

THE SUNY CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE

*FIRST YEAR SCHOOL EVALUATION REPORT
ELMWOOD VILLAGE CHARTER SCHOOL
HERTEL*

VISIT DATE: MAY 10, 2018

REPORT DATE: JULY 18, 2018

SUNY Charter Schools Institute

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Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York



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INTRODUCTION & SCHOOL BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the SUNY Charter Schools Institute’s (the “Institute’s”) observations and findings from its May 10, 2018 first year school evaluation visit to the Elmwood Village Charter School Hertel (“Elmwood Hertel” or the “school”).

REPORT FORMAT

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

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

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

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INTRODUCTION & SCHOOL BACKGROUND

SCHOOL BACKGROUND

The SUNY Trustees approved the original charter for Elmwood Hertel, a replication of Elmwood Village Charter School Days Park (“Elmwood Days Park”) on April 13, 2016. Elmwood Days park began operation in 2006 under the authorization of the State Education Department Board of Regents (the “Regents”). On March 8, 2017, the SUNY Trustees approved the merge of Elmwood Days Park and Elmwood Hertel into a single education corporation called Elmwood Village Charter Schools (the “education corporation”).

Elmwood Hertel opened its doors in the fall of 2017, serving 150 students in Kindergarten – 2nd grade. The school operates in space the education corporation owns at 665 Hertel Ave., Buffalo, NY 14207 within the Buffalo City School District. At scale, Elmwood Hertel will serve 350 students in Kindergarten – 6th grade.

The mission of Elmwood Hertel is:



The Elmwood Village Charter School 2 will provide a stimulating and engaging learning environment that recognizes student capability, fosters their connectedness to their immediate and broader communities, and offers them ways to contribute to school life. EVCS believes that all students can and will learn at high levels when provided with the right learning conditions.

Pursuant to the Institute’s inspection of Elmwood Hertel at the above address on August 23, 2017, (and documentation provided to or inspected by the Institute at that visit and prior/post thereto), the Institute determined that Elmwood Village Charter Schools (the “education corporation”) had completed substantially all of the Prior Actions required of it as defined in the Charter Agreement between the education corporation and the SUNY Trustees (the “Charter Agreement”) for the operation of the school. Therefore, per Section 3.1 of the Charter Agreement, the Institute permitted the education corporation to provide instruction at the school to students in accordance with the plan provided in the Charter Agreement.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

QUALITATIVE BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

The SUNY Renewal Benchmarks, grounded in the body of research from the Center for Urban Studies at Harvard University,¹ 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.²

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

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

Elmwood Hertel is establishing systems to collect assessment data and use it to improve student learning and instructional effectiveness. The school collects and reviews standardized assessment data, and uses that data to adjust instruction. Instructional leaders are working to develop systems to review a broader range of data to more effectively improve student learning.

- Elmwood Hertel is developing systems to use data in a comprehensive manner to improve student outcomes, and instructional leaders identify this as a growth area. Some teachers review daily work to identify topics with which students struggle, and then use these observations to plan re-teach lessons and small group interventions. However, this practice is not consistent across all classes. The instructional leadership team identifies strengthening data systems as a priority and will be attending trainings in Summer 2018 that will focus in part on developing strong data systems.
- The school regularly administers standardized and curriculum-based assessments. Teachers administer the Fountas and Pinnell ("F&P") and STAR assessments three times per year in order to provide a baseline achievement level and track growth. Elmwood Hertel also administers a number of curriculum based assessments from the Wonders English Language Arts ("ELA") and Everyday Math curricula. Elmwood Hertel does not currently administer the internally-developed interim assessments that Elmwood

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1B

1. An extensive body of research identifying and confirming the correlates of effective schools exists dating back four decades. Selected sources include:

<https://www.gao.gov/assets/80/77488.pdf>; and http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/dobbie_fryer_revision_final.pdf.

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

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BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

Days Park uses. This is a strategic decision by Elmwood Hertel to focus on classroom management and F&P and STAR data in its first year due to the relative inexperience of teaching staff. The school will administer the internally developed interim assessments starting in its second year.

- Elmwood Hertel staff members use several systems to access and review student achievement data. Teachers enter STAR data in eDoctrina, an online platform which allows staff to review student data and growth over time. Teachers also use F&P running records to identify students' struggle areas and develop coaching plans. Some teachers also use checklists to track in-class exit ticket data and observation notes, as well as to plan which students each teacher will target for support during independent work time. The school conducts professional development to train teachers on how to access the results of assessments and conduct basic analysis, and will hold further training on how to use and analyze data to adjust instruction in its second year.
- The school keeps parents apprised of their student's progress by sending home report cards at the end of each trimester. Teachers also reach out to parents informally by phone and email to update them on their students' progress, and set up in-person meetings with parents if there are more significant concerns about their child's academic results.

