



# First Year School Evaluation Report New York City Charter School of the Arts

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# INTRODUCTION AND REPORT FORMAT

## INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the SUNY Charter Schools Institute's (the "Institute's") observations and findings from its June 1, 2017, first year school evaluation visit to the New York City Charter School of the Arts ("City School of the Arts").

## REPORT FORMAT

As with all SUNY authorized charter schools, on a periodic basis throughout the term of the school's charter, the Institute conducts a number of formal site visits. The Institute reports in writing to the school on data gathered during these visits. Cumulatively, the information in reports such as this and those issued in later years, forms the foundation of qualitative data on the school's effectiveness. At the conclusion of the school's charter term, the Institute provides the State University of New York Board of Trustees (the "SUNY Trustees") an analysis of the school's performance over the term of its charter that includes this qualitative information. The Institute makes a renewal recommendation for the school based on two components: the school's attainment of its Accountability Plan goals and evidence of the quality of the school's educational program collected during school evaluation visits.

At renewal, the Institute evaluates the academic, organizational, legal, and fiscal aspects of the school's program using the State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks (the "SUNY Renewal Benchmarks"; see attachment). For formal school evaluation visits conducted prior to renewal, the Institute focuses on specific qualitative benchmarks that provide a fixed standard for determining the quality of the academic program as the school progresses toward renewal.

Although the information provided in this report is not prescriptive, the Institute would expect school leadership to review thoroughly the issues highlighted below and, to the extent helpful, use them to assist in guiding the school's academic program or other aspects of the school. In this regard, please be aware that although the Institute takes very seriously the conclusions provided, staff members are cognizant of the fact that a one-day site visit may not yield information on all facets of a school's program.

### BACKGROUND

The SUNY Trustees approved the charter for City School of the Arts on October 15, 2015. The school opened its doors in the fall of 2016, serving 98 students in 6<sup>th</sup> grade during the 2016-17 school year. Having received more applications for enrollment than seats available for the 2017-18 school year, City School of the Arts held its enrollment lottery on April 9, 2017, and established active waitlists for 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade. The school currently operates in privately leased space at 25 Pine Street, New York, NY, within New York City Community School District (“CSD”) 2. Due to a need for additional space, it will move to co-located space next year at 440 West 53<sup>rd</sup> Street, New York, NY, also in CSD 2. At scale, City School of the Arts will serve 306 students in 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grades in this charter term.

The school’s mission statement states:

**The mission of New York City Charter School of the Arts is to inspire a diverse community of young people to engage with the arts as a pathway to rich and rigorous academic scholarship and a creative, purposeful life.**

City School of the Arts offers integrated English language arts (“ELA”) and social studies instruction through double period humanities blocks each day using a teacher-designed humanities curriculum. The school implements the Connected Mathematics Project 3 (“CMP3”) mathematics curriculum, an inquiry-based program that emphasizes problem-solving skills and real-world applications. The FOSS program, which focuses on hands-on activities for students, comprises the school’s science curriculum. In keeping with its mission, the school infuses the arts throughout the curriculum with the intent of supporting students in making connections between artistic and academic content. All students receive instruction in piano as well as visual arts and dance classes.

City School of the Arts delivers special education services to students via integrated co-teaching (“ICT”) classrooms, in which a general education teacher and special education teacher provide instruction jointly. The school also provides special education teacher support services (“SETSS”) and related services as mandated by students’ Individualized Education Programs (“IEPs”). A student support team (“SST”), which consists of the principal, dean of arts integration and culture, social worker, and director of student supports, meets regularly to discuss students who are at risk academically. Each SST member is assigned a student and takes responsibility for tracking his/her progress and determining if additional interventions are necessary. City School of the Arts provides its sole English language learner (“ELL”) with some language supports in the ICT classroom, but at the time of the Institute’s visit, the school did not have a compliant ELL program.

