

THE SUNY CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE

SCHOOL EVALUATION REPORT
EXPLORE CHARTER SCHOOL
VISIT DATE: MAY 29 - 30, 2018
REPORT DATE: JUNE 28, 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 are in various colors including green, blue, red, orange, yellow, green, orange, blue, purple, and brown. Some pencils are sharpened. Paper clips in colors like orange, light green, pink, blue, and black are scattered around the pencils.

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INTRODUCTION & SCHOOL BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

This School Evaluation Report offers an analysis of evidence collected during the school visit on May 29 - 30, 2018. 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 performance summary that contains the school’s performance on the required measures under its ELA and mathematics goals. Appendix C displays the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks.

This report does not contain an overall rating or comprehensive indicator that would specify at a glance the school’s prospects for renewal. Rather, it 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.

INTRODUCTION & SCHOOL BACKGROUND

SCHOOL BACKGROUND

The New York City Schools Chancellor approved the original charter for Explore Charter School (“Explore”) on June 12, 2001. The school opened its doors in the fall of 2002, initially serving students in Kindergarten – 3rd grade. Effective July 1, 2015, the SUNY Trustees granted approval for Explore and Explore Empower Charter School, both originally authorized by the New York City School Chancellor (“NYC Chancellor”) to merge with SUNY authorized Explore Excel, Explore Exceed Charter School, and two unopened charter schools creating Explore Charter Schools of Brooklyn (the “education corporation”).

Explore is in the second year of its second charter term with the SUNY Trustees as its authorizer, currently enrolling students in Kindergarten – 8th grade. Explore operates as a lower school (Kindergarten – 5th grade) and an upper school (6th – 8th grades). The school is located in New York City Community School District (“CSD”) 17 at 655 Parkside Ave, Brooklyn, NY.

Since Explore’s 2002 opening, Explore’s charter has been renewed three times; the school’s original authorizer approved an initial full term renewal in 2006 and renewed the school again for a subsequent full term in 2011. When the school came to its first renewal as a SUNY authorized charter school on January 14, 2016, the SUNY Trustees applied their policies for initial renewal and granted Explore a short term, three-year renewal. Explore is up for its first subsequent renewal as a SUNY authorized charter school, and its fourth overall, in fall 2018.

The mission of Explore is:



Explore Schools’ mission is to provide students with the academic skills and critical thinking abilities they need to succeed in a college preparatory high school.

All schools within the education corporation, including Explore Excel, operate under the management of Explore Schools, Inc. (“Explore Schools” or the “network”), a New York not-for-profit charter management organization based in New York City. The network provides the schools with academic, operational, and back office assistance. Schools utilize the network’s curriculum and assessment materials, all purchased or designed by network curriculum teams. The network is also responsible for managing and evaluating the performance of each school and school leader.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

2016-17 SCHOOL PERFORMANCE REVIEW

During 2016-17, the second year of its three year Accountability Period, Explore did not meet or come close to meeting its English language arts (“ELA”) or its mathematics Accountability Plan goals. The school also did not meet these goals during 2015-16. Explore did not meet its science goal. Explore met its No Child Left Behind (“NCLB”) goal as the school was in good standing according to the state’s NCLB accountability system. Now in its 16th year of operation, the school has not put in place a sustained and coherent instructional program that supports student success. Based on this record of academic success, Explore’s prospects for renewal are in jeopardy.

ELA

Explore did not meet or come close to meeting its ELA goal during 2016-17 after having also missed the goal in 2015-16. The school’s performance on its comparative measures declined in 2016-17 when it continued to perform lower than Brooklyn District 17’s (the “district”). Although the district’s published scores increased by three percentage points over 2015-16, Explore’s declined slightly with 28 percent of its 3rd – 8th graders scoring at or above proficiency. The gap between the school and the district increased from 2.5 percentage points in 2015-16 to 5 percentage points in 2016-17. The school’s performance was also lower than expected in comparison to schools throughout the state enrolling similar concentrations of economically disadvantaged students for the second consecutive year in the current Accountability Period. Explore’s mean growth percentile of 45 corroborates the comparative data and further indicates that the school is losing ground in comparison to the learning of a subset of similarly situated schools throughout the state.

MATHEMATICS

During the first two years of the current three year Accountability Period, Explore has not met or come close to meeting its mathematics goal. With 24 percent of its 3rd – 8th graders scoring at or above proficiency on the state’s mathematics exam, Explore’s performance declined from 2015-16 by 6 percentage points and fell below the district’s comparative performance by two percentage points. Explore’s performance was lower than expected in comparison to schools throughout the state enrolling similar concentrations of economically disadvantaged students, as it was during the year prior. The school’s grade level growth scores were mixed during 2016-17. The 6th grade posted a mean growth percentile of nearly 70 while, alarmingly, the 5th and 7th grades posted growth percentiles in the 20s. Overall, Explore’s aggregate growth score of 41 is not sufficiently strong to push the high achievement of its students or meet the target for the measure.

1. Because the SUNY Trustees make a renewal decision before student achievement results for the final year of a charter term become available, the Accountability Period ends with the school year prior to the final year of the charter term. In the case of initial renewal, the Accountability Period covers the first four years of the charter term.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

SCIENCE

Explore did not meet its science goal during 2016-17 for the second consecutive year in the Accountability Period. The state administers a science exam in 4th grade and 8th grade. In both grades, Explore performed lower than the district. Overall, the district's percentage of students scoring at or above proficiency at 62 was seven points higher than Explore's performance.

NCLB

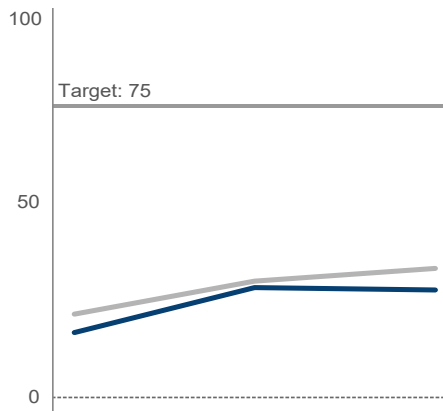
Explore met its NCLB goal during 2016-17 as the school was not identified as a focus charter school based on the results of the 2014-15 state assessments.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

EXPLORE CHARTER SCHOOL

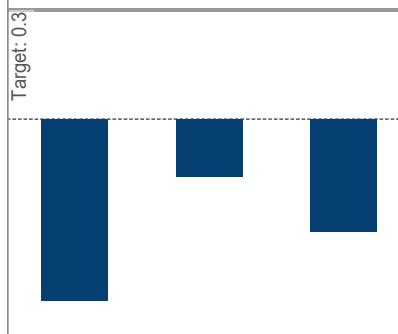
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GOAL

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



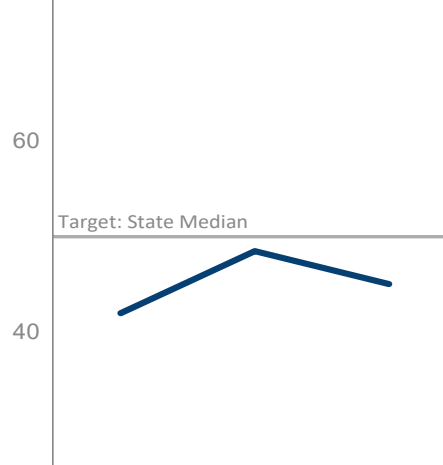
Test Year	Comp Grades	District %	School %
2015	3-8	22	17
2016	3-8	30	29
2017	3-8	33	28

