

THE SUNY CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE

SCHOOL EVALUATION REPORT
**BUFFALO CREEK ACADEMY
CHARTER SCHOOL**

VISIT DATE: MARCH 19, 2024
REPORT DATE: MAY 10, 2024

SUNY Charter Schools Institute

H. Carl McCall SUNY Building

353 Broadway

Albany, NY 12246

518.445.4250

www.newyorkcharters.org



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

CONTENTS

1

Introduction

2

Charter Background

3

Executive Summary

4

Academic Performance

7

Benchmark Summary

Appendices

A: Charter Overview

B: SUNY Renewal Benchmarks

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This School Evaluation Report offers an analysis of evidence collected during the school visit to Buffalo Creek Academy Charter School (“Buffalo Creek”) on March 19, 2024. While the SUNY Charter Schools Institute (the “Institute”) conducts a comprehensive review of evidence related to all the State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks (the “SUNY Renewal Benchmarks”) near the end of a charter term, most mid-cycle charter school evaluation visits focus on a subset of these benchmarks addressing the academic success of the charter and the effectiveness and viability of the charter school organization. It provides a framework for examining the quality of the educational program, focusing on teaching and learning (e.g., curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and services for at-risk students), as well as leadership, organizational capacity, and board oversight. The Institute uses the established criteria on a regular basis to provide schools with a consistent set of expectations leading up to renewal.

Appendix A to the report contains a Charter Overview with descriptive and historical information about the school, as well as background information on the conduct of the visit. Together this information puts the visit in the context of the school’s current charter cycle. Appendix B provides the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks.

This report serves as a summary of the school’s program based on a subset of the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks. The Institute intends this selection of information to be an exception report in order to highlight areas of concern. As such, limited detail about positive elements of the educational program does not indicate the Institute does not recognize the program’s overall effectiveness.





CHARTER BACKGROUND

BUFFALO CREEK ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL

528 South Park Avenue, Buffalo, New York | Grades: 5-8 | Buffalo City Schools District

The State University of New York Board of Trustees (the “SUNY Trustees”) approved the original charter for Buffalo Creek on October 15, 2019. The school opened in fall 2020, serving 112 students in 5th and 6th grade.

“ MISSION

Through rigor and structure, Buffalo Creek Academy Charter School prepares 5th – 12th grade students to graduate from college and positively impact our community.

CURRENT CHARTER

Serves: 5th – 8th grade

*Chartered Enrollment:
224*

*Charter Expiration:
July 31, 2025*

KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS

| | |
|---|---|
| Rigorous academics that prepare students to excel in and graduate from college; | – |
| Frequent assessments and a focus on results; | – |
| Structure and safety within a values-driven, caring community; and, | + |
| Community engagement and a global perspective. | + |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Buffalo Creek is in its fourth year of its initial charter term and has not yet demonstrated track record of meeting or coming close to meeting its Accountability Plan goals. In the two years of the charter term with credible state testing data suitable for analysis (2021-22 and 2022-23), Buffalo Creek did not meet its Accountability Plan goals in either ELA or mathematics. Though the school increased its overall mathematics proficiency, it performed below the district by eight percentage points in 2022-23. In those two years, the only target Buffalo Creek met on any measure of academic performance was outperforming the district in ELA on the 2021-22 state tests. As a result, the school's prospects for renewal are currently in jeopardy.

Since the Institute's spring 2023 visit, the school improved its academic program in some areas. Two former part-time assistant principals, who previously had teaching assignments, are now assigned full time to support teachers in the areas of culture and academics. The school is building more consistent routines with observation and feedback cycles, weekly meetings with content teams, and weekly professional development. Although promising practices exist within these routines, instructional leaders do not effectively improve teacher practice.

While teaching and learning demonstrate some improvement from the Institute's spring 2022 visit, pedagogy is not yet effective. Although some teachers consistently present clear learning objectives, most teachers miss opportunities to effectively check for student understanding or engage students in activities that promote higher order thinking. Due to low enrollment, the school restructured its 6th – 8th grade cohorts to reduce from three sections to two. This gives the school the opportunity to place more teachers in a classroom. However, due to a lack of coordination from leadership, the additional teacher in a room does not always have a clear plan for how to best support students.

