THE SUNY CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE

FIRST YEAR SCHOOL EVALUATION REPORT
BUFFALO COMMONS CHARTER SCHOOL
VISIT DATE: MAY 12, 2023
REPORT DATE: JULY 12, 2023

SUNY Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the SUNY Charter Schools Institute's (the "Institute's") observations and findings from its May 12, 2023 first year school evaluation visit to the Buffalo Commons Charter School ("Buffalo Commons").

REPORT FORMAT

Throughout the charter term the Institute may conduct a number of formal evaluative visits including in the first year of operation. Each formal evaluative visit produces a written report based on data gathered during these visits. These reports form the foundation of qualitative data on the charter's effectiveness.

At the conclusion of the charter term, the Institute provides the State University of New York Board of Trustees (the "SUNY Trustees") a renewal recommendation based on its evaluation of the academic, organizational, legal, and fiscal aspects of the charter's program using the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks (see attachment), which incorporates the school's attainment of its Accountability Plan goals and evidence of the quality of the charter's educational program gathered in its formal evaluative visits. For first year evaluation visits, the Institute focuses on specific qualitative benchmarks that provide a fixed standard for determining the quality of the academic program as the charter progresses toward renewal.

CB
CHARTER
BACKGROUND

BUFFALO COMMONS CHARTER SCHOOL

833 Michigan Ave Buffalo, NY 14203 | **Grades: K-1** | **Buffalo City School District**

The SUNY Trustees approved the original charter for Buffalo Commons on October 6, 2020. The charter opened in fall 2022, serving 100 students in Kindergarten and 1st Grade.

> ❝
> ### MISSION
> *Buffalo Commons is an academically rigorous, creative, and collaborative Kindergarten – 8th grade learning community that uses research-based teaching practices and innovative programming to eliminate the opportunity gap and prepare a diverse student body for successful lives that strengthen their communities.*

CURRENT YEAR

Serves: Kindergarten – 1st

Chartered Enrollment: 100

Charter Expiration: July 31, 2027

ANTICIPATED 2026-27

Grades Served: Kindergarten – 4th

Chartered Enrollment: 250

KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS

Rigorous, research-based curriculum;	＋	Robust social emotional learning program;	＋
Effective instruction;	＋	Partnering with families;	＋
Data-driven approach;	＋	Summer professional development;	＋
Creative problem solving;	＋	Small professional learning communities; and,	＋
Value-driven school culture;	＋	Individualized coaching.	＋

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Buffalo Commons, in its first year of operation, is building a strong educational program and beginning to establish the systems necessary to support it. The school realizes its vision and mission by creating a diverse by design model that reflects the diversity of the City of Buffalo. Leaders reflected on the results of the first year of the charter term and plan to work over the summer to evolve systems and procedures to support an additional grade for the 2023-24 school year. Leaders recognize the biggest challenge this year has been enrollment as the school only meets 53% of its chartered enrollment. While the school has been able to navigate the low enrollment financially, it recognizes the importance of recruitment and enrollment. Earlier in the year, leaders identified specific challenges to enrollment and rectified systems and recruitment efforts to adapt. The school established organizational partnerships throughout the city and thereby increased its visibility in the community, which led to a higher anticipated enrollment for the next school year.

Buffalo Commons' classrooms are warm, welcoming, and safe environments. Teachers establish strong cultural norms in their classrooms and lessons primarily focus on exploratory, hands-on learning. Students are often moving about classrooms to work on group projects or in small groups with teachers who design specific activities to meet students' learning needs. The school's EL Education ("EL") curriculum provides learning activities that give students an opportunity to build understanding and meaning through experiential learning.

Pursuant to the Institute's inspection of Buffalo Commons at the above address on August 25, 2022, and documentation provided to or inspected by the Institute at that visit and prior/post thereto, the Institute determined that Buffalo Commons (the "education corporation") had completed substantially all of the Prior Actions required of it as defined in the Charter Agreement between the education corporation and the SUNY Trustees (the "Charter Agreement") for the operation of the school. Therefore, per Section 3.1 of the Charter Agreement, the Institute permitted the education corporation to provide instruction at the school to students in accordance with the plan provided in the Charter Agreement.

