

# THE SUNY CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE

*FIRST YEAR SCHOOL EVALUATION REPORT  
NEW VISIONS AIM CHARTER HIGH  
SCHOOL II*

*VISIT DATE: APRIL 26, 2018*

*REPORT DATE: JULY 2, 2018*

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

A collection of colorful pencils and paper clips is arranged on a dark grey, textured background. The pencils, in various colors including green, blue, red, orange, yellow, green, orange, blue, purple, and brown, are fanned out from the top left towards the bottom right. Several paper clips in colors like orange, light green, pink, and blue are scattered at the bottom of the frame.

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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 April 26, 2018 first year school evaluation visit to the New Visions AIM Charter High School II ("AIM II").

## 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 charter renewal and restructuring of ROADS Charter School II (“ROADS II”) to AIM II on May 24, 2017. This restructuring allowed the education corporation to serve the same students but required the program to operate under new governance and a new educational program. ROADS II closed its doors at the end of the 2016-17 school year. AIM II began transitioning the program at the end of the 2016-17 school year and officially began operating on August 1, 2017, serving 164 students in 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade during the 2017-18 school year. The school is in co-located space at 1010 Reverend James A. Polite Avenue, Bronx, NY, in New York City School District (“CSD”) 12. At scale, AIM II will serve 250 students in 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

The mission of AIM II is:



*New Visions AIM Charter High Schools provide youth who face the greatest obstacles to successful high school completion with the supports, experiences, and opportunities they need to graduate high school prepared for a successful transition into a post-secondary academic or work preparatory program.*

AIM II is one of 10 charter schools that partner with New Visions for Public Schools, Inc. (“New Visions” or the “network”), a New York not-for-profit corporation that serves as the educational management organization (“EMO”) for AIM II. The network operates six charter schools authorized by the New York State Board of Regents (the “Board of Regents”). The remaining four charter schools are authorized by the SUNY Trustees: New Visions Charter High School for Humanities, New Visions Charter High School for Math and Science, New Visions AIM Charter High School I (“AIM I”), and AIM II, all of which operate as independent education corporations. AIM I and AIM II are the network’s first charter schools to serve over-age and under-credited high school students. New Visions also provides educational programming to a portfolio of New York City Department of Education (“NYCDOE”) schools across the city, 10 of which serve populations similar to AIM I and AIM II.

AIM I and AIM II share a board of trustees distinct from the remaining New Visions charter schools. The schools implement elements of the instructional programs at other New Visions schools including NYCDOE transfer schools, which work to re-engage students who previously dropped out of school and identify career pathways for students. By contract, the network provides the school with academic, operational, facilities, and back office assistance. Schools utilize the network’s curriculum and assessment materials. The network is also responsible for managing and evaluating the performance of each school and school leader.

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# INTRODUCTION & SCHOOL BACKGROUND

Because AIM II is the result of a restructuring renewal, in contrast to a first year school, the Institute expects that a restructuring charter will fully develop systems and processes supporting the educational program during its first year of operation, aligned to those described in the school's proposal. At the end of the charter term, AIM II will be treated by SUNY, for purposes of renewal, as a school coming to renewal for the first time.

Pursuant to the Institute's inspection of AIM II at the above address on August 30, 2017, (and documentation provided to or inspected by the Institute at that visit and prior/post thereto), the Institute determined that AIM II 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,<sup>1</sup> describe the elements in place at schools that are highly effective at providing students from low-income backgrounds the instruction, content, knowledge, and skills necessary to produce strong academic performance. The SUNY Renewal Benchmarks describe the elements an effective school must have in place at the time of renewal.<sup>2</sup>

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.

## DOES AIM II HAVE AN ASSESSMENT SYSTEM THAT IMPROVES INSTRUCTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND STUDENT LEARNING?

AIM II is developing systems to gather assessment data for all students and use it to improve student learning.

- AIM II regularly administers a variety of assessments. The school administers the Performance Series, a web-based, nationally-normed assessment, in reading and mathematics two times per year. Ongoing technological challenges, coupled with an average daily attendance rate of only 45%, resulted in the school only assessing 30% of the student body in the fall. At the time of the Institute's visit, the school was in the process of administering the assessment for the second time and reported a higher student participation rate. New Visions creates mock Regents exams that utilize past Regents exam items, which AIM II administers twice per year. AIM II also administers the Clear Path assessment twice per year to track students' social-emotional wellbeing.
- AIM II makes assessment data readily accessible to school leaders, teachers, and students. All school leaders have access to the New Visions data portal, which includes the schoolwide assessment data as well as a multitude of additional data such as attendance and students' course history. Network staff and school leaders review the data portal together once per month to monitor students' graduation plans. The school provides the Performance Series data to teachers, and New Visions network staff provide a scoring breakdown of mock Regents data to school leaders and teachers. School leaders provide

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](http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/dobbie_fryer_revision_final.pdf).

