

# THE SUNY CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE

*RENEWAL RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY  
EXPLORE EMPOWER CHARTER SCHOOL*

*REPORT DATE: FEBRUARY 4, 2025  
VISIT DATE: MARCH 25-26, 2024*



**Charter Schools Institute**  
The State University of New York

# CONTENTS

---

**1** CHARTER SCHOOL BACKGROUND

**2** EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**5** ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE DATA

**7** FISCAL DASHBOARD

**9** COMPLIANCE REPORTING

**10** COMMUNITY SATISFACTION AND RETENTION

**12** APPENDICES

A: Charter School Overview

B: Benchmark Summary

C: Student Demographics

D: Fiscal Benchmarks Summary



# CHARTER SCHOOL BACKGROUND

## EXPLORE EMPOWER CHARTER SCHOOL

188 Rochester Avenue, Brooklyn, New York | Grades: K-8 | NYC Community School District 17



### MISSION

*Our mission is to provide all students with the academic skills and critical thinking abilities they need to succeed in a college preparatory high school.*

### EXPLORE CHARTER SCHOOLS OF BROOKLYN BOARD OF TRUSTEES<sup>1</sup>

#### CHAIR

Angela Brice-Thomas

#### VICE CHAIR

Shawn Jenkins

#### TREASURER

Lisa Lurie

#### TRUSTEES

Karen A. Francois

Anna D. Johnson

Henry Mannix

Kevin Bryant

Lindsay Danon

Avni Gupta-Kagan

Sha-Keema Griffin

Orissa Pereira-Hamler

### CURRENT CHARTER INFORMATION

Year Opened: 2009

Serves: Kindergarten – 8<sup>th</sup>

Chartered Enrollment: 540

Charter Expiration: July 31, 2025

### PROPOSED FUTURE CHARTER INFORMATION

Serves: Kindergarten – 8<sup>th</sup>

Chartered Enrollment: 553

Charter Expiration: July 31, 2029

### KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS

We focus on thinking and learning;	+	We put the needs of students first;	+
We utilize standards-aligned curricula;	+	We meet the needs of all students; and,	+
We use data to drive daily instruction;	+	We hold high expectations for all students and focus on high school placement.	+
We have small teacher to student ratios;	+		

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

"+" : This indicator is generally present.

"-" : This indicator is generally not present.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### FULL-TERM RENEWAL

**Renewal through July 31, 2029.** *The SUNY Charter Schools Institute (the “Institute”) recommends the SUNY Trustees’ Charter Schools Committee approve the Application for Charter Renewal of Explore Empower Charter School for a period of four years through July 31, 2029 to align all charters in the education corporation and with authority to provide instruction to students in Kindergarten – 8<sup>th</sup> grade in such configuration as set forth in its Application for Charter Renewal, with a projected total enrollment of 553 students. The Institute makes this recommendation as Explore Empower Charter School meets the requirements for renewal set forth in the Policies for Renewal of Not-For-Profit Charter School Education Corporations and Charter Schools Authorized by the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (the “SUNY Renewal Policies”).<sup>2</sup>*

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Explore Empower Charter School (“Explore Empower”) is part of the Explore Charter Schools of Brooklyn (“Explore Schools” or the “education corporation”), an education corporation with authority to operate three charter schools, including Explore Charter School (“Explore”) and Explore Excel Charter School (“Explore Excel”). All schools within the education corporation operate under the management of Explore Schools, Inc. (“Explore Network” or the “network”), a New York not-for-profit charter management organization based in New York City. The network provides the schools with academic, operational, and back office assistance. Schools utilize the network’s curricular and assessment materials, all of which are selected or produced by network curriculum teams. The network is also responsible for managing and evaluating the performance of each school and school leader.

Throughout its charter term, Explore Empower continued the upward trajectory of academic gains evident at the Explore and Explore Excel campuses as they reached the end of their respective charter terms. Following the return to in-person instruction in the 2021-22 school year, and in alignment with Explore Schools’ strategic plan, the network emphasized training all staff members in trauma-informed practices and implementing comprehensive social emotional supports within school buildings to ensure that students were safe, secure, and prepared to learn. With a strong cultural foundation in place, the network returned to the effective instructional strategies it had implemented at the end of the last charter term. An investment in teacher and leader coaching pipelines, combined with the network’s commitment to improving instructional resources and practices and enhancing data response cycles, has resulted in academic growth and organizational stability.

To solidify this academic growth, network leaders drafted a new strategic plan to prioritize the implementation of rigorous curricular materials, strengthening internal data systems and routines, and the fostering of inclusive, culturally responsive school environments for staff and students. When setting long term goals for the strategic plan, the network’s board integrated input from teachers, leaders, and families. In service of the board’s plans for the future of Explore Schools, the Explore Network transitioned from a co-leader model to a single chief executive officer (“CEO”) during the charter term after conducting a national search and promoting an experienced internal candidate. Network leadership and the board work effectively to monitor the progress of the educational programming and needs of the organization while striving for continuous improvement across each of the schools.

2. SUNY Renewal Policies (p. 14) are available on the [Institute’s website](#).

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### FINDINGS & INFORMATION

#### ***Is the charter an academic success?***

Explore Empower met or came close to meeting its English language arts (“ELA”) and mathematics Accountability Plan goals throughout the charter term. The school maintained effective instructional practices due to its strong leadership pipelines and teacher development programs. Explore Empower demonstrates a clear growth pattern throughout the charter term. The school’s performance, particularly in the 2023-24 school year, highlights the impact of Explore Schools’ commitment to continuous improvement practices. Explore Empower’s high staff member retention rate and high rate of satisfaction among families are indicative of its investment in building a strong, community-centered culture with an emphasis on teaching, learning, and individualized supports for students and teachers alike.

The following highlights the success of the school’s performance against its Accountability Plan goals:

- From 2021-22 to 2023-24, Explore Empower increased the proportion of students enrolled in at least their second year scoring at or above proficiency by 16 percentage points in ELA and 31 percentage points in mathematics. The school posted mean growth percentiles above the target of 50 in both subjects corroborating the strong growth in absolute proficiency.
- In ELA, the school outperformed the district and posted high comparative effect sizes in 2022-23 and 2023-24. The school performed higher than expected compared to demographically similar schools according to the Institute’s analysis.
- Explore Empower met its mathematics goal over the charter term. The school exceeded all comparative and growth targets under its goal in each year. Notably in 2023-24, the school outperformed the district by 15 percentage points.

