

THE SUNY CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE

SCHOOL EVALUATION REPORT
**NURSES MIDDLE COLLEGE CHARTER
HIGH SCHOOL - CAPITAL REGION**

VISIT DATE: FEBRUARY 4, 2025

REPORT DATE: MARCH 17, 2025

SUNY Charter Schools Institute

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Charter Schools Institute
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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This School Evaluation Report offers an analysis of evidence collected during the school visit to Nurses Middle College Charter High School- Capital Region (“Nurses MC- CR”) on February 4, 2025. 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.

The Appendix 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.

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





CHARTER BACKGROUND

NURSES MIDDLE COLLEGE CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL - CAPITAL REGION

199 Washington Ave, Rensselaer, NY 12144 | **Grades: 9-10** | Rensselaer City School District*



MISSION

The mission of the Nurses Middle College Charter High School – Capital Region is to prepare a diverse group of students to become the highly educated and professional nursing workforce of the future.

CURRENT CHARTER

Opened: 2023-24

Serves: 9th–10th

Chartered Enrollment:
245

Charter Expiration:
July 21, 2028

KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS

Nursing college and career preparation;	■
Applied learning; and,	■
Personal development.	■

* Chartered to Operate in Albany City School District, Temporarily Approved to Operate in Rensselaer City School District through July 31, 2025.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The SUNY Trustees approved the charter for Nurses MC-CR in October 2021. The school opened in the fall of 2023. Nurses MC-CR contracts with the charter management organization (“CMO”) Nurses MC (“Nurses MC”, the “CMO,” or “network”), a Rhode Island-based Internal Revenue Code 510(c)(3) non-profit organization. In addition to Nurses MC-CR, the network supports an operating charter school in Rhode Island, and a new charter school in Nashville, Tennessee which is planned to open in Fall 2025.

Nurses MC-CR is in the second year of its initial charter term and has not yet begun to establish instructional and operational systems necessary to deliver an adequate education program. After weathering multiple leadership transitions through its first year of operation and into the second year, the school has hired a new executive director and director of teaching and learning who are working to establish systems for the delivery of the academic program. Despite the efforts of the leadership team, the school has poor quality teaching across classrooms, critically low enrollment with ongoing attrition, low student attendance, critical vacancies for instructional staff, and a pervasive culture of low expectations. The CMO is contracted to provide support in the areas of school leader development, curriculum and instruction, business operations, finance, human resources, and student recruitment and marketing, however, the network supports have not yet been effective in developing systems to deliver an academic program aligned with the school’s mission and key design elements.

With staff members stretched beyond their capacity and ineffective support from the CMO, there is a lack of urgency to assess programmatic challenges and implement an effective plan to improve the quality of education and services that was promised to students. The low quality of the academic program on the ground merits an urgent turnaround plan, which was not evident at the time of the Institute’s review. Despite consistent challenges with staff turnover and vacancies, the board, school based leaders, and CMO have yet to develop and implement a strategy to recruit, train, and retain staff. The school’s mathematics teacher left in February 2025, adding to the existing vacancies. As a result of frequent need to cover teaching responsibilities, leaders are not consistently able to manage day-to-day operations and provide sustained instructional coaching. Turnover further hampers the school’s ability to maintain institutional knowledge necessary to conduct long-term planning and create consistency for students.

The adult and student culture at Nurses MC-CR is not focused on academic achievement. In fall 2024, the school experienced substantial behavior challenges that resulted in the network and school contracting with an external consultant to develop and implement a culture reset plan. The school increased staffing for security and behavior management and codified a discipline system with clear consequences. While leaders and teachers report that this discipline system has resulted in an improved school climate, hallways and classrooms at Nurses MC-CR were unfocused during the Institute’s visit. During most lessons, there were frequent disruptions without consequence and off-task behavior often went unacknowledged. Further, student attendance is low and tardiness is pervasive. On the day of the visit, 55 students were present of 73 on the total roster resulting in a 75% attendance rate. Many students arrived late, which disrupted lessons.

