



2015-16 School Evaluation Report

MERRICK ACADEMY-QUEENS

PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL

Visit Dates: March 22 and June 1, 2016

Report Date: July 26, 2016

State University of New York
41 State Street, Suite 700
Albany, New York 12207

(518) 445-4250
www.newyorkcharters.org



INTRODUCTION AND SCHOOL BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

This School Evaluation Report offers an analysis of evidence collected during the school visits on March 22 and June 1, 2016. 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 (i.e., 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 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 summarizes various strengths of the school and notes areas in need of improvement 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.

SCHOOL BACKGROUND

Opening Information

Date Initial Charter Approved by SUNY Trustees	February 1, 2000
Date of School Opening	September 2000

Location and 2015-16 Enrollment

Address	District	Facility	Chartered Enrollment	Grades
136-25 218 th Street Springfield Gardens (Queens)	NYC CSD 29	Private	475	K-5

Merrick Academy-Queens Public Charter School (“Merrick”) operates with a limited services contract model with Victory Schools Inc. (“Victory”), a national educational services provider based in New York.

2014-15 SCHOOL PERFORMANCE REVIEW

During 2014-15, the first year of its five-year Accountability Period, Merrick did not meet either of its key academic Accountability Plan goals of English language arts (“ELA”) or mathematics. Merrick met its science goal and its No Child Left Behind (“NCLB”) goal.

ELA

Merrick did not meet its ELA goal during 2014-15 and posted declining performance from 2013-14 when it was renewed for a full five year charter term. The percentage of students enrolled in the school for at least two years scoring at or above proficiency on the state’s ELA exam declined by three percentage points from 20 to 17. Concomitantly, Merrick widened the gap between its ELA performance and that of New York City Community School District 29 (the “district”): the school underperformed the district by 5 percentage points during 2013-14 and by 11 percentage points during 2014-15. Merrick’s ELA achievement did not grow at a pace sufficient to catch students up to proficiency, posting an average growth percentile of 44 and falling below the target mean percentile of 50 on the measure. Most importantly, in comparison to schools throughout New York State with similar concentrations of economically disadvantaged students, Merrick performed lower than expected posting an Effect Size of -.90.

Mathematics

Merrick did not meet its mathematics goal during 2014-15. The school’s performance declined and fell below that of the district after it narrowly outperformed the district during 2013-14. In comparison to schools throughout the state with similar concentrations of economically disadvantaged students, Merrick performed lower than expected. In addition to posting low performance on an important comparative measure of performance, the school did not grow its mathematics achievement at a rate sufficient to move students toward proficiency. Merrick’s growth score of 43 fell below the target of the state’s median 50th percentile.

Science

Merrick met its science goal during 2014-15. With 85 percent of 4th grade students proficient on the state’s science exam, the school’s performance exceeded its absolute target of 75 percent proficiency and the narrowly exceeded the district’s comparative proficiency rate of 82 percent.

NCLB

Merrick met its NCLB goal and is in good standing. The school was not identified on the state’s priority or focus school list for 2014-15.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

		2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Enrollment (N) Receiving Mandated Academic Services		(33)	(32)	(43)
Results	Tested on State Exams (N)	(16)	(22)	(31)
	School Percent Proficient on ELA Exam	12.5	0	3.2
	Percent Proficient Statewide	5.0	5.2	5.8

		2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
ELL Enrollment (N)		(4)	(8)	(12)
Results	Tested on NYSESLAT ¹ Exam (N)	(4)	(7)	(12)
	School Percent 'Commanding' or Making Progress ² on NYSESLAT	s ³	14.3	0

¹ New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test, a standardized state exam.

² Defined as moving up at least one level of proficiency. As of 2014-15, student scores can fall into five categories/proficiency levels: Entering (formerly Beginning); Emerging (formerly Low Intermediate); Transitioning (formerly Intermediate); Expanding (formerly Advanced); and, Commanding (formerly Proficient).

³ 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.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

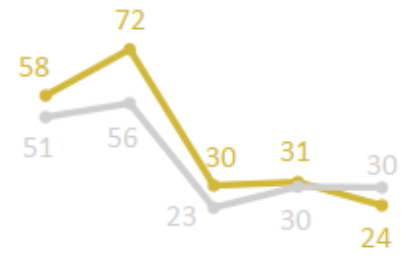
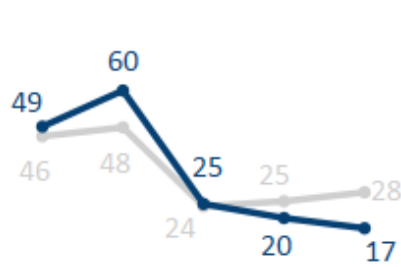
Merrick Academy-Queens Public Charter School