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



Test Year	Test Grades	Effect Size
2015	3-8	-0.50
2016	3-8	-0.16
2017	3-8	-0.31

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



Test Year	School Mean Growth
2015	42.1
2016	48.6
2017	45.1

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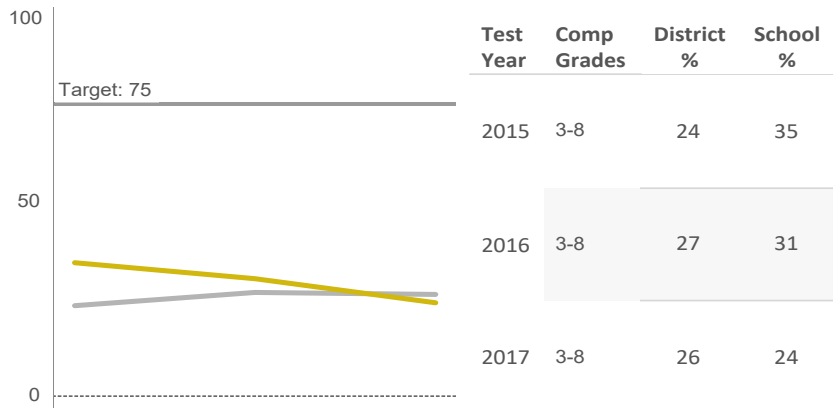
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

EXPLORE CHARTER SCHOOL

MATHEMATICS ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GOAL

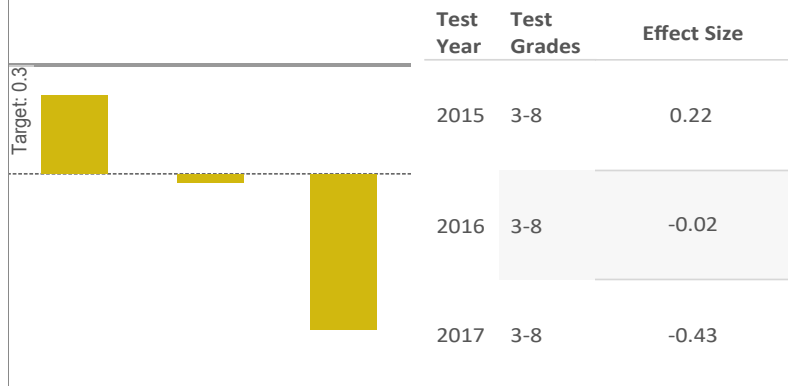
Comparative Measure:

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



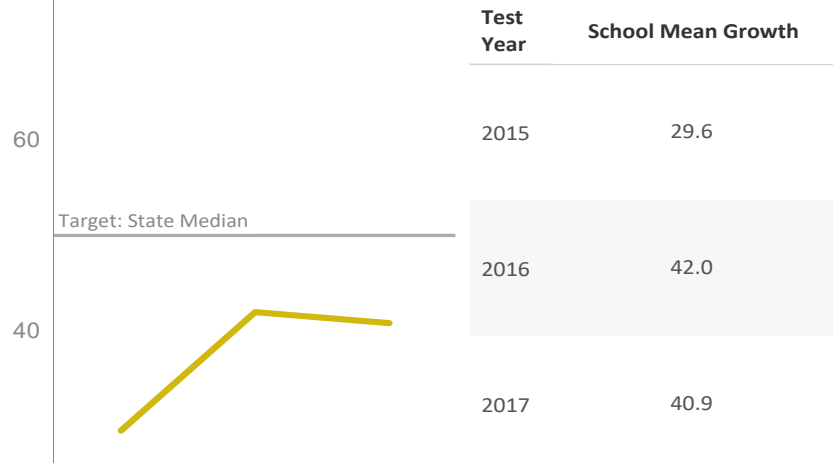
Comparative Measure: Effect Size

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



Comparative Growth Measure: Mean Growth Percentile

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

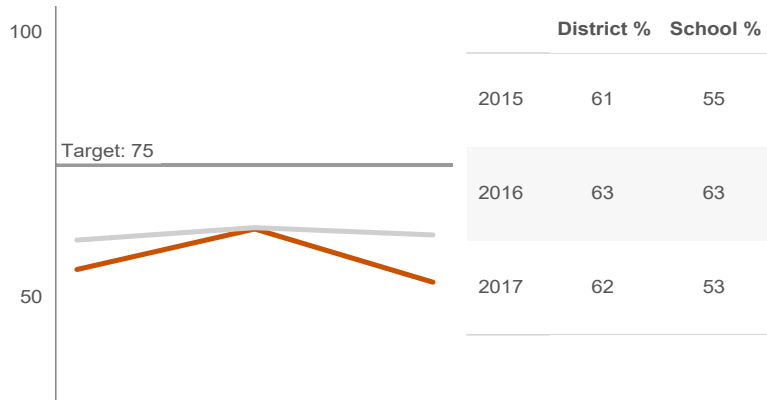


ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

EXPLORE CHARTER SCHOOL

SCIENCE ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GOAL

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



SPECIAL POPULATIONS PERFORMANCE

	2015	2016	2017
Enrollment Receiving Mandated Academic Services	77	70	77
Tested on State Exam	50	44	43
School Percent Proficient on ELA Exam	0.0	6.8	7.0
District Percent Proficient	5.0	8.0	11.0

	2015	2016	2017
ELL Enrollment	32	48	40
Tested on NYSESLAT Exam	20	24	17
School Percent 'Commanding' or Making Progress on NYSESLAT	15.0	25.0	23.5

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

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

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

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

QUALITATIVE BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

The SUNY Renewal Benchmarks, grounded in the body of research from the Center for Urban Studies at Harvard University,² 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.³

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1B

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

Explore lacks a system for analyzing data that improves instructional effectiveness despite administering an extensive array of assessments that measure student growth and achievement. Notwithstanding recent improvements to its data systems and analysis processes, Explore continues to miss opportunities to use assessment data systematically to target the particular learning needs of students and devise appropriate strategies to meet them. The school collects a plethora of data but realizes that results among the various assessments are incongruous. In its 16th year of operation, the network continues to develop changes to the assessment system that may bring it into internal alignment.

- Explore administers a battery of formative and summative assessments designed to diagnose gaps in students' knowledge and skills, to monitor growth over time, and to determine mastery of instructional content. ELA teachers administer the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessments ("F&P") to monitor students' reading levels. Teachers administer the Core Knowledge Language Arts ("CKLA") assessments three times per year to monitor Kindergarten – 2nd grade students' growth toward meeting the state's learning standards for ELA. In 3rd – 8th grades, the school administers a set of network-developed interim progress tests ("IPT") in ELA and mathematics that align to the school's curricula. Explore also administers a set of weekly quizzes designed for quick checks of student comprehension. The school and the network analyze and compare overall trends in the data across each of these exams. The aggregate analysis of the data reveals inconsistencies in the scores between the different exams: the school's internally developed IPTs align best to the school's curriculum and state learning standards and correlate most closely with the school's results on the state's ELA and mathematics exams. The CKLA assessments do not consistently correlate with the school's other assessments, typically producing higher levels of proficiency that do not align to state assessment results.