Overall, the school's prospects for renewal are in jeopardy. It must demonstrate improvement in academic achievement and the overall quality of instruction and instructional supports to make a case for renewal.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

2022-23 CHARTER PERFORMANCE REVIEW

At the beginning of the Accountability Period,¹ the school developed and adopted an Accountability Plan that set academic goals in the key subjects of English language arts (“ELA”) and mathematics. For each goal in the Accountability Plan, specific outcome measures define the level of performance necessary to meet that goal. Throughout the charter term, the Institute examines results for five required Accountability Plan measures on an annual basis and provides an Accountability Dossier to each school detailing the school’s progress toward meeting its Accountability Plan goals. Because the Act requires charters be held “accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results”² and states the educational programs at a charter school must “meet or exceed the student performance standards adopted by the board of regents”³ for other public schools, SUNY’s required accountability measures rest on performance as measured by statewide assessments. More information about the required Accountability Plan measures can be found on the [Institute’s website](#).

In 2022-23, the second year in which the charter produced data suitable for analysis on New York State’s ELA and mathematics exams, Buffalo Creek did not meet its key academic Accountability Plan goals in ELA or mathematics. As a result, the school’s prospects for earning renewal are currently in jeopardy. In order to establish the best case for renewal, the charter must improve its academic achievement. Under the state’s Every Student Succeeds Act (“ESSA”) accountability system, schools must test at least 95% of students within each accountability group comprising greater than 40 students in order to meet the participation rate criterion. In 2022-23, the school continued to struggle with exam participation when only 81% of students at Buffalo Creek were tested in ELA and only 80% were tested in mathematics.

Buffalo Creek did not meet its ELA goal in 2022-23 after having come close to meeting the goal the prior year. The school did not meet the target for any of the five measures included under its goal. With only 17% of students enrolled in at least their second year scoring at or above proficiency on the state’s ELA exam, the school performed far below the absolute target of 75% and 12 percentage points below the district. Over half of the school’s tested students scored at Level 1, the lowest possible level of performance. Buffalo Creek posted an effect size of -1.18 according to the Institute’s effect size analysis. This level of achievement is lower than the target of 0.30 and indicates the school performed lower than expected in comparison to demographically similar schools across the state. The school also did not meet the target for its growth measure posting a mean growth percentile of 45.

Buffalo Creek did not meet its mathematics goal in 2022-23 having not met the target for any of the available measures for the second consecutive year. Only 13% of students enrolled in at least their second year scored at or above proficiency. Among all tested students, 73% scored at Level 1 indicating performance far below grade level expectations. The school performed eight percentage points below the district and performed lower than expected in comparison to schools across the state enrolling similar percentages of economically disadvantaged students. The school’s mean growth percentile of 36 was 14 percentile points below the target indicating that the students at Buffalo Creek are falling behind their statewide peers.

