



2015-16 School Evaluation Report

NEW ROOTS CHARTER SCHOOL

Visit Date: April 20, 2016

Report Date: June 21, 2016

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INTRODUCTION AND SCHOOL BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

This School Evaluation Report offers an analysis of evidence collected during the school visit on April 20, 2016. While the SUNY Charter Schools Institute (the “Institute”) conducts a comprehensive review of evidence related to all the State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks (the “SUNY Renewal Benchmarks”) near the end of a charter term, most mid-cycle school evaluation visits focus on a subset of these benchmarks. This subset, the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, addresses the academic success of the school and the effectiveness and viability of the school organization. It provides a framework for examining the quality of the educational program, focusing on teaching and learning (i.e., curriculum, instruction, assessment and services for at-risk students), as well as leadership, organizational capacity and board oversight. The Institute uses the established criteria on a regular basis to provide schools with a consistent set of expectations leading up to renewal.

Appendix A to the report contains a School Overview with descriptive information about the school, including enrollment and demographic data, as well as historical information regarding the life of the school. It also provides background information on the conduct of the visit, including information about the evaluation team and puts the visit in the context of the school’s current charter cycle. Appendix B displays the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks.

This report does not contain an overall rating or comprehensive indicator that would specify at a glance the school’s prospects for renewal. Rather, it summarizes various strengths of the school and notes areas in need of improvement based on the Qualitative Education Benchmarks. The Institute intends this selection of information to be an exception report in order to highlight areas of concern. As such, limited detail about positive elements of the educational program is not an indication that the Institute does not recognize other indicators of program effectiveness.

SCHOOL BACKGROUND

Opening Information

Date Initial Charter Approved by SUNY Trustees	September 8, 2008
Date of School Opening	September 7, 2009

Location and 2015-16 Enrollment

Address	District	Facility	Chartered Enrollment	Grades
116 North Cayuga St., Ithaca, NY	Ithaca	Private	160	9-12

2014-15 SCHOOL PERFORMANCE REVIEW

In 2014-15, the second year of its three-year Accountability Period, New Roots came close to meeting its Accountability Plan goal in English language arts (“ELA”) but did not meet its goal in mathematics as measured against New York State’s college and career readiness standards. Currently, New York’s standard for college and career readiness is defined as scoring at least 75 on the Regents English exam, at least 65 on the Regents Common Core English exam, and at least 80 on a Regents mathematics exam. New Roots came close to meeting its high school graduation goal and met its college preparation goal. New Roots came close to meeting its science and social studies goals. The school met its No Child Left Behind (“NCLB”) goal.

ELA

During 2014-15, New Roots came close to meeting its ELA goal according to the four available measures calibrated to the state’s college and career readiness standard, currently defined as achieving a score of at least 75 on the Regents English exam or at least 65 on the Regents Common Core English exam. With a target of 65 percent of the Accountability Cohort scoring at or above 75, New Roots exceeded its performance expectation for this absolute measure with 71 percent of the cohort scoring at or above 75 on the Regents Comprehensive English exam. Notwithstanding the school’s laudable growth from the previous year when only 49 percent of the 2010 Accountability Cohort performed at the college and career readiness standard, its Accountability Performance Level (“APL”) of 169 failed to exceed the district’s 171. The school’s APL also narrowly missed meeting its Annual Measureable Objective (“AMO”) target of 170.

Mathematics

According to the four available measures calibrated to the state’s college and career readiness standard (currently defined as scoring at least an 80 on the Regents Integrated Algebra exam or a 65 on the Algebra I (Common Core) exam) under the mathematics goal in the school’s Accountability Plan, New Roots failed to meet the goal during 2014-15. With only 42 percent of students in the 2011 Accountability Cohort scoring at least an 80 on a Regents mathematics exam, the school fell far short of meeting its target of 75 percent. The 2011 Accountability Cohort’s APL of 137 also fell short of two benchmarks included in the school’s Accountability Plan mathematics goal. The Ithaca City School District’s (the “district’s”) APL of 164 exceeded New Roots’ by 27 points and the AMO of 154 exceeded New Roots’ APL by 17 points.

Graduation

New Roots came close to meeting its graduation goal during 2014-15 after not meeting the goal during 2013-14. The school graduated 79 percent of its 2011 Total Graduation Cohort, meeting its absolute target of 75 percent but falling short of the district’s four year graduation rate of 94 percent. Notwithstanding the dramatic increase in the school’s four year graduation rate over the 2010 cohort when the school graduated only 51 percent of its cohort, leading indicators of high school completion for future cohorts are weak. Only 41 percent of the 2013 Graduation Cohort successfully completed at least three Regents exams required for graduation by their second year

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

in the cohort while only 53 percent of the 2014 cohort (enrolled in their first year of high school) successfully completed the necessary coursework to advance to the subsequent grade level.

College Preparation

During 2014-15, New Roots met its college preparation goal with 97 percent of the school's graduates from the 2011 Graduation Cohort enrolled in a 2-year or 4-year college program during the fall after their final year at the school. During the past three years, the school's rate of college going graduates has increased from roughly half to the current rate of nearly all. In addition, during 2014-15, 87 percent of the school's graduates demonstrated college readiness by passing a college level exam or by completing college level coursework, exceeding the school's target of 75 percent.

Science

New Roots came close to meeting its science goal during 2014-15. With 89 percent of New Roots' Accountability Cohort scoring at least 65 on a Regents science exam, the school exceeded its absolute target of 75 percent proficiency. However, the district exceeded New Roots' performance with 97 percent of its cohort proficient on a Regents science exam.

Social Studies

New Roots came close to meeting its social studies goal during 2014-15. Of the school's 2011 Accountability Cohort, 84 percent of students scored at or above proficiency on the Regents global studies exam and 87 percent met proficiency on the Regents U.S. History exam. Both scores exceed the benchmark of 75 percent scoring at or above proficiency on the respective exams. Comparatively, New Roots performed lower than the district on both exam: 93 percent of the district's cohort scored at or above proficiency on the Regents global exam and 97 percent scored at or above proficiency on the U.S. History exam.

NCLB

The school met its NCLB goal as it has not been identified as a Local Assistance Plan, Focus or Priority school under the state's NCLB accountability system.