2. 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.

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

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- The school attempts to maintain a consistent approach to scoring assessments by requiring all teachers to score student work during planning meetings, but, in practice, leaders do not consistently ensure that teachers norm scoring procedures in all content areas. During the meetings, teachers discuss possible student misconceptions. They also discuss and norm on the criteria students must demonstrate to earn full, partial, or no credit for each item. During scoring sessions, principals and academic directors circulate the room to monitor the consistent application of normed scoring criteria while teachers apply rubrics to short answer and longer form responses. Notwithstanding, the school does not maintain consistent scoring practices at all times. The network's internally developed guidance documents for the school's curriculum deemphasize teachers' need to administer and score on-demand writing assessments. Teachers' scoring of on demand writing is inconsistent within and across grade levels. In some cases, students receive little information about how to meet the criteria set forth by the state's learning standards or guidance about how to improve their writing. The evaluation visit team reviewed some assessment papers containing inadequate feedback for students.
- Explore makes data available to teachers and school leaders through the use of an electronic repository but teachers do not consistently use the data to understand the strengths and weaknesses of student learning and their teaching. Leaders do not require or expect teachers to analyze the data first hand. During weekly staff meetings, teachers and instructional leaders review the network's analysis of assessment results to determine which skills to re-teach during subsequent lessons. Lacking a set of clear expectations, teachers and instructional leaders miss opportunities to develop targeted re-teaching strategies for small groups of students needing to focus on particular skills. The network uses the data from the same repository to make assessment data accessible to the board through the use of a standardized dashboard. The board reviews the available data at each meeting and uses it to set priorities for the instructional program and to hold school and network leaders accountable for student achievement.
- This year, the school is including quantitative achievement data and assessment results in its evaluations for teachers' performance after phasing in the practice over time. Teachers are responsible for meeting grade level performance targets rooted in baseline data from last year. Although the school is using quantitative data to evaluate teachers' effectiveness, it continues to miss opportunities to analyze the data for areas where teachers need professional development.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1C

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

Explore's curriculum, as implemented, lacks the rigor necessary to allow students to meet the expectations of the New York state standards. Leaders do not set clear expectations or provide support for teachers to plan rigorous and purposeful lessons that differentiate instruction for students with different learning needs.

- Explore implemented several adjustments to its ELA and mathematics curricula this year. After using TERC Investigations for mathematics for the first six weeks of school, Explore transitioned to using Achievement First's Navigator mathematics program in 3rd – 8th grade. Explore continues to use TERC in Kindergarten – 2nd grade. In ELA, Explore uses CKLA in Kindergarten – 2nd grade and Expeditionary Learning ("EL") in 3rd – 8th grade. This year, Explore has implemented a schoolwide focus on close reading in order to increase students' critical thinking and depth of engagement with key texts. External consultants guided Explore's implementation of its close reading strategies this year. The school uses Teachers College Reading and Writing Project for its writing curriculum.
- Teachers have supporting tools like curriculum maps that come directly from the commercial materials. Pacing calendars provide day-to-day information about lesson targets and learning objectives, allowing teachers to know exactly what to teach and when to teach it. However, the Institute's team found that lesson objectives lack the rigor required by the state's learning standards. The network prepares and distributes fundamentals of instruction ("FOI") documents that provide general guidance about instructional methods. Leaders do not provide opportunities for teachers to develop content knowledge in which they can apply the pedagogical strategies in the FOIs rendering the strategies less effective than they would be otherwise.
- The network has cursory evaluation practices aimed at discovering weaknesses in its curriculum materials that have motivated some adjustments. After realizing low student achievement results as measured by the state's mathematics exam, the network implemented Achievement First's Navigator mathematics curriculum in 3rd – 8th grade. However, the network's analytic procedures do not provide a depth of analysis of the curricular materials and lesson plans that enable it to distinguish if a weakness in the curriculum or particular pedagogical strategies used to teach the content is the cause of the low performance in mathematics. Although teachers use time in Professional Learning Communities ("PLCs") to analyze student work and identify where students require extra practice, Explore lacks systems to ensure the continuous improvement of instructional delivery to drive student achievement.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- Leaders do not set consistent processes and expectations for teachers to plan purposeful and focused lessons. At some grade levels, teachers comport with the strategies outlined in the school’s FOI documents while others implement lessons from the commercial curriculum materials without making any adjustments to address the particular learning needs of the class. Lesson objectives are not consistently rigorous and measurable across lessons. Teachers do not plan for students to engage deeply with the material and perform the intellectual lifting required to meet the state learning standards. Teachers do not always plan purposeful roles for multiple adults in classrooms. In one lesson, the lesson plan included small group work. In the implementation of the lesson, rather than rotate through several groups to target specific skills or learning needs, a teacher worked with only one small group for the majority of the time while the rest of the class worked on a low level learning game.

IS HIGH QUALITY INSTRUCTION EVIDENT THROUGHOUT EXPLORE?

Instruction at Explore generally lacks rigor and, based on assessment results, does not prepare students to meet the expectations of the state learning standards. Nearly all lessons employ teacher centered and whole group instruction despite the school’s stated focus of increasing the level on student discourse and engagement with lesson material. As shown in the chart below, during the evaluation visit, Institute team members conducted 22 classroom observations following a defined protocol used in all renewal visits.

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1D

		GRADE									
		K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
CONTENT AREA	ELA	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	13
	Math			2	2	1	1	1		1	8
	Science									1	1
	Total	2	1	3	3	2	3	3	2	3	22

- A majority of lessons contain objectives aligned to the school’s curriculum (15 out of 22 lessons observed) although lesson objectives lack rigor. The network provides lesson plans to teachers that include objectives and learning targets. Instructional leaders require teachers to complete intellectual pre-work prior to teaching a lesson, which is to complete the network’s lessons to understand what they are asking of the students and to uncover any potential student misconceptions. Notwithstanding this process, leaders

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

do not consistently provide the level of support that allows teachers to adjust the lessons provided by the network to drive student learning such that students will meet grade level expectations. Lessons do not always include purposeful roles for all of the adults available in a classroom highlighting another missed opportunity to plan and provide targeted supports for students who continue to perform below grade level expectations and their district peers.

