

THE SUNY CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE

SCHOOL EVALUATION REPORT
**MERRICK ACADEMY - QUEENS
PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL**

VISIT DATE: APRIL 9 - 10, 2019

REPORT DATE: MAY 28, 2019

SUNY Charter Schools Institute

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Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

A collection of colorful pencils and paper clips on a dark grey background. The pencils are arranged in a fan shape, showing various colors including green, blue, red, orange, yellow, green, orange, blue, purple, and brown. There are also several paper clips in various colors like orange, green, pink, blue, and black.

CONTENTS

2

Introduction & School Background

4

Academic Performance

9

Benchmark Analysis

Appendices

A: School Overview

B: School Performance Summaries

C: SUNY Renewal Benchmarks

INTRODUCTION & SCHOOL BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

This School Evaluation Report offers an analysis of evidence collected during the school visit on April 9-10, 2019 to Merrick Academy - Queens Public Charter School (“Merrick”). 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 Merrick in January 2000. The school opened its doors in the fall of 2000, initially serving 121 students in Kindergarten – 2nd grade. Merrick’s chartered enrollment for the 2018-19 school year is 475 students in Kindergarten – 5th grade. The school is located in New York City Community School District (“CSD”) 29 at 136-25 218th Street, Springfield Gardens, NY.

Merrick’s mission states:



The mission of the Merrick Academy - Queens Public Charter School is to become one of the finest public schools in America. Merrick Academy is built on the philosophy that all children can learn. The Academy ensures that all students meet or exceed New York State performance standards. The focus of the Academy is built on the core skills of reading, language, and mathematics. Merrick Academy is organized to provide an extended day, a high degree of individualized instruction, and an innovative research-based academic curriculum.

Merrick is in its fourth year of its fourth charter term, and its charter is due for renewal during the 2019-20 school year. At the time of Merrick’s last renewal, the school stopped serving 6th grade students and has since continued to enroll Kindergarten – 5th grade students. Now in its 19th year of operation, the school has failed to consistently meet its ELA and mathematics Accountability Plan goals over the charter term. Based on this record of academic performance, Merrick’s prospects for earning a renewal are currently in jeopardy.

Over the current charter term, Merrick has struggled to retain consistent leadership. Accumulated programmatic deficits resulting from leadership turnover and a lack of high expectations for staff members have led Merrick to struggle to put in place a systematic or sustained instructional program that supports student success. Despite the recent hire of a new executive director and chief academic officer (“CAO”), the board has not provided effective oversight of the academic program throughout the charter term resulting in the school’s inability to consistently meet its Accountability Plan goals.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

2017-18 SCHOOL PERFORMANCE REVIEW

At the beginning of the Accountability Period,¹ 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"² and states the educational programs at a charter school must "meet or exceed the student performance standards adopted by the board of regents"³ 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/.

After not meeting its ELA goal during the first three years of its Accountability Period, Merrick came close to meeting the ELA goal in 2017-18. The school did not meet its mathematics goal for the fourth consecutive year. Merrick met its science and No Child Left Behind ("NCLB") goals in 2017-18.

ELA

In 2017-18, Merrick came close to meeting its ELA goal after not having met the goal for the previous two years. Although Merrick has established a pattern of increasing scores throughout the Accountability Period, the achievement gains in ELA do not significantly distinguish the school's performance as higher than that of the district. This year, 45% of students enrolled for at least two years scored at or above proficiency on the state's ELA exam. The result is slightly higher than the district's 43% but remains far from the school's absolute target of 75% of students enrolled for at least two years scoring at or above proficiency. In comparison to schools enrolling similar proportions of economically disadvantaged students across the state, the school's effect size of 0.13 did not meet the goal. Given the school's low absolute proficiency rate, Merrick's mean growth score of 53 in ELA indicates that it is not substantially moving the achievement of all its students such that the school will meaningfully increase its performance during the charter term. The school's growth score track record during the Accountability Period indicates that many 5th grade students are not academically prepared to begin middle school after completing their time at Merrick.

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. In the case of initial renewal, the Accountability Period covers the first four years of the charter term.

2. Education Law § 2850(2)(f).

3. Education Law § 2854(1)(d).

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

MATHEMATICS

Merrick did not meet its mathematics goal in 2017-18 after not having met the goal in the two previous years. With 39% of students enrolled for at least two years scoring at or above proficiency, the school is far from meeting its absolute target of 75%. The school's mathematics outcomes have risen concomitantly with the district and have not significantly exceeded the district's overall performance. In comparison to schools throughout the state enrolling similar percentages of economically disadvantaged students, Merrick's comparative effect size in mathematics indicates that the school performed lower than expected in 2017-18. Merrick's performance on this measure has declined throughout the charter term. The school posted a 2017-18 growth percentile just above the target of 50. Over the charter term, the school has not posted a consistent record of overall high growth. Further, the difference between the average growth scores of the 4th and 5th grade students (the two grades with growth scores available) has been large. The school's record of declining comparative performance and inconsistent growth does not provide evidence that the school's mathematics program is improving.

SCIENCE

In 2017-18, Merrick met its science goal. With 94% of tested students enrolled for at least two years scoring at or above proficiency, the school's performance exceeded its absolute target of 75%. Merrick also outscored its district by 10 percentage points.

NCLB

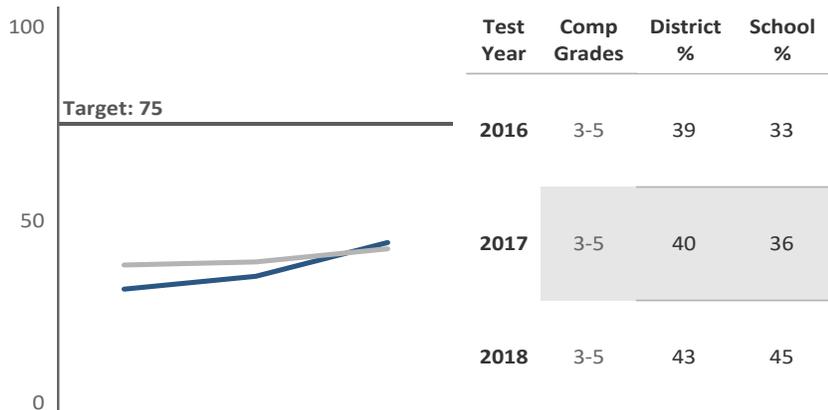
In 2017-18, the state's NCLB accountability system did not identify Merrick as a focus charter school and therefore the school met the NCLB goal.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