#### ***Is the charter an effective, viable organization?***

Explore Empower is an effective and viable organization, and its operational team allows instructional leaders to focus efforts on the oversight and delivery of the academic program. The school involves the school community in outreach and recruitment efforts with teachers canvassing the neighborhood to support with student recruitment. The board maintains effective governance practices and is seeking to add additional members with the goal of increasing connection to and visibility within the community the school serves.

#### ***Is the charter fiscally sound<sup>3</sup>?***

Explore Schools is fiscally adequate as is its charter, Explore Empower, based on the Institute’s analysis of the renewal application and financial documentation. The education corporation has made investments with excess cash on hand in recent years into a CD ladder, which is still in effect and growing with a balance of more than \$4.6 million. Explore Schools posted deficits from 2021-22 through 2023-24 due to the education corporation’s investments in technology, salary

3. The U.S. Department of Education has established fiscal criteria for certain ratios or information with high – medium – low categories, represented in the table as blue – gray – orange. The categories generally correspond to levels of fiscal risk, but must be viewed in the context of each education corporation and the general type or category of school.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

increases to retain teachers, and wraparound services to support families and students during the COVID-19 disruptions. As of June 30, 2024, Explore Schools reported \$6.9 million in net assets and 0.7 months of cash on hand. Explore Schools has the required amounts in a separate dissolution fund account.

---

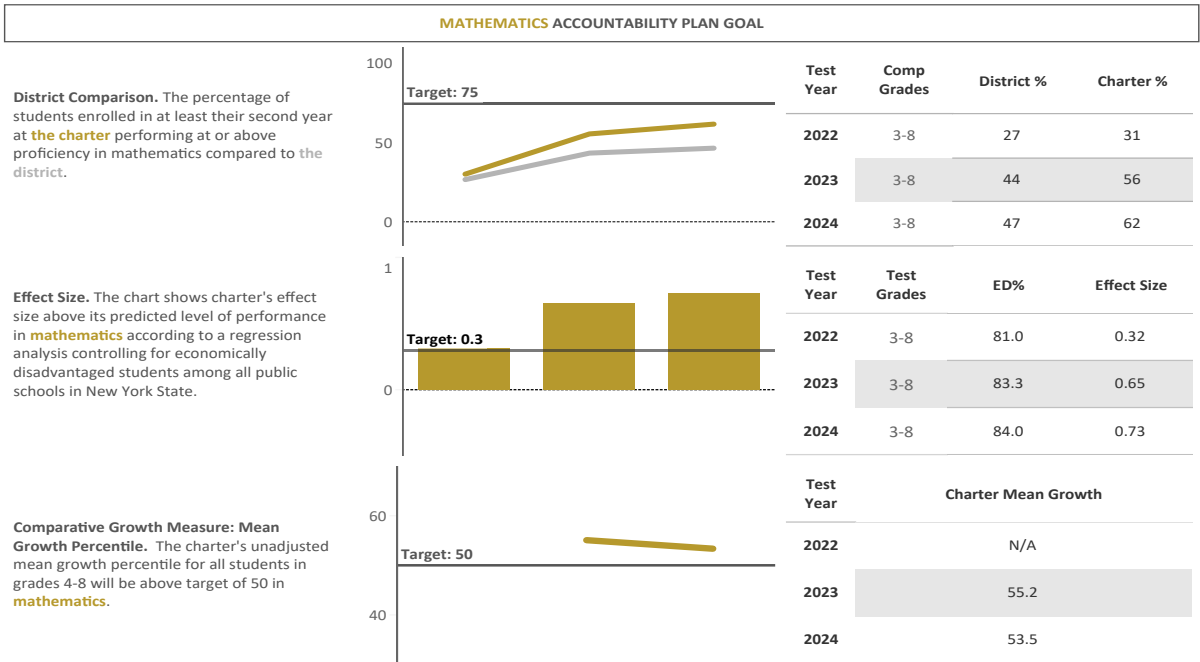
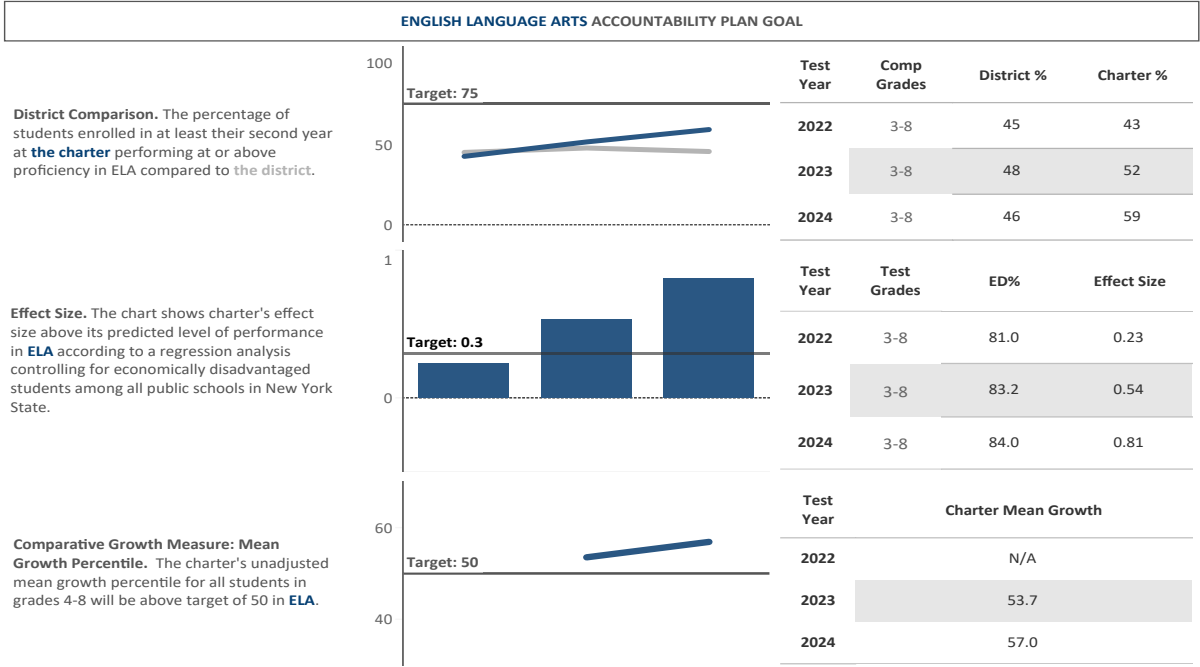
***If the SUNY Trustees renew the charter, are the education corporation’s plans for the charter reasonable, feasible, and achievable?***

Explore Schools’ plans for Explore Empower are reasonable, feasible, and achievable. Explore Schools’ projected future budgets anticipate a return to surpluses in the next charter term. The education corporation plans to implement the same core elements that led to its success over the current charter term. The board, after recruiting additional members in the past year including two parent representatives, expresses interest in continuing service in the next charter term. Explore Empower plans to remain in its current co-located facility with the necessary space and amenities to serve its Kindergarten – 8<sup>th</sup> grade students.