- Many teachers regularly use techniques to gauge student understanding (14 of 22 lessons observed), but few teachers use that information to adjust instruction. Although teachers circulate around the classroom, they do not effectively redirect lessons with information gleaned from the monitoring activities. While some teachers conference with individual students, they do not provide meaningful feedback to improve students' work products. In one instance, a teacher's ineffective exit ticket required students to write down two things they learned during the lesson rather than requiring students to demonstrate mastery of the lesson objective by applying what they learned.
- Few lessons at Explore incorporate opportunities for students to engage in higher order thinking (5 of 22 lessons observed). In most lessons, teachers perform the heavy cognitive lift rather than require students to engage deeply with the material. Where students had opportunities to engage, the lessons required students to focus on the procedural aspects of learning rather than evaluating information and creating new knowledge. Observed lessons in 3rd – 5th grades all lacked opportunities for students to engage in higher order thinking.
- A slight majority of classrooms establish and maintain a classroom environment with a consistent focus on academic achievement (12 of 22 lessons observed). A low din of off task behavior is present in most classrooms. Although leaders have made attempts to incorporate techniques that would allow teachers to refocus students during whole group instruction, leaders do not consistently provide teachers with feedback that allows these techniques to be successful or ensure that the class is on task. In most cases, the Institute observed teachers performing a technique and then moving on in a lesson without requiring 100% of the class to comply with the direction.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1E

DOES EXPLORE HAVE STRONG INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP?

In its 16th year of operation, Explore continues to develop its instructional leadership. The school has two new principals this year but has a critical vacancy in a student support services leadership position. Although the school has clear procedures and routines for triaging teacher coaching and professional development, student achievement is not improving at a pace that demonstrates sustained growth.

- Across the network, schools have clear goals for academic achievement at the end of the year. Explore's goal is to increase its proficiency rate by 10% over last year on each of the state's ELA and mathematics assessments. Explore's leaders also set performance expectations for the school's interim exams to ensure the school is on track to meet the annual performance targets. Despite setting goals that would allow the school to marginally close the gap toward meeting or coming close to meeting its Accountability Plan goals, the network predicts that mathematics proficiency rates will slightly increase by 7% – 12% and that ELA proficiency rates will remain essentially the same as last year's performance. Teachers and instructional leaders clearly articulate Explore's priorities for improving the quality of student work and student discourse. This year, teachers' evaluations include classroom performance as measured by the school's internal exams as an indicator of effectiveness. Instructional leaders also provide clear performance ratings in teachers' written evaluations that indicate whether a teacher is effectively delivering instruction, approaching expectations for delivering instruction, or is far from meeting expectations.
- With a vital vacancy in the student support coordinator position, Explore leadership does not have the capacity to support the development of the teaching staff. Although the school expanded the capacity of the instructional leadership by adding a principal position so that one principal oversees Kindergarten – 4th grade and a second principal oversees 5th – 8th grade, the lack of a leadership team member to lead the school's at-risk program causes the leadership team to spend time with additional duties. Additionally, the school uses special education teachers to perform some of the oversight and compliance duties, and so the capacity of the special education staff to provide professional development and coordinate learning activities with general education teachers is diminished.
- Notwithstanding some promising practices, the school's interim data does not indicate that the school's leaders have increased the effectiveness of instruction at the school throughout this charter term. Explore's instructional leaders identify a coaching tier for each teacher in order to differentiate the intensity of coaching and to provide support that matches each teacher's level of need. The most intensive coaching tier requires an instructional leader to meet with the teacher twice each week and observe

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

instruction two to three times per week. The least intensive tier requires a coaching meeting once every other week with more sporadic observations between meetings. Instructional leaders and teachers set goals during their coaching meetings and focus future coaching meetings and observations on those goals, monitoring teachers' progress toward attainment. After they determine that the teacher has met the goal, the leaders and teachers define new goals. Instructional leaders provide feedback after each observation, but the feedback is not always formally written or tracked to ensure teachers' development. Therefore, it is difficult to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the feedback to improve teachers' pedagogical practices to demonstrate growth in student performance.

- Explore does not provide a comprehensive professional development program that results in increased achievement for students, as evidenced by the school's drop in test scores from 2015-16 to 2016-17. Some teachers report that the professional development topics do not relate to classroom activities. Further exacerbating the deficient effectiveness of Explore's professional development, the school has not established a process to include special education and ELL teachers in professional development activities.

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

With about 70% of students not demonstrating proficiency on state assessments, the majority of Explore students are struggling academically, and the school does not have programs in place to address this high level of need consistently across the school. Additionally, the school does not have intervention programs in place to meet the needs of students with disabilities and ELLs. Special education teachers, also called learning specialists, ELL teachers, and general education classroom teachers have little or no time in their schedule to coordinate about at-risk students' progress. As a result, general education teachers do not stay informed about at-risk student progress and do not provide extra support in their classrooms.

- Explore has clear procedures for identifying ELLs but lacks precise procedures for identifying students who require RTI services. The response to intervention ("RTI") process for identifying students struggling academically is based on teachers' data analysis to identify students who struggle. Teachers inconsistently identify the first step in the RTI process as bringing a struggling student's data to either a grade level team meeting or a child study team ("CST") meeting. As a result, the school does not always identify or refer students that may require special education services to the to the district's committee on special education ("CSE") for special education referrals.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

For ELLs, upon admission to the school, families complete the home language survey and Explore follows up with a family interview and the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners (“NYSITELL”), as necessary.

- Explore’s intervention programs lack effective teaching strategies and coordination to serve at-risk students effectively. Although each grade level has a classroom designated for integrated co-teaching (“ICT”) to support students with academic needs, teachers are not aware of which students in their rooms have an IEP. General education and special education teachers do not have common planning time to adjust lesson plans to meet the specific needs of at-risk students. As a result, all adults in co-teaching classrooms do not always have specific roles for delivering lessons. Given that last year’s state ELA and mathematics assessments indicated that less than 30% of Explore’s students were proficient in either subject, the school’s additional academic supports are not demonstrating a level of rigorous support to meet the needs of the students enrolled at the school.
- Explore lacks a clear system for monitoring the progress of at-risk students. Teachers report using different methods with varying degrees of fidelity. For instance, some classroom teachers use a set of running records to monitor reading and literacy levels among students requiring extra support, while special education teachers use a tracking sheet aligned to reading level growth and IEP goals. Since leaders do not set these data in context of an analysis of schoolwide performance data, it is unclear if the methods effectively monitor students’ growth and evolving learning needs. In CST meetings, teachers and other key staff members discuss a student’s academic and behavioral data before developing discrete strategies to address the perceived deficiency. They return to identified data points during subsequent CST meetings to monitor progress throughout the year but do not include contextual data to inform and guide their analysis.
- Most teachers are not aware of their students’ progress toward meeting IEP goals or English language proficiency. Special education and ELL teachers monitor students’ progress independently of other teachers; the school lacks any systems to ensure that information reaches all necessary staff members. Although special education teachers and general education teachers meet at the beginning of the year to discuss the special education needs of students, there is little coordination about progress throughout the year. Teachers report that professional development on topics about supporting at-risk students at the school does not equip them to provide proper support in their classrooms.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 20

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

Explore's organization, in coordination with the network, struggles to develop structures and routines to support the educational program that is typically well established at a school in its 16th year of operation. The network and school do not work urgently to evaluate and revise the school's programs to demonstrate a high level of improvement needed to demonstrate progress toward meeting the school's Accountability Plan goals. Turnover and vacancies hinder the effectiveness of the organization.