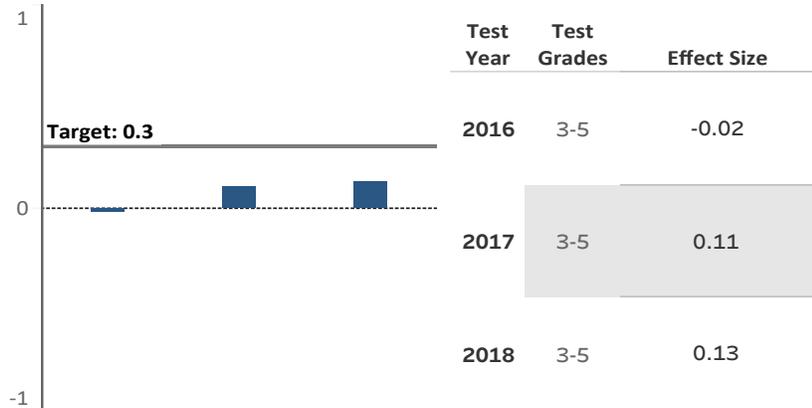
MERRICK ACADEMY - QUEENS PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GOAL

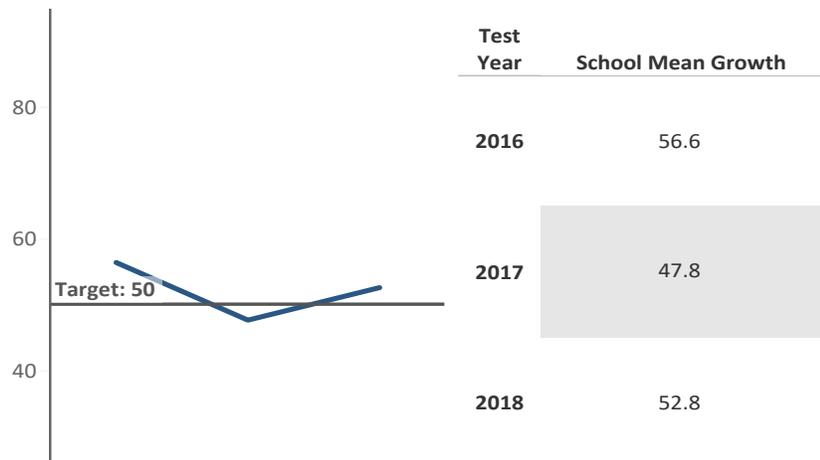
Comparative Measure: District Comparison. Each year, the percentage of students at **the school** in at least their second year performing at or above proficiency in ELA will be greater than that of students in the same tested grades in **the district**.



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**.

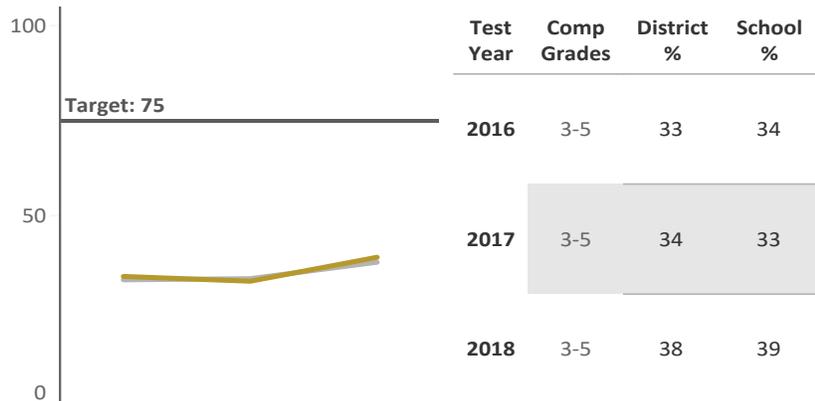


ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

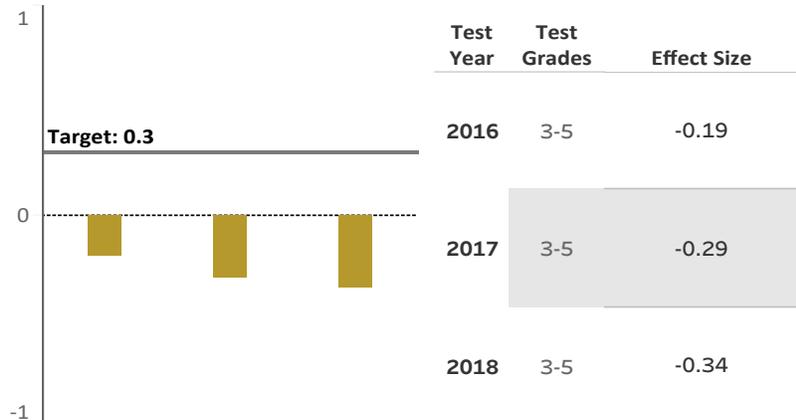
MERRICK ACADEMY - QUEENS PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL

MATHEMATICS ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GOAL

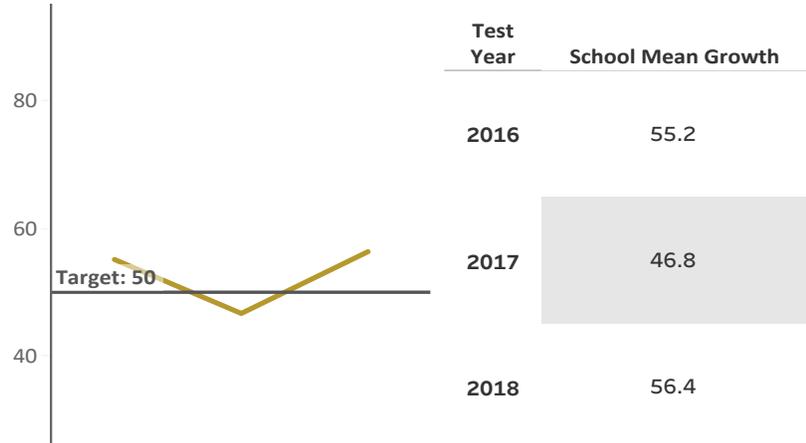
Comparative Measure: District Comparison. Each year, the percentage of students at **the school** in at least their second year performing at or above proficiency in Mathematics will be greater than that of students in the same tested grades in **the district**.



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**.