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QUALITATIVE BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

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

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

ASSESSMENT

Buffalo Commons is establishing an assessment system that improves instructional effectiveness and student learning. Buffalo Commons utilizes the STAR assessment as a benchmark to evaluate students' literacy skills in English language arts ("ELA"). Teachers effectively use assessment data to group students according to individual needs and tailor instruction accordingly. The school analyzes data from assessments embedded in the EL program to enable targeted instruction. In mathematics, teachers use Bridges assessments to determine appropriate groupings and assignments with students performing above grade level receiving activities for enriched learning experiences. Staff members participated in Data Wise sessions with Harvard University, funded by the Cullen Foundation, to learn a systematized way to analyze assessment results. School leaders facilitated a mid-year Data Wise meeting that highlighted the need to ensure a better balance of student ability levels in each classroom. As a result, the school scheduled earlier administrations of the STAR assessments and will use the resulting data to create class lists based on performance. Teachers utilize data meetings to identify students who may require additional academic support. School leaders are exploring the implementation of a more robust Kindergarten screening process to assess student readiness in all areas including mathematics, literacy, and overall school readiness. Instructional leaders leverage STAR data and analyze student work samples to effectively differentiate instruction. Buffalo Commons does not currently have formal documentation codifying this information, which leaders recognize as an area to improve for future years. Buffalo Commons prioritizes data-driven practices to support effective differentiation, instructional decision-making, and potential identification of specialized interventions.

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1. An extensive body of research, including a report from Harvard and a report from the United States General Accounting Office, identifying and confirming the correlates of effective schools exists dating back four decades.

2. Additional details regarding the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks are available on the Institute's website.

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CURRICULUM

Buffalo Commons' curricular program supports teachers with instructional planning. Buffalo Commons demonstrates a strong commitment to curriculum implementation, utilizing a range of core programs to support student learning. The school employs Project Lead the Way for science, Bridges for mathematics, and Community Roots Integrated Studies for social studies, providing a comprehensive foundation across these subjects. For ELA, the school uses EL for its core reading program, and teachers use EL Foundations for phonics instruction. Leaders recognize that the materials for EL Foundations are limited resulting in teachers spending a lot of time building out program materials with additional resources and so leaders will work over the summer to find solutions. Recognizing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the school is focused on addressing learning gaps and developing a comprehensive approach to support students. Leaders refine the EL curriculum to meet the needs of both new and experienced teachers. Teachers meet regularly with grade teams to monitor student progress within the curricular programs. Lead teachers collaborate over instructional planning with supports from school leaders.

PEDAGOGY

Buffalo Commons is developing high quality instruction across classrooms. Teachers deliver purposeful lessons reflecting grade level standards and curricular program alignment. Teachers craft lessons that highlight the expeditionary aspect of EL. During the visit, the EL unit for Kindergarten and 1st grade included bread and birds, respectively. In Kindergarten, students explored different types of bread and made observations on the way it felt, looked, and tasted. In 1st grade, students watched video of a bird egg hatching and wrote responses on observations. Buffalo Commons employs two teachers in every classroom. Leaders and teachers have built a strong, cohesive, and supportive structure and culture in the school's first year. Teachers deliver lessons using a variety of co-teaching strategies and primarily focus on pulling small groups. Given the small class size, teachers routinely check student understanding and work to meet individual student needs. During small group sessions, teachers work directly with students and provide immediate feedback and support on student work. Buffalo Commons is working to build teachers' skills in delivering multiple opportunities to challenge students with higher order thinking and problem-solving skills. Teachers ask many questions of students during lessons, and leaders recognize a need to improve teachers' design of questions to include more opportunities for higher order thinking. One lesson, however, demonstrated an effective use of 'why' and 'how' questions to students and engaged students in multiple rounds of questioning and discussion to build students' understanding of the concept. Teachers establish classroom environments that are warm and welcoming. Some minor disruptions occurred during lessons, but these did not significantly impact student learning. Leaders are working with teachers to establish clear schoolwide routines and procedures to build better transitions between lessons.