Instruction across classrooms is low quality. Teachers do not deliver purposeful lessons with clear objectives and fail to maintain classrooms focused on academic achievement. Large proportions of students opt out of participating in classwork, and teachers do not make sufficient attempts to redirect students who are off task. As a result, student

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

engagement is low across all classrooms. When teachers attempt to check for understanding or ask higher order thinking questions, students generally do not respond. While there is a low din of noise and disruption in most rooms, there is very little student voice related to academic content.

In summary, Nurses MC-CR has yet to establish an effective academic program and faces critical fiscal challenges as a result of low enrollment and retention.

BENCHMARK SUMMARY

QUALITATIVE BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

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

ASSESSMENT

Nurses MC-CR lacks a comprehensive assessment system to improve instructional effectiveness. The management agreement between the school and network delineates that the school is responsible for developing and administering assessments, which the network is responsible for reporting on progress of each student by analyzing assessment results. While the school is improving its timely administration of assessments, teachers and leaders do not have systems to analyze and respond to data to meet students' needs. The persistent challenges with data accessibility hinder leaders' ability to evaluate the program to make necessary changes and prevent teachers from making effective adjustments in their day-to-day instruction.

Teachers administer formative assessments aligned to the school's curriculum but the school did not have systems in place to implement standards-based grading through the PowerSchool platform for much of the first semester. Teachers developed their own summative course exams in the absence of guidance from school or network based instructional leaders. As a result, the validity and reliability of assessments are inconsistent. The school has not yet implemented consistent procedures to score and analyze assessments, and as a result, teachers are limited in their ability to use data to adjust classroom instruction or modify lesson plans.

CURRICULUM

Nurses MC-CR has not yet developed elements of a curricular system adequate to support teachers in their instructional planning. The network team provides a standards-aligned curriculum for each subject area, including American Reading Company for English language arts ("ELA"), Agile Minds for mathematics, and internally developed resources for science and social studies courses. The school provides teachers with a framework to inform lesson planning including supporting documents such as curriculum maps and scope and sequence overviews. Some teachers benefit from external trainings by representatives of the specific curricular programs. However, the amount of teacher modification required to translate the network's resources into daily lesson plans and classroom materials varies significantly across subjects. As a result, the quality of lesson plans and student-facing assignments is inconsistent. To mitigate these challenges, instructional leaders introduced a standardized lesson plan template to support teachers in bridging the curricular materials and daily lessons. Despite these efforts, the school has not provided the support necessary to account for variation in teacher experience and lessons generally remain low quality. The school has not yet developed systems to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of the curriculum based on the needs of leaders, teachers, and students.

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

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

BENCHMARK SUMMARY

The school is misaligned in executing the mission and key design alignments as evidenced by the lack of nursing content embedded in the curricular program. Teachers did not effectively embed nursing content into their lessons. While the board and CMO indicate content should be taught through the nursing thematic lens, the Institute did not observe evidence of this across classroom observations and lesson plans. The school lacks clear expectations for what high quality lesson planning entails and does not implement a systematic review of teachers' curricular planning to ensure that the nursing focus is incorporated into plans.

PEDAGOGY

Instruction across Nurses MC-CR classrooms is poor quality. While the school has somewhat improved its culture from the fall according to leaders and teachers as a result of its culture reset plan, student behavior remains disruptive, and teachers do not implement effective classroom management resulting in low levels of student engagement with academic content.

Teachers do not deliver purposeful lessons and activities do not consistently align to stated objectives. In some classrooms, teachers reference rigorous learning objectives but provide tasks and activities misaligned to the lesson's aims. In other lessons, instruction lacked any clear goal, and teachers did not deliver directions to support students in accessing material. As a result, the majority of students do not engage with lesson material, and teachers fail to redirect students who explicitly opt out of participation in instruction. In instances when the Institute observed teachers presenting a potentially rigorous task, teachers did not hold students accountable for the stated work product. Many students remain off task while teachers deliver instructions and are consequently unprepared to work independently on lesson assignments.