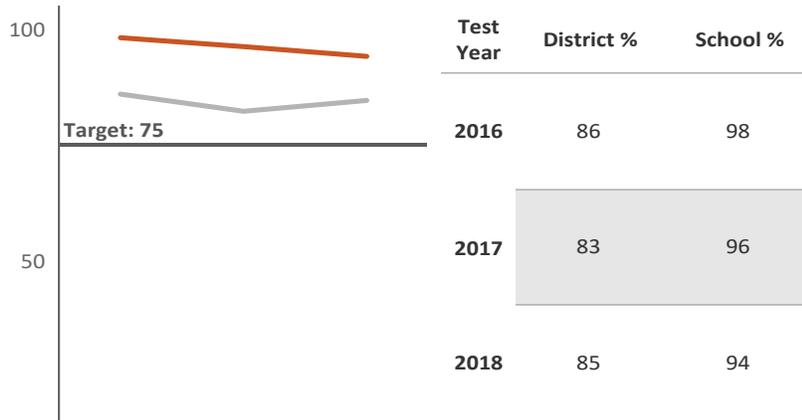


ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

MERRICK ACADEMY - QUEENS PUBLIC 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
Enrollment Receiving Mandated Academic Services	81	83	115
Tested on State Exam	38	42	51
School Percent Proficient on ELA Exam	13.2	16.7	19.6
District Percent Proficient	9.0	10.1	12.4
	2016	2017	2018
ELL Enrollment	14	13	17
Tested on NYSESLAT Exam	14	10	13
School Percent 'Commanding' or Making Progress on NYSESLAT	7.1	20.0	38.5

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,⁴ 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.⁵

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1B

DOES MERRICK HAVE AN ASSESSMENT SYSTEM THAT IMPROVES INSTRUCTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND STUDENT LEARNING?

Now in its 19th year of operation, the school continues to lack an assessment system to ensure teachers and instructional coaches effectively use data to improve instruction and student learning. Although Merrick's new leader prioritizes using data analysis to adjust instruction and has put procedures in place to do so, assessments are not consistently aligned to state standards. The school lacks a system to norm scoring for all major assessments, hindering the reliability of assessment results.

- The school administers a variety of assessments. The validity and reliability of the assessments are unclear because leaders' training on the administration of assessments varies. The school lacks a consistent and clear process for teachers and leaders to analyze results. Three times a year, Merrick administers iReady assessments and school created interim assessments in ELA and mathematics. Merrick also administers the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System ("F&P") and DIBELS to assess reading comprehension and literacy skills three times each year. The school also administers mid-unit and end-of-unit curricular assessments throughout the school year.
- Merrick does not consistently ensure that the rigor of the interim assessments consistently aligns to the requirements of state standards and assessments, and Merrick lacks consistent evidence that the school has a system in place to ensure alignment of all assessments within single grades and vertically from Kindergarten – 8th grade. For example, during the school's first administration of the mathematics interim assessment, 18% of 4th grade students, and 66% of 5th grade students scored at or above proficiency. During the second administration, 64% of 4th grade students, and 35% of 5th grade students met proficiency.

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.

5. Additional details regarding the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks are available at: www.newyorkcharters.org/suny-renewal-benchmarks/.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- The school does not have a valid and reliable process to score open ended assessment responses. Although coaches guide teachers through a norming process when scoring responses on the interim assessments, no such process exists for end of unit assessments. Merrick lacks a process to ensure teachers discuss what would merit a particular score on an assignment and regularly align scoring within and across grade levels. The Institute found that teachers' feedback for student work does not clearly identify student mistakes in a manner that enables students to address misconceptions. On the F&P assessment, individual teachers administer the assessment to students, and leaders do not provide regular oversight to ensure valid administration over time.
- The school has processes for teachers to use data to adjust instruction but has not established a system that allows implementation with fidelity. Four times per week, 3rd – 5th grade teachers engage in a data dive protocol adapted from the Achievement First network. The school expects instructional coaches to ensure teachers review exit ticket or other assessment data, effectively identify student misconceptions, and plan how to address them. However, coaches are not consistently present in data dive meetings, and the Institute observed the extent to which teachers collaborate and use time effectively during these meetings varies by grade level. Teachers' ability to clearly identify and plan to address student misconceptions varies by teachers' skill level. The school's implementation of the data dive process also lacks a method to immediately evaluate the effectiveness of the planned reteach.
- School leaders inconsistently use assessment data to develop coaching strategies and professional development. Based on classroom observations and last year's assessment data, the CAO implemented a new rubric to evaluate teachers' pedagogical skills. Although leaders regularly review assessment results to monitor student progress, the Institute did not observe consistent evidence that all instructional leaders use data to inform coaching strategies or align on schoolwide priorities.
- The school makes assessment data accessible to teachers, leaders, and board members. New this year, the school uses Illuminate, an online repository, to house interim assessment data. Teachers also use the platform for some in-class assessments. School leaders and teachers easily access Illuminate to identify student mastery on state standards. The CAO provides regular assessment data reports to the board.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1C

DOES MERRICK'S CURRICULUM SUPPORT TEACHERS IN THEIR INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING?

Under new school leadership, Merrick adopted new curricula at the start of the current school year. While the school's new curricula support teachers in planning, leaders do not hold teachers accountable for modifying the scripted curricula with fidelity. Leaders' lesson plan feedback does not enable teachers to meaningfully improve instruction and adapt plans to meet Merrick students' needs and raise student achievement.

- In its 19th year of operation, Merrick adopted a new curricular program with potential to provide rigorous instruction to students and raise student achievement; however, instructional leaders' coaching and lesson planning supports do not result in high quality, rigorous instruction. The school adopted open source curricula from the Achievement First network for all grades in ELA and mathematics for the 2018-19 school year. The curricula include detailed scripted lesson plans, student worksheets, unit plans, and some assessments.
- Lesson plans at Merrick lack focus and differentiation. Leaders expect teachers to adapt the scripted Achievement First lesson plans for students by first completing the lesson activities themselves, modifying the scripted language or activities, adding in questioning or differentiated content based on their students' skill levels, and identifying which students to prioritize while checking student work. Teachers submit lesson plans to instructional coaches weekly; however, the Institute's review of lesson plans demonstrates that the feedback leaders provide is limited and not related to meaningful actions teachers can take to improve lessons. Leaders do not hold teachers accountable for internalizing the scripted lessons and making adjustments to meet student needs.
- Merrick lacks a clear long-term system for reviewing its curricular documents. During the summer, the CAO, after reviewing the school's assessment data and talking with school staff, selected the Achievement First curricula for this school year. The principal then worked with the instructional coaches to train leaders and teachers in curricular implementation. Given the leadership turnover, Merrick has not yet established a systematic method to review, select, and develop its curriculum each school year.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1D

IS HIGH QUALITY INSTRUCTION EVIDENT THROUGHOUT MERRICK?

Merrick continues to lack the high quality instruction required to move students toward mastery of grade level standards. Despite coaching efforts and the implementation of a focused and prioritized instructional plan, teachers lack the skills to drive student learning to meet the school's stated achievement goals. Although one of the school's priorities is to use data to drive instruction, the majority of Merrick teachers do not effectively check for understanding or utilize student misconceptions to adjust instruction. As shown in the table below, during the evaluation visit, Institute team members conducted 29 classroom observations following a defined protocol used in all school visits.