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INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Buffalo Commons is establishing effective instructional leadership to support teachers. Leaders actively work toward the realization of the diverse by design model by monitoring enrollment of student demographics, providing training to staff members in diversity, equity, and inclusion, and ensuring the curricular program is culturally responsive and reflective of the student population. Leadership holds the expectation that every student has the potential to meet grade-level expectations and celebrate growth as an integral part of the learning journey. Buffalo Commons leadership is actively evolving the idea of students having an academic mindset, collectively working to develop and define a belief that all students can achieve success.

The school places a clear emphasis on building schoolwide systems through meetings that address logistics and establish teacher and staff member expectations. Leaders recognize the need for establishing academic and behavioral expectations across classrooms and demonstrate a commitment to address these areas. Teachers value professional development and express a desire for more targeted professional development on the EL curricular program and content-driven topics. The experiences of coaching and support vary from teacher to teacher with some reporting mixed feedback regarding frequency on the observation processes. The school provides opportunities for leadership development, appointing teachers as team leads to develop scope and sequence documents and support peers. Leaders observe and evaluate teachers using the Thoughtful Classroom Teacher Effectiveness Framework ("Thoughtful Teacher"), ensuring a comprehensive assessment of instructional practices. As part of ongoing efforts to enhance professional development, the school is considering aligning professional development initiatives with the Thoughtful Teacher rubric, focusing on specific areas throughout the year. Currently, the professional development plans consist of both whole school sessions and individual development for teachers. However, leaders recognize a need for dedicated time to develop staff members further.

AT-RISK PROGRAM

Buffalo Commons is establishing its at-risk program to meet the educational needs of students struggling academically, students with disabilities, and English language learners ("ELLs"). The school uses clear procedures to identify ELLs, but the school has not yet enrolled any ELL students. Buffalo Commons is prepared to support ELLs by providing English language acquisition supports with a blend of push in and pull out services. The school administers a range of assessments throughout the year, and these serve as points to identify any student struggling academically to go through the school's Response to Intervention ("RTI") process. If students do not make progress through the RTI process, then the school works with the family to refer the student for evaluation by the district committee on special education. In its first year, Buffalo Commons has not formalized or codified its RTI procedures to have a clear system in place for teachers to present students for consideration in the RTI process, but rather teachers informally bring up students to review in staff meetings or team meetings. Leaders recognize this as an issue as the school continues to grow and have a plan to build better systems for the 2023-24 school year.

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Interventions for students struggling academically include SIPPs Beginning Reading Intervention and Lalilo, an online based reading program, and ABLE Math intervention program. Intervention teachers provide both push in and pull out support to students. Buffalo Commons' special education program includes consultant teacher services, resource room, and integrated co-teaching ("ICT"). As the school continues to expand, leaders recognize the need to both codify its systems for identifying students and coordinating between at-risk program teachers and general education teachers.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Buffalo Commons is establishing an organizational structure that works effectively to deliver the educational program. The organization chart effectively works to serve the school in its first year, and leaders have a clear plan for how the team will evolve as the program grows to serve more grades. Each leader's roles and responsibilities are clear to staff members. The executive director supports each of the directors and team members as needed and drives the vision of the school. The director of teaching and learning works to develop teachers and provide guidance on the curricular programs and conducts observations. The director of school community helps with student behavior and management and family communication. The director of student support services provides special education services and oversees all aspects of the school's at-risk program.

Leaders recognize the need to increase enrollment as in its first year of operation the school only enrolled 53% of its chartered enrollment. Leaders reflect on practices from the previous summer that hindered the school's enrollment and have rectified many of the issues. The school is anticipating higher enrollment for the 2023-24 school year based on the efforts its made, as well as gaining more of a reputation within the community and building strong relationships with community partners to support in raising awareness about the school. The school also retains high quality staff members with all teachers reporting, at the time of the visit, that they would return for the following school year.

Over the summer, Buffalo Commons leaders will conduct a thorough review of the previous school year, including the implementation of its curricular and assessment systems and discipline procedures, to understand any specific changes required to improve the overall operation of the charter.