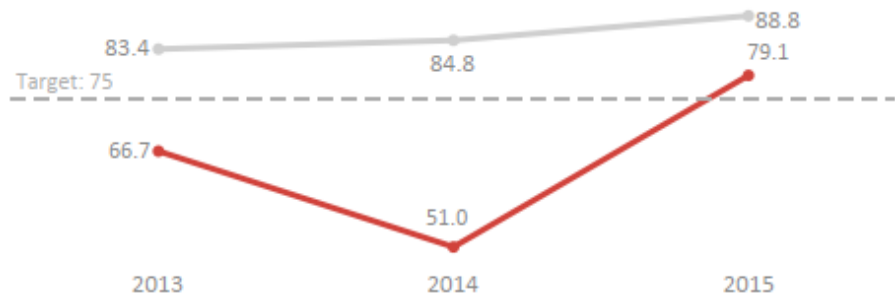
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

New Roots Charter School

DESCRIPTION

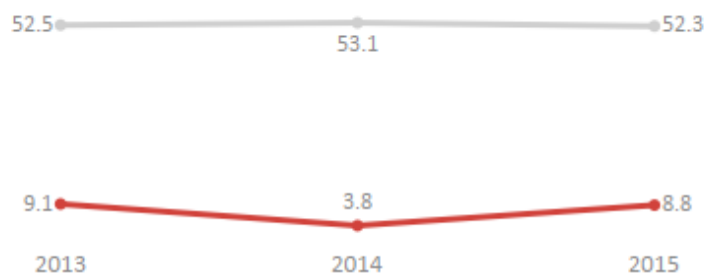
FOUR YEAR GRADUATION RATE

Comparative Measure: Graduation Rate. Each year, the percentage of **New Roots students graduating** after completion of their fourth year will exceed that of the Ithaca City School District.



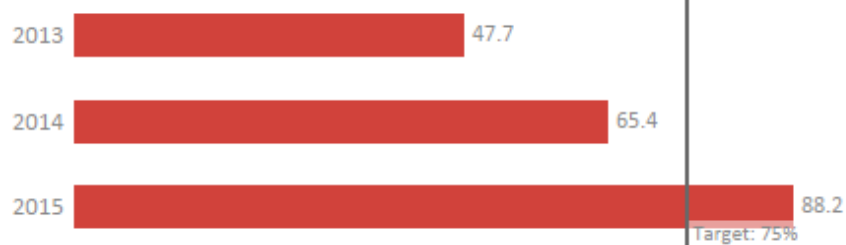
ADVANCED REGENTS DIPLOMA ATTAINMENT

College Preparation Measure: Advanced Regents Diploma. Each year, the percentage of **students graduating** with an Advanced Regents diploma will exceed that of the district.



COLLEGE MATRICULATION

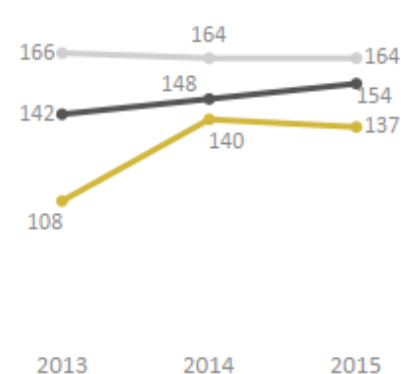
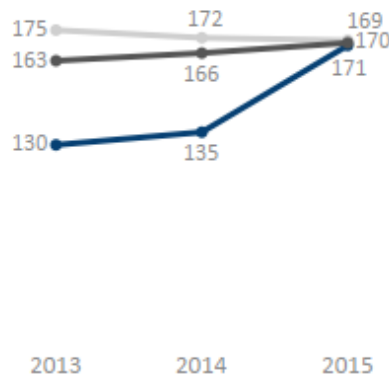
College Attainment Measure: Matriculation into College. Each year, 75 percent of **graduating students** will enroll in a college or university.



ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

MATHEMATICS

Comparative and Absolute Measure: District Comparison. Each year, the school's **ELA Accountability Performance Level** and the **math APL** will exceed the district's Performance Index and the state's AMO.



BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

QUALITATIVE EDUCATION BENCHMARKS

The SUNY Renewal Benchmarks, grounded in the body of research from the Center for Urban Studies at Harvard University,¹ describe the elements in place at schools that are highly effective at providing students from low-income backgrounds the instruction, content, knowledge and skills necessary to produce strong academic performance. The SUNY Renewal Benchmarks describe the elements an effective school must have in place at the time of renewal.²

Use of Assessment Data

With a significantly stronger emphasis on utilizing data to inform programmatic changes this year, New Roots is implementing an assessment system during its first subsequent charter term that improves instructional effectiveness and student learning.

- New Roots regularly administers valid and reliable exams aligned to the school's curriculum and state performance standards, as well as performance tasks and portfolio based assessments, to monitor students' progress. Teachers maintain primary responsibility for creating and aligning these assessments to the rigor of Regents exams.
- Teachers across the school employ formative assessment strategies to check for students' understanding, such as quick writing activities at the beginning of class and exit tickets to demonstrate level of concept mastery. These strategies link directly to content area curriculum and many teachers report utilizing the data collected to inform the next day's teaching. However, teacher lesson plans do not contain corroborating information on skills to re-teach or other forms of differentiation.
- New Roots has a valid process for scoring and analyzing assessments, but the process is not yet reliable. Most teachers score their own students' work based on Regents rubrics, but the school has invested limited resources into norming scoring and course grading practices to ensure consistent expectations across teachers.
- Early in 2015-16, New Roots leaders created a part time data manager position in response to Institute feedback. This teacher on special assignment makes assessment data accessible to teachers, school leaders and board members quickly and regularly. This additional data analysis has informed leaders about particular areas of weakness across the school, such as the below grade level reading abilities of many incoming students,

¹ An extensive body of research identifying and confirming the correlates of effective schools exists dating back four decades. Selected sources include: www.mes.org/correlates.html; scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/dobbie_fryer_revision_final.pdf; and, gao.gov/assets/80/77488.pdf.

² Additional details regarding the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks, including greater specificity as to what the Institute looks for at each school that may demonstrate attainment of the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks, is available at: www.newyorkcharters.org/suny-renewal-benchmarks/.

BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

which led them to implement remedial literacy programming for ninth and tenth graders this year.