Pursuant to the Institute’s inspection of City School of the Arts at the above address on August 22, 2016, (and documentation provided to or inspected by the Institute at that visit and prior/post thereto), the Institute determined that New York City Charter School of the Arts (the “Education Corporation”) had completed substantially all of the prior actions required of it as defined in the Charter Agreement between the Education Corporation and the SUNY Trustees (the “Charter Agreement”) for the operation of the school. Therefore, per Section 3.1 of the Charter Agreement, the Institute permitted the Education Corporation to provide instruction at the school to students in accordance with the plan provided in the Charter Agreement.

## QUALITATIVE EDUCATION BENCHMARKS CONCLUSIONS

The SUNY Renewal Benchmarks, grounded in the body of research from the Center for Urban Studies at Harvard University,<sup>1</sup> 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 describe the elements an effective school must have in place at the time of renewal.<sup>2</sup>

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

### SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1B:

**Does the school have an assessment system that improves instructional effectiveness and student learning?**

*City School of the Arts is developing systems to gather assessment data to improve student learning. The school has established clear procedures for interim assessments; however, leaders recognize a need to establish systematic processes for formative data collection and adjusting instruction.*

- City School of the Arts regularly administers standardized assessments. The school uses interim assessments from the Achievement Network (“ANet”) four times a year for ELA and mathematics. Teachers create unit assessments to assess standards taught, including arts integration. For example, students read a passage, write a response, and provide a critique of a piece of artwork that relates to the unit's theme. The school administers a school environment survey through Panorama to gather data on students' perceptions of safety and culture within the school. Notably, the school is preparing students to take the New York State School Music Association's (“NYSSMA”) piano assessment in June.
- The school makes assessment results accessible to teachers, school leaders, and board members. Teachers utilize academic data reports through the ANet website, and leaders disaggregate data from Panorama by student subgroups. Leaders present board members with data regularly at board meetings, including enrollment, discipline, and achievement data.
- Teachers at City School of the Arts do not regularly use assessment data to adjust instruction. While the school has a robust process for creating action plans based on ANet assessment data, teachers do not have systematic processes to utilize formative data in classrooms. Teachers do not consistently use informal checks for understanding or formal protocols for exit tickets to inform small group instruction, devise lesson differentiation, or make adjustments to scope and sequence documents.

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<sup>1</sup> An extensive body of research identifying and confirming the correlates of effective schools exists dating back four decades. Selected sources include: [www.mes.org/correlates.html](http://www.mes.org/correlates.html); [http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/dobbie\\_fryer\\_revision\\_final.pdf](http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/dobbie_fryer_revision_final.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Additional details regarding the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks, including greater specificity as to what the Institute looks for at each school that may demonstrate attainment of the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks, is available at: <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/suny-renewal-benchmarks/>.

# QUALITATIVE EDUCATION BENCHMARKS CONCLUSIONS

## SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1C:

### Does the school's curriculum support teachers in their instructional planning?

*City School of the Arts is developing a curriculum that supports teachers in their planning and delivery of instruction. Teachers are creating a humanities curriculum that incorporates ELA and history learning with a focused integration of the arts and social activism. Leaders are reflective of the curricula's first year of implementation to make adjustments for next year.*

- City School of the Arts has sufficient curricular documents, including curriculum maps and scope and sequence documents, to support teachers in developing daily lesson plans. For humanities, which includes history and ELA, the school is developing its own curriculum based on an Understanding by Design approach, with an emphasis on arts integration. For mathematics, the school uses CMP3. The school's science curriculum is FOSS. For humanities, teachers create the curriculum map and framework. Leaders recognize the heavy lift for humanities teachers to create curriculum and are providing teachers with a stipend to develop the framework over the summer.
- Teachers know what to teach and when to teach it. For humanities, teachers establish a scope and sequence to ensure all standards are covered in the school year. For mathematics, the teacher revised CMP3's scope and sequence to align to ANet's schedule of assessed standards. While teachers utilize curricular materials to stay on pace for the year, leaders do not provide effective oversight of teachers' curriculum planning to ensure all standards are covered.
- The school provides teachers with ample curriculum materials to support with meeting the educational needs of all students. Teachers have access to and easily request materials for lessons, and classrooms are outfitted with technological resources, including projectors and laptops for student use.

## SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1D:

### Is high quality instruction evident throughout the school?

*Instruction at City School of the Arts is generally purposeful and engaging, but the school has yet to complete the implementation of an instructional program that challenge students with higher-order questions and activities to drive deeper understanding of content in every classroom. As shown in the chart below, during the first year visit, Institute team members conducted six classroom observations following a defined protocol used in all school visits.*

		Total 6 <sup>th</sup> grade Observations
Content Area	Humanities	2
	Math	2
	Science	1
	Piano	1
	Total	6

- Some teachers at City School of the Arts deliver purposeful lessons with clear objectives aligned to the school's curriculum (3 of 6 classrooms observed). In several classrooms, the objective or inquiry question is posted, but student activities are not explicitly tied to it. In

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classrooms where lessons are more closely linked to the stated objective, teachers consistently reinforce how the lesson activities connect to the objective.

- Most City School of the Arts teachers regularly and effectively use techniques to check for student understanding (4 of 6 classrooms observed). In classrooms where teachers effectively utilize checks for understanding, they conference with individual students and provide them with substantive feedback on their work. In classrooms where teachers do not effectively utilize checks for understanding, they either do not provide students with feedback at all or provide only generalized, whole-class feedback that addresses a few students' misconceptions.
- Very few teachers at City School of the Arts 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 (1 of 6 classrooms observed). In the majority of classrooms, teacher questions require students to recall basic facts and do not challenge them to examine, analyze, interpret, or summarize information. In one classroom where students consistently engage in higher-order thinking, the teacher encourages them to defend and elaborate on their own and other students' answers.
- Some teachers at City School of the Arts maximize learning time with efficient transitions and have effective classroom management techniques and routines that create a consistent focus on academic achievement (3 of 6 classrooms observed). In classrooms where this is not the case, teachers do not demonstrate urgency or provide students with clear directions for completing an assigned task. Occasionally, students in these classrooms are off task, which results in simple activities and tasks taking longer than necessary. In classrooms where teachers create a consistent focus on academic achievement, they engage students through rigorous content and maintain a sense of urgency, even while students work independently or in small groups.

### SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1E:

#### Does the school have strong instructional leadership?

*City School of the Arts' instructional leadership is focused on the school's mission. In its first year staffing changes distracted from City Arts' original leadership design. The school has clear plans in place to ensure a strong focus on instruction in the future.*

- The leadership at City School of the Arts has promoted a culture of learning and scholarship. Teachers indicate that members of the leadership team have acted as effective thought partners and that they have responded appropriately to requests for specific supports when asked. Given the small size of the school's staff, they are able to communicate about issues that arise and address them quickly and effectively, but there are not yet formal structures in place to systematize this.
- Due to an unanticipated staffing change in the middle of the school year, instructional leadership at City School of the Arts has been inconsistent. The school's director of operations, who acted as co-leader of the school, voluntarily left the role in December, which compelled the principal, who was acting as the school's primary instructional leader, to take on considerable operational responsibilities. As a result, teachers did not receive consistent coaching or lesson plan feedback throughout the school year. The school has leveraged its remaining leadership team to the extent possible, however. When teachers request help in a

## QUALITATIVE EDUCATION BENCHMARKS CONCLUSIONS

particular area, such as arts integration or a common social-emotional issue observed among students, school leaders have responded appropriately. In order to mitigate this in the future, the school will adopt a single leader model. Starting in the 2017-18 school year, the principal will oversee an administrative team that includes an artistic director, director of student supports, dean of culture, dean of operations, and dean of curriculum and instruction, which will create additional capacity for instructional leadership.