In most classrooms, teachers do not implement effective checks for understanding and provide no opportunities for higher order thinking. The majority of questions reflect clarification of routines and procedural tasks rather than understanding of academic content. When teachers circulate rooms, they do not gather information to make strategic changes to instruction or ask whole class questions based on misconceptions. In most classrooms, teachers do not effectively check if students understand directions, which results in delayed delivery of academic content.

Across classrooms, the environment is not focused on academic achievement and teachers do not successfully redirect student behavior. In most lessons, teachers do not address frequent student disruptions and struggle to re-engage students who are off task. The presence of laptops in classrooms provides students with further ability to disengage from the teacher's instruction. Transitions between lessons are slow and disorderly, as are transitions between lesson activities. In some classrooms, teachers spend excessive time on procedural directions, low level tasks, and ineffective reminders about expectations. As a result, lesson pacing is slow. In other classrooms, teachers deliver lesson content without adjustment despite a low din of noise and virtually no student engagement. The school's overall poor quality instruction is particularly concerning given the small class sizes resulting from its low enrollment.

BENCHMARK SUMMARY

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Nurses MC-CR is beginning to implement instructional leadership practices to better support teaching and learning, but has been significantly hindered in establishing effective systems due to multiple leadership transitions. The school hired its director of teaching and learning in November 2024 following the departure of the principal in the first weeks of the school year. The director of teaching and learning is in the early stages of establishing an observation and feedback cycle after conducting initial coaching meetings with teachers to assess individual needs and schoolwide areas of weakness. As a result, the school does not yet provide sustained, systemic, and effective coaching and supervision to improve instructional effectiveness.

The school has yet to establish an aligned vision of high expectations for performance or academic rigor. While the school has some coaching structures in place, it is unclear how network and school leaders collaborate on implementing key instructional design elements and determine pedagogical priorities. The school lacks a process to define and communicate its instructional model, set performance targets, and evaluate the effectiveness of instructional plans. The school lacks documentation of its teacher development systems and is only beginning to develop processes for delivering feedback on curricular planning.

While instructional leaders conduct teacher evaluations using defined criteria and provide some support through classroom observations, it remains unclear how these evaluations effectively improve teaching practices given persistent turnover in school leadership and teaching staff. Leaders have not yet determined if the evaluations accurately identify teachers' strengths and growth areas. Further, while instructional leaders conduct observations, they do not yet have the capacity to hold teachers accountable for the changes necessary to improve their instruction.

AT-RISK PROGRAM

Nurses MP-CR does not meet the educational needs of at-risk students. The school does not have comprehensive systems for identifying, supporting, and monitoring at-risk students, including those with disabilities, English language learners ("ELLs"), and those struggling academically. There are no structured data systems, procedures, referral processes, or monitoring tools to track the progress of students. While a new intervention period has been implemented recently, there is not a schoolwide vision for meeting the needs at-risk students and supporting teachers to serve all students effectively, despite demonstrated academic gaps in the student population. The school currently enrolls zero students with individualized education programs ("IEPs") and two ELLs, who it supports with a digital program during advisory and translated classroom materials. The school's guidance counselor and director of teaching and learning communicate with teachers about implementing accommodations and modifications for students with 504 plans.

Beginning in the second semester of the 2024-25 school year, the school introduced an advisory block during which a small group of students receive online academic interventions based on their performance on the STAR diagnostic and course grades; ELL students receive online language instruction; and teachers deliver tutoring to all other students in rotating subject areas. Despite the potential of this structure to better serve students

BENCHMARK SUMMARY

at-risk of academic failure, leaders do not provide teachers with sufficient planning time or guidance to make tutoring purposeful, nor does the school maintain data tracking systems to allow teachers to target specific standards-aligned needs based on student performance during these periods.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Even though the school is in its second year of instruction and had a planning year, Nurses MC-CR is in the early stages of developing an organizational structure sufficient to support the delivery of its programming. The school's recently established administrative structure is comprised of school leaders new to the organization. The school's CMO, which sometimes has dedicated staff present at the Capital Region school, had limited involvement in day-to-day school operations at the time of the Institute's visit. School leaders are working to codify systems and the organizational structure, but lines of accountability are blurred, and administrative roles and responsibilities are undefined across the organization. This was evident in the operational chaos caused by recent changes to course schedules. While well-intentioned, the changes were implemented with insufficient communication across administrative staff members, teachers, and students, severely impacting the school's academic program. The school's miscommunication with staff, teachers, students, and families about the school's planned relocation, as well as the underdevelopment of school systems, protocols, practices, policies, and procedures, evidences a lack of capacity to plan and implement systems to carry out the academic program.