- Teachers use multiple forms of evidence, including assessments, to inform their instruction. This includes formative measures such as do now prompts and exit ticket data, students' written work, and group projects. Policies and expectations for how and when teachers will use data to monitor their lesson planning and curriculum adjustments are becoming increasingly systematic; many teachers now report using formative assessment data to inform the next day's lessons.
- Parents receive information regarding students' progress through progress reports, individualized credit recovery plans for individual students, conferences, and report cards regularly throughout the school year.

Curriculum

The school's curriculum supports teachers in their instructional planning, but does not yet ensure a consistent level of rigor across courses and assignments.

- New Roots continues to implement a curriculum based on state learning standards, Education for Sustainability standards, and the Environmental Roundtable's curriculum. Teachers have considerable autonomy to use this content to create unit and expedition plans, interdisciplinary projects and daily lessons, resulting in a mixture of high level and engaging activities in some classrooms and basic, foundational content that does not adequately challenge students in others.
- Teachers use interim and summative assessment results, as well as annotated reflections on levels of student engagement and interest, from prior years to revise and refine scope and sequence documents. New Roots has a comprehensive curriculum map for every course containing essential questions, overarching learning goals, specific learning targets and specific projects to measure student mastery. With these curricular documents guiding lesson planning, teachers know what to teach and when to teach it.
- New Roots' process for assessing the quality of the curriculum is still largely informal and teacher-led. Leaders evaluate the curriculum to determine alignment to the standards and performance goals, but have not formally implemented a process for conducting this evaluation of the curriculum across all content areas at regular intervals, particularly in regards to a consistent level of rigor across courses.

Pedagogy

Notwithstanding a few exceptions, teachers continue to struggle to implement project and place based lessons included in the school's vision that rigorously prepare students for college and

BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

career and that align with the school’s mission and vision. As shown in the chart below, during the school visit, Institute team members conducted 8 classroom observations using a defined protocol used in all school evaluation visits.

CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

		Grade				Total
		9	10	11	12	
Content Area	ELA	1	1	1		3
	Math	2		1		3
	Science			1		1
	Soc Stu		1			1
	Total	3	2	3		8

- Most lessons are purposeful and address clear objectives that align to the school’s curriculum (6 of 8 classrooms observed). Many teachers observed during the visit display the lesson objective in front of class. In these classrooms, activities are purposeful and align to the stated objective. For instance, the objective in one science class required students to understand and communicate about the key components of a scientific experiment and the lesson activities had students run four quick experiments before designing their own to explore the effects of a stimulus on a system. In the two observed classrooms where the lesson objective was not displayed at the front of the room, activities lacked rigor and purpose. Co-teachers did not have purposeful and clearly defined roles. They generally monitored student behaviors and admonished students to stay on task. They were not seen to support students in attaining academic mastery of the lesson content.
- Teachers struggle to effectively use checks for understanding (3 of 8 classrooms observed). Some teachers include a variety of checks including cold calling and questioning but most rely on volunteers and miss opportunities to engage all or most students in the lesson. In a few exceptions, teachers adjusted instruction to relate the lesson content to students’ real life interests and in doing so increased student understanding and engagement. Many teachers include an exit ticket in their plans but do not always implement them with fidelity, if at all.
- A small minority of teachers include opportunities for higher order thinking or for students to develop depth of understanding (2 of 8 classrooms observed). Most teachers do not require students to expand upon or defend their responses to questions or written prompts. Teachers accept a minimal level of engagement in the lesson content from most

BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

students and concentrate their discussion and questioning on those students who choose to engage. Most lessons did not evidence questions that require depth of thinking and that develop deep understanding. Notwithstanding many lessons requiring students to coordinate and cooperate in their efforts to tackle a task, many activities are low in rigor and do not develop deep understanding of complex concepts.

- Students remain on task during lessons notwithstanding inconsistent behavioral expectations throughout the school (6 of 8 classrooms observed). Some teachers allow students to opt out of participating in lesson activities as long as the students are not disruptive. Teachers tolerate low level misbehaviors and distractions in most classrooms and accept minimal student engagement with the material as sufficient.

Instructional Leadership

New Roots' leadership has developed its ability to guide teachers in effectively implementing the project and place based lessons that align with the school's mission. Although stripped down to only the principal and superintendent³ and academic coordinator this year, the leadership structure is adequate to support the development of the small teaching staff.

- The school's leaders expect that 75 percent of students will pass each course by the end of each quarter. This year, school leaders monitor course passing rates to identify where teachers need support. Teachers set performance goals early in the year with input from the instructional leaders. Late in the year, the leaders and teachers were not able to identify their goals but were able to describe which areas teachers selected for their own improvement.
- This year, the school's instructional leadership is stripped down to only the principal and academic coordinator. In contrast to last year, the academic coordinator has no assigned teaching duties making the duo adequate to support the development of the small teaching staff. The academic coordinator is responsible for coaching and evaluating all core content area teachers throughout the school with support and direction from the principal. Early in the school year, the leadership team worked to develop an observation and evaluation protocol based on Charlotte Danielson's teacher evaluation framework. An external consultant provided training to both leaders enabling them to implement the protocol with fidelity throughout the school year.
- The academic coordinator observes every teacher informally at least weekly and observes some teachers as often as twice weekly depending on the level of teacher need. The academic coordinator recognizes that the system for closing the feedback loop with

³ Although officially titled "principal and superintendent", the report will heretofore refer to the "principal" for ease of reference.

BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

teachers about pedagogical practice is generally informal. In addition, the academic coordinator performs at least two formal observations per year that include a calculated assessment of teachers' attainment of goals for their professional practice. Following each formal observation, the academic coordinator prepares a written performance review and confers with the teacher about its contents. Both parties then circle back to collaborate on a reset of professional goals. The principal formally signs off on each formal performance appraisal.

- Teachers meet weekly as content teams to plan instruction. These planning sessions include opportunities to plan content across curricular areas. The academic coordinator guides these sessions that also include discussions about student work products, particularly about those students who are struggling academically. These sessions enable the school's academic leaders to guide discussions and set school norms about academic expectations and the quality of student work products.
- New Roots provides all teachers with professional development sessions that align closely to the schools' place centered, project based curriculum. The sessions interrelate with classroom practice insofar as they address promoting pro-social behavior, data driven student intervention plans and building strategies for responding to student performance data.

At-Risk Students

New Roots addresses the educational needs of at-risk students.