		GRADE							
		K	1	2	3	4	5	Self-Contained	Total
CONTENT AREA	ELA	2	1	2	5	3	2	1	16
	Math	1	2		1	2	3	3	12
	Soc Stu		1						1
	Total	3	4	2	6	5	5	4	29

- Despite 19 out of 29 lessons having objectives posted, Merrick teachers do not craft lesson objectives that clearly communicate success criteria or expected learning outcomes that link to a broader purpose or transferable skill. During the most recent visit, the Institute found less of the lessons observed to have evidence of purposeful instruction compared to the Institute's visit in the spring of 2018. While teachers post objectives on the board, teachers do not consistently connect the objective to previous learning, and students are unable to explain the learning target. In most classrooms, at least two teachers are present but the role and purpose of each teacher is not consistently clear.
- Less than half of teachers regularly and effectively use techniques to check for student understanding (13 out of 29 lessons observed). In a few lessons, teachers use nonverbal signals such as thumbs up or down to check for whole group understanding, but teachers do not hold students accountable for responding to allow teachers to have a clear understanding of student mastery. Lesson plans contain detailed information on when and how teachers plan to check for student understanding at specific points in the lesson.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

However, teachers do not effectively maximize these opportunities to give targeted feedback aligned with learning targets. In most classes, teachers circulate around the classroom to monitor on task behaviors but do not provide actionable feedback to students based on the learning target. Teachers also allow students to opt out of answering questions, or provide the correct answers to students instead of scaffolding their teaching to ensure students master the content.

- Few teachers include opportunities in their lessons to challenge students with questions or activities that engage students in higher order thinking and problem solving (6 out of 29 lessons observed). Lesson plans include high level questions and discussion points with relevance to real world issues. However, teachers do not execute on the planned questioning to deepen student understanding or uncover misconceptions, assist students in clarifying and assessing their thinking, or provide opportunities and strategies for students to take ownership of their learning. Rather, teachers have students respond to procedural questions that require factual recall.
- While the Institute observed 21 out of 29 lessons with calm classroom environments and students on task, teachers do not effectively create a culture that continuously focuses on high academic outcomes and maximizes instructional time for all students. Evident in most classes is the absence of strategies that include time, space, structure, and materials to differentiate to individual learning strengths and needs. Evidence of this includes ineffective use of small group teaching, use of center activities that do not push student thinking, and infrequent use of the point system for rewarding positive student behavior.

DOES MERRICK HAVE STRONG INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP?

Merrick does not have an instructional leadership structure sufficient to drive teachers to meet the school's student achievement goals. Following from last year's leadership vacuum, this year, the school hired an experienced CAO who has initiated consistent expectations to address the needs of a teaching staff with accumulated deficits from inconsistent leadership and expectations over the charter term. While the CAO has initiated a strategic plan with a deliberate focus and appropriate priorities, the six members of the instructional leadership team have not yet developed teachers who can deliver quality instruction.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- Merrick’s leadership has not established an environment of high expectations for teacher performance in pedagogical skills. To improve instruction this year, the school has introduced Get Better Faster: A 90-Day Plan for Coaching New Teachers (“Get Better Faster”),⁶ a tool for providing a uniform schoolwide focus on developing important pedagogical competencies for teachers. Nevertheless, the skills of focus are foundational and should be fully addressed earlier in a school year. At the time of the visit in April, coaching documents and classroom observations demonstrate that few teachers have fully mastered the requisite skills. Aside from teaching skill development, the CAO has concentrated on introducing a comprehensive instructional model adapted from a successful charter school network. The CAO communicates clear expectations for following the instructional model procedures. Further, teachers are aware of the importance of student assessment data in using the model and of the school’s current student achievement goals. However, given teachers’ current skill levels and a lack of consistent support and development in previous years, the school is not quickly progressing to enact these expectations to result in high quality instruction.
- In its 19th year, Merrick’s instructional leadership lacks the capacity to support the development of the teaching staff. In assuming the school instructional leader role this year, the CAO has been thoughtful and strategic in providing a smooth transition for the six member instructional leadership team. In addition to the CAO, this team consists of the director of curriculum and instruction, ELA coach, mathematics coach, dean of student support services, and assistant principal. In meeting with the team regularly to oversee coaching, the CAO has focused on norming the monitoring of classroom activity, observing lessons, and offering teacher feedback. Nevertheless, given the leadership’s team limited familiarity with the components of the new instructional model and their uneven skill in systematically strengthening teaching skills, they are not developing the teaching staff at a rate that will likely demonstrate significantly improved student achievement results.
- Instructional leaders provide regular informal feedback to teachers on their lesson planning, delivery of instruction, and use of assessment data, but the effectiveness of these practices is not yet evident. The members of the leadership team have a caseload of teachers whom they coach during six week cycles, in which they conduct short daily classroom visits and a weekly extended informal observation, as well as provide regular feedback. However, because of the short duration of the cycles, the coaches do not

6. Get Better Faster is a framework from Uncommon network focusing on training new teachers. For more information: <https://uncommonschoools.org/books/get-better-faster-a-90-day-plan-for-coaching-new-teachers/>.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

provide sustained support to their assigned teachers. Further, while the assignments are ostensibly based on the extent to which a teacher progresses through the Get Better Faster rubric of skills, it is not clear that the teachers who are developing the slowest get more intensive support. More importantly, a review of a sample of coaching feedback reports submitted by the school provides little evidence of a systemic coaching effort. These reports, which the leadership reviews jointly, show limited continuity in monitoring teachers' development and limited focus on teaching skill development.

- Instructional leaders implement a differentiated professional development program that targets teachers' deficits, but has not established a consistent system to follow up and hold teachers accountable for implementing new strategies. Working with the coaches and some teachers, the CAO laid the groundwork before the 10 day pre-service summer professional development program for implementing the school's new instructional model. The school carries out its 2018-19 professional development agenda at monthly schoolwide meetings, in after school staff meetings, and at grade level meetings with differentiated and targeted participation of all school staff. In addition to enabling selected teachers to attend special out of school training sessions, the coaches provide professional development sessions targeted to each teacher's skill level on the Get Better Faster protocol. These professional development activities are interrelated with classroom practice insofar as coaches select teachers for specific skill training sessions based on the coaches' classroom observations. While the leader expects coaches to follow up with the teachers in their classroom to reinforce the training teachers had received, the Institute did not find consistent evidence to confirm this initiative.
- Historically, Merrick instructional leaders have not conducted formal teacher evaluations. This challenge continues in the current school year; however, the school's new CAO reports plans to complete teacher evaluations prior to the end of June 2019. Leaders meet with teachers every six weeks, depending on individual instructional proficiency, to review professional growth as measured by Uncommon Schools' Get Better Faster rubric as well as what leaders capture in coaching feedback reports.
- The instructional leaders at Merrick do not yet hold teachers accountable for quality instruction and student achievement. The Institute observed limited evidence that the informal feedback for teachers includes a consideration of student growth as an indication of teacher effectiveness. In the absence of summative teacher evaluations, the school lacks a standard for quality instruction both qualitative and quantitative that enable the school to meet, or come close to meeting, its Accountability Plan goals.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1F

DOES MERRICK MEET THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF AT-RISK STUDENTS?

