

THE SUNY CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE

*FIRST YEAR SCHOOL EVALUATION REPORT
BRICK BUFFALO ACADEMY CHARTER
SCHOOL*

*VISIT DATE: FEBRUARY 7, 2024
REPORT DATE: APRIL 5, 2024*

SUNY Charter Schools Institute

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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 February 7, 2024 first year school evaluation visit to the BRICK Buffalo Academy Charter School (“BRICK Buffalo” or the “education corporation”).

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.





CHARTER BACKGROUND

BRICK BUFFALO ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL

30 Rich St, Buffalo, NY 14211 | Grades: K-1 | Buffalo City School District

The SUNY Trustees approved the original charter for BRICK Buffalo on October 6, 2022. The school opened in fall 2023, serving 56 students in Kindergarten and 1st grade.

BRICK Buffalo replicates the program in place at Achieve Community Charter School (“Achieve”), a charter school located in Newark, New Jersey serving students in Kindergarten – 8th grade. BRICK Buffalo contracts with Building Responsible Intelligent Creative Kids (“BRICK” or the “network”), a New Jersey-based non-profit charter management organization (“CMO”), supporting the school in the areas of school leader development, curriculum and instruction, operations, human resources, and financial services.

MISSION

The BRICK Education Network’s mission is to relentlessly knock down all barriers to students’ academic success. Our innovative model aligns an individualized excellent education with the necessary family supports to make sure each and every child can succeed.

CURRENT CHARTER

Serves: Kindergarten – 1st

Chartered Enrollment:
56

Charter Expiration:
July 31, 2028

ANTICIPATED 2027-28

Grades Served:
Kindergarten – 5th

Chartered Enrollment:
340

KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS

Rigorous and culturally responsive educational program;



Ubuntu cultural program; and,



Ecosystem approach to whole child development.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In its first year of operation, BRICK Buffalo effectively implements some elements of the BRICK instructional model, which have demonstrated success in the network's established schools. However, the school is still developing the organizational capacity and instructional leadership systems necessary to deliver an effective, sustainable educational program. The school struggled with recruitment and facilities issues in summer 2023, and the board considered delaying opening due to low enrollment and logistics of finding an appropriate space to operate. However, in partnership with the network, the board and regional leadership team successfully revised the staffing model, budget, and growth plan to open on time in a temporary facility, and ultimately moved into a permanent facility in November 2023. Although BRICK Buffalo experienced the transition of the network's regional superintendent and school's founding principal in the fall of 2023, the board and network leadership worked with the regional executive director and interim principal to stabilize the school's trajectory. At the time of the visit, BRICK Buffalo demonstrated clear systems in the areas of assessment, curriculum, and board oversight, and leaders are in the process of establishing organizational capacity to support effective instructional leadership for both the school and the network's regional team. BRICK Buffalo has secured some partnerships to support its mission of creating an "ecosystem" that facilitates student learning by supporting the whole family with foundational resources, and leaders recognize the need to accelerate the implementation of these partnerships to provide wraparound services to meet the full range of the school population's needs.

Pursuant to the Institute's pre-opening inspection of BRICK Buffalo on August 23, 2023, (and documentation provided to or inspected by the Institute at the time of that visit and prior/post thereto), the Institute determined that the education corporation had completed substantially all of the pre-opening actions required of it as defined in the Charter Agreement between the education corporation and the SUNY Trustees (the "Charter Agreement"). Therefore, the Institute permitted the school to open for instruction in accordance with the plan provided in the Charter Agreement.