- New Roots provides several layers of academic support for students with disabilities, including push in and pull out support, resource room, after school tutoring, Saturday school, as well as personalized intervention plans for students who are academically struggling. In addition to a math lab course to provide additional support, the school added Read180 classes this year to remediate students entering the school with below level literacy skills. Evidence of the effectiveness of these new programs will be available after completion of the first year of implementation.
- The student success team meets regularly to develop individualized intervention plans and monitor student progress, including assessment data. New Roots' special education coordinator leads this team and provides oversight to the school's two teachers who serve its 45 students with disabilities, but neither teacher currently possesses the certification necessary for working with these students.
- The school schedule includes limited time for communication between classroom teachers and at-risk program staff regarding student progress on intervention plans. The school's special education coordinator attends content area meetings regularly where these staff members are able to coordinate.

BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

- The school has a plan to identify and support English language learners but does not currently enroll any students who require English language acquisition supports.

Organizational Capacity

The school organization has sufficient capacity to carry out its day to day operations well. This year, New Roots made calculated changes to its leadership and staff structure to bolster the efficacy of its academic program. Data about the effectiveness of the changes will become available after the end of the year.

- New Roots' administrative structure enables the school to carry out its mission. The academic coordinator oversees the school's curriculum and instruction and the business and operations manager continues to maintain the school facility, ensure teachers' access to instructional materials, and monitor the school's finances. The principal coordinates the day to day operations and monitors the effectiveness of New Roots' academic program.
- This year, New Roots calibrated its chartered enrollment to match historical data. The adjustment aligned the school's chartered and actual enrollment and alleviated concerns about the school's projections for per-pupil revenue and actual revenue. The board's reorganization of the school staff enabled New Roots to continue to deliver its academic program with fidelity to the school's mission.
- This year, the school made its academic advisor responsible for monitoring and communicating with students regularly about their progress toward meeting all requirements for graduation and enrolling in college. The school also charged a faculty member with student academic data analysis duties in order to more systematically identify and develop strategies to address weaknesses in the education program.

Board Oversight

New Roots' board continues to make thoughtful changes to the school organization and program to address the needs of its students.

- The New Roots board utilizes multiple committees to monitor the school's academic and fiscal health as it works to achieve the school's mission. The board continually monitors the school's interim academic performance as well as high school graduation and college attainment rates. This year, the board has increased the school's alumni relations activities in order to learn how well New Roots is preparing students to persevere and achieve success in college.

BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

- The school's principal regularly makes presentations to the board about the school's academic progress at scheduled board meetings. When necessary and at the board's request, academic departments have presented information at meetings to supplement the board's close monitoring of the program. As a result of this monitoring, the board adjusted the school's student enrollment policies. As a result, students enrolled at New Roots are given more time to meet the state's requirements for graduation and college and career readiness. This year, the board also executed its plans to make the school's data reports more systematic and consistent and continues to thoughtfully revise these reporting mechanisms to closely monitor the academic achievement of the school.

Appendix A

School Overview

APPENDIX A: SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Mission Statement

New Roots Charter School will prepare our diverse student body to meet the challenges of citizenship, work and life-long learning in the 21st century. Our interdisciplinary academic program will feature hands-on, community-based learning that supports students in solving real-world problems. New Roots Charter School students will earn a Regents diploma and demonstrate readiness for higher education by earning college credit and creating a graduation portfolio that demonstrates that they have met or exceeded all 28 New York State Learning Standards. Our school community will create a model of secondary education that integrates best practices in sustainability education with those proven to support educational equity.

Board of Trustees⁴

Board Member Name	Position	Board Member Name	Position
Dr. Jason Hamilton	Chair/President	Kati Torello	Trustee
Dr. Synnove Heggoy	Secretary	Jennifer Bokaer-Smith	Trustee
Conrad Metcalfe	Trustee	Dr. Roger Richardson	Trustee
Joseph Wilson	Trustee	Tina Nilsen-Hodges	Trustee Ex-Officio
Catherine Thompson	Trustee		

School Characteristics

School Year	Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment⁵	Proposed Grades	Actual Grades
2009-10	125	100	9-10	9-10
2010-11	175	115	9-11	9-11
2011-12	225	171	9-12	9-12
2012-13	200	191	9-12	9-12
2013-14	200	151	9-12	9-12
2014-15	200	148	9-12	9-12

⁴ Source: The Institute's board records at the time of the visit.

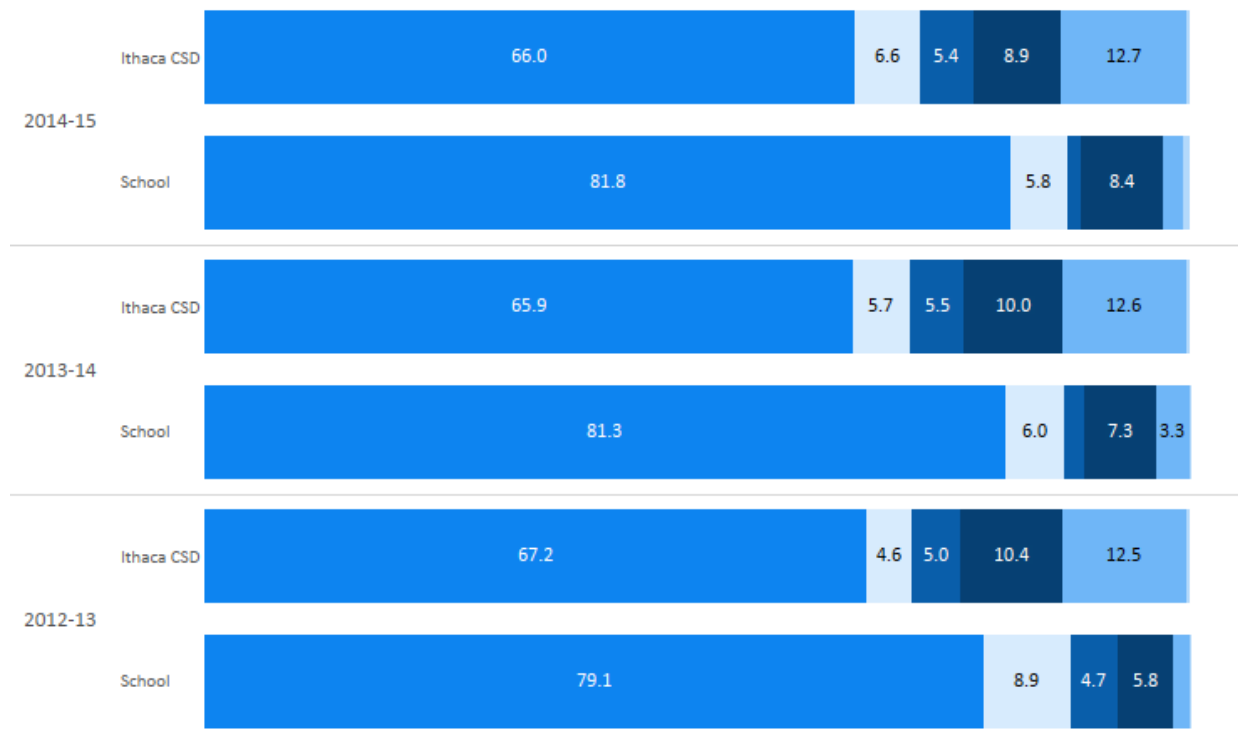
⁵ Source: Institute's Official Enrollment Binder. (Figures may differ slightly from New York State Report Cards, depending on date of data collection.)

