0.18	
		4	96.2	16.2	25.7	-0.48	4	92.7	25.6	25.2	0.02	4	91.4	37.7	33.4	0.22	
		5	92.3	28.6	22.1	0.36	5	93.4	18.3	24.1	-0.34	5	90.1	26.0	28.1	-0.12	
		6	98.7	25.7	17.2	0.44	6	93.8	21.7	18.9	0.17	6	95.0	9.2	24.8	-1.00	
		7	94.7	11.8	13.1	-0.06	7	100.0	10.1	13.0	-0.17	7	95.2	15.1	21.4	-0.39	
		8	93.5	22.1	12.8	0.54	8	93.8	0.0	12.0	-0.73	8	93.1	0.0	20.3	-1.06	
		All	94.0	22.4	20.9	0.09	NO	All	95.0	23.0	22.2	0.02	NO	All	93.7	24.4	28.8
Growth Measure	5. Each year, the school's unadjusted mean growth percentile will meet or exceed the target of 50.	Grades	School	State		Grades	School	State		Grades	School	State					
		4	48.9			4	50.8			4	46.3						
		5	46.2			5	59.0			5	44.3						
		6	53.8			6	43.4			6	52.4						
		7	39.9			7	32.0			7	41.8						
		8	60.5			8	66.1			8	65.3						
		All	49.8	50.0	NO	All	48.2	50.0	NO	All	48.5	50.0	NO				

VERSION 5.0, MAY 2012

## Introduction

The State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks<sup>1</sup> (the “SUNY Renewal Benchmarks”) serve two primary functions at renewal:

- They provide a framework for the Charter Schools Institute (the “Institute”) to gather and evaluate evidence to determine whether a school has made an adequate case for renewal. In turn, this evidence assists the Institute in deciding if it can make the required legal and other findings in order to reach a positive recommendation for renewal. For example, the various benchmarks that the Institute uses to determine whether the school has had fiscally responsible practices in place during the last charter period allow the Institute to determine with greater precision whether the school will operate in a fiscally sound manner during the next charter period, a finding that the New York Charter Schools Act requires the SUNY Trustees to make.
- At the same time that the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks provide a framework for the Institute to collect and review evidence, they also provide the school with a guide to understanding the Institute’s evaluative criteria. As the Institute uses the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks (or some subset of them) as the framework for conducting its ongoing school evaluation visits, school leaders should be fully aware of the content of the Benchmarks at the time of renewal.

The SUNY Renewal Benchmarks are organized into four inter-connected renewal questions that each school must answer when submitting a renewal application. The benchmarks further reflect the interwoven nature of schools from an academic, organizational, fiscal and/or legal perspective. For example, the Institute could reasonably place many of the academic benchmarks under the heading of organizational effectiveness. More generally, some redundancy exists because the Institute looks at the same issue from different perspectives.

Precisely how the Institute uses the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks, during both the renewal process and throughout the charter period, is explained in greater detail in the Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University of New York (the “SUNY Renewal Practices”), available on the Institute’s website at: <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/renewal/>. Responses to frequently asked questions about the Institute’s use of the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks appear below:

- The Institute does not have a point system for recommending renewal. A school cannot simply tally up the number of positive benchmark statements in order to determine the Institute’s recommendation
  - Some benchmarks are weighed more heavily than others. In particular, the Institute gives the greatest weight to how well the school has met its academic Accountability Plan goals.

1. Research on public school reform, known as the effective schools movement, has embraced the premise that, given certain organizing and cultural characteristics, schools can teach all children the intended curriculum and hold them to high academic standards. Over the decades, the accumulated research into effective schools has yielded a set of common characteristics that all effective schools share.

These characteristics are so consistently prevalent among successful schools that they have come to be known as the Correlates of Effective Schools.

The Renewal Benchmarks adapt and elaborate on these correlates.