REQUIRED MEASURE DESCRIPTION

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GOAL

MATHEMATICS ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GOAL

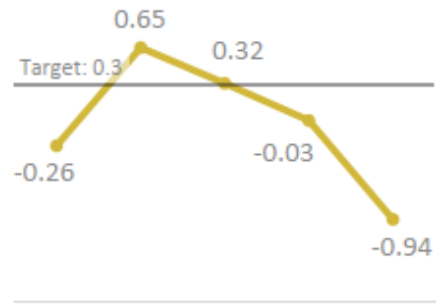
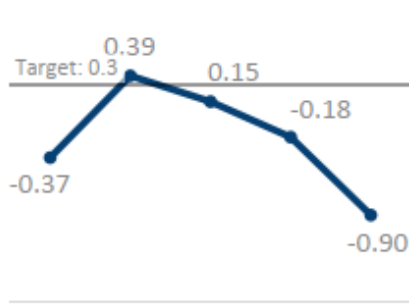
Comparative Measure: District Comparison. Each year, the percentage of students at Merrick in at least their second year performing at or above proficiency in **ELA** and **mathematics** will be greater than that of students in the same tested grades in **CSD 29**.



2011 2012 2013 2014 2015

2011 2012 2013 2014 2015

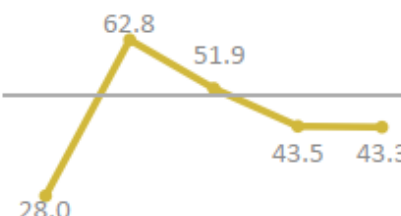
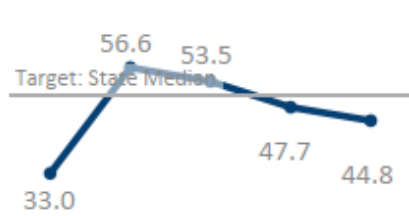
Comparative Measure: Effect Size. Each year, the school will exceed its predicted level of performance by an Effect Size of 0.3 or above in **ELA** and **mathematics** according to a regression analysis controlling for economically disadvantaged students among all public schools in New York State.



2011 2012 2013 2014 2015

2011 2012 2013 2014 2015

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



2011 2012 2013 2014 2015

2011 2012 2013 2014 2015

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**.



BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

QUALITATIVE EDUCATION BENCHMARKS

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

Board Oversight

Trustee turnover since Merrick's most recent renewal has severely diminished the board's ability to support the school in meeting its Accountability Plan goals. In the first year of the school's fourth charter term, the Merrick board has continued to neglect its oversight duties. The board only acts to mitigate its governance deficiencies in the face of multiple violation letters from the Institute.

- At the time of the school's November 2014 renewal visit, 10 trustees comprised the school's board. Six of the trustees active during the renewal review no longer serve on the board. Because of this turnover, Merrick's board lacks members with K-12 academic expertise, which is critical to the board's ability to monitor the educational program. The board also lacks sufficient governance knowledge as demonstrated by multiple violations of its charter contract.
- The inability of Merrick's board to glean sufficient pertinent information from key sources endangers the school's academic program and financial health. The board does not use the wealth of information presented in monthly reports from the school principal and other staff members to think critically about the state of academic affairs at Merrick. Conversely, the board does not require sufficient information from Victory, a contracted provider of academic, financial, and back office supports. For example, reviewed board meeting minutes provide no evidence of discussion of changes in Victory services and fee structure at the start of the school year. Minutes also do not indicate the board's formal agreement to new terms of the contract. Board members expressed surprise at hearing from the Institute during the March evaluation visit that Victory withdrew its teacher coaching supports in fall 2015 and were unable to speak definitively about the services for which the school continued to pay the contractor. The board also expressed surprise that the school's fiscal dashboard⁶ showed Merrick with zero days of cash on hand as of the

⁴ An extensive body of research identifying and confirming the correlates of effective schools exists dating back four decades. Selected sources include: www.mes.org/correlates.html; scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/dobbie_fryer_revision_final.pdf; and, gao.gov/assets/80/77488.pdf.

⁵ Additional details regarding the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks, including greater specificity as to what the Institute looks for at each school that may demonstrate attainment of the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks, is available at: www.newyorkcharters.org/suny-renewal-benchmarks/.

⁶ The SUNY Fiscal Dashboard contains a benchmark of 30 days of cash on hand.

BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

June 30, 2015 independent audit report. Both the Institute's January 2015 Renewal Recommendation Report and a June 2016 report from the City of New York Office of the Comptroller identified findings related to the handling of the Victory agreement that demonstrate insufficient board oversight.