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

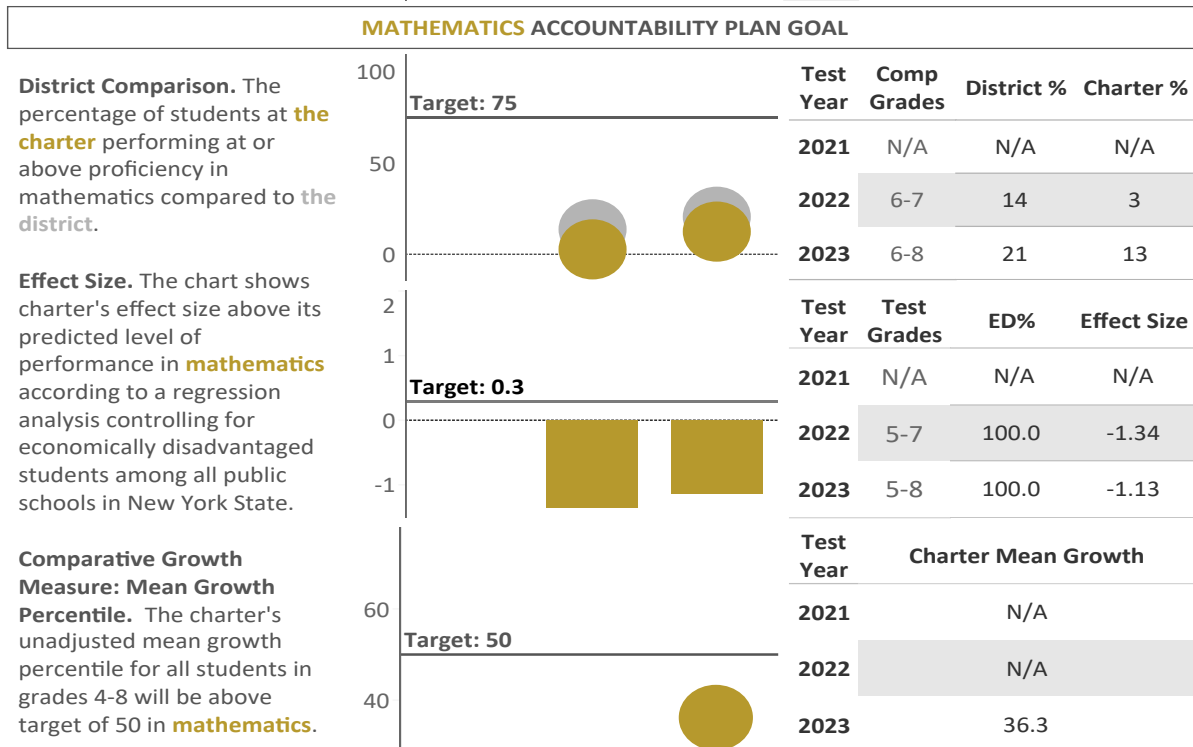
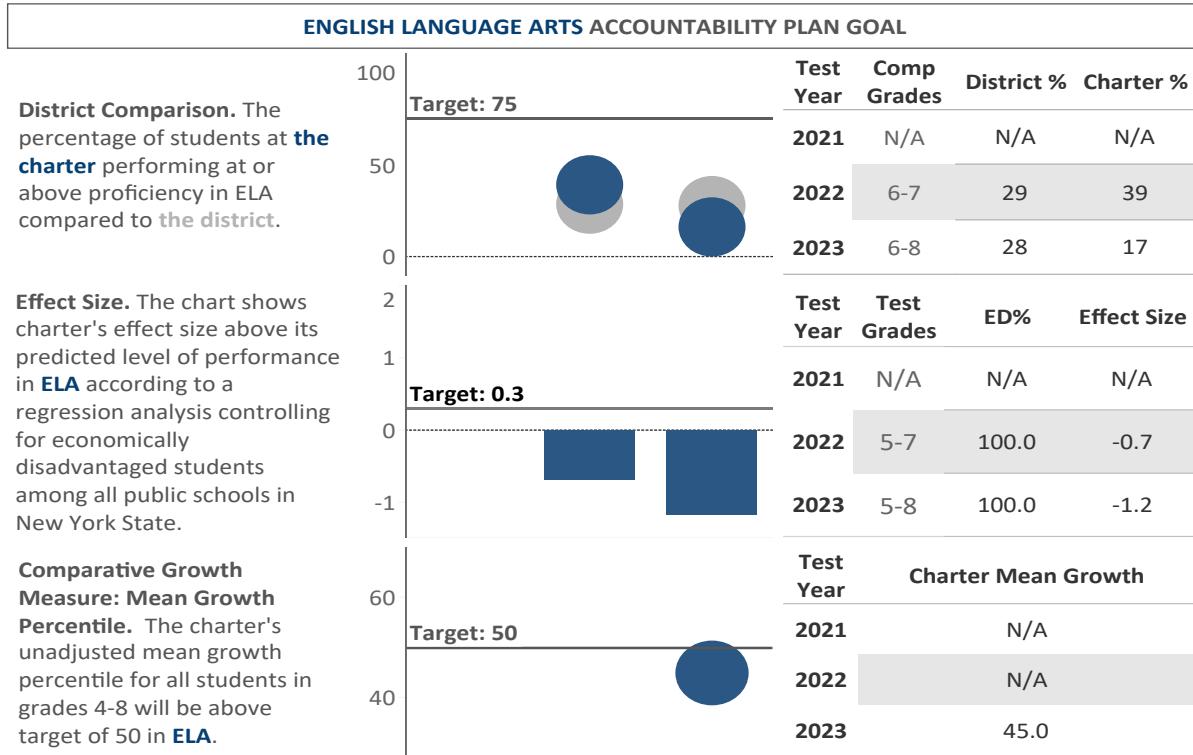
2. Education Law § 2850(2)(f).

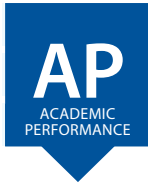
3. Education Law § 2854(1)(d).



ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

BUFFALO CREEK ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL





ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

BUFFALO CREEK ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL



| TESTED PERCENTAGES | | | | | |
|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--|
| | 2022 | | 2023 | | |
| | ELA | Math | ELA | Math | |
| School Tested Number | 95 | 94 | 162 | 159 | |
| School Tested % | 72.5% | 71.8% | 81.4% | 79.9% | |
| District Tested % | 82.5% | 79.0% | 85.6% | 81.3% | |

| SPECIAL POPULATIONS PERFORMANCE* | |
|---|-----|
| 2022 | |
| Students with Disabilities Tested on State Exam | 13 |
| Charter Percent Proficient on ELA Exam | 7.7 |
| District Percent Proficient | 6.0 |
| | |
| Tested on NYSESLAT Exam | 2 |
| Charter Percent 'Commanding' or Making Progress | s |

* The academic outcome data about the performance of students receiving special education services and English language learners ("ELLs") above is not tied to separate goals in the charter school's formal Accountability Plan. The NYSESLAT, the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test, is a standardized state exam. "Making Progress" is defined as moving up at least one level of proficiency. Student scores fall into five categories/proficiency levels: Entering; Emerging; Transitioning; Expanding; and, Commanding. In order to comply with Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act regulations on reporting education outcome data, the Institute does not report assessment results for groups containing five or fewer students and indicates this with an "s".

BENCHMARK SUMMARY

QUALITATIVE BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

The SUNY Renewal Benchmarks, grounded in the body of research from the Center for Urban Studies at Harvard University,⁴ 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 charter school must have in place at the time of renewal.⁵

ASSESSMENT

Buffalo Creek is still developing an assessment system that improves teaching and learning. The school administers the i-Ready assessment three times annually in addition to curriculum-based assessments and mock New York State exams. Leaders establish expectations for embedding previously released state exam items into daily lessons to build students' exposure to the rigors of New York State standards, which is an improvement from the Institute's spring 2023 visit. As a result, teachers frequently use state exam items as exit tickets and have a strong understanding of students' areas of growth regarding testing skills. For example, teachers report that certain cohorts struggle with testing stamina and short response items. However, leaders do not empower teachers to analyze data and understand necessary solutions, and no other staff members provide this information because the school has not developed systems to do so. Further, instructional leaders' expectations for how teachers should modify instruction based on formative assessment data remain unclear. Teachers cannot speak with detail regarding how they modify lesson plans or adjust their pedagogy based on i-Ready results, curriculum assessments, or exit tickets.

Leaders have established the general expectation for using data to drive instruction and teachers discuss student data in common team meetings and with instructional coaches. The schoolwide priority to use data to drive instruction is evident, but Buffalo Creek has not yet established clear norms around how to analyze data and what excellent data-driven instruction looks like. The school does not yet implement codified protocols for data analysis, action planning, and follow up with fidelity. As a result, teachers' ability to make meaningful changes to instructional practice varies across the academic program.

CURRICULUM

In its fourth year of operation, Buffalo Creek's curriculum is beginning to support teachers with instructional planning. The school continues to use i-Ready for its primary ELA and mathematics curricula. Leaders brought in i-Ready curriculum trainers to support teachers with understanding how to fully utilize curricular resources and the i-Ready personalized learning program in the school's fourth year of operation. This year, teachers incorporate more New York State released test items to supplement the curricular programs during advisory time, which serves as a targeted instruction period. Leaders provide teachers with a scope and sequence document, and the curricular programs provide teachers with unit and lesson plans. However, teachers do

4. 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.

5. Additional details regarding the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks are available on the [Institute's website](#).

BENCHMARK SUMMARY

not modify lessons to meet the needs of students, and leaders do not use the current support systems to help teachers with modifying lessons to meet the learning needs of students, nor are teachers coordinating with special education and ELL teachers to ensure clear plans are ready to support the needs of students with disabilities or ELLs. Lessons do not effectively differentiate learning for the wide range of learners. Leaders expect teachers to create a week at a glance document that focuses on what they will be teaching each week. Teachers submit the week at a glance on a weekly basis and, new for this school year, a pacing guide update on a monthly basis. The pacing guide update is an effective system for leaders to monitor pacing across each subject and grade. However, teachers report receiving little to no feedback on their submissions.