APPENDIX A: SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Key Design Elements

- Education for sustainability as an integrated principle for applied disciplinary studies;
- Real world, community based learning;
- Small school design elements, including advisory groups and service learning;
- A college preparatory curriculum, including offering concurrent enrollment for college credit;
- Use of the Environment as Integrating Context model for curriculum development; and,
- Demonstrating achievement through exhibitions and digital portfolios.

Student Demographics: Race/Ethnicity

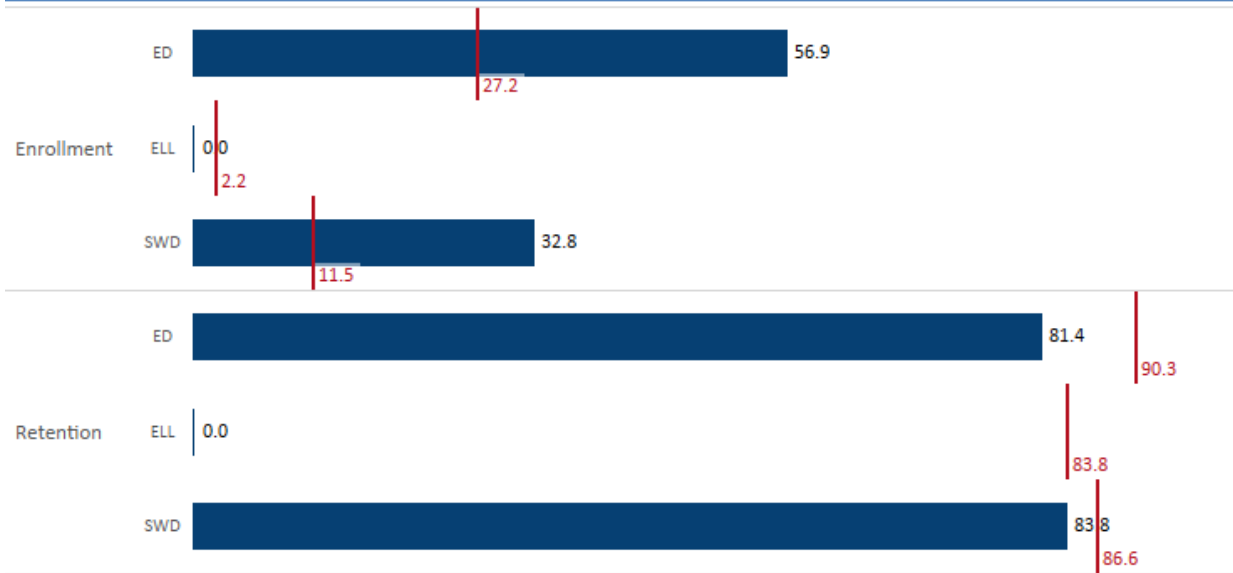


Race/Ethnicity Color Legend

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

APPENDIX A: SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Enrollment and Retention Targets



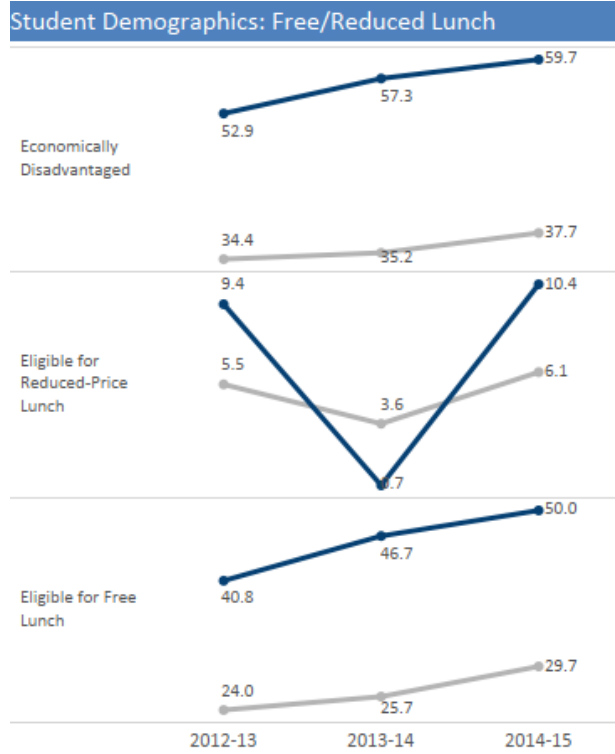
The chart illustrates the school's **current enrollment and retention percentages** against the **enrollment and retention targets**. As required by Education Law § 2851(4)(e), a school must include in its renewal application information regarding the efforts it has, and will, put in place to meet or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