# APPENDIX C: SUNY Renewal Benchmarks

- Despite the fact that the Accountability Plan comprises only a single benchmark, a school’s performance on that benchmark is critical. In fact, it is so important that while the Institute may recommend non-renewal for fiscal and organizational failures (if sufficiently serious), excellence in these areas will not excuse poor academic performance.
- The Institute does not use every benchmark during every kind of renewal review, and how the benchmarks are used differs depending on a school’s circumstances. For example, the Qualitative Education Benchmarks (Benchmarks 1B-1F, 2C and 2D) are given far less weight in making a renewal decision on schools that the Institute has previously renewed. Similarly, less weight is accorded to these benchmarks during an initial renewal review where a school has consistently met its academic Accountability Plan goals.
  - The Institute also may not consider every indicator subsumed under a benchmark when determining if a school has met that benchmark, given the school’s stage of development or its previous track record.
- Aside from Benchmark 1A on academic Accountability Plan goals (which is singular in its importance), no school should fear that a failure to meet every element of every benchmark means that it is not in a position to make a case for renewal. To the contrary, the Institute has yet to see a school that performs perfectly in every respect. The Institute appreciates that the benchmarks set a very high standard collectively. While the Institute certainly hopes and expects that schools aim high, it is understood that a school’s reach will necessarily exceed its grasp in at least some aspects.

In this fifth edition of the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks, the Institute has made some revisions to the Qualitative Educational Benchmarks, namely those benchmarks used for ongoing school evaluation visits, to streamline the collection of evidence. For example, the Institute has incorporated Student Order and Discipline into Pedagogy, and Professional Development into Instructional Leadership. The Institute has rewritten some of the overarching benchmark statements to capture the most salient aspects of school effectiveness, organizational viability, legal compliance, and fiscal soundness. Some of the bulleted indicators within benchmarks have been recast or eliminated. Finally, the Institute has added some indicators to align the benchmarks with changes in the Charter Schools Act (e.g., provisions in meeting enrollment and retention targets when assigned and abiding by the General Municipal Law).

It is important that the entire school community understand the renewal process. All members of a school’s leadership team and board should carefully review both the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks and the SUNY Renewal Practices. Note that a renewal overview document for parents, teacher and community members is also available on the Institute’s website at: <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/renewal/>. Please do not hesitate to contact the Institute with any questions.

## RENEWAL QUESTION 1

### IS THE SCHOOL AN ACADEMIC SUCCESS?

#### SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1A

#### OVER THE ACCOUNTABILITY PERIOD, THE SCHOOL HAS MET OR COME CLOSE TO MEETING ITS ACADEMIC ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GOALS.

*The Institute determines the extent to which the school has met the Accountability Plan goals in the following areas:*

- English language arts;
- mathematics;
- science;
- social studies (high school only);
- NCLB;
- high school graduation and college preparation (if applicable); and
- optional academic goals included by the school.

#### SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1B

#### THE SCHOOL HAS AN ASSESSMENT SYSTEM THAT IMPROVES INSTRUCTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND STUDENT LEARNING.

*The following elements are generally present:*

- the school regularly administers valid and reliable assessments aligned to the school's curriculum and state performance standards;
- the school has a valid and reliable process for scoring and analyzing assessments;
- the school makes assessment data accessible to teachers, school leaders and board members;
- teachers use assessment results to meet students' needs by adjusting classroom instruction, grouping students and/or identifying students for special intervention;
- school leaders use assessment results to evaluate teacher effectiveness and to develop professional development and coaching strategies; and
- the school regularly communicates to parents/guardians about their students' progress and growth.

## SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1C

### THE SCHOOL'S CURRICULUM SUPPORTS TEACHERS IN THEIR INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING.

*The following elements are generally present:*

- the school has a curriculum framework with student performance expectations that provides a fixed, underlying structure, aligned to state standards and across grades;
- in addition to the framework, the school has supporting tools (i.e., curriculum maps or scope and sequence documents) that provide a bridge between the curriculum framework and lesson plans;
- teachers know what to teach and when to teach it based on these documents;
- the school has a process for selecting, developing and reviewing its curriculum documents and its resources for delivering the curriculum; and
- teachers plan purposeful and focused lessons.

## SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1D

### HIGH QUALITY INSTRUCTION IS EVIDENT THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL.

*The following elements are generally present:*

- teachers deliver purposeful lessons with clear objectives aligned to the school's curriculum;
- teachers regularly and effectively use techniques to check for student understanding;
- 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;
- teachers maximize learning time (e.g., appropriate pacing, on-task student behavior, clear lesson focus and clear directions to students); transitions are efficient; and
- teachers have effective classroom management techniques and routines that create a consistent focus on academic achievement.

## SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1E

### THE SCHOOL HAS STRONG INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP.

*The following elements are generally present:*

- the school's leadership establishes an environment of high expectations for teacher performance (in content knowledge and pedagogical skills) and in which teachers believe that all students can succeed;
- the instructional leadership is adequate to support the development of the teaching staff;
- instructional leaders provide sustained, systemic and effective coaching and supervision that improves teachers' instructional effectiveness;

# APPENDIX C: SUNY Renewal Benchmarks

- instructional leaders provide opportunities and guidance for teachers to plan curriculum and instruction within and across grade levels;
- instructional leaders implement a comprehensive professional development program that develops the competencies and skills of all teachers;
- professional development activities are interrelated with classroom practice;
- instructional leaders regularly conduct teacher evaluations with clear criteria that accurately identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses; and
- instructional leaders hold teachers accountable for quality instruction and student achievement.

## SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1F

### THE SCHOOL MEETS THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF AT-RISK STUDENTS

*The following elements are generally present:*

- the school uses clear procedures for identifying at-risk students including students with disabilities, English language learners and those struggling academically;
- the school has adequate intervention programs to meet the needs of at-risk students;
- general education teachers, as well as specialists, utilize effective strategies to support students within the general education program;
- the school adequately monitors the progress and success of at-risk students;
- teachers are aware of their students' progress toward meeting IEP goals, achieving English proficiency or school-based goals for struggling students;
- the school provides adequate training and professional development to identify at-risk students and to help teachers meet students' needs; and
- the school provides opportunities for coordination between classroom teachers and at-risk program staff including the school nurse, if applicable.

## RENEWAL QUESTION 2

IS THE SCHOOL AN EFFECTIVE, VIABLE ORGANIZATION?

### SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 2A

**THE SCHOOL IS FAITHFUL TO ITS MISSION AND HAS IMPLEMENTED THE KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS INCLUDED IN ITS CHARTER.**

*The following elements are generally present:*

- the school faithfully follows its mission; and
- the school has implemented its key design elements.

### SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 2B

**PARENTS/GUARDIANS AND STUDENTS ARE SATISFIED WITH THE SCHOOL.**

*The following elements are generally present:*

- the school regularly communicates each child's academic performance results to families;
- families are satisfied with the school; and
- parents keep their children enrolled year-to-year.

### SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 2C

**THE SCHOOL ORGANIZATION EFFECTIVELY SUPPORTS THE DELIVERY OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM.**

*The following elements are generally present:*

- the school has established an administrative structure with staff, operational systems, policies and procedures that allow the school to carry out its academic program;
- the organizational structure establishes distinct lines of accountability with clearly defined roles and responsibilities;
- the school has a clear student discipline system in place at the administrative level that is consistently applied;
- the school retains quality staff;
- the school has allocated sufficient resources to support the achievement of goals;
- the school maintains adequate student enrollment;
- the school has procedures in place to monitor its progress toward meeting enrollment and retention targets for special education students, ELLs and students who qualify for free and reduced price lunch, and adjusts its recruitment efforts accordingly; and
- the school regularly monitors and evaluates the school's programs and makes changes if necessary.

## SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 2D

### THE SCHOOL BOARD WORKS EFFECTIVELY TO ACHIEVE THE SCHOOL'S ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GOALS.

*The following elements are generally present:*

- board members possess adequate skills and have put in place structures and procedures with which to govern the school and oversee management of day-to-day operations in order to ensure the school's future as an academically successful, financially healthy and legally compliant organization;
- the board requests and receives sufficient information to provide rigorous oversight of the school's program and finances;
- it establishes clear priorities, objectives and long-range goals, (including Accountability Plan, fiscal, facilities and fundraising), and has in place benchmarks for tracking progress as well as a process for their regular review and revision;
- the board successfully recruits, hires and retains key personnel, and provides them with sufficient resources to function effectively;
- the board regularly evaluates its own performance and that of the school leaders and the management company (if applicable), holding them accountable for student achievement; and
- the board effectively communicates with the school community including school leadership, staff, parents/guardians and students.

## SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 2E

### THE BOARD IMPLEMENTS, MAINTAINS AND ABIDES BY APPROPRIATE POLICIES, SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES.