DOES ELMWOOD HERTEL'S CURRICULUM SUPPORT TEACHERS IN THEIR INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING?

Elmwood Hertel utilizes multiple online platforms and materials included in purchased curricula to support teachers in their planning and delivery of instruction. Teachers make use of these web-based programs to support them in developing unit and lesson plans.

- Teachers at Elmwood Village Hertel utilize a variety of commercial curricula for ELA and mathematics classes, and have access to ample materials that support them in meeting the educational needs of all students. School leaders provide teachers with a pacing guide for ELA and mathematics at the beginning of the school year, and teachers know what to teach and when to teach it based on these documents. In ELA classes, the school implements the Wonders curriculum, a state standards aligned program that places particular emphasis on phonics skills. The school's ELA program also utilizes the Teacher's College Reading and Writing Project for writing classes. The mathematics curriculum is Everyday Mathematics, a state standards aligned program that reinforces abstract mathematics concepts through real-world applications. The school does not currently have a formal curriculum for science or social studies classes; teachers report that they develop individual lessons based on state standards in those subject areas.

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- Teachers regularly save materials to a shared Google drive that is accessible to staff at both Elmwood Hertel and Elmwood Days Park, and regularly share lesson plans across and between the schools. Teachers at Elmwood Hertel also use the online platforms ConnectEd and eDoctrina to develop unit and lesson plans and unit calendars, and they regularly access the website Teachers Pay Teachers, an online marketplace for educational materials such as lesson plans. These web-based tools support teachers in developing and sharing curricular materials.

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1D

IS HIGH QUALITY INSTRUCTION EVIDENT THROUGHOUT ELMWOOD HERTEL?

High quality instruction is evident in classrooms at Elmwood Hertel. Teachers maximize learning time through effective classroom management and deliver lessons with clear and purposeful objectives, though instruction does not yet effectively push students to develop higher-order thinking skills. As shown in the chart below, during the first year visit, Institute team members conducted 11 classroom observations following a defined protocol used in all school visits.

		GRADE			
		K	1 st	2 nd	Total
CONTENT AREA	ELA	2	1	2	5
	Math	2	1	1	4
	Science		1		1
	Specials		1		1
	Total	4	4	3	11

- Most teachers at Elmwood Hertel deliver purposeful lessons with clear objectives aligned to the school's curriculum (9 out of 11 lessons observed). Lesson materials support the lesson objectives and align to state standards. For instance, during a writing lesson on using a word wall to correctly spell sight words, the teacher directed students to approach the word wall during independent work to model correct use. Most classrooms with multiple teachers use all adults effectively; for instance, in classrooms with two lead teachers, both adults actively engage in coaching students during independent work. In classrooms where this is less effective, teachers miss opportunities to reinforce the day's objective in order to ensure students understand what they are learning and why it is important.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- A majority of teachers at Elmwood Hertel regularly and effectively use techniques to check for student understanding (8 out of 11 lessons observed). Teachers employ various methods to check for understanding throughout instruction, such as cold calling, having students show “thumbs up or down” to indicate agreement or disagreement, or using choral responses. Teachers use their observations to adjust instruction. For instance, in one classroom a teacher narrated several positive examples where students used the day’s learning objective while working independently. In classrooms where this is less effective, teachers miss opportunities to cold call rather than simply calling on students with raised hands, or circulate to observe student work but do not adjust their instruction or collect data on student work.
- Few teachers at Elmwood Hertel include opportunities in their lessons to challenge students with questions and activities that develop depth of understanding and higher-order thinking and problem solving skills (3 out of 11 lessons observed). In most classrooms, the bulk of interaction and questioning is teacher-to-student, rather than providing opportunities for students to discuss and interact with each other. In addition, teachers pose questions that are vague, or based in low-level fact recall, rather than asking questions that push students to synthesize and analyze information based on their own thinking or on clear evidence. In the few classrooms where activities aimed at developed students’ higher-order thinking skills are present, teachers push students to discuss and critique their ideas with each other, such as by having all students turn-and-talk and present their ideas of how to most effectively solve a math problem.
- Most teachers at Elmwood Hertel maximize learning time and utilize effective classroom management techniques that create a consistent focus on academic achievement (9 out of 11 classrooms observed). Teachers utilize well-established classroom procedures and transition routines such as attention-getting chants, claps, and signals that ensure efficient use of learning time. Teachers also consistently set expectations to ensure that students know what they should be doing, such as by clearly stating when students should be working independently versus when students may work in groups or partnerships. The school uses Responsive Classroom structures such as having a “rest and recharge” station in each classroom, including in specials such as art, to support consistent and effective management across the school.