Persistence in Enrollment

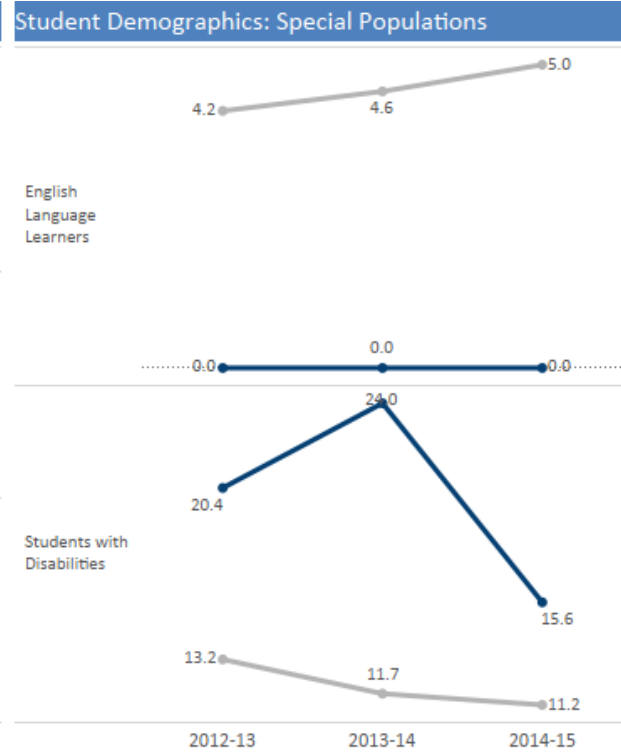


Persistence in enrollment illustrates the percentage of students not scheduled to age out of the school who re-enroll from the previous year. The Institute derived the statistical information on enrollment persistence from its database. No comparative data from NYCDOE or NYSED is available to the Institute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

APPENDIX A: SCHOOL OVERVIEW



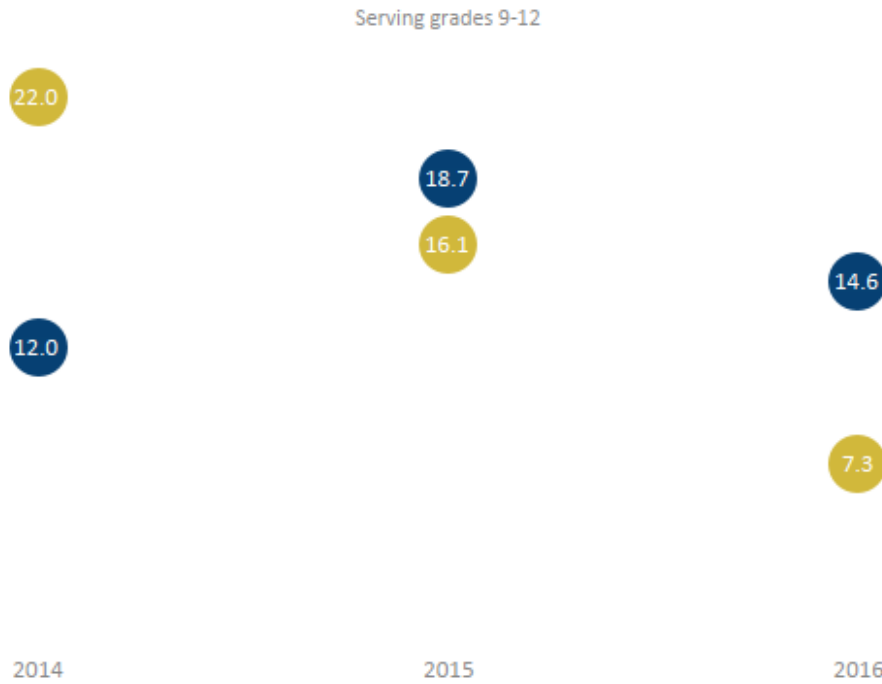
The charts show the trends in enrollment in the **school** and the **district** for each subgroup over the charter term. Reduced-Price and Free Lunch data are not available for 2014-15. Economically disadvantaged includes those students eligible for Free and Reduced-Price lunch among other qualifying income assistance programs.



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

APPENDIX A: SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Suspensions: New Roots Charter School's in school suspension rate and out of school suspension rate.



CSD comparison data are not yet available. The percentage rate shown here is calculated using the method employed by the New York City Department of Education: 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.

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

2014	2015	2016
0	1	0

APPENDIX A: SCHOOL OVERVIEW

School Leaders

School Year(s)

Name(s) and Title(s)

2009-10 to Present	Tina Nilsen-Hodges, Principal and Superintendent
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School Visit History

School Year	Visit Type	Date
2009-10	First Year	March 25, 2010
2010-11	Evaluation	May 17-19, 2012
2013-14	Initial Renewal	October 8-9, 2013
2014-15	Evaluation	May 12-13, 2015
2015-16	Evaluation	April 20, 2016

Conduct of the Visit

Date(s) of Visit	Evaluation Team Member	Title
April 20, 2016	Jeff Wasbes	Executive Deputy Director for Accountability
	Heather Wendling	Director for New Charters

Charter Cycle Context

Charter Term	2 nd Year of Three-Year Charter Term
Accountability Period ⁶	3 rd Year of Three-Year Accountability Period
Anticipated Renewal Visit	Fall 2016

⁶ 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.

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Appendix B

SUNY Renewal Benchmarks



State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks

Version 5.0, May 2012

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is important that the entire school community understand the renewal process. All members of a school’s leadership team and board should carefully review both the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks and the SUNY Renewal Practices. Note that a renewal overview document for parents, teachers and

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

State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks

	Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1A</p> <p>Academic Accountability Plan Goals</p>	<p>Over the Accountability Period, the school has met or come close to meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals.</p> <p>The Institute determines the extent to which the school has met the Accountability Plan goals in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English language arts; • mathematics; • science; • social studies (high school only); • NCLB; • high school graduation and college preparation (if applicable); and • optional academic goals included by the school.
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1B</p> <p>Use of Assessment Data</p>	<p>The school has an assessment system that improves instructional effectiveness and student learning.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school regularly administers valid and reliable assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum and state performance standards; • the school has a valid and reliable process for scoring and analyzing assessments; • the school makes assessment data accessible to teachers, school leaders and board members; • teachers use assessment results to meet students’ needs by adjusting classroom instruction, grouping students and/or identifying students for special intervention; • school leaders use assessment results to evaluate teacher effectiveness and to develop professional development and coaching strategies; and • the school regularly communicates to parents/guardians about their students’ progress and growth.