*The following elements are generally present:*

- the board effectively communicates with its partner or management organizations as well as key contractors such as back-office service providers and ensures that it receives value in exchange for contracts and relationships it enters into and effectively monitors such relationships;
- the board takes effective action when there are organizational, leadership, management, facilities or fiscal deficiencies; or where the management or partner organization fails to meet expectations; to correct those deficiencies and puts in place benchmarks for determining if the partner organization corrects them in a timely fashion;
- the board regularly reviews and updates board and school policies as needed and has in place an orientation process for new members;
- the board effectively recruits and selects new members in order to maintain adequate skill sets and expertise for effective governance and structural continuity;

# APPENDIX C: SUNY Renewal Benchmarks

- the board implements a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy (and/or code of ethics)—consistent with that set forth in the charter and with the General Municipal Law—and consistently abides by them throughout the term of the charter;
- the board generally avoids conflicts of interest; where not possible, the board manages those conflicts in a clear and transparent manner;
- the board implements a process for dealing with complaints consistent with that set forth in the charter, makes the complaint policy clear to all stakeholders, and follows the policy including acting on complaints in a timely fashion;
- the board abides by its by-laws including, but not limited to, provisions regarding trustee election and the removal and filling of vacancies; and
- the board holds all meetings in accordance with the Open Meetings Law and records minutes for all meetings including executive sessions and, as appropriate, committee meetings.

## THE SCHOOL SUBSTANTIALLY COMPLIES WITH APPLICABLE LAWS, RULES AND REGULATIONS AND THE PROVISIONS OF ITS CHARTER.

*The following elements are generally present:*

- the school compiles a record of substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations including, but not limited to, submitting items to the Institute in a timely manner, and meeting teacher certification (including NCLB highly qualified status) and background check requirements, FOIL and Open Meetings Law; the school substantially complies with the terms of its charter and applicable laws, rules and regulations;
- the school abides by the terms of its monitoring plan;
- the school implements effective systems and controls to ensure that it meets legal and charter requirements;
- the school has an active and ongoing relationship with in-house or independent legal counsel who reviews and makes recommendations on relevant policies, documents, transactions and incidents and who also handles other legal matters as needed; and
- the school manages any litigation appropriately and provides litigation papers to insurers and the Institute in a timely manner.

### SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 2F

## RENEWAL QUESTION 3

### IS THE SCHOOL FISCALLY SOUND?

#### SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 3A

#### THE SCHOOL OPERATES PURSUANT TO A LONG-RANGE FINANCIAL PLAN IN WHICH IT CREATES REALISTIC BUDGETS THAT IT MONITORS AND ADJUSTS WHEN APPROPRIATE.

*The following elements are generally present:*

- the school has clear budgetary objectives and budget preparation procedures;
- board members, school management and staff contribute to the budget process, as appropriate;
- the school frequently compares its long-range fiscal plan to actual progress and adjusts it to meet changing conditions;
- the school routinely analyzes budget variances; the board addresses material variances and makes necessary revisions; and
- actual expenses are equal to, or less than, actual revenue with no material exceptions.

#### SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 3B

#### THE SCHOOL MAINTAINS APPROPRIATE INTERNAL CONTROLS AND PROCEDURES.

*The following elements are generally present:*

- the school follows a set of comprehensive written fiscal policies and procedures;
- the school accurately records and appropriately documents transactions in accordance with management's direction, laws, regulations, grants and contracts;
- the school safeguards its assets;
- the school identifies/analyzes risks and takes mitigating actions;
- the school has controls in place to ensure that management decisions are properly carried out and monitors and assesses controls to ensure their adequacy;
- the school's trustees and employees adhere to a code of ethics;
- the school ensures duties are appropriately segregated, or institutes compensating controls;
- the school ensures that employees performing financial functions are appropriately qualified and adequately trained;
- the school has systems in place to provide the appropriate information needed by staff and the board to make sound financial decisions and to fulfill compliance requirements;
- a staff member of the school reviews grant agreements and restrictive gifts and monitors compliance with all stated conditions;
- the school prepares payroll according to appropriate state and federal regulations and school policy;

# APPENDIX C: SUNY Renewal Benchmarks

- the school ensures that employees, trustees and volunteers who handle cash and investments are bonded to help assure the safeguarding of assets; and
- the school takes corrective action in a timely manner to address any internal control or compliance deficiencies identified by its external auditor, the Institute, and/or the State Education Department or the Comptroller, if needed.

## SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 3C

### THE SCHOOL HAS COMPLIED WITH FINANCIAL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS BY PROVIDING THE SUNY TRUSTEES AND THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT WITH REQUIRED FINANCIAL REPORTS THAT ARE ON TIME, COMPLETE AND FOLLOW GENERALLY ACCEPTED ACCOUNTING PRINCIPLES.