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SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1E

DOES ELMWOOD HERTEL HAVE STRONG INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP?

Elmwood Hertel is establishing strong instructional leadership to support the development of all instructional staff. The school effectively addresses whole school professional development needs such as classroom management, but is still establishing consistent and comprehensive teacher coaching systems.

- Elmwood Hertel's leadership promotes a culture of learning and scholarship. The instructional leadership team consists of the principal and behavior specialist, who are both based at Elmwood Hertel, and the director of curriculum and instruction, who works with both Elmwood Hertel and Elmwood Days Park. In addition, an external consultant from Responsive Classroom observes on-site one week per month and gives teachers feedback. Leaders make themselves available to teachers as needed, and are present in most classrooms at least once per week. Teachers describe the school culture as very supportive and report that they know who to go to when they need support or have a question. Instructional leaders use an internal rubric for formal teacher evaluation. Formal evaluation is based on two observations, one of which takes place at the beginning of the year and one of which takes place at the end of the year.
- Elmwood Hertel provides regular whole-staff professional development opportunities that support the development of instructional staff. The school provides two weeks of training before the school year begins and provides free access to any local Boards of Cooperative Education Services ("BOCES") teacher trainings to all staff for the academic year. The instructional leaders focused on behavior management training this year, providing a full week of Responsive Classroom training during the summer before opening. The school is also responsive to teachers' development needs; at the beginning of the school year, in response to ongoing classroom management struggles, the school hired a full-time behavior specialist to provide additional support.
- The school does not yet have systems to provide consistent and comprehensive individualized coaching to teachers. Several different instructional leaders and consultants conduct observations, but observations do not follow a regular schedule. In addition, the leaders and consultants conducting observations present feedback using several different systems, so teachers receive disparate feedback from different observers. Instructional leaders identify this as a growth area and are prioritizing improving feedback and coaching systems for subsequent years.

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SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1F

DOES ELMWOOD HERTEL MEET THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF AT-RISK STUDENTS?

Elmwood Hertel meets the needs of at risk students through the implementation of a variety of interventions based on regular progress-monitoring. The school employs a robust student support staff that coordinates regularly to determine how best to support students struggling academically, students with disabilities, and English language learners (“ELLs”).

- Elmwood Hertel follows a Response to Intervention (“RTI”) model in order to ensure the school meets the needs of at-risk students. The school conducts formal progress-monitoring three times during the school year to identify students struggling academically and determine the appropriate interventions. In September, all students take the STAR reading assessment, then teachers use the resulting data to assign students to interventions. In January, teachers and school leaders revisit the interventions and make changes based on students’ updated assessment data and performance in class. In addition to this formal progress-monitoring system, the title I academic intervention services (“AIS”) teacher conducts running records every month to monitor students’ reading growth. If students do not make adequate progress after receiving tier 3 interventions, the school refers them to the district Committee on Special Education (“CSE”) for formal evaluation. With regard to ELLs, the school administers a home language survey to incoming families at the beginning of the school year. If the survey indicates that students speak a language other than English at home, the English as a new language (“ENL”) teacher administers the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners (“NYSITELL”), the results of which the school uses to determine if students require language acquisition supports.
- Elmwood Hertel utilizes a variety of staff, structures, and programs to address the range of students’ needs. The school employs a title I AIS teacher, three special education teachers (one per grade level), six instructional assistants, and an ENL teacher, as well as a physical therapist and an occupational therapist, all of whom provide support to students in a variety of settings. The school also receives support from the network special services coordinator. Students with disabilities at the school receive instruction in an Integrated Co-Teaching (“ICT”) classroom setting, in which a general education and special education teacher provide instruction jointly with the support of an instructional assistant. The title I AIS teacher also pulls small groups of students struggling academically and students with disabilities for additional support each week according to a set schedule. The school assigns students in need of reading support based on

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regular progress-monitoring to academic support programs such as Wonderworks, the ELA curriculum's intervention program, and/or Leveled Literacy Intervention ("LLI"), which provides students with daily, intensive, small group instruction. The ENL teacher utilizes both a push-in and pull-out approach to meet the needs of ELLs. By developing a daily language objective and maintaining daily notes on student progress toward objective mastery, the ENL teacher is able to monitor ELLs' language acquisition progress.