The school has made progress in establishing a clear discipline system which teachers report mitigates previous safety concerns. As part of its culture reset plan, the organization contracted with an external consultant to codify formal behavior plan with a consequence ladder and embedded strategies for teachers to rely on in their classrooms, despite a school culture system with social emotional supports and interventions being proposed with the original application.. The school provided professional development on implementing these classroom management systems and leaders coach teachers on specific intervention strategies. Through these initiatives, leaders and teachers report that the school has improved its behavior and culture though it still faces declining enrollment. Despite the reported improvements, the culture evident in classrooms at the time of the visit was disruptive and not conducive to delivering effective instruction and did not display the school's purported key design element of embodying the Pillars of Nursing: scholarship, character, compassion & empathy, and professionalism

Nurses MC-CR is developing procedures for monitoring progress toward student enrollment targets but recruitment efforts lack systematic analysis to make data-driven changes. While increasing recruitment and enrollment is a stated priority across all levels of the organization, it remains unclear how school leaders, network staff, and the board work collaboratively to address the declining student enrollment and low number of student applications. The school does not have systems in place to regularly monitor or evaluate its programs and does not collect or analyze data in a way that would provide actionable insights to its leaders.

BENCHMARK SUMMARY

BOARD OVERSIGHT & GOVERNANCE

The Nurses MC- CR board is developing its capacity to provide the oversight necessary for the school to become an academic success. Board members possess skills relevant to the school's unique mission and key design elements and are seeking to recruit new members with greater expertise in Kindergarten – 12th grade education. Although the board seeks out some training opportunities, trustees must work with greater urgency to improve their governance capacity in order to oversee the school and evaluate the network services.

The board requests information from the school to inform its progress monitoring and decision making. However, the board does not conduct strategic planning that allows it to effectively triage priorities for immediate action and long-term projects. At the time of the Institute's visit, the board identified maintaining financial stability, securing a future facility, recruiting and retaining students, and improving academics as its primary areas of focus. In contrast to the prior year, the school's executive director provides regular, detailed reporting in a consistent format. While the board receives ample information to make decisions, it does not hold its CMO accountable for providing the necessary supports to make continued progress on its priorities.

The board is reflective about the challenges that staff transitions cause the school but largely relies on the CMO for staff recruitment, hiring, and the management of its personnel. Given the thin organizational structure and history of turnover, the board lacks planning for staffing contingencies that could hamstring the school's ability to deliver instruction on a daily basis. While trustees appreciate the severity of the challenges and reflect on the necessity for greater supports from the CMO, they do not conduct a formal evaluation of the CMO or implement processes to evaluate the effectiveness of its services or required performance.

Nurses MC - CR

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APPENDICES

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NURSES MIDDLE COLLEGE CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL - CAPITAL REGION BOARD OF TRUSTEES¹

CHAIR	TRUSTEES
Dr. Susan Birkhead	Dr. Mark M. Little
TREASURER	Maxine M. Smalling
Deborah Elliott	Dr. Latasha Powell
SECRETARY	
Mary Therriault	