BENCHMARK SUMMARY

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

BRICK Buffalo consistently implements the BRICK network assessment system to guide instruction and measure student learning. The school administers i-Ready, mClass, and interim assessments in English language arts ("ELA") and mathematics three times a year, and formative unit assessments and daily exit tickets to monitor student progress. The network content directors in ELA and mathematics work with teachers weekly to plan interventions and monitor progress for students in need of additional academic support. The network makes assessment results accessible to teachers, leaders, and the school's board of trustees for review and planning purposes. Teachers include specific student groupings within lesson plans based on students' understanding of the previous week's content and use daily small group instruction time to reteach or practice specific skills. Instructional leaders use professional development time following each benchmark assessment to facilitate teachers' analysis of data and action planning in response to student performance, and the school holds teachers accountable for reflecting on interim data. Teachers are familiar with the network's goals for student proficiency. Despite the school's professional development efforts, the quality of teachers' action planning documents varies and evidence of effective differentiation during whole group instruction is limited. Overall, the school and network maintain clear expectations for the administration, distribution, and use of assessment data. However, as the BRICK Buffalo academic program continues to grow, leaders have the opportunity to leverage assessments to develop targeted professional development and coaching strategies to strengthen teacher practice and support student learning.

CURRICULUM

In its first year of operation, BRICK Buffalo has a clear curricular framework and lesson internalization protocol that support teachers with instructional planning. The network provides teachers with comprehensive materials for each subject area, including CKLA Skills, Wit and Wisdom, and Amplify ELA; Navigator and i-Ready mathematics; FOSS science; and, Core Knowledge History and Geography social studies programs.

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](#).

BENCHMARK SUMMARY

Teachers have access to all lesson materials, scope and sequence documents, and pacing guides via an online repository managed by the network. Teachers indicate they are well-resourced and know what to teach and when to teach it because of the available curricular tools. Each week, network content directors meet with ELA and mathematics teachers to discuss the upcoming week's lessons, anticipate challenges, review model instructional videos, and ensure teachers are prepared to deliver the content with fidelity. The principal and content directors implement an intellectual preparation protocol for all teachers that includes annotating the plan, crafting exemplar student responses, scripting questions, creating student grouping based on recent or interim data, and completing the exit ticket. Instructional leaders provide feedback on the uploaded lesson plans each week. While teachers appreciate the network's robust curricula and are prepared to execute the lessons, leaders can continue to monitor and evaluate instructional delivery to ensure the programs meet the needs of all students in reaching New York State learning standards, given the network's expansion to a new state.

PEDAGOGY

BRICK Buffalo is developing high-quality instruction across classrooms, but leaders can further develop teachers' capacity to implement targeted checks for understanding and higher order thinking opportunities to effectively maximize learning time. Teachers deliver purposeful lessons aligned to standards-based curricular programs, and students engage with high quality learning materials throughout each lesson. Student behaviors occasionally disrupt the learning environment. While BRICK Buffalo utilizes a co-teaching model, the second teacher primarily focuses on behavior management, which at times was not successful at minimizing student behavioral disruptions. BRICK Buffalo does not currently have designated staff members to support teachers with culture, specifically with more disruptive behaviors. Teachers have basic management systems in place and attempt to address student needs in the classroom environment, but most cite a need for additional staffing capacity as the second teacher in the classroom is often pulled away from instruction to manage individual student demands. Teachers indicate it is challenging to deliver the curriculum as designed and maintain a consistent focus on academic achievement without the support of a social worker or administrator dedicated to student culture and discipline. Instructional leaders are called to address students' social emotional needs, and thus miss opportunities to establish standardized coaching, observation, and feedback cycles that would lead to improvements in teachers' pedagogical practice.

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

BRICK Buffalo is working to establish effective instructional leadership to support high quality teaching and learning but does not yet provide adequate development to meet the needs of all teachers. Following a reduction in the staffing model in response to low enrollment, combined with the departure of the regional superintendent for instruction, the instructional leadership team includes the interim principal and two network content directors who are on-site to observe instruction once a month. Although the network and school leaders have high expectations for teacher performance and prioritize the school's mission to support students' social-emotional wellbeing to facilitate student academic growth, the school lacks a dedicated head of the academic program. The network is actively recruiting for the superintendent role with plans to fill the position before the 2024-25 school year, but at the time of the visit, systems for feedback and coaching to improve teachers' instructional effectiveness were limited.