PEDAGOGY

High quality instruction is not yet evident across Buffalo Creek. Since the Institute's last visit, the school has improved its capacity to deliver purposeful lessons, check for student understanding, and manage student behaviors. Just over half of lessons observed demonstrated clear objectives that relate to learning through the class period. In some examples, objectives are not clearly written with a student learning goal in mind. This year, due to low enrollment, the school collapsed the number of sections from three to two in each grade level from 6th to 8th grade, and the additional teacher now joins classrooms as additional support. While this has good potential to provide more support for students, at the time of the visit, teachers did not effectively support students as they did not consistently have access to the lesson plans. This resulted in the additional adult primarily focusing on management and ancillary support for students. Teachers demonstrate more checks for understanding by circulating the classroom and checking in with students consistently. However, few teachers vary checks for understanding to ensure that the majority of students know the content of the lesson. The Institute observed high levels of engagement in the morning observations, and students were eager to learn. However, pacing across the school varied drastically due to factors such as slow transitions between classrooms due to inefficient procedures, resulting in missed learning time throughout the day.

Leaders have not yet set clear expectations for teachers or hold them accountable for including opportunities for students to engage in higher order thinking. In most lessons, questions focused specifically on factual recall. Most interactions in the classroom consist of teachers questioning individual students, and the Institute observed only one instance of student to student discourse. Teachers did not improve their instructional effectiveness by engaging students in checks for understanding to monitor learning across the entire class.

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Buffalo Creek does not yet have strong instructional leadership. Instructional leadership at Buffalo Creek has made some changes to support teaching and learning in the fourth year of the charter term by providing more consistent coaching to teachers. Leaders also make efforts to hold teachers accountable to implementing feedback from coaching sessions in lessons. These changes represent potentially viable solutions to the instructional weaknesses the Institute observed over the course of the charter term. However, given that the current quality of teaching and learning across the school remains low, the efficacy of these efforts remains undetermined. Instructional leadership, at the time of the visit, was ineffective at ensuring the quality of these systems was effective enough to improve teaching and learning.

BENCHMARK SUMMARY

Buffalo Creek has a well-defined process for providing teachers with formal and informal feedback about the overall quality of teaching and learning in their classrooms. Each year, instructional leaders use the McRel Teacher Evaluation to conduct two formal evaluations of teachers. Teachers receive frequent informal observations tied to coaching support and feedback that attempts to help them establish and maintain a culture of high expectations and strengthen teaching and learning across the school. While teachers report that they find the feedback helpful, a review of the written comments they receive revealed that they are not always specific or consistently aligned to a targeted area for professional growth and development. School leaders acknowledge the urgent need to improve the overall quality of curriculum and instruction across the school. Although they would like to engage proven, effective consultants to increase their capacity to train and coach teachers, the school's current fiscal condition, at the time of the visit, does not allow the necessary funds to engage these additional resources.

In addition to conducting frequent class visits, school leaders provide monthly professional development for teachers. During the monthly professional development sessions, school leaders and teachers review student performance on local assessments, address urgent behavioral issues, and continue to build and deepen their understanding of effective instructional practices. Although teachers try to employ the resources and strategies shared during the monthly professional development, there is limited evidence that they are doing so at the highest level. For example, teachers have yet to differentiate instruction or student work products to better address their students' diverse learning needs.

AT-RISK PROGRAM

Buffalo Creek is developing its academic programming and progress monitoring to meet the needs of its at-risk student population. The school implements clear, compliant procedures to identify students with disabilities, English language learners ("ELLs"), and students struggling academically. However, the school lacks sufficient professional development, coaching, and formalized systems to support at-risk program staff and general education teachers in meeting all students' academic needs.

Once students are identified, Buffalo Creek employs adequate instructional staff members to deliver interventions, special education supports, and language acquisition supports to its students. However, the school does not provide adequate time for collaboration between at-risk program staff and general education teachers. Teachers collaborate on an ad hoc basis and lack formal protocols ensuring lesson plans are modified to include necessary scaffolds for all students. Instructional leaders do not hold general education teachers accountable for differentiating their instruction for at-risk students and the expectations for what general education teachers are required to do remain vague. As a result, the visit team saw inconsistent efforts from general education teachers to adjust instruction to meet needs of at-risk students. Further, Buffalo Creek's professional development program does not adequately support all teachers with strategies for differentiation. The school does not have effective, concrete systems for monitoring students' progress toward language acquisition goals, attainment of individualized education program ("IEP") goals, or growth in academic intervention. Across all levels of the school hierarchy, expectations for goal monitoring are inconsistent. As