- The board fails to establish clear priorities, objectives, and long-range goals of its own volition. An April 1, 2016 violation letter detailed the Institute's concern that the board's inaction on issues such as finalizing the school's collective bargaining agreement ("CBA"), bolstering instructional leadership capacity in the absence of an assistant principal and planned Victory services, and identifying clear benchmarks to monitor academic progress jeopardized the school's ability to make significant student achievement gains. The Institute required the board to implement a Corrective Plan to address such matters and will monitor the school's implementation of its submitted plan.
- The board does not provide the school leadership with sufficient resources to function effectively. For example: as noted above, as of the Institute's March 22nd visit, the board had not finalized a CBA. Without a contract in place, the principal was unable to conduct formal teacher evaluations. Without completed evaluations, the principal had limited ability to make staffing plans for the upcoming school year. The board also had not engaged the principal in conversations about her performance or its intentions to renew her contract or seek new leadership. This sort of delay in communicating plans for the school's leadership can have a negative impact on both leaders' and teachers' desire to remain at the school.
- Merrick's board does not hold the school leader, itself, or contractors accountable for student outcomes. A self-evaluation prescribed in the Corrective Plan states, "The Board has not consistently reviewed and reacted to data on academic performance, nor made corresponding adjustments to strengthen and support the program." The evaluation further notes that the board should "consistently and clearly evaluate the performance of the Principal" as well as track progress toward meeting goals it plans to establish for itself but makes no mention of student achievement targets. With regard to its evaluation of Victory's services, the self-assessment simply declares the board's management "could and should have been stronger."

Use of Assessment Data

This year, Merrick revised its assessment system in order to monitor the effectiveness of the academic program more accurately. In addition to administering different assessments, the school analyzes its data more deeply than in previous years. However, the school's principal notes that Merrick's assessments do not completely align with the state's performance standards. Classroom instruction does not evidence differentiation or the use of assessment data to adjust instruction to meet the needs of individual students.

BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

- Merrick administers a variety of commercial and internally produced assessments to monitor the academic growth and achievement of its students. One of the school's math teachers, acting in additional capacity as a data specialist, produces various analyses that teachers examine at weekly grade team meetings. Teachers draw conclusions from these analyses to determine which standards, skills and content deficits they will readdress in future lessons.
- This year, Merrick uses assessment data to assign students to one of the following learning pathways that provide opportunities for extra support: Title I academic supports, academic intervention services, after school tutoring or Saturday school, or the school's academic enrichment program. The school has yet to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs.
- Merrick's instructional leaders attempt to use data from the school's various assessments to make predictions about how students will perform on the state's assessments but the lack of alignment between the school's assessments and state performance standards complicates this task. Although teachers and leaders purport to use data to differentiate instruction in the classroom, the visit team found no evidence of differentiation in classroom instruction (via small group or one on one tutoring) during the visits.
- Merrick's instructional leaders do not use assessment data to select professional development topics or to develop coaching strategies. School leaders use classroom observation data and input from teachers to determine topics for professional development.

Curriculum

Despite last year's changes to Merrick's curriculum, student performance in ELA and mathematics, as measured by the state's assessment system during the 2014-15 school year, did not improve. This year, the school has increased the available resources in its classrooms but has left its curriculum largely unchanged. Merrick introduced deeper analysis of its assessment data in order to improve the academic program and has used other materials to supplement the commercial curricula.

- Merrick uses commercial curricula for both ELA and mathematics and supplements those with materials from EngageNY. The school's ELA curriculum relies heavily on leveled texts and students complete separate assessments three times per year to determine reading levels. In contrast to previous years, the school's classrooms are well equipped with grade appropriate leveled reading materials that offer students challenging but accessible literature based on assessed reading levels.
- Until December, Victory provided materials that leaders and teachers used to guide instructional planning. Following a change in Victory services, teachers and school leaders have taken responsibility for developing these materials and ensuring alignment to state

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standards. The resulting documents are available through shared computer hard drives to other staff members including Title I and intervention support teachers. The principal attempts to use data from the school's assessments to evaluate curriculum effectiveness; however, gaps in Merrick's teacher coaching system limit the leader's ability to ensure that teachers deliver planned lessons with fidelity.

- Teachers use a template to plan lessons containing objectives and purposeful activities. However, teachers' plans generally lack sufficient detail. For example, teachers do not consistently include adequate plans to measure students' attainment of specific skills and content mastery. At times, lesson activities do not align with even broadly stated objectives. In the absence of a clearly defined standard for rigor, teachers do not plan instruction that drives high expectations for student learning.

Pedagogy

Instruction at Merrick does not equip students to demonstrate grade level proficiency and master presented skills and concepts. As shown in the chart below, during the evaluation visit, Institute team members conducted 21 classroom observations following a defined protocol used in all school evaluation visits.

CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

		Grade						Total
		K	1	2	3	4	5	
Content Area	ELA				4	2	2	8
	Math	1	1	3	3	3	2	13
	Total	1	1	3	7	5	4	21

- Most teachers present lessons aligned with Merrick's curriculum (13 of 21 classroom observations), but learning objectives often lack detail and are not measurable. Co-teachers do not consistently have clear roles in delivering instruction or providing students with support to achieve articulated outcome targets.
- A minority of teachers (8 of 21 classroom observations) effectively check for student understanding of lesson content. Though many teachers regularly implement some techniques to gauge understanding, they do not design the checks to yield adequate information to adjust instruction to meet student needs. Teachers' frequent questioning of students tends to require very low-level recall rather than application of lesson concepts. Some teachers fail to follow up when students provide incorrect answers. For example, a teacher checking for students' understanding of authors' use of structure in novels accepted answers solely focused on content details.

BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

- Teacher-centered instruction dominates Merrick classrooms; few lessons challenge students to develop higher-order thinking and problem solving skills (2 of 21 classrooms observed). Teachers closely direct classroom discussions, thereby minimizing opportunities for meaningful peer-to-peer interactions. With little encouragement for students to engage in deep discovery or exploration of material, discussions do little to expand breadth of knowledge. Designed lesson activities frequently miss opportunities to challenge students. For example, a teacher distributed 8.5 x 11 sheets of paper to students during a lesson on equivalent parts. Rather than allowing students time to experiment with their own solutions, the teacher interjected with scripted step-by-step directions for creating two equal parts with one fold of the paper. This approach eliminated students' independent comparison of horizontal and diagonal folds and missed the opportunity for rich discussion about the results of a diagonal fold.
- A minority of classrooms maintain focus on academic achievement (9 of 21 classrooms observed), and teachers struggle to implement effective classroom management techniques. Prolonged transitions, unclear instructions, and behavioral disruptions result in considerable lost learning time. For example, a teacher instructed students in a mathematics lesson to work on a problem set during snack time. Squabbles over the snacks and about who would be able to demonstrate problem solutions on the white board quickly broke out across the classroom. The teacher expressed disapproval of the students' behavior but took no action to redirect the behavior and focus students' attention on the learning task at hand.

Instructional Leadership

Merrick's instructional leadership team is critically understaffed. Notwithstanding, it is not practicable for the existing leadership team to provide the close clinical coaching that the teaching staff needs in order to improve student academic performance.

- Merrick's coaching supports for teachers and the instructional leadership team both diminished this year. The assistant principal position, intended to play a key role in coaching teachers, has been vacant since January 2015. In November 2015, Victory significantly scaled back its coaching and in-classroom support to the school's teachers. Victory continues to provide some professional development, particularly in support of the school's special education staff and services, but general education teacher coaching responsibilities now fall on the principal. The principal implemented peer observations as a means of providing teachers with some level of feedback on their teaching practice, but this practice is insufficient to meet Merrick's instructional leadership needs.
- Teacher evaluation results do not align with the school's academic outcomes. Loosely based on Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching, the majority of teacher

BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

evaluations from 2014-15 indicate that teachers are generally effective or highly effective across all of the domains included in the evaluation protocol. However, during the 2014-15 school year, the school posted its lowest academic performance outcomes in ELA and mathematics during the past three years.

- Again in response to the lack of adequate personnel to provide sustained clinical coaching of the school's teachers, the principal has begun sending teachers to external trainings offered by Uncommon Schools designed to improve student engagement and student understanding of lesson content. At least one teacher from each grade level team has attended a training session and returned to the school to train fellow grade level teachers on the content during the next grade team meeting. Notwithstanding enthusiasm among most of the school's teaching staff for the training, these new techniques were not in evidence in Merrick's classroom at the time of the visit, which demonstrates the limited capacity in the current leadership structure to guide and improve instruction.

At-Risk Students

Merrick has sufficient programs in place to address the needs of students with disabilities, ELLs and students who struggle academically.

- Merrick has clear and appropriate systems in place to identify at-risk students. It screens students with potential limited English proficiency upon registration with the Home Language Identification Survey. The school then administers the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners, when necessary. Teachers refer students struggling academically to Merrick's student support team ("SST") based on state test results, performance on school-wide assessments, and classroom observation data. While the referral process is clear, the school does not have clear criteria to establish students' need for academic intervention services ("AIS").
- The school does not have a defined mechanism for intensifying academic supports for struggling students aside from referral for special education evaluation. The SST refers students perceived as not making adequate progress with AIS for evaluation for special education services but does not have a codified intervention cycle. Merrick has seen a significant increase in referrals and classifications for special education services in the current school year, which likely aligns to the principal's stated priority of strengthening the school's program with better identification of students with disabilities.
- Merrick has adequate English language acquisition supports in place. A certified English as a New Language ("ENL") teacher provides pullout services for the school's 14 ELLs. Although most ELLs participate in small proficiency-based groups, a small number of ELLs receive one-on-one supports. The ENL teacher collaborates with classroom teachers to differentiate instruction on an ad hoc basis.

BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

- Merrick monitors the performance of at-risk students through iReady, the Fountas and Pinnell (“F&P”) assessment, and DIBELS assessments as well as classroom work products. Additionally, the ENL teacher monitors students’ progress toward English proficiency with weekly assessments from the commercial Reading A to Z program, which targets foundational skills in language, phonetics, reading fluency and comprehension.

Organizational Capacity

The school organization fails to retain adequate human capital and does not maintain sharp focus on ensuring students reach mastery of core academic skills.

- Merrick’s organization establishes distinct lines of accountability with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, but it does not have adequate staff, systems, and procedures to deliver a strong educational program that supports students in reaching high levels of achievement. Most notably, the school requires additional instructional leadership to ensure all teachers have the pedagogical skills necessary to meet the learning needs of all students.
- Merrick continues to face challenges in the recruitment and retention of high quality staff. Five leaders helmed the school at various points in the previous five-year charter term with several leadership transitions occurring mid-year. The current principal has just completed the second year of her tenure. Staff members report that leadership turnover contributed to many teachers’ decisions to leave the school in the last charter term, as did the New York City Department of Education’s lifting of its teacher hiring freeze. Fifteen of the school’s 2013-14 teachers left Merrick prior to the start of the 2014-15 school year. Teacher turnover has continued in the new charter term: according to minutes from the board’s September meeting, Merrick had to replace 17 teachers as it began the 2015-16 school year and pre-visit documents submitted by the school show 11 teachers left Merrick between September 2015 and March 2016.
- The school does not focus its resources on strengthening existing programs to improve student outcomes and meet its Accountability Plan targets. Board meeting minutes show that the school submitted applications for pre-Kindergarten, gifted & talented, and International Baccalaureate programs it hoped to implement in the 2016-17 school year. This demonstrates questionable judgment in deploying the school’s limited resources to develop such applications rather than focus on establishing a rigorous Kindergarten-5th grade program to prepare students to demonstrate grade level proficiency.
- Merrick maintains adequate student enrollment and reports a waitlist of 123 prospective students.
- At the end of the previous term, Merrick developed clear procedures to monitor its progress toward meeting its enrollment and retention targets for students with disabilities, ELLs and students who are eligible applicants to the federal free and reduced price lunch

BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

program. However, the school does not maintain accurate enrollment data,⁷ thereby inhibiting the effectiveness of those procedures.

⁷ During the Institute's preparation of this report, Merrick repeatedly submitted incomplete and inaccurate data related to students' persistence in enrollment and on the school's progress toward meeting its enrollment and retention targets. As of the date of this report, the school has not provided accurate and complete student discipline data requested by the Institute.

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Appendix A

School Overview

APPENDIX A: SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Mission Statement

The mission of Merrick Academy is to become one of the finest public schools in America. Merrick Academy is built on the philosophy that all children can learn and the Academy ensures that all students meet or exceed New York State performance standards. The focus of the Academy is 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.

Board of Trustees⁸

Board Member Name	Position	Board Member Name	Position
Gerald Karikari	Chair	Lula Mae Fischer	PTO President/Trustee
Anna Ramroop	Secretary	James Ding	Trustee
Cameil Dalgetty-Jarvis	Trustee	Kevin Thomas	Trustee
Tameka Pierre-Louis	Trustee		

School Characteristics

School Year	Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment⁹	Proposed Grades	Actual Grades
2010-11	540	492	K-6	K-6
2011-12	540	497	K-6	K-6
2012-13	540	493	K-6	K-6
2013-14	540	494	K-6	K-6
2014-15	540	498	K-6	K-6
2015-16	475	526	K-5	K-5

⁸ Source: The Institute's board records at the time of the visit.