BOARD OVERSIGHT & GOVERNANCE

Buffalo Commons' board works effectively to achieve the school's Accountability Plan goals. Members possess a wide range of skills that support the oversight and governance of the school, and the board is actively recruiting additional members with backgrounds in finance and education. Committees work effectively to provide specific information to the full board, and school-based staff members join the appropriate committees to provide specific information about the school's programs. This year, the school provided the board with many different data points.

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The board regularly reviews data and information from school leaders. Leaders present data regarding mathematics and ELA student performance, staff member and family satisfaction, finances, and enrollment. The board uses these data to hold school leaders accountable. For example, when beginning of year reading and mathematics data demonstrated approximately only 20% of students on grade level, the board expected improvement by the middle of the year and was satisfied with the next set of STAR results during the midyear assessments. Over the summer, the board will establish a dedicated dashboard template based on the reflection of the most useful data and information to support its oversight in the future.

The board drives the school's mission and vision through its governance and oversight. The board is clear that the purpose of the school is to support school integration through its diverse by design model. The board monitors the school's enrollment trends and works to match the demographics of the City of Buffalo rather than the Buffalo City Schools District, which do not align as families avail themselves of non-district options.

Buffalo Commons

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APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A: CHARTER SCHOOL OVERVIEW

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CHARTER OVERVIEW

BUFFALO COMMONS CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD OF TRUSTEES[1]

CHAIR	TRUSTEES
Trey Thompson	Royce L. Woods
VICE CHAIR	Kevin L. Southern
Jesi Miller	Danielle Bruno
TREASURER	Latricia Davis
Josefina Paez	Mark Baetzhold
SECRETARY	Sabrina Robazza
Krystle Hinton	

CHARTER LEADERS

PRINCIPAL

Daniel Brink-Washington, Executive Director (2022-23 to Present)

CHARTER CHARACTERISTICS

SCHOOL YEAR	CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT[2]	ACTUAL AS A PERCENTAGE OF CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	GRADES SERVED
2022-23	100	60	60%	K-1

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.)

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APPENDIX A: CHARTER SCHOOL OVERVIEW

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CHARTER
OVERVIEW

CHARTER SCHOOL VISIT HISTORY

SCHOOL YEAR	VISIT TYPE	DATE
2022-23	First Year Visit	May 12, 2023

CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

DATE(S) OF REVIEW	EVALUATION TEAM MEMBERS	TITLE
May 12, 2023	Andrew Kile	Managing Director of School Evaluation
	Vickie Masséus	School Evaluation Analyst

CHARTER CYCLE CONTEXT

CHARTER TERM	ACCOUNTABILITY PERIOD	ANTICIPATED RENEWAL VISIT
Initial	First Year of a Four Year Accountability Period	Fall 2026

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APPENDIX B: SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARKS

Ax^b — rendered as:

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SUNY RENEWAL
BENCHMARKS

VERSION 5.0, MAY 2012

INTRODUCTION

The State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks[1] (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: 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.

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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.*

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- 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.

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RENEWAL QUESTION 1
IS THE SCHOOL AN ACADEMIC SUCCESS?

1A – ACADEMIC ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GOALS

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.

1B – USE OF ASSESSMENT DATA

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.

1C – CURRICULUM

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;

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- 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.

1D – PEDAGOGY

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.

1E – INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

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;

- 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.

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1F – AT-RISK STUDENTS

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.

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RENEWAL QUESTION 2

IS THE SCHOOL AN EFFECTIVE, VIABLE ORGANIZATION?

2A – MISSION & KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS

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.

2B – PARENTS & STUDENTS

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.

2C – ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

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.

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2D – BOARD OVERSIGHT

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.

2E – GOVERNANCE

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;

- 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;

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- 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.

2F – LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

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.

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RENEWAL QUESTION 3
IS THE SCHOOL FISCALLY SOUND?

3A – BUDGETING AND LONG RANGE PLANNING

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.

3B – INTERNAL CONTROLS

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;
- 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.

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3C – FINANCIAL REPORTING

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.

3D – FINANCIAL CONDITION

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.

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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?

4A – PLANS FOR THE SCHOOL'S STRUCTURE

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.

4B – PLANS FOR THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

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.

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4C – PLANS FOR BOARD OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNANCE

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.

4D – FISCAL & FACILITY PLANS

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.