Merrick does not meet the educational needs of students at risk of academic failure. The school has in place compliant programs to support students with disabilities and ELLs, but with a majority of all Merrick students in 3rd – 5th grade not meeting grade level standards, the school's programs to support academically at-risk students are not adding the necessary support for students to reach grade level standards. The school does not work with urgency to ensure classroom teachers are equipped with the instructional skills to support at-risk students by providing high quality tier 1 instruction.

- Merrick has clear procedures in place for identifying at-risk students. The school uses ELA and mathematics diagnostic data to identify students who are significantly below grade level at the beginning of the year. Those students are assigned academic intervention services ("AIS") or Title I services depending on the severity of their deficits. The AIS provider determines if a student should progress to Title I services if the student is not making necessary progress with the AIS interventions. If students have received one to two rounds of Title I services without making progress the dean of student support services determines if the student requires a referral to the district Committee on Special Education ("CSE") for evaluation for special education services. The school administers a home language survey and the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners ("NYSITELL"), to identify ELLs.
- The school does not have the necessary intervention programs to meet the needs of students at risk of academic failure, and the school does not work with urgency to initiate tier 2 supports for students. With more than half the students in 3rd – 5th grade not meeting grade level standards, the school's AIS and Title I services do not effectively support the high number of students at risk of academic failure and ensure all students are making academic progress to meet to grade level expectations. The school has two AIS providers and two Title I providers. However, at the time of the visit one of these providers worked in an integrated co-teaching ("ICT") classroom to cover another teacher's long term leave and was therefore unable to provide intervention services. Similarly, another intervention provider is also responsible for providing ELL services to the school's nine ELLs, further diminishing the capacity of the intervention providers' ability to deliver tier 3 academic intervention supports to the high number of students at risk of academic failure.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- General education teachers do not utilize effective strategies to support students within the general education program. The quality of instruction varies significantly across classrooms at Merrick, and the school does not ensure general education teachers are equipped to provide effective tier 1 strategies in the general education classroom to support at-risk students. The school does not work strategically to support teachers with professional development that will enhance their instructional capacity to support at-risk students. External organizations provide most of the professional development trainings that focus on at-risk students and teachers opt into these trainings rather than the school assigning teachers based on instructional ability.
- Not all teachers are aware of students' progress toward meeting IEP goals, achieving English proficiency, or school-based goals for struggling students. The school has systems in place in which at-risk program staff members track student progress toward these goals on trackers created by the dean of student support services. However, at-risk program providers do not systematically communicate student progress to all teachers. Although the school provides opportunities for special education teachers working in the ICT classrooms and the self contained classrooms time to coordinate with the general education teachers, the school does not allot time for the AIS and Title I teachers to collaborate and discuss student progress with the general education teachers. As a result, despite the at-risk program providers utilization of the progress trackers, at-risk providers do not keep general education teacher informed.

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

Currently, the Merrick school organization does not fully support the delivery of the educational program. At the beginning of the 2017-18 school year, Merrick created the position of executive director with responsibility for overseeing the educational program and ensuring the delivery of operational supports for the educational program. The initial executive director held the position for a year; a new executive director recently began serving in the position in January 2019. Notwithstanding the new executive director's initial efforts to develop plans for improving the school's operations, and a focus on tightening the operational systems, at the time of the visit, the school operations continued to face a variety of challenges, including the recent departure of the school's director of operations.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- Merrick does not have an administrative structure with staff, operational systems, policies, and procedures that fully support the academic program. With a vacancy in the director of operations and registrar positions and with individual members of the operations staff taking on a range of ad hoc responsibilities separate from their assigned functions, the school has relied on outside consulting services to provide basic support and shore up operational procedures. This year, the school has had a decline in enrollment and revenue, and has not established a fully functioning teacher recruitment process inhibiting future staffing and impacting current teacher evaluations. At the beginning of the school year, the operations team could not give the CAO accurate data on the number of returning teachers. Similarly, the operations team has reported inaccurate data to the Institute and not satisfied compliance reporting.
- The organizational structure has general lines of accountability. Based on the overall reporting structure, the operations staff reports to the director of operations and the teaching staff reports to the CAO; the director of operations and the CAO in turn report to the executive director. However, the school has not operationalized the specific lines of accountability in which leaders formally evaluate teachers. The CAO and assistant principal, the only certified building leaders who can under the requirements of the school's union contract act as rating officers, have not yet conducted formal teacher evaluations. As such, the division of labor in supervision is not clear to teachers. Further, with ongoing changes in coaching caseloads, teachers are, at times, unaware of which coach is their current instructional leader.
- Merrick has made an effort to retain some quality staff through internal promotions. The school has invited teachers who have been particularly successful in enabling their students to achieve academically to become coaches. The school has established grade team leaders and invited teachers to attend special professional development events and then turnkey the training to other teachers. About one fourth of the staff has turned over in each of the last two years. In the absence of formal teacher evaluations, no teachers have been asked not to return since before last year.
- Merrick has maintained student enrollment to meet budget requirements, but the school is facing a drop in enrollment this year because of late registration at the beginning of the year, inadequate tracking of no shows, and failure to tap into the waiting list. To compound the issue, the school's registrar, the operational staff member who is responsible for student recruitment, left earlier in the school year, and the school has not yet filled the position.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- Merrick does not have procedures to monitor its progress toward meeting enrollment and retention targets for students with disabilities, ELLs, and economically disadvantaged students, or adjust its recruitment efforts accordingly. With vacancies in the director of operations and registrar positions, the school is not developing and documenting procedures to recruit these students. In particular, the school's enrollment of ELLs is notably lower than the district target. The school has not made a concerted effort to conduct outreach to recruit ELLs.
- Merrick's new CAO spent time in the summer reviewing and making adjustments to the school's program, although this review process is not yet systematic given the recent leadership transition. For the current school year, the school adopted the ELA and mathematics curricula and assessment models from Achievement First; expanded daily time for ELA instruction; established daily grade level teacher planning and weekly professional development meetings; promoted two staff members to higher leadership positions; and, added an additional data analysis cycle and interim assessment. The executive director reviewed the CAO's strategic plan with a focus on this year's student achievement results. Given the recent organizational disruptions, the executive director currently endeavors to support the CAO in executing the initial strategic plan without initiating any further programmatic changes until the end of the school year.