- After several years of low academic performance and in recognition of its inadequacy, the board expanded the administrative structure at the school by adding the second principal to provide extra support for the academic program. Concomitantly, several vacancies among the teaching and support staff have required school leaders to cover teaching responsibilities and have stretched the leadership's capacity to oversee and support the program. The network provides coaching, leadership, and operational support to Explore. This year, the network added personnel to ensure the school's programs for students with disabilities are compliant; however, the school's at-risk programs do not effectively support students' needs. The delineation of responsibilities between school leadership and network leadership is clear albeit the vacancy in the student support coordinator position that hinders the effectiveness of the otherwise clear structure.
- Staff members at Explore are mostly clear about the organization's lines of accountability, roles, and responsibilities. In light of the student support services coordinator vacancy, teachers do not fully understand evaluation responsibilities among the supervisory positions, and at-risk program staff members are unclear about who will conduct end of year evaluations.
- Explore clearly defines a discipline system, but faculty and staff members do not consistently implement the system throughout the school. Staff members consistently describe the system of merits and demerits and the actions and consequences associated therewith. Throughout the visit, the Institute's team observed the application of merits and demerits across classrooms inconsistently and sometimes not at all.
- The network maintains responsibility to recruit students and ensure the school is meeting its enrollment and retention targets. According to the board report this year, the school received 1558 applications for 240 available seats. The school's overall enrollment is adequate although the enrollment of ELLs and students with disabilities remains lower than the school's targets.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- The network lacks urgency and comprehensive efforts to regularly monitor and evaluate any schools within the education corporation's programs and make changes as necessary. The network adopted a new mathematics curriculum this year, but the transition only occurred in October 2017 despite multiple years of poor performance in mathematics. Additionally, as the network has operated at least two schools since 2009-2010, the network is only now, at the end of Explore's 16th year of operation, working to establish consistent practices for the school's RTI program.

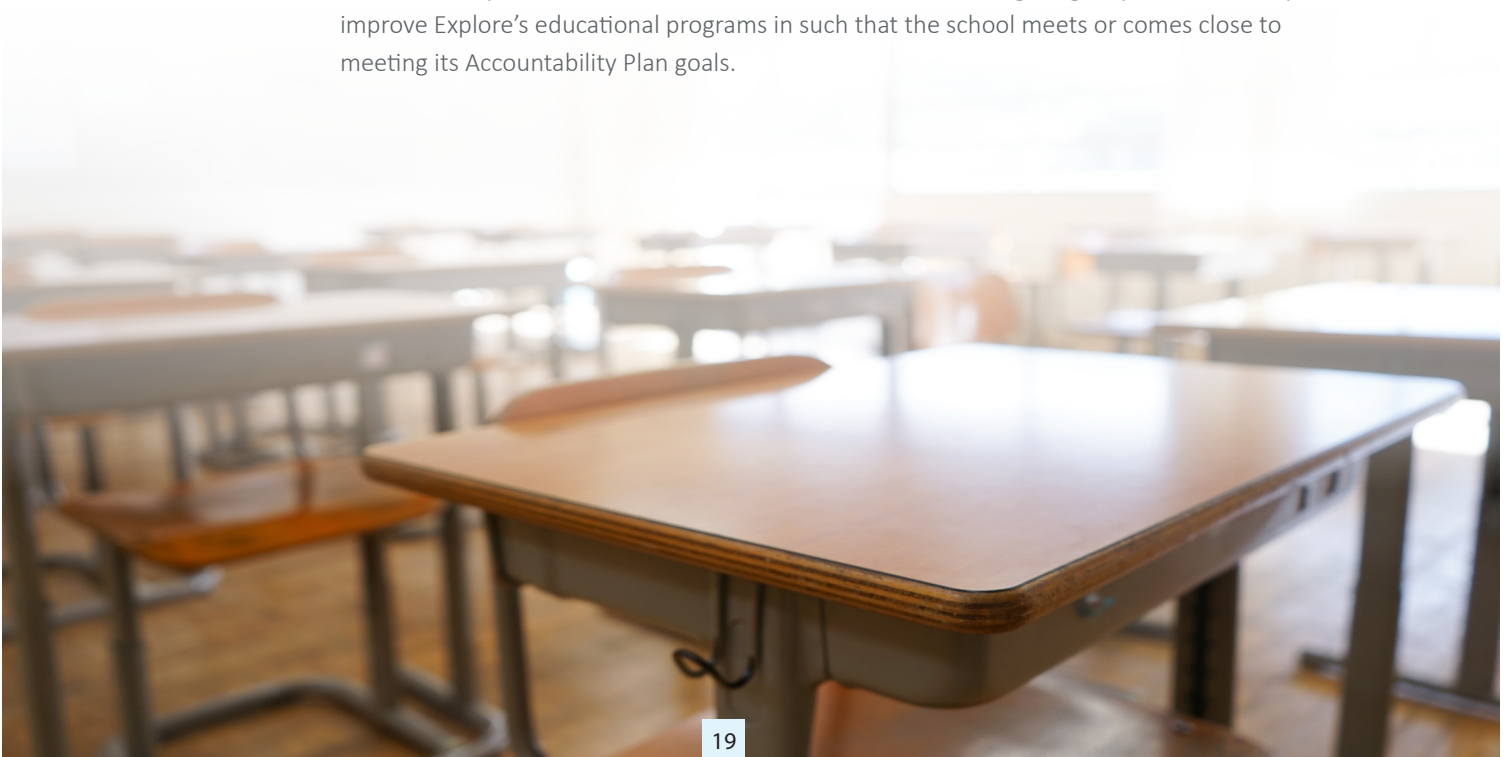
DOES THE EDUCATION CORPORATION BOARD WORK EFFECTIVELY TO ACHIEVE THE SCHOOL'S ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GOALS?

Although Explore Charter Schools of Brooklyn's board is working strategically to improve the Explore's performance, the school has not met or come close to meeting its Accountability Plan goals during the charter term, and thus the school's prospects for charter renewal are in jeopardy. This year, the board has a clear and strategic set of priorities that focus on the academic program. The board has also made school level shifts in the organizational structure and supported the school's changes to its curriculum. Based on observations, interviews, document reviews, and leaders' predictions of results, the effects of these changes have minimal impact with supporting the school in making progress toward meeting or coming close to meeting the school's Accountability Plan goals.

- Explore Charter Schools of Brooklyn's board members possess the necessary skills and expertise to oversee the day-to-day operations of the school organization. Board members have experience in education, human capital, finance, and law. Notwithstanding, the board seeks to recruit an additional member with a finance background. The activities of an audit committee and an accountability committee support the board with particular oversight duties.
- The board receives data that allows it to provide oversight and understand the full academic context of each school within the education corporation. The network provides updates on operations, finance, student achievement, and the academic program at each monthly meeting. A data dashboard supplements the network's presentation of information about the school's operational and academic data. Although the dashboard presents a dense set of data, board members are accustomed to reading it and prioritize certain data points that coincide with items on each meeting's agenda. The board has discussed doing so, but it does not yet request or examine student work to monitor the quality of the academic program and student outcomes.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- The Explore Charter Schools of Brooklyn board has set clear targets for improving ELA and mathematics achievement this year along with identifying three other strategic priorities. In both ELA and mathematics, the board expects each school in the education corporation to improve its proficiency rate at each grade level by 10% over last year's results. In addition to these two academic achievement foci, the board identifies its priorities as increasing diversity, equity, and inclusiveness; strengthening practices around recruiting and retaining key staff members; and, developing and retaining the network's highest performing school leaders. The network joins the school leaders to conduct a monthly walkthrough of the school to monitor the implementation and progress of the five priorities. However, the board acknowledges the process of gathering and evaluating information by way of the walkthroughs is less formal than desired. As of the time of the visit, the board and the network do not have a process in place for systematically sharing out promising practices among all of the education corporation's schools.
- Although the board lacks a formal process to evaluate itself and the network, the board pushed the network to drive specific improvements this year. As a result of this request, the network created a position to oversee programs and compliance for special education programs at all schools. At the time of the visit, the network filled the position with an interim staff member; the permanent appointee is scheduled to start later this year. The board also pushed the network to make changes to the mathematics program after schools across the education corporation posted no improvement in scores on last year's state mathematics assessments. Given the timing of these changes, it is unclear if the education corporation and network's efforts demonstrate enough urgency to dramatically improve Explore's educational programs in such that the school meets or comes close to meeting its Accountability Plan goals.