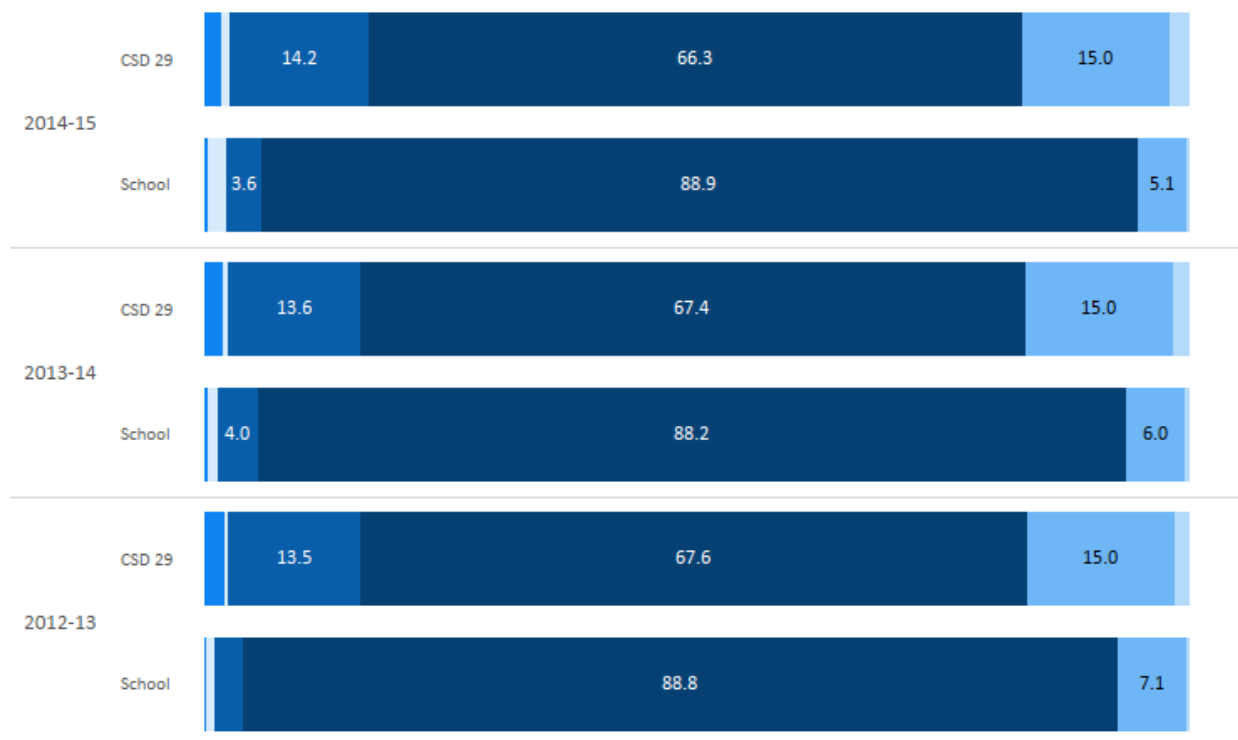
⁹ Source: Institute's Official Enrollment Binder. (Figures may differ slightly from New York State Report Cards, depending on date of data collection.)

APPENDIX A: SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Key Design Elements

- 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 assessment data to inform instruction and in providing differentiated instruction to support 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 daily of mathematics instruction, using Everyday Mathematics, enrichment and experiential learning; and,
- A comprehensive assessment system.