---

# ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

## EXPLORE EMPOWER CHARTER SCHOOL

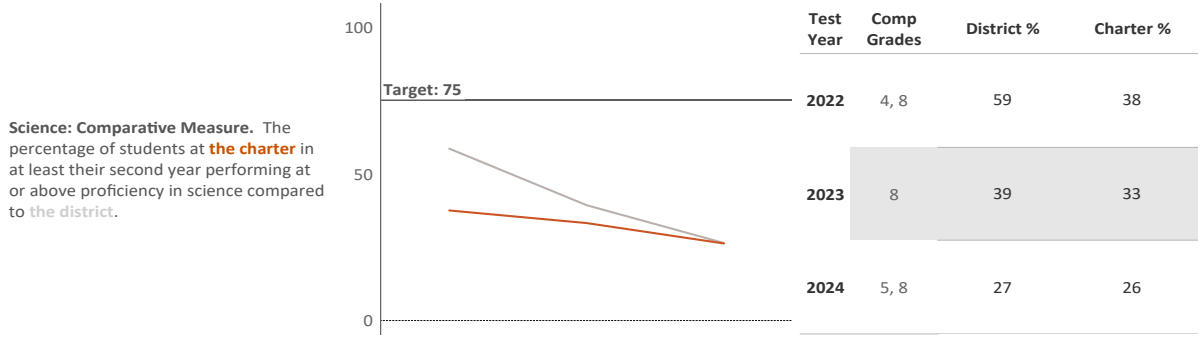




# ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

## EXPLORE EMPOWER CHARTER SCHOOL

### SCIENCE ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GOAL



### TESTED PERCENTAGES

	2022		2023		2024	
	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	ELA	Math
School Tested Number	318	322	296	301	308	306
School Tested %	94.1%	95.8%	93.4%	95.0%	96.0%	95.3%
District Tested %	86.6%	89.4%	85.3%	88.4%	82.7%	87.9%

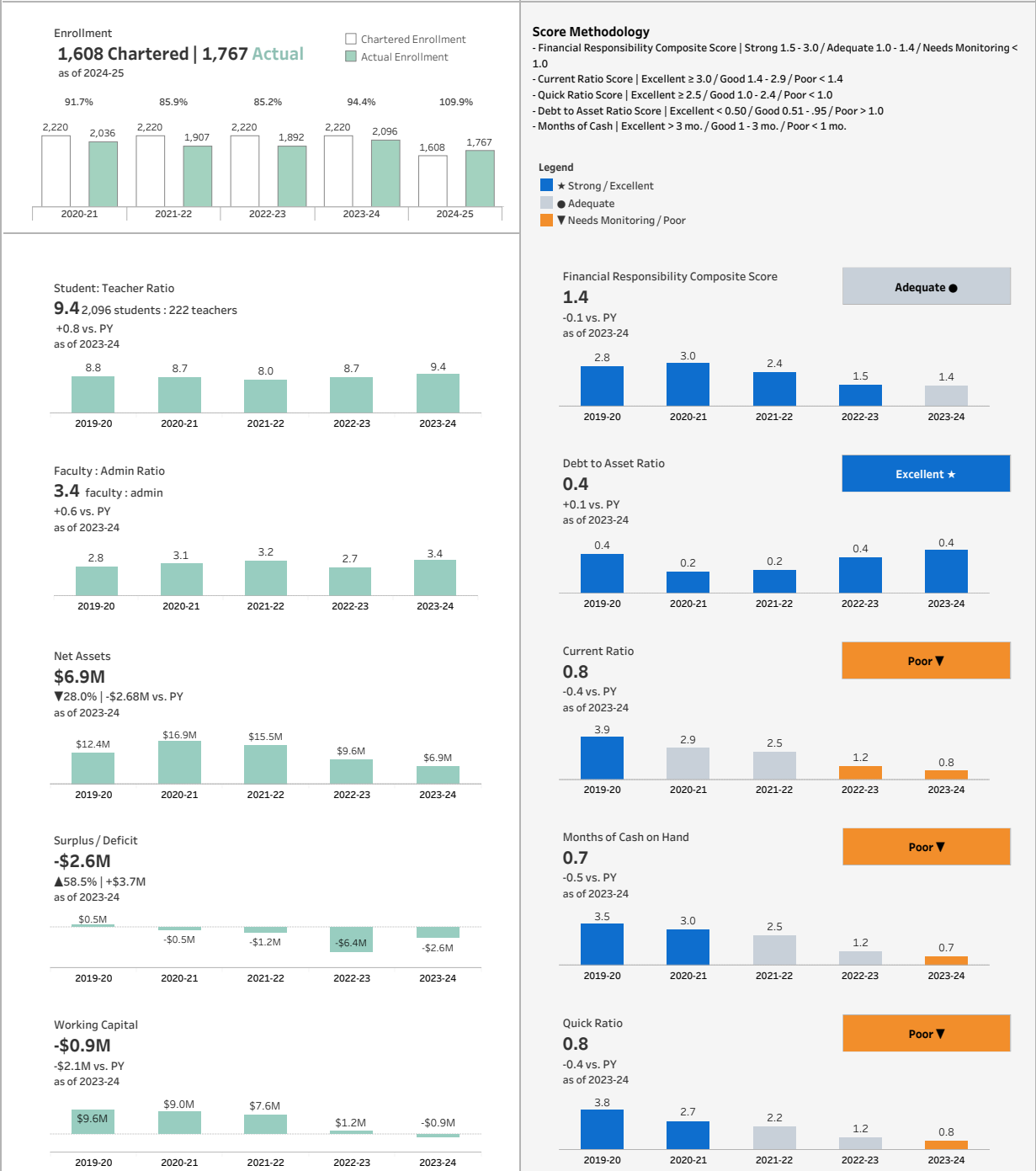
### SPECIAL POPULATIONS PERFORMANCE\*

	2022	2023	2024
Students with Disabilities Tested on State Exam	66	65	74
Charter Percent Proficient on ELA Exam	21.2	18.5	23.0
District Percent Proficient	19.8	21.3	21.9
Tested on NYSESLAT Exam	22	25	24
Charter Percent 'Commanding' or Making Progress	22.7	28.0	8.3

\* 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".