BENCHMARK SUMMARY

Although network members meet with teachers to provide support with curriculum and assessment, leaders recognize the need to establish consistent observation cycles with school-based staff members, and acknowledge that schedule interruptions, staffing challenges, and competing priorities make it difficult to create sustained coaching structures. The school has strong foundational resources in place to support teaching and learning, but inconsistent professional development and teacher evaluation practices result in missed opportunities to maximize the impact of the educational model on the ground. The small size of the school currently enables extensive collaboration between teachers, and weekly full staff meetings allow for the team to address emergent needs. However, network and school leaders can plan strategically to ensure a culture of academic accountability and the requisite support to set the school up for success as it grows and stabilizes.

AT-RISK PROGRAM

BRICK Buffalo is establishing systems to meet the educational needs of at-risk students, but it can better define processes for coordination between teachers and at-risk support staff members and provide more robust training for general education teachers in how to effectively support all learners. The school uses clear and appropriate procedures for identifying students struggling academically, students with disabilities, and English language learners (“ELLs”). Leaders embed small group instruction into the daily schedule, and co-teachers and the director of special education provide a mixture of push-in and pull-out support depending on the targeted skill and students’ identified needs. Network and school staff members monitor the progress of at-risk students against weekly goals and make adjustments when necessary. The school has a productive relationship with the district’s committee on special education (“CSE”) and Buffalo Public Schools provides timely communication and satisfactory related services in speech, occupational therapy, and physical therapy. Teachers are aware of their students’ focus areas as the network’s content directors track and share academic progress monitoring data for tier 2 and tier 3 students, while the director of special education provides daily updates on the goals of students with individualized education programs (“IEPs”). Teachers deliver phonics instruction for ELLs during small group sessions using the school’s existing curriculum, and leaders recognize the need to develop a more robust ELL program as the number of students and their range of speaking, reading, writing, and listening demands increase.

In the first year of operation, the school’s director of special education leads the program, manages compliance with the CSE, provides direct support to teachers, delivers mandated services to students, and coordinates behavior intervention plans for students struggling with social-emotional regulation. While this may be a feasible scope of responsibilities given the school’s enrollment, the current ad hoc collaboration between general education teachers and the director of special education, as well as the special education department’s capacity to broadly support school culture, will not be sustainable as the student population grows. There is no evidence that BRICK network provides the school with strategic resources and support for at-risk programming, and it has yet to deploy sufficient staff members to manage school culture. Further, the school has not provided sufficient training and professional development to give teachers strategies to effectively support all learners in the classroom. As such, existing staff members feel limited in their ability and capacity

BENCHMARK SUMMARY

to support diverse learners under the current structure. Teachers and leaders cite a need for additional staff members in the areas of special education, language acquisition, and classroom support, and dedicated staff to oversee behavior and school culture and the development of the school's leadership team. While the school has clear intervention programs in place, there is an opportunity to ensure a sustainable staffing structure that will support the needs of the student population as it grows.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

BRICK Buffalo is developing an organizational structure to effectively deliver the educational program. The school struggled to fill seats through the start of the school year and ultimately revised its targeted enrollment down. Network and board members worked to adjust the staffing model, consolidating to create just one co-taught section each for Kindergarten and 1st grade, removing the vice principal of instruction role, and shrinking the operations team. The organization also modified its growth plan to meet the lower overall enrollment and budget projections. BRICK Buffalo is engaged in ongoing, focused recruitment outreach and anticipates stronger enrollment for the 2024-25 school year now that the school is established in its permanent facility with growing name recognition in the community. The executive director keeps the board and school leadership informed of progress against enrollment targets and partnerships to support the BRICK model's growth in the region.

While the first year cost saving measures have stabilized the school's financial outlook, staff member turnover, including the departure of school and regional leaders, the social worker, and several teachers, has contributed to BRICK Buffalo's struggle to establish consistency, strong staff and student culture, and effective communication across all levels of the organization. For example, existing staff members do not know which positions will be filled in the upcoming school year or what their duties will be; leadership team members have taken on student support responsibilities outside of their established roles; and, teachers are overwhelmed by large class sizes and shifting coverage demands. Network and school leaders cite attendance as a major obstacle to student achievement, but individuals within the school struggle to identify who is responsible for communication related to attendance and the efforts to improve it. While the BRICK staff is committed to the mission and vision of the school, the quality of the academic program is impacted by a lack of clearly defined lines of accountability and responsibility, as well as the organization's struggle to retain quality staff members in key positions.