Student Demographics: Race/Ethnicity

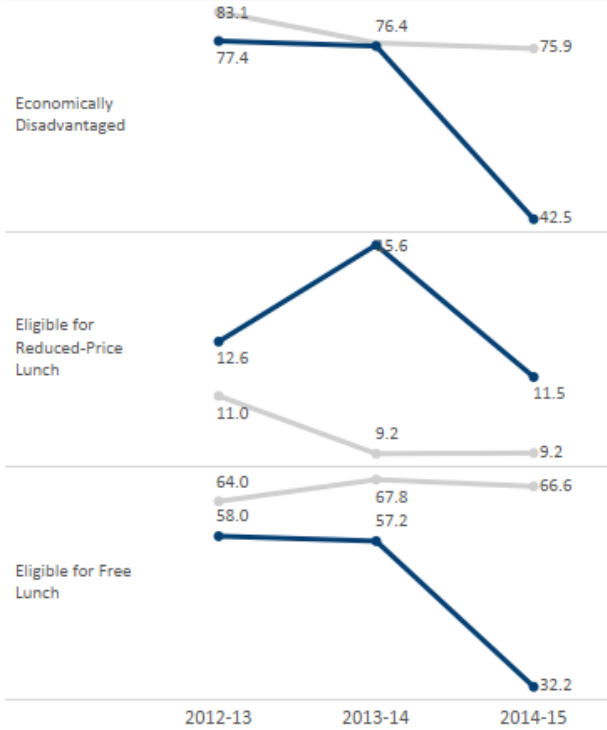


Race/Ethnicity Color Legend

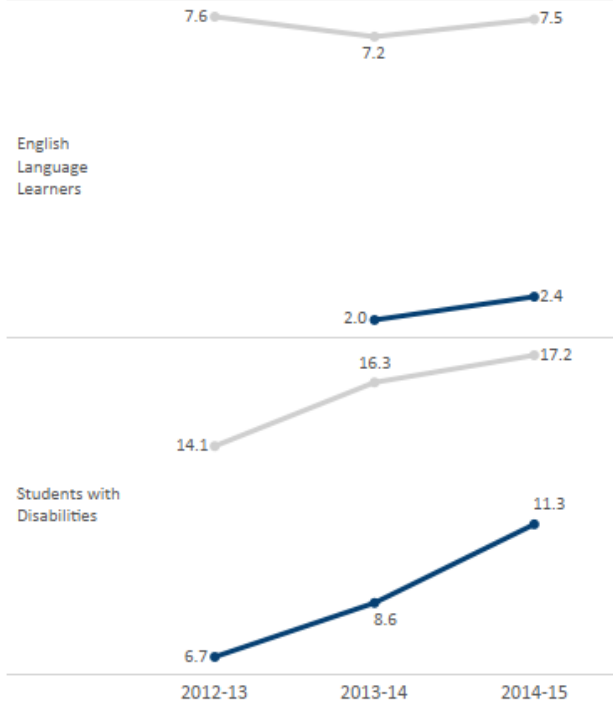
■ American Indian or ..
 ■ Asian, Native Hawaii..
 ■ Black or African Ame..
 ■ Hispanic
 ■ Multiracial
 ■ White

APPENDIX A: SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Student Demographics: Free/Reduced Lunch



Student Demographics: Special Populations

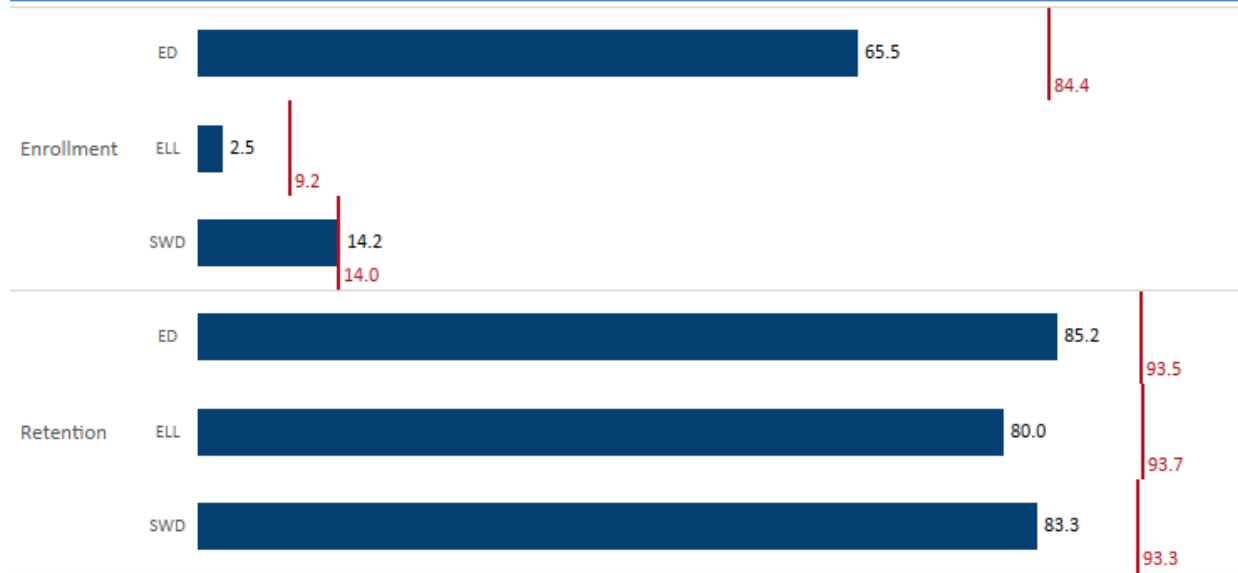


The charts show the trends in enrollment in the **school** and the **district** for each subgroup. Economically disadvantaged includes those students eligible for Free and Reduced-Price lunch among other qualifying income assistance programs.

The charts show trends in enrollment in the **school** and the **district** for each subgroup.

APPENDIX A: SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Enrollment and Retention Targets



The chart illustrates the school's **current enrollment and retention percentages** against the **enrollment and retention targets**. As required by Education Law § 2851(4)(e), a school must include in its renewal application information regarding the efforts it has, and will, put in place to meet or exceed SUNY's enrollment and retention targets for students with disabilities, ELLs, and FRPL students. This analysis is based on the most recently available data provided by the school.

Persistence in Enrollment



Persistence in enrollment illustrates the percentage of students not scheduled to age out of the school who re-enroll from the previous year. The Institute derived the statistical information on enrollment persistence from its database. No comparative data from NYCDOE or NYSED is available to the Institute to provide either district wide or by CSD context. As such, the information presented is for information purposes but does not allow for comparative analysis.