CHARTER CHARACTERISTICS

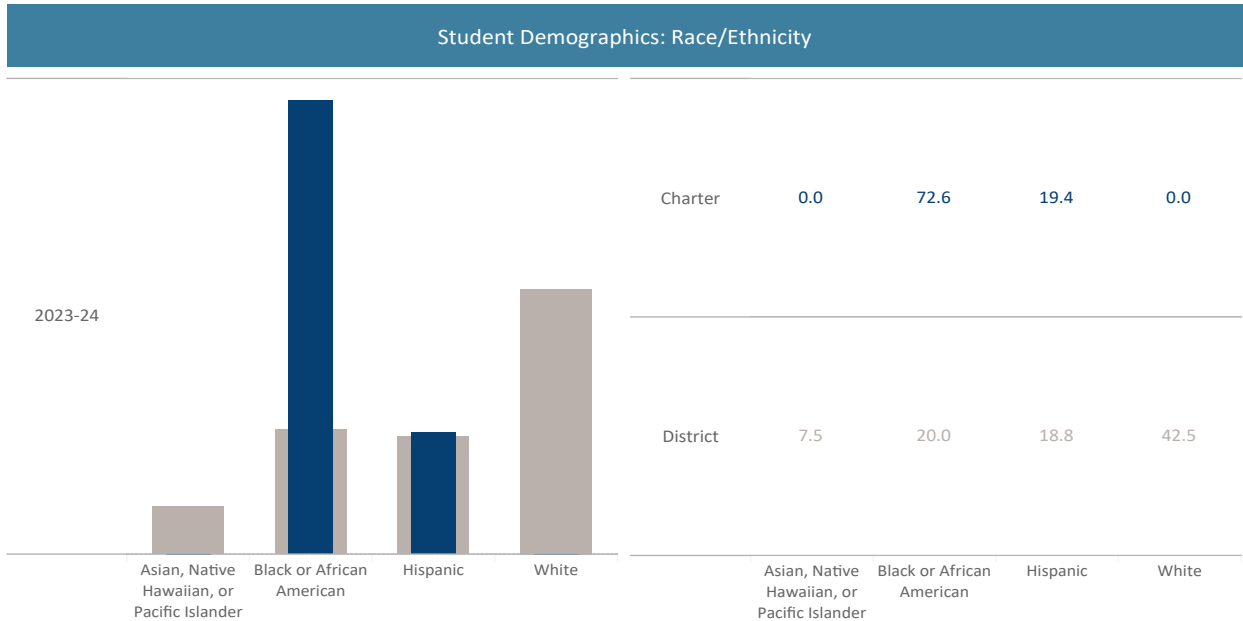
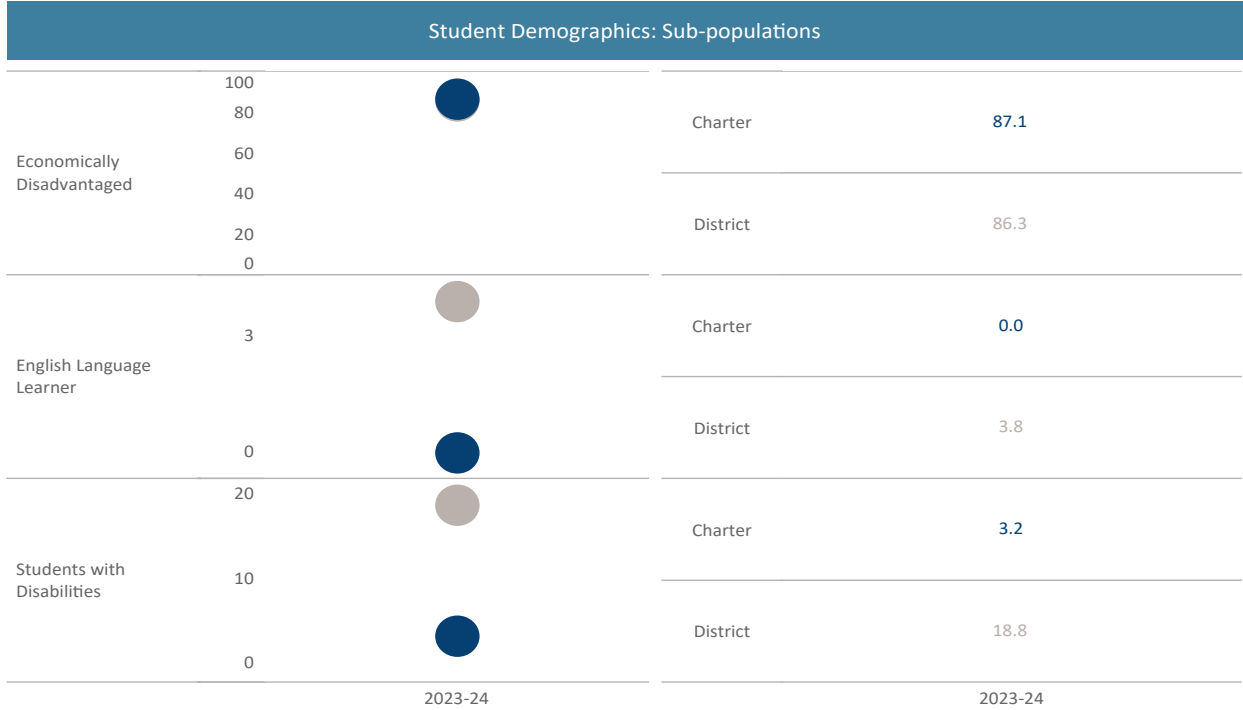
SCHOOL YEAR	CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT ²	ACTUAL AS A PERCENTAGE OF CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	GRADES SERVED
2023-24	130	44	34%	9
2024-25	245	90	37%	9-10