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 2D

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

Only after the Institute's visit in the spring of 2018 did the board begin to work with some urgency to invest in the school's academic program to improve results for students. The board relies on school leaders and consultants to keep it informed and educated about academic program areas, rather than demonstrating a proactive urgency to gain skills it needs to provide clear directives to leaders.

- Since the Institute's 2018 evaluation visit, the board retained members. Board members have experience in law, K-12 education, human resources, and finance. The board has a parent representative. Late in its current charter term, the board now gets targeted information from staff members through its new committee structure. Committee members then report out main information and priorities to the full board. The board also engages in multiple retreats with a consulting firm to enhance its reporting and governance structures. Given that the board has only engaged in this level of work and commitment in its 19th year, the Institute is not yet able to collect evidence of the effectiveness of the board's current procedures and processes.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- Late in the school's fourth charter term, Merrick's board improved its practices regarding collecting data and questioning leaders. After 19 years in existence, the board is only beginning to improve its practices to request and receive accurate and timely student achievement data in this school year. During academic committee meetings, school leaders present iReady and interim assessment data. Board members now ask more critical questions and push leaders to clearly explain data points and link them to student achievement and predictability for state assessment results. Though it is commendable the board has taken many steps to improve in its skills as a board, these changes are occurring late in the overall existence of the school demonstrating a lack of urgency to improve the school's program over the current charter term.
- The board recognizes the current and main priority is to improve the academic outcomes defined in its Accountability Plan in order to make a strong case for renewal. At the beginning of this school year, the CAO developed strategic planning areas for this school year, which the board reviewed. In January 2019, the executive director refined the plan, and the board approved the changes. Through the CAO's and executive director's monthly reports to board committees, members stay aware of what progress is occurring toward the strategic plan or action steps.
- In its 19th year of existence, the board now reports that it receives accurate, timely, and complete information about Merrick's academic program. The board also recognizes that the school is not meeting or coming close to meeting its Accountability Plan goals, and so has attempted, late in the charter term, to utilize more resources into improving the school's program, such as resources for a new curricular program, and additional consultants to build the capacity of the operational and academic teams.
- For this school year, the board is changing its evaluation processes for the school's executive director. Despite operating in its 19th year, the board has not established a consistent system for evaluating school leaders. The board submitted a self review of the former executive director and worked with a consultant to establish new criteria and evaluation for the current executive director. The board anticipates completing an evaluation of the current executive director by June. The board also initiated a process to evaluate itself after each meeting with a checklist to indicate whether or not they conducted specific tasks and executed the agenda. Although the tool demonstrates the board is beginning to think about its interactions and compliance for each meeting, the tool does not result in a high level self evaluation that drives strategic planning for the board to follow.

Merrick

Ax

APPENDICES

PAGES Ax 1-21

SO^A

SCHOOL
OVERVIEW

PAGE Ax 2

PS^B

PERFORMANCE
SUMMARIES

PAGE Ax 8

DC^C

RENEWAL
BENCHMARKS

PAGE Ax 10

APPENDIX A: School Overview

BOARD OF TRUSTEES¹

CHAIR

Gerald KariKari

VICE CHAIR

Tameka Pierre-Louis

TREASURER

Tameka Pierre-Louis

SECRETARY

Tatum T. Boothe

TRUSTEES

Cameil Dalgetty-Jarvis

James Ding

Linda Johnson

Maria Munoz

SCHOOL LEADERS

PRINCIPAL

Alma Alston, Principal (September 2000 to February 2010)

Carolyn Thomas, Interim Acting Principal (March 2010 to August 2010)

Melissa Muhammed, Director of Strategic Planning and Staff Development (September 2010 to November 2010)

Roberta Cummings-Smith, Director of Strategic Planning and Staff Development (January 2011 to December 2011)

Raquel Pottinger -Bird, Principal/Director of Curriculum and Instruction (January 2012 to July 2013)

Nicole Griffin, Interim Acting Principal (2013-14)

Karen Valbrun, Principal (2014-15 to March 2018)

Aubrey Featherstone, Executive Director (October 2017 to December 2018)

Samantha Pugh, Chief Academic Officer (July 2018 to Present)

Dr. Adrian Manuel, Executive Director (January 2019 to Present)

SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

SCHOOL YEAR	CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT ²	ACTUAL AS A PERCENTAGE OF CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	PROPOSED GRADES	ACTUAL GRADES
2000-01	125	121	97%	K-2	K-2
2001-02	175	169	97%	K-3	K-3
2002-03	350	348	99%	K-4	K-4
2003-04	400	400	100%	K-5	K-5
2004-05	450	448	99%	K-6	K-6
2005-06	500	500	100%	K-6	K-6
2006-07	525	461	88%	K-6	K-6
2007-08	525	495	94%	K-6	K-6

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

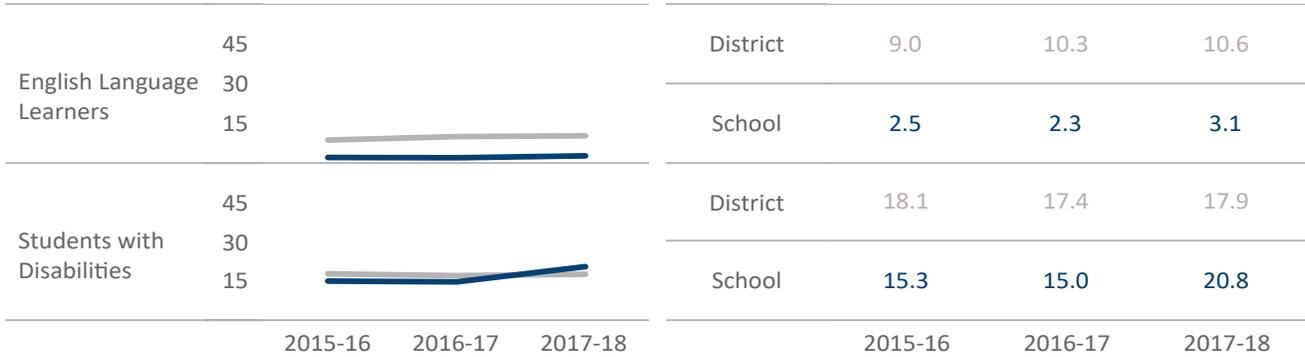
SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS CONTINUED