Explore

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APPENDIX A: School Overview

EXPLORE CHARTER SCHOOLS OF BROOKLYN BOARD OF TRUSTEES WITH AUTHORITY TO OPERATE
 EXPLORE CHARTER SCHOOL¹

CHAIR

Henry Mannix

TREASURER

Peter Walker

TRUSTEES

Angela Brice Thomas

Lindsay Fry Danon

Tamara Fulcher

Morty Ballen

Jana Reed

SCHOOL LEADERS

PRINCIPAL

Latasha Williams, Lower School Principal (2017-18 to Present)

Anwar Abdul Rahman, Upper School Principal (2017-18 to Present)

Michal- Anne Jones, Co-Principal (2014-15 to 2016-17)

Kevin Mara, Co-Principal (2014-15 to 2016-17)

Ken Baum, Superintendent (2012-13 to 2013-14)

Rod Bowen, Principal (2012-13)

Tracy Rebe, Principal (2010-11 to 2011-12)

SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

SCHOOL YEAR ³	CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT ²	ACTUAL AS A PERCENTAGE OF CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	PROPOSED GRADES	ACTUAL GRADES
2011-12	480	498	103%	K-8	K-8
2012-13	489	513	105%	K-8	K-8
2013-14	495	530	107%	K-8	K-8
2014-15	499	519	104%	K-8	K-8
2015-16	540	521	96%	K-8	K-8
2016-17	540	518	96%	K-8	K-8
2017-18	540	527	98%	K-8	K-8

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

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

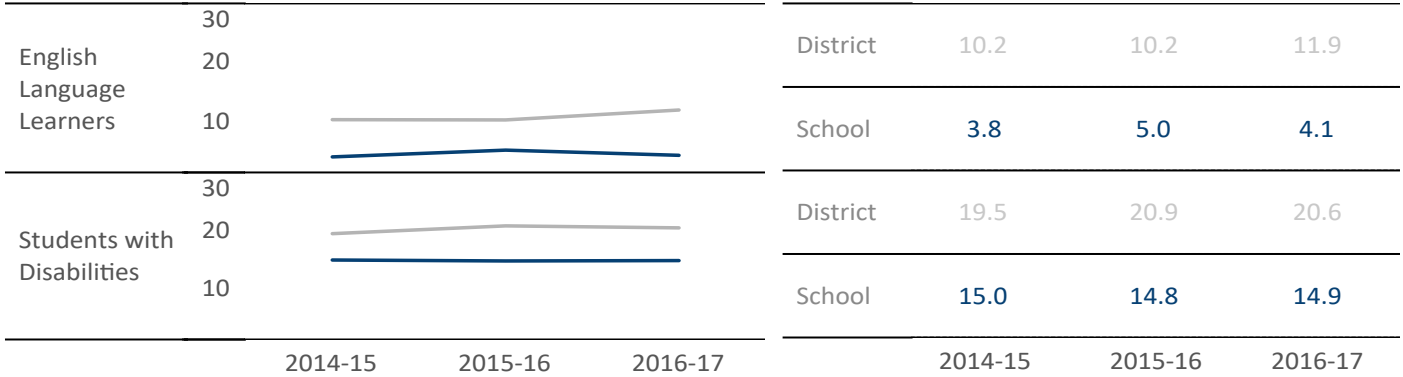
3. Enrollment data for the years when the NYC Chancellor was Explore's authorizer are not available to the Institute.