2. Additional details regarding the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks are available at: [www.newyorkcharters.org/suny-renewal-benchmarks/](http://www.newyorkcharters.org/suny-renewal-benchmarks/).

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

data reports to the board each month. AIM II uses PowerSchool to report students' course grades, and students can log into their accounts at any time to view their grades. Board members access the New Visions data platform to review student progress.

- AIM II lacks strong schoolwide systems to use data to increase student learning. Although leaders expect teachers to use data to adjust instruction, the school does not provide specific directives for how to use data for all assessments. Teachers analyze daily and weekly class assessment data without oversight from leaders. AIM II leaders use the Performance Series data to identify students for daily reading intervention support, but have not established a schoolwide system for utilizing the data for mathematics interventions. Additionally, because less than a third of the students took the Performance Series assessment in the beginning of the year, school leaders do not have a complete snapshot of student performance on the assessments. Teachers review students' Lexile levels to determine how to differentiate content for the whole class. Instructional leaders support teachers in using the mock Regents data to determine content and skills to target during the Regents prep sessions, and leaders provided a professional development session on analyzing the data.

## DOES AIM II'S CURRICULUM SUPPORT TEACHERS IN THEIR INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING?

AIM II has a curriculum that has the potential to support teachers in their instructional planning and delivery. However, New Visions has not yet modified, or effectively trained teachers to modify, the network-developed curriculum in order to meet the unique needs of over-age and under-credited students.

- AIM II has access to a curriculum framework aligned to state standards. However, the school has not adequately adapted this curriculum to support the school's specialized population of over-age and under-credited students. As part of the New Visions network, the school uses the open source New Visions curriculum for all core subjects. The curriculum includes scope and sequence documents, unit plans, pacing calendars, student activities, assessments, and other supporting materials. Despite having documents that aid teachers in knowing what to teach and when to teach it, the network has not provided sufficient support in training teachers to adjust instructional materials to meet the specific needs of students.
- Lessons often sacrifice rigor in attempts to remediate learning, despite the structures in place to support teachers in adapting the curriculum. The New Visions network expects its schools to adapt the open source curriculum as necessary. AIM II teachers participate in network-wide professional development to familiarize themselves with the curricular

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

resources and collaborate on content delivery. Teachers use external resources or collaborate with each other to adjust the New Visions curriculum for their students. School leaders recognize that the New Visions curriculum requires significant modification to meet AIM II students' needs, and that this is an area of improvement for the school. The network provides opportunities for leaders and teachers across the network to meet to discuss planning, but has not yet provided effective differentiated support for AIM II teachers.

## IS HIGH QUALITY INSTRUCTION EVIDENT THROUGHOUT AIM II?

High quality instruction is not yet evident at AIM II. Although teachers deliver purposeful lessons and create an environment focused on academic achievement, instructional material is not rigorous or engaging enough to push students to meet or exceed grade-level expectations. As shown in the table below, during the first year visit, Institute team members conducted 13 classroom observations following a defined protocol used in all school visits. Most courses at the school enroll students in multiple grade levels, labeled in the table below as "mixed" grades.

		GRADE					Total
		9	10	11	12	Mixed	
CONTENT AREA	ELA		1		1	1	3
	Math		1			3	4
	Science	1				2	3
	Soc Stu					2	2
	Other					1	1
	Total	1	2		1	9	13

- Some teachers deliver purposeful lessons with clear objectives aligned to the school's curriculum (8 of 13 lessons observed). Teachers generally communicate measurable learning objectives and align lesson activities to the stated objective. Co-teachers have clear roles in helping students reach lesson objectives, with one teacher circulating the classroom to monitor progress while the other teacher provides individualized supports.
- About half of teachers regularly use techniques to check for student understanding (6 of 13 lessons observed). Teachers leverage multiple adults in the classroom, with each teacher circulating to monitor performance. In lessons that do not include effective

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

checks for understanding, teachers ask leading questions, do not require students to respond to the question, or do not ask questions that would elicit sufficient information to gauge student understanding.