# FISCAL DASHBOARD

## EXPLORE CHARTER SCHOOLS OF BROOKLYN



## EXPLORE EMPOWER CHARTER SCHOOL



## COMPLIANCE REPORTING

### HAS THE CHARTER SUBSTANTIALLY COMPLIED WITH APPLICABLE LAWS, RULES AND REGULATIONS, AND PROVISIONS OF ITS CHARTER?

*The education corporation substantially complies with applicable laws, rules and regulations, and provisions of its charter. During the current charter term, the education corporation demonstrates a clear record of compliance with the terms of its charter including the timely submission of required reporting to the Institute.*

#### EXPLORE EMPOWER CHARTER SCHOOL

##### **Teacher Certification**

The Act allows charters to hire up to 15 uncertified lead teachers contingent upon those teachers meeting certain requirements including: two years of Teach for America experience; three years of teaching experience; status as a higher education professor; exceptional experience in a subject; or, teaching science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) or career and technical education courses.

The network partners with the New York City Charter School Center (the “Center”) to track and monitor certification of teachers. The Center offers one-to-one consultation with individual teachers to help navigate the acquisition of certification. The education corporation offers scholarships for certification related expenses including exam fees while offering flexible time off for teachers to complete requirements. The network partners with Brooklyn College to offer a certification pathway master’s program to school leaders.

At the time of the renewal review, the school employed 44 lead teachers. Of the 44 lead teachers, 35 were uncertified which is 20 over the allowable limit. Thirty of the 35 uncertified teachers met the appropriate qualifications under the Act.

## COMMUNITY SATISFACTION & ENROLLMENT AND RETENTION

To report on parent satisfaction with the charter’s program, the Institute used satisfaction survey data, information gathered from a focus group of parents representing a cross section of students, and data regarding persistence in enrollment.

---

### ***Parent Survey Data***

The Institute compiled data from the education corporation’s annual family survey from the 2023-24 school year. In 2023-24, 87% of families responded. Of the families who responded, 96% expressed satisfaction with the charters.

---

### ***Parent Focus Group***

The Institute asks all charters facing renewal to convene a representative set of parents for a focus group discussion. A representative set includes parents of students in attendance at the charter for multiple years, parents of students new to the charter, parents of students receiving general education services, parents of students with special needs, and parents of English language learners (“ELLs”).

The five family representatives in attendance spoke highly of their experiences with Explore Empower. Families are appreciative of the experience leaders and teachers provide to their children. Stakeholders note that the school environment is warm, inviting, and feels like a family, and that staff members are willing to take extra time to meet the individualized needs of students and families. The afterschool programming is responsive to the requests of families and is used to meet social emotional needs of struggling students as well as provide opportunities for additional academic and extracurricular interests. The high school placement coordinator is also a stated asset, as families express gratitude for the guidance in navigating the high school application process. Communication is a consistent area of strength cited by parents, and families feel respected by the multiple avenues of communication teachers use to provide updates on student progress, including ParentSquare, emails, texts, calls, reports, and conferences.

---

### ***Public Comments***

In accordance with the Act, the Institute notified the district in which the charter school is located regarding the Application for Charter Renewal. The full text of any written comments received from the district appears below, which also includes a summary of any public comments.

The New York City Department of Education (“NYCDOE”) held its required hearing for Explore Empower’s renewal application on June 4, 2024, via videoconference. Explore Empower’s two principals spoke about the school’s efforts to engage families and support students’ social and emotional needs. They emphasized that most families reside within a one-mile radius of the school and highlighted the school’s strong connection with the local community through family events and workshops. The principals also shared how Explore Empower provides training on trauma-informed instruction and introduced social-emotional curriculum in Kindergarten – 8th grade. This curriculum, coupled with responsive classroom strategies, has created a nurturing learning environment and reduced suspension rates. No other members of the public spoke in support or opposition to the charter renewal.

# COMMUNITY SATISFACTION & ENROLLMENT AND RETENTION







## Enrollment and Retention

Explore Empower makes good faith efforts to meet its enrollment and retention targets. With the help of the network, the school meets the targets for students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged students, and it engages in a wide range of strategies to recruit and retain subgroups of students.

## Persistence in Enrollment

An additional indicator of parent satisfaction is persistence in enrollment. In 2023-24, 87% of Explore Empower students returned from the previous year. Student persistence data from previous years of the charter term is available in the student demographics section of the report.

*The Institute derived the statistical information on persistence in enrollment from its database. No comparative data from the NYCDOE or the New York State Education Department ("NYSED") is available to the Institute to provide either district or statewide context.*

Explore Empower Charter School's Enrollment and Retention Status: 2023-24			Target	Charter
enrollment	economically disadvantaged		82.3	86.8
	English language learners		11.6	5.9
	students with disabilities		20.0	26.8
retention	economically disadvantaged		85.1	87.1
	English language learners		87.0	78.3
	students with disabilities		83.7	88.2

Explore Empower

# Ax

## APPENDICES

PAGES Ax 1-11

<b>CO<sup>A</sup></b> CHARTER OVERVIEW	<b>BS<sup>B</sup></b> BENCHMARK SUMMARY	<b>SD<sup>C</sup></b> STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS	<b>FB<sup>D</sup></b> FISCAL BENCHMARKS
PAGE Ax 1	PAGE Ax 2	PAGE Ax 7	PAGE Ax 9



**CHARTER CHARACTERISTICS**

SCHOOL YEAR	CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL AS A PERCENTAGE OF CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	GRADES SERVED
2020-21	540	457	85%	K – 8
2021-22	540	453	84%	K – 8
2022-23	540	429	79%	K – 8
2023-24	540	435	81%	K – 8
2024-25	540	546	101%	K – 8