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	Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1C</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Curriculum</p>	<p>The school’s curriculum supports teachers in their instructional planning.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school has a curriculum framework with student performance expectations that provides a fixed, underlying structure, aligned to state standards and across grades; • in addition to the framework, the school has supporting tools (i.e., curriculum maps or scope and sequence documents) that provide a bridge between the curriculum framework and lesson plans; • teachers know what to teach and when to teach it based on these documents; • the school has a process for selecting, developing and reviewing its curriculum documents and its resources for delivering the curriculum; and • teachers plan purposeful and focused lessons.
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1D</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Pedagogy</p>	<p>High quality instruction is evident throughout the school.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teachers deliver purposeful lessons with clear objectives aligned to the school’s curriculum; • teachers regularly and effectively use techniques to check for student understanding; • teachers include opportunities in their lessons to challenge students with questions and activities that develop depth of understanding and higher-order thinking and problem solving skills; • teachers maximize learning time (e.g., appropriate pacing, on-task student behavior, clear lesson focus and clear directions to students); transitions are efficient; and • teachers have effective classroom management techniques and routines that create a consistent focus on academic achievement.
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1E</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Instructional Leadership</p>	<p>The school has strong instructional leadership.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school’s leadership establishes an environment of high expectations for teacher performance (in content knowledge and

	<p align="center">Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?</p>
<p><u>Evidence Category</u></p>	<p><u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u></p>
	<p>pedagogical skills) and in which teachers believe that all students can succeed;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the instructional leadership is adequate to support the development of the teaching staff; • instructional leaders provide sustained, systemic and effective coaching and supervision that improves teachers’ instructional effectiveness; • instructional leaders provide opportunities and guidance for teachers to plan curriculum and instruction within and across grade levels; • instructional leaders implement a comprehensive professional development program that develops the competencies and skills of all teachers; • professional development activities are interrelated with classroom practice; • instructional leaders regularly conduct teacher evaluations with clear criteria that accurately identify teachers’ strengths and weaknesses; and • instructional leaders hold teachers accountable for quality instruction and student achievement.
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1F</p> <p>At-Risk Students</p>	<p>The school meets the educational needs of at-risk students.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school uses clear procedures for identifying at-risk students including students with disabilities, English language learners and those struggling academically; • the school has adequate intervention programs to meet the needs of at-risk students; • general education teachers, as well as specialists, utilize effective strategies to support students within the general education program; • the school adequately monitors the progress and success of at-risk students; • teachers are aware of their students’ progress toward meeting IEP goals, achieving English proficiency or school-based goals for struggling students;

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	Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school provides adequate training and professional development to identify at-risk students and to help teachers meet students' needs; and • the school provides opportunities for coordination between classroom teachers and at-risk program staff including the school nurse, if applicable.

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	Renewal Question 2 Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2A Mission & Key Design Elements	<p>The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school faithfully follows its mission; and • the school has implemented its key design elements.
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2B Parents & Students	<p>Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school regularly communicates each child's academic performance results to families; • families are satisfied with the school; and • parents keep their children enrolled year-to-year.
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2C Organizational Capacity	<p>The school organization effectively supports the delivery of the educational program.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school has established an administrative structure with staff, operational systems, policies and procedures that allow the school to carry out its academic program; • the organizational structure establishes distinct lines of accountability with clearly defined roles and responsibilities; • the school has a clear student discipline system in place at the administrative level that is consistently applied; • the school retains quality staff; • the school has allocated sufficient resources to support the achievement of goals; • the school maintains adequate student enrollment; • the school has procedures in place to monitor its progress toward meeting enrollment and retention targets for special education students, ELLs and students who qualify for free and reduced price lunch, and adjusts its recruitment efforts accordingly; and • the school regularly monitors and evaluates the school's programs and makes changes if necessary.

	Renewal Question 2 Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2D Board Oversight	<p>The school board works effectively to achieve the school’s Accountability Plan goals.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • board members possess adequate skills and have put in place structures and procedures with which to govern the school and oversee management of day-to-day operations in order to ensure the school’s future as an academically successful, financially healthy and legally compliant organization; • the board requests and receives sufficient information to provide rigorous oversight of the school’s program and finances; • it establishes clear priorities, objectives and long-range goals, (including Accountability Plan, fiscal, facilities and fundraising), and has in place benchmarks for tracking progress as well as a process for their regular review and revision; • the board successfully recruits, hires and retains key personnel, and provides them with sufficient resources to function effectively; • the board regularly evaluates its own performance and that of the school leaders and the management company (if applicable), holding them accountable for student achievement; and • the board effectively communicates with the school community including school leadership, staff, parents/guardians and students.
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2E Governance	<p>The board implements, maintains and abides by appropriate policies, systems and processes.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the board effectively communicates with its partner or management organizations as well as key contractors such as back-office service providers and ensures that it receives value in exchange for contracts and relationships it enters into and effectively monitors such relationships; • the board takes effective action when there are organizational, leadership, management, facilities or fiscal deficiencies; or where the management or partner organization fails to meet

Renewal Question 2 Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?	
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
	<p>expectations; to correct those deficiencies and puts in place benchmarks for determining if the partner organization corrects them in a timely fashion;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the board regularly reviews and updates board and school policies as needed and has in place an orientation process for new members; • the board effectively recruits and selects new members in order to maintain adequate skill sets and expertise for effective governance and structural continuity; • the board implements a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy (and/or code of ethics)—consistent with that set forth in the charter and with the General Municipal Law—and consistently abides by them throughout the term of the charter; • the board generally avoids conflicts of interest; where not possible, the board manages those conflicts in a clear and transparent manner; • the board implements a process for dealing with complaints consistent with that set forth in the charter, makes the complaint policy clear to all stakeholders, and follows the policy including acting on complaints in a timely fashion; • the board abides by its by-laws including, but not limited to, provisions regarding trustee election and the removal and filling of vacancies; and • the board holds all meetings in accordance with the Open Meetings Law and records minutes for all meetings including executive sessions and, as appropriate, committee meetings.
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2F</p> <p>Legal Requirements</p>	<p>The school substantially complies with applicable laws, rules and regulations and the provisions of its charter.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school compiles a record of substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations including, but not limited to, submitting items to the Institute in a timely manner, and meeting teacher certification (including NCLB highly qualified status) and background check requirements, FOIL and Open Meetings Law;

	Renewal Question 2 Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school substantially complies with the terms of its charter and applicable laws, rules and regulations; • the school abides by the terms of its monitoring plan; • the school implements effective systems and controls to ensure that it meets legal and charter requirements; • the school has an active and ongoing relationship with in-house or independent legal counsel who reviews and makes recommendations on relevant policies, documents, transactions and incidents and who also handles other legal matters as needed; and • the school manages any litigation appropriately and provides litigation papers to insurers and the Institute in a timely manner.