APPENDIX A: School Overview

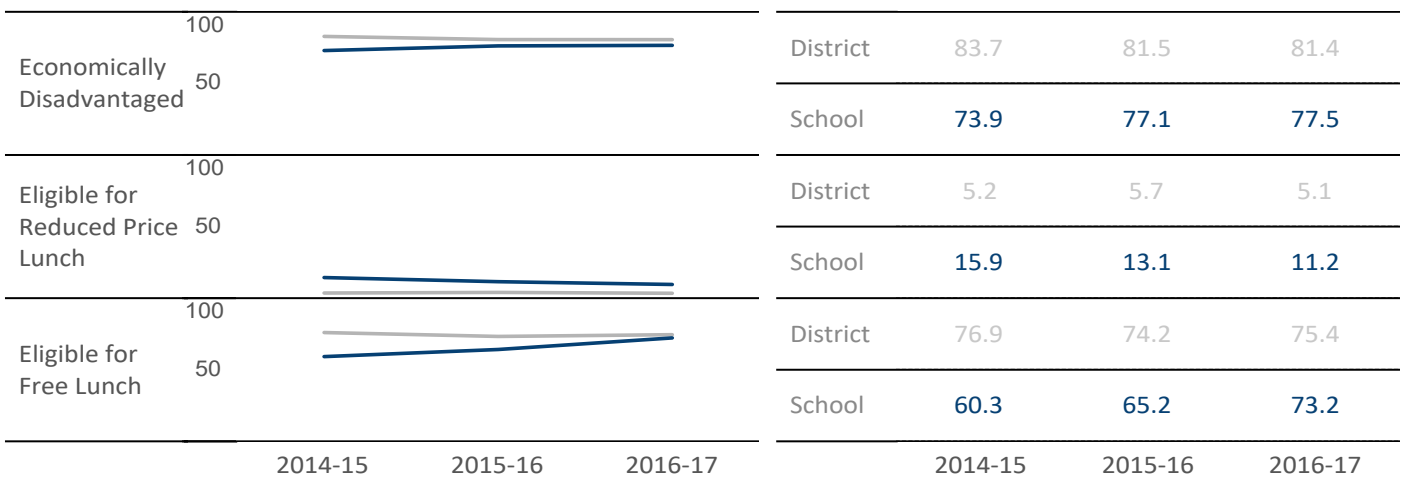
Explore Charter School

Brooklyn CSD 17

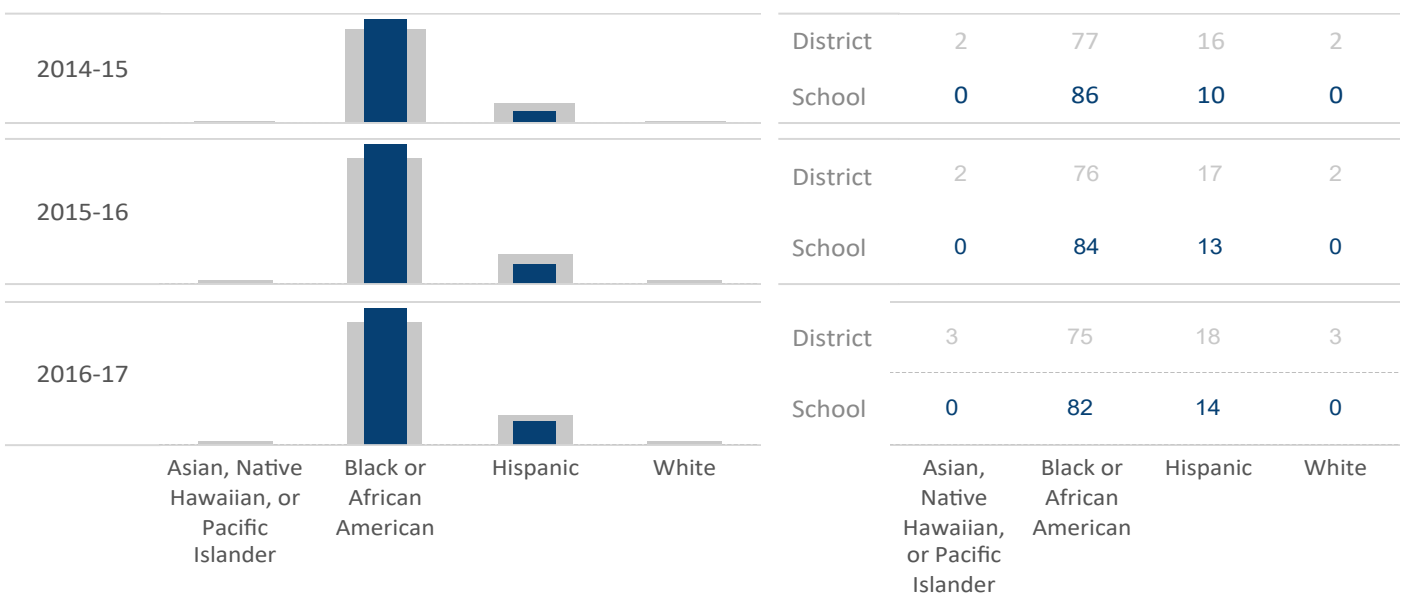
Student Demographics: Special Populations



Student Demographics: Free/Reduced Lunch



Student Demographics: Race/Ethnicity



APPENDIX A: School Overview

Explore Charter School

Brooklyn District 17



Although Community School District ("CSD") and school suspension rates are presented on the same graph, a direct comparison between the rates is not possible for three primary reasons. Available CSD data includes Kindergarten through high school grades and school data includes only the grades served by the school. CSD data are not available that show multiple instances of suspension of a single student, the overall number of suspensions, the duration of suspensions, or the time of year when the school administered the suspension. CSD data showing the difference between in-school and out-of-school suspensions are not available. The percentage rate shown here is calculated using the method employed by the New York City Department of Education ("NYCDOE"): the total the number of students receiving an in school or out of school suspension at any time during the school year is divided by the total enrollment, then multiplied by 100.

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



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

Year	2015	2016	2017
Expulsions	0	0	1

Explore Charter School's Enrollment and Retention Status: 2016-17

		District Target	School
Enrollment	Economically disadvantaged	91.1	75.6
	English language learners	10.4	7.5
	Students with disabilities	15.5	14.5
Retention	Economically disadvantaged	89.2	100.0
	English language learners	90.2	100.0
	Students with disabilities	89.4	100.0

APPENDIX A: School Overview

SCHOOL VISIT HISTORY

SCHOOL YEAR	VISIT TYPE	DATE
2015-16	Initial Renewal Visit	October 26-27, 2015
2017-18	Evaluation Visit	May 29 - 30, 2018

CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

DATE(S) OF VISIT	EVALUATION TEAM MEMBERS	TITLE
May 29 - 30, 2018	Jeff Wasbes	Executive Deputy Director for Accountability
	Chastity McFarlan, PhD	Senior Analyst
	Hannah Colestock	School Evaluation Analyst
	Cindy Schumaker	External Consultant

CHARTER CYCLE CONTEXT

CHARTER TERM	ACCOUNTABILITY PERIOD ⁴	ANTICIPATED RENEWAL VISIT
Fourth	Third year of a three-year Accountability Period	Fall 2018

4. Because the SUNY Trustees make a renewal decision in the last year of a charter term, the Accountability Period ends in the next to last year of that charter term. For schools in initial charter terms, the Accountability Period is the first four years that the school provides instruction. For schools in subsequent charter terms, the Accountability Period includes the last year of the previous charter term through the next to last year of the current charter term.

APPENDIX A: School Overview

KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS:

ELEMENT	EVIDENT?
Beginning young;	+
Continuing through 8 th grade;	+
Longer school day and year;	-
Small class size;	-
Meeting the needs of at-risk students;	-
Continuous research to drive improvement;	+
Instructional decision making; and,	+
Governance and organizational design.	+

APPENDIX B: Performance Summaries

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY: English Language Arts Explore Charter School

	2014-15 Grades Served: K-8				2015-16 Grades Served: K-8				2016-17 Grades Served: K-8				MET
	Grades	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	MET	Grades	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	MET	Grades	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	MET	
ABSOLUTE MEASURES 1. Each year 75 percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at proficiency on the New York State exam.	3	16.9 (59)	17.6 (51)		3	34.5 (55)	35.4 (48)		3	29.3 (58)	28.3 (46)		
	4	18.0 (61)	17.5 (57)		4	31.0 (58)	29.4 (51)		4	18.3 (60)	19.6 (51)		
	5	20.0 (60)	19.6 (56)		5	26.7 (60)	26.3 (57)		5	15.8 (57)	15.7 (51)		
	6	22.0 (50)	23.9 (46)		6	21.8 (55)	21.2 (52)		6	22.8 (57)	24.1 (54)		
	7	10.5 (57)	11.5 (52)		7	30.0 (50)	31.3 (48)		7	41.8 (55)	42.6 (54)		
	8	12.7 (55)	12.7 (55)		8	29.1 (55)	28.8 (52)		8	37.5 (48)	37.5 (48)		
	All	16.7 (342)	17.0 (317)	NO	All	28.8 (333)	28.6 (308)	NO	All	27.2 (335)	28.0 (304)	NO	
2. Each year the school's aggregate Performance Level Index on the State exam will meet the Annual Measurable Objective set forth in the State's NCLB accountability system.	Grades	PLI	AMO		Grades	PLI	AMO		Grades	PLI	AMO		
	3-8	79	97	NO	3-8	97	104	NO	3-8	92	111	NO	
COMPARATIVE MEASURES 3. Each year the percent of students enrolled in at least their second year and performing at proficiency will be greater than that of students in the same grades in the local district.	Comparison: Brooklyn District 17				Comparison: Brooklyn District 17				Comparison: Brooklyn District 17				
	Grades	School	District		Grades	School	District		Grades	School	District		
	3-8	17.0	21.8	NO	3-8	28.6	30.2	NO	3-8	28.0	33.5	NO	
4. Each year the school will exceed its predicted percent of students at proficiency on the state exam by at least a small Effect Size (at least 0.3) based on its percentage of Economically Disadvantaged students.	% ED	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size	% ED	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size	% ED	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size	
	71.8	16.7	24.0	-0.50	70.6	28.8	31.6	-0.16	73.7	27.2	32.2	-0.31	
GROWTH MEASURE 5. Each year, the school's unadjusted mean growth percentile will meet or exceed the state's unadjusted median growth percentile.	Grades	School	State		Grades	School	State		Grades	School	State		
	4	40.8	40.2		4	40.2	34.1		4	34.1	34.1		
	5	40.9	38.9		5	38.9	44.4		5	44.4	44.4		
	6	40.4	55.5		6	55.5	51.1		6	51.1	51.1		
	7	49.2	53.4		7	53.4	45.2		7	45.2	45.2		
	8	38.9	54.1		8	54.1	52.3		8	52.3	52.3		
	All	42.1	50.0	NO	All	48.6	50.0	NO	All	45.1	50.0	NO	