BENCHMARK SUMMARY

a consequence, at-risk program staff and general education teachers do not consistently make necessary pedagogical adjustments in their planning or lesson delivery to meet student needs. Instructional leaders do not hold all teachers accountable for quality instruction during dedicated intervention time and the lack of sufficient progress monitoring hampers leaders' ability to make evaluations of the efficacy of interventions.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Buffalo Creek's organizational structure is sufficient to support school operations. There are distinct lines of accountability and both the teachers and staff members know where to get answers and support for issues related to the school's operation. School leaders continue to refine classroom management in the school. Teachers receive regular feedback on how to make their classrooms welcoming and engaging for students in addition to delivering quality lessons. Teachers, board members, and school leaders reported that the consistent application of the school's discipline code and expectations for school and classroom culture have helped to create a positive impact on the school culture and environment. Classroom visits show that student behavior was not an issue and that students were ready to learn.

Buffalo Creek continues to struggle to meet its enrollment targets. School leaders, however, believe that they will be able to meet their target to recruit 230 students for the 2024-25 year because they have been proactive about recruiting students since the start of the year. While the school has made efforts to build its identity in the City of Buffalo, this goal would mean recruiting over 100 students to meet this goal.

BOARD OVERSIGHT & GOVERNANCE

The board demonstrates increased capacity with new members and improved oversight skills since the Institute's spring 2023 visit. Since that time, the board onboarded two members, one with a finance background and one with Kindergarten – 12th grade experience. The board, alongside school leadership, set specific student achievement goals for this school year. The board is aware of the strategies instructional leaders use to improve teaching and learning and ask questions and review information as it pertains to specific strategies with the end goals in mind. At monthly meetings, the board receives and reviews up to date student achievement, attendance, and suspension data.

The board is actively involved in correcting the school's current financial stability due to a dispute with its lender. The board is working to ensure the fiscal stability of the school through the end of the school year and ensure fiscal soundness before it opens for the 2024-25 school year.

Buffalo Creek

Ax

APPENDICES

PAGES Ax 1-16

CO^A
CHARTER
OVERVIEW

PAGE Ax 1

SB^B
SUNY RENEWAL
BENCHMARKS

PAGE Ax 5



BUFFALO CREEK ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD OF TRUSTEES¹

| CHAIR | TRUSTEES |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| Jessica Smith-Jordan | Candace Moppins |
| VICE CHAIR | Peter D’Errico |
| Cedric Holloway | MJ Caliendo |
| TREASURER | Andre Geddes |
| William Oliver | Dr. Cassandra Wright |

CHARTER CHARACTERISTICS

| SCHOOL YEAR | CHARTERED ENROLLMENT | ACTUAL ENROLLMENT ² | ACTUAL AS A PERCENTAGE OF CHARTERED ENROLLMENT | GRADES SERVED |
|-------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|--|---------------|
| 2020-21 | 112 | 70 | 63% | 5 – 6 |
| 2021-22 | 168 | 123 | 73% | 5 – 7 |
| 2022-23 | 224 | 210 | 94% | 5 – 8 |
| 2023-24 | 224 | 163 | 73% | 5 – 8 |