School Leaders

School Year(s)	Name(s) and Title(s)
September – November 2010	Melissa Muhammed, Director of Strategic Planning and Staff Development
January - December 2011	Roberta Cummings-Smith, Director of Strategic Planning and Staff Development
January 2012 – July 2013	Raquel Pottinger-Bird, Principal/Director of Curriculum and Instruction

APPENDIX A: SCHOOL OVERVIEW

2013-14	Nicole Griffin, Interim Acting Principal
2014-15 - Present	Dr. Karen Valbrun, Principal

School Visit History

School Year	Visit Type	Date
2009-10	Subsequent Renewal	November 6, 2009
2011-12	Evaluation	February 15-16, 2012
2014-15	Subsequent Renewal	November 13, 2014
2015-16	Evaluation	March 22/June 1, 2016

Conduct of the Visit

Date(s) of Visit	Evaluation Team Member	Title
March 22 & June 1, 2016	Natasha M. Howard, PhD	Managing Director of Program
	Chastity McFarlan, PhD	Senior Analyst
	Vanessa Threatte	Special Advisor
	Jeff Wasbes	Executive Deputy Director for Accountability

Charter Cycle Context

Charter Term	1 st Year of Five-Year Charter Term
Accountability Period ¹⁰	2 nd Year of Five-Year Accountability Period
Anticipated Renewal Visit	Fall 2019

¹⁰ 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 B
SUNY Renewal Benchmarks



State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks

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 sub-set 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: www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm. Responses to frequently asked questions about the Institute’s use of the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks appear below:

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

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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.

- 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.
 - 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, teachers and

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community members is also available on the Institute’s website at: www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm. Please do not hesitate to contact the Institute with any questions.

State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks

	Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1A</p> <p>Academic Accountability Plan Goals</p>	<p>Over the Accountability Period, the school has met or come close to meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals.</p> <p>The Institute determines the extent to which the school has met the Accountability Plan goals in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1B</p> <p>Use of Assessment Data</p>	<p>The school has an assessment system that improves instructional effectiveness and student learning.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.

Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?	
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1C</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Curriculum</p>	<p>The school’s curriculum supports teachers in their instructional planning.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1D</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Pedagogy</p>	<p>High quality instruction is evident throughout the school.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1E</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Instructional Leadership</p>	<p>The school has strong instructional leadership.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school’s leadership establishes an environment of high expectations for teacher performance (in content knowledge and

	<p style="text-align: center;">Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?</p>
<p><u>Evidence Category</u></p>	<p><u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u></p>
	<p>pedagogical skills) and in which teachers believe that all students can succeed;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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; • 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.
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1F</p> <p>At-Risk Students</p>	<p>The school meets the educational needs of at-risk students.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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;

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<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?	
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2A Mission & Key Design Elements	<p>The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school faithfully follows its mission; and • the school has implemented its key design elements.
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2B Parents & Students	<p>Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 Organizational Capacity	<p>The school organization effectively supports the delivery of the educational program.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.

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<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2D</p> <p>Board Oversight</p>	<p>The school board works effectively to achieve the school’s Accountability Plan goals.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2E</p> <p>Governance</p>	<p>The board implements, maintains and abides by appropriate policies, systems and processes.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

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	<p>expectations; to correct those deficiencies and puts in place benchmarks for determining if the partner organization corrects them in a timely fashion;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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; • 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.
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2F</p> <p>Legal Requirements</p>	<p>The school substantially complies with applicable laws, rules and regulations and the provisions of its charter.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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;

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.

Renewal Question 3 Is the School Fiscally Sound?	
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 3A</p> <p>Budgeting and Long Range Planning</p>	<p>The school operates pursuant to a long-range financial plan in which it creates realistic budgets that it monitors and adjusts when appropriate.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 3B</p> <p>Internal Controls</p>	<p>The school maintains appropriate internal controls and procedures.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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;

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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; • 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 Financial Reporting	<p>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.</p> <p>The following reports have generally been filed in a timely, accurate and complete manner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 Financial Condition	<p>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).</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school maintains sufficient cash on hand to pay current bills and those that are due shortly;

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<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?	
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 4A</p> <p>Plans for the School’s Structure</p>	<p>Key structural elements of the school, as defined in the exhibits of the Application for Charter Renewal, are reasonable, feasible and achievable.</p> <p>Based on elements present in the Application for Charter Renewal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 4B</p> <p>Plans for the Educational Program</p>	<p>The school’s plans for implementing the educational program allow it to meet its Accountability Plan goals.</p> <p>Based on elements present in the Application for Charter Renewal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.

	<p align="center">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?</p>
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 4C</p> <p>Plans for Board Oversight and Governance</p>	<p>The school provides a reasonable, feasible and achievable plan for board oversight and governance.</p> <p>Based on elements present in the Application for Charter Renewal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.

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<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 4D</p> <p>Fiscal & Facility Plans</p>	<p>The school provides a reasonable, feasible and achievable fiscal plan including plans for an adequate facility.</p> <p>Based on the elements present in the Application for Charter Renewal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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.
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