SCHOOL YEAR	CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT ²	ACTUAL AS A PERCENTAGE OF CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	PROPOSED GRADES	ACTUAL GRADES
2008-09	525	500	95%	K-5	K-6
2009-10	525	494	94%	K-5	K-6
2010-11	540	492	91%	K-6	K-6
2011-12	540	497	92%	K-6	K-6
2012-13	540	493	91%	K-6	K-6
2013-14	540	494	91%	K-6	K-6
2014-15	540	498	92%	K-6	K-6
2015-16	475	517	109%	K-5	K-5
2016-17	475	546	115%	K-5	K-5
2017-18	475	543	114%	K-5	K-5
2018-19	475	516	109%	K-5	K-5

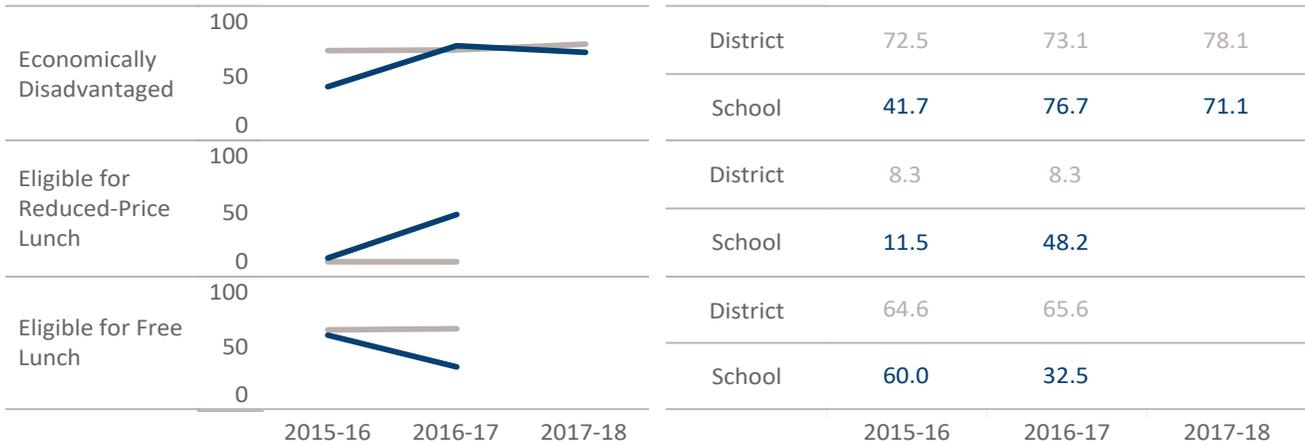
APPENDIX A: School Overview

Merrick Academy-Queens Public Charter School CSD 29

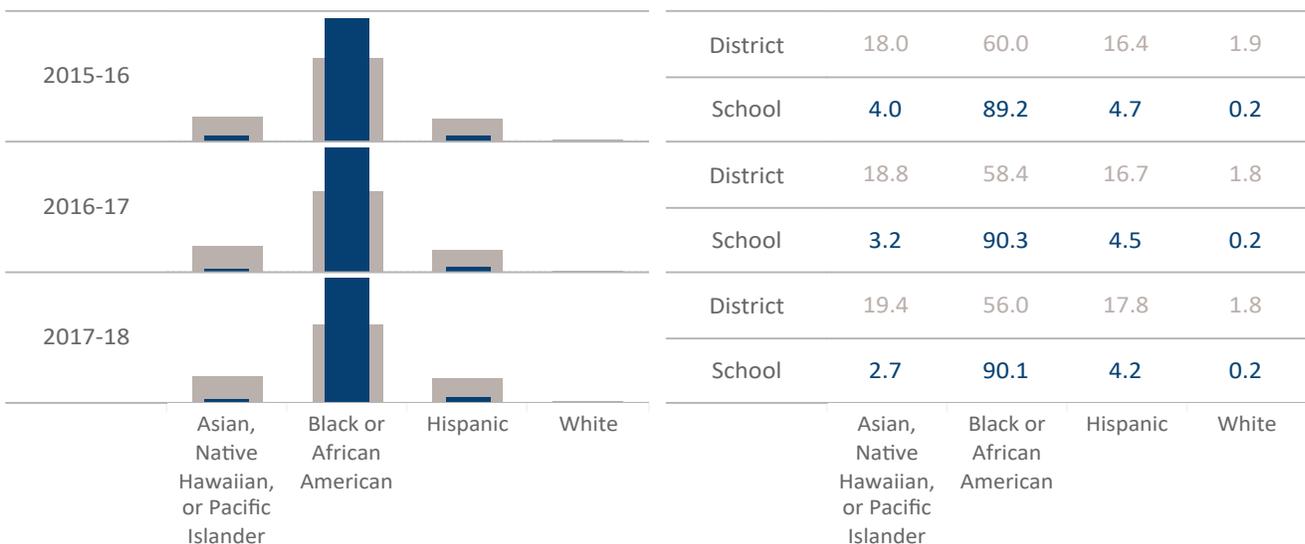
Student Demographics: Special Populations



Student Demographics: Free/Reduced Lunch



Student Demographics: Race/Ethnicity

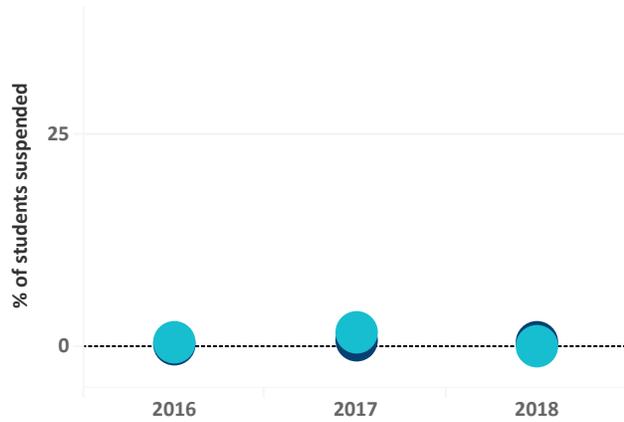


Data reported in these charts reflect BEDS day enrollment counts as reported by the New York State Education Department

APPENDIX A: School Overview

Merrick Academy-Queens Public Charter School

CSD 29



	School ISS Rate	School OSS Rate
2016	0.4	0.2
2017	1.6	0.5
2018	0.0	0.4

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

Merrick Academy-Queens Public Charter School's Enrollment and Retention Status: 2017-18

		District Target	School
Enrollment	economically disadvantaged	84.4	71.1
	English language learners	9.2	3.1
	students with disabilities	14.0	20.8
Retention	economically disadvantaged	93.5	89.3
	English language learners	93.7	91.7
	students with disabilities	93.3	93.0