**CHARTER SCHOOL VISIT HISTORY**

SCHOOL YEAR	VISIT TYPE	DATE
2015-16	Evaluation Visit	May 9 – 10, 2016
2016-17	Initial Renewal Visit	October 24 – 25, 2016
2019-20	Subsequent Renewal Visit	September 25 – 26, 2019
2023-24	Subsequent Renewal Visit	March 25 – 26, 2024

**CONDUCT OF THE RENEWAL REVIEW**

DATE(S) OF REVIEW	EVALUATION TEAM MEMBERS	TITLE
March 25 – 26, 2024	Ciani Jones	Senior Analyst
	Jeff Wasbes	Executive Deputy Director for Accountability

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

## BENCHMARK SUMMARY

### ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Explore Empower met or came close to meeting its key academic Accountability Plan goals over the charter term. Notably, the school exceeded the targets for all of its comparative and growth measures in mathematics in every year of the Accountability Period. In 2023-24, the school increased its percentage of students scoring at or above proficiency in both English language arts (“ELA”) and mathematics from the prior year at higher rates than the local district.

Explore Empower met its ELA goal over the majority of the term. The school’s students enrolled in at least their second year posted proficiency rates that exceeded or were approximately the same as the district in every year with data suitable for analysis. In comparison to schools across the state enrolling similar percentages of economically disadvantaged students, Explore Empower performed higher than expected in every year. The school also posted high growth scores in the years with data suitable for analysis. In 2022-23 and 2023-24, the school’s mean growth percentile in ELA was above the target of 50.

From 2021-22 through 2023-24, Explore Empower met its mathematics goal. The school’s students enrolled in at least their second year posted proficiency rates on the state mathematics exam that exceeded the district results by at least four percentage points each year. Explore Empower posted effect sizes above the target of 0.30 each year indicating that the school performed higher than expected to a meaningful degree compared to demographically similar schools across the state. The school also posted mean growth scores above the target of 50 in each year with available data.

### ASSESSMENT

Explore Schools implements an effective assessment system to improve teaching and learning across its schools. Explore Schools uses several different assessment tools to collect timely and reliable data on student performance and to measure progress towards year end performance goals. The schools leverage mCLASS and i-Ready as universal screening and progress monitoring tools. These assessments provide leaders and teachers with robust beginning of year data on students that effectively allows them to set student goals and quickly determine specific students who require additional support. Explore Empower references data on end of year performance to immediately introduce interventions for returning students with known gaps in proficiency at the start of each school year.

In addition to interim assessments each term in mathematics, ELA, social studies, and science, Explore Empower uses high quality mid- and end-of-unit assessments derived from the network’s curricular programs and aligned to the rigor of state standards. Teachers also administer frequent quizzes to routinely gather information on student mastery and identify skills or concepts to review to prepare students for benchmark assessments. At multiple points during each lesson, teachers circulate and confer with students to collect immediate data on misconceptions or knowledge and skill gaps and respond to demonstrated needs by adjusting instruction or assigning students to small groups for additional support on specific standards. As a result, teachers often differentiate instruction and make it responsive to emerging or continuing academic challenges.

Explore Schools implements a robust progress monitoring system through the use of biweekly assessments in mathematics and ELA. Leaders support teachers in responding to these data and adapting instruction as needed. Data dashboards broken out by school, grade, and subgroup enable network content and assessment directors to analyze performance trends, while the network shares class and student level data with school based instructional leaders to analyze specific strengths and weaknesses to address with teachers in coaching cohorts. During weekly professional learning community time, teachers work with leaders and peers to unpack trends and strengthen their capacity to analyze and respond to data. School-based academic directors and coordinators serve as coaches while also monitoring students struggling academically and providing additional targeted support at the individual level. As part of the evaluation process, teachers and leaders reflect on student outputs as measured by each quarter's data cycle and end of year measures and analyze student performance to determine the next steps in their professional development. The cumulative exam results are part of the annual teacher and leader evaluations, while coaching cycles incorporate real time formative data. The school regularly communicates academic data to families through ParentSquare, PowerSchool, phone calls, text messages from teachers, and conferences each term.

## CURRICULUM

Explore Empower implements a clear curricular framework to support teachers with instructional planning and delivery. The school uses Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts ("CKLA") in Kindergarten – 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, EL Education and Lavinia Group Close Reading in 3<sup>rd</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and Wilson's Just Words to provide additional reading support. For mathematics, the school uses LEAP Math supplemented with Do the Math to provide additional skills support. The network also uses resources from History Alive! by The Curriculum Institute ("TCI") and the DBQ Project for social studies at the middle school level to develop a rigorous writing focus across the humanities program.

Explore Empower leverages PhD Science, Amplify Science, and the New Visions living environment curricula to execute the science program. Teachers and leaders internalize the network-provided materials to understand the objective, essential points, and guiding questions while maintaining autonomy to adapt and personalize the content to meet specific student needs. Classroom observations generally demonstrate that teachers have a clear grasp of the lesson goals and activities and the tools to deliver instruction effectively. Teachers have all necessary materials and guiding documents to plan and present purposeful lessons in accordance with the curricular vision of the network. The network's scope and sequence for each content area includes flex days to address or reassess areas where students demonstrate gaps in fundamental knowledge or skills, and teachers review data following each lesson to make adjustments to instruction by previewing, reteaching, or incorporating necessary supplemental content.

Leaders and teachers reflect on the implementation of the programs annually to make adjustments to the curricular suite based on connections between student performance, teacher experience with the lessons, and any issues with the tools as written in order to update the materials for the upcoming year. For example, in response to feedback from teachers and student data, the network changed the mathematics scope and sequence in the 2023-24 school year to introduce specific mathematics concepts earlier and better align the progression of the curriculum to the conceptual developmental needs of students. Over the charter term, the network also audited the curricular programs to improve alignment and cultural responsiveness in service of their mission to develop the critical thinking skills students need to succeed in a college preparatory high school.