In the 2024-25 school year, BRICK Buffalo plans to enhance the instructional leadership structures at the school by hiring a regional superintendent, permanent principal, vice principal, and teachers to serve the expanded grades in closer alignment with its original vision for year one of operation. Leaders and the board have the opportunity to further bolster the organizational capacity of BRICK Buffalo by continuing to monitor and evaluate the school's programs, effectively communicate with all staff members, and allocate sufficient resources to ensure the school can achieve its mission, vision, and Accountability Plan goals.

BENCHMARK SUMMARY

BOARD OVERSIGHT & GOVERNANCE

In its first year of operation, the BRICK Buffalo board implements appropriate structures and procedures to govern the school and oversee the CMO. Board members possess skills and experience in the areas of Kindergarten – 12th grade charter education, human resources, real estate development, higher education administration, and community engagement. The board uses a comprehensive dashboard to monitor the school's performance and inform dialogue with the CMO. During subcommittee meetings, including the executive, finance and development, and academic and personnel committees, representatives of the BRICK network present updates and answer questions about the organization's progress. Following the school's initial enrollment challenges and the departure of the network's regional superintendent for instruction and the school's founding principal, the board has been highly engaged with the network and executive director to adjust priorities and navigate the transitions. While board members originally charged leaders with establishing strong culture and close community partnerships, low enrollment prompted the board to pivot and prioritize a leaner budget that centered sustainability, network accountability for performance, and core staff member retention, working to remain aligned to the original mission of the school. The board continues to work on building out communication systems and streamlining the information it requests from the CMO to ensure BRICK provides all promised services and the board holds the organization accountable for effective and efficient delivery of the BRICK educational model.

BRICK Buffalo

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OVERVIEW

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SUNY RENEWAL
BENCHMARKS

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BRICK BUFFALO ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD OF TRUSTEES¹

CHAIR	TRUSTEES
Yolanda Wood	Christopher Perpich
VICE CHAIR	Genia M. Collins
Kimberly Kadziolka	Gregory F. Daniel Jr.
TREASURER	Jeff Carter
Roan Anthony Moncrieffe	Ramone Alexander
SECRETARY	Tamica Jones
Jason Zwara	Thomas E. Baines

CHARTER LEADERS

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
<i>Antwan Barlow (2023-24 to Present)</i>

CHARTER CHARACTERISTICS

SCHOOL YEAR	CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT ²	ACTUAL AS A PERCENTAGE OF CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	GRADES SERVED
2023-24	56	53	95%	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.)



CHARTER SCHOOL VISIT HISTORY

SCHOOL YEAR	VISIT TYPE	DATE
2023-24	First Year Visit	February 7, 2024

CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

DATE(S) OF REVIEW	EVALUATION TEAM MEMBERS	TITLE
February 7, 2024	Katy Clayton	School Evaluation Analyst
	Tanya Lewis Jones	Director for New Charters

CHARTER CYCLE CONTEXT

CHARTER TERM	ACCOUNTABILITY PERIOD	ANTICIPATED RENEWAL VISIT
Initial	First of Four years	Fall 2027



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: <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/renewal/>. Responses to frequently asked questions about the Institute’s use of the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks appear below:

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

1. Research on public school reform, known as the effective schools movement, has embraced the premise that, given certain organizing and cultural characteristics, schools can teach all children the intended curriculum and hold them to high academic standards. Over the decades, the accumulated research into effective schools has yielded a set of common characteristics that all effective schools share. These characteristics are so consistently prevalent among successful schools that they have come to be known as the Correlates of Effective Schools. The Renewal Benchmarks adapt and elaborate on these correlates.



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

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

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



RENEWAL QUESTION 1
IS THE SCHOOL AN ACADEMIC SUCCESS?

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;

- 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.

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.

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;

- 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.
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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.



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.



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 ACHIEVEABLE?

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.



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.