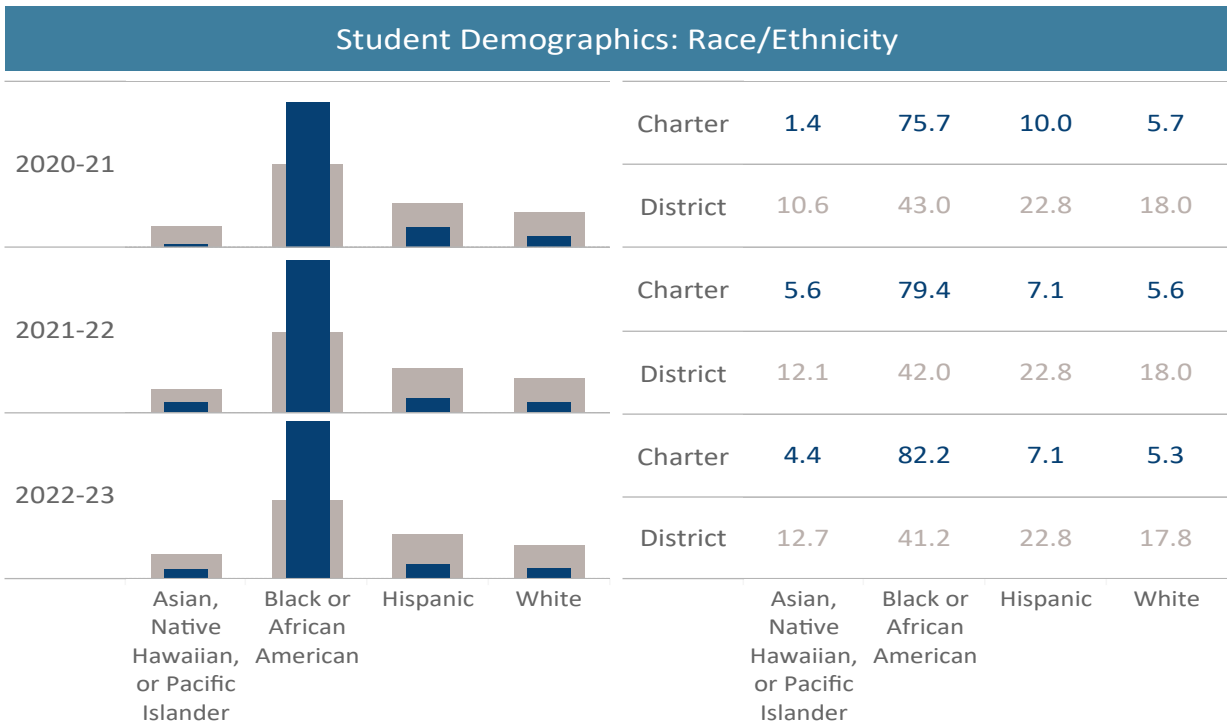
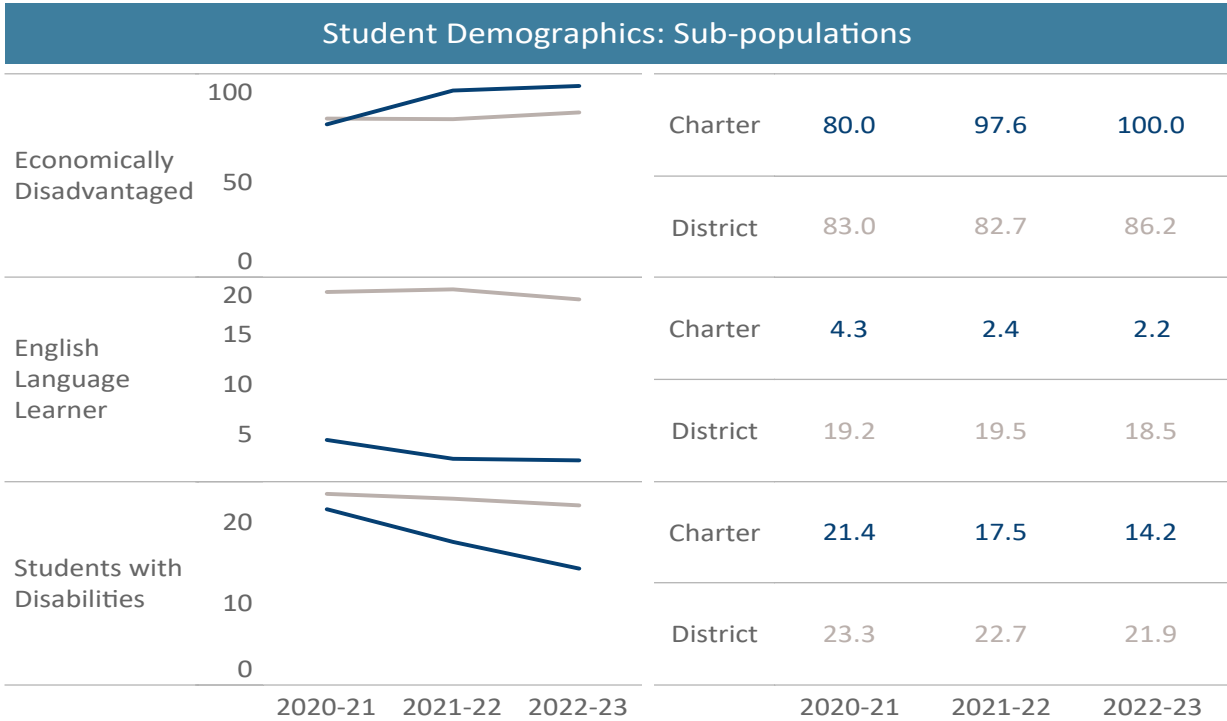
1. Source: The Institute’s board records at the time of the visit.