## PEDAGOGY

High quality instruction is evident throughout most Explore Empower lessons. Teachers deliver purposeful lessons with clear objectives aligned to state standards, and the school retains many experienced teachers who demonstrate high levels of content knowledge and abilities to effectively facilitate the nuances of the curricular programs. Many classrooms leverage an effective integrated co-teaching (“ICT”) model, in which one teacher leads a small group of students to support with specific knowledge or skill prerequisites while the other teacher simultaneously leads instruction for the rest of the classroom or attends to students during independent practice. Teachers use multiple modes to check for student understanding, including circulating to check for specific steps, conferencing with students, hand signals, choral responses, and listening in to student turn and talks, and often make adjustments to instruction to address emergent misconceptions.

During circulation routines, teachers use data collected to inform small student groupings. The combination of frequent checks for understanding and strategic ICT practices ensure that teachers hold all students to high standards for learning and engagement. Targeted, small group interventions are evident throughout the academic program, and teachers frequently respond to data collected daily in order to support students with specific needs during differentiated small group lessons. In some lessons, teachers include opportunities to exercise higher order thinking skills and engage in peer to peer discourse.

At the time of the visit, not all lessons challenged students to grapple with the learning tasks, particularly at the middle school level. Teachers sometimes provide supports before allowing students to tackle content independently, resulting in missed opportunities for students to explore new concepts and apply previously mastered skills. However, most classrooms include reference materials and anchor charts to support students in understanding the expectations for academic discourse, and teachers facilitate student to student engagement through hand signals, turn and talks, and sentence stems. In most lessons, teachers use effective classroom management techniques and across the school, there are consistent and intentional routines that allow students to focus on academic achievement. Teachers maximize learning time in most cases, and effective transitions and lesson pacing result in minimal interruptions due to behavior.

## INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Explore Empower has effective instructional leadership. The instructional leadership team at Explore Empower, consisting of two principals, academic directors, a special populations director, and special populations coordinator, holds teachers to high expectations tied to end of year performance goals. The school emphasizes a culture of coaching by providing frequent, consistent feedback to teachers. In support of this effort, all teachers receive weekly observations and check-ins with coaches at different tiers of intensity based on observation performance. High performing teachers have the opportunity to serve as teacher leaders to support the facilitation of professional learning communities and peer coaching. New teachers benefit from onboarding and guidance from a peer mentor to supplement the weekly coaching cycle.

The instructional leadership team demonstrates Explore Empower’s commitment to continuous growth by providing multiple opportunities for teachers to receive feedback, and the school places a strong focus on data driven instruction. Instructional coaches provide feedback to teachers on lesson plans modified during intellectual preparation meetings prior to lesson delivery, and academic leaders enter classroom observation notes and action steps into an online portal for teachers to review and implement within subsequent lessons.

Leaders and teachers use student performance data to plan the next steps to improve student learning, and school leaders design purposeful professional development opportunities in response to data trends. To maximize the impact of professional development, school-based instructional leaders monitor the implementation of directives while differentiating content based on individual teacher needs.

### AT-RISK PROGRAM

Explore Empower meets the needs of at-risk students through clear identification procedures, ongoing staff member collaboration, a flexible tier of interventions, and robust progress monitoring systems. The school provides comprehensive programming to meet the needs of English language learners (“ELLs”), students with disabilities, and students struggling academically. The school administers multiple universal screeners in ELA and mathematics at the beginning of each year and regular assessments over the course of the school year to gauge students’ progress toward grade level proficiency.

Over the charter term, the school codified and refined its response to intervention (“RTI”) program and significantly improved its data analytics functionality to target and evaluate the efficacy of remediation for individual students. These data, in addition to formative data and work samples collected during lessons, informs tier 1 supports within general education classrooms such as small group reteaching. Students who score significantly below grade level in either subject receive tier 2 support from learning specialists in their specific areas of need. Classroom teachers and learning specialists collaborate to monitor ongoing assessment data and track students’ progress toward individual goals and potentially identify needs for more intensive tier 3 services. After six to eight weeks of intensive intervention, the school refers students who have not responded to intervention to the district’s Committee on Special Education (“CSE”) for further evaluation.

Explore Empower also offers a daily intervention block in which faculty reteach content at the whole group level based on classwide areas of struggle from daily and weekly assessments. In accordance with students’ individualized education programs (“IEPs”), Explore Empower provides ICT classes, special education teacher support services (“SETSS”), and in-house mandated counseling to students with disabilities. The school contracts with third party providers for students’ related services, which include physical, occupational, and speech therapies. Explore Empower’s ELL teachers provide ELLs with integrated language acquisition support through a combination of push-in and pull-out services. The school uses the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners (“NYSITELL”) and New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (“NYSESLAT”) results to determine the frequency, group size, and goals for sessions. ELL teachers also use the WIDA ACCESS assessment for ELLs several times a year to evaluate students’ progress toward English language development and fluency, which includes specific testing for reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Recognizing a difficulty with fully staffing ELL teaching positions across its campuses, Explore Schools provides Explore Empower with additional professional development to strengthen teachers’ ability to incorporate fluency building strategies into classroom instruction.

### ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Explore Empower has an administrative structure in place that allows for effective delivery of the education program. Leaders ensure teachers have what they need to carry out the academic program. As such, leaders ensure instructional resources are readily available, as well as a clear outline of roles and responsibilities for both instructional and non-instructional staff members. Staff members willingly support the school in

areas outside of their main roles, including teachers participating in student recruitment canvassing in the neighborhood. Explore Empower, and all schools in the network, frequently hire teachers from within their neighborhood of location and maintain strong staff member retention rates, which further supports family recruitment efforts in the geographic area of each school.

Explore Empower came close to meeting its enrollment targets for the year. The school's strategies for recruiting prospective families demonstrates its responsive approach to student recruitment. In response to the changing demographics of the community, recruitment advertisements and events are translated into Haitian Creole, Spanish, and other languages as needed. The education corporation's high teacher retention rate across Kindergarten – 8<sup>th</sup> grade allows for the continuity of the Explore Schools culture for all students.

Explore Empower's culture is focused on developing the social emotional skills of all students. During this charter term, the school adopted the Responsive Classroom model, which uses restorative practices to inform student discipline. The Responsive Classroom model places a strong emphasis on age-appropriate structures that reward and reinforce positive behaviors while maintaining a focus on developing the social and emotional skills of all students. Both teachers and parents shared that Explore Empower's current approach to behavior management demonstrates a focus on building a sense of community at school and incentivizing positive behaviors.