- Elmwood Hertel provides time and support for ongoing coordination between general and at risk teachers, as well as other program specialists and service providers. Grade level teams meet weekly for professional learning communities ("PLCs"), during which general education and special education teachers share best practices. Co-teachers in ICT classrooms meet organically as a result of teaching the same class and share information regularly throughout the school day via informal in-person check-ins, emails, and/or text messages. The title I AIS teacher coordinates primarily with general and special education lead teachers to determine which students require push in or pullout supports, and reports on students' performance in LLI. The ENL teacher does not have formal planning time with general or special education teachers but instead seeks them out for brief check-ins during lunch and teacher prep periods.

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

Elmwood Hertel has effective organizational structures, staff, and systems to support the implementation of its educational program. The school employs ample instructional staff with clear reporting structures, and it utilizes systems to ensure the efficient allocation of resources.

- Elmwood Hertel has staff, operational systems, and procedures that allow it to carry out the academic program. The school has a robust instructional staff that includes school leaders, general and special education teachers, instructional assistants, service providers, and support staff. In addition, the school benefits from the support of network staff shared with Elmwood Days Park. The school effectively implements operational and technological systems such as Google Drive, ConnectEd, and eDoctrina, which facilitate planning and collaboration among teachers. Likewise, the school makes effective use of systems such as the RTI process and PLCs that aid efficiency and enable teachers to meet students' needs.

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- The school has established a safe and orderly environment through the implementation of Responsive Classroom, a school and classroom management approach that emphasizes the relationship between academic success and social emotional learning (“SEL”). Responsive Classroom techniques compel teachers to build strong relationships with students with the goal of developing a strong sense of community among students and staff. Teachers and school leaders report that student behavior was a particular struggle at the beginning of the school year; as a result, the school allocated significant time and resources to training teachers in Responsive Classroom and ensuring they implemented it consistently. Teachers also benefited from the expertise of school’s behavior intervention specialist, who works with students in need of additional behavior interventions and supports teachers in implementing Responsive Classroom.

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

The education corporation board monitors student achievement and provides effective oversight to the educational program.

- The Elmwood Village Charter Schools board oversees both Elmwood Days Park and Elmwood Hertel. The board has adequate skills, structures, and procedures with which to govern the school. There are two committees within the board: a finance and audit committee, and a nominating committee. Board members possess a variety of backgrounds in professions such as education, finance, and law, which enable them to support and oversee the successful functioning of the school. One board member resigned within the past school year due to scheduling conflicts, and the school added one board member.
- The board regularly meets all compliance deadlines and submits minutes to the Institute on time. A review of minutes indicates that the board allocates its time in a way that supports strong oversight of the organization, with a focus on broad issues such as facilities, staffing, and academic results.
- Network and school staff regularly attend board meetings and convey critical information to the board about student performance, school operations, parent relations, and other topics critical to the school. For instance, the school recently reported on the status of recruitment efforts for instructional staff for the upcoming school year and enrollment lottery results.

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SCHOOL OVERVIEW

ELMWOOD VILLAGE CHARTER SCHOOL HERTEL BOARD OF TRUSTEES ³

CHAIR

Mimi Barnes-Coppola

VICE CHAIR

Jennifer Bernacki Smith

TREASURER

Matthew Moscati

SECRETARY

Pamela Pollock

TRUSTEES

Marguerite Battaglia

Matthew Ryan

Liz Santacrose

Lacole Brumfeld

SCHOOL LEADERS

Kathy Jamil (2017-Present)

SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

SCHOOL YEAR	CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT ⁴	ACTUAL AS A PERCENTAGE OF CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	PROPOSED GRADES	ACTUAL GRADES
2017-18	150	147	98%	K-2	K-2

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

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

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SCHOOL OVERVIEW

CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

DATE(S) OF VISIT	EVALUATION TEAM MEMBERS	TITLE
May 10, 2018	Keegan Prue	Program Analyst
	Maureen Foley	Director for New Charters

KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS:

ELEMENT	EVIDENT?
K-8 Community	+
Small class size	+
Small student-teacher ratio	+
Community alliances	+
Longer daily schedule and school year	+
More time on task	+
Interdisciplinary curriculum	+
Arts integration; Parental involvement; Social and emotional learning through use of Responsive Classroom, Diversity	+