- Instruction at AIM II does not challenge students with questions and activities that develop depth of understanding and higher-order thinking and problem solving skills (1 of 13 lessons observed). Instruction is mostly teacher-directed and, despite a rigorous curriculum, teachers miss opportunities to engage students in analysis and discussion of high-quality materials. Lesson activities lack sufficient rigor for students to meet grade-level expectations.
- About half of teachers maximize learning time to create a consistent focus on academic achievement (7 of 13 lessons observed). Teachers are generally prepared and have instructional materials readily available. However, teachers do not hold all students accountable for engaging with the material and allow students to opt out of learning. For instance, teachers across multiple classrooms did not address students who fell asleep, were listening to headphones, or were inattentive. Despite partnering with NYCDOE schools that serve similar populations, the network did not act with sufficient urgency to develop and implement effective strategies for targeting the attendance challenges schools serving these students typically encounter. As a result, classroom attendance remains low and tardiness disrupts instruction.

## DOES AIM II HAVE STRONG INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP?

AIM II is developing strong instructional leadership. Though school leaders have not set clear priorities for the current school year, leaders have established systems for professional development that have the potential to improve instruction. Despite partnering with 10 transfer schools that serve a similar population as AIM II, the network did not immediately establish critical systems and has spent the year gathering baseline data to identify the school's areas of need.

- The school's leadership has not yet established an environment of high expectations for teacher or student performance. Beyond a goal of 65% attendance, school leaders and teachers cite vague and varying priorities for the academic year, such as looking at teacher-student feedback and "doing well" on Regents assessments. AIM II has not established clear systems for improving attendance and leaders report the school has made little progress toward its attendance goal.

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- The school’s instructional leadership team, consisting of the principal, academic director, and associate director of clinical support, is developing its capacity to support the development of the teaching staff. The network provides instructional leaders with coaching on developing teachers, implementing curriculum, and improving instruction. New Visions has not effectively leveraged its experience supporting transfer schools when establishing systems for the AIM II program. For instance, the data portal the network initially provided to school leaders did not include critical measures for the specialized student population, such as students’ results on the social and emotional assessments. Network leaders also communicate frequently with school leaders to identify and provide additional supports that meet the needs of the school model, such as specific data tracking metrics on the New Visions data portal.
- Instructional leaders have established systems for coaching and supervision that have the potential to support teachers in meeting students’ needs. Throughout the year, leaders observe teachers, varying the frequency of observations based on teachers’ needs. Following observations, instructional leaders utilize online platforms and post-observation debriefs to provide feedback on classroom practices. Teachers also engage in instructional rounds, in which teachers observe their peers recognized for specific effective practices. Although school leaders work with teachers to develop individualized goals at the beginning of the year, some teachers report leaders have not followed up on those goals.
- The school has regular professional development activities. School leaders hold multiple meetings throughout the week, each with a focus on delivery of instruction, students with disabilities, instructional planning, or a general staff meeting. In addition to schoolwide professional development, teachers and leaders attend network-wide professional development at least once per month. Although a significant portion of the network-wide professional development has focused on implementing New Visions’ curriculum and assessments, it has not focused on meeting the specific needs of over-age, under-credited students, resulting in ineffective adaptation of the curriculum. Teachers and leaders report a need for sessions focusing on how to differentiate and scaffold material to simultaneously remediate and accelerate student learning.
- Professional development activities are interrelated with classroom practice. School leaders provide teachers with an action step at the end of each professional development session and follow up when reviewing lesson plans or observing classrooms to ensure implementation. Leaders set agendas based on school goals and priorities identified during observations.

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

## SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1F

### DOES AIM II MEET THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF AT-RISK STUDENTS?

Given that AIM II serves students who are over-age and under-credited, the entire student body is at risk of academic failure. The school is beginning to address the educational needs of its students. AIM II administers baseline assessments to identify students requiring additional academic and non-academic supports. The school utilizes multiple adults in the classroom, social workers, advocate counselors, and external resources to meet students' social and emotional needs. The school does not meet the English language acquisition needs of students who are English language learners ("ELLs").

- The school has a clearly defined screening procedure for identifying at-risk students. The school administers Scantron's Performance Series as a baseline assessment to identify incoming students' Lexile Levels. Leaders use performance data to assign students to READ180 and MATH180 personalized blended learning intervention programs. The school also administers a resiliency survey to identify students' social and emotional needs. However, teachers and leaders cannot consistently articulate how they use survey data or the extent to which the school is meeting students' social and emotional needs.
- Lack of rigor and low attendance impede AIM II's academic interventions from meeting the needs of at-risk students. The school offers integrated co-teaching ("ICT") in core content areas for students with disabilities whose Individualized Education Programs ("IEPs") indicate such a setting. Due to the vacancy in the special education coordinator role, social workers and teachers are responsible for monitoring IEP progress. AIM II also provides Regents prep sessions after school and on weekends to students in need of additional support. However, low attendance during school hours and during out-of-school sessions limit the effectiveness of the interventions. The school is piloting an incentive model to increase student attendance and reward improved performance, but the model has not improved attendance. AIM II has had a vacancy for an ELL teacher for the entire academic year and does not provide a formal English language acquisition program for ELL students.
- AIM II's non-academic intervention team has the experience and capacity to provide supports that will allow students to focus on academic achievement. Program leaders have extensive backgrounds in youth and family services with strong ties to community programs. Upon enrollment, the school assigns an advocate counselor to each student. Advocate counselors facilitate restorative circles, sometimes push in to classrooms, and help students and families navigate and access community-based supports. Social workers provide any mandated counseling and conduct home visits. The network's community and engagement team has developed a resource portal of community-based and