APPENDIX B: Performance Summaries

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY: Mathematics Explore Charter School

	2014-15 Grades Served: K-8			2015-16 Grades Served: K-8			2016-17 Grades Served: K-8			MET
	Grades	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	Grades	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	Grades	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	MET
ABSOLUTE MEASURES 1. Each year 75 percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at proficiency on the New York State exam.	3	28.8 (59)	31.4 (51)	3	25.5 (55)	25.0 (48)	3	20.3 (59)	23.9 (46)	NO
	4	29.5 (61)	29.8 (57)	4	32.8 (58)	31.4 (51)	4	13.3 (60)	15.7 (51)	
	5	50.0 (60)	48.2 (56)	5	21.7 (60)	22.8 (57)	5	14.0 (57)	15.7 (51)	
	6	18.4 (49)	20.0 (45)	6	56.4 (55)	55.8 (52)	6	35.1 (57)	35.2 (54)	
	7	56.1 (57)	57.7 (52)	7	22.0 (50)	22.9 (48)	7	34.5 (55)	35.2 (54)	
	8	17.6 (51)	17.6 (51)	8	23.6 (55)	25.0 (52)	8	18.8 (48)	18.8 (48)	
	All	34.1 (337)	34.6 (312)	All	30.3 (333)	30.5 (308)	All	22.6 (336)	24.3 (304)	
	Grades	PLI	AMO	Grades	PLI	AMO	Grades	PLI	AMO	
	3-8	107	94	3-8	95	101	3-8	80	109	
	COMPARATIVE MEASURES 3. Each year the percent of students enrolled in at least their second year and performing at proficiency will be greater than that of students in the same grades in the local district.	Comparison: Brooklyn District 17			Comparison: Brooklyn District 17			Comparison: Brooklyn District 17		
Grades		School	District	Grades	School	District	Grades	School	District	
3-8		34.6	23.6	3-8	30.5	27.0	3-8	24.3	26.5	
% ED		Actual	Predicted	% ED	Actual	Predicted	% ED	Actual	Predicted	
71.6		34.1	30.5	70.6	30.3	30.8	73.7	22.6	30.9	
			0.22			-0.02			-0.43	
Effect Size			Effect Size			Effect Size				
NO			NO			NO				
Grades		School	State	Grades	School	State	Grades	School	State	
4		22.3		4	45.9		4	34.1		
5	37.9		5	33.0		5	28.2			
6	12.3		6	58.8		6	69.4			
7	49.3		7	59.0		7	23.8			
8	22.7		8	16.0		8	50.0			
All	29.6	50.0	All	42.0	50.0	All	40.9	50.0		
GROWTH MEASURE 5. Each year, the school's unadjusted mean growth percentile will meet or exceed the state's unadjusted median growth percentile.	Comparison: Brooklyn District 17			Comparison: Brooklyn District 17			Comparison: Brooklyn District 17			NO
	Grades	School	State	Grades	School	State	Grades	School	State	
	4	22.3		4	45.9		4	34.1		
	5	37.9		5	33.0		5	28.2		
	6	12.3		6	58.8		6	69.4		
	7	49.3		7	59.0		7	23.8		
	8	22.7		8	16.0		8	50.0		
	All	29.6	50.0	All	42.0	50.0	All	40.9	50.0	

VERSION 5.0, MAY 2012

Introduction

The State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks¹ (the “SUNY Renewal Benchmarks”) serve two primary functions at renewal:

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Renewal Benchmarks adapt and elaborate on these correlates.

APPENDIX C: SUNY Renewal Benchmarks

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

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

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

RENEWAL QUESTION 1

IS THE SCHOOL AN ACADEMIC SUCCESS?

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1A

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

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

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

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1B

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

The following elements are generally present:

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

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1C

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

The following elements are generally present:

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

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1D

HIGH QUALITY INSTRUCTION IS EVIDENT THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL.

The following elements are generally present:

- teachers deliver purposeful lessons with clear objectives aligned to the school's curriculum;
- teachers regularly and effectively use techniques to check for student understanding;
- teachers include opportunities in their lessons to challenge students with questions and activities that develop depth of understanding and higher-order thinking and problem solving skills;
- teachers maximize learning time (e.g., appropriate pacing, on-task student behavior, clear lesson focus and clear directions to students); transitions are efficient; and
- teachers have effective classroom management techniques and routines that create a consistent focus on academic achievement.

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1E

THE SCHOOL HAS STRONG INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP.

The following elements are generally present:

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

APPENDIX C: SUNY Renewal Benchmarks

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

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1F

THE SCHOOL MEETS THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF AT-RISK STUDENTS

The following elements are generally present:

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

RENEWAL QUESTION 2

IS THE SCHOOL AN EFFECTIVE, VIABLE ORGANIZATION?

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 2A

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

The following elements are generally present:

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

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 2B

PARENTS/GUARDIANS AND STUDENTS ARE SATISFIED WITH THE SCHOOL.

The following elements are generally present:

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

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 2C

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

The following elements are generally present:

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

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 2D

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

The following elements are generally present:

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

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 2E

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

The following elements are generally present:

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

APPENDIX C: SUNY Renewal Benchmarks

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

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

The following elements are generally present:

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

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 2F

RENEWAL QUESTION 3

IS THE SCHOOL FISCALLY SOUND?

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 3A

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

The following elements are generally present:

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

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 3B

THE SCHOOL MAINTAINS APPROPRIATE INTERNAL CONTROLS AND PROCEDURES.

The following elements are generally present:

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

APPENDIX C: SUNY Renewal Benchmarks

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

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 3C

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

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

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

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 3D

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

The following elements are generally present:

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

RENEWAL QUESTION 4

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

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 4A

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

Based on elements present in the Application for Charter Renewal:

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

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 4B

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

Based on elements present in the Application for Charter Renewal:

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

APPENDIX C: SUNY Renewal Benchmarks

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 4C

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

Based on elements present in the Application for Charter Renewal:

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

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 4D

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

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

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