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.)



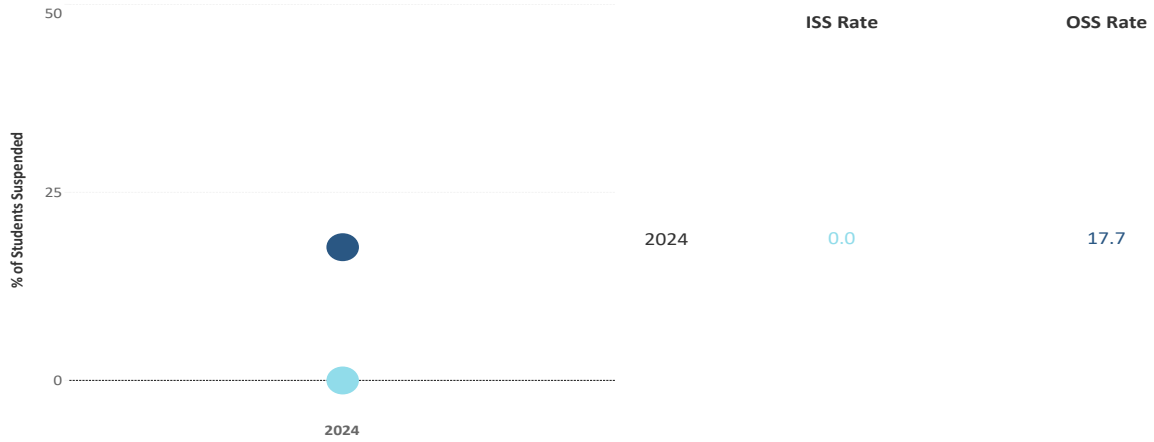
Nurses Middle College Charter School



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



Nurses Middle College 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

2024

N/A

0

Nurses Middle College Charter School's Enrollment and Retention Status: 2023-24

	Target	Charter
economically disadvantaged	60.2	87.1
enrollment English language learners	4.5	0.0
students with disabilities	13.3	3.2

* 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
2023-24	First Year School Visit	January 31, 2024
2024-25	School Evaluation Visit	February 4, 2025

CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

DATE(S) OF REVIEW	EVALUATION TEAM MEMBERS	TITLE
February 4, 2025	Sinnjinn Bucknell	Managing Director for Accountability
	Katy Clayton	School Evaluator
	Kennesha Kelly	External Consultant

CHARTER CYCLE CONTEXT

CHARTER TERM	ACCOUNTABILITY PERIOD	ANTICIPATED RENEWAL VISIT
Initial	Second of Five Years	Fall 2027