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

government agency contacts that provide student and family support services near the school. School and network leaders are also finalizing a partnership with Good Shepherd, a New York City community service organization that provides on-site physical, emotional, and mental health services for students. The school does not yet track a comprehensive set of at-risk factors, such as students who are food insecure, court-involved, pregnant or parenting, facing physical or mental health challenges, in foster care, or experiencing severe economic hardship. The network continues to work with the school and external consultants to identify additional relevant measures to track these areas.

- AIM II provides sufficient time and support for on-going coordination between general education and special education teachers. Co-teachers have daily common planning time built into their schedules and the school reserves time to discuss at-risk students during the professional development cycle.

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

### SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 2C

School leaders are developing AIM II's capacity to support the delivery of the educational program. The school has not yet implemented effective systems to target chronically low attendance and excessive tardiness.

- With assistance from the network, the school has put in place an administrative structure with operational systems and procedures that allow it to carry out the academic program. The director of operations leads the school's operations team and allows the principal and assistant principals to focus on improving instructional effectiveness. The school continues to struggle with vacancies in critical teaching roles, including a vacant ELL teacher position for the entire academic year.
- AIM II has not yet established a safe and orderly environment. Teachers report strict discipline practices, which has led to the school's 76 suspensions and three expulsions by the time of the April evaluation visit. Further, the school has not established systems to promote positive academic behavior, as evidenced by continued low attendance rates.
- School leaders are beginning to work with network leaders to monitor and evaluate the program to ensure a well-functioning school organization. The school intends to collaborate with Good Shepherd, an external agency that will provide on-site physical, emotional, and mental health services. The network is working to understand the needs of the school in order to support leaders in delivering a high quality educational program.

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

## SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 2D

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

The school board is building its capacity to provide effective oversight to the total educational program. The network and board continue to assess the school's needs in order to identify critical areas to monitor and provide appropriate supports.

- AIM II's board is building out its capacity to govern the school. Board members possess skills in education, finance, business, trauma-informed social services, and mental health, and seek to add additional members with experience in law and education. As the board continues to grow, it plans to put in place formal committee structures to govern the school.
- The board is working with the school leader and the network to identify critical measures to monitor. The network's initial data portal did not offer a comprehensive overview of the program and was therefore insufficient to monitor the school's success. As such, the board, school leader, and network have engaged in ongoing discussions regarding requirements of the leader's data portal and the board's dashboard.
- The board relies on New Visions to evaluate the principal and has not yet developed clear criteria to evaluate the network. New Visions uses a multi-dimensional rubric to evaluate the principal and plans to revise the rubric to include indicators relevant to the school model. AIM II's board is identifying effective processes to evaluate the network and, in the interim, has established a culture with the network centered on continual feedback and open discussion.

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# SCHOOL OVERVIEW

## NEW VISIONS AIM CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL II BOARD OF TRUSTEES<sup>3</sup>

### CHAIR

Melanie Harris

### TREASURER

Marina Schreiber

### SECRETARY

Kelly Roman

### TRUSTEES

Elizabeth Chu

Jacqueline Cooper

Musa Ali Shama

Garrett Lynch

Rebecca Zofnass

## SCHOOL LEADERS

*Tameka Jackson, Principal (2017-18 to Present)*

## SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

SCHOOL YEAR	CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT <sup>4</sup>	ACTUAL AS A PERCENTAGE OF CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	PROPOSED GRADES	ACTUAL GRADES
2017-18	164	177	108%	9-12	9-12

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
April 26, 2018	Chastity McFarlan, PhD	Senior Analyst
	Kerri Rizzolo	School Evaluation Analyst
	Leslie Talbot	External Consultant

## KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS:

ELEMENT	EVIDENT?
Evidence-based and technology-enabled administrative systems	+
Defined post-secondary pathways	-
Intensive and personalized academic supports	-
Flexible and personalized academic programming	+
Student advisors	+
Intensive and integrated socio-emotional supports	+