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



Buffalo Creek Academy Charter School

Buffalo City School District

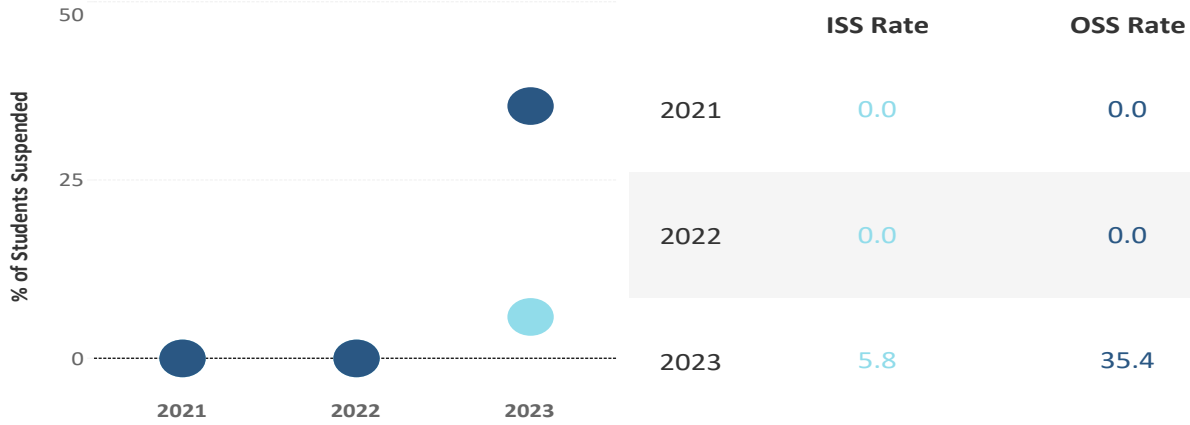


* Data reported in these charts reflect BEDS day enrollment counts as reported by the NYSED and data reported by the education corporation and validated by the Institute.



Buffalo Creek Academy Charter School

Buffalo City School District



Data suitable for comparison are not available. The percentage rate shown here is calculated using the method employed by NYCDOE: the total number of students receiving an in school or out of school suspension at any time during the school year is divided by the total enrollment, then multiplied by 100.

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



Expulsions: The number of students expelled from the charter each year

| Year | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|------------|------|------|------|
| Expulsions | 0 | 0 | 3 |

Buffalo Creek Academy Charter School's Enrollment and Retention Status: 2022-23

| | | Target | Charter |
|------------|----------------------------|--------|---------|
| enrollment | economically disadvantaged | 81.5 | 95.1 |
| | English language learners | 11.6 | 2.4 |
| | students with disabilities | 19.9 | 15.5 |
| retention | economically disadvantaged | 94.1 | 77.2 |
| | English language learners | 93.3 | 66.7 |
| | students with disabilities | 93.4 | 77.3 |

* Data reported in these charts reflect information reported by the education corporation and validated by the Institute.



CHARTER SCHOOL VISIT HISTORY

| SCHOOL YEAR | VISIT TYPE | DATE |
|-------------|----------------------------|-----------------|
| 2020-21 | First Year Visit (virtual) | May 19, 2021 |
| 2021-22 | Evaluation Visit | May 24, 2022 |
| 2022-23 | Evaluation Visit | May 8 – 9, 2023 |
| 2023-24 | Evaluation Visit | March 19, 2024 |

CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

| DATE(S) OF REVIEW | EVALUATION TEAM MEMBERS | TITLE |
|-------------------|-------------------------|--|
| March 19, 2024 | Andrew Kile | Managing Director of School Evaluation |
| | Sinnjinn Bucknell | Director of Performance and Systems |
| | Aretha Miller | External Consultant |

CHARTER CYCLE CONTEXT

| CHARTER TERM | ACCOUNTABILITY PERIOD | ANTICIPATED RENEWAL VISIT |
|--------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Initial | Fourth of four years | Fall 2024 |



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 [Renewal website page](#). 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.
-



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.

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.



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.