---

## BOARD OVERSIGHT & GOVERNANCE

The Explore Schools board of trustees works effectively to achieve the schools' Accountability Plan goals and mission of preparing students for success in college preparatory high schools. Leveraging its stable membership, deep institutional knowledge, and professional expertise across Kindergarten – 12<sup>th</sup> grade education, finance, talent development, non-profit management, accounting, and human resources, the board drives the schools toward continuous improvement in their academic, financial, and organizational performance.

Board members receive and analyze an array of schoolwide and disaggregated data via monthly dashboards that include assessment, enrollment, disciplinary, budgetary, and staff member retention information. During this charter term, the board engaged in a strategic and comprehensive national search for the network's new chief executive officer. After identifying an internal candidate as the best choice, it shifted its focus to supporting the leadership transition to maintain the organization's stability and positive culture. The board annually self-evaluates its strengths and weaknesses, engages in retreats, and assesses the value of services the Explore network provides against an array of end-of-year measures.

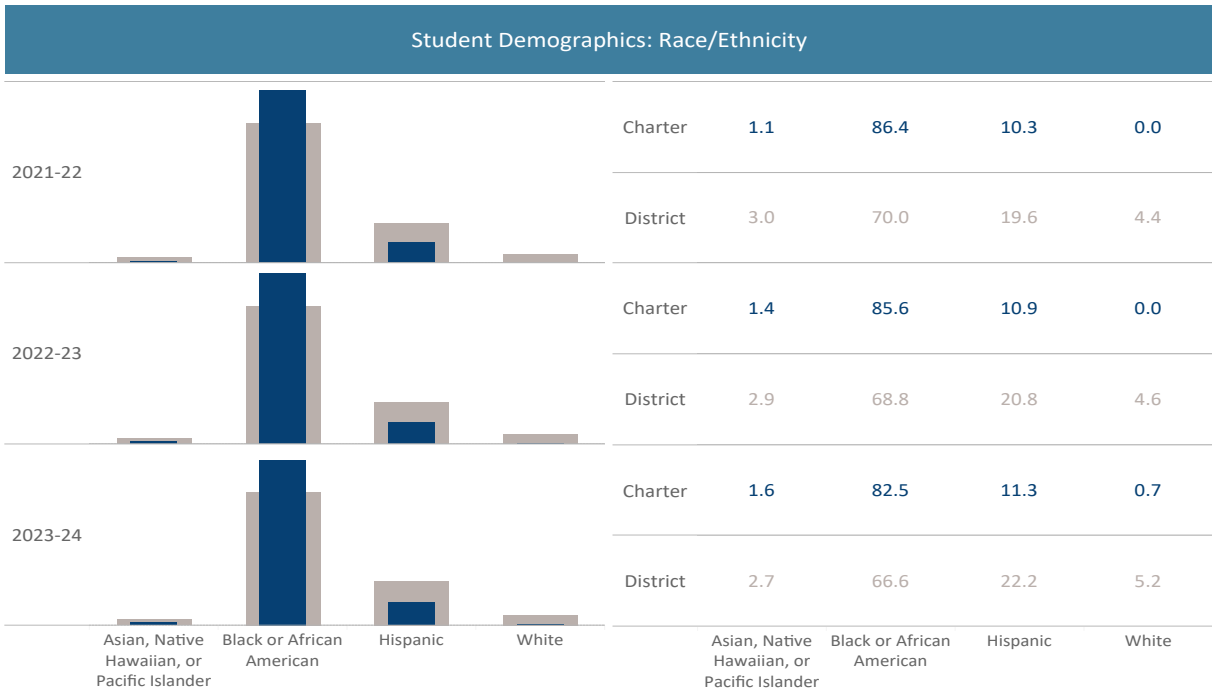
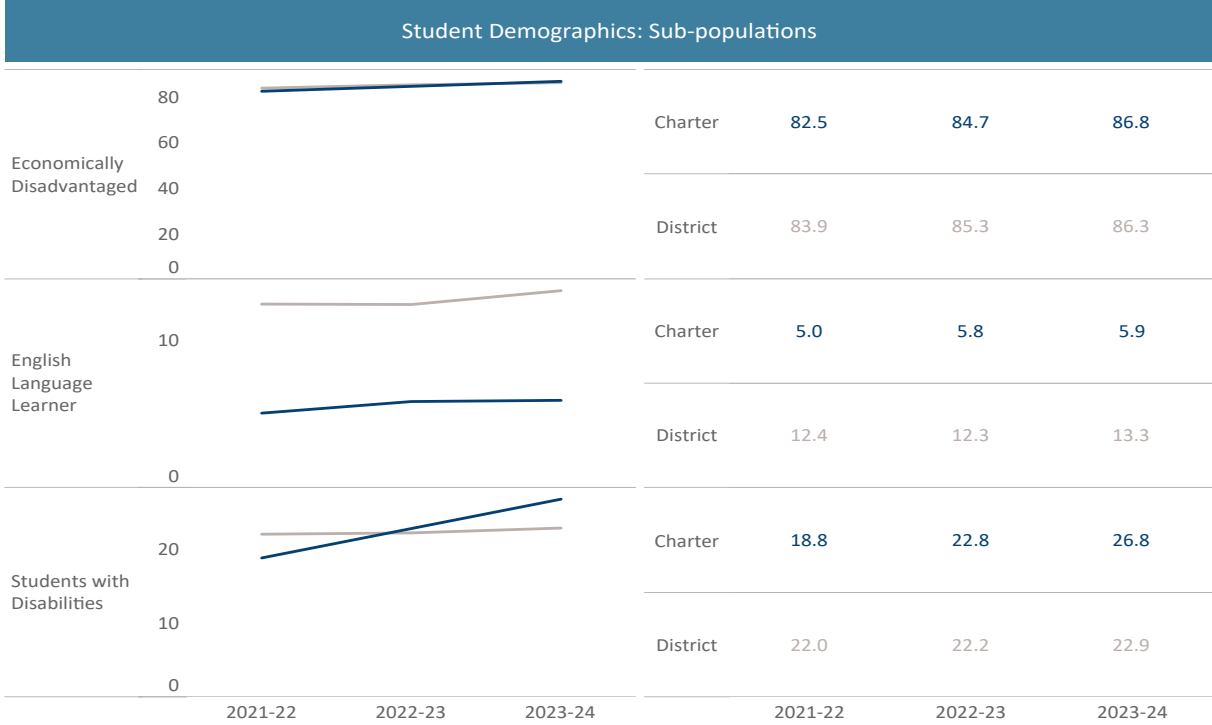
Looking forward, the board articulates an ongoing commitment to retaining top talent, enhancing students' experience and academic outcomes, and strengthening family engagement. The latter priority includes plans to add a parent trustee seat to strengthen feedback mechanisms between the board and school community.