- Instructional coaching at City School of the Arts is inconsistent due primarily to the leadership changes described above. School leaders have standing weekly meetings with their direct reports during which they discuss curricular and instructional priorities, student progress, and general classroom trends. However, the frequency with which individual school leaders observe teachers varies from several times a week to only a few times during the school year. Teachers do receive written and/or oral feedback based on these observations when they take place.
- City School of the Arts has regular professional development activities that assist teachers in meeting students' academic needs. Before the school year began, teachers had two weeks of pre-service training, during which they participated in sessions about the school's philosophical approach and curricular structures as well as a presentation from a neuroscientist, who discussed how exposure to the arts promotes students' academic performance. Teachers and school leaders meet for two hours every Friday afternoon to discuss student issues and solve problems that arise. Additionally, the school arranged for two full-day professional development sessions with the Lincoln Center during the school year, which focused on how to integrate arts into the academic curriculum. The school determines teachers' professional development needs through classroom observations, analysis of assessments, and other academic data and through conversations with teachers about their instructional and curricular needs.
- At the time of the Institute's visit, City School of the Arts had not yet conducted formal teacher evaluations but did complete them before the school year ended. Teachers were not able to articulate the process for formal evaluations and were not aware of the criteria that school leaders would use to evaluate them. School leaders indicate that with the increase in instructional capacity in the 2017-18 school year, they intend to conduct formal evaluations earlier and in a more structured manner. The school did utilize a structured feedback protocol in which school leaders and teachers wrote and then discussed what each was doing well and could improve upon.

### SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1F:

#### Does the school meet the educational needs of at-risk students?

*City School of the Arts is addressing the educational needs of students with disabilities and students struggling academically. The school's small size allows teachers and leaders to discuss student needs frequently; however, leaders recognize a need to codify more formal procedures as the school grows. The school does not have a fully compliant ELL program. The Institute will work with the school to ensure it fully complies in the remainder of its charter term.*

- City School of the Arts has sufficient resources to provide academic interventions that support learning for students with disabilities and students struggling academically. The school's SST is comprised of the principal, director of student support, director of arts

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integration and culture, and social worker. The school complies with providing mandated services from students' IEPs such as related services, counseling, ICT classrooms, and SETSS. For students struggling academically, the SST makes recommendations for student interventions and works with teachers to provide small group differentiation and intervention. The ICT teacher pulls small groups consisting of both students with disabilities and students struggling academically to provide additional support based on student achievement results. While the school does not have a formal Response to Intervention ("RtI") process currently in place, leaders identified this as a growth area for next year. City School of the Arts' ELL program is out of compliance as the school does not currently have a formal English language acquisition program or adequately trained staff to provide language support to the school's one ELL. The school should contact the Institute, which will support them in ensuring a fully compliant ELL program is in place for the remainder of the charter term.

- City School of the Arts has clear procedures for identifying at-risk students. The school uses the New York City Department of Education ("NYCDOE") student information systems to identify students with IEPs and ELLs. This year, all students were in the NYCDOE system; however, the school has clear procedures in place to administer the Home Language Identification Survey and the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners ("NYSITELL") if a student enrolls who is not currently in the system. Despite not having a formal RtI process in place, the school dedicates ample time for the SST and teachers to discuss students struggling academically and students that could possibly be referred to the committee on special education ("CSE") for special education services. Leaders have dedicated time during weekly whole-staff collaboration meetings to discuss individual student needs and identify possible interventions to support all students.
- The school has yet to provide sufficient time and support for on-going coordination between general education and at-risk teachers. While teachers have informal communication and meetings to discuss lesson plans and instructional techniques, the meetings occur on an ad hoc basis. The special education teacher currently supports the ICT cohort of students in each subject, which limits the special education teacher from becoming an expert in any one content area or allowing ample time to revise and differentiate lesson plans. While the entire school uses collaboration time to discuss individual student needs, the coordination process is not yet a systematic procedure in the school's framework.

### SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2C:

#### Does the school's organization work effectively to deliver the educational program?

*City School of the Arts is developing an organizational structure that will enable it to deliver the educational program effectively.*

- City School of the Arts has an administrative structure with staff, operational systems, and procedures that allow it to carry out the academic program, with some limitations due to the school's loss of its director of operations. The leadership team is able to execute the tasks necessary to ensure the organization continues to function, with the notable exception of consistent and systematic instructional coaching. The school has identified this area of need and is mitigating it by adjusting the school leadership model for the 2017-18 school year.
- City School of the Arts has established a safe and orderly environment that incorporates

## QUALITATIVE EDUCATION BENCHMARKS CONCLUSIONS

numerous supports for students with social-emotional needs, including a staff social worker and SST. The school facility is clean, organized, and conducive to learning.

- City School of the Arts has allocated sufficient resources in support of achieving its goals, particularly with regard to the resources necessary to implement a robust arts integration program. Arts teachers have access to an abundance of materials and supplies, which facilitates a range of activities and projects for students.
- School leaders have begun to create the systems and protocols necessary to ensure a well-functioning school organization. While much of the coordination that currently takes place at the school is not systematized, leaders have identified the need to formalize the practices that to date have happened organically as the result of the staff's small size and close proximity.

City School of the Arts staff members use the following strategies to meet enrollment and retention targets:

- Maintaining an updated website and social media presence that disseminates relevant information about the school;
- Attending community meetings and neighborhood events, particularly those with a cultural and/or arts theme;
- Participating in the New York City Charter School Center's charter school fair; and,
- Hosting events for prospective parents, families, and stakeholders.

### SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2D:

*Does the school board work effectively to achieve the school's Accountability Plan goals?*

*The school board monitors student achievement and provides sufficient oversight to the total educational program.*

- The school board has adequate skills, structures, and procedures with which to govern the school, including experience in K-12 and higher education, finance, law, entrepreneurialism, and the arts.
- The board receives sufficient information from the school leader to provide rigorous oversight. The principal and other school leaders provide a comprehensive report to the board at monthly meetings that includes assessment, attendance, enrollment, discipline, staffing, and other relevant data. This information is adequate to inform the board's strategic planning and goal-setting.

# SCHOOL OVERVIEW

## Board of Trustees<sup>3</sup>

Board Member Name	Position	Board Member Name	Position
Danal Abrams	Chair	Matthias Ederer	Trustee
Laura Blankenfein	Vice Chair	Ben Gliklich	Trustee
Adam Falkner	Trustee	Jose De Jesus	Trustee
Jim Chu	Trustee	Daniel Hew	Trustee

## School Characteristics

School Year	Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment <sup>4</sup>	Actual as a Percentage of Chartered Enrollment	Proposed Grades	Actual Grades
2016-17	102	99	97%	6	6

## Key Design Elements

Element	Evident?
Guided by a growing body of research that demonstrates that in-depth study in the visual and performing arts results in measurably better academic performance for all students, City School of the Arts will leverage arts-infused learning across all content areas to produce exceptional academic outcomes;	+
City School of the Arts will employ intervention methods grounded in the arts to maximize student engagement, provide targeted academic supports for struggling students and design creative extensions for those who are ready for more challenging work;	+
City School of the Arts will invest significant resources into a robust professional development program to develop and sustain an innovative, results driven and collaborative staff;	+
City School of the Arts will build community by supporting students' socio-emotional wellness through its advisory curriculum developed in partnership with the Community of Unity; and	+
City School of the Arts' students will participate in three separate trips per year to Camp Vacamas, the school's partner wilderness facility in New Jersey, to learn in a natural environment that dramatically contrasts with their life in the city.	+

## School Leaders

School Year(s)	Name(s) and Title(s)
2016-17 to Present	Jamie Davidson, Principal

## School Visit History

Date(s) of Visit	Evaluation Team Members	Title
June 1, 2017	Maureen Foley	Director for New Charters
	Andrew Kile	Senior Analyst

<sup>3</sup> Source: The Institute's board records at the time of the visit.

<sup>4</sup> Source: Institute's Official Enrollment Binder. (Figures may differ slightly from New York State Report Cards, depending on date of data collection.)