*The following reports have generally been filed in a timely, accurate and complete manner:*

- annual financial statement audit reports including federal Single Audit report, if applicable;
- annual budgets and cash flow statements;
- un-audited quarterly reports of income, expenses, and enrollment;
- bi-monthly enrollment reports to the district and, if applicable, to the State Education Department including proper documentation regarding the level of special education services provided to students; and
- grant expenditure reports.

## SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 3D

### THE SCHOOL MAINTAINS ADEQUATE FINANCIAL RESOURCES TO ENSURE STABLE OPERATIONS. CRITICAL FINANCIAL NEEDS OF THE SCHOOL ARE NOT DEPENDENT ON VARIABLE INCOME (GRANTS, DONATIONS AND FUNDRAISING).

*The following elements are generally present:*

- the school maintains sufficient cash on hand to pay current bills and those that are due shortly;
- the school maintains adequate liquid reserves to fund expenses in the event of income loss (generally three months);
- the school prepares and monitors cash flow projections;
- If the school includes philanthropy in its budget, it monitors progress toward its development goals on a periodic basis;
- If necessary, the school pursues district state aid intercepts with the state education department to ensure adequate per pupil funding; and
- the school accumulates unrestricted net assets that are equal to or exceed two percent of the school's operating budget for the upcoming year.

## RENEWAL QUESTION 4

IF THE SCHOOL'S CHARTER IS RENEWED, WHAT ARE ITS PLANS FOR THE TERM OF THE NEXT CHARTER PERIOD, AND ARE THEY REASONABLE, FEASIBLE AND ACHIEVABLE?

### SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 4A

**KEY STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS OF THE SCHOOL, AS DEFINED IN THE EXHIBITS OF THE APPLICATION FOR CHARTER RENEWAL, ARE REASONABLE, FEASIBLE AND ACHIEVABLE.**

*Based on elements present in the Application for Charter Renewal:*

- the school is likely to fulfill its mission in the next charter period;
- the school has an enrollment plan that can support the school program;
- the school calendar and daily schedules clearly provide sufficient instructional time to meet all legal requirements, allow the school to meet its proposed Accountability Plan goals and abide by its proposed budget;
- key design elements are consistent with the mission statement and are feasible given the school's budget and staffing;
- a curriculum framework for added grades aligns with the state's performance standards; and
- plans in the other required Exhibits indicate that the school's structure is likely to support the educational program.

### SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 4B

**THE SCHOOL'S PLANS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM ALLOW IT TO MEET ITS ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GOALS.**

*Based on elements present in the Application for Charter Renewal:*

- for those grades served during the last charter period, the school has plans for sustaining and (where possible) improving upon the student outcomes it has compiled during the last charter period including any adjustments or additions to the school's educational program;
- for a school that is seeking to add grades, the school is likely to meet its Accountability Plan goals and the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks at the new grade levels; and
- where the school will provide secondary school instruction, it has presented a set of requirements for graduation that students are likely to meet and that are consistent with the graduation standards set by the Board of Regents.

# APPENDIX C: SUNY Renewal Benchmarks

## SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 4C

### THE SCHOOL PROVIDES A REASONABLE, FEASIBLE AND ACHIEVABLE PLAN FOR BOARD OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNANCE.

*Based on elements present in the Application for Charter Renewal:*

- school trustees are likely to possess a range of experience, skills, and abilities sufficient to oversee the academic, organizational and fiscal performance of the school;
- plans by the school board to orient new trustees to their roles and responsibilities, and, if appropriate, to participate in ongoing board training are likely to sustain the board's ability to carry out its responsibilities;
- if the school plans to change an association with a partner or management organization in the term of a future charter, it has provided a clear rationale for the disassociation and an outline indicating how it will manage the functions previously associated with that partnering organization; and
- if the school is either moving from self-management to a management structure or vice-versa, or is changing its charter management organization/educational service provider, its plans indicate that it will be managed in an effective, sound and viable manner including appropriate oversight of the academic and fiscal performance of the school or the management organization.

## SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 4D

### THE SCHOOL PROVIDES A REASONABLE, FEASIBLE AND ACHIEVABLE FISCAL PLAN INCLUDING PLANS FOR AN ADEQUATE FACILITY.

*Based on the elements present in the Application for Charter Renewal:*

- the school's budgets adequately support staffing, enrollment and facility projections;
- fiscal plans are based on the sound use of financial resources to support academic program needs;
- fiscal plans are clear, accurate, complete and based on reasonable assumptions;
- information on enrollment demand provides clear evidence for the reasonableness of projected enrollment; and
- facility plans are likely to meet educational program needs.