---



Explore Empower Charter School

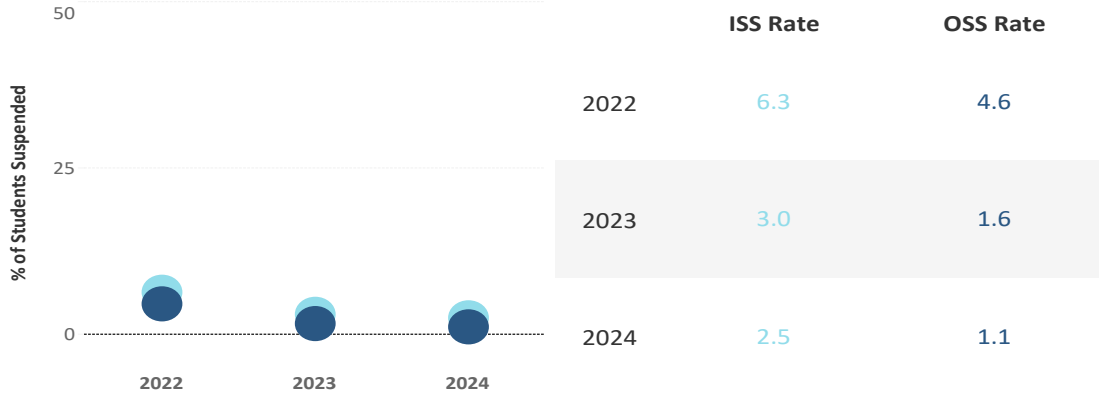
Brooklyn CSD 17



\* Data reported in these charts reflect BEDS day enrollment counts as reported by the NYSED.



**Explore Empower Charter School**



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

	2022	2023	2024
	0	0	0

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

## FISCAL BENCHMARKS SUMMARY



### DOES THE EDUCATION CORPORATION OPERATE PURSUANT TO A FISCAL PLAN WITH REALISTIC BUDGETS THAT THE EDUCATION CORPORATION MONITORS AND ADJUSTS WHEN APPROPRIATE?

*The education corporation operates pursuant to a long-range financial plan in which the education corporation creates realistic budgets that it monitors and adjusts when appropriate. The following elements are generally present:*

INDICATORS	EVIDENT?
The education corporation has clear budgetary objectives and budget preparation procedures for the charter.	+
Board members, charter leadership, and staff members contribute to the budget process for the charter, as appropriate.	+
The education corporation frequently compares its long-range fiscal plan for the charter to actual progress and adjusts it to meet changing conditions.	+
The education corporation routinely analyzes charter budget variances; the education corporation board addresses material variances and makes necessary revisions.	+
Actual expenses are equal to, or less than, actual revenue with no material exceptions.	-
Explore Schools experienced a budget deficit during the last charter term primarily due to low enrollment. The education corporation outlined a plan to address the deficit in the next charter term.	

### DOES THE EDUCATION CORPORATION MAINTAIN APPROPRIATE INTERNAL CONTROLS AND PROCEDURES?

*The education corporation maintains appropriate internal controls and procedures, which the charter implements. The following elements are generally present:*

INDICATORS	EVIDENT?
The education corporation has a history of sound fiscal policies, procedures and practices, and maintains appropriate internal controls at the charter.	+
The most recent education corporation audit report, which covers the fiscal operations of the charter, was free of any significant deficiencies or material weaknesses in internal controls.	+

"+" : This indicator is generally present.  
"-": This indicator is generally not present.  
"P" : The education corporation is progressing toward this indicator being present.  
"N/A" : This indicator is not applicable.



INDICATORS	EVIDENT?
The education corporation reviews and updates the Financial Policies and Procedures manual (“FPPM”), which covers the charter on a regular basis. The Institute recommends that the FPPM be reviewed and updated annually.	<b>JUNE 2018</b>

## DOES THE EDUCATION CORPORATION COMPLY WITH FINANCIAL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS?

*The education corporation has complied with financial reporting requirements by providing the SUNY Trustees and the NYSED with required financial reports that are on time, complete and follow generally accepted accounting principles. The following reports, which include information about the charter, will have generally been filed in a timely, accurate and complete manner:*

INDICATORS	EVIDENT?
Annual financial statement audit reports, including federal Single Audit report, if applicable.	+
Annual budgets.	+
Un-audited quarterly reports of income, expenses, and enrollment.	+
Bi-monthly enrollment reports to the sending districts and, if applicable, to NYSED including proper documentation regarding the level of special education services provided to students.	+
Grant expenditure reports.	+

## DOES THE EDUCATION CORPORATION MAINTAIN ADEQUATE FINANCIAL RESOURCES TO ENSURE STABLE OPERATIONS?

*The education corporation maintains adequate financial resources for the charter to ensure stable operations. Critical financial needs of the charter are not dependent on variable income (grants, donations, and fundraising). The following elements are generally present:*

INDICATORS	EVIDENT?
The education corporation maintains sufficient cash on hand to pay current bills for the charter and those that are due shortly.	+
The education corporation maintains adequate liquid reserves to fund expenses in the event of income loss (generally 30 days).	+

## APPENDIX D: FISCAL BENCHMARKS SUMMARY

INDICATORS	EVIDENT?
The education corporation prepares and monitors cash flow projections for the charter.	+
If the education corporation includes philanthropy in its budget for the charter, the education corporation monitors progress toward its development goals on a periodic basis.	N/A
If necessary, the education corporation pursues district state aid intercepts with the NYSED to ensure adequate per pupil funding for the charter.	N/A
The education corporation accumulates unrestricted net assets that are equal to or exceed two percent of the charter’s operating budget for the upcoming year.	+
The education corporation is in compliance with all loan covenants related to the charter.	+



SUNY Charter Schools Institute  
H. Carl McCall SUNY Building  
353 Broadway  
Albany, NY 12246

518.445.4250  
[www.newyorkcharters.org](http://www.newyorkcharters.org)