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
2000-01	First Year Visit	May 22, 2001
2001-02	Evaluation Visit	May 13, 2002
2002-03	Evaluation Visit	January 15 -16, 2003
2003-04	Initial Renewal Visit	Spring 2004
2006-07	Evaluation Visit	May 24, 2007
2007-08	Evaluation Visit	May 13 - 14, 2008
2009-10	Subsequent Renewal Visit	November 6, 2009
2011-12	Evaluation Visit	February 15-16, 2012
2014-15	Subsequent Renewal Visit	November 13, 2014
2015-16	Evaluation Visit	March 22 and June 1, 2016
2017-18	Evaluation Visit	April 18-19, 2018
2018-19	Evaluation Visit	April 9-10, 2019

CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

DATE(S) OF VISIT	EVALUATION TEAM MEMBERS	TITLE
April 9 - 10, 2019	Hannah Hansen	School Evaluation Analyst
	Andrew Kile	Director of School Evaluation
	Kerri Rizzolo	Senior Analyst
	Denise Gaffor	School Evaluation Analyst
	Ron Miller	External Consultant

CHARTER CYCLE CONTEXT

CHARTER TERM	ACCOUNTABILITY PERIOD ³	ANTICIPATED RENEWAL VISIT
Fourth year of fourth charter term	Fifth year of five-year Accountability Period	Fall 2019

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 commitment to students, parents and the Southeast Queens community to provide an academic program that will prepare students to meet and exceed New York State performance standards;	+
A curriculum in ELA and mathematics that includes scientifically based research to support its success;	+
The use of data to inform instruction and in providing differentiated instruction to support individual student needs;	-
Established learning community where teachers use student work, research and best practices to improve student performance;	-
A comprehensive professional development program;	+
A summer homework program to address any regression in learning;	+
One hour and thirty minutes of ELA instruction daily based on balanced literacy, including a reader’s and writer’s workshop, as modeled by the National Writing Project and Great Source Writing Program;	-
One hour and thirty minutes of daily mathematics instruction, using Everyday Mathematics, enrichment and experiential learning; and,	-
A comprehensive assessment system.	+

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY: ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Merrick Academy - Queens Public Charter School

		2015-16 Grades Served K-5				2016-17 Grades Served K-5				2017-18 Grades Served K-5							
		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	35.3 (102)	35.4 (79)		3	38.5 (78)	39.7 (73)		3	59.5 (74)	61.9 (63)					
		4	48.8 (80)	47.7 (65)		4	33.0 (109)	35.2 (91)		4	38.8 (85)	42.9 (70)					
		5	14.5 (69)	13.1 (61)		5	31.7 (82)	33.3 (75)		5	33.7 (95)	34.1 (91)					
		6	(0)	(0)		6	(0)	(0)		6	(0)	(0)					
		7	(0)	(0)		7	(0)	(0)		7	(0)	(0)					
		8	(0)	(0)		8	(0)	(0)		8	(0)	(0)					
		All	33.9 (251)	32.7 (205)	NO	All	34.2 (269)	36.0 (239)	NO	All	42.9 (254)	44.6 (224)	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					
		3-5	106	104	YES	3-5	109	111	NO	3-5	126	101	YES				
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: Queens CSD 29				Comparison: Queens CSD 29				Comparison: Queens CSD 29							
		Grades	School	District		Grades	School	District		Grades	School	District					
		3-5	32.7	38.9	NO	3-5	36.0	39.7	NO	3-5	44.6	43.0	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	65.4	35.3	39.1	-0.28	3	74.7	38.5	35.7	0.16	3	68.9	59.5	47.1	0.70	
		4	72.6	48.8	34.0	0.88	4	75.0	33.0	33.2	-0.01	4	66.7	38.8	44.6	-0.31	
		5	79.5	14.5	24.2	-0.69	5	73.8	31.7	28.3	0.23	5	68.9	33.7	32.6	0.07	
		6					6					6					
		7					7					7					
		8					8					8					
All	71.6	33.9	33.4	-0.02	NO	All	74.5	34.2	32.5	0.11	NO	All	68.2	42.9	40.8	0.13	NO
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	58.5			4	45.0			4	54.7						
		5	54.3			5	51.6			5	51.2						
		6	0.0			6	0.0			6	0.0						
		7	0.0			7	0.0			7	0.0						
		8	0.0			8	0.0			8	0.0						
All	56.6	50.0	YES	All	47.8	50.0	NO	All	52.8	50.0	YES						

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY: MATHEMATICS

Merrick Academy - Queens Public Charter School

		2015-16 Grades Served K-5				2016-17 Grades Served K-5				2017-18 Grades Served K-5							
		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	33.7 (101)	35.4 (79)		3	27.8 (79)	28.4 (74)		3	47.2 (72)	49.2 (61)					
		4	43.0 (79)	45.3 (64)		4	24.8 (109)	29.7 (91)		4	39.3 (84)	43.5 (69)					
		5	21.7 (69)	21.3 (61)		5	40.7 (81)	41.9 (74)		5	28.9 (90)	29.1 (86)					
		6	(0)	(0)		6	(0)	(0)		6	(0)	(0)					
		7	(0)	(0)		7	(0)	(0)		7	(0)	(0)					
		8	(0)	(0)		8	(0)	(0)		8	(0)	(0)					
		All	33.3 (249)	34.3 (204)	NO	All	30.5 (269)	33.1 (239)	NO	All	37.8 (246)	39.4 (216)	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					
		3-5	102	101	YES	3-5	95	109	NO	3-5	110	103	YES				
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: Queens CSD 29				Comparison: Queens CSD 29				Comparison: Queens CSD 29							
		Grades	School	District		Grades	School	District		Grades	School	District					
		3-5	34.3	33.4	YES	3-5	33.1	33.7	NO	3-5	39.4	38.1	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	65.4	33.7	41.5	-0.44	3	74.7	27.8	41.1	-0.68	3	68.9	47.2	50.1	-0.15	
		4	72.6	43.0	37.5	0.29	4	75.0	24.8	34.1	-0.50	4	66.7	39.3	44.9	-0.28	
		5	79.5	21.7	28.7	-0.38	5	73.8	40.7	34.4	0.35	5	68.9	28.9	38.8	-0.56	
		6					6					6					
		7					7					7					
		8					8					8					
All	71.6	33.3	36.7	-0.19	NO	All	74.6	30.5	36.2	-0.29	NO	All	68.1	37.8	44.2	-0.34	NO
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	62.3			4	39.7			4	63.9						
		5	47.3			5	56.3			5	49.8						
		6	0.0			6	0.0			6	0.0						
		7	0.0			7	0.0			7	0.0						
		8	0.0			8	0.0			8	0.0						
All	55.2	50.0	YES	All	46.8	50.0	NO	All	56.4	50.0	YES						

VERSION 5.0, MAY 2012

Introduction

The State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks¹ (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.

APPENDIX C: SUNY Renewal Benchmarks

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.