Renewal Question 3 Is the School Fiscally Sound?	
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 3A</p> <p>Budgeting and Long Range Planning</p>	<p>The school operates pursuant to a long-range financial plan in which it creates realistic budgets that it monitors and adjusts when appropriate.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school has clear budgetary objectives and budget preparation procedures; • board members, school management and staff contribute to the budget process, as appropriate; • the school frequently compares its long-range fiscal plan to actual progress and adjusts it to meet changing conditions; • the school routinely analyzes budget variances; the board addresses material variances and makes necessary revisions; and • actual expenses are equal to, or less than, actual revenue with no material exceptions.
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 3B</p> <p>Internal Controls</p>	<p>The school maintains appropriate internal controls and procedures.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school follows a set of comprehensive written fiscal policies and procedures; • the school accurately records and appropriately documents transactions in accordance with management’s direction, laws, regulations, grants and contracts; • the school safeguards its assets; • the school identifies/analyzes risks and takes mitigating actions; • the school has controls in place to ensure that management decisions are properly carried out and monitors and assesses controls to ensure their adequacy; • the school’s trustees and employees adhere to a code of ethics; • the school ensures duties are appropriately segregated, or institutes compensating controls; • the school ensures that employees performing financial functions are appropriately qualified and adequately trained; • the school has systems in place to provide the appropriate information needed by staff and the board to make sound financial decisions and to fulfill compliance requirements;

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	Renewal Question 3 Is the School Fiscally Sound?
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a staff member of the school reviews grant agreements and restrictive gifts and monitors compliance with all stated conditions; • the school prepares payroll according to appropriate state and federal regulations and school policy; • the school ensures that employees, trustees and volunteers who handle cash and investments are bonded to help assure the safeguarding of assets; and • the school takes corrective action in a timely manner to address any internal control or compliance deficiencies identified by its external auditor, the Institute, and/or the State Education Department or the Comptroller, if needed.
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 3C</p> <p>Financial Reporting</p>	<p>The school has complied with financial reporting requirements by providing the SUNY Trustees and the State Education Department with required financial reports that are on time, complete and follow generally accepted accounting principles.</p> <p>The following reports have generally been filed in a timely, accurate and complete manner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • annual financial statement audit reports including federal Single Audit report, if applicable; • annual budgets and cash flow statements; • un-audited quarterly reports of income, expenses, and enrollment; • bi-monthly enrollment reports to the district and, if applicable, to the State Education Department including proper documentation regarding the level of special education services provided to students; and • grant expenditure reports.
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 3D</p> <p>Financial Condition</p>	<p>The school maintains adequate financial resources to ensure stable operations. Critical financial needs of the school are not dependent on variable income (grants, donations and fundraising).</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school maintains sufficient cash on hand to pay current bills and those that are due shortly;

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	Renewal Question 3 Is the School Fiscally Sound?
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school maintains adequate liquid reserves to fund expenses in the event of income loss (generally three months); • the school prepares and monitors cash flow projections; • If the school includes philanthropy in its budget, it monitors progress toward its development goals on a periodic basis; • If necessary, the school pursues district state aid intercepts with the state education department to ensure adequate per pupil funding; and • the school accumulates unrestricted net assets that are equal to or exceed two percent of the school's operating budget for the upcoming year.

Renewal Question 4 If the School’s Charter is Renewed, What are its Plans for the Term of the Next Charter Period, and are they Reasonable, Feasible and Achievable?	
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 4A</p> <p>Plans for the School’s Structure</p>	<p>Key structural elements of the school, as defined in the exhibits of the Application for Charter Renewal, are reasonable, feasible and achievable.</p> <p>Based on elements present in the Application for Charter Renewal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school is likely to fulfill its mission in the next charter period; • the school has an enrollment plan that can support the school program; • the school calendar and daily schedules clearly provide sufficient instructional time to meet all legal requirements, allow the school to meet its proposed Accountability Plan goals and abide by its proposed budget; • key design elements are consistent with the mission statement and are feasible given the school’s budget and staffing; • a curriculum framework for added grades aligns with the state’s performance standards; and • plans in the other required Exhibits indicate that the school’s structure is likely to support the educational program.
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 4B</p> <p>Plans for the Educational Program</p>	<p>The school’s plans for implementing the educational program allow it to meet its Accountability Plan goals.</p> <p>Based on elements present in the Application for Charter Renewal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for those grades served during the last charter period, the school has plans for sustaining and (where possible) improving upon the student outcomes it has compiled during the last charter period including any adjustments or additions to the school’s educational program; • for a school that is seeking to add grades, the school is likely to meet its Accountability Plan goals and the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks at the new grade levels; and • where the school will provide secondary school instruction, it has presented a set of requirements for graduation that students are likely to meet and that are consistent with the graduation standards set by the Board of Regents.

	<p align="center">Renewal Question 4 If the School’s Charter is Renewed, What are its Plans for the Term of the Next Charter Period, and are they Reasonable, Feasible and Achievable?</p>
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 4C</p> <p>Plans for Board Oversight and Governance</p>	<p>The school provides a reasonable, feasible and achievable plan for board oversight and governance.</p> <p>Based on elements present in the Application for Charter Renewal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • school trustees are likely to possess a range of experience, skills, and abilities sufficient to oversee the academic, organizational and fiscal performance of the school; • plans by the school board to orient new trustees to their roles and responsibilities, and, if appropriate, to participate in ongoing board training are likely to sustain the board’s ability to carry out its responsibilities; • if the school plans to change an association with a partner or management organization in the term of a future charter, it has provided a clear rationale for the disassociation and an outline indicating how it will manage the functions previously associated with that partnering organization; and • if the school is either moving from self-management to a management structure or vice-versa, or is changing its charter management organization/educational service provider, its plans indicate that it will be managed in an effective, sound and viable manner including appropriate oversight of the academic and fiscal performance of the school or the management organization.

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<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 4D</p> <p>Fiscal & Facility Plans</p>	<p>The school provides a reasonable, feasible and achievable fiscal plan including plans for an adequate facility.</p> <p>Based on the elements present in the Application for Charter Renewal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the school’s budgets adequately support staffing, enrollment and facility projections;• fiscal plans are based on the sound use of financial resources to support academic program needs;• fiscal plans are clear, accurate, complete and based on reasonable assumptions;• information on enrollment demand provides clear evidence for the reasonableness of projected enrollment; and• facility plans are likely to meet educational program